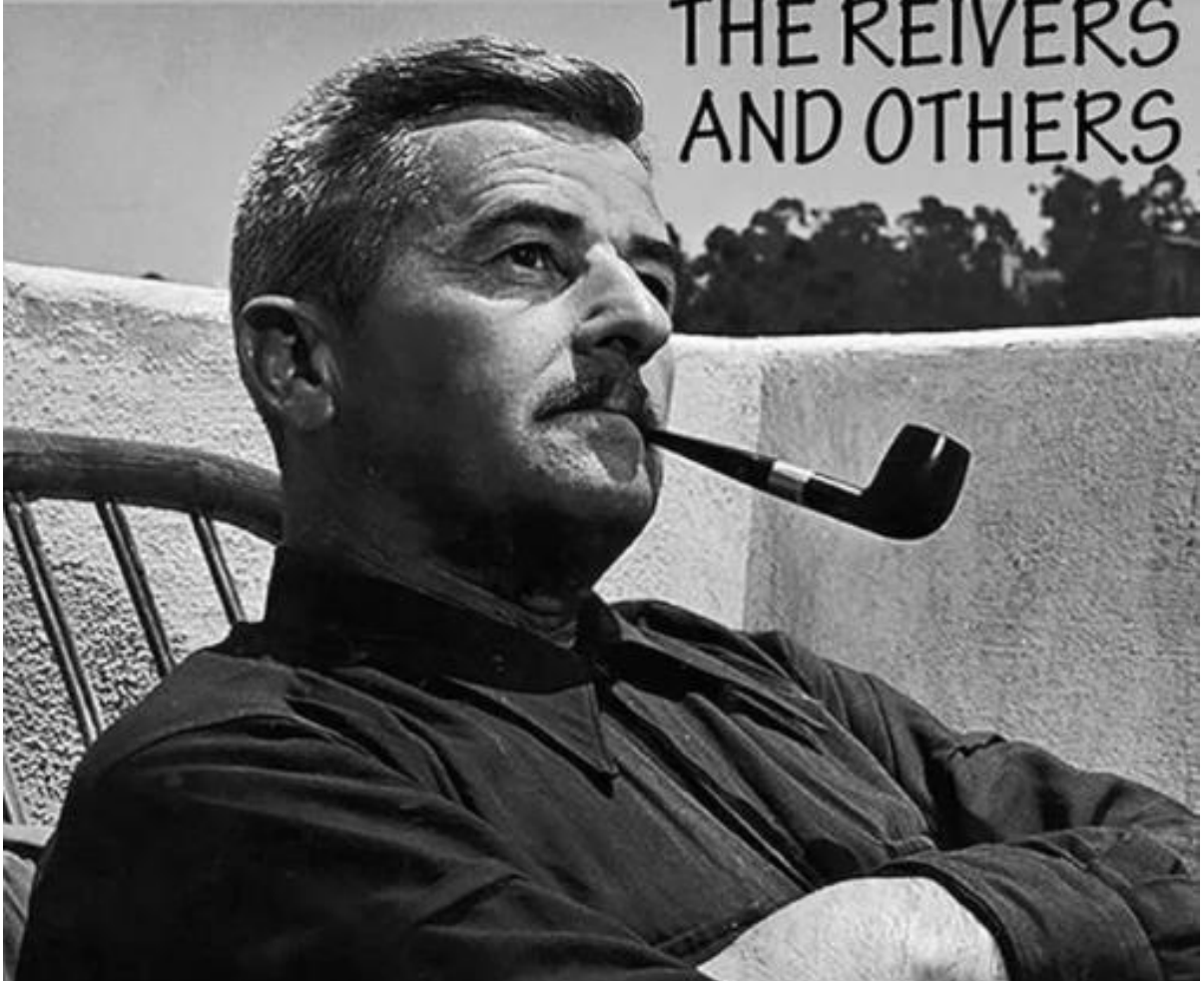


**THE COMPLETE WORKS OF
WILLIAM FAULKNER**

SOLDIERS' PAY
ABSALOM, ABSALOM!
THE SOUND AND,
THE FURY, AS I LAY DYING
LIGHT IN AUGUST
THE REIVERS
AND OTHERS



The Complete Works of William Faulkner

Contents

Soldiers' Pay

Mosquitoes

The Sound and the Fury

As I Lay Dying

Sanctuary

Light in August

Pylon

Absalom, Absalom!

The Unvanquished

The Wild Palms

Go Down, Moses

The Hamlet

Intruder in the Dust

Knight's Gambit

Requiem for a Nun

A Fable

The Town

The Mansion

The Reivers

The Short Story Collections

These 13

Collected Stories

Uncollected Stories

The Marble Faun

A Green Bough

Soldiers' Pay, William Faulkner

Soldiers' Pay

Contents

Chapter One

Chapter Two
Chapter Three
Chapter Four
Chapter Five
Chapter Six
Chapter Seven
Chapter Eight
Chapter Nine

SOLDIER

'The hushèd plaint of wind in stricken trees
Shivers the grass in path and lane
And Grief and Time are tideless golden seas —
Hush, hush! He's home again.'

CHAPTER ONE

1

ACHILLES: DID YOU shave this morning, Cadet?

MERCURY: Yes, Sir.

ACHILLES: What with, Cadet?

MERCURY: Issue, Sir.

ACHILLES: Carry on, Cadet.

Old Play (about 19 — — ?)

Lowe, Julian, number — , late a Flying Cadet, Umptieth Squadron, Air Service, known as 'One Wing' by the other embryonic aces of his flight, regarded the world with a yellow and disgruntled eye. He suffered the same jaundice that many a more booted one than he did, from Flight Commanders through Generals to the ambrosial single-barred (not to mention that inexplicable beast of the field which the French so beautifully call an aspiring aviator); they had stopped the war on him.

So he sat in a smouldering of disgusted sorrow, not even enjoying his Pullman prerogatives, spinning on his thumb his hat with its accursed white band.

‘Had your nose in the wind, hey, buddy?’ said Yaphank, going home and smelling to high heaven of bad whisky.

‘Ah, go to hell,’ he returned sourly and Yaphank doffed his tortured hat.

‘Why, sure, General — or should I of said Lootenant? Excuse me, madam. I got gassed doing k.p. and my sight ain’t been the same since. On to Berlin! Yeh, sure, we’re on to Berlin. I’m on to you, Berlin. I got your number. Number no thousand no hundred and naughty naught Private (very private) Joe Gilligan, late for parade, late for fatigue, late for breakfast when breakfast is late. The Statue of Liberty ain’t never seen me, and if she do, she’ll have to ‘bout face.’

Cadet Lowe raised a sophisticated eye. ‘Say, whatcher drinking, anyway?’

‘Brother, I dunno. Fellow that makes it was gave a Congressional medal last Chuesday because he has got a plan to stop the war. Enlist all the Dutchmen in our army and make ’em drink so much of his stuff a day for forty days, see? Ruin any war. Get the idea?’

‘I’ll say. Won’t know whether it’s a war or a dance, huh?’

‘Sure, they can tell. The women will all be dancing. Listen, I had a swell jane and she said, “for Christ’s sake, you can’t dance”. And I said, “like hell I can’t”. And we was dancing and she said, “what are you, anyways?” And I says, “what do you wanta know for?’

I can dance as well as any general or major or even a sergeant, because I just win four hundred in a poker game,” and she said, “oh, you did?” and I said, “sure, stick with me, kid,” and she said, “where is it?” Only I wouldn’t show it to her and then this fellow come up to her and said, “are you dancing this one?” And she said, “sure, I am.

This bird don't dance." Well, he was a sergeant, the biggest one I ever seen. Say, he was like that fellow in Arkansaw that had some trouble with a nigger and a friend said to him, "well, I hear you killed a nigger yesterday." And he said, "yes, weighed two hundred pounds." Like a bear.' He took the lurching of the train limberly and Cadet Lowe said, 'For Christ's sake.'

'Sure,' agreed the other. 'She won't hurt you, though. I done tried it. My dog won't drink none of it of course, but then he got bad ways hanging around Brigade H.Q. He's the one trophy of the war I got: something that wasn't never bawled out by a shave-tail for not saluting.'

Say, would you kindly like to take a little something to keep off the sunniferous dews of this goddam country? The honour is all mine and you won't mind it much after the first two drinks. Makes me homesick: like a garage. Ever work in a garage?'

Sitting on the floor between two seats was Yaphank's travelling companion, trying to ignite a splayed and sodden cigar. Like devastated France, thought Cadet Lowe, swimming his memory through the adenoidal reminiscences of Captain Bleyth, an R.A.F. pilot delegated to temporarily reinforce their democracy.

'Why, poor soldier,' said his friend, tearfully, 'all alone in no man's land and no matches. Ain't war hell? I ask you.' He tried to push the other over with his leg, then he fell to kicking him, slowly. 'Move over, you ancient mariner. Move over, you goddam bastard.'

Alas, poor Jerks or something (I seen that in a play, see? Good line) come on, come on; here's General Pershing come to have a drink with the poor soldiers.' He addressed Cadet Lowe. 'Look at him: ain't he sodden in depravity?'

'Battle of Coonyak,' the man on the floor muttered. 'Ten men killed. Maybe fifteen. Maybe hundred. Poor children at home saying "Alice, where art thou?" '

'Yeh, Alice. Where in hell are you? That other bottle. What'n'ell have you done with it? Keeping it to swim in when you get home?'

The man on the floor weeping said: 'You wrong me as ever man wronged. Accuse me of hiding mortgage on house? Then take this soul and body; take all. Ravish me, big boy.'

'Ravish a bottle of vinegar juice out of you, anyway,' the other muttered, busy beneath the seat. He rose triumphant, clutching a fresh bottle. 'Hark! the sound of battle and the laughing horses draws near. But shall they dull this poor unworthy head? No!

But I would like to of seen one of them laughing horses. Must of been lady horses all together. Your extreme highness' — with ceremony, extending the bottle— 'will you be kind enough to kindly condescend to honour these kind but unworthy strangers in a foreign land?'

Cadet Lowe accepted the bottle, drank briefly, gagged and spat his drink. The other supporting him massaged his back. 'Come on, come on, they don't nothing taste that bad.' Kindly cupping Lowe's opposite shoulder in his palm he forced the bottle mouthward again. Lowe released the bottle, defending himself. 'Try again. I got you. Drink it, now.'

'Jesus Christ,' said Cadet Lowe, averting his head.

Passengers were interested and Yaphank soothed him. 'Now, now. They won't nothing hurt you. You are among friends. Us soldiers got to stick together in a foreign country like this. Come on, drink her down. She ain't worth nothing to no one, spit on his legs like that.'

'Hell, man, I can't drink it.'

'Why, sure you can. Listen: think of flowers. Think of your poor grey-haired mother banging on the front gate and sobbing her grey-haired heart out. Listen, think of having to go to work again when you get home. Ain't war hell? I would of been a corporal at least, if she had just hung on another year.'

'Hell, I can't.'

'Why, you got to,' his new friend told him kindly, pushing the bottle suddenly in his mouth and tilting it. To be flooded or to swallow were his choices so he drank and retained it. His belly rose and hung, then sank reluctant.

'There now, wasn't so bad, was it? Remember, this hurts me to see my good licker going more than it does you. But she do kind of smack of gasoline, don't she?'

Cadet Lowe's outraged stomach heaved at its muscular moorings like a captive balloon. He gaped and his vitals coiled coldly in a passionate ecstasy. His friend again thrust the bottle in his mouth.

'Drink, quick! You got to protect your investment, you know.'

His private parts, flooded, washed back to his gulping and a sweet fire ran through him, and the Pullman conductor came and regarded them in helpless disgust.

'Ten-shun,' said Yaphank, springing to his feet. 'Beware of officers! Rise, men, and salute the admiral here.' He took the conductor's hand and held it. 'Boys, this man commanded the navy,' he said. 'When the enemy tried to capture Coney Island he was there. Or somewhere between there and Chicago, anyway, wasn't you, Colonel?'

'Look out, men, don't do that.' But Yaphank had already kissed his hand.

'Now, run along, Sergeant. And don't come back until dinner is ready.'

'Listen, you must stop this. You will ruin my train.'

'Bless your heart, Captain, your train couldn't be no safer with us if it was your own daughter.' The man sitting on the floor moved and Yaphank cursed him. 'Sit still, can't you? Say, this fellow thinks it's

night. Suppose you have your hired man bed him down? He's just in the way here.'

The conductor, deciding Lowe was the sober one, addressed him.

'For God's sake, soldier, can't you do something with them?'

'Sure,' said Cadet Lowe. 'You run along; I'll look after them. They're all right.'

'Well, do something with them. I can't bring a train into Chicago with the whole army drunk on it. My God, Sherman was sure right.'

Yaphank stared at him quietly. Then he turned to his companions.

'Men,' he said solemnly, 'he don't want us here. And this is the reward we get for giving our flesh and blood to our country's need. Yes, sir, he don't want us here; he begrudges us riding on his train, even.

Say, suppose we hadn't sprang to the nation's call, do you know what kind of a train you'd have? A train full of Germans. A train full of folks eating sausage and drinking beer, all going to Milwaukee, that's what you'd have.'

'Couldn't be worse than a train full of you fellows not knowing where you're going,' the conductor replied.

'All right,' Yaphank answered. 'If that's the way you feel, we'll get off your goddam train. Do you think this is the only train in the world?'

'No, no,' the conductor said hastily, 'not at all. I don't want you to get off. I just want you to straighten up and not disturb the other passengers.'

The sitting man lurched clumsily and Cadet Lowe met interested stares.

'No,' said Yaphank, 'no! You have refused the hospitality of your train to the saviours of your country. We could have expected better treatment than this in Germany, even in Texas.' He turned to Lowe.

'Men, we will get off his train at the next station. Hey, General?'

'My God,' repeated the conductor. 'If we ever have another peace I don't know what the railroads will do. I thought war was bad, but my God.'

'Run along,' Yaphank told him, 'run along. You probably won't stop for us, so I guess we'll have to jump off. Gratitude! Where is gratitude, when trains won't stop to let poor soldiers off? I know what it means. They'll fill trains with poor soldiers and run 'em off into the Pacific Ocean. Won't have to feed 'em any more. Poor soldiers! Woodrow, you wouldn't of treated me like this.'

'Hey, what you doing?' But the man ignored him, tugging the window up and dragging a cheap paper suit-case across his companion's knees. Before either Lowe or the conductor could raise a hand he had pushed the suit-case out the window. 'All out, men!'

His sodden companion heaved clawing from the floor. 'Hey! That was mine you throwed out?'

'Well, ain't you going to get off with us? We are going to throw 'em all off, and when she slows down we'll jump ourselves.'

'But you throwed mine off first,' the other said.

'Why, sure. I was saving you the trouble, see? Now don't you feel bad about it; you can throw mine off if you want, and then Pershing here, and the admiral can throw each other's off the same way. You got a bag, ain't you?' he asked the conductor. 'Get yours, quick, so we won't have so damn far to walk.'

'Listen, soldiers,' said the conductor, and Cadet Lowe, thinking of Elba, thinking of his coiling guts and a slow alcoholic fire in him, remarked the splayed official gold breaking the man's cap. New York swam flatly past; Buffalo was imminent, and sunset.

'Listen, soldiers,' repeated the conductor. 'I got a son in France. Sixth Marines he is. His mother ain't heard from him since October. I'll do anything for you boys, see, but for God's sake act decent.'

'No,' replied the man, 'you have refused us hospitality, so we get off. When does the train stop? or have we got to jump?'

'No, no, you boys sit here. Sit here and behave and you'll be all right. No need to get off.'

He moved swaying down the aisle and the sodden one removed his devastated cigar. 'You threw my suit-case out,' he repeated.

Yaphank took Cadet Lowe's arm. 'Listen. Wouldn't that discourage you? God knows, I'm trying to help the fellow get a start in life, and what do I get? One complaint after another.' He addressed his friend again. 'Why, sure, I throwed your suit-case off. Whatcher wanta do? wait till we get to Buffalo and pay a quarter to have it took off for you?'

'But you throwed my suit-case out,' said the other again.

'All right. I did. Whatcher going to do about it?'

The other pawed himself erect, clinging to the window, and fell heavily over Lowe's feet. 'For Christ's sake,' his companion said, thrusting him into his seat, 'watch whatcher doing.'

'Get off,' the man mumbled wetly.

'Huh?'

'Get off, too,' he explained, trying to rise again. He got on to his legs and lurching, bumping, and sliding about the open window he thrust his head through it. Cadet Lowe caught him by the brief skirt of his blouse.

'Here, here, come back, you damn fool. You can't do that.'

'Why, sure he can,' contradicted Yaphank, 'let him jump off if he wants. He ain't only going to Buffalo, anyways.'

'Hell, he'll kill himself.'

'My God,' repeated the conductor, returning at a heavy gallop. He leaned across Lowe's shoulder and caught the man's leg. The man, with his head and torso through the window, swayed lax and sodden as a meal sack. Yaphank pushed Lowe aside and tried to break the conductor's grip on the other's leg.

'Let him be. I don't believe he'll jump.'

'But, good God, I can't take any chances. Look out, look out, soldier! Pull him back there!'

'Oh, for Christ's sake, let him go,' said Lowe, giving up.

'Sure,' the other amended, 'let him jump. I'd kind of like to see him do it, since he suggested it himself. Besides, he ain't the kind for young fellows like us to associate with. Good riddance. Let's help him off,' he added, shoving at the man's lumpy body.

The would-be suicide's hat whipped from his head and the wind temporarily clearing his brain, he fought to draw himself in. He had changed his mind. His companion resisted, kindly.

'Come on, come on. Don't lose your nerve now. G'wan and jump.'

'Help!' the man shrieked into the vain wind and 'help!' the conductor chorused, clinging to him, and two alarmed passengers and the porter came to his assistance. They overcame Yaphank and drew the now thoroughly alarmed man into the car. The conductor slammed shut the window.

'Gentlemen,' he addressed the two passengers, 'will you sit here and keep them from putting him out that window? I am going to put them all off as soon as we reach Buffalo. I'd stop the train and do it now, only they'd kill him as soon as they get him alone. Henry,' to the porter, 'call the train conductor and tell him to wire ahead to Buffalo we got two crazy men on board.'

'Yeh, Henry,' Yaphank amended to the Negro, 'tell 'em to have a band there and three bottles of whisky. If they ain't got a band of their own, tell 'em to hire one. I will pay for it.' He dragged a blobby mass of bills from his pocket and stripping off one, gave it to the porter. 'Do you want a band too?' he asked Lowe. 'No,' answering himself, 'no, you don't need none. You can use mine. Run now,' he repeated.

'Yas suh, Cap'm.' White teeth were like a suddenly opened piano. 'Watch 'em, men,' the conductor told his appointed guards. 'You, Henry!' he shouted, following the vanishing white jacket.

Yaphank's companion, sweating and pale, was about to become ill; Yaphank and Lowe sat easily, respectively affable and belligerent. The newcomers touched shoulders for mutual support, alarmed but determined. Craned heads of other passengers became again smugly unconcerned over books and papers and the train rushed on along the sunset.

'Well gentlemen,' began Yaphank conversationally.

The two civilians sprang like plucked wires and one of them said, 'Now, now,' soothingly, putting his hand on the soldier. 'Just be quiet, soldier, and we'll look after you. Us Americans appreciates what you've done.'

'Hank White,' muttered the sodden one.

'Huh?' asked his companion.

'Hank White,' he repeated.

The other turned to the civilian cordially. 'Well, bless my soul if here ain't old Hank White in the flesh, that I was raised with! Why, Hank! We heard you was dead, or in the piano business or something. You ain't been fired, have you? I notice you ain't got no piano with you.'

'No, no,' the man answered in alarm, 'you are mistaken. Schluss is my name. I got a swell line of ladies' underthings.' He produced a card.

'Well, well, ain't that nice. Say,' he leaned confidentially towards the other, 'you don't carry no women samples with you? No? I was afraid

not. But never mind. I will get you one in Buffalo. Not buy you one, of course: just rent you one, you might say, for the time being. Horace,' to Cadet Lowe, 'where's that bottle?'

'Here she is, Major,' responded Lowe, taking the bottle from beneath his blouse. Yaphank offered it to the two civilians.

'Think of something far, far away, and drink fast,' he advised.

'Why, thanks,' said the one called Schluss, tendering the bottle formally to his companion. They stooped cautiously and drank. Yaphank and Cadet Lowe drank, not stooping.

'Be careful, soldiers,' warned Schluss.

'Sure,' said Cadet Lowe. They drank again.

'Won't the other one take nothing?' asked the heretofore silent one, indicating Yaphank's travelling companion. He was hunched awkwardly in the corner. His friend shook him and he slipped limply to the floor.

'That's the horror of the demon rum, boys,' said Yaphank solemnly and he took another drink. And Cadet Lowe took another drink. He tendered the bottle.

'No, no,' Schluss said with passion, 'not no more right now.'

'He don't mean that,' Yaphank said, 'he just ain't thought.' He and Lowe stared at the two civilians. 'Give him time: he'll come to hisself.' After a while the one called Schluss took the bottle.

'That's right,' Yaphank told Lowe confidentially. 'For a while I thought he was going to insult the uniform. But you wasn't, was you?'

'No, no. They ain't no one respects the uniform like I do. Listen, I would of liked to fought by your side, see? But someone got to look out for business while the boys are gone. Ain't that right?' he appealed to Lowe.

'I don't know,' said Lowe with courteous belligerence, 'I never had time to work any.'

'Come on, come on,' Yaphank reprimanded him, 'all of us wasn't young enough to be lucky as you.'

'How was I lucky?' Lowe rejoined fiercely.

'Well, shut up about it, if you wasn't lucky. We got something else to worry about.'

'Sure,' Schluss added quickly, 'we all got something to worry about.' He tasted the bottle briefly and the other said:

'Come on, now, drink it.'

'No, no, thanks, I got a plenty.'

Yaphank's eye was like a snake's. 'Take a drink, now. Do you want me to call the conductor and tell him you are worrying us to give you whisky?'

The man gave him the bottle quickly. He turned to the other civilian.

'What makes him act so funny?'

'No, no,' said Schluss. 'Listen, you soldiers drink if you want: we'll look after you.'

The silent one added like a brother and Yaphank said:

'They think we are trying to poison them. They think we are German spies, I guess.'

'No, no! When I see a uniform, I respect it like it was my mother.'

'Then, come on and drink.'

Schluss gulped and passed the bottle. His companion drank also and sweat beaded them.

'Won't he take nothing?' repeated the silent one and Yaphank regarded the other soldier with compassion.

'Alas, poor Hank,' he said, 'poor boy's done for, I fear. The end of a long friendship, men.' Cadet Lowe said sure, seeing two distinct Hanks, and the other continued. 'Look at that kind, manly face. Children together

we was, picking flowers in the flowery meadows; him and me made the middleweight mule-wiper's battalion what she was; him and me devastated France together.

And now look at him.

'Hank! Don't you recognize this weeping voice, this soft hand on your brow? General,' he turned to Lowe, 'will you be kind enough to take charge of the remains? I will deputize these kind strangers to stop at the first harness factory we pass and have a collar suitable for mules made of dog-wood with the initials H.W. in forget-me-nots.'

Schluss in ready tears tried to put his arm about Yaphank's shoulders. 'There, there, death ain't only a parting. Brace up; take a little drink, then you'll feel better.'

'Why, I believe I will,' he replied; 'you got a kind heart, buddy. Fall in when fire call blows, boys.'

Schluss mopped his face with a soiled, scented handkerchief and they drank again. New York in a rosy glow of alcohol and sunset streamed past breaking into Buffalo, and with fervent new fire in them they remarked the station. Poor Hank now slept peacefully in a spittoon.

Cadet Lowe and his friend being cold of stomach, rose and supported their companions. Schluss evinced a disinclination to get off. He said it couldn't possibly be Buffalo, that he had been to Buffalo too many times. Sure, they told him, holding him erect, and the conductor glared at them briefly and vanished. Lowe and Yaphank got their hats and helped the civilians into the aisle.

'I'm certainly glad my boy wasn't old enough to be a soldier,' remarked a woman passing them with difficulty, and Lowe said to Yaphank: 'Say, what about him?'

'Him?' repeated the other, having attached Schluss to himself.

'That one back there,' Lowe indicated the casual.

'Oh, him? You are welcome to him, if you want him.'

'Why, aren't you together?'

Outside was the noise and smoke of the station. They saw through the windows hurrying people and porters, and Yaphank moving down the aisle answered:

'Hell, no. I never seen him before. Let the porter sweep him out or keep him, whichever he likes.'

They half dragged, half carried the two civilians and with diabolical cunning Yaphank led the way through the train and dismounted from a day coach. On the platform Schluss put his arm around the soldier's neck.

'Listen, fellows,' he said with passion, 'y' know m' name, y' got addressh. Listen, I will show you 'Merica preshates what you done. Ol' Glory ever wave on land and sea. Listen, ain't nothing I got soldier can't have, nothing. 'N'if you wasn't soldiers I am still for you, one hundred pershent. I like you. I swear I like you.'

'Why, sure,' the other agreed, supporting him. After a while he spied a policeman and he directed his companion's gait towards the officer. Lowe with his silent one followed. 'Stand up, can't you?' he hissed, but the man's eyes were filled with an inarticulate sadness, like a dog's.

'Do the best you can, then,' Cadet Lowe softened, added, and Yaphank, stopped before the policeman, was saying:

'Looking for two drunks, Sergeant? These men were annoying a whole trainload of people.'

Can't nothing be done to protect soldiers from annoyance? If it ain't top sergeants, it's drunks.'

'I'd like to see the man can annoy a soldier,' answered the officer. 'Beat it, now.'

'But say, these men are dangerous. What are you good for, if you can't preserve the peace?'

'Beat it, I said. Do you want me to run all of you in?'

'You are making a mistake, Sergeant. These are the ones you are looking for.'

The policeman said, 'Looking for?' regarding him with interest.

'Sure. Didn't you get our wire? We wired ahead to have the train met.'

'Oh, these are the crazy ones, are they? Where's the one they were trying to murder?'

'Sure, they are crazy. Do you think a sane man would get hisself into this state?'

The policeman looked at the four of them with a blasé eye. 'G'wan, now. You're all drunk. Beat it, or I'll run you in.'

'All right. Take us in. If we got to go to the station to get rid of these crazy ones, we'll have to.'

'Where's the conductor of this train?'

'He's with a doctor, working on the wounded one.'

'Say, you men better be careful. Whatcher trying to do — kid me?'

Yaphank jerked his companion up. 'Stand up,' he said, shaking the man.

'Love you like a brother,' the other muttered. 'Look at him,' he said,

'look at both of 'em. And there's a man hurt on that train. Are you going to stand here and do nothing?'

'I thought you was kidding me. These are the ones, are they?' he raised his whistle and another policeman ran up. 'Here they are, Ed. You watch 'em and I'll get aboard and see about that dead man. You soldiers stay here, see?'

'Sure, Sergeant,' Yaphank agreed. The officer ran heavily away and he turned to the civilians. 'All right, boys. Here's the bell-hops come to carry you out where the parade starts. You go with them and me and this other officer will go back and get the conductor and the porter. They want to come, too.'

Schluss again took him in his arms.

'Love you like a brother. Anything got's yours. Ask me.'

'Sure,' he rejoined. 'Watch 'em, Cap, they're crazy as hell. Now, you run along with this nice man.'

'Here,' the policeman said, 'you two wait here.'

There came a shout from the train and the conductor's face was a bursting bellowing moon. 'Like to wait and see it explode on him,' Yaphank murmured. The policeman supporting the two men hurried towards the train. 'Come on here,' he shouted to Yaphank and Lowe.

As he drew away Yaphank spoke swiftly to Lowe.

'Come on, General,' he said, 'let's get going. So long, boys. Let's go, kid.'

The policeman shouted, 'Stop, there!' but they disregarded him, hurrying down the long shed, leaving the excitement to clot about itself, for all of them.

Outside the station in the twilight the city broke sharply its skyline against the winter evening and lights were shimmering birds on motionless golden wings, bell notes in arrested flight; ugly everywhere beneath a rumoured retreating magic of colour.

Food for the belly, and winter, though spring was somewhere in the world, from the south blown up like forgotten music. Caught both in the magic of change they stood feeling the spring in the cold air, as if they had but recently come into a new world, feeling their littleness and believing too that lying in wait for them was something new and strange. They were ashamed of this and silence was unbearable.

'Well, buddy,' and Yaphank slapped Cadet Lowe smartly on the back, 'that's one parade we'll sure be A.W.O.L. from, huh?'

2

Who sprang to be his land's defence
And has been sorry ever since?
Cadet!

Who can't date a single girl
Long as kee-wees run the world?
Kay-det!

With food in their bellies and a quart of whisky snugly under Cadet Lowe's arm they boarded a train.
'Where are we going?' asked Lowe. 'This train don't go to San Francisco, do she?'

'Listen,' said Yaphank, 'my name is Joe Gilligan. Gilligan, G-i-l-l-i-g-a-n, Gilligan, J-o-e, Joe; Joe Gilligan. My people captured Minneapolis from the Irish and taken a Dutch name, see? Did you ever know a man named Gilligan give you a bum steer? If you wanta go to San Francisco, all right. If you wanta go to St Paul or Omyhaw, it's all right with me. And more than that, I'll see that you get there. I'll see that you go to all three of 'em if you want. But why'n hell do you wanta go so damn far as San Francisco?'

'I don't,' replied Cadet Lowe. 'I don't want to go anywhere especially. I like this train here — far as I am concerned. I say, let's fight this war out right here. But you see, my people live in San Francisco. That's why I am going there.'

'Why, sure,' Private Gilligan agreed readily. 'Sometimes a man does wanta see his family — especially if he don't hafta live with 'em. I ain't criticizing you. I admire you for it, buddy. But say, you can go home any time. What I say is, let's have a look at this glorious nation which we have fought for.'

'Hell, I can't. My mother has wired me every day since the armistice to fly low and be careful and come home as soon as I am demobilized. I bet she wired the President to have me excused as soon as possible.'

'Why sure. Of course she did. What can equal a mother's love? Except a good drink of whisky. Where's that bottle? You ain't betrayed a virgin, have you?'

'Here she is.' Cadet Lowe produced it and Gilligan pressed the bell.

'Claude,' he told a superior porter, 'bring us two glasses and a bottle of sassperiller or something. We are among gentlemen today and we aim to act like gentlemen.'

'Watcher want glasses for?' asked Lowe. 'Bottle was all right yesterday.'

'You got to remember we are getting among strangers now. We don't want to offend no savage customs. Wait until you get to be an experienced traveller and you'll remember these things. Two glasses, Othello.'

The porter in his starched jacket became a symbol of self-sufficiency.

'You can't drink in this car. Go to the buffet car.'

'Ah, come on, Claude. Have a heart.'

'We don't have no drinking in this car. Go to the buffet car if you want.'

He swung himself from seat to seat down the lurching car.

Private Gilligan turned to his companion. 'Well! What do you know about that? Ain't that one hell of a way to treat soldiers? I tell you, General, this is the worst run war I ever seen.'

'Hell, let's drink out of the bottle.'

'No, no! This thing has got to be a point of honour, now. Remember, we got to protect our uniform from insult. You wait here and I'll see the conductor. We bought tickets, hey, buddy?'

With officers gone and officers' wives

Having the grand old time of their lives —

an overcast sky, and earth dissolving monotonously into a grey mist, greyly. Occasional trees and houses marching through it; and towns like bubbles of ghostly sound beaded on a steel wire —

Who's in the guard-room chewing the bars,

Saying to hell with the government wars?

Cadet!

And here was Gilligan returned, saying: 'Charles, at ease.' I might have known he would have gotten another one, thought Cadet Lowe, looking up. He saw a belt and wings, he rose and met a young face with a dreadful scar across his brow. My God he thought, turning sick. He saluted and the other peered at him with strained distraction. Gilligan, holding his arm, helped him into the seat. The man turned his puzzled gaze to Gilligan and murmured, 'Thanks.'

'Lootenant,' said Gilligan, 'you see here the pride of the nation. General, ring the bell for ice water. The lootenant here is sick.'

Cadet Lowe pressed the bell, regarding with a rebirth of that old feud between American enlisted men and officers of all nations the man's insignia and wings and brass, not even wondering what a British officer in his condition could be doing travelling in America. Had I been old enough or lucky enough, this might have been me, he thought jealously.

The porter reappeared.

'No drinking in this car, I told you,' he said. Gilligan produced a bill 'No, sir. Not in this car.' Then he saw the third man. He leaned down to him quickly, then glanced suspiciously from Gilligan to Lowe.

'What you all doing with him?' he asked.

'Oh, he's just a lost foreigner I found back yonder. Now, Ernest—'

'Lost? He ain't lost. He's from Gawgia. I'm looking after him. Cap'm,' — to the officer— 'is these folks all right?'

Gilligan and Lowe looked at each other. 'Christ, I thought he was a foreigner,' Gilligan whispered.

The man raised his eyes to the porter's anxious face. 'Yes,' he said slowly, 'they're all right.'

'Does you want to stay here with them, or don't you want me to fix you up in your place?'

'Let him stay here,' Gilligan said. 'He wants a drink.'

'But he ain't got no business drinking. He's sick.'

'Loot,' Gilligan said, 'do you want a drink?'

'Yes. I want a drink. Yes.'

'But he oughtn't to have no whisky, sir.'

'I won't let him have too much. I am going to look after him. Come on, now, let's have some glasses, can't we?'

The porter began again. 'But he oughtn't—'

'Say, Loot,' Gilligan interrupted, 'can't you make your friend here get us some glasses to drink from?'

'Glasses?'

'Yeh! He don't want to bring us none.'

'Does you want glasses, Cap'm?'

'Yes, bring us some glasses, will you?'

'All right, Cap'm.' He stopped again. 'You going to take care of him, ain't you?' he asked Gilligan.

'Sure, sure!'

The porter gone, Gilligan regarded his guest with envy. 'You sure got to be from Georgia to get service on this train. I showed him money but it never even shook him. Say, General,' to Lowe, 'we better keep the lootenant with us, huh? Might come in useful.'

'Sure,' agreed Lowe. 'Say, sir, what kind of ships did you use?'

'Oh, for Christ's sake,' interrupted Gilligan, 'let him be. He's been devastating France, now he needs rest. Hey, Loot?'

Beneath his scarred and tortured brow the man's gaze was puzzled but kindly and the porter reappeared with glasses and a bottle of ginger ale. He produced a pillow which he placed carefully behind the officer's head, then he got two more pillows for the others, forcing them with

ruthless kindness to relax. He was deftly officious, including them impartially in his activities, like Fate. Private Gilligan, unused to this, became restive.

‘Hey, ease up, George; lemme do my own pawing a while. I aim to paw this bottle if you’ll gimme room.’

He desisted saying ‘Is this all right, Cap’m?’

‘Yes, all right, thanks,’ the officer answered. Then: ‘Bring your glass and get a drink.’

Gilligan solved the bottle and filled the glasses. Ginger ale hissed sweetly and pungently. ‘Up and at ’em, men.’

The officer took his glass in his left hand and then Lowe noticed his right hand was drawn and withered.

‘Cheer-O,’ he said.

‘Nose down,’ murmured Lowe. The man looked at him with poised glass. He looked at the hat on Lowe’s knee and that groping puzzled thing behind his eyes became clear and sharp as with a mental process, and Lowe thought that his lips had asked a question.

‘Yes, sir. Cadet,’ he replied, feeling warmly grateful, feeling again a youthful clean pride in his corps.

But the effort had been too much and again the officer’s gaze was puzzled and distracted.

Gilligan raised his glass, squinting at it. ‘Here’s to peace,’ he said. ‘The first hundred years is the hardest.’

Here was the porter again, with his own glass. ‘ ‘Nother nose in the trough,’ Gilligan complained, helping him.

The Negro patted and rearranged the pillow beneath the officer’s head. ‘Excuse me, Cap’m, but can’t I get you something for your head?’

‘No, no, thanks. It’s all right.’

‘But you’re sick, sir. Don’t you drink too much.’

'I'll be careful.'

'Sure,' Gilligan amended, 'we'll watch him.'

'Lemme pull the shade down. Keep the light out of your eyes?'

'No, I don't mind the light. You run along. I'll call if I want anything.'

With the instinct of his race the Negro knew that his kindness was becoming untactful, yet he ventured again.

'I bet you haven't wired your folks to meet you. Whyn't you lemme wire 'em for you? I can look after you far as I go, but who's going to look after you, then?'

'No, I'm all right, I tell you. You look after me as far as you go. I'll get along.'

'All right. But I am going to tell your paw how you are acting some day. You ought to know better than that, Cap'm.' He said to Gilligan and Lowe: 'You gentlemen call me if he gets sick.'

'Yes, go on bow, damn you. I'll call if I don't feel well.' Gilligan looked from his retreating back to the officer in admiration. 'Loot, how do you do it?'

But the man only turned on them his puzzled gaze. He finished his drink and while Gilligan renewed them Cadet Lowe, like a trailing hound, repeated:

'Say, sir, what kind of ships did you use?'

The man looked at Lowe kindly, not replying, and Gilligan said:

'Hush. Let him alone. Don't you see he don't remember himself? Do you reckon you would, with that scar? Let the war be. Hey, Lootenant?'
'I don't know. Another drink is better.'

'Sure it is. Buck up, General. He don't mean no harm. He's just got to let her ride as she lays for a while. We all got horrible memories of the war. I lose eighty-nine dollars in a crap game once, besides losing, as that wop writer says, that an' which thou knowest at Chatter Teary. So how about a little whisky, men?'

‘Cheer-O,’ said the officer again.

‘What do you mean, Chateau Thierry?’ said Lowe, boyish in disappointment, feeling that he had been deliberately ignored by one to whom Fate had been kinder than to himself.

‘You talking about Chatter Teary?’

‘I’m talking about a place you were not at, anyway.’

‘I was there in spirit, sweetheart. That’s what counts.’

‘You couldn’t have been there any other way. There ain’t any such place.’

‘Hell there ain’t! Ask the Loot here if I ain’t right. How about it, Loot?’

But he was asleep. They looked at his face, young, yet old as the world, beneath the dreadful scar. Even Gilligan’s levity left him. ‘My God, it makes you sick at the stomach, don’t it? I wonder if he knows how he looks? What do you reckon his folks will say when they see him? or his girl — if he has got one. And I’ll bet he has.’

New York flew away: it became noon within, by clock, but the grey imminent horizon had not changed. Gilligan said: ‘If he has got a girl, know what she’ll say?’

Cadet Lowe, knowing all the despair of abortive endeavour, asked, ‘What?’

New York passed on and Mahon beneath his martial harness slept. (Would I sleep? thought Lowe; had I wings, boots, would I sleep?) His wings indicated by a graceful sweep pointed sharply down above a ribbon. White, purple, white, over his pocket, over his heart (supposedly). Lowe descried between the pinions of a superimposed crown and three letters, then his gaze mounted to the sleeping scarred face. ‘What?’ he repeated.

‘Shell give him the air, buddy.’

‘Ah, come on. Of course she won’t.’

‘Yes, she will. You don’t know women. Once the new has wore off it’ll be some bird that stayed at home and made money, or some lad that wore shiny leggings and never got nowheres so he could get hurt, like you and me.’

The porter came to hover over the sleeping man.
‘He ain’t got sick, has he?’ he whispered.

They told him no; and the Negro eased the position of the sleeping man’s head. ‘You gentlemen look after him and be sure to call me if he wants anything. He’s a sick man.’

Gilligan and Lowe, looking at the officer, agreed, and the porter lowered the shade. ‘You want some more ginger ale?’

‘Yes,’ said Gilligan, assuming the porter’s hushed tone, and the Negro withdrew. The two of them sat in silent comradeship, the comradeship of those whose lives had become pointless through the sheer equivocation of events, of the sorry jade, Circumstance. The porter brought ginger ale and they sat drinking while New York became Ohio.

Gilligan, that talkative unserious one, entered some dream within himself and Cadet Lowe, young and dreadfully disappointed, knew all the old sorrows of the Jasons of the world who see their vessels sink ere the harbour is left behind. . . . Beneath his scar the officer slept in all the travesty of his wings and leather and brass, and a terrible old woman paused, saying:
‘Was he wounded?’

Gilligan waked from his dream. ‘Look at his face,’ he said fretfully: ‘he fell off of a chair on to an old woman he was talking to and done that.’

‘What insolence,’ said the woman, glaring at Gilligan. ‘But can’t something be done for him? He looks sick to me.’

'Yes, ma'am. Something can be done for him. What we are doing now — letting him alone.'

She and Gilligan stared at each other, then she looked at Cadet Lowe, young and belligerent and disappointed. She looked back to Gilligan. She said from the ruthless humanity of money:
'I shall report you to the conductor. That man is sick and needs attention.'

'All right, ma'am. But you tell the conductor that if he bothers him now, I'll knock his goddam head off.'

The old woman glared at Gilligan from beneath a quiet, modish black hat and a girl's voice said:
'Let them alone, Mrs Henderson. They'll take care of him all right.'

She was dark. Had Gilligan and Lowe ever seen an Aubrey Beardsley, they would have known that Beardsley would have sickened for her: he had drawn her so often dressed in peacock hues, white and slim and depraved among meretricious trees and impossible marble fountains. Gilligan rose.

'That's right, miss. He is all right sleeping here with us. The porter is looking after him—' wondering why he should have to explain to her—
'and we are taking him home. Just leave him be. And thank you for your interest.'

'But something ought to be done about it,' the old woman repeated futilely. The girl led her away and the train ran swaying in afternoon. (Sure, it was afternoon. Cadet Lowe's wrist watch said so. It might be any state under the sun, but it was afternoon. Afternoon or evening or morning or night, far as the officer was concerned. He slept.)

Damned old bitch, Gilligan muttered, careful not to wake him.

'Look how you've got his arm,' the girl said, returning. She moved his withered hand from his thigh. (His hand, too, seeing the scrofulous

indication of his bones beneath the blistered skin.) ‘Oh, his poor terrible face,’ she said, shifting the pillow under his head.

‘Be quiet, ma’am,’ Gilligan said.

She ignored him. Gilligan, expecting to see him wake, admitted defeat and she continued:

‘Is he going far?’

‘Lives in Georgia,’ Gilligan said. He and Cadet Lowe, seeing that she was not merely passing their section, rose. Lowe remarking her pallid distinction, her black hair, the red scar of her mouth, her slim dark dress, knew an adolescent envy of the sleeper. She ignored Lowe with a brief glance. How impersonal she was, how self-contained. Ignoring them.

‘He can’t get home alone,’ she stated with conviction. ‘Are you all going with him?’

‘Sure,’ Gilligan assured her. Lowe wished to say something, something that would leave him fixed in her mind: something to reveal himself to her. But she glanced at the glasses, the bottle that Lowe feeling a fool yet clasped.

‘You seem to be getting along pretty well, yourselves,’ she said.

‘Snake medicine, miss. But won’t you have some?’

Lowe, envying Gilligan’s boldness, his presence of mind, watched her mouth. She looked down the car.

‘I believe I will, if you have another glass.’

‘Why, sure. General, ring the bell.’ She sat down beside Mahon and Gilligan and Lowe sat again. She seemed . . . she was young; she probably liked dancing, yet at the same time she seemed not young — as if she knew everything. (She is married, and about twenty-five, thought Gilligan.) (She is about nineteen, and she is not in love, Lowe decided.) She looked at Lowe.

‘What’s your outfit, soldier?’

‘Flying Cadet,’ answered Lowe with slow patronage, ‘Air Service.’ She was a kid: she only looked old.

‘Oh. Then of course you are looking after him. He’s an aviator, too, isn’t he?’

‘Look at his wings,’ Lowe answered. ‘British. Royal Air Force. Pretty good boys.’

‘Hell,’ said Gilligan, ‘he ain’t no foreigner.’

‘You don’t have to be a foreigner to be with the British or French. Look at Lufbery. He was with the French until we come in.’

The girl looked at him, and Gilligan, who had never heard of Lufbery, said: ‘Whatever he is, he’s all right. With us, anyway. Let him be whatever he wants.’

The girl said: ‘I am sure he is.’

The porter appeared. ‘Cap’m’s all right?’ he whispered, remarking her without surprise as is the custom of his race.

‘Yes,’ she told him, ‘he’s all right.’

Cadet Lowe thought I bet she can dance and she added: ‘He couldn’t be in better hands than these gentlemen.’ How keen she is! thought Gilligan. She has known disappointment ‘I wonder if I could have a drink on your car?’

The porter examined her and then he said: ‘Yes, ma’am. I’ll get some fresh ginger ale. You going to look after him?’

‘Yes, for a while.’

He leaned down to her. ‘I’m from Gawgia, too. Long time ago.’

‘You are? I’m from Alabama.’

‘That’s right. We got to look out for our own folks, ain’t we? I’ll get you a glass right away.’

The officer still slept and the porter returning hushed and anxious, they sat drinking and talking with muted voices. New York was Ohio, and Ohio became a series of identical cheap houses with the same man entering gate after gate, smoking and spitting. Here was Cincinnati and under the blanched flash of her hand he waked easily.

‘Are we in?’ he asked. On her hand was a plain gold band. No engagement ring. (Pawned it, maybe, thought Gilligan. But she did not look poor.)

‘General, get the Lootenant’s hat.’
Lowe climbed over Gilligan’s knees and Gilligan said:
‘Here’s an old friend of ours, Loot. Meet Mrs Powers.’

She took his hand, helping him to his feet, and the porter appeared.

‘Donald Mahon,’ he said, like a parrot. Cadet Lowe assisted by the porter returned with cap and stick and a trench coat and two kit bags. The porter help him into the coat.

‘I’ll get yours, ma’am,’ said Gilligan, but the porter circumvented him. Her coat was rough and heavy and light of colour. She wore it carelessly and Gilligan and Cadet Lowe gather up their ‘issued’ impedimenta. The porter handed the officer his cap and stick, then he vanished with the luggage belonging to them. She glanced again down the length of the car.

‘Where are my—’
‘Yessum,’ the porter called from the door, across the coated shoulders of passengers, ‘I got your things, ma’am.’
He had gotten them and his dark gentle hand lowered the officer carefully to the platform.

‘Help the lootenant there,’ said the conductor officiously, but he had already got the officer to the floor.
‘You’ll look after him, ma’am?’

‘Yes. I’ll look after him.’

They moved down the shed and Cadet Lowe looked back. But the Negro was efficient and skilful, busy with other passengers. He seemed to have forgotten them. And Cadet Lowe looked from the porter occupied with bags and the garnering of quarters and half dollars, to the officer in his coat and stick, remarking the set of his cap slanting backward bonelessly from his scarred brow, and he marvelled briefly upon his own kind.

But this was soon lost in the mellow death of evening in a street between stone buildings, among lights, and Gilligan in his awkward khaki and the girl in her rough coat, holding each an arm of Donald Mahon, silhouetted against it in the doorway.

3

Mrs Powers lay in her bed aware of her long body beneath strange sheets, hearing the hushed night sounds of a hotel — muffled footfalls along mute carpeted corridors, discreet opening and shutting of doors, somewhere a murmurous pulse of machinery — all with that strange propensity which sounds, anywhere else soothing, have, when heard in a hotel, for keeping you awake.

Her mind and body warming to the old familiarity of sleep became empty, then as she settled her body to the bed, shaping it for slumber, it filled with a remembered troubling sadness.

She thought of her husband youngly dead in France in a recurrence of fretful exasperation with having been tricked by a wanton Fate: a joke amusing to no one.

Just when she had calmly decided that they had taken advantage of a universal hysteria for the purpose of getting of each other a brief ecstasy, just when she had decided calmly that they were better quit of each other with nothing to mar the memory of their three days

together and had written him so, wishing him luck, she must be notified casually and impersonally that he had been killed in action.

So casually, so impersonally; as if Richard Powers, with whom she had spent three days, were one man and Richard Powers commanding a platoon in the — — Division were another.

And she being young must again know all the terror of parting, of that passionate desire to cling to something concrete in a dark world, in spite of war departments. He had not even got her letter! This in some way seemed the infidelity: having him die still believing in her, bored though they both probably were.

She turned feeling sheets like water, warming by her bodily heat, upon her legs.

Oh, damn, damn. What a rotten trick you played on me. She recalled those nights during which they had tried to eradicate tomorrows from the world. Two rotten tricks, she thought. Anyway, I know what I'll do with the insurance, she added, wondering what Dick thought about it — if he did know or care.

Her shoulder rounded upward, into her vision, the indication of her covered turning body swelled and died away towards the foot of the bed: she lay staring down the tunnel of her room, watching the impalpable angles of furniture, feeling through plastered smug walls a rumour of spring outside. The airshaft was filled with a prophecy of April come again into the world.

Like a heedless idiot into a world that had forgotten spring. The white connecting door took the vague indication of a transom and held it in a mute and luminous plane, and obeying an impulse she rose and slipped on a dressing-gown.

The door opened quietly under her hand. The room, like hers, was a suggestion of furniture, identically vague. She could hear Mahon's breathing and she found a light switch with her fingers. Under his

scarred brow he slept, the light full and sudden on his closed eyes did not disturb him. And she knew in an instinctive flash what was wrong with him, why his motions were hesitating, ineffectual.

He's going blind, she said, bending over him. He slept and after a while there were sounds without the door. She straightened up swiftly and the noises ceased. Then the door opened to a blundering key and Gilligan entered supporting Cadet Lowe, glassy-eyed and quite drunk.

Gilligan, standing his lax companion upright, said:
'Good afternoon, ma'am.'

Lowe muttered wetly and Gilligan continued:
'Look at this lonely mariner I got here. Sail on, O proud and lonely,' he told his attached and aimless burden. Cadet Lowe muttered again, not intelligible. His eyes were like two oysters.
'Huh?' asked Gilligan. 'Come on, be a man: speak to the nice lady.'

Cadet Lowe repeated himself liquidly and she whispered: 'Shhh: be quiet.'
'Oh,' said Gilligan with surprise, 'Loot's asleep, huh? What's he want to sleep for, this time of day?'

Lowe with quenchless optimism essayed speech again and Gilligan, comprehending, said:
'That's what you want, is it? Why couldn't you come out like a man and say it? Wants to go to bed, for some reason,' he explained to Mrs Powers.

'That's where he belongs,' she said; and Gilligan with alcoholic care led his companion to the other bed and with the exaggerated caution of the inebriate laid him upon it. Lowe drawing his knees up sighed and turn his back to them, but Gilligan dragging at his legs removed his puttees and shoes, taking each shoe in both hands and placing it on a table. She leaned against the foot of Mahon's bed, fitting her long thigh to the hard rail, until he had finished.

At last Lowe, freed of his shoes, turned sighing to the wall and she said:
'How drunk are you, Joe?'

'Not very, ma'am. What's wrong? Loo need something?'
Mahon slept and Cadet Lowe immediately slept.

'I want to talk to you, Joe. About him,' she added quickly, feeling Gilligan's stare. 'Can you listen or had you rather go to bed and talk it over in the morning?'

Gilligan, focusing his eyes, answered:

'Why, now suits me. Always oblige a lady.'

Making her decision suddenly she said:

'Come in my room then.'

'Sure: lemme get my bottle and I'm your man.'

She returned to her room while he sought his bottle and when he joined her she was sitting on her bed, clasping her knees, wrapped in a blanket Gilligan drew up a chair.

'Joe, do you know he's going blind?' she said abruptly.

After a time her face became a human face and holding it in his vision he said:

'I know more than that. He's going to die.'

'Die?'

'Yes, ma'am. If I ever seen death in a man's face, it's in his. Goddam this world,' he burst out suddenly.

'Shhh!' she whispered.

'That's right, I forgot,' he said swiftly.

She clasped her knees, huddled beneath the blanket, changing the position of her body as it became cramped, feeling the wooden head board of the bed, wondering why there were not iron beds, wondering why everything was as it was — iron beds, why you deliberately took

certain people to break your intimacy, why these people died, why you yet took others. . . . Will my death be like this: fretting and exasperating? Am I cold by nature, or have I spent all my emotional coppers, that I don't seem to feel things like others? Dick, Dick. Ugly and dead.

Gilligan sat brittlely in his chair, focusing his eyes with an effort, having those instruments of vision evade him, slimy as broken eggs. Lights completing a circle, an orbit; she with two faces sitting on two beds, clasping four arms around her knees. . . .

Why can't a man be very happy or very unhappy? It's only a sort of pale mixture of the two. Like beer when you want a shot — or a drink of water. Neither one nor the other.

She moved and drew the blanket closer about her. Spring in an airshaft, the rumour of spring; but in the room steam heat suggested winter, dying away.

'Let's have a drink, Joe.'

He rose careful and brittle, and walking with meticulous deliberation he fetched a carafe and glasses. She drew a small table near them and Gilligan prepared two drinks. She drank and set the glass down. He lit a cigarette for her.

'It's a rotten old world, Joe.'

'You damn right. And dying ain't the hair of it.'

'Dying?'

'In this case, I mean. Trouble is, he probably won't die soon enough.'

'Not die soon enough?'

Gilligan drained his glass. 'I got the low down on him, see. He's got a girl at home: folks got 'em engaged when they was young, before he went off to war. And do you know what she's going to do when she sees his

face?’ he asked, staring at her. At last her two faces became one face and her hair was black. Her mouth was like a scar.

‘Oh, no, Joe. She wouldn’t do that.’ She sat up. The blanket slipped from her shoulders and she replaced it, watching him intently.

Gilligan breaking the orbit of visible things by an effort of will said: ‘Don’t you kid yourself. I’ve seen her picture. And the last letter he had from her.’

‘He didn’t show them to you!’ she said quickly.

‘That’s all right about that. I seen ’em.’

‘Joe. You didn’t go through his things?’

‘Hell, ma’am, ain’t I and you trying to help him? Suppose I did do something that ain’t exactly according to holy Hoyle: you know damn well that I can help him — if I don’t let a whole lot of don’ts stop me. And if I know I’m right there ain’t any don’ts or anything else going to stop me.’

She looked at him and he hurried on:

‘I mean, you and I know what to do for him, but if you are always letting a gentleman don’t do this and a gentleman don’t do that interfere, you can’t help him. Do you see?’

‘But what makes you so sure she will turn him down?’

‘Why, I tell you I seen that letter: all the old bunk about knights of the air and the romance of battle, that even the fat crying ones outgrow soon as the excitement is over and uniforms and being wounded ain’t only not stylish no more, but it is troublesome.’

‘But aren’t you taking a lot for granted, not to have seen her, even?’

‘I’ve seen that photograph: one of them flighty-looking pretty ones with lots of hair. Just the sort would have got herself engaged to him.’

‘How do you know it is still on? Perhaps she has forgotten him. And he probably doesn’t remember her, you know.’

'That ain't it. If he don't remember her he's all right. But if he will know his folks he will want to believe that something in his world ain't turned upside down.'

They were silent a while, then Gilligan said: 'I wish I could have knowed him before. He's the kind of a son I would have liked to have.' He finished his drink.

'Joe, how old are you?'

'Thirty-two, ma'am.'

'How did you ever learn so much about us?' she asked with interest, watching him.

He grinned briefly. 'It ain't knowing, it's just saying things. I think I done it through practice. By talking so much,' he replied with sardonic humour. 'I talk so much I got to say the right thing sooner or later. You don't talk much, yourself.'

'Not much,' she agreed. She moved carelessly and the blanket slipped entirely, exposing her thin nightdress; raising her arms and twisting her body to replace it her long shank was revealed and her turning ankle and her bare foot.

Gilligan without moving said: 'Ma'am, let's get married.'

She huddled quickly in the blanket again, already knowing a faint disgust with herself.

'Bless your heart, Joe. Don't you know my name is Mrs?'

'Sure. And I know, too, you ain't got any husband. I dunno where he is or what you done with him, but you ain't got a husband now.'

'Goodness, I'm beginning to be afraid of you: you know too much. You are right: my husband was killed last year.'

Gilligan looking at her said: 'Rotten luck.' And she, tasting again a faint, warm sorrow, bowed her head to her arched clasped knees.

'Rotten luck. That's exactly what it was, what everything is. Even sorrow is a fake, now.' She raised her face, her pallid face beneath her black hair, scarred with her mouth. 'Joe, that was the only sincere word of condolence I ever had. Come here.'

Gilligan went to her and she took his hand, holding it against her cheek. Then she removed it, shaking back her hair.

'You are a good fellow, Joe. If I felt like marrying anybody now, I'd take you. I'm sorry I played that trick, Joe.'

'Trick?' repeated Gilligan, gazing upon her black hair. Then he said Oh, non-committally.

'But we haven't decided what to do with that poor boy in there,' she said with brisk energy, clasping her blanket. 'That's what I wanted to talk to you about. Are you sleepy?'

'Not me,' he answered. 'I don't think I ever want to sleep again.'

'Neither do I.' She moved across the bed, propping her back against the head board. 'Lie down here and let's decide on something.'

'Sure,' agreed Gilligan. 'I better take off my shoes, first. Ruin the hotel's bed.'

'To hell with the hotel's bed,' she told him. 'Put your feet on it.'

Gilligan lay down, shielding his eyes with his hand. After a time she said:

'Well, what's to be done?'

'We got to get him home first,' Gilligan said. 'I'll wire his folks tomorrow — his old man is a preacher, see. But it's that damn girl bothers me. He sure ought to be let die in peace. But what else to do I don't know. I

know about some things,' he explained, 'but after all women can guess and be nearer right than whatever I could decide on.'

'I don't think anyone could do much more than you. I'd put my money on you every time.'

He moved, shading his eyes again. 'I dunno: I am good so far, but then you got to have more'n just sense. Say, why don't you come with the general and me?'

'I intend to, Joe.' Her voice came from beyond his shielding hand. 'I think I intended to all the time.'

(She is in love with him.) But he only said:

'Good for you. But I knowed you'd do the right thing. All right with your people is it?'

'Yes. But what about money?'

'Money?'

'Well . . . for what he might need. You know. He might get sick anywhere.'

'Lord, I cleaned up in a poker game and I ain't had time to spend it. Money's all right. That ain't any question,' he said roughly.

'Yes, money's all right. You know I have my husband's insurance.'

He lay silent, shielding his eyes. His khaki legs marring the bed ended in clumsy shoes. She nursed her knees, huddling in her blanket. After a space she said:

'Sleep, Joe?'

'It's a funny world, ain't it?' he asked irrelevantly, not moving.

'Funny?'

'Sure. Soldier dies and leaves you money, and you spend the money helping another soldier die comfortable. Ain't that funny?'

'I suppose so. . . . Everything is funny. Horribly funny.'

'Anyway, it's nice to have it all fixed,' he said after a while. 'He'll be glad you are coming along.'

(Dear dead Dick.) (Mahon under his scar, sleeping.) (Dick, my dearest one.)

She felt the head board against her head, through her hair, felt the bones of her long shanks against her arms clasping them, nursing them, saw the smug, impersonal room like an appointed tomb (in which how many, many discontents, desires, passions, had died?) high above a world of joy and sorrow and lust for living, high above impervious trees occupied solely with maternity and spring. (Dick, Dick. Dead, ugly Dick. Once you were alive and young and passionate and ugly, after a time you were dead, dear Dick: that flesh, that body, which I loved and did not love; your beautiful, young, ugly body, dear Dick, become now a seething of worms, like new milk. Dear Dick.)

Gilligan, Joseph, late a private, a democrat by enlistment and numbered like a convict, slept beside her, his boots (given him gratis by democrats of a higher rating among democrats) innocent and awkward upon a white spread of rented cloth, immaculate and impersonal.

She invaded her blanket and reaching her arm swept the room with darkness. She slipped beneath the covers, settling her cheek on her palm. Gilligan undisturbed snored, filling the room with a homely, comforting sound.

(Dick, dear, ugly dead. . . .)

4

In the next room Cadet Lowe waked from a chaotic dream, opening his eyes and staring with detachment, impersonal as God, at lights burning about him. After a time, he recalled his body, remembering where he was, and by an effort he turned his head. In the other bed the man

slept beneath his terrible face. (I am Julian Lowe, I eat, I digest, evacuate: I have flown.)

This man . . . this man here, sleeping beneath his scar. . . . Where do we touch? Oh, God, oh, God: knowing his own body, his stomach.)

Raising his hand he felt his own undamaged brow. No scar there. Near him upon a chair was his hat severed by a white band, upon the table the other man's cap with its cloth crown sloping backward from a bronze initialed crest.

He tasted his sour mouth, knowing his troubled stomach. To have been him! he moaned. Just to be him. Let him take this sound body of mine! Let him take it. To have got wings on my breast, to have wings; and to have got his scar, too, I would take death tomorrow. Upon a chair Mahon's tunic evinced above the left breast pocket wings breaking from an initialled circle beneath a crown, tipping downward in an arrested embroidered sweep; a symbolized desire.

To be him, to have gotten wings, but to have got his scar too! Cadet Lowe turned to the wall with passionate disappointment like a gnawing fox at his vitals. Slobbering and moaning Cadet Lowe, too, dreamed again, sleeping.

5

ACHILLES: What preparation would you make for a cross-country flight, Cadet?

MERCURY: Empty your bladder and fill your petrol tank, Sir.

ACHILLES: Carry on, Cadet.

Old Play (about 19 — — ?)

Cadet Lowe, waking, remarked morning, and Gilligan entering the room, dressed. Gilligan looking at him said:

'How you coming, ace?'

Mahon yet slept beneath his scar, upon a chair his tunic. Above the left pocket, wings swept silkenly, breaking downward above a ribbon.

White, purple, white.

'Oh, God,' Lowe groaned.

Gilligan with the assurance of physical well-being stood in brisk arrested motion.

'As you were, fellow. I'm going out and have some breakfast sent up. You stay here until Loot wakes, huh?'

Cadet Lowe tasting his sour mouth groaned again. Gilligan regarded him. 'Oh, you'll stay all right, won't you? I'll be back soon.'

The door closed after him and Lowe, thinking of water, rose and took his wavering way across the room to a water pitcher. Carafe. Like giraffe or like café? he wondered. The water was good, but lowering the vessel he felt immediately sick. After a while he recaptured the bed.

He dozed, forgetting his stomach, and remembering it he dreamed and waked. He could feel his head like a dull inflation, then he could distinguish the foot of his bed and thinking again of water he turned on a pillow and saw another identical bed and the suave indication of a dressing-gown motionless beside it. Leaning over Mahon's scarred supineness, she said: 'Don't get up.'

Lowe said, I won't, closing his eyes, tasting his mouth, seeing her long slim body against his red eyelids, opening his eyes to light and her thigh shaped and falling away into an impersonal fabric. With an effort he might have seen her ankles. Her feet will be there, he thought, unable to accomplish the effort and behind his closed eyes he thought of saying something which would leave his mouth on hers. Oh, God, he thought, feeling that no one had been so sick, imagining that she would say I love you, too.

If I had wings, and a scar. . . . To hell with officers, he thought, sleeping again:

To hell with kee-wees, anyway. I wouldn't be a goddam kee-wee. Rather be a sergeant. Rather be a mechanic. Crack up, Cadet. Hell, yes, Why not? War's over. Glad. Glad. Oh, God. His scar: his wings. Last time.

He was briefly in a Jenny again, conscious of lubricating oil and a slow gracious restraint of braced plane surfaces, feeling an air blast and feeling the stick in his hand, watching bobbing rocker arms on the horizon, laying her nose on the horizon like a sighted rifle.

Christ, what do I care? seeing her nose rise until the horizon was hidden, seeing the arc of a descending wing expose it again, seeing her become abruptly stationary while a mad world spinning vortexed about his seat. 'Sure, what do you care?' asked a voice and waking he saw Gilligan beside him with a glass of whisky.

'Drink her down, General,' said Gilligan, holding the glass under his nose.

'Oh, God, move it, move it.'

'Come on, now; drink her down: you'll feel better. The Loot is up and at 'em, and Mrs Powers. Whatcher get so drunk for, ace?'

'Oh, God, I don't know,' answered Cadet Lowe, rolling his head in anguish. 'Lemme alone.'

Gilligan said: 'Come on, drink her, now.' Cadet Lowe said, Go away passionately.

'Lemme alone; I'll be all right.'

'Sure you will. Soon as you drink this.'

'I can't. Go away.'

'You got to. You want I should break your neck?' asked Gilligan kindly, bringing his face up, kind and ruthless. Lowe eluded him and Gilligan reaching under his body, raised him.

'Lemme lie down,' Lowe implored.

'And stay here forever? We got to go somewheres. We can't stay here.'

'But I can't drink.' Cadet Lowe's interior coiled passionately: an ecstasy. 'For God's sake, let me alone.'

'Ace,' said Gilligan, holding his head up, 'you got to. You might just as well drink this yourself. If you don't, I'll put it down your throat, glass and all. Here, now.'

The glass was between his lips, so he drank, gulping, expecting to gag. But gulping, the stuff became immediately pleasant. It was like new life in him. He felt a kind sweat and Gilligan removed the empty glass. Mahon, dressed except for his belt, sat beside a table. Gilligan vanished through a door and he rose, feeling shaky but quite fit. He took another drink. Water thundered in the bathroom and Gilligan returning said briskly: 'Atta boy.'

He pushed Lowe into the bathroom. 'In you go, ace,' he added.

Feeling the sweet bright needles of water burning his shoulders, watching his body slipping an endless silver sheath of water, smelling soap: beyond that was her room, where she was, tall and red and white and black, beautiful.

I'll tell her at once, he decided, sawing his hard young body with a rough towel. Glowing, he brushed his teeth and hair, then he had another drink under Mahon's quiet inverted stare and Gilligan's quizzical one. He dressed, hearing her moving in her room. Maybe she's thinking of me, he told himself, swiftly donning his khaki.

He caught the officer's kind, puzzled gaze and the man said: 'How are you?'

'Never felt better after my solo,' he answered, wanting to sing. 'Say, I left my hat in her room last night,' he told Gilligan. 'Guess I better get it.'

Here's your hat,' Gilligan informed him unkindly, producing it.

‘Well, then, I want to talk to her. Whatcher going to say about that?’ asked Cadet Lowe, swept and garnished and belligerent.

‘Why, sure, General,’ Gilligan agreed readily. ‘She can’t refuse one of the saviours of her country.’ He knocked on her door. ‘Mrs Powers?’

‘Yes?’ her voice was muffled.

‘General Pershing here wants to talk to you. . . . Sure. . . . All right.’ He turned about, opening the door. ‘In you go, ace.’

Lowe, hating him, ignored his wink, entering. She sat in bed with a breakfast tray upon her knees. She was not dressed and Lowe looked delicately away. But she said blandly:

‘Cheerio, Cadet! How looks the air today?’

She indicated a chair and he drew it up to the bed, being so careful not to seem to stare that his carriage became noticeable. She looked at him quickly and kindly and offered him coffee. Courageous with whisky on an empty stomach he knew hunger suddenly. He took the cup.

‘Good morning,’ he said with belated courtesy, trying to be more than nineteen. (Why is nineteen ashamed of its age?) She treats me like a child, he thought, fretted and gaining courage, watching with increasing boldness her indicated shoulders and wondering with interest if she had stockings on.

Why didn’t I say something as I came in? Something easy and intimate? Listen, when I first saw you my love for you was like — my love was like — my love for you — God, if I only hadn’t drunk so much last night I could say it my love for you my love is love is like . . . and found himself watching her arms as she moved and her loose sleeves fell away from them, saying, yes, he was glad the war was over and telling her that he had forty-seven hours’ flying time and would have got wings in two weeks more and that his mother in San Francisco was expecting him.

She treats me like a child, he thought with exasperation, seeing the slope of her shoulders and the place where her breast was.

‘How black your hair is,’ he said, and she said:
‘Lowe, when are you going home?’

‘I don’t know. Why should I go home? I think I’ll have to look at the country first.’

‘But your mother!’ She glanced at him.

‘Oh, well,’ he said largely, ‘you know what women are — always worrying you.’

‘Lowe! How do you know so much about things? Women? You — aren’t married, are you?’

‘Me married?’ repeated Lowe with ungrammatical zest, ‘me married? Not so’s you know it. I have lots of girls, but married?’ he brayed with brief unnecessary vigour. ‘What made you think so?’ he asked with interest.

‘Oh, I don’t know. You look so — so mature, you see.’

‘Ah, that’s flying does that. Look at him in there.’

‘Is that it? I had noticed something about you. . . . You would have been an ace, too, if you’d seen any Germans, wouldn’t you?’

He glanced at her quickly, like a struck dog. Here was his old dull despair again.

‘I’m so sorry,’ she said with quick sincerity. ‘I didn’t think: of course you would. Anyway, it wasn’t your fault. You did your best, I know.’

‘Oh, for Christ’s sake,’ he said, hurt, ‘what do you women want, anyway? I am as good a flyer as any ever was at the front — flying or any other way.’ He sat morose under her eyes. He rose suddenly. ‘Say, what’s your name, anyway?’

'Margaret,' she told him. He approached the bed where she sat and she said: 'More coffee?' stopping him dead. 'You've forgotten your cup. There it is, on the table.'

Before he thought he had returned and fetched his cup, received coffee he did not want. He felt like a fool and being young he resented it. All right for you, he promised her and sat again in a dull rage. To hell with them all.

'I have offended you, haven't I?' she asked. 'But, Lowe, I feel so bad, and you were about to make love to me.'

'Why do you think that?' he asked, hurt and dull.

'Oh, I don't know. But women can tell. And I don't want to be made love to. Gilligan has already done that.'

'Gilligan? Why, I'll kill him if he has annoyed you.'

'No, no: he didn't offend me, any more than you did. It was flattering. But why were you going to make love to me? You thought of it before you came in, didn't you?'

Lowe told her youngly: 'I thought of it on the train when I first saw you. When I saw you I knew you were the woman for me. Tell me, you don't like him better than me because he has wings and a scar, do you?'

'Why, of course not.' She looked at him a moment, calculating. Then she said: 'Mr Gilligan says he is dying.'

'Dying?' he repeated and 'Dying?' How the man managed to circumvent him at every turn! As if it were not enough to have wings and a scar. But to die.

'Margaret,' he said with such despair that she gazed at him in swift pity. (He was so young.) 'Margaret, are you in love with him?' (Knowing that if he were a woman, he would be.)

'No, certainly not. I am not in love with anybody. My husband was killed on the Aisne, you see,' she told him gently.

'Oh, Margaret,' he said with bitter sincerity, 'I would have been killed there if I could, or wounded like him, don't you know it?'

'Of course, darling.' She put the tray aside. 'Come here.'
Cadet Lowe rose again and went to her. 'I would have been, if I'd had a chance,' he repeated.

She drew him down beside her, and he knew he was acting the child she supposed him to be, but he couldn't help it. His disappointment and despair were more than everything now. Here were her knees sweetly under her face, and he put his arms around her legs.

'I wanted to be,' he confessed more than he had ever believed. 'I would take his scar and all.'

'And be dead, like he is going to be?'

But what was death to Cadet Lowe, except something true and grand and sad? He saw a tomb, open, and himself in boots and belt, and pilot's wings on his breast, a wound stripe. . . . What more could one ask of Fate?

'Yes, yes,' he answered.

'Why, you have flown, too,' she told him, holding his face against her knees, 'you might have been him, but you were lucky. Perhaps you would have flown too well to have been shot down as he was. Had you thought of that?'

'I don't know. I guess I would let them catch me, if I could have been him. You are in love with him.'

'I swear I am not.' She raised his head to see his face. 'I would tell you if I were. Don't you believe me?' her eyes were compelling: he believed her.

'Then, if you aren't, can't you promise to wait for me? I will be older soon and I'll work like hell and make money.'

'What will your mother say?'

'Hell, I don't have to mind her like a kid forever. I am nineteen, as old as you are, and if she don't like it, she can go to hell.'

'Lowe!' she reproved him, not telling him she was twenty-four, 'the idea! You go home and tell your mother — I will give you a note to her — and you can write what she says.'

'But I had rather go with you.'

'But, dear heart, what good will that do? We are going to take him home, and he is sick. Don't you see, darling, we can't do anything until we get him settled, and that you would only be in the way?'

'In the way?' he repeated with sharp pain.

'You know what I mean. We can't have anything to think about until we get him home, don't you see?'

'But you aren't in love with him?'

'I swear I'm not. Does that satisfy you?'

'Then, are you in love with me?'

She drew his face against her knees again. 'You sweet child,' she said; 'of course I won't tell you — yet.'

And he had to be satisfied with this. They held each other in silence for a time. 'How good you smell,' remarked Cadet Lowe at last.

She moved. 'Come up here by me,' she commanded, and when he was beside her she took his face in her hands and kissed him. He put his arms around her, and she drew his head between her breasts. After a while she stroked his hair and spoke.

'Now, are you going home at once?'

'Must I?' he asked vacuously.

'You must,' she answered. 'Today. Wire her at once. And I will give you a note to her.'

'Oh, hell, you know what she'll say.'

'Of course I do. You haven't any sisters and brothers, have you?'

'No,' he said in surprise. She moved and he sensed the fact that she desired to be released. He sat up. 'How did you know?' he asked in surprise.

'I just guessed. But you will go, won't you? Promise.'

'Well, I will, then. But I will come back to you.'

'Of course you will. I will expect you. Kiss me.'

She offered her face coolly and he kissed her as she wished: coldly, remotely. She put her hands on his cheeks. 'Dear boy,' she said, kissing him again, as his mother kissed him.

'Say, that's no way for engaged people to kiss,' he objected.

'How do engaged people kiss?' she asked. He put his arms around her, feeling her shoulder-blades, and drew her mouth against his with the technique he had learned. She suffered his kiss a moment, then thrust him away.

'Is that how engaged people kiss?' she asked, laughing. 'I like this better.' She took his face in her palms and touched his mouth briefly and coolly. 'Now swear you'll wire your mother at once.'

'But will you write to me?'

'Surely. But swear you will go today, in spite of what Gilligan may tell you.'

'I swear,' he answered, looking at her mouth. 'Can't I kiss you again?'

'When we are married,' she said, and he knew he was being dismissed. Thinking, knowing, that she was watching him, he crossed the room with an air, not looking back.

Here were yet Gilligan and the officer. Mahon said:
'Morning, old chap.'

Gilligan looked at Lowe's belligerent front from a quizzical reserve of sardonic amusement.

'Made a conquest, hey, ace?'

'Go to hell,' replied Lowe. 'Where's that bottle? I'm going home today.'
'Here she is, General. Drink deep. Going home?' he repeated. 'So are we, hey, Loot?'

CHAPTER TWO

1

JONES, JANUARIUS JONES, born of whom he knew and cared not, becoming Jones alphabetically, January through a conjunction of calendar and biology, Januarius through the perverse conjunction of his own star and the compulsion of food and clothing — Januarius Jones baggy in grey tweed, being lately a fellow of Latin in a small college, leaned upon a gate of iron grill-work breaking a levee of green and embryonically starred honeysuckle, watching April busy in a hyacinth bed.

Dew was on the grass and bees broke apple bloom in the morning sun while swallows were like plucked strings against a pale windy sky. A face regarded him across a suspended trowel and the metal clasps of crossed suspenders made a cheerful glittering.

The rector said: 'Good morning, young man.' His shining dome was friendly against an ivy-covered wall above which the consummate grace of a spire and a gilded cross seemed to arc across motionless young clouds.

Januarius Jones, caught in the spire's illusion of slow ruin, murmured: 'Watch it fall, sir.' The sun was full on his young round face.

The horticulturist regarded him with benevolent curiosity. 'Fall? Ah, you see an aeroplane,' he stated. 'My son was in that service during the war.' He became gigantic in black trousers and broken shoes. 'A beautiful day for flying,' he said from beneath his cupped hand. 'Where do you see it?'

'No, sir,' replied Jones, 'no aeroplane, sir. I referred in a fit of unpardonable detachment to your spire. It was ever my childish delight to stand beneath a spire while clouds are moving overhead. The illusion of slow falling is perfect. Have you ever experienced this, sir?'

'To be sure I have, though it has been — let me see — more years than I care to remember. But one of my cloth is prone to allow his soul to atrophy in his zeal for the welfare of other souls that—'

'— that not only do not deserve salvation, but that do not particularly desire it,' finished Jones.

The rector promptly rebuked him. Sparrows were delirious in ivy and the rambling façade of the rectory was a dream in jonquils and clipped sward. There should be children here, thought Jones. He said: 'I must humbly beg your pardon for my flippancy, Doctor. I assure you that I — ah — took advantage of the situation without any ulterior motive whatever.'

'I understand that, dear boy. My rebuke was tendered in the same spirit. There are certain conventions which we must observe in this world; one of them being an outward deference to that cloth which I unworthily, perhaps, wear. And I have found this particularly incumbent upon us of the — what shall I say — ?'

'Integer vitae scelerisque purus
non eget Mauris iaculis neque arcu

nec venenatis grava sagittis,
Fusce, pharetra—'
began Jones. The rector chimed in:
' — sive per Syrtis iter aestuosas
sive facturus per inhospitalem
Causasum vel quae loca fabulosus
lambit Hydaspes,'

they concluded in galloping duet and stood in the ensuing silence regarding each other with genial enthusiasm.

'But come, come,' cried the rector. His eyes were pleasant. 'Shall I let the stranger languish without my gates?' The grilled iron swung open and his earthy hand was heavy on Jones's shoulder. 'Come let us try the spire.'

The grass was good. A myriad bees vacillated between clover and apple bloom, apple bloom and clover, and from the Gothic mass of the church the spire rose, a prayer imperishable in bronze, immaculate in its illusion of slow ruin across motionless young clouds.

'My one sincere parishioner,' murmured the divine. Sunlight was a windy golden plume about his bald head, and Januarius Jones's face was a round mirror before which fauns and nymphs might have wanted when the world was young.

'Parishioner, did I say? It is more than that: it is by such as this that man may approach nearest to God. And how few will believe this! How few, how few!' He stared unblinking into the sun-filled sky: drowned in his eyes was a despair long since grown cool and quiet.

'That is very true, sir. But we of this age believe that he who may be approached informally, without the intercession of an office-boy of some sort, is not worth the approaching. We purchase our salvation as we do our real estate. Our God,' continued Jones, 'need not be compassionate, he need not be very intelligent. But he must have dignity.'

The rector raised his great dirty hand. 'No, no. You do them injustice. But who has ever found justice in youth, or any of those tiresome virtues with which we coddle and cradle our hardening arteries and souls? Only the ageing need conventions and laws to aggregate to themselves some of the beauty of this world. Without laws the young would reave us of it as corsairs of old combed the blue seas.'

The rector was silent a while. The intermittent shadows of young leaves were bird cries made visible and sparrows in ivy were flecks of sunlight become vocal. The rector continued:

'Had I the arranging of this world I should establish a certain point, say at about the age of thirty, upon reaching which a man would be automatically relegated to a plane where his mind would no longer be troubled with the futile recollection of temptations he had resisted and of beauty he had failed to garner to himself.'

It is jealousy, I think, which makes us wish to prevent young people doing the things we had not the courage or the opportunity ourselves to accomplish once, and have not the power to do now.'

Jones, wondering what temptations he had ever resisted and then recalling the women he might have seduced and hadn't, said: 'And then what? What would the people who have been unlucky enough to reach thirty do?'

'On this plane there would be no troubling physical things such as sunlight and space and birds in the trees — but only unimportant things such as physical comfort: eating and sleeping and procreation.'

What more could you want? thought Jones. Here was a swell place. A man could very well spend all his time eating and sleeping and procreating, Jones believed. He rather wished the rector (or anyone who could imagine a world consisting solely of food and sleep and women) had had the creating of things and that he, Jones, could be forever thirty-one years of age. The rector, though, seemed to hold different opinions.

‘What would they do to pass the time?’ asked Jones for the sake of argument, wondering what the others would do to pass the time, what with eating and sleeping and fornication taken from them.

‘Half of them would manufacture objects and another portion would coin gold and silver with which to purchase these objects. Of course, there would be storage places for the coins and objects, thus providing employment for some of the people. Others naturally would have to till the soil.’

‘But how would you finally dispose of the coins and objects? After a while you would have a single vast museum and a bank, both filled with useless and unnecessary things. And that is already the curse of our civilization — Things, Possessions, to which we are slaves, which require us to either labour honestly at least eight hours a day or do something illegal so as to keep them painted or dressed in the latest mode or filled with whisky or gasoline.’

‘Quite true. And this would remind us too sorely of the world as it is. Needless to say, I have provided for both of these contingencies. The coins might be reduced again to bullion and coined over, and’ — the reverend man looked at Jones in ecstasy— ‘the housewives could use the objects for fuel with which to cook food.’

Old fool, thought Jones, saying: ‘Marvellous, magnificent! You are a man after my own heart, Doctor.’

The rector regarded Jones kindly. ‘Ah, boy, there is nothing after youth’s own heart: youth has no heart.’

‘But, Doctor. This borders on borders upon lese-majesty. I thought we had declared a truce regarding each other’s cloth.’

Shadows moved as the sun moved, a branch dappled the rector’s brow: a laurelled Jove.

‘What is your cloth?’

‘Why—’ began Jones.

'It is the diaper still, dear boy. But forgive me,' he added quickly on seeing Jones's face. His arm was heavy and solid as an oak branch across Jones's shoulder. 'Tell me, what do you consider the most admirable of virtues?'

Jones was placated. 'Sincere arrogance,' he returned promptly. The rector's great laugh boomed like bells in the sunlight, sent the sparrows like gusty leaves whirling.

'Shall we be friends once more, then? Come, I will make a concession: I will show you my flowers. You are young enough to appreciate them without feeling called upon to comment.'

The garden was worth seeing. An avenue of roses bordered a gravelled path which passed from sunlight beneath two overarching oaks. Beyond the oaks, against a wall of poplars in a restless formal row were columns of a Greek temple, yet the poplars themselves in slim, vague green were poised and vain as girls in a frieze.

Against a privet hedge would soon be lilies like nuns in a cloister and blue hyacinths swung soundless bells, dreaming of Lesbos. Upon a lattice wall wistaria would soon burn in slow inverted lilac flame, and following it they came lastly upon a single rose bush. The branches were huge and knotted with age, heavy and dark as a bronze pedestal, crowned with pale impermanent gold. The divine's hands lingered upon it with soft passion.

'Now, this,' he said, 'is my son and my daughter, the wife of my bosom and the bread of my belly: it is my right hand and my left hand. Many is the night I have stood beside it here after having moved the wrappings too soon, burning newspapers to keep the frost out. Once I recall I was in a neighbouring town attending a conference. The weather — it was March — had been most auspicious and I had removed the covering.

'The tips were already swelling. Ah, my boy, no young man ever awaited the coming of his mistress with more impatience than do I await the first bloom on this bush. (Who was the old pagan who kept

his Byzantine goblet at his bedside and slowly wore away the rim kissing it? there is an analogy.) . . . But what was I saying? — ah, yes.

So I left the bush uncovered against my better judgement and repaired to the conference. The weather continued perfect until the last day, then the weather reports predicted a change. The bishop was to be present; I ascertained that I could not reach home by rail and return in time. At last I engaged a livery man to drive me home.

‘The sky was becoming overcast, it was already turning colder. And then, three miles from home, we came upon a stream and found the bridge gone. After some shouting we attracted the attention of a man ploughing across the stream and he came over to us in a skiff. I engaged my driver to await me, was ferried across, walked home and covered my rose, walked back to the stream and returned in time. And that night’ — the rector beamed upon Januarius Jones— ‘snow fell!’

Jones fatly supine on gracious grass, his eyes closed against the sun, stuffing his pipe: ‘This rose has almost made history. You have had the bush for some time, have you not? One does become attached to things one has long known.’ Januarius Jones was not particularly interested in flowers.

‘I have a better reason than that. In this bush is imprisoned a part of my youth, as wine is imprisoned in a wine jar. But with this difference: my wine jar always renews itself.’

‘Oh,’ remarked Jones, despairing, ‘there is a story here, then.’

‘Yes, dear boy. Rather a long story. But you are not comfortable lying there.’

‘Whoever is completely comfortable,’ Jones rushed into the breach, ‘unless he be asleep? It is the fatigue caused by man’s inevitable contact with the earth which bears him, be he sitting, standing, or lying, which keeps his mind in a continual fret over futilities. If a man, if a single man, could be freed for a moment from the forces of gravity, concentrating his weight upon that point of his body which touches the

earth, what would he not do? He would be a god, the lord of life, causing the high gods to tremble on their thrones: he would thunder at the very gates of infinity like a mailed knight. As it is, he must ever have behind his mind a dull wonder how anything composed of fire and air and water and omnipotence in equal parts can be so damn hard.'

'That is true. Man cannot remain in one position long enough to really think. But about the rose bush—'

'Regard the buzzard,' interrupted Jones with enthusiasm, fighting for time, 'supported by air alone: what dignity, what singleness of purpose! What cares he whether or not Smith is governor?

What cares he that the sovereign people annually commission comparative strangers about whom nothing is known save that they have no inclination towards perspiration, to meddle with impunity in the affairs of the sovereign people?'

'But, my dear boy, this borders on anarchism.'

'Anarchism? Surely. The hand of Providence with money-changing blisters. That is anarchism.'

'At least you admit the hand of Providence.'

'I don't know. Do I?' Jones, his hat over his eyes and his pipe projecting beneath, heaved a box of matches from his jacket. He extracted one and scraped it on the box. It failed and he threw it weakly into a clump of violets. He tried another. He tried another. 'Turn it around,' murmured the rector. He did so and the match flared.

'How do you find the hand of Providence here?' he puffed around his pipe stem.

The rector gathered the dead matches from the clump of violets. 'In this way: it enables man to rise and till the soil, so that he might eat. Would he, do you think, rise and labour if he could remain comfortably supine over long? Even that part of the body which the Creator designed for sitting on serves him only a short time, then it rebels, then

it, too, gets his sullen bones up and hauls them along. And there is no help for him save in sleep.'

'But he cannot sleep for more than a possible third of his time,' Jones pointed out. 'And soon it will not even be a third of his time. The race is weakening, degenerating: we cannot stand nearly as much sleep as our comparatively recent (geologically speaking of course) forefathers could, not even as much as our more primitive contemporaries can. For we, the self-styled civilized peoples, are now exercised over our minds and our arteries instead of our stomachs and sex, as were our progenitors and some of our uncompelled contemporaries.'

'Uncompelled?'

'Socially, of course. Doe believes that Doe and Smith should and must do this or that because Smith believes that Smith and Doe should and must do this or that.'

'Ah, yes.' The divine again lifted his kind, unblinking eyes straight into the sun. Dew was off the grass and jonquils and narcissi were beginning to look drowsy, like girls after a ball. 'It is drawing towards noon. Let us go in: I can offer you refreshment and lunch, if you are not engaged.'

Jones rose. 'No, no. Thank you a thousand times. But I shan't trouble you.'

The rector was hearty. 'No trouble, no trouble at all. I am alone at present.'

Jones demurred. He had a passion for food, and an instinct. He had only to pass a house for his instinct to inform him whether or not the food would be good. Jones did not, gastronomically speaking, react favourably to the rector.

The divine, however, overrode him with hearty affability: the rector would not take No. He attached Jones to himself and they trod their shadows across the lawn, herding them beneath the subdued grace of a fanlight of dim-coloured glass lovely with lack of washing.

After the immaculate naked morning, the interior of the hall vortexed with red fire. Jones, temporarily blind, stumbled violently over an object and the handle of a pail clasped his ankle passionately. The rector, bawling Emmy! dragged him, pail and all, erect: he thanked his lucky stars that he had not been attached to the floor as he rose a sodden Venus, disengaging the pail. His dangling feet touched the floor and he felt his trouser leg with despair, fretfully. He's like a derrick, he thought with exasperation.

The rector bawled Emmy again. There was an alarmed response from the depths of the house and one in gingham brushed them. The divine's great voice boomed like surf in the narrow confines, and opening a door upon a flood of light, he ushered the trickling Jones into his study.

'I shall not apologize,' the rector began, 'for the meagreness of the accommodation which I offer you. I am alone at present, you see. But, then, we philosophers want bread for the belly and not for the palate, eh? Come in, come in.'

Jones despaired. A drenched trouser leg, and bread for the belly alone. And God only knew what this great lump of a divine meant by bread for the belly and no bread for the palate. Husks, probably. Regarding food, Jones was sybaritically rather than aesthetically inclined. Or even philosophically. He stood disconsolate, swinging his dripping leg.

'My dear boy, you are soaking!' exclaimed his host. 'Come, off with your trousers.'

Jones protested weakly. 'Emmy!' roared the rector again.

'All right, Uncle Joe. Soon's I get this water up.'

'Never mind the water right now. Run to my room and fetch me a pair of trousers.'

'But the rug will be ruined!'

‘Not irreparably, I hope. We’ll take the risk. Fetch me the trousers. Now, dear boy, off with them. Emmy will dry them in the kitchen and then you will be right as rain.’

Jones surrendered in dull despair. He had truly fallen among moral thieves. The rector assailed him with ruthless kindness and the gingham-clad one reappeared at the door with a twin of the rector’s casual black nether coverings over her arm.

‘Emmy, this is Mr — I do not recall having heard your name — he will be with us at lunch. And, Emmy, see if Cecily wishes to come also.’

This virgin shrieked at the spectacle of Jones, ludicrous in his shirt and his fat pink legs and the trousers jerked solemn and lethargic into the room. ‘Jones,’ supplied Januarius Jones, faintly. Emmy, however, was gone.

‘Ah, yes, Mr Jones.’ The rector fell upon him anew, doing clumsy and intricate things with the waist and bottoms of the trousers, and Jones, decently if voluminously clad, stood like a sheep in a gale while the divine pawed him heavily.

‘Now,’ cried his host, ‘make yourself comfortable (even Jones found irony in this) while I find something that will quench thirst.’

The guest regained his composure in a tidy, shabby room. Upon a rag rug a desk bore a single white hyacinth in a handleless teacup, above a mantel cluttered with pipes and twists of paper hung a single photograph.

There were books everywhere — on shelves, on window ledges, on the floor: Jones saw the Old Testament in Greek in several volumes, a depressing huge book on international law, Jane Austen and Les Contes Drolatiques in dog-eared amity: a mutual supporting caress. The rector re-entered with milk in a pitcher of blue glass and two mugs. From a drawer he extracted a bottle of Scotch whisky.

'A sop to the powers,' he said, leering at Jones with innocent depravity. 'Old dog and new tricks, my boy. But your pardon: perhaps you do not like this combination?'

Jones's morale rose balloon-like. 'I will try any drink once,' he said, like Jurgen.

'Try it, anyway. If you do not like it you are at perfect liberty to employ your own formula.'

The beverage was more palatable than he would have thought. He sipped with relish. 'Didn't you mention a son, sir?'

'That was Donald. He was shot down in Flanders last spring.' The rector rose and took the photograph down from above the mantel. He handed it to his guest. The boy was about eighteen and coatless: beneath unruly hair, Jones saw a thin face with a delicate pointed chin and wild, soft eyes. Jones's eyes were clear and yellow, obscene and old in sin as a goat's.

'There is death in his face,' said Jones.

His host took the photograph and gazed at it. 'There is always death in the faces of the young in spirit, the eternally young. Death for themselves or for others. And dishonour. But death, surely. And why not? why should death desire only those things which life no longer has use for? Who gathers the withered rose?'

The rector dreamed darkly in space for a while. After a time he added: 'A companion sent back a few of his things.' He propped the photograph upright on the desk and from a drawer he took a tin box. His great hand fumbled at the catch.

'Let me, sir,' offered Jones, knowing that it was useless to volunteer, that the rector probably did this every day. But the lid yielded as he spoke and the divine spread on the desk the sorry contents: a woman's chemise, a cheap paper-covered 'Shropshire Lad', a mummied hyacinth bulb. The rector picked up the bulb and it crumbled to dust in his hand.

‘Tut, tut! How careless of me!’ he ejaculated, sweeping the dust carefully into an envelope. ‘I have often deplored the size of my hands. They should have been given to someone who could use them for something other than thumbing books or grubbing in flower beds. Donald’s hands, on the contrary, were quite small, like his mother’s: he was quite deft with his hands. What a surgeon he would have made.’

He placed the things upon the desk, before the propped photograph like a ritual, and propping his face in his earthy bands he took his ruined dream of his son into himself as one inhales tobacco smoke.

‘Truly there is life and death and dishonour in his face. Had you noticed Emmy? Years ago, about the time this picture was made. . . . But that is an old story. Even Emmy has probably forgotten it. . . . You will notice that he has neither coat nor cravat. How often has he appeared after his mother had seen him decently arrayed, on the street, in church, at formal gatherings, carrying hat, coat, and collar in his hands.

How often have I heard him say “Because it is too hot.” Education in the bookish sense he had not: the schooling he got was because he wanted to go, the reading he did was because he wanted to read. Least of all did I teach him fortitude. What is fortitude? Emotional atrophy, gangrene. . . .’ He raised his face and looked at Jones. ‘What do you think? was I right? Or should I have made my son conform to a type?’

‘Conform that face to a type? (So Emmy has already been dishonoured, once, anyway.) How could you? (I owe that dishonoured one a grudge, too.) Could you put a faun into formal clothes?’

The rector sighed. ‘Ah, Mr Jones, who can say?’ He slowly replaced the things in the tin box and sat clasping the box between his hands.

‘As I grow older, Mr Jones, I become more firmly convinced that we learn scarcely anything as we go through this world, and that we learn nothing whatever which can ever help us or be of any particular benefit to us, even. However! . . .’ He sighed again, heavily.

Emmy, the dishonoured virgin, appeared, saying: 'What do you want for dinner, Uncle Joe? Ice-cream or strawberry shortcake?' Blushing, she avoided Jones's eye.

The rector looked at his guest, yearning. 'What would you like, Mr Jones? But I know how young people are about ice-cream. Would you prefer ice-cream?'

But Jones was a tactful man in his generation and knowing about food himself he had an uncanny skill in anticipating other people's reactions to food. 'If it is the same to you, Doctor, let it be shortcake.'

'Shortcake, Emmy,' the rector instructed with passion. Emmy withdrew. 'Do you know,' he continued with apologetic gratitude, 'do you know, when a man becomes old, when instead of using his stomach, his stomach uses him, as his other physical compulsions become weaker and decline, his predilections towards the food he likes obtrude themselves.'

'Not at all, sir,' Jones assured him. 'I personally prefer a warm dessert to an ice.'

'Then you must return when there are peaches. I will give you a peach cobbler, with butter and cream. . . . But ah, my stomach has attained a sad ascendancy over me.'

'Why shouldn't it, sir? Years reave us of sexual compulsions: why shouldn't they fill the interval with compulsions of food?'

The rector regarded him kindly and piercingly. 'You are becoming specious. Man's life need not be always filled with compulsions of either sex or food, need it?'

But here came quick tapping feet down the uncarpeted hall and she entered, saying: 'Good morning, Uncle Joe,' in her throaty voice, crossing the room with graceful effusion, not seeing Jones at once. Then she remarked him and paused like a bird in mid flight, briefly.

Jones rose and under his eyes she walked mincing and graceful, theatrical with body-consciousness to the desk. She bent sweetly as a young tree and the divine kissed her cheek. Jones's goat's eyes immersed her in yellow contemplation.

'Good morning, Cecily.' The rector rose. 'I had expected you earlier, on such a day as this. But young girls must have their beauty sleep regardless of weather,' he ended with elephantine joviality. 'This is Mr Jones, Cecily. Miss Saunders, Mr Jones.'

Jones bowed with obese incipient grace as she faced him, but at her expression of hushed delicate amazement he knew panic. Then he remembered the rector's cursed trousers and he felt his neck and ears slowly burn, knowing that not only was he ridiculous looking but that she supposed he wore such things habitually.

She was speechless and Jones damned the hearty oblivious rector slowly and completely. Curse the man: one moment it was Emmy and no trousers at all, next moment an attractive stranger and nether coverings like a tired balloon.

The rector was saying bland as Fate:

'I had expected you earlier. I had decided to let you take some hyacinths.'

'Uncle Joe! How won — derful!' Her voice was rough, like a tangle of golden wires. She dragged her fascinated gaze from Jones and hating them both Jones felt perspiration under his hair. 'Why didn't I come sooner? But I am always doing the wrong thing, as Mr — Mr Jones will know from my not coming in time to get hyacinths.'

She looked at him again, as she might at a strange beast. Jones's confusion became anger and he found his tongue.

'Yes, it is too bad you didn't come earlier. You would have seen me more interestingly gotten up than this even. Emmy seemed to think so, at least.'

'I beg your pardon?' she said.

The rector regarded him with puzzled affability. Then he understood. 'Ah, yes, Mr Jones suffered a slight accident and was forced to don a garment of mine.'

'Thanks for saying "was forced",' Jones said viciously. 'Yes, I stumbled over that pail of water the doctor keeps just inside the front door, doubtless for the purpose of making his parishioners be sure they really require help from heaven, on the second visit,' he explained, Greek-like, giving his dignity its death-stroke with his own hand. 'You, I suppose, are accustomed to it and can avoid it.'

She looked from Jones's suffused angry face to the rector's kind, puzzled one and screamed with laughter.

'Forgive me,' she pleaded, sobering as quickly. 'I simply couldn't help it, Mr Jones. You'll forgive me, won't you?'

'Certainly. Even Emmy enjoyed it. Doctor, Emmy cannot have been so badly outraged after all, to suffer such shock from seeing a man's bare—'

She covered up this gaucherie, losing most of the speech in her own words. 'So you showed Mr Jones your flowers? Mr Jones should be quite flattered: that is quite a concession for Uncle Joe to make,' she said smoothly, turning to the divine, graceful, and insincere as a French sonnet. 'Is Mr Jones famous, then? You haven't told me you knew famous men.'

The rector boomed his laugh. 'Well, Mr Jones, you seem to have concealed something from me.' (Not as much as I would have liked to, Jones thought.) 'I didn't know I was entertaining a celebrity.'

Jones's essential laziness of temper regained its ascendancy and he answered civilly: 'Neither did I, sir.'

'Ah, don't try to hide your light, Mr Jones. Women know these things. They see through us at once.'

'Uncle Joe,' she cautioned swiftly at this unfortunate remark, watching Jones. But Jones was safe now.

'No, I don't agree with you. If they saw through us they would never marry us.'

She was grateful and her glance showed a faint interest (what colour are her eyes?).

'Oh, that's what Mr Jones is! an authority on women.'

Jones's vanity swelled and the rector saying, 'Pardon me,' fetched a chair from the hall. She leaned her thigh against the desk and her eyes (are they grey or blue or green?) met his yellow unabashed stare. She lowered her gaze and he remarked her pretty selfconscious mouth.

This is going to be easy, he thought. The rector placed the chair for her and she sat and when the rector had taken his desk chair again, Jones resumed his own seat. How long her legs are, he thought, seeing her frail white dress shape to her short torso. She felt his bold examination and looked up.

'So Mr Jones is married,' she remarked. She did something to her eyes and it seemed to Jones that she had touched him with her hands. I've got your number, he thought vulgarly. He replied:

'No, what makes you think so?' The rector filling his pipe regarded them kindly.

'Oh, I misunderstood, then.'

'That isn't why you thought so.'

'No?'

'It's because you like married men,' he told her boldly. 'Do I?' without interest. It seemed to Jones that he could see her interest ebb away from him, could feel it cool.

'Don't you?'

'You ought to know.'

'I?' asked Jones. 'How should I know?'

'Aren't you an authority on women?' she replied with sweet ingenuousness. Speechless he could have strangled her. The divine applauded:

'Checkmate, Mr Jones?'

Just let me catch her eye again, he vowed, but she would not look at him. He sat silent and under his seething gaze she took the photograph from the desk and held it quietly for a time. Then she replaced it and reaching across the desk-top she laid her hand on the rector's.

'Miss Saunders was engaged to my son,' the divine explained to Jones.

'Yes?' said Jones, watching her profile, waiting for her to look at him again. Emmy, that unfortunate virgin, appeared at the door.

'All right, Uncle Joe,' she said, vanishing immediately.

'Ah, lunch,' the rector announced, starting up. They rose.

'I can't stay,' she demurred, yielding to the divine's hand upon her back. Jones fell in behind. 'I really shouldn't stay,' she amended.

They moved down the dark hall and Jones watching her white dress flow indistinctly to her stride, imagining her kiss, cursed her. At a door she paused and stood aside courteously, as a man would. The rector stopped also as perforce did Jones and here was a French comedy regarding precedence.

Jones with counterfeit awkwardness felt her soft uncorseted thigh against the back of his hand and her sharp stare was like ice water. They entered the room. 'Made you look at me then,' he muttered.

The rector remarking nothing said:

'Sit here, Mr Jones,' and the virgin Emmy gave him a haughty antagonistic stare. He returned her a remote yellow one. 'I'll see about

you later, he promised her mentally, sitting to immaculate linen. The rector drew the other guest's chair and sat himself at the head of the table.

'Cecily doesn't eat very much,' he said, carving a fowl, 'so the burden will fall upon you and me. But I think we can be relied upon, eh, Mr Jones?'

She propped her elbows opposite him. And I'll attend to you, too, Jones promised her darkly. She still ignored his yellow gaze and he said: 'Certainly, sir,' employing upon her the old thought process which he had used in school when he was prepared upon a certain passage, but she ignored him with such thorough perfection that he knew a sudden qualm of unease, a faint doubt. I wonder if I am wrong? he pondered. I'll find out, he decided suddenly.

'You were saying, sir,' — still watching her oblivious shallow face— 'as Miss Saunders so charmingly came in, that I am too specious. But one must always generalize about fornication. Only after—'

'Mr Jones!' the rector exclaimed heavily.

'— the fornication is committed should one talk about it at all, and then only to generalize, to become — in your words — specious. He who kisses and tells is not very much of a fellow, is he?'

'Mr Jones,' the rector remonstrated.

'Mr Jones!' she echoed. 'What a terrible man you are! Really, Uncle Joe—'

Jones interrupted viciously. 'As far as the kiss itself goes, women do not particularly care who does the kissing. All they are interested in is the kiss itself.'

'Mr Jones!' she repeated, staring at him, then looking quickly away. She shuddered.

'Come, come, sir. There are ladies present.' The rector achieved his aphorism.

Jones pushed his plate from him, Emmy's raw and formless hand removed it and here was a warm golden brow crowned with strawberries. Dam'f I look at her, he swore, and so he did. Her gaze was remote and impersonal, green and cool as sea water, and Jones turned his eyes first. She turned to the rector, talking smoothly about flowers. He was politely ignored and he moodily engaged his spoon as Emmy appeared again.

Emmy emanated a thin hostility and staring from Jones to the girl she said:

'Lady to see you, Uncle Joe.'

The rector poised his spoon. 'Who is it, Emmy?'

'I dunno. I never saw her before. She's waiting in the study.'

'Has she had lunch? Ask her in here.'

(She knows I am watching her. Jones knew exasperation and a puerile lust.)

'She don't want anything to eat. She said not to disturb you until you had finished dinner. You better go in and see what she wants.' Emmy retreated.

The rector wiped his mouth and rose. 'I suppose I must. You young people sit here until I return. Call Emmy if you want anything.'

Jones sat in sullen silence, turning a glass in his fingers. At last she looked at his bent ugly face.

'So you are unmarried, as well as famous,' she remarked.

'Famous because I'm unmarried,' he replied darkly.

'And courteous because of which?'

'Either one you like.'

'Well, frankly, I prefer courtesy.'

'Do you often get it?'

'Always . . . eventually.' He made no reply and she continued: 'Don't you believe in marriage?'

'Yes, as long as there are no women in it.' She shrugged indifferently. Jones could not bear seeming a fool to anyone as shallow as he considered her and he blurted, wanting to kick himself: 'You don't like me, do you?'

'Oh, I like anyone who believes there may be something he doesn't know,' she replied without interest.

'What do you mean by that?' (are they green or grey?) Jones was a disciple of the cult of boldness with women. He rose and the table wheeled smoothly as he circled it: he wished faintly that he were more graceful. Those thrice unhappy trousers!

You can't blame her, he thought with fairness. What would I think had she appeared in one of her grandma's mother hubbards? He remarked her reddish dark hair and the delicate slope of her shoulder. (I'll put my hand there and let it slip down her arm as she turns.)

Without looking up, she said suddenly: 'Did Uncle Joe tell you about Donald?' (Oh, hell, thought Jones.) 'Isn't it funny,' her chair scraped to her straightening knees, 'we both thought of moving at the same time?' She rose, her chair intervened woodenly, and Jones stood ludicrous and foiled. 'You take mine and I'll take yours,' she added, moving around the table.

'You bitch,' said Jones evenly and her green-blue eyes took him sweetly as water.

'What made you say that?' she asked quietly. Jones, having to an extent eased his feelings, thought he saw a recurring interest in her expression. (I was right, he gloated.)

'You know why I said that.'

'It's funny how few men know that women like to be talked to that way,' she remarked irrelevantly.

I wonder if she loves someone? I guess not — like a tiger loves meat. 'I am not like other men,' he told her.

He thought he saw derision in her brief glance, but she merely yawned delicately. At last he had her classified in the animal kingdom. Hamadryad, a slim jewelled one.

'Why doesn't George come for me!' she said as if in answer to his unspoken speculation, patting her mouth with the tips of petulant, delicate fingers. 'Isn't it boring, waiting for someone?'

'Yes. Who is George, may I ask?'

'Certainly, you may ask.'

'Well, who is he?' (I don't like her type, anyway.) 'I had gathered that you were pining for the late lamented.'

'The late lamented?'

'That fox-faced Henry or Oswald or something.'

'Oh, Donald. Do you mean Donald?'

'Surely. Let him be Donald, then.'

She regarded him impersonally. (I can't even make her angry, he thought fretfully.) 'Do you know, you are impossible.'

'All right. So I am,' he answered with anger. 'But then I wasn't engaged to Donald. And George is not calling for me.'

'What makes you so angry? Because I won't let you put your hands on me?'

'My dear woman, if I had wanted to put my hands on you I would have done it.'

'Yes?' Her rising inflection was a polite maddening derision.

'Certainly. Don't you believe it?' his own voice gave him courage.

'I don't know . . . but what good would it do to you?'

'No good at all. That's the reason I don't want to.'

Her green eyes took him again. Sparse old silver on a buffet shadowed heavily under a high fanlight of coloured glass identical with the one above the entrance, her fragile white dress across the table from him: he could imagine her long subtle legs, like Atalanta's reft of running.

'Why do you tell yourself lies?' she asked with interest.

'Same reason you do.'

'I?'

'Surely. You intend to kiss me and yet you are going to all this damn trouble about it.'

'Do you know,' she remarked with speculation, 'I believe I hate you.'

'I don't doubt it. I know damn well I hate you.'

She moved in her chair, sloping the light now across her shoulders, releasing him and becoming completely another person. 'Let's go to the study. Shall we?'

'All right. Uncle Joe should be done with his caller by now.' He rose and they faced each other across the broken meal. She did not rise.

'Well?' she said.

'After you, ma'am,' he replied with mock deference.

'I have changed my mind. I think I'll wait here and talk to Emmy, if you don't object.'

'Why Emmy?'

'Why not Emmy?'

'Ah, I see. You can feel fairly safe with Emmy: she probably won't want to put her hands on you. That's it, isn't it?' She glanced briefly at him.

'What you really mean is, that you will stay if I am going out of the room, don't you?'

'Suit yourself.' She became oblivious of him, breaking a biscuit upon a plate and dripping water upon it from a glass. Jones moved fatly in his

borrowed trousers, circling the table again. As he approached she turned slightly in her chair, extending her hand. He felt its slim bones in his fat moist palm, its nervous ineffectual flesh. Not good for anything. Useless. But beautiful with lack of character. Beautiful hand. Its very fragility stopped him like a stone barrier.

‘Oh, Emmy,’ she called sweetly, ‘come here, darling. I have something to show you.’

Emmy regarded them balefully from the door and Jones said quickly: ‘Will you fetch me my trousers, Miss Emmy?’

Emmy glanced from one to the other ignoring the girl’s mute plea. (Oho, Emmy has fish of her own to fry, thought Jones.) Emmy vanished and he put his hands on the girl’s shoulders.

‘Now what will you do? Call the reverend?’

She looked at him across her shoulder from beyond an inaccessible barrier. His anger grew and his hands wantonly crushed her dress.

‘Don’t ruin my clothes, please,’ she said icily. ‘Here, if you must.’ She raised her face and Jones felt the shame, but his boyish vanity would not let him stop now. Her face a prettiness of shallow characterless planes blurred into his, her mouth was motionless and impersonal, unresisting and cool.

Her face from a blur became again a prettiness of characterless shallowness icy and remote, and Jones, ashamed of himself and angry with her therefore, said with heavy irony: ‘Thanks.’

‘Not at all. If you got any pleasure from it you are quite welcome.’ She rose. ‘Let me pass, please.’

He stood awkwardly aside. Her frigid polite indifference was unbearable. What a fool he had been! He had ruined everything.

‘Miss Saunders,’ he blurted, ‘I — forgive me: I don’t usually act that way, I swear I don’t.’

She spoke over her shoulder. 'You don't have to, I suppose? I imagine you are usually quite successful with us?'

'I am very sorry. But I don't blame you. . . . One hates to convict oneself of stupidity.'

After a while hearing no further sound of movement he looked up. She was like a flower stalk or a young tree relaxed against the table: there was something so fragile, so impermanent since robustness and strength were unnecessary, yet strong withal as a poplar is strong through very absence of strength, about her; you knew that she lived, that her clear delicate being was nourished by sunlight and honey until even digestion was a beautiful function . . . as he watched something like a shadow come over her, somewhere between her eyes and her petulant pretty mouth, in the very clear relaxation of her body, that caused him to go quickly to her.

She stared into his unblinking goat's eyes as his hands sliding across her arms met at the small of her back, and Jones did not know the door had opened until she jerked her mouth from his and twisted slimly from his clasp.

The rector loomed in the door, staring into the room as if he did not recognize it. He has never seen us at all, Jones knew, then seeing the divine's face he said: 'He's ill.'

The rector spoke. 'Cecily—'

'What is it, Uncle Joe?' she replied in sharp terror, going to him. 'Aren't you well?'

The divine balanced his huge body with a hand on either side of the doorway.

'Cecily, Donald's coming home,' he said.

There was that subtle effluvia of antagonism found inevitably in a room where two young 'pretty' women are, and they sat examining each other with narrow care. Mrs Powers, temporarily engaged in an unselfconscious accomplishment and being among strangers as well, was rather oblivious of it; but Cecily, never having been engaged in an unselfconscious action of any kind and being among people whom she knew, examined the other closely with that attribute women have for gaining correct instinctive impressions of another's character, clothes, morals, etc.

Jones's yellow stare took the newcomer at intervals, returning, however, always to Cecily, who ignored him.

The rector tramped heavily back and forth. 'Sick?' he boomed. 'Sick? But we'll cure him. Get him home here with good food and rest and attention and we'll have him well in a week. Eh, Cecily?'

'Oh, Uncle Joe! I can't believe it yet. That he is really safe.' She rose as the rector passed her chair and sort of undulated into his arms, like a slim wave. It was beautiful.

'Here's the medicine for him, Mrs Powers,' he said with heavy gallantry, embracing Cecily, speaking over her head towards the contemplative pallor of the other woman's quiet watching face. 'There, there, don't cry,' he added, kissing her. The audience watched this, Mrs Powers with speculative detached interest and Jones with morose speculation.

'It's because I am so happy — for you, dear Uncle Joe,' she answered. She turned graceful as a flower stalk against the rector's black bulk.

'And we owe it all to Mrs — Mrs Powers,' she continued in her slightly rough voice, like a tangle of golden wires, 'she was so kind to bring him back to us.' Her glance swept past Jones and flickered like a knife towards the other woman. (Damn little fool thinks I have tried to vamp him, Mrs Powers thought.) Cecily moved towards her with studied impulse. 'May I kiss you? do you mind?'

It was like kissing a silken smooth steel blade and Mrs Powers said brutally: 'Not at all. I'd have done the same for anyone sick as he is, nigger or white. And you would, too,' she added with satisfying malice.

'Yes, it was so sweet of you,' Cecily repeated, coolly non-committal, exposing a slim leg from the arm of the caller's chair. Jones, statically remote, watched the comedy.

'Nonsense,' the rector interposed. 'Mrs Powers merely saw him fatigued with travelling. I am sure he will be a different man tomorrow.'

'I hope so,' Mrs Powers answered with sudden weariness, recalling his devastated face and that dreadful brow, his whole relaxed inertia of constant dull pain and ebbing morale. It's too late, she thought with instinctive perspicuity. Shall I tell them about the scar? she pondered. Prevent a scene when this — this creature (feeling the girl's body against her shoulder) sees it.

But no, I won't, she decided, watching the tramping rector leonine in his temporary happiness. What a coward I am. Joe should have come: he might have known I'd bungle it some way.

The rector fetched his photograph. She took it: thin-faced, with the serenity of a wild thing, the passionate serene alertness of a faun; and that girl leaning against the oaken branch of the rector's arm, believing that she is in love with the boy, or his illusion — pretending she is, anyway.

No, no, I won't be catty. Perhaps she is — as much as she is capable of being in love with anyone. It's quite romantic, being reft of your love and then having him returned unexpectedly to your arms. And an aviator, too. What luck that girl has playing her parts. Even God helps her. . . . You cat! she's pretty and you are jealous.

That's what's the matter with you, she thought in her bitter weariness. What makes me furious is her thinking that I am after him, am in love with him! Oh, yes, I'm in love with him! I'd like to hold his poor ruined head against my breast and not let him wake again ever. . . . Oh, hell,

what a mess it all is! And that dull fat one yonder in somebody else's trousers, watching her with his yellow unwinking eyes — like a goat's. I suppose she's been passing the time with him.

' — he was eighteen then,' the rector was saying. 'He would never wear hat nor tie: his mother could never make him. She saw him correctly dressed, but it mattered not how formal the occasion, he invariably appeared without them.'

Cecily rubbing herself like a cat on the rector's arm: 'Oh, Uncle Joe, I love him so!'

And Jones like another round and arrogant cat, blinking his yellow eyes, muttered a shocking phrase. The rector was oblivious in speech and Cecily in her own graceful immersion, but Mrs Powers half heard, half saw, and Jones looking up met her black stare. He tried to look her down but her gaze was impersonal as a dissection so he averted his and fumbled for his pipe.

There came a prolonged honking of a motor horn from without and Cecily sprang to her feet.

'Oh, there's — there's a friend of ours. I'll send him away and come straight back. Will you excuse me a moment, Uncle Joe?'

'Eh?' The rector broke his speech. 'Oh, yes.'

'And you, Mrs Powers?' She moved towards the door and her glance swept Jones again. 'And you, Mr Jones?'

'George got a car, has he?' Jones asked as she passed him. 'Bet you don't come back.'

She gave him her cool stare and from beyond the study door she heard the rector's voice resume the story again — of Donald, of course. And now I'm engaged again, she thought complacently, enjoying George's face in anticipation when she would tell him.

And that long black woman has been making love to him — or he to her. I guess it's that, from what I know of Donald. Oh, well, that's how men are, I guess. Perhaps he'll want to take us both. . . .

She tripped down the steps into the sunlight: the sunlight caressed her with joy, as though she were a daughter of sunlight. How would I like to have a husband and wife, too, I wonder? Or two husbands? I wonder if I want one even, want to get married at all. . . . I guess it's worth trying, once.

I'd like to see that horrible fat one's face if he could hear me say that, she thought. Wonder why I let him kiss me? Ugh!
George leaned from his car watching her restricted swaying stride with faint lust. 'Come on, come on,' he called.

She did not increase her gait at all. He swung the door open, not bothering to dismount himself. 'My God, what took you so long?' he asked plaintively. 'Dam'f I thought you were coming at all.'

'I'm not,' she told him, laying her hand on the door. Her white dress in the nooning sun was unbearable to the eye, sloped to her pliant fragility. Beyond her, across the lawn, was another pliant gesture though this was only a tree, a poplar.

'Huh?'

'Not coming. My fiancé is arriving today.'

'Aw hell, get in.'

'Donald's coming today,' she repeated, watching him. His face was ludicrous: blank as a plate, then shocked to slow amazement.

'Why, he's dead,' he said vacuously.

'But he isn't dead,' she told him sweetly. 'A lady friend he's travelling with came on ahead and told us. Uncle Joe's like a balloon.'

'Ah, come on, Cecily. You're kidding me.'

'I swear I'm not. I'm telling you the God's truth.'

His smooth empty face hung before her like a handsome moon, empty as a promise. Then it filled with an expression of a sort.

'Hell, you got a date with me tonight. Whatcher going to do about that?'

'What can I do? Donald will be here by then.'

'Then it's all off with us?'

She gazed at him, then looked quickly away. Funny how only an outsider had been able to bring home to her the significance of Donald's imminence, his return. She nodded dumbly, beginning to feel miserable and lost.

He leaned from the car and caught her hand. 'Get in here,' he commanded.

'No, no, I can't,' she protested, trying to draw back. He held her wrist.

'No, no, let me go. You are hurting me.'

'I know it,' he answered grimly. 'Get in.'

'Don't, George, don't! I must go back.'

'Well, when can I see you?'

Her mouth trembled. 'Oh, I don't know. Please, George. Don't you see how miserable I am?' Her eyes became blue, dark; the sunlight made bold the wrenched thrust of her body, her thin taut arm. 'Please, George.'

'Are you going to get in or do you want me to pick you up and put you in?'

'I'm going to cry in a minute. You'd better let me go.'

'Oh, damn. Why, sugar, I didn't mean it that way. I just wanted to see you. We've got to see each other if it's going to be all off with us. Come on, I've been good to you.'

She relaxed. 'Well, but just around the block then. I've got to get back to them.' She raised a foot to the running board. 'Promise?' she insisted.

'Sure. Round the block it is. I won't run off with you if you say not.'

She got in and as they drove off she looked quickly to the house. There was a face in the window, a round face.

4

George turned from the street and drove down a quiet lane bordered by trees, between walls covered with honeysuckle. He stopped the car and she said swiftly:

'No, no, George! Drive on.'

But he cut the switch. 'Please,' she repeated. He turned in his seat.

'Cecily, you are kidding me, aren't you?'

She turned the switch and tried to reach the starter with her foot. He caught her hands, holding her. 'Look at me.'

Her eyes grew blue again with foreboding.

'You are kidding me, aren't you?'

'I don't know. Oh, George, it all happened so suddenly! I don't know what to think. When we were in there talking about him it all seemed so grand for Donald to be coming back, in spite of that woman with him; and to be engaged to a man who will be famous when he gets here — oh, it seemed then that I did love him: it was exactly the thing to do. But now . . . I'm just not ready to be married yet.

And he's been gone so long, and to take up with another woman on his way to me — I don't know what to do. I — I'm going to cry,' she ended suddenly, putting her crooked arm on the seat-back and burying her face in her elbow. He put his arm around her shoulders and tried to draw her to him. She raised her hands between them straightening her arms.

'No, no, take me back.'

'But, Cecily—'

'You mustn't! Don't you know I'm engaged to be married? He'll probably want to be married tomorrow, and I'll have to do it.'

'But you can't do that. You aren't in love with him.'

'But I've got to, I tell you!'

'Are you in love with him?'

'Take me back to Uncle Joe's. Please.'

He was the stronger and at last he held her close, feeling her small bones, her frail taut body beneath her dress. 'Are you in love with him?' he repeated.

She burrowed her face into his coat.

'Look at me.' She refused to lift her face and he slipped his hand under her chin, raising it. 'Are you?'

'Yes, yes,' she said wildly, staring at him. 'Take me back!'

'You are lying. You aren't going to marry him.'

She was weeping. 'Yes, I am. I've got to. He expects it and Uncle Joe expects it. I must, I tell you.'

'Darling, you can't. Don't you love me? You know you do. You can't marry him.' She stopped struggling and lay against him, crying. 'Come on, say you won't marry him.'

'George, I can't,' she said hopelessly. 'Don't you see I have got to marry him?'

Young and miserable they clung to each other. The slumbrous afternoon lay about them in the empty lane. Even the sparrows seemed drowsy and from the spire of the church pigeons were remote and monotonous, unemphatic as sleep. She raised her face.

'Kiss me, George.'

He tasted tears: their faces were coolly touching. She drew her head back, searching his face. 'That was the last time, George.'

'No, no,' he objected, tightening his arms. She resisted a moment, then kissed him passionately.

'Darling!'

'Darling!'

She straightened up, dabbing at her eyes with his handkerchief. 'There! I feel better now. Take me home, kind sir.'

'But, Cecily,' he protested, trying to embrace her again. She put him aside coolly.

'Not any more, ever. Take me home, like a nice boy.'

'But, Cecily—'

'Do you want me to get out and walk? I can, you know: it isn't far.'

He started the engine and drove on in a dull youthful sorrow. She patted at her hair, her fingers bloomed slimly in it, and they turned on to the street again. As she descended at the gate he made a last despairing attempt.

'Cecily, for God's sake!'

She looked over her shoulder at his stricken face. 'Don't be silly, George. Of course I'll see you again. I'm not married — yet.'

Her white dress in the sun was an unbearable shimmer sloping to her body's motion and she passed from sunlight to shadow, mounting the steps. At the door she turned, flashed him a smile, and waved her hand. Then her white dress faded beyond a fanlight of muted colour dim with age and lovely with lack of washing, leaving George to stare at the empty maw of the house in hope and despair and baffled youthful lust.

Jones at the window saw them drive away. His round face was enigmatic as a god's, his clear obscene eyes showed no emotion. You are good, you are, he thought in grudging, unillusioned admiration. I hand it to you. He was still musing upon her when the mean-looking black-haired woman, interrupting the rector's endless reminiscences of his son's boyhood and youth, suggested that it was time to go to the station.

The divine became aware of the absence of Cecily, who was at that moment sitting in a stationary motor-car in an obscure lane, crying on the shoulder of a man whose name was not Donald. Jones, the only one who had remarked the manner of her going, was for some reason he could not have named safely non-committal.

The rector stated fretfully that Cecily, who was at that moment kissing a man whose name was not Donald, should not have gone away at that time. But the other woman (I bet she's as mean as hell, thought Jones) interrupted again, saying that it was better so.

'But she should have gone to the station to meet him,' the rector stated with displeasure.

'No, no. Remember, he is sick. The less excitement the better for him. Besides, it is better for them to meet privately.'

'Ah, yes, quite right, quite right. Trust a woman in these things, Mr Jones. And for that reason perhaps you had better wait also, don't you think?'

'By all means, sir. I will wait and tell Miss Saunders why you went without her. She will doubtless be anxious to know.'

After the cab had called for them and gone Jones, still standing, stuffed his pipe with moody viciousness. He wandered aimlessly about the room, staring out the windows in turn, puffing his pipe; then pausing to push a dead match beneath a rug with his toe he crossed deliberately to the rector's desk. He drew and closed two drawers before finding the right one.

The bottle was squat and black and tilted took the light pleasantly. He replaced it, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. And just in time, too, for her rapid brittle steps crossed the veranda and he heard a motor-car retreating.

The door framed her fragile surprise. She remarked, 'Oh! Where are the others?'

'What's the matter? Have a puncture?' Jones countered nastily. Her eyes flew like birds, and he continued: 'The others? They went to the station, the railroad station. You know: where the trains come in. The parson's son or something is coming home this afternoon. Fine news, isn't it? But won't you come in?'

She entered hesitant, watching him.

'Oh, come on in, sister, I won't hurt you.'

'But why didn't they wait for me?'

'They thought you didn't want to go, I suppose. Hadn't you left that impression?'

In the silence of the house was a clock like a measured respiration, and Emmy was faintly audible somewhere. These sounds reassured her and she entered a few steps. 'You saw me go. Didn't you tell them where I was?'

'Told them you went to the bathroom.'

She looked at him curiously, knowing in some way that he was not lying. 'Why did you do that?'

'It was your business where you were going, not mine. If you wanted them to know you should have told them yourself.'

She sat alertly. 'You're a funny sort of a man, aren't you?'

Jones moved casually, in no particular direction. 'How funny?'

She rose. 'Oh, I don't know exactly . . . you don't like me and yet you told a lie for me.'

‘Hell, you don’t think I mind telling a lie, do you?’

She said with speculation:

‘I wouldn’t put anything past you — if you thought you could get any fun out of it.’ Watching his eyes she moved towards the door.

The trousers hampered him but despite them his agility was amazing. But she was alert and her studied grace lent her muscular control and swiftness, and so it was a bland rubbed panel of wood that he touched. Her dress whipped from sight, he heard a key and her muffled laugh, derisive.

‘Damn your soul,’ he spoke in a quiet toneless emotion, ‘open the door.’

The wood was bland and inscrutable: baffling, holding up to him in its polished depths the fat white blur of his own face. Holding his breath he heard nothing beyond it save a clock somewhere.

‘Open the door,’ he repeated, but there was no sound. Has she gone away, or not? he wondered, straining his ears, bending to the bulky tweeded Narcissus of himself in the polished wood. He thought of the windows and walking quietly he crossed the room, finding immovable gauze wire.

He returned to the centre of the room without trying to muffle his steps and stood in a mounting anger, cursing her slowly. Then he saw the door handle move.

He sprang to it. ‘Open the door, you little slut, or I’ll kick your screens out.’

The lock clicked and he jerked the door open upon Emmy, his trousers over her arm, meeting him with her frightened antagonistic eyes.

‘Where—’ began Jones, and Cecily stepped from the shadows, curtsying like a derisive flower.

‘Checkmate, Mr Jones.’ Jones paraphrased the rector in a reedy falsetto. ‘Do you know—’

‘Yes,’ said Cecily quickly, taking Emmy’s arm. ‘But tell us on the veranda.’ She led the way and Jones followed in reluctant admiration. She and the baleful speechless Emmy preceding him sat arm in arm in a porch swing while afternoon sought interstices in soon-to-be lilac wistaria: afternoon flowed and ebbed upon them as they swung and their respective silk and cotton shins took and released sunlight in running planes.

‘Sit down, Mr Jones,’ she continued, gushing. ‘Do tell us about yourself. We are so interested, aren’t we, Emmy dear?’ Emmy was watchful and inarticulate, like an animal ‘Emmy, dear Mr Jones, has missed all of your conversation and admiring you as we all do — we simply cannot help it, Mr Jones — she is naturally anxious to make up for it.’

Jones cupped a match in his palms and there were two little flames in his eyes, leaping and sinking to pin points.

‘You are silent, Mr Jones? Emmy and I both would like to hear some more of what you have learned about us from your extensive amatory career. Don’t we, Emmy darling?’

‘No, I won’t spoil it for you,’ Jones replied heavily. ‘You are on the verge of getting some first-hand information of your own. As for Miss Emmy, I’ll teach her sometime later, in private.’

Emmy continued to watch him with fierce dumb distrust. Cecily said: ‘At first-hand?’

‘Aren’t you being married tomorrow? You can learn from Oswald. He should certainly be able to tell you, travelling as he seems to with a sparring partner. Got caught, at last, didn’t you?’

She shivered. She looked so delicate, so needing to be cared for, that Jones, becoming masculine and sentimental, felt again like a cloddish

brute. He lit his pipe again and Emmy, convicting herself of the power of speech, said:

'Yonder they come.'

A cab had drawn up to the gate and Cecily sprang to her feet and ran along the porch to the steps. Jones and Emmy rose and Emmy vanished somewhere as four people descended from the cab. So that's him, thought Jones ungrammatically, following Cecily, watching her as she stood poised on the top step like a bird, her hand to her breast. Trust her!

He looked again at the party coming through the gate, the rector looming above them all. There was something changed about the divine: age seemed to have suddenly overtaken him, unresisted, coming upon him like a highwayman. He's sure sick, Jones told himself. The woman, that Mrs Something-or-other, left the party and hastened ahead. She mounted the steps to Cecily.

'Come darling,' she said, taking the girl's arm, 'come inside. He is not well and the light hurts his eyes. Come in and meet him there, hadn't you rather?'

'No, no: here. I have waited so long for him.'

The other woman was kind but obdurate. And she led the girl into the house. Cecily reluctant, with reverted head cried: 'Uncle Joe! his face! is he sick?'

The divine's face was grey and slack as dirty snow. At the steps he stumbled slightly and Jones sprang forward, taking his arm. 'Thanks, buddy,' said the third man, in a private's uniform, whose hand was beneath Mahon's elbow. They mounted the steps and crossing the porch passed under the fanlight, into the dark hall.

'Take your cap, Loot,' murmured the enlisted man. The other removed it and handed it to him. They heard swift tapping feet crossing a room and the study door opened letting a flood of light fall upon them, and Cecily cried:

'Donald! Donald! She says your face is hur — oooooh!' she ended, screaming as she saw him.

The light passing through her fine hair gave her a halo and lent her frail dress a fainting nimbus about her crumpling body like a stricken poplar. Mrs Powers moving quickly caught her, but not before her head had struck the door jamb.

CHAPTER THREE

1

MRS SAUNDERS SAID: 'You come away now, let your sister alone.'

Young Robert Saunders fretted but optimistic, joining again that old battle between parent and child, hopeful in the face of invariable past defeat:

'But can't I ask her a civil question? I just want to know what his scar I—'

'Come now, come with mamma.'

'But I just want to know what his sc—'

'Robert.'

'But mamma,' he essayed again, despairing. His mother pushed him firmly doorward.

'Run down to the garden and tell your father to come here. Run, now.'

He left the room in exasperation. His mamma would have been shocked could she have read his thoughts. It wasn't her especially. They're all alike, he guessed largely, as has many a man before him and as many will after him. He wasn't going to hurt the old 'fraid cat.

Cecily freed of her clothing lay crushed and pathetic between cool linen, surrounded by a mingled scent of cologne and ammonia, her fragile face coiffed in a towel. Her mother drew a chair to the side of the bed and examined her daughter's pretty shallow face, the sweep of

her lashes upon her white cheek, her arms paralleling the shape of her body beneath the covers, her delicate blue-veined wrists and her long slender hands relaxed and palm-upwards beside her. Then young Robert Saunders, without knowing it, had his revenge.

‘Darling, what did his face look like?’

Cecily shuddered, turning her head on the pillow. ‘Ooooh, don’t, don’t, mamma! I c-can’t bear to think of it.’

(But I just want to ask you a civil question.) ‘There there. We won’t talk about it until you feel better.’

‘Not ever, not ever. If I have to see him again I’ll — I’ll just die. I can’t bear it, I can’t bear it.’

She was crying again frankly like a child, not even concealing her face. Her mother rose and leaned over her. ‘There, there. Don’t cry any more. You’ll be ill.’ She gently brushed the girl’s hair from her temples, rearranging the towel. She bent down and kissed her daughter’s pale cheek. ‘Mamma’s sorry, baby. Suppose you try to sleep. Shall I bring you a tray at supper time?’

‘No, I couldn’t eat. Just let me lie here alone and I’ll feel better.’

The older woman lingered, still curious. (I just want to ask her a civil question.) The telephone rang, and with a last ineffectual pat at the pillow she withdrew.

Lifting the receiver, she remarked her husband closing the garden gate behind him.

‘Yes? . . . Mrs Saunders. . . . Oh, George? . . . Quite well, thank you. How are you . . . no, I am afraid not. . . . What? . . . yes, but she is not feeling well . . . later, perhaps. . . . Not tonight. Call her tomorrow . . . yes, yes, quite well, thank you. Good-bye.’

She passed through the cool darkened hall and on to the veranda letting her tightly corseted figure sink creaking into a rocking chair as her husband, carrying a sprig of mint and his hat, mounted the steps.

Here was Cecily in the masculine and gone to flesh: the same slightly shallow good looks and somewhere an indicated laxness of moral fibre.

He had once been precise and dapper but now he was clad slovenly in careless uncreased grey and earthy shoes. His hair still curled youthfully upon his head and he had Cecily's eyes. He was a Catholic, which was almost as sinful as being a republican; his fellow townsmen, while envying his social and financial position in the community, yet looked askance at him because he and his family made periodical trips to Atlanta to attend church.

'Tobe!' he bellowed, taking a chair near his wife.

'Well, Robert,' she began with zest, 'Donald Mahon came home today.'

'Government sent his body back, did they?'

'No, he came back himself. He got off the train this afternoon.'

'Eh? Why, but he's dead.'

'But he isn't dead. Cecily was there and saw him. A strange fat young man brought her home in a cab — completely collapsed. She said something about a scar on him. She fainted, poor child. I made her go to bed at once. I never did find who that strange young man was,' she ended fretfully.

Tobe in a white jacket appeared with a bowl of ice, sugar, water, and a decanter. Mr Saunders sat staring at his wife. 'Well, I'll be damned,' he said at last. And again, 'I'll be damned.'

His wife rocked complacent over her news. After a while Mr Saunders, breaking his trance, stirred. He crushed his mint spring between his fingers and taking a cube of ice he rubbed the mint over it, then dropped both into a tall glass. Then he spooned sugar into the glass and dribbled whisky from the decanter slowly, and slowly stirring it he stared at his wife. 'I'll be damned,' he said for the third time.

Tobe filled the glass from a water-bottle and withdrew.

'So he come home. Well, well, I'm glad on the parson's account. Pretty decent feller.'

'You must have forgotten what it means.'

'Eh?'

'To us.'

'To us?'

'Cecily was engaged to him, you know.'

Mr Saunders sipped and, setting his glass on the floor beside him, he lit a cigar. 'Well, we've given our consent, haven't we? I ain't going to back out now.' A thought occurred to him. 'Does Sis still want to?'

'I don't know. It was such a shock to her, poor child, his coming home and the scar and all. But do you think it is a good thing?'

'I never did think it was a good thing. I never wanted it.'

'Are you putting it off on me? Do you think I insisted on it?'

Mr Saunders from long experience said mildly: 'She ain't old enough to marry yet.'

'Nonsense. How old was I when we married?'

He raised his glass again. 'Seems to me you are the one insisting on it.'

Mrs Saunders rocking, stared at him: he was made aware of his stupidity. 'Why do you think it ain't a good thing, then?'

'I declare, Robert. Sometimes . . .' she sighed and then as one explains to a child in fond exasperation at its stupidity: 'Well, an engagement in wartime and an engagement in peacetime are two different things. Really, I don't see how he can expect to hold her to it.'

'Now look here, Minnie. If he went to war expecting her to wait for him and come back expecting her to take him, there's nothing else for them to do. And if she still wants to don't you go persuading her out of it, you hear?'

'Are you going to force your daughter into marriage? You just said yourself she is too young.'

'Remember, I said if she still wants to. By the way, he ain't lame or badly hurt, is he?' he asked quickly.

'I don't know. Cecily cried when I tried to find out.'

'Sis is a fool, sometimes. But don't you go monkeying with them, now.'
He raised his glass and took a long draught, then he puffed his cigar furiously, righteously.

'I declare, Robert, I don't understand you sometimes. The idea of you driving your own daughter into marriage with a man who has nothing and who may be half dead, and who probably won't work anyway. You know yourself how these ex-soldiers are.'

'You are the one wants her to get married. I ain't. Who do you want her to take, then?'

'Well, there's Dr Gary. He likes her, and Harrison Maurier from Atlanta. Cecily likes him, I think.'

Mr Saunders inelegantly snorted. 'Who? That Maurier feller? I wouldn't have that damn feller around here at all. Slick hair and cigarettes all over the place. You better pick out another one.'

'I'm not picking out anybody. I just don't want you to drive her into marrying that Mahon boy.'

'I ain't driving her, I tell you. You have already taught me better than to try to drive a woman to do anything. But I don't intend to interfere if she does want to marry Mahon.'

She sat rocking and he finished his julep. The oaks on the lawn became still with dusk, and the branches of trees were as motionless as coral fathoms deep under seas.

A tree frog took up his monotonous trilling and the west was a vast green lake, still as eternity. Tobe appeared silently. 'Supper served, Miss Minnie.'

The cigar arced redly into a canna bed, and they rose.
'Where is Bob, Tobe?'

'I don't know'm. I seed him gwine to'ds de garden a while back, but I ain't seed him since.'

'See if you can find him. And tell him to wash his face and hands.'

'Yessum.' He held the door for them and they passed into the house, leaving the twilight behind them filled with Tobe's mellowed voice calling across the dusk.

2

But young Robert Saunders could not hear him. He was at that moment climbing a high board fence which severed the dusk above his head. He conquered it at last and sliding downwards his trousers evinced reluctance, then accepting the gambit accompanied him with a ripping sound.

He sprawled in damp grass feeling a thin shallow fire across his young behind, and said Damn, regaining his feet and disjuncting his hip trying to see down his back.

Ain't that hell, he remarked to the twilight. I have rotten luck. It's all your fault, too, for not telling me, he thought, gaining a vicarious revenge on all sisters. He picked up the object he had dropped in falling and crossed the rectory lawn through dew, towards the house.

There was a light in a heretofore unused upper room and his heart sank. Had he gone to bed this early? Then he saw silhouetted feet on the balustrade of the porch and the red eye of a cigarette. He sighed with relief. That must be him.

He mounted the steps, saying: 'Hi, Donald.'

'Hi, Colonel,' answered the one sitting there. Approaching, he discerned soldier clothes. That's him. Now I'll see, he thought exultantly, snapping on a flash light and throwing its beam full on the man's face. Aw, shucks. He was becoming thoroughly discouraged. Did anyone ever have such luck? There must be a cabal against him.

'You ain't got no scar,' he stated with dejection. 'You ain't even Donald, are you?'

'You guessed it, bub. I ain't even Donald. But say, how about turning that searchlight some other way?'

He snapped off the light in weary disillusion. He burst out: 'They won't tell me nothing. I just want to know what his scar looks like but they won't tell me nothing about it. Say, has he gone to bed?'

'Yes, he's gone to bed. This ain't a good time to see his scar.'

'How about tomorrow morning?' hopefully. 'Could I see it then?'

'I dunno. Better wait till then.'

'Listen,' he suggested with inspiration, 'I tell you what: tomorrow about eight when I am going to school you kind of get him to look out of the window and I'll be passing and I'll see it. I asked Sis, but she wouldn't tell me nothing.'

'Who is Sis, bub?'

'She's just my sister. Gosh, she's mean. If I'd seen his scar I'd a told her now, wouldn't I?'

'You bet. What's your sister's name?'

'Name's Cecily Saunders, like mine only mine's Robert Saunders. You'll do that, won't you?'

'Oh . . . Cecily. . . . Sure, you leave it to me, Colonel'

He sighed with relief, yet still lingered. 'Say how many soldiers has he got here?'

'About one and a half, bub.'

'One and a half? Are they live ones?'

'Well practically.'

'How can you have one and a half soldiers if they are live ones?'

'Ask the war department. They know how to do it.'

He pondered briefly. 'Gee, I wish we could get some soldiers at our house. Do you reckon we could?'

'Why, I expect you could.'

'Could? How?' he asked eagerly.

'Ask your sister. She can tell you.'

'Aw, she won't tell me.'

'Sure she will. You ask her.'

'Well, I'll try,' he agreed without hope, yet still optimistic 'Well, I guess I better be going. They might be kind of anxious about me,' he explained, descending the steps. 'Good-bye, mister,' he added politely.

'So long Colonel.'

I'll see his scar tomorrow, he thought with elation. I wonder if Sis does know how to get us a soldier? She don't know much but maybe she does know that. But girls don't never know nothing, so I ain't going to count on it. Anyway I'll see his scar tomorrow.

Tobe's white jacket looming around the corner of the house gleamed dully in the young night and as young Robert mounted the steps towards the yellow rectangle of the front door Tobe's voice said: 'Whyn't you come on to yo' supper? Yo' mommer gwine tear yo' and my hair bofe out if you late like this. She say fer you to clean up befo' you goes to de dinin-room: I done drawed you some nice water in de baffroom. Run 'long now. I tell 'em you here.'

He paused only to call through his sister's door: 'I'm going to see it tomorrow. Yaaaah!' Then soaped and hungry he clattered into the dining-room, accomplishing an intricate field manoeuvre lest his damaged rear be exposed. He ignored his mother's cold stare.

'Robert Saunders, where have you been?'

'Mamma, there's a soldier there says we can get one too.'

'One what?' asked his father through his cigar smoke.

'A soldier.'

'Soldier?'

'Yes, sir. That one says so.'

'That one what?'

'That soldier where Donald is. He says we can get a soldier, too.'

'How get one?'

'He wouldn't tell me. But he says that Sis knows how to get us one.'

Mr and Mrs Saunders looked at each other above young Robert's oblivious head as he bent over his plate spooning food into himself.

On board the Frisco Limited,

Missouri, 2 April 1919

Dear Margaret,

I wonder if you miss me like I miss you. Well I never had much fun in St Louis. I was there only a half a day. This is just a short note to remind you of waiting for me. It's too bad I had to leave you so soon after. I will see my mother and attend to a few business matters and I will come back pretty soon. I will work like hell for you Margaret.

This is just a short note to remind you of waiting for me. This dam train rocks so I cannot write any way. Well, give my regards to Giligan tell him not to break his arm crooking it until I get back. I will love you all ways.

With love

Julian

'What is that child's name, Joe?'

Mrs Powers in one of her straight dark dresses stood on the porch in the sun. The morning breeze was in her hair, beneath her clothing like water, carrying sun with it: pigeons about the church spire leaned upon it like silver and slanting splashes of soft paint. The lawn sloping fenceward was grey with dew, and a Negro informal in undershirt and overalls passed a lawn mower over the grass, leaving behind his

machine a darker green stripe like an unrolling carpet. Grass sprang, from the whirling blades and clung wetly to his legs.

‘What child?’ Gilligan, uncomfortable in new hard serge and a linen collar, sat on the balustrade moodily smoking. For reply she handed him the letter and with his cigarette tilted in the corner of his mouth he squinted through the smoke, reading.

‘Oh, the ace. Name’s Lowe.’

‘Of course: Lowe. I tried several times after he left us but I never could recall it.’

Gilligan returned the letter to her. ‘Funny kid, ain’t he? So you scorned my affections and taken his, huh?’

Her windy dress moulded her longly. ‘Let’s go to the garden so I can have a cigarette.’

‘You could have it here. The padre wouldn’t mind, I bet.’

‘I’m sure he wouldn’t. I am considering his parishioners. What would they think to see a dark strange woman smoking a cigarette on the rectory porch at eight o’clock in the morning?’

‘They’ll think you are one of them French what-do-you-call-’ems the Loot brought back with him. Your good name won’t be worth nothing after these folks get through with it.’

‘My good name is your trouble, not mine, Joe.’

‘My trouble? How you mean?’

‘Men are the ones who worry about our good names, because they gave them to us. But we have other things to bother about, ourselves. What you mean by a good name is like a dress that’s too flimsy to wear comfortably. Come on, let’s go to the garden.’

‘You know you don’t mean that,’ Gilligan told her. She smiled faintly, not turning her face to him.

‘Come on,’ she repeated, descending the steps.

They left the delirium of sparrows and the sweet smell of fresh grass behind them and were in a gravelled path between rose bushes. The path ran on beneath two formal arching oaks; lesser roses rambling upon a wall paralleled them, and Gilligan following her long stride trod brittle and careful. Whenever he was among flowers he always felt as if he had entered a room full of women: he was always conscious of his body, of his walk, feeling as though he trod in sand. So he believed that he really did not like flowers.

Mrs Powers paused at intervals, sniffing, tasting dew upon buds and blooms, then the path passed between violet beds to where against a privet hedge there would soon be lilies. Beside a green iron bench beneath a magnolia she paused again, staring up into the tree. A mocking-bird flew out and she said:

‘There’s one, Joe. See?’

‘One what? Bird nest?’

‘No, a bloom. Not quite, but in a week or so. Do you know magnolia blooms?’

‘Sure: not good for anything if you pick ’em. Touch it, and it turns brown on you. Fades.’

‘That’s true of almost everything, isn’t it?’

‘Yeh, but how many folks believe it? Reckon the Loot does?’

‘I don’t know. . . . I wonder if he’ll have a chance to touch that one?’

‘Why should he want to? He’s already got one that’s turning brown on him.’

She looked at him, not comprehending at once. Her black eyes, her red mouth like a pomegranate blossom. She said then: ‘Oh! Magnolia. . . . I’d thought of her as a — something like an orchid. So you think she’s a magnolia?’

‘Not an orchid, anyways. Find orchids anywhere but you wouldn’t find her in Illinoy or Denver, hardly.’

‘I guess you are right. I wonder if there are any more like her anywhere?’

'I dunno. But if there ain't there's already one too many.'

'Let's sit down for a while. Where's my cigarette?' She sat on the bench and he offered her his paper pack and struck a match for her. 'So you think she won't marry him, Joe?'

'I ain't so sure any more. I think I am changing my mind about it. She won't miss a chance to marry what she calls a hero — if only to keep somebody else from getting him.' (Meaning you, he thought.)

(Meaning me, she thought.) She said: 'Not if she knows he's going to die?'

'What does she know about dying? She can't even imagine herself getting old, let alone imagining anybody she is interested in dying. I bet she believes they can even patch him up so it won't show.'

'Joe, you are an incurable sentimentalist. You mean you think she'll marry him because she is letting him think she will and because she is a "good" woman. You are quite a gentle person, Joe.'

'I ain't!' he retorted with warmth. 'I'm as hard as they make 'em: I got to be.' He saw she was laughing at him and he grinned ruefully. 'Well, you got me that time, didn't you?' He became suddenly serious. 'But it ain't her I'm worrying about. It's his old man. Why didn't you tell him how bad off he was?'

She quite feminine and Napoleonic:

'Why did you send me on ahead instead of coming yourself? I told you I'd spoil it.' She flipped her cigarette away and put her hand on his arm. 'I didn't have the heart to, Joe. If you could have seen his face! and heard him! He was like a child, Joe. He showed me all of Donald's things. You know: pictures, and a slingshot, and a girl's undie and a hyacinth bulb he carried with him in France. And there was that girl and everything. I just couldn't. Do you blame me?'

'Well, it's all right now. It was a kind of rotten trick, though, to let him find it all out before them people at the station. We done the best we could, didn't we?'

'Yes, we did the best we could. I wish we could do more.' Her gaze brooded across the garden where in the sun beyond the trees, bees were already at work. Across the garden, beyond a street and another wall, you could see the top of a pear tree like a branching candelabra, closely bloomed, white, white. . . . She stirred, crossing her knees. 'That girl fainting, though. What do you—'

'Oh, I expected that. But here comes Othello, like he was looking for us.'

They watched the late conductor of the lawn mower as he shuffled his shapeless shoes along the gravel. He saw them and halted.

'Mist' Gillmum, Rev'un say fer you to come to de house.'

'Me?'

'You Mist' Gillmum, ain't you?'

'Oh, sure.' He rose. 'Excuse me, ma'am. You coming, too?'

'You go and see what he wants. I'll come along after a while.'

The Negro had turned shuffling on ahead of him and the lawn mower had resumed its chattering song as Gilligan mounted the steps. The rector stood on the veranda. His face was calm but it was evident he had not slept.

'Sorry to trouble you, Mr Gilligan, but Donald is awake, and I am not familiar with his clothing as you are. I gave away his civilian things when he — when he—'

'Sure, sir,' Gilligan answered in sharp pity for the grey-faced man. He don't know him yet! 'I'll help him.'

The divine, ineffectual, would have followed, but Gilligan leaped away from him up the stairs. He saw Mrs Powers coming from the garden and he descended to the lawn, meeting her.

'Good morning, Doctor,' she responded to his greeting. 'I have been looking at your flowers. I hope you don't mind?'

‘Not at all, not at all, my dear madam. An old man is always flattered when his flowers are admired. The young are so beautifully convinced that their emotions are admirable: young girls wear the clothes of their older sisters who require clothes, principally because they do not need them themselves, just for fun, or perhaps to pander to an illusion of the male; but as we grow older what we are loses importance, giving place to what we do.

And I have never been able to do anything well save to raise flowers. And that is, I think, an obscure emotional house-wifery in me: I had thought to grow old with my books among my roses: until my eyes became too poor to read longer I would read, after that I would sit in the sun. Now, of course, with my son at home again, I must put that by. I am anxious for you to see Donald this morning. You will notice a marked improvement.’

‘Oh, I’m sure I shall,’ she answered, wanting to put her arms around him. But he was so big and so confident. At the corner of the house was a tree covered with tiny white-bellied leaves like a mist, like a swirl of arrested silver water. The rector offered his arm with heavy gallantry.

‘Shall we go in to breakfast?’

Emmy had been before them with narcissi, and red roses in a vase repeated the red of strawberries in flat blue bowls. The rector drew her chair. ‘When we are alone Emmy sits here, but she has a strange reluctance to dining with strangers, or when guests are present.’

Mrs Powers sat and Emmy appeared briefly and disappeared for no apparent reason. At last there came slow feet on the staircase slanting across the open door. She saw their legs, then their bodies crossed her vision, and the rector rose as they appeared in the door. ‘Good morning, Donald,’ he said.

(That my father? Sure, Loot. That’s him.) ‘Good morning, sir.’ The divine stood huge and tense and powerless as Gilligan helped Mahon into his seat.

‘Here’s Mrs Powers, too, Loot.’

He turned his faltering puzzled gaze upon her. ‘Good morning,’ he said, but her eyes were on his father’s face. She lowered her gaze to her plate feeling hot moisture against her lids. What have I done? she thought, what have I done?

She tried to eat but could not, watching Mahon, awkward with his left hand, peering into his plate, eating scarcely anything, and Gilligan’s healthy employment of knife and fork, and the rector tasting nothing, watching his son’s every move with grey despair.

Emmy appeared again with fresh dishes. Averting her face she set the dishes down awkwardly and was about to flee precipitately when the rector looking up stopped her. She turned in stiff selfconscious fright, hanging her head.

‘Here’s Emmy, Donald,’ his father said.

Mahon raised his head and looked at his father. Then his puzzled gaze touched Gilligan’s face and returned to his plate, and his hand rose slowly to his mouth. Emmy stood for a space and her black eyes became wide and the blood drained from her face slowly. Then she put the back of one red hand against her mouth and fled, blundering into the door.

I can’t stand this. Mrs Powers rose unnoticed save by Gilligan and followed Emmy. Upon a table in the kitchen Emmy leaned bent almost double, her head cradled in her red arms. What a terrible position to cry in, Mrs Powers thought, putting her arms around Emmy. The girl jerked herself erect, staring at the other. Her face was wrung with weeping, ugly.

‘He didn’t speak to me!’ she gasped.

'He didn't know his father, Emmy. Don't be silly.' She held Emmy's elbows, smelling harsh soap. Emmy clung to her.

'But me, me! He didn't even look at me!' she repeated.

It was on her tongue to say Why should he? but Emmy's blurred sobbing and her awkward wrung body; the very kinship of tears to tears, something to cling to after having been for so long a prop to others. . . .

Outside the window was a trellised morning-glory vine with a sparrow in it, and clinging to Emmy, holding each other in a recurrent mutual sorrow, she tasted warm salt in her throat.

Damn, damn, damn, she said amid her own tacking infrequent tears.

3

In front of the post office the rector was the centre of an interested circle when Mr Saunders saw him.

The gathering was representative, embracing the professions with a liberal leavening of those inevitable casuals, cravatless, overalled or unoveralled, who seem to suffer no compulsions whatever, which anything from a captured still to a Negro with an epileptic fit or a mouth-organ attracts to itself like atoms to a magnet, in any small southern town — or northern town or western town, probably.

'Yes, yes, quite a surprise,' the rector was saying. 'I had no intimation of it, none whatever, until a friend with whom he was travelling — he is not yet fully recovered, you see — preceded him in order to inform me.'

(One of them airy-plane fellers.)

(S'what I say: if the Lord had intended folks to fly around in the air He'd 'a' give 'em wings.)

(Well, he's been closter to the Lord'n you'll ever git.)

This outer kindly curious fringe made way for Mr Saunders.

(Closter'n that feller'll ever git, anyway. Guffaws.) This speaker was probably a Baptist.

Mr Saunders extended his hand.

'Well, Doctor, we are mighty glad to hear the good news.'

'Ah, good morning, good morning.' The rector took the proffered hand in his huge paw. 'Yes, quite a surprise. I was hoping to see you. How is Cecily this morning?' he asked in a lower tone. But there was no need, no lack of privacy. There was a general movement into the post office.

The mail was in and the window had opened and even those who expected no mail, who had received no mail in months must need answer one of the most enduring compulsions of the American nation. The rector's news had become stale in the face of the possibility of a stamped personal communication of some kind, of any kind.

Charlestown, like numberless other towns throughout the south, had been built around a circle of tethered horses and mules. In the middle of the square was the courthouse — a simple utilitarian edifice of brick and sixteen beautiful Ionic columns stained with generations of casual tobacco.

Elms surrounded the courthouse and beneath these trees, on scarred and carved wood benches and chairs the city fathers, progenitors of solid laws and solid citizens who believed in Tom Watson and feared only God and drouth, in black string ties or the faded brushed grey and bronze meaningless medals of the Confederate States of America, no longer having to make any pretence toward labour, slept or whittled away the long drowsy days while their juniors of all ages, not yet old enough to frankly slumber in public, played checkers or chewed tobacco and talked.

A lawyer, a drug clerk, and two nondescripts tossed iron discs back and forth between two holes in the ground. And above all brooded early April sweetly pregnant with noon.

Yet all of them had a pleasant word for the rector as he and Mr Saunders passed. Even the slumberers waked from the light sleep of the aged to ask about Donald. The divine's progress was almost triumphal.

Mr Saunders walked beside him, returning greetings, preoccupied. Damn these womenfolks, he fretted. They passed beneath a stone shaft bearing a Confederate soldier shading his marble eyes forever in eternal rigid vigilance and the rector repeated his question.

'She is feeling better this morning. It is too bad she fainted yesterday, but she isn't strong, you know.'

'That was to be expected; his unannounced arrival rather startled us all. Even Donald acknowledges that, I am sure. Their attachment also, you see.'

Trees arching greenly over the street made a green tunnel of quiet, the sidewalk was checkered with shade. Mr Saunders felt the need of mopping his neck. He took two cigars from his pocket, but the rector waved them away. Damn these women! Minnie should have done this.

The rector said: 'We have a beautiful town, Mr Saunders, these streets, these trees. . . . This quiet is just the thing for Donald.'

'Yes, yes, just the thing for him, Doctor—'

'You and Mrs Saunders must come in to see him this afternoon. I had expected you last night, but remembering that Cecily had been quite overcome — It is as well you did not, though. Donald was fatigued and Mrs P — I thought it better to have a doctor (just as a precaution, you see), and he advised Donald to go to bed.'

'Yes, yes. We had intended to come, but, as you say, his condition, first night at home; and Cecily's condition, too—' He could feel his moral fibre disintegrating. Yet his course had seemed so logical last night after his wife had taken him to task, taking him, as a clinching argument, in to see his daughter weeping in bed. Damn these women! he repeated

for the third time. He puffed his cigar and flung it away, mentally girding himself.

‘About this engagement, Doctor—’

‘Ah, yes, I was thinking of it myself. Do you know, I believe Cecily is the best medicine he can have? Wait,’ as the other would have interrupted, ‘it will naturally take her some time to become accustomed to his — to him—’ he faced his companion confidentially, ‘he has a scar, you see. But I am confident this can be removed, even though Cecily does become accustomed to it. In fact, I am depending on her to make a new man of him in a short time.’

Mr Saunders gave it up. Tomorrow, he promised himself. Tomorrow I will do it.

‘He is naturally a bit confused now,’ the divine continued, ‘but care and attention, and, above all, Cecily, will remedy that. Do you know,’ he turned his kind gaze on Mr Saunders again, ‘do you know, he didn’t even know me at first when I went into his room this morning? Merely a temporary condition, though, I assure you. Quite to be expected,’ he added quickly. ‘Don’t you think it was to be expected?’

‘I should think so, yes. But what happened to him? How did he manage to turn up like this?’

‘He won’t talk about it. A friend who came home with him assures me that he doesn’t know, cannot remember. But this happens quite often, the young man — a soldier himself — tells me, and that it will all come back to him some day. Donald seems to have lost all his papers save a certificate of discharge from a British hospital. But pardon me: you were saying something about the engagement.’

‘No, no. It was nothing.’ The sun was overhead: it was almost noon. Around the horizon were a few thick clouds fat as whipped cream. Rain this afternoon. Suddenly he spoke: ‘By the way, Doctor, I wonder if I might stop in and speak to Donald?’

'By all means. Certainly. He will be glad to see an old friend. Stop in, by all means.'

The clouds were steadily piling higher, as they passed beneath the church spire and crossed the lawn. Mounting the steps of the rectory, they saw Mrs Powers sitting with a book. She raised her eyes, seeing the resemblance immediately; the rector's 'Mr Saunders is an old friend of Donald's' was unnecessary. She rose, shutting her book on her forefinger.

'Donald is lying down. Mr Gilligan is with him, I think. Let me call.'
'No, no,' Mr Saunders objected quickly, 'don't disturb him. I will call later.'

'After you have come out of your way to speak to him? He will be disappointed if you don't go up. You are an old friend, you know. You said Mr Saunders is an old friend of Donald's, didn't you, Doctor?'

'Yes, indeed. He is Cecily's father.'

'Then you must come up by all means.' She put her hand on his elbow.

'No, no, ma'am. Don't you think it would be better not to disturb him now, Doctor?' he appealed to the rector.

'Well, perhaps so. You and Mrs Saunders are coming this afternoon, then?'

But she was obdurate. 'Hush, Doctor. Surely Donald can see Miss Saunders's father at any time.' She firmly compelled him through the door, and he and the divine followed her up the stairs. To her knock, Gilligan's voice replied and she opened the door.

'Here is Cecily's father to see Donald, Joe,' she said, standing aside. The door opened and flooded the narrow passage with light, closing it left the passage of light again, and moving through a walled twilight, she descended the stairs again slowly.

The lawn mower was long since stilled and beneath a tree she could see the recumbent form and one propped knee of its languid conductor lapped in slumber. Along the street passed slowly the hourly quota of Negro children who, seeming to have no arbitrary hours, seemingly free of all impulses of time or higher learning, went to and from school at any hour of a possible lighted eight, carrying lunch pails of ex-molasses and -lard tins.

Some of them also carried books. The lunch was usually eaten on the way to school, which was conducted by a fattish Negro in a lawn tie and an alpaca coat who could take a given line from any book from the telephone directory down and soon have the entire present personnel chanting it after him, like Vachel Lindsay. Then they were off for the day.

The clouds had piled higher and thicker, taking a lavender tinge, making bits of sky laked among them more blue. The air was becoming sultry, oppressive; and the church spire had lost perspective until now it seemed but two dimensions of metal and cardboard.

The leaves hung lifeless and sad, as if life were being recalled from them before it was fully given, leaving only the ghosts of young leaves. As she lingered near the door, she could hear Emmy clashing dishes in the dining-room and at last she heard that for which she waited.

‘— expect you and Mrs Saunders this afternoon, then,’ the rector was saying as they appeared.

‘Yes, yes,’ the caller answered with detachment. His eyes met Mrs Powers’s. How like her he is! she thought, and her heart sank. Have I blundered again? She examined his face fleetingly and sighed with relief.

‘How do you think he looks, Mr Saunders?’ she asked.

‘Fine, considering his long trip, fine.’

The rector said happily: 'I had noticed it myself this morning. Didn't you also, Mrs Powers?' His eyes implored her and she said yes. 'You should have seen him yesterday, to discern the amazing improvement in him. Eh, Mrs Powers?'

'Yes, indeed, sir. We all commented on it this morning.'

Mr Saunders, carrying his limp panama hat, moved towards the steps. 'Well, Doctor, it's fine having the boy home again. We are all glad for our own sakes as well as yours. If there is anything we can do—' he added with neighbourly sincerity.

'Thank you, thank you. I will not hesitate. But Donald is in a position to help himself now, provided he gets his medicine often enough. We depend on you for this, you know,' the rector answered with jovial innuendo.

Mr Saunders added a complement of expected laughter. 'As soon as she is herself again we, her mother and I, expect it to be the other way: we expect to be asking you to lend us Cecily occasionally.'

'Well, that might be arranged, I imagine — especially with a friend.' The rector laughed in turn and Mrs Powers, listening, exulted. Then she knew a brief misgiving. They are so much alike! Will they change his mind for him, those women? She said:

'I think I'll walk as far as the gate with Mr Saunders, if he doesn't mind.'

'Not at all, ma'am. I'll be delighted.'

The rector stood in the door and beamed upon them as they descended the steps. 'Sorry you cannot remain to dinner,' he said. 'Some other time, Doctor. My missus is waiting for me today.'

'Yes, some other time,' the rector agreed. He entered the house again, and they crossed grass beneath the imminent heavens. Mr Saunders looked at her sharply. 'I don't like this,' he stated. 'Why doesn't someone tell him the truth about that boy?'

‘Neither do I,’ she answered. ‘But if they did, would he believe it? Did anyone have to tell you about him!’

‘My God, no! Anybody could look at him. It made me sick. But, then, I’m chicken-livered, anyway,’ he added with mirthless apology. ‘What did the doctor say about him?’

‘Nothing definite, except that he remembers nothing that happened before he was hurt. The man that was wounded is dead and this is another person, a grown child. It’s his apathy, his detachment, that’s so terrible. He doesn’t seem to care where he is nor what he does. He must have been passed from hand to hand, like a child.’

‘I mean, about his recovery.’

She shrugged. ‘Who can tell? There is nothing physically wrong with him that surgeons can remedy, if that’s what you mean.’

He walked on in silence. ‘His father should be told though,’ he said at last.

‘I know, but who is to do it? Besides, he is bound to know some day, so why not let him believe as he wishes as long as he can? The shock will be no greater at one time than at another. And he is old, and so big and happy now. And Donald may recover, you know,’ she lied.

‘Yes, that’s right. But do you think he will?’

‘Why not? He can’t remain forever as he is now.’ They had reached the gate. The iron was rough and hot with sun under her hand, but there was no blue anywhere in the sky.

Mr Saunders, fumbling with his hat, said: ‘But suppose he — he does not recover?’

She gave him a direct look. ‘Dies, you mean?’ she asked brutally.

‘Well, yes. Since you put it that way.’

‘Now that’s what I want to discuss with you. It is a question of strengthening his morale, of giving him some reason to — well, buck up. And who could do that better than Miss Saunders?’

‘But, ma’am, ain’t you asking a lot, asking me to risk my daughter’s happiness on such a poor bet as that?’

‘You don’t understand. I am not asking that the engagement be insisted upon. I mean, why not let Cecily — Miss Saunders — see him as often as she will, let her be sweethearts with him if necessary until he gets to know her again and will make an effort for himself. Time enough then to talk of engagements. Think, Mr Saunders: suppose he were your son. That wouldn’t be very much to ask of a friend, would it?’

He looked at her again in admiration, keenly, ‘You’ve got a level head on your shoulders, young lady. So what I’m to do is to prevail on her to come and see him, is it?’

‘You must do more than that: you must see that she does come, that she acts just as she acted towards him before.’ She gripped his arm. ‘You must not let her mother dissuade her. You must not. Remember, he might have been your son.’

‘What makes you think her mother might object?’ he asked in amazement.

She smiled faintly. ‘You forget I’m a woman, too,’ she said. Then her face became serious, imminent. ‘But you mustn’t let that happen, do you hear?’ Her eyes compelled him. ‘Is that a promise?’

‘Yes,’ he agreed, meeting her level glance. He took her firm proffered hand and felt her clean, muscular clasp.

‘A promise, then,’ she said as warm great drops of rain dissolving from the fat, dull sky splashed heavily. She said good-bye and fled, running across the lawn towards the house before assaulting grey battalions of rain. Her long legs swept her up and on to the veranda as the pursuing rain, foiled, whirled like cavalry with silver lances across the lawn.

4

Mr Saunders, casting an uneasy look at the dissolving sky, let himself out the gate and here, returning from school, was his son, saying: 'Did you see his scar, daddy? Did you see his scar?'

The man stared at this troublesome small miniature of himself, and then he knelt suddenly, taking his son into his arms, holding him close.

'You seen his scar,' young Robert Saunders accused, trying to release himself as the rain galloped over them, through the trees.

5

Emmy's eyes were black and shallow as a toy animal's and her hair was a sun-burned shock of no particular colour. There was something wild in Emmy's face: you knew that she out-ran, out-fought, out-climbed her brothers: you could imagine her developing like a small but sturdy greenness on a dunghill. Not a flower. But not dung, either.

Her father was a house painter, with the house painter's inevitable penchant for alcohol, and he used to beat his wife. She, fortunately, failed to survive the birth of Emmy's fourth brother, whereupon her father desisted from the bottle long enough to woo and wed an angular shrew who, serving as an instrument of retribution, beat him soundly with stove wood in her lighter moments.

'Don't never marry a woman, Emmy,' her father, maudlin and affectionate, advised her. 'If I had it to do all over again I'd take a man every time.'

'I won't never marry nobody,' Emmy had promised herself passionately, especially after Donald had gone to war and her laboriously worded letters to him had gone unanswered. (And now he don't even know me, she thought dully.)

'I won't never marry nobody,' she repeated, putting dinner on the table. 'I think I'll just die,' she said, staring through a streaming window into the rain, watching the gusty rain surge by like a grey yet silver ship crossing her vision, nursing a final plate between her hands.

She broke her reverie, and putting the plate on the table she went and stood without the study door where they were sitting watching the streaming window panes, hearing the grey rain like a million little feet across the roof and in the trees.

'All right, Uncle Joe,' she said, fleeing kitchenward.

Before they were half-way through lunch the downpour had ceased, the ships of rain had surged onward, drawing before the wind, leaving only a whisper in the wet green waves of leaves, with an occasional gust running in long white lines like elves holding hands across the grass. But Emmy did not appear with dessert.

'Emmy!' called the rector again.
Mrs Powers rose. 'I'll go see,' she said.

The kitchen was empty. 'Emmy?' she called quietly. There was no reply, and she was on the point of leaving when an impulse bade her look behind the open door. She swung it away from the wall and Emmy stared at her dumbly.

'Emmy, what is it?' she asked.

But Emmy marched wordless from her hiding place, and taking a tray she placed the prepared dessert on it and handed it to Mrs Powers.

'This is silly, Emmy, acting this way. You must give him time to get used to us again.'

But Emmy only looked at her from beyond the frontiers of her inarticulate despair, and the other woman carried the tray in to the table. 'Emmy's not feeling well,' she explained.

'I am afraid Emmy works too hard,' the rector said. 'She was always a hard worker, don't you remember, Donald?'

Mahon raised his puzzled gaze to his father's face. 'Emmy?' he repeated.

'Don't you remember Emmy?'

'Yes, sir,' he repeated tonelessly.

6

The window panes had cleared, though it yet rained. She sat after the men had left the table and at last Emmy peered through the door, then entered. She rose and together the two of them cleared the table, over Emmy's mild protest, and carried the broken meal to the kitchen. Mrs Powers turned back her sleeves briskly.

'No, no, lemme do it,' Emmy objected. 'You'll spoil your dress.'

'It's an old one: no matter if I do.'

'It don't look old to me. I think it's right pretty. But this is my work. You go on and lemme do it.'

'I know, but I've got to do something or I'll go wild. Don't you worry about this dress: I don't.'

'You are rich, you don't have to, I guess,' Emmy answered coldly, examining the dress.

'Do you like it?' Emmy made no reply. 'I think clothes of this sort suit people of your and my type, don't you?'

'I dunno. I never thought about it,' splashing water in the sink.

'I tell you what,' said Mrs Powers, watching Emmy's firm, sturdy back, 'I have a new dress up in my trunk that doesn't suit me, for some reason. When we get through, suppose you come up with me and we'll try it on you. I can sew a little, and we can make it fit you exactly. What about it?'

Emmy thawed imperceptibly. 'What use would I have for it? I don't go anywhere, and I got clothes good enough to wash and sweep and cook in.'

'I know, but it's always well to have some dress-up things. I will lend you stockings and things to go with it, and a hat, too.'

Emmy slid dishes into hot water and steam rose about her reddened arms. 'Where's your husband?' she asked irrelevantly.

'He was killed in the war, Emmy.'

'Oh,' she said. Then, after a while: 'And you so young, too.' She gave Mrs Powers a quick, kind glance: sisters in sorrow. (My Donald was killed, too.)

Mrs Powers rose quickly. 'Where's a cup towel? Let's get done so we can try that dress.'

Emmy drew her hands from the water and dried them on her apron. 'Wait, lemme get an apron for you, too.'

A bedraggled sparrow eyed her from the limp, glistening morning-glory vine, and Emmy dropped the apron over her head and knotted the cords at the back. Steam rose again about Emmy's forearms, wreathing her head, and the china was warm and smooth and sensuous to the touch; a glass gleamed under Mrs Powers's towelling and a dull parade of silver took the light mutely, hushing it as like two priestesses they repeated the orisons of Clothes.

As they passed the study door they saw the rector and his son gazing quietly into a rain-perplexed tree, and Gilligan sprawled on his back upon a battered divan, smoking and reading.

7

Emmy, outfitted from head to heel, thanked her awkwardly.

'How good the rain smells!' Mrs Powers interrupted her. 'Sit down a while, won't you?'

Emmy, admiring her finery, came suddenly from out her Cinderella dream. 'I can't. I got some mending to do. I nearly clean forgot it.' 'Bring your mending in here, then, so we can talk. I haven't had a woman to talk to in months, it seems like. Bring it in here and let me help you.'

Emmy said, flattered: 'Why do you want to do my work?'

'I told you if I don't have something to do I'll be a crazy woman in two days. Please, Emmy, as a favour. Won't you?'

'All right. Lemme get it.' She gathered up her garments and leaving the room she returned with a heaped basket. They sat on either side of it. 'His poor huge socks,' Mrs Powers raised her encased hand. 'Like chair covers, aren't they?'

Emmy laughed happily above her needle, and beneath swooning gusts of rain across the roof the pile of neatly folded and mended garments grew steadily.

'Emmy,' Mrs Powers said after a time, 'what was Donald like before? You knew him a long time, didn't you?'

Emmy's needle continued its mute, tiny flashing, and after a while Mrs Powers leaned across the basket and putting her hand under Emmy's chin, raised her bent face. Emmy twisted her head aside and bent again over her needle. Mrs Powers rose and drew the shades, darkening the room against the rain-combed afternoon.

Emmy continued to peer blindly at her darning until the other woman took it from her hand, then she raised her head and stared at her new friend with beast-like, unresisting hopelessness.

Mrs Powers took Emmy's arms and drew her erect. 'Come, Emmy,' she said, feeling the bones in Emmy's hard, muscular arms. Mrs Powers knew that lacking a bed any reclining intimacy was conducive to confidence, so she drew Emmy down beside her in an ancient obese

armchair. And with heedless rain filling the room with hushed monotonous sound, Emmy told her brief story.

‘We was in school together — when he was there at all. He never came, mostly. They couldn’t make him. He’d just go off into the country by himself, and not come back for two or three days.

And nights, too. It was one night when he — when he—’

Her voice died away and Mrs Powers said: ‘When he what, Emmy? Aren’t you going too fast?’

‘Sometimes he used to walk home from school with me. He wouldn’t never have a hat or a coat, and his face was like — it was like he ought to live in the woods. You know: not like he ought to went to school or had to dress up. And so you never did know when you’d see him. He’d come in school at almost any time and folks would see him way out in the country at night.

Sometimes he’d sleep in folks’ houses in the country and sometimes niggers would find him asleep in sand ditches. Everybody knew him. And then one night—’

‘How old were you then?’

‘I was sixteen and he was nineteen. And then one night—’

‘But you are going too fast. Tell me about you and him before that. Did you like him?’

‘I liked him better than anybody. When we was both younger we dammed up a place in a creek and built a swimming hole and we used to go in every day. And then we’d lie in a old blanket we had and sleep until time to get up and go home. And in summer we was together nearly all the time.

Then one day he’d just disappear and nobody wouldn’t know where he was. And then he’d be outside our house some morning, calling me.

'The trouble was that I always lied to pappy where I had been and I hated that. Donald always told his father: he never lied about nothing he ever did. But he was braver than me, I reckon.

'And then when I was fourteen pappy found out about how I liked Donald, and so he took me out of school and kept me at home all the time.

So I didn't hardly ever get to see Donald. Pappy made me promise I wouldn't go around with him any more. He had come for me once or twice and I told him I couldn't go, and then one day he came and pappy was at home.

'Pappy ran out to the gate and told him not to come fooling around there no more, but Donald stood right up to him. Not acting bad, but just like pappy was a fly or something. And so pappy come in the house mad and said he wasn't going to have any such goings-on with his girls, and he hit me and then he was sorry and cried (he was drunk, you see), and made me swear I wouldn't never see Donald again. And I had to. But I thought of how much fun we used to have, and I wanted to die.

'And so I didn't see Donald for a long time. Then folks said he was going to marry that — that — her. I knew Donald didn't care much about me: he never cared about anybody. But when I heard that he was going to marry her —

'Anyway, I didn't sleep much at night, and so I'd sit on the porch after I'd undressed lots of times, thinking about him and watching the moon getting bigger every night. And then one night, when the moon was almost full and you could see like day almost, I saw somebody walk up to our gate and stop there. And I knew it was Donald, and he knew I was there because he said:

' "Come here, Emmy."

'And I went to him. And it was like old times because I forgot all about him marrying her, because he still liked me, to come for me after so long. And he took my hand and we walked down the road, not talking at all. After a while we came to the place where you turn off the road to

go to our swimming hole, and when we crawled through the fence my nightie got hung and he said, "Take it off." And I did and we put it in a plum bush and went on.

'The water looked so soft in the moonlight you couldn't tell where the water was hardly, and we swam a while and then Donald hid his clothes, too, and we went on up on top of a hill. Everything was so kind of pretty and the grass felt so good to your feet, and all of a sudden Donald ran on ahead of me.

I can keep up with Donald when I want to, but for some reason I didn't want to tonight, and so I sat down. I could see him running along the top of the hill, all shiny in the moonlight, then he ran back down the hill towards the creek.

'And so I laid down. I couldn't see anything except the sky, and I don't know how long it was when all of a sudden there was his head against the sky, over me, and he was wet again and I could see the moonlight kind of running on his wet shoulders and arms, and he looked at me.

I couldn't see his eyes, but I could feel them somehow like things touching me. When he looks at you — you feel like a bird, kind of: like you was going swooping right away from the ground or something. But now there was something different, too. I could hear him panting from running, and I could feel something inside me panting, too.

I was afraid and I wasn't afraid. It was like everything was dead except us. And then he said:

' "Emmy, Emmy."

'Kind of like that. And then — and then—'

'Yes. And then he made love to you.'

Emmy turned suddenly, and the other held her close. 'And now he don't even know me, he don't even know me!' she wailed.

Mrs Powers held her and at last Emmy raised her hand and pushed her hair from her face. 'And then?' Mrs Powers prompted.

'And afterwards we laid there and held each other, and I felt so quiet, so good, and some cows came up and looked at us and went away. And I could feel his hand going right slow from my shoulder along my side so far as he could reach and then back again, slow, slow. We didn't talk at all, just his hand going up and down my side, so smooth and quiet. And after a while I was asleep.

'Then I waked up. It was getting dawn and I was cramped and wet and cold, and he was gone. . . . But I knew he would come back. And so he did, with some blackberries. We ate 'em and watched it getting light in the east. Then when the blackberries were gone I could feel the cold, wet grass under me again and see the sky all yellow and chilly behind his head.

'After a while we went back by the swimming hole and he put on his clothes and we got my nightie and I put it on. It was getting light fast and he wanted to go all the way home with me, only I wouldn't let him: I didn't care what happened to me now. And when I went through the gate there was pappy standing on the porch.'

She was silent. Her story seemed to be finished. She breathed regularly as a child against the other's shoulder.

'And what then, Emmy?' Mrs Powers prompted again.

'Well, when I came to the porch I stopped and he said, "Where have you been?" and I said, "None of your business," and he said, "You whore, I'll beat you to death," and I said, "Touch me." But he didn't. I think I would have killed him if he had. He went into the house and I went in and dressed and bundled up my clothes and left. And I haven't been back since, either.'

'What did you do then?'

'I got a job sewing for a dressmaker named Mrs Miller, and she let me sleep in her shop until I could earn some money. I hadn't been there but three days when one day Mr Mahon walked in. He said that Donald had told him about us and that Donald had gone to the war, and that

he had come for me. So I have been here ever since. So I didn't see Donald any more, and now he don't know me at all.'

'You poor child,' Mrs Powers said. She raised Emmy's face: it was calm, purged. She no longer felt superior to the girl. Suddenly Emmy sprang to her feet and gathered up the mended clothes. 'Wait, Emmy,' she called. But Emmy was gone.

She lit a cigarette and sat smoking slowly in her great dim room with its heterogeneous collection of furniture. After a while she rose to draw the curtains; the rain had ceased and long lances of sunlight piercing the washed immaculate air struck sparks amid the dripping trees.

She crushed out her cigarette, and descending the stairs she saw a strange retreating back, and the rector, turning from the door, said hopelessly, staring at her:

'He doesn't give us much hope for Donald's sight.'

'But he's only a general practitioner. We'll get a specialist from Atlanta,' she encouraged him, touching his sleeve.

And here was Miss Cecily Saunders tapping her delicate way up the fast-drying path, between the fresh-sparkled grass.

8

Cecily sat in her room in pale satin knickers and a thin orange-coloured sweater, with her slim legs elevated to the arm of another chair, reading a book. Her father, opening the door without knocking, stared at her in silent disapproval. She met his gaze for a time, then lowered her legs.

'Do nice girls sit around half-naked like this?' he asked coldly. She laid her book aside and rose.

'Maybe I'm not a nice girl,' she answered flippantly. He watched her as she enveloped her narrow body in a flimsy diaphanous robe.

'I suppose you consider that an improvement, do you?'

'You shouldn't come in my room without knocking, daddy,' she told him fretfully.

'No more I will, if that's the way you sit in it.' He knew he was creating an unfortunate atmosphere in which to say what he wished, but he felt compelled to continue. 'Can you imagine your mother sitting in her room half undressed like this?'

'I hadn't thought about it' She leaned against the mantel, combatively respectful. 'But I can if she wanted to.'

He sat down. 'I want to talk to you, Sis.' His tone was changed and she sank on to the foot of the bed, curling her legs under her, regarding him hostilely. How clumsy I am, he thought, clearing his throat. 'It's about young Mahon.'

She looked at him.

'I saw him this noon, you know.'

She was forcing him to do all the talking. Dammit, what an amazing ability children have for making parental admonition hard to achieve. Even Bob was developing it.

Cecily's eyes were green and fathomless. She extended her arm, taking a nail file from her dressing-table. The downpour had ceased and the rain was only a whisper in the wet leaves. Cecily bent her face above the graceful slender gesturing of her hands.

'I say, I saw young Mahon today,' her father repeated with rising choler.

'You did? How did he look, daddy?' Her tone was so soft, so innocent that he sighed with relief. He glanced at her sharply, but her face was lowered sweetly and demurely; he could see only her hair filled with warm reddish lights and the shallow plane of her cheek and her soft unemphatic chin.

'That boy's in bad shape, Sis.'

'His poor father,' she commiserated above her busy hands. 'It is so hard on him, isn't it?'

'His father doesn't know.'

She looked quickly up and her eyes became grey and dark, darker still. He saw that she didn't know, either. 'Doesn't know?' she repeated, 'How can he help seeing that scar?' Her face blanched and her hand touched her breast delicately. 'Do you mean—'

'No, no,' he said hastily. 'I mean his father thinks — that he — his father doesn't think — I mean his father forgets that his journey has tired him, you see,' he finished awkwardly. He continued swiftly: 'That's what I wanted to talk to you about.'

'About being engaged to him? How can I, with that scar? How can I?'
'No, no, not engaged to him, if you don't want to be. We won't think about the engagement at all now. But just keep on seeing him until he gets well, you see.'

'But, daddy, I can't. I just can't.'

'Why, Sis?'

'Oh, his face. I can't bear it any more.' Her own face was wrung with the recollection of a passed anguish. 'Don't you see I can't? I would if I could.'

'But you'll get used to it. And I expect a good doctor can patch him up and hide it. Doctors can do anything these days. Why, Sis, you are the one who can do more for him right now than any doctor.'

She lowered her head to her arms folded upon the foot-tail of the bed and her father stood beside her, putting his arm about her slim, nervous body.

'Can't you do that much, Sis? Just drop in and see him occasionally?'

'I just can't,' she moaned, 'I just can't.'

'Well, then, I guess you can't see that Farr boy any more, either.'
She raised her head quickly and her body became taut beneath his arm.
'Who says I can't?'
'I say so, Sis,' he replied gently and firmly.
Her eyes became blue with anger, almost black.

'You can't prevent it. You know you can't.' She thrust herself back against his arm, trying to evade it. He held her and she twisted her head aside, straining from him.

'Look at me,' he said quietly, putting his other hand under her cheek. She resisted, he felt her warm breath on his hand, but he forced her face around. Her eyes blazed at him. 'If you can't occasionally see the man you are engaged to, and a sick man to boot, I'm damned if I'll have you running around with anybody else.'

There were red prints of his fingers on her cheek, and her eyes slowly filled. 'You are hurting me,' she said, and feeling her soft, vague chin in his palm and her fragile body against his arm, he knew a sudden access of contrition. He picked her up bodily and sat again in a chair, holding her on his lap.

'Now, then,' he whispered, rocking, holding her face against his shoulder, 'I didn't mean to be so rough about it.'

She lay against him limply, weeping, and the rain filled the interval, whispering across the roof among the leaves of trees. After a long space in which they could hear dripping eaves and the happy sound of gutters and a small ivory clock in the room, she moved and still holding her face against his coat, she clasped her father about the neck.

'We won't think about it any more,' he told her, kissing her cheek. She clasped him again tightly, then slipping from his lap, she stood at the dressing-table, dabbing powder upon her face. He rose, and in the mirror across her shoulder he saw her blurred face and the deft nervousness of her hands.

‘We won’t think of it anymore,’ he repeated, opening the door. The orange sweater was a hushed incandescence under the formal illusion of her robe, moulding her narrow back, as he closed the door after him.

As he passed his wife’s room she called to him.

‘What were you scolding Cecily for, Robert?’ she asked.

But he stumped on down the stairs, ignoring her, and soon she heard him cursing Tobe from the back porch.

Mrs Saunders entered her daughter’s room and found her swiftly dressing. The sun broke suddenly through the rain and long lances of sunlight piercing the washed immaculate air struck sparks amid the dripping trees.

‘Where are you going, Cecily?’ she asked.

‘To see Donald,’ she replied, drawing on her stockings, twisting them skilfully and deftly at the knees.

9

Januarius Jones, lounging through the wet grass, circled the house and, peering through the kitchen window, saw Emmy’s back and one angled arm sawing across her body. He mounted the steps quietly and entered. Emmy’s stare above her poised iron was impersonally combative. Jones’s yellow eyes, unabashed, took her and the ironing board and the otherwise empty kitchen boldly.

Jones said:

‘Well, Cinderella.’

‘My name is Emmy,’ she told him icily.

‘That’s right,’ he agreed equably, ‘so it is. Emmy, Emmeline, Emmylune, Lune— “La lune en garde aucune rancune.” But does it? Or perhaps you prefer “Noir sur la lune”? Or do you make finer or less fine distinctions than this? It might be jazzed a bit, you know.

Aelia thought so, quite successfully, but then she had a casement in which to lean at dusk and harp her sorrow on her golden hair. You don't seem to have any golden hair, but then you might jazz your hair up a little, too. Ah, this restless young generation! Wanting to jazz up everything, not only their complexes, but the shapes of their behinds as well.'

She turned her back on him indifferently, and again her arm sawed the iron steadily along a stretched fabric. He became so still that after a while she turned to see what had become of him. He was so close behind her that her hair brushed his face. Clutching her iron, she shrieked.

'Hah, my proud beauty!' hissed Jones in accepted style, putting his arms around her.

'Let me go!' she said, glaring at him.

'Your speech is wrong,' Jones informed her helpfully. ' "Release me, villain, or it will be the worse for you," is what you should say.'

'Let me go,' she repeated.

'Not till you divulge them papers,' he answered, fat and solemn, his yellow eyes expressionless as a dead man's.

'Lemme go, or I'll burn you,' she cried hotly, brandishing the iron. They stared at one another. Emmy's eyes were fiercely implacable and Jones said at last:

'Dam'f I don't believe you would.'

'See if I don't,' she said with anger. But releasing her, he sprang away in time. Her red hand brushed her hair from her hot face and her eyes blazed at him. 'Get out, now,' she ordered, and Jones, sauntering easily towards the door, remarked plaintively:

'What's the matter with you women here, anyway? Wildcats. Wildcats. By the way, how is the dying hero today?'

‘Go on now,’ she repeated, gesturing with the iron. He passed through the door and closed it behind him. Then he opened it again and making her a deep fattish bow from the threshold he withdrew.

In the dark hallway he halted, listening. Light from the front door fell directly in his face: he could see only the edged indication of sparse furniture. He paused, listening. No, she isn’t here, he decided. Not enough talk going on for her to be here. That femme hates silence like a cat does water.

Cecily and silence: oil and water. And she’ll be on top of it, too. Little bitch, wonder what she meant by that yesterday. And Georgie, too. She’s such a fast worker I guess it takes a whole string to keep her busy. Oh, well, there’s always tomorrow. Especially when today ain’t over yet. Go in and pull the Great Dane’s leg a while.

At the study door he met Gilligan. He didn’t recognize him at first. ‘Bless my soul’ he said at last. ‘Has the army disbanded already? What will Pershing do now, without any soldiers to salute him? We had scarcely enough men to fight a war with, but with a long peace ahead of us — man, we are helpless.’

Gilligan said coldly: ‘Whatcher want?’

‘Why, nothing, thank you. Thank you so much. I merely came to call upon our young friend in the kitchen and to incidentally inquire after Mercury’s brother.’

‘Whose brother?’

‘Young Mr Mahon, in a manner of speaking, then.’

‘Doctor’s with him,’ Gilligan replied curtly. ‘You can’t go in now.’ He turned on his heel.

‘Not at all,’ murmured Jones, after the other’s departing back. ‘Not at all, my dear fellow.’ Yawning, he strolled up the hall. He stood in the entrance, speculative, filling his pipe. He yawned again openly. At his right was an open door and he entered a stuffily formal room. Here was

a convenient window ledge on which to put spent matches, and sitting beside it he elevated his feet to another chair.

The room was depressingly hung with glum portraits of someone's forebears, between which the principal strain of kinship appeared to be some sort of stomach trouble. Or perhaps they were portraits of the Ancient Mariner at different ages before he wore out his albatross. (Not even a dead fish could make a man look like that, thought Jones, refusing the dyspeptic gambit of their fretful painted eyes. No wonder the parson believes in hell.)

A piano had not been opened in years, and opened would probably sound like the faces looked. Jones rose and from a bookcase he got a copy of Paradise Lost (cheerful thing to face a sinner with, he thought) and returned to his chair. The chair was hard, but Jones was not. He elevated his feet again.

The rector and a stranger came into his vision, pausing at the front door in conversation. The stranger departed and that black woman appeared. She and the rector exchanged a few words. Jones remarked with slow, lustful approval her firm, free carriage, and —

And here came Miss Cecily Saunders in pale lilac with a green ribbon at her waist, tapping her delicate way up the fast-drying gravel path between the fresh-sparkled grass.

'Uncle Joe!' she called, but the rector had already withdrawn to his study. Mrs Powers met her and she said: 'Oh. How do you do? May I see Donald?'

She entered the hall beneath the dim lovely fanlight, and her roving glance remarked one sitting with his back to a window. She said 'Donald!' and sailed into the room like a bird. One hand covered her eyes and the other was outstretched as she ran with quick tapping steps and sank before him at his feet, burying her face in his lap.

'Donald, Donald! I will try to get used to it, I will try! Oh, Donald, Donald! Your poor face! But I will, I will,' she repeated hysterically. Her

fumbling hand touched his sleeve and slipping down his arm she drew his hand under her cheek, clasping it. 'I didn't mean to, yesterday. I wouldn't hurt you for anything, Donald. I couldn't help it, but I love you, Donald, my precious, my own.' She burrowed deeper into his lap.

'Put your arms around me, Donald,' she said, 'until I get used to you again.'

He complied, drawing her upward. Suddenly, struck with something familiar about the coat, she raised her head. It was Januarius Jones.

She sprang to her feet. 'You beast, why didn't you tell me?'
'My dear ma'am, who am I to refuse what the gods send?'

But she did not wait to hear him. At the door Mrs Powers stood watching with interest. Now she's laughing at me! Cecily thought furiously. Her glance was a blue dagger and her voice was like dripped honey.

'How silly of me, not to have looked,' she said sweetly. 'Seeing you, I thought at once that Donald would be near by. I am sure if I were a man I'd always be as near you as possible. But I didn't know you and Mr — Mr Smith were such good friends. Though they say that fat men are awfully attractive. May I see Donald — do you mind?'

Her anger lent her fortitude. When she entered the study she looked at Mahon without a qualm, scar and all. She greeted the rector, kissing him, then she turned swift and graceful to Mahon, averting her eyes from his brow. He watched her quietly, without emotion.

You have caused me to look foolish, she told him with whispered smooth fury, sweetly kissing his mouth.

Jones, ignored, followed down the hall and stood without the closed door to the study, listening, hearing her throaty, rapid speech beyond the bland panel. Then, stooping, he peered through the keyhole.

But he could see nothing and feeling his creased waistline constricting his breathing, feeling his braces cutting into his stooped fleshy shoulders, he rose under Gilligan's detached, contemplative stare. Jones's own yellow eyes became quietly empty and he walked around Gilligan's immovable belligerence and on towards the front door, whistling casually.

10

Cecily Saunders returned home nursing the yet uncooled embers of her anger. From beyond the turning angle of the veranda her mother called her name and she found her parents sitting together.

'How is Donald?' her mother asked, and not waiting for a reply, she said: 'George Farr phoned again after you left. I wish you'd leave a message for him. It keeps Tobe forever stopping whatever he is doing to answer the phone.'

Cecily, making no reply, would have passed on to a french window opening upon the porch, but her father caught her hand, stopping her.

'How is Donald looking today?' he asked, repeating his wife.

Her unrelaxed hand tried to withdraw from his. 'I don't know and I don't care,' she said harshly.

'Why, didn't you go there?' Her mother's voice was faintly laced with surprise. 'I thought you were going there.'

'Let me go, daddy.' She wrenched her hand nervously. 'I want to change my dress.' He could feel her rigid, delicate bones. 'Please,' she implored and he said:

'Come here, Sis.'

'Now, Robert,' his wife interposed. 'You promised to let her alone.'

'Come here, Sis,' he repeated, and her hand becoming lax, she allowed herself to be drawn to the arm of his chair. She sat nervously, impatiently, and he put his arm around her. 'Why didn't you go there?'

'Now, Robert, you promised,' his wife parroted futilely.

'Let me go, daddy.' She was rigid beneath her thin, pale dress. He held her and she said: 'I did go there.'

'Did you see Donald?'

'Oh, yes. That black, ugly woman finally condescended to let me see him a few minutes. In her presence, of course.'

'What black, ugly woman, darling?' asked Mrs Saunders, with interest.

'Black woman? Oh, you mean Mrs What's-her-name. Why, Sis, I thought you and she would like each other. She has a good level head, I thought.'

'I don't doubt it. Only—'

'What black woman, Cecily?'

'— only you'd better not let Donald see that you are smitten with her.'

'Now, now, Sis. What are you talking about?'

'Oh, it's well enough to talk that way,' she said, taut and passionate, 'but haven't I eyes of my own? Haven't I seen? Why did she come all the way from Chicago or wherever it was with him? And yet you expect me—'

'Who came from where? What woman, Cecily? What woman, Robert?' They ignored her.

'Now, Sis, you ain't just to her. You're just excited.'

His arm held her fragile rigidity.

'I tell you, it isn't that — just her. I had forgiven that, because he is sick and because of how he used to be about — about girls. You know, before the war. But he has humiliated me in public: this afternoon he — he — Let me go, daddy,' she repeated, imploring, trying to thrust herself away from him.

'But what woman, Cecily? What is all this about a woman?' Her mother's voice was fretted.

'Sis, honey, remember he is sick. And I know more about Mrs — er — Mrs Powers than you do.' He removed his arm, yet held her by the wrist 'Now, you—'

'Robert, who is this woman?'

' — think about it tonight and we'll talk it over in the morning.'

'No, I am through with him, I tell you. He has humiliated me before her.' Her hand came free and she sprang towards the window.

'Cecily?' her mother called after the slim whirl of her vanishing dress, 'are you going to call George Farr?'

'No! Not if he was the last man in the world. I hate men.' The swift staccato of her feet died away upon the stairs, and then a door slammed. Mrs Saunders sank creaking into her chair.

'Now, Robert.'

So he told her.

11

Cecily did not appear at breakfast. Her father mounted to her room, and knocked this time.

'Yes?' her voice penetrated the wood, muffled thinly.

'It's me, Sis. Can I come in?'

There was no reply, so he entered. She had not even bathed her face, and upon the pillow she was flushed and childish with sleep. The room

was permeated with her body's intimate repose; it was in his nostrils like an odour and he felt ill at ease, cumbersome, and awkward. He sat on the edge of the bed and took her surrendered hand diffidently. It was unresponsive.

'How do you feel this morning?'

She made no reply, lazily feeling her ascendancy and he continued with assumed lightness: 'Do you feel better about poor young Mahon this morning?'

'I've put him out of my mind. He doesn't need me any more.'

'Course he does,' heartily, 'we expect you to be his best medicine.'

'How can I?'

'How? What do you mean?'

'He brought his own medicine with him.'

Her calmness, her exasperating calmness. He must flog himself into yesterday's rage. That was the only way to do anything with 'em, damn 'em.

'Did it ever occur to you that I, in my limited way, may know more about this than you?'

She withdrew her hand and slid it beneath the covers, making no reply, not even looking at him.

He continued: 'You are acting like a fool, Cecily. What did the man do to you yesterday?'

'He simply insulted me before another woman. But I don't care to discuss it.'

'But listen, Sis. Are you refusing to even see him when seeing him means whether or not he will get well again?'

'He's got that black woman. If she can't cure him with all her experience, I certainly can't.'

Her father's face slowly suffused. She glanced at him impersonally then turned her head on the pillow, staring out the window.

'So you refuse to see him any more?'

'What else can I do? He very evidently does not want me to bother him any longer. Do you want me to go where I am not wanted?'

He swallowed his anger, trying to speak calmly, trying to match her calm. 'Don't you see that I'm not trying to make you do anything? that I am only trying to help that boy get on his feet again? Suppose he was Bob, suppose Bob was lying there like he is.'

'Then you'd better get engaged to him yourself. I'm not.'

'Look at me,' he said with such quiet, such repression, that she lay motionless, holding her breath. He put a rough hand on her shoulder.

'You don't have to man-handle me,' she told him calmly, turning her head.

'Listen to me. You are not to see that Farr boy, any more. Understand?'

Her eyes were unfathomable as sea-water.

'Do you understand me?' he repeated.

'Yes, I hear you.'

He rose. They were amazingly alike. He turned at the door meeting her stubborn, impersonal gaze. 'I meant it, Sis.'

Her eyes clouded suddenly. 'I am sick and tired of men. Do you think I care?'

The door closed behind him and she lay staring at its inscrutable, painted surface, running her fingers lightly over her breasts, across her belly, drawing concentric circles upon her body beneath the covers, wondering how it would feel to have a baby, hating that inevitable time when she'd have to have one, blurring her slim epicenity, blurring her body with pain. . . .

12

Miss Cecily Saunders, in pale blue linen, entered a neighbour's house, gushing, paying a morning call. Women did not like her, and she knew it. Yet she had a way with them, a way of charming them temporarily with her conventional perfection, insincere though she might be.

Her tact and her graceful deference were such that they discussed her disparagingly only behind her back. None of them could long resist her. She always seemed to enjoy other people's gossip. It was not until later you found that she had gossiped none herself. And this, indeed, requires tact.

She chattered briefly while her hostess potted among tubed flowers, then asking and receiving permission, she entered the house to use the telephone.

13

Mr George Farr, lurking casually within the courthouse portals, saw her unmistakable approaching figure far down the shady street, remarking her quick, nervous stride. He gloated, fondling her in his eyes with a slow sensuality.

That's the way to treat 'em: make 'em come to you. Forgetting that he had phoned her vainly five times in thirty hours. But her surprise was so perfect, her greeting so impersonal, that he began to doubt his own ears.

'My God,' he said, 'I thought I'd never get you on the phone.'

'Yes?' She paused, creating an unpleasant illusion of arrested haste.

'Been sick?'

'Yes, sort of. Well,' moving on, 'I'm awfully glad to have seen you. Call me again sometime, when I'm in, won't you?'

'But say, Cecily—'

She paused again and looked at him over her shoulder with courteous patience. 'Yes?'

'Where are you going?'

'Oh, I'm running errands today. Buying some things for mamma. Good-bye.' She moved again, her blue linen shaping delicate and crisp to her stride. A Negro driving a wagon passed between them, interminable as Time: he thought the wagon would never pass, so he darted around it to overtake her.

'Be careful,' she said quickly, 'Daddy's downtown today. I am not supposed to see you any more. My folks are down on you.'

'Why?' he asked in startled vacuity.

'I don't know. Perhaps they have heard of your running around with women, and they think you will ruin me. That's it, probably.'

Flattered, he said: 'Aw, come on.'

They walked beneath awnings. Wagons tethered to slumbering mules and horses were motionless in the square. They were lapped, surrounded, submerged by the frank odour of unwashed Negroes, most of whom wore at least one ex-garment of the army O.D.; and their slow, unemphatic voices and careless, ready laughter, which has also somehow beneath it something elemental and sorrowful and unresisting, lay drowsily upon the noon.

At the corner was a drugstore in each window of which was an identical globe, containing liquids, once red and green, respectively, but faded now to a weak similar brown by the suns of many summers. She stayed him with her hand.

'You mustn't come any further, George, please.'

'Oh, come on, Cecily.'

'No, no. Good-bye.' Her slim hand stopped him dead in his tracks.

'Come in and have a Coca-Cola.'

'No, I can't. I have so many things to do. I'm sorry.'

'Well, after you get through, then,' he suggested as a last resort.

'I can't tell. But if you want to, you can wait here for me and I'll come back if I have time. If you want to, you know.'

'All right, I'll wait here for you. Please come, Cecily.'

'I can't promise. Good-bye.'

He was forced to watch her retreating from him, mincing and graceful, diminishing. Hell, she won't come, he told himself. But he daren't leave for fear she might. He watched her as long as he could see her, watching her head among other heads, sometimes seeing her whole body, delicate and unmistakable. He lit a cigarette and lounged into the drugstore.

After a while the clock on the courthouse struck twelve and he threw away his fifth cigarette. God damn her, she won't have another chance to stand me up, he swore. Cursing her he felt better and pushed open the screen door.

He sprang suddenly back into the store and stepped swiftly out of sight and the soda clerk, glassy-haired and white-jacketed, said 'Whatcher dodging?' with interest. She passed, walking and talking gaily with a young married man who clerked in a department store. She looked in as they passed, without seeing him.

He waited, wrung and bitter with anger and jealousy, until he knew she had turned the corner. Then he swung the door outward furiously. He cursed her again, blindly, and someone behind him saying, 'Mist' George, Mist' George,' monotonously drew up beside him. He whirled upon a Negro boy.

'What in hell you want?' he snapped.

'Letter fer you,' replied the Negro equably, shaming him with better breeding. He took it and gave the boy a coin. It was written on a scrap

of wrapping paper and it read: 'Come tonight after they have gone to bed. I may not get out. But come — if you want to.'

He read and reread it, he stared at her spidery, nervous script until the words themselves ceased to mean anything to his mind. He was sick with relief. Everything, the ancient, slumbering courthouse, the elms, the hitched somnolent horses and mules, the stolid coagulation of Negroes and the slow unemphasis of their talk and laughter, all seemed some way different, lovely, and beautiful under the indolent noon.

He drew a long breath.

CHAPTER FOUR

1

MR GEORGE FARR considered himself quite a man. I wonder if it shows in my face? he thought, keenly examining the faces of men whom he passed, trying to fancy that he did see something in some faces that other faces had not. But he had to admit that he could see nothing, and he knew a slight depression, a disappointment. Strange. If that didn't show in your face what could you do for things to show in your face?

It would be fine if (George Farr was a gentleman), if without talking men who had women could somehow know each other on sight — some sort of involuntary sign: an automatic masonry. Of course women were no new thing to him.

But not like this. Then the pleasing thought occurred to him that he was unique in the world, that nothing like this had happened to any other man, that no one else had ever thought of such a thing. Anyway I know it. He gloated over a secret thought like a pleasant taste in the mouth.

When he remembered (remember? had he thought of anything else?) how she had run into the dark house in her nightgown, weeping, he felt quite masculine and superior and gentle. She's all right now though, I guess they all do that.

His Jove-like calm was slightly shaken, however, after he had tried twice unsuccessfully to get her over the phone and it was completely shattered when late in the afternoon she drove serenely by him in a car with a girl friend, utterly ignoring him. She didn't see me. (You know she did.) She didn't see me! (You know damn well she did.)

By nightfall he was on the verge of his possible, mild unemphatic insanity. Then this cooled away as the sun cooled from the sky. He felt nothing, yet like an unattached ghost he felt compelled to linger around the corner which she would pass if she did come downtown. Suddenly he knew terror.

What if I were to see her with another man? It would be worse than death he knew, trying to make himself leave, to hide somewhere like a wounded beast. But his body would not go.

He saw her time after time and when it turned out to be someone else he did not know what he felt. And so when she did turn the corner he did not believe his eyes at first. It was her brother that he first recognized, then he saw her and all his life went into his eyes leaving his body but an awkward, ugly, gesture in unquicked clay.

He could not have said how long it was that he was unconscious of the stone base of the monument on which he sat while she and her brother moved slowly and implacably across his vision, then his life flowed completely, emptying his eyes and filling his body again, giving him dominion over his arms and legs, and temporarily sightless he sprang after her.

'Hi, George,' young Robert greeted him casually, as an equal. 'Goin' to the show?'

She looked at him swiftly, delicately, with terror and something like loathing.

'Cecily—' he said.

Her eyes were dark, black, and she averted her head and hurried on.

‘Cecily,’ he implored, touching her arm.

At his touch she shuddered, shrinking from him. ‘Don’t, don’t touch me,’ she said piteously. Her face was blanched, colourless, and he stood watching her frail dress flowing to the fragile articulation of her body as she and her brother passed on, leaving him. And he, too, partook of her pain and terror, not knowing what it was.

2

Donald Mahon’s homecoming, poor fellow, was hardly a nine days’ wonder even. Curious, kindly neighbours came in — men who stood or sat jovially respectable, cheerful: solid businessmen interested in the war only as a by-product of the rise and fall of Mr Wilson, and interested in that only as a matter of dollars and cents, while their wives chatted about clothes to each other across Mahon’s scarred, oblivious brow; a few of the rector’s more casual acquaintances democratically uncravated, hushing their tobacco into a bulged cheek, diffidently but firmly refusing to surrender their hats; girls that he had known, had danced with or courted of summer nights, come now to look once upon his face, and then quickly aside in hushed nausea, not coming any more unless his face happened to be hidden on the first visit (upon which they finally found opportunity to see it); boys come to go away fretted because he wouldn’t tell any war stories — all this going on about him while Gilligan, his glum major-domo, handled them all with impartial discouraging efficiency.

‘Beat it, now,’ he repeated to young Robert Saunders, who, with sundry contemporaries to whom he had promised something good in the way of damaged soldiers, had called.

‘He’s going to marry my sister. I’d like to know why I can’t see him,’ young Robert protested. He was in the uncomfortable position of one who has inveigled his friends into a gold mine and then cannot produce the mine. They jeered at him and he justified his position hotly, appealing to Gilligan.

'G'wan now, beat it. Show's over. G'wan now.' Gilligan shut the door on him. Mrs Powers, descending the stairs said:

'What is it, Joe?'

'That damn Saunders hellion brought his whole gang around to see his scar. We got to stop this,' he stated with exasperation, 'can't have these damn folks in and out of here all day long, staring at him.'

'Well, it is about over,' she told him, 'they have all called by now. Even their funny little paper has appeared. "War Hero Returns", you know — that sort of thing.'

'I hope so,' he answered without hope. 'God knows they've all been here once. Do you know, while I was living and eating and sleeping with men all the time I never thought much of them, but since I got civilized again and seen all these women around here saying, Ain't his face terrible, poor boy, and Will she marry him? and Did you see her downtown yesterday almost nekkid? why, I think a little better of men after all. You'll notice them soldiers don't bother him, specially the ones that was overseas. They just kind of call the whole thing off. He just had hard luck and whatcher going to do about it? is the way they figure. Some didn't and some did, the way they think of it.'

They stood together looking out of the window upon the sleepy street. Women, quite palpably 'dressed', went steadily beneath parasols in one direction. 'Ladies' Aid,' murmured Gilligan. 'W.C.T.U. maybe.'

'I think you are becoming misanthropic, Joe.'

Gilligan glanced at her smooth contemplative profile almost on a level with his own.

'About women? When I say soldiers I don't mean me. I wasn't no soldier any more than a man that fixes watches is a watchmaker. And when I say women I don't mean you.'

She put her arm over his shoulder. It was firm, latent in strength, comforting. He knew that he could embrace her in the same way, that if he wished she would kiss him, frankly and firmly, that her eyelids would never veil her eyes at the touch of his mouth.

What man is for her? he wondered, knowing that after all no man was for her, knowing that she would go through with all physical intimacies, that she would undress to a lover (?) with this same impersonal efficiency. (He should be a — a — he should be a gladiator or a statesman or a victorious general: someone hard and ruthless who would expect nothing from her, of whom she would expect nothing. Like two gods exchanging golden baubles. And I, I am no gladiator nor statesman nor general: I am nothing. Perhaps that's why I want so much from her.) He put his arm over her shoulders.

Niggers and mules. Afternoon lay in a coma in the street, like a woman recently loved. Quiet and warm: nothing now that the lover has gone away. Leaves were like a green liquid arrested in mid flow, flattened and spread; leaves were as though cut with scissors from green paper and pasted flat on the afternoon: someone dreamed them and then forgot his dream. Niggers and mules.

Monotonous wagons drawn by long-eared beasts crawled past. Negroes humped with sleep, portentous upon each wagon and in the wagon bed itself sat other Negroes upon chairs: a pagan catafalque under the afternoon.

Rigid, as though carved in Egypt ten thousand years ago. Slow dust rising veiled their passing, like Time; the necks of mules limber as rubber hose swayed their heads from side to side, looking behind them always. But the mules were asleep also. 'Ketch me sleep, he kill me. But I got mule blood in me: when he sleep, I sleep; when he wake, I wake.'

In the study where Donald sat, his father wrote steadily on tomorrow's sermon. The afternoon slept without.

The Town:

War Hero Returns. . . .

His face . . . the way that girl goes on with that Farr boy. . . .

Young Robert Saunders:

I just want to see his scar. . . .

Cecily:

And now I'm not a good woman any more. Oh, well, it had to be sometime, I guess. . . .

George Farr:

Yes! Yes! She was a virgin! But if she won't see me it means somebody else. Her body in another's arms. . . . Why must you? Why must you? What do you want? Tell me: I will do anything, anything. . . .

Margaret Powers:

Can nothing at all move me again? Nothing to desire? Nothing to stir me, to move me, save pity? . . .

Gilligan:

Margaret, tell me what you want. I will do it. Tell me, Margaret. . . .

The rector wrote, 'The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want.'

Donald Mahon, knowing Time as only something which was taking from him a world he did not particularly mind losing, stared out a window into green and motionless leaves: a motionless blur.

The afternoon dreamed on towards sunset. Niggers and mules. . . . At last Gilligan broke the silence.

'That old fat one is going to send her car to take him riding.'

Mrs Powers made no reply.

3

San Francisco, Cal.

5 April 1919

Dear Margaret,

Well I am at home again I got here this afternoon. As soon as I got away from mother I am sitting down to write to you. Home seems pretty good after you have been doing a pretty risky thing like lots of them cracked up at. It's boring all these girls how they go on over a flying man if you ever experienced it isn't it. There was a couple of janes on the train I met.

Well anyway they saw my hat band and they gave me the eye they were society girls they said but I am not so dumb any way they were nice kids and they might of been society girls. Anyway I got there phone numbers and I am going to give them a call. Just kidding them see there is only one woman for me Margaret you know it.

Well we rode on into San Francisco talking and laughing in there stateroom so I am going to take the best looking of them out this week I made a date with her except she wants me to bring a fellow for her friend so I guess I will poor kids they probably haven't had much fun dureing the war like a man can have dureing the war. But I am just kidding them Margaret you mustnt be jealous like I am not jealous over Lieut Mahon. Well mother is dragging me out to tea I had rather I had be shot than go except she insists. Give my regards to Joe.

With love

Julian

Mrs Powers and Gilligan met the specialist from Atlanta at the station. In the cab he listened to her attentively.

'But, my dear madam,' he objected when she had finished, 'you are asking me to commit an ethical violation.'

'But, surely, Doctor, it isn't a violation of professional ethics to let his father believe as he wishes to believe, is it?'

'No, it is a violation of my personal ethics.'

'Then, you tell me and let me tell his father.'

'Yes, I will do that. But pardon me, may I ask what exactly is your relation to him?'

'We are to be married,' she answered, looking at him steadily.

'Oho. Then that is quite all right. I will promise not to say anything before his father that can disturb him.'

He kept his promise. After lunch he joined her where she sat on the shaded quiet veranda. She put aside her embroidery frame and he took a chair, puffing furiously at his cigar until it burned evenly.

'What is he waiting for?' he asked suddenly.

'Waiting for?' she repeated.

He flashed her a keen grey glance. 'There is no ultimate hope for him, you know.'

'For his sight, you mean?'

'That's practically gone now. I mean for him.'

'I know. That's what Mr Gilligan said two weeks ago.'

'M'm. Is Mr Gilligan a doctor?'

'No. But it doesn't take a doctor to see that, does it?'

'Not necessarily. But I think Mr Gilligan rather overshot himself, making a public statement like that.'

She rocked gently. He veiled his head in smoke, watching the evenly burning ash at the cigar tip. She said:

'You think that there is no hope for him, then?'

'Frankly, I do.' He tilted the ash carefully over the balustrade. 'He is practically a dead man now. More than that, he should have been dead these three months were it not for the fact that he seems to be waiting for something. Something he has begun, but has not completed, something he has carried from his former life that he does not remember consciously. That is his only hold on life that I can see.' He

gave her another keen glance. 'How does he regard you now? He remembers nothing of his life before he was injured.'

She met his sharp, kind gaze a moment, then she suddenly decided to tell him the truth. He watched her intently until she had finished.

'So you are meddling with Providence, are you?'

'Wouldn't you have done the same?' she defended herself.

'I never speculate on what I would have done,' he answered shortly.

'There can be no If in my profession. I work in tissue and bone, not in circumstance.'

'Well, it's done now. I am in it too far to withdraw. So you think he may go at any time?'

'You are asking me to speculate again. What I said was that he will go whenever that final spark somewhere in him is no longer fed. His body is already dead. Further than that I cannot say.'

'An operation?' she suggested.

'He would not survive it. And in the second place, the human machine can only be patched and parts replaced up to a certain point. And all that has been done for him, or he would have never been released from any hospital.'

Afternoon drew on. They sat quietly talking while sunlight becoming lateral, broke through the screening leaves and sprinkled the porch with flecks of yellow, like mica in a stream. The same Negro in the same undershirt droned up and down the lawn with his mower, an occasional vehicle passed slumbrous and creaking behind twitching mules, or moving more swiftly, leaving a fretful odour of gasoline to die beneath the afternoon.

The rector joined them after a while.

'Then there's nothing to do except let him build himself up, eh, Doctor?' he asked.

‘Yes, that is my advice. Attention, rest, and quiet, let him resume old habits. About his sight, though—’

The rector looked up slowly. ‘Yes, I realize his sight must go. But there are compensations. He is engaged to be married to a very charming lady. Don’t you think that will give him incentive to help himself?’

‘Yes, that should, if anything can.’

‘What do you think? Shall we hurry the marriage along?’

‘We — ll—’ the doctor hesitated: he was not exactly accustomed to giving advice on this subject.

Mrs Powers came to his rescue. ‘I think we had better not hurry him at all,’ she said quickly. ‘Let him accustom himself leisurely, you see. Don’t you think so, Doctor Baird?’

‘Yes, Reverend, you let Mrs Powers here advise you about that. I have every confidence in her judgement. You let her take charge of this thing. Women are always more capable than we are, you know.’

‘That’s quite true. We are already under measureless obligations to Mrs Powers.’

‘Nonsense. I have almost adopted Donald myself.’

The cab came at last and Gilligan appeared with the doctor’s things. They rose and Mrs Powers slipped her arm through the rector’s. She squeezed his arm and released him. As she and Gilligan, flanking the doctor, descended the steps the rector said again, timidly:

‘You are sure, Doctor, that there is nothing to be done immediately? We are naturally anxious, you know,’ he ended apologetically.

‘No, no,’ the doctor replied testily, ‘he can help himself more than we can help him.’

The rector stood watching until the cab turned the corner. Looking back, she could see him in the door staring after them. Then they turned a corner.

As the train drew into the station the doctor said, taking her hand: 'You've let yourself in for something that is going to be unpleasant, young lady.'

She gave him a straight glance in return. 'I'll take the risk,' she said, shaking his hand firmly.

'Well, good-bye, then, and good luck.'
'Good-bye, sir,' she answered, 'and thank you.'
He turned to Gilligan, offering his hand.

'And the same to you, Doctor Gilligan,' he said with faint sarcasm. They saw his neat grey back disappear and Gilligan, turning to her, asked: 'What'd he call me Doctor for?'

'Come on, Joe,' she said, not replying to his question, 'let's walk back. I want to walk through the woods again.'

4

The air was sweet with fresh-sawed lumber and they walked through a pale yellow city of symmetrical stacked planks. A continuous line of Negroes carried boards up a cleated incline like a chicken run into a freight car and flung them clashing to the floor, under the eye of an informally clad white man who reclined easily upon a lumber pile, chewing indolent tobacco. He watched them with interest as they passed, following the faint wagon road.

They crossed grass-grown steel rails, and trees obscured the lumber yard, but until they reached the bottom of the hill the voices of the Negroes raised in bursts of meaningless laughter or snatches of song in a sorrowful minor came to them, and the slow reverberations of the cast boards smote at measured intervals. Quietly, under the spell of the still late afternoon woods they descended a loamy hill, following the faint downward winding of the road. At the foot of the hill a dogwood

tree spread flat palm-like branches in invocation among dense green, like a white nun.

‘Niggers cut them for firewood because they are easy to chop,’ she said, breaking the silence. ‘Shame, isn’t it?’

‘Do they?’ he murmured without interest. With the soft, sandy soil giving easily under their feet they came upon water. It ran sombrely from out massed honeysuckle vines and crossed the dim road into another impenetrable thicket, murmuring. She stopped, and bending slightly, they could see their heads and their two fore-shortened bodies repeating themselves.

‘Do we look that funny to people, I wonder?’ she said. Then she stepped quickly across. ‘Come on, Joe.’

The road passed from the dim greenness into sunlight, again. It was still sandy and the going was harder, exasperating.

‘You’ll have to pull me, Joe.’ She took his arm, feeling her heels sink and slip treacherously at each step. Her unevenly distributed weight made his own progress more difficult, and he disengaged his arm and put his hand against her back.

‘That’s better,’ she said, leaning against his firm hand. The road circled the foot of a hill and trees descending the hill were halted by the curving road’s green canyon as though waiting to step across when they had passed. Sun was in the trees like an arrested lateral rain and ahead where, circling, the green track of the stream approached the road again, they heard young voices and a sound of water.

They walked slowly through the shifting sand, and the voices beyond a screen of thick leaves became louder. She squeezed his arm for silence and they left the road and parted leaves cautiously upon glistened disturbed water, taking and giving the sun in a flashing barter of gold for gold, dazzling the eyes. Two wet matted heads spread opening fans of water like muskrats and on a limb, balanced precariously to dive,

stood a third swimmer. His body was the colour of old paper, beautiful as a young animal's.

They stepped into view and Gilligan said:
'Hi, Colonel.'

The diver took one quick, terrified look and releasing his hold he fell like a stone into the water. The other two, shocked and motionless, stared at the intruders, then when the diver reappeared above the surface they whooped at him in merciless derision. He swam like an eel across the pool and took refuge beneath the overhanging bank, out of sight. His companions still squalled at him in inarticulate mirth. She raised her voice above the din.

'Come on, Joe. We've spoiled their fun.'

They left the noise behind and again in the road, she remarked:
'We shouldn't have done that. Poor boy, they'll tease him to death now. What makes men so silly, Joe?'

'Dam'f I know. But they sure are. Do you know who that was?'

'No. Who was it?'

'Her brother.'

'Her—'

'Young Saunders.'

'Oh, was it? Poor boy, I'm sorry I shocked him.'

And well she might have been, could she have seen his malevolent face watching her retreating figure as he swiftly donned his clothes. I'll fix you! he swore, almost crying.

The road wound through a depression between two small ridges. The sun was yet in the tops of trees and here were cedars unsunned and solemn, a green quiet nave. A thrush sang and they stopped as one, listening to its four notes, watching the fading patches of sun on the top of the ridge.

'Let's sit down and have a cigarette,' she suggested.

She lowered herself easily and he sat beside her as young Robert Saunders, panting up the hill behind them, saw them and fell flat, creeping as near as he dared. Gilligan, reclining on his elbow, watched her pallid face. Her head was lowered and she dug in the earth with a stick. Her unconscious profile was in relief against a dark cedar and she said, feeling his eyes on her:

‘Joe, we have got to do something about that girl. We can’t expect Dr Mahon to take sickness as an excuse much longer. I hoped her father would make her come, but they are so much alike. . . .’

‘Whatcher want to do? Want me to go and drag her up by the hair?’
‘I expect that would be the best way, after all.’ Her twig broke and casting it aside she searched for another one.

‘Sure it would — if you got to fool with her kind at all.’

‘Unluckily, though, this is a civilized age and you can’t do that.’

‘So-called,’ muttered Gilligan. He sucked at his cigarette, then watched the spun white arc of its flight. The thrush sang again, filling the interval liquidly and young Robert, thinking, is it Sis they’re talking about? felt fire on his leg and brushed from it an ant almost half an inch long. Drag her by the hair, huh? he muttered. I’d like to see ’em. Ow, but he stings! rubbing his leg, which did not help it any.

‘What are we going to do, Joe? Tell me. You know about people.’

Gilligan shifted his weight and his corrugated elbow tingled under his other hand.

‘We’ve been thinking of them ever since we met. Let’s think about you and me for a while,’ he said roughly.

She looked at him quickly. Her black hair and her mouth like a pomegranate blossom. Her eyes were black and they became quite gentle as she said:

‘Please, Joe.’

'Oh, I ain't going to propose. I just want you to talk to me about yourself for a while.'

'What do you want me to tell you?'

'Nothing you don't want to. Just quit thinking about the loot for a while. Just talk to me.'

'So you are surprised to find a woman doing something without some obvious material end in view. Aren't you?' He was silent, nursing his knees, staring between them at the ground. 'Joe, you think I'm in love with him, don't you?' (Uhuh! Stealing Sis's feller. Young Robert Saunders squirming nearer, taking sand into his bosom.) 'Don't you, Joe?'

'I don't know,' he replied sullenly and she asked:

'What kind of women have you known, Joe?'

'The wrong kind, I guess. Leastways none of 'em ever made me lose a night's sleep until I saw you.'

'It isn't me that made you lose a night's sleep. I just happened to be the first woman you ever knew doing something you thought only a man would do. You had nice fixed ideas about women and I upset them. Wasn't that it?'

She looked at his averted face, at his reliable homely face. (Are they going to talk all night? thought young Robert Saunders. Hunger was in his belly and he was gritty and uncomfortable with sand.)

The sun was almost down. Only the tips of trees were yet dipped in fading light and where they sat the shadow became a violet substance in which the thrush sang and then fell still.

'Margaret,' said Gilligan at last, 'were you in love with your husband?'

Her face in the dusk was a smooth pallor, and after a while:

'I don't know, Joe, I don't think I was. You see, I lived in a small town and I had got kind of sick lazing around home all morning and dressing

up just to walk downtown in the afternoon and spending the evenings messing around with men, so after we got in the war I persuaded some friends of my mother's to get me a position in New York.

Then I got into the Red Cross — you know, helping in canteens, dancing with those poor country boys on leave, lost as sheep, trying to have a good time. And nothing in the world is harder to do in New York.

'And one night Dick (my husband) came in. I didn't notice him at first, but after we had danced together and I saw he was — well — impressed, I asked him about himself. He was in an officers' training camp.

'Then I started getting letters from him and at last he wrote that he would be in New York until he sailed. I had got in the habit of Dick by that time and when I saw him again, all spic and span, and soldiers saluting him, I thought he was grand. You remember how it was then — everybody excited and hysterical, like a big circus.

'So every night we went out to dinner and to dance, and after we would sit in my room and smoke and talk until all hours, till daylight. You know how it was: all soldiers talking of dying gloriously in battle without really believing it or knowing very much about it, and how women kind of got the same idea, like the flu — that what you did today would not matter tomorrow, that there really wasn't a tomorrow at all.

'You see, I think we both had agreed that we were not in love with each other for always, but we were both young, and so we might as well get all the fun we could. And then, three days before he sailed, he suggested that we get married.

I had had proposals from nearly every soldier I had been at all kind to, just as all the other girls did, and so I wasn't surprised much. I told him I had other men friends and I knew that he knew other women, but neither of us bothered about that. He told me he expected to know women in France and that he didn't expect me to be a hermit while he

was gone. And so we met the next morning and got married and I went to work.

'He called for me at the canteen while I was dancing with some boys on leave, and the other girls all congratulated us (lots of them had done the same thing), only some of them teased me about being a highbrow and marrying an officer. You see, we all got so many proposals we hardly listened to them, and I don't think they listened to us, either.

'He called for me and we went to his hotel. You see, Joe, it was like when you are a child in the dark and you keep on saying, It isn't dark, it isn't dark. We were together for three days and then his boat sailed. I missed him like the devil at first. I moped around without anybody to feel sorry for me: so many of my friends were in the same fix, with no sympathy to waste. Then I got dreadfully afraid I might be going to have a baby and I almost hated Dick. But when I was sure I wasn't I went back to the canteen, and after a while I hardly thought of Dick at all.

'I got more proposals, of course, and I didn't have such a bad time. Sometimes at night I'd wake up, wanting Dick, but after a time he got to be a shadowy sort of person, like George Washington. And at last I didn't even miss him any more.

'Then I began to get letters from him, addressed to his dear little wife, and telling me how he missed me and so forth. Well, that brought it all back again and I'd write him every day for a time. And then I found that writing bored me, that I no longer looked forward to getting one of those dreadful flimsy envelopes, that had already been opened by a censor.

'I didn't write any more. And one day I got a letter saying that he didn't know when he'd be able to write again, but it would be as soon as he could. That was when he was going up to the front, I guess.

I thought about it for a day or two and then I made up my mind that the best thing for both of us was just to call the whole thing off. So I sat down and wrote him, wishing him luck and asking him to wish me the same.

‘And then, before my letter reached him, I received an official notice that he had been killed in action. He never got my letter at all. He died believing that everything was the same between us.’

She brooded in the imminent twilight. ‘You see, I feel some way that I wasn’t square with him. And so I guess I am trying to make it up to him in some way.’

Gilligan felt impersonal, weary. He took her hand and rubbed his cheek against it. Her hand turned in his and patted his cheek, withdrawing. (Holding hands! gloated young Robert Saunders.) She leaned down, peering into Gilligan’s face.

He sat motionless, taut. Take her in my arms, he debated, overcome her with my own passion. Feeling this, she withdrew from him, though her body had not moved.

‘That wouldn’t do any good, Joe. Don’t you know it wouldn’t?’ she asked.

‘Yes, I know it,’ he said. ‘Let’s go.’

‘I’m sorry, Joe,’ she told him in a low voice, rising. He rose and helped her to her feet. She brushed her shirt and walked on beside him. The sun was completely gone and they walked through a violet silence soft as milk. ‘I wish I could, Joe,’ she added.

He made no reply and she said: ‘Don’t you believe me?’

He strode on and she grasped his arm, stopping. He faced her and in her firm sexless embrace he stood staring at the blur of her face almost on a level with his own, in longing and despair. (Uhuh, kissing! crowed

young Robert Saunders, releasing his cramped limbs, trailing them like an Indian.)

They then turned and walked on, out of his sight. Night was almost come: only the footprint of day, only the odour of day, only a rumour, a ghost of light among the trees.

5

He burst into his sister's room. She was fixing her hair and she saw him in the mirror, panting and regrettably soiled.

'Get out, you little beast,' she said.

Undaunted, he gave his news: 'Say, she's in love with Donald, that other one says, and I seen them kissing.'

Her arrested hands bloomed delicately in her hair.

'Who is?'

'That other lady at Donald's house.'

'Saw her kissing Donald?'

'Naw, kissing that soldier feller that ain't got no scar.'

'Did she say she was in love with Donald?' she turned, trying to grasp her brother's arm.

'Naw, but that soldier said she is and she never said nothing. So I guess she is, don't you?'

'The cat! I'll fix her.'

'That's right,' he commended. 'That's what I told her when she sneaked up on me nekkid. I knowed you wouldn't let no woman beat you out of Donald.'

6

Emmy put supper on the table. The house was quiet and dark. No lights yet. She went to the study door. Mahon and his father sat in the dusk,

quietly watching the darkness come slow and soundless as a measured respiration. Donald's head was in silhouette against a fading window and Emmy saw it and felt her heart contract as she remembered that head above her against the sky, on a night long, long ago.

But now the back of it was towards her and he no longer remembered her. She entered that room silently as the twilight itself and standing beside his chair, looking down upon his thin worn hair that had once been so wild, so soft, she drew his unresisting head against her hard little hip.

His face was quiet under her slow hand, and as she gazed out into the twilight upon which they two gazed she tasted the bitter ashes of an old sorrow and she bent suddenly over his devastated head, moaning against it, making no sound.

The rector stirred heavily in the dusk. 'That you, Emmy?' 'Supper's ready,' she said quietly. Mrs Powers and Gilligan mounted the steps on to the veranda.

7

Doctor Gary could waltz with a level glass of water on his head, without spilling a drop. He did not care for the more modern dances, the nervous ones. 'All jumping around — like monkeys. Why try to do something a beast can do so much better?' he was wont to say. 'But a waltz, now. Can a dog waltz, or a cow?'

He was a smallish man, bald and dapper, and women liked him. Such a nice bedside manner. Doctor Gary was much in demand, both professionally and socially. He had also served in a French hospital in '14, '15, and '16. 'Like hell,' he described it. 'Long alleys of excrement and red paint.'

Doctor Gary, followed by Gilligan, descended nattily from Donald's room, smoothing the set of his coat, dusting his hands with a silk

handkerchief. The rector appeared hugely from his study, saying: 'Well, Doctor?'

Doctor Gary rolled a slender cigarette from a cloth sack, returning the sack to its lair in his cuff. When carried in his pocket it made a bulge in the cloth. He struck a match.

'Who feeds him at table?'

The rector, surprised, answered: 'Emmy has been giving him his meals — helping him, that is,' he qualified.

'Put it in his mouth for him?'

'No, no. She merely guides his hand. Why do you ask?'

'Who dresses and undresses him?'

'Mr Gilligan here assists him. But why—'

'Have to dress and undress him like a baby, don't you?' he turned sharply to Gilligan.

'Kind of,' Gilligan admitted. Mrs Powers came out of the study and Doctor Gary nodded briefly to her. The rector said:

'But why do you ask, Doctor?'

The doctor looked at him sharply. 'Why? Why?' he turned to Gilligan.

'Tell him,' he snapped.

The rector gazed at Gilligan. Don't say it, his eyes seemed to plead. Gilligan's glance fell. He stood dumbly gazing at his feet, and the doctor said abruptly: 'Boy's blind. Been blind three or four days. How you didn't know it I can't see.' He settled his coat and took his derby hat. 'Why didn't you tell?' he asked Gilligan. 'You knew, didn't you? Well, no matter. I'll look in again tomorrow. Good day, madam. Good day.'

Mrs Powers took the rector's arm. 'I hate that man,' she said. 'Damn little snob. But don't you mind, Uncle Joe. Remember, that Atlanta doctor told us he would lose his sight. But doctors don't know everything: who knows, perhaps when he gets strong and well he can have his sight restored.'

'Yes, yes,' the rector agreed, clinging to straws. 'Let's get him well and then we can see.'

He turned heavily and re-entered his study. She and Gilligan looked at one another a long moment.

'I could weep for him, Joe.'

'So could I — if it would do any good,' he answered sombrely. 'But for God's sake, keep people out today.'

'I intend to. But it's hard to refuse them: they mean so well, so kind and neighbourly.'

'Kind, hell. They are just like that Saunders brat: come to see his scar. Come in and mill around and ask him how he got it and if it hurt. As if he knowed or cared.'

'Yes. But they shan't come in and stare at his poor head any more. We won't let them in, Joe. Tell them he is not well, tell them anything.'

She entered the study. The rector sat in his desk, a pen poised above an immaculate sheet, but he was not writing. His face was propped on one great fist and his gaze brooded darkly upon the opposite wall.

She stood beside him, then she touched him. He started like a goaded beast before he recognized her.

'This had to come, you know,' she told him quietly.

'Yes, yes. I have expected it. We all have have we not?'

'Yes, we all have,' she agreed.

'Poor Cecily. I was just thinking of her. It will be a blow to her, I am afraid. But she really cares for Donald, thank God. Her affection for him is quite pretty. You have noticed it, haven't you?'

'Yes, yes.'

'It's too bad she is not strong enough to come every day. But she is quite delicate, as you know, don't you?'

'Yes, yes. I'm sure she will come when she can.'

'So am I. Thank God, there is one thing which has not failed him.'

His hands were clasped loosely upon the paper before him.

'Oh, you are writing a sermon and I have interrupted you. I didn't know,' she apologized, withdrawing.

'Not at all. Don't go, I can do this later.'

'No, you do it now. I will go and sit with Donald. Mr Gilligan is going to fix a chair for him on the lawn today, it is so nice out.'

'Yes, yes. I will finish my sermon and join you.'

From the door she looked back. But he was not writing. His face was propped on one great fist and his gaze brooded darkly upon the opposite wall.

Mahon sat in a deck chair. He wore blue glasses and a soft, limp hat concealed his brow. He liked to be read to, though no one could tell whether or not the words meant anything to him. Perhaps it was the sound of the voice that he liked. This time it was Gibbons's History of Rome, and Gilligan wallowed atrociously among polysyllabic words when Mrs Powers joined them.

He had brought a chair for her, and she sat, neither hearing nor not hearing, letting Gilligan's droning voice sooth her as it did Mahon. The leaves above her head stirred faintly, agitated upon the ineffable sky, dappling her dress with shadow.

Clover was again thrusting above the recently mown grass and bees broke it: bees were humming golden arrows tipped or untipped with honey and from the church spire pigeons were remote and unemphatic as sleep.

A noise aroused her and Gilligan ceased reading. Mahon sat motionless, hopeless as Time, as across the grass came an old Negro woman, followed by a strapping young Negro in a private's uniform. They came straight towards the sitting group and the woman's voice rose upon the slumbrous afternoon.

'Hush yo' mouf, Loosh,' she was saying, 'it'll be a po' day in de mawnin' when my baby don't wanter see his ole Cal'line. Donald, Mist' Donald honey, here Callie come ter you, honey; here yo' mammy come ter you.' She completed the last steps in a shuffling lope. Gilligan rose, intercepting her.

'Hold up, Aunty. He's asleep. Don't bother him.'

'Naw, suh! He don't wanter sleep when his own folks comes ter see him.' Her voice rose again and Donald moved in his chair. 'Whut I tell you? he wake: look at 'im. Mist' Donald, honey!' Gilligan held her withered arm while she strained like a leashed hound.

'Bless de Lawd, done sont you back ter yo' mammy. Yes, Jesus! Ev'y day I prayed, and de Lawd heard me.' She turned to Gilligan. 'Lemme go, please, suh.'

'Let her go, Joe,' Mrs Powers seconded, and Gilligan released her. She knelt beside Donald's chair, putting her hands on his face. Loosh stood diffidently in the background.

'Donald, baby, look at me. Don't you know who dis is? Dis yo' Callie whut use ter put you ter bed, honey. Look here at me. Lawd, de white folks done ruint you, but nummine, yo' mammy gwine look after her baby.

You, Loosh!' still kneeling, she turned and called to her grandson. 'Come up here and speek ter Mist' Donald. Here whar he kin see you. Donald, honey, here dis triflin' nigger talking ter you. Look at him, in dem soldier clothes.'

Loosh took two paces and came smartly to attention, saluting. 'If de lootenant please, Co'pul Nelson glad to see — Co'pul Nelson glad to see de lootenant looking so well.'

'Don't you stand dar wavin' yo' arm at yo' Mist' Donald, nigger boy. Come up here and speak ter him like you been raised to.'

Loosh lost his military bearing and he became again that same boy who had known Mahon long ago, before the world went crazy. He came up diffidently and took Mahon's hand in his kind, rough black one. 'Mist' Donald?' he said.

'Dat's it,' his grandmother commended. 'Mist' Donald, dat Loosh talkin' ter you. Mist' Donald?'

Mahon stirred in his chair and Gilligan forcibly lifted the old woman to her feet. 'Now, Aunty. That's enough for one time. You come back tomorrow.'

'Lawd! ter hear de day when white man tell me Mist' Donald don't wanter see me!'

'He's sick, Aunty,' Mrs Powers explained. 'Of course, he wants to see you. When he is better you and Loosh must come every day.'

'Yes, ma'am! Dey ain't enough water in de sevum seas to keep me from my baby. I'm coming back, honey. I gwine to look after you.'

'Get her away, Loosh,' Mrs Powers whispered to the Negro. 'He's sick, you know.'

'Yessum. He one sick man in dis world. Ef you wants me fer anything, any black man kin tell you whar I'm at, ma'am.' He took his grandmother's arm. 'Come on here, mammy. Us got to be goin'.'

'I'm a-comin' back, Donald, honey. I ain't gwine to leave you.' They retreated and her voice died away. Mahon said:

'Joe.'

'Whatcher say, Loot?'

'When am I going to get out?'

'Out of what, Loot?'

But he was silent, and Gilligan and Mrs Powers stared at each other tensely. At last he spoke again:

'I've got to go home, Joe.' He raised his hand, fumbling, striking his glasses, and they fell from his face. Gilligan replaced them.

'Whatcher wanta go home for, Loot?'

But he had lost his thought. Then:

'Who was that talking, Joe?'

Gilligan told him and he sat slowly plaiting the corner of his jacket (the suit Gilligan had got for him) in his fingers. Then he said: 'Carry on, Joe.' Gilligan picked up the book again and soon his voice resumed its soporific drone. Mahon became still in his chair. After a while Gilligan ceased, Mahon did not move, and he rose and peered over the blue glasses.

'You never can tell when he's asleep and when he ain't,' he said fretfully.

CHAPTER FIVE

1

CAPTAIN GREEN, WHO raised the company, had got a captain's commission from the governor of the state thereby. But Captain Green was dead. He might have been a good officer, he might have been anything: certainly he remembered his friends. Two subaltern's commissions were given away politically in spite of him, so the best he could do was to make his friend, Madden, First Sergeant. Which he did.

And so here was Green in bars and shiny putties, here was Madden trying to acquire the habit of saying Sir to him, here was Tom and Dick and Harry with whom both Green and Madden had gambled and drunk whisky trying to learn to remember that there was a difference not only

between them and Green and Madden, but that there was also a difference between Madden and Green.

'Oh, well,' they said in American camps, 'he's working hard: let him get used to it. It's only on parade, hey, Sergeant?'

'Sure,' Sergeant Madden replied. 'The Colonel is giving us hell about our appearance. Can't we do better than this?'

But at Brest:

'What in hell does he think he is? Pershing?' they asked Sergeant Madden.

'Come on, come on, snap into it. If I hear another word from a man he goes before the Captain.' Sergeant Madden had also changed.

In wartime one lives in today. Yesterday is gone and tomorrow may never come. Wait till we get into action, they told each other, we'll kill the son-of-a-bitch. 'Not Madden?' asked one horrified. They only looked at him. 'For Christ's sake,' remarked one at last.

But Fate, using the War Department as an instrument, circumvented them. When Sergeant Madden reported to his present captain and his old friend he found Green alone.

'Sit down, dammit,' Green told him, 'nobody's coming in. I know what you're going to say. I am moving, anyhow: should get my papers tonight. Wait,' as Madden would have interrupted. 'If I want to hold my commission I have got to work. These goddam training camps turn out officers trained.

But I wasn't. And so I am going to school for a while. Christ. At my age. I wish to God somebody else had gotten up this damn outfit. Do you know where I would like to be now? Out yonder with them, calling somebody else a son-of-a-bitch, as they are calling me now. Do you think I get any fun out of this?'

'Ah, hell, let 'em talk. What do you expect?'

'Nothing. Only I had to promise the mother of every goddam one of them that I'd look out for him and not let him get hurt. And now there's not a bastard one wouldn't shoot me in the back if he got a chance.'

'But what do you expect from them? What do you want? This is no picnic, you know.'

They sat silent across a table from each other. Their faces were ridged and sharp, cavernous in the unshadowed glare of light while they sat thinking of home, of quiet elm-shaded streets along which wagons creaked and crawled through the dusty day and along which girls and boys walked in the evening to and from the picture show or to sip sweet chilled liquids in drug stores; of peace and quiet and all homely things, of a time when there was no war.

They thought of young days not so far behind them, of the faint unease of complete physical satisfaction, of youth and lust like icing on a cake, making the cake sweeter. . . . Outside was Brittany and mud, an equivocal city, temporary and twice foreign, lust in a foreign tongue. Tomorrow we die.

At last Captain Green said diffidently:

'You are all right?'

'Hell, yes. They wanted to reduce me at one time, but I am all right now.'

Green opened his mouth twice, like a fish, and Madden said quickly: 'I'll look after them. Don't you worry.'

'Ah, I'm not. Not about those bastards.'

An orderly entered, saluting. Green acknowledged him and the man delivered his message stiffly and withdrew.

'There it is,' said the captain.

'You'll go tomorrow, then?'

'Yes. Yes. I hope so,' he answered, vaguely staring at the sergeant. Madden rose.

'Well, I think I'll run along. I feel tired tonight.'

Green rose also and they stared at each other like strangers across the table.

'You'll come in to see me in the morning?'

'I guess so. Sure, I'll come in.'

Madden wished to withdraw and Green wanted him to, but they stood awkwardly, silent. At last Green said: 'I am obliged to you.' Madden's light-caverned eyes held a question. Their shadows were monstrous. 'For helping me get by with that dose. Court-martial, you know. . . .'

'What did you expect of me?' No less, Green acknowledged and Madden continued: 'Why don't you let those women alone? They are all rotten with it.'

'Easy to say.' Green laughed mirthlessly. 'For you, I mean.'

Madden's hand strayed to the pocket of his blouse, then fell to his side again. After a while he repeated: 'Well, I'll be going.'

The captain moved around the table, extending his hand. 'Well, good-bye.'

Madden did not take it. 'Good-bye?'

'I may not see you again,' the other explained lamely.

'Hell. You talk like you were going home. Don't be a fool. Those birds don't mean anything by panning you. It will be the same with anybody.'

Green watched his knuckles whitening on the table. 'I didn't mean that. I meant—' He could not say I may be killed. A man simply didn't say a thing like that. 'You will get to the front before I do, I expect.'

'Perhaps so. But there is enough for all of us, I reckon.'

The rain had ceased for some reason and there came up faintly on the damp air that sound made by battalions and regiments being quiet, an orderly silence louder than a riot. Outside, Madden felt mud, knew darkness and damp, he smelled food and excrement and slumber beneath a sky too remote to distinguish between peace and war.

2

He thought at times of Captain Green as he crossed France, seeing the intermittent silver smugness of rain spaced forever with poplars like an eternal frieze giving way upon vistas fallow and fecund, roads and canals and villages shining their roofs violently; spires and trees; roads, villages; villages, towns, a city; villages, villages, then cars and troops and cars and troops at junction points.

He saw people going about warfare in a businesslike way, he saw French soldiers playing croquet in stained horizon-blue, he saw American soldiers watching them, giving them American cigarettes; he saw American and British troops fighting, saw nobody minding them particularly. Save the M.P.s. A man must be in a funny frame of mind to be an M.P. Or a nigger general. The war zone. Business as usual. The golden age of non-combatants.

He thought at times of Green, wondering where the other was, even after he got to know his new company commander. A man quite different from Green. He had been a college instructor and he could explain to you where Alexander and Napoleon and Grant made their mistakes. He was mild: his voice could scarcely be heard on a parade ground and his men all said, Wait till we get into the lines. We'll fix the son-of-a-bitch.

Sergeant Madden, however, got along quite well with his officers; particularly with a lieutenant named Powers. And with the men, too. Even after a training period with dummies and a miniature sector he got along with them.

They had become accustomed to the sounds of far guns (shooting at other people, however) and the flickering horizon at night; they had been bombed by aeroplanes while lined up for mess at a field kitchen, while the personnel of a concealed French battery watched them without interest from a dugout; they had received much advice from troops that had been in the lines.

At last they were going in themselves after a measureless space of aimless wandering here and there, and the sound of guns though seemingly no nearer was no longer impersonal. They tramped by night, feeling their feet sink, then hearing them suck in mud. Then they felt sloping ground and were in a ditch.

It was as if they were burying themselves, descending into their own graves in the bowels of the wet black earth, into a darkness so dense as to constrict breathing, constrict the heart. They stumbled on in the darkness.

Out of the gratis advice they had received, they recalled strongest to drop when a gun went off or when they heard a shell coming; so when a machine-gun, far to the right, stuttered, breaking the slow hysteria of decay which buried them, someone dropped, someone stumbled over him, then they all went down as one man.

The officer cursed them, non-coms kicked them erect again. Then while they stood huddled in the dark, smelling death, the lieutenant ran back along the line making them a brief bitter speech.

‘Who in hell told you to lie down? The only guns within two miles of you are those things in your hands there. Feel this? this thing here’ — slapping the rifles — ‘this is a gun. Sergeants, if another man drops, tramp him right into the mud and leave him.’

They ploughed on, panting and cursing in whispers. Suddenly they were among men, and a veteran of four days, sensing that effluvia of men new to battle, said:

‘Why, look at the soldiers come to fight in the war.’

'Silence there!' a non-com's voice, and a sergeant came jumping along saying, 'Where is your officer?' Men going out brushed them, passing on in the pitch wet darkness and a voice whispered wickedly, 'Look out for gas.' The word Gas passed from mouth to mouth and Authority raged them into silence again. But the mischief had been done.

Gas. Bullets and death and damnation. But Gas. It looked like mist, they had been told. First thing you know you are in it. And then — Good night.

Silence broken by muddy movements of unrest and breathing. Eastward the sky paled impalpably, more like a death than a birth of anything; and they peered out in front of them, seeing nothing. There seemed to be no war here at all, though to the right of them a rumor of guttural of guns rose and fell thickly and heavily on the weary dawn.

Powers, the officer, had passed from man to man. No one must fire: there was a patrol out there somewhere in the darkness. Dawn grew grey and slow; after a while the earth took a vague form and someone seeing a lesser darkness screamed, 'Gas!'

Powers and Madden sprang among them as they fought blindly, rumbling and tearing at their gas masks, trampling each other, but they were powerless. The lieutenant laid about him with his fists, trying to make himself heard, and the man who had given the alarm whirled suddenly on the fire-step, his head and shoulders sharp against the sorrowful dawn.

'You got us killed,' he shrieked, shooting the officer in the face at point-blank range.

3

Sergeant Madden thought of Green again on a later day as he ran over broken ground at Cantigny saying, Come on, you bastards, do you want

to live forever? He forgot Green temporarily as he lay beside a boy who had sold him shoes back home, in a shell-hole too small for them, feeling his exposed leg whipped by a gale as a tufted branch is whipped by a storm. After a while night came and the gale passed away and the man beside him died.

While in hospital he saw Captain Green's name in a published casualty list. He also discovered in hospital that he had lost his photograph. He asked hospital orderlies and nurses about it, but no one recalled having seen it among his effects. It was just as well, though. She had in the meantime married a lieutenant on the staff of a college R.O.T.C. unit.

4

Mrs Burney's black was neat and completely air-proof: she did not believe in air save as a necessary adjunct to breathing. Mr Burney, a morose, silent man, whose occupation was that of languidly sawing boards and then mildly nailing them together again, took all his ideas from his wife, so he believed this, too.

She toiled, neat as a pin, along the street, both fretted with and grateful to the heat because of her rheumatism, making a call. When she thought of her destination, of her changed status in the town, above her dull and quenchless sorrow she knew a faint pride: the stroke of Fate which robbed her likewise made of her an aristocrat.

The Mrs Worthingtons, the Mrs Saunderses, all spoke to her now as one of them, as if she, too, rode in a car and bought a half-dozen new dresses a year. Her boy had done this for her, his absence accomplishing that which his presence had never done, could never do.

Her black gown drank heat and held it in solution about her, her cotton umbrella became only a delusion. How hot for April, she thought, seeing cars containing pliant women's bodies in cool, thin cloth passing her. Other women walking in delicate, gay shades nodded to her bent small rotundity, greeting her pleasantly. Her flat 'common sense' shoes carried her steadily and proudly on.

She turned a corner and the sun through maples was directly in her face. She lowered her umbrella to it, and remarking after a while a broken drain, and feeling an arching thrust of poorly laid concrete, she slanted her umbrella back.

Pigeons in the spire were coolly remote from the heat, unemphatic as sleep, and she passed through an iron gate, following a gravelled path. The rambling façade of the rectory dreamed in the afternoon above a lawn broken by geranium beds and a group of chairs beneath a tree. She crossed grass and the rector rose, huge as a rock, black and shapeless, greeting her.

(Oh, the poor man, how bad he looks. And so old, so old we are for this to happen to us. He was not any good, but he was my son. And now Mrs Worthington and Mrs Saunders and Mrs Wardle speak to me, stop in to chat about this and that while there is my Dewey dead. They hadn't no sons and now his son come back and mine didn't, and how grey his face, poor man.)

She panted with heat, like a dog, feeling pain in her bones, and she hobbled horribly across to the grouped figures. It was because the sun was in her eyes that she couldn't see, sun going down beyond a lattice wall covered with wistaria.

Pigeons crooned liquid gutturals from the spire, slanting like smears of paint, and the rector was saying:

'This is Mrs Powers, Mrs Barney, a friend of Donald's. Donald, here is Mrs Burney. You remember Mrs Burney: she is Dewey's mother, you remember.'

Mrs Burney took a proffered chair blindly. Her dress held heat, her umbrella tripped her bonelessly, then bonelessly avoided her. The rector closed it and Mrs Powers settled her in the chair. She rubbed at her eyes with a black-bordered cotton handkerchief.

Donald Mahon waked to voices. Mrs Powers was saying: 'How good of you to come. All Donald's old friends have been so nice to him. Especially the ones who had sons in the war. They know, don't they?'

(Oh, the poor man, the poor man. And your scarred face! Madden didn't tell me your face was scarred, Donald.)

Pigeons like sloe sleep, afternoon passing away, dying. Mrs Burney, in her tight, hot black, the rector, huge and black and shapeless, Mrs Burney with an unhealed sorrow, Mrs Powers — (Dick, Dick. How young, how terribly young: tomorrow must never come. Kiss me, kiss me through my hair. Dick, Dick. My body flowing away from me, dividing.

How ugly men are, naked. Don't leave me, don't leave me! No, no! we don't love each other! we don't! we don't! Hold me close, close: my body's intimacy is broken, unseeing: thank God my body cannot see. Your body is so ugly, Dick! Dear Dick. Your bones, your mouth hard and shaped as bone: rigid.

My bones, your mouth you cannot hold it. Why do you sleep, Dick? My body flows on and on. You cannot hold it, for yours is so ugly, dear Dick. . . . 'You may not hear from me for some time. I will write when I can. . . .')

Donald Mahon, hearing voices, moved in his chair. He felt substance he could not see, heard what did not move him at all. 'Carry on, Joe.'

The afternoon dreamed on, unbroken. A Negro, informal in an undershirt, restrained his lawn mower, and stood beneath a tree, talking to a woman across the fence. Mrs Burney in her rigid unbearable black. Mrs Worthington speaks to me, but Dewey is dead.

Oh, the poor man, his grey face. My boy is dead, but his boy has come home, come home . . . with a woman. What is she doing here? Mrs Mitchell says . . . Mrs Mitchell says . . . that Saunders girl is engaged to

him. She is downtown yesterday almost nekkid. With the sun on her. . .
. She wiped her eyes again under inevitable spring.

Donald Mahon, hearing voices: 'Carry on, Joe.'

'I come to see how your boy is getting along, what with everything.'
(Dewey, my boy.)

(I miss you like the devil, Dick. Someone to sleep with? I don't know.
Oh, Dick, Dick. You left no mark on me, nothing. Kiss me through my
hair, Dick, with all your ugly body, and let's don't ever see each other
again, ever. . . . No, we won't, dear, ugly Dick.)

(Yes, that was Donald. He is dead.) 'He is much better, thank you. Give
him a few weeks' rest and he will be well again.'

'I am so glad, so glad,' she answered, pitying him, envying him. (My son
died, a hero: Mrs Worthington, Mrs Saunders, chat with me about
nothing at all.) 'Poor boy, don't he remember his friends at all?'

'Yes, yes.' (This was Donald, my son.) 'Donald, don't you remember Mrs
Burney? She is Dewey's mother, you know.'

(. . . but not forever. I wish you all the luck and love in the world. Wish
me luck, dear Dick. . . .)

Donald Mahon, hearing voices: 'Carry on, Joe.'

The way that girl goes on with men! she thought exultantly. Dewey may
be dead, but thank God he ain't engaged to her. 'Your boy is home,
he'll be married soon and everything. So nice for you, so nice. . . .'

'There, there,' the rector said, touching her shoulder kindly, 'you must
come often to see him.'

'Yes, I will come often,' she replied through her black-bordered cotton
handkerchief. 'It's so nice he come home safe and well. Some didn't.'
(Dewey, Dewey.)

The sun flamed slowly across the wistaria, seeking interstices. She would see Mrs Worthington downtown now, probably. Mrs Worthington would ask her how she was, how her husband was. (My rheumatism, but I am old. Yes, yes. When we get old. . . .)

You are old, too, she would think with comfortable malice, older than me. Old, old, too old for things like this to happen to us. He was so good to me, so big and strong: brave. . . .) She rose and someone handed her the cotton umbrella.

‘Yes, yes. I will come again to see him.’ (Poor boy. Poor man, his face: so grey.)

The lawn mower chattered slowly, reluctantly breaking the evening. Mrs Burney, disturbing bees, crossed grass blindly. Someone passed her at the gate and, remarking an arching thrust of poorly laid concrete and a broken drain, she slanted her umbrella backward, shielding her neat, black-clad, airproof back.

Sucking silver sound of pigeons slanting to and from the spire like smears of soft paint on a cloudless sky. The sun lengthened the shadow of the wistaria-covered wall, immersing the grouped chairs in cool shadow. Waiting for sunset.

(Dick, my love, that I did not love, Dick, your ugly body breaking into mine like a burglar, my body flowing away, washing away all trace of yours. . . . Kiss and forget me: remember me only to wish me luck, dear, ugly, dead Dick. . . .)

(This was my son, Donald. He is dead.)
Gilligan, crossing the lawn, said: ‘Who was that?’

‘Mrs Burney,’ the rector told him. ‘Her son was killed. You’ve probably heard of him downtown.’

‘Yeh, I’ve heard of him. He was the one under indictment for stealing fifty pounds of sugar and they let him go to enlist, wasn’t he?’

'There were stories. . . .' The rector's voice died away.
Donald Mahon, hearing silence: 'You stopped, Joe.'

Gilligan stood near him settling the coloured glasses over his eyes.
'Sure, Loot. More Rome?'
The shadow of the wall took them completely and at last he said:
'Carry on, Joe.'

5

She missed Mrs Worthington. She saw the old woman drive smoothly away from Price's in her car, alone in the back seat. The Negro driver's head was round as a cannon-ball and Mrs Burney watched it draw away, smelling gasoline.

The shadow of the courthouse was like thinned tobacco smoke filling one side of the square, and standing in the door of a store she saw an acquaintance, a friend of her son's. He had been in Dewey's company, an officer or something, but he hadn't got killed, not him! Trust them generals and things.

(No, no! I won't feel like this! He done the best he could. It ain't his fault if he wasn't brave enough to get killed, like Dewey was. They are all jealous of Dewey anyway: won't talk about him except that he done what was right. Done what was right! Didn't I know he would? Dewey, Dewey. So young he was, so big and brave. Until that Green man took him off and got him killed.)

She felt sorry for the man, felt kindly towards him, pitying him. She stopped beside him. Yes, ma'am, he was all right. Yes, the other boys were all right

'But then you wasn't killed,' she explained. 'All soldiers wasn't like Dewey: so brave — foolhardy, almost. . . . I always told him not to let that Green get him — get him—'

'Yes, yes,' he agreed, looking at her meticulous, bent neatness.
'He was all right? He didn't want for nothing?'

'No, no, he was all right,' he assured her. Sunset was almost come. Sparrows in a final delirium in the dusty elms, the last wagons going slowly countryward.

'Men don't know,' she said bitterly. 'You probably never done for him what you could. That Mr Green . . . I always misdoubted him.'

'He is dead, too, you know,' he reminded her. (I won't be unjust to him!) 'You was a officer or something: seems like you'd have took better care of a boy you knowed.'

'We did all we could for him,' he told her patiently. The square, empty of wagons, was quiet. Women went slowly in the last of the sun, meeting husbands, going home to supper. She felt her rheumatism more, now that the air was getting cooler, and she became restive in her fretful black.

'Well. You seen his grave, you say. . . . You are sure he was all right?' So big and strong he was, so good to her.

'Yes, yes. He was all right.'

Madden watched her bent, neat rotundity going down the street among shadows, beneath metallic awnings. The shadow of the courthouse had taken half the town like a silent victorious army, not firing a shot. The sparrows completed a final dusty delirium and went away, went away across evening into morning, retracing months: a year.

Someone on a fire-step had shouted Gas and the officer leaped among them striking, imploring. Then he saw the officer's face in red and bitter relief as the man on the fire-step, sharp against the sorrowful dawn, turned screaming, You have got us killed, and shot him in the face at point-blank range.

San Francisco, Cal.

14 April 1919

Dear Margaret,

I got your letter and I intended to answering it sooner but I have been busy running around. Yes she was not a bad kid she has shown me a good time no she is not so good-looking but she takes a good photo she wants to go in the movies. And a director told her she photographs better than any girl he has seen. She has a car and she is a swell dancer but of course I just like to play around with her she is to young for me. To really care for. No I have not gone to work yet.

This girl goes to the U and she is talking about me going there next year. So I may go there next year. Well there is no news I have done a little flying but mostly dancing and running around. I have got to go out on a party now or I would write more. Next time more next time give my regards to everybody I know.

Your sincere friend

Julian Lowe

7

Mahon liked music; so Mrs Worthington sent her car for them. Mrs Worthington lived in a large, beautiful old house which her husband, conveniently dead, had bequeathed, with a colourless male cousin who had false teeth and no occupation that anyone knew of, to her. The male cousin's articulation was bad (he had been struck in the mouth with an axe in a dice game in Cuba during the Spanish-American War): perhaps this was why he did nothing.

Mrs Worthington ate too much and suffered from gout and a flouted will. So her church connexion was rather trying to the minister and his flock. But she had money — that panacea for all ills of the flesh and

spirit. She believed in rights for women, as long as women would let her dictate what was right for them.

One usually ignored the male relation. But sometimes one pitied him.

But she sent her car for them and with Mrs Powers and Mahon in the rear, and Gilligan beside the Negro driver, they rolled smoothly beneath elms, seeing stars in a clear sky, smelling growing things, hearing a rhythmic thumping soon to become music.

8

This, the spring of 1919, was the day of the Boy, of him who had been too young for soldiering. For two years he had had a dry time of it. Of course, girls had used him during the scarcity of men, but always in such a detached impersonal manner. Like committing fornication with a beautiful woman who chews gum steadily all the while. O Uniform, O Vanity. They had used him but when a uniform showed up he got the air.

Up to that time uniforms could all walk: they were not only fashionable and romantic, but they were also quite keen on spending what money they had and they were also going too far away and too immediately to tell on you. Of course it was silly that some uniforms had to salute others, but it was nice, too. Especially, if the uniform you had caught happened to be a salutee. And heaven only knows how much damage among feminine hearts a set of pilot's wings was capable of.

And the shows:

Beautiful, pure girls (American) in afternoon or evening gowns (doubtless under Brigade Orders) caught in deserted fire trenches by Prussian Hussars (on passes signed by Belasco) in parade uniform; courtesans in Paris frocks demoralizing Brigade staffs, having subalterns with arrow collar profiles and creased breech, whom the generals all think may be German spies, and handsome old generals, whom the subalterns all think may be German spies, glaring at each other across her languid body while corporal comedians entertain the beautiful-

limbed and otherwise idle Red Cross nurses (American). The French women present are either marquises or whores or German spies, sometimes both, sometimes all three.

The marquises may be told immediately because they all wear sabots, having given their shoes with the rest of their clothing to the French army, retaining only a pair of forty carat diamond earrings.

Their sons are all aviators who have been out on a patrol since the previous Tuesday, causing the marquises to be a trifle distraught. The regular whores patronize them, while the German spies make love to the generals.

A courtesan (doubtless also under Brigade Orders) later saves the sector by sex appeal after gun-powder had failed, and the whole thing is wound up with a sort of garden party near a papiermâché dugout in which the army sits in sixty-pound packs, all three smoking cigarettes, while the Prussian Guard gnashes its teeth at them from an adjacent cardboard trench.

A chaplain appears who, to indicate that the soldiers love him because he is one of them, achieves innuendoes about home and mother and fornication. A large new flag is flown and the enemy fires at it vainly with .22 rifles. The men on our side cheer, led by the padre.

‘What,’ said a beautiful, painted girl, not listening, to James Dough who had been for two years a corporal-pilot in a French chasse escadrille, ‘is the difference between an American Ace and a French or British aviator?’

‘About six reels,’ answered James Dough glumly (such a dull man! Where did Mrs Wardle get him?) who had shot down thirteen enemy craft and had himself been crashed twice, giving him eleven points without allowing for evaporation.

‘How nice. Is that so, really? You had movies in France, too, then?’
‘Yes. Gave us something to do in our spare time.’

'Yes,' she agreed, offering him her oblivious profile. 'You must have had an awfully good time while we poor women were slaving here rolling bandages and knitting things. I hope women can fight in the next war: I had much rather march and shoot guns than knit.'

Do you think they will let women fight in the next war?' she asked, watching a young man dancing, limber as a worm.

'I expect they'll have to.' James Dough shifted his artificial leg, nursing his festering arm between the bones of which a tracer bullet had passed. 'If they want to have another one.'

'Yes.' She yearned towards the agile, prancing youth. His body was young in years, his hair was glued smoothly to his skull. His face, under a layer of powder, was shaved and pallid, sophisticated, and he and his blonde and briefly-shirted partner slid and poised and drifted like a dream.

The Negro cornetist stayed his sweating crew and the assault arrested withdrew, leaving the walls of silence peopled by the unconquered defenders of talk. Boys of both sexes swayed arm in arm, taking sliding tripping steps, waiting for the music and the agile youth, lounging immaculately, said: 'Have this dance?'

She said 'Hel — lo,' sweetly drawling. 'Have you met Mr Dough? Mr Rivers, Mr Dough. Mr Dough is a visitor in town.'

Mr Rivers patronized Mr Dough easily and repeated: 'Dance the next?' Mr Rivers had had a year at Princeton.

'I'm sorry. Mr Dough doesn't dance,' answered Miss Cecily Saunders faultlessly. Mr Rivers, well-bred, with all the benefits of a year at a cultural centre, mooned his blank face at her.

'Aw, come on. You aren't going to sit out all evening, are you? What did you come here for?'

'No, no: later, perhaps. I want to talk to Mr Dough. You hadn't thought of that, had you?'

He stared at her quietly and emptily. At last he mumbled 'Sorry,' and lounged away.

'Really,' began Mr Dough, 'not on my account, you know. If you want to dance—'

'Oh, I have to see those — those infants all the time. Really, it is quite a relief to meet someone who knows more than dancing and — and — dancing. But tell me about yourself. Do you like Charlestown? I can see that you are accustomed to larger cities, but don't you find something charming about these small towns?'

Mr Rivers roved his eye, seeing two girls watching him in poised invitation, but he moved on towards a group of men standing and sitting near the steps, managing in some way to create the illusion of being both participants and spectators at the same time. They were all of a kind: there was a kinship like an odour among them, a belligerent self-effacement. Wallflowers.

Wallflowers. Good to talk to the hostess and dance with the duds. But even the talkative hostess had given them up now. One or two of them, bolder than the rest, but disseminating that same faint identical odour stood beside girls, waiting for the music to start again, but the majority of them herded near the steps, touching each other as if for mutual protection. Mr Rivers heard phrases in bad French and he joined them aware of his own fitted dinner jacket revealing his matchless linen.

'May I see you a minute, Madden?'

The man quietly smoking detached himself from the group. He was not big, yet there was something big and calm about him: a sense of competent inertia after activity.

'Yes?' he said.

'Do me a favour, will you?'

'Yes?' the man repeated courteously non-committal.

'There's a man here who can't dance, that nephew of Mrs Wardle's, that was hurt in the war. Cecily — I mean Miss Saunders — has been with him all evening. She wants to dance.'

The other watched him with calm intentness and Mr Rivers suddenly lost his superior air.

'To tell the truth, I want to dance with her. Would you mind sitting with him a while? I'd be awfully obliged to you if you would.'

'Does Miss Saunders want to dance?'

'Sure she does. She said so.' The other's gaze was so penetrating that he felt moisture and drew his handkerchief, wiping his powdered brow lightly, not to disarrange his hair. 'God damn it,' he burst out, 'you soldiers think you own things, don't you?'

Columns, imitation Doric, supported a remote small balcony, high and obscure, couples strolled in, awaiting the music, talk and laughter and movement distorted by a lax transparency of curtains inside the house.

Along the balustrade of the veranda red eyes of cigarettes glowed; a girl stooping ostrich-like drew up her stocking and light from a window found her young shapeless leg. The Negro cornetist, having learned in his thirty years a century of the white man's lust, blinked his dispassionate eye, leading his crew in a fresh assault. Couples erupted in, clasped and danced; vague blurs locked together on the lawn beyond the light.

'... Uncle Joe, Sister Kate, all shimmy like jelly on a plate. ...'

Mr Rivers felt like a chip in a current: he knew a sharp puerile anger. Then as they turned the angle of the porch he saw Cecily clothed delicately in a silver frock, fragile as spun glass. She carried a green feather fan and her slim, animated turned body, her nervous prettiness, filled him with speculation. The light falling diffidently on her, felt her arm, her short body, suavely indicated her long, virginal legs.

'... Uncle Bud, ninety-two, shook his cane and shimmied too. ...'

Dr Gary danced by without his glass of water: they avoided him and Cecily looked up, breaking her speech.

‘Oh, Mr Madden! How do you do?’ She gave him her hand and presented him to Mr Dough. ‘I’m awfully flattered that you decided to speak to me — or did Lee have to drag you over? Ah, that’s how it was. You were going to ignore me, I know you were. Of course we can’t hope to compete with French women—’

Madden protested conventionally and she made room for him beside her.

‘Sit down. Mr Dough was a soldier, too, you know.’

Mr Rivers said heavily: ‘Mr Dough will excuse you. How about a dance? Time to go home soon.’

She civilly ignored him and James Dough shifted his leg. ‘Really, Miss Saunders, please dance, I wouldn’t spoil your evening for anything.’

‘Do you hear that, Mr Madden? The man is driving me away. Would you do that?’ she tilted her eyes at him effectively. Then she turned to Dough with restrained graceful impulsiveness. ‘I still call him Mr Madden, though we have known each other all our lives. But then he was in the war, and I wasn’t.

He is so — so experienced you see. And I am only a girl. If I had been a boy like Lee I’d have gone and been a lieutenant in shiny boots or a general or something by now. Wouldn’t I?’ Her turning body was graceful, impulsive: a fragile spontaneity. ‘I cannot call you mister any more. Do you mind?’

‘Let’s dance.’ Mr Rivers, tapping his foot to the music, watched this with sophisticated boredom. He yawned openly. ‘Let’s dance.’

‘Rufus, ma’am,’ said Madden.

‘Rufus. And you mustn’t say ma’am to me any longer. You won’t, will you?’

‘No ma — I mean, no.’

'Oh, you nearly forgot then—'
'Let's dance,' repeated Mr Rivers.

'— but you won't forget any more. You won't, will you?'
'No, no.'

'Don't let him forget, Mr Dough. I am depending on you.'
'Good, good. But you go and dance with Mr Smith here.'

She rose. 'He is sending me away,' she stated with mock humility. Then she shrugged narrowly, nervously. 'I know we aren't as attractive as French women, but you must make the best of us. Poor Lee, here, doesn't know any French women so we can please him. But you soldiers don't like us any more, I'm afraid.'

'Not at all: we give you up to Mr Lee only on condition that you come back to us.'

'Now that's better. But you are saying that just to be polite,' she accused.

'No, no, if you don't dance with Mr Lee, here, you will be impolite. He has asked you several times.'

She shrugged again nervously, 'So I guess I must dance, Lee. Unless you have changed your mind, too, and don't want me?'

He took her hand. 'Hell, come on.'

Restraining him, she turned to the other two, who had risen also. 'You will wait for me?'

They assured her, and she released them. Dough's creaking, artificial knee was drowned by the music and she gave herself to Mr Rivers's embrace. They took the syncopation, he felt her shallow breast and her knees briefly, and said: 'What you doing to him?' slipping his arm further around her, feeling the swell of her hip under his hand.

'Doing to him?'
'Ah, let's dance.'

Locked together they poised and slid and poised, feeling the beat of the music, toying with it, eluding it, seeking it again, rifting like a broken dream.

9

George Farr, from the outer darkness, glowered at her, watching her slim body cut by a masculine arm, watching her head beside another head, seeing her limbs beneath her silver dress anticipating her partner's limbs, seeing the luminous plane of her arm across his black shoulders and her fan drooping from her arched wrist like a willow at evening. He heard the rhythmic troubling obscenities of saxophones, he saw vague shapes in the darkness and he smelled the earth and things growing in it.

A couple passed them and a girl said, 'Hello, George. Coming in?' 'No,' he told her, wallowing in all the passionate despair of spring and youth and jealousy, getting of them an exquisite bliss.

His friend beside him, a soda clerk, spat his cigarette. 'Let's have another drink.'

The bottle was a combination of alcohol and sweet syrup purloined from the drugstore. It was temporarily hot to the throat, but this passed away leaving in its place a sweet, inner fire, a courage.

'To hell with them,' he said.

'You ain't going in, are you?' his friend asked. They had another drink. The music beat on among youthful leaves, into the darkness, beneath the gold and mute cacophony of stars.

The light from the veranda mounting was lost, the house loomed huge against the sky: a rock against which waves of trees broke, and breaking were forever arrested; and stars were golden unicorns neighing

unheard through blue meadows, spurning them with hooves sharp and scintillant as ice.

The sky, so remote, so sad, spurned by the unicorns of gold, that, neighing soundlessly from dusk to dawn, had seen them, had seen her — her taut body prone and naked as a narrow pool sweetly dividing: two silver streams from a single source. . . .

‘I’m not going in,’ he answered, moving away. They crossed the lawn and in the shadow of a crepe-myrtle one with a sound of breath became two. They walked quickly on, averting their eyes. ‘Hell, no,’ he repeated, ‘I’m not going in.’

10

This was the day of the Boy, male and female.

‘Look at them, Joe,’ Mrs Powers said, ‘sitting there like lost souls waiting to get into hell.’

The car had stopped broadside on, where they could get a good view.

‘They don’t look like they’re sitting to me,’ Gilligan answered with enthusiasm.’ Look at them two: look where he’s got his hand. This is what they call polite dancing, is it? I never learned it: I would have got throwed out of any place I ever danced doing that. But I had a unfortunate youth: I never danced with nice people.’

Through two heavy identical magnolias the lighted porch was like a stage. The dancers moved, locked two and two, taking the changing light, eluding it.

‘. . . shake it and break it, don’t let it fall. . . .’

Along the balustrade they sat like birds, effacingly belligerent. Wallflowers.

'No, no, I mean those ex-soldiers there. Look at them. Sitting there, talking their army French, kidding themselves. Why did they come, Joe?'

'Same reason we come. Like a show, ain't it? But how do you know they're soldiers? . . . Look at them two there,' he crowed suddenly, with childish intentness. The couple slid and poised, losing the syncopation deliberately, seeking and finding it, losing it again. . . . Her limbs eluded his, anticipated his: the breath of a touch and an escape, which he, too, was quick to assist. Touch and retreat: no satiety. 'Wow, if that tune ever stops!'

'Don't be silly, Joe. I know them. I have seen their sort at the canteen too often, acting just that way: poor kind dull boys going to war, and because they were going girls were nice to them. But now there is no war for them to go to. And look how the girls treat them.'

'What was you saying?' asked Gilligan with detachment. He tore his eyes from the couple. 'Wow, if the Loot could see this it'd sure wake him up, wouldn't it?'

Mahon sat quietly beside Mrs Powers. Gilligan turning in his seat beside the Negro driver looked at his quiet shape. The syncopation pulsed about them, a reiteration of wind and strings warm and troubling as water. She leaned toward him.

'Like it Donald?'

He stirred, raising his hand to his glasses.

'Come on, Loot,' said Gilligan quickly; 'don't knock 'em off. We might lose 'em here.' Mahon lowered his hand obediently. 'Music's pretty good, ain't it?'

'Pretty good, Joe,' he agreed.

Gilligan looked at the dancers again. 'Pretty good ain't the half of it. Look at 'em.'

' . . . oh, oh, I wonder where my easy rider's gone. . . .'

He turned suddenly to Mrs Powers. 'You know who that is there?'

Mrs Powers saw Dr Gary, without his glass of water, she saw a feather fan like a willow at evening and the luminous plane of a bare arm upon conventional black. She saw two heads as one head, cheek to cheek, expressionless and fixed as a ritual above a slow synchronization of limbs. 'That Saunders lady,' Gilligan explained.

She watched the girl's graceful motion, a restrained delicate abandon, and Gilligan continued; 'I think I'll go closer, with them birds sitting there. I got to see this.'

They greeted him with the effusiveness of people who are brought together by invitation yet are not quite certain of themselves and of the spirit of the invitation; in this case the eternal country boys of one national mental state, lost in the comparative metropolitan atmosphere of one diametrically opposed to it. To feel provincial: finding that a certain conventional state of behaviour has become inexplicably obsolete overnight.

Most of them Gilligan knew by name and he sat also upon the balustrade. He was offered and accepted a cigarette and he perched among them while they talked loudly, drowning the intimation of dancers they could not emulate, of girls who once waited upon their favours and who now ignored them — the hang-over of warfare in a society tired of warfare.

Puzzled and lost, poor devils. Once Society drank war, brought them into manhood with a cultivated taste for war; but now Society seemed to have found something else for a beverage, while they were not yet accustomed to two and seventy-five per cent.

'Look at those kids that grew up while we were away,' one advised him with passion. 'The girls don't like it. But what can they do? We can't do them dances. It ain't just going through the motions. You could learn that, I guess. It's — it's—' he sought vainly for words. He gave it up and continued: 'Funny, too. I learned things from French women. . . . Say,

the girls don't like it, do they? They haven't changed that much, you know.'

'Naw, they don't like it,' Gilligan answered. 'Look at them two.'
'Sure, they don't like it. These are nice girls; they will be the mothers of the next generation. Of course they don't like it.'

'Somebody sure does, though,' Gilligan replied. Dr Gary passed, dancing smoothly, efficiently, quite decorous, yet enjoying himself. His partner was young and briefly skirted: you could see that she danced with him because it was the thing to dance with Dr Gary — no one knew exactly why.

She was conscious of physical freedom, of her young, uncorseted body, flat as a boy's and, like a boy's, pleasuring in freedom and motion, as though freedom and motion were water, pleasuring her flesh to the intermittent teasing of silk. Her glance followed over Dr Gary's shoulder (it was masculine because it was drably conventional in black) and arrested seeking for a lost rhythm, lost deliberately. Dr Gary's partner, skilfully following him, watched the other couple, ignoring the girl. (If there's justice in heaven, I'll get him next time.)

'Dancing with you,' said Dr Gary, 'is like a poem by a minor poet named Swinburne. Dr Gary preferred Milton; he had the passages all designated, like a play.

'Swinburne?' She smiled vaguely, watching the other couple, not losing the rhythm, not cracking her paint. Her face was smooth, as skilfully done and as artificial as an orchid. 'Did he write poems, too?' (Is he thinking of Ella Wilcox or Irene Castle? He is a grand dancer: takes a good dancer to get along with Cecily.) 'I think Kipling is awfully cute, don't you?' (What a funny dress Cecily has on.)

Gilligan, watching the dancers, said: 'What?'
The other repeated defensively: 'He was in a French base. Sure he was. Two or three years. Good fellow.' He added: 'Even if he can dance like they do.'

Light, motion, sound: no solidity. A turgid compulsion, passionate and evanescent. And outside spring, like a young girl reft of happiness and incapable of sorrow.

'... throw it on the wall. Oh, oh, oh, oh ...' '... won't never forget his expression when he said, "Jack, mine's got syph. Had her ..."' 'shake it and break it, shake it. ...' 'First night in Paris ... then the other one. ...' '... don't let it fall. ...' '... with a gun ... twenty dollars in gold pinned to my ...' 'I wonder where my easy, easy rider's. ...'

'Sure,' Gilligan agreed. He wondered where Madden, whom he liked, was, and not expecting an answer he was informed. There she is again. Her feather fan like a willow at evening, her arm crossing conventional black a slim warm plane. Jove would have said, How virginal her legs are, but Gilligan, not being Jove, said, For Christ's sake, wishing Donald Mahon were her partner or failing this, being glad he couldn't see her.

The music stopped. The dancers stood waiting its renewal. The hostess talking interminably appeared and, as before a plague, people scattered before her passage. Gilligan caught, submerged beneath waves of talk, suffered her, watching couples pass from the veranda on to the vague lawn. How soft their bodies look, their little backs and hips, he thought, saying yes ma'am or no ma'am. At last he walked away and left her talking, and in a swing he saw Madden and a stranger.

'This is Mr Dough,' Madden said, greeting him. 'How's Mahon?' Gilligan shook hands. 'He's outside there, now, with Mrs Powers.' 'He is? Mahon was with the British,' he explained to his companion. 'Aviation.'

He betrayed a faint interest. 'R.A.F.?'

'I guess so,' Gilligan replied. 'We brought him over to hear the music a while.'

'Brought him?'

'Got his in the head. Don't remember much,' Madden informed the other. 'Did you say Mrs Powers is with him?' he asked Gilligan. 'Yeh, she came. Why not come out and speak to her?'

Madden looked at his companion. Dough shifted his cork leg. 'I think not,' he said. 'I'll wait for you.'

Madden rose. 'Come on,' Gilligan said, 'she'll be glad to see you. She ain't a bad sort, as Madden can tell you.'

'No, I'll wait here, thanks. But come back, will you?'

Madden read his unexpressed thought. 'She's dancing now. I'll be back before then.'

They left him lighting a cigarette. The Negro cornetist had restrained his men and removed them temporarily and the porch was deserted save for the group sitting on the balustrade. These, the hostess, with a renaissance of optimism, had run to earth and captured.

Gilligan and Madden crossed grass, leaving lights behind. 'Mrs Powers, you remember Mr Madden,' Gilligan informed her formally. He was not big, yet there was something big and calm about him, a sense of competent inertia after activity. Madden saw her colourless face against the canopied darkness of the car, her black eyes and her mouth like a scar. Beside her Mahon sat motionless and remote, waiting for music which you could not tell whether or not he heard.

'Good evening, ma'am,' Madden said enveloping her firm, slow hand, remembering a figure sharp against the sky screaming, You got us killed and firing point-blank into another man's face red and bitter in a relief of transient flame against a sorrowful dawn.

11

Jones, challenging the competition, danced with her twice, once for six feet and then for nine feet. She could not dance with the muscular facility of some of the other girls. Perhaps this was the reason she was in such demand. Dancing with the more skilled ones was too much like

dancing with agile boys. Anyway, men all seemed to want to dance with her, to touch her.

Jones, foiled for the second time, became yellowly speculative: tactical; then, watching his chance, he cut in upon glued hair and a dinner coat. The man raised his empty iron face fretfully, but Jones skilfully cut her out of the prancing herd and into the angle made by the corner of the balustrade. Here only his back could be assailed.

He knew his advantage was but temporary, so he spoke quickly.
'Friend of yours here tonight.'

Her feather fan drew softly across his neck. He sought her knee with his and she eluded him with efficiency, trying vainly to manoeuvre from the corner. One desiring to cut in importuned him from behind, and she said with exasperation: 'Do you dance, Mr Jones? They have a good floor here. Suppose we try it.'

'Your friend Donald dances. Ask him for one,' he told her, feeling her shallow breast and her nervous efforts to evade him. One importuned him from behind and she raised her pretty unpretty face. Her hair was soft and fine, carelessly caught about her head and her painted mouth was purple in this light.

'Here? Dancing?'

'With his two Niobes. I saw the female one and I imagine the male one is here also.'

'Niobes?'

'That Mrs Powers, or whatever her name is.'

She held her head back so as to see his face. 'You are lying.'

'No, I'm not. They are here.'

She stared at him. He could feel her fan drooping from her arched wrist on his cheek softly and one importuned him from behind. 'Sitting out now, in a car,' he added.

'With Mrs Powers?'

‘Watch your step, sister, or she’ll have him.’

She slipped from him suddenly. ‘If you aren’t going to dance—’

One importuning him from behind repeated tirelessly. ‘May I cut in,’ and she evaded Jones’s arm.

‘Oh, Lee. Mr Jones doesn’t dance.’

‘M’I’ve this dance,’ mumbled the conventional one conventionally, already encircling her. Jones stood baggy and yellow, yellowly watching her fan upon her partner’s coat, like a hushed splash of water, her arching neck and her arm crossing a black shoulder with luminous warmth, the indicated silver evasion of her limbs anticipating her partner’s like a broken dream.

‘Got a match?’ Jones, pausing, asked abruptly of a man sitting alone in a swing. He lit his pipe and lounged in slow and fat belligerence among a group sitting upon the balustrade near the steps, like birds.

The Negro cornetist spurred his men to fiercer endeavour, the brass died and a plaintive minor of hushed voices carried the rhythm until the brass, suspiring again, took it. Jones sucked his pipe, thrusting his hands in his jacket and a slim arm slid suddenly beneath his tweed sleeve.

‘Wait for me, Lee.’ Jones, looking around, remarked her fan and the glass-like fragility of her dress. ‘I must see some people in a car.’

The boy’s ironed face was a fretted fatuity above his immaculate linen.

‘Let me go with you.’

‘No, no. You wait for me. Mr Jones will take me: you don’t even know them. You dance until I come back. Promise?’

‘But say—’

Her hand flashed slimly staying him. ‘No, no. Please. Promise?’

He promised and stood to stare at them as they descended the steps passing beneath the two magnolias and so on into darkness, where her dress became a substanceless articulation beside the man’s shapeless

tweed. . . . After a while he turned and walked down the emptying veranda. Where'd that slob come from? he wondered, seeing two girls watching him in poised invitation. Do they let anybody in here?

As he hesitated, the hostess appeared talking interminably, but he circumvented her with skill of long practice. Beyond a shadowed corner in the half-darkness of a swing a man sat alone. He approached and before he could make his request the man extended a box of matches.

'Thanks,' he murmured, without surprise, lighting a cigarette. He strolled away, and the owner of the matches fingered the small, crisp wood box, wondering mildly who the third one would be.

12

'No, no, let's go to them first.'

She arrested their progress and after a time succeeded in releasing her arm. As they stood, a couple passed them, and the girl, leaning to her, whispered: 'See right through you. Stay out of the light.'

They passed on and she looked after them, watching the other girl. Cat! What a queer dress she is wearing. Funny ankles. Funny. Poor girl.

But she had little time for impersonal speculation, being attached temporarily to Jones. 'No, no,' she repeated, twisting the hand he held, drawing him in the direction of the car. Mrs Powers, looking over Madden's head, saw them.

Jones released the fragile writhing of her fingers, and she sped delicately over the damp grass. He followed fatly and she put her hands on the door of the car, her narrow nervous hands, between which the green fan splashed graciously.

'Oh, how do you do? I didn't have any idea you were coming! If I had I would have arranged partners for you. I'm sure you dance awfully well.'

But then, as soon as the men see you here you won't lack for partners, I know.'

(What does she want with him now? Watching me: doesn't trust me with him.)

'Awfully nice dance. And Mr Gilligan!' (What's she wanta come worrying him now for? She bothers damn little while he's sitting at home there.) 'Of course, one simply does not see Donald without Mr Gilligan. It must be nice to have Mr Gilligan fond of you like that. Don't you think so, Mrs Powers?' Her braced straightening arms supported a pliant slow backward curve from her hips. 'And Rufus.' (Yes, she is pretty. And silly. But — but pretty.)

'You deserted me for another woman! Don't say you didn't. I tried to make him dance with me, Mrs Powers, but he wouldn't do it. Perhaps you had better luck?' A dropped knee moulded the glass-like fragility of her silver dress. 'Ah, you needn't say anything: we know how attractive Mrs Powers is, don't we, Mr Jones?' (See your behind, the shape of it. And your whole leg, when you stand like that. Knows it, too.)

Her eyes became hard, black. 'You told me they were dancing,' she accused.

'He can't dance, you know,' Mrs Powers said. 'We brought him so he could hear the music.'

'Mr Jones told me you and he were dancing. And I believed him: I seem to know so much less than other people about him. But, of course, he is sick, he does not — remember his old friends, now that he has made new ones.'

(Is she going to cry? It would be just like her. The fool, the little fool.) 'I think you are not fair to him. But won't you get in and sit down? Mr Madden, will you — ?'

Madden had already opened the door.

'No, no: if he likes the music I'd only disturb him. He had much rather sit with Mrs Powers, I know.'

(Yes, she's going to make a scene.) 'Please. Just a moment. He hasn't seen you today, you know.'

She hesitated, then Jones regarded the dividing soft curves of her thighs and the fleeting exposure of a stocking, and borrowed a match from Gilligan. The music had ceased and through the two identical magnolias the porch was like an empty stage. The Negro driver's head was round as a capped cannon-ball: perhaps he slept. She mounted and sank into the dark seat beside Mahon, sitting still and resigned. Mrs Powers suddenly spoke:

'Do you dance, Mr Madden?'

'Yes, a little,' he admitted. She descended from the car and turning, met Cecily's startled shallow face.

'I'll leave you to visit with Donald while I have a dance or two with Mr Madden, shall I?' She took Madden's arm. 'Don't you want to come in, too, Joe?'

'I guess not,' Gilligan answered. 'Competition'll be too strong for me. I'll get you to learn me private, some time, so I can be a credit to you.'

Cecily, in exasperation, saw the other woman stealing part of her audience. But here were still Jones and Gilligan. Jones climbed heavily into the vacated seat, uninvited. Cecily gave him a fierce glance and turned her back upon him, feeling his arm against her side.

'Donald, sweetheart,' she said, patting her arm about Mahon. From here she could not see the scar so she drew his face to hers with her hand, laying her cheek against his. Feeling her touch, hearing voices, he stirred. 'It's Cecily, Donald,' she said sweetly.

'Cecily,' he parroted.

'Yes. Put your arm around me like you used to, Donald, dear heart.' She moved nervously, but the length of Jones's arm remained against her closely as though it were attached by suction, like an octopus's

tentacle. Trying to avoid him, her clasp about Mahon tightened convulsively, and he raised his hand, touching her face, fumbling at his glasses. 'Easy there, Loot,' Gilligan warned quickly, and he lowered his hand.

Cecily kissed his cheek swiftly and sat up, releasing him. 'Oh, there goes the musk again, and I have this dance.' She stood up in the car, looking about. One lounging immaculately, smoking, strolled past. 'Oh, Lee,' she called, in happy relief, 'here I am.'

She opened the door and sprang out as the conventional one approached. Jones descended fatly, baggily, and stood dragging his jacket across his thick, heavy hips, staring yellowly at Mr Rivers. Her body poised again, turning, and she said to Gilligan: 'You aren't dancing tonight?'

'Not like that,' he replied, 'no, ma'am. Where I come from you'd have to have a licence to dance that way.'

Her laugh was in three notes and she was like a swept tree. Her eyes, beneath lowered lids, her teeth, between her purple lips, glittered briefly.

'I think that's awfully clever. And Mr Jones doesn't dance either, so all I have left is Lee.'

Lee — Mr Rivers — stood waiting, and Jones said heavily: 'This is my dance.'

'I'm sorry. I promised Lee,' she answered swiftly. 'But you cut in, won't you?' Her hand was briefly on his sleeve and Jones, contemplating Mr Rivers, yellowly repeated:

'This is my dance.'

Mr Rivers looked at him and then looked quickly away.

'Oh, beg pardon. Your dance?'

'Lee!' she said sharply, reaching her hand again. Mr Rivers met Jones's stare once more.

'Beg pardon,' he muttered, 'I'll cut in.' He lounged onward. Cecily let her glance follow him, then she shrugged and turned to Jones. Her neck, her arm, took faint light warmly, smoothly. She took Jones's tweed sleeve.

'Say,' Gilligan murmured, watching their retreat, 'you can see right through her.'

'Dat's de war,' explained the Negro driver, sleeping again immediately.

13

Jones dragged her resisting among shadows. A crepe-myrtle bush obscured them.

'Let me go!' she said, struggling.

'What's the matter with you? You kissed me once, didn't you?'

'Let me go,' she repeated.

'What for? For that goddam dead man? What does he care about you?' He held her until her nervous energy, deserting her, left her fragile as a captured bird. He stared at the white blur which was her face and she was aware of the shapeless looming bulk of his body in the darkness, smelling wool and tobacco.

'Let me go,' she repeated piteously, and finding herself suddenly free, she fled across grass, knowing dew on her shoes, seeing gratefully a row of men sitting like birds on the balustrade. Mr Rivers's iron face, above his immaculate linen, met her and she grasped his arm.

'Let's dance, Lee,' she said thinly, striking her body sharply against him, taking the broken suggestion of saxophones.

14

Mrs Powers had a small triumph: the railbirds had given her a 'rush'.

'Say,' they had nudged each other, 'look who Rufe's got.'

And while the hostess stood in effusive volubility beside her straight, dark dress, two of them, whispering together, beckoned Madden aside. 'Powers?' they asked, when he joined them. But he hushed them.

'Yes, that was him. But that's not for talk, you know. Don't tell them, see.' His glance swept the group along the rail. 'Won't do any good, you know.'

'Hell, no,' they assured him. Powers!

And so they danced with her, one or two at first, then having watched her firm, capable performance, all of them that danced at all were soon involved in a jolly competition, following her while she danced with another of their number, importuning her between dances: some of them even went so far as to seek out other partners whom they knew.

Madden after a time merely looked on, but his two friends were assiduous, tireless; seeing that she did not dance too long with the poor dancers, fetching her cups of insipid punch; kind and a little tactless.

Her popularity brought the expected harvest of feminine speculation. Her clothes were criticized, her 'nerve' in coming to a dance in a street dress, in coming at all. Living in a house with two young men, one of them a stranger. No other woman there . . . except a servant.

And there had been something funny about that girl, years ago. Mrs Wardle spoke to her, however. But she speaks to everyone who can't avoid her. And Cecily Saunders stopped between dances, holding her arm, chatting in her coarse, nervous, rushing speech, rolling her eyes about at all the inevitable men, talking all the time. . . . The Negro cornetist unleashed his indefatigable pack anew and the veranda broke again into clasped couples.

Mrs Powers, catching Madden's eye, signalled him. 'I must go,' she said. 'If I have to drink another cup of that punch—'

They threaded their way among dancers, followed by her protesting train. But she was firm and they told her good night with regret and gratitude, shaking her hand.

'It was like old times,' one of them diffidently phrased it, and her slow, friendly, unsmiling glance took them all.

'Wasn't it? Again soon, I hope. Good-bye, good-bye.' They watched her until her dark dress merged with shadow beyond the zone of light. The music swept on, the brass swooned away, and the rhythm was carried by a hushed plaintive minor of voices until the brass recovered.

'Say, you could see right through her,' Gilligan remarked with interest as they came up. Madden opened the door and helped her in, needlessly.

'I'm tired, Joe. Let's go.'

The Negro driver's head was round as a capped cannon-ball and he was not asleep. Madden stood aside, hearing the spitting engine merge into a meshed whine of gears, watching them roll smoothly down the drive.

Powers . . . a man jumping along a trench of demoralized troops caught in a pointless hysteria. Powers. A face briefly spitted on the flame of a rifle: a white moth beneath a reluctant and sorrowful dawn.

15

George Farr and his friend the soda clerk walked beneath trees that in reverse motion seemed to swim backward above them, and houses were huge and dark or else faintly luminous shapes of flattened lesser dark where no trees were. People were asleep in them, people lapped in slumber, temporarily freed of the flesh. Other people elsewhere dancing under the spring sky: girls dancing with boys while other boys whose bodies had known all intimacies with the bodies of girls, walked dark streets alone, alone. . . .

'Well,' the friend remarked, 'we got two more good drinks left.'

He drank fiercely, feeling the fire in his throat become an inner grateful fire, pleasuring in it like a passionate muscular ecstasy. (Her body prone and naked as a narrow pool, flowing away like two silver streams from a single source.) Dr Gary would dance with her, would put his arm around her, anyone could touch her. (Except you: she doesn't even speak of you who have seen her prone and silver . . . moonlight on her like sweetly dividing water, marbled and slender and unblemished by any shadow, the sweet passion of her constricting arms that constricting hid her body beyond the obscuring prehensileness of her mouth —) Oh God, oh God!

'Say, whatcher say we go back to the store and mix another bottle?' He did not answer and his friend repeated the suggestion. 'Let me alone,' he said suddenly, savagely.

'Goddam you, I'm not hurting you!' the other answered with justifiable heat.

They stopped at a corner, where another street stretched away beneath trees into obscurity, in uncomfortable intimacy. (I'm sorry: I'm a fool. I'm sorry I flew out at you, who are not at all to blame.) He turned heavily.

'Well, I guess I'll go in. Don't feel so good tonight. See you in the morning.

His friend accepted the unspoken apology. 'Sure. See you tomorrow.'

The other's coatless figure faded and after a while his footsteps died away. And George Farr had the town, the earth, the world, to himself and his sorrow. Music came faint as a troubling rumour beneath the spring night, sweetened by distance: a longing knowing no ease. (Oh God, oh God!)

CHAPTER SIX

AT LAST GEORGE Farr gave up trying to see her. He had phoned vainly and time after time, at last the telephone became the end in place of the means: he had forgotten why he wanted to reach her.

Finally he told himself that he hated her, that he would go away; finally he was going to as much pains to avoid her as he had been to see her. So he slunk about the streets like a criminal, avoiding her, feeling his very heart stop when he did occasionally see her unmistakable body from a distance.

And at night he lay sleepless and writhing to think of her, then to rise and don a few garments and walk past her darkened house, gazing in slow misery at the room in which he knew she lay, soft and warm, in intimate slumber, then to return to home and bed, to dream of her brokenly.

When her note came at last, he knew relief, sharp and bitter as the pain had been. When he took the square white paper from the post office, when he saw her nervous spidery script sprawled thinly across it, he felt something like a shocking silent concussion at the base of his brain. I won't go, he told himself, knowing that he would, and he reread it, wondering if he could bear to see her, if he could speak to her, touch her again.

He was ahead of the appointed time, sitting hidden from view at a turn of the stairs ascending to the balcony. The stairs were enclosed by a solid wood balustrade and from the foot of the steps the long tunnel of the drugstore swept towards light and the entrance, a tunnel filled with the mingled scents of carbolic and sweet syrups: a medicated, a synthetic purity.

He saw her as she entered the door and, rising, he saw her pause on seeing him, then, as in a dream, silhouetted against the door, with light toying with her white dress, giving it a shallow nimbus, she came tap-tapping on her high heels towards him. He sat back trembling and heard her mount the steps.

He saw her dress, and feeling his breath catch, he raised his eyes to her face as without pausing she sank into his arms like a settling bird.

'Cecily, oh, Cecily,' he said brokenly, taking her kiss. He withdrew his mouth. 'You damn near killed me.'

She drew his face quickly back to hers, murmuring against his cheek. He held her close and they sat so for a long time. At last he whispered: 'You'll ruin your dress sitting here.' But she only shook her head, clinging to him. Finally she sat up.

'Is this my drink?' she asked, picking up one of the glassed, sweetish liquids beside him. She put the other glass in his hand, and he closed his fingers about it, still looking at her.

'Now, we'll have to get married,' he said, fatuously.

'Yes?' sipping her drink.

'Well, won't we?' he asked, in surprise.

'You've got it backward. Now we don't have to get married.' She gave him a quick glance, and seeing his face, she laughed. Her occasional coarseness so out of keeping with her innate and utter delicacy always shocked him. But then George Farr, like most men, was by nature a prude. He eyed her with disapproval, silent. She set her glass down and leaned her breast against him. 'George?'

He thawed, putting his arm about her, but she refused her mouth. She thrust herself away from him and he, feeling that he had conquered, released her.

'But aren't you going to marry me?'

'Darling, aren't we already married, now? Do you doubt me, or is it only a marriage licence will keep you true to me?'

'You know it isn't.' He couldn't tell her that it was jealousy, that he didn't trust her. 'It's only that—'

'Only what?'

‘Only that if you won’t marry me, you don’t love me.’

She moved from him. Her eyes became dark blue. ‘Can you say that?’ She looked away, and her movement was half shiver, half shrug. ‘I might have known it, though. Well, I’ve been a fool, I guess. You were just — just passing the time with me, then?’

‘Cecily—’ trying to take her in his arms again. She evaded him and rose.

‘I don’t blame you. I suppose that’s what any man would have done in your place. That’s all men ever want of me, anyway. So it might as well have been you, as anyone. . . . Only I’m sorry you didn’t tell me before — sooner, George. I thought you were different.’ She gave him her narrow back. How little, how — how helpless she is! And I have hurt her, he thought, in sharp pain, rising and putting his arm about her, careless of who might see.

‘Don’t, don’t!’ she whispered quickly turning. Her eyes were quite green again. ‘Someone will see! Sit down!’

‘Not till you take that back.’

‘Sit down, sit down! Please, George! Please, please!’

‘Take that back, then.’

Her eyes were dark again, and he read terror in her face, and he released her, sitting down again.

‘Promise me not ever, ever, ever to do that again.’

He promised dully and she sat beside him. She slid her hand into his and he looked up.

‘Why do you treat me like this?’

‘Like what?’ he asked.

‘Saying I don’t love you. What other proof do you want? What other proof can I give? What do you consider proof? Tell me: I’ll try to do it.’ She looked at him in delicate humility.

‘I’m sorry: forgive me,’ he said abjectly.

'I've already forgiven you. It's forgetting it I can't promise. I don't doubt you, George. Or I couldn't have. . . .' Her voice died away and she clutched his hand convulsively, releasing it. She rose. 'I must go.'

He caught her hand. It was unresponsive. 'May I see you this afternoon?'

'Oh, no. I can't come back this afternoon. I have some sewing to do.'

'Oh, come on, put it off. Don't treat me again like you did. I nearly went crazy. I swear I did.'

'Sweetheart, I can't, I simply can't. Don't you know I want to see you as badly as you want to see me; that I would come if I could?'

'Let me come down there, then.'

'I believe you are crazy,' she told him, with contemplation. 'Don't you know I'm not supposed to see you at all?'

'Then I'm coming tonight.'

'Hush!' she whispered, quickly, descending the steps.

'But I am,' he repeated stubbornly. She looked hurriedly about the store, and her heart turned to water. Here, sitting at a table in the alcove made by the ascending stairs, was that fat man, with a half-empty glass before him.

She knew dreadful terror, and as she stared at his round, bent head, all her blood drained from her icy heart. She put her hand on the railing, lest she fall. Then this gave way to anger. The man was a nemesis: every time she had seen him since that first day at luncheon with Uncle Joe, he had flouted her, had injured her with diabolic ingenuity.

And now, if he had heard —

George had risen, following her, but at her frantic gesture, her terror-stricken face, he retreated again. Then she changed her expression as readily as you would a hat. She descended the steps.

'Good morning, Mr Jones.'

Jones looked up with his customary phlegmatic calm, then he rose, lazily courteous. She watched him narrowly with the terror-sharpened cunning of an animal, but his face and manner told nothing.

‘Good morning, Miss Saunders.’

‘You have the morning Coca-Cola habit, too, I see. Why didn’t you come up and join me?’

‘I am still cursing myself for missing that pleasure. You see, I didn’t know you were alone.’ His yellow bodyless stare was as impersonal as the jars of yellowish liquid in the windows and her heart sank.

‘I didn’t see nor hear you come in, or I would have called to you.’ He was non-committal. ‘Thank you. The misfortune is mine, however.’ She said suddenly: ‘I wonder if you will do me a favour? I have a thousand million things to do this morning. Will you go with me and help me remember them — do you mind?’ Her eyes held a desperate coquetry.

Jones’s eyes were fathomless, slowly yellow. ‘I’ll be delighted.’
‘Finish your drink, then.’

George Farr’s good-looking face, wrung and jealous, peered down at them. She made no sign, yet there was such pitiful terror in her whole attitude that even George’s dull and jealous intelligence took her meaning. His face sank again from view. Jones said:

‘Let the drink go. I don’t know why I keep on trying the things. Make myself think I have a highball, perhaps.’

She laughed in three notes. ‘You can’t expect to satisfy tastes like that in this town. In Atlanta now—’

‘Yes, you can do lots of things in Atlanta you can’t do here.’

She laughed again, flatteringly, and they moved up the antiseptic tunnel of the drug store, towards the entrance. She would laugh in such a way as to lend the most innocent remark a double entendre: you

immediately accepted the fact that you had said something clever, without recalling what it was at all.

Jones's yellow idol's stare remarked her body's articulation, her pretty, nervous face, while George Farr, in a sick, dull rage, watched them in silhouette, flatly. Then they reassumed depth and she, fragile as a Tanagra, and he, slouching and shapeless and tweeded, disappeared.

2

'Say,' said young Robert Saunders, 'are you a soldier, too?'

Jones, lurching to a slow completion, heavily courteous, deferentially conversational, had already won Mrs Saunders. Of Mr Saunders he was not so sure, nor did he care. Finding that the guest knew practically nothing about money or crops or politics, Mr Saunders soon let him be to gossip trivially with Mrs Saunders. Cecily was perfect: pleasantly tactful, letting him talk. Young Robert though was bent on a seduction of his own.

'Say,' he repeated, for the third time, watching Jones's every move with admiration— 'was you a soldier, too?'

'Were, Robert,' corrected his mother.

'Yessum. Was you a soldier in the war?'

'Robert. Let Mr Jones alone, now.'

'Sure, old fellow,' Jones answered. 'I fought some.'

'Oh, did you?' asked Mrs Saunders. 'How interesting,' she commented without interest. Then: 'I suppose you never happened to run across Donald Mahon in France, did you?'

'No. I had very little time in which to meet people, you see,' replied Jones with gravity, who had never seen the Statue of Liberty — even from behind.

'What did you do?' asked young Robert indefatigable.

'I suppose so.' Mrs Saunders sighed with repletion and rang a bell. 'The war was so big. Shall we go?'

Jones drew her chair, and young Robert repeated tirelessly: 'What did you do in the war? Did you kill folks?'

The older people passed on to the veranda. Cecily, with a gesture of her head, indicated a door and Jones entered, followed by young Robert, still importunate. The scent of Mr Saunders's cigar wafted down the hall and into the room where they sat and young Robert, refraining his litany, caught Jones's yellow, fathomless eye like a snake's, and young Robert's spine knew an abrupt, faint chill. Watching Jones cautiously he moved nearer his sister.

'Run along, Bobby. Don't you see that real soldiers never like to talk about themselves?'

He was nothing loath. He suddenly desired to be in the warm sun. This room had got cold. Still watching Jones he sidled past him to the door.

'Well,' he remarked, 'I guess I'll be going.'

'What did you do to him?' she asked, when he had gone.

'I? Nothing. Why?'

'You scared him, some way. Didn't you see how he watched you?'

'No, I didn't notice it.' He filled his pipe, slowly.

'I suppose not. But then you frighten lots of people, don't you?'

'Not as many as you'd think. Lots of them I'd like to frighten can take care of themselves too well.'

'Yes? But why frighten them?'

'Sometimes that's the only way to get what you want from people.'

'Oh. . . . They have a name for that, haven't they? Blackmail, isn't it?'

'I don't know. Is it?'

She shrugged with assumed indifference. 'Why do you ask me about it?'

His yellow stare became unbearable and she looked away. How quiet it is outside, under the spell of noon. Trees shaded the house, the room was dark and cool. Furniture was slow unemphatic gleams of lesser dark and young Robert Saunders, at the age of sixty-five, was framed and indistinct above the mantel: her grandfather.

She wished for George. He should be here to help her. But what could he do? she reconsidered with that vast tolerance of their men which women must gain by giving their bodies (else how do they continue to live with them?) that the conquering male is after all no better than a clumsy, tactless child. She examined Jones with desperate speculation. If he were not so fat! Like a worm.

She repeated: 'Why do you ask me?'

'I don't know. You have never been frightened by anyone, have you?'

She watched him, not replying.

'Perhaps that's because you have never done anything to be afraid of?'

She sat on a divan, her hands palm up on either side, watching him. He rose suddenly, and she as suddenly shed her careless laxness, becoming defensive, watchful. But he only scratched a match on the iron grate screen.

He sucked it into his pipe bowl while she watched the fleshy concavity of his cheeks and the golden pulsations of the flame in his eyes. He pushed the match through the screen and resumed his seat. But she did not relax.

'When are you to be married?' he asked suddenly.

'Married?'

'Yes. Isn't it all arranged?'

She felt slow, slow blood in her throat and wrists, in her palms: her blood seemed to mark away an interval that would never pass. Jones,

watching the light in her fine hair, lazy and yellow as an idol, Jones released her at last. 'He expects it, you know.'

Her blood liquefied again and became cold. She could feel the skin all over her body. She said: 'What makes you think he does? He is too sick to expect anything, now.'

'He?'

'You said Donald expects it.'

'My dear girl, I said. . . .' He could see a nimbus of light in her hair and the shape of her, but her face he could not see. He rose. She did not move as he sat beside her. The divan sank luxuriously beneath his weight, sensuously enfolding him. She did not move, her hand lay palm up between them, but he ignored it. 'Why don't you ask me how much I heard?'

'Heard? When?' Her whole attitude expressed ingenuous interest.

He knew that in her examination of his face there was calm speculation and probably contempt. He considered moving beyond her so that she must face the light and leave his own face in shadow. . . . The light in her hair, caressing the shape of her cheek.

Her hand between them, naked and palm upward, grew to be a monstrous size: it was the symbol of her body. His hand a masculine body for hers to curl inside. Browning, is it? seeing noon become afternoon, becoming gold and slightly wearied among leaves like the limp hands of women. Her hand was a frail, impersonal barrier, restraining him.

'You attach a lot of importance to a kiss, don't you?' she asked at length. He shaped her unresponsive hand to his and she continued lightly: 'That's funny, in you.'

'Why, in me?'

'You've had lots of girls crazy about you, haven't you?'

'What makes you think that?'

'I don't know. The way you — everything about you.' She could never decide exactly about him. The feminine predominated so in him, and the rest of him was feline: a woman with a man's body and a cat's nature.

'I expect you are right. You are an authority regarding your own species yourself.' He released her hand saying, 'Excuse me,' and lit his pipe again. Her hand remained lax impersonal between them: it might have been a handkerchief. He pushed the dead match through the screen and said:

'What makes you think I attach so much importance to a kiss?'

Light in her hair was the thumbed rim of a silver coin, the divan embraced her quietly, and light quietly followed the long slope of her limbs. A wind came among leaves without the window, stroking them together. Noon was past.

'I mean, you think that whenever a woman kisses a man or tells him something that she means something by it.'

'She does mean something by it. Of course it never is what the poor devil thinks she means, but she means something.'

'Then you certainly don't blame the woman if the man chooses to think she meant something she didn't at all mean, do you?'

'Why not? It would be the devil of a chaotic world if you never could count on whether or not people mean what they say. You knew damn well what I meant when you let me kiss you that day.'

'But I don't know that you meant anything, any more than I did. You are the one who—'

'Like hell you didn't,' Jones interrupted roughly. 'You knew what I meant by it.'

'I think we are getting personal,' she told him, with faint distaste.

Jones sucked his pipe. 'Certainly, we are. What else are we interested in except you and me?'

She crossed her knees. 'Never in my life—'

'In God's name, don't say it. I have heard that from so many women. I had expected better of someone as vain as I am.'

He would be fairly decent looking, she thought, if he were not so fat — and could dye his eyes another colour. After a while, she spoke.

'What do you think I mean when I do either of them?'

'I couldn't begin to say. You are a fast worker, too fast for me. I doubt if I could keep up with the men you kiss and lie to, let alone with what you mean in each case. I don't think you can yourself.'

'So you cannot imagine letting people make love to you and saying things to them without meaning anything by it?'

'I cannot. I always mean something by what I say or do.'

'For instance?' her voice was faintly interested, ironical.

Again he considered moving, so that her face would be in light and his in shadow. But then he would no longer be beside her. He said roughly: 'I meant by that kiss that some day I intend to have your body.'

'Oh,' she said sweetly, 'it's all arranged, then? How nice. I can now understand your success with us. Just a question of will power, isn't it? Look the beast in the eye and he — I mean she — is yours. That must save a lot of your valuable time and trouble, I imagine?'

Jones's stare was calm, bold, and contemplative, obscene as a goat's. 'You don't believe I can?' he asked.

She shrugged delicately, nervously, and her lax hand between them grew again like a flower: it was as if her whole body became her hand. The symbol of a delicate, bodyless lust. Her hand seemed to melt into his yet remain without volition, her hand unawaked in his and her body also yet sleeping, crushed softly about with her fragile clothing.

Her long legs, not for locomotion, but for the studied completion of a rhythm carried to its nth: compulsion of progress, movement; her body created for all men to dream after. A poplar, vain and pliant, trying attitude after attitude, gesture after gesture— ‘a girl trying gown after gown, perplexed but in pleasure’. Her unseen face nimbused with light and her body, which was no body, crumpling a dress that had been dreamed. Not for maternity, not even for love: a thing for the eye and the mind. Epicene, he thought, feeling her slim bones, the bitter nervousness latent in her flesh.

‘If I really held you close you’d pass right through me like a ghost, I am afraid,’ he said and his clasp was loosely about her.
‘Quite a job,’ she said coarsely. ‘Why are you so fat?’
‘Hush,’ he told her, ‘you’ll spoil it.’

His embrace but touched her and she, with amazing tact, suffered him. Her skin was neither warm nor cool, her body in the divan’s embrace was nothing, her limbs only an indication of crushed texture. He refused to hear her breath as he refused to feel a bodily substance in his arms.

Not an ivory carving: this would have body, rigidity; not an animal that eats and digests — this is the heart’s desire purged of flesh. ‘Be quiet,’ he told himself as much as her, ‘don’t spoil it.’

The trumpets in his blood, the symphony of living, died away. The golden sand of hours bowled by day ran through the narrow neck of time into the corresponding globe of night, to be inverted and so flow back again. Jones felt the slow, black sand of time marking life away. ‘Hush,’ he said, ‘don’t spoil it.’

The sentries in her blood lay down, but they lay down near the ramparts with their arms in their hands, waiting the alarm, the inevitable stand-to, and they sat clasped in the vaguely gleamed twilight of the room, Jones a fat Mirandola in a chaste Platonic nympholepsy, a religiosentimental orgy in a grey tweed, shaping an

insincere, fleeting articulation of damp clay to an old imperishable desire, building himself a papiermâché Virgin: and Cecily Saunders wondering what, how much, he had heard, frightened and determined.

What manner of man was this? she thought alertly, wanting George to be there and put an end to this situation, how she did not know; wondering if the fact of his absence were significant.

Outside the window leaves stirred and cried soundlessly. Noon was past. And under the bowled pale sky, trees and grass, hills and valleys, somewhere the sea, regretted him, with relief. No, no, he thought, with awakened despair, don't spoil it.

But she had moved and her hair brushed his face. Hair. Everyone, anyone, has hair. (To hold it, to hold it.) But it was hair and here was a body in his arms, fragile and delicate it might be, but still a body, a woman: something to answer the call of his flesh, to retreat pausing, touching him tentatively, teasing and retreating, yet still answering the call of his flesh. Impalpable and dominating. He removed his arm.

'You little fool, don't you know you had me?'

Her position had not changed. The divan embraced her in its impersonal clasp. Light like the thumbed rim of a coin about her indistinct face, her long legs crushed to her dress. Her hand, relaxed, lay slim and lax between them. But he ignored it.

'Tell me what you heard,' she said.

He rose. 'Good-bye,' he said. 'Thanks for lunch, or dinner, or whatever you call it.'

'Dinner,' she told him. 'We are common people.' She rose also and studiously leaned her hip against the arm of a chair. His yellow eyes washed over her warm and clear as urine, and he said, 'God damn you.' She sat down again leaning back into the corner of the divan and as he sat beside her, seemingly without moving, she came to him.

'Tell me what you heard.'

He embraced her, silent and morose. She moved slightly and he knew she was offering her mouth.

'How do you prefer a proposal?' he asked.

'How?'

'Yes. What form do you like it in? You have had two or three in the last few days, haven't you?'

'Are you proposing?'

'That was my humble intention. Sorry I'm dull. That was why I asked for information.'

'So when you can't get your women any other way, you marry them, then?'

'Dammit, do you think all a man wants of you is your body?' She was silent and he continued: 'I am not going to tell on you, you know.' Her tense body, her silence, was a question. 'What I heard, I mean.'

'Do you think I care? You have told me yourself that women say one thing and mean another. So I don't have to worry about what you heard. You said so yourself.' Her body became a direct challenge, yet she had not moved. 'Didn't you?'

'Don't do that,' he said sharply. 'What makes you so beautiful and disturbing and so goddammed dull?'

'What do you mean? I am not used—'

'Oh, I give up. I can't explain to you. And you wouldn't understand, anyway. I know I am temporarily a fool, so if you tell me I am, I'll kill you.'

'Who knows? I may like that.' Her soft, coarse voice was quiet.

Light in her hair, her mouth speaking, and the vague, crushed shape of her body. 'Atthis,' he said.

'What did you call me?'

He told her. ‘ “For a moment, an aeon, I pause plunging above the narrow precipice of thy breast” and on and on and on. Do you know how falcons make love? They embrace at an enormous height and fall locked, beak to beak, plunging: an unbearable ecstasy.

While we have got to assume all sorts of ludicrous postures, knowing our own sweat. The falcon breaks his clasp and swoops away swift and proud and lonely, while a man must rise and take his hat and walk out.’

She was not listening, hadn’t heard him. ‘Tell me what you heard,’ she repeated. Where she touched him was a cool fire; he moved but she followed like water. ‘Tell me what you heard.’

‘What difference does it make, what I heard? I don’t care anything about your jelly-beans.

You can have all the Georges and Donalds you want. Take them all for lovers if you like. I don’t want your body. If you can just get that through your beautiful thick head, if you will just let me alone, I will never want it again.’

‘But you have proposed to me. What do you want of me?’

‘You wouldn’t understand, if I tried to tell you.’

‘Then if I did marry you, how would I know how to act towards you? I think you are crazy.’

‘That’s what I have been trying to tell you,’ Jones answered in a calm fury. ‘You won’t have to act anyway towards me. I will do that. Act with your Donalds and Georges, I tell you.’

She was like a light globe from which the current has been shut. ‘I think you’re crazy,’ she repeated.

‘I know I am.’ He rose abruptly. ‘Good-bye. Shall I see your mother, or will you thank her for lunch for me?’

Without moving she said: ‘Come here.’

In the hall, he could hear Mrs Saunders’s chair as it creaked to her rocking, through the front door he saw trees, the lawn, and the street.

She said Come here again. Her body was a vague white shape as he entered the room again and light was the thumbled rim of a coin about her head. He said:

‘If I come back, you know what it means.’

‘But I can’t marry you. I am engaged.’

‘I wasn’t talking about that.’

‘Then what do you mean?’

‘Good-bye,’ he repeated. At the front door he could hear Mr and Mrs Saunders talking but from the room he had left came a soft movement, louder than any other sound. He thought she was following him, but the door remained empty and when he looked into the room again she sat as he had left her. He could not even tell if she were looking at him. ‘I thought you had gone,’ she remarked.

After a time he said: ‘Men have lied to you a lot, haven’t they?’

‘What makes you say that?’

He looked at her a long moment. Then he turned to the door again.

‘Come here,’ she repeated quickly.

She made no movement, save to slightly avert her face as he embraced her. ‘I’m not going to kiss you,’ he told her.

‘I’m not so sure of that.’ Yet his clasp was impersonal.

‘Listen. You are a shallow fool, but at least you can do as you are told. And that is, let me alone about what I heard. Do you understand? You’ve got that much sense, haven’t you? I’m not going to hurt you: I don’t even want to see you again. So just let me alone about it. If I heard anything I have already forgotten it — and it’s damn seldom I do anything this decent. Do you hear?’

She was cool and pliant as a young tree in his arms and against his jaw she said: ‘Tell me what you heard.’

'All right then,' he said savagely. His hand cupped her shoulder, holding her powerless and his other hand ruthlessly brought her face around. She resisted, twisting her face against his fat palm.

'No, no; tell me first.'

He dragged her face up brutally and she said in a smothered whisper:

'You are hurting me!'

'I don't give a damn. That might go with George, but not with me.'

He saw her eyes go dark, saw the red print of his fingers on her cheek and chin. He held her face where the light could fall on it, examining it with sybaritish anticipation. She exclaimed quickly, staring at him: 'Here comes daddy! Stop!'

But it was Mrs Saunders in the door, and Jones was calm, circumspect, lazy, and remote as an idol.

'Why, it's quite cool in here, isn't it? But so dark. How do you keep awake?' said Mrs Saunders, entering. 'I nearly went to sleep several times on the porch. But the glare is so bad on the porch. Robert went off to school without his hat: I don't know what he will do.'

'Perhaps they haven't a porch at the school house,' murmured Jones.

'Why, I don't recall. But our school is quite modern. It was built in — when was it built, Cecily?'

'I don't know, mamma.'

'Yes. But it is quite new. Was it last year or the year before, darling?'

'I don't know, mamma.'

'I told him to wear his hat because of the glare, but of course, he didn't. Boys are so hard to manage. Were you hard to manage when you were a child, Mr Jones?'

'No, ma'am,' answered Jones, who had no mother that he could name and who might have claimed any number of possible fathers, 'I never gave my parents much trouble. I am of a quiet nature, you see. In fact, until I reached my eleventh year, the only time I ever knew passion was

one day when I discovered beneath the imminent shadow of our annual picnic that my Sunday school card was missing.

At our church they gave prizes for attendance and knowing the lesson, and my card bore forty-one stars, when it disappeared.' Jones grew up in a Catholic orphanage, but like Henry James, he attained verisimilitude by means of tediousness.

'How dreadful. And did you find it again?'

'Oh, yes. I found it in time for the picnic. My father had used it to enter a one-dollar bet on a race-horse. When I went to my father's place of business to prevail on him to return home, as was my custom, just as I passed through the swinging doors, one of his business associates there was saying. "Whose card is this?" I recognized my forty-one stars immediately, and claimed it, collecting twenty-two dollars, by the way. Since then I have been a firm believer in Christianity.'

'How interesting,' Mrs Saunders commented, without having heard him. 'I wish Robert liked Sunday school as much as that.'

'Perhaps he would, at twenty-two to one.'

'Pardon me?' she said. Cecily rose, and Mrs Saunders said: 'Darling, if Mr Jones is going, perhaps you had better lie down. You look tired. Don't you think she looks tired, Mr Jones?'

'Yes, indeed. I had just commented on it.'

'Now, mamma,' said Cecily.

'Thank you for lunch.' Jones moved doorward and Mrs Saunders replied conventionally, wondering why he did not try to reduce. (But perhaps he is trying, she added, with belated tolerance.) Cecily followed him.

'Do come again,' she told him staring at his face. 'How much did you hear?' she whispered, with fierce desperation. 'You must tell me.'

Jones bowed fatly to Mrs Saunders, and again bathed the girl in his fathomless, yellow stare. She stood beside him in the door and the afternoon fell full upon her slender fragility. Jones said: 'I am coming tonight.'

She whispered, 'What?' and he repeated. 'You heard that?' Her mouth shaped the words against her blanched face. 'You heard that?'

'I say that.'

Blood came beneath her skin again and her eyes became opaque, cloudy. 'No, you aren't,' she told him. He looked at her calmly, and her knuckles whitened on his sleeve. 'Please,' she said, with utter sincerity. He made no answer, and she added: 'Suppose I tell daddy?'

'Come in again, Mr Jones,' Mrs Saunders said. Jones's mouth shaped 'You don't dare.' Cecily stared at him in hatred and bitter desperation, in helpless terror and despair. 'So glad to have you,' Mrs Saunders was saying. 'Cecily, you had better lie down: you don't look at all well. Cecily is not very strong, Mr Jones.'

'Yes, indeed. One can easily see she isn't strong,' Jones agreed, politely. The screen door severed them and Cecily's mouth, elastic and mobile as red rubber, shaped 'Don't.'

But Jones made no reply. He descended wooden steps and walked beneath locust trees in which bees were busy. Roses were slashed upon green bushes, roses red as the mouths of courtesans, red as Cecily's mouth, shaping 'Don't.'

She watched his fat, lazy, tweed back until he reached the gate and the street, then she turned to where her mother stood in impatient anticipation of her freed stout body. The light was behind her and the older woman could not see her face, but there was something in her attitude, in the relaxed hopeless tension of her body that caused the other to look at her in quick alarm.

'Cecily?'

The girl touched her and Mrs Saunders put her arm around her daughter. The older woman had eaten too much, as usual, and she breathed heavily, knowing her corsets, counting the minutes until she would be free of them.

'Cecily?'

'Where is daddy, mamma?'

'Why, he's gone to town. What is it, baby?' She asked, quickly, 'what's the matter?'

Cecily clung to her mother. The other was like a rock, a panting rock: something imperishable, impervious to passion and fear. And heartless. 'I must see him,' she answered. 'I have just got to see him.'

The other said: 'There, there. Go to your room and lie down a while.' She sighed heavily. 'No wonder you don't feel well. Those new potatoes at dinner! When will I learn when to stop eating? But if it isn't one thing, it's another, isn't it? Darling, would you mind coming in and unlacing me? I think I'll lie down a while before I dress to go to Mrs Coleman's.'

'Yes, mamma. Of course,' she answered, wanting her father, George, anyone, to help her.

3

George Farr, lurking along a street, climbed a fence swiftly when the exodus from the picture show came along. Despite himself, he simply could not act as though he were out for a casual stroll, but must drift aimlessly and noticeably back and forth along the street with a sort of skulking frankness. He was too nervous to go somewhere else and time his return; he was too nervous to conceal himself and stay there. So he gave up and became frankly skulking, climbing a fence smartly when the exodus from the picture show began.

Nine-thirty

People sat on porches rocking and talking in low tones, enjoying the warmth of April, people passing beneath dark trees along the street, old and young, men and women, making comfortable, unintelligible sounds, like cattle going to barn and bed. Tiny red eyes passed along at mouth-height and burning tobacco lingered behind sweet and pungent. Spitting arc lights, at street corners, revealed the passers-by, temporarily dogging them with elastic shadows. Cars passed under the lights and he recognized friends: young men and the inevitable girls with whom they were 'going' — coiffed or bobbed hair and slim young hands fluttering forever about it, keeping it in place. . . . The cars passed on into darkness, into another light, into darkness again.

Ten o'clock

Dew on the grass, dew on small unpickable roses, making them sweeter, giving them an odour. Otherwise, they had no odour, except that of youth and growth, as young girls have no particular attributes, save the kinship of youth and growth. Dew on the grass, the grass assumed a faint luminousness as if it had stolen light from day and the moisture of night were releasing it, giving it back to the world again. Tree-frogs shrilled in the trees, insects droned in the grass.

Tree-frogs are poison, Negroes had told him. If they spit on you, you'll die. When he moved they fell silent (getting ready to spit, perhaps), when he became still again, they released the liquid flute-like monotony swelling in their throats, filling the night with the imminence of summer. Spring, like a girl loosing her girdle. . . . People passed in belated ones and twos. Words reached him in meaningless snatches. Fire-flies had not yet come.

Ten-thirty

Rocking blurs on the verandas of houses rose and went indoors, entering rooms, and lights went off here and there, beyond smoothly descending shades. George Farr stole across a deserted lawn to a magnolia tree. Beneath it, fumbling in a darkness so inky that the rest of the world seemed quite visible in comparison, he found a water tap.

Water gushed, filling his incautious shoe, and a mocking-bird flew darkly and suddenly out. He drank, wetting his dry hot mouth, and returned to his post. When he was still again, the frogs and insects teased at silence gently, not to break it completely. As the small odourless roses unfolded under the dew their scent grew as though they, too, were growing, doubling in size.

Eleven o'clock

Solemnly the clock on the courthouse, staring its four bland faces across the town, like a kind and sleepless god, dropped eleven measured golden bells of sound. Silence carried them away, silence and dark that passing along the street like a watchman, snatched scraps of light from windows, palming them as a pickpocket palms snatched handkerchiefs. A belated car passed swiftly. Nice girls must be home by eleven. The street, the town, the world, was empty for him.

He lay on his back in a slow consciousness of relaxing muscles, feeling his back and thighs and legs luxuriously. It became so quiet that he dared to smoke, though being careful not to expose the match unduly. Then he lay down again, stretching, feeling the gracious earth through his clothing. After a while his cigarette burned down and he spun it from two fingers and sickled his knee until he could reach his ankle, scratching.

Life of some sort was also down his back, or it felt like it, which was the same thing. He writhed his back against the earth and the irritation ceased. . . . It must be eleven-thirty by now. He waited for what he judged to be five minutes, then he held his watch this way and that, trying to read it. But it only tantalized him: he could have sworn to almost any hour or minute you could name. So he cupped another cautious match. It was eleven-fourteen. Hell.

He lay back again cradling his head in his clasped arms. From this position the sky became a flat plane, flat as the brass-studded lid of a dark-blue box. Then, as he watched, it assumed depth again, it was as if he lay on the bottom of the sea while sea-weed, clotting blackly, lifted

surfaceward unshaken by any current, motionless; it was as if he lay on his stomach, staring downward into water into which his gorgon's hair, clotting blackly, hung motionless. Eleven-thirty.

He had lost his body. He could not feel it at all. It was as though vision were a bodiless Eye suspended in dark-blue space, an Eye without Thought, regarding without surprise an antic world where wanton stars galloped neighing like unicorns in blue meadows. . . . After a while, the Eye, having nothing in or by which to close itself, ceased to see, and he waked, thinking that he was being tortured, that his arms were being crushed and wrung from his body.

He dreamed that he had screamed, and finding that to move his arms was an agony equalled only by that of letting them stay where they were, he rolled writhing, chewing his lip. His whole blood took fire: the pain became a swooning ecstasy that swooned away. Yet they still felt like somebody else's arms, even after the pain had gone. He could not even take out his watch, he was afraid he would not be able to climb the fence.

But he achieved this, knowing it was midnight, because the streets lamps had been turned off, and in the personal imminent desertion of the street he slunk, feeling, though there was none to see him, more like a criminal than ever, now that his enterprise was really under way. He walked on trying to bolster his moral courage, trying not to look like a sneaking nigger, but, in spite of him, it seemed that every dark quiet house stared at him, watching him with blank and lightless eyes, making his back itch after he had passed. But what if they do see me? What am I doing, that anyone should not do? Walking along a deserted street after midnight. That's all. But this did not stop the prickling of hair on the back of his neck.

His gait faltered, not quite stopping altogether: near the trunk of a tree, he discerned movement, a thicker darkness. His first impulse was to turn back, then he cursed himself for an excitable fool. Suppose it were someone. He had as much right to the street as the other had — more, if the other were concealing himself. He strode on no longer skulking,

feeling on the contrary quite righteous. As he passed the tree, the thicket darkness shifted slowly. Whoever it was did not wish to be seen. The other evidently feared him more than he did the other, so he passed on boldly. He looked back once or twice, but saw nothing.

Her house was dark, but remembering the shadow behind the tree, and for the sake of general precaution, he passed steadily on. After a block or so he halted, straining his ears. Nothing save the peaceful, unemphatic sounds of night. He crossed the street and stopped again, listening. Nothing. Frogs and crickets, and that was all. He walked in the grass beside the pavement, stealing quiet as a shadow to the corner of her lawn. He climbed the fence and, crouching, stole along beside a hedge until he was opposite the house, where he stopped again. The house was still, unlighted, bulking huge and square in slumber and he sped swiftly from the shadow of the hedge to the shadow of the veranda at the place where a french window gave upon it. He sat down in a flower bed, leaning his back against the wall.

The turned flower bed filled the darkness with the smell of fresh earth, something friendly and personal in a world of enormous vague formless shapes of greater and lesser darkness. The night, the silence, was complete and profound: a formless region filled with the smell of fresh earth and the measured ticking of the watch in his pocket. After a time, he felt soft damp earth through his trousers upon his thighs and he sat in a slow physical content, a oneness with the earth, waiting a sound from the dark house at his back. He heard a sound after a while but it was from the street. He sat still and calm. With the inconsistency of his kind, he felt safer here, where he had no business being, than on the street to which he had every right. The sound, approaching, became two vague figures, and Tobe and the cook passed along the drive towards their quarters, murmuring softly to each other. . . . Soon the night was again vague and vast and empty.

Again he became one with the earth, with dark and silence, with his own body . . . with her body, like a little silver water sweetly dividing . . . turned earth and hyacinths along a veranda, swinging soundless bells. . . . How can breasts be as small as yours, and yet be breasts . . . the dull

gleam of her eyes beneath lowered lids, of her teeth beneath her lip, her arms rising like two sweet wings of a dream. . . . Her body like.

He took breath into himself, holding it. Something came slow and shapeless across the lawn towards him, pausing opposite. He breathed again, held his breath again. The thing moved and came directly towards him and he sat motionless until it had almost reached the flower bed in which he sat. Then he sprang to his feet and before the other could raise a hand he fell upon the intruder, raging silently. The man accepted battle and they fell clawing and panting, making no outcry. They were at such close quarters, it was so dark, that they could not damage each other, and intent on battle, they were oblivious of their surroundings until Jones hissed suddenly beneath George Farr's armpit:

'Look out! Somebody's coming!'

They paused mutually and sat clasping each other like the first position of a sedentary dance. A light had appeared suddenly in a lower window and with one accord they rose and hurled themselves into the shadow of the porch, plunging into the flower bed as Mr Saunders stepped through the window. Crushing themselves against the brick wall, they lay in a mutual passion for concealment, hearing Mr Saunders's feet on the floor above their heads. They held their breath, closing their eyes like ostriches and the man came to the edge of the veranda, and standing directly over them, he shook cigar ashes upon them and spat across their prone bodies . . . after years had passed, he turned and went away.

After a while Jones heaved and George Parr released his cramped body. The light was off again and the house bulked huge and square, sleeping among the trees. They rose and stole across the lawn and after they had passed the frogs and crickets resumed their mild monotonies.

'What—' began George Parr, once they were on the street again. 'Shut up,' Jones interrupted. 'Wait until we are farther away.'

They walked side by side, and George Farr, seething, decided upon what he considered a safe distance. Stopping, he faced the other.

‘What in hell were you doing there?’ he burst out. Jones had dirt on his face and his collar had burst. George Farr’s tie was like a hangman’s noose under his ear and he wiped his face with his handkerchief.

‘What were you doing there?’ Jones countered. ‘None of your damn business,’ he answered hotly. ‘What I ask is, what in hell do you mean, hanging around that house?’ ‘Maybe she asked me to. What do you think of that?’

‘You lie,’ said George Farr, springing upon him. They fought again in the darkness, beneath the arching silence of elms. Jones was like a bear and George Farr, feeling his soft enveloping hug, kicked Jones’s legs from under him. They fell, Jones uppermost, and George lay gasping, with breath driven from his lungs, while Jones held him upon his back. ‘How about it?’ Jones asked, thinking of his shin. ‘Got enough?’

For reply, George Farr heaved and struggled, but the other held him down, thumping his head rhythmically upon the hard earth. ‘Come on, come on. Don’t act like a child. What do we want to fight for?’

‘Take back what you said about her, then,’ he panted. Then he lay still and cursed Jones. Jones, unmoved, repeated: ‘Got enough? Promise?’

George Farr arched his back, writhing, trying vainly to cast off Jones’s fat enveloping bulk. At last he promised in weak rage, almost weeping, and Jones removed his soft weight. George sat up.

‘You better go home,’ Jones advised him, rising to his feet. ‘Come on, get up.’ He took George’s arm and tugged at it. ‘Let go, you bastard!’

‘Funny how things get around,’ remarked Jones mildly, releasing him. George got slowly to his feet and Jones continued: ‘Run along, now. You have been out late enough. Had a fight and everything.’

George Farr, panting, rearranged his clothes. Jones bulked vaguely beside him. ‘Good night,’ said Jones, at last. ‘Goodnight.’

They faced each other and after a time Jones repeated:

‘Good night, I said.’

‘I heard you.’

‘What’s the matter? Not going in now?’

‘Hell, no.’

‘Well, I am.’ He turned away. ‘See you again.’ George Farr followed him, doggedly. Jones, slow and fat, shapeless, in the darkness, remarked: ‘Do you live down this way now? You’ve moved recently, haven’t you?’

‘I live wherever you do tonight,’ George told him, stubbornly.

‘Thanks, awfully. But I have only one bed and I don’t like to sleep double. So I can’t ask you in. Some other time.’

They walked slowly beneath dark trees, in dogged intimacy.

The clock on the courthouse struck one and the stroke died away into silence. After a while Jones stopped again. ‘Look here, what are you following me for?’

‘She didn’t ask you to come there tonight.’

‘How do you know. If she asked you, she would ask someone else.’

‘Listen,’ said George Farr, ‘if you don’t let her alone, I’ll kill you. I swear I will.’

‘Salut,’ murmured Jones. ‘Ave Caesar. . . . Why don’t you tell her father that? Perhaps he’ll let you set up a tent on the lawn to protect her. Now, you go on and let me alone, do you hear?’ George held his ground stubbornly. ‘You want me to beat hell out of you again?’ Jones suggested.

'Try it,' George whispered with dry passion. Jones said:

'Well, we've both wasted this night, anyway. It's too late, now—'

'I'll kill you! She never told you to come at all. You just followed me. I saw you behind that tree. You let her alone, do you hear?'

'In God's name, man! Don't you see that all I want now is sleep? Let's go home, for heaven's sake.'

'You swear you are going home?'

'Yes, yes. I swear. Good night.'

George Farr watched the other's shapeless fading figure, soon it became but a thicker shadow among shadows. Then he turned homeward himself in cooled anger and bitter disappointment and desire. That blundering idiot had interfered this time, perhaps he would interfere every time. Or perhaps she would change her mind, perhaps, since he had failed her tonight. . . . Even Fate envied him this happiness, this unbearable happiness, he thought bitterly. Beneath trees arching the quiet sky, spring loosing her girdle languorous . . . her body, like a narrow pool, sweetly . . . I thought I had lost you, I found you again, and now he. . . . He paused, sharply struck by a thought, an intuition. He turned and sped swiftly back.

He stood near a tree at the corner of the lawn and after a short time he saw something moving shapeless and slow across the faint grass, along a hedge. He strode out boldly and the other saw him and paused, then that one, too, stood erect and came boldly to meet him. Jones joined him, murmuring, 'Oh, hell,' and they stood in static dejection, side by side.

'Well?' challenged George Farr, at last.

Jones sat down heavily on the sidewalk. 'Let's smoke a while,' he suggested, in that impersonal tone which people sitting up with corpses use.

George Farr sat beside him and Jones held a match to his cigarette, then lit his own pipe. He sighed, clouding his head with an unseen pungency of tobacco. George Farr sighed also, resting his back against a tree. The stars swam on like the masthead lights of squadrons and squadrons on a dark river, going on and on. Darkness and silence and a world turning through darkness towards another day. . . . The bark of the tree was rough, the ground was hard. He wished vaguely that he were fat like Jones, temporarily. . . .

. . . Then, waking, it was about to be dawn. He no longer felt the earth and the tree save when he moved. It seemed to him that his thighs must be flattened like a table-top and that his back had assumed depressions into which the projections of the tree trunk fitted like the locked rims of wheels.

There was a rumour of light eastward, somewhere beyond her house and the room where she lay in the soft familiar intimacy of sleep, like a faintly blown trumpet; soon perspective returned to a mysterious world, and instead of being a huge portentous shadow among lesser shadows, Jones was only a fat young man in baggy tweed, white and pathetic and snoring on his back.

George Farr, waking, saw him so, saw earth stains on him and a faint incandescence of dew. George Farr bore earth stains himself and his tie was a hangman's knot beneath his ear. The wheel of the world, slowing through the hours of darkness, passed the dead centre point and gained momentum. After a while Jones opened his eyes, groaning. He rose stiffly, stretching and spitting, yawning.

'Good time to go in, I think,' he said. George Farr, tasting his own sour mouth, moved and felt little pains, like tiny red ants, running over him. He, too, rose and they stood side by side. They yawned again.

Jones turned fatly, limping a little.

'Good night,' he said.

'Good night.'

The east grew yellow, then red, and day had really come into the world, breaking the slumber of sparrows.

4

But Cecily Saunders was not asleep. Lying on her back in her bed, in her dark room she, too, heard the hushed sounds of night, smelled the sweet scents of spring and dark and growing things: the earth, watching the wheel of the world, the terrible calm, inevitability of life, turning through the hours of darkness, passing its dead centre point and turning faster, drawing the waters of dawn up from the hushed cistern of the east, breaking the slumber of sparrows.

5

'May I see him,' she pleaded hysterically, 'may I? Oh, may I, please?' Mrs Powers, seeing her face, said: 'Why, child! What is it? What is it, darling?'

'Alone, alone. Please. May I? May I?'

'Of course. What—'

'Thank you, thank you.' She sped down the hall and crossed the study like a bird.

'Donald, Donald! It's Cecily, sweetheart. Cecily. Don't you know Cecily?'

'Cecily,' he repeated mildly. Then she stopped his mouth with hers, clinging to him.

'I will marry you, I will, I will. Donald, look at me. But you cannot, you cannot see me, can you? But I will marry you, today, any time: Cecily will marry you, Donald. You cannot see me, can you, Donald? Cecily. Cecily.'

'Cecily?' he repeated.

'Oh, your poor, poor face, your blind, scarred face! But I will marry you. They said I wouldn't, that I mustn't, but yes, yes, Donald my dear love!' Mrs Powers, following her, raised her to her feet, removing her arms. 'You might hurt him, you know,' she said.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1

'JOE.'

'Whatcher say, LOOT?'

'I'm going to get married, Joe.'

'Sure you are, Loot. Some day—' tapping himself on the chest.

'What's that, Joe?'

'I say, good luck. You got a fine girl.'

'Cecily . . . Joe?'

'Hello.'

'She'll get used to my face.'

'You're damn right. You face is all right. But easy there, don't knock 'em off. Attaboy,' as the other lowered his fumbling hand.

'What do I have to wear 'em for, Joe? Get married as well without 'em, can't I?'

'I'll be damned if I know why they make you wear 'em. I'll ask Margaret. Here, lemme have 'em,' he said suddenly removing the glasses. 'Damn shame, making you keep 'em on. How's that? Better?'

'Carry on, Joe.'

2

San Francisco, Cal.

24 April 1919

Margaret Dearest,

I miss you so much. If I could only see each other and talk to each other. I sit in my room and I think you are the only woman for me. Girls are not like you they are so young and dumb you can't trust them. I hope you are lonely for me like I am just to know you are sweetheart.

When I kissed you that day I know you are the only woman for me
Margaret.

You cannot trust them. I told her hes Just kidding her he won't get her a
job in the movies. So I sit in my room and outside life goes on just the
same though we are thousand miles apart wanting to see you like hell I
think of how happy we will be. I haven't told my mother yet because
we have been waiting we ought to tell her I think if you think so.

And she will invite you out here and we can be together all day riding
and swimming and dancing and talking to each other. If I can arrange
business affairs I will come for you as soon as I can. It is hell without you
I miss you and I love you like hell.

J

3

It had rained the night before but this morning was soft as a breeze.
Birds across the lawn parabolic from tree to tree mocked him as he
passed lounging and slovenly in his careless unpressed tweeds, and a
tree near the corner of the veranda, turning upward its ceaseless white-
bellied leaves, was a swirling silver veil stood on end, a fountain
arrested forever: carven water.

He saw that black woman in the garden among roses, blowing smoke
upon them from her pursed mouth, bending and sniffing above them,
and he joined her with slow anticipated malice mentally stripping her
straight dark unemphatic dress downward from her straight back over
her firm quiet thighs.

Hearing his feet on the gravel, she looked over her shoulder without
surprise. Her poised cigarette balanced on its tip a wavering plume of
vapour, and Jones said:

'I have come to weep with you.'

She met his stare, saying nothing. Her other hand blanched upon a solid mosaic of red and green, her repose absorbed all motion from her immediate atmosphere so that the plume of her cigarette became rigid as a pencil, flowering its tip into nothingness.

‘I mean your hard luck, losing your intended,’ he explained.

She raised her cigarette and expelled smoke. He lounged nearer, his expensive jacket, which had evidently had no attention since he bought it, sagging to the thrust of his heavy hands, shaping his fat thighs. His eyes were bold and lazy, clear as a goat’s. She got of him an impression of aped intelligence imposed on an innate viciousness; the cat that walks by himself.

‘Who are your people, Mr Jones?’ she asked after a while.

‘I am the world’s little brother. I probably have a bar sinister in my ‘scutcheon. In spite of me, my libido seems to be a complex regarding decency.’

What does that mean? she wondered. ‘What is your escutcheon, then?’

‘One newspaper-wrapped bundle couchant and rampant, one doorstep stone, on a field noir and damned froid. Device: Quand mangerai-je?’

‘Oh. A foundling.’ She smoked again.

‘I believe that is the term. It is too bad we are contemporary: you might have found the thing yourself. I would not have thrown you down.’

‘Thrown me down?’

‘You can never tell just exactly how dead these soldiers are, can you? You think you have him and then the devil reveals as much idiocy as a normal sane person, doesn’t he?’

She skilfully pinched the coal from her cigarette end and flipped the stub in a white twinkling arc, grinding the coal under her toe. ‘If that was an implied compliment—’

‘Only fools imply compliments. The wise man comes right out with it, point-blank. Imply criticism — unless the criticized is not within ear-shot.’

‘It seems to me that is a rather precarious doctrine for one who is — if you will pardon me — not exactly a combative sort.’

‘Combative?’

‘Well, a fighting man, then. I can’t imagine you lasting very long in an encounter with — say Mr Gilligan.’

‘Does that imply that you have taken Mr Gilligan as a — protector?’

‘No more than it implies that I expect compliments from you. For all your intelligence, you seem to have acquired next to no skill with women.’

Jones, remote and yellowly unfathomable, stared at her mouth. ‘For instance?’

‘For instance. Miss Saunders,’ she said, wickedly. ‘You seem to have let her get away from you, don’t you?’

‘Miss Saunders,’ repeated Jones, counterfeiting surprise, admiring the way she had turned the tables on him without reverting to sex, ‘my dear lady, can you imagine anyone making love to her? Epicene. Of course it is different with a man practically dead,’ he added, ‘he probably doesn’t care much whom he marries, nor whether or not he marries at all.’

‘No? I understood from your conduct the day I arrived that you had your eye on her. But perhaps I was mistaken after all.’

‘Granted I had: you and I seem to be in the same fix now, don’t we?’

She pinched through the stem of a rose, feeling him quite near her. Without looking at him she said:

‘You have already forgotten what I told you, haven’t you?’

He did not reply. She released her rose and moved slightly away from him. ‘That you have no skill in seduction. Don’t you know I can see what you are leading up to — that you and I should console one another? That’s too childish, even for you. I have had to play at too many of

these sexual acrostics with poor boys whom I respected even if I didn't like them.' The rose splashed redly against the front of her dark dress. She secured it with a pin.

'Let me give you some advice,' she continued sharply, 'the next time you try to seduce anyone, don't do it with talk, with words. Women know more about words than men ever will. And they know how little they can ever possibly mean.'

Jones removed his yellow stare. His next move was quite feminine: he turned and lounged away without a word. For he had seen Emmy beyond the garden hanging washed clothes upon a line. Mrs Powers, looking after his slouching figure, said Oh. She had just remarked Emmy raising garments to a line with formal gestures, like a Greek masque.

She watched Jones approach Emmy, saw Emmy, when she heard his step, poise a half-raised cloth in a formal arrested gesture, turning her head across her reverted body. Damn the beast, Mrs Powers thought, wondering whether or not to follow and interfere. But what good would it do? He'll only come back later.

And playing Cerberus to Emmy. . . . She removed her gaze and saw Gilligan approaching. He blurted:

'Damn that girl. Do you know what I think? I think she—'

'What girl?'

'What's her name, Saunders. I think she's scared of something. She acts like she might have got herself into a jam of some kind and is trying to get out of it by taking the loot right quick. Scared. Flopping around like a fish.'

'Why don't you like her, Joe? You don't want her to marry him.'

'No, it ain't that. It just frets me to see her change her mind every twenty minutes.' He offered her a cigarette which she refused and lit one himself. 'I'm jealous, I guess,' he said, after a time, 'seeing the loot getting married when neither of 'em want to 'specially, while I can't get my girl at all. . . .'

'What, Joe? You married?'

He looked at her steadily. 'Don't talk like that. You know what I mean.'

'Oh, Lord. Twice in one hour.' His gaze was so steady, so serious, that she looked quickly away.

'What's that?' she asked. She took the rose from her dress and slipped it into his lapel.

'Joe, what is that beast hanging around here for?'

'Who? What beast?' He followed her eyes. 'Oh. That damn feller. I'm going to beat hell out of him on principle, some day. I don't like him.'

'Neither do I. Hope I'm there to see you do it.'

'Has he been bothering you?' he asked quickly. She gave him her steady gaze.

'Do you think he could?'

'That's right,' he admitted. He looked at Jones and Emmy again. 'That's another thing. That Saunders girl lets him fool around her. I don't like anybody that will stand for him.'

'Don't be silly, Joe. She's just young and more or less of a fool about men.'

'If that's your polite way of putting it, I agree with you.' His eyes touched her smooth cheek blackly winged by her hair. 'If you had let a man think you was going to marry him you wouldn't blow hot and cold like that.'

She stared away across the garden and he repeated: 'Would you, Margaret?'

'You are a fool yourself, Joe. Only you are a nice fool.' She met his intent gaze and he said Margaret? She put her swift strong hand on his arm. 'Don't Joe. Please.'

He rammed his hands in his pockets, turning away. They walked on in silence.

Spring, like a soft breeze, was in the rector's fringe of hair as with upflung head he tramped the porch like an old war-horse who hears again a trumpet after he had long thought all wars were done. Birds in a wind across the lawn, parabolic from tree to tree, and a tree at the corner of the house turning upward its white-bellied leaves in a passionate arrested rush: it and the rector faced each other in ecstasy. A friend came morosely along the path from the kitchen door.

'Good morning, Mr Jones,' the rector boomed, scattering sparrows from the screening vine. The tree to his voice took a more unbearable ecstasy, its twinkling leaves swirled in a never-escaping silver skyward rush.

Jones, nursing his hand, replied Good morning in a slow obese anger. He mounted the steps and the rector bathed him in a hearty exuberance.

'Come 'round to congratulate us on the good news, eh? Fine, my boy, fine, fine. Yes, everything is arranged at last. Come in, come in.'

Emmy flopped on to the veranda belligerently. 'Uncle Joe,' she said, shooting at Jones a hot exulting glance. Jones, nursing his hand, glowered at her. (God damn you, you'll suffer for this.)

'Eh? What is it, Emmy?'

'Mr Saunders is on the phone: he wants to know if you'll see him this morning.' (I showed you! Teach you to fool with me.)

'Ah, yes. Mr Saunders coming to discuss plans for the marriage, Mr Jones.'

'Yes, sir.' (I'll fix you.)

'What'll I tell him?' (Do it, if you think you can. You have never come off very well yet. You fat worm.)

'Tell him, by all means, that I had intended calling upon him myself. Yes, indeed. Ah, Mr Jones, we are all to be congratulated this morning.'

'Yes, sir.' (You little slut.)

'Tell him, by all means, Emmy.'

'All right.' (I told you I'd do it! I told you you can't fool with me. Didn't I, now?)

'And, Emmy, Mr Jones will be with us for lunch. A celebration is in order, eh, Mr Jones?'

'Without doubt. We all have something to celebrate.' (That's what makes me so damn mad: you said you would and I let you do it. Slam a door on my hand! Damn YOU to hell.)

'All right. He can stay if he wants to.' (Damn you to hell.) Emmy arrowed him another hot exulting glance and slammed the door as a parting shot.

The rector tramped heavily, happily, like a boy. 'Ah, Mr Jones, to be as young as he is, to have your life circumscribed, moved hither and yonder at the vacillations of such delightful pests. Women, women! How charming never to know exactly what you want! While we men are always so sure we do. Dullness, dullness, Mr Jones. Perhaps that's why we like them, yet cannot stand very much of them. What do you think?'

Jones, glumly silent, nursing his hand, said after a while: 'I don't know. But it seemed to me your son has had extraordinarily good luck with his women.'

'Yes?' the rector said, with interest. 'How so?'

'Well (I think you told me that he was once involved with Emmy?), well, he no longer remembers Emmy (damn her soul: slam a door on me) and now he is about to become involved with another whom he will not even have to look at. What more could one ask than that?'

The rector looked at him keenly and kindly a moment. 'You have retained several of your youthful characteristics, Mr Jones.'

'What do you mean?' asked Jones, with defensive belligerence. A car drew up to the gate, and after Mr Saunders had descended, drove away.

'One in particular: that of being unnecessarily and pettily brutal about rather insignificant things. Ah,' he added, looking up, 'here is Mr Saunders. Excuse me, will you? You will probably find Mrs Powers and Mr Gilligan in the garden,' he said, over his shoulder, greeting his caller.

Jones, in a vindictive rage, saw them shake hands. They ignored him, and he lounged viciously past them seeking his pipe. It eluded him and he cursed it slowly, beating at his various pockets.

'I had intended calling upon you today.' The rector took his caller affectionately by the elbow. 'Come in, come in.'

Mr Saunders allowed himself to be propelled across the veranda. Murmuring a conventional response the rector herded him heartily beneath the fanlight, down the dark hall, and into the study, without noticing the caller's air of uncomfortable reserve. He moved a chair for the guest and took his own seat at the desk. Through the window he could see a shallow section of the tree that, unseen but suggested, swirled upward in an ecstasy of never-escaping silver-bellied leaves.

The rector's swivel chair protested, tilting. 'Ah, yes, you smoke cigars, I recall. Matches at your elbow.'

Mr Saunders rolled his cigar slowly in his fingers. At last he made up his mind and lit it.

'Well, the young people have taken things out of our hands, eh?' the rector spoke around his pipe stem. 'I will say now that I have long desired it, and, frankly, I have expected it. Though I would not have insisted, knowing Donald's condition. But as Cecily herself desires it—'

'Yes, yes,' agreed Mr Saunders, slowly. The rector did not notice.

'You, I know, have been a staunch advocate of it all along. Mrs Powers repeated your conversation to me.'

'Yes, that's right.'

'And do you know, I look for this marriage to be better than a medicine for him. Not my own idea,' he added, in swift explanation. 'Frankly, I was sceptical but Mrs Powers and Joe — Mr Gilligan — advanced it first, and the surgeon from Atlanta convinced us all. He assured us that Cecily could do as much if not more for him than anyone.'

These were his very words, if I recall correctly. And now, since she desires it so much, since you and her mother support her. . . . Do you know,' he slapped his caller upon the shoulder, 'do you know, were I a betting man I would wager that we will not know the boy in a year's time!'

Mr Saunders had trouble getting his cigar to burn properly. He bit the end from it savagely, then wreathing his head in smoke he blurted: 'Mrs Saunders seems to have a few doubts yet.' He fanned the smoke away and saw the rector's huge face gone grey and quiet. 'Not objections, exactly, you understand,' he added, hurriedly, apologetically. Damn the woman, why couldn't she have come herself instead of sending him?

The divine made a clicking sound. 'This is bad. I had not expected this.'

'Oh, I am sure we can convince her, you and I. Especially with Sis on our side.' He had forgotten his own scruples, forgotten that he did not want his daughter to marry anyone.

'This is bad,' the rector repeated, hopelessly.

'She will not refuse her consent,' Mr Saunders lied hastily. 'It is only that she is not convinced as to its soundness, considering Do — Cecily's — Cecily's youth, you see,' he finished with inspiration. 'On the contrary, in fact. I only brought it up so that we could have a clear understanding. Don't you think it is best to know all the facts?'

'Yes, yes.' The rector was having trouble with his own tobacco. He put his pipe aside, pushing it away. He rose and tramped heavily along the worn path in the rug.

'I am sorry,' said Mr Saunders.
(This was Donald, my son. He is dead.)

'But come, come. We are making a mountain out of a molehill,' the rector exclaimed at last without conviction. 'As you say, if the girl wants to marry Donald I am sure her mother will not refuse her consent. What do you think? Shall we call on her? Perhaps she does not understand the situation, that — that they care for each other so much. She has not seen Donald since he returned, and you know how rumours get about. . . .' (This was Donald, my son. He is dead.)

He paused mountainous and shapeless in his casual black, yearning upon the other. Mr Saunders rose from his chair, and the rector took, his arm, lest he escape.

'Yes, that is best. We will see her together and talk it over thoroughly before we make a definite decision. Yes, yes,' the rector repeated, flogging his own failing conviction, spurring it. 'This afternoon, then?'

'This afternoon,' Mr Saunders agreed.

'Yes, that is our proper course. I'm sure she does not understand. You don't think she fully understands?' (This was Donald, my son. He is dead.)

'Yes, yes,' Mr Saunders agreed in his turn.

Jones found his pipe at last and nursing his bruised hand he filled and lit it.

She had just met Mrs Worthington in a store and they had discussed putting up plums. Then Mrs Worthington, saying good-bye, waddled away slowly to her car. The Negro driver helped her in with efficient detachment and shut the door.

I'm spryer than her, thought Mrs Burney exultantly, watching the other's gouty painful movement. Spite of she's rich and got a car, she added, feeling better through malice, suppressing her own bone-aches, walking spryer than the rich one. Spite of she's got money. And here approaching was that strange woman staying at Parson Mahon's, the one that come here with him and that other man, getting herself talked about, and right. The one everybody expected to marry him and that he had throwed down for that boy-chasing Saunders girl.

'Well,' she remarked with comfortable curiosity, peering up into the white calm face of the tall dark woman in her dark dress with its immaculate cuffs and collar. 'I hear you are going to have a marriage up at your house. That's so nice for Donald. He's quite sweet on her, ain't he?'

'Yes. They were engaged for a long time, you know.'

'Yes, they was. But folks never thought she'd wait for him, let alone take him sick and scratched up like he is. She's had lots of chances, since.'

'Folks think lots of things that aren't true,' Mrs Powers reminded her. But Mrs Burney was intent on her own words.

'Yes, she's had lots of chances. But then Donald has too, ain't he?' she asked cunningly.

'I don't know. You see, I haven't known him very long.'

'Oh, you ain't? Folks all thought you and him was old friends, like.' Mrs Powers looked down at her neat cramped figure in its air-proof black without replying.

Mrs Burney sighed. 'Well, marriages is nice. My boy never married. Like's not he would by now: girls was all crazy about him, only he went to war so young.' Her peering, salacious curiosity suddenly left her. 'You heard about my boy?' she asked with yearning.

'Yes, they told me, Dr Mahon did. He was a good soldier, wasn't he?'

'Yes. And them folks got him killed with just a lot of men around: nobody to do nothing for him. Seems like they might of took him into a house where womenfolks could have eased him.

Them others come back spry and bragging much as you please. Trust them officers and things not to get hurt!' Her washed blue eyes brooded across the quiet square. After a time she said: 'You never lost no one you loved in the war, did you?'

'No,' Mrs Powers answered, gently.

'I never thought so,' the other stated fretfully. 'You don't look like it, so tall and pretty. But then, most didn't. He was so young,' she explained, 'so brave. . . .' She fumbled with her umbrella. Then she said briskly: 'Mahon's boy come back, anyway. That's something 'Specially as he's taking a bride.' She became curious again, obscene: 'He's all right, ain't he?'

'All right?'

'I mean for marriage. He ain't — it's just — I mean a man ain't no right to palm himself off on a woman if he ain't—'

'Good morning,' said Mrs Powers curtly, leaving her cramped and neat in her meticulous air-proof black, holding her cotton umbrella like a flag, stubborn, refusing to surrender.

6

'You fool, you idiot, marrying a blind man, a man with nothing, practically dead.'

'He is not! He is not!'

‘What do you call him then? Aunt Callie Nelson was here the other day saying that the white folks had killed him.’

‘You know nigger talk doesn’t mean anything. They probably wouldn’t let her worry him, so she says he—’

‘Nonsense. Aunt Callie has raised more children than I can count. If she says he is sick, he is sick.’

‘I don’t care. I am going to marry him.’

Mrs Saunders sighed creakingly. Cecily stood before her, flushed and obstinate. ‘Listen, honey. If you marry him you are throwing yourself away, all your chances, all your youth and prettiness, all the men that like you: men who are good matches.’

‘I don’t care,’ she repeated, stubbornly.

‘Think. There are so many you can have for the taking, so much you can have: a big wedding in Atlanta with all your friends for bridesmaids, clothes, a wedding trip. . . . And then to throw yourself away. After your father and I have done so much for you.’

‘I don’t care. I am going to marry him.’

‘But, why? Do you love him?’

‘Yes, yes!’

‘That scar, too?’

Cecily’s face blanched as she stared at her mother. Her eyes became dark and she raised her hand delicately. Mrs Saunders took her hand and drew her resisting on to her lap. Cecily protested tautly but her mother held her, drawing her head down to her shoulder, smoothing her hair. ‘I’m sorry, baby. I didn’t mean to say that. But tell me what it is.’

Her mother would not fight fair. She knew this with anger, but the older woman’s tactics scattered her defences of anger: she knew she

was about to cry. Then it would be all up. 'Let me go,' she said, struggling, hating her mother's unfairness.

'Hush, hush. There now, lie here and tell me what it is. You must have some reason.'

She ceased to struggle and became completely lax. 'I haven't. I just want to marry him. Let me go. Please, mamma.'

'Cecily, did your father put this idea in your head?'

She shook her head and her mother turned her face up. 'Look at me.' They stared at each other, and Mrs Saunders repeated: 'Tell me what your reason is.'

'I can't.'

'You mean you won't?'

'I can't tell you.' She slipped suddenly from her mother's lap but Mrs Saunders held her kneeling against her knee. 'I won't,' she cried, struggling. The other held her tightly. 'You are hurting me!' 'Tell me.'

Cecily wrenched herself free and stood. 'I can't tell you. I have just got to marry him.'

'Got to marry him? What do you mean?' She stared at her daughter, gradually remembering old rumours about Mahon, gossip she had forgot. 'Got to marry him? Do you mean that you — that a daughter of mine — with a blind man, a man who has nothing, a pauper — ?'

Cecily stared at her mother and her face flamed. 'You think — you said that to — Oh, you're not my mother: you are somebody else.' Suddenly she cried like a child, wide-mouthed, not even hiding her face. She whirled running. 'Don't ever speak to me again,' she gasped and fled wailing up the stairs. And a door slammed.

Mrs Saunders sat thinking, tapping her teeth monotonously with a finger-nail. After a while she rose, and going to the telephone, she called her husband downtown.

7

Voices

The Town:

I wonder what that woman that came home with him thinks about it, now he's taken another one. If I were that Saunders girl I wouldn't take a man that brought another woman right up to my door, you might say. And that new one, what'll she do now? Go away and get another man, I guess. Hope she'll learn enough to get a well one this time. . . . Funny goings-on in that house. And a preacher of the gospel, too. Even if he is Episcopal. If he wasn't such a nice man. . . .

George Farr:

It isn't true, Cecily, darling, sweetheart. You can't, you can't. After your body prone and narrow as a pool dividing. . . .

The Town:

I hear that boy of Mahon's, that hurt fellow, and that girl of Saunders's are going to get married. My wife said they never would, but I said all the time . . .

Mrs Burney:

Men don't know. They should of looked out for him better. Saying he never wanted for nothing. . . .

George Farr:

Cecily, Cecily. . . . Is this death?

The Town:

There's that soldier that came with Mahon. I guess that woman will take him now. But maybe she don't have to. He might have been saving time himself.

Well, wouldn't you, if you was him?

Sergeant Madden:

Powers. Powers. . . . A man's face spitted like a moth on a lance of flame. Powers. . . . Rotten luck for her.

Mrs Burney:

Dewey, my boy. . . .

Sergeant Madden:

No, ma'am. He was all right. We did all we could. . . .

Cecily Saunders:

Yes, yes, Donald. I will. I will! I will get used to your poor face, Donald!

George, my dear love, take me away, George!

Sergeant Madden:

Yes, yes, he was all right. . . . A man on a fire-step, screaming with fear.

George Farr:

Cecily, how could you? How could you?

The Town:

That girl . . . time she was took in hand by somebody. Running around town nearly nekkid. Good thing he's blind, ain't it?

Guess she hopes he'll stay blind, too. . . .

Margaret Powers:

No, no, good-bye, dear dead Dick, ugly dead Dick. . . .

Joe Gilligan:

He is dying, he gets the women he doesn't want even, while I am not dying. . . . Margaret, what shall I do? What can I say?

Emmy:

Come here, Emmy? Ah, come to me, Donald. But he is dead.

Cecily Saunders:

George, my lover, my poor dear. . . . What have we done?

Mrs Burney:

Dewey, Dewey, so brave, so young. . . .

(This was Donald, my son. He is dead.)

8

Mrs Powers mounted the stairs under Mrs Saunders's curious eyes. The older woman had been cold, almost rude, but Mrs Powers had won her point, and choosing Cecily's door from her mother's directions she knocked.

After a while she knocked again and called: 'Miss Saunders.'
Silence was again a hushed tense interval, then Cecily's muffled voice came through the door:

'Go away.'

'Please,' she insisted. 'I want to see you a moment.'

'No, no. Go away.'

'But I must see you.' There was no reply and she added: 'I have just talked to your mother, and to Dr Mahon. Let me come in, won't you?' She heard movement, a bed, then another interval. Fool, taking time to powder her face. But you would, too, she told herself. The door opened under her hand.

Powder only made the traces of tears more visible, and Cecily turned her back as Mrs Powers entered the room. She could see the indentation of a body on the bed, and a crumpled pillow. Mrs Powers, not being offered a chair, sat on the foot of the bed, and Cecily, across the room, leaning in a window and staring out, said ungraciously: 'What do you want?'

How like her this room is! thought the caller, observing pale maple and a triple mirrored dressing-table bearing a collection of fragile crystal, and delicate clothing carelessly about on chairs, on the floor. On a chest of drawers was a small camera picture, framed.

'May I look?' she asked, knowing instinctively who it was. Cecily, stubbornly presenting her back in a thin formless garment through

which light from the window passed revealing her narrow torso, made no reply. Mrs Powers approached and saw Donald Mahon, bareheaded, in a shabby unbuttoned tunic, standing before a corrugated iron wall, carrying a small resigned dog casually by the scruff of the neck, like a handbag.

‘That’s so typical of him, isn’t it?’ she commented. Cecily said rudely: ‘What do you want with me?’

‘That’s exactly what your mother asked me, you know. She seemed to think I was interfering also.’

‘Well, aren’t you? Nobody asked you to come here.’ Cecily turned, leaning her hip against the window ledge.

‘I don’t think it’s interference when it’s warranted though. Do you?’

‘Warranted? Who asked you to interfere? Did Donald do it, or are you trying to scare me off? You needn’t tell me Donald asked you to get him out of it: it will be a lie.’

‘But I’m not: I don’t intend to. I’m trying to help you both.’

‘Oh, you are against me. Everybody’s against me, except Donald. And you keep him shut up like a — prisoner.’ She turned quickly and leaned her head against the window.

Mrs Powers sat quietly examining her, her frail revealed body under the silly garment she wore — a webby cloying thing worse than nothing and a fit complement to the single belaced garment it revealed above the long hushed gleams of her stockings . . .

If Cellini had been a hermit-priest he might have imagined her, Mrs Powers thought, wishing mildly she could see the other naked. At last she rose from the bed and crossed to the window.

Cecily kept her head stubbornly averted, and expecting tears, she touched the girl’s shoulder. ‘Cecily,’ she said, quietly.

Cecily's green eyes were dry, stony, and she moved swiftly across the room with her delicate narrow stride. She stood holding the door open. Mrs Powers, at the window, did not accept. Did she ever, ever forget herself? she wondered, observing the studied grace of the girl's body turned on the laxed ball of a thigh.

Cecily met her gaze with one of haughty commanding scorn. 'Won't you even leave the room when you are asked?' she said, making her swift, coarse voice sound measured and cold.

Mrs Powers thinking O hell, what's the use? moved so as to lean her thigh against the bed. Cecily, without changing her position, moved the door for emphasis. Standing quietly, watching her studied fragility (her legs are rather sweet, she admitted, but why all this posing for me? I'm not a man) Mrs Powers ran her palm slowly along the smooth wood of the bed. Suddenly the other slammed the door and returned to the window. Mrs Powers followed.

'Cecily, why can't we talk about it sensibly?' The girl made no reply, ignoring her, crumpling the curtain in her fingers. 'Miss Saunders?'

'Why can't you let me alone?' Cecily flared suddenly, flaming out at her. 'I don't want to talk to you about it. Why do you come to me?' Her eyes darkened: they were no longer hard. 'If you want him, take him, then. You have every chance you could want, keeping him shut up there so that even I can't see him!'

'But I don't want him. I am trying to straighten things out for him. Don't you know that if I had wanted him I would have married him before I brought him home?'

'You tried it, and couldn't. That's why you didn't. Oh, don't say it wasn't,' she rushed on as the other would have spoken. 'I saw it that first day. That you were after him. And if you aren't, why do you keep on staying here?'

'You know that's a lie,' Mrs Powers replied, calmly.

'Then what makes you so interested in him, if you aren't in love with him?'

(This is hopeless.) She put her hand on the other's arm. Cecily shrank quickly away and she returned to lean again against the bed. She said: 'Your mother is against this, and Donald's father expects it. But what chance will you have against your mother?' (Against yourself?)

'I certainly don't need any advice from you,' Cecily turned her head, her haughtiness, her anger, were gone and in their place was a thin hopeless despair. Even her voice, her whole attitude, had changed. 'Don't you see how miserable I am?' she said, pitifully. 'I didn't mean to be rude to you, but I know what to do. I don't know. . . . I am in such trouble: something terrible has happened to me. Please!'

Mrs Powers, seeing her face, went to her quickly, putting her arm about the girl's narrow shoulders. Cecily avoided her. 'Please, please go.' 'Tell me what it is.'

'No, no, I can't. Please—'

They paused, listening. Footsteps approaching, stopped beyond the door: a knock, and her father's voice called her name.

'Yes?'

'Dr Mahon is downstairs. Can you come down?'

The two women stared at each other.

'Come,' Mrs Powers said.

Cecily's eyes went dark again and she whispered. 'No, no, no!' trembling.

'Sis,' her father repeated.

'Say yes,' Mrs Powers whispered.

'Yes, daddy. I'm coming.'

'All right.' The footsteps retreated and Mrs Powers drew Cecily towards the door. The girl resisted.

'I can't go like this,' she said, hysterically.

‘Yes, you can. It’s all right. Come.’

Mrs Saunders, sitting militant, formal, and erect upon her chair, was saying as they entered:

‘May I ask what this — this woman has to do with it?’

Her husband chewed a cigar. Light falling upon the rector’s face held it like a grey bitten mask. Cecily ran to him. ‘Uncle Joe!’ she cried.

‘Cecily!’ her mother said, sharply. ‘What do you mean, coming down like that?’

The rector rose, huge and black, embracing her. ‘Uncle Joe!’ she repeated, clinging to him.

‘Now, Robert,’ Mrs Saunders began. But the rector interrupted her.

‘Cecily,’ he said, raising her face. She twisted her chin and hid her face against his coat.

‘Robert,’ said Mrs Saunders.

The rector spoke greyly. ‘Cecily, we have talked it over together, and we think — your mother and father—’

She moved in her silly, revealing garment, ‘Daddy?’ she exclaimed, staring at her father. He would not meet her gaze but sat slowly twisting his cigar. The rector continued:

‘We think that you will only — that you — They say that Donald is going to die, Cecily,’ he finished.

Lithe as a sapling she thrust herself backward against his arm, bending, to see his face, staring at him. ‘Oh, Uncle Joe! Have you gone back on me, too?’ she cried, passionately.

9

George Farr had been quite drunk for a week. His friend, the drug clerk, thought that he was going crazy. He had become a local landmark, a

tradition: even the town soaks began to look upon him with respect, calling him by his given name, swearing undying devotion to him.

In the intervals of belligerent or rollicking or maudlin inebriation he knew periods of devastating despair like a monstrous bliss, like that of a caged animal, of a man being slowly tortured to death: a minor monotony of pain. As a rule, though, he managed to stay fairly drunk. Her narrow body sweetly dividing naked . . . have another drink. . . . I'll kill you if you keep on fooling around her . . . my girl, my girl . . . her narrow . . . 'nother drink . . . oh, God, oh, God . . . sweetly dividing for another . . . have drink, what hell I care, oh, God, oh, God, oh, God, oh, God. . . .

Though 'nice' people no longer spoke to him on the streets he was, after a fashion, cared for and protected by casual acquaintances and friends both black and white, as in the way of small towns particularly and of the 'inferior' classes anywhere.

He sat glassy-eyed among fried smells, among noises, at an oilcloth-covered table.

'Clu — hoverrrrrr blarrrr — sums, clo — ver blarrrr — summmzzzz,' sang a nasal voice terribly, the melody ticked off at spaced intervals by a small monotonous sound, like a clock-bomb going off. Like this: Clo (tick) ver (tick) rrr (tick) (tick) bl (tick) rrs (tick) sss (tick) umm (tick) zzz.

Beside him sat two of his new companions, quarrelling, spitting, holding hands, and weeping over the cracked interminability of the phonograph record. 'Clo — verrrr blar — sums,' it repeated with saccharine passion; when it ran down they repaired to a filthy alley behind the filthier kitchen to drink of George Farr's whisky. Then they returned and played the record through again, clutching hands while frank tears slid down their otherwise unwashed cheeks. 'Clooooooover blaiaaaarsummmssss. . . .'

Truly vice is a dull and decorous thing: no life in the world is as hard, requiring so much sheer physical and moral strength as the so-called 'primrose path'. Being 'good' is much less trouble.

'Clo — ver blar — sums. . . .'

. . . After a while his attention was called to the fact that someone had been annoying him for some time. Focusing his eyes he at last recognized the proprietor in an apron on which he must have dried his dishes for weeks. 'What'n 'ell y' want?' he asked, with feeble liquid belligerence, and the man finally explained to him that he was wanted on the telephone in a neighbouring drugstore. He rose, pulling himself together.

'Clu — hoooooover blar — sums. . . .'

After a few years he languished from a telephone mouthpiece holding himself erect, watching without interest a light globe over the prescription desk describing slow concentric circles.

'George?' There was something in the unknown voice speaking his name, such anguish, as to almost shock him sober. 'George.'

'This George . . . hello. . . .'

'George, it's Cecily. Cecily. . . .'

Drunkenness left him like a retreating wave. He could feel his heart stop, then surge, deafening him, blinding him with his own blood.

'George. . . . Do you hear me?' (Ah, George, to have been drunk now!) (Cecily, oh, Cecily!) 'Yes! Yes!' gripping the instrument as though this would keep her against escape. 'Yes, Cecily?'

Cecily! It's George. . . .'

'Come to me, now. At once.'

'Yes, yes. Now?'

'Come, George, darling. Hurry, hurry. . . .'

'Yes!' he cried again. 'Hello, hello!' The line made no response. He waited but it was dead. His heart pounded and pounded, hotly; he could taste his own hot bitter blood in his throat. (Cecily, oh, Cecily!)

He plunged down the length of the store and, while a middle-aged clerk filling a prescription poised his bottle to watch in dull amazement, George Farr tore his shirt open at the throat and thrust his whole head beneath a gushing water tap in a frenzy of activity.

(Cecily, oh, Cecily!)

10

He seemed so old, so tired, as he sat at the head of the table toying with his food, as if the very fibre of him had lost all resilience. Gilligan ate with his usual informal appetite and Donald and Emmy sat side by side so that Emmy could help him.

Emmy enjoyed mothering him, now that she could never have him again for a lover; she objected with passionate ardour when Mrs Powers offered to relieve her. The Donald she had known was dead; this one was but a sorry substitute, but Emmy was going to make the best of it, as women will. She had even got accustomed to taking her food after it had cooled.

Mrs Powers sat watching them. Emmy's shock of no-particular-colour hair was near his worn head in intent devotion, her labour-worried hand seemed to have an eye of its own, so quick, so tender, it was to anticipate him and guide his hand with the food she had prepared for him. Mrs Powers wondered which Donald Emmy loved the more, wondering if she had not perhaps forgotten the former one completely save as a symbol of sorrow. Then the amazing logical thought occurred to her that here was the woman for Donald to marry.

Of course it was. Why had no one thought of that before? Then she told herself that no one had done very much thinking during the whole affair, that it had got on without any particular drain on any

intelligence. Why did we take it for granted that he must marry Cecily, and no other? Yet we all accepted it as an arbitrary fact and off we went with our eyes closed and our mouths open, like hounds in full cry.

But would Emmy take him? Wouldn't she be so frightened at the prospect that she'd be too selfconscious with him afterward to care for him as skilfully as she does now; wouldn't it cause her to confuse in her mind to his detriment two separate Donalds — a lover and an invalid? I wonder what Joe will think about it.

She looked at Emmy impersonal as Omnipotence, helping Donald with effacing skill, seeming to envelop him, yet never touching him. Anyway, I'll ask her, she thought, sipping her tea.

Night was come.

Tree-frogs, remembering last night's rain, resumed their monotonous moulding of liquid beads of sound; grass blades and leaves losing shapes of solidity gained shapes of sound: the still suspire of earth, of the ground preparing for slumber; flowers by day, spikes of bloom, became, with night, spikes of scent; the silver tree at the corner of the house hushed its never-still never-escaping ecstasy. Already toads hopped along concrete pavements drinking prisoned heat through their dragging bellies.

Suddenly the rector started from his dream. 'Tut, tut. We are making mountains from mole hills, as usual. If she wants to marry Donald I am sure her people will not withhold their consent always. Why should they object to their daughter marrying him? Do you know—'

'Hush!' she said. He looked up at her startled, then, seeing her warning glance touch Mahon's oblivious head, he understood. She saw Emmy's wide shocked eyes on her and she rose at her place. 'You are through, aren't you?' she said to the rector. 'Suppose we go to the study.'

Mahon sat quiet, chewing. She could not tell whether or not he heard. She passed behind Emmy and leaning to her whispered 'I want to speak to you. Don't say anything to Donald.'

The rector, preceding her, fumbled the light on in the study. 'You must be careful,' she told him, 'how you talk before him, how you tell him.'

'Yes,' he agreed apologetically. 'I was so deep in thought.'

'I know you were. I don't think it is necessary to tell him at all, until he asks.'

'And that will never be. She loves Donald: she will not let her people prevent her marrying him. I am not customarily in favour of such a procedure as instigating a young woman to marry against her parents' wishes, but in this case. . . . You do not think that I am inconsistent, that I am partial because my son is involved?'

'No, no. Of course not.'

'Don't you agree with me, that Cecily will insist on the wedding?'

'Yes, indeed.' What else could she say?

Gilligan and Mahon had gone, and Emmy was clearing the table when she returned. Emmy whirled upon her.

'She ain't going to take him? What was Uncle Joe saying?'

'Her people don't like the idea. That's all. She hasn't refused. But I think we had better stop it now, Emmy. She has changed her mind so often nobody can tell what she'll do.'

Emmy turned back to the table, lowering her head, scraping a plate. Mrs Powers watched her busy elbow, hearing the little clashing noises of china and silver. A bowl of white roses shattered slowly upon the centre of the table.

'What do you think, Emmy?'

'I don't know,' Emmy replied, sullenly. 'She ain't my kind. I don't know nothing about it.'

Mrs Powers approached the table. 'Emmy,' she said. The other did not raise her head, made no reply. She turned the girl gently by the shoulder. 'Would you marry him, Emmy?'

Emmy straightened hotly, clutching a plate and a fork. 'Me? Me marry him? Me take another's leavings? (Donald, Donald.) And her leavings, at that, her that's run after every boy in town, dressed up in her silk clothes?'

Mrs Powers moved back to the door and Emmy scraped dishes fiercely. This plate became blurred, she blinked and saw something splash on it. She shan't see me cry! she whispered passionately, bending her head lower, waiting for Mrs Powers to ask her again. (Donald, Donald. . . .)

When she was young, going to school in the spring, having to wear coarse dresses and shoes while other girls wore silk and thin leather; being not pretty at all while other girls were pretty —

Walking home to where work awaited her while other girls were riding in cars or having ice-cream or talking to boys and dancing with them, with boys that had no use for her; sometimes he would step out beside her, so still, so quick, all of a sudden — and she didn't mind not having silk.

And when they swam and fished and roamed the woods together she forgot she wasn't pretty, even. Because he was beautiful, with his body all brown and quick, so still . . . making her feel beautiful, too.

And when he said Come here, Emmy, she went to him, and wet grass and dew under her and over her his head with the whole sky for a crown, and the moon running on them like water that wasn't wet and that you couldn't feel. . . .

Marry him? Yes! Yes! Let him be sick: she would cure him; let him be a Donald that had forgotten her — she had not forgotten: she could remember enough for both of them. Yes! Yes! she cried, soundlessly, stacking dishes, waiting for Mrs Powers to ask her again.

Her red hands were blind, tears splashed fatly on her wrists. Yes! Yes! trying to think it so loudly that the other must hear. She shan't see me cry! she whispered again. But the other woman only stood in the door

watching her busy back. So she gathered up the dishes slowly, there being no reason to linger any longer. Keeping her head averted she carried the dishes to the pantry door, slowly, waiting for the other to speak again. But the other woman said nothing, and Emmy left the room, her pride forbidding her to let the other see her tears.

11

The study was dark when she passed, but she could see the rector's head in dim silhouette against the more spacious darkness outside the window. She passed slowly on to the veranda. Leaning her quiet tall body against a column in the darkness beyond the fan of light from the door, she listened to the hushed myriad life of night things, to the slow voices of people passing unseen along an unseen street, watching the hurried staring twin eyes of motor-cars like restless insects.

A car slowing, drew up to the corner, and after a while a dark figure came along the pale gravel of the path, hurried yet diffident. It paused and screamed delicately in midpath, then it sped on towards the steps, where it stopped again, and Mrs Powers stepped forward from beside her post.

'Oh,' gasped Miss Cecily Saunders, starting, lifting her hand slimly against her dark dress. 'Mrs Powers?'

'Yes. Come in, won't you?'

Cecily ran with nervous grace up the steps. 'It was a f-frog,' she explained between her quick respirations. 'I nearly stepped — ugh!' She shuddered, a slim muted flame hushed darkly in dark clothing. 'Is Uncle Joe here? May I—' her voice died away diffidently.

'He is in the study,' Mrs Powers answered. What has happened to her? she thought. Cecily stood so that the light from the hall fell full on her. There was in her face a thin nervous despair, a hopeless recklessness, and she stared at the other woman's shadowed face for a long moment. Then she said 'Thank you, thank you,' suddenly, hysterically, and ran quickly into the house. Mrs Powers looked after her, then,

following, saw her dark dress. She is going away, Mrs Powers thought, with conviction.

Cecily flew on ahead like a slim dark bird, into the unlighted study.

'Uncle Joe?' she said, poised, touching either side of the door-frame.

The rector's chair creaked suddenly.

'Eh?' he said, and the girl sailed across the room like a bat, dark in the darkness, sinking at his feet, clutching his knees. He tried to raise her but she clung to his legs the tighter, burrowing her head into his lap.

'Uncle Joe, forgive me, forgive me?'

'Yes, yes. I knew you would come to us. I told them—'

'No, no. I — I — You have always been so good, so sweet to me, that I couldn't. . . .' She clutched him again fiercely.

'Cecily, what is it? Now, now, you mustn't cry about it. Come now, what is it?' Knowing a sharp premonition he raised her face, trying to see it. But it was only a formless soft blur warmly in his hands.

'Say you forgive me first, dear Uncle Joe. Won't you? Say it, say it. If you won't forgive me, I don't know what'll become of me.' His hands slipping downward felt her delicate tense shoulders and he said: 'Of course, I forgive you.'

'Thank you. Oh, thank you. You are so kind—' she caught his hand, holding it against her mouth.

'What is it, Cecily?' he asked, quietly, trying to soothe her.

She raised her head. 'I am going away.'

'Then you aren't going to marry Donald?'

She lowered her head to his knees again, clutching his hand in her long nervous fingers, holding it against her face. 'I cannot, I cannot. I am a — I am not a good woman any more, dear Uncle Joe. Forgive me, forgive me. . . .'

He withdrew his hand and she let herself be raised to her feet, feeling his arms, his huge kind body. 'There, there,' patting her back with his gentle heavy hand. 'Don't cry.'

'I must go,' she said at last, moving slimly and darkly against his bulk. He released her. She clutched his hand again sharply, letting it go. 'Good-bye,' she whispered, and fled swift and dark as a bird, gracefully to a delicate tapping of heels, as she had come.

She passed Mrs Powers on the porch without seeing her and sped down the steps. The other woman watched her slim dark figure until it disappeared . . . after an interval the car that had stopped at the corner of the garden flashed on its lights and drove away. . . .

Mrs Powers, pressing the light switch, entered the study. The rector stared at her as she approached the desk, quiet and hopeless.

'Cecily has broken the engagement, Margaret. So the wedding is off.'
'Nonsense,' she told him sharply, touching him with her firm hand. 'I'm going to marry him myself. I intended to all the time. Didn't you suspect?'

12

San Francisco, Cal.

25 April 1919

Darling Margaret,

I told mother last night and of coarse she thinks we are too young. But I explained to her how times have changed since the war how the war makes you older than they used to. I see fellows my age that did not serve specially flying which is an education in itself and they seem like kids to me because at last I have found the woman I want and my kid days are over.

After knowing so many women to found you so far away when I did not expect it. Mother says for me to go in business and make money if I

expect a woman to marry me so I am going to start in tomorrow I have got the place already. So it will not be long till I see you and take you in my arms at last and always. How can I tell you how much I love you you are so different from them. Loving you has already made me a serious man realizing responsibilities.

They are all so silly compared with you talking of jazz and going some place where all the time I have been invited on parties but I refuse because I rather sit in my room thinking of you putting my thoughts down on paper let them have their silly fun.

I think of you all ways and if it did not make you so unhappy I want you to think of me always. But don't I would not make you unhappy at all my own dearest. So think of me and remember I love you only and will love you only will love you all ways.

Forever yours

Julian

13

The Baptist minister, a young dervish in a white lawn tie, being most available, came and did his duty and went away. He was young and fearfully conscientious and kind-hearted; upright and passionately desirous of doing good: so much so that he was a bore. But he had soldiered after a fashion and he liked and respected Dr Mahon, refusing to believe that simply because Dr Mahon was Episcopal he was going to hell as soon as he died.

He wished them luck and fled busily away, answering his own obscure compulsions. They watched his busy energetic backside until he was out of sight, then Gilligan silently helped Mahon down the steps and across the lawn to his favourite seat beneath the tree.

The new Mrs Mahon walked silently beside them. Silence was her wont, but not Gilligan's. Yet he had spoken no word to her. Walking

near him she put out her hand and touched his arm: he turned to her a face so bleak, so reft, that she knew a sharp revulsion, a sickness with everything. (Dick, Dick. How well you got out of this mess!) She looked quickly away, across the garden, beyond the spire where pigeons crooned the afternoon away, unemphatic as sleep, biting her lips. Married, and she had never felt so alone.

Gilligan settled Mahon in his chair with his impersonal half-reckless care. Mahon said:

‘Well, Joe, I’m married at last.’

‘Yes,’ answered Gilligan. His careless spontaneity was gone. Even Mahon noticed it in his dim oblivious way. ‘I say Joe.’

‘What is it, Loot?’

Mahon was silent and his wife took her customary chair, leaning back and staring up into the tree. He said at last: ‘Carry on, Joe.’

‘Not now, Loot. I don’t feel so many. Think I’ll take a walk,’ he answered, feeling Mrs Mahon’s eyes on him. He met her gaze harshly, combatively.

‘Joe,’ she said quietly, bitterly.

Gilligan saw her pallid face, her dark unhappy eyes, her mouth like a tired scar, and he knew shame. His own bleak face softened.

‘All right, Loot,’ he said, quietly matching her tone, with a trace of his old ambiguous unseriousness. ‘What’ll it be? Bust up a few more minor empires, huh?’

Just a trace, but it was there. Mrs Mahon looked at him again with gratitude and that old grave happiness which he knew so well, unsmiling but content, which had been missing for so long, so long; and it was as though she had laid her firm strong hand on him. He looked quickly away from her face, sad and happy, not bitter any more.

‘Carry on, Joe.’

CHAPTER EIGHT

1

SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.

27 April 1919

My Dearest Sweetheart,

Just a line to let you know that I have gone into business into the banking business making money for you. To give ourselves the position in the world you deserve and a home of our own. The work is congenial talking to other people in the business that don't know anything about aviation. All they think about is going out to dance with men. Everyday means one day less for us to be with you forever. All my love.

Yours forever

Julian

2

Nine-day or ninety-day or nine-hundred-day sensations have a happy faculty for passing away into the oblivion whence pass sooner or later all of man's inventions. Keeps from getting the world all cluttered up. You say right off that this is God's work. But it must be a woman: no man could be so utilitarian. But then, women preserve only those things which can or might be used again. So this theory is also exploded.

After a while there were no more of the local curious to call; after a while those who had said I told you so when Miss Cecily Saunders let it be known that she would marry the parson's son and who said I told you so when she did not marry the parson's son forgot about it. There were other things to think and talk of: this was the lying-in period of the K.K.K. and the lying-out period of Mr Wilson, a democratish gentleman living in Washington, D.C.

Besides, it was all legal now. Miss Cecily Saunders was safely married — though nobody knew where they were from the time they drove out of town in George Farr's car until they were properly married by a priest in

Atlanta the next day (but then I always told you about that girl). They all hoped for the worst. And that Mrs What's-her-name, that tall black-headed woman at Mahon's had at last married someone, putting an end to that equivocal situation.

And so April became May. There were fair days when the sun, becoming warmer and warmer, rising, drank off the dew, and flowers bloomed like girls ready for a ball, then drooped in the languorous fulsome heat like girls after the ball; when earth, like a fat woman, recklessly trying giddy hat after hat, trying a trimming of apple and pear and peach, threw it away; tried narcissi and jonquil and flag: threw it away — so early flowers bloomed and passed and later flowers bloomed to fade and fall, giving place to yet later ones.

Fruit blossoms were gone, pear was forgotten: what were once tall candlesticks, silvery with white bloom, were now tall jade candlesticks of leaves beneath the blue cathedral of sky across which, in hushed processional, went clouds like choirboys slow and surpliced.

Leaves grew larger and greener until all rumour of azure and silver and pink had gone from them; birds sang and made love and married and built houses in them and in the tree at the corner of the house that yet swirled its white-bellied leaves in never-escaping skyward ecstasies; bees broke clover upon the lawn interrupted at intervals by the lawn mower and its informal languid conductor.

Their mode of life had not changed. The rector was neither happy nor unhappy, neither resigned nor protesting. Occasionally he entered some dream within himself. He conducted services in the dim oaken tunnel of the church while his flock hissed softly among themselves or slept between the responses, while pigeons held their own crooning rituals of audible slumber in the spire that, arcing across motionless young clouds, seemed slow and imminent with ruin. He married two people and buried one: Gilligan found this ominous and said so aloud: Mrs Mahon found this silly and said so aloud.

Mrs Worthington sent her car for them at times and they drove into the country regretting the dogwood, the three of them (two of them did, that is, Mahon had forgotten what dogwood was); the three of them sat beneath the tree while one of them wallowed manfully among polysyllables and another of them sat motionless, neither asleep nor awake. They could never tell whether or not he heard. Nor could they ever tell whether or not he knew whom he had married. Perhaps he didn't care. Emmy, efficient and gentle, mothering him, was a trifle subdued. Gilligan still slept on his cot at the foot of Mahon's bed, lest he be needed.

'You two are the ones who should have married him,' his wife remarked with quiet wit.

3

Mrs Mahon and Gilligan had resumed their old status of companionship and quiet pleasure in each other's company. Now that he no longer hoped to marry her she could be freer with him.

'Perhaps this is what we needed, Joe. Anyway, I never knew anyone I liked half this much.'

They walked slowly in the garden along the avenue of roses which passed beneath the two oaks, beyond which, against a wall, poplars in a restless formal row were like columns of a temple.

'You're easy pleased then,' Gilligan answered with sour assumed moroseness. He didn't have to tell her how much he liked her.

'Poor Joe,' she said. 'Cigarette, please.'

'Poor you,' he retorted, giving her one. 'I'm all right. I ain't married.'

'You can't escape forever, though. You are too nice: safe for the family; will stand hitched.'

'Is that a bargain?' he asked.

'Sufficient unto the day, Joe. . . .'

After a while he stayed her with his hand 'Listen.' They halted and she stared at him intently.

'What?'

'There's that damn mocking-bird again. Hear him? What's he got to sing about, you reckon?'

'He's got plenty to sing about. April's got to be May, and still spring isn't half over. Listen. . . .'

4

Emmy had become an obsession with Januarius Jones, such an obsession that it had got completely out of the realm of sex into that of mathematics, like a paranoia. He manufactured chances to see her, only to be repulsed; he lay in wait for her like a highwayman, he begged, he threatened, he tried physical strength, and he was repulsed. It had got to where, had she acceded suddenly, he would have been completely reft of one of his motivating impulses, of his elemental impulse to live: he might have died. Yet he knew that if he didn't get her soon he would become crazy, an imbecile.

After a time it assumed the magic of numbers. He had failed twice: this time success must be his or the whole cosmic scheme would crumble, hurling him, screaming, into blackness, where no blackness was, death where death was not. Januarius Jones, by nature and inclination a Turk, was also becoming an oriental. He felt that his number must come: the fact that it would not was making an idiot of him.

He dreamed of her at night, he mistook other women for her, other voices for hers; he hung skulking about the rectory at all hours, too wrought up to come in where he might have to converse sanely with sane people. Sometimes the rector, tramping huge and oblivious in his dream, flushed him in out-of-the-way corners of concealment, flushed him without surprise.

'Ah, Mr Jones,' he would say, starting like a goaded elephant, 'good morning.'

'Good morning, sir,' Jones would reply, his eyes glued on the house.
'You are out for a walk?'

'Yes, sir. Yes, sir.' And Jones would walk hurriedly away in an opposite direction as the rector, entering his dream again, resumed his own. Emmy told Mrs Mahon of this with scornful contempt.

'Why don't you tell Joe, or let me tell him?' Mrs Mahon asked.

Emmy sniffed with capable independence. 'About that worm? I can take care of him, all right. I do my own fighting.'

'And I bet you are good at it, too.'

And Emmy said: 'I guess I am.'

5

April had become May.

Fair days, and wet days in which rain ran with silver lances over the lawn, in which rain dripped leaf to leaf while birds still sang in the hushed damp greenness under the trees, and made love and married and built houses and still sang; in which rain grew soft as the grief of a young girl grieving for the sake of grief.

Mahon hardly ever rose now. They had got him a movable bed and upon this he lay, sometimes in the house, sometimes on the veranda where the wistaria inverted its cool lilac flame, while Gilligan read to him. They had done with Rome and they now swam through the tedious charm of Rousseau's Confessions to Gilligan's hushed childish delight.

Kind neighbours came to inquire; the specialist from Atlanta came once by request and once on his own initiative, making a friendly call and addressing Gilligan meticulously as 'Doctor', spent the afternoon chatting with them, and went away. Mrs Mahon and he liked each

other immensely. Dr Gary called once or twice and insulted them all and went away nattily smoking his slender rolled cigarettes. Mrs Mahon and he did not like each other at all. The rector grew greyer and quieter, neither happy nor unhappy, neither protesting nor resigned.

‘Wait until next month. He will be stronger then. This is a trying month for invalids. Don’t you think so?’ he asked his daughter-in-law.

‘Yes,’ she would tell him, looking out at the green world, the sweet, sweet spring, ‘yes, yes.’

6

It was a postcard. You buy them for a penny, stamp and all. The post office furnishes writing material free.

Got your letter. Will write later. Remember me to Gilligan and Lieut. Mahon.

Julian L.

7

Mahon was asleep on the veranda and the other three sat beneath the tree on the lawn, watching the sun go down. At last the reddened edge of the disc was sliced like a cheese by the wistaria-covered lattice wall and the neutral buds were a pale agitation against the dead afternoon.

Soon the evening star would be there above the poplar tip, perplexing it, immaculate and ineffable, and the poplar was vain as a girl darkly in an arrested passionate ecstasy. Half of the moon was a coin broken palely near the zenith and at the end of the lawn the first fireflies were like lazily blown sparks from cool fires. A Negro woman passing crooned a religious song, mellow and passionless and sad.

They sat talking quietly. The grass was becoming grey with dew and she felt dew on her thin shoes. Suddenly Emmy came around the corner of

the house running and darted up the steps and through the entrance, swift in the dusk.

'What in the world—' began Mrs Mahon, then they saw Jones, like a fat satyr, leaping after her, hopelessly distanced. When he saw them he slowed immediately and lounged up to them slovenly as ever. His yellow eyes were calmly opaque but she could see the heave of his breathing. Convulsed with laughter she at last found her voice.

'Good evening, Mr Jones.'

'Say,' said Gilligan with interest, 'what was you—'

'Hush, Joe,' Mrs Mahon told him. Jones's eyes, clear and yellow, obscene and old in sin as a goat's, roved between them.

'Good evening, Mr Jones.' The rector became abruptly aware of his presence. 'Walking again, eh?'

'Running,' Gilligan corrected and the rector repeated Eh? looking from Jones to Gilligan.

Mrs Mahon indicated a chair. 'Sit down, Mr Jones. You must be rather fatigued, I imagine.'

Jones stared towards the house, tore his eyes away, and sat down. The canvas sagged under him and he rose and spun his chair so as to face the dreaming façade of the rectory. He sat again.

'Say,' Gilligan asked him, 'what was you doing, anyway?'

Jones eyes him briefly, heavily. 'Running,' he snapped, turning his eyes again to the dark house.

'Running?' the divine repeated.

'I know; I seen that much from here. What was you running for, I asked.'

'Reducing, perhaps,' Mrs Mahon remarked, with quiet malice.

Jones turned his yellow stare upon her. Twilight was gathering swiftly. He was a fat and shapeless mass palely tweeded. 'Reducing, yes. But not to marriage.'

'I wouldn't be so sure of that if I were you,' she told him. 'A courtship like that will soon reduce you to anything, almost.'

'Yeh,' Gilligan amended, 'if that's the only way you got to get a wife you'd better pick out another one besides Emmy. You'll be a shadow time you catch her. That is,' he added, 'if you aim to do your courting on foot.'

'What's this?' the rector asked.

'Perhaps Mr Jones was merely preparing to write a poem. Living it first, you know,' Mrs Mahon offered. Jones looked at her sharply. 'Atalanta,' she suggested in the dusk.

'Atlanta?' repeated Gilligan, 'what—'

'Try an apple next time, Mr Jones,' she advised.

'Or a handful of salt, Mr Jones,' added Gilligan in a thin falsetto. Then in his natural voice. 'But what's Atlanta got to—'

'Or a cherry, Mr Gilligan,' said Jones viciously. 'But then, I am not God, you know.'

'Shut your mouth, fellow,' Gilligan told him roughly.

'What's this?' the rector repeated. Jones turned to him heavily explanatory:

'It means, sir, that Mr Gilligan is under the impression that his wit is of as much importance to me as my actions are to him.'

'Not me,' denied Gilligan with warmth. 'You and me don't have the same thoughts about anything, fellow.'

‘Why shouldn’t they be?’ the rector asked ‘It is but natural to believe that one’s actions and thoughts are as important to others as they are to oneself, is it not?’

Gilligan gave this his entire attention. It was getting above his head, beyond his depth. But Jones was something tangible, and he had already chosen Jones for his own.

‘Naturally,’ agreed Jones with patronage. ‘There was kinship between the human instruments of all action and thought and emotion. Napoleon thought that his actions were important, Swift thought his emotions were important, Savonarola thought his beliefs were important. And they were. But we are discussing Mr Gilligan.’

‘Say—’ began Gilligan.

‘Very apt, Mr Jones,’ murmured Mrs Mahon above the suggested triangle of her cuffs and collar. ‘A soldier, a priest, and a dyspeptic.’

‘Say,’ Gilligan repeated, ‘who’s swift, anyway? I kind of got bogged up back there.’

‘Mr Jones is, according to his own statement. You are Napoleon, Joe.’

‘Him? Not quite swift enough to get himself a girl, though. The way he was gaining on Emmy — You ought to have a bicycle,’ he suggested.

‘There’s your answer, Mr Jones,’ the rector told him. Jones looked towards Gilligan’s fading figure in disgust, like that of a swordsman who has been disarmed by a peasant with a pitchfork.

‘That’s what association with the clergy does for you,’ he said crassly.

‘What is it?’ Gilligan asked. ‘What did I say wrong?’

Mrs Mahon leaned over and squeezed his arm. ‘You didn’t say anything wrong, Joe. You were grand.’

Jones glowered sullenly in the dusk. ‘By the way,’ he said, suddenly, ‘how is your husband today?’

'Just the same, thank you.'

'Stands wedded life as well as can be expected, does he?' She ignored this. Gilligan watched him in leashed anticipation. He continued: 'That's too bad. You had expected great things from marriage, hadn't you? Sort of a miraculous rejuvenation?'

'Shut up, fellow,' Gilligan told him. 'Whatcher mean, anyway?'
'Nothing, Mr Galahad, nothing at all. I merely made a civil inquiry. . . . Shows that when a man marries, his troubles continue, doesn't it?'

'Then you oughtn't to have no worries about your troubles,' Gilligan told him savagely.

'What?'

'I mean, if you don't have no better luck than you have twice that I know of—'

'He has a good excuse for one failure, Joe,' Mrs Mahon said.

They both looked towards her voice. The sky was bowled with a still disseminated light that cast no shadow and branches of trees were rigid as coral in a mellow tideless sea. 'Mr Jones says that to make love to Miss Saunders would be epicene.'

'Epicene? What's that?'

'Shall I tell him, Mr Jones? or will you?'

'Certainly. You intend to, anyway, don't you?'

'Epicene is something you want and can't get, Joe.'

Jones rose viciously. 'If you will allow me, I'll retire, I think,' he said savagely. 'Good evening.'

'Sure,' agreed Gilligan with alacrity, rising also. 'I'll see Mr Jones to the gate. He might get mixed up and head for the kitchen by mistake. Emmy might be one of them epicenes, too.'

Without seeming to hurry Jones faded briskly away. Gilligan sprang after him. Jones, sensing him, whirled in the dusk and Gilligan leaned upon him.

‘For the good of your soul,’ Gilligan told him joyously. ‘You might say that’s what running with preachers does for you, mightn’t you?’ he panted as they went down.

They rolled in dew and an elbow struck him smartly under the chin. Jones was up immediately and Gilligan, tasting his bitten tongue, sprang in pursuit. But Jones retained his lead. ‘He has sure learned to run from somebody,’ Gilligan grunted. ‘Practising on Emmy so much, I guess. Wisht I was Emmy, now — until I catch him.’

Jones doubled the house and plunged into the dreaming garden. Gilligan, turning the corner of the house, saw the hushed expanse where his enemy was, but his enemy, himself, was out of sight.

Roses bloomed quietly under the imminence of night, hyacinths swung pale bells, waiting for another day. Dusk was a dream of arrested time, the mocking-bird rippled it tentatively, and everywhere blooms slept passionately, waiting for tomorrow. But Jones was gone.

He stopped to listen upon the paling gravel, between the slow unpickable passion of roses, seeing the pale broken coin of the moon attain a richer lustre against the unemphatic sky. Gilligan stilled his heaving lungs to listen, but he heard nothing.

Then he began systematically to beat the firefly-starred scented dusk of the garden, beating all available cover, leaving not a blade of grass unturned. But Jones had got clean away; the slow hands of dusk had removed him as cleanly as the prestidigitator reaves a rabbit from an immaculate hat.

He stood in the centre of the garden and cursed Jones thoroughly on the off-chance that he might be within hearing, then Gilligan slowly retraced his steps, retracing the course of the race through the palpable violet dusk. He passed the unlighted house where Emmy went somewhere about her duties, where at the corner of the veranda near the silver tree’s twilight-musicked ecstasy Mahon slept on his movable

bed, and on across the lawn while evening like a ship with twilight-coloured sails dreamed on down the world.

The chairs were formless blurs beneath the tree and Mrs Mahon's presence was indicated principally by her white collar and cuffs. As he approached he could see dimly the rector reclined in slumber, and the woman's dark dress shaped her against the dull white of her canvas chair. Her face was pallid, winged either side by her hair. She raised her hand as he drew near.

'He's asleep,' she whispered, as he sat beside her.

'He got away, damn him,' he told her, in exasperation.

'Too bad. Better luck next time.'

'You bet. And there'll be a next time soon as I see him again.'

Night was almost come. Light, all light, passed from the world, from the earth, and leaves were still. Night was almost come, but not quite; day was almost gone, but not quite. Her shoes were quite soaked in dew.

'How long he has slept.' She broke the silence diffidently. 'We'll have to wake him soon for supper.'

Gilligan stirred in his chair and almost as she spoke the rector sat hugely and suddenly up.

'Wait, Donald,' he said, lumbering to his feet. With elephantine swiftness he hurried across the lawn towards the darkly dreaming house.

'Did he call?' they spoke together, in a dark foreboding. They half rose and stared towards the house, then at each other's indistinct, white face. 'Did you — ?' the question hung poised in the dusk between them and here was the evening star bloomed miraculously at the poplar's tip and the slender tree was a leafed and passionate Atalanta, poisoning her golden apple.

'No, did you?' he replied.

But they heard nothing.
'He dreamed,' she said.

'Yes,' Gilligan agreed. 'He dreamed.'

8

Donald Mahon lay quietly conscious of unseen forgotten spring, of greenness neither recalled nor forgot. After a time the nothingness in which he lived took him wholly again, but restlessly. It was like a sea into which he could neither completely pass nor completely go away from. Day became afternoon, became dusk and imminent evening: evening like a ship, with twilight-coloured sails, dreamed down the world darkly towards darkness.

And suddenly he found that he was passing from the dark world in which he had lived for a time he could not remember, again into a day that had long passed, that had already been spent by those who lived and wept and died, and so remembering it, this day was his alone: the one trophy he had reft from Time and Space. *Per ardua ad astra.*

I never knew I could carry this much petrol, he thought in unsurprised ubiquity, leaving a darkness he did not remember for a day he had long forgot, finding that the day, his own familiar day, was approaching noon.

It must be about ten o'clock, for the sun was getting overhead and a few degrees behind him, because he could see the shadow of his head bisecting in an old familiarity the hand which held the control column and the shadow of the cockpit rim across his flanks, filling his lap, while the sun fell almost directly downward upon his other hand lying idly on the edge of the fuselage. Even the staggered lower wing was partly shadowed by the upper one.

Yes, it is about ten, he thought, with a sense of familiarity. Soon he would look at the time and make sure, but now . . . with the quick skill of practice and habit he swept the horizon with a brief observing

glance, casting a look above, banking slightly to see behind. All clear. The only craft in sight were faraway to the left: a cumbersome observation plane doing artillery work: a brief glance divulged a pair of scouts high above it, and above these he knew were probably two more.

Might have a look, he thought, knowing instinctively that they were Huns, calculating whether or not he could reach the spot before the protecting scouts saw him. No, I guess not, he decided. Better get on home. Fuel's low. He settled his swinging compass needle.

Ahead of him and to the right, far away, what was once Ypres, was like the cracked scab on an ancient festering sore; beneath him were other shining sores lividly on a corpse that would not be let to die. . . . He passed on lonely and remote as a gull.

Then, suddenly, it was as if a cold wind had blown upon him. What is it? he thought. It was that the sun had been suddenly blotted from him. The empty world, the sky, were yet filled with lazy spring sunlight, but the sun that had been full upon him had been brushed away as by a hand. In the moment of realizing this, cursing his stupidity, he dived steeply, slipping to the left.

Five threads of vapour passed between the upper and lower planes, each one nearer his body, then he felt two distinct shocks at the base of his skull and vision was reft from him as if a button somewhere had been pressed. His trained hand nosed the machine up smartly, and finding the Vickers release in the darkness, he fired into the bland morning marbled and imminent with March.

Sight flickered on again, like a poorly made electrical contact, he watched holes pitting into the fabric near him like a miraculous small-pox and as he hung poised firing into the sky a dial on his instrument board exploded with a small sound.

Then he felt his hand, saw his glove burst, saw his bared bones. Then sight flashed off again and he felt himself lurch, falling until his belt

caught him sharply across the abdomen, and he heard something gnawing through his frontal bone, like mice. You'll break your damn teeth, there, he told them, opening his eyes.

His father's heavy face hung over him in the dusk like a murdered Caesar's.

He knew sight again and an imminent nothingness more profound than any yet, while evening, like a ship with twilight-coloured sails, drew down the world, putting calmly out to an immeasurable sea. 'That's how it happened,' he said, staring at him.

CHAPTER NINE

1

SEX AND DEATH: the front door and the back door of the world. How indissolubly are they associated in us! In youth they lift us out of the flesh, in old age they reduce us again to the flesh; one to fatten us, the other to flay us, for the worm. When are sexual compulsions more readily answered than in war or famine or flood or fire?

Jones, lurking across the street, saw the coast clear at last.

(First, marched a uniformed self-constituted guard, led by a subaltern with three silver V's on his sleeve and a Boy Scout bugler furnished by the young Baptist minister, a fiery-eyed dervish, who had served in the Y.M.C.A.)

And then fatly arrogant as a cat, Jones let himself through the iron gate.

(The last motor-car trailed slowly up the street and the casuals gathered through curiosity — the town should raise a monument to Donald Mahon, with effigies of Margaret Mahon-Powers and Joe Gilligan for caryatides — and the little blackguard boys, both black and white, and including young Robert Saunders, come to envy the boy bugler, drifted away.)

And still cat-like, Jones mounted the steps and entered the deserted house. His yellow goat's eyes became empty as he paused, listening. Then he moved quietly towards the kitchen.

(The procession moved slowly across the square. Country people, in town to trade, turned to stare vacuously, merchant and doctor and lawyer came to door and window to look; the city fathers, drowsing in the courthouse yard, having successfully circumvented sex, having reached the point where death would look after them instead of they after death, waked and looked and slept again. Into a street, among and between horses and mules tethered to wagons, it passed, into a street bordered by shabby Negro stores and shops, and here was Loosh standing stiffly at salute as it passed. 'Who dat, Loosh?' 'Mist' Donald Mahon.' 'Well, Jesus! we all gwine dat way, some day. All roads leads to de graveyard.')

Emmy sat at the kitchen table, her head between her hard elbows, her hands clasping behind her in her hair. How long she had sat there she did not know but she had heard them clumsily carrying him from the house and she put her hands over her ears, not to hear.

But it seemed as if she could hear in spite of her closed ears those horrible, blundering, utterly unnecessary sounds: the hushed scraping of timid footsteps, the muted thumping of wood against wood that, passing, left behind an unbearable unchastity of stale flowers — as though flowers themselves getting a rumour of death became corrupt — all the excruciating ceremony for disposing of human carrion. So she had not heard Mrs Mahon until the other touched her shoulder. (I would have cured him! If they had just let me marry him instead of her!)

At the touch Emmy raised her swollen, blurred face, swollen because she couldn't seem to cry. (If I could just cry. You are prettier than me, with your black hair and your painted mouth. That's the reason.)

'Come, Emmy,' Mrs Mahon said.

'Let me alone! Go away!' she said, fiercely. 'You got him killed: now bury him yourself.'

'He would have wanted you to come, Emmy,' the other woman said, gently.

'Go away, let me alone, I tell you!' She dropped her head to the table again, bumping her forehead. . . .

There was no sound in the kitchen save a clock. Life. Death. Life. Death. Life. Death. Forever and ever. (If I could only cry!) She could hear the dusty sound of sparrows and she imagined she could see the shadows growing longer across the grass. Soon it will be night, she thought, remembering that night long, long ago, the last time she had seen Donald, her Donald — not that one! and he had said, 'Come here, Emmy,' and she had gone to him. Her Donald was dead long, long ago. . . . The clock went Life. Death. Life. Death. There was something frozen in her chest, like a dish-cloth in winter.

(The procession moved beneath arching iron letters. Rest in Peace in cast repetition: Our motto is one for every cemetery, a cemetery for everyone throughout the land. Away, following where fingers of sunlight pointed among cedars, doves were cool, throatily unemphatic among the dead.)

'Go away,' Emmy repeated to another touch on her shoulder, thinking she had dreamed. It was a dream! she thought and the frozen dish-rag in her chest melted with unbearable relief, becoming tears. It was Jones who had touched her, but anyone would have been the same and she turned in a passion of weeping, clinging to him.

(I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord. . . .)

Jones's yellow stare enveloped her like amber, remarking her sun-burned hair and her fore-shortened thigh, wrung by her turning body into high relief.

(Whosoever believeth in Me, though he were dead. . . .)

My God, when will she get done weeping? First she wets my pants, then my coat. But this time she'll dry it for me, or I'll know the reason why.

(. . . yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. . . .)

Emmy's sobbing died away: she knew no sensation save that of warmth and languorous contentment, emptiness, even when Jones raised her face and kissed her. 'Come, Emmy,' he said, raising her by the armpits. She rose obediently, leaning against him warm and empty, and he led her through the house and up the stairs to her room. Outside the window, afternoon became abruptly rain, without warning, with no flapping of pennons nor sound of trumpet to herald it.

(The sun had gone, had been recalled as quickly as a usurer's note and the doves fell silent or went away. The Baptist dervish's Boy Scout lipped his bugle, sounding taps.)

2

'Hi, Bob,' called a familiar voice, that of a compatriot. 'Le's gwup to Miller's. They're playing ball up there.'

He looked at his friend, making no reply to the greeting, and his expression was so strange that the other said: 'Whatcher looking so funny about? You ain't sick, are you?'

'I don't haf to play ball if I don't want to, do I?' he replied with sudden heat. He walked on while the other boy stood watching him with open mouth. After a while, he, too, turned and went on, stopping once or twice to look again at his friend become suddenly strange and queer. Then he passed, whooping from sight, forgetting him.

How strange everything looked! This street, these familiar trees — was this his home here, where his mother and father were, where Sis lived, where he ate and slept, lapped closely around with safety and solidity, where darkness was kind and sweet for sleeping? He mounted the steps and entered, wanting his mother.

But, of course, she hadn't got back from — He found himself running suddenly through the hall towards a voice raised in comforting, crooning song. Here was a friend mountainous in blue calico, her elephantine thighs undulating, gracious as the wake of a ferry boat as she moved between table and stove.

She broke off her mellow, passionless song, exclaiming: 'Bless yo' heart, honey, what is it?'

But he did not know. He only clung to her comforting, voluminous skirt in a gust of uncontrollable sorrow, while she wiped biscuit dough from her hands on a towel. Then she picked him up and sat upon a stiff-backed chair, rocking back and forth and holding him against her balloon-like breast until his fit of weeping shuddered away.

Outside the window the afternoon became abruptly rain, without warning, with no flapping of pennons nor sound of trumpet to herald it.

3

There was nothing harsh about this rain. It was grey and quiet as a benediction. The birds did not even cease to sing, and the west was already thinning to a moist and imminent gold.

The rector, bareheaded, walked slowly, unconscious of the rain and the dripping trees, beside his daughter-in-law across the lawn, houseward, and they mounted the steps together, passing beneath the dim and unwashed fanlight. Within the hall he stood while water ran down his face and dripped from his clothing in a series of small sounds.

She took his arm and led him into the study and to his chair. He sat obediently and she took his handkerchief from the breast of his coat and wiped the rain from his temples and face. He submitted, fumbling for his pipe.

She watched him as he sprinkled tobacco liberally over the desk-top, trying to fill the bowl, then she quietly took it from his hand. 'Try this. It

is much simpler,' she told him, taking a cigarette from her jacket pocket and putting it in his mouth. 'You have never smoked one, have you?'

'Eh? Oh, thank you. Never too old to learn, eh?'

She lit it for him and then she quickly fetched a glass from the pantry. Kneeling beside the desk she drew out drawer after drawer until she found the bottle of whisky. He seemed to have forgotten her until she put the glass in his hand.

Then he looked up at her from a bottomless, grateful anguish and she sat suddenly on the arm of his chair, drawing his head against her breast. His untasted drink in one hand and his slowly burning cigarette lifting an unshaken plume of vapour from the other; and after a while the rain passed away and the dripping eaves but added to the freshened silence, measuring it, spacing it off; and the sun breaking through the west took a last look at the earth before going down.

'So you will not stay,' he said at last, repeating her unspoken decision. 'No,' she said, holding him.

4

Before her descending, the hill crossed with fireflies. At its foot among dark trees was unseen water and Emmy walked slowly on, feeling the tall wet grass sopping her to the knees, dragging her skirt.

She walked on and soon was among trees that as she moved, moved overhead like dark ships parting the star-filled river of the sky, letting the parted waters join again behind them with never a ripple. The pool lay darkly in the dark: sky and trees above it, trees and sky beneath it.

She sat down on the wet earth, seeing through the trees the moon becoming steadily brighter in the darkening sky. A dog saw it also and bayed: a mellow, long sound that slid immaculately down a hill of silence, yet at the same time seemed to linger about her like a rumour of a far despair.

Tree trunks taking light from the moon, streaks of moonlight in the water — she could almost imagine she saw him standing there across the pool with her beside him; leaning above the water she could almost see them darting keen and swift and naked, flashing in the moon.

She could feel earth strike through her clothes against legs and belly and elbows . . . the dog bayed again, hopeless and sorrowful, dying, dying away. . . . After a while she rose slowly, feeling her damp clothes, thinking of the long walk home. Tomorrow was washday.

5

‘Damn!’ said Mrs Mahon, staring at the bulletin board. Gilligan, setting down her smart leather bags against the station wall, remarked briefly: ‘Late?’

‘Thirty minutes. What beastly luck!’

‘Well, can’t be helped. Wanta go back to the house and wait?’

‘No, I don’t. I don’t like these abortive departures. Get my ticket, please.’ She gave him her purse and standing on tiptoe to see her reflection in a raised window she did a few deft things to her hat. Then she sauntered along the platform to the admiration of those casuals always to be found around small railway stations anywhere in these United States. And yet Continentals labour under the delusion that we spend all our time working!

Freedom comes with the decision: it does not wait for the act. She felt freer, more at peace with herself than she had felt for months. But I won’t think about that, she decided deliberately. It is best just to be free, not to let it into the conscious mind.

To be consciously anything argues a comparison, a bond with antithesis. Live in your dream, do not attain it — else comes satiety. Or sorrow, which is worse, I wonder? Dr Mahon and his dream: left, restored, left again. Funny for someone, I guess.

And Donald, with his scar and his stiffened hand quiet in the warm earth, in the warmth and the dark, where the one cannot hurt him and the other he will not need. No dream for him! The ones with whom he now sleeps don't care what his face looks like. Per ardua ad astra. . . . And Jones, what dream is his? 'Nightmare, I hope,' she said aloud, viciously, and one collarless and spitting tobacco said Ma'am? with interest.

Gilligan reappeared with her ticket.

'You're a nice boy, Joe,' she told him, receiving her purse.

He ignored her thanks. 'Come on, let's walk a ways.'

'Will my bags be all right there, do you think?'

'Sure.' He looked about, then beckoned to a Negro youth reclining miraculously on a steel cable that angled up to a telephone pole. 'Here, son.'

The Negro said Suh? without moving. 'Git up dar, boy. Dat white man talkin' to you,' said a companion, squatting on his heels against the wall. The lad rose and a coin spun arcing from Gilligan's hand.

'Keep your eye on them bags till I come back, will you?'

'Awright, cap'm.' The boy slouched over to the bags and became restfully and easily static beside them, going to sleep immediately, like a horse.

'Damn 'em, they do what you say, but they make you feel so — so—'

'Immature, don't they?' she suggested.

'That's it. Like you was a kid or something and that they'd look after you even if you don't know exactly what you want.'

'You are a funny sort; Joe. And nice. Too nice to waste.'

Her profile was sharp, pallid against a doorway darkly opened. 'I'm giving you a chance not to waste me.'

'Come on, let's walk a bit.' She took his arm and moved slowly along the track, conscious that her ankles were being examined. The two threads of steel ran narrowing and curving away beyond trees. If you could see them as far as you can see, farther than you can see . . .

'Huh?' asked Gilligan, walking moodily beside her.

'Look at the spring, Joe. See, in the trees: summer is almost here, Joe.'

'Yes, summer is almost here. Funny, ain't it? I'm always kind of surprised to find that things get on about the same, spite of us. I guess old nature does too much of a wholesale business to ever be surprised at us, let alone worrying if we ain't quite the fellows we think we ought to of been.'

Holding his arm, walking a rail: 'What kind of fellows do we think we ought to have been, Joe?'

'I don't know what kind of a fel — I mean girl you think you are and I don't know what kind of a fellow I think I am, but I know you and I tried to help nature make a good job out of a poor one without having no luck at it.'

Flat leaves cupped each a drop of sunlight and the trees seemed coolly on fire with evening. Here was a wooden foot-bridge crossing a stream and a footpath mounting a hill. 'Let's sit on the rail of the bridge,' she suggested, guiding him towards it. Before he could help her she had turned her back to the rail and her straightening arms raised her easily. She hooked her heels over a lower rail and he mounted beside her. 'Let's have a cigarette.'

She produced a pack from her handbag and he accepted one, scraping a match. 'Who has had any luck in this business?' she asked.

'The loot has.'

'No, he hasn't. When you are married you are either lucky or unlucky, but when you are dead you aren't either: you aren't anything.'

'That's right. He don't have to bother about his luck any more. . . . The padre's lucky, though.'

'How?'

'Well, if you have hard luck and your hard luck passes away, ain't you lucky?'

'I don't know. You are too much for me now, Joe.'

'And how about that girl? Fellow's got money, I hear, and no particular brains. She's lucky.'

'Do you think she's satisfied?' Gilligan gazed at her attentively, not replying. 'Think how much fun she could have got out of being so romantically widowed, and so young. I'll bet she's cursing her luck this minute.'

He regarded her with admiration. 'I always thought I'd like to be a buzzard,' he remarked, 'but now I think I'd like to be a woman.'

'Good gracious, Joe. Why in the world?'

'Now, long as you're being one of them sybils, tell me about this bird Jones. He's lucky.'

'How lucky?'

'Well, he gets what he wants, don't he?'

'Not the women he wants.'

'Not exactly. Certainly he don't get all the women he wants. He has failed twice to my knowledge. But failure don't seem to worry him. That's what I mean by lucky.' Their cigarettes arced together into the stream, hissing. 'I guess brass gets along about as well as anything else with women.'

'You mean stupidity.'

'No, I don't. Stupidity. That's the reason I can't get the one I want.'

She put her hand on his arm. 'You aren't stupid, Joe. And you aren't bold, either.'

'Yes, I am. Can you imagine me considering anybody else's feelings when they's something I want?'

'I can't imagine you doing anything without considering someone else's feelings.'

Offended, he became impersonal. 'Course you are entitled to your own opinion. I know I ain't bold like the man in that story. You remember? accosted a woman on the street and her husband was with her and knocked him down. When he got up, brushing himself off, a man says: "For heaven's sake, friend, do you do that often?" and the bird says: "Sure. Of course I get knocked down occasionally, but you'd be surprised." I guess he just charged the beating to overhead,' he finished with his old sardonic humour.

She laughed out. Then she said: 'Why don't you try that, Joe?'

He looked at her quietly for a time. She met his gaze unwavering and he slipped to his feet facing her, putting his arm around her. 'What does that mean, Margaret?'

She made no reply and he lifted her down. She put her arms over his shoulders. 'You don't mean anything by it,' he told her quietly, touching her mouth with his. His clasp became lax.

'Not like that, Joe.'

'Not like what?' he asked stupidly. For answer she drew his face down to hers and kissed him with slow fire. Then they knew that after all they were strangers to each other. He hastened to fill an uncomfortable interval. 'Does that mean you will?'

'I can't, Joe,' she answered, standing easily in his arms.

'But why not, Margaret? You never give me any reason.'

She was silent in profile against sunshot green. 'If I didn't like you so much, I wouldn't tell you. But it's your name, Joe, Gilligan. I couldn't marry a man named Gilligan.'

He was really hurt. 'I'm sorry,' he said dully. She laid her cheek against his. On the crest of the hill tree trunks were a barred grate beyond which the fires of evening were dying away. 'I could change it,' he suggested.

Across the evening came a long sound. 'There's your train,' he said. She thrust herself slightly from him, to see his face. 'Joe, forgive me. I didn't mean that—'

'That's all right,' he interrupted, patting her back with awkward gentleness. 'Come on, let's get back.'

The locomotive appeared blackly at the curve, plumed with steam like a sinister squat knight and grew larger without seeming to progress. But it was moving and it roared past the station in its own good time, bearing the puny controller of its destiny like a goggled greasy excrescence in its cab. The train jarred to a stop and an eruption of white-jacketed porters.

She put her arms about him again to the edification of the by-standers. 'Joe, I didn't mean that. But don't you see, I have been married twice already, with damn little luck either time, and I just haven't the courage to risk it again. But if I could marry anyone, don't you know it would be you? Kiss me, Joe.' He complied. 'Bless your heart, darling. If I married you you'd be dead in a year, Joe. All the men that marry me die, you know.'

'I'll take the risk,' he told her.

'But I won't. I'm too young to bury three husbands.' People got off, passed them, other people got on. And above all like an obbligato the vocal competition of cabmen. 'Joe, does it really hurt you for me to go?' He looked at her dumbly, 'Joe!' she exclaimed, and a party passed them. It was Mr and Mrs George Farr: they saw Cecily's stricken face as she melted graceful and fragile and weeping into her father's arms. And here was Mr George Farr morose and thunderous behind her. Ignored.

'What did I tell you?' Mrs Mahon said, clutching Gilligan's arm.

'You're right,' he answered, from his own despair. 'It's a sweet honeymoon he's had, poor devil.'

The party passed on around the station and she looked at Gilligan again. 'Joe, come with me.'

'To a minister?' he asked with resurgent hope.

'No, just as we are. Then when we get fed up all we need do is wish each other luck and go our ways.' He stared at her, shocked. 'Damn your Presbyterian soul, Joe. Now you think I'm a bad woman.'

'No I don't, ma'am. But I can't do that. . . .'

'Why not?'

'I dunno: I just can't.'

'But what difference does it make?'

'Why, none, if it was just your body I wanted. But I want — I want—'

'What do you want, Joe?'

'Hell. Come on, let's get aboard.'

'You are coming, then?'

'You know I ain't. You knew you were safe when you said that.'

He picked up her bags. A porter ravished them skilfully from him and he helped her into the car. She sat upon green plush and he removed his hat awkwardly, extending his hand. 'Well, good-bye.'

Her face pallid and calm beneath her small white and black hat, above her immaculate collar. She ignored his hand.

'Look at me, Joe. Have I ever told you a lie?'

'No,' he admitted.

'Then don't you know I am not lying now? I meant what I said. Sit down.'

'No, no. I can't do it that way. You know I can't.'

'Yes. I can't even seduce you, Joe. I'm sorry. I'd like to make you happy for a short time, if I could. But I guess it isn't in the cards, is it?' She raised her face and he kissed her.

'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, Joe.'

But why not? he thought with cinders under his feet, why not take her this way? I could persuade her in time, perhaps before we reached Atlanta. He turned and sprang back on board the train. He hadn't much time and when he saw that her seat was empty he rushed through the car in a mounting excitement. She was not in the next car either.

Have I forgotten which car she is in? he thought. But no that was where he had left her, for there was the Negro youth, still motionless opposite the window. He hurried back to take another look at her place. Yes, there were her bags. He ran, blundering into other passengers, the whole length of the train. She was not there.

She has changed her mind and got off, looking for me, he thought, in an agony of futile endeavour. He slammed open a vestibule and leaped to the ground as the train began to move. Careless of how he must look to the station loungers he leaped towards the waiting-room. It was empty, a hurried glance up and down the platform did not discover her, and, he turned despairing to the moving train.

She must be on it! he thought furiously, cursing himself because he had not stayed on it until she reappeared. For now the train was moving too swiftly and all the vestibules were closed. Then the last car slid smoothly past and he saw her standing on the rear platform where she had gone in order to see him again and where he had not thought of looking for her.

'Margaret!' he cried after the arrogant steel thing, running vainly down the track after it, seeing it smoothly distancing him. 'Margaret?' he cried again, stretching his arms to her, to the vocal support of the loungers.

'Whup up a little, mister,' a voice advised. 'Ten to one on the train,' a sporting one offered. There were no takers.

He stopped at last, actually weeping with anger and despair, watching her figure, in its dark straight dress and white collar and cuffs, become smaller and smaller with the diminishing train that left behind a derisive whistle blast and a trailing fading vapour like an insult, moving along twin threads of steel out of his sight and his life.

. . . At last he left the track at right angles and climbed a wire fence into woods where spring becoming languorous with summer turned sweetly nightward, though summer had not quite come.

6

Deep in a thicket from which the evening was slowly dissolving a thrush sang four liquid notes. Like the shape of her mouth, he thought, feeling the heat of his pain become cool with the cooling of sunset. The small stream murmured busily like a faint incantation and repeated alder shoots leaned over it Narcissus-like.

The thrush, disturbed, flashed a modest streak of brown deeper into the woods, and sang again. Mosquitoes spun about him, unresisted: he seemed to get ease from their sharp irritation. Something else to think about.

I could have made up to her. I would make up to her for everything that ever hurt her, so that when she remembered things that once hurt her she'd say: Was this I? If I could just have told her! Only I couldn't seem to think of what to say. Me, that talks all the time, being stuck for words. . . .

Aimlessly he followed the stream. Soon it ran among violet shadows, among willows, and he heard a louder water. Parting the willows he came upon an old mill-race and a small lake calmly repeating the calm sky and the opposite dark trees. He saw fish gleaming dully upon the earth, and the buttocks of a man.

'Lost something?' he asked, watching ripples spread from the man's submerged arm. The other heaved himself to his hands and knees, looking up over his shoulder.

'Dropped my terbaccer,' he replied, in an unemphatic drawl. 'Don't happen to have none on you, do you?'

'Got a cigarette, if that'll do you any good.' Gilligan offered his pack and the other, squatting back on his heels, took one.

'Much obliged. Feller likes a little smoke once in a while, don't he?'
'Fellow likes a lot of little things in this world, once in a while.'

The other guffawed, not comprehending, but suspecting a reference to sex. 'Well, I ain't got any o' that, but I got the next thing to it.' He rose, lean as a hound, and from beneath a willow clump he extracted a gallon jug. With awkward formality he tendered it. 'Allers take a mite with me when I go fishing,' he explained. 'Seems to make the fish bite more'n the muskeeters less.'

Gilligan took the jug awkwardly. What in hell did you do with it? 'Here, lemme show you,' his host said, relieving him of it. Crooking his first finger through the handle the man raised the jug with a round backhanded sweep to his horizontal upper arm, craning his neck until his mouth met the mouth of the vessel.

Gilligan could see his pumping adam's apple against the pale sky. He lowered the jug and drew the back of his hand across his mouth. 'That's how she's done,' he said, handing the thing to Gilligan.

Gilligan tried it with inferior success, feeling the stuff chill upon his chin, sopping the front of his waistcoat. But in his throat it was like fire: it seemed to explode pleasantly as soon as it touched his stomach. He lowered the vessel, coughing.

'Good God, what is it?'

The other laughed hoarsely, slapping his thighs. 'Never drunk no corn before, hain't you? But how does she feel inside? Better'n out, don't she?'

Gilligan admitted that she did. He could feel all his nerves like electric filaments in a bulb: he was conscious of nothing else. Then it became a warmth and an exhilaration. He raised the jug again and did better.

I'll go to Atlanta tomorrow and find her, catch her before she takes a train out of there, he promised himself. I will find her: she cannot escape me forever. The other drank again and Gilligan lit a cigarette. He too knew a sense of freedom, of being master of his destiny. I'll go to Atlanta tomorrow, find her, make her marry me, he repeated. Why did I let her go?

But why not tonight? Sure, why not tonight? I can find her! I know I can. Even in New York. Funny I never thought of that before. His legs and arms had no sensation, his cigarette slipped from his nerveless fingers and reaching for the tiny coal he wavered, finding that he could no longer control his body. Hell, I ain't that drunk, he thought. But he was forced to admit that he was. 'Say, what was that stuff, anyway? I can't hardly stand up.'

The other guffawed again, flattered. 'Ain't she, though? Make her myself, and she's good. You'll git used to it, though. Take another.' He drank it like water, with uncton.
'Dam'f I do. I got to get to town.'

'Take a little sup. I'll put you on the road all right.'

If two drinks make me feel this good I'll scream if I take another, he thought. But his friend insisted and he drank again. 'Let's go,' he said, returning the jug.

The man carrying 'her' circled the lake. Gilligan blundered behind him, among cypress knees, in occasional mud. After a time he regained

some control over his body and they came to a break in the willows and a road slashed into the red sandy soil.

'Here you be, friend. Jest keep right to the road. 'Tain't over a mile.'
'All right. Much obliged to you. You've sure got a son-of-a-gun of a drink there.'

'She's all right, ain't she?' the other agreed.

'Well, good night.' Gilligan extended his hand and the other grasped it formally and limply and pumped it once from a rigid elbow.

'Take keer of yourself.'

'I'll try to,' Gilligan promised. The other's gangling malaria-ridden figure faded again among the willows. The road gashed across the land, stretched silent and empty before him, and below the east was a rumorous promise of moonlight. He trod in dust between dark trees like spilled ink upon the pale clear page of the sky, and soon the moon was more than a promise.

He saw the rim of it sharpening the tips of trees, saw soon the whole disc, bland as a saucer. Whippoorwills were like lost coins among the trees and one blundered awkwardly from the dust almost under his feet. The whisky died away in the loneliness, soon his temporarily mislaid despair took its place again.

After a while passing beneath crossed skeletoned arms on a pole he crossed the railroad and followed a lane between Negro cabins, smelling the intimate odour of Negroes. The cabins were dark but from them came soft meaningless laughter and slow unemphatic voices cheerful yet somehow filled with all the old despairs of time and breath.

Under the moon, quavering with the passion of spring and flesh among whitewashed walls papered inwardly with old newspapers, something pagan using the white man's conventions as it used his clothing, hushed and powerful not knowing its own power:

'Sweet chariot . . . comin' fer to ca'y me home. . . .'

Three young men passed him, shuffling in the dust, aping their own mute shadows in the dusty road, sharp with the passed sweat of labour: 'You may be fas', but you can't las'; cause yo' mommer go' slow you down.'

He trod on with the moon in his face, seeing the cupolaed clock squatting like a benignant god on the courthouse against the sky, staring across the town with four faces. He passed yet more cabins where sweet mellow voices called from door to door. A dog bayed the moon, clear and sorrowful, and a voice cursed it in soft syllables.

' . . . sweet chariot, comin' fer to ca'y me home . . . yes, Jesus, comin' fer to ca'y me hooooome. . . .'

The church loomed a black shadow with a silver roof and he crossed the lawn, passing beneath slumbrous ivied walls. In the garden the mocking-bird that lived in the magnolia rippled the silence, and along the moony wall of the rectory, from ledge to ledge, something crawled shapelessly. What in hell, thought Gilligan, seeing it pause at Emmy's window.

He leaped flower beds swiftly and noiseless. Here was a convenient gutter and Jones did not hear him until he had almost reached the window to which the other clung. They regarded each other precariously, the one clinging to the window, the other to the gutter.

'What are you trying to do?' Gilligan asked.

'Climb up here a little further and I'll show you,' Jones told him snarling his yellow teeth.

'Come away from there, fellow.'

'Damn my soul, if here ain't the squire of dames again. We all hoped you had gone off with that black woman.'

'Are you coming down, or am I coming up there and throw you down?'

'I don't know: am I? Or are you?'

For reply Gilligan heaved himself up, grasping the window ledge. Jones, clinging, tried to kick him in the face but Gilligan caught his foot, releasing his grasp on the gutter. For a moment they swung like a great pendulum against the side of the house, then Jones's hold on the window was torn loose and they plunged together into a bed of tulips. Jones was first on his feet and kicking Gilligan in the side he fled. Gilligan sprang after him and overtook him smartly.

This time it was hyacinths. Jones fought like a woman, kicking, clawing, biting, but Gilligan hauled him to his feet and knocked him down. Jones rose again and was felled once more. This time he crawled and grasping Gilligan's knees pulled him down. Jones kicked himself free and rising fled anew. Gilligan sat up contemplating pursuit, but gave it up as he watched Jones's unwieldy body leaping away through the moonlight.

Jones doubled the church at a good speed and let himself out at the gate. He saw no pursuit so his pace slackened to a walk. Beneath quiet elms his breath became easier. Branches motionlessly leafed were still against stars, and mopping his face and neck with his handkerchief he walked along a deserted street.

At a corner he stopped to dip his handkerchief in a trough for watering horses, bathing his face and hands. The water reduced the pain of the blows he had received and as he paced fatly on from shadow to moonlight and then to shadow again, dogged by his own skulking and shapeless shadow, the calm still night washed his recent tribulation completely from his mind.

From shadowed porches beyond oaks and maples, elms and magnolias, from beyond screening vines starred with motionless pallid blossoms came snatches of hushed talk and sweet broken laughter. . . . Male and female created He them, young. Jones was young, too. 'Yet ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose! That Youth's sweet-scented Manuscript should close! The Nightingale that in the Branches sang, Ah,

whence, and whither flown again, who knows! . . .' Wish I had a girl tonight, he sighed.

The moon was serene: 'Ah, Moon of my Delight, that knows't no wane, The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again: How oft hereafter rising shall she look Through this same Garden after me — in vain!' But how spring itself is imminent with autumn, with death: 'As autumn and the moon of death draw nigh The sad long days of summer herein lie And she too warm in sorrow 'neath the trees Turns to night and weeps, and longs to die.' And in the magic of spring and youth and moonlight Jones raised his clear sentimental tenor.

'Sweetheart, sweetheart, sweetheart.'

His slow shadow blotted out the pen strokes of iron pickets but when he had passed, the pen strokes were still there upon the dark soft grass. Clumps of petunia and cannas broke the smooth stretch of lawn and above the bronze foliage of magnolias the serene columns of a white house rose more beautiful in simplicity than death.

Jones leaned his elbows on a gate, staring at his lumpy shadow at his feet, smelling cape jasmine, hearing a mocking-bird somewhere, somewhere. . . . Jones sighed. It was a sigh of pure ennui.

7

On the rector's desk was a letter addressed to Mr Julian Lowe, — — St, San Francisco, Cal., telling him of her marriage and of her husband's death. It had been returned by the post office department stamped, 'Removed. Present address unknown'.

8

Gilligan, sitting in the hyacinth bed, watched Jones's flight. 'He ain't so bad for a fat one,' he admitted, rising. 'Emmy'll sure have to sleep single tonight.' The mocking-bird in the magnolia, as though it had waited for hostilities to cease, sang again.

‘What in hell have you got to sing about?’ Gilligan shook his fist at the tree. The bird ignored him and he brushed dark earth from his clothes. Anyway, he soliloquized, I feel better.

Wish I could have held the bastard, though. He passed from the garden with a last look at the ruined hyacinth bed. The rector, looming, met him at the corner of the house, beneath the hushed slumbrous passion of the silver tree.

‘That you, Joe? I thought I heard noises in the garden.’

‘You did. I was trying to beat hell out of that fat one, but I couldn’t hold the so — I couldn’t hold him. He lit out.’

‘Fighting? My dear boy!’

‘It wasn’t no fight; he was too busy getting away. It takes two folks to fight, padre.’

‘Fighting doesn’t settle anything, Joe. I’m sorry you resorted to it. Was anyone hurt?’

‘No, worse luck,’ Gilligan replied ruefully, thinking of his soiled clothes and his abortive vengeance.

‘I am glad of that. But boys will fight, eh, Joe? Donald fought in his day.’

‘You damn right he did, reverend. I bet he was a son-of-a-gun in his day.’

The rector’s heavy lined face took a flared match, between his cupped hands he sucked at his pipe. He walked slowly in the moonlight across the lawn, towards the gate. Gilligan followed. ‘I feel restless tonight,’ he explained. ‘Shall we walk a while?’

They paced slowly beneath arched and moon-bitten trees, scuffing their feet in shadows of leaves. Under the moon lights in houses were yellow futilities.

‘Well, Joe, things are back to normal again. People come and go, but Emmy and I seem to be like the biblical rocks. What are your plans?’

Gilligan lit a cigarette with ostentatiousness, hiding his embarrassment. 'Well, padre, to tell the truth, I ain't got any. If it's all the same to you I think I'll stay on with you a while longer.'

'And welcome, dear boy,' the rector answered heartily. Then he stopped and faced the other, keenly. 'God bless you, Joe. Was it on my account you decided to stay?'

Gilligan averted his face guiltily. 'Well, padre—'

'Not at all. I won't have it. You have already done all you can. This is no place for a young man, Joe.'

The rector's bald forehead and his blobby nose were intersecting planes in the moonlight. His eyes were cavernous. Gilligan knew suddenly all the old sorrows of the race, black or yellow or white, and he found himself telling the rector all about her.

'Tut, tut,' the divine said, 'this is bad, Joe.' He lowered himself hugely to the edge of the sidewalk and Gilligan sat beside him. 'Circumstance moves in marvellous ways, Joe.'

'I thought you'd a said God, reverend.'

'God is circumstance, Joe. God is in this life. We know nothing about the next. That will take care of itself in good time. "The Kingdom of God is in man's own heart," the Book says.'

'Ain't that a kind of funny doctrine for a parson to get off?'

'Remember, I am an old man, Joe. Too old for bickering or bitterness. We make our own heaven or hell in this world. Who knows; perhaps when we die we may not be required to go anywhere nor do anything at all. That would be heaven.'

'Or other people make out heaven and hell for us.'

The divine put his heavy arm across Gilligan's shoulder. 'You are suffering from disappointment. But this will pass away. The saddest

thing about love, Joe, is that not only the love cannot last forever, but even the heartbreak is soon forgotten. How does it go? “Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love.” No, no;’ as Gilligan would have interrupted, ‘I know that is an unbearable belief, but all truth is unbearable. Do we not both suffer at this moment from the facts of division and death?’

Gilligan knew shame. Bothering him now, me with a fancied disappointment! The rector spoke again. ‘I think it would be a good idea for you to stay, after all, until you make your future plans. So let’s consider it closed, eh? Suppose we walk further — unless you are tired?’

Gilligan rose in effusive negation. After a while the quiet tree-tunnelled street became a winding road, and leaving the town behind them they descended and then mounted a hill.

Cresting the hill beneath the moon, seeing the world breaking away from them into dark, moon-silvered ridges above valleys where mist hung slumbrous, they passed a small house, sleeping among climbing roses. Beyond it an orchard slept the night away in symmetrical rows, squatting and pregnant. ‘Willard has good fruit,’ the divine murmured.

The road dropped on again descending between reddish gashes, and across a level moon-lit space, broken by a clump of saplings, came a pure quivering chord of music wordless and far away. ‘They are holding services. Negroes,’ the rector explained. They walked on in the dust, passing neat tidy houses, dark with slumber. An occasional group of Negroes passed them, bearing lighted lanterns that jetted vain little flames futilely into the moonlight. ‘No one knows why they do that,’ the divine replied to Gilligan’s question. ‘Perhaps it is to light their churches with.’

The singing drew nearer and nearer; at last, crouching among a clump of trees beside the road, they saw the shabby church with its canting travesty of a spire. Within it was a soft glow of kerosene serving only to make the darkness and the heat thicker, making thicker the imminence

of sex after harsh labour along the mooned land; and from it welled the crooning submerged passion of the dark race. It was nothing, it was everything; then it swelled to an ecstasy, taking the white man's words as readily as it took his remote God and made a personal Father of Him.

Feed Thy Sheep, O Jesus. All the longing of mankind for a Oneness with Something, somewhere. Feed Thy Sheep, O Jesus. . . . The rector and Gilligan stood side by side in the dusty road. The road went on under the moon, vaguely dissolving without perspective. Worn-out red-gutted fields were now alternate splashes of soft black and silver; trees had each a silver nimbus, save those moonward from them, which were sharp as bronze.

Feed Thy Sheep, O Jesus. The voices rose full and soft. There was no organ: no organ was needed as above the harmonic passion of bass and baritone soared a clear soprano of women's voices like a flight of gold and heavenly birds.

They stood together in the dust, the rector in his shapeless black, and Gilligan in his new hard serge, listening, seeing the shabby church become beautiful with mellow longing, passionate and sad. Then the singing died, fading away along the mooned land inevitable with tomorrow and sweat, with sex and death and damnation; and they turned townward under the moon, feeling dust in their shoes.

The Tnd

In his youth William Faulkner exclusively wrote poetry and he did not complete his first novel until 1925, at the age of twenty-eight. His literary influences were varied and he later stated that he modelled his early writing on the Romantic era in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England. He attended the University of Mississippi

("Ole Miss") in Oxford, enrolling in 1919, going three semesters before deciding to drop out in November 1920. Faulkner had been permitted to attend classes at the university as his father had a job there as a business manager. He often skipped classes and received a "D" grade in English. However, some of his poems were published in campus publications.

Although today Faulkner is largely identified with the state of Mississippi, he was residing in New Orleans, Louisiana, when he finished work on what is generally considered to be his first novel, *Soldiers' Pay*. The influence of Sherwood Anderson's modern experimental approach to fiction is clearly discernible in this work. Indeed, Anderson was a close friend and assisted Faulkner in his work, recommending his work to his own publisher.

Soldier's Pay is one of only a few of the author's novels that is not set in his fictional Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. Originally released by the New York-based publishing house Boni & Liveright on 25 February 1926, the narrative revolves around a wounded aviator, who returns home to a small town in Georgia following the conclusion of the First World War. He is escorted by a veteran of the war, as well as a widow whose husband was killed in the conflict.

The aviator has suffered a horrendous head injury, leaving him in a state of almost perpetual silence, as well as blindness. Several conflicts revolving around his return include the state of his engagement to his fiancée, the desire of the widow to break the engagement in order to marry him herself and the romantic intrigue surrounding the fiancée who had been less than faithful to the aviator in his absence.

By the standards of the day, *Soldiers' Pay* and Faulkner's second novel *Mosquitoes* were commercial failures, as neither sold more than 1,200 copies after their initial release. However, since Faulkner was awarded the 1954 Nobel Prize for Literature, *Soldiers' Pay* has remained in print. First edition copies are valuable among collectors, often selling for upwards of \$35,000.

Mosquitoes, William Faulkner

Mosquitoes

First published in 1927 by Boni & Liveright, *Mosquitoes* is a satirical novel and was largely inspired by Faulkner's involvement in the New Orleans creative community, where he spent time before moving to France. Beginning and ending in the city of New Orleans, the narrative follows a diverse cast of artists, aesthetes and adolescents as they embark on a four-day excursion aboard the motorised yacht, the *Nausikaa*, owned by a wealthy patron of the arts.

The narrative is organised into six sections, with a prologue that introduces the characters, followed by four body sections each of which documents a day of the yacht trip hour-by-hour, concluding with an epilogue that returns the characters, changed or unchanged, to their lives off the boat.

The inspiration for Faulkner's second novel has been traced to a specific yachting excursion in Faulkner's life that took place in April 1925 on Lake Pontchartrain. He was joined by members of the real-life New Orleans' artistic community, which included artist William Spratling, author Hamilton Basso and the novelist and short-story writer Sherwood Anderson.

Though the parallels between this trip and the fictive journey documented in *Mosquitoes* are clearly evident, it has been noted by critics that direct references to Faulkner's life do not end here. Dawson Fairchild's character, for example, is known to be a satirical portrait of his mentor Sherwood Anderson and is cited as the reason for his falling-out with Faulkner.

The hour-by-hour, day-by-day organisation of the narrative's body sections suggests, in form as well as function, the nature of the days spent on the cruise ship, vastly repetitive and mundane. By grounding the repetitive activities of the characters in concrete temporal divisions,

Faulkner fashions a structure to what might otherwise appear as an endless stream of conversation and interaction between various combinations of the yacht's passengers.

Though many views on the contemporary culture of the 1920's American South could be drawn from the endless cultural references in the text, two major themes are notable: Faulkner's exploration of sex and sexuality and the societal role of the artist.

Several critics consider *Mosquitoes* to be Faulkner's weakest and most imitative work, recognising his debt to the styles of Aldous Huxley, T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce. Nonetheless, *Mosquitoes* represents a period in Faulkner's career where he begins to cultivate the personal literary style for which he would later become famous.

The first edition

Contents

Prologue

The First Day

The Second Day

The Fourth Day

Epilogue

Lake Pontchartrain, Louisiana – a primary setting of the novel

Sherwood Anderson, Faulkner's friend and mentor. Unfortunately, due to Faulkner's satirical depiction of Anderson in '*Mosquitoes*', the two authors fell out.

TO HELEN

In spring, the sweet young spring, decked out with little green, necklaced, braceleted with the song of idiotic birds, spurious and sweet and tawdry as a shopgirl in her cheap finery, like an idiot with money and no taste; they were little and young and trusting, you could kill them sometimes.

But now, as August like a languorous replete bird winged slowly through the pale summer toward the moon of decay and death, they were bigger, vicious; ubiquitous as undertakers, cunning as pawnbrokers; confident and unavoidable as politicians; They came cityward lustful as country boys, as passionately integral as a college football squad; pervading and monstrous but without majesty: a biblical plague seen through the wrong end of a binocular: the majesty of Fate become contemptuous through ubiquity and sheer repetition.

PROLOGUE

I

“THE SEX INSTINCT,” repeated Mr. Talliaferro in his careful cockney, with that smug complacence with which you plead guilty to a characteristic which you privately consider a virtue, “is quite strong in me. Frankness, without which there can be no friendship, without which two people cannot really ever ‘get’ each other, as you artists say; frankness, as I was saying, I believe—”

“Yes,” his host agreed. “Would you mind moving a little?”

He complied with obsequious courtesy, remarking the thin fretful flashing of the chisel beneath the rhythmic maul. Wood scented gratefully slid from its mute flashing, and slapping vainly about himself with his handkerchief he moved in a Bluebeard’s closet of blonde hair in severed clots, examining with concern a faint even powdering of dust upon his neat small patent leather shoes.

Yes, one must pay a price for Art.... Watching the rhythmic power of the other’s back and arm he speculated briefly upon which was more to be desired — muscularity in an undershirt, or Ms own symmetrical sleeve, and reassured he continued:

“... frankness compels me to admit that the sex instinct is perhaps my most dominating compulsion.” Mr. Talliaferro believed that

Conversation — not talk: Conversation — with an intellectual equal consisted of admitting as many so-called unpublishable facts as possible about oneself. Mr. Talliaferro often mused with regret on the degree of intimacy he might have established with his artistic acquaintances had he but acquired the habit of masturbation in his youth. But he had not even done this.

“Yes,” his host agreed again, thrusting a hard hip into him. “Not at all,” murmured Mr. Talliaferro quickly. A harsh wall restored his equilibrium roughly and hearing a friction of cloth and plaster he rebounded with repressed alacrity.

“Pardon me,” he chattered. His entire sleeve indicated his arm in gritty white and regarding his coat with consternation he moved out of range and sat upon an upturned wooden block. Brushing did no good, and the ungracious surface on which he sat recalling his trousers to his attention, he rose and spread his handkerchief upon it. Whenever he came here he invariably soiled his clothes, but under that spell put on us by those we admire doing things we ourselves cannot do, he always returned.

The chisel bit steadily beneath the slow arc of the maul. His host ignored him. Mr. Talliaferro slapped viciously and vainly at the back of his hand, sitting in lukewarm shadow while light came across roofs and chimneypots, passing through the dingy skylight, becoming weary.

His host labored on in the tired light while the guest sat on his hard block regretting his sleeve, watching the other's hard body in stained trousers and undershirt, watching the curling vigor of his hair, Outside the window New Orleans, the vieux carré, brooded in a faintly tarnished languor like an aging yet still beautiful courtesan in a smokefilled room, avid yet weary too of ardent ways.

Above the city summer was hushed warmly into the bowled weary passion of the sky. Spring and the cruellest months were gone, the cruel months, the wantons that break the fat hybernant dullness and comfort of Time; August was on the wing, and September — a month

of languorous days regretful as woodsmoke. But Mr. Talliaferro's youth, or lack of it, troubled him no longer. Thank God.

No youth to trouble the individual in this room at all. What this room troubled was something eternal in the race, something immortal. And youth is not deathless. Thank God.

This unevenly boarded floor, these rough stained walls broken by high small practically useless windows beautifully set, these crouching lintels cutting the immaculate ruined pitch of walls which had housed slaves long ago, slaves long dead and dust with the age that had produced them and which they had served with a kind and gracious dignity — shades of servants and masters now in a more gracious region, lending dignity to eternity.

After all, only a few chosen can accept service with dignity: it is man's impulse to do for himself. It rests with the servant to lend dignity to an unnatural proceeding. And outside, above rooftops becoming slowly violet, summer lay supine, unchaste with decay.

As you entered the room the thing drew your eyes; you turned sharply as to a sound, expecting movement. But it was marble, it could not move.

And when you tore your eyes away and turned your back on it at last, you got again untarnished and high and clean that sense of swiftness, of space encompassed; but on looking again it was as before: motionless and passionately eternal — the virginal breastless torso of a girl, headless, armless, legless, in marble temporarily caught and hushed yet passionate still for escape, passionate and simple and eternal in the equivocal derisive darkness of the world.

Nothing to trouble your youth or lack of it: rather something to trouble the very fibrous integrity of your being. Mr. Talliaferro slapped his neck savagely.

The manipulator of the chisel and maul ceased his labor and straightened up, flexing his arm and shoulder muscles.

And as though it had graciously waited for him to get done, the light faded quietly and abruptly: the room was like a bathtub after the drain has been opened. Mr. Talliaferro rose also and his host turned upon him a face like that of a heavy hawk, breaking his dream. Mr. Talliaferro regretted his sleeve again and said briskly:

“Then I may tell Mrs. Maurier that you will come?”

“What?” the other asked sharply, staring at him. “Oh, Hell, I have work to do. Sorry. Tell her I am sorry.”

Mr. Talliaferro’s disappointment was tinged faintly with exasperation as he watched the other cross the darkening room to a rough wood bench and raise a cheap enamelware water pitcher, gulping from it.

“But, I say,” said Mr. Talliaferro fretfully.

“No, no,” the other repeated brusquely, wiping his beard on his upper arm. “Some other time, perhaps. I am too busy to bother with her now. Sorry.” He swung back the open door and from a hook screwed into it he took down a thin coat and a battered tweed cap. Mr. Talliaferro watched his muscles bulge the thin cloth with envious distaste, recalling anew the unmuscled emphasis of his own pressed flannel.

The other was palpably on the verge of abrupt departure and Mr. Talliaferro, to whom solitude, particularly dingy solitude, was unbearable, took his stiff straw hat from the bench where it flaunted its wanton gay band above the slim yellow gleam of his straight malacca stick.

“Wait,” he said, “and I’ll join you.”

The other paused, looking back. “I’m going out,” he stated belligerently, Mr. Talliaferro, at a momentary loss, said fatuously; “Why — ah, I thought — I should—” The hawk’s face brooded above him in the dusk remotely and he added quickly: “I could return, however.”

“Sure it’s no trouble?”

“Not at all, my dear fellow, not at all! Only call on me. I will be only too glad to return.”

“Well, if you’re sure it’s no trouble, suppose you fetch me a bottle of milk from the grocer on the corner. You know the place, don’t you? Here’s the empty one.”

With one of his characteristic plunging movements the other passed through the door and Mr. Talliaferro stood in a dapper fretted surprise, clutching a coin in one hand and an unwashed milk bottle in the other. On the stairs, watching the other’s shape descending into the welled darkness, he stopped again and standing on one leg like a crane he clasped the bottle under his arm and slapped at his ankle, viciously and vainly.

2

Descending a final stair and turning into a darkling corridor he passed two people indistinguishably kissing, and he hastened on toward the street door. He paused here in active indecision, opening his coat.

The bottle had become clammy in his hand. He contemplated it through his sense of touch with acute repugnance. Unseen, it seemed to have become unbearably dirty. He desired something, vaguely — a newspaper, perhaps, but before striking a match he looked quickly over his shoulder.

They were gone, hushing their chimed footsteps up the dark curve of the stair: their chimed tread was like a physical embrace. His match flared a puny fledged gold that followed his clasped gleaming stick as if it were a train of gun powder. But the passage was empty, swept with chill stone, imminent with weary moisture... the match burned down to the even polished temper of his fingernails and plunged him back into darkness more intense.

He opened the street door. Twilight ran in like a quiet violet dog and nursing his bottle he peered out across an undimensional feathered square, across stencilled palms and Andrew Jackson in childish effigy bestriding the terrific arrested plunge of his curly balanced horse, toward the long unemphasis of the Pontalba building and three spires of the cathedral graduated by perspective, pure and slumbrous beneath the decadent languor of August and evening. Mr. Talliaferro thrust his head modestly forth, looking both ways along the street. Then he withdrew his head and closed the door again.

He employed his immaculate linen handkerchief reluctantly before thrusting the bottle beneath his coat. It bulged distressingly under his exploring hand, and he removed the bottle in mounting desperation. He struck another match, setting the bottle down at his feet to do so, but there was nothing in which he might wrap the thing.

His impulse was to grasp it and hurl it against the wall: already he pleased in its anticipated glassy crash. But Mr. Talliaferro was quite honorable: he had passed his word. Or he might return to Ms friend's room and get a bit of paper. He stood in hot indecision until feet on the stairs descending decided for him. He bent and fumbled for the bottle, struck it and heard its disconsolate empty flight, captured it at last and opening the street door anew he rushed hurriedly forth.

The violet dusk held in soft suspension lights slow as bell-strokes, Jackson square was now a green and quiet lake in which abode lights round as jellyfish, feathering with silver mimosa and pomegranate and hibiscus beneath which lantana and cannas bled and bled. Pontalba and cathedral were cut from black paper and pasted fiat on a green sky; above them taller palms were fixed in black and soundless explosions. The street was empty, but from Royal street there came the hum of a trolley that rose to a staggering clatter, passed on and away leaving an interval filled with the gracious sound of inflated rubber on asphalt, like a tearing of endless silk.

Clasping his accursed bottle, feeling like a criminal, Mr. Talliaferro hurried on.

He walked swiftly beside a dark wall, passing small indiscriminate shops dimly lighted with gas and smelling of food of all kinds, fulsome, slightly overripe. The proprietors and their families sat before the doors in tilted chairs, women nursing babies into slumber spoke in soft south European syllables one to another.

Children scurried before him and about him, ignoring him or becoming aware of him and crouching in shadow like animals, defensive, passive and motionless.

He turned the corner. Royal street sprang in two directions and he darted into a grocery store on the corner, passing the proprietor sitting in the door with his legs spread for comfort, nursing the Italian balloon of his belly on his lap.

The proprietor removed his short terrific pipe and belched, rising to follow the customer. Mr. Talliaferro set the bottle down hastily. The grocer belched again, frankly. "Good afternoon," he said in a broad West End accent much nearer the real thing than Mr. Talliaferro's. "Meelk, hay?"

Mr. Talliaferro extended the coin, murmuring, watching the man's thick reluctant thighs as he picked up the bottle without repugnance and slid it into a pigeonholed box and opening a refrigerator beside it, took therefrom a fresh one. Mr. Talliaferro recoiled, "Haven't you a bit of paper to wrap it in?" he asked diffidently.

"Why, sure," the other agreed affably, "Make her in a parcel, hay?" He complied with exasperating deliberation, and breathing freer but still oppressed, Mr. Talliaferro took his purchase and glancing hurriedly about, stepped into the street. And paused, stricken.

She was under full sail and accompanied by a slimmer one when she saw him, but she tacked at once and came about in a hushed swishing of silk and an expensive clashing of impediments — handbag and chains and beads. Her hand bloomed fatly through bracelets, ringed and

manicured, and her hothouse face wore an expression of infantile trusting astonishment.

“Mister Talliaferro! What a surprise,” she exclaimed, accenting the first word of each phrase, as was her manner. And she really was surprised. Mrs. Manner went through the world continually amazed at chance, whether or not she had instigated it. Mr. Talliaferro shifted his parcel quickly behind him, to its imminent destruction, being forced to accept her hand without removing his hat. He rectified this as soon as possible.

“I would never have expected to see you in this part of town at this hour,” she continued. “But you have been calling on some of your artist friends, I suppose?”

The slim one had stopped also, and stood examining Mr. Talliaferro with cool uninterest. The older woman turned to her. “Mr. Talliaferro knows all the interesting people in the Quarter, darling.

All the people who are — who are creating — creating things. Beautiful things. Beauty, you know.” Mrs. Maurier waved her glittering hand vaguely toward the sky in which stars had begun to flower like pale and tarnished gardenias. “Oh, do excuse me, Mr. Talliaferro — This is my niece, Miss Robyn, of whom you have heard me speak.

She and her brother have come to comfort a lonely old woman—” her glance held a decayed coquetry, and taking his cue Mr. Talliaferro said: “Nonsense, dear lady. It is we, your unhappy admirers, who need comforting. Perhaps Miss Robyn will take pity on us, also?”

He bowed toward the niece with calculated formality. The niece was not enthusiastic.

“Now, darling,” Mrs. Maurier turned to her niece with rapture. “Here is an example of the chivalry of our southern men. Can you imagine a man in Chicago saying that?”

“Not hardly,” the niece agreed. Her aunt rushed on: “That is why I have been so anxious for Patricia to visit me, so she can meet men who are — who are — My niece is named for me, you see, Mr. Talliaferro. Isn’t that nice?” She pressed Mr. Talliaferro with recurrent happy astonishment.

Mr. Talliaferro bowed again, came within an ace of dropping the bottle, darted the hand which held his hat and stick behind him to steady it. “Charming, charming,” he agreed, perspiring under his hair.

“But, really, I am surprised to find you here at this hour. And I suppose you are as surprised to find us here, aren’t you? But I have just found the most wonderful thing! Do look at it, Mr. Talliaferro: I do so want your opinion.”

She extended to him a dull lead plaque from which in dim has-relief of faded red and blue simpered a Madonna with an expression of infantile astonishment identical with that of Mrs. Maurier, and a Child somehow smug and complacent looking as an old man.

Mr. Talliaferro, feeling the poised precariousness of the bottle, dared not release his hand. He bent over the extended object. “Do take it, so you can examine it under the light,” its owner insisted. Mr. Talliaferro perspired again mildly.

The niece spoke suddenly:

“I’ll hold your package.”

She moved with young swiftness and before he could demur she had taken the bottle from his hand. “Ow,” she exclaimed, almost dropping it herself, and her aunt gushed:

“Oh, you have discovered something also, haven’t you?”

Now I’ve gone and shown you my treasure, and all the while you were concealing something much, much nicer” She wagged her hands to indicate dejection. “You will consider mine trash, I know you will,” she went on with heavy assumed displeasure. “Oh, to be a man, so I could

poke around in shops all day and really discover things! Do show us what you have, Mr. Talliaferro.”

“It’s a bottle of milk,” remarked the niece, examining Mr. Talliaferro with interest.

Her aunt shrieked. Her breast heaved with repression, glinting her pins and beads. “A bottle of milk? Have you turned artist, too?”

For the first and last time in his life Mr. Talliaferro wished a lady dead. But he was a gentleman: he only seethed inwardly. He laughed with abortive heartiness.

“An artist? You flatter me, dear lady. I’m afraid my soul does not aspire so high. I am content to be merely a—”

“Milkman,” suggested the young female devil.

“ — Maecenas alone. If I might so style myself,”

Mrs. Maurier sighed with disappointment and surprise. “Ah, Mr. Talliaferro, I am dreadfully disappointed. I had hoped for a moment that some of your artist friends had at last prevailed on you to give something to the world of Art.

No, no; don’t say you cannot: I am sure you are capable of it, what with your — your delicacy of soul, your—” she waved her hand again vaguely toward the sky above Rampart street “Ah, to be a man, with no ties save those of the soul! To create, to create.” She returned easily to Royal street, “But, really, a bottle of milk, Mr. Talliaferro?”

“Merely for my friend Gordon, I looked in on him this afternoon and found him quite busy. So I ran out to fetch him milk for his supper. These artists!” Mr. Talliaferro shrugged. “You know how they live.”

“Yes, indeed. Genius. A hard taskmaster, isn’t it? Perhaps you are wise in not giving your life to it. It is a long lonely road. But how is Mr. Gordon?”

I am so continually occupied with things — unavoidable duties, which my conscience will not permit me to evade (I am very conscientious, you know) — that I simply haven't the time to see as much of the Quarter as I should like. I had promised Mr. Gordon faithfully to call, and to have him to dinner soon.

I am sure he thinks I have forgotten him. Please make my peace with him, won't you? Assure him that I have not forgotten him."

"I am sure he realizes how many calls you have on your time," Mr. Talliaferro assured her gallantly. "Don't let that distress you at all."

"Yes, I really don't know how I get anything done: I am always surprised when I find I have a spare moment for my own pleasure."

She turned her expression of happy astonishment on him again. The niece spun slowly and slimly on one high heel: the sweet young curve of her shanks straight and brittle as the legs of a bird and ending in the twin inky splashes of her slippers, entranced him.

Her hat was a small brilliant bell about her face, and she wore her clothing with a casual rakishness, as though she had opened her wardrobe and said, Let's go downtown. Her aunt was saying: "But what about our yachting party? You gave Mr. Gordon my invitation?"

Mr. Talliaferro was troubled. "We-ll — You see, he is quite busy now. He — He has a commission that will admit of no delay," he concluded with inspiration.

"Ah, Mr. Talliaferro! You haven't told him he is invited. Shame on you! Then I must tell him myself, since you have failed me."

"No, really—"

She interrupted him, "Forgive me, dear Mr. Talliaferro.

I didn't mean to be unjust. I am glad you didn't invite him. It will be better for me to do it, so I can overcome any scruples he might have.

He is quite shy, you know. Oh, quite, I assure you. Artistic temperament, you understand: so spiritual....”

“Yes,” agreed Mr. Talliaferro, covertly watching the niece who had ceased her spinning and got her seemingly boneless body into an undimensional angular flatness pure as an Egyptian carving.

“So I shall attend to it myself. I shall call him to-night: we sail at noon to-morrow, you know. That will allow him sufficient time, don’t you think? He’s one of these artists who never have much, lucky people.” Mrs. Maurier looked at her watch. “Heavens above! seven thirty. We must fly. Come, darling. Can’t we drop you somewhere, Mr. Talliaferro?”

“Thank you, no. I must take Gordon’s milk to him, and then I am engaged for the evening.”

“Ah, Mr. Talliaferro! It’s a woman, I know.” She rolled her eyes roguishly. “What a terrible man you are.” She lowered her voice and tapped him on the sleeve. “Do be careful what you say before this child. My instincts are all bohemian, but she... unsophisticated...”

Her voice bathed him warmly and Mr. Talliaferro bridled: had he had a mustache he would have stroked it. Mrs. Maurier jangled and glittered again: her expression became one of pure delight. “But, of course! We will drive you to Mr. Gordon’s and then I can run in and invite him for the party, The very thing! How fortunate to have thought of it. Come, darling,”

Without stooping the niece angled her leg upward and outward from the knee, scratching her ankle, Mr. Talliaferro recalled the milk bottle and assented gratefully, falling in on the curbside with meticulous thoughtfulness.

A short distance up the street Mrs. Maurier’s car squatted expensively. The negro driver descended and opened the door and Mr. Talliaferro

sank into gracious upholstery, nursing his milk bottle, smelling flowers cut and delicately vased, promising himself a car next year.

3

They rolled smoothly, passing between spaced lights and around narrow corners, while Mrs. Maurier talked steadily of hers and Mr. Talliaferro's and Gordon's souls. The niece sat quietly. Mr. Talliaferro was conscious of the clean young odor of her, like that of young trees; and when they passed beneath lights he could see her slim shape and the impersonal revelation of her legs and her bare sexless knees. Mr. Talliaferro luxuriated, clutching his bottle of milk, wishing the ride need not end. But the car drew up to the curb again, and he must get out, no matter with what reluctance.

"I'll run up and bring him down to you," he suggested with premonitory tact.

"No, no: let's all go up," Mrs. Maurier objected. "I want Patricia to see how genius looks at home."

"Gee, Aunty, I've seen these dives before," the niece said. "They're everywhere. I'll wait for you." She jackknifed her body effortlessly, scratching her ankles with her brown hands.

"It's so interesting to see how they live, darling. You'll simply love it," Mr. Talliaferro demurred again, but Mrs. Maurier overrode him with sheer words. So against his better judgment he struck matches for them, leading the way up the dark tortuous stairs while their three shadows aped them, rising and falling monstrously upon the ancient wall.

Long before they reached the final stage Mrs. Maurier was puffing and panting, and Mr. Talliaferro found a puerile vengeful glee in hearing her labored breath. But he was a gentleman; he put this from him, rebuking himself. He knocked on a door, was bidden, opened it:

"Back, are you?"

Gordon sat in his single chair, munching a thick sandwich, clutching a book. The unshaded light glared savagely upon his undershirt.

“You have callers,” Mr. Talliaferro offered his belated warning, but the other looking up had already seen beyond his shoulder Mrs. Maurier’s interested face. He rose and cursed Mr. Talliaferro, who had begun immediately his unhappy explanation.

“Mrs. Maurier insisted on dropping in—”

Mrs. Maurier vanquished him anew, “Mister Gordon!” She sailed into the room, bearing her expression of happy astonishment like a round platter stood on edge. “How do you do? Can you ever, ever forgive us for intruding like this?” she went on in her gushing italics, “We just met Mr. Talliaferro on the street with your milk, and we decided to brave the lion in his den.

How do you do?” She forced her effusive hand upon him, staring about in happy curiosity.

“So this is where genius labors. How charming: so — so original. And that—” she indicated a corner screened off by a draggled length of green rep “ — is your bedroom, isn’t it?

How delightful! Ah, Mr. Gordon, how I envy you this freedom. And a view — you have a view also, haven’t you?” She held his hand and stared entranced at a high useless window framing two tired looking stars of the fourth magnitude, “I would have if I were eight feet tall,” he corrected. She looked at him quickly, happily. Mr. Talliaferro laughed nervously.

“That would be delightful,” she agreed readily. “I was so anxious to have my niece see a real studio, Mr. Gordon, where a real artist works. Darling—” she glanced over her shoulder fatly, still holding his hand “ — darling, let me present you to a real sculptor, one from whom we expect great things.... Darling,” she repeated in a louder tone.

The niece, untroubled by the stairs, had drifted in after them and she now stood before the single marble. "Come and speak to Mr. Gordon, darling." Beneath her aunt's saccharine modulation was a faint trace of something not so sweet after all. The niece turned her head and nodded slightly without looking at him. Gordon released his hand.

"Mr. Talliaferro tells me you have a commission." Mrs. Maurier's voice was again a happy astonished honey. "May we see it?"

I know artists don't like to exhibit an incomplete work, but just among friends, you see.... You both know how sensitive to beauty I am, though I have been denied the creative impulse myself."

"Yes," agreed Gordon, watching the niece.

"I have long intended visiting your studio, as I promised, you remember. So I shall take this opportunity of looking about — Do you mind?"

"Help yourself. Talliaferro can show you things. Pardon me." He lurched characteristically between them and Mrs. Maurier chanted:

"Yes, indeed. Mr. Talliaferro, like myself, is sensitive to the beautiful in Art. Ah, Mr. Talliaferro, why were you and I given a love for the beautiful, yet denied the ability to create it from stone and wood and clay..."

Her body in its brief simple dress was motionless when he came over to her. After a time he said:

"Like it?"

Her jaw in profile was heavy: there was something masculine about it. But in full face it was not heavy, only quiet. Her mouth was full and colorless, unpainted, and her eyes were opaque as smoke. She met his gaze, remarking the icy blueness of his eyes (like a surgeon's she thought) and looked at the marble again.

"I don't know," she answered slowly. Then: "It's like me,"

“How like you?” he asked gravely.

She didn’t answer. Then she said: “Can I touch it?”

“If you like,” he replied, examining the line of her jaw, her firm brief nose. She made no move and he added: “Aren’t you going to touch it?”

“I’ve changed my mind,” she told him calmly. Gordon glanced over his shoulder to where Mrs, Maurier pored volubly over something, Mr. Talliaferro yea’d her with restrained passion.

“Why is it like you?” he repeated.

She said irrelevantly: “Why hasn’t she anything here?” Her brown hand flashed slimly across the high unemphasis of the marble’s breast, and withdrew.

“You haven’t much there yourself.” She met his steady gaze steadily.

“Why should it have anything there?” he asked.

“You’re right,” she agreed with the judicial complaisance of an equal. “I see now. Of course she shouldn’t. I didn’t quite — quite get it for a moment.”

Gordon examined with growing interest her flat breast and belly, her boy’s body which the poise of it and the thinness of her arms belied. Sexless, yet somehow vaguely troubling. Perhaps just young, like a calf or a colt. “How old are you?” he asked abruptly.

“Eighteen, if it’s any of your business,” she replied without rancor, staring at the marble, Suddenly she looked up at him again. “I wish I could have it,” she said with sudden sincerity and longing, quite like a four-year-old.

“Thanks,” he said. “That was quite sincere, too, wasn’t it? Of course you can’t have it, though. You see that, don’t you?”

She was silent. He knew she could see no reason why she shouldn’t have it.

"I guess so," she agreed at last. "I just thought I'd see, though."
"Not to overlook any bets?"

"Oh, well, by to-morrow I probably won't want it, anyway.... And if I still do, I can get something just as good."

"You mean," he amended, "that if you still want it to-morrow, you can get it. Don't you?"

Her hand, as if it were a separate organism, reached out slowly, stroking the marble. "Why are you so black?" she asked.

"Black?"

"Not your hair and beard. I like your red hair and beard. But you. You are black. I mean.. her voice fell and he suggested Soul? "I don't know what that is," she stated quietly.

"Neither do I. You might ask your aunt, though. She seems familiar with souls."

She glanced over her shoulder, showing him her other unequal profile.

"Ask her yourself. Here she comes."

Mrs. Maurier surged her scented upholstered bulk between them.

"Wonderful, wonderful," she was exclaiming in sincere astonishment.

"And this..." her voice died away and she gazed at the marble, dazed.

Mr. Talliaferro echoed her immaculately, taking to himself the showman's credit.

"Do you see what he has caught?" he bugled melodiously, "Do you see? The spirit of youth, of something fine and hard and clean in the world; something we all desire until our mouths are stopped with dust."

Desire with Mr. Talliaferro had long since become an unfulfilled habit requiring no longer any particular object at all.

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Maurier. "How beautiful. What — what does it signify, Mr. Gordon?"

"Nothing, Aunt Pat," the niece snapped. "It doesn't have to."

"But, really—"

“What do you want it to signify? Suppose it signified a — a dog, or an ice cream soda, what difference would it make? Isn’t it all right like it is?”

“Yes, indeed, Mrs. Maurier,” Mr. Talliaferro agreed with soothing haste, “it is not necessary that it have objective significance. We must accept it for what it is: pure form untrammelled by any relation to a familiar or utilitarian object.”

“Oh, yes: untrammelled.” Here was a word Mrs. Maurier knew. “The untrammelled spirit, freedom like the eagle’s.”

“Shut up, Aunty,” the niece told her. “Don’t be a fool.”

“But it has what Talliaferro calls objective significance,” Gordon interrupted brutally. “This is my feminine ideal: a virgin with no legs to leave me, no arms to hold me, no head to talk to me.”

“Mister Gordon!” Mrs. Maurier stared at him over her compressed breast. Then she thought of something that did possess objective significance. “I had almost forgotten our reason for calling so late. Not,” she added quickly, “that we needed any other reason to — to — Mr. Talliaferro, how was it those old people used to put it, about pausing on Life’s busy highroad to kneel for a moment at the Master’s feet?”

. Mrs. Maurier’s voice faded and her face assumed an expression of mild concern. “Or is it the Bible of which I am thinking? Well, no matter: we dropped in to invite you for a yachting party, a few days on the lake—”

“Yes. Talliaferro told me about it. Sorry, but I shall be unable to come.”

Mrs. Maurier’s eyes became quite round. She turned to Mr. Talliaferro. “Mister Talliaferro! You told me you hadn’t mentioned it to him!”

Mr. Talliaferro writhed acutely. “Do forgive me, if I left you under that impression. It was quite unintentional. I only desired that you speak to

him yourself and make him reconsider. The party will not be complete without him, will it?"

"Not at all. Really, Mr. Gordon, won't you reconsider? Surely you won't disappoint us." She stooped creaking, and slapped at her ankle.

"Pardon me."

"No. Sorry. I have work to do."

Mrs. Maurier transferred her expression of astonishment and dejection to Mr. Talliaferro. "It can't be that he doesn't want to come. There must be some other reason. Do say something to him, Mr. Talliaferro. We simply must have him. Mr. Fairchild is going, and Eva and Dorothy: we simply must have a sculptor. Do convince him, Mr. Talliaferro."

"I'm sure his decision is not final: I am sure he will not deprive us of his company. A few days on the water will do him no end of good; freshen him up like a tonic. Eh, Gordon?"

Gordon's hawk's face brooded above them, remote and insufferable with arrogance.

The niece had turned away, drifting slowly about the room, grave and quiet and curious, straight as a poplar. Mrs. Maurier implored him with her eyes doglike, temporarily silent. Suddenly she had an inspiration.

"Come, people, let's all go to my house for dinner. Then we can discuss it at our ease."

Mr. Talliaferro demurred. "I am engaged this evening, you know," he reminded her.

"Oh, Mr. Talliaferro." She put her hand on his sleeve. "Don't you fail me, too. I always depend on you when people fail me. Can't you defer your engagement?"

"Really, I am afraid not. Not in this case," Mr. Talliaferro replied smugly. "Though I am distressed.."

Mrs. Maurier sighed. "These women! Mr. Talliaferro is perfectly terrible with women," she informed Gordon. "But you will come, won't you?"

The niece had drifted up to them and stood rubbing the calf of one leg against the other shin. Gordon turned to her. "Will you be there?"

Damn their little souls, she whispered on a sucked breath. She yawned. "Oh, yes. I eat. But I'm going to bed darn soon." She yawned again, patting the broad pale oval of her mouth with brown fingers "Patricia!" her aunt exclaimed in shocked amazement. "Of course you will do nothing of the kind. The very idea! Come, Mr. Gordon."

"No, thanks. I am engaged myself," he answered stiffly. "Some other time, perhaps."

"I simply won't take No for an answer. Do help me, Mr. Talliaferro. He simply must come."

"Do you want him to come as he is?" the niece asked.

Her aunt glanced briefly at the undershirt, and shuddered. But she said bravely: "Of course, if he wishes. What are clothes, compared with this?" she described an arc with her hand; diamonds glittered on its orbit. "So you cannot evade it, Mr. Gordon. You must come."

Her hand poised above his arm, pouncing. He eluded it brusquely.

"Excuse me." Mr. Talliaferro avoided his sudden movement just in time, and the niece said wickedly:

"There's a shirt behind the door, if that's what you are looking for. You won't need a tie, with that beard."

He picked her up by the elbows, as you would a high narrow table, and set her aside. Then his tail controlled body filled and emptied the door and disappeared in the darkness of the hallway. The niece gazed after him. Mrs. Maurier stared at the door, then to Mr. Talliaferro in quiet amazement. "What in the world—" Her hands clashed vainly among her various festooned belongings. "Where is he going?" she said at last.

The niece said suddenly: "I like him." She too gazed at the door through which, passing, he seemed to have emptied the room. "I bet he doesn't come back," she remarked.

Her aunt shrieked. "Doesn't come back?"

“Well, I wouldn’t, if I were him.” She returned to the marble, stroking it with slow desire. Mrs. Maurier gazed helplessly at Mr. Talliaferro. “Where—” she began.

“I’ll go see,” he offered, breaking his own trance. The two women regarded his vanishing neat back.

“Never in my life — Patricia, what did you mean by being so rude to him? Of course he is offended. Don’t you know how sensitive artists are? After I have worked so hard to cultivate him, too!”

“Nonsense. It’ll do him good. He thinks just a little too well of himself as it is.”

“But to insult the man in his own house. I can’t understand you young people at all. Why, if I’d said a thing like that to a gentleman, and a stranger... I can’t imagine what your father can mean, letting you grow up like this. He certainly knows better than this—”

“I’m not to blame for the way he acted. You are the one, yourself. Suppose you’d been sitting in your room in your shimmy, and a couple of men you hardly knew had walked in on you and tried to persuade you to go somewhere you didn’t want to go, what would you have done?”

“These people are different,” her aunt told her coldly. “You don’t understand them. Artists don’t require privacy as we do: it means nothing whatever to them. But any one, artist or no, would object—”

“Oh, haul in your sheet,” the niece interrupted coarsely. “You’re jibbing.”

Mr. Talliaferro reappeared panting with delicate repression, “Gordon was called hurriedly away. He asked me to make his excuses and to express his disappointment over having to leave so unceremoniously.”

“Then he’s not coming to dinner.” Mrs. Maurier sighed, feeling her age, the imminence of dark and death. She seemed not only unable to get

new men any more, but to hold to the old ones, even... Mr. Talliaferro, too,.. age, age....

She sighed again. "Come, darling," she said in a strangely chastened tone, quieter, pitiable in a way. The niece put both her firm tanned hands on the marble, hand, hand, O beautiful, she whispered in salutation and farewell, turning quickly away.

"Let's go," she said, "I'm starving."

Mr. Talliaferro had lost his box of matches: he was desolated. So they were forced to feel their way down the stairs, disturbing years and years of dust upon the rail. The stone corridor was cool and dank and filled with a suppressed minor humming. They hurried on.

Night was fully come and the car squatted at the curb in patient silhouette; the negro driver sat within with all the windows closed. Within its friendly familiarity Mrs. Maurier's spirits rose again. She gave Mr. Talliaferro her hand, sugaring her voice again with a decayed coquetry.

"You will call me, then? But don't promise: I know how completely your time is taken up—" she leaned forward, tapping him on the cheek—"Don Juan!"

He laughed deprecatingly, with pleasure. The niece from her corner said:

"Good evening, Mr. Tarver."

Mr. Talliaferro stood slightly inclined from the hips, frozen. He closed his eyes like a dog awaiting the fall of the stick, while time passed and passed... he opened his eyes again, after how long he knew not. But Mrs. Maurier's fingers were but leaving his cheek and the niece was invisible in her corner: a bodiless evil. Then he straightened up, feeling his cold entrails resume their proper place.

The car drew away and he watched it, thinking of the girl's youngness, her hard clean youngness, with fear and a troubling unhappy desire like

an old sorrow. Were children really like dogs? Could they penetrate one's concealment, know one instinctively?

Mrs. Maurier settled back comfortably. "Mr. Talliaferro is perfectly terrible with women," she informed her niece.

"I bet he is," the niece agreed, "perfectly terrible."

4

Mr. Talliaferro had been married while quite young by a rather plainfaced girl whom he was trying to seduce. But now, at thirty-eight, he was a widower these eight years. He had been the final result of some rather casual biological research conducted by two people who, like the great majority, had no business producing children at all.

The family originated in northern Alabama and drifted slowly westward ever after, thus proving that a certain racial impulse in the race, which one Horace Greeley summed up in a slogan so excruciatingly apt that he didn't have to observe it himself, has not yet died away. His brothers were various and they attained their several milieus principally by chance; milieus ranging from an untimely heaven via some one else's horse and a rope and a Texas cottonwood, through a classical chair in a small Kansas college, to a state legislature via some one else's votes. This one got as far as California.

They never did know what became of Mr. Talliaferro's sister, Mr. Talliaferro had got what is known as a careful raising: he had been forced while quite young and pliable to do all the things to which his natural impulses objected, and to forgo all the things he could possibly have had any fun doing. After a while nature gave up and this became a habit with him. Nature surrendered him without a qualm: even disease germs seemed to ignore him.

His marriage had driven him into work as drouth drives the fish down stream into the larger waters, and things had gone hard with them during the years during which he had shifted from position to position,

correspondence course to correspondence course, until he had an incorrect and impractical smattering of information regarding every possible genteel method of gaining money, before finally and inevitably gravitating into the women's clothing section of a large department store.

Here he felt that he had at last come into his own (he always got along much better with women than with men) and his restored faith in himself enabled him to rise with comfortable ease to the coveted position of wholesale buyer.

He knew women's clothes and, interested in women, it was his belief that knowledge of the frail intimate things they preferred gave him an insight which no other man had into the psychology of women. But he merely speculated on this, for he remained faithful to his wife, although she was bedridden; an invalid.

And then, when success was in his grasp and life had become smooth at last for them, his wife died. He had become habituated to marriage, sincerely attached to her, and readjustment came slowly. Yet in time he became accustomed to the novelty of mature liberty. He had been married so young that freedom was an unexplored field to him.

He took pleasure in his snug bachelor quarters in the proper neighborhood, in his solitary routine of days: of walking home in the dusk for the sake of his figure, examining the soft bodies of girls on the street, knowing that if he cared to take one of them, that there was none save the girls themselves to say him nay; to his dinners alone or in company with an available literary friend.

Mr. Talliaferro did Europe in forty-one days, gained thereby a worldly air and a smattering of esthetics and a precious accent, and returned to New Orleans feeling that he was Complete. His only alarm was his thinning hair, his only worry was the fact that some one would discover that he had been born Tarver, not Talliaferro.

But long since celibacy had begun to oppress him.

Handling his stick smartly he turned into Broussard's. As he had hoped, here was Dawson Fairchild, the novelist, resembling a benevolent walrus too recently out of bed to have made a toilet, dining in company with three men. Mr. Talliaferro paused diffidently in the doorway and a rosy cheeked waiter resembling a studious Harvard undergraduate in an actor's dinner coat, assailed him courteously. At last he caught Fairchild's eye and the other greeted him across the small room, then said something to his three companions that caused them to turn half about in their chairs to watch his approach. Mr. Talliaferro, to whom entering a restaurant alone and securing a table was an excruciating process, joined them with relief. The cherubic waiter spun a chair from an adjoining table deftly against Mr. Talliaferro's knees as he shook Fairchild's hand.

"You're just in time," Fairchild told him, propping his fist and a clutched fork on the table. "This is Mr. Hooper. You know these other folks, I think."

Mr. Talliaferro ducked his head to a man with iron gray hair and an orotund humorless face like that of a thwarted Sunday school superintendent, who insisted on shaking his hand, then his glance took in the other two members of the party — a tall, ghostly young man with a thin evaporation of fair hair and a pale prehensile mouth, and a bald Semitic man with a pasty loose jowled face and sad quizzical eyes.

"We were discussing—" began Fairchild when the stranger interrupted with a bland and utterly unselfconscious rudeness.

"What did you say the name was?" he asked, fixing Mr. Talliaferro with his eye. Mr. Talliaferro met the eye and knew immediately a faint unease. He answered the question, but the other brushed the reply aside. "I mean your given name. I didn't catch it to-day,"

"Why, Ernest," Mr. Talliaferro told him with alarm.

“Ah, yes: Ernest. You must pardon me, but traveling, meeting new faces each Tuesday, as I do—” he interrupted himself with the same bland unconsciousness. “What are your impressions of the get-together to-day?” Ere Mr. Talliaferro could have replied, he interrupted himself again. “You have a splendid organization here,” he informed them generally compelling them with his glance, “and a city that is worthy of it.

Except for this southern laziness of yours. You folks need more northern blood, to bring out all your possibilities. Still, I won’t criticize: you boys have treated me pretty well.” He put some food into his mouth and chewed it down hurriedly, forestalling any one who might have hoped to speak.

“I was glad that my itinerary brought me here, to see the city and be with the boys to-day, and that one of your reporters gave me the chance to see something of your bohemian life by directing me to Mr. Fairchild here, who, I understand, is an author.”

He met Mr. Talliaferro’s expression of courteous amazement again. “I am glad to see how you boys are carrying on the good work; I might say, the Master’s work, for it is only by taking the Lord into our daily lives—” He stared at Mr. Talliaferro once more. “What did you say the name was?”

“Ernest,” suggested Fairchild mildly.

“ — Ernest. People, the man in the street, the breadwinner, he on whom the heavy burden of life rests, does he know what we stand for, what we can give him in spite of himself — forgetfulness of the trials of day by day?

He knows nothing of our ideals of service, of the benefits to ourselves, to each other, to you” — he met Fairchild’s burly quizzical gaze— “to himself. And, by the way,” he added coming to earth again, “there are a few points on this subject I am going to take up with your secretary to-

morrow.” He transfixed Mr. Talliaferro again, “What were your impressions of my remarks to-day?”

“I beg pardon?”

“What did you think of my idea for getting a hundred percent church attendance by keeping them afraid they’d miss something good by staying away?”

Mr. Talliaferro turned his stricken face to the others, one by one. After a while his interrogator said in a tone of cold displeasure: “You don’t mean to say you do not recall me?”

Mr. Talliaferro cringed. “Really, sir — I am distressed—” The other interrupted heavily.

“You were not at lunch to-day?”

“No,” Mr. Talliaferro replied with effusive gratitude, “I take only a glass of buttermilk at noon. I breakfast late, you see.” The other man stared at him with chill displeasure, and Mr. Talliaferro added with inspiration: “You have mistaken me for some one else, I fear.”

The stranger regarded Mr. Talliaferro for a cold moment. The waiter placed a dish before Mr. Talliaferro and he fell upon it in a flurry of acute discomfort.

“Do you mean—” began the stranger. Then he put his fork down and turned his disapproval coldly upon Fairchild. “Didn’t I understand you to say that this — gentleman was a member of Rotary?”

Mr. Talliaferro suspended his fork and he too looked at Fairchild in shocked unbelief, “I a member of Rotary?” he repeated.

“Why, I kind of got the impression he was,” Fairchild admitted. “Hadn’t you heard that Talliaferro was a Rotarian?” he appealed to the others. They were noncommittal and he continued: “I seem to recall somebody telling me you were a Rotarian. But then, you know how rumors get around.

Maybe it is because of your prominence in the business life of our city. Talliaferro is a member of one of our largest ladies' clothing houses," he explained. "He is just the man to help you figure out some way to get God into the mercantile business. Teach Him the meaning of service, hey, Talliaferro?"

"No: really, I—" Mr. Talliaferro objected with alarm. The stranger interrupted again.

"Well, there's nothing better on God's green earth than Rotary. Mr. Fairchild had given me to understand that you were a member," he accused with a recurrence of cold suspicion. Mr. Talliaferro squirmed with unhappy negation. The other stared him down, then he took out his watch. "Well, well. I must run along. I run my day to schedule. You'd be astonished to learn how much time can be saved by cutting off a minute here and a minute there," he informed them. "And—"

"I beg pardon?"

"What do you do with them?" Fairchild asked.

"When you've cut off enough minutes here and there to make up a sizable mess, what do you do with them?"

"— Setting a time limit to everything you do makes a man get more punch into it; makes him take the hills on high, you might say."

A drop of nicotine on the end of the tongue will kill a dog, Fairchild thought, chuckling to himself. He said aloud:

"Our forefathers reduced the process of gaining money to proverbs. But we have beaten them; we have reduced the whole of existence to fetiches."

"To words of one syllable that look well in large red type," the Semitic man corrected.

The stranger ignored them. He half turned in his chair. He gestured at the waiter's back, then he snapped his fingers until he had attracted the waiter's attention. "Trouble with these small second-rate places,"

he told them. “No pep, no efficiency, in handling trade. Check, please,” he directed briskly. The cherubic waiter bent over them.

“You found the dinner nice?” he suggested.

“Sure, sure, all right. Bring the bill, will you, George?” The waiter looked at the others, hesitating.

“Never mind, Mr. Broussard,” Fairchild said quickly. “We won’t go right now. Mr. Hooper here has got to catch a train. You are my guest,” he explained to the stranger. The other protested conventionally: he offered to match coins for it, but Fairchild repeated: “You are my guest to-night. Too bad you must hurry away.”

“I haven’t got the leisure you New Orleans fellows have,” the other explained. “Got to keep on the jump, myself.” He arose and shook hands all around. “Glad to’ve met you boys,” he said to each in turn. He clasped Mr. Talliaferro’s elbow with his left hand while their rights were engaged. The waiter fetched his hat and he gave the man a half dollar with a flourish. “If you’re ever in the little city” — he paused to reassure Fairchild.

“Sure, sure,” Fairchild agreed heartily, and they sat down again. The late guest paused at the street door a moment, then he darted forth shouting, “Taxi! Taxi!” The cab took him to the Monteleone hotel, three blocks away, where he purchased two to-morrow’s papers and sat in the lobby for an hour, dozing over them. Then he went to his room and lay in bed staring at them until he had harried his mind into unconsciousness by the sheer idiocy of print.

6

“Now,” said Fairchild, “let that be a lesson to yon young men. That’s what you’ll come to by joining things, by getting the habit of it. As soon as a man begins to join clubs and lodges, his spiritual fiber begins to disintegrate. When you are young, you join things because they profess high ideals.

You believe in ideals at that age, you know. Which is all right, as long as you just believe in them as ideals and not as criteria of conduct. But after a while you join more things, you are getting older and more sedate and sensible; and believing in ideals is too much trouble so you begin to live up to them with your outward life, in your contacts with other people. And when you've made a form of behavior out of an ideal, it's not an ideal any longer, and you become a public nuisance."

"It's a man's own fault if the fetich men annoy him," the Semitic man said. "Nowadays there are enough things for every one to belong to something."

"That's a rather stiff price to pay for immunity, though," Fairchild objected.

"That need not bother you," the other told him. "You have already paid it."

Mr. Talliaferro laid aside his fork. "I do hope he's not offended," he murmured. Fairchild chuckled.

"At what?" the Semitic man asked. He and Fairchild regarded Mr. Talliaferro kindly.

"At Fairchild's little joke," Mr. Talliaferro explained.

Fairchild laughed. "I'm afraid we disappointed him. He probably not only does not believe that we are bohemians, but doubts that we are even artistic. Probably the least he expected was to be taken to dinner at the studio of two people who are not married to each other, and to be offered hashish instead of food."

"And to be seduced by a girl in an orange smock and no stockings," the ghostly young man added in a sepulchral tone.

"Yes," Fairchild said. "But he wouldn't have succumbed, though."

"No," the Semitic man agreed. "But, like any Christian, he would have liked the opportunity to refuse."

“Yes, that’s right,” Fairchild admitted. He said: “I guess he thinks that if you don’t stay up all night and get drunk and ravish somebody, there’s no use in being an artist.”

“Which is worse?” murmured the Semitic man.

“God knows,” Fairchild answered. “I’ve never been ravished.. He sucked at his coffee. “But he’s not the first man that ever hoped to be ravished and was disappointed. I’ve spent a lot of time in different places laying myself open, and always come off undefiled. Hey, Talliaferro?”

Mr. Talliaferro squirmed again, diffidently. Fairchild lit a cigarette.

“Well, both of them are vices, and we’ve all seen to-night what an uncontrolled vice will lead a man into — defining a vice as any natural impulse which rides you, like the gregarious instinct in Hooper,” He ceased a while.

Then he chuckled again. “God must look about our American scene with a good deal of consternation, watching the antics of these volunteers who are trying to help Him.”

“Or entertainment,” the Semitic man amended. “But why American scene?”

“Because our doings are so much more comical. Other nations seem to be able to entertain the possibility that God may not be a Rotarian or an Elk or a Boy Scout after all. We don’t. And convictions are always alarming, unless you are looking at them from behind.”

The waiter approached with a box of cigars. The Semitic man took one. Mr. Talliaferro finished his dinner with decorous expedition. The Semitic man said:

“My people produced Jesus, your people Christianized him. And ever since you have been trying to get him out of your church.

And now that you have practically succeeded, look at what is filling the vacuum of his departure. Do you think that your new ideal of willynilly Service without request or recourse is better than your old ideal of

humility? No, no” — as the other would have spoken— “I don’t mean as far as results go.

The only ones who ever gain by the spiritual machinations of mankind are the small minority who gain emotional or mental or physical exercise from the activity itself, never the passive majority for whom the crusade is set afoot.”

“Katharsis by peristalsis,” murmured the blond young man, who was nurturing a reputation for cleverness. Fairchild said:

“Are you opposed to religion, then — in its general sense, I mean?”

“Certainly not,” the Semitic man answered. “The only sense in which religion is general is when it benefits the greatest number in the same way. And the universal benefit of religion is that it gets the children out of the house on Sunday morning.”

“But education gets them out of the house five days a week,” Fairchild pointed out.

“That’s true, too. But I am not at home myself on those days: education has already got me out of the house six days a week.” The waiter brought Mr. Talliaferro’s coffee. Fairchild lit another cigarette.

“So you believe the sole accomplishment of education is that it keeps us away from home?”

“What other general result can you name? It doesn’t make us all brave or healthy or happy or wise, it doesn’t even keep us married. In fact, to take an education by the modern process is like marrying in haste and spending the rest of your life making the best of it. But, understand me: I have no quarrel with education, I don’t think it hurts you much, except to make you unhappy and unfit for work, for which man was cursed by the gods before they had learned about education. And if it were not education, it would be something else just as bad, and perhaps worse. Man must fill his time some way, you know.”

“But to go back to religion” — “the spirit protestant eternal,” murmured the blond young man hoarsely — “do you mean any particular religion, or just the general teaching of Christ?”

“What has Christ to do with it?”

“Well, it’s generally accepted that he instigated a certain branch of it, whatever his motives really were.”

“It’s generally accepted that first you must have an effect to discern a cause. And it is a human trait to foist the blunders of the age and the race upon some one or something too remote or heedless or weak to resist. But when you say religion, you have a particular sect in mind, haven’t you?”

“Yes,” Fairchild admitted. “I always think of the Protestant religion.”

“The worst of all,” the Semitic man said. “To raise children into, I mean. For some reason one can be a Catholic or a Jew and be religious at home. But a Protestant at home is only a Protestant. It seems to me that the Protestant faith was invented for the sole purpose of filling our jails and morgues and houses of detention.

I speak now of its more rabid manifestations, particularly of its activities in smaller settlements. How do young Protestant boys in small towns spend Sunday afternoons, with baseball and all such natural muscular vents denied them?

They kill, they slay and steal and burn. Have you ever noticed how many juvenile firearm accidents occur on Sunday, how many fires in barns and outhouses happen on Sunday afternoon?” He ceased and shook the ash from his cigar carefully into his coffee cup. Mr. Talliaferro seeing an opening, coughed and spoke.

“By the way, I saw Gordon to-day. Tried to persuade him for our yachting party to-morrow. He doesn’t enthuse, so to speak. Though I assured him how much we’d all like to have him.”

“Oh, he’ll come, I guess,” Fairchild said. “He’d be a fool not to let her feed him for a few days.”

“He’d pay a fairly high price for his food,” the Semitic man remarked drily. Fairchild looked at him and he added: “Gordon hasn’t served his apprenticeship yet, you know. You’ve got through yours.”

“Oh,” Fairchild grinned. “Well, yes, I did kind of play out on her, I reckon.” He turned to Mr. Talliaferro. “Has she been to him in person to sell him the trip, yet?”

Mr. Talliaferro hid his mild retrospective discomfort behind a lighted match. “Yes. She stopped in this afternoon. I was with him at the time.”

“Good for her,” the Semitic man applauded, and Fairchild said with interest:

“She did? What did Gordon say?”

“He left,” Mr. Talliaferro admitted mildly.

“Walked out on her, did he?” Fairchild glanced briefly at the Semitic man. He laughed. “You are right,” he agreed. He laughed again, and Mr. Talliaferro said:

“He really should come, you know. I thought perhaps” — diffidently— “that you’d help me persuade him. The fact that you will be with us, and your — er — assured position in the creative world..”

“No, I guess not,” Fairchild decided. “I’m not much of a hand for changing folks’ opinions. I guess I won’t meddle with it.”

“But, really,” Mr. Talliaferro persisted, “the trip would benefit the man’s work. Besides,” he added with inspiration, “he will round out our party. A novelist, a painter—”

“I am invited, too,” the blond young man put in sepulchrally. Mr. Talliaferro accepted him with apologetic effusion.

“By all means, a poet. I was about to mention you, my dear fellow. Two poets, in fact, with Eva W — .”

“I am the best poet in New Orleans,” the other interrupted with sepulchral belligerence.

“Yes, yes,” Mr. Talliaferro agreed quickly, “ — and a sculptor. You see?” he appealed to the Semitic man. The Semitic man met Mr. Talliaferro’s importunate gaze kindly, without reply. Fairchild turned to him.

“We — ll,” he began. Then: “What do you think?” The Semitic man glanced briefly at him. “I think well need Gordon by all means.” Fairchild grinned again and agreed.

“Yes, I guess you’re right.”

7

The waiter brought Fairchild’s change and stood courteously beside them as they rose. Mr. Talliaferro caught Fairchild’s eye and leaned nearer, diffidently, lowering his tone.

“Eh?” Fairchild said in his burly jovial voice, not lowering it.

“Would like a moment, if you’ve time. Your advice—”

“Not to-night?” Fairchild asked in alarm.

“Why, yes.” Mr. Talliaferro was faintly apologetic. “Just a few moments, if you are alone—” he gestured meaningly with his head toward the other two.

“No, not to-night. Julius and I are spending the evening together.” Mr. Talliaferro’s face fell, and Fairchild added kindly: “Some other time, perhaps.”

“Yes, of course,” Mr. Talliaferro agreed faultlessly. “Some other time.”

8

The car swept sibilantly up the drive and on around the house. There was a light on the veranda vaguely beyond vines. They descended and

Mrs. Maurier crossed the veranda and passed clashing and jangling through a French window.

The niece turned the corner and followed the veranda to where beyond a nook spaced with wicker and chintz, and magazines gaily on a table, her brother sat coatless on a divan beneath a wall lamp.

There was a faint litter of shavings about his feet and clinging to his trousers, and at the moment he bent with a carpenter's saw over something in his lap. The saw scraped fretfully, monotonously, and she stopped beside him and stood scratching her knee. Presently he raised his head.

"Hello," he remarked without enthusiasm. "Go to the library and get me a cigarette."

"I've got one on me, somewhere." She searched the pockets of her linen dress, but without success. "Where" — she said. She mused a moment, spreading her pocket with her hand and staring into it. Then she said, oh, yes, and took off her hat.

From the crown of it she produced one limp cigarette. "I ought to have another," she mused aloud, searching the hat again. "I guess that's all, though. You can have it: I don't want one, anyway." She extended the cigarette and skirled her hat onto the lounge beside.

"Look out," he said quickly, "don't put it there. I need all this space. Put it somewhere else, can't you?" He pushed the hat off the divan, onto the floor, and accepted the cigarette. The tobacco was partially shredded from it and it was limp, like a worm. "Whatcher been doing to it? How long've you had it, anyway?"

She sat beside him and he raked a match across his thigh.

"How's it coming, Josh?" she asked, extending her hand toward the object on his lap. It was a cylinder of wood larger than a silver dollar and about three inches long. He fended her off with the hand that held the lighted match, thrusting the elbow beneath her chin.

“Let it alone, I tell you.”

“Oh, all right. Keep your shirt on.” She moved slightly away and he took up the saw again, putting the burning cigarette on the wicker lounge between them. A thin pencil of smoke rose from it into the windless air, and soon a faint smell of burning. She picked up the cigarette, drew once at it and replaced it so it would not scorch the wicker. The saw grated jerkily and thinly; outside, beyond the vines, insects scraped monotonously one to another in the heavy, swooning darkness.

A moth, having evaded the screen wire, gyrated idiotically beneath and about the light. She raised her skirt to stare at a small feverish spot on her brown knee....

The saw grated jerkily, ceased, and he laid it aside again. The cylinder was in two sections, fitted one to another, and she drew one foot beneath the other knee, bending nearer to watch him, breathing against his neck. He moved restively and she said at last: “Say, Gus, how long will it take you to get it finished?”

He raised his face, suspending his knife blade. They were twins: just as there was something masculine about her jaw, so was there something feminine about his.

“For God’s sake,” he exclaimed, “let me alone, can’t you? Go away and pull your clothes down. Don’t you ever get tired of waving your legs around?”

A yellow negro in a starched jacket stepped silently around the corner. When they looked up he turned without speaking. “All right, Walter,” she said. But he was gone. They followed, leaving the cigarette to lift its unwavering plume and a thin smell of burning wicker into the somnolent air.

fool fool you have work to do o cursed of god cursed and forgotten
form shapes cunningly sweated cunning to simplicity shapes out of
chaos more satisfactory than bread to the belly form by a madmans
dream gat on the body of chaos le garçon vierge of the soul horned by
utility o cuckold of derision.

The warehouse, the dock, was a formal rectangle without perspective.
Flat as cardboard, and projecting at a faint motionless angle above it,
against a lighter spaciousness and a sky not quite so imminent and
weary, masts of a freighter lying against the dock. Form and utility,
Gordon repeated to himself. Or form and chance. Or chance and utility.

Beneath it, within the somber gloom of the warehouse where men had
sweated and labored, across the empty floor lately thunderous with
trucks, amid the rich overripe odors of the ends of the earth — coffee
and resin and tow and fruit — he walked, surrounded by ghosts,
passing on.

The hull of the freighter bulked, forecastle and poop soaring darkly
sharp, solid, cutting off vision, soaring its superstructure on the sky. The
unseen river continued a ceaseless sound against the hull, lulling it with
a simulation of the sea, and about the piles of the wharf.

The shore and the river curved away like the bodies of two dark
sleepers embracing, curved one to another in slumber; and far away
opposite the Point, banked lights flickered like a pile of yet living ashes
in a wind.

Gordon paused, leaning over the edge of the wharf, staring down into
the water. stars in my hair in my hair and beard i am crowned with stars
christ by his own hand an autogethsemane carved darkly out of pure
space but not rigid no no an unmusclcd wallowing fecund and foul the
placid tragic body of a woman who conceives without pleasure bears
without pain what would i say to her fool fool you have work to do you
have nothing accursed intolerant and unclean too warm your damn
bones then whisky will do as well or a chisel and maul any damn
squirrel keeps warm in a cage go on go on then israfel revolted

surprised behind a haycock by a male relation fortitude become a matchflame snuffed by a small white belly where was it i once saw a dogwood tree not white but tan tan as cream what will you say to her bitter and new as a sunburned flame bitter and new those two little silken snails somewhere under her dress horned pinkly yet reluctant o israfel ay wax your wings with the thin odorless moisture of her thighs strangle your heart with hair fool fool cursed and forgotten of god He flung back his head and laughed a huge laugh in the loneliness.

His voice surged like a dark billow against the wall behind him, then ebbing outward over the dim, formless river, it died slowly away... then from the other shore a mirthless echo mocked him, and it too died away. He went on treading the dark resin-scented wharf.

Presently he came to a break in the black depthless monotony of the wall, and the wall again assumed a pure and inevitable formal significance sharp against the glow of the city. He turned his back to the river and soon was among freight cars black and angular, looming; and down the tracks, much further away than it appeared, an engine glared and panted while filaments of steel radiating from it toward and about his feet were like incandescent veins in a dark leaf.

There was a moon, low in the sky and worn, thumbled partly away like an old coin, and he went on. Above banana and palm the cathedral spires soared without perspective on the hot sky. Looking through the tall pickets into Jackson square was like looking into an aquarium — a moist and motionless absinthe-cloudy green of all shades from ink black to a thin and rigid feathering of silver on pomegranate and mimosa — like coral in a tideless sea, amid which globular lights hung dull and unstraying as jellyfish, incandescent yet without seeming to emanate light; and in the center of it Andrew's baroque plunging stasis nimbused about with thin gleams as though he too were recently wetted.

He crossed the street into shadow, following the wall. Two figures stood indistinguishably at his door. "Pardon me," he said touching the nearer man peremptorily, and as he did so the other man turned.

“Why, here he is now,” this one said. “Hello, Gordon, Julius and I were looking for you.”

“Yes?” Gordon loomed above the two shorter men, staring down at them, remote and arrogant. Fairchild removed his hat, mopping his face. Then he flipped his handkerchief viciously about his head.

“I don’t mind the heat,” he explained fretfully. “I like it, in fact. Like an old racehorse, you know. He’s willing enough, you know, but in the cool weather when his muscles are stiff and his bones ache, the young ones all show him up. But about Fourth of July, when the sun gets hot and his muscles loosen up and his old bones don’t complain any more, then he’s good as any of ’em.”

“Yes?” repeated Gordon looking above them into shadow, The Semitic man removed his cigar.

“It will be better on the water to-morrow,” he said.

Gordon brooded above them. Then he remembered himself. “Come up,” he directed abruptly, elbowing the Semitic man aside and extending his latchkey.

“No, no,” Fairchild demurred quickly, “We won’t stop.

Julius just reminded me: we came to see if you’d change your mind and come with us on Mrs. Maurier’s boat to-morrow? We saw Tal—”

“I have,” Gordon interrupted him. “I’m coming.”

“That’s good,” Fairchild agreed heartily. “You probably won’t regret it much. He may enjoy it, Julius,” he added. “Besides, you’ll be wise to go on and get it over with, then she’ll let you alone. After all, you can’t afford to ignore people that own food and automobiles, you know. Can he, Julius?”

The Semitic man agreed. “When he clutters himself up with people (which he can’t avoid doing) by all means let it be with people who own food and whisky and motor cars. The less intelligent, the better.” He

struck a match to his cigar. "But he won't last very long with her, anyway. Hell last even a shorter time than you did," he told Fairchild.

"Yes, I guess you're right. But he ought to keep a line on her, anyhow. If you can neither ride nor drive the beast yourself, it's a good idea to keep it in a pasture nearby: you may some day be able to swap it for something, you know."

"A Ford, for instance, or a radio," the Semitic man suggested. "But you've got your simile backward."

"Backward?" repeated the other.

"You were speaking from the point of view of the rider," he explained.

"Oh," Fairchild remarked. He emitted a disparaging sound. "Ford' is good," he said heavily.

"I think 'radio' is pretty good, myself," the other said complacently.

"Oh, dry up." Fairchild replaced his hat. "So you are coming with us, then," he said to Gordon.

"Yes. I'm coming. But won't you come up?"

"No, no: not to-night. I know your place, you see." Gordon made no reply, brooding his tall head in the shadow. "Well, I'll phone her and have her send a car for you tomorrow," Fairchild added. "Come on, Julius, let's go. Glad you changed your mind," he added belatedly.

"Good night. Come on, Julius."

They crossed the street and entered the square. Once within the gates they were assailed, waylaid from behind every blade and leaf with a silent, vicious delight.

"Good Lord," exclaimed Fairchild, flipping his handkerchief madly about, "let's go over to the docks. Maybe there ain't any nautical ones." He hurried on, the Semitic man ambling beside him, clamping his dead cigar.

“He’s a funny chap,” the Semitic man remarked. They waited for a trolley to pass, then crossed the street. The wharf, the warehouse, was a formal rectangle with two slender masts projecting above it at a faint angle. They went on between two dark buildings and halted again while a switch engine drew an interminable monotony of cars up the track.

“He ought to get out of himself more,” Fairchild commented. “You can’t be an artist all the time. You’ll go crazy.”

“You couldn’t,” the other corrected. “But then, you are not an artist. There is somewhere within you a bewildered stenographer with a gift for people, but outwardly you might be anything. You are an artist only when you are telling about people, while Gordon is not an artist only when he is cutting at a piece of wood or stone.

And it’s very difficult for a man like that to establish workable relations with people. Other artists are too busy playing with their own egos, workaday people will not or cannot bother with him, so his alternatives are misanthropy or an endless gabbling of esthetic foster sisters of both sexes. Particularly if his lot is cast outside of New York city.”

“There you go: disparaging our Latin Quarter again. Where’s your civic pride? where’s your common courtesy, even? Even the dog won’t bite the hand that holds the bread.”

“Corn belt,” the other said shortly, “Indiana talking. You people up there are born with the booster complex, aren’t you? Or do you acquire it with sunburned necks?”

“Oh, well, we Nordics are at a disadvantage,” Fairchild replied. His tone was unctuous, the other detected something falsely frank in it. “We’ve got to fix our idea on a terrestrial place. Though we know it’s second rate, that’s the best we can do. But your people have got all heaven for your old home town, you know.”

“I could forgive everything except the unpardonable clumsiness of that,” the other told him. “Your idea is not bad. Why don’t you give it to

Mark Frost — roughly, you know — and let him untangle it for you? You and he could both use it then — if you are quick enough, that is.”

Fairchild laughed. “Now, you lay off our New Orleans bohemian life; stay away from us if you don’t like it. I like it, myself: there is a kind of charming futility about it, like—”

“Like a country club where they play croquet instead of golf,” the other supplied for him.

“Well, yes,” Fairchild agreed. “Something like that.” The warehouse loomed above them, and they passed into it and amid the ghosts of the ends of the earth. “A croquet player may not be much of a go-getter, but what do you think of a man that just sits around and criticizes croquet?”

“Well, I’m like the rest of you immortals: I’ve got to pass the time in some way in order to gain some idea of how to pass eternity,” the Semitic man answered. They passed through the warehouse and onto the dock. It was cooler here, quieter. Two ferry boats passed and repassed like a pair of golden swans in a barren cycle of courtship. The shore and the river curved away in a dark embracing slumber to where a bank of tiny lights flickered and trembled, bodiless and far away. It was much cooler here and they removed their hats. The Semitic man unclamped his dead cigar and cast it outward. Silence, water, night, absorbed it without a sound.

THE FIRST DAY

TEN O’CLOCK

THE NAUSIKAA LAY in the basin — a nice thing, with her white, matronly hull and mahogany-and-brass superstructure and the yacht club flag at the peak. A firm, steady wind blew in from the lake and Mrs. Maurier, having already got a taste of the sea from it, had donned her yachting cap and she now clashed and jangled in a happy, pointless ecstasy.

Her two cars had made several trips and would make several more, creeping and jouncing along the inferior macadam road upon and beside which the spoor of coca cola and the almond bar betrayed the lair of the hot dog and the less-than-one-percent.

All the jollity of departure under a perfect day, heatridden city behind, and a breeze too steady for the dam things to light on you. Her guests each with his or her jar of almond cream and sunburn lotion came aboard in bright babbling surges, calling, "Ship ahoy, every one," and other suitable nautical cries, while various casuals, gathered along the quay, looked on with morose interest. Mrs. Maurier in her yachting cap clashed and jangled in a happy and senseless excitement.

On the upper deck where the steward broke out chairs for them, her guests in their colored clothing gathered, dressed for deep water in batik and flowing ties and open collars, informal and colorful with the exception of Mark Frost, the ghostly young man, a poet who produced an occasional cerebral and obscure poem in four or seven lines reminding one somehow of the function of evacuation excruciatingly and incompletely performed.

He wore ironed serge and a high starched collar and he borrowed a cigarette of the steward and lay immediately at full length on something, as was his way. Mrs. Wiseman and Miss Jameson, flanking Mr. Talliaferro, sat with cigarettes also. Fairchild, accompanied by Gordon, the Semitic man and a florid stranger in heavy tweeds, and carrying among them several weighty looking suitcases, had gone directly below.

"Are we all here? are we all here?" Mrs. Maurier chanted beneath her yachting cap, roving her eyes among her guests. Her niece stood at the afterrail beside a soft blonde girl in a slightly soiled green dress. They both gazed shoreward where at the end of the gangplank a flashy youth lounged in a sort of skulking belligerence, smoking cigarettes.

The niece said, without turning her head, "What's the matter with him? Why doesn't he come aboard?" The youth's attention seemed to be anywhere else save on the boat, yet he was so obviously there, in the eye, belligerent and skulking. The niece said, "Hey!" Then she said: "What's his name? You better tell him to come on, hadn't you?"

The blonde girl hissed "Pete" in a repressed tone. The youth moved his slanted stiff straw hat an inch and the blonde girl beckoned to him. He slanted the hat to the back of his head: his whole attitude gave the impression that he was some distance away. "Ain't you coming with us?" the blonde girl asked in that surreptitious tone.

"Whatcher say?" he replied loudly, so that everybody looked at him — even the reclining poet raised his head.

"Come on aboard, Pete," the niece called. "Be yourself."

The youth took another cigarette from his pack. He buttoned his narrow coat. "Well, I guess I will," he agreed in his carrying tone. Mrs. Maurier held her expression of infantile astonishment up to him as he crossed the gangplank.

He evaded her politely, climbing the rail with that fluid agility of the young.

"Are you the new steward?" she asked doubtfully, blinking at him.

"Sure, lady," he agreed courteously, putting his cigarette in his mouth. The other guests stared at him from their deck chairs and slanting his hat forward he ran the gauntlet of their eyes, passing aft to join the two girls. Mrs. Maurier gazed after his high vented coat in astonishment. Then she remarked the blonde girl beside her niece. She blinked again. "Why—" she began. Then she said: "Patricia, who—"

"Oh, yes," the niece said, "this is—" she turned to the blonde girl.

"What's your name, Jenny? I forgot."

"Genevieve Steinbauer," the blonde girl submitted.

“ — Miss Steinbauer. And this one is Pete Something. I met them downtown. They want to go, too.”

Mrs. Maurier transferred her astonishment from Jenny’s vague ripe prettiness to Pete’s bold uncomfortable face. “Why, he’s the new steward, isn’t he?”

“I don’t know.” The niece looked at Jenny again. “Is he?” she asked. Jenny didn’t know either. Pete himself was uncomfortably noncommittal.

“I dunno,” he answered. “You told me to come,” he accused the niece. “She means,” the niece explained, “did you come to work on the boat?”

“Not me,” Pete answered quickly. “I ain’t a sailor. If she expects me to run this ferry for her, me and Jenny are going back to town.”

“You don’t have to run it. She’s got regular men for that. There’s your steward, anyway, Aunt Pat,” the niece said. “Pete just wanted to come with Jenny. That’s all,”

Mrs. Maurier looked. Yes, there was the steward, descending the companionway with a load of luggage. She looked again at Pete and Jenny, but at that moment voices came aft breaking her amazement. The captain wished to know if he should cast off: the message was relayed by all present.

“Are we all here?” Mrs. Maurier chanted anew, forgetting Jenny and Pete. “Mr. Fairchild — Where is he?” She roved her round frantic face, trying to count noses. “Where is Mr. Fairchild?” she repeated in panic.

Her car was backing and filling to turn around and she ran to the rail and screamed to the driver. He stopped the car, completely blocking the road, and hung his head out with resignation. Mrs. Wiseman said: “He’s here: he came with Ernest. Didn’t he?”

Mr. Talliaferro corroborated her and Mrs. Maurier roved her frantic gaze anew, trying to count them. A sailor sprang ashore and cast off head-and sternlines under the morose regard of the casuals.

The helmsman thrust his head from the wheelhouse and he and the deckhand bawled at each other. The sailor sprang aboard and the Nausikaa moved slightly in the water, like a soundless awakening sigh. The steward drew in the gangplank and the engine room telegraph rang remotely.

The Nausikaa waked further, quivering a little, and as a gap of water grew between quay and boat without any sensation of motion whatever, Mrs. Maurier's second car came jouncing into view, honking madly, and the niece sitting flat on the deck and stripping off her stockings said:

"Here comes Josh."

Mrs. Maurier shrieked. The car stopped and her nephew descended without haste. The steward, coiling the sternline down, gathered it up and flung it outward across the growing gap of water.

The telegraph rang again and the Nausikaa sighed and went back to sleep, rocking sedately. "Shake it up, Josh," his sister called. Mrs. Maurier shrieked again and two of the loungers caught the line and dug their heels as the nephew, coatless and hatless, approached without haste and climbed aboard, carrying a new carpenter's saw.

"I had to go downtown and buy one," he explained casually. "Walter wouldn't let me bring yours."

ELEVEN O'CLOCK

At last Mrs. Maurier succeeded in cornering her niece. New Orleans, the basin, the yacht dub, were far behind. The Nausikaa sped youthfully and gaily under a blue and drowsy day, beneath her forefoot a small bow wave spread its sedate fading fan. Mrs. Maurier's people could not escape her now.

They had settled themselves comfortably on deck: there was nothing to look at save one another, nothing to do save wait for lunch. All, that is, except Jenny and Pete. Pete, holding his hat on, stood yet at the afterrail, with Jenny beside him.

Her air was that of a soft and futile cajolery, to which Pete was smoldering and impervious. Mrs. Maurier breathed a sigh of temporary relief and astonishment and ran her niece to earth in the after companionway.

“Patricia,” she demanded, “what on earth did you invite those two — young people for?”

“God knows,” the niece answered, looking past her aunt’s yachting cap to Pete, belligerent and uncomfortable beside Jenny’s bovine white placidity. “God knows. If you want to turn around and take ’em back, don’t let me stand in your way.”

“But why did you ask them?”

“Well, I couldn’t tell that they were going to turn to be so wet, could I? And you said yourself there were not enough women coming. You said so yourself last night.”

“Yes, but why ask those two? Who are they? Where did you ever meet such people?”

“I met Jenny downtown. She—”

“I know: but where did you come to know her? How long have you known her?”

“I met her downtown this morning, I tell you; in Holmes’ while I was buying a bathing suit. She said she’d like to come, but the other one was waiting outside on the street for her and he put his foot down: he said she couldn’t go without him. He’s her heavy, I gather.”

Mrs. Maurier’s astonishment was sincere now. “Do you mean to tell me,” she asked in shocked unbelief, “that you never saw these people

before? That you invited two people you never saw before to come on a party on my boat?"

"I just asked Jenny," the niece explained patiently. "The other one had to come so she could come. I didn't want him specially. How could I know her when I never saw her before? If I had known her, you can bet I wouldn't have asked her to come. She's a complete washout, far as I'm concerned.

But I couldn't see that this morning. I thought she was all right, then. Gabriel's pants, look at 'em." They both looked back at Jenny in her flimsy green dress, at Pete holding his hat on. "Well, I got 'em here: I guess I'll have to keep 'em from getting stepped on.

I think I'll get Pete a piece of string to tie his hat down with, anyway." She swung herself easily up the stairs: Mrs. Maurier saw with horrified surprise that she wore neither shoes nor stockings.

"Patricia!" she shrieked. The niece paused, looking over her shoulder. Her aunt pointed mutely at her bare legs.

"Haul in your sheet, Aunt Pat," the niece replied brusquely, "you're jibbing."

ONE O'CLOCK

Lunch was spread on deck, on collapsible card tables set end to end. When she appeared her guests all regarded her brightly, a trifle curiously. Mrs. Maurier, oblivious, herded them toward it. "Sit anywhere, people," she repeated in singsong. "Girls will be at a premium this voyage. To the winner belongs the fair lady, remember."

This sounded a little strange to her, so she repeated: "Sit anywhere, people; the gentlemen must make..." She looked about upon her guests and her voice died away. Her party consisted of Mrs.

Wiseman, Miss Jameson, herself, Jenny and Pete clotting unhappily behind her niece, Mr. Talliaferro and her nephew, who had already seated himself. "Where are the gentlemen?" she asked at large.

"Jumped overboard," muttered Pete darkly, unheard, clutching his hat. The others stood, watching her brightly.

"Where are the gentlemen?" Mrs. Maurier repeated.

"If you'd stop talking a minute you wouldn't have to ask," her nephew told her. He had already seated himself and he now spooned into a grapefruit with preoccupied celerity.

"Theodore!" his aunt exclaimed.

From below there came an indistinguishable mixture of sound somehow vaguely convivial. "Whooping it up," the nephew added, looking up at his aunt at her expression of reproof. "In a hurry," he explained. "Got to get done. Can't wait on those birds." He remarked his sister's guests for the first time. "Who're your friends, Gus?" he asked without interest. Then he fell anew upon his grapefruit.

"Theodore!" his aunt exclaimed again. The indistinguishable convivial sound welled, becoming laughter. Mrs. Maurier roved her astonished eyes. "What can they be doing?"

Mr. Talliaferro moved deferentially, tactfully. "If you wish — ?"

"Oh, Mr. Talliaferro, if you would be so kind," Mrs. Maurier accepted with emotion.

"Let the steward go, Aunt Pat. Let's eat," the niece said, thrusting Jenny forward. "Come on, Pete. Gimme your hat," she added, offering to take it. Pete refused to surrender it.

"Wait," the nephew interjected, "I'll get 'em up." He picked up the thick plate and flipping his grapefruit hull overboard he turned sideways in his chair and hammered a brisk staccato on the deck with the dish.

"Theodore!" his aunt exclaimed for the third time. "Mr. Talliaferro, will you—" Mr. Talliaferro sped toward the companionway, vanished.

“Aw, let the steward go, Aunt Pat,” the niece repeated. “Come on, let’s sit down. Let up, Josh, for God’s sake.”

“Yes, Mrs. Maurier, let’s don’t wait for them,” Mrs. Wiseman abetted, seating herself also. The others followed suit. Mrs. Maurier roved her fretted eyes. “Well,” she submitted at last. Then she remarked Pete, still clutching his hat. “I’ll take your hat,” she offered, extending her hand. Pete foiled her quickly.

“Look out,” he said, “I’ve got it.” He moved beyond Jenny and put his hat behind him in his chair. At this moment the gentlemen appeared from below, talking loudly.

“Ah, wretches,” began the hostess with flaccid coquetry, shaking her finger at them. Fairchild was in the lead, burly and jovial, a shade unsteady as to gait. Mr. Talliaferro brought up the rear: he too had now a temporarily emancipated air.

“I guess you thought we’d jumped the ship,” Fairchild suggested, happily apologetic. Mrs. Maurier sought Mr. Talliaferro’s evasive eyes. “We were helping Major Ayers find his teeth,” Fairchild added.

“Lost ’em in that little rabbit hutch where we were,” explained the florid man. “Couldn’t find ’em right off. No teeth, no tiffin, y’know. If you don’t mind?” he murmured politely, seating himself next Mrs. Wiseman. “Ah, grapefruit.” He raised his voice again. “How jolly: seen no grapefruit since we left New Orleans, eh, Julius?”

“Lost his teeth?” repeated Mrs. Maurier, dazed. The niece and her brother regarded the florid man with interest.

“They fell out of his mouth,” Fairchild elaborated, taking the seat next Miss Jameson. “He was laughing at something Julius said, and they fell out of his mouth and somebody kicked ’em under the bunk, you see. What was it you said, Julius?”

Mr. Talliaferro essayed to seat himself beside the florid man. Mrs. Maurier again sought his eye, forced him and vanquished him with bright command. He rose and went to the chair next to her, and she leaned toward him, sniffing. "Ah, Mr. Talliaferro," she murmured with playful implacability, "naughty, naughty."

"Just a nip — they were rather insistent," Mr. Talliaferro apologized. "You men, you naughty men. I'll forgive you, however, this once," she answered. "Do ring, please."

The Semitic man's flaccid face and dark compassionate eyes presided at the head of the table. Gordon stood for a time after the others were seated, then he came and took the seat between Mrs. Maurier and her niece, with abrupt arrogance. The niece looked up briefly. "Hello, Blackboard." Mrs. Maurier smiled at him automatically. She said: "Listen, people. Mr. Talliaferro is going to make an announcement. About promptness," she added to Mr. Talliaferro, putting her hand on his sleeve.

"Ah, yes. I say, you chaps almost missed lunch. We were not going to wait on you. The lunch hour is half after twelve, hereafter, and every one must be present promptly. Ship's discipline, you know. Eh, Commodore?"

The hostess corroborated. "You must be good children," she added with playful relief, looking about her table. Her worried expression returned. "Why, there's an empty place. Who isn't here?" She roved her eyes in growing alarm. "Some one isn't here," she repeated.

She had a brief and dreadful vision of having to put back short one guest, of inquest and reporters and headlines, and of floating inert buttocks in some lonely reach of the lake, that would later wash ashore with that mute inopportune implacability of the drowned. The guests stared at one another, then at the vacant place, then at one another again. Mrs. Maurier tried to call a mental roll, staring at each in turn. Presently Miss Jameson said: "Why, it's Mark, isn't it?"

It was Mark. They had forgotten him. Mrs. Maurier dispatched the steward, who found the ghostly poet still at full length on the upper deck. He appeared in his ironed serge, bathing them briefly in his pale gaze.

“You gave us rather a turn, my dear fellow,” Mr. Talliaferro informed him with reproof, taking upon himself the duties of host.

“I wondered how long it would be before some one saw fit to notify me that lunch was ready,” the poet replied with cold dignity, taking his seat.

Fairchild, watching him, said abruptly: “Say, Julius, Mark’s the very man for Major Ayers, ain’t he? Say, Major, here’s a man to take your first bottle. Tell him about your scheme.”

The florid man regarded the poet affably. “Ah, yes. It’s a salts, you see. You spoon a bit of it into your—”

“A what?” asked the poet, poisoning his spoon and staring at the florid man. The others all poised their tools and stared at the florid man.

“A salts,” he explained. “Like our salts at home, y’know—”

“A — ?” repeated Mrs. Maurier. Mr. Talliaferro’s eyes popped mildly.

“All Americans are constipated,” the florid man continued blithely, “do with a bit of salts in a tumbler of water in the morning. Now, my scheme is—”

“Mr. Talliaferro!” Mrs. Maurier implored. Mr. Talliaferro girded himself anew.

“My dear sir,” he began.

“ — is to put the salts up in a tweaky phial, a phial that will look well on one’s night table: a jolly design of some sort. All Americans will buy it. Now, the population of your country is several millions, I fancy; and when you take into consideration the fact that all Americans are con—”

“My dear sir,” said Mr. Talliaferro, louder.

“Eh?” said the florid man, looking at him.

“What kind of a jar will you put ’em in?” asked the nephew, his mind taking fire.

“Some tweaky sort of thing that all Americans will buy—”

“The American flag and a couple of doves holding dollar marks in their bills, and a handle that when you pull it out, it’s a corkscrew,” suggested Fairchild. The florid man glared at him with interest and calculation.

“Or,” the Semitic man suggested, “a small condensed table for calculating interest on one side and a good recipe for beer on the other.” The florid man glared at him with interest.

“That’s just for men,” Mrs. Wiseman said. “How about the women’s trade?”

“A bit of mirror would do for them, don’t you think?” the florid man offered, “surrounded by a design in colors, eh?” Mrs. Wiseman gave him a murderous glance and the poet added:

“And a formula for preventing conception and a secret place for hairpins.”

The hostess moaned, Mr. Talliaferro! Mrs. Wiseman said savagely:

“I have a better idea than that, for both sexes: your photograph on one side and the golden rule on the other.”

The florid man glared at her with interest. The nephew broke in once more:

“I mean, have you invented a jar yet, invented a way to get the stuff out of the jar?”

“Oh, yes. I’ve done that. You spoon it out, you know.”

“But tell ’em how you know all Americans are constipated,” Fairchild suggested. Mrs. Maurier rang the service bell furiously and at length.

The steward appeared and as he removed the plates and replaced them with others, the florid man leaned nearer Mrs. Wiseman.

“What’s that chap?” he asked indicating Mr. Talliaferro.

“What is he?” Mrs. Wiseman repeated. “Why — I think he sells things downtown. Doesn’t he, Julius?” She appealed to her brother.

“I mean, what — ah — race does he belong to?”

“Oh. You’d noticed his accent, then?”

“Yes. I noticed he doesn’t talk like Americans. I thought perhaps he is one of your natives.”

“One of our — ?” She stared at him.

“Your red Indians, y’know,” he explained.

Mrs. Maurier rang her little bell again, sort of chattering to herself.

TWO O’CLOCK

Mrs. Maurier put an end to that luncheon as soon as she decently could. If I can only break them up, get them into a bridge game, she thought in an agony. It had got to where every time one of the gentlemen made the precursory sound of speech, Mrs. Maurier flinched and cringed nearer Mr. Talliaferro. At least she could depend on him, provided...

But she was going to do the providing in his case. They had discussed Major Ayers’ salts throughout the meal. Eva Wiseman had turned renegade and abetted them, despite the atmosphere of reproof Mrs. Maurier had tried to foster and support. And, on top of all this, the strange young man had the queerest manner of using knife and fork.

Mr. Fairchild’s way was — well, uncouth; but after all, one must pay a price for Art. Jenny, on the other hand, had an undeniable style, feeding herself with her little finger at a rigid and elegant angle from her hand. And now Fairchild was saying:

“Now here’s a clean case of poetic justice for you.

A hundred odd years ago Major Ayers’ grandpa wants to come to New Orleans, but our grandfathers stop him down yonder in those Chalmette swamps and lick hell out of him. And now Major Ayers comes into the city itself and conquers it with a laxative so mild that, as he says, you don’t even notice it. Hey, Julius?”

“It also confounds all the old convictions regarding the irreconcilability of science and art,” the Semitic man suggested.

“Huh?” said Fairchild. “Oh, sure. That’s right. Say, he certainly ought to make Al Jackson a present of a bottle, oughtn’t he?”

The thin poet groaned sepulchrally. Major Ayers repeated: “Al Jackson?”

The steward removed the cloth, The table was formed of a number of card tables; by Mrs, Maurier’s direction he did not remove these. She called him to her, whispered to him: he went below.

“Why, didn’t you ever hear of Al Jackson?” asked Fairchild in unctuous surprise.

“He’s a funny man, a direct descendant of Old Hickory that licked you folks in 1812, he claims. He’s quite a Character in New Orleans.” The other guests all listened to Fairchild with a sort of noncommittal attention. “You can always tell him because he wears congress boots all the time—”

“Congress boots?” murmured Major Ayers, staring at him. Fairchild explained, raising his foot above the level of the table to demonstrate.

“Sure. On the street, at formal gatherings, even in evening dress he wears ’em. He even wears ’em in bathing.”

“In bathing? I say.” Major Ayers stared at the narrator with his round china-blue eyes.

“Sure. Won’t let any one see him barefoot. A family deformity, you see. Old Hickory himself had it: that’s the reason he outfought the British in

those swamps. He'd never have whipped 'em otherwise. When you get to town, go down to Jackson square and look at that statue of the old fellow. He's got on congress boots."

He turned to the Semitic man "By the way, Julius, you remember about Old Hickory's cavalry, don't you?" The Semitic man was noncommittal, and Fairchild continued:

"Well, the old general bought a place in Florida.

A stock farm, they told him it was, and he gathered up a bunch of mountaineers from his Tennessee place and sent 'em down there with a herd of horses. Well, sir, when they got there they found the place was pretty near all swamp. But they were hardy folks, so they lit right in to make the best of it. In the meantime—"

"Doing what?" asked the nephew.

"Huh?" said Fairchild.

"What were they going to do in Florida? That's what we all want to know," Mrs. Wiseman said.

"Sell real estate to the Indians," the Semitic man suggested. Major Ayers stared at him with his little blue eyes.

"No, they were going to run a dude ranch for the big hotels at Palm Beach," Fairchild told them. "And in the meantime some of these horses strayed off into the swamps, and in some way the breed got crossed with alligators. And so, when Old Hickory found he was going to have to fight his battle down there in those Chalmette swamps, he sent over to his Florida place and had 'em round up as many of those half-horse half-alligators as they could, and he mounted some of his infantry on 'em and the British couldn't stop 'em at all. The British didn't know Florida—"

"That's true," the Semitic man put in. "There were no excursions then."

"— and they didn't even know what the things were, you see."

Major Ayers and Mrs. Maurier stared at Fairchild in quiet childlike astonishment. "Go on," said Major Ayers at last, "you're pulling my leg."

"No, no: ask Julius. But then, it is kind of hard for a foreigner to get us. We're a simple people, we Americans, kind of childlike and hearty. And you've got to be both to cross a horse on an alligator and then find some use for him, you know.

That's part of our national temperament, Major. You'll understand it better when you've been among us longer. Won't he, Julius?"

"Yes, he'll be able to get us all right when he's been in America long enough to acquire our customs. It's the custom that makes the man, you know."

"Ah, yes," said Major Ayers, blinking at him. "But there's one of your customs I'll not be able to acquire: your habit of eating apple tarts. We don't have apple tarts at home, y'know. No Englishman nor Welshman nor Scot will eat an apple tart."

"You don't?" repeated Fairchild, "Why, I seem to remember—"

"But not apple tarts, old lad. We have other sorts, but no apple tarts. You see, years ago it was the custom at Eton for the young lads to pop out at all hours and buy apple tarts.

And one day a chap, a cabinet member's son, died of a surfeit of apple tarts, whereupon his father had parliament put through a bill that no minor should be able to purchase an apple tart in the British dominions. So this generation grew up without them; the former generation died off, and now the present generation never heard of apple tarts." He turned to the Semitic man.

"Custom, as you just remarked."

The ghostly poet, waiting his chance, murmured "Secretary of the Interior," but this was ignored. Mrs. Maurier stared at Major Ayers, and

Fairchild and the others all stared at Major Ayers' florid bland face, and there was an interval of silence during which the hostess glanced about hopelessly among her guests.

The steward reappeared and she hailed him with utter relief, ringing her little bell again commandingly. The others looked toward her and she passed her gaze from face to face.

"Now, people, at four o'clock we will be in good bathing water. Until then, what do you say to a nice game of bridge? Of course, those who really must have a siesta will be excused, but I'm sure no one will wish to remain below on such a day as this," she added brightly.

"Let me see — Mr. Fairchild, Mrs. Wiseman, Patricia and Julius, will be table number one. Major Ayers, Miss Jameson, Mr. — Talliaferro—" her gaze came to rest on Jenny. "Do you play bridge, Miss-child?"

Fairchild had risen with some trepidation. "Say, Julius, Major Ayers had better lie down a while, don't you think? Being new to our hot climate, you know. And Gordon, too. Hey, Gordon, don't you reckon we better lie down a while?"

"Right you are," Major Ayers agreed with alacrity, rising also. "If the ladies will excuse us, that is. Might get a touch of sun, you know," he added, glancing briefly at the awning overhead.

"But really," said Mrs. Maurier helplessly. The gentlemen, clotting, moved toward the companionway.

"Coming, Gordon?" Fairchild called.

Mrs. Maurier turned to Gordon. "Surely, Mr. Gordon, you'll not desert us?"

Gordon looked at the niece. She met his harsh arrogant stare calmly, and he turned away. "Yes. Don't play cards," he answered shortly.

"But really," repeated Mrs. Maurier. Mr. Talliaferro and Pete remained. The nephew had already taken himself off to his new carpenter's saw.

Mrs. Maurier looked at Pete. Then she looked away. Not even necessary to ask Pete if he played bridge. "You won't play at all?" she called after the departing gentlemen, hopelessly.

"Sure, we'll come back later," Fairchild assured her, herding his watch below. They descended noisily.

Mrs. Maurier looked about on her depleted party with astonished despair. The niece gazed at the emptied companionway a moment, then she looked about at the remainder of the party grouped about the superfluous card tables. "And you said you didn't have enough women to go around," she remarked.

"But we can have one table, anyway," Mrs. Maurier brightened suddenly. "There's Eva, Dorothy, Mr. Talliaferro and in — Why, here's Mark," she exclaimed. They had forgotten him again. "Mark, of course. I'll cut out this hand."

Mr. Talliaferro demurred. "By no means. I'll cut out. You take the hand: I insist."

Mrs. Maurier refused. Mr. Talliaferro became insistent and she examined him with cold speculation. Mr. Talliaferro at last averted his eyes and Mrs. Maurier glanced briefly toward the companionway. She was firm.

"Poor Talliaferro," the Semitic man said. Fairchild led the way along the passage, pausing at his door while his gang trod his heels. "Did you see his face? She'll keep him under her thumb from now on."

"I don't feel sorry for him," Fairchild said. "I think he kind of likes it: he's always a little uncomfortable with men, you know. Being among a bunch of women seems to restore his confidence in himself, gives him a sense of superiority which his contacts with men seem to have pretty well hammered out of him. I guess the world does seem a kind of crude

place to a man that spends eight hours a day surrounded by lace trimmed crêpe de chine,” he added, fumbling at the door.

“Besides, he can’t come to me for advice about how to seduce somebody. He’s a fairly intelligent man, more sensitive than most, and yet he too labors under the illusion that art is just a valid camouflage for rutting.” He opened the door at last and they entered and sat variously while he knelt and dragged from beneath the bunk a heavy suitcase.

“She’s quite wealthy, isn’t she?” Major Ayers asked from the bunk. The Semitic man, as was his way, had already preempted the single chair. Gordon leaned his back against the wall, tall and shabby and arrogant.

“Rotten with it,” Fairchild answered. He got a bottle from the suitcase and rose to his feet and held the bottle against the light, gloating. “She owns plantations or something, don’t she, Julius? First family, or something like that?”

“Something like that,” the Semitic man agreed. “She is a northerner, herself. Married it. I think that explains her, myself.”

“Explains her?” Fairchild repeated, passing glasses among them.

“It’s a long story. I’ll tell it to you some day.”

“It’ll take a long story to explain her,” Fairchild rejoined. “Say, she’d be a better bet for Major Ayers than the laxative business, wouldn’t she? I’d rather own plantations than a patent medicine plant, any day.”

“He’d have to remove Talliaferro, somehow,” the Semitic man remarked.

“Talliaferro’s not thinking seriously of her, is he?”

“He’d better be,” the other answered. “I wouldn’t say he’s got intentions on her, exactly,” he corrected. “He’s just there without knowing it: a natural hazard as regards any one else’s prospects.”

“Freedom and the laxative business, or plantations and Mrs. Maurier,” Fairchild mused aloud. “Well, I don’t know.
.. What do you think, Gordon?”

Gordon stood against the wall, aloof, not listening to them hardly, watching within the bitter and arrogant loneliness of his heart a shape strange and new as fire swirling, headless, armless, legless, but when his name was spoken he stirred. “Let’s have a drink,” he said.

Fairchild filled the glasses: the muscles at the bases of their noses tightened, “That’s a pretty good rejoinder to every emergency life may offer — like Squire Western’s hollo,” the Semitic man said.
“Yes, but freedom—” began Fairchild.

“Drink your whisky,” the other told him. “Take what little freedom you’ll ever get while you can. Freedom from the police is the greatest freedom man can demand or expect.”

“Freedom,” said Major Ayers, “the only freedom is in wartime. Every one too busy fighting or getting ribbons or a snug berth to annoy you. Samurai or headhunters — take your choice. Mud and glory, or a bit of ribbon on a clean tunic.

Mud and abnegation and dear whisky and England full of your beastly expeditionary forces. You were better than Canadians, though,” he admitted, “not so damned many of you. It was a priceless war, eh?... I like a bit of red, myself,” he confided. “Staff tabs worth two on the breast: only see the breast from one side. Ribbon’s good in peacetime, however.”

“But even peace can’t last forever, can it?” the Semitic man added.

“It’ll last a while — this one. Can’t have another war right off. Too many would stop away. Regulars jump in and get all the cushy jobs right off: learned in the last one, you know; and the others would all get their backs up and refuse to go again.”

He mused for a moment. "The last one made war so damned unpopular with the proletariat. They overdid it. Like the showman who fills his stage so full chaps can see through into the wings."

"You folks were pretty good at war bunk yourselves, weren't you?" Fairchild said. "War bunk?" repeated Major Ayers. Fairchild explained. "We didn't pay money for it, though," Major Ayers answered. "We only gave ribbons.... Pretty good whisky, eh?"

"If you want me to," Jenny said, "I'll put it away in my room somewheres."

Pete crammed it down on his head, holding his head tilted rigidly a little to windward. The wind was eating his cigarette right out of his mouth: he held his hand as a shield, smoking behind his hand.

"It's all right," he answered. "Where'd you put it, anyway?"

"... Somewheres. I'd just kind of put it away somewheres." The wind was in her dress, molding it, and clasping her hands about the rail she let herself swing backward to the full stretch of her arms while the wind molded her thighs. Pete's coat, buttoned, ballooned its vented flaring skirts.

"Yes," he said, "I can just kind of put it away myself, when I want.... Look out, kid." Jenny had drawn herself up to the rail again. The rail was breast high to her, but by hooking her legs over the lower one she could draw herself upward, and by creasing her young belly over the top one she leaned far out over the water. The water sheared away creaming: a white fading through milky jade to blue again, and a thin spray whipped from it, scuttering like small shot. "Come on, get back on the boat. We are not riding the blinds this trip."

"Gee," said Jenny, creasing her young belly, hanging out over the water, while wind molded and flipped her little skirt, revealing the pink backs of her knees above her stockings. The helmsman thrust his head out and yelled at her, and Jenny craned her neck to look back at him, swinging her blown drowsy hair.

“Keep your shirt on, brother,” Pete shouted back at the helmsman, for form’s sake. “What’d I tell you, dumbness?” he hissed at Jenny, pulling her down. “Come on, now, it’s their boat. Try to act like somebody.”

“I wasn’t hurting it,” Jenny answered placidly. “I guess I can do this, can’t I?” She let her body swing back again at the stretch of her arms... Say, there he is with that saw again. I wonder what he’s making.”

“Whatever it is he probably don’t need any help from us,” Pete answered.... “Say, how long did she say this was going to last?”

“I don’t know... maybe they’ll dance or something after a while. This is kind of funny, ain’t it? They are not going anywhere, and they don’t do anything... kind of like a movie or something.” Jenny brooded softly, gazing at the nephew where he sat with his saw in the lee of the wheel-house, immersed and oblivious, “If I was rich, I’d stay where I could spend it. Not like this, where there’s not even anything to look at.”

“Yeh. If you were rich you’d buy a lot of clothes and jewelry and an automobile. And then what’d you do? Wear your clothes out sitting in the automobile, huh?”

“I guess so.... I wouldn’t buy a boat, anyway.... I think he’s kind of good looking. Not very snappy looking, though. I wonder what he’s making?”

“Better go ask him,” Pete answered shortly. “I don’t know.”

“I don’t want to know, anyhow. I was just kind of wondering.” She swung herself slowly at arms’ length, against the wind, slowly until she swung herself over beside Pete, leaning her back against him.

“Go on and ask him,” Pete insisted, his elbows hooked over the rail, ignoring Jenny’s soft weight. “A pretty boy like him won’t bite you.” “I don’t mind being bit,” Jenny replied placidly.... “Peter — ...?”

“Get away, kid: I’m respectable,” Pete told her. “Try your pretty boy; see if you can compete with that saw.”

“I like peppy looking men,” Jenny remarked. She sighed. “Gee, I wish there was a movie to go to or something.” (I wonder what he’s making.)

“What horsepower does she develop?” the nephew asked, raising his voice above the deep vibration of the engine, staring at it entranced. It was clean as a watch, nicked and red-leaded — a latent and brooding power beneath a thin film of golden lubricating oil like the film of moisture on a splendid animal functioning, physical with perfection. The captain in a once white cap with a tarnished emblem on the visor, and a thin undershirt stained with grease, told him how much horsepower she developed.

He stood in a confined atmosphere oppressive with energy: an ecstatic tingling that penetrated to the core of his body, giving to his entrails a slightly unpleasant sensation of lightness, staring at the engine with rapture.

It was as beautiful as a racehorse and in a way terrifying, since with all its implacable soulless power there was no motion to be seen save a trivial nervous flickering of rockerarms — a thin bright clicking that rode just above the remote contemplative thunder of it. The keelplates shook with it, the very bulkheads trembled with it, as though a moment were approaching when it would burst the steel as a cocoon is burst, and soar upward and outward on dreadful and splendid wings of energy and flame....

But the engine was bolted down with huge bolts, clean and firm and neatly redleaded; bolts that nothing could break, as firmly fixed as the nethermost foundations of the world. Across the engine, above the flickering rockerarms, the captain’s soiled cap appeared and vanished. The nephew moved carefully around the engine, following.

There was a port at the height of his eye and he saw beyond it sky bisected by a rigid curving sweep of water stiff with a fading energy like bronze. The captain was busy with a wisp of cotton waste, hovering about the engine, dabbing at its immaculate anatomy with needless maternal infatuation. The nephew watched with interest. The captain leaned nearer, wiped his waste through a small accumulation of grease at the base of a pushrod, and raised it to the light.

The nephew approached, peering over the captain's shoulder. It was a tiny speck, quite dead.

"What is it, Josh?" his sister said, breathing against his neck. The nephew turned sharply.

"Gabriel's pants," he said. "What are you doing down here? Who told you to come down here?"

"I wanted to come, too," she answered, crowding against him. "What is it, Captain? What've you and Gus got?"

"Here," her brother thrust at her, "get on back on deck where you belong. You haven't got any business down here."

"What is it, Captain?" she repeated, ignoring him. The captain extended his rag. "Did the engine kill it?" she asked.

"Gee, I wish we could get all of 'em down here and lock the door for a while, don't you?" She stared at the engine, at the flickering rockerarms. She squealed. "Look! Look how fast they're going. It's going awfully fast, isn't it, Captain?"

"Yes, ma'am," the captain replied. "Pretty fast."

"What's her bore and stroke?" the nephew asked. The captain examined a dial. Then he turned a valve slightly.

Then he examined the dial again. The nephew repeated his question and the captain told him her bore and stroke.

"She revs up pretty well, don't she?" the nephew suggested after a while.

“Yes, sir,” the captain answered. He was busy doing something with two small wrenches, and the nephew offered to help. His sister followed, curious and intent.

“I expect you’d better let me do it alone,” the captain said, courteous and firm. “I know her better than you, I expect... Suppose you and the young lady stand over there just a little.”

“You sure do keep her clean, Captain,” the niece said. “Clean enough to eat off of, isn’t she?”

The captain thawed. “She’s worth keeping clean. Best marine engine made. German. She cost twelve thousand dollars.”

“Gee,” the niece remarked in a hushed tone. Her brother turned upon her, pushing her before him from the room.

“Look here,” he said fiercely, his voice shaking, when they were again in the passage. “What are you doing, following me around? What did I tell you I was going to do if you followed me any more?”

“I wasn’t following you. I—”

“Yes, you were,” he interrupted, shaking her, “following me. You—”

“I just wanted to come, too. Besides, it’s Aunt Fat’s boat: it’s not yours. I’ve got as much right down there as you have.”

“Aw, get on up on deck. And if I catch you trailing around behind me again.. his voice merged into a dire and nameless threat. The niece turned toward the companion-way, “Oh, haul in your sheet: you’re jibbing.”

FOUR O’CLOCK

They sat at their bridge on deck, shuffling, dealing, speaking in sparse monosyllables. The Nausikaa surged sedately onward under the blue drowsing afternoon. Far away on the horizon, the lazy smudge of the Mandeville ferry.

Mrs. Maurier on the outskirts of the game, gazed at intervals abstractedly into space. From below there came an indistinguishable sound, welling at intervals, and falling, and Mr. Talliaferro grew restive. The sound died away at intervals, swelled again. The Nausikaa paced sedately on.

They played their hands, dealt and shuffled again, Mr. Talliaferro was becoming distraught. Every once in a while his attention strayed and returning found Mrs. Maurier's eyes upon him, coldly contemplative, and he bent anew over his cards.... The indistinguishable sound welled once more. Mr. Talliaferro trumped his partner's queen and the gentlemen in their bathing suits surged up the stairs.

They completely ignored the cardplayers, passing aft in a body and talking loudly; something about a wager. They paused at the rail upon which the steward leaned at the moment; here they clotted momentarily, then Major Ayers detached himself from the group and flung himself briskly and awkwardly overboard. "Hurray," roared Fairchild. "He wins!"

Mrs. Maurier had raised her face when they passed, she had spoken to them and had watched them when they halted, and she saw Major Ayers leap overboard with a shocked and dreadful doubt of her own eyesight. Then she screamed.

The steward stripped off his jacket, detached and flung a lifebelt, then followed himself, diving outward and away from the screw. "Two of 'em," Fairchild howled with joy. "Pick you up when we come back," he megaphoned through his hands.

Major Ayers came up in the wake of the yacht, swimming strongly. The Nausikaa circled, the telegraph rang. Major Ayers and the steward reached the lifebelt together, and before the yacht lost way completely the helmsman and the deckhand had swung the tender overside, and soon they hauled Major Ayers savagely into the small boat.

The Nausikaa was hove to. Mrs. Maurier was helped below to her cabin, where her irate captain attended her presently. Meanwhile the other gentlemen plunged in and began to cajole the ladies, so the rest of the party went below and donned their bathing suits.

Jenny didn't have one: her sole preparation for the voyage had consisted of the purchase of a lipstick and a comb. The niece loaned Jenny hers, and in this borrowed suit which fit her a shade too well, Jenny clung to the gunwale of the tender, clutching Pete's hand and floating her pink-and-white face like a toy balloon unwetted above the water, while Pete sat in the boat fully dressed even to his hat, glowering.

Mr. Talliaferro's bathing suit was red, giving him a bizarre desiccated look, like a recently extracted tooth. He wore also a red rubber cap and he let himself gingerly into the water feet first from the stern of the tender, and here he clung beside the placid Jenny, trying to engage her in small talk beneath Pete's thunderous regard. The ghostly poet in his ironed serge — he didn't swim — lay again at full length on four chairs, craning his pale prehensile face above the bathers.

Fairchild looked more like a walrus than ever: a deceptively sedate walrus of middle age suddenly evincing a streak of demoniac puerility. He wallowed and splashed, heavily playful, and, seconded by Major Ayers, annoyed the ladies by pinching them under water and by splashing them, wetting Pete liberally where he sat smoldering with Jenny clinging to his hand and squealing, trying to protect her make-up.

The Semitic man paddled around with that rather ludicrous intentness of a fat man swimming. Gordon sat on the rail, looking on. Fairchild and Major Ayers at last succeeded in driving the ladies back into the tender, about which they splashed and yapped with the tactless playfulness of dogs while Pete refraining "Look out goddam you look out christ watcher doing lookout" struck at their fingers with one of his discarded and sopping shoes.

Above this one-sided merriment the niece appeared poised upon the top of the wheelhouse, unseen by those in the water. They were aware first of a white arrow arcing down the sky. The water took it lazily and while they stared at the slow green vortex where it had entered there was a commotion behind Fairchild, and as he opened his mouth his gaping surprise vanished beneath the surface. In its place the niece balanced momentarily on something under the water, then she fell plunging in the direction of Major Ayers' yet passive astonishment.

The ladies screamed with delight. Major Ayers also vanished, and the niece plunged on. Fairchild appeared presently, coughing and gasping, and climbed briskly into the tender where Mr. Talliaferro with admirable presence of mind already was, having deserted Jenny without a qualm. "I've got enough," Fairchild said when he could speak.

Major Ayers, however, accepted the challenge. The niece trod water and awaited him. "Drown him, Pat!" the ladies shrieked. Just before he reached her, her dark wet head vanished and for a while Major Ayers plunged about in a kind of active resignation.

Then he vanished again and the niece, clad in a suit of her brother's underwear — a knitted sleeveless jersey and short narrow trunks — surged out of the water and stood erect on his shoulders. Then she put her foot on the top of his head and thrust him deeper yet. Then she plunged on and trod water again.

Major Ayers reappeared at last, already headed for the boat. He had enough also, and the gentlemen dragged him aboard and they dripped across the deck and passed below, to the derision of the ladies.

The ladies got aboard themselves. Pete standing erect in the tender was trying to haul Jenny out of the water. She hung like an expensive doll-confection from his hands, raising at lax intervals a white lovely leg, while Mr. Talliaferro, kneeling, pawed at her shoulders. "Come on, come on," Pete hissed at her.

The niece swam up and thrust at Jenny's sweet thighs until Jenny tumbled at last into the tender in a soft blonde abandon: a charming awkwardness. The niece held the tender steady while they boarded the yacht, then she slid skilfully out of the water, sleek and dripping as a seal; and as she swung her short coarse hair back from her face she saw hands, and Gordon's voice said:

"Give me your hands."

She clasped his hard wrists and felt herself flying. The setting sun came level into his beard and upon all his tall lean body, and dripping water on the deck she stood and looked at him with admiration. "Gee, you're hard," she said. She touched his forearms again, then she struck him with her fist on his hard high chest. "Do it again, will you?"

"Swing you again?" he asked. But she was already in the tender, extending her arms while sunset was a moist gold sheathing her. Again that sensation of flying, of space and motion and his hard hands coming into it; and for an instant she stopped in midflight, hand to hand and arm braced to arm, high above the deck while water dripping from her turned to gold as it fell. Sunset was in his eyes: a glory he could not see; and her taut simple body, almost breastless and with the fleeting hips of a boy, was an ecstasy in golden marble, and in her face the passionate ecstasy of a child.

At last her feet touched the deck again and she turned. She sped toward the companionway and as she flashed downward the last of the sun slid upon her and over her with joy. Then she was gone, and Gordon stood looking at the wet and simple prints of her naked feet on the deck.

SIX O'CLOCK

They had raised land just about the time Major Ayers won his wager, and while the last of day drained out of the world the Nausikaa at halfspeed forged slowly into a sluggish river mouth, broaching a timeless violet twilight between solemn bearded cypresses motionless as bronze.

You might, by listening, have heard a slow requiem in this tall nave, might have heard here the chanted orisons of the dark heart of the world turning toward slumber. The world was becoming dimensionless, the tall bearded cypresses drew nearer one to another across the wallowing river with the soulless implacability of pagan gods, gazing down upon this mahogany-and-brass intruder with inscrutable unalarm. The water was like oil and the Nausikaa forged onward without any sensation of motion through a corridor without ceiling or floor.

Mr. Talliaferro stood at the sternrail beside Jenny and her morose hatted duenna. In the dusk Jenny's white troubling placidity bloomed like a heavy flower, pervading and rife like an odor lazier, heavier than that of lilies. Pete loomed beyond her: the last light in the world was concentrated in the implacable glaze of his hat, leaving the atmosphere about them darker still; and in the weary passion of August and nightfall Mr. Talliaferro's dry interminable voice fell lower and lower and finally ceased altogether; and abruptly becoming aware of an old mislaid sorrow he slapped suddenly at the back of his hand, with consternation, remarking at the same time that Pete was also restive and that Jenny was agitating herself as though she were rubbing her body against her clothing from within. Then, as if at a signal, they were all about them, unseen, with a dreadful bucolic intentness; unlike their urban cousins, making no sound.

Jenny and Pete and Mr. Talliaferro evacuated the deck. At the companionway the ghostly poet joined them hurriedly, flapping his handkerchief about his face and neck and the top of his unnurtured evaporating head. At that instant Mrs. Maurier's voice rose from somewhere in astonished adjuration, and presently the Nausikaa put about and felt her way back to open water and stood out to sea. And not at halfspeed, either.

SEVEN O'CLOCK

Years ago Mrs. Maurier had learned that unadulterated fruit juice was salutary, nay, necessary to a nautical life. A piece of information strange, irrelevant at first draught, yet on second thought quite possible, not to mention pleasant in contemplation, so she had accepted it, taking it unto her and making of it an undeviating marine conviction. Hence there was grapefruit again for dinner: she was going to inoculate them first, then take chances.

Fairchild's gang was ultimately started from its lair in his quarters. The other guests were already seated and they regarded the newcomers with interest and trepidation and, on Mrs. Maurier's part, with actual alarm.

"Here comes the dogwatch," Mrs. Wiseman remarked brightly. "It's the gentlemen, isn't it? We haven't seen any gentlemen since we left New Orleans, hey, Dorothy?"

Her brother grinned at her sadly. "How about Mark and Talliaferro?"

"Oh, Mark's a poet. That lets him out. And Ernest isn't a poet, so that lets him out, too," she replied with airy feminine logic. "Isn't that right, Mark?"

"I'm the best poet in New Orleans," the ghostly young man said heavily, mooning his pale, prehensile face at her.

"We were kind of wondering where you were, Mark," Fairchild told the best poet in New Orleans. "We got the idea you were supposed to be on the boat with us. Too bad you couldn't come," he continued tediously.

"Maybe Mark couldn't find himself in time," the Semitic man suggested, taking his seat.

"He's found his appetite, though," Fairchild replied. "Maybe he'll find the rest of himself laying around somewhere nearby." He seated himself and stared at the plate before him. He murmured, Well, well, with abstraction.

His companions found seats and Major Ayers stared at his plate. He murmured Well, well, also. Mrs. Maurier chewed her lip nervously, putting her hand on Mr. Talliaferro's sleeve. Major Ayers murmured:

"It does look familiar, doesn't it?" and Fairchild said:

"Why, it's grapefruit: I can tell every time." He looked at Major Ayers.

"I'm not going to eat mine, now. I'm going to put it away and save it."

"Right you are," agreed Major Ayers readily. "Save 'em by all means." He set his grapefruit carefully to one side. "Advise you people to do the same," he added at large.

"Save them?" Mrs. Maurier repeated in astonishment. "Why, there are more of them. We have several crates."

Fairchild wagged his head at her. "I can't risk it. They might be lost overboard or something, and us miles from land. I'm going to save mine."

Major Ayers offered a suggestion. "Save the rinds, anyway. Might need 'em. Never can tell what might happen at sea, y'know," he said owlshly.

"Sure," Fairchild agreed. "Might need 'em in a pinch to prevent constipation." Mrs. Maurier clasped Mr. Talliaferro's arm again.

"Mr. Talliaferro!" she whispered imploringly. Mr. Talliaferro sprang to the breach.

"Now that we are all together at last," he began, clearing his throat, "the Commodore wishes us to choose our first port of call. In other words, people, where shall we go to-morrow?" He looked from face to face about the table.

"Why, nowhere," answered Fairchild with surprise. "We just came from somewhere yesterday, didn't we?"

"You mean to-day," Mrs. Wiseman told him. "We left New Orleans this morning."

“Oh, did we? Well, well, it takes a long time to spend the afternoon, don’t it? But we don’t want to go anywhere, do we?”

“Oh, yes,” Mr. Talliaferro contradicted him smoothly. “To-morrow we are going up the Tchufuncta river and spend the day fishing. Our plan was to go up the river and spend the night, but this was found impossible. So we shall go up to-morrow. Is this unanimous? or shall we call for a ballot?”

“Gabriel’s pants,” the niece said to Jenny, “I itch just to think about that, don’t you?”

Fairchild brightened. “Up the Tchufuncta?” he repeated. “Why, that’s where the Jackson place is. Maybe Al’s at home. Major Ayers must meet Al Jackson, Julius.”

“Al Jackson?” Major Ayers repeated. The best poet in New Orleans groaned and Mrs. Wiseman said:

“Good Lord, Dawson.”

“Sure. The one I was telling you about at lunch, you know.”

“Ah, yes: the alligator chap, eh?” Mrs. Maurier exclaimed. “Mr, Talliaferro” again.

“Very well,” Mr, Talliaferro said loudly, “that’s settled, then. Fishing has it. And in the meantime, the Commodore invites you all to a dancing party on deck immediately after dinner. So finish your dinner, people. Fairchild, you are to lead the grand march.”

“Sure,” Fairchild agreed again, “Yes, that’s the one. His father has a fish ranch up here. That’s where Al got his start, and now he’s the biggest fisherd in the world—”

“Did you see the sunset this evening, Major Ayers?” Mrs. Wiseman asked loudly. “Deliciously messy, wasn’t it?”

“Nature getting even with Turner,” the poet suggested, “That will take years and years,” Mrs. Wiseman answered. Mrs. Maurier sailed in, gushing.

“Our southern sunsets, Major Ayers—” But Major Ayers was staring at Fairchild.

— “Fisherd?” he murmured.

“Sure. Like the old cattle ranches out west, you know. But instead of a cattle ranch, Al Jackson has got a fish ranch out in the wide open spaces of the Gulf of Mexico—”

“Where men are sharks,” put in Mrs. Wiseman. “Don’t leave that out” Major Ayers stared at her.

“Sure. Where men are men. That’s where this beautiful blonde girl comes in. Like Jenny yonder. Maybe Jenny’s the one. Are you the girl, Jenny?” Major Ayers now stared at Jenny.

Jenny was gazing at the narrator, her blue ineffable eyes quite round, holding a piece of bread in her hand. “Sir?” she said at last.

“Are you the girl that lives on that Jackson fish ranch out in the Gulf of Mexico?”

“I live on Esplanade,” Jenny said after a while, tentatively.

“Mr. Fairchild!” Mrs. Maurier exclaimed. Mr. Talliaferro said:

“My dear sir!”

“No, I reckon you are not the one, or you’d know it. I don’t imagine that even Claude Jackson could live on a fish ranch in the Gulf of Mexico and not know it. This girl is from Brooklyn, anyway — a society girl. She went down there to find her brother. Her brother had just graduated from reform school and so his old man sent him down there for the Jacksons to make a fisherd out of him. He hadn’t shown any aptitude for anything else, you see, and his old man knew it didn’t take much intelligence to herd a fish. His sister—”

“But, I say,” Major Ayers interrupted, “why do they herd their fish?”

“They round ’em up and brand ’em, you see. Al Jackson brands—”

“Brand ’em?”

“Sure: marks ’em so he can tell his fish from ordinary wild fish — mavericks, they call ’em. And now he owns nearly all the fish in the world; a fish millionaire, even if he is fish-poor right now. Wherever you see a marked fish, it’s one of Al Jackson’s.”

“Marks his fish, eh?”

“Sure: notches their tails.”

“Mr. Fairchild,” Mrs. Maurier said.

“But our fish at home have notched tails.” Major Ayers objected.

“Well, they are Jackson fish that have strayed off the range, then.”

“Why doesn’t he establish a European agent?” the ghostly poet asked viciously.

Major Ayers stared about from face to face. “I say,” he began. He stuck there. The hostess rose decisively.

“Come, people, let’s go on deck.”

“No, no,” the niece said quickly, “go on: tell us some more,” Mrs. Wiseman rose also.

“Dawson,” she said firmly, “shut up. We simply cannot stand any more. This afternoon has been too trying. Come on, let’s go up,” she said, herding the ladies firmly out of the room, taking Mr. Talliaferro along also.

NINE O’CLOCK

He needed a bit of wire. He had reached that impasse familiar to all creators, where he could not decide which of a number of things to do next. His object had attained that stage of completion in which the simplicity of the initial impulse dissolves into a number of trivial necessary details; and lying on his bunk in the cabin he and Mr. Talliaferro shared, his saw at hand and a thin litter of sawdust and shavings well impermeating the bed clothing, he held his wooden cylinder to the small inadequate light and decided that he could do with a bit of stiff wire or something of that nature.

He swung his legs out of the berth and flowed to the floor in a single beautiful motion, and crossing the room on his bare feet he searched Mr. Talliaferro's effects without success, so he passed from the cabin.

Still on his bare feet he went along the passage, and opening another door he let subdued light from the passage into a room filled with snoring, discerning vaguely the sleeper and, on a peg in the wall, a stained white cap. Captain's room, he decided, leaving the door open and traversing the room silently to another door.

There was a dim small light in this room, gleaming dully on the viscid anatomy of the now motionless engine. But he ignored the engine now, going about his search with businesslike expedition. There was a wooden cabinet against the wall: some of the drawers were locked.

He rummaged through the others, pausing at times to raise certain objects to the light for a closer inspection, discarding them again. He closed the last drawer and stood with his hand on the cabinet, examining the room.

A piece of wire would do, a short piece of stiff wire... there were wires on one wall, passing among and between switches. But these were electric wires and probably indispensable. Electric wires... battery room. It must be there, beyond that small door.

It was there — a shadow filled cubbyhole smelling of acids, of decomposition; a verdigris of decay. Plenty of wires here, but no loose ones... He stared around, and presently he saw something upright and gleaming dully. It was a piece of mechanism, steel, smooth and odorless and rather comforting in this tomb of smells, and he examined it curiously, striking matches.

And there, attached to it, was exactly what he needed — a small straight steel rod.

I wonder what it does, he thought. It looked... a winch of some kind, maybe. But what would they want with a winch down here? Something they don't use much, evidently, he assured himself. Too clean. Cleaner than the engine. Not greased all over like the engine. They mustn't hardly ever use it....

Or a pump. A pump, that's what it is. They won't need a pump once a year: not any bilge in a boat kept up like a grand piano. Anyhow, they couldn't possibly need it before to-morrow, and I'll be through with it then. Chances are they wouldn't miss it if I kept it altogether.

The rod came off easily. Plenty of wrenches in the cabinet, and he just unscrewed the nuts at each end of the rod and lifted it out. He paused again, holding the rod in his hand.... Suppose he were to injure the rod some way. He hadn't considered that and he stood turning the rod this way and that in his fingers, watching dull gleams of light on its slender polished length. It was so exactly what he needed. Steel, too; good steel: it cost twelve thousand dollars.

And if you can't get good steel for that... He put his tongue on it. It tasted principally of machine oil, but it must be good hard steel, costing twelve thousand dollars. I guess I can't hurt anything that cost twelve thousand dollars, specially by just using it one time... "If they need it to-morrow, I'll be through with it, anyway," he said aloud.

He replaced the wrenches. His mouth tasted of machine oil and he spat. The captain yet snored, and he passed through the captain's room on his bare feet, closing the door thoughtfully so the light from the passage wouldn't disturb the sleeper. He slipped the rod into his pocket. His hands were greasy and so he wiped them on the seat of his trousers.

He paused again at the galley door, where the steward was still busy over the sink. The steward stopped long enough to find a candle for him, then he returned to his room. He lit the candle, drew Mr. Talliaferro's suitcase from beneath the bunk and dripping a bit of hot wax onto it, he fixed the candle upright.

Then he got Mr. Talliaferro's pigskin enclosed shaving kit and propped the rod upon it with one end of the rod in the candle flame. His mouth still tasted of machine oil, so he climbed onto his berth and spat through the port, discovering as he did so that the port was screened. It'll dry, though.

He touched the rod. It was getting warm. But he wanted it red hot. His mouth yet tasted of machine oil and he remembered the other cigarette. It was in the same pocket in which he had had the rod, and it too was slightly reminiscent of machinery, but the burning tobacco would soon kill that.

The rod was getting pretty hot, so he fetched the wooden cylinder from the bunk and laying the cigarette on the edge of the suitcase he picked up the rod and held its heated end firmly against the selected spot on the cylinder; and soon a thin thread of smoke rose curling into the windless air. The smoke had a faint odor like that of scorching leather in it, also. Machine oil, probably.

TEN O'CLOCK

It's being an artist, Mrs. Maurier said to herself with helpless despondence. Mrs. Wiseman, Miss Jameson, Mark and Mr. Talliaferro sat at bridge. She herself did not feel like playing: the strain of her party kept her too nervous and wrought up. "You simply cannot tell what they're going to do," she said aloud in her exasperation, seeing again Major Ayers' vanishing awkward shape and Fairchild leaning over the rail and howling after him like a bullvoiced Druid priest at a sacrifice.

"Yes," Mrs. Wiseman agreed, "it's like an excursion, isn't it? — all drunkenness and trampling around," she added, attempting to finesse.

"Damn you, Mark."

"It's worse than that," the niece corrected, pausing to watch the hissing fall of cards, "it's like a cattle boat — all trampling around."

Mrs. Maurier sighed. "Whatever it is..." her sentence died stillborn. The niece drifted away and a tall shape appeared from shadow and joined her, and they went on down the dark deck and from her sight. It was that queer shabby Mr. Gordon, and she knew a sudden sharp stab of conscience, of having failed in her duty as a hostess. She had barely exchanged a word with him since they came aboard. It's that terrible Mr. Fairchild, she told herself.

But who could have known that a middleaged man, and a successful novelist, could or would conduct himself so?

The moon was getting up, spreading a silver flare of moonlight on the water. The Nausikaa swung gently at her cables, motionless but never still, sleeping but not dead, as is the manner of ships on the seas of the world; cradled like a silver dreaming gull on the water... her yacht. Her party, people whom she had invited together for their mutual pleasure.... Maybe they think I ought to get drunk with them, she thought.

She roused herself, creating conversation. The cardplayers shuffled and dealt interminably, replying Mmmm to her remarks, irrelevant and detached, or pausing to answer sensibly with a patient deference. Mrs. Maurier rose briskly.

"Come, people, I know you are tired of cards. Let's have some music and dance a while."

"I'd rather play bridge with Mark than dance with him," Mrs. Wiseman said.... "Whose trick was that?"

"There'll be plenty of men when the music starts," Mrs. Maurier said. "Mmmm," replied Mrs. Wiseman.... "It'll take more than a victrola record to get any men on this party.... You'll need extradition papers.... Three without and three aces. How much is that, Ernest?"

"Wouldn't you like to dance, Mr. Talliaferro?" Mrs. Maurier persisted. "Whatever you wish, dear lady," Mr. Talliaferro answered with courteous detachment, busy with his pencil. "That makes—" he totted

a column of his neat fingers, then he raised his head. "I beg your pardon: did you say something?"

"Don't bother," Mrs. Maurier said. "I'll put on a record myself: I'm sure our party will gather when they hear it." She wound up the portable victrola and put on a record. "You finish your rubber, and I'll look about and see whom I can find," she added. Mmmm, they replied.

The victrola raised its teasing rhythms of saxophones and drums, and Mrs. Maurier prowled around, peering into the shadows. She found the steward first, whom she dispatched to the gentlemen with a command couched in the form of an invitation. Then further along she discovered Gordon, and her niece sitting on the rail with her legs locked about a stanchion.

"Do be careful," she said, "you might fall. We are going to dance a while," she added happily.

"Not me," her niece answered quickly. "Not to-night, anyway. You have to dance enough in this world on dry land."

"You will certainly not prevent Mr. Gordon dancing, however. Come, Mr. Gordon, we need you."

"I don't dance," Gordon answered shortly.

"You don't dance?" Mrs. Maurier repeated. "You really don't dance at all?"

"Run along, Aunt Pat," the niece answered for him "We're talking about art."

Mrs. Maurier sighed. "Where's Theodore?" she asked at last. "Perhaps he will help us out."

"He's in bed. He went to bed right after dinner. But you might go down and ask him if he wants to get up and dance."

Mrs. Maurier stared helplessly at Gordon. Then she turned away. The steward met her: the gentlemen were sorry, but they had all gone to

bed. They were tired after such a strenuous day. She sighed again and passed on to the companionway.

There seemed to be nothing else she could do for them, I've certainly tried, she told herself, taking this thin satisfaction, and stopped again while something shapeless in the dark companionway unblent, becoming two; and after a white Pete said from the darkness: "It's me and Jenny."

Jenny made a soft meaningless sound, and Mrs. Maurier bent forward suspiciously. Mrs. Wiseman's remark about excursion boats recurred to her.

"You are enjoying the moon, I suppose?" she remarked.

"Yessum," Jenny answered, "We're just sitting here."

"Don't you children want to dance? They have started the victrola," Mrs. Maurier said in a resurgence of optimism.

"Yessum," said Jenny again, after a while. But they made no further move, and Mrs. Maurier sniffed. Quite genteelly, and she said icily: "Excuse me, please."

They made room for her to pass and she descended without looking back again, and found her door. She snapped the light switch viciously. Then she sighed again.

It's being an artist, she told herself again, helplessly.

"Damn, damn, damn," said Mrs. Wiseman slapping her cards on the table. The victrola record had played itself through and into an endless monotonous rasping. "Mark, stop that thing, as you love God. I'm far enough behind, without being jinxed." The ghostly poet rose obediently and Mrs. Wiseman swept her hand amid the cards on the table, scattering them.

"I'm not going to spend any more of my life putting little spotted squares of paper in orderly sequence for three dull people, not tonight, anyway. Gimme a cigarette, some one." She thrust her chair back

and Mr. Talliaferro opened his case to her. She took one and lifted her foot to the other knee and scratched a match on the sole of her slipper. "Let's talk a while instead."

"Where on earth did you get those garters?" Miss Jameson asked curiously.

"These?" she flipped her skirt down. "Why? Don't you like 'em?" "They are a trifle out of the picture, on you."

"What kind would you suggest for me? Pieces of colored string?" "You ought to have black ones clasped with natural size red roses," Mark Frost told her. "That's what one would expect to find on you."

"Wrrrong, me good man," Mrs. Wiseman answered dramatically. "You have wronged me foully... Where's Mrs. Maurier, I wonder?"

"She must have caught somebody. That Gordon man, perhaps," Miss Jameson replied. "I saw him at the rail yonder a while ago."

"Ah, Mr. Talliaferro!" exclaimed Mrs. Wiseman. "Look out for yourself. Widders and artists, you know. You see how susceptible I am, myself. Wasn't there ever a fortune teller to warn you of a tall red stranger in your destiny?"

"You are a widow only by courtesy," the poet rejoined, "like the serving maids in sixteenth century literature."

"So are some of the artists, my boy," Mrs. Wiseman replied. "But all the men on board are not even artists. What, Ernest?"

Mr. Talliaferro bridled smugly through the smoke of his cigarette. Mrs. Wiseman consumed hers in an unbroken series of deep draughts and flipped it railward; a twinkling scarlet coal. "I said talk," she reminded them, "not a few mild disjointed beans of gossip." She rose. "Come on, let's go to bed, Dorothy."

Miss Jameson sat, a humorless inertia. "And leave that moon?" Mrs. Wiseman yawned, stretching her arms. The moon spread her silver ceaseless hand on the dark water. Mrs. Wiseman turned,

spreading her arms in a flamboyant gesture, in silhouette against it. "Ah, Moon, poor weary one.... By yon black moon," she apostrophized.

"No wonder it looks tired," the poet remarked hollowly. "Think of how much adultery it's had to look upon."

"Or assume the blame for," Mrs. Wiseman amended. She dropped her arms. "I wish I were in love," she said. "Why aren't you and Ernest more... more... Come on, Dorothy, let's go to bed."

"Have I got to move?" Miss Jameson said. She rose, however.

The men rose also, and the two women departed. When they had gone Mr. Talliaferro gathered up the cards Mrs. Wiseman had scattered. Some of them had fallen to the deck.

ELEVEN O'CLOCK

Mr. Talliaferro tapped diffidently at the door of Fairchild's room, was bidden, and opening it he saw the Semitic man sitting in the lone chair and Major Ayers and Fairchild on the bunk, holding glasses. "Come in," Fairchild repeated "How did you escape? Push her overboard and run?"

Mr. Talliaferro grinned with deprecation, regarding the bottle sitting on a small table, rubbing his hands together with anticipation.

"The human body can stand anything, can't it?" the Semitic man remarked. "But I imagine Talliaferro is just about at the end of his rope, without outside aid," he added. Major Ayers glared at him affably with his china blue eyes.

"Yes, Talliaferro's sure earned a drink," Fairchild agreed. "Where's Gordon? Was he on deck?"

"I think so," Mr. Talliaferro replied. "I believe he's with Miss Robyn."

"Well, more power to him," Fairchild said. "Hope she won't handle him as roughly as she did us, hey, Major?"

“You and Major Ayers deserved exactly what you got,” the Semitic man rejoined. “You can’t complain.”

“I guess so. But I don’t like to see a human being arrogating to himself the privileges and pleasures of providence. Quelling nuisances is God’s job.”

“How about instruments of providence?”

“Oh, take another drink,” Fairchild told him. “Stop talking so Talliaferro can have one, anyway. Then we better go up on deck. The ladies might begin to wonder what has become of us.”

“Why should they?” the Semitic man asked innocently. Fairchild heaved himself off the bunk and got Mr. Talliaferro a tumbler. Mr. Talliaferro drank it slowly, unctuously; and pressed, accepted another.

He emptied his glass with a flourish. He grimaced slightly. They had another drink and Fairchild put the bottle away.

“Let’s go up a while,” he suggested, prodding them to their feet and herding them toward the door. Mr. Talliaferro allowed the others to precede him. Lingered, he touched Fairchild’s arm. The other glanced at his meaningful expression, and paused.

“I want your advice,” Mr. Talliaferro explained. Major Ayers and the Semitic man halted in the passage, waiting.

“Go on, you fellows,” Fairchild told them. “I’ll be along in a moment.”

He turned to Mr. Talliaferro. “Who’s the lucky girl this time?”

Mr. Talliaferro whispered a name. “Now, this is my plan of campaign. What do you think—”

“Wait,” Fairchild interrupted, “let’s have a drink on it.” Mr. Talliaferro closed the door again, carefully.

Fairchild swung the door open.

“And you think it will work?” Mr. Talliaferro repeated, quitting the room.

“Sure, sure; I think it’s airtight; that she might just as well make up her mind to the inevitable.”

“No; really, I want your candid opinion. I have more faith in your judgment of people than any one I know.”

“Sure, sure,” Fairchild repeated solemnly. “She can’t resist you. No chance, no chance at all. To tell the truth, I kind of hate to think of women and young girls going around exposed to a man like you,”

Mr. Talliaferro glanced over his shoulder at Fairchild, quickly, doubtfully. But the other’s face was solemn, without guile. Mr. Talliaferro went on again. “Well, wish me luck, he said.

“Sure. The admiral expects every man to do his duty, you know,” Fairchild replied solemnly, following Mr. Talliaferro’s dapper figure up the stairs.

Major Ayers and the Semitic man awaited them. There were no ladies. Nobody at all, in fact. The deck was deserted.

“Are you sure?” Fairchild insisted. “Have you looked good? I kind of wanted to dance some. Come on, let’s look again.”

At the door of the wheelhouse they came upon the helmsman. He wore only an undershirt above his trousers and he was gazing into the sky.

“Fine night,” Fairchild greeted him.

“Fine now,” the helmsman agreed. “Bad weather off there, though.” He extended his arm toward the southwest. “Lake may be running pretty high by morning. We’re on a lee shore, too.” He stared again into the sky.

“Ah, I guess not,” Fairchild replied with large optimism. “Hardly on a clear night like this, do you reckon?”

The helmsman stared into the sky, making no answer. They passed on. “I forgot to tell you the ladies had retired, Mr. Talliaferro remarked. “That’s funny,” Fairchild said. “I wonder if they thought we were not coming back?”

“Perhaps they were afraid we were,” the Semitic man suggested. “Huh,” said Fairchild.... “What time is it, anyway?”

It was twelve o’clock, and the sky toward the zenith was hazed over, obscuring the stars. But the moon was still undimmed, bland and chill, affable and bloodless as a successful procuress, bathing the yacht in quiet silver; and across the southern sky went a procession of small clouds, like silver dolphins on a rigid ultramarine wave, like an ancient geographical woodcut.

THE SECOND DAY

BY THREE O’CLOCK the storm had blown itself out across the lake and by dawn, when the helmsman waked the captain, the lake, as he had predicted, was running pretty high. The trend was directly inshore; waves came up in endless battalions under a cloudless sky, curling and creaming along the hull, fading and dying as the water shoaled astern of the yacht to a thin white smother against a dark impenetrable band of trees.

The Nausikaa rose and fell, bows on, dragging at her taut cables. The helmsman roused the captain and returned swiftly to the wheelhouse.

The deckhand got the anchors up and the helmsman rang the telegraph. The Nausikaa shivered awake, coming to life again, and pausing for a moment between two waves like a swimmer, she surged ahead. She paid off a little and the helmsman spun the wheel.

But she didn't respond, falling off steadily and gaining speed, and as the helmsman put the wheel down hard the Nausikaa fell broadside on into the trough of the waves. The helmsman rang the telegraph again and shouted to the deckhand to let go the anchors.

By seven o'clock the Nausikaa, dragging her anchors, had touched bottom with a faint jar. She considered a moment, then freed herself and crawling a bit further up the shoaling sand she turned herself a little, and with a barely perceptible list she sat down like a plump bather waist deep in the water, taking the waves on her beam.

Dorothy Jameson had a bold, humorless style. She preferred portraits, though she occasionally painted still life — harsh, implacable fruit and flowers in dimensionless bowls upon tables without depth. Her teeth were large and white in the pale revelation of her gums, and her gray eyes were coldly effective. Her body was long, loosely articulated and frail, and while spending in Greenwich Village the two years she had considered necessary for the assimilation of American tendencies in painting, she had taken a lover although she was still a virgin.

She took the lover principally because he owed her money which he had borrowed of her in order to pay a debt to another woman. The lover ultimately eloped to Paris with a wealthy Pittsburgh lady, pawning her — Dorothy's — fur coat on the way to the dock and mailing the ticket back to her from shipboard. The lover himself was a musician.

He was quite advanced, what is known as a radical; and in the intervals of experimenting with the conventional tonal scale he served as part of an orchestra in an uptown dancing place. It was here that he met the Pittsburgh lady.

But this episode was complete, almost out of her memory even. She had had a year abroad and had returned to New Orleans where she settled down to a moderate allowance which permitted her a studio in

the vieux carré and her name several times on the police docket for reckless driving and a humorless and reasonably pleasant cultivation of her individuality, with no more than a mild occasional nagging at the hands of her family, like a sound of rain heard beyond a closed window.

She had always had trouble with her men. Principally through habit since that almost forgotten episode she had always tried for artists, but sooner or later they inevitably ran out on her. With the exception of Mark Frost, that is. And in his case, she realized, it was sheer inertia more than anything else. And she admitted with remote perspicuity, who cared one way or the other whether they kept Mark Frost? No one ever cared long for an artist who did nothing save create art, and very little of that.

But other men, men she recognized as having potentialities, all passed through a violent but temporary period of interest which ceased as abruptly as it began, without leaving even the lingering threads of mutually remembered incidence, like those brief thunderstorms of August that threaten and dissolve for no apparent reason, without producing any rain.

At times she speculated with almost masculine detachment on the reason for this. She always tried to keep their relations on the plane which the men themselves seemed to prefer — certainly no woman would, and few women could, demand less of their men than she did.

She never made arbitrary demands on their time, never caused them to wait for her nor to see her home at inconvenient hours, never made them fetch and carry for her; she fed them and she flattered herself that she was a good listener. And yet... She thought of the women she knew: how all of them had at least one obviously entranced male; she thought of the women she had observed: how they seemed to acquire a man at will, and if he failed to stay acquired, how readily they replaced him.

She thought of the women on board, briefly reviewing them. Eva Wiseman. She had had one husband, practically discarded him. Men

liked her. Fairchild, for instance: a man of undisputed ability and accomplishment. Yet this might be due to his friendship with her brother. But no, Fairchild was not that sort: social obligations rested too lightly upon him. It was because he was attracted to her. Because of kindred tastes? But I create, too, she reminded herself.

Then she thought of the two young girls. Of the niece Patricia, with her frank curiosity in things, her childish delight in strenuous physical motion, of her hard unsentimentality and no interest whatever in the function of creating art (I'll bet she doesn't even read) and Gordon aloof and insufferably arrogant, yet intrigued. And Fairchild also interested in his impersonal way. Even Pete, probably.

Pete, and Jenny. Jenny with her soft placidity, her sheer passive appeal to the senses, and Mr. Talliaferro, braving Mrs. Maurier's displeasure to dangle about her, fawning almost. Even she felt Jenny's appeal — an utterly mindless ripeness of young, pink flesh, a supine potential fecundity lovely to look upon: a doll awaiting a quickening and challenging it with neither joy nor sorrow. She had brought one man with her....

No, not even brought: he had followed in her blonde troubling orbit as a tide follows the moon, without volition, against his inclination, perhaps. Two women who had no interest whatever in the arts, yet who without effort drew to themselves men, artistic men. Opposites, antitheses... perhaps, she thought, I have been trying for the wrong kind of men, perhaps the artistic man is not my type.

SEVEN O'CLOCK

"No, ma'am," the nephew replied courteously, "It's a pipe."

"Oh," she murmured, "a pipe,"

He bent over his wooden cylinder, paring at it with a knife, delicately, with care. It was much cooler to-day. The sun had risen from out a serrated miniature sea, into a cloudless sky.

For a while the yacht had had a perceptible motion — It was this motion which had roused her — but now it had ceased, although sizable waves yet came in from the lake, creaming whitely along the hull, and spent themselves shoaling up the beach toward a dark cliff of trees. She'd had no idea last night that they were so close to land, either. But distances always confused her by night.

She wished she'd brought a coat: had she anticipated such a cool spell in August... She stood huddling her scarf about her shoulders, watching his brown intent forearms and his coarse, cropped head exactly like his sister's, mildly desiring breakfast.

I wonder if he's hungry? she thought. She remarked:

"Aren't you rather chilly this morning without a coat?" He carved at his object with a rapt maternal absorption, and after a while she said, louder:

"Wouldn't it be simpler to buy one?"

"I hope so," he murmured... then he raised his head and the sun shone full into his opaque yellow-flecked eyes. "What'd you say?"

"I should think you'd wait until we got ashore and buy one instead of trying to make one."

"You can't buy one like this. They don't make 'em." The cylinder came in two sections, carved and fitted cunningly. He raised one piece, squinting at it, and carved an infinitesimal sliver from it. Then he returned it to its husband. Then he broke them apart again and carved an infinitesimal sliver from the other piece, fitted them together again. Miss Jameson watched him.

"Do you carry the design in your head?" she asked.

He raised his head again. "Huh?" he said in a dazed tone. "The design you're carving. Are you just carving from memory, or what?"

"Design?" he repeated. "What design?"

It was much cooler to-day.

There was in Pete's face a kind of active alarm not quite yet dispersed, and clutching his sheet of newspaper he rose with belated politeness, but she said, "No, no: I'll get it. Keep your seat." So he stood acutely, clutching his paper, while she fetched a chair and drew it up beside his. "It's quite chilly this morning isn't it?"

"Sure is," he agreed. "When I woke up this morning and felt all that cold wind and the boat going up and down, I didn't know what we were into. I didn't feel so good this morning, anyway, and with the boat going up and down like it was... it's still now, though. Looks like they went in closer to the bank and parked it this time."

"Yes, it seems to me we're closer than we were last night." When she was settled he sat also, and presently he forgot and put his feet back on the rail. Then he remembered and removed them.

"Why, how did you manage to get a paper this morning? Did we put in shore somewhere last night?" she asked, raising her feet to the rail.

For some reason he felt uncomfortable about his paper. "It's just an old piece," he explained lamely. "I found it downstairs somewhere. It kind of kept my mind off of how bad I felt." He made a gesture repudiating it.

"Don't throw it away," she said quickly, "go on — don't let me interrupt if you found something interesting in it. I'm sorry you aren't feeling well. Perhaps you'll feel better after breakfast."

"Maybe so," he agreed, without conviction. "I don't feel much like breakfast, waking up like I did and feeling kind of bad, and the boat going up and down too."

"You'll get over that, I'm sure." She leaned nearer to see the paper. It was a single sheet of a Sunday magazine section: a depressing looking

article in small print about Romanesque architecture, interspersed with blurred indistinguishable photographs. "Are you interested in architecture?" she asked intensely.

"I guess not," he replied. "I was just looking it over until they get up." He slanted his hat anew: under cover of this movement he raised his feet to the rail, settling down on his spine. She said:

"So many people waste their time over things like architecture and such. It's much better to be a part of life, don't you think? Much better to be in it yourself and make your own mistakes and enjoy making them and suffering for them, than to make your life barren through dedicating it to an improbable and ungrateful posterity. Don't you think so?"

"I hadn't thought about it," Pete said cautiously. He lit a cigarette. "Breakfast is late to-day."

"Of course you hadn't. That's what I admire about a man like you. You know life so well that you aren't afraid of what it might do to you. You don't spend your time thinking about life, do you?"

"Not much," he agreed. "A man don't want to be a fish, though."

"You'll never be a fish, Pete (every one calls you Pete, don't they? — do you mind?) I think the serious things really are the things that make for happiness — people and things that are compatible, love.... So many people are content just to sit around and talk about them instead of getting out and attaining them.

As if life were a joke of some kind.... May I have a cigarette? Thanks. You smoke this brand, too, I see. A in — Thanks. I like your hat: it just suits the shape of your face. You have an extremely interesting face — do you know it? And your eyes. I never saw eyes exactly the color of yours. But I suppose lots of women have told you that, haven't they?"

"I guess so," Pete answered. "They'll tell you anything."

“Is that what love has meant to you, Pete — deception?” she leaned to the match, staring at him with the humorless invitation of her eyes, “Is that your opinion of us?”

“Aw, they don’t mean anything by it,” Pete said in something like alarm. “What time do they have breakfast on this line?” He rose. “I guess I better run downstairs a minute before it’s ready. It oughtn’t to be long,” he added. Miss Jameson was gazing quietly out across the water.

She wore a thin scarf about her shoulders: a webbed brilliant thing that lent her a bloodless fragility, as did the faint bridge of freckles (relict of a single afternoon of sunlight) across her nose.

She now sat suddenly quiet, poising the cigarette in her long, delicate fingers; and Pete stood beside her, acutely uncomfortable — why, he knew not. “I guess I’ll go downstairs before breakfast,” he repeated. “Say” — he extended his newspaper— “why don’t you look it over while I’m gone?”

Then she looked at him again, and took the paper. “Ah, Pete, you don’t know much about us — for all your experience.”

“Sure,” he replied. “I’ll see you again, see?” and he went away. I’m glad I had a clean collar yesterday, he thought, turning into the companionway. This trip sure ought to be over in a couple of years.... Just as he began the descent he looked back at her. The newspaper lay across her lap but she wasn’t looking at it.

And she had thrown the cigarette away, too. My God, Pete said to himself. Then he was struck by a thought. Pete, my boy, he told himself, it’s going to be a hard trip. He descended into the narrow passage.

It swept forward on either hand, broken smugly by spaced mute doors with brass knobs. He slowed momentarily, counting doors to find his own, and while he paused the door at his hand opened suddenly and the niece appeared clutching a raincoat about her.

"Hello," she said.

"Don't mention it," Pete replied, raising his hat slightly. "Jenny up, too?"

"Say, I dreamed you lost that thing," the niece told him. "Yes, shell be out soon, I guess."

"That's good. I was afraid she was going to lay there and starve to death."

"No, shell be out pretty soon." They stood facing each other in the narrow passage, blocking it completely, and the niece said: "Get on, Pete. I feel too tired to climb over you this morning."

He stood aside for her, and watching her retreat he called after her: "Losing your pants."

She stopped and dragged at her hips as a shapeless fabric descended from beneath the raincoat and waddled slow and lethargic about her feet. She stood on one leg and kicked at the mass, then stooping she picked from amid its folds a man's frayed and shapeless necktie. "Damn that string," she said, kicking out of the garment and picking it up.

Pete turned in the narrow corridor, counting discrete identical doors. He smelled coffee and he added to himself: A hard trip, and, with unction: I'll tell the world it is.

EIGHT O'CLOCK

"It's the steering gear," Mrs. Maurier explained at the breakfast table. "Some—"

"I know," Mrs. Wiseman exclaimed immediately above the grapefruit, "German spies!"

Mrs. Maurier stared at her with patient astonishment. She said, How cute. "It worked perfectly yesterday. The captain said it worked perfectly yesterday. But this morning, when the storm came up... anyway, we're aground, and they are sending some one to get a tug to

pull us off. They are trying to find the trouble this morning, but I don't know..

Mrs. Wiseman leaned toward her and patted her fumbling ringed hand. "There, there, don't you feel badly about it: it wasn't your fault. They'll get us off soon, and we can have just as much fun here as we would sailing around.

More, perhaps motion seems to have had a bad effect on the party. I wonder.,." Fairchild and his people had not yet arrived: before each vacant place its grapefruit, innocent and profound. Surely just the prospect of more grapefruit couldn't have driven them... Mrs. Maurier followed her gaze.

"Perhaps it's just as well," she murmured.

"Anyway, I've always wanted to be shipwrecked," Mrs. Wiseman went on. "What do they call it? scuttled the ship, isn't it? But surely Dawson and Julius couldn't have thought of this, though" Mrs. Maurier, brooding above her plate, raised her eyes, cringing. "No, no," the other answered herself hastily, "of course not: that's silly.

It just happened, as things do. But let this be a lesson to you children, never to lay yourselves open to suspicion," she added looking from the niece to the nephew. The steward appeared with coffee and Mrs. Maurier directed him to leave the gentlemen's grapefruit until it suited their pleasure to come for it.

"They couldn't have done it if they'd wanted to," the niece replied. "They don't know anything about machinery. Josh could have done it. He knows all about automobile motors. I bet you could fix it for 'em if you wanted to, couldn't you, Gus?"

He didn't seem to have heard her at all. He finished his breakfast, eating with a steady and complete preoccupation, then thrusting his chair back he asked generally for a cigarette. His sister produced a

package from somewhere. It bore yet faint traces of pinkish scented powder, and Miss Jameson said sharply:

“I wondered who took my cigarettes. It was you, was it?”

“I thought you’d forgot ’em, so I brought ’em up with me.”

She and her brother took one each, and she slid the package across the table. Miss Jameson picked it up, stared into it a moment, then put it in her handbag. The nephew had a patent lighter. They all watched with interest, and after a while Mr. Talliaferro with facetious intent offered him a match.

But it took fire finally, and he lit his cigarette and snapped the cap down. ‘Gimme a light too, Gus,’ his sister said quickly, and from the pocket of his shirt he took two matches, laid them beside her plate. He rose.

He whistled four bars of “Sleepytime Gal” monotonously, ending on a prolonged excruciating note, and from the bed clothing at the foot of his bunk he got the steel rod and stood squinting his eyes against the smoke of his cigarette, examining it.

One end of it was kind of blackened, and pinching the cloth of his trouserleg about it, he shuttled it swiftly back and forth. Then he examined it again. It was still kind of black. The smoke of his cigarette was making his eyes water, so he spat it and ground his heel on it.

After a time he found a toothbrush and crossing the passage to a lavatory he scrubbed the rod. A little of the black came off, onto the brush, and he dried the rod on his shirt and scrubbed the brush against the screen in a port, then against a redleaded water pipe, and then against the back of his hand. He sniffed at it... a kind of machinery smell yet, but you won’t notice it with toothpaste on it. He returned and replaced the brush among Mr. Talliaferro’s things.

He whistled four bars of “Sleepytime Gal” monotonously. The engine room was deserted. But he was making no effort toward concealment,

anyway. He found the wrenches again and went to the battery room and restored the rod without haste, whistling with monotonous preoccupation. He replaced the wrenches and stood for a while examining the slumbering engine with rapture. Then still without haste he quitted the room.

The captain, the steward and the deckhand sat at breakfast in the saloon. He paused in the door.

"Broke down, have we?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," the captain answered shortly. They went on with their breakfast.

"What's the trouble?" No reply, and after a time he suggested: "Engine play out?"

"Steering gear," the captain answered shortly.

"You ought to be able to fix that.... Where is the steering gear?"

"Engine room," the captain replied. The nephew turned away.

"Well, I haven't touched anything in the engine room."

The captain bent above his plate, chewing. Then his jaws ceased and he raised his head sharply, staring after the nephew retreating down the passage.

TEN O'CLOCK

"The trouble with you, Talliaferro, is that you ain't bold enough with women. That's your trouble."

"But I—" Fairchild wouldn't let him finish.

"I don't mean with words. They don't care anything about words except as little things to pass the time with. You can't be bold with them with words: you can't even shock them with words. Though the reason may be that half the time they are not listening to you. They ain't interested in what you're going to say: they are interested in what you're going to do."

"Yes, but... How do you mean, be bold? What must I do to be bold?"

“How do they do it everywhere? Ain’t every paper you pick up full of accounts of men being caught in Kansas City or Omaha under compromising conditions with young girls who’ve been missing from Indianapolis and Peoria and even Chicago for days and days? Surely if a man can get as far as Kansas City with a Chicago girl, without her shooting him through chance or affection or sheer exuberance of spirits or something, he can pretty safely risk a New Orleans girl.”

“But why should Talliaferro want to take a New Orleans girl, or any other girl, to Kansas City?” the Semitic man asked. They ignored him. “I know,” Mr. Talliaferro rejoined. “But these men have always just robbed a cigar store. I couldn’t do that, you know.”

“Well, maybe New Orleans girls won’t require that: maybe they haven’t got that sophisticated yet. They may not be aware that their favors are worth as high as a cigar store. But I don’t know: there are moving pictures, and some of ’em probably even read newspapers, too, so I’d advise you to get busy right away. The word may have already got around that if they just hold off another day or so, they can get a cigar store for practically nothing. And there ain’t very many cigar stores in New Orleans, you know.”

“But,” the Semitic man put in again, “Talliaferro doesn’t want a girl and a cigar store both, you know.”

“That’s right,” Fairchild agreed. “You ain’t looking for tobacco, are you, Talliaferro?”

ELEVEN O’CLOCK

“No, sir,” the nephew answered patiently, “it’s a pipe.”

“A pipe?” Fairchild drew nearer, interested. “What’s the idea? Will it smoke longer than an ordinary pipe? Holds more tobacco, eh?”

“Smokes cooler,” the nephew corrected, carving minutely at his cylinder. “Won’t burn your tongue. Smoke the tobacco down to the last

grain, and it won't burn your tongue. You change gears on it, kind of, like a car."

"Well, I'm damned. How does it work?" Fairchild dragged up a chair, and the nephew showed him how it worked. "Well, I'm damned," he repeated, taking fire. "Say, you ought to make a pile of money out of it, if you make it work, you know."

"It works," the nephew answered, joining his cylinders again. "Made a little one out of pine. Smoked pretty good for a pine pipe. It'll work all right."

"What kind of wood are you using now?"

"Cherry." He carved and fitted intently, bending his coarse dark head above his work. Fairchild watched him. "Well, I'm damned," he said again in a sort of heavy astonishment. "Funny nobody thought of it before."

Say, we might form a stock company, you know, with Julius and Major Ayers. He's trying to get rich right away at something that don't require work, and this pipe is a lot better idea than the one he's got, for I can't imagine even Americans spending very much money for something that don't do anything except keep your bowels open. That's too sensible for us, even though we will buy anything.... Your sister tells me you and she are going to Yale college next month."

"I am," he corrected, without raising his head. "She just thinks she's going too. That's all. She kept on worrying dad until he said she could go. She'll be wanting to do something else by then."

"What does she do?" Fairchild asked. "I mean, does she have a string of beaux and run around dancing and buying things like most girls like her do?"

"Naw," the nephew answered. "She spends most of her time and mine too tagging around after me. Oh, she's all right, I guess," he added

tolerantly, “but she hasn’t got much sense.” He unfitted the cylinders, squinting at them.

“That’s where she changes gear, is it?” Fairchild leaned nearer again. “Yes, she’s a pretty nice sort of a kid. Kind of like a racehorse colt, you know.... So you’re going up to Yale. I used to want to go to Yale, myself, once.

Only I had to go where I could. I guess there is a time in the life of every young American of the class that wants to go to college or accepts the inevitability of education, when he wants to go to Yale or Harvard. Maybe that’s the value of Yale and Harvard to our American life: a kind of illusion of an intellectual nirvana that makes the ones that can’t go there work like hell where they do go, so as not to show up so poorly alongside of the ones that can go there.

“Still, ninety out of a hundred Yale and Harvard turn out are reasonably bearable to live with, if they ain’t anything else. And that’s something to be said for any manufactory, I guess.

But I’d like to have gone there... The nephew was not listening particularly. He shaved and trimmed solicitously at his cylinder. Fairchild said:

“It was a kind of funny college I went to.

A denominational college, you know, where they turned out preachers. I was working in a mowing machinery factory in Indiana, and the owner of the factory was a trustee of this college. He was a sanctimonious old fellow with a beard like a goat, and every year he offered a half scholarship to be competed for by young men working for him. You won it, you know, and he found you a job near the college to pay your board, but not enough to do anything else — to keep you from fleshly temptations, you know — and he had a monthly report on your progress sent to him. And I won it, that year.

“It was just for one year, so I tried to take everything I could. I had about six or seven lectures a day, besides the work I had to do to earn

my board. But I kind of got interested in learning things: I learned in spite of the instructors we had. They were a bunch of brokendown preachers: head full of dogma and intolerance and a belly full of big meaningless words.

English literature course whittled Shakespeare down because he wrote about whores without pointing a moral, and one instructor always insisted that the head devil in Paradise Lost was an inspired prophetic portrait of Darwin, and they wouldn't touch Byron with a ten foot pole, and Swinburne was reduced to his mother and his old standby, the ocean.

And I guess they'd have cut this out had they worn one piece bathing suits in those days. But in spite of it, I kind of got interested in learning things. I would like to have looked inside of my mind, after that year was up... He gazed out over the water, over the snoring waves, steady and wind-frothed. He laughed. "And I joined a fraternity, too, almost."

The nephew bent over his pipe. Fairchild produced a package of cigarettes. The nephew accepted one with abstraction. He accepted a light, also. "I guess you've got your eye on a fraternity, haven't you?" Fairchild suggested.

"Senior club," the nephew corrected shortly. "If I can make it."

"Senior club," Fairchild repeated. "That means you won't join for three years, eh? That's a good idea. I like that idea. But I had to do everything in one year, you see. I couldn't wait. I never had much time to mix with other students. Six hours a day at lectures, and the rest of the time working and studying for next day.

But I couldn't help but hear something about it, about rushing and pledges and so on, and how so-and-so were after this fellow and that, because he made the football team or something.

"There was a fellow at my boarding house; a kind of handsome tall fellow he was, always talking about the big athletes and such in school.

He knew them all by their first names. And he always had some yarn about girls: always showing you a pink envelope or something — a kind of gentlemanly innuendo, protecting their good names.

He was a senior, he told me, and he was the first one to talk to me about fraternities. He said he had belonged to one a long time, though he didn't wear a badge. He had given his badge to a girl who wouldn't return it.... You see," Fairchild explained again, "I had to work so much. You know: getting into a rut of work for bread and meat, where chance couldn't touch me much. Chance and information. That's what they mean by wisdom, horsesense, you know....

"He was the one that told me he could get me in his fraternity, if I wanted to." He drew at his cigarette, flipped it away. "It's young people who put life into ritual by making conventions a living part of life: only old people destroy life by making it a ritual. And I wanted to get all I could out of being at college.

The boy that belongs to a secret pirates' gang and who dreams of defending an abstraction with his blood, hasn't quite died out before twenty-one, you know. But I didn't have any money.

"Then he suggested that I get more work to do, temporarily. He pointed out to me other men who belonged to it or who were going to join — baseball players, and captains of teams, and prize scholars and all.

So I got more work. He told me not to mention it to anybody, that that was the way they did it. I didn't know anybody much, you see," he explained. "I had to work pretty steady all day: no chance to get to know anybody well enough to talk to 'em." He mused upon the ceaseless fading battalions of waves. "So I got some more work to do.

"This had to be night work, so I got a job helping to fire the college power plant. I could take my books along and study while the steam was up. Only it cut into my sleep some, and sometimes I would get too drowsy to study. So I had to give up one of my lecture courses, though the instructor finally agreed to let me try to make it up during the

Christmas vacation. But I learned how to sleep in a cinder pile or a coal bunker, anyway.”

The nephew was interested now. His knife was idle in his hand, his cylinder reposed, forgetting the agony of wood.

“It would take twenty-five dollars, but working overtime as I was, I figured it wouldn’t be any actual cost at all, except the loss of sleep. And a young fellow can stand that if he has to. I was used to work, you know, and it seemed to me that this was just like finding twenty-five dollars.

“I had been working about a month when this fellow came to me and told me that something had happened and that the fraternity would have to initiate right away, and he asked me how much I had earned. I lacked a little of having twenty-five dollars, so he said he would loan me the difference to make it up.

So I went to the power house manager and told him I had to have some money to pay a dentist with, and got my pay up to date and gave it to this fellow, and he told me where to be the following night — behind the library at a certain hour. So I did: I was there, like he said.” Fairchild laughed again.

“What’d the bird do?” the nephew asked. “Gyp you?”

“It was cold, that night. Late November, and a cold wind came right out of the north, whistling around that building, among the bare trees. Just a few dead leaves on the trees, making a kind of sad dry sound. We had won a football game that afternoon, and I could hear yelling occasionally, and see lights in the dormitories where the ones that could afford to lived, warm and jolly looking, with the bare trees swaying and waving across the windows. Still celebrating the game we had won.

“So I walked back and forth, stamping my feet, and after a while I went around the corner of the library where it wasn’t so cold, and I could stick out my head occasionally in case they came looking for me.

From this side of the building I could see the hall where the girl students lived. It was all lighted up, as if for a party, and I could see shadows coming and going upon the drawn shades where they were dressing and fixing their hair and all; and pretty soon I heard a crowd coming across the campus and I thought, here they come at last. But they passed on, going toward the girls’ hall, where the party was.

“I walked up and down some more, stamping my feet. Pretty soon I heard a clock striking nine. In half an hour I’d have to be back at the power house. They were playing music at the party: I could hear it even in spite of the closed windows, and I thought maybe I’d go closer. But the wind was colder: there was a little snow in it, and besides I was afraid they might come for me and I wouldn’t be there. So I stamped my feet, walking up and down.

“Pretty soon I knew it must be nine thirty, but I stayed a while longer, and soon it was snowing hard — a blizzard. It was the first snow of the year, and somebody came to the door of the party and saw it, and then they all came out to look, yelling: I could hear the girls’ voices, kind of high and excited and fresh, and the music was louder.

Then they went back, and the music was faint again, and then the clock struck ten. So I went back to the power house. I was already late.” He ceased, musing on the glittering battalions of waves and hands of wind slapping them whitely. He laughed again. “But I nearly joined one, though.”

“How about the bird?” the nephew asked. “Didn’t you hunt him up the next day?”

“He was gone. I never saw him again. I found out later he wasn’t even a student in the college. I never did know what became of him.” Fairchild

rose. "Well, you get it finished, and well form a stock company and get rich."

The nephew sat clutching his knife and his cylinder, gazing after Fairchild's stocky back until the other passed from view. "You poor goof," the nephew said, resuming his work again.

TWO O'CLOCK

It was that interval so unbearable to young active people: directly after lunch on a summer day. Every one else was dozing somewhere, no one to talk to and nothing to do. It was warmer than in the forenoon, though the sky was still clear and waves yet came in before a steady wind, slapping the Nausikaa on her comfortable beam and creaming on to fade and die frothing up the shoaling beach and its still palisade of trees.

The niece hung over the bows, watching the waves. They were diminishing: by sunset there would be none at all. But occasionally one came in large enough to send up a thin exhilarating spray. Her dress whipped about her bare legs and she gazed downward into the restless water, trying to make up her mind to get her bathing suit.

But if I go in now I'll get tired and then when the others go in later, I won't have anything to do. She gazed down into the water, watching it surge and shift and change, watching the slack anchor cables severing the incoming waves, feeling the wind against her back.

Then the wind blew upon her face and she idled along the deck and paused again at the wheelhouse, yawning. Nobody there. But that's so, the helmsman went off early to get word for a tug. She entered the room, examining the control fixtures with interest.

She touched the wheel, tentatively. It turned all right: they must have fixed it, whatever was broken about it. She removed her hand and examined the room again, hopefully, and her eyes came upon a binocular suspended from a nail in the wall.

Through the binocular she saw a blur in two colors, but presently under her fingers the blur became trees startlingly distinct and separate leaf by leaf and bough by bough, and pendants of rusty green moss were beards of contemplative goats ruminating among the trees and above a yellow strip of beach and a smother of foam in which the sun hung little fleeting rainbows.

She watched this for a time, entranced, then swinging the glass slowly, waves slid past at arms' length, curling and creaming; and swinging the glass further, the rail of the yacht leapt monstrously into view and upon the rail a nameless object emitting at that instant a number of circular yellow basins.

The yellow things fell into the water, seemingly so near, yet without any sound, and swinging the glass again, the thing that had emitted them was gone and in its place the back of a man close enough for her to touch him by extending her hand.

She lowered the glass and the man's back sprang away, becoming that of the steward carrying a garbage pail, and she knew then what the yellow basins were. She raised the glass again and again the steward sprang suddenly and silently within reach of her arm. She called "Hey!" and when he paused and turned, his face was plain as plain. She waved her hand to him, but he only looked at her a moment. Then he went on and around a corner.

She hung the binocular back on its nail and followed along the deck where he had disappeared. Inside the companionway and obliquely through the galley door she could see him moving about, washing the luncheon dishes, and she sat on the top step of the stairs.

There was a small round window beside her, and he bent over the sink while light fell directly upon his brown head. She watched him quietly, intently but without rudeness, as a child would, until he looked up and saw her tanned serious face framed roundly in the port. "Hello," she said.

“Hello,” he answered as gravely.

“You have to work all the time, don’t you?” she asked. “Say, I liked the way you went over after that man, yesterday. With your clothes on, too. Not many have sense enough to dive away from the propeller. What’s your name?”

David West, he told her, scraping a stew pan and sloshing water into it. Steam rose from the water and about it bobbed a cake of thick implacable looking yellow soap. The niece sat bent forward to see through the window, rubbing her palms on her bare calves.

“It’s too bad you have to work whether we are aground or not,” she remarked. “The captain and the rest of them don’t have anything to do now, except just lie around. They can have more fun than us, now. Aunt Pat’s kind of terrible,” she explained. “Have you been with her long?”

“No, ma’am. This is my first trip. But I don’t mind light work like this. Ain’t much to do, when you get settled down to it. Ain’t nothing to what I have done.”

“Oh. You don’t — You are not a regular cook, are you?”

“No, ma’am. Not regular. It was Mr. Fairchild got me this job with Mrs. — with her.”

“He did? Gee, he knows everybody almost, don’t he?”

“Does he?”

She gazed through the round window, watching a blackened kettle brighten beneath his brush. Soap frothed, piled like summer clouds, floated in the sink like small reflections of clouds. “Have you known him long?” she asked. “Mr. Fairchild, I mean?”

“I didn’t know him any until a couple of days ago, I was in that park where that statue is, down close to the docks, and he came by and we were talking and I wasn’t working then, and so he got me this job. I can do any kind of work,” he added with quiet pride.

“You can? You don’t live in New Orleans, do you?”

“Indiana,” he told her. “I’m just traveling around.”

“Gee,” the niece said, “I wish I were a man, like that. I bet it’s all right, going around wherever you want to. I guess I’d work on ships. That’s what I’d do.”

“Yes,” he agreed. “That’s where I learned to cook — on a ship.”

“Not—”

“Yes’m, to the Mediterranean ports, last trip.”

“Gee,” she said again. “You’ve seen lots, haven’t you? What would you do, when the ship got to different places? You didn’t just stay on the ship, did you?”

“No’m. I went to a lot of towns. Away from the coast.”

“To Paris, I bet.”

“No’m,” he admitted, with just a trace of apology, “I never seemed to get to Paris. But next—”

“I knew you wouldn’t,” she said quickly. “Say, men just go to Europe because they say European women are fast, don’t they? Are European women like that? promiscuous, like they say?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I nev—”

“I bet you never had time to fool with them, did you? That’s what I’d do: I wouldn’t waste my time on women, if I went to Europe. They make me sick — these little college boys in their balloon pants, and colored stickers all over their suitcases, bringing empty cognac bottles back with ’em and snickering about French girls and trying to make love to you in French. Say, I bet where you went you could see a lot of mountains and little cute towns on the side of ’em, and old gray walls and ruined castles on the mountains, couldn’t you?”

“Yes’m. And one place was high over a lake. It was blue as... blue like... washing water,” he said finally. “Water with bluing in it. They put bluing in the water when they wash clothes, country folks do,” he explained.

"I know," she said impatiently. "Were there mountains around it?"

"The Alps Mountains, and little white boats on it no bigger than water beetles. You couldn't see 'em moving: you only could see the water kind of spreading out to each side. The water would keep on spreading out until it pretty near touched both shores whenever a boat passed.

And you could lay on your back on the mountain where I was and watch eagles flying around way up above the water, until sunset. Then the eagles all went back to the mountains." David gazed through the port, past her sober tanned face mooned there by the round window, not even seeing it any more, seeing instead his washing powder colored lake and his lonely mountains and eagles against the blue.

"And then the sun would go down, and sometimes the mountains would look like they were on fire all over. That was the ice and snow on 'em. It was pretty at night too," he added simply, scrubbing again at his pots.

"Gee," she said with hushed young longing. "And that's what you get for being a woman. I guess I'll have to get married and have a bunch of kids." She watched him with her grave opaque eyes. "No, I'm not, either," she said fiercely, "I'm going to make Hank let me go there next summer. Can't you go back then, too?"

Say, you fix it up to go back then, and I'll go home and see Hank about it and then I'll come over. Josh'll want to come too, most likely, and you'll know where the places are. Can't you do that?"

"I guess I could," he answered slowly. "Only—"

"Only what?"

"Nothing," he said at last.

"Well, you fix it up to go, then. Ill give you my address, and you can write me when to start and where to meet you... I guess I couldn't go over on the same boat you'll be on, could I?"

"I'm afraid not," he answered.

“Well, it’ll be all right, anyway. Gee, David, I wish we could go tomorrow, don’t you? I wonder if they let people swim in that lake? But I don’t know, maybe it’s nicer to be away up there where you were, looking down at it.

Next summer...” her unseeing eyes rested on his brown busy head while her spirit lay on its belly above Maggiore, watching little white boats no bigger than water beetles, and the lonely arrogant eagles aloft in blue sunshot space surrounded and enclosed by mountains cloud brooded, taller than God.

David dried his pots and pans and hung them along the bulkhead in a burnished row. He washed out his dishcloths and hung them to dry upon the wall. The niece watched him.

“It’s too bad you have to work all the time,” she said with polite regret.

“I’m all done, now.”

“Let’s go swimming, then. It ought to be good now. I’ve just been waiting for somebody to go in with me.”

“I can’t,” he answered, “I’ve got a little more work I better do now.”

“I thought you were through. Will it take you very long? If it won’t, let’s go in then: I’ll wait for you.”

“Well, you see, I don’t go in during the day. I go in early in the morning, before you are up.”

“Say, I hadn’t thought of that. I bet it’s fine then, isn’t it? How about calling me in the morning, when you are ready to go in? Will you?” He hesitated again and she added, watching him with her sober opaque eyes, “Is it because you don’t like to go swimming with girls? That’s all right: I won’t bother you. I swim pretty well. You won’t have to keep me from drowning.”

“It ain’t that,” he answered lamely. “You see, I — I haven’t got a bathing suit,” he blurted.

“Oh, is that all? I’ll get my brother’s for you. It’ll be kind of tight, but I guess you can wear it. I’ll get it for you now, if you’ll go in.”

“I can’t,” he repeated. “I’ve still got some cleaning up to do.”

“Well—” She got to her feet. “If you won’t, then. But in the morning? you promised, you know.”

“All right,” he agreed.

“I’ll try to be awake. But you just knock on the door — the second door on the right of the passage, you know.” She turned on her silent bare feet. She paused again. “Don’t forget you promised,” she called back. Then her flat boy’s body was gone, and David turned again to his work.

The niece went on up the deck and turned the corner of the deckhouse on her silent feet just in time to see Jenny rout and disperse an attack by Mr. Talliaferro. She stepped back beyond the corner, unseen.

Boldness. But Fairchild had said you can’t be bold with words. How, then, to be bold? To try to do anything without words, it seemed to him, was like trying to grow grain without seed. Still, Fairchild had said... who knew people, women....

Mr. Talliaferro prowled restlessly, having the boat to himself practically, and presently he found Jenny sleeping placidly in a chair in the shade of the deckhouse. Blonde and pink and soft in sleep was Jenny: a passive soft abandon fitting like water to the sagging embrace of the canvas chair. Mr. Talliaferro envied that chair with a surge of fire like an adolescent’s in his dry bones; and while he stood regarding the sprawled awkwardness of Jenny’s sweet thighs and legs and one little soiled hand dangling across her hip, that surge of imminence and fire and desolation seemed to lightly distend all his organs, leaving a thin salty taste on his tongue. Mr. Talliaferro glanced quickly about the deck.

He glanced quickly about the deck, then feeling rather foolish, but strangely and exuberantly young, he came near and bending he traced with his hand lightly the heavy laxness of Jenny's body through the canvas which supported her. Then he thought terribly that some one was watching him, and he sprang erect with an alarm like a nausea, staring at Jenny's closed eyes.

But her eyelids lay shadowed, a faint transparent blue upon her cheeks, and her breath was a little regular wind come recently from off fresh milk. But he still felt eyes upon him and he stood acutely, trying to think of something to do some casual gesture to perform.

A cigarette his chaotic brain supplied at last. But he had none, and still spurred by this need, he darted quickly away and to his cabin.

The nephew slept yet in his berth, and breathing rather fast, Mr. Talliaferro got his cigarette? and then he stood before the mirror, examining his face, seeking wildness, recklessness there. But it bore its customary expression of polite faint alarm, and he smoothed his hair, thinking of the sweet passive sag of that deckchair... yes, almost directly over Ms head.... He rushed back on deck in a surge of fear that she had waked and risen, gone away. He restrained himself by an effort to a more sedate pace, reconnoitering the deck. All was well.

He smoked his cigarette in short nervous puffs, hearing his heart, tasting that warm salt. Yes, his hand was actually trembling, and he stood in a casual attitude, looking about at water and sky and shore. Then he moved, and still with casualness he strolled back to where Jenny slept, unchanged her supine abandon, soft and oblivious and terrifying.

Mr. Talliaferro bent over her. Then he got on one knee, then on both knees. Jenny slept ineffably, breathing her sweet regular breath upon his face... he wondered if he could rise quickly enough, in an emergency... he rose and looked about, then tiptoed across the deck and still on tiptoe he fetched another chair and set it beside Jenny's, and sat down.

But it was for reclining, so he tried sitting on the edge of it. Too high, and amid his other chaotic emotions was a harried despair of futility and an implacable passing of opportunity. While all the time it was as though he stood nearby yet aloof, watching his own antics. He lit another cigarette with hands that trembled, took three puffs that he did not taste, and cast it away.

Hard this floor his old knees yes yes Jenny her breath Yes yes her red soft mouth where little teeth but showed parted bloneness a golden pink swirl kaleidoscopic a single blue eye not come fully awake her breath yes yes He felt eyes again, knew they were there, but he cast all things away, and sprawled nuzzling for Jenny's mouth as she came awake.

"Wake sleeping princess Kiss," Mr. Talliaferro jabbered in a dry falsetto. Jenny squealed, moving her head a little. Then she came fully awake and got her hand under Mr. Talliaferro's chin. "Wake princess with kiss," Mr. Talliaferro repeated, laughing a thin hysterical laugh, obsessed with an utter and dreadful need to complete the gesture.

Jenny heaved herself up, thrusting Mr. Talliaferro back on his heels. "Whatcher doing, you old—" Jenny glared at him, and seeking about in that vague pinkish region which was her mind, she brought forth finally an expression such as a steamboat mate or a railroad flagman, heated with wine, might apply to his temporary Saturday night Phillida, who would charge him for it by the letter, like a cablegram.

Jenny watched Mr. Talliaferro's dapper dispersion with soft, blonde indignation. When he had disappeared she flopped back again. Then she snorted, a soft, indignant sound, and turned again onto her side. Once more she expelled her breath with righteous indignation, and soon thereafter she drowsed again and slept.

NINE O'CLOCK

It was a sleazy scrap of slightly soiled applegreen crêpe and its principal purpose seemed to be that of indicating vaguely the shape of Jenny's

behind, as she danced, caressing the twin soft points of her thighs with the lingering sterility of an aged lover. It looked as if she might have slept in it recently, and there was also a small hat of pale straw, of no particular shape, ribboned.

Jenny slid about in Mr. Talliaferro's embrace with placid skill. She and Pete had just quarreled bitterly. Pete had, that is. Jenny's bovine troubling placidity had merely dissolved into tears, causing her eyes to be more ineffable than ever, and she had gone calmly about what she had intended all the time; to have as much fun as she could, as long as she was here. Pete couldn't walk out on her: all he could do would be to fuss at her or sulk, or maybe bit her. He had done that once, thereby voluntarily making himself her bond slave. She had rather liked it....

Beyond lights, beyond the sound of the victrola, water was a minor ceaseless sound in the darkness; above, vague drowsy stars. Jenny danced on placidly, untroubled by Mr. Talliaferro's endless flow of soft words against her neck, hardly conscious of his hand sliding a small concentric circle at the small of her back.

"She looks kind of nice, don't she?" Fairchild said to his companion as they stood at the head of the companionway, come up for air. "Kind of soft and stupid and young, you know. Passive, and at the same time troubling, challenging." He watched them for a time, then he added: "Now, there goes the Great Illusion, par excellence."

"What's Talliaferro's trouble?" asked the Semitic man.

"The illusion that you can seduce women. Which you can't. They just elect you."

"And then, Gold help you," the other added.

"And with words, at that," Fairchild continued. "With words," he repeated savagely.

"Well, why not with words? One thing gets along with women as well as another. And you are a funny sort to disparage words; you, a

member of that species all of whose actions are controlled by words. It's the word that overturns thrones and political parties and instigates vice crusades, not things; the Thing is merely the symbol for the Word.

And more than that, think what a devil of a fix you and I'd be in were it not for words, were we to lose our faith in words. I'd have nothing to do all day long, and you'd have to work or starve to death." He was silent for a while. Jenny yet slid and poised, pleasuring her soft young placidity. "And, after all, his illusion is just as nourishing as yours. Or mine, either."

"I know: but yours or mine ain't quite so ridiculous as his is."

"How do you know they aren't?" Fairchild had no reply, and the other continued: "After all, it doesn't make any difference what you believe. Man is not only nourished by convictions, he is nourished by any conviction. Whatever you believe, you'll always annoy some one, but you yourself will follow and bleed and die for it in the face of law, hell or high water.

And those who die for causes will perish for any cause, the more tawdry it is, the quicker they flock to it. And be quite happy at it, too. It's a provision of providence to keep their time occupied." He sucked at his cigar, but it was dead.

"Do you know who is the happiest man in the world today? Mussolini, of course. And do you know who are next? The poor devils he will get killed with his Cæsar illusion. Don't pity them, however: were it not Mussolini and his illusion it would be some one else and his cause.

I believe it is some grand cosmic scheme for fertilizing the earth. And it could be so much worse," he added. "Who knows? They might all migrate to America and fall into the hands of Henry Ford.

"So don't you go around feeling superior to Talliaferro. I think his present illusion and its object are rather charming, almost as charming as the consummation of it would be — which is more than you can say

for yours.” He held a match to his cigar. His sucking, intent face came abruptly out of the darkness, and as abruptly vanished again.

He flipped the match toward the rail. “And so do you, you poor emotional eunuch; so do you, despite that bastard of a surgeon and a stenographer which you call your soul, so do you remember with regret kissing in the dark and all the tender and sweet stupidity of young flesh.”

“Hell,” said Fairchild, “let’s have another drink.”
His friend was too kind, too tactful to say I told you so.

Mrs. Maurier captured them as they reached the stairs. “Here you are,” she exclaimed brightly, prisoning their arms; “come: let’s all dance a while. We need men. Eva has taken Mark away from Dorothy, and she has no partner. Come, Mr. Fairchild; Julius.”

“We’re coming back,” Fairchild answered, “we’re going now to hunt up Gordon and the Major, and we’ll all come right back.”
“No, no,” she said soothingly, “we’ll send the steward for them. Come, now.”

“I think we better go,” Fairchild objected quickly. “The steward has been working hard all day: he’s tired out, I expect. And Gordon’s kind of timid; he might not come if you send a servant for him.” She released them doubtfully, staring at them with her round, astonished face.

“You will...? Do come back, Mr. Fairchild.”
“Sure, sure,” Fairchild replied, descending hastily.
“Julius,” Mrs. Maurier called after them helplessly.

“I’ll bring them up in ten minutes,” the Semitic man promised, following. Mrs. Maurier watched them until they had passed from view, then she turned away. Jenny and Mr. Talliaferro were still dancing, as were Mrs. Wiseman and the ghostly poet.

Miss Jameson, partnerless, sat at the card table playing solitaire. Mrs. Maurier looked on until the record played itself through. Then she said firmly:

"I think we'd better change partners among ourselves until the men come up."

Mr. Talliaferro released Jenny obediently, and Jenny, released, stood around for a while, then she drifted away and down the deck, passing that tall ugly man leaning alone at the rail, and further along the niece spoke from the shadow:

"Going to bed?"

Jenny paused and turning her head toward the voice she saw the faint glint of Pete's hat. She went on. "Uhuh," she replied. The moon was getting up, rising out of the dark water: a tarnished, implacable Venus.

Her aunt came along soon, prowling, peering fretfully into shadowy chairs and obscure corners, implacable and tactless as a minor disease.

"My Lord, what've we got to do now?" the niece moaned. She sighed. "She sure makes life real and earnest for everybody, that woman does."

"Dance, I guess," Pete answered. The vicious serrated rim of his hat, where the moon fell upon it, glinted dully like a row of filed teeth, like a gaping lithograph of a charging shark.

"Guess so. Say, I'm going to fade out. Stall her off some way, or run yourself would be better." The niece rose hurriedly, "So long. See you to-m — Oh, you coming too?"

They stepped behind the companionway housing and flattened themselves against it, listening to Mrs. Maurier's fretful prowling, and clutching Pete's hand for caution the niece craned her head around the corner.

"There's Dorothy, too," she whispered and she withdrew her head and they flattened themselves closer yet, clutching hands, while the two searchers passed, pausing to peer into every obscurity.

But they went on, finally, passing from sight, and the niece wriggled her fingers free and moved, and moving found that she had turned into Pete's arm and against his dark shape and the reckless angle of his hat topping it.

An interval like that between two fencers ere they engage, then Pete's arm moved with confidence and his other arm came about her shoulders with a technique that was forcing her face upward. She was so still that he stopped again in a momentary flagging of confidence, and out of this lull a hard elbow came without force but steadily under his chin. "Try it on your saxophone, Pete," she told him without alarm.

His hand moved again and caught her wrist, but she held her elbow jammed against his windpipe, increasing the pressure as he tried to remove her arm, their bodies taut against each other and without motion. Some one approached again and he released her, but before they could dodge again around the corner Miss Jameson saw them.

"Who is that?" she said in her high humorless voice. She drew nearer, peering. "Oh, I recognize Pete's hat. Mrs. Maurier wants you." She peered at them suspiciously. "What are you folks doing here?"

"Hiding from Aunt Pat," the niece answered. "What's she going to make us do, now?"

"Why... nothing. She — we ought to be more sociable. Don't you think so? We never are all together, you know. Anyway, she wants to see Pete. Aren't you coming too?"

"I'm going to bed. Pete can go if he wants to risk it, though." She turned away. Miss Jameson put her hand on Pete's sleeve.

"You don't mind if I take Pete, then?" she persisted intensely.

"I don't if he don't," the niece replied. She went on. "Good night."

"That child ought to be spanked," Miss Jameson said viciously. She slid her hand through Pete's elbow. "Come on, Pete."

The niece stood and rubbed one bare sole against the other shin, hearing their footsteps retreating toward the lights and the fatuous reiteration of the victrola. She rubbed her foot rhythmically up and down her shin, gazing out upon the water where the moon had begun to spread her pallid and boneless hand.... Her foot ceased its motion and she remained motionless for a space. Then she stood on one leg and raised the other one.

Under her fingers was a small, hard bump, slightly feverish. Gabriel's pants, she whispered, they've found us again. But there was nothing for it except to wait until the tug came. "And finds a lot of picked bones," she added aloud. She went on across the deck; at the stairs she stopped again.

It was David, standing there at the rail, his shirt blanching in the level moonlight, against the dark shoreline. She went over beside him, silent on her bare feet.

"Hello, David," she said quietly, putting her elbows on the rail beside his and hunching her shoulders and crossing her legs as his were. "This would be a good night to be on our mountain, looking down at the lake and the little boats all lighted up, wouldn't it? I guess this time next summer well be there, won't we?"

And lots of other places, where you went to. You know nice things, don't you? When we come back, I'll know nice things, too." She gazed downward upon the dark, ceaseless water. It was never still, never the same, and on it moonlight was broken into little fleeting silver wings rising and falling and changing.

"Wish I were in it," she said, "swimming around in the moonlight.... You won't forget about in the morning, will you?" No, he told her watching

her crossed thin arms and the cropped crown of her head. "Say," she looked up at him, "I tell you what: let's go in to-night."

"Now?"

"When the moon gets up more. Aunt Pat wouldn't let me go now, anyway. But about twelve, when they've gone to bed. What do you say?" He looked at her, looked at her in such a strange fashion that she said sharply: "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," he answered at last.

"Well, I'll meet you about twelve o'clock, then. I'll get Gus' bathing suit for you. Don't forget, now."

"No," he repeated. And when she reached the stairs and looked back at him he was still watching her in that strange manner. But she didn't puzzle over it long.

TEN O'CLOCK

Jenny had the cabin to herself. Mrs. — , that one whose name she always forgot, was still on deck. She could hear them talking, and Mr. Fairchild's jolly laugh came from somewhere, though he hadn't been upstairs when she left; and the muted nasal sound of the victrola and thumping feet just over her head. Still dancing. Should she go back?

She sat holding a handglass, staring into it, but the handglass was bland, reminding her that after all this was one night she didn't have to dance any more. And you have to dance so many nights. To-morrow night, perhaps, it said. But I don't have to dance to-morrow night, she thought... staring into the glass and sitting utterly motionless....

Its thin whine rose keening to an ecstatic point and in the glass she saw it mar her throat with a small gray speck. She slapped savagely. It eluded her with a weary, practised skill, hanging fuzzily between her and the unshaded light.

My Lord, why do you want to go to Mandeville? she thought. Her palms flashed, smacking cleanly, and Jenny examined her hand with distaste. Where do they carry so much blood she wondered, rubbing her palm on the back of her stocking.

And so young, too. I hope that's the last one. It must have been, for there was no sound save a small lapping whisper of water and a troubling faraway suggestion of brass broken by a monotonous thumping of feet over her head. Dancing still.

You really don't have to dance at all, thought Jenny, yawning into the glass, examining with interest the pink and seemingly endless curve of her gullet, when the door opened and the girl, Patricia, entered the room. She wore a raincoat over her pajamas and Jenny saw her reflected face in the mirror.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello," the niece replied, "I thought you'd have stayed up there prancing around with 'em."

"Lord," Jenny said, "you don't have to dance all your life, do you? You don't seem to be there."

The niece thrust her hands into the raincoat pockets and stared about the small room. "Don't you close that window when you undress?" she asked. "Standing wide open like that...."

Jenny put the mirror down. "That window? I don't guess there's anybody out there this time of night."

The niece went to the port and saw a pale sky bisected laterally by a dark rigidity of water. The moon spread her silver hand on it; a broadening path of silver, and in the path the water came alive ceaselessly, no longer rigid. "I guess not," she murmured. "The only man who could walk on water is dead.... Which one is yours?" She threw off the raincoat and turned toward the two berths. The lower garment of her pajamas was tied about her waist with a man's frayed necktie.

"Is he?" Jenny murmured with detachment. "That one," she answered vaguely, twisting her body to examine the back of one reverted leg. After a while she looked up. "That ain't mine. That's Mrs. What's-her-name's you are in."

"Well, it don't make any difference." The niece lay flat, spreading her arms and legs luxuriously. "Gimme a cigarette. Have you got any?" "I haven't got any. I don't smoke." Jenny's leg was satisfactory, so she unwrithed herself-

"You don't smoke? Why don't you?"

"I don't know," Jenny replied, "I just don't."

"Look around and see if Eva's got some somewhere." The niece raised her head. "Go on: look in her things, she won't mind."

Jenny hunted for cigarettes in a soft blonde futility. "Pete's got some," she remarked after a time. "He bought twenty packages just before we left town, to bring on the boat."

"Twenty packages? Good Lord, where'd he think we were going? He must have been scared of shipwreck or something."

"I guess so."

"Gabriel's pants," the niece said. "That's all he brought, was it? Just cigarettes? What did you bring?"

"I brought a comb," Jenny dragged her little soiled dress over her head. Her voice was muffled, "and some rouge." She shook out her drowsy gold hair and let the dress fall to the floor. "Pete's got some, though," she repeated, thrusting the dress beneath the dressing table with her foot.

"I know," the niece rejoined, "and so has Mr. Fairchild. And so has the steward, if Mark Frost hasn't borrowed 'em all. And I saw the captain smoking one, too. But that's not doing me any good."

“No,” agreed Jenny placidly. Her undergarment was quite pink, enveloping her from shoulder to knee with ribbons and furbelows. She loosened a few of these and stepped sweetly and rosily out of it, casting it also under the table.

“You aren’t going to leave ’em there, are you?” the niece asked. “Why don’t you put ’em on the chair?”

“Mrs. — Mrs. Wiseman puts hers on the chair.”

“Well, you got here first: why don’t you take it? Or hang ’em on those hooks behind the door?”

“Hooks?” Jenny looked at the door. “Oh... They’ll be all right there, I guess.” She stripped off her stockings and laid them on the dressing table. Then she turned to the mirror again and picked up her comb.

The comb passed through her fair, soft hair with a faint sound, as of silk, and her hair lent to Jenny’s divine body a halo like an angel’s. The remote victrola, measured feet, a lapping of water, came into the room.

“You’ve got a funny figure,” the niece remarked after a while, calmly, watching her.

“Funny?” repeated Jenny, looking up with soft belligerence. “It’s no funnier than yours. At least my legs don’t look like birds’ legs.”

“Neither do mine,” the other replied with complacency, flat on her back. “Your legs are all right. I mean, you are kind of thick through the middle for your legs; kind of big behind for them.”

“Well, why not? I didn’t make it like that, did I?”

“Oh, sure. I guess it’s all right if you like it to be that way.”

Without apparent effort Jenny dislocated her hip and stared downward over her shoulder. Then she turned sideways and accepted the mute

proffering of the mirror. Reassured, she said: "Sure, it's all right. I expect to be bigger than that, in front, some day."

"So do I... when I have to. Rut what do you want one for?"

"Lord," said Jenny, "I guess I'll have a whole litter of 'em. Besides, I think they're kind of cute, don't you?"

The sound of the victrola came down, melodious and nasal, and measured feet marked away the lapping of waves. The light was small and inadequate, sunk into the ceiling, and Jenny and the niece agreed that they were kind of cute and pink.

Jenny was quite palpably on the point of coming to bed and the other said:

"Don't you wear any nightclothes?"

"I can't wear that thing Mrs. What's-her-name lent me," Jenny replied.

"You said you were going to lend me something, only you didn't. If I'd depended on you on this trip, I guess I'd be back yonder about ten miles, trying to swim home."

"That's right. But it doesn't make any difference what you sleep in, does it?... Turn off the light." Light followed Jenny rosily as she crossed the room, it slid rosily upon her as she turned obediently toward the switch beside the door.

The niece lay flat on her back gazing at the unshaded globe. Jenny's angelic nakedness went beyond her vision and suddenly she stared at nothing with a vague orifice vaguely in the center of it, and beyond the orifice a pale moonfilled sky.

Jenny's bare feet hissed just a little on the uncarpeted floor and she came breathing softly in the dark, and her hand came out of the dark. The niece moved over against the wall. The round orifice in the center of the dark was obscured, then it reappeared, and breathing with a soft blonde intentness Jenny climbed gingerly into the berth.

But she bumped her head anyway, lightly, and she exclaimed “ow” with placid surprise. The bunk heaved monstrosly, creaking; the porthole vanished again, then the berth became still and Jenny sighed with a soft explosive sound.

Then she changed her position again and the other said: “Be still, can’t you?” thrusting at Jenny’s boneless, naked abandon with her elbow. “I’m not fixed yet,” Jenny replied without rancor.

“Well, get in then, and quit flopping around.” Jenny became lax. “I’m fixed now,” she said at last. She sighed again, a frank yawning sound.

Those slightly dulled feet thudthudded monotonously overhead. Outside, in the pale darkness, water lapped at the hull of the yacht. The close cabin emptied slowly of heat; heat ebbed steadily away now that the light was off, and in it was no sound save that of their breathing.

No other sound at all. “I hope that was the last one, the one I killed,” Jenny murmured. “God, yes,” the niece agreed. “This party is wearing enough with just people on it.... Say, how’d you like to be on a party with a boatful of Mr. Talliaferros?”

“Which one is he?”

“Why, don’t you remember him? You sure ought to. He’s that funny talking little man that puts his hands on you — that dreadful polite one. I don’t see how you could forget a man as polite as him.”

“Oh, yes,” said Jenny, remembering, and the other said: “Say, Jenny, how about Pete?”, Jenny became utterly still for a moment. Then she said innocently: “What about him?”

“He’s mad at you about Mr. Talliaferro, isn’t he?”

“Pete’s all right, I guess.”

“You keep yourself all cluttered up with men, don’t you?” the other asked curiously.

“Well, you got to do something,” Jenny defended herself.

“Bunk,” the niece said roughly, “bunk. You like petting. That’s the reason. Don’t you?”

“Well, I don’t mind,” Jenny answered. “I’ve kind of got used to it,” she explained. The niece expelled her breath in a thin snorting sound and Jenny repeated: “You’ve got to do something, haven’t you?”

“Oh, sweet attar of bunk,” the niece said. In the darkness she made a gesture of disgust. “You women! That’s the way Dorothy Jameson thinks about it too, I bet. You better look out: I think she’s trying to take Peter away from you.”

“Oh, Pete’s all right,” Jenny repeated placidly. She lay perfectly still again. The water was a cool dim sound. Jenny spoke, suddenly confidential.

“Say, you know what she wants Pete to do?”

“No: What?” asked the niece quickly.

“Well — Say, what kind of a girl is she? Do you know her very good?”

“What does she want Pete to do?” the other insisted.

Jenny was silent. Then she blurted in prim disapproval: “She wants Pete to let her paint him.”

“Yes? And then what?”

“That’s it. She wants Pete to let her paint him in a picture.”

“Well, that’s the way she usually goes about getting men, I guess. What’s wrong with it?”

“Well, it’s the wrong way to go about getting Pete. Pete’s not used to that,” Jenny replied in that prim tone.

"I don't blame him for not wanting to waste his time that way. But what makes you and Pete so surprised at the idea of it? Pete won't catch lead poisoning just from having his portrait painted."

"Well, it may be all right for folks like you all. But Pete says he wouldn't let any strange woman see him without any clothes on. He's not used to things like that."

"Oh," remarked the niece. Then: "So that's the way she wants to paint him, is it?"

"Why, that's the way they always do it, ain't it? In the nude?" Jenny pronounced it nodd.

"Good Lord, didn't you ever see a picture of anybody with clothes on? Where'd you get that idea from? From the movies?"

Jenny didn't reply. Then she said suddenly: "Besides, the ones with clothes on are all old ladies, or mayors or somethingc Anyway, I thought..."

"Thought what?"

"Nothing," Jenny answered, and the other said:

"Pete can get that idea right out of his head. Chances are she wants to paint him all regular and respectable, not to shock his modesty at all. I'll tell him so, to-morrow."

"Never mind," Jenny said quickly, "I'll tell him. You needn't to bother about it."

"All right. Whatever you like.... Wish I had a cigarette." They lay quiet for a time. Outside water whispered against the hull. The victrola was hushed temporarily and the dancers had ceased. Jenny moved again, onto her side, facing the other in the darkness.

"Say," she asked, "what's your brother making?"

"Gus? Why don't you ask him yourself?"

"I did, only..."

"What?"

“Only he didn’t tell me. At least, I don’t remember.”

“What did he say when you asked him?”

Jenny mused briefly. “He kissed me. Before I knew it, and he kind of patted me back here and told me to call again later, because he was in conference or something like that.”

“Gabriel’s pants,” the niece murmured. Then she said sharply: “Look here, you leave Josh alone, you hear? Haven’t you got enough with Pete and Mr. Talliaferro, without fooling with children?”

“I’m not going to fool with any children.”

“Well, please don’t. Let Josh alone, anyway.” She moved her arm, arching her elbow against Jenny’s soft nakedness. “Move over some. Gee, woman, you sure do feel indecent. Get over on your side a little, can’t you?”

Jenny moved away, rolling onto her back again, and they lay quiet, side by side in the dark. “Say,” remarked Jenny presently, “Mr. — that polite man—”

“Talliaferro,” the other prompted. “ — Talliaferro. I wonder if he’s got a car?”

“I don’t know. You better ask him. What do you keep on asking me what people are making or what they’ve got, for?”

“Taxicabbers are best, I think,” Jenny continued, unruffled. “Sometimes when they have cars they don’t have anything else. They just take you riding.”

“I don’t know,” the niece repeated. “Say,” she said suddenly, “what was that you said to him this afternoon?”

Jenny said, “Oh.” She breathed placidly and regularly for a while. Then she remarked: “I thought you were there, around that corner.”

“Yes. What was it? Say it again.” Jenny said it again. The niece repeated it after her. “What does it mean?”

“I don’t know. I just happened to remember it. I don’t know what it means.”

“It sounds good,” the other said. “You didn’t think it up yourself, did you?”

“No. It was a fellow told it to me. There was two couples of us at the Market one night, getting coffee: me and Pete and a girl friend of mine and another fellow. We had been to Mandeville on the boat that day, swimming and dancing.

Say, there was a man drowned at Mandeville that day. Pete and Thelma, my girl friend, and Roy, this girl friend of mine’s fellow, saw it. I didn’t see it because I wasn’t with them. I didn’t go in bathing with them: it was too sunny. I don’t think blondes ought to expose themselves to hot sun like brunettes, do you?”

“Why not? But what about—”

“Oh, yes. Anyway, I didn’t go in swimming where the man got drowned. I was waiting for them, and I got to talking to a funny man. A little kind of black man—”

“A nigger?”

“No. He was a white man, except he was awful sunburned and kind of shabby dressed — no necktie and hat. Say, he said some funny things to me. He said I had the best digestion he ever saw, and he said if the straps of my dress was to break I’d devastate the country.

He said he was a liar by profession, and he made good money at it, enough to own a Ford as soon as he got it paid out. I think he was crazy. Not dangerous: just crazy.”

The niece lay quiet. She said, contemplatively: “You do look like they feed you on bread and milk and put you to bed at sunset every day.... What was his name? Did he tell you?” she asked suddenly.

“Yes. It was...” Jenny pondered a while. “I remembered it because he was such a funny kind of man. It was... Walker or Foster or something.”
“Walker or Foster? Well, which one was it?”

“It must be Foster because I remembered it by it began with a F like my girl friend’s middle name — Frances. Thelma Frances, only she don’t use both of them. Only I don’t think it was Foster, because—”
“You don’t remember it, then.”

“Yes, I do. Wait.... Oh, yes: I remember — Faulkner, that was it.”

“Faulkner?” the niece pondered in turn. “Never heard of him,” she said at last, with finality. “And he was the one that told you that thing?”

“No. It was after that, when we had come back to N.O. That crazy man was on the boat coming back. He got to talking to Pete and Roy while me and Thelma was fixing up downstairs, and he danced with Thelma. He wouldn’t dance with me because he said he didn’t dance very well, and so he had to keep his mind on the music while he danced. He said he could dance with either Roy or Thelma or Pete, but he wouldn’t dance with me. I think he was crazy. Don’t you?”

“It all sounds crazy, the way you tell it. But what about the one that said that to you?”

“Oh, yes. Well, we was at the Market. There was a big crowd there because it was Sunday night, see, and these other fellows was there. One of them was a snappy looking fellow, and I kind of looked at him. Pete had stopped in a place to get some cigarettes, and me and Thelma and Roy was crowded in with a lot of folks, having coffee. So I kind of looked at this goodlooking fellow.”

“Yes. You kind of looked at him. Go on.”

“All right. And so this goodlooking fellow crowded in behind me and started talking to me. There was a man in between me and Roy, and this fellow that was talking to me said, Is he with you? talking about the

man sitting next to me, and I said, No, I didn't know who he was. And this fellow said, How about coming out with him because he had his car parked outside...

Pete's brother has a lot of cars. One of them is the same as Pete's... And then... Oh, yes, and I said, where will we go, because my old man didn't like for me to go out with strangers, and the fellow said he wasn't a stranger, that anybody could tell me who some name was, I forgot what it was he said his name was.

And I said he better ask Pete if I could go, and he said, Who was Pete? Well, there was a big man standing near where we was. He was big as a stevedore, and just then this big man happened to look at me again.

He looked at me a minute, and I kind of knew that he'd look at me again pretty soon, so I told this fellow talking to me that he was Pete, and when the big man looked somewheres else a minute this fellow said that to me. And then the big man looked at me again, and the fellow that said that to me kind of went away. So I got up and went to where Thelma and Roy was, and pretty soon Fete came back. And that's how I learned it."

"Well, it sure sounds good. I wonder... Say, let me say it sometimes, will you?"

"All right," Jenny agreed. "You can have it. Say, what's that you keep telling your aunt? something about pulling up the sheet or something?" The niece told her. "That sounds good, too," Jenny said magnanimously.

"Does it? I tell you what: You let me use yours sometime, and you can take mine. How about it?"

"All right," Jenny agreed again, "it's a trade."

Water lapped and whispered ceaselessly in the pale darkness. The curve of the low ceiling directly over the berth lent a faint sense of oppression to the cabin, but this sense of oppression faded out into the comparatively greater spaciousness of the room, of the darkness with a

round orifice vaguely in the center of it. The moon was higher and the lower curve of the brass rim of the port was now a thin silver sickle, like a new moon.

Jenny moved again, turning against the other's side, breathing ineffably across the niece's face. The niece lay with Jenny's passive nakedness against her arm, and moving her arm outward from the elbow she slowly stroked the back of her hand along the swell of Jenny's flank. Slowly, back and forth, while Jenny lay supine and receptive as a cat. Slowly, back and forth and back... "I like flesh," the niece murmured. "Warm and smooth. Wish I'd lived in Rome... oiled gladiators.... Jenny," she said abruptly, "are you a virgin?"

"Of course I am," Jenny answered immediately in a startled tone. She lay for a moment in lax astonishment. "I mean," she said, "I — yes. I mean, yes, of course I am." She brooded in passive surprise, then her body lost its laxness. "Say—"

"Well," the niece agreed judicially, "I guess that's about what I'd have said, myself."

"Say," demanded Jenny, thoroughly aroused, "what did you ask me that for?"

"Just to see what you'd say. It doesn't make any difference, you know, whether you are or not. I know lots of girls that say they're not. I don't think all of 'em are lying, either."

"Maybe it don't to some folks," Jenny rejoined primly, "but I don't approve of it. I think a girl loses a man's respect by pom — prom — I don't approve of it, that's all. And I don't think you had any right to ask me."

"Good Lord, you sound like a girl scout or something. Don't Pete ever try to persuade you otherwise?"

"Say, what're you asking me questions like that for?"

"I just wanted to see what you'd say. I don't think it's anything to tear your shirt over. You're too easily shocked, Jenny," the niece informed her.

"Well, who wouldn't be? If you want to know what folks say when you ask 'em things like that, why don't you ask 'em to yourself? Did anybody ever ask you if you were one?"

"Not that I know of. But I wou—"

"Well, are you?"

The niece lay perfectly still a moment. "Am I what?"

"Are you a virgin?"

"Why, of course I am," she answered sharply. She raised herself on her elbow. "I mean — Say, look here—"

"Well, that's what I'd 'a' said, myself," Jenny responded with placid malice from the darkness.

The niece poised on her tense elbow above Jenny's sweet regular breathing. "Anyway, what bus — I mean — You asked me so quick," she rushed on, "I wasn't even thinking about being asked something like that."

"Neither was I. You asked me quicker than I asked you."

"But that was different. We were talking about you being one. We were not even thinking about me being one. You asked it so quick I had to say that. It wasn't fair."

"So did I have to say what I said. It was as fair for you as it was for me."

"No, it was different. I had to say I wasn't: quick, like that."

"Well, I'll ask it when you're not surprised, then. Are you?"

The niece lay quiet for a time. "You mean, sure enough?"

"Yes." Jenny breathed her warm intent breath across the other's face. The niece lay silent again. After a time she said: "Hell," and then: "Yes, I am. It's not worth lying about."

“That’s what I think,” Jenny agreed smugly. She became placidly silent in the darkness. The other waited a moment, then said sharply:
“Well? Are you one?”

“Sure I am.”

“I mean, sure enough. You said sure enough, didn’t you?”

“Sure, I am,” Jenny repeated.

“You’re not playing fair,” the niece accused, “I told you.”

“Well, I told you, too.”

“Honest? You swear?”

“Sure, I am,” Jenny said again with her glib and devastating placidity. The niece said, “Hell.” She snorted thinly.

They lay quiet, side by side. They were quiet on deck, too, but it seemed as though there still lingered in the darkness a thin stubborn ghost of syncopation and thudding tireless feet. Jenny wiggled her free toes with pleasure. Presently she said:

“You’re mad, ain’t you?” No reply. “You’ve got a good figure, too,” Jenny offered, conciliatory. “I think you’ve got a right sweet little shape.”

But the other refused to be cajoled. Jenny sighed again ineffably, her milk-and-honey breath. She said: “Your brother’s a college boy, ain’t he? I know some college boys. Tulane. I think college boys are cute. They don’t dress as well as Pete... sloppy.” She mused for a time. “I wore a frat pin once, for a couple of days. I guess your brother belongs to it, don’t he?”

“Gus? Belong to one of these jerkwater clubs? I guess not. He’s a Yale man — he will be next month, that is. I’m going with him. They don’t take every Tom, Dick and Harry that shows up in up there. You have to wait until sophomore year. But Gus is going to work for a senior society, anyhow. He don’t think much of fraternities. Gee, you’d sure give him a laugh if he could hear you.”

“Well, I didn’t know. It seems to me one thing you join is about like another. What’s he going to get by joining the one he’s going to join?”
“You don’t get anything, stupid. You just join it.”

Jenny pondered this a while. “And you have to work to join it?”
“Three years. And only a few make it, then.”

“And if you do make it, you don’t get anything except a little button or something? Good Lord... Say, you know what I’m going to tell him tomorrow? I’m going to tell him he better hold up the sheet: he’s — he’s — What’s the rest of it?”

“Oh shut up and get over on your side,” the niece said sharply, turning her back. “You don’t understand anything about it.”

“I sure don’t,” Jenny agreed, rolling away and onto her other side, and they lay with their backs to each other and their behinds just touching, as children do.... “Three years... Good Lord.”

Fairchild had not returned. But she had known they would not: she was not even surprised, and so once more her party had evolved into interminable cards. Mrs. Wiseman, herself, Mr. Talliaferro and Mark.

By craning her neck she could see Dorothy Jameson’s frail humorless intentness and the tawdry sophistication of Jenny’s young man where they swung their legs from the roof of the wheelhouse. The moon was getting up and Pete’s straw hat was a dull implacable gleam slanted above the red eye of his eternal cigarette. And, yes, there was that queer, shy, shabby Mr. Gordon, mooning alone, as usual; and again she felt a stab of reproof for having neglected him.

At least the others seemed to be enjoying the voyage, however trying they might be to one another. But what could she do for him? He was so difficult, so ill at ease whenever she extended herself for him... Mrs. Maurier rose.

“For a while,” she explained; “Mr. Gordon. — . the trials of a hostess, you know. You might play dummy until I — no: wait.” She called Dorothy with saccharine insistence and presently Miss Jameson responded. “Won’t you take my hand for a short time? I’m sure the young gentleman will excuse you.”

“I’m sorry,” Miss Jameson called back. “I have a headache. Please excuse me.”

“Go on, Mrs. Maurier,” Mrs. Wiseman said, “we can pass the time until you come back: we’ve got used to sitting around.”

“Yes, do,” Mr. Talliaferro added, “we understand.”

Mrs. Maurier looked over to where Gordon still leaned his tall body upon the rail. “I really must,” she explained again. “It’s such a comfort to have a few on whom I can depend.”

“Yes, do,” Mr. Talliaferro repeated.

When she had gone Mrs. Wiseman said: “Let’s play red dog for pennies. I’ve got a few dollars left.”

She joined him quietly. He glanced his gaunt face at her, glanced away. “How quiet, how peaceful it is,” she began, undeterred, leaning beside him and gazing also out across the restless slumber of water upon which the worn moon spread her ceaseless peacock’s tail like a train of silver sequins.

In the yet level rays of the moon the man’s face was spare and cavernous, haughty and inhuman almost. He doesn’t get enough to eat, she knew suddenly and infallibly. It’s like a silver faun’s face, she thought. But he is so difficult, so shy....

“So few of us take time to look inward and contemplate ourselves, don’t you think? It’s the life we lead, I suppose. Only he who creates has not lost the art of this: of making his life complete by living within himself. Don’t you think so, Mr. Gordon?”

“Yes,” he answered shortly. Beyond the dimensionless curve of the deck on which he stood he could see, forward and downward, the stem of the yacht: a pure triangle of sheer white with small waves lapping at its horizontal leg, breaking and flashing each with its particle of shattered moonlight, making a ceaseless small whispering. Mrs. Maurier moved her hands in a gesture: moonlight smoldered greenly amid her rings.

“To live within yourself, to be sufficient unto yourself.

There is so much unhappiness in the world...” she sighed again with astonishment. “To go through life, keeping yourself from becoming involved in it, to gather inspiration for your Work — ah, Mr. Gordon, how lucky you who create are. As for we others, the best we can hope is that sometime, somewhere, somehow we may be fortunate enough to furnish that inspiration, or the setting for it, at least.

But, after all, that would be an end in itself, I think. To know that one had given her mite to Art, no matter how humble the mite or the giver... The humble laborer, Mr. Gordon: she, too, has her place in the scheme of things; she, too, has given something to the world, has walked where gods have trod. And I do so hope that you will find on this voyage something to compensate you for having been taken away from your Work.”

“Yes,” said Gordon again, staring at her with his arrogant uncomfortable stare. The man looks positively uncanny, she thought with a queer cold feeling within her. Like an animal, a beast of some sort.

Her own gaze fluttered away and despite herself she glanced quickly over her shoulder to the reassuring group at the card table. Dorothy’s and Jenny’s young man’s legs swung innocent and rhythmic from the top of the wheelhouse, and as she looked Pete snapped his cigarette outward and into the dark water, twinkling.

“But to be a world in oneself, to regard the antics of man as one would a puppet show — ah, Mr. Gordon, how happy you must be.”

“Yes,” he repeated. Sufficient unto himself in the city of his arrogance, in the marble tower of his loneliness and pride, and... She coming into the dark sky of his life like a star, like a flame...

O bitter and new.., Somewhere within him was a far dreadful laughter, unheard; his whole life was become toothed with jeering laughter, and he faced the old woman again, putting his hand on her and turning her face upward into the moonlight. Mrs. Manner knew utter fear. Not fright, fear: a passive and tragic condition like a dream. She whispered Mr. Gordon, but made no sound.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” he said harshly, staring at her face as a surgeon might. “Tell me about her,” he commanded. “Why aren’t you her mother, so you could tell me how conceiving her must have been, how carrying her in your loins must have been?”

Mr. Gordon! she implored through her dry lips, without making a sound. His hand moved over her face, learning the bones of her forehead and eyesockets and nose through her flesh.

“There’s something in your face, something behind all this silliness,” he went on in his cold level voice while an interval of frozen time refused to pass. His hand pinched the loose sag of flesh around her mouth, slid along the fading line of her cheek and jaw. “I suppose you’ve had what you call your sorrows, too, haven’t you?”

“Mr. Gordon!” she said at last, finding her voice. He released her as abruptly and stood over her, gaunt and ill nourished and arrogant in the moonlight while she believed she was going to faint, hoping vaguely that he would make some effort to catch her when she did, knowing that he would not do so. But she didn’t faint, and the moon spread her silver and boneless hand on the water, and the water lapped and lapped at the pure dreaming hull of the Nausikaa with a faint whispering sound.

ELEVEN O'CLOCK

"Do you know," said Mrs. Wiseman rising and speaking across her chair, "what I'm going to do if this lasts another night? I'm going to ask Julius to exchange with me and let me get drunk with Dawson and Major Ayers in his place. And so, to one and all: Good night."

"Aren't you going to wait for Dorothy?" Mark Frost asked. She glanced toward the wheelhouse.

"No. I guess Pete can look out for himself," she replied, and left them. The moon cast a deep shadow on the western side of the deck, and near the companionway some one lay in a chair. She slowed, passing. "Mrs. Maurier?" she said. "We wondered what had become of you. Been asleep?"

Mrs. Maurier sat up slowly, as a very old person moves. The younger woman bent down to her, quickly solicitous. "You don't feel well, do you?"

"Is it time to go below?" Mrs. Maurier asked, raising herself more briskly. "Our bridge game..."

"You all had beat us too badly. But can't I—"

"No, no," Mrs. Maurier objected quickly, a trifle testily. "It's nothing: I was just sitting here enjoying the moonlight."

"We thought Mr. Gordon was with you." Mrs. Maurier shuddered.

"These terrible men," she said with an attempt at lightness. "These artists!"

"Gordon, too? I thought he had escaped Dawson and Julius."

"Gordon, too," Mrs. Maurier replied. She rose. "Come, I think we'd better go to bed." She shuddered again, as with cold: her flesh seemed to shake despite her, and she took the younger woman's arm, clinging to it. "I do feel a little tired," she confessed. "The first few days are always trying, don't you think?"

But we have a very nice party, don't you think so?"

"An awfully nice party," the other agreed without irony. "But we are all tired: we'll all feel better to-morrow, I know."

Mrs. Maurier descended the stairs slowly, heavily. The other steadied her with her strong hand, and opening Mrs. Manner's door she reached in and found the light button. "There. Would you like anything before you go to bed?"

"No, no," Mrs. Maurier answered, entering and averting her face quickly. She crossed the room and busied herself at the dressing table, keeping her back to the other. "Thank you, nothing. I shall go to sleep at once, I think. I always sleep well on the water. Good night."

Mrs. Wiseman closed the door. I wonder what it is, she thought, I wonder what happened to her? She went on along the passage to her own door. Something did, something happened to her, she repeated, putting her hand on the door and turning the knob.

TWELVE O'CLOCK

The moon had got higher, that worn and bloodless one, old and a little weary and shedding her tired silver on yacht and water and shore; and the yacht, the deck and its fixtures, was passionless as a dream upon the shifting silvered wings of water when she appeared in her bathing suit. She stood for a moment in the doorway until she saw movement and his white shirt where he half turned on the coil of rope where he sat.

Her lifted hand blanched slimly in the hushed treachery of the moon: a gesture, and her bare feet made no sound on the deck.

"Hello, David. I'm on time, like I said. Where's your bathing suit?"

"I didn't think you would come," he said, looking up at her, "I didn't think you meant it."

"Why not?" she asked. "Good Lord, what'd I want to tell you I was for, if I wasn't?"

"I don't know. I just thought... You sure are brown, seeing it in the moonlight."

"Yes, I've got a good one," she agreed. "Where's your bathing suit? Why haven't you got it on?"

"You were going to get one for me, you said."

She stared at his face in consternation. "That's right: I sure was. I forgot it. Wait, maybe I can wake Josh up and get it. It won't take long. You wait here."

He stopped her. "It'll be all right. Don't bother about it to-night. I'll get it some other time."

"No, I'll get it. I want somebody to go in with me. You wait."

"No, never mind: I'll row the boat for you."

"Say, you still don't believe I meant it, do you?" She examined him curiously. "All right, then. I guess I'll have to go in by myself. You can row the boat, anyway. Come on."

He fetched the oars and they got in the tender and cast off. "Only I wish you had a bathing suit," she repeated from the stem. "I'd rather have somebody to go in with me. Couldn't you go in in your clothes or something? Say, I'll turn my back, and you take off your clothes and jump in: how about that?"

"I guess not," he answered in alarm. "I guess I better not do that."

"Shucks, I wanted somebody to go swimming with me. It's not any fun, by myself.... Take off your shirt and pants, then, and go in in your underclothes. That's almost like a bathing suit. I went in yesterday in Josh's."

“I’ll row the boat for you while you go in,” he repeated. The niece said Shucks again, David pulled steadily on upon the mooned and shifting water. Little waves slapped the bottom of the boat lightly as it rose and fell, and behind them the yacht was pure and passionless as a dream against the dark trees.

“I just love to-night,” the niece said. “It’s like we owned everything.” She lay flat on her back on the stern seat, propping her heels against the gunwale. David pulled rhythmically, the motion of the boat was a rhythm that lent to the moon and stars swinging up and down beyond the tapering simplicity of her propped knees a motion slow and soothing as a huge tree in a wind.

“How far do you want to go?” he asked presently.

“I don’t care,” she answered, gazing into the sky. He rowed on, the oarlocks thumping and measured, and she turned onto her belly, dragging her arm in the water while small bubbles of silver fire clung to her arm, broke away reluctantly and swam slowly to the surface, disappeared...

Little casual swells slapped the bottom of the boat, lightly, and slid along beside the hull, mooned with bubbling fire. She slid her legs overside and swung from the stern of the boat, dragging through the water. He pulled on a few strokes.

“I can’t row with you hanging there,” he said. Her two hands vanished from the gunwale and her dark head vanished, but when he slewed the boat sharply and half rose, she reappeared, whipping a faint shower of silver drops from her head. The moon slid and ran on her alternate arms and before her spread a fan of silver lines, shifting and spreading and fading.

“Gee,” she said. Her voice came low along the water, not loud but still distinct: little waves lapped at it. “It’s grand: warm as warm. You better come in.” Her head vanished again, he saw her sickling legs as they

vanished, and once more she rayed shattered silver from her flung head. She swam up to the boat. "Come on in, David," she insisted.

"Take off your skirt and pants and jump in. I'll swim out and wait for you. Come on, now," she commanded.

So he removed his outer garments, sitting in the bottom of the boat, and slid quickly and modestly into the water. "Isn't it grand?" she called to him. "Come on out here."

"We better not get too far from the boat," he said cautiously, "she ain't got any anchor, you know."

"We can catch it. It won't drift fast. Come on out here, and I'll race you back to it."

He swam out to where her dark wet head awaited him. "I bet I beat you," she challenged. "Are you ready? One. Two. Three — Go!" And she did beat him and with a single unceasing motion she slid upward and into the tender, and stood erect for the moonlight to slide over her in hushed silver.

"Ill plunge for distance with you," she now challenged. David hung by his hands, submerged to his neck. She waited for him to get into the skiff, then she said: "You can dive, can't you?" But he still clung to the gunwale, looking up at her.

"Come on, David," she said sharply. "Are you timid, or what? I'm not going to look at you, if you don't want me to." So he got into the boat, modestly keeping his back to her, but even his wet curious garment could not make ridiculous the young lean splendor of him.

"I don't see what you are ashamed of. You've got a good physique," she told him. "Tall and hard looking.... Are you ready? One. Two. Three — Go!"

But soon she was content to float on her back and recover breath, while he trod water beside her. Little hands of water lapped at her, in

her hair and upon her face, and she breathed deeply, closing her eyes against the bland waning moon “I’ll hold you up a while,” he offered, putting his hand under the small of her back.

“You sure can,” she said, holding herself motionless. “Is it hard to do? Let me see if I can hold you up. This water is different from seawater: you don’t hardly sink in seawater if you want to.” She let her legs sink and he lay obediently on his back. “I can hold you up, can’t I? Say, can you carry somebody in the water, like lifesavers?”

“A little,” he admitted and she rolled again onto her back, and he showed her how it was done. Then she must try it herself, and he submitted with dubious resignation. Her hard young arm gripped him chokingly across his throat, jamming his windpipe, and she plunged violently forward, threshing her legs.

He jerked up his arms to remove her strangling elbow and his head went under, openmouthed. He fought free of her and reappeared gasping. Her concerned face came to him and she tried to hold him up, unnecessarily.

“I’m so sorry: I didn’t mean to duck you.”

“It’s all right,” he said, coughing and strangling.

“I didn’t do it right, did I? Are you all right now?” She watched him anxiously, trying to support him.

“I’m all right,” he repeated. “You had the wrong hold,” he explained, treading water. “You had me around the neck.”

“Gee, I thought I was doing it right. I’ll do it right this time.”

“I guess we better wait and practise it in shallow water sometime,” he demurred quickly.

“Why... all right,” she agreed. “I think I know how, now. I guess I had better learn good, first, though. I’m awful sorry I strangled you.”

“It don’t hurt any more. I don’t notice it.”

“But it was such a dumb thing to do. I’ll learn it good next time.”

“You know how now, all right. You just got the wrong hold that time. Try it again: see if you don’t know it.”

“You don’t mind?” she said with quick joy. “I won’t catch you wrong this time.... No, no: I might duck you again. I’d better learn it first.” “Sure you won’t,” he said. “You know how now. You won’t hurt me. Try it.” He turned onto his back.

“Gee, David,” she said. She slid her arm carefully across his chest and beneath his opposite arm. “That’s right? Now, I’m going.”

She held him carefully, intent on doing it correctly, while he encouraged her. But their progress was maddeningly slow: the boat seemed miles away, and so much of her effort was needed to keep her own head above water.

Soon she was breathing faster, gulping air and then closing her mouth against the water her thrusting arm swirled up against her face. I will do it, I will do it, she told herself, but it was so much harder than it had looked. The skiff rose and fell against the stars, and mooned water bubbled about her.

It would take more effort or she’d have to give up. And she’d drown before that.

The arm that held him was numb, and she swam harder, shifting her grip and again her hard elbow shut with strangling force upon his windpipe. But he was expecting it and without moving his body he twisted his head aside and filled his lungs and shut his mouth and eyes....

Soon she ceased swimming and her arm slid down again, holding him up, and he emptied his lungs and opened his eyes to remark the gunwale of the tender rising and falling against the sky above his head.

“I did make it,” she gasped, “I did make it. Are you all right?” she asked, panting. “I sure did it, David. I knew I could.” She clung to the skiff,

resting her head upon her hands. "I thought for a while, when I had to change my hold, that I was doing it wrong again.

But I did it right, didn't I?" The remote chill stars swung over them, and the decaying disc of the moon, over the empty world in which they clung by their hands, side by side. "I'm pretty near all in," she admitted.

"It's pretty hard," he agreed, "until you've practised a lot. I'll hold you up until you get your breath." He put his arm around her under the water.

"I'm not all the way winded," she protested, but by degrees she relaxed until he supported her whole weight, feeling her heart thumping against his palm, while she clung to the gunwale resting her bowed head upon her hands; and it was like he had been in a dark room and all of a sudden the lights had come on: simple, like that.

It was like one morning when he was in a bunch of hoboes riding a freight into San Francisco and the bulls had jumped them and they had had to walk in. Along the water front it was, and there were a lot of boats in the water, kind of rocking back and forth at anchor: he could see reflections of boats and of the piles of the wharves in the water, wavering back and forth; and after a while dawn had come up out of the smoke of the city, like a sound you couldn't hear, and a lot of yellow and pink had come onto the water where the boats were rocking, and around the piles of the wharf little yellow lines seemed to come right up out of the water; and pretty soon there were gulls looking like they had pink and yellow feathers, slanting and wheeling around.

And it was like there was a street in a city, a street with a lot of trash in it, but pretty soon he was out of the street and in a place where trees were. It must be spring because the trees were not exactly bare, and yet they didn't exactly have leaves on them, and there was a wind coming through the trees and he stopped and heard music somewhere; it was like he had just waked up and a wind with music in it was coming across green hills brave in a clean dawn. Simple, like that.

She moved at last against his arm. "Maybe I can climb in now. You better gimme a push, I guess." His hand found her knee, slid down, and she raised her foot to his palm. He saw her flat boy's body against the stars rising, and she was in the boat, leaning down to him. "Catch my hands," she said, extending them, but for a time he didn't move at all, but only clung to the gunwale and looked up at her with an utter longing, like that of a dog.

Mrs. Maurier lay in bed in her darkened room. There was a port just over the bed and a long pencil of moonlight came slanting through it, shattering upon the floor and filling the room with a cold, disseminated radiance. Upon the chair, vaguely, her clothes: a shapeless, familiar mass, comforting; and about her the intimate familiarity of her own possessions — her toilet things, her clothing, her very particular odor with which she had grown so familiar that she no longer noticed it at all.

She lay in bed — her bed, especially built for her, was the most comfortable on board — surrounded, lapped in security and easeful things, walled and secure within the bland, hushed planes of the bulkheads. A faint, happy sound came in to her: little tongues of water lapping ceaselessly alongside the yacht, against her yacht — that island of security that was always waiting to transport her comfortably beyond the rumors of the world and its sorrows; and beyond the yacht, space: water and sky and darkness and silence; a worn cold moon neither merry nor sad.... Mrs. Maurier lay in her easy bed, within her comfortable room, weeping long shuddering sobs: a passive terrible hysteria without a sound.

THIS morning waked in a quiet fathomless mist. It was upon the world of water unstirred; soon the first faint wind of morning would thin it away, but now it was about the Nausikaa timelessly: the yacht was a thick jewel swaddled in soft gray wool, while in the wool somewhere dawn was like a suspended breath.

The first morning of Time might well be beyond this mist, and trumpets preliminary to a golden flourish; and held in suspension in it might be

heard yet the voices of the Far Gods on the first morning saying, It is well: let there be light. A short distance away, a shadow, a rumor, a more palpable thickness: this was the shore. The water fading out of the mist became as a dark metal in which the Nausikaa was rigidly fixed, and the yacht was motionless, swaddled in mist like a fat jewel.

FIVE O'CLOCK

Up from the darkness of the companionway the niece came, naked and silent as a ghost. She stood for a space, but there was no sound from anywhere, and she crossed the deck and stopped again at the rail, breathing the soft chill mist into her lungs, feeling the mist swaddling her firm simple body with a faint lingering chillness.

Her legs and arms were so tan that naked she appeared to wear a bathing suit of a startling white. She climbed the rail. The tender rocked a little under her, causing the black motionless water to come alive, making faint sounds. Then she slid over the stem and swam out into the mist.

The water divided with oily reluctance, closing again behind her with scarce a ripple. Here, at the water level, she could see nothing save a grayness and flaccid disturbed tongues of water lapping into it, leaving small fleeting gaps between mist and water before the mist filled them again silently as settling wings. The hull of the yacht was a vague thing, a thing felt, known, rather than seen. She swam slowly, circling the place where she knew it should be.

She swam slowly and steadily, trying to keep her approximate distance from the yacht by instinct. But, consciously this was hard to do; consciously in this vague restricted immensity, this limitless vagueness whose center was herself, the yacht could be in any direction from her.

She paused and trod water while little tongues of water kissed her face, lapping against her lips. Iris on my right, she told herself. Iris on my right, over there. Not fear: merely a faint unease, an exasperation; but

to reassure herself she swam a few strokes in that direction. The mist neither thickened nor thinned.

She trod water again and water licked at her face soundlessly. Damn your fool soul, she whispered, and at that moment a round huge thing like a dead lidless eye watched her suddenly from the mist and there came a faint sound from somewhere in the mist above her head. In two strokes she touched the hull of the yacht: a vindication, and she knew a faint pride and a touch of relief as she swam along the hull and circled the stern. She grasped the gunwale of the tender and hung there for a while, getting her wind back.

That faint sound came again from the deck; a movement, and she spoke into the mist: "David?" The mist took the word, sweeping it lightly against the hull, then it rebounded again and the mist absorbed it. But he had heard and he appeared vaguely above her at the rail, looking down at her where she hung in the water. "Go away, so I can get out," she said. He didn't move, and she added: "I haven't got on a bathing suit. Go away a minute, David."

But he didn't move. He leaned over the rail, looking at her with a dumb and utter longing and after a while she slid quickly and easily into the tender, and still he remained motionless, making no move to help her as her grave simple body came swiftly aboard the yacht. "Be back in a minute," she said over her shoulder and her startling white bathing suit sped across the deck and out of the ken of his dog's eyes. The mist without thinning was filling with light: an imminence of dawn like a glory, a splendor of trumpets unheard.

Her minute was three minutes. She reappeared in her little colored linen dress, her dark coarse hair still damp, carrying her shoes and stockings in her hand. He hadn't moved at all.

"Well, let's get going," she said. She looked at him impatiently. "Aren't you ready yet?" He stirred at last, watching her with the passive abjectness of a dog.

“Come on,” she said sharply. “Haven’t you got the stuff for breakfast yet? What’s the matter with you, David? Snap out of your trance.” She examined him again, with a sober impersonality. “You didn’t believe I was going to do it — is that it? Or are you backing out yourself? Come on, say so now, if you want to call it off.” She came nearer, examining his face with her grave opaque eyes. She extended her hand. “David?”

He took her hand slowly, looking at her, and she grasped his hand and shook his arm sharply. “Wake up. Say, you haven’t — Come on, let’s get some stuff for breakfast, and beat it. We haven’t got all day.”

He followed her and in the galley she switched on the light and chose a flat box of bacon and a loaf of bread, putting them on a table and delving again among boxes and lockers and shelves. “Have you got matches? a knife?” she asked over her shoulder.

“And — where are oranges? Let’s take some oranges. I love oranges, don’t you?” She turned her head to look at him. His hand was just touching her sleeve, so diffidently that she had not felt it. She turned suddenly, putting the oranges down, and put her arms about him, hard and firm and sexless, drawing his cheek down to her sober moist kiss.

She could feel his hammering erratic heart against her breast, could hear it surging in the silence almost as though it were in her own body. His arms tightened and he moved his head, seeking her mouth, but she evaded him with a quick movement, without reproof.

“No, no, not that. Everybody does that.” She strained him against her hard body again, then released him. “Come on, now. Have you got everything?” She examined the shelves again, finding at last a small basket. It was filled with damp lettuce but she dumped the lettuce out and put her things in it. “You take my shoes. They’ll go in your pocket, won’t they?” She crumpled her limp blonde stockings into her slippers and gave them to him. Then she picked up the basket and snapped off the light.

Day was a nearer thing yet, though it was not quite come. Though the mist had not thinned, the yacht was visible from stem to stern, asleep like a gull with folded wings; and against the hull the water sighed a long awakening sigh. The shoreline was darker, a more palpable vagueness in the mist.

“Say,” she remarked, stopping suddenly, “how are we going to get ashore? I forgot that. We don’t want to take the tender.”

“Swim,” he suggested. Her dark damp head came just to his chin and she mused for a time in a sober consternation.

“Isn’t there some way we can go in the tender and then pull it back to the yacht with a rope?”

“I... Yes. Yes, we can do that.”

“Well, you get a rope then. Snap into it.”

When he returned with a coiled line she was already in the tender with the oars, and she watched with interest while he passed the rope around a stanchion and brought both ends into the boat with him and made one of the ends fast to the ringbolt in the stem of the skiff. Then she caught the idea and she sat and paid out the line while he pulled away for shore. Soon they beached and she sprang ashore, still holding the free end of the rope.

“How’re we going to keep the tender from pulling the rope back around that post and getting aloose?” she asked.

“I’ll show you,” he answered, and she watched him while he tied the oars and the rowlocks together with the free end of the line and wedged them beneath the thwarts. “That’ll hold, I guess. Somebody’ll be sure to see her pretty soon,” he added, and prepared to draw the skiff back to the yacht.

“Wait a minute,” she said. She mused gravely, gazing at the dim shadowy yacht, then she borrowed matches from him, and sitting on the gunwale of the tender she tore a strip of paper from the bacon box and with a charred match printed Going to — She looked up.

“Where are we going?” He looked at her and she added quickly: “I mean, what town? We’ll have to go to a town somewhere, you know, to get back to New Orleans so I can get some clothes and my seventeen dollars. What’s the name of a town?”

After a while he said: “I don’t know. I never—”

“That’s right, you never were over here before, either, were you? Well, what’s that town the ferries go to? the one Jenny’s always talking about you have fun at?” She stared again at the vague shape of the Nausikaa, then she suddenly printed Mandeville. “That’s the name of it — Mandeville.

Which way is Mandeville from here?” He didn’t know, and she added: “No matter, we’ll find it, I guess.” She signed the note and laid it on the sternseat, weighting it with a small rock. “Now, pull her off,” she commanded, and soon there came back to them across the motionless water a faint thud.

“Good-bye, Nausikaa” she said. “Wait,” she added, “I better put my shoes on, I guess.” He gave her her slippers and she sat flat on the narrow beach and put them on, returning the crumpled stockings to him. “Wait,” she said again, taking the stockings again and flipping them out.

She slid one of them over her brown arm and withdrew a crumpled wad — the money she had been able to rake up by ransacking her aunt’s and Mrs. Wiseman’s and Miss Jameson’s things. She reached her hand and he drew her to her feet. “You’d better carry the money,” she said, giving it to him. “Now, for breakfast,” she said, clutching his hand.

SIX O’CLOCK

Trees heavy and ancient with moss loomed out of it hugely and grayly: the mist might have been a sluggish growth between and among them. No, this mist might have been the first prehistoric morning of time

itself; it might have been the very substance in which the seed of the beginning of things fecundated; and these huge and silent trees might have been the first of living things, too recently born to know either fear or astonishment, dragging their sluggish umbilical cords from out the old miasmatic womb of a nothingness latent and dreadful.

She crowded against him, suddenly quiet and subdued, trembling a little like a puppy against the reassurance of his arm. "Gee," she said in a small voice.

That small sound did not die away. It merely dissolved into the moist gray surrounding them, and it was as if at a movement of any sort the word might repeat itself somewhere between sky and ground as a pebble is shaken out of cotton batting. He put his arm across her shoulders and at his touch she turned quickly beneath his armpit, hiding her face.

"I'm hungry," she said at last, in that small voice. "That's what's the matter with me," she added with more assurance. "I want something to eat."

"Want me to build a fire?" he asked of the dark coarse crown of her head.

"No, no," she answered quickly, holding to him. "Besides, we are too close to the lake, here. Somebody might see it. We ought to get farther from the shore." She clung to him, inside his arm. "I guess we'd better wait here until the fog goes away, though. A piece of bread will do." She reached her brown hand. "Let's sit down somewhere. Let's sit down and eat some bread," she decided. "And when the fog goes away we can find the road. Come on, let's find a log or something,"

She drew him by the hand and they sat at the foot of a huge tree, on the damp ground, while she delved into the basket. She broke a bit from the loaf and gave it to him, and a fragment for herself. Then she slid further down against her propped heels until her back rested against him, and bit from her bread. She sighed contentedly.

“There now. Don’t you just love this?” she raised her grave chewing face to look at him. “All gray and lonesome. Makes you feel kind of cold on the outside and warm inside, doesn’t it? — say, you aren’t eating your bread. Eat your bread, David.

I love bread, don’t you?” She moved again, inward upon herself: in some way she seemed to get herself yet closer against him.

The mist was already beginning to thin, breaking with heavy reluctance before a rumor of motion too faint to be called wind. The mist broke raggedly and drifted in sluggish wraiths that seemed to devour all sound, swaying and swinging like huge spectral apes from tree to tree, rising and falling, revealing somber patriarchs of trees, hiding them again. From far, far back in the swamp there came a hoarse homely sound — an alligator’s lovesong.

“Chicago,” she murmured. “Didn’t know we were so near home.” Soon the sun; and she sprawled against him, contentedly munching her bread.

SEVEN O’CLOCK

They hadn’t found the road, but they had reached a safe distance from the lake. She had discovered a butterfly larger than her two hands clinging to a spotlight of sun on the ancient trunk of a tree, moving its damp lovely wings like laboring exposed lungs of glass or silk; and while he gathered firewood — a difficult feat, since neither of them had thought of a hatchet — she paused at the edge of a black stream to harry a sluggish thick serpent with a small switch.

A huge gaudy bird came up and cursed her, and the snake ignored her with a sort of tired unillusion and plopped heavily into the thick water. Then, looking around, she saw thin fire in the somber equivocal twilight of the trees.

They ate again: the oranges; they broiled bacon, scorched it, dropped it on the ground, retrieved it and wiped it and chewed it down; and the rest of the loaf. “Don’t you just love camping?” She sat crosslegged and wiped a strip of bacon on her skirt.

“Let’s always do this, David: let’s don’t ever have a house where you’ve always got to stay in one place. We’ll just go around like this, camping... David?” She raised the strip of bacon and met his dumb yearning eyes. She poised her bacon.

“Don’t look at me like that,” she told him sharply. Then, more gently: “Don’t ever look at anybody like that. You’ll never get anybody to run away with you if you look at ’em like that, David.” She extended her hand. His hand came out, slowly and diffidently, but her grip was hard, actual. She shook his arm for emphasis.

“How was I looking at you?” he asked after a while, in a voice that didn’t seem to him to be his voice at all. “How do you want me to look at you?”

“Oh — you know how. Not like that, though. Like that, you look at me just like a — a man, that’s all. Or a dog. Not like David.” She writhed her hand free and ate her strip of bacon. Then she wiped her fingers on her dress. “Gimme a cigarette.”

The mist had gone, and the sun came already sinister and hot among the trees, upon the miasmic earth. She sat on her crossed legs, replete, smoking. Abruptly she poised the cigarette in a tense cessation of all movement. Then she moved her head quickly and stared at him in consternation. She moved again, suddenly slapping her bare leg.

“What is it?” he asked.

For reply she extended her flat tan palm. In the center of it was a dark speck and a tiny splash of crimson. “Good Lord, gimme my stockings,” she exclaimed. “We’ll have to move. Gee, I’d forgotten about them,” she said, drawing her stockings over her straightening legs.

She sprang to her feet. "We'll soon be out, though. David, stop looking at me that way. Look like you were having a good time, at least. Cheer up, David. A man would think you were losing your nerve already.

Buck up: I think it's grand, running off like this. Don't you think it's grand?" She turned her head and saw again that diffident still gesture of his hand touching her dress. Across the hot morning there came the high screech of the Nausikaa's whistle.

EIGHT O'CLOCK;

"No, sir," the nephew answered patiently. "It's a pipe."

"A pipe, eh?" repeated Major Ayers, glaring at him with his hard affable little eyes. "You make pipes, eh?"

"I'm making this one," the nephew replied with preoccupation.

"Came away and left your own ashore, perhaps?" Major Ayers suggested after a time.

"Naw. I don't smoke 'em. I'm just making a new kind."

"Ah, I see. For the market." Major Ayers' mind slowly took fire. "Money in it, eh? Americans would buy a new kind of pipe, too. You've made arrangements for the marketing of it, of course?"

"No, I'm just making it. For fun," the nephew explained in that patient tone you use with obtuse children. Major Ayers glared at his bent preoccupied head.

"Yes," he agreed. "Best to say nothing about it until you've completed all your computations regarding the cost of production. Don't blame you at all." Major Ayers brooded with calculation. He said: "Americans really would buy a new sort of pipe.

Strange no one had thought of that." The nephew carved minutely at his pipe. Major Ayers said secretly: "No, I don't blame you at all. But

when you've done, you'll require capital: that sort of thing, you know. And then... a word to your friends at the proper time, eh?" The nephew looked up. "A word to my friends?" he repeated. "Say, I'm just making a pipe, I tell you, A pipe. Just to be making it. For fun."

"Right you are," Major Ayers agreed suavely. "No offense, dear lad. I don't blame you, don't blame you at all. Experienced the same situation myself."

NINE O'CLOCK

They had found the road at last — two faint scars and a powder of unbearable dust upon a raised levee traversing the swamp. But between them and the road was a foul sluggish width of water and vegetation and biology.

Huge cypress roots thrust up like weathered bones out of a green scum and a quaking neither earth nor water, and always those bearded eternal trees like gods regarding without alarm this puny desecration of a silence of air and earth and water ancient when hoary old Time himself was a pink and dreadful miracle in his mother's arms.

It was she who found the fallen tree, who first essayed its oozy treacherous bark and first stood in the empty road stretching monotonously in either direction between battalions of patriachs of trees. She was panting a little, whipping a broken green branch about her body, watching him as he inched his way across the fallen trunk.

"Come on, David," she called impatiently. "Here's the road: we're all right now." He was across the ditch and he now struggled up the rank reluctant levee bank. She leaned down and reached her hand to him. But he would not take it, so she leaned further and clutched his shirt. "Now, which way is Mandeville?"

"That way," he answered immediately, pointing.

"You said you never were over here before," she accused.

“No. But we were west of Mandeville when we went aground, and the lake is back yonder. So Mandeville must be that way.”

“I don’t think so. It’s this way: see, the swamp isn’t so thick this way. Besides, I just know it’s this way.”

He looked at her a moment. “All right,” he agreed. “I guess you are right.”

“But don’t you know which way it is? Isn’t there any way you could tell?” She bent and whipped her legs with the broken branch.

“Well, the lake is over yonder, and we were west of Mandeville last night—”

“You’re just guessing,” she interrupted harshly.

“Yes,” he answered. “I guess you are right.”

“Well, we’ve got to go somewhere. We can’t stand here.” She twitched her shoulders, writhing her body beneath her dress. “Which way, then?”

“Well, we w—”

She turned abruptly in the direction she had chosen. “Come on, I’ll die here.” She strode on ahead.

TEN O’CLOCK

She was trying to explain it to Pete. The sun had risen sinister and hot, climbing into a drowsy haze, and up from a low vague region neither water nor sky clouds like fat little girls in starched frocks marched solemnly.

“It’s a thing they join at that place he’s going to. Only they have to work to join it, and sometimes you don’t even get to join it then. And the ones that do join it don’t get anything except a little button or something.”

“Pipe down and try it again,” Pete told her, leaning with his elbows and one heel hooked backward on the rail, his hat slanted across his

reckless dark face, squinting his eyes against the smoke of his cigarette.
“What’re you talking about?”

“There’s something in the water,” Jenny remarked with placid astonishment, creasing her belly over the rail and staring downward into the faintly rippled water while the land breeze molded her little green dress. “It must of fell off the boat.... Oh, I’m talking about that college he’s going to. You work to join things there. You work three years, she says. And then maybe you—”

“What college?”

“I forgot. It’s the one where they have big football games in the papers every year. He’s—”

“Yale and Harvard?”

“Uhuh, that’s the one she said. He’s—”

“Which one? Yale, or Harvard?”

“Uhuh. And so he—”

“Come on, baby. You’re talking about two colleges. Was it Yale she said, or Harvard? or Sing Sing or what?”

“Oh,” Jenny said. “It was Yale. Yes, that’s the one she said. And he’ll have to work three years to join it. And even then maybe he won’t.”

“Well, what about it? Suppose he does work three years: what about it?”

“Why, if he does, he won’t get anything except a little button or something, even if he does join it, I mean.” Jenny brooded softly, creasing herself upon the rail. “He’s going to have to work for it,” she recurred again in a dull soft amazement. “He’ll have to work three years for it, and even then he may not—”

“Don’t be dumb all your life, kid,” Pete told her.

Wind and sun were in Jenny’s drowsing hair. The deck swept trimly forward, deserted. The others were gathered on the deck above. Occasionally they could hear voices, and a pair of masculine feet were

crossed innocently upon the rail directly over Pete's head. A half-smoked cigarette spun in a small twinkling arc astern.

Jenny watched it drop lightly onto the water, where it floated amid the other rubbish that had caught her attention. Pete spun his own cigarette backward over his shoulder, but this one sank immediately, to her placid surprise.

"Let the boy join his club, if he wants," Pete added. "What kind of a club is it? What do they do?"

"I don't know. They just join it. You work for it three years, she said. Three years.... Gee, by that time you'd be too old to do anything if you got to join it.... Three years. My Lord."

"Sit down and give your wooden leg a rest," Pete said. "Don't be a dumbbell forever." He examined the deck a moment, then without changing his position against the rail he turned his head toward Jenny. "Give papa a kiss."

Jenny also glanced briefly up the deck. Then she came with a sort of wary docility, raising her ineffable face... presently Pete withdrew his face. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"The matter with what?" said Jenny innocently.

Pete unhooked his heel and he put his arm around Jenny. Their faces merged again and Jenny became an impersonal softness against his mouth and a single blue eye and a drowsing aura of hair.

ELEVEN O'CLOCK

The swamp did not seem to end, ever. On either side of the road it brooded, fetid and timeless, somber and hushed and dreadful. The road went on and on through a bearded tunnel, beneath the sinister brass sky. The dew was long departed and dust puffed listlessly to her fierce striding. David tramped behind her, watching two splotches of dead blood on her stockings. Abruptly there were three of them and he drew abreast of her. She looked over her shoulder, showing him her wrung face.

“Don’t come near me!” she cried. “Don’t you see you make ’em worse?”

He dropped behind again and she stopped suddenly, dropping the broken branch and extending her arms. “David,” she said. He went to her awkwardly, and she clung to him, whimpering. She raised her face, staring at him. “Can’t you do something? They hurt me, David.” But he only looked at her with his unutterable dumb longing.

She tightened her arms, released him quickly. “We’ll be out soon.” She picked up the branch again. “It’ll be different then. Look! There’s another big butterfly!” Her squeal of delight became again a thin whimpering sound. She strode on.

Jenny found Mrs. Wiseman in their room, changing her dress.

“Mr. Ta — Talliaferro,” Jenny began. Then she said: “He’s an awful refined man, I guess. Don’t you think so?”

“Refined?” the other repeated. “Exactly that. Ernest invented that word.”

“He did?” Jenny went to the mirror and looked at herself a while. “Her brother’s refined, too, ain’t he?”

“Whose brother, honey?” Mrs. Wiseman paused and watched Jenny curiously.

“The one with that saw.”

“Oh. Yes, fairly so. He seems to be too busy to be anything else. Why?”

“And that popeyed man. All English men are refined, though. There was one in a movie I saw. He was awful refined.” Jenny looked at her reflected face, tunelessly and completely entertained. Mrs. Wiseman gazed at Jenny’s fine minted hair, at her sleazy little dress revealing the divine inevitability of her soft body.

“Come here, Jenny,” she said.

TWELVE O’CLOCK

When he reached her she sat huddled in the road, crouching bonelessly upon herself, huddling her head in her crossed thin arms. He stood beside her, and presently he spoke her name. She rocked back and forth, then wrung her body in an ecstasy. “They hurt me, they hurt me,” she wailed, crouching again in that impossible spasm of agony. David knelt beside her and spoke her name again, and she sat up.

“Look,” she said wildly, “on my legs — look, look,” staring with a sort of fascination at a score of great gray specks hovering about her blood-flecked stockings, making no effort to brush them away. She raised her wild face again. “Do you see them?”

They are everywhere on me — my back, my back, where I can’t reach.” She lay suddenly flat, writhing her back in the dust, clutching his hand. Then she sat up again and against his knees she turned wringing her body from the hips, trying to draw her bloody legs beneath her brief skirt. He held her while she writhed in his grasp, staring her wild bloodless face up at him. “I must get in water,” she panted. “I must get in water. Mud, anything. I’m dying, I tell you.”

“Yes, yes: I’ll get you some water. You wait here Will you wait here?”
“You’ll get me some water? You will? You promise?”

“Yes, yes,” he repeated. “I’ll get you some. You wait here. You wait here, see?” he repeated idiotically. She bent again inward upon herself, moaning and writhing in the dust, and he plunged down the bank, stripping his shirt off and dipped it into the foul warm ditch. She had dragged her dress up about her shoulders, revealing her startling white bathing suit between her knickers and the satin band binding her breasts. “On my back,” she moaned, bending forward again, “quick! quick!”

He laid the wet shirt on her back and she caught the ends of it and drew it around her, and presently she leaned back against his knees with a long shuddering sigh. "I want a drink. Can't I have a drink of water, David?"

"Soon," he promised with despair. "You can have one soon as we get out of the swamp."

She moaned again, a long whimpering sound, lowering her head between her arms. They crouched together in the dusty road. The road went on shimmering before them, endless beneath bearded watching trees, crossing the implacable swamp with a puerile bravado like a thin voice cursing in a cathedral. Needles of fire darted about them, about his bare shoulders and arms. After a while she said:

"Wet it again, please, David."

He did so, and returned, scrambling up the steep rank levee side.

"Now, bathe my face, David." She raised her face and closed her eyes and he bathed her face and throat and brushed her damp coarse hair back from her brow.

"Let's put the shirt on you," he suggested.

"No," she demurred against his arm, without opening her eyes, drowsily. "They'll eat you alive without it."

"They don't bother me like they do you. Come on, put it on." She demurred again and he tried awkwardly to draw the shirt over her head. "I don't need it," he repeated.

"No.... Keep it, David.... You ought to keep it. Besides, I'd rather have it underneath.... Oooo, it feels so good. You're sure you don't need it?" She opened her eyes, watching him with that sober gravity of hers. He insisted and she sat up and slipped her dress over her head. He helped her to don the shirt, then she slipped her dress on again.

"I wouldn't take it, only they hurt me so damn bad. I'll do something for you some day, David. I swear I will."

“Sure,” he repeated. “I don’t need it.”

He rose, and she came to her feet in a single motion, before he could offer to help her. “I swear I wouldn’t take it if they didn’t hurt me so much, David,” she persisted, putting her hand on his shoulder and raising her tanned serious face.

“Sure, I know.”

“I’ll pay you back somehow. Come on: let’s get out of here.”

ONE O’CLOCK

Mrs. Wiseman and Miss Jameson drove Mrs. Maurier moaning and wringing her hands, from the galley and prepared lunch — grapefruit again, disguised thinly.

“We have so many of them,” the hostess apologized helplessly. “And the steward gone.... We are aground, too, you see,” she explained.

“Oh, we can stand a little hardship, I guess,” Fairchild reassured her jovially. “The race hasn’t degenerated that far. In a book, now, it would be kind of terrible; if you forced characters in a book to eat as much grapefruit as we do, both the art boys and the humanitarians would stand on their hind legs and howl.

But in real life — In life, anything might happen; in actual life people will do anything. It’s only in books that people must function according to arbitrary rules of conduct and probability; it’s only in books that events must never flout credulity.”

“That’s true,” Mrs. Wiseman agreed. “People’s characters, when writers delineate them by revealing their likings and dislikings, always appear so perfect, so inevitably consistent, but in li—”

“That’s why literature is art and biology isn’t,” her brother interrupted. “A character in a book must be consistent in all things, while man is consistent in one thing only: he is consistently vain. It’s his vanity alone

which keeps his particles damp and adhering one to another, instead of like any other handful of dust which any wind that passes can disseminate.”

“In other words, he is consistently inconsistent,” Mark Frost recapitulated.

“I guess so,” the Semitic man replied. “Whatever that means.... But what were you saying, Eva?”

“I was thinking of how book people, when you find them in real life, have such a perverse and disconcerting way of liking and disliking the wrong things. For instance, Dorothy here. Suppose you were drawing Dorothy’s character in a novel, Dawson. Any writer would give her a liking for blue jewelry: white gold, and platinum, and sapphires in dull silver — you know. Wouldn’t you do that?”

“Why, yes, so I would,” Fairchild agreed with interest. “She would like blue things, sure enough.”

“And then,” the other continued, “music. You’d say she would like Grieg, and those other cold mad northern people with icewater in their veins, wouldst you?”

“Yes,” Fairchild agreed again, thinking immediately of Ibsen and the Peer Gynt legend and remembering a sonnet of Siegfried Sassoon’s about Sibelius that he had once read in a magazine. “That’s what she would like.”

“Should like,” Mrs. Wiseman corrected. “For the sake of esthetic consistency. But I bet you are wrong. Isn’t he, Dorothy?”

“Why, yes,” Miss Jameson replied. “I always liked Chopin.” Mrs. Wiseman shrugged: a graceful dark gesture. “And there you are. That’s what makes art so discouraging. You come to expect anything associated with and dependent on the actions of man to be discouraging. But it always shocks me to learn that art also depends on

population, on the herd instinct just as much as manufacturing automobiles or stockings does—”

“Only they can’t advertise art by means of women’s legs yet,” Mark Frost interrupted.

“Don’t be silly, Mark,” Mrs. Wiseman said sharply. “That’s exactly how art came to the attention of the ninety-nine who don’t produce it and so have any possible reason for buying it — postcards and lithographs barely esoteric enough to escape police persecution. Ask any man on the street what he understands by the word art: he’ll tell you it means a picture. Won’t he?” she appealed to Fairchild.

“That’s so,” he agreed. “And it’s a wrong impression. Art means anything consciously done well, to my notion. Living, or building a good lawn mower, or playing poker. I don’t like this modern idea of restricting the word to painting, at all.”

“The art of Life, of a beautiful and complete existence of the Soul,” Mrs. Maurier put in. “Don’t you think that is Art’s greatest function, Mr. Gordon?”

“Of course you don’t, child,” Mrs. Wiseman told Fairchild, ignoring Mrs. Maurier. “As rabidly American as you are, you can’t stand that, can you? And there’s the seat of your bewilderment, Dawson — your belief that the function of creating art depends on geography.”

“It does. You can’t grow corn without something to plant it in.”

“But you don’t plant com in geography: you plant it in soil. It not only does not matter where that soil is, you can even move the soil from one place to another — around the world, if you like — and it will still grow corn.”

“You’d have a different kind of corn, though — Russian corn, or Latin or Anglo-Saxon corn.”

“All corn is the same to the belly,” the Semitic man said.

“Julius!” exclaimed Mrs. Manner. “The Soul’s hunger: that is the true purpose of Art. There are so many things to satisfy the grosser appetites. Don’t you think so, Mr. Talliaferro?”

“Yes,” Mrs. Wiseman took her brother up. “Dawson clings to his conviction for the old reason: it’s good enough to live with and comfortable to die with — like a belief in immortality. Insurance against doubt or alarm.”

“And laziness,” her brother added. Mrs. Maurier exclaimed “Julius” again. “Clinging spiritually to one little spot of the earth’s surface, so much of his labor is performed for him.

Details of dress and habit and speech which entail no hardship in the assimilation and which, piled one on another, become quite as imposing as any single startling stroke of originality, as trivialities in quantities will. Don’t you agree? But then, I suppose that all poets in their hearts consider prosewriters shirkers, don’t they?”

“Yes,” his sister agreed. “We do think they are lazy — just a little. Not mentally, but that their... not hearts—”

“Souls?” her brother suggested. “I hate that word, but it’s the nearest thing...” She met her brother’s sad quizzical eyes and exclaimed: “Oh, Julius! I could kill you, at times. He’s laughing at me, Dawson.”

“He’s laughing at us both,” Fairchild said. “But let him have his fun, poor fellow.” He chuckled, and lit a cigarette. “Let him laugh. I always did want to be one of those old time eunuchs, for one night. They must have just laughed themselves to death when those sultans and things would come visiting.”

“Mister Fairchild! Whatever in the world!” exclaimed Mrs. Maurier.

“It’s a good thing there’s some one to see something amusing in that process,” the other rejoined. “The husbands, the active participants, never seem to.”

“That’s a provision of nature’s for racial survival,” Fairchild said. “If the husbands ever saw the comic aspect of it.... But they never do, even when they have the opportunity, no matter how white and delicate the hand that decorates their brows.”

“It’s not lovely ladies nor dashing strangers,” the Semitic man said, “it’s the marriage ceremony that disfigures our foreheads.”

Fairchild grunted. Then he chuckled again. “There’d sure be a decline in population if a man were twins and had to stand around and watch himself making love.”

“Mister Fairchild!”

“Chopin,” Mrs. Wiseman interrupted. “Really, Dorothy, I’m disappointed in you.” She shrugged again, flashing her hands. Mrs. Maurier said with relief:

“How much Chopin has meant to me in my sorrows” — she looked about in tragic confiding astonishment— “no one will ever know.”

“Surely,” agreed Mrs. Wiseman, “he always does.” She turned to Miss Jameson. “Just think how much better Dawson would have done you than God did. With all deference to Mrs. Maurier, so many people find comfort in Chopin. It’s like having a pain that aspirin will cure, you know. I could have forgiven you even Verdi, but Chopin! Chopin,” she repeated, then with happy inspiration: “Snow rotting under a dead moon.”

Mark Frost sat staring at his hands on his lap, beneath the edge of the table, moving his lips slightly. Fairchild said:

“What music do you like, Eva?”

“Oh — Debussy, George Gershwin, Berlioz perhaps — why not?”

“Berlioz,” repeated Miss Jameson mimicking the other’s tone:

“Swedenborg on a French holiday.” Mark Frost stared at his hands on his lap, moving his lips slightly.

“Forget your notebook, Mark?” Fairchild asked quizzically.

“It’s very sad,” the Semitic man said. “Man gets along quite well until that unhappy day on which some one else discovers him thinking. After that, God help him: he doesn’t dare leave home without a notebook. It’s very sad.”

“Mark’s not such an accomplished buccaneer as you and Dawson,” his sister answered quickly. “At least he requires a notebook.”

“My dear girl,” the Semitic man murmured in his lazy voice, “you flatter yourself.”

“So do I,” Fairchild said. “I always—”

“Whom?” the Semitic man asked. “Yourself, or me?”

“What?” said Fairchild, staring at him.

“Nothing. Excuse me: you were saying — ?”

“I was saying that I always carry my portfolio with me because it’s the only comfortable thing I ever found to sit on.”

Talk, talk, talk: the utter and heartbreaking stupidity of words. It seemed endless, as though it might go on forever. Ideas, thoughts, became mere sounds to be bandied about until they were dead.

Noon was oppressive as a hand, as the ceaseless blow of a brass hand: a brass blow neither struck nor withheld; brass rushing wings that would not pass. The deck blistered with it, the rail was too hot to touch and the patches of shadow about the deck were heavy and heat soaked as sodden blankets.

The water was an unbearable glitter, the forest was a bronze wall cast at a fearful heat and not yet cooled, and no breeze was anywhere under the world’s heaven.

But the unbearable hiatus of noon passed at last and the soundless brazen wings rushed westward. The deck was deserted as it had been on that first afternoon when he had caught her in midflight like a damp swallow, a swallow hard and passionate with flight; and it was as though he yet saw upon the deck the wet and simple prints of her

naked feet, and he seemed to feel about him like an odor that young hard graveness of hers.

No wonder she was gone out of it: she who here was as a flame among stale ashes, a little tanned flame; who, gone, was as a pipe blown thinly and far away, as a remembered surf on a rocky coast at dawn... ay ay strangle your heart o israfel winged with loneliness feathered bitter with pride.

Dust spun from their feet, swirling sluggish and lazy in the brooding dreadful noon. Beside them always and always those eternal bearded trees, bearded and brooding, older and stiller than eternity. The road ran on like a hypnotism: a dull and endless progression from which there was no escape.

After a while he missed her from her position at his shoulder and he stopped and looked back. She was kneeling beside the foul ditch. He watched her stupidly, then he suddenly realized what she was about and he ran back to her, grasping her by the shoulder. "Here, you can't do that! That stuff is poison: you can't drink it!"

"I can't help it! I've got to have some water, I've got to!" She strained against his hands. "Please, David. Just one mouthful. Please, David. Please, David."

He got his hands under her arms, but his feet slid in the rank sloping grass and he went up to his knees in thick reluctant water. She twisted in his hands. "Please, oh, please! Just enough to wet my mouth. Look at my mouth," She raised her face: her broad pale lips were parched, rough. "Please, David."

But he held her. "Put your feet in it, like mine. That'll help some," he said through his own dry harsh throat. "Here, let me take off your shoes."

She sat whimpering like a dog while he removed her slippers. Then she slid her legs into the water and moaned with partial relief. The sunlight

was beginning to slant at last, slanting westward like a rushing of unheard golden wings across the sky; though the somber twilight under the trees was unchanged — somber and soundless, brooding, and filled with a vicious darting of invisible fire.

“I must have water,” she said at last. “You’ll have to find me some water, David.”

“Yes.” He climbed heavily out of the hot ooze, out of the mud and slime. He bent and slid his hands under her arms. “Get up. We must go on.”

TWO O’CLOCK

Jenny yawned, frankly, then she did something to the front of her dress, drawing it away from her to peer down into her bosom. It seemed to be all right, and she settled her dress again with a preening motion, lifting her shoulders and smoothing it over her hips. She went upstairs and presently she saw them, sitting around like always. Mrs. Maurier wasn’t there.

She drifted over to the rail and laxed herself against it and stood there, placidly waiting until Mr. Talliaferro became aware of her presence.

“I was watching these things in the water,” she said when he came to her like a tack to a magnet, volitionless and verbose.

“Where?” He also stared overside.

“That stuff there,” she answered, looking forward to the group of chairs.

“Why, that’s just refuse from the galley,” Mr. Talliaferro said with surprise.

“Is it? It’s kind of funny looking.... There’s some more of it down here a ways.” Mr. Talliaferro followed her, intrigued and curious. She stopped

and glanced back over her shoulder and beyond him: Mr. Talliaferro aped her but saw no living thing except Mark Frost on the edge of the group. The others were out of sight beyond the deckhouse. "It's farther on," Jenny said.

Further along she stopped again and again she looked forward.

"Where?" Mr. Talliaferro asked.

"Here." Jenny stared at the lake a moment. Then she examined the deck again. Mr. Talliaferro was thoroughly puzzled now, even a trifle alarmed. "It was right here, that funny thing I saw. I guess it's gone, though."

"What was it you saw?"

"Some kind of a funny thing," she answered with detachment.... "The sun is hot here." Jenny moved away and went to where an angle of the deckhouse wall formed a shallow niche. Mr.

Talliaferro followed her in amazement. Again Jenny peered around him, examining that part of the deck which was in sight and the immediate approaches to it. Then she became utterly static beside him and without moving at all she seemed to envelop him, giving him to think of himself surrounded, enclosed by the sweet cloudy fire of her thighs, as young girls can.

Mr. Talliaferro saw her as through a blonde mist. A lightness was moving down his members, a lightness so exquisite as to be almost unbearable, while above it all he listened to the dry interminable incoherence of his own voice. That unbearable lightness moved down his arms to his hands, and down his legs, reaching his feet at last, and Mr. Talliaferro fled.

Jenny looked after him. She sighed.

* * * * *

After a while the white dusty road left the swamp behind. It ran now through a country vaguely upland: sand and pines and a crisp thick undergrowth sunburnt and sibilant.

“We’re out of it at last,” she called back to him. Her pace quickened and she called over her shoulder: “It can’t be much further now. Come on, let’s run a while,” He shouted to her, but she trotted on, drawing away from him. He followed her splotched flashing legs at a slower pace, steadily losing distance.

Her legs twinkled on ahead in the shimmering forgotten road. Heat wavered and shimmered above the road and the sky was a metallic intolerable bowl and the tall pines in the windless afternoon exuded a thin exhilarating odor of resin and heat, casting sparse patches of shade upon the shimmering endless ribbon of the road. Lizards scuttled in the dust before them, hissing abruptly amid the dusty brittle undergrowth beside the road.

The road went on and on, endless and shimmering ahead of them. He called to her again, but she trotted on unheeding.

Without faltering in her pace she turned and ran from the road and when he reached her she leaned against a tree, panting. “I ran too much,” she gasped through her pale open mouth. “I feel funny — all gone. Better hold me up,” she said, staring at him. “No: let me lie down.” She slumped against him.

“My heart’s going too fast. Feel how it’s going.” He felt her heart leaping against his hand. “It’s too fast, isn’t it? What’ll I do now?” she asked soberly. “Do something quick, David,” she told him, staring at him, and he lowered her awkwardly and knelt beside her, supporting her head. She closed her eyes against the implacable sky, but opened them immediately and struggled to rise. “No, no: I mustn’t stay here. I want to get up again. Help me up.”

He did so, and had to hold her on her feet. “I must go on,” she repeated. “Make me go on, David. I don’t want to die here Make me go on, I tell you.” Her face was flushed: he could see blood pumping in her throat, and holding her so he knew sharp and utter terror. “What must I do?” she was saying. “You ought to know. Don’t you know what to do? I’m sick, I tell you. They’ve given me hydrophobia or something.”

She closed her eyes and all her muscles relaxed at once and she slipped to the ground and he knelt again beside her in terror and despair. "Raise my head a little," she muttered and he sat and drew her across his legs and raised her head against his breast, smoothing her damp hair from her forehead. "That's right." She opened her eyes. "Cheer up, David.... I told you once about looking at me like that." Then she closed her eyes again.

THREE O'CLOCK

"If we were only afloat," Mrs. Maurier moaned for the twelfth time.

"They can't be further than Mandeville: I know they can't. What will Henry say to me!"

"Why don't they start her up and try to get off again?" Fairchild asked.

"Maybe the sand has settled or something by now," he added vaguely.

"The captain says they can't, that we'll have to wait for the tug. They sent for the tug yesterday, and it hasn't come yet," she added in a sort of stubborn astonishment. She rose and went to the rail and stared up the lake toward Mandeville.

"You wouldn't think it'd take a tug to pull us off," Fairchild remarked.

"She ain't such a big boat, you know. Seems like any sort of a boat would pull us off. I've seen little launches hauling bigger boats than this around. And a river tug can haul six or eight of these steel barges, upstream, too."

Mrs. Maurier returned hopefully. "It really doesn't seem necessary to have a tug to move this yacht, does it? You'd think that sailors could think of some way, something with ropes and things," she added, also vaguely.

"What would they stand on while they pulled the ropes?" Mark Frost wanted to know. "They couldn't pull from the shore. That isn't the way we want to go."

“They might row out in the tender and anchor,” the Semitic man offered as his mite.

“Why, yes,” Mrs. Maurier agreed, brightening. “If they could just anchor the tender securely, they might... if there were something to pull the rope with. The men themselves.... Do you suppose the sailors themselves could move a boat like this by hand?”

“I’ve seen a single river tug not much bigger than a Ford hauling a whole string of loaded steel barges up the river,” Fairchild repeated. He sat and stared from one to another of his companions and a strange light came into his eyes. “Say,” he said suddenly, “I bet that if all of us were to..

The Semitic man and Mark Frost groaned in simultaneous alarm, and Pete sitting on the outskirts of the group rose hastily and unostentatiously and headed for the companionway. He ducked into his room and stood listening.

Yes, they were really going to try it. He could hear Fairchild’s burly voice calling for all the men, and also one or two voices raised in protest; and above all of them the voice of the old woman in an indistinguishable senseless excitement. Jesus Christ, he whispered, clutching his hat.

People descending the stairs alarmed him and he sprang behind the open door. It was Fairchild and the fat Jew, but they passed his door and entered the room next to his, from which he heard immediately sounds of activity that culminated in a thin concussion of glass and glass.

“My God, man” — the fat Jew’s voice— “what have you done? Do you really think we can move this boat?”

“Naw. I just want to stir ’em up a little. Life’s getting altogether too tame on this boat: nothing’s happened at all to-day. I did it principally to see Talliaferro and Mark Frost sweat some.” Fairchild laughed. His

laughter died into chuckles, heavily. "But I have seen a little river tug no bigger than a Ford hauling a st—"

"Good Lord," the other man said again. "Finish your drink. O immaculate cherubim," he said, going on down the passage. Fairchild followed. Pete heard their feet on the stairs, then crossing the deck. He returned to the port.

Yes, sir, they were going to try it, sure as hell. They were now embarking in the tender: he could hear them, thumping and banging around and talking; a thin shriek of momentary alarm. Women, too (Damn to hell, I bet Jenny's with 'em, Pete whispered to himself). And somebody that didn't want to go at all.

Voices without; alarms and excursions, etc:

Come on, Mark, you've got to go. All the men will be needed, hey, Mrs. Maurier?

Yes, indeed; indeed, yes. All the men must help.

Sure: all you brave strong men have got to go.

I'm a poet, not an oarsman. I can't —

So is Eva: look at her, she's going.

Shelley could row a boat.

Yes, and remember what happened to him, too.

I'm going to beep you all from drowning, Jenny. That's (Damn to hell, Pete whispered) why I'm going.

Aw, come on, Mark; earn your board and keep Oooo, hold the boat still, Dawson.

Come on, come on. Say, where's Pete?

Pete!

Pete! (Feet on the deck.)

Pete! Oh, Pete! (At the companionway.) Pete! (Jesus Christ, Pete whispered, making no sound.)

Never mind, Eva. We've got a boatload now. If anybody else comes, they'll have to walk.

There's somebody missing yet. Who is it?

Ah, we've got enough. Come on.

But somebody ain't here. I don't guess he fell overboard while we were not looking, do you?

Oh, come on and let's go. Shove off, you Talliaferro (a scream).

Look out, there: catch her! Y'all right, Jenny? Let's go, then. Careful, now.

Ooooooo!

"Damn to hell, she's with 'em," Pete whispered again, trying to see through the port. More thumping, and presently the tender came jerkily and lethargically into sight, loaded to the gunwales like a nigger excursion. Yes, Jenny was in it, and Mrs. Wiseman and five men, including Mr. Talliaferro. Mrs. Maurier leaned over the rail above Pete's head, waving her handkerchief and shrieking at them as the tender drew uncertainly away, trailing a rope behind it. Almost every one had an oar: the small boat bristled with oars beating the water vainly, so that it resembled a tarantula with palsy and no knee joints.

But they finally began to get the knack of it and gradually the boat began to assume something like a definite direction. As Pete watched it there came again feet on the stairs and a voice said guardedly:
"Ed."

An indistinguishable response from the captain's room and the voice added mysteriously: "Come up on deck a minute." Then the footsteps withdrew, accompanied.

The tender evinced a maddening inclination to progress in any fashion save that for which it was built. Fairchild turned his head and glanced comprehensively about his small congested island enclosed with an unrhythmic clashing of blades. The oars clashed against each other, jabbing and scuttering at the tortured water until the tender resembled an ancient stiff jointed horse in a state of mad unreasoning alarm.

“We’ve got too many rowers,” Fairchild decided. Mark Frost drew in his oar immediately, striking the Semitic man across the knuckles with it. “No, no: not you,” Fairchild said. “Julius, you quit: you ain’t doing any good, anyhow; you’re the one that’s holding us back. Gordon, and Mark, and Talliaferro and me—”

“I want to row,” Mrs. Wiseman said. “Let me have Julius’ oar. Ernest will have to help Jenny watch the rope.”

“Take mine,” Mark Frost offered quickly, extending Ms oar and clashing it against some one else’s. The boat rocked alarmingly. Jenny squealed.

“Look out,” Fairchild exclaimed. “Do you want to have us all in the water? Julius, pass your oar along — that’s it. Now, you folks sit still back there. Dammit, Mark, if you hit anybody else with that thing, we’ll throw you out. Shelley could swim, too, you know.”

Mrs. Wiseman got fixed at last with her oar, and at last the tender became comparatively docile. Jenny and Mr. Talliaferro sat in the stern, paying out the line. “Now,” Fairchild glanced about at his crew and gave the command: “Let’s go.”

“Give way, all,” Mrs. Wiseman corrected with inspiration. They dipped their oars anew. Mark Frost drew his oar in once more, clashing it against Gordon’s.

“Let me get my handkerchief,” he said. “My hands are tender.”

“That’s what I want, too,” Mrs. Wiseman decided. “Gimme your handkerchief, Ernest.”

Mark Frost released his oar and it leapt quickly overboard. “Catch that paddle!” Fairchild shouted. Mrs. Wiseman and Mr. Talliaferro both reached for it and Gordon and the Semitic man trimmed the boat at the ultimate instant., It became stable presently and Jenny closed her mouth upon her soundless scream.

The oar swam away and stopped just beyond reach, raising and falling on the faint swells. "We'll have to row over and get it," Mrs. Wiseman said. So they did, but just before they reached it the oar swam on again, slowly and maddeningly. The rowers clashed and churned. Mr. Talliaferro sat in a taut diffident alarm.

"I really think," he said, "we'd better return to the yacht. The ladies, you know." But they didn't heed him.

"Now, Ernest," Mrs. Wiseman directed sharply, "reach out and grab it." But it eluded them again, and Fairchild said: "Let's let the damn thing go. We've got enough left to row with, anyway." But at that moment the oar, rocking sedately, swung slowly around and swam docilely up alongside.

"Grab it! grab it!" Mrs. Wiseman cried.

"I really think—" Mr. Talliaferro offered again. Mark Frost grabbed it and it came meekly and unresistingly out of the water.

"I've got it," he said, and as he spoke it leapt viciously at him and struck him upon the mouth. Then it became docile again.

They got started again, finally; and after a few false attempts they acquired a vague sort of rhythm though Mark Frost, favoring his hands, caught a crab at every stroke for a while, liberally wetting Mr. Talliaferro and Jenny where they sat tensely in the stem. Jenny's eyes were quite round and her mouth was a small red O: a continuous soundless squeal. Mr. Talliaferro's expression was that of a haggard anticipatory alarm. He said again: "I really think—"

"I suspect we had better try to go another way," the Semitic man suggested without emphasis from the bows, "or we'll be aground ourselves."

They all scuttered their oars upon the water, craning their necks. The shore was only a few yards away and immediately, as though they had

heard the Semitic man speak, needles of fire assailed the crew with fierce joy.

They bent to their oars again, flapping their spare frantic hands about their heads, and after a few minutes of violent commotion the tender acquiesced and crept slowly and terrifically seaward again. But their presence was now known, the original scouting party was reenforced and offing could not help them.

"I really think," Mr. Talliaferro said, "for the ladies' sake, that we'd better return."

"So do I," Mark Frost abetted quickly.

"Don't lose your nerve, Mark," Mrs. Wiseman told him. "Just a little more and we can take a nice long boatripe this afternoon."

"I've had enough boatriping in the last half hour to do me a long time," the poet answered. "Let's go back. How about it, you fellows back there? How about it, Jenny? Don't you want to go back?"

Jenny answered "Yes, sir," in a small frightened voice, clutching the seat with both hands. Her green dress was splotched and stained with water from Mark Frost's oar. Mrs. Wiseman released one hand and patted Jenny's knee.

"Shut up, Mark. Jenny's all right. Aren't you, darling? It'll be such a good joke if we really were to get the yacht afloat. Look sharp, Ernest. Isn't that rope almost tight?"

It was nearly taut, sliding away into the water in a lovely slender arc and rising again to the bow of the yacht. Mrs. Maurier stood at the rail, waving her handkerchief at intervals. On the farther wall sat three people in attitudes studiously casual: these were the captain, the helmsman and the deckhand.

"Now," Fairchild said, "let's all get started at the same time. Talliaferro, you keep the rope straight, and Julius—" he glanced over his shoulder, sweating, marshaling his crew. "Durn that shore," he exclaimed in an annoyed tone, "there it is again." They were nearly ashore a second time. Commotion, and more sweat and a virulent invisible fire; and

after a while the tender acquiesced reluctantly and again they attained the necessary offing.

“Give way, all!” Mrs. Wiseman cried. They dug their oars anew.

“Mine hurts my hands,” Mark Frost complained. “Is it moving, Ernest?” The tender was off the yacht’s quarter: the bows of the yacht pointed inshore of them. Mr. Talliaferro rose cautiously and knelt on the seat, putting his hand on Jenny’s shoulder to steady himself.

“Not yet,” he replied.

“Pull all you know, men,” Fairchild panted, releasing one hand momentarily and batting it madly about his face. The crew pulled and sweated, goaded unto madness with invisible needles of fire, clashing one another’s fingers with their oars, and presently the tender acquired a motion reminiscent of the rocking horses of childhood.

“The rope’s becoming loose,” Mr. Talliaferro called in a warning tone.

“Pull,” Fairchild urged them, gritting his teeth. Mark Frost groaned dismally and released one hand to fan it across his face.

“It’s still loose,” Mr. Talliaferro said after a time.

“She must be moving then,” Fairchild panted.

“Maybe it’s because we aren’t singing,” Mrs. Wiseman suggested presently, resting on her oar. “Don’t you know any deep sea chanteys, Dawson?”

“Let Julius sing: he ain’t doing anything,” Fairchild answered. “Pull, you devils!”

Mr. Talliaferro shrieked suddenly: “She’s moving! She’s moving!”

They all ceased rowing to stare at the yacht. Sure enough, she was swinging slowly across their stern. “She’s moving!” Mr. Talliaferro screamed again, waving his arms. Mrs. Maurier responded madly from the deck of the yacht with her handkerchief; beyond her, the three men

sat motionless and casual. "Why don't the fools start the engine?" Fairchild gasped. "Pull!" he roared.

They dipped their oars with new life, flailing the water like mad. The yacht swung slowly; soon she was pointing her prow seaward of them, and continued to swing slowly around. "She's coming off, she's coming off," Mr. Talliaferro chanted in a thin falsetto, his voice breaking, fairly dancing up and down. Mrs. Maurier was shrieking also, waving her handkerchief. "She's coming off," Mr. Talliaferro chanted, standing erect and clutching Jenny's shoulder. "Pull! Pull!"

"All together," Fairchild gasped and the crew repeated it, flailing the water. The yacht was almost broadside to them, now. "She's coming!" Mr. Talliaferro screamed in an ecstasy. "She's co—"

A faint abrupt shock. The tender stopped immediately. They saw the sweet blonde entirety of Jenny's legs and the pink seat of her ribboned undergarment as with a wild despairing cry Mr. Talliaferro plunged overboard, taking Jenny with him, and vanished beneath the waves.

All but his buttocks, that is. They didn't quite vanish, and presently all of Mr. Talliaferro rose in eighteen inches of water and stared in shocked amazement at the branch of a tree directly over his head. Jenny, yet prone in the water, was an indistinguishable turmoil of bloneness and green crêpe and fright. She rose, slipped and fell again, then the Semitic man stepped into the water and picked her up bodily and set her in the boat where she sat and gazed at them with abject beseeching eyes, strangling.

Only Mrs. Wiseman had presence of mind to thump her between the shoulders, and after a dreadful trancelike interval during which they sat clutching their oars and gazing at her while she beseeched them with her eyes, she caught her breath, wailing. Mrs. Wiseman mothered her, holding her dragged unhappy wetness while Jenny wept dreadfully. "He — he sc-scared me so bad," Jenny gasped after a time, shuddering and crying again, utterly abject, making no effort to hide her face.

Mrs. Wiseman made meaningless comforting sounds, holding Jenny in her arms. She borrowed a handkerchief and wiped Jenny's streaming face. Mr. Talliaferro stood in the lake and dripped disconsolately, peering his harried face across Mrs. Wiseman's shoulder. The others sat motionless, holding their oars.

Jenny raised her little wet hands futilely about her face. Then she remarked her hand and she held it before her face, gazing at it. On it was a thinly spreading crimson stain that grew as she watched it, and Jenny wept again with utter and hopeless misery.

"Oh, you've cut your poor hand! Dawson," Mrs. Wiseman said, "you are the most consummate idiot unleashed. You take us right back to that yacht. Don't try to row back: we'll never get there. Can't you pull us back with the rope?"

They could, and Mrs. Wiseman helped Jenny into the bows and the men took their places again. Mr. Talliaferro flitted about in the water with his despairing face. "Jump in," Fairchild told him. "We ain't going to maroon you."

They pulled the tender back to the yacht with chastened expedition. Mrs. Maurier met them at the rail, shrieking with alarm and astonishment. Pete was beside her. The sailors had decreetly vanished.

"What is it? What is it?" Mrs. Maurier chanted, mooning her round alarmed face above them. They brought the tender alongside and held it steady while Mrs. Wiseman helped Jenny across the thwarts and to the rail. Mr. Talliaferro flitted about in a harried distraction, but Jenny shrank from him. "You scared me so bad," she repeated.

Pete leaned over the rail, reaching his hands while Mr. Talliaferro flitted about his victim. The tender rocked, scraping against the hull of the yacht. Pete caught Jenny's hands.

"Hold the boat still, you old fool," he told Mr. Talliaferro fiercely.

His legs were completely numb beneath her weight, but he would not move. He swished the broken branch about her, and at intervals he whipped it across his own back. Her face wasn't so flushed, and he laid his hand again above her heart. At his touch she opened her eyes.

"Hello, David. I dreamed about water.... Where've you been all these years?" She closed her eyes again. "I feel better," she said after a while. And then: "What time is it?" He looked at the sun and guessed. "We must go on," she said. "Help me up."

She sat up and a million red ants scurried through the arteries of his legs. She stood, dizzy and swaying, holding to him. "Gee, I'm not worth a damn. Next time you elope you'd better make her stand a physical examination, David. Do you hear?... But we must go on: come on, make me walk." She took a few unsteady steps and clutched him again, closing her eyes. "Jesus H, if I ever get out of this alive.. She stopped again. "What must we do?" she asked.

"I'll carry you a ways," he said.

"Can you? I mean, aren't you too tired?"

"Ill carry you a ways, until we get somewhere," he repeated.

"I guess you'll have to.... But if you were me, I'd leave you flat. That's what I'd do."

He squatted before her and reached back and slid his hands under her knees, and as he straightened up she leaned forward onto his back and put her arms around his neck, clasping the broken branch against his chest. He rose slowly, hitching her legs further around his hips as the constriction of her skirt lessened.

"You're awful nice to me, David," she murmured against his neck, limp upon his back.

Mrs. Wiseman washed and bound Jenny's hand, interestingly; then she scrubbed Jenny's little soft wormlike fingers and cleaned her fingernails while Jenny, naked, dried rosily in the cabined air. Underthings were not difficult, and stockings were simple also. But Jenny's feet were short rather than small, and shoes were a problem. Though Jenny insisted that Mrs. Wiseman's shoes were quite comfortable.

But she was clothed at last and Mrs. Wiseman gathered up the two wet garments gingerly and went to lean her hip against the bunk. The dress Jenny now wore belonged to the girl Patricia and Jenny stood before the mirror, bulging it divinely, examining herself in the mirror, smoothing the dress over her hips with a slow preening motion.

I had no idea there was that much difference between them, the other thought. It's far more exciting than a bathing suit... "Jenny," she said, "I think — really, I — Darling, you simply must not go where men can see you, like that. For Mrs. Maurier's sake, you know; she's having enough trouble as it is, without any rioting."

"Don't it look all right? It feels all right," Jenny answered, trying to see as much of herself as possible in a twelve-inch glass.

"I don't doubt it. You must be able to feel every stitch in it. But we'll have to get something else for you to wear. Slip it off, darling."

Jenny obeyed. "It feels all right to me," she repeated. "It don't feel funny."

"It doesn't look funny, not at all. On the contrary, in fact. That's the trouble with it," the other answered delving busily in her bag.

"I always thought I had the kind of figure that could wear anything," Jenny persisted, holding the dress regretfully in her hands.

"You have," the other told her, "exactly that kind. Terribly like that. Simple and inevitable. Devastating."

"Devastating," Jenny repeated with interest. "There was a kind of funny little man at Mandeville that day.. She turned to the mirror again, trying to see as much of herself as possible. "I've been told I have a figure like

Dorothy Mackaill's, only not too thin.... I think a little flesh is becoming to a girl. Don't you?"

"Devastating," the other agreed again. She rose and held a dark colored dress between her hands. "You'll look worse than ever in this... terrible as a young widow."... She went to Jenny and held the dress against her, contemplative; then still holding the dress between her hands she put her arms around Jenny. "A little flesh is worse than a little dynamite, Jenny," she said soberly, looking at Jenny with her dark, sad eyes... "Does your hand still hurt?"

"It's all right now." Jenny craned her neck, peering downward along her flank. "It's a little long, ain't it?"

"Yours will dry soon." She raised Jenny's face and kissed her on the mouth. "Slip it on, and we'll hang your things in the sun."

FOUR O'CLOCK

He strode on in the dust, along the endless shimmering road between pines like fixed explosions on the afternoon. The afternoon was an endless unbearable brightness. Their shapeless, merged shadow moved on: two steps more and he would tread upon it and through it as he did the sparse shadows of pines, but it moved on just ahead of him between the faded forgotten ruts, keeping its distance effortlessly in the uneven dust. The dust was fine as powder and unbroken; only an occasional hoofprint, a fading ghost of a forgotten passage.

Above, the metallic implacable sky resting upon his bowed neck and her lax, damp weight upon his back and her cheek against his neck, rubbing monotonously against it. Thin fire darted upon him constantly. He strode on.

The dusty road swam into his vision, passed beneath his feet and so behind like an endless ribbon. He found that his mouth was open, drooling, though no moisture came, and his gums took a thin dry

texture like cigarette paper. He closed his mouth, trying to moisten his gums.

Trees without tops passed him, marched up abreast of him, topless, and fell behind; the rank roadside grass approached and became monstrous and separate, blade by blade: lizards hissed in it sibilantly ere it faded behind him. Thin unseen fire darted upon him but he didn't even feel it, for in his shoulders and arms there was no longer any sensation at all save that of her lax weight upon his back and the brass sky resting against his neck and her moist cheek rubbing against his neck monotonously. He found that his mouth was open again, and he closed it.

"That's far enough," she said, presently rousing. "Let me down." Their merged shadow blended at intervals with the shadows of the tall topless trees, but beyond the shadow of the trees their blended shadow appeared again, two paces ahead of him.

And the road went on ahead of him shimmering and blistered and whiter than salt. "Put me down, David," she repeated.

"No," he said between his dry, rough teeth, above the remote, imperturbable tramping of his heart, "not tired."

His heart made a remote sound. Each beat seemed to be somewhere in his head, just behind his eyes; each beat was a red tide that temporarily obscured his vision. But it always ended, then another dull surge blinded him for a moment.

But remote, like a tramping of soldiers in red uniforms stepping endlessly across the door of a room where he was, where he crouched trying to look out the door. It was a dull, heavy sound, like a steamer's engines, and he found that he was thinking of water, of a blue monotony of seas. It was a red sound, just back of his eyes.

The road came on, an endless blistering ribbon between worn ruts where nothing had passed for a long time. The sea makes a swishing

sound in your ears. Regular. Swish. Swish. Not against your eyes, though. Not against the backs of your eyes. The shadow came out of a blotch of larger shadows cast by trees that had no tops.

Two steps more. No, three steps now. Three steps. Getting to be afternoon, getting to be later than it was once. Three steps, then. All right. Man walks on his hind legs; a man can take three steps, a monkey can take three steps, but there is water in a monkey's cage, in a pan. Three steps. All right. One. Two. Three. Gone. Gone. Gone.

It's a red sound. Not behind your eyes. Sea. See. Sea. See. You're in a cave, you're in a cave of dark sound, the sound of the sea is outside the cave. Sea. See. See. See. Not when they keep stepping in front of the door.

There was another sound in his ears now, a faint annoying sound, and the weight on his back was shifting of its own volition, thrusting him downward toward the blistering, blanched dust in which he walked, took three steps a man can take three steps and he staggered, trying to shift his numb arms and get a new grip. His mouth was open again and when he tried to shut it, it made a dry, hissing sound. One. Two. Three. One. Two. Three.

"Let me down, I tell you," she repeated, thrusting herself backward. "Look, there's a signboard. Let me down, I tell you. I can walk now."

She thrust herself away from him, twisting her legs from his grasp and forcing him down, and he stumbled and went to his knees. Her feet touched the ground and still astride of his body she braced herself and held him partially up by his shoulders.

He stopped at last, on all fours like a beast, his head hanging between his shoulders; and kneeling beside him in the dust she slid her hand under his forehead to lessen the tension on his neck and raised her eyes to the signboard. Mandeville. Fourteen miles, and a crude finger pointing in the direction from which they had come. The front of her dress was damp, blotched darkly with his sweat.

After the women had hovered Jenny's dragged helplessness below decks Fairchild removed his hat and mopped his face, looking about upon his fatuous Frankenstein with a sort of childlike astonishment. Then his gaze came to rest on Mr. Talliaferro's haggard damp despair and he laughed and laughed.

"Laugh you may," the Semitic man told him, "but much more of this sort of humor and you'll be doing your laughing ashore. I think now, if Talliaferro'd start an active protest with you as its immediate object, that we'd all be inclined to support him.' Mr. Talliaferro dripped forlornly: an utter and hopeless dejection. The Semitic man looked at him, then he too looked about at the others and upon the now peaceful scene of their recent activities. "One certainly pays a price for art," he murmured, "one really does."

"Talliaferro's the only one who has suffered any actual damage," Fairchild protested. "And I'm just going to buy him off now. Come on, Talliaferro, we can fix you up."

"That won't be sufficient," the Semitic man said, still ominous. "The rest of us have been assailed enough in our vanities to rise from principle."

"Well, then, if I have to, I'll buy you all off," Fairchild answered. He led the way toward the stairs. But he halted again and looked back at them. "Where's Gordon?" he asked. Nobody knew. "Well, no matter. He knows where to come." He went on. "After all," he said, "there are compensations for art, ain't there?"

The Semitic man admitted that there were. "Though," he added, "it's a high price to pay for whisky." He descended in his turn. "Yes, we really must get something out of it. We spend enough time on it and suffer enough moral and mental turmoil because of it."

"Sure," Fairchild agreed. "The ones that produce it get a lot from it. They get the boon of keeping their time pretty well filled. And that's a whole lot to expect in this world," he said profoundly, fumbling at his

door. It opened at last and he said: "Oh, here you are. Say, you just missed it."

Major Ayers, his neglected tumbler beside him and clutching a book, came up for air when they entered, festooned yet with a kind of affable bewilderment. "Missed what?" he repeated.

They all began to tell him about it at once, producing Mr. Talliaferro as evidence from where he lurked unhappily in their midst, for Major Ayers' inspection and commiseration; and still telling him about it they found seats while Fairchild again assumed the ritual of his hidden suitcase. Major Ayers already had the chair, but the Semitic man attempted the book anyway. "What have you got there?" he asked.

Major Ayers' hearty bewilderment descended upon him again. "I was passing the time," he explained quickly. He stared at the book. "It's quite strange," he said. Then he added: "I mean, the way... The way they get their books up nowadays. I like the way they get their books up. Jolly, with colors, y'know. But I—" He considered a moment. "I rather lost the habit of reading at Sandhurst," he explained in a burst of confidence. "And then, on active service constantly..

"War is bad," the Semitic man agreed. "What were you reading?" "I rather lost the habit of reading at Sandhurst," Major Ayers explained again. He raised the book again.

Fairchild opened a fresh bottle. "Somebody'll have to dig up some more glasses. Mark, see if you can slip back to the kitchen and get one or two more. Let's see the book," he said reaching his hand. The Semitic man forestalled him.

"You go ahead and give us some whisky. I'd rather forget my grief that way, just now."

"But look," Fairchild insisted. The other fended him off.

“Give us some whisky, I tell you,” he repeated. “Here’s Mark with the glasses. What we need in this country is protection from artists. They even want to annoy us with each other’s stuff.”

“Go ahead,” Fairchild replied equably, “have your joke. You know my opinion of smartness.” He passed glasses among them.

“He can’t mean that,” the Semitic man said, “Just because the New Republic gives him hell—”

“But the Dial once bought a story of him,” Mark Frost said with hollow envy.

“And what a fate for a man in all the lusty pride of his Ohio valley masculinity: immolation in a home for old young ladies of either sex.... That atmosphere was too rare for him. Eh, Dawson?”

Fairchild laughed. “Well, I ain’t much of an Alpinist. What do you want to be in there for, Mark?”

“It would suit Mark exactly,” the Semitic man said, “that vague polite fury of the intellect in which they function. What I can’t see is how Mark has managed to stay out of it.... But then, if you’ll look close enough, you’ll find an occasional grain of truth in these remarks which Mark and I make and which you consider merely smart.

But you utter things not quite clever enough to be untrue, and while we are marveling at your profundity, you lose courage and flatly contradict yourself the next moment. Why, only that tactless and well meaning God of yours alone knows.

Why any one should worry enough about the temporary meaning or construction of words to contradict himself consciously or to feel annoyed when he has done it unconsciously, is beyond me.”

“Well, it is a kind of sterility — Words,” Fairchild admitted. “You begin to substitute words for things and deeds, like the withered cuckold husband that took the Decameron to bed with him every night, and

pretty soon the thing or the deed becomes just a kind of shadow of a certain sound you make by shaping your mouth a certain way.

But you have a confusion, too. I don't claim that words have life in themselves. But words brought into a happy conjunction produce something that lives, just as soil and climate and an acorn in proper conjunction will produce a tree. Words are like acorns, you know. Every one of 'em won't make a tree, but if you just have enough of 'em, you're bound to get a tree sooner or later."

"If you just talk long enough, you're bound to say the right thing some day. Is that what you mean?" the Semitic man asked.

"Let me show you what I mean." Fairchild reached again for the book.

"For heaven's sake," the other exclaimed, "let us have this one drink in peace. We'll admit your contention, if that's what you want. Isn't that what you say, Major?"

"No, really," Major Ayers protested, "I enjoyed the book. Though I rather lost the habit of reading at Sa—"

"I like the book myself," Mark Frost said. "My only criticism is that it got published."

"You can't avoid that," Fairchild told him. "It's inevitable; it happens to every one who will take the risk of writing down a thousand coherent consecutive words."

"And sooner than that," the Semitic man added, "if you've murdered your husband or won a golf championship."

"Yes," Fairchild agreed. "Cold print. Your stuff looks so different in cold print. It lends a kind of impersonal authority even to stupidity."

"That's backward," the other said. "Stupidity lends a kind of impersonal authority even to cold print."

Fairchild stared at him. "Say, what did you just tell me about contradicting myself?"

“I can afford to,” the other answered. “I never authenticate mine.” He drained his glass. “But as for art and artists, I prefer artists: I don’t even object to paying my pro rata to feed them, so long as I am not compelled to listen to them.”

“It seems to me,” Fairchild rejoined, “that you spend a lot of time listening to them, for a man who professes to dislike it and who don’t have to.”

“That’s because I’d have to listen to somebody — artist or shoe clerk. And the artist is more entertaining because he knows less about what he is trying to do.... And besides, I talk a little, myself. I wonder what became of Gordon?”

FIVE O’CLOCK

Evening came sad as horns among the trees. The road had dropped downward again into the swamp where amid rank, impenetrable jungle dark streams wallowed aimless and obscene, and against the hidden flame of the west huge trees brooded bearded and ancient as prophets out of Genesis. David lay at full length at the roadside. He had lain there a long time, but at last he sat up and looked about for her.

She stood beside a cypress, up to her knees in thick water, her arms crossed against the tree trunk and her face hidden in her arms, utterly motionless. About them, a moist green twilight filled with unseen fire.

“David.” Her voice was muffled by her arms, and after it, there was no sound in this fecund, timeless twilight of trees. He sat beside the road, and presently she spoke again. “It’s a mess, David. I didn’t know it was going to be like this.” He made a harsh, awkward sound, as though it were some one else’s voice he was trying to speak with. “Hush,” she said. “It’s my fault: I got you into this. I’m sorry, David.”

These trees were thicker, huger, more ancient than any yet, amid the brooding twilight of their beards. “What must we do now, David?”

After a while she raised her head and looked at him and repeated the question.

He answered slowly: "Whatever you want to do."

She said: "Come here, David." And he got slowly to his feet and stepped into the black, thick water and went to her, and for a while she looked at him soberly, without moving. Then she turned from the tree and came nearer and they stood in the foul, black water, embracing. Suddenly she clasped him fiercely. "Can't you do something about it? Can't you make it different? Must it be like this?"

"What do you want me to do?" he asked slowly in that voice which was not his. She loosed her arms, and he repeated as though prompted: "You do whatever you want to."

"I'm damn sorry, David, for getting you into this. Josh is right: I'm just a fool." She writhed her body beneath her dress, whimpering again.

"They hurt me so damn bad," she moaned.

"We must get out of this," he said, "You tell me what you want to do."

"It will be all right, if I do what I think is best?" she asked quickly, staring at him with her grave opaque eyes. "You swear it will?"

"Yes," he answered with utter weariness. "You do whatever you want to."

She became at once passive, a submissive docility in Ms embrace. But he stood holding her loosely, not even looking at her. As abruptly her passiveness faded and she said: "You're all right, David. I'd like to do something for you. Pay you back, some way." She looked at him again and found that he was looking at her. "David! why, David! Don't feel that way about it!" But he continued to look at her with his quiet utter yearning. "David, I'm sorry, sorry, sorry. What can I do about it? Tell me: I'll do it. Anything, just anything."

"It's all right," he said.

"But it isn't. I want to make it up to you, some way, for getting you into this." His head was averted: he seemed to be listening. Then the sound

came again across the afternoon, among the patriarchal trees — a faint, fretful sound.

“There’s a boat,” he said. “We are close to the lake.”

“Yes,” she agreed. “I heard it a while ago. I think it’s coming in near here.” She moved, and he released her. She listened again, touching his shoulder lightly. “Yes, it’s coming this way. You’d better take your shirt again. Turn your back, please, David.”

SIX O’CLOCK

“Sure, I know where your boat is, seen her hove to when I come along. In mighty shaller water, too. Ain’t more’n three miles down the lake,” the man told them, setting a galvanized pail of water on the edge of the veranda. His house stood on piles driven into the moist earth at the edge of the jungle. Before it a dark broad stream was seemingly without any movement at all between rigid palisades of trees.

The man stood on the veranda and watched her while she poured dippersful of heavenly water on her head. The water ran through her hair and dripped down her face, sopping her dress, while the man stood and watched her. His blue collarless shirt was fastened at the throat by a brass collar button, his sweat-stained suspenders drew his faded cotton trousers snugly over his paunch. His loose jowls moved rhythmically and he spat brownly upon the earth at their feet, barely averting his head.

“You folks been wandering around in the swamp all day?” he asked staring at her with his pale, heavy eyes, roving his gaze slowly up her muddy stockings and her stained dress. “What you want to go back fer, now? Feller got enough, huh?” He spat again, and made a heavy sound of disparagement and disgust. “Ain’t no such thing as enough. Git a real man, next time.” He looked at David and asked him a question, using an unprintable verb.

Anger, automatic and despite his weariness, fired him slowly, but she forestalled him. “Let’s get back to the boat, first,” she said to him. She

looked at the man again, meeting his pale heavy stare. "How much?" she asked briskly.

"Five dollars." He glanced at David again. "In advance."

David put his hand to his waist. "With my money," she said quickly, watching him as he dug into his watch pocket and extracted a single bill, neatly folded. "No, no: with mine," she insisted peremptorily, staying his hand. "Where's mine?" she asked, and he drew from his trousers her crumpled mass of notes, and she took it.

The man accepted the bill and spat again. He descended heavily from the porch and led the way down to the water where his launch was moored. They got in and he cast off and thrust the boat away from the shore and bent heavily over the engine, "Yes, sir, that's the way with these town fellers. No guts. Next time, come over to this side and git you a real man. I kin git off most any day. And I won't be honing to git home by sundown, neither," he added, looking back over his shoulder.

"Shut your mouth," she told him sharply. "Make him shut up, David." The man paused, staring at her with his pale sleepy eyes.

"Now, look-a-here," he began heavily.

"Shut up and start your flivver," she repeated. "You've got your money, so let's go if we are going."

"Well, that's all right, too. I like 'em to have a little git-up-and-git to 'em." He stared at her with his lazy drooping eyes, chewing rhythmically, then he called her a name.

David rose from his seat, but she restrained him with one hand and she cursed the man fluently and glibly. "Now get started," she finished. "If he opens his head again, David, just knock him right out of the boat."

The man snarled his yellow teeth at them, then he bent again over the engine. Its fretful clamor rose soon and the boat slid away circling, cutting the black motionless water. Ahead, soon, there was a glint of space beyond the trees, a glint of water; and soon they had passed

from the bronze nave of the river onto the lake beneath the rushing soundless wings of sunset and a dying glory of day under the cooling brass bowl of the sky.

The Nausikaa was more like a rosy gull than ever in the sunset, squatting sedately upon the darkening indigo of the water, against the black metallic trees. The man shut off his fussy engine and the launch slid up alongside and the man caught the rail and held his boat stationary, watching her muddy legs as she climbed aboard the yacht.

No one was in sight. They stood at the rail and looked downward upon his thick backside while he spun the flywheel again. The engine caught at last and the launch circled away from the yacht and headed again into the sunset while the fussy engine desecrated the calm of water and sky and trees. Soon the boat was only a speck in the fading path of the sunset.

“David?” she said, when it had gone. She turned and put her firm tanned hand on his breast, and he turned his head also and looked at her with his beastlike longing.

“It’s all right,” he said after a time. She put her arms around him again, sexless and hard, drawing his cheek down to her sober moist kiss. This time he didn’t move his head.

“I’m sorry, David.”

“It’s all right,” he repeated. She laid her hands flat on his chest and he released her. For a time they gazed at each other.

Then she left him and crossed the deck and descended the companionway without looking back, and so left him and the evening from which the sun had gone suddenly and into which night was as suddenly come, and across which the fretful thin sound of the launch came yet faintly along the dreaming water, beneath the tarnished sky

where stars were already pricking like a hushed magical blooming of flowers.

She found the others at dinner in the saloon, since what breeze there was was still offshore and the saloon was screened. They greeted her with various surprise, but she ignored them and her aunt's round suffused face, going haughtily to her place.

"Patricia," Mrs. Maurier said at last, "where have you been?"

"Walking," the niece snapped. In her hand she carried a small crumpled mass and she put this on the table, separating the notes and smoothing them into three flat sheaves.

"Patricia," said Mrs. Maurier again.

"I owe you six dollars," she told Miss Jameson, putting one of the sheaves beside her plate. "You only had a dollar," she informed Mrs. Wiseman, passing a single note across the table to her. "I'll pay you the rest of yours when we get home," she told her aunt, reaching across Mr. Talliaferro's shoulder with the third sheaf, She met her aunt's apoplectic face again. "I brought your steward back, too. So you haven't got anything to kick about."

"Patricia," Mrs. Maurier said. She said, chokingly: "Mr. Gordon, didn't he come back with you?"

"He wasn't with me. What would I want to take him along for? I already had one man."

Mrs. Maurier's face became dreadful, and as the blood died swooning in her heart she had again that brief vision of floating inert buttocks, later to wash ashore with that inopportune and terrible implacability of the drowned. "Patricia," she said dreadfully.

“Oh, haul in your sheet,” the niece interrupted wearily. “You’re jibbing. Gosh, I’m hungry.” She sat down and met her brother’s cold gaze. “And you too, Josh,” she added, taking a piece of bread.

The nephew glanced briefly at his aunt’s wrung face. “You ought to beat hell out of her,” he said calmly, going on with his dinner.

NINE O’CLOCK

“But I saw him about four o’clock,” Fairchild argued. “He was in the boat with us. Didn’t you see him, Major? but that’s so: you were not with us. You saw him, Mark, didn’t you?”

“He was in the boat when we started. I remember that. But I don’t remember seeing him after Ernest fell out.”

“Well, I do. I know I saw him on deck right after we got back. But I can’t remember seeing him in the boat after Jenny and Talliaferro... Ah, he’s all right, though. He’ll show up soon. He ain’t the sort to get drowned.”

“Don’t be too sure of that,” Major Ayers said. “There are no women missing, you know.”

Fairchild laughed his burly appreciative laugh. Then he met Major Ayers’ glassy solemn stare, and ceased. Then he laughed once more, somewhat after the manner of one feeling his way into a dark room, and ceased again, turning on Major Ayers his trustful baffled expression. Major Ayers said:

“This place to which these young people went to-day—”

“Mandeville,” the Semitic man supplied. “— what sort of a place is it?” They told him. “Ah, yes. They have facilities for that sort of thing, eh?”

“Well, not more than usual,” the Semitic man answered, and Fairchild said, still watching Major Ayers with a sort of cautious bafflement:

“Not any more than you can carry along with you. We Americans always carry our own facilities with us. It’s living high tension go-getting lives like we do in this country, you see.”

Major Ayers glared at him politely. "Somewhat like the Continent," he suggested after a time.

"Not exactly," the Semitic man said. "In America you often find an H in caste." Fairchild and Major Ayers stared at the Semitic man.

"As well as a cast in chaste," Mark Frost put in. Fairchild and Major Ayers now stared at him, watching him while he lit a fresh cigarette from the stub of his present one, and left his chair and went to lie at full length on the deck.

"Why not?" the Semitic man took him up. "Love itself is stone blind."

"It has to be," Mark Frost answered. Major Ayers stared one to the other for a while. He said:

"This Mandeville, now. It is a convention, eh? A local convention?"

"Convention?" Fairchild repeated.

"I mean, like our Gretna Green. You ask a lady there, and immediately there is an understanding: saves unnecessary explanations and all that."

"I thought Gretna Green was a place where they used to go to get marriage licenses in a hurry," Fairchild said suspiciously.

"It was, once," Major Ayers agreed. "But during the Great Fire all the registrars' and parsons' homes were destroyed. And in those days communication was so poor that word didn't get about until a fortnight or so later. In the meantime quite a few young people had gone there in all sincerity, you know, and were forced to return the next day without benefit of clergy. Of course the young ladies durst not tell until matters were remedied, which, during those unsettled times, might be any time up to a month or so. But by that time, of course, the police had heard of it — London police always hear of things in time, you know."

"And so, when you go to Gretna Green now, you get a policeman," the Semitic man said.

“You’ve Yokohama in mind,” Major Ayers answered as gravely. “Of course, they are native policemen,” he added.

“Like whitebait,” the Semitic man suggested.

“Or sardines,” Mark Frost corrected.

“Or sardines,” Major Ayers agreed suavely. He sucked violently at his cold pipe while Fairchild stared at him with intrigued bewilderment.

“But this young lady, the one who popped off with the steward. And came back the same day.... Is this customary with your young girls? I ask for information,” he added quickly. “Our young girls don’t do that, you know; with us, only decayed countesses do that — cut off to Italy with chauffeurs and second footmen. And they never return before nightfall.

But our young girls..

“Art,” the Semitic man explained succinctly. Mark Frost elaborated: “In Europe, being an artist is a form of behavior; in America, it’s an excuse for a form of behavior.”

“Yes. But, I say—” Major Ayers mused again, sucking violently at his cold pipe. Then: “She’s not the one who did that tweaky little book, is she? The syphilis book?”

“No. That was Julius’ sister; the one named Eva,” Fairchild said. “This one that eloped and then came back ain’t an artist at all. It’s just the artistic atmosphere of the boat, I guess.”

“Oh,” said Major Ayers. “Strange,” he remarked. He rose and thumped his pipe against his palm. Then he blew through the stem and put it in his pocket. “I think I shall go below and have a whisky. Who’ll come along?”

“I guess I won’t, right now,” Fairchild decided. The Semitic man said later on. Major Ayers turned to the prone poet.

“And you, old thing?”

“Bring it up to us,” Mark Frost suggested. But Fairchild vetoed this. The Semitic man supported him and Major Ayers departed.

“I wish I had a drink,” Mark Frost said.

“Go down and have one, then,” Fairchild told him. The poet groaned.

The Semitic man lighted his cigar again and Fairchild spoke from his tentative bewilderment. “That was interesting, about Gretna Green, wasn’t it? I didn’t know about that. Never read it anywhere, I mean. But I guess there’s lots of grand things in the annals of all people that never get into the history books.”

The Semitic man chuckled. Fairchild tried to see his face in the obscurity. Then he said:

“Englishmen are funny folks: always kidding you at the wrong time. Things just on the verge of probability, and just when you have made up your mind to take it one way, you find they meant it the other.” He mused a while in the darkness.

“It was kind of nice, wasn’t it? Young people, young men and girls caught in that strange hushed magic of sex and the mystery of intimate clothing and functions and all, and of lying side by side in the darkness, telling each other things... that’s the charm of virginity: telling each other things.

Virginity don’t make any difference as far as the body’s concerned. Young people running away together in a flurry of secrecy and caution and desire, and getting there to find”... again he turned his kind, baffled face toward his friend. He continued after a while.

“Of course the girls would be persuaded, after they’d come that far, wouldn’t they? You know — strange surroundings, a strange room like an island in an uncharted sea full of monsters like landlords and strangers and such; the sheer business of getting their bodies from place to place and feeding ’em and caring for ’em; and your young man thwarted and lustful and probably fearful that you’d change your mind

and back out altogether, and a strange room all secret and locked and far away from familiar things and you young and soft and nice to look at and knowing it, too.... Of course they'd be persuaded.

"And, of course, when they got back home they wouldn't tell, not until another parson turned up and everything was all regular again. And maybe not then. Maybe they'd whisper it to a friend some day, after they'd been married long enough to prefer talking to other women to talking to their husbands, while they were discussing the things women talk about. But they wouldn't tell the young unmarried ones, though.

And if they, even a year later, ever got wind of another one being seen going there or coming away... They are such practical creatures, you know: only men hold to conventions for moral reasons."

"Or from habit," the Semitic man added.

"Yes," Fairchild agreed.... "I wonder what became of Gordon."

Jenny remarked his legs, tweeded. How can he stand them heavy clothes in this weather, she thought with placid wonder, calling him soundlessly as he passed. His purposeful stride faltered and he came over beside her.

"Enjoying the evening, eh?" he suggested affably, glaring down at her in the darkness. Inside her borrowed clothes she was rife as whipped cream, blonde and perishable as an expensive pastry.

"Kind of," she admitted. Major Ayers leaned his elbows on the rail. "I was on my way below," he told her.

"Yes, sir," Jenny agreed, passive in the darkness, like an erotic lightning bug projecting that sense of himself surrounded, enclosed by the sweet, cloudy fire of her thighs, as young girls will. Major Ayers looked

down at her vague, soft head. Then he jerked his head sharply, glaring about.

“Enjoying the evening, eh?” he asked again.

“Yes, sir,” Jenny repeated. She bloomed like a cloying heavy flower. Major Ayers moved restively. Again he jerked his head as if he had heard his name spoken. Then he looked at Jenny again.

“Are you a native of New Orleans?”

“Yes, sir. Esplanade.”

“I beg pardon?”

“Esplanade. Where I live in New Orleans,” she explained. “It’s a street,” she added after a while.

“Oh,” Major Ayers murmured.... “Do you like living there?”

“I don’t know. I always lived there.” After a time she added: “It’s not far.”

“Not far, eh?”

“No, sir.” She stood motionless beside him and for the third time Major Ayers jerked his head quickly, as though some one were trying to attract his attention.

“I was on my way below,” he repeated. Jenny waited a while. Then she murmured:

“It’s a fine night for courting.”

“Courting?” Major Ayers repeated.

“With dates.” Major Ayers stared down upon her hushed, soft hair.

“When boys come to see you,” she explained. “When you go out with the boys.”

“Go out with boys,” Major Ayers repeated. “To Mandeville, perhaps?”

“Sometimes,” she agreed. “I’ve been there.”

“Do you go often?”

“Why... sometimes,” she repeated.

“With boys, eh? With men, too, hey?”

“Yes, sir,” Jenny answered with mild surprise. “I don’t guess anybody would just go there by herself.”

Major Ayers calculated heavily. Jenny stood docile and rife, projecting her little enticing aura, doing her best. “I say,” he said presently, “suppose we pop down there tomorrow — you and I?”

“To-morrow?” Jenny repeated with soft astonishment. “To-night, then,” he amended. “What d’ye say?”

“To-night? Can we get there to-night? It’s kind of late, ain’t it? How’ll we get there?”

“Like those people who went this morning did. There’s a tram or a bus, isn’t there? Or a train at the nearest village?”

“I don’t know. They come back in a boat.”

“Oh, a boat.” Major Ayers considered a moment. “Well, no matter: we’ll wait until to-morrow, then. We’ll go to-morrow, eh?”

“Yes, sir,” Jenny repeated tirelessly, passive and rife, projecting her emanation. Once more Major Ayers looked about him. Then he moved his hand from the rail and as Jenny, seeing the movement, turned to him with a slow unreluctance, he chucked her under the chin.

“Right, then,” he said briskly, moving away. “To-morrow it is.” Jenny gazed after him in passive astonishment and he turned and came back to her, and giving her an intimate inviting glare he chucked her again under her soft surprised chin. Then he departed permanently.

Jenny gazed after his tweedclad dissolving shape, watching him out of sight. He sure is a foreigner, she told herself. She sighed.

The water lapped at the hull of the yacht with little sounds, little hushed sounds like boneless hands might make, and she leaned again over the rail, gazing downward into the dark water.

He would be refined as anybody, she mused to herself. Being her brother... more refined, because she had been away all day with that waiter in the dining room....

But maybe the waiter was refined, too. Except I never found many boys that... I guess her aunt must have jumped on her. I wonder what she'd 'a' done when they come back, if we'd got the boat started and went away... and now that redheaded man and She says he's drowned....

Jenny gazed into the dark water, thinking of death, of being helpless in that terrible suffocating resilience of water, feeling again that utter and dreadful helplessness of terror and fear. So when Mr. Talliaferro was suddenly and silently beside her, touching her, she recognized him by instinct.

And feeling again her world become unstable and shifting beneath her, feeling all familiar solid things fall away from under her and seeing familiar faces and objects arc swooping away from her as she plunged from glaring sunlight through a timeless interval into Fear like a green lambence straying to receive her, she was stark and tranced. But at last she could move again, screaming.

"You scared me so bad," she gasped piteously, shrinking from 'him. She turned and ran, ran toward light, toward the security of walls.

The room was dark: no sound within it, and after the dim spaciousness of the deck it seemed close and hot. But here "were comfortable walls and Jenny snapped on the light and entered, entered into an atmosphere of familiarity.

Here was a vague ghost of the scent she liked and with which she had happily been impregnated when she came aboard and which had not yet completely died away, and the thin sharp odor of lilacs which she had come to associate with Mrs. Wiseman and which lingered also in

the room, and the other's clothing, and her own comb on the dressing table and the bright metal cylinder of her lipstick beside it.

Jenny looked at her face in the mirror for a while. Then she removed a garment and returned to gaze at her stainless pink-and-whiteness, ineffable, unmarred by any thought at all. Then she removed the rest of her clothes, and again before the glass she passed her comb through the drowsing miniature Golconda of her hair, then she got her naked body placidly into bed, as was her habit since three nights.

But she didn't turn out the light. She lay in her berth, gazing up at the smug glare of light upon the painted unbroken sweep of the ceiling. Time passed while she lay rosy and motionless, measured away by the small boneless hands of water lapping against the hull beyond the port; and she could hear feet also, and people moving about and making sounds.

She didn't know what it was she wanted, except it was something. So she lay on her back rosy and quiet beneath the unshaded glare of the inadequate light, and after a while she thought that maybe she was going to cry. Maybe that was it, so she lay naked and rosy and passive on her back, waiting to begin.

She could still hear people moving about: voices and feet, and she kept waiting for that first taste of crying that comes into your throat before you really get started — that feeling that there are two little salty canals just under your ears when you feel sorry for yourself, and that other kind of feeling you have at the base of your nose.

Only my nose don't get red when I cry, she thought, in a placid imminent misery of sadness and meaningless despair, waiting passive and still and without dread for it to begin. But before it began, Mrs. Wiseman entered the room.

She came over to Jenny and Jenny looked up and saw the other's dark small head, like a deer's head, against the light, and that dark intent way the other had of looking at her; and presently Mrs. Wiseman said:

“What is it, Jenny? What’s the matter?”

But she had forgotten what it was, almost: all she could remember was that there had been something; but now that the other had come Jenny could hardly remember that she had forgotten anything even, and so she just lay and looked up at the other’s dark slender head against the unshaded light.

“Poor child, you have had a hard day, haven’t you?” She put her hand on Jenny’s brow, smoothing back the fine hushed gold of Jenny’s hair, stroking her hand along Jenny’s cheek. Jenny lay quiet under the hand, drowsing her eyes like a stroked kitten, and then she knew she could cry all right, whenever she wanted to. Only it was almost as much fun just lying here and knowing you could cry whenever you got ready to, as the crying itself would be. She opened her blue ineffable eyes.

“Do you suppose he’s really drowned?” she asked. Mrs. Wiseman’s hand stroked Jenny’s cheek, pushing her hair upward and away from her brow.

“I don’t know, darling,” she answered soberly. “He’s a luckless man And anything may happen to a luckless man. But don’t you think about that any more Do you hear?” She leaned her face down to Jenny’s. “Do you hear?” she said again.

“No,” Fairchild said, “he ain’t the sort to get drowned. Some people just ain’t that sort.... I wonder,” he broke off suddenly and gazed at his companions. “Say, do you suppose he went off because he thought that girl was gone for good?”

“Drowned himself for love?” Mark Frost said. “Not in this day and time. People suicide because of money and disease; not for love.”

“I don’t know about that,” Fairchild objected. “They used to die because of love. And human nature don’t change. Its actions achieve different results under different conditions, but human nature don’t change.”

“Mark is right,” the Semitic man said. “People in the old books died of heartbreak also, which was probably merely some ailment that any modern surgeon or veterinarian could cure out of hand. But people do not die of love. That’s the reason love and death in conjunction have such an undying appeal in books: they are never very closely associated anywhere else.

“But as for a broken heart in this day of general literacy and facilities for disseminating the printed word—” he made a sound of disparagement. “Lucky he who believes that his heart is broken: he can immediately write a book and so take revenge (what is more terrible than the knowledge that the man you just knocked down discovered a coin in the gutter while getting up?) on him or her who damaged his or her ventricles. Besides cleaning up in the movies and magazines. No, no,” he repeated, “you don’t commit suicide when you are disappointed in love. You write a book.”

“I don’t know about that,” repeated Fairchild stubbornly. “People will do anything. But I suppose it takes a fool to believe that and act on that principle.” Beyond the eastern horizon was a rumor of pale silver, pallid and chill and faint, and they sat for a while in silence, thinking of love and death. The red eye of a cigarette twelve inches from the deck: this was Mark Frost. Fairchild broke the silence.

“The way she went off with Da — the steward. It was kind of nice, wasn’t it? And came back. No excuses, no explanations— ‘think no evil’ you know. That’s what these postwar young folks have taught us. Only old folks like Julius and me would ever see evil in what people, young people, do.

But then, I guess folks growing up into the manner of looking at life that we inherited, would find evil in anything where inclination wasn’t subservient to duty. We were taught to believe that duty is infallible, or it wouldn’t be duty, and if it were just unpleasant enough, you got a mark in heaven, sure....

But maybe it ain't so different, taken one generation by another. Most of our sins are vicarious, anyhow. I guess when you are young you have too much fun just being, to sin very much. But it's kind of nice, being young in this generation."

"Surely. We all think that, when our arteries begin to harden," the Semitic man rejoined. "Not only are most of our sins vicarious, but most of our pleasures are too look at our books, our stage, the movies. Who supports 'em? Not the young folks. They'd rather walk around or just sit and hold each other's hands."

"It's a substitute," Fairchild said. "Don't you see?"

"Substitute for what? When you are young and in love yesterday and out to-day and in again to-morrow, do you know anything about love? Is it anything to you except a rather dreadful mixture of jealousy and thwarted desires and interference with that man's world which after all, we all prefer, and nagging and maybe a little pleasure like a drug? It's not the women you sleep with that you remember, you know."

"No, thank God," Fairchild said. The other continued: "It's the old problem of the aristocracy over and over: a natural envy of that minority which is at liberty to commit all the sins which the majority cannot stop earning a living long enough to commit."

He lit his cigar again. "Young people always shape their lives as the preceding generation requires of them. I don't mean exactly that they go to church when they are told to, for instance, because their elders expect it of them — though God only knows what other reason they could possibly have for going to church as it is conducted nowadays, with a warden to patrol the building in the urban localities and in the rural districts squads of K.K.K.'s beating the surrounding copses and all those traditional retreats that in the olden days enabled the church to produce a soul for every one it saved. But youth in general lives unquestioningly according to the arbitrary precepts of its elders.

“For instance, a generation ago higher education was not considered so essential, and young people grew up at home into the convention that the thing to do was to get married at twenty-one and go to work immediately, regardless of one’s equipment or inclination or aptitude.

But now they grow up into the convention that youth, that being under thirty years of age, is a protracted sophomore course without lectures, in which one must spend one’s entire time dressed like a caricature, drinking homemade booze and pawing at the opposite sex in the intervals of being arrested by traffic policemen.

“A few years ago a so called commercial artist (groan, damn you) named John Held began to caricature college life, cloistered and otherwise, in the magazines; ever since then college life, cloistered and otherwise, has been busy caricaturing John Held. It is expected of them by their elders, you see.

And the young people humor them: young people are far more tolerant of the inexplicable and dangerous vagaries of their elders than the elders ever were or ever will be of the natural and harmless foibles of their children.... But perhaps they both enjoy it.”

“I don’t know,” Fairchild said. “Not even the old folks would like to be surrounded by people making such a drama of existence. And the young folks wouldn’t like it, either: young people have so many other things to do, you know. I think.. His voice ceased, died into darkness and a faint lapping sound of water.

The moon had swum up out of the east again, that waning moon of decay, worn and affable and cold. It was a magic on the water, a magic of pallid and fleshless things. The red eye of Mark Frost’s cigarette arced slow and lateral in his invisible hand, returned to its station twelve inches above the deck, and glowed and faded like a pulse. “You see,” Fairchild added like an apology, “I believe in young love in the spring, and things like that. I guess I’m a hopeless sentimentalist.”

The Semitic man grunted. Mark Frost said: "Virtue through abjectness and falsification: immolation of insincerity." Fairchild ignored him, wrapped in this dream of his own.

"When youth goes out of you, you get out of it. Out of life, I mean. Up to that time you just live; after that, you are aware of living and living becomes a conscious process.

Like thinking does in time, you know. You become conscious of thinking, and then you start right off to think in words. And first thing you know, you don't have thoughts in your mind at all: you just have words in it. But when you are young, you just be. Then you reach a stage where you do. Then a stage where you think, and last of all, where you remember. Or try to."

"Sex and death," said Mark Frost sepulchrally, arcing the red eye of his cigarette, "a blank wall on which sex casts a shadow, and the shadow is life." The Semitic man grunted again, immersed in one of his rare periods of uncommunicativeness. The moon climbed higher, the pallid unmuscled belly of the moon, and the Nausikaa dreamed like a silver gull on the dark restless water.

"I don't know," Fairchild said again. "I never found anything shadowy about life, people. Least of all, about my own doings. But it may be that there are shadowy people in the world, people to whom life is a kind of antic shadow.

But people like that make no impression on me at all, I can't seem to get them at all. But this may be because I have a kind of firm belief that life is all right." Mark Frost had cast away his final cigarette and was now a long prone shadow. The Semitic man was motionless also, holding his dead cigar.

"I was spending the summer with my grandfather, in Indiana. In the country. I was a boy then, and it was a kind of family reunion, with aunts and cousins that hadn't seen each other in years. Children, too, all sizes.

“There was a girl that I remember, about my age, I reckon.

She had blue eyes and a lot of long, prim, golden curls. This girl, Jenny, must have looked like her, when she was about twelve. I didn't know the other children very well, and besides I was used to furnishing my own diversion anyway; so I just kind of hung around and watched them doing the things children do.

I didn't know how to go about getting acquainted with them. I'd seen how the other newcomers would do it, and I'd kind of plan to myself how I'd go about it: what I'd say when I went up to them... He ceased and mused for a time in a kind of hushed surprise. “Just like Talliaferro,” he said at last, quietly. “I hadn't thought of that before.” He mused for a time. Then he spoke again.

“I was kind of like a dog going among strange dogs. Scared, kind of, but acting haughty and aloof. But I watched them. The way she made up to them, for instance. The day after she came she was the leader, always telling them what to do next. She had blue dresses, mostly.” Mark Frost snored in the silence. The Nausikaa dreamed like a gull on the dark water.

“This was before the day of water works and sewage systems in country homes, and this one had the usual outhouse. It was down a path from the house. In the late summer there were tall burdocks on either side of the path, taller than a twelve-year-old boy by late August. The outhouse was a small square frame box kind of thing, with a partition separating the men from the women inside.

“It was a hot day, in the middle of the afternoon. The others were down in the orchard, under the trees. From where I had been, in a big tree in the yard, I could see them, and the girls' colored dresses in the shade; and when I climbed down from the tree and went across the back yard and through the gate and along the path toward the privy I could still see them occasionally through gaps in the burdocks. They were sitting around in the shade, playing some game, or maybe just talking.

“I went on down the path and went inside, and when I turned to shut the door to the men’s side, I looked back. And I saw her blue dress kind of shining, coming along the path between the tall weeds.

I couldn’t tell if she had seen me or not, but I knew that if I went back I’d have to pass her, and I was ashamed to do this. It would have been different if I’d already been there and was coming away: or it seemed to me that it would have. Boys are that way, you know,” he added uncertainly, turning his bewilderment again toward his friend. The other grunted. Mark Frost snored in his shadow.

“So I shut the door quick and stood right quiet, and soon I heard her enter the other side. I didn’t know yet if she’d seen me, but I was going to stay quiet as I could until she went away. I just had to do that, it seemed to me.

“Children are much more psychic than adults. More of a child’s life goes on in its mind than people believe. A child can distil the whole gamut of experiences it has never actually known, into a single instant. Anthropology explains a little of it. But not much, because the gaps in human knowledge that have to be bridged by speculation are too large.

The first thing a child is taught is the infallibility and necessity of precept, and by the time the child is old enough to add anything to our knowledge of the mind, it has forgotten. The soul sheds every year, like snakes do, I believe. You can’t recall the emotions you felt last year: you remember only that an emotion was associated with some physical fact of experience.

But all you have of it now is a kind of ghost of happiness and a vague and meaningless regret. Experience: why should we be expected to learn wisdom from experience? Muscles only remember, and it takes repetition and repetition to teach a muscle anything....”

Arcturus, Orion swinging head downward by his knees, in the southern sky an electric lobster fading as the moon rose. Water lapped at the hull of the Nausikaa with little sounds.

“So I tiptoed across to the seat. It was hot in there, with the sun beating down on it: I could smell hot resin, even above the smell of the place itself. In a corner of the ceiling there was a dirt dobber’s nest — a hard lump of clay with holes in it, stuck to the ceiling, and big green flies made a steady droning sound.

I remember how hot it was in there, and that feeling places like that give you — a kind of letting down of the bars of pretense, you know; a kind of submerging of civilized strictures before the grand implacability of nature and the physical body. And I stood there, feeling this feeling and the heat, and hearing the drone of those big flies, holding my breath and listening for a sound from beyond the partition. But there wasn’t any sound from beyond it, so I put my head down through the seat.”

Mark Frost snored. The moon, the pallid belly of the moon, inundating the world with a tarnished magic not of living things, laying her silver fleshless hand on the water that whispered and lapped against the hull of the yacht.

The Semitic man clutched his dead cigar and he and Fairchild sat in the implacable laxing of muscles and softening tissue of their forty odd years, seeing two wide curious blue eyes into which an inverted surprise came clear as water, and long golden curls swinging downward above the ordure; and they sat in silence, remembering youth and love, and time and death,

ELEVEN O’CLOCK

Mark Frost had roused and with a ghostly epigram had taken himself off to bed. Later the Semitic man rose and departed, leaving him with a cigar; and Fairchild sat with his stockinged feet on the rail, puffing at the unfamiliar weed. He could see the whole deck in the pallid

moonlight, and presently he remarked some one sitting near the afterrail.

How long this person had been there Fairchild could not have told, but he was there now, alone and quite motionless, and there was something about his attitude that unleashed Fairchild's curiosity, and at last he rose from his chair.

It was David, the steward. He sat on a coiled rope and he held something in his hands, between his knees. When Fairchild stopped beside him David raised his head slowly into the moonlight and gazed at the older man, making no effort to conceal that which he held. Fairchild leaned nearer to see. It was a slipper, a single slipper, cracked and stained with dried mud and disreputable, yet seeming still to hold in its mute shape something of that hard and sexless graveness of hers.

After a while David looked away, gazing again out across the dark water and its path of shifting silver, holding the slipper between his hands; and without speaking Fairchild turned and went quietly away.

THE FOURTH DAY

SEVEN O'CLOCK

FAIRCHILD WAKED AND lay for a while luxuriously on his back. After a time he turned on his side to doze again, and when he turned he noticed the square of paper lying on the floor, as though it had been thrust under the door. He lay watching it for a while, then he came fully awake, and he rose and crossed the room and picked it up.

Dear Mr. Fairchild: I am leaveing the boat to day I have got a better job I have got 2 days comeing to me I will not claim it I am leaveing the boat be fore the trip is over tell Mrs. More I have got a better job ask her she will pay you \$5 dollars of it you loned me yours truly DAVID WEST.

He reread the note, brooding over it, then he folded it and put it in the pocket of his pajama jacket, and poured himself a drink. The Semitic man in his berth snored, profound, defenseless on his back.

Fairchild sat again in his berth, his drink untasted beside him, and he unfolded the note and read it through again, remembering youth, thinking of age and slackening flesh like an old thin sorrow everywhere in the world.

EIGHT O'CLOCK

"Now, don't you worry at all," they reassured Mrs. Maurier, "we can do just as we did yesterday: it will be more fun than ever, that way. Dorothy and I can open cans and warm things. We can get along just as well without a steward as with one. Can't we, Dorothy?"

"It will be like a picnic," Miss Jameson agreed. "Of course, the men will have to help, too," she added, looking at Pete with her pale humorless eyes.

Mrs. Maurier submitted, dogging them with her moaning fatuousness while Mrs. Wiseman and Miss Jameson and the niece opened cans and heated things, smearing dreadfully about the galley with grease and juices and blood from the niece's thumb; opening, at Mark Frost's instigation, a can labeled Beans, which turned out to be green string beans.

But they got coffee made at last, and breakfast was finally not very late. As they had said, it was like a picnic, though there were no ants, as the Semitic man pointed out just before he was ejected from the kitchen.

"Well open a can of them for you," his sister offered briskly. Besides, there was still plenty of grapefruit.

AT BREAKFAST

Fairchild — But I saw him after we got back to the yacht. I know I did.

Mark — No, he wasn't in the boat when we came back: I remember now. I never saw him after we changed places, just after Jenny and Ernest fell out.

Julius — That's so.... Was he in the boat with us at all?

Does anybody remember seeing him in the boat at all? Fairchild — Sure he was: don't you remember how Mark kept hitting him with his oar? I tell you I saw —

Mark — He was in the boat at first. But after Jenny and — Fairchild — Sure he was. Don't you remember seeing him after we came back, Eva?

Eva — I don't know. My back was toward all of you while we were rowing. And after Ernest threw Jenny out, I don't remember who was there and who wasn't.

Fairchild — Talliaferro was facing us. Didn't you see him, Talliaferro? And Jenny, Jenny ought to remember. Don't you remember seeing him, Jenny?

Mr. Talliaferro — I was watching the rope, you know.

Fairchild — How about you, Jenny? Don't you remember?

Eva — Now, don't you bother Jenny about it. How could she be expected to remember anything about it? How could anybody be expected to remember anything about such an idiotic — idiotic —

Fairchild — Well, I do. Don't you all remember him going below with us, after we got back?

Mrs. Maurier (wringing her hands) — Doesn't some one remember something about it? It's terrible. I don't know what to do: yous people don't seem to realize what a position it puts me in, with such a dreadful thing hanging over me. You people have nothing to lose, but I live here, I have a certain... And now a thing like this —

Fairchild — Ah, he ain't drowned. He'll turn up soon: you watch what I say.

The Niece — And if he is drowned, we'll find him all right. The water isn't very deep between here and the shore. (Her aunt gazed at her dreadfully.)

The Nephew — Besides, a dead body always floats after forty-eight hours. All we have to do is wait right here until tomorrow morning: chances are he'll be bumping alongside, ready to be hauled back on board. (Mrs. Maurier screamed. Her scream shuddered and died among her chins and she gazed about at her party in abject despair.)

Fairchild — Aw, he ain't drowned. I tell you I saw —

The Niece — Sure. Cheer up, Aunt Pat. We'll get him back, even if he is. It's not like losing him altogether, you know.

If you send his body back, maybe his folks won't even claim your boat or anything.

Eva — Shut up, you children.

Fairchild — But I tell you I saw —

NINE O'CLOCK

Forward, Jenny, the niece, her brother come temporarily out of his scientific shell, and Pete stood in a group; Pete in his straw hat and the nephew with his lean young body and the two girls in their little scanty dresses and awkward with a sort of terrible grace. So flagrantly young they were that it served as a barrier between them and the others, causing even Mr. Talliaferro to lurk nearby without the courage to join them.

"These young girls," Fairchild said. He watched the group, watched the niece and Jenny as they clung to the rail and swung aimlessly back and forth, pivoting on their heels, in a sheer wantonness of young muscles. "They scare me," he admitted. "Not as a possible or probable chastity, you know. Chastity ain't..

"A bodiless illusion multiplied by lack of opportunity," Mark Frost said.

"What?" he asked, looking at the poet. "Well, maybe so." He resumed his own tenuous thought. "Maybe we all have different ideas of sex,

like all races do.... Maybe us three sitting here are racially unrelated to each other, as regards sex. Like a Frenchman and an Anglo-Saxon and a Mongol, for instance.”

“Sex,” said the Semitic man, “to an Italian is something like a firecracker at a children’s party; to a Frenchman, a business the relaxation from which is making money; to an Englishman, it is a nuisance; to an American, a horserace. Now, which are you?”

Fairchild laughed. He watched the group forward a while. “Their strange sexless shapes, you know,” he went on. “We, you and I, grew up expecting something beneath a woman’s dress. Something satisfying in the way of breasts and hips and such. But now...

“Do you remember the pictures you used to get in packages of cigarettes, or that you saw in magazines in barber shops? Anna Held and Eva Tanguay with shapes like elegant parlor lamp chimneys? Where are they now? Now, on the street, what do you see? Creatures with the uncomplex awkwardness of calves or colts, with two little knobs for breasts and indicated buttocks that, except for their soft look, might well belong to a boy of fifteen. Not satisfying any more; just exciting and monotonous. And mostly monotonous.

“Where,” he continued, “are the soft bulging rabbitlike things women used to have inside their clothes? Gone, with the poor Indian and ten cent beer and cambric drawers. But still, they are kind of nice, these young girls: kind of like a thin monotonous flute music or something.”

“Shrill and stupid,” the Semitic man agreed. He, too, gazed at the group forward for a time. “Who was the fool who said that our clothing, our custom in dress, does not affect the shape of our bodies and our behavior?”

“Not stupid,” the other objected. “Women are never stupid. Their mental equipment is too sublimely sufficient to do what little directing their bodies require. And when your mentality is sufficient to your bodily needs, where there is such a perfect mating of capability and

necessity, there can't be any stupidity. When women have more intelligence than that, they become nuisances sooner or later. All they need is enough intelligence to move and eat and observe the cardinal precautions of existence—"

"And recognize the current mode in time to standardize themselves," Mark Frost put in.

"Well, yes. And I don't object to that, either," Fairchild said. "As a purely lay brother to the human race, I mean. After all they are merely articulated genital organs with a kind of aptitude for spending whatever money you have; so when they get themselves up to look exactly like all the other ones, you can give all your attention to their bodies."

"How about the exceptions?" Mark Frost asked. "The ones that don't paint or bob their hair?"

"Poor things," Fairchild answered, and the Semitic man said:

"Perhaps there is a heaven, after all."

"You believe they have souls, then?" Fairchild asked. "Certainly. If they are not born with them, it's a poor creature indeed who can't get one from some man by the time she's eleven years old."

"That's right," Fairchild agreed. He watched the group forward for a time. Then he rose. "I think I'll go over and hear what they're talking about."

Mrs. Wiseman came up and borrowed a cigarette of Mark Frost, and they watched Fairchild's burly retreating back. The Semitic man said: "There's a man of undoubted talent, despite his fumbling bewilderment in the presence of sophisticated emotions."

"Despite his lack of self-assurance, you mean," Mark Frost corrected.

“No, it isn’t that,” Mrs. Wiseman put in. “You mean the same thing that Julius does: that having been born an American of a provincial midwestern lower middle class family, he has inherited all the lower middle class’s awe of Education with a capital E, an awe which the very fact of his difficulty in getting to college and staying there, has increased.”

“Yes,” her brother agreed. “And the reaction which sheer accumulated years and human experience has brought about in him has swung him to the opposite extreme without destroying that ingrained awe or offering him anything to replace it with, at all.

His writing seems fumbling, not because life is unclear to him, but because of his innate humorless belief that, though it bewilder him at times, life at bottom is sound and admirable and fine; and because hovering over this American scene into which he has been thrust, the ghosts of the Emersons and Lowells and other exemplifiers of Education with a capital E who, ‘seated on chairs in handsomely carpeted parlors’ and surrounded by an atmosphere of half calf and security, dominated American letters in its most healthy American phase ‘without heat or vulgarity,’ simpler yet in a sort of ubiquitous watchfulness. A sort of puerile bravado in flouting while he fears,” he explained.

“But,” his sister said, “for a man like Dawson there is no better American tradition than theirs — if he but knew it. They may have sat among their objects, transcribing their Greek and Latin and holding correspondences across the Atlantic, but they still found time to put out of their New England ports with the Word of God in one hand and a belaying pin in the other and all sails drawing aloft; and whatever they fell foul of was American. And it was American. And is yet.”

“Yes,” her brother agreed again. “But he lacks what they had at command among their shelves of discrete books and their dearth of heat and vulgarity — a standard of literature that is international. No, not a standard, exactly: a belief, a conviction that his talent need not be

restricted to delineating things which his conscious mind assures him are America? reactions.”

“Freedom?” suggested Mark Frost hollowly.

“No. No one needs freedom. We cannot bear it. He need only let himself go, let himself forget all this fetich of culture and education which his upbringing and the ghosts of those whom circumstance permitted to reside longer at college than himself, and whom despite himself he regards with awe, assure him that he lacks. For by getting himself and his own bewilderment and inhibitions out of the way by describing, in a manner that even translation cannot injure (as Balzac did) American life as American life is, it will become eternal and timeless despite him.

“Life everywhere is the same, you know. Manners of living it may be different — are they not different between adjoining villages? family names, profits on a single field or orchard, work influences — but man’s old compulsions, duty and inclination: the axis and the circumference of his squirrel cage, they do not change.

Details don’t matter, details only entertain us. And nothing that merely entertains us can matter, because the things that entertain us are purely speculative: prospective pleasures which we probably will not achieve. The other things only surprise us. And he who has stood the surprise of birth can stand anything.”

TEN O’CLOCK

“Gabriel’s pants,” the nephew said, raising his head. “I’ve already told you once what I’m making, haven’t I?” He had repaired to his retreat in the lee of the wheelhouse, where he would be less liable to interruption. Or so he thought.

Jenny stood beside his chair and looked at him placidly. “I wasn’t going to ask you again,” she replied without rancor, “I just happened to be

walking by here.” Then she examined the visible deck space with a brief comprehensive glance. “This is a fine place for courting,” she remarked.

“Is, huh?” the nephew said. “What’s the matter with Pete?” His knife ceased and he raised his head again. Jenny answered something vaguely. She moved her head again and stood without exactly looking at him, placid and rife, giving him to think of himself surrounded enclosed by the sweet cloudy fire of her thighs, as young girls do. The nephew laid his pipe and his knife aside.

“Where’m I going to sit?” Jenny asked, so he moved over in his canvas chair, making room, and she came with slow unreluctance and squirmed into the sagging chair. “It’s a kind of tight fit,” she remarked.

.. Presently the nephew raised his head. “You don’t put much pep into your petting,” he remarked. So Jenny placidly put more pep into it.... After a time the nephew raised his head and gazed out over the water. “Gabriel’s pants,” he murmured in a tone of hushed detachment, stroking his hand slowly over the placid points of Jenny’s thighs, “Gabriel’s pants.” ... After a while he raised his head.

“Say,” he said abruptly, “where’s Pete?”

“Back yonder, somewheres,” Jenny answered. “I saw him just before you stopped me.”

The nephew craned his neck, looking aft along the deck. Then he uncraned it, and after a while he raised his head. “I guess that’s enough,” he said. He pushed at Jenny’s blonde abandon. “Get up, now. I got my work to do. Beat it, now.”

“Gimme time to,” Jenny said placidly, struggling out of the chair. It was a kind of tight fit, but she stood erect finally, smoothing at her clothes. The nephew resumed his tools, and so after a while Jenny went away.

ELEVEN O’CLOCK

It was a thin volume bound in dark blue boards and a narrow orange arabesque of esoteric design unbroken across front and back near the top, and the title, in orange, *Satyricon in Starlight*.

“Now, here,” said Fairchild, flattening a page under his hand, his heavy hornrimmed spectacles riding his blobby benign face jauntily, “is the Major’s syphilis poem. After all, poetry has accomplished something when it causes a man like the Major to mull over it for a while. Poets lack business judgment. Now, if I—”

“Perhaps that’s what makes one a poet,” the Semitic man suggested, “being able to sustain a fine obliviousness of the world and its compulsions.”

“You’re thinking of oyster fishermen,” Mrs. Wiseman said. “Being a successful poet is being just glittering and obscure and imminent enough in your public life to excuse whatever you might do privately.” “If I were a poet—” Fairchild attempted.

“That’s right,” the Semitic man said. “Nowadays the gentle art has attained that state of perfection where you don’t have to know anything about literature at all to be a poet; and the time is coming when you won’t even have to write to be one.

But that day hasn’t quite arrived yet: you still have to write something occasionally; not very often, of course, but still occasionally. And if it’s obscure enough every one is satisfied and you have vindicated yourself and are immediately forgotten and are again at perfect liberty to dine with whoever will invite you.”

“But listen,” repeated Fairchild, “if I were a poet, you know what I’d do? I’d—”

“You’d capture an unattached but ardent wealthy female.

Or, lacking that, some other and more fortunate poet would divide a weekend or so with you: there seems to be a noblesse oblige among them,” the other answered. “Gentleman poets, that is,” he added.

“No,” said Fairchild, indefatigable, “I’d intersperse my book with photographs and art studies on ineffable morons in bathing suits or clutching imitation lace window curtains across their middies. That’s what I’d do.”

“That would damn it as Art,” Mark Frost objected.

“You’re confusing Art with Studio Life, Mark,” Mrs. Wiseman told him. She forestalled him and accepted a cigarette. “I’m all out, myself. Sorry. Thanks.”

“Why not?” Mark Frost responded. “If studio life costs you enough, it becomes art. You have to have a good reason to give to your people back home in Ohio or Indiana or somewhere.”

“But everybody wasn’t born in the Ohio valley, thank God,” the Semitic man said. Fairchild stared at him, kind and puzzled, a trifle belligerent.

“I speak for those of us who read books instead of write them,” he explained. “It’s bad enough to grow into the conviction after you reach the age of discretion that you are to spend the rest of your life writing books, but to have your very infancy darkened by the possibility that you may have to write the Great American Novel..,”

“Oh,” Fairchild said. “Well, maybe you are like me, and prefer a live poet to the writings of any man.”

“Make it a dead poet, and I’ll agree.”

“Well..,” He settled his spectacles. “Listen to this”: Mark Frost groaned, rising, and departed. Fairchild read implacably:

“On rose and peach their droppings bled, Love a sacrifice has lain,
Beneath his hand his mouth is slain,
Beneath his hand his mouth is dead—’

“No: wait.” He skipped back up the page. Mrs. Wiseman listened restively, her brother with his customary quizzical phlegm.

“The Raven bleak and Philomel

Amid the bleeding trees were fixed,
His hoarse cry and hers were mixed
And through the dark their droppings fell
“Upon the red erupted rose,
Upon the broken branch of peach
Blurred with scented mouths, that each
To another sing, and close—”

He read the entire poem through. “What do you make of it?” he asked.

“Mostly words,” the Semitic man answered promptly, “a sort of cocktail of words. I imagine you get quite a jolt from it, if your taste is educated to cocktails.”

“Well, why not?” Mrs. Wiseman said with fierce protectiveness. “Only fools require ideas in verse.”

“Perhaps so,” her brother admitted. “But there’s no nourishment in electricity, as you poets nowadays seem to believe.”

“Well, what would you have them write about, then?” she demanded. “There’s only one possible subject to write anything about. What is there worth the effort and despair of writing about, except love and death?”

“That’s the feminine of it. You’d better let art alone and stick to artists, as is your nature.”

“But women have done some good things,” Fairchild objected. “I’ve read—”

“They bear geniuses. But do you think they care anything about the pictures and music their children produce? That they have any other emotion than a fierce tolerance of the vagaries of the child? Do you think Shakespeare’s mother was any prouder of him than, say, Tom o’ Bedlam’s?”

“Certainly she was,” Mrs. Wiseman said. “Shakespeare made money.”

“You made a bad choice for comparison,” Fairchild said. “All artists are kind of insane. Don’t you think so?” he asked Mrs. Wiseman.

“Yes,” she snapped. “Almost as insane as the ones that sit around and talk about them.”

“Well—” Fairchild stared again at the page under his hand. He said slowly: “It’s a kind of dark thing. It’s kind of like somebody brings you to a dark door. Will you enter that room, or not?”

“But the old fellows got you into the room first,” the Semitic man said. “Then they asked you if you wanted to go out or not.”

“I don’t know. There are rooms, dark rooms, that they didn’t know anything about at all. Freud and these other—”

“Discovered them just in time to supply our shelterless literati with free sleeping quarters. But you and Eva just agreed that subject, substance, doesn’t signify in verse, that the best poetry is just words.”

“Yes... infatuation with words,” Fairchild agreed. “That’s when you hammer out good poetry, great poetry. A kind of singing rhythm in the world that you get into without knowing it, like a swimmer gets into a current. Words.... I had it once.”

“Shut up, Dawson,” Mrs. Wiseman said. “Julius can afford to be a fool.” “Words,” repeated Fairchild. “But it’s gone out of me, now. That first infatuation, I mean; that sheer infatuation with and marveling over the beauty and power of words. That has gone out of me. Used up, I guess. So I can’t write poetry any more. It takes me too long to say things, now.”

“We all wrote poetry, when we were young,” the Semitic man said.

“Some of us even put it down on paper. But all of us wrote it.”

“Yes,” repeated Fairchild, turning slowly onward through the volume.

“Listen:

“... O spring O wanton O cruel baring to the curved and hungry hand of march your white unsubtle thighs..

And listen.” He turned onward. Mrs. Wiseman was gazing aft where Jenny and Mr. Talliaferro had come into view and now leaned together upon the rail. The Semitic man listened with weary courtesy.

“... above unsapped convolvulæ of hills april a bee sipping perplexed with pleasure..’

“It’s a kind of childlike faith in the efficacy of words, you see, a kind of belief that circumstance somehow will invest the veriest platitude with magic. And, darn it, it does happen at times, let it be historically or grammatically incorrect or physically impossible; let it even be trite: there comes a time when it will be invested with a something not of this life, this world, at all. It’s a kind of fire, you know... He fumbled himself among words, staring at them, at the Semitic man’s sad quizzical eyes and Mrs. Wiseman’s averted face.

“Somebody, some drug clerk or something, has shredded the tender — and do you know what I believe? I believe that he’s always writing it for some woman, that he fondly believes he’s stealing a march on some brute bigger or richer or handsomer than he is; I believe that every word a writing man writes is put down with the ultimate intention of impressing some woman that probably don’t care anything at all for literature, as is the nature of women. Well, maybe she ain’t always a flesh and blood creature. She may be only the symbol of a desire. But she is feminine. Fame is only a by-product..., Do you remember, the old boys never even bothered to sign their things.... But, I don’t know. I suppose nobody ever knows a man’s reasons for what he does: you can only generalize from results.”

“He very seldom knows his reasons, himself,” the other said. “And by the time he has recovered from his astonishment at the unforeseen result he got, he has forgotten what reason he once believed he had.... But how can you generalize from a poem?”

What result does a poem have? You say that substance doesn’t matter, has no proper place in a poem. You have,” the Semitic man continued

with curious speculation, “the strangest habit of contradicting yourself, of fumbling around and then turning tail and beating your listener to the refutation....

But God knows, there is plenty of room for speculation in modern verse. Fumbling, too, though the poets themselves do most of this. Don’t you agree, Eva?”

His sister answered “What?” turning upon him her dark, preoccupied gaze. He repeated the question. Fairchild interrupted in full career: “The trouble with modern verse is, that to comprehend it you must have recently passed through an emotional experience identical with that through which the poet himself has recently passed. The poetry of modern poets is like a pair of shoes that only those whose feet are shaped like the cobbler’s feet, can wear; while the old boys turned out shoes that anybody who can walk at all can wear—”

“Like overshoes,” the other suggested.

“Like overshoes,” Fairchild agreed. “But, then, I ain’t disparaging. Perhaps the few that the shoes fit can go a lot further than a whole herd of people shod alike could go.”

“Interesting, anyway,” the Semitic man said, “to reduce the spiritual progress of the race to terms of an emotional migration; esthetic Israelites crossing unwetted a pink sea of dullness and security. What about it, Eva?”

Mrs. Wiseman, thinking of Jenny’s soft body, came out of her dream. “I think you are both not only silly, but dull.” She rose. “I want to burn another cigarette, Dawson.”

He gave her one, and a match, and she left them. Fairchild turned a few pages. “It’s kind of difficult for me to reconcile her with this book,” he said slowly. “Does it strike you that way?”

“Not so much that she wrote this,” the other answered, “but that she wrote anything at all. That anybody should. But there’s no puzzle about the book itself. Not to me, that is. But you, straying trustfully about this

park of dark and rootless trees which Dr. Ellis and your Germans have recently thrown open to the public... You'll always be a babe in that wood, you know. Bewildered, and slightly annoyed; restive, like Ashur-bani-pal's stallion when his master mounted Mm."

"Emotional bisexuality," Fairchild said.

"Yes. But you are trying to reconcile the book and the author. A book is the writer's secret life, the dark twin of a man: you can't reconcile them. And with you, when the inevitable clash comes, the author's actual self is the one that goes down, for you are of those for whom fact and fallacy gain verisimilitude by being in cold print."

"Perhaps so," Fairchild said, with detachment, brooding again on a page. "Listen:

"Lips that of thy weary all seem weariest,
Seem wearier for the curled and pallid sly
Still riddle of thy secret face, and thy
Sick despair of its own ill obsessed;
Lay not to heart thy boy's hand, to protest
That smiling leaves thy tired mouth reconciled,
For swearing so keeps thee but ill beguiled
With secret joy of thine own woman's breast.

"Weary thy mouth with smiling; canst thou bride
Thyself with thee and thine own kissing slake?
Thy virgin's waking doth itself deride
With sleep's sharp absence, coming so awake,
And near thy mouth thy twinned heart's grief doth hide
For there's no breast between: it cannot break.'

"Hermaphroditus,'" he read. "That's what it's about. It's a kind of dark perversion. Like a fire that don't need any fuel, that lives on its own heat. I mean, all modern verse is a kind of perversion. Like the day for healthy poetry is over and done with, that modern people were not born to write poetry any more. Other things, I grant. But not poetry. Kind of like men nowadays are not masculine and lusty enough to

tamper with something that borders so close to the unnatural. A kind of sterile race: women too masculine to conceive, men too feminine to beget...

He closed the book and removed his spectacles slowly. "You and me sitting here, right now, this is one of the most insidious things poetry has to combat. General education has made it too easy for everybody to have an opinion on it. On everything else, too. The only people who should be allowed an opinion on poetry should be poets. But as it is... But then, all artists have to suffer it, though: oblivion and scorn and indignation and, what is worse, the adulation of fools." "And," added the Semitic man, "what is still worse: talk."

TWELVE O'CLOCK

"You must get rather tired of bothering about it," Fairchild suggested as they descended toward lunch. (There was an offshore breeze and the saloon was screened. And besides, it was near the galley.) "Why don't you leave it in your stateroom? Major Ayers is pretty trustworthy, I guess."

"It'll be all right," Pete replied. "I've got used to it. I'd miss it, see?"

"Yes," the other agreed. "New one, eh?"

"I've had it a while." Pete removed it and Fairchild remarked its wanton gay band and the heavy plaiting of the straw.

"I like a panama, myself," he murmured. "A soft hat.... This must have cost five or six dollars, didn't it?"

"Yeh," Pete agreed, "but I guess I can look out for it."

"It's a nice hat," the Semitic man said. "Not everybody can wear a stiff straw hat. But it rather suits the shape of Pete's face, don't you think?"

"Yes, that's so," Fairchild agreed. "Pete has a kind of humorless reckless face that a stiff hat just suits. A man with a humorous face should never wear a stiff straw hat. But then, only a humorless man would dare buy one,"

Pete preceded them into the saloon. The man's intent was kindly, anyway. Funny old bird. Easy. Easy. Somebody's gutting. Anybody's. Fairchild spoke to him again with a kind of tactful persistence: "Look here, here's a good place to leave it while you eat.

You hadn't seen this place, I reckon. Slip it under here, see? It'll be safe as a church under here until you want it again. Look, Julius, this place was made for a stiff straw hat, wasn't it?" This place was a collapsible serving table of two shelves that let shallowly into the bulkhead: it operated by a spring and anything placed on the lower shelf would be inviolate until some one came along and lowered the shelves again.

"It don't bother me any," Pete said.

"All right," the other answered. "But you might as well leave it here: it's such a grand place to leave a hat. Lots better than the places in theaters. I kind of wish I had a hat to leave there, don't you, Julius?"

"I can hold it all right," Pete said again.

"Sure," agreed Fairchild readily, "but just try it a moment." Pete did so, and the other two watched with interest. "It just fits, don't it? Why not leave it there, just for a trial?"

"I guess not. I guess I'll hold onto it," Pete decided. He took his hat again and when he had taken his seat he slid it into its usual place between the chairback and himself.

Mrs. Maurier was chanting: "Sit down, people," in an apologetic, hopeless tone. "You must excuse things. I had hoped to have lunch on deck, but with the wind blowing from the shore..."

"They've found where we are and that we are good to eat, so it doesn't make any difference where the wind blows from," Mrs. Wiseman said, businesslike with her tray.

"And with the steward gone, and things so unsettled," the hostess resumed in antistrophe, roving her unhappy gaze. "And Mr. Gordon—" "Oh, he's all right," Fairchild said heavily helpful, taking his seat. "He'll show up all right."

“Don’t be a fool, Aunt Pat,” the niece added. “What would he want to get drowned for?”

“I’m so unlucky,” Mrs. Maurier moaned, “things — things happen to me, you see,” she explained, haunted with that vision of a pale implacability of water, and sodden pants, and a red beard straying amid the slanting green regions of the sea in a dreadful simulation of life.

“Aw, shucks,” the niece protested, “ugly like he is, and so full of himself.... He’s got too many good reasons for getting drowned. It’s the ones that don’t have any excuse for it that get drowned and run down by taxis and things.”

“But you never can tell what people will do,” Mrs. Maurier rejoined, becoming profound through the sheer disintegration of comfortable things. “People will do anything.”

“Well, if he’s drowned, I guess he wanted to be,” the niece said bloodlessly. “He certainly can’t expect us to fool around here waiting for him, anyway. I never heard of anybody fading out without leaving a note of some kind. Did you, Jenny?” Jenny sat in a soft anticipatory dread. “Did he get drowned?” she asked. “One day at Mandeville, I saw...” Into Jenny’s heavenly eyes there welled momentarily a selfless emotion, temporarily pure and dean. Mrs. Wiseman looked at her, compelling her with her eyes. She said:

“Oh, forget about Gordon for a while. If he’s drowned (which I don’t believe) he’s drowned; if he isn’t, he’ll show up again, just as Dawson says.”

“That’s what I say,” the niece supported her quickly. “Only he’d better show up soon, if he wants to go back with us. We’ve got to get back home.”

“You have?” her aunt said with heavy astonished irony. “How are you going, pray?”

“Perhaps her brother will make us a boat with his saw,” Mark Frost suggested.

"That's an idea," Fairchild agreed. "Say, Josh, haven't you got a tool of some sort that'll get us off again?" The nephew regarded Fairchild solemnly.

"Whittle it off," he said. "Lend you my knife if you bring it back right away." He resumed his meal.

"Well, we've got to get back," his sister repeated. "You folks can stay around here if you want to, but me and Josh have got to get back to New Orleans."

"Going by Mandeville?" Mark Frost asked.

"But the tug should be here at any time," Mrs. Maurier insisted, reverting again to her hopeless amaze. The niece gave Mark Frost a grave speculative stare.

"You're smart, aren't you?"

"I've got to be," Mark Frost answered equably, "or I'd—"

"— have to work, huh? It takes a smart man to sponge off of Aunt Pat, don't it?"

"Patricia!" her aunt exclaimed.

"Well, we have got to get back. We've got to get ready to go up to New Haven next month."

Her brother came again out of his dream. "We have?" he repeated heavily.

"I'm going, too," she answered quickly. "Hank said I could."

"Look here," her brother said, "are you going to follow me around all your life?"

"I'm going to Yale," she repeated stubbornly. "Hank said I could go."

"Hank?" Fairchild repeated, watching the niece with interest.

"It's what she calls her father," her aunt explained. "Patricia—"

"Well, you can't go," her brother answered violently. "Dam'f I'm going to have you tagging around behind me forever. I can't move, for you. You ought to be a bill collector."

"I don't care: I'm going," she repeated stubbornly. Her aunt said vainly:

“Theodore!”

“Well, I can’t do anything, for her,” he complained bitterly. “I can’t move, for her. And now she’s talking about going — She worried Hank until he had to say she could go. God knows, I’d ‘a’ said that too: I wouldn’t want her around me all the time.”

“Shut your goddam mouth,” his sister told him. Mrs. Manner chanted “Patricia, Patricia.”

“I’m going, I’m going, I’m going!”

“What’ll you do up there?” Fairchild asked. The niece whirled, viciously belligerent. Then she said:

“What’d you say?”

“I mean, what’ll you do to pass the time while he’s at classes and things? Are you going to take some work, too?”

“Oh, I’ll just go around with balloon pants. To night clubs and things. I won’t bother him: I won’t hardly see him, he’s such a damn crum.”

“Like hell you will,” her brother interrupted, “you’re not going, I tell you.”

“Yes, I am. Hank said I could go. He said I could. I—”

“Well, you won’t ever see me: I’m not going to have you tagging around after me up there.”

“Are you the only one in the world that’s going up there next year? Are you the only one that’ll be there? I’m not going up there to waste my time hanging around the entrance to Dwight or Osborne hall just to see you. You won’t catch me sitting on the rail of the Green with freshmen.

I’ll be going to places that maybe you’ll get into in three years, if you don’t bust out or something. Don’t you worry about me. Who was it,” she rushed on, “got invited up for Prom Week last year, only Hank wouldn’t let me go? Who was it saw the game last fall, while you were perched up on the top row with a bunch of newspaper reporters, in the rain?”

“You didn’t go up for Prom Week.”

“Because Hank wouldn’t let me. But I’ll be there next year, and you can haul out the family sock on it.”

“Oh, shut up for a while,” her brother said wearily. “Maybe some of these ladies want to talk some.”

TWO O’CLOCK

And there was the tug, squatting at her cables, breaking the southern horizon with an effect of abrupt magic, like a stereopticon slide flashed on the screen while you had turned your head for a moment.

“Look at that boat,” said Mark Frost, broaching. Mrs. Maurier directly behind him, shrieked:

“It’s the tug!” She turned and screamed down the companionway: “It’s the tug: the tug has come!” The others all chanted “The tug! The tug!”

Major Ayers exclaimed dramatically and opportunely:

“Ha, gone away!”

“It has come at last,” Mrs. Maurier shrieked. “It came while we were at lunch. Has any one—” She roved her eyes about. “The captain — Has he been notified? Mr. Talliaferro — ?”

“Surely,” Mr. Talliaferro agreed with polite alacrity, mounting the stairs and disintegrating his members with expedition, “I’ll summon the captain.”

So he rushed forward and the others came on deck and stared at the tug, and a gentle breeze blew offshore and they slapped intermittently at their exposed surfaces. Mr. Talliaferro shouted: “Captain! oh, Captain!” about the deck: he screamed it into the empty wheelhouse and returned. “He must be asleep,” he told them.

“We are off at last,” Mrs. Maurier intoned, “we can get off at last. The tug has come: I sent for it days and days ago. But we can get off, now. But the captain.... Where is the captain? He shouldn’t be asleep, at this time. Of all times for the captain to be asleep — Mr. Talliaferro—”

“But Gordon,” Mark Frost said, “how about—”
Miss Jameson clutched his arm. “Let’s get off, first,” she said.

“I called him,” Mr. Talliaferro reminded them. “He must be asleep in his room.”

“He must be asleep,” Mrs. Maurier repeated. “Will some gentleman—”
Mr. Talliaferro took his cue. “I’ll go,” he said.

“If you will be so kind,” Mrs. Maurier screamed after him. She stared again at the tug. “He should have been here, so we could be all ready to start,” she said fretfully. She waved her handkerchief at the tug: it ignored her.

“We might be getting everything ready, though,” Fairchild suggested.

“We ought to have everything ready when they pull us off.”

“That’s so,” Mark Frost agreed. “We’d better run down and pack, hadn’t we?”

“Ah, we ain’t going back home yet. We’ve just started the cruise. Are we, folks?”

They all looked at the hostess. She roved her stricken eyes, but she said at last, bravely: “Why, no. No, of course not, if you don’t want to.... But the captain: we ought to be ready,” she repeated.

“Well, let’s get ready,” Mrs. Wiseman said.

“Nobody knows anything about boats except Fairchild,” Mark Frost said. Mr. Talliaferro returned, barren.

“Me?” Fairchild repeated. “Talliaferro’s been across the whole ocean. And there’s Major Ayers. All Britishers cut their teeth on anchor chains and marlinspikes.”

“

“And draw their toys with lubbers’ lines,” Mrs. Wiseman chanted. “It’s almost a poem. Finish it, some one.”

Mr. Talliaferro made a sound of alarm. “No: really, I—” Mrs. Maurier turned to Fairchild.

“Will you assume charge until the captain appears, Mr, Fairchild?”

“Mr. Fairchild,” Mr. Talliaferro parroted. “Mr. Fairchild is temporary captain, people. The captain doesn’t seem to be on board,” he whispered to Mrs. Maurier.

Fairchild glanced about with a sort of ludicrous helplessness. “What am I supposed to do?” he asked. “Jump overboard with a shovel and shovel the sand away?”

“A man who has reiterated his superiority as much as you have for the last week should never be at a loss for what to do,” Mrs. Wiseman told him. “We ladies have already thought of that. You are the one to think of something else.”

“Well, I’ve already thought of not jumping overboard and shoveling her off,” Fairchild answered, “but that don’t seem to help much, does it?”

“You ought to coil ropes or something like that,” Miss Jameson suggested. “That’s what they were always doing on all the ships I ever read about.”

“All right,” Fairchild agreed equably. “We’ll coil ropes, then. Where are the ropes?”

“That’s your trouble,” Mrs. Wiseman said. “You’re captain now.”

“Well, we’ll find some ropes and coil ’em.” He addressed Mrs. Maurier.

“We have your permission to coil ropes?”

“No: really,” said Mrs. Maurier in her helpless astonished voice. “Isn’t there something we can do? Can’t we signal to them with a sheet? They may not know that this is the right boat.”

“Oh, they know, I guess. Anyway, we’ll coil ropes and be ready for them. Come on here, you men.” He named over his depleted watch and herded it forward. He herded it down to his cabin and nourished it with stimulants.

“We may coil the right rope, at that,” the Semitic man suggested.

“Major Ayers ought to know something about boats: it should be in his British blood.”

Major Ayers didn't think so. "American boats have amphibious traits that are lacking in ours," he explained. "Half the voyage on land, you know," he explained tediously.

"Sure," Fairchild agreed. He brought his watch above again and forward, where instinct told him the ropes should be. "I wonder where the captain is. Surely he ain't drowned, do you reckon?"

"I guess not," the Semitic man answered. "He gets paid for this.... There comes a boat."

The boat came from the tug, and soon it came alongside and the captain came over the rail. A stranger followed him and they went below without haste, leaving Mrs. Maurier's words like vain unmated birds in the air. "Let's get ready, then," Fairchild ordered his crew. "Let's tie a rope to something."

So they tied a rope to something, knotting it intricately, then Major Ayers discovered that they had tied it to a winch handle which fitted loosely into a socket and which would probably come out quite easily, once a strain came onto the rope. So they untied it and found something attached firmly to the deck, and they tied the rope to this, and after a while the captain and the stranger, clutching a short evil pipe, came back on deck and stood and watched them. "We've got the right rope," Fairchild told his watch in an undertone, and they knotted the rope intricately and straightened up.

"How's that, Cap?" Fairchild asked.

"All right," the captain answered. "Can we trouble you for a match?" Fairchild gave them a match. The stranger fired his pipe and they got into the tender and departed. They hadn't got far when the one called Walter came out and called them, and they put about and returned for him. Then they went back to the tug. Fairchild's watch had ceased work, and it gazed after the tender. After a time Fairchild said: "He said that was the right rope. So I guess we can quit."

So they did, and went aft to where the ladies were, and presently the tender came bobbing back across the water. It came alongside again and a negro, sweating gently and regularly, held it steady while the one

called Walter and yet another stranger got aboard, bringing a rope that trailed away into the water behind them.

Every one watched with interest while Walter and his companion made the line fast in the bows, after having removed Fairchild's rope. Then Walter and his friend went below.

"Say," Fairchild said suddenly, "do you reckon they've found our whisky?"

"I guess not," the Semitic man assured him. "I hope not," he amended; and they all returned in a body to stare down into the tender where the negro sat without selfconsciousness, eating of a large grayish object. While they watched the negro Walter and his companion returned, and the stranger bawled at the tug through his hands.

A reply at last, and the other end of the line which they had recently brought aboard the yacht and made fast, slid down from the deck of the tug and plopped heavily into the water; and Walter and his companion drew it aboard the yacht and coiled it down, wet and dripping. Then they elbowed themselves to the rail, cast the rope into the tender and got in themselves, and the negro stowed his strange edible object temporarily away and rowed back to the tug.

"You guessed wrong again," Mark Frost said with sepulchral irony. He bent and scratched his ankles. "Try another rope."

"You wait," Fairchild retorted, "wait ten minutes, then talk. Well be under full steam in ten minutes.... Where did that boat come from?"

This boat was a skiff, come when and from where they knew not; and beneath the drowsy afternoon there came faintly from somewhere up the lake the fretful sound of a motor boat engine. The skiff drew alongside, manned by a malaria-ridden man wearing a woman's dilapidated hat of black straw that lent him a vaguely bereaved air. "Whar's the drowned feller?" he asked, grasping the rail.

“We don’t know,” Fairchild answered. “We missed him somewhere between here and the shore.” He extended his arm. The newcomer followed his gesture sadly.

“Any reward?”

“Reward?” repeated Fairchild.

“Reward?” Mrs. Maurier chimed in, breathlessly. “Yes, there is a reward: I offer a reward.”

“How much?”

“You find him first,” the Semitic man put in. “There’ll be a reward, all right.”

The man clung yet to the rail. “Have you drug fer him yet?”

“No, we’ve just started hunting,” Fairchild answered. “You go on and look around, and we’ll get our boat and come out and help you. There’ll be a reward.”

The man pushed his skiff clear and engaged his oars.

The sound of the motor boat grew clearer steadily; soon it came into view, with two men in it, and changed its course and bore down on the skiff. The fussy little engine ceased its racket and it slid up to the skiff, pushing a dying ripple under its stem. The two boats clung together for a time, then they parted, and at a short distance from each other they moved slowly onward while their occupants prodded at the lake bottom with their oars.

“Look at them,” the Semitic man said, “just like buzzards. Probably be a dozen boats out there in the next hour. How do you suppose they learned about it?”

“Lord knows,” Fairchild answered. “Let’s get our crew and go out and help look. We better get the tug’s men.” They shouted in turn for a while, and presently one came to the rail of the tug and gazed apathetically at them, and went away; and after a while the small boat came away from the tug and crossed to them. A consultation, assisted by all hands, while the man from the tug moved unhurriedly about the

business of making fast another and dirtier rope to the Nausikaa's bows.

Then he and Walter went back to the tug, paying out the line behind them while Mrs. Maurier's insistence wasted itself upon the somnolent afternoon. The guests looked at one another helplessly. Then Fairchild said with determination:

"Come on, we'll go in our boat." He chose his men, and they gathered all the available oars and prepared to embark.

"Here comes the tug's boat again," Mark Frost said. "They forgot and tied one end of that rope to something." Mrs. Wiseman said viciously. The boat came alongside without haste and it and the yacht's tender lay rubbing noses, and Walter's companion asked, without interest: "Wher's the feller y'all drowneded?"

"I'll go along in their boat and show 'em," Fairchild decided. Mark Frost got back aboard the yacht with alacrity. Fairchild stopped him. "You folks come on behind us in this boat. The more to hunt, the better." Mark Frost groaned and acquiesced. The others took their places, and under Fairchild's direction the two tenders retraced the course of yesterday. The first two boats were some distance ahead, moving slowly, and the tenders separated also and the searchers poled along, prodding with their oars at the lake floor. And such is the influence of action on the mind that soon even Fairchild's burly optimism became hushed and uncertain before the imminence of the unknown, and he too was accepting the possible for the probable, unaware.

The sun was hazed, as though wearied of its own implacable heat, and the water — that water which might hold, soon to be revealed, the mute evidence of ultimate flouting of all man's strife — lapped and plopped at the mechanical fragilities that supported them: a small sound, monotonous and without rancor — it could well wait! They poled slowly on.

Soon the four boats, fanwise, had traversed the course, and they turned and quartered back and forth again, slowly and in silence.

Afternoon drew on, drowsing and somnolent. Yacht and tug lay motionless in a blinding shimmer of water and sun....

Again the course of yesterday was covered foot by foot, patiently and silently and in vain; and the four boats as without volition drew nearer each other, drifting closer together as sheep huddle, while water lapped and plopped beneath their hulls, sinister and untroubled by waiting... soon the motor boat drifted up and scraped lightly along the hull in which Fairchild sat, and he raised his head, blinking against the glare. After a while he said:

“Are you a ghost, or am I?”

“I was about to ask you that,” Gordon, sitting in the motor boat, replied. They sat and stared at each other. The other boats came up, and presently the one called Walter spoke.

“Is this all you wanted out here,” he asked in a tone of polite disgust, breaking the spell, “or do you want to row around some more?” Fairchild went immoderately into hysterical laughter.

FOUR O’CLOCK

The malarial man had attached his skiff to the fat man’s motor boat and they had puttered away in a morose dejection, rewardless; the tug had whistled a final derisive blast, showed them her squat, unpretty stern, where the negro leaned eating again of his grayish object, and as dirty a pair of heels as it would ever be their luck to see, and sailed away.

The Nausikaa was free once more and she sped quickly onward, gaining offing, and the final sharp concussion of flesh and flesh died away beneath the afternoon.

Mrs. Maurier had gazed at him, raised her hands in a fluttering cringing gesture, and cut him dead.

“But I saw you on the boat right after we came back,” Fairchild repeated with a sort of stubborn wonder. He opened a fresh bottle.

“You couldn’t have,” Gordon answered shortly. “I got out of the boat in the middle of Talliaferro’s excitement.” He waved away the proffered glass. The Semitic man said triumphantly, “I told you so,” and Fairchild essayed again, stubbornly:

“But I saw—”

“If you say that again,” the Semitic man told him, “I’ll kill you.” He addressed Gordon. “And you thought Dawson was drowned?”

“Yes. The man who brought me back — I stumbled on his house this morning — he had already heard of it, some way. It must have spread all up and down the lake. He didn’t remember the name, exactly, and when I named over the party and said Dawson Fairchild, he agreed. Dawson and Gordon — you see? And so I thought—”

Fairchild began to laugh again. He laughed steadily, trying to say something. “And so — and so he comes back and sp-spends—” Again that hysterical note came into his laughter and his hands trembled, clinking the bottle against the glass and sloshing a spoonful of the liquor onto the floor “ — and spends... He comes back, you know, and spends half a day looking — looking for his own bububod—”

The Semitic man rose and took the bottle and glass from him and half led, half thrust him into his bunk. “You sit down and drink this.” Fairchild drank the whisky obediently. The Semitic man turned to Gordon again. “What made you come back? Not just because you heard Dawson was drowned, was it?”

Gordon stood against the wall, mudstained and silent. He raised his head and stared at them, and through them, with his harsh, uncomfortable stare. Fairchild touched the Semitic man’s knee warningly.

“That’s neither here nor there,” he said. “The question is, Shall we or shall we not get drunk? I kind of think we’ve got to, myself.”

“Yes,” the other agreed. “It looks like it’s up to us. Gordon ought to celebrate his resurrection, anyway.”

“No,” Gordon answered, “I don’t want any.” The Semitic man protested, but again Fairchild gripped him silent, and when Gordon turned toward the door, he rose and followed him into the passage.

“She came back too, you know,” he said.

Gordon looked down at the shorter man with his lean bearded face, his lonely hawk’s face arrogant with shyness and pride. “I know it,” he answered (your name is like a little golden bell hung in my heart). “The man who brought me back was the same one who brought them back yesterday.”

“He was?” said Fairchild. “He’s doing a landoffice business with deserters, ain’t he?”

“Yes,” Gordon answered. And he went on down the passage with a singing lightness in his heart, a bright silver joy like wings.

The deck was deserted, as on that other afternoon. But he waited patiently in the hushed happiness of his dream and his arrogant bitter heart was young as any yet, as forgetful of yesterday and to-morrow; and soon, as though in answer to it, she came barelegged and molded by the wind of motion, and her grave surprise ebbed and she thrust him a hard tanned hand.

“So you ran away,” she said.

“And so did you,” he answered after an interval filled with a thing all silver and clean and fine.

“That’s right. We’re sure the herrings on this boat, aren’t we?”

“Herrings?”

“Guts, you know,” she explained. She looked at him gravely from beneath the coarse dark bang of her hair. “But you came back,” she accused.

“And so did you,” he reminded her from amid his soundless silver wings.

FIVE O'CLOCK

"But we're moving again, at last," Mrs. Maurier repeated at intervals, with a detached air, listening to a sound somehow vaguely convivial that welled at intervals up the companionway. Presently Mrs. Wiseman remarked the hostess' preoccupied air and she too ceased, hearkening.

"Not again?" she said with foreboding.

"I'm afraid so," the other answered unhappily.

Mr. Talliaferro hearkened also. "Perhaps I'd better..." Mrs. Maurier fixed him with her eye, and Mrs. Wiseman said:

"Poor fellows. They have had to stand a great deal in the last few days."

"Boys will be boys," Mr. Talliaferro added with docile regret, listening with yearning to that vaguely convivial sound. Mrs. Maurier listened to it, coldly detached and speculative. She said:

"But we are moving again, anyway."

SIX O'CLOCK

The sun was setting across the scudding water: the water was shot goldenly with it, as was the gleaming mahogany-and-brass elegance of the yacht, and the silver wings in his heart were touched with pink and gold while he stood and looked downward upon the coarse crown of her head and at her body's grave and sexless replica of his own attitude against the rail — an unconscious aping both comical and heartshaking.

"Do you know," he asked, "what Cyrano said once?" Once there was a king who possessed all things. All things were his: power, and glory, and wealth, and splendor and ease. And so he sat at dusk in Ms marble court filled with the sound of water and of birds and surrounded by the fixed gesturing of palms, looking out across the hushed fading domes of Ms city and beyond, to the dreaming lilac barriers of his world.

“No: what?” she asked. But he only looked down upon her with his cavernous uncomfortable eyes. “What did he say?” she repeated. And then: “Was he in love with her?”

“I think so.... Yes, he was in love with her. She couldn’t leave him, either. Couldn’t go away from him at all.”

“She couldna? What’d he done to her? Locked her up?”

“Maybe she didn’t want to,” he suggested.

“Huh.” And then: “She was an awful goof, then. Was he fool enough to believe she didn’t want to?”

“He didn’t take any chances. He had her locked up. In a book.”

“In a book?” she repeated. Then she comprehended. “Oh.... That’s what you’ve done, isn’t it? With that marble girl without any arms and legs you made? Hadn’t you rather have a live one? Say, you haven’t got any sweetheart or anything, have you?”

“No,” he answered. “How did you know?”

“You look so bad. Shabby. But that’s the reason: no woman is going to waste time on a man that’s satisfied with a piece of wood or something. You ought to get out of yourself. You’ll either bust all of a sudden some day, or just dry up.... How old are you?”

“Thirty-six,” he told her. She said:

“Gabriel’s pants. Thirty-six years old, and living in a hole with a piece of rock, like a dog with a dry bone. Gabriel’s pants. Why don’t you get rid of it?” But he only stared down at her. “Give it to me, won’t you?”

“No.”

“I’ll buy it from you, then.”

“No.”

“Give you—” she looked at him with sober detachment. “Give you seventeen dollars for it. Cash.”

“No.”

She looked at him with a sort of patient exasperation. “Well, what are you going to do with it? Have you got any reason for keeping it? You didn’t steal it, did you? Don’t tell me you haven’t got any use for seventeen dollars, living like you do. I bet you haven’t got five dollars to your name, right now.

Bet you came on this party to save food. I’ll give you twenty dollars, seventeen in cash.” He continued to gaze at her as though he had not heard. — and the king spoke to a slave crouching at Ms feet — Halim — Lord? — I possess all things, do I not? — Thou art the Son of Morning, Lord — Then listen, Halim: I have a desire— “Twenty-five,” she said, shaking his arm.

“No.”

“No, no, no, no!” she hammered both brown fists on the rail. “You make me so damn mad! Can’t you say anything except No? You — you—” she glared at him with her angry tanned face and her grave opaque eyes, and used that phrase Jenny had traded her.

He took her by the elbows, and she became taut, still watching his face: he could feel the small hard muscles in her arms. “What are you going to do?” she asked. He raised her from the floor, and she began to struggle. But he carried her implacably across the deck and sat on a deckchair and turned her face downward across his knees.

She clawed and kicked in a silent fury, but he held her, and she ceased to struggle, and set her teeth into his leg through the gritty cloth of his trousers, and clung like a raging puppy while he drew her skirt tight across her thighs and spanked her, good.

“I meant it!” she cried, raging and tearless, when he had dragged her teeth loose and set her upright on his lap. There was a small wet oval on his trouserleg. “I meant it!” she repeated, taut and raging.

“I know you meant it. That’s why I spanked you. Not because you said it: what you said doesn’t mean anything because you’ve got the

genders backward. I spanked you because you meant it, whether you knew what to say or not.”

Suddenly she became lax, and wept, and he held her against his breast. But she ceased crying as abruptly, and lay quiet while he moved his hand over her face, slowly and firmly, but lightly.

It is like a thing heard, not as a music of brass and plucked strings is heard and a pallid voluptuousness of dancing girls among the strings; nay, Halim, it is no pale virgin from Tal with painted fingernails and honey and myrrh cunningly beneath her tongue.

Nor is it a scent as of myrrh and roses to soften and make to flow like water the pith in a man's bones, nor yet — Stay, Halim: Once I was... once I was? Is not this a true thing? It is dawn, in the high cold hills, dawn is like a wind in the clean hills, and on the wind comes the thin piping of shepherds, and the smell of dawn and of almond trees on the wind. Is not that a true thing? — Ay, Lord. I told thee that. I was there.

“Are you a petter, as well as a he-man?” she asked, becoming taut again and rolling upward her exposed eye. His hand moved slowly along her cheekbone and jaw, pausing, tracing a muscle, moving on.

Then hark thee, Halim: I desire a thing that, had I not been at all, becoming aware of it I would awake; that, dead, remembering it I would cling to this world though it be as a beggar in a tattered robe; yea, rather that would I than a king among kings amid the soft and scented sounds of paradise.

Find me this, O Halim. “Say,” she said curiously, no longer alarmed, “what are you doing that for?”

“Learning your face.”

“Learning my face? Are you going to make me in marble?” she asked quickly, raising herself. “Can you do a marble of my head?”

“Yes.”

“Can I have it?” she thrust herself away, watching his face. “Make two of them, then,” she suggested. And then: “If you won’t do that, give me the other one, the one you’ve got, and I’ll pose for this one without charging you anything. How about that?”

“Maybe.”

“I’d rather do that than to have this one. Have you learned my face good?” She moved again, quickly, returning to her former position. She turned her face up. “Learn it good.” Now, this Halim was an old man, so old that he had forgotten muck.

He had held this king on Ms first pony, walking patiently beside Mm through the streets and paths; he had stood between the young prince and all those forms of sudden and complete annihilation which the young prince had engendered after the ingenuous fashion of boys; he had got himself between the young prince and the inevitable parental admonishment which these entailed.

And he sat with his gray hands on his thin knees and Ms gray head bent above his hands while dusk came across the simple immaculate domes of the city and into the court, stilling the sound of birds so that the lilac silence of the court was teased only by the splashing of water, and on among the grave restlessness of the palms.

After a while Halim spoke. — Ah, Lord, in the Georgian Mils I loved this maid myself, when I was a lad. But that was long ago, and she is dead. She lay still against his breast while sunset died like brass horns across the water. She said, without moving:

“You’re a funny man.... I wonder if I could sculp? Suppose I learn your face?... Well, don’t, then.

I’d just as soon lie still. You’re a lot more comfortable to lie on than you look. Only I’d think you’d be getting tired now — I’m no humming bird. Aren’t you tired of holding me?” she persisted. He moved his head at last and looked at her again with his caverned uncomfortable eyes, and she tried to do something with her eyes, assuming at the same time an

attitude, a kind of leering invitation, so palpably theatrical and false that it but served to emphasize that grave, hard sexlessness of hers.

“What are you trying to do?” he asked quietly, “vamp me?”
She said “Shucks.” She sat up, then squirmed off his lap and to her feet.
“So you won’t give it to me? You just won’t?”
“No,” he told her soberly. She turned away, but presently she stopped again and looked back at him.

“Give you twenty-five dollars for it.”
“No.”

She said “Shucks” again, and she went on on her brown silent feet, and was gone. (Your name is like a little golden bell hung in my heart, and when I think of you...) The Nausikaa sped on. It was twilight abruptly; soon, a star.

SEVEN O’CLOCK

The place did appear impregnable, but then he had got used to feeling it behind him in his chair, where he knew nothing was going to happen to it. Besides, to change now, after so many days, would be like hedging on a bet.... Still, to let those two old burns kid him about it... He paused in the door of the saloon.

The others were seated and well into their dinner, but before four vacant places that bland eternal grapefruit, sinister and bland as taxes. Some of them hadn’t arrived: he’d have time to run back to his room and leave it. And let one of them drunkards throw it out the window for a joke?

Mrs. Wiseman carrying a tray said briskly: “Gangway, Pete,” and he crowded against the wall for her to pass, and then the niece turned her head and saw him. “Belly up,” she said, and he heard a further trampling drawing near.

He hesitated a second, then he thrust his hat into the little cubbyhole between the two shelves. He'd risk it to-night, anyway. He could still sort of keep an eye on it. He took his seat.

Fairchild's watch surged in: a hearty joviality that presently died into startled consternation when it saw the grapefruit. "My God," said Fairchild in a hushed tone.

"Sit down, Dawson," Mrs. Wiseman ordered sharply. "We've had about all that sort of humor this voyage will stand."

"That's what I think," he agreed readily. "That's what Julius and Major Ayers and me think at every meal. And yet, when we come to the table, what do we see?"

"My first is an Indian princess," said Mark Frost in a hollow lilting tone. "But it's a little early to play charades yet, isn't it?"

Major Ayers said "Eh?" looking from Mark Frost to Fairchild. Then he ventured: "It's grapefruit, isn't it?"

"But we have so many of them," Mrs. Maurier explained. "You are supposed to never tire of them."

"That's it," said Fairchild solemnly. "Major Ayers guessed it the first time. I wasn't certain what it was, myself. But you can't fool Major Ayers; you can't fool a man that's traveled as much as he has, with just a grapefruit. I guess you've shot lots of grapefruit in China and India, haven't you, Major?"

"Dawson, sit down," Mrs. Wiseman repeated. "Make them sit down, Julius, or go out to the kitchen if they just want to stand around and talk."

Fairchild sat down quickly, "Never mind," he said. "We can stand it if the ladies can. The human body can stand anything," he added owlily. "It can get drunk and stay up and dance all night, and consume crate after crate of gr—" Mrs. Wiseman leaned across his shoulder and swept his grapefruit away. "Here," he exclaimed.

“They don’t want ’em,” she told Miss Jameson across the table. “Get his, too.” So they left Major Ayers of his also, and Mrs. Wiseman clashed the plates viciously onto her tray. In passing behind Mrs. Maurier she struck the collapsible serving table with her hip and said “Damn!” pausing to release the catch and slam it back into the bulkhead. Pete’s hat slid onto the floor and she thrust it against the wall with her toe.

“Yes, sir,” Fairchild repeated, “the human body can stand lots of things. But if I have to eat another grapefruit Say, Julius, I was examining my back to-day, and do you know, my skin is getting dry and rough, with a kind of yellowish cast. If it keeps on, first thing I know I won’t any more dare undress in public than Al Jack—”

Mark Frost made a sound of sharp alarm. “Look out, people,” he exclaimed, rising. “I’m going to get out of here.”

“ — son would take off his shoes in public,” Fairchild continued unperturbed. Mrs. Wiseman returned and she stood with her hands on her hips, regarding Fairchild’s unkempt head with disgust. Mrs. Maurier gazed helplessly at him.

“Every one’s finished,” Mrs. Wiseman said. “Come on, let’s go on deck.” “No,” Mrs. Maurier protested. She said firmly: “Mr. Fairchild.”

“Go on,” the niece urged him. “What about Al Jackson?”

“Shut up, Pat,” Mrs. Wiseman commanded. “Come on, you all. Let ’em stay here and drivel to each other. Let’s lock ’em in here: what do you say?”

Mrs. Maurier asserted herself. She rose. “Mr. Fairchild, I simply will not have — if you continue in this behavior, I shall leave the room. Don’t you see how trying — how difficult — how difficult” — beneath the beseeching helplessness of her eyes her various chins began to quiver a little— “how difficult—”

Mrs. Wiseman touched her arm. "Come: it's useless to argue with them now. Come, dear." She drew Mrs. Maurier's chair aside and the old woman took a step and stopped abruptly, clutching the other's arm.

"I've stepped on something," she said, peering blindly.
Pete rose with a mad inarticulate cry.

"Old man Jackson" — Fairchild continued— "claims to be a lineal descendant of Old Hickory. A fine old southern family with all a fine old southern family's pride. Al has a lot of that pride, himself: that's why he won't take off his shoes in company. I'll tell you the reason later.

"Well, old man Jackson was a bookkeeper or something, drawing a small salary with a big family to support, and he wanted to better himself with the minimum of labor, like a descendant of any fine old southern family naturally would, and so he thought up the idea of taking up some of this Louisiana swamp land and raising sheep on it.

He'd noticed how much ranker vegetation grows on trees in swampy land, so he figured that wool ought to grow the same rank way on a sheep raised in a swamp. So he threw up his bookkeeping job and took up a few hundred acres of Tchufuncta river swamp and stocked it with sheep, using the money his wife's uncle, a member of an old aristocratic Tennessee moonshining family, had left 'em.

"But his sheep started right in to get themselves drowned, so he made lifebelts for 'em out of some small wooden kegs that had been part of the heritage from that Tennessee uncle, so that when the sheep strayed off into deep water they would float until the current washed 'em back to land again. This worked all right, but still his sheep kept on disappearing — the ewes and lambs did, that is. Then he found that the alligators were—"

"Yes," murmured Major Ayers, "Old Hickory."

“ — getting them. So he made some imitation rams’ horns out of wood and fastened a pair to each ewe and to every lamb when it was born. And that reduced his losses by alligators to a minimum scarcely worth notice. The rams’ flesh seemed to be too rank even for alligators.

“After a time the lifebelts wore out, but the sheep had learned to swim pretty well by then, so old man Jackson decided it wasn’t worth while to put any more lifebelts on ’em. The fact is, the sheep had got to like the water: the first crop of lambs would only come out of the water at feeding time; and when the first shearing time came around, he and his boys had to round up the sheep with boats.

“By the next shearing time, those sheep wouldn’t even come out of the water to be fed. So he and his boys would go out in boats and set floating tubs of feed around in the bayous for them. This crop of lambs could dive, too. They never saw one of them on land at all: they’d only see their heads swimming across the bogues and sloughs.

“Finally another shearing time came around. Old man Jackson tried to catch one of them, but the sheep could swim faster than he and his boys could row, and the young ones dived under water and got away.

So they finally had to borrow a motor boat. And when they finally tired one of those sheep down and caught it and took it out of the water, they found that only the top of its back had any wool on it. The rest of its body was scaled like a fish.

And when they finally caught one of the spring lambs on an alligator hook, they found that its tail had broadened out and flattened like a beaver’s, and that it had no legs at all. They didn’t hardly know what it was, at first.”

“I say,” murmured Major Ayers.

“Yes, sir, completely atrophied away. Time passed, and they never saw the next crop of lambs at all. The food they set out the birds ate, and

when the next shearing time came, they couldn't even catch one with the motor boat.

They hadn't even seen one in three weeks. They knew they were still there, though, because they would occasionally hear 'em baa-ing at night way back in the swamp. They caught one occasionally on a trotline of shark hooks baited with ears of corn. But not many.

"Well, sir, the more old man Jackson thought about that swampful of sheep, the madder he got. He'd stamp around the house and swear he'd catch 'em if he had to buy a motor boat that would run fifty miles an hour, and a diving suit for himself and every one of his boys.

He had one boy named Claude — Al's brother, you know. Claude was kind of wild: hell after women, a gambler and a drunkard — a kind of handsome humorless fellow with lots of dash. And finally Claude made a trade with his father to have half of every sheep he could catch, and he got to work right away. He never bothered with boats or trotlines: he just took off his clothes and went right in the water and grappled for 'em."

"Grappled for 'em?" Major Ayers repeated.

"Sure: run one down and hem him up under the bank and drag him out with his bare hands. That was Claude, all over. And then they found that this year's lambs didn't have any wool on 'em at all, and that its flesh was the best fish eating in Louisiana; being partly cornfed that way giving it a good flavor, you see.

So that's where old man Jackson quit the sheep business and went to fish ranching on a large scale. He knew he had a snap as long as Claude could catch 'em, so he made arrangements with the New Orleans markets right away, and they began to get rich."

"By Jove," Major Ayers said tensely, his mind taking fire.

“Claude liked the work. It was an adventurous kind of life that just suited him, so he quit everything and gave all his time to it. He quit drinking and gambling and running around at night, and there was a marked decrease in vice in that neighborhood, and the young girls pined for him at the local dances and sat on their front porches of a Sunday evening in vain.

“Pretty soon he could outswim the old sheep, and having to dive so much after the young ones, he got to where he could stay under water longer and longer at a time. Sometimes he’d stay under for a half an hour or more.

And pretty soon he got to where he’d stay in the water all day, only coming out to eat and sleep; and then they noticed that Claude’s skin was beginning to look funny and that he walked kind of peculiar, like his knees were stiff or something.

Soon after that he quit coming out of the water at all, even to eat, so they’d bring his dinner down to the water and leave it, and after a while he’d swim up and get it. Sometimes they wouldn’t see Claude for days.

But he was still catching those sheep, herding ’em into a pen old man Jackson had built in a shallow bayou and fenced off with hog wire, and his half of the money was growing in the bank. Occasionally half eaten pieces of sheep would float ashore, and old man Jackson decided alligators were getting ’em again.

But he couldn’t put horns on ’em now because no one but Claude could catch ’em, and he hadn’t seen Claude in some time.

“It had been a couple of weeks since anybody had seen Claude, when one day there was a big commotion in the sheep pen. Old man Jackson and a couple of his other boys ran down there, and when they got there they could see the sheep jumping out of the water every which way, trying to get on land again; and after a while a big alligator rushed out from among ’em, and old man Jackson knew what had scared the sheep.

“And then, right behind the alligator he saw Claude. Claude’s eyes had kind of shifted around to the side of his head and his mouth had spread back a good way, and his teeth had got longer. And then old man Jackson knew what had scared that alligator. But that was the last they ever saw of Claude.

“Pretty soon after that, though, there was a shark scare at the bathing beaches along the Gulf coast. It seemed to be a lone shark that kept annoying women bathers, especially blondes; and they knew it was Claude Jackson. He was always hell after blondes.”

Fairchild ceased. The niece squealed and jumped up and came to him, patting his back. Jenny’s round ineffable eyes were upon him, utterly without thought. The Semitic man was slumped in his chair: he may have slept.

Major Ayers stared at Fairchild a long time. At last he said: “But why does the alligator one wear congress boots?”

Fairchild mused a moment. Then he said dramatically: “He’s got webbed feet.”

“Yes,” Major Ayers agreed. He mused in turn. “But this chap that got rich—” The niece squealed again. She sat beside Fairchild and regarded him with admiration.

“Go on, go on,” she said, “about the one that stole the money, you know.”

Fairchild looked at her kindly. Into the silence there came a thin saccharine strain. “There’s the victrola,” he said. “Let’s go up and start a dance.”

“The one who stole the money,” she insisted. “Please.” She put her hand on his shoulder.

“Some other time,” he promised, rising. “Let’s go up and dance now.” The Semitic man yet slumped in his chair, and Fairchild shook him. “Wake up, Julius. I’m safe now.”

The Semitic man opened his eyes and Major Ayers said: "How much did they gain with their fish ranching?"

"Not as much as they would have with a patent nicetasting laxative. All Americans don't eat fish, you know. Come on, let's go up and hold that dance they've been worrying us about every night."

NINE O'CLOCK

"Say," the niece said as she and Jenny mounted to the deck, "remember that thing we traded for the other night? the one you let me use for the one I let you use?"

"I guess so," Jenny answered. "I remember trading."

"Have you used it yet?"

"I never can think of it," Jenny confessed. "I never can remember what it was you told me.... Besides, I've got another one, now."

"You have? Who told it to you?"

"The popeyed man. That Englishman."

"Major Ayers?"

"Uhuh. Last night we was talking and he kept on saying for us to go to Mandeville to-day. He kept on saying it. And so this morning he acted like he thought I meant we was going. He acted like he was mad."

"What was it he said?" Jenny told her — a mixture of pidgin English and Hindustani that Major Ayers must have picked up along the Singapore water front, or mayhap at some devious and doubtful place in the Straits, but after Jenny had repeated it, it didn't sound like anything at all.

"What?" the niece asked. Jenny said it again.

"It don't sound like anything, to me," the niece said. "Is that the way he said it?"

"That's what it sounded like to me," Jenny replied.

The niece said curiously: "Men sure do swear at you a lot. They're always cursing you. What do you do to them, anyway?"

"I don't do anything to them," Jenny answered. "I'm just talking to them."

"Well, they sure do.... Say, you can have that one back you loaned me."

"Have you used it on anybody?" Jenny asked with interest. "I tried it on that redheaded Gordon."

"That drowned man? What'd he say?"

"He beat me." The niece rubbed herself with a tanned retrospective hand. "He just beat hell out of me," she said. "Gee," said Jenny.

TEN O'CLOCK

Fairchild gathered his watch, nourished it, and brought it on deck again. The ladies hailed its appearance with doubtful pleasure. Mr. Talliaferro and Jenny were dancing, and the niece and Pete with his damaged hat, were performing together with a skilful and sexless abandon that was almost professional, while the rest of the party watched them.

"Whee," Fairchild squealed, watching the niece and Pete with growing childish admiration. At the moment they faced each other at a short distance, their bodies rigid as far as the waist. But below this they were as amazing jointless toys, and their legs seemed to fly in every direction at once until their knees seemed to touch the floor.

Then they caught hands and whirled sharply together, without a break in that dizzy staccato of heels. "Say, Major, look there! Look there, Julius! Come on, I believe I can do that."

He led his men to the assault. The victrola ran down at the moment; he directed the Semitic man to attend to it, and went at once to where Pete and the niece stood. "Say, you folks are regular professionals.

Pete, let me have her this time, will you? I want her to show me how you do that. Will you show me? Pete won't mind."

"All right," the niece agreed, "I'll show you. I owe you something for that yarn at dinner to-night." She put her hand on Pete's arm. "Don't go off, Pete. I'll show him and then he can practise on the others. Don't you go off; you are all right. You might take Jenny for a while. She must be tired: he's been leaning on her for a half an hour. Come on, Dawson. Watch me now." She had no bones at all.

Major Ayers and the Semitic man had partners, though more sedately. Major Ayers galloped around in a heavy dragoonish manner: when that record was over Miss Jameson was panting. She offered to sit out the next one, but Fairchild overruled her. He believed he had the knack of it. "We'll put the old girl's dance over in style," he told them.

Major Ayers, inflamed by Fairchild's example, offered for the niece himself. Mr. Talliaferro, reft of Jenny, acquired Mrs. Wiseman; the Semitic man was cajoling the hostess. "We'll put her dance over for her," Fairchild chanted. They were off.

Gordon had come up from somewhere and he stood in shadow, watching. "Come on, Gordon," Fairchild shouted to him. "Grab one!" When the music ceased Gordon cut in on Major Ayers. The niece looked up in surprise, and Major Ayers departed in Jenny's direction.

"I didn't know you danced," she said.

"Why not?" Gordon asked.

"You just don't look like you did. And you told Aunt Pat you couldn't dance."

"I can't," he answered, staring down at her. "Bitter," he said slowly. "That's what you are. New. Like bark when the sap is rising."

"Will you give it to me?" He was silent. She couldn't see his face distinctly: only the bearded shape of his tall head. "Why won't you give

it to me?" Still no answer, and his head was ugly as bronze against the sky. Fairchild started the victrola again: a saxophone was a wailing obscenity, and she raised her arms, "Come on."

When that one was finished Fairchild's watch rushed below again, and presently Mr. Talliaferro saw his chance and followed surreptitiously. Fairchild and Major Ayers were ecstatically voluble: the small room fairly moiled with sound. Then they rushed back on deck.

"Watch your step, Talliaferro," Fairchild cautioned him as they ascended. "She's got her eye on you. Have you danced with her yet?" Mr. Talliaferro had not. "Better kind of breathe away from her when you do."

He led his men to the assault. The ladies demurred, but Fairchild was everywhere, cajoling, threatening, keeping life in the party. Putting the old girl's dance over. Mrs. Maurier was trying to catch Mr. Talliaferro's eye. The niece had peremptorily commandeered Pete again, and again Gordon stood in his shadow, haughty and aloof. They were off.

ELEVEN O'CLOCK

"I say," said Mr. Talliaferro, popping briskly and cautiously into the room, accepting his glass, "we'd better slow up a bit, hadn't we?"

"What for?" asked the Semitic man, and Fairchild said:

"Ah, it's all right. She expects it of us. Somebody's got to be the hoi polloi, you know. Besides, we want to make this cruise memorable in the annals of deep water. Hey, Major? Talliaferro'd better go easy, though."

"Oh, we'll look out for Talliaferro," the Semitic man said.

"No damned fear," Major Ayers assured him. "Have a go eh?" They all had a go. Then they rushed back on deck.

"What do you do in New Orleans, Pete?" Miss Jameson asked intensely.

“One thing and another,” Pete answered cautiously. “I’m in business with my brother,” he added.

“You have lots of friends, I imagine? Girls would all like to dance with you. You are one of the best dancers I ever saw — almost a professional. I like dancing.”

“Yeh,” Pete agreed. He was restive. “I guess—”

“I wonder if you and I couldn’t get together some evening and dance again? I don’t go to night clubs much, because none of the men I know dance very well. But I’d enjoy it, with you.”

“I guess so,” Pete answered. “Well, I—”

“I’ll give you my phone number and address, and you call me soon, will you? You might come out to dinner, and we’ll go out afterward, you know.”

“Sure,” Pete answered uncomfortably. He removed his hat and examined the crown. Then he slanted it once more across his dark reckless head. Miss Jameson said:

“Do you ever make dates ahead of time, Pete?”

“Naw,” he answered quickly. “I wouldn’t have a date over a day old. I just call ’em up and take ’em out and bring ’em back in time to go to work next day. I wouldn’t have one I had to wait until to-morrow on.”

“Neither do I. So I tell you what: let’s break the rule one time, and make a date for the first night we are ashore — what do you say? You come out to dinner at my house, and well go out later to dance. I’ve got a car.”

“I — Well, you see—”

“We’ll just do that,” Miss Jameson continued remorselessly. “We won’t forget that; it’s a promise, isn’t it?”

Pete rose. “I guess we — I guess I better not promise. Something might turn up so I — we couldn’t make it. I guess..”

She sat quietly, looking at him. "Maybe it'll be better to wait and fix it up when we get back. I might have to be out of town or something that day, see? Maybe we better wait and see how things shape up." Still she said nothing, and presently she removed her patient humorless eyes and looked out across the darkling water, and Pete stood uncomfortably with his goading urge to keep on saying something. "I guess we better wait and see later, see?"

Her head was turned away, so he departed unostentatiously. He paused again and looked back at her. She gazed still out over the water: an uncomplaining abjectness of passivity, quiet in her shadowed chair.

As he embraced her, Jenny removed his hat slanted viciously upon his reckless head, and examined the broken crown with a recurrence of soft astonishment; and still holding the hat in her hand she came to him in a flowing enveloping movement, without seeming to move at all.

Their faces merged and Jenny was immediately utterly boneless, seeming to suspend her merging ripeness by her soft mouth, then she opened her mouth against his... after a while Pete raised his head, Jenny's face was a passive drowsing blur rich, ineffably rich, in the dark; and Pete got out his unfresh handkerchief and wiped her mouth, quite gently.

"Got over it without leaving a scar, didn't you?" he said. Without volition they swung in a world unseen and warm as water, unseen and rife and beautiful, strange and hushed and grave beneath that waning moon of decay and death.... "Give your old man a kiss, kid..."

The niece entered her aunt's room, without knocking, Mrs. Maurier raised her astonished, shrieking face and dragged a garment shapelessly across her recently uncorseted breast, as women do. When she had partially recovered from the shock she ran heavily to the door and locked it.

"It's just me," the niece said. "Say, Aunt Pat—"

Her aunt gasped: her breast and chins billowed unconfined. "Why don't you knock? You should never enter a room like that. Doesn't Henry ever—"

"Sure he does," the niece interrupted, "all the time. Say, Aunt Pat, Pete thinks you ought to pay him for his hat. For stepping on it, you know."

Her aunt stared at her. "What?"

"You stepped through Pete's hat. He and Jenny think you ought to pay for it. Or offer to, anyway. I expect if you'd offer to, he wouldn't take it."

"Thinks I ought to p—" Mrs. Maurier's voice faded into a shocked, soundless amazement.

"Yes, they think so.... I mentioned it because I promised them I would. You don't have to unless you want to, you know."

"Thinks I ought to p—" Again Mrs. Maurier's voice failed her, and her amazement became a chaotic thing that filled her round face interestingly. Then it froze into something definite: a coldly determined displeasure, and she recovered her voice.

"I have lodged and fed these people for a week," she said without humor. "I do not feel that I am called upon to clothe them also."

"Well, I just mentioned it because I promised," the niece repeated soothingly.

Mrs. Maurier, Jenny and the niece had disappeared, to Mr. Talliaferro's mixed relief. They still had two left, however. They took turn about with them.

Major Ayers, Fairchild and the Semitic man rushed below again. Mr. Talliaferro following openly this time, and a trifle erratically.

“How’s it coming along?” Fairchild asked, poisoning the bottle. Mr. Talliaferro made a wet deprecating sound, glancing at the other two. They regarded him with kindly interest. “Oh, they’re all right,” Fairchild reassured him.

“They are as anxious to see you put it over as I am.” He set the bottle down well within reach, and gulped at his glass. “I tell you what, it’s boldness that does the trick with women, ain’t it, Major?”

“Right you are. Boldness: dash in; take ’em by storm.”

“Sure. That’s what you want to do. Have another drink.” He filled Mr. Talliaferro’s glass.

“That’s my plan, exactly. Boldness. Boldness. Boldness.” Mr. Talliaferro stared at the other glassily. He tried to wink. “Didn’t you see me dancing with her?”

“Yes, but that ain’t bold enough. If I were you, if I were doing it, I’d turn the trick to-night, now. Say, Julius, you know what I’d do? I’d go right to her room: walk right in. He’s been dancing with her and talking to her: ground already broken, you see. I bet she’s in there right now, waiting for him, hoping he is bold enough to come in to her.

He’ll feel pretty cheap to-morrow when he finds he missed his chance, won’t he? You never have but one chance with a woman, you know. If you fail her then, she’s done with you — the next man that comes along gets her without a struggle.

It ain’t the man a woman cares for that reaps the harvest of passion, you know: it’s the next man that comes along after she’s lost the other one. I’d sure hate to think I’d been doing work for somebody else to get the benefit of. Wouldn’t you?”

Mr. Talliaferro stared at him. He swallowed twice. “But suppose, just suppose, that she isn’t expecting me.”

“Oh, sure. Of course, you’ve got to take that risk. It would take a bold man, anyway, to walk right in her room, walk right in without knocking and go straight to the bed. But how many women would resist? I wouldn’t, if I were a woman.

If you were her, Talliaferro, would you resist? I’ve found,” he went on, “that boldness gets pretty near anything, in this world, especially women. But it takes a bold man.... Say, I bet Major Ayers would do it.”

“Right you are. I’d walk right in, by Jove.... I say, I think I shall, anyway. Which one is it? Not the old one?”

“All right. That is, if Talliaferro don’t want to do it. He has first shot, you know: he’s done all the heavy preparatory work. But it takes a bold man.”

“Oh, Talliaferro’s bold as any man,” the Semitic man said.

“But, really,” Mr. Talliaferro repeated, “suppose she isn’t expecting me. Suppose she were to call out — No, no.”

“Yes, Talliaferro ain’t bold enough. We better let Major Ayers go, after all. No necessity for disappointing the girl, at least.”

“Besides,” Mr. Talliaferro added quickly, “she is in a room with some one else.”

“No, she ain’t. She’s in a room to herself, now; that one at the end of the hall.”

“That’s Mrs. Maurier’s room,” Mr. Talliaferro said, staring at him.

“No, no; she changed. That room has a broken screen, so she changed. Julius and I were helping her move this afternoon. Weren’t we, Julius? That’s how I happen to know Jenny’s in there now.”

“But, really—” Mr. Talliaferro swallowed again. “Are you sure that’s her room? This is a serious matter, you know.”

“Have another drink,” Fairchild said.

TWELVE O'CLOCK

The deck was deserted. Fairchild and Major Ayers halted and gazed about in pained astonishment. The victrola was hooded and mute, smugly inscrutable. They held a hurried council, then they set forth to beat up stragglers. There were no stragglers.

"Put on a record," Fairchild suggested at last. "Maybe that'll get 'em up here. They must have thought we'd gone to bed."

The Semitic man started the victrola again, and again Major Ayers and Fairchild combed the deck in vain. The moon had risen, its bony erstwhile disc was thumbed into the sky like a coin after too much handling.

Mrs. Maurier routed out the captain and together they repaired to Fairchild's room. "Find it all," she directed, "every single one." The captain found it all. "Now, open that window."

She gave the captain further directions, when they had finished, and she returned to her room and sat again on the edge of her bed.

Moonlight came into the room level as a lance through the port, like a marble pencil shattering and filling the room with a thin silver dust, as of marble. "It has come, at last," she whispered, aware of her body, heavy and soft with years.

I should feel happy, I should feel happy, she told herself, but her limbs felt chill and strange to her and within her a terrible thing was swelling, a thing terrible and poisonous and released, like water that has been dammed too long: it was as though there were waking within her comfortable, long familiar body a thing that abode there dormant and which she had harbored unaware.

She sat on the edge of her bed, feeling her strange chill limbs, while that swelling thing within her unfolded like an intricate poisonous flower, an intricate slow convolvulse of petals that grew and faded, died and were replaced by other petals huger and more implacable.

Her limbs were strange and cold: they were trembling. That dark flower of laughter, that secret hideous flower grew and grew until that entire world which was herself was become a slow implacable swirling of hysteria that rose in her throat and shook it as though with a myriad small hands while from overhead there came a thin saccharine strain spaced off by a heavy thumping of feet, where Fairchild was teaching Major Ayers the Charleston.

And soon, another sound; and the Nausikaa trembled and pulsed, girding herself with motion.

Mr. Talliaferro stood in the bows, letting the wind blow upon his face, amid his hair. The worn moon had risen and she spread her boneless hand upon the ceaseless water, and the cold remote stars swung overhead, cold and remote and incurious: what cared they for the haggard despair in his face, for the hushed despair in his heart? They had seen too much of human moiling and indecision and astonishments to be concerned over the fact that Mr. Talliaferro had got himself engaged to marry again.

.. Soon, a sound; and the Nausikaa trembled and pulsed, girding herself with motion.

Suddenly Fairchild stopped, raising his hand for silence. "What's that?" he asked.

"What's what?" responded Major Ayers, pausing also and staring at him.

"I thought I heard something fall into the water." He crossed to the rail and leaned over it. Major Ayers followed him and they listened. But the dark restless water was untroubled by any foreign sound, the night was calm, islanding the worn bland disc of the moon.

"Steward throwing out grapefruit," Major Ayers suggested at last. They turned away.

"Hope so," Fairchild said. "Start her up again, Julius."

And, soon, another sound; and the Nausikaa trembled and pulsed, girding herself with motion.

EPILOGUE

1

LAKE WATER HAD done strange things to Jenny's little green dress. It was rough-dried and draggled, and it had kind of sagged here and drawn up there. The skirt in the back, for instance; because now between the gracious miniature ballooning of its hem and the tops of her dingy stockings, you saw pink flesh.

But she was ineffably unaware of this as she stood on Canal street waiting for her car to come along, watching Pete's damaged hat slanting away amid the traffic, clutching the dime he had given her for carfare in her little soiled hand.

Soon her car came along and she got in it and gave the conductor her dime and received change and put seven cents in the machine while men, unshaven men and coatless men and old men and spruce young men and men that smelled of toilet water and bay rum and sweat and men that smelled of just sweat, watched her with the moist abjectness of hounds.

Then she went on up the aisle, rife, placidly unreluctant, and then the car jolted forward and she sat partly upon a fat man in a derby and a newspaper, who looked up at her and then hunched over to the window and dived again into his newspaper with his derby on.

The car hummed and sputtered and jolted and stopped and jolted and hummed and sputtered between croaching walls and old iron lovely as dingy lace, and shrieking children from south Europe once removed and wild and soft as animals and cheerful with filth; and old rich food smells, smells rich enough to fatten the flesh through the lungs; and women screaming from adjacent door to door in bright dirty shawls.

Her three pennies had got warm and moist in her hand, so she changed them to the other hand and dried her palm on her thigh.

Soon it was a broader street at right angles — a weary green spaciousness of late August foliage and civilization again in the shape of a filling station; and she descended and passed between houses possessing once and long ago individuality, reserve, but now become somehow vaguely and dingily identical; reaching at last an iron gate through which she went and on up a shallow narrow concrete walk bordered on either side by beds in which flowers for some reason never seemed to grow well, and so on across the veranda and into the house.

Her father was on the night force and he now sat in his sock feet and with his galluses down, at his supper of mackerel (it is Friday) and fried potatoes and coffee and an early afternoon edition. He wiped his mustache with two sweeps of the back of his hand.

“Where you been?”

Jenny entered the room removing her hat. She dropped it to the floor and came up in a flanking movement. “On a boat ride,” she answered. Her father drew his feet under his chair to rise and his face suffused slowly with relief and anger.

“And you think you can go off like that, without a word to nobody, and then walk back into this house—” But Jenny captured him and she squirmed onto his rising lap and though he tried to defend himself, kissed him through his mackerelish mustache, and held him speechless so while she delved amid that vague pinish region which was her mind. After a while she remembered it.

“Haul up your sheet,” she said. “You’re jibbing.”

2

Pete was the baby: he was too young to have been aware of it, of course, but that electric sign with the family name on it had marked a climacteric: the phoenix-like rise of the family fortunes from the dun

ashes of respectability and a small restaurant catering to Italian working people, to the final and ultimate Americanization of the family, since this fortune, like most American ones, was built on the flouting of a statutory impediment.

Prior to nineteen-nineteen you entered a dingy room fecund with the rich heavy odor of Italian cooking, you sat surrounded by Italian faces and frank Italian eating sounds, at oilcloth of a cheerful red-and-white check and cunningly stained, impermeated with food, where you were presently supplied with more food.

Perhaps old lady Ginotta herself came bustling out with soup and one thumb in a thick platter and a brisk word for you, or by Joe, anyway, barearmed and skilful and taciturn, while Mr. Ginotta himself in his stained apron stood talking to a table of his intimates.

Perhaps if you lingered long enough over your banana or overripe oft-handled grapes you would see Pete in his ragged corduroy knickers and faded clean shirt, with his curling shock of hair and his queer golden eyes, twelve years old and beautiful as only an Italian lad can be.

But now, all this was changed. Where was once a dingy foodladen room, wooden floored and not too clean, was now a tiled space cleared and waxed for dancing and enclosed on one side by mirrors and on the other by a row of booths containing each a table and two chairs and lighted each by a discreet table lamp of that surreptitious and unmistakable shade of pink and curtained each with heavy maroon rep.

And where you once got food good and Italian and cheap, you now paid so much for it that you were not required to eat it at all: and platters of spaghetti and roasted whole fowls, borne not by Joe, barearmed and skilful if taciturn, but by dinner-coated waiters with faces ironed and older than sin; — platters which served as stage properties for the oldest and weariest comedy in the world, were served you and later removed by the waiters with a sort of clairvoyant ubiquity and returned to the kitchen practically intact. And from the kitchen there came no longer any odor of cooking at all.

Joe's idea, it was. Joe, five-and-twenty and more American than any of them, had seen the writing on the wall, had argued, prevailed, and proven himself right. Mr. Ginotta had not stood prosperity. He was afraid of the new floor, to begin with. It was too slick, dangerous for a man of his age and bulk; and to look out of his kitchen, that kitchen into which he no longer dared bring his stained apron, upon a room once crowded with his friends and noisy and cheerful with eating and smells of food...

But all that was changed now. The very waiters themselves he did not know, and the food they bore back and forth was not food; and the noise was now a turgid pandemonium of saxophones and drums and, riding above it like distracted birds, a shrill and metallic laughter of women, ceaseless and without joy; and the smells a blending of tobacco and alcohol and unchaste scent. And from the kitchen there came no longer any odor of cooking at all: even his range was gone, replaced by an oil stove.

So he died, fairly full of years and with more money to his name in the bank than most Italian princes have. Mrs. Ginotta had the flu at the same time. It had settled in her ears and as time passed she became quite deaf; and because of the fact that her old friends now went elsewhere to dine and the people who came now arrived quite late, after she was in bed mostly, and her old man was dead and her sons were such Americans now, busy and rich and taciturn, and because the strange waiters frightened her a little, the old lady had got out of the habit of talking at all.

She prepared food for her sons on the new stove of which she was afraid, but they were in and out so much it was hard to anticipate their mealtimes; and her eyes being no longer good enough for sewing, she spent her time puttering about their living quarters overhead or in a corner of the kitchen where she would be out of the way, preparing vegetables and such — things that didn't require keenness of sight or attention.

The room itself she would not enter, though from her accustomed corner in the kitchen she could on occasion watch the boneless sophistication of the saxophone player and the drummer's flapping elbows, and years ago she had heard the noise they made.

But that was long ago and she had forgotten it, and now she accepted their antics as she accepted the other changes, associating no sound with them at all. Joe had several automobiles now: big noticeable ones, and he used to try to persuade her to ride in them. But she refused stubbornly always, though it was a matter of neighborhood comment, how good the Ginotta boys were to the old lady.

But Joe, with his shrewd taciturn face and his thinning hair and his shirt of heavy striped silk smoothly taut across his tight embryonic paunch — Joe, standing with his head-waiter at the desk, paused in his occupation to glance down that room with its every modern fixture, its tiled floor and lights and mirrors, with commendable pride.

With the quiet joy of ownership his gaze followed its mirrored diminishing tunnel and passed on to the discreetly curtained entrance beneath that electric sign, that ultimate accolade of Americanization, flashing his name in golden letters in rain or mist or against the remote insane stars themselves; and to his brother slanting his damaged hat defiantly, turning in beneath it.

Joe held his sheaf of banknotes in one hand and his poised wetted finger over it and watched Pete traverse the mirrored length of the room.

"Where in hell you been?" he demanded.

"To the country," Pete answered shortly. "Anything to eat?"

"Eat, hell," his brother exclaimed. "Here I've had to pay a man two days just because you were off helling around somewheres. And now you come in talking about something to eat. Here—" he put aside his sheaf of money and from a drawer he took a pack of small slips of paper and

ran through them. The headwaiter counted money undisturbed, methodically.

“I promised this stuff to her by noon. You get busy and run it out there — here’s the address — and no more foolishness, see? Eat, hell.” But Pete had brushed past the other without even pausing. His brother followed him. “You get right at it, you hear?” He raised his voice. “You think you can walk out of here and stay as long as you want, huh? You think you can come strolling back after a week, huh? You think you own this place?”

The old lady was waiting inside the kitchen. She didn’t hardly talk at all any more: only made sounds, wet sounds of satisfaction and alarm; and she saw her older son’s face and she made these sounds now, looking from one to the other but not offering to touch them. Pete entered the room and his brother stopped at the door, and the old lady shuffled across to the stove and fetched Pete a plate of warmed-over spaghetti and fish and set it before him at a zinc-covered table. His brother stood in the door and glared at him.

“Get up from there, now, like I told you. Come on, come on, you can eat when you get back.”

But the old lady bustled around, getting between them with the stubborn barrier of her deafness, and her alarmed sounds rose again, then fell and became a sort of meaningless crooning while she kept herself between them, pushing Pete’s plate nearer, patting his knife and fork into his hands. “Look out,” Pete said at last, pushing her hands away. Joe glared from the door, but he humored her, as he always did.

“Make it snappy,” he said gruffly, turning away. When he had gone the old lady returned to her chair and her discarded bowl of vegetables.

Pete ate hungrily. Sounds came back to him: a broom, and indistinguishable words, and then the street door opened and closed and above a swift tapping of heels he heard a woman’s voice. It spoke to his brother at the desk, but the brittle staccato came on without

stopping, and as Pete raised his head the girl entered on her high cheap heels and an unbelievable length of pale stocking severed sharply by her skimpy dark frock. Within the small bright bell of her hat, her painted passionate face, and her tawdry shrillness was jointless and poised as a thin tree.

"Where you been?" she asked.

"Off with some women." He resumed his meal.

"More than one?" she asked quickly, watching him.

"Yeh. Five or six. Reason it took me so long."

"Oh," she said. "You're some little poppa, ain't you?" He continued to eat and she came over beside him. "Whatcher so glum about? Somebody take your candy away from you?" She removed his hat. "Say, look at your hat." She stared at it, then laid it on the table and sliding her hand into his thickly curling hair she tugged his face up, and his queer golden eyes. "Wipe your mouth off," she said. But she kissed him anyway, and raised her head again.

"You better wipe it off now, sure enough," she said with contemplation. She released his hair. "Well, I got to go." And she turned, but paused again at the old lady's chair and screamed at her in Italian. The old lady looked up, nodding her head, then bent over her beans again.

Pete finished his meal. He could still hear her shrill voice from the other room, and he lit a cigarette and strolled out. The old lady hadn't been watching him, but as soon as he was gone, she got up and removed the plate and washed it and put it away, and then sat down again and picked up her bowl.

"Ready to go, huh?" his brother looked up from the desk. "Here's the address. Snap it up, now: I told her I'd have it out there by noon." The bulk of Joe's business was outside, like this. He had a name for reliability of which he was proud. "Take the Studebaker," he added.

"That old hack?" Pete paused, protesting, "I'll take your Chrysler."

“Damn if you will,” his brother rejoined, heating again. “Get on, now; take that Studebaker like I told you,” he said violently. “If you don’t like it, buy one of your own.”

“Ah, shut up.” Pete turned away. Within one of the booths, beyond a partly drawn curtain, he saw her facing the mirror, renewing the paint on her mouth. Beside her stood one of the waiters in his shirtsleeves, holding a mop. She made a swift signal with her hand to his reflection in the glass. He slanted his hat again, without replying.

She was an old hack, beside the fawn-and-nickel splendor of the new Chrysler, but she would go and she’d carry six or seven cases comfortably — the four cases he now had were just peas in a matchbox. He followed the traffic to Canal street, crossed it and fell into the line waiting to turn out St. Charles.

The line inched forward, stopped, inched forward again when the bell rang. The policeman at the curb held the line again and Pete sat watching the swarming darting newsboys, and the loafers and shoppers and promenaders, and little colt-like girls with their monotonous blonde legs. The bell rang, but the cop still held them. Pete leaned out, jazzing his idling engine. “Come on, come on, you blue-bellied bastard,” he called. “Let’s go.”

At last the cop lowered his glove and Pete whipped skilfully into St. Charles, and presently the street widened and became an avenue picketed with palms, and settling onto his spine and slanting his damaged straw hat to a swaggering slant on his dark reckless head, he began to overhaul the slow ones, passing them up.

3

Fairchild’s splitting head ultimately roused him and he lay for some time submerged in the dull throbbing misery of his body before he discovered that the boat was stationary again and, after an effort of unparalleled stoicism, that it was eleven o’clock. No sound anywhere, yet there was something in the atmosphere of his surroundings, something different. But trying to decide what it was only made his

head pound the worse, so he gave it up and lay back again. The Semitic man slumbered in his berth.

After a while Fairchild groaned, and rose and wavered blundering across the cabin and drank deeply of water. Then he saw land through the port: a road and a weathered board wall, and beyond it, trees. Mandeville he decided. He tried to rouse the Semitic man, but the other cursed him from slumber and rolled over to face the wall.

He hunted again for a bottle, but there were not even any empty ones: who ever did it had made a clean sweep. Well, a cup of coffee, then. So he got into his trousers and crossed the passage to a lavatory and held his head beneath a tap for a while. Then he returned and finished dressing and sallied forth.

Some one slumbered audibly in Major Ayers' room. It was Major Ayers himself, and Fairchild closed the door and went on, struck anew with that strange atmosphere which the yacht seemed to have gained overnight. The saloon was empty also, and a broken meal offended his temporarily refined sensibilities with partially emptied cups and cold soiled plates.

But still no sound, no human sound, save Major Ayers and the Semitic man in slumber's strophe and antistrophe. He stood in the door of the saloon and groaned again. Then he took his splitting head on deck.

Here he blinked in the light, shutting his eyes against it while hot brass hammers beat against his eyeballs. Three men dangled their legs over the edge of the quay and regarded him, and he opened his eyes again and saw the three men.

"Good morning," he said. "What town's this? Mandeville?"

The three men looked at him. After a time one said:

"Mandevilie? Mandeville what?"

"What town is it, then?" he asked, but as he spoke awareness came to him and looking about he saw a steel bridge and a trolley on the bridge,

and further still, a faint mauve smudge on the sky, and in the other direction the flag that floated above the yacht club, languorous in a faint breeze. The three men sat and swung their legs and watched him. Presently one of them said:

“Your party went off and left you.”

“Looks like it,” Fairchild agreed. “Do you know if they said anything about sending a car back for us?”

“No, she ain’t going to send back to-day,” the man answered. Fairchild cleared his aching eyes: it was the captain. “Trolley track over yonder a ways,” he called after Fairchild as he turned and descended the companionway.

4

Major Ayers’ appointment was for three o’clock. His watch corroborated and commended him as he stepped from the elevator into a long cool corridor glassed on either hand by opaque plate from beyond which came a thin tapping of typewriters.

Soon he found the right door and entered it, and across a low barrier he gave his card to a thin scented girl, glaring at her affably, and stood in the ensuing interval gazing out the window across diversified rectangles of masonry, toward the river.

The girl returned. “Mr. Reichman will see you now,” she said across her chewing gum, swinging the gate open for him.

Mr. Reichman shook his hand and offered him a chair and a cigar. He asked Major Ayers for his impressions of New Orleans and immediately interrupted the caller’s confused staccato response to ask Major Ayers, for whom the war had served as the single possible condition under which he could have returned to England at all, and to whom for certain private reasons London had been interdict since the Armistice, how affairs compared between the two cities.

Then he swung back in his patent chair and said:
“Now, Major, just what is your proposition?”

“Ah, yes,” said Major Ayers, flicking the ash from his cigar. “It’s a salts. Now, all Americans are constipated—”

5

Beneath him, on the ground floor, where a rectangle of light fell outward across the alley, a typewriter was being hammered by a heavy and merciless hand. Fairchild sat with a cigar on his balcony just above the unseen but audible typist, enjoying the cool darkness and the shadowed tree-filled spaciousness of the cathedral close beneath his balcony.

An occasional trolley clanged and crashed up Royal street, but this was but seldom, and when it had died away there was no sound save the monotonous merging clatter of the typewriter. Then he saw and recognized Mr. Talliaferro turning the corner and with an exclamation of alarm he sprang to his feet, kicking his chair over backward. Ducking quickly into the room redolent of pennyroyal he snapped off the reading lamp and leaped upon a couch, feigning sleep.

Mr. Talliaferro walked dapperly, swinging his stick, his goal in sight. Yes, Fairchild was right, he knew women, the feminine soul — ? No, not soul: they have no souls. Nature, the feminine nature: that substance, that very substance of their being, impalpable as moonlight, challenging and retreating at the same time; inconsistent, nay, incomprehensible, yet serving their ends with such a devastating practicality.

As though the earth, the world, man and his very desires and impulses themselves, had been invented for the sole purpose of hushing their little hungry souls by filling their time through serving their biological ends....

Yes, boldness. And propinquity. And opportunity, that happy conjunction of technique and circumstance, being with the right one in

the right place at the right time. Yes, yes, Opportunity, Opportunity — more important than all, perhaps. Mr. Talliaferro put up Opportunity: he called for a ballot. The ayes had it.

He stopped utterly still in the flash of his inspiration. At last he had it, had the trick, the magic Word. It was so simple that he stood in amaze at the fact that it had not occurred to him before. But then he realized that its very simplicity was the explanation.

And my nature is complex, he told himself, gazing at stars in the hot dark sky, in a path of sky above the open coffin of the street. It was so devastatingly simple that he knew a faint qualm. Was it — was it exactly sporting? Wasn't it like shooting quail on the ground?

But no, no: now that he had the key, now that he had found the Word, he dared admit to himself that he had suffered. Not so much in his vanity, not physically — after all, man can do without the pleasures of love: it will not kill him; but because each failure seemed to put years behind him with far more finality than the mere recurrence of natal days. Yes, Mr. Talliaferro owed himself reparation, let them suffer who must. And was not that woman's part from time immemorial?

Opportunity, create your opportunity, prepare the ground by overlooking none of those small important trivialities which mean so much to them, then take advantage of it. And I can do that, he told himself.

Indifference, perhaps, as though women were no rare thing with me; that there is perhaps another woman I had rather have seen, but circumstances over which neither of us had any control intervened. They like a man who has other women, for some reason. Can it be that love to them is half adultery and half jealousy?... Yes, I can do that sort of thing, I really can.... "She would have one suit of black underthings," Mr. Talliaferro said aloud with a sort of exultation.

He struck the pavement with his stick, lightly. "By God, that's it," he exclaimed in a hushed tone, striding on.... "Create the opportunity, lead

up to it delicately but firmly Drop a remark about coming to-night only because I had promised....

Yes, they like an honorable man: it increases their latitude. She'll say, 'Please take me to dance,' and I'll say 'No, really, I don't care to dance to-night,' and she'll say, 'Won't you take me?' leaning against me, eh? — let's see — yes, she'll take my hand.

But I shan't respond at once. She'll tease and then I'll put my arm around her and raise her face in the dark cab and kiss her, coldly, and I'll say, 'Do you really want to dance to-night?' and then she'll say, Oh, I don't know. Suppose we just drive around a while?... Will she say that at this point? Well, should she not... Let's see, what would she say?"

Mr. Talliaferro strode on, musing swiftly. Well, anyway, if she says that, if she does say that, then I'll say 'No, let's dance.' Yes, yes, something like that. Though perhaps I'd better kiss her again, not so coldly, perhaps?...

But should she say something else... But then, I shall be prepared for any contingency, eh? Half the battle.... Yes, something like that, delicately but firmly done, so as not to alarm the quarry. Some walls are carried by storm, but all walls are reduced by siege. There is also the fable of the wind and the sun and the man in a cloak. "We'll change the gender, by Jove," Mr. Talliaferro said aloud, breaking suddenly from his reverie to discover that he had passed Fairchild's door. He retraced his steps and craned his neck to see the dark window.

"Fairchild!"

No reply.

"Oh, Fairchild!"

The two dark windows were inscrutable as two fates. He pressed the bell, then stepped back to complete his aria. Beside the door was another entrance. Light streamed across a half length lattice blind like a saloon door; beyond it a typewriter was being thumped viciously. Mr. Talliaferro knocked diffidently upon the blind.

“Hello,” a voice boomed above the clattering machine, though the machine itself did not falter. Mr. Talliaferro pondered briefly, then he knocked again.

“Come in, damn you.” The voice drowned the typewriter temporarily. “Come in: do you think this is a bathroom?” Mr. Talliaferro opened the blind and the huge collarless man at the typewriter raised his sweating leonine head, and regarded Mr. Talliaferro fretfully. “Well?”

“Pardon me, I’m looking for Fairchild.”

“Next floor,” the other snapped, poisoning his hands. “Good night.”

“But he doesn’t answer. Do you happen to know if he is in to-night?”

“I do not.”

Mr. Talliaferro pondered again, diffidently. “I wonder how I might ascertain? I’m pressed for time—”

“How in hell do I know? Go up and see, or stand out there and call him.”

“Thanks, I’ll go up, if you’ve no objection.”

“Well, go up, then,” the big man answered, leaping again upon his typewriter. Mr. Talliaferro watched him for a time.

“May I go through this way?” he ventured at last, mildly and politely.

“Yes, yes. Go anywhere. But for God’s sake, don’t bother me any longer.”

Mr. Talliaferro murmured Thanks and sidled past the large frenzied man. The whole small room trembled to the man’s heavy hands and the typewriter leaped and chattered like a mad thing.

He went on and into a dark corridor filled with a thin vicious humming, and mounted lightless stairs into an acrid region scented with pennyroyal. Fairchild heard him stumble in the darkness, and groaned.

I’ll have your blood for this! he swore at the thundering oblivious typewriter beneath him. After a time his door opened and the caller

hissed Fairchild! into the room. Fairchild swore again under his breath. The couch complained to his movement, and he said:
“Wait there until I turn up the light. You’ll break everything I’ve got, blundering around in the dark.”

Mr. Talliaferro sighed with relief. “Well, well, I had just about given you up and gone away when that man beneath you kindly let me come through his place.” The light came on under Fairchild’s hand. “Oh, you were asleep, weren’t you? So sorry to have disturbed you. But I want your advice, as I failed to see you this morning.... You got home all right?” he asked with thoughtful tact.

Fairchild answered “Yes” shortly, and Mr. Talliaferro laid his hat and stick on a table, knocking therefrom a vase of late summer flowers. With amazing agility he caught the vase before it crashed, though not before its contents had liberally splashed him. “Ah, the devil!” he ejaculated. He replaced the vase and quickly fell to mopping at his sleeves and coat front with his handkerchief. “And this suit fresh from the presser, too!” he added with exasperation.

Fairchild watched him with ill-suppressed vindictive glee. “Too bad,” he commiserated insincerely, lying again on the couch. “But she won’t notice it: she’ll be too interested in what you’re saying to her.”

Mr. Talliaferro looked up quickly, a trifle dubiously. He spread his handkerchief across the corner of the table to dry. Then he smoothed his hands over his neat pale hair.

“Do you think so? Really? That’s what I stopped in to discuss with you.” For a while Mr. Talliaferro sat neatly and gazed at his host from beyond a barrier of a polite and hopeless despair. Fairchild remarked his expression with sudden curiosity, but before he could speak Mr. Talliaferro reassimilated himself and became again his familiar articulated mild alarm.

“What’s the matter?” Fairchild asked.

“I? Nothing. Nothing at all, my dear fellow. Why do you ask?”

“You looked like you had something on your mind, just then.”

The guest laughed artificially. “Not at all. You imagined it, really.” His hidden dark thing lurked behind his eyes yet, but he vanquished it temporarily. “I will ask a favor, however, before I... before I ask your advice. That you don’t mention our — conversation. — The general trend of it, you know.” Fairchild watched him with curiosity. “To any of our mutual women friends,” he added further, meeting his host’s curious gaze.

“All right,” Fairchild agreed. “I never mention any of the conversations we have on this subject. I don’t reckon I’ll start now.”

“Thank you.” Mr. Talliaferro was again his polite smug self. “I have a particular reason, this time, which I’ll divulge to you as soon as I consider myself... You will be the first to know.”

“Sure,” said Fairchild again. “What is it to be this time?”

“Ah, yes,” said the guest with swift optimism, “I really believe that I have discovered the secret of success with them: create the proper setting beforehand, indifference to pique them, then boldness — that is what I have always overlooked. Listen: to-night I shall turn the trick.

But I want your advice.” Fairchild groaned and lay back, Mr. Talliaferro picked his handkerchief from the table and whipped it about his ankles. He continued:

“Now, I shall make her jealous to begin with, by speaking of another woman in — ah — quite intimate terms.

She will doubtless wish to dance, but I shall pretend indifference, and when she begs me to take her to dance, perhaps I’ll kiss her, suddenly but with detachment — you see?”

“Yes?” murmured the other, cradling his head on his arms and closing his eyes.

“Yes. So we’ll go and dance, and I’ll pet her a bit, still impersonally, as if I were thinking of some one else. She’ll naturally be intrigued and she’ll say, ‘What are you thinking of?’ and I’ll say, ‘Why do you want to know?’ She’ll plead with me, perhaps dancing quite close to me, cajoling; but I’ll say, ‘I’d rather tell you what you are thinking of,’ and she will say ‘What?’ immediately, and I’ll say, ‘You are thinking of me.’ Now, what do you think of that? What will she say then?”

“Probably tell you you’ve got a swelled head.”

Mr. Talliaferro’s face fell. “Do you think she’ll say that?”

“Don’t know. You’ll find out soon enough.”

“No,” Mr. Talliaferro said after a while, “I don’t believe she will. I rather fancied she’d think I knew a lot about women.” He mused deeply for a time. Then he burst out again: “If she does, I’ll say ‘Perhaps so. But I am tired of this place. Let’s go.’ She’ll not want to leave, but I’ll be firm. And then—” Mr. Talliaferro became smug, bursting with something he withheld. “No, no: I shan’t tell you — it’s too excruciatingly simple. Why some one else has not..

He sat gloating.

“Scared I’ll run out and use it myself before you have a chance?”

Fairchild asked.

“No, really; not at all. I—” He considered a moment, then he leaned to the other. “It’s not that at all, really; I only feel that... Being the discoverer, that sort of thing, eh? I trust you, my dear fellow,” he added swiftly in a burst of confidence. “Merely my own scruples — You see?”

“Sure,” said Fairchild drily. “I understand.”

“You will have so many opportunities, while I.. Again that dark thing came up behind Mr. Talliaferro’s eyes and peered forth a moment. He drove it back. “And you really think it will work?”

“Sure. Provided that final coup is as deadly as you claim. And provided she acts like she ought to. It might be a good idea to outline the plot to her, though, so she won’t slip up herself.”

“You are pulling my leg now,” Mr. Talliaferro bridled slightly. “But don’t you think this plan is good?”

“Airtight. You’ve thought of everything, haven’t you?”

“Surely. That’s the only way to win battles, you know. Napoleon taught us that.”

“Napoleon said something about the heaviest artillery, too,” the other said wickedly. Mr. Talliaferro smiled with deprecatory complacency.

“I am as I am,” he murmured.

“Especially when it hasn’t been used in some time,” Fairchild added.

Mr. Talliaferro looked like a struck beast and the other said quickly:

“But are you going to try this scheme to-night, or are you just describing a hypothetical case?”

Mr. Talliaferro produced his watch and glanced at it in consternation

“Good gracious, I must run!” He sprang to his feet and thrust his handkerchief into his pocket. “Thanks for advising me. I really think I have the system at last, don’t you?”

“Sure,” the other agreed. At the door Mr. Talliaferro turned and rushed back to shake hands. “Wish me luck,” he said turning again. He paused once more. “Our little talk: you’ll not mention it?”

“Sure, sure,” repeated Fairchild. The door closed upon the caller and his descending feet sounded on the stairs. He stumbled again, then the street door closed behind him, and Fairchild rose and stood on the balcony and watched him out of sight.

Fairchild returned to the couch and reclined again, laughing. Abruptly he ceased chuckling and lay for a time in alarmed concern. Then he groaned again, and rose and took his hat.

As he stepped into the alley, the Semitic man pausing at the entrance spoke to him. “Where are you going?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” Fairchild replied. “Somewhere. The Great Illusion has just called,” he explained. “He has an entirely new scheme to-night.”

“Oh. Slipping out, are you?” the other asked, lowering his voice.

“No, he just dashed away. But I don’t dare stay in this evening. He’ll be back inside of two hours to tell me why this one didn’t work. We’ll have to go somewhere else.” The Semitic man mopped his handkerchief across his bald head. Beyond the lattice blind beside them the typewriter still chattered. Fairchild chuckled again. Then he sighed. “I wish Talliaferro could find him a woman. I’m tired of being seduced.... Let’s go over to Gordon’s.”

6

The niece had already yawned elaborately several times at the lone guest: she was prepared, and recognized the preliminary symptoms indicating that her brother was on the point of his customary abrupt and muttered departure from the table. She rose also, with alacrity.

“Well,” she said briskly, “I’ve enjoyed knowing you a lot, Mark. Next summer maybe we’ll be back here, and we’ll have to do it again, won’t we?”

“Patricia,” her aunt said, “sit down.”

“I’m sorry, Aunt Pat. But Josh wants me to sit with him to-night. He’s going away to-morrow,” she explained to the guest.

“Aren’t you going, too?” Mark Frost asked.

“Yes, but this is our last night here, and Gus wants me to—”

“Not me,” her brother denied quickly. “You needn’t come away on my account.”

“Well, I think I’d better, anyway.”

Her aunt repeated “Patricia.”

But the niece ignored her. She circled the table and shook the guest’s hand briskly, before he could rise. “Good-by,” she repeated. “Until next summer.” Her aunt said “Patricia” again, firmly. She turned again at the door and said politely: “Good night, Aunt Pat.”

Her brother had gone on up the stairs. She hurried after him, leaving her aunt to call "Patricia!" from the dining room, and reached the head of the stairs in time to see his door close behind him. When she tried the knob, the door was locked, so she came away and went quietly to her room.

She stripped off her clothes in the darkness and lay on her bed, and after a while she heard him banging and splashing in the connecting bathroom. When these sounds had ceased she rose and entered the bathroom quietly from her side, and quietly she tried his door. Unlocked.

She snapped on the light and spun the tap of the shower until needles of water drummed viciously into the bath. She thrust her hand beneath it at intervals: soon it was stinging and cold; and she drew her breath as for a dive and sprang beneath it, clutching a cake of soap, and cringed shuddering and squealing while the water needled her hard simple body in its startling bathing suit of white skin, matting her coarse hair, stinging and blinding her.

She whirled the tap again and the water ceased its antiseptic miniature thunder, and after toweling herself vigorously she found that she was hot as ever, though not sticky any longer; so moving more slowly she returned to her room and donned fresh pajamas.

This suit had as yet its original cord. Then she went on her bare silent feet and stood again at the door of her brother's room, listening.

"Look out, Josh," she called suddenly, flinging open the door, "I'm coming in."

His room was dark, but she could discern the shape of him on the bed and she sped across the room and plumped jouncing onto the bed beside him. He jerked himself up sharply.

“Here,” he exclaimed. “What do you want to come in here worrying me, for?” He raised himself still further: a brief violent struggle, and the niece thudded solidly on the floor. She said Ow in a muffled surprised tone. “Now, get out and stay out,” her brother added. “I want to go to sleep.”

“Aw, lemme stay a while. I’m not going to bother you.”

“Haven’t you been staying under my feet for a week, without coming in here where I’m trying to go to sleep? Get out, now.”

“Just a little while,” she begged. “I’ll lie still if you want to go to sleep.”

“You won’t keep still. You go on, now.”

“Please, Gus. I swear I will.”

“Well,” he agreed at last, grudgingly. “But if you start flopping around—”

“I’ll be still,” she promised. She slid quickly onto the bed and lay rigidly on her back. Outside, in the hot darkness, insects scraped and rattled and droned. The room, however, was a spacious quiet coolness, and the curtains at the windows stirred in a ghost of a breeze.

“Josh.” She lay flat, perfectly still.

“Huh.”

“Didn’t you do something to that boat?”

After a while he said: “What boat?” She was silent, taut with listening.

He said: “Why? What would I want to do anything to the boat for?”

“What makes you think I did?”

“Didn’t you, now? Honest?”

“You’re crazy. I never hurt — I never was down there except when you came tagging down there, that morning. What would I want to do anything to it, for?” They lay motionless, a kind of tenseness. He said, suddenly: “Did you tell her I did something to it?”

“Aw, don’t be a goof. I’m not going to tell on you.”

“You’re damn right you won’t. I never did anything to it.”

“All right, all right: I’m not going to tell if you haven’t got guts to. You’re yellow, Josh,” she told him calmly.

“Look here, I told you that if you wanted to stay in here, you’d have to keep quiet, didn’t I? Shut up, then. Or get out.”

“Didn’t you break that boat, honest?”

“No, I told you. Now, you shut up or get out of here.” They lay quiet for a time. After a while she moved carefully, turning onto her belly by degrees. She lay still again for a time, then she raised her head. He seemed to be asleep, so she lowered her head and relaxed her muscles, spreading her arms and legs to where the sheet was still cool.

“I’m glad we’re going to-morrow,” she murmured, as though to herself. “I like to ride on the train. And mountains again. I love mountains, all blue and... blue... We’ll be seeing mountains day after to-morrow. Little towns on ’em that don’t smell like people eating all the time... and mountains...”

“No mountains between here and Chicago,” her brother said gruffly.

“Shut up.”

“Yes, there are.” She raised herself to her elbow. “There are some. I saw some coming down here.”

“That was in Virginia and Tennessee. We don’t go through Virginia to Chicago, dumbbell.”

“We go through Tennessee, though.”

“Not that part of Tennessee. Shut up, I tell you. Here, you get up and go back to your room.”

“No. Please, just a little while longer. I’ll lie still. Come on, Gus, don’t be so crummy.”

“Get out, now,” he repeated implacably.

“HI be still: I won’t say a w—”

“No. Outside, now. Go on. Go on, Gus, like I tell you.” She heaved herself over nearer. “Please, Josh. Then I’ll go.”

“Well. Be quick about it.” He turned his face away and she leaned down and took his ear between her teeth, biting it just a little, making a kind of meaningless maternal sound against his ear. “That’s enough,” he said presently, turning his head and his moistened ear. “Get out, now.”

She rose obediently and returned to her room. It seemed to be hotter in here than in his room, so she got up and removed her pajamas and got back in bed and lay on her back, cradling her dark grave head in her arms and gazing into the darkness; and after a while it wasn’t so hot and it was like she was on a high place looking away out where mountains faded dreaming and blue and on and on into a purple haze under the slanting and solemn music of the sun. She’d see ’em day after to-morrow. Mountains...

7

Fairchild went directly to the marble and stood before it, clasping his hands at his burly back. The Semitic man sat immediately on entering the room, preempting the single chair. The host was busy beyond the rep curtain which constituted his bedroom, from where he presently reappeared with a bottle of whisky. He had removed both shirt and undershirt now and beneath a faint reddish fuzz his chest gleamed with heat like an oiled gladiator’s.

“I see,” Fairchild remarked as the host entered, “that you too have been caught by this modern day fetich of virginity. But you have this advantage over us: yours will remain inviolate without your having to shut your eyes to its goings-on. You don’t have to make any effort to keep yours from being otherwise. Very satisfactory.

And very unusual. The greatest part of man's immolation of virginity is, I think, composed of an alarm and a suspicion that some one else may be, as the term is, getting it."

"Perhaps Gordon's alarm regarding his own particular illusion of it is, that some one else may not get it," the Semitic man suggested.

"No, I guess not," Fairchild said. "He don't expect to sell this to anybody, you know. Who would pay out good money for a virginity he couldn't later violate, if only to assure himself it was the genuine thing?"

"Leda clasping her duck between her thighs could yet be carved out of it, however," the other pointed out; "it is large enough for that. Or—" "Swan," corrected Fairchild.

"No. Duck," the Semitic man insisted. "Americans would prefer a duck. Or udders and a fig leaf might be added to the thing as it stands. Isn't that possible, Gordon?"

"Yes. It might be restored," Gordon admitted drily. He disappeared again beyond the curtain and returned with two heavy tumblers and a shaving mug bearing a name in Gothic lettering of faded gilt. He drew up the bench on which his enamel water pitcher rested, and Fairchild came and sat upon it.

Gordon took the shaving mug and went to lean his tall body against the wall. His intolerant hawk's face was like bronze in the unshaded glare of the light. The Semitic man puffed at his cigar. Fairchild raised Ms glass, squinting through it.

"Udders, and a fig leaf," he repeated. He drank, and set his tumbler down to light a cigarette. "After all, that is the end of art. I mean—" "We do get something out of art," the Semitic man agreed. "We all admit that."

“Yes,” said Fairchild. “Art reminds us of our youth, of that age when life don’t need to have her face lifted every so often for you to consider her beautiful. That’s about all the virtue there is in art: it’s a kind of Battle Creek, Michigan, for the spirit. And when it reminds us of youth, we remember grief and forget time. That’s something.”

“Something, if all a man has to do is forget time,” the Semitic man rejoined. “But one who spends his days trying to forget time is like one who spends his time forgetting death or digestion. That’s another instance of your unshakable faith in words. It’s like morphine, language is. A fearful habit to form: you become a bore to all who would otherwise cherish you.

Of course, there is the chance that you may be hailed as a genius after you are dead long years, but what is that to you? There will still be high endeavor that ends, as always, with kissing in the dark, but where are you? Time? Time? Why worry about something that takes care of itself so well? You were born with the habit of consuming time. Be satisfied with that. Tom-o’-Bediam had the only genius for consuming time: that is, to be utterly unaware of it.

“But you speak for the artists. I am thinking of the majority of us who are not artists and who need protection from artists, whose time the artists insist on passing for us. We get along quite well with our sleeping and eating and procreating, if you artists only let us alone. But you accursed who are not satisfied with the world as it is and so must try to rebuild the very floor you are standing on, you keep on talking and shouting and gesturing at us until you get us all fidgety and alarmed. So I believe that if art served any purpose at all, it would at least keep the artists themselves occupied.”

Fairchild raised his glass again. “It’s more than that. It’s getting into life, getting into it and wrapping it around you, becoming a part of it. Women can do it without art — old biology takes care of that. But men, men...

A woman conceives: does she care afterward whose seed it was? Not she. And bears, and all the rest of her life — her young troubling years, that is — is filled. Of course the father can look at it occasionally. But in art, a man can create without any assistance at all: what he does is his. A perversion, I grant you, but a perversion that builds Chartres and invents Lear is a pretty good thing.” He drank, and set Ms tumbler down.

“Creation, reproduction from within.... Is the dominating impulse in the world feminine, after all, as aboriginal peoples believe?.., There is a kind of spider or something. The female is the larger, and when the male goes to her he goes to death: she devours him during the act of conception.

And that’s man: a kind of voraciousness that makes an artist stand beside himself with a notebook in his hand always, putting down all the charming things that ever happen to him, killing them for the sake of some problematical something he might or he might not ever use. Listen,” he said, “love, youth, sorrow and hope and despair — they were nothing at all to me until I found later some need of a particular reaction to put in the mouth of some character of whom I wasn’t at that time certain, and that I don’t yet consider very admirable. But maybe it was because I had to work all the time to earn a living, when I was a young man.”

“Perhaps so,” the Semitic man agreed. “People still believe they have to work to live.”

“Sure you have to work to live,” Fairchild said quickly. “You’d naturally say that. If a man has had to deny himself any pleasures during his pleasuring years, he always likes to believe it was necessary.

That’s where you get your Puritans from. We don’t like to see any one violate laws we observed, and get away with it God knows, heaven is a dry reward for abnegation.”

Fairchild rose and went to stand again before the fluid, passionate fixity of the marble. “The end of art,” he repeated. “I mean, to the consumer,

not to us: we have to do it, they don't. They can take it or leave it. Probably Gordon feels the same way about stories that I do about sculpture, but for me,.

He mused upon the marble for a time. "When the statue is completely nude, it has only a coldly formal significance, you know. But when some foreign matter like a leaf or a fold of drapery (kept there in defiance of gravity by God only knows what) draws the imagination to where the organs of reproduction are concealed, it lends the statue a wanner, a — a — more—"

"Speculative significance," supplied the Semitic man.

" — speculative significance which I must admit I require in my sculpture."

"Certainly the moralists agree with you."

"Why shouldn't they? The same food nourishes everybody's convictions alike. And a man that earns his bread in a glue factory must get some sort of pleasure from smelling cattle hooves, or he'd change his job. There's your perversion, I think."

"And," the Semitic man said, "if you spend your life worrying over sex, it's an added satisfaction to get paid for your time."

"Yes. But if I earned my bread by means of sex, at least I'd have enough pride about it to be a good honest whore." Gordon came over and filled the glasses again. Fairchild returned and got his, and prowled aimlessly about the room, examining things. The Semitic man sat with his handkerchief spread over his bald head. He regarded Gordon's naked torso with envious wonder. "They don't seem to bother you at all," he stated fretfully.

"Look here," Fairchild called suddenly. He had unswaddled a damp cloth from something and he now bent over his find. "Come here, Julius." The Semitic man rose and joined him.

It was clay, yet damp, and from out its dull, dead grayness Mrs. Maurier looked at them. Her chins, harshly, and her flaccid jaw muscles with savage verisimilitude. Her eyes were caverns thumbed with two motions into the dead familiar astonishment of her face; and yet, behind them, somewhere within those empty sockets, behind all her familiar surprise, there was something else — something that exposed her face for the mask it was, and still more, a mask unaware. “Well, I’m damned,” Fairchild said slowly, staring at it. “I’ve known her for a year, and Gordon comes along after four days... Well, I’ll be damned,” he said again.

“I could have told you,” the Semitic man said. “But I wanted you to get it by yourself. I don’t see how you missed it; I don’t see how any one with your faith in your fellow man could believe that any one could be as silly as she, without reason.”

“An explanation for silliness?” Fairchild repeated. “Does her sort of silliness require explanation?”

“It shouts it,” the other answered. “Look how Gordon got it, right away.”

“That’s so,” Fairchild admitted. He gazed at the face again, then he looked at Gordon with envious admiration. “And you got it right away, didn’t you?”

Gordon was replenishing the glasses again. “He couldn’t have missed it,” the Semitic man repeated. “I don’t see how you missed it. You are reasonably keen about people — sooner or later.”

“Well, I guess I missed her,” Fairchild returned, and extended his tumbler. “But it’s the usual thing, ain’t it? plantations and things? First family, and all that?”

“Something like that,” the Semitic man agreed. He returned to his chair and Fairchild sat again beside the water pitcher. “She’s a northerner, herself. Married it. Her husband must have been pretty old when they married. That’s what explains her, I think.”

“What does? Being a northerner, or marriage? Marriage starts and explains lots of things about us, just like singleness or widowhood does. And I guess the Ohio river can affect your destiny, too. But how does it explain her?”

“The story is, that her people forced her to marry old Maurier. He had been overseer on a big place before the Civil War. He disappeared in '63, and when the war was over he turned up again riding a horse with a Union Army cavalry saddle and a hundred thousand dollars in uncut Federal notes for a saddle blanket. Lord knows what the amount really was, or how he got it, but it was enough to establish him. Money. You can't argue against money: you only protest.

“Everybody expected him to splurge about with his money: show up the penniless aristocracy, that sort of thing; work out some of the inhibitions he must have developed during his overseer days. But he didn't. Perhaps he'd got rid of his inhibitions during his sojourn at the war.

Anyway, he failed to live up to character, so people decided that he was a moral coward, that he was off somewhere in a hole with his money, like a rat. And this was the general opinion until a rumor got out about several rather raw land deals in which he was assisted by a Jew named Julius Kauffman who was acquiring a fortune and an unsavory name during those years immediately following General Butler's assumption of the local purple.

“And when the smoke finally cleared somewhat, he had more money than ever rumor could compute and he was the proprietor of that plantation on which he had once been a head servant, and within a decade he was landed gentry. I don't doubt but that he had dug up some blueblood émigré ancestry.

He was a small shrewd man, a cold and violent man; just the sort to have an unimpeachable genealogy. Humorless and shrewd, but I don't doubt that he sat at times in the halls of his newly adopted fathers, and laughed.

“The story is that her father came to New Orleans on a business trip, with a blessing from Washington. She was young, then; probably a background of an exclusive school, and a social future, the taken-for-granted capital letter kind, but all somehow rather precarious — cabbage, and a footman to serve it; a salon in which they sat politely, surrounded by objects, and spoke good French; and bailiff’s men on the veranda and the butcher’s bill in the kitchen — gentility: evening clothes without fresh linen underneath.

I imagine he — her father — was pretty near at the end of his rope. Some government appointment, I imagine, brought him south: hijacking privileges with official sanction, you know.

“The whole family seemed to have found our climate salubrious, though, what with hibiscus and mimosa on the lawn instead of bailiffs, and our dulcet airs after the rigors of New England; and she cut quite a figure among the jeunesse dorée of the nineties; fell in love with a young chap, penniless but real people, who led cotillions and went without gloves to send her flowers and glacé trifles from the rue Vendôme and sang to a guitar among the hibiscus and mimosa when stars were wont to rise. Old Maurier had made a bid, himself, in the meantime.

Maurier was not yet accepted by the noblesse. But you can’t ignore money, you know: you can only protest. And tremble. It took my people to teach the world that.... And so—” the Semitic man drained his glass. He continued: “You know how it is, how there comes a certain moment in the course of human events during which everything — public attention, circumstance, even destiny itself — is caught at the single possible instant, and the actions of certain people, for no reason at all, become of paramount interest and importance to the rest of the world?

That’s how it was with these people. There were wagers laid; a famous gambler even made a book on it. And all the time she went about her

affairs, her parties and routs and balls, behind that cold Dresden china mask of hers. She was quite beautiful then, they say.

People always painting her, you know. Her face in every exhibition, her name a byword in the street and a toast at Antoine's or the St. Charles.... But then, perhaps nothing went on behind that mask at all."

"Of course there was," said Fairchild quickly. "For the sake of the story, if nothing else."

"Pride, anyway, I guess. She had that." The Semitic man reached for the bottle. Gordon came and refilled his mug. "It must have been pretty hard for her, even if there was only pride to suffer. But women can stand anything—"

"And enjoy it," Fairchild put in. "But go on."

"That's all. They were married in the Cathedral. She wasn't a Catholic — Ireland had yet to migrate in any sizable quantities when her people established themselves in New England. That was another thing, mind you. And her horseless Lochinvar was present. Bets had been made that if he stayed away or passed the word, no one would attend at all.

Maurier was still regarded — Well, imagine for yourself a situation like that: a tradition of ease unassailable and unshakable gone to pieces right under you, and out of the wreckage rising a man who once held your stirrup while you mounted.... Thirty years is barely the adolescence of bitterness, you know.

"I'd like to have seen her, coming out of the church afterward. They would have had a canopy leading from the door to the carriage: there must have been a canopy, and flowers, heavy ones — Lochinvar would have sent gardenias; and she, decked out in all the pagan trappings of innocence and her beautiful secret face beside that cold, violent man, graying now, but you have remarked how it takes the harlequinade of aristocracy to really reveal peasant blood, haven't you?

And her Lochinvar to wish her godspeed, watching her ankles as she got into the carriage.

“They never had any children. Maurier may have been too old; she herself may have been barren. Often that type is. But I don’t think so. I believe... But who knows? I don’t Anyway, that explains her, to me. At first you think it’s just silliness, lack of occupation — a tub of washing, to be exact. But I see something thwarted back of it all, something stifled, yet which won’t quite die.”

“A virgin,” Fairchild said immediately. “That’s what it is, exactly. Fooling with sex, kind of dabbing at it, like a kitten at a ball of string. She missed something: her body told her so, insisted, forced her to try to remedy it and fill the vacuum.

But now her body is old; it no longer remembers that it missed anything, and all she has left is a habit, the ghost of a need to rectify something the lack of which her body has long since forgotten about.”

The Semitic man lit his cold cigar again. Fairchild gazed at his glass, turning it this way and that slowly in his hand. Gordon stood yet against the wall, looking beyond them and watching something not in this room. The Semitic man slapped his other wrist, then wiped his palm on his handkerchief. Fairchild spoke.

“And I missed it, missed it clean,” he mused. “And then Gordon... Say,” he looked up suddenly, “how did you happen to learn all this?”
“Julius Kauffman was my grandfather,” the Semitic man replied.

“Oh... Well, it’s a good thing you told me about it, I guess I won’t have another chance to get anything from her at first hand.” He chuckled without mirth.

“Oh, yes, you will,” the other told him. “She won’t hold this boat party against us. People are far more tolerant of artists than artists are of people.” He puffed at his cigar for a time. “The trouble with you,” he

said, “is that you don’t act right at all. You are the most disappointing artist I know.

Mark Frost is much nearer the genuine thing than you are. But then, he’s got more time to be a genius than you have: you spend too much time writing. And that’s where Gordon is going to fall down. You and he typify genius décolleté. And people who own motor cars and food draw the line just at négligé — somewhere about the collarbone. And remind me to give that to Mark to-morrow: it struck me several times these last few days that he needs a new one.”

“Speaking of décolleté—” Fairchild mopped his face again. “What is it that makes a man drink whisky on a night like this, anyway?”

“I don’t know,” the other answered. “Perhaps it’s a scheme of nature’s to provide for our Italian immigrants. Or of Providence. Prohibition for the Latin, politics for the Irish invented He them.”

Fairchild filled his glass again, unsteadily. “Might as well make a good job of it,” he said. Gordon yet leaned against the wall, motionless and remote. Fairchild continued; “Italians and Irish. Where do we homegrown Nordics come in? What has He invented for us?”

“Nothing,” the Semitic man answered. “You invented Providence.” Fairchild raised his tumbler, gulping, and a part of the liquor ran over thinly and trickled from both corners of his mouth down his chin. Then he set the glass down and stared at the other with a mild astonishment.

“I am afraid,” he enunciated carefully, “that that one is going to do the business for me.” He wiped his chin unsteadily, and moving he struck his empty glass to the floor. The Semitic man groaned.

“Now we’ll have to move again, just when I had become inured to them. Or perhaps you’d like to lie down for a while?”

Fairchild sat and mused a moment. “No, I don’t,” he stated thickly. “If I lie down, I wouldn’t get up again. Little air, fresh air. I’ll go outside.”

The Semitic man rose and helped him to his feet. Fairchild pulled himself together. "Come along, Gordon. I've got to get outside for a while."

Gordon came out of his dream. He came and raised the bottle to the light, and divided it between his mug and the Semitic man's tumbler, and supporting Fairchild between them they drank. Then Fairchild must examine the marble again.

"I think it's kind of nice." He stood before it, swaying, swallowing the hot salty liquid that continued to fill his throat. "You kind of wish she could talk, don't you? It would be sort of like wind through trees.... No... not talk: you'd like to watch her from a distance on a May morning, bathing in a pool where there were a lot of poplar trees. Now, this is the way to forget your grief."

"She is not blonde," Gordon said harshly, holding the empty bottle in his hand. "She is dark, darker than fire. She is more terrible and beautiful than fire." He ceased and stared at them. Then he raised the bottle and hurled it crashing into the huge littered fireplace.

"Not — ?" murmured Fairchild, trying to focus his eyes.

"Marble, purity," Gordon said in his harsh, intolerant voice. "Pure because they have yet to discover some way to make it unpure. They would if they could, God damn them!" He stared at them for a moment from beneath his caverned bronze brows. His eyes were pale as two bits of steel. "Forget grief," he repeated harshly. "Only an idiot has no grief; only a fool would forget it. What else is there in this world sharp enough to stick to your guts?"

He took the thin coat from behind the door and put it on over his naked torso, and they helped Fairchild from the room and down the dark stairs, abruptly subdued and quiet.

Mark Frost stood on the corner, frankly exasperated. The street light sprayed his tall ghostly figure with shadows of bitten late August leaves, and he stood in indecision, musing fretfully. His evening was spoiled: too late to instigate anything on his own hook or to join any one else's party, too soon to go home. Mark Frost depended utterly upon other people to get his time passed.

He was annoyed principally with Mrs. Maurier. Annoyed and unpleasantly shocked and puzzled. At her strange... not coldness: rather, detachment, aloofness... callousness. If you were at all artistic, if you had any taint of art in your blood, dining with her filled the evening.

But now, tonight... Never saw the old girl so bloodless in the presence of genius, he told himself. Didn't seem to give a damn whether I stayed or not. But perhaps she doesn't feel well, after the recent excitement, he added generously. Being a woman, too.... He had completely forgotten about the niece: the sepulchral moth of his heart had completely forgotten that temporary flame.

His car (owned and operated by the city) came along presently, and instinct got him aboard. Instinct also took the proper transfer for him, but a crumb of precaution (or laziness) at the transfer point haled him amid automobiles bearing the young enchanted of various ages swiftly toward nowhere or less, to and within a corner drug store where was a telephone. His number cost him a nickel.

"Hello... It's me... Thought you were going out to night... Yes, I did. Very stupid party, though. I couldn't stick it... So you decided to stay in, did you?... No, I just thought I'd call you up... you're welcome. I have another button off... Thanks. I'll bring it next time I am out that way.... To-night? — We — ll... huh?... all right. I'll come on out. G'bye."

His very ghostliness seemed to annihilate space: he invariably arrived after you had forgotten about him and before you expected him. But she had known him for a long time and ere he could ring she appeared in a window overhead and dropped the latchkey, and he retrieved its

forlorn clink and let himself into the dark hall. A light gleamed dimly from the stairhead where she leaned to watch the thin evaporation of his hair as he mounted.

"I'm all alone to-night," she remarked. "The folks are gone for the weekend. They didn't expect me back until Sunday."

"That's good," he answered. "I don't feel up to talking to your mother to-night."

"Neither do I. Not to anybody, after these last four days. Come in."

It was a vaguely bookish room, in the middle of which a heavy, hotlooking champagne shaded piano lamp cast an oasis of light upon a dull blue brocaded divan. Mark Frost went immediately to the divan and lay at full length upon it. Then he moved again and extracted a package of cigarettes from his jacket. Miss Jameson accepted one and he relaxed again and groaned with hollow relief.

"I'm too comfortable," he said. "I'm really ashamed to be so comfortable."

Miss Jameson drew up a chair, just without the oasis of light. "Help yourself," she replied. "There's nobody here but us. The family won't be back until Sunday night."

"Elegant," Mark Frost murmured. He laid his arm across his face, shading his eyes. "Whole house to yourself. You're lucky. Lord, I'm glad to be off that boat. Never again for me."

"Don't mention that boat," Miss Jameson shuddered. "I think it'll be never again for any of that party. From the way Mrs. Maurier talked this morning. Not for Dawson and Julius, anyway."

"Did she send a car back for them?"

"No. After yesterday, they could have fallen overboard and she wouldn't even have notified the police,.. But let's don't talk about that trip any more," she said wearily. She sat just beyond the radius of light: a vague humorless fragility. Mark Frost lay on his back, smoking his

cigarette. She said: "While I think of it: Will you be sure to lock the door after you? I'll be here alone, to-night."

"All right," he promised from beneath his arm. His pale, prehensile mouth released the cigarette and his arm swung it outward to where he hoped there was an ash tray. The ash tray wasn't there and his hand made a series of futile dabbing motions until Miss Jameson leaned forward and moved the ash tray into the automatic ellipsis of his hand. After a while she leaned forward again and crushed out her cigarette.

A clock somewhere behind him tapped monotonously at silence and she moved restlessly in her chair, and presently she leaned and took another cigarette from his pack. Mark Frost removed his arm long enough to raise the pack to his vision and count the remaining cigarettes. Then he replaced his arm.

"You're quiet to-night," she remarked. He grunted and once more she leaned forward and ground out her half-smoked cigarette with decision. She rose. "I'm going to take off some clothes and get into something cooler. Nobody here to object. Excuse me a moment."

He grunted again beneath his arm, and she went away from the oasis of light. She opened the door of her room and stood in the darkness just within the door a moment. Then she closed the door audibly, stood for a moment, then opened it again slightly and pressed the light switch.

She went to her dressing table and switched on two small, shaded electric candles there, and returned and switched off the ceiling light. She considered for a while; then she returned to the door and stood with the knob in her hand, then without closing it she went back to the dressing table and turned off one of the lights there.

This left the room filled with a soft, pinkish glow in which a hushed gleaming of crystal on the dressing-table was the only distinguishable feature. She removed her dress hastily and stood in her underthings with a kind of cringing, passive courage, but there was still no sound of

movement beyond the door, and she switched on the other light again and examined herself in the mirror.

She mused again, examining her frail body in its intimate garment. Then she ran swiftly and silently to a chest of drawers and in a locked drawer she sought feverishly among a delicate neat mass of sheer fabric, coming at last upon an embroidered night dress, neatly folded and unworn and scented faintly.

Then, standing where the door, should it be opened, would conceal her for a moment, she slipped the gown over her head and from beneath it she removed the undergarment. Then she took her reckless troubled heart and the fragile and humorless calmness in which it beat, back to the dressing table; and sitting before the mirror she assumed a studied pose, combing and combing out her long, uninteresting hair.

Mark Frost lay at length on the divan, as was his habit, shading his eyes with his arm. At intervals he roused himself to light a fresh cigarette, at each time counting the diminishing few that remained, with static alarm. A clock ticked regularly somewhere in the room. The soft light from the lamp bathed him in a champagne colored and motionless sea.... He raised a fresh cigarette: his pale, prehensile mouth wrapped about it as though his mouth were a separate organism.

But after a while there were no more cigarettes. And roused temporarily, he remarked his hostess' prolonged absence. But he lay back again, luxuriating in quiet and the suave surface on which he rested. But before long he raised the empty cigarette package and groaned dismally and rose and prowled quietly about the room, hoping perhaps to find one cigarette some one had forgotten. But there was none.

The couch drew him and he returned to the oasis of light, where he discovered and captured the practically whole cigarette which Miss Jameson had discarded, "Snipe," he murmured with sepulchral

humorlessness and he fired it, averting his head lest he lose his eyelashes in doing so, and he lay once more, shading his eyes with his arm. The clock ticked on in the silence. It seemed to be directly behind him: if he could just roll his eyes a bit further back into his skull.... He'd better look, anyhow, after a while. After midnight only one trolley to the hour. If he missed the twelve o'clock car...

So, after a while he did look, having to move to do so, and he immediately rose from the divan in a mad, jointless haste. Fortunately he remembered where he had left his hat and he caught it up and plunged down the stairs and on through the dark hall. He blundered into a thing or so, but the pale rectangle of the glass door guided him and after a violent struggle he opened it, and leaping forth he crashed it behind him. It failed to catch and in midflight down the steps he glanced wildly back at the growing darkness of its gap that revealed at the top edge a vague gleam from the light at the head of the stairs.

The corner was not far, and as he ran loosely and frantically toward it there came among the grave gesturing of tall palms a worn and bloodless rumor of the dying moon, and the rising hum of the street car crashed among the trees.

He saw its lighted windows halt, heard its hum cease, saw the windows move again and heard its hum rise swelling, drowning his hoarse reiterated cries. But the conductor saw him at last and pulled the cord again and the car halted once more, humming impatiently; and Mark Frost plunged his long ungovernable legs across the soft slumbrous glare of polished asphalt and clawed his panting, ghostly body through the opened doors out of which the conductor leaned, calling to him: "Come on, come on: this ain't a taxi."

9

Three gray, softfooted priests had passed on, but in an interval hushed by windowless old walls there lingers yet a thin celibate despair. Beneath a high stone gate with a crest and a device in carven stone, a beggar lies, nursing in his hand a crust of bread.

(Gordon, Fairchild and the Semitic man walked in the dark city. Above them, the sky: a heavy, voluptuous night and huge, hot stars like wilting gardenias. About them, streets: narrow, shallow canyons of shadow rich with decay and laced with delicate ironwork, scarcely seen.)

Spring is in the world somewhere, like a blown keen reed, high and fiery cold — he does not yet see it; a shape which he will know — he does not yet see it. The three priests pass on: the walls have hushed their gray and unshod feet.

(In a doorway slightly ajar were women, their faces in the starlight flat and pallid and rife, odorous and exciting and unchaste. Gordon hello dempsey loomed hatless above his two companions. He strode on, paying the women no heed. Fairchild lagged, the Semitic man perforce also. A woman laughed, rife and hushed and rich in the odorous dark come in boys lots of girls cool you off come in boys. The Semitic man drew Fairchild onward, babbling excitedly.)

That's it, that's it! You walk along a dark street, in the dark. The dark is close and intimate about you, holding all things, anything — you need only put out your hand to touch life, to feel the beating heart of life. Beauty: a thing unseen, suggested: natural and fecund and foul — you don't stop for it; you pass on.

(The Semitic man drew him onward after Gordon's tall striding.) I love three things. Rats like dull and cunning silver, keen and plump as death, steal out to gnaw the crust held loosely by the beggar beneath the stone gate. Unreproved they swarm about Ms still recumbent shape, exploring Ms clothing in an obscene silence, dragging their hot bellies over his lean and agechilled body, sniffing his intimate parts. I love three things.

(He drew Fairchild onward, babbling in an ecstasy.) A voice, a touch, a sound: life going on about you unseen in the close dark, beyond these walls, these bricks — (Fairchild stopped, laying his hand against the heatdrunken wall beside him, staring at his friend in the starlight.

Gordon strode on ahead) — in this dark room or that dark room. You want to go into all the streets of all the cities men live in. To look into all the darkened rooms in the world. Not with curiosity, not with dread nor doubt nor disapproval. But humbly, gently, as you would steal in to look at a sleeping child, not to disturb it.

Then as one rat they flash away, and, secure again and still, they become as a row of cigarettes unwinking at a single level. The beggar, whose hand yet shapes Ms stolen crust, sleeps beneath the stone gate.

(Fairchild babbled on. Gordon striding on ahead turned and passed through a door. The door swung open, letting a sheet of light fall outward across the pavement, then the door swung to, snatching the sheet of light again. The Semitic man grasped Fairchild's arm, and he halted. About him the city swooned in a voluptuous of dark and heat, a sleep which was not sleep; and dark and heat lapped his burly short body about with the hidden eternal pulse of the world. Above him, above the shallow serrated canyon of the street, huge hot stars burned at the heart of things.)

Three more priests, barefoot, in robes the color of silence, appear from nowhere. They are speeding after the first three, when they spy the beggar beneath the stone gate. They pause above him: the walls bush away their gray and sibilant footsteps. The rats are motionless as a row of cigarettes. (Gordon reappeared, looming above the other two in the hushed starlight. He held in his hand a bottle.)

The priests draw nearer, touching one another, leaning diffidently above the beggar in the empty street while silence comes slow as a procession of nuns with breathing blent. Above the hushing walls, a thing wild and passionate, remote and sad; shrill as pipes, and yet unheard. Beneath it, soundless shapes amid which, vaguely, a maiden in an ungirdled robe and with a thin bright chain between her ankles, and a sound of far lamenting.

(They went on around a corner and into a darker street. Gordon stopped again, brooding and remote. He raised the bottle against the

sky.) Yes, bitter and new as fire. Fueled close now with sleep. Hushed her strange and ardent fire. A chrysalis of fire whitely. Splendid and new as fire. (He drank, listening to the measured beat of his wild, bitter heart. Then he passed the bottle to his companions, brooding his hawk's face above them against the sky. The others drank, They went on through the dark city.)

The beggar yet sleeps, shaping Ms stolen crust, and one of the priests says, Do you require aught of man, Brother? Just above the silence, amid the shapes, a young naked boy daubed with vermilion, carrying casually a crown. He moves erratic with senseless laughter; and the headless naked body of a woman carved of ebony, surrounded by women wearing skins of slain beasts and chained one to another, lamenting.

The beggar makes no reply, he does not stir; and the second priest leans nearer Ms pale half-shadowed face. Beneath his high white brow he is not asleep, for his eyes stare quietly past the three priests without remarking them. The third priest leans down, raising Ms voice. Brother (They stopped and drank again.

Then they went on, the Semitic man carrying the bottle, nursing it against his breast.) I love three things. (Fairchild walked erratically beside him. Above him, among the mad stars, Gordon's bearded head. The night was full and rich, smelling of streets and people, of secret beings and things.)

The beggar does not move and the priest's voice is a dark bird seeking its way from out a cage. Above the silence, between it and the antic sky, there grows a sound like that of the sea heard afar off. The three priests gaze at one another. The beggar lies motionless "beneath the stone gate. The rats stare their waiting cigarettes upon the scene.

I love three things: gold, marble and purple. The sound grows. Amid shadows and echoes it becomes a wind thunderous from hills with the clashing hooves of centaurs. The headless black woman is a carven agony beyond the fading placidity of the ungirdled maiden, and as the

shadows and echoes blend the chained women raise their voices anew, lamenting thinly. — (They were accosted. Whispers from every door way, hands unchaste and importunate and rife in the tense wild darkness. Fairchild wavered beside him, and Gordon stopped again. “I’m going in here,” he said. “Give me some money.” The Semitic man gave him a nameless bill.)

The wind rushes on, becoming filled with leaping figures antic as flames, and a sound of pipes fiery cold carves the world darkly out of space. The centaurs’ hooves clash, storming; shrill voices ride the storm like gusty birds, wild and passionate and sad. (A door opened in the wall.

Gordon entered and before the door closed again they saw him in a narrow passageway lift a woman from the shadow and raise her against the mad stars, smothering her squeal against his tall kiss.) Then voices and sounds, shadows and echoes change form swirling, becoming the headless, armless, legless torso of a girl, motionless and virginal and passionately eternal before the shadows and echoes whirl away.

(They went on. The Semitic man nursed the bottle against his breast.) I love three things.... Dante invented Beatrice, creating himself a maid that life had not had time to create, and laid upon her frail and unbowed shoulders the whole burden of man’s history of his impossible heart’s desire....

At last one priest, becoming bolder, leans yet nearer and slips his hand beneath the beggar’s sorry robe, against Ms heart. It is cold. (Suddenly Fairchild stumbled heavily beside him and would have fallen. He held Fairchild up and supported him to the wall, and Fairchild leaned against the wall, his head tilted back, hatless, staring into the sky, listening to the dark and measured beating of the heart of things.

“That’s what it is. Genius.” He spoke slowly, distinctly, staring into the sky. “People confuse it so, you see. They have got it now to where it signifies only an active state of the mind in which a picture is painted or a poem is written. When it is not that at all.

It is that Passion Week of the heart, that instant of timeless beatitude which some never know, which some, I suppose, gain at will, which others gain through an outside agency like alcohol, like to-night — that passive state of the heart with which the mind, the brain, has nothing to do at all, in which the hackneyed accidents which make up this world — love and life and death and sex and sorrow — brought together by chance in perfect proportions, take on a kind of splendid and timeless beauty.

Like 'Yseult of the White Hands and her Tristan with that clean, highhearted dullness of his; like that young Lady Something that some government executed, asking permission and touching with a kind of sober wonder the edge of the knife that was to cut her head off; like a redhaired girl, an idiot, turning in a white dress beneath a wistaria covered trellis on a late sunny afternoon in May,..” He leaned against the wall, staring into the hushed mad sky, hearing the dark and simple heart of things. From beyond a cornice there came at last a cold and bloodless rumor of the dying moon.)

(The Semitic man nursed the bottle against his breast. “I love three things: gold, marble and purple—”) — The priests cross themselves while the nuns of silence blend anew their breath, and pass on: soon the high windowless walls have hushed away their thin celibate despair.

The rats are arrogant as cigarettes. After a while they steal forth again climbing over the beggar, dragging their hot bellies over him, exploring unreproved his private parts. Somewhere above the dark street, above the windcarved hills, beyond the silence; thin pipes unheard, wild and passionate and sad. (“ — form solidity color,” he said to his own dark and passionate heart and to Fairchild beside him, leaning against a dark wall, vomiting.)

The rectangle of light yet fell outward across the alleyway; beyond the half-length lattice blind the typewriter yet leaped and thundered.
“Fairchild.”

The manipulator of the machine felt a vague annoyance, like knowing that some one is trying to waken you from a pleasant dream, knowing that if you resist the dream will be broken.
“Oh, Fairchild.”

He concentrated again, trying to exorcise the ravisher of his heart’s beatitude by banging louder on the keyboard. But at last there came a timid knock at the blind.

“Damn!” He surrendered. “Come in,” he bellowed, raising his head.
“My God, where did you come from? I just let you in about ten minutes ago, didn’t I?” Then he saw his caller’s face. “What’s the matter, friend?” he asked quickly, “sick?”

Mr. Talliaferro stood blinking in the light. Then he entered slowly and drooped upon a chair. “Worse than that,” he answered with utter despondence. The large man wheeled heavily to face him.

“Need a doctor or anything?”

The caller buried his face in his hands. “No, no, a doctor can’t help me.”
“Well, what do you want, then? I’m busy. What is it?”

“I believe I want a drink of whisky,” Mr. Talliaferro said at last. “If it’s no trouble,” he added with his customary polite diffidence. He raised a stricken face for a moment. “A terrible thing happened to me to-night.” He lowered his face to his hands again, and the other rose and returned presently with a tumbler half full of liquor. Mr. Talliaferro accepted it gratefully.

He took a swallow, then lowered the glass shakily. “I simply must talk to some one. A terrible thing happened to me...” He brooded for a moment. “It was my last opportunity, you see,” he burst out suddenly. “For Fairchild now, or you, it would be different. But for me—” Mr.

Talliaferro hid his face in his free hand. "A terrible thing happened to me," he repeated.

"Well, spit it out, then. But be quick about it."

Mr. Talliaferro fumbled his handkerchief and weakly mopped his face. The other sat watching him impatiently. "Well, just as I'd planned, I pretended indifference; said that I didn't care to dance to-night. But she said, 'Ah, come along: do you think I came out just to sit in the park or something?' Like that. And when I put my arm around her—" "Around who?"

"Around her. And when I tried to kiss her, she just put—" "But where was this?"

"In the cab. I haven't a car, you see. Though I am planning to buy one next year. And she just put her elbow under my chin and choked me until I had to move back to my side of the seat, and she said, 'I never dance in private or without music, mister man.' And then—"

"In God's name, friend, what are you raving about?"

"About J — , about that girl I was with this evening. And so we went to dance, and I was petting her a bit, just as I had done on the boat: no more, I assure you; and she told me immediately to stop. She said something about not having lumbago. And yet, all the time we were on the yacht she never objected once." Mr. Talliaferro looked at his host with polite uncomprehending astonishment. Then he sighed and finished the whisky and set the glass near his feet.

"Good Lord," the other murmured in a hushed tone.

Mr. Talliaferro continued more briskly: "And quite soon I remarked that her attention was engaged by something or some one behind me. She was dodging her head this way and that as we danced and getting out of step and saying, 'Pardon me,' but when I tried to see what it was I could discover nothing at all to engage her like that.

So I said, 'What are you thinking of?' and she said 'Huh?' like that, and I said, 'I can tell you what you are thinking of,' and she said 'Who? me? What am I thinking of?' still trying to see something behind me, mind you. Then I saw that she was smiling also, and I said, 'You are thinking of me,' and she said Oh. Was I?'"

"Good God," the other murmured.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Talliaferro unhappily. He continued briskly however: "And so I said, as I'd planned, 'I'm tired of this place. Let's go.' She demurred, but I was firm, and so at last she consented and told me to run down and engage a cab and she would join me on the street."

"I should have suspected something then, but I didn't. I ran down and engaged a cab. I gave the driver ten dollars and he agreed to drive out on some unfrequented road and to stop and pretend that he had lost something back along the road, and to wait there until I blew the horn for him.

"So I waited and waited. She didn't appear, so at last I ordered the cab to wait and I ran back upstairs. I didn't see her in the anteroom, so I went back to the dancing floor." He ceased, and sat for a while in a brooding dejection.

"Well?" the other prompted.

Mr. Talliaferro sighed. "I swear, I think I'll give it up: never have anything to do with them any more. When I returned to the dancing floor I looked for her at the table where we had been sitting.

She was not there, and for a moment I couldn't find her, but presently I saw her, dancing. With a man I had never seen before. A large man, like you. I didn't know what to think. I decided finally he was a friend of hers with whom she was dancing until I should return, having misunderstood our arrangement about meeting below. Yet she had told me herself to await her on the street. That's what confused me.

“I waited at the door until I finally caught her eye, and I signaled to her. She flipped her hand in reply, as though she desired that I wait until the dance was finished. So I stood there. Other people were entering and leaving, but I kept my place near the door, where she could find me without difficulty. But when the music ceased, they went to a table and sat down and called to a waiter. And she didn’t glance toward me again!

“I began to get angry, then. I walked over to them. I didn’t want every one to see that I was angry, so I bowed to them, and she looked up at me and said, ‘Why hello, I thought you’d left me and so this kind gentleman was kind enough to take me home.’

‘You damn right I will,’ the man said, popping his eyes at me. ‘Who’s he?’ You see,” Mr. Talliaferro interpolated, “I’m trying to talk as he did. I can’t imitate his execrable speech. You see, it wouldn’t have been so — so — I wouldn’t have felt so helpless had he spoken proper English. But the way he said things — there seemed to be no possible rejoinder — You see?”

“Go on, go on,” the other said.

“And she said, ‘Why, he’s a little friend of mine’ and the man said, ‘Well, it’s time little boys like him was in bed.’ He looked at me, hard, but I ignored him and said firmly, ‘Come, Miss Steinbauer, our taxi is waiting.’ Then he said, ‘Herb, you ain’t trying to take my girl, are you?’

I told him that she had come with me, firmly, you know; and then she said, ‘Run along. You are tired of dancing: I ain’t. So I’m going to stay and dance with this nice man. Good night.’ “She was smiling again: I could see that they were ridiculing me; and then he laughed — like a horse. ‘Beat it, brother,’ he said, ‘she’s gave you the air. Come back tomorrow.’ Well, when I saw his fat red face all full of teeth I wanted to hit him.

But I remembered myself in time — my position in the city and my friends,” he explained, “so I just looked at them and turned and walked

away. Of course every one had seen and heard it all: as I went through the door a waiter said to me: 'Hard luck, fellow, but they will do it.'"

Mr. Talliaferro mused again in a sort of polite incomprehension, more of bewilderment than anger or even dejection. He sighed again. "And on top of all that, the cab driver had gone off with my ten dollars."

The other man looked at Mr. Talliaferro with utter admiration. "O Thou above the thunder and above the excursions and alarms, regard Your masterpiece! Balzac, chew thy bitter thumbs! And here I am, wasting my damn life trying to invent people by means of the written word!" His face became suddenly suffused: he rose towering. "Get to hell out of here," he roared. "You have made me sick!"

Mr. Talliaferro rose obediently. His hopeless dejection invested him again. "But what am I to do?"

"Do? Do? Go to a brothel, if you want a girl. Or if you are afraid some one will come in and take her away from you, get out on the street and pick one up: bring her here, if you like. But in Christ's dear name, don't ever talk to me again. You have already damaged my ego beyond repair. Do you want another drink?"

Mr. Talliaferro sighed again and shook his head. "Thanks just the same," he answered. "Whisky can't help me any." The large man took his arm and kicking the blind outward he helped Mr. Talliaferro kindly but firmly into the alleyway.

Then the blind swung to again and Mr. Talliaferro stood for a time, listening to the frantic typewriter, watching planes of shadow, letting the darkness soothe him. A cat, slinking, regarded him, then flashed a swift, dingy streak across the alley.

He followed it with his eyes in a slow misery, with envy. Love was so simple for cats — mostly noise, success didn't seem to make much difference. He sighed and walked slowly on, leaving the thundering typewriter behind. Presently he turned a corner and heard it no more.

From beyond a cornice there came at last a cold and bloodless rumor of the dying moon.

His decorous pace spaced away streets interesting with darkness and as he walked he marveled that he could be inwardly so despairing, yet outwardly the same as ever. I wonder if it does show on me? he thought.

It is because I am getting old, that women are not attracted to me. Yet, I know any number of men of my age and more, who get women easily... or say they do... - It is something I do not possess, something I have never had....

And soon he would be married again. Mr. Talliaferro, seeing freedom and youth deserting him again, had known at first a clear, sharp regret, almost a despair, realizing that marriage this time would be a climacteric, that after this he would be definitely no longer young; and a final flare of freedom and youth had surged in him like a dying flame.

But now as he walked dark streets beneath the hot heavy sky and the mad wilting gardenias of stars, feeling empty and a little tired and hearing his grumbling skeleton — that smug and dour and unshakable comrade who loves so well to say I told you so — he found himself looking forward to marriage with a thin but definite relief as a solution to his problem. Yes, he told himself, sighing again, chastity is expected of married men. Or, at least they don't lose caste by it....

But it was unbearable to believe that he had never had the power to stir women, that he had been always a firearm unloaded and unaware of it. No, it's something I can do, or say, that I have not yet discovered. As he turned into the quiet street in which he lived he saw two people in a doorway, embracing, He hurried on.

In his rooms at last he slowly removed his coat and hung it neatly in a closet without being aware that he had performed the rite at all, then from his bathroom he got a metal machine with a handpump attached, and he quartered the room methodically with an acrid spraying of

pennyroyal. On each downstroke there was a faint comfortable resistance, though the plunger came back quite easily. Like breathing, back and forth and back and forth: a rhythm.

Something I can do. Something I can say, he repeated to the rhythm of his arm. The liquid hissed pungently, dissolving into the atmosphere, permeating it. Something I can do. Something I can say. There must be. There must be. Surely a man would not be endowed with an impulse and yet be denied the ability to slake it. Something I can say.

His arm moved swifter and swifter, spraying the liquid into the air in short, hissing jets. He ceased, and felt for his handkerchief before he recalled that it was in his coat. His fingers discovered something, though, and claspng his reeking machine he removed from his hip pocket a small round metal box and he held it in his hand, gazing at it.

Agnes Mabel Becky he read, and he laughed a short, mirthless laugh. Then he moved slowly to his chest of drawers and hid the small box carefully away in its usual place and returned to the closet where his coat hung and got his handkerchief, and mopped his brow with it. But must I become an old man before I discover what it is? Old, old, an old man before I have lived at all...

He went slowly to the bathroom and replaced the pump, and returned with a basin of warm water. He set the basin on the floor and went again to the mirror and examined himself. His hair was getting thin, there was no question about that (can't even keep my hair, he thought bitterly) and his thirty-eight years showed in Ms face.

He was not fleshily inclined, yet the skin under his jaw was becoming loose, flabby. He sighed and completed his disrobing, putting his clothing neatly and automatically away as he removed it. On the table beside his chair was a box of flavored digestive lozenges and presently he sat with his feet in the warm water, chewing one of the tablets.

The water mounted warmly through his thin body, soothing him, the pungent lozenge between his slow jaws gave him a temporary

surcease. Let's see, he mused to his rhythmic mastication, calmly reviewing the evening. Where did I go wrong to-night? My plan was good: Fairchild himself admitted that.

Let me think.... His jaws ceased and his gaze brooded on a photograph of his late wife on the opposite wall. Why is it that they never act as you had calculated? You can allow for every contingency, and yet they will always do something else, something they themselves could not have imagined nor devised beforehand.

.. I have been too gentle with them, I have allowed too much leeway for the intervention of their natural perversity and of sheer chance. That has been my mistake every time: giving them dinners and shows right away, allowing them to relegate me to the position of a suitor, of one waiting upon their pleasure.

The trick, the only trick, is to bully them, to dominate them from the start — never employ wiles and never allow them the opportunity to employ wiles. The oldest technique in the world: a club. By God, that's it.

He dried his feet swiftly and thrust them into his bedroom slippers, and went to the telephone and gave a number. "That's the trick, exactly," he whispered exultantly, and then in his ear was a sleepy masculine voice.

"Fairchild? So sorry to disturb you, but I have it at last." A muffled inarticulate sound came over the wire, but he rushed on, unheeding. "I learned through a mistake to-night. The trouble is, I haven't been bold enough with them: I have been afraid of frightening them away. Listen: I will bring her here, I will not take No; I will be cruel and hard, brutal, if necessary, until she begs for my love. What do you think of that?... Hello! Fairchild?..

An interval filled with a remote buzzing. Then a female voice said: "You tell 'em, big boy; treat 'em rough."

THE END

The Sound and The Fury, Faulkner William

Contents

APPENDIX

April 7, 1928

June 2, 1910

April 6, 1928

April 8, 1928

APPENDIX

Compson

1699-1945

IKKEMOTUBBE. A dispossessed American king. Called "l'Homme" (and sometimes "de l'homme") by his fosterbrother, a Chevalier of France, who had he not been born too late could have been among the brightest in that glittering galaxy of knightly blackguards who were Napoleon's marshals, who thus translated the Chickasaw title meaning "The Man"; which translation Ikkemotubbe, himself a man of wit and imagination as well as a shrewd judge of character, including his own, carried one step further and anglicised it to "Doom."

Who granted out of his vast lost domain a solid square mile of virgin North Mississippi dirt as truly angled as the four corners of a cardtable top (forested then because these were the old days before 1833 when the stars fell and Jefferson Mississippi was one long rambling onestorey mudchinked log building housing the Chickasaw Agent and his tradingpost store) to the grandson of a Scottish refugee who had lost his own birthright by casting his lot with a king who himself had been

dispossessed. This in partial return for the right to proceed in peace, by whatever means he and his people saw fit, afoot or a horse provided they were Chickasaw horses, to the wild western land presently to be called Oklahoma: not knowing then about the oil.

JACKSON. A Great White Father with a sword. (An old duellist, a brawling lean fierce mangy durable imperishable old lion who set the wellbeing of the nation above the White House and the health of his new political party above either and above them all set not his wife's honor but the principle that honor must be defended whether it was or not because defended it was whether or not.) Who patented sealed and countersigned the grant with his own hand in his gold tepee in Wassi Town, not knowing about the oil either: so that one day the homeless descendants of the dispossessed would ride supine with drink and splendidly comatose above the dusty allotted harborage of their bones in specially built scarletpainted hearses and fire engines.

These were Compsons:

QUENTIN MACLACHAN. Son of a Glasgow printer, orphaned and raised by his mother's people in the Perth highlands. Fled to Carolina from Culloden Moor with a claymore and the tartan he wore by day and slept under by night, and little else. At eighty, having fought once against an English king and lost, he would not make that mistake twice and so fled again one night in 1779, with his infant grandson and the tartan (the claymore had vanished, along with his son, the grandson's father from one of Tarleton's regiments on a Georgia battlefield about a yea; ago) into Kentucky, where a neighbor named Boon or Boone had already established a settlement.

CHARLES STUART. Attainted and proscribed by name and grade in his British regiment. Left for dead in a Georgia swamp by his own retreating army and then by the advancing American one, both of which were wrong.

He still had the claymore even when on his homemade wooden leg he finally overtook his father and son four years later at Harrodsburg,

Kentucky, just in time to bury the father and enter upon a long period of being a split personality while still trying to be the schoolteacher which he believed he wanted to be, until he gave up at last and became the gambler he actually was and which no Compson seemed to realize they all were provided the gambit was desperate and the odds long enough. Succeeded at last in risking not only his neck but the security of his family and the very integrity of the name he would leave behind him, by joining the confederation headed by an acquaintance named Wilkinson (a man of considerable talent and influence and intellect and power) in a plot to secede the whole Mississippi Valley from the United States and join it to Spain.

Fled in his turn when the bubble burst (as anyone except a Compson schoolteacher should have known it would), himself unique in being the only one of the plotters who had to flee the country: this not from the vengeance and retribution of the government which he had attempted to dismember, but from the furious revulsion of his late confederates now frantic for their own safety. He was not expelled from the United States, he talked himself countryless, his expulsion due not to the treason but to his having been so vocal and vociferant in the conduct of it, burning each bridge vocally behind him before he had even reached the place to build the next one: so that it was no provost marshal nor even a civic agency but his late coplotter themselves who put afoot the movement to evict him from Kentucky and the United States and, if they had caught him, probably from the world too. Fled by night, running true to family tradition, with his son and the old claymore and the tartan.

JASON LYCURGUS. Who, driven perhaps by the compulsion of the flamboyant name given him by the sardonic embittered woodenlegged indomitable father who perhaps still believed with his heart that what he wanted to be was a classicist schoolteacher, rode up the Natchez Trace one day in 1811 with a pair of fine pistols and one meagre saddlebag on a small lightwaisted but stronghocked mare which could do the first two furlongs in definitely under the halfminute and the next two in not appreciably more, though that was all. But it was enough:

who reached the Chickasaw Agency at Okatoba (which in 1860 was still called Old Jefferson) and went no further.

Who within six months was the Agent's clerk and within twelve his partner, officially still the clerk though actually halfowner of what was now a considerable store stocked with the mare's winnings in races against the horses of Ikkemotubbe's young men which he, Compson, was always careful to limit to a quarter or at most three furlongs, and in the next year it was Ikkemotubbe who owned the little mare and Compson owned the solid square mile of land which someday would be almost in the center of the town of Jefferson, forested then and still forested twenty years later though rather a park than a forest by that time, with its slavequarters and stables and kitchengardens and the formal lawns and promenades and pavilions laid out by the same architect who built the columned porticoed house furnished by steamboat from France and New Orleans, and still the square intact mile in 1840 (with not only the little white village called Jefferson beginning to enclose it but an entire white county about to surround it because in a few years now Ikkemotubbe's descendants and people would be gone, those remaining living not as warriors and hunters but as white men as shiftless farmers or, here and there, the masters of what they too called plantations and the owners of shiftless slaves, a little dirtier than the white man, a little lazier, a little crueller until at last even the wild blood itself would have vanished, to be seen only occasionally in the noseshape of a Negro on a cottonwagon or a white sawmill hand or trapper or locomotive fireman), known as the Compson Domain then, since now it was fit to breed princes, statesmen and generals and bishops, to avenge the dispossessed Compsons from Culloden and Carolina and Kentucky then known as the Governor's house because sure enough in time it did produce or at least spawn a governor Quentin MacLachan again, after the Culloden grandfather and still known as the Old Governor's even after it had spawned (1861) a general (called so by predetermined accord and agreement by the whole town and county, as though they knew even then and beforehand that the old governor was the last Compson who would not fail at everything he touched save longevity or suicide) the Brigadier Jason Lycurgus II who failed at Shiloh in '62 and failed again though not

so badly at Resaca in '64, who put the first mortgage on the still intact square mile to a New England carpetbagger in '66, after the old town had been burned by the Federal General Smith and the new little town, in time to be populated mainly by the descendants not of Compsons but of Snopeses, had begun to encroach and then nibble at and into it as the failed brigadier spent the next forty years selling fragments of it off to keep up the mortgage on the remainder: until one day in 1900 he died quietly on an army cot in the hunting and fishing camp in the Tallahatchie River bottom where he passed most of the end of his days.

And even the old governor was forgotten now; what was left of the old square mile was now known merely as the Compson place the weedchoked traces of the old ruined lawns and promenades, the house which had needed painting too long already, the scaling columns of the portico where Jason III (bred for a lawyer and indeed he kept an office upstairs above the Square, where entombed in dusty filingcases some of the oldest names in the county Holston and Sutpen, Grenier and Beauchamp and Coldfield faded year by year among the bottomless labyrinths of chancery: and who knows what dream in the perennial heart of his father, now completing the third of his three avatars the one as son of a brilliant and gallant statesman, the second as battleleader of brave and gallant men, the third as a sort of privileged pseudo Daniel Boone Robinson Crusoe, who had not returned to juvenility because actually he had never left it that that lawyer's office might again be the anteroom to the governor's mansion and the old splendor) sat all day long with a decanter of whiskey and a litter of dogeared Horaces and Livys and Catulluses, composing (it was said) caustic and satiric eulogies on both his dead and his living fellowtownsmen, who sold the last of the property, except that fragment containing the house and the kitchengarden and the collapsing stables and one servant's cabin in which Dilsey's family lived, to a golfclub for the ready money with which his daughter Candace could have her fine wedding in April and his son Quentin could finish one year at Harvard and commit suicide in the following June of 1910, already known as the Old Compson place even while Compsons were still living in it on that spring dusk in 1928 when the old governor's doomed lost nameless seventeen year old greatgreatgranddaughter

robbed her last remaining sane male relative (her uncle Jason IV) of his secret hoard of money and climbed down a rainpipe and ran off with a pitchman in a travelling streetshow, and still known as the Old Compson place long after all traces of Compsons were gone from it: after the widowed mother died and Jason IV, no longer needing to fear Dilsey now, committed his idiot brother, Benjamin, to the State Asylum in Jackson and sold the house to a countryman who operated it as a boarding house for juries and horse and muletraders, and still known as the Old Compson place even after the boardinghouse (and presently the golfcourse too) had vanished and the old square mile was even intact again in row after row of small crowded jerrybuilt individuallyowned demiurban bungalows.

And these:

QUENTIN III. Who loved not his sister's body but some concept of Compson honor precariously and (he knew well) only temporarily supported by the minute fragile membrane of her maidenhead as a miniature replica of all the whole vast globy earth may be poised on the nose of a trained seal. Who loved not the idea of the incest which he would not commit, but some presbyterian concept of its eternal punishment: he, not God, could by that means cast himself and his sister both into hell, where he could guard her forever and keep her forevermore intact amid the eternal fires.

But who loved death above all, who loved only death, loved and lived in a deliberate and almost perverted anticipation of death as a lover loves and deliberately refrains from the waiting willing friendly tender incredible body of his beloved, until he can no longer bear not the refraining but the restraint and so flings, hurls himself relinquishing, drowning. Committed suicide in Cambridge Massachusetts, June 1910, two months after his sister's wedding, waiting first to complete the current academic year and so get the full value of his paid in advance tuition, not because he had his old Culloden and Carolina and Kentucky grandfathers in him but because the remaining piece of the old Compson mile which had been sold to pay for his sister's wedding and

his year at Harvard had been the one thing, excepting that same sister and the sight of an open fire, which his youngest brother, born an idiot, had loved.

CANDACE (CADDY). Doomed and knew it, accepted the doom without either seeking or fleeing it. Loved her brother despite him, loved not only him but loved in him that bitter prophet and inflexible corruptless judge of what he considered the family's honor and its doom, as he thought he loved but really hated in her what he considered the frail doomed vessel of its pride and the foul instrument of its disgrace, not only this, she loved him not only in spite of but because of the fact that he himself was incapable of love, accepting the fact that he must value above all not her but the virginity of which she was custodian and on which she placed no value whatever: the frail physical stricture which to her was no more than a hangnail would have been.

Knew the brother loved death best of all and was not jealous, would (and perhaps in the calculation and deliberation of her marriage did) have handed him the hypothetical hemlock. Was two months pregnant with another man's child which regardless of what its sex would be she had already named Quentin after the brother whom they both (she and her brother) knew was already the same as dead, when she married (1910) an extremely eligible young Indianian she and her mother had met while vacationing at French Lick the summer before. Divorced by him 1911.

Married 1920 to a minor movingpicture magnate, Hollywood California. Divorced by mutual agreement, Mexico 1925. Vanished in Paris with the German occupation, 1940, still beautiful and probably still wealthy too since she did not look within fifteen years of her actual fortyeight, and was not heard of again. Except there was a woman in Jefferson, the county librarian, a mousesized and colored woman who had never married who had passed through the city schools in the same class with Candace Compson and then spent the rest of her life trying to keep Forever Amber in its orderly overlapping avatars and Jurgen and Tom Jones out of the hands of the highschool juniors and seniors who could

reach them down without even having to tip toe from the back shelves where she herself would have to stand on a box to hide them.

One day in 1943, after a week of a distraction bordering on disintegration almost, during which those entering the library would find her always in the act of hurriedly closing her desk drawer and turning the key in it (so that the matrons, wives of the bankers and doctors and lawyers, some of whom had also been in that old highschool class, who came and went in the afternoons with the copies of the Forever Ambers and the volumes of Thorne Smith carefully wrapped from view in sheets of Memphis and Jackson newspapers, believed she was on the verge of illness or perhaps even loss of mind) she closed and locked the library in the middle of the afternoon and with her handbag clasped tightly under her arm and two feverish spots of determination in her ordinarily colorless cheeks, she entered the farmers' supply store where Jason IV had started as a clerk and where he now owned his own business as a buyer of and dealer in cotton, striding on through that gloomy cavern which only men ever entered a cavern cluttered and walled and stalagmitehung with plows and discs and loops of tracechain and singletrees and mulecollars and sidemeat and cheap shoes and horselinament and flour and molasses, gloomy because the goods it contained were not shown but hidden rather since those who supplied Mississippi farmers or at least Negro Mississippi farmers for a share of the crop did not wish, until that crop was made and its value approximately computable, to show them what they could learn to want but only to supply them on specific demand with what they could not help but need and strode on back to Jason's particular domain in the rear: a railed enclosure cluttered with shelves and pigeonholes bearing spiked dust and lintgathering gin receipts and ledgers and cottonsamples and rank with the blended smell of cheese and kerosene and harnessoil and the tremendous iron stove against which chewed tobacco had been spat for almost a hundred years, and up to the long high sloping counter behind which Jason stood and, not looking again at the overalled men who had quietly stopped talking and even chewing when she entered, with a kind of fainting desperation she opened the handbag and fumbled something out of it and laid it open on the counter and stood trembling and breathing rapidly while

Jason looked down at it a picture, a photograph in color clipped obviously from a slick magazine a picture filled with luxury and money and sunlight a Cannebière backdrop of mountains and palms and cypresses and the sea, an open powerful expensive chromium/rimmed sports car, the woman's face hatless between a rich scarf and a seal coat, ageless and beautiful, cold serene and damned; beside her a handsome lean man of middleage in the ribbons and tabs of a German staffgeneral and the mousesized mousecolored spinster trembling and aghast at her own temerity, staring across it at the childless bachelor in whom ended that long line of men who had had something in them of decency and pride even after they had begun to fail at the integrity and the pride had become mostly vanity and selfpity: from the expatriate who had to flee his native land with little else except his life yet who still refused to accept defeat, through the man who gambled his life and his good name twice and lost twice and declined to accept that either, and the one who with only a clever small quarterhorse for tool avenged his dispossessed father and grandfather and gained a principality, and the brilliant and gallant governor and the general who though he failed at leading in battle brave and gallant men at least risked his own life too in the failing, to the cultured dipsomaniac who sold the last of his patrimony not to buy drink but to give one of his descendants at least the best chance in life he could think of.

'It's Caddy!' the librarian whispered. 'We must save her!'

'It's Cad, all right,' Jason said. Then he began to laugh. He stood there laughing above the picture, above the cold beautiful face now creased and dogeared from its week's sojourn in the desk drawer and the handbag. And the librarian knew why he was laughing, who had not called him anything but Mr Compson for thirty-two years now, ever since the day in 1911 when Candace, cast off by her husband, had brought her infant daughter home and left the child and departed by the next train, to return no more, and not only the Negro cook, Dilsey, but the librarian too divined by simple instinct that Jason was somehow using the child's life and its illegitimacy both to blackmail the mother not only into staying away from Jefferson for the rest of her life but into appointing him sole unchallengeable trustee of the money she would send for the child's maintenance, and had refused to speak to him at all

since that day in 1928 when the daughter climbed down the rainpipe and ran away with the pitchman.

'Jason!' she cried. 'We must save her! Jason! Jason!' and still crying it even when he took up the picture between thumb and finger and threw it back across the counter toward her.

'That Candace?' he said. 'Don't make me laugh. This bitch aint thirty yet. The other one's fifty now.'

And the library was still locked all the next day too when at three o'clock in the afternoon, footsore and spent yet still unflagging and still clasping the handbag tightly under her arm, she turned into a neat small yard in the Negro residence section of Memphis and mounted the steps of the neat small house and rang the bell and the door opened and a black woman of about her own age looked quietly out at her. 'It's Frony, isn't it?' the librarian said. 'Dont you remember me Melissa Meek, from Jefferson?' 'Yes,' the Negress said. 'Come in. You want to see Mama.'

And she entered the room, the neat yet cluttered bedroom of an old Negro, rank with the smell of old people, old women, old Negroes, where the old woman herself sat in a rocker beside the hearth where even though it was June a fire smoldered a big woman once, in faded clean calico and an immaculate turban wound round her head above the bleared and now apparently almost sightless eyes and put the dogeared clipping into the black hands which, like the women of her race, were still as supple and delicately shaped as they had been when she was thirty or twenty or even seventeen.

'It's Caddy!' the librarian said. 'It is! Dilsey! Dilsey!' 'What did he say?' the old Negress said. And the librarian knew whom she meant by 'he', nor did the librarian marvel, not only that the old Negress would know that she (the librarian) would know whom she meant by the 'he', but that the old Negress would know at once that she had already shown the picture to Jason.

'Dont you know what he said?' she cried. 'When he realised she was in danger, he said it was her, even if I hadn't even had a picture to show him. But as soon as he realised that somebody, anybody, even just me, wanted to save her, would try to save her, he said it wasn't. But it is! Look at it!' 'Look at my eyes,' the old Negress said. 'How can I see that picture?' 'Call Frony!' the librarian cried. 'She will know her!' But already the old Negress was folding the clipping carefully back into its old creases, handing it back.

'My eyes aint any good anymore,' she said. 'I cant see it.' And that was all. At six oclock she fought her way through the crowded bus terminal, the bag clutched under one arm and the return half of her roundtrip ticket in the other hand, and was swept out onto the roaring platform on the diurnal tide of a few middleaged civilians but mostly soldiers and sailors enroute either to leave or to death and the homeless young women, their companions, who for two years now had lived from day to day in pullmans and hotels when they were lucky and in daycoaches and busses and stations and lobbies and public restrooms when not, pausing only long enough to drop their foals in charity wards or policestations and then move on again, and fought her way into the bus, smaller than any other there so that her feet touched the floor only occasionally until a shape (a man in khaki; she couldn't see him at all because she was already crying) rose and picked her up bodily and set her into a seat next the window, where still crying quietly she could look out upon the fleeing city as it streaked past and then was behind and presently now she would be home again, safe in Jefferson where life lived too with all its incomprehensible passion and turmoil and grief and fury and despair, but here at six oclock you could close the covers on it and even the weightless hand of a child could put it back among its unfeared kindred on the quiet eternal shelves and turn the key upon it for the whole and dreamless night.

Yes she thought, crying quietly that was it she didn't want to see it know whether it was Caddy or not because she knows Caddy doesn't want to be saved hasn't anything anymore worth being saved for nothing worth being lost that she can lose JASON IV. The first sane Compson since before Culloden and (a childless bachelor) hence

the last. Logical rational contained and even a philosopher in the old stoic tradition: thinking nothing whatever of God one way or the other and simply considering the police and so fearing and respecting only the Negro woman, his sworn enemy since his birth and his mortal one since that day in 1911 when she too divined by simple clairvoyance that he was somehow using his infant niece's illegitimacy to blackmail its mother, who cooked the food he ate. Who not only fended off end held his own with Compsons but competed and held his own with the Snopeses who took over the little town following the turn of the century as the Compsons and Sartoris and their ilk faded from it (no Snopes, but Jason Compson himself who as soon as his mother died the niece had already climbed down the rainpipe and vanished so Dilsey no longer had either of these clubs to hold over him committed his idiot younger brother to the state and vacated the old house, first chopping up the vast oncesplendid rooms into what he called apartments and selling the whole thing to a countryman who opened a boardinghouse in it), though this was not difficult since to him all the rest of the town and the world and the human race too except himself were Compsons, inexplicable yet quite predictable in that they were in no sense whatever to be trusted.

Who, all the money from the sale of the pasture having gone for his sister's wedding and his brother's course at Harvard, used his own niggard savings out of his meagre wages as a storeclerk to send himself to a Memphis school where he learned to class and grade cotton, and so established his own business with which, following his dipsomaniac father's death, he assumed the entire burden of the rotting family in the rotting house, supporting his idiot brother because of their mother, sacrificing what pleasures might have been the right and just due and even the necessity of a thirty year old bachelor, so that his mother's life might continue as nearly as possible to what it had been this not because he loved her but (a sane man always) simply because he was afraid of the Negro cook whom he could not even force to leave even when he tried to stop paying her weekly wages, and who despite all this, still managed to save almost three thousand dollars (\$2840. 50) as he reported it on the night his niece stole it, in niggard and agonised dimes and quarters and halfdollars, which hoard he kept in no

bank because to him a banker too was just one more Compson, but hid in a locked bureau drawer in his bedroom whose bed he made and changed himself since he kept the bedroom door locked all the time save when he was passing through it.

Who, following a fumbling abortive attempt by his idiot brother on a passing female child, had himself appointed the idiot's guardian without letting their mother know and so was able to have the creature castrated before the mother even knew it was out of the house, and who following the mother's death in 1933 was able to free himself forever not only from the idiot brother and the house but from the Negro woman too, moving into a pair of offices up a flight of stairs above the supplystore containing his cotton ledgers and samples, which he had

converted into a bedroom kitchen bath, in and out of which on weekends there would be seen a big plain friendly brazenhaired pleasantfaced woman no longer very young, in round picture hats and (in its season) an imitation fur coat, the two of them, the middleaged cottonbuyer and the woman whom the town called, simply, his friend from Memphis, seen at the local picture show on Saturday night and on Sunday morning mounting the apartment stairs with paper bags from the grocer's containing loaves and eggs and oranges and cans of soup, domestic, uxorious, connubial, until the late afternoon bus carried her back to Memphis. He was emancipated now. He was free. 'In 1865,' he would say, 'Abe Lincoln freed the niggers from the Compsons. In 1933, Jason Compson freed the Compsons from the niggers.'

BENJAMIN. Born Maury, after his mother's only brother: a handsome flashing swaggering workless bachelor who borrowed money from almost anyone, even Dilsey although she was a Negro, explaining to her as he withdrew his hand from his pocket that she was not only in his eyes the same as a member of his sister's family, she would be considered a born lady anywhere in any eyes.

Who, when at last even his mother realised what he was and insisted weeping that his name must be changed, was rechristened Benjamin by his brother Quentin (Benjamin, our lastborn, sold into Egypt). Who

loved three things: the pasture which was sold to pay for Candace's wedding and to send Quentin to Harvard, his sister Candace, firelight. Who lost none of them because he could not remember his sister but only the loss of her, and firelight was the same bright shape as going to sleep, and the pasture was even better sold than before because now he and TP could not only follow timeless along the fence the motions which it did not even matter to him were humanbeings swinging golfsticks, TP could lead them to clumps of grass or weeds where there would appear suddenly in TP's hand small white spherules which competed with and even conquered what he did not even know was gravity and all the immutable laws when released from the hand toward plank floor or smokehouse wall or concrete sidewalk. Gelded 1913. Committed to the State Asylum, Jackson 1933. Lost nothing then either because, as with his sister, he remembered not the pasture but only its loss, and firelight was still the same bright shape of sleep.

QUENTIN. The last. Candace's daughter. Fatherless nine months before her birth, nameless at birth and already doomed to be unwed from the instant the dividing egg determined its sex. Who at seventeen, on the one thousand eight hundred ninetyfifth anniversary of the day before the resurrection of Our Lord, swung herself by a rainpipe from the window of the room in which her uncle had locked her at noon, to the locked window of his own locked and empty bedroom and broke a pane and entered the window and with the uncle's firepoker burst open the locked bureau drawer and took the money (it was not \$2840. 50 either, it was almost seven thousand dollars and this was Jason's rage, the red unbearable fury which on that night and at intervals recurring with little or no diminishment for the next five years, made him seriously believe would at some unwarned instant destroy him, kill him as instantaneously dead as a bullet or a lightningbolt: that although he had been robbed not of a mere petty three thousand dollars but of almost seven thousand he couldn't even tell anybody; because he had been robbed of seven thousand dollars instead of just three he could not only never receive justification he did not want sympathy from other men unlucky enough to have one bitch for a sister and another for a niece, he couldn't even go to the police; because he had lost four thousand dollars which did

not belong to him he couldn't even recover the three thousand which did since those first four thousand dollars were not only the legal property of his niece as a part of the money supplied for her support and maintenance by her mother over the last sixteen years, they did not exist at all, having been officially recorded as expended and consumed in the annual reports he submitted to the district Chancellor, as required of him as guardian and trustee by his bondsmen: so that he had been robbed not only of his thievings but his savings too, and by his own victim; he had been robbed not only of the four thousand dollars which he had risked jail to acquire but of the three thousand which he had hoarded at the price of sacrifice and denial, almost a nickel and a dime at a time, over a period of almost twenty years: and this not only by his own victim but by a child who did it at one blow, without premeditation or plan, not even knowing or even caring how much she would find when she broke the drawer open; and now he couldn't even go to the police for help: he who had considered the police always, never given them any trouble, had paid the taxes for years which supported them in parasitic and sadistic idleness; not only that, he didn't dare pursue the girl himself because he might catch her and she would talk, so that his only recourse was a vain dream which kept him tossing and sweating on nights two and three and even four years after the event, when he should have forgotten about it: of catching her without warning, springing on her out of the dark, before she had spent all the money, and murder her before she had time to open her mouth) and climbed down the same rainpipe in the dusk and ran away with the pitchman who was already under sentence for bigamy. And so vanished; whatever occupation overtook her would have arrived in no chromium Mercedes; whatever snapshot would have contained no general of staff.

And that was all. These others were not Compsons. They were black: T.P. Who wore on Memphis's Beale Street the fine bright cheap intransigent clothes manufactured specifically for him by the owners of Chicago and New York sweatshops.

FRONY. Who married a pullman porter and went to St Louis to live and later moved back to Memphis to make a home for her mother since Dilsey refused to go further than that.

LUSTER. A man, aged 14. Who was not only capable of the complete care and security of an idiot twice his age and three times his size, but could keep him entertained.

DILSEY.

They endured.

April 7, 1928

Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out, and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit. Then they went on, and I went along the fence. Luster came away from the flower tree and we went along the fence and they stopped and we stopped and I looked through the fence while Luster was hunting in the grass.

"Here, caddie." He hit. They went away across the pasture. I held to the fence and watched them going away.

"Listen at you, now." Luster said. "Aint you something, thirty-three years old, going on that way. After I done went all the way to town to buy you that cake. Hush up that moaning. Aint you going to help me find that quarter so I can go to the show tonight."

They were hitting little, across the pasture. I went back along the fence to where the flag was. It flapped on the bright grass and the trees.

“Come on.” Luster said. “We done looked there. They aint no more coming right now. Lets go down to the branch and find that quarter before themniggers finds it.”

It was red, flapping on the pasture. Then there was a bird slanting and tilting on it. Luster threw. The flag flapped on the bright grass and the trees. I held to the fence.

“Shut up that moaning,” Luster said. “I cant make them come if they aint coming, can I. If you dont hush up, mammy aint going to have no birthday for you. If you dont hush, you know what I going to do. I going to eat that cake allup. Eat themcandles, too. Eat allthemthirty-three candles. Come on, let’s go down to the branch. I got to find my quarter. Maybe we can find one of they balls. Here. Here they is. Way over yonder. See.” He came to the fence and pointed his arm. “See them. They aint coming back here no more. Come on.”

We went along the fence and came to the garden fence, where our shadows were. My shadow was higher than Luster’s on the fence. We came to the broken place and went through it.

“Wait a minute.” Luster said. “You snagged on that nail again. Cant you never crawl through here without snagging on that nail.”

Caddy uncaught me and we crawled through. Uncle Maury said to not let anybody see us, so we better stoop over, Caddy said. Stoop over, Benjy. Like this, see. We stooped over and crossed the garden, where the flowers rasped and rattled against us. The ground was hard. We climbed the fence, where the pigs were grunting and snuffing. I expect they’re sorry because one ofthem got killed today, Caddy said. The ground was hard, churned and knotted.

Keep your hands in your pockets, Caddy said. Or they’ll get froze. You don’t want your hands froze on Christmas, do you.

“It’s too cold out there.” Versh said. “You dont want to go out doors.”

“What is it now.” Mother said.

“He want to go out doors.” Versh said. “Let himgo.” Uncle Maury said.

“It’s too cold.” Mother said. “He’d better stay in. Benjamin. Stop that, now.” “It wont hurt him.” Uncle Maury said.

“You, Benjamin.” Mother said. “If you dont be good, you’llhave to go to the kitchen.” “Mammy say keep himout the kitchen today.” Versh said. “She say she got all that cooking to get done.”

“Let himgo, Caroline.” Uncle Maury said. “You’llworry yourself sick over him.” “I know it.” Mother said. “It’s a judgment on me. I sometimes wonder”

“I know, I know.” Uncle Maury said. “You must keep your strength up. I’ll make you a toddy.”

“It just upsets me that much more.” Mother said. “Dont you know it does.”

“You’ll feel better.” Uncle Maury said. “Wrap him up good, boy, and take him out for a while.”

Uncle Maury went away. Versh went away.

“Please hush.” Mother said. “We’re trying to get you out as fast as we can. I dont want you to get sick.”

Versh put my overshoes and overcoat on and we took my cap and went out. Uncle Maury was putting the bottle away in the sideboard in the dining-room.

“Keep himout about half an hour, boy.” Uncle Maury said. “Keep himin the yard, now.” “Yes, sir.” Versh said. “We dont never let himget off the place.”

We went out doors. The sun was cold and bright.

“Where you heading for.” Versh said. “You dont think you going to town, does you.” We went through the rattling leaves. The gate was cold. “You better keep them hands in your pockets.” Versh said, “You get them froze onto that gate, then what you do. Whyn’t you wait for them in the house.” He put my hands into my pockets. I could hear him rattling in the leaves. I could smellthe cold. The gate was cold.

“Here some hickeynuts. Whooeey. Git up that tree. Look here at this squirrel, Benjy.” I couldn’t feelthe gate at all, but I could smellthe bright cold.

“You better put them hands back in your pockets.”

Caddy was walking. Then she was running, her book-satchel swinging and jouncing behind her.

“Hello, Benjy.” Caddy said. She opened the gate and came in and stooped down. Caddy smelled like leaves. “Did you come to meet me.” she said. “Did you come to meet Caddy. What did you let him get his hands so cold for, Versh.”

“I told him to keep them in his pockets.” Versh said. “Holding onto that ahun gate.”

“Did you come to meet Caddy.” she said, rubbing my hands. “What is it. What are you trying to tell Caddy.” Caddy smelled like trees and like when she says we were asleep.

What are you moaning about, Luster said. You can watch them again when we get to the branch. Here. Here’s you a jimson weed. He gave me the flower. We went through the fence, into the lot.

“What is it.” Caddy said. “What are you trying to tell Caddy. Did they send him out, Versh.” “Couldn’t keep him in.” Versh said. “He kept on until they let him go and he come right straight down here, looking through the gate.”

“What is it.” Caddy said. “Did you think it would be Christmas when I came home from school. Is that what you thought. Christmas is the day after tomorrow. Santy Claus, Benjy. Santy Claus. Come on, let’s run to the house and get warm.” She took my hand and we ran through the bright rustling leaves. We ran up the steps and out of the bright cold, into the dark cold. Uncle Maury was putting the bottle back in the sideboard. He called Caddy. Caddy said,

“Take him in to the fire, Versh. Go with Versh.” she said. “I’ll come in a minute.” We went to the fire. Mother said,

“Is he cold, Versh.”

“Nome.” Versh said.

“Take his overcoat and overshoes off.” Mother said. “How many times do I have to tell you not to bring him into the house with his overshoes on.”

“Yessum.” Versh said. “Hold still, now.” He took my overshoes off and unbuttoned my coat. Caddy said, “Wait, Versh. Cant he go out again, Mother. I want him to go with me.” “You’d better leave him here.” Uncle Maury said. “He’s been out enough today.” “I think you’d both better stay in.” Mother said. “It’s getting colder, Dilsey says.” “Oh, Mother.” Caddy said.

“Nonsense.” Uncle Maury said. “She’s been in school all day. She needs the fresh air. Run along, Candace.”

“Let him go, Mother.” Caddy said. “Please. You know he’ll cry.”

“Then why did you mention it before him.” Mother said. “Why did you come in here. To give him some excuse to worry me again. You’ve been out enough today. I think you’d better sit down here and play with him.”

“Let them go, Caroline.” Uncle Maury said. “A little cold won’t hurt them. Remember, you’ve got to keep your strength up.”

“I know.” Mother said. “Nobody knows how I dread Christmas. Nobody knows. I am not one of those women who can stand things. I wish for Jason’s and the children’s sakes I was stronger.”

“You must do the best you can and not let them worry you.” Uncle Maury said. “Run along, you two. But don’t stay out long, now. Your mother will worry.”

“Yes, sir.” Caddy said. “Come on, Benjy. We’re going out doors again.” She buttoned my coat and we went toward the door.

“Are you going to take that baby out without his overshoes.” Mother said. “Do you want to make him sick, with the house full of company.”

“I forgot.” Caddy said. “I thought he had them on.”

We went back. “You must think.” Mother said. Hold still now Versh said. He put my overshoes on. “Someday I’ll be gone, and you’ll have to think for him.” Now stomp Versh said. “Come here and kiss Mother, Benjamin.”

Caddy took me to Mother’s chair and Mother took my face in her hands and then she held me against her.

"My poor baby." she said. She let me go. "You and Versh take good care of him, honey." "Yessum." Caddy said. We went out. Caddy said, "You needn't go, Versh. I'll keep him for a while."

"All right." Versh said. "I aint going out in that cold for no fun." He went on and we stopped in the hall and Caddy knelt and put her arms around me and her cold bright face against mine. She smelled like trees.

"You're not a poor baby. Are you. You've got your Caddy. Haven't you got your Caddy." Cant you shut up that moaning and slobbering, Luster said. Aint you shamed of yourself, making all this racket. We passed the carriage house, where the carriage was. It had a new wheel.

"Git in, now, and set still until your maw come." Dilsey said. She shoved me into the carriage. T. P. held the reins. "'Clare I don't see how come Jason wont get a new surrey." Dilsey said. "This thing going to fall to pieces under you all some day. Look at them wheels."

Mother came out, pulling her veil down. She had some flowers.

"Where's Roskus." she said.

"Roskus cant lift his arms, today." Dilsey said. "T. P. can drive all right." "I'm afraid to." Mother said. "It seems to me you all could furnish me with a driver for the carriage once a week. It's little enough I ask, Lord knows."

"You know just as well as me that Roskus got the rheumatism too bad to do more than he have to, Miss Cahline." Dilsey said. "You come on and get in, now. T. P. can drive you just as good as Roskus."

"I'm afraid to." Mother said. "With the baby."

Dilsey went up the steps. "You calling that thing a baby," she said. She took Mother's arms. "A man big as T. P. Come on, now, if you going."

"I'm afraid to." Mother said. They came down the steps and Dilsey helped Mother in. "Perhaps it'll be the best thing, for all of us." Mother said.

"Aint you shamed, talking that way." Dilsey said. "Dont you know it'll take more than a eighteen year old nigger to make Queenie run away. She older than him and Benjy put together. And dont you start no

projecting with Queenie, you hear me, T. P. If you dont drive to suit Miss Cahline, I going to put Roskus on you. He aint too tied up to do that.”

“Yessum.” T. P. said.

“I just know something will happen.” Mother said. “Stop, Benjamin.” “Give him a flower to hold.” Dilsey said, “That what he wanting.” She reached her hand in. “No, no.” Mother said. “You’ll have them all scattered.”

“You hold them.” Dilsey said. “I’ll get him one out.” She gave me a flower and her hand went away.

“Go on now, ’fore Quentin see you and have to go too.” Dilsey said.

“Where is she.” Mother said.

“She down to the house playing with Luster.” Dilsey said. “Go on, T. P. Drive that surrey like Roskus told you, now.”

“Yessum.” T. P. said. “Humup, Queenie.” “Quentin.” Mother said.

“Don’t let” “Course I is.” Dilsey said.

The carriage jolted and crunched on the drive. “I’m afraid to go and leave Quentin.” Mother said. “I’d better not go. T. P.” We went through the gate, where it didn’t jolt anymore. T. P. hit Queenie with the whip.

“You, T. P.” Mother said.

“Got to get her going.” T. P. said. “Keep her wake up till we get back to the barn.” “Turn around.” Mother said. “I’m afraid to go and leave Quentin.”

“Cant turn here.” T. P. said. Then it was broader. “Cant you turn here.” Mother said.

“Allright.” T. P. said. We began to turn. “You, T. P.” Mother said, clutching me.

“I got to turn around somehow.” T. P. said. “Whoa, Queenie.” We stopped. “You’ll turn us over.” Mother said.

“What you want to do, then.” T. P. said.

“I’m afraid for you to try to turn around.” Mother said. “Get up, Queenie.” T. P. said. We went on.

"I just know Dilsey will let something happen to Quentin while I'm gone." Mother said. "We must hurry back."

"Humup, there." T. P. said. He hit Queenie with the whip.

"You, T. P." Mother said, clutching me. I could hear Queenie's feet and the bright shapes went smooth and steady on both sides, the shadows of them flowing across Queenie's back. They went on like the bright tops of wheels. Then those on one side stopped at the tall white post where the soldier was. But on the other side they went on smooth and steady, but a little slower.

"What do you want." Jason said. He had his hands in his pockets and a pencil behind his ear.

"We're going to the cemetery." Mother said.

"All right." Jason said. "I dont aimto stop you, do I. Was that all you wanted with me, just to tellme that."

"I know you wont come." Mother said. "I'd feelsafer if you would."

"Safe fromwhat." Jason said. "Father and Quentin cant hurt you."

Mother put her handkerchief under her veil. "Stop it, Mother." Jason said. "Do you want to get that damn loony to bawling in the middle of the square. Drive on, T. P."

"Humup, Queenie." T. P. said.

"It's a judgment on me." Mother said. "But I'llbe gone too, soon."

"Here." Jason said.

"Whoa." T. P. said. Jason said,

"Uncle Maury's drawing on you for fifty. What do you want to do about it."

"Why ask me." Mother said. "I dont have any say so. I try not to worry you and Dilsey. I'll be gone soon, and then you"

"Go on, T. P." Jason said.

"Hum up, Queenie." T. P. said. The shapes flowed on. The ones on the other side began again, bright and fast and smooth, like when Caddy says we are going to sleep.

Cry baby, Luster said. Aint you shamed. We went through the barn. The stalls were all open. You aint got no spotted pony to ride now, Luster said. The floor was dry and dusty. The roof was falling. The slanting holes were full of spinning yellow. What do you want to go that way for. You want to get your head knocked off with one of them balls. "Keep your hands in your pockets." Caddy said, "Or they'll be froze. You dont want your hands froze on Christmas, do you."

We went around the barn. The big cow and the little one were standing in the door, and we could hear Prince and Queenie and Fancy stomping inside the barn. "If it wasn't so cold, we'd ride Fancy." Caddy said, "But it's too cold to hold on today." Then we could see the branch, where the smoke was blowing. "That's where they are killing the pig." Caddy said. "We can come back by there and see them." We went down the hill.

"You want to carry the letter." Caddy said. "You can carry it." She took the letter out of her pocket and put it in mine. "It's a Christmas present." Caddy said. "Uncle Maury is going to surprise Mrs Patterson with it. We got to give it to her without letting anybody see it. Keep your hands in your pockets good, now." We came to the branch. "It's froze." Caddy said, "Look." She broke the top of the water and held a piece of it against my face. "Ice. That means how cold it is." She helped me across and we went up the hill. "We cant even tell Mother and Father. You know what I think it is. I think it's a surprise for Mother and Father and Mr Patterson both, because Mr Patterson sent you some candy. Do you remember when Mr Patterson sent you some candy last summer."

There was a fence. The vine was dry, and the wind rattled in it.

"Only I dont see why Uncle Maury didn't send Versh." Caddy said. "Versh wont tell." Mrs Patterson was looking out the window. "You wait here." Caddy said. "Wait right here, now. I'll be back in a minute. Give me the letter." She took the letter out of my pocket. "Keep your hands in your pockets." She climbed the fence with the letter in her hand and went through the brown, rattling flowers. Mrs Patterson came to the door and opened it and stood there.

Mr Patterson was chopping in the green flowers. He stopped chopping and looked at me. Mrs Patterson came across the garden, running. When I saw her eyes I began to cry. You idiot, Mrs Patterson said, I told him never to send you alone again. Give it to me. Quick. Mr Patterson came fast, with the hoe. Mrs Patterson leaned across the fence, reaching her hand. She was trying to climb the fence. Give it to me, she said, Give it to me. Mr Patterson climbed the fence. He took the letter. Mrs Patterson's dress was caught on the fence. I saw her eyes again and I ran down the hill.

"They aint nothing over yonder but houses." Luster said. "We going down to the branch." They were washing down at the branch. One of them was singing. I could smell the clothes flapping, and the smoke blowing across the branch. "You stay down here." Luster said. "You aint got no business up yonder. Them folks hit you, sho." "What he want to do."

"He dont know what he want to do." Luster said. "He think he want to go up yonder where they knocking that ball. You sit down here and play with your jimson weed. Look at them chillen playing in the branch, if you got to look at something. How come you cant behave yourself like folks." I sat down on the bank, where they were washing, and the smoke blowing blue.

"Is you allseen anything of a quarter down here." Luster said. "What quarter."

"The one I had here this morning." Luster said. "I lost it somewhere. It fell through this here hole in my pocket. If I dont find it I cant go to the show tonight."

"Where'd you get a quarter, boy. Find it in white folks' pocket while they aint looking." "Got it at the getting place." Luster said. "Plenty more where that one come from. Only I got to find that one. Is you allfound it yet."

"I aint studying no quarter. I got my own business to tend to." "Come on here." Luster said. "Help me look for it."

"He wouldn't know a quarter if he was to see it, would he."

"He can help look just the same." Luster said. "You allgoing to the show tonight."

"Dont talk to me about no show. Time I get done over this here tub I be too tired to lift my hand to do nothing."

"I bet you be there." Luster said. "I bet you was there last night. I bet you all be right there when that tent open."

"Be enough niggers there without me. Was last night." "Nigger's money good as white folks, I reckon."

"White folks gives nigger money because know first white man comes along with a band going to get it allback, so nigger can go to work for some more."

"Aint nobody going make you go to that show." "Aint yet. Aint thought of it, I reckon."

"What you got against white folks."

"Aint got nothing against them. I goes my way and lets white folks go theirs. I aint studying that show."

"Got a man in it can play a tune on a saw. Play it like a banjo."

"You go last night." Luster said. "I going tonight. If I can find where I lost that quarter." "You going take himwith you, I reckon."

"Me." Luster said. "You reckon I be found anywhere with him, time he start bellering." "What does you do when he start bellering."

"I whips him." Luster said. He sat down and rolled up his overalls. They played in the branch.

"You allfound any balls yet." Luster said.

"Aint you talking biggity. I bet you better not let your grandmammy hear you talking like that."

Luster got into the branch, where they were playing. He hunted in the water, along the bank.

"I had it when we was down here this morning." Luster said. "Where 'bouts you lose it."

“Right out this here hole in my pocket.” Luster said. They hunted in the branch. Then they all stood up quick and stopped, then they splashed and fought in the branch. Luster got it and they squatted in the water, looking up the hill through the bushes.

“Where is they.” Luster said. “Aint in sight yet.”

Luster put it in his pocket. They came down the hill. “Did a ball come down here.”

“It ought to be in the water. Didn’t any of you boys see it or hear it.”

“Aint heard nothing come down here.” Luster said. “Heard something hit that tree up yonder. Dont know which way it went.”

They looked in the branch.

“Hell. Look along the branch. It came down here. I saw it.” They looked along the branch. Then they went back up the hill. “Have you got that ball.” the boy said.

“What I want with it.” Luster said. “I aint seen no ball.”

The boy got in the water. He went on. He turned and looked at Luster again. He went on down the branch.

The man said “Caddie” up the hill. The boy got out of the water and went up the hill. “Now, just listen at you.” Luster said. “Hush up.”

“What he moaning about now.”

“Lawd knows.” Luster said. “He just starts like that. He been at it all morning. Cause it his birthday, I reckon.”

“How old he.”

“He thirty-three.” Luster said. “Thirty-three this morning.” “You mean, he been three years old thirty years.”

“I going by what mammy say.” Luster said. “I dont know. We going to have thirty-three candles on a cake, anyway. Little cake. Wont hardly hold them. Hush up. Come on back here.” He came and caught my arm.

“You old loony.” he said. “You want me to whip you.”

“I bet you will.”

“I is done it. Hush, now.” Luster said. “Aint I told you you cant go up there. They’ll knock your head clean off with one of them balls. Come on, here.” He pulled me back. “Sit down.” I sat

down and he took off my shoes and rolled up my trousers. "Now, git in that water and play and see can you stop that slobbering and moaning."

I hushed and got in the water and Roskus came and said to come to supper and Caddy said,
It's not supper time yet. I'm not going.

She was wet. We were playing in the branch and Caddy squatted down and got her dress wet and Versh said,
"Your mommer going to whip you for getting your dress wet." "She's not going to do any such thing." Caddy said.
"How do you know." Quentin said.

"That's allright how I know." Caddy said. "How do you know." "She said she was." Quentin said. "Besides, I'molder than you." "I'mseven years old." Caddy said, "I guess I know."

"I'molder than that." Quentin said. "I go to school. Dont I, Versh."

"I'mgoing to schoolnext year." Caddy said, "When it comes. Aint I, Versh." "You know she whip you when you get your dress wet." Versh said.

"It's not wet." Caddy said. She stood up in the water and looked at her dress. "I'll take it off." she said. "Then it'lldry."

"I bet you wont." Quentin said. "I bet I will." Caddy said.

"I bet you better not." Quentin said.

Caddy came to Versh and me and turned her back. "Unbutton it, Versh." she said.

"Dont you do it, Versh." Quentin said. "Taint none of my dress." Versh said.

"You unbutton it, Versh." Caddy said, "Or I'll tell Dilsey what you did yesterday." So Versh unbuttoned it.

"You just take your dress off." Quentin said. Caddy took her dress off and threw it on the bank. Then she didn't have on anything but her bodice and drawers, and Quentin slapped her and she slipped and fell down in the water. When she got up she began to splash water on Quentin, and Quentin splashed water on Caddy. Some of it splashed on

Versh and me and Versh picked me up and put me on the bank. He said he was going to tell on Caddy and Quentin, and then Quentin and Caddy began to splash water at Versh. He got behind a bush.

"I'm going to tell mammy on you all." Versh said.

Quentin climbed up the bank and tried to catch Versh, but Versh ran away and Quentin couldn't. When Quentin came back Versh stopped and hollered that he was going to tell. Caddy told him that if he wouldn't tell, they'd let him come back. So Versh said he wouldn't, and they let him.

"Now I guess you're satisfied." Quentin said, "We'll both get whipped now." "I don't care." Caddy said. "I'll run away."

"Yes you will." Quentin said.

"I'll run away and never come back." Caddy said. I began to cry. Caddy turned around and said "Hush." So I hushed. Then they played in the branch. Jason was playing too. He was by himself further down the branch. Versh came around the bush and lifted me down into the water again. Caddy was all wet and muddy behind, and I started to cry and she came and squatted in the water.

"Hush now." she said. "I'm not going to run away." So I hushed. Caddy smelled like trees in the rain.

What is the matter with you, Luster said. Can't you get done with that moaning and play in the branch like folks.

Why'n't you take him on home. Didn't they told you not to take him off the place.

He still think they own this pasture, Luster said. Can't nobody see down here from the house, no ways.

We can. And folks don't like to look at a loony. Taint no luck in it.

Roskus came and said to come to supper and Caddy said it wasn't supper time yet.

"Yes tis." Roskus said. "Dilsey say for you all to come on to the house. Bring them on, Versh." He went up the hill, where the cow was lowing.

"Maybe we'll be dry by the time we get to the house." Quentin said.

"It was all your fault." Caddy said. "I hope we do get whipped." She put her dress on and Versh buttoned it.

"They wont know you got wet." Versh said. "It dont show on you. Less me and Jason tells."

"Are you going to tell, Jason." Caddy said. "Tellon who." Jason said.

"He wont tell." Quentin said. "Willyou, Jason."

"I bet he does tell." Caddy said. "He'lltellDamuddy."

"He cant tell her." Quentin said. "She's sick. If we walk slow it'll be too dark for them to see."

"I dont care whether they see or not." Caddy said. "I'mgoing to tell, myself. You carry him up the hill, Versh."

"Jason wont tell." Quentin said. "You remember that bow and arrow I made you, Jason." "It's broke now." Jason said.

"Let him tell." Caddy said. "I dont give a cuss. Carry Maury up the hill, Versh." Versh squatted and I got on his back.

See you all at the show tonight, Luster said. Come on, here. We got to find that quarter. "If we go slow, it'llbe dark when we get there."

Quentin said.

"I'm not going slow." Caddy said. We went up the hill, but Quentin didn't come. He was down at the branch when we got to where we could smell the pigs. They were grunting and snuffing in the trough in the corner. Jason came behind us, with his hands in his pockets. Roskus was milking the cow in the barn door.

The cows came jumping out ofthe barn.

"Go on." T. P. said. "Holler again. I going to holler myself. Whooeey."

Quentin kicked T. P. again. He kicked T. P. into the trough where the pigs ate and T. P. lay there. "Hot dogs." T. P. said, "Didn't he get me then. You see that white man kick me that time. Whooeey."

I wasn't crying, but I couldn't stop. I wasn't crying, but the ground wasn't still, and then I was crying. The ground kept sloping up and the cows ran up the hill. T. P. tried to get up. He fell down again and the cows ran down the hill. Quentin held my arm and we went toward the barn. Then the barn wasn't there and we had to wait until it came back.

I didn't see it come back. It came behind us and Quentin set me down in the trough where the cows ate. I held on to it. It was going away too, and I held to it. The cows ran down the hill again, across the door. I couldn't stop. Quentin and T. P. came up the hill, fighting. T. P. was falling down the hill and Quentin dragged him up the hill. Quentin hit T. P. I couldn't stop.

"Stand up." Quentin said, "You stay right here. Don't you go away until I get back." "Me and Benjy going back to the wedding." T. P. said.

"Whooey."

Quentin hit T. P. again. Then he began to thump T. P. against the wall. T. P. was laughing. Every time Quentin thumped him against the wall he tried to say Whooey, but he couldn't say it for laughing. I quit crying, but I couldn't stop. T. P. fell on me and the barn door went away. It went down the hill and T. P. was fighting by himself and he fell down again. He was still laughing, and I couldn't stop, and I tried to get up and I fell down, and I couldn't stop. Versh said,

"You sho done it now. I'll declare if you aint. Shut up that yelling."

T. P. was still laughing. He flopped on the door and laughed. "Whooey." he said, "Me and Benjy going back to the wedding. Sassprilluh." T. P. said.

"Hush." Versh said. "Where you get it." "Out the cellar." T. P. said.

"Whooey."

"Hush up." Versh said, "Where'bouts in the cellar."

"Anywhere." T. P. said. He laughed some more. "Moren a hundred bottles left. Moren a million. Look out, nigger, I going to holler."

Quentin said, "Lift him up." Versh lifted me up.

"Drink this, Benjy." Quentin said. The glass was hot. "Hush, now." Quentin said. "Drink it." "Sassprilluh." T. P. said. "Lemme drink it, Mr Quentin."

"You shut your mouth." Versh said, "Mr Quentin wear you out." "Hold him, Versh." Quentin said.

They held me. It was hot on my chin and on my shirt. "Drink." Quentin said. They held my head. It was hot inside me, and I began again. I was crying now, and something was happening inside me and I cried more,

and they held me until it stopped happening. Then I hushed. It was still going around, and then the shapes began. "Open the crib, Versh." They were going slow. "Spread those empty sacks on the floor." They were going faster, almost fast enough. "Now. Pick up his feet." They went on, smooth and bright. I could hear T. P. laughing. I went on with them, up the bright hill.

At the top of the hill Versh put me down. "Come on here, Quentin." he called, looking back down the hill. Quentin was still standing there by the branch. He was chunking into the shadows where the branch was. "Let the old skizzard stay there." Caddy said. She took my hand and we went on past the barn and through the gate. There was a frog on the brick walk, squatting in the middle of it. Caddy stepped over it and pulled me on.

"Come on, Maury." she said. It stillsquatted there until Jason poked at it with his toe. "He'll make a wart on you." Versh said. The frog hopped away.

"Come on, Maury." Caddy said.

"They got company tonight." Versh said. "How do you know." Caddy said.

"With all the lights on." Versh said, "Light in every window."

"I reckon we can turn all the lights on without company, if we want to." Caddy said. "I bet it's company." Versh said. "You all better go in the back and slip upstairs."

"I dont care." Caddy said. "I'll walk right in the parlor where they are." "I bet your pappy whip you if you do." Versh said.

"I dont care." Caddy said. "I'll walk right in the parlor. I'll walk right in the dining room and eat supper."

"Where you sit." Versh said.

"I'd sit in Damuddy's chair." Caddy said. "She eats in bed."

"I'm hungry." Jason said. He passed us and ran on up the walk. He had his hands in his pockets and he fell down. Versh went and picked him up.

"If you keep them hands out your pockets, you could stay on your feet." Versh said. "You cant never get them out in time to catch yourself, fat as you is."

Father was standing by the kitchen steps. "Where's Quentin." he said.

"He coming up the walk." Versh said. Quentin was coming slow. His shirt was a white blur. "Oh." Father said. Light fell down the steps, on him.

"Caddy and Quentin threw water on each other." Jason said. We waited.

"They did." Father said. Quentin came, and Father said, "You can eat supper in the kitchen tonight." He stopped and took me up, and the light came tumbling down the steps on me too, and I could look down at Caddy and Jason and Quentin and Versh. Father turned toward the steps. "You must be quiet, though." he said.

"Why must we be quiet, Father." Caddy said. "Have we got company."

"Yes." Father said.

"I told you they was company." Versh said.

"You did not." Caddy said, "I was the one that said there was. I said I would"

"Hush." Father said. They hushed and Father opened the door and we crossed the back porch and went in to the kitchen. Dilsey was there, and Father put me in the chair and closed the apron down and pushed it to the table, where supper was. It was steaming up.

"You mind Dilsey, now." Father said. "Dont let them make any more noise than they can help, Dilsey."

"Yes, sir." Dilsey said. Father went away.

"Remember to mind Dilsey, now." he said behind us. I leaned my face over where the supper was. It steamed up on my face.

"Let them mind me tonight, Father." Caddy said. "I wont." Jason said.

"I'mgoing to mind Dilsey."

"You'llhave to, if Father says so." Caddy said. "Let them mind me, Father." "I wont." Jason said, "I wont mind you."

"Hush." Father said. "You all mind Caddy, then. When they are done, bring them up the back stairs, Dilsey."

"Yes, sir." Dilsey said.

"There." Caddy said, "Now I guess you'll mind me."

"You all hush, now." Dilsey said. "You got to be quiet tonight." "Why do we have to be quiet tonight." Caddy whispered.

"Never you mind." Dilsey said, "You'll know in the Lawd's own time."

She brought my bowl. The steam from it came and tickled my face.

"Come here, Versh." Dilsey said.

"When is the Lawd's own time, Dilsey." Caddy said. "It's Sunday."

Quentin said. "Dont you know anything."

"Shhhhhh." Dilsey said. "Didn't Mr Jason say for you all to be quiet. Eat your supper, now. Here, Versh. Git his spoon." Versh's hand came with the spoon, into the bowl. The spoon came up to my mouth. The steam tickled into my mouth. Then we quit eating and we looked at each other and we were quiet, and then we heard it again and I began to cry.

"What was that." Caddy said. She put her hand on my hand.

"That was Mother." Quentin said. The spoon came up and I ate, then I cried again.

"Hush." Caddy said. But I didn't hush and she came and put her arms around me. Dilsey went and closed both the doors and then we couldn't hear it.

"Hush, now." Caddy said. I hushed and ate. Quentin wasn't eating, but Jason was. "That was Mother." Quentin said. He got up.

"You set right down." Dilsey said. "They got company in there, and you in them muddy clothes. You set down too, Caddy, and get done eating."

"She was crying." Quentin said.

"It was somebody singing." Caddy said. "Wasn't it, Dilsey."

"You all eat your supper, now, like Mr Jason said." Dilsey said. "You'll know in the Lawd's own time." Caddy went back to her chair.

"I told you it was a party." she said. Versh said, "He done et all that."

"Bring his bowl here." Dilsey said. The bowl went away.

"Dilsey." Caddy said, "Quentin's not eating his supper. Hasn't he got to mind me."

"Eat your supper, Quentin." Dilsey said, "You all got to get done and get out of my kitchen."

"I dont want any more supper." Quentin said.

"You've got to eat if I say you have." Caddy said. "Hasn't he, Dilsey."

The bowl steamed up to my face, and Versh's hand dipped the spoon in it and the steam tickled into my mouth.

"I dont want any more." Quentin said. "How can they have a party when Damuddy's sick." "They'll have it down stairs." Caddy said. "She can come to the landing and see it. That's what I'mgoing to do when I get my nightie on."

"Mother was crying." Quentin said. "Wasn't she crying, Dilsey."

"Dont you come pestering at me, boy." Dilsey said. "I got to get supper for all them folks soon as you allget done eating."

After a while even Jason was through eating, and he began to cry. "Now you got to tune up." Dilsey said.

"He does it every night since Damuddy was sick and he cant sleep with her." Caddy said. "Cry baby."

"I'mgoing to tellon you." Jason said.

He was crying. "You've already told." Caddy said. "There's not anything else you can tell, now."

"You all needs to go to bed." Dilsey said. She came and lifted me down and wiped my face and hands with a warm cloth. "Versh, can you get them up the back stairs quiet. You, Jason, shut up that crying."

"It's too early to go to bed now." Caddy said. "We dont ever have to go to bed this early." "You is tonight." Dilsey said. "Your pa say for you to come right on up stairs when you et supper. You heard him."

"He said to mind me." Caddy said. "I'mnot going to mind you." Jason said.

"You have to." Caddy said. "Come on, now. You have to do like I say."

"Make thembe quiet, Versh." Dilsey said. "You allgoing to be quiet, aint you."

“What do we have to be so quiet for, tonight.” Caddy said.

“Your mommer aint feeling well.” Dilsey said. “You allgo on with Versh, now.”

“I told you Mother was crying.” Quentin said. Versh took me up and opened the door onto the back porch. We went out and Versh closed the door black. I could smell Versh and feel him. “You all be quiet, now. We’re not going up stairs yet. Mr Jason said for you to come right up stairs. He said to mind me. I’m not going to mind you. But he said for all of us to. Didn’t he, Quentin.” I could feel Versh’s head. I could hear us. “Didn’t he, Versh. Yes, that’s right. Then I say for us to go out doors a while. Come on.” Versh opened the door and we went out. We went down the steps.

“I expect we’d better go down to Versh’s house, so we’ll be quiet.” Caddy said. Versh put me down and Caddy took my hand and we went down the brick walk.

“Come on.” Caddy said, “That frog’s gone. He’s hopped way over to the garden, by now. Maybe we’ll see another one.” Roskus came with the milk buckets. He went on. Quentin wasn’t coming with us. He was sitting on the kitchen steps. We went down to Versh’s house. I liked to smell Versh’s house. There was a fire in it and T. P. squatting in his shirt tail in front of it, chunking it into a blaze.

Then I got up and T. P. dressed me and we went to the kitchen and ate. Dilsey was singing and I began to cry and she stopped.

“Keep him away from the house, now.” Dilsey said. “We cant go that way.” T. P. said.

We played in the branch.

“We cant go around yonder.” T. P. said. “Dont you know mammy say we cant.” Dilsey was singing in the kitchen and I began to cry.

“Hush.” T. P. said. “Come on. Lets go down to the barn.”

Roskus was milking at the barn. He was milking with one hand, and groaning. Some birds sat on the barn door and watched him. One of them came down and ate with the cows. I watched Roskus milk while T.

P. was feeding Queenie and Prince. The calf was in the pig pen. It nuzzled at the wire, bawling.

"T. P." Roskus said. T. P. said Sir, in the barn. Fancy held her head over the door, because T. P. hadn't fed her yet. "Git done there." Roskus said. "You got to do this milking. I cant use my right hand no more."

T. P. came and milked.

"Whyn't you get the doctor." T. P. said.

"Doctor cant do no good." Roskus said. "Not on this place." "What wrong with this place." T. P. said.

"Taint no luck on this place." Roskus said. "Turn that calf in if you done."

Taint no luck on this place, Roskus said. The fire rose and fell behind him and Versh, sliding on his and Versh's face. Dilsey finished putting me to bed. The bed smelled like T. P. I liked it.

"What you know about it." Dilsey said. "What trance you been in."

"Dont need no trance." Roskus said. "Aint the sign of it laying right there on that bed. Aint the sign of it been here for folks to see fifteen years now."

"Spose it is." Dilsey said. "It aint hurt none of you and yourn, is it. Versh working and Frony married off your hands and T. P. getting big enough to take your place when rheumatism finish getting you."

"They been two, now." Roskus said. "Going to be one more. I seen the sign, and you is too."

"I heard a squinch owl that night." T. P. said. "Dan wouldn't come and get his supper, neither. Wouldn't come no closer than the barn. Begun howling right after dark. Versh heard him."

"Going to be more than one more." Dilsey said. "Show me the man what aint going to die, bless Jesus."

"Dying aint all." Roskus said.

"I knows what you thinking." Dilsey said. "And they aint going to be no luck in saying that name, lessen you going to set up with himwhile he cries."

"They aint no luck on this place." Roskus said. "I seen it at first but when they changed his name I knowed it."

"Hush your mouth." Dilsey said. She pulled the covers up. It smelled like T. P. "You allshut up now, tillhe get to sleep."

"I seen the sign." Roskus said.

"Sign T. P. got to do allyour work for you." Dilsey said. Take him and Quentin down to the house and let them play with Luster, where Frony can watch them, T. P., and go and help your pa.

We finished eating. T. P. took Quentin up and we went down to T. P.'s house. Luster was playing in the dirt. T. P. put Quentin down and she played in the dirt too. Luster had some spools and he and Quentin fought and Quentin had the spools. Luster cried and Frony came and gave Luster a tin can to play with, and then I had the spools and Quentin fought me and I cried.

"Hush." Frony said, "Aint you shamed of yourself. Taking a baby's play pretty." She took the spools fromme and gave themback to Quentin.

"Hush, now." Frony said, "Hush, I tellyou."

"Hush up." Frony said. "You needs whipping, that's what you needs." She took Luster and Quentin up. "Come on here." she said. We went to the barn. T. P. was milking the cow. Roskus was sitting on the box.

"What's the matter with himnow." Roskus said.

"You have to keep him down here." Frony said. "He fighting these babies again. Taking they play things. Stay here with T. P. now, and see can you hush a while."

"Clean that udder good now." Roskus said. "You milked that young cow dry last winter. If you milk this one dry, they aint going to be no more milk."

Dilsey was singing.

"Not around yonder." T. P. said. "Dont you know mammy say you cant go around there." They were singing.

"Come on." T. P. said. "Lets go play with Quentin and Luster. Come on."

Quentin and Luster were playing in the dirt in front of T. P.'s house. There was a fire in the house, rising and falling, with Roskus sitting black against it.

"That's three, thank the Lawd." Roskus said. "I told you two years ago. They aint no luck on this place."

"Whyn't you get out, then." Dilsey said. She was undressing me. "Your bad luck talk got them Memphis notions into Versh. That ought to satisfy you."

"If that all the bad luck Versh have." Roskus said. Frony came in.

"You all done." Dilsey said.

"T. P. finishing up." Frony said. "Miss Cahline want you to put Quentin to bed." "I'm coming just as fast as I can." Dilsey said. "She ought to know by this time I aint got no wings."

"That's what I tellyou." Roskus said. "They aint no luck going be on no place where one of they own chillens' name aint never spoke."

"Hush." Dilsey said. "Do you want to get him started?"

"Raising a child not to know its own mammy's name." Roskus said.

"Dont you bother your head about her." Dilsey said. "I raised all of them and I reckon I can raise one more. Hush now. Let him get to sleep if he will."

"Saying a name." Frony said. "He dont know nobody's name."

"You just say it and see if he dont." Dilsey said. "You say it to him while he sleeping and I bet he hear you."

"He know lot more than folks thinks." Roskus said. "He knowed they time was coming, like that pointer done. He could tellyou when his coming, if he could talk. Or yours. Or mine."

"You take Luster outen that bed, mammy." Frony said. "That boy conjure him."

"Hush your mouth." Dilsey said, "Aint you got no better sense than that. What you want to listen to Roskus for, anyway. Get in, Benjy."

Dilsey pushed me and I got in the bed, where Luster already was. He was asleep. Dilsey took a long piece of wood and laid it between Luster and me. "Stay on your side now." Dilsey said "Luster little, and you don't want to hurt him."

You can't go yet, T. P. said. Wait.

We looked around the corner of the house and watched the carriages go away.

"Now." T. P. said. He took Quentin up and we ran down to the corner of the fence and watched them pass. "There he go," T. P. said. "See that one with the glass in it. Look at him. He laying in there. See him."

Come on, Luster said, I going to take this here ball down home, where I wont lose it. Naw, sir, you cant have it. If them men sees you with it, they'll say you stole it. Hush up, now. You cant have it. What business you got with it. You cant play no ball.

Frony and T. P. were playing in the dirt by the door. T. P. had lightning bugs in a bottle. "How did you all get back out." Frony said.

"We've got company." Caddy said. "Father said for us to mind me tonight. I expect you and T. P. will have to mind me too."

"I'm not going to mind you." Jason said. "Frony and T. P. dont have to either." "They will if I say so." Caddy said. "Maybe I wont say for them to."

"T. P. dont mind nobody." Frony said. "Is they started the funeral yet."

"What's a funeral." Jason said.

"Didn't mammy tell you not to tell them." Versh said.

"Where they moans." Frony said. "They moaned two days on Sis Beulah Clay."

They moaned at Dilsey's house. Dilsey was moaning. When Dilsey moaned Luster said, Hush, and we hushed, and then I began to cry and Blue howled under the kitchen steps. Then Dilsey stopped and we stopped.

“Oh.” Caddy said, “That’s niggers. White folks dont have funerals.”
“Mammy said us not to tellthem, Frony.” Versh said. “Tellthemwhat.”
Caddy said.

Dilsey moaned, and when it got to the place I began to cry and Blue howled under the steps. Luster, Frony said in the window, Take them down to the barn. I cant get no cooking done with all that racket. That hound too. Get them outen here.

I aint going down there, Luster said. I might meet pappy down there. I seen him last night, waving his arms in the barn.

“I like to know why not.” Frony said. “White folks dies too. Your grandmammy dead as any nigger can get, I reckon.”

“Dogs are dead.” Caddy said, “And when Nancy fell in the ditch and Roskus shot her and the buzzards came and undressed her.”

The bones rounded out of the ditch, where the dark vines were in the black ditch, into the moonlight, like some of the shapes had stopped. Then they all stopped and it was dark, and when I stopped to start again I could hear Mother, and feet walking fast away, and I could smell it. Then the roomcame, but my eyes went shut. I didn’t stop. I could smellit. T. P. unpinned the bed clothes.

“Hush.” he said, “Shhhhhhhh.”

But I could smellit. T. P. pulled me up and he put on my clothes fast.

“Hush, Benjy.” he said. “We going down to our house. You want to go down to our house, where Frony is. Hush. Shhhhh.”

He laced my shoes and put my cap on and we went out. There was a light in the hall. Across the hallwe could hear Mother.

“Shhhhhh, Benjy.” T. P. said, “We’llbe out in a minute.”

A door opened and I could smell it more than ever, and a head came out. It wasn’t Father. Father was sick there.

“Can you take himout of the house.”

“That’s where we going.” T. P. said. Dilsey came up the stairs.

“Hush.” she said, “Hush. Take him down home, T. P. Frony fixing him a bed. You all look after him, now. Hush, Benjy. Go on with T. P.”
She went where we could hear Mother.

“Better keep him there.” It wasn’t Father. He shut the door, but I could still smell it.

We went down stairs. The stairs went down into the dark and T. P. took my hand, and we went out the door, out of the dark. Dan was sitting in the back yard, howling.

“He smell it.” T. P. said. “Is that the way you found it out.” We went down the steps, where our shadows were.

“I forgot your coat.” T. P. said. “You ought to had it. But I aint going back.” Dan howled.

“Hush now.” T. P. said. Our shadows moved, but Dan’s shadow didn’t move except to howl when he did.

“I cant take you down home, bellering like you is.” T. P. said. “You was bad enough before you got that bullfrog voice. Come on.”

We went along the brick walk, with our shadows. The pig pen smelled like pigs. The cow stood in the lot, chewing at us. Dan howled.

“You going to wake the whole town up.” T. P. said. “Cant you hush.”

We saw Fancy, eating by the branch. The moon shone on the water when we got there. “Naw, sir.” T. P. said, “This too close. We cant stop here. Come on. Now, just look at you.

Got your whole leg wet. Come on, here.” Dan howled.

The ditch came up out of the buzzing grass. The bones rounded out of the black vines. “Now.” T. P. said. “Beller your head off if you want to. You got the whole night and a twenty acre pasture to beller in.”

T. P. lay down in the ditch and I sat down, watching the bones where the buzzards ate Nancy, flapping black and slow and heavy out of the ditch.

I had it when we was down here before, Luster said. I showed it to you. Didn’t you see it. I took it out of my pocket right here and showed it to you.

“Do you think buzzards are going to undress Damuddy.” Caddy said.

“You’re crazy.” “You’re a skizzard.” Jason said. He began to cry.

"You're a knobnot." Caddy said. Jason cried. His hands were in his pockets. "Jason going to be rich man." Versh said. "He holding his money all the time." Jason cried.

"Now you've got him started." Caddy said. "Hush up, Jason. How can buzzards get in where Damuddy is. Father wouldn't let them. Would you let a buzzard undress you. Hush up, now."

Jason hushed. "Frony said it was a funeral." he said.

"Well it's not." Caddy said. "It's a party. Frony dont know anything about it. He wants your lightning bugs, T. P. Let him hold it a while." T. P. gave me the bottle of lightning bugs.

"I bet if we go around to the parlor window we can see something." Caddy said. "Then you'll believe me."

"I already knows." Frony said. "I dont need to see."

"You better hush your mouth, Frony." Versh said. "Mammy going whip you." "What is it." Caddy said.

"I knows what I knows." Frony said.

"Come on." Caddy said, "Let's go around to the front." We started to go.

"T. P. wants his lightning bugs." Frony said.

"Let him hold it a while longer, T. P." Caddy said. "We'll bring it back."

"You all never caught them." Frony said.

"If I say you and T. P. can come too, will you let him hold it." Caddy said.

"Aint nobody said me and T. P. got to mind you." Frony said.

"If I say you dont have to, will you let him hold it." Caddy said.

"Allright." Frony said. "Let him hold it, T. P. We going to watch them moaning." "They aint moaning." Caddy said. "I tellyou it's a party. Are they moaning, Versh." "We aint going to know what they doing, standing here." Versh said.

"Come on." Caddy said. "Frony and T. P. dont have to mind me. But the rest of us do. You better carry him, Versh. It's getting dark."

Versh took me up and we went on around the kitchen.

When we looked around the corner we could see the lights coming up the drive. T. P. went back to the cellar door and opened it. You know what's down there, T. P. said. Soda water. I seen Mr Jason come up with both hands full of them. Wait here a minute. T. P. went and looked in the kitchen door. Dilsey said, What are you peeping in here for. Where's Benjy. He out here, T. P. said.

Go on and watch him, Dilsey said. Keep him out the house now. Yessum, T. P. said. Is they started yet. You go on and keep that boy out of sight, Dilsey said. I got all I can tend to. A snake crawled out from under the house. Jason said he wasn't afraid of snakes and Caddy said he was but she wasn't and Versh said they both were and Caddy said to be quiet, like father said.

You aint got to start bellering now, T. P. said. You want some this sassprilluh. It tickled my nose and eyes. If you aint going to drink it, let me get to it, T. P. said. All right, here tis. We better get another bottle while aint nobody bothering us. You be quiet, now. We stopped under the tree by the parlor window. Versh set me down in the wet grass. It was cold. There were lights in all the windows. "That's where Damuddy is." Caddy said. "She's sick every day now. When she gets well we're going to have a picnic." "I knows what I knows." Frony said. The trees were buzzing, and the grass.

"The one next to it is where we have the measles." Caddy said. "Where do you and T. P. have the measles, Frony." "Has them just wherever we is, I reckon." Frony said. "They haven't started yet." Caddy said. They getting ready to start, T. P. said. You stand right here now while I get that box so we can see in the window. Here, les finish drinking this here sassprilluh. It make me feel just like a squinch owl inside.

We drank the sassprilluh and T. P. pushed the bottle through the lattice, under the house, and went away. I could hear them in the parlor and I clawed my hands against the wall. T. P. dragged the box. He fell down, and he began to laugh. He lay there, laughing into the grass. He got up and dragged the box under the window, trying not to laugh. "I skeered I going to holler." T. P. said. "Git on the box and see is they started." "They haven't started because the band hasn't come yet." Caddy said.

"They aint going to have no band." Frony said. "How do you know." Caddy said.

"I knows what I knows." Frony said.

"You dont know anything." Caddy said. She went to the tree. "Push me up, Versh." "Your paw told you to stay out that tree." Versh said. "That was a long time ago." Caddy said. "I expect he's forgotten about it. Besides, he said to mind me tonight. Didn't he say to mind me tonight."

"I'mnot going to mind you." Jason said. "Frony and T. P. are not going to either." "Push me up, Versh." Caddy said.

"All right." Versh said. "You the one going to get whipped. I aint." He went and pushed Caddy up into the tree to the first limb. We watched the muddy bottom of her drawers. Then we couldn't see her. We could hear the tree thrashing.

"Mr Jason said if you break that tree he whip you." Versh said.

"I'mgoing to tellon her too." Jason said.

The tree quit thrashing. We looked up into the still branches. "What you seeing." Frony whispered.

I saw them. Then I saw Caddy, with flowers in her hair, and a long veil like shining wind. Caddy Caddy

"Hush." T. P. said, "They going to hear you. Get down quick." He pulled me. Caddy. I clawed my hands against the wall Caddy. T. P. pulled me.

"Hush." he said, "Hush. Come on here quick." He pulled me on. Caddy

"Hush up, Benjy. You want them to hear you. Come on, les drink some more sassprilluh, then we can come back if you hush. We better get

one more bottle or we both be hollering. We can say Dan drunk it. Mr Quentin always saying he so smart, we can say he sassprilluh dog, too.” The moonlight came down the cellar stairs. We drank some more sassprilluh.

“You know what I wish.” T. P. said. “I wish a bear would walk in that cellar door. You know what I do. I walk right up to him and spit in he eye. Gimme that bottle to stop my mouth before I holler.”

T. P. fell down. He began to laugh, and the cellar door and the moonlight jumped away and something hit me.

“Hush up.” T. P. said, trying not to laugh, “Lawd, they’ll all hear us. Get up.” T. P. said, “Get up, Benjy, quick.” He was thrashing about and laughing and I tried to get up. The cellar steps ran up the hill in the moonlight and T. P. fell up the hill, into the moonlight, and I ran against the fence and T. P. ran behind me saying “Hush up hush up” Then he fell into the flowers, laughing, and I ran into the box. But when I tried to climb onto it it jumped away and hit me on the back of the head and my throat made a sound. It made the sound again and I stopped trying to get up, and it made the sound again and I began to cry. But my throat kept on making the sound while T. P. was pulling me. It kept on making it and I couldn’t tell if I was crying or not, and T. P. fell down on top of me, laughing, and it kept on making the sound and Quentin kicked T. P. and Caddy put her arms around me, and her shining veil, and I couldn’t smell trees anymore and I began to cry.

Benjy, Caddy said, Benjy. She put her arms around me again, but I went away. “What is it, Benjy.” she said, “Is it this hat.” She took her hat off and came again, and I went away.

“Benjy.” she said, “What is it, Benjy. What has Caddy done.”

“He dont like that prissy dress.” Jason said. “You think you’re grown up, dont you. You think you’re better than anybody else, dont you. Prissy.”

“You shut your mouth.” Caddy said, “You dirty little beast. Benjy.”

“Just because you are fourteen, you think you’re grown up, dont you.” Jason said. “You think you’re something. Dont you.”

"Hush, Benjy." Caddy said. "You'll disturb Mother. Hush."

But I didn't hush, and when she went away I followed, and she stopped on the stairs and waited and I stopped too.

"What is it, Benjy." Caddy said, "Tell Caddy. She'll do it. Try." "Candace." Mother said.

"Yessum." Caddy said.

"Why are you teasing him." Mother said. "Bring him here."

We went to Mother's room, where she was lying with the sickness on a cloth on her head. "What is the matter now." Mother said. "Benjamin." "Benjy." Caddy said. She came again, but I went away.

"You must have done something to him." Mother said. "Why won't you let him alone, so I can have some peace. Give him the box and please go on and let him alone."

Caddy got the box and set it on the floor and opened it. It was full of stars. When I was still, they were still. When I moved, they glinted and sparkled. I hushed.

Then I heard Caddy walking and I began again.

"Benjamin." Mother said, "Come here." I went to the door. "You, Benjamin." Mother said. "What is it now." Father said, "Where are you going."

"Take him downstairs and get someone to watch him, Jason." Mother said. "You know I'm ill, yet you"

Father shut the door behind us. "T. P." he said.

"Sir." T. P. said downstairs.

"Benjy's coming down." Father said. "Go with T. P." I went to the bathroom door. I could hear the water. "Benjy." T. P. said downstairs. I could hear the water. I listened to it. "Benjy." T. P. said downstairs. I listened to the water.

I couldn't hear the water, and Caddy opened the door.

"Why, Benjy." she said. She looked at me and I went and she put her arms around me. "Did you find Caddy again." she said. "Did you think Caddy had run away." Caddy smelled like trees.

We went to Caddy's room. She sat down at the mirror. She stopped her hands and looked at me.

"Why, Benjy. What is it." she said. "You mustn't cry. Caddy's not going away. See here." she said. She took up the bottle and took the stopper out and held it to my nose. "Sweet. Smell. Good."

I went away and I didn't hush, and she held the bottle in her hand, looking at me.

"Oh." she said. She put the bottle down and came and put her arms around me. "So that was it. And you were trying to tell Caddy and you couldn't tell her. You wanted to, but you couldn't, could you. Of course Caddy wont. Of course Caddy wont. Just wait till dress."

Caddy dressed and took up the bottle again and we went down to the kitchen.

"Dilsey." Caddy said, "Benjy's got a present for you." She stooped down and put the bottle in my hand. "Hold it out to Dilsey, now." Caddy held my hand out and Dilsey took the bottle.

"Well I'll declare." Dilsey said, "If my baby aint give Dilsey a bottle of perfume. Just look here, Roskus."

Caddy smelled like trees. "We dont like perfume ourselves." Caddy said. She smelled like trees.

"Come on, now." Dilsey said, "You too big to sleep with folks. You a big boy now. Thirteen years old. Big enough to sleep by yourself in Uncle Maury's room." Dilsey said.

Uncle Maury was sick. His eye was sick, and his mouth. Versh took his supper up to himon the tray.

"Maury says he's going to shoot the scoundrel." Father said. "I told him he'd better not mention it to Patterson before hand." He drank.

"Jason." Mother said.

"Shoot who, Father." Quentin said. "What's Uncle Maury going to shoot himfor." "Because he couldn't take a little joke." Father said.

"Jason." Mother said, "How can you. You'd sit right there and see Maury shot down in ambush, and laugh."

"Then Maury'd better stay out of ambush." Father said.

"Shoot who, Father." Quentin said, "Who's Uncle Maury going to shoot." "Nobody." Father said. "I dont own a pistol."

Mother began to cry. "If you begrudge Maury your food, why aren't you man enough to say so to his face. To ridicule him before the children, behind his back."

"Of course I dont." Father said, "I admire Maury. He is invaluable to my own sense of racial superiority. I wouldn't swap Maury for a matched team. And do you know why, Quentin."

"No, sir." Quentin said.

"Et ego in arcadia I have forgotten the latin for hay." Father said.

"There, there." he said, "I was just joking." He drank and set the glass down and went and put his hand on Mother's shoulder.

"It's no joke." Mother said. "My people are every bit as well born as yours. Just because Maury's health is bad."

"Of course." Father said. "Bad health is the primary reason for all life. Created by disease, within putrefaction, into decay. Versh."

"Sir." Versh said behind my chair. "Take the decanter and fillit."

"And tell Dilsey to come and take Benjamin up to bed." Mother said.

"You a big boy." Dilsey said, "Caddy tired sleeping with you. Hush now, so you can go to sleep." The room went away, but I didn't hush, and the room came back and Dilsey came and sat on the bed, looking at me.

"Aint you going to be a good boy and hush." Dilsey said. "You aint, is you. See can you wait a minute, then."

She went away. There wasn't anything in the door. Then Caddy was in it. "Hush." Caddy said. "I'm coming."

I hushed and Dilsey turned back the spread and Caddy got in between the spread and the blanket. She didn't take off her bathrobe.

"Now." she said, "Here I am." Dilsey came with a blanket and spread it over her and tucked it around her.

"He be gone in a minute." Dilsey said. "I leave the light on in your room."

"All right." Caddy said. She snuggled her head beside mine on the pillow. "Goodnight, Dilsey."

"Goodnight, honey." Dilsey said. The room went black. Caddy smelled like trees. We looked up into the tree where she was.

"What she seeing, Versh." Frony whispered. "Shhhhhhh." Caddy said in the tree. Dilsey said,

"You come on here." She came around the corner of the house.

"Whyn't you all go on up stairs, like your paw said, stead of slipping out behind my back. Where's Caddy and Quentin."

"I told her not to climb up that tree." Jason said. "I'm going to tell on her."

"Who in what tree." Dilsey said. She came and looked up into the tree.

"Caddy." Dilsey said. The branches began to shake again.

"You, Satan." Dilsey said. "Come down from there."

"Hush." Caddy said, "Dont you know Father said to be quiet." Her legs came in sight and Dilsey reached up and lifted her out of the tree.

"Aint you got any better sense than to let them come around here."

Dilsey said. "I couldn't do nothing with her." Versh said.

"What you alldoing here." Dilsey said. "Who told you to come up to the house." "She did." Frony said. "She told us to come."

"Who told you you got to do what she say." Dilsey said. "Get on home, now." Frony and T. P. went on. We couldn't see them when they were still going away.

"Out here in the middle of the night." Dilsey said. She took me up and we went to the kitchen.

"Slipping out behind my back." Dilsey said. "When you knowed it's past your bedtime." "Shhhh, Dilsey." Caddy said. "Dont talk so loud. We've got to be quiet."

"You hush your mouth and get quiet, then." Dilsey said. "Where's Quentin."

"Quentin's mad because he had to mind me tonight." Caddy said. "He's still got T. P.'s bottle of lightning bugs."

"I reckon T. P. can get along without it." Dilsey said. "You go and find Quentin, Versh. Roskus say he seen him going towards the barn." Versh went on. We couldn't see him.

"They're not doing anything in there." Caddy said. "Just sitting in chairs and looking." "They don't need no help from you all to do that." Dilsey said. We went around the kitchen. Where you want to go now, Luster said. You going back to watch them knocking ball

again. We done looked for it over there. Here. Wait a minute. You wait right here while I go back and get that ball. I done thought of something. The kitchen was dark. The trees were black on the sky. Dan came waddling out from under the steps and chewed my ankle. I went around the kitchen, where the moon was. Dan came scuffling along, into the moon.

"Benjy." T. P. said in the house.

The flower tree by the parlor window wasn't dark, but the thick trees were. The grass was buzzing in the moonlight where my shadow walked on the grass.

"You, Benjy." T. P. said in the house. "Where you hiding. You slipping off. I knows it." Luster came back. Wait, he said. Here. Don't go over there. Miss Quentin and her beau in the swing yonder. You come on this way. Come back here, Benjy.

It was dark under the trees. Dan wouldn't come. He stayed in the moonlight. Then I could see the swing and I began to cry. Come away from there, Benjy, Luster said. You know Miss Quentin going to get mad. It was two now, and then one in the swing. Caddy came fast, white in the darkness. "Benjy," she said. "How did you slip out. Where's Versh."

She put her arms around me and I hushed and held to her dress and tried to pull her away. "Why, Benjy." she said. "What is it. T. P." she called.

The one in the swing got up and came, and I cried and pulled Caddy's dress. "Benjy." Caddy said. "It's just Charlie. Don't you know Charlie."

"Where's his nigger." Charlie said. "What do they let him run around loose for."

"Hush, Benjy." Caddy said. "Go away, Charlie. He doesn't like you." Charlie went away and I hushed. I pulled at Caddy's dress.

"Why, Benjy." Caddy said. "Aren't you going to let me stay here and talk to Charlie awhile."

"Call that nigger." Charlie said. He came back. I cried louder and pulled at Caddy's dress. "Go away, Charlie." Caddy said. Charlie came and put his hands on Caddy and I cried more. I cried loud.

"No, no." Caddy said. "No. No."

"He can't talk." Charlie said. "Caddy."

"Are you crazy." Caddy said. She began to breathe fast. "He can see. Don't. Don't." Caddy fought. They both breathed fast. "Please. Please." Caddy whispered.

"Send him away." Charlie said.

"I will." Caddy said. "Let me go."

"Will you send him away." Charlie said.

"Yes." Caddy said. "Let me go." Charlie went away. "Hush." Caddy said.

"He's gone." I hushed. I could hear her and feel her chest going.

"I'll have to take him to the house." she said. She took my hand. "I'm coming." she whispered.

"Wait." Charlie said. "Call the nigger."

"No." Caddy said. "I'll come back. Come on, Benjy."

"Caddy." Charlie whispered, loud. We went on. "You better come back. Are you coming back." Caddy and I were running. "Caddy." Charlie said. We ran out into the moonlight, toward the kitchen.

"Caddy." Charlie said.

Caddy and I ran. We ran up the kitchen steps, onto the porch, and Caddy knelt down in the dark and held me. I could hear her and feel her chest. "I won't." she said. "I won't anymore, ever. Benjy. Benjy." Then she was crying, and I cried, and we held each other. "Hush." she said. "Hush. I won't anymore." So I hushed and Caddy got up and we went

into the kitchen and turned the light on and Caddy took the kitchen soap and washed her mouth at the sink, hard. Caddy smelled like trees. I kept a telling you to stay away from there, Luster said. They sat up in the swing, quick. Quentin had her hands on her hair. He had a red tie. You old crazy loon, Quentin said. I'm going to tell Dilsey about the way you let him follow everywhere I go. I'm going to make her whip you good.

"I couldn't stop him." Luster said. "Come on here, Benjy."

"Yes you could." Quentin said. "You didn't try. You were both snooping around after me. Did Grandmother send you all out here to spy on me." She jumped out of the swing. "If you dont take himright away this minute and keep himaway, I'mgoing to make Jason whip you."

"I cant do nothing with him." Luster said. "You try it if you think you can." "Shut your mouth." Quentin said. "Are you going to get himaway."

"Ah, let him stay." he said. He had a red tie. The sun was red on it.

"Look here, Jack." He struck a match and put it in his mouth. Then he took the match out of his mouth. It was still burning. "Want to try it." he said. I went over there. "Open your mouth." he said. I opened my mouth. Quentin hit the match with her hand and it went away.

"Goddamn you." Quentin said. "Do you want to get himstarted. Dont you know he'll beller allday. I'mgoing to tellDilsey on you." She went away running.

"Here, kid." he said. "Hey. Come on back. I aint going to foolwith him." Quentin ran on to the house. She went around the kitchen.

"You played hellthen, Jack." he said. "Aint you."

"He cant tellwhat you saying." Luster said. "He deaf and dumb." "Is." he said. "How long's he been that way."

"Been that way thirty-three years today." Luster said. "Born looney. Is you one of them show folks."

"Why." he said.

"I dont ricklick seeing you around here before." Luster said. "Well, what about it." he said.

"Nothing." Luster said. "I going tonight." He looked at me.

"You aint the one can play a tune on that saw, is you." Luster said.

"It'll cost you a quarter to find that out." he said. He looked at me.

"Why dont they lock him up." he said. "What'd you bring him out here for."

"You aint talking to me." Luster said. "I cant do nothing with him. I just come over here looking for a quarter I lost so I can go to the show tonight. Look like now I aint going to get to go." Luster looked on the ground. "You aint got no extra quarter, is you." Luster said.

"No." he said. "I aint."

"I reckon I just have to find that other one, then." Luster said. He put his hand in his pocket. "You dont want to buy no golf ball neither, does you." Luster said.

"What kind of ball." he said.

"Golf ball." Luster said. "I dont want but a quarter." "What for." he said.

"What do I want with it."

"I didn't think you did." Luster said. "Come on here, mulehead." he said. "Come on here and watch them knocking that ball. Here. Here something you can play with along with that jimson weed." Luster picked it up and gave it to me. It was bright.

"Where'd you get that." he said. His tie was red in the sun, walking.

"Found it under this here bush." Luster said. "I thought for a minute it was that quarter I lost."

He came and took it.

"Hush." Luster said. "He going to give it back when he done looking at it." "Agnes Mabel Becky." he said. He looked toward the house.

"Hush." Luster said. "He fixing to give it back." He gave it to me and I hushed.

"Who come to see her last night." he said.

"I dont know." Luster said. "They comes every night she can climb down that tree. I dont keep no track of them."

"Damn if one of them didn't leave a track." he said. He looked at the house. Then he went and lay down in the swing. "Go away." he said.

"Dont bother me."

"Come on here." Luster said. "You done played hell now. Time Miss Quentin get done telling on you."

We went to the fence and looked through the curling flower spaces. Luster hunted in the grass.

"I had it right here." he said. I saw the flag flapping, and the sun slanting on the broad grass.

"They'll be some along soon." Luster said. "There some now, but they going away. Come on and help me look for it."

We went along the fence.

"Hush." Luster said. "How can I make them come over here, if they aint coming. Wait. They'll be some in a minute. Look yonder. Here they come."

I went along the fence, to the gate, where the girls passed with their booksatchels. "You, Benjy." Luster said. "Come back here."

You cant do no good looking through the gate, T. P. said. Miss Caddy done gone long ways away. Done got married and left you. You cant do no good, holding to the gate and crying. She cant hear you.

What is it he wants, T. P. Mother said. Cant you play with him and keep him quiet. He want to go down yonder and look through the gate, T. P. said.

Well, he cannot do it, Mother said. It's raining. You will just have to play with him and

keep him quiet. You, Benjamin.

Aint nothing going to quiet him, T. P. said. He think if he down to the gate, Miss Caddy come back.

Nonsense, Mother said.

I could hear them talking. I went out the door and I couldn't hear them, and I went down to the gate, where the girls passed with their booksatchels. They looked at me, walking fast, with their heads turned.

I tried to say, but they went on, and I went along the fence, trying to say, and they went faster. Then they were running and I came to the corner of the fence and I couldn't go any further, and I held to the fence, looking after them and trying to say.

"You, Benjy." T. P. said. "What you doing, slipping out. Dont you know Dilsey whip you." "You cant do no good, moaning and slobbering through the fence." T. P. said. "You done skeered themchillen. Look at them, walking on the other side of the street."

How did he get out, Father said. Did you leave the gate unlatched when you came in, Jason.

Of course not, Jason said. Dont you know I've got better sense than to do that. Do you think I wanted anything like this to happen. This family is bad enough, God knows. I could have told you, all the time. I reckon you'll send him to Jackson, now. If Mrs Burgess dont shoot him first. Hush, Father said.

I could have told you, all the time, Jason said.

It was open when I touched it, and I held to it in the twilight. I wasn't crying, and I tried to stop, watching the girls coming along in the twilight. I wasn't crying.

"There he is." They stopped.

"He cant get out. He wont hurt anybody, anyway. Come on."

"I'mscared to. I'mscared. I'mgoing to cross the street." "He cant get out."

I wasn't crying.

"Dont be a 'fraid cat. Come on."

They came on in the twilight. I wasn't crying, and I held to the gate.

They came slow. "I'mscared."

"He wont hurt you. I pass here every day. He just runs along the fence."

They came on. I opened the gate and they stopped, turning. I was trying to say, and I caught her, trying to say, and she screamed and I was trying to say and trying and the bright shapes began to stop and I tried to get out. I tried to get it off of my face, but the bright shapes were going again. They were going up the hill to where it fell away and I tried to cry. But when I breathed in, I couldn't breathe out again to cry, and I tried to keep from falling off the hill and I felloff the hill into the bright, whirling shapes.

Here, loony, Luster said. Here come some. Hush your slobbering and moaning, now. They came to the flag. He took it out and they hit, then he put the flag back. "Mister." Luster said. He looked around. "What." he said. "Want to buy a golf ball." Luster said.

"Let's see it." he said. He came to the fence and Luster reached the ballthrough. "Where'd you get it." he said.

"Found it." Luster said.

"I know that." he said. "Where. In somebody's golf bag."

"I found it laying over here in the yard." Luster said. "I'lltake a quarter for it." "What makes you think it's yours." he said.

"I found it." Luster said.

"Then find yourself another one." he said. He put it in his pocket and went away. "I got to go to that show tonight." Luster said.

"That so." he said. He went to the table. "Fore, caddie." he said. He hit.

"I'll declare." Luster said. "You fusses when you dont see them and you fusses when you does. Why cant you hush. Dont you reckon folks gets tired of listening to you all the time. Here. You dropped your jimson weed." He picked it up and gave it back to me. "You needs a new one. You 'bout wore that one out." We stood at the fence and watched them.

"That white man hard to get along with." Luster said. "You see him take my ball." They went on. We went on along the fence. We came to the garden and we couldn't go any further. I held to the fence and looked through the flower spaces. They went away.

"Now you aint got nothing to moan about." Luster said. "Hush up. I the one got something to moan over, you aint. Here. Whyn't you hold on to that weed. You be bellering about it next." He gave me the flower.

"Where you heading now."

Our shadows were on the grass. They got to the trees before we did. Mine got there first. Then we got there, and then the shadows were gone. There was a flower in the bottle. I put the other flower in it.

"Aint you a grown man, now." Luster said. "Playing with two weeds in a bottle. You know what they going to do with you when Miss Cahline die. They going to send you to Jackson, where you belong. Mr Jason say so. Where you can hold the bars all day long with the rest of the looneys and slobber. How you like that."

Luster knocked the flowers over with his hand. "That's what they'll do to you at Jackson when you starts bellering."

I tried to pick up the flowers. Luster picked them up, and they went away. I began to cry. "Beller." Luster said. "Beller. You want something to beller about. Allright, then. Caddy." he whispered. "Caddy. Beller now. Caddy." "Luster." Dilsey said from the kitchen. The flowers came back.

"Hush." Luster said. "Here they is. Look. It's fixed back just like it was at first. Hush, now." "You, Luster." Dilsey said.

"Yessum." Luster said. "We coming. You done played hell. Get up." He jerked my armand I got up. We went out of the trees. Our shadows were gone.

"Hush." Luster said. "Look at allthemfolks watching you. Hush." "You bring himon here." Dilsey said. She came down the steps. "What you done to himnow." she said.

"Aint done nothing to him." Luster said. "He just started bellering."

"Yes you is." Dilsey said. "You done something to him. Where you been." "Over yonder under themcedars." Luster said.

"Getting Quentin all riled up." Dilsey said. "Why cant you keep him away from her. Dont you know she dont like himwhere she at."

"Got as much time for himas I is." Luster said. "He aint none of my uncle." "Dont you sass me, nigger boy." Dilsey said.

"I aint done nothing to him." Luster said. "He was playing there, and all of a sudden he started bellering."

"Is you been projecking with his graveyard." Dilsey said. "I aint touched his graveyard." Luster said.

"Dont lie to me, boy." Dilsey said. We went up the steps and into the kitchen. Dilsey opened the firedoor and drew a chair up in front of it and I sat down. I hushed.

What you want to get her started for, Dilsey said. Whyn't you keep him out ofthere.

He was just looking at the fire, Caddy said. Mother was telling him his new name. We didn't mean to get her started.

I knows you didn't, Dilsey said. Him at one end of the house and her at the other. You let my things alone, now. Dont you touch nothing till I get back.

"Aint you shamed of yourself." Dilsey said. "Teasing him." She set the cake on the table.

"I aint been teasing him." Luster said. "He was playing with that bottle full of dogfennel and allof a sudden he started up belling. You heard him."

"You aint done nothing to his flowers." Dilsey said.

"I aint touched his graveyard." Luster said. "What I want with his truck. I was just hunting for that quarter."

"You lost it, did you." Dilsey said. She lit the candles on the cake. Some of them were little ones. Some were big ones cut into little pieces. "I told you to go put it away. Now I reckon you want me to get you another one fromFrony."

"I got to go to that show, Benjy or no Benjy." Luster said. "I aint going to follow him around day and night both."

"You going to do just what he want you to, nigger boy." Dilsey said.

"You hear me." "Aint I always done it." Luster said. "Dont I always does what he wants. Dont I, Benjy."

"Then you keep it up." Dilsey said. "Bringing him in here, bawling and getting her started too. You allgo ahead and eat this cake, now, before Jason come. I dont want himjumping on me about a cake I bought with my own money. Me baking a cake here, with himcounting every egg that comes into this kitchen. See can you let him alone now, less you dont want to go to that show tonight."

Dilsey went away.

"You cant blow out no candles." Luster said. "Watch me blow them out." He leaned down and puffed his face. The candles went away. I began to cry. "Hush." Luster said. "Here. Look at the fire whiles I cuts this cake."

I could hear the clock, and I could hear Caddy standing behind me, and I could hear the roof. It's still raining, Caddy said. I hate rain. I hate everything. And then her head came into my lap and she was crying, holding me, and I began to cry. Then I looked at the fire again and the bright, smooth shapes went again. I could hear the clock and the roof and Caddy.

I ate some cake. Luster's hand came and took another piece. I could hear him eating. I looked at the fire.

A long piece of wire came across my shoulder. It went to the door, and then the fire went away. I began to cry.

"What you howling for now." Luster said. "Look there." The fire was there. I hushed. "Cant you set and look at the fire and be quiet like mammy told you." Luster said. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Here. Here's you some more cake."

"What you done to him now." Dilsey said. "Cant you never let him alone."

"I was just trying to get him to hush up and not sturb Miss Cahline." Luster said. "Something got him started again."

"And I know what that something name." Dilsey said. "I'm going to get Versh to take a stick to you when he comes home. You just trying yourself. You been doing it all day. Did you take him down to the branch."

"Nome." Luster said. "We been right here in this yard all day, like you said."

His hand came for another piece of cake. Dilsey hit his hand. "Reach it again, and I chop it right off with this here butcher knife." Dilsey said. "I bet he aint had one piece of it."

"Yes he is." Luster said. "He already had twice as much as me. Ask him if he aint." "Reach hit one more time." Dilsey said. "Just reach it."

That's right, Dilsey said. I reckon it'll be my time to cry next. Reckon Maury going to let me cry on him a while, too.
His name's Benjy now, Caddy said.

How come it is, Dilsey said. He aint wore out the name he was born with yet, is he. Benjamin came out of the bible, Caddy said. It's a better name for him than Maury was. How come it is, Dilsey said.
Mother says it is, Caddy said.

Huh, Dilsey said. Name aint going to help him. Hurt him, neither. Folks dont have no luck, changing names. My name been Dilsey since fore I could remember and it be Dilsey when they's long forgot me.

How will they know it's Dilsey, when it's long forgot, Dilsey, Caddy said. It'll be in the Book, honey, Dilsey said. Writ out.
Can you read it, Caddy said.

Wont have to, Dilsey said. They'll read it for me. All I got to do is say Ise here. The long wire came across my shoulder, and the fire went away. I began to cry. Dilsey and Luster fought.

"I seen you." Dilsey said. "Oho, I seen you." She dragged Luster out of the corner, shaking him. "Wasn't nothing bothering him, was they. You just wait till your pappy come home. I wish I was young like I use to be, I'd tear them years right off your head. I good mind to lock you up in that cellar and not let you go to that show tonight, I sho is."

"Ow, mammy." Luster said. "Ow, mammy."

I put my hand out to where the fire had been. "Catch him." Dilsey said. "Catch him back."

My hand jerked back and I put it in my mouth and Dilsey caught me. I could still hear the clock between my voice. Dilsey reached back and hit Luster on the head. My voice was going loud every time.

"Get that soda." Dilsey said. She took my hand out of my mouth. My voice went louder then and my hand tried to go back to my mouth, but Dilsey held it. My voice went loud. She sprinkled soda on my hand.

"Look in the pantry and tear a piece off of that rag hanging on the nail." she said. "Hush, now. You dont want to make your ma sick again, does you. Here, look at the fire. Dilsey make your hand stop hurting in just a minute. Look at the fire." She opened the fire door. I looked at the fire, but my hand didn't stop and I didn't stop. My hand was trying to go to my mouth but Dilsey held it.

She wrapped the cloth around it. Mother said,

"What is it now. Cant I even be sick in peace. Do I have to get up out of bed to come down to him, with two grown negroes to take care of him."

"He allright now." Dilsey said. "He going to quit. He just burnt his hand a little."

"With two grown negroes, you must bring him into the house, bawling." Mother said. "You got him started on purpose, because you know I'm sick." She came and stood by me. "Hush." she said. "Right this minute. Did you give him this cake."

"I bought it." Dilsey said. "It never come out of Jason's pantry. I fixed him some birthday." "Do you want to poison him with that cheap store cake." Mother said. "Is that what you are trying to do. Am I never to have one minute's peace."

"You go on back up stairs and lay down." Dilsey said. "It'll quit smarting him in a minute now, and he'll hush. Come on, now."

"And leave him down here for you all to do something else to." Mother said. "How can I lie there, with him bawling down here. Benjamin. Hush this minute."

"They aint nowhere else to take him." Dilsey said. "We aint got the room we use to have. He cant stay out in the yard, crying where all the neighbors can see him."

"I know, I know." Mother said. "It's all my fault. I'll be gone soon, and you and Jason will both get along better." She began to cry.

"You hush that, now." Dilsey said. "You'll get yourself down again. You come on back up stairs. Luster going to take him to the liberry and play with him till I get his supper done."

Dilsey and Mother went out.

“Hush up.” Luster said. “You hush up. You want me to burn your other hand for you. You aint hurt. Hush up.”

“Here.” Dilsey said. “Stop crying, now.” She gave me the slipper, and I hushed. “Take him to the liberry.” she said. “And if I hear him again, I going to whip you myself.”

We went to the library. Luster turned on the light. The windows went black, and the dark tall place on the wall came and I went and touched it. It was like a door, only it wasn't a door.

The fire came behind me and I went to the fire and sat on the floor, holding the slipper. The fire went higher. It went onto the cushion in Mother's chair.

“Hush up.” Luster said. “Cant you never get done for a while. Here I done built you a fire, and you wont even look at it.”

Your name is Benjy. Caddy said. Do you hear. Benjy. Benjy. Dont tell him that, Mother said. Bring him here.

Caddy lifted me under the arms.

Get up, Mau—I mean Benjy, she said.

Dont try to carry him, Mother said. Cant you lead him over here. Is that too much for you to think of.

I can carry him, Caddy said. “Let me carry him up, Dilsey.”

“Go on, Minute.” Dilsey said. “You aint big enough to tote a flea. You go on and be quiet, like Mr. Jason said.”

There was a light at the top of the stairs. Father was there, in his shirt sleeves. The way he looked said Hush. Caddy whispered, “Is Mother sick.”

Versh set me down and we went into Mother's room. There was a fire. It was rising and falling on the walls. There was another fire in the mirror. I could smell the sickness. It was a cloth folded on Mother's head. Her hair was on the pillow. The fire didn't reach it, but it shone on her hand, where her rings were jumping.

“Come and tell Mother goodnight.” Caddy said. We went to the bed. The fire went out of the mirror. Father got up from the bed and lifted me up and Mother put her hand on my head.

“What time is it.” Mother said. Her eyes were closed.

“Ten minutes to seven.” Father said.

"It's too early for him to go to bed." Mother said. "He'll wake up at daybreak, and I simply cannot bear another day like today."

"There, there." Father said. He touched Mother's face.

"I know I'm nothing but a burden to you." Mother said. "But I'll be gone soon. Then you will be rid of my bothering."

"Hush." Father said. "I'll take him downstairs awhile." He took me up.

"Come on, old fellow. Let's go downstairs awhile. We'll have to be quiet while Quentin is studying, now."

Caddy went and leaned her face over the bed and Mother's hand came into the firelight. Her rings jumped on Caddy's back.

Mother's sick, Father said. Dilsey will put you to bed. Where's Quentin. Versh getting him, Dilsey said.

Father stood and watched us go past. We could hear Mother in her room. Caddy said "Hush." Jason was still climbing the stairs. He had his hands in his pockets.

"You all must be good tonight." Father said. "And be quiet, so you won't disturb Mother." "We'll be quiet." Caddy said. "You must be quiet now, Jason." she said. We tiptoed.

We could hear the roof. I could see the fire in the mirror too. Caddy lifted me again. "Come on, now." she said. "Then you can come back to the fire. Hush, now." "Candace." Mother said.

"Hush, Benjy." Caddy said. "Mother wants you a minute. Like a good boy. Then you can come back. Benjy."

Caddy let me down, and I hushed.

"Let him stay here, Mother. When he's through looking at the fire, then you can tell him." "Candace." Mother said. Caddy stooped and lifted me. We staggered. "Candace." Mother said.

"Hush." Caddy said. "You can still see it. Hush."

"Bring him here." Mother said. "He's too big for you to carry. You must stop trying. You'll injure your back. All of our women have prided themselves on their carriage. Do you want to look like a washer-woman?"

"He's not too heavy." Caddy said. "I can carry him."

"Well, I don't want him carried, then." Mother said. "A five year old child. No, no. Not in my lap. Let him stand up."

"If you'll hold him, he'll stop." Caddy said. "Hush." she said. "You can go right back. Here. Here's your cushion. See."

"Don't, Candace." Mother said.

"Let him look at it and he'll be quiet." Caddy said. "Hold up just a minute while I slip it out. There, Benjy. Look."

I looked at it and hushed.

"You humour him too much." Mother said. "You and your father both. You don't realise that I am the one who has to pay for it. Damuddy spoiled Jason that way and it took him two years to outgrow it, and I am not strong enough to go through the same thing with Benjamin."

"You don't need to bother with him." Caddy said. "I like to take care of him. Don't I, Benjy." "Candace." Mother said. "I told you not to call him that. It was bad enough when your

father insisted on calling you by that silly nickname, and I will not have him called by one. Nicknames are vulgar. Only common people use them. Benjamin." she said.

"Look at me." Mother said.

"Benjamin." she said. She took my face in her hands and turned it to hers. "Benjamin." she said. "Take that cushion away, Candace."

"He'll cry." Caddy said.

"Take that cushion away, like I told you." Mother said. "He must learn to mind." The cushion went away.

"Hush, Benjy." Caddy said.

"You go over there and sit down." Mother said. "Benjamin." She held my face to hers. "Stop that." she said. "Stop it."

But I didn't stop and Mother caught me in her arms and began to cry, and I cried. Then the cushion came back and Caddy held it above Mother's head. She drew Mother back in the chair and Mother lay crying against the red and yellow cushion.

"Hush, Mother." Caddy said. "You go upstairs and lay down, so you can be sick. I'll go get Dilsey." She led me to the fire and I looked at the bright, smooth shapes. I could hear the fire and the roof.

Father took me up. He smelled like rain.

“Well, Benjy.” he said. “Have you been a good boy today.” Caddy and Jason were fighting in the mirror.

“You, Caddy.” Father said.

They fought. Jason began to cry.

“Caddy.” Father said. Jason was crying. He wasn’t fighting anymore but we could see Caddy fighting in the mirror and Father put me down and went into the mirror and fought too. He lifted Caddy up. She fought. Jason lay on the floor, crying. He had the scissors in his hand. Father held Caddy.

“He cut up all Benjy’s dolls.” Caddy said. “I’ll slit his gizzle.” “Candace.” Father said.

“I will.” Caddy said. “I will.” She fought. Father held her. She kicked at Jason. He rolled into the corner, out of the mirror. Father brought Caddy to the fire. They were all out of the mirror. Only the fire was in it. Like the fire was in a door.

“Stop that.” Father said. “Do you want to make Mother sick in her room.”

Caddy stopped. “He cut up all the dolls Mau—Benjy and I made.” Caddy said. “He did it just for meanness.”

“I didn’t.” Jason said. He was sitting up, crying. “I didn’t know they were his. I just thought they were some old papers.”

“You couldn’t help but know.” Caddy said. “You did it just.” “Hush.” Father said. “Jason.” he said.

“I’ll make you some more tomorrow.” Caddy said. “We’ll make a lot of them. Here, you can look at the cushion, too.”

Jason came in.

I kept telling you to hush, Luster said. What’s the matter now, Jason said.

“He just trying hisself.” Luster said. “That the way he been going on all day.”

“Why dont you let him alone, then.” Jason said. “If you cant keep him quiet, you’ll have to take him out to the kitchen. The rest of us cant shut ourselves up in a room like Mother does.”

“Mammy say keep him out the kitchen till she get supper.” Luster said.

“Then play with him and keep him quiet.” Jason said. “Do I have to work all day and then come home to a mad house.” He opened the paper and read it.

You can look at the fire and the mirror and the cushion too, Caddy said. You wont have to wait until supper to look at the cushion, now. We could hear the roof. We could hear Jason too, crying loud beyond the wall.

Dilsey said, “You come, Jason. You letting him alone, is you.” “Yessum.” Luster said.

“Where Quentin.” Dilsey said. “Supper near bout ready.” “I dont know’m.” Luster said. “I aint seen her.”

Dilsey went away. “Quentin.” she said in the hall. “Quentin. Supper ready.” We could hear the roof. Quentin smelled like rain, too.

What did Jason do, he said.

He cut up all Benjy’s dolls, Caddy said.

Mother said to not call him Benjy, Quentin said. He sat on the rug by us. I wish it wouldn’t rain, he said. You cant do anything.

You’ve been in a fight, Caddy said. Haven’t you. It wasn’t much, Quentin said.

You can tell it, Caddy said. Father’ll see it.

I dont care, Quentin said. I wish it wouldn’t rain. Quentin said, “Didn’t Dilsey say supper was ready.”

“Yessum.” Luster said. Jason looked at Quentin. Then he read the paper again. Quentin came in. “She say it bout ready.” Luster said. Quentin jumped down in Mother’s chair. Luster said,

“Mr Jason.” “What.” Jason said.

“Let me have two bits.” Luster said. “What for.” Jason said.

“To go to the show tonight.” Luster said.

“I thought Dilsey was going to get a quarter from Frony for you.” Jason said.

“She did.” Luster said. “I lost it. Me and Benjy hunted all day for that quarter. You can ask him.”

“Then borrow one from him.” Jason said. “I have to work for mine.” He read the paper. Quentin looked at the fire. The fire was in her eyes and on her mouth. Her mouth was red.

"I tried to keep him away from there." Luster said. "Shut your mouth." Quentin said. Jason looked at her.

"What did I tell you I was going to do if I saw you with that show fellow again." he said. Quentin looked at the fire. "Did you hear me." Jason said.

"I heard you." Quentin said. "Why don't you do it, then." "Don't you worry." Jason said.

"I'm not." Quentin said. Jason read the paper again.

I could hear the roof. Father leaned forward and looked at Quentin. Hello, he said. Who won.

"Nobody." Quentin said. "They stopped us. Teachers." "Who was it." Father said. "Will you tell."

"It was all right." Quentin said. "He was as big as me." "That's good." Father said. "Can you tell what it was about."

"It wasn't anything." Quentin said. "He said he would put a frog in her desk and she wouldn't dare to whip him."

"Oh." Father said. "She. And then what."

"Yes, sir." Quentin said. "And then I kind of hit him."

We could hear the roof and the fire, and a snuffling outside the door.

"Where was he going to get a frog in November." Father said.

"I don't know, sir." Quentin said. We could hear them.

"Jason." Father said. We could hear Jason. "Jason." Father said. "Come in here and stop that." We could hear the roof and the fire and Jason.

"Stop that, now." Father said. "Do you want me to whip you again."

Father lifted Jason up into the chair by him. Jason snuffled. We could hear the fire and the roof. Jason snuffled a little louder.

"One more time." Father said. We could hear the fire and the roof.

Dilsey said, All right. You all can come on to supper.

Versh smelled like rain. He smelled like a dog, too. We could hear the fire and the roof.

We could hear Caddy walking fast. Father and Mother looked at the door. Caddy passed it, walking fast, She didn't look. She walked fast.

"Candace." Mother said. Caddy stopped walking. "Yes, Mother." she said.

"Hush, Caroline." Father said. "Come here." Mother said.

“Hush, Caroline.” Father said. “Let her alone.”

Caddy came to the door and stood there, looking at Father and Mother. Her eyes flew at me, and away. I began to cry. It went loud and I got up. Caddy came in and stood with her back to the wall, looking at me. I went toward her, crying, and she shrank against the wall and I saw her eyes and I cried louder and pulled at her dress. She put her hands out but I pulled at her dress. Her eyes ran.

Versh said, Your name Benjamin now. You know how come your name Benjamin now. They making a bluegum out of you. Mammy say in old time your granpa changed nigger’s name, and he turn preacher, and when they look at him, he bluegum too. Didn’t use to be bluegum, neither. And when family woman look him in the eye in the full of the moon, chile born bluegum. And one evening, when they was about a dozen them bluegum chillen running round the place, he never come home. Possum hunters found him in the woods, et clean. And you know who et him. Them bluegum chillen did.

We were in the hall. Caddy was still looking at me. Her hand was against her mouth and I saw her eyes and I cried. We went up the stairs. She stopped again, against the wall, looking at me and I cried and she went on and I came on, crying, and she shrank against the wall, looking at me. She opened the door to her room, but I pulled at her dress and we went to the bathroom and she stood against the door, looking at me. Then she put her arm across her face and I pushed at her, crying.

What are you doing to him, Jason said. Why cant you let him alone.

I aint touching him, Luster said. He been doing this way all day long. He needs whipping. He needs to be sent to Jackson, Quentin said. How can anybody live in a house like this. Ifyou dont like it, young lady, you’d better get out, Jason said.

I’m going to, Quentin said. Dont you worry.

Versh said, “You move back some, so I can dry my legs off.” He shoved me back a little.

"Dont you start belling, now. You can still see it. That's all you have to do. You aint had to be out in the rain like I is. You's born lucky and dont know it." He lay on his back before the fire.

"You know how come your name Benjamin now." Versh said. "Your mamma too proud for you. What mammy say."

"You be still there and let me dry my legs off." Versh said. "Or you know what I'll do. I'll skin your rinktum."

We could hear the fire and the roof and Versh.

Versh got up quick and jerked his legs back. Father said, "Allright, Versh." "I'll feed him tonight." Caddy said. "Sometimes he cries when Versh feeds him." "Take this tray up," Dilsey said. "And hurry back and feed Benjy."

"Dont you want Caddy to feed you." Caddy said.

Has he got to keep that old dirty slipper on the table, Quentin said. Why dont you feed him in the kitchen. It's like eating with a pig.

If you dont like the way we eat, you'd better not come to the table, Jason said.

Steam came off of Roskus. He was sitting in front of the stove. The oven door was open and Roskus had his feet in it. Steam came off the bowl. Caddy put the spoon into my mouth easy. There was a black spot on the inside of the bowl.

Now, now, Dilsey said. He aint going to bother you no more.

It got down below the mark. Then the bowl was empty. It went away.

"He's hungry tonight." Caddy said. The bowl came back. I couldn't see the spot. Then I could. "He's starved, tonight." Caddy said. "Look how much he's eaten."

Yes he will, Quentin said. You all send him out to spy on me. I hate this house. I'm going to run away.

Roskus said, "It going to rain all night."

You've been running a long time, not to 've got any further off than mealtime, Jason said. See if I dont, Quentin said.

"Then I dont know what I going to do." Dilsey said. "It caught me in the hip so bad now I cant scarcely move. Climbing them stairs allevening."

Oh, I wouldn't be surprised, Jason said. I wouldn't be surprised at anything you'd do. Quentin threw her napkin on the table.

Hush your mouth, Jason, Dilsey said. She went and put her arm around Quentin. Sit down, honey, Dilsey said. He ought to be shamed of himself, throwing what aint your fault up to you.

"She sulling again, is she." Roskus said. "Hush your mouth." Dilsey said.

Quentin pushed Dilsey away. She looked at Jason. Her mouth was red. She picked up her glass of water and swung her arm back, looking at Jason. Dilsey caught her arm. They fought. The glass broke on the table, and the water ran into the table. Quentin was running.

"Mother's sick again." Caddy said.

"Sho she is." Dilsey said. "Weather like this make anybody sick. When you going to get done eating, boy."

Goddamn you, Quentin said. Goddamn you. We could hear her running on the stairs. We went to the library.

Caddy gave me the cushion, and I could look at the cushion and the mirror and the fire. "We must be quiet while Quentin's studying."

Father said. "What are you doing, Jason." "Nothing." Jason said.

"Suppose you come over here to do it, then." Father said.

Jason came out of the corner.

"What are you chewing." Father said. "Nothing." Jason said.

"He's chewing paper again." Caddy said. "Come here, Jason." Father said.

Jason threw into the fire. It hissed, uncurled, turning black. Then it was gray. Then it was gone. Caddy and Father and Jason were in Mother's chair. Jason's eyes were puffed shut and his mouth moved, like tasting. Caddy's head was on Father's shoulder. Her hair was like fire, and little points of fire were in her eyes, and I went and Father lifted me into the chair too, and Caddy held me. She smelled like trees.

She smelled like trees. In the corner it was dark, but I could see the window. I squatted there, holding the slipper. I couldn't see it, but my hands saw it, and I could hear it getting night, and my hands saw the slipper but I couldn't see myself, but my hands could see the slipper, and I squatted there, hearing it getting dark.

Here you is, Luster said. Look what I got. He showed it to me. You know where I got it. Miss Quentin gave it to me. I knowed they couldn't keep me out. What you doing, off in here. I thought you done slipped back out doors. Aint you done enough moaning and slobbering today, without hiding off in this here empty room, mumbling and taking on. Come on here to bed, so I can get up there before it starts. I cant fool with you all night tonight. Just let them horns toot the first toot and I done gone.

We didn't go to our room.

"This is where we have the measles." Caddy said. "Why do we have to sleep in here tonight."

"What you care where you sleep." Dilsey said. She shut the door and sat down and began to undress me. Jason began to cry. "Hush." Dilsey said.

"I want to sleep with Damuddy." Jason said.

"She's sick." Caddy said. "You can sleep with her when she gets well. Cant he, Dilsey." "Hush, now." Dilsey said. Jason hushed.

"Our nighties are here, and everything." Caddy said. "It's like moving."

"And you better get into them." Dilsey said. "You be unbuttoning Jason." Caddy unbuttoned Jason. He began to cry.

"You want to get whipped." Dilsey said. Jason hushed. Quentin, Mother said in the hall.

What, Quentin said beyond the wall. We heard Mother lock the door. She looked in our door and came in and stooped over the bed and kissed me on the forehead.

When you get him to bed, go and ask Dilsey if she objects to my having a hot water bottle, Mother said. Tell her that if she does, I'll try to get along without it. Tell her I just want to know.

Yessum, Luster said. Come on. Get your pants off.

Quentin and Versh came in. Quentin had his face turned away. "What are you crying for." Caddy said.

"Hush." Dilsey said. "You allget undressed, now. You can go on home, Versh."

I got undressed and I looked at myself, and I began to cry. Hush, Luster said. Looking for them aint going to do no good. They're gone. You keep

on like this, and we aint going have you no more birthday. He put my gown on. I hushed, and then Luster stopped, his head toward the window. Then he went to the window and looked out. He came back and took my arm.

Here she come, he said. Be quiet, now. We went to the window and looked out. It came out of Quentin's window and climbed across into the tree. We watched the tree shaking. The shaking went down the tree, than it came out and we watched it go away across the grass. Then we couldn't see it. Come on, Luster said. There now. Hear them horns. You get in that bed while my foots behaves.

There were two beds. Quentin got in the other one. He turned his face to the wall. Dilsey put Jason in with him. Caddy took her dress off.

"Just look at your drawers." Dilsey said. "You better be glad your ma aint seen you." "I already told on her." Jason said.

"I bound you would." Dilsey said.

"And see what you got by it." Caddy said. "Tattletale." "What did I get by it." Jason said.

"Whyn't you get your nightie on." Dilsey said. She went and helped Caddy take off her bodice and drawers. "Just look at you." Dilsey said. She wadded the drawers and scrubbed Caddy behind with them. "It done soaked clean through onto you." she said. "But you wont get no bath this night. Here." She put Caddy's nightie on her and Caddy climbed into the bed and Dilsey went to the door and stood with her hand on the light. "You all be quiet now, you hear." she said.

"All right." Caddy said. "Mother's not coming in tonight." she said. "So we still have to mind me."

"Yes." Dilsey said. "Go to sleep, now."

"Mother's sick." Caddy said. "She and Damuddy are both sick." "Hush." Dilsey said. "You go to sleep."

The room went black, except the door. Then the door went black.

Caddy said, "Hush, Maury," putting her hand on me. So I stayed hushed. We could hear us. We could hear the dark.

It went away, and Father looked at us. He looked at Quentin and Jason, then he came and kissed Caddy and put his hand on my head.

"Is Mother very sick." Caddy said.

“No.” Father said. “Are you going to take good care of Maury.” “Yes.” Caddy said.

Father went to the door and looked at us again. Then the dark came back, and he stood black in the door, and then the door turned black again. Caddy held me and I could hear us all, and the darkness, and something I could smell. And then I could see the windows, where the trees were buzzing. Then the dark began to go in smooth, bright shapes, like it always does, even when Caddy says that I have been asleep.

June 2, 1910

When the shadow of the sash appeared on the curtains it was between seven and eight o'clock and then I was in time again, hearing the watch. It was Grandfather's and when Father gave it to me he said, Quentin, I give you the mausoleum of all hope and desire; it's rather excruciatingly apt that you will use it to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's. I give it to you not that you may remember time, but that you might forget it now and then for a moment and not spend all your breath trying to conquer it. Because no battle is ever won he said. They are not even fought. The field only reveals to man his own folly and despair, and victory is an illusion of philosophers and fools.

It was propped against the collar box and I lay listening to it. Hearing it, that is. I don't suppose anybody ever deliberately listens to a watch or a clock. You don't have to. You can be oblivious to the sound for a long while, then in a second of ticking it can create in the mind unbroken the long diminishing parade of time you didn't hear. Like Father said down the long and lonely light-rays you might see Jesus walking, like. And the good Saint Francis that said Little Sister Death, that never had a sister.

Through the wall I heard Shreve's bed-springs and then his slippers on the floor hissing. I got up and went to the dresser and slid my hand along it and touched the watch and turned it face-down and went back

to bed. But the shadow of the sash was still there and I had learned to tell almost to the minute, so I'd have to turn my back to it, feeling the eyes animals used to have in the back of their heads when it was on top, itching. It's always the idle habits you acquire which you will regret. Father said that. That Christ was not crucified: he was worn away by a minute clicking of little wheels. That had no sister.

And so as soon as I knew I couldn't see it, I began to wonder what time it was. Father said that constant speculation regarding the position of mechanical hands on an arbitrary dial which is a symptom of mind-function. Excrement Father said like sweating. And I saying All right. Wonder. Go on and wonder.

If it had been cloudy I could have looked at the window, thinking what he said about idle habits. Thinking it would be nice for them down at New London if the weather held up like this. Why shouldn't it? The month of brides, the voice that breathed She ran right out of the mirror, out of the banked scent. Roses. Roses. Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of. Roses. Not virgins like dogwood, milkweed. I said I have committed incest, Father I said. Roses. Cunning and serene. If you attend Harvard one year, but don't see the boat-race, there should be a refund. Let Jason have it. Give Jason a year at Harvard.

Shreve stood in the door, putting his collar on, his glasses glinting rosily, as though he had washed them with his face. "You taking a cut this morning?"

"Is it that late?"

He looked at his watch. "Bellin two minutes."

"I didn't know it was that late." He was still looking at the watch, his mouth shaping. "I'll have to hustle. I can't stand another cut. The dean told me last week—" He put the watch back into his pocket. Then I quit talking.

"You'd better slip on your pants and run," he said. He went out. I got up and moved about, listening to him through the wall. He entered the sitting-room, toward the door.

“Aren’t you ready yet?”

“Not yet. Run along. I’ll make it.”

He went out. The door closed. His feet went down the corridor. Then I could hear the watch again. I quit moving around and went to the window and drew the curtains aside and watched them running for chapel, the same ones fighting the same heaving coat-sleeves, the same books and flapping collars flushing past like debris on a flood, and Spode. Calling Shreve my husband. Ah let him alone, Shreve said, if he’s got better sense than to chase after the little dirty sluts, whose business. In the South you are ashamed of being a virgin. Boys. Men. They lie about it. Because it means less to women, Father said. He said it was men invented virginity not women. Father said it’s like death, only a state in which the others are left and I said, But to believe it doesn’t matter and he said, That’s what’s so sad about anything: not only virginity, and I said, Why couldn’t it have been me and not her who is unvirgin and he said, That’s why that’s sad too; nothing is even worth the changing of it, and Shreve said if he’s got better sense than to chase after the little dirty sluts and I said Did you ever have a sister? Did you? Did you?

Spode was in the middle of them like a terrapin in a street full of scuttering dead leaves, his collar about his ears, moving at his customary unhurried walk. He was from South Carolina, a senior. It was his club’s boast that he never ran for chapel and had never got there on time and had never been absent in four years and had never made either chapel or first lecture with a shirt on his back and socks on his feet. About ten o’clock he’d come in Thompson’s, get two cups of coffee, sit down and take his socks out of his pocket and remove his shoes and put them on while the coffee cooled. About noon you’d see him with a shirt and collar on, like anybody else. The others passed him running, but he never increased his pace at all. After a while the quad was empty.

A sparrow slanted across the sunlight, onto the window ledge, and cocked his head at me. His eye was round and bright. First he’d watch me with one eye, then flick! and it would be the other one, his throat

pumping faster than any pulse. The hour began to strike. The sparrow quit swapping eyes and watched me steadily with the same one until the chimes ceased, as if he were listening too. Then he flicked off the ledge and was gone.

It was a while before the last stroke ceased vibrating. It stayed in the air, more felt than heard, for a long time. Like all the bells that ever rang still ringing in the long dying light-rays and Jesus and Saint Francis talking about his sister. Because if it were just to hell; if that were all of it. Finished. If things just finished themselves. Nobody else there but her and me. If we could just have done something so dreadful that they would have fled hell except us. I have committed incest I said Father it was I it was not Dalton Ames And when he put Dalton Ames.

Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. When he put the pistol in my hand I didn't. That's why I didn't. He would be there and she would and I would. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. If we could have just done something so dreadful and Father said That's sad too, people cannot do anything that dreadful they cannot do anything very dreadful at all they cannot even remember tomorrow what seemed dreadful today and I said, You can shirk all things and he said, Ah can you.

And I will look down and see my murmuring bones and the deep water like wind, like a roof of wind, and after a long time they cannot distinguish even bones upon the lonely and inviolate sand. Until on the Day when He says Rise only the flat-iron would come floating up. It's not when you realise that nothing can help you—religion, pride, anything—it's when you realise that you don't need any aid. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames.

If I could have been his mother lying with open body lifted laughing, holding his father with my hand refraining, seeing, watching him die before he lived. One minute she was standing in the door I went to the dresser and took up the watch, with the face still down. I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass in my hand and put them into the ashtray and twisted the hands off and put them in the tray. The watch ticked on. I turned the face up, the

blank dial with little wheels clicking and clicking behind it, not knowing any better. Jesus walking on Galilee and Washington not telling lies. Father brought back a watch-charm from the Saint Louis Fair to Jason: a tiny opera glass into which you squinted with one eye and saw a skyscraper, a ferris wheel all spidery, Niagara Falls on a pinhead. There was a red smear on the dial. When I saw it my thumb began to smart. I put the watch down and went into Shreve's room and got the iodine and painted the cut. I cleaned the rest of the glass out of the rim with the towel.

I laid out two suits of underwear, with socks, shirts, collars and ties, and packed my trunk. I put in everything except my new suit and an old one and two pairs of shoes and two hats, and my books. I carried the books into the sitting-room and stacked them on the table, the ones I had brought from home and the ones Father said it used to be a gentleman was known by his books; nowadays he is known by the ones he has not returned and locked the trunk and addressed it. The quarter hour sounded. I stopped and listened to it until the chimes ceased.

I bathed and shaved. The water made my finger smart a little, so I painted it again. I put on my new suit and put my watch on and packed the other suit and the accessories and my razor and brushes in my hand bag, and wrapped the trunk key into a sheet of paper and put it in an envelope and addressed it to Father, and wrote the two notes and sealed them.

The shadow hadn't quite cleared the stoop. I stopped inside the door, watching the shadow move. It moved almost perceptibly, creeping back inside the door, driving the shadow back into the door. Only she was running already when I heard it. In the mirror she was running before I knew what it was. That quick, her train caught up over her arm she ran out of the mirror like a cloud, her veil swirling in long glints her heels brittle and fast clutching her dress onto her shoulder with the other hand, running out of the mirror the smells roses roses the voice that breathed o'er Eden. Then she was across the porch I couldn't hear her heels then in the moonlight like a cloud, the floating shadow of the veil running across the grass, into the bellowing. She ran out of her dress,

clutching her bridal, running into the bellowing where T. P. in the dew Whooeey Sassprilluh Benjy under the box bellowing. Father had a V-shaped silver cuirass on his running chest Shreve said, "Well, you didn't. . . . Is it a wedding or a wake?" "I couldn't make it," I said.

"Not with all that primping. What's the matter? You think this was Sunday?" "I reckon the police wont get me for wearing my new suit one time," I said.

"I was thinking about the Square students. Have you got too proud to attend classes too?" "I'm going to eat first." The shadow on the stoop was gone. I stepped into sunlight, finding my shadow again. I walked down the steps just ahead of it. The half hour went. Then the chimes ceased and died away.

Deacon wasn't at the postoffice either. I stamped the two envelopes and mailed the one to Father and put Shreve's in my inside pocket, and then I remembered where I had last seen the Deacon. It was on Decoration Day, in a G. A. R. uniform, in the middle of the parade. If you waited long enough on any corner you would see him in whatever parade came along. The one before was on Columbus' or Garibaldi's or somebody's birthday. He was in the Street Sweeper's section, in a stovepipe hat, carrying a two inch Italian flag, smoking a cigar among the brooms and scoops. But the last time was the G. A. R. one, because Shreve said: "There now. Just look at what your grandpa did to that poor old nigger."

"Yes," I said, "Now he can spend day after day marching in parades. If it hadn't been for my grandfather, he'd have to work like whitefolks." I didn't see him anywhere. But I never knew even a working nigger that you could find when you wanted him, let alone one that lived off the fat of the land. A car came along. I went over to town and went to Parker's and had a good breakfast. While I was eating I heard a clock strike the hour. But then I suppose it takes at least one hour to lose time in, who has been longer than history getting into the mechanical progression of it.

When I finished breakfast I bought a cigar. The girl said a fifty cent one was the best, so I took one and lit it and went out to the street. I stood there and took a couple of puffs, then I held it in my hand and went on toward the corner. I passed a jeweller's window, but I looked away in time. At the corner two bootblacks caught me, one on either side, shrill and raucous, like blackbirds. I gave the cigar to one of them, and the other one a nickel. Then they let me alone. The one with the cigar was trying to sell it to the other for the nickel.

There was a clock, high up in the sun, and I thought about how, when you don't want to do a thing, your body will try to trick you into doing it, sort of unawares. I could feel the muscles in the back of my neck, and then I could hear my watch ticking away in my pocket and after a while I had all the other sounds shut away, leaving only the watch in my pocket. I turned back up the street, to the window. He was working at the table behind the window. He was going bald. There was a glass in his eye—a metal tube screwed into his face. I went in.

The place was full of ticking, like crickets in September grass, and I could hear a big clock on the wall above his head. He looked up, his eye big and blurred and rushing beyond the glass. I took mine out and handed it to him.

"I broke my watch."

He flipped it over in his hand. "I should say you have. You must have stepped on it."

"Yes, sir. I knocked it off the dresser and stepped on it in the dark. It's still running though." He pried the back open and squinted into it.

"Seems to be all right. I can't tell until I go over it, though. I'll go into it this afternoon."

"I'll bring it back later," I said. "Would you mind telling me if any of those watches in the window are right?"

He held my watch on his palm and looked up at me with his blurred rushing eye. "I made a bet with a fellow," I said, "And I forgot my glasses this morning."

“Why, all right,” he said. He laid the watch down and half rose on his stool and looked over the barrier. Then he glanced up at the wall. “It’s twen—”

“Dont tellme,” I said, “please sir. Just tellme if any of themare right.”

He looked at me again. He sat back on the stool and pushed the glass up onto his forehead. It left a red circle around his eye and when it was gone his whole face looked naked. “What’re you celebrating today?” he said. “That boat race aint untilnext week, is it?”

“No, sir. This is just a private celebration. Birthday. Are any of themright?”

“No. But they haven’t been regulated and set yet. If you’re thinking of buying one of them —”

“No, sir. I dont need a watch. We have a clock in our sitting room. I’ll have this one fixed when I do.” I reached my hand.

“Better leave it now.”

“I’ll bring it back later.” He gave me the watch. I put it in my pocket. I couldn’t hear it now, above allthe others. “I’mmuch obliged to you. I hope I haven’t taken up your time.”

“That’s allright. Bring it in when you are ready. And you better put off this celebration until after we win that boat race.”

“Yes, sir. I reckon I had.”

I went out, shutting the door upon the ticking. I looked back into the window. He was watching me across the barrier. There were about a dozen watches in the window, a dozen different hours and each with the same assertive and contradictory assurance that mine had, without any hands at all. Contradicting one another. I could hear mine, ticking away inside my pocket, even though nobody could see it, even though it could tellnothing if anyone could.

And so I told myself to take that one. Because Father said clocks slay time. He said time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life. The hands were extended, slightly off the horizontal at a faint angle, like a gull tilting into the wind. Holding all I used to be sorry about like the new

moon holding water, niggers say. The jeweler was working again, bent over his bench, the tube tunnelled into his face. His hair was parted in the center. The part ran up into the bald spot, like a drained marsh in December.

I saw the hardware store from across the street. I didn't know you bought flat-irons by the pound.

The clerk said, "These weigh ten pounds." Only they were bigger than I thought. So I got two six-pound little ones, because they would look like a pair of shoes wrapped up. They felt heavy enough together, but I thought again how Father had said about the reducto absurdum of human experience, thinking how the only opportunity I seemed to have for the application of Harvard. Maybe by next year; thinking maybe it takes two years in school to learn to do that properly.

But they felt heavy enough in the air. A street car came. I got on. I didn't see the placard on the front. It was full, mostly prosperous looking people reading newspapers. The only vacant seat was beside a nigger. He wore a derby and shined shoes and he was holding a dead cigar stub. I used to think that a Southerner had to be always conscious of niggers. I thought that Northerners would expect him to. When I first came East I kept thinking You've got to remember to think of them as coloured people not niggers, and if it hadn't happened that I wasn't thrown with many of them, I'd have wasted a lot of time and trouble before I learned that the best way to take all people, black or white, is to take them for what they think they are, then leave them alone. That was when I realised that a nigger is not a person so much as a form of behaviour; a sort of obverse reflection of the white people he lives among. But I thought at first that I ought to miss having a lot of them around me because I thought that Northerners thought I did, but I didn't know that I really had missed Roskus and Dilsey and them until that morning in Virginia. The train was stopped when I waked and I raised the shade and looked out. The car was blocking a road crossing, where two white fences came down a hill and then sprayed outward and downward like part of the skeleton of a horn, and there was a nigger on a mule in the middle of the stiff ruts, waiting for the train to move. How long he had been there I didn't know, but he sat straddle of

the mule, his head wrapped in a piece of blanket, as if they had been built there with the fence and the road, or with the hill, carved out of the hill itself, like a sign put there saying You are home again. He didn't have a saddle and his feet dangled almost to the ground. The mule looked like a rabbit. I raised the window.

"Hey, Uncle," I said, "Is this the way?"

"Suh?" He looked at me, then he loosened the blanket and lifted it away from his ear.

"Christmas gift!" I said.

"Sho comin, boss. You done caught me, aint you?"

"I'll let you off this time." I dragged my pants out of the little hammock and got a quarter out. "But look out next time. I'll be coming back through here two days after New Year, and look out then." I threw the quarter out the window. "Buy yourself some Santy Claus."

"Yes, suh," he said. He got down and picked up the quarter and rubbed it on his leg. "Thanky, young marster. Thanky." Then the train began to move. I leaned out the window, into the cold air, looking back. He stood there beside the gaunt rabbit of a mule, the two of them shabby and motionless and unimpatient. The train swung around the curve, the engine puffing with short, heavy blasts, and they passed smoothly from sight that way, with that quality about them of shabby and timeless patience, of static serenity: that blending of childlike and ready incompetence and paradoxical reliability that tends and protects them it loves out of all reason and robs them steadily and evades responsibility and obligations by means too barefaced to be called subterfuge even and is taken in theft or evasion with only that frank and spontaneous admiration for the victor which a gentleman feels for anyone who beats him in a fair contest, and withal a fond and unflagging tolerance for whitefolks' vagaries like that of a grandparent for unpredictable and troublesome children, which I had forgotten. And all that day, while the train wound through rushing gaps and along ledges where movement was only a labouring sound of the exhaust and groaning wheels and the eternal mountains stood fading into the thick sky, I thought of home, of the bleak station and the mud and the niggers and country folks thronging slowly about the square, with toy

monkeys and wagons and candy in sacks and roman candles sticking out, and my insides would move like they used to do in school when the bellrang.

I wouldn't begin counting until the clock struck three. Then I would begin, counting to sixty and folding down one finger and thinking of the other fourteen fingers waiting to be folded down, or thirteen or twelve or eight or seven, until all of a sudden I'd realise silence and the unwinking minds, and I'd say "Ma'am?" "Your name is Quentin, isn't it?" Miss Laura said. Then more silence and the cruel unwinking minds and hands jerking into the silence. "Tell Quentin who discovered the Mississippi River, Henry." "DeSoto." Then the minds would go away, and after a while I'd be afraid I had gotten behind and I'd count fast and fold down another finger, then I'd be afraid I was going too fast and I'd slow up, then I'd get afraid and count fast again. So I never could come out even with the bell, and the released surging of feet moving already, feeling earth in the scuffed floor, and the day like a pane of glass struck a light, sharp blow, and my insides would move, sitting still. Moving sitting still. One minute she was standing in the door. Benjy. Bellowing. Benjamin the child of mine old age bellowing. Caddy! Caddy!

I'm going to run away. He began to cry she went and touched him. Hush. I'm not going to. Hush. He hushed. Dilsey. He smell what you tell him when he want to. Dont have to listen nor talk. Can he smell that new name they give him? Can he smell bad luck? What he want to worry about luck for? Luck cant do him no hurt.

What they change his name for then ifaint trying to help his luck? The street car stopped, started, stopped again. Below the window I watched the crowns of people's heads passing beneath new straw hats not yet unbleached. There were women in the car now, with market baskets, and men in work-clothes were beginning to outnumber the shined shoes and collars.

The nigger touched my knee. "Pardon me," he said. I swung my legs out and let him pass. We were going beside a blank wall, the sound clattering back into the car, at the women with market baskets on their

knees and a man in a stained hat with a pipe stuck in the band. I could smell water, and in a break in the wall I saw a glint of water and two masts, and a gull motionless in midair, like on an invisible wire between the masts, and I raised my hand and through my coat touched the letters I had written. When the car stopped I got off.

The bridge was open to let a schooner through. She was in tow, the tug nudging along under her quarter, trailing smoke, but the ship herself was like she was moving without visible means. A man naked to the waist was coiling down a line on the fore'st'le head. His body was burned the colour of leaf tobacco. Another man in a straw hat without any crown was at the wheel. The ship went through the bridge, moving under bare poles like a ghost in broad day, with three gulls hovering above the stern like toys on invisible wires.

When it closed I crossed to the other side and leaned on the rail above the boathouses. The float was empty and the doors were closed. The crew just pulled in the late afternoon now, resting up before. The shadow of the bridge, the tiers of railing, my shadow leaning flat upon the water, so easily had I tricked it that would not quit me. At least fifty feet it was, and if I only had something to blot it into the water, holding it until it was drowned, the shadow of the package like two shoes wrapped up lying on the water. Niggers say a drowned man's shadow was watching for him in the water all the time. It twinkled and glinted, like breathing, the float slow like breathing too, and debris half submerged, healing out to the sea and the caverns and the grottoes of the sea. The displacement of water is equal to the something of something. Reducto absurdum of all human experience, and two six-pound flat-irons weigh more than one tailor's goose. What a sinful waste Dilsey would say. Benjy knew it when Damuddy died. He cried. He smell hit. He smell hit.

The tug came back downstream, the water shearing in long rolling cylinders, rocking the float at last with the echo of passage, the float lurching onto the rolling cylinder with a plopping sound and a long jarring noise as the door rolled back and two men emerged, carrying a shell. They set it in the water and a moment later Bland came out, with

the skulls. He wore flannels, a grey jacket and a stiff straw hat. Either he or his mother had read somewhere that Oxford students pulled in flannels and stiff hats, so early one March they bought Gerald a one pair shell and in his flannels and stiff hat he went on the river.

The folks at the boathouses threatened to call a policeman, but he went anyway. His mother came down in a hired auto, in a fur suit like an arctic explorer's, and saw him off in a twenty-five mile wind and a steady drove of ice floes like dirty sheep. Ever since then I have believed that God is not only a gentleman and a sport; He is a Kentuckian too. When he sailed away she made a detour and came down to the river again and drove along parallel with him, the car in low gear. They said you couldn't have told they'd ever seen one another before, like a King and Queen, not even looking at one another, just moving side by side across Massachusetts on parallel courses like a couple of planets.

He got in and pulled away. He pulled pretty well now. He ought to. They said his mother tried to make him give rowing up and do something else the rest of his class couldn't or wouldn't do, but for once he was stubborn. If you could call it stubbornness, sitting in his attitudes of princely boredom, with his curly yellow hair and his violet eyes and his eyelashes and his New York clothes, while his mamma was telling us about Gerald's horses and Gerald's niggers and Gerald's women. Husbands and fathers in Kentucky must have been awful glad when she carried Gerald off to Cambridge.

She had an apartment over in town, and Gerald had one there too, besides his rooms in college. She approved of Gerald associating with me because I at least revealed a blundering sense of noblesse oblige by getting myself born below Mason and Dixon, and a few others whose geography met the requirements (minimum) Forgive, at least. Or condoned. But since she met Spode coming out of chapel one He said she couldn't be a lady no lady would be out at that hour of the night she never had been able to forgive him for having five names, including that of a present English ducal house. I'm sure she solaced herself by being convinced that some misfit Maingault or Mortemar had got

mixed up with the lodge-keeper's daughter. Which was quite probable, whether she invented it or not. Spode was the world's champion sitter-around, no holds barred and gouging discretionary.

The shell was a speck now, the oars catching the sun in spaced glints, as if the hull were winking itself along. Did you ever have a sister? No but they're all bitches. Did you ever have a sister? One minute she was. Bitches. Not bitch one minute she stood in the door Dalton Ames. Dalton Ames. Dalton Shirts. I thought all the time they were khaki, army issue khaki, until I saw they were of heavy Chinese silk or finest flannel because they made his face so brown his eyes so blue. Dalton Ames. It just missed gentility. Theatrical fixture. Just papier-mache, then touch. Oh. Asbestos. Not quite bronze. But wont see him at the house.

Caddy's a woman too, remember. She must do things for women's reasons, too.

Why wont you bring him to the house, Caddy? Why must you do like nigger women do in the pasture the ditches the dark woods hot hidden furious in the dark woods.

And after a while I had been hearing my watch for some time and I could feel the letters crackle through my coat, against the railing, and I leaned on the railing, watching my shadow, how I had tricked it. I moved along the rail, but my suit was dark too and I could wipe my hands, watching my shadow, how I had tricked it. I walked it into the shadow of the quai. Then I went east.

Harvard my Harvard boy Harvard harvard That pimple-faced infant she met at the field-meet with coloured ribbons. Skulking along the fence trying to whistle her out like a puppy. Because they couldn't cajole him into the diningroom Mother believed he had some sort of spell he was going to cast on her when he got her alone. Yet any blackguard He was lying beside the box under the window bellowing that could drive up in a limousine with a flower in his buttonhole. Harvard. Quentin this is Herbert. My Harvard boy. Herbert will be a big brother has already promised Jason a position in the bank.

Hearty, celluloid like a drummer. Face full of teeth white but not smiling. I've heard of him up there. All teeth but not smiling. You going to drive?

Get in Quentin. You going to drive.

It's her car aren't you proud of your little sister owns first auto in town Herbert his present. Louis has been giving her lessons every morning didn't you get my letter Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson announce the marriage of their daughter Candace to Mr Sydney Herbert Head on the twenty-fifth of April one thousand nine hundred and ten at Jefferson Mississippi. At home after the first of August number Something Something Avenue South Bend Indiana. Shreve said Aren't you even going to open it? Three days. Times. Mr and Mrs Jason Richmond Compson Young Lochinvar rode out of the west a little too soon, didn't he?

I'm from the south. You're funny, aren't you. O yes I knew it was somewhere in the country.

You're funny, aren't you. You ought to join the circus.

I did. That's how I ruined my eyes watering the elephant's fleas. Three times These country girls. You can't even tell about them, can you. Well, anyway Byron never had his wish, thank God. But not hit a man in glasses. Aren't you even going to open it? It lay on the table a candle burning at each corner upon the envelope tied in a soiled pink garter two artificial flowers. Not hit a man in glasses.

Country people poor things they never saw an auto before lots of them honk the horn Candace so She wouldn't look at me they'll get out of the way wouldn't look at me your father wouldn't like it if you were to injure one of them I'll declare your father will simply have to get an auto now I'm almost sorry you brought it down Herbert I've enjoyed it so much of course there's the carriage but so often when I'd like to go out Mr Compson has the darkies doing something it would be worth my head to interrupt he insists that Roskus is at my call all the time but I know what that means I know how often people make promises just to satisfy their consciences are you going to treat my little baby girl that

way Herbert but I know you wont Herbert has spoiled us all to death
Quentin did I write you that he is going to take Jason into his bank
when Jason finishes high school Jason will make a splendid banker he is
the only one of my children with any practical sense you can thank me
for that he takes after my people the others are all Compson Jason
furnished the flour. They made kites on the back porch and sold them
for a nickle a piece, he and the Patterson boy. Jason was treasurer.

There was no nigger in this street car, and the hats unbleached as yet
flowing past under the window. Going to Harvard. We have sold Benjy's
He lay on the ground under the window, bellowing. We have sold
Benjy's pasture so that Quentin may go to Harvard a brother to you.
Your little brother.

You should have a car it's done you no end of good dont you think so
Quentin I call him Quentin at once you see I have heard so much about
himfromCandace.

Why shouldn't you I want my boys to be more than friends yes Candace
and Quentin more than friends Father I have committed what a pity
you had no brother or sister No sister no sister had no sister Dont ask
Quentin he and Mr Compson both feel a little insulted when I am
strong enough to come down to the table I am going on nerve now I'll
pay for it after it's all over and you have taken my little daughter away
fromme My little sister had no. If I could say Mother. Mother Unless I
do what I am tempted to and take you instead I dont think Mr Compson
could overtake the car.

Ah Herbert Candace do you hear that She wouldn't look at me soft
stubborn jaw-angle not back-looking You needn't be jealous though it's
just an old woman he's flattering a grown married daughter I cant
believe it.

Nonsense you look like a girl you are lots younger than Candace colour
in your cheeks like a girl A face reproachful tearful an odour of camphor
and of tears a voice weeping steadily and softly beyond the twilit door
the twilight-coloured smell of honeysuckle. Bringing empty trunks
down the attic stairs they sounded like coffins French Lick. Found not

death at the salt lick Hats not unbleached and not hats. In three years I can not wear a hat. I could not. Was. Will there be hats then since I was not and not Harvard then. Where the best of thought Father said clings like dead ivy vines upon old dead brick. Not Harvard then. Not to me, anyway. Again. Sadder than was. Again. Saddest of all. Again.

Spoade had a shirt on; then it must be. When I can see my shadow again if not careful that I tricked into the water shall tread again upon my impervious shadow. But no sister. I wouldn't have done it. I won't have my daughter spied on I wouldn't have.

How can I control any of them when you have always taught them to have no respect for me and my wishes I know you look down on my people but is that any reason for teaching my children my own children I suffered for to have no respect Trampling my shadow's bones into the concrete with hard heels and then I was hearing the watch, and I touched the letters through my coat.

I will not have my daughter spied on by you or Quentin or anybody no matter what you think she has done.

At least you agree there is reason for having her watched.

I wouldn't have I wouldn't have. I know you wouldn't I didn't mean to speak so sharply but women have no respect for each other for themselves.

But why did she The chimes began as I stepped on my shadow, but it was the quarter hour. The Deacon wasn't in sight anywhere. think I would have could have.

She didn't mean that that's the way women do things its because she loves Caddy.

The street lamps would go down the hill then rise toward town I walked upon the belly of my shadow. I could extend my hand beyond it. feeling Father behind me beyond the rasping darkness of summer and August the street lamps Father and I protect women from one another from themselves our women Women are like that they dont acquire knowledge of people we are for that they are just born with a practical fertility of suspicion that makes a crop every so often and usually right

they have an affinity for evil for supplying whatever the evil lacks in itself for drawing it about them instinctively as you do bedclothing in slumber fertilising the mind for it until the evil has served its purpose whether it ever existed or no He was coming along between a couple of freshmen. He hadn't quite recovered from the parade, for he gave me a salute, a very superior-officerish kind.

"I want to see you a minute," I said, stopping.

"See me? All right. See you again, fellows," he said, stopping and turning back; "glad to have chatted with you." That was the Deacon, all over. Talk about your natural psychologists. They said he hadn't missed a train at the beginning of school in forty years, and that he could pick out a Southerner with one glance. He never missed, and once he had heard you speak, he could name your state. He had a regular uniform he met trains in, a sort of Uncle Tom's cabin outfit, patches and all.

"Yes, suh. Right dis way, young marster, hyer we is," taking your bags.

"Hyer, boy, come hyer and git dese grips." Whereupon a moving mountain of luggage would edge up, revealing a white boy of about fifteen, and the Deacon would hang another bag on him somehow and drive him off. "Now, den, dont you drap hit. Yes, suh, young marster, jes give de old nigger yo roomnumber, and hit'll be done got cold dar when you arrives."

From then on until he had you completely subjugated he was always in or out of your room, ubiquitous and garrulous, though his manner gradually moved northward as his raiment improved, until at last when he had bled you until you began to learn better he was calling you Quentin or whatever, and when you saw him next he'd be wearing a cast-off Brooks suit and a hat with a Princeton club I forget which band that someone had given him and which he was pleasantly and unshakably convinced was a part of Abe Lincoln's military sash. Someone spread the story years ago, when he first appeared around college from wherever he came from, that he was a graduate of the divinity school. And when he came to understand what it meant he was so taken with it that he began to retail the story himself, until at last he must come to believe he really had. Anyway he related long pointless

anecdotes of his undergraduate days, speaking familiarly of dead and departed professors by their first names, usually incorrect ones.

But he had been guide mentor and friend to unnumbered crops of innocent and lonely freshmen, and I suppose that with all his petty chicanery and hypocrisy he stank no higher in heaven's nostrils than any other.

"Haven't seen you in three-four days," he said, staring at me from his still military aura. "You been sick?"

"No. I've been alright. Working, I reckon. I've seen you, though."

"Yes?"

"In the parade the other day."

"Oh, that. Yes, I was there. I dont care nothing about that sort of thing, you understand, but the boys likes to have me with them, the vet'runs does. Ladies wants allthe old vet'runs to turn out, you know. So I has to oblige them."

"And on that Wop holiday too," I said. "You were obliging the W. C. T. U. then, I reckon." "That? I was doing that for my son-in-law. He aims to get a job on the city forces. Street cleaner. I tells himallhe wants is a broomto sleep on. You saw me, did you?" "Both times. Yes."

"I mean, in uniform. How'd I look?"

"You looked fine. You looked better than any of them. They ought to make you a general, Deacon."

He touched my arm, lightly, his hand that worn, gentle quality of niggers' hands. "Listen. This aint for outside talking. I dont mind telling you because you and me's the same folks, come long and short." He leaned a little to me, speaking rapidly, his eyes not looking at me. "I've got strings out, right now. Wait till next year. Just wait. Then see where I'm marching. I wont need to tell you how I'mfixing it; I say, just wait and see, my boy." He looked at me now and clapped me lightly on the shoulder and rocked back on his heels, nodding at me. "Yes, sir. I didnt turn Democrat three years ago for nothing. My son-in-law on the city; me—Yes, sir. If just turning Democrat'll make that son of a bitch go to

work. . . . And me: just you stand on that corner yonder a year from two days ago, and see.”

“I hope so. You deserve it, Deacon. And while I think about it—” I took the letter from my pocket. “Take this around to my room tomorrow and give it to Shreve. He’ll have something for you. But not till tomorrow, mind.”

He took the letter and examined it. “It’s sealed up.” “Yes. And it’s written inside, Not good until tomorrow.”

“H’m,” he said. He looked at the envelope, his mouth pursed.

“Something for me, you say?” “Yes. A present I’m making you.”

He was looking at me now, the envelope white in his black hand, in the sun. His eyes were soft and irisless and brown, and suddenly I saw Roskus watching me from behind all his white-folks’ claptrap of uniforms and politics and Harvard manner, diffident, secret, inarticulate and sad. “You aint playing a joke on the old nigger, is you?”

“You know I’m not. Did any Southerner ever play a joke on you?”

“You’re right. They’re fine folks. But you cant live with them.”

“Did you ever try?” I said. But Roskus was gone. Once more he was that self he had long since taught himself to wear in the world’s eye, pompous, spurious, not quite gross.

“I’ll confer to your wishes, my boy.” “Not until tomorrow, remember.”

“Sure,” he said; “understood, my boy. Well—”

“I hope—” I said. He looked down at me, benignant, profound.

Suddenly I held out my hand and we shook, he gravely, from the pompous height of his municipal and military dream. “You’re a good fellow, Deacon. I hope. . . . You’ve helped a lot of young fellows, here and there.”

“I’ve tried to treat all folks right,” he said. “I draw no petty social lines. A man to me is a man, wherever I find him.”

“I hope you’ll always find as many friends as you’ve made.”

“Young fellows. I get along with them. They dont forget me, neither,” he said, waving the envelope. He put it into his pocket and buttoned his coat. “Yes, sir,” he said, “I’ve had good friends.”

The chimes began again, the half hour. I stood in the belly of my shadow and listened to the strokes spaced and tranquil along the sunlight, among the thin, still little leaves. Spaced and peaceful and serene, with that quality of autumn always in bells even in the month of brides. Lying on the ground under the window bellowing He took one look at her and knew. Out of the mouths of babes. The street lamps The chimes ceased. I went back to the postoffice, treading my shadow into pavement. go down the hill then they rise toward town like lanterns hung one above another on a wall. Father said because she loves Caddy she loves people through their shortcomings. Uncle Maury straddling his legs before the fire must remove one hand long enough to drink Christmas.

Jason ran on, his hands in his pockets fell down and lay there like a trussed fowl until Versh set him up. Whyn't you keep them hands outen your pockets when you running you could stand up then Rolling his head in the cradle rolling it flat across the back. Caddy told Jason Versh said that the reason Uncle Maury didn't work was that he used to rollhis head in the cradle when he was little.

Shreve was coming up the walk, shambling, fatly earnest, his glasses glinting beneath the running leaves like little pools.

"I gave Deacon a note for some things. I may not be in this afternoon, so dont you let him have anything untilltomorrow, willyou?"

"All right." He looked at me. "Say, what're you doing today, anyhow? All dressed up and mooning around like the prologue to a suttee. Did you go to Psychology this morning?"

"I'mnot doing anything. Not untilltomorrow, now." "What's that you got there?"

"Nothing. Pair of shoes I had half-soled. Not untilltomorrow, you hear?"

"Sure. Allright. Oh, by the way, did you get a letter off the table this morning?" "No."

"It's there. FromSemiramis. Chauffeur brought it before ten o'clock."

"Allright. I'llget it. Wonder what she wants now."

"Another band recital, I guess. Tumpy ta ta Gerald blah. 'A little louder on the drum, Quentin.' God, I'm glad I'm not a gentleman." He went

on, nursing a book, a little shapeless, fatly intent. The street lamps do you think so because one of our forefathers was a governor and three were generals and Mother's weren't any live man is better than any dead man but no live or dead man is very much better than any other live or dead man Done in Mother's mind though. Finished. Finished. Then we were all poisoned you are confusing sin and morality women dont do that your Mother is thinking of morality whether it be sin or not has not occurred to her Jason I must go away you keep the others I'll take Jason and go where nobody knows us so he'll have a chance to grow up and forget all this the others dont love me they have never loved anything with that streak of Compson selfishness and false pride Jason was the only one my heart went out to without dread nonsense Jason is all right I was thinking that as soon as you feel better you and Caddy might go up to French Lick and leave Jason here with nobody but you and the darkies she willforget himthen allthe talk willdie away found not death at the salt licks maybe I could find a husband for her not death at the salt licks The car came up and stopped. The bells were still ringing the half hour. I got on and it went on again, blotting the half hour. No: the three quarters.

Then it would be ten minutes anyway. To leave Harvard your Mother's dream for sold Benjy's pasture for what have I done to have been given children like these Benjamin was punishment enough and now for her to have no more regard for me her own mother I've suffered for her dreamed and planned and sacrificed I went down into the valley yet never since she opened her eyes has she given me one unselfish thought at times I look at her I wonder if she can be my child except Jason he has never given me one moment's sorrow since I first held him in my arms I knew then that he was to be my joy and my salvation I thought that Benjamin was punishment enough for any sins I have committed I thought he was my punishment for putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me I dont complain I loved him above all of them because of it because my duty though Jason pulling at my heart all the while but I see now that I have not suffered enough I see now that I must pay for your sins as well as mine what have you done what sins have your high and mighty people visited upon me but you'll take up for themyou always have found excuses for

your own blood only Jason can do wrong because he is more Bascomb than Compson while your own daughter my little daughter my baby girl she is she is no better than that when I was a girl I was unfortunate I was only a Bascomb I was taught that there is no halfway ground that a woman is either a lady or not but I never dreamed when I held her in my arms that any daughter of mine could let herself dont you know I can look at her eyes and tellyou may think she'd tellyou but she doesn't tellthings she is secretive you dont know her I know things she's done that I'd die before I'd have you know that's it go on criticise Jason accuse me of setting him to watch her as if it were a crime while your own daughter can I know you dont love him that you wish to believe faults against him you never have yes ridicule himas you always have Maury you cannot hurt me any more than your children already have and then I'll be gone and Jason with no one to love him shield him fromthis I look at himevery day dreading to see this Compson blood beginning to show in him at last with his sister slipping out to see what do you callit then have you ever laid eyes on him willyou even let me try to find out who he is it's not for myself I couldn't bear to see himit's for your sake to protect you but who can fight against bad blood you wont let me try we are to sit back with our hands folded while she not only drags your name in the dirt but corrupts the very air your children breathe Jason you must let me go away I cannot stand it let me have Jason and you keep the others they're not my flesh and blood like he is strangers nothing of mine and I am afraid of them I can take Jason and go where we are not known I'll go down on my knees and pray for the absolution of my sins that he may escape this curse try to forget that the others ever were If that was the three quarters, not over ten minutes now. One car had just left, and people were already waiting for the next one.

I asked, but he didn't know whether another one would leave before noon or not because you'd think that interurbans. So the first one was another trolley. I got on. You can feel noon. I wonder if even miners in the bowels of the earth. That's why whistles: because people that sweat, and if just far enough from sweat you wont hear whistles and in eight minutes you should be that far fromsweat in Boston. Father said a man is the sum of his misfortunes. One day you'd think misfortune

would get tired, but then time is your misfortune Father said. A gull on an invisible wire attached through space dragged.

You carry the symbol of your frustration into eternity. Then the wings are bigger Father said only who can play a harp.

I could hear my watch whenever the car stopped, but not often they were already eating Who would play a Eating the business of eating inside of you space too space and time confused Stomach saying noon brain saying eat oclock All right I wonder what time it is what of it. People were getting out. The trolley didn't stop so often now, emptied by eating.

Then it was past. I got off and stood in my shadow and after a while a car came along and I got on and went back to the interurban station. There was a car ready to leave, and I found a seat next the window and it started and I watched it sort of frazzle out into slack tide flats, and then trees. Now and then I saw the river and I thought how nice it would be for them down at New London if the weather and Gerald's shell going solemnly up the glinting forenoon and I wondered what the old woman would be wanting now, sending me a note before ten oclock in the morning. What picture of Gerald I to be one of the Dalton Ames oh asbestos Quentin has shot background. Something with girls in it. Women do have always his voice above the gabble voice that breathed an affinity for evil, for believing that no woman is to be trusted, but that some men are too innocent to protect themselves. Plain girls. Remote cousins and family friends whom mere acquaintanceship invested with a sort of blood obligation noblesse oblige.

And she sitting there telling us before their faces what a shame it was that Gerald should have all the family looks because a man didn't need it, was better off without it but without it a girl was simply lost. Telling us about Gerald's women in a Quentin has shot Herbert he shot his voice through the floor of Caddy's room tone of smug approbation. "When he was seventeen I said to him one day 'What a shame that you should have a mouth like that it should be on a girls face'and can you

imagine the curtains leaning in on the twilight upon the odour of the apple tree her head against the twilight her arms behind her head kimono-winged the voice that breathed o'er eden clothes upon the bed by the nose seen above the apple what he said? just seventeen, mind. 'Mother' he said 'it often is.' " And him sitting there in attitudes regal watching two or three of them through his eyelashes.

They gushed like swallows swooping his eyelashes. Shreve said he always had Are you going to look after Benjy and Father The less you say about Benjy and Father the better when have you ever considered them Caddy Promise You needn't worry about them you're getting out in good shape Promise I'm sick you'll have to promise wondered who invented that joke but then he always had considered Mrs Bland a remarkably preserved woman he said she was grooming Gerald to seduce a duchess sometime.

She called Shreve that fat Canadian youth twice she arranged a new room-mate for me without consulting me at all, once for me to move out, once for He opened the door in the twilight. His face looked like a pumpkin pie.

"Well, I'll say a fond farewell. Cruel fate may part us, but I will never love another. Never." "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about cruel fate in eight yards of apricot silk and more metal pound for pound than a galley slave and the sole owner and proprietor of the unchallenged peripatetic John of the late Confederacy." Then he told me how she had gone to the proctor to have him moved out and how the proctor had revealed enough low stubbornness to insist on consulting Shreve first. Then she suggested that he send for Shreve right off and do it, and he wouldn't do that, so after that she was hardly civil to Shreve. "I make it a point never to speak harshly of females," Shreve said, "but that woman has got more ways like a bitch than any lady in these sovereign states and dominions." and now Letter on the table by hand, command orchid scented coloured If she knew I had passed almost beneath the window knowing it there without.

My dear Madam I have not yet had an opportunity of receiving your communication but I beg in advance to be excused today or yesterday and tomorrow or when As I remember that the next one is to be how Gerald throws his nigger downstairs and how the nigger plead to be allowed to matriculate in the divinity school to be near marster marse gerald and How he ran all the way to the station beside the carriage with tears in his eyes when marse gerald rid away I will wait until the day for the one about the sawmill husband came to the kitchen door with a shotgun Gerald went down and bit the gun in two and handed it back and wiped his hands on a silk handkerchief threw the handkerchief in the stove I've only heard that one twice shot him through the I saw you come in here so I watched my chance and came along thought we might get acquainted have a cigar Thanks I dont smoke No things must have changed up there since my day mind if I light up Help yourself.

Thanks I've heard a lot I guess your mother wont mind if I put the match behind the screen willshe a lot about you Candace talked about you allthe time up there at the Licks I got pretty jealous I says to myself who is this Quentin anyway I must see what this animal looks like because I was hit pretty hard see soon as I saw the little girl I dont mind telling you it never occurred to me it was her brother she kept talking about she couldnt have talked about you any more if you'd been the only man in the world husband wouldnt have been in it you wont change your mind and have a smoke

I dont smoke In that case I wont insist even though it is a pretty fair weed cost me twenty-five bucks a hundred wholesale friend in Havana yes I guess there are lots of changes up there I keep promising myself a visit but I never get around to it been hitting the ball now for ten years I cant get away fromthe bank during schoolfellow's habits change things that seemimportant to an undergraduate you know tellme about things up there

I'mnot going to tellFather and Mother if that's what you are getting at Not going to tell not going to oh that that's what you are talking about is it you understand that I dont give a damn whether you tellor not

understand that a thing like that unfortunate but no police crime I wasn't the first or the last I was just unlucky you might have been luckier

You lie

Keep your shirt on I'm not trying to make you tell anything you dont want to meant no offense of course a young fellow like you would consider a thing of that sort a lot more serious than you willin five years

I dont know but one way to consider cheating I dont think I'm likely to learn different at Harvard

We're better than a play you must have made the Dramat well you're right no need to tell themwe'll let bygones be bygones eh no reason why you and I should let a little thing like that come between us I like you Quentin I like your appearance you dont look like these other hicks I'mglad we're going to hit it off like this I've promised your mother to do something for Jason but I would like to give you a hand too Jason would be just as well off here but there's no future in a hole like this for a young fellow like you

Thanks you'd better stick to Jason he'd suit you better than I would

I'm sorry about that business but a kid like I was then I never had a mother like yours to teach me the finer points it would just hurt her unnecessarily to know it yes you're right no need to that includes Candace of course

I said Mother and Father

Look here take a look at me how long do you think you'd last with me I wont have to last long if you learned to fight up at school too try and see how long I would

You damned little

what do you think you're getting at Try and see

My God the cigar what would your mother say if she found a blister on her mantel just in time too look here Quentin we're about to do something we'll both regret I like you liked you as soon as I saw you I says he must be a damned good fellow whoever he is or Candace wouldnt be so keen on him listen I've been out in the world now for ten years things dont matter so much then you'll find that out let's you and

I get together on this thing sons of old Harvard and all I guess I wouldn't know the place now best place for a young fellow in the world I'm going to send my sons there give them a better chance than I had wait don't go yet let's discuss this thing a young man gets these ideas and I'm all for them does him good while he's in school forms his character good for tradition the school but when he gets out into the world he'll have to get his the best way he can because he'll find that everybody else is doing the same thing and be damned to here let's shake hands and let bygones be bygones for your mother's sake remember her health come on give me your hand here look at it it's just out of context look not a blemish not even been creased yet see here

To hell with your money

No no come on I belong to the family now see I know how it is with a young fellow he has lots of private affairs it's always pretty hard to get the old man to stump up for I know haven't I been there and not so long ago either but now I'm getting married and all specially up there come on don't be a fool listen when we get a chance for a real talk I want to tell you about a little widow over in town I've heard that too keep your damned money

Call it a loan then just shut your eyes a minute and you'll be fifty Keep your hands off of me you'd better get that cigar off the mantel Tell and be damned then see what it gets you if you were not a damned fool you'd have seen that I've got them too tight for any half-baked Galahad of a brother your mother's told me about your sort with your head swelled up come in oh come in dear Quentin and I were just getting acquainted talking about Harvard did you want me can't stay away from the old man can she Go out a minute Herbert I want to talk to Quentin

Come in come in let's all have a gabfest and get acquainted I was just telling Quentin Go on Herbert go out a while Well all right then I suppose you and bubber do want to see one another once more eh You'd better take that cigar off the mantel

Right as usual my boy then I'll toddle along let them order you around
while they can Quentin after day after tomorrow it'll be pretty please
to the old man wont it dear give us a kiss

honey

Oh stop that save that for day after tomorrow

I'll want interest then dont let Quentin do anything he cant finish oh by
the way did I tell Quentin the story about the man's parrot and what
happened to it a sad story remind me of that think of it yourself ta-ta
see you in the funnypaper

Well Well

What are you up to now Nothing

You're meddling in my business again didn't you get enough of that last
summer Caddy you've got fever You're sick how are you sick

I'm just sick. I cant ask. Shot his voice through the Not that blackguard
Caddy

Now and then the river glinted beyond things in sort of swooping glints,
across noon and after. Well after now, though we had passed where he
was still pulling upstream majestic in the face of god gods. Better.

Gods. God would be canaille too in Boston in Massachusetts. Or maybe
just not a husband. The wet oars winking him along in bright winks and
female palms. Adulant. Adulant if not a husband he'd ignore God. That
blackguard, Caddy The river glinted away beyond a swooping curve.

I'm sick you'll have to promise Sick how are you sick

I'm just sick I cant ask anybody yet promise you will

If they need any looking after it's because of you how are you sick

Under the window we could hear the car leaving for the station, the
8:10 train. To bring back cousins. Heads. Increasing himself head by
head but not barbers. Manicure girls. We had a blood horse once. In
the stable yes, but under leather a cur. Quentin has shot all of their
voices through the floor of Caddy's room

The car stopped. I got off, into the middle of my shadow. A road
crossed the track. There was a wooden marquee with an old man
eating something out of a paper bag, and then the car was out of
hearing too. The road went into the trees, where it would be shady, but

June foliage in New England not much thicker than April at home in Mississippi. I could see a smoke stack. I turned my back to it, tramping my shadow into the dust. There was something terrible in me sometimes at night I could see it grinning at me I could see it through them grinning at me through their faces it's gone now and I'm sick

Caddy

Dont touch me just promise If you're sick you cant

Yes I can after that it'll be all right it wont matter dont let them send him to Jackson promise

I promise Caddy Caddy

Dont touch me dont touch me What does it look like Caddy What That that grins at you that thing through them

I could still see the smoke stack. That's where the water would be, heading out to the sea

and the peaceful grottoes. Tumbling peacefully they would, and when He said Rise only the flat irons. When Versh and I hunted all day we wouldn't take any lunch, and at twelve o'clock I'd get hungry. I'd stay hungry until about one, then all of a sudden I'd even forget that I wasn't hungry anymore. The street lamps go down the hill then heard the car go down the hill. The chair-arm flat cool smooth under my forehead shaping the chair the apple tree leaning on my hair above the eden clothes by the nose seen You've got fever I felt it yesterday it's like being near a stove.

Dont touch me.

Caddy you cant do it if you are sick. That blackguard.

I've got to marry somebody. Then they told me the bone would have to be broken again

At last I couldn't see the smoke stack. The road went beside a wall. Trees leaned over the wall, sprayed with sunlight. The stone was cool. Walking near it you could feel the coolness. Only our country was not like this country. There was something about just walking through it. A kind of still and violent fecundity that satisfied ever bread-hunger like. Flowing around you, not brooding and nursing every niggard stone. Like it were put to makeshift for enough green to go around among the trees and even the blue of distance not that rich chimaera. told me the

bone would have to be broken again and inside me it began to say Ah Ah Ah and I began to sweat. What do I care I know what a broken leg is all it is it wont be anything I'll just have to stay in the house a little longer that's all and my jaw-muscles getting numb and my mouth saying Wait Wait just a minute through the sweat ah ah ah behind my teeth and Father damn that horse damn that horse. Wait it's my fault. He came along the fence every morning with a basket toward the kitchen dragging a stick along the fence every morning I dragged myself to the window cast and all and laid for him with a piece of coal Dilsey said you goin to ruin yoself aint you got no mo sense than that not fo days since you bruck hit. Wait I'll get used to it in a minute wait just a minute I'll get

Even sound seemed to failin this air, like the air was worn out with carrying sounds so long. A dog's voice carries further than a train, in the darkness anyway. And some people's. Niggers. Louis Hatcher never even used his horn carrying it and that old lantern. I said, "Louis, when was the last time you cleaned that lantern?"

"I cleant hit a little while back. You member when all dat floodwatter wash dem folks away up yonder? I cleant hit dat ve'y day. Old woman and me settin fore de fire dat night and she say 'Louis, whut you gwine do ef dat flood git out dis fur?' and I say 'Dat's a fack. I reckon I had better clean dat lantun up.' So I cleant hit dat night."

"That flood was way up in Pennsylvania," I said. "It couldn't even have got down this far." "Dat's whut you says," Louis said. "Watter kin git des ez high en wet in Jefferson ez hit kin in Pennsylvaney, I reckon. Hit's de folks dat says de high watter cant git dis fur dat comes floatin out on de ridge-pole, too."

"Did you and Martha get out that night?"

"We done jest that. I cleant dat lantun and me and her sot de balance of de night on top o dat knollback de graveyard. En ef I'd a knowed of aihy one higher, we'd a been on hit instead."

"And you haven't cleaned that lantern since then." "Whut I want to clean hit when dey aint no need?" "You mean, until another flood comes along?"

“Hit kep us outen dat un.”

“Oh, come on, Uncle Louis,” I said.

“Yes, suh. You do you way en I do mine. Ef all I got to do to keep outen de high watter is to

clean dis yere lantun, I wont quoilwid no man.”

“Unc’Louis wouldn’t ketch nothin wid a light he could see by,” Versh said.

“I wuz huntin possums in dis country when dey was still drowndin nits in yo pappy’s head wid coaloil, boy,” Louis said. “Ketchin um, too.”

“Dat’s de troof,” Versh said. “I reckon Unc’Louis done caught mo possums than aihy man in dis country.”

“Yes, suh,” Louis said, “I got plenty light fer possums to see, all right. I aint heard none o demcomplainin. Hush, now. Dar he. Whooey. Humawn, dawg.” And we’d sit in the dry leaves that whispered a little with the slow respiration of our waiting and with the slow breathing of the earth and the windless October, the rank smell of the lantern fouling the brittle air, listening to the dogs and to the echo of Louis’ voice dying away. He never raised it, yet on a still night we have heard it from our front porch. When he called the dogs in he sounded just like the horn he carried slung on his shoulder and never used, but clearer, mellower, as though his voice were a part of darkness and silence, coiling out of it, coiling into it again. WhoOoooo. WhoOoooo. WhoOoooooooooooooooooooo. Got to marry somebody

Have there been very many Caddy

I dont know too many will you look after Benjy and Father You dont know whose it is then does he know

Dont touch me will you look after Benjy and Father

I began to feel the water before I came to the bridge. The bridge was of grey stone, lichened, dappled with slow moisture where the fungus crept. Beneath it the water was clear and still in the shadow, whispering and clucking about the stone in fading swirls of spinning sky. Caddy that

I’ve got to marry somebody Versh told me about a man mutilated himself. He went into the woods and did it with a razor, sitting in a

ditch. A broken razor flinging them backward over his shoulder the same motion complete the jerked skein of blood backward not looping. But that's not it. It's not not having them. It's never to have had them then I could say O That That's Chinese I don't know Chinese. And Father said it's because you are a virgin: don't you see? Women are never virgins. Purity is a negative state and therefore contrary to nature. It's nature is hurting you not Caddy and I said That's just words and he said So is virginity and I said you don't know. You can't know and he said Yes. On the instant when we come to realise that tragedy is second-hand.

Where the shadow of the bridge fell I could see down for a long way, but not as far as the bottom. When you leave a leaf in water a long time after awhile the tissue will be gone and the delicate fibers waving slow as the motion of sleep. They don't touch one another, no matter how knotted up they once were, no matter how close they lay once to the bones. And maybe when He says Rise the eyes will come floating up too, out of the deep quiet and the sleep, to look on glory. And after awhile the flat irons would come floating up. I hid them under the end of the bridge and went back and leaned on the rail.

I could not see the bottom, but I could see a long way into the motion of the water before the eye gave out, and then I saw a shadow hanging like a fat arrow stemming into the current. Mayflies skimmed in and out of the shadow of the bridge just above the surface. If it could just be a hell beyond that: the clean flame the two of us more than dead. Then you will have only me then only me then the two of us amid the pointing and the horror beyond the clean flame The arrow increased without motion, then in a quick swirl the trout lipped a fly beneath the surface with that sort of gigantic delicacy of an elephant picking up a peanut. The fading vortex

drifted away down stream and then I saw the arrow again, nose into the current, wavering delicately to the motion of the water above which the May flies slanted and poised. Only you and me then amid the pointing and the horror walled by the clean flame

The trout hung, delicate and motionless among the wavering shadows. Three boys with fishing poles came onto the bridge and we leaned on the rail and looked down at the trout. They knew the fish. He was a neighbourhood character.

“They’ve been trying to catch that trout for twenty-five years. There’s a store in Boston offers a twenty-five dollar fishing rod to anybody that can catch him.”

“Why dont you all catch him, then? Wouldnt you like to have a twenty-five dollar fishing rod?”

“Yes,” they said. They leaned on the rail, looking down at the trout. “I sure would,” one said.

“I wouldnt take the rod,” the second said. “I’d take the money instead.”

“Maybe they wouldnt do that,” the first said. “I bet he’d make you take the rod.” “Then I’d sellit.”

“You couldnt get twenty-five dollars for it.”

“I’d take what I could get, then. I can catch just as many fish with this pole as I could with a twenty-five dollar one.” Then they talked about what they would do with twenty-five dollars. They all talked at once, their voices insistent and contradictory and impatient, making of unreality a possibility, then a probability, then an incontrovertible fact, as people will when their desires become words.

“I’d buy a horse and wagon,” the second said. “Yes you would,” the others said.

“I would. I know where I can buy one for twenty-five dollars. I know the man.” “Who is it?”

“That’s alright who it is. I can buy it for twenty-five dollars.”

“Yah,” the others said, “He dont know any such thing. He’s just talking.”

“Do you think so?” the boy said. They continued to jeer at him, but he said nothing more. He leaned on the rail, looking down at the trout which he had already spent, and suddenly the acrimony, the conflict, was gone from their voices, as if to them too it was as though he had captured the fish and bought his horse and wagon, they too partaking of that adult trait of being convinced of anything by an assumption of silent superiority. I suppose that people, using themselves and each

other so much by words, are at least consistent in attributing wisdom to a still tongue, and for a while I could feel the other two seeking swiftly for some means by which to cope with him, to rob him of his horse and wagon.

“You couldn't get twenty-five dollars for that pole,” the first said. “I bet anything you couldn't.”

“He hasn't caught that trout yet,” the third said suddenly, then they both cried:

“Yah, wha'd I tell you? What's the man's name? I dare you to tell. There aint any such man.”

“Ah, shut up,” the second said. “Look, Here he comes again.” They leaned on the rail, motionless, identical, their poles slanting slenderly in the sunlight, also identical. The trout rose without haste, a shadow in faint wavering increase; again the little vortex faded slowly downstream. “Gee,” the first one murmured.

“We dont try to catch him anymore,” he said. “We just watch Boston folks that come out and try.”

“Is he the only fish in this pool?”

“Yes. He ran all the others out. The best place to fish around here is down at the Eddy.” “No it aint,” the second said. “It's better at Bigelow's Mill two to one.” Then they argued

for a while about which was the best fishing and then left off all of a sudden to watch the trout rise again and the broken swirl of water suck down a little of the sky. I asked how far it was to the nearest town. They told me.

“But the closest car line is that way,” the second said, pointing back down the road. “Where are you going?”

“Nowhere. Just walking.” “You from the college?”

“Yes. Are there any factories in that town?” “Factories?” They looked at me.

“No,” the second said. “Not there.” They looked at my clothes. “You looking for work?” “How about Bigelow's Mill?” the third said. “That's a factory.”

“Factory my eye. He means a sure enough factory.”

“One with a whistle,” I said. “I havent heard any one oclock whistles yet.”

“Oh,” the second said. “There’s a clock in the Unitarian steeple. You can find out the time fromthat. Havent you got a watch on that chain?”

“I broke it this morning.” I showed themmy watch. They examined it gravely. “It’s stillrunning,” the second said. “What does a watch like that cost?”

“It was a present,” I said. “My father gave it to me when I graduated fromhigh school.” “Are you a Canadian?” the third said. He had red hair.

“Canadian?”

“He dont talk like them,” the second said. “I’ve heard them talk. He talks like they do in minstrelshows.”

“Say,” the third said, “Aint you afraid he’llhit you?” “Hit me?”

“You said he talks like a coloured man.”

“Ah, dry up,” the second said. “You can see the steeple when you get over that hillthere.” I thanked them. “I hope you have good luck. Only dont catch that old fellow down there.

He deserves to be let alone.”

“Cant anybody catch that fish,” the first said. They leaned on the rail, looking down into the water, the three poles like three slanting threads of yellow fire in the sun. I walked upon my shadow, tramping it into the dappled shade of trees again. The road curved, mounting away fromthe water. It crossed the hill, then descended winding, carrying the eye, the mind on ahead beneath a still green tunnel, and the square cupola above the trees and the round eye of the clock but far enough. I sat down at the roadside. The grass was ankle deep, myriad. The shadows on the road were as still as if they had been put there with a stencil, with slanting pencils of sunlight. But it was only a train, and after a while it died away beyond the trees, the long sound, and then I could hear my watch and the train dying away, as though it were running through another month or another summer somewhere, rushing away under the poised gull and all things rushing. Except Gerald. He would be

sort of grand too, pulling in lonely state across the noon, rowing himself right out of noon, up the long bright air like an apotheosis, mounting into a drowsing infinity where only he and the gull, the one terrifically motionless, the other in a steady and measured pull and recover that partook of inertia itself, the world punily beneath their shadows on the sun. Caddy that blackguard that blackguard Caddy

Their voices came over the hill, and the three slender poles like balanced threads of running fire. They looked at me passing, not slowing.

"Well," I said, "I dont see him."

"We didnt try to catch him," the first said. "You cant catch that fish."

"There's the clock," the second said, pointing. "You can tell the time when you get a little closer."

"Yes," I said, "Allright." I got up. "You allgoing to town?" "We're going to the Eddy for chub," the first said.

"You cant catch anything at the Eddy," the second said.

"I guess you want to go to the mill, with a lot of fellows splashing and scaring all the fish away."

"You cant catch any fish at the Eddy."

"We wont catch none nowhere if we dont go on," the third said.

"I dont see why you keep on talking about the Eddy," the second said.

"You cant catch anything there."

"You dont have to go," the first said. "You're not tied to me." "Let's go to the milland go swimming," the third said.

"I'mgoing to the Eddy and fish," the first said. "You can do as you please."

"Say, how long has it been since you heard of anybody catching a fish at the Eddy?" the second said to the third.

"Let's go to the mill and go swimming," the third said. The cupola sank slowly beyond the trees, with the round face of the clock far enough yet. We went on in the dappled shade. We came to an orchard, pink and white. It was fullof bees; already we could hear them.

"Let's go to the mill and go swimming," the third said. A lane turned off beside the orchard. The third boy slowed and halted. The first went on, flecks of sunlight slipping along the pole across his shoulder and down the back of his shirt. "Come on," the third said. The second boy stopped too. Why must you marry somebody Caddy

Do you want me to say it do you think that if I say it it won't be "Let's go up to the mill," he said. "Come on."

The first boy went on. His bare feet made no sound, falling softer than leaves in the thin dust. In the orchard the bees sounded like a wind getting up, a sound caught by a spell just under crescendo and sustained. The lane went along the wall, arched over, shattered with bloom, dissolving into trees. Sunlight slanted into it, sparse and eager. Yellow butterflies flickered along the shade like flecks of sun.

"What do you want to go to the Eddy for?" the second boy said. "You can fish at the mill if you want to."

"Ah, let him go," the third said. They looked after the first boy. Sunlight slid patchily across his walking shoulders, glinting along the pole like yellow ants.

"Kenny," the second said. Say it to Father will you I will am my fathers Progenitive I invented him created I him Say it to him it will not be for he will say I was not and then you and I since philoprogenitive

"Ah, come on," the boy said, "They're already in." They looked after the first boy. "Yah," they said suddenly, "go on then, mamma's boy. If he goes swimming he'll get his head wet and then he'll get a licking." They turned into the lane and went on, the yellow butterflies slanting about them along the shade.

it is because there is nothing else I believe there is something else but there may not be

and then I You will find that even injustice is scarcely worthy of what you believe yourself to be He paid me no attention, his jaw set in profile, his face turned a little away beneath his broken hat.

"Why don't you go swimming with them?" I said. that blackguard Caddy Were you trying to pick a fight with him were you

A liar and a scoundrel Caddy was dropped from his club for cheating at cards got sent to Coventry caught cheating at midterm exams and expelled

Well what about it I'm not going to play cards with

"Do you like fishing better than swimming?" I said. The sound of the bees diminished, sustained yet, as though instead of sinking into silence, silence merely increased between us, as water rises. The road curved again and became a street between shady lawns with white houses. Caddy that blackguard can you think of Benjy and Father and do it not of me

What else can I think about what else have I thought about The boy turned from the street. He climbed a picket fence without looking back and crossed the lawn to a tree and laid the pole down and climbed into the fork of the tree and sat there, his back to the road and the dappled sun motionless at last upon his white shirt. Else have I thought about I can't even cry I died last year I told you I had but I didn't know then what I meant I didn't know what I was saying Some days in late August at home are like this, the air thin and eager like this, with something in it sad and nostalgic and familiar. Man the sum of his climatic experiences Father said. Man the sum of what have you. A problem in impure properties carried tediously to an unvarying nil: stalemate of dust and desire. But now I know I'm dead I tell you

Then why must you listen we can go away you and Benjy and me where nobody knows us where The buggy was drawn by a white horse, his feet clopping in the thin dust; spidery wheels chattering thin and dry, moving uphill beneath a rippling shawl of leaves. Elm. No: ellum. Ellum.

On what on your school money the money they sold the pasture for so you could go to Harvard don't you see you've got to finish now if you don't finish he'll have nothing

Sold the pasture His white shirt was motionless in the fork, in the flickering shade. The wheels were spidery. Beneath the sag of the buggy the hooves neatly rapid like the motions of a lady doing embroidery, diminishing without progress like a figure on a treadmill

being drawn rapidly offstage. The street turned again. I could see the white cupola, the round stupid assertion of the clock. Sold the pasture

Father will be dead in a year they say if he doesn't stop drinking and he won't stop he can't stop since I since last summer and then they'll send Benjy to Jackson I can't cry I can't even cry one minute she was standing in the door the next minute he was pulling at her dress and bellowing his voice hammered back and forth between the walls in waves and she shrinking against the wall getting smaller and smaller with her white face her eyes like thumbs dug into it until he pushed her out of the room his voice hammering back and forth as though its own momentum would not let it stop as though there were no place for it in silence bellowing

When you opened the door a bell tinkled, but just once, high and clear and small in the neat obscurity above the door, as though it were gauged and tempered to make that single clear small sound so as not to wear the bell out nor to require the expenditure of too much silence in restoring it when the door opened upon the recent warm scent of baking; a little dirty child with eyes like a toy bear's and two patent-leather pig-tails.

"Hello, sister." Her face was like a cup of milk dashed with coffee in the sweet warm emptiness. "Anybody here?"

But she merely watched me until a door opened and the lady came. Above the counter where the ranks of crisp shapes behind the glass her neat grey face her hair tight and sparse from her neat grey skull, spectacles in neat grey rims riding approaching like something on a wire, like a cash box in a store. She looked like a librarian. Something among dusty shelves of ordered certitudes long divorced from reality, desiccating peacefully, as if a breath of that air which sees injustice done

"Two of these, please, ma'am."

From under the counter she produced a square cut from a newspaper and laid it on the counter and lifted the two buns out. The little girl watched them with still and unwinking eyes like two currants floating

motionless in a cup of weak coffee Land of the kike home of the wop. Watching the bread, the neat grey hands, a broad gold band on the left forefinger, knuckled there by a blue knuckle.

“Do you do your own baking, ma’am?”

“Sir?” she said. Like that. Sir? Like on the stage. Sir? “Five cents. Was there anything else?” “No, ma’am. Not for me. This lady wants something.” She was not tall enough to see over the case, so she went to the end of the counter and looked at the little girl. “Did you bring her in here?”

“No, ma’am. She was here when I came.”

“You little wretch,” she said. She came out around the counter, but she didnt touch the little girl. “Have you got anything in your pockets?” “She hasnt got any pockets,” I said. “She wasnt doing anything. She was just standing here, waiting for you.”

“Why didnt the bell ring, then?” She glared at me. She just needed a bunch of switches, a blackboard behind her 2 X 2 e 5. “She’llhide it under her dress and a body’d never know it. You, child. How’d you get in here?”

The little girlsaid nothing. She looked at the woman, then she gave me a flying black glance and looked at the woman again, “Themforeigners,” the woman said. “How’d she get in without the bellringing?”

“She came in when I opened the door,” I said. “It rang once for both of us. She couldnt reach anything from here, anyway. Besides, I dont think she would. Would you, sister?” The little girllooked at me, secretive, contemplative. “What do you want? bread?”

She extended her fist. It uncurled upon a nickel, moist and dirty, moist dirt ridged into her flesh. The coin was damp and warm. I could smellit, faintly metallic.

“Have you got a five cent loaf, please, ma’am?”

From beneath the counter she produced a square cut from a newspaper sheet and laid it on the counter and wrapped a loaf into it. I laid the coin and another one on the counter. "And another one of those buns, please, ma'am."

She took another bun from the case. "Give me that parcel," she said. I gave it to her and she unwrapped it and put the third bun in and wrapped it and took up the coins and found two coppers in her apron and gave them to me. I handed them to the little girl. Her fingers closed about them, damp and hot, like worms.

"You going to give her that bun?" the woman said.

"Yessum," I said. "I expect your cooking smells as good to her as it does to me."

I took up the two packages and gave the bread to the little girl, the woman all iron-grey behind the counter, watching us with cold certitude. "You wait a minute," she said. She went to the rear. The door opened again and closed. The little girl watched me, holding the bread against her dirty dress.

"What's your name?" I said. She quit looking at me, but she was still motionless. She didn't even seem to breathe. The woman returned. She had a funny looking thing in her hand. She carried it sort of like it might have been a dead pet rat.

"Here," she said. The child looked at her. "Take it," the woman said, jabbing it at the little girl. "It just looks peculiar. I calculate you won't know the difference when you eat it. Here. I can't stand here all day." The child took it, still watching her. The woman rubbed her hands on her apron. "I got to have that bell fixed," she said. She went to the door and jerked it open. The little bell tinkled once, faint and clear and invisible. We moved toward the door and the woman's peering back. "Thank you for the cake," I said.

"Them foreigners," she said, staring up into the obscurity where the bell tinkled. "Take my advice and stay clear of them, young man."

"Yessum," I said. "Come on, sister." We went out. "Thank you, ma'am."

She swung the door to, then jerked it open again, making the bell give forth its single small note. "Foreigners," she said, peering up at the bell. We went on. "Well," I said, "How about some ice cream?" She was eating the gnarled cake. "Do you like ice cream?" She gave me a black stilllook, chewing. "Come on."

We came to the drugstore and had some ice cream. She wouldn't put the loaf down. "Why not put it down so you can eat better?" I said, offering to take it. But she held to it, chewing the ice cream like it was taffy. The bitten cake lay on the table. She ate the ice cream steadily, then she fell to on the cake again, looking about at the showcases. I finished mine and we went out.

"Which way do you live?" I said.

A buggy, the one with the white horse it was. Only Doc Peabody is fat. Three hundred pounds. You ride with him on the uphill side, holding on. Children. Walking easier than holding uphill. Seen the doctor yet have you seen Caddy

I don't have to I can't ask now afterward it will be all right it won't matter

Because women so delicate so mysterious Father said. Delicate equilibrium of periodical filth between two moons balanced. Moons he said full and yellow as harvest moons her hips thighs. Outside outside of them always but. Yellow. Feet soles with walking like. Then know that some man that all those mysterious and imperious concealed. With all that inside of them shapes an outward suavity waiting for a touch to. Liquid putrefaction like drowned things floating like pale rubber flabbily filled getting the odour of honeysuckle all mixed up. "You'd better take your bread on home, hadn't you?"

She looked at me. She chewed quietly and steadily; at regular intervals a small distension passed smoothly down her throat. I opened my package and gave her one of the buns. "Goodbye," I said.

I went on. Then I looked back. She was behind me. "Do you live down this way?" She said nothing. She walked beside me, under my elbow sort of, eating. We went on. It was quiet, hardly anyone about getting

the odour of honeysuckle all mixed She would have told me not to let me sit there on the steps hearing her door twilight slamming hearing Benjy still crying Supper she would have to come down then getting honeysuckle all mixed up in it We reached the corner.

“Well, I’ve got to go down this way,” I said, “Goodbye.” She stopped too. She swallowed the last of the cake, then she began on the bun, watching me across it. “Goodbye,” I said. I turned into the street and went on, but I went to the next corner before I stopped.

“Which way do you live?” I said. “This way?” I pointed down the street. She just looked at me. “Do you live over that way? I bet you live close to the station, where the trains are. Dont you?” She just looked at me, serene and secret and chewing. The street was empty both ways, with quiet lawns and houses neat among the trees, but no one at all except back there. We turned and went back. Two men sat in chairs in front of a store.

“Do you all know this little girl? She sort of took up with me and I cant find where she lives.”

They quit looking at me and looked at her.

“Must be one of themnew Italian families,” one said. He wore a rusty frock coat. “I’ve seen her before. What’s your name, little girl?” She looked at them blackly for awhile, her jaws moving steadily. She swallowed without ceasing to chew.

“Maybe she cant speak English,” the other said.

“They sent her after bread,” I said. “She must be able to speak something.”

“What’s your pa’s name?” the first said. “Pete? Joe? name John huh?” She took another bite fromthe bun.

“What must I do with her?” I said. “She just follows me. I’ve got to get back to Boston.” “You fromthe college?”

“Yes, sir. And I’ve got to get on back.”

“You might go up the street and turn her over to Anse. He’ll be up at the livery stable. The marshall.”

"I reckon that's what I'll have to do," I said. "I've got to do something with her. Much obliged. Come on, sister."

We went up the street, on the shady side, where the shadow of the broken façade blotted slowly across the road. We came to the livery stable. The marshal wasn't there. A man sitting in a chair tilted in the broad low door, where a dark cool breeze smelling of ammonia blew among the ranked stalls, said to look at the postoffice. He didn't know her either.

"Them furriners. I can't tell one from another. You might take her across the tracks where they live, and maybe somebody'll claim her."

We went to the postoffice. It was back down the street. The man in the frock coat was opening a newspaper.

"Anse just drove out of town," he said. "I guess you'd better go down past the station and walk past them houses by the river. Somebody there'll know her."

"I guess I'll have to," I said. "Come on, sister." She pushed the last piece of the bun into her mouth and swallowed it. "Want another?" I said. She looked at me, chewing, her eyes black and unwinking and friendly. I took the other two buns out and gave her one and bit into the other. I asked a man where the station was and he showed me. "Come on, sister."

We reached the station and crossed the tracks, where the river was. A bridge crossed it, and a street of jumbled frame houses followed the river, backed onto it. A shabby street, but with an air heterogeneous and vivid too. In the center of an untrimmed plot enclosed by a fence of gaping and broken pickets stood an ancient lopsided surrey and a weathered house from an upper window of which hung a garment of vivid pink.

"Does that look like your house?" I said. She looked at me over the bun. "This one?" I said, pointing. She just chewed, but it seemed to me that I discerned something affirmative, acquiescent even if it wasn't eager, in her air. "This one?" I said. "Come on, then." I entered the broken gate. I looked back at her. "Here?" I said. "This look like your house?" She nodded her head rapidly, looking at me, gnawing into the damp halfmoon of the bread.

We went on. A walk of broken random flags, speared by fresh coarse blades of grass, led to the broken stoop. There was no movement about the house at all, and the pink garment hanging in no wind from the upper window. There was a bell pull with a porcelain knob, attached to about six feet of wire when I stopped pulling and knocked. The little girl had the crust edgewise in her chewing mouth.

A woman opened the door. She looked at me, then she spoke rapidly to the little girl in Italian, with a rising inflexion, then a pause, interrogatory. She spoke to her again, the little girl looking at her across the end of the crust, pushing it into her mouth with a dirty hand. "She says she lives here," I said. "I met her down town. Is this your bread?"

"No spika," the woman said. She spoke to the little girl again. The little girl just looked at her.

"No live here?" I said. I pointed to the girl, then at her, then at the door. The woman shook her head. She spoke rapidly. She came to the edge of the porch and pointed down the road, speaking.

I nodded violently too. "You come show?" I said. I took her arm, waving my other hand toward the road. She spoke swiftly, pointing. "You come show," I said, trying to lead her down the steps.

"Si, si," she said, holding back, showing me whatever it was. I nodded again.

"Thanks. Thanks. Thanks." I went down the steps and walked toward the gate, not running, but pretty fast. I reached the gate and stopped and looked at her for a while. The crust was gone now, and she looked at me with her black, friendly stare. The woman stood on the stoop, watching us.

"Come on, then," I said. "We'll have to find the right one sooner or later."

She moved along just under my elbow. We went on. The houses all seemed empty. Not a soul in sight. A sort of breathlessness that empty

houses have. Yet they couldn't all be empty. All the different rooms, if you could just slice the walls away all of a sudden Madam, your daughter, if you please. No. Madam, for God's sake, your daughter. She moved along just under my elbow, her shiny tight pigtails, and then the last house played out and the road curved out of sight beyond a wall, following the river. The woman was emerging from the broken gate, with a shawl over her head and clutched under her chin. The road curved on, empty. I found a coin and gave it to the little girl. A quarter. "Goodbye, sister," I said. Then I ran.

I ran fast, not looking back. Just before the road curved away I looked back. She stood in the road, a small figure clasping the loaf of bread to her filthy little dress, her eyes still and black and unwinking. I ran on.

A lane turned from the road. I entered it and after a while I slowed to a fast walk. The lane went between back premises—unpainted houses with more of those gay and startling coloured garments on lines, a barn broken-backed, decaying quietly among rank orchard trees, unpruned and weed-choked, pink and white and murmurous with sunlight and with bees. I looked back. The entrance to the lane was empty. I slowed still more, my shadow pacing me, dragging its head through the weeds that hid the fence.

The lane went back to a barred gate, became defunctive in grass, a mere path scarred quietly into new grass. I climbed the gate into a woodlot and crossed it and came to another wall and followed that one, my shadow behind me now. There were vines and creepers where at home would be honeysuckle. Coming and coming especially in the dusk when it rained, getting honeysuckle all mixed up in it as though it were not enough without that, not unbearable enough. What did you let him for kiss kiss

I didn't let him I made him watching me getting mad What do you think of that? Red print of my hand coming up through her face like turning a light on under your hand her eyes going bright
It's not for kissing I slapped you. Girl's elbows at fifteen Father said you swallow like you had a fishbone in your throat what's the matter with

you and Caddy across the table not to look at me. It's for letting it be
some darn town squirt I slapped you you will will you now I guess you
say calf rope. My red hand coming up out of her face. What do you
think of that scouring her head into the. Grass sticks crisscrossed into
the flesh tingling scouring her head. Say calfrope say it

I didnt kiss a dirty girl like Natalie anyway The wall went into shadow,
and then my shadow, I had tricked it again. I had forgot about the river
curving along the road. I climbed the wall. And then she watched me
jump down, holding the loaf against her dress.
I stood in the weeds and we looked at one another for a while.

"Why didnt you tell me you lived out this way, sister?" The loaf was
wearing slowly out of the paper; already it needed a new one. "Well,
come on then and show me the house." not a dirty girl like Natalie. It
was raining we could hear it on the roof, sighing through the high sweet
emptiness of the barn.
There? touching her Not there

There? not raining hard but we couldnt hear anything but the roof and
as if it was my blood or her blood
She pushed me down the ladder and ran off and left me Caddy did Was
it there it hurt you when Caddy did ran off was it there
Oh She walked just under my elbow, the top of her patent leather
head, the loaf fraying out of the newspaper.
"If you dont get home pretty soon you're going to wear that loaf out.
And then what'll your mamma say?" I bet I can lift you up
You cant I'm too heavy

Did Caddy go away did she go to the house you cant see the barn from
our house did you ever try to see the barn from
It was her fault she pushed me she ran away I can lift you up see how I
can
Oh her blood or my blood Oh We went on in the thin dust, our feet
silent as rubber in the thin dust where pencils of sun slanted in the
trees. And I could feel water again running swift and peaceful in the
secret shade.

“You live a long way, dont you. You’re mighty smart to go this far to town by yourself.” It’s like dancing sitting down did you ever dance sitting down? We could hear the rain, a rat in the crib, the empty barn vacant with horses. How do you hold to dance do you hold like this Oh

I used to hold like this you thought I wasnt strong enough didn’t you Oh Oh Oh Oh

I hold to use like this I mean did you hear what I said I said oh oh oh oh

The road went on, still and empty, the sun slanting more and more. Her stiff little pigtails were bound at the tips with bits of crimson cloth. A corner of the wrapping flapped a little as she walked, the nose of the loaf naked. I stopped.

“Look here. Do you live down this road? We havent passed a house in a mile, almost.” She looked at me, black and secret and friendly.

“Where do you live, sister? Dont you live back there in town?”

There was a bird somewhere in the woods, beyond the broken and infrequent slanting of sunlight.

“Your papa’s going to be worried about you. Dont you reckon you’ll get a whipping for not coming straight home with that bread?”

The bird whistled again, invisible, a sound meaningless and profound, inflexionless, ceasing as though cut off with the blow of a knife, and again, and that sense of water swift and peaceful above secret places, felt, not seen not heard.

“Oh, hell, sister.” About half the paper hung limp. “That’s not doing any good now.” I tore it off and dropped it beside the road. “Come on. We’ll have to go back to town. We’ll go back along the river.”

We left the road. Among the moss little pale flowers grew, and the sense of water mute and unseen. I hold to use like this I mean I use to hold She stood in the door looking at us her hands on her hips You pushed me it was your fault it hurt me too

We were dancing sitting down I bet Caddy cant dance sitting down Stop that stop that

I was just brushing the trash off the back of your dress
You keep your nasty old hands off of me it was your fault you pushed
me down I'm mad at you
I don't care she looked at us stay mad she went away We began to hear
the shouts, the splashings; I saw a brown body gleam for an instant.

Stay mad. My shirt was getting wet and my hair. Across the roof
hearing the roof loud now I could see Natalie going through the garden
among the rain. Get wet I hope you catch pneumonia go on home
Cowface. I jumped hard as I could into the hogwallow the mud
yellowed up to my waist stinking I kept on plunging until I fell down and
rolled over in it "Hear them in swimming, sister? I wouldn't mind doing
that myself." If I had time. When I have time. I could hear my watch.
mud was warmer than the rain it smelled awful. She had her back
turned I went around in front of her. You know what I was doing? She
turned her back I went around in front of her the rain creeping into the
mud flattening her bodice through her dress it smelled horrible. I was
hugging her that's what I was doing. She turned her back I went around
in front of her. I was hugging her I tell you.
I don't give a damn what you were doing

You don't you don't I'll make you I'll make you give a damn. She hit my
hands away I smeared mud on her with the other hand I couldn't feel
the wet smacking of her hand I wiped mud from my legs smeared it on
her wet hard turning body hearing her fingers going into my face but I
couldn't feel it even when the rain began to taste sweet on my lips
They saw us from the water first, heads and shoulders. They yelled and
one rose squatting and sprang among them. They looked like beavers,
the water lapping about their chins, yelling.

"Take that girl away! What did you want to bring a girl here for? Go on
away!" "She won't hurt you. We just want to watch you for a while."

They squatted in the water. Their heads drew into a clump, watching
us, then they broke and rushed toward us, hurling water with their
hands. We moved quick.

"Look out, boys; she won't hurt you."

“Go on away, Harvard!” It was the second boy, the one that thought the horse and wagon back there at the bridge. “Splash them, fellows!” “Let’s get out and throw them in,” another said. “I aint afraid of any girl.”

“Splash them! Splash them!” They rushed toward us, hurling water. We moved back. “Go on away!” they yelled. “Go on away!”

We went away. They huddled just under the bank, their slick heads in a row against the bright water. We went on. “That’s not for us, is it.” The sun slanted through to the moss here and there, leveller. “Poor kid, you’re just a girl.” Little flowers grew among the moss, littler than I had ever seen. “You’re just a girl. Poor kid.” There was a path, curving along beside the water. Then the water was still again, dark and still and swift. “Nothing but a girl. Poor sister.” We lay in the wet grass panting the rain like cold shot on my back. Do you care now do you do you

My Lord we sure are in a mess get up. Where the rain touched my forehead it began to smart my hand came red away streaking off pink in the rain. Does it hurt

Ofcourse it does what do you reckon

I tried to scratch your eyes out my Lord we sure do stink we better try to wash it off in the branch “There’s town again, sister. You’ll have to go home now. I’ve got to get back to school. Look how late it’s getting. You’ll go home now, wont you?” But she just looked at me with her black, secret, friendly gaze, the half-naked loaf clutched to her breast. “It’s wet. I thought we jumped back in time.” I took my handkerchief and tried to wipe the loaf, but the crust began to come off, so I stopped. “We’ll just have to let it dry itself. Hold it like this.” She held it like that. It looked kind of like rats had been eating it now. and the water building and building up the squatting back the sloughed mud stinking surfaceward pocking the pattering surface like grease on a hot stove. I told you I’d make you

I dont give a goddam what you do

Then we heard the running and we stopped and looked back and saw him coming up the path running, the level shadows flicking upon his legs.

"He's in a hurry. We'd—" then I saw another man, an oldish man running heavily, clutching a stick, and a boy naked from the waist up, clutching his pants as he ran.

"There's Julio," the little girl said, and then I saw his Italian face and his eyes as he sprang upon me. We went down. His hands were jabbing at my face and he was saying something and trying to bite me, I reckon, and then they hauled him off and held him heaving and thrashing and yelling and they held his arms and he tried to kick me until they dragged him back. The little girl was howling, holding the loaf in both arms. The half-naked boy was darting and jumping up and down, clutching his trousers and someone pulled me up in time to see another stark naked figure come around the tranquil bend in the path running and change direction in midstride and leap into the woods, a couple of garments rigid as boards behind it. Julio still struggled. The man who had pulled me up said, "Whoa, now. We got you." He wore a vest but no coat. Upon it was a metal shield. In his other hand he clutched a knotted, polished stick.

"You're Anse, aren't you?" I said. "I was looking for you. What's the matter?"

"I warn you that anything you say will be used against you," he said.

"You're under arrest."

"I killa heem," Julio said. He struggled. Two men held him. The little girl howled steadily, holding the bread. "You steala my seester," Julio said.

"Let go, meesters."

"Steal his sister?" I said. "Why, I've been—" "Shet up," Anse said. "You can tell that to Squire."

"Steal his sister?" I said. Julio broke from the men and sprang at me again, but the marshal met him and they struggled until the other two pinioned his arms again. Anse released him, panting.

“You durn furriner,” he said, “I’ve a good mind to take you up too, for assault and battery.” He turned to me again. “Willyou come peaceable, or do I handcuff you?”

“I’ll come peaceable,” I said. “Anything, just so I can find someone—do something with— Stole his sister,” I said. “Stole his—”

“I’ve warned you,” Anse said, “He aims to charge you with meditated criminal assault. Here, you, make that galshut up that noise.”

“Oh,” I said. Then I began to laugh. Two more boys with plastered heads and round eyes came out of the bushes, buttoning shirts that had already dampened onto their shoulders and arms, and I tried to stop the laughter, but I couldnt.

“Watch him, Anse, he’s crazy, I believe.”

“I’ll h-have to qu-quit,” I said, “It’ll stop in a mu-minute. The other time it said ah ah ah,” I said, laughing. “Let me sit down a while.” I sat down, they watching me, and the little girl with her streaked face and the gnawed looking loaf, and the water swift and peacefulbelow the path. After a while the laughter ran out. But my throat wouldnt quit trying to laugh, like retching after your stomach is empty.

“Whoa, now,” Anse said. “Get a grip on yourself.”

“Yes,” I said, tightening my throat. There was another yellow butterfly, like one of the sunflecks had come loose. After a while I didnt have to hold my throat so tight. I got up. “I’m ready. Which way?”

We followed the path, the two others watching Julio and the little girl and the boys somewhere in the rear. The path went along the river to the bridge. We crossed it and the tracks, people coming to the doors to look at us and more boys materializing from somewhere until when we turned into the main street we had quite a procession. Before the drugstore stood an auto, a big one, but I didn’t recognise themuntilMrs Bland said,

“Why, Quentin! Quentin Compson!” Then I saw Gerald, and Spode in the back seat, sitting on the back of his neck. And Shreve. I didnt know the two girls.

“Quentin Compson!” Mrs Bland said.

“Good afternoon,” I said, raising my hat. “I’m under arrest. I’m sorry I didn’t get your note. Did Shreve tell you?”

“Under arrest?” Shreve said. “Excuse me,” he said. He heaved himself up and climbed over their feet and got out. He had on a pair of my flannel pants, like a glove. I didn’t remember forgetting them. I didn’t remember how many chins Mrs Bland had, either. The prettiest girl was with Gerald in front, too. They watched me through veils, with a kind of delicate horror. “Who’s under arrest?” Shreve said. “What’s this, mister?”

“Gerald,” Mrs Bland said, “Send these people away. You get in this car, Quentin.” Gerald got out. Spode hadn’t moved.

“What’s he done, Cap?” he said. “Robbed a hen house?” “I warn you,” Anse said. “Do you know the prisoner?” “Know him,” Shreve said. “Look here—”

“Then you can come along to the squire’s. You’re obstructing justice. Come along.” He shook my arm.

“Well, good afternoon,” I said. “I’m glad to have seen you all. Sorry I couldn’t be with you.” “You, Gerald,” Mrs Bland said.

“Look here, constable,” Gerald said.

“I warn you you’re interfering with an officer of the law,” Anse said. “If you’ve anything to say, you can come to the squire’s and make cognizance of the prisoner.” We went on. Quite a procession now, Anse and I leading. I could hear them telling them what it was, and Spode asking questions, and then Julio said something violently in Italian and I looked back and saw the little girl standing at the curb, looking at me with her friendly, inscrutable regard.

“Git on home,” Julio shouted at her, “I beat hell outa you.”

We went down the street and turned into a bit of lawn in which, set back from the street, stood a one storey building of brick trimmed with white. We went up the rock path to the door, where Anse halted everyone except us and made them remain outside. We entered a bare room smelling of stale tobacco. There was a sheet iron stove in the center of a wooden frame filled with sand, and a faded map on the wall

and the dingy plat of a township. Behind a scarred littered table a man with a fierce roach of iron grey hair peered at us over steelspectacles. "Got him, did ye, Anse?" he said. "Got him, Squire."

He opened a huge dusty book and drew it to him and dipped a foul pen into an inkwell filled with what looked like coal dust.

"Look here, mister," Shreve said.

"The prisoner's name," the squire said. I told him. He wrote it slowly into the book, the pen scratching with excruciating deliberation.

"Look here, mister," Shreve said, "We know this fellow. We—" "Order in the court," Anse said.

"Shut up, bud," Spode said. "Let him do it his way. He's going to anyhow."

"Age," the squire said. I told him. He wrote that, his mouth moving as he wrote. "Occupation." I told him. "Harvard student, hey?" he said. He looked up at me, bowing his neck a little to see over the spectacles. His eyes were clear and cold, like a goat's. "What are you up to, coming out here kidnapping children?"

"They're crazy, Squire," Shreve said. "Whoever says this boy's kidnapping—"

Julio moved violently. "Crazy?" he said. "Dont I catcha heem, eh? Dont I see weetha my own eyes—"

"You're a liar," Shreve said. "You never—" "Order, order," Anse said, raising his voice.

"You fellers shet up," the squire said. "If they dont stay quiet, turn 'em out, Anse." They got quiet. The squire looked at Shreve, then at Spode, then at Gerald. "You know this young man?" he said to Spode.

"Yes, your honour," Spode said. "He's just a country boy in school up there. He dont mean any harm. I think the marshall'll find it's a mistake. His father's a congregational minister."

"H'm," the squire said. "What was you doing, exactly?" I told him, he watching me with his cold, pale eyes. "How about it, Anse?"

"Might have been," Anse said. "Themdurn furriners." "I American," Julio said. "I gotta da pape'."

"Where's the gal?"

"He sent her home," Anse said. "Was she scared or anything?"

"Not till Julio there jumped on the prisoner. They were just walking along the river path, towards town. Some boys swimming told us which way they went."

"It's a mistake, Squire," Spoade said. "Children and dogs are always taking up with himlike that. He cant help it."

"H'm," the squire said. He looked out of the window for a while. We watched him. I could hear Julio scratching himself. The squire looked back.

"Air you satisfied the galaint took any hurt, you, there?" "No hurt now," Julio said sullenly.

"You quit work to hunt for her?"

"Sure I quit. I run. I run like hell. Looka here, looka there, then man tella me he seen himgiva her she eat. She go weetha."

"H'm," the squire said. "Well, son, I calculate you owe Julio something for taking himaway fromhis work."

"Yes, sir," I said. "How much?" "Dollar, I calculate."
I gave Julio a dollar.

"Well," Spoade said, "If that's all—I reckon he's discharged, your honour?" The squire didn't look at him. "How far'd you run him, Anse?"

"Two miles, at least. It was about two hours before we caught him."

"H'm," the squire said. He mused a while. We watched him, his stiff crest, the spectacles riding low on his nose. The yellow shape of the window grew slowly across the floor, reached the wall, climbing. Dust motes whirled and slanted. "Sixdollars."

"Sixdollars?" Shreve said. "What's that for?"

"Sixdollars," the squire said. He looked at Shreve a moment, then at me again. "Look here," Shreve said.

“Shut up,” Spoadé said. “Give it to him, bud, and let’s get out of here. The ladies are waiting for us. You got sixdollars?”

“Yes,” I said. I gave him sixdollars. “Case dismissed,” he said.

“You get a receipt,” Shreve said. “You get a signed receipt for that money.”

The squire looked at Shreve mildly. “Case dismissed,” he said without raising his voice. “I’ll be damned—” Shreve said.

“Come on here,” Spoadé said, taking his arm. “Good afternoon, Judge. Much obliged.” As we passed out the door Julio’s voice rose again, violent, then ceased. Spoadé was looking at me, his brown eyes quizzical, a little cold. “Well, bud, I reckon you’ll do your girl chasing in Boston after this.”

“You damned fool,” Shreve said, “What the hell do you mean anyway, straggling off here, fooling with these damn wops?”

“Come on,” Spoadé said, “They must be getting impatient.”

Mrs Bland was talking to them. They were Miss Holmes and Miss Daingerfield and they quit listening to her and looked at me again with that delicate and curious horror, their veils turned back upon their little white noses and their eyes fleeing and mysterious beneath the veils.

“Quentin Compson,” Mrs Bland said, “What would your mother say? A young man naturally gets into scrapes, but to be arrested on foot by a country policeman. What did they think he’d done, Gerald?”

“Nothing,” Gerald said.

“Nonsense. What was it, you, Spoadé?”

“He was trying to kidnap that little dirty girl, but they caught him in time,” Spoadé said.

“Nonsense,” Mrs Bland said, but her voice sort of died away and she stared at me for a moment, and the girls drew their breaths in with a soft concerted sound. “Fiddlesticks,” Mrs Bland said briskly, “If that isn’t just like these ignorant lowclass Yankees. Get in, Quentin.”

Shreve and I sat on two small collapsible seats. Gerald cranked the car and got in and we started.

“Now, Quentin, you tell me what all this foolishness is about,” Mrs Bland said. I told them, Shreve hunched and furious on his little seat and Spoade sitting again on the back of his neck beside Miss Daingerfield.

“And the joke is, all the time Quentin had us all fooled,” Spoade said. “All the time we thought he was the model youth that anybody could trust a daughter with, until the police showed him up at his nefarious work.”

“Hush up, Spoade,” Mrs Bland said. We drove down the street and crossed the bridge and passed the house where the pink garment hung in the window. “That’s what you get for not reading my note. Why didnt you come and get it? Mr MacKenzie says he told you it was there.”

“Yessum. I intended to, but I never went back to the room.”

“You’d have let us sit there waiting I dont know how long, if it hadnt been for Mr MacKenzie. When he said you hadnt come back, that left an extra place, so we asked him to come. We’re very glad to have you anyway, Mr MacKenzie.” Shreve said nothing. His arms were folded and he glared straight ahead past Gerald’s cap. It was a cap for motoring in England. Mrs Bland said so. We passed that house, and three others, and another yard where the little girl stood by the gate. She didnt have the bread now, and her face looked like it had been streaked with coaldust. I waved my hand, but she made no reply, only her head turned slowly as the car passed, following us with her unwinking gaze. Then we ran beside the wall, our shadows running along the wall, and after a while we passed a piece of torn newspaper lying beside the road and I began to laugh again. I could feel it in my throat and I looked off into the trees where the afternoon slanted, thinking of afternoon and of the bird and the boys in swimming. But still I couldnt stop it and then I knew that if I tried too hard to stop it I’d be crying and I thought about how I’d thought about I could not be a virgin, with so many of them walking along in the shadows and whispering with their soft girlvoices lingering in the shadowy places and the words coming out and perfume and eyes you could feel not see, but if it was that simple to do it

wouldnt be anything and if it wasnt anything, what was I and then Mrs Bland said, "Quentin? Is he sick, Mr MacKenzie?" and then Shreve's fat hand touched my knee and Spoade began talking and I quit trying to stop it.

"If that hamper is in his way, Mr MacKenzie, move it over on your side. I brought a hamper of wine because I think young gentlemen should drink wine, although my father, Gerald's grandfather" ever do that Have you ever done that In the grey darkness a little light her hands locked about

"They do, when they can get it," Spoade said. "Hey, Shreve?" her knees her face looking at the sky the smell ofhoneysuckle upon her face and throat

"Beer, too," Shreve said. His hand touched my knee again. I moved my knee again. like a thin wash oflilac coloured paint talking about him bringing

"You're not a gentleman," Spoade said. him between us until the shape of her blurred not with dark

"No. I'm Canadian," Shreve said. talking about him the oar blades winking him along winking the Cap made for motoring in England and all time rushing beneath and they two blurred within the other forever more he had been in the army had killed men "I adore Canada," Miss Daingerfield said. "I think it's marvellous."

"Did you ever drink perfume?" Spoade said. with one hand he could lift her to his shoulder and run with her running Running

"No," Shreve said. running the beast with two backs and she blurred in the winking oars running the swine ofEuboeleus running coupled within how many Caddy

"Neither did I," Spoade said. I dont know too many there was something terrible in me terrible in me Father I have committed Have you ever done that We didnt we didnt do that did we do that

“and Gerald’s grandfather always picked his own mint before breakfast, while the dew was still on it. He wouldn’t even let old Wilkie touch it do you remember Gerald but always gathered it himself and made his own julep. He was as crochety about his julep as an old maid, measuring everything by a recipe in his head. There was only one man he ever gave that recipe to; that was” we did how can you not know it if you’ll just wait I’ll tell you how it was it was a crime we did a terrible crime it cannot be hid you think it can but wait

Poor Quentin you’ve never done that have you and I’ll tell you how it was I’ll tell Father then it’ll have to be because you love Father then we’ll have to go away amid the pointing and the horror the clean flame I’ll make you say we did I’m stronger than you I’ll make you know we did you thought it was them but it was me listen I fooled you all the time it was me you thought I was in the house where that damn honeysuckle trying not to think the swing the cedars the secret surges the breathing locked drinking the wild breath the yes Yes Yes yes “never be got to drink wine himself, but he always said that a hamper what book did you read that in the one where Gerald’s rowing suit of wine was a necessary part of any gentlemen’s picnic basket” did you love them Caddy did you love them When they touched me I died

one minute she was standing there the next he was yelling and pulling at her dress they went into the hall and up the stairs yelling and shoving at her up the stairs to the bathroom door and stopped her back against the door and her arm across her face yelling and trying to shove her into the bathroom when she came in to supper T. P. was feeding him he started again just whimpering at first until she touched him then he yelled she stood there her eyes like cornered rats then I was running in the grey darkness it smelled of rain and all flower scents the damp warm air released and crickets sawing away in the grass pacing me with a small travelling island of silence Fancy watched me across the fence blotchy like a quilt on a line I thought damn that nigger he forgot to feed her again I ran down the hill in that vacuum of crickets like a breath travelling across a mirror she was lying in the water her head on the sand spit the water flowing about her hips there was a little more light in the water her skirt half saturated flopped along her flanks to the

waters motion in heavy ripples going nowhere renewed themselves of their own movement I stood on the bank I could smell the honeysuckle on the water gap the air seemed to drizzle with honeysuckle and with the rasping of crickets a substance you could feel on the flesh

is Benjy stillcrying

I dont know yes I dont know poor Benjy

I sat down on the bank the grass was damp a little then I found my shoes wet get out of that water are you crazy but she didnt move her face was a white blur framed out of the blur of the sand by her hair get out now

she sat up then she rose her skirt flopped against her draining she climbed the bank her clothes flopping sat down why dont you wring it out do you want to catch cold yes

the water sucked and gurgled across the sand spit and on in the dark among the willows across the shallow the water rippled like a piece of cloth holding still a little light as water does he's crossed all the oceans all around the world

then she talked about him clasping her wet knees her face tilted back in the grey light the smell of honeysuckle there was a light in mothers room and in Benjys where T. P. was putting him to bed do you love him

her hand came out I didnt move it fumbled down my arm and she held my hand flat against her chest her heart thudding no no

did he make you then he made you do it let him he was stronger than you and he tomorrow Ill kill him I swear I will father neednt know until afterward and then you and I nobody need ever know we can take my school money we can cancel my matriculation Caddy you hate him dont you dont you

she held my hand against her chest her heart thudding I turned and
caught her arm Caddy you hate him dont you
she moved my hand up against her throat her heart was hammering
there poor Quentin

her face looked at the sky it was low so low that all smells and sounds
of night seemed to have been crowded down like under a slack tent
especially the honeysuckle it had got into my breathing it was on her
face and throat like paint her blood pounded against my hand I was
leaning on my other arm it began to jerk and jump and I had to pant to
get any air at all out of that thick grey honeysuckle

yes I hate him I would die for him I've already died for him I die for
him over and over again everytime this goes
when I lifted my hand I could still feel crisscrossed twigs and grass
burning into the palm poor Quentin
she leaned back on her arms her hands locked about her knees youve
never done that have you
what done what
that what I have what I did

yes yes lots of times with lots of girls
then I was crying her hand touched me again and I was crying against
her damp blouse then she lying on her back looking past my head into
the sky I could see a rim of white under her irises I opened my knife

do you remember the day damuddy died when you sat down in the
water in your drawers yes
I held the point of the knife at her throat
it wont take but a second just a second then I can do mine I can do
mine then alright can you do yours by yourself
yes the blades long enough Benjys in bed by now yes
it wont take but a second Ill try not to hurt alright
will you close your eyes

no like this youll have to push it harder touch your hand to it

but she didnt move her eyes were wide open looking past my head at
the sky

Caddy do you remember how Dilsey fussed at you because your
drawers were muddy dont cry

Imnot crying Caddy push it are you going to do you want me to
yes push it

touch your hand to it dont cry poor Quentin

but I couldnt stop she held my head against her damp hard breast I
could hear her heart going firm and slow now not hammering and the
water gurgling among the willows in the dark and waves of honeysuckle
coming up the air my armand shoulder were twisted under me
what is it what are you doing her muscles gathered I sat up its my knife
I dropped it

she sat up what time is it I dont know

she rose to her feet I fumbled along the ground Imgoing let it go

I could feelher standing there I could smellher damp clothes feeling her
there its right here somewhere

let it go you can find it tomorrow come on wait a minute I'llfind it
are you afraid to

here it is it was right here allthe time was it come on

I got up and followed we went up the hillthe crickets hushing before us
its funny how you can sit down and drop something and have to hunt
allaround for it the grey it was grey with dew slanting up into the grey
sky then the trees beyond damn that honeysuckle I wish it would stop

you used to like it

we crossed the crest and went on toward the trees she walked into me
she gave over a little the ditch was a black scar on the grey grass she
walked into me again she looked at me and gave over we reached the
ditch

lets go this way what for

lets see if you can stillsee Nancys bones I havent thought to look in a
long time have you it was matted with vines and briers dark

they were right here you cant tell whether you see them or not can you
stop Quentin
come on
the ditch narrowed closed she turned toward the trees stop Quentin
Caddy
I got in front of her again Caddy

stop it
I held her I'm stronger than you
she was motionless hard unyielding but still I won't fight stop you'd
better stop
Caddy don't Caddy
it won't do any good don't you know it won't let me go
the honeysuckle drizzled and drizzled I could hear the crickets watching
us in a circle she moved back went around me on toward the trees
you go on back to the house you needn't come I went on
why don't you go on back to the house damn that honeysuckle

we reached the fence she crawled through I crawled through when I
rose from stooping he was coming out of the trees into the grey toward
us coming toward us tall and flat and still even moving like he was
still she went to him
this is Quentin I'm wet I'm wet all over you don't have to if you don't want
to
their shadows one shadow her head rose it was above his on the sky
higher their two heads you don't have to if you don't want to then not
two heads the darkness smelled of rain of damp grass and leaves the
grey light drizzling like rain the honeysuckle coming up in damp waves I
could see her face a blur against his shoulder he held her in one arm like
she was no bigger than a child he extended his hand glad to know you
we shook hands then we stood there her shadow high against his
shadow one shadow what're you going to do Quentin

walk a while I think I'll go through the woods to the road and come back
through town I turned away going
goodnight Quentin
I stopped

what do you want

in the woods the tree frogs were going smelling rain in the air they sounded like toy music boxes that were hard to turn and the honeysuckle

come here

what do you want come here Quentin

I went back she touched my shoulder leaning down her shadow the blur of her face leaning down from his high shadow I drew back

look out

you go on home

I'm not sleepy I'm going to take a walk wait for me at the branch

I'm going for a walk

I'll be there soon wait for me you wait no I'm going through the woods

I didn't look back the tree frogs didn't pay me any mind the grey light like moss in the trees drizzling but still it wouldn't rain after a while I turned went back to the edge of the woods as soon as I got there I began to smell honeysuckle again I could see the lights on the courthouse clock and the glare of town the square on the sky and the dark willows along the branch and the light in mother's windows the light still on in Benjy's room and I stooped through the fence and went across the pasture running I ran in the grey grass among the crickets the honeysuckle getting stronger and stronger and the smell of water then I could see the water the colour of grey honeysuckle I lay down on the bank with my face close to the ground so I couldn't smell the honeysuckle I couldn't smell it then and I lay there feeling the earth going through my clothes listening to the water and after a while I wasn't breathing so hard and I lay there thinking that if I didn't move my face I wouldn't have to breathe hard and smell it and then I wasn't thinking about anything at all she came along the bank and stopped I didn't move

it's late you go on home what

you go on home it's late alright

her clothes rustled I didn't move they stopped rustling are you going in like I told you

I didn't hear anything Caddy

yes I will if you want me to I will
I sat up she was sitting on the ground her hands clasped about her knee
go on to the house like I told you
yes I'll do anything you want me to anything yes
she didn't even look at me I caught her shoulder and shook her hard you
shut up
I shook her
you shut up you shut up yes

she lifted her face then I saw she wasn't even looking at me at all I could
see that white rim get up
I pulled her she was limp I lifted her to her feet go on now
was Benjy still crying when you left go on
we crossed the branch the roof came in sight then the windows
upstairs he's asleep now
I had to stop and fasten the gate she went on in the grey light the smell
of rain and still it wouldn't rain and honeysuckle beginning to come
from the garden fence beginning she went into the shadow I could hear
her feet then
Caddy

I stopped at the steps I couldn't hear her feet Caddy
I heard her feet then my hand touched her not warm not cool just still
her clothes a little damp still
do you love him now
not breathing except slow like far away breathing Caddy do you love
him now
I don't know

outside the grey light the shadows of things like dead things in stagnant
water I wish you were dead
do you you coming in now
are you thinking about him now I don't know
tell me what you're thinking about tell me stop stop Quentin

you shut up you shut up you hear me you shut up are you going to shut
up all right I will stop we'll make too much noise

Ill kill you do you hear

lets go out to the swing theyll hear you here Im not crying do you say
Im crying

no hush now we'll wake Benjy up you go on into the house go on now

I dont cry Im bad anyway you cant help it theres a curse on us its not
our fault is it our fault hush come on and go to bed now

you cant make me theres a curse on us

finally I saw him he was just going into the barbershop he looked out I
went on and waited Ive been looking for you two or three days

you wanted to see me Im going to see you

he rolled the cigarette quickly with about two motions he struck the
match with his thumb we cant talk here suppose I meet you

somewhere

Ill come to your room are you at the hotel

no thats not so good you know that bridge over the creek in there back
of yes all right

at one oclock right yes

I turned away Im obliged to you look

I stopped looked back she all right

he looked like he was made out of bronze his khaki shirt she need me
for anything now

I'll be there at one

she heard me tell T. P. to saddle Prince at one oclock she kept watching
me not eating much

she came too

what are you going to do

nothing cant I go for a ride if I want to youre going to do something

what is it none of your business whore whore

T. P. had Prince at the side door I wont want him Im going to walk

I went down the drive and out the gate I turned into the lane then I ran

before I reached the bridge I saw him leaning on the rail the horse was

hitched in the woods he looked over his shoulder then he turned his

back he didnt look up until I came onto the bridge and stopped he had

a piece of bark in his hands breaking pieces from it and dropping
them over the rail into the water
I came to tell you to leave town

he broke a piece of bark deliberately dropped it carefully into the water
watched it float away
I said you must leave town he looked at me
did she send you to me
I say you must go not my father not anybody I say it
listen save this for a while I want to know if she's all right have they
been bothering her up there
that's something you don't need to trouble yourself about
then I heard myself saying I'll give you until sundown to leave town
he broke a piece of bark and dropped it into the water then he laid the
bark on the rail and rolled a cigarette with those two swift motions
spun the match over the rail
what will you do if I don't leave

I'll kill you don't think that just because I look like a kid to you the smoke
flowed in two jets from his nostrils across his face how old are you
I began to shake my hands were on the rail I thought if I hid them he'd
know why I'll give you until tonight
listen buddy what's your name Benjy's the naturalist he you are
Quentin
my mouth said it I didn't say it at all I'll give you till sundown
Quentin

he raked the cigarette ash carefully off against the rail he did it slowly
and carefully like sharpening a pencil my hands had quit shaking
listen no good taking it so hard it's not your fault kid it would have been
some other fellow did you ever have a sister did you
no but they're all bitches
I hit him my open hand beat the impulse to shut it to his face his hand
moved as fast as mine the cigarette went over the rail I swung with the
other hand he caught it too before the cigarette reached the water he
held both my wrists in the same hand his other hand flicked to his
armpit under his coat behind him the sun slanted and a bird singing

somewhere beyond the sun we looked at one another while the bird
singing he turned my hands loose
look here
he took the bark from the rail and dropped it into the water it bobbed
up the current took it floated away his hand lay on the rail holding the
pistol loosely we waited
you can't hit it now no

it floated on it was quite still in the woods I heard the bird again and
the water afterward the pistol came up he didn't aim at all the bark
disappeared then pieces of it floated up spreading he hit two more of
them pieces of bark no bigger than silver dollars
that's enough I guess
he swung the cylinder out and blew into the barrel a thin wisp of smoke
dissolved he reloaded the three chambers shut the cylinder he handed
it to me butt first
what for I won't try to beat that

you'll need it from what you said I'm giving you this one because you've
seen what it'll do to hell with your gun
I hit him I was still trying to hit him long after he was holding my wrists
but I still tried then it was like I was looking at him through a piece of
coloured glass I could hear my blood and then I could see the sky again
and branches against it and the sun slanting through them and he
holding me on my feet
did you hit me I couldn't hear what
yes how do you feel all right let go
he let me go I leaned against the rail do you feel all right
let me alone I'm all right
can you make it home all right go on let me alone
you'd better not try to walk take my horse no you go on

you can hang the reins on the pommel and turn him loose he'll go back
to the stable let me alone you go on and let me alone
I leaned on the rail looking at the water I heard him untie the horse and
ride off and after a while I couldn't hear anything but the water and
then the bird again I left the bridge and sat down with my back against

a tree and leaned my head against the tree and shut my eyes a patch of sun came through and fell across my eyes and I moved a little further around the tree I heard the bird again and the water and then everything sort of rolled away and I didnt feel anything at all I felt almost good after all those days and the nights with honeysuckle coming up out of the darkness into my room where I was trying to sleep even when after a while I knew that he hadnt hit me that he had lied about that for her sake too and that I had just passed out like a girl but even that didnt matter anymore and I sat there against the tree with little flecks of sunlight brushing across my face like yellow leaves on a twig listening to the water and not thinking about anything at all even when I heard the horse coming fast I sat there with my eyes closed and heard its feet bunch scuttering the hissing sand and feet running and her hard running hands
foolfoolare you hurt

I opened my eyes her hands running on my face
I didnt know which way until I heard the pistol I didnt know where I didnt think he and you running off slipping I didnt think he would have she held my face between her hands bumping my head against the tree
stop stop that
I caught her wrists quit that quit it
I knew he wouldnt I knew he wouldnt
she tried to bump my head against the tree
I told him never to speak to me again I told him she tried to break her wrists free
let me go

stop it I'm stronger than you stop it now
let me go Ive got to catch him and ask his let me go Quentin please let me go let me go all at once she quit her wrists went lax
yes I can tell him I can make him believe anytime I can make him Caddy she hadnt hitched Prince he was liable to strike out for home if the notion took him anytime he will believe me
do you love him Caddy do I what

she looked at me then everything emptied out of her eyes and they looked like the eyes in the statues blank and unseeing and serene
put your hand against my throat
she took my hand and held it flat against her throat now say his name
Dalton Ames
I felt the first surge of blood there it surged in strong accelerating beats
say it again
her face looked off into the trees where the sun slanted and where the bird say it again
Dalton Ames
her blood surged steadily beating and beating against my hand
It kept on running for a long time, but my face felt cold and sort of dead, and my eye, and the cut place on my finger was smarting again. I could hear Shreve working the pump, then he came back with the basin and a round blob of twilight wobbling in it, with a yellow edge like a fading balloon, then my reflection. I tried to see my face in it.
“Has it stopped?” Shreve said. “Give me the rag.” He tried to take it from my hand.
“Look out,” I said, “I can do it. Yes, it’s about stopped now.” I dipped the rag again, breaking the balloon. The rag stained the water. “I wish I had a clean one.”
“You need a piece of beefsteak for that eye,” Shreve said. “Damn if you wont have a shiner tomorrow. The son of a bitch,” he said.
“Did I hurt him any?” I wrung out the handkerchief and tried to clean the blood off of my vest.
“You cant get that off,” Shreve said. “You’ll have to send it to the cleaner’s. Come on, hold it on your eye, why dont you.”
“I can get some of it off,” I said. But I wasn’t doing much good. “What sort of shape is my collar in?”
“I dont know,” Shreve said. “Hold it against your eye. Here.” “Look out,” I said. “I can do it. Did I hurt himany?”
“You may have hit him. I may have looked away just then or blinked or something. He boxed the hell out of you. He boxed you all over the place. What did you want to fight himwith your fists for? You goddamn fool. How do you feel?”
“I feelfine,” I said. “I wonder if I can get something to clean my vest.”
“Oh, forget your damn clothes. Does your eye hurt?”

"I feel fine," I said. Everything was sort of violet and still, the sky green paling into gold beyond the gable of the house and a plume of smoke rising from the chimney without any wind. I heard the pump again. A man was filling a pail, watching us across his pumping shoulder. A woman crossed the door, but she didn't look out. I could hear a cow lowing somewhere.

"Come on," Shreve said, "Let your clothes alone and put that rag on your eye. I'll send your suit out first thing tomorrow."

"Allright. I'm sorry I didn't bleed on him a little, at least."

"Son of a bitch," Shreve said. Spode came out of the house, talking to the woman I reckon, and crossed the yard. He looked at me with his cold, quizzical eyes.

"Well, bud," he said, looking at me, "I'll be damned if you don't go to a lot of trouble to have your fun. Kidnapping, then fighting. What do you do on your holidays? burn houses?"

"I'm allright," I said. "What did Mrs Bland say?"

"She's giving Gerald hell for bloodying you up. She'll give you hell for letting him, when she sees you. She don't object to the fighting, it's the blood that annoys her. I think you lost caste with her a little by not holding your blood better. How do you feel?"

"Sure," Shreve said, "If you can't be a Bland, the next best thing is to commit adultery with one or get drunk and fight him, as the case may be."

"Quite right," Spode said. "But I didn't know Quentin was drunk."

"He wasn't," Shreve said. "Do you have to be drunk to want to hit that son of a bitch?" "Well, I think I'd have to be pretty drunk to try it, after seeing how Quentin came out.

Where'd he learn to box?"

"He's been going to Mike's every day, over in town," I said. "He has?"

Spode said. "Did you know that when you hit him?" "I don't know," I said. "I guess so. Yes."

"Wet it again," Shreve said. "Want some fresh water?"

"This is all right," I said. I dipped the cloth again and held it to my eye.

"Wish I had something to clean my vest." Spode was still watching me.

"Say," he said, "What did you hit him for? What was it he said?" "I don't know. I don't know why I did."

“The first I knew was when you jumped up all of a sudden and said, ‘Did you ever have a sister? Did you?’ and when he said No, you hit him. I noticed you kept on looking at him, but you didn’t seem to be paying any attention to what anybody was saying until you jumped up and asked him if he had any sisters.”

“Ah, he was blowing off as usual,” Shreve said, “about his women. You know: like he does, before girls, so they don’t know exactly what he’s saying. All his damn innuendo and lying and a lot of stuff that don’t make sense even. Telling us about some wench that he made a date with to meet at a dance hall in Atlantic City and stood her up and went to the hotel and went to bed

and how he lay there being sorry for her waiting on the pier for him, without him there to give her what she wanted. Talking about the body’s beauty and the sorry ends thereof and how tough women have it, without anything else they can do except lie on their backs. Leda lurking in the bushes, whimpering and moaning for the swan, see. The son of a bitch. I’d hit him myself. Only I’d grabbed up her damn hamper of wine and done it if it had been me.”

“Oh,” Spode said, “the champion of dames. Bud, you excite not only admiration, but horror.” He looked at me, cold and quizzical. “Good God,” he said.

“I’m sorry I hit him,” I said. “Do I look too bad to go back and get it over with?” “Apologies, hell,” Shreve said, “Let them go to hell. We’re going to town.”

“He ought to go back so they’ll know he fights like a gentleman,” Spode said. “Gets licked like one, I mean.”

“Like this?” Shreve said, “With his clothes all over blood?” “Why, all right,” Spode said, “You know best.”

“He can’t go around in his undershirt,” Shreve said, “He’s not a senior yet. Come on, let’s go to town.”

“You needn’t come,” I said. “You go on back to the picnic.” “Hell with them,” Shreve said. “Come on here.”

“What’ll I tell them?” Spode said. “Tell them you and Quentin had a fight too?”

“Tell them nothing,” Shreve said. “Tell her her option expired at sunset. Come on, Quentin. I’ll ask that woman where the nearest interurban—”

“No,” I said, “I’m not going back to town.”

Shreve stopped, looking at me. Turning, his glasses looked like small yellow moons. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm not going back to town yet. You go on back to the picnic. Tell them I wouldn't come back because my clothes were spoiled."

"Look here," he said, "What are you up to?"

"Nothing. I'm all right. You and Spode go on back. I'll see you tomorrow." I went on across the yard, toward the road.

"Do you know where the station is?" Shreve said.

"I'll find it. I'll see you all tomorrow. Tell Mrs Bland I'm sorry I spoiled her party." They stood watching me. I went around the house. A rock path went down to the road. Roses grew on both sides of the path. I went through the gate, onto the road. It dropped downhill, toward the woods, and I could make out the auto beside the road. I went up the hill. The light increased as I mounted, and before I reached the top I heard a car. It sounded far away across the twilight and I stopped and listened to it. I couldn't make out the auto any longer, but Shreve was standing in the road before the house, looking up the hill. Behind him the yellow light lay like a wash of paint on the roof of the house. I lifted my hand and went on over the hill, listening to the car. Then the house was gone and I stopped in the green and yellow light and heard the car growing louder and louder, until just as it began to die away it ceased all together. I waited until I heard it start again. Then I went on. As I descended the light dwindled slowly, yet at the same time without altering its quality, as if I and not light were changing, decreasing, though even when the road ran into trees you could have read a newspaper. Pretty soon I came to a lane. I turned into it. It was closer and darker than the road, but when it came out at the trolley stop—another wooden marquee—the light was still unchanged. After the lane it seemed brighter, as though I had walked through night in the lane and come out into morning again. Pretty soon the car came. I got on it, they

turning to look at my eye, and found a seat on the left side.

The lights were on in the car, so while we ran between trees I couldn't see anything except my own face and a woman across the aisle with a hat sitting right on top of her head, with a broken feather in it, but when we ran out of the trees I could see the twilight again, that quality of light as if time really had stopped for a while, with the sun hanging

just under the horizon, and then we passed the marquee where the old man had been eating out of the sack, and the road going on under the twilight, into twilight and the sense of water peaceful and swift beyond. Then the car went on, the draught building steadily up in the open door until it was drawing steadily through the car with the odour of summer and darkness except honeysuckle. Honeysuckle was the saddest odour of all, I think. I remember lots of them. Wistaria was one. On the rainy days when Mother wasn't feeling quite bad enough to stay away from the windows we used to play under it. When Mother stayed in bed Dilsey would put old clothes on us and let us go out in the rain because she said rain never hurt young folks. But if Mother was up we always began by playing on the porch until she said we were making too much noise, then we went out and played under the wistaria frame.

This was where I saw the river for the last time this morning, about here. I could feel water beyond the twilight, smell. When it bloomed in the spring and it rained the smell was everywhere you didn't notice it so much at other times but when it rained the smell began to come into the house at twilight either it would rain more at twilight or there was something in the light itself but it always smelled strongest then until I would lie in bed thinking when will it stop when will it stop. The draft in the door smelled of water, a damp steady breath. Sometimes I could put myself to sleep saying that over and over until after the honeysuckle got all mixed up in it the whole thing came to symbolise night and unrest I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long corridor of grey halflight where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed thinking I was I was not who was not was not who.

I could smell the curves of the river beyond the dusk and I saw the last light supine and tranquil upon tideflats like pieces of broken mirror, then beyond them lights began in the pale clear air, trembling a little like butterflies hovering a long way off. Benjamin the child of. How he used to sit before that mirror. Refuge unfailing in which conflict tempered silenced reconciled. Benjamin the child of mine old age held hostage into Egypt. O Benjamin. Dilsey said it was because Mother was

too proud for him. They come into white people's lives like that in sudden sharp black trickles that isolate white facts for an instant in unarguable truth like under a microscope; the rest of the time just voices that laugh when you see nothing to laugh at, tears when no reason for tears. They will bet on the odd or even number of mourners at a funeral. A brothel full of them in Memphis went into a religious trance ran naked into the street. It took three policemen to subdue one of them. Yes Jesus O good man Jesus O that good man.

The car stopped. I got out, with them looking at my eye. When the trolley came it was full. I stopped on the back platform.

"Seats up front," the conductor said. I looked into the car. There were no seats on the left side.

"I'm not going far," I said. "I'll just stand here."

We crossed the river. The bridge, that is, arching slow and high into space, between silence and nothingness where lights—yellow and red and green—trembled in the clear air, repeating themselves.

"Better go up front and get a seat," the conductor said. "I get off pretty soon," I said. "A couple of blocks."

I got off before we reached the postoffice. They'd all be sitting around somewhere by now though, and then I was hearing my watch and I began to listen for the chimes and I touched Shreve's letter through my coat, the bitten shadows of the elms flowing upon my hand. And then as I turned into the quad the chimes did begin and I went on while the notes came up like ripples on a pool and passed me and went on, saying Quarter to what? All right. Quarter to what.

Our windows were dark. The entrance was empty. I walked close to the left wall when I entered, but it was empty: just the stairs curving up into shadows echoes of feet in the sad generations like light dust upon the shadows, my feet waking them like dust, lightly to settle again.

I could see the letter before I turned the light on, propped against a book on the table so I would see it. Calling him my husband. And then Spode said they were going somewhere, would not be back until late,

and Mrs Bland would need another cavalier. But I would have seen him and he cannot get another car for an hour because after six o'clock. I took out my watch and listened to it clicking away, not knowing it couldn't even lie. Then I laid it face up on the table and took Mrs Bland's letter and tore it across and dropped the pieces into the waste basket and took off my coat, vest, collar, tie and shirt. The tie was spoiled too, but then niggers. Maybe a pattern of blood he could call that the one Christ was wearing. I found the gasoline in Shreve's room and spread the vest on the table, where it would be flat, and opened the gasoline.

the first car in town a girl Girl that's what Jason couldn't bear smell of gasoline making him sick then got madder than ever because a girl Girl had no sister but Benjamin Benjamin the child of my sorrowful if I'd just had a mother so I could say Mother Mother It took a lot of gasoline, and then I couldn't tell if it was still the stain or just the gasoline. It had started the cut to smarting again so when I went to wash I hung the vest on a chair and lowered the light cord so that the bulb would be drying the splotch. I washed my face and hands, but even then I could smell it within the soap stinging, constricting the nostrils a little. Then I opened the bag and took the shirt and collar and tie out and put the bloody ones in and closed the bag, and dressed. While I was brushing my hair the half hour went. But there was until the three quarters anyway, except suppose seeing on the rushing darkness only his own face no broken feather unless two of them but not two like that going to Boston the same night then my face his face for an instant across the crashing when out of darkness two lighted windows in rigid fleeing crash gone his face and mine just I see saw did I see not goodbye the marquee empty of eating the road empty in darkness in silence the bridge arching into silence darkness sleep the water peaceful and swift not goodbye

I turned out the light and went into my bedroom, out of the gasoline but I could still smell it. I stood at the window the curtains moved slow out of the darkness touching my face like someone breathing asleep, breathing slow into the darkness again, leaving the touch. After they had gone up stairs Mother lay back in her chair, the camphor handkerchief to her mouth. Father hadn't moved he still sat beside her

holding her hand the bellowing hammering away like no place for it in silence When I was little there was a picture in one of our books, a dark place into which a single weak ray of light came slanting upon two faces lifted out of the shadow. You know what I'd do if I were King? she never was a queen or a fairy she was always a king or a giant or a general I'd break that place open and drag them out and I'd whip them

good It was torn out, jagged out. I was glad. I'd have to turn back to it until the dungeon was Mother herself she and Father upward into weak light holding hands and us lost somewhere below even them without even a ray of light. Then the honeysuckle got into it. As soon as I turned off the light and tried to go to sleep it would begin to come into the room in waves building and building up until I would have to pant to get any air at all out of it until I would have to get up and feel my way like when I was a little boy hands can see touching in the mind shaping unseen door Door now nothing hands can see My nose could see gasoline, the vest on the table, the door. The corridor was still empty of all the feet in sad generations seeking water. yet the eyes unseeing clenched like teeth not disbelieving doubting even the absence of pain shin ankle knee the long invisible flowing of the stair-railing where a misstep in the darkness filled with sleeping Mother Father Caddy Jason Maury door I am not afraid only Mother Father Caddy Jason Maury getting so far ahead sleeping I will sleep fast when I door Door door It was empty too, the pipes, the porcelain, the stained quiet walls, the throne of contemplation. I had forgotten the glass, but I could hands can see cooling fingers invisible swan-throat where less than Moses rod the glass touch tentative not to drumming lean cool throat drumming cooling the metal the glass full overfull cooling the glass the fingers flushing sleep leaving the taste of dampened sleep in the long silence of the throat I returned up the corridor, waking the lost feet in whispering battalions in the silence, into the gasoline, the watch telling its furious lie on the dark table. Then the curtains breathing out of the dark upon my face, leaving the breathing upon my face. A quarter hour yet. And then I'll not be. The peacefulest words. Peacefulest words. Non fui. Sum. Fui. Nom sum. Somewhere I heard bells once. Mississippi or Massachusetts. I was. I am not. Massachusetts or Mississippi. Shreve has a bottle in his trunk. Aren't you even going to open it Mr and Mrs

Jason Richmond Compson announce the Three times. Days. Aren't you even going to open it marriage of their daughter Candace that liquor teaches you to confuse the means with the end. I am. Drink. I was not. Let us sell Benjy's pasture so that Quentin may go to Harvard and I may knock my bones together and together. I will be dead in. Was it one year Caddy said. Shreve has a bottle in his trunk. Sir I will not need Shreve's I have sold Benjy's pasture and I can be dead in Harvard Caddy said in the caverns and the grottoes of the sea tumbling peacefully to the wavering tides because Harvard is such a fine sound forty acres is no high price for a fine sound. A find dead sound we will swap Benjy's pasture for a fine dead sound. It will last him a long time because he cannot hear it unless he can smell it as soon as she came in the door he began to cry I thought all the time it was just one of those town squirts that Father was always teasing her about until. I didnt notice him any more than any other stranger drummer or what thought they were army shirts until all of a sudden I knew he wasn't thinking of me at all as a potential source of harm, but was thinking of her when he looked at me was looking at me through her like through a piece of coloured glass why must you meddle with me dont you know it wont do any good I thought you'd have left that for Mother and Jason did Mother set Jason to spy on you I wouldnt have.

Women only use other people's codes of honour it's because she loves Caddy staying downstairs even when she was sick so Father couldnt kid Uncle Maury before Jason Father said Uncle Maury was too poor a classicist to risk the blind immortal boy in person he should have chosen Jason because Jason would have made only the same kind of blunder Uncle Maury himself would have made not one to get him a black eye the Patterson boy was smaller than Jason too they sold the kites for a nickel apiece until the trouble over finances Jason got a new partner still smaller one small enough anyway because T. P. said Jason still treasurer but

Father said why should Uncle Maury work if he father could support five or six niggers that did nothing at all but sit with their feet in the oven he certainly could board and lodge Uncle Maury now and then and lend him a little money who kept his Father's belief in the celestial derivation

of his own species at such a fine heat then Mother would cry and say that Father believed his people were better than hers that he was ridiculing Uncle Maury to teach us the same thing she couldnt see that Father was teaching us that all men are just accumulations dolls stuffed with sawdust swept up from the trash heaps where all previous dolls had been thrown away the sawdust flowing from what wound in what side that not for me died not. It used to be I thought of death as a man something like Grandfather a friend of his a kind of private and particular friend like we used to think of Grandfather's desk not to touch it not even to talk loud in the room where it was I always thought of them as being together somewhere all the time waiting for old Colonel Sartoris to come down and sit with them waiting on a high place beyond cedar trees Colonel Sartoris was on a still higher place looking out across at something and they were waiting for him to get done looking at it and come down Grandfather wore his uniform and we could hear the murmur of their voices from beyond the cedars they were always talking and Grandfather was always right

The three quarters began. The first note sounded, measured and tranquil, serenely peremptory, emptying the unhurried silence for the next one and that's it if people could only change one another forever that way merge like a flame swirling up for an instant then blown cleanly out along the cool eternal dark instead of lying there trying not to think of the swing until all cedars came to have that vivid dead smell of perfume that Benjy hated so. Just by imagining the clump it seemed to me that I could hear whispers secret surges smell the beating of hot blood under wild unsecret flesh watching against red eyelids the swine untethered in pairs rushing coupled into the sea and he we must just stay awake and see evil done for a little while its not always and i it doesnt have to be even that long for a man of courage and he do you consider that courage and i yes sir dont you and he every man is the arbiter of his own virtues whether or not you consider it courageous is of more importance than the act itself than any act otherwise you could not be in earnest and i you dont believe i am serious and he i think you are too serious to give me any cause for alarm you wouldn't have felt driven to the expedient of telling me you have committed incest otherwise and i i wasnt lying i wasnt lying and he you wanted to

sublimate a piece of natural human folly into a horror and then exercise it with truth and it was to isolate her out of the loud world so that it would have to flee us of necessity and then the sound of it would be as though it had never been and he did you try to make her do it and i i was afraid to i was afraid she might and then it wouldnt have done any good but if icould tellyou we did it would have been so and then the others wouldnt be so and then the world would roar away and he and now this other you are not lying now either but you are still blind to what is in yourself to that part of general truth the sequence of natural events and their causes which shadows every mans brow even benjys you are not thinking of finitude you are contemplating an apotheosis in which a temporary state of mind will become symmetrical above the flesh and aware both of itself and of the flesh it will not quite discard you will not even be dead and i temporary and he you cannot bear to think that someday it will no longer hurt you like this now were getting at it you seem to regard it merely as an experience that will whiten your hair overnight so to speak without altering your appearance at all you wont do it under these conditions it will be a gamble and the strange thing is that man who is conceived by accident and whose every breath is a fresh cast with dice already loaded against him will not face that final main which he knows before hand he has assuredly to face without

essaying expedients ranging all the way from violence to petty chicanery that would not deceive a child until someday in very disgust he risks everything on a single blind turn of a card no man ever does that under the first fury of despair or remorse or bereavement he does it only when he has realised that even the despair or remorse or bereavement is not particularly important to the dark diceman and i temporary and he it is hard believing to think that a love or a sorrow is a bond purchased without design and which matures willynilly and is recalled without warning to be replaced by whatever issue the gods happen to be floating at the time no you will not do that until you come to believe that even she was not quite worth despair perhaps and i i will never do that nobody knows what i know and he i think youd better go on up to cambridge right away you might go up into maine for a month you can afford it if you are careful it might be a good thing watching

pennies has healed more scars than jesus and i suppose i realise what you believe i will realise up there next week or next month and he then you will remember that for you to go to harvard has been your mothers dream since you were born and no compson has ever disappointed a lady and i temporary it will be better for me for all of us and he every man is the arbiter of his own virtues but let no man prescribe for another mans wellbeing and i temporary and he was the saddest word of all there is nothing else in the world its not despair untiltime its not even time untilit was

The last note sounded. At last it stopped vibrating and the darkness was still again. I entered the sitting room and turned on the light. I put my vest on. The gasoline was faint now, barely noticeable, and in the mirror the stain didnt show. Not like my eye did, anyway. I put on my coat. Shreve's letter crackled through the cloth and I took it out and examined the address, and put it in my side pocket. Then I carried the watch into Shreve's room and put it in his drawer and went to my room and got a fresh handkerchief and went to the door and put my hand on the light switch. Then I remembered I hadnt brushed my teeth, so I had to open the bag again. I found my toothbrush and got some of Shreve's paste and went out and brushed my teeth. I squeezed the brush as dry as I could and put it back in the bag and shut it, and went to the door again. Before I snapped the light out I looked around to see if there was anything else, then I saw that I had forgotten my hat. I'd have to go by the postoffice and I'd be sure to meet some of them, and they'd think I was a Harvard Square student making like he was a senior. I had forgotten to brush it too, but Shreve had a brush, so I didnt have to open the bag any more.

April 6, 1928

Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say. I says you're lucky if her playing out of school is all that worries you. I says she ought to be down there in that kitchen right now, instead of up there in her room, gobbing paint on her face and waiting for sixniggers that cant even stand up out

of a chair unless they've got a pan full of bread and meat to balance them, to fix breakfast for her. And Mother says,

"But to have the school authorities think that I have no control over her, that I can't—" "Well," I says, "You can't, can you? You never have tried to do anything with her," I says,

"How do you expect to begin this late, when she's seventeen years old?" She thought about that for a while.

"But to have them think that . . . I didn't even know she had a report card. She told me last fall that they had quit using them this year. And now for Professor Junkin to call me on the telephone and tell me if she's absent one more time, she will have to leave school. How does she do it? Where does she go? You're down town all day; you ought to see her if she stays on the streets."

"Yes," I says, "If she stayed on the streets. I don't reckon she'd be playing out of school just to do something she could do in public," I says.

"What do you mean?" she says.

"I don't mean anything," I says. "I just answered your question." Then she begun to cry again, talking about how her own flesh and blood rose up to curse her.

"You asked me," I says.

"I don't mean you," she says. "You are the only one of them that isn't a reproach to me." "Sure," I says, "I never had time to be. I never had time to go to Harvard like Quentin or drink myself into the ground like Father. I had to work. But of course if you want me to follow her around and see what she does, I can quit the store and get a job where I can work at night. Then I can watch her during the day and you can use Ben for the night shift."

"I know I'm just a trouble and a burden to you," she says, crying on the pillow.

"I ought to know it," I says. "You've been telling me that for thirty years. Even Ben ought to know it now. Do you want me to say anything to her about it?"

"Do you think it will do any good?" she says.

"Not if you come down there interfering just when I get started," I says.

"If you want me to control her, just say so and keep your hands off.

Everytime I try to, you come butting in and then she gives both of us the laugh."

"Remember she's your own flesh and blood," she says.

"Sure," I says, "that's just what I'm thinking of—flesh. And a little blood too, if I had my way. When people act like niggers, no matter who they are the only thing to do is treat them like a nigger."

"I'm afraid you'll lose your temper with her," she says.

"Well," I says, "You haven't had much luck with your system. You want me to do anything about it, or not? Say one way or the other; I've got to get on to work."

"I know you have to slave your life away for us," she says. "You know if I had my way, you'd have an office of your own to go to, and hours that became a Bascomb. Because you are a Bascomb, despite your name. I know that if your father could have foreseen—"

"Well," I says, "I reckon he's entitled to guess wrong now and then, like anybody else, even a Smith or a Jones." She begun to cry again.

"To hear you speak bitterly of your dead father," she says.

"Alright," I says, "allright. Have it your way. But as I haven't got an office, I'll have to get on to what I have got. Do you want me to say anything to her?"

"I'm afraid you'll lose your temper with her," she says. "Alright," I says, "I wont say anything, then."

"But something must be done," she says. "To have people think I permit her to stay out of school and run about the streets, or that I cant prevent her doing it. . . . Jason, Jason," she says, "How could you. How could you leave me with these burdens."

"Now, now," I says, "You'll make yourself sick. Why dont you either lock her up allday too, or turn her over to me and quit worrying over her?"

"My own flesh and blood," she says, crying. So I says, "Allright. I'lltend to her. Quit crying, now."

"Dont lose your temper," she says. "She's just a child, remember."

"No," I says, "I wont." I went out, closing the door.

"Jason," she says. I didn't answer. I went down the hall. "Jason," she says beyond the door. I went on down stairs. There wasn't anybody in the diningroom, then I heard her in the kitchen. She was trying to make Dilsey let her have another cup of coffee. I went in.

"I reckon that's your schoolcostume, is it?" I says. "Or maybe today's a holiday?" "Just a half a cup, Dilsey," she says. "Please."

"No, suh," Dilsey says, "I aint gwine do it. You aint got no business wid mo'n one cup, a seventeen year old gal, let lone whut Miss Cahline say. You go on and git dressed for school, so you kin ride to town wid Jason. You fixin to be late again."

"No she's not," I says. "We're going to fixthat right now." She looked at me, the cup in her hand. She brushed her hair back from her face, her kimono slipping off her shoulder. "You put that cup down and come in here a minute," I says.

"What for?" she says.

"Come on," I says. "Put that cup in the sink and come in here." "What you up to now, Jason?" Dilsey says.

"You may think you can run over me like you do your grandmother and everybody else," I says, "But you'll find out different. I'll give you ten seconds to put that cup down like I told you."

She quit looking at me. She looked at Dilsey. "What time is it, Dilsey?" she says. "When it's ten seconds, you whistle. Just a half a cup. Dilsey, pl—"

I grabbed her by the arm. She dropped the cup. It broke on the floor and she jerked back, looking at me, but I held her arm. Dilsey got up fromher chair.

"You, Jason," she says.

"You turn me loose," Quentin says, "I'llslap you."

“You will, will you?” I says, “You will will you?” She slapped at me. I caught that hand too and held her like a wildcat. “You will, will you?” I says. “You think you will?”

“You, Jason!” Dilsey says. I dragged her into the diningroom. Her kimono came unfastened, flapping about her, damn near naked. Dilsey came hobbling along. I turned and kicked the door shut in her face.

“You keep out of here,” I says.

Quentin was leaning against the table, fastening her kimono. I looked at her.

“Now,” I says, “I want to know what you mean, playing out of school and telling your

grandmother lies and forging her name on your report and worrying her sick. What do you mean by it?”

She didn’t say anything. She was fastening her kimono up under her chin, pulling it tight around her, looking at me. She hadn’t got around to painting herself yet and her face looked like she had polished it with a gun rag. I went and grabbed her wrist. “What do you mean?” I says.

“None of your damn business,” she says. “You turn me loose.” Dilsey came in the door. “You, Jason,” she says.

“You get out of here, like I told you,” I says, not even looking back. “I want to know where you go when you play out of school,” I says. “You keep off the streets, or I’d see you. Who do you play out with? Are you hiding out in the woods with one of those damn slick-headed jellybeans? Is that where you go?”

“You—you old goddamn!” she says. She fought, but I held her. “You damn old goddamn!” she says.

“I’ll show you,” I says. “You may can scare an old woman off, but I’ll show you who’s got hold of you now.” I held her with one hand, then she quit fighting and watched me, her eyes getting wide and black.

“What are you going to do?” she says.

“You wait until I get this belt out and I’ll show you,” I says, pulling my belt out. Then Dilsey grabbed my arm.

“Jason,” she says, “You, Jason! Aint you shamed of yourself.” “Dilsey,” Quentin says, “Dilsey.”

“I aint gwine let him,” Dilsey says, “Dont you worry, honey.” She held to my arm. Then the belt came out and I jerked loose and flung her away. She stumbled into the table. She was so old she couldn’t do any more

than move hardly. But that's all right: we need somebody in the kitchen to eat up the grub the young ones cant tote off. She came hobbling between us, trying to hold me again. "Hit me, den," she says, "ef nothin else but hittin somebody wont do you. Hit me," she says.

"You think I wont?" I says.

"I dont put no devilment beyond you," she says. Then I heard Mother on the stairs. I might have known she wasn't going to keep out of it. I let go. She stumbled back against the wall, holding her kimono shut.

"Allright," I says, "We'll just put this off a while. But dont think you can run it over me. I'm not an old woman, nor an old half dead nigger, either. You damn little slut," I says.

"Dilsey," she says, "Dilsey, I want my mother."

Dilsey went to her. "Now, now," she says, "He aint gwine so much as lay his hand on you while Ise here." Mother came on down the stairs.

"Jason," she says, "Dilsey."

"Now, now," Dilsey says, "I aint gwine let himtech you." She put her hand on Quentin. She knocked it down.

"You damn old nigger," she says. She ran toward the door.

"Dilsey," Mother says on the stairs. Quentin ran up the stairs, passing her. "Quentin," Mother says, "You, Quentin." Quentin ran on. I could hear her when she reached the top, then in the hall. Then the door slammed.

Mother had stopped. Then she came on. "Dilsey," she says.

"All right," Dilsey says, "Ise comin. You go on and git dat car and wait now," she says, "so you kin cahy her to school."

"Dont you worry," I says. "I'll take her to school and I'mgoing to see that she stays there. I've started this thing, and I'mgoing through with it."

"Jason," Mother says on the stairs.

"Go on, now," Dilsey says, going toward the door. "You want to git her started too? Ise comin, Miss Cahline."

I went on out. I could hear them on the steps. "You go on back to bed now," Dilsey was saying, "Dont you know you aint feeling wellenough to git up yet? Go on back, now. I'mgwine to see she gits to schoolin time."

I went on out the back to back the car out, then I had to go all the way round to the front before I found them.

"I thought I told you to put that tire on the back of the car," I says.

"I aint had time," Luster says. "Aint nobody to watch him till mammy git done in de kitchen."

"Yes," I says, "I feed a whole damn kitchen fullof niggers to follow around after him, but if I want an automobile tire changed, I have to do it myself."

"I aint had nobody to leave himwid," he says. Then he begun moaning and slobbering. "Take him on round to the back," I says. "What the hell makes you want to keep him

around here where people can see him?" I made them go on, before he got started bellowing good. It's bad enough on Sundays, with that damn field full of people that haven't got a side show and sixniggers to feed, knocking a damn oversize mothballaround. He's going to keep on running up and down that fence and bellowing every time they come in sight until first thing I know they're going to begin charging me golf dues, then Mother and Dilsey'll have to get a couple of china door knobs and a walking stick and work it out, unless I play at night with a lantern. Then they'd send us all to Jackson, maybe. God knows, they'd hold Old Home week when that happened.

I went on back to the garage. There was the tire, leaning against the wall, but be damned if I was going to put it on. I backed out and turned around. She was standing by the drive. I says,

"I know you haven't got any books: I just want to ask you what you did with them, if it's any of my business. Of course I haven't got any right to ask," I says, "I'm just the one that paid \$11.65 for themlast September."

"Mother buys my books," she says. "There's not a cent of your money on me. I'd starve first."

"Yes?" I says. "You tell your grandmother that and see what she says. You dont look all the way naked," I says, "even if that stuff on your face does hide more of you than anything else you've got on."

"Do you think your money or hers either paid for a cent of this?" she says.

"Ask your grandmother," I says. "Ask her what became of those checks. You saw her burn one of them, as I remember." She wasn't even listening, with her face all gummed up with paint and her eyes hard as a fice dog's.

"Do you know what I'd do if I thought your money or hers either bought one cent of this?" she says, putting her hand on her dress.

"What would you do?" I says, "Wear a barrel?"

"I'd tear it right off and throw it into the street," she says. "Dont you believe me?" "Sure you would," I says. "You do it every time."

"See if I wouldn't," She says. She grabbed the neck of her dress in both hands and made like she would tear it.

"You tear that dress," I says, "And I'll give you a whipping right here that you'll remember allyour life."

"See if I dont," she says. Then I saw that she really was trying to tear it, to tear it right off of her. By the time I got the car stopped and grabbed her hands there was about a dozen people looking. It made me so mad for a minute it kind of blinded me.

"You do a thing like that again and I'llmake you sorry you ever drew breath," I says.

"I'm sorry now," she says. She quit, then her eyes turned kind of funny and I says to myself if you cry here in this car, on the street, I'llwhip you. I'llwear you out. Lucky for her she didn't, so I turned her wrists loose and drove on. Luckily we were near an alley, where I could turn into the back street and dodge the square. They were already putting the tent up in Beard's lot. Earl had already given me the two passes for our show windows. She sat there with her face turned away, chewing her lip. "I'm sorry now," she says. "I dont see why I was ever born."

"And I know of at least one other person that dont understand all he knows about that," I says. I stopped in front of the school house. The bell had rung, and the last of them were just going in. "You're on time for once, anyway," I says. "Are you going in there and stay there, or am I coming with you and make you?" She got out and banged the door. "Remember what I say," I says, "I mean it. Let me hear one more time that you were slipping up and down back alleys with one of those damn squirts."

She turned back at that. "I dont slip around," she says. "I dare anybody to know everything I do."

"And they all know it, too," I says. "Everybody in this town knows what you are. But I wont have it anymore, you hear? I dont care what you do, myself," I says, "But I've got a position in this town, and I'mnot going to

have any member of my family going on like a nigger wench. You hear me?"

"I dont care," she says, "I'mbad and I'mgoing to hell, and I dont care. I'd rather be in hell than anywhere where you are."

"If I hear one more time that you haven't been to school, you'll wish you were in hell," I says. She turned and ran on across the yard. "One more time, remember," I says. She didn't look back.

I went to the postoffice and got the mail and drove on to the store and parked. Earl looked at me when I came in. I gave him a chance to say something about my being late, but he just said,

"Those cultivators have come. You'd better help Uncle Job put themup."

I went on to the back, where old Job was uncrating them, at the rate of about three bolts to the hour.

"You ought to be working for me," I says. "Every other no-count nigger in town eats in my kitchen."

"I works to suit de man whut pays me Sat'dy night," he says. "When I does dat, it dont leave me a whole lot of time to please other folks." He screwed up a nut. "Aint nobody works much in dis country cep de boll-weevil, noways," he says.

"You'd better be glad you're not a boll-weevil waiting on those cultivators," I says. "You'd work yourself to death before they'd be ready to prevent you."

"Dat's de troof," he says, "Boll-weevil got tough time. Work ev'y day in de week out in de hot sun, rain er shine. Aint got no front porch to set on en watch de wattermilyuns growin and Sat'dy dont mean nothin a-tallto him."

"Saturday wouldn't mean nothing to you, either," I says, "if it depended on me to pay you wages. Get those things out of the crates now and drag theminside."

I opened her letter first and took the check out. Just like a woman. Sixdays late. Yet they try to make men believe that they're capable of conducting a business. How long would a man that thought the first of the month came on the sixth last in business. And like as not, when they sent the bank statement out, she would want to know why I never deposited my salary untilthe sixth. Things like that never occur to a woman.

"I had no answer to my letter about Quentin's easter dress. Did it arrive all right? I've had no answer to the last two letters I wrote her, though the check in the second one was cashed with the other check. Is she sick? Let me know at once or I'll come there and see for myself. You promised you would let me know when she needed things. I will expect to hear from you before the 10th. No you'd better wire me at once. You are opening my letters to her. I know that as well as if I were looking at you. You'd better wire me at once about her to this address."

About that time Earl started yelling at Job, so I put them away and went over to try to put some life into him. What this country needs is white labour. Let these damn trifling niggers starve for a couple of years, then they'd see what a soft thing they have.

Along toward ten oclock I went up front. There was a drummer there. It was a couple of minutes to ten, and I invited him up the street to get a coca-cola. We got to talking about crops.

"There's nothing to it," I says, "Cotton is a speculator's crop. They fill the farmer full of hot air and get him to raise a big crop for them to whipsaw on the market, to trim the suckers with. Do you think the farmer gets anything out of it except a red neck and a hump in his back? You think the man that sweats to put it into the ground gets a red cent more than a bare living," I says. "Let him make a big crop and it wont be worth picking; let him make a small crop and he wont have enough to gin. And what for? so a bunch of damn eastern jews, I'm not talking about men of the jewish religion," I says, "I've known some jews that were fine citizens. You might be one yourself," I says.

"No," he says, "I'man American."

"No offense," I says. "I give every man his due, regardless of religion or anything else. I have nothing against jews as an individual," I says. "It's just the race. You'll admit that they produce nothing. They follow the pioneers into a new country and sell them clothes."

"You're thinking of Armenians," he says, "aren't you. A pioneer wouldn't have any use for new clothes."

"No offense," I says. "I dont hold a man's religion against him."

"Sure," he says, "I'm an American. My folks have some French blood, why I have a nose like this. I'm an American, alright."

"So am I," I says. "Not many of us left. What I'm talking about is the fellows that sit up there in New York and trim the sucker gamblers."

"That's right," he says. "Nothing to gambling, for a poor man. There ought to be a law against it."

"Dont you think I'm right?" I says.

"Yes," he says, "I guess you're right. The farmer catches it coming and going."

"I know I'm right," I says. "It's a sucker game, unless a man gets inside information from somebody that knows what's going on. I happen to be associated with some people who're right there on the ground. They have one of the biggest manipulators in New York for an adviser. Way I do it," I says, "I never risk much at a time. It's the fellow that thinks he knows it all and is trying to make a killing with three dollars that they're laying for. That's why they are in the business."

Then it struck ten. I went up to the telegraph office. It opened up a little, just like they said. I went into the corner and took out the telegram again, just to be sure. While I was looking at it a report came in. It was up two points. They were all buying. I could tell that from what they were saying. Getting aboard. Like they didn't know it could go but one way. Like there was a law or something against doing anything but buying. Well, I reckon those eastern jews have got to live too. But I'll be damned if it hasn't come to a pretty pass when any damn foreigner that cant make a living in the country where God put him, can come to this one and take money right out of an American's pockets. It was up two points more. Four points. But hell, they were right there and knew what was going on. And if I wasn't going to take the advice, what was I paying them ten dollars a month for. I went out, then I remembered and came back and sent the wire. "Allwell. Q writing today."

"Q?" the operator says.

"Yes," I says, "Q. Cant you spell Q?" "I just asked to be sure," he says.

“You send it like I wrote it and I’ll guarantee you to be sure,” I says.
“Send it collect.” “What you sending, Jason?” Doc Wright says, looking over my shoulder. “Is that a code message to buy?”

“That’s all right about that,” I says. “You boys use your own judgment. You know more about it than those New York folks do.”

“Well, I ought to,” Doc says, “I’d a saved money this year raising it at two cents a pound.” Another report came in. It was down a point.
“Jason’s selling,” Hopkins says. “Look at his face.”

“That’s all right about what I’m doing,” I says. “You boys follow your own judgment. Those rich New York jews have got to live like everybody else,” I says.

I went on back to the store. Earl was busy up front. I went on back to the desk and read Lorraine’s letter. “Dear daddy wish you were here. No good parties when daddys out of town I miss my sweet daddy.” I reckon she does. Last time I gave her forty dollars. Gave it to her. I never promise a woman anything nor let her know what I’m going to give her. That’s the only way to manage them. Always keep them guessing. If you cant think of any other way to surprise them, give thema bust in the jaw.

I tore it up and burned it over the spittoon. I make it a rule never to keep a scrap of paper bearing a woman’s hand, and I never write themat all. Lorraine is always after me to write to her but I says anything I forgot to tell you will save till I get to Memphis again but I says I dont mind you writing me now and then in a plain envelope, but if you ever try to call me up on the telephone, Memphis wont hold you I says. I says when I’m up there I’m one of the boys, but I’mnot going to have any woman calling me on the telephone. Here I says, giving her the forty dollars. If you ever get drunk and take a notion to call me on the phone, just remember this and count ten before you do it.

“When’llthat be?” she says. “What?” I says.

“When you’re coming back,” she says.

“I’ll let you know,” I says. Then she tried to buy a beer, but I wouldn’t let her. “Keep your

money," I says. "Buy yourself a dress with it." I gave the maid a five, too. After all, like I say money has no value; it's just the way you spend it. It dont belong to anybody, so why try to hoard it. It just belongs to the man that can get it and keep it. There's a man right here in Jefferson made a lot of money selling rotten goods to niggers, lived in a room over the store about the size of a pigpen, and did his own cooking. About four or five years ago he was taken sick. Scared the hell out of himso that when he was up again he joined the church and bought himself a Chinese missionary, five thousand dollars a year. I often think how mad he'll be if he was to die and find out there's not any heaven, when he thinks about that five thousand a year. Like I say, he'd better go on and die now and save money.

When it was burned good I was just about to shove the others into my coat when all of a sudden something told me to open Quentin's before I went home, but about that time Earl started yelling for me up front, so I put them away and went and waited on the damn redneck while he spent fifteen minutes deciding whether he wanted a twenty cent hame string or a thirty-five cent one.

"You'd better take that good one," I says. "How do you fellows ever expect to get ahead, trying to work with cheap equipment?"

"If this one aint any good," he says, "why have you got it on sale?"

"I didn't say it wasn't any good," I says, "I said it's not as good as that other one." "How do you know it's not," he says. "You ever use airy one of them?"

"Because they dont ask thirty-five cents for it," I says. "That's how I know it's not as good."

He held the twenty cent one in his hands, drawing it through his fingers. "I reckon I'll take this hyer one," he says. I offered to take it and wrap it, but he rolled it up and put it in his overalls. Then he took out a tobacco sack and finally got it untied and shook some coins out. He handed me a quarter. "That fifteen cents willbuy me a snack of dinner," he says.

"All right," I says, "You're the doctor. But dont come complaining to me next year when you have to buy a new outfit."

“I aint makin next year’s crop yit,” he says. Finally I got rid of him, but every time I took that letter out something would come up. They were all in town for the show, coming in in droves to give their money to something that brought nothing to the town and wouldn’t leave anything except what those grafters in the Mayor’s office will split among themselves, and Earl chasing back and forth like a hen in a coop, saying “Yes, ma’am, Mr Compson will wait on you. Jason, show this lady a churn or a nickel’s worth of screen hooks.”

Well, Jason likes work. I says no I never had university advantages because at Harvard they teach you how to go for a swim at night without knowing how to swim and at Sewanee they dont even teach you what water is. I says you might send me to the state University; maybe I’ll learn how to stop my clock with a nose spray and then you can send Ben to the Navy I says or to the cavalry anyway, they use geldings in the cavalry. Then when she sent Quentin home for me to feed too I says I guess that’s right too, instead of me having to go way up north for a job they sent the job down here to me and then Mother begun to cry and I says it’s not that I have any objection to having it here; if it’s any satisfaction to you I’ll quit work and nurse it myself and let you and Dilsey keep the flour barrel full, or Ben. Rent him out to a sideshow; there must be folks somewhere that would pay a dime to see him, then she cried more and kept saying my poor afflicted baby and I says yes he’ll be quite a help to you when he gets his growth not being more than one and a half times as high as me now and she says she’d be dead soon and then we’d all be better off and so I says all right, all right, have it your

way. It’s your grandchild, which is more than any other grandparents it’s got can say for certain. Only I says it’s only a question of time. If you believe she’ll do what she says and not try to see it, you fool yourself because the first time that was that Mother kept on saying thank God you are not a Compson except in name, because you are all I have left now, you and Maury, and I says well I could spare Uncle Maury myself and then they came and said they were ready to start. Mother stopped crying then. She pulled her veil down and we went down stairs. Uncle Maury was coming out of the diningroom, his handkerchief to his

mouth. They kind of made a lane and we went out the door just in time to see Dilsey driving Ben and T. P. back around the corner. We went down the steps and got in. Uncle Maury kept saying Poor little sister, poor little sister, talking around his mouth and patting Mother's hand. Talking around whatever it was.

"Have you got your band on?" she says. "Why dont they go on, before Benjamin comes out and makes a spectacle. Poor little boy. He doesn't know. He cant even realise."

"There, there," Uncle Maury says, patting her hand, talking around his mouth. "It's better so. Let him be unaware of bereavement until he has to."

"Other women have their children to support them in times like this," Mother says. "You have Jason and me," he says.

"It's so terrible to me," she says, "Having the two of them like this, in less than two years." "There, there," he says. After a while he kind of sneaked his hand to his mouth and dropped them out the window. Then I knew what I had been smelling. Clove stems. I reckon he thought that the least he could do at Father's funeral or maybe the sideboard thought it was still Father and tripped him up when he passed. Like I say, if he had to sell something to send Quentin to Harvard we'd all been a damn sight better off if he'd sold that sideboard and bought himself a one-armed strait jacket with part of the money. I reckon the reason all the Compson gave out before it got to me like Mother says, is that he drank it up. At least I never heard of him offering to sell anything to send me to Harvard.

So he kept on patting her hand and saying "Poor little sister," patting her hand with one of the black gloves that we got the bill for four days later because it was the twenty-sixth because it was the same day one month that Father went up there and got it and brought it home and wouldn't tell anything about where she was or anything and Mother crying and saying "And you didn't even see him? You didn't even try to get him to make any provision for it?" and Father says "No she shall not touch his money not one cent of it" and Mother says "He can be forced

to by law. He can prove nothing, unless—Jason Compson,” she says, “Were you fool enough to tell—”

“Hush, Caroline,” Father says, then he sent me to help Dilsey get that old cradle out of the attic and I says,

“Well, they brought my job home tonight” because all the time we kept hoping they’d get things straightened out and he’d keep her because Mother kept saying she would at least have enough regard for the family not to jeopardize my chance after she and Quentin had had theirs.

“And whar else do she belong?” Dilsey says, “Who else gwine raise her ’cep me? Aint I raised eve’y one of y’all?”

“And a damn fine job you made of it,” I says. “Anyway it’ll give her something to sure enough worry over now.” So we carried the cradle down and Dilsey started to set it up in her old room. Then Mother started sure enough.

“Hush, Miss Cahline,” Dilsey says, “You gwine wake her up.”

“In there?” Mother says, “To be contaminated by that atmosphere? It’ll be hard enough as it is, with the heritage she already has.” “Hush,” Father says, “Dont be silly.”

“Why aint she gwine sleep in here,” Dilsey says, “In the same room whar I put her ma to bed ev’y night of her life since she was big enough to sleep by herself.”

“You dont know,” Mother says, “To have my own daughter cast off by her husband. Poor little innocent baby,” she says, looking at Quentin.

“You will never know the suffering you’ve caused.”

“Hush, Caroline,” Father says.

“What you want to go on like that fo Jason fer?” Dilsey says.

“I’ve tried to protect him,” Mother says. “I’ve always tried to protect him from it. At least I can do my best to shield her.”

“How sleepin in dis room gwine hurt her, I like to know,” Dilsey says.

“I cant help it,” Mother says. “I know I’m just a troublesome old woman. But I know that people cannot flout God’s laws with impunity.”

“Nonsense,” Father said. “Fixit in Miss Caroline’s room then, Dilsey.”

"You can say nonsense," Mother says. "But she must never know. She must never even learn that name. Dilsey, I forbid you ever to speak that name in her hearing. If she could grow up never to know that she had a mother, I would thank God."

"Dont be a fool," Father says.

"I have never interfered with the way you brought them up," Mother says, "But now I cannot stand anymore. We must decide this now, tonight. Either that name is never to be spoken in her hearing, or she must go, or I willgo. Take your choice."

"Hush," Father says, "You're just upset. Fixit in here, Dilsey."

"En you's about sick too," Dilsey says. "You looks like a hant. You git in bed and I'llfixyou a toddy and see kin you sleep. I bet you aint had a fullnight's sleep since you lef."

"No," Mother says, "Dont you know what the doctor says? Why must you encourage him to drink? That's what's the matter with him now. Look at me, I suffer too, but I'm not so weak that I must killmyself with whiskey."

"Fiddlesticks," Father says, "What do doctors know? They make their livings advising people to do whatever they are not doing at the time, which is the extent of anyone's knowledge of the degenerate ape. You'llhave a minister in to hold my hand next." Then Mother cried, and he went out. Went down stairs, and then I heard the sideboard. I woke up and heard himgoing down again. Mother had gone to sleep or something, because the house was quiet at last. He was trying to be quiet too, because I couldn't hear him, only the bottom of his nightshirt and his bare legs in front of the sideboard.

Dilsey fixed the cradle and undressed her and put her in it. She never had waked up since he brought her in the house.

"She pretty near too big fer hit," Dilsey says. "Dar now. I gwine spread me a pallet right acrost de hall, so you wont need to git up in de night."

"I wont sleep," Mother says. "You go on home. I wont mind. I'll be happy to give the rest of my life to her, if I can just prevent—"

"Hush, now," Dilsey says. "We gwine take keer of her. En you go on to bed too," she says to me, "You got to go to schooltomorrow."

So I went out, then Mother called me back and cried on me awhile.

“You are my only hope,” she says. “Every night I thank God for you.” While we were waiting there for them to start she says Thank God if he had to be taken too, it is you left me and not Quentin. Thank God you are not a Compson, because all I have left now is you and Maury and I says, Well I could spare Uncle Maury myself. Well, he kept on patting her hand with his black glove, talking away from her. He took them off when his turn with the shovel came. He got up near the first, where they were holding the umbrellas over them, stamping every now and then and trying to kick the mud off their feet and sticking to the shovels so they’d have to knock it off, making a hollow sound when it fell on it, and when I stepped back around the hack I could see him behind a tombstone, taking another one out of a bottle. I thought he never was going to stop because I had on my new suit too, but it happened that there wasn’t much mud on the wheels yet, only Mother saw it and says I dont know when you’ll ever have another one and Uncle Maury says, “Now, now. Dont you worry at all. You have me to depend on, always.”

And we have. Always. The fourth letter was from him. But there wasn’t any need to open it. I could have written it myself, or recited it to her from memory, adding ten dollars just to be safe. But I had a hunch about that other letter. I just felt that it was about time she was up to some of her tricks again. She got pretty wise after that first time. She found out pretty quick that I was a different breed of cat from Father. When they begun to get it filled up toward the top Mother started crying sure enough, so Uncle Maury got in with her and drove off. He says You can come in with somebody; they’ll be glad to give you a lift. I’ll have to take your mother on and I thought about saying, Yes you ought to brought two bottles instead of just one only I thought about where we were, so I let them go on. Little they cared how wet I got, because then Mother could have a whale of a time being afraid I was taking pneumonia.

Well, I got to thinking about that and watching them throwing dirt into it, slapping it on anyway like they were making mortar or something or building a fence, and I began to feel sort of funny and so I decided to

walk around a while. I thought that if I went toward town they'd catch up and be trying to make me get in one of them, so I went on back toward the nigger graveyard. I got under some cedars, where the rain didn't come much, only dripping now and then, where I could see when they got through and went away. After a while they were all gone and I waited a minute and came out.

I had to follow the path to keep out of the wet grass so I didn't see her until I was pretty near there, standing there in a black cloak, looking at the flowers. I knew who it was right off, before she turned and looked at me and lifted up her veil.

"Hello, Jason," she says, holding out her hand. We shook hands.

"What are you doing here?" I says. "I thought you promised her you wouldn't come back here. I thought you had more sense than that."

"Yes?" she says. She looked at the flowers again. There must have been fifty dollars' worth. Somebody had put one bunch on Quentin's. "You did?" she says.

"I'm not surprised though," I says. "I wouldn't put anything past you. You dont mind anybody. You dont give a damn about anybody."

"Oh," she says, "that job." She looked at the grave. "I'm sorry about that, Jason."

"I bet you are," I says. "You'll talk mighty meek now. But you needn't have come back. There's not anything left. Ask Uncle Maury, if you dont believe me."

"I dont want anything," she says. She looked at the grave. "Why didn't they let me know?" she says. "I just happened to see it in the paper. On the back page. Just happened to."

I didn't say anything. We stood there, looking at the grave, and then I got to thinking about when we were little and one thing and another and I got to feeling funny again, kind of mad or something, thinking about now we'd have Uncle Maury around the house all the time, running

things like the way he left me to come home in the rain by myself. I says,

"A fine lot you care, sneaking in here soon as he's dead. But it wont do you any good. Dont think that you can take advantage of this to come sneaking back. If you cant stay on the horse you've got, you'll have to walk," I says. "We dont even know your name at that house," I says. "Do you know that? We don't even know you with him and Quentin," I says. "Do you know that?"

"I know it," she says. "Jason," she says, looking at the grave, "if you'll fix it so I can see her a minute I'llgive you fifty dollars."

"You haven't got fifty dollars," I says. "Willyou?" she says, not looking at me.

"Let's see it," I says. "I dont believe you've got fifty dollars."

I could see where her hands were moving under her cloak, then she held her hand out. Damn if it wasn't fullof money. I could see two or three yellow ones.

"Does he stillgive you money?" I says. "How much does he send you?"

"I'llgive you a hundred," she says. "Willyou?"

"Just a minute," I says, "And just like I say. I wouldn't have her know it for a thousand dollars."

"Yes," she says. "Just like you say do it. Just so I see her a minute. I wont beg or do anything. I'llgo right on away."

"Give me the money," I says.

"I'llgive it to you afterward," she says. "Dont you trust me?" I says.

"No," she says. "I know you. I grew up with you."

"You're a fine one to talk about trusting people," I says. "Well," I says, "I got to get on out of the rain. Goodbye." I made to go away.

"Jason," she says. I stopped.

"Yes?" I says. "Hurry up. I'mgetting wet."

"All right," she says. "Here." There wasn't anybody in sight. I went back and took the money. She still held to it. "You'll do it?" she says, looking at me from under the veil, "You promise?"

"Let go," I says, "You want somebody to come along and see us?"

She let go. I put the money in my pocket. "You'll do it, Jason?" she says.

"I wouldn't ask you, if there was any other way."

"You're damn right there's no other way," I says. "Sure I'll do it. I said I would, didn't I? Only you'llhave to do just like I say, now."

"Yes," she says, "I will." So I told her where to be, and went to the livery stable. I hurried and got there just as they were unhitching the hack. I asked if they had paid for it yet and he said No and I said Mrs Compson forgot something and wanted it again, so they let me take it. Mink was driving. I bought him a cigar, so we drove around until it begun to get dark on the back streets where they wouldn't see him. Then Mink said he'd have to take the team on back and so I said I'd buy him another cigar and so we drove into the lane and I went across the yard to the house. I stopped in the hall until I could hear Mother and Uncle Maury upstairs, then I went on back to the kitchen. She and Ben were there with Dilsey. I said Mother wanted her and I took her into the house. I found Uncle Maury's raincoat and put it around her and picked her up and went back to the lane and got in the hack. I told Mink to drive to the depot. He was afraid to pass the stable, so we had to go the back way and I saw her standing on the corner under the light and I told Mink to drive close to the walk and when I said Go on, to give the team a bat. Then I took the raincoat off of her and held her to the window and Caddy saw her and sort of jumped forward.

"Hit 'em, Mink!" I says, and Mink gave them a cut and we went past her like a fire engine. "Now get on that train like you promised," I says. I could see her running after us through the back window. "Hit 'emagain," I says, "Let's get on home." When we turned the corner she was stillrunning.

And so I counted the money again that night and put it away, and I didn't feel so bad. I says I reckon that'llshow you. I reckon you'llknow now that you cant beat me out of a job and get away with it. It never occurred to me she wouldn't keep her promise and take that train. But I didn't know much about them then; I didn't have any more sense than to believe what they said, because the next morning damn if she didn't walk right into the store, only she had sense enough to wear the veil and not speak to anybody. It was Saturday morning, because I was at the store, and she came right on back to the desk where I was, walking fast.

"Liar," she says, "Liar."

"Are you crazy?" I says. "What do you mean? coming in here like this?" She started in, but I shut her off. I says, "You already cost me one job;

do you want me to lose this one too? If you've got anything to say to me, I'll meet you somewhere after dark. What have you got to say to me?" I says, "Didn't I do everything I said? I said see her a minute, didn't I? Well, didn't you?" She just stood there looking at me, shaking like an ague-fit, her hands clenched and kind of jerking. "I did just what I said I would," I says, "You're the one that lied. You promised to take that train. Didn't you Didn't you promise? If you think you can get that money back, just try it," I says. "If it'd been a thousand dollars, you'd still owe me after the risk I took. And if I see or hear you're still in town after number 17 runs," I says, "I'll tell Mother and Uncle Maury. Then hold your breath until you see her again." She just stood there, looking at me, twisting her hands together.

"Damn you," she says, "Damn you."

"Sure," I says, "That's alright too. Mind what I say, now. After number 17, and I tellthem." After she was gone I felt better. I says I reckon you'llthink twice before you deprive me of a job that was promised me. I was a kid then. I believed folks when they said they'd do things. I've learned better since. Besides, like I say I guess I dont need any man's help to get along I can stand on my own feet like I always have. Then all of a sudden I thought of Dilsey and Uncle Maury. I thought how she'd get around Dilsey and that Uncle Maury would do anything for ten dollars. And there I was, couldn't even get away from the store to protect my own Mother. Like she says, if one of you had to be taken, thank God it was you left me I can depend on you and I says well I dont reckon I'll ever get far enough from the store to get out of your reach. Somebody's got to hold on to what little we have left, I reckon.

So as soon as I got home I fixed Dilsey. I told Dilsey she had leprosy and I got the bible and read where a man's flesh rotted off and I told her that if she ever looked at her or Ben or Quentin they'd catch it too. So I thought I had everything all fixed until that day when I came home and found Ben bellowing. Raising hell and nobody could quiet him. Mother said, Well, get himthe slipper then. Dilsey made out she didn't hear. Mother said it again and I says I'd go I couldn't stand that damn noise. Like I say I can stand lots of things I dont expect much from them but if I have to work all day long in a damn store damn if I dont think I deserve

a little peace and quiet to eat dinner in. So I says I'd go and Dilsey says quick, "Jason!"

Well, like a flash I knew what was up, but just to make sure I went and got the slipper and

brought it back, and just like I thought, when he saw it you'd thought we were killing him. So I made Dilsey own up, then I told Mother. We had to take her up to bed then, and after things got quieted down a little I put the fear of God into Dilsey. As much as you can into a nigger, that is. That's the trouble with nigger servants, when they've been with you for a long time they get so full of self importance that they're not worth a damn. Think they run the whole family.

"I like to know whut's de hurt in lettin dat po chile see her own baby," Dilsey says. "If Mr Jason was still here hit ud be different."

"Only Mr Jason's not here," I says. "I know you wont pay me any mind, but I reckon you'll do what Mother says. You keep on worrying her like this until you get her into the graveyard too, then you can fill the whole house full of ragtag and bobtail. But what did you want to let that damn idiot see her for?"

"You's a cold man, Jason, if man you is," she says. "I thank de Lawd I got mo heart dan dat, even ef hit is black."

"At least I'm man enough to keep that flour barrel full," I says. "And if you do that again, you wont be eating out of it either."

So the next time I told her that if she tried Dilsey again, Mother was going to fire Dilsey and send Ben to Jackson and take Quentin and go away. She looked at me for a while. There wasn't any street light close and I couldn't see her face much. But I could feel her looking at me.

When we were little when she'd get mad and couldn't do anything about it her upper lip would begin to jump. Everytime it jumped it would leave a little more of her teeth showing, and all the time she'd be as still as a post, not a muscle moving except her lip jerking higher and higher up her teeth. But she didn't say anything. She just said, "Allright. How much?"

"Well, if one look through a hack window was worth a hundred," I says. So after that she behaved pretty well, only one time she asked to see a statement of the bank account.

"I know they have Mother's indorsement on them," she says, "But I want to see the bank statement. I want to see myself where those checks go."

"That's in Mother's private business," I says. "If you think you have any right to pry into her private affairs I'll tell her you believe those checks are being misappropriated and you want an audit because you dont trust her."

She didn't say anything or move. I could hear her whispering Damn you oh damn you oh damn you.

"Say it out," I says, "I dont reckon it's any secret what you and I think of one another. Maybe you want the money back," I says.

"Listen, Jason," she says, "Dont lie to me now. About her. I wont ask to see anything. If that isn't enough, I'll send more each month. Just promise that she'll—that she—You can do that. Things for her. Be kind to her. Little things that I cant, they wont let. . . . But you wont. You never had a drop of warm blood in you. Listen," she says, "If you'll get Mother to let me have her back, I'llgive you a thousand dollars."

"You haven't got a thousand dollars," I says, "I know you're lying now."

"Yes I have. I willhave. I can get it."

"And I know how you'll get it," I says, "You'll get it the same way you got her. And when she gets big enough—" Then I thought she really was going to hit at me, and then I didn't know what she was going to do. She acted for a minute like some kind of a toy that's wound up too tight and about to burst allto pieces.

"Oh, I'm crazy," she says, "I'm insane. I can't take her. Keep her. What am I thinking of. Jason," she says, grabbing my arm. Her hands were hot as fever. "You'll have to promise to take care of her, to—She's kin to you; your own flesh and blood. Promise, Jason. You have Father's name:do you think I'd have to ask himtwice? once, even?"

"That's so," I says, "He did leave me something. What do you want me to do," I says, "Buy an apron and a go-cart? I never got you into this," I says. "I run more risk than you do, because you haven't got anything at stake. So if you expect—"

"No," she says, then she begun to laugh and to try to hold it back all at the same time. "No. I have nothing at stake," she says, making that noise, putting her hands to her mouth, "Nuh-nuh-nothing," she says.

"Here," I says, "Stop that!"

“I’mtr-trying to,” she says, holding her hands over her mouth. “Oh God, oh God.” “I’mgoing away fromhere,” I says, “I cant be seen here. You get on out of town now, you hear?”

“Wait,” she says, catching my arm. “I’ve stopped. I wont again. You promise, Jason?” she says, and me feeling her eyes almost like they were touching my face, “You promise? Mother— that money—if sometimes she needs things—if I send checks for her to you, other ones besides those, you’ll give them to her? You wont tell? You’ll see that she has things like other girls?”

“Sure,” I says, “As long as you behave and do like I tellyou.”

And so when Earl came up front with his hat on he says, “I’m going to step up to Rogers’ and get a snack. We wont have time to go home to dinner, I reckon.”

“What’s the matter we wont have time?” I says.

“With this show in town and all,” he says. “They’re going to give an afternoon performance too, and they’ll all want to get done trading in time to go to it. So we’d better just run up to Rogers’.”

“All right,” I says, “It’s your stomach. If you want to make a slave of yourself to your business, it’s alright with me.”

“I reckon you’llnever be a slave to any business,” he says. “Not unless it’s Jason Compson’s business,” I says.

So when I went back and opened it the only thing that surprised me was it was a money order not a check. Yes, sir. You cant trust a one of them. After all the risk I’d taken, risking Mother finding out about her coming down here once or twice a year sometimes, and me having to tellMother lies about it. That’s gratitude for you. And I wouldn’t put it past her to try to notify the postoffice not to let anyone except her cash it. Giving a kid like that fifty dollars. Why I never saw fifty dollars until I was twenty-one years old, with all the other boys with the afternoon off and all day Saturday and me working in a store. Like I say, how can they expect anybody to control her, with her giving her money behind our backs. She has the same home you had I says, and the same raising. I reckon Mother is a better judge of what she needs than you are, that haven’t even got a home. “If you want to give her money,” I says, “You send it to Mother, dont be giving it to her. If I’ve got to run this risk every few months, you’ll have to do like I say, or it’s out.”

And just about the time I got ready to begin on it because if Earl thought I was going to dash up the street and gobble two bits worth of indigestion on his account he was bad fooled. I may not be sitting with my feet on a mahogany desk but I am being paid for what I do inside this building and if I cant manage to live a civilised life outside of it I'll go where I can. I can stand on my own feet; I dont need any man's mahogany desk to prop me up. So just about the time I got ready to start I'd have to drop everything and run to sell some redneck a dime's worth of nails or something, and Earl up there gobbling a sandwich and half way back already, like as not, and then I found that all the blanks were gone. I remembered then that I had aimed to get some more, but it was too late now, and then I looked up and there Quentin came. In the back door. I heard her asking old Job if I was there. I just had time to stick them in the drawer and close it.

She came around to the desk. I looked at my watch.

"You been to dinner already?" I says. "It's just twelve; I just heard it strike. You must have flown home and back."

"I'mnot going home to dinner," she says. "Did I get a letter today?"

"Were you expecting one?" I says. "Have you got a sweetie that can write?" "FromMother," she says. "Did I get a letter fromMother?" she says, looking at me. "Mother got one fromher," I says. "I haven't opened it. You'll have to wait until she opens it. She'lllet you see it, I imagine."

"Please, Jason," she says, not paying any attention, "Did I get one?"

"What's the matter?" I says. "I never knew you to be this anxious about anybody. You must expect some money fromher."

"She said she—" she says. "Please, Jason," she says, "Did I?"

"You must have been to school today, after all," I says, "Somewhere where they taught you to say please. Wait a minute, while I wait on that customer."

I went and waited on him. When I turned to come back she was out of sight behind the desk. I ran. I ran around the desk and caught her as she jerked her hand out of the drawer. I took the letter away fromher, beating her knuckles on the desk untilshe let go.

"You would, would you?" I says.

"Give it to me," she says, "You've already opened it. Give it to me. Please, Jason. It's mine. I saw the name."

"I'll take a hame string to you," I says. "That's what I'll give you. Going into my papers." "Is there some money in it?" she says, reaching for it.

"She said she would send me some money. She promised she would. Give it to me." "What do you want with money?" I says.

"She said she would," she says, "Give it to me. Please, Jason. I wont ever ask you anything again, if you'll give it to me this time."

"I'm going to, if you'll give me time," I says. I took the letter and the money order out and gave her the letter. She reached for the money order, not hardly glancing at the letter. "You'll have to sign it first," I says.

"How much is it?" she says.

"Read the letter," I says. "I reckon it'll say." She read it fast, in about two looks.

"It dont say," she says, looking up. She dropped the letter to the floor.

"How much is it?" "It's ten dollars," I says.

"Ten dollars?" she says, staring at me.

"And you ought to be damn glad to get that," I says, "A kid like you. What are you in such a rush for money allof a sudden for?"

"Ten dollars?" she says, like she was talking in her sleep, "Just ten dollars?" She made a grab at the money order. "You're lying," she says.

"Thief!" she says, "Thief!"

"You would, would you?" I says, holding her off.

"Give it to me!" she says, "It's mine. She sent it to me. I will see it. I will." "You will?" I says, holding her, "How're you going to do it?"

"Just let me see it, Jason," she says, "Please. I wont ask you for anything again." "Think I'm lying, do you?" I says. "Just for that you wont see it."

"But just ten dollars," she says, "She told me she—she told me—Jason, please please please. I've got to have some money. I've just got to. Give it to me, Jason. I'll do anything if you will."

"Tell me what you've got to have money for," I says.

"I've got to have it," she says. She was looking at me. Then allof a sudden she quit looking at me without moving her eyes at all. I knew she was going to lie. "It's some money I owe," she says. "I've got to pay it. I've got to pay it today."

“Who to?” I says. Her hands were sort of twisting. I could watch her trying to think of a lie to tell. “Have you been charging things at stores again?” I says. “You needn’t bother to tell me that. If you can find anybody in this town that’ll charge anything to you after what I told them, I’ll eat it.”

“It’s a girl,” she says, “It’s a girl. I borrowed some money from a girl. I’ve got to pay it back. Jason, give it to me. Please. I’ll do anything. I’ve got to have it. Mother will pay you. I’ll write to her to pay you and that I won’t ever ask her for anything again. You can see the letter. Please, Jason. I’ve got to have it.”

“Tell me what you want with it, and I’ll see about it,” I says. “Tell me.” She just stood there, with her hands working against her dress. “All right,” I says, “If ten dollars is too little for you, I’ll just take it home to Mother, and you know what’ll happen to it then. Of course, if you’re so rich you don’t need ten dollars—”

She stood there, looking at the floor, kind of mumbling to herself. “She said she would send me some money. She said she sends money here and you say she don’t send any. She said she’s sent a lot of money here. She says it’s for me. That it’s for me to have some of it. And you say we haven’t got any money.”

“You know as much about that as I do,” I says. “You’ve seen what happens to those checks.”

“Yes,” she says, looking at the floor. “Ten dollars,” she says, “Ten dollars.”

“And you’d better thank your stars it’s ten dollars,” I says. “Here,” I says. I put the money order face down on the desk, holding my hand on it, “Sign it.”

“Will you let me see it?” she says. “I just want to look at it. Whatever it says, I won’t ask for but ten dollars. You can have the rest. I just want to see it.”

“Not after the way you’ve acted,” I says. “You’ve got to learn one thing, and that is that when I tell you to do something, you’ve got it to do. You sign your name on that line.”

She took the pen, but instead of signing it she just stood there with her head bent and the pen shaking in her hand. Just like her mother. “Oh, God,” she says, “oh, God.”

"Yes," I says, "That's one thing you'll have to learn if you never learn anything else. Sign it now, and get on out of here."

She signed it. "Where's the money?" she says. I took the order and blotted it and put it in my pocket. Then I gave her the ten dollars.

"Now you go on back to school this afternoon, you hear?" I says. She didn't answer. She crumpled the bill up in her hand like it was a rag or something and went on out the front door just as Earl came in. A customer came in with him and they stopped up front. I gathered up the things and put on my hat and went up front. "Been much busy?" Earlsays.

"Not much," I says. He looked out the door.

"That your car over yonder?" he says. "Better not try to go out home to dinner. We'll likely have another rush just before the show opens. Get you a lunch at Rogers' and put a ticker in the drawer."

"Much obliged," I says. "I can still manage to feed myself, I reckon." And right there he'd stay, watching that door like a hawk until it came through it again. Well, he'd just have to watch it for a while; I was doing the best I could. The time before I says that's the last one now; you'll have to remember to get some more right away. But who can remember anything in all this hurrah. And now this damn show had to come here the one day I'd have to hunt all over town for a blank check, besides all the other things I had to do to keep the house running, and Earl watching the door like a hawk.

I went to the printing shop and told him I wanted to play a joke on a fellow, but he didn't have anything. Then he told me to have a look in the old opera house, where somebody had stored a lot of papers and junk out of the old Merchants' and Farmers' Bank when it failed, so I dodged up a few more alleys so Earl couldn't see me and finally found old man Simmons and got the key from him and went up there and dug around. At last I found a pad on a Saint Louis bank. And of course she'd pick this one time to look at it close. Well, it would have to do. I couldn't waste any more time now.

I went back to the store. "Forgot some papers Mother wants to go to the bank," I says. I went back to the desk and fixed the check. Trying to hurry and all, I says to myself it's a good thing her eyes are giving out, with that little whore in the house, a Christian forbearing woman like Mother. I says you know just as well as I do what she's going to grow up

into but I says that's your business, if you want to keep her and raise her in your house just because of Father. Then she would begin to cry and say it was her own flesh and blood so I just says All right. Have it your way. I can stand it if you can.

I fixed the letter up again and glued it back and went out. "Try not to be gone any longer than you can help," Earlsays.

"Allright," I says. I went to the telegraph office. The smart boys were allthere. "Any of you boys made a million yet?" I says.

"Who can do anything, with a market like that?" Doc says.

"What's it doing?" I says. I went in and looked. It was three points under the opening. "You boys are not going to let a little thing like the cotton market beat you, are you?" I says. "I thought you were too smart for that."

"Smart, hell," Doc says. "It was down twelve points at twelve o'clock. Cleaned me out." "Twelve points?" I says. "Why the hell didn't somebody let me know? Why didn't you let me know?" I says to the operator.

"I take it as it comes in," he says. "I'mnot running a bucket shop."

"You're smart, aren't you?" I says. "Seems to me, with the money I spend with you, you could take time to call me up. Or maybe your damn company's in a conspiracy with those damn eastern sharks." He didn't say anything. He made like he was busy.

"You're getting a little too big for your pants," I says. "First thing you know you'll be working for a living."

"What's the matter with you?" Doc says. "You're stillthree points to the good."

"Yes," I says, "If I happened to be selling. I haven't mentioned that yet, I think. You boys allcleaned out?"

"I got caught twice," Doc says. "I switched just in time."

"Well," I. O. Snopes says, "I've picked hit; I reckon taint no more than fair fer hit to pick me once in a while."

So I left thembuying and selling among themselves at a nickel a point. I found a nigger and sent him for my car and stood on the corner and waited. I couldn't see Earl looking up and down the street, with one eye on the clock, because I couldn't see the door from here. After about a week he got back with it.

"Where the hell have you been?" I says, "Riding around where the wenches could see you?"

"I come straight as I could," he says, "I had to drive clean around the square, wid all dem wagons."

I never found a nigger yet that didn't have an airtight alibi for whatever he did. But just turn one loose in a car and he's bound to show off. I got in and went on around the square. I caught a glimpse of Earlin the door across the square.

I went straight to the kitchen and told Dilsey to hurry up with dinner.

"Quentin aint come yit," she says.

"What of that?" I says. "You'll be telling me next that Luster's not quite ready to eat yet. Quentin knows when meals are served in this house. Hurry up with it, now."

Mother was in her room. I gave her the letter. She opened it and took the check out and sat holding it in her hand. I went and got the shovel from the corner and gave her a match. "Come on," I says, "Get it over with. You'll be crying in a minute."

She took the match, but she didn't strike it. She sat there, looking at the check. Just like I said it would be.

"I hate to do it," she says, "To increase your burden by adding Quentin. . . ." "I guess we'll get along," I says. "Come on. Get it over with."

But she just sat there, holding the check.

"This one is on a different bank," she says. "They have been on an Indianapolis bank." "Yes," I says. "Women are allowed to do that too."

"Do what?" she says.

"Keep money in two different banks," I says.

"Oh," she says. She looked at the check a while. "I'm glad to know she's so . . . she has so much . . . God sees that I am doing right," she says.

"Come on," I says, "Finish it. Get the fun over." "Fun?" she says, "When I think—"

"I thought you were burning this two hundred dollars a month for fun," I says. "Come on, now. Want me to strike the match?"

"I could bring myself to accept them," she says, "For my childrens' sake. I have no pride." "You'd never be satisfied," I says, "You know you

wouldn't. You've settled that once, let it stay settled. We can get along."

"I leave everything to you," she says. "But sometimes I become afraid that in doing this I am depriving you all of what is rightfully yours. Perhaps I shall be punished for it. If you want me to, I will smother my pride and accept them."

"What would be the good in beginning now, when you've been destroying them for fifteen years?" I says. "If you keep on doing it, you have lost nothing, but if you'd begin to take them now, you'll have lost fifty thousand dollars. We've got along so far, haven't we?" I says. "I haven't seen you in the poorhouse yet."

"Yes," she says, "We Bascombs need nobody's charity. Certainly not that of a fallen woman."

She struck the match and lit the check and put it in the shovel, and then the envelope, and watched them burn.

"You don't know what it is," she says, "Thank God you will never know what a mother feels."

"There are lots of women in this world no better than her," I says.

"But they are not my daughters," she says. "It's not myself," she says, "I'd gladly take her back, sins and all, because she is my flesh and blood. It's for Quentin's sake."

Well, I could have said it wasn't much chance of anybody hurting Quentin much, but like I say I don't expect much but I do want to eat and sleep without a couple of women squabbling and crying in the house.

"And yours," she says. "I know how you feel toward her." "Let her come back," I says, "far as I'm concerned."

"No," she says. "I owe that to your father's memory."

"When he was trying all the time to persuade you to let her come home when Herbert threw her out?" I says.

"You don't understand," she says. "I know you don't intend to make it more difficult for me. But it's my place to suffer for my children," she says. "I can bear it."

"Seems to me you go to a lot of unnecessary trouble doing it," I says. The paper burned out. I carried it to the grate and put it in. "It just seems a shame to me to burn up good money," I says.

"Let me never see the day when my children will have to accept that, the wages of sin," she says. "I'd rather see even you dead in your coffin first."

"Have it your way," I says. "Are we going to have dinner soon?" I says, "Because if we're not, I'll have to go on back. We're pretty busy today." She got up. "I've told her once," I says. "It seems she's waiting on Quentin or Luster or somebody. Here, I'll call her. Wait." But she went to the head of the stairs and called.

"Quentin aint come yit," Dilsey says.

"Well, I'll have to get on back," I says. "I can get a sandwich downtown. I dont want to interfere with Dilsey's arrangements," I says. Well, that got her started again, with Dilsey hobbling and mumbling back and forth, saying,

"Alright, alright, Ise puttin hit on fast as I kin."

"I try to please you all," Mother says, "I try to make things as easy for you as I can." "I'mnot complaining, aml?" I says. "Have I said a word except I had to go back to work?" "I know," she says, "I know you haven't had the chance the others had, that you've had to bury yourself in a little country store. I wanted you to get ahead. I knew your father would never realise that you were the only one who had any business sense, and then when everything else failed I believed that when she married, and Herbert . . . after his promise . . ." "Well, he was probably lying too," I says. "He may not have even had a bank. And if he had, I dont reckon he'd have to come allthe way to Mississippito get a man for it."

We ate awhile. I could hear Ben in the kitchen, where Luster was feeding him. Like I say, if we've got to feed another mouth and she wont take that money, why not send him down to Jackson. He'll be happier there, with people like him. I says God knows there's little enough

roomfor pride in this family, but it dont take much pride to not like to see a thirty year old man playing around the yard with a nigger boy, running up and down the fence and lowing like a cow whenever they play golf over there. I says if they'd sent himto Jackson at first we'd all be better off today. I says, you've done your duty by him; you've done all anybody can expect of you and more than most folks would do, so why not send him there and get that much benefit out of the taxes we pay. Then she says, "I'll be gone soon. I know I'm just a burden to you" and I says "You've been saying that so long that I'm beginning to

believe you” only I says you’d better be sure and not let me know you’re gone because I’ll sure have him on number seventeen that night and I says I think I know a place where they’ll take her too and the name of it’s not Milk street and Honey avenue either. Then she begun to cry and I says All right all right I have as much pride about my kinfolks as anybody even if I dont always know where they come from.

We ate for awhile. Mother sent Dilsey to the front to look for Quentin again. “I keep telling you she’s not coming to dinner,” I says.

“She knows better than that,” Mother says, “She knows I dont permit her to run about the streets and not come home at mealtime. Did you look good, Dilsey?”

“Dont let her, then,” I says.

“What can I do,” she says. “You have allof you flouted me. Always.”

“If you wouldn’t come interfering, I’d make her mind,” I says. “It wouldn’t take me but about one day to straighten her out.”

“You’d be too brutalwith her,” she says. “You have your Uncle Maury’s temper.”

That reminded me of the letter. I took it out and handed it to her. “You wont have to open it,” I says. “The bank willet you know how much it is this time.”

“It’s addressed to you,” she says.

“Go on and open it,” I says. She opened it and read it and handed it to me. “ ‘My dear young nephew,’ it says,

‘You will be glad to learn that I am now in a position to avail myself of an opportunity regarding which, for reasons which I shall make obvious to you, I shall not go into details until I have an opportunity to divulge it to you in a more secure manner. My business experience has taught me to be chary of committing anything of a confidential nature to any more concrete medium than speech, and my extreme precaution in this instance should give you some inkling of its value. Needless to say, I have just completed a most exhaustive examination of all its phases, and I feel no hesitancy in telling you that it is that sort of golden chance that comes but once in a lifetime, and I now see clearly before me that goal toward which I have long and unflaggingly striven: i.e., the ultimate solidification of my affairs by which I may restore to its rightful position that family of which I have the honour to be the sole remaining

male descendant; that family in which I have ever included your lady mother and her children.

'As it so happens, I am not quite in a position to avail myself of this opportunity to the uttermost which it warrants, but rather than go out of the family to do so, I am today drawing upon your Mother's bank for the small sum necessary to complement my own initial investment, for which I herewith enclose, as a matter of formality, my note of hand at eight percent per annum. Needless to say, this is merely a formality, to secure your Mother in the event of that circumstance of which man is ever the

plaything and sport. For naturally I shall employ this sum as though it were my own and so permit your Mother to avail herself of this opportunity which my exhaustive investigation has shown to be a bonanza—if you will permit the vulgarism—of the first water and purest ray serene.

'This is in confidence, you will understand, from one business man to another; we will harvest our own vineyards, eh? And knowing your Mother's delicate health and that timorousness which such delicately nurtured Southern ladies would naturally feel regarding matters of business, and their charming proneness to divulge unwittingly such matters in conversation, I would suggest that you do not mention it to her at all. On second thought, I advise you not to do so. It might be better to simply restore this sum to the bank at some future date, say, in a lump sum with the other small sums for which I am indebted to her, and say nothing about it at all. It is our duty to shield her from the crass material world as much as possible.

'Your affectionate Uncle,

'Maury L. Bascomb.'

"What do you want to do about it?" I says, flipping it across the table. "I know you grudge what I give him," she says.

"It's your money," I says. "If you want to throw it to the birds even, it's your business." "He's my own brother," Mother says. "He's the last Bascomb. When we are gone there won't be any more of them."

"That'll be hard on somebody, I guess," I says. "All right, all right," I says, "It's your money. Do as you please with it. You want me to tell the bank to pay it?"

"I know you begrudge him," she says. "I realise the burden on your shoulders. When I'm gone it will be easier on you."

"I could make it easier right now," I says. "All right, all right, I won't mention it again. Move all the bedlam here if you want to."

"He's your own brother," she says, "Even if he is afflicted." "I'll take your bank book," I says. "I'll draw my check today."

"He kept you waiting six days," she says. "Are you sure the business is sound? It seems strange to me that a solvent business cannot pay its employees promptly."

"He's all right," I says, "Safe as a bank. I tell him not to bother about mine until we get done collecting every month. That's why it's late sometimes."

"I just couldn't bear to have you lose the little I had to invest for you," she says. "I've often thought that Earl is not a good business man. I know he doesn't take you into his confidence to the extent that your investment in the business should warrant. I'm going to speak to him."

"No, you let him alone," I says. "It's his business." "You have a thousand dollars in it."

"You let him alone," I says, "I'm watching things. I have your power of attorney. It'll be all right."

"You don't know what a comfort you are to me," she says. "You have always been my pride and joy, but when you came to me of your own accord and insisted on banking your salary each month in my name, I thanked God it was you left me if they had to be taken."

"They were all right," I says. "They did the best they could, I reckon."

"When you talk that way I know you are thinking bitterly of your father's memory," she

says. "You have a right to, I suppose. But it breaks my heart to hear you."

I got up. "If you've got any crying to do," I says, "you'll have to do it alone, because I've got to get on back. I'll get the bank book."

"I'll get it," she says.

"Keep still," I says, "I'll get it." I went upstairs and got the bank book out of her desk and went back to town. I went to the bank and

deposited the check and the money order and the other ten, and stopped at the telegraph office. It was one point above the opening. I had already lost thirteen points, all because she had to come helling in there at twelve, worrying me about that letter.

"What time did that report come in?" I says. "About an hour ago," he says.

"An hour ago?" I says. "What are we paying you for?" I says, "Weekly reports? How do you expect a man to do anything? The whole damn top could blow off and we'd not know it."

"I dont expect you to do anything," he says. "They changed that law making folks play the cotton market."

"They have?" I says. "I hadn't heard. They must have sent the news out over the Western Union."

I went back to the store. Thirteen points. Damn if I believe anybody knows anything about the damn thing except the ones that sit back in those New York offices and watch the country suckers come up and beg them to take their money. Well, a man that just calls shows he has no faith in himself, and like I say if you aren't going to take the advice, what's the use in paying money for it. Besides, these people are right up there on the ground; they know everything that's going on. I could feel the telegram in my pocket. I'd just have to prove that they were using the telegraph company to defraud. That would constitute a bucket shop. And I wouldn't hesitate that long, either. Only be damned if it doesn't look like a company as big and rich as the Western Union could get a market report out on time. Half as quick as they'll get a wire to you saying Your account closed out. But what the hell do they care about the people. They're hand in glove with that New York crowd. Anybody could see that.

When I came in Earl looked at his watch. But he didn't say anything until the customer was gone. Then he says,

"You go home to dinner?"

"I had to go to the dentist," I says because it's not any of his business where I eat but I've got to be in the store with him all the afternoon. And with his jaw running off after all I've stood. You take a little two by four country storekeeper like I say it takes a man with just five hundred dollars to worry about it fifty thousand dollars' worth.

"You might have told me," he says. "I expected you back right away."

"I'll trade you this tooth and give you ten dollars to boot, any time," I says. "Our agreement was an hour for dinner," I says, "and if you dont like the way I do, you know what you can do about it."

"I've known that some time," he says. "If it hadn't been for your mother I'd have done it before now, too. She's a lady I've got a lot of sympathy for, Jason. Too bad some other folks I know cant say as much."

"Then you can keep it," I says. "When we need any sympathy I'll let you know in plenty of time."

"I've protected you about that business a long time, Jason," he says.

"Yes?" I says, letting him go on. Listening to what he would say before I shut him up.

"I believe I know more about where that automobile came from than she does."

"You think so, do you?" I says. "When are you going to spread the news that I stole it from my mother?"

"I dont say anything," he says, "I know you have her power of attorney. And I know she still believes that thousand dollars is in this business."

"All right," I says, "Since you know so much, I'll tell you a little more: go to the bank and ask them whose account I've been depositing a hundred and sixty dollars on the first of every month for twelve years."

"I dont say anything," he says, "I just ask you to be a little more careful after this."

I never said anything more. It doesn't do any good. I've found that when a man gets into a rut the best thing you can do is let him stay there. And when a man gets it in his head that he's got to tell something on you for your own good, good-night. I'm glad I haven't got the sort of conscience I've got to nurse like a sick puppy all the time. If I'd ever be as careful over anything as he is to keep his little shirt tail full of business from making him more than eight percent. I reckon he thinks they'd get him on the usury law if he netted more than eight percent. What the hell chance has a man got, tied down in a town like this and to a business like this. Why I could take his business in one year and fix him so he'd never have to work again, only he'd give it all away to the church or something. If there's one thing gets under my skin, it's a damn hypocrite. A man that thinks anything he dont understand all about must be crooked and that first chance he gets he's morally

bound to tell the third party what's none of his business to tell. Like I say if I thought every time a man did something I didn't know all about he was bound to be a crook, I reckon I wouldn't have any trouble finding something back there on those books that you wouldn't see any use for running and telling somebody I thought ought to know about it, when for all I knew they might know a damn sight more about it now than I did, and if they didn't it was damn little of my business anyway and he says, "My books are open to anybody. Anybody that has any claim or believes she has any claim on this business can go back there and welcome."

"Sure, you wont tell," I says, "You couldn't square your conscience with that. You'll just take her back there and let her find it. You wont tell, yourself."

"I'm not trying to meddle in your business," he says. "I know you missed out on some things like Quentin had. But your mother has had a misfortunate life too, and if she was to come in here and ask me why you quit, I'd have to tell her. It aint that thousand dollars. You know that. It's because a man never gets anywhere if fact and his ledgers dont square. And I'm not going to lie to anybody, for myself or anybody else."

"Well, then," I says, "I reckon that conscience of yours is a more valuable clerk than I am; it dont have to go home at noon to eat. Only dont let it interfere with my appetite," I says, because how the hell can I do anything right, with that damn family and her not making any effort to control her nor any of them, like that time when she happened to see one of them kissing Caddy and all next day she went around the house in a black dress and a veil and even Father couldn't get her to say a word except crying and saying her little daughter was dead and Caddy about fifteen then only in three years she'd been wearing haircloth or probably sandpaper at that rate. Do you think I can afford to have her running bout the streets with every drummer that comes to town, I says, and themtelling the new ones up and down the road where to pick up a hot one when they made Jefferson. I haven't got much pride, I can't afford it with a kitchen full of niggers to feed and robbing the state asylum of its star freshman. Blood, I says, governors and generals. It's a damn good thing we never had any kings and presidents;

we'd all be down there at Jackson chasing butterflies. I say it'd be bad enough if it was mine; I'd at least be sure it was a bastard to begin with, and now even the Lord doesn't know that for certain probably.

So after awhile I heard the band start up, and then they begun to clear out. Headed for the show, every one of them. Haggling over a twenty cent hame string to save fifteen cents, so they can give it to a bunch of Yankees that come in and pay maybe ten dollars for the privilege. I went on out to the back.

"Well," I says, "If you dont look out, that bolt will grow into your hand. And then I'm going to take an axe and chop it out. What do you reckon the boll-weevils'll eat if you dont get those cultivators in shape to raise the ma crop?" I says, "sage grass?"

"Demfolks sho do play demhorns," he says. "Tell me man in dat show kin play a tune on a handsaw. Pick hit like a banjo."

"Listen," I says. "Do you know how much that show'll spend in this town? About ten dollars," I says. "The ten dollars Buck Turpin has in his pocket right now."

"Whut dey give Mr Buck ten dollars fer?" he says.

"For the privilege of showing here," I says. "You can put the balance of what they'll spend in your eye."

"You mean dey pays ten dollars jest to give dey show here?" he says.

"That's all," I says. "And how much do you reckon . . ."

"Gret day," he says, "You mean to tell me dey chargin umto let um show here? I'd pay ten dollars to see dat man pick dat saw, ef I had to. I figures dat tomorrow mawnin I be still owin um nine dollars and sixbits at dat rate."

And then a Yankee will talk your head off about niggers getting ahead. Get them ahead, what I say. Get them so far ahead you cant find one south of Louisville with a blood hound. Because when I told him about how they'd pick up Saturday night and carry off at least a thousand dollars out of the county, he says,

"I don't begrudge um. I kin sho afford my two bits."

"Two bits hell," I says. "That dont begin it. How about the dime or fifteen cents you'll spend for a damn two cent box of candy or something. How about the time you're wasting right now, listening to that band."

“Dat’s de troof,” he says. “Well, ef I lives twell night hit’s gwine to be two bits mo dey takin out of town, dat’s sho.”

“Then you’re a fool,” I says.

“Well,” he says, “I dont spute dat neither. Ef dat uz a crime, all chain-gangs wouldn’t be black.”

Well, just about that time I happened to look up the alley and saw her. When I stepped back and looked at my watch I didn’t notice at the time who he was because I was looking at the watch. It was just two thirty, forty-five minutes before anybody but me expected her to be out. So when I looked around the door the first thing I saw was the red tie he had on and I was thinking what the hell kind of a man would wear a red tie. But she was sneaking along the alley, watching the door, so I wasn’t thinking anything about him until they had gone past. I was wondering if she’d have so little respect for me that she’d not only play out of school when I told her not to, but would walk right past the store, daring me not to see her. Only she couldn’t see into the door because the sun fell straight into it and it was like trying to see through an automobile searchlight, so I stood there and watched her go on past, with her face painted up like a damn clown’s and her hair all gummed and twisted and a dress that if a woman had come out doors even on Gayoso or Beale street when I was a young fellow with no more than that to cover her legs and behind, she’d been thrown in jail. I’ll be damned if they dont dress like they were trying to make every man they passed on the street want to reach out and clap his hand on it. And so I was thinking what kind of a damn man would wear a red tie when all of a sudden I knew he was one of those show folks well as if she’d told me. Well, I can stand a lot; if I couldn’t, damn if I wouldn’t be in a hell of a fix, so when they turned the corner I jumped down and followed. Me, without any hat, in the middle of the afternoon, having to chase up and down back alleys because of my mother’s good name. Like I say you cant do anything with a woman like that, if she’s got it in her. If it’s in her blood, you cant do anything with her. The only thing you can do is to get rid of her, let her go on and live with her own sort.

I went on to the street, but they were out of sight. And there I was, without any hat, looking like I was crazy too. Like a man would naturally think, one of them is crazy and another one drowned himself and the

other one was turned out into the street by her husband, what's the reason the rest of them are not crazy too. All the time I could see them watching me like a hawk, waiting for a chance to say Well I'm not surprised I expected it all the time the whole family's crazy. Selling land to send him to Harvard and paying taxes to support a state University all the time that I never saw except twice at a baseball game and not letting her daughter's name be spoken on the place until after a while Father wouldn't even come down town anymore but just sat there all day with the decanter I could see the bottom of his nightshirt and his bare legs and hear the decanter clinking until finally T. P. had to pour it for him and she says You have no respect for your Father's memory and I says I don't know why not it sure is preserved well enough to last only if I'm crazy too God knows what I'll do about it just to look at water makes me sick and I'd just as soon swallow gasoline as a glass of whiskey and Lorraine telling them he may not drink but if you don't believe he's a man I can tell you how to find out she says If I catch you fooling with any of these whores you know what I'll do she says I'll whip her grabbing at her I'll whip her as long as I can find her she says and I says if I don't drink that's my business but have you ever found me short I says I'll buy you enough beer to take a bath in if you want it because I've got every respect for a good honest whore because with Mother's health and the position I try to uphold to have her with no more respect for what I try to do for her than to make her name and my name and my Mother's name a byword in the town.

She had dodged out of sight somewhere. Saw me coming and dodged into another alley, running up and down the alleys with a damn show man in a red tie that everybody would look at and think what kind of a damn man would wear a red tie. Well, the boy kept speaking to me and so I took the telegram without knowing I had taken it. I didn't realise what it was until I was signing for it, and I tore it open without even caring much what it was. I knew all the time what it would be, I reckon. That was the only thing else that could happen, especially holding it up until I had already had the check entered on the pass book.

I don't see how a city no bigger than New York can hold enough people to take the money away from us country suckers. Work like hell all day every day, send them your money and get a little piece of paper back, Your account closed at 20.62. Teasing you along, letting you pile up a

little paper profit, then bang! Your account closed at 20.62. And if that wasn't enough, paying ten dollars a month to somebody to tell you how to lose it fast, that either don't know anything about it or is in cahoots with the telegraph company. Well, I'm done with them. They've sucked me in for the last time. Any fool except a fellow that hasn't got any more sense than to take a Jew's word for anything could tell the market was going up all the time, with the whole damn delta about to be flooded again and the cotton washed right out of the ground like it was last

year. Let it wash a man's crop out of the ground year after year, and them up there in Washington spending fifty thousand dollars a day keeping an army in Nicaragua or some place. Of course it'll overflow again, and then cotton'll be worth thirty cents a pound. Well, I just want to hit them one time and get my money back. I don't want a killing; only these small town gamblers are out for that, I just want my money back that these damn Jews have gotten with all their guaranteed inside dope. Then I'm through; they can kiss my foot for every other red cent of mine they get.

I went back to the store. It was half past three almost. Damn little time to do anything in, but then I am used to that. I never had to go to Harvard to learn that. The band had quit playing. Got them all inside now, and they wouldn't have to waste any more wind. Earl says, "He found you, did he? He was in here with it a while ago. I thought you were out back somewhere."

"Yes," I says, "I got it. They couldn't keep it away from me all afternoon. The town's too small. I've got to go out home a minute," I says. "You can dock me if it'll make you feel any better."

"Go ahead," he says, "I can handle it now. No bad news, I hope."

"You'll have to go to the telegraph office and find that out," I says.

"They'll have time to tell you. I haven't."

"I just asked," he says. "Your mother knows she can depend on me."

"She'll appreciate it," I says. "I won't be gone any longer than I have to."

"Take your time," he says. "I can handle it now. You go ahead."

I got the car and went home. Once this morning, twice at noon, and now again, with her and having to chase all over town and having to beg them to let me eat a little of the food I am paying for. Sometimes I think what's the use of anything. With the precedent I've been set I

must be crazy to keep on. And now I reckon I'll get home just in time to take a nice long drive after a basket of tomatoes or something and then have to go back to town smelling like a camphor factory so my head wont explode right on my shoulders. I keep telling her there's not a damn thing in that aspirin except flour and water for imaginary invalids. I says you dont know what a headache is. I says you think I'd fool with that damn car at all if it depended on me. I says I can get along without one I've learned to get along without lots of things but if you want to risk yourself in that old wornout surrey with a halfgrown nigger boy all right because I says God looks after Ben's kind, God knows He ought to do something for himbut if you think I'm going to trust a thousand dollars' worth of delicate machinery to a halfgrown nigger or a grown one either, you'd better buy him one yourself because I says you like to ride in the car and you know you do.

Dilsey said Mother was in the house. I went on into the hall and listened, but I didn't hear anything. I went up stairs, but just as I passed her door she called me.

"I just wanted to know who it was," she says. "I'm here alone so much that I hear every sound."

"You dont have to stay here," I says. "You could spend the whole day visiting like other women, if you wanted to." She came to the door.

"I thought maybe you were sick," she says. "Having to hurry through your dinner like you did."

"Better luck next time," I says. "What do you want?" "Is anything wrong?" she says.

"What could be?" I says. "Cant I come home in the middle of the afternoon without upsetting the whole house?"

"Have you seen Quentin?" she says. "She's in school," I says.

"It's after three," she says. "I heard the clock strike at least a half an hour ago. She ought to be home by now."

"Ought she?" I says. "When have you ever seen her before dark?" "She ought to be home," she says. "When I was a girl. . ."

"You had somebody to make you behave yourself," I says. "She hasn't."

"I can't do anything with her," she says. "I've tried and I've tried."

“And you wont let me, for some reason,” I says, “So you ought to be satisfied.” I went on to my room. I turned the key easy and stood there until the knob turned. Then she says,

“Jason.” “What,” I says.

“I just thought something was wrong.”

“Not in here,” I says. “You’ve come to the wrong place.” “I dont mean to worry you,” she says.

“I’m glad to hear that,” I says. “I wasn’t sure. I thought I might have been mistaken. Do you want anything?”

After awhile she says, “No. Not any thing.” Then she went away. I took the box down and counted out the money and hid the box again and unlocked the door and went out. I thought about the camphor, but it would be too late now, anyway. And I’d just have one more round trip. She was at her door, waiting.

“You want anything from town?” I says.

“No,” she says. “I dont mean to meddle in your affairs. But I dont know what I’d do if anything happened to you, Jason.”

“I’m all right,” I says. “Just a headache.”

“I wish you’d take some aspirin,” she says. “I know you’re not going to stop using the car.”

“What’s the car got to do with it?” I says. “How can a car give a man a headache?”

“You know gasoline always made you sick,” she says. “Ever since you were a child. I wish you’d take some aspirin.”

“Keep on wishing it,” I says. “It wont hurt you.”

I got in the car and started back to town. I had just turned onto the street when I saw a ford coming helling toward me. All of a sudden it stopped. I could hear the wheels sliding and it slewed around and backed and whirled and just as I was thinking what the hell they were up to, I saw that red tie. Then I recognised her face looking back through the window. It whirled into the alley. I saw it turn again, but when I got to the back street it was just disappearing, running like hell. I saw red. When I recognised that red tie, after all I had told her, I forgot about everything. I never thought about my head even until I came to the first forks and had to stop. Yet we spend money and spend money on roads and damn if it isn’t like trying to drive over a sheet of corrugated iron roofing. I’d like to know how a man could be expected

to keep up with even a wheelbarrow. I think too much of my car; I'm not going to hammer it to pieces like it was a Ford. Chances were they had stolen it, anyway, so why should they give a damn. Like I say blood always tells. If you've got blood like that in you, you'll do anything. I says whatever claim you believe she has on you has already been discharged; I says from now on you have only yourself to blame because you know what any sensible person would do. I says if I've got to spend half my time being a damn detective, at least I'll go where I can get paid for it.

So I had to stop there at the forks. Then I remembered it. It felt like somebody was inside with a hammer, beating on it. I says I've tried to keep you from being worried by her; I says far as I'm concerned, let her go to hell as fast as she pleases and the sooner the better. I says what else do you expect except every drummer and cheap show that comes to town because even these town jellybeans give her the go-by now. You don't know what goes on I says, you don't hear the talk that I hear and you can just bet I shut them up too. I says my people owned slaves here when you all were running little shirt tail country stores and farming land no nigger would look at on shares.

If they ever farmed it. It's a good thing the Lord did something for this country; the folks that live on it never have. Friday afternoon, and from right here I could see three miles of land that hadn't even been broken, and every able bodied man in the county in town at that show. I might have been a stranger starving to death, and there wasn't a soul in sight to ask which way to town even. And she trying to get me to take aspirin. I says when I eat bread I'll do it at the table. I says you always talking about how much you give up for us when you could buy ten new dresses a year on the money you spend for those damn patent medicines. It's not something to cure it I need it's just an even break not to have to have them but as long as I have to work ten hours a day to support a kitchen full of niggers in the style they're accustomed to and send them to the show with every other nigger in the county, only he was late already. By the time he got there it would be over.

After awhile he got up to the car and when I finally got it through his head if two people in a Ford had passed him, he said yes. So I went on, and when I came to where the wagon road turned off I could see the tire tracks. Ab Russell was in his lot, but I didn't bother to ask him and I

hadn't got out of sight of his barn hardly when I saw the ford. They had tried to hide it. Done about as well at it as she did at everything else she did. Like I say it's not that I object to so much; maybe she can't help that, it's because she hasn't even got enough consideration for her own family to have any discretion. I'm afraid all the time I'll run into them right in the middle of the street or under a wagon on the square, like a couple of dogs.

I parked and got out. And now I'd have to go way around and cross a plowed field, the only one I had seen since I left town, with every step like somebody was walking along behind me, hitting me on the head with a club. I kept thinking that when I got across the field at least I'd have something level to walk on, that wouldn't jolt me every step, but when I got into the woods it was full of underbrush and I had to twist around through it, and then I came to a ditch full of briars. I went along it for awhile, but it got thicker and thicker, and all the time Earl probably telephoning home about where I was and getting Mother all upset again.

When I finally got through I had had to wind around so much that I had to stop and figure out just where the car would be. I knew they wouldn't be far from it, just under the closest bush, so I turned and worked back toward the road. Then I couldn't tell just how far I was, so I'd have to stop and listen, and then with my legs not using so much blood, it all would go into my head like it would explode any minute, and the sun getting down just to where it could shine straight into my eyes and my ears ringing so I couldn't hear anything. I went on, trying to move quiet, then I heard a dog or something and I knew that when he scented me he'd have to come helling up, then it would be all off. I had gotten beggar lice and twigs and stuff all over me, inside my clothes and shoes and all, and then I happened to look around and I had my hand right on a bunch of poison oak. The only thing I couldn't understand was why it was just poison oak and not a snake or something. So I didn't even bother to move it. I just stood there until the dog went away. Then I went on.

I didn't have any idea where the car was now. I couldn't think about anything except my head, and I'd just stand in one place and sort of wonder if I had really seen a ford even, and I didn't even care much whether I had or not. Like I say, let her lay out all day and all night with

everything in town that wears pants, what do I care. I don't owe anything to anybody that has no more consideration for me, that wouldn't be a damn bit above planting that Ford there and making me spend a whole afternoon and Earl taking her back there and showing her the books just because he's too damn virtuous for this world. I says you'll have one hell of a time in heaven, without anybody's business to meddle in only don't you ever let me catch you at it I says, I close my eyes to it because of your grandmother, but just you let me catch you doing it one time on this place, where my mother lives. These damn little slick haired squirts, thinking they are raising so much hell, I'll show them something about hell I says, and you too. I'll make him think that damn red tie is the latch string to hell, if he thinks he can run the woods with my niece.

With the sun and all in my eyes and my blood going so I kept thinking every time my head would go on and burst and get it over with, with briars and things grabbing at me, then I came onto the sand ditch where they had been and I recognised the tree where the car was, and just as I got out of the ditch and started running I heard the car start. It went off fast, blowing the horn. They kept on blowing it, like it was saying Yah. Yah. Yaaahhhhhhhh, going out of sight. I got to the road just in time to see it go out of sight.

By the time I got up to where my car was, they were clean out of sight, the horn still blowing. Well, I never thought anything about it except I was saying Run. Run back to town. Run home and try to convince Mother that I never saw you in that car. Try to make her believe that I don't know who he was. Try to make her believe that I didn't miss ten feet of catching you in that ditch. Try to make her believe you were standing up, too.

It kept on saying Yahhhh, Yahhhh, Yaaahhhhhhhh, getting fainter and fainter. Then it quit, and I could hear a cow lowing up at Russell's barn. And still I never thought. I went up to the door and opened it and raised my foot. I kind of thought then that the car was leaning a little more than the slant of the road would be, but I never found it out until I got in and started off.

Well, I just sat there. It was getting on toward sundown, and town was about five miles. They never even had guts enough to puncture it, to jab a hole in it. They just let the air out. I just stood there for awhile,

thinking about that kitchen full of niggers and not one of them had time to lift a tire onto the rack and screw up a couple of bolts. It was kind of funny because even she couldn't have seen far enough ahead to take the pump out on purpose, unless she thought about it while he was letting out the air maybe. But what it probably was, was somebody took it out and gave it to Ben to play with for a squirt gun because they'd take the whole car to pieces if he wanted it and Dilsey says, Aint nobody teched yo car. What we want to fool with hit fer? and I says You're a nigger. You're lucky, do you know it? I says I'll swap with you any day because it takes a white man not to have anymore sense than to worry about what a little slut of a girl does.

I walked up to Russell's. He had a pump. That was just an oversight on their part, I reckon. Only I still couldn't believe she'd have had the nerve to. I kept thinking that. I dont know why it is I cant seem to learn that a woman'll do anything. I kept thinking, Let's forget for awhile how I feel toward you and how you feel toward me: I just wouldn't do you this way. I wouldn't do

you this way no matter what you had done to me. Because like I say blood is blood and you cant get around it. It's not playing a joke that any eight year old boy could have thought of, it's letting your own uncle be laughed at by a man that would wear a red tie. They come into town and call us all a bunch of hicks and think it's too small to hold them. Well he doesn't know just how right he is. And her too. If that's the way she feels about it, she'd better keep right on going and a damn good riddance.

I stopped and returned Russell's pump and drove on to town. I went to the drugstore and got a coca-cola and then I went to the telegraph office. It had closed at 12.21, forty points down. Forty times five dollars; buy something with that if you can, and she'll say, I've got to have it I've just got to and I'll say that's too bad you'll have to try somebody else, I haven't got any money; I've been too busy to make any.

I just looked at him.

"I'll tell you some news," I says, "You'll be astonished to learn that I am interested in the cotton market," I says. "That never occurred to you, did it?"

"I did my best to deliver it," he says. "I tried the store twice and called up your house, but they didn't know where you were," he says, digging in the drawer.

"Deliver what?" I says. He handed me a telegram. "What time did this come?" I says. "About half past three," he says.

"And now it's ten minutes past five," I says.

"I tried to deliver it," he says. "I couldn't find you."

"That's not my fault, is it?" I says. I opened it, just to see what kind of a lie they'd tell me this time. They must be in one hell of a shape if they've got to come all the way to Mississippi to steal ten dollars a month. Sell, it says. The market will be unstable, with a general downward tendency. Do not be alarmed following government report.

"How much would a message like this cost?" I says. He told me. "They paid it," he says.

"Then I owe them that much," I says. "I already knew this. Send this collect," I says, taking a blank. Buy, I wrote, Market just on point of blowing its head off. Occasional flurries for purpose of hooking a few more country suckers who haven't got in to the telegraph office yet. Do not be alarmed. "Send that collect," I says.

He looked at the message, then he looked at the clock. "Market closed an hour ago," he says.

"Well," I says, "That's not my fault either. I didn't invent it; I just bought a little of it while under the impression that the telegraph company would keep me informed as to what it was doing."

"A report is posted whenever it comes in," he says.

"Yes," I says, "And in Memphis they have it on a blackboard every ten seconds," I says. "I was within sixty-seven miles of there once this afternoon."

He looked at the message. "You want to send this?" he says.

"I still haven't changed my mind," I says. I wrote the other one out and counted the money. "And this one too, if you're sure you can spell b-u-y."

I went back to the store. I could hear the band from down the street. Prohibition's a fine thing. Used to be they'd come in Saturday with just one pair of shoes in the family and him wearing them, and they'd go down to the express office and get his package; now they all go to the

show barefooted, with the merchants in the door like a row of tigers or something in a cage, watching them pass. Earl says,

"I hope it wasn't anything serious."

"What?" I says. He looked at his watch. Then he went to the door and looked at the courthouse clock. "You ought to have a dollar watch," I says. "It wont cost you so much to believe it's lying each time."

"What?" he says.

"Nothing," I says. "Hope I haven't inconvenienced you."

"We were not busy much," he says. "They all went to the show. It's allright." "If it's not allright," I says, "You know what you can do about it."

"I said it was allright," he says.

"I heard you," I says. "And if it's not allright, you know what you can do about it." "Do you want to quit?" he says.

"It's not my business," I says. "My wishes dont matter. But dont get the idea that you are protecting me by keeping me."

"You'd be a good business man if you'd let yourself, Jason," he says.

"At least I can tend to my own business and let other peoples' alone," I says.

"I dont know why you are trying to make me fire you," he says. "You know you could quit anytime and there wouldn't be any hard feelings between us."

"Maybe that's why I dont quit," I says. "As long as I tend to my job, that's what you are paying me for." I went on to the back and got a drink of water and went on out to the back door. Job had the cultivators all set up at last. It was quiet there, and pretty soon my head got a little easier. I could hear them singing now, and then the band played again. Well, let them get every quarter and dime in the county; it was no skin off my back. I've done what I could; a man that can live as long as I have and not know when to quit is a fool. Especially as it's no business of mine. If it was my own daughter now it would be different, because she wouldn't have time to; she'd have to work some to feed a few invalids and idiots and niggers, because how could I have the face to bring anybody there. I've too much respect for anybody to do that. I'm a man, I can stand it, it's my own flesh and blood and I'd like to see the colour of the man's eyes that would speak disrespectful of any woman that was my friend it's these damn good women that do it I'd

like to see the good, church-going woman that's half as square as Lorraine, whore or no whore. Like I say if I was to get married you'd go up like a balloon and you know it and she says I want you to be happy to have a family of your own not to slave your life away for us. But I'll be gone soon and then you can take a wife but you'll never find a woman who is worthy of you and I says yes I could. You'd get right up out of your grave you know you would. I says no thank you I have all the women I can take care of now if I married a wife she'd probably turn out to be a hophead or something. That's all we lack in this family, I says.

The sun was down beyond the Methodist church now, and the pigeons were flying back and forth around the steeple, and when the band stopped I could hear them cooing. It hadn't been four months since Christmas, and yet they were almost as thick as ever. I reckon Parson Walthall was getting a belly full of them now. You'd have thought we were shooting people, with him making speeches and even holding onto a man's gun when they came over. Talking about peace on earth good will toward all and not a sparrow can fall to earth. But what does he care how thick they get, he hasn't got anything to do; what does he care what time it is. He pays no taxes, he doesn't have to see his money going every year to have the courthouse clock cleaned to where it'll run. They had to pay a man forty-five dollars to clean it. I counted over a hundred half-hatched pigeons on the ground. You'd think they'd have sense enough to leave town. It's a good thing I don't have any more ties than a pigeon, I'll say that.

The band was playing again, a loud fast tune, like they were breaking up. I reckon they'd be satisfied now. Maybe they'd have enough music to entertain them while they drove fourteen or fifteen miles home and unharnessed in the dark and fed the stock and milked. All they'd have to do would be to whistle the music and tell the jokes to the live stock in the barn, and then they could count up how much they'd made by not taking the stock to the show too. They could figure that if a man had five children and seven mules, he cleared a quarter by taking his family to the show. Just like that. Earl came back with a couple of packages. "Here's some more stuff going out," he says. "Where's Uncle Job?" "Gone to the show, I imagine," I says. "Unless you watched him." "He doesn't slip off," he says. "I can depend on him."

"Meaning me by that," I says.

He went to the door and looked out, listening.

"That's a good band," he says. "It's about time they were breaking up, I'd say."

"Unless they're going to spend the night there," I says. The swallows had begun, and I could hear the sparrows beginning to swarmin the trees in the courthouse yard. Every once in a while a bunch of them would come swirling around in sight above the roof, then go away. They are as big a nuisance as the pigeons, to my notion. You cant even sit in the courthouse yard for them. First thing you know, bing. Right on your hat. But it would take a millionaire to afford to shoot them at five cents a shot. If they'd just put a little poison out there in the square, they'd get rid of them in a day, because if a merchant cant keep his stock from running around the square, he'd better try to deal in something besides chickens, something that dont eat, like plows or onions. And if a man dont keep his dogs up, he either dont want it or he hasn't any business with one. Like I say if all the businesses in a town are run like country businesses, you're going to have a country town. "It wont do you any good if they have broke up," I says. "They'll have to hitch up and take out to get home by midnight as it is."

"Well," he says, "They enjoy it. Let them spend a little money on a show now and then. A hillfarmer works pretty hard and gets mighty little for it."

"There's no law making them farmin the hills," I says, "Or anywhere else." "Where would you and me be, if it wasn't for the farmers?" he says.

"I'd be home right now," I says, "Lying down, with an ice pack on my head."

"You have these headaches too often," he says. "Why dont you have your teeth examined good? Did he go over them all this morning?"

"Did who?" I says.

"You said you went to the dentist this morning."

"Do you object to my having the headache on your time?" I says. "Is that it?" They were crossing the alley now, coming up from the show.

"There they come," he says. "I reckon I better get up front." He went on. It's a curious thing how no matter what's wrong with you, a man'll tell you to have your teeth examined and a woman'll tell you to

get married. It always takes a man that never made much at any thing to tell you how to run your business, though. Like these college professors without a whole pair of socks to their name, telling you how to make a million in ten years, and a woman that couldn't even get a husband can always tell you how to raise a family.

Old man Job came up with the wagon. After a while he got through wrapping the lines around the whip socket.

"Well," I says, "Was it a good show?"

"I aint been yit," he says. "But I kin be arrested in dat tent tonight, dough."

"Like hell you haven't," I says. "You've been away from here since three oclock. Mr Earl was just back here looking for you."

"I been tendin to my business," he says. "Mr Earl knows whar I been."

"You may can fool him," I says. "I wont tell on you."

"Den he's de onliest man here I'd try to fool," he says. "Whut I want to waste my time foolin a man whut I dont keer whether I sees him Sat'dy night er not? I wont try to fool you," he says. "You too smart fer me.

Yes, suh," he says, looking busy as hell, putting five or six little packages into the wagon, "You's too smart fer me. Aint a man in dis town kin keep up wid you fer smartness. You fools a man whut so smart he cant even keep up wid hisself," he says, getting in the wagon and unwrapping the reins.

"Who's that?" I says.

"Dat's Mr Jason Compson," he says. "Git up dar, Dan!"

One of the wheels was just about to come off. I watched to see if he'd get out of the alley before it did. Just turn any vehicle over to a nigger, though. I says that old rattletrap's just an eyesore, yet you'll keep it standing there in the carriage house a hundred years just so that boy can ride to the cemetery once a week. I says he's not the first fellow that'll have to do things he doesn't want to. I'd make him ride in that car like a civilised man or stay at home. What does he know about where he goes or what he goes in, and us keeping a carriage and a horse so he can take a ride on Sunday afternoon.

A lot Job cared whether the wheel came off or not, long as he wouldn't have too far to walk back. Like I say the only place for them is in the field, where they'd have to work from sun up to sundown. They cant stand prosperity or an easy job. Let one stay around white people for a

while and he's not worth killing. They get so they can outguess you about work before your very eyes, like Roskus the only mistake he ever made was he got careless one day and died. Shirking and stealing and giving you a little more lip and a little more lip until some day you have to lay them out with a scantling or something. Well, it's Earl's business. But I'd hate to have my business advertised over this town by an old doddering nigger and a wagon that you thought every time it turned a corner it would come allto pieces.

The sun was all high up in the air now, and inside it was beginning to get dark. I went up front. The square was empty. Earl was back closing the safe, and then the clock begun to strike. "You lock the back door," he says. I went back and locked it and came back. "I suppose you're going to the show tonight," he says. "I gave you those passes yesterday, didn't I?" "Yes," I said. "You want them back?" "No, no," he says, "I just forgot whether I gave them to you or not. No sense in wasting them."

He locked the door and said Goodnight and went on. The sparrows were still rattling away in the trees, but the square was empty except for a few cars. There was a ford in front of the drugstore, but I didn't even look at it. I know when I've had enough of anything. I dont mind trying to help her, but I know when I've had enough. I guess I could teach Luster to drive it, then they could chase her all day long if they wanted to, and I could stay home and play with Ben.

I went in and got a couple of cigars. Then I thought I'd have another headache shot for luck, and I stood and talked with them awhile. "Well," Mac says, "I reckon you've got your money on the Yankees this year." "What for?" I says.

"The Pennant," he says. "Not anything in the League can beat them."

"Like hell there's not," I says. "They're shot," I says. "You think a team can be that lucky forever?"

"I dont callit luck," Mac says.

"I wouldn't bet on any team that fellow Ruth played on," I says. "Even if I knew it was going to win."

"Yes?" Mac says.

"I can name you a dozen men in either League who're more valuable than he is," I says. "What have you got against Ruth?" Mac says.

"Nothing," I says. "I haven't got any thing against him. I dont even like to look at his picture." I went on out. The lights were coming on, and people going along the streets toward home. Sometimes the sparrows never got still until full dark. The night they turned on the new lights around the courthouse it waked them up and they were flying around and blundering into the lights allnight long. They kept it up two or three nights, then one morning they were all gone. Then after about two months they allcame back again.

I drove on home. There were no lights in the house yet, but they'd all be looking out the windows, and Dilsey jawing away in the kitchen like it was her own food she was having to keep hot until I got there. You'd think to hear her that there wasn't but one supper in the world, and that was the one she had to keep back a few minutes on my account. Well at least I could come home one time without finding Ben and that nigger hanging on the gate like a bear and a monkey in the same cage. Just let it come toward sundown and he'd head for the gate like a cow for the barn, hanging onto it and bobbing his head and sort of moaning to himself. That's a hog for punishment for you. If what had happened to him for fooling with open gates had happened to me, I never would want to see another one. I often wondered what he'd be thinking about, down there at the gate, watching the girls going home from school, trying to want something he couldn't even remember he didn't and couldn't want any longer. And what he'd think when they'd be undressing him and he'd happen to take a look at himself and begin to cry like he'd do. But like I say they never did enough of that. I says I know what you need, you need what they did to Ben then you'd behave. And if you dont know what that was I says, ask Dilsey to tellyou.

There was a light in Mother's room. I put the car up and went on into the kitchen. Luster and Ben were there.

"Where's Dilsey?" I says. "Putting supper on?"

"She upstairs wid Miss Cahline," Luster says. "Dey been goin hit. Ever since Miss Quentin come home. Mammy up there keepin umfumfightin. Is dat show come, Mr Jason?"

"Yes," I says.

"I thought I heard de band," he says. "Wish I could go," he says. "I could ef I jes had a quarter."

Dilsey came in. "You come, is you?" she says. "Whut you been up to dis evenin? You knows how much work I got to do; whyn't you git here on time?"

"Maybe I went to the show," I says. "Is supper ready?" "Wish I could go," Luster said. "I could ef I jes had a quarter."

"You aint got no business at no show," Dilsey says. "You go on in de house and set down," she says. "Dont you go up stairs and git umstarted again, now."

"What's the matter?" I says.

"Quentin come in a while ago and says you been follerin her around all evenin and den Miss Cahline jumped on her. Whyn't you let her alone? Cant you live in de same house wid you own blood niece widout quoilin?"

"I cant quarrel with her," I says, "because I haven't seen her since this morning. What does she say I've done now? made her go to school? That's pretty bad," I says.

"Well, you tend to yo business and let her alone," Dilsey says, "I'll take keer of her ef you'n Miss Cahline'lllet me. Go on in dar now and behave yoself twelll get supper on."

"Ef I jes had a quarter," Luster says, "I could go to dat show."

"En ef you had wings you could fly to heaven," Dilsey says. "I dont want to hear another word about dat show."

"That reminds me," I says, "I've got a couple of tickets they gave me." I took them out of my coat.

"You fixin to use um?" Luster says.

"Not me," I says. "I wouldn't go to it for ten dollars." "Gimme one of um, Mr Jason," he says.

"I'llsellyou one," I says. "How about it?" "I aint got no money," he says.

"That's too bad," I says. I made to go out.

"Gimme one of um, Mr Jason," he says. "You aint gwine need umbofe."

"Hush yo mouf," Dilsey says, "Dont you know he aint gwine give nothing away?" "How much you want fer hit?" he says.

"Five cents," I says.

"I aint got dat much," he says. "How much you got?" I says. "I aint got nothing," he says. "Alright," I says. I went on. "Mr Jason," he says. "Whyn't you hush up?" Dilsey says. "He jes teasin you. He fixin to use demtickets hisself. Go on, Jason, and let him lone."

"I dont want them," I says. I came back to the stove. "I came in here to burn them up. But if you want to buy one for a nickel?" I says, looking at him and opening the stove lid.

"I aint got dat much," he says.

"Alright," I says. I dropped one of them in the stove. "You, Jason," Dilsey says, "Aint you shamed?"

"Mr Jason," he says, "Please, suh. I'll fix dem tires ev'ry day fer a mont'."

"I need the cash," I says. "You can have it for a nickel."

"Hush, Luster," Dilsey says. She jerked him back. "Go on," she says, "Drop hit in. Go on. Git hit over with."

"You can have it for a nickel," I says.

"Go on," Dilsey says. "He aint got no nickel. Go on. Drop hit in."

"Alright," I says. I dropped it in and Dilsey shut the stove.

"A big growed man like you," she says. "Git on outen my kitchen.

Hush," she says to Luster. "Dont you git Benjy started. I'll git you a quarter fum Frony tonight and you kin go tomorrow night. Hush up, now."

I went on into the living room. I couldn't hear anything from upstairs. I opened the paper. After awhile Ben and Luster came in. Ben went to the dark place on the wall where the mirror used to be, rubbing his hands on it and slobbering and moaning. Luster begun punching at the fire.

"What're you doing?" I says. "We dont need any fire tonight."

"I trying to keep him quiet," he says. "Hit always cold Easter," he says.

"Only this is not Easter," I says. "Let it alone."

He put the poker back and got the cushion out of Mother's chair and gave it to Ben, and he hunkered down in front of the fireplace and got quiet.

I read the paper. There hadn't been a sound from upstairs when Dilsey came in and sent Ben and Luster on to the kitchen and said supper was ready.

"All right," I says. She went out. I sat there, reading the paper. After a while I heard Dilsey looking in at the door.

"Whyn't you come on and eat?" she says. "I'm waiting for supper," I says.

"Hit's on the table," she says. "I done told you."

"Is it?" I says. "Excuse me. I didn't hear anybody come down."

"They aint comin," she says. "You come on and eat, so I can take something up to them." "Are they sick?" I says. "What did the doctor say it was? Not Smallpox, I hope."

"Come on here, Jason," she says, "So I kin git done."

"Alright," I says, raising the paper again. "I'm waiting for supper now." I could feel her watching me at the door. I read the paper.

"Whut you want to act like this fer?" she says. "When you knows how much bother I has anyway."

"If Mother is any sicker than she was when she came down to dinner, alright," I says. "But as long as I am buying food for people younger than I am, they'll have to come down to the table to eat it. Let me know when supper's ready," I says, reading the paper again. I heard her climbing the stairs, dragging her feet and grunting and groaning like they were straight up and three feet apart. I heard her at Mother's door, then I heard her calling Quentin, like the door was locked, then she went back to Mother's room and then Mother went and talked to Quentin. Then they came down stairs. I read the paper.

Dilsey came back to the door. "Come on," she says, "fo you kin think up some mo devilment. You just tryin yoself tonight."

I went to the diningroom. Quentin was sitting with her head bent. She had painted her face again. Her nose looked like a porcelain insulator.

"I'm glad you feel well enough to come down," I says to Mother.

"It's little enough I can do for you, to come to the table," she says. "No matter how I feel. I realise that when a man works all day he likes to be

surrounded by his family at the supper table. I want to please you. I only wish you and Quentin got along better. It would be easier for me.”
“We get along alright,” I says. “I dont mind her staying locked up in her room all day if she wants to. But I cant have all this whoop-de-do and sulking at mealtimes. I know that’s a lot to ask her, but I’m that way in my own house. Your house, I meant to say.”

“It’s yours,” Mother says, “You are the head of it now.”

Quentin hadn’t looked up. I helped the plates and she begun to eat.

“Did you get a good piece of meat?” I says. “If you didn’t, I’ll try to find you a better one.” She didn’t say anything.

“I say, did you get a good piece of meat?” I says. “What?” she says.

“Yes. It’s alright.”

“Will you have some more rice?” I says. “No,” she says.

“Better let me give you some more,” I says. “I dont want any more,” she says.

“Not at all,” I says, “You’re welcome.” “Is your headache gone?”

Mother says. “Headache?” I says.

“I was afraid you were developing one,” she says. “When you came in this afternoon.” “Oh,” I says. “No, it didn’t show up. We stayed so busy this afternoon I forgot about it.” “Was that why you were late?”

Mother says. I could see Quentin listening. I looked at her.

Her knife and fork were still going, but I caught her looking at me, then she looked at her plate again. I says,

“No. I loaned my car to a fellow about three o’clock and I had to wait until he got back with it.” I ate for a while.

“Who was it?” Mother says.

“It was one of those show men,” I says. “It seems his sister’s husband was out riding with some town woman, and he was chasing them.”

Quentin sat perfectly still, chewing.

“You ought not to lend your car to people like that,” Mother says. “You are too generous with it. That’s why I never call on you for it if I can help it.”

“I was beginning to think that myself, for awhile,” I says. “But he got back, all right. He says he found what he was looking for.”

“Who was the woman?” Mother says.

"I'll tell you later," I says. "I dont like to talk about such things before Quentin."

Quentin had quit eating. Every once in a while she'd take a drink of water, then she'd sit there crumbling a biscuit up, her face bent over her plate.

"Yes," Mother says, "I suppose women who stay shut up like I do have no idea what goes on in this town."

"Yes," I says, "They dont."

"My life has been so different from that," Mother says. "Thank God I dont know about such wickedness. I dont even want to know about it. I'm not like most people."

I didn't say any more. Quentin sat there, crumbling the biscuit until I quit eating, then she says,

"Can I go now?" without looking at anybody.

"What?" I says. "Sure, you can go. Were you waiting on us?"

She looked at me. She had crumbled all the biscuit, but her hands still went on like they were crumbling it yet and her eyes looked like they were cornered or something and then she started biting her mouth like it ought to have poisoned her, with all that red lead.

"Grandmother," she says, "Grandmother—" "Did you want something else to eat?" I says.

"Why does he treat me like this, Grandmother?" she says. "I never hurt him."

"I want you all to get along with one another," Mother says, "You are all that's left now, and I do want you all to get along better."

"It's his fault," she says, "He wont let me alone, and I have to. If he doesn't want me here, why wont he let me go back to—"

"That's enough," I says, "Not another word."

"Then why wont he let me alone?" she says. "He—he just—"

"He is the nearest thing to a father you've ever had," Mother says. "It's his bread you and I eat. It's only right that he should expect obedience from you."

"It's his fault," she says. She jumped up. "He makes me do it. If he would just—" she looked at us, her eyes cornered, kind of jerking her arms against her sides.

"If I would just what?" I says.

"Whatever I do, it's your fault," she says. "If I'm bad, it's because I had to be. You made me. I wish I was dead. I wish we were all dead." Then she ran. We heard her run up the stairs. Then a door slammed.

"That's the first sensible thing she ever said," I says. "She didn't go to school today," Mother says.

"How do you know?" I says. "Were you down town?"

"I just know," she says. "I wish you could be kinder to her."

"If I did that I'd have to arrange to see her more than once a day," I says. "You'll have to make her come to the table every meal. Then I could give her an extra piece of meat every time."

"There are little things you could do," she says.

"Like not paying any attention when you ask me to see that she goes to school?" I says. "She didn't go to school today," she says. "I just know she didn't. She says she went for a car ride with one of the boys this afternoon and you followed her."

"How could I," I says, "When somebody had my car all afternoon? Whether or not she was in school today is already past," I says, "If you've got to worry about it, worry about next Monday."

"I wanted you and she to get along with one another," she says. "But she has inherited all of the headstrong traits. Quentin's too. I thought at the time, with the heritage she would already have, to give her that name, too. Sometimes I think she is the judgment of Caddy and Quentin upon me."

"Good Lord," I says, "You've got a fine mind. No wonder you kept yourself sick all the time."

"What?" she says. "I dont understand."

"I hope not," I says. "A good woman misses a lot she's better off without knowing."

“They were both that way,” she says, “They would make interest with your father against me when I tried to correct them. He was always saying they didn’t need controlling, that they already knew what cleanliness and honesty were, which was all that anyone could hope to be taught. And now I hope he’s satisfied.”

“You’ve got Ben to depend on,” I says, “Cheer up.”

“They deliberately shut me out of their lives,” she says, “It was always her and Quentin. They were always conspiring against me. Against you too, though you were too young to realise it. They always looked on you and me as outsiders, like they did your Uncle Maury. I always told your father that they were allowed too much freedom, to be together too much. When Quentin started to school we had to let her go the next year, so she could be with him. She couldn’t bear for any of you to do anything she couldn’t. It was vanity in her, vanity and false pride. And then when her troubles began I knew that Quentin would feel that he had to do something just as bad. But I didn’t believe that he would have been so selfish as to—I didn’t dream that he—”

“Maybe he knew it was going to be a girl,” I says, “And that one more of them would be more than he could stand.”

“He could have controlled her,” she says. “He seemed to be the only person she had any consideration for. But that is a part of the judgment too, I suppose.”

“Yes,” I says, “Too bad it wasn’t me instead of him. You’d be a lot better off.”

“You say things like that to hurt me,” she says. “I deserve it though. When they began to sell the land to send Quentin to Harvard I told your father that he must make an equal provision for you. Then when Herbert offered to take you into the bank I said, Jason is provided for now, and when all the expense began to pile up and I was forced to sell our furniture and the rest of the pasture, I wrote her at once because I said she will realise that she and Quentin have had their share and part of Jason’s too and that it depends on her now to compensate him. I said she will do that out of respect for her father. I believed that, then. But I’m just a poor old woman; I was raised to believe that people

would deny themselves for their own flesh and blood. It's my fault. You were right to reproach me."

"Do you think I need any man's help to stand on my feet?" I says, "Let alone a woman that cant name the father of her own child."

"Jason," she says.

"Alright," I says. "I didn't mean that. Of course not." "If I believed that were possible, after allmy suffering." "Of course it's not," I says. "I didn't mean it."

"I hope that at least is spared me," she says.

"Sure it is," I says, "She's too much like both of themto doubt that." "I couldn't bear that," she says.

"Then quit thinking about it," I says. "Has she been worrying you any more about getting out at night?"

"No. I made her realise that it was for her own good and that she'd thank me for it some day. She takes her books with her and studies after I lock the door. I see the light on as late as eleven oclock some nights."

"How do you know she's studying?" I says.

"I don't know what else she'd do in there alone," she says. "She never did read any."

"No," I says, "You wouldn't know. And you can thank your stars for that," I says. Only what would be the use in saying it aloud. It would just have her crying on me again.

I heard her go up stairs. Then she called Quentin and Quentin says What? through the door. "Goodnight," Mother says. Then I heard the key in the lock, and Mother went back to her room.

When I finished my cigar and went up, the light was still on. I could see the empty keyhole, but I couldn't hear a sound. She studied quiet. Maybe she learned that in school.

I told Mother goodnight and went on to my room and got the boxout and counted it again. I could hear the Great American Gelding snoring away like a planing mill. I read somewhere they'd fixmen that way to

give them women's voices. But maybe he didn't know what they'd done to him. I dont reckon he even knew what he had been trying to do, or why Mr Burgess knocked him out with the fence picket. And if they'd just sent him on to Jackson while he was under the ether, he'd never have known the difference. But that would have been too simple for a Compson to think of.

Not half complex enough. Having to wait to do it at all until he broke out and tried to run a little girl down on the street with her own father looking at him. Well, like I say they never started soon enough with their cutting, and they quit too quick. I know at least two more that needed something like that, and one of them not over a mile away, either.

But then I dont reckon even that would do any good. Like I say once a bitch always a bitch. And just let me have twenty-four hours without any damn New York Jew to advise me what it's going to do. I dont want to make a killing; save that to suck in the smart gamblers with. I just want an even chance to get my money back. And once I've done that they can bring all Beale Street and all bedlam here and two of them can sleep in my bed and another one can have my place at the table too.

April 8, 1928

The day dawned bleak and chill, a moving wall of grey light out of the northeast which, instead of dissolving into moisture, seemed to disintegrate into minute and venomous particles, like dust that, when Dilsey opened the door of the cabin and emerged, needled laterally into her flesh, precipitating not so much a moisture as a substance partaking of the quality of thin, not quite congealed oil. She wore a stiff black straw hat perched upon her turban, and a maroon velvet cape with a border of mangy and anonymous fur above a dress of purple silk, and she stood in the door for awhile with her myriad and sunken face lifted to the weather, and one gaunt hand flaccid as the belly of a

fish, then she moved the cape aside and examined the bosom of her gown.

The gown fell gauntly from her shoulders, across her fallen breasts, then tightened upon her paunch and fell again, ballooning a little above the nether garments which she would remove layer by layer as the spring accomplished and the warm days, in colour regal and moribund. She had been a big woman once but now her skeleton rose, draped loosely in unpadded skin that tightened again upon a paunch almost dropsical, as though muscle and tissue had been courage or fortitude which the days or the years had consumed until only the indomitable skeleton was left rising like a ruin or a landmark above the somnolent and impervious guts, and above that the collapsed face that gave the impression of the bones themselves being outside the flesh, lifted into the driving day with an expression at once fatalistic and of a child's astonished disappointment, until she turned and entered the house again and closed the door.

The earth immediately about the door was bare. It had a patina, as though from the soles of bare feet in generations, like old silver or the walls of Mexican houses which have been plastered by hand. Beside the house, shading it in summer, stood three mulberry trees, the fledged leaves that would later be broad and placid as the palms of hands streaming flatly undulant upon the driving air.

A pair of jaybirds came up from nowhere, whirled up on the blast like gaudy scraps of cloth or paper and lodged in the mulberries, where they swung in raucous tilt and recover, screaming into the wind that ripped their harsh cries onward and away like scraps of paper or of cloth in turn.

Then three more joined them and they swung and tilted in the wrung branches for a time, screaming. The door of the cabin opened and Dilsey emerged once more, this time in a man's felt hat and an army overcoat, beneath the frayed skirts of which her blue gingham dress fell in uneven ballooning, streaming too about her as she crossed the yard and mounted the steps to the kitchen door.

A moment later she emerged, carrying an open umbrella now, which she slanted ahead into the wind, and crossed to the woodpile and laid the umbrella down, still open. Immediately she caught at it and arrested it and held to it for a while, looking about her. Then she closed it and laid it down and stacked stovewood into her crooked arm, against her breast, and picked up the umbrella and got it open at last and returned to the steps and held the wood precariously balanced while she contrived to close the umbrella, which she propped in the corner just within the door.

She dumped the wood into the box behind the stove. Then she removed the overcoat and hat and took a soiled apron down from the wall and put it on and built a fire in the stove. While she was doing so, rattling the grate bars and clattering the lids, Mrs Compson began to call her from the head of the stairs.

She wore a dressing gown of quilted black satin, holding it close under her chin. In the other hand she held a red rubber hot water bottle and she stood at the head of the back stairway, calling "Dilsey" at steady and inflectionless intervals into the quiet stairwell that descended into complete darkness, then opened again where a grey window fell across it. "Dilsey," she called, without inflection or emphasis or haste, as though she were not listening for a reply at all. "Dilsey."

Dilsey answered and ceased clattering the stove, but before she could cross the kitchen Mrs Compson called her again, and before she crossed the diningroom and brought her head into relief against the grey splash of the window, still again.

"All right," Dilsey said, "All right, here I is. I'll fill hit soon ez I git some hot water." She gathered up her skirts and mounted the stairs, wholly blotting the grey light. "Put hit down dar en g'awn back to bed."

"I couldn't understand what was the matter," Mrs Compson said. "I've been lying awake for an hour at least, without hearing a sound from the kitchen."

"You put hit down and g'awn back to bed," Dilsey said. She toiled painfully up the steps, shapeless, breathing heavily. "I'll have de fire gwine in a minute, en de water hot in two mo."

"I've been lying there for an hour, at least," Mrs Compson said. "I thought maybe you were waiting for me to come down and start the fire."

Dilsey reached the top of the stairs and took the water bottle. "I'll fix hit in a minute," she said. "Luster overslep dis mawnin, up half de night at dat show. I gwine build de fire myself. Go on now, so you wont wake de others twell ready."

"If you permit Luster to do things that interfere with his work, you'll have to suffer for it yourself," Mrs Compson said. "Jason wont like this if he hears about it. You know he wont."

"Twusn't none of Jason's money he went on," Dilsey said. "Dat's one thing sho." She went on down the stairs. Mrs Compson returned to her room. As she got into bed again she could hear Dilsey yet descending the stairs with a sort of painful and terrific slowness that would have become maddening had it not presently ceased beyond the flapping diminishment of the pantry door.

She entered the kitchen and built up the fire and began to prepare breakfast. In the midst of this she ceased and went to the window and looked out toward her cabin, then she went to the door and opened it and shouted into the driving weather.

"Luster!" she shouted, standing to listen, tilting her face from the wind, "You, Luster?" She listened, then as she prepared to shout again Luster appeared around the corner of the kitchen.

"Ma'am?" he said innocently, so innocently that Dilsey looked down at him, for a moment motionless, with something more than mere surprise.

"Whar you at?" she said. "Nowhere," he said. "Jes in de cellar."

"Whut you doin in de cellar?" she said. "Dont stand dar in de rain, fool," she said. "Aint doin nothin," he said. He came up the steps.

"Dont you dare come in dis do widout a armful of wood," she said.
"Here I done had to tote yo wood en build yo fire bofe. Didn't I tole you not to leave dis place last night befo dat woodboxwus fullto de top?"
"I did," Luster said, "I filled hit." "Whar hit gone to, den?"

"I dont know'm. I aint teched hit."

"Well, you git hit fullup now," she said. "And git on up den en see bout Benjy."

She shut the door. Luster went to the woodpile. The five jaybirds whirled over the house, screaming, and into the mulberries again. He watched them. He picked up a rock and threw it. "Whoo," he said, "Git on back to hell, whar you belong at. 'Taint Monday yit."

He loaded himself mountainously with stove wood. He could not see over it, and he staggered to the steps and up them and blundered crashing against the door, shedding billets. Then Dilsey came and opened the door for him and he blundered across the kitchen. "You, Luster!" she shouted, but he had already hurled the wood into the box with a thunderous crash. "Hah!" he said.

"Is you tryin to wake up de whole house?" Dilsey said. She hit him on the back of his head with the flat of her hand. "Go on up dar and git Benjy dressed, now."

"Yessum," he said. He went toward the outer door. "Whar you gwine?" Dilsey said.

"I thought I better go round de house en in by de front, so I wont wake up Miss Cahline en dem."

"You go on up dem backstairs like I tole you en git Benjy's clothes on him," Dilsey said. "Go on, now."

"Yessum," Luster said. He returned and left by the diningroom door. After awhile it ceased to flap. Dilsey prepared to make biscuit. As she ground the sifter steadily above the bread board, she sang, to herself at first, something without particular tune or words, repetitive, mournful and plaintive, austere, as she ground a faint, steady snowing of flour onto the bread board. The stove had begun to heat the room and to fill it with murmurous minors of the fire, and presently she was singing

louder, as if her voice too had been thawed out by the growing warmth, and then Mrs Compson called her name again from within the house. Dilsey raised her face as if her eyes could and did penetrate the walls and ceiling and saw the old woman in her quilted dressing gown at the head of the stairs, calling her name with machinelike regularity.

“Oh, Lawd,” Dilsey said. She set the sifter down and swept up the hem of her apron and wiped her hands and caught up the bottle from the chair on which she had laid it and gathered her apron about the handle of the kettle which was now jetting faintly. “Jes a minute,” she called, “De water jes dis minute got hot.”

It was not the bottle which Mrs Compson wanted, however, and clutching it by the neck like a dead hen Dilsey went to the foot of the stairs and looked upward.

“Aint Luster up dar wid him?” she said.

“Luster hasn’t been in the house. I’ve been lying here listening for him. I knew he would be late, but I did hope he’d come in time to keep Benjamin from disturbing Jason on Jason’s one day in the week to sleep in the morning.”

“I dont see how you expect anybody to sleep, wid you standin in de hall, holl’in at folks fum de crack of dawn,” Dilsey said. She began to mount the stairs, toiling heavily. “I sont dat boy up dar half hour ago.”

Mrs Compson watched her, holding the dressing gown under her chin.

“What are you going to do?” she said.

“Gwine git Benjy dressed en bring him down to de kitchen, whar he wont wake Jason en Quentin,” Dilsey said.

“Haven’t you started breakfast yet?”

“I’ll tend to dat too,” Dilsey said. “You better git back in bed twell Luster make yo fire. Hit cold dis mawnin.”

“I know it,” Mrs Compson said. “My feet are like ice. They were so cold they waked me up.” She watched Dilsey mount the stairs. It took her a long while. “You know how it frets

Jason when breakfast is late,” Mrs Compson said.

"I cant do but one thing at a time," Dilsey said. "You git on back to bed, fo I has you on my hands dis mawnin too."

"If you're going to drop everything to dress Benjamin, I'd better come down and get breakfast. You know as wellas I do how Jason acts when it's late."

"En who gwine eat yo messin?" Dilsey said. "Tell me dat. Go on now," she said, toiling upward. Mrs Compson stood watching her as she mounted, steadying herself against the wall with one hand, holding her skirts up with the other.

"Are you going to wake him up just to dress him?" she said.

Dilsey stopped. With her foot lifted to the next step she stood there, her hand against the wall and the grey splash of the window behind her, motionless and shapeless she loomed.

"He aint awake den?" she said.

"He wasn't when I looked in," Mrs Compson said. "But it's past his time. He never does sleep after half past seven. You know he doesn't."

Dilsey said nothing. She made no further move, but though she could not see her save as a blobby shape without depth, Mrs Compson knew that she had lowered her face a little and that she stood now like a cow in the rain, as she held the empty water bottle by its neck.

"You're not the one who has to bear it," Mrs Compson said. "It's not your responsibility. You can go away. You dont have to bear the brunt of it day in and day out. You owe nothing to them, to Mr Compson's memory. I know you have never had any tenderness for Jason. You've never tried to conceal it."

Dilsey said nothing. She turned slowly and descended, lowering her body from step to step, as a small child does, her hand against the wall.

"You go on and let him alone," she said. "Dont go in dar no mo, now. I'll send Luster up soon as I find him. Let him alone, now."

She returned to the kitchen. She looked into the stove, then she drew her apron over her head and donned the overcoat and opened the

outer door and looked up and down the yard. The weather drove upon her flesh, harsh and minute, but the scene was empty of all else that moved. She descended the steps, gingerly, as if for silence, and went around the corner of the kitchen. As she did so Luster emerged quickly and innocently from the cellar door.

Dilsey stopped. "Whut you up to?" she said.

"Nothin," Luster said, "Mr Jason say fer me to find out whar dat water leak in de cellar fum."

"En when wus hit he say fer you to do dat?" Dilsey said. "Last New Year's day, wasn't hit?"

"I thought I jes be lookin whiles dey sleep," Luster said. Dilsey went to the cellar door. He stood aside and she peered down into the obscurity odorous of dank earth and mould and rubber.

"Huh," Dilsey said. She looked at Luster again. He met her gaze blandly, innocent and open. "I dont know whut you up to, but you aint got no business doin hit. You jes tryin me too dis mawnin cause de others is, aint you? You git on up dar en see to Benjy, you hear?"

"Yessum," Luster said. He went on toward the kitchen steps, swiftly.

"Here," Dilsey said, "You git me another armful of wood while I got you."

"Yessum," he said. He passed her on the steps and went to the woodpile. When he blundered again at the door a moment later, again invisible and blind within and beyond his wooden avatar, Dilsey opened the door and guided him across the kitchen with a firm hand.

"Jes thow hit at dat box again," she said, "Jes thow hit."

"I got to," Luster said, panting, "I cant put hit down no other way."

"Den you stand dar en hold hit a while," Dilsey said. She unloaded him a stick at a time. "Whut got into you dis mawnin? Here I sont you fer wood en you aint never brought mo'n six sticks at a time to save yo life twell today. Whut you fixin to ax me kin you do now? Aint dat show lef town yit?"

"Yessum. Hit done gone."

She put the last stick into the box. "Now you go on up dar wid Benjy, like I tole you befo," she said. "And I dont want nobody else yellin down dem stairs at me twell I rings de bell. You hear me."

"Yessum," Luster said. He vanished through the swing door. Dilsey put some more wood in the stove and returned to the bread board. Presently she began to sing again.

The room grew warmer. Soon Dilsey's skin had taken on a rich, lustrous quality as compared with that as of a faint dusting of wood ashes which both it and Luster's had worn, as she moved about the kitchen, gathering about her the raw materials of food, coordinating the meal. On the wall above a cupboard, invisible save at night, by lamp light and even then evincing an enigmatic profundity because it had but one hand, a cabinet clock ticked, then with a preliminary sound as if it had cleared its throat, struck five times.

"Eight oclock," Dilsey said. She ceased and tilted her head upward, listening. But there was no sound save the clock and the fire. She opened the oven and looked at the pan of bread, then stooping she paused while someone descended the stairs. She heard the feet cross the diningroom, then the swing door opened and Luster entered, followed by a big man who appeared to have been shaped of some substance whose particles would not or did not cohere to one another or to the frame which supported it.

His skin was dead looking and hairless; dropsical too, he moved with a shambling gait like a trained bear. His hair was pale and fine. It had been brushed smoothly down upon his brow like that of children in daguerreotypes. His eyes were clear, of the pale sweet blue of cornflowers, his thick mouth hung open, drooling a little.

"Is he cold?" Dilsey said. She wiped her hands on her apron and touched his hand.

"Ef he aint, I is," Luster said. "Always cold Easter. Aint never seen hit fail. Miss Cahline say ef you aint got time to fixher hot water bottle to never mind about hit."

"Oh, Lawd," Dilsey said. She drew a chair into the corner between the woodbox and the stove. The man went obediently and sat in it. "Look in de dinin room and see whar I laid dat bottle down," Dilsey said. Luster fetched the bottle from the dining room and Dilsey filled it and give it to him. "Hurry up, now," she said. "See ef Jason wake now. Telle hit's allready."

Luster went out. Ben sat beside the stove. He sat loosely, utterly motionless save for his head, which made a continual bobbing sort of movement as he watched Dilsey with his sweet vague gaze as she moved about. Luster returned.

"He up," he said, "Miss Cahline say put hit on de table." He came to the stove and spread his hands palm down above the firebox. "He up, too," He said, "Gwine hit wid bofe feet dis mawnin."

"Whut's de matter now?" Dilsey said. "Git away fum dar. How kin I do anything wid you standin over de stove?"

"I cold," Luster said.

"You ought to thought about dat whiles you wus down dar in dat cellar," Dilsey said. "Whut de matter wid Jason?"

"Sayin me en Benjy broke dat winder in his room."

"Is dey one broke?" Dilsey said.

"Dat's whut he sayin," Luster said. "Say I broke hit."

"How could you, when he keep hit locked allday en night?" "Say I broke hit chunkin rocks at hit," Luster said.

"En did you?" "Nome," Luster said.

"Dont lie to me, boy," Dilsey said.

"I never done hit," Luster said. "Ask Benjy ef I did. I aint stud'in dat winder."

"Who could a broke hit, den?" Dilsey said. "He jes tryin hissself, to wake Quentin up," she said, taking the pan of biscuits out of the stove.

"Reckin so," Luster said. "Dese is funny folks. Glad I aint none of em."

"Aint none of who?" Dilsey said. "Lemme tell you somethin, nigger boy, you got jes es much Compson devilment in you es any of em. Is you right sho you never broke dat window?"

"Whut I want to break hit fur?"

"Whut you do any of yo devilment fur?" Dilsey said. "Watch himnow, so he cant burn his hand again twelll git de table set."

She went to the diningroom, where they heard her moving about, then she returned and set a plate at the kitchen table and set food there.

Ben watched her, slobbering, making a faint, eager sound.

"All right, honey," she said, "Here yo breakfast. Bring his chair, Luster."

Luster moved the chair up and Ben sat down, whimpering and slobbering. Dilsey tied a cloth about his neck and wiped his mouth with the end of it. "And see kin you kep fummessin up his clothes one time," she said, handing Luster a spoon.

Ben ceased whimpering. He watched the spoon as it rose to his mouth. It was as if even eagerness were muscle-bound in him too, and hunger itself inarticulate, not knowing it is hunger. Luster fed him with skill and detachment. Now and then his attention would return long enough to enable him to feint the spoon and cause Ben to close his mouth upon the empty air, but it was apparent that Luster's mind was elsewhere.

His other hand lay on the back of the chair and upon that dead surface it moved tentatively, delicately, as if he were picking an inaudible tune out of the dead void, and once he even forgot to tease Ben with the spoon while his fingers teased out of the slain wood a soundless and involved arpeggio until Ben recalled him by whimpering again.

In the diningroom Dilsey moved back and forth. Presently she rang a small clear bell, then in the kitchen Luster heard Mrs Compson and Jason descending, and Jason's voice, and he rolled his eyes whitely with listening.

"Sure, I know they didn't break it," Jason said. "Sure, I know that. Maybe the change of weather broke it."

"I dont see how it could have," Mrs Compson said. "Your room stays locked all day long, just as you leave it when you go to town. None of us ever go in there except Sunday, to clean it. I dont want you to think that I would go where I'mnot wanted, or that I would permit anyone else to."

"I never said you broke it, did I?" Jason said.

"I dont want to go in your room," Mrs Compson said. "I respect anybody's private affairs. I wouldn't put my foot over the threshold, even if I had a key."

"Yes," Jason said, "I know your keys wont fit. That's why I had the lock changed. What I want to know is, how that window got broken."

"Luster say he didn't do hit," Dilsey said.

"I knew that without asking him," Jason said. "Where's Quentin?" he said.

"Where she is ev'y Sunday mawnin," Dilsey said. "Whut got into you de last few days, anyhow?"

"Well, we're going to change allthat," Jason said. "Go up and tellher breakfast is ready." "You leave her alone now, Jason," Dilsey said. "She gits up fer breakfast ev'y week mawnin, en Cahline lets her stay in bed ev'y Sunday. You knows dat."

"I cant keep a kitchen full of niggers to wait on her pleasure, much as I'd like to," Jason said. "Go and tellher to come down to breakfast."

"Aint nobody have to wait on her," Dilsey said. "I puts her breakfast in de warmer en she —"

"Did you hear me?" Jason said.

"I hears you," Dilsey said. "All I been hearin, when you in de house. Ef hit aint Quentin er yo maw, hit's Luster en Benjy. Whut you let himgo on dat way fer, Miss Cahline?"

"You'd better do as he says," Mrs Compson said, "He's head of the house now. It's his right to require us to respect his wishes. I try to do it, and if I can, you can too."

“Taint no sense in himbein so bad tempered he got to make Quentin git up jes to suit him,” Dilsey said. “Maybe you think she broke dat window.”

“She would, if she happened to think of it,” Jason said. “You go and do what I told you.” “En I wouldn’t blame her none ef she did,” Dilsey said, going toward the stairs. “Wid you naggin at her allde blessed time you in de house.”

“Hush, Dilsey,” Mrs Compson said, “It’s neither your place nor mine to tell Jason what to do. Sometimes I think he is wrong, but I try to obey his wishes for you alls’sakes. If I’mstrong enough to come to the table, Quentin can too.”

Dilsey went out. They heard her mounting the stairs. They heard her a long while on the stairs.

“You’ve got a prize set of servants,” Jason said. He helped his mother and himself to food. “Did you ever have one that was worth killing? You must have had some before I was big enough to remember.”

“I have to humour them,” Mrs Compson said. “I have to depend on themso completely. It’s not as if I were strong. I wish I were. I wish I could do all the house work myself. I could at least take that much off your shoulders.”

“And a fine pigsty we’d live in, too,” Jason said. “Hurry up, Dilsey,” he shouted.

“I know you blame me,” Mrs Compson said, “for letting themoff to go to church today.” “Go where?” Jason said. “Hasn’t that damn show left yet?”

“To church,” Mrs Compson said. “The darkies are having a special Easter service. I promised Dilsey two weeks ago that they could get off.”

“Which means we’ll eat cold dinner,” Jason said, “or none at all.” “I know it’s my fault,” Mrs Compson said. “I know you blame me.” “For what?” Jason said. “You never resurrected Christ, did you?”

They heard Dilsey mount the finalstair, then her slow feet overhead.

“Quentin,” she said. When she called the first time Jason laid his knife and fork down and he and his mother appeared to wait across the table from one another, in identical attitudes; the one cold and shrewd, with close-thatched brown hair curled into two stubborn hooks, one on either side of his forehead like a bartender in caricature, and hazel eyes with black-ringed irises like marbles, the other cold and querulous, with perfectly white hair and eyes pouched and baffled and so dark as to appear to be all pupil and all iris.

“Quentin,” Dilsey said, “Get up, honey. Dey waitin breakfast on you.”

“I cant understand how that window got broken,” Mrs Compson said. “Are you sure it was done yesterday? It could have been like that a long time, with the warm weather. The upper sash, behind the shade like that.”

“I’ve told you for the last time that it happened yesterday,” Jason said. “Dont you reckon I know the room I live in? Do you reckon I could have lived in it a week with a hole in the window you could stick your hand—” his voice ceased, ebbed, left him staring at his mother with eyes that for an instant were quite empty of anything. It was as though his eyes were holding their breath, while his mother looked at him, her face flaccid and querulous, interminable, clairvoyant yet obtuse. As they sat so Dilsey said, “Quentin. Dont play wid me, honey. Come on to breakfast, honey. Dey waitin fer you.”

“I cant understand it,” Mrs Compson said, “It’s just as if somebody had tried to break into the house—” Jason sprang up. His chair crashed over backward. “What—” Mrs Compson said, staring at him as he ran past her and went jumping up the stairs, where he met Dilsey. His face was now in shadow, and Dilsey said, “She sullin. Yo ma aint unlocked—” But Jason ran on past her and along the corridor to a door.

He didn’t call. He grasped the knob and tried it, then he stood with the knob in his hand and his head bent a little, as if he were listening to something much further away than the dimensioned room beyond the door, and which he already heard. His attitude was that of one who goes through the motions of listening in order to deceive himself as to

what he already hears. Behind him Mrs Compson mounted the stairs, calling his name. Then she saw Dilsey and she quit calling him and began to call Dilsey instead.

"I told you she aint unlocked dat do'yit," Dilsey said.

When she spoke he turned and ran toward her, but his voice was quiet, matter of fact. "She carry the key with her?" he said. "Has she got it now, I mean, or will she have—"

"Dilsey," Mrs Compson said on the stairs. "Is which?" Dilsey said.

"Whyn't you let—"

"The key," Jason said, "To that room. Does she carry it with her all the time. Mother." Then he saw Mrs Compson and he went down the stairs and met her. "Give me the key," he said. He fell to pawing at the pockets of the rusty black dressing sacque she wore. She resisted.

"Jason," she said, "Jason! Are you and Dilsey trying to put me to bed again?" she said, trying to fend him off, "Cant you even let me have Sunday in peace?"

"The key," Jason said, pawing at her, "Give it here." He looked back at the door, as if he expected it to fly open before he could get back to it with the key he did not yet have.

"You, Dilsey!" Mrs Compson said, clutching her sacque about her.

"Give me the key, you old fool!" Jason cried suddenly. From her pocket he tugged a huge bunch of rusted keys on an iron ring like a mediaeval jailer's and ran back up the hall with the two women behind him.

"You, Jason!" Mrs Compson said. "He will never find the right one," she said, "You know I never let anyone take my keys, Dilsey," she said. She began to wail.

"Hush," Dilsey said, "He aint gwine do nothin to her. I aint gwine let him."

"But on Sunday morning, in my own house," Mrs Compson said, "When I've tried so hard to raise them Christians. Let me find the right key, Jason," she said. She put her hand on his arm. Then she began to

struggle with him, but he flung her aside with a motion of his elbow and looked around at her for a moment, his eyes cold and harried, then he turned to the door again and the unwieldy keys.

“Hush,” Dilsey said, “You, Jason!”

“Something terrible has happened,” Mrs Compson said, wailing again, “I know it has. You, Jason,” she said, grasping at him again. “He wont even let me find the key to a room in my own house!”

“Now, now,” Dilsey said, “Whut kin happen? I right here. I aint gwine let him hurt her. Quentin,” she said, raising her voice, “dont you be skeered, honey, I’s right here.”

The door opened, swung inward. He stood in it for a moment, hiding the room, then he stepped aside. “Go in,” he said in a thick, light voice. They went in. It was not a girl’s room. It was not anybody’s room, and the faint scent of cheap cosmetics and the few feminine objects and the other evidences of crude and hopeless efforts to feminize it but added to its anonymity, giving it that dead and stereotyped transience of rooms in assignation houses.

The bed had not been disturbed. On the floor lay a soiled undergarment of cheap silk a little too pink; from a half open bureau drawer dangled a single stocking. The window was open. A pear tree grew there, close against the house. It was in bloom and the branches scraped and rasped against the house and the myriad air, driving in the window, brought into the room the forlorn scent of the blossoms.

“Dar now,” Dilsey said, “Didn’t I told you she alright?”

“Alright?” Mrs Compson said. Dilsey followed her into the room and touched her. “You come on and lay down, now,” she said. “I find her in ten minutes.”

Mrs Compson shook her off. “Find the note,” she said. “Quentin left a note when he did it.” “Alright,” Dilsey said, “I’ll find hit. You come on to yo room, now.”

“I knew the minute they named her Quentin this would happen,” Mrs Compson said. She went to the bureau and began to turn over the

scattered objects there—scent bottles, a box of powder, a chewed pencil, a pair of scissors with one broken blade lying upon a darned scarf dusted with powder and stained with rouge. “Find the note,” she said.

“I is,” Dilsey said. “You come on, now. Me and Jason’ll find hit. You come on to yo room.” “Jason,” Mrs Compson said, “Where is he?” She went to the door. Dilsey followed her on down the hall, to another door. It was closed. “Jason,” she called through the door. There was no answer. She tried the knob, then she called him again. But there was still no answer, for he was hurling things backward out of the closet: garments, shoes, a suitcase. Then he emerged carrying a sawn section of tongue-and-groove planking and laid it down and entered the closet again and emerged with a metal box.

He set it on the bed and stood looking at the broken lock while he dug a key ring from his pocket and selected a key, and for a time longer he stood with the selected key in his hand, looking at the broken lock, then he put the keys back in his pocket and carefully tilted the contents of the box out upon the bed. Still carefully he sorted the papers, taking them up one at a time and shaking them. Then he upended the box and shook it too and slowly replaced the papers and stood again, looking at the broken lock, with the box in his hands and his head bent. Outside the window he heard some jaybirds swirl shrieking past, and away, their cries whipping away along the wind, and an automobile passed somewhere and died away also.

His mother spoke his name again beyond the door, but he didn’t move. He heard Dilsey lead her away up the hall, and then a door closed. Then he replaced the box in the closet and flung the garments back into it and went down stairs to the telephone. While he stood there with the receiver to his ear, waiting, Dilsey came down the stairs. She looked at him, without stopping, and went on.

The wire opened. “This is Jason Compson,” he said, his voice so harsh and thick that he had to repeat himself. “Jason Compson,” he said, controlling his voice. “Have a car ready, with a deputy, if you cant go, in

ten minutes. I'll be there—What?—Robbery. My house. I know who it—Robbery, I say. Have a car read—What? Aren't you a paid law enforcement—Yes, I'll be there in five minutes. Have that car ready to leave at once. If you dont, I'll report it to the governor.”

He clapped the receiver back and crossed the diningroom, where the scarce-broken meal now lay cold on the table, and entered the kitchen. Dilsey was filling the hot water bottle. Ben sat, tranquil and empty. Beside him Luster looked like a fice dog, brightly watchful. He was eating something. Jason went on across the kitchen.

“Aint you going to eat no breakfast?” Dilsey said. He paid her no attention. “Go on and eat yo breakfast, Jason.” He went on. The outer door banged behind him. Luster rose and went to the window and looked out.

“Whoo,” he said, “Whut happenin up dar? He been beatin' Miss Quentin?”

“You hush yo mouf,” Dilsey said. “You git Benjy started now en I beat yo head off. You keep him quiet es you kin twell I get back, now.” She screwed the cap on the bottle and went out. They heard her go up the stairs, then they heard Jason pass the house in his car. Then there was no sound in the kitchen save the simmering murmur of the kettle and the clock.

“You know whut I bet?” Luster said. “I bet he beat her. I bet he knock her in de head en now he gone fer de doctor. Dat's whut I bet.” The clock tick-tocked, solemn and profound. It might have been the dry pulse of the decaying house itself; after a while it whirred and cleared its throat and struck six times. Ben looked up at it, then he looked at the bullet-like silhouette of Luster's head in the window and he begun to bob his head again, drooling. He whimpered.

“Hush up, loony,” Luster said without turning. “Look like we aint gwine git to go to no church today.” But Ben sat in the chair, his big soft hands dangling between his knees, moaning faintly. Suddenly he wept, a slow bellowing sound, meaningless and sustained. “Hush,” Luster said. He

turned and lifted his hand. "You want me to whup you?" But Ben looked at him, bellowing slowly with each expiration. Luster came and shook him. "You hush dis minute!" he shouted. "Here," he said. He hauled Ben out of the chair and dragged the chair around facing the stove and opened the door to the firebox and shoved Ben into the chair. They looked like a tug nudging at a clumsy tanker in a narrow dock. Ben sat down again facing the rosy door. He hushed. Then they heard the clock again, and Dilsey slow on the stairs. When she entered he began to whimper again. Then he lifted his voice.

"Whut you done to him?" Dilsey said. "Why cant you let him lone dis mawnin, of all times?"

"I aint doin nothin to him," Luster said. "Mr Jason skeered him, dat's whut hit is. He aint kilt Miss Quentin, is he?"

"Hush, Benjy," Dilsey said. He hushed. She went to the window and looked out. "Is it quit rainin?" she said.

"Yessum," Luster said. "Quit long time ago."

"Den y'allgo out do's awhile," she said. "I jes got Miss Cahline quiet now." "Is we gwine to church?" Luster said.

"I let you know bout dat when de time come. You keep himaway fumde house twell I calls you."

"Kin we go to de pastuh?" Luster said.

"Allright. Only you keep himaway fumde house. I done stood all kin."

"Yessum," Luster said. "Whar Mr Jason gone, mammy?"

"Dat's some mo of yo business, aint it?" Dilsey said. She began to clear the table. "Hush, Benjy. Luster gwine take you out to play."

"Whut he done to Miss Quentin, mammy?" Luster said. "Aint done nothin to her. You allgit on outen here?"

"I bet she aint here," Luster said.

Dilsey looked at him. "How you know she aint here?"

"Me and Benjy seed her clamb out de window last night. Didn't us, Benjy?" "You did?" Dilsey said, looking at him.

"We sees her doin hit ev'y night," Luster said, "Clamb right down dat pear tree." "Dont you lie to me, nigger boy," Dilsey said.

"I aint lyin. Ask Benjy ef I is."

"Whyn't you say somethin about it, den?"

"'Twarn't none o my business," Luster said. "I aint gwine git mixed up in white folks' business. Come on here, Benjy, les go out do's."

They went out. Dilsey stood for awhile at the table, then she went and cleared the breakfast things from the diningroom and ate her breakfast and cleaned up the kitchen. Then she removed her apron and hung it up and went to the foot of the stairs and listened for a moment. There was no sound. She donned the overcoat and the hat and went across to her cabin.

The rain had stopped. The air now drove out of the southeast, broken overhead into blue patches. Upon the crest of a hill beyond the trees and roofs and spires of town sunlight lay like a pale scrap of cloth, was blotted away. Upon the air a bell came, then as if at a signal, other bells took up the sound and repeated it.

The cabin door opened and Dilsey emerged, again in the maroon cape and the purple gown, and wearing soiled white elbow-length gloves and minus her headcloth now. She came into the yard and called Luster. She waited awhile, then she went to the house and around it to the cellar door, moving close to the wall, and looked into the door. Ben sat on the steps. Before him Luster squatted on the damp floor. He held a saw in his left hand, the blade sprung a little by pressure of his hand, and he was in the act of striking the blade with the worn wooden mallet with which she had been making beaten biscuit for more than thirty years. The saw gave forth a single sluggish twang that ceased with lifeless alacrity, leaving the blade in a thin clean curve between Luster's hand and the floor. Still, inscrutable, it bellied.

"Dat's de way he done hit," Luster said. "I jes aint foun de right thing to hit it wid." "Dat's whut you doin, is it?" Dilsey said. "Bring me dat mallet," she said.

"I aint hurt hit," Luster said.

"Bring hit here," Dilsey said. "Put dat saw whar you got hit first."

He put the saw away and brought the mallet to her. Then Ben wailed again, hopeless and prolonged. It was nothing. Just sound. It might have been all time and injustice and sorrow become vocal for an instant by a conjunction of planets.

"Listen at him," Luster said, "He been gwine on dat way ev'y since you sont us outen de house. I dont know whut got in to himdis mawnin."

"Bring himhere," Dilsey said.

"Come on, Benjy," Luster said. He went back down the steps and took Ben's arm. He came obediently, wailing, that slow hoarse sound that ships make, that seems to begin before the sound itself has started, seems to cease before the sound itself has stopped.

"Run and git his cap," Dilsey said. "Dont make no noise Miss Cahline kin hear. Hurry, now. We already late."

"She gwine hear himanyhow, ef you dont stop him." Luster said.

"He stop when we git off de place," Dilsey said. "He smellin hit. Dat's whut hit is." "Smellwhut, mammy?" Luster said.

"You go git dat cap," Dilsey said. Luster went on. They stood in the cellar door, Ben one step below her. The sky was broken now into scudding patches that dragged their swift shadows up out of the shabby garden, over the broken fence and across the yard. Dilsey stroked Ben's head, slowly and steadily, smoothing the bang upon his brow. He wailed quietly, unhurriedly. "Hush," Dilsey said, "Hush, now. We be gone in a minute. Hush, now." He wailed quietly and steadily.

Luster returned, wearing a stiff new straw hat with a coloured band and carrying a cloth cap. The hat seemed to isolate Luster's skull, in the beholder's eye as a spotlight would, in all its individual planes and angles. So peculiarly individual was its shape that at first glance the hat appeared to be on the head of someone standing immediately behind Luster. Dilsey looked at the hat.

"Whyn't you wear yo old hat?" she said. "Couldn't find hit," Luster said.

"I bet you couldn't. I bet you fixed hit last night so you couldn't find hit. You fixin to ruin dat un."

"Aw, mammy," Luster said, "Hit aint gwine rain."

"How you know? You go git dat old hat en put dat new un away." "Aw, mammy."

"Den you go git de umbreller." "Aw, mammy."

"Take yo choice," Dilsey said. "Git yo old hat, er de umbreller. I dont keer which." Luster went to the cabin. Ben wailed quietly.

"Come on," Dilsey said, "Dey kin ketch up wid us. We gwine to hear de singin." They went around the house, toward the gate. "Hush," Dilsey said from time to time as they went down the drive. They reached the gate. Dilsey opened it. Luster was coming down the drive behind them, carrying the umbrella. A woman was with him. "Here dey come," Dilsey said. They passed out the gate. "Now, den," she said. Ben ceased. Luster and his mother overtook them. Frony wore a dress of bright blue silk and a flowered hat. She was a thin woman, with a flat, pleasant face.

"You got six weeks' work right dar on yo back," Dilsey said. "Whut you gwine do ef hit rain?"

"Git wet, I reckon," Frony said. "I aint never stopped no rain yit."

"Mammy always talkin bout hit gwine rain," Luster said.

"Ef I dont worry bout y'all, I dont know who is," Dilsey said. "Come on, we already late." "Rev'un Shegog gwine preach today," Frony said.

"Is?" Dilsey said. "Who him?"

"He fumSaint Looley," Frony said. "Dat big preacher."

"Huh," Dilsey said, "Whut dey needs is a man kin put de fear of God into dese here triflin young niggers."

"Rev'un Shegog gwine preach today," Frony said. "So dey tells."

They went on along the street. Along its quiet length white people in bright clumps moved churchward, under the windy bells, walking now and then in the random and tentative sun. The wind was gusty, out of the southeast, chill and raw after the warm days.

"I wish you wouldn't keep on bringin him to church, mammy," Frony said. "Folks talkin." "Whut folks?" Dilsey said.

"I hears em," Frony said.

“And I knows whut kind of folks,” Dilsey said, “Trash white folks. Dat’s who it is. Thinks he aint good enough fer white church, but nigger church aint good enough fer him.”

“Dey talks, jes de same,” Frony said.

“Den you send umto me,” Dilsey said. “Tell umde good Lawd dont keer whether he smart er not. Dont nobody but white trash keer dat.”

A street turned oil at right angles, descending, and became a dirt road. On either hand the land dropped more sharply; a broad flat dotted with small cabins whose weathered roofs were on a level with the crown of the road. They were set in small grassless plots littered with broken things, bricks, planks, crockery, things of a once utilitarian value. What growth there was consisted of rank weeds and the trees were mulberries and locusts and sycamores—trees that partook also of the foul desiccation which surrounded the houses; trees whose very burgeoning seemed to be the sad and stubborn remnant of September, as if even spring had passed them by, leaving them to feed upon the rich and unmistakable smell of negroes in which they grew.

From the doors negroes spoke to them as they passed, to Dilsey usually: “Sis’ Gibson! How you dis mawnin?”

“I’m well. Is you well?” “I’m right well, I thank you.”

They emerged from the cabins and struggled up the shading levee to the road—men in staid, hard brown or black, with gold watch chains and now and then a stick; young men in cheap violent blues or stripes and swaggering hats; women a little stiffly sibilant, and children in garments bought second hand of white people, who looked at Ben with the covertness of nocturnal animals:

“I bet you wont go up en tech him.” “How come I wont?”

“I bet you wont. I bet you skeered to.” “He wont hurt folks. He des a loony.” “How come a loony wont hurt folks?” “Dat un wont. I teched him.”

“I bet you wont now.” “Case Miss Dilsey lookin.” “You wont no ways.”

“He dont hurt folks. He des a loony.”

And steadily the older people speaking to Dilsey, though, unless they were quite old, Dilsey permitted Frony to respond.

“Mammy aint feelin welldis mawnin.”

“Dat’s too bad. But Rev’un Shegog’llcure dat. He’llgive her de comfort en de unburdenin.” The road rose again, to a scene like a painted backdrop. Notched into a cut of red clay crowned with oaks the road appeared to stop short off, like a cut ribbon. Beside it a weathered church lifted its crazy steeple like a painted church, and the whole scene was as flat and without perspective as a painted cardboard set upon the ultimate edge of the flat earth, against the windy sunlight of space and April and a midmorning filled with bells.

Toward the church they thronged with slow sabbath deliberation. The women and children went on in, the men stopped outside and talked in quiet groups until the bell ceased ringing. Then they too entered. The church had been decorated, with sparse flowers from kitchen gardens and hedgerows, and with streamers of coloured crepe paper. Above the pulpit hung a battered Christmas bell, the accordian sort that collapses. The pulpit was empty, though the choir was already in place, fanning themselves although it was not warm.

Most of the women were gathered on one side of the room. They were talking. Then the bell struck one time and they dispersed to their seats and the congregation sat for an instant, expectant. The bell struck again one time. The choir rose and began to sing and the congregation turned its head as one, as six small children—four girls with tight pigtailed bound with small scraps of cloth like butterflies, and two boys with close napped heads, entered and marched up the aisle, strung together in a harness of white ribbons and flowers, and followed by two men in single file.

The second man was huge, of a light coffee colour, imposing in a frock coat and white tie. His head was magisterial and profound, his neck rolled above his collar in rich folds. But he was familiar to them, and so the heads were still reverted when he had passed, and it was not until the choir ceased singing that they realised that the visiting clergyman

had already entered, and when they saw the man who had preceded their minister enter the pulpit still ahead of him an indescribable sound went up, a sigh, a sound of astonishment and disappointment.

The visitor was undersized, in a shabby alpaca coat. He had a wizened black face like a small, aged monkey. And all the while that the choir sang again and while the six children rose and sang in thin, frightened, tuneless whispers, they watched the insignificant looking man sitting dwarfed and countrified by the minister's imposing bulk, with something like consternation. They were still looking at him with consternation and unbelief when the minister rose and introduced him in rich, rolling tones whose very unctiousness served to increase the visitor's insignificance.

"En dey brung dat all de way fum Saint Looey," Frony whispered. "I've knowed de Lawd to use cuiser tools dan dat," Dilsey said. "Hush, now," she said to Ben, "Dey fixin to sing again in a minute."

When the visitor rose to speak he sounded like a white man. His voice was level and cold. It sounded too big to have come from him and they listened at first through curiosity, as they would have to a monkey talking. They began to watch him as they would a man on a tight rope. They even forgot his insignificant appearance in the virtuosity with which he ran and poised and swooped upon the cold inflectionless wire of his voice, so that at last, when with a sort of swooping glide he came to rest again beside the reading desk with one arm resting upon it at shoulder height and his monkey body as reft of all motion as a mummy or an emptied vessel, the congregation sighed as if it waked from a collective dream and moved a little in its seats. Behind the pulpit the choir fanned steadily. Dilsey whispered, "Hush, now. Dey fixin to sing in a minute."

Then a voice said, "Brethren."

The preacher had not moved. His arm lay yet across the desk, and he still held that pose while the voice died in sonorous echoes between the walls. It was as different as day and dark from his former tone, with a sad, timbrous quality like an alto horn, sinking into their hearts and

speaking there again when it had ceased in fading and cumulate echoes.

“Brethren and sisteren,” it said again. The preacher removed his arm and he began to walk back and forth before the desk, his hands clasped behind him, a meagre figure, hunched over upon itself like that of one long immured in striving with the implacable earth, “I got the recollection and the blood of the Lamb!” He tramped steadily back and forth beneath the twisted paper and the Christmas bell, hunched, his hands clasped behind him. He was like a worn small rock whelmed by the successive waves of his voice.

With his body he seemed to feed the voice that, succubus like, had fleshed its teeth in him. And the congregation seemed to watch with its own eyes while the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words, so that when he came to rest against the reading desk, his monkey face lifted and his whole attitude that of a serene, tortured crucifix that transcended its shabbiness and insignificance and made it of no moment, a long moaning expulsion of breath rose from them, and a woman’s single soprano: “Yes, Jesus!”

As the scudding day passed overhead the dingy windows glowed and faded in ghostly retrograde. A car passed along the road outside, labouring in the sand, died away. Dilsey sat bolt upright, her hand on Ben’s knee. Two tears slid down her fallen cheeks, in and out of the myriad coruscations of immolation and abnegation and time.

“Brethren,” the minister said in a harsh whisper, without moving. “Yes, Jesus!” the woman’s voice said, hushed yet.

“Breddren en sistuhn!” His voice rang again, with the horns. He removed his armand stood erect and raised his hands. “I got de ricklickshun en de blood of de Lamb!” They did not mark just when his intonation, his pronunciation, became negroid, they just sat swaying a little in their seats as the voice took them into itself.

“When de long, cold—Oh, I tells you, breddren, when de long, cold—I sees de light en I sees de word, po sinner! Dey passed away in Egypt, de swingin chariots; de generations passed away. Wus a rich man: whar he now, O breddren? Wus a po man: whar he now, O sistuhn? Oh I tells you, ef you aint got de milk en de dew of de old salvation when de long, cold years rolls away!”

“Yes, Jesus!”

“I tells you, breddren, en I tells you, sistuhn, dey’ll come a time. Po sinner sayin Let me lay down wid de Lawd, lemme lay down my load. Den whut Jesus gwine say, O breddren? O sistuhn? Is you got de ricklickshun en de Blood of de Lamb? Case I aint gwine load down heaven!”

He fumbled in his coat and took out a handkerchief and mopped his face. A low concerted sound rose from the congregation:

“Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmm!” The woman’s voice said, “Yes, Jesus! Jesus!”

“Breddren! Look at dem little chillen settin dar. Jesus wus like dat once. He mammy suffered de glory en de pangs. Sometime maybe she helt himat de nightfall, whilst de angels singin him to sleep; maybe she look out de do’ en see de Roman po-lice passin.” He tramped back and forth, mopping his face. “Listen, breddren! I sees de day. Ma’y settin in de do’ wid Jesus on her lap, de little Jesus. Like dem chillen dar, de little Jesus. I hears de angels singin de peaceful songs en de glory; I sees de closin eyes; sees Mary jump up, sees de sojer face: We gwine to kill! We gwine to kill! We gwine to kill yo little Jesus! I hears de weepin en de lamentation of de po mammy widout de salvation en de word of God!”

“Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm! Jesus! Little Jesus!” and another voice, rising:

“I sees, O Jesus! Oh I sees!” and still another, without words, like bubbles rising in water.

“I sees hit, breddren! I sees hit! Sees de blastin, blindin sight! I sees Calvary, wid de sacred trees, sees de thief en de murderer en de least of dese; I hears de boasting en de braggin: Ef you be Jesus, lif up yo tree en walk! I hears de wailin of women en de evenin lamentations; I

hears de weepin en de cryin en de turnt-away face of God:dey done kilt Jesus; dey done kilt my Son!”

“Mmmmmmmmmmmmm. Jesus! I sees, O Jesus!”

“O blind sinner! Breddren, I tells you; sistuhn, I says to you, when de Lawd did turn His mighty face, say, Aint gwine overload heaven! I can see de widowed God shet His do’; I sees de whelmin flood roll between; I sees de darkness en de death everlastin upon de generations. Den, lo! Breddren! Yes, breddren! Whut I see? Whut I see, O sinner? I sees de resurrection en de light; sees de meek Jesus sayin Dey kilt Me dat ye shall live again; I died dat demwhut sees en believes shall never die. Breddren, O breddren! I sees de doom crack en hears de golden horns shoutin down de glory, en de arisen dead whut got de blood en de ricklickshun of de Lamb!”

In the midst of the voices and the hands Ben sat, rapt in his sweet blue gaze. Dilsey sat bolt upright beside, crying rigidly and quietly in the annealment and the blood of the remembered Lamb.

As they walked through the bright noon, up the sandy road with the dispersing congregation talking easily again group to group, she continued to weep, unmindful of the talk.

“He sho a preacher, mon! He didn’t look like much at first, but hush!”

“He seed de power en de glory.”

“Yes, suh. He seed hit. Face to face he seed hit.”

Dilsey made no sound, her face did not quiver as the tears took their sunken and devious courses, walking with her head up, making no effort to dry them away even.

“Whyn’t you quit dat, mammy?” Frony said. “Wid all dese people lookin. We be passin white folks soon.”

“I’ve seed de first en de last,” Dilsey said. “Never you mind me.” “First en last whut?” Frony said.

“Never you mind,” Dilsey said. “I seed de beginnin, en now I sees de endin.”

Before they reached the street, though, she stopped and lifted her skirt and dried her eyes on the hem of her topmost underskirt. Then they went on. Ben shambled along beside Dilsey, watching Luster who anticked along ahead, the umbrella in his hand and his new straw hat slanted viciously in the sunlight, like a big foolish dog watching a small clever one. They reached the gate and entered. Immediately Ben began to whimper again, and for a while all of them looked up the drive at the square, paintless house with its rotting portico.

"Whut's gwine on up dar today?" Frony said. "Something is."

"Nothin," Dilsey said. "You tend to yo business en let de white folks tend to deir'n." "Somethin is," Frony said. "I heard him first thing dis mawnin. 'Taint none of my business, dough."

"En I knows whut, too," Luster said.

"You knows mo dan you got any use fer," Dilsey said. "Aint you jes heard Frony say hit aint none of yo business? You take Benjy on to de back and keep him quiet twell I put dinner on."

"I knows whar Miss Quentin is," Luster said.

"Den jes keep hit," Dilsey said. "Soon es Quentin need any of yo egvice, I'll let you know. Y'allg'awn en play in de back, now."

"You know whut gwine happen soon es dey start playin dat ballover yonder," Luster said. "Dey wont start fer awhile yit. By dat time T.P. be here to take him ridin. Here, you gimme dat new hat."

Luster gave her the hat and he and Ben went on across the back yard. Ben was still whimpering, though not loud. Dilsey and Frony went to the cabin. After a while Dilsey emerged, again in the faded calico dress, and went to the kitchen. The fire had died down. There was no sound in the house. She put on the apron and went up stairs. There was no sound anywhere. Quentin's room was as they had left it. She entered and picked up the undergarment and put the stocking back in the drawer and closed it. Mrs Compson's door was closed. Dilsey stood beside it for a moment, listening. Then she opened it and entered,

entered a pervading reek of camphor. The shades were drawn, the room in half-light, and the bed, so that at first she thought Mrs Compson was asleep and was about to close the door when the other spoke.

“Well?” she said, “What is it?”

“Hit’s me,” Dilsey said. “You want anything?”

Mrs Compson didn’t answer. After awhile, without moving her head at all, she said: “Where’s Jason?”

“He aint come back yit,” Dilsey said. “Whut you want?”

Mrs Compson said nothing. Like so many cold, weak people, when faced at last by the incontrovertible disaster she exhumed from somewhere a sort of fortitude, strength. In her case it was an unshakable conviction regarding the yet unplumbed event. “Well,” she said presently, “Did you find it?”

“Find whut? Whut you talkin about?”

“The note. At least she would have enough consideration to leave a note. Even Quentin did that.”

“Whut you talkin about?” Dilsey said, “Dont you know she all right? I bet she be walkin right in dis do’befo dark.”

“Fiddlesticks,” Mrs Compson said, “It’s in the blood. Like uncle, like niece. Or mother. I dont know which would be worse. I dont seem to care.”

“Whut you keep on talkin that way fur?” Dilsey said. “Whut she want to do anything like that fur?”

“I dont know. What reason did Quentin have? Under God’s heaven what reason did he have? It cant be simply to flout and hurt me. Whoever God is, He would not permit that. I’m a lady. You might not believe that from my offspring, but I am.”

“You des wait en see,” Dilsey said. “She be here by night, right dar in her bed.” Mrs Compson said nothing. The camphor-soaked cloth lay upon her brow. The black robe lay across the foot of the bed. Dilsey stood with her hand on the door knob.

"Well," Mrs Compson said. "What do you want? Are you going to fix some dinner for Jason and Benjamin, or not?"

"Jason aint come yit," Dilsey said. "I gwine fix somethin. You sho you dont want nothin? Yo bottle stillhot enough?"

"You might hand me my Bible."

"I give hit to you dis mawnin, befo I left."

"You laid it on the edge of the bed. How long did you expect it to stay there?"

Dilsey crossed to the bed and groped among the shadows beneath the edge of it and found the Bible, face down. She smoothed the bent pages and laid the book on the bed again. Mrs Compson didn't open her eyes. Her hair and the pillow were the same color, beneath the wimple of the medicated cloth she looked like an old nun praying.

"Dont put it there again," she said, without opening her eyes. "That's where you put it before. Do you want me to have to get out of bed to pick it up?"

Dilsey reached the book across her and laid it on the broad side of the bed. "You cant see to read, noways," she said. "You want me to raise de shade a little?"

"No. Let themalone. Go on and fixJason something to eat."

Dilsey went out. She closed the door and returned to the kitchen. The stove was almost cold. While she stood there the clock above the cupboard struck ten times. "One oclock," she said aloud, "Jason aint comin home. Ise seed de first en de last," she said, looking at the cold stove, "I seed de first en de last." She set out some cold food on a table. As she moved back and forth she sang a hymn. She sang the first two lines over and over to the complete tune. She arranged the meal and went to the door and called Luster, and after a time Luster and Ben entered. Ben was stillmoaning a little, as to himself.

"He aint never quit," Luster said.

"Y'all come on en eat," Dilsey said. "Jason aint coming to dinner." They sat down at the table. Ben could manage solid food pretty well for himself, though even now, with cold food before him, Dilsey tied a

cloth about his neck. He and Luster ate. Dilsey moved about the kitchen, singing the two lines of the hymn which she remembered. "Yo'll kin g'awn en eat," she said, "Jason aint comin home."

He was twenty miles away at that time. When he left the house he drove rapidly to town, overreaching the slow sabbath groups and the peremptory bells along the broken air. He crossed the empty square and turned into a narrow street that was abruptly quieter even yet, and stopped before a frame house and went up the flower-bordered walk to the porch.

Beyond the screen door people were talking. As he lifted his hand to knock he heard steps, so he withheld his hand until a big man in black broadcloth trousers and a stiff-bosomed white shirt without collar opened the door. He had vigorous untidy iron-grey hair and his grey eyes were round and shiny like a little boy's. He took Jason's hand and drew him into the house, still shaking it.

"Come right in," he said, "Come right in." "You ready to go now?" Jason said.

"Walk right in," the other said, propelling him by the elbow into a room where a man and a woman sat. "You know Myrtle's husband, dont you? Jason Compson, Vernon."

"Yes," Jason said. He did not even look at the man, and as the sheriff drew a chair across the room the man said,

"We'll go out so you can talk. Come on, Myrtle."

"No, no," the sheriff said, "You folks keep your seat. I reckon it aint that serious, Jason? Have a seat."

"I'll tell you as we go along," Jason said. "Get your hat and coat."

"We'll go out," the man said, rising.

"Keep your seat," the sheriff said. "Me and Jason will go out on the porch."

"You get your hat and coat," Jason said. "They've already got a twelve hour start." The sheriff led the way back to the porch. A man and a woman passing spoke to him. He responded with a hearty florid

gesture. Bells were still ringing, from the direction of the section known as Nigger Hollow. "Get your hat, Sheriff," Jason said. The sheriff drew up two chairs.

"Have a seat and tell me what the trouble is."

"I told you over the phone," Jason said, standing. "I did that to save time. Am I going to have to go to law to compel you to do your sworn duty?"

"You sit down and tell me about it," the sheriff said. "I'll take care of you all right."

"Care, hell," Jason said. "Is this what you call taking care of me?"

"You're the one that's holding us up," the sheriff said. "You sit down and tell me about it." Jason told him, his sense of injury and impotence feeding upon its own sound, so that after a time he forgot his haste in the violent cumulation of his self justification and his outrage. The sheriff watched him steadily with his cold shiny eyes.

"But you don't know they done it," he said. "You just think so."

"Don't know?" Jason said. "When I spent two damn days chasing her through alleys, trying to keep her away from him, after I told her what I'd do to her if I ever caught her with him, and you say I don't know that that little b—"

"Now, then," the sheriff said, "That'll do. That's enough of that." He looked out across the street, his hands in his pockets.

"And when I come to you, a commissioned officer of the law," Jason said. "That show's in Mottson this week," the sheriff said.

"Yes," Jason said, "And if I could find a law officer that gave a solitary damn about protecting the people that elected him to office, I'd be there too by now." He repeated his story, harshly recapitulant, seeming to get an actual pleasure out of his outrage and impotence. The sheriff did not appear to be listening at all.

"Jason," he said, "What were you doing with three thousand dollars hid in the house?" "What?" Jason said. "That's my business where I keep my money. Your business is to help

me get it back.”

“Did your mother know you had that much on the place?”

“Look here,” Jason said, “My house has been robbed. I know who did it and I know where they are. I come to you as the commissioned officer of the law, and I ask you once more, are you going to make any effort to recover my property, or not?”

“What do you aim to do with that girl, if you catch them?”

“Nothing,” Jason said, “Not anything. I wouldn’t lay my hand on her. The bitch that cost me a job, the one chance I ever had to get ahead, that killed my father and is shortening my mother’s life every day and made my name a laughing stock in the town. I won’t do anything to her,” he said. “Not anything.”

“You drove that girl into running off, Jason,” the sheriff said.

“How I conduct my family is no business of yours,” Jason said. “Are you going to help me or not?”

“You drove her away from home,” the sheriff said. “And I have some suspicions about who that money belongs to that I don’t reckon I’ll ever know for certain.”

Jason stood, slowly wringing the brim of his hat in his hands. He said quietly: “You’re not going to make any effort to catch them for me?”

“That’s not any of my business, Jason. If you had any actual proof, I’d have to act. But without that I don’t figure it’s any of my business.”

“That’s your answer, is it?” Jason said. “Think well, now.” “That’s it, Jason.”

“All right,” Jason said. He put his hat on. “You’ll regret this. I won’t be helpless. This is not Russia, where just because he wears a little metal badge, a man is immune to law.” He went down the steps and got in his car and started the engine. The sheriff watched him drive away, turn, and rush past the house toward town.

The bells were ringing again, high in the scudding sunlight in bright disorderly tatters of sound. He stopped at a filling station and had his tires examined and the tank filled.

"Gwine on a trip, is you?" the negro asked him. He didn't answer. "Look like hit gwine fair off, after all," the negro said.

"Fair off, hell," Jason said, "It'll be raining like hell by twelve oclock." He looked at the sky, thinking about rain, about the slick clay roads, himself stalled somewhere miles from town. He thought about it with a sort of triumph, of the fact that he was going to miss dinner, that by starting now and so serving his compulsion of haste, he would be at the greatest possible distance from both towns when noon came. It seemed to him that, in this, circumstance was giving him a break, so he said to the negro:

"What the hell are you doing? Has somebody paid you to keep this car standing here as long as you can?"

"Dis here ti'aint got no air a-tallin hit," the negro said.

"Then get the hellaway fromthere and let me have that tube," Jason said. "Hit up now," the negro said, rising. "You kin ride now."

Jason got in and started the engine and drove off. He went into second gear, the engine spluttering and gasping, and he raced the engine, jamming the throttle down and snapping the choker in and out savagely. "It's goin to rain," he said, "Get me half way there, and rain like hell." And he drove on out of the bells and out of town, thinking of himself slogging through the mud, hunting a team. "And every damn one of them will be at church." He thought of how he'd find a church at last and take a team and of the owner coming out, shouting at him and of himself striking the man down. "I'm Jason Compson. See if you can stop me.

See if you can elect a man to office that can stop me," he said, thinking of himself entering the courthouse with a file of soldiers and dragging the sheriff out. "Thinks he can sit with his hands folded and see me lose my job. I'll show him about jobs." Of his niece he did not think at all, nor of the arbitrary valuation of the money. Neither of them had had entity or individuality for him for ten years; together they merely symbolized the job in the bank of which he had been deprived before he ever got it.

The air brightened, the running shadow patches were not the obverse, and it seemed to him that the fact that the day was clearing was another cunning stroke on the part of the foe, the fresh battle toward which he was carrying ancient wounds. From time to time he passed churches, unpainted frame buildings with sheet iron steeples, surrounded by tethered teams and shabby motorcars, and it seemed to him that each of them was a picket-post where the rear guards of Circumstance peeped fleetingly back at him. "And damn You, too," he said, "See if You can stop me," thinking of himself, his file of soldiers with the manacled sheriff in the rear, dragging Omnipotence down from His throne, if necessary; of the embattled legions of both hell and heaven through which he tore his way and put his hands at last on his fleeing niece.

The wind was out of the southeast. It blew steadily upon his cheek. It seemed that he could feel the prolonged blow of it sinking through his skull, and suddenly with an old premonition he clapped the brakes on and stopped and sat perfectly still. Then he lifted his hand to his neck and began to curse, and sat there, cursing in a harsh whisper. When it was necessary for him to drive for any length of time he fortified himself with a handkerchief soaked in camphor, which he would tie about his throat when clear of town, thus inhaling the fumes, and he got out and lifted the seat cushion on the chance that there might be a forgotten one there.

He looked beneath both seats and stood again for a while, cursing, seeing himself mocked by his own triumphing. He closed his eyes, leaning on the door. He could return and get the forgotten camphor, or he could go on. In either case, his head would be splitting, but at home he could be sure of finding camphor on Sunday, while if he went on he could not be sure. But if he went back, he would be an hour and a half later in reaching Mottson. "Maybe I can drive slow," he said. "Maybe I can drive slow, thinking of something else—"

He got in and started. "I'll think of something else," he said, so he thought about Lorraine. He imagined himself in bed with her, only he

was just lying beside her, pleading with her to help him, then he thought of the money again, and that he had been outwitted by a woman, a girl. If he could just believe it was the man who had robbed him. But to have been robbed of that which was to have compensated him for the lost job, which he had acquired through so much effort and risk, by the very symbol of the lost job itself, and worst of all, by a bitch of a girl. He drove on, shielding his face from the steady wind with the corner of his coat.

He could see the opposed forces of his destiny and his will drawing swiftly together now, toward a junction that would be irrevocable; he became cunning. I can't make a blunder, he told himself. There would be just one right thing, without alternatives: he must do that. He believed that both of them would know him on sight, while he'd have to trust to seeing her first, unless the man still wore the red tie. And the fact that he must depend on that red tie seemed to be the sum of the impending disaster; he could almost smell it, feel it above the throbbing of his head.

He crested the final hill. Smoke lay in the valley, and roofs, a spire or two above trees. He drove down the hill and into the town, slowing, telling himself again of the need for caution, to find where the tent was located first. He could not see very well now, and he knew that it was the disaster which kept telling him to go directly and get something for his head. At a filling station they told him that the tent was not up yet, but that the show cars were on a siding at the station. He drove there.

Two gaudily painted pullman cars stood on the track. He reconnoitred them before he got out. He was trying to breathe shallowly, so that the blood would not beat so in his skull. He got out and went along the station wall, watching the cars. A few garments hung out of the windows, limp and crinkled, as though they had been recently laundered. On the earth beside the steps of one sat three canvas chairs. But he saw no sign of life at all until a man in a dirty apron came to the door and emptied a pan of dishwater with a broad gesture, the sunlight glinting on the metal belly of the pan, then entered the car again.

Now I'll have to take him by surprise, before he can warn them, he thought. It never occurred to him that they might not be there, in the car. That they should not be there, that the whole result should not hinge on whether he saw them first or they saw him first, would be opposed to all nature and contrary to the whole rhythm of events. And more than that: he must see them first, get the money back, then what they did would be of no importance to him, while otherwise the whole world would know that he, Jason Compson, had been robbed by Quentin, his niece, a bitch.

He reconnoitred again. Then he went to the car and mounted the steps, swiftly and quietly, and paused at the door. The galley was dark, rank with stale food. The man was a white blur, singing in a cracked, shaky tenor. An old man, he thought, and not as big as I am. He entered the car as the man looked up.

"Hey?" the man said, stopping his song.

"Where are they?" Jason said. "Quick, now. In the sleeping car?"

"Where's who?" the man said.

"Don't lie to me," Jason said. He blundered on in the cluttered obscurity.

"What's that?" the other said, "Who you calling a liar?" And when Jason grasped his shoulder he exclaimed, "Look out, fellow!"

"Don't lie," Jason said, "Where are they?"

"Why, you bastard," the man said. His arm was frail and thin in Jason's grasp. He tried to wrench free, then he turned and fell to scrabbling on the littered table behind him.

"Come on," Jason said, "Where are they?"

"I'll tell you where they are," the man shrieked, "Lemme find my butcher knife." "Here," Jason said, trying to hold the other, "I'm just asking you a question."

"You bastard," the other shrieked, scrabbling at the table. Jason tried to grasp him in both arms, trying to prison the puny fury of him. The man's body felt so old, so frail, yet so fatally single-purposed that for

the first time Jason saw clear and unshadowed the disaster toward which he rushed.

“Quit it!” he said, “Here! Here! I’ll get out. Give me time, and I’ll get out.”

“Call me a liar,” the other wailed, “Lemme go. Lemme go just one minute. I’ll show you.” Jason glared wildly about, holding the other. Outside it was now bright and sunny, swift and bright and empty, and he thought of the people soon to be going quietly home to Sunday dinner, decorously festive, and of himself trying to hold the fatal, furious little old man whom he dared not release long enough to turn his back and run.

“Will you quit long enough for me to get out?” he said, “Will you?” But the other still struggled, and Jason freed one hand and struck him on the head. A clumsy, hurried blow, and not hard, but the other slumped immediately and slid clattering among pans and buckets to the floor. Jason stood above him, panting, listening. Then he turned and ran from the car. At the door he restrained himself and descended more slowly and stood there again. His breath made a hah hah hah sound and he stood there trying to repress it, darting his gaze this way and that, when at a scuffling sound behind him he turned in time to see the little old man leaping awkwardly and furiously from the vestibule, a rusty hatchet high in his hand.

He grasped at the hatchet, feeling no shock but knowing that he was falling, thinking So this is how it’ll end, and he believed that he was about to die and when something crashed against the back of his head he thought How did he hit me there? Only maybe he hit me a long time ago, he thought, And I just now felt it, and he thought Hurry. Hurry. Get it over with, and then a furious desire not to die seized him and he struggled, hearing the old man wailing and cursing in his cracked voice.

He still struggled when they hauled him to his feet, but they held him and he ceased.

“Am I bleeding much?” he said, “The back of my head. Am I bleeding?” He was still saying that while he felt himself being propelled rapidly

away, heard the old man's thin furious voice dying away behind him. "Look at my head," he said, "Wait, I—"

"Wait, hell," the man who held him said, "That damn little wasp'll kill you. Keep going. You aint hurt."

"He hit me," Jason said. "Am I bleeding?"

"Keep going," the other said. He led Jason on around the corner of the station, to the empty platform where an express truck stood, where grass grew rigidly in a plot bordered with rigid flowers and a sign in electric lights: Keep your on Mottson, the gap filled by a

human eye with an electric pupil. The man released him.

"Now," he said, "You get on out of here and stay out. What were you trying to do? Commit suicide?"

"I was looking for two people," Jason said. "I just asked him where they were." "Who you looking for?"

"It's a girl," Jason said. "And a man. He had on a red tie in Jefferson yesterday. With this show. They robbed me."

"Oh," the man said. "You're the one, are you. Well, they aint here."

"I reckon so," Jason said. He leaned against the wall and put his hand to the back of his head and looked at his palm. "I thought I was bleeding," he said. "I thought he hit me with that hatchet."

"You hit your head on the rail," the man said. "You better go on. They aint here." "Yes. He said they were not here. I thought he was lying."

"Do you think I'm lying?" the man said. "No," Jason said. "I know they're not here."

"I told him to get the hell out of there, both of them," the man said. "I wont have nothing like that in my show. I run a respectable show, with a respectable troupe."

"Yes," Jason said. "You dont know where they went?"

"No. And I dont want to know. No member of my show can pull a stunt like that. You her— brother?"

"No," Jason said. "It dont matter. I just wanted to see them. You sure he didn't hit me? No blood, I mean."

"There would have been blood if I hadn't got there when I did. You stay away from here, now. That little bastard'll kill you. That your car yonder?"

"Yes."

"Well, you get in it and go back to Jefferson. If you find them, it wont be in my show. I run a respectable show. You say they robbed you?"

"No," Jason said, "It dont make any difference." He went to the car and got in. What is it I must do? he thought. Then he remembered. He started the engine and drove slowly up the street until he found a drugstore. The door was locked. He stood for a while with his hand on the knob and his head bent a little. Then he turned away and when a man came along after a while he asked if there was a drugstore open anywhere, but there was not. Then he asked when the northbound train ran, and the man told him at two thirty. He crossed the pavement and got in the car again and sat there. After a while two negro lads passed. He called to them.

"Can either of you boys drive a car?" "Yes, suh."

"What'll you charge to drive me to Jefferson right away?" They looked at one another, murmuring.

"I'll pay a dollar," Jason said.

They murmured again. "Couldn't go fer dat," one said. "What will you go for?"

"Kin you go?" one said.

"I cant git off," the other said. "Whyn't you drive him up dar? You aint got nothin to do." "Yes I is."

"Whut you got to do?"

They murmured again, laughing.

"I'll give you two dollars," Jason said. "Either of you." "I cant git away neither," the first said.

"Allright," Jason said. "Go on."

He sat there for sometime. He heard a clock strike the half hour, then people began to pass, in Sunday and Easter clothes. Some looked at him as they passed, at the man sitting quietly behind the wheel of a small car, with his invisible life unravelled out about him like a worn-out sock.

After a while a negro in overalls came up.

"Is you de one wants to go to Jefferson?" he said. "Yes," Jason said.

"What'll you charge me?"

"Fo dollars." "Give you two."

"Cant go fer no less'n fo." The man in the car sat quietly. He wasn't even looking at him. The negro said, "You want me er not?"

"Alright," Jason said, "Get in."

He moved over and the negro took the wheel. Jason closed his eyes. I can get something for it at Jefferson, he told himself, easing himself to the jolting, I can get something there. They drove on, along the streets where people were turning peacefully into houses and Sunday dinners, and on out of town. He thought that. He wasn't thinking of home, where Ben and Luster were eating cold dinner at the kitchen table. Something—the absence of disaster, threat, in any constant evil—permitted him to forget Jefferson as any place which he had ever seen before, where his life must resume itself.

When Ben and Luster were done Dilsey sent them outdoors. "And see kin you keep let him alone twellfo oclock. T.P. be here den."

"Yessum," Luster said. They went out. Dilsey ate her dinner and cleared up the kitchen. Then she went to the foot of the stairs and listened, but there was no sound. She returned through the kitchen and out the outer door and stopped on the steps. Ben and Luster were not in sight, but while she stood there she heard another sluggish twang from the direction of the cellar door and she went to the door and looked down upon a repetition of the morning's scene. "He done it jes dat way," Luster said. He contemplated the motionless saw with a kind of hopeful dejection. "I aint got de right thing to hit it wid yit," he said.

“En you aint gwine find hit down here, neither,” Dilsey said. “You take himon out in de sun. You bofe get pneumonia down here on dis wet flo.”

She waited and watched them cross the yard toward a clump of cedar trees near the fence. Then she went on to her cabin.

“Now, dont you git started,” Luster said, “I had enough trouble wid you today.” There was a hammock made of barrel staves slatted into woven wires. Luster lay down in the swing, but Ben went on vaguely and purposelessly. He began to whimper again. “Hush, now,” Luster said, “I fixin to whup you.” He lay back in the swing. Ben had stopped moving, but Luster could hear him whimpering. “Is you gwine hush, er aint you?” Luster said. He got up and followed and came upon Ben squatting before a small mound of earth. At either end of it an empty bottle of blue glass that once contained poison was fixed in the ground. In one was a withered stalk of jimson weed. Ben squatted before it, moaning, a slow, inarticulate sound.

Still moaning he sought vaguely about and found a twig and put it in the other bottle. “Whyn’t you hush?” Luster said, “You want me to give you somethin’ to sho nough moan about? Sposin I does dis.” He knelt and swept the bottle suddenly up and behind him. Ben ceased moaning.

He squatted, looking at the small depression where the bottle had sat, then as he drew his lungs full Luster brought the bottle back into view. “Hush!” he hissed, “Dont you dast to beller! Dont you. Dar hit is. See? Here. You fixin to start ef you stays here. Come on, les go see ef dey started knockin ball yit.” He took Ben’s arm and drew him up and they went to the fence and stood side by side there, peering between the matted honeysuckle not yet in bloom.

“Dar,” Luster said, “Dar come some. See um?”

They watched the foursome play onto the green and out, and move to the tee and drive.

Ben watched, whimpering, slobbering. When the foursome went on he followed along the fence, bobbing and moaning. One said.

“Here, caddie. Bring the bag.”

“Hush, Benjy,” Luster said, but Ben went on at his shambling trot, clinging to the fence, wailing in his hoarse, hopeless voice. The man played and went on, Ben keeping pace with him until the fence turned at right angles, and he clung to the fence, watching the people move on and away.

“Will you hush now?” Luster said, “Will you hush now?” He shook Ben’s arm. Ben clung to the fence, wailing steadily and hoarsely. “Aint you gwine stop?” Luster said, “Or is you?” Ben gazed through the fence. “All right, den,” Luster said, “You want somethin to beller about?” He looked over his shoulder, toward the house. Then he whispered: “Caddy! Beller now. Caddy! Caddy! Caddy!”

A moment later, in the slow intervals of Ben’s voice, Luster heard Dilsey calling. He took Ben by the armand they crossed the yard toward her. “I tole you he warn’t gwine stay quiet,” Luster said. “You vilyun!” Dilsey said, “Whut you done to him?” “I aint done nothin. I tole you when demfolks start playin, he git started up.”

“You come on here,” Dilsey said. “Hush, Benjy. Hush, now.” But he wouldn’t hush. They crossed the yard quickly and went to the cabin and entered. “Run git dat shoe,” Dilsey said. “Dont you sturb Miss Cahline, now. Ef she say anything, tellher I got him. Go on, now; you kin sho do dat right, I reckon.” Luster went out. Dilsey led Ben to the bed and drew him down beside her and she held him, rocking back and forth, wiping his drooling mouth upon the hem of her skirt. “Hush, now,” she said, stroking his head, “Hush.

Dilsey got you.” But he bellowed slowly, abjectly, without tears; the grave hopeless sound of all voiceless misery under the sun. Luster returned, carrying a white satin slipper. It was yellow now, and cracked and soiled, and when they placed it into Ben’s hand he hushed for a while. But he still whimpered, and soon he lifted his voice again.

"You reckon you kin find T. P.?" Dilsey said.

"He say yistiddy he gwine out to St John's today. Say he be back at fo." Dilsey rocked back and forth, stroking Ben's head.

"Dis long time, O Jesus," she said, "Dis long time." "I kin drive dat surrey, mammy," Luster said.

"You kill bofe y'all," Dilsey said, "You do hit fer devilment. I knows you got plenty sense to. But I cant trust you. Hush, now," she said. "Hush. Hush."

"Nome I wont," Luster said. "I drives wid T. P." Dilsey rocked back and forth, holding Ben. "Miss Cahline say ef you cant quiet him, she gwine git up en come down en do hit."

"Hush, honey," Dilsey said, stroking Ben's head. "Luster, honey," she said, "Will you think about yo ole mammy en drive dat surrey right?"

"Yessum," Luster said. "I drive hit jes like T. P."

Dilsey stroked Ben's head, rocking back and forth. "I does de bes I kin," she said, "Lawd knows dat. Go git it, den," she said, rising. Luster scuttled out. Ben held the slipper, crying. "Hush, now. Luster gone to git de surrey en take you to de graveyard. We aint gwine risk gittin yo cap," she said. She went to a closet contrived of a calico curtain hung across a corner of the room and got the felt hat she had worn. "We's down to worse'n dis, ef folks jes knowed," she said. "You's de Lawd's chile, anyway. En I be His'n too, fo long, praise Jesus. Here." She put the hat on his head and buttoned his coat. He wailed steadily. She took the slipper from him and put it away and they went out. Luster came up, with an ancient white horse in a battered and lopsided surrey.

"You gwine be careful, Luster?" she said.

"Yessum," Luster said. She helped Ben into the back seat. He had ceased crying, but now he began to whimper again.

"Hit's his flower," Luster said. "Wait, I'll git him one."

"You set right dar," Dilsey said. She went and took the cheek-strap.

"Now, hurry en git him one." Luster ran around the house, toward the garden. He came back with a single narcissus.

"Dat un broke," Dilsey said, "Whyn't you git him a good un?"

“Hit de onliest one I could find,” Luster said. “Y’all took all of um Friday to dec’rate de church. Wait, I’ll fixhit.” So while Dilsey held the horse Luster put a splint on the flower stalk with a twig and two bits of string and gave it to Ben. Then he mounted and took the reins. Dilsey still held the bridle.

“You knows de way now?” she said, “Up de street, round de square, to de graveyard, den straight back home.”

“Yessum,” Luster said, “Humup, Queenie.” “You gwine be careful, now?”

“Yessum.” Dilsey released the bridle. “Humup, Queenie,” Luster said.

“Here,” Dilsey said, “You han me dat whup.” “Aw, mammy,” Luster said.

“Give hit here,” Dilsey said, approaching the wheel. Luster gave it to her reluctantly. “I wont never git Queenie started now.”

“Never you mind about dat,” Dilsey said. “Queenie know mo bout whar she gwine dan you does. Allyou got to do is set dar en hold demreins. You knows de way, now?”

“Yessum. Same way T. P. goes ev’y Sunday.” “Den you do de same thing dis Sunday.”

“Cose I is. Aint I drove fer T. P. mo’n a hund’ed times?”

“Den do hit again,” Dilsey said. “G’awn, now. En ef you hurts Benjy, nigger boy, I dont know whut I do. You bound fer de chain gang, but I’ll send you dar fo even chain gang ready fer you.”

“Yessum,” Luster said. “Humup, Queenie.”

He flapped the lines on Queenie’s broad back and the surrey lurched into motion. “You, Luster!” Dilsey said.

“Hum up, dar!” Luster said. He flapped the lines again. With subterranean rumblings Queenie jogged slowly down the drive and turned into the street, where Luster exhorted her into a gait resembling a prolonged and suspended fallin a forward direction.

Ben quit whimpering. He sat in the middle of the seat, holding the repaired flower upright in his fist, his eyes serene and ineffable. Directly before him Luster's bullet head turned backward continually until the house passed from view, then he pulled to the side of the street and while Ben watched him he descended and broke a switch from a hedge. Queenie lowered her head and fell to cropping the grass until Luster mounted and hauled her head up and harried her into motion again, then he squared his elbows and with the switch and the reins held high he assumed a swaggering attitude out of all proportion to the sedate clopping of Queenie's hooves and the organlike basso of her internal accompaniment. Motors passed them, and pedestrians; once a group of half grown negroes:

"Dar Luster. Whar you gwine, Luster? To de boneyard?"

"Hi," Luster said, "Aint de same boneyard y'allheaded fer. Humup, elefump."

They approached the square, where the Confederate soldier gazed with empty eyes beneath his marble hand into wind and weather. Luster took still another notch in himself and gave the impervious Queenie a cut with the switch, casting his glance about the square. "Dar Mr Jason's car," he said then he spied another group of negroes. "Les show demniggers how quality does, Benjy," he said, "Whut you say?" He looked back.

Ben sat, holding the flower in his fist, his gaze empty and untroubled. Luster hit Queenie again and swung her to the left at the monument. For an instant Ben sat in an utter hiatus. Then he bellowed. Bellow on bellow, his voice mounted, with scarce interval for breath. There was more than astonishment in it, it was horror; shock; agony eyeless, tongueless; just sound, and Luster's eyes backrolling for a white instant. "Gret God," he said, "Hush! Hush! Gret God!" He whirled again and struck Queenie with the switch. It broke and he cast it away and with Ben's voice mounting toward its unbelievable crescendo Luster caught up the end of the reins and leaned forward as Jason came jumping across the square and onto the step.

With a backhanded blow he hurled Luster aside and caught the reins and sawed Queenie about and doubled the reins back and slashed her across the hips. He cut her again and again, into a plunging gallop, while Ben's hoarse agony roared about them, and swung her about to the right of the monument. Then he struck Luster over the head with his fist.

"Dont you know any better than to take him to the left?" he said. He reached back and struck Ben, breaking the flower stalk again. "Shut up!" he said, "Shut up!" He jerked Queenie back and jumped down. "Get to hell on home with him. If you ever cross that gate with him again, I'll kill you!"

"Yes, suh!" Luster said. He took the reins and hit Queenie with the end of them. "Git up! Git up, dar! Benjy, fer God's sake!" Ben's voice roared and roared. Queenie moved again, her feet began to clop-clop steadily again, and at once Ben hushed. Luster looked quickly back over his shoulder, then he drove on. The broken flower drooped over Ben's fist and his eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and façade flowed smoothly once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place.

1929

The end

As I Lay Dying

As I Lay Dying, William Faulkner

Produced during Faulkner's time working at a power plant, this Southern Gothic novel was reportedly written from midnight to 4:00 AM over the course of six weeks and he claimed he did not change a

word of the manuscript. Faulkner's fifth novel, *As I Lay Dying* (1930) is consistently ranked among the best novels of twentieth century literature. The title derives from Book XI of Homer's *Odyssey* (taken from William Marris' 1925 translation), wherein Agamemnon tells Odysseus: "As I lay dying, the woman with the dog's eyes would not close my eyes as I descended into Hades." Once again, the novel employs the stream of consciousness writing technique, with multiple narrators and varying chapter lengths.

In total the book is narrated by 15 different characters, each expressing their own thoughts and emotions, over 59 chapters. As with many of Faulkner's works, the narrative is set in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, which Faulkner referred to as "my apocryphal county," a fictional rendition of his home in Lafayette County, Mississippi.

It tells the story of the death of Addie Bundren and her impoverished family's quest and motivations, both noble and selfish, to honor her wish to be buried in her hometown of Jefferson, Mississippi. As the novel opens, Addie is alive, though in poor health and she is expected to die before long. She sits at a window watching her firstborn, Cash, building her coffin. Anse, Addie's husband, waits on the porch, while their daughter, Dewey Dell, fans her mother in the July heat.

The night after Addie dies, a heavy rainstorm sets in, destroying the bridges the family will need to cross to make their journey to Jefferson. The family's trek by wagon begins, with Addie's non-embalmed body in the coffin. Along the way, her children encounter various difficulties. Anse frequently rejects any offers of assistance, including meals or lodging, so at times the family goes hungry and sleeps in barns. At other times, he refuses to accept loans, claiming he wishes to "be beholden to no man," thus manipulating the would-be-lender into giving him charity as a gift not to be repaid.

The chapters are titled by their narrators' names, as the characters are developed gradually through each other's perceptions and opinions, with Darl's predominating. The novel helped solidify Faulkner's reputation as a pioneer modernist author. He establishes his unique

narrative technique through stream of consciousness and interior monologue, conveying the existential metaphysics of everyday life.

Contents

DARL

CORA

DARL

JEWEL

DARL

CORA

DEWEY DELL

TULL

ANSE

DARL

PEABODY

DARL

VARDAMAN

DEWEY DELL

VARDAMAN

TULL

DARL

CASH

VARDAMAN

TULL

DARL

CASH

DARL

VARDAMAN

DARL

ANSE

DARL

ANSE

SAMSON

DEWEY DELL

TULL

DARL

TULL

DARL
VARDAMAN
TULL
DARL
CASH
CORA
WHITFIELD
DARL
ARMSTID
VARDAMAN
MOSELEY
DARL
VARDAMAN
DARL
VARDAMAN
DARL
VARDAMAN
DARL
CASH
PEABODY
MacGOWAN
VARDAMAN
DARL
DEWEY DELL
CASH

To
HAL SMITH
DARL

As I Lay Dying, William Faulkner

As I Lay Dying By William Faulkner

To HAL SMITH

DARL

JEWEL and I come up from the field, following the path in single file. Although I am fifteen feet ahead of him, anyone watching us from the cotton-house can see Jewel's frayed and broken straw hat a full head above my own.

The path runs straight as a plumb-line, worn smooth by feet and baked brick-hard by July, between the green rows of laid-by cotton, to the cotton-house in the centre of the field, where it turns and circles the cotton-house at four soft right angles and goes on across the field again, worn so by feet in fading precision.

The cotton-house is of rough logs, from between which the chinking has long fallen. Square, with a broken roof set at a single pitch, it leans in empty and shimmering dilapidation in the sunlight, a single broad window in two opposite walls giving on to the approaches of the path. When we reach it I turn and follow the path which circles the house. Jewel, fifteen feet behind me, looking straight ahead, steps in a single stride through the window.

Still staring straight ahead, his pale eyes like wood set into his wooden face, he crosses the floor in four strides with the rigid gravity of a cigar-store Indian dressed in patched overalls and endued with life from the hips down, and steps in a single stride through the opposite window and into the path again just as I come around the corner. In single file and five feet apart and Jewel now in front, we go on up the path toward the foot of the bluff.

Tull's wagon stands beside the spring, hitched to the rail, the reins wrapped about the seat stanchion. In the wagon-bed are two chairs. Jewel stops at the spring and takes the gourd from the willow branch and drinks. I pass him and mount the path, beginning to hear Cash's saw.

When I reach the top he has quit sawing. Standing in a litter of chips, he is fitting two of the boards together. Between the shadow spaces they

are yellow as gold, like soft gold, bearing on their flanks in smooth undulations the marks of the adze blade: a good carpenter, Cash is. He holds the two planks on the trestle, fitted along the edges in a quarter of the finished box. He kneels and squints along the edge of them, then he lowers them and takes up the adze. A good carpenter. Addie Bundren could not want a better one, a better box to lie in. It will give her confidence and comfort. I go on to the house, followed by the

Chuck Chuck Chuck

of the adze.

CORA

SO I saved out the eggs and baked yesterday. The cakes turned out right well. We depend a lot on our chickens. They are good layers, what few we have left after the possums and such. Snakes, too, in the summer. A snake will break up a hen-house quicker than anything. So after they were going to cost so much more than Mr. Tull thought, and after I promised that the difference in the number of eggs would make it up, I had to be more careful than ever because it was on my final say-so we took them.

We could have stocked cheaper chickens, but I gave my promise as Miss Lawington said when she advised me to get a good breed, because Mr. Tull himself admits that a good breed of cows or hogs pays in the long run. So when we lost so many of them we couldn't afford to use the eggs ourselves, because I could not have had Mr. Tull chide me when it was on my say-so we took them. So when Miss Lawington told me about the cakes I thought that I could bake them and earn enough at one time to increase the net value of the flock the equivalent of two head.

And that by saving the eggs out one at a time, even the eggs wouldn't be costing anything. And that week they laid so well that I not only saved out enough eggs above what we had engaged to sell, to bake the cakes with, I had saved enough so that the flour and the sugar and the

stove wood would not be costing anything. So I baked yesterday, more careful than ever I baked in my life, and the cakes turned out right well. But when we got to town this morning Miss Lawington told me the lady had changed her mind and was not going to have the party after all.

“She ought to taken those cakes anyway,” Kate says.

“Well,” I say, “I reckon she never had no use for them now.”

“She ought to taken them,” Kate says. “But those rich town ladies can change their minds. Poor folks can’t.”

Riches is nothing in the face of the Lord, for He can see into the heart. “Maybe I can sell them at the bazaar Saturday,” I say. They turned out real well.

“You can’t get two dollars a piece for them,” Kate says.

“Well, it isn’t like they cost me anything,” I say. I saved them out and swapped a dozen of them for the sugar and flour. It isn’t like the cakes cost me anything, as Mr. Tull himself realizes that the eggs I saved were over and beyond what we had engaged to sell, so it was like we had found the eggs or they had been given to us.

“She ought to taken those cakes when she same as gave you her word,” Kate says. The Lord can see into the heart. If it is His will that some folks has different ideas of honesty from other folks, it is not my place to question His decree.

“I reckon she never had any use for them,” I say. They turned out real well, too.

The quilt is drawn up to her chin, hot as it is, with only her two hands and her face outside. She is propped on the pillow, with her head raised so she can see out the window, and we can hear him every time he takes up the adze or the saw. If we were deaf we could almost watch her face and hear him, see him. Her face is wasted away so that the

bones draw just under the skin in white lines. Her eyes are like two candles when you watch them gutter down into the sockets of iron candle-sticks. But the eternal and the everlasting salvation and grace is not upon her.

“They turned out real nice,” I say. “But not like the cakes Addie used to bake.” You can see that girl’s washing and ironing in the pillow-slip, if ironed it ever was. Maybe it will reveal her blindness to her, laying there at the mercy and the ministrations of four men and a tom-boy girl.

“There’s not a woman in this section could ever bake with Addie Bundren,” I say. “First thing we know she’ll be up and baking again, and then we won’t have any sale for ours at all.” Under the quilt she makes no more of a hump than a rail would, and the only way you can tell she is breathing is by the sound of the mattress shucks. Even the hair at her cheek does not move, even with that girl standing right over her, fanning her with the fan. While we watch she swaps the fan to the other hand without stopping it.

“Is she sleeping?” Kate whispers.

“She’s just watching Cash yonder,” the girl says. We can hear the saw in the board. It sounds like snoring. Eula turns on the trunk and looks out the window. Her necklace looks real nice with her red hat. You wouldn’t think it only cost twenty-five cents.

“She ought to have taken those cakes,” Kate says.

I could have used the money real well. But it’s not like they cost me anything except the baking. I can tell him that anybody is likely to make a miscue, but it’s not all of them that can get out of it without loss, I can tell him. It’s not everybody can eat their mistakes, I can tell him.

Someone comes through the hall. It is Darl. He does not look in as he passes the door. Eula watches him as he goes on and passes from sight again toward the back. Her hand rises and touches her beads lightly, and then her hair. When she finds me watching her, her eyes go blank.

DARL

PA and Vernon are sitting on the back porch. Pa is tilting snuff from the lid of his snuff-box into his lower lip, holding the lip outdrawn between thumb and finger. They look around as I cross the porch and dip the gourd into the water bucket and drink.

“Where’s Jewel?” Pa says. When I was a boy I first learned how much better water tastes when it has set a while in a cedar bucket. Warmish-cool, with a faint taste like the hot July wind in cedar trees smells. It has to set at least six hours, and be drunk from a gourd. Water should never be drunk from metal.

And at night it is better still. I used to lie on the pallet in the hall, waiting until I could hear them all asleep, so I could get up and go back to the bucket. It would be black, the shelf black, the still surface of the water a round orifice in nothingness, where before I stirred it awake with the dipper I could see maybe a star or two in the bucket, and maybe in the dipper a star or two before I drank. After that I was bigger, older.

Then I would wait until they all went to sleep so I could lie with my shirt-tail up, hearing them asleep, feeling myself without touching myself, feeling the cool silence blowing upon my parts and wondering if Cash was yonder in the darkness doing it too, had been doing it perhaps for the last two years before I could have wanted to or could have.

Pa’s feet are badly splayed, his toes cramped and bent and warped, with no toenail at all on his little toes, from working so hard in the wet in home-made shoes when he was a boy. Beside his chair his brogans sit. They look as though they had been hacked with a blunt axe out of pig-iron. Vernon has been to town. I have never seen him go to town in overalls. His wife, they say. She taught school too, once.

I fling the dipper dregs to the ground and wipe my mouth on my sleeve. It is going to rain before morning. Maybe before dark. "Down to the barn," I say. "Harnessing the team."

Down there fooling with that horse. He will go on through the barn, into the pasture. The horse will not be in sight: he is up there among the pine seedlings, in the cool. Jewel whistles, once and shrill. The horse snorts, then Jewel sees him, glinting for a gaudy instant among the blue shadows. Jewel whistles again; the horse comes dropping down the slope, stiff-legged, his ears cocking and flicking, his mismatched eyes rolling, and fetches up twenty feet away, broadside on, watching Jewel over his shoulder in an attitude kittenish and alert.

"Come here, sir," Jewel says. He moves. Moving that quick his coat, bunching, tongues swirling like so many flames. With tossing mane and tail and rolling eye the horse makes another short curvetting rush and stops again, feet bunched, watching Jewel. Jewel walks steadily toward him, his hands at his sides. Save for Jewel's legs they are like two figures carved for a tableau savage in the sun.

When Jewel can almost touch him, the horse stands on his hind legs and slashes down at Jewel. Then Jewel is enclosed by a glittering maze of hooves as by an illusion of wings; among them, beneath the upreared chest, he moves with the flashing limberness of a snake. For an instant before the jerk comes on to his arms he sees his whole body earth-free, horizontal, whipping snake-limber, until he finds the horse's nostrils and touches earth again.

Then they are rigid, motionless, terrific, the horse back-thrust on stiffened, quivering legs, with lowered head; Jewel with dug heels, shutting off the horse's wind with one hand, with the other patting the horse's neck in short strokes myriad and caressing, cursing the horse with obscene ferocity.

They stand in rigid terrific hiatus, the horse trembling and groaning. Then Jewel is on the horse's back. He flows upward in a stooping swirl like the lash of a whip, his body in mid-air shaped to the horse. For

another moment the horse stands spraddled, with lowered head, before it bursts into motion. They descend the hill in a series of spine-jolting jumps, Jewel high, leech-like on the withers, to the fence where the horse bunches to a scuttering halt again.

“Well,” Jewel says, “you can quit now, if you got a-plenty.”

Inside the barn Jewel slides running to the ground before the horse stops. The horse enters the stall, Jewel following. Without looking back the horse kicks at him, slamming a single hoof into the wall with a pistol-like report. Jewel kicks him in the stomach; the horse arches his neck back, crop-toothed; Jewel strikes him across the face with his fist and slides on to the trough and mounts upon it. Clinging to the hay-rack he lowers his head and peers out across the stall-tops and through the doorway. The path is empty; from here he cannot even hear Cash sawing. He reaches up and drags down hay in hurried armfuls and crams it into the rack.

“Eat,” he says. “Get the goddamn stuff out of sight while you got a chance, you pussel-gutted bastard. You sweet son of a bitch,” he says.

JEWEL

IT’S because he stays out there, right under the window, hammering and sawing on that goddamn box. Where she’s got to see him. Where every breath she draws is full of his knocking and sawing where she can see him saying See. See what a good one I am making for you. I told him to go somewhere else. I said Good God do you want to see her in it. It’s like when he was a little boy and she says if she had some fertilizer she would try to raise some flowers and he taken the bread-pan and brought it back from the barn full of dung.

And now them others sitting there, like buzzards. Waiting, fanning themselves. Because I said if you wouldn’t keep on sawing and nailing at it until a man can’t sleep even and her hands laying on the quilt like two of them roots dug up and tried to wash and you couldn’t get them clean. I can see the fan and Dewey Dell’s arm. I said if you’d just let her

alone. Sawing and knocking, and keeping the air always moving so fast on her face that when you're tired you can't breathe it, and that goddamn adze going.

One lick less. One lick less. One lick less until everybody that passes in the road will have to stop and see it and say what a fine carpenter he is. If it had just been me when Cash fell off of that church and if it had just been me when pa laid sick with that load of wood fell on him, it would not be happening with every bastard in the county coming in to stare at her because if there is a God what the hell is He for. It would just be me and her on a high hill and me rolling the rocks down the hill at their faces, picking them up and throwing them down the hill, faces and teeth and all by God until she was quiet and not that goddamn adze going. One lick less. One lick less and we could be quiet.

DARL

WE watch him come around the corner and mount the steps. He does not look at us. "You ready?" he says.

"If you're hitched up," I say. I say "Wait." He stops, looking at pa. Vernon spits, without moving. He spits with decorous and deliberate precision into the pocked dust below the porch. Pa rubs his hands slowly on his knees. He is gazing out beyond the crest of the bluff, out across the land. Jewel watches him a moment, then he goes on to the pail and drinks again.

"I mislike undecision as much as ere a man," pa says.

"It means three dollars," I say. The shirt across pa's hump is faded lighter than the rest of it. There is no sweat stain on his shirt. I have never seen a sweat stain on his shirt. He was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die. I suppose he believes it.

"But if she don't last until you get back," he says. "She will be disappointed."

Vernon spits into the dust. But it will rain before morning.

“She’s counted on it,” pa says. “She’ll want to start right away. I know her. I promised her I’d keep the team here and ready, and she’s counting on it.”

“We’ll need that three dollars then, sure,” I say. He gazes out over the land, rubbing his hands on his knees. Since he lost his teeth his mouth collapses in slow repetition when he dips. The stubble gives his lower face that appearance that old dogs have. “You’d better make up your mind soon, so we can get there and get a load on before dark,” I say.

“Ma ain’t that sick,” Jewel says. “Shut up, Darl.”

“That’s right,” Vernon says. “She seems more like herself to-day than she has in a week. Time you and Jewel get back, she’ll be setting up.”

“You ought to know,” Jewel says. “You been here often enough looking at her. You or your folks.” Vernon looks at him. Jewel’s eyes look like pale wood in his high-blooded face. He is a head taller than any of the rest of us, always was. I told them that’s why ma always whipped him and petted him more. Because he was peakling around the house more. That’s why she named him Jewel I told them.

“Shut up, Jewel,” pa says, but as though he is not listening much. He gazes out across the land, rubbing his knees.

“You could borrow the loan of Vernon’s team and we could catch up with you,” I say. “If she didn’t wait for us.”

“Ah, shut your goddamn mouth,” Jewel says.

“She’ll want to go in ourn,” pa says. He rubs his knees. “Don’t ere a man mislike it more.”

"It's laying there, watching Cash whittle on that damn . . ." Jewel says. He says it harshly, savagely, but he does not say the word. Like a little boy in the dark to flail his courage and suddenly aghast into silence by his own noise.

"She wanted that like she wants to go in our own wagon," pa says. "She'll rest easier for knowing it's a good one, and private. She was ever a private woman. You know it well."

"Then let it be private," Jewel says. "But how the hell can you expect it to be——" He looks at the back of pa's head, his eyes like pale wooden eyes.

"Sho," Vernon says, "she'll hold on till it's finished. She'll hold on till everything's ready, till her own good time. And with the roads like they are now, it won't take you no time to get her to town."

"It's fixing up to rain," pa says. "I am a luckless man. I have ever been." He rubs his hands on his knees. "It's that durn doctor, liable to come at any time. I couldn't get word to him till so late. If he was to come tomorrow and tell her the time was nigh, she wouldn't wait. I know her. Wagon or no wagon, she wouldn't wait. Then she'd be upset, and I wouldn't upset her for the living world. With that family burying-ground in Jefferson and them of her blood waiting for her there, she'll be impatient. I promised my word me and the boys would get her there quick as mules could walk it, so she could rest quiet." He rubs his hands on his knees. "No man ever misliked it more."

"If everybody wasn't burning hell to get her there," Jewel says in that harsh, savage voice. "With Cash all day long right under the window, hammering and sawing at that—"

"It was her wish," pa says. "You got no affection nor gentleness for her. You never had. We would be beholden to no man," he says, "me and her. We have never yet been, and she will rest quieter for knowing it and that it was her own blood sawed out the boards and drove the nails. She was ever one to clean up after herself."

“It means three dollars,” I say. “Do you want us to go, or not?” Pa rubs his knees. “We’ll be back by to-morrow sundown.”

“Well . . .” pa says. He looks out over the land, awry-haired, mouthing the snuff slowly against his gums.

“Come on,” Jewel says. He goes down the steps. Vernon spits neatly into the dust.

“By sundown, now,” pa says. “I would not keep her waiting.”

Jewel glances back, then he goes on around the house. I enter the hall, hearing the voices before I reach the door. Tilting a little down the hill, as our house does, a breeze draws through the hall all the time, upslanting. A feather dropped near the front door will rise and brush along the ceiling, slanting backward, until it reaches the down-turning current at the back door: so with voices. As you enter the hall, they sound as though they were speaking out of the air about your head.

CORA

IT was the sweetest thing I ever saw. It was like he knew he would never see her again, that Anse Bundren was driving him from his mother’s death-bed, never to see her in this world again. I always said Darl was different from those others. I always said he was the only one of them that had his mother’s nature, had any natural affection. Not that Jewel, the one she laboured so to bear and coddled and petted so and him flinging into tantrums or sulking spells, inventing devilment to devil her till I would have frailed him time and time. Not him to come and tell her good-bye. Not him to miss a chance to make that extra three dollars at the price of his mother’s good-bye kiss.

A Bundren through and through, loving nobody, caring for nothing except how to get something with the least amount of work. Mr. Tull says Darl asked them to wait. He said Darl almost begged them on his knees not to force him to leave her in her condition. But nothing would

do but Anse and Jewel must make that three dollars. Nobody that knows Anse could have expected different, but to think of that boy, that Jewel, selling all those years of self-denial and downright partiality—they couldn't fool me: Mr. Tull says Mrs. Bundren liked Jewel the least of all, but I knew better. I knew she was partial to him, to the same quality in him that let her put up with Anse Bundren when Mr. Tull said she ought to poisoned him—for three dollars, denying his dying mother the good-bye kiss.

Why, for the last three weeks I have been coming over every time I could, coming sometimes when I shouldn't have, neglecting my own family and duties so that somebody would be with her in her last moments and she would not have to face the Great Unknown without one familiar face to give her courage. Not that I deserve credit for it: I will expect the same for myself. But thank God it will be the faces of my loved kin, my blood and flesh, for in my husband and children I have been more blessed than most, trials though they have been at times.

She lived, a lonely woman, lonely with her pride, trying to make folks believe different, hiding the fact that they just suffered her, because she was not cold in the coffin before they were carting her forty miles away to bury her, flouting the will of God to do it. Refusing to let her lie in the same earth with those Bundrens.

"But she wanted to go," Mr. Tull said. "It was her own wish to lie among her own people."

"Then why didn't she go alive?" I said. "Not one of them would have stopped her, with even that little one almost old enough now to be selfish and stone-hearted like the rest of them."

"It was her own wish," Mr. Tull said. "I heard Anse say it was."

"And you would believe Anse, of course," I said. "A man like you would. Don't tell me."

“I’d believe him about something he couldn’t expect to make anything off of me by not telling,” Mr. Tull said.

“Don’t tell me,” I said. “A woman’s place is with her husband and children, alive or dead. Would you expect me to want to go back to Alabama and leave you and the girls when my time comes, that I left of my own will to cast my lot with yours for better and worse, until death and after?”

“Well, folks are different,” he said.

I should hope so. I have tried to live right in the sight of God and man, for the honour and comfort of my Christian husband and the love and respect of my Christian children. So that when I lay me down in the consciousness of my duty and reward I will be surrounded by loving faces, carrying the farewell kiss of each of my loved ones into my reward. Not like Addie Bundren dying alone, hiding her pride and her broken heart. Glad to go.

Lying there with her head propped up so she could watch Cash building the coffin, having to watch him so he would not skimp on it, like as not, with those men not worrying about anything except if there was time to earn another three dollars before the rain came and the river got too high to get across it. Like as not, if they hadn’t decided to make that last load, they would have loaded her into the wagon on a quilt and crossed the river first and then stopped and give her time to die what Christian death they would let her.

Except Darl. It was the sweetest thing I ever saw. Sometimes I lose faith in human nature for a time; I am assailed by doubt. But always the Lord restores my faith and reveals to me His bounteous love for His creatures. Not Jewel, the one she had always cherished, not him. He was after that three extra dollars. It was Darl, the one that folks say is queer, lazy, pottering about the place no better than Anse, with Cash a good carpenter and always more building than he can get around to, and Jewel always doing something that made him some money or got him talked about, and that near-naked girl always standing over Addie

with a fan so that every time a body tried to talk to her and cheer her up, would answer for her right quick, like she was trying to keep anybody from coming near her at all.

It was Darl. He come to the door and stood there, looking at his dying mother. He just looked at her, and I felt the bounteous love of the Lord again and His mercy. I saw that with Jewel she had just been pretending, but that it was between her and Darl that the understanding and the true love was. He just looked at her, not even coming in where she could see him and get upset, knowing that Anse was driving him away and he would never see her again. He said nothing, just looking at her.

“What you want, Darl?” Dewey Dell said, not stopping the fan, speaking up quick, keeping even him from her. He didn’t answer. He just stood and looked at his dying mother, his heart too full for words.

DEWEY DELL

THE first time me and Lafe picked on down the row. Pa dassent sweat because he will catch his death from the sickness so everybody that comes to help us. And Jewel don’t care about anything he is not kin to us in caring, not care-kin. And Cash like sawing the long hot sad yellow days up into planks and nailing them to something. And pa thinks because neighbours will always treat one another that way because he has always been too busy letting neighbours do for him to find out. And I did not think that Darl would, that sits at the supper-table with his eyes gone further than the food and the lamp, full of the land dug out of his skull and the holes filled with distance beyond the land.

We picked on down the row, the woods getting closer and closer and the secret shade, picking on into the secret shade with my sack and Life’s sack. Because I said will I or won’t I when the sack was half-full because I said if the sack is full when we get to the woods it won’t be me. I said if it don’t mean for me to do it the sack will not be full and I will turn up the next row but if the sack is full, I cannot help it. It will be that I had to do it all the time and I cannot help it. And we picked on

toward the secret shade and our eyes would drown together touching on his hands and my hands and I didn't say anything. I said "What are you doing?" and he said "I am picking into your sack." And so it was full when we came to the end of the row and I could not help it.

And so it was because I could not help it. It was then, and then I saw Darl and he knew. He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words, and I knew he knew because if he had said he knew with the words I would not have believed that he had been there and saw us. But he said he did know and I said "Are you going to tell pa are you going to kill him?" without the words I said it and he said "Why?" without the words. And that's why I can talk to him with knowing with hating because he knows.

He stands in the door, looking at her.

"What you want, Darl?" I say.

"She is going to die," he says. And old turkey-buzzard Tull coming to watch her die but I can fool them.

"When is she going to die?" I say.

"Before we get back," he says.

"Then why are you taking Jewel?" I say.

"I want him to help me load," he says.

TULL

ANSE keeps on rubbing his knees. His overalls are faded; on one knee a serge patch cut out of a pair of Sunday pants, wore iron-slick. "No man dislikes it more than me," he says.

"A fellow's got to guess ahead now and then," I say. "But, come long and short, it won't be no harm done neither way."

“She’ll want to get started right off,” he says. “It’s far enough to Jefferson at best.”

“But the roads is good now,” I say. It’s fixing to rain to-night, too. His folks buries at New Hope, too, not three miles away. But it’s just like him to marry a woman born a day’s hard ride away and have her die on him.

He looks out over the land, rubbing his knees. “No man so mislikes it,” he says.

“They’ll get back in plenty of time,” I say. “I wouldn’t worry none.”

“It means three dollars,” he says.

“Might be it won’t be no need for them to rush back, noways,” I say. “I hope it.”

“She’s a-going,” he says. “Her mind is set on it.” It’s a hard life on women, for a fact. Some women. I mind my mammy lived to be seventy and more. Worked every day, rain or shine; never a sick day since her last chap was born until one day she kind of looked around her and then she went and taken that lace-trimmed nightgown she had had forty-five years and never wore out of the chest and put it on and laid down on the bed and pulled the covers up and shut her eyes. “You all will have to look out for pa the best you can,” she said. “I’m tired.”

Anse rubs his hands on his knees. “The Lord giveth,” he says. We can hear Cash a-hammering and sawing beyond the corner.

It’s true. Never a truer breath was ever breathed. “The Lord giveth,” I say.

That boy comes up the hill. He is carrying a fish nigh long as he is. He slings it to the ground and grunts “Hah” and spits over his shoulder like a man. Durn nigh long as he is.

“What’s that?” I say. “A hog? Where’d you get it?”

“Down to the bridge,” he says. He turns it over, the under-side caked over with dust where it is wet, the eye coated over, humped under the dirt.

“Are you aiming to leave it laying there?” Anse says.

“I aim to show it to ma,” Vardaman says. He looks toward the door. We can hear the talking, coming out on the draught. Cash, too, knocking and hammering at the boards. “There’s company in there,” he says.

“Just my folks,” I say. “They’d enjoy to see it, too.”

He says nothing, watching the door. Then he looks down at the fish laying in the dust. He turns it over with his foot and prods at the eye-bump with his toe, gouging at it. Anse is looking out over the land. Vardaman looks at Anse’s face, then at the door. He turns, going toward the corner of the house, when Anse calls him without looking around.

“You clean that fish,” Anse says.

Vardaman stops. “Why can’t Dewey Dell clean it?” he says.

“You clean that fish,” Anse says.

“Aw, pa,” Vardaman says.

“You clean it,” Anse says. He don’t look around. Vardaman comes back and picks up the fish. It slides out of his hands, smearing wet dirt on to him, and flops down, dirtying itself again, gap-mouthed, goggle-eyed, hiding into the dust like it was ashamed of being dead, like it was in a hurry to get back hid again. Vardaman cusses it. He cusses it like a grown man, standing a-straddle of it. Anse don’t look around. Vardaman picks it up again. He goes on around the house, toting it in

both arms like an armful of wood, it overlapping him on both ends, head and tail. Durn nigh big as he is.

Anse's wrists dangle out of his sleeves: I never see him with a shirt on that looked like it was his in all my life. They all looked like Jewel might have give him his old ones. Not Jewel, though. He's long-armed, even if he is spindling. Except for the lack of sweat. You could tell they ain't been nobody else's but Anse's that way without no mistake. His eyes look like pieces of burnt-out cinder fixed in his face, looking out over the land.

When the shadow touches the steps he says "It's five o'clock."

Just as I get up Cora comes to the door and says it's time to get on. Anse reaches for his shoes. "Now, Mr. Bundren," Cora says, "don't you get up now." He puts his shoes on, stomping into them, like he does everything, like he is hoping all the time he really can't do it and can quit trying to. When we go up the hall we can hear them clumping on the floor like they was iron shoes. He comes toward the door where she is, blinking his eyes, kind of looking ahead of hisself before he sees, like he is hoping to find her setting up, in a chair maybe or maybe sweeping, and looks into the door in that surprised way like he looks in and finds her still in bed every time and Dewey Dell still a-fanning her with the fan. He stands there, like he don't aim to move again nor nothing else.

"Well, I reckon we better get on," Cora says. "I got to feed the chickens." It's fixing to rain, too. Clouds like that don't lie, and the cotton making every day the Lord sends. That'll be something else for him. Cash is still trimming at the boards. "If there's ere a thing we can do," Cora says.

"Anse'll let us know," I say.

Anse don't look at us. He looks around, blinking, in that surprised way, like he had wore hisself down being surprised and was even surprised at that. If Cash just works that careful on my barn.

"I told Anse it likely won't be no need," I say. "I so hope it."

"Her mind is set on it," he says. "I reckon she's bound to go."

"It comes to all of us," Cora says. "Let the Lord comfort you."

"About that corn," I say. I tell him again I will help him out if he gets into a tight, with her sick and all. Like most folks around here, I done help him so much already I can't quit now.

"I aimed to get to it to-day," he says. "Seems like I can't get my mind on nothing."

"Maybe she'll hold out till you are laid by," I say.

"If God wills it," he says.

"Let Him comfort you," Cora says.

If Cash just works that careful on my barn. He looks up when we pass. "Don't reckon I'll get to you this week," he says.

"'Tain't no rush," I say. "Whenever you get around to it."

We get into the wagon. Cora sets the cake-box on her lap. It's fixing to rain, sho.

"I don't know what he'll do," Cora says. "I just don't know."

"Poor Anse," I say. "She kept him at work for thirty-odd years. I reckon she is tired."

"And I reckon she'll be behind him for thirty years more," Kate says. "Or if it ain't her, he'll get another one before cotton-picking."

"I reckon Cash and Darl can get married now," Eula says.

“That poor boy,” Cora says. “The poor little tyke.”

“What about Jewel?” Kate says.

“He can, too,” Eula says.

“Humph,” Kate says. “I reckon he will. I reckon so. I reckon there’s more gals than one around here that don’t want to see Jewel tied down. Well, they needn’t to worry.”

“Why, Kate!” Cora says. The wagon begins to rattle. “The poor little tyke,” Cora says.

It’s fixing to rain this night. Yes, sir. A rattling wagon is mighty dry weather, for a Birdsell. But that’ll be cured. It will for a fact.

“She ought to taken them cakes after she said she would,” Kate says.

ANSE

DURN that road. And it fixing to rain, too. I can stand here and same as see it with second-sight, a-shutting down behind them like a wall, shutting down betwixt them and my given promise. I do the best I can, much as I can get my mind on anything, but durn them boys.

A-laying there, right up to my door, where every bad luck that comes and goes is bound to find it. I told Addie it wasn’t any luck living on a road when it come by here, and she said, for the world like a woman, “Get up and move, then.” But I told her it wasn’t no luck in it, because the Lord put roads for travelling: why He laid them down flat on the earth. When He aims for something to be always a-moving, He makes it long ways, like a road or a horse or a wagon, but when He aims for something to stay put, He makes it up-and-down ways, like a tree or a man.

And so he never aimed for folks to live on a road, because which gets there first, I says, the road or the house? Did you ever know Him to set a road down by a house? I says. No you never, I says, because it's always men can't rest till they gets the house set where everybody that passes in a wagon can spit in the doorway, keeping the folks restless and wanting to get up and go somewheres else when He aimed for them to stay put like a tree or a stand of corn. Because if He'd a aimed for man to be always a-moving and going somewheres else, wouldn't He a put him longways on his belly, like a snake? It stands to reason He would.

Putting it where every bad luck prowling can find it and come straight to my door, charging me taxes on top of it. Making me pay for Cash having to get them carpenter notions when if it hadn't been no road come there, he wouldn't a got them; falling off of churches and lifting no hand in six months and me and Addie slaving and a-slaving, when there's plenty of sawing on this place he could do if he's got to saw.

And Darl, too. Talking me out of him, durn them. It ain't that I am afraid of work; I always have fed me and mine and kept a roof above us: it's that they would short-hand me just because he tends to his own business, just because he's got his eyes full of the land all the time. I says to them, he was all right at first, with his eyes full of the land, because the land laid up-and-down ways then; it wasn't till that ere road come and switched the land around longways and his eyes still full of the land, that they begun to threaten me out of him, trying to short-hand me with the law.

Making me pay for it. She was well and hale as ere a woman ever were, except for that road. Just laying down, resting herself in her own bed, asking naught of none. "Are you sick, Addie?" I said.

"I am not sick," she said.

"You lay you down and rest you," I said. "I knowed you are not sick. You're just tired. You lay you down and rest."

"I am not sick," she said. "I will get up."

"Lay still and rest," I said. "You are just tired. You can get up tomorrow." And she was laying there, well and hale as ere a woman ever were, except for that road.

"I never sent for you," I said. "I take you to witness I never sent for you."

"I know you didn't," Peabody said. "I bound that. Where is she?"

"She's a-laying down," I said. "She's just a little tired, but she'll——"

"Get outen here, Anse," he said. "Go set on the porch a while."

And now I got to pay for it, me without a tooth in my head, hoping to get ahead enough so I could get my mouth fixed where I could eat God's own victuals as a man should, and her hale and well as ere a woman in the land until that day. Got to pay for being put to the need of that three dollars. Got to pay for the way for them boys to have to go away to earn it. And now I can see same as second-sight the rain shutting down betwixt us, a-coming up that road like a durn man, like it wasn't ere a other house to rain on in all the living land.

I have heard men cuss their luck, and right, for they were sinful men. But I do not say it's a curse on me, because I have done no wrong to be cussed by. I am not religious, I reckon. But peace is my heart: I know it is. I have done things but neither better nor worse than them that pretend otherlike, and I know that Old Marster will care for me as for ere a sparrow that falls. But it seems hard that a man in his need could be so flouted by a road.

Vardaman comes around the house, bloody as a hog to his knees, and that ere fish chopped up with the axe like as not, or maybe throwed away for him to lie about the dogs et it. Well, I reckon I ain't no call to expect no more of him than of his man-growed brothers. He comes

along, watching the house, quiet, and sits on the steps. "Whew," he says, "I'm pure tired."

"Go wash them hands," I say. But couldn't no woman strove harder than Addie to make them right, man and boy: I'll say that for her.

"It was full of blood and guts as a hog," he says. But I just can't seem to get no heart into anything, with this here weather sapping me, too.

"Pa," he says, "is ma sick some more?"

"Go wash them hands," I say. But I just can't seem to get no heart into it.

DARL

HE has been to town this week: the back of his neck is trimmed close, with a white line between hair and sunburn like a joint of white bone. He has not once looked back.

"Jewel," I say. Back running, tunnelled between the two sets of bobbing mule ears, the road vanishes beneath the wagon as though it were a ribbon and the front axle were a spool. "Do you know she is going to die, Jewel?"

It takes two people to make you, and one people to die. That's how the world is going to end.

I said to Dewey Dell: "You want her to die so you can get to town: is that it?" She wouldn't say what we both knew. "The reason you will not say it is, when you say it, even to yourself, you will know it is true: is that it? But you know it is true now. I can almost tell you the day when you knew it is true. Why won't you say it, even to yourself?" She will not say it. She just keeps on saying Are you going to tell pa? Are you going to kill him? "You cannot believe it is true because you cannot believe that Dewey Dell, Dewey Dell Bundren, could have such bad luck: is that it?"

The sun, an hour above the horizon, is poised like a bloody egg upon a crest of thunderheads; the light has turned copper: in the eye portentous, in the nose sulphurous, smelling of lightning. When Peabody comes, they will have to use the rope. He has pussel-gutted himself eating cold greens. With the rope they will haul him up the path, baloon-like up the sulphurous air.

“Jewel,” I say, “do you know that Addie Bundren is going to die? Addie Bundren is going to die?”

PEABODY

WHEN Anse finally sent for me of his own accord, I said “He has wore her out at last.” And I said a damn good thing and at first I would not go because there might be something I could do and I would have to haul her back, by God. I thought maybe they have the same sort of fool ethics in heaven they have in the Medical College and that it was maybe Vernon Tull sending for me again, getting me there in the nick of time, as Vernon always does things, getting the most for Anse’s money like he does for his own. But when it got far enough into the day for me to read weather sign I knew it couldn’t have been anybody but Anse that sent. I knew that nobody but a luckless man could ever need a doctor in the face of a cyclone. And I knew that if it had finally occurred to Anse himself that he needed one, it was already too late.

When I reach the spring and get down and hitch the team, the sun has gone down behind a bank of black cloud like a top-heavy mountain range, like a load of cinders dumped over there, and there is no wind. I could hear Cash sawing for a mile before I got there. Anse is standing at the top of the bluff above the path.

“Where’s the horse?” I say.

“Jewel’s taken and gone,” he says. “Can’t nobody else ketch hit. You’ll have to walk up, I reckon.”

“Me, walk up, weighing two hundred and twenty-five pounds?” I say. “Walk up that burn wall?” He stands there beside a tree. Too bad the Lord made the mistake of giving trees roots and giving the Anse Bundrens He makes feet and legs. If He’d just swapped them, there wouldn’t ever be a worry about this country being deforested someday. Or any other country. “What do you aim for me to do?” I say. “Stay here and get blowed clean out of the county when that cloud breaks?” Even with the horse it would take me fifteen minutes to ride up across the pasture to the top of the ridge and reach the house. The path looks like a crooked limb blown against the bluff. Anse has not been in town in twelve years. And how his mother ever got up there to bear him, he being his mother’s son.

“Vardaman’s gittin’ the rope,” he says.

After a while Vardaman appears with the plough-line. He gives the end of it to Anse and comes down the path, uncoiling it.

“You hold it tight,” I say. “I done already wrote this visit on to my books, so I’m going to charge you just the same, whether I get there or not.”

“I got hit,” Anse says. “You kin come on up.”

I’ll be damned if I can see why I don’t quit. A man seventy years old, weighing two hundred and odd pounds, being hauled up and down a damn mountain on a rope. I reckon it’s because I must reach the fifty-thousand dollar mark of dead accounts on my books before I can quit. “What the hell does your wife mean,” I say, “taking sick on top of a durn mountain?”

“I’m right sorry,” he says. He let the rope go, just dropped it, and he has turned toward the house. There is a little daylight up here still, of the colour of sulphur matches. The boards look like strips of sulphur. Cash does not look back. Vernon Tull says he brings each board up to the window for her to see it and say it is all right. The boy overtakes us. Anse looks back at him. “Where’s the rope?” he says.

“It’s where you left it,” I say. “But never you mind that rope. I got to get back down that bluff. I don’t aim for that storm to catch me up here. I’d blow too durn far once I got started.”

The girl is standing by the bed, fanning her. When we enter she turns her head and looks at us. She has been dead these ten days. I suppose it’s having been a part of Anse for so long that she cannot even make that change, if change it be. I can remember how when I was young I believed death to be a phenomenon of the body; now I know it to be merely a function of the mind—and that of the minds of the ones who suffer the bereavement. The nihilists say it is the end; the fundamentalists, the beginning; when in reality it is no more than a single tenant or family moving out of a tenement or a town.

She looks at us. Only her eyes seem to move. It’s like they touch us, not with sight or sense, but like the stream from a hose touches you, the stream at the instant of impact as dissociated from the nozzle as though it had never been there. She does not look at Anse at all. She looks at me, then at the boy. Beneath the quilt she is no more than a bundle of rotten sticks.

“Well, Miss Addie,” I say. The girl does not stop the fan. “How are you, sister?” I say. Her head lies gaunt on the pillow, looking at the boy. “You picked out a fine time to get me out here and bring up a storm.” Then I send Anse and the boy out. She watches the boy as he leaves the room. She has not moved save her eyes.

He and Anse are on the porch when I come out, the boy sitting on the steps, Anse standing by a post, not even leaning against it, his arms dangling, the hair pushed and matted up on his head like a dipped rooster. He turns his head, blinking at me.

“Why didn’t you send for me sooner?” I say.

“Hit was jest one thing and then another,” he says. “That ere corn me and the boys was aimin’ to git up with, and Dewey Dell a-takin’ good

keer of her, and folks comin' in, a-offerin' to help and sich, till I jest thought . . ."

"Damn the money," I say. "Did you ever hear of me worrying a fellow before he was ready to pay?"

"Hit ain't begrudin' the money," he says. "I jest kept a-thinkin' . . . She's goin', is she?" The durn little tyke is sitting on the top step, looking smaller than ever in the sulphur-coloured light. That's the one trouble with this country: everything, weather, all, hangs on too long. Like our rivers, our land: opaque, slow, violent; shaping and creating the life of man in its implacable and brooding image. "I knowed hit," Anse says. "All the while I made sho. Her mind is sot on hit."

"And a damn good thing, too," I say. "With a trifling——" He sits on the top step, small, motionless in faded overalls. When I came out he looked up at me, then at Anse. But now he has stopped looking at us. He just sits there.

"Have you told her yit?" Anse says.

"What for?" I say. "What the devil for?"

"She'll know hit. I knowed that when she see you she would know hit, same as writing. You wouldn't need to tell her. Her mind—"

Behind us the girl says, "Paw." I look at her, at her face.

"You better go quick," I say.

When we enter the room she is watching the door. She looks at me. Her eyes look like lamps blaring up just before the oil is gone. "She wants you to go out," the girl says.

"Now, Addie," Anse says, "when he come all the way from Jefferson to git you well?" She watches me: I can feel her eyes. It's like she was shoving at me with them, I have seen it before in women. Seen them

drive from the room them coming with sympathy and pity, with actual help, and clinging to some trifling animal to whom they never were more than pack-horses. That's what they mean by the love that passeth understanding: that pride, that furious desire to hide that abject nakedness which we bring here with us, carry with us into operating rooms, carry stubbornly and furiously with us into the earth again. I leave the room. Beyond the porch Cash's saw snores steadily into the board. A minute later she calls his name, her voice harsh and strong.

"Cash," she says; "you, Cash!"

DARL

PA stands beside the bed. From behind his leg Vardaman peers, with his round head and his eyes round and his mouth beginning to open. She looks at pa; all her failing life appears to drain into her eyes, urgent, irremediable. "It's Jewel she wants," Dewey Dell says.

"Why, Addie," pa says, "him and Darl went to make one more load. They thought there was time. That you would wait for them, and that three dollars and all . . ." He stoops, laying his hand on hers. For a while yet she looks at him, without reproach, without anything at all, as if her eyes alone are listening to the irrevocable cessation of his voice. Then she raises herself, who has not moved in ten days. Dewey Dell leans down, trying to press her back.

"Ma," she says; "ma."

She is looking out the window, at Cash stooping steadily at the board in the failing light, labouring on toward darkness and into it as though the stroking of the saw illumined its own motion, board and saw engendered.

"You, Cash," she shouts, her voice harsh, strong, and unimpaired. "You, Cash!"

He looks up at the gaunt face framed by the window in the twilight. It is a composite picture of all time since he was a child. He drops the saw and lifts the board for her to see, watching the window in which the face has not moved. He drags a second plank into position and slants the two of them into their final juxtaposition, gesturing toward the ones yet on the ground, shaping with his empty hand in pantomime the finished box. For a while still she looks down at him from the composite picture, neither with censure nor approbation. Then the face disappears.

She lies back and turns her head without so much as glancing at pa. She looks at Vardaman; her eyes, the life in them, rushing suddenly upon them; the two flames glare up for a steady instant. Then they go out as though someone had leaned down and blown upon them.

“Ma,” Dewey Dell says; “ma!” Leaning above the bed, her hands lifted a little, the fan still moving like it has for ten days, she begins to keen. Her voice is strong, young, tremulous and clear, rapt with its own timbre and volume, the fan still moving steadily up and down, whispering the useless air. Then she flings herself across Addie Bundren’s knees, clutching her, shaking her with the furious strength of the young before sprawling suddenly across the handful of rotten bones that Addie Bundren left, jarring the whole bed into a chattering sibilance of mattress shucks, her arms outflung and the fan in one hand still beating with expiring breath into the quilt.

From behind pa’s leg Vardaman peers, his mouth full open and all colour draining from his face into his mouth, as though he has by some means fleshed his own teeth in himself, sucking. He begins to move slowly backward from the bed, his eyes round, his pale face fading into the dusk like a piece of paper pasted on a failing wall, and so out of the door.

Pa leans above the bed in the twilight, his humped silhouette partaking of that owl-like quality of awry-feathered, disgruntled outrage within which lurks a wisdom too profound or too inert for even thought.

“Durn them boys,” he says.

Jewel, I say. Overhead the day drives level and grey, hiding the sun by a flight of grey spears. In the rain the mules smoke a little, splashed yellow with mud, the off one clinging in sliding lunges to the side of the road above the ditch. The tilted lumber gleams dull yellow, water-soaked and heavy as lead, tilted at a steep angle into the ditch above the broken wheel; about the shattered spokes and about Jewel’s ankles a runnel of yellow neither water nor earth swirls, curving with the yellow road neither of earth nor water, down the hill dissolving into a streaming mass of dark green neither of earth nor sky. Jewel, I say.

Cash comes to the door, carrying the saw. Pa stands beside the bed, humped, his arms dangling. He turns his head, his shabby profile, his chin collapsing slowly as he works the snuff against his gums.

“She’s gone,” Cash says.

“She taken and left us,” pa says. Cash does not look at him. “How nigh are you done?” pa says. Cash does not answer. He enters, carrying the saw. “I reckon you better get at it,” pa says. “You’ll have to do the best you can, with them boys gone off that-a-way.” Cash looks down at her face. He is not listening to pa at all. He does not approach the bed. He stops in the middle of the floor, the saw against his leg, his sweating arms powdered lightly with sawdust, his face composed. “If you get in a tight, maybe some of them’ll get here to-morrow and help you,” pa says. “Vernon could.” Cash is not listening. He is looking down at her peaceful, rigid face fading into the dusk as though darkness were a precursor of the ultimate earth, until at last the face seems to float detached upon it, lightly as the reflection of a dead leaf. “There is Christians enough to help you,” pa says. Cash is not listening. After a while he turns without looking at pa and leaves the room. Then the saw begins to snore again. “They will help us in our sorrow,” pa says.

The sound of the saw is steady, competent, unhurried, stirring the dying light so that at each stroke her face seems to wake a little into an expression of listening and of waiting, as though she were counting the

strokes. Pa looks down at the face, at the black sprawl of Dewey Dell's hair, the outflung arms, the clutched fan now motionless on the fading quilt. "I reckon you better get supper on," he says.

Dewey Dell does not move.

"Git up, now, and put supper on," pa says. "We got to keep our strength up. I reckon Doctor Peabody's right hungry, coming all this way. And Cash'll need to eat quick and get back to work so he can finish it in time."

Dewey Dell rises, heaving to her feet. She looks down at the face. It is like a casting of fading bronze upon the pillow, the hands alone still with any semblance of life: a curled, gnarled inertness; a spent yet alert quality from which weariness, exhaustion, travail has not yet departed, as though they doubted even yet the actuality of rest, guarding with horned and penurious alertness the cessation which they know cannot last.

Dewey Dell stoops and slides the quilt from beneath them and draws it up over them to the chin, smoothing it down, drawing it smooth. Then without looking at pa she goes around the bed and leaves the room.

She will go out where Peabody is, where she can stand in the twilight and look at his back with such an expression that, feeling her eyes and turning, he will say; I would not let it grieve me, now. She was old, and sick too. Suffering more than we knew. She couldn't have got well. Vardaman's getting big now, and with you to take good care of them all. I would try not to let it grieve me. I expect you'd better go and get some supper ready. It don't have to be much. But they'll need to eat, and she looking at him, saying You could do so much for me if you just would. If you just knew. I am I and you are you and I know it and you don't know it and you could do so much for me if you just would and if you just would then I could tell you and then nobody would have to know it except you and me and Darl.

Pa stands over the bed, dangle-armed, humped, motionless. He raises his hand to his head, scouring his hair, listening to the saw. He comes nearer and rubs his hand, palm and back, on his thigh and lays it on her face and then on the hump of quilt where her hands are. He touches the quilt as he saw Dewey Dell do, trying to smoothe it up to the chin, but disarranging it instead. He tries to smoothe it again, clumsily, his hand awkward as a claw, smoothing at the wrinkles which he made and which continue to emerge beneath his hand with perverse ubiquity, so that at last he desists, his hand falling to his side and stroking itself again, palm and back, on his thigh. The sound of the saw snores steadily into the room. Pa breathes with a quiet, rasping sound, mouthing the snuff against his gums. "God's will be done," he says. "Now I can get them teeth."

Jewel's hat droops limp about his neck, channelling water on to the soaked tow-sack tied about his shoulders as, ankle-deep in the running ditch, he pries with a slipping two-by-four, with a piece of rotting log for fulcrum, at the axle. Jewel, I say, she is dead, Jewel. Addie Bundren is dead.

VARDAMAN

THEN I begin to run. I run toward the back and come to the edge of the porch and stop. Then I begin to cry. I can feel where the fish was in the dust. It is cut up into pieces of not-fish now, not-blood on my hands and overalls. Then it wasn't so. It hadn't happened then. And now she is getting so far ahead I cannot catch her.

The trees look like chickens when they ruffle out into the cool dust on the hot days. If I jump off the porch I will be where the fish was, and it all cut up into not-fish now. I can hear the bed and her face and them and I can feel the floor shake when he walks on it that came and did it. That came and did it when she was all right but he came and did it.

"The fat son of a bitch."

I jump from the porch, running. The top of the barn comes swooping up out of the twilight. If I jump I can go through it like the pink lady in the circus, into the warm smelling, without having to wait. My hands grab at the bushes; beneath my feet the rocks and dirt go rubbing down.

Then I can breathe again, in the warm smelling. I enter the stall, trying to touch him, and then I can cry then I vomit the crying. As soon as he gets through kicking I can and then I can cry, the crying can.

“He kilt her. He kilt her.”

The life in him runs under the skin, under my hand, running through the splotches, smelling up into my nose where the sickness is beginning to cry, vomiting the crying, and then I can breathe, vomiting it. It makes a lot of noise. I can smell the life running up from under my hands, up my arms, and then I can leave the stall.

I cannot find it. In the dark, along the dust, the walls I cannot find it. The crying makes a lot of noise. I wish it wouldn't make so much noise. Then I find it in the wagon-shed, in the dust, and I run across the lot and into the road, the stick jouncing on my shoulder.

They watch me as I run up, beginning to jerk back, their eyes rolling, snorting, jerking back on the hitch rein. I strike. I can hear the stick striking; I can see it hitting their heads, the breast-yoke, missing altogether sometimes as they rear and plunge, but I am glad.

“You kilt my maw!”

The stick breaks, they rearing and snorting, their feet popping loud on the ground; loud because it is going to rain and the air is empty for the rain. But it is still long enough. I run this way and that as they rear and jerk at the hitch-rein, striking.

“You kilt her!”

I strike at them, striking, they wheeling in a long lunge, the buggy wheeling on to two wheels and motionless like it is nailed to the ground and the horses motionless like they are nailed by the hind feet to the centre of a whirling-plate.

I run in the dust. I cannot see, running in the sucking dust where the buggy vanishes tilted on two wheels. I strike, the stick hitting into the ground, bouncing, striking into the dust and then into the air again and the dust sucking on down the road faster than if a car was in it. And then I can cry, looking at the stick. It is broken down to my hand, not longer than stove wood that was a long stick. I throw it away and I can cry. It does not make so much noise now.

The cow is standing in the barn door, chewing. When she sees me come into the lot she lows, her mouth full of flopping green, her tongue flopping.

“I ain’t a-goin’ to milk you. I ain’t a-goin’ to do nothing for them.”

I hear her turn when I pass. When I turn she is just behind me with her sweet, hot, hard breath.

“Didn’t I tell you I wouldn’t?”

She nudges me, snuffing. She moans deep inside, her mouth closed. I jerk my hand, cursing her like Jewel does.

“Git, now.”

I stoop my hand to the ground and run at her. She jumps back and whirls away and stops, watching me. She moans. She goes on to the path and stands there, looking up the path.

It is dark in the barn, warm, smelling, silent. I can cry quietly, watching the top of the hill.

Cash comes to the hill, limping where he fell off of the church. He looks down at the spring, then up the road and back toward the barn. He comes down the path stiffly and looks at the broken hitch-rein and at the dust in the road and then up the road, where the dust is gone.

“I hope they’ve got clean past Tull’s by now. I so hope hit.”

Cash turns and limps up the path.

“Durn him. I showed him. Durn him.”

I am not crying now. I am not anything. Dewey Dell comes to the hill and calls me. “Vardaman.” I am not anything. I am quiet. “You, Vardaman.” I can cry quiet now, feeling and hearing my tears.

“Then hit want. Hit hadn’t happened then. Hit was a-layin’ right there on the ground. And now she’s gittin ready to cook hit.”

It is dark. I can hear wood, silence: I know them. But not living sounds, not even him. It is as though the dark were resolving him out of his integrity, into an unrelated scattering of components—snuffings and stampings; smells of cooling flesh and ammoniac hair; an illusion of a coordinated whole of splotched hide and strong bones within which, detached and secret and familiar, an is different from my is. I see him dissolve—legs, a rolling eye, a gaudy splotching like cold flames—and float upon the dark in fading solution; all one yet neither; all either yet none. I can see hearing coil toward him, caressing, shaping his hard shape—fetlock, hip, shoulder and head; smell and sound. I am not afraid.

“Cooked and et. Cooked and et.”

DEWEY DELL

HE could do so much for me if he just would. He could do everything for me. It’s like everything in the world for me is inside a tub full of guts, so that you wonder how there can be any room in it for anything else very

important. He is a big tub of guts and I am a little tub of guts and if there is not any room for anything else important in a big tub of guts, how can it be room in a little tub of guts. But I know it is there because God gave women a sign when something has happened bad.

It's because I am alone. If I could just feel it, it would be different, because I would not be alone. But if I were not alone, everybody would know it. And he could do so much for me, and then I would not be alone. Then I could be all right alone.

I would let him come in between me and Lafe, like Darl came in between me and Lafe, and so Lafe is alone too. He is Lafe and I am Dewey Dell, and when mother died I had to go beyond and outside of me and Lafe and Darl to grieve because he could do so much for me and he don't know it. He don't even know it.

From the back porch I cannot see the barn. Then the sound of Cash's sawing comes in from that way. It is like a dog outside the house, going back and forth around the house to whatever door you come to, waiting to come in. He said I worry more than you do and I said You don't know what worry is so I can't worry. I try to but I can't think long enough to worry.

I light the kitchen lamp. The fish, cut into jagged pieces, bleeds quietly in the pan. I put it into the cupboard quick, listening into the hall, hearing. It took her ten days to die; maybe she don't know it is yet. Maybe she won't go until Cash. Or maybe until Jewel. I take the dish of greens from the cupboard and the bread-pan from the cold stove, and I stop, watching the door.

"Where's Vardaman?" Cash says. In the lamp his sawdusted arms look like sand.

"I don't know. I ain't seen him."

"Peabody's team run away. See if you can find Vardaman. The horse will let him catch him."

“Well. Tell them to come to supper.”

I cannot see the barn. I said, I don't know how to worry. I don't know how to cry. I tried, but I can't. After a while the sound of the saw comes around, coming dark along the ground in the dust-dark. Then I can see him, going up and down above the plank.

“You come in to supper,” I say. “Tell him.” He could do everything for me. And he don't know it. He is his guts and I am my guts. And I am Lafe's guts. That's it. I don't see why he didn't stay in town. We are country people not as good as town people. I don't see why he didn't. Then I can see the top of the barn. The cow stands at the foot of the path, lowing. When I turn back, Cash is gone.

I carry the buttermilk in. Pa and Cash and he are at the table.

“Where's that big fish Bud caught, sister?” he says.

I set the milk on the table. “I never had no time to cook it.”

“Plain turnip greens is mighty spindling eating for a man my size,” he says. Cash is eating. About his head the print of his hat is sweated into his hair. His shirt is blotched with sweat. He has not washed his hands and arms.

“You ought to took time,” pa says. “Where's Vardaman?”

I go toward the door. “I can't find him.”

“Here, sister,” he says; “never mind about the fish. It'll save, I reckon. Come on and sit down.”

“I ain't minding it,” I say. “I'm going to milk before it sets in to rain.”

Pa helps himself and pushes the dish on. But he does not begin to eat. His hands are half-closed on either side of his plate, his head bowed a

little, his awry hair standing into the lamplight. He looks like right after the maul hits the steer and it no longer alive and don't yet know that it is dead.

But Cash is eating, and he is too. "You better eat something," he says. He is looking at pa. "Like Cash and me. You'll need it."

"Ay," pa says. He rouses up, like a steer that's been kneeling in a pond and you run at it. "She would not begrudge me it."

When I am out of sight of the house, I go fast. The cow lows at the foot of the bluff. She nuzzles at me, snuffing, blowing her breath in a sweet, hot blast, through my dress, against my hot nakedness, moaning. "You got to wait a little while. Then I'll tend to you." She follows me into the barn where I set the bucket down. She breathes into the bucket, moaning. "I told you. You just got to wait, now. I got more to do than I can tend to." The barn is dark. When I pass, he kicks the wall a single blow. I go on. The broken plank is like a pale plank standing on end. Then I can see the slope, feel the air moving on my face again, slow, pale, with lesser dark and with empty seeing, the pine clumps blotched up the tilted slope, secret and waiting.

The cow in silhouette against the door nuzzles at the silhouette of the bucket, moaning.

Then I pass the stall. I have almost passed it. I listen to it saying for a long time before it can say the word and the listening part is afraid that there may not be time to say it. I feel my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone, and the process of coming unalone is terrible. Lafe. Lafe. "Lafe" Lafe. Lafe. I lean a little forward, one foot advanced with dead walking. I feel the darkness rushing past my breast, past the cow; I begin to rush upon the darkness but the cow stops me and the darkness rushes on upon the sweet blast of her moaning breath, filled with wood and with silence.

"Vardaman. You, Vardaman."

He comes out of the stall. "You durn little sneak! You durn little sneak!"

He does not resist; the last of rushing darkness flees whistling away.
"What? I ain't done nothing."

"You durn little sneak!" My hands shake him, hard. Maybe I couldn't stop them. I didn't know they could shake so hard. They shake both of us, shaking.

"I never done it," he says. "I never touched them."

My hands stop shaking him, but I still hold him. "What are you doing here? Why didn't you answer when I called you?"

"I ain't doing nothing."

"You go on to the house and get your supper."

He draws back. I hold him. "You quit now. You leave me be."

"What were you doing down here? You didn't come down here to sneak after me?"

"I never. I never. You quit, now. I didn't even know you was down here. You leave me be."

I hold him, leaning down to see his face, feel it with my eyes. He is about to cry. "Go on, now. I done put supper on and I'll be there soon as I milk. You better go on before he eats everything up. I hope that team runs clean back to Jefferson."

"He kilt her," he says. He begins to cry.

"Hush."

"She never hurt him and he come and kilt her."

“Hush.” He struggles. I hold him. “Hush.”

“He kilt her.” The cow comes up behind us, moaning. I shake him again.

“You stop it, now. Right this minute. You’re fixing to make yourself sick and then you can’t go to town. You go on to the house and eat your supper.”

“I don’t want no supper. I don’t want to go to town.”

“We’ll leave you here, then. Lessen you behave, we will leave you. Go on, now, before that old green-eating tub of guts eats everything up from you.” He goes on, disappearing slowly into the hill. The crest, the trees, the roof of the house stand against the sky. The cow nuzzles at me, moaning. “You’ll just have to wait. What you got in you ain’t nothing to what I got in me, even if you are a woman too.” She follows me, moaning. Then the dead, hot, pale air breathes on my face again. He could fix it all right, if he just would. And he don’t even know it. He could do everything for me if he just knowed it. The cow breathes upon my hips and back, her breath warm, sweet, stertorous, moaning. The sky lies flat down the slope, upon the secret clumps. Beyond the hill sheet-lightning stains upward and fades. The dead air shapes the dead earth in the dead darkness, further away than seeing shapes the dead earth. It lies dead and warm upon me, touching me naked through my clothes. I said You don’t know what worry is. I don’t know what it is. I don’t know whether I am worrying or not. Whether I can or not. I don’t know whether I can cry or not. I don’t know whether I have tried to or not. I feel like a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth.

VARDAMAN

WHEN they get it finished they are going to put her in it and then for a long time I couldn’t say it. I saw the dark stand up and go whirling away and I said “Are you going to nail her up in it, Cash? Cash? Cash?” I got shut up in the crib the new door it was too heavy for me it went shut I couldn’t breathe because the rat was breathing up all the air. I said “Are you going to nail it shut, Cash? Nail it? Nail it?”

Pa walks around. His shadow walks around, over Cash going up and down above the saw, at the bleeding plank.

Dewey Dell said we will get some bananas. The train is behind the glass, red on the track. When it runs the track shines on and off. Pa said flour and sugar and coffee costs so much. Because I am a country boy because boys in town. Bicycles. Why do flour and sugar and coffee cost so much when he is a country boy. "Wouldn't you ruther have some bananas instead?" Bananas are gone, eaten. Gone. When it runs on the track shines again. "Why ain't I a town boy, pa?" I said God made me. I did not said to God to made me in the country. If He can make the train, why can't He make them all in the town because flour and sugar and coffee. "Wouldn't you ruther have bananas?"

He walks around. His shadow walks around.

It was not her. I was there, looking. I saw. I thought it was her, but it was not. It was not my mother. She went away when the other one laid down in her bed and drew the quilt up. She went away. "Did she go as far as town?" "She went farther than town." "Did all those rabbits and possums go farther than town?" God made the rabbits and possums. He made the train. Why must He make a different place for them to go if she is just like the rabbit.

Pa walks around. His shadow does. The saw sounds like it is asleep.

And so if Cash nails the box up, she is not a rabbit. And so if she is not a rabbit I couldn't breathe in the crib and Cash is going to nail it up. And so if she lets him it is not her. I know. I was there. I saw when it did not be her. I saw. They think it is and Cash is going to nail it up.

It was not her because it was laying right yonder in the dirt. And now it's all chopped up. I chopped it up. It's laying in the kitchen in the bleeding pan, waiting to be cooked and et. Then it wasn't and she was, and now it is and she wasn't. And to-morrow it will be cooked and et and she will be him and pa and Cash and Dewey Dell and there won't

be anything in the box and so she can breathe. It was laying right yonder on the ground. I can get Vernon. He was there and he seen it, and with both of us it will be and then it will not be.

TULL

IT was nigh to midnight and it had set in to rain when he woke us. It had been a misdoubtful night, with the storm making; a night when a fellow looks for most anything to happen before he can get the stock fed and himself to the house an supper et and in bed with the rain starting, and when Peabody's team come up, lathered, with the broke harness dragging and the neck-yoke betwixt the off critter's legs, Cora says "It's Addie Bundren. She's gone at last."

"Peabody mought have been to ere a one of a dozen houses hereabouts," I says. "Besides, how do you know it's Peabody's team?"

"Well, ain't it?" she says. "You hitch up, now."

"What for?" I says. "If she is gone, we can't do nothing till morning. And it fixing to storm too."

"It's my duty," she says. "You put the team in."

But I wouldn't do it. "It stands to reason they'd send for us if they needed us. You don't even know she's gone yet."

"Why, don't you know that's Peabody's team? Do you claim it ain't? Well, then." But I wouldn't go. When folks wants a fellow, it's best to wait till they sends for him, I've found. "It's my Christian duty," Cora says. "Will you stand between me and my Christian duty?"

"You can stay there all day to-morrow, if you want," I says.

So when Cora waked me it had set in to rain. Even while I was going to the door with the lamp and it shining on the glass so he could see I am coming, it kept on knocking. Not loud, but steady, like he might have

gone to sleep thumping, but I never noticed how low down on the door the knocking was till I opened it and never seen nothing. I held the lamp up, with the rain sparkling across it and Cora back in the hall saying “Who is it, Vernon?” but I couldn’t see nobody a-tall at first until I looked down and around the door, lowering the lamp.

He looked like a drowned puppy, in them overalls, without no hat, splashed up to his knees where he had walked them four miles in the mud. “Well, I’ll be durned,” I says.

“Who is it, Vernon?” Cora says.

He looked at me, his eyes round and black in the middle like when you throw a light in a owl’s face. “You mind that ere fish,” he says.

“Come in the house,” I says. “What is it? Is your maw—”

“Vernon,” Cora says.

He stood kind of around behind the door, in the dark. The rain was blowing on to the lamp, hissing on it so I am scared every minute it’ll break. “You was there,” he says. “You seen it.”

Then Cora come to the door. “You come right in outen the rain,” she says, pulling him in and him watching me. He looked just like a drowned puppy. “I told you,” Cora says. “I told you it was a-happening. You go and hitch.”

“But he ain’t said—” I says.

He looked at me, dripping on to the floor. “He’s a-ruining the rug,” Cora says. “You go get the team while I take him to the kitchen.”

But he hung back, dripping, watching me with them eyes. “You was there. You seen it laying there. Cash is fixing to nail her up, and it was a-laying right there on the ground. You seen it. You seen the mark in the

dirt. The rain never come up till after I was a-coming here. So we can get back in time.”

I be durn if it didn’t give me the creeps, even when I didn’t know yet. But Cora did. “You get that team quick as you can,” she says. “He’s outen his head with grief and worry.”

I be durn if it didn’t give me the creeps. Now and then a fellow gets to thinking. About all the sorrow and afflictions in this world; how it’s liable to strike anywhere, like lightning. I reckon it does take a powerful trust in the Lord to guard a fellow, though sometimes I think that Cora’s a mite over-cautious, like she was trying to crowd the other folks away and get in closer than anybody else. But then, when something like this happens, I reckon she is right and you got to keep after it and I reckon I am blessed in having a wife that ever strives for sanctity and well-doing like she says I am.

Now and then a fellow gets to thinking about it. Not often, though. Which is a good thing. For the Lord aimed for him to do and not to spend too much time thinking, because his brain it’s like a piece of machinery: it won’t stand a whole lot of racking. It’s best when it all runs along the same, doing the day’s work and not no one part used no more than needful. I have said and I say again, that’s ever living thing the matter with Darl: he just thinks by himself too much. Cora’s right when she says all he needs is a wife to straighten him out. And when I think about that, I think that if nothing but being married will help a man, he’s durn nigh hopeless. But I reckon Cora’s right when she says the reason the Lord had to create women is because man don’t know his own good when he sees it.

When I come back to the house with the team, they was in the kitchen. She was dressed on top of her nightgown with a shawl over her head and her umbrella and her Bible wrapped up in the oil-cloth, and him sitting on a up-turned bucket on the stove-zinc where she had put him, dripping on to the floor. “I can’t get nothing outen him except about a fish,” she says. “It’s a judgment on them. I see the hand of the Lord upon this boy for Anse Bundren’s judgment and warning.”

“The rain never come up till after I left,” he says. “I had done left. I was on the way. And so it was there in the dust. You seen it. Cash is fixing to nail her, but you seen it.”

When we got there it was raining hard, and him sitting on the seat between us, wrapped up in Cora’s shawl. He hadn’t said nothing else, just sitting there with Cora holding the umbrella over him. Now and then Cora would stop singing long enough to say “It’s a judgment on Anse Bundren. May it show him the path of sin he is a-trodding.” Then she would sing again, and him sitting there between us, leaning forward a little like the mules couldn’t go fast enough to suit him.

“It was laying right yonder,” he says, “but the rain come up after I taken and left. So I can go and open the windows, because Cash ain’t nailed her yet.”

It was long a-past midnight when we drove the last nail, and almost dust-dawn when I got back home and taken the team out and got back in bed, with Cora’s nightcap laying on the other pillow. And be durned if even then it wasn’t like I could still hear Cora singing and feel that boy leaning forward between us like he was ahead of the mules, and still see Cash going up and down with that saw, and Anse standing there like a scarecrow, like he was a steer standing knee-deep in a pond and somebody come by and set the pond up on edge and he ain’t missed it yet.

It was nigh toward daybreak when we drove the last nail and toted it into the house, where she was laying on the bed with the window open and the rain blowing on her again. Twice he did it, and him so dead for sleep that Cora says his face looked like one of these here Christmas masts that had done been buried a while and then dug up, until at last they put her into it and nailed it down so he couldn’t open the window on her no more. And the next morning they found him in his shirt-tail laying asleep on the floor like a felled steer, and the top of the box bored clean full of holes and Cash’s new auger broke off in the last one.

When they taken the lid off they found that two of them had bored on into her face.

If it's a judgment, it ain't right. Because the Lord's got more to do than that. He's bound to have. Because the only burden Anse Bundren's ever had is himself. And when folks talks him low, I think to myself he ain't that less of a man or he couldn't a bore himself this long.

It ain't right. I be durn if it is. Because He said Suffer little children to come unto Me don't make it right, neither. Cora said, "I have bore you what the Lord God sent me. I faced it without fear nor terror because my faith was strong in the Lord, a-bolstering and sustaining me. If you have no son, it's because the Lord has decreed otherwise in His wisdom. And my life is and has ever been a open book to ere a man or woman among His creatures because I trust in my God and my reward."

I reckon she's right. I reckon if there's ere a man or woman anywhere that He could turn it all over to and go away with His mind at test, it would be Cora. And I reckon she would make a few changes, no matter how He was running it. And I reckon they would be for man's good. Leastways, we would have to like them. Leastways, we might as well go on and make like we did.

DARL

THE lantern sits on a stump. Rusted, grease-fouled, its cracked chimney smeared on one side with a soaring smudge of soot, it sheds a feeble and sultry glare upon the trestles and the boards and the adjacent earth. Upon the dark ground the chips look like random smears of soft pale paint on a black canvas. The boards look like long smooth tatters torn from the flat darkness and turned backside out.

Cash labours about the trestles, moving back and forth, lifting and placing the planks with long clattering reverberations in the dead air as though he were lifting and dropping them at the bottom of an invisible well, the sounds ceasing without departing, as if any movement might dislodge them from the immediate air in reverberant repetition.

He saws again, his elbow flashing slowly, a thin thread of fire running along the edge of the saw, lost and recovered at the top and bottom of each stroke in unbroken elongation, so that the saw appears to be six feet long, into and out of pa's shabby and aimless silhouette. "Give me that plank," Cash says. "No; the other one." He puts the saw down and comes and picks up the plank he wants, sweeping pa away with the long swinging gleam of the balanced board.

The air smells like sulphur. Upon the impalpable plane of it their shadows form as upon a wall, as though like sound they had not gone very far away in falling but had merely congealed for a moment, immediate and musing. Cash works on, half turned into the feeble light, one thigh and one pole-thin arm braced, his face sloped into the light with a rapt, dynamic immobility above his tireless elbow. Below the sky sheet-lightning slumbers lightly; against it the trees, motionless, are ruffled out to the last twig, swollen, increased as though quick with young.

It begins to rain. The first harsh, sparse, swift drops rush through the leaves and across the ground in a long sigh, as though of relief from intolerable suspense. They are big as buckshot, warm as though fired from a gun; they sweep across the lantern in a vicious hissing.

Pa lifts his face, slack-mouthed, the wet black rim of snuff plastered close along the base of his gums; from behind his slack-faced astonishment he muses as though from beyond time, upon the ultimate outrage. Cash looks once at the sky, then at the lantern. The saw has not faltered, the running gleam of its pistoning edge unbroken. "Get something to cover the lantern," he says.

Pa goes to the house. The rain rushes suddenly down, without thunder, without warning of any sort; he is swept on to the porch upon the edge of it and in an instant Cash is wet to the skin. Yet the motion of the saw has not faltered, as though it and the arm functioned in a tranquil conviction that rain was an illusion of the mind. Then he puts down the saw and goes and crouches above the lantern, shielding it with his

body, his back shaped lean and scrawny by his wet shirt as though he had been abruptly turned wrong-side out, shirt and all.

Pa returns. He is wearing Jewel's raincoat and carrying Dewey Dell's. Squatting over the lantern, Cash reaches back and picks up four sticks and drives them into the earth and takes Dewey Dell's raincoat from pa and spreads it over the sticks, forming a roof above the lantern. Pa watches him. "I don't know what you'll do," he says. "Darl taken his coat with him."

"Get wet," Cash says. He takes up the saw again; again it moves up and down, in and out of that unhurried imperviousness as a piston moves in the oil; soaked, scrawny, tireless, with the lean light body of a boy or an old man. Pa watches him, blinking, his face streaming; again he looks up at the sky with that expression of dumb and brooding outrage and yet of vindication, as though he had expected no less; now and then he stirs, moves, gaunt and streaming, picking up a board or a tool and then laying it down. Vernon Tull is there now, and Cash is wearing Mrs. Tull's raincoat and he and Vernon are hunting the saw. After a while they find it in pa's hand.

"Why don't you go on to the house, out of the rain?" Cash says. Pa looks at him, his face streaming slowly. It is as though upon a face carved by a savage caricaturist a monstrous burlesque of all bereavement flowed. "You go on in," Cash says. "Me and Vernon can finish it."

Pa looks at them. The sleeves of Jewel's coat are too short for him. Upon his face the rain streams, slow as cold glycerine. "I don't begrudge her the wetting," he says. He moves again and falls to shifting the planks, picking them up, laying them down again carefully, as though they are glass. He goes to the lantern and pulls at the propped raincoat until he knocks it down and Cash comes and fixes it back.

"You get on to the house," Cash says. He leads pa to the house and returns with the raincoat and folds it and places it beneath the shelter

where the lantern sits. Vernon has not stopped. He looks up, still sawing.

“You ought to done that at first,” he says. “You knowed it was fixing to rain.”

“It’s his fever,” Cash says. He looks at the board.

“Ay,” Vernon says. “He’d a come, anyway.”

Cash squints at the board. On the long flank of it the rain crashes steadily, myriad, fluctuant. “I’m going to bevel it,” he says.

“It’ll take more time,” Vernon says. Cash sets the plank on edge; a moment longer Vernon watches him, then he hands him the plane.

Vernon holds the board steady while Cash bevels the edge of it with the tedious and minute care of a jeweller. Mrs. Tull comes to the edge of the porch and calls Vernon. “How near are you done?” she says.

Vernon does not look up. “Not long. Some, yet.”

She watches Cash stooping at the plank, the turgid savage gleam of the lantern slicking on the raincoat as he moves. “You go down and get some planks off the barn and finish it and come in out of the rain,” she says. “You’ll both catch your death.” Vernon does not move. “Vernon,” she says.

“We won’t be long,” he says. “We’ll be done after a spell.” Mrs. Tull watches them a while. Then she re-enters the house.

“If we get in a tight, we could take some of them planks,” Vernon says. “I’ll help you put them back.”

Cash ceases the plane and squints along the plank, wiping it with his palm. “Give me the next one,” he says.

Some time toward dawn the rain ceases. But it is not yet day when Cash drives the last nail and stands stiffly up and looks down at the finished coffin, the others watching him. In the lantern-light his face is calm, musing; slowly he strokes his hands on his raincoated thighs in a gesture deliberate, final and composed. Then the four of them—Cash and pa and Vernon and Peabody—raise the coffin to their shoulders and turn toward the house.

It is light, yet they move slowly; empty, yet they carry it carefully; lifeless, yet they move with hushed precautionary words to one another, speaking of it as though, complete, it now slumbered lightly alive, waiting to come awake. On the dark floor their feet clump awkwardly, as though for a long time they have not walked on floors.

They set it down by the bed. Peabody says quietly: "Let's eat a snack. It's almost daylight. Where's Cash?"

He has returned to the trestles, stooped again in the lantern's feeble glare as he gathers up his tools and wipes them on a cloth carefully and puts them into the box with its leather sling to go over the shoulder. Then he takes up box, lantern and raincoat and returns to the house, mounting the steps into faint silhouette against the paling east.

In a strange room you must empty yourself for sleep. And before you are emptied for sleep, what are you. And when you are emptied for sleep, you are not. And when you are filled with sleep, you never were. I don't know what I am. I don't know if I am or not. Jewel knows he is, because he does not know that he does not know whether he is or not. He cannot empty himself for sleep because he is not what he is and he is what he is not.

Beyond the unlamped wall I can hear the rain shaping the wagon that is ours, the load that is no longer theirs that felled and sawed it nor yet theirs that bought it and which is not ours either, lie on our wagon though it does, since only the wind and the rain shape it only to Jewel and me, that are not asleep. And since sleep is is-not and rain and wind are was, it is not. Yet the wagon is, because when the wagon is was,

Addie Bundren will not be. And Jewel is, so Addie Bundren must be. And then I must be, or I could not empty myself for sleep in a strange room. And so if I am not emptied yet, I am is.

How often have I lain beneath rain on a strange roof, thinking of home.

CASH

IMADE it on the bevel.

1. There is more surface for the nails to grip.
2. There is twice the gripping-surface to each seam.
3. The water will have to seep into it on a slant. Water moves easiest up and down or straight across.
4. In a house people are upright two-thirds of the time. So the seams and joints are made up-and-down. Because the stress is up-and-down.
5. In a bed where people lie down all the time, the joints and seams are made sideways, because the stress is sideways.
6. Except.
7. A body is not square like a cross-tie.
8. Animal magnetism.
9. The animal magnetism of a dead body makes the stress come slanting, so the seams and joints of a coffin are made on the bevel.
10. You can see by an old grave that the earth sinks down on the bevel.
11. While in a natural hole it sinks by the centre, the stress being up-and-down.
12. So I made it on the bevel.
13. It makes a neater job.

VARDAMAN

MY mother is a fish.

TULL

IT was ten o'clock when I got back, with Peabody's team hitched on to the back of the wagon. They had already dragged the buckboard back

from where Quick found it upside down straddle of the ditch about a mile from the spring. It was pulled out of the road at the spring, and about a dozen wagons was already there. It was Quick found it. He said the river was up and still rising. He said it had already covered the highest water-mark on the bridge-piling he had ever seen. "That bridge won't stand a whole lot of water," I said. "Has somebody told Anse about it?"

"I told him," Quick said. "He says he reckons them boys has heard and unloaded and are on the way back by now. He says they can load up and get across."

"He better go on and bury her at New Hope," Armstid said. "That bridge is old. I wouldn't monkey with it."

"His mind is set on taking her to Jefferson," Quick said.

"Then he better get at it soon as he can," Armstid said.

Anse meets us at the door. He has shaved, but not good. There is a long cut on his jaw, and he is wearing his Sunday pants and a white shirt with the neckband buttoned. It is drawn smooth over his hump, making it look bigger than ever, like a white shirt will, and his face is different too. He looks folks in the eye now, dignified, his face tragic and composed, shaking us by the hand as we walk up on to the porch and scrape our shoes, a little stiff in our Sunday clothes, our Sunday clothes rustling, not looking full at him as he meets us.

"The Lord giveth," we say.

"The Lord giveth."

That boy is not there. Peabody told about how he come into the kitchen, hollering, swarming and clawing at Cora when he found her cooking that fish, and how Dewey Dell taken him down to the barn. "My team all right?" Peabody says.

“All right,” I tell him. “I give them a bait this morning. Your buggy seems all right too. It ain’t hurt.”

“And no fault of somebody’s,” he says. “I’d give a nickel to know where that boy was when that team broke away.”

“If it’s broke anywhere, I’ll fix it,” I say.

The womenfolks go on into the house. We can hear them, talking and fanning. The fans go wish, wish, wish and them talking, the talking sounding kind of like bees murmuring in a water-bucket. The men stop on the porch, talking some, not looking at one another.

“Howdy, Vernon,” they say. “Howdy, Tull.”

“Looks like more rain.”

“It does for a fact.”

“Yes, sir. It will rain some more.”

“It come up quick.”

“And going away slow. It don’t fail.”

I go around to the back. Cash is filling up the holes he bored in the top of it. He is trimming out plugs for them, one at a time, the wood wet and hard to work. He could cut up a tin can and hide the holes and nobody wouldn’t know the difference. Wouldn’t mind, anyway. I have seen him spend a hour trimming out a wedge like it was glass he was working, when he could have reached around and picked up a dozen sticks and drove them into the joint and made it do.

When we finished I go back to the front. The men have gone a little piece from the house, sitting on the ends of the boards and on the saw-horses where we made it last night, some sitting and some squatting. Whitfield ain’t come yet.

They look up at me, their eyes asking.

“It’s about,” I say. “He’s ready to nail.”

While they are getting up Anse comes to the door and looks at us and we return to the porch. We scrape our shoes again, careful, waiting for one another to go in first, milling a little at the door. Anse stands inside the door, dignified, composed. He waves us in and leads the way into the room.

They had laid her in it reversed. Cash made it clock-shape, like this ☞ with every joint and seam bevelled and scrubbed with the plane, tight as a drum and neat as a sewing basket, and they had laid her in it head to foot so it wouldn’t crush her dress. It was her wedding dress and it had a flare-out bottom, and they had laid her head to foot in it so the dress could spread out, and they had made her a veil out of a mosquito bar so the auger holes in her face wouldn’t show.

When we are going out, Whitfield comes. He is wet and muddy to the waist, coming in. “The Lord comfort this house,” he says. “I was late because the bridge has gone. I went down to the old ford and swum my horse over, the Lord protecting me. His grace be upon this house.”

We go back to the trestles and plank-ends and sit or squat.

“I knowed it would go,” Armstid says.

“It’s been there a long time, that ere bridge,” Quick says.

“The Lord has kept it there, you mean,” Uncle Billy says. “I don’t know ere a man that’s touched hammer to it in twenty-five years.”

“How long has it been there, Uncle Billy?” Quick says.

"It was built in . . . let me see . . . It was in the year 1888," Uncle Billy says. "I mind it because the first man to cross it was Peabody coming to my house when Jody was born."

"If I'd a crossed it every time your wife littered since, it'd a been wore out long before this, Billy," Peabody says.

We laugh, suddenly loud, then suddenly quiet again. We look a little aside at one another.

"Lots of folks has crossed it that won't cross no more bridges," Houston says.

"It's a fact," Littlejohn says. "It's so."

"One more ain't, no ways," Armstid says. "It'd taken them two-three days to got her to town in the wagon. They'd be gone a week, getting her to Jefferson and back."

"What's Anse so itching to take her to Jefferson for, anyway?" Houston says.

"He promised her," I say. "She wanted it. She come from there. Her mind was set on it."

"And Anse is set on it, too," Quick says.

"Ay," Uncle Billy says. "It's like a man that's let everything slide all his life to get set on something that will make the most trouble for everybody he knows."

"Well, it'll take the Lord to get her over that river now," Peabody says. "Anse can't do it."

"And I reckon He will," Quick says. "He's took care of Anse a long time, now."

"It's a fact," Littlejohn says.

"Too long to quit now," Armstid says.

"I reckon He's like everybody else around here," Uncle Billy says. "He's done it so long now He can't quit."

Cash comes out. He has put on a clean shirt; his hair, wet, is combed smooth down on his brow, smooth and black as if he had painted it on to his head. He squats stiffly among us, we watching him.

"You feeling this weather, ain't you?" Armstid says.

Cash says nothing.

"A broke bone always feels it," Littlejohn says. "A fellow with a broke bone can tell it a-coming."

"Lucky Cash got off with just a broke leg," Armstid says. "He might have hurt himself bed-rid. How far'd you fall, Cash?"

"Twenty-eight foot, four and a half inches, about," Cash says. I move over beside him.

"A fellow can sho slip quick on wet planks," Quick says.

"It's too bad," I say. "But you couldn't a holp it."

"It's them durn women," he says. "I made it to balance with her. I made it to her measure and weight."

If it takes wet boards for folks to fall, it's fixing to be lots of falling before this spell is done.

"You couldn't have holp it," I say.

I don't mind the folks falling. It's the cotton and corn I mind.

Neither does Peabody mind the folks falling. How 'bout it, Doc?

It's a fact. Washed clean outen the ground it will be. Seems like something is always happening to it.

'Course it does. That's why it's worth anything. If nothing didn't happen and everybody made a big crop, do you reckon it would be worth the raising?

Well, I be durn if I like to see my work washed outen the ground, work I sweat over.

It's a fact. A fellow wouldn't mind seeing it washed up if he could just turn on the rain himself.

Who is that man can do that? Where is the colour of his eyes?

Ay. The Lord made it to grow. It's Hisn to wash up if He sees it fitten so.

"You couldn't have holp it," I say.

"It's them durn women," he says.

In the house the women begin to sing. We hear the first line commence, beginning to swell as they take hold, and we rise and move toward the door, taking off our hats and throwing our chews away. We do not go in. We stop at the steps, clumped, holding our hats between our lax hands in front or behind, standing with one foot advanced and our heads lowered, looking aside, down at our hats in our hands and at the earth or now and then at the sky and at one another's grave, composed face.

The song ends; the voices quaver away with a rich and dying fall. Whitfield begins. His voice is bigger than him. It's like they are not the same. It's like he is one, and his voice is one, swimming on two horses side by side across the ford and coming into the house, the mud-

splashed one and the one that never even got wet, triumphant and sad. Somebody in the house begins to cry. It sounds like her eyes and her voice were turned back inside her, listening; we move, shifting to the other leg, meeting one another's eye and making like they hadn't touched.

Whitfield stops at last. The women sing again. In the thick air it's like their voices come out of the air, flowing together and on in the sad, comforting tunes. When they cease it's like they hadn't gone away. It's like they had just disappeared into the air and when we moved we would lose them again out of the air around us, sad and comforting. Then they finish and we put on our hats, our movements stiff, like we hadn't ever worn hats before.

On the way home Cora is still singing. "I am bounding toward my God and my reward," she sings, sitting on the wagon, the shawl around her shoulders and the umbrella open over her, though it is not raining.

"She has her'n," I say. "Wherever she went, she has her reward in being free of Anse Bundren." She laid there three days in that box, waiting for Darl and Jewel to come clean back home and get a new wheel and go back to where the wagon was in the ditch. Take my team, Anse, I said.

We'll wait for our'n, he said. She'll want it so. She was ever a particular woman.

On the third day they got back and they loaded her into the wagon and started and it already too late. You'll have to go all the way round by Samson's bridge. It'll take you a day to get there. Then you'll be forty miles from Jefferson. Take my team, Anse.

We'll wait for our'n. She'll want it so.

It was about a mile from the house we saw him, sitting on the edge of the slough. It hadn't had a fish in it never that I knowed. He looked around at us, his eyes round and calm, his face dirty, the pole across his knees. Cora was still singing.

"This ain't no good day to fish," I said. "You come on home with us and me and you'll go down to the river first thing in the morning and catch some fish."

"It's one in here," he said. "Dewey Dell seen it."

"You come on with us. The river's the best place."

"It's in here," he said. "Dewey Dell seen it."

"I'm bounding toward my God and my reward," Cora sung.

DARL

"IT'S not your horse that's dead, Jewel," I say. He sits erect on the seat, leaning a little forward, wooden-backed. The brim of his hat has soaked free of the crown in two places, drooping across his wooden face so that, head lowered, he looks through it like through the visor of a helmet, looking long across the valley to where the barn leans against the bluff, shaping the invisible horse. "See then?" I say. High above the house, against the quick thick sky, they hang in narrowing circles. From here they are no more than specks, implacable, patient, portentous. "But it's not your horse that's dead."

"Goddamn you," he says. "Goddamn you."

I cannot love my mother because I have no mother. Jewel's mother is a horse.

Motionless, the tall buzzards hang in soaring circles, the clouds giving them an illusion of retrograde.

Motionless, wooden-backed, wooden-faced, he shapes the horse in a rigid stoop like a hawk, hook-winged. They are waiting for us, ready for the moving of it, waiting for him. He enters the stall and waits until it kicks at him so that he can slip past and mount on to the trough and

pause, peering out across the intervening stall-tops toward the empty path, before he reaches into the loft.

“Goddamn him. Goddamn him.”

CASH

“IT won’t balance. If you want it to tote and ride on a balance, we will have——”

“Pick up. Goddamn you, pick up.”

“I’m telling you it won’t tote and it won’t ride on a balance unless——”

“Pick up! Pick up, goddamn your thick-nosed soul to hell, pick up!”

It won’t balance. If they want it to tote and ride on a balance, they will have——

DARL

HE stoops among us above it, two of the eight hands. In his face the blood goes in waves. In between them his flesh is greenish looking, about that smooth, thick, pale green of cow’s cud; his face suffocated, furious, his lip lifted upon his teeth. “Pick up!” he says. “Pick up, goddamn your thick-nosed soul!”

He heaves, lifting one whole side so suddenly that we all spring into the lift to catch and balance it before he hurls it completely over. For an instant it resists, as though volitional, as though within it her pole-thin body clings furiously, even though dead, to a sort of modesty, as she would have tried to conceal a soiled garment that she could not prevent her body soiling. Then it breaks free, rising suddenly as though the emaciation of her body had added buoyancy to the planks or as though, seeing that the garment was about to be torn from her, she rushes suddenly after it in a passionate reversal that flouts its own

desire and need. Jewel's face goes completely green and I can hear teeth in his breath.

We carry it down the hall, our feet harsh and clumsy on the floor, moving with shuffling steps, and through the door.

"Steady it a minute, now," pa says, letting go. He turns back to shut and lock the door, but Jewel will not wait.

"Come on," he says in that suffocating voice. "Come on."

We lower it carefully down the steps. We move, balancing it as though it were something infinitely precious, our faces averted, breathing through our teeth to keep our nostrils closed. We go down the path, toward the slope.

"We better wait," Cash says. "I tell you it ain't balanced now. We'll need another hand on that hill."

"Then turn loose," Jewel says. He will not stop. Cash begins to fall behind, hobbling to keep up, breathing harshly; then he is distanced and Jewel carries the entire front end alone, so that, tilting as the path begins to slant, it begins to rush away from me and slip down the air like a sled upon invisible snow, smoothly evacuating atmosphere in which the sense of it is still shaped.

"Wait, Jewel," I say. But he will not wait. He is almost running now and Cash is left behind. It seems to me that the end which I now carry alone has no weight, as though it coasts like a rushing straw upon the furious tide of Jewel's despair. I am not even touching it when, turning, he lets it overshoot him, swinging, and stops it and sloughs it into the wagon-bed in the same motion and looks back at me, his face suffused with fury and despair.

"Goddamn you. Goddamn you."

VARDAMAN

WE are going to town. Dewey Dell says it won't be sold because it belongs to Santa Claus and he has taken it back with him until next Christmas. Then it will be behind the glass again, shining with waiting.

Pa and Cash are coming down the hill, but Jewel is going to the barn. "Jewel," pa says. Jewel does not stop. "Where you going?" pa says. But Jewel does not stop. "You leave that horse here," pa says. Jewel stops and looks at pa. Jewel's eyes look like marbles. "You leave that horse here," pa says. "We'll all go in the wagon with ma, like she wanted."

But my mother is a fish. Vernon seen it. He was there.

"Jewel's mother is a horse," Darl said.

"Then mine can be a fish, can't it, Darl?" I said.

Jewel is my brother.

"Then mine will have to be a horse, too," I said.

"Why?" Darl said. "If pa is your pa, why does your ma have to be a horse just because Jewel's is?"

"Why does it?" I said. "Why does it, Darl?"

Darl is my brother.

"Then what is your ma, Darl?" I said.

"I haven't got ere one," Darl said. "Because if I had one, it is was. And if it is was, it can't be is. Can it?"

"No," I said.

"Then I am not," Darl said. "Am I?"

"No," I said.

I am. Darl is my brother.

"But you are, Darl," I said.

"I know it," Darl said. "That's why I am not is. Are is too many for one woman to foal."

Cash is carrying his tool-box. Pa looks at him. "I'll stop at Tull's on the way back," Cash says. "Get on that barn roof."

"It ain't respectful," pa says. "It's a deliberate flouting of her and of me."

"Do you want him to come all the way back here and carry them up to Tull's afoot?" Darl says. Pa looks at Darl, his mouth chewing. Pa shaves every day now because my mother is a fish.

"It ain't right," pa says.

Dewey Dell has the package in her hand. She has the basket with our dinner too.

"What's that?" pa says.

"Mrs. Tull's cakes," Dewey Dell says, getting into the wagon. "I'm taking them to town for her."

"It ain't right," pa says. "It's a flouting of the dead."

It'll be there. It'll be there come Christmas, she says, shining on the track. She says he won't sell it to no town boys.

DARL

HE goes on toward the barn, entering the lot, wooden-backed.

Dewey Dell carries the basket on one arm, in the other hand something wrapped square in a newspaper. Her face is calm and sullen, her eyes brooding and alert; within them I can see Peabody's back like two round peas in two thimbles: perhaps in Peabody's back two of those worms which work surreptitious and steady through you and out the other side and you waking suddenly from sleep or from waking, with on your face an expression sudden, intent, and concerned. She sets the basket into the wagon and climbs in, her leg coming long from beneath her tightening dress: that lever which moves the world; one of that caliper which measures the length and breadth of life. She sits on the seat beside Vardaman and sets the parcel on her lap.

Then he enters the barn. He has not looked back.

"It ain't right," pa says. "It's little enough for him to do for her."

"Go on," Cash says. "Leave him stay if he wants. He'll be all right here. Maybe he'll go up to Tull's and stay."

"He'll catch us," I say. "He'll cut across and meet us at Tull's lane."

"He would have rid that horse, too," pa says, "if I hadn't a stopped him. A durn spotted critter wilder than a cattymount. A deliberate flouting of her and of me."

The wagon moves; the mules' ears begin to bob. Behind us, above the house, motionless in tall and soaring circles, they diminish and disappear.

ANSE

ITOLD him not to bring that horse out of respect for his dead ma, because it wouldn't look right, him prancing along on a durn circus animal and her wanting us all to be in the wagon with her that sprung from her flesh and blood, but we hadn't no more than passed Tull's lane when Darl begun to laugh. Setting back there on the plank seat

with Cash, with his dead ma lying in her coffin at his feet, laughing. How many times I told him it's doing such things as that that makes folks talk about him, I don't know. I says I got some regard for what folks says about my flesh and blood even if you haven't, even if I have raised such a durn passel of boys, and when you fixes it so folks can say such about you, it's a reflection on your ma, I says, not me: I am a man and I can stand it; it's on your womenfolks, your ma and sister that you should care for, and I turned and looked back at him setting there, laughing.

"I don't expect you to have no respect for me," I says. "But with your own ma not cold in her coffin yet."

"Yonder," Cash says, jerking his head toward the lane. The horse is still a right smart piece away, coming up at a good pace, but I don't have to be told who it is. I just looked back at Darl, setting there laughing.

"I done my best," I says. "I tried to do as she would wish it. The Lord will pardon me and excuse the conduct of them He sent me." And Darl setting on the plank seat right above her where she was laying, laughing.

DARL

HE comes up the lane fast, yet we are three hundred yards beyond the mouth of it when he turns into the road, the mud flying beneath the flickering drive of the hooves. Then he slows a little, light and erect in the saddle, the horse mincing through the mud.

Tull is in his lot. He looks at us, lifts his hand. We go on, the wagon creaking, the mud whispering on the wheels. Vernon still stands there. He watches Jewel as he passes, the horse moving with a light, high-kneed driving gait, three hundred yards back. We go on, with a motion so soporific, so dreamlike as to be uninferant of progress, as though time and not space were decreasing between us and it.

It turns off at right angles, the wheel-marks of last Sunday healed away now: a smooth, red scoriation curving away into the pines; a white

signboard with faded lettering: New Hope Church. 3 mi. It wheels up like a motionless hand lifted above the profound desolation of the ocean; beyond it the red road lies like a spoke of which Addie Bundren is the rim. It wheels past, empty, unscarred, the white signboard turns away its fading and tranquil assertion. Cash looks up the road quietly, his head turning as we pass it like an owl's head, his face composed. Pa looks straight ahead, humped. Dewey Dell looks at the road too, then she looks back at me, her eyes watchful and repudiant, not like that question which was in those of Cash, for a smouldering while. The signboard passes; the unscarred road wheels on. Then Dewey Dell turns her head. The wagon creaks on.

Cash spits over the wheel. "In a couple of days now it'll be smelling," he says.

"You might tell Jewel that," I say.

He is motionless now, sitting the horse at the junction, upright, watching us, no less still than the signboard that lifts its fading capitulation opposite him.

"It ain't balanced right for no long ride," Cash says.

"Tell him that, too," I say. The wagon creaks on.

A mile farther along he passes us, the horse, arch-necked, reined back to a swift single-foot. He sits lightly, poised, upright, wooden-faced in the saddle, the broken hat raked at a swaggering angle. He passes us swiftly, without looking at us, the horse driving, its hooves hissing in the mud. A gout of mud, back-flung, plops on to the box. Cash leans forward and takes a tool from his box and removes it carefully. When the road crosses Whiteleaf, the willows leaning near enough, he breaks off a branch and scours at the stain with the wet leaves.

ANSE

IT'S a hard country on man; it's hard. Eight miles of the sweat of his body washed up outen the Lord's earth, where the Lord Himself told him to put it. Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hard-working man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats. It ain't the hard-working man, the farmer. Sometimes I wonder why we keep at it. It's because there is a reward for us above, where they can't take their motors and such. Every man will be equal there and it will be taken from them that have and give to them that have not by the Lord.

But it's a long wait, seems like. It's bad that a fellow must earn the reward of his right-doing by flouting hissself and his dead. We drove all the rest of the day and got to Samson's at dust-dark and then that bridge was gone, too. They hadn't never seen the river so high, and it's not done raining yet. There was old men that hadn't never seen nor heard of it being so in the memory of man. I am the chosen of the Lord, for who He loveth, so doeth He chastiseth. But I be durn if He don't take some curious ways to show it, seems like.

But now I can get them teeth. That will be a comfort. It will.

SAMSON

IT was just before sundown. We were sitting on the porch when the wagon came up the road with the five of them in it and the other one on the horse behind. One of them raised his hand, but they was going on past the store without stopping.

"Who's that?" MacCallum says: I can't think of his name: Rafe's twin; that one it was.

"It's Bundren, from down beyond New Hope," Quick says. "There's one of them Snopes horses Jewel's riding."

"I didn't know there was ere a one of them horses left," MacCallum says. "I thought you folks down there finally contrived to give them all away."

“Try and get that one,” Quick says. The wagon went on.

“I bet old man Lon never gave it to him,” I says.

“No,” Quick says. “He bought it from pappy.” The wagon went on.

“They must not a heard about the bridge,” he says.

“What’re they doing up here, anyway?” MacCallum says.

“Taking a holiday since he got his wife buried, I reckon,” Quick says.

“Heading for town, I reckon, with Tull’s bridge gone too. I wonder if they ain’t heard about the bridge.”

“They’ll have to fly, then,” I says. “I don’t reckon there’s ere a bridge between here and Mouth of Ishatawa.”

They had something in the wagon. But Quick had been to the funeral three days ago and we naturally never thought anything about it except that they were heading away from home mighty late and that they hadn’t heard about the bridge. “You better holler at them,” MacCallum says. Durn it, the name is right on the tip of my tongue. So Quick hollered and they stopped and he went to the wagon and told them.

He come back with them. “They’re going to Jefferson,” he says. “The bridge at Tull’s is gone, too.” Like we didn’t know it, and his face looked funny, around the nostrils, but they just sat there, Bundren and the girl and the chap on the seat, and Cash and the second one, the one folks talks about, on a plank across the tail-gate, and the other one on that spotted horse. But I reckon they was used to it by then because when I said to Cash that they’d have to pass by New Hope again and what they’d better do, he just says,

“I reckon we can get there.”

I ain’t much for meddling. Let every man run his own business to suit himself, I say. But after I talked to Rachel about them not having a

regular man to fix her and it being July and all, I went back down to the barn and tried to talk to Bundren about it.

“I give her my promise,” he says. “Her mind was set on it.”

I notice how it takes a lazy man, a man that hates moving, to get set on moving once he does get started off, the same as he was set on staying still, like it ain't the moving he hates so much as the starting and the stopping. And like he would be kind of proud of whatever come up to make the moving or the setting still look hard. He set there on the wagon, hunched up, blinking, listening to us tell about how quick the bridge went and how high the water was, and I be durn if he didn't act like he was proud of it, like he had made the river rise himself.

“You say it's higher than you ever see it before?” he says. “God's will be done,” he says. “I reckon it won't go down much by morning, neither,” he says.

“You better stay here to-night,” I says, “and get a early start for New Hope to-morrow morning.” I was just sorry for them bone-gaunted mules. I told Rachel, I says, “Well, would you have had me turn them away at dark, eight miles from home? What else could I do,” I says. “It won't be but one night, and they'll keep it in the barn, and they'll sholy get started by daylight.” And so I says, “You stay here to-night and early to-morrow you can go back to New Hope. I got tools enough, and the boys can go on right after supper and have it dug and ready if they want,” and then I found that girl watching me. If her eyes had a been pistols, I wouldn't be talking now. I be dog if they didn't blaze at me. And so when I went down to the barn I come on them, her talking so she never noticed when I come up.

“You promised her,” she says. “She wouldn't go until you promised. She thought she could depend on you. If you don't do it, it will be a curse on you.”

“Can't no man say I don't aim to keep my word,” Bundren says. “My heart is open to ere a man.”

"I don't care what your heart is," she says. She was whispering, kind of, talking fast. "You promised her. You've got to. You——" Then she seen me and quit, standing there. If they'd been pistols, I wouldn't be talking now. So when I talked to him about it, he says,

"I give her my promise. Her mind is set on it."

"But seems to me she'd rather have her ma buried close by, so she could——"

"It's Addie I give the promise to," he says. "Her mind is set on it."

So I told them to drive it into the barn because it was threatening rain again, and that supper was about ready. Only they didn't want to come in.

"I thank you," Bundren says. "We wouldn't discommode you. We got a little something in the basket. We can make out."

"Well," I says, "since you are so particular about your womenfolks, I am too. And when folks stops with us at meal-time and won't come to the table, my wife takes it as a insult."

So the girl went on to the kitchen to help Rachel. And then Jewel come to me.

"Sho," I says. "Help yourself outen the loft. Feed him when you bait the mules."

"I rather pay you for him," he says.

"What for?" I says. "I wouldn't begrudge no man a bait for his horse."

"I rather pay you," he says; I thought he said extra.

"Extra for what?" I says. "Won't he eat hay and corn?"

“Extra feed,” he says. “I feed him a little extra and I don’t want him beholden to no man.”

“You can’t buy no feed from me, boy,” I says. “And if he can eat that loft clean, I’ll help you load the barn on to the wagon in the morning.”

“He ain’t never been beholden to no man,” he says. “I rather pay you for it.”

And if I had my rathers, you wouldn’t be here a-tall, I wanted to say. But I just says, “Then it’s high time he commenced. You can’t buy no feed from me.”

When Rachel put supper on, her and the girl went and fixed some beds. But wouldn’t any of them come in. “She’s been dead long enough to get over that sort of foolishness,” I says. Because I got just as much respect for the dead as ere a man, but you’ve got to respect the dead themselves, and a woman that’s been dead in a box four days, the best way to respect her is to get her into the ground as quick as you can. But they wouldn’t do it.

“It wouldn’t be right,” Bundren says. “ ’Course, if the boys wants to go to bed, I reckon I can set up with her. I don’t begrudge her it.”

So when I went back down there they were squatting on the ground around the wagon, all of them. “Let that chap come to the house and get some sleep, anyway,” I says. “And you better come too,” I says to the girl. I wasn’t aiming to interfere with them. And I sholy hadn’t done nothing to her that I knowed.

“He’s done already asleep,” Bundren says. They had done put him to bed in the trough in a empty stall.

“Well, you come on, then,” I says to her. But still she never said nothing. They just squatted there. You couldn’t hardly see them. “How

about you boys?" I says. "You got a full day to-morrow." After a while Cash says,

"I thank you. We can make out."

"We wouldn't be beholden," Bundren says. "I thank you kindly."

So I left them squatting there. I reckon after four days they was used to it. But Rachel wasn't.

"It's a outrage," she says. "A outrage."

"What could he 'a' done?" I says. "He give her his promised word."

"Who's talking about him?" she says. "Who cares about him?" she says, crying. "I just wish that you and him and all the men in the world that torture us alive and flout us dead, dragging us up and down the country——"

"Now, now," I says. "You're upset."

"Don't you touch me!" she says. "Don't you touch me!"

A man can't tell nothing about them. I lived with the same one fifteen years and I be durn if I can. And I imagined a lot of things coming up between us, but I be durn if I ever thought it would be a body four days dead and that a woman. But they make life hard on them not taking it as it comes up, like a man does.

So I laid there, hearing it commence to rain, thinking about them down there, squatting around the wagon and the rain on the roof, and thinking about Rachel crying there until after a while it was like I could still hear her crying even after she was asleep, and smelling it even when I knowed I couldn't. I couldn't decide even then whether I could or not, or if it wasn't just knowing it was what it was.

So next morning I never went down there. I heard them hitching up and then when I knowed they must be about ready to take out, I went out the front and went down the road toward the bridge until I heard the wagon come out of the lot and go back toward New Hope. And then when I come back to the house, Rachel jumped on me because I wasn't there to make them come in to breakfast. You can't tell about them. Just about when you decide they mean one thing, I be durn if you not only haven't got to change your mind, like as not you got to take a raw-hiding for thinking they meant it.

But it was still like I could smell it. And so I decided then that it wasn't smelling it, but it was just knowing it was there, like you will get fooled now and then. But when I went to the barn I knew different. When I walked into the hallway I saw something. It kind of hunkered up when I come in and I thought at first it was one of them got left, then I saw what it was. It was a buzzard. It looked around and saw me and went on down the hall, spraddle-legged, with its wings kind of hunkered out, watching me first over one shoulder and then over the other, like a old bald-headed man. When it got outdoors it begun to fly. It had to fly a long time before it ever got up into the air, with it thick and heavy and full of rain like it was.

If they was bent on going to Jefferson, I reckon they could have gone around up by Mount Vernon, like MacCallum did. He'll get home about day after to-morrow, horse-back. Then they'd be just eighteen miles from town. But maybe this bridge being gone too has learned him the Lord's sense and judgment.

That MacCallum. He's been trading with me off and on for twelve years. I have known him from a boy up; know his name as well as I do my own. But be durn if I can say it.

DEWEY DELL

THE signboard comes in sight. It is looking out at the road now, because it can wait. New Hope. 3 mi. it will say. New Hope. 3 mi. New Hope. 3

mi. And then the road will begin, curving away into the trees, empty with waiting, saying New Hope three miles.

I heard that my mother is dead. I wish I had time to let her die. I wish I had time to wish I had. It is because in the wild and outraged earth too soon too soon too soon. It's not that I wouldn't and will not it's that it is too soon too soon too soon.

Now it begins to say it. New Hope three miles. New Hope three miles. That's what they mean by the womb of time: the agony and the despair of spreading bones, the hard girdle in which lie the outraged entrails of events. Cash's head turns slowly as we approach, his pale, empty, sad, composed and questioning face following the red and empty curve; beside the back wheel Jewel sits the horse, gazing straight ahead.

The land runs out of Darl's eyes; they swim to pin-points. They begin at my feet and rise along my body to my face, and then my dress is gone: I sit naked on the seat above the unhurrying mules, above the travail. Suppose I tell him to turn. He will do what I say. Don't you know he will do what I say? Once I waked with a black void rushing under me. I could not see. I saw Vardaman rise and go to the window and strike the knife into the fish, the blood gushing, hissing like steam but I could not see. He'll do as I say. He always does. I can persuade him to anything. You know I can. Suppose I say Turn here. That was when I died that time. Suppose I do. We'll go to New Hope. We won't have to go to town. I rose and took the knife from the streaming fish still hissing and I killed Darl.

When I used to sleep with Vardaman I had a nightmare once I thought I was awake but I couldn't see and couldn't feel I couldn't feel the bed under me and I couldn't think what I was I couldn't think of my name I couldn't even think I am a girl I couldn't even think I nor even think I want to wake up nor remember what was opposite to awake so I could do that I knew that something was passing but I couldn't even think of time then all of a sudden I knew that something was it was wind blowing over me it was like the wind came and blew me back from where it was I was not blowing the room and Vardaman asleep and all

of them back under me again and going on like a piece of cool silk dragging across my naked legs.

It blows cool out of the pines, a sad steady sound. New Hope. Was 3 mi. Was 3 mi. I believe in God I believe in God.

“Why didn’t we go to New Hope, pa?” Vardaman says. “Mr. Samson said we was, but we done passed the road.”

Darl says, “Look, Jewel.” But he is not looking at me. He is looking at the sky. The buzzard is as still as if he were nailed to it.

We turn into Tull’s lane. We pass the barn and go on, the wheels whispering in the mud, passing the green rows of cotton in the wild earth, and Vernon little across the field behind the plough. He lifts his hand as we pass and stands there looking after us for a long while.

“Look, Jewel,” Darl says. Jewel sits on his horse like they were both made out of wood, looking straight ahead.

I believe in God, God. God, I believe in God.

TULL

AFTER they passed I taken the mule out and looped up the trace chains and followed. They were setting in the wagon at the end of the levee. Anse was setting there, looking at the bridge where it was swagged down into the river with just the two ends in sight. He was looking at it like he had believed all the time that folks had been lying to him about it being gone, but like he was hoping all the time it really was. Kind of pleased astonishment he looked, setting on the wagon in his Sunday pants, mumbling his mouth. Looking like a uncurried horse dressed up: I don’t know.

The boy was watching the bridge where it was midsunk and logs and such drifted up over it and it swagging and shivering like the whole thing would go any minute, big-eyed he was watching it, like he was to

a circus. And the gal, too. When I come up she looked around at me, her eyes kind of blaring up and going hard like I had made to touch her. Then she looked at Anse again and then back at the water again.

It was nigh up to the levee on both sides, the earth hid except for the tongue of it we was on going out to the bridge and then down into the water, and except for knowing how the road and the bridge used to look, a fellow couldn't tell where was the river and where the land. It was just a tangle of yellow and the levee not less wider than a knife-back kind of, with us setting in the wagon and on the horse and the mule.

Darl was looking at me, and then Cash turned and looked at me with that look in his eyes like when he was figuring on whether the planks would fit her that night, like he was measuring them inside of him and not asking you to say what you thought and not even letting on he was listening if you did say it, but listening all right. Jewel hadn't moved. He sat there on the horse, leaning a little forward, with that same look on his face when him and Darl passed the house yesterday, coming back to get her.

"If it was just up, we could drive across," Anse says. "We could drive right on across it."

Sometimes a log would get shoved over the jam and float on, rolling and turning, and we could watch it go on to where the ford used to be. It would slow up and whirl crossways and hang out of water for a minute, and you could tell by that that the ford used to be there.

"But that don't show nothing," I say. "It could be a bar of quicksand built up there." We watch the log. Then the gal is looking at me again.

"Mr. Whitfield crossed it," she says.

"He was a horse-back," I say. "And three days ago. It's riz five foot since."

"If the bridge was just up," Anse says.

The log bobs up and goes on again. There is a lot of trash and foam, and you can hear the water.

"But it's down," Anse says.

Cash says, "A careful fellow could walk across yonder on the planks and logs."

"But you couldn't tote nothing," I say. "Likely time you set foot on that mess, it'll all go, too. What you think, Darl?"

He is looking at me. He don't say nothing; just looks at me with them queer eyes of hisn that makes folks talk. I always say it ain't never been what he done so much or said or anything so much as how he looks at you. It's like he had got into the inside of you, someway. Like somehow you was looking at yourself and your doings outen his eyes. Then I can feel that gal watching me like I had made to touch her. She says something to Anse. ". . . Mr. Whitfield . . ." she says.

"I give her my promised word in the presence of the Lord," Anse says. "I reckon it ain't no need to worry."

But still he does not start the mules. We set there above the water. Another log bobs up over the jam and goes on; we watch it check up and swing slow for a minute where the ford used to be. Then it goes on.

"It might start falling to-night," I say. "You could lay over one more day."

Then Jewel turns sideways on the horse. He has not moved until then, and he turns and looks at me. His face is kind of green, then it would go red and then green again. "Get to hell on back to your damn ploughing," he says. "Who the hell asked you to follow us here?"

"I never meant no harm," I say.

“Shut up, Jewel,” Cash says. Jewel looks back at the water, his face gritted, going red and green and then red. “Well,” Cash says after a while, “what you want to do?”

Anse don't say nothing. He sets humped up, mumbling his mouth. “If it was just up, we could drive across it,” he says.

“Come on,” Jewel says, moving the horse.

“Wait,” Cash says. He looks at the bridge. We look at him, except Anse and the gal. They are looking at the water. “Dewey Dell and Vardaman and pa better walk across on the bridge,” Cash says.

“Vernon can help them,” Jewel says. “And we can hitch his mule ahead of ours.”

“You ain't going to take my mule into that water,” I say.

Jewel looks at me. His eyes look like pieces of a broken plate. “I'll pay for your damn mule. I'll buy it from you right now.”

“My mule ain't going into that water,” I say.

“Jewel's going to use his horse,” Darl says. “Why won't you risk your mule, Vernon?”

“Shut up, Darl,” Cash says. “You and Jewel both.”

“My mule ain't going into that water,” I say.

DARL

HE sits the horse, glaring at Vernon, his lean face suffused up to and beyond the pale rigidity of his eyes. The summer when he was fifteen, he took a spell of sleeping. One morning when I went to feed the mules the cows were still in the tie-up and then I heard pa go back to the

house and call him. When we came on back to the house for breakfast he passed us, carrying the milk buckets, stumbling along like he was drunk, and he was milking when we put the mules in and went on to the field without him. We had been there an hour and still he never showed up. When Dewey Dell came with our lunch, pa sent her back to find Jewel. They found him in the tie-up, sitting on the stool, asleep.

After that, every morning pa would go in and wake him. He would go to sleep at the supper-table and soon as supper was finished he would go to bed, and when I came in to bed he would be lying there like a dead man. Yet still pa would have to wake him in the morning. He would get up, but he wouldn't hardly have half sense: he would stand for pa's jawing and complaining without a word and take the milk buckets and go to the barn, and once I found him asleep at the cow, the bucket in place and half-full and his hands up to the wrists in the milk and his head against the cow's flank.

After that Dewey Dell had to do the milking. He still got up when pa waked him, going about what we told him to do in that dazed way. It was like he was trying hard to do them; that he was as puzzled as anyone else.

"Are you sick?" ma said. "Don't you feel all right?"

"Yes," Jewel said. "I feel all right."

"He's just lazy, trying me," pa said, and Jewel standing there, asleep on his feet like as not. "Ain't you?" he said, waking Jewel up again to answer.

"No," Jewel said.

"You take off and stay in the house to-day," ma said.

"With that whole bottom piece to be busted out?" pa said. "If you ain't sick, what's the matter with you?"

“Nothing,” Jewel said. “I’m all right.”

“All right?” pa said. “You’re asleep on your feet this minute.”

“No,” Jewel said. “I’m all right.”

“I want him to stay at home to-day,” ma said.

“I’ll need him,” pa said. “It’s tight enough, with all of us to do it.”

“You’ll just have to do the best you can with Cash and Darl,” ma said. “I want him to stay in to-day.”

But he wouldn’t do it. “I’m all right,” he said, going on. But he wasn’t all right. Anybody could see it. He was losing flesh, and I have seen him go to sleep chopping; watched the hoe going slower and slower up and down, with less and less of an arc, until it stopped and he leaning on it motionless in the hot shimmer of the sun.

Ma wanted to get the doctor, but pa didn’t want to spend the money without it was needful, and Jewel did seem all right except for his thinness and his way of dropping off to sleep at any moment. He ate hearty enough, except for his way of going to sleep in his plate, with a piece of bread half-way to his mouth and his jaws still chewing. But he swore he was all right.

It was ma that got Dewey Dell to do his milking, paid her somehow, and the other jobs around the house that Jewel had been doing before supper she found some way for Dewey Dell and Vardaman to do them. And doing them herself when pa wasn’t there. She would fix him special things to eat and hide them for him. And that may have been when I first found it out, that Addie Bundren should be hiding anything she did, who had tried to teach us that deceit was such that, in a world where it was, nothing else could be very bad or very important, not even poverty. And at times when I went in to go to bed she would be sitting in the dark by Jewel where he was asleep. And I knew that she

was hating herself for that deceit and hating Jewel because she had to love him so that she had to act the deceit.

One night she was taken sick and when I went to the barn to put the team in and drive to Tull's, I couldn't find the lantern. I remembered noticing it on the nail the night before, but it wasn't there now at midnight. So I hitched in the dark and went on and came back with Mrs. Tull just after daylight. And there the lantern was, hanging on the nail where I remembered it and couldn't find it before. And then one morning while Dewey Dell was milking just before sun-up, Jewel came into the barn from the back, through the hole in the back wall, with the lantern in his hand.

I told Cash, and Cash and I looked at one another.

"Rutting," Cash said.

"Yes," I said. "But why the lantern? And every night, too. No wonder he's losing flesh. Are you going to say anything to him?"

"Won't do any good," Cash said.

"What he's doing now won't do any good, either."

"I know. But he'll have to learn that himself. Give him time to realize that it'll save, that there'll be just as much more to-morrow, and he'll be all right. I wouldn't tell anybody, I reckon."

"No," I said. "I told Dewey Dell not to. Not ma, anyway."

"No. Not ma."

After that I thought it was right comical: he acting so bewildered and willing and dead for sleep and gaunt as a bean-pole, and thinking he was so smart with it. And I wondered who the girl was. I thought of all I knew that it might be, but I couldn't say for sure.

“ ’Taint any girl,” Cash said. “It’s a married woman somewhere. Ain’t any young girl got that much daring and staying power. That’s what I don’t like about it.”

“Why?” I said. “She’ll be safer for him than a girl would. More judgment.”

He looked at me, his eyes fumbling, the words fumbling at what he was trying to say. “It ain’t always the safe things in this world that a fellow . . .”

“You mean, the safe things are not always the best things?”

“Ay; best,” he said, fumbling again. “It ain’t the best things, the things that are good for him. . . . A young boy. A fellow kind of hates to see . . . wallowing in somebody else’s mire . . .” That’s what he was trying to say. When something is new and hard and bright, there ought to be something a little better for it than just being safe, since the safe things are just the things that folks have been doing so long they have worn the edges off and there’s nothing to the doing of them that leaves a man to say, That was not done before and it cannot be done again.

So we didn’t tell, not even when after a while he’d appear suddenly in the field beside us and go to work, without having had time to get home and make out he had been in bed all night. He would tell ma that he hadn’t been hungry at breakfast or that he had eaten a piece of bread while he was hitching up the team. But Cash and I knew that he hadn’t been home at all on those nights and he had come up out of the woods when we got to the field. But we didn’t tell. Summer was almost over then; we knew that when the nights began to get cool, she would be done if he wasn’t.

But when fall came and the nights began to get longer, the only difference was that he would always be in bed for pa to wake him, getting him up at last in that first state of semi-idioty like when it first started, worse than when he had stayed out all night.

“She’s sure a stayer,” I told Cash. “I used to admire her, but I downright respect her now.”

“It ain’t a woman,” he said.

“You know,” I said. But he was watching me. “What is it, then?”

“That’s what I aim to find out,” he said.

“You can trail him through the woods all night if you want to,” I said.
“I’m not.”

“I ain’t trailing him,” he said.

“What do you call it, then?”

“I ain’t trailing him,” he said. “I don’t mean it that way.”

And so a few nights later I heard Jewel get up and climb out the window, and then I heard Cash get up and follow him. The next morning when I went to the barn, Cash was already there, the mules fed, and he was helping Dewey Dell milk. And when I saw him I knew that he knew what it was. Now and then I would catch him watching Jewel with a queer look, like having found out where Jewel went and what he was doing had given him something to really think about at last. But it was not a worried look; it was the kind of look I would see on him when I would find him doing some of Jewel’s work around the house, work that pa still thought Jewel was doing and that ma thought Dewey Dell was doing. So I said nothing to him, believing that when he got done digesting it in his mind, he would tell me. But he never did.

One morning—it was November then, five months since it started—Jewel was not in bed and he didn’t join us in the field. That was the first time ma learned anything about what had been going on. She sent Vardaman down to find where Jewel was, and after a while she came down too. It was as though, so long as the deceit ran along quiet and monotonous, all of us let ourselves be deceived, abetting it unawares

or maybe through cowardice, since all people are cowards and naturally prefer any kind of treachery because it has a bland outside. But now it was like we had all—and by a kind of telepathic agreement of admitted fear—flung the whole thing back like covers on the bed and we all sitting bolt upright in our nakedness, staring at one another and saying “Now is the truth. He hasn’t come home. Something has happened to him. We let something happen to him.”

Then we saw him. He came up along the ditch and then turned straight across the field, riding the horse. Its mane and tail were going, as though in motion they were carrying out the splotchy pattern of its coat: he looked like he was riding on a big pinwheel, barebacked, with a rope bridle, and no hat on his head. It was a descendant of those Texas ponies Flem Snopes brought here twenty-five years ago and auctioned off for two dollars a head and nobody but old Lon Quick ever caught his and still owned some of the blood because he could never give it away.

He galloped up and stopped, his heels in the horse’s ribs and it dancing and swirling like the shape of its mane and tail and the splotches of its coat had nothing whatever to do with the flesh-and-bone horse inside them, and he sat there, looking at us.

“Where did you get that horse?” pa said.

“Bought it,” Jewel said. “From Mr. Quick.”

“Bought it?” pa said. “With what? Did you buy that thing on my word?”

“It was my money,” Jewel said. “I earned it. You won’t need to worry about it.”

“Jewel,” ma said; “Jewel.”

“It’s all right,” Cash said. “He earned the money. He cleaned up that forty acres of new ground Quick laid out last spring. He did it single-handed, working at night by lantern. I saw him. So I don’t reckon that

horse cost anybody anything except Jewel. I don't reckon we need worry."

"Jewel," ma said. "Jewel——" Then she said: "You come right to the house and go to bed."

"Not yet," Jewel said. "I ain't got time. I got to get me a saddle and bridle. Mr. Quick says he——"

"Jewel," ma said, looking at him. "I'll give—I'll give—give——" Then she began to cry. She cried hard, not hiding her face, standing there in her faded wrapper, looking at him and him on the horse, looking down at her, his face growing cold and a little sick looking until he looked away quick and Cash came and touched her.

"You go on to the house," Cash said. "This here ground is too wet for you. You go on, now." She put her hands to her face then and after a while she went on, stumbling a little on the plough-marks. But pretty soon she straightened up and went on. She didn't look back. When she reached the ditch she stopped and called Vardaman. He was looking at the horse, kind of dancing up and down by it.

"Let me ride, Jewel," he said. "Let me ride, Jewel."

Jewel looked at him, then he looked away again, holding the horse reined back. Pa watched him, mumbling his lip.

"So you bought a horse," he said. "You went behind my back and bought a horse. You never consulted me; you know how tight it is for us to make by, yet you bought a horse for me to feed. Taken the work from your flesh and blood and bought a horse with it."

Jewel looked at pa, his eyes paler than ever.

"He won't never eat a mouthful of yours," he said. "Not a mouthful. I'll kill him first. Don't you never think it. Don't you never."

“Let me ride, Jewel,” Vardaman said. “Let me ride, Jewel.” He sounded like a cricket in the grass, a little one. “Let me ride, Jewel.”

That night I found ma sitting beside the bed where he was sleeping, in the dark. She cried hard, maybe because she had to cry so quiet; maybe because she felt the same way about tears she did about deceit, hating herself for doing it, hating him because she had to. And then I knew that I knew. I knew that as plain on that day as I knew about Dewey Dell on that day.

TULL

SO they finally got Anse to say what he wanted to do, and him and the gal and the boy got out of the wagon. But even when we were on the bridge Anse kept on looking back, like he thought maybe, once he was outen the wagon, the whole thing would kind of blow up and he would find himself back yonder in the field again and her laying up there in the house, waiting to die and it to do all over again.

“You ought to let them taken your mule,” he says, and the bridge shaking and swaying under us, going down into the moiling water like it went clean through to the other side of the earth, and the other end coming up outen the water like it wasn’t the same bridge a-tall and that them that would walk up outen the water on that side must come from the bottom of the earth. But it was still whole; you could tell that by the way when this end swagged, it didn’t look like the other end swagged at all: just like the other trees and the bank yonder were swinging back and forth slow like on a big clock. And them logs scraping and bumping at the sunk part and tilting end-up and shooting clean outen the water and tumbling on toward the ford and the waiting, slick, whirling, and foamy.

“What good would that ‘a’ done?” I says. “If your team can’t find the ford and haul it across, what good would three mules or even ten mules do?”

“I ain’t asking it of you,” he says. “I can always do for me and mine. I ain’t asking you to risk your mule. It ain’t your dead; I am not blaming you.”

“They ought to went back and laid over until to-morrow,” I says. The water was cold. It was thick, like slush ice. Only it kind of lived. One part of you knowed it was just water, the same thing that had been running under this same bridge for a long time, yet when them logs would come spewing up outen it, you were not surprised, like they was a part of water, of the waiting and the threat.

It was like when we was across, up out of the water again and the hard earth under us, that I was surprised. It was like we hadn’t expected the bridge to end on the other bank, on something tame like the hard earth again that we had tromped on before this time and knowed well. Like it couldn’t be me here, because I’d have had better sense than to done what I just done. And when I looked back and saw the other bank and saw my mule standing there where I used to be and knew that I’d have to get back there some way, I knew it couldn’t be, because I just couldn’t think of anything that could make me cross that bridge ever even once. Yet here I was, and the fellow that could make himself cross it twice, couldn’t be me, not even if Cora told him to.

It was that boy. I said “Here; you better take a holt of my hand,” and he waited and held to me. I be durn if it wasn’t like he come back and got me; like he was saying They won’t nothing hurt you. Like he was saying about a fine place he knowed where Christmas come twice with Thanksgiving and lasts on through the winter and the spring and the summer, and if I just stayed with him I’d be all right too.

When I looked back at my mule it was like he was one of these here spy-glasses and I could look at him standing there and see all the broad land and my house sweated outen it like it was the more the sweat, the broader the land; the more the sweat, the tighter the house because it would take a tight house for Cora, to hold Cora like a jar of milk in the spring: you’ve got to have a tight jar or you’ll need a powerful spring, so if you have a big spring, why then you have the incentive to have tight,

well-made jars, because it is your milk, sour or not, because you would rather have milk that will sour than to have milk that won't, because you are a man.

And him holding to my hand, his hand that hot and confident, so that I was like to say: Look-a-here. Can't you see that mule yonder? He never had no business over here, so he never come, not being nothing but a mule. Because a fellow can see ever now and then that children have more sense than him. But he don't like to admit it to them until they have beards. After they have a beard, they are too busy because they don't know if they'll ever quite make it back to where they were in sense before they was haired, so you don't mind admitting then to folks that are worrying about the same thing that ain't worth the worry that you are yourself.

Then we was over and we stood there, looking at Cash turning the wagon around. We watched them drive back down the road to where the trail turned off into the bottom. After a while the wagon was out of sight.

"We better get on down to the ford and git ready to help," I said.

"I give her my word," Anse says. "It is sacred on me. I know you begrudge it, but she will bless you in heaven."

"Well, they got to finish circumventing the land before they can dare the water," I said. "Come on."

"It's the turning back," he said. "It ain't no luck in turning back."

He was standing there, humped, mournful, looking at the empty road beyond the swagging and swaying bridge. And that gal, too, with the lunch-basket on one arm and that package under the other. Just going to town. Bent on it. They would risk the fire and the earth and the water and all just to eat a sack of bananas. "You ought to laid over a day," I said. "It would 'a' fell some by morning. It mought not 'a' rained to-night. And it can't get no higher."

“I give my promise,” he says. “She is counting on it.”

DARL

BEFORE us the thick dark current runs. It talks up to us in a murmur become ceaseless and myriad, the yellow surface dimpled monstrously into fading swirls travelling along the surface for an instant, silent, impermanent and profoundly significant, as though just beneath the surface something huge and alive waked for a moment of lazy alertness out of and into light slumber again.

It clucks and murmurs among the spokes and about the mules' knees, yellow, skummed with flotsman and with thick soiled gouts of foam as though it had sweat, lathering, like a driven horse. Through the undergrowth it goes with a plaintive sound, a musing sound; in it the unwinded cane and saplings lean as before a little gale, swaying without reflections as though suspended on invisible wires from the branches overhead. Above the ceaseless surface they stand—trees, cane, vines—rootless, severed from the earth, spectral above a scene of immense yet circumscribed desolation filled with the voice of the waste and mournful water.

Cash and I sit in the wagon; Jewel sits the horse at the off rear-wheel. The horse is trembling, its eye rolling wild and baby-blue in its long pink face, its breathing stertorous like groaning. He sits erect, poised, looking quietly and steadily and quickly this way and that, his face calm, a little pale, alert. Cash's face is also gravely composed; he and I look at one another with long probing looks, looks that plunge unimpeded through one another's eyes and into the ultimate secret place where for an instant Cash and Darl crouch flagrant and unabashed in all the old terror and the old foreboding, alert and secret and without shame. When we speak our voices are quiet, detached.

“I reckon we're still in the road, all right.”

“Tull taken and cut them two big whiteoaks. I heard tell how at high water in the old days they used to line up the ford by them trees.”

“I reckon he did that two years ago when he was logging down here. I reckon he never thought that anybody would ever use this ford again.”

“I reckon not. Yes, it must have been then. He cut a sight of timber outen here then. Payed off that mortgage with it, I hear tell.”

“Yes. Yes, I reckon so. I reckon Vernon could have done that.”

“That’s a fact. Most folks that logs in this here country, they need a darn good farm to support the sawmill. Or maybe a store. But I reckon Vernon could.”

“I reckon so. He’s a sight.”

“Ay. Vernon is. Yes, it must still be here. He never would have got that timber out of here if he hadn’t cleaned out that old road. I reckon we are still on it.” He looks about quietly, at the position of the trees, leaning this way and that, looking back along the floorless road shaped vaguely high in air by the position of the lopped and felled trees, as if the road too had been soaked free of earth and floated upward, to leave in its spectral tracing a monument to a still more profound desolation than this above which we now sit, talking quietly of old security and old trivial things. Jewel looks at him, then at me, then his face turns in in that quiet, constant, questing about the scene, the horse trembling quietly and steadily between his knees.

“He could go on ahead slow and sort of feel it out,” I say.

“Yes,” Cash says, not looking at me. His face is in profile as he looks forward where Jewel has moved on ahead.

“He can’t miss the river,” I say. “He couldn’t miss seeing it fifty yards ahead.”

Cash does not look at me, his face in profile. "If I'd just suspicioned it, I could 'a' come down last week and taken a sight on it."

"The bridge was up then," I say. He does not look at me. "Whitfield crossed it a-horse-back."

Jewel looks at us again, his expression sober and alert and subdued. His voice is quiet. "What you want me to do?"

"I ought to come down last week and taken a sight on it," Cash says.

"We couldn't have known," I say. "There wasn't any way for us to know."

"I'll ride on ahead," Jewel says. "You can follow where I am." He lifts the horse. It shrinks, bowed; he leans to it, speaking to it, lifting it forward almost bodily, it setting its feet down with gingerly splashings, trembling, breathing harshly. He speaks to it, murmurs to it. "Go on," he says. "I ain't going to let nothing hurt you. Go on, now."

"Jewel," Cash says. Jewel does not look back. He lifts the horse on.

"He can swim," I say. "If he'll just give the horse time, anyhow . . ." When he was born, he had a bad time of it. Ma would sit in the lamplight, holding him on a pillow on her lap. We would wake and find her so. There would be no sound from them.

"That pillow was longer than him," Cash says. He is leaning a little forward. "I ought to come down last week and sighted. I ought to done it."

"That's right," I say. "Neither his feet nor his head would reach the end of it. You couldn't have known," I say.

"I ought to done it," he says. He lifts the reins. The mules move, into the traces; the wheels murmur alive in the water. He looks back and down at Addie. "It ain't on a balance," he says.

At last the trees open; against the open river Jewel sits the horse, half turned, it belly deep now. Across the river we can see Vernon and pa and Vardaman and Dewey Dell. Vernon is waving at us, waving us further downstream.

“We are too high up,” Cash says. Vernon is shouting too, but we cannot make out what he says for the noise of the water. It runs steady and deep now, unbroken, without sense of motion until a log comes along, turning slowly. “Watch it,” Cash says. We watch it and see it falter and hang for a moment, the current building up behind it in a thick wave, submerging it for an instant before it shoots up and tumbles on.

“There it is,” I say.

“Ay,” Cash says. “It’s there.” We look at Vernon again. He is now flapping his arms up and down. We move on downstream, slowly and carefully, watching Vernon. He drops his hands. “This is the place,” Cash says.

“Well, goddamn it, let’s get across, then,” Jewel says. He moves the horse on.

“You wait,” Cash says. Jewel stops again.

“Well, by God—” he says. Cash looks at the water, then he looks back at Addie. “It ain’t on a balance,” he says.

“Then go on back to the goddamn bridge and walk across,” Jewel says. “You and Darl both. Let me on that wagon.”

Cash does not pay him any attention. “It ain’t on a balance,” he says. “Yes, sir. We got to watch it.”

“Watch it, hell,” Jewel says. “You get out of that wagon and let me have it. By God, if you’re afraid to drive it over . . .” His eyes are pale as two bleached chips in his face. Cash is looking at him.

“We’ll get it over,” he says. “I tell you what you do. You ride on back and walk across the bridge and come down the other bank and meet us with the rope. Vernon’ll take your horse home with him and keep it till we get back.”

“You go to hell,” Jewel says.

“You take the rope and come down the bank and be ready with it,” Cash says. “Three can’t do no more than two can—one to drive and one to steady it.”

“Goddamn you,” Jewel says.

“Let Jewel take the end of the rope and cross upstream of us and brace it,” I say. “Will you do that, Jewel?”

Jewel watches me, hard. He looks quick at Cash, then back at me, his eyes alert and hard. “I don’t give a damn. Just so we do something. Setting here, not lifting a goddamn hand . . .”

“Let’s do that, Cash,” I say.

“I reckon we’ll have to,” Cash says.

The river itself is not a hundred yards across, and pa and Vernon and Vardaman and Dewey Dell are the only things in sight not of that single monotony of desolation leaning with that terrific quality a little from right to left, as though we had reached the place where the motion of the wasted world accelerates just before the final precipice. Yet they appear dwarfed. It is as though the space between us were time: an irrevocable quality.

It is as though time, no longer running straight before us in a diminishing line, now runs parallel between us like a looping string, the distance being the doubling accretion of the thread and not the interval between. The mules stand, their forequarters already sloped a little,

their rumps high. They too are breathing now with a deep groaning sound; looking back once, their gaze sweeps across us with in their eyes a wild, sad, profound and despairing quality as though they had already seen in the thick water the shape of the disaster which they could not speak and we could not see.

Cash turns back into the wagon. He lays his hands flat on Addie, rocking her a little. His face is calm, down-sloped, calculant, concerned. He lifts his box of tools and wedges it forward under the seat; together we shove Addie forward, wedging her between the tools and the wagon-bed. Then he looks at me.

“No,” I say. “I reckon I’ll stay. Might take both of us.”

From the tool-box he takes his coiled rope and carries the end twice around the seat stanchion and passes the end to me without tying it. The other end he pays out to Jewel, who takes a turn about his saddle-horn.

He must force the horse down into the current. It moves, high-kneed, arch-necked, boring and chafing. Jewel sits lightly forward, his knees lifted a little; again his swift alert calm gaze sweeps upon us and on. He lowers the horse into the stream, speaking to it in a soothing murmur. The horse slips, goes under to the saddle, surges to its feet again, the current building up against Jewel’s thighs.

“Watch yourself,” Cash says.

“I’m on it now,” Jewel says. “You can come ahead now.”

Cash takes the reins and lowers the team carefully and skilfully into the stream.

I felt the current take us and I knew we were on the ford by that reason, since it was only by means of that slipping contact that we could tell that we were in motion at all. What had once been a flat surface was now a succession of troughs and hillocks lifting and falling

about us, shoving at us, teasing at us with light lazy touches in the vain instants of solidity underfoot. Cash looked back at me, and then I knew that we were gone. But I did not realise the reason for the rope until I saw the log. It surged up out of the water and stood for an instant upright upon that surging and heaving desolation like Christ. Get out and let the current take you down to the bend, Cash said. You can make it all right. No, I said, I'd get just as wet that way as this.

The log appears suddenly between two hills, as if it had rocketed suddenly from the bottom of the river. Upon the end of it a long gout of foam hangs like the beard of an old man or a goat. When Cash speaks to me I know that he has been watching it all the time, watching it and watching Jewel ten feet ahead of us. "Let the rope go," he says. With his other hand he reaches down and reeves the two turns from the stanchion. "Ride on, Jewel," he says; "see if you can pull us ahead of the log."

Jewel shouts at the horse; again he appears to lift it bodily between his knees. He is just above the top of the ford and the horse has a purchase of some sort for it surges forward, shining wetly half out of water, crashing on in a succession of lunges. It moves unbelievably fast; by that token Jewel realizes at last that the rope is free, for I can see him sawing back on the reins, his head turned, as the log rears in a long sluggish lunge between us, bearing down upon the team.

They see it too; for a moment they also shine black out of water. Then the downstream one vanishes, dragging the other with him; the wagon sheers crosswise, poised on the crest of the ford as the log strikes it, tilting it up and on. Cash is half turned, the reins running taut from his hand and disappearing into the water, the other hand reached back upon Addie, holding her jammed over against the high side of the wagon. "Jump clear," he says quietly. "Stay away from the team and don't try to fight it. It'll swing you into the bend all right."

"You come too," I say. Vernon and Vardaman are running along the bank, pa and Dewey Dell stand watching us, Dewey Dell with the basket and the package in her arms. Jewel is trying to fight the horse back. The

head of one mule appears, its eyes wide; it looks back at us for an instant, making a sound almost human. The head vanishes again.

“Back, Jewel,” Cash shouts. “Back, Jewel.” For another instant I see him leaning to the tilting wagon, his arm braced back against Addie and his tools; I see the bearded head of the rearing log strike up again, and beyond it Jewel holding the horse upreared, its head wrenched around, hammering its head with his fist. I jump from the wagon on the downstream side. Between two hills I see the mules once more. They roll up out of the water in succession, turning completely over, their legs stiffly extended as when they had lost contact with the earth.

VARDAMAN

CASH tried but she fell off and Darl jumped going under he went under and Cash hollering to catch her and I hollering running and hollering and Dewey Dell hollering at me Vardaman you vardaman you vardaman and Vernon passed me because he was seeing her come up and she jumped into the water again and Darl hadn't caught her yet.

He came up to see and I hollering catch her Darl catch her and he didn't come back because she was too heavy he had to go on catching at her and I hollering catch her darl catch her darl because in the water she could go faster than a man and Darl had to grabble for her so I knew he could catch her because he is the best grabbler even with the mules in the way again they dived up rolling their feet stiff rolling down again and their backs up now and Darl had to again because in the water she could go faster than a man or a woman and I passed Vernon and he wouldn't get in the water and help Darl he would grabble for her with Darl he knew but he wouldn't help.

The mules dived up again diving their legs stiff their stiff legs rolling slow and then Darl again and I hollering catch her darl catch her head her into the bank darl and Vernon wouldn't help and then Darl dodged past the mules where he could he had her under the water coming in to the bank coming in slow because in the water she fought to stay under the water but Darl is strong and he was coming in slow and so I knew

he had her because he came slow and I ran down into the water to help and I couldn't stop hollering because Darl was strong and steady holding her under the water even if she did fight he would not let her go he was seeing me and he would hold her and it was all right now it was all right now it was all right.

Then he comes up out of the water. He comes a long way up slow before his hands do but he's got to have her got to so I can bear it. Then his hands come up and all of him above the water. I can't stop. I have not got time to try. I will try to when I can but his hands came empty out of the water emptying the water emptying away.

"Where is ma, Darl?" I said. "You never got her. You knew she is a fish but you let her get away. You never got her. Darl. Darl. Darl." I began to run along the bank, watching the mules dive up slow again and then down again.

TULL

WHEN I told Cora how Darl jumped out of the wagon and left Cash sitting there trying to save it and the wagon turning over, and Jewel that was almost to the bank fighting that horse back where it had more sense than to go, she says "And you're one of the folks that says Darl is the queer one, the one that ain't bright, and him the only one of them that had sense enough to get off that wagon. I notice Anse was too smart to been on it a-tall."

"He couldn't 'a' done no good, if he'd been there," I said. "They was going about it right and they would have made it if it hadn't a-been for that log."

"Log, fiddlesticks," Cora said. "It was the hand of God."

"Then how can you say it was foolish?" I said. "Nobody can't guard against the hand of God. It would be sacrilege to try to."

"Then why dare it?" Cora says. "Tell me that."

“Anse didn’t,” I said. “That’s just what you faulted him for.”

“His place was there,” Cora said. “If he had been a man, he would ’a’ been there instead of making his sons do what he dursn’t.”

“I don’t know what you want, then,” I said. “One breath you say they was daring the hand of God to try it, and the next breath you jump on Anse because he wasn’t with them.” Then she begun to sing again, working at the wash-tub, with that singing look in her face like she had done give up folks and all their foolishness and had done went on ahead of them, marching up the sky, singing.

The wagon hung for a long time while the current built up under it, shoving it off the ford, and Cash leaning more and more, trying to keep the coffin braced so it wouldn’t slip down and finish tilting the wagon over. Soon as the wagon got tilted good, to where the current could finish it, the log went on. It headed around the wagon and went on good as a swimming man could have done. It was like it had been sent there to do a job and done it and went on.

When the mules finally kicked loose, it looked for a minute like maybe Cash would get the wagon back. It looked like him and the wagon wasn’t moving at all, and just Jewel fighting that horse back to the wagon. Then that boy passed me, running and hollering at Darl and the gal trying to catch him, and then I see the mules come rolling slow up out of the water, their legs spraddled stiff like they had balked upside down, and roll on into the water again.

Then the wagon tilted over and then it and Jewel and the horse was all mixed up together. Cash went outen sight, still holding the coffin braced, and then I couldn’t tell anything for the horse lunging and splashing. I thought that Cash had give up then and was swimming for it and I was yelling at Jewel to come on back and then all of a sudden him and the horse went under too and I thought they was all going. I knew that the horse had got dragged off the ford too, and with that wild drowning horse and that wagon and that loose box, it was going to be

pretty bad, and there I was, standing knee-deep in the water, yelling at Anse behind me: "See what you done now? See what you done now?"

The horse come up again. It was headed for the bank now, throwing its head up, and then I saw one of them holding to the saddle on the downstream side, so I started running along the bank, trying to catch sight of Cash because he couldn't swim, yelling at Jewel where Cash was like a durn fool, bad as that boy that was on down the bank still hollering at Darl.

So I went down into the water so I could still keep some kind of a grip in the mud, when I saw Jewel. He was middle deep, so I knew he was on the ford, anyway, leaning hard upstream, and then I see the rope, and then I see the water building up where he was holding the wagon snubbed just below the ford.

So it was Cash holding to the horse when it come splashing and scrambling up the bank, moaning and groaning like a natural man. When I come to it it was just kicking Cash loose from his holt on the saddle. His face turned up a second when he was sliding back into the water. It was grey, with his eyes closed and a long swipe of mud across his face. Then he let go and turned over in the water. He looked just like an old bundle of clothes kind of washing up and down against the bank. He looked like he was laying there in the water on his face, rocking up and down a little, looking at something on the bottom.

We could watch the rope cutting down into the water, and we could feel the weight of the wagon kind of blump and lunge lazy like, like it just as soon as not, and that rope cutting down into the water hard as a iron bar. We could hear the water hissing on it like it was red hot. Like it was a straight iron bar stuck into the bottom and us holding the end of it, and the wagon lazing up and down, kind of pushing and prodding at us like it had come around and got behind us, lazy like, like it just as soon as not when it made up its mind. There was a shoat come by, blowed up like a balloon: one of them spotted shoats of Lon Quick's. It bumped against the rope like it was a iron bar and bumped off and

went on, and us watching that rope slanting down into the water. We watched it.

DARL

CASH lies on his back on the earth, his head raised on a rolled garment. His eyes are closed, his face is grey, his hair plastered in a smooth smear across his forehead as though done with a paint-brush. His face appears sunken a little, sagging from the bony ridges of eye-sockets, nose, gums, as though the wetting had slacked the firmness which had held the skin full; his teeth, set in pale gums, are parted a little as if he had been laughing quietly. He lies pole-thin in his wet clothes, a little pool of vomit at his head and a thread of it running from the corner of his mouth and down his cheek where he couldn't turn his head quick or far enough, until Dewey Dell stoops and wipes it away with the hem of her dress.

Jewel approaches. He has the plane. "Vernon just found the square," he says. He looks down at Cash, dripping too. "Ain't he talked none yet?"

"He had his saw and hammer and chalk-line and rule," I say. "I know that."

Jewel lays the square down. Pa watches him.

"They can't be far away," pa says. "It all went together. Was there ere a such misfortunate man."

Jewel does not look at pa. "You better call Vardaman back here," he says. He looks at Cash. Then he turns and goes away. "Get him to talk soon as he can," he says, "so he can tell us what else there was."

We return to the river. The wagon is hauled clear, the wheels chocked (carefully: we all helped; it is as though upon the shabby, familiar, inert shape of the wagon there lingered somehow, latent yet still immediate, that violence which had slain the mules that drew it not an hour since) above the edge of the flood. In the wagon-bed it lies profoundly, the

long pale planks hushed a little with wetting yet still yellow, like gold seen through water, save for two long muddy smears. We pass it and go on to the bank.

One end of the rope is made fast to a tree. At the edge of the stream, knee-deep, Vardaman stands, bent forward a little, watching Vernon with rapt absorption. He has stopped yelling and he is wet to the armpits. Vernon is at the other end of the rope, shoulder-deep in the river, looking back at Vardaman. "Further back than that," he says. "You git back by the tree and hold the rope for me, so it can't slip."

Vardaman backs along the rope, to the tree, moving blindly, watching Vernon. When we come up he looks at us once, his eyes round and a little dazed. Then he looks at Vernon again in that posture of rapt alertness.

"I got the hammer too," Vernon says. "Looks like we ought to done already got that chalk-line. It ought to floated."

"Floated clean away," Jewel says. "We won't get it. We ought to find the saw, though."

"I reckon so," Vernon says. He looks at the water. "That chalk-line, too. What else did he have?"

"He ain't talked yet," Jewel says, entering the water. He looks back at me. "You go back and get him roused up to talk," he says.

"Pa's there," I say. I follow Jewel into the water, along the rope. It feels alive in my hand, bellied faintly in a prolonged and resonant arc. Vernon is watching me.

"You better go," he says. "You better be there."

"Let's see what else we can get before it washes on down," I say.

We hold to the rope, the current curling and dimpling about our shoulders. But beneath that false blandness the true force of it leans against us lazily. I had not thought that water in July could be so cold. It is like hands moulding and prodding at the very bones. Vernon is still looking back toward the bank.

“Reckon it’ll hold us all?” he says. We too look back, following the rigid bar of the rope as it rises from the water to the tree and Vardaman crouched a little beside it, watching us. “Wish my mule wouldn’t strike out for home,” Vernon says.

“Come on,” Jewel says. “Let’s get outen here.”

We submerge in turn, holding to the rope, being clutched by one another while the cold wall of the water sucks the slanting mud backward and upstream from beneath our feet and we are suspended so, groping along the cold bottom. Even the mud there is not still. It has a chill, scouring quality, as though the earth under us were in motion too. We touch and fumble at one another’s extended arms, letting ourselves go cautiously against the rope; or, erect in turn, watch the water suck and boil where one of the other two gropes beneath the surface. Pa has come down to the shore, watching us.

Vernon comes up, streaming, his face sloped down into his pursed blowing mouth. His mouth is bluish, like a circle of weathered rubber. He has the rule.

“He’ll be glad of that,” I say. “It’s right new. He bought it just last month out of the catalogue.”

“If we just knowed for sho what else,” Vernon says, looking over his shoulder and then turning to face where Jewel had disappeared.

“Didn’t he go down ’fore me?” Vernon says.

“I don’t know,” I say. “I think so. Yes. Yes, he did.”

We watch the thick curling surface, streaming away from us in slow whorls.

“Give him a pull on the rope,” Vernon says.

“He’s on your end of it,” I say.

“Ain’t nobody on my end of it,” he says.

“Pull it in,” I say. But he has already done that, holding the end above the water; and then we see Jewel. He is ten yards away; he comes up, blowing, and looks at us, tossing his long hair back with a jerk of his head, then he looks toward the bank; we can see him filling his lungs.

“Jewel,” Vernon says, not loud, but his voice going full and clear along the water, peremptory yet tactful. “It’ll be back here. Better come back.”

Jewel dives again. We stand there, leaning back against the current, watching the water where he disappeared, holding the dead rope between us like two men holding the nozzle of a fire-hose, waiting for the water. Suddenly Dewey Dell is behind us in the water. “You make him come back,” she says. “Jewel!” she says. He comes up again, tossing his hair back from his eyes.

He is swimming now, toward the bank, the current sweeping him downstream quartering. “You, Jewel!” Dewey Dell says. We stand holding the rope and see him gain the bank and climb out. As he rises from the water, he stoops and picks up something. He comes back along the bank. He has found the chalk-line. He comes opposite us and stands there, looking about as if he were seeking something. Pa goes on down the bank. He is going back to look at the mules again where their round bodies float and rub quietly together in the slack water within the bend.

“What did you do with the hammer, Vernon?” Jewel says.

"I give it to him," Vernon says, jerking his head at Vardaman. Vardaman is looking after pa. Then he looks at Jewel. "With the square." Vernon is watching Jewel. He moves toward the bank, passing Dewey Dell and me.

"You get on out of here," I say. She says nothing, looking at Jewel and Vernon.

"Where's the hammer?" Jewel says. Vardaman scuttles up the bank and fetches it.

"It's heavier than the saw," Vernon says. Jewel is tying the end of the chalk-line about the hammer shaft.

"Hammer's got the most wood in it," Jewel says. He and Vernon face one another, watching Jewel's hands.

"And flatter, too," Vernon says. "It'd float three to one, almost. Try the plane."

Jewel looks at Vernon. Vernon is tall, too; long and lean, eye to eye they stand in their close wet clothes. Lon Quick could look even at a cloudy sky and tell the time to ten minutes. Big Lon I mean, not little Lon.

"Why don't you get out of the water?" I say.

"It won't float like a saw," Jewel says.

"It'll float nigher to a saw than a hammer will," Vernon says.

"Bet you," Jewel says.

"I won't bet," Vernon says.

They stand there, watching Jewel's still hands.

“Hell,” Jewel says. “Get the plane, then.”

So they get the plane and tie it to the chalk-line and enter the water again. Pa comes back along the bank. He stops for a while and looks at us, hunched, mournful, like a failing steer or an old tall bird.

Vernon and Jewel return, leaning against the current. “Get out of the way,” Jewel says to Dewey Dell. “Get out of the water.”

She crowds against me a little so they can pass, Jewel holding the plane high as though it were perishable, the blue string trailing back over his shoulder. They pass us and stop; they fall to arguing quietly about just where the wagon went over.

“Darl ought to know,” Vernon says. They look at me.

“I don’t know,” I says. “I wasn’t there that long.”

“Hell,” Jewel says. They move on, gingerly, leaning against the current, reading the ford with their feet.

“Have you got a holt of the rope?” Vernon says. Jewel does not answer. He glances back at the shore, calculant, then at the water. He flings the plane outward, letting the string run through his fingers, his fingers turning blue where it runs over them. When the line stops, he hands it back to Vernon.

“Better let me go this time,” Vernon says. Again Jewel does not answer; we watch him duck beneath the surface.

“Jewel,” Dewey Dell whimpers.

“It ain’t so deep there,” Vernon says. He does not look back. He is watching the water where Jewel went under.

When Jewel comes up he has the saw.

When we pass the wagon pa is standing beside it, scrubbing at the two mud smears with a handful of leaves. Against the jungle Jewel's horse looks like a patchwork quilt hung on a line.

Cash has not moved. We stand above him, holding the plane, the saw, the hammer, the square, the rule, the chalk-line, while Dewey Dell squats and lifts Cash's head. "Cash," she says; "Cash."

He opens his eyes, staring profoundly up at our inverted faces.

"If ever was such a misfortunate man," pa says.

"Look, Cash," we say, holding the tools up so he can see; "what else did you have?"

He tries to speak, rolling his head, shutting his eyes.

"Cash," we say; "Cash."

It is to vomit he is turning his head. Dewey Dell wipes his mouth on the wet hem of her dress; then he can speak.

"It's his saw-set," Jewel says. "The new one he bought when he bought the rule." He moves, turning away. Vernon looks up after him, still squatting. Then he rises and follows Jewel down to the water.

"If ever was such a misfortunate man," pa says. He looms tall above us as we squat; he looks like a figure carved clumsily from tough wood by a drunken caricaturist. "It's a trial," he says. "But I don't begrudge her it. No man can say I begrudge her it." Dewey Dell has laid Cash's head back on the folded coat, twisting his head a little to avoid the vomit. Beside him his tools lie. "A fellow might call it lucky it was the same leg he broke when he fell offen that church," pa says. "But I don't begrudge her it."

Jewel and Vernon are in the river again. From here they do not appear to violate the surface at all; it is as though it had severed them both at a

single blow, the two torsos moving with infinitesimal and ludicrous care upon the surface. It looks peaceful, like machinery does after you have watched it and listened to it for a long time. As though the clotting which is you had dissolved into the myriad original motion, and seeing and hearing in themselves blind and deaf; fury in itself quiet with stagnation. Squatting, Dewey Dell's wet dress shapes for the dead eyes of three blind men those mammalian ludicrousities which are the horizons and the valleys of the earth.

CASH

IT wasn't on a balance. I told them that if they wanted it to tote and ride on a balance, they would have to—

CORA

ONE day we were talking. She had never been pure religious, not even after that summer at the camp meeting when Brother Whitfield wrestled with her spirit, singled her out and strove with the vanity in her mortal heart, and I said to her many a time, "God gave you children to comfort your hard human lot and for a token of His own suffering and love, for in love you conceived and bore them." I said that because she took God's love and her duty to Him too much as a matter of course, and such conduct is not pleasing to Him. I said, "He gave us the gift to raise our voices in His undying praise" because I said there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner than over a hundred that never sinned. And she said "My daily life is an acknowledgment and expiation of my sin" and I said "Who are you, to say what is sin and what is not sin?"

It is the Lord's part to judge; ours to praise His mercy and His holy name in the hearing of our fellow mortals" because He alone can see into the heart, and just because a woman's life is right in the sight of man, she can't know if there is no sin in her heart without she opens her heart to the Lord and receives His grace. I said, "Just because you have been a faithful wife is no sign that there is no sin in your heart, and just because your life is hard is no sign that the Lord's grace is absolving

you.” And she said, “I know my own sin. I know that I deserve my punishment. I do not begrudge it.”

And I said, “It is out of your vanity that you would judge sin and salvation in the Lord’s place. It is our mortal lot to suffer and to raise our voices in praise of Him who judges the sin and offers the salvation through our trials and tribulations time out of mind amen. Not even after Brother Whitfield, a godly man if ever one breathed God’s breath, prayed for you and strove as never a man could except him,” I said.

Because it is not us that can judge our sins or know what is sin in the Lord’s eyes. She has had a hard life, but so does every woman. But you’d think from the way she talked that she knew more about sin and salvation than the Lord God Himself, than them who have strove and laboured with the sin in this human world. When the only sin she ever committed was being partial to Jewel that never loved her and was its own punishment, in preference to Darl that was touched by God Himself and considered queer by us mortals and that did love her. I said, “There is your sin. And your punishment too. Jewel is your punishment. But where is your salvation? And life is short enough,” I said, “to win eternal grace in. And God is a jealous God. It is His to judge and to mete; not yours.”

“I know,” she said. “I—” Then she stopped, and I said,

“Know what?”

“Nothing,” she said. “He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me.”

“How do you know, without you open your heart to Him and lift your voice in His praise?” I said. Then I realized that she did not mean God. I realized that out of the vanity of her heart she had spoken sacrilege. And I went down on my knees right there. I begged her to kneel and open her heart and cast from it the devil of vanity and cast herself upon the mercy of the Lord. But she wouldn’t. She just sat there, lost in her

vanity and her pride, that had closed her heart to God and set that selfish mortal boy in His place. Kneeling there I prayed for her. I prayed for that poor blind woman as I had never prayed for me and mine.

ADDIE

IN the afternoon when school was out and the last one had left with his little dirty snuffling nose, instead of going home I would go down the hill to the spring where I could be quiet and hate them. It would be quiet there then, with the water bubbling up and away and the sun slanting quiet in the trees and the quiet smelling of damp and rotting leaves and new earth; especially in the early spring, for it was worst then.

I could just remember how my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time. And when I would have to look at them day after day, each with his and her secret and selfish thought, and blood strange to each other blood and strange to mine, and think that this seemed to be the only way I could get ready to stay dead, I would hate my father for having ever planted me. I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them. When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch: Now you are aware of me! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever.

And so I took Anse. I saw him pass the school-house three or four times before I learned that he was driving four miles out of his way to do it. I noticed then how he was beginning to hump—a tall man and young—so that he looked already like a tall bird hunched in the cold weather, on the wagon-seat. He would pass the school-house, the wagon creaking slow, his head turning slow to watch the door of the school-house as the wagon passed, until he went on around the curve and out of sight. One day I went to the door and stood there when he passed. When he saw me he looked quickly away and did not look back again.

In the early spring it was worst. Sometimes I thought that I could not bear it, lying in bed at night, with the wild geese going north and their honking coming faint and high and wild out of the wild darkness, and during the day it would seem as though I couldn't wait for the last one to go so I could go down to the spring. And so when I looked up that day and saw Anse standing there in his Sunday clothes, turning his hat round and round in his hands, I said:

"If you've got any womenfolks, why in the world don't they make you get your hair cut?"

"I ain't got none," he said. Then he said suddenly, driving his eyes at me like two hounds in a strange yard: "That's what I come to see you about."

"And make you hold your shoulders up," I said. "You haven't got any? But you've got a house. They tell me you've got a house and a good farm. And you live there alone, doing for yourself, do you?" He just looked at me, turning the hat in his hands. "A new house," I said. "Are you going to get married?"

And he said again, holding his eyes to mine: "That's what I come to see you about."

Later he told me, "I ain't got no people. So that won't be no worry to you. I don't reckon you can say the same."

"No. I have people. In Jefferson."

His face fell a little. "Well, I got a little property. I'm forehanded; I got a good honest name. I know how town folks are, but maybe when they talk to me . . ."

"They might listen," I said. "But they'll be hard to talk to." He was watching my face. "They're in the cemetery."

"But your living kin," he said. "They'll be different."

“Will they?” I said. “I don’t know. I never had any other kind.”

So I took Anse. And when I knew that I had Cash, I knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it. That was when I learned that words are no good; that words don’t ever fit even what they are trying to say at. When he was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn’t care whether there was a word for it or not. I knew that fear was invented by someone that had never had the fear; pride, who never had the pride.

I knew that it had been, not that they had dirty noses, but that we had had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching, and that only through the blows of the switch could my blood and their blood flow as one stream. I knew that it had been, not that my aloneness had to be violated over and over each day, but that it had never been violated until Cash came. Not even by Anse in the nights.

He had a word, too. Love, he called it. But I had been used to words for a long time. I knew that that word was like the others: just a shape to fill a lack; that when the right time came, you wouldn’t need a word for that any more than for pride or fear. Cash did not need to say it to me nor I to him, and I would say, Let Anse use it, if he wants to. So that it was Anse or love; love or Anse: it didn’t matter.

I would think that even while I lay with him in the dark and Cash asleep in the cradle within the swing of my hand. I would think that if he were to wake and cry, I would suckle him, too. Anse or love: it didn’t matter. My aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation: time, Anse, love, what you will, outside the circle.

Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it. Then I believed that I would kill Anse. It was as though he had tricked me, hidden within a word like within a paper screen and struck me in the back through it. But then I realized that I had been tricked by words

older than Anse or love, and that the same word had tricked Anse too, and that my revenge would be that he would never know I was taking revenge. And when Darl was born I asked Anse to promise to take me back to Jefferson when I died, because I knew that father had been right, even when he couldn't have known he was right any more than I could have known I was wrong.

"Nonsense," Anse said; "you and me ain't nigh done chapping yet, with just two."

He did not know that he was dead, then. Sometimes I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the land that was now of my blood and flesh, and I would think: Anse. Why Anse. Why are you Anse. I would think about his name until after a while I could see the word as a shape, a vessel, and I would watch him liquefy and flow into it like cold molasses flowing out of the darkness into the vessel, until the jar stood full and motionless: a significant shape profoundly without life like an empty door frame; and then I would find that I had forgotten the name of the jar. I would think: The shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a and I couldn't think Anse, couldn't remember Anse. It was not that I could think of myself as no longer unvirgin, because I was three now. And when I would think Cash and Darl that way until their names would die and solidify into a shape and then fade away, I would say, All right. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what they call them.

And so when Cora Tull would tell me I was not a true mother, I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other; and that sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words. Like Cora, who could never even cook.

She would tell me what I owed to my children and to Anse and to God. I gave Anse the children. I did not ask for them. I did not even ask him for what he could have given me: not-Anse. That was my duty to him, to

not ask that, and that duty I fulfilled. I would be I; I would let him be the shape and echo of his word. That was more than he asked, because he could not have asked for that and been Anse, using himself so with a word.

And then he died. He did not know he was dead. I would lie by him in the dark, hearing the dark land talking of God's love and His beauty and His sin; hearing the dark voicelessness in which the words are the deeds, and the other words that are not deeds, that are just the gaps in peoples' lacks, coming down like the cries of the geese out of the wild darkness in the old terrible nights, fumbling at the deeds like orphans to whom are pointed out in a crowd two faces and told, That is your father, your mother.

I believed that I had found it. I believed that the reason was the duty to the alive, to the terrible blood, the red bitter flood boiling through the land. I would think of sin as I would think of the clothes we both wore in the world's face, of the circumspection necessary because he was he and I was I; the sin the more utter and terrible since he was the instrument ordained by God who created the sin, to sanctify that sin He had created. While I waited for him in the woods, waiting for him before he saw me, I would think of him as dressed in sin.

I would think of him as thinking of me as dressed also in sin, he the more beautiful since the garment which he had exchanged for sin was sanctified. I would think of the sin as garments which we would remove in order to shape and coerce the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air. Then I would lay with Anse again—I did not lie to him: I just refused, just as I refused my breast to Cash and Darl after their time was up—hearing the dark land talking the voiceless speech.

I hid nothing. I tried to deceive no one. I would not have cared. I merely took the precautions that he thought necessary for his sake, not for my safety, but just as I wore clothes in the world's face. And I would think then when Cora talked to me, of how the high dead words in time seemed to lose even the significance of their dead sound.

Then it was over. Over in the sense that he was gone and I knew that, see him again though I would, I would never again see him coming swift and secret to me in the woods dressed in sin like a gallant garment already blowing aside with the speed of his secret coming.

But for me it was not over. I mean, over in the sense of beginning and ending, because to me there was no beginning nor ending to anything then. I even held Anse refraining still, not that I was holding him recessional, but as though nothing else had ever been. My children were of me alone, of the wild blood boiling along the earth, of me and of all that lived; of none and of all. Then I found that I had Jewel. When I waked to remember to discover it, he was two months gone.

My father said that the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead. I knew at last what he meant and that he could not have known what he meant himself, because a man cannot know anything about cleaning up the house afterward. And so I have cleaned my house. With Jewel—I lay by the lamp, holding up my own head, watching him cap and suture it before he breathed—the wild blood boiled away and the sound of it ceased. Then there was only the milk, warm and calm, and I lying calm in the slow silence, getting ready to clean my house.

I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of. And now he has three children that are his and not mine. And then I could get ready to die.

One day I was talking to Cora. She prayed for me because she believed I was blind to sin, wanting me to kneel and pray too, because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too.

WHITFIELD

WHEN they told me she was dying, all that night I wrestled with Satan, and I emerged victorious. I woke to the enormity of my sin; I saw the true light at last, and I fell on my knees and confessed to God and asked his guidance and received it. “Rise,” He said; “repair to that home in

which you have put a living lie, among those people with whom you have outraged My Word; confess your sin aloud. It is for them, for that deceived husband, to forgive you: not I."

So I went. I heard that Tull's bridge was gone; I said "Thanks, O Lord, O Mighty Ruler of all"; for by those dangers and difficulties which I should have to surmount I saw that He had not abandoned me; that my reception again into His holy peace and love would be the sweeter for it. "Just let me not perish before I have begged the forgiveness of the man whom I betrayed," I prayed; "let me not be too late; let not the tale of mine and her transgression come from her lips instead of mine. She had sworn then that she would never tell it, but eternity is a fearsome thing to face: have I not wrestled thigh to thigh with Satan myself? let me not have also the sin of her broken vow upon my soul. Let not the waters of Thy mighty wrath encompass me until I have cleansed my soul in the presence of them whom I injured."

It was His hand that bore me safely above the flood, that fended from me the dangers of the waters. My horse was frightened, and my own heart failed me as the logs and the uprooted trees bore down upon my littleness. But not my soul: time after time I saw them averted at destruction's final instant, and I lifted my voice above the noise of the flood: "Praise to thee, O Mighty Lord and King. By this token shall I cleanse my soul and gain again into the fold of Thy undying love."

I knew then that forgiveness was mine. The flood, the danger, behind, and as I rode on across the firm earth again and the scene of my Gethsemane drew closer and closer, I framed the words which I should use. I would enter the house; I would stop her before she had spoken; I would say to her husband: "Anse, I have sinned. Do with me as you will."

It was already as though it were done. My soul felt freer, quieter than it had in years; already I seemed to dwell in abiding peace again as I rode on. To either side I saw His hand; in my heart I could hear His voice: "Courage. I am with thee."

Then I reached Tull's house. His youngest girl came out and called to me as I was passing. She told me that she was already dead.

I have sinned, O Lord. Thou knowest the extent of my remorse and the will of my spirit. But He is merciful; He will accept the will for the deed, Who knew that when I framed the words of my confession it was to Anse I spoke them, even though he was not there. It was He in His infinite wisdom that restrained the tale from her dying lips as she lay surrounded by those who loved and trusted her; mine the travail by water which I sustained by the strength of His hand. Praise to Thee in Thy bounteous and omnipotent love; O praise.

I entered the house of bereavement, the lowly dwelling where another erring mortal lay while her soul faced the awful and irrevocable judgment, peace to her ashes.

"God's grace upon this house," I said.

DARL

ON the horse he rode up to Armstid's and came back on the horse, leading Armstid's team. We hitched up and laid Cash on top of Addie. When we laid him down he vomited again, but he got his head over the wagon-bed in time.

"He taken a lick in the stomach too," Vernon said.

"The horse may have kicked him in the stomach too," I said. "Did he kick you in the stomach, Cash?"

He tried to say something. Dewey Dell wiped his mouth again.

"What's he say?" Vernon said.

"What is it, Cash?" Dewey Dell said. She leaned down. "His tools," she said. Vernon got them and put them into the wagon. Dewey Dell lifted Cash's head so he could see. We drove on, Dewey Dell and I sitting

beside Cash to steady him and he riding on ahead on the horse. Vernon stood watching us for a while. Then he turned and went back toward the bridge. He walked gingerly, beginning to flap the wet sleeves of his shirt as though he had just got wet.

He was sitting the horse before the gate. Armstid was waiting at the gate. We stopped and he got down and we lifted Cash down and carried him into the house, where Mrs. Armstid had the bed ready. We left her and Dewey Dell undressing him.

We followed pa out to the wagon. He went back and got into the wagon and drove on, we following on foot, into the lot. The wetting had helped, because Armstid said, "You welcome to the house. You can put it there." He followed, leading the horse, and stood beside the wagon, the reins in his hand.

"I thank you," pa said. "We'll use in the shed yonder. I know it's a imposition on you."

"You're welcome to the house," Armstid said. He had that wooden look on his face again; that bold, surly, high-coloured rigid look like his face and eyes were two colours of wood, the wrong one pale and the wrong one dark. His shirt was beginning to dry, but it still clung close upon him when he moved.

"She would appreciate it," pa said.

We took the team out and rolled the wagon back under the shed. One side of the shed was open.

"It won't rain under," Armstid said. "But if you'd rather . . ."

Back of the barn was some rusted sheets of tin roofing. We took two of them and propped them against the open side.

"You're welcome to the house," Armstid said.

"I thank you," pa said. "I'd take it right kind if you'd give them a little snack."

"Sho," Armstid said. "Lula'll have supper ready soon as she gets Cash comfortable." He had gone back to the horse and he was taking the saddle off, his damp shirt lapping flat to him when he moved.

Pa wouldn't come in the house.

"Come in and eat," Armstid said. "It's nigh ready."

"I wouldn't crave nothing," pa said. "I thank you."

"You come in and dry and eat," Armstid said. "It'll be all right here."

"It's for her," pa said. "It's for her sake I am taking the food. I got no team, no nothing. But she will be grateful to ere a one of you."

"Sho," Armstid said. "You folks come in and dry."

But after Armstid gave pa a drink, he felt better, and when we went in to see about Cash he hadn't come in with us. When I looked back he was leading the horse into the barn he was already talking about getting another team, and by supper time he had good as bought it. He is down there in the barn, sliding fluidly past the gaudy lunging swirl, into the stall with it. He climbs on to the manger and drags the hay down and leaves the stall and seeks and finds the curry-comb.

Then he returns and slips quickly past the single crashing thump and up against the horse, where it cannot over-reach. He applies the curry-comb, holding himself within the horse's striking radius with the agility of an acrobat, cursing the horse in a whisper of obscene caress. Its head flashes back, tooth-cropped; its eyes roll in the dusk like marbles on a gaudy velvet cloth as he strikes it upon the face with the back of the curry-comb.

ARMSTID

BUT time I give him another sup of whisky and supper was about ready, he had done already bought a team from somebody, on a credit. Picking and choosing he were by then, saying how he didn't like this span and wouldn't put his money in nothing so-and-so owned, not even a hen coop.

"You might try Snopes," I said. "He's got three-four span. Maybe one of them would suit you."

Then he begun to mumble his mouth, looking at me like it was me that owned the only span of mules in the country and wouldn't sell them to him, when I knew that like as not it would be my team that would ever get them out of the lot at all. Only I don't know what they would do with them, if they had a team. Littlejohn had told me that the levee through Haley bottom had done gone for two miles and that the only way to get to Jefferson would be to go around by Mottson. But that was Anse's business.

"He's a close man to trade with," he says, mumbling his mouth. But when I give him another sup after supper, he cheered up some. He was aiming to go back to the barn and set up with her. Maybe he thought that if he just stayed down there ready to take out, Santa Claus would maybe bring him a span of mules. "But I reckon I can talk him around," he says. "A man'll always help a fellow in a tight, if he's got ere a drop of Christian blood in him."

"Of course you're welcome to the use of mine," I said, me knowing how much he believed that was the reason.

"I thank you," he said. "She'll want to go in ourn," and him knowing how much I believed that was the reason.

After supper Jewel rode over to the Bend to get Peabody. I heard he was to be there to-day at Varner's. Jewel come back about midnight. Peabody had gone down below Inverness somewhere, but Uncle Billy come back with him, with his satchel of horse-physic. Like he says, a

man ain't so different from a horse or a mule, come long come short, except a mule or a horse has got a little more sense. "What you been into now, boy?" he says, looking at Cash. "Get me a mattress and a chair and a glass of whisky," he says.

He made Cash drink the whisky, then he run Anse out of the room. "Lucky it was the same leg he broke last summer," Anse says, mournful, mumbling and blinking. "That's something."

We folded the mattress across Cash's legs and set the chair on the mattress and me and Jewel set on the chair and the gal held the lamp and Uncle Billy taken a chew of tobacco and went to work. Cash fought pretty hard for a while, until he fainted. Then he laid still, with big balls of sweat standing on his face like they had started to roll down and then stopped to wait for him.

When he waked up, Uncle Billy had done packed up and left. He kept on trying to say something until the gal leaned down and wiped his mouth. "It's his tools," she said.

"I brought them in," Darl said. "I got them."

He tried to talk again; she leaned down. "He wants to see them," she said. So Darl brought them in where he could see them. They shoved them under the side of the bed, where he could reach his hand and touch them when he felt better. Next morning Anse taken that horse and rode over to the Bend to see Snopes. Him and Jewel stood in the lot talking a while, then Anse got on the horse and rode off. I reckon that was the first time Jewel ever let anybody ride that horse, and until Anse come back he hung around in that swole-up way, watching the road like he was half a mind to take out after Anse and get the horse back.

Along toward nine o'clock it begun to get hot. That was when I see the first buzzard. Because of the wetting, I reckon. Anyway it wasn't until well into the day that I see them. Lucky the breeze was setting away from the house, so it wasn't until well into the morning. But soon as I

see them it was like I could smell it in the field a mile away from just watching them, and them circling and circling for everybody in the county to see what was in my barn.

I was still a good half a mile from the house when I heard that boy yelling. I thought maybe he might have fell into the well or something, so I whipped up and come into the lot on the lope.

There must have been a dozen of them setting along the ridge-pole of the barn, and that boy was chasing another one around the lot like it was a turkey and it just lifting enough to dodge him and go flopping back to the roof of the shed again where he had found it setting on the coffin. It had got hot then, right, and the breeze had dropped or changed or something, so I went and found Jewel, but Lula come out.

“You got to do something,” she said. “It’s a outrage.”

“That’s what I aim to do,” I said.

“It’s a outrage,” she said. “He should be lawed for treating her so.”

“He’s getting her into the ground the best he can,” I said. So I found Jewel and asked him if he didn’t want to take one of the mules and go over to the Bend and see about Anse. He didn’t say nothing. He just looked at me with his jaws going bone-white and them bone-white eyes of hisn, then he went and begun to call Darl.

“What you fixing to do?” I said.

He didn’t answer. Darl come out. “Come on,” Jewel said.

“What you aim to do?” Darl said.

“Going to move the wagon,” Jewel said over his shoulder.

“Don’t be a fool,” I said. “I never meant nothing. You couldn’t help it.” And Darl hung back too, but nothing wouldn’t suit Jewel.

“Shut your goddamn mouth,” he says.

“It’s got to be somewhere,” Darl said. “We’ll take out soon as pa gets back.”

“You won’t help me?” Jewel says, them white eyes of hisn kind of blaring and his face shaking like he had a aguer.

“No,” Darl said. “I won’t. Wait till pa gets back.”

So I stood in the door and watched him push and haul at that wagon. It was on a downhill, and once I thought he was fixing to beat out the back end of the shed. Then the dinner-bell rung. I called him, but he didn’t look around. “Come on to dinner,” I said. “Tell that boy.” But he didn’t answer, so I went on to dinner. The gal went down to get that boy, but she come back without him. About half through dinner we heard him yelling again, running that buzzard out.

“It’s a outrage,” Lula said; “a outrage.”

“He’s doing the best he can,” I said. “A fellow don’t trade with Snopes in thirty minutes. They’ll set in the shade all afternoon to dicker.”

“Do?” she says. “Do? He’s done too much, already.”

And I reckon he had. Trouble is, his quitting was just about to start our doing. He couldn’t buy no team from nobody, let alone Snopes, withouten he had something to mortgage he didn’t know would mortgage yet. And so when I went back to the field I looked at my mules and same as told them good-bye for a spell. And when I come back that evening and the sun shining all day on that shed, I wasn’t so sho I would regret it.

He come riding up just as I went out to the porch, where they all was. He looked kind of funny: kind of more hangdog than common, and kind

of proud too. Like he had done something he thought was cute but wasn't so sho now how other folks would take it.

"I got a team," he said.

"You bought a team from Snopes?" I said.

"I reckon Snopes ain't the only man in this country that can drive a trade," he said.

"Sho," I said. He was looking at Jewel, with that funny look, but Jewel had done got down from the porch and was going toward the horse. To see what Anse had done to it, I reckon.

"Jewel," Anse says. Jewel looked back. "Come here," Anse says. Jewel come back a little and stopped again.

"What you want?" he said.

"So you got a team from Snopes," I said. "He'll send them over to-night, I reckon? You'll want a early start to-morrow, long as you'll have to go by Mottson."

Then he quit looking like he had been for a while. He got that badgered look like he used to have, mumbling his mouth.

"I do the best I can," he said. "'Fore God, if there were ere a man in the living world suffered the trials and floutings I have suffered."

"A fellow that just beat Snopes in a trade ought to feel pretty good," I said. "What did you give him, Anse?"

He didn't look at me. "I give a chattel mortgage on my cultivator and seeder," he said.

"But they ain't worth forty dollars. How far do you aim to get with a forty-dollar team?"

They were all watching him now, quiet and steady. Jewel was stopped, half-way back, waiting to go on to the horse. "I give other things," Anse said. He begun to mumble his mouth again, standing there like he was waiting for somebody to hit him and him with his mind already made up not to do nothing about it.

"What other things?" Darl said.

"Hell," I said. "You take my team. You can bring them back. I'll get along some way."

"So that's what you were doing in Cash's clothes last night," Darl said. He said it just like he was reading it outen the paper. Like he never give a durn himself one way or the other. Jewel had come back now, standing there, looking at Anse with them marble eyes of his. "Cash aimed to buy that talking machine from Suratt with that money," Darl said.

Anse stood there, mumbling his mouth. Jewel watched him. He ain't never blinked yet.

"But that's just eight dollars more," Darl said, in that voice like he was just listening and never give a durn himself. "That still won't buy a team."

Anse looked at Jewel quick, kind of sliding his eyes that way, then he looked down again. "God knows, if there were ere a man," he says. Still they didn't say nothing. They just watched him, waiting, and him sliding his eyes toward their feet and up their legs but no higher. "And the horse," he says.

"What horse?" Jewel said. Anse just stood there. I be durn, if a man can't keep the upper hand of his sons, he ought to run them away from home, no matter how big they are. And if he can't do that, I be durn if he oughtn't to leave himself. I be durn if I wouldn't. "You mean, you tried to swap my horse?" Jewel says.

Anse stands there, dangle-armed. "For fifteen years I ain't had a tooth in my head," he says. "God knows it. He knows in fifteen years I ain't et the victuals He aimed for man to eat to keep his strength up, and me saving a nickel here and a nickel there so my family wouldn't suffer it, to buy them teeth so I could eat God's appointed food. I give that money. I thought that if I could do without eating, my sons could do without riding. God knows I did."

Jewel stands with his hands on his hips, looking at Anse. Then he looks away. He looked out across the field, his face still as a rock, like it was somebody else talking about somebody else's horse and him not even listening. Then he spit, slow, and said "Hell" and he turned and went on to the gate and unhitched the horse and got on it. It was moving when he come into the saddle and by the time he was on it they was tearing down the road like the Law might have been behind them. They went out of sight that way, the two of them looking like some kind of a spotted cyclone.

"Well," I says. "You take my team," I said. But he wouldn't do it. And they wouldn't even stay, and that boy chasing them buzzards all day in the hot sun until he was nigh as crazy as the rest of them. "Leave Cash here, anyway," I said. But they wouldn't do that. They made a pallet for him with quilts on top of the coffin and laid him on it and set his tools by him, and we put my team in and hauled the wagon about a mile down the road.

"If we'll bother you here," Anse says, "just say so."

"Sho," I said. "It'll be fine here. Safe, too. Now let's go back and eat supper."

"I thank you," Anse said. "We got a little something in the basket. We can make out."

"Where'd you get it?" I said.

“We brought it from home.”

“But it’ll be stale now,” I said. “Come and get some hot victuals.”

But they wouldn’t come. “I reckon we can make out,” Anse said. So I went home and et and taken a basket back to them and tried again to make them come back to the house.

“I thank you,” he said. “I reckon we can make out.” So I left them there, squatting around a little fire, waiting; God knows what for.

I come on home. I kept thinking about them there, and about that fellow tearing away on that horse. And that would be the last they would see of him. And I be durn if I could blame him. Not for wanting to not give up his horse, but for getting shut of such a durn fool as Anse.

Or that’s what I thought then. Because be durn if there ain’t something about a durn fellow like Anse that seems to make a man have to help him, even when he knows he’ll be wanting to kick himself next minute. Because about a hour after breakfast next morning Eustace Grimm that works Snopes’ place come up with a span of mules, hunting Anse.

“I thought him and Anse never traded,” I said.

“Sho,” Eustace said. “All they liked was the horse. Like I said to Mr. Snopes, he was letting this team go for fifty dollars, because if his uncle Flem had a just kept them Texas horses when he owned them, Anse wouldn’t a never——”

“The horse?” I said. “Anse’s boy taken that horse and cleared out last night, probably half-way to Texas by now, and Anse——”

“I didn’t know who brung it,” Eustace said. “I never see them. I just found the horse in the barn this morning when I went to feed, and I told Mr. Snopes and he said to bring the team on over here.”

Well, that'll be the last they'll ever see of him now, sho enough. Come Christmas time they'll maybe get a postal card from him in Texas, I reckon. And if it hadn't a been Jewel, I reckon it'd a been me; I owe him that much, myself. I be durn if Anse don't conjure a man, some way. I be durn if he ain't a sight.

VARDAMAN

NOW there are seven of them, in little tall black circles.

"Look, Darl," I say; "see?"

He looks up. We watch them in little tall black circles of not-moving.

"Yesterday there were just four," I say.

There were more than four on the barn.

"Do you know what I would do if he tries to light on the wagon again?" I say.

"What would you do?" Darl says.

"I wouldn't let him light on her," I say. "I wouldn't let him light on Cash, either."

Cash is sick. He is sick on the box. But my mother is a fish.

"We got to get some medicine in Mottson," pa says. "I reckon we'll just have to."

"How do you feel, Cash?" Darl says.

"It don't bother none," Cash says.

"Do you want it propped a little higher?" Darl says.

Cash has a broken leg. He has had two broken legs. He lies on the box with a quilt rolled under his head and a piece of wood under his knee.

"I reckon we ought to left him at Armstid's," pa says.

I haven't got a broken leg and pa hasn't and Darl hasn't and "It's just the bumps," Cash says. "It kind of grinds together a little on a bump. I don't bother none." Jewel has gone away. He and his horse went away one supper time.

"It's because she wouldn't have us beholden," pa says. "'Fore God, I do the best that ere a man." Is it because Jewel's mother is a horse, Darl? I said.

"Maybe I can draw the ropes a little tighter," Darl says. That's why Jewel and I were both in the shed and she was in the wagon because the horse lives in the barn and I had to keep on running the bustard away from

"If you just would," Cash says. And Dewey Dell hasn't got a broken leg and I haven't. Cash is my brother.

We stop. When Darl loosens the rope Cash begins to sweat again. His teeth look out.

"Hurt?" Darl says.

"I reckon you better put it back," Cash says.

Darl puts the rope back, pulling hard. Cash's teeth look out.

"Hurt?" Darl says.

"It don't bother none," Cash says.

"Do you want pa to drive slower?" Darl says.

“No,” Cash says. “Ain’t no time to hang back. It don’t bother none.”

“We’ll have to get some medicine at Mottson,” pa says. “I reckon we’ll have to.”

“Tell him to go on,” Cash says. We go on. Dewey Dell leans back and wipes Cash’s face. Cash is my brother. But Jewel’s mother is a horse. My mother is a fish. Darl says that when we come to the water again I might see her and Dewey Dell said, She’s in the box; how could she have got out? She got out through the holes I bored, into the water I said, and when we come to the water again I am going to see her. My mother is not in the box. My mother does not smell like that. My mother is a fish.

“Those cakes will be in fine shape by the time we get to Jefferson,” Darl says.

Dewey Dell does not look around.

“You better try to sell them in Mottson,” Darl says.

“When will we get to Mottson, Darl?” I say.

“To-morrow,” Darl says. “If this team don’t tack to pieces. Snopes must have fed them on sawdust.”

“Why did he feed them on sawdust, Darl?” I say.

“Look,” Darl says. “See?”

Now there are nine of them, tall in little tall black circles.

When we come to the foot of the hill pa stops and Darl and Dewey Dell and I get out. Cash can’t walk because he has a broken leg. “Come up, mules,” pa says. The mules walk hard; the wagon creaks. Darl and Dewey Dell and I walk behind the wagon, up the hill. When we come to the top of the hill pa stops and we get back into the wagon.

Now there are ten of them, tall in little tall black circles on the sky.

MOSELEY

I HAPPEDED to look up, and saw her outside the window, looking in. Not close to the glass, and not looking at anything in particular; just standing there with her head turned this way and her eyes full on me and kind of blank too, like she was waiting for a sign. When I looked up again she was moving toward the door.

She kind of bumbled at the screen door a minute, like they do, and came in. She had on a stiff-brimmed straw hat setting on the top of her head and she was carrying a package wrapped in newspaper: I thought that she had a quarter or a dollar at the most, and that after she stood around awhile she would maybe buy a cheap comb or a bottle of nigger toilet water, so I never disturbed her for a minute or so except to notice that she was pretty in a kind of sullen, awkward way, and that she looked a sight better in her gingham dress and her own complexion than she would after she bought whatever she would finally decide on. Or tell that she wanted. I knew that she had already decided before she came in. But you have to let them take their time. So I went on with what I was doing, figuring to let Albert wait on her when he caught up at the fountain, when he came back to me.

“That woman,” he said. “You better see what she wants.”

“What does she want?” I said.

“I don’t know. I can’t get anything out of her. You better wait on her.”

So I went around the counter. I saw that she was barefooted, standing with her feet flat and easy on the floor, like she was used to it. She was looking at me, hard, holding the package; I saw she had about as black a pair of eyes as ever I saw, and she was a stranger. I never remembered seeing her in Mottson before. “What can I do for you?” I said.

Still she didn't say anything. She stared at me without winking. Then she looked back at the folks at the fountain. Then she looked past me, toward the back of the store.

"Do you want to look at some toilet things?" I said. "Or is it medicine you want?"

"That's it," she said. She looked quick back at the fountain again. So I thought maybe her ma or somebody had sent her in for some of this female dope and she was ashamed to ask for it. I knew she couldn't have a complexion like hers and use it herself, let alone not being much more than old enough to barely know what it was for. It's a shame, the way they poison themselves with it. But a man's got to stock it or go out of business in this country.

"Oh," I said. "What do you use? We have——" She looked at me again, almost like she had said hush, and looked toward the back of the store again.

"I'd liefer go back there," she said.

"All right," I said. You have to humour them. You save time by it. I followed her to the back. She put her hand on the gate. "There's nothing back there but the prescription case," I said. "What do you want?" She stopped and looked at me. It was like she had taken some kind of a lid off her face, her eyes. It was her eyes: kind of dumb and hopeful and sullenly willing to be disappointed all at the same time. But she was in trouble of some sort; I could see that. "What's your trouble?" I said. "Tell me what it is you want. I'm pretty busy." I wasn't meaning to hurry her, but a man just hasn't got the time they have out there.

"It's the female trouble," she said.

"Oh," I said. "Is that all?" I thought maybe she was younger than she looked, and her first one had scared her, or maybe one had been a little

abnormal as it will in young women. "Where's your ma?" I said. "Haven't you got one?"

"She's out yonder in the wagon," she said.

"Why not talk to her about it before you take any medicine," I said. "Any woman would have told you about it." She looked at me, and I looked at her again and said, "How old are you?"

"Seventeen," she said.

"Oh," I said. "I thought maybe you were . . ." She was watching me. But then, in the eyes all of them look like they had no age and knew everything in the world, anyhow. "Are you too regular, or not regular enough?"

She quit looking at me but she didn't move. "Yes," she said. "I reckon so. Yes."

"Well, which?" I said. "Don't you know?" It's a crime and a shame; but after all, they'll buy it from somebody. She stood there, not looking at me. "You want something to stop it?" I said. "Is that it?"

"No," she said. "That's it. It's already stopped."

"Well, what——" Her face was lowered a little, still, like they do in all their dealings with a man so he don't ever know just where the lightning will strike next. "You are not married, are you?" I said.

"No."

"Oh," I said. "And how long has it been since it stopped? about five months maybe?"

"It ain't been but two," she said.

“Well, I haven’t got anything in my store you want to buy,” I said, “unless it’s a nipple. And I’d advise you to buy that and go back home and tell your pa, if you have one, and let him make somebody buy you a wedding licence. Was that all you wanted?”

But she just stood there, not looking at me.

“I got the money to pay you,” she said.

“Is it your own, or did he act enough of a man to give you the money?”

“He give it to me. Ten dollars. He said that would be enough.”

“A thousand dollars wouldn’t be enough in my store and ten cents wouldn’t be enough,” I said. “You take my advice and go home and tell you pa or your brothers if you have any or the first man you come to in the road.”

But she didn’t move. “Lafe said I could get it at the drug-store. He said to tell you me and him wouldn’t never tell nobody you sold it to us.”

“And I just wish your precious Lafe had come for it himself; that’s what I wish. I don’t know: I’d have had a little respect for him then. And you can go back and tell him I said so—if he ain’t half-way to Texas by now, which I don’t doubt. Me, a respectable druggist, that’s kept store and raised a family and been a church-member for fifty-six years in this town. I’m a good mind to tell your folks myself, if I can just find who they are.”

She looked at me now, her eyes and face kind of blank again like when I first saw her through the window. “I didn’t know,” she said. “He told me I could get something at the drug-store. He said they might not want to sell it to me, but if I had ten dollars and told them I wouldn’t never tell nobody . . .”

“He never said this drug-store,” I said. “If he did or mentioned my name, I defy him to prove it. I defy him to repeat it or I’ll prosecute him to the full extent of the law, and you can tell him so.”

“But maybe another drug-store would,” she said.

“Then I don’t want to know it. Me, that’s—” Then I looked at her. But it’s a hard life they have; sometimes a man . . . if there can ever be any excuse for sin, which it can’t be. And then, life wasn’t made to be easy on folks: they wouldn’t ever have any reason to be good and die. “Look here,” I said. “You get that notion out of your head. The Lord gave you what you have, even if He did use the devil to do it; you let Him take it away from you if it’s His will to do so. You go on back to Lafe and you and him take that ten dollars and get married with it.”

“Lafe said I could get something at the drug-store,” she said.

“Then go and get it,” I said. “You won’t get it here.”

She went out, carrying the package, her feet making a little hissing on the floor. She bumped again at the door and went out. I could see her through the glass going on down the street.

It was Albert told me about the rest of it. He said the wagon was stopped in front of Grummet’s hardware store, with the ladies all scattering up and down the street with handkerchief to their noses, and a crowd of hard-nosed men and boys standing around the wagon, listening to the marshal arguing with the man. He was a kind of tall, gaunted man sitting on the wagon, saying it was a public street and he reckoned he had as much right there as anybody, and the marshal telling him he would have to move on; folks couldn’t stand it.

It had been dead eight days, Albert said. They came from some place out in Yoknapatawpha county, trying to get to Jefferson with it. It must have been like a piece of rotten cheese coming into an ant-hill, in that ramshackle wagon that Albert said folks were scared would fall all to pieces before they could get it out of town, with that home-made box

and another fellow with a broken leg lying on a quilt on top of it, and the father and a little boy sitting on the seat and the marshal trying to make them get out of town.

“It’s a public street,” the man says. “I reckon we can stop to buy something same as airy other man. We got the money to pay for hit, and hit ain’t airy law that says a man can’t spend his money where he wants.”

They had stopped to buy some cement. The other son was in Grummet’s, trying to make Grummet break a sack and let him have ten cents’ worth, and finally Grummet broke the sack to get him out. They wanted the cement to fix the fellow’s broken leg, someday.

“Why, you’ll kill him,” the marshal said. “You’ll cause him to lose his leg. You take him on to a doctor, and you get this thing buried soon as you can. Don’t you know you’re liable to jail for endangering the public health?”

“We’re doing the best we can,” the father said. Then he told a long tale about how they had to wait for the wagon to come back and how the bridge was washed away and how they went eight miles to another bridge and it was gone too so they came back and swum the ford and the mules got drowned and how they got another team and found that the road was washed out and they had to come clean around by Mottson, and then the one with the cement came back and told him to shut up.

“We’ll be gone in a minute,” he told the marshal.

“We never aimed to bother nobody,” the father said.

“You take that fellow to a doctor,” the marshal told the one with the cement.

“I reckon he’s all right,” he said.

"It ain't that we're hard-hearted," the marshal said. "But I reckon you can tell yourself how it is."

"Sho," the other said. "We'll take out soon as Dewey Dell comes back. She went to deliver a package."

So they stood there with the folks backed off with handkerchiefs to their faces, until in a minute the girl came up with that newspaper package.

"Come on," the one with the cement said, "we've lost too much time." So they got in the wagon and went on. And when I went to supper it still seemed like I could smell it. And the next day I met the marshal and I began to sniff and said,

"Smell anything?"

"I reckon they're in Jefferson by now," he said.

"Or in jail. Well, thank the Lord it's not our jail."

"That's a fact," he said.

DARL

"HERE'S a place," pa says. He pulls the team up and sits looking at the house. "We could get some water over yonder."

"All right," I say. "You'll have to borrow a bucket from them, Dewey Dell."

"God knows," pa says. "I wouldn't be beholden, God knows."

"If you see a good-sized can, you might bring it," I say. Dewey Dell gets down from the wagon, carrying the package. "You had more trouble than you expected, selling those cakes in Mottson," I say. How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily

recapitulant: echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no-strings: in sunset we fall into furious attitudes, dead gestures of dolls. Cash broke his leg and now the sawdust is running out. He is bleeding to death is Cash.

"I wouldn't be beholden," pa says. "God knows."

"Then make some water yourself," I say. "We can use Cash's hat."

When Dewey Dell comes back the man comes with her. Then he stops and she comes on and he stands there and after a while he goes back to the house and stands on the porch, watching us.

"We better not try to lift him down," pa says. "We can fix it here."

"Do you want to be lifted down, Cash?" I say.

"Won't we get to Jefferson to-morrow?" he says. He is watching us, his eyes interrogatory, intent, and sad. "I can last it out."

"It'll be easier on you," pa says. "It'll keep it from rubbing together."

"I can last it," Cash says. "We'll lose time stopping."

"We done bought the cement, now," pa says.

"I could last it," Cash says. "It ain't but one more day. It don't bother to speak of." He looks at us, his eyes wide in his thin grey face, questioning. "It sets up so," he says.

"We done bought it now," pa says.

I mix the cement in the can, stirring the slow water into the pale-green thick coils. I bring the can to the wagon where Cash can see. He lies on his back, his thin profile in silhouette, ascetic and profound against the sky. "Does that look about right?" I say.

“You don’t want too much water, or it won’t work right,” he says.

“Is this too much?”

“Maybe if you could get a little sand,” he says. “It ain’t but one more day,” he says. “It don’t bother me none.”

Vardaman goes back down the road to where we crossed the branch and returns with sand. He pours it slowly into the thick coiling in the can. I go to the wagon again.

“Does that look all right?”

“Yes,” Cash says. “I could have lasted. It don’t bother me none.”

We loosen the splints and pour the cement over his leg, slow.

“Watch out for it,” Cash says. “Don’t get none on it if you can help.”

“Yes,” I say. Dewey Dell tears a piece of paper from the package and wipes the cement from the top of it as it drips from Cash’s leg.

“How does that feel?”

“It feels fine,” he says. “It’s cold. It feels fine.”

“If it’ll just help you,” pa says. “I asks your forgiveness. I never forseen it no more than you.”

“It feels fine,” Cash says.

If you could just ravel out into time. That would be nice. It would be nice if you could just ravel out into time.

We replace the splints, the cords, drawing them tight, the cement in thick pale green slow surges among the cords, Cash watching us quietly with that profound questioning look.

“That’ll steady it,” I say.

“Ay,” Cash says. “I’m obliged.”

Then we all turn on the wagon and watch him. He is coming up the road behind us, wooden-backed, wooden-faced, moving only from his hips down. He comes up without a word, with his pale rigid eyes in his high sullen face, and gets into the wagon.

“Here’s a hill,” pa says. “I reckon you’ll have to get out and walk.”

VARDAMAN

DARL and Jewel and Dewey Dell and I are walking up the hill behind the wagon. Jewel came back. He came up the road and got into the wagon. He was walking. Jewel hasn’t got a horse any more. Jewel is my brother. Cash is my brother. Cash has a broken leg. We fixed Cash’s leg so it doesn’t hurt. Cash is my brother. Jewel is my brother too, but he hasn’t got a broken leg.

Now there are five of them, tall in little tall black circles.

“Where do they stay at night, Darl?” I say. “When we stop at night in the barn, where do they stay?”

The hill goes off into the sky. Then the sun comes up from behind the hill and the mules and the wagon and pa walk on the sun. You cannot watch them, walking slow on the sun. In Jefferson it is red on the track behind the glass. The track goes shining round and round. Dewey Dell says so.

To-night I am going to see where they stay while we are in the barn.

DARL

“JEWEL,” I say, “whose son are you?”

The breeze was setting up from the barn, so we put her under the apple tree, where the moonlight can dapple the apple tree upon the long slumbering flanks within which now and then she talks in little trickling bursts of secret and murmurous bubbling. I took Vardaman to listen. When we came up the cat leaped down from it and flicked away with silver claw and silver eye into the shadow.

“Your mother was a horse, but who was your father, Jewel?”

“You goddamn lying son of a bitch.”

“Don’t call me that,” I say.

“You goddamn lying son of a bitch.”

“Don’t you call me that, Jewel.” In the tall moonlight his eyes look like spots of white paper pasted on a high small football.

After supper Cash began to sweat a little. “It’s getting a little hot,” he said. “It was the sun shining on it all day, I reckon.”

“You want some water poured on it?” we say. “Maybe that will ease it some.”

“I’d be obliged,” Cash said. “It was the sun shining on it, I reckon. I ought to thought and kept it covered.”

“We ought to thought,” we said. “You couldn’t have suspicioned.”

“I never noticed it getting hot,” Cash said. “I ought to minded it.”

So we poured the water over it. His leg and foot below the cement looked like they had been boiled. “Does that feel better?” we said.

“I’m obliged,” Cash said. “It feels fine.”

Dewey Dell wipes his face with the hem of her dress.

“See if you can get some sleep,” we say.

“Sho,” Cash says. “I’m right obliged. It feels fine now.”

Jewel, I say, Who was your father, Jewel?

Goddamn you. Goddamn you.

VARDAMAN

SHE was under the apple tree and Darl and I go across the moon and the cat jumps down and runs and we can hear her inside the wood.

“Hear?” Darl says. “Put your ear close.”

I put my ear close and I can hear her. Only I can’t tell what she is saying.

“What is she saying, Darl?” I say. “Who is she talking to?”

“She’s talking to God,” Darl says. “She is calling on Him to help her.”

“What does she want Him to do?” I say.

“She wants Him to hide her away from the sight of man,” Darl says.

“Why does she want to hide her away from the sight of man, Darl?”

“So she can lay down her life,” Darl says.

“Why does she want to lay down her life, Darl?”

“Listen,” Darl says. We hear her. We hear her turn over on her side.

“Listen,” Darl says.

“She’s turned over,” I say. “She’s looking at me through the wood.”

“Yes,” Darl says.

“How can she see through the wood, Darl?”

“Come,” Darl says. “We must let her be quiet. Come.”

“She can’t see out there, because the holes are in the top,” I say. “How can she see, Darl?”

“Let’s go see about Cash,” Darl says.

And I saw something Dewey Dell told me not to tell nobody.

Cash is sick in his leg. We fixed his leg this afternoon, but he is sick in it again, lying on the bed. We pour water on his leg and then he feels fine.

“I feel fine,” Cash says. “I’m obliged to you.”

“Try to get some sleep,” we say.

“I feel fine,” Cash says. “I’m obliged to you.”

And I saw something Dewey Dell told me not to tell nobody. It is not about pa and it is not about Cash and it is not about Jewel and it is not about Dewey Dell and it is not about me.

Dewey Dell and I are going to sleep on the pallet. It is on the back porch, where we can see the barn, and the moon shines on half of the pallet and we will lie half in the white and half in the black, with the moonlight on our legs. And then I am going to see where they stay at night while we are in the barn. We are not in the barn to-night but I can see the barn and so I am going to find where they stay at night.

We lie on the pallet, with our legs in the moon.

“Look,” I say, “my legs look black. Your legs look black, too.”

“Go to sleep,” Dewey Dell says.

Jefferson is a far piece.

“Dewey Dell.”

“If it’s not Christmas now, how will it be there?”

It goes round and round on the shining track. Then the track goes shining round and round.

“Will what be there?”

“That train. In the window.”

“You go to sleep. You can see to-morrow if it’s there.”

Maybe Santa Claus won’t know they are town boys.

“Dewey Dell.”

“You go to sleep. He ain’t going to let none of them town boys have it.”

It was behind the window, red on the track, and the track shining round and round. It made my heart hurt. And then it was pa and Jewel and Darl and Mr. Gillespie’s boy. Mr. Gillespie’s boy’s legs come down under his nightshirt. When he goes into the moon, his legs fuzz. They go on around the house toward the apple tree.

“What are they going to do, Dewey Dell?”

They went around the house toward the apple tree.

“I can smell her,” I say. “Can you smell her, too?”

“Hush,” Dewey Dell says. “The wind’s changed. Go to sleep.”

And so I am going to know where they stay at night soon. They come around the house, going across the yard in the moon, carrying her on their shoulders. They carry her down to the barn, the moon shining flat and quiet on her. Then they come back and go into the house again. While they were in the moon, Mr. Gillespie's boy's legs fuzzed. And then I waited and I said Dewey Dell? and then I waited and then I went to find where they stay at night and I saw something that Dewey Dell told me not to tell nobody.

DARL

AGAINST the dark doorway he seems to materialize out of darkness, lean as a racehorse in his underclothes in the beginning of the glare. He leaps to the ground with on his face an expression of furious unbelief. He has seen me without even turning his head or his eyes in which the glare swims like two small torches. "Come on," he says, leaping down the slope toward the barn.

For an instant longer he runs silver in the moonlight, then he springs out like a flat figure cut cleanly from tin against an abrupt and soundless explosion as the whole loft of the barn takes fire at once, as though it had been stuffed with powder. The front, the conical facade with the square orifice of doorway broken only by the square squat shape of the coffin on the saw-horses like a cubistic bug, comes into relief. Behind me pa and Gillespie and Mack and Dewey Dell and Vardaman emerge from the house.

He pauses at the coffin, stooping, looking at me, his face furious. Overhead the flames sound like thunder; across us rushes a cool draught: there is no heat in it at all yet, and a handful of chaff lifts suddenly and sucks swiftly along the stalls where a horse is screaming. "Quick," I say; "the horses."

He glares a moment longer at me, then at the roof overhead, then he leaps toward the stall where the horse screams. It plunges and kicks, the sound of the crashing blows sucking up into the sound of the

flames. They sound like an interminable train crossing an endless trestle. Gillespie and Mack pass me, in knee-length nightshirts, shouting, their voices thin and high and meaningless and at the same time profoundly wild and sad: “. . . cow . . . stall . . .” Gillespie’s nightshirt rushes ahead of him on the draft, ballooning about his hairy thighs.

The stall door has swung shut. Jewel thrusts it back with his buttocks and he appears, his back arched, the muscles ridged through his garments as he drags the horse out by its head. In the glare its eyes roll with soft, fleet, wild opaline fire; its muscles bunch and run as it flings its head about, lifting Jewel clear of the ground. He drags it on, slowly, terrifically; again he gives me across his shoulder a single glare furious and brief. Even when they are clear of the barn the horse continues to fight and lash backward toward the doorway until Gillespie passes me, stark naked, his nightshirt wrapped about the mule’s head, and beats the maddened horse on out of the door.

Jewel returns, running; again he looks down at the coffin. But he comes on. “Where’s cow?” he cries, passing me. I follow him. In the stall Mack is struggling with the other mule. When its head turns into the glare I can see the wild rolling of its eye too, but it makes no sound. It just stands there, watching Mack over its shoulder, swinging its hindquarters toward him whenever he approaches. He looks back at us, his eyes and mouth three round holes in his face on which the freckles look like English peas on a plate. His voice is thin, high, far away.

“I can’t do nothing. . . .” It is as though the sound had been swept from his lips and up and away, speaking back to us from an immense distance of exhaustion. Jewel slides past us; the mule whirls and lashes out, but he has already gained its head. I lean to Mack’s ear:

“Nightshirt. Around his head.”

Mack stares at me. Then he rips the nightshirt off and flings it over the mule’s head, and it becomes docile at once. Jewel is yelling at him: “Cow? Cow?”

“Back,” Mack cries. “Last stall.”

The cow watches us as we enter. She is backed into the corner, head lowered, still chewing though rapidly. But she makes no move. Jewel has paused, looking up, and suddenly we watch the entire floor to the loft dissolve. It just turns to fire; a faint litter of sparks rains down. He glances about. Back under the trough is a three-legged milking-stool. He catches it up and swings it into the planking of the rear wall. He splinters a plank, then another, a third; we tear the fragments away. While we are stooping at the opening something charges into us from behind. It is the cow; with a single whistling breath she rushes between us and through the gap and into the outer glare, her tail erect and rigid as a broom nailed upright to the end of her spine.

Jewel turns back into the barn. “Here,” I say; “Jewel!” I grasp at him; he strikes my hand down. “You fool,” I say, “don’t you see you can’t make it back yonder?” The hallway looks like a searchlight turned into rain. “Come on,” I say, “around this way.”

When we are through the gap he begins to run. “Jewel,” I say, running. He darts around the corner. When I reach it he has almost reached the next one, running against the glare like that figure cut from tin. Pa and Gillespie and Mack are some distance away, watching the barn, pink against the darkness where for the time the moonlight has been vanquished. “Catch him!” I cry; “stop him!”

When I reach the front, he is struggling with Gillespie; the one lean in underclothes, the other stark naked. They are like two figures in a Greek frieze, isolated out of all reality by the red glare. Before I can reach them he has struck Gillespie to the ground and turned and run back into the barn.

The sound of it has become quite peaceful now, like the sound of the river did. We watch through the dissolving proscenium of the doorway as Jewel runs crouching to the far end of the coffin and stoops to it. For an instant he looks up and out at us through the rain of burning hay like

a portière of flaming beads, and I can see his mouth shape as he calls my name.

“Jewel!” Dewey Dell cries; “Jewel!” It seems to me that I now hear the accumulation of her voice through the last five minutes, and I hear her scuffling and struggling as pa and Mack hold her, screaming, “Jewel! Jewel!” But he is no longer looking at us. We see his shoulders strain as he up-ends the coffin and slides it single-handed from the saw-horses.

It looms unbelievably tall, hiding him: I would not have believed that Addie Bundren would have needed that much room to lie comfortable in; for another instant it stands upright while the sparks rain on it in scattering bursts as though they engendered other sparks from the contact. Then it topples forward, gaining momentum, revealing Jewel and the sparks raining on him too in engendering gusts, so that he appears to be enclosed in a thin nimbus of fire.

Without stopping it over-ends and rears again, pauses, then crashes slowly forward and through the curtain. This time Jewel is riding upon it, clinging to it, until it crashes down and flings him forward and clear and Mack leaps forward into a thin smell of scorching meat and slaps at the widening crimson-edged holes that bloom like flowers in his undershirt.

VARDAMAN

WHEN I went to find where they stay at night, I saw something. They said, “Where is Darl? Where did Darl go?”

They carried her back under the apple tree.

The barn was still red, but it wasn't a barn now. It was sunk down, and the red went swirling up. The barn went swirling up in little red pieces, against the sky and the stars so that the stars moved backward.

And then Cash was still awake. He turned his head from side to side, with sweat on his face.

“Do you want some more water on it, Cash?” Dewey Dell said.

Cash’s leg and foot turned black. We held the lamp and looked at Cash’s foot and leg where it was black.

“Your foot looks like a nigger’s foot, Cash,” I said.

“I reckon we’ll have to bust it off,” pa said.

“What in the tarnation you put it on there for?” Mr. Gillespie said.

“I thought it would steady it some,” pa said. “I just aimed to help him.”

They got the flat iron and the hammer. Dewey Dell held the lamp. They had to hit it hard. And then Cash went to sleep.

“He’s asleep now,” I said. “It can’t hurt him while he’s asleep.”

It just cracked. It wouldn’t come off.

“It’ll take the hide, too,” Mr. Gillespie said. “Why in the tarnation you put it on there? Didn’t none of you think to grease his leg first?”

“I just aimed to help him,” pa said. “It was Darl put it on.”

“Where is Darl?” they said.

“Didn’t none of you have more sense than that?” Mr. Gillespie said. “I’d ‘a’ thought he would, anyway.”

Jewel was lying on his face. His back was red. Dewey Dell put the medicine on it. The medicine was made out of butter and soot, to draw out the fire. Then his back was black.

“Does it hurt, Jewel?” I said. “Your back looks like a nigger’s, Jewel,” I said. Cash’s foot and leg looked like a nigger’s. Then they broke it off. Cash’s leg bled.

“You go on back and lay down,” Dewey Dell said. “You ought to be asleep.”

“Where is Darl?” they said.

He is out there under the apple tree with her, lying on her. He is there so the cat won’t come back. I said, “Are you going to keep the cat away, Darl?”

The moonlight dappled on him too. On her it was still, but on Darl it dappled up and down.

“You needn’t to cry,” I said. “Jewel got her out. You needn’t to cry, Darl.”

The barn is still red. It used to be redder than this. Then it went swirling, making the stars run backward without falling. It hurt my heart like the train did.

When I went to find where they stay at night, I saw something that Dewey Dell says I mustn’t never tell nobody.

DARL

WE have been passing the signs for some time now: the drug-stores, the clothing stores, the patent medicine and the garages and cafés, and the mile-boards diminishing, becoming more starkly re-accruent: 3 mi. 2 mi. From the crest of a hill, as we get into the wagon again, we can see the smoke low and flat, seemingly unmoving in the unwinded afternoon.

“Is that it, Darl?” Vardaman says. “Is that Jefferson?” He too has lost flesh; like ours, his face has an expression strained, dreamy, and gaunt.

“Yes,” I say. He lifts his head and looks at the sky. High against it they hang in narrowing circles, like the smoke, with an outward semblance of form and purpose, but with no inference of motion, progress or retrograde. We mount the wagon again where Cash lies on the box, the jagged shards of cement cracked about his leg. The shabby mules droop rattling and clanking down the hill.

“We’ll have to take him to the doctor,” pa says. “I reckon it ain’t no way around it.” The back of Jewel’s shirt, where it touches him, stains slow and black with grease. Life was created in the valleys. It blew up on to the hills on the old terrors, the old lusts, the old despairs. That’s why you must walk up the hills so you can ride down.

Dewey Dell sits on the seat, the newspaper package on her lap. When we reach the foot of the hill where the road flattens between close walls of trees, she begins to look about quietly from one side of the road to the other. At last she says,

“I got to stop.”

Pa looks at her, his shabby profile that of anticipant and disgruntled annoyance. He does not check the team. “What for?”

“I got to go to the bushes,” Dewey Dell says.

Pa does not check the team. “Can’t you wait till we get to town? It ain’t over a mile now.”

“Stop,” Dewey Dell says. “I got to go to the bushes.”

Pa stops in the middle of the road and we watch Dewey Dell descend, carrying the package. She does not look back.

“Why not leave your cakes here?” I say. “We’ll watch them.”

She descends steadily, not looking at us.

“How would she know where to go to if she waited till we get to town?” Vardaman says. “Where would you go to do it in town, Dewey Dell?”

She lifts the package down and turns and disappears among the trees and undergrowth.

“Don’t be no longer than you can help,” pa says. “We ain’t got no time to waste.” She does not answer. After a while we cannot hear her even. “We ought to done like Armstid and Gillespie said and sent word to town and had it dug and ready,” he said.

“Why didn’t you?” I say. “You could have telephoned.”

“What for?” Jewel says. “Who the hell can’t dig a hole in the ground?”

A car comes over the hill. It begins to sound the horn, slowing. It runs along the roadside in low gear, the outside wheels in the ditch, and passes us and goes on. Vardaman watches it until it is out of sight.

“How far is it now, Darl?” he says.

“Not far,” I say.

“We ought to done it,” pa says. “I just never wanted to be beholden to none except her flesh and blood.”

“Who the hell can’t dig a damn hole in the ground?” Jewel says.

“It ain’t respectful, talking that way about her grave,” pa says. “You all don’t know what it is. You never pure loved her, none of you.” Jewel does not answer. He sits a little stiffly erect, his body arched away from his shirt. His high-coloured jaw juts.

Dewey Dell returns. We watch her emerge from the bushes, carrying the package, and climb into the wagon. She now wears her Sunday dress, her beads, her shoes and stockings.

"I thought I told you to leave them clothes to home," pa says. She does not answer, does not look at us. She sits the package in the wagon and gets in. The wagon moves on.

"How many more hills now, Darl?" Vardaman says.

"Just one," I say. "The next one goes right up into town."

This hill is red sand, bordered on either hand by negro cabins; against the sky ahead the massed telephone lines run, and the clock on the court-house lifts among the trees. In the sand the wheels whisper, as though the very earth would hush our entry. We descend as the hill commences to rise.

We follow the wagon, the whispering wheels, passing the cabins where faces come suddenly to the doors, white-eyed. We hear sudden voices, ejaculant. Jewel has been looking from side to side; now his head turns forward and I can see his ears taking on a still deeper tone of furious red. Three negroes walk beside the road ahead of us; ten feet ahead of them a white man walks. When we pass the negroes their heads turn suddenly with that expression of shock and instinctive outrage. "Great God," one says; "what they got in that wagon?"

Jewel whirls. "Son of a bitches," he says. As he does so he is abreast of the white man, who has paused. It is as though Jewel had gone blind for the moment, for it is the white man toward whom he whirls.

"Darl!" Cash says from the wagon. I grasp at Jewel. The white man has fallen back a pace, his face still slack-jawed; then his jaw tightens, claps to. Jewel leans above him, his jaw muscles gone white.

"What did you say?" he says.

"Here," I say. "He don't mean anything, mister. Jewel," I say. When I touch him he swings at the man. I grasp his arm; we struggle. Jewel has never looked at me. He is trying to free his arm. When I see the man again he has an open knife in his hand.

"Hold up, mister," I say; "I've got him. Jewel," I say.

"Thinks because he's a goddam town fellow," Jewel says, panting, wrenching at me. "Son of a bitch," he says.

The man moves. He begins to edge around me, watching Jewel, the knife low against his flank. "Can't no man call me that," he says. Pa has got down, and Dewey Dell is holding Jewel, pushing at him. I release him and face the man.

"Wait," I say. "He don't mean nothing. He's sick; got burned in a fire last night, and he ain't himself."

"Fire or no fire," the man says, "can't no man call me that."

"He thought you said something to him," I say.

"I never said nothing to him. I never see him before."

"'Fore God," pa says; "'fore God."

"I know," I say. "He never meant anything. He'll take it back."

"Let him take it back, then."

"Put up your knife, and he will."

The man looks at me. He looks at Jewel. Jewel is quiet now.

"Put up your knife," I say.

The man shuts the knife.

“ ’Fore God,” pa says. “ ’Fore God.”

“Tell him you didn’t mean anything, Jewel,” I say.

“I thought he said something,” Jewel says. “Just because he’s—”

“Hush,” I say. “Tell him you didn’t mean it.”

“I didn’t mean it,” Jewel says.

“He better not,” the man says. “Calling me a—”

“Do you think he’s afraid to call you that?” I say.

The man looks at me. “I never said that,” he said.

“Don’t think it, neither,” Jewel says.

“Shut up,” I say. “Come on. Drive on, pa.”

The wagon moves. The man stands watching us. Jewel does not look back. “Jewel would ’a’ whipped him,” Vardaman says.

We approach the crest, where the street runs, where cars go back and forth; the mules haul the wagon up and on to the crest and the street. Pa stops them. The street runs on ahead, where the square opens and the monument stands before the court-house. We mount again while the heads turn with that expression which we know; save Jewel. He does not get on, even though the wagon has started again. “Get in, Jewel,” I say. “Come on. Let’s get away from here.” But he does not get in. Instead he sets his foot on the turning hub of the rear wheel, one hand grasping the stanchion, and with the hub turning smoothly under his sole he lifts the other foot and squats there, staring straight ahead, motionless, lean, wooden-backed, as though carved squatting out of the lean wood.

CASH

IT wasn't nothing else to do. It was either send him to Jackson, or have Gillespie sue us, because he knowed some way that Darl set fire to it. I don't know how he knowed, but he did. Vardaman see him do it, but he swore he never told nobody but Dewey Dell and that she told him not to tell nobody. But Gillespie knowed it. But he would 'a' suspicioned it sooner or later. He could have done it that night just watching the way Darl acted.

And so pa said, "I reckon there ain't nothing else to do," and Jewel said,

"You want to fix him now?"

"Fix him?" pa said.

"Catch him and tie him up," Jewel said. "Goddam it, do you want to wait until he sets fire to the goddam team and wagon?"

But there wasn't no use in that. "There ain't no use in that," I said. "We can wait till she is underground." A fellow that's going to spend the rest of his life locked up, he ought to be let to have what pleasure he can have before he goes.

"I reckon he ought to be there," pa says. "God knows, it's a trial on me. Seems like it ain't no end to bad luck when once it starts."

Sometimes I ain't so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he ain't. Sometimes I think it ain't none of us pure crazy and ain't none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way. It's like it ain't so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it.

Because Jewel is too hard on him. Of course it was Jewel's horse was traded to get her that nigh to town, and in a sense it was the value of his horse Darl tried to burn up. But I thought more than once before we crossed the river and after, how it would be God's blessing if He did

take her outen our hands and get shut of her in some clean way, and it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way, and then when Darl seen that it looked like one of us would have to do something, I can almost believe he done right in a way. But I don't reckon nothing excuses setting fire to a man's barn and endangering his stock and destroying his property. That's how I reckon a man is crazy. That's how he can't see eye to eye with other folks. And I reckon they ain't nothing else to do with him but what the most folks says is right.

But it's a shame, in a way. Folks seems to get away from the olden right teaching that says to drive the nails down and trim the edges well always like it was for your own use and comfort you were making it. It's like some folks has the smooth, pretty boards to build a court-house with and others don't have no more than rough lumber fitten to build a chicken coop. But it's better to build a tight chicken coop than a shoddy court-house, and when they both build shoddy or build well, neither because it's one or tother is going to make a man feel the better nor the worse.

So we went up the street, toward the square, and he said, "We better take Cash to the doctor first. We can leave him there and come back for him." That's it. It's because me and him was born close together, and it nigh ten years before Jewel and Dewey Dell and Vardaman begun to come along. I feel kin to them, all right, but I don't know. And me being the oldest, and thinking already the very thing that he done: I don't know.

Pa was looking at me, then at him, mumbling his mouth.

"Go on," I said. "We'll get it done first."

"She would want us all there," pa says.

"Let's take Cash to the doctor first," Darl said. "She'll wait. She's already waited nine days."

"You all don't know," pa says. "The somebody you was young with and you grewed old in her and she grewed old in you, seeing the old coming on and it was the one somebody you could hear say it don't matter and know it was the truth outen the hard world and all a man's grief and trials. You all don't know."

"We got the digging to do, too," I said.

"Armstid and Gillespie both told you to send word ahead," Darl said. "Don't you want to go to Peabody's now, Cash?"

"Go on," I said. "It feels right easy now. It's best to get things done in the right place."

"If it was just dug," pa says. "We forgot our spade, too."

"Yes," Darl said. "I'll go to the hardware store. We'll have to buy one."

"It'll cost money," pa says.

"Do you begrudge her it?" Darl says.

"Go on and get a spade," Jewel said. "Here, give me the money."

But pa didn't stop. "I reckon we can get a spade," he said. "I reckon there are Christians here." So Darl set still and we went on, with Jewel squatting on the tail-gate, watching the back of Dad's head. He looked like one of these bulldogs, one of these dogs that don't bark none, squatting against the rope, watching the thing he was waiting to jump at.

He set that way all the time we was in front of Mrs. Bundren's house, hearing the music, watching the back of Darl's head with them hard white eyes of hisn.

The music was playing in the house. It was one of them graphophones. It was natural as a music-band.

“Do you want to go to Peabody’s?” Darl said. “They can wait here and tell pa, and I’ll drive you to Peabody’s and come back for them.”

“No,” I said. It was better to get her underground, now we was this close, just waiting until pa borrowed the shovel. He drove along the street until we could hear the music.

“Maybe they got one here,” he said. He pulled up at Mrs. Bundren’s. It was like he knowed. Sometimes I think that if a working man could see work as far ahead as a lazy man can see laziness. So he stopped there like he knowed, before that little new house, where the music was. We waited there, hearing it. I believe I could have dickered Suratt down to five dollars on that one of his. It’s a comfortable thing, music is. “Maybe they got one here,” pa says.

“You want Jewel to go,” Darl says, “or do you reckon I better?”

“I reckon I better,” pa says. He got down and went up the path and around the house to the back. The music stopped, then it started again.

“He’ll get it, too,” Darl said.

“Ay,” I said. It was just like he knowed, like he could see through the walls and into the next ten minutes.

Only it was more than ten minutes. The music stopped and never commenced again for a good spell, where her and pa was talking at the back. We waited in the wagon.

“You let me take you back to Peabody’s,” Darl said.

“No,” I said. “We’ll get her underground.”

“If he ever gets back,” Jewel said. He began to cuss. He started to get down from the wagon. “I’m going,” he said.

Then we saw pa coming back. He had two spades, coming around the house. He laid them in the wagon and got in and we went on. The music never started again. Pa was looking back at the house. He kind of lifted his hand a little and I saw the shade pulled back a little at the window and her face in it.

But the curiouesest thing was Dewey Dell. It surprised me. I see all the while how folks could say he was queer, but that was the very reason couldn't nobody hold it personal. It was like he was outside of it too, same as you, and getting mad as it would be kind of like getting mad at a mud-puddle that splashed you when you stepped in it. And then I always kind of had a idea that him and Dewey Dell kind of knowed things betwixt them.

If I'd 'a' said it was ere a one of us she liked better than ere a other, I'd 'a' said it was Darl. But when we got it filled and covered and drove out the gate and turned into the lane where them fellows was waiting, when they come out and come on him and he jerked back, it was Dewey Dell that was on him before even Jewel could get at him. And then I believed I knowed how Gillespie knowed about how his barn taken fire.

She hadn't said a word, hadn't even looked at him, but when them fellows told him what they wanted and that they had come to get him and he threwed back, she jumped on him like a wild cat so that one of the fellows had to quit and hold her and her scratching and clawing at him like a wild cat, while the other one and pa and Jewel throwed Darl down and held him lying on his back, looking up at me.

"I thought you would have told me," he said. "I never thought you wouldn't have."

"Darl," I said. But he fought again, him and Jewel and the fellow, and the other one holding Dewey Dell and Vardaman yelling and Jewel saying,

"Kill him. Kill the son of a bitch."

It was bad so. It was bad. A fellow can't get away from a shoddy job. He can't do it. I tried to tell him, but he just said, "I thought you'd 'a' told me. It's not that I," he said, then he began to laugh. The other fellow pulled Jewel off of him and he sat there on the ground, laughing.

I tried to tell him. If I could have just moved, even set up. But I tried to tell him and he quit laughing, looking up at me.

"Do you want me to go?" he said.

"It'll be better for you," I said. "Down there it'll be quiet, with none of the bothering and such. It'll be better for you, Darl," I said.

"Better," he said. He began to laugh again. "Better," he said. He couldn't hardly say it for laughing. He sat on the ground and us watching him, laughing and laughing. It was bad. It was bad so. I be durn if I could see anything to laugh at. Because there just ain't nothing justifies the deliberate destruction of what a man has built with his own sweat and stored the fruit of his sweat into.

But I ain't so sho that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what ain't. It's like there was a fellow in every man that's done a-past the sanity or the insanity, that watches the sane and the insane doings of that man with the same horror and the same astonishment.

PEABODY

ISAID, "I reckon a man in a tight might let Bill Varner patch him up like a damn mule, but I be damned if the man that'd let Anse Bundren treat him with raw cement ain't got more spare legs than I have."

"They just aimed to ease hit some," he said.

"Aimed, hell," I said. "What in hell did Armstid mean by even letting them put you on that wagon again?"

“Hit was gittin’ right noticeable,” he said. “We never had time to wait.” I just looked at him. “Hit never bothered me none,” he said.

“Don’t you lie there and try to tell me you rode six days on a wagon without springs, with a broken leg and it never bothered you.”

“I never bothered me much,” he said.

“You mean, it never bothered Anse much,” I said. “No more than it bothered him to throw that poor devil down in the public street and handcuff him like a damn murderer. Don’t tell me. And don’t tell me it ain’t going to bother you to lose sixty-odd square inches of skin to get that concrete off. And don’t tell me it ain’t going to bother you to have to limp around on one short leg for the balance of your life—if you walk at all again. Concrete,” I said. “God Amighty, why didn’t Anse carry you to the nearest sawmill and stick your leg in the saw? That would have cured it. Then you all could have stuck his head into the saw and cured a whole family. . . . Where is Anse, anyway? What’s he up to now?”

“He’s takin’ back them spades he borrowed,” he said.

“That’s right,” I said. “Of course he’d have to borrow a spade to bury his wife with. Unless he could borrow a hole in the ground. Too bad you all didn’t put him in it too. . . . Does that hurt?”

“Not to speak of,” he said, and the sweat big as marbles running down his face and his face about the colour of blotting-paper.

“ ’Course not,” I said. “About next summer you can hobble around fine on this leg. Then it won’t bother you, not to speak of . . . If you had anything you could call luck, you might say it was lucky this is the same leg you broke before,” I said.

“Hit’s what paw says,” he said.

MacGOWAN

IT happened I am back of the prescription case, pouring up some chocolate sauce, when Jody comes back and says, "Say, Skeet, there's a woman up front that wants to see the doctor and when I said What doctor you want to see, she said she want to see the doctor that works here and when I said There ain't any doctor works here, she just stood there, looking back this way."

"What kind of a woman is it?" I says. "Tell her to go upstairs to Alford's office."

"Country woman," he says.

"Send her to the court-house," I says. "Tell her all the doctors have gone to Memphis to a Barbers' Convention."

"All right," he says, going away. "She looks pretty good for a country girl," he says.

"Wait," I says. He waited and I went and peeped through the crack. But I couldn't tell nothing except she had a good leg against the light. "Is she young, you say?" I says.

"She looks like a pretty hot mamma, for a country girl," he says.

"Take this," I says, giving him the chocolate. I took off my apron and went up there. She looked pretty good. One of them black-eyed ones that look like she'd as soon put a knife in you as not if you two-timed her. She looked pretty good. There wasn't nobody else in the store; it was dinner-time.

"What can I do for you?" I says.

"Are you the doctor?" she says.

"Sure," I says. She quit looking at me and was kind of looking around.

"Can we go back yonder?" she says.

It was just a quarter-past twelve, but I went and told Jody to kind of watch out and whistle if the old man come in sight, because he never got back before one.

“You better lay off of that,” Jody says. “He’ll fire your stern out of here so quick you can’t wink.”

“He don’t never get back before one,” I says. “You can see him go into the post-office. You keep your eye peeled, now, and give me a whistle.”

“What you going to do?” he says.

“You keep your eye out. I’ll tell you later.”

“Ain’t you going to give me no seconds on it?” he says.

“What the hell do you think this is?” I says; “a stud-farm? You watch out for him. I’m going into conference.”

So I go on to the back. I stopped at the glass and smoothed my hair, then I went behind the prescription case, where she was waiting. She is looking at the medicine cabinet, then she looks at me.

“Now, madam,” I says; “what is your trouble?”

“It’s the female trouble,” she says, watching me. “I got the money,” she says.

“Ah,” I says. “Have you got female troubles or do you want female troubles? If so, you come to the right doctor.” Them country people. Half the time they don’t know what they want, and the balance of the time they can’t tell it to you. The clock said twenty past twelve.

“No,” she says.

“No which?” I says.

"I ain't had it," she says. "That's it." She looked at me. "I got the money," she says.

So I knew what she was talking about.

"Oh," I says. "You got something in your belly you wish you didn't have." She looks at me. "You wish you had a little more or a little less, huh?"

"I got the money," she says. "He said I could git something at the drug-store for hit."

"Who said so?" I says.

"He did," she says, looking at me.

"You don't want to call no names," I says. "The one that put the acorn in your belly? He the one that told you?" She don't say nothing. "You ain't married, are you?" I says. I never saw no ring. But like as not, they ain't heard yet out there that they use rings.

"I got the money," she says. She showed it to me, tied up in her handkerchief: a ten spot.

"I'll swear you have," I says. "He give it to you?"

"Yes," she says.

"Which one?" I says. She looks at me. "Which one of them give it to you?"

"It ain't but one," she says. She looks at me.

"Go on," I says. She don't say nothing. The trouble about the cellar is, it ain't but one way out and that's back up the inside stairs. The clock says twenty-five to one. "A pretty girl like you," I says.

She looks at me. She begins to tie the money back up in the handkerchief. "Excuse me a minute," I says. I go around the prescription case. "Did you hear about that fellow sprained his ear?" I says. "After that he couldn't even hear a belch."

"You better get her out from back there before the old man comes," Jody says.

"If you'll stay up there in front where he pays you to stay, he won't catch nobody but me," I says.

He goes on, slow, toward the front. "What you doing to her, Skeet?" he says.

"I can't tell you," I says. "It wouldn't be ethical. You go on up there and watch."

"Say, Skeet," he says.

"Ah, go on," I says. "I ain't doing nothing but filling a prescription."

"He may not do nothing about that woman back there, but if he finds you monkeying with that prescription case, he'll kick your stern clean down them cellar stairs."

"My stern has been kicked by bigger bastards than him," I says. "Go back and watch out for him, now."

So I come back. The clock said fifteen to one. She is tying the money in the handkerchief. "You ain't the doctor," she says.

"Sure I am," I says. She watches me. "Is it because I look too young, or am I too handsome?" I says. "We used to have a bunch of old water-jointed doctors here," I says; "Jefferson used to be a kind of Old Doctors' Home for them. But business started falling off and folks stayed so well until one day they found out that the women wouldn't

never get sick at all. So they run all the old doctors out and got us young good-looking ones that the women would like and then the women begun to get sick again and so business picked up. They're doing that all over the country. Hadn't you heard about it? Maybe it's because you ain't never needed a doctor."

"I need one now," she says.

"And you come to the right one," I says. "I already told you that."

"Have you got something for it?" she says. "I got the money."

"Well," I says, "of course a doctor has to learn all sorts of things while he's learning to roll calomel; he can't help himself. But I don't know about your trouble."

"He told me I could get something. He told me I could get it at the drug-store."

"Did he tell you the name of it?" I says. "You better go back and ask him."

She quit looking at me, kind of turning the handkerchief in her hands. "I got to do something," she says.

"How bad do you want to do something?" I says. She looks at me. "Of course, a doctor learns all sorts of things folks don't think he knows. But he ain't supposed to tell all he knows. It's against the law."

Up front Jody says, "Skeet."

"Excuse me a minute," I says. I went up front. "Do you see him?" I says.

"Ain't you done yet?" he says. "Maybe you better come up here and watch and let me do that consulting."

“Maybe you’ll lay a egg,” I says. I come back. She is looking at me. “Of course you realize that I could be put in the penitentiary for doing what you want,” I says. “I would lose my licence and then I’d have to go to work. You realize that?”

“I ain’t got but ten dollars,” she says. “I could bring the rest next month, maybe.”

“Pooh,” I says, “ten dollars? You see, I can’t put no price on my knowledge and skill. Certainly not for no little paltry sawbuck.”

She looks at me. She don’t even blink. “What you want, then?”

The clock said four to one. So I decided I better get her out. “You guess three times and then I’ll show you,” I says.

She don’t even blink her eyes. “I got to do something,” she says. She looks behind her and around, then she looks toward the front. “Gimme the medicine first,” she says.

“You mean, you’re ready to right now?” I says. “Here?”

“Gimme the medicine first,” she says.

So I took a graduated glass and kind of turned my back to her and picked out a bottle that looked all right; because a man that would keep poison setting around in a unlabelled bottle ought to be in jail, anyway. It smelled like turpentine. I poured some into the glass and give it to her. She smelled it, looking at me across the glass.

“Hit smells like turpentine,” she says.

“Sure,” I says. “That’s just the beginning of the treatment. You come back at ten o’clock to-night and I’ll give you the rest of it and perform the operation.”

“Operation?” she says.

“It won’t hurt you. You’ve had the same operation before. Ever hear about the hair of the dog?”

She looks at me. “Will it work?” she says.

“Sure it’ll work. If you come back and get it.”

So she drunk whatever it was without batting a eye, and went out. I went up front.

“Didn’t you get it?” Jody says.

“Get what?” I says.

“Ah, come on,” he says. “I ain’t going to try to beat your time.”

“Oh, her,” I says. “She just wanted a little medicine. She’s got a bad case of dysentery and she’s a little ashamed about mentioning it with a stranger there.”

It was my night, anyway, so I helped the old bastard check up and I got his hat on him and got him out of the store by eight-thirty. I went as far as the corner with him and watched him until he passed under two street lamps and went on out of sight. Then I come back to the store and waited until nine-thirty and turned out the front lights and locked the door and left just one light burning at the back, and I went back and put some talcum powder into six capsules and kind of cleared up the cellar and then I was all ready.

She come in just at ten, before the clock had done striking. I let her in and she come in, walking fast. I looked out the door, but there wasn’t nobody but a boy in overalls sitting on the curb. “You want something?” I says. He never said nothing, just looking at me. I locked the door and turned off the light and went on back. She was waiting. She didn’t look at me now.

"Where is it?" she said.

I gave her the box of capsules. She held the box in her hand, looking at the capsules.

"Are you sure it'll work?" she says.

"Sure," I says. "When you take the rest of the treatment."

"Where do I take it?" she says.

"Down in the cellar," I says.

VARDAMAN

NOW it is wider and lighter, but the stores are dark because they have all gone home. The stores are dark, but the lights pass on the windows when we pass. The lights are in the trees around the court-house. They roost in the trees, but the court-house is dark. The clock on it looks four ways, because it is not dark. The moon is not dark too. Not very dark. Darl he went to Jackson is my brother Darl is my brother. Only it was over that way, shining on the track.

"Let's go that way, Dewey Dell," I say.

"What for?" Dewey Dell says. The track went shining around the window, it red on the track. But she said he would not sell it to the town boys. "But it will be there Christmas," Dewey Dell says. "You'll have to wait till then, when he brings it back."

Darl went to Jackson. Lots of people didn't go to Jackson. Darl is my brother. My brother is going to Jackson

While we walk the lights go around, roosting in the trees. On all sides it is the same. They go around the court-house and then you cannot see them. But you can see them in the black windows beyond. They have all gone home to bed except me and Dewey Dell.

Going on the train to Jackson. My brother

There is a light in the store, far back. In the window are two big glasses of soda-water, red and green. Two men could not drink them. Two mules could not. Two cows could not. Darl

A man comes to the door. He looks at Dewey Dell.

“You wait out here,” Dewey Dell says.

“Why can’t I come in?” I say. “I want to come in, too.”

“You wait out here,” she says.

“All right,” I say.

Dewey Dell goes in.

Darl is my brother. Darl went crazy

The walk is harder than sitting on the ground. He is in the open door. He looks at me. “You want something?” he says. His head is slick. Jewel’s head is slick sometimes. Cash’s head is not slick. Darl he went to Jackson my brother Darl In the street he ate a banana. Wouldn’t you rather have bananas? Dewey Dell said. You wait till Christmas. It’ll be there then. Then you can see it. So we are going to have some bananas. We are going to have a bag full, me and Dewey Dell. He locks the door. Dewey Dell is inside. Then the light winks out.

He went to Jackson. He went crazy and went to Jackson both. Lots of people didn’t go crazy. Pa and Cash and Jewel and Dewey Dell and me didn’t go crazy. We never did go crazy. We didn’t go to Jackson either. Darl

I hear the cow a long time, clopping on the street. Then she comes into the square. She goes across the square, her head down clopping. She

lows. There was nothing in the square before she lowed, but it wasn't empty. Now it is empty after she lowed. She goes on, clopping. She lows. My brother is Darl. He went to Jackson on the train. He didn't go on the train to go crazy. He went crazy in our wagon. Darl She had been in there a long time. And the cow is gone too. A long time. She has been in there longer than the cow was. But not as long as empty. Darl is my brother. My brother Darl

Dewey Dell comes out. She looks at me.

"Let's go around that way now," I say.

She looks at me. "It ain't going to work," she says. "That son of a bitch."

"What ain't going to work, Dewey Dell?"

"I just know it won't," she says. She is not looking at anything. "I just know it."

"Let's go that way," I say.

"We got to go back to the hotel. It's late. We got to slip back in."

"Can't we go by and see, anyway?"

"Hadn't you rather have bananas? Hadn't you rather?"

"All right." My brother he went crazy and he went to Jackson too. Jackson is further away than crazy

"It won't work," Dewey Dell says. "I just know it won't."

"What won't work?" I say. He had to get on the train to go to Jackson. I have not been on the train, but Darl has been on the train. Darl. Darl is my brother. Darl. Darl

DARL

DARL has gone to Jackson. They put him on the train, laughing, down the long car laughing, the heads turning like the heads of owls when he passed. "What are you laughing at?" I said.

"Yes yes yes yes yes."

Two men put him on the train. They wore mis-matched coats, bulging behind over their right hip pockets. Their necks were shaved to a hairline, as though the recent and simultaneous barbers had had a chalk-line like Cash's. "Is it the pistols you're laughing at?" I said. "Why do you laugh?" I said. "Is it because you hate the sound of laughing?"

They pulled two seats together so Darl could sit by the window to laugh. One of them sat beside him, the other sat on the seat facing him, riding backward. One of them had to ride backward because the state's money had a face to each backside and a backside to each face, and they are riding on the state's money which is incest. A nickel has a woman on one side and a buffalo on the other; two faces and no back. I don't know what that is. Darl had a little spy-glass he got in France at the war. In it it had a woman and a pig with two backs and no face. I know what that is. "Is that why you are laughing, Darl?"

"Yes yes yes yes yes yes."

The wagon stands on the square, hitched, the mules motionless, the reins wrapped about the seat-spring, the back of the wagon toward the court-house. It looks no different from a hundred other wagons there; Jewel standing beside it and looking up the street like any other man in town that day, yet there is something different, distinctive. There is about it that unmistakable air of definite and imminent departure that trains have, perhaps due to the fact that Dewey Dell and Vardaman on the seat and Cash on a pallet in the wagon-bed are eating bananas from a paper bag. "Is that why you are laughing, Darl?"

Darl is our brother, our brother Darl. Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying light in the quiet interstices, looking out he foams.

“Yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes.”

DEWEY DELL

WHEN he saw the money I said, “It’s not my money, it doesn’t belong to me.”

“Whose is it, then?”

“It’s Cora Tull’s money. It’s Mrs. Tull’s. I sold the cakes for it.”

“Ten dollars for two cakes?”

“Don’t you touch it. It’s not mine.”

“You never had them cakes. It’s a lie. It was them Sunday clothes you had in that package.”

“Don’t you touch it! If you take it you are a thief.”

“My own daughter accuses me of being a thief. My own daughter.”

“Pa. Pa.”

“I have fed you and sheltered you. I give you love and care, yet my own daughter, the daughter of my dead wife, calls me a thief over her mother’s grave.”

“It’s not mine, I tell you. If it was, God knows you could have it.”

“Where did you get ten dollars?”

“Pa. Pa.”

“You won’t tell me. Did you come by it so shameful you dare not?”

“It’s not mine, I tell you. Can’t you understand it’s not mine?”

“It’s not like I wouldn’t pay it back. But she calls her own father a thief.”

“I can’t, I tell you. I tell you it’s not my money. God knows you could have it.”

“I wouldn’t take it. My own born daughter that has et my food for seventeen years, begrudges me the loan of ten dollars.”

“It’s not mine. I can’t.”

“Whose is it, then?”

“It was give to me. To buy something with.”

“To buy what with?”

“Pa. Pa.”

“It’s just a loan. God knows, I hate for my blooden children to reproach me. But I give them what was mine without stint. Cheerful I give them, without stint. And now they deny me. Addie. It was lucky for you you died, Addie.”

“Pa. Pa.”

“God knows it is.”

He took the money and went out.

CASH

SO when we stopped there to borrow the shovels we heard the graphophone playing in the house, and so when we got done with the shovels pa says, "I reckon I better take them back."

So we went back to the house. "We better take Cash on to Peabody's," Jewel said.

"It won't take but a minute," pa said. He got down from the wagon. The music was not playing now.

"Let Vardaman do it," Jewel said. "He can do it in half the time you can. Or here, you let me——"

"I reckon I better do it," pa says. "Long as it was me that borrowed them."

So we set in the wagon, but the music wasn't playing now. I reckon it's a good thing we ain't got ere a one of them. I reckon I wouldn't never get no work done a-tall for listening to it. I don't know if a little music ain't about the nicest thing a fellow can have. Seems like when he comes in tired of a night, it ain't nothing could rest him like having a little music played and him resting. I have seen them that shuts up like a hand-grip, with a handle and all, so a fellow can carry it with him wherever he wants.

"What you reckon he's doing?" Jewel says. "I could 'a' toted them shovels back and forth ten times by now."

"Let him take his time," I said. "He ain't as spry as you, remember."

"Why didn't he let me take them back, then? We got to get your leg fixed up so we can start home to-morrow."

"We got plenty of time," I said. "I wonder what them machines costs on the instalment."

"Instalment of what?" Jewel said. "What you got to buy it with?"

“A fellow can’t tell,” I said. “I could ’a’ bought that one from Suratt for five dollars, I believe.”

And so pa come back and we went to Peabody’s. While we was there pa said he was going to the barber-shop and get a shave. And so that night he said he had some business to tend to, kind of looking away from us while he said it, with his hair combed wet and slick and smelling sweet with perfume, but I said leave him be; I wouldn’t mind hearing a little more of that music myself.

And so next morning he was gone again, then he come back and told us get hitched up and ready to take out and he would meet us and when they was gone he said,

“I don’t reckon you got no more money.”

“Peabody just give me enough to pay the hotel with,” I said. “We don’t need nothing else, do we?”

“No,” pa said; “no. We don’t need nothing.” He stood there, not looking at me.

“If it is something we got to have, I reckon maybe Peabody,” I said.

“No,” he said; “it ain’t nothing else. You all wait for me at the corner.”

So Jewel got the team and come for me and they fixed me a pallet in the wagon and we drove across the square to the corner where pa said, and we was waiting there in the wagon, with Dewey Dell and Vardaman eating bananas, when we see them coming up the street. Pa was coming along with that kind of daresome and hangdog look all at once like when he has been up to something he knows ma ain’t going to like, carrying a grip in his hand, and Jewel says,

“Who’s that?”

Then we see it wasn't the grip that made him look different; it was his face, and Jewel says, "He got them teeth."

It was a fact. It made him look a foot taller, kind of holding his head up, hangdog and proud too, and then we see her behind him, carrying the other grip—a kind of duck-shaped woman all dressed up, with them kind of hard-looking pop eyes like she was daring ere a man to say nothing. And there we set watching them, with Dewey Dell's and Vardaman's mouth half open and half-et bananas in their hands and her coming around from behind pa, looking at us like she dared ere a man. And then I see that the grip she was carrying was one of them little graphophones.

It was for a fact, all shut up as pretty as a picture, and every time a new record would come from the mail order and us setting in the house in the winter, listening to it, I would think what a shame Darl couldn't be to enjoy it too. But it is better so for him. This world is not his world; this life his life.

"It's Cash and Jewel and Vardaman and Dewey Dell," pa says, kind of hangdog and proud too, with his teeth and all, even if he wouldn't look at us. "Meet Mrs. Bundren," he says.

The End

Sanctuary, William Faulkner

Contents

Sanctuary

I

II

III

IV

V

VI
VII
VIII
IX
X
XI
XII
XIII
XIV
XV
XVI
XVII
XVIII
XIX
XX
XXI
XXII
XXIII
XXIV
XXV
XXVI
XXVII
XXVIII
XXIX
XXX
XXXI

Sanctuary

I

From beyond the screen of bushes which surrounded the spring, Popeye watched the man drinking. A faint path led from the road to the spring. Popeye watched the man—a tall, thin man, hatless, in worn gray flannel trousers and carrying a tweed coat over his arm—emerge from the path and kneel to drink from the spring.

The spring welled up at the root of a beech tree and flowed away upon a bottom of whorled and waved sand. It was surrounded by a thick growth of cane and brier, of cypress and gum in which broken sunlight lay sourceless. Somewhere, hidden and secret yet nearby, a bird sang three notes and ceased.

In the spring the drinking man leaned his face to the broken and myriad reflection of his own drinking. When he rose up he saw among them the shattered reflection of Popeye's straw hat, though he had heard no sound.

He saw, facing him across the spring, a man of under size, his hands in his coat pockets, a cigarette slanted from his chin. His suit was black, with a tight, high-waisted coat. His trousers were rolled once and caked with mud above mud-caked shoes.

His face had a queer, bloodless color, as though seen by electric light; against the sunny silence, in his slanted straw hat and his slightly akimbo arms, he had that vicious depthless quality of stamped tin.

Behind him the bird sang again, three bars in monotonous repetition: a sound meaningless and profound out of a suspirant and peaceful following silence which seemed to isolate the spot, and out of which a moment later came the sound of an automobile passing along a road and dying away.

The drinking man knelt beside the spring. "You've got a pistol in that pocket, I suppose," he said.

Across the spring Popeye appeared to contemplate him with two knobs of soft black rubber. "I'm asking you," Popeye said. "What's that in your pocket?"

The other man's coat was still across his arm. He lifted his other hand toward the coat, out of one pocket of which protruded a crushed felt hat, from the other a book. "Which pocket?" he said.

“Dont show me,” Popeye said. “Tell me.”

The other man stopped his hand. “It’s a book.”

“What book?” Popeye said.

“Just a book. The kind that people read. Some people do.”

“Do you read books?” Popeye said.

The other man’s hand was frozen above the coat. Across the spring they looked at one another. The cigarette wreathed its faint plume across Popeye’s face, one side of his face squinted against the smoke like a mask carved into two simultaneous expressions.

From his hip pocket Popeye took a soiled handkerchief and spread it upon his heels. Then he squatted, facing the man across the spring. That was about four oclock on an afternoon in May. They squatted so, facing one another across the spring, for two hours. Now and then the bird sang back in the swamp, as though it were worked by a clock; twice more invisible automobiles passed along the highroad and died away. Again the bird sang.

“And of course you dont know the name of it,” the man across the spring said. “I dont suppose you’d know a bird at all, without it was singing in a cage in a hotel lounge, or cost four dollars on a plate.” Popeye said nothing. He squatted in his tight black suit, his right-hand coat pocket sagging compactly against his flank, twisting and pinching cigarettes in his little, doll-like hands, spitting into the spring. His skin had a dead, dark pallor.

His nose was faintly aquiline, and he had no chin at all. His face just went away, like the face of a wax doll set too near a hot fire and forgotten. Across his vest ran a platinum chain like a spider web. “Look here,” the other man said. “My name is Horace Benbow. I’m a lawyer in Kinston. I used to live in Jefferson yonder; I’m on my way there now.

Anybody in this county can tell you I am harmless. If it's whiskey, I don't care how much you all make or sell or buy. I just stopped here for a drink of water. All I want to do is get to town, to Jefferson."

Popeye's eyes looked like rubber knobs, like they'd give to the touch and then recover with the whorled smudge of the thumb on them.

"I want to reach Jefferson before dark," Benbow said. "You can't keep me here like this."

Without removing the cigarette Popeye spat past it into the spring.

"You can't stop me like this," Benbow said. "Suppose I break and run?"

Popeye put his eyes on Benbow, like rubber. "Do you want to run?"

"No," Benbow said.

Popeye removed his eyes. "Well, don't, then."

Benbow heard the bird again, trying to recall the local name for it. On the invisible highroad another car passed, died away. Between them and the sound of it the sun was almost gone. From his trousers pocket Popeye took a dollar watch and looked at it and put it back in his pocket, loose like a coin.

Where the path from the spring joined the sandy byroad a tree had been recently felled, blocking the road. They climbed over the tree and went on, the highroad now behind them. In the sand were two shallow parallel depressions, but no mark of hoof. Where the branch from the spring seeped across it Benbow saw the prints of automobile tires. Ahead of him Popeye walked, his tight suit and stiff hat all angles, like a modernistic lampstand.

The sand ceased. The road rose, curving, out of the jungle. It was almost dark. Popeye looked briefly over his shoulder. "Step out, Jack," he said.

“Why didn’t we cut straight across up the hill?” Benbow said.

“Through all them trees?” Popeye said. His hat jerked in a dull, vicious gleam in the twilight as he looked down the hill where the jungle already lay like a lake of ink. “Jesus Christ.”

It was almost dark. Popeye’s gait had slowed. He walked now beside Benbow, and Benbow could see the continuous jerking of the hat from side to side as Popeye looked about with a sort of vicious cringing. The hat just reached Benbow’s chin.

Then something, a shadow shaped with speed, stooped at them and on, leaving a rush of air upon their very faces, on a soundless feathering of taut wings, and Benbow felt Popeye’s whole body spring against him and his hand clawing at his coat. “It’s just an owl,” Benbow said. “It’s nothing but an owl.” Then he said: “They call that Carolina wren a fishingbird. That’s what it is. What I couldn’t think of back there,” with Popeye crouching against him, clawing at his pocket and hissing through his teeth like a cat. He smells black, Benbow thought; he smells like that black stuff that ran out of Bovary’s mouth and down upon her bridal veil when they raised her head.

A moment later, above a black, jagged mass of trees, the house lifted its stark square bulk against the failing sky.

The house was a gutted ruin rising gaunt and stark out of a grove of unpruned cedar trees. It was a landmark, known as the Old Frenchman place, built before the Civil War; a plantation house set in the middle of a tract of land; of cotton fields and gardens and lawns long since gone back to jungle, which the people of the neighborhood had been pulling down piecemeal for firewood for fifty years or digging with secret and sporadic optimism for the gold which the builder was reputed to have buried somewhere about the place when Grant came through the county on his Vicksburg campaign.

Three men were sitting in chairs on one end of the porch. In the depths of the open hall a faint light showed. The hall went straight back through the house. Popeye mounted the steps, the three men looking at him and his companion. "Here's the professor," he said, without stopping. He entered the house, the hall. He went on and crossed the back porch and turned and entered the room where the light was. It was the kitchen. A woman stood at the stove. She wore a faded calico dress. About her naked ankles a worn pair of man's brogans, unlaced, flapped when she moved. She looked back at Popeye, then to the stove again, where a pan of meat hissed.

Popeye stood in the door. His hat was slanted across his face. He took a cigarette from his pocket, without producing the pack, and pinched and fretted it and put it into his mouth and snapped a match on his thumbnail. "There's a bird out front," he said.

The woman did not look around. She turned the meat. "Why tell me?" she said. "I dont serve Lee's customers."

"It's a professor," Popeye said.

The woman turned, an iron fork suspended in her hand. Behind the stove, in shadow, was a wooden box. "A what?"

"Professor," Popeye said. "He's got a book with him."

"What's he doing here?"

"I dont know. I never thought to ask. Maybe to read the book."

"He came here?"

"I found him at the spring."

"Was he trying to find this house?"

"I dont know," Popeye said. "I never thought to ask." The woman was still looking at him. "I'll send him on to Jefferson on the truck," Popeye said. "He said he wants to go there."

"Why tell me about it?" the woman said.

"You cook. He'll want to eat."

"Yes," the woman said. She turned back to the stove. "I cook. I cook for crimps and spungs and feebs. Yes. I cook."

In the door Popeye watched her, the cigarette curling across his face. His hands were in his pockets. "You can quit. I'll take you back to Memphis Sunday. You can go to hustling again." He watched her back. "You're getting fat here. Laying off in the country. I wont tell them on Manuel Street."

The woman turned, the fork in her hand. "You bastard," she said.

"Sure," Popeye said. "I wont tell them that Ruby Lamar is down in the country, wearing a pair of Lee Goodwin's throwed-away shoes, chopping her own firewood. No. I'll tell them Lee Goodwin is big rich."

"You bastard," the woman said. "You bastard."

"Sure," Popeye said. Then he turned his head. There was a shuffling sound across the porch, then a man entered. He was stooped, in overalls. He was barefoot; it was his bare feet which they had heard. He had a sunburned thatch of hair, matted and foul. He had pale furious eyes, a short soft beard like dirty gold in color.

"I be dawg if he aint a case, now," he said.

"What do you want?" the woman said. The man in overalls didn't answer. In passing, he looked at Popeye with a glance at once secret and alert, as though he were ready to laugh at a joke, waiting for the time to laugh. He crossed the kitchen with a shambling, bear-like gait,

and still with that air of alert and gleeful secrecy, though in plain sight of them, he removed a loose board in the floor and took out a gallon jug.

Popeye watched him, his forefingers in his vest, the cigarette (he had smoked it down without once touching it with his hand) curling across his face. His expression was savage, perhaps baleful; contemplative, watching the man in overalls recross the floor with a kind of alert diffidence, the jug clumsily concealed below his flank; he was watching Popeye, with that expression alert and ready for mirth, until he left the room. Again they heard his bare feet on the porch.

“Sure,” Popeye said. “I wont tell them on Manuel Street that Ruby Lamar is cooking for a dummy and a feeb too.”

“You bastard,” the woman said. “You bastard.”

II

When the woman entered the dining-room, carrying a platter of meat, Popeye and the man who had fetched the jug from the kitchen and the stranger were already at a table made by nailing three rough planks to two trestles. Coming into the light of the lamp which sat on the table, her face was sullen, not old; her eyes were cold. Watching her, Benbow did not see her look once at him as she set the platter on the table and stood for a moment with that veiled look with which women make a final survey of a table, and went and stooped above an open packing case in a corner of the room and took from it another plate and knife and fork, which she brought to the table and set before Benbow with a kind of abrupt yet unhurried finality, her sleeve brushing his shoulder.

As she was doing that, Goodwin entered. He wore muddy overalls. He had a lean, weathered face, the jaws covered by a black stubble; his hair was gray at the temples. He was leading by the arm an old man with a long white beard stained about the mouth. Benbow watched Goodwin seat the old man in a chair, where he sat obediently with that tentative and abject eagerness of a man who has but one pleasure left

and whom the world can reach only through one sense, for he was both blind and deaf: a short man with a bald skull and a round, full-fleshed, rosy face in which his cataracted eyes looked like two clots of phlegm. Benbow watched him take a filthy rag from his pocket and regurgitate into the rag an almost colorless wad of what had once been chewing tobacco, and fold the rag up and put it into his pocket.

The woman served his plate from the dish. The others were already eating, silently and steadily, but the old man sat there, his head bent over his plate, his beard working faintly. He fumbled at the plate with a diffident, shaking hand and found a small piece of meat and began to suck at it until the woman returned and rapped his knuckles. He put the meat back on the plate then and Benbow watched her cut up the food on the plate, meat, bread and all, and then pour sorghum over it. Then Benbow quit looking. When the meal was over, Goodwin led the old man out again. Benbow watched the two of them pass out the door and heard them go up the hall.

The men returned to the porch. The woman cleared the table and carried the dishes to the kitchen. She set them on the table and she went to the box behind the stove and she stood over it for a time. Then she returned and put her own supper on a plate and sat down to the table and ate and lit a cigarette from the lamp and washed the dishes and put them away. Then she went back up the hall. She did not go out onto the porch.

She stood just inside the door, listening to them talking, listening to the stranger talking and to the thick, soft sound of the jug as they passed it among themselves. "That fool," the woman said. "What does he want. . . ." She listened to the stranger's voice; a quick, faintly outlandish voice, the voice of a man given to much talk and not much else. "Not to drinking, anyway," the woman said, quiet inside the door. "He better get on to where he's going, where his women folks can take care of him."

She listened to him. "From my window I could see the grape arbor, and in the winter I could see the hammock too. But in the winter it was just

the hammock. That's why we know nature is a she; because of that conspiracy between female flesh and female season. So each spring I could watch the reaffirmation of the old ferment hiding the hammock; the green-snared promise of unease. What blossoms grapes have, this is.

It's not much: a wild and waxlike bleeding less of bloom than leaf, hiding and hiding the hammock, until along in late May, in the twilight, her—Little Belle's—voice would be like the murmur of the wild grape itself. She never would say, 'Horace, this is Louis or Paul or Whoever' but 'It's just Horace.' Just, you see; in a little white dress in the twilight, the two of them all demure and quite alert and a little impatient. And I couldn't have felt any more foreign to her flesh if I had begot it myself.

"So this morning—no; that was four days ago; it was Thursday she got home from school and this is Tuesday—I said, 'Honey, if you found him on the train, he probably belongs to the railroad company. You can't take him from the railroad company; that's against the law, like the insulators on the poles.'

" 'He's as good as you are. He goes to Tulane.'

" 'But on a train, honey,' I said.

" 'I found them in worse places than on the train.'

" 'I know,' I said. 'So have I. But you don't bring them home, you know. You just step over them and go on. You don't soil your slippers, you know.'

"We were in the living-room then; it was just before dinner; just the two of us in the house then. Belle had gone down town.

" 'What business is it of yours who comes to see me? You're not my father. You're just—just—'

" 'What?' I said. 'Just what?'

“ ‘Tell Mother, then! Tell her. That’s what you’re going to do. Tell her!’

“ ‘But on the train, honey,’ I said. ‘If he’d walked into your room in a hotel, I’d just kill him. But on the train, I’m disgusted. Let’s send him along and start all over again.’

“ ‘You’re a fine one to talk about finding things on the train! You’re a fine one! Shrimp! Shrimp!’ ”

“He’s crazy,” the woman said, motionless inside the door. The stranger’s voice went on, tumbling over itself, rapid and diffuse.

“Then she was saying ‘No! No!’ and me holding her and she clinging to me. ‘I didn’t mean that! Horace! Horace!’ And I was smelling the slain flowers, the delicate dead flowers and tears, and then I saw her face in the mirror. There was a mirror behind her and another behind me, and she was watching herself in the one behind me, forgetting about the other one in which I could see her face, see her watching the back of my head with pure dissimulation. That’s why nature is ‘she’ and Progress is ‘he’; nature made the grape arbor, but Progress invented the mirror.”

“He’s crazy,” the woman said inside the door, listening.

“But that wasn’t quite it. I thought that maybe the spring, or maybe being forty-three years old, had upset me. I thought that maybe I would be all right if I just had a hill to lie on for a while—It was that country. Flat and rich and foul, so that the very winds seem to engender money out of it. Like you wouldn’t be surprised to find that you could turn in the leaves off the trees, into the banks for cash. That Delta. Five thousand square miles, without any hill save the bumps of dirt the Indians made to stand on when the River overflowed.

“So I thought it was just a hill I wanted; it wasn’t Little Belle that set me off. Do you know what it was?”

“He is,” the woman said inside the door. “Lee ought not to let—”

Benbow had not waited for any answer. “It was a rag with rouge on it. I knew I would find it before I went into Belle’s room. And there it was, stuffed behind the mirror: a handkerchief where she had wiped off the surplus paint when she dressed and stuck it behind the mantel. I put it into the clothes-bag and took my hat and walked out. I had got a lift on a truck before I found that I had no money with me. That was part of it too, you see; I couldn’t cash a check. I couldn’t get off the truck and go back to town and get some money. I couldn’t do that. So I have been walking and bumming rides ever since. I slept one night in a sawdust pile at a mill, one night at a Negro cabin, one night in a freight car on a siding. I just wanted a hill to lie on, you see. Then I would be all right. When you marry your own wife, you start off from scratch . . . maybe scratching. When you marry somebody else’s wife, you start off maybe ten years behind, from somebody else’s scratch and scratching. I just wanted a hill to lie on for a while.”

“The fool,” the woman said. “The poor fool.” She stood inside the door. Popeye came through the hall from the back. He passed her without a word and went onto the porch.

“Come on,” he said. “Let’s get it loaded.” She heard the three of them go away. She stood there. Then she heard the stranger get unsteadily out of his chair and cross the porch. Then she saw him, in faint silhouette against the sky, the lesser darkness: a thin man in shapeless clothes; a head of thinning and ill-kempt hair; and quite drunk. “They dont make him eat right,” the woman said.

She was motionless, leaning lightly against the wall, he facing her. “Do you like living like this?” he said. “Why do you do it? You are young yet; you could go back to the cities and better yourself without lifting more than an eyelid.” She didn’t move, leaning lightly against the wall, her arms folded. “The poor, scared fool,” she said.

“You see,” he said, “I lack courage: that was left out of me. The machinery is all here, but it wont run.” His hand fumbled across her

cheek. "You are young yet." She didn't move, feeling his hand upon her face, touching her flesh as though he were trying to learn the shape and position of her bones and the texture of the flesh. "You have your whole life before you, practically. How old are you? You're not past thirty yet." His voice was not loud, almost a whisper.

When she spoke she did not lower her voice at all. She had not moved, her arms still folded across her breast. "Why did you leave your wife?" she said.

"Because she ate shrimp," he said. "I couldn't— You see, it was Friday, and I thought how at noon I'd go to the station and get the box of shrimp off the train and walk home with it, counting a hundred steps and changing hands with it, and it—"

"Did you do that every day?" the woman said.

"No. Just Friday. But I have done it for ten years, since we were married. And I still don't like to smell shrimp. But I wouldn't mind the carrying it home so much. I could stand that. It's because the package drips. All the way home it drips and drips, until after a while I follow myself to the station and stand aside and watch Horace Benbow take that box off the train and start home with it, changing hands every hundred steps, and I following him, thinking Here lies Horace Benbow in a fading series of small stinking spots on a Mississippi sidewalk."

"Oh," the woman said. She breathed quietly, her arms folded. She moved; he gave back and followed her down the hall. They entered the kitchen where a lamp burned. "You'll have to excuse the way I look," the woman said. She went to the box behind the stove and drew it out and stood above it, her hands hidden in the front of her garment. Benbow stood in the middle of the room. "I have to keep him in the box so the rats can't get to him," she said.

"What?" Benbow said. "What is it?" He approached, where he could see into the box. It contained a sleeping child, not a year old. He looked down at the pinched face quietly.

“Oh,” he said. “You have a son.” They looked down at the pinched, sleeping face of the child. There came a noise outside; feet came onto the back porch. The woman shoved the box back into the corner with her knee as Goodwin entered.

“All right,” Goodwin said. “Tommy’ll show you the way to the truck.” He went away, on into the house.

Benbow looked at the woman. Her hands were still wrapped into her dress. “Thank you for the supper,” he said. “Some day, maybe . . .” He looked at her; she was watching him, her face not sullen so much, as cold, still. “Maybe I can do something for you in Jefferson. Send you something you need . . .”

She removed her hands from the fold of the dress in a turning, flicking motion; jerked them hidden again. “With all this dishwater and washing . . . You might send me an orange-stick,” she said.

Walking in single file, Tommy and Benbow descended the hill from the house, following the abandoned road. Benbow looked back. The gaunt ruin of the house rose against the sky, above the massed and matted cedars, lightless, desolate, and profound. The road was an eroded scar too deep to be a road and too straight to be a ditch, gutted by winter freshets and choked with fern and rotted leaves and branches. Following Tommy, Benbow walked in a faint path where feet had worn the rotting vegetation down to the clay. Overhead an arching hedgerow of trees thinned against the sky.

The descent increased, curving. “It was about here that we saw the owl,” Benbow said.

Ahead of him Tommy guffawed. “It skeered him too, I’ll be bound,” he said.

“Yes,” Benbow said. He followed Tommy’s vague shape, trying to walk carefully, to talk carefully, with that tedious concern of drunkenness.

"I be dawg if he aint the skeeriest durn white man I ever see," Tommy said. "Here he was comin up the path to the porch and that ere dog come out from under the house and went up and sniffed his heels, like ere a dog will, and I be dawg if he didn't flinch off like it was a moccasin and him barefoot, and whupped out that little artermatic pistol and shot it dead as a door-nail. I be durn if he didn't."

"Whose dog was it?" Horace said.

"Hit was mine," Tommy said. He chortled. "A old dog that wouldn't hurt a flea if hit could."

The road descended and flattened; Benbow's feet whispered into sand, walking carefully. Against the pale sand he could now see Tommy, moving at a shuffling shamble like a mule walks in sand, without seeming effort, his bare feet hissing, flicking the sand back in faint spouting gusts from each inward flick of his toes.

The bulky shadow of the felled tree blobbed across the road. Tommy climbed over it and Benbow followed, still carefully, gingerly, hauling himself through a mass of foliage not yet withered, smelling still green. "Some more of—" Tommy said. He turned. "Can you make it?"

"I'm all right," Horace said. He got his balance again. Tommy went on.

"Some more of Popeye's doins," Tommy said. "'Twarn't no use, blocking this road like that. Just fixed it so we'd have to walk a mile to the trucks. I told him folks been coming out here to buy from Lee for four years now, and aint nobody bothered Lee yet. Besides gettin that car of hisn outen here again, big as it is. But 'twarn't no stoppin him. I be dawg if he aint skeered of his own shadow."

"I'd be scared of it too," Benbow said. "If his shadow was mine."

Tommy guffawed, in undertone. The road was now a black tunnel floored with the impalpable defunctive glare of the sand. "It was about

here that the path turned off to the spring," Benbow thought, trying to discern where the path notched into the jungle wall. They went on.

"Who drives the truck?" Benbow said. "Some more Memphis fellows?"

"Sho," Tommy said. "Hit's Popeye's truck."

"Why cant those Memphis folks stay in Memphis and let you all make your liquor in peace?"

"That's where the money is," Tommy said. "Aint no money in these here piddlin little quarts and half-a-gallons. Lee just does that for a-commodation, to pick up a extry dollar or two. It's in making a run and getting shut of it quick, where the money is."

"Oh," Benbow said. "Well, I think I'd rather starve than have that man around me."

Tommy guffawed. "Popeye's all right. He's just a little curious." He walked on, shapeless against the hushed glare of the road, the sandy road. "I be dawg if he aint a case, now. Aint he?"

"Yes," Benbow said. "He's all of that."

The truck was waiting where the road, clay again, began to mount toward the gravel highway. Two men sat on the fender, smoking cigarettes; overhead the trees thinned against the stars of more than midnight.

"You took your time," one of the men said. "Didn't you? I aimed to be halfway to town by now. I got a woman waiting for me."

"Sure," the other man said. "Waiting on her back." The first man cursed him.

"We come as fast as we could," Tommy said. "Whyn't you fellows hang out a lantern? If me and him had a been the Law, we'd had you, sho."

“Ah, go climb a tree, you mat-faced bastard,” the first man said. They snapped their cigarettes away and got into the truck. Tommy guffawed, in undertone. Benbow turned and extended his hand.

“Goodbye,” he said. “And much obliged, Mister—”

“My name’s Tawmmy,” the other said. His limp, calloused hand fumbled into Benbow’s and pumped it solemnly once and fumbled away. He stood there, a squat, shapeless figure against the faint glare of the road, while Benbow lifted his foot for the step. He stumbled, catching himself.

“Watch yourself, Doc,” a voice from the cab of the truck said. Benbow got in. The second man was laying a shotgun along the back of the seat. The truck got into motion and ground terrifically up the gutted slope and into the gravelled highroad and turned toward Jefferson and Memphis.

III

On the next afternoon Benbow was at his sister’s home. It was in the country, four miles from Jefferson; the home of her husband’s people. She was a widow, with a boy ten years old, living in a big house with her son and the great aunt of her husband: a woman of ninety, who lived in a wheel chair, who was known as Miss Jenny. She and Benbow were at the window, watching his sister and a young man walking in the garden. His sister had been a widow for ten years.

“Why hasn’t she ever married again?” Benbow said.

“I ask you,” Miss Jenny said. “A young woman needs a man.”

“But not that one,” Benbow said. He looked at the two people. The man wore flannels and a blue coat; a broad, plumpish young man with a swaggering air, vaguely collegiate. “She seems to like children. Maybe

because she has one of her own now. Which one is that? Is that the same one she had last fall?"

"Gowan Stevens," Miss Jenny said. "You ought to remember Gowan."

"Yes," Benbow said. "I do now. I remember last October." At that time he had passed through Jefferson on his way home, and he had stopped overnight at his sister's. Through the same window he and Miss Jenny had watched the same two people walking in the same garden, where at that time the late, bright, dusty-odored flowers of October bloomed. At that time Stevens wore brown, and at that time he was new to Horace.

"He's only been coming out since he got home from Virginia last spring," Miss Jenny said. "The one then was that Jones boy; Herschell. Yes. Herschell."

"Ah," Benbow said. "An F.F.V., or just an unfortunate sojourner there?"

"At the school, the University. He went there. You dont remember him because he was still in diapers when you left Jefferson."

"Dont let Belle hear you say that," Benbow said. He watched the two people. They approached the house and disappeared beyond it. A moment later they came up the stairs and into the room. Stevens came in, with his sleek head, his plump, assured face. Miss Jenny gave him her hand and he bent fatly and kissed it.

"Getting younger and prettier every day," he said. "I was just telling Narcissa that if you'd just get up out of that chair and be my girl, she wouldn't have a chance."

"I'm going to tomorrow," Miss Jenny said. "Narcissa—"

Narcissa was a big woman, with dark hair, a broad, stupid, serene face. She was in her customary white dress. "Horace, this is Gowan Stevens," she said. "My brother, Gowan."

“How do you do, sir,” Stevens said. He gave Benbow’s hand a quick, hard, high, close grip. At that moment the boy, Benbow Sartoris, Benbow’s nephew, came in. “I’ve heard of you,” Stevens said.

“Gowan went to Virginia,” the boy said.

“Ah,” Benbow said. “I’ve heard of it.”

“Thanks,” Stevens said. “But everybody cant go to Harvard.”

“Thank you,” Benbow said. “It was Oxford.”

“Horace is always telling folks he went to Oxford so they’ll think he means the state university, and he can tell them different,” Miss Jenny said.

“Gowan goes to Oxford a lot,” the boy said. “He’s got a jelly there. He takes her to the dances. Dont you, Gowan?”

“Right, bud,” Stevens said. “A red-headed one.”

“Hush, Bory,” Narcissa said. She looked at her brother. “How are Belle and Little Belle?” She almost said something else, then she ceased. Yet she looked at her brother, her gaze grave and intent.

“If you keep on expecting him to run off from Belle, he will do it,” Miss Jenny said. “He’ll do it someday. But Narcissa wouldn’t be satisfied, even then,” she said. “Some women wont want a man to marry a certain woman. But all the women will be mad if he ups and leaves her.”

“You hush, now,” Narcissa said.

“Yes, sir,” Miss Jenny said. “Horace has been bucking at the halter for some time now. But you better not run against it too hard, Horace; it might not be fastened at the other end.”

Across the hall a small bell rang. Stevens and Benbow both moved toward the handle of Miss Jenny's chair. "Will you forbear, sir?" Benbow said. "Since I seem to be the guest."

"Why, Horace," Miss Jenny said. "Narcissa, will you send up to the chest in the attic and get the duelling pistols?" She turned to the boy. "And you go on ahead and tell them to strike up the music, and to have two roses ready."

"Strike up what music?" the boy said.

"There are roses on the table," Narcissa said. "Gowan sent them. Come on to supper."

Through the window Benbow and Miss Jenny watched the two people, Narcissa still in white, Stevens in flannels and a blue coat, walking in the garden. "The Virginia gentleman one, who told us at supper that night about how they had taught him to drink like a gentleman. Put a beetle in alcohol, and you have a scarab; put a Mississippian in alcohol, and you have a gentleman—"

"Gowan Stevens," Miss Jenny said. They watched the two people disappear beyond the house. It was some time before he heard the two people come down the hall. When they entered, it was the boy instead of Stevens.

"He wouldn't stay," Narcissa said. "He's going to Oxford. There is to be a dance at the University Friday night. He has an engagement with a young lady."

"He should find ample field for gentlemanly drinking there," Horace said. "Gentlemanly anything else. I suppose that's why he is going down ahead of time."

“Taking an old girl to a dance,” the boy said. “He’s going to Starkville Saturday, to the baseball game. He said he’d take me, but you wont let me go.”

IV

Townspeople taking after-supper drives through the college grounds or an oblivious and bemused faculty member or a candidate for a master’s degree on his way to the library would see Temple, a snatched coat under her arm and her long legs blonde with running, in speeding silhouette against the lighted windows of the Coop, as the women’s dormitory was known, vanishing into the shadow beside the library wall, and perhaps a final squatting swirl of knickers or whatnot as she sprang into the car waiting there with engine running on that particular night. The cars belonged to town boys.

Students in the University were not permitted to keep cars, and the men—hatless, in knickers and bright pull-overs—looked down upon the town boys who wore hats cupped rigidly upon pomaded heads, and coats a little too tight and trousers a little too full, with superiority and rage.

This was on week nights. On alternate Saturday evenings, at the Letter Club dances, or on the occasion of the three formal yearly balls, the town boys, lounging in attitudes of belligerent casualness, with their identical hats and upturned collars, watched her enter the gymnasium upon black collegiate arms and vanish in a swirling glitter upon a glittering swirl of music, with her high delicate head and her bold painted mouth and soft chin, her eyes blankly right and left looking, cool, predatory and discreet.

Later, the music wailing beyond the glass, they would watch her through the windows as she passed in swift rotation from one pair of black sleeves to the next, her waist shaped slender and urgent in the interval, her feet filling the rhythmic gap with music. Stooping they would drink from flasks and light cigarettes, then erect again, motionless against the light, the upturned collars, the hatted heads,

would be like a row of hatted and muffled busts cut from black tin and nailed to the window-sills.

There would always be three or four of them there when the band played Home, Sweet Home, lounging near the exit, their faces cold, bellicose, a little drawn with sleeplessness, watching the couples emerge in a wan aftermath of motion and noise. Three of them watched Temple and Gowan Stevens come out, into the chill presage of spring dawn. Her face was quite pale, dusted over with recent powder, her hair in spent red curls. Her eyes, all pupil now, rested upon them for a blank moment. Then she lifted her hand in a wan gesture, whether at them or not, none could have said. They did not respond, no flicker in their cold eyes. They watched Gowan slip his arm into hers, and the fleet revelation of flank and thigh as she got into his car. It was a long, low roadster, with a jacklight.

“Who’s that son bitch?” one said.

“My father’s a judge,” the second said in a bitter, lilting falsetto.

“Hell. Let’s go to town.”

They went on. Once they yelled at a car, but it did not stop. On the bridge across the railroad cutting they stopped and drank from a bottle. The last made to fling it over the railing. The second caught his arm.

“Let me have it,” he said. He broke the bottle carefully and spread the fragments across the road. They watched him.

“You’re not good enough to go to a college dance,” the first said. “You poor bastard.”

“My father’s a judge,” the other said, propping the jagged shards upright in the road.

“Here comes a car,” the third said.

It had three headlights. They leaned against the railing, slanting their hats against the light, and watched Temple and Gowan pass. Temple's head was low and close. The car moved slowly.

"You poor bastard," the first said.

"Am I?" the second said. He took something from his pocket and flipped it out, whipping the sheer, faintly scented web across their faces. "Am I?"

"That's what you say."

"Doc got that step-in in Memphis," the third said. "Off a damn whore."

"You're a lying bastard," Doc said.

They watched the fan of light, the diminishing ruby taillamp, come to a stop at the Coop. The lights went off. After a while the car door slammed. The lights came on; the car moved away. It approached again. They leaned against the rail in a row, their hats slanted against the glare. The broken glass glinted in random sparks. The car drew up and stopped opposite them.

"You gentlemen going to town?" Gowan said, opening the door. They leaned against the rail, then the first said "Much obliged" gruffly and they got in, the two others in the rumble seat, the first beside Gowan.

"Pull over this way," he said. "Somebody broke a bottle there."

"Thanks," Gowan said. The car moved on. "You gentlemen going to Starkville tomorrow to the game?"

The ones in the rumble seat said nothing.

"I dont know," the first said. "I dont reckon so."

"I'm a stranger here," Gowan said. "I ran out of liquor tonight, and I've got a date early in the morning. Can you gentlemen tell me where I could get a quart?"

"It's mighty late," the first said. He turned to the others. "You know anybody he can find this time of night, Doc?"

"Luke might," the third said.

"Where does he live?" Gowan said.

"Go on," the first said. "I'll show you." They crossed the square and drove out of town about a half mile.

"This is the road to Taylor, isn't it?" Gowan said.

"Yes," the first said.

"I've got to drive down there early in the morning," Gowan said. "Got to get there before the special does. You gentlemen not going to the game, you say."

"I reckon not," the first said. "Stop here." A steep slope rose, crested by stunted blackjacks. "You wait here," the first said. Gowan switched off the lights. They could hear the other scrambling the slope.

"Does Luke have good liquor?" Gowan said.

"Pretty good. Good as any, I reckon," the third said.

"If you dont like it, you dont have to drink it," Doc said. Gowan turned fatly and looked at him.

"It's as good as that you had tonight," the third said.

"You didn't have to drink that, neither," Doc said.

“They cant seem to make good liquor down here like they do up at school,” Gowan said.

“Where you from?” the third said.

“Virgin—oh, Jefferson. I went to school at Virginia. Teach you how to drink, there.”

The other two said nothing. The first returned, preceded by a minute shaling of earth down the slope. He had a fruit jar. Gowan lifted it against the sky. It was pale, innocent looking. He removed the cap and extended it.

“Drink.”

The first took it and extended it to them in the rumble.

“Drink.”

The third drank, but Doc refused. Gowan drank.

“Good God,” he said, “how do you fellows drink this stuff?”

“We dont drink rotgut at Virginia,” Doc said. Gowan turned in the seat and looked at him.

“Shut up, Doc,” the third said. “Dont mind him,” he said. “He’s had a bellyache all night.”

“Son bitch,” Doc said.

“Did you call me that?” Gowan said.

“Course he didn’t,” the third said. “Doc’s all right. Come on, Doc. Take a drink.”

“I dont give a damn,” Doc said. “Hand it here.”

They returned to town. "The shack'll be open," the first said. "At the depot."

It was a confectionery-lunchroom. It was empty save for a man in a soiled apron. They went to the rear and entered an alcove with a table and four chairs. The man brought four glasses and Coca-Colas. "Can I have some sugar and water and a lemon, Cap?" Gowan said. The man brought them. The others watched Gowan make a whiskey sour. "They taught me to drink it this way," he said. They watched him drink. "Hasn't got much kick, to me," he said, filling his glass from the jar. He drank that.

"You sure do drink it," the third said.

"I learned in a good school." There was a high window. Beyond it the sky was paler, fresher. "Have another, gentlemen," he said, filling his glass again. The others helped themselves moderately. "Up at school they consider it better to go down than to hedge," he said. They watched him drink that one. They saw his nostrils bead suddenly with sweat.

"That's all for him, too," Doc said.

"Who says so?" Gowan said. He poured an inch into the glass. "If we just had some decent liquor. I know a man in my county named Goodwin that makes—"

"That's what they call a drink up at school," Doc said.

Gowan looked at him. "Do you think so? Watch this." He poured into the glass. They watched the liquor rise.

"Look out, fellow," the third said. Gowan filled the glass level full and lifted it and emptied it steadily. He remembered setting the glass down carefully, then he became aware simultaneously of open air, of a chill gray freshness and an engine panting on a siding at the head of a dark

string of cars, and that he was trying to tell someone that he had learned to drink like a gentleman.

He was still trying to tell them, in a cramped dark place smelling of ammonia and creosote, vomiting into a receptacle, trying to tell them that he must be at Taylor at six-thirty, when the special arrived. The paroxysm passed; he felt extreme lassitude, weakness, a desire to lie down which was forcibly restrained, and in the flare of a match he leaned against the wall, his eyes focusing slowly upon a name written there in pencil. He shut one eye, propped against the wall, swaying and drooling, and read the name. Then he looked at them, wagging his head.

“Girl name . . . Name girl I know. Good girl. Good sport. Got date to take her to Stark . . . Starkville. No chap’rone, see?” Leaning there, drooling, mumbling, he went to sleep.

At once he began to fight himself out of sleep. It seemed to him that it was immediately, yet he was aware of time passing all the while, and that time was a factor in his need to wake; that otherwise he would be sorry. For a long while he knew that his eyes were open, waiting for vision to return. Then he was seeing again, without knowing at once that he was awake.

He lay quite still. It seemed to him that, by breaking out of sleep, he had accomplished the purpose that he had waked himself for. He was lying in a cramped position under a low canopy, looking at the front of an unfamiliar building above which small clouds rosy with sunlight drove, quite empty of any sense. Then his abdominal muscles completed the retch upon which he had lost consciousness and he heaved himself up and sprawled into the foot of the car, banging his head on the door.

The blow fetched him completely to and he opened the door and half fell to the ground and dragged himself up and turned toward the station at a stumbling run. He fell. On hands and knees he looked at the empty siding and up at the sunfilled sky with unbelief and despair. He

rose and ran on, in his stained dinner jacket, his burst collar and broken hair. I passed out, he thought in a kind of rage, I passed out. I passed out.

The platform was deserted save for a Negro with a broom. "Gret Gawd, white folks," he said.

"The train," Gowan said, "the special. The one that was on that track."

"Hit done lef. But five minutes ago." With the broom still in the arrested gesture of sweeping he watched Gowan turn and run back to the car and tumble into it.

The jar lay on the floor. He kicked it aside and started the engine. He knew that he needed something on his stomach, but there wasn't time. He looked down at the jar. His inside coiled coldly, but he raised the jar and drank, guzzling, choking the stuff down, clapping a cigarette into his mouth to restrain the paroxysm. Almost at once he felt better.

He crossed the square at forty miles an hour. It was six-fifteen. He took the Taylor road, increasing speed. He drank again from the jar without slowing down. When he reached Taylor the train was just pulling out of the station. He slammed in between two wagons as the last car passed. The vestibule opened; Temple sprang down and ran for a few steps beside the car while an official leaned down and shook his fist at her.

Gowan had got out. She turned and came toward him, walking swiftly. Then she paused, stopped, came on again, staring at his wild face and hair, at his ruined collar and shirt.

"You're drunk," she said. "You pig. You filthy pig."

"Had a big night. You dont know the half of it."

She looked about, at the bleak yellow station, the overalled men chewing slowly and watching her, down the track at the diminishing train, at the four puffs of vapor that had almost died away when the

sound of the whistle came back. "You filthy pig," she said. "You cant go anywhere like this. You haven't even changed clothes." At the car she stopped again. "What's that behind you?"

"My canteen," Gowan said. "Get in."

She looked at him, her mouth boldly scarlet, her eyes watchful and cold beneath her brimless hat, a curled spill of red hair. She looked back at the station again, stark and ugly in the fresh morning. She sprang in, tucking her legs under her. "Let's get away from here." He started the car and turned it. "You'd better take me back to Oxford," she said. She looked back at the station. It now lay in shadow, in the shadow of a high scudding cloud. "You'd better," she said.

At two oclock that afternoon, running at good speed through a high murmurous desolation of pines, Gowan swung the car from the gravel into a narrow road between eroded banks, descending toward a bottom of cypress and gum. He wore a cheap blue workshirt beneath his dinner jacket. His eyes were bloodshot, puffed, his jowls covered by blue stubble, and looking at him, braced and clinging as the car leaped and bounced in the worn ruts, Temple thought His whiskers have grown since we left Dumfries. It was hair-oil he drank. He bought a bottle of hair-oil at Dumfries and drank it.

He looked at her, feeling her eyes. "Dont get your back up, now. It wont take a minute to run up to Goodwin's and get a bottle. It wont take ten minutes. I said I'd get you to Starkville before the train does, and I will. Dont you believe me?"

She said nothing, thinking of the pennant-draped train already in Starkville; of the colorful stands; the band, the yawning glitter of the bass horn; the green diamond dotted with players, crouching, uttering short, yelping cries like marsh-fowl disturbed by an alligator, not certain of where the danger is, motionless, poised, encouraging one another with short meaningless cries, plaintive, wary and forlorn.

“Trying to come over me with your innocent ways. Dont think I spent last night with a couple of your barber-shop jellies for nothing. Dont think I fed them my liquor just because I’m big-hearted. You’re pretty good, aren’t you? Think you can play around all week with any badger-trimmed hick that owns a Ford, and fool me on Saturday, dont you? Dont think I didn’t see your name where it’s written on that lavatory wall. Dont you believe me?”

She said nothing, bracing herself as the car lurched from one bank to the other of the cut, going too fast. He was still watching her, making no effort to steer it.

“By God, I want to see the woman that can—” The road flattened into sand, arched completely over, walled completely by a jungle of cane and brier. The car lurched from side to side in the loose ruts.

She saw the tree blocking the road, but she only braced herself anew. It seemed to her to be the logical and disastrous end to the train of circumstance in which she had become involved. She sat and watched rigidly and quietly as Gowan, apparently looking straight ahead, drove into the tree at twenty miles an hour. The car struck, bounded back, then drove into the tree again and turned onto its side.

She felt herself flying through the air, carrying a numbing shock upon her shoulder and a picture of two men peering from the fringe of cane at the roadside. She scrambled to her feet, her head reverted, and saw them step into the road, the one in a suit of tight black and a straw hat, smoking a cigarette, the other bareheaded, in overalls, carrying a shotgun, his bearded face gaped in slow astonishment. Still running her bones turned to water and she fell flat on her face, still running.

Without stopping she whirled and sat up, her mouth open upon a soundless wail behind her lost breath. The man in overalls was still looking at her, his mouth open in innocent astonishment within a short soft beard. The other man was leaning over the upturned car, his tight coat ridged across his shoulders. Then the engine ceased, though the lifted front wheel continued to spin idly, slowing.

The man in overalls was barefoot also. He walked ahead of Temple and Gowan, the shotgun swinging in his hand, his splay feet apparently effortless in the sand into which Temple sank almost to the ankle at each step. From time to time he looked over his shoulder at them, at Gowan's bloody face and splotched clothes, at Temple struggling and lurching on her high heels.

"Putty hard walkin, aint it?" he said. "Ef she'll take off them high heel shoes, she'll git along better."

"Will I?" Temple said. She stopped and stood on alternate legs, holding to Gowan, and removed her slippers. The man watched her, looking at the slippers.

"Durn ef I could git ere two of my fingers into one of them things," he said. "Kin I look at em?" She gave him one. He turned it slowly in his hand. "Durn my hide," he said. He looked at Temple again with his pale, empty gaze. His hair grew innocent and straw-like, bleached on the crown, darkening about his ears and neck in untidy curls. "She's a right tall gal, too," he said. "With them skinny legs of hern. How much she weigh?" Temple extended her hand. He returned the slipper slowly, looking at her, at her belly and loins. "He aint laid no crop by yit, has he?"

"Come on," Gowan said, "let's get going. We've got to get a car and get back to Jefferson by night."

When the sand ceased Temple sat down and put her slippers on. She found the man watching her lifted thigh and she jerked her skirt down and sprang up. "Well," she said, "go on. Dont you know the way?"

The house came into sight, above the cedar grove beyond whose black interstices an apple orchard flaunted in the sunny afternoon. It was set

in a ruined lawn, surrounded by abandoned grounds and fallen outbuildings. But nowhere was any sign of husbandry—plow or tool; in no direction was a planted field in sight—only a gaunt weather-stained ruin in a sombre grove through which the breeze drew with a sad, murmurous sound. Temple stopped.

“I dont want to go there,” she said. “You go on and get the car,” she told the man. “We’ll wait here.”

“He said fer y’all to come on to the house,” the man said.

“Who did?” Temple said. “Does that black man think he can tell me what to do?”

“Ah, come on,” Gowan said. “Let’s see Goodwin and get a car. It’s getting late. Mrs Goodwin’s here, isn’t she?”

“Hit’s likely,” the man said.

“Come on,” Gowan said. They went on to the house. The man mounted to the porch and set the shotgun just inside the door.

“She’s around somewher,” he said. He looked at Temple again. “Hit aint no cause fer yo wife to fret,” he said. “Lee’ll git you to town, I reckon.”

Temple looked at him. They looked at one another soberly, like two children or two dogs. “What’s your name?”

“My name’s Tawmmy,” he said. “Hit aint no need to fret.”

The hall was open through the house. She entered.

“Where you going?” Gowan said. “Why dont you wait out here?” She didn’t answer. She went on down the hall. Behind her she could hear Gowan’s and the man’s voices. The back porch lay in sunlight, a segment of sunlight framed by the door. Beyond, she could see a weed-choked slope and a huge barn, broken-backed, tranquil in sunny

desolation. To the right of the door she could see the corner either of a detached building or of a wing of the house. But she could hear no sound save the voices from the front.

She went on, slowly. Then she stopped. On the square of sunlight framed by the door lay the shadow of a man's head, and she half spun, poised with running. But the shadow wore no hat, so she turned and on tiptoe she went to the door and peered around it. A man sat in a splint-bottom chair, in the sunlight, the back of his bald, white-fringed head toward her, his hands crossed on the head of a rough stick. She emerged onto the back porch.

"Good afternoon," she said. The man did not move. She advanced again, then she glanced quickly over her shoulder. With the tail of her eye she thought she had seen a thread of smoke drift out of the door in the detached room where the porch made an L, but it was gone. From a line between two posts in front of this door three square cloths hung damp and limp, as though recently washed, and a woman's undergarment of faded pink silk. It had been washed until the lace resembled a ragged, fibre-like fraying of the cloth itself. It bore a patch of pale calico, neatly sewn. Temple looked at the old man again.

For an instant she thought that his eyes were closed, then she believed that he had no eyes at all, for between the lids two objects like dirty yellowish clay marbles were fixed. "Gowan," she whispered, then she wailed "Gowan" and turned running, her head reverted, just as a voice spoke beyond the door where she had thought to have seen smoke:

"He cant hear you. What do you want?"

She whirled again and without a break in her stride and still watching the old man, she ran right off the porch and fetched up on hands and knees in a litter of ashes and tin cans and bleached bones, and saw Popeye watching her from the corner of the house, his hands in his pockets and a slanted cigarette curling across his face. Still without stopping she scrambled onto the porch and sprang into the kitchen,

where a woman sat at a table, a burning cigarette in her hand, watching the door.

VI

Popeye went on around the house. Gowan was leaning over the edge of the porch, dabbing gingerly at his bloody nose. The barefooted man squatted on his heels against the wall.

“For Christ’s sake,” Popeye said, “why cant you take him out back and wash him off? Do you want him sitting around here all day looking like a damn hog with its throat cut?” He snapped the cigarette into the weeds and sat on the top step and began to scrape his muddy shoes with a platinum penknife on the end of his watch chain.

The barefoot man rose.

“You said something about—” Gowan said.

“Pssst!” the other said. He began to wink and frown at Gowan, jerking his head at Popeye’s back.

“And then you get on back down that road,” Popeye said. “You hear?”

“I thought you was fixin to watch down ther,” the man said.

“Dont think,” Popeye said, scraping at his trouser-cuffs. “You’ve got along forty years without it. You do what I told you.”

When they reached the back porch the barefoot man said: “He jest caint stand fer nobody— Aint he a curious feller, now? I be dawg ef he aint better’n a circus to— He won’t stand fer nobody drinkin hyer cep Lee. Wont drink none hisself, and jest let me take one sup and I be dawg ef hit dont look like he’ll have a catfit.”

“He said you were forty years old,” Gowan said.

“Taint that much,” the other said.

“How old are you? Thirty?”

“I dont know. 'Taint as much as he said, though.” The old man sat in the chair, in the sun. “Hit’s jest Pap,” the man said. The azure shadow of the cedars had reached the old man’s feet. It was almost up to his knees. His hand came out and fumbled about his knees, dabbling into the shadow, and became still, wrist-deep in shadow. Then he rose and grasped the chair and, tapping ahead with the stick, he bore directly down upon them in a shuffling rush, so that they had to step quickly aside. He dragged the chair into the full sunlight and sat down again, his face lifted into the sun, his hands crossed on the head of the stick. “That’s Pap,” the man said. “Blind and deaf both. I be dawg ef I wouldn’t hate to be in a fix wher I couldn’t tell and wouldn’t even keer whut I was eatin.”

On a plank fixed between two posts sat a galvanised pail, a tin basin, a cracked dish containing a lump of yellow soap. “To hell with water,” Gowan said. “How about that drink?”

“Seems to me like you done already had too much. I be dawg ef you didn’t drive that ere car straight into that tree.”

“Come on. Haven’t you got some hid out somewhere?”

“Mought be a little in the barn. But dont let him hyear us, er he’ll find hit and po hit out.” He went back to the door and peered up the hall. Then they left the porch and went toward the barn, crossing what had once been a kitchen garden choked now with cedar and blackjack saplings. Twice the man looked back over his shoulder. The second time he said:

“Yon’s yo wife wantin something.”

Temple stood in the kitchen door. “Gowan,” she called.

“Wave yo hand er somethin,” the man said. “Ef she dont hush, he’s goin to hyear us.” Gowan flapped his hand. They went on and entered the barn. Beside the entrance a crude ladder mounted. “Better wait twell I git up,” the man said. “Hit’s putty rotten; mought not hold us both.”

“Why dont you fix it, then? Dont you use it every day?”

“Hit’s helt all right, so fur,” the other said. He mounted. Then Gowan followed, through the trap, into yellow-barred gloom where the level sun fell through the broken walls and roof. “Walk wher I do,” the man said. “You’ll tromp on a loose boa’d and find yoself downstairs befo you know hit.” He picked his way across the floor and dug an earthenware jug from a pile of rotting hay in the corner. “One place he wont look fer hit,” he said. “Skeered of sp’ilin them gal’s hands of hisn.”

They drank. “I’ve seen you out hyer befo,” the man said. “Caint call yo name, though.”

“My name’s Stevens. I’ve been buying liquor from Lee for three years. When’ll he be back? We’ve got to get on to town.”

“He’ll be hyer soon. I’ve seen you befo. Nother feller fum Jefferson out hyer three-fo nights ago. I cant call his name neither. He sho was a talker, now. Kep on tellin how he up and quit his wife. Have some mo,” he said; then he ceased and squatted slowly, the jug in his lifted hands, his head bent with listening. After a moment the voice spoke again, from the hallway beneath.

“Jack.”

The man looked at Gowan. His jaw dropped into an expression of imbecile glee. What teeth he had were stained and ragged within his soft, tawny beard.

“You, Jack, up there,” the voice said.

“Hyear him?” the man whispered, shaking with silent glee. “Callin me Jack. My name’s Tawmmy.”

“Come on,” the voice said. “I know you’re there.”

“I reckon we better,” Tommy said. “He jest lief take a shot up through the flo as not.”

“For Christ’s sake,” Gowan said, “why didn’t you— Here,” he shouted, “here we come!”

Popeye stood in the door, his forefingers in his vest. The sun had set. When they descended and appeared in the door Temple stepped from the back porch. She paused, watching them, then she came down the hill. She began to run.

“Didn’t I tell you to get on down that road?” Popeye said.

“Me an him jest stepped down hyer a minute,” Tommy said.

“Did I tell you to get on down that road, or didn’t I?”

“Yeuh,” Tommy said. “You told me.” Popeye turned without so much as a glance at Gowan. Tommy followed. His back still shook with secret glee. Temple met Popeye halfway to the house. Without ceasing to run she appeared to pause. Even her flapping coat did not overtake her, yet for an appreciable instant she faced Popeye with a grimace of taut, toothed coquetry. He did not stop; the finicking swagger of his narrow back did not falter. Temple ran again. She passed Tommy and clutched Gowan’s arm.

“Gowan, I’m scared. She said for me not to— You’ve been drinking again; you haven’t even washed the blood— She says for us to go away from here . . .” Her eyes were quite black, her face small and wan in the dusk. She looked toward the house. Popeye was just turning the corner. “She has to walk all the way to a spring for water; she— They’ve got

the cutest little baby in a box behind the stove. Gowan, she said for me not to be here after dark. She said to ask him. He's got a car. She said she didn't think he—"

"Ask who?" Gowan said. Tommy was looking back at them. Then he went on.

"That black man. She said she didn't think he would, but he might. Come on." They went toward the house. A path led around it to the front. The car was parked between the path and the house, in the tall weeds. Temple faced Gowan again, her hand lying upon the door of the car. "It wont take him any time, in this. I know a boy at home has one. It will run eighty. All he would have to do is just drive us to a town, because she said if we were married and I had to say we were. Just to a railroad. Maybe there's one closer than Jefferson," she whispered, staring at him, stroking her hand along the edge of the door.

"Oh," Gowan said, "I'm to do the asking. Is that it? You're all nuts. Do you think that ape will? I'd rather stay here a week than go anywhere with him."

"She said to. She said for me not to stay here."

"You're crazy as a loon. Come on here."

"You wont ask him? You wont do it?"

"No. Wait till Lee comes, I tell you. He'll get us a car."

They went on in the path. Popeye was leaning against a post, lighting a cigarette. Temple ran on up the broken steps. "Say," she said, "dont you want to drive us to town?"

He turned his head, the cigarette in his mouth, the match cupped between his hands. Temple's mouth was fixed in that cringing grimace. Popeye leaned the cigarette to the match. "No," he said.

“Come on,” Temple said. “Be a sport. It wont take you any time in that Packard. How about it? We’ll pay you.”

Popeye inhaled. He snapped the match into the weeds. He said, in his soft, cold voice: “Make your whore lay off of me, Jack.”

Gowan moved thickly, like a clumsy, good-tempered horse goaded suddenly. “Look here, now,” he said. Popeye exhaled, the smoke jetting downward in two thin spurts. “I dont like that,” Gowan said. “Do you know who you’re talking to?” He continued that thick movement, like he could neither stop it nor complete it. “I dont like that.” Popeye turned his head and looked at Gowan. Then he quit looking at him and Temple said suddenly:

“What river did you fall in with that suit on? Do you have to shave it off at night?” Then she was moving toward the door with Gowan’s hand in the small of her back, her head reverted, her heels clattering. Popeye leaned motionless against the post, his head turned over his shoulder in profile.

“Do you want—” Gowan hissed.

“You mean old thing!” Temple cried. “You mean old thing!”

Gowan shoved her into the house. “Do you want him to slam your damn head off?” he said.

“You’re scared of him!” Temple said. “You’re scared!”

“Shut your mouth!” Gowan said. He began to shake her. Their feet scraped on the bare floor as though they were performing a clumsy dance, and clinging together they lurched into the wall. “Look out,” he said, “you’re getting all that stuff stirred up in me again.” She broke free, running. He leaned against the wall and watched her in silhouette run out the back door.

She ran into the kitchen. It was dark save for a crack of light about the fire door of the stove. She whirled and ran out the door and saw Gowan going down the hill toward the barn. He's going to drink some more, she thought; he's getting drunk again. That makes three times today. Still more dusk had grown in the hall. She stood on tiptoe, listening, thinking I'm hungry, I haven't eaten all day; thinking of the school, the lighted windows, the slow couples strolling toward the sound of the supper bell, and of her father sitting on the porch at home, his feet on the rail, watching a Negro mow the lawn. She moved quietly on tiptoe. In the corner beside the door the shotgun leaned and she crowded into the corner beside it and began to cry.

Immediately she stopped and ceased breathing. Something was moving beyond the wall against which she leaned. It crossed the room with minute, blundering sounds, preceded by a dry tapping. It emerged into the hall and she screamed, feeling her lungs emptying long after all the air was expelled, and her diaphragm laboring long after her chest was empty, and watched the old man go down the hall at a wide-legged shuffling trot, the stick in one hand and the other elbow cocked at an acute angle from his middle. Running, she passed him—a dim, spraddled figure standing at the edge of the porch—and ran on into the kitchen and darted into the corner behind the stove.

Crouching, she drew the box out and drew it before her. Her hand touched the child's face, then she flung her arms around the box, clutching it, staring across it at the pale door and trying to pray. But she could not think of a single designation for the heavenly father, so she began to say "My father's a judge; my father's a judge" over and over until Goodwin ran lightly into the room. He struck a match and held it overhead and looked down at her until the flame reached his fingers.

"Hah," he said. She heard his light, swift feet twice, then his hand touched her cheek and he lifted her from behind the box by the scruff of the neck, like a kitten. "What are you doing in my house?" he said.

From somewhere here beyond the lamplit hall she could hear the voices—a word; now and then a laugh: the harsh, derisive laugh of a man easily brought to mirth by youth or by age, cutting across the spluttering of frying meat on the stove where the woman stood. Once she heard two of them come down the hall in their heavy shoes, and a moment later the clatter of the dipper in the galvanised pail and the voice that had laughed, cursing. Holding her coat close she peered around the door with the wide, abashed curiosity of a child, and saw Gowan and a second man in khaki breeches. He's getting drunk again, she thought. He's got drunk four times since we left Taylor.

"Is he your brother?" she said.

"Who?" the woman said. "My what?" She turned the meat on the hissing skillet.

"I thought maybe your young brother was here."

"God," the woman said. She turned the meat with a wire fork. "I hope not."

"Where is your brother?" Temple said, peering around the door. "I've got four brothers. Two are lawyers and one's a newspaper man. The other's still in school. At Yale. My father's a judge. Judge Drake of Jackson." She thought of her father sitting on the veranda, in a linen suit, a palm leaf fan in his hand, watching the Negro mow the lawn.

The woman opened the oven and looked in. "Nobody asked you to come out here. I didn't ask you to stay. I told you to go while it was daylight."

"How could I? I asked him. Gowan wouldn't, so I had to ask him."

The woman closed the oven and turned and looked at Temple, her back to the light. "How could you? Do you know how I get my water? I walk after it. A mile. Six times a day. Add that up. Not because I am

somewhere I am afraid to stay.” She went to the table and took up a pack of cigarettes and shook one out.

“May I have one?” Temple said. The woman flipped the pack along the table. She removed the chimney from the lamp and lit hers at the wick. Temple took up the pack and stood listening to Gowan and the other man go back into the house. “There are so many of them,” she said in a wailing tone, watching the cigarette crush slowly in her fingers. “But maybe, with so many of them . . .” The woman had gone back to the stove. She turned the meat. “Gowan kept on getting drunk again.

He got drunk three times today. He was drunk when I got off the train at Taylor and I am on probation and I told him what would happen and I tried to get him to throw the jar away and when we stopped at that little country store to buy a shirt he got drunk again. And so we hadn’t eaten and we stopped at Dumfries and he went into the restaurant but I was too worried to eat and I couldn’t find him and then he came up another street and I felt the bottle in his pocket before he knocked my hand away. He kept on saying I had his lighter and then when he lost it and I told him he had, he swore he never owned one in his life.”

The meat hissed and spluttered in the skillet. “He got drunk three separate times,” Temple said. “Three separate times in one day. Buddy—that’s Hubert, my youngest brother—said that if he ever caught me with a drunk man, he’d beat hell out of me. And now I’m with one that gets drunk three times in one day.” Leaning her hip against the table, her hand crushing the cigarette, she began to laugh. “Dont you think that’s funny?” she said.

Then she quit laughing by holding her breath, and she could hear the faint guttering the lamp made, and the meat in the skillet and the hissing of the kettle on the stove, and the voices, the harsh, abrupt, meaningless masculine sounds from the house. “And you have to cook for all of them every night. All those men eating here, the house full of them at night, in the dark . . .” She dropped the crushed cigarette.

“May I hold the baby? I know how; I’ll hold him good.” She ran to the box, stooping, and lifted the sleeping child. It opened its eyes, whimpering. “Now, now; Temple’s got it.” She rocked it, held high and awkward in her thin arms. “Listen,” she said, looking at the woman’s back, “will you ask him? your husband, I mean. He can get a car and take me somewhere. Will you? Will you ask him?” The child had stopped whimpering. Its lead-colored eyelids showed a thin line of eyeball. “I’m not afraid,” Temple said.

“Things like that dont happen. Do they? They’re just like other people. You’re just like other people. With a little baby. And besides, my father’s a ju-judge. The gu-governor comes to our house to e-eat— What a cute little bu-ba-a-by,” she wailed, lifting the child to her face; “if bad mans hurts Temple, us’ll tell the governor’s soldiers, wont us?”

“Like what people?” the woman said, turning the meat. “Do you think Lee hasn’t anything better to do than chase after every one of you cheap little—” She opened the fire door and threw her cigarette in and slammed the door. In nuzzling at the child Temple had pushed her hat onto the back of her head at a precarious dissolute angle above her clotted curls. “Why did you come here?”

“It was Gowan. I begged him. We had already missed the ball game, but I begged him if he’d just get me to Starkville before the special started back, they wouldn’t know I wasn’t on it, because the ones that saw me get off wouldn’t tell. But he wouldn’t. He said we’d stop here just a minute and get some more whiskey and he was already drunk then. He had gotten drunk again since we left Taylor and I’m on probation and Daddy would just die. But he wouldn’t do it. He got drunk again while I was begging him to take me to a town anywhere and let me out.”

“On probation?” the woman said.

“For slipping out at night. Because only town boys can have cars, and when you had a date with a town boy on Friday or Saturday or Sunday, the boys in school wouldn’t have a date with you, because they cant have cars. So I had to slip out. And a girl that didn’t like me told the

Dean, because I had a date with a boy she liked and he never asked her for another date. So I had to.”

“If you didn’t slip out, you wouldn’t get to go riding,” the woman said. “Is that it? And now when you slipped out once too often, you’re squealing.”

“Gowan’s not a town boy. He’s from Jefferson. He went to Virginia. He kept on saying how they had taught him to drink like a gentleman, and I begged him just to let me out anywhere and lend me enough money for a ticket because I only had two dollars, but he—”

“Oh, I know your sort,” the woman said. “Honest women. Too good to have anything to do with common people. You’ll slip out at night with the kids, but just let a man come along.” She turned the meat. “Take all you can get, and give nothing. ‘I’m a pure girl; I dont do that.’ You’ll slip out with the kids and burn their gasoline and eat their food, but just let a man so much as look at you and you faint away because your father the judge and your four brothers might not like it.

But just let you get into a jam, then who do you come crying to? to us, the ones that are not good enough to lace the judge’s almighty shoes.” Across the child Temple gazed at the woman’s back, her face like a small pale mask beneath the precarious hat.

“My brother said he would kill Frank. He didn’t say he would give me a whipping if he caught me with him; he said he would kill the goddam son of a bitch in his yellow buggy and my father cursed my brother and said he could run his family a while longer and he drove me into the house and locked me in and went down to the bridge to wait for Frank. But I wasn’t a coward. I climbed down the gutter and headed Frank off and told him. I begged him to go away, but he said we’d both go. When we got back in the buggy I knew it had been the last time.

I knew it, and I begged him again to go away, but he said he’d drive me home to get my suitcase and we’d tell father. He wasn’t a coward either. My father was sitting on the porch. He said ‘Get out of that

buggy' and I got out and I begged Frank to go on, but he got out too and we came up the path and father reached around inside the door and got the shotgun. I got in front of Frank and father said 'Do you want it too?' and I tried to stay in front but Frank shoved me behind him and held me and father shot him and said 'Get down there and sup your dirt, you whore.' "

"I have been called that," Temple whispered, holding the sleeping child in her high thin arms, gazing at the woman's back.

"But you good women. Cheap sports. Giving nothing, then when you're caught . . . Do you know what you've got into now?" she looked across her shoulder, the fork in her hand. "Do you think you're meeting kids now? kids that give a damn whether you like it or not? Let me tell you whose house you've come into without being asked or wanted; who you're expecting to drop everything and carry you back where you had no business ever leaving. When he was a soldier in the Philippines he killed another soldier over one of those nigger women and they sent him to Leavenworth. Then the war came and they let him out to go to it. He got two medals, and when it was over they put him back in Leavenworth until the lawyer got a congressman to get him out. Then I could quit jazzing again—"

"Jazzing?" Temple whispered, holding the child, looking herself no more than an elongated and leggy infant in her scant dress and uptilted hat.

"Yes, putty-face!" the woman said. "How do you suppose I paid that lawyer? And that's the sort of man you think will care that much—" with the fork in her hand she came and snapped her fingers softly and viciously in Temple's face "—what happens to you. And you, you little doll-faced slut, that think you cant come into a room where a man is without him . . ." Beneath the faded garment her breast moved deep and full. With her hands on her hips she looked at Temple with cold, blazing eyes. "Man? You've never seen a real man.

You dont know what it is to be wanted by a real man. And thank your stars you haven't and never will, for then you'd find just what that little putty face is worth, and all the rest of it you think you are jealous of when you're just scared of it. And if he is just man enough to call you whore, you'll say Yes Yes and you'll crawl naked in the dirt and the mire for him to call you that. . . . Give me that baby." Temple held the child, gazing at the woman, her mouth moving as if she were saying Yes Yes Yes.

The woman threw the fork onto the table. "Turn loose," she said, lifting the child. It opened its eyes and wailed. The woman drew a chair out and sat down, the child upon her lap. "Will you hand me one of those diapers on the line yonder?" she said. Temple stood in the floor, her lips still moving. "You're scared to go out there, aren't you?" the woman said. She rose.

"No," Temple said; "I'll get—"

"I'll get it." The unlaced brogans scuffed across the kitchen. She returned and drew another chair up to the stove and spread the two remaining cloths and the undergarment on it, and sat again and laid the child across her lap. It wailed. "Hush," she said, "hush, now," her face in the lamplight taking a serene, brooding quality. She changed the child and laid it in the box. Then she took a platter down from a cupboard curtained by a split trowsack and took up the fork and came and looked into Temple's face again.

"Listen. If I get a car for you, will you get out of here?" she said. Staring at her Temple moved her mouth as though she were experimenting with words, tasting them. "Will you go out the back and get into it and go away and never come back here?"

"Yes," Temple whispered, "anywhere. Anything."

Without seeming to move her cold eyes at all the woman looked Temple up and down. Temple could feel all her muscles shrinking like

severed vines in the noon sun. "You poor little gutless fool," the woman said in her cold undertone. "Playing at it."

"I didn't. I didn't."

"You'll have something to tell them now, when you get back. Wont you?" Face to face, their voices were like shadows upon two close blank walls. "Playing at it."

"Anything. Just so I get away. Anywhere."

"It's not Lee I'm afraid of. Do you think he plays the dog after every hot little bitch that comes along? It's you."

"Yes. I'll go anywhere."

"I know your sort. I've seen them. All running, but not too fast. Not so fast you cant tell a real man when you see him. Do you think you've got the only one in the world?"

"Gowan," Temple whispered, "Gowan."

"I have slaved for that man," the woman whispered, her lips scarce moving, in her still, dispassionate voice. It was as though she were reciting a formula for bread. "I worked night shift as a waitress so I could see him Sundays at the prison. I lived two years in a single room, cooking over a gas-jet, because I promised him. I lied to him and made money to get him out of prison, and when I told him how I made it, he beat me. And now you must come here where you're not wanted. Nobody asked you to come here. Nobody cares whether you are afraid or not. Afraid? You haven't the guts to be really afraid, any more than you have to be in love."

"I'll pay you," Temple whispered. "Anything you say. My father will give it to me." The woman watched her, her face motionless, as rigid as when she had been speaking. "I'll send you clothes. I have a new fur coat. I just wore it since Christmas. It's as good as new."

The woman laughed. Her mouth laughed, with no sound, no movement of her face. "Clothes? I had three fur coats once. I gave one of them to a woman in an alley by a saloon. Clothes? God." She turned suddenly. "I'll get a car. You get away from here and dont you ever come back. Do you hear?"

"Yes," Temple whispered. Motionless, pale, like a sleepwalker she watched the woman transfer the meat to the platter and pour the gravy over it. From the oven she took a pan of biscuits and put them on a plate. "Can I help you?" Temple whispered. The woman said nothing. She took up the two plates and went out. Temple went to the table and took a cigarette from the pack and stood staring stupidly at the lamp. One side of the chimney was blackened. Across it a crack ran in a thin silver curve. The lamp was of tin, coated about the neck with dirty grease. She lit hers at the lamp, some way, Temple thought, holding the cigarette in her hand, staring at the uneven flame. The woman returned. She caught up the corner of her skirt and lifted the smutty coffee-pot from the stove.

"Can I take that?" Temple said.

"No. Come on and get your supper." She went out.

Temple stood at the table, the cigarette in her hand. The shadow of the stove fell upon the box where the child lay. Upon the lumpy wad of bedding it could be distinguished only by a series of pale shadows in soft small curves, and she went and stood over the box and looked down at its putty-colored face and bluish eyelids. A thin whisper of shadow cupped its head and lay moist upon its brow; one thin arm, upflung, lay curl-palmed beside its cheek. Temple stooped above the box.

"He's going to die," Temple whispered. Bending, her shadow loomed high upon the wall, her coat shapeless, her hat tilted monstrously above a monstrous escaping of hair. "Poor little baby," she whispered, "poor little baby." The men's voices grew louder. She heard a trampling

of feet in the hall, a rasping of chairs, the voice of the man who had laughed above them, laughing again. She turned, motionless again, watching the door. The woman entered.

“Go and eat your supper,” she said.

“The car,” Temple said. “I could go now, while they’re eating.”

“What car?” the woman said. “Go on and eat. Nobody’s going to hurt you.”

“I’m not hungry. I haven’t eaten today. I’m not hungry at all.”

“Go and eat your supper,” she said.

“I’ll wait and eat when you do.”

“Go on and eat your supper. I’ve got to get done here some time tonight.”

VIII

Temple entered the dining-room from the kitchen, her face fixed in a cringing, placative expression; she was quite blind when she entered, holding her coat about her, her hat thrust upward and back at that dissolute angle. After a moment she saw Tommy. She went straight toward him, as if she had been looking for him all the while. Something intervened: a hard forearm; she attempted to evade it, looking at Tommy.

“Here,” Gowan said across the table, his chair rasping back, “you come around here.”

“Outside, brother,” the one who had stopped her said, whom she recognised then as the one who had laughed so often; “you’re drunk. Come here, kid.” His hard forearm came across her middle. She thrust

against it, grinning rigidly at Tommy. "Move down, Tommy," the man said. "Aint you got no manners, you mat-faced bastard?" Tommy guffawed, scraping his chair along the floor. The man drew her toward him by the wrist. Across the table Gowan stood up, propping himself on the table. She began to resist, grinning at Tommy, picking at the man's fingers.

"Quit that, Van," Goodwin said.

"Right on my lap here," Van said.

"Let her go," Goodwin said.

"Who'll make me?" Van said. "Who's big enough?"

"Let her go," Goodwin said. Then she was free. She began to back slowly away. Behind her the woman, entering with a dish, stepped aside. Still smiling her aching, rigid grimace Temple backed from the room. In the hall she whirled and ran. She ran right off the porch, into the weeds, and sped on. She ran to the road and down it for fifty yards in the darkness, then without a break she whirled and ran back to the house and sprang onto the porch and crouched against the door just as someone came up the hall. It was Tommy.

"Oh, hyer you are," he said. He thrust something awkwardly at her.

"Hyer," he said.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"Little bite of victuals. I bet you aint et since mawnin."

"No. Not then, even," she whispered.

"You eat a little mite and you'll feel better," he said, poking the plate at her. "You set down hyer and eat a little bite wher wont nobody bother you. Durn them fellers."

Temple leaned around the door, past his dim shape, her face wan as a small ghost in the refracted light from the dining-room. "Mrs—Mrs . . ." she whispered.

"She's in the kitchen. Want me to go back there with you?" In the dining-room a chair scraped. Between blinks Tommy saw Temple in the path, her body slender and motionless for a moment as though waiting for some laggard part to catch up. Then she was gone like a shadow around the corner of the house. He stood in the door, the plate of food in his hand. Then he turned his head and looked down the hall just in time to see her flit across the darkness toward the kitchen. "Durn them fellers."

He was standing there when the others returned to the porch.

"He's got a plate of grub," Van said. "He's trying to get his with a plate full of ham."

"Git my whut?" Tommy said.

"Look here," Gowan said.

Van struck the plate from Tommy's hand. He turned to Gowan. "Dont you like it?"

"No," Gowan said, "I dont."

"What are you going to do about it?" Van said.

"Van," Goodwin said.

"Do you think you're big enough to not like it?" Van said.

"I am," Goodwin said.

When Van went back to the kitchen Tommy followed him. He stopped at the door and heard Van in the kitchen.

“Come for a walk, little bit,” Van said.

“Get out of here, Van,” the woman said.

“Come for a little walk,” Van said. “I’m a good guy. Ruby’ll tell you.”

“Get out of here, now,” the woman said. “Do you want me to call Lee?” Van stood against the light, in a khaki shirt and breeches, a cigarette behind his ear against the smooth sweep of his blond hair. Beyond him Temple stood behind the chair in which the woman sat at the table, her mouth open a little, her eyes quite black.

When Tommy went back to the porch with the jug he said to Goodwin: “Why dont them fellers quit pesterin that gal?”

“Who’s pestering her?”

“Van is. She’s skeered. Whyn’t they leave her be?”

“It’s none of your business. You keep out of it. You hear?”

“Them fellers ought to quit pesterin her,” Tommy said. He squatted against the wall. They were drinking, passing the jug back and forth, talking. With the top of his mind he listened to them, to Van’s gross and stupid tales of city life with rapt interest, guffawing now and then, drinking in his turn. Van and Gowan were doing the talking, and Tommy listened to them. “Them two’s fixin to have hit out with one another,” he whispered to Goodwin in a chair beside him. “Hyear em?” They were talking quite loud; Goodwin moved swiftly and lightly from his chair, his feet striking the floor with light thuds; Tommy saw Van standing and Gowan holding himself erect by the back of his chair.

“I never meant—” Van said.

“Dont say it, then,” Goodwin said.

Gowan said something. That durn feller, Tommy thought. Cant even talk no more.

“Shut up, you,” Goodwin said.

“Think talk bout my—” Gowan said. He moved, swayed against the chair. It fell over. Gowan blundered into the wall.

“By God, I’ll—” Van said.

“—ginia gentleman; I dont give a—” Gowan said. Goodwin flung him aside with a backhanded blow of his arm, and grasped Van. Gowan fell against the wall.

“When I say sit down, I mean it,” Goodwin said.

After that they were quiet for a while. Goodwin returned to his chair. They began to talk again, passing the jug, and Tommy listened. But soon he began to think about Temple again. He would feel his feet scouring on the floor and his whole body writhing in an acute discomfort. “They ought to let that gal alone,” he whispered to Goodwin. “They ought to quit pesterin her.”

“It’s none of your business,” Goodwin said. “Let every damned one of them . . .”

“They ought to quit pesterin her.”

Popeye came out the door. He lit a cigarette. Tommy watched his face flare out between his hands, his cheeks sucking; he followed with his eyes the small comet of the match into the weeds. Him too, he said. Two of em; his body writhing slowly. Pore little crittur. I be dawg ef I aint a mind to go down to the barn and stay there, I be dawg ef I aint. He rose, his feet making no sound on the porch. He stepped down into the path and went around the house.

There was a light in the window there. Don't nobody never use in there, he said, stopping, then he said, That's where she'll be stayin, and he went to the window and looked in. The sash was down. Across a missing pane a sheet of rusted tin was nailed.

Temple was sitting on the bed, her legs tucked under her, erect, her hands lying in her lap, her hat tilted on the back of her head. She looked quite small, her very attitude an outrage to muscle and tissue of more than seventeen and more compatible with eight or ten, her elbows close to her sides, her face turned toward the door against which a chair was wedged. There was nothing in the room save the bed, with its faded patchwork quilt, and the chair. The walls had been plastered once, but the plaster had cracked and fallen in places, exposing the lathing and molded shreds of cloth. On the wall hung a raincoat and a khaki-covered canteen.

Temple's head began to move. It turned slowly, as if she were following the passage of someone beyond the wall. It turned on to an excruciating degree, though no other muscle moved, like one of those papier-mâché Easter toys filled with candy, and became motionless in that reverted position. Then it turned back, slowly, as though pacing invisible feet beyond the wall, back to the chair against the door and became motionless there for a moment.

Then she faced forward and Tommy watched her take a tiny watch from the top of her stocking and look at it. With the watch in her hand she lifted her head and looked directly at it, her eyes calm and empty as two holes. After a while she looked down at the watch again and returned it to her stocking.

She rose from the bed and removed her coat and stood motionless, arrowlike in her scant dress, her head bent, her hands clasped before her. She sat on the bed again. She sat with her legs close together, her head bent. She raised her head and looked about the room. Tommy could hear the voices from the dark porch. They rose again, then sank to the steady murmur.

Temple sprang to her feet. She unfastened her dress, her arms arched thin and high, her shadow anticking her movements. In a single motion she was out of it, crouching a little, match-thin in her scant undergarments. Her head emerged facing the chair against the door.

She hurled the dress away, her hand reaching for the coat. She scrabbled it up and swept it about her, pawing at the sleeves. Then, the coat clutched to her breast, she whirled and looked straight into Tommy's eyes and whirled and ran and flung herself upon the chair. "Durn them fellers," Tommy whispered, "durn them fellers." He could hear them on the front porch and his body began again to writhe slowly in an acute unhappiness. "Durn them fellers."

When he looked into the room again Temple was moving toward him, holding the coat about her. She took the raincoat from the nail and put it on over her own coat and fastened it. She lifted the canteen down and returned to the bed. She laid the canteen on the bed and picked her dress up from the floor and brushed it with her hand and folded it carefully and laid it on the bed. Then she turned back the quilt, exposing the mattress. There was no linen, no pillow, and when she touched the mattress it gave forth a faint dry whisper of shucks.

She removed her slippers and set them on the bed and got in beneath the quilt. Tommy could hear the mattress crackle. She didn't lie down at once. She sat upright, quite still, the hat tilted rakishly upon the back of her head. Then she moved the canteen, the dress and the slippers beside her head and drew the raincoat about her legs and lay down, drawing the quilt up, then she sat up and removed the hat and shook her hair out and laid the hat with the other garments and prepared to lie down again.

Again she paused. She opened the raincoat and produced a compact from somewhere and, watching her motions in the tiny mirror, she spread and fluffed her hair with her fingers and powdered her face and replaced the compact and looked at the watch again and fastened the raincoat. She moved the garments one by one under the quilt and lay down and drew the quilt to her chin. The voices had got quiet for a

moment and in the silence Tommy could hear a faint, steady chatter of the shucks inside the mattress where Temple lay, her hands crossed on her breast and her legs straight and close and decorous, like an effigy on an ancient tomb.

The voices were still; he had completely forgot them until he heard Goodwin say "Stop it. Stop that!" A chair crashed over; he heard Goodwin's light thudding feet; the chair clattered along the porch as though it had been kicked aside, and crouching, his elbows out a little in squat, bear-like alertness, Tommy heard dry, light sounds like billiard balls. "Tommy," Goodwin said.

When necessary he could move with that thick, lightning-like celerity of badgers or coons. He was around the house and on the porch in time to see Gowan slam into the wall and slump along it and plunge full length off the porch into the weeds, and Popeye in the door, his head thrust forward. "Grab him there!" Goodwin said. Tommy sprang upon Popeye in a sidling rush.

"I got—hah!" he said as Popeye slashed savagely at his face; "you would, would you? Hole up hyer."

Popeye ceased. "Jesus Christ. You let them sit around here all night, swilling that goddamn stuff; I told you. Jesus Christ."

Goodwin and Van were a single shadow, locked and hushed and furious. "Let go!" Van shouted. "I'll kill . . ." Tommy sprang to them. They jammed Van against the wall and held him motionless.

"Got him?" Goodwin said.

"Yeuh. I got him. Hole up hyer. You done whapped him."

"By God, I'll—"

"Now, now; whut you want to kill him fer? You caint eat him, kin you? You want Mr Popeye to start guttin us all with that ere artermatic?"

Then it was over, gone like a furious gust of black wind, leaving a peaceful vacuum in which they moved quietly about, lifting Gowan out of the weeds with low-spoken, amicable directions to one another. They carried him into the hall, where the woman stood, and to the door of the room where Temple was.

“She’s locked it,” Van said. He struck the door, high. “Open the door,” he shouted. “We’re bringing you a customer.”

“Hush,” Goodwin said. “There’s no lock on it. Push it.”

“Sure,” Van said; “I’ll push it.” He kicked it. The chair buckled and sprang into the room. Van banged the door open and they entered, carrying Gowan’s legs. Van kicked the chair across the room. Then he saw Temple standing in the corner behind the bed. His hair was broken about his face, long as a girl’s. He flung it back with a toss of his head. His chin was bloody and he deliberately spat blood onto the floor.

“Go on,” Goodwin said, carrying Gowan’s shoulders, “put him on the bed.” They swung Gowan onto the bed. His bloody head lolled over the edge. Van jerked him over and slammed him into the mattress. He groaned, lifting his hand. Van struck him across the face with his palm.

“Lie still, you—”

“Let be,” Goodwin said. He caught Van’s hand. For an instant they glared at one another.

“I said, Let be,” Goodwin said. “Get out of here.”

“Got proteck . . .” Gowan muttered “. . . girl. ’Ginia gem . . . gemman got proteck . . .”

“Get out of here, now,” Goodwin said.

The woman stood in the door beside Tommy, her back against the door frame. Beneath a cheap coat her nightdress dropped to her feet.

Van lifted Temple's dress from the bed. "Van," Goodwin said. "I said get out."

"I heard you," Van said. He shook the dress out. Then he looked at Temple in the corner, her arms crossed, her hands clutching her shoulders. Goodwin moved toward Van. He dropped the dress and went around the bed. Popeye came in the door, a cigarette in his fingers. Beside the woman Tommy drew his breath hissing through his ragged teeth.

He saw Van take hold of the raincoat upon Temple's breast and rip it open. Then Goodwin sprang between them; he saw Van duck, whirling, and Temple fumbling at the torn raincoat. Van and Goodwin were now in the middle of the floor, swinging at one another, then he was watching Popeye walking toward Temple. With the corner of his eye he saw Van lying on the floor and Goodwin standing over him, stooped a little, watching Popeye's back.

"Popeye," Goodwin said. Popeye went on, the cigarette trailing back over his shoulder, his head turned a little as though he were not looking where he was going, the cigarette slanted as though his mouth were somewhere under the turn of his jaw. "Dont touch her," Goodwin said.

Popeye stopped before Temple, his face turned a little aside. His right hand lay in his coat pocket. Beneath the raincoat on Temple's breast Tommy could see the movement of the other hand, communicating a shadow of movement to the coat.

"Take your hand away," Goodwin said. "Move it."

Popeye moved his hand. He turned, his hands in his coat pockets, looking at Goodwin. He crossed the room, watching Goodwin. Then he turned his back on him and went out the door.

“Here, Tommy,” Goodwin said quietly, “grab hold of this.” They lifted Van and carried him out. The woman stepped aside. She leaned against the wall, holding her coat together. Across the room Temple stood crouched into the corner, fumbling at the torn raincoat. Gowan began to snore.

Goodwin returned. “You’d better go back to bed,” he said. The woman didn’t move. He put his hand on her shoulder. “Ruby.”

“While you finish the trick Van started and you wouldn’t let him finish? You poor fool. You poor fool.”

“Come on, now,” he said, his hand on her shoulder. “Go back to bed.”

“But dont come back. Dont bother to come back. I wont be there. You owe me nothing. Dont think you do.”

Goodwin took her wrists and drew them steadily apart. Slowly and steadily he carried her hands around behind her and held them in one of his. With the other hand he opened the coat. The nightdress was of faded pink crepe, lace-trimmed, laundered and laundered until, like the garment on the wire, the lace was a fibrous mass.

“Hah,” he said. “Dressed for company.”

“Whose fault is it if this is the only one I have? Whose fault is it? Not mine. I’ve given them away to nigger maids after one night. But do you think any nigger would take this and not laugh in my face?”

He let the coat fall to. He released her hands and she drew the coat together. With his hand on her shoulder he began to push her toward the door. “Go on,” he said. Her shoulder gave. It alone moved, her body turning on her hips, her face reverted, watching him. “Go on,” he said. But her torso alone turned, her hips and head still touching the wall. He turned and crossed the room and went swiftly around the bed and caught Temple by the front of the raincoat with one hand. He began to shake her.

Holding her up by the gathered wad of coat he shook her, her small body clattering soundlessly inside the loose garment, her shoulders and thighs thumping against the wall. "You little fool!" he said. "You little fool!" Her eyes were quite wide, almost black, the lamplight on her face and two tiny reflections of his face in her pupils like peas in two inkwells.

He released her. She began to sink to the floor, the raincoat rustling about her. He caught her up and began to shake her again, looking over his shoulder at the woman. "Get the lamp," he said. The woman did not move. Her head was bent a little; she appeared to muse upon them. Goodwin swept his other arm under Temple's knees. She felt herself swooping, then she was lying on the bed beside Gowan, on her back, jouncing to the dying chatter of the shucks.

She watched him cross the room and lift the lamp from the mantel. The woman had turned her head, following him also, her face sharpening out of the approaching lamp in profile. "Go on," he said. She turned, her face turning into shadow, the lamp now on her back and on his hand on her shoulder. His shadow blotted the room completely; his arm in silhouette backreaching, drew to the door. Gowan snored, each respiration choking to a huddle fall, as though he would never breathe again.

Tommy was outside the door, in the hall.

"They gone down to the truck yet?" Goodwin said.

"Not yit," Tommy said.

"Better go and see about it," Goodwin said. They went on. Tommy watched them enter another door. Then he went to the kitchen, silent on his bare feet, his neck craned a little with listening. In the kitchen Popeye sat, straddling a chair, smoking. Van stood at the table, before a fragment of mirror, combing his hair with a pocket comb. Upon the

table lay a damp, blood-stained cloth and a burning cigarette. Tommy squatted outside the door, in the darkness.

He was there when Goodwin came out with the raincoat. Goodwin entered the kitchen without seeing him. "Where's Tommy?" he said. Tommy heard Popeye say something, then Goodwin emerged with Van following him, the raincoat on his arm now. "Come on, now," Goodwin said. "Let's get that stuff out of here."

Tommy's pale eyes began to glow faintly, like those of a cat. The woman could see them in the darkness when he crept into the room after Popeye, and while Popeye stood over the bed where Temple lay. They glowed suddenly out of the darkness at her, then they went away and she could hear him breathing beside her; again they glowed up at her with a quality furious and questioning and sad and went away again and he crept behind Popeye from the room.

He saw Popeye return to the kitchen, but he did not follow at once. He stopped at the hall door and squatted there. His body began to writhe again in shocked indecision, his bare feet whispering on the floor with a faint, rocking movement as he swayed from side to side, his hands wringing slowly against his flanks. And Lee too, he said, And Lee too. Durn them fellers. Durn them fellers. Twice he stole along the porch until he could see the shadow of Popeye's hat on the kitchen floor, then returned to the hall and the door beyond which Temple lay and Gowan snored. The third time he smelled Popeye's cigarette. Ef he'll jest keep that up, he said. And Lee too, he said, rocking from side to side in a dull, excruciating agony, And Lee too.

When Goodwin came up the slope and onto the back porch Tommy was squatting just outside the door again. "What in hell . . ." Goodwin said. "Why didn't you come on? I've been looking for you for ten minutes." He glared at Tommy, then he looked into the kitchen. "You ready?" he said. Popeye came to the door. Goodwin looked at Tommy again. "What have you been doing?"

Popeye looked at Tommy. Tommy stood now, rubbing his instep with the other foot, looking at Popeye.

“What’re you doing here?” Popeye said.

“Aint doin nothin,” Tommy said.

“Are you following me around?”

“I aint trailin nobody,” Tommy said sullenly.

“Well, dont, then,” Popeye said.

“Come on,” Goodwin said. “Van’s waiting.” They went on. Tommy followed them. Once he looked back at the house, then he shambled on behind them. From time to time he would feel that acute surge go over him, like his blood was too hot all of a sudden, dying away into that warm unhappy feeling that fiddle music gave him. Durn them fellers, he whispered, Durn them fellers.

IX

The room was dark. The woman stood inside the door, against the wall, in the cheap coat, the lace-trimmed crepe nightgown, just inside the lockless door. She could hear Gowan snoring in the bed, and the other men moving about, on the porch and in the hall and in the kitchen, talking, their voices indistinguishable through the door. After a while they got quiet. Then she could hear nothing at all save Gowan as he choked and snored and moaned through his battered nose and face.

She heard the door open. The man came in, without trying to be silent. He entered, passing within a foot of her. She knew it was Goodwin before he spoke. He went to the bed. “I want the raincoat,” he said. “Sit up and take it off.” The woman could hear the shucks in the mattress as Temple sat up and Goodwin took the raincoat off of her. He returned across the floor and went out.

She stood just inside the door. She could tell all of them by the way they breathed. Then, without having heard, felt, the door open, she began to smell something: the brilliantine which Popeye used on his hair. She did not see Popeye at all when he entered and passed her; she did not know he had entered yet; she was waiting for him; until Tommy entered, following Popeye.

Tommy crept into the room, also soundless; she would have been no more aware of his entrance than of Popeye's, if it hadn't been for his eyes. They glowed, breast-high, with a profound interrogation, then they disappeared and the woman could then feel him, squatting beside her; she knew that he too was looking toward the bed over which Popeye stood in the darkness, upon which Temple and Gowan lay, with Gowan snoring and choking and snoring. The woman stood just inside the door.

She could hear no sound from the shucks, so she remained motionless beside the door, with Tommy squatting beside her, his face toward the invisible bed. Then she smelled the brilliantine again. Or rather, she felt Tommy move from beside her, without a sound, as though the stealthy evacuation of his position blew soft and cold upon her in the black silence; without seeing or hearing him, she knew that he had crept again from the room, following Popeye. She heard them go down the hall; the last sound died out of the house.

She went to the bed. Temple did not move until the woman touched her. Then she began to struggle. The woman found Temple's mouth and put her hand over it, though Temple had not attempted to scream. She lay on the shuck mattress, turning and thrashing her body from side to side, rolling her head, holding the coat together across her breast but making no sound.

"You fool!" the woman said in a thin, fierce whisper. "It's me. It's just me."

Temple ceased to roll her head, but she still thrashed from side to side beneath the woman's hand. "I'll tell my father!" she said. "I'll tell my father!"

The woman held her. "Get up," she said. Temple ceased to struggle. She lay still, rigid. The woman could hear her wild breathing. "Will you get up and walk quiet?" the woman said.

"Yes!" Temple said. "Will you get me out of here? Will you? Will you?"

"Yes," the woman said. "Get up." Temple got up, the shucks whispering. In the further darkness Gowan snored, savage and profound. At first Temple couldn't stand alone. The woman held her up. "Stop it," the woman said. "You've got to stop it. You've got to be quiet."

"I want my clothes," Temple whispered. "I haven't got anything on but . . ."

"Do you want your clothes," the woman said, "or do you want to get out of here?"

"Yes," Temple said. "Anything. If you'll just get me out of here."

On their bare feet they moved like ghosts. They left the house and crossed the porch and went on toward the barn. When they were about fifty yards from the house the woman stopped and turned and jerked Temple up to her, and gripping her by the shoulders, their faces close together, she cursed Temple in a whisper, a sound no louder than a sigh and filled with fury. Then she flung her away and they went on. They entered the hallway. It was pitch dark.

Temple heard the woman fumbling at the wall. A door creaked open; the woman took her arm and guided her up a single step into a floored room where she could feel walls and smell a faint, dusty odor of grain, and closed the door behind them. As she did so something rushed invisibly nearby in a scurrying scabble, a dying whisper of fairy feet.

Temple whirled, treading on something that rolled under her foot, and sprang toward the woman.

“It’s just a rat,” the woman said, but Temple hurled herself upon the other, flinging her arms about her, trying to snatch both feet from the floor.

“A rat?” she wailed, “a rat? Open the door! Quick!”

“Stop it! Stop it!” the woman hissed. She held Temple until she ceased. Then they knelt side by side against the wall. After a while the woman whispered: “There’s some cottonseed-hulls over there. You can lie down.” Temple didn’t answer. She crouched against the woman, shaking slowly, and they squatted there in the black darkness, against the wall.

X

While the woman was cooking breakfast, the child still—or already—
asleep in the box behind the stove, she heard a blundering sound
approaching across the porch and stop at the door. When she looked
around she saw the wild and battered and bloody apparition which she
recognised as Gowan. His face, beneath a two days’ stubble, was
marked, his lip was cut. One eye was closed and the front of his shirt
and coat were blood-stained to the waist. Through his swollen and
stiffened lips he was trying to say something. At first the woman could
not understand a word. “Go and bathe your face,” she said. “Wait.
Come in here and sit down. I’ll get the basin.”

He looked at her, trying to talk. “Oh,” the woman said. “She’s all right.
She’s down there in the crib, asleep.” She had to repeat it three or four
times, patiently. “In the crib. Asleep. I stayed with her until daylight. Go
wash your face, now.”

Gowan got a little calmer then. He began to talk about getting a car.

“The nearest one is at Tull’s, two miles away,” the woman said. “Wash your face and eat some breakfast.”

Gowan entered the kitchen, talking about getting the car. “I’ll get it and take her on back to school. One of the other girls will slip her in. It’ll be all right then. Don’t you think it’ll be all right then?” He came to the table and took a cigarette from the pack and tried to light it with his shaking hands. He had trouble putting it into his mouth, and he could not light it at all until the woman came and held the match.

But he took but one draw, then he stood, holding the cigarette in his hand, looking at it with his one good eye in a kind of dull amazement. He threw the cigarette away and turned toward the door, staggering and catching himself. “Go get car,” he said.

“Get something to eat first,” the woman said. “Maybe a cup of coffee will help you.”

“Go get car,” Gowan said. When he crossed the porch he paused long enough to splash some water upon his face, without helping his appearance much.

When he left the house he was still groggy and he thought that he was still drunk. He could remember only vaguely what had happened. He had got Van and the wreck confused and he did not know that he had been knocked out twice. He only remembered that he had passed out some time early in the night, and he thought that he was still drunk.

But when he reached the wrecked car and saw the path and followed it to the spring and drank of the cold water, he found that it was a drink he wanted, and he knelt there, bathing his face in the cold water and trying to examine his reflection in the broken surface, whispering Jesus Christ to himself in a kind of despair. He thought about returning to the house for a drink, then he thought of having to face Temple, the men; of Temple there among them.

When he reached the highroad the sun was well up, warm. I'll get cleaned up some, he said. And come back with another car to get her. I'll decide what to say to her on the way to town; thinking of Temple returning among people who knew him, who might know him. I passed out twice, he said. I passed out twice. Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ he whispered, his body writhing inside his disreputable and bloody clothes in an agony of rage and shame.

His head began to clear with air and motion, but as he began to feel better physically the blackness of the future increased. Town, the world, began to appear as a black cul-de-sac; a place in which he must walk forever more, his whole body cringing and flinching from whispering eyes when he had passed, and when in midmorning he reached the house he sought, the prospect of facing Temple again was more than he could bear. So he engaged the car and directed the man and paid him and went on. A little later a car going in the opposite direction stopped and picked him up.

XI

Temple waked lying in a tight ball, with narrow bars of sunlight falling across her face like the tines of a golden fork, and while the stiffened blood trickled and tingled through her cramped muscles she lay gazing quietly up at the ceiling. Like the walls, it was of rough planks crudely laid, each plank separated from the next by a thin line of blackness; in the corner a square opening above a ladder gave into a gloomy loft shot with thin pencils of sun also.

From nails in the walls broken bits of desiccated harness hung, and she lay plucking tentatively at the substance in which she lay. She gathered a handful of it and lifted her head, and saw within her fallen coat naked flesh between brassiere and knickers and knickers and stockings. Then she remembered the rat and scrambled up and sprang to the door, clawing at it, still clutching the fist full of cottonseed-hulls, her face puffed with the hard slumber of seventeen.

She had expected the door to be locked and for a time she could not pull it open, her numb hands scoring at the undressed planks until she could hear her fingernails. It swung back and she sprang out. At once she sprang back into the crib and banged the door to. The blind man was coming down the slope at a scuffling trot, tapping ahead with the stick, the other hand at his waist, clutching a wad of his trousers. He passed the crib with his braces dangling about his hips, his gymnasium shoes scuffing in the dry chaff of the hallway, and passed from view, the stick rattling lightly along the rank of empty stalls.

Temple crouched against the door, clutching her coat about her. She could hear him back there in one of the stalls. She opened the door and peered out, at the house in the bright May sunshine, the sabbath peace, and she thought about the girls and men leaving the dormitories in their new spring clothes, strolling along the shaded streets toward the cool, unhurried sound of bells. She lifted her foot and examined the soiled sole of her stocking, brushing at it with her palm, then at the other one.

The blind man's stick clattered again. She jerked her head back and closed the door to a crack and watched him pass, slower now, hunching his braces onto his shoulders. He mounted the slope and entered the house. Then she opened the door and stepped gingerly down.

She walked swiftly to the house, her stockinged feet flinching and cringing from the rough earth, watching the house. She mounted to the porch and entered the kitchen and stopped, listening into the silence. The stove was cold. Upon it the blackened coffee-pot sat, and a soiled skillet; upon the table soiled dishes were piled at random. I haven't eaten since . . . since . . . Yesterday was one day, she thought, but I didn't eat then.

I haven't eaten since . . . and that night was the dance, and I didn't eat any supper. I haven't eaten since dinner Friday, she thought. And now it's Sunday, thinking about the bells in cool steeples against the blue, and pigeons crooning about the belfries like echoes of the organ's bass.

She returned to the door and peered out. Then she emerged, clutching the coat about her.

She entered the house and sped up the hall. The sun lay now on the front porch and she ran with a craning motion of her head, watching the patch of sun framed in the door. It was empty. She reached the door to the right of the entrance and opened it and sprang into the room and shut the door and leaned her back against it. The bed was empty. A faded patchwork quilt was wadded across it. A khaki-covered canteen and one slipper lay on the bed. On the floor her dress and hat lay.

She picked up the dress and hat and tried to brush them with her hand and with the corner of her coat. Then she sought the other slipper, moving the quilt, stooping to look under the bed. At last she found it in the fireplace, in a litter of wood ashes between an iron fire-dog and an overturned stack of bricks, lying on its side, half full of ashes, as though it had been flung or kicked there. She emptied it and wiped it on her coat and laid it on the bed and took the canteen and hung it on a nail in the wall. It bore the letters U S and a blurred number in black stencil. Then she removed the coat and dressed.

Long-legged, thin-armed, with high small buttocks—a small childish figure no longer quite a child, not yet quite a woman—she moved swiftly, smoothing her stockings and writhing into her scant, narrow dress. Now I can stand anything, she thought quietly, with a kind of dull, spent astonishment; I can stand just anything. From the top of one stocking she removed a watch on a broken black ribbon. Nine o'clock. With her fingers she combed her matted curls, combing out three or four cottonseed-hulls. She took up the coat and hat and listened again at the door.

She returned to the back porch. In the basin was a residue of dirty water. She rinsed it and filled it and bathed her face. A soiled towel hung from a nail. She used it gingerly, then she took a compact from her coat and was using it when she found the woman watching her in the kitchen door.

“Good morning,” Temple said. The woman held the child on her hip. It was asleep. “Hello, baby,” Temple said, stooping; “you wan s’leep all day? Look at Temple.” They entered the kitchen. The woman poured coffee into a cup.

“It’s cold, I expect,” she said. “Unless you want to make up the fire.” From the oven she took a pan of bread.

“No,” Temple said, sipping the lukewarm coffee, feeling her insides move in small, tickling clots, like loose shot. “I’m not hungry. I haven’t eaten in two days, but I’m not hungry. Isn’t that funny? I haven’t eaten in . . .” She looked at the woman’s back with a fixed placative grimace. “You haven’t got a bathroom, have you?”

“What?” the woman said. She looked at Temple across her shoulder while Temple stared at her with that grimace of cringing and placative assurance. From a shelf the woman took a mail-order catalogue and tore out a few leaves and handed them to Temple. “You’ll have to go to the barn, like we do.”

“Will I?” Temple said, holding the paper. “The barn.”

“They’re all gone,” the woman said. “They wont be back this morning.”

“Yes,” Temple said. “The barn.”

“Yes; the barn,” the woman said. “Unless you’re too pure to have to.”

“Yes,” Temple said. She looked out the door, across the weed-choked clearing. Between the sombre spacing of the cedars the orchard lay bright in the sunlight. She donned the coat and hat and went toward the barn, the torn leaves in her hand, splotched over with small cuts of clothes-pins and patent wringers and washing-powder, and entered the hallway. She stopped, folding and folding the sheets, then she went on, with swift, cringing glances at the empty stalls. She walked right through the barn.

It was open at the back, upon a mass of jimson weed in savage white-and-lavender bloom. She walked on into the sunlight again, into the weeds. Then she began to run, snatching her feet up almost before they touched the earth, the weeds slashing at her with huge, moist, malodorous blossoms. She stooped and twisted through a fence of sagging rusty wire and ran downhill among trees.

At the bottom of the hill a narrow scar of sand divided the two slopes of a small valley, winding in a series of dazzling splotches where the sun found it. Temple stood in the sand, listening to the birds among the sunshot leaves, listening, looking about. She followed the dry runlet to where a jutting shoulder formed a nook matted with briars. Among the new green last year's dead leaves from the branches overhead clung, not yet fallen to earth. She stood here for a while, folding and folding the sheets in her fingers, in a kind of despair. When she rose she saw, upon the glittering mass of leaves along the crest of the ditch, the squatting outline of a man.

For an instant she stood and watched herself run out of her body, out of one slipper. She watched her legs twinkle against the sand, through the flecks of sunlight, for several yards, then whirl and run back and snatch up the slipper and whirl and run again.

When she caught a glimpse of the house she was opposite the front porch. The blind man sat in a chair, his face lifted into the sun. At the edge of the woods she stopped and put on the slipper. She crossed the ruined lawn and sprang onto the porch and ran down the hall. When she reached the back porch she saw a man in the door of the barn, looking toward the house. She crossed the porch in two strides and entered the kitchen, where the woman sat at the table, smoking, the child on her lap.

"He was watching me!" Temple said. "He was watching me all the time!" She leaned beside the door, peering out, then she came to the woman, her face small and pale, her eyes like holes burned with a cigar, and laid her hand on the cold stove.

“Who was?” the woman said.

“Yes,” Temple said. “He was there in the bushes, watching me all the time.” She looked toward the door, then back at the woman, and saw her hand lying on the stove. She snatched it up with a wailing shriek, clapping it against her mouth, and turned and ran toward the door. The woman caught her arm, still carrying the child on the other, and Temple sprang back into the kitchen. Goodwin was coming toward the house. He looked once at them and went on into the hall.

Temple began to struggle. “Let go,” she whispered, “let go! Let go!” She surged and plunged, grinding the woman’s hand against the door jamb until she was free. She sprang from the porch and ran toward the barn and into the hallway and climbed the ladder and scrambled through the trap and to her feet again, running toward the pile of rotting hay.

Then suddenly she ran upside down in a rushing interval; she could see her legs still running in space, and she struck lightly and solidly on her back and lay still, staring up at an oblong yawn that closed with a clattering vibration of loose planks. Faint dust sifted down across the bars of sunlight.

Her hand moved in the substance in which she lay, then she remembered the rat a second time. Her whole body surged in an involuted spurning movement that brought her to her feet in the loose hulls, so that she flung her hands out and caught herself upright, a hand on either angle of the corner, her face not twelve inches from the cross beam on which the rat crouched. For an instant they stared eye to eye, then its eyes glowed suddenly like two tiny electric bulbs and it leaped at her head just as she sprang backward, treading again on something that rolled under her foot.

She fell toward the opposite corner, on her face in the hulls and a few scattered corn-cobs gnawed bone-clean. Something thudded against the wall and struck her hand in ricochet. The rat was in that corner now, on the floor. Again their faces were not twelve inches apart, the

rat's eyes glowing and fading as though worked by lungs. Then it stood erect, its back to the corner, its forepaws curled against its chest, and began to squeak at her in tiny plaintive gasps. She backed away on hands and knees, watching it. Then she got to her feet and sprang at the door, hammering at it, watching the rat over her shoulder, her body arched against the door, rasping at the planks with her bare hands.

XII

The woman stood in the kitchen door, holding the child, until Goodwin emerged from the house. The lobes of his nostrils were quite white against his brown face, and she said: "God, are you drunk too?" He came along the porch. "She's not here," the woman said. "You cant find her." He brushed past her, trailing a reek of whiskey. She turned, watching him. He looked swiftly about the kitchen, then he turned and looked at her standing in the door, blocking it. "You wont find her," she said. "She's gone." He came toward her, lifting his hand. "Dont put your hand on me," she said. He gripped her arm, slowly. His eyes were a little bloodshot. The lobes of his nostrils looked like wax.

"Take your hand off me," she said. "Take it off." Slowly he drew her out of the door. She began to curse him. "Do you think you can? Do you think I'll let you? Or any other little slut?" Motionless, facing one another like the first position of a dance, they stood in a mounting terrific muscular hiatus.

With scarce any movement at all he flung her aside in a complete revolution that fetched her up against the table, her arm flung back for balance, her body bent and her hand fumbling behind her among the soiled dishes, watching him across the inert body of the child. He walked toward her. "Stand back," she said, lifting her hand slightly, bringing the butcher knife into view. "Stand back." He came steadily toward her, then she struck at him with the knife.

He caught her wrist. She began to struggle. He plucked the child from her and laid it on the table and caught her other hand as it flicked at his face, and holding both wrists in one hand, he slapped her. It made a

dry, flat sound. He slapped her again, first on one cheek, then the other, rocking her head from side to side. "That's what I do to them," he said, slapping her. "See?" He released her. She stumbled backward against the table and caught up the child and half crouched between the table and the wall, watching him as he turned and left the room.

She knelt in the corner, holding the child. It had not stirred. She laid her palm first on one cheek, then on the other. She rose and laid the child in the box and took a sunbonnet from a nail and put it on. From another nail she took a coat trimmed with what had once been white fur, and took up the child and left the room.

Tommy was standing in the barn, beside the crib, looking toward the house. The old man sat on the front porch, in the sun. She went down the steps and followed the path to the road and went on without looking back. When she came to the tree and the wrecked car she turned from the road, into a path. After a hundred yards or so she reached the spring and sat down beside it, the child on her lap and the hem of her skirt turned back over its sleeping face.

Popeye came out of the bushes, walking gingerly in his muddy shoes, and stood looking down at her across the spring. His hand flicked to his coat and he fretted and twisted a cigarette and put it into his mouth and snapped a match with his thumb. "Jesus Christ," he said, "I told him about letting them sit around all night, swilling that goddamn stuff. There ought to be a law." He looked away in the direction in which the house lay. Then he looked at the woman, at the top of her sunbonnet.

"Goofy house," he said. "That's what it is. It's not four days ago I find a bastard squatting here, asking me if I read books. Like he would jump me with a book or something. Take me for a ride with the telephone directory." Again he looked off toward the house, jerking his neck forth as if his collar were too tight. He looked down at the top of the sunbonnet. "I'm going to town, see?" he said. "I'm clearing out. I've got enough of this." She did not look up. She adjusted the hem of the skirt above the child's face. Popeye went on, with light, finicking sounds in

the underbrush. Then they ceased. Somewhere in the swamp a bird sang.

Before he reached the house Popeye left the road and followed a wooded slope. When he emerged he saw Goodwin standing behind a tree in the orchard, looking toward the barn. Popeye stopped at the edge of the wood and looked at Goodwin's back. He put another cigarette into his mouth and thrust his fingers into his vest. He went on across the orchard, walking gingerly. Goodwin heard him and looked over his shoulder. Popeye took a match from his vest, flicked it into flame and lit the cigarette. Goodwin looked toward the barn again and Popeye stood at his shoulder, looking toward the barn.

"Who's down there?" he said. Goodwin said nothing. Popeye jettied smoke from his nostrils. "I'm clearing out," he said. Goodwin said nothing, watching the barn. "I said, I'm getting out of here," Popeye said. Without turning his head Goodwin cursed him. Popeye smoked quietly, the cigarette wreathing across his still, soft, black gaze. Then he turned and went toward the house. The old man sat in the sun. Popeye did not enter the house. Instead he went on across the lawn and into the cedars until he was hidden from the house. Then he turned and crossed the garden and the weed-choked lot and entered the barn from the rear.

Tommy squatted on his heels beside the crib door, looking toward the house. Popeye looked at him a while, smoking. Then he snapped the cigarette away and entered a stall quietly. Above the manger was a wooden rack for hay, just under an opening in the loft floor. Popeye climbed into the rack and drew himself silently into the loft, his tight coat strained into thin ridges across his narrow shoulders and back.

XIII

Tommy was standing in the hallway of the barn when Temple at last got the door of the crib open. When she recognised him she was half spun, leaping back, then she whirled and ran toward him and sprang

down, clutching his arm. Then she saw Goodwin standing in the back door of the house and she whirled and leaped back into the crib and leaned her head around the door, her voice making a thin eeeeeeeeeeeeeee sound like bubbles in a bottle. She leaned there, scrabbling her hands on the door, trying to pull it to, hearing Tommy's voice.

“. . . Lee says hit wont hurt you none. All you got to do is lay down . . .” It was a dry sort of sound, not in her consciousness at all, nor his pale eyes beneath the shaggy thatch. She leaned in the door, wailing, trying to shut it. Then she felt his hand clumsily on her thigh. “. . . says hit wont hurt you none. All you got to do is . . .”

She looked at him, his diffident, hard hand on her hip. “Yes,” she said, “all right. Dont you let him in here.”

“You mean fer me not to let none of them in hyer?”

“All right. I'm not scared of rats. You stay there and dont let him in.”

“All right. I'll fix hit so caint nobody git to you. I'll be right hyer.”

“All right. Shut the door. Dont let him in here.”

“All right.” He shut the door. She leaned in it, looking toward the house. He pushed her back so he could close the door. “Hit aint goin to hurt you none, Lee says. All you got to do is lay down.”

“All right. I will. Dont you let him in here.” The door closed. She heard him drive the hasp to. Then he shook the door.

“Hit's fastened,” he said. “Caint nobody git to you now. I'll be right hyer.”

He squatted on his heels in the chaff, looking at the house. After a while he saw Goodwin come to the back door and look toward him, and squatting, clasping his knees, Tommy's eyes glowed again, the pale

irises appearing for an instant to spin on the pupils like tiny wheels. He squatted there, his lip lifted a little, until Goodwin went back into the house. Then he sighed, expelling his breath, and he looked at the blank door of the crib and again his eyes glowed with a diffident, groping, hungry fire and he began to rub his hands slowly on his shanks, rocking a little from side to side. Then he ceased, became rigid, and watched Goodwin move swiftly across the corner of the house and into the cedars. He squatted rigid, his lip lifted a little upon his ragged teeth.

Sitting in the cottonseed-hulls, in the litter of gnawed corn-cobs, Temple lifted her head suddenly toward the trap at the top of the ladder. She heard Popeye cross the floor of the loft, then his foot appeared, groping gingerly for the step. He descended, watching her over his shoulder.

She sat quite motionless, her mouth open a little. He stood looking at her. He began to thrust his chin out in a series of jerks, as though his collar were too tight. He lifted his elbows and brushed them with his palm, and the skirt of his coat, then he crossed her field of vision, moving without a sound, his hand in his coat pocket. He tried the door. Then he shook it.

“Open the door,” he said.

There was no sound. Then Tommy whispered: “Who’s that?”

“Open the door,” Popeye said. The door opened. Tommy looked at Popeye. He blinked.

“I didn’t know you was in hyer,” he said. He made to look past Popeye, into the crib. Popeye laid his hand flat on Tommy’s face and thrust him back and leaned past him and looked up at the house. Then he looked at Tommy.

“Didn’t I tell you about following me?”

“I wasn’t following you,” Tommy said. “I was watching him,” jerking his head toward the house.

“Watch him, then,” Popeye said. Tommy turned his head and looked toward the house and Popeye drew his hand from his coat pocket.

To Temple, sitting in the cottonseed-hulls and the corn-cobs, the sound was no louder than the striking of a match: a short, minor sound shutting down upon the scene, the instant, with a profound finality, completely isolating it, and she sat there, her legs straight before her, her hands limp and palm-up on her lap, looking at Popeye’s tight back and the ridges of his coat across the shoulders as he leaned out the door, the pistol behind him, against his flank, wisping thinly along his leg.

He turned and looked at her. He wagged the pistol slightly and put it back in his coat, then he walked toward her. Moving, he made no sound at all; the released door yawned and clapped against the jamb, but it made no sound either; it was as though sound and silence had become inverted. She could hear silence in a thick rustling as he moved toward her through it, thrusting it aside, and she began to say Something is going to happen to me.

She was saying it to the old man with the yellow clots for eyes.

“Something is happening to me!” she screamed at him, sitting in his chair in the sunlight, his hands crossed on the top of the stick. “I told you it was!” she screamed, voiding the words like hot silent bubbles into the bright silence about them until he turned his head and the two phlegm-clots above her where she lay tossing and thrashing on the rough, sunny boards. “I told you! I told you all the time!”

XIV

While she was sitting beside the spring, with the sleeping child upon her knees, the woman discovered that she had forgot its bottle. She sat there for about an hour after Popeye left her. Then she returned to the

road and turned back toward the house. When she was about halfway back to the house, carrying the child in her arms, Popeye's car passed her. She heard it coming and she got out of the road and stood there and watched it come dropping down the hill. Temple and Popeye were in it.

Popeye did not make any sign, though Temple looked full at the woman. From beneath her hat Temple looked the woman full in the face, without any sign of recognition whatever. The face did not turn, the eyes did not wake; to the woman beside the road it was like a small, dead-colored mask drawn past her on a string and then away. The car went on, lurching and jolting in the ruts. The woman went on to the house.

The blind man was sitting on the front porch, in the sun. When she entered the hall, she was walking fast. She was not aware of the child's thin weight. She found Goodwin in their bedroom. He was in the act of putting on a frayed tie; looking at him, she saw that he had just shaved.

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

"I've got to walk up to Tull's and telephone for the sheriff," he said.

"The sheriff," she said. "Yes. All right." She came to the bed and laid the child carefully down. "To Tull's," she said. "Yes. He's got a phone."

"You'll have to cook," Goodwin said. "There's Pap."

"You can give him some cold bread. He wont mind. There's some left in the stove. He wont mind."

"I'll go," Goodwin said. "You stay here."

"To Tull's," she said. "All right." Tull was the man at whose house Gowan had found a car. It was two miles away. Tull's family was at dinner. They asked her to stop. "I just want to use the telephone," she said. The telephone was in the dining-room, where they were eating.

She called, with them sitting about the table. She didn't know the number. "The Sheriff," she said patiently into the mouthpiece. Then she got the sheriff, with Tull's family sitting about the table, about the Sunday dinner. "A dead man. You pass Mr Tull's about a mile and turn off to the right. . . . Yes, the Old Frenchman place. Yes. This is Mrs Goodwin talking . . . Goodwin. Yes."

XV

Benbow reached his sister's home in the middle of the afternoon. It was four miles from town, Jefferson. He and his sister were born in Jefferson, seven years apart, in a house which they still owned, though his sister had wanted to sell the house when Benbow married the divorced wife of a man named Mitchell and moved to Kinston. Benbow would not agree to sell, though he had built a new bungalow in Kinston on borrowed money upon which he was still paying interest.

When he arrived, there was no one about. He entered the house and he was sitting in the dim parlor behind the closed blinds, when he heard his sister come down the stairs, still unaware of his arrival. He made no sound. She had almost crossed the parlor door and vanished when she paused and looked full at him, without outward surprise, with that serene and stupid impregnability of heroic statuary; she was in white. "Oh, Horace," she said.

He did not rise. He sat with something of the air of a guilty small boy. "How did you—" he said. "Did Belle—"

"Of course. She wired me Saturday. That you had left, and if you came here, to tell you that she had gone back home to Kentucky and had sent for Little Belle."

"Ah, damnation," Benbow said.

"Why?" his sister said. "You want to leave home yourself, but you dont want her to leave."

He stayed at his sister's two days. She had never been given to talking, living a life of serene vegetation like perpetual corn or wheat in a sheltered garden instead of a field, and during those two days she came and went about the house with an air of tranquil and faintly ludicrous tragic disapproval.

After supper they sat in Miss Jenny's room, where Narcissa would read the Memphis paper before taking the boy off to bed. When she went out of the room, Miss Jenny looked at Benbow.

"Go back home, Horace," she said.

"Not to Kinston," Benbow said. "I hadn't intended to stay here, anyway. It wasn't Narcissa I was running to. I haven't quit one woman to run to the skirts of another."

"If you keep on telling yourself that you may believe it, someday," Miss Jenny said. "Then what'll you do?"

"You're right," Benbow said. "Then I'd have to stay at home."

His sister returned. She entered the room with a definite air. "Now for it," Benbow said. His sister had not spoken directly to him all day.

"What are you going to do, Horace?" she said. "You must have business of some sort there in Kinston that should be attended to."

"Even Horace must have," Miss Jenny said. "What I want to know is, why he left. Did you find a man under the bed, Horace?"

"No such luck," Benbow said. "It was Friday, and all of a sudden I knew that I could not go to the station and get that box of shrimp and—"

"But you have been doing that for ten years," his sister said.

"I know. That's how I know that I will never learn to like smelling shrimp."

“Was that why you left Belle?” Miss Jenny said. She looked at him. “It took you a long time to learn that if a woman dont make a very good wife for one man, she aint likely to for another, didn’t it?”

“But to walk out just like a nigger,” Narcissa said. “And to mix yourself up with moonshiners and street-walkers.”

“Well, he’s gone and left the street-walker too,” Miss Jenny said. “Unless you’re going to walk the streets with that orange-stick in your pocket until she comes to town.”

“Yes,” Benbow said. He told again about the three of them, himself and Goodwin and Tommy sitting on the porch, drinking from the jug and talking, and Popeye lurking about the house, coming out from time to time to ask Tommy to light a lantern and go down to the barn with him and Tommy wouldn’t do it and Popeye would curse him, and Tommy sitting on the floor, scouring his bare feet on the boards with a faint, hissing noise, chortling: “Aint he a sight, now?”

“You could feel the pistol on him just like you knew he had a navel,” Benbow said. “He wouldn’t drink, because he said it made him sick to his stomach like a dog; he wouldn’t stay and talk with us; he wouldn’t do anything: just lurking about, smoking his cigarettes, like a sullen and sick child.

“Goodwin and I were both talking. He had been a cavalry sergeant in the Philippines and on the Border, and in an infantry regiment in France; he never told me why he changed, transferred to infantry and lost his rank. He might have killed someone, might have deserted. He was talking about Manila and Mexican girls, and that halfwit chortling and glugging at the jug and shoving it at me: ‘Take some mo’; and then I knew that the woman was just behind the door, listening to us. They are not married. I know that just like I know that that little black man had that flat little pistol in his coat pocket.

But she's out there, doing a nigger's work, that's owned diamonds and automobiles too in her day, and bought them with a harder currency than cash. And that blind man, that old man sitting there at the table, waiting for somebody to feed him, with that immobility of blind people, like it was the backs of their eyeballs you looked at while they were hearing music you couldn't hear; that Goodwin led out of the room and completely off the earth, as far as I know. I never saw him again. I never knew who he was, who he was kin to. Maybe not to anybody. Maybe that old Frenchman that built the house a hundred years ago didn't want him either and just left him there when he died or moved away."

The next morning Benbow got the key to the house from his sister, and went into town. The house was on a side street, unoccupied now for ten years. He opened the house, drawing the nails from the windows. The furniture had not been moved. In a pair of new overalls, with mops and pails, he scoured the floors. At noon he went down town and bought bedding and some tinned food. He was still at work at six o'clock when his sister drove up in her car.

"Come on home, Horace," she said. "Dont you see you cant do this?"

"I found that out right after I started," Benbow said. "Until this morning I thought that anybody with one arm and a pail of water could wash a floor."

"Horace," she said.

"I'm the older, remember," he said. "I'm going to stay here. I have some covers." He went to the hotel for supper. When he returned, his sister's car was again in the drive. The Negro driver had brought a bundle of bedclothing.

"Miss Narcissa say for you to use them," the Negro said. Benbow put the bundle into a closet and made a bed with the ones which he had bought.

Next day at noon, eating his cold food at the kitchen table, he saw through the window a wagon stop in the street. Three women got down and standing on the curb they made unabashed toilets, smoothing skirts and stockings, brushing one another's back, opening parcels and donning various finery. The wagon had gone on. They followed, on foot, and he remembered that it was Saturday. He removed the overalls and dressed and left the house.

The street opened into a broader one. To the left it went on to the square, the opening between two buildings black with a slow, continuous throng, like two streams of ants, above which the cupola of the courthouse rose from a clump of oaks and locusts covered with ragged snow. He went on toward the square. Empty wagons still passed him and he passed still more women on foot, black and white, unmistakable by the unease of their garments as well as by their method of walking, believing that town dwellers would take them for town dwellers too, not even fooling one another.

The adjacent alleys were choked with tethered wagons, the teams reversed and nuzzling gnawed corn-ears over the tail-boards. The square was lined two-deep with ranked cars, while the owners of them and of the wagons thronged in slow overalls and khaki, in mail-order scarves and parasols, in and out of the stores, soiling the pavement with fruit- and peanut-hulls. Slow as sheep they moved, tranquil, impassable, filling the passages, contemplating the fretful hurrying of those in urban shirts and collars with the large, mild inscrutability of cattle or of gods, functioning outside of time, having left time lying upon the slow and imponderable land green with corn and cotton in the yellow afternoon.

Horace moved among them, swept here and there by the deliberate current, without impatience. Some of them he knew; most of the merchants and professional men remembered him as a boy, a youth, a brother lawyer—beyond a foamy screen of locust branches he could see the dingy second-story windows where he and his father had practised, the glass still innocent of water and soap as then—and he stopped now and then and talked with them in unhurried backwaters.

The sunny air was filled with competitive radios and phonographs in the doors of drug- and music-stores. Before these doors a throng stood all day, listening. The pieces which moved them were ballads simple in melody and theme, of bereavement and retribution and repentance metallically sung, blurred, emphasised by static or needle— disembodied voices blaring from imitation wood cabinets or pebble-grain horn-mouths above the rapt faces, the gnarled slow hands long shaped to the imperious earth, lugubrious, harsh, and sad.

That was Saturday, in May: no time to leave the land. Yet on Monday they were back again, most of them, in clumps about the courthouse and the square, and trading a little in the stores since they were here, in their khaki and overalls and collarless shirts. All day long a knot of them stood about the door to the undertaker's parlor, and boys and youths with and without schoolbooks leaned with flattened noses against the glass, and the bolder ones and the younger men of the town entered in twos and threes to look at the man called Tommy.

He lay on a wooden table, barefoot, in overalls, the sunbleached curls on the back of his head matted with dried blood and singed with powder, while the coroner sat over him, trying to ascertain his last name. But none knew it, not even those who had known him for fifteen years about the countryside, nor the merchants who on infrequent Saturdays had seen him in town, barefoot, hatless, with his rapt, empty gaze and his cheek bulged innocently by a peppermint jawbreaker. For all general knowledge, he had none.

XVI

On the day when the sheriff brought Goodwin to town, there was a Negro murderer in the jail, who had killed his wife; slashed her throat with a razor so that, her whole head tossing further and further backward from the bloody regurgitation of her bubbling throat, she ran out the cabin door and for six or seven steps up the quiet moonlit lane. He would lean in the window in the evening and sing.

After supper a few Negroes gathered along the fence below—natty, shoddy suits and sweat-stained overalls shoulder to shoulder—and in chorus with the murderer, they sang spirituals while white people slowed and stopped in the leafed darkness that was almost summer, to listen to those who were sure to die and him who was already dead singing about heaven and being tired; or perhaps in the interval between songs a rich, sourceless voice coming out of the high darkness where the ragged shadow of the heaven-tree which snooded the street lamp at the corner fretted and mourned: “Fo days mo! Den dey ghy stroy de bes ba’ytone singer in nawth Mississippi!”

Sometimes during the day he would lean there, singing alone then, though after a while one or two ragamuffin boys or Negroes with delivery baskets like as not, would halt at the fence, and the white men sitting in tilted chairs along the oil-foul wall of the garage across the street would listen above their steady jaws. “One day mo! Den lse a gawn po sonnen bitch. Say, Aint no place fer you in heavum! Say, Aint no place fer you in hell! Say, Aint no place fer you in jail!”

“Damn that fellow,” Goodwin said, jerking up his black head, his gaunt, brown, faintly harried face. “I aint in any position to wish any man that sort of luck, but I’ll be damned. . . .” He wouldn’t talk. “I didn’t do it. You know that, yourself. You know I wouldn’t have. I aint going to say what I think. I didn’t do it. They’ve got to hang it on me first. Let them do that. I’m clear. But if I talk, if I say what I think or believe, I wont be clear.” He was sitting on the cot in his cell. He looked up at the windows: two orifices not much larger than sabre slashes.

“Is he that good a shot?” Benbow said. “To hit a man through one of those windows?”

Goodwin looked at him. “Who?”

“Popeye,” Benbow said.

“Did Popeye do it?” Goodwin said.

“Didn’t he?” Benbow said.

“I’ve told all I’m going to tell. I don’t have to clear myself; it’s up to them to hang it on me.”

“Then what do you want with a lawyer?” Benbow said. “What do you want me to do?”

Goodwin was not looking at him. “If you’ll just promise to get the kid a good newspaper gift when he’s big enough to make change,” he said. “Ruby’ll be all right. Wont you, old gal?” He put his hand on the woman’s head, scouring her hair with his hand. She sat on the cot beside him, holding the child on her lap. It lay in a sort of drugged immobility, like the children which beggars on Paris streets carry, its pinched face slick with faint moisture, its hair a damp whisper of shadow across its gaunt, veined skull, a thin crescent of white showing beneath its lead-colored eyelids.

The woman wore a dress of gray crepe, neatly brushed and skilfully darned by hand. Parallel with each seam was that faint, narrow, glazed imprint which another woman would recognise at a hundred yards with one glance. On the shoulder was a purple ornament of the sort that may be bought in ten cent stores or by mail order; on the cot beside her lay a gray hat with a neatly darned veil; looking at it, Benbow could not remember when he had seen one before, when women ceased to wear veils.

He took the woman to his house. They walked, she carrying the child while Benbow carried a bottle of milk and a few groceries, food in tin cans. The child still slept. “Maybe you hold it too much,” he said. “Suppose we get a nurse for it.”

He left her at the house and returned to town, to a telephone, and he telephoned out to his sister’s, for the car. The car came for him. He told his sister and Miss Jenny about the case over the supper table.

“You’re just meddling!” his sister said, her serene face, her voice, furious. “When you took another man’s wife and child away from him I thought it was dreadful, but I said At least he will not have the face to ever come back here again. And when you just walked out of the house like a nigger and left her I thought that was dreadful too, but I would not let myself believe you meant to leave her for good.

And then when you insisted without any reason at all on leaving here and opening the house, scrubbing it yourself and all the town looking on and living there like a tramp, refusing to stay here where everybody would expect you to stay and think it funny when you wouldn’t; and now to deliberately mix yourself up with a woman you said yourself was a street-walker, a murderer’s woman.”

“I cant help it. She has nothing, no one. In a made-over dress all neatly about five years out of mode, and that child that never has been more than half alive, wrapped in a piece of blanket scrubbed almost cotton-white. Asking nothing of anyone except to be let alone, trying to make something out of her life when all you sheltered chaste women—”

“Do you mean to say a moonshiner hasn’t got the money to hire the best lawyer in the country?” Miss Jenny said.

“It’s not that,” Horace said. “I’m sure he could get a better lawyer. It’s that—”

“Horace,” his sister said. She had been watching him. “Where is that woman?” Miss Jenny was watching him too, sitting a little forward in the wheel chair. “Did you take that woman into my house?”

“It’s my house too, honey.” She did not know that for ten years he had been lying to his wife in order to pay interest on a mortgage on the stucco house he had built for her in Kinston, so that his sister might not rent to strangers that other house in Jefferson which his wife did not know he still owned any share in. “As long as it’s vacant, and with that child—”

“The house where my father and mother and your father and mother, the house where I— I wont have it. I wont have it.”

“Just for one night, then. I’ll take her to the hotel in the morning. Think of her, alone, with that baby. . . . Suppose it were you and Bory, and your husband accused of a murder you knew he didn’t—”

“I dont want to think about her. I wish I had never heard of the whole thing. To think that my brother— Dont you see that you are always having to clean up after yourself? It’s not that there’s a litter left; it’s that you—that— But to bring a street-walker, a murderess, into the house where I was born.”

“Fiddlesticks,” Miss Jenny said. “But, Horace, aint that what the lawyers call collusion? connivance?” Horace looked at her. “It seems to me you’ve already had a little more to do with these folks than the lawyer in the case should have. You were out there where it happened yourself not long ago. Folks might begin to think you know more than you’ve told.”

“That’s so,” Horace said, “Mrs Blackstone. And sometimes I have wondered why I haven’t got rich at the law. Maybe I will, when I get old enough to attend the same law school you did.”

“If I were you,” Miss Jenny said, “I’d drive back to town now and take her to the hotel and get her settled. It’s not late.”

“And go on back to Kinston until the whole thing is over,” Narcissa said. “These people are not your people. Why must you do such things?”

“I cannot stand idly by and see injustice—”

“You wont ever catch up with injustice, Horace,” Miss Jenny said.

“Well, that irony which lurks in events, then.”

“Hmmpf,” Miss Jenny said. “It must be because she is one woman you know that dont know anything about that shrimp.”

“Anyway, I’ve talked too much, as usual,” Horace said. “So I’ll have to trust you all—”

“Fiddlesticks,” Miss Jenny said. “Do you think Narcissa’d want anybody to know that any of her folks could know people that would do anything as natural as make love or rob or steal?” There was that quality about his sister. During all the four days between Kinston and Jefferson he had counted on that imperviousness. He hadn’t expected her—any woman—to bother very much over a man she had neither married nor borne when she had one she did bear to cherish and fret over. But he had expected that imperviousness, since she had had it thirty-six years.

When he reached the house in town a light burned in one room. He entered, crossing floors which he had scrubbed himself, revealing at the time no more skill with a mop than he had expected, than he had with the lost hammer with which he nailed the windows down and the shutters to ten years ago, who could not even learn to drive a motor car. But that was ten years ago, the hammer replaced by the new one with which he had drawn the clumsy nails, the windows open upon scrubbed floor spaces still as dead pools within the ghostly embrace of hooded furniture.

The woman was still up, dressed save for the hat. It lay on the bed where the child slept. Lying together there, they lent to the room a quality of transience more unmistakable than the makeshift light, the smug paradox of the made bed in a room otherwise redolent of long unoccupation. It was as though femininity were a current running through a wire along which a certain number of identical bulbs were hung.

“I’ve got some things in the kitchen,” she said. “I wont be but a minute.”

The child lay on the bed, beneath the unshaded light, and he wondered why women, in quitting a house, will remove all the lamp shades even though they touch nothing else; looking down at the child, at its bluish eyelids showing a faint crescent of bluish white against its lead-colored cheeks, the moist shadow of hair capping its skull, its hands uplifted, curl-palmed, sweating too, thinking Good God. Good God.

He was thinking of the first time he had seen it, lying in a wooden box behind the stove in that ruined house twenty miles from town; of Popeye's black presence lying upon the house like the shadow of something no larger than a match falling monstrous and portentous upon something else otherwise familiar and everyday and twenty times its size; of the two of them—himself and the woman—in the kitchen lighted by a cracked and smutty lamp on a table of clean, spartan dishes and Goodwin and Popeye somewhere in the outer darkness peaceful with insects and frogs yet filled too with Popeye's presence in black and nameless threat. The woman drew the box out from behind the stove and stood above it, her hands still hidden in her shapeless garment. "I have to keep him in this so the rats cant get to him," she said.

"Oh," Horace said, "you have a son." Then she showed him her hands, flung them out in a gesture at once spontaneous and diffident and self-conscious and proud, and told him he might bring her an orange-stick.

She returned, with something wrapped discreetly in a piece of newspaper. He knew that it was a diaper, freshly washed, even before she said: "I made a fire in the stove. I guess I overstepped."

"Of course not," he said. "It's merely a matter of legal precaution, you see," he said. "Better to put everybody to a little temporary discomfort than to jeopardize our case." She did not appear to be listening. She spread the blanket on the bed and lifted the child onto it. "You understand how it is," Horace said. "If the judge suspected that I knew more about it than the facts would warrant— I mean, we must try to give everybody the idea that holding Lee for that killing is just—"

“Do you live in Jefferson?” she said, wrapping the blanket about the child.

“No. I live in Kinston. I used to—I have practised here, though.”

“You have kinfolks here, though. Women. That used to live in this house.” She lifted the child, tucking the blanket about it. Then she looked at him. “It’s all right. I know how it is. You’ve been kind.”

“Damn it,” he said, “do you think— Come on. Let’s go on to the hotel. You get a good night’s rest, and I’ll be in early in the morning. Let me take it.”

“I’ve got him,” she said. She started to say something else, looking at him quietly for a moment, but she went on. He turned out the light and followed and locked the door. She was already in the car. He got in.

“Hotel, Isom,” he said. “I never did learn to drive one,” he said. “Sometimes, when I think of all the time I have spent not learning to do things . . .”

The street was narrow, quiet. It was paved now, though he could remember when, after a rain, it had been a canal of blackish substance half earth, half water, with murmuring gutters in which he and Narcissa paddled and splashed with tucked-up garments and muddy bottoms, after the crudest of whittled boats, or made loblollies by treading and treading in one spot with the intense oblivion of alchemists.

He could remember when, innocent of concrete, the street was bordered on either side by paths of red brick tediously and unevenly laid and worn in rich, random maroon mosaic into the black earth which the noon sun never reached; at that moment, pressed into the concrete near the entrance of the drive, were the prints of his and his sister’s naked feet in the artificial stone.

The infrequent lamps mounted to crescendo beneath the arcade of a filling-station at the corner. The woman leaned suddenly forward. “Stop

here, please, boy," she said. Isom put on the brakes. "I'll get out here and walk," she said.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Horace said. "Go on, Isom."

"No; wait," the woman said. "We'll be passing people that know you. And then the square."

"Nonsense," Horace said. "Go on, Isom."

"You get out and wait, then," she said. "He can come straight back."

"You'll do no such thing," Horace said. "By heaven, I— Drive on, Isom!"

"You'd better," the woman said. She sat back in the seat. Then she leaned forward again. "Listen. You've been kind. You mean all right, but—"

"You dont think I am lawyer enough, you mean?"

"I guess I've got just what was coming to me. There's no use fighting it."

"Certainly not, if you feel that way about it. But you dont. Or you'd have told Isom to drive you to the railroad station. Wouldn't you?" She was looking down at the child, fretting the blanket about its face. "You get a good night's rest and I'll be in early tomorrow." They passed the jail—a square building slashed harshly by pale slits of light. Only the central window was wide enough to be called a window, criss-crossed by slender bars.

In it the Negro murderer leaned; below along the fence a row of heads hatted and bare above work-thickened shoulders, and the blended voices swelled rich and sad into the soft, depthless evening, singing of heaven and being tired. "Dont you worry at all, now. Everybody knows Lee didn't do it."

They drew up to the hotel, where the drummers sat in chairs along the curb, listening to the singing. "I must—" the woman said. Horace got down and held the door open. She didn't move. "Listen. I've got to tell—"

"Yes," Horace said, extending his hand. "I know. I'll be in early tomorrow." He helped her down. They entered the hotel, the drummers turning to watch her legs, and went to the desk. The singing followed them, dimmed by the walls, the lights.

The woman stood quietly nearby, holding the child, until Horace had done.

"Listen," she said. The porter went on with the key, toward the stairs. Horace touched her arm, turning her that way. "I've got to tell you," she said.

"In the morning," he said. "I'll be in early," he said, guiding her toward the stairs. Still she hung back, looking at him; then she freed her arm by turning to face him.

"All right, then," she said. She said, in a low, level tone, her face bent a little toward the child: "We haven't got any money. I'll tell you now. That last batch Popeye didn't—"

"Yes, yes," Horace said; "first thing in the morning. I'll be in by the time you finish breakfast. Good night." He returned to the car, into the sound of the singing. "Home, Isom," he said. They turned and passed the jail again and the leaning shape beyond the bars and the heads along the fence. Upon the barred and slitted wall the splotched shadow of the heaven-tree shuddered and pulsed monstrously in scarce any wind; rich and sad, the singing fell behind. The car went on, smooth and swift, passing the narrow street. "Here," Horace said, "where are you—" Isom clapped on the brakes.

"Miss Narcissa say to bring you back out home," he said.

“Oh, she did?” Horace said. “That was kind of her. You can tell her I changed her mind.”

Isom backed and turned into the narrow street and then into the cedar drive, the lights lifting and boring ahead into the unpruned tunnel as though into the most profound blackness of the sea, as though among straying rigid shapes to which not even light could give color. The car stopped at the door and Horace got out. “You might tell her it was not to her I ran,” he said. “Can you remember that?”

XVII

The last trumpet-shaped bloom had fallen from the heaven-tree at the corner of the jail yard. They lay thick, viscid underfoot, sweet and oversweet in the nostrils with a sweetness surfeit and moribund, and at night now the ragged shadow of full-fledged leaves pulsed upon the barred window in shabby rise and fall. The window was in the general room, the white-washed walls of which were stained with dirty hands, scribbled and scratched over with names and dates and blasphemous and obscene doggerel in pencil or nail or knife-blade. Nightly the Negro murderer leaned there, his face checkered by the shadow of the grating in the restless interstices of leaves, singing in chorus with those along the fence below.

Sometimes during the day he sang also, alone then save for the slowing passersby and ragamuffin boys and the garage men across the way. “One day mo! Aint no place fer you in heavum! Aint no place fer you in hell! Aint no place fer you in whitefolks’ jail! Nigger, whar you gwine to? Whar you gwine to, nigger?”

Each morning Isom fetched in a bottle of milk, which Horace delivered to the woman at the hotel, for the child. On Sunday afternoon he went out to his sister’s. He left the woman sitting on the cot in Goodwin’s cell, the child on her lap. Heretofore it had lain in that drugged apathy, its eyelids closed to thin crescents, but today it moved now and then in frail, galvanic jerks, whimpering.

Horace went up to Miss Jenny's room. His sister had not appeared. "He wont talk," Horace said. "He just says they will have to prove he did it. He said they had nothing on him, no more than on the child. He wouldn't even consider bond, if he could have got it. He says he is better off in the jail. And I suppose he is. His business out there is finished now, even if the sheriff hadn't found his kettles and destroyed—"

"Kettles?"

"His still. After he surrendered, they hunted around until they found the still. They knew what he was doing, but they waited until he was down. Then they all jumped on him. The good customers, that had been buying whiskey from him and drinking all that he would give them free and maybe trying to make love to his wife behind his back. You should hear them down town.

This morning the Baptist minister took him for a text. Not only as a murderer, but as an adulterer; a polluter of the free Democratico-Protestant atmosphere of Yoknapatawpha county. I gathered that his idea was that Goodwin and the woman should both be burned as a sole example to that child; the child to be reared and taught the English language for the sole end of being taught that it was begot in sin by two people who suffered by fire for having begot it. Good God, can a man, a civilised man, seriously . . ."

"They're just Baptists," Miss Jenny said. "What about the money?"

"He had a little, almost a hundred and sixty dollars. It was buried in a can in the barn. They let him dig that up. 'That'll keep her' he says 'until it's over. Then we'll clear out. We've been intending to for a good while. If I'd listened to her, we'd have been gone already. You've been a good girl' he says. She was sitting on the cot beside him, holding the baby, and he took her chin in his hand and shook her head a little."

"It's a good thing Narcissa aint going to be on that jury," Miss Jenny said.

“Yes. But the fool wont even let me mention that that gorilla was ever on the place. He said ‘They cant prove anything on me. I’ve been in a jam before. Everybody that knows anything about me knows that I wouldn’t hurt a feeb.’ But that wasn’t the reason he doesn’t want it told about that thug. And he knew I knew it wasn’t, because he kept on talking, sitting there in his overalls, rolling his cigarettes with the sack hanging in his teeth. ‘I’ll just stay here until it blows over. I’ll be better off here; cant do anything outside, anyway. And this will keep her, with maybe something for you until you’re better paid.’

“But I knew what he was thinking. ‘I didn’t know you were a coward’ I said.

“ ‘You do like I say’ he said. ‘I’ll be all right here.’ But he doesn’t . . .” He sat forward, rubbing his hands slowly. “He doesn’t realise. . . . Dammit, say what you want to, but there’s a corruption about even looking upon evil, even by accident; you cannot haggle, traffic, with putrefaction— You’ve seen how Narcissa, just hearing about it, how it’s made her restless and suspicious. I thought I had come back here of my own accord, but now I see that— Do you suppose she thought I was bringing that woman into the house at night, or something like that?”

“I did too, at first,” Miss Jenny said. “But I reckon now she’s learned that you’ll work harder for whatever reason you think you have, than for anything anybody could offer you or give you.”

“You mean, she’d let me think they never had any money, when she—”

“Why not? Aint you doing all right without it?”

Narcissa entered.

“We were just talking about murder and crime,” Miss Jenny said.

“I hope you’re through, then,” Narcissa said. She did not sit down.

“Narcissa has her sorrows too,” Miss Jenny said. “Dont you, Narcissa?”

“What now?” Horace said. “She hasn’t caught Bory with alcohol on his breath, has she?”

“She’s been jilted. Her beau’s gone and left her.”

“You’re such a fool,” Narcissa said.

“Yes, sir,” Miss Jenny said, “Gowan Stevens has thrown her down. He didn’t even come back from that Oxford dance to say goodbye. He just wrote her a letter.” She began to search about her in the chair. “And now I flinch every time the doorbell rings, thinking that his mother—”

“Miss Jenny,” Narcissa said, “you give me my letter.”

“Wait,” Miss Jenny said, “here it is. Now, what do you think of that for a delicate operation on the human heart without anaesthetic? I’m beginning to believe all this I hear, about how young folks learn all the things in order to get married, that we had to get married in order to learn.”

Horace took the single sheet.

Narcissa my dear

This has no heading. I wish it could have no date. But if my heart were as blank as this page, this would not be necessary at all. I will not see you again. I cannot write it, for I have gone through with an experience which I cannot face. I have but one rift in the darkness, that is that I have injured no one save myself by my folly, and that the extent of that folly you will never learn. I need not say that the hope that you never learn it is the sole reason why I will not see you again. Think as well of me as you can. I wish I had the right to say, if you learn of my folly think not the less of me.

G.

Horace read the note, the single sheet. He held it between his hands. He did not say anything for a while.

“Good Lord,” Horace said. “Someone mistook him for a Mississippi man on the dance floor.”

“I think, if I were you—” Narcissa said. After a moment she said: “How much longer is this going to last, Horace?”

“Not any longer than I can help. If you know of any way in which I can get him out of that jail by tomorrow . . .”

“There’s only one way,” she said. She looked at him a moment. Then she turned toward the door. “Which way did Bory go? Dinner’ll be ready soon.” She went out.

“And you know what that way is,” Miss Jenny said. “If you aint got any backbone.”

“I’ll know whether or not I have any backbone when you tell me what the other way is.”

“Go back to Belle,” Miss Jenny said. “Go back home.”

The Negro murderer was to be hanged on a Saturday without pomp, buried without circumstance: one night he would be singing at the barred window and yelling down out of the soft myriad darkness of a May night; the next night he would be gone, leaving the window for Goodwin. Goodwin had been bound over for the June term of court, without bail. But still he would not agree to let Horace divulge Popeye’s presence at the scene of the murder.

“I tell you, they’ve got nothing on me,” Goodwin said.

“How do you know they haven’t?” Horace said.

“Well, no matter what they think they have on me, I stand a chance in court. But just let it get to Memphis that I said he was anywhere around there, what chance do you think I’d have to get back to this cell after I testified?”

“You’ve got the law, justice, civilization.”

“Sure, if I spend the rest of my life squatting in that corner yonder. Come here.” He led Horace to the window. “There are five windows in that hotel yonder that look into this one. And I’ve seen him light matches with a pistol at twenty feet. Why, damn it all, I’d never get back here from the courtroom the day I testified that.”

“But there’s such a thing as obstruct—”

“Obstructing damnation. Let them prove I did it. Tommy was found in the barn, shot from behind. Let them find the pistol. I was there, waiting. I didn’t try to run. I could have, but I didn’t. It was me notified the sheriff. Of course my being there alone except for her and Pap looked bad. If it was a stall, dont common sense tell you I’d have invented a better one?”

“You’re not being tried by common sense,” Horace said. “You’re being tried by a jury.”

“Then let them make the best of it. That’s all they’ll get. The dead man is in the barn, hadn’t been touched; me and my wife and child and Pap in the house; nothing in the house touched; me the one that sent for the sheriff. No, no; I know I run a chance this way, but let me just open my head about that fellow, and there’s no chance to it. I know what I’ll get.”

“But you heard the shot,” Horace said. “You have already told that.”

“No,” he said, “I didn’t. I didn’t hear anything. I dont know anything about it. . . . Do you mind waiting outside a minute while I talk to Ruby?”

It was five minutes before she joined him. He said:

“There’s something about this that I don’t know yet; that you and Lee haven’t told me. Something he just warned you not to tell me. Isn’t there?” She walked beside him, carrying the child. It was still whimpering now and then, tossing its thin body in sudden jerks. She tried to soothe it, crooning to it, rocking it in her arms. “Maybe you carry it too much,” Horace said; “maybe if you could leave it at the hotel . . .”

“I guess Lee knows what to do,” she said.

“But the lawyer should know all the facts, everything. He is the one to decide what to tell and what not to tell. Else, why have one? That’s like paying a dentist to fix your teeth and then refusing to let him look into your mouth, don’t you see? You wouldn’t treat a dentist or a doctor this way.” She said nothing, her head bent over the child. It wailed.

“Hush,” she said, “hush, now.”

“And worse than that, there’s such a thing called obstructing justice. Suppose he swears there was nobody else there, suppose he is about to be cleared—which is not likely—and somebody turns up who saw Popeye about the place, or saw his car leaving. Then they’ll say, if Lee didn’t tell the truth about an unimportant thing, why should we believe him when his neck’s in danger?”

They reached the hotel. He opened the door for her. She did not look at him. “I guess Lee knows best,” she said, going in. The child wailed, a thin, whimpering, distressful cry. “Hush,” she said. “Shhhhhhhhhhhhh.”

Isom had been to fetch Narcissa from a party; it was late when the car stopped at the corner and picked him up. A few of the lights were beginning to come on, and men were already drifting back toward the square after supper, but it was still too early for the Negro murderer to begin to sing. “And he’d better sing fast, too,” Horace said. “He’s only

got two days more." But he was not there yet. The jail faced west; a last faint copper-colored light lay upon the dingy grating and upon the small, pale blob of a hand, and in scarce any wind a blue wisp of tobacco floated out and dissolved raggedly away. "If it wasn't bad enough to have her husband there, without that poor brute counting his remaining breaths at the top of his voice. . . ."

"Maybe they'll wait and hang them both together," Narcissa said. "They do that sometimes, dont they?"

That night Horace built a small fire in the grate. It was not cool. He was using only one room now, taking his meals at the hotel; the rest of the house was locked again. He tried to read, then he gave up and undressed and went to bed, watching the fire die in the grate. He heard the town clock strike twelve. "When this is over, I think I'll go to Europe," he said. "I need a change. Either I, or Mississippi, one."

Maybe a few of them would still be gathered along the fence, since this would be his last night; the thick, small-headed shape of him would be clinging to the bars, gorilla-like, singing, while upon his shadow, upon the checkered orifice of the window, the ragged grief of the heaven-tree would pulse and change, the last bloom fallen now in viscid smears upon the sidewalk. Horace turned again in the bed. "They ought to clean that damn mess off the sidewalk," he said. "Damn. Damn. Damn."

He was sleeping late the next morning; he had seen daylight. He was wakened by someone knocking at the door. It was half-past six. He went to the door. The Negro porter of the hotel stood there.

"What?" Horace said. "Is it Mrs Goodwin?"

"She say for you to come when you up," the Negro said.

"Tell her I'll be there in ten minutes."

As he entered the hotel he passed a young man with a small black bag, such as doctors carry. Horace went on up. The woman was standing in the half-open door, looking down the hall.

"I finally got the doctor," she said. "But I wanted anyway. . . ." The child lay on the bed, its eyes shut, flushed and sweating, its curled hands above its head in the attitude of one crucified, breathing in short, whistling gasps. "He was sick all last night. I went and got some medicine and I tried to keep him quiet until daylight. At last I got the doctor." She stood beside the bed, looking down at the child. "There was a woman there," she said. "A young girl."

"A—" Horace said. "Oh," he said. "Yes. You'd better tell me about it."

XVIII

Popeye drove swiftly but without any quality of haste or of flight, down the clay road and into the sand. Temple was beside him. Her hat was jammed onto the back of her head, her hair escaping beneath the crumpled brim in matted clots. Her face looked like a sleepwalker's as she swayed limply to the lurching of the car. She lurched against Popeye, lifting her hand in limp reflex. Without releasing the wheel he thrust her back with his elbow. "Brace yourself," he said. "Come on, now."

Before they came to the tree they passed the woman. She stood beside the road, carrying the child, the hem of her dress folded back over its face, and she looked at them quietly from beneath the faded sunbonnet, flicking swiftly in and out of Temple's vision without any motion, any sign.

When they reached the tree Popeye swung the car out of the road and drove it crashing into the undergrowth and through the prone tree-top and back into the road again in a running popping of cane-stalks like musketry along a trench, without any diminution of speed. Beside the tree Gowan's car lay on its side. Temple looked vaguely and stupidly at it as it too shot behind.

Popeye swung back into the sandy ruts. Yet there was no flight in the action: he performed it with a certain vicious petulance, that was all. It was a powerful car. Even in the sand it held forty miles an hour, and up the narrow gulch to the highroad, where he turned north. Sitting beside him, braced against jolts that had already given way to a smooth increasing hiss of gravel, Temple gazed dully forward as the road she had traversed yesterday began to flee backward under the wheels as onto a spool, feeling her blood seeping slowly inside her loins.

She sat limp in the corner of the seat, watching the steady backward rush of the land—pines in opening vistas splashed with fading dogwood; sedge; fields green with new cotton and empty of any movement, peaceful, as though Sunday were a quality of atmosphere, of light and shade—sitting with her legs close together, listening to the hot minute seeping of her blood, saying dully to herself, I'm still bleeding. I'm still bleeding.

It was a bright, soft day, a wanton morning filled with that unbelievable soft radiance of May, rife with a promise of noon and of heat, with high fat clouds like gobs of whipped cream floating lightly as reflections in a mirror, their shadows scudding sedately across the road. It had been a lavender spring. The fruit trees, the white ones, had been in small leaf when the blooms matured; they had never attained that brilliant whiteness of last spring, and the dogwood had come into full bloom after the leaf also, in green retrograde before crescendo.

But lilac and wistaria and redbud, even the shabby heaven-trees, had never been finer, fulgent, with a burning scent blowing for a hundred yards along the vagrant air of April and May. The bougainvillea against the veranda would be large as basketballs and lightly poised as balloons, and looking vacantly and stupidly at the rushing roadside Temple began to scream.

It started as a wail, raising, cut suddenly off by Popeye's hand. With her hands lying on her lap, sitting erect, she screamed, tasting the gritty acidity of his fingers while the car slewed squealing in the gravel,

feeling her secret blood. Then he gripped her by the back of the neck and she sat motionless, her mouth round and open like a small empty cave. He shook her head.

“Shut it,” he said, “shut it”; gripping her silent. “Look at yourself. Here.” With the other hand he swung the mirror on the windshield around and she looked at her image, at the uptilted hat and her matted hair and her round mouth. She began to fumble at her coat pockets, looking at her reflection. He released her and she produced the compact and opened it and peered into the mirror, whimpering a little. She powdered her face and rouged her mouth and straightened her hat, whimpering into the tiny mirror on her lap while Popeye watched her. He lit a cigarette. “Aint you ashamed of yourself?” he said.

“It’s still running,” she whimpered. “I can feel it.” With the lipstick poised she looked at him and opened her mouth again. He gripped her by the back of the neck.

“Stop it, now. You going to shut it?”

“Yes,” she whimpered.

“See you do, then. Come on. Get yourself fixed.”

She put the compact away. He started the car again.

The road began to thicken with pleasure cars Sunday-bent—small, clay-crusted Fords and Chevrolets; an occasional larger car moving swiftly, with swathed women, and dust-covered hampers; trucks filled with wooden-faced country people in garments like a colored wood meticulously carved; now and then a wagon or a buggy. Before a weathered frame church on a hill the grove was full of tethered teams and battered cars and trucks. The woods gave away to fields; houses became more frequent. Low above the skyline, above roofs and a spire or two, smoke hung. The gravel became asphalt and they entered Dumfries.

Temple began to look about, like one waking from sleep. "Not here!" she said. "I cant—"

"Hush it, now," Popeye said.

"I cant—I might—" she whimpered. "I'm hungry," she said. "I haven't eaten since . . ."

"Ah, you aint hungry. Wait till we get to town."

She looked about with dazed, glassy eyes. "There might be people here . . ." He swung in toward a filling station. "I cant get out," she whimpered. "It's still running, I tell you!"

"Who told you to get out?" He descended and looked at her across the wheel. "Dont you move." She watched him go up the street and enter a door. It was a dingy confectionery. He bought a pack of cigarettes and put one in his mouth. "Gimme a couple of bars of candy," he said.

"What kind?"

"Candy," he said. Under a glass bell on the counter a plate of sandwiches sat. He took one and flipped a dollar on the counter and turned toward the door.

"Here's your change," the clerk said.

"Keep it," he said. "You'll get rich faster."

When he saw the car it was empty. He stopped ten feet away and changed the sandwich to his left hand, the unlighted cigarette slanted beneath his chin. The mechanic, hanging the hose up, saw him and jerked his thumb toward the corner of the building.

Beyond the corner the wall made an offset. In the niche was a greasy barrel half full of scraps of metal and rubber. Between the barrel and

the wall Temple crouched. "He nearly saw me!" she whispered. "He was almost looking right at me!"

"Who?" Popeye said. He looked back up the street. "Who saw you?"

"He was coming right toward me! A boy. At school. He was looking right toward—"

"Come on. Come out of it."

"He was look—" Popeye took her by the arm. She crouched in the corner, jerking at the arm he held, her wan face craned around the corner.

"Come on, now." Then his hand was at the back of her neck, gripping it.

"Oh," she wailed in a choked voice. It was as though he were lifting her slowly erect by that one hand. Excepting that, there was no movement between them. Side by side, almost of a height, they appeared as decorous as two acquaintances stopped to pass the time of day before entering church.

"Are you coming?" he said. "Are you?"

"I cant. It's down to my stocking now. Look." She lifted her skirt away in a shrinking gesture, then she dropped the skirt and rose again, her torso arching backward, her soundless mouth open as he gripped her. He released her.

"Will you come now?"

She came out from behind the barrel. He took her arm.

"It's all over the back of my coat," she whimpered. "Look and see."

"You're all right. I'll get you another coat tomorrow. Come on."

They returned to the car. At the corner she hung back again. "You want some more of it, do you?" he whispered, not touching her. "Do you?" She went on and got in the car quietly. He took the wheel. "Here, I got you a sandwich." He took it from his pocket and put it in her hand. "Come on, now. Eat it." She took a bite obediently. He started the car and took the Memphis road. Again, the bitten sandwich in her hand, she ceased chewing and opened her mouth in that round, hopeless expression of a child; again his hand left the wheel and gripped the back of her neck and she sat motionless, gazing straight at him, her mouth open and the half chewed mass of bread and meat lying upon her tongue.

They reached Memphis in midafternoon. At the foot of the bluff below Main Street Popeye turned into a narrow street of smoke-grimed frame houses with tiers of wooden galleries, set a little back in grassless plots, with now and then a forlorn and hardy tree of some shabby species—gaunt, lopbranched magnolias, a stunted elm or a locust in grayish, cadaverous bloom—interspersed by rear ends of garages; a scrap-heap in a vacant lot; a low doored cavern of an equivocal appearance where an oilcloth-covered counter and a row of backless stools, a metal coffee-urn and a fat man in a dirty apron with a toothpick in his mouth, stood for an instant out of the gloom with an effect as of a sinister and meaningless photograph poorly made.

From the bluff, beyond a line of office buildings terraced sharply against the sunfilled sky, came a sound of traffic—motor horns, trolleys—passing high overhead on the river breeze; at the end of the street a trolley materialised in the narrow gap with an effect as of magic and vanished with a stupendous clatter. On a second storey gallery a young Negro woman in her underclothes smoked a cigarette sullenly, her arms on the balustrade.

Popeye drew up before one of the dingy three-storey houses, the entrance of which was hidden by a dingy lattice cubicle leaning a little awry. In the grimy grassplot before it two of those small, woolly, white, worm-like dogs, one with a pink, the other a blue, ribbon about its neck, moved about with an air of sluggish and obscene paradox. In the

sunlight their coats looked as though they had been cleaned with gasoline.

Later Temple could hear them outside her door, whimpering and scuffing, or, rushing thickly in when the Negro maid opened the door, climbing and sprawling onto the bed and into Miss Reba's lap with wheezy, flatulent sounds, billowing into the rich pneumasis of her breast and tonguing along the metal tankard which she waved in one ringed hand as she talked.

"Anybody in Memphis can tell you who Reba Rivers is. Ask any man on the street, cop or not. I've had some of the biggest men in Memphis right here in this house, bankers, lawyers, doctors—all of them. I've had two police captains drinking beer in my dining-room and the commissioner himself upstairs with one of my girls. They got drunk and crashed the door in on him and found him buck-nekkid, dancing the highland fling.

A man fifty years old, seven foot tall, with a head like a peanut. He was a fine fellow. He knew me. They all know Reba Rivers. Spent their money here like water, they have. They know me. I aint never double-crossed nobody, honey." She drank beer, breathing thickly into the tankard, the other hand, ringed with yellow diamonds as large as gravel, lost among the lush billows of her breast.

Her slightest movement appeared to be accomplished by an expenditure of breath out of all proportion to any pleasure the movement could afford her. Almost as soon as they entered the house she began to tell Temple about her asthma, toiling up the stairs in front of them, planting her feet heavily in worsted bedroom slippers, a wooden rosary in one hand and the tankard in the other. She had just returned from church, in a black silk gown and a hat savagely flowered; the lower half of the tankard was still frosted with inner chill. She moved heavily from big thigh to thigh, the two dogs moiling underfoot, talking steadily back across her shoulder in a harsh, expiring, maternal voice.

“Popeye knew better than to bring you anywhere else but to my house. I been after him for, how many years I been after you to get you a girl, honey? What I say, a young fellow cant no more live without a girl than . . .” Panting, she fell to cursing the dogs under her feet, stopping to shove them aside. “Get back down there,” she said, shaking the rosary at them.

They snarled at her in vicious falsetto, baring their teeth, and she leaned against the wall in a thin aroma of beer, her hand to her breast, her mouth open, her eyes fixed in a glare of sad terror of all breathing as she sought breath, the tankard a squat soft gleam like dull silver lifted in the gloom.

The narrow stairwell turned back upon itself in a succession of niggard reaches. The light, falling through a thickly-curtained door at the front and through a shuttered window at the rear of each stage, had a weary quality. A spent quality; defunctive, exhausted—a protracted weariness like a vitiated backwater beyond sunlight and the vivid noises of sunlight and day.

There was a defunctive odor of irregular food, vaguely alcoholic, and Temple even in her ignorance seemed to be surrounded by a ghostly promiscuity of intimate garments, of discreet whispers of flesh stale and oft-assailed and impregnable beyond each silent door which they passed. Behind her, about hers and Miss Reba’s feet the two dogs scabbled in nappy gleams, their claws clicking on the metal strips which bound the carpet to the stairs.

Later, lying in bed, a towel wrapped about her naked loins, she could hear them sniffing and whining outside the door. Her coat and hat hung on nails on the door, her dress and stockings lay upon a chair, and it seemed to her that she could hear the rhythmic splash-splash of the washing-board somewhere and she flung herself again in an agony for concealment as she had when they took her knickers off.

“Now, now,” Miss Reba said. “I bled for four days, myself. It aint nothing. Doctor Quinn’ll stop it in two minutes, and Minnie’ll have

them all washed and pressed and you wont never know it. That blood'll be worth a thousand dollars to you, honey." She lifted the tankard, the flowers on her hat rigidly moribund, nodding in macabre waes hail. "Us poor girls," she said. The drawn shades, cracked into a myriad pattern like old skin, blew faintly on the bright air, breathing into the room on waning surges the sound of Sabbath traffic, festive, steady, evanescent. Temple lay motionless in the bed, her legs straight and close, in covers to her chin and her face small and wan, framed in the rich sprawl of her hair. Miss Reba lowered the tankard, gasping for breath. In her hoarse, fainting voice she began to tell Temple how lucky she was.

"Every girl in the district has been trying to get him, honey. There's one, a little married woman slips down here sometimes, she offered Minnie twenty-five dollars just to get him into the room, that's all. But do you think he'd so much as look at one of them? Girls that have took in a hundred dollars a night. No, sir. Spend his money like water, but do you think he'd look at one of them except to dance with her? I always knowed it wasn't going to be none of these here common whores he'd take. I'd tell them, I'd say, the one of yez that gets him'll wear diamonds, I says, but it aint going to be none of you common whores, and now Minnie'll have them washed and pressed until you wont know it."

"I cant wear it again," Temple whispered. "I cant."

"No more you'll have to, if you dont want. You can give them to Minnie, though I dont know what she'll do with them except maybe—" At the door the dogs began to whimper louder. Feet approached. The door opened. The Negro maid entered, carrying a tray bearing a quart bottle of beer and a glass of gin, the dogs surging in around her feet. "And tomorrow the stores'll be open and me and you'll go shopping, like he said for us to.

Like I said, the girl that gets him'll wear diamonds: you just see if I wasn't—" she turned, mountainous, the tankard lifted, as the two dogs scrambled onto the bed and then onto her lap, snapping viciously at one another. From their curled shapeless faces bead-like eyes glared

with choleric ferocity, their mouths gaped pinkly upon needle-like teeth. “Reba!” Miss Reba said, “get down! You, Mr Binford!” flinging them down, their teeth clicking about her hands. “You just bite me, you— Did you get Miss— What’s your name, honey? I didn’t quite catch it.”

“Temple,” Temple whispered.

“I mean, your first name, honey. We dont stand on no ceremony here.”

“That’s it. Temple. Temple Drake.”

“You got a boy’s name, aint you?—Miss Temple’s things washed, Minnie?”

“Yessum,” the maid said. “Hit’s dryin now hind the stove.” She came with the tray, shoving the dogs gingerly aside while they clicked their teeth at her ankles.

“You wash it out good?”

“I had a time with it,” Minnie said. “Seem like that the most hardest blood of all to get—” With a convulsive movement Temple flopped over, ducking her head beneath the covers. She felt Miss Reba’s hand.

“Now, now. Now, now. Here, take your drink. This one’s on me. I aint going to let no girl of Popeye’s—”

“I dont want any more,” Temple said.

“Now, now,” Miss Reba said. “Drink it and you’ll feel better.” She lifted Temple’s head. Temple clutched the covers to her throat. Miss Reba held the glass to her lips. She gulped it, writhed down again, clutching the covers about her, her eyes wide and black above the covers. “I bet you got that towel disarranged,” Miss Reba said, putting her hand on the covers.

“No,” Temple whispered. “It’s all right. It’s still there.” She shrank, cringing; they could see the cringing of her legs beneath the covers.

“Did you get Dr Quinn, Minnie?” Miss Reba said.

“Yessum.” Minnie was filling the tankard from the bottle, a dull frosting pacing the rise of liquor within the metal. “He say he dont make no Sunday afternoon calls.”

“Did you tell him who wanted him? Did you tell him Miss Reba wanted him?”

“Yessum. He say he dont—”

“You go back and tell that suh—You tell him I’ll— No; wait.” She rose heavily. “Sending a message like that back to me, that can put him in jail three times over.” She waddled toward the door, the dogs crowding about the felt slippers. The maid followed and closed the door. Temple could hear Miss Reba cursing the dogs as she descended the stairs with terrific slowness. The sounds died away.

The shades blew steadily in the windows with faint rasping sounds. Temple began to hear a clock. It sat on the mantel above a grate filled with fluted green paper. The clock was of flowered china, supported by four china nymphs. It had only one hand, scrolled and gilded, halfway between ten and eleven, lending to the otherwise blank face a quality of unequivocal assertion, as though it had nothing whatever to do with time.

Temple rose from the bed. Holding the towel about her she stole toward the door, her ears acute, her eyes a little blind with the strain of listening. It was twilight; in a dim mirror, a pellucid oblong of dusk set on end, she had a glimpse of herself like a thin ghost, a pale shadow moving in the uttermost profundity of shadow. She reached the door.

At once she began to hear a hundred conflicting sounds in a single converging threat and she clawed furiously at the door until she found

the bolt, dropping the towel to drive it home. Then she caught up the towel, her face averted, and ran back and sprang into the bed and clawed the covers to her chin and lay there, listening to the secret whisper of her blood.

They knocked at the door for some time before she made any sound. "It's the doctor, honey," Miss Reba panted harshly. "Come on, now. Be a good girl."

"I cant," Temple said, her voice faint and small. "I'm in bed."

"Come on, now. He wants to fix you up." She panted harshly. "My God, if I could just get one full breath again. I aint had a full breath since . . ." Low down beyond the door Temple could hear the dogs. "Honey."

She rose from the bed, holding the towel about her. She went to the door, silently.

"Honey," Miss Reba said.

"Wait," Temple said. "Let me get back to the bed before Let me get."

"There's a good girl," Miss Reba said. "I knowed she was going to be good."

"Count ten, now," Temple said. "Will you count ten, now?" she said against the wood. She slipped the bolt soundlessly, then she turned and sped back to the bed, her naked feet in pattering diminuendo.

The doctor was a fattish man with thin, curly hair. He wore horn-rimmed glasses which lent to his eyes no distortion at all, as though they were of clear glass and worn for decorum's sake. Temple watched him across the covers, holding them to her throat. "Make them go out," she whispered; "if they'll just go out."

"Now, now," Miss Reba said, "he's going to fix you up."

Temple clung to the covers.

“If the little lady will just let . . .” the doctor said. His hair evaporated finely from his brow. His mouth nipped in at the corners, his lips full and wet and red. Behind the glasses his eyes looked like little bicycle wheels at dizzy speed; a metallic hazel. He put out a thick, white hand bearing a masonic ring, haired over with fine reddish fuzz to the second knuckle-joints. Cold air slipped down her body, below her thighs; her eyes were closed. Lying on her back, her legs close together, she began to cry, hopelessly and passively, like a child in a dentist’s waiting-room.

“Now, now,” Miss Reba said, “take another sup of gin, honey. It’ll make you feel better.”

In the window the cracked shade, yawning now and then with a faint rasp against the frame, let twilight into the room in fainting surges. From beneath the shade the smoke-colored twilight emerged in slow puffs like signal smoke from a blanket, thickening in the room. The china figures which supported the clock gleamed in hushed smooth flexions: knee, elbow, flank, arm and breast in attitudes of voluptuous lassitude.

The glass face, become mirror-like, appeared to hold all reluctant light, holding in its tranquil depths a quiet gesture of moribund time, one-armed like a veteran from the wars. Half-past-ten o'clock. Temple lay in the bed, looking at the clock, thinking about half-past-ten-o'clock.

She wore a too-large gown of cerise crepe, black against the linen. Her hair was a black sprawl, combed out now; her face, throat and arms outside the covers were gray. After the others left the room she lay for a time, head and all beneath the covers.

She lay so until she heard the door shut and the descending feet, the doctor’s light, unceasing voice and Miss Reba’s labored breath grow twilight-colored in the dingy hall and die away. Then she sprang from the bed and ran to the door and shot the bolt and ran back and hurled

the covers over her head again, lying in a tight knot until the air was exhausted.

A final saffron-colored light lay upon the ceiling and the upper walls, tinged already with purple by the serrated palisade of Main Street high against the western sky. She watched it fade as the successive yawns of the shade consumed it. She watched the final light condense into the clock face, and the dial change from a round orifice in the darkness to a disc suspended in nothingness, the original chaos, and change in turn to a crystal ball holding in its still and cryptic depths the ordered chaos of the intricate and shadowy world upon whose scarred flanks the old wounds whirl onward at dizzy speed into darkness lurking with new disasters.

She was thinking about half-past-ten-oclock. The hour for dressing for a dance, if you were popular enough not to have to be on time. The air would be steamy with recent baths, and perhaps powder in the light like chaff in barn-lofts, and they looking at one another, comparing, talking whether you could do more damage if you could just walk out on the floor like you were now. Some wouldn't, mostly ones with short legs. Some of them were all right, but they just wouldn't. They wouldn't say why. The worst one of all said boys thought all girls were ugly except when they were dressed. She said the Snake had been seeing Eve for several days and never noticed her until Adam made her put on a fig leaf.

How do you know? they said, and she said because the Snake was there before Adam, because he was the first one thrown out of heaven; he was there all the time. But that wasn't what they meant and they said, How do you know? and Temple thought of her kind of backed up against the dressing table and the rest of them in a circle around her with their combed hair and their shoulders smelling of scented soap and the light powder in the air and their eyes like knives until you could almost watch her flesh where the eyes were touching it, and her eyes in her ugly face courageous and frightened and daring, and they all saying, How do you know? until she told them and held up her hand and swore

she had. That was when the youngest one turned and ran out of the room. She locked herself in the bath and they could hear her being sick.

She thought about half-past-ten-oclock in the morning. Sunday morning, and the couples strolling toward church. She remembered it was still Sunday, the same Sunday, looking at the fading peaceful gesture of the clock. Maybe it was half-past-ten this morning, that half-past-ten-oclock. Then I'm not here, she thought. This is not me.

Then I'm at school. I have a date tonight with . . . thinking of the student with whom she had the date. But she couldn't remember who it would be. She kept the dates written down in her Latin "pony," so she didn't have to bother about who it was. She'd just dress, and after a while somebody would call for her. So I better get up and dress, she said, looking at the clock.

She rose and crossed the room quietly. She watched the clock face, but although she could see a warped turmoil of faint light and shadow in geometric miniature swinging across it, she could not see herself. It's this nightie, she thought, looking at her arms, her breast rising out of a dissolving pall beneath which her toes peeped in pale, fleet intervals as she walked. She drew the bolt quietly and returned to the bed and lay with her head cradled in her arms.

There was still a little light in the room. She found that she was hearing her watch; had been hearing it for some time. She discovered that the house was full of noises, seeping into the room muffled and indistinguishable, as though from a distance. A bell rang faintly and shrilly somewhere; someone mounted the stairs in a swishing garment.

The feet went on past the door and mounted another stair and ceased. She listened to the watch. A car started beneath the window with a grind of gears; again the faint bell rang, shrill and prolonged. She found that the faint light yet in the room was from a street lamp. Then she realised that it was night and that the darkness beyond was full of the sound of the city.

She heard the two dogs come up the stairs in a furious scrabble. The noise passed the door and stopped, became utterly still; so still that she could almost see them crouching there in the dark against the wall, watching the stairs. One of them was named Mister something, Temple thought, waiting to hear Miss Reba's feet on the stairs. But it was not Miss Reba; they came too steadily and too lightly. The door opened; the dogs surged in in two shapeless blurs and scuttled under the bed and crouched, whimpering. "You, dawgs!" Minnie's voice said. "You make me spill this." The light came on. Minnie carried a tray. "I got you some supper," she said. "Where them dawgs gone to?"

"Under the bed," Temple said. "I dont want any."

Minnie came and set the tray on the bed and looked down at Temple, her pleasant face knowing and placid. "You want me to—" she said, extending her hand. Temple turned her face quickly away. She heard Minnie kneel, cajoling the dogs, the dogs snarling back at her with whimpering, asthmatic snarls and clicking teeth. "Come outen there, now," Minnie said. "They know fo Miss Reba do when she fixing to get drunk. You, Mr Binford!"

Temple raised her head. "Mr Binford?"

"He the one with the blue ribbon," Minnie said. Stooping, she flapped her arm at the dogs. They were backed against the wall at the head of the bed, snapping and snarling at her in mad terror. "Mr Binford was Miss Reba's man. Was landlord here twenty-five years until he die bout five years ago. Next day Miss Reba get these dawgs, name one Mr Binford and other Miss Reba. Whenever she go to the cemetery she start drinking like this evening, then they both got to run. But Mr Binford ketch it sho nough. Last time she throw him outen upstairs window and go down and empty Mr Binford's clothes closet and throw everything out in the street except what he buried in."

"Oh," Temple said. "No wonder they're scared. Let them stay under there. They wont bother me."

“Reckon I have to. Mr Binford aint going to leave this room, not if he know it.” She stood again, looking at Temple. “Eat that supper,” she said. “You feel better. I done slip you a drink of gin, too.”

“I dont want any,” Temple said, turning her face away. She heard Minnie leave the room. The door closed quietly. Under the bed the dogs crouched against the wall in that rigid and furious terror.

The light hung from the center of the ceiling, beneath a fluted shade of rose-colored paper browned where the bulb bulged it. The floor was covered by a figured maroon-tinted carpet tacked down in strips; the olive-tinted walls bore two framed lithographs. From the two windows curtains of machine lace hung, dust-colored, like strips of lightly congealed dust set on end.

The whole room had an air of musty stodginess, decorum; in the wavy mirror of a cheap varnished dresser, as in a stagnant pool, there seemed to linger spent ghosts of voluptuous gestures and dead lusts. In the corner, upon a faded scarred strip of oilcloth tacked over the carpet, sat a washstand bearing a flowered bowl and pitcher and a row of towels; in the corner behind it sat a slop jar dressed also in fluted rose-colored paper.

Beneath the bed the dogs made no sound. Temple moved slightly; the dry complaint of mattress and springs died into the terrific silence in which they crouched. She thought of them, woolly, shapeless; savage, petulant, spoiled, the flatulent monotony of their sheltered lives snatched up without warning by an incomprehensible moment of terror and fear of bodily annihilation at the very hands which symbolised by ordinary the licensed tranquillity of their lives.

The house was full of sounds. Indistinguishable, remote, they came in to her with a quality of awakening, resurgence, as though the house itself had been asleep, rousing itself with dark; she heard something which might have been a burst of laughter in a shrill woman voice. Steamy odors from the tray drifted across her face. She turned her head and looked at it, at the covered and uncovered dishes of thick

china. In the midst of them sat the glass of pale gin, a pack of cigarettes and a box of matches.

She rose on her elbow, catching up the slipping gown. She lifted the covers upon a thick steak, potatoes, green peas; rolls; an anonymous pinkish mass which some sense—elimination, perhaps—identified as a sweet. She drew the slipping gown up again, thinking about them eating down at school in a bright uproar of voices and clattering forks; of her father and brothers at the supper table at home; thinking about the borrowed gown and Miss Reba saying that they would go shopping tomorrow. And I've just got two dollars, she thought.

When she looked at the food she found that she was not hungry at all, didn't even want to look at it. She lifted the glass and gulped it empty, her face wry, and set it down and turned her face hurriedly from the tray, fumbling for the cigarettes. When she went to strike the match she looked at the tray again and took up a strip of potato gingerly in her fingers and ate it. She ate another, the unlighted cigarette in her other hand. Then she put the cigarette down and took up the knife and fork and began to eat, pausing from time to time to draw the gown up onto her shoulder.

When she finished eating she lit the cigarette. She heard the bell again, then another in a slightly different key. Across a shrill rush of a woman's voice a door banged. Two people mounted the stairs and passed the door; she heard Miss Reba's voice booming from somewhere and listened to her toiling slowly up the stairs.

Temple watched the door until it opened and Miss Reba stood in it, the tankard in her hand. She now wore a bulging house dress and a widow's bonnet with a veil. She entered on the flowered felt slippers. Beneath the bed the two dogs made a stifled concerted sound of utter despair.

The dress, unfastened in the back, hung lumpily about Miss Reba's shoulders. One ringed hand lay on her breast, the other held the

tankard high. Her open mouth, studded with gold-fillings gaped upon the harsh labor of her breathing.

“Oh God oh God,” she said. The dogs surged out from beneath the bed and hurled themselves toward the door in a mad scrabble. As they rushed past her she turned and flung the tankard at them. It struck the door jamb, splashing up the wall, and rebounded with a forlorn clatter. She drew her breath whistling, clutching her breast. She came to the bed and looked down at Temple through the veil.

“We was happy as two doves,” she wailed, choking, her rings smoldering in hot glints within her billowing breast. “Then he had to go and die on me.” She drew her breath whistling, her mouth gaped, shaping the hidden agony of her thwarted lungs, her eyes pale and round with stricken bafflement, protuberant. “As two doves,” she roared in a harsh, choking voice.

Again time had overtaken the dead gesture behind the clock crystal: Temple’s watch on the table beside the bed said half-past-ten. For two hours she had lain undisturbed, listening. She could distinguish voices now from below stairs. She had been hearing them for some time, lying in the room’s musty isolation. Later a mechanical piano began to play. Now and then she heard automobile brakes in the street beneath the window; once two voices quarreling bitterly came up and beneath the shade.

She heard two people—a man and a woman—mount the stairs and enter the room next hers. Then she heard Miss Reba toil up the stairs and pass her door, and lying in the bed, her eyes wide and still, she heard Miss Reba hammering at the next door with the metal tankard and shouting into the wood. Beyond the door the man and woman were utterly quiet, so quiet that Temple thought of the dogs again, thought of them crouching against the wall under the bed in that rigid fury of terror and despair.

She listened to Miss Reba’s voice shouting hoarsely into the blank wood. It died away into terrific gasping, then it rose again in the gross

and virile cursing of a man. Beyond the wall the man and woman made no sound. Temple lay staring at the wall beyond which Miss Reba's voice rose again as she hammered at the door with the tankard.

Temple neither saw nor heard her door when it opened. She just happened to look toward it after how long she did not know, and saw Popeye standing there, his hat slanted across his face. Still without making any sound he entered and shut the door and shot the bolt and came toward the bed. As slowly she began to shrink into the bed, drawing the covers up to her chin, watching him across the covers. He came and looked down at her. She writhed slowly in a cringing movement, cringing upon herself in as complete an isolation as though she were bound to a church steeple. She grinned at him, her mouth warped over the rigid, placative porcelain of her grimace.

When he put his hand on her she began to whimper. "No, no," she whispered, "he said I cant now he said . . ." He jerked the covers back and flung them aside. She lay motionless, her palms lifted, her flesh beneath the envelope of her loins cringing rearward in furious disintegration like frightened people in a crowd. When he advanced his hand again she thought he was going to strike her. Watching his face, she saw it beginning to twitch and jerk like that of a child about to cry, and she heard him begin to make a whimpering sound.

He gripped the top of the gown. She caught his wrists and began to toss from side to side, opening her mouth to scream. His hand clapped over her mouth, and gripping his wrist, the saliva drooling between his fingers, her body thrashing furiously from thigh to thigh, she saw him crouching beside the bed, his face wrung above his absent chin, his bluish lips protruding as though he were blowing upon hot soup, making a high whinnying sound like a horse. Beyond the wall Miss Reba filled the hall, the house, with a harsh choking uproar of obscene cursing.

“But that girl,” Horace said. “She was all right. You know she was all right when you left the house. When you saw her in the car with him. He was just giving her a lift to town. She was all right. You know she was all right.”

The woman sat on the edge of the bed, looking down at the child. It lay beneath the faded, clean blanket, its hands upflung beside its head, as though it had died in the presence of an unbearable agony which had not had time to touch it. Its eyes were half open, the balls rolled back into the skull so that only the white showed, in color like weak milk. Its face was still damp with perspiration, but its breathing was easier. It no longer breathed in those weak, whistling gasps as it had when Horace entered the room.

On a chair beside the bed sat a tumbler half full of faintly discolored water, with a spoon in it. Through the open window came the myriad noises of the square—cars, wagons, footsteps on the pavement beneath—and through it Horace could see the courthouse, with men pitching dollars back and forth between holes in the bare earth beneath the locust and water oaks.

The woman brooded above the child. “Nobody wanted her out there. Lee has told them and told them they must not bring women out there, and I told her before it got dark they were not her kind of people and to get away from there. It was that fellow that brought her. He was out there on the porch with them, still drinking, because when he came in to supper he couldn’t hardly walk, even. He hadn’t even tried to wash the blood off of his face.

Little shirt-tail boys that think because Lee breaks the law, they can come out there and treat our house like a . . . Grown people are bad, but at least they take buying whiskey like buying anything else; it’s the ones like him, the ones that are too young to realise that people dont break the law just for a holiday.” Horace could see her clenched hands writhing in her lap. “God, if I had my way, I’d hang every man that makes it or buys it or drinks it, every one of them.

“But why must it have been me, us? What had I ever done to her, to her kind? I told her to get away from there. I told her not to stay there until dark. But that fellow that brought her was getting drunk again, and him and Van picking at each other. If she’d just stopped running around where they had to look at her. She wouldn’t stay anywhere. She’d just dash out one door, and in a minute she’d come running in from the other direction.

And if he’d just let Van alone, because Van had to go back on the truck at midnight, and so Popeye would have made him behave. And Saturday night too, and them sitting up all night drinking anyway, and I had gone through it and gone through it and I’d tell Lee to let’s get away, that he was getting nowhere, and he would have these spells like last night, and no doctor, no telephone. And then she had to come out there, after I had slaved for him, slaved for him.” Motionless, her head bent and her hands still in her lap, she had that spent immobility of a chimney rising above the ruin of a house in the aftermath of a cyclone.

“Standing there in the corner behind the bed, with that raincoat on. She was that scared, when they brought the fellow in, all bloody again. They laid him on the bed and Van hit him again and Lee caught Van’s arm, and her standing there with her eyes like the holes in one of these masks. The raincoat was hanging on the wall, and she had it on, over her coat. Her dress was all folded up on the bed. They threw the fellow right on top of it, blood and all, and I said ‘God, are you drunk too?’ But Lee just looked at me and I saw that his nose was white already, like it gets when he’s drunk.

“There wasn’t any lock on the door, but I thought that pretty soon they’d have to go and see about the truck and then I could do something. Then Lee made me go too, and he took the lamp out, so I had to wait until they went back to the porch before I could go back. I stood just inside the door. The fellow was snoring, in the bed there, breathing hard, with his nose and mouth all battered up again, and I could hear them on the porch. Then they would be outdoors, around the house and at the back too I could hear them. Then they got quiet.

“I stood there, against the wall. He would snore and choke and catch his breath and moan, sort of, and I would think about that girl lying there in the dark, with her eyes open, listening to them, and me having to stand there, waiting for them to go away so I could do something. I told her to go away. I said ‘What fault is it of mine if you’re not married? I don’t want you here a bit more than you want to be here.’ I said ‘I’ve lived my life without any help from people of your sort; what right have you got to look to me for help?’ Because I’ve done everything for him. I’ve been in the dirt for him. I’ve put everything behind me and all I asked was to be let alone.

“Then I heard the door open. I could tell Lee by the way he breathes. He went to the bed and said ‘I want the raincoat. Sit up and take it off’ and I could hear the shucks rattling while he took it off of her, then he went out. He just got the raincoat and went out. It was Van’s coat.

“And I have walked around that house so much at night, with those men there, men living off of Lee’s risk, men that wouldn’t lift a finger for him if he got caught, until I could tell any of them by the way they breathed, and I could tell Popeye by the smell of that stuff on his hair. Tommy was following him. He came in the door behind Popeye and looked at me and I could see his eyes, like a cat. Then his eyes went away and I could feel him sort of squatting against me, and we could hear Popeye over where the bed was and that fellow snoring and snoring.

“I could just hear little faint sounds, from the shucks, so I knew it was all right yet, and in a minute Popeye came on back, and Tommy followed him out, creeping along behind him, and I stood there until I heard them go down to the truck. Then I went to the bed. When I touched her she began to fight. I was trying to put my hand over her mouth so she couldn’t make a noise, but she didn’t anyway. She just lay there, thrashing about, rolling her head from one side to the other, holding to the coat.

“ ‘You fool!’ I says ‘It’s me—the woman.’ ”

“But that girl,” Horace said. “She was all right. When you were coming back to the house the next morning after the baby’s bottle, you saw her and knew she was all right.” The room gave onto the square. Through the window he could see the young men pitching dollars in the courthouse yard, and the wagons passing or tethered about the hitching chains, and he could hear the footsteps and voices of people on the slow and unhurried pavement below the window; the people buying comfortable things to take home and eat at quiet tables. “You know she was all right.”

That night Horace went out to his sister’s, in a hired car; he did not telephone. He found Miss Jenny in her room. “Well,” she said. “Narcissa will—”

“I dont want to see her,” Horace said. “Her nice, well-bred young man. Her Virginia gentleman. I know why he didn’t come back.”

“Who? Gowan?”

“Yes; Gowan. And, by the Lord, he’d better not come back. By God, when I think that I had the opportunity—”

“What? What did he do?”

“He carried a little fool girl out there with him that day and got drunk and ran off and left her. That’s what he did. If it hadn’t been for that woman— And when I think of people like that walking the earth with impunity just because he has a balloon-tailed suit and went through the astonishing experience of having attended Virginia . . . On any train or in any hotel, on the street; anywhere, mind you—”

“Oh,” Miss Jenny said. “I didn’t understand at first who you meant. Well,” she said. “You remember that last time he was here, just after you came? the day he wouldn’t stay for supper and went to Oxford?”

“Yes. And when I think how I could have—”

“He asked Narcissa to marry him. She told him that one child was enough for her.”

“I said she has no heart. She cannot be satisfied with less than insult.”

“So he got mad and said he would go to Oxford, where there was a woman he was reasonably confident he would not appear ridiculous to: something like that. Well.” She looked at him, her neck bowed to see across her spectacles. “I’ll declare, a male parent is a funny thing, but just let a man have a hand in the affairs of a female that’s no kin to him . . . What is it that makes a man think that the female flesh he marries or begets might misbehave, but all he didn’t marry or get is bound to?”

“Yes,” Horace said, “and thank God she isn’t my flesh and blood. I can reconcile myself to her having to be exposed to a scoundrel now and then, but to think that at any moment she may become involved with a fool.”

“Well, what are you going to do about it? Start some kind of roach campaign?”

“I’m going to do what she said: I’m going to have a law passed making it obligatory upon everyone to shoot any man less than fifty years old that makes, buys, sells or thinks whiskey . . . scoundrel I can face, but to think of her being exposed to any fool. . . .”

He returned to town. The night was warm, the darkness filled with the sound of newfledged cicadas. He was using a bed, one chair, a bureau on which he had spread a towel and upon which lay his brushes, his watch, his pipe and tobacco pouch, and, propped against a book, a photograph of his step-daughter, Little Belle. Upon the glazed surface a highlight lay. He shifted the photograph until the face came clear. He stood before it, looking at the sweet, inscrutable face which looked in turn at something just beyond his shoulder, out of the dead cardboard.

He was thinking of the grape arbor in Kinston, of summer twilight and the murmur of voices darkening into silence as he approached, who

meant them, her, no harm; who meant her less than harm, good God; darkening into the pale whisper of her white dress, of the delicate and urgent mammalian whisper of that curious small flesh which he had not begot and in which appeared to be vatted delicately some seething sympathy with the blossoming grape.

He moved, suddenly. As of its own accord the photograph had shifted, slipping a little from its precarious balancing against the book. The image blurred into the highlight, like something familiar seen beneath disturbed though clear water; he looked at the familiar image with a kind of quiet horror and despair, at a face suddenly older in sin than he would ever be, a face more blurred than sweet, at eyes more secret than soft. In reaching for it, he knocked it flat; whereupon once more the face mused tenderly behind the rigid travesty of the painted mouth, contemplating something beyond his shoulder. He lay in bed, dressed, with the light burning, until he heard the courthouse clock strike three. Then he left the house, putting his watch and his tobacco pouch into his pocket.

The railroad station was three quarters of a mile away. The waiting room was lit by a single weak bulb. It was empty save for a man in overalls asleep on the bench, his head on his folded coat, snoring, and a woman in a calico dress, in a dingy shawl and a new hat trimmed with rigid and moribund flowers set square and awkward on her head. Her head was bent; she may have been asleep; her hands crossed on the paper-wrapped parcel upon her lap, a straw suit case at her feet. It was then that Horace found that he had forgot his pipe.

The train came, finding him tramping back and forth along the cinder-packed right-of-way. The man and woman got on, the man carrying his rumpled coat, the woman the parcel and the suit case. He followed them into the day coach filled with snoring, with bodies sprawled half into the aisle as though in the aftermath of a sudden and violent destruction, with dropped heads, open-mouthed, their throats turned profoundly upward as though waiting the stroke of knives.

He dozed. The train clicked on, stopped, jolted. He waked and dozed again. Someone shook him out of sleep into a primrose dawn, among unshaven puffy faces washed lightly over as though with the paling ultimate stain of a holocaust, blinking at one another with dead eyes into which personality returned in secret opaque waves. He got off, had breakfast, and took another accommodation, entering a car where a child wailed hopelessly, crunching peanut-shells under his feet as he moved up the car in a stale ammoniac odor until he found a seat beside a man.

A moment later the man leaned forward and spat tobacco juice between his knees. Horace rose quickly and went forward into the smoking car. It was full too, the door between it and the Jim Crow car swinging open. Standing in the aisle he could look forward into a diminishing corridor of green plush seat-backs topped by hatted cannonballs swaying in unison, while gusts of talk and laughter blew back and kept in steady motion the blue acrid air in which white men sat, spitting into the aisle.

He changed again. The waiting crowd was composed half of young men in collegiate clothes with small cryptic badges on their shirts and vests, and two girls with painted small faces and scant bright dresses like identical artificial flowers surrounded each by bright and restless bees. When the train came they pushed gaily forward, talking and laughing, shouldering aside older people with gay rudeness, clashing and slamming seats back and settling themselves, turning their faces up out of laughter, their cold faces still toothed with it, as three middle-aged women moved down the car, looking tentatively left and right at the filled seats.

The two girls sat together, removing a fawn and a blue hat, lifting slender hands and preening not-quite-formless fingers about their close heads seen between the sprawled elbows and the leaning heads of two youths hanging over the back of the seat and surrounded by colored hat bands at various heights where the owners sat on the seat arms or stood in the aisle; and presently the conductor's cap as he thrust among them with plaintive, fretful cries, like a bird.

“Tickets. Tickets, please,” he chanted. For an instant they held him there, invisible save for his cap. Then two young men slipped swiftly back and into the seat behind Horace. He could hear them breathing. Forward the conductor’s punch clicked twice. He came on back. “Tickets,” he chanted. “Tickets.” He took Horace’s and stopped where the youths sat.

“You already got mine,” one said. “Up there.”

“Where’s your check?” the conductor said.

“You never gave us any. You got our tickets, though. Mine was number—” he repeated a number glibly, in a frank, pleasant tone. “Did you notice the number of yours, Shack?”

The second one repeated a number in a frank, pleasant tone. “Sure you got ours. Look and see.” He began to whistle between his teeth, a broken dance rhythm, unmusical.

“Do you eat at Gordon hall?” the other said.

“No. I have natural halitosis.” The conductor went on. The whistle reached crescendo, clapped off by his hands on his knees, ejaculating duh-duh-duh. Then he just squalled, meaningless, vertiginous; to Horace it was like sitting before a series of printed pages turned in furious snatches, leaving a series of cryptic, headless and tailless evocations on the mind.

“She’s travelled a thousand miles without a ticket.”

“Marge too.”

“Beth too.”

“Duh-duh-duh.”

“Marge too.”

“I’m going to punch mine Friday night.”

“Eeeeyow.”

“Do you like liver?”

“I cant reach that far.”

“Eeeeeyow.”

They whistled, clapping their heels on the floor to furious crescendo, saying duh-duh-duh. The first jolted the seat back against Horace’s head. He rose. “Come on,” he said. “He’s done gone.” Again the seat jarred into Horace and he watched them return and join the group that blocked the aisle, saw one of them lay his bold, rough hand flat upon one of the bright, soft faces uptilted to them. Beyond the group a countrywoman with an infant in her arms stood braced against a seat. From time to time she looked back at the blocked aisle and the empty seats beyond.

At Oxford he descended into a throng of them at the station, hatless, in bright dresses, now and then with books in their hands and surrounded still by swarms of colored shirts. Impassable, swinging hands with their escorts, objects of casual and puppyish pawings, they dawdled up the hill toward the college, swinging their little hips, looking at Horace with cold, blank eyes as he stepped off the walk in order to pass them.

At the top of the hill three paths diverged through a broad grove beyond which, in green vistas, buildings in red brick or gray stone gleamed, and where a clear soprano bell began to ring. The procession became three streams, thinning rapidly upon the dawdling couples, swinging hands, strolling in erratic surges, lurching into one another with puppyish squeals, with the random intense purposelessness of children.

The broader path led to the postoffice. He entered and waited until the window was clear.

"I'm trying to find a young lady, Miss Temple Drake. I probably just missed her, didn't I?"

"She's not here any longer," the clerk said. "She quit school about two weeks ago." He was young: a dull, smooth face behind horn glasses, the hair meticulous. After a time Horace heard himself asking quietly:

"You dont know where she went?"

The clerk looked at him. He leaned, lowering his voice: "Are you another detective?"

"Yes," Horace said, "yes. No matter. It doesn't matter." Then he was walking quietly down the steps, into the sunlight again. He stood there while on both sides of him they passed in a steady stream of little colored dresses, bare-armed, with close bright heads, with that identical cool, innocent, unabashed expression which he knew well in their eyes, above the savage identical paint upon their mouths; like music moving, like honey poured in sunlight, pagan and evanescent and serene, thinly evocative of all lost days and outpaced delights, in the sun. Bright, trembling with heat, it lay in open glades of miragelike glimpses of stone or brick: columns without tops, towers apparently floating above a green cloud in slow ruin against the southwest wind, sinister, imponderable, bland; and he standing there listening to the sweet cloistral bell, thinking Now what? What now? and answering himself: Why, nothing. Nothing. It's finished.

He returned to the station an hour before the train was due, a filled but unlighted cob pipe in his hand. In the lavatory he saw, scrawled on the foul, stained wall, her pencilled name. Temple Drake. He read it quietly, his head bent, slowly fingering the unlighted pipe.

A half hour before the train came they began to gather, strolling down the hill and gathering along the platform with thin, bright, raucous

laughter, their blonde legs monotonous, their bodies moving continually inside their scant garments with that awkward and voluptuous purposelessness of the young.

The return train carried a pullman. He went on through the day coach and entered it. There was only one other occupant: a man in the center of the car, next the window, bareheaded, leaning back, his elbow on the window sill and an unlighted cigar in his ringed hand. When the train drew away, passing the sleek crowds in increasing reverse, the other passenger rose and went forward toward the day coach. He carried an overcoat on his arm, and a soiled, light-colored felt hat.

With the corner of his eye Horace saw his hand fumbling at his breast pocket, and he remarked the severe trim of hair across the man's vast, soft, white neck. Like with a guillotine, Horace thought, watching the man sidle past the porter in the aisle and vanish, passing out of his sight and his mind in the act of flinging the hat onto his head. The train sped on, swaying on the curves, flashing past an occasional house, through cuts and across valleys where young cotton wheeled slowly in fanlike rows.

The train checked speed; a jerk came back, and four whistle-blasts. The man in the soiled hat entered, taking a cigar from his breast pocket. He came down the aisle swiftly, looking at Horace. He slowed, the cigar in his fingers. The train jolted again. The man flung his hand out and caught the back of the seat facing Horace.

"Aint this Judge Benbow?" he said. Horace looked up into a vast, puffy face without any mark of age or thought whatever—a majestic sweep of flesh on either side of a small blunt nose, like looking out over a mesa, yet withal some indefinable quality of delicate paradox, as though the Creator had completed his joke by lighting the munificent expenditure of putty with something originally intended for some weak, acquisitive creature like a squirrel or a rat. "Dont I address Judge Benbow?" he said, offering his hand. "I'm Senator Snopes, Cla'ence Snopes."

“Oh,” Horace said, “yes. Thanks,” he said, “but I’m afraid you anticipate a little. Hope, rather.”

The other waved the cigar, the other hand, palm-up, the third finger discolored faintly at the base of a huge ring, in Horace’s face. Horace shook it and freed his hand. “I thought I recognised you when you got on at Oxford,” Snopes said, “but I— May I set down?” he said, already shoving at Horace’s knee with his leg. He flung the overcoat—a shoddy blue garment with a greasy velvet collar—on the seat and sat down as the train stopped.

“Yes, sir, I’m always glad to see any of the boys, any time . . .” He leaned across Horace and peered out the window at a small dingy station with its cryptic bulletin board chalked over, an express truck bearing a wire chicken coop containing two forlorn fowls, three or four men in overalls gone restfully against the wall, chewing. “Course you aint in my county no longer, but what I say a man’s friends is his friends, whichever way they vote. Because a friend is a friend, and whether he can do anything for me or not . . .” He leaned back, the unlighted cigar in his fingers. “You aint come all the way up from the big town, then.”

“No,” Horace said.

“Any time you’re in Jackson, I’ll be glad to accommodate you as if you was still in my county. Dont no man stay so busy he aint got time for his old friends, what I say. Let’s see, you’re in Kinston, now, aint you? I know your senators. Fine men, both of them, but I just caint call their names.”

“I really couldn’t say, myself,” Horace said. The train started. Snopes leaned into the aisle, looking back. His light gray suit had been pressed but not cleaned. “Well,” he said. He rose and took up the overcoat. “Any time you’re in the city . . . You going to Jefferson, I reckon?”

“Yes,” Horace said.

“I’ll see you again, then.”

“Why not ride back here?” Horace said. “You’ll find it more comfortable.”

“I’m going up and have a smoke,” Snopes said, waving the cigar. “I’ll see you again.”

“You can smoke here. There aren’t any ladies.”

“Sure,” Snopes said. “I’ll see you at Holly Springs.” He went on back toward the day coach and passed out of sight with the cigar in his mouth. Horace remembered him ten years ago as a hulking, dull youth, son of a restaurant-owner, member of a family which had been moving from the Frenchman’s Bend neighborhood into Jefferson for the past twenty years, in sections; a family of enough ramifications to have elected him to the legislature without recourse to a public polling.

He sat quite still, the cold pipe in his hand. He rose and went forward through the day coach, then into the smoker. Snopes was in the aisle, his thigh draped over the arm of a seat where four men sat, using the unlighted cigar to gesture with. Horace caught his eye and beckoned from the vestibule. A moment later Snopes joined him, the overcoat on his arm.

“How are things going at the capital?” Horace said.

Snopes began to speak in his harsh, assertive voice. There emerged gradually a picture of stupid chicanery and petty corruption for stupid and petty ends, conducted principally in hotel rooms into which bellboys whisked with bulging jackets upon discreet flicks of skirts in swift closet doors. “Any time you’re in town,” he said. “I always like to show the boys around. Ask anybody in town; they’ll tell you if it’s there, Cla’ence Snopes’ll know where it is. You got a pretty tough case up home there, what I hear.”

"Cant tell yet," Horace said. He said: "I stopped off at Oxford today, at the university, speaking to some of my step-daughter's friends. One of her best friends is no longer in school there. A young lady from Jackson named Temple Drake."

Snopes was watching him with thick, small, opaque eyes. "Oh, yes; Judge Drake's gal," he said. "The one that ran away."

"Ran away?" Horace said. "Ran back home, did she? What was the trouble? Fail in her work?"

"I dont know. When it come out in the paper folks thought she'd run off with some fellow. One of them companionate marriages."

"But when she turned up at home, they knew it wasn't that, I reckon. Well, well, Belle'll be surprised. What's she doing now? Running around Jackson, I suppose?"

"She aint there."

"Not?" Horace said. He could feel the other watching him. "Where is she?"

"Her paw sent her up north somewhere, with an aunt. Michigan. It was in the papers couple days later."

"Oh," Horace said. He still held the cold pipe, and he discovered his hand searching his pocket for a match. He drew a deep breath. "That Jackson paper's a pretty good paper. It's considered the most reliable paper in the state, isn't it?"

"Sure," Snopes said. "You was at Oxford trying to locate her?"

"No, no. I just happened to meet a friend of my daughter who told me she had left school. Well, I'll see you at Holly Springs."

“Sure,” Snopes said. Horace returned to the pullman and sat down and lit the pipe.

When the train slowed for Holly Springs he went to the vestibule, then he stepped quickly back into the car. Snopes emerged from the day coach as the porter opened the door and swung down the step, stool in hand. Snopes descended. He took something from his breast pocket and gave it to the porter. “Here, George,” he said, “have a cigar.”

Horace descended. Snopes went on, the soiled hat towering half a head above any other. Horace looked at the porter.

“He gave it to you, did he?”

The porter chucked the cigar on his palm. He put it in his pocket.

“What’re you going to do with it?” Horace said.

“I wouldn’t give it to nobody I know,” the porter said.

“Does he do this very often?”

“Three-four times a year. Seems like I always git him, too . . . Thank’ suh.”

Horace saw Snopes enter the waiting-room; the soiled hat, the vast neck, passed again out of his mind. He filled the pipe again.

From a block away he heard the Memphis-bound train come in. It was at the platform when he reached the station. Beside the open vestibule Snopes stood, talking with two youths in new straw hats, with something vaguely mentorial about his thick shoulders and his gestures. The train whistled. The two youths got on. Horace stepped back around the corner of the station.

When his train came he saw Snopes get on ahead of him and enter the smoker. Horace knocked out his pipe and entered the day coach and found a seat at the rear, facing backward.

XX

As Horace was leaving the station at Jefferson a townward-bound car slowed beside him. It was the taxi which he used to go out to his sister's. "I'll give you a ride, this time," the driver said.

"Much obliged," Horace said. He got in. When the car entered the square, the courthouse clock said only twenty minutes past eight, yet there was no light in the hotel room window. "Maybe the child's asleep," Horace said. He said, "If you'll just drop me at the hotel—" Then he found that the driver was watching him, with a kind of discreet curiosity.

"You been out of town today," the driver said.

"Yes," Horace said. "What is it? What happened here today?"

"She aint staying at the hotel any more. I heard Mrs Walker taken her in at the jail."

"Oh," Horace said. "I'll get out at the hotel."

The lobby was empty. After a moment the proprietor appeared: a tight, iron-gray man with a toothpick, his vest open upon a neat paunch. The woman was not there. "It's these church ladies," he said. He lowered his voice, the toothpick in his fingers. "They come in this morning. A committee of them. You know how it is, I reckon."

"You mean to say you let the Baptist church dictate who your guests shall be?"

“It’s them ladies. You know how it is, once they got set on a thing. A man might just as well give up and do like they say. Of course, with me—”

“By God, if there was a man—”

“Shhhhhh,” the proprietor said. “You know how it is when them—”

“But of course there wasn’t a man who would— And you call yourself one, that’ll let—”

“I got a certain position to keep up myself,” the proprietor said in a placative tone. “If you come right down to it.” He stepped back a little, against the desk. “I reckon I can say who’ll stay in my house and who won’t,” he said. “And I know some more folks around here that better do the same thing. Not no mile off, neither. I aint beholden to no man. Not to you, nowadays.”

“Where is she now? or did they drive her out of town?”

“That aint my affair, where folks go after they check out,” the proprietor said, turning his back. He said: “I reckon somebody took her in, though.”

“Yes,” Horace said. “Christians. Christians.” He turned toward the door. The proprietor called him. He turned. The other was taking a paper down from a pigeon-hole. Horace returned to the desk. The paper lay on the desk. The proprietor leaned with his hands on the desk, the toothpick tilted in his mouth.

“She said you’d pay it,” he said.

He paid the bill, counting the money down with shaking hands. He entered the jail yard and went to the door and knocked. After a while a lank, slattern woman came with a lamp, holding a man’s coat across her breast. She peered at him and said before he could speak:

“You’re lookin fer Miz Goodwin, I reckon.”

“Yes. How did— Did—”

“You’re the lawyer. I’ve seed you befo. She’s hyer. Sleepin now.”

“Thanks,” Horace said. “Thanks. I knew that someone—I didn’t believe that—”

“I reckon I kin always find a bed fer a woman and child,” the woman said. “I dont keer whut Ed says. Was you wantin her special? She’s sleepin now.”

“No, no; I just wanted to—”

The woman watched him across the lamp. “Taint no need botherin her, then. You kin come around in the mawnin and git her a boa’din-place. ’Taint no hurry.”

On the next afternoon Horace went out to his sister’s, again in a hired car. He told her what had happened. “I’ll have to take her home now.”

“Not into my house,” Narcissa said.

He looked at her. Then he began to fill his pipe slowly and carefully. “It’s not a matter of choice, my dear. You must see that.”

“Not in my house,” Narcissa said. “I thought we settled that.”

He struck the match and lit the pipe and put the match carefully into the fireplace. “Do you realise that she has been practically turned into the streets? That—”

“That shouldn’t be a hardship. She ought to be used to that.”

He looked at her. He put the pipe in his mouth and smoked it to a careful coal, watching his hand tremble upon the stem. “Listen. By

tomorrow they will probably ask her to leave town. Just because she happens not to be married to the man whose child she carries about these sanctified streets. But who told them? That's what I want to know. I know that nobody in Jefferson knew it except—"

"You were the first I heard tell it," Miss Jenny said. "But, Narcissa, why—"

"Not in my house," Narcissa said.

"Well," Horace said. He drew the pipe to an even coal. "That settles it, of course," he said, in a dry, light voice.

She rose. "Will you stay here tonight?"

"What? No. No. I'll—I told her I'd come for her at the jail and . . ." He sucked at his pipe. "Well, I don't suppose it matters. I hope it doesn't."

She was still paused, turning. "Will you stay or not?"

"I could even tell her I had a puncture," Horace said. "Time's not such a bad thing after all. Use it right, and you can stretch anything out, like a rubberband, until it busts somewhere, and there you are, with all tragedy and despair in two little knots between thumb and finger of each hand."

"Will you stay, or wont you stay, Horace?" Narcissa said.

"I think I'll stay," Horace said.

He was in bed. He had been lying in the dark for about an hour, when the door of the room opened, felt rather than seen or heard. It was his sister. He rose to his elbow. She took shape vaguely, approaching the bed. She came and looked down at him. "How much longer are you going to keep this up?" she said.

“Just until morning,” he said. “I’m going back to town. You need not see me again.”

She stood beside the bed, motionless. After a moment her cold unbending voice came down to him: “You know what I mean.”

“I promise not to bring her into your house again. You can send Isom in to hide in the canna bed.” She said nothing. “Surely you don’t object to my living there, do you?”

“I dont care where you live. The question is, where I live. I live here, in this town. I’ll have to stay here. But you’re a man. It doesn’t matter to you. You can go away.”

“Oh,” he said. He lay quite still. She stood above him, motionless. They spoke quietly, as though they were discussing wallpaper, food.

“Dont you see, this is my home, where I must spend the rest of my life. Where I was born. I dont care where else you go not what you do. I dont care how many women you have nor who they are. But I cannot have my brother mixed up with a woman people are talking about. I dont expect you to have consideration for me; I ask you to have consideration for our father and mother. Take her to Memphis. They say you refused to let the man have bond to get out of jail; take her on to Memphis. You can think of a lie to tell him about that, too.”

“Oh. So you think that, do you?”

“I dont think anything about it. I don’t care. That’s what people in town think. So it doesn’t matter whether it’s true or not. What I do mind is, every day you force me to have to tell lies for you. Go away from here, Horace. Anybody but you would realise it’s a case of cold-blooded murder.”

“And over her, of course. I suppose they say that too, out of their odorous and omnipotent sanctity. Do they say yet that it was I killed him?”

“I dont see that it makes any difference who did it. The question is, are you going to stay mixed up with it? When people already believe you and she are slipping into my house at night.” Her cold, unbending voice shaped the words in the darkness above him. Through the window, upon the blowing darkness, came the drowsy dissonance of cicada and cricket.

“Do you believe that?” he said.

“It doesn’t matter what I believe. Go on away, Horace. I ask it.”

“And leave her—them, flat?”

“Hire a lawyer, if he still insists he’s innocent. I’ll pay for it. You can get a better criminal lawyer than you are. She wont know it. She wont even care. Cant you see that she is just leading you on to get him out of jail for nothing? Dont you know that woman has got money hidden away somewhere? You’re going back into town tomorrow, are you?” She turned, began to dissolve into the blackness. “You wont leave before breakfast.”

The next morning at breakfast, his sister said: “Who will be the lawyer on the other side of the case?”

“District Attorney. Why?”

She rang the bell and sent for fresh bread. Horace watched her. “Why do you ask that?” Then he said: “Damn little squirt.” He was talking about the District Attorney, who had also been raised in Jefferson and who had gone to the town school with them. “I believe he was at the bottom of that business night before last. The hotel. Getting her turned out of the hotel for public effect, political capital. By God, if I knew that, believed that he had done that just to get elected to Congress . . .”

After Horace left, Narcissa went up to Miss Jenny’s room. “Who is the District Attorney?” she said.

“You’ve known him all your life,” Miss Jenny said. “You even elected him. Eustace Graham. What do you want to know for? Are you looking around for a substitute for Gowan Stevens?”

“I just wondered,” Narcissa said.

“Fiddlesticks,” Miss Jenny said. “You dont wonder. You just do things and then stop until the next time to do something comes around.”

Horace met Snopes emerging from the barbershop, his jowls gray with powder, moving in an effluvium of pomade. In the bosom of his shirt, beneath his bow tie, he wore an imitation ruby stud which matched his ring. The tie was of blue polka-dots; the very white spots on it appeared dirty when seen close; the whole man with his shaved neck and pressed clothes and gleaming shoes emanated somehow the idea that he had been dry-cleaned rather than washed.

“Well, Judge,” he said, “I hear you’re having some trouble gettin a boarding-place for that client of yourn. Like I always say—” he leaned, his voice lowered, his mud-colored eyes roving aside “—the church aint got no place in politics, and women aint got no place in neither one, let alone the law. Let them stay at home and they’ll find plenty to do without upsetting a man’s lawsuit. And besides, a man aint no more than human, and what he does aint nobody’s business but his. What you done with her?”

“She’s at the jail,” Horace said. He spoke shortly, making to pass on. The other blocked his way with an effect of clumsy accident.

“You got them all stirred up, anyhow. Folks is saying you wouldn’t git Goodwin no bond, so he’d have to stay—” again Horace made to pass on. “Half the trouble in this world is caused by women, I always say. Like that girl gittin her paw all stirred up, running off like she done. I reckon he done the right thing sending her clean outen the state.”

“Yes,” Horace said in a dry, furious voice.

"I'm mighty glad to hear your case is going all right. Between you and me, I'd like to see a good lawyer make a monkey outen that District Attorney. Give a fellow like that a little county office and he gits too big for his pants right away. Well, glad to've saw you. I got some business up town for a day or two. I dont reckon you'll be going up that-a-way?"

"What?" Horace said. "Up where?"

"Memphis. Anything I can do for you?"

"No," Horace said. He went on. For a short distance he could not see at all. He tramped steadily, the muscles beside his jaws beginning to ache, passing people who spoke to him, unawares.

XXI

As the train neared Memphis Virgil Snopes ceased talking and began to grow quieter and quieter, while on the contrary his companion, eating from a paraffin-paper package of popcorn and molasses, grew livelier and livelier with a quality something like intoxication, seeming not to notice the inverse state of his friend. He was still talking away when, carrying their new, imitation leather suit cases, their new hats slanted above their shaven necks, they descended at the station. In the waiting room Fonzo said:

"Well, what're we going to do first?" Virgil said nothing. Someone jostled them: Fonzo caught at his hat. "What we going to do?" he said. Then he looked at Virgil, at his face. "What's the matter?"

"Aint nothing the matter," Virgil said.

"Well, what're we going to do? You been here before. I aint."

"I reckon we better kind of look around," Virgil said.

Fonzo was watching him, his blue eyes like china. "What's the matter with you? All the time on the train you was talking about how many times you been to Memphis. I bet you aint never bu—" Someone jostled them, thrust them apart; a stream of people began to flow between them. Clutching his suit case and hat Fonzo fought his way back to his friend.

"I have, too," Virgil said, looking glassily about.

"Well, what we going to do then? It wont be open till eight oclock in the morning."

"What you in such a rush for, then?"

"Well, I dont aim to stay here all night. . . . What did you do when you was here before?"

"Went to the hotel," Virgil said.

"Which one? They got more than one here. You reckon all these folks could stay in one hotel? Which one was it?"

Virgil's eyes were also a pale, false blue. He looked glassily about. "The Gayoso hotel," he said.

"Well, let's go to it," Fonzo said. They moved toward the exit. A man shouted "taxi" at them; a redcap tried to take Fonzo's bag. "Look out," he said, drawing it back. On the street more cabmen barked at them.

"So this is Memphis," Fonzo said. "Which way is it, now?" He had no answer. He looked around and saw Virgil in the act of turning away from a cabman. "What you—"

"Up this way," Virgil said. "It aint far."

It was a mile and a half. From time to time they swapped hands with the bags. "So this is Memphis," Fonzo said. "Where have I been all my

life?" When they entered the Gayoso a porter offered to take the bags. They brushed past him and entered, walking gingerly on the tile floor. Virgil stopped.

"Come on," Fonzo said.

"Wait," Virgil said.

"Thought you was here before," Fonzo said.

"I was. This hyer place is too high. They'll want a dollar a day here."

"What we going to do, then?"

"Let's kind of look around."

They returned to the street. It was five oclock. They went on, looking about, carrying the suit cases. They came to another hotel. Looking in they saw marble, brass cuspidors, hurrying bellboys, people sitting among potted plants.

"That un'll be just as bad," Virgil said.

"What we going to do then? We caint walk around all night."

"Let's git off this hyer street," Virgil said. They left Main Street. At the next corner Virgil turned again. "Let's look down this-a-way. Git away from all that ere plate glass and monkey niggers. That's what you have to pay for in them places."

"Why? It's already bought when we got there. How come we have to pay for it?"

"Suppose somebody broke it while we was there. Suppose they couldn't ketch who done it. Do you reckon they'd let us out withouten we paid our share?"

At five-thirty they entered a narrow dingy street of frame houses and junk yards. Presently they came to a three-storey house in a small grassless yard. Before the entrance a lattice-work false entry leaned. On the steps sat a big woman in a mother hubbard, watching two fluffy white dogs which moved about the yard.

“Let’s try that un,” Fonzo said.

“That aint no hotel. Where’s ere sign?”

“Why aint it?” Fonzo said. “Course it is. Who ever heard of anybody just living in a three-storey house?”

“We cant go in this-a-way,” Virgil said. “This hyer’s the back. Dont you see that privy?” jerking his head toward the lattice.

“Well, let’s go around to the front, then,” Fonzo said. “Come on.”

They went around the block. The opposite side was filled by a row of automobile salesrooms. They stood in the middle of the block, their suit cases in their right hands.

“I dont believe you was ever here before, noways,” Fonzo said.

“Let’s go back. That must a been the front.”

“With the privy built onto the front door?” Fonzo said.

“We can ask that lady.”

“Who can? I aint.”

“Let’s go back and see, anyway.”

They returned. The woman and the dogs were gone.

“Now you done it,” Fonzo said. “Aint you?”

“Let’s wait a while. Maybe she’ll come back.”

“It’s almost seven oclock,” Fonzo said.

They set the bags down beside the fence. The lights had come on, quivering high in the serried windows against the tall serene western sky.

“I can smell ham, too,” Fonzo said.

A cab drew up. A plump blonde woman got out, followed by a man. They watched them go up the walk and enter the lattice. Fonzo sucked his breath across his teeth. “Durned if they didn’t,” he whispered.

“Maybe it’s her husband,” Virgil said.

Fonzo picked up his bag. “Come on.”

“Wait,” Virgil said. “Give them a little time.”

They waited. The man came out and got in the cab and went away.

“Caint be her husband,” Fonzo said. “I wouldn’t a never left. Come on.” He entered the gate.

“Wait,” Virgil said.

“You can,” Fonzo said. Virgil took his bag and followed. He stopped while Fonzo opened the lattice gingerly and peered in. “Aw, hell,” he said. He entered. There was another door, with curtained glass. Fonzo knocked.

“Why didn’t you push that ere button?” Virgil said. “Dont you know city folks dont answer no knock?”

“All right,” Fonzo said. He rang the bell. The door opened. It was the woman in the mother hubbard; they could hear the dogs behind her.

“Got ere extra room?” Fonzo said.

Miss Reba looked at them, at their new hats and the suit cases.

“Who sent you here?” she said.

“Didn’t nobody. We just picked it out.” Miss Reba looked at him. “Them hotels is too high.”

Miss Reba breathed harshly. “What you boys doing?”

“We come hyer on business,” Fonzo said. “We aim to stay a good spell.”

“If it aint too high,” Virgil said.

Miss Reba looked at him. “Where you from, honey?”

They told her, and their names. “We aim to be hyer a month or more, if it suits us.”

“Why, I reckon so,” she said after a while. She looked at them. “I can let you have a room, but I’ll have to charge you extra whenever you do business in it. I got my living to make like everybody else.”

“We aint,” Fonzo said. “We’ll do our business at the college.”

“What college?” Miss Reba said.

“The barber’s college,” Fonzo said.

“Look here,” Miss Reba said, “you little whipper-snapper.” Then she began to laugh, her hand at her breast. They watched her soberly while she laughed in harsh gasps. “Lord, Lord,” she said. “Come in here.”

The room was at the top of the house, at the back. Miss Reba showed them the bath. When she put her hand on the door a woman's voice said: "Just a minute, dearie" and the door opened and she passed them, in a kimono. They watched her go up the hall, rocked a little to their young foundations by a trail of scent which she left. Fonzo nudged Virgil surreptitiously. In their room again he said:

"That was another one. She's got two daughters. Hold me, big boy; I'm heading for the henhouse."

They didn't go to sleep for some time that first night, what with the strange bed and room and the voices. They could hear the city, evocative and strange, imminent and remote; threat and promise both—a deep, steady sound upon which invisible lights glittered and wavered: colored coiling shapes of splendor in which already women were beginning to move in suave attitudes of new delights and strange nostalgic promises.

Fonzo thought of himself surrounded by tier upon tier of drawn shades, rose-colored, beyond which, in a murmur of silk, in panting whispers, the apotheosis of his youth assumed a thousand avatars. Maybe it'll begin tomorrow, he thought; maybe by tomorrow night . . . A crack of light came over the top of the shade and sprawled in a spreading fan upon the ceiling. Beneath the window he could hear a voice, a woman's, then a man's: they blended, murmured; a door closed. Someone came up the stairs in swishing garments, on the swift hard heels of a woman.

He began to hear sounds in the house: voices, laughter; a mechanical piano began to play. "Hear them?" he whispered.

"She's got a big family, I reckon," Virgil said, his voice already dull with sleep.

"Family, hell," Fonzo said. "It's a party. Wish I was to it."

On the third day as they were leaving the house in the morning, Miss Reba met them at the door. She wanted to use their room in the afternoons while they were absent. There was to be a detective's convention in town and business would look up some, she said. "Your things'll be all right. I'll have Minnie lock everything up beforehand. Aint nobody going to steal nothing from you in my house."

"What business you reckon she's in?" Fonzo said when they reached the street.

"Dont know," Virgil said.

"Wish I worked for her, anyway," Fonzo said. "With all them women in kimonos and such running around."

"Wouldn't do you no good," Virgil said. "They're all married. Aint you heard them?"

The next afternoon when they returned from the school they found a woman's undergarment under the washstand . . . Fonzo picked it up. "She's a dressmaker," he said.

"Reckon so," Virgil said. "Look and see if they taken anything of yourn."

The house appeared to be filled with people who did not sleep at night at all. They could hear them at all hours, running up and down the stairs, and always Fonzo would be conscious of women, of female flesh. It got to where he seemed to lie in his celibate bed surrounded by women, and he would lie beside the steadily snoring Virgil, his ears strained for the murmurs, the whispers of silk that came through the walls and the floor, that seemed to be as much a part of both as the planks and the plaster, thinking that he had been in Memphis ten days, yet the extent of his acquaintance was a few of his fellow pupils at the school. After Virgil was asleep he would rise and unlock the door and leave it ajar, but nothing happened.

On the twelfth day he told Virgil they were going visiting, with one of the barber-students.

“Where?” Virgil said.

“That’s all right. You come on. I done found out something. And when I think I been here two weeks without knowing about it—”

“What’s it going to cost?” Virgil said.

“When’d you ever have any fun for nothing?” Fonzo said. “Come on.”

“I’ll go,” Virgil said. “But I aint going to promise to spend nothing.”

“You wait and say that when we get there,” Fonzo said.

The barber took them to a brothel. When they came out Fonzo said, “And to think I been here two weeks without never knowing about that house.”

“I wisht you hadn’t never learned,” Virgil said. “It cost three dollars.”

“Wasn’t it worth it?” Fonzo said.

“Aint nothing worth three dollars you caint tote off with you,” Virgil said.

When they reached home Fonzo stopped. “We got to sneak in, now,” he said. “If she was to find out where we been and what we been doing, she might not let us stay in the house with them ladies no more.”

“That’s so,” Virgil said. “Durn you. Hyer you done made me spend three dollars, and now you fixing to git us both throwed out.”

“You do like I do,” Fonzo said. “That’s all you got to do. Dont say nothing.”

Minnie let them in. The piano was going full blast. Miss Reba appeared in a door, with a tin cup in her hand. "Well, well," she said, "you boys been out mighty late tonight."

"Yessum," Fonzo said, prodding Virgil toward the stairs. "We been to prayer-meeting."

In bed, in the dark, they could still hear the piano.

"You made me spend three dollars," Virgil said.

"Aw, shut up," Fonzo said. "When I think I been here for two whole weeks almost . . ."

The next afternoon they came home through the dusk, with the lights winking on, beginning to flare and gleam, and the women on their twinkling blonde legs meeting men and getting into automobiles and such.

"How about that three dollars now?" Fonzo said.

"I reckon we better not go over tonight," Virgil said. "It'll cost too much."

"That's right," Fonzo said. "Somebody might see us and tell her."

They waited two nights. "Now it'll be six dollars," Virgil said.

"Dont come, then," Fonzo said.

When they returned home Fonzo said: "Try to act like something, this time. She near about caught us before on account of the way you acted."

"What if she does?" Virgil said in a sullen voice. "She caint eat us."

They stood outside the lattice, whispering.

“How you know she caint?” Fonzo said.

“She dont want to, then.”

“How you know she dont want to?”

“Maybe she dont,” Virgil said. Fonzo opened the lattice door. “I caint eat that six dollars, noways,” Virgil said. “Wisht I could.”

Minnie let them in. She said: “Somebody huntin you all.” They waited in the hall.

“We done caught now,” Virgil said. “I told you about throwing that money away.”

“Aw, shut up,” Fonzo said.

A man emerged from a door, a big man with his hat cocked over one ear, his arm about a blonde woman in a red dress. “There’s Cla’ence,” Virgil said.

In their room Clarence said: “How’d you get into this place?”

“Just found it,” Virgil said. They told him about it. He sat on the bed, in his soiled hat, a cigar in his fingers.

“Where you been tonight?” he said. They didn’t answer. They looked at him with blank, watchful faces. “Come on. I know. Where was it?” They told him.

“Cost me three dollars, too,” Virgil said.

“I’ll be durned if you aint the biggest fool this side of Jackson,” Clarence said. “Come on here.” They followed sheepishly. He led them from the house and for three or four blocks. They crossed a street of Negro

stores and theatres and turned into a narrow, dark street and stopped at a house with red shades in the lighted windows. Clarence rang the bell. They could hear music inside, and shrill voices, and feet. They were admitted into a bare hallway where two shabby Negro men argued with a drunk white man in greasy overalls. Through an open door they saw a room filled with coffee-colored women in bright dresses, with ornate hair and golden smiles.

“Them’s niggers,” Virgil said.

“Course they’re niggers,” Clarence said. “But see this?” he waved a banknote in his cousin’s face. “This stuff is color-blind.”

XXI

On the third day of his search, Horace found a domicile for the woman and child. It was in the ramshackle house of an old half-crazed white woman who was believed to manufacture spells for Negroes. It was on the edge of town, set in a tiny plot of ground choked and massed with waist-high herbage in an unbroken jungle across the front. At the back a path had been trodden from the broken gate to the door. All night a dim light burned in the crazy depths of the house and at almost any hour of the twenty-four a wagon or a buggy might be seen tethered in the lane behind it and a Negro entering or leaving the back door.

The house had been entered once by officers searching for whiskey. They found nothing save a few dried bunches of weeds, and a collection of dirty bottles containing liquid of which they could say nothing surely save that it was not alcoholic, while the old woman, held by two men, her lank grayish hair shaken before the glittering collapse of her face, screamed invective at them in her cracked voice. In a lean-to shed room containing a bed and a barrel of anonymous refuse and trash in which mice rattled all night long, the woman found a home.

“You’ll be all right here,” Horace said. “You can always get me by telephone, at—” giving her the name of a neighbor. “No: wait; tomorrow I’ll have the telephone put back in. Then you can—”

“Yes,” the woman said. “I reckon you better not be coming out here.”

“Why? Do you think that would—that I’d care a damn what—”

“You have to live here.”

“I’m damned if I do. I’ve already let too many women run my affairs for me as it is, and if these uxorious . . .” But he knew he was just talking. He knew that she knew it too, out of that feminine reserve of unflagging suspicion of all people’s actions which seems at first to be mere affinity for evil but which is in reality practical wisdom.

“I guess I’ll find you if there’s any need,” she said. “There’s not anything else I could do.”

“By God,” Horace said, “dont you let them . . . Bitches,” he said; “bitches.”

The next day he had the telephone installed. He did not see his sister for a week; she had no way of learning that he had a phone, yet when, a week before the opening of Court, the telephone shrilled into the quiet where he sat reading one evening, he thought it was Narcissa until, across a remote blaring of victrola or radio music, a man’s voice spoke in a guarded, tomblike tone.

“This is Snopes,” it said. “How’re you, Judge?”

“What?” Horace said. “Who is it?”

“Senator Snopes, Cla’ence Snopes.” The victrola blared, faint, far away; he could see the man, the soiled hat, the thick shoulders, leaning above the instrument—in a drugstore or a restaurant—whispering into it behind a soft, huge, ringed hand, the telephone toylike in the other.

“Oh,” Horace said. “Yes? What is it?”

“I got a little piece of information that might interest you.”

“Information that would interest me?”

“I reckon so. That would interest a couple of parties.” Against Horace’s ear the radio or the victrola performed a reedy arpeggio of saxophones. Obscene, facile, they seemed to be quarreling with one another like two dextrous monkeys in a cage. He could hear the gross breathing of the man at the other end of the wire.

“All right,” he said. “What do you know that would interest me?”

“I’ll let you judge that.”

“All right. I’ll be down town in the morning. You can find me somewhere.” Then he said immediately: “Hello!” The man sounded as though he were breathing in Horace’s ear: a placid, gross sound, suddenly portentous somehow. “Hello!” Horace said.

“It evidently dont interest you, then. I reckon I’ll dicker with the other party and not trouble you no more. Goodbye.”

“No; wait,” Horace said. “Hello! Hello!”

“Yeuh?”

“I’ll come down tonight. I’ll be there in about fifteen—”

“Taint no need of that,” Snopes said. “I got my car. I’ll drive up there.”

He walked down to the gate. There was a moon tonight. Within the black-and-silver tunnel of cedars fireflies drifted in fatuous pinpricks. The cedars were black and pointed on the sky like a paper silhouette; the sloping lawn had a faint sheen, a patina like silver. Somewhere a

whippoorwill called, reiterant, tremulous, plaintful above the insects. Three cars passed. The fourth slowed and swung toward the gate. Horace stepped into the light. Behind the wheel Snopes loomed bulkily, giving the impression of having been inserted into the car before the top was put on. He extended his hand.

“How’re you tonight, Judge? Didn’t know you was living in town again until I tried to call you out to Mrs Sartoris’s.”

“Well, thanks,” Horace said. He freed his hand. “What’s this you’ve got hold of?”

Snopes creased himself across the wheel and peered out beneath the top, toward the house.

“We’ll talk here,” Horace said. “Save you having to turn around.”

“It aint very private here,” Snopes said. “But that’s for you to say.” Huge and thick he loomed, hunched, his featureless face moonlike itself in the refraction of the moon. Horace could feel Snopes watching him, with that sense of portent which had come over the wire; a quality calculating and cunning and pregnant. It seemed to him that he watched his mind flicking this way and that, striking always that vast, soft, inert bulk, as though it were caught in an avalanche of cottonseed-hulls.

“Let’s go to the house,” Horace said. Snopes opened the door. “Go on,” Horace said, “I’ll walk up.” Snopes drove on. He was getting out of the car when Horace overtook him. “Well, what is it?” Horace said.

Again Snopes looked at the house. “Keeping batch, are you?” he said. Horace said nothing. “Like I always say, every married man ought to have a little place of his own, where he can git off to himself without it being nobody’s business what he does. ’Course a man owes something to his wife, but what they dont know caint hurt them, does it? Long’s he does that, I caint see where she’s got ere kick coming. Aint that what you say?”

“She’s not here,” Horace said, “if that’s what you’re hinting it. What did you want to see me about?”

Again he felt Snopes watching him, the unabashed stare calculating and completely unbelieving. “Well, I always say, caint nobody tend to a man’s private business but himself. I aint blaming you. But when you know me better, you’ll know I aint loose-mouthed. I been around. I been there. . . . Have a cigar?” His big hand flicked to his breast and offered two cigars.

“No, thanks.”

Snopes lit a cigar, his face coming out of the match like a pie set on edge.

“What did you want to see me about?” Horace said.

Snopes puffed the cigar. “Couple days ago I come onto a piece of information which will be of value to you, if I aint mistook.”

“Oh. Of value. What value?”

“I’ll leave that to you. I got another party I could dicker with, but being as me and you was fellow-townsmen and all that.”

Here and there Horace’s mind flicked and darted. Snopes’ family originated somewhere near Frenchman’s Bend and still lived there. He knew of the devious means by which information passed from man to man of that illiterate race which populated that section of the county. But surely it cant be something he’d try to sell to the State, he thought. Even he is not that big a fool.

“You’d better tell me what it is, then,” he said.

He could feel Snopes watching him. “You remember one day you got on the train at Oxford, where you’d been on some bus—”

“Yes,” Horace said.

Snopes puffed the cigar to an even coal, carefully, at some length. He raised his hand and drew it across the back of his neck. “You recall speaking to me about a girl.”

“Yes. Then what?”

“That’s for you to say.”

He could smell the honeysuckle as it bore up the silver slope, and he heard the whippoorwill, liquid, plaintful, reiterant. “You mean, you know where she is?” Snopes said nothing. “And that for a price you’ll tell?” Snopes said nothing. Horace shut his hands and put them in his pockets, shut against his flanks. “What makes you think that information will interest me?”

“That’s for you to judge. I aint conducting no murder case. I wasn’t down there at Oxford looking for her. Of course, if it dont, I’ll dicker with the other party. I just give you the chance.”

Horace turned toward the steps. He moved gingerly, like an old man. “Let’s sit down,” he said. Snopes followed and sat on the step. They sat in the moonlight. “You know where she is?”

“I seen her.” Again he drew his hand across the back of his neck. “Yes, sir. If she aint—hasn’t been there, you can git your money back. I caint say no fairer, can I?”

“And what’s your price?” Horace said. Snopes puffed the cigar to a careful coal. “Go on,” Horace said. “I’m not going to haggle.” Snopes told him. “All right,” Horace said. “I’ll pay it.” He drew his knees up and set his elbows on them and laid his hands to his face. “Where is— Wait. Are you a Baptist, by any chance?”

“My folks is. I’m putty liberal, myself. I aint hidebound in no sense, as you’ll find when you know me better.”

“All right,” Horace said from behind his hands. “Where is she?”

“I’ll trust you,” Snopes said. “She’s in a Memphis ’ho’house.”

XXIII

As Horace entered Miss Reba’s gate and approached the lattice door, someone called his name from behind him. It was evening; the windows in the weathered, scaling wall were close pale squares. He paused and looked back. Around an adjacent corner Snopes’s head peered, turkey-like. He stepped into view. He looked up at the house, then both ways along the street. He came along the fence and entered the gate with a wary air.

“Well, Judge,” he said. “Boys will be boys, wont they?” He didn’t offer to shake hands. Instead he bulked above Horace with that air somehow assured and alert at the same time, glancing over his shoulder at the street. “Like I say, it never done no man no harm to git out now and then and—”

“What is it now?” Horace said. “What do you want with me?”

“Now, now, Judge. I aint going to tell this at home. Git that idea clean out of your mind. If us boys started telling what we know, caint none of us git off a train at Jefferson again, hey?”

“You know as well as I do what I’m doing here. What do you want with me?”

“Sure; sure,” Snopes said. “I know how a feller feels, married and all and not being sho where his wife is at.” Between jerky glances over his shoulder he winked at Horace. “Make your mind easy. It’s the same with me as if the grave knowed it. Only I hate to see a good—” Horace

had gone on toward the door. "Judge," Snopes said in a penetrant undertone. Horace turned. "Dont stay."

"Dont stay?"

"See her and then leave. It's a sucker place. Place for farm-boys. Higher'n Monte Carlo. I'll wait out hyer and I'll show you a place where—" Horace went on and entered the lattice. Two hours later, as he sat talking to Miss Reba in her room while beyond the door feet and now and then voices came and went in the hall and on the stair, Minnie entered with a torn scrap of paper and brought it to Horace.

"What's that?" Miss Reba said.

"That big pie-face-ted man left it fer him," Minnie said. "He say fer you to come on down there."

"Did you let him in?" Miss Reba said.

"Nome. He never tried to git in."

"I guess not," Miss Reba said. She grunted. "Do you know him?" she said to Horace.

"Yes. I cant seem to help myself," Horace said. He opened the paper. Torn from a handbill, it bore an address in pencil in a neat, flowing hand.

"He turned up here about two weeks ago," Miss Reba said. "Come in looking for two boys and sat around the dining-room blowing his head off and feeling the girls' behinds, but if he ever spent a cent I dont know it. Did he ever give you an order, Minnie?"

"Nome," Minnie said.

"And couple of nights later he was here again. Didn't spend nuttin, didn't do nuttin but talk, and I says to him 'Look here, mister, folks

what uses this waiting-room has got to get on the train now and then.' So next time he brought a half-pint of whiskey with him.

I dont mind that, from a good customer. But when a fellow like him comes here three times, pinching my girls and bringing one half-pint of whiskey and ordering four Coca-Colas . . . Just a cheap, vulgar man, honey. So I told Minnie not to let him in any more, and here one afternoon I aint no more than laid down for a nap when—I never did find out what he done to Minnie to get in. I know he never give her nuttin. How did he do it, Minnie? He must a showed you something you never seen before. Didn't he?"

Minnie tossed her head. "He ain't got nothing I wantin to see. I done seed too many now fer my own good." Minnie's husband had quit her. He didn't approve of Minnie's business. He was a cook in a restaurant and he took all the clothes and jewelry the white ladies had given Minnie and went off with a waitress in the restaurant.

"He kept on asking and hinting around about that girl," Miss Reba said, "and me telling him to go ask Popeye if he wanted to know right bad. Not telling him nuttin except to get out and stay out, see; so this day it's about two in the afternoon and I'm asleep and Minnie lets him in and he asks her who's here and she tells him aint nobody, and he goes on up stairs. And Minnie says about that time Popeye comes in. She says she dont know what to do. She's scared not to let him in, and she says she knows if she does and he spatters that big bastard all over the upstairs floor, she knows I'll fire her and her husband just quit her and all.

"So Popeye goes on upstairs on them cat feet of his and comes on your friend on his knees, peeping through the keyhole. Minnie says Popeye stood behind him for about a minute, with his hat cocked over one eye. She says he took out a cigarette and struck a match on his thumbnail without no noise and lit it and then she says he reached over and held the match to the back of your friend's neck, and Minnie says she stood there halfway up the stairs and watched them: that fellow kneeling

there with his face like a pie took out of the oven too soon and Popeye squirting smoke through his nose and kind of jerking his head at him.

Then she come on down and in about ten seconds here he comes down the stairs with both hands on top of his head, going wump-wump-wump inside like one of these here big dray-horses, and he pawed at the door for about a minute, moaning to himself like the wind in a chimney Minnie says, until she opened the door and let him out. And that's the last time he's even rung this bell until tonight. . . . Let me see that." Horace gave her the paper. "That's a nigger whorehouse," she said. "The lous— Minnie, tell him his friend aint here. Tell him I dont know where he went."

Minnie went out. Miss Reba said:

"I've had all sorts of men in my house, but I got to draw the line somewhere. I had lawyers, too. I had the biggest lawyer in Memphis back there in my dining-room, treating my girls. A millionaire. He weighed two hundred and eighty pounds and he had his own special bed made and sent down here. It's upstairs right this minute. But all in the way of my business, not theirs. I aint going to have none of my girls pestered by lawyers without good reason."

"And you dont consider this good reason? That a man is being tried for his life for something he didn't do? You may be guilty right now of harboring a fugitive from justice."

"Then let them come take him. I got nuttin to do with it. I had too many police in this house to be scared of them." She raised the tankard and drank and drew the back of her hand across her mouth. "I aint going to have nuttin to do with nuttin I dont know about. What Popeye done outside is his business. When he starts killing folks in my house, then I'll take a hand."

"Have you any children?" She looked at him. "I dont mean to pry into your affairs," he said. "I was just thinking about that woman. She'll be

on the streets again, and God only knows what will become of that baby.”

“Yes,” Miss Reba said. “I’m supporting four, in a Arkansaw home now. Not mine, though.” She lifted the tankard and looked into it, oscillating it gently. She set it down again. “It better not been born at all,” she said. “None of them had.” She rose and came toward him, moving heavily, and stood above him with her harsh breath.

She put her hand on his head and tilted his face up. “You aint lying to me, are you?” she said, her eyes piercing and intent and sad. “No, you aint.” She released him. “Wait here a minute. I’ll see.” She went out. He heard her speak to Minnie in the hall, then he heard her toil up the stairs.

He sat quietly as she had left him. The room contained a wooden bed, a painted screen, three overstuffed chairs, a wall safe. The dressing-table was littered with toilet articles tied in pink satin bows. The mantel supported a wax lily beneath a glass bell; above it, draped in black, the photograph of a meek-looking man with an enormous moustache. On the walls hung a few lithographs of spurious Greek scenes, and one picture done in tatting. Horace rose and went to the door. Minnie sat in a chair in the dim hall.

“Minnie,” he said, “I’ve got to have a drink. A big one.”

He had just finished it when Minnie entered again. “She say fer you to come on up,” she said.

He mounted the stairs. Miss Reba waited at the top. She led the way up the hall and opened a door into a dark room. “You’ll have to talk to her in the dark,” she said. “She wont have no light.” Light from the hall fell through the door and across the bed. “This aint hers,” Miss Reba said. “Wouldn’t even see you in her room at all. I reckon you better humor her until you find out what you want.” They entered.

The light fell across the bed, upon a motionless curving ridge of bedclothing, the general tone of the bed unbroken. She'll smother, Horace thought. "Honey," Miss Reba said. The ridge did not move. "Here he is, honey. Long as you're all covered up, let's have some light. Then we can close the door." She turned the light on.

"She'll smother," Horace said.

"She'll come out in a minute," Miss Reba said. "Go on. Tell her what you want. I better stay. But dont mind me. I couldn't a stayed in my business without learning to be deaf and dumb a long time before this. And if I'd ever a had any curiosity, I'd have worn it out long ago in this house. Here's a chair." She turned, but Horace anticipated her and drew up two chairs. He sat down beside the bed and, talking at the top of the unstirring ridge, he told her what he wanted.

"I just want to know what really happened. You wont commit yourself. I know that you didn't do it. I'll promise before you tell me a thing that you wont have to testify in Court unless they are going to hang him without it. I know how you feel. I wouldn't bother you if the man's life were not at stake."

The ridge did not move.

"They're going to hang him for something he never done," Miss Reba said. "And she wont have nuttin, nobody. And you with diamonds, and her with that poor little kid. You seen it, didn't you?"

The ridge did not move.

"I know how you feel," Horace said. "You can use a different name, wear clothes nobody will recognise you in, glasses."

"They aint going to catch Popeye, honey," Miss Reba said. "Smart as he is. You dont know his name, noway, and if you have to go and tell them in the court, I'll send him word after you leave and he'll go somewheres and send for you. You and him dont want to stay here in Memphis.

The lawyer'll take care of you and you wont have to tell nuttin you—" The ridge moved. Temple flung the covers back and sat up. Her head was tousled, her face puffed, two spots of rouge on her cheekbones and her mouth painted into a savage cupid's bow. She stared for an instant at Horace with black antagonism, then she looked away.

"I want a drink," she said, pulling up the shoulder of her gown.

"Lie down," Miss Reba said. "You'll catch cold."

"I want another drink," Temple said.

"Lie down and cover up your nekkidness, anyway," Miss Reba said, rising. "You already had three since supper."

Temple dragged the gown up again. She looked at Horace. "You give me a drink, then."

"Come on, honey," Miss Reba said, trying to push her down. "Lie down and get covered up and tell him about that business. I'll get you a drink in a minute."

"Let me alone," Temple said, writhing free. Miss Reba drew the covers about her shoulders. "Give me a cigarette, then. Have you got one?" she asked Horace.

"I'll get you one in a minute," Miss Reba said. "Will you do what he wants you to?"

"What?" Temple said. She looked at Horace with her black, belligerent stare.

"You needn't tell me where your—he—" Horace said.

"Dont think I'm afraid to tell," Temple said. "I'll tell it anywhere. Dont think I'm afraid. I want a drink."

“You tell him, and I’ll get you one,” Miss Reba said.

Sitting up in the bed, the covers about her shoulders, Temple told him of the night she had spent in the ruined house, from the time she entered the room and tried to wedge the door with the chair, until the woman came to the bed and led her out. That was the only part of the whole experience which appeared to have left any impression on her at all: the night which she had spent in comparative inviolation.

Now and then Horace would attempt to get her on ahead to the crime itself, but she would elude him and return to herself sitting on the bed, listening to the men on the porch, or lying in the dark while they entered the room and came to the bed and stood there above her.

“Yes; that,” she would say. “It just happened. I dont know. I had been scared so long that I guess I had just gotten used to being. So I just sat there in those cottonseeds and watched him. I thought it was the rat at first. There were two of them there. One was in one corner looking at me and the other was in the other corner. I dont know what they lived on, because there wasn’t anything there but corn-cobs and cottonseeds. Maybe they went to the house to eat.

But there wasn’t any in the house. I never did hear one in the house. I thought it might have been a rat when I first heard them, but you can feel people in a dark room: did you know that? You dont have to see them. You can feel them like you can in a car when they begin to look for a good place to stop—you know: park for a while.” She went on like that, in one of those bright, chatty monologues which women can carry on when they realise that they have the center of the stage; suddenly Horace realised that she was recounting the experience with actual pride, a sort of naïve and impersonal vanity, as though she were making it up, looking from him to Miss Reba with quick, darting glances like a dog driving two cattle along a lane.

“And so whenever I breathed I’d hear those shucks. I dont see how anybody ever sleeps on a bed like that. But maybe you get used to it. Or

maybe they're tired at night. Because when I breathed I could hear them, even when I was just sitting on the bed. I didn't see how it could be just breathing, so I'd sit as still as I could, but I could still hear them. That's because breathing goes down. You think it goes up, but it doesn't.

It goes down you, and I'd hear them getting drunk on the porch. I got to thinking I could see where their heads were leaning back against the wall and I'd say Now this one's drinking out of the jug. Now that one's drinking. Like the mashed-in place on the pillow after you got up, you know.

“That was when I got to thinking a funny thing. You know how you do when you're scared. I was looking at my legs and I'd try to make like I was a boy. I was thinking about if I just was a boy and then I tried to make myself into one by thinking. You know how you do things like that.

Like when you know one problem in class and when they came to that you look at him and think right hard, Call on me. Call on me. Call on me. I'd think about what they tell children, about kissing your elbow, and I tried to. I actually did. I was that scared, and I'd wonder if I could tell when it happened.

I mean, before I looked, and I'd think I had and how I'd go out and show them—you know. I'd strike a match and say Look. See? Let me alone, now. And then I could go back to bed. I'd think how I could go to bed and go to sleep then, because I was sleepy. I was so sleepy I simply couldn't hardly hold my eyes open.

“So I'd hold my eyes tight shut and say Now I am. I am now. I'd look at my legs and I'd think about how much I had done for them. I'd think about how many dances I had taken them to—crazy, like that. Because I thought how much I'd done for them, and now they'd gotten me into this. So I'd think about praying to be changed into a boy and I would pray and then I'd sit right still and wait. Then I'd think maybe I couldn't tell it and I'd get ready to look.

Then I'd think maybe it was too soon to look; that if I looked too soon I'd spoil it and then it wouldn't, sure enough. So I'd count. I said to count fifty at first, then I thought it was still too soon, and I'd say to count fifty more. Then I'd think if I didn't look at the right time, it would be too late.

"Then I thought about fastening myself up some way. There was a girl went abroad one summer that told me about a kind of iron belt in a museum a king or something used to lock the queen up in when he had to go away, and I thought if I just had that. That was why I got the raincoat and put it on. The canteen was hanging by it and I got it too and put it in the—"

"Canteen?" Horace said. "Why did you do that?"

"I don't know why I took it. I was just scared to leave it there, I guess. But I was thinking if I just had that French thing. I was thinking maybe it would have long sharp spikes on it and he wouldn't know it until too late and I'd jab it into him. I'd jab it all the way through him and I'd think about the blood running on me and how I'd say I guess that'll teach you! I guess you'll let me alone now! I'd say. I didn't know it was going to be just the other way . . . I want a drink."

"I'll get you one in a minute," Miss Reba said. "Go on and tell him."

"Oh, yes; this was something else funny I did." She told about lying in the darkness with Gowan snoring beside her, listening to the shucks and hearing the darkness full of movement, feeling Popeye approaching. She could hear the blood in her veins, and the little muscles at the corners of her eyes cracking faintly wider and wider, and she could feel her nostrils going alternately cool and warm. Then he was standing over and she was saying Come on. Touch me. Touch me! You're a coward if you don't. Coward! Coward!

"I wanted to go to sleep, you see. And he just kept on standing there. I thought if he'd just go on and get it over with, I could go to sleep. So I'd

say You're a coward if you dont! You're a coward if you dont! and I could feel my mouth getting fixed to scream, and that little hot ball inside you that screams. Then it touched me, that nasty little cold hand, fiddling around inside the coat where I was naked.

It was like alive ice and my skin started jumping away from it like those little flying fish in front of a boat. It was like my skin knew which way it was going to go before it started moving, and my skin would keep on jerking just ahead of it like there wouldn't be anything there when the hand got there.

"Then it got down to where my insides begin, and I hadn't eaten since yesterday at dinner and my insides started bubbling and going on and the shucks began to make so much noise it was like laughing. I'd think they were laughing at me because all the time his hand was going inside the top of my knickers and I hadn't changed into a boy yet.

"That was the funny thing, because I wasn't breathing then. I hadn't breathed in a long time. So I thought I was dead. Then I did a funny thing. I could see myself in the coffin. I looked sweet—you know: all in white. I had on a veil like a bride, and I was crying because I was dead or looked sweet or something. No: it was because they had put shucks in the coffin.

I was crying because they had put shucks in the coffin where I was dead, but all the time I could feel my nose going cold and hot and cold and hot, and I could see all the people sitting around the coffin, saying Dont she look sweet. Dont she look sweet.

"But I kept on saying Coward! Coward! Touch me, coward! I got mad, because he was so long doing it. I'd talk to him. I'd say Do you think I'm going to lie here all night, just waiting on you? I'd say. Let me tell you what I'll do, I'd say. And I'd lie there with the shucks laughing at me and me jerking away in front of his hand and I'd think what I'd say to him, I'd talk to him like the teacher does in school, and then I was a teacher in school and it was a little black thing like a nigger boy, kind of, and I was the teacher. Because I'd say How old am I? and I'd say I'm forty-

five years old. I had iron-gray hair and spectacles and I was all big up here like women get. I had on a gray tailored suit, and I never could wear gray. And I was telling it what I'd do, and it kind of drawing up and drawing up like it could already see the switch.

"Then I said That wont do. I ought to be a man. So I was an old man, with a long white beard, and then the little black man got littler and littler and I was saying Now. You see now. I'm a man now. Then I thought about being a man, and as soon as I thought it, it happened. It made a kind of plopping sound, like blowing a little rubber tube wrong-side outward. It felt cold, like the inside of your mouth when you hold it open.

I could feel it, and I lay right still to keep from laughing about how surprised he was going to be. I could feel the jerking going on inside my knickers ahead of his hand and me lying there trying not to laugh about how surprised and mad he was going to be in about a minute. Then all of a sudden I went to sleep. I couldn't even stay awake until his hand got there. I just went to sleep. I couldn't even feel myself jerking in front of his hand, but I could hear the shucks. I didn't wake up until that woman came and took me down to the crib."

As he was leaving the house Miss Reba said: "I wish you'd get her down there and not let her come back. I'd find her folks myself, if I knowed how to go about it. But you know how . . . She'll be dead, or in the asylum in a year, way him and her go on up there in that room. There's something funny about it that I aint found out about yet. Maybe it's her. She wasn't born for this kind of life. You have to be born for this like you have to be born a butcher or a barber, I guess. Wouldn't anybody be either of them just for money or fun."

Better for her if she were dead tonight, Horace thought, walking on. For me, too. He thought of her, Popeye, the woman, the child, Goodwin, all put into a single chamber, bare, lethal, immediate and profound: a single blotting instant between the indignation and the surprise. And I too; thinking how that were the only solution. Removed, cauterised out of the old and tragic flank of the world.

And I, too, now that we're all isolated; thinking of a gentle dark wind blowing in the long corridors of sleep; of lying beneath a low cozy roof under the long sound of the rain: the evil, the injustice, the tears. In an alley-mouth two figures stood, face to face, not touching; the man speaking in a low tone unprintable epithet after epithet in a caressing whisper, the woman motionless before him as though in a musing swoon of voluptuous ecstasy.

Perhaps it is upon the instant that we realise, admit, that there is a logical pattern to evil, that we die, he thought, thinking of the expression he had once seen in the eyes of a dead child, and of other dead: the cooling indignation, the shocked despair fading, leaving two empty globes in which the motionless world lurked profoundly in miniature.

He did not even return to his hotel. He went to the station. He could get a train at midnight. He had a cup of coffee and wished immediately that he had not, for it lay in a hot ball on his stomach. Three hours later, when he got off at Jefferson, it was still there, unassimilated. He walked to town and crossed the deserted square. He thought of the other morning when he had crossed it.

It was as though there had not been any elapsed time between: the same gesture of the lighted clock-face, the same vulture-like shadows in the doorways; it might be the same morning and he had merely crossed the square, about-faced and was returning; all between a dream filled with all the nightmare shapes it had taken him forty-three years to invent, concentrated in a hot, hard lump in his stomach. Suddenly he was walking fast, the coffee jolting like a hot, heavy rock inside him.

He walked quietly up the drive, beginning to smell the honeysuckle from the fence. The house was dark, still, as though it were marooned in space by the ebb of all time. The insects had fallen to a low monotonous pitch, everywhere, nowhere, spent, as though the sound were the chemical agony of a world left stark and dying above the tide-

edge of the fluid in which it lived and breathed. The moon stood overhead, but without light; the earth lay beneath, without darkness.

He opened the door and felt his way into the room and to the light. The voice of the night—insects, whatever it was—had followed him into the house; he knew suddenly that it was the friction of the earth on its axis, approaching that moment when it must decide to turn on or to remain forever still: a motionless ball in cooling space, across which a thick smell of honeysuckle writhed like cold smoke.

He found the light and turned it on. The photograph sat on the dresser. He took it up, holding it in his hands. Enclosed by the narrow imprint of the missing frame Little Belle's face dreamed with that quality of sweet chiaroscuro. Communicated to the cardboard by some quality of the light or perhaps by some infinitesimal movement of his hands, his own breathing, the face appeared to breathe in his palms in a shallow bath of highlight, beneath the slow, smokelike tongues of invisible honeysuckle.

Almost palpable enough to be seen, the scent filled the room and the small face seemed to swoon in a voluptuous languor, blurring still more, fading, leaving upon his eye a soft and fading aftermath of invitation and voluptuous promise and secret affirmation like a scent itself.

Then he knew what that sensation in his stomach meant. He put the photograph down hurriedly and went to the bathroom. He opened the door running and fumbled at the light. But he had not time to find it and he gave over and plunged forward and struck the lavatory and leaned upon his braced arms while the shucks set up a terrific uproar beneath her thighs. Lying with her head lifted slightly, her chin depressed like a figure lifted down from a crucifix, she watched something black and furious go roaring out of her pale body.

She was bound naked on her back on a flat car moving at speed through a black tunnel, the blackness streaming in rigid threads overhead, a roar of iron wheels in her ears. The car shot bodily from the

tunnel in a long upward slant, the darkness overhead now shredded with parallel attenuations of living fire, toward a crescendo like a held breath, an interval in which she would swing faintly and lazily in nothingness filled with pale, myriad points of light. Far beneath her she could hear the faint, furious uproar of the shucks.

XXIV

The first time Temple went to the head of the stairs Minnie's eyeballs rolled out of the dusky light beside Miss Reba's door. Leaning once more within her bolted door Temple heard Miss Reba toil up the stairs and knock. Temple leaned silently against the door while Miss Reba panted and wheezed beyond it with a mixture of blandishment and threat. She made no sound. After a while Miss Reba went back down the stairs.

Temple turned from the door and stood in the center of the room, beating her hands silently together, her eyes black in her livid face. She wore a street dress, a hat. She removed the hat and hurled it into a corner and went and flung herself face down upon the bed. The bed had not been made. The table beside it was littered with cigarette stubs, the adjacent floor strewn with ashes. The pillow slip on that side was spotted with brown holes. Often in the night she would wake to smell tobacco and to see the single ruby eye where Popeye's mouth would be.

It was midmorning. A thin bar of sunlight fell beneath the drawn shade of the south window, lying upon the sill and then upon the floor in a narrow band. The house was utterly quiet, with that quality as of spent breathing which it had in midmorning. Now and then a car passed in the street beneath.

Temple turned over on the bed. When she did so she saw one of Popeye's innumerable black suits lying across a chair. She lay looking at it for a while, then she rose and snatched the garments up and hurled them into the corner where the hat was. In another corner was a closet

improvised by a print curtain. It contained dresses of all sorts and all new.

She ripped them down in furious wads and flung them after the suit, and a row of hats from a shelf. Another of Popeye's suits hung there also. She flung it down. Behind it, hanging from a nail, was an automatic pistol in a holster of oiled silk. She took it down gingerly and removed the pistol and stood with it in her hand. After a moment she went to the bed and hid it beneath the pillow.

The dressing-table was cluttered with toilet-things—brushes and mirrors, also new; with flasks and jars of delicate and bizarre shapes, bearing French labels. One by one she gathered them up and hurled them into the corner in thuds and splintering crashes. Among them lay a platinum bag: a delicate webbing of metal upon the smug orange gleam of banknotes. This followed the other things into the corner and she returned to the bed and lay again on her face in a slow thickening of expensive scent.

At noon Minnie tapped at the door. "Here yo dinner." Temple didn't move. "I ghy leave it here by the door. You can git it when you wants it." Her feet went away. Temple did not move.

Slowly the bar of sunlight shifted across the floor; the western side of the window-frame was now in shadow. Temple sat up, her head turned aside as though she were listening, fingering with deft habitude at her hair. She rose quietly and went to the door and listened again. Then she opened it. The tray sat on the floor. She stepped over it and went to the stairs and peered over the rail. After a while she made Minnie out, sitting in a chair in the hall.

"Minnie," she said. Minnie's head jerked up; again her eyes rolled whitely. "Bring me a drink," Temple said. She returned to her room. She waited fifteen minutes. She banged the door and was tramping furiously down the stairs when Minnie appeared in the hall.

“Yessum,” Minnie said, “Miss Reba say— We aint got no—” Miss Reba’s door opened. Without looking up at Temple she spoke to Minnie. Minnie lifted her voice again. “Yessum; all right. I bring it up in just a minute.”

“You’d better,” Temple said. She returned and stood just inside the door until she heard Minnie mount the stairs. Temple opened the door, holding it just ajar.

“Aint you going to eat no dinner?” Minnie said, thrusting at the door with her knee. Temple held it to.

“Where is it?” she said.

“I aint straightened your room up this mawnin,” Minnie said.

“Give it here,” Temple said, reaching her hand through the crack. She took the glass from the tray.

“You better make that un last,” Minnie said. “Miss Reba say you aint ghy git no more. . . . What you want to treat him this-a-way, fer? Way he spend his money on you, you ought to be ashamed. He a right pretty little man, even if he aint no John Gilbert, and way he spendin his money—” Temple shut the door and shot the bolt. She drank the gin and drew a chair up to the bed and lit a cigarette and sat down with her feet on the bed. After a while she moved the chair to the window and lifted the shade a little so she could see the street beneath. She lit another cigarette.

At five oclock she saw Miss Reba emerge, in the black silk and flowered hat, and go down the street. She sprang up and dug the hat from the mass of clothes in the corner and put it on. At the door she turned and went back to the corner and exhumed the platinum purse and descended the stairs. Minnie was in the hall.

“I’ll give you ten dollars,” Temple said. “I wont be gone ten minutes.”

"I caint do it, Miss Temple. Hit be worth my job if Miss Reba find it out, and my th' oat too, if Mist Popeye do."

"I swear I'll be back in ten minutes. I swear I will. Twenty dollars." She put the bill in Minnie's hand.

"You better come back," Minnie said, opening the door. "If you aint back here in ten minutes, I aint going to be, neither."

Temple opened the lattice and peered out. The street was empty save for a taxi at the curb across the way, and a man in a cap standing in a door beyond it. She went down the street, walking swiftly. At the corner a cab overtook her, slowing, the driver looking at her interrogatively. She turned into the drug store at the corner and went back to the telephone booth. Then she returned to the house. As she turned the corner she met the man in the cap who had been leaning in the door. She entered the lattice. Minnie opened the door.

"Thank goodness," Minnie said. "When that cab over there started up, I got ready to pack up too. If you aint ghy say nothing about it, I git you a drink."

When Minnie fetched the gin Temple started to drink it. Her hand was trembling and there was a sort of elation in her face as she stood again just inside the door, listening, the glass in her hand. I'll need it later, she said. I'll need more than that. She covered the glass with a saucer and hid it carefully. Then she dug into the mass of garments in the corner and found a dancing-frock and shook it out and hung it back in the closet. She looked at the other things a moment, but she returned to the bed and lay down again. At once she rose and drew the chair up and sat down, her feet on the unmade bed. While daylight died slowly in the room she sat smoking cigarette after cigarette, listening to every sound on the stairs.

At half-past six Minnie brought her supper up. On the tray was another glass of gin. "Miss Reba sont this un," she said. "She say, how you feelin?"

“Tell her, all right,” Temple said. “I’m going to have a bath and then go to bed, tell her.”

When Minnie was gone Temple poured the two drinks into a tumbler and gloated over it, the glass shaking in her hands. She set it carefully away and covered it and ate her supper from the bed. When she finished she lit a cigarette. Her movements were jerky; she smoked swiftly, moving about the room. She stood for a moment at the window, the shade lifted aside, then she dropped it and turned into the room again, spying herself in the mirror. She turned before it, studying herself, puffing at the cigarette.

She snapped it behind her, toward the fireplace, and went to the mirror and combed her hair. She ripped the curtain aside and took the dress down and laid it on the bed and returned and drew out a drawer in the dresser and took a garment out. She paused with the garment in her hand, then she replaced it and closed the drawer and caught up the frock swiftly and hung it back in the closet. A moment later she found herself walking up and down the room, another cigarette burning in her hand, without any recollection of having lit it.

She flung it away and went to the table and looked at her watch and propped it against the pack of cigarettes so she could see it from the bed, and lay down. When she did so she felt the pistol through the pillow. She slipped it out and looked at it, then she slid it under her flank and lay motionless, her legs straight, her hands behind her head, her eyes focussing into black pinheads at every sound on the stairs.

At nine she rose. She picked up the pistol again; after a moment she thrust it beneath the mattress and undressed and in a spurious Chinese robe splotched with gold dragons and jade and scarlet flowers she left the room. When she returned her hair curled damply about her face. She went to the washstand and took up the tumbler, holding it in her hands, but she set it down again.

She dressed, retrieving the bottles and jars from the corner. Her motions before the glass were furious yet painstaking. She went to the washstand and took up the glass, but again she paused and went to the corner and got her coat and put it on and put the platinum bag in the pocket and leaned once more to the mirror. Then she went and took up the glass and gulped the gin and left the room, walking swiftly.

A single light burned in the hall. It was empty. She could hear voices in Miss Reba's room, but the lower hall was deserted. She descended swiftly and silently and gained the door. She believed that it would be at the door that they would stop her and she thought of the pistol with acute regret, almost pausing, knowing that she would use it without any compunction whatever, with a kind of pleasure. She sprang to the door and pawed at the bolt, her head turned over her shoulder.

It opened. She sprang out and out the lattice door and ran down the walk and out the gate. As she did so a car, moving slowly along the curb, stopped opposite her. Popeye sat at the wheel. Without any apparent movement from him the door swung open. He made no movement, spoke no word. He just sat there, the straw hat slanted a little aside.

"I wont!" Temple said. "I wont!"

He made no movement, no sound. She came to the car.

"I wont, I tell you!" Then she cried wildly: "You're scared of him! You're scared to!"

"I'm giving him his chance," he said. "Will you go back in that house, or will you get in this car?"

"You're scared to!"

"I'm giving him his chance," he said, in his cold soft voice. "Come on. Make up your mind."

She leaned forward, putting her hand on his arm. "Popeye," she said; "daddy." His arm felt frail, no larger than a child's, dead and hard and light as a stick.

"I dont care which you do," he said. "But do it. Come on."

She leaned toward him, her hand on his arm. Then she got into the car. "You wont do it. You're afraid to. He's a better man than you are."

He reached across and shut the door. "Where?" he said. "Grotto?"

"He's a better man than you are!" Temple said shrilly. "You're not even a man! He knows it. Who does know it if he dont?" The car was in motion. She began to shriek at him. "You, a man, a bold bad man, when you cant even— When you had to bring a real man in to— And you hanging over the bed, moaning and slobbering like a— You couldn't fool me but once, could you? No wonder I bled and bluh—" his hand came over her mouth, hard, his nails going into her flesh. With the other hand he drove the car at reckless speed. When they passed beneath lights she could see him watching her as she struggled, tugging at his hand, whipping her head this way and that.

She ceased struggling, but she continued to twist her head from side to side, tugging at his hand. One finger, ringed with a thick ring, held her lips apart, his fingertips digging into her cheek. With the other hand he whipped the car in and out of traffic, bearing down upon other cars until they slewed aside with brakes squealing, shooting recklessly across intersections. Once a policeman shouted at them, but he did not even look around.

Temple began to whimper, moaning behind his hand, drooling upon his fingers. The ring was like a dentist's instrument; she could not close her lips to regurgitate. When he removed it she could feel the imprint of his fingers cold on her jaw. She lifted her hand to it.

"You hurt my mouth," she whimpered. They were approaching the outskirts of the city, the speedometer at fifty miles. His hat slanted

above his delicate hooked profile. She nursed her jaw. The houses gave way to broad, dark subdivisions out of which realtors' signs loomed abrupt and ghostly, with a quality of forlorn assurance. Between them low, far lights hung in the cool empty darkness blowing with fireflies. She began to cry quietly, feeling the cooling double drink of gin inside her.

"You hurt my mouth," she said in a voice small and faint with self-pity. She nursed her jaw with experimental fingers, pressing harder and harder until she found a twinge. "You'll be sorry for this," she said in a muffled voice. "When I tell Red. Dont you wish you were Red? Dont you? Dont you wish you could do what he can do? Dont you wish he was the one watching us instead of you?"

They turned into the Grotto, passing along a closely curtained wall from which a sultry burst of music came. She sprang out while he was locking the car and ran on up the steps. "I gave you your chance," she said. "You brought me here. I didn't ask you to come."

She went to the washroom. In the mirror she examined her face. "Shucks," she said, "it didn't leave a mark, even"; drawing the flesh this way and that. "Little runt," she said, peering at her reflection. She added a phrase, glibly obscene, with a detached parrotlike effect. She painted her mouth again. Another woman entered. They examined one another's clothes with brief, covert, cold, embracing glances.

Popeye was standing at the door to the dancehall, a cigarette in his fingers.

"I gave you your chance," Temple said. "You didn't have to come."

"I dont take chances," he said.

"You took one," Temple said. "Are you sorry? Huh?"

"Go on," he said, his hand on her back. She was in the act of stepping over the sill when she turned and looked at him, their eyes almost on a

level; then her hand flicked toward his armpit. He caught her wrist; the other hand flicked toward him. He caught that one too in his soft, cold hand. They looked eye to eye, her mouth open and the rouge spots darkening slowly on her face.

“I gave you your chance back there in town,” he said. “You took it.”

Behind her the music beat, sultry, evocative; filled with movement of feet, the voluptuous hysteria of muscles warming the scent of flesh, of the blood. “Oh, God; oh, God,” she said, her lips scarce moving. “I’ll go. I’ll go back.”

“You took it,” he said. “Go on.”

In his grasp her hands made tentative plucking motions at his coat just out of reach of her finger-tips. Slowly he was turning her toward the door, her head reverted. “You just dare!” she cried. “You just—” His hand closed upon the back of her neck, his fingers like steel, yet cold and light as aluminum. She could hear the vertebrae grating faintly together, and his voice, cold and still.

“Will you?”

She nodded her head. Then they were dancing. She could still feel his hand at her neck. Across his shoulder she looked swiftly about the room, her gaze flicking from face to face among the dancers. Beyond a low arch, in another room, a group stood about the crap-table. She leaned this way and that, trying to see the faces of the group.

Then she saw the four men. They were sitting at a table near the door. One of them was chewing gum; the whole lower part of his face seemed to be cropped with teeth of an unbelievable whiteness and size. When she saw them she swung Popeye around with his back to them, working the two of them toward the door again. Once more her harried gaze flew from face to face in the crowd.

When she looked again two of the men had risen. They approached. She dragged Popeye into their path, still keeping his back turned to them. The men paused and essayed to go around her; again she backed Popeye into their path. She was trying to say something to him, but her mouth felt cold. It was like trying to pick up a pin with the fingers numb. Suddenly she felt herself lifted bodily aside, Popeye's small arms light and rigid as aluminum. She stumbled back against the wall and watched the two men leave the room. "I'll go back," she said. "I'll go back." She began to laugh shrilly.

"Shut it," Popeye said. "Are you going to shut it?"

"Get me a drink," she said. She felt his hand; her legs felt cold too, as if they were not hers. They were sitting at a table. Two tables away the man was still chewing, his elbows on the table. The fourth man sat on his spine, smoking, his coat buttoned across his chest.

She watched hands: a brown one in a white sleeve, a soiled white one beneath a dirty cuff, setting bottles on the table. She had a glass in her hand. She drank, gulping; with the glass in her hand she saw Red standing in the door, in a gray suit and a spotted bow tie. He looked like a college boy, and he looked about the room until he saw her. He looked at the back of Popeye's head, then at her as she sat with the glass in her hand. The two men at the other table had not moved. She could see the faint, steady movement of the one's ears as he chewed. The music started.

She held Popeye's back toward Red. He was still watching her, almost a head taller than anybody else. "Come on," she said in Popeye's ear. "If you're going to dance, dance."

She had another drink. They danced again. Red had disappeared. When the music ceased she had another drink. It did no good. It merely lay hot and hard inside her. "Come on," she said, "don't quit." But he wouldn't get up, and she stood over him, her muscles flinching and jerking with exhaustion and terror. She began to jeer at him. "Call yourself a man, a bold, bad man, and let a girl dance you off your feet."

Then her face drained, became small and haggard and sincere; she spoke like a child, with sober despair.

“Popeye.” He sat with his hands on the table, finicking with a cigarette, the second glass with its melting ice before him. She put her hand on his shoulder. “Daddy,” she said. Moving to shield them from the room, her hand stole toward his armpit, touching the butt of the flat pistol. It lay rigid in the light, dead vise of his arm and side. “Give it to me,” she whispered. “Daddy. Daddy.” She leaned her thigh against his shoulder, caressing his arm with her flank. “Give it to me, daddy,” she whispered. Suddenly her hand began to steal down his body in a swift, covert movement; then it snapped away in a movement of revulsion. “I forgot,” she whispered; “I didn’t mean . . . I didn’t . . .”

One of the men at the other table hissed once through his teeth. “Sit down,” Popeye said. She sat down. She filled her glass, watching her hands perform the action. Then she was watching the corner of the gray coat. He’s got a broken button, she thought stupidly. Popeye had not moved.

“Dance this?” Red said.

His head was bent but he was not looking at her. He was turned a little, facing the two men at the other table. Still Popeye did not move. He shredded delicately the end of the cigarette, pinching the tobacco off. Then he put it into his mouth.

“I’m not dancing,” Temple said through her cold lips.

“Not?” Red said. He said, in a level tone, without moving: “How’s the boy?”

“Fine,” Popeye said. Temple watched him scrape a match, saw the flame distorted through glass. “You’ve had enough,” Popeye said. His hand took the glass from her lips. She watched him empty it into the ice bowl. The music started again. She sat looking quietly about the room. A voice began to buzz faintly at her hearing, then Popeye was gripping

her wrist, shaking it, and she found that her mouth was open and that she must have been making a noise of some sort with it. "Shut it, now," he said. "You can have one more." He poured the drink into the glass.

"I haven't felt it at all," she said. He gave her the glass. She drank. When she set the glass down she realised that she was drunk. She believed that she had been drunk for some time. She thought that perhaps she had passed out and that it had already happened. She could hear herself saying I hope it has. I hope it has. Then she believed it had and she was overcome by a sense of bereavement and of physical desire. She thought, It will never be again, and she sat in a floating swoon of agonised sorrow and erotic longing, thinking of Red's body, watching her hand holding the empty bottle over the glass.

"You've drunk it all," Popeye said. "Get up, now. Dance it off." They danced again. She moved stiffly and languidly, her eyes open but unseeing; her body following the music without hearing the tune for a time. Then she became aware that the orchestra was playing the same tune as when Red was asking her to dance. If that were so, then it couldn't have happened yet. She felt a wild surge of relief. It was not too late: Red was still alive; she felt long shuddering waves of physical desire going over her, draining the color from her mouth, drawing her eyeballs back into her skull in a shuddering swoon.

They were at the crap-table. She could hear herself shouting to the dice. She was rolling them, winning; the counters were piling up in front of her as Popeye drew them in, coaching her, correcting her in his soft, querulous voice. He stood beside her, shorter than she.

He had the cup himself. She stood beside him cunningly, feeling the desire going over her in wave after wave, involved with the music and with the smell of her own flesh. She became quiet. By infinitesimal inches she moved aside until someone slipped into her place. Then she was walking swiftly and carefully across the floor toward the door, the dancers, the music swirling slowly about her in a bright myriad wave. The table where the two men had sat was empty, but she did not even glance at it. She entered the corridor. A waiter met her.

“Room,” she said. “Hurry.”

The room contained a table and four chairs. The waiter turned on the light and stood in the door. She jerked her hand at him; he went out. She leaned against the table on her braced arms, watching the door, until Red entered.

He came toward her. She did not move. Her eyes began to grow darker and darker, lifting into her skull above a half moon of white, without focus, with the blank rigidity of a statue’s eyes. She began to say Ah-ah-ah-ah in an expiring voice, her body arching slowly backward as though faced by an exquisite torture. When he touched her she sprang like a bow, hurling herself upon him, her mouth gaped and ugly like that of a dying fish as she writhed her loins against him.

He dragged his face free by main strength. With her hips grinding against him, her mouth gaping in straining protrusion, bloodless, she began to speak. “Let’s hurry. Anywhere. I’ve quit him. I told him so. It’s not my fault. Is it my fault? You dont need your hat and I dont either. He came here to kill you but I said I gave him his chance. It wasn’t my fault. And now it’ll just be us. Without him there watching. Come on. What’re you waiting for?” She strained her mouth toward him, dragging his head down, making a whimpering moan. He held his face free. “I told him I was. I said if you bring me here. I gave you your chance I said. And now he’s got them there to bump you off. But you’re not afraid. Are you?”

“Did you know that when you telephoned me?” he said.

“What? He said I wasn’t to see you again. He said he’d kill you. But he had me followed when I telephoned. I saw him. But you’re not afraid. He’s not even a man, but you are. You’re a man. You’re a man.” She began to grind against him, dragging at his head, murmuring to him in parrotlike underworld epithet, the saliva running pale over her bloodless lips. “Are you afraid?”

“Of that dopey bastard?” Lifting her bodily he turned so that he faced the door, and slipped his right hand free. She did not seem to be aware that he had moved.

“Please. Please. Please. Please. Dont make me wait. I’m burning up.”

“All right. You go on back. You wait till I give you the sign. Will you go on back?”

“I cant wait. You’ve got to. I’m on fire, I tell you.” She clung to him. Together they blundered across the room toward the door, he holding her clear of his right side; she in a voluptuous swoon, unaware that they were moving, straining at him as though she were trying to touch him with all of her body-surface at once. He freed himself and thrust her into the passage.

“Go on,” he said. “I’ll be there in a minute.”

“You wont be long? I’m on fire. I’m dying, I tell you.”

“No. Not long. Go on, now.”

The music was playing. She moved up the corridor, staggering a little. She thought that she was leaning against the wall, when she found that she was dancing again; then that she was dancing with two men at once; then she found that she was not dancing but that she was moving toward the door between the man with the chewing gum and the one with the buttoned coat. She tried to stop, but they had her under the arms; she opened her mouth to scream, taking one last despairing look about the swirling room.

“Yell,” the man with the buttoned coat said. “Just try it once.”

Red was at the crap-table. She saw his head turned, the cup in his lifted hand. With it he made her a short, cheery salute. He watched her disappear through the door, between the two men. Then he looked briefly about the room. His face was bold and calm, but there were two

white lines at the base of his nostrils and his forehead was damp. He rattled the cup and threw the dice steadily.

“Eleven,” the dealer said.

“Let it lay,” Red said. “I’ll pass a million times tonight.”

They helped Temple into the car. The man in the buttoned coat took the wheel. Where the drive joined the lane that led to the highroad a long touring car was parked. When they passed it Temple saw, leaning to a cupped match, Popeye’s delicate hooked profile beneath the slanted hat as he lit the cigarette. The match flipped outward like a dying star in miniature, sucked with the profile into darkness by the rush of their passing.

XXV

The tables had been moved to one end of the dance floor. On each one was a black table-cloth. The curtains were still drawn; a thick, salmon-colored light fell through them. Just beneath the orchestra platform the coffin sat. It was an expensive one: black, with silver fittings, the trestles hidden by a mass of flowers. In wreaths and crosses and other shapes of ceremonial mortality, the mass appeared to break in a symbolical wave over the bier and on upon the platform and the piano, the scent of them thickly oppressive.

The proprietor of the place moved about among the tables, speaking to the arrivals as they entered and found seats. The Negro waiters, in black shirts beneath their starched jackets, were already moving in and out with glasses and bottles of ginger ale. They moved with swaggering and decorous repression; already the scene was vivid, with a hushed, macabre air a little febrile.

The archway to the dice-room was draped in black. A black pall lay upon the crap-table, upon which the overflow of floral shapes was beginning to accumulate. People entered steadily, the men in dark suits

of decorous restraint, others in the light, bright shades of spring, increasing the atmosphere of macabre paradox. The women—the younger ones—wore bright colors also, in hats and scarves; the older ones in sober gray and black and navy blue, and glittering with diamonds: matronly figures resembling housewives on a Sunday afternoon excursion.

The room began to hum with shrill, hushed talk. The waiters moved here and there with high, precarious trays, their white jackets and black shirts resembling photograph negatives. The proprietor went from table to table with his bald head, a huge diamond in his black cravat, followed by the bouncer, a thick, muscle-bound, bullet-headed man who appeared to be on the point of bursting out of his dinner-jacket through the rear, like a cocoon.

In a private dining-room, on a table draped in black, sat a huge bowl of punch floating with ice and sliced fruit. Beside it leaned a fat man in a shapeless greenish suit, from the sleeves of which dirty cuffs fell upon hands rimmed with black nails. The soiled collar was wilted about his neck in limp folds, knotted by a greasy black tie with an imitation ruby stud. His face gleamed with moisture and he adjured the throng about the bowl in a harsh voice:

“Come on, folks. It’s on Gene. It dont cost you nothing. Step up and drink. There wasn’t never a better boy walked than him.” They drank and fell back, replaced by others with extended cups. From time to time a waiter entered with ice and fruit and dumped them into the bowl; from a suit case under the table Gene drew fresh bottles and decanted them into the bowl; then, proprietorial, adjurant, sweating, he resumed his harsh monologue, mopping his face on his sleeve. “Come on, folks. It’s all on Gene. I aint nothing but a bootlegger, but he never had a better friend than me. Step up and drink, folks. There’s more where that come from.”

From the dance hall came a strain of music. The people entered and found seats. On the platform was the orchestra from a downtown

hotel, in dinner coats. The proprietor and a second man were conferring with the leader.

“Let them play jazz,” the second man said. “Never nobody liked dancing no better than Red.”

“No, no,” the proprietor said. “Time Gene gets them all ginned up on free whiskey, they’ll start dancing. It’ll look bad.”

“How about the Blue Danube?” the leader said.

“No, no; dont play no blues, I tell you,” the proprietor said. “There’s a dead man in that bier.”

“That’s not blues,” the leader said.

“What is it?” the second man said.

“A waltz. Strauss.”

“A wop?” the second man said. “Like hell. Red was an American. You may not be, but he was. Dont you know anything American? Play I Cant Give You Anything but Love. He always liked that.”

“And get them all to dancing?” the proprietor said. He glanced back at the tables, where the women were beginning to talk a little shrilly. “You better start off with Nearer, My God, to Thee,” he said, “and sober them up some. I told Gene it was risky about that punch, starting it so soon. My suggestion was to wait until we started back to town. But I might have knowed somebody’d have to turn it into a carnival. Better start off solemn and keep it up until I give you the sign.”

“Red wouldn’t like it solemn,” the second man said. “And you know it.”

“Let him go somewheres else, then,” the proprietor said. “I just done this as an accommodation. I aint running no funeral parlor.”

The orchestra played Nearer, My God, to Thee. The audience grew quiet. A woman in a red dress came in the door unsteadily. "Whoopee," she said, "so long, Red. He'll be in hell before I could even reach Little Rock."

"Shhhhhhhh!" voices said. She fell into a seat. Gene came to the door and stood there until the music stopped.

"Come on, folks," he shouted, jerking his arms in a fat, sweeping gesture, "come and get it. It's on Gene. I don't want a dry throat or eye in this place in ten minutes." Those at the rear moved toward the door. The proprietor sprang to his feet and jerked his hand at the orchestra. The cornetist rose and played In That Haven of Rest in solo, but the crowd at the back of the room continued to dwindle through the door where Gene stood waving his arm. Two middle-aged women were weeping quietly beneath flowered hats.

They surged and clamored about the diminishing bowl. From the dance hall came the rich blare of the cornet. Two soiled young men worked their way toward the table, shouting "Gangway. Gangway" monotonously, carrying suit cases. They opened them and set bottles on the table, while Gene, frankly weeping now, opened them and decanted them into the bowl. "Come up, folks. I couldn't love him no better if he'd a been my own son," he shouted hoarsely, dragging his sleeve across his face.

A waiter edged up to the table with a bowl of ice and fruit and went to put them into the punch bowl. "What the hell you doing?" Gene said, "putting that slop in there? Get to hell away from here."

"Ra-a-a-a-y-y-y-y!" they shouted, clashing their cups, drowning all save the pantomime as Gene knocked the bowl of fruit from the waiter's hand and fell again to dumping raw liquor into the bowl, splashing it into and upon the extended hands and cups. The two youths opened bottles furiously.

As though swept there upon a brassy blare of music the proprietor appeared in the door, his face harried, waving his arms. "Come on, folks," he shouted, "let's finish the musical program. It's costing us money."

"Hell with it," they shouted.

"Costing who money?"

"Who cares?"

"Costing who money?"

"Who begrudges it? I'll pay it. By God, I'll buy him two funerals."

"Folks! Folks!" the proprietor shouted. "Dont you realise there's a bier in that room?"

"Costing who money?"

"Beer?" Gene said. "Beer?" he said in a broken voice. "Is anybody here trying to insult me by—"

"He begrudges Red the money."

"Who does?"

"Joe does, the cheap son of a bitch."

"Is somebody here trying to insult me—"

"Let's move the funeral, then. This is not the only place in town."

"Let's move Joe."

"Put the son of a bitch in a coffin. Let's have two funerals."

“Beer? Beer? Is somebody—”

“Put the son of a bitch in a coffin. See how he likes it.”

“Put the son of a bitch in a coffin,” the woman in red shrieked. They rushed toward the door, where the proprietor stood waving his hands above his head, his voice shrieking out of the uproar before he turned and fled.

In the main room a male quartet engaged from a vaudeville house was singing. They were singing mother songs in close harmony; they sang Sonny Boy. The weeping was general among the older women. Waiters were now carrying cups of punch in to them and they sat holding the cups in their fat, ringed hands, crying.

The orchestra played again. The woman in red staggered into the room. “Come on, Joe,” she shouted, “open the game. Get that damn stiff out of here and open the game.” A man tried to hold her; she turned upon him with a burst of filthy language and went on to the shrouded crap-table and hurled a wreath to the floor. The proprietor rushed toward her, followed by the bouncer.

The proprietor grasped the woman as she lifted another floral piece. The man who had tried to hold her intervened, the woman cursing shrilly and striking at both of them impartially with the wreath. The bouncer caught the man’s arm; he whirled and struck at the bouncer, who knocked him halfway across the room. Three more men entered. The fourth rose from the floor and all four of them rushed at the bouncer.

He felled the first and whirled and sprang with unbelievable celerity, into the main room. The orchestra was playing. It was immediately drowned in a sudden pandemonium of chairs and screams. The bouncer whirled again and met the rush of the four men. They mingled; a second man flew out and skittered along the floor on his back; the bouncer sprang free.

Then he whirled and rushed them and in a whirling plunge they bore down upon the bier and crashed into it. The orchestra had ceased and were now climbing onto their chairs, with their instruments. The floral offerings flew; the coffin teetered. "Catch it!" a voice shouted. They sprang forward, but the coffin crashed heavily to the floor, coming open. The corpse tumbled slowly and sedately out and came to rest with its face in the center of a wreath.

"Play something!" the proprietor bawled, waving his arms. "Play! Play!"

When they raised the corpse the wreath came too, attached to him by a hidden end of a wire driven into his cheek. He had worn a cap which, tumbled off, exposed a small blue hole in the center of his forehead. It had been neatly plugged with wax and was painted, but the wax had been jarred out and lost. They couldn't find it, but by unfastening the snap in the peak, they could draw the cap down to his eyes.

As the cortège neared the downtown section more cars joined it. The hearse was followed by six Packard touring cars with the tops back, driven by liveried chauffeurs and filled with flowers. They looked exactly alike and were of the type rented by the hour by the better-class agencies. Next came a nondescript line of taxis, roadsters, sedans, which increased as the procession moved slowly through the restricted district where faces peered from beneath lowered shades, toward the main artery that led back out of town, toward the cemetery.

On the avenue the hearse increased its speed, the procession stretching out at swift intervals. Presently the private cars and the cabs began to drop out. At each intersection they would turn this way or that, until at last only the hearse and the six Packards were left, each carrying no occupant save the liveried driver. The street was broad and now almost empty, with a white line down the center that diminished on ahead into the smooth asphalt vacancy. Soon the hearse was making forty miles an hour and then forty-five and then fifty.

One of the cabs drew up at Miss Reba's door. She got out, followed by a thin woman in sober, severe clothes and gold nose-glasses, and a

short plump woman in a plumed hat, her face hidden by a handkerchief, and a small bullet-headed boy of five or six. The woman with the handkerchief continued to sob in snuffy gasps as they went up the walk and entered the lattice. Beyond the house door the dogs set up a falsetto uproar. When Minnie opened the door they surged about Miss Reba's feet. She kicked them aside. Again they assailed her with snapping eagerness; again she flung them back against the wall in muted thuds.

"Come in, come in," she said, her hand to her breast. Once inside the house the woman with the handkerchief began to weep aloud.

"Didn't he look sweet?" she wailed. "Didn't he look sweet!"

"Now, now," Miss Reba said, leading the way to her room, "come in and have some beer. You'll feel better. Minnie!" They entered the room with the decorated dresser, the safe, the screen, the draped portrait. "Sit down, sit down," she panted, shoving the chairs forward. She lowered herself into one and stooped terrifically toward her feet.

"Uncle Bud, honey," the weeping woman said, dabbing at her eyes, "come and unlace Miss Reba's shoes."

The boy knelt and removed Miss Reba's shoes. "And if you'll just reach me them house slippers under the bed there, honey," Miss Reba said. The boy fetched the slippers. Minnie entered, followed by the dogs. They rushed at Miss Reba and began to worry the shoes she had just removed.

"Scat!" the boy said, striking at one of them with his hand. The dog's head snapped around, its teeth clicking, its half-hidden eyes bright and malevolent. The boy recoiled. "You bite me, you thon bitch," he said.

"Uncle Bud!" the fat woman said, her round face, rigid in fatty folds and streaked with tears, turned upon the boy in shocked surprise, the plumes nodding precariously above it. Uncle Bud's head was quite round, his nose bridged with freckles like splotches of huge summer

rain on a sidewalk. The other woman sat primly erect, in gold nose-glasses on a gold chain and neat iron-gray hair. She looked like a school-teacher. "The very idea!" the fat woman said. "How in the world he can learn such words on an Arkansaw farm, I dont know."

"They'll learn meanness anywhere," Miss Reba said. Minnie leaned down a tray bearing three frosted tankards. Uncle Bud watched with round cornflower eyes as they took one each. The fat woman began to cry again.

"He looked so sweet!" she wailed.

"We all got to suffer it," Miss Reba said. "Well, may it be a long day," lifting her tankard. They drank, bowing formally to one another. The fat woman dried her eyes; the two guests wiped their lips with prim decorum. The thin one coughed delicately aside, behind her hand.

"Such good beer," she said.

"Aint it?" the fat one said. "I always say it's the greatest pleasure I have to call on Miss Reba."

They began to talk politely, in decorous half-completed sentences, with little gasps of agreement. The boy had moved aimlessly to the window, peering beneath the lifted shade.

"How long's he going to be with you, Miss Myrtle?" Miss Reba said.

"Just till Sat'dy," the fat woman said. "Then he'll go back home. It makes a right nice little change for him, with me for a week or two. And I enjoy having him."

"Children are such a comfort to a body," the thin one said.

"Yes," Miss Myrtle said. "Is them two nice young fellows still with you, Miss Reba?"

“Yes,” Miss Reba said. “I think I got to get shut of them, though. I aint specially tender-hearted, but after all it aint no use in helping young folks to learn this world’s meanness until they have to. I already had to stop the girls running around the house without no clothes on, and they dont like it.”

They drank again, decorously, handling the tankards delicately, save Miss Reba, who grasped hers as though it were a weapon, her other hand lost in her breast. She set her tankard down empty. “I get so dry, seems like,” she said. “Wont you ladies have another?” They murmured, ceremoniously. “Minnie!” Miss Reba shouted.

Minnie came and filled the tankards again. “Reely, I’m right ashamed,” Miss Myrtle said. “But Miss Reba has such good beer. And then we’ve all had a kind of upsetting afternoon.”

“I’m just surprised it wasn’t upset no more,” Miss Reba said. “Giving away all that free liquor like Gene done.”

“It must have cost a good piece of jack,” the thin woman said.

“I believe you,” Miss Reba said. “And who got anything out of it? Tell me that. Except the privilege of having his place hell-full of folks not spending a cent.” She had set her tankard on the table beside her chair. Suddenly she turned her head sharply and looked at it. Uncle Bud was now behind her chair, leaning against the table. “You aint been into my beer, have you, boy?” she said.

“You, Uncle Bud,” Miss Myrtle said. “Aint you ashamed? I declare, it’s getting so I dont dare take him nowhere. I never see such a boy for snitching beer in my life. You come out here and play, now. Come on.”

“Yessum,” Uncle Bud said. He moved, in no particular direction. Miss Reba drank and set the tankard back on the table and rose.

“Since we all been kind of tore up,” she said, “maybe I can prevail on you ladies to have a little sup of gin?”

“No; reely,” Miss Myrtle said.

“Miss Reba’s the perfect hostess,” the thin one said. “How many times you heard me say that, Miss Myrtle?”

“I wouldn’t undertake to say, dearie,” Miss Myrtle said.

Miss Reba vanished behind the screen.

“Did you ever see it so warm for June, Miss Lorraine?” Miss Myrtle said.

“I never did,” the thin woman said. Miss Myrtle’s face began to crinkle again. Setting her tankard down she began to fumble for her handkerchief.

“It just comes over me like this,” she said, “and them singing that Sonny Boy and all. He looked so sweet,” she wailed.

“Now, now,” Miss Lorraine said. “Drink a little beer. You’ll feel better. Miss Myrtle’s took again,” she said, raising her voice.

“I got too tender a heart,” Miss Myrtle said. She snuffled behind the handkerchief, groping for her tankard. She groped for a moment, then it touched her hand. She looked quickly up. “You, Uncle Bud!” she said. “Didn’t I tell you to come out from behind there and play? Would you believe it? The other afternoon when we left here I was so mortified I didn’t know what to do. I was ashamed to be seen on the street with a drunk boy like you.”

Miss Reba emerged from behind the screen with three glasses of gin. “This’ll put some heart into us,” she said. “We’re setting here like three old sick cats.” They bowed formally and drank, patting their lips. Then they began to talk. They were all talking at once, again in half-completed sentences, but without pauses for agreement or affirmation.

"It's us girls," Miss Myrtle said. "Men just cant seem to take us and leave us for what we are. They make us what we are, then they expect us to be different. Expect us not to never look at another man, while they come and go as they please."

"A woman that wants to fool with more than one man at a time is a fool," Miss Reba said. "They're all trouble, and why do you want to double your trouble? And the woman that cant stay true to a good man when she gets him, a free-hearted spender that never give her a hour's uneasiness or a hard word . . ." looking at them, her eyes began to fill with a sad, unutterable expression, of baffled and patient despair.

"Now, now," Miss Myrtle said. She leaned forward and patted Miss Reba's huge hand. Miss Lorraine made a faint clucking sound with her tongue. "You'll get yourself started."

"He was such a good man," Miss Reba said. "We was like two doves. For twenty-five years we was like two doves."

"Now, dearie; now, dearie," Miss Myrtle said.

"It's when it comes over me like this," Miss Reba said. "Seeing that boy laying there under them flowers."

"He never had no more than Mr Binford had," Miss Myrtle said. "Now, now. Drink a little beer."

Miss Reba brushed her sleeve across her eyes. She drank some beer.

"He ought to known better than to take a chance with Popeye's girl," Miss Lorraine said.

"Men dont never learn better than that, dearie," Miss Myrtle said. "Where you reckon they went, Miss Reba?"

"I dont know and I dont care," Miss Reba said. "And how soon they catch him and burn him for killing that boy, I dont care neither. I dont care none."

"He goes all the way to Pensacola every summer to see his mother," Miss Myrtle said. "A man that'll do that cant be all bad."

"I dont know how bad you like them, then," Miss Reba said. "Me trying to run a respectable house, that's been running a shooting-gallery for thirty years, and him trying to turn it into a peep-show."

"It's us poor girls," Miss Myrtle said, "causes all the trouble and gets all the suffering."

"I heard two years ago he wasn't no good that way," Miss Lorraine said.

"I knew it all the time," Miss Reba said. "A young man spending his money like water on girls and not never going to bed with one. It's against nature. All the girls thought it was because he had a little woman out in town somewhere, but I says mark my words, there's something funny about him. There's a funny business somewhere."

"He was a free spender, all right," Miss Lorraine said.

"The clothes and jewelry that girl bought, it was a shame," Miss Reba said. "There was a Chinee robe she paid a hundred dollars for—imported, it was—and perfume at ten dollars an ounce; next morning when I went up there, they was all wadded in the corner and the perfume and rouge busted all over them like a cyclone. That's what she'd do when she got mad at him, when he'd beat her. After he shut her up and wouldn't let her leave the house. Having the front of my house watched like it was a . . ." She raised the tankard from the table to her lips. Then she halted it, blinking. "Where's my—"

"Uncle Bud!" Miss Myrtle said. She grasped the boy by the arm and snatched him out from behind Miss Reba's chair and shook him, his round head bobbing on his shoulders with an expression of equable

idiocy. "Aint you ashamed? Aint you ashamed? Why cant you stay out of these ladies' beer? I'm a good mind to take that dollar back and make you buy Miss Reba a can of beer, I am for a fact. Now, you go over there by that window and stay there, you hear?"

"Nonsense," Miss Reba said. "There wasn't much left. You ladies are about ready too, aint you? Minnie!"

Miss Lorraine touched her mouth with her handkerchief. Behind her glasses her eyes rolled aside in a veiled, secret look. She laid the other hand to her flat spinster's breast.

"We forgot about your heart, honey," Miss Myrtle said. "Dont you reckon you better take gin this time?"

"Reely, I—" Miss Lorraine said.

"Yes; do," Miss Reba said. She rose heavily and fetched three more glasses of gin from behind the screen. Minnie entered and refilled the tankards. They drank, patting their lips.

"That's what was going on, was it?" Miss Lorraine said.

"First I knowed was when Minnie told me there was something funny going on," Miss Reba said. "How he wasn't here hardly at all, gone about every other night, and that when he was here, there wasn't no signs at all the next morning when she cleaned up. She'd hear them quarrelling, and she said it was her wanting to get out and he wouldn't let her. With all them clothes he was buying her, mind, he didn't want her to leave the house, and she'd get mad and lock the door and wouldn't even let him in."

"Maybe he went off and got fixed up with one of these glands, these monkey glands, and it quit on him," Miss Myrtle said.

"Then one morning he come in with Red and took him up there. They stayed about an hour and left, and Popeye didn't show up again until

next morning. Then him and Red come back and stayed up there about an hour. When they left, Minnie come and told me what was going on, so next day I waited for them. I called him in here and I says 'Look here, you son of a buh—' " She ceased. For an instant the three of them sat motionless, a little forward. Then slowly their heads turned and they looked at the boy leaning against the table.

"Uncle Bud, honey," Miss Myrtle said, "dont you want to go and play in the yard with Reba and Mr Binford?"

"Yessum," the boy said. He went toward the door. They watched him until the door closed upon him. Miss Lorraine drew her chair up; they leaned together.

"And that's what they was doing?" Miss Myrtle said.

"I says 'I been running a house for thirty years, but this is the first time I ever had anything like this going on in it. If you want to turn a stud in to your girl' I says 'go somewhere else to do it. I aint going to have my house turned into no French joint.' "

"The son of a bitch," Miss Lorraine said.

"He'd ought to've had sense enough to got a old ugly man," Miss Myrtle said. "Tempting us poor girls like that."

"Men always expects us to resist temptation," Miss Lorraine said. She was sitting upright like a schoolteacher. "The lousy son of a bitch."

"Except what they offers themselves," Miss Reba said. "Then watch them. . . . Every morning for four days that was going on, then they didn't come back. For a week Popeye didn't show up at all, and that girl wild as a young mare. I thought he was out of town on business maybe, until Minnie told me he wasn't and that he give her five dollars a day not to let that girl out of the house nor use the telephone. And me trying to get word to him to come and take her out of my house because I didn't want nuttin like that going on in it. Yes, sir, Minnie said

the two of them would be nekkid as two snakes, and Popeye hanging over the foot of the bed without even his hat off, making a kind of whinnying sound.”

“Maybe he was cheering for them,” Miss Lorraine said. “The lousy son of a bitch.”

Feet came up the hall; they could hear Minnie’s voice lifted in adjuration. The door opened. She entered, holding Uncle Bud erect by one hand. Limp-kneed he dangled, his face fixed in an expression of glassy idiocy. “Miss Reba,” Minnie said, “this boy done broke in the icebox and drunk a whole bottle of beer. You, boy!” she said, shaking him, “stan up!” Limply he dangled, his face rigid in a slobbering grin. Then upon it came an expression of concern, consternation; Minnie swung him sharply away from her as he began to vomit.

XXVI

When the sun rose, Horace had not been to bed nor even undressed. He was just finishing a letter to his wife, addressed to her at her father’s in Kentucky, asking for a divorce. He sat at the table, looking down at the single page written neatly and illegibly over, feeling quiet and empty for the first time since he had found Popeye watching him across the spring four weeks ago. While he was sitting there he began to smell coffee from somewhere. “I’ll finish this business and then I’ll go to Europe. I am sick. I am too old for this. I was born too old for it, and so I am sick to death for quiet.”

He shaved and made coffee and drank a cup and ate some bread. When he passed the hotel, the bus which met the morning train was at the curb, with the drummers getting into it. Clarence Snopes was one of them, carrying a tan suit case.

“Going down to Jackson for a couple of days on a little business,” he said. “Too bad I missed you last night. I come on back in a car. I reckon you was settled for the night, maybe?” He looked down at Horace, vast, pasty, his intention unmistakable. “I could have took you to a place

most folks dont know about. Where a man can do just whatever he is big enough to do. But there'll be another time, since I done got to know you better." He lowered his voice a little, moving a little aside. "Dont you be uneasy. I aint a talker. When I'm here, in Jefferson, I'm one fellow; what I am up town with a bunch of good sports aint nobody's business but mine and theirs. Aint that right?"

Later in the morning, from a distance he saw his sister on the street ahead of him turn and disappear into a door. He tried to find her by looking into all the stores within the radius of where she must have turned, and asking the clerks. She was in none of them. The only place he did not investigate was a stairway that mounted between two stores, to a corridor of offices on the first floor, one of which was that of the District Attorney, Eustace Graham.

Graham had a club foot, which had elected him to the office he now held. He worked his way into and through the State University; as a youth the town remembered him as driving wagons and trucks for grocery stores. During his first year at the University he made a name for himself by his industry. He waited on table in the commons and he had the government contract for carrying the mail to and from the local postoffice at the arrival of each train, hobbling along with the sack over his shoulder: a pleasant, open-faced young man with a word for everyone and a certain alert rapacity about the eyes.

During his second year he let his mail contract lapse and he resigned from his job in the commons; he also had a new suit. People were glad that he had saved through his industry to where he could give all his time to his studies. He was in the law school then, and the law professors groomed him like a race-horse. He graduated well, though without distinction. "Because he was handicapped at the start," the professors said. "If he had had the same start that the others had . . . He will go far," they said.

It was not until he had left school that they learned that he had been playing poker for three years in the office of a livery stable, behind

drawn shades. When, two years out of school, he got elected to the State legislature, they began to tell an anecdote of his school days.

It was in the poker game in the livery stable office. The bet came to Graham. He looked across the table at the owner of the stable, who was his only remaining opponent.

“How much have you got there, Mr Harris?” he said.

“Forty-two dollars, Eustace,” the proprietor said. Eustace shoved some chips into the pot. “How much is that?” the proprietor said.

“Forty-two dollars, Mr Harris.”

“Hmmm,” the proprietor said. He examined his hand. “How many cards did you draw, Eustace?”

“Three, Mr Harris.”

“Hmmm. Who dealt the cards, Eustace?”

“I did, Mr Harris.”

“I pass, Eustace.”

He had been District Attorney but a short time, yet already he had let it be known that he would announce for Congress on his record of convictions, so when he found himself facing Narcissa across the desk in his dingy office, his expression was like that when he had put the forty-two dollars into the pot.

“I only wish it weren’t your brother,” he said. “I hate to see a brother-in-arms, you might say, with a bad case.” She was watching him with a blank, enveloping look. “After all, we’ve got to protect society, even when it does seem that society does not need protection.”

“Are you sure he cant win?” she said.

“Well, the first principle of law is, God alone knows what the jury will do. Of course, you cant expect—”

“But you dont think he will.”

“Naturally, I—”

“You have good reason to think he cant. I suppose you know things about it that he doesn’t.”

He looked at her briefly. Then he picked up a pen from his desk and began to scrape at the point with a paper cutter. “This is purely confidential. I am violating my oath of office. I wont have to tell you that. But it may save you worry to know that he hasn’t a chance in the world. I know what the disappointment will be to him, but that cant be helped. We happen to know that the man is guilty. So if there’s any way you know of to get your brother out of the case, I’d advise you to do it. A losing lawyer is like a losing anything else, ballplayer or merchant or doctor: his business is to—”

“So the quicker he loses, the better it would be, wouldn’t it?” she said. “If they hung the man and got it over with.” His hands became perfectly still. He did not look up. She said, her tone cold and level: “I have reasons for wanting Horace out of this case. The sooner the better. Three nights ago that Snopes, the one in the legislature, telephoned out home, trying to find him. The next day he went to Memphis. I dont know what for. You’ll have to find that out yourself. I just want Horace out of this business as soon as possible.”

She rose and moved toward the door. He hobbled over to open it; again she put that cold, still, unfathomable gaze upon him as though he were a dog or a cow and she waited for it to get out of her path. Then she was gone. He closed the door and struck a clumsy clog-step, snapping his fingers just as the door opened again; he snapped his hands toward his tie and looked at her in the door, holding it open.

“What day do you think it will be over with?” she said.

“Why, I cuh— Court opens the twentieth,” he said. “It will be the first case. Say . . . Two days. Or three at the most, with your kind assistance. And I need not assure you that this will be held in strictest confidence between us. . . .” He moved toward her, but her blank calculating gaze was like a wall, surrounding him.

“That will be the twenty-fourth.” Then she was looking at him again. “Thank you,” she said, and closed the door.

That night she wrote Belle that Horace would be home on the twenty-fourth. She telephoned Horace and asked for Belle’s address.

“Why?” Horace said.

“I’m going to write her a letter,” she said, her voice tranquil, without threat. Dammit, Horace thought, holding the dead wire in his hand, How can I be expected to combat people who will not even employ subterfuge. But soon he forgot it, forgot that she had called. He did not see her again before the trial opened.

Two days before it opened Snopes emerged from a dentist’s office and stood at the curb, spitting. He took a gold-wrapped cigar from his pocket and removed the foil and put the cigar gingerly between his teeth. He had a black eye, and the bridge of his nose was bound in soiled adhesive tape. “Got hit by a car in Jackson,” he told them in the barber-shop. “But dont think I never made the bastard pay,” he said, showing a sheaf of yellow bills. He put them into a notecase and stowed it away. “I am an American,” he said. “I dont brag about it, because I was born one. And I been a decent Baptist all my life, too.

Oh, I aint no preacher and I aint no old maid; I been around with the boys now and then, but I reckon I aint no worse than lots of folks that pretends to sing loud in church. But the lowest, cheapest thing on this earth aint a nigger: it’s a jew. We need laws against them. Drastic laws.

When a durn lowlife jew can come to a free country like this and just because he's got a law degree, it's time to put a stop to things.

A jew is the lowest thing on this creation. And the lowest kind of jew is a jew lawyer. And the lowest kind of jew lawyer is a Memphis jew lawyer. When a jew lawyer can hold up an American, a white man, and not give him but ten dollars for something that two Americans, Americans, southron gentlemen; a judge living in the capital of the State of Mississippi and a lawyer that's going to be as big a man as his pa some day, and a judge too; when they give him ten times as much for the same thing than the lowlife jew, we need a law. I been a liberal spender all my life; whatever I had has always been my friends' too. But when a durn, stinking, lowlife jew will refuse to pay an American one tenth of what another American, and a judge at that—"

"Why did you sell it to him, then?" the barber said.

"What?" Snopes said. The barber was looking at him.

"What was you trying to sell to that car when it run over you?" the barber said.

"Have a cigar," Snopes said.

XXVII

The trial was set for the twentieth of June. A week after his Memphis visit, Horace telephoned Miss Reba. "Just to know if she's still there," he said. "So I can reach her if I need to."

"She's here," Miss Reba said. "But this reaching. I dont like it. I dont want no cops around here unless they are on my business."

"It'll be only a bailiff," Horace said. "Someone to hand a paper into her own hand."

“Let the postman do it, then,” Miss Reba said. “He comes here anyway. In a uniform too. He dont look no worse in it than a full-blowed cop, neither. Let him do it.”

“I wont bother you,” Horace said. “I wont make you any trouble.”

“I know you aint,” Miss Reba said. Her voice was thin, harsh, over the wire. “I aint going to let you. Minnie’s done took a crying spell tonight, over that bastard that left her, and me and Miss Myrtle was sitting here, and we got started crying too. Me and Minnie and Miss Myrtle. We drunk up a whole new bottle of gin. I cant afford that. So dont you be sending no jay cops up here with no letters for nobody. You telephone me and I’ll turn them both out on the street and you can have them arrested there.”

On the night of the nineteenth he telephoned her again. He had some trouble in getting in touch with her.

“They’re gone,” she said. “Both of them. Dont you read no papers?”

“What papers?” Horace said. “Hello. Hello!”

“They aint here no more, I said,” Miss Reba said. “I dont know nuttin about them and I dont want to know nuttin except who’s going to pay me a week’s room rent on—”

“But cant you find where she went to? I may need her.”

“I dont know nuttin and I dont want to know nuttin,” Miss Reba said. He heard the receiver click. Yet the disconnection was not made at once. He heard the receiver thud onto the table where the telephone sat, and he could hear Miss Reba shouting for Minnie: “Minnie. Minnie!” Then some hand lifted the receiver and set it onto the hook; the wire clicked in his ear. After a while a detached Delsarte-ish voice said: “Pine Bluff dizzent . . . Enkyew!”

The trial opened the next day. On the table lay the sparse objects which the District Attorney was offering: the bullet from Tommy's skull, a stoneware jug containing corn whiskey.

"I will call Mrs Goodwin to the stand," Horace said. He did not look back. He could feel Goodwin's eyes on his back as he helped the woman into the chair. She was sworn, the child lying on her lap. She repeated the story as she had told it to him on the day after the child was ill. Twice Goodwin tried to interrupt and was silenced by the Court. Horace would not look at him.

The woman finished her story. She sat erect in the chair, in her neat, worn gray dress and hat with the darned veil, the purple ornament on her shoulder. The child lay on her lap, its eyes closed in that drugged immobility. For a while her hand hovered about its face, performing those needless maternal actions as though unawares.

Horace went and sat down. Then only did he look at Goodwin. But the other sat quietly now, his arms folded and his head bent a little, but Horace could see that his nostrils were waxy white with rage against his dark face. He leaned toward him and whispered, but Goodwin did not move.

The District Attorney now faced the woman.

"Mrs Goodwin," he said, "what was the date of your marriage to Mr Goodwin?"

"I object!" Horace said, on his feet.

"Can the prosecution show how this question is relevant?" the Court said.

"I waive, your Honor," the District Attorney said, glancing at the jury.

When court adjourned for the day Goodwin said bitterly: "Well, you've said you would kill me someday, but I didn't think you meant it. I didn't think that you—"

"Dont be a fool," Horace said. "Dont you see your case is won? That they are reduced to trying to impugn the character of your witness?" But when they left the jail he found the woman still watching him from some deep reserve of foreboding. "You mustn't worry at all, I tell you. You may know more about making whiskey or love than I do, but I know more about criminal procedure than you, remember."

"You dont think I made a mistake?"

"I know you didn't. Dont you see how that explodes their case? The best they can hope for now is a hung jury. And the chances of that are not one in fifty. I tell you, he'll walk out of that jail tomorrow a free man."

"Then I guess it's time to think about paying you."

"Yes," Horace said, "all right. I'll come out tonight."

"Tonight?"

"Yes. He may call you back to the stand tomorrow. We'd better prepare for it, anyway."

At eight oclock he entered the mad woman's yard. A single light burned in the crazy depths of the house, like a firefly caught in a brier patch, but the woman did not appear when he called. He went to the door and knocked. A shrill voice shouted something; he waited a moment. He was about to knock again when he heard the voice again, shrill and wild and faint, as though from a distance, like a reedy pipe buried by an avalanche.

He circled the house in the rank, waist-high weeds. The kitchen door was open. The lamp was there, dim in a smutty chimney, filling the

room—a jumble of looming shapes rank with old foul female flesh—not with light but with shadow. White eyeballs rolled in a high, tight bullet head in brown gleams above a torn singlet strapped into overalls. Beyond the Negro the mad woman turned in an open cupboard, brushing her lank hair back with her forearm.

“Your bitch has gone to jail,” she said. “Go on with her.”

“Jail?” Horace said.

“That’s what I said. Where the good folks live. When you get a husband, keep him in jail where he cant bother you.” She turned to the negro, a small flask in her hand. “Come on, dearie. Give me a dollar for it. You got plenty money.”

Horace returned to town, to the jail. They admitted him. He mounted the stairs; the jailer locked a door behind him.

The woman admitted him to the cell. The child lay on the cot. Goodwin sat beside it, his arms crossed, his legs extended in the attitude of a man in the last stage of physical exhaustion.

“Why are you sitting there, in front of that slit?” Horace said. “Why not get into the corner, and we’ll put the mattress over you.”

“You come to see it done, did you?” Goodwin said. “Well, that’s no more than right. It’s your job. You promised I wouldn’t hang, didn’t you?”

“You’ve got an hour yet,” Horace said. “The Memphis train doesn’t get here until eight-thirty. He’s surely got better sense than to come here in that canary-colored car.” He turned to the woman. “But you. I thought better of you. I know that he and I are fools, but I expected better of you.”

“You’re doing her a favor,” Goodwin said. “She might have hung on with me until she was too old to hustle a good man. If you’ll just

promise to get the kid a newspaper grift when he's old enough to make change, I'll be easy in my mind."

The woman had returned to the cot. She lifted the child onto her lap. Horace went to her. He said: "You come on, now. Nothing's going to happen. He'll be all right here. He knows it. You've got to go home and get some sleep, because you'll both be leaving here tomorrow. Come, now."

"I reckon I better stay," she said.

"Damn it, dont you know that putting yourself in the position for disaster is the surest way in the world to bring it about? Hasn't your own experience shown you that? Lee knows it. Lee, make her stop this."

"Go on, Ruby," Goodwin said. "Go home and go to bed."

"I reckon I better stay," she said.

Horace stood over them. The woman mused above the child, her face bent and her whole body motionless. Goodwin leaned back against the wall, his brown wrists folded into the faded sleeves of his shirt. "You're a man now," Horace said. "Aren't you? I wish that jury could see you now, locked up in a concrete cell, scaring women and children with fifth grade ghost stories. They'd know you never had the guts to kill anybody."

"You better go on and go to bed yourself," Goodwin said. "We could sleep here, if there wasn't so much noise going on."

"No; that's too sensible for us to do," Horace said. He left the cell. The jailer unlocked the door for him and he quitted the building. In ten minutes he returned, with a parcel. Goodwin had not moved. The woman watched him open the package. It contained a bottle of milk, a box of candy, a box of cigars. He gave Goodwin one of the cigars and took one himself. "You brought his bottle, didn't you?"

The woman produced the bottle from a bundle beneath the cot. "It's got some in it," she said. She filled it from the bottle. Horace lit his and Goodwin's cigars. When he looked again the bottle was gone.

"Not time to feed him yet?" he said.

"I'm warming it," the woman said.

"Oh," Horace said. He tilted the chair against the wall, across the cell from the cot.

"Here's room on the bed," the woman said. "It's softer. Some."

"Not enough to change, though," Horace said.

"Look here," Goodwin said, "you go on home. No use in you doing this."

"We've got a little work to do," Horace said. "That lawyer'll call her again in the morning. That's his only chance: to invalidate her testimony somehow. You might try to get some sleep while we go over it."

"All right," Goodwin said.

Horace began to drill the woman, tramping back and forth upon the narrow floor. Goodwin finished his cigar and sat motionless again, his arms folded and his head bent. The clock above the square struck nine and then ten. The child whimpered, stirred. The woman stopped and changed it and took the bottle from beneath her flank and fed it. Then she leaned forward carefully and looked into Goodwin's face. "He's asleep," she whispered.

"Shall we lay him down?" Horace whispered.

“No. Let him stay there.” Moving quietly she laid the child on the cot and moved herself to the other end of it. Horace carried the chair over beside her. They spoke in whispers.

The clock struck eleven. Still Horace drilled her, going over and over the imaginary scene. At last he said: “I think that’s all. Can you remember it, now? If he should ask you anything you cant answer in the exact words you’ve learned tonight, just say nothing for a moment. I’ll attend to the rest. Can you remember, now?”

“Yes,” she whispered. He reached across and took the box of candy from the cot and opened it, the glazed paper crackling faintly. She took a piece. Goodwin had not moved. She looked at him, then at the narrow slit of window.

“Stop that,” Horace whispered. “He couldn’t reach him through that window with a hat-pin, let alone a bullet. Dont you know that?”

“Yes,” she said. She held the bon-bon in her hand. She was not looking at him. “I know what you’re thinking,” she whispered.

“What?”

“When you got to the house and I wasn’t there. I know what you’re thinking.” Horace watched her, her averted face. “You said tonight was the time to start paying you.”

For a while longer he looked at her. “Ah,” he said. “O tempora! O mores! O hell! Can you stupid mammals never believe that any man, every man— You thought that was what I was coming for? You thought that if I had intended to, I’d have waited this long?”

She looked at him briefly. “It wouldn’t have done you any good if you hadn’t waited.”

“What? Oh. Well. But you would have tonight?”

“I thought that was what—”

“You would now, then?” She looked around at Goodwin. He was snoring a little. “Oh, I dont mean right this minute,” he whispered. “But you’ll pay on demand.”

“I thought that was what you meant. I told you we didn’t have— If that aint enough pay, I dont know that I blame you.”

“It’s not that. You know it’s not that. But cant you see that perhaps a man might do something just because he knew it was right, necessary to the harmony of things that it be done?”

The woman turned the bon-bon slowly in her hand. “I thought you were mad about him.”

“Lee?”

“No. Him.” She touched the child. “Because I’d have to bring him with us.”

“You mean, with him at the foot of the bed, maybe? perhaps you holding him by the leg all the time, so he wouldn’t fall off?”

She looked at him, her eyes grave and blank and contemplative. Outside the clock struck twelve.

“Good God,” he whispered. “What kind of men have you known?”

“I got him out of jail once that way. Out of Leavenworth, too. When they knew he was guilty.”

“You did?” Horace said. “Here. Take another piece. That one’s about worn out.” She looked down at her chocolate-stained fingers and the shapeless bon-bon. She dropped it behind the cot. Horace extended his handkerchief.

"It'll soil it," she said. "Wait." She wiped her fingers on the child's discarded garment and sat again, her hands clasped in her lap. Goodwin was snoring regularly. "When he went to the Philippines he left me in San Francisco. I got a job and I lived in a hall room, cooking over a gas-jet, because I told him I would. I didn't know how long he'd be gone, but I promised him I would and he knew I would. When he killed that other soldier over that nigger woman, I didn't even know it.

I didn't get a letter from him for five months. It was just when I happened to see an old newspaper I was spreading on a closet shelf in the place where I worked that I saw the regiment was coming home, and when I looked at the calendar it was that day. I'd been good all that time. I'd had good chances; every day I had them with the men coming in the restaurant.

"They wouldn't let me off to go and meet the ship, so I had to quit. Then they wouldn't let me see him, wouldn't even let me on the ship. I stood there while they came marching off it, watching for him and asking the ones that passed if they knew where he was and them kidding me if I had a date that night, telling me they never heard of him or that he was dead or he had run off to Japan with the colonel's wife. I tried to get on the ship again, but they wouldn't let me.

So that night I dressed up and went to the cabarets until I found one of them and let him pick me up, and he told me. It was like I had died. I sat there with the music playing and all, and that drunk soldier pawing at me, and me wondering why I didn't let go, go on with him, get drunk and never sober up again and me thinking And this is the sort of animal I wasted a year over. I guess that was why I didn't.

"Anyway, I didn't. I went back to my room and the next day I started looking for him. I kept on, with them telling me lies and trying to make me, until I found he was in Leavenworth. I didn't have enough money for a ticket, so I had to get another job. It took two months to get enough money. Then I went to Leavenworth. I got another job as waitress, in Childs, nightshifts, so I could see Lee every other Sunday afternoon. We decided to get a lawyer.

We didn't know that a lawyer couldn't do anything for a federal prisoner. The lawyer didn't tell me, and I hadn't told Lee how I was getting the lawyer. He thought I had saved some money. I lived with the lawyer two months before I found it out.

"Then the war came and they let Lee out and sent him to France. I went to New York and got a job in a munitions plant. I stayed straight too, with the cities full of soldiers with money to spend, and even the little ratty girls wearing silk. But I stayed straight. Then he came home.

I was at the ship to meet him. He got off under arrest and they sent him back to Leavenworth for killing that soldier three years ago. Then I got a lawyer to get a Congressman to get him out. I gave him all the money I had saved too. So when Lee got out, we had nothing. He said we'd get married, but we couldn't afford it. And when I told him about the lawyer, he beat me."

Again she dropped a shapeless piece of candy behind the cot and wiped her hands on the garment. She chose another piece from the box and ate it. Chewing, she looked at Horace, turning upon him a blank, musing gaze for an unhurried moment. Through the slotted window the darkness came chill and dead.

Goodwin ceased snoring. He stirred and sat up.

"What time is it?" he said.

"What?" Horace said. He looked at his watch. "Half-past two."

"He must have had a puncture," Goodwin said.

Toward dawn Horace himself slept, sitting in the chair. When he waked a narrow rosy pencil of sunlight fell level through the window. Goodwin and the woman were talking quietly on the cot. Goodwin looked at him bleakly.

“Morning,” he said.

“I hope you slept off that nightmare of yours,” Horace said.

“If I did, it’s the last one I’ll have. They say you don’t dream there.”

“You’ve certainly done enough not to miss it,” Horace said. “I suppose you’ll believe us, after this.”

“Believe, hell,” Goodwin said, who had sat so quiet, so contained, with his saturnine face, negligent in his overalls and blue shirt; “do you think for one minute that man is going to let me walk out of that door and up the street and into that courthouse, after yesterday? What sort of men have you lived with all your life? In a nursery? I wouldn’t do that, myself.”

“If he does, he has sprung his own trap,” Horace said.

“What good will that do me? Let me tell—”

“Lee,” the woman said.

—“you something: the next time you want to play dice with a man’s neck—”

“Lee,” she said. She was stroking her hand slowly on his head, back and forth. She began to smooth his hair into a part, patting his collarless shirt smooth. Horace watched them.

“Would you like to stay here today?” he said quietly. “I can fix it.”

“No,” Goodwin said. “I’m sick of it. I’m going to get it over with. Just tell that goddamned deputy not to walk too close to me. You and her better go and eat breakfast.”

“I’m not hungry,” the woman said.

“You go on like I told you,” Goodwin said.

“Lee.”

“Come,” Horace said. “You can come back afterward.”

Outside, in the fresh morning, he began to breathe deeply. “Fill your lungs,” he said. “A night in that place would give anyone the jimjams. The idea of three grown people . . . My Lord, sometimes I believe that we are all children, except children themselves. But today will be the last. By noon he’ll walk out of there a free man: do you realise that?”

They walked on in the fresh sunlight, beneath the high, soft sky. High against the blue, fat little clouds blew up from the southwest, and the cool steady breeze shivered and twinkled in the locusts where the blooms had long since fallen.

“I dont know how you’ll get paid,” she said.

“Forget it. I’ve been paid. You wont understand it, but my soul has served an apprenticeship that has lasted for forty-three years. Forty-three years. Half again as long as you have lived. So you see that folly, as well as poverty, cares for its own.”

“And you know that he—that—”

“Stop it, now. We dreamed that away, too. God is foolish at times, but at least He’s a gentleman. Dont you know that?”

“I always thought of Him as a man,” the woman said.

The bell was already ringing when Horace crossed the square toward the courthouse. Already the square was filled with wagons and cars and the overalls and khaki thronged slowly beneath the gothic entrance of the building. Overhead the clock was striking nine as he mounted the stairs.

The broad double doors at the head of the cramped stair were open. From beyond them came a steady preliminary stir of people settling themselves. Above the seat-backs Horace could see their heads—bald heads, gray heads, shaggy heads and heads trimmed to recent feather-edge above sun-baked necks, oiled heads above urban collars and here and there a sunbonnet or a flowered hat.

The hum of their voices and movements came back upon the steady draft which blew through the door. The air entered the open windows and blew over the heads and back to Horace in the door, laden with smells of tobacco and stale sweat and the earth and with that unmistakable odor of courtrooms; that musty odor of spent lusts and greeds and bickerings and bitterness, and withal a certain clumsy stability in lieu of anything better.

The windows gave upon balconies close under the arched porticoes. The breeze drew through them, bearing the chirp and coo of sparrows and pigeons that nested in the eaves, and now and then the sound of a motor horn from the square below, rising out of and sinking back into a hollow rumble of feet in the corridor below and on the stairs.

The Bench was empty. At one side, at the long table, he could see Goodwin's black head and gaunt brown face, and the woman's gray hat. At the other end of the table sat a man picking his teeth. His skull was capped closely by tightly-curved black hair thinning upon a bald spot. He had a long, pale nose.

He wore a tan palm beach suit; upon the table near him lay a smart leather brief-case and a straw hat with a red-and-tan band, and he gazed lazily out a window above the ranked heads, picking his teeth. Horace stopped just within the door. "It's a lawyer," he said. "A Jew lawyer from Memphis." Then he was looking at the backs of the heads about the table, where the witnesses and such would be. "I know what I'll find before I find it," he said. "She will have on a black hat."

He walked up the aisle. From beyond the balcony window where the sound of the bell seemed to be and where beneath the eaves the guttural pigeons crooned, the voice of the bailiff came:

“The honorable Circuit Court of Yoknapatawpha county is now open according to law. . . .”

Temple had on a black hat. The clerk called her name twice before she moved and took the stand. After a while Horace realised that he was being spoken to, a little testily, by the Court.

“Is this your witness, Mr Benbow?”

“It is, your Honor.”

“You wish her sworn and recorded?”

“I do, your Honor.”

Beyond the window, beneath the unhurried pigeons, the bailiff’s voice still droned, reiterant, importunate, and detached, though the sound of the bell had ceased.

XXVIII

The district attorney faced the jury. “I offer as evidence this object which was found at the scene of the crime.” He held in his hand a corn-cob. It appeared to have been dipped in dark brownish paint. “The reason this was not offered sooner is that its bearing on the case was not made clear until the testimony of the defendant’s wife which I have just caused to be read aloud to you gentlemen from the record.

“You have just heard the testimony of the chemist and the gynecologist—who is, as you gentlemen know, an authority on the most sacred affairs of that most sacred thing in life: womanhood—who says that this is no longer a matter for the hangman, but for a bonfire of gasoline—”

“I object!” Horace said: “The prosecution is attempting to sway—”

“Sustained,” the Court said. “Strike out the phrase beginning ‘who says that,’ mister clerk. You may instruct the jury to disregard it, Mr Benbow. Keep to the matter in hand, Mr District Attorney.”

The District Attorney bowed. He turned to the witness stand, where Temple sat. From beneath her black hat her hair escaped in tight red curls like clots of resin. The hat bore a rhinestone ornament. Upon her black satin lap lay a platinum bag. Her pale tan coat was open upon a shoulder knot of purple. Her hands lay motionless, palm-up on her lap. Her long blonde legs slanted, lax-ankled, her two motionless slippers with their glittering buckles lay on their sides as though empty.

Above the ranked intent faces white and pallid as the floating bellies of dead fish, she sat in an attitude at once detached and cringing, her gaze fixed on something at the back of the room. Her face was quite pale, the two spots of rouge like paper discs pasted on her cheek bones, her mouth painted into a savage and perfect bow, also like something both symbolical and cryptic cut carefully from purple paper and pasted there.

The District Attorney stood before her.

“What is your name?” She did not answer. She moved her head slightly, as though he had obstructed her view, gazing at something in the back of the room. “What is your name?” he repeated, moving also, into the line of her vision again. Her mouth moved. “Louder,” he said. “Speak out. No one will hurt you. Let these good men, these fathers and husbands, hear what you have to say and right your wrong for you.”

The Court glanced at Horace, his eyebrows raised. But Horace made no move. He sat with his head bent a little, his hands clutched in his lap.

“Temple Drake,” Temple said.

“Your age?”

“Eighteen.”

“Where is your home?”

“Memphis,” she said in a scarce distinguishable voice.

“Speak a little louder. These men will not hurt you. They are here to right the wrong you have suffered. Where did you live before you went to Memphis?”

“In Jackson.”

“Have you relations there?”

“Yes.”

“Come. Tell these good men—”

“My father.”

“Your mother is dead?”

“Yes.”

“Have you any sisters?”

“No.”

“You are your father’s only daughter?”

Again the Court looked at Horace; again he made no move.

“Yes.”

“Where have you been living since May twelfth of this year?” Her head moved faintly, as though she would see beyond him. He moved into her line of vision, holding her eyes. She stared at him again, giving her parrotlike answers.

“Did your father know you were there?”

“No.”

“Where did he think you were?”

“He thought I was in school.”

“You were in hiding, then, because something had happened to you and you dared not—”

“I object!” Horace said. “The question is lead—”

“Sustained,” the Court said. “I have been on the point of warning you for some time, Mr Attorney, but defendant would not take exception, for some reason.”

The District Attorney bowed toward the Bench. He turned to the witness and held her eyes again.

“Where were you on Sunday morning, May twelfth?”

“I was in the crib.”

The room sighed, its collective breath hissing in the musty silence. Some newcomers entered, but they stopped at the rear of the room in a clump and stood there. Temple’s head had moved again. The District Attorney caught her gaze and held it. He half turned and pointed at Goodwin.

“Did you ever see that man before?” She gazed at the District Attorney, her face quite rigid, empty. From a short distance her eyes, the two

spots of rouge and her mouth, were like five meaningless objects in a small heart-shaped dish. "Look where I am pointing."

"Yes."

"Where did you see him?"

"In the crib."

"What were you doing in the crib?"

"I was hiding."

"Who were you hiding from?"

"From him."

"That man there? Look where I am pointing."

"Yes."

"But he found you."

"Yes."

"Was anyone else there?"

"Tommy was. He said—"

"Was he inside the crib or outside?"

"He was outside by the door. He was watching. He said he wouldn't let—"

"Just a minute. Did you ask him not to let anyone in?"

"Yes."

“And he locked the door on the outside?”

“Yes.”

“But Goodwin came in.”

“Yes.”

“Did he have anything in his hand?”

“He had the pistol.”

“Did Tommy try to stop him?”

“Yes. He said he—”

“Wait. What did he do to Tommy?”

She gazed at him.

“He had the pistol in his hand. What did he do then?”

“He shot him.” The District Attorney stepped aside. At once the girl’s gaze went to the back of the room and became fixed there. The District Attorney returned, stepped into her line of vision. She moved her head; he caught her gaze and held it and lifted the stained corn-cob before her eyes. The room sighed, a long hissing breath.

“Did you ever see this before?”

“Yes.”

The District Attorney turned away. “Your Honor and gentlemen, you have listened to this horrible, this unbelievable, story which this young girl has told; you have seen the evidence and heard the doctor’s testimony: I shall no longer subject this ruined, defenseless child to the

agony of—” he ceased; the heads turned as one and watched a man come stalking up the aisle toward the Bench. He walked steadily, paced and followed by a slow gaping of the small white faces, a slow hissing of collars.

He had neat white hair and a clipped moustache like a bar of hammered silver against his dark skin. His eyes were pouched a little. A small paunch was buttoned snugly into his immaculate linen suit. He carried a panama hat in one hand and a slender black stick in the other. He walked steadily up the aisle in a slow expulsion of silence like a prolonged sigh, looking to neither side. He passed the witness stand without a glance at the witness, who still gazed at something in the back of the room, walking right through her line of vision like a runner crossing a tape, and stopped before the bar above which the Court had half-risen, his arms on the desk.

“Your Honor,” the old man said, “is the Court done with this witness?”

“Yes, sir, Judge,” the Court said; “yes, sir. Defendant, do you waive—”

The old man turned slowly, erect above the held breaths, the little white faces, and looked down at the six people at the counsel table. Behind him the witness had not moved. She sat in her attitude of childish immobility, gazing like a drugged person above the faces, toward the rear of the room. The old man turned to her and extended his hand. She did not move. The room expelled its breath, sucked it quickly in and held it again. The old man touched her arm.

She turned her head toward him, her eyes blank and all pupil above the three savage spots of rouge. She put her hand in his and rose, the platinum bag slipping from her lap to the floor with a thin clash, gazing again at the back of the room. With the toe of his small gleaming shoe the old man flipped the bag into the corner where the jurybox joined the Bench, where a spittoon sat, and steadied the girl down from the dais. The room breathed again as they moved on down the aisle.

Half way down the aisle the girl stopped again, slender in her smart open coat, her blank face rigid, then she moved on, her hand in the old man's. They returned down the aisle, the old man erect beside her, looking to neither side, paced by that slow whisper of collars. Again the girl stopped. She began to cringe back, her body arching slowly, her arm tautening in the old man's grasp. He bent toward her, speaking; she moved again, in that shrinking and rapt abasement.

Four younger men were standing stiffly erect near the exit. They stood like soldiers, staring straight ahead until the old man and the girl reached them. Then they moved and surrounded the other two, and in a close body, the girl hidden among them, they moved toward the door. Here they stopped again; the girl could be seen shrunk against the wall just inside the door, her body arched again. She appeared to be clinging there, then the five bodies hid her again and again in a close body the group passed through the door and disappeared.

The room breathed: a buzzing sound like a wind getting up. It moved forward with a slow increasing rush, on above the long table where the prisoner and the woman with the child and Horace and the District Attorney and the Memphis lawyer sat, and across the jury and against the Bench in a long sigh. The Memphis lawyer was sitting on his spine, gazing dreamily out the window. The child made a fretful sound, whimpering.

"Hush," the woman said. "Shhhhhhhh."

XXIX

The jury was out eight minutes. When Horace left the courthouse it was getting toward dusk. The tethered wagons were taking out, some of them to face twelve and sixteen miles of country road. Narcissa was waiting for him in the car. He emerged among the overalls, slowly; he got into the car stiffly, like an old man, with a drawn face. "Do you want to go home?" Narcissa said.

"Yes," Horace said.

“I mean, to the house, or out home?”

“Yes,” Horace said.

She was driving the car. The engine was running. She looked at him, in a new dark dress with a severe white collar, a dark hat.

“Which one?”

“Home,” he said. “I dont care. Just home.”

They passed the jail. Standing along the fence were the loafers, the countrymen, the blackguard boys and youths who had followed Goodwin and the deputy from the courthouse. Beside the gate the woman stood, in the gray hat with the veil, carrying the child in her arms. “Standing where he can see it through the window,” Horace said. “I smell ham, too. Maybe he’ll be eating ham before we get home.” Then he began to cry, sitting in the car beside his sister.

She drove steadily, not fast. Soon they had left the town and the stout rows of young cotton swung at either hand in parallel and diminishing retrograde. There was still a little snow of locust blooms on the mounting drive. “It does last,” Horace said. “Spring does. You’d almost think there was some purpose to it.”

He stayed to supper. He ate a lot. “I’ll go and see about your room,” his sister said, quite gently.

“All right,” Horace said. “It’s nice of you.” She went out. Miss Jenny’s wheel chair sat on a platform slotted for the wheels. “It’s nice of her,” Horace said. “I think I’ll go outside and smoke my pipe.”

“Since when have you quit smoking it in here?” Miss Jenny said.

“Yes,” Horace said. “It was nice of her.” He walked across the porch. “I intended to stop here,” Horace said. He watched himself cross the

porch and then tread the diffident snow of the last locusts; he turned out of the iron gates, onto the gravel. After about a mile a car slowed and offered him a ride. "I'm just walking before supper," he said; "I'll turn back soon." After another mile he could see the lights of town. It was a faint glare, low and close.

It got stronger as he approached. Before he reached town he began to hear the sound, the voices. Then he saw the people, a shifting mass filling the street, and the bleak, shallow yard above which the square and slotted bulk of the jail loomed. In the yard, beneath the barred window, a man in his shirt sleeves faced the crowd, hoarse, gesticulant. The barred window was empty.

Horace went on toward the square. The sheriff was among the drummers before the hotel, standing along the curb. He was a fat man, with a broad, dull face which belied the expression of concern about his eyes. "They wont do anything," he said. "There is too much talk. Noise. And too early. When a mob means business, it dont take that much time and talk. And it dont go about its business where every man can see it."

The crowd stayed in the street until late. It was quite orderly, though. It was as though most of them had come to see, to look at the jail and the barred window, or to listen to the man in shirt sleeves. After a while he talked himself out. Then they began to move away, back to the square and some of them homeward, until there was left only a small group beneath the arc light at the entrance to the square, among whom were two temporary deputies, and the night marshal in a broad pale hat, a flash light, a time clock and a pistol. "Git on home now," he said. "Show's over. You boys done had your fun. Git on home to bed, now."

The drummers sat a little while longer along the curb before the hotel, Horace among them; the south-bound train ran at one oclock. "They're going to let him get away with it, are they?" a drummer said. "With that corn-cob? What kind of folks have you got here? What does it take to make you folks mad?"

“He wouldn’t a never got a trial, in my town,” a second said.

“To jail, even,” a third said. “Who was she?”

“College girl. Good looker. Didn’t you see her?”

“I saw her. She was some baby. Jeez. I wouldn’t have used no cob.”

Then the square was quiet. The clock struck eleven; the drummers went in and the Negro porter came and turned the chairs back into the wall. “You waiting for the train?” he said to Horace.

“Yes. Have you got a report on it yet?”

“It’s on time. But that’s two hours yet. You could lay down in the Sample Room, if you want.”

“Can I?” Horace said.

“I’ll show you,” the Negro said. The Sample Room was where the drummers showed their wares. It contained a sofa. Horace turned off the light and lay down on the sofa. He could see the trees about the courthouse, and one wing of the building rising above the quiet and empty square. But people were not asleep. He could feel the wakefulness, the people awake about the town. “I could not have gone to sleep, anyway,” he said to himself.

He heard the clock strike twelve. Then—it might have been thirty minutes or maybe longer than that—he heard someone pass under the window, running. The runner’s feet sounded louder than a horse, echoing across the empty square, the peaceful hours given to sleeping. It was not a sound Horace heard now; it was something in the air which the sound of the running feet died into.

When he went down the corridor toward the stairs he did not know he was running until he heard beyond a door a voice say, “Fire! it’s a . . .” Then he had passed it. “I scared him,” Horace said. “He’s just from Saint

Louis, maybe, and he's not used to this." He ran out of the hotel, onto the street. Ahead of him the proprietor had just run, ludicrous; a broad man with his trousers clutched before him and his braces dangling beneath his nightshirt, a tousled fringe of hair standing wildly about his bald head; three other men passed the hotel running. They appeared to come from nowhere, to emerge in midstride out of nothingness, fully dressed in the middle of the street, running.

"It is a fire," Horace said. He could see the glare; against it the jail loomed in stark and savage silhouette.

"It's in that vacant lot," the proprietor said, clutching his trousers. "I cant go because there aint anybody on the desk . . ."

Horace ran. Ahead of him he saw other figures running, turning into the alley beside the jail; then he heard the sound of the fire; the furious sound of gasoline. He turned into the alley. He could see the blaze, in the center of a vacant lot where on market days wagons were tethered.

Against the flames black figures showed, antic; he could hear panting shouts; through a fleeting gap he saw a man turn and run, a mass of flames, still carrying a five-gallon coal oil can which exploded with a rocket-like glare while he carried it, running.

He ran into the throng, into the circle which had formed about a blazing mass in the middle of the lot. From one side of the circle came the screams of the man about whom the coal oil can had exploded, but from the central mass of fire there came no sound at all. It was now indistinguishable, the flames whirling in long and thunderous plumes from a white-hot mass out of which there defined themselves faintly the ends of a few posts and planks. Horace ran among them; they were holding him, but he did not know it; they were talking, but he could not hear the voices.

"It's his lawyer."

"Here's the man that defended him. That tried to get him clear."

“Put him in, too. There’s enough left to burn a lawyer.”

“Do to the lawyer what we did to him. What he did to her. Only we never used a cob. We made him wish we had used a cob.”

Horace couldn’t hear them. He couldn’t hear the man who had got burned screaming. He couldn’t hear the fire, though it still swirled upward unabated, as though it were living upon itself, and soundless: a voice of fury like in a dream, roaring silently out of a peaceful void.

XXX

The trains at Kinston were met by an old man who drove a seven passenger car. He was thin, with gray eyes and a gray moustache with waxed ends. In the old days, before the town boomed suddenly into a lumber town, he was a planter, a landholder, son of one of the first settlers. He lost his property through greed and gullibility, and he began to drive a hack back and forth between town and the trains, with his waxed moustache, in a top hat and a worn Prince Albert coat, telling the drummers how he used to lead Kinston society; now he drove it.

After the horse era passed, he bought a car, still meeting the trains. He still wore his waxed moustache, though the top hat was replaced by a cap, the frock coat by a suit of gray striped with red made by Jews in the New York tenement district. “Here you are,” he said, when Horace descended from the train. “Put your bag into the car,” he said. He got in himself. Horace got into the front seat beside him. “You are one train late,” he said.

“Late?” Horace said.

“She got in this morning. I took her home. Your wife.”

“Oh,” Horace said. “She’s home?”

The other started the car and backed and turned. It was a good, powerful car, moving easily. "When did you expect her? . . ." They went on. "I see where they burned that fellow over at Jefferson. I guess you saw it."

"Yes," Horace said. "Yes. I heard about it."

"Served him right," the driver said. "We got to protect our girls. Might need them ourselves."

They turned, following a street. There was a corner, beneath an arc light. "I'll get out here," Horace said.

"I'll take you on to the door," the driver said.

"I'll get out here," Horace said. "Save you having to turn."

"Suit yourself," the driver said. "You're paying for it, anyway."

Horace got out and lifted out his suit case; the driver did not offer to touch it. The car went on. Horace picked up the suit case, the one which had stayed in the closet at his sister's home for ten years and which he had brought into town with him on the morning when she had asked him the name of the District Attorney.

His house was new, on a fairish piece of lawn, the trees, the poplars and maples which he had set out, still new. Before he reached the house, he saw the rose-colored shade at his wife's windows. He entered the house from the back and came to her door and looked into the room. She was reading in bed, a broad magazine with a colored back. The lamp had a rose-colored shade. On the table sat an open box of chocolates.

"I came back," Horace said.

She looked at him across the magazine.

“Did you lock the back door?” she said.

“Yes, I knew she would be,” Horace said. “Have you tonight . . .”

“Have I what?”

“Little Belle. Did you telephone . . .”

“What for? She’s at that house party. Why shouldn’t she be? Why should she have to disrupt her plans, refuse an invitation?”

“Yes,” Horace said. “I knew she would be. Did you . . .”

“I talked to her night before last. Go lock the back door.”

“Yes,” Horace said. “She’s all right. Of course she is. I’ll just . . .” The telephone sat on a table in the dark hall. The number was on a rural line; it took some time. Horace sat beside the telephone. He had left the door at the end of the hall open. Through it the light airs of the summer night drew, vague, disturbing. “Night is hard on old people,” he said quietly, holding the receiver. “Summer nights are hard on them. Something should be done about it. A law.”

From her room Belle called his name, in the voice of a reclining person. “I called her night before last. Why must you bother her?”

“I know,” Horace said. “I wont be long at it.”

He held the receiver, looking at the door through which the vague, troubling wind came. He began to say something out of a book he had read: “Less oft is peace. Less oft is peace,” he said.

The wire answered. “Hello! Hello! Belle?” Horace said.

“Yes?” her voice came back thin and faint. “What is it? Is anything wrong?”

“No, no,” Horace said. “I just wanted to tell you hello and good night.”

“Tell what? What is it? Who is speaking?” Horace held the receiver, sitting in the dark hall.

“It’s me, Horace. Horace. I just wanted to—”

Over the thin wire there came a scuffling sound; he could hear Little Belle breathe. Then a voice said, a masculine voice: “Hello, Horace; I want you to meet a—”

“Hush!” Little Belle’s voice said, thin and faint; again Horace heard them scuffling; a breathless interval. “Stop it!” Little Belle’s voice said. “It’s Horace! I live with him!” Horace held the receiver to his ear. Little Belle’s voice was breathless, controlled, cool, discreet, detached. “Hello. Horace. Is Mamma all right?”

“Yes. We’re all right. I just wanted to tell you . . .”

“Oh. Good night.”

“Good night. Are you having a good time?”

“Yes. Yes. I’ll write tomorrow. Didn’t Mamma get my letter today?”

“I dont know. I just—”

“Maybe I forgot to mail it. I wont forget tomorrow, though. I’ll write tomorrow. Was that all you wanted?”

“Yes. Just wanted to tell you . . .”

He put the receiver back; he heard the wire die. The light from his wife’s room fell across the hall. “Lock the back door,” she said.

While on his way to Pensacola to visit his mother, Popeye was arrested in Birmingham for the murder of a policeman in a small Alabama town on June 17 of that year. He was arrested in August. It was on the night of June 17 that Temple had passed him sitting in the parked car beside the road house on the night when Red had been killed.

Each summer Popeye went to see his mother. She thought he was a night clerk in a Memphis hotel.

His mother was the daughter of a boarding house keeper. His father had been a professional strike-breaker hired by the street railway company to break a strike in 1900. His mother at that time was working in a department store downtown. For three nights she rode home on the car beside the motorman's seat on which Popeye's father rode. One night the strike-breaker got off at her corner with her and walked to her home.

"Wont you get fired?" she said.

"By who?" the strike-breaker said. They walked along together. He was well-dressed. "Them others would take me that quick. They know it, too."

"Who would take you?"

"The strikers. I dont care a damn who is running the car, see. I'll ride with one as soon as another. Sooner, if I could make this route every night at this time."

She walked beside him. "You dont mean that," she said.

"Sure I do." He took her arm.

"I guess you'd just as soon be married to one as another, the same way."

“Who told you that?” he said. “Have them bastards been talking about me?”

A month later she told him that they would have to be married.

“How do you mean, have to?” he said.

“I dont dare to tell them. I would have to go away. I dont dare.”

“Well, dont get upset. I’d just as lief. I have to pass here every night anyway.”

They were married. He would pass the corner at night. He would ring the foot-bell. Sometimes he would come home. He would give her money. Her mother liked him: he would come roaring into the house at dinner time on Sunday, calling the other clients, even the old ones, by their first names. Then one day he didn’t come back; he didn’t ring the foot-bell when the trolley passed. The strike was over by then.

She had a Christmas card from him; a picture, with a bell and an embossed wreath in gilt, from a Georgia town. It said: “The boys trying to fix it up here. But these folks awful slow. Will maybe move on until we strike a good town ha ha.” The word, strike, was underscored.

Three weeks after her marriage, she had begun to ail. She was pregnant then. She did not go to a doctor, because an old Negro woman told her what was wrong. Popeye was born on the Christmas day on which the card was received.

At first they thought he was blind. Then they found that he was not blind, though he did not learn to walk and talk until he was about four years old. In the meantime, the second husband of her mother, an undersized, snuffy man with a mild, rich moustache, who pottered about the house—he fixed all the broken steps and leaky drains and such—left home one afternoon with a check signed in blank to pay a twelve dollar butcher’s bill. He never came back. He drew from the

bank his wife's fourteen hundred dollar savings account, and disappeared.

The daughter was still working downtown, while her mother tended the child. One afternoon one of the clients returned and found his room on fire. He put it out; a week later he found a smudge in his waste-basket. The grandmother was tending the child. She carried it about with her. One evening she was not in sight. The whole household turned out. A neighbor turned in a fire alarm and the firemen found the grandmother in the attic, stamping out a fire in a handful of excelsior in the center of the floor, the child asleep in a discarded mattress nearby.

"Them bastards are trying to get him," the old woman said. "They set the house on fire." The next day, all the clients left.

The young woman quit her job. She stayed at home all the time. "You ought to get out and get some air," the grandmother said.

"I get enough air," the daughter said.

"You could go out and buy the groceries," the mother said. "You could buy them cheaper."

"We get them cheap enough."

She would watch all the fires; she would not have a match in the house. She kept a few hidden behind a brick in the outside wall. Popeye was three years old then. He looked about one, though he could eat pretty well. A doctor had told his mother to feed him eggs cooked in olive oil. One afternoon the grocer's boy, entering the area-way on a bicycle, skidded and fell.

Something leaked from the package. "It aint eggs," the boy said. "See?" It was a bottle of olive oil. "You ought to buy that oil in cans, anyway," the boy said. "He cant tell no difference in it. I'll bring you another one. And you want to have that gate fixed. Do you want I should break my neck on it?"

He had not returned by six o'clock. It was summer. There was no fire, not a match in the house. "I'll be back in five minutes," the daughter said.

She left the house. The grandmother watched her disappear. Then she wrapped the child up in a light blanket and left the house. The street was a side street, just off a main street where there were markets, where the rich people in limousines stopped on the way home to shop. When she reached the corner, a car was just drawing in to the curb. A woman got out and entered a store, leaving a Negro driver behind the wheel. She went to the car.

"I want a half a dollar," she said.

The Negro looked at her. "A which?"

"A half a dollar. The boy busted the bottle."

"Oh," the Negro said. He reached in his pocket. "How am I going to keep it straight, with you collecting out here? Did she send you for the money out here?"

"I want a half a dollar. He busted the bottle."

"I reckon I better go in, then," the Negro said. "Seem like to me you folks would see that folks got what they buy, folks that been trading here long as we is."

"It's a half a dollar," the woman said. He gave her a half dollar and entered the store. The woman watched him. Then she laid the child on the seat of the car, and followed the Negro. It was a self-serve place, where the customers moved slowly along a railing in single file. The Negro was next to the white woman who had left the car. The grandmother watched the woman pass back to the Negro a loose handful of bottles of sauce and catsup. "That'll be a dollar and a quarter," she said.

The Negro gave her the money. She took it and passed them and crossed the room. There was a bottle of imported Italian olive oil, with a price tag. "I got twenty-eight cents more," she said. She moved on, watching the price tags, until she found one that said twenty-eight cents. It was seven bars of bath soap. With the two parcels she left the store. There was a policeman at the corner. "I'm out of matches," she said.

The policeman dug into his pocket. "Why didn't you buy some while you were there?" he said.

"I just forgot it. You know how it is, shopping with a child."

"Where is the child?" the policeman said.

"I traded it in," the woman said.

"You ought to be in vaudeville," the policeman said. "How many matches do you want? I aint got but one or two."

"Just one," the woman said. "I never do light a fire with but one."

"You ought to be in vaudeville," the policeman said. "You'd bring down the house."

"I am," the woman said. "I bring down the house."

"What house?" He looked at her. "The poor house?"

"I'll bring it down," the woman said. "You watch the papers tomorrow. I hope they get my name right."

"What's your name? Calvin Coolidge?"

"No, sir. That's my boy."

“Oh. That’s why you had so much trouble shopping, is it? You ought to be in vaudeville. . . . Will two matches be enough?”

They had had three alarms from that address, so they didn’t hurry. The first to arrive was the daughter. The door was locked and when the firemen came and chopped it down, the house was already gutted. The grandmother was leaning out an upstairs window through which the smoke already curled. “Them bastards,” she said. “They thought they would get him. But I told them I would show them. I told them so.”

The mother thought that Popeye had perished also. They held her, shrieking, while the shouting face of the grandmother vanished into the smoke, and the shell of the house caved in; that was where the woman and the policeman carrying the child, found her: a young woman with a wild face, her mouth open, looking at the child with a vague air, scouring her loose hair slowly upward from her temples with both hands. She never wholly recovered.

What with the hard work and the lack of fresh air, diversion, and the disease, the legacy which her brief husband had left her, she was not in any condition to stand shock, and there were times when she still believed that the child had perished, even though she held it in her arms crooning above it.

Popeye might well have been dead. He had no hair at all until he was five years old, by which time he was already a kind of day pupil at an institution: an undersized, weak child with a stomach so delicate that the slightest deviation from a strict regimen fixed for him by the doctor would throw him into convulsions. “Alcohol would kill him like strychnine,” the doctor said. “And he will never be a man, properly speaking. With care, he will live some time longer.

But he will never be any older than he is now.” He was talking to the woman who had found Popeye in her car that day when his grandmother burned the house down and at whose instigation Popeye was under the doctor’s care. She would fetch him to her home in afternoons and for holidays, where he would play by himself. She

decided to have a children's party for him. She told him about it, bought him a new suit. When the afternoon of the party came and the guests began to arrive, Popeye could not be found.

Finally a servant found a bathroom door locked. They called the child, but got no answer. They sent for a locksmith, but in the meantime the woman, frightened, had the door broken in with an axe. The bathroom was empty. The window was open. It gave onto a lower roof, from which a drain-pipe descended to the ground. But Popeye was gone. On the floor lay a wicker cage in which two lovebirds lived; beside it lay the birds themselves, and the bloody scissors with which he had cut them up alive.

Three months later, at the instigation of a neighbor of his mother, Popeye was arrested and sent to a home for incorrigible children. He had cut up a half-grown kitten the same way.

His mother was an invalid. The woman who had tried to befriend the child supported her, letting her do needlework and such. After Popeye was out—he was let out after five years, his behavior having been impeccable, as being cured—he would write to her two or three times a year, from Mobile and then New Orleans and then Memphis.

Each summer he would return home to see her, prosperous, quiet, thin, black, and uncommunicative in his narrow black suits. He told her that his business was being night clerk in hotels; that, following his profession, he would move from town to town, as a doctor or a lawyer might.

While he was on his way home that summer they arrested him for killing a man in one town and at an hour when he was in another town killing somebody else—that man who made money and had nothing he could do with it, spend it for, since he knew that alcohol would kill him like poison, who had no friends and had never known a woman and knew he could never—and he said, "For Christ's sake," looking about the cell in the jail of the town where the policeman had been killed, his

free hand (the other was handcuffed to the officer who had brought him from Birmingham) finicking a cigarette from his coat.

“Let him send for his lawyer,” they said, “and get that off his chest. You want to wire?”

“Nah,” he said, his cold, soft eyes touching briefly the cot, the high small window, the grated door through which the light fell. They removed the handcuff; Popeye’s hand appeared to flick a small flame out of thin air. He lit the cigarette and snapped the match toward the door. “What do I want with a lawyer? I never was in— What’s the name of this dump?”

They told him. “You forgot, have you?”

“He wont forget it no more,” another said.

“Except he’ll remember his lawyer’s name by morning,” the first said.

They left him smoking on the cot. He heard doors clash. Now and then he heard voices from the other cells; somewhere down the corridor a Negro was singing. Popeye lay on the cot, his feet crossed in small, gleaming black shoes. “For Christ’s sake,” he said.

The next morning the judge asked him if he wanted a lawyer.

“What for?” he said. “I told them last night I never was here before in my life. I dont like your town well enough to bring a stranger here for nothing.”

The judge and the bailiff conferred aside.

“You’d better get your lawyer,” the judge said.

“All right,” Popeye said. He turned and spoke generally into the room: “Any of you ginneys want a one-day job?”

The judge rapped on the table. Popeye turned back, his tight shoulders lifted in a faint shrug, his hand moving toward the pocket where he carried his cigarettes. The judge appointed him counsel, a young man just out of law school.

“And I wont bother about being sprung,” Popeye said. “Get it over with all at once.”

“You wouldn’t get any bail from me, anyway,” the judge told him.

“Yeuh?” Popeye said. “All right, Jack,” he told his lawyer, “get going. I’m due in Pensacola right now.”

“Take the prisoner back to jail,” the judge said.

His lawyer had an ugly, eager, earnest face. He rattled on with a kind of gaunt enthusiasm while Popeye lay on the cot, smoking, his hat over his eyes, motionless as a basking snake save for the periodical movement of the hand that held the cigarette. At last he said: “Here. I aint the judge. Tell him all this.”

“But I’ve got—”

“Sure. Tell it to them. I dont know nothing about it. I wasn’t even there. Get out and walk it off.”

The trial lasted one day. While a fellow policeman, a cigar-clerk, a telephone girl testified, while his own lawyer rebutted in a gaunt mixture of uncouth enthusiasm and earnest ill-judgment, Popeye lounged in his chair, looking out the window above the jury’s heads. Now and then he yawned; his hand moved to the pocket where his cigarettes lay, then refrained and rested idle against the black cloth of his suit, in the waxy lifelessness of shape and size like the hand of a doll.

The jury was out eight minutes. They stood and looked at him and said he was guilty. Motionless, his position unchanged, he looked back at

them in a slow silence for several moments. "Well, for Christ's sake," he said.

The judge rapped sharply with his gavel; the officer touched his arm.

"I'll appeal," the lawyer babbled, plunging along beside him. "I'll fight them through every court—"

"Sure," Popeye said, lying on the cot and lighting a cigarette; "but not in here. Beat it, now. Go take a pill."

The District Attorney was already making his plans for the appeal. "It was too easy," he said. "He took it— Did you see how he took it? like he might be listening to a song he was too lazy to either like or dislike, and the Court telling him on what day they were going to break his neck. Probably got a Memphis lawyer already there outside the Supreme Court door now, waiting for a wire. I know them. It's them thugs like that that have made justice a laughing-stock, until even when we get a conviction, everybody knows it wont hold."

Popeye sent for the turnkey and gave him a hundred dollar bill. He wanted a shaving-kit and cigarettes. "Keep the change and let me know when it's smoked up," he said.

"I reckon you wont be smoking with me much longer," the turnkey said. "You'll get a good lawyer, this time."

"Dont forget that lotion," Popeye said. "Ed Pinaud." He called it "Py-nawd."

It had been a gray summer, a little cool. Little daylight ever reached the cell, and a light burned in the corridor all the time, falling into the cell in a broad pale mosaic, reaching the cot where his feet lay. The turnkey gave him a chair. He used it for a table; upon it the dollar watch lay, and a carton of cigarettes and a cracked soup bowl of stubs, and he lay on the cot, smoking and contemplating his feet while day after day passed.

The gleam of his shoes grew duller, and his clothes needed pressing, because he lay in them all the time, since it was cool in the stone cell.

One day the turnkey said: "There's folks here says that deppity invited killing. He done two-three mean things folks knows about." Popeye smoked, his hat over his face. The turnkey said: "They might not sent your telegram. You want me to send another one for you?"

Leaning against the grating he could see Popeye's feet, his thin, black legs motionless, merging into the delicate bulk of his prone body and the hat slanted across his averted face, the cigarette in one small hand. His feet were in shadow, in the shadow of the turnkey's body where it blotted out the grating. After a while the turnkey went away quietly.

When he had six days left the turnkey offered to bring him magazines, a deck of cards.

"What for?" Popeye said. For the first time he looked at the turnkey, his head lifted, in his smooth, pallid face his eyes round and soft as those prehensile tips on a child's toy arrows. Then he lay back again. After that each morning the turnkey thrust a rolled newspaper through the door.

They fell to the floor and lay there, accumulating, unrolling and flattening slowly of their own weight in diurnal progression.

When he had three days left a Memphis lawyer arrived. Unbidden, he rushed up to the cell. All that morning the turnkey heard his voice raised in pleading and anger and expostulation; by noon he was hoarse, his voice not much louder than a whisper.

"Are you just going to lie here and let—"

"I'm all right," Popeye said. "I didn't send for you. Keep your nose out."

"Do you want to hang? Is that it? Are you trying to commit suicide? Are you so tired of dragging down Jack that . . . You, the smartest—"

"I told you once. I've got enough on you."

"You, to have it hung on you by a small-time j.p.! When I go back to Memphis and tell them, they won't believe it."

"Don't tell them, then." He lay for a time while the lawyer looked at him in baffled and raging unbelief. "Them durn hicks," Popeye said. "Jesus Christ . . . Beat it, now," he said. "I told you. I'm all right."

On the night before, a minister came in.

"Will you let me pray with you?" he said.

"Sure," Popeye said; "go ahead. Don't mind me."

The minister knelt beside the cot where Popeye lay smoking. After a while the minister heard him rise and cross the floor, then return to the cot. When he rose Popeye was lying on the cot, smoking. The minister looked behind him, where he had heard Popeye moving and saw twelve marks at spaced intervals along the base of the wall, as though marked there with burned matches.

Two of the spaces were filled with cigarette stubs laid in neat rows. In the third space were two stubs. Before he departed he watched Popeye rise and go there and crush out two more stubs and lay them carefully beside the others.

Just after five o'clock the minister returned. All the spaces were filled save the twelfth one. It was three quarters complete. Popeye was lying on the cot. "Ready to go?" he said.

"Not yet," the minister said. "Try to pray," he said. "Try."

"Sure," Popeye said; "go ahead." The minister knelt again. He heard Popeye rise once and cross the floor and then return.

At five-thirty the turnkey came. "I brought—" he said. He held his closed fist dumbly through the grating. "Here's your change from that hundred you never— I brought . . . It's forty-eight dollars," he said. "Wait; I'll count it again; I don't know exactly, but I can give you a list— them tickets . . ."

"Keep it," Popeye said, without moving. "Buy yourself a hoop."

They came for him at six. The minister went with him, his hand under Popeye's elbow, and he stood beneath the scaffold praying, while they adjusted the rope, dragging it over Popeye's sleek, oiled head, breaking his hair loose. His hands were tied, so he began to jerk his head, flipping his hair back each time it fell forward again, while the minister prayed, the others motionless at their posts with bowed heads.

Popeye began to jerk his neck forward in little jerks. "Psssst!" he said, the sound cutting sharp into the drone of the minister's voice; "psssst!" The sheriff looked at him; he quit jerking his neck and stood rigid, as though he had an egg balanced on his head. "Fix my hair, Jack," he said.

"Sure," the sheriff said. "I'll fix it for you"; springing the trap.

It had been a gray day, a gray summer, a gray year. On the street old men wore overcoats, and in the Luxembourg Gardens as Temple and her father passed the women sat knitting in shawls and even the men playing croquet played in coats and capes, and in the sad gloom of the chestnut trees the dry click of balls, the random shouts of children, had that quality of autumn, gallant and evanescent and forlorn.

From beyond the circle with its spurious Greek balustrade, clotted with movement, filled with a gray light of the same color and texture as the water which the fountain played into the pool, came a steady crash of music. They went on, passed the pool where the children and an old man in a shabby brown overcoat sailed toy boats, and entered the trees again and found seats. Immediately an old woman came with decrepit promptitude and collected four sous.

In the pavilion a band in the horizon blue of the army played Massenet and Scriabine, and Berlioz like a thin coating of tortured Tschaikovsky on a slice of stale bread, while the twilight dissolved in wet gleams from the branches, onto the pavilion and the sombre toadstools of umbrellas. Rich and resonant the brasses crashed and died in the thick green twilight, rolling over them in rich sad waves. Temple yawned behind her hand, then she took out a compact and opened it upon a face in miniature sullen and discontented and sad.

Beside her her father sat, his hands crossed on the head of his stick, the rigid bar of his moustache beaded with moisture like frosted silver. She closed the compact and from beneath her smart new hat she seemed to follow with her eyes the waves of music, to dissolve into the dying brasses, across the pool and the opposite semicircle of trees where at sombre intervals the dead tranquil queens in stained marble mused, and on into the sky lying prone and vanquished in the embrace of the season of rain and death.

1931

The End

Light in August, William Faulkner

Contents

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16
Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Chapter 19
Chapter 20
Chapter 21

Chapter 1

Sitting beside the road, watching the wagon mount the hill toward her, Lena thinks, 'I have come from Alabama: a fur piece. All the way from Alabama a-walking. A fur piece.' Thinking although I have not been quite a month on the road I am already in Mississippi, further from home than I have ever been before. I am now further from Doane's Mill than I have been since I was twelve years old

She had never even been to Doane's Mill until after her father and mother died, though six or eight times a year she went to town on Saturday, in the wagon, in a mailorder dress and her bare feet flat in the wagon bed and her shoes wrapped in a piece of paper beside her on the seat. She would put on the shoes just before the wagon reached town. After she got to be a big girl she would ask her father to stop the wagon at the edge of town and she would get down and walk. She would not tell her father why she wanted to walk in instead of riding. He thought that it was because of the smooth streets, the sidewalks. But it was because she believed that the people who saw her and whom she passed on foot would believe that she lived in the town too.

When she was twelve years old her father and mother died in the same summer, in a log house of three rooms and a hall, without screens, in a room lighted by a bug-swirled kerosene lamp, the naked floor worn smooth as old silver by naked feet. She was the youngest living child. Her mother died first. She said, "Take care of paw." Lena did so.

Then one day her father said, "You go to Doane's Mill with McKinley. You get ready to go, be ready when he comes." Then he died. McKinley, the brother, arrived in a wagon. They buried the father in a grove behind a country church one afternoon, with a pine headstone. The next morning she departed forever, though it is possible that she did not know this at the time, in the wagon with McKinley, for Doane's Mill. The wagon was borrowed and the brother had promised to return it by nightfall.

The brother worked in the mill. All the men in the village worked in the mill or for it. It was cutting pine. It had been there seven years and in seven years more it would destroy all the timber within its reach. Then some of the machinery and most of the men who ran it and existed because of and for it would be loaded onto freight cars and moved away.

But some of the machinery would be left, since new pieces could always be bought on the installment plan—gaunt, staring, motionless wheels rising from mounds of brick rubble and ragged weeds with a quality profoundly astonishing, and gutted boilers lifting their rusting and unsmoking stacks with an air stubborn, baffled and bemused upon a stumpocked scene of profound and peaceful desolation, unplowed, untilled, gutting slowly into red and choked ravines beneath the long quiet rains of autumn and the galloping fury of vernal equinoxes.

Then the hamlet which at its best day had borne no name listed on Postoffice Department annals would not now even be remembered by the hookwormridden heirs-at-large who pulled the buildings down and burned them in cookstoves and winter grates.

There were perhaps five families there when Lena arrived. There was a track and a station, and once a day a mixed train fled shrieking through it. The train could be stopped with a red flag, but by ordinary it appeared out of the devastated hills with apparitionlike suddenness and wailing like a banshee, athwart and past that little less-than-village like a forgotten bead from a broken string. The brother was twenty years her senior. She hardly remembered him at all when she came to live with him. He lived in a four room and unpainted house with his labor- and child-ridden wife. For almost half of every year the sister-in-law was either lying in or recovering. During this time Lena did all the housework and took care of the other children. Later she told herself, 'I reckon that's why I got one so quick myself.'

She slept in a leanto room at the back of the house. It had a window which she learned to open and close again in the dark without making a sound, even though there also slept in the leanto room at first her oldest nephew and then the two oldest and then the three. She had lived there eight years before she opened the window for the first time. She had not opened it a dozen times hardly before she discovered that she should not have opened it at all. She said to herself, 'That's just my luck.'

The sister-in-law told the brother. Then he remarked her changing shape, which he should have noticed some time before. He was a hard man. Softness and gentleness and youth (he was just forty) and almost everything else except a kind of stubborn and despairing fortitude and the bleak heritage of his bloodpride had been sweated out of him.

He called her whore. He accused the right man (young bachelors, or sawdust Casanovas anyway, were even fewer in number than families) but she would not admit it, though the man had departed six months ago. She just repeated stubbornly, "He's going to send for me. He said he would send for me"; unshakable, sheeplike, having drawn upon that reserve of patient and steadfast fidelity upon which the Lucas Burches depend and trust, even though they do not intend to be present when the need for it arises. Two weeks later she climbed again through the window.

It was a little difficult, this time. 'If it had been this hard to do before, I reckon I would not be doing it now,' she thought. She could have departed by the door, by daylight. Nobody would have stopped her. Perhaps she knew that. But she chose to go by night, and through the window. She carried a palm leaf fan and a small bundle tied neatly in a bandanna handkerchief. It contained among other things thirtyfive cents in nickels and dimes. Her shoes were a pair of his own which her brother had given to her. They were but slightly worn, since in the summer neither of them wore shoes at all. When she felt the dust of the road beneath her feet she removed the shoes and carried them in her hand.

She had been doing that now for almost four weeks. Behind her the four weeks, the evocation of far, is a peaceful corridor paved with unflagging and tranquil faith and peopled with kind and nameless faces and voices: Lucas Burch? I dont know. I dont know of anybody by that name around here. This road? It goes to Pocahontas. He might be there.

It's possible. Here's a wagon that's going a piece of the way. It will take you that far; backrolling now behind her a long monotonous succession of peaceful and undeviating changes from day to dark and dark to day again, through which she advanced in identical and anonymous and deliberate wagons as though through a succession of creakwheeled and limpeared avatars, like something moving forever and without progress across an urn.

The wagon mounts the hill toward her. She passed it about a mile back down the road. It was standing beside the road, the mules asleep in the traces and their heads pointed in the direction in which she walked. She saw it and she saw the two men squatting beside a barn beyond the fence. She looked at the wagon and the men once: a single glance all-embracing, swift, innocent and profound.

She did not stop; very likely the men beyond the fence had not seen her even look at the wagon or at them. Neither did she look back. She

went on out of sight, walking slowly, the shoes unlaced about her ankles, until she reached the top of the hill a mile beyond. Then she sat down on the ditchbank, with her feet in the shallow ditch, and removed the shoes. After a while she began to hear the wagon. She heard it for some time. Then it came into sight, mounting the hill.

The sharp and brittle crack and clatter of its weathered and ungreased wood and metal is slow and terrific: a series of dry sluggish reports carrying for a half mile across the hot still pinewiney silence of the August afternoon. Though the mules plod in a steady and unflagging hypnosis, the vehicle does not seem to progress. It seems to hang suspended in the middle distance forever and forever, so infinitesimal is its progress, like a shabby bead upon the mild red string of road.

So much is this so that in the watching of it the eye loses it as sight and sense drowsily merge and blend, like the road itself, with all the peaceful and monotonous changes between darkness and day, like already measured thread being rewound onto a spool.

So that at last, as though out of some trivial and unimportant region beyond even distance, the sound of it seems to come slow and terrific and without meaning, as though it were a ghost travelling a half mile ahead of its own shape. 'That far within my hearing before my seeing,' Lena thinks. She thinks of herself as already moving, riding again, thinking then it will be as if I were riding for a half mile before I even got into the wagon, before the wagon even got to where I was waiting, and that when the wagon is empty of me again it will go on for a half mile with me still in it She waits, not even watching the wagon now, while thinking goes idle and swift and smooth, filled with nameless kind faces and voices: Lucas Burch? You say you tried in Pocahontas? This road? It goes to Springvale.

You wait here. There will be a wagon passing soon that will take you as far as it goes Thinking, 'And if he is going all the way to Jefferson, I will be riding within the hearing of Lucas Burch before his seeing. He will hear the wagon, but he wont know. So there will be one within his hearing before his seeing. And then he will see me and he will be

excited. And so there will be two within his seeing before his remembering.'

While Armstid and Winterbottom were squatting against the shady wall of Winterbottom's stable, they saw her pass in the road. They saw at once that she was young, pregnant, and a stranger. "I wonder where she got that belly," Winterbottom said.

"I wonder how far she has brought it afoot," Armstid said.

"Visiting somebody back down the road, I reckon," Winterbottom said.

"I reckon not. Or I would have heard. And it aint nobody up my way, neither. I would have heard that, too."

"I reckon she knows where she is going," Winterbottom said. "She walks like it."

"She'll have company, before she goes much further," Armstid said. The woman had now gone on, slowly, with her swelling and unmistakable burden. Neither of them had seen her so much as glance at them when she passed in a shapeless garment of faded blue, carrying a palm leaf fan and a small cloth bundle. "She aint come from nowhere close," Armstid said. "She's hitting that lick like she's been at it for a right smart while and had a right smart piece to go yet."

"She must be visiting around here somewhere," Winterbottom said.

"I reckon I would have heard about it," Armstid said. The woman went on. She had not looked back. She went out of sight up the road: swollen, slow, deliberate, unhurried and tireless as augmenting afternoon itself. She walked out of their talking too; perhaps out of their minds too. Because after a while Armstid said what he had come to say.

He had already made two previous trips, coming in his wagon five miles and squatting and spitting for three hours beneath the shady wall of

Winterbottom's barn with the timeless unhaste and indirection of his kind, in order to say it. It was to make Winterbottom an offer for a cultivator which Winterbottom wanted to sell. At last Armstid looked at the sun and offered the price which he had decided to offer while lying in bed three nights ago. "I know of one in Jefferson I can buy at that figure," he said.

"I reckon you better buy it," Winterbottom said. "It sounds like a bargain."

"Sho," Armstid said. He spat. He looked again at the sun, and rose. "Well, I reckon I better get on toward home."

He got into his wagon and waked the mules. That is, he put them into motion, since only a negro can tell when a mule is asleep or awake. Winterbottom followed him to the fence, leaning his arms on the top rail. "Yes, sir," he said. "I'd sho buy that cultivator at that figure. If you dont take it, I be dog if I aint a good mind to buy it, myself, at that price. I reckon the fellow that owns it aint got a span of mules to sell for about five dollars, has he?"

"Sho," Armstid said. He drove on, the wagon beginning to fall into its slow and mileconsuming clatter. Neither does he look back. Apparently he is not looking ahead either, because he does not see the woman sitting in the ditch beside the road until the wagon has almost reached the top of the hill. In the instant in which he recognises the blue dress he cannot tell if she has ever seen the wagon at all.

And no one could have known that he had ever looked at her either as, without any semblance of progress in either of them, they draw slowly together as the wagon crawls terrifically toward her in its slow palpable aura of somnolence and red dust in which the steady feet of the mules move dreamlike and punctuate by the sparse jingle of harness and the limber bobbing of jackrabbit ears, the mules still neither asleep nor awake as he halts them.

From beneath a sunbonnet of faded blue, weathered now by other than formal soap and water, she looks up at him quietly and pleasantly: young, pleasantfaced, candid, friendly, and alert. She does not move yet. Beneath the faded garment of that same weathered blue her body is shapeless and immobile. The fan and the bundle lie on her lap. She wears no stockings. Her bare feet rest side by side in the shallow ditch. The pair of dusty, heavy, manlooking shoes beside them are not more inert. In the halted wagon Armstid sits, humped, bleached. He sees that the rim of the fan is bound neatly in the same faded blue as the sunbonnet and the dress.

“How far you going?” he says.

“I was trying to get up the road a pieceways before dark,” she says. She rises and takes up the shoes. She climbs slowly and deliberately into the road, approaching the wagon. Armstid does not descend to help her. He merely holds the team still while she climbs heavily over the wheel and sets the shoes beneath the seat. Then the wagon moves on. “I thank you,” she says. “It was right tiring afoot.”

Apparently Armstid has never once looked full at her. Yet he has already seen that she wears no wedding ring. He does not look at her now. Again the wagon settles into its slow clatter. “How far you come from?” he says.

She expels her breath. It is not a sigh so much as a peaceful expiration, as though of peaceful astonishment. “A right good piece, it seems now. I come from Alabama.”

“Alabama? In your shape? Where’s your folks?”

She does not look at him, either. “I’m looking to meet him up this way. You might know him. His name is Lucas Burch. They told me back yonder a ways that he is in Jefferson, working for the planing mill.”

“Lucas Burch.” Armstid’s tone is almost identical with hers. They sit side by side on the sagging and broken-sprung seat. He can see her hands

upon her lap and her profile beneath the sunbonnet; from the corner of his eye he sees it. She seems to be watching the road as it unrolls between the limber ears of the mules. "And you come all the way here, afoot, by yourself, hunting for him?"

She does not answer for a moment. Then she says: "Folks have been kind. They have been right kind."

"Womenfolks too?" From the corner of his eye he watches her profile, thinking I dont know what Martha's going to say thinking, 'I reckon I do know what Martha's going to say. I reckon womenfolks are likely to be good without being very kind. Men, now, might. But it's only a bad woman herself that is likely to be very kind to another woman that needs the kindness' thinking Yes I do. I know exactly what Martha is going to say.

She sits a little forward, quite still, her profile quite still, her cheek. "It's a strange thing," she says.

"How folks can look at a strange young gal walking the road in your shape and know that her husband has left her?" She does not move. The wagon now has a kind of rhythm, its ungreased and outraged wood one with the slow afternoon, the road, the heat. "And you aim to find him up here."

She does not move, apparently watching the slow road between the ears of the mules, the distance perhaps road-carved and definite. "I reckon I'll find him. It won't be hard. He'll be where the most folks are gathered together, and the laughing and joking is. He always was a hand for that."

Armstid grunts, a sound savage, brusque. "Get up, mules," he says; he says to himself, between thinking and saying aloud: 'I reckon she will. I reckon that fellow is fixing to find that he made a bad mistake when he stopped this side of Arkansas, or even Texas.'

The sun is slanting, an hour above the horizon now, above the swift coming of the summer night. The lane turns from the road, quieter even than the road. "Here we are," Armstid says.

The woman moves at once. She reaches down and finds the shoes; apparently she is not even going to delay the wagon long enough to put them on. "I thank you kindly," she says. "It was a help."

The wagon is halted again. The woman is preparing to descend. "Even if you get to Varner's store before sundown, you'll still be twelve miles from Jefferson," Armstid says.

She holds the shoes, the bundle, the fan awkwardly in one hand, the other free to help her down. "I reckon I better get on," she says.

Armstid does not touch her. "You come on and stay the night at my house," he says; "where womenfolks—where a woman can . . . if you— You come on, now. I'll take you on to Varner's first thing in the morning, and you can get a ride into town. There will be somebody going, on a Saturday. He aint going to get away on you overnight. If he is in Jefferson at all, he will still be there tomorrow."

She sits quite still, her possessions gathered into her hand for dismounting. She is looking ahead, to where the road curves on and away, crossslanted with shadows. "I reckon I got a few days left."

"Sho. You got plenty of time yet. Only you are liable to have some company at any time now that can't walk. You come on home with me." He puts the mules into motion without waiting for a reply. The wagon enters the lane, the dim road. The woman sits back, though she still holds the fan, the bundle, the shoes.

"I wouldn't be beholden," she says. "I wouldn't trouble."

"Sho," Armstid says. "You come on with me." For the first time the mules move swiftly of their own accord. "Smelling corn," Armstid says, thinking, 'But that's the woman of it. Her own self one of the first ones

to cut the ground from under a sister woman, she'll walk the public country herself without shame because she knows that folks, menfolks, will take care of her. She don't care nothing about womenfolks. It wasn't any woman that got her into what she don't even call trouble. Yes, sir.

You just let one of them get married or get into trouble without being married, and right then and there is where she secedes from the woman race and species and spends the balance of her life trying to get joined up with the man race. That's why they dip snuff and smoke and want to vote.'

When the wagon passes the house and goes on toward the barn-lot, his wife is watching it from the front door. He does not look in that direction; he does not need to look to know that she will be there, is there. 'Yes,' he thinks with sardonic ruefulness, turning the mules into the open gate, 'I know exactly what she is going to say. I reckon I know exactly.' He halts the wagon, he does not need to look to know that his wife is now in the kitchen, not watching now; just waiting.

He halts the wagon. "You go on to the house," he says; he has already descended and the woman is now climbing slowly down, with that inward listening deliberation. "When you meet somebody, it will be Martha. I'll be in when I feed the stock." He does not watch her cross the lot and go on toward the kitchen. He does not need to. Step by step with her he enters the kitchen door also and comes upon the woman who now watches the kitchen door exactly as she had watched the wagon pass from the front one. 'I reckon I know exactly what she will say,' he thinks.

He takes the team out and waters and stalls and feeds them, and lets the cows in from the pasture. Then he goes to the kitchen. She is still there, the gray woman with a cold, harsh, irascible face, who bore five children in six years and raised them to man- and woman-hood. She is not idle.

He does not look at her. He goes to the sink and fills a pan from the pail and turns his sleeves back. "Her name is Burch," he says. "At least that's what she says the fellow's name is that she is hunting for. Lucas Burch. Somebody told her back down the road a ways that he is in Jefferson now." He begins to wash, his back to her. "She come all the way from Alabama, alone and afoot, she says."

Mrs Armstid does not look around. She is busy at the table. "She's going to quit being alone a good while before she sees Alabama again," she says.

"Or that fellow Burch either, I reckon." He is quite busy at the sink, with the soap and water. And he can feel her looking at him, at the back of his head, his shoulders in the shirt of sweatfaded blue. "She says that somebody down at Samson's told her there is a fellow named Burch or something working at the planing mill in Jefferson."

"And she expects to find him there. Waiting. With the house all furnished and all."

He cannot tell from her voice if she is watching him or not now. He towels himself with a split floursack. "Maybe she will. If it's running away from her he's after, I reckon he's going to find out he made a bad mistake when he stopped before he put the Mississippi River between them." And now he knows that she is watching him: the gray woman not plump and not thin, manhard, workhard, in a serviceable gray garment worn savage and brusque, her hands on her hips, her face like those of generals who have been defeated in battle.

"You men," she says.

"What do you want to do about it? Turn her out? Let her sleep in the barn maybe?"

"You men," she says. "You durn men."

They enter the kitchen together, though Mrs Armstid is in front. She goes straight to the stove. Lena stands just within the door. Her head is uncovered now, her hair combed smooth. Even the blue garment looks freshened and rested. She looks on while Mrs Armstid at the stove clashes the metal lids and handles the sticks of wood with the abrupt savageness of a man. "I would like to help," Lena says.

Mrs Armstid does not look around. She clashes the stove savagely. "You stay where you are. You keep off your feet now, and you'll keep off your back a while longer maybe."

"It would be a beholden kindness to let me help."

"You stay where you are. I been doing this three times a day for thirty years now. The time when I needed help with it is done passed." She is busy at the stove, not back-looking. "Armstid says your name is Burch."

"Yes," the other says. Her voice is quite grave now, quite quiet. She sits quite still, her hands motionless upon her lap. And Mrs Armstid does not look around either. She is still busy at the stove. It appears to require an amount of attention out of all proportion to the savage finality with which she built the fire. It appears to engage as much of her attention as if it were an expensive watch.

"Is your name Burch yet?" Mrs Armstid says.

The young woman does not answer at once. Mrs Armstid does not rattle the stove now, though her back is still toward the younger woman. Then she turns. They look at one another, suddenly naked, watching one another: the young woman in the chair, with her neat hair and her inert hands upon her lap, and the older one beside the stove, turning, motionless too, with a savage screw of gray hair at the base of her skull and a face that might have been carved in sandstone. Then the younger one speaks.

"I told you false. My name is not Burch yet. It's Lena Grove."

They look at one another. Mrs Armstid's voice is neither cold nor warm. It is not anything at all. "And so you want to catch up with him so your name will be Burch in time. Is that it?"

Lena is looking down now, as though watching her hands upon her lap. Her voice is quiet, dogged. Yet it is serene. "I dont reckon I need any promise from Lucas. It just happened unfortunat so, that he had to go away. His plans just never worked out right for him to come back for me like he aimed to. I reckon me and him didn't need to make word promises. When he found out that night that he would have to go, he—"

"Found out what night? The night you told him about that chap?"

The other does not answer for a moment. Her face is calm as stone, but not hard. Its doggedness has a soft quality, an inward-lighted quality of tranquil and calm unreason and detachment. Mrs Armstid watches her. Lena is not looking at the other woman while she speaks. "He had done got the word about how he might have to leave a long time before that. He just never told me sooner because he didn't want to worry me with it. When he first heard about how he might have to leave, he knowed then it would be best to go, that he could get along faster somewhere where the foreman wouldn't be down on him. But he kept on putting it off.

But when this here happened, we couldn't put it off no longer then. The foreman was down on Lucas because he didn't like him because Lucas was young and full of life all the time and the foreman wanted Lucas' job to give it to a cousin of his. But he hadn't aimed to tell me because it would just worry me. But when this here happened, we couldn't wait any longer. I was the one that said for him to go. He said he would stay if I said so, whether the foreman treated him right or not. But I said for him to go.

He never wanted to go, even then. But I said for him to. To just send me word when he was ready for me to come. And then his plans just never worked out for him to send for me in time, like he aimed. Going away

among strangers like that, a young fellow needs time to get settled down. He never knowed that when he left, that he would need more time to get settled down in than he figured on. Especially a young fellow full of life like Lucas, that likes folks and jollifying, and liked by folks in turn. He didn't know it would take longer than he planned, being young, and folks always after him because he is a hand for laughing and joking, interfering with his work unbeknownst to him because he never wanted to hurt folks' feelings. And I wanted him to have his last enjoyment, because marriage is different with a young fellow, a lively young fellow, and a woman. It lasts so long with a lively young fellow. Don't you think so?"

Mrs Armstid does not answer. She looks at the other sitting in the chair with her smooth hair and her still hands lying upon her lap and her soft and musing face. "Like as not, he already sent me the word and it got lost on the way. It's a right far piece from here to Alabama even, and I ain't to Jefferson yet. I told him I would not expect him to write, being as he ain't any hand for letters. 'You just send me your mouthword when you are ready for me,' I told him. 'I'll be waiting.'

It worried me a little at first, after he left, because my name wasn't Burch yet and my brother and his folks not knowing Lucas as well as I knew him. How could they?" Into her face there comes slowly an expression of soft and bright surprise, as if she had just thought of something which she had not even been aware that she did not know. "How could they be expected to, you see. But he had to get settled down first; it was him would have all the trouble of being among strangers, and me with nothing to bother about except to just wait while he had all the bother and trouble. But after a while I reckon I just got too busy getting this chap up to his time to worry about what my name was or what folks thought.

But me and Lucas dont need no word promises between us. It was something unexpected come up, or he even sent the word and it got lost. So one day I just decided to up and not wait any longer."

"How did you know which way to go when you started?"

Lena is watching her hands. They are moving now, plaiting with rapt bemusement a fold of her skirt. It is not diffidence, shyness. It is apparently some musing reflex of the hand alone. "I just kept asking. With Lucas a lively young fellow that got to know folks easy and quick, I knew that wherever he had been, folks would remember him. So I kept asking. And folks was right kind. And sure enough, I heard two days back on the road that he is in Jefferson, working for the planing mill."

Mrs Armstid watches the lowered face. Her hands are on her hips and she watches the younger woman with an expression of cold and impersonal contempt. "And you believe that he will be there when you get there. Granted that he ever was there at all. That he will hear you are in the same town with him, and still be there when the sun sets."

Lena's lowered face is grave, quiet. Her hand has ceased now. It lies quite still on her lap, as if it had died there. Her voice is quiet, tranquil, stubborn. "I reckon a family ought to all be together when a chap comes. Specially the first one. I reckon the Lord will see to that."

"And I reckon He will have to," Mrs Armstid says, savagely, harshly. Armstid is in bed, his head propped up a little, watching her across the footboard as, still dressed, she stoops into the light of the lamp upon the dresser, hunting violently in a drawer. She produces a metal box and unlocks it with a key suspended about her neck and takes out a cloth sack which she opens and produces a small china effigy of a rooster with a slot in its back. It jingles with coins as she moves it and upends it and shakes it violently above the top of the dresser, shaking from the slot coins in a meagre dribbling. Armstid in the bed watches her.

"What are you fixing to do with your eggmoney this time of night?" he says.

"I reckon it's mine to do with what I like." She stoops into the lamp, her face harsh, bitter. "God knows it was me sweated over them and nursed them. You never lifted no hand."

“Sho,” he says. “I reckon it ain’t any human in this country is going to dispute them hens with you, lessen it’s the possums and the snakes. That rooster bank, neither,” he says. Because, stooping suddenly, she jerks off one shoe and strikes the china bank a single shattering blow. From the bed, reclining, Armstid watches her gather the remaining coins from among the china fragments and drop them with the others into the sack and knot it and reknot it three or four times with savage finality.

“You give that to her,” she says. “And come sunup you hitch up the team and take her away from here. Take her all the way to Jefferson, if you want.”

“I reckon she can get a ride in from Varner’s store,” he says.

Mrs Armstid rose before day and cooked breakfast. It was on the table when Armstid came in from milking. “Go tell her to come and eat,” Mrs Armstid said. When he and Lena returned to the kitchen, Mrs Armstid was not there. Lena looked about the room once, pausing at the door with less than a pause, her face already fixed in an expression immanent with smiling, with speech, prepared speech, Armstid knew. But she said nothing; the pause was less than a pause.

“Let’s eat and get on,” Armstid said. “You still got a right good piece to go.” He watched her eat, again with the tranquil and hearty decorum of last night’s supper, though there was now corrupting it a quality of polite and almost finicking restraint. Then he gave her the knotted cloth sack. She took it, her face pleased, warm, though not very much surprised.

“Why, it’s right kind of her,” she said. “But I won’t need it. I’m so nigh there now.”

“I reckon you better keep it. I reckon you done noticed how Martha ain’t much on being crossed in what she aims to do.”

"It's right kind," Lena said. She tied the money up in the bandanna bundle and put on the sunbonnet. The wagon was waiting. When they drove down the lane, past the house, she looked back at it. "It was right kind of you all," she said.

"She done it," Armstid said. "I reckon I can't claim no credit."

"It was right kind, anyway. You'll have to say goodbye to her for me. I had hopened to see her myself, but . . ."

"Sho," Armstid said. "I reckon she was busy or something. I'll tell her."

They drove up to the store in the early sunlight, with the squatting men already spitting across the heelgnawed porch, watching her descend slowly and carefully from the wagon seat, carrying the bundle and the fan. Again Armstid did not move to assist her. He said from the seat: "This here is Miz Burch. She wants to go to Jefferson. If anybody is going in today, she will take it kind to ride with them."

She reached the earth, in the heavy, dusty shoes. She looked up at him, serene, peaceful. "It's been right kind," she said.

"Sho," Armstid said. "I reckon you can get to town now." He looked down at her. Then it seemed an interminable while that he watched his tongue seek words, thinking quiet and swift, thought fleeing A man.

All men. He will pass up a hundred chances to do good for one chance to meddle where meddling is not wanted. He will overlook and fail to see chances, opportunities, for riches and fame and welldoing, and even sometimes for evil. But he won't fail to see a chance to meddle. Then his tongue found words, he listening, perhaps with the same astonishment that she did: "Only I wouldn't set too much store by . . . store in . . ." thinking She is not listening.

If she could hear words like that she would not be getting down from this wagon, with that belly and that fan and that little bundle, alone, bound for a place she never saw before and hunting for a man she ain't

going to ever see again and that she has already seen one time too many as it is “—any time you are passing back this way, tomorrow or even tonight . . .”

“I reckon I’ll be all right now,” she said. “They told me he is there.”

He turned the wagon and drove back home, sitting hunched, bleached, on the sagging seat, thinking, ‘It wouldn’t have done any good. She would not have believed the telling and hearing it any more than she will believe the thinking that’s been going on all around her for . . . It’s four weeks now, she said. No more than she will feel it and believe it now. Setting there on that top step, with her hands in her lap and them fellows squatting there and spitting past her into the road.

And not even waiting for them to ask her about it before she begins to tell. Telling them of her own accord about that durn fellow like she never had nothing particular to either hide or tell, even when Jody Varner or some of them will tell her that that fellow in Jefferson at the planing mill is named Bunch and not Burch; and that not worrying her either. I reckon she knows more than even Martha does, like when she told Martha last night about how the Lord will see that what is right will get done.’

It required only one or two questions. Then, sitting on the top step, the fan and the bundle upon her lap, Lena tells her story again, with that patient and transparent recapitulation of a lying child, the squatting overalled men listening quietly.

“That fellow’s name is Bunch,” Varner says. “He’s been working there at the mill about seven years. How do you know that Burch is there too?”

She is looking away up the road, in the direction of Jefferson. Her face is calm, waiting, a little detached without being bemused. “I reckon he’ll be there. At that planing mill and all. Lucas always did like excitement. He never did like to live quiet. That’s why it never suited

him back at Doane's Mill. Why he—we decided to make a change: for money and excitement.”

“For money and excitement,” Varner says. “Lucas aint the first young buck that's throwed over what he was bred to do and them that depended on him doing it, for money and excitement.”

But she is not listening apparently. She sits quietly on the top step, watching the road where it curves away, empty and mounting, toward Jefferson. The squatting men along the wall look at her still and placid face and they think as Armstid thought and as Varner thinks: that she is thinking of a scoundrel who deserted her in trouble and who they believe that she will never see again, save his coattails perhaps already boardflat with running. ‘Or maybe it's about that Sloane's or Bone's Mill she is thinking,’ Varner thinks.

‘I reckon that even a fool gal don't have to come as far as Mississippi to find out that whatever place she run from ain't going to be a whole lot different or worse than the place she is at. Even if it has got a brother in it that objects to his sister's night-prowling,’ thinking I would have done the same as the brother; the father would have done the same. She has no mother because fatherblood hates with love and pride, but motherblood with hate loves and cohabits

She is not thinking about this at all. She is thinking about the coins knotted in the bundle beneath her hands. She is remembering breakfast, thinking how she can enter the store this moment and buy cheese and crackers and even sardines if she likes. At Armstid's she had had but a cup of coffee and a piece of cornbread: nothing more, though Armstid pressed her. ‘I et polite,’ she thinks, her hands lying upon the bundle, knowing the hidden coins, remembering the single cup of coffee, the decorous morsel of strange bread; thinking with a sort of serene pride: ‘Like a lady I et. Like a lady travelling. But now I can buy sardines too if I should so wish.’

So she seems to muse upon the mounting road while the slow-spitting and squatting men watch her covertly, believing that she is thinking

about the man and the approaching crisis, when in reality she is waging a mild battle with that providential caution of the old earth of and with and by which she lives. This time she conquers. She rises and walking a little awkwardly, a little carefully, she traverses the ranked battery of maneyes and enters the store, the clerk following. 'I'm a-going to do it,' she thinks, even while ordering the cheese and crackers; 'I'm a-going to do it,' saying aloud: "And a box of sardines." She calls them sour-deens. "A nickel box."

"We ain't got no nickel sardines," the clerk says. "Sardines is fifteen cents." He also calls them sour-deens.

She muses. "What have you got in a can for a nickel?"

"Aint got nothing except shoeblacking. I dont reckon you want that. Not to eat, noway."

"I reckon I'll take the fifteen cent ones, then." She unties the bundle and the knotted sack. It requires some time to solve the knots. But she unties them patiently, one by one, and pays and knots the sack and the bundle again and takes up her purchase. When she emerges onto the porch there is a wagon standing at the steps. A man is on the seat.

"Here's a wagon going to town," they tell her. "He will take you in."

Her face wakes, serene, slow, warm. "Why, you're right kind," she says.

The wagon moves slowly, steadily, as if here within the sunny loneliness of the enormous land it were outside of, beyond all time and all haste. From Varner's store to Jefferson it is twelve miles. "Will we get there before dinnertime?" she says.

The driver spits. "We mought," he says.

Apparently he has never looked at her, not even when she got into the wagon. Apparently she has never looked at him, either. She does not do so now. "I reckon you go to Jefferson a right smart."

He says, "Some." The wagon creaks on. Fields and woods seem to hang in some inescapable middle distance, at once static and fluid, quick, like mirages. Yet the wagon passes them.

"I reckon you don't know anybody in Jefferson named Lucas Burch."

"Burch?"

"I'm looking to meet him there. He works at the planing mill."

"No," the driver says. "I don't know that I know him. But likely there is a right smart of folks in Jefferson I don't know. Likely he is there."

"I'll declare, I hope so. Travelling is getting right bothersome."

The driver does not look at her. "How far have you come, looking for him?"

"From Alabama. It's a right far piece."

He does not look at her. His voice is quite casual. "How did your folks come to let you start out, in your shape?"

"My folks are dead. I live with my brother. I just decided to come on."

"I see. He sent you word to come to Jefferson."

She does not answer. He can see beneath the sunbonnet her calm profile. The wagon goes on, slow, timeless. The red and unhurried miles unroll beneath the steady feet of the mules, beneath the creaking and clanking wheels. The sun stands now high overhead; the shadow of the sunbonnet now falls across her lap. She looks up at the sun. "I reckon it's time to eat," she says. He watches from the corner of his eye as she opens the cheese and crackers and the sardines and offers them.

"I wouldn't care for none," he says.

“I’d take it kind for you to share.”

“I wouldn’t care to. You go ahead and eat.”

She begins to eat. She eats slowly, steadily, sucking the rich sardine oil from her fingers with slow and complete relish. Then she stops, not abruptly, yet with utter completeness, her jaw stilled in midchewing, a bitten cracker in her hand and her face lowered a little and her eyes blank, as if she were listening to something very far away or so near as to be inside her. Her face has drained of color, of its full, hearty blood, and she sits quite still, hearing and feeling the implacable and immemorial earth, but without fear or alarm. ‘It’s twins at least,’ she says to herself, without lip movement, without sound. Then the spasm passes. She eats again. The wagon has not stopped; time has not stopped. The wagon crests the final hill and they see smoke.

“Jefferson,” the driver says.

“Well, I’ll declare,” she says. “We are almost there, aint we?”

It is the man now who does not hear. He is looking ahead, across the valley toward the town on the opposite ridge. Following his pointing whip, she sees two columns of smoke: the one the heavy density of burning coal above a tall stack, the other a tall yellow column standing apparently from among a clump of trees some distance beyond the town. “That’s a house burning,” the driver says. “See?”

But she in turn again does not seem to be listening, to hear. “My, my,” she says; “here I aint been on the road but four weeks, and now I am in Jefferson already. My, my. A body does get around.”

Chapter 2

Byron Bunch knows this: It was one Friday morning three years ago. And the group of men at work in the planer shed looked up, and saw

the stranger standing there, watching them. They did not know how long he had been there. He looked like a tramp, yet not like a tramp either. His shoes were dusty and his trousers were soiled too. But they were of decent serge, sharply creased, and his shirt was soiled but it was a white shirt, and he wore a tie and a stiffbrim straw hat that was quite new, cocked at an angle arrogant and baleful above his still face. He did not look like a professional hobo in his professional rags, but there was something definitely rootless about him, as though no town nor city was his, no street, no walls, no square of earth his home. And that he carried his knowledge with him always as though it were a banner, with a quality ruthless, lonely, and almost proud.

“As if,” as the men said later, “he was just down on his luck for a time, and that he didn’t intend to stay down on it and didn’t give a damn much how he rose up.” He was young. And Byron watched him standing there and looking at the men in sweatstained overalls, with a cigarette in one side of his mouth and his face darkly and contemptuously still, drawn down a little on one side because of the smoke.

After a while he spat the cigarette without touching his hand to it and turned and went on to the mill office while the men in faded and worksoiled overalls looked at his back with a sort of baffled outrage. “We ought to run him through the planer,” the foreman said. “Maybe that will take that look off his face.”

They did not know who he was. None of them had ever seen him before. “Except that’s a pretty risky look for a man to wear on his face in public,” one said: “He might forget and use it somewhere where somebody wont like it.” Then they dismissed him, from the talk, anyway. They went back to their work among the whirring and grating belts and shafts. But it was not ten minutes before the mill superintendent entered, with the stranger behind him.

“Put this man on,” the superintendent said to the foreman. “He says he can handle a scoop, anyhow. You can put him on the sawdust pile.”

The others had not stopped work, yet there was not a man in the shed who was not again watching the stranger in his soiled city clothes, with his dark, insufferable face and his whole air of cold and quiet contempt. The foreman looked at him, briefly, his gaze as cold as the other's. "Is he going to do it in them clothes?"

"That's his business," the superintendent said. "I'm not hiring his clothes."

"Well, whatever he wears suits me if it suits you and him," the foreman said. "All right, mister," he said. "Go down yonder and get a scoop and help them fellows move that sawdust."

The newcomer turned without a word. The others watched him go down to the sawdust pile and vanish and reappear with a shovel and go to work. The foreman and the superintendent were talking at the door. They parted and the foreman returned. "His name is Christmas," he said.

"His name is what?" one said.

"Christmas."

"Is he a foreigner?"

"Did you ever hear of a white man named Christmas?" the foreman said.

"I never heard of nobody a-tall named it," the other said.

And that was the first time Byron remembered that he had ever thought how a man's name, which is supposed to be just the sound for who he is, can be somehow an augur of what he will do, if other men can only read the meaning in time. It seemed to him that none of them had looked especially at the stranger until they heard his name. But as soon as they heard it, it was as though there was something in the sound of it that was trying to tell them what to expect; that he carried

with him his own inescapable warning, like a flower its scent or a rattlesnake its rattle. Only none of them had sense enough to recognise it.

They just thought that he was a foreigner, and as they watched him for the rest of that Friday, working in that tie and the straw hat and the creased trousers, they said among themselves that that was the way men in his country worked; though there were others who said, "He'll change clothes tonight. He won't have on them Sunday clothes when he comes to work in the morning."

Saturday morning came. As the late arrivals came up just before the whistle blew, they were already saying, "Did he— Where—" The others pointed. The new man was standing alone down at the sawdust pile. His shovel was beside him, and he stood in the same garments of yesterday, with the arrogant hat, smoking a cigarette. "He was there when we come," the first ones said. "Just standing there, like that. Like he hadn't never been to bed, even."

He did not talk to any of them at all. And none of them tried to talk to him. But they were all conscious of him, of the steady back (he worked well enough, with a kind of baleful and restrained steadiness) and arms. Noon came. With the exception of Byron, they had brought no lunch with them today, and they began to gather up their belongings preparatory to quitting until Monday. Byron went alone with his lunch pail to the pump house where they usually ate, and sat down. Then something caused him to look up. A short distance away the stranger was leaning against a post, smoking. Byron knew that he had been there when he entered, and would not even bother to go away. Or worse: that he had come there deliberately, ignoring Byron as if he were another post. "Aint you going to knock off?" Byron said.

The other expelled smoke. Then he looked at Byron. His face was gaunt, the flesh a level dead parchment color. Not the skin: the flesh itself, as though the skull had been molded in a still and deadly regularity and then baked in a fierce oven. "How much do they pay for overtime?" he said. And then Byron knew. He knew then why the other worked in the

Sunday clothes, and why he had had no lunch with him either yesterday or today, and why he had not quit with the others at noon.

He knew as well as if the man had told him that he did not have a nickel in his pockets and that in all likelihood he had lived on cigarettes for two or three days now. Almost with the thought Byron was offering his own pail, the action as reflex as the thought. Because before the act was completed the man, without changing his indolent and contemptuous attitude, turned his face and looked once at the proffered pail through the drooping smoke of the cigarette. "I ain't hungry. Keep your muck."

Monday morning came and Byron proved himself right. The man came to work in new overalls, and with a paper bag of food. But he did not squat with them in the pump house to eat at noon, and the look was still on his face. "Let it stay there," the foreman said. "Simms ain't hiring his face anymore than his clothes."

Simms hadn't hired the stranger's tongue, either, Byron thought. At least, Christmas didn't seem to think so, to act so. He still had nothing to say to anyone, even after six months. No one knew what he did between mill hours. Now and then one of his fellow workers would pass him on the square downtown after supper, and it would be as though Christmas had never seen the other before. He would be wearing then the new hat and the ironed trousers and the cigarette in one side of his mouth and the smoke sneering across his face. No one knew where he lived, slept at night, save that now and then someone would see him following a path that came up through the woods on the edge of town, as if he might live out that way somewhere.

This is not what Byron knows now. This is just what he knew then, what he heard and watched as it came to his knowledge. None of them knew then where Christmas lived and what he was actually doing behind the veil, the screen, of his negro's job at the mill. Possibly no one would ever have known if it had not been for the other stranger, Brown. But as soon as Brown told, there were a dozen men who admitted having bought whiskey from Christmas for over two years, meeting him at

night and alone in the woods behind an old colonial plantation house two miles from town, in which a middleaged spinster named Burden lived alone. But even the ones who bought the whiskey did not know that Christmas was actually living in a tumble down negro cabin on Miss Burden's place, and that he had been living in it for more than two years.

Then one day about six months ago another stranger appeared at the mill as Christmas had done, seeking work. He was young too, tall, already in overalls which looked as though he had been in them constantly for some time, and he looked as though he had been travelling light also. He had an alert, weakly handsome face with a small white scar beside the mouth that looked as if it had been contemplated a great deal in the mirror, and a way of jerking his head quickly and glancing over his shoulder like a mule does in front of an automobile in the road, Byron thought.

But it was not alone backwatching, alarm; it seemed also to Byron to possess a quality of assurance, brass, as though the man were reiterating and insisting all the while that he was afraid of nothing that might or could approach him from behind. And when Mooney, the foreman, saw the new hand, Byron believed that he and Mooney had the same thought. Mooney said: "Well, Simms is safe from hiring anything at all when he put that fellow on. He never even hired a whole pair of pants."

"That's so," Byron said. "He puts me in mind of one of these cars running along the street with a radio in it. You can't make out what it is saying and the car ain't going anywhere in particular and when you look at it close you see that there ain't even anybody in it."

"Yes," Mooney said. "He puts me in mind of a horse. Not a mean horse. Just a worthless horse. Looks fine in the pasture, but it's always down in the spring bottom when anybody comes to the gate with a bridle. Runs fast, all right, but it's always got a sore hoof when hitching-up time comes."

“But I reckon maybe the mares like him,” Byron said.

“Sho,” Mooney said. “I don’t reckon he’d do even a mare any permanent harm.”

The new hand went to work down in the sawdust pile with Christmas. With a lot of motion to it, telling everybody who he was and where he had been, in a tone and manner that was the essence of the man himself, that carried within itself its own confounding and mendacity. So that a man put no more belief in what he said that he had done than in what he said his name was, Byron thought. There was no reason why his name should not have been Brown.

It was that, looking at him, a man would know that at some time in his life he would reach some crisis in his own foolishness when he would change his name, and that he would think of Brown to change it to with a kind of gleeful exultation, as though the name had never been invented. The thing was, there was no reason why he should have had or have needed any name at all. Nobody cared, just as Byron believed that no one (wearing pants, anyway) cared where he came from nor where he went nor how long he stayed.

Because wherever he came from and wherever he had been, a man knew that he was just living on the country, like a locust. It was as though he had been doing it for so long now that all of him had become scattered and diffused and now there was nothing left but the transparent and weightless shell blown oblivious and without destination upon whatever wind.

He worked some, though, after a fashion. Byron believed that there was not even enough left of him to do a good, shrewd job of shirking. To desire to shirk, even, since a man must be better than common to do a good job of malingering, the same as a good job at anything else: of stealing and murdering even. He must be aiming at some specific and definite goal, working toward it. And he believed that Brown was not. They heard how he went and lost his entire first week’s pay in a crap game on the first Saturday night. Byron said to Mooney: “I am

surprised at that. I would have thought that maybe shooting dice would be the one thing he could do.”

“Him?” Mooney said. “What makes you think that he could be good at any kind of devilment when he ain’t any good at anything as easy as shovelling sawdust? that he could fool anybody with anything as hard to handle as a pair of dice, when he can’t with anything as easy to handle as a scoop?” Then he said, “Well, I reckon there ain’t any man so sorry he can’t beat somebody doing something. Because he can at least beat that Christmas doing nothing at all.”

“Sho,” Byron said, “I reckon that being good is about the easiest thing in the world for a lazy man.”

“I reckon he’d be bad fast enough,” Mooney said, “if he just had somebody to show him how.”

“Well, he’ll find that fellow somewhere, sooner or later,” Byron said. They both turned and looked down at the sawdust pile, where Brown and Christmas labored, the one with that brooding and savage steadiness, the other with a higharmed and erratic motion which could not have been fooling even itself.

“I reckon so,” Mooney said. “But if I aimed to be bad, I’d sho hate to have him for my partner.”

Like Christmas, Brown came to work in the same clothes which he wore on the street. But unlike Christmas, he made no change in his costume for some time. “He’ll win just enough in that crap game some Saturday night to buy a new suit and still have fifty cents in nickels to rattle in his pocket,” Mooney said. “And on the next Monday morning we aint going to see him again.” Meanwhile Brown continued to come to work in the same overalls and shirt in which he had arrived in Jefferson, losing his week’s pay in the Saturday night dice game or perhaps winning a little, greeting either the one or the other with the same shouts of imbecile laughter, joking and chaffing with the very men who in all likelihood

were periodically robbing him. Then one day they heard that he had won sixty dollars. "Well, that's the last we'll see of him," one said.

"I don't know," Mooney said. "Sixty dollars is the wrong figure. If it had been either ten dollars or five hundred, I reckon you'd be right. But not just sixty. He'll just feel now that he is settled down good here, drawing at last somewhere about what he is worth a week." And on Monday he did return to work, in the overalls; they saw them, Brown and Christmas, down at the sawdust pile. They had been watching the two of them down there from the day when Brown went to work: Christmas jabbing his shovel into the sawdust slowly and steadily and hard, as though he were chopping up a buried snake ("or a man," Mooney said) and Brown leaning on his shovel while he apparently told Christmas a story, an anecdote.

Because presently he would laugh, shout with laughter, his head backflung, while beside him the other man worked with silent and unflagging savageness. Then Brown would fall to again, working for a time once again as fast as Christmas, but picking up less and less in the scoop until at last the shovel would not even touch the sawdust in its flagging arc. Then he would lean upon it again and apparently finish whatever it was that he was telling Christmas, telling to the man who did not even seem to hear his voice. As if the other were a mile away, or spoke a different language from the one he knew, Byron thought. And they would be seen together down town on Saturday evening sometimes: Christmas in his neat, soberly austere serge-and-white and the straw hat, and Brown in his new suit (it was tan, with a red crisscross, and he had a colored shirt and a hat like Christmas' but with a colored band) talking and laughing, his voice heard clear across the square and back again in echo, somewhat as a meaningless sound in a church seems to come from everywhere at once. Like he aimed for everybody to see how he and Christmas were buddies, Byron thought. And then Christmas would turn and with that still, sullen face of his walk out of whatever small gathering the sheer empty sound of Brown's voice had surrounded them with, with Brown following, still laughing and talking. And each time the other workmen would say,

“Well, he wont be back on the job Monday morning.” But each Monday he was back. It was Christmas who quit first.

He quit one Saturday night, without warning, after almost three years. It was Brown who informed them that Christmas had quit. Some of the other workers were family men and some were bachelors and they were of different ages and they led a catholic variety of lives, yet on Monday morning they all came to work with a kind of gravity, almost decorum. Some of them were young, and they drank and gambled on Saturday night, and even went to Memphis now and then. Yet on Monday morning they came quietly and soberly to work, in clean overalls and clean shirts, waiting quietly until the whistle blew and then going quietly to work, as though there were still something of Sabbath in the overlingering air which established a tenet that, no matter what a man had done with his Sabbath, to come quiet and clean to work on Monday morning was no more than seemly and right to do.

That is what they had always remarked about Brown. On Monday morning as likely as not he would appear in the same soiled clothes of last week, and with a black stubble that had known no razor. And he would be more noisy than ever, shouting and playing the pranks of a child of ten. To the sober others it did not look right. To them it was as though he had arrived naked, or drunk. Hence it was Brown who on this Monday morning notified them that Christmas had quit. He arrived late, but that was not it. He hadn't shaved, either; but that was not it. He was quiet. For a time they did not know that he was even present, who by that time should have had half the men there cursing him, and some in good earnest. He appeared just as the whistle blew and went straight to the sawdust pile and went to work without a word to anyone, even when one man spoke to him. And then they saw that he was down there alone, that Christmas, his partner, was not there. When the foreman came in, one said: “Well, I see you have lost one of your apprentice firemen.”

Mooney looked down to where Brown was spading into the sawdust pile as though it were eggs. He spat briefly. “Yes. He got rich too fast. This little old job couldn't hold him.”

“Got rich?” another said.

“One of them did,” Mooney said, still watching Brown. “I saw them yesterday riding in a new car. He” —he jerked his head toward Brown— “was driving it. I wasn’t surprised at that. I am just surprised that even one of them come to work today.”

“Well, I don’t reckon Simms will have any trouble finding a man to fill his shoes in these times,” the other said.

“He wouldn’t have any trouble doing that at any time,” Mooney said.

“It looked to me like he was doing pretty well.”

“Oh,” Mooney said. “I see. You are talking about Christmas.”

“Who were you talking about? Has Brown said he is quitting too?”

“You reckon he’s going to stay down there, working, with the other one riding around town all day in that new car?”

“Oh.” The other looked at Brown too. “I wonder where they got that car.”

“I don’t,” Mooney said. “What I wonder is, if Brown is going to quit at noon or work on until six o’clock.”

“Well,” Byron said, “if I could get rich enough out here to buy a new automobile, I’d quit too.”

One or two of the others looked at Byron. They smiled a little. “They never got that rich out here,” one said. Byron looked at him. “I reckon Byron stays out of meanness too much himself to keep up with other folks’,” the other said. They looked at Byron. “Brown is what you might call a public servant. Christmas used to make them come way out to them woods back of Miss Burden’s place, at night; now Brown brings it

right into town for them. I hear tell how if you just know the pass word, you can buy a pint of whiskey out of his shirt front in any alley on a Saturday night.”

“What’s the pass word?” another said. “Six bits?”

Byron looked from face to face. “Is that a fact? Is that what they are doing?”

“That’s what Brown is doing. I don’t know about Christmas. I wouldn’t swear to it. But Brown aint going to be far away from where Christmas is at. Like to like, as the old folks say.”

“That’s a fact,” another said. “Whether Christmas is in it or not, I reckon we aint going to know. He aint going to walk around in public with his pants down, like Brown does.”

“He aint going to need to,” Mooney said, looking at Brown.

And Mooney was right. They watched Brown until noon, down there at the sawdust pile by himself. Then the whistle blew and they got their lunch pails and squatted in the pump shed and began to eat. Brown came in, glum, his face at once sullen and injured looking, like a child’s, and squatted among them, his hands dangling between his knees. He had no lunch with him today.

“Aint you going to eat any dinner?” one said.

“Cold muck out of a dirty lard bucket?” Brown said. “Starting in at daylight and slaving all day like a durn nigger, with a hour off at noon to eat cold muck out of a tin bucket.”

“Well, maybe some folks work like the niggers work where they come from,” Mooney said. “But a nigger wouldn’t last till the noon whistle, working on this job like some white folks work on it.”

But Brown did not seem to hear, to be listening, squatting with his sullen face and his dangling hands. It was as though he were not listening to any save himself, listening to himself: "A fool. A man is a fool that will do it."

"You are not chained to that scoop," Mooney said.

"You durn right I aint," Brown said.

Then the whistle blew. They went back to work. They watched Brown down at the sawdust pile. He would dig for a while, then he would begin to slow, moving slower and slower until at last he would be clutching the shovel as though it were a riding whip, and they could see that he was talking to himself. "Because there aint nobody else down there for him to tell it to," one said.

"It's not that," Mooney said. "He hasn't quite convinced himself yet. He aint quite sold yet."

"Sold on what?"

"On the idea that he's a bigger fool than even I think he is," Mooney said.

The next morning he did not appear. "His address from now on will be the barbershop," one said.

"Or that alley just behind it," another said.

"I reckon we'll see him once more," Mooney said. "He'll be out here once more to draw his time for yesterday."

Which he did. About eleven o'clock he came up. He wore now the new suit and the straw hat, and he stopped at the shed and stood there looking at the working men as Christmas had done on that day three years ago, as if somehow the very attitudes of the master's dead life motivated, unawares to him, the willing muscles of the disciple who

had learned too quick and too well. But Brown merely contrived to look scattered and emptily swaggering where the master had looked sullen and quiet and fatal as a snake. "Lay into it, you slaving bastards!" Brown said, in a merry, loud voice cropped with teeth.

Mooney looked at Brown. Then Brown's teeth didn't show. "You aint calling me that," Mooney said, "are you?"

Brown's mobile face performed one of those instantaneous changes which they knew. Like it was so scattered and so lightly built that it wasn't any trouble for even him to change it, Byron thought. "I wasn't talking to you," Brown said.

"Oh, I see." Mooney's tone was quite pleasant, easy. "It was these other fellows you were calling a bastard."

Immediately a second one said: "Were you calling that at me?"

"I was just talking to myself," Brown said.

"Well, you have told God's truth for once in your life," Mooney said. "The half of it, that is. Do you want me to come up there and whisper the other half in your ear?"

And that was the last they saw of him at the mill, though Byron knows and remembers now the new car (with presently a crumpled fender or two) about the town, idle, destinationless, and constant, with Brown lolling behind the wheel and not making a very good job of being dissolute and enviable and idle. Now and then Christmas would be with him, but not often. And it is now no secret what they were doing. It is a byword among young men and even boys that whiskey can be bought from Brown almost on sight, and the town is just waiting for him to get caught, to produce from his raincoat and offer to sell it to an undercover man. They still do not know for certain if Christmas is connected with it, save that no one believes that Brown alone has sense enough to make a profit even from bootlegging, and some of

them know that Christmas and Brown both live in a cabin on the Burden place.

But even these do not know if Miss Burden knows it or not, and if they did, they would not tell her. She lives in the big house alone, a woman of middleage. She has lived in the house since she was born, yet she is still a stranger, a foreigner whose people moved in from the North during Reconstruction. A Yankee, a lover of negroes, about whom in the town there is still talk of queer relations with negroes in the town and out of it, despite the fact that it is now sixty years since her grandfather and her brother were killed on the square by an exslaveowner over a question of negro votes in a state election. But it still lingers about her and about the place: something dark and outlandish and threatful, even though she is but a woman and but the descendant of them whom the ancestors of the town had reason (or thought that they had) to hate and dread. But it is there: the descendants of both in their relationship to one another ghosts, with between them the phantom of the old spilled blood and the old horror and anger and fear.

If there had been love once, man or woman would have said that Byron Bunch had forgotten her. Or she (meaning love) him, more like—that small man who will not see thirty again, who has spent six days of every week for seven years at the planing mill, feeding boards into the machinery. Saturday afternoons too he spends there, alone now, with the other workmen all downtown in their Sunday clothes and neckties, in that terrific and aimless and restive idleness of men who labor.

On these Saturday afternoons he loads the finished boards into freight cars, since he cannot operate the planer alone, keeping his own time to the final second of an imaginary whistle. The other workmen, the town itself or that part of it which remembers or thinks about him, believe that he does it for the overtime which he receives. Perhaps this is the reason. Man knows so little about his fellows. In his eyes all men or women act upon what he believes would motivate him if he were mad enough to do what that other man or woman is doing. In fact, there is but one man in the town who could speak with any certainty about

Bunch, and with this man the town does not know that Bunch has any intercourse, since they meet and talk only at night. This man's name is Hightower. Twenty-five years ago he was minister of one of the principal churches, perhaps the principal church.

This man alone knows where Bunch goes each Saturday evening when the imaginary whistle blows (or when Bunch's huge silver watch says that it has blown). Mrs Beard, at whose boarding house Bunch lives, knows only that shortly after six o'clock each Saturday Bunch enters, bathes and changes to a suit of cheap serge which is not new, eats his supper and saddles the mule which he stables in a shed behind the house which Bunch himself patched up and roofed, and departs on the mule. She does not know where he goes. It is the minister Hightower alone who knows that Bunch rides thirty miles into the country and spends Sunday leading the choir in a country church—a service which lasts all day long.

Then some time around midnight he saddles the mule again and rides back to Jefferson at a steady, allnight jog. And on Monday morning, in his clean overalls and shirt he will be on hand at the mill when the whistle blows. Mrs Beard knows only that from Saturday's supper to Monday's breakfast each week his room and the mule's homemade stable will be vacant. Hightower alone knows where he goes and what he does there, because two or three nights a week Bunch visits Hightower in the small house where the ex-minister lives alone, in what the town calls his disgrace—the house unpainted, small, obscure, poorly lighted, mansmelling, manstale. Here the two of them sit in the minister's study, talking quietly: the slight, nondescript man who is utterly unaware that he is a man of mystery among his fellow workers, and the fifty-year-old outcast who has been denied by his church.

Then Byron fell in love. He fell in love contrary to all the tradition of his austere and jealous country raising which demands in the object physical inviolability. It happens on a Saturday afternoon while he is alone at the mill. Two miles away the house is still burning, the yellow smoke standing straight as a monument on the horizon. They saw it before noon, when the smoke first rose above the trees, before the

whistle blew and the others departed. "I reckon Byron'll quit too, today," they said. "With a free fire to watch."

"It's a big fire," another said. "What can it be? I don't remember anything out that way big enough to make all that smoke except that Burden house."

"Maybe that's what it is," another said. "My pappy says he can remember how fifty years ago folks said it ought to be burned, and with a little human fat meat to start it good."

"Maybe your pappy slipped out there and set it afire," a third said. They laughed. Then they went back to work, waiting for the whistle, pausing now and then to look at the smoke. After a while a truck loaded with logs drove in. They asked the truck driver, who had come through town.

"Burden," the driver said. "Yes. That's the name. Somebody in town said that the sheriff had gone out there too."

"Well, I reckon Watt Kennedy likes to watch a fire, even if he does have to take that badge with him," one said.

"From the way the square looks," the driver said, "he won't have much trouble finding anybody he wants out there to arrest."

The noon whistle blew. The others departed. Byron ate his lunch, the silver watch open beside him. When it said one o'clock, he went back to work. He was alone in the loading shed, making his steady and interminable journeys between the shed and the car, with a piece of folded tow sack upon his shoulder for a pad and bearing upon the pad stacked burdens of staves which another would have said he could not raise nor carry, when Lena Grove walked into the door behind him, her face already shaped with serene anticipatory smiling, her mouth already shaped upon a name. He hears her and turns and sees her face fade like the dying agitation of a dropped pebble in a spring.

“You aint him,” she says behind her fading smile, with the grave astonishment of a child.

“No, ma’am,” Byron says. He pauses, half turning with the balanced staves. “I dont reckon I am. Who is it I aint?”

“Lucas Burch. They told me—”

“Lucas Burch?”

“They told me I would find him out here.” She speaks with a kind of serene suspicion, watching him without blinking, as if she believes that he is trying to trick her. “When I got close to town they kept a-calling it Bunch instead of Burch. But I just thought they was saying it wrong. Or maybe I just heard it wrong.”

“Yes, ma’am,” he says. “That’s what it is: Bunch. Byron Bunch.” With the staves still balanced on his shoulder he looks at her, at her swollen body, her heavy loins, at the red dust upon the man’s heavy shoes upon her feet. “Are you Miz Burch?”

She does not answer at once. She stands there just inside the door, watching him intently but without alarm, with that untroubled, faintly baffled, faintly suspicious gaze. Her eyes are quite blue. But in them is that shadow of the belief that he is trying to deceive her. “They told me away back on the road that Lucas is working at the planing mill in Jefferson. Lots of them told me. And I got to Jefferson and they told me where the planing mill was, and I asked in town about Lucas Burch and they said, ‘Maybe you mean Bunch’; and so I thought they had just got the name wrong and so it wouldn’t make any difference. Even when they told me the man they meant wasn’t dark complected. You aint telling me you dont know Lucas Burch out here.”

Byron puts down the load of staves, in a neat stack, ready to be taken up again. “No, ma’am. Not out here. Not no Lucas Burch out here. And I know all the folks that work here. He may work somewhere in town. Or at another mill.”

“Is there another planing mill?”

“No, ma’am. There’s some sawmills, a right smart of them, though.”

She watches him. “They told me back down the road that he worked for the planing mill.”

“I dont know of any here by that name,” Byron says. “I dont recall none named Burch except me, and my name is Bunch.”

She continues to watch him with that expression not so much concerned for the future as suspicious of the now. Then she breathes. It is not a sigh: she just breathes deeply and quietly once. “Well,” she says. She half turns and glances about, at the sawn boards, the stacked staves. “I reckon I’ll set down a while. It’s right tiring, walking over them hard streets from town. It seems like walking out here from town tired me more than all that way from Alabama did.” She is moving toward a low stack of planks.

“Wait,” Byron says. He almost springs forward, slipping the sack pad from his shoulder. The woman arrests herself in the act of sitting and Byron spreads the sack on the planks. “You’ll set easier.”

“Why, you’re right kind.” She sits down.

“I reckon it’ll set a little easier,” Byron says. He takes from his pocket the silver watch and looks at it; then he too sits, at the other end of the stack of lumber. “I reckon five minutes will be about right.”

“Five minutes to rest?” she says.

“Five minutes from when you come in. It looks like I done already started resting. I keep my own time on Saturday evenings,” he says.

“And every time you stop for a minute, you keep a count of it? How will they know you stopped? A few minutes wouldn’t make no difference, would it?”

“I reckon I aint paid for setting down,” he says. “So you come from Alabama.”

She tells him, in his turn, sitting on the trowsack pad, heavy-bodied, her face quiet and tranquil, and he watching her as quietly; telling him more than she knows that she is telling, as she has been doing now to the strange faces among whom she has travelled for four weeks with the untroubled unhaste of a change of season. And Byron in his turn gets the picture of a young woman betrayed and deserted and not even aware that she has been deserted, and whose name is not yet Burch.

“No, I dont reckon I know him,” he says at last. “There aint anybody but me out here this evening, anyway. The rest of them are all out yonder at that fire, more than like.” He shows her the yellow pillar of smoke standing tall and windless above the trees.

“We could see it from the wagon before we got to town,” she says. “It’s a right big fire.”

“It’s a right big old house. It’s been there a long time. Dont nobody live in it but one lady, by herself. I reckon there are folks in this town will call it a judgment on her, even now. She is a Yankee. Her folks come down here in the Reconstruction, to stir up the niggers. Two of them got killed doing it. They say she is still mixed up with niggers. Visits them when they are sick, like they was white. Wont have a cook because it would have to be a nigger cook. Folks say she claims that niggers are the same as white folks. That’s why folks dont never go out there. Except one.” She is watching him, listening. Now he does not look at her, looking a little aside. “Or maybe two, from what I hear. I hope they was out there in time to help her move her furniture out. Maybe they was.”

“Maybe who was?”

“Two fellows named Joe that live out that way somewhere. Joe Christmas and Joe Brown.”

“Joe Christmas? That’s a funny name.”

“He’s a funny fellow.” Again he looks a little aside from her interested face. “His partner’s a sight, too, Brown. He used to work here too. But they done quit now, both of them. Which aint nobody’s loss, I reckon.”

The woman sits on the trowsack pad, interested, tranquil. The two of them might be sitting in their Sunday clothes, in splint chairs on the patinasmooth earth before a country cabin on a sabbath afternoon. “Is his partner named Joe too?”

“Yes, ma’am. Joe Brown. But I reckon that may be his right name. Because when you think of a fellow named Joe Brown, you think of a bigmouthed fellow that’s always laughing and talking loud. And so I reckon that is his right name, even if Joe Brown does seem a little kind of too quick and too easy for a natural name, somehow. But I reckon it is his, all right. Because if he drew time on his mouth, he would be owning this here mill right this minute. Folks seem to like him, though. Him and Christmas get along, anyway.”

She is watching him. Her face is still serene, but now it is quite grave, her eyes quite grave and quite intent. “What do him and the other one do?”

“Nothing they hadn’t ought to, I reckon. At least, they aint been caught at it yet. Brown used to work here, some; what time he had off from laughing and playing jokes on folks. But Christmas has retired. They live out yonder together, out there somewhere where that house is burning. And I have heard what they do to make a living. But that aint none of my business in the first place. And in the second place, most of what folks tells on other folks aint true to begin with. And so I reckon I aint no better than nobody else.”

She is watching him. She is not even blinking. “And he says his name is Brown.” It might have been a question, but she does not wait for an answer. “What kind of tales have you heard about what they do?”

“I would injure no man,” Byron says. “I reckon I ought not to talked so much. For a fact, it looks like a fellow is bound to get into mischief soon as he quits working.”

“What kind of tales?” she says. She has not moved. Her tone is quiet, but Byron is already in love, though he does not yet know it. He does not look at her, feeling her grave, intent gaze upon his face, his mouth.

“Some claim they are selling whiskey. Keeping it hid out there where that house is burning. And there is some tale about Brown was drunk downtown one Saturday night and he pretty near told something that ought not to been told, about him and Christmas in Memphis one night, or on a dark road close to Memphis, that had a pistol in it. Maybe two pistols. Because Christmas come in quick and shut Brown up and took him away. Something that Christmas didn’t want told, anyway, and that even Brown would have had better sense than to told if he hadn’t been drunk. That’s what I heard. I wasn’t there, myself.” When he raises his face now he finds that he has looked down again before he even met her eyes. He seems to have already a foreknowledge of something now irrevocable, not to be recalled, who had believed that out here at the mill alone on Saturday afternoon he would be where the chance to do hurt or harm could not have found him.

“What does he look like?” she says.

“Christmas? Why—”

“I don’t mean Christmas.”

“Oh. Brown. Yes. Tall, young. Dark complected; womenfolks calls him handsome, a right smart do, I hear tell. A big hand for laughing and frolicking and playing jokes on folks. But I . . .” His voice ceases. He cannot look at her, feeling her steady, sober gaze upon his face.

“Joe Brown,” she says. “Has he got a little white scar right here by his mouth?”

And he cannot look at her, and he sits there on the stacked lumber when it is too late, and he could have bitten his tongue in two.

Chapter 3

From his study window he can see the street. It is not far away, since the lawn is not deep. It is a small lawn, containing a half dozen lowgrowing maples. The house, the brown, unpainted and unobtrusive bungalow is small too and by bushing crape myrtle and syringa and Althea almost hidden save for that gap through which from the study window he watches the street. So hidden it is that the light from the corner street lamp scarcely touches it.

From the window he can also see the sign, which he calls his monument. It is planted in the corner of the yard, low, facing the street. It is three feet long and eighteen inches high—a neat oblong presenting its face to who passes and its back to him. But he does not need to read it because he made the sign with hammer and saw, neatly, and he painted the legend which it bears, neatly too, tediously, when he realised that he would have to begin to have to have money for bread and fire and clothing. When he quitted the seminary he had a small income inherited from his father, which, as soon as he got his church, he forwarded promptly on receipt of the quarterly checks to an institution for delinquent girls in Memphis. Then he lost his church, he lost the Church, and the bitterest thing which he believed that he had ever faced—more bitter even than the bereavement and the shame—was the letter which he wrote them to say that from now on he could send them but half the sum which he had previously sent.

So he continued to send them half of a revenue which in its entirety would little more than have kept him. “Luckily there are things which I

can do," he said at the time. Hence the sign, carpentered neatly by himself and by himself lettered, with bits of broken glass contrived cunningly into the paint, so that at night, when the corner street lamp shone upon it, the letters glittered with an effect as of Christmas:

Rev. Gail Hightower, D.D.

Art Lessons

Handpainted Xmas & Anniversary Cards

Photographs Developed

But that was years ago, and he had had no art pupils and few enough Christmas cards and photograph plates, and the paint and the shattered glass had weathered out of the fading letters. They were still readable, however; though, like Hightower himself, few of the townspeople needed to read them anymore. But now and then a negro nursemaid with her white charges would loiter there and spell them aloud with that vacuous idiocy of her idle and illiterate kind, or a stranger happening along the quiet and remote and unpaved and littleused street would pause and read the sign and then look up at the small, brown, almost concealed house, and pass on; now and then the stranger would mention the sign to some acquaintance in the town. "Oh, yes," the friend would say. "Hightower. He lives there by himself. He come here as minister of the Presbyterian church, but his wife went bad on him.

She would slip off to Memphis now and then and have a good time. About twentyfive years ago, that was, right after he come here. Some folks claimed he knew about it. That he couldn't or wouldn't satisfy her

himself and that he knew what she was doing. Then one Saturday night she got killed, in a house or something in Memphis. Papers full of it. He had to resign from the church, but he wouldn't leave Jefferson, for some reason. They tried to get him to, for his own sake as well as the town's, the church's.

That was pretty bad on the church, you see. Having strangers come here and hear about it, and him refusing to leave the town. But he wouldn't go away. He has lived out there on what used to be the main street ever since, by himself. At least it aint a principal street anymore. That's something. But then he dont worry anybody anymore, and I reckon most folks have forgot about him. Does his own housework. I dont reckon anybody's even been inside that house in twentyfive years. We dont know why he stays here. But any day you pass along there about dusk or nightfall, you can see him sitting in the window. Just sitting there. The rest of the time folks wont hardly see him around the place at all, except now and then working in his garden."

So the sign which he carpentered and lettered is even less to him than it is to the town; he is no longer conscious of it as a sign, a message. He does not remember it at all until he takes his place in the study window just before dusk. Then it is just a familiar low oblong shape without any significance at all, low at the street end of the shallow lawn; it too might have grown up out of the tragic and inescapable earth along with the low spreading maples and the shrubs, without help or hindrance from him.

He no longer even looks at it, as he does not actually see the trees beneath and through which he watches the street, waiting for nightfall, the moment of night. The house, the study, is dark behind him, and he is waiting for that instant when all light has failed out of the sky and it would be night save for that faint light which daygranaried leaf and grassblade reluctant suspire, making still a little light on earth though night itself has come. Now, soon, he thinks; soon, now He does not say even to himself: "There remains yet something of honor and pride, of life."

When Byron Bunch first came to Jefferson seven years ago and saw that little sign Gail Hightower D.D. Art Lessons Christmas Cards Photographs Developed he thought, 'D.D. What is D.D.,' and he asked and they told him it meant Done Damned. Gail Hightower Done Damned in Jefferson anyway, they told him. And how Hightower had come straight to Jefferson from the seminary, refusing to accept any other call; how he had pulled every string he could in order to be sent to Jefferson.

And how he arrived with his young wife, descending from the train in a state of excitement already, talking, telling the old men and women who were the pillars of the church how he had set his mind on Jefferson from the first, since he had first decided to become a minister; telling them with a kind of glee of the letters he had written and the worrying he had done and the influence he had used in order to be called here. To the people of the town it sounded like a horse-trader's glee over an advantageous trade.

Perhaps that is how it sounded to the elders. Because they listened to him with something cold and astonished and dubious, since he sounded like it was the town he desired to live in and not the church and the people who composed the church, that he wanted to serve. As if he did not care about the people, the living people, about whether they wanted him here or not. And he being young too, and the old men and the old women trying to talk down his gleeful excitement with serious matters of the church and its responsibilities and his own.

And they told Byron how the young minister was still excited even after six months, still talking about the Civil War and his grandfather, a cavalryman, who was killed, and about General Grant's stores burning in Jefferson until it did not make sense at all. They told Byron how he seemed to talk that way in the pulpit too, wild too in the pulpit, using religion as though it were a dream. Not a nightmare, but something which went faster than the words in the Book; a sort of cyclone that did not even need to touch the actual earth. And the old men and women did not like that, either.

It was as if he couldn't get religion and that galloping cavalry and his dead grandfather shot from the galloping horse untangled from each other, even in the pulpit. And that he could not untangle them in his private life, at home either, perhaps. Perhaps he did not even try to at home, Byron thought, thinking how that is the sort of thing that men do to the women who belong to them; thinking that that is why women have to be strong and should not be held blameable for what they do with or for or because of men, since God knew that being anybody's wife was a tricky enough business.

They told him how the wife was a small, quietlooking girl who at first the town thought just had nothing to say for herself. But the town said that if Hightower had just been a more dependable kind of man, the kind of man a minister should be instead of being born about thirty years after the only day he seemed to have ever lived in—that day when his grandfather was shot from the galloping horse—she would have been all right too. But he was not, and the neighbors would hear her weeping in the parsonage in the afternoons or late at night, and the neighbors knowing that the husband would not know what to do about it because he did not know what was wrong.

And how sometimes she would not even come to the church, where her own husband was preaching, even on Sunday, and they would look at him and wonder if he even knew that she was not there, if he had not even forgot that he ever had a wife, up there in the pulpit with his hands flying around him and the dogma he was supposed to preach all full of galloping cavalry and defeat and glory just as when he tried to tell them on the street about the galloping horses, it in turn would get all mixed up with absolution and choirs of marital seraphim, until it was natural that the old men and women should believe that what he preached in God's own house on God's own day verged on actual sacrilege.

And they told Byron how after about a year in Jefferson, the wife began to wear that frozen look on her face, and when the church ladies would go to call Hightower would meet them alone, in his shirt sleeves and without any collar, in a flurry, and for a time it would seem as though

he could not even think what they had come for and what he ought to do.

Then he would invite them in and excuse himself and go out. And they would not hear a sound anywhere in the house, sitting there in their Sunday dresses, looking at one another and about the room, listening and not hearing a sound. And then he would come back with his coat and collar on and sit and talk with them about the church and the sick, and they talking back, bright and quiet, still listening and maybe watching the door, maybe wondering if he knew what they believed that they already knew.

The ladies quit going there. Soon they did not even see the minister's wife on the street. And he still acting like there was nothing wrong. And then she would be gone for a day or two; they would see her get on the early train, with her face beginning to get thin and gaunted as though she never ate enough and that frozen look on it as if she were not seeing what she was looking at. And he would tell that she had gone to visit her people downstate somewhere, until one day, during one of her absences, a Jefferson woman shopping in Memphis saw her walking fast into a hotel there. It was one Saturday that the woman returned home and told it.

But the next day Hightower was in the pulpit, with religion and the galloping cavalry all mixed up again, and the wife returned Monday and the following Sunday she came to church again, for the first time in six or seven months, sitting by herself at the rear of the church. She came every Sunday after that for a while. Then she was gone again, in the middle of the week this time (it was in July and hot) and Hightower said that she had gone to see her folks again, in the country where it would be cool; and the old men, the elders, and the old women watching him, not knowing if he believed what he was telling or not, and the young people talking behind his back.

But they could not tell whether he himself believed or not what he told them, if he cared or not, with his religion and his grandfather being shot from the galloping horse all mixed up, as though the seed which

his grandfather had transmitted to him had been on the horse too that night and had been killed too and time had stopped there and then for the seed and nothing had happened in time since, not even him.

The wife returned before Sunday. It was hot; the old people said that it was the hottest spell which the town had ever known. She came to church that Sunday and took her seat on a bench at the back, alone. In the middle of the sermon she sprang from the bench and began to scream, to shriek something toward the pulpit, shaking her hands toward the pulpit where her husband had ceased talking, leaning forward with his hands raised and stopped. Some people nearby tried to hold her but she fought them, and they told Byron how she stood there, in the aisle now, shrieking and shaking her hands at the pulpit where her husband leaned with his hand still raised and his wild face frozen in the shape of the thundering and allegorical period which he had not completed.

They did not know whether she was shaking her hands at him or at God. Then he came down and approached and she stopped fighting then and he led her out, with the heads turning as they passed, until the superintendent told the organist to play. That afternoon the elders held a meeting behind locked doors. The people did not know what went on behind them, save that Hightower returned and entered the vestry room and closed the door behind him too.

But the people did not know what had happened. They only knew that the church made up a sum to send the wife to an institution, a sanatorium, and that Hightower took her there and came back and preached the next Sunday, as usual. The women, the neighbors, some of whom had not entered the parsonage in months, were kind to him, taking him dishes now and then, telling one another and their husbands what a mess the parsonage was in, and how the minister seemed to eat like an animal—just when he got hungry and just whatever he could find. Every two weeks he would go and visit his wife in the sanatorium, but he always returned after a day or so; and on Sunday, in the pulpit again, it was as though the whole thing had never happened. The

people would ask about her health, curious and kind, and he would thank them.

Then Sunday he would be again in the pulpit, with his wild hands and his wild rapt eager voice in which like phantoms God and salvation and the galloping horses and his dead grandfather thundered, while below him the elders sat, and the congregation, puzzled and outraged. In the fall the wife came home. She looked better. She had put on a little flesh. She had changed more than that, even. Perhaps it was that she seemed chastened now; awake, anyway. Anyhow she was now like the ladies had wanted her to be all the time, as they believed that the minister's wife should be. She attended church and prayer meeting regularly, and the ladies called upon her and she called upon them, sitting quiet and humble, even in her own house, while they told her how to run it and what to wear and what to make her husband eat.

It might even be said that they forgave her. No crime or transgression had been actually named and no penance had been actually set. But the town did not believe that the ladies had forgot those previous mysterious trips, with Memphis as their destination and for that purpose regarding which all had the same conviction, though none ever put it into words, spoke it aloud, since the town believed that good women dont forget things easily, good or bad, lest the taste and savor of forgiveness die from the palate of conscience.

Because the town believed that the ladies knew the truth, since it believed that bad women can be fooled by badness, since they have to spend some of their time not being suspicious. But that no good woman can be fooled by it because, by being good herself, she does not need to worry anymore about hers or anybody else's goodness; hence she has plenty of time to smell out sin. That was why, they believed, that good can fool her almost any time into believing that it is evil, but that evil itself can never fool her.

So when after four or five months the wife went away again on a visit and the husband said again that she had gone to visit her people, the town believed that this time even he was not fooled. Anyway, she came

back and he went on preaching every Sunday like nothing had happened, making his calls on the people and the sick and talking about the church. But the wife did not come to church anymore, and soon the ladies stopped calling on her, going to the parsonage at all. And even the neighbors on either side would no longer see her about the house. And soon it was as though she were not there; as though everyone had agreed that she was not there, that the minister did not even have a wife. And he preaching to them every Sunday, not even telling them now that she had gone to visit her people. Maybe he was glad of that, the town thought. Maybe he was glad to not have to lie anymore.

So nobody saw her when she got on the train that Friday, or maybe it was Saturday, the day itself. It was Sunday morning's paper which they saw, telling how she had jumped or fallen from a hotel window in Memphis Saturday night, and was dead. There had been a man in the room with her. He was arrested. He was drunk. They were registered as man and wife, under a fictitious name.

The police found her rightful name where she had written it herself on a piece of paper and then torn it up and thrown it into the waste basket. The papers printed it, with the story: wife of the Reverend Gail Hightower, of Jefferson, Mississippi. And the story told how the paper telephoned to the husband at two a.m. and how the husband said that he had nothing to say. And when they reached the church that Sunday morning the yard was full of Memphis reporters taking pictures of the church and the parsonage. Then Hightower came. The reporters tried to stop him but he walked right through them and into the church and up into the pulpit.

The old ladies and some of the old men were already in the church, horrified and outraged, not so much about the Memphis business as about the presence of the reporters. But when Hightower came in and actually went up into the pulpit, they forgot about the reporters even. The ladies got up first and began to leave. Then the men got up too, and then the church was empty save for the minister in the pulpit, leaning a little forward, with the Book open and his hands propped on either side of it and his head not bowed either, and the Memphis

reporters (they had followed him into the church) sitting in a line in the rear pew. They said he was not watching his congregation leaving; he was not looking at anything.

They told Byron about it; about how at last the minister closed the Book, carefully, and came down into the empty church and walked up the aisle without once looking at the row of reporters, like the congregation had done, and went out the door. There were some photographers waiting out in front, with the cameras all set up and their heads under the black cloths. The minister had evidently expected this. Because he emerged from the church with an open hymnbook held before his face.

But the cameramen had evidently expected that too. Because they fooled him. Very likely he was not used to it and so was easily fooled, they told Byron. One of the cameramen had his machine set up to one side, and the minister did not see that one at all, or until too late. He was keeping his face concealed from the one in front, and next day when the picture came out in the paper it had been taken from the side, with the minister in the middle of a step, holding the hymnbook before his face. And behind the book his lips were drawn back as though he were smiling. But his teeth were tight together and his face looked like the face of Satan in the old prints. The next day he brought his wife home and buried her. The town came to the ceremony. It was not a funeral. He did not take the body to the church at all. He took it straight to the cemetery and he was preparing to read from the Book himself when another minister came forward and took it from his hand. A lot of the people, the younger ones, remained after he and the others had gone, looking at the grave.

Then even the members of the other churches knew that his own had asked him to resign, and that he refused. The next Sunday a lot of them from the other churches came to his church to see what would happen. He came and entered the church. The congregation as one rose and walked out, leaving the minister and those from the other churches who had come as though to a show. So he preached to them, as he had always preached: with that rapt fury which they had considered

sacrilege and which those from the other churches believed to be out and out insanity.

He would not resign. The elders asked the church board to recall him. But after the story, the pictures in the papers and all, no other town would have him either. There was nothing against him personally, they all insisted.

He was just unlucky. He was just born unlucky. So the people quit coming to the church at all, even the ones from the other churches who had come out of curiosity for a time: he was no longer even a show now; he was now only an outrage. But he would reach the church at the old hour each Sunday morning and go to the pulpit, and the congregation would rise and leave, and the loafers and such would gather along the street outside and listen to him preaching and praying in the empty church. And the Sunday after that when he arrived the door was locked, and the loafers watched him try the door and then desist and stand there with his face still not bowed, with the street lined with men who never went to church anyway, and little boys who did not know exactly what it was but that it was something, stopping and looking with still round eyes at the man standing quite motionless before the locked door. The next day the town heard how he had gone to the elders and resigned his pulpit for the good of the church.

Then the town was sorry with being glad, as people sometimes are sorry for those whom they have at last forced to do as they wanted them to. They thought of course that he would go away now, and the church made up a collection for him to go away on and settle somewhere else. Then he refused to leave the town. They told Byron of the consternation, the more than outrage, when they learned that he had bought the little house on the back street where he now lives and has lived ever since; and the elders held another meeting because they said that they had given him the money to go away on, and when he spent it for something else he had accepted the money under false pretences.

They went to him and told him so. He asked them to excuse him; he returned to the room with the sum which had been given him, to the exact penny and in the exact denominations, and insisted that they take it back. But they refused, and he would not tell where he had got the money to buy the house with. So by the next day, they told Byron, there were some who said that he had insured his wife's life and then paid someone to murder her. But everyone knew that this was not so, including the ones who told and repeated it and the ones who listened when it was told.

But he would not leave the town. Then one day they saw the little sign which he had made and painted himself and set in his front yard, and they knew that he meant to stay. He still kept the cook, a negro woman. He had had her all the time. But they told Byron how as soon as his wife was dead, the people seemed to realise all at once that the negro was a woman, that he had that negro woman in the house alone with him all day. And how the wife was hardly cold in the shameful grave before the whispering began. About how he had made his wife go bad and commit suicide because he was not a natural husband, a natural man, and that the negro woman was the reason.

And that's all it took; all that was lacking. Byron listened quietly, thinking to himself how people everywhere are about the same, but that it did seem that in a small town, where evil is harder to accomplish, where opportunities for privacy are scarcer, that people can invent more of it in other people's names. Because that was all it required: that idea, that single idle word blown from mind to mind. One day the cook quit. They heard how one night a party of carelessly masked men went to the minister's house and ordered him to fire her.

Then they heard how the next day the woman told that she quit herself because her employer asked her to do something which she said was against God and nature. And it was said that some masked men had scared her into quitting because she was what is known as a high brown and it was known that there were two or three men in the town who would object to her doing whatever it was which she considered contrary to God and nature, since, as some of the younger men said, if

a nigger woman considered it against God and nature, it must be pretty bad. Anyway, the minister couldn't—or didn't—get another woman cook.

Possibly the men scared all the other negro women in town that same night. So he did his own cooking for a while, until they heard one day that he had a negro man to cook for him. And that finished him, sure enough. Because that evening some men, not masked either, took the negro man out and whipped him. And when Hightower waked the next morning his study window was broken and on the floor lay a brick with a note tied to it, commanding him to get out of town by sunset and signed k.k.k. And he did not go, and on the second morning a man found him in the woods about a mile from town. He had been tied to a tree and beaten unconscious.

He refused to tell who had done it. The town knew that that was wrong, and some of the men came to him and tried again to persuade him to leave Jefferson, for his own good, telling him that next time they might kill him. But he refused to leave. He would not even talk about the beating, even when they offered to prosecute the men who had done it. But he would do neither. He would neither tell, nor depart.

Then all of a sudden the whole thing seemed to blow away, like an evil wind. It was as though the town realised at last that he would be a part of its life until he died, and that they might as well become reconciled. As though, Byron thought, the entire affair had been a lot of people performing a play and that now and at last they had all played out the parts which had been allotted them and now they could live quietly with one another.

They let the minister alone. They would see him working in the yard or the garden, and on the street and in the stores with a small basket on his arm, and they would speak to him. They knew that he did his own cooking and housework, and after a while the neighbors began to send him dishes again, though they were the sort of dishes which they would have sent to a poor mill family. But it was food, and wellmeant.

Because, as Byron thought, people forget a lot in twenty years. 'Why,' he thinks, 'I dont reckon there is anybody in Jefferson that knows that he sits in that window from sundown to full dark every day that comes, except me. Or what the inside of that house looks like. And they dont even know that I know, or likely they'd take us both out and whip us again, since folks dont seem to forget much longer than they remember.' Because there is one other thing, which came into Byron's own knowledge and observation, in his own time since he came to Jefferson to live.

Hightower read a great deal. That is, Byron had examined with a kind of musing and respectful consternation the books which lined the study walls: books of religion and history and science of whose very existence Byron had never heard. One day about four years ago a negro man came running up to the minister's house from his cabin on the edge of town immediately behind it, and said that his wife was at childbed. Hightower had no telephone and he told the negro to run next door and call a doctor. He watched the negro go to the gate of the next house.

But instead of entering, the negro stood there for a time and then went on up the street toward town, walking; Hightower knew that the man would walk all the way to town and then spend probably thirty minutes more getting in touch with a doctor, in his fumbling and timeless negro fashion, instead of asking some white woman to telephone for him.

Then he went to his kitchen door and he could hear the woman in the not so distant cabin, wailing. He waited no longer. He ran down to the cabin and found that the woman had got out of bed, for what reason he never learned, and she was now on her hands and knees on the floor, trying to get back into the bed, screaming and wailing. He got her back into the bed and told her to lie still, frightened her into obeying him, and ran back to his house and took one of the books from the study shelf and got his razor and some cord and ran back to the cabin and delivered the child. But it was already dead; the doctor when arrived said that she had doubtless injured it when she left the bed

where Hightower found her. He also approved of Hightower's work, and the husband was satisfied too.

'But it was just too close to that other business,' Byron thought, 'even despite the fifteen years between them.' Because within two days there were those who said that the child was Hightower's and that he had let it die deliberately. But Byron believed that even the ones who said this did not believe it. He believed that the town had had the habit of saying things about the disgraced minister which they did not believe themselves for too long a time to break themselves of it. 'Because always,' he thinks, 'when anything gets to be a habit, it also manages to get a right good distance away from truth and fact.' And he remembers one evening when he and Hightower were talking together and Hightower said: "They are good people. They must believe what they must believe, especially as it was I who was at one time both master and servant of their believing.

And so it is not for me to outrage their believing nor for Byron Bunch to say that they are wrong. Because all that any man can hope for is to be permitted to live quietly among his fellows." That was soon after Byron had heard the story, shortly after the evening visits to Hightower's study began and Byron still wondered why the other remained in Jefferson, almost within sight of, and within hearing of, the church which had disowned and expelled him. One evening Byron asked him.

"Why do you spend your Saturday afternoons working at the mill while other men are taking pleasure downtown?" Hightower said.

"I dont know," Byron said. "I reckon that's just my life."

"And I reckon this is just my life, too," the other said. 'But I know now why it is,' Byron thinks. 'It is because a fellow is more afraid of the trouble he might have than he ever is of the trouble he's already got. He'll cling to trouble he's used to before he'll risk a change. Yes. A man will talk about how he'd like to escape from living folks. But it's the dead folks that do him the damage. It's the dead ones that lay quiet in one place and dont try to hold him, that he cant escape from.'

They have thundered past now and crashed silently on into the dusk; night has fully come. Yet he still sits at the study window, the room still dark behind him. The street lamp at the corner flickers and glares, so that the bitten shadows of the unwinded maples seem to toss faintly upon the August darkness. From a distance, quite faint though quite clear, he can hear the sonorous waves of massed voices from the church: a sound at once austere and rich, abject and proud, swelling and falling in the quiet summer darkness like a harmonic tide.

Then he sees a man approaching along the street. On a week night he would have recognised the figure, the shape, the carriage and gait. But on Sunday evening, and with the echo of the phantom hooves still crashing soundlessly in the duskfilled study, he watches quietly the puny, unhorsed figure moving with that precarious and meretricious cleverness of animals balanced on their hinder legs; that cleverness of which the man animal is so fatuously proud and which constantly betrays him by means of natural laws like gravity and ice, and by the very extraneous objects which he has himself invented, like motor cars and furniture in the dark, and the very refuse of his own eating left upon floor or pavement; and he thinks quietly how right the ancients were in making the horse an attribute and symbol of warriors and kings, when he sees the man in the street pass the low sign and turn into his gate and approach the house. He sits forward then, watching the man come up the dark walk toward the dark door; he hears the man stumble heavily at the dark bottom step. "Byron Bunch," he says. "In town on Sunday night. Byron Bunch in town on Sunday."

Chapter 4

They sit facing one another across the desk. The study is lighted now, by a greenshaded reading lamp sitting upon the desk. Hightower sits behind it, in an ancient swivel chair, Byron in a straight chair opposite. Both their faces are just without the direct downward pool of light from the shaded lamp. Through the open window the sound of singing from the distant church comes. Byron talks in a flat, level voice.

“It was a strange thing. I thought that if there ever was a place where a man would be where the chance to do harm could not have found him, it would have been out there at the mill on a Saturday evening. And with the house burning too, right in my face, you might say. It was like all the time I was eating dinner and I would look up now and then and see that smoke and I would think, ‘Well, I wont see a soul out here this evening, anyway. I aint going to be interrupted this evening, at least.’

And then I looked up and there she was, with her face all fixed for smiling and with her mouth all fixed to say his name, when she saw that I wasn’t him. And I never knowed any better than to blab the whole thing.” He grimaces faintly. It is not a smile. His upper lip just lifts momentarily, the movement, even the surface wrinkling, travelling no further and vanishing almost at once. “I never even suspicioned then that what I didn’t know was not the worst of it.”

“It must have been a strange thing that could keep Byron Bunch in Jefferson over Sunday,” Hightower says. “But she was looking for him. And you helped her to find him. Wasn’t what you did what she wanted, what she had come all the way from Alabama to find?”

“I reckon I told her, all right. I reckon it aint any question about that. With her watching me, sitting there, swole-bellied, watching me with them eyes that a man could not have lied to if he had wanted. And me blabbing on, with that smoke right yonder in plain sight like it was put there to warn me, to make me watch my mouth only I never had the sense to see it.”

“Oh,” Hightower says. “The house that burned yesterday. But I dont see any connection between— Whose house was it? I saw the smoke, myself, and I asked a passing negro, but he didn’t know.”

“That old Burden house,” Byron says. He looks at the other. They look at one another. Hightower is a tall man, and he was thin once. But he is not thin now. His skin is the color of flour sacking and his upper body in shape is like a loosely filled sack falling from his gaunt shoulders of its own weight, upon his lap. Then Byron says, “You aint heard yet.” The

other watches him. He says in a musing tone: "That would be for me to do too. To tell on two days to two folks something they aint going to want to hear and that they hadn't ought to have to hear at all."

"What is this that you think I will not want to hear? What is it that I have not heard?"

"Not the fire," Byron says. "They got out of the fire all right."

"They? I understood that Miss Burden lived there alone."

Again Byron looks at the other for a moment. But Hightower's face is merely grave and interested. "Brown and Christmas," Byron says. Still Hightower's face does not change in expression. "You aint heard that, even," Byron says. "They lived out there."

"Lived out there? They boarded in the house?"

"No. In a old nigger cabin in the back. Christmas fixed it up three years ago. He's been living in it ever since, with folks wondering where he slept at night. Then when him and Brown set up together, he took Brown in with him."

"Oh," Hightower said. "But I dont see . . . If they were comfortable, and Miss Burden didn't—"

"I reckon they got along. They were selling whiskey, using that old place for a headquarters, a blind. I dont reckon she knew that, about the whiskey. Leastways, folks dont know if she ever knew or not. They say that Christmas started it by himself three years ago, just selling to a few regular customers that didn't even know one another. But when he took Brown in with him, I reckon Brown wanted to spread out. Selling it by the half a pint out of his shirt bosom in any alley and to anybody. Selling what he never drunk, that is. And I reckon the way they got the whiskey they sold would not have stood much looking into."

Because about two weeks after Brown quit out at the mill and taken to riding around in that new car for his steady work, he was downtown drunk one Saturday night and bragging to a crowd in the barbershop something about him and Christmas in Memphis one night, or on a road close to Memphis. Something about them and that new car hid in the bushes and Christmas with a pistol, and a lot more about a truck and a hundred gallons of something, until Christmas come in quick and walked up to him and jerked him out of the chair.

And Christmas saying in that quiet voice of his, that aint pleasant and aint mad either: 'You ought to be careful about drinking so much of this Jefferson hair tonic. It's gone to your head. First thing you know you'll have a hairlip.' Holding Brown up he was with one hand and slapping his face with the other. They didn't look like hard licks. But the folks could see the red even through Brown's whiskers when Christmas' hand would come away between licks. 'You come out and get some fresh air,' Christmas says. 'You're keeping these folks from working.' " He muses. He speaks again: "And there she was, sitting there on them staves, watching me and me blabbing the whole thing to her, and her watching me. And then she says, 'Did he have a little white scar right here by his mouth?' "

"And Brown is the man," Hightower says. He sits motionless, watching Byron with a sort of quiet astonishment. There is nothing militant in it, nothing of outraged morality. It is as though he were listening to the doings of people of a different race. "Her husband a bootlegger. Well, well, well." Yet Byron can see in the other's face something latent, about to wake, of which Hightower himself is unaware, as if something inside the man were trying to warn or prepare him. But Byron thinks that this is just the reflection of what he himself already knows and is about to tell.

"And so I had already told her before I knew it. And I could have bit my tongue in two, even then, even when I thought that that was all." He is not looking at the other now. Through the window, faint yet clear, the blended organ and voices come from the distant church, across the still evening. I wonder if he hears it too Byron thinks Or maybe he has

listened to it so much and so long that he dont even hear it anymore. Dont even need to not listen “And she set there all the evening while I worked, and the smoke dying away at last, and me trying to think what to tell her and what to do. She wanted to go right on out there, for me to tell her the way. When I told her it was two miles she just kind of smiled, like I was a child or something. ‘I done come all the way from Alabama,’ she said. ‘I reckon I aint going to worry about two miles more.’

And then I told her . . .” His voice ceases. He appears to contemplate the floor at his feet. He looks up. “I lied, I reckon. Only in a way it was not a lie. It was because I knowed there would be folks out there watching the fire, and her coming up, trying to find him. I didn’t know myself, then, the other. The rest of it. The worst of it. So I told her that he was busy at a job he had, and that the best time to find him would be downtown after six o’clock. And that was the truth.

Because I reckon he does call it work, carrying all them cold little bottles nekkid against his chest, and if he ever was away from the square it was just because he was a little behind in getting back or had just stepped into a alley for a minute. So I persuaded her to wait and she set there and I went on working, trying to decide what to do. When I think now how worried I was on what little I knowed, now when I know the rest of it, it dont seem like I had anything then to worry me at all. All day I have been thinking how easy it would be if I could just turn back to yesterday and not have any more to worry me than I had then.”

“I still cannot see what you have to worry about,” Hightower says. “It is not your fault that the man is what he is or she what she is. You did what you could. All that any stranger could be expected to do. Unless . . .” His voice ceases also. Then it dies away on that inflection, as if idle thinking had become speculation and then something like concern. Opposite him Byron sits without moving, his face lowered and grave. And opposite Byron, Hightower does not yet think love. He remembers only that Byron is still young and has led a life of celibacy and hard labor, and that by Byron’s telling the woman whom he has never seen possesses some disturbing quality at least, even though Byron still

believes that it is only pity. So he watches Byron now with a certain narrowness neither cold nor warm, while Byron continues in that flat voice: about how at six o'clock he had still decided on nothing; that when he and Lena reached the square he was still undecided.

And now there begins to come into Hightower's puzzled expression a quality of shrinking and foreboding as Byron talks quietly, telling about how he decided after they reached the square to take Lena on to Mrs Beard's. And Byron talking quietly, thinking, remembering: It was like something gone through the air, the evening, making the familiar faces of men appear strange, and he, who had not yet heard, without having to know that something had happened which made of the former dilemma of his innocence a matter for children, so that he knew before he knew what had happened, that Lena must not hear about it.

He did not even have to be told in words that he had surely found the lost Lucas Burch; it seemed to him now that only the crassest fatuousness and imbecility should have kept him unaware. It seemed to him that fate, circumstance, had set a warning in the sky all day long in that pillar of yellow smoke, and he too stupid to read it. And so he would not let them tell—the men whom they passed, the air that blew upon them full of it—lest she hear too.

Perhaps he knew at the time that she would have to know, hear, it sooner or later; that in a way it was her right to know. It just seemed to him that if he could only get her across the square and into a house his responsibility would be discharged. Not responsibility for the evil to which he held himself for no other reason than that of having spent the afternoon with her while it was happening, having been chosen by circumstance to represent Jefferson to her who had come afoot and without money for thirty days in order to reach there.

He did not hope nor intend to avoid that responsibility. It was just to give himself and her time to be shocked and surprised. He tells it quietly, fumbling, his face lowered, in his flat, inflectionless voice, while across the desk Hightower watches him with that expression of shrinking and denial.

They reached the boarding house at last and entered it. It was as though she felt foreboding too, watching him as they stood in the hall, speaking for the first time: "What is it them men were trying to tell you? What is it about that burned house?"

"It wasn't anything," he said, his voice sounding dry and light to him. "Just something about Miss Burden got hurt in the fire."

"How got hurt? How bad hurt?"

"I reckon not bad. Maybe not hurt at all. Just folks talking, like as not. Like they will." He could not look at her, meet her eyes at all. But he could feel her watching him, and he seemed to hear a myriad sounds: voices, the hushed tense voices about the town, about the square through which he had hurried her, where men met among the safe and familiar lights, telling it.

The house too seemed filled with familiar sounds, but mostly with inertia, a terrible procrastination as he gazed down the dim hall, thinking Why dont she come on. Why dont she come on Then Mrs Beard did come: a comfortable woman, with red arms and untidy grayish hair. "This here is Miz Burch," he said.

His expression was almost a glare: importunate, urgent. "She just got to town from Alabama. She is looking to meet her husband here. He aint come yet. So I brought her here, where she can rest some before she gets mixed up in the excitement of town. She aint been in town or talked to anybody yet, and so I thought maybe you could fix her up a place to get rested some before she has to hear talking and . . ." His voice ceased, died, recapitulant, urgent, importunate. Then he believed that she had got his meaning.

Later he knew that it was not because of his asking that she refrained from telling what he knew that she had also heard, but because she had already noticed the pregnancy and that she would have kept the

matter hidden anyway. She looked at Lena, once, completely, as strange women had been doing for four weeks now.

“How long does she aim to stay?” Mrs Beard said.

“Just a night or two,” Byron said. “Maybe just tonight. She’s looking to meet her husband here. She just got in, and she aint had time to ask or inquire—” His voice was still recapitulant, meaningful. Mrs Beard watched him now. He thought that she was still trying to get his meaning. But what she was doing was watching him grope, believing (or about to believe) that his fumbling had a different reason and meaning. Then she looked at Lena again. Her eyes were not exactly cold. But they were not warm.

“I reckon she aint got any business trying to go anywhere right now,” she said.

“That’s what I thought,” Byron said, quickly, eagerly. “With all the talk and excitement she might have to listen to, after not hearing no talk and excitement . . . If you are crowded tonight, I thought she might have my room.”

“Yes,” Mrs Beard said immediately. “You’ll be taking out in a few minutes, anyway. You want her to have your room until you get back Monday morning?”

“I aint going tonight,” Byron said. He did not look away. “I wont be able to go this time.” He looked straight into cold, already disbelieving eyes, watching her in turn trying to read his own, believing that she read what was there instead of what she believed was there. They say that it is the practiced liar who can deceive. But so often the practiced and chronic liar deceives only himself; it is the man who all his life has been selfconvicted of veracity whose lies find quickest credence.

“Oh,” Mrs Beard said. She looked at Lena again. “Aint she got any acquaintances in Jefferson?”

“She dont know nobody here,” Byron said. “Not this side of Alabama. Likely Mr Burch will show up in the morning.”

“Oh,” Mrs Beard said. “Where are you going to sleep?” But she did not wait for an answer. “I reckon I can fix her up a cot in my room for tonight. If she wont object to that.”

“That’ll be fine,” Byron said. “It’ll be fine.”

When the supper bell rang, he was all prepared. He had found a chance to speak to Mrs Beard. He had spent more time in inventing that lie than any yet. And then it was not necessary; that which he was trying to shield was its own protection. “Them men will be talking about it at the table,” Mrs Beard said. “I reckon a woman in her shape (and having to find a husband named Burch at the same time she thought with dry irony) aint got no business listening to any more of man’s devilment. You bring her in later, after they have all et.” Which Byron did. Lena ate heartily again, with that grave and hearty decorum, almost going to sleep in her plate before she had finished.

“It’s right tiring, travelling is,” she explained.

“You go set in the parlor and I’ll fix your cot,” Mrs Beard said.

“I’d like to help,” Lena said. But even Byron could see that she would not; that she was dead for sleep.

“You go set in the parlor,” Mrs Beard said. “I reckon Mr Bunch wont mind keeping you company for a minute or two.”

“I didn’t dare leave her alone,” Byron says. Beyond the desk Hightower has not moved. “And there we was setting, at the very time when it was all coming out downtown at the sheriff’s office, at the very time when Brown was telling it all; about him and Christmas and the whiskey and all. Only the whiskey wasn’t much news to folks, not since he had took Brown for a partner. I reckon the only thing folks wondered about was why Christmas ever took up with Brown. Maybe it was because like

not only finds like; it cant even escape from being found by its like. Even when it's just like in one thing, because even them two with the same like was different.

Christmas dared the law to make money, and Brown dared the law because he never even had sense enough to know he was doing it. Like that night in the barbershop and him drunk and talking loud until Christmas kind of run in and dragged him out. And Mr Maxey said, 'What do you reckon that was he pretty near told on himself and that other one?' and Captain McLendon said, 'I dont reckon about it at all,' and Mr Maxey said, 'Do you reckon they was actually holding up somebody else's liquor truck?' and McLendon said, 'Would it surprise you to hear that that fellow Christmas hadn't done no worse than that in his life?'

"That's what Brown was telling last night. But everybody knew about that. They had been saying for a good while that somebody ought to tell Miss Burden. But I reckon there wasn't anybody that wanted to go out there and tell her, because nobody knowed what was going to happen then. I reckon there are folks born here that never even saw her. I dont reckon I'd wanted to go out there to that old house where nobody ever saw her unless maybe it was folks in a passing wagon that would see her now and then standing in the yard in a dress and sunbonnet that some nigger women I know wouldn't have wore for its shape and how it made her look. Or maybe she already knew it. Being a Yankee and all, maybe she didn't mind. And then couldn't nobody have known what was going to happen.

"And so I didn't dare leave her alone until she was in bed. I aimed to come out and see you last night, right away. But I never dared to leave her. Them other boarders was passing up and down the hall and I didn't know when one of them would take a notion to come in and start talking about it and tell the whole thing; I could already hear them talking about it on the porch, and her still watching me with her face all fixed to ask me again about that fire.

And so I didn't dare leave her. And we was setting there in the parlor and she couldn't hardly keep her eyes open then, and me telling her how I would find him for her all right, only I wanted to come and talk to a preacher I knowed that could help her to get in touch with him.

And her setting there with her eyes closed while I was telling her, not knowing that I knew that her and that fellow wasn't married yet. She thought she had fooled everybody. And she asked me what kind of a man it was that I aimed to tell about her to and I told her and her setting there with her eyes closed so that at last I said, 'You ain't heard a word I been saying' and she kind of roused up, but without opening her eyes, and said, 'Can he still marry folks?' and I said, 'What? Can he what?' and she said, 'Is he still enough of a preacher to marry folks?' "

Hightower has not moved. He sits erect behind the desk, his forearms parallel upon the armrests of the chair. He wears neither collar nor coat. His face is at once gaunt and flabby; it is as though there were two faces, one imposed upon the other, looking out from beneath the pale, bald skull surrounded by a fringe of gray hair, from behind the twin motionless glares of his spectacles. That part of his torso visible above the desk is shapeless, almost monstrous, with a soft and sedentary obesity. He sits rigid; on his face now that expression of denial and flight has become definite. "Byron," he says; "Byron. What is this you are telling me?"

Byron ceases. He looks quietly at the other, with an expression of commiseration and pity. "I knowed you had not heard yet. I knowed it would be for me to tell you."

They look at one another. "What is it I haven't heard yet?"

"About Christmas. About yesterday and Christmas. Christmas is part nigger. About him and Brown and yesterday."

"Part negro," Hightower says. His voice sounds light, trivial, like a thistle bloom falling into silence without a sound, without any weight. He does not move. For a moment longer he does not move. Then there seems

to come over his whole body, as if its parts were mobile like face features, that shrinking and denial, and Byron sees that the still, flaccid, big face is suddenly slick with sweat. But his voice is light and calm. "What about Christmas and Brown and yesterday?" he says.

The sound of music from the distant church has long since ceased. Now there is no sound in the room save the steady shrilling of insects and the monotonous sound of Byron's voice. Beyond the desk Hightower sits erect. Between his parallel and downturned palms and with his lower body concealed by the desk, his attitude is that of an eastern idol.

"It was yesterday morning. There was a countryman coming to town in a wagon with his family. He was the one that found the fire. No: he was the second one to get there, because he told how there was already one fellow there when he broke down the door.

He told about how he come into sight of the house and he said to his wife how it was a right smart of smoke coming out of that kitchen, and about how the wagon come on and then his wife said, 'That house is afire.' And I reckon maybe he stopped the wagon and they set there in the wagon for a while, looking at the smoke, and I reckon that after a while he said, 'It looks like it is.' And I reckon it was his wife that made him get down and go and see.

'They dont know it's afire,' she said, I reckon. 'You go up there and tell them.' And he got out of the wagon and went up onto the porch and stood there, hollering 'Hello. Hello' for a while. He told how he could hear the fire then, inside the house, and then he hit the door a lick with his shoulder and went in and then he found the one that had found that fire first. It was Brown. But the countryman didn't know that.

He just said it was a drunk man in the hall that looked like he had just finished falling down the stairs, and the countryman said, 'Your house is afire, mister,' before he realised how drunk the man was. And he told how the drunk man kept on saying how there wasn't nobody upstairs

and that the upstairs was all afire anyway and there wasn't any use trying to save anything from up there.

"But the countryman knew there couldn't be that much fire upstairs because the fire was all back toward the kitchen. And besides, the man was too drunk to know, anyway. And he told how he suspected there was something wrong from the way the drunk man was trying to keep him from going upstairs. So he started upstairs, and the drunk fellow trying to hold him back, and he shoved the drunk man away and went on up the stairs.

He told how the drunk man tried to follow him, still telling him how it wasn't anything upstairs, and he said that when he come back down again and thought about the drunk fellow, he was gone. But I reckon it was some time before he remembered to think about Brown again. Because he went on up the stairs and begun hollering again, opening the doors, and then he opened the right door and he found her."

He ceases. Then there is no sound in the room save the insects. Beyond the open window the steady insects pulse and beat, drowsy and myriad. "Found her," Hightower says. "It was Miss Burden he found." He does not move. Byron does not look at him, he might be contemplating his hands upon his lap while he talks.

"She was lying on the floor. Her head had been cut pretty near off; a lady with the beginning of gray hair. The man said how he stood there and he could hear the fire and there was smoke in the room itself now, like it had done followed him in. And how he was afraid to try to pick her up and carry her out because her head might come clean off. And then he said how he run back down the stairs again and out the front without even noticing that the drunk fellow was gone, and down to the road and told his wife to whip the team on to the nearest telephone and call for the sheriff too.

And how he run back around the house to the cistern and he said he was already drawing up a bucket of water before he realised how foolish that was, with the whole back end of the house afire good now.

So he run back into the house and up the stairs again and into the room and jerked a cover off the bed and rolled her onto it and caught up the corners and swung it onto his back like a sack of meal and carried it out of the house and laid it down under a tree.

And he said that what he was scared of happened. Because the cover fell open and she was laying on her side, facing one way, and her head was turned clean around like she was looking behind her. And he said how if she could just have done that when she was alive, she might not have been doing it now.”

Byron ceases and looks, glances once, at the man beyond the desk. Hightower has not moved. His face about the twin blank glares of the spectacles is sweating quietly and steadily. “And the sheriff come out, and the fire department come too. But there wasn’t nothing it could do because there wasn’t any water for the hose. And that old house burned all evening and I could see the smoke from the mill and I showed it to her when she come up, because I didn’t know then. And they brought Miss Burden to town, and there was a paper at the bank that she had told them would tell what to do with her when she died. It said how she had a nephew in the North where she come from, her folks come from. And they telegraphed the nephew and in two hours they got the answer that the nephew would pay a thousand dollars’ reward for who done it.

“And Christmas and Brown were both gone. The sheriff found out how somebody had been living in that cabin, and then right off everybody begun to tell about Christmas and Brown, that had kept it a secret long enough for one of them or maybe both of them to murder that lady. But nobody could find either one of them until last night. The countryman didn’t know it was Brown that he found drunk in the house. Folks thought that him and Christmas had both run, maybe.

And then last night Brown showed up. He was sober then, and he come onto the square about eight o’clock, wild, yelling about how it was Christmas that killed her and making his claim on that thousand dollars. They got the officers and took him to the sheriff’s office and they told

him the reward would be his all right soon as he caught Christmas and proved he done it.

And so Brown told. He told about how Christmas had been living with Miss Burden like man and wife for three years, until Brown and him teamed up. At first, when he moved out to live in the cabin with Christmas, Brown said that Christmas told him he had been sleeping in the cabin all the time. Then he said how one night he hadn't gone to sleep and he told how he heard Christmas get up out of bed and come and stand over Brown's cot for a while, like he was listening, and then he tiptoed to the door and opened it quiet and went out. And Brown said how he got up and followed Christmas and saw him go up to the big house and go in the back door, like either it was left open for him or he had a key to it.

Then Brown come on back to the cabin and got into bed. But he said how he couldn't go to sleep for laughing, thinking about how smart Christmas thought he was. And he was laying there when Christmas come back in about a hour. Then he said how he couldn't keep from laughing no longer, and he says to Christmas, 'You old son of a gun.' Then he said how Christmas got right still in the dark, and how he laid there laughing, telling Christmas how he wasn't such a slick one after all and joking Christmas about gray hair and about how if Christmas wanted him to, he would take it week about with him paying the house rent.

"Then he told how he found out that night that sooner or later Christmas was going to kill her or somebody. He said he was laying there, laughing, thinking that Christmas would just maybe get back in bed again, when Christmas struck a match. Then Brown said he quit laughing and he laid there and watched Christmas light the lantern and set it on the box by Brown's cot. Then Brown said how he wasn't laughing and he laid there and Christmas standing there by the cot, looking down at him.

'Now you got a good joke,' Christmas says. 'You can get a good laugh, telling them in the barbershop tomorrow night.' And Brown said he

didn't know that Christmas was mad and that he kind of said something back to Christmas, not meaning to make him mad, and Christmas said, in that still way of his: 'You dont get enough sleep. You stay awake too much. Maybe you ought to sleep more,' and Brown said, 'How much more?' and Christmas said, 'Maybe from now on.' And Brown said how he realised then that Christmas was mad and that it wasn't no time to joke him, and he said, 'Aint we buddies? What would I want to tell something that aint none of my business? Cant you trust me?' and Christmas said, 'I dont know. I dont care, neither. But you can trust me.' And he looked at Brown. 'Cant you trust me?' and Brown said he said 'Yes.'

"And he told then about how he was afraid that Christmas would kill Miss Burden some night, and the sheriff asked him how come he never reported his fear and Brown said he thought how maybe by not saying nothing he could stay out there and prevent it, without having to bother the officers with it; and the sheriff kind of grunted and said that was thoughtful of Brown and that Miss Burden would sholy appreciate it if she knowed. And then I reckon it begun to dawn on Brown that he had a kind of rat smell too.

Because he started in telling about how it was Miss Burden that bought Christmas that auto and how he would try to persuade Christmas to quit selling whiskey before he got them both into trouble; and the officers watching him and him talking faster and faster and more and more; about how he had been awake early Saturday morning and saw Christmas get up about dawn and go out.

And Brown knew where Christmas was going, and about seven o'clock Christmas come back into the cabin and stood there, looking at Brown. 'I've done it,' Christmas says. 'Done what?' Brown says. 'Go up to the house and see,' Christmas says. And Brown said how he was afraid then, but that he never suspected the truth. He just said that at the outside all he expected was that maybe Christmas just beat her some. And he said how Christmas went out again and then he got up and dressed and he was making a fire to cook his breakfast when he

happened to look out the door and he said how all the kitchen was afire up at the big house.

“ ‘What time was this?’ the sheriff says.

“ ‘About eight o’clock, I reckon,’ Brown says. ‘When a man would naturally be getting up. Unless he is rich. And God knows I aint that.’

“ ‘And that fire wasn’t reported until nigh eleven o’clock,’ the sheriff says. ‘And that house was still burning at three p.m. You mean to say a old wooden house, even a big one, would need seven hours to burn down in?’

“And Brown was setting there, looking this way and that, with them fellows watching him in a circle, hemming him in. ‘I’m just telling you the truth,’ Brown says. ‘That’s what you asked for.’ He was looking this way and that, jerking his head. Then he kind of hollered: ‘How do I know what time it was? Do you expect a man doing the work of a nigger slave at a sawmill to be rich enough to own a watch?’

“ ‘You aint worked at no sawmill nor at anything else in six weeks,’ the marshal says. ‘And a man that can afford to ride around all day long in a new car can afford to pass the courthouse often enough to see the clock and keep up with the time.’

“ ‘It wasn’t none of my car, I tell you!’ Brown says. ‘It was his. She bought it and give it to him; the woman he murdered give it to him.’

“ ‘That’s neither here nor there,’ the sheriff says. ‘Let him tell the rest of it.’

“And so Brown went on then, talking louder and louder and faster and faster, like he was trying to hide Joe Brown behind what he was telling on Christmas until Brown could get his chance to make a grab at that thousand dollars. It beats all how some folks think that making or getting money is a kind of game where there are not any rules at all. He told about how even when he saw the fire, he never dreamed that she

would still be in the house, let alone dead. He said how he never even thought to look into the house at all; that he was just figuring on how to put out the fire.

“ ‘And that was round eight a.m.,’ the sheriff says. ‘Or so you claim. And Hamp Waller’s wife never reported that fire until nigh eleven. It took you a right smart while to find out you couldn’t put out that fire with your bare hands.’ And Brown sitting there in the middle of them (they had locked the door, but the windows was lined with folks’ faces against the glass) with his eyes going this way and that and his lip lifted away from his teeth. ‘Hamp says that after he broke in the door, there was already a man inside that house,’ the sheriff says. ‘And that that man tried to keep him from going up the stairs.’ And him setting there in the center of them, with his eyes going and going.

“I reckon he was desperate by then. I reckon he could not only see that thousand dollars getting further and further away from him, but that he could begin to see somebody else getting it. I reckon it was like he could see himself with that thousand dollars right in his hand for somebody else to have the spending of it.

Because they said it was like he had been saving what he told them next for just such a time as this. Like he had knowed that if it come to a pinch, this would save him, even if it was almost worse for a white man to admit what he would have to admit than to be accused of the murder itself. ‘That’s right,’ he says. ‘Go on. Accuse me. Accuse the white man that’s trying to help you with what he knows. Accuse the white man and let the nigger go free. Accuse the white and let the nigger run.’

“ ‘Nigger?’ the sheriff said. ‘Nigger?’

“It’s like he knew he had them then. Like nothing they could believe he had done would be as bad as what he could tell that somebody else had done. ‘You’re so smart,’ he says. ‘The folks in this town is so smart. Fooled for three years. Calling him a foreigner for three years, when soon as I watched him three days I knew he wasn’t no more a foreigner

than I am. I knew before he even told me himself.’ And them watching him now, and looking now and then at one another.

“ ‘You better be careful what you are saying, if it is a white man you are talking about,’ the marshal says. ‘I dont care if he is a murderer or not.’

“ ‘I’m talking about Christmas,’ Brown says. ‘The man that killed that white woman after he had done lived with her in plain sight of this whole town, and you all letting him get further and further away while you are accusing the one fellow that can find him for you, that knows what he done. He’s got nigger blood in him. I knowed it when I first saw him. But you folks, you smart sheriffs and such. One time he even admitted it, told me he was part nigger. Maybe he was drunk when he done it: I dont know. Anyway, the next morning after he told me he come to me and he says (Brown was talking fast now, kind of glaring his eyes and his teeth both around at them, from one to another), he said to me, “I made a mistake last night.

Dont you make the same one.” And I said “How do you mean a mistake?” and he said, “You think a minute,” and I thought about something he done one night when me and him was in Memphis and I knowed my life wouldn’t be worth nothing if I ever crossed him and so I said, “I reckon I know what you mean. I aint going to meddle in what aint none of my business. I aint never done that yet, that I know of.” And you’d have said that, too,’ Brown says, ‘way out there, alone in that cabin with him and nobody to hear you if you was to holler. You’d have been scared too, until the folks you was trying to help turned in and accused you of the killing you never done.’ And there he sat, with his eyes going and going, and them in the room watching him and the faces pressed against the window from outside.

“ ‘A nigger,’ the marshal said. ‘I always thought there was something funny about that fellow.’

“Then the sheriff talked to Brown again. ‘And that’s why you didn’t tell what was going on out there until tonight?’

“And Brown setting there in the midst of them, with his lips snarled back and that little scar by his mouth white as a popcorn. ‘You just show me the man that would a done different,’ he says. ‘That’s all I ask. Just show me the man that would a lived with him enough to know him like I done, and done different.’

“ ‘Well,’ the sheriff says, ‘I believe you are telling the truth at last. You go on with Buck, now, and get a good sleep. I’ll attend to Christmas.’

“ ‘I reckon that means the jail,’ Brown says. ‘I reckon you’ll lock me up in jail while you get the reward.’

“ ‘You shut your mouth,’ the sheriff says, not mad. ‘If that reward is yours, I’ll see that you get it. Take him on, Buck.’

“The marshal come over and touched Brown’s shoulder and he got up. When they went out the door the ones that had been watching through the window crowded up: ‘Have you got him, Buck? Is he the one that done it?’

“ ‘No,’ Buck says. ‘You boys get on home. Get on to bed, now.’ ”

Byron’s voice ceases. Its flat, inflectionless, countrybred singsong dies into silence. He is now looking at Hightower with that look compassionate and troubled and still, watching across the desk the man who sits there with his eyes closed and the sweat running down his face like tears. Hightower speaks: “Is it certain, proved, that he has negro blood? Think, Byron; what it will mean when the people—if they catch . . . Poor man. Poor mankind.”

“That’s what Brown says,” Byron says, his tone quiet, stubborn, convinced. “And even a liar can be scared into telling the truth, same as a honest man can be tortured into telling a lie.”

“Yes,” Hightower says. He sits with his eyes closed, erect. “But they have not caught him yet. They have not caught him yet, Byron.”

Neither is Byron looking at the other. “Not yet. Not the last I heard. They took some bloodhounds out there today. But they hadn’t caught him when I heard last.”

“And Brown?”

“Brown,” Byron says. “Him. He went with them. He may have helped Christmas do it. But I dont reckon so. I reckon that setting fire to the house was about his limit. And why he done that, if he did, I reckon even he dont know. Unless maybe he thought that if the whole thing was just burned up, it would kind of not ever been at all, and then him and Christmas could go on riding around in that new car. I reckon he figured that what Christmas committed was not so much a sin as a mistake.”

His face is musing, downlooking; again it cracks faintly, with a kind of sardonic weariness. “I reckon he’s safe enough. I reckon she can find him now any time she wants, provided him and the sheriff aint out with the dogs. He aint trying to run—not with that thousand dollars hanging over his head, you might say. I reckon he wants to catch Christmas worse than any man of them.

He goes with them. They take him out of the jail and he goes along with them, and then they all come back to town and lock Brown up again. It’s right queer. Kind of a murderer trying to catch himself to get his own reward. He dont seem to mind though, except to begrudge the time while they aint out on the trail, the time wasted setting down. Yes. I’ll tell her tomorrow. I’ll just tell her that he is in hock for the time being, him and them two dogs. Maybe I’ll take her to town where she can see them, all three of them hitched to the other men, a-straining and yapping.”

“You haven’t told her yet.”

“I aint told her. Nor him. Because he might run again, reward or no reward. And maybe if he can catch Christmas and get that reward, he will marry her in time. But she dont know yet, no more than she

knowed yesterday when she got down from that wagon on the square. Swole-bellied, getting down slow from that strange wagon, among them strange faces, telling herself with a kind of quiet astonishment, only I dont reckon it was any astonishment in it, because she had come slow and afoot and telling never bothered her: 'My, my. Here I have come clean from Alabama, and now I am in Jefferson at last, sure enough.' ”

Chapter 5

It was after midnight. Though Christmas had been in bed for two hours, he was not yet asleep. He heard Brown before he saw him. He heard Brown approach the door and then blunder into it, in silhouette propping himself erect in the door. Brown was breathing heavily. Standing there between his propped arms, Brown began to sing in a saccharine and nasal tenor. The very longdrawn pitch of his voice seemed to smell of whiskey. “Shut it,” Christmas said. He did not move and his voice was not raised.

Yet Brown ceased at once. He stood for a moment longer in the door, propping himself upright. Then he let go of the door and Christmas heard him stumble into the room; a moment later he blundered into something. There was an interval filled with hard, labored breathing. Then Brown fell to the floor with a tremendous clatter, striking the cot on which Christmas lay and filling the room with loud and idiot laughter.

Christmas rose from his cot. Invisible beneath him Brown lay on the floor, laughing, making no effort to rise. “Shut it!” Christmas said. Brown still laughed. Christmas stepped across Brown and put his hand out toward where a wooden box that served for table sat, on which the lantern and matches were kept. But he could not find the box, and then he remembered the sound of the breaking lantern when Brown fell. He stooped, astride Brown, and found his collar and hauled him out from beneath the cot and raised Brown’s head and began to strike him with his flat hand, short, vicious, and hard, until Brown ceased laughing.

Brown was limp. Christmas held his head up, cursing him in a voice level as whispering. He dragged Brown over to the other cot and flung him onto it, face up. Brown began to laugh again. Christmas put his hand flat upon Brown's mouth and nose, shutting his jaw with his left hand while with the right he struck Brown again with those hard, slow, measured blows, as if he were meting them out by count. Brown had stopped laughing. He struggled. Beneath Christmas's hand he began to make a choked, gurgling noise, struggling. Christmas held him until he ceased and became still. Then Christmas slacked his hand a little. "Will you be quiet now?" he said. "Will you?"

Brown struggled again. "Take your black hand off of me, you damn niggerblooded—" The hand shut down again. Again Christmas struck him with the other hand upon the face. Brown ceased and lay still again. Christmas slacked his hand. After a moment Brown spoke, in a tone cunning, not loud: "You're a nigger, see? You said so yourself. You told me. But I'm white. I'm a wh—" The hand shut down. Again Brown struggled, making a choked whimpering sound beneath the hand, drooling upon the fingers. When he stopped struggling, the hand slacked. Then he lay still, breathing hard.

"Will you now?" Christmas said.

"Yes," Brown said. He breathed noisily. "Let me breathe. I'll be quiet. Let me breathe."

Christmas slacked his hand but he did not remove it. Beneath it Brown breathed easier, his breath came and went easier, with less noise. But Christmas did not remove the hand. He stood in the darkness above the prone body, with Brown's breath alternately hot and cold on his fingers, thinking quietly Something is going to happen to me. I am going to do something Without removing his left hand from Brown's face he could reach with his right across to his cot, to his pillow beneath which lay his razor with its five inch blade. But he did not do it. Perhaps thinking had already gone far enough and dark enough to tell him This is not the right one Anyway he did not reach for the razor.

After a time he removed his hand from Brown's face. But he did not go away. He still stood above the cot, his own breathing so quiet, so calm, as to make no sound even to himself. Invisible too, Brown breathed quieter now, and after a while Christmas returned and sat upon his cot and fumbled a cigarette and a match from his trousers hanging on the wall. In the flare of the match Brown was visible. Before taking the light, Christmas lifted the match and looked at Brown. Brown lay on his back, sprawled, one arm dangling to the floor. His mouth was open. While Christmas watched, he began to snore.

Christmas lit the cigarette and snapped the match toward the open door, watching the flame vanish in midair. Then he was listening for the light, trivial sound which the dead match would make when it struck the floor; and then it seemed to him that he heard it. Then it seemed to him, sitting on the cot in the dark room, that he was hearing a myriad sounds of no greater volume—voices, murmurs, whispers: of trees, darkness, earth; people: his own voice; other voices evocative of names and times and places—which he had been conscious of all his life without knowing it, which were his life, thinking God perhaps and me not knowing that too He could see it like a printed sentence, fullborn and already dead God loves me too like the faded and weathered letters on a last year's billboard God loves me too

He smoked the cigarette down without once touching it with his hand. He snapped it too toward the door. Unlike the match, it did not vanish in midflight. He watched it twinkle end over end through the door. He lay back on the cot, his hands behind his head, as a man lies who does not expect to sleep, thinking I have been in bed now since ten o'clock and I have not gone to sleep. I do not know what time it is but it is later than midnight and I have not yet been asleep "It's because she started praying over me," he said. He spoke aloud, his voice sudden and loud in the dark room, above Brown's drunken snoring. "That's it. Because she started praying over me."

He rose from the cot. His bare feet made no sound. He stood in the darkness, in his underclothes. On the other cot Brown snored. For a

moment Christmas stood, his head turned toward the sound. Then he went on toward the door.

In his underclothes and barefoot he left the cabin. It was a little lighter outdoors. Overhead the slow constellations wheeled, the stars of which he had been aware for thirty years and not one of which had any name to him or meant anything at all by shape or brightness or position. Ahead, rising from out a close mass of trees, he could see one chimney and one gable of the house. The house itself was invisible and dark.

No light shown and no sound came from it when he approached and stood beneath the window of the room where she slept, thinking If she is asleep too. If she is asleep The doors were never locked, and it used to be that at whatever hour between dark and dawn that the desire took him, he would enter the house and go to her bedroom and take his sure way through the darkness to her bed. Sometimes she would be awake and waiting and she would speak his name. At others he would waken her with his hard brutal hand and sometimes take her as hard and as brutally before she was good awake.

That was two years ago, two years behind them now, thinking Perhaps that is where outrage lies. Perhaps I believe that I have been tricked, fooled. That she lied to me about her age, about what happens to women at a certain age He said, aloud, solitary, in the darkness beneath the dark window: "She ought not to started praying over me. She would have been all right if she hadn't started praying over me.

It was not her fault that she got too old to be any good any more. But she ought to have had better sense than to pray over me." He began to curse her. He stood beneath the dark window, cursing her with slow and calculated obscenity. He was not looking at the window. In the less than half-light he appeared to be watching his body, seeming to watch it turning slow and lascivious in a whispering of gutter filth like a drowned corpse in a thick still black pool of more than water. He touched himself with his flat hands, hard, drawing his hands hard up his abdomen and chest inside his undergarment. It was held together by a single button at the top.

Once he had owned garments with intact buttons. A woman had sewed them on. That was for a time, during a time. Then the time passed. After that he would purloin his own garments from the family wash before she could get to them and replace the missing buttons. When she foiled him he set himself deliberately to learn and remember which buttons were missing and had been restored. With his pocket knife and with the cold and bloodless deliberation of a surgeon he would cut off the buttons which she had just replaced.

His right hand slid fast and smooth as the knife blade had ever done, up the opening in the garment. Edgewise it struck the remaining button a light, swift blow. The dark air breathed upon him, breathed smoothly as the garment slipped down his legs, the cool mouth of darkness, the soft cool tongue.

Moving again, he could feel the dark air like water; he could feel the dew under his feet as he had never felt dew before. He passed through the broken gate and stopped beside the road. The August weeds were thightall. Upon the leaves and stalks dust of a month of passing wagons lay. The road ran before him. It was a little paler than the darkness of trees and earth.

In one direction town lay. In the other the road rose to a hill. After a time a light began to grow beyond the hill, defining it. Then he could hear the car. He did not move. He stood with his hands on his hips, naked, thighdeep in the dusty weeds, while the car came over the hill and approached, the lights full upon him.

He watched his body grow white out of the darkness like a kodak print emerging from the liquid. He looked straight into the headlights as it shot past. From it a woman's shrill voice flew back, shrieking. "White bastards!" he shouted. "That's not the first of your bitches that ever saw . . ." But the car was gone. There was no one to hear, to listen. It was gone, sucking its dust and its light with it and behind it, sucking with it the white woman's fading cry. He was cold now.

It was as though he had merely come there to be present at a finality, and the finality had now occurred and he was free again. He returned to the house. Beneath the dark window he paused and hunted and found his undergarment and put it on. There was no remaining button at all now and he had to hold it together as he returned to the cabin. Already he could hear Brown snoring. He stood for a while at the door, motionless and silent, listening to the long, harsh, uneven suspirations ending each in a choked gurgle.

‘I must have hurt his nose more than I knew,’ he thought. ‘Damn son of a bitch.’ He entered and went to his cot, preparing to lie down. He was in the act of reclining when he stopped, halted, halfreclining. Perhaps the thought of himself lying there until daylight, with the drunken man snoring in the darkness and the intervals filled with the myriad voices, was more than he could bear.

Because he sat up and fumbled quietly beneath his cot and found his shoes and slipped them on and took from the cot the single half cotton blanket which composed his bedding, and left the cabin. About three hundred yards away the stable stood. It was falling down and there had not been a horse in it in thirty years, yet it was toward the stable that he went. He was walking quite fast. He was thinking now, aloud now, ‘Why in hell do I want to smell horses?’ Then he said, fumbling: “It’s because they are not women. Even a mare horse is a kind of man.”

He slept less than two hours. When he waked dawn was just beginning. Lying in the single blanket upon the loosely planked floor of the sagging and gloomy cavern acrid with the thin dust of departed hay and faintly ammoniac with that breathless desertion of old stables, he could see through the shutterless window in the eastern wall the primrose sky and the high, pale morning star of full summer.

He felt quite rested, as if he had slept an unbroken eight hours. It was the unexpected sleep, since he had not expected to sleep at all. With his feet again in the unlaced shoes and the folded blanket beneath his arm he descended the perpendicular ladder, feeling for the rotting and invisible rungs with his feet, lowering himself from rung to rung in

onehanded swoops. He emerged into the gray and yellow of dawn, the clean chill, breathing it deep.

The cabin now stood sharp against the increasing east, and the clump of trees also within which the house was hidden save for the single chimney. The dew was heavy in the tall grass. His shoes were wet at once. The leather was cold to his feet; against his bare legs the wet grass blades were like strokes of limber icicles. Brown had stopped snoring. When Christmas entered he could see Brown by the light from the eastern window. He breathed quietly now. 'Sober now,' Christmas thought. 'Sober and dont know it. Poor bastard.' He looked at Brown. 'Poor bastard. He'll be mad when he wakes up and finds out that he is sober again. Take him maybe a whole hour to get back drunk again.'

He put down the blanket and dressed, in the serge trousers, the white shirt a little soiled now, the bow tie. He was smoking. Nailed to the wall was a shard of mirror. In the fragment he watched his dim face as he knotted the tie. The stiff hat hung on a nail. He did not take it down. He took instead a cloth cap from another nail, and from the floor beneath his cot a magazine of that type whose covers bear either pictures of young women in underclothes or pictures of men in the act of shooting one another with pistols. From beneath the pillow on his cot he took his razor and a brush and a stick of shaving soap and put them into his pocket.

When he left the cabin it was quite light. The birds were in full chorus. This time he turned his back on the house. He went on past the stable and entered the pasture beyond it. His shoes and his trouser legs were soon sopping with gray dew. He paused and rolled his trousers gingerly to his knees and went on. At the end of the pasture woods began. The dew was not so heavy here, and he rolled his trousers down again. After a while he came to a small valley in which a spring rose.

He put down the magazine and gathered twigs and dried brush and made a fire and sat, his back against a tree and his feet to the blaze. Presently his wet shoes began to steam. Then he could feel the heat moving up his legs, and then all of a sudden he opened his eyes and

saw the high sun and that the fire had burned completely out, and he knew that he had been asleep. 'Damned if I haven't,' he thought. 'Damned if I haven't slept again.'

He had slept more than two hours this time, because the sun was shining down upon the spring itself, glinting and glancing upon the ceaseless water. He rose, stretching his cramped and stiffened back, waking his tingling muscles. From his pocket he took the razor, the brush, the soap. Kneeling beside the spring he shaved, using the water's surface for glass, stropping the long bright razor on his shoe.

He concealed the shaving things and the magazine in a clump of bushes and put on the tie again. When he left the spring he bore now well away from the house. When he reached the road he was a half mile beyond the house. A short distance further on stood a small store with a gasoline pump before it. He entered the store and a woman sold him crackers and a tin of potted meat. He returned to the spring, the dead fire.

He ate his breakfast with his back against the tree, reading the magazine while he ate. He had previously read but one story; he began now upon the second one, reading the magazine straight through as though it were a novel. Now and then he would look up from the page, chewing, into the sunshot leaves which arched the ditch. 'Maybe I have already done it,' he thought. 'Maybe it is no longer now waiting to be done.' It seemed to him that he could see the yellow day opening peacefully on before him, like a corridor, an arras, into a still chiaroscuro without urgency.

It seemed to him that as he sat there the yellow day contemplated him drowsily, like a prone and somnolent yellow cat. Then he read again. He turned the pages in steady progression, though now and then he would seem to linger upon one page, one line, perhaps one word. He would not look up then. He would not move, apparently arrested and held immobile by a single word which had perhaps not yet impacted, his whole being suspended by the single trivial combination of letters in quiet and sunny space, so that hanging motionless and without physical

weight he seemed to watch the slow flowing of time beneath him, thinking All I wanted was peace thinking, 'She ought not to started praying over me.'

When he reached the last story he stopped reading and counted the remaining pages. Then he looked at the sun and read again. He read now like a man walking along a street might count the cracks in the pavement, to the last and final page, the last and final word. Then he rose and struck a match to the magazine and prodded it patiently until it was consumed. With the shaving things in his pocket he went on down the ditch.

After a while it broadened: a smooth, sandblanched floor between steep shelving walls choked, flank and crest, with brier and brush. Over it trees still arched, and in a small cove in one flank a mass of dead brush lay, filling the cove. He began to drag the brush to one side, clearing the cove and exposing a short handled shovel. With the shovel he began to dig in the sand which the brush had concealed, exhuming one by one six metal tins with screw tops. He did not unscrew the caps.

He laid the tins on their sides and with the sharp edge of the shovel he pierced them, the sand beneath them darkening as the whiskey spurted and poured, the sunny solitude, the air, becoming redolent with alcohol. He emptied them thoroughly, unhurried, his face completely cold, masklike almost. When they were all empty he tumbled them back into the hole and buried them roughly and dragged the brush back and hid the shovel again. The brush hid the stain but it could not hide the scent, the smell. He looked at the sun again. It was now afternoon.

At seven o'clock that evening he was in town, in a restaurant on a side street, eating his supper, sitting on a backless stool at a frictionsmooth wooden counter, eating.

At nine o'clock he was standing outside the barbershop, looking through the window at the man whom he had taken for a partner. He stood quite still, with his hands in his trousers and cigarette smoke drifting across his still face and the cloth cap worn, like the stiff hat, at

that angle at once swaggering and baleful. So cold, so baleful he stood there that Brown inside the shop, among the lights, the air heavy with lotion and hot soap, gesticulant, thick-voiced, in the soiled redbarred trousers and the soiled colored shirt, looked up in midvoice and with his drunken eyes looked into the eyes of the man beyond the glass. So still and baleful that a negro youth shuffling up the street whistling saw Christmas' profile and ceased whistling and edged away and slid past behind him, turning, looking back over his shoulder. But Christmas was moving himself now. It was as if he had just paused there for Brown to look at him.

He went on, not fast, away from the square. The street, a quiet one at all times, was deserted at this hour. It led down through the negro section, Freedman Town, to the station. At seven o'clock he would have passed people, white and black, going toward the square and the picture show; at half past nine they would have been going back home. But the picture show had not turned out yet, and he now had the street to himself.

He went on, passing still between the homes of white people, from street lamp to street lamp, the heavy shadows of oak and maple leaves sliding like scraps of black velvet across his white shirt. Nothing can look quite as lonely as a big man going along an empty street. Yet though he was not large, not tall, he contrived somehow to look more lonely than a lone telephone pole in the middle of a desert. In the wide, empty, shadow-brooded street he looked like a phantom, a spirit, strayed out of its own world, and lost.

Then he found himself. Without his being aware the street had begun to slope and before he knew it he was in Freedman Town, surrounded by the summer smell and the summer voices of invisible negroes. They seemed to enclose him like bodiless voices murmuring, talking, laughing, in a language not his.

As from the bottom of a thick black pit he saw himself enclosed by cabinshapes, vague, kerosenelit, so that the street lamps themselves seemed to be further spaced, as if the black life, the black breathing

had compounded the substance of breath so that not only voices but moving bodies and light itself must become fluid and accrete slowly from particle to particle, of and with the now ponderable night inseparable and one.

He was standing still now, breathing quite hard, glaring this way and that. About him the cabins were shaped blackly out of blackness by the faint, sultry glow of kerosene lamps. On all sides, even within him, the bodiless fecundmellow voices of negro women murmured. It was as though he and all other manshaped life about him had been returned to the lightless hot wet primogenitive Female. He began to run, glaring, his teeth glaring, his inbreath cold on his dry teeth and lips, toward the next street lamp.

Beneath it a narrow and rutted lane turned and mounted to the parallel street, out of the black hollow. He turned into it running and plunged up the sharp ascent, his heart hammering, and into the higher street. He stopped here, panting, glaring, his heart thudding as if it could not or would not yet believe that the air now was the cold hard air of white people.

Then he became cool. The negro smell, the negro voices, were behind and below him now. To his left lay the square, the clustered lights: low bright birds in stillwinged and tremulous suspension. To the right the street lamps marched on, spaced, intermittent with bitten and unstirring branches. He went on, slowly again, his back toward the square, passing again between the houses of white people.

There were people on these porches too, and in chairs upon the lawns; but he could walk quiet here. Now and then he could see them: heads in silhouette, a white blurred garmented shape; on a lighted veranda four people sat about a card table, the white faces intent and sharp in the low light, the bare arms of the women glaring smooth and white above the trivial cards. 'That's all I wanted,' he thought. 'That dont seem like a whole lot to ask.'

This street in turn began to slope. But it sloped safely. His steady white shirt and pacing dark legs died among long shadows bulging square and huge against the August stars: a cotton warehouse, a horizontal and cylindrical tank like the torso of a beheaded mastodon, a line of freight cars. He crossed the tracks, the rails coming momentarily into twin green glints from a switch lamp, glinting away again. Beyond the tracks woods began. But he found the path unerringly. It mounted, among the trees, the lights of the town now beginning to come into view again across the valley where the railroad ran. But he did not look back until he reached the crest of the hill.

Then he could see the town, the glare, the individual lights where streets radiated from the square. He could see the street down which he had come, and the other street, the one which had almost betrayed him; and further away and at right angles, the far bright rampart of the town itself, and in the angle between the black pit from which he had fled with drumming heart and glaring lips. No light came from it, from here no breath, no odor. It just lay there, black, impenetrable, in its garland of Augusttremulous lights. It might have been the original quarry, abyss itself.

His way was sure, despite the trees, the darkness. He never once lost the path which he could not even see. The woods continued for a mile. He emerged into a road, with dust under his feet. He could see now, the vague spreading world, the horizon. Here and there faint windows glowed. But most of the cabins were dark. Nevertheless his blood began again, talking and talking. He walked fast, in time to it; he seemed to be aware that the group were negroes before he could have seen or heard them at all, before they even came in sight vaguely against the defunctive dust. There were five or six of them, in a straggling body yet vaguely paired; again there reached him, above the noise of his own blood, the rich murmur of womevoices.

He was walking directly toward them, walking fast. They had seen him and they gave to one side of the road, the voices ceasing. He too changed direction, crossing toward them as if he intended to walk them down. In a single movement and as though at a spoken command the

women faded back and were going around him, giving him a wide berth. One of the men followed them as if he were driving them before him, looking over his shoulder as he passed.

The other two men had halted in the road, facing Christmas. Christmas had stopped also. Neither seemed to be moving, yet they approached, looming, like two shadows drifting up. He could smell negro; he could smell cheap cloth and sweat. The head of the negro, higher than his own, seemed to stoop, out of the sky, against the sky. "It's a white man," he said, without turning his head, quietly. "What you want, white folks? You looking for somebody?" The voice was not threatful. Neither was it servile.

"Come on away from there, Jupe," the one who had followed the women said.

"Who you looking for, cap'm?" the negro said.

"Jupe," one of the women said, her voice a little high. "You come on, now."

For a moment longer the two heads, the light and the dark, seemed to hang suspended in the darkness, breathing upon one another. Then the negro's head seemed to float away; a cool wind blew from somewhere. Christmas, turning slowly, watching them dissolve and fade again into the pale road, found that he had the razor in his hand. It was not open. It was not from fear. "Bitches!" he said, quite loud. "Sons of bitches!"

The wind blew dark and cool; the dust even through his shoes was cool. 'What in hell is the matter with me?' he thought. He put the razor back into his pocket and stopped and lit a cigarette. He had to moisten his lips several times to hold the cigarette. In the light of the match he could watch his own hands shake. 'All this trouble,' he thought. "All this damn trouble," he said aloud, walking again. He looked up at the stars, the sky.

'It must be near ten now,' he thought; and then almost with the thought he heard the clock on the courthouse two miles away. Slow, measured, clear the ten strokes came. He counted them, stopped again in the lonely and empty road. 'Ten o'clock,' he thought. 'I heard ten strike last night too. And eleven. And twelve. But I didn't hear one. Maybe the wind had changed.'

When he heard eleven strike tonight he was sitting with his back against a tree inside the broken gate, while behind him again the house was dark and hidden in its shaggy grove. He was not thinking Maybe she is not asleep either tonight. He was not thinking at all now; thinking had not begun now; the voices had not begun now either. He just sat there, not moving, until after a while he heard the clock two miles away strike twelve. Then he rose and moved toward the house. He didn't go fast. He didn't think even then Something is going to happen. Something is going to happen to me

Chapter 6

Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders. Knows remembers believes a corridor in a big long garbled cold echoing building of dark red brick sootbleakened by more chimneys than its own, set in a grassless cinderstrewnpacked compound surrounded by smoking factory purlieus and enclosed by a ten foot steel-and-wire fence like a penitentiary or a zoo, where in random erratic surges, with sparrowlike childtrebling, orphans in identical and uniform blue denim in and out of remembering but in knowing constant as the bleak walls, the bleak windows where in rain soot from the yearly adjacent chimneys streaked like black tears.

In the quiet and empty corridor, during the quiet hour of early afternoon, he was like a shadow, small even for five years, sober and quiet as a shadow. Another in the corridor could not have said just when and where he vanished, into what door, what room. But there was no one else in the corridor at this hour. He knew that. He had been

doing this for almost a year, ever since the day when he discovered by accident the toothpaste which the dietitian used.

Once in the room, he went directly on his bare and silent feet to the washstand and found the tube. He was watching the pink worm coil smooth and cool and slow onto his parchmentcolored finger when he heard footsteps in the corridor and then voices just beyond the door. Perhaps he recognised the dietitian's voice.

Anyway, he did not wait to see if they were going to pass the door or not. With the tube in his hand and still silent as a shadow on his bare feet he crossed the room and slipped beneath a cloth curtain which screened off one corner of the room. Here he squatted, among delicate shoes and suspended soft womangarments. Crouching, he heard the dietitian and her companion enter the room.

The dietitian was nothing to him yet, save a mechanical adjunct to eating, food, the diningroom, the ceremony of eating at the wooden forms, coming now and then into his vision without impacting at all except as something of pleasing association and pleasing in herself to look at—young, a little fullbodied, smooth, pink-and-white, making his mind think of the diningroom, making his mouth think of something sweet and sticky to eat, and also pinkcolored and surreptitious.

On that first day when he discovered the toothpaste in her room he had gone directly there, who had never heard of toothpaste either, as if he already knew that she would possess something of that nature and he would find it. He knew the voice of her companion also. It was that of a young interne from the county hospital who was assistant to the parochial doctor, he too a familiar figure about the house and also not yet an enemy.

He was safe now, behind the curtain. When they went away, he would replace the toothpaste and also leave. So he squatted behind the curtain, hearing without listening to it the woman's tense whispering voice: "No! No! Not here. Not now. They'll catch us. Somebody will—No, Charley! Please!" The man's words he could not understand at all.

The voice was lowered too. It had a ruthless sound, as the voices of all men did to him yet, since he was too young yet to escape from the world of women for that brief respite before he escaped back into it to remain until the hour of his death.

He heard other sounds which he did know: a scuffing as of feet, the turn of the key in the door. "No, Charley! Charley, please! Please, Charley!" the woman's whisper said. He heard other sounds, rustlings, whisperings, not voices. He was not listening; he was just waiting, thinking without particular interest or attention that it was a strange hour to be going to bed. Again the woman's fainting whisper came through the thin curtain: "I'm scared! Hurry! Hurry!"

He squatted among the soft womansmelling garments and the shoes. He saw by feel alone now the ruined, once cylindrical tube. By taste and not seeing he contemplated the cool invisible worm as it coiled onto his finger and smeared sharp, automatonlike and sweet, into his mouth. By ordinary he would have taken a single mouthful and then replaced the tube and left the room. Even at five, he knew that he must not take more than that. Perhaps it was the animal warning him that more would make him sick; perhaps the human being warning him that if he took more than that, she would miss it. This was the first time he had taken more.

By now, hiding and waiting, he had taken a good deal more. By feel he could see the diminishing tube. He began to sweat. Then he found that he had been sweating for some time, that for some time now he had been doing nothing else but sweating. He was not hearing anything at all now.

Very likely he would not have heard a gunshot beyond the curtain. He seemed to be turned in upon himself, watching himself sweating, watching himself smear another worm of paste into his mouth which his stomach did not want. Sure enough, it refused to go down. Motionless now, utterly contemplative, he seemed to stoop above himself like a chemist in his laboratory, waiting.

He didn't have to wait long. At once the paste which he had already swallowed lifted inside him, trying to get back out, into the air where it was cool. It was no longer sweet. In the rife, pinkwomansmelling obscurity behind the curtain he squatted, pinkfoamed, listening to his insides, waiting with astonished fatalism for what was about to happen to him. Then it happened. He said to himself with complete and passive surrender: 'Well, here I am.'

When the curtain fled back he did not look up. When hands dragged him violently out of his vomit he did not resist. He hung from the hands, limp, looking with slackjawed and glassy idiocy into a face no longer smooth pink-and-white, surrounded now by wild and dishevelled hair whose smooth bands once made him think of candy. "You little rat!" the thin, furious voice hissed; "you little rat! Spying on me! You little nigger bastard!"

The dietitian was twentyseven—old enough to have to take a few amorous risks but still young enough to attach a great deal of importance not so much to love, but to being caught at it. She was also stupid enough to believe that a child of five not only could deduce the truth from what he had heard, but that he would want to tell it as an adult would.

So when during the following two days she could seem to look nowhere and be nowhere without finding the child watching her with the profound and intent interrogation of an animal, she foisted upon him more of the attributes of an adult: she believed that he not only intended to tell, but that he deferred doing it deliberately in order to make her suffer more.

It never occurred to her that he believed that he was the one who had been taken in sin and was being tortured with punishment deferred and that he was putting himself in her way in order to get it over with, get his whipping and strike the balance and write it off.

By the second day she was wellnigh desperate. She did not sleep at night. She lay most of the night now tense, teeth and hands clenched,

panting with fury and terror and worst of all, regret: that blind fury to turn back time just for an hour, a second. This was to the exclusion of even love during the time. The young doctor was now even less than the child, merely an instrument of her disaster and not even that of her salvation. She could not have said which she hated most. She could not even say when she was asleep and when she was awake. Because always against her eyelids or upon her retinæ was that still, grave, inescapable, parchmentcolored face watching her.

On the third day she came out of the coma state, the waking sleep through which during the hours of light and faces she carried her own face like an aching mask in a fixed grimace of dissimulation that dared not flag. On the third day she acted. She had no trouble finding him.

It was in the corridor, the empty corridor during the quiet hour after dinner. He was there, doing nothing at all. Perhaps he had followed her.

No one else could have said if he were waiting there or not. But she found him without surprise and he heard and turned and saw her without surprise: the two faces, the one no longer smooth pink-and-white, the other grave, sobereyed, perfectly empty of everything except waiting. 'Now I'll get it over with,' he thought.

"Listen," she said. Then she stopped, looking at him. It was as though she could not think what to say next. The child waited, still, motionless. Slowly and gradually the muscles of his backside were becoming flat and rigid and tense as boards. "Are you going to tell?" she said.

He didn't answer. He believed that anyone should have known that the last thing in the world he would do would be to tell about the toothpaste, the vomit. He was not looking at her face. He was watching her hands, waiting. One of them was clenched inside her skirt pocket.

Through the cloth he could see that it was clenched hard. He had never been struck with a fist. Yet neither had he ever waited three days to be punished. When he saw the hand emerge from the pocket he believed that she was about to strike him. But she did not; the hand just opened

beneath his eyes. Upon it lay a silver dollar. Her voice was thin, urgent, whispering, though the corridor was empty about them. "You can buy a lot with this.

A whole dollar." He had never seen a dollar before, though he knew what it was. He looked at it. He wanted it as he would have wanted the bright cap from a beer bottle. But he did not believe that she would give it to him, because he would not give it to her if it were his. He didn't know what she wanted him to do. He was waiting to get whipped and then be released. Her voice went on, urgent, tense, fast: "A whole dollar. See? How much you could buy. Some to eat every day for a week. And next month maybe I'll give you another one."

He did not move nor speak. He might have been carved, a large toy: small, still, round headed and round eyed, in overalls. He was still with astonishment, shock, outrage. Looking at the dollar, he seemed to see ranked tubes of toothpaste like corded wood, endless and terrifying; his whole being coiled in a rich and passionate revulsion. "I don't want no more," he said. 'I don't never want no more,' he thought.

Then he didn't dare even look at her face. He could feel her, hear her, her long shuddering breath. Now it's coming he thought in a flashing instant. But she didn't even shake him. She just held him, hard, not shaking him, as if her hand too didn't know what it wanted to do next. Her face was so near that he could feel her breath on his cheek. He didn't need to look up to know what her face looked like now. "Tell!" she said. "Tell, then! You little nigger bastard! You nigger bastard!"

That was the third day. On the fourth day she became quite calmly and completely mad. She no longer planned at all. Her subsequent actions followed a kind of divination, as if the days and the unsleeping nights during which she had nursed behind that calm mask her fear and fury had turned her psychic along with her natural female infallibility for the spontaneous comprehension of evil.

She was quite calm now. She had escaped for the moment from even urgency. It was as though now she had time to look about and plan.

Looking about the scene her glance, her mind, her thought, went full and straight and instantaneous to the janitor sitting in the door of the furnace room. There was no ratiocination in it, no design. She just seemed to look outside herself for one moment like a passenger in a car, and saw without any surprise at all that small, dirty man sitting in a splint chair in a sootgrimed doorway, reading through steelrimmed spectacles from a book upon his knees—a figure, almost a fixture, of which she had been aware for five years now without once having actually looked at him.

She would not have recognised his face on the street. She would have passed him without knowing him, even though he was a man. Her life now seemed straight and simple as a corridor with him sitting at the end of it. She went to him at once, already in motion upon the dingy path before she was aware that she had started.

He was sitting in his splint chair in the doorway, the open book upon his knees. When she approached she saw that it was the Bible. But she just noticed this, as she might have noticed a fly upon his leg. “You hate him too,” she said. “You’ve been watching him too.

“I’ve seen you. Dont say you dont.” He looked up at her face, the spectacles propped now above his brows. He was not an old man. In his present occupation he was an incongruity. He was a hard man, in his prime; a man who should have been living a hard and active life, and whom time, circumstance, something, had betrayed, sweeping the hale body and thinking of a man of fortyfive into a backwater suitable for a man of sixty or sixtyfive.

“You know,” she said. “You knew before the other children started calling him Nigger. You came out here at the same time. You weren’t working here a month before that Christmas night when Charley found him on the doorstep yonder. Tell me.” The janitor’s face was round, a little flabby, quite dirty, with a dirty stubble.

His eyes were quite clear, quite gray, quite cold. They were quite mad too. But the woman did not notice that. Or perhaps they did not look

mad to her. So they faced one another in the coalgrimed doorway, mad eyes looking into mad eyes, mad voice talking to mad voice as calm and quiet and terse as two conspirators. "I've watched you for five years." She believed that she was telling the truth.

"Sitting here in this very chair, watching him. You never sit here except when the children are outdoors. But as soon as they come out, you bring this chair here to the door and sit in it where you can watch them. Watching him and hearing the other children calling him Nigger. That's what you are doing. I know. You came here just to do that, to watch him and hate him. You were here ready when he came. Maybe you brought him and left him on the step yonder yourself. But anyway you know. And I've got to know. When he tells I will be fired. And Charley may— will— Tell me. Tell me, now."

"Ah," the janitor said. "I knowed he would be there to catch you when God's time came. I knowed. I know who set him there, a sign and a damnation for bitchery."

"Yes. He was right behind the curtain. As close as you are. You tell me, now. I've seen your eyes when you look at him. Watched you. For five years."

"I know," he said. "I know evil. Aint I made evil to get up and walk God's world? A walking pollution in God's own face I made it. Out of the mouths of little children He never concealed it. You have heard them. I never told them to say it, to call him in his rightful nature, by the name of his damnation. I never told them. They knowed. They was told, but it wasn't by me. I just waited, on His own good time, when He would see fitten to reveal it to His living world. And it's come now. This is the sign, wrote again in woman-sinning and bitchery."

"Yes. But what must I do? Tell me."

"Wait. Like I waited. Five years I waited for the Lord to move and show His will. And He done it. You wait too. When He is ready for it He will show His will to them that have the sayso."

“Yes. The sayso.” They glared at one another, still, breathing quietly.

“The madam. When He is ready, He will reveal it to her.”

“You mean, if the madam knows, she will send him away? Yes. But I cant wait.”

“No more can you hurry the Lord God. Aint I waited five years?”

She began to beat her hands lightly together. “But dont you see? This may be the Lord’s way. For you to tell me. Because you know. Maybe it’s His way for you to tell me and me to tell the madam.” Her mad eyes were quite calm, her mad voice patient and calm: it was only her light unceasing hands.

“You’ll wait, the same as I waited,” he said. “You have felt the weight of the Lord’s remorseful hand for maybe three days. I have lived under it for five years, watching and waiting for His own good time, because my sin is greater than your sin.” Though he was looking directly at her face he did not seem to see her at all, his eyes did not. They looked like they were blind, wide open, icecold, fanatical. “To what I done and what I suffered to expiate it, what you done and are womansuffering aint no more than a handful of rotten dirt. I done bore mine five years; who are you to hurry Almighty God with your little womanfilth?”

She turned, at once. “Well. You dont have to tell me. I know, anyway. I’ve known it all the time that he’s part nigger.” She returned to the house. She did not walk fast now and she yawned, terrifically. ‘All I have to do is to think of some way to make the madam believe it. He wont tell her, back me up.’ She yawned again, tremendously, her face emptied now of everything save yawning and then emptied even of yawning.

She had just thought of something else. She had not thought of it before, but she believed that she had, had known it all the while, because it seemed so right: he would not only be removed; he would

be punished for having given her terror and worry. 'They'll send him to the nigger orphanage,' she thought. 'Of course. They will have to.'

She did not even go to the matron at once. She had started there, but instead of turning toward the office door she saw herself passing it, going on toward the stairs and mounting. It was as though she followed herself to see where she was going. In the corridor, quiet and empty now, she yawned again, with utter relaxation. She entered her room and locked the door and took off her clothes and got into bed. The shades were drawn and she lay still in the more than halfdark, on her back. Her eyes were closed and her face was empty and smooth. After a while she began to open her legs and close them slowly, feeling the sheets flow cool and smooth over them and then flow warm and smooth again.

Thinking seemed to hang suspended between the sleep which she had not had now in three nights and the sleep which she was about to receive, her body open to accept sleep as though sleep were a man. 'All I need do is to make the madam believe,' she thought. And then she thought He will look just like a pea in a pan full of coffee beans

That was in the afternoon. At nine that evening she was undressing again when she heard the janitor come up the corridor, toward her door. She did not, could not, know who it was, then somehow she did know, hearing the steady feet and then a knock at the door which already began to open before she could spring to it.

She didn't call; she sprang to the door, putting her weight against it, holding it to. "I'm undressing!" she said in a thin, agonised voice, knowing who it was. He didn't answer, his weight firm and steady against the crawling door, beyond the crawling gap. "You cant come in here!" she cried, hardly louder than a whisper. "Dont you know they . . ." Her voice was panting, fainting, and desperate. He did not answer. She tried to halt and hold the slow inward crawling of the door. "Let me get some clothes on, and I'll come out there. Will you do that?"

She spoke in that fainting whisper, her tone light, inconsequential, like that of one speaking to an unpredictable child or a maniac: soothing, cajoling: "You wait, now. Do you hear? Will you wait, now?" He did not answer. The slow and irresistible crawling of the door did not cease. Leaning against it, wearing nothing save her undergarment, she was like a puppet in some burlesque of rapine and despair.

Leaning, downlooking, immobile, she appeared to be in deepest thought, as if the puppet in the midst of the scene had gone astray within itself. Then she turned, releasing the door, and sprang back to the bed, whipping up without looking at it a garment and whirling to face the door, clutching the garment at her breast, huddling. He had already entered; apparently he had been watching her and waiting during the whole blind interval of fumbling and interminable haste.

He still wore the overalls and he now wore his hat. He did not remove it. Again his cold mad gray eyes did not seem to see her, to look at her at all. "If the Lord Himself come into the room of one of you," he said, "you would believe He come in bitchery." He said, "Have you told her?"

The woman sat on the bed. She seemed to sink slowly back upon it, clutching the garment, watching him, her face blanched. "Told her?"

"What will she do with him?"

"Do?" She watched him: those bright, still eyes that seemed not to look at her so much as to envelop her. Her mouth hung open like the mouth of an idiot.

"Where will they send him to?" She didn't answer. "Dont lie to me, to the Lord God. They'll send him to the one for niggers." Her mouth closed; it was as if she had discovered at last what he was talking about. "Ay, I've thought it out. They'll send him to the one for nigger children." She didn't answer, but she was watching him now, her eyes still a little fearful but secret too, calculating. Now he was looking at her; his eyes seemed to contract upon her shape and being. "Answer me, Jezebel!" he shouted.

“Shhhhhhhhh!” she said. “Yes. They’ll have to. When they find . . .”

“Ah,” he said. His gaze faded; the eyes released her and enveloped her again. Looking at them, she seemed to see herself as less than nothing in them, trivial as a twig floating upon a pool. Then his eyes became almost human. He began to look about the womanroom as if he had never seen one before: the close room, warm, littered, womanpinksmelling. “Womanfilth,” he said. “Before the face of God.” He turned and went out. After a while the woman rose.

She stood for a time, clutching the garment, motionless, idiotic, staring at the empty door as if she could not think what to tell herself to do. Then she ran. She sprang to the door, flinging herself upon it, crashing it to and locking it, leaning against it, panting, clutching the turned key in both hands.

At breakfast time the next morning the janitor and the child were missing. No trace of them could be found. The police were notified at once. A side door was found to be unlocked, to which the janitor had a key.

“It’s because he knows,” the dietitian told the matron.

“Knows what?”

“That that child, that Christmas boy, is a nigger.”

“A what?” the matron said. Backthrust in her chair, she glared at the younger woman. “A ne— I dont believe it!” she cried. “I dont believe it!”

“You dont have to believe it,” the other said. “But he knows it. He stole him away because of it.”

The matron was past fifty, flabby faced, with weak, kind, frustrated eyes. “I dont believe it!” she said. But on the third day she sent for the

dietitian. She looked as if she had not slept in some time. The dietitian, on the contrary, was quite fresh, quite serene. She was still unshaken when the matron told her the news, that the man and the child had been found. "At Little Rock," the matron said. "He tried to put the child into an orphanage there. They thought he was crazy and held him until the police came." She looked at the younger woman. "You told me . . . The other day you said . . . How did you know about this?"

The dietitian did not look away. "I didn't. I had no idea at all. Of course I knew it didn't mean anything when the other children called him Nigger—"

"Nigger?" the matron said. "The other children?"

"They have been calling him Nigger for years. Sometimes I think that children have a way of knowing things that grown people of your and my age don't see. Children, and old people like him, like that old man. That's why he always sat in the door yonder while they were playing in the yard: watching that child. Maybe he found it out from hearing the other children call him Nigger. But he might have known beforehand. If you remember, they came here about the same time.

He hadn't been working here hardly a month before the night—that Christmas, don't you remember—when Ch—they found the baby on the doorstep?" She spoke smoothly, watching the baffled, shrinking eyes of the older woman full upon her own as though she could not remove them. The dietitian's eyes were bland and innocent.

"And so the other day we were talking and he was trying to tell me something about the child. It was something he wanted to tell me, tell somebody, and finally he lost his nerve maybe and wouldn't tell it, and so I left him. I wasn't thinking about it at all. It had gone completely out of my mind when—" Her voice ceased. She gazed at the matron while into her face there came an expression of enlightenment, sudden comprehension; none could have said if it were simulated or not. "Why, that's why it . . . Why, I see it all, now. What happened just the day before they were gone, missing.

I was in the corridor, going to my room; it was the same day I happened to be talking to him and he refused to tell me whatever it was he started to tell, when all of a sudden he came up and stopped me; I thought then it was funny because I had never before seen him inside the house. And he said—he sounded crazy, he looked crazy. I was scared, too scared to move, with him blocking the corridor—he said, ‘Have you told her yet?’ and I said, ‘Told who? Told who what?’ and then I realised he meant you; if I had told you that he had tried to tell me something about the child. But I didn’t know what he meant for me to tell you and I wanted to scream and then he said, ‘What will she do if she finds it out?’ and I didn’t know what to say or how to get away from him and then he said, ‘You dont have to tell me. I know what she will do. She will send him to the one for niggers.’ ”

“For negroes?”

“I dont see how we failed to see it as long as we did. You can look at his face now, his eyes and hair. Of course it’s terrible. But that’s where he will have to go, I suppose.”

Behind her glasses the weak, troubled eyes of the matron had a harried, jellied look, as if she were trying to force them to something beyond their physical cohesiveness. “But why did he want to take the child away?”

“Well, if you want to know what I think, I think he is crazy. If you could have seen him in the corridor that ni— day like I did. Of course it’s bad for the child to have to go to the nigger home, after this, growing up with white people. It’s not his fault what he is. But it’s not our fault, either—” She ceased, watching the matron. Behind the glasses the older woman’s eyes were still harried, weak, hopeless; her mouth was trembling as she shaped speech with it. Her words were hopeless too, but they were decisive enough, determined enough.

“We must place him. We must place him at once. What applications have we? If you will hand me the file . . .”

When the child awakened, he was being carried. It was pitch dark and cold; he was being carried downstairs by someone who moved with silent and infinite care. Pressed between him and one of the arms which supported him was a wad which he knew to be his clothes. He made no outcry, no sound. He knew where he was by the smell, the air, of the back stairway which led down to the side door from the room in which his bed had been one among forty others since he could remember.

He knew also by smell that the person who carried him was a man. But he made no sound, lying as still and as lax as while he had been asleep, riding high in the invisible arms, moving, descending slowly toward the side door which gave onto the playground.

He didn't know who was carrying him. He didn't bother about it because he believed that he knew where he was going. Or why, that is. He didn't bother about where either, yet. It went back two years, to when he was three years old. One day there was missing from among them a girl of twelve named Alice. He had liked her, enough to let her mother him a little; perhaps because of it. And so to him she was as mature, almost as large in size, as the adult women who ordered his eating and washing and sleeping, with the difference that she was not and never would be his enemy. One night she waked him. She was telling him goodbye but he did not know it.

He was sleepy and a little annoyed, never full awake, suffering her because she had always tried to be good to him. He didn't know that she was crying because he did not know that grown people cried, and by the time he learned that, memory had forgotten her. He went back into sleep while still suffering her, and the next morning she was gone. Vanished, no trace of her left, not even a garment, the very bed in which she had slept already occupied by a new boy. He never did know where she went to.

That day he listened while a few of the older girls who had helped her prepare to leave in that same hushed, secret sibilance in which a half

dozen young girls help prepare the seventh one for marriage told, still bated her breath, about the new dress, the new shoes, the carriage which had fetched her away. He knew then that she had gone for good, had passed beyond the iron gates in the steel fence. He seemed to see her then, grown heroic at the instant of vanishment beyond the clashed-to gates, fading without diminution of size into something nameless and splendid, like a sunset.

It was more than a year before he knew that she had not been the first and would not be the last. That there had been more than Alice to vanish beyond the clashed-to gates, in a new dress or new overalls, with a small neat bundle less large sometimes than a shoe-box. He believed that that was what was happening to him now. He believed that he knew now how they had all managed to depart without leaving any trace behind them. He believed that they had been carried out, as he was being, in the dead of night.

Now he could feel the door. It was quite near now; he knew to the exact number how many more invisible steps remained to which in turn the man who carried him would lower himself with that infinite and silent care. Against his cheek he could feel the man's quiet, fast, warm breathing; beneath him he could feel the tense and rigid arms, the wadded lump which he knew was his clothing caught up by feel in the dark. The man stopped. As he stooped the child's feet swung down and touched the floor, his toes curling away from the iron-cold planks. The man spoke, for the first time. "Stand up," he said. Then the child knew who he was.

He recognised the man at once, without surprise. The surprise would have been the matron's if she had known how well he did know the man. He did not know the man's name and in the three years since he had been a sentient creature they had not spoken a hundred words. But the man was a more definite person than anyone else in his life, not excepting the girl Alice.

Even at three years of age the child knew that there was something between them that did not need to be spoken. He knew that he was

never on the playground for instant that the man was not watching him from the chair in the furnace room door, and that the man was watching him with a profound and unflagging attention.

If the child had been older he would perhaps have thought He hates me and fears me. So much so that he cannot let me out of his sight With more vocabulary but no more age he might have thought That is why I am different from the others: because he is watching me all the time He accepted it. So he was not surprised when he found who it was who had taken him, sleeping, from his bed and carried him downstairs; as, standing beside the door in the cold pitch dark while the man helped him put on his clothes, he might have thought He hates me enough even to try to prevent something that is about to happen to me coming to pass

He dressed obediently, shivering, as swiftly as he could, the two of them fumbling at the small garments, getting them on him somehow. "Your shoes," the man said, in that dying whisper. "Here." The child sat on the cold floor, putting on the shoes. The man was not touching him now, but the child could hear, feel, that the man was stooped too, engaged in something. 'He's putting on his shoes too,' he thought. The man touched him again, groping, lifting him to his feet. His shoes were not laced. He had not learned to do that by himself yet. He did not tell the man that he had not laced them. He made no sound at all.

He just stood there and then a bigger garment enveloped him completely—by its smell he knew that it belonged to the man—and then he was lifted again. The door opened, inyawned. The fresh cold air rushed in, and light from the lamps along the street; he could see the lights and the blank factory walls and the tall unsmoking chimneys against the stars. Against the street light the steel fence was like a parade of starved soldiers. As they crossed the empty playground his dangling feet swung rhythmically to the man's striding, the unlaced shoes flapping about his ankles. They reached the iron gates and passed through.

They did not have to wait long for the streetcar. If he had been older he would have remarked how well the man had timed himself. But he didn't wonder or notice. He just stood on the corner beside the man, in the unlaced shoes, enveloped to the heels in the man's coat, his eyes round and wide, his small face still, awake. The car came up, the row of windows, jarring to a stop and humming while they entered.

It was almost empty, since the hour was past two o'clock. Now the man noticed the unlaced shoes and laced them, the child watching, quite still on the seat, his legs thrust straight out before him. The station was a long distance away, and he had ridden on a streetcar before, so when they reached the station he was asleep. When he waked it was daylight and they had been on the train for some time. He had never ridden on a train before, but no one could have told it.

He sat quite still, as in the streetcar, completely enveloped in the man's coat save for his outthrust legs and his head, watching the country—hills and trees and cows and such—that he had never seen before flowing past. When the man saw that he was awake he produced food from a piece of newspaper. It was bread, with ham between. "Here," the man said. He took the food and ate, looking out the window.

He said no word, he had shown no surprise, not even when on the third day the policemen came and got him and the man. The place where they now were was no different from the one which they had left in the night—the same children, with different names; the same grown people, with different smells: he could see no more reason why he should not have stayed there than why he should ever have left the first one.

But he was not surprised when they came and told him again to get up and dress, neglecting to tell him why or where he was going now. Perhaps he knew that he was going back; perhaps with his child's clairvoyance he had known all the while what the man had not: that it would not, could not, last. On the train again he saw the same hills, the same trees, the same cows, but from another side, another direction. The policeman gave him food. It was bread, with ham between, though

it did not come out of a scrap of newspaper. He noticed that, but he said nothing, perhaps thought nothing.

Then he was home again. Perhaps he expected to be punished upon his return, for what, what crime exactly, he did not expect to know, since he had already learned that, though children can accept adults as adults, adults can never accept children as anything but adults too. He had already forgot the toothpaste affair. He was now avoiding the dietitian just as, a month ago, he had been putting himself in her way.

He was so busy avoiding her that he had long since forgot the reason for it; soon he had forgotten the trip too, since he was never to know that there was any connection between them. Now and then he thought of it, hazily and vaguely. But that was only when he would look toward the door to the furnace room and remember the man who used to sit there and watch him and who was now gone, completely, without leaving any trace, not even the splint chair in the doorway, after the fashion of all who departed from there. Where he may have gone to also the child did not even think or even wonder.

One evening they came to the schoolroom and got him. It was two weeks before Christmas. Two of the young women—the dietitian was not one—took him to the bathroom and washed him and combed his damp hair and dressed him in clean overalls and fetched him to the matron's office. In the office sat a man, a stranger. And he looked at the man and he knew before the matron even spoke. Perhaps memory knowing, knowing beginning to remember; perhaps even desire, since five is still too young to have learned enough despair to hope. Perhaps he remembered suddenly the train ride and the food, since even memory did not go much further back than that. "Joseph," the matron said, "how would you like to go and live with some nice people in the country?"

He stood there, his ears and face red and burning with harsh soap and harsh towelling, in the stiff new overalls, listening to the stranger. He had looked once and saw a thickish man with a close brown beard and hair cut close though not recently. Hair and beard both had a hard,

vigorous quality, unsilvered, as though the pigmentation were impervious to the forty and more years which the face revealed. The eyes were lightcolored, cold. He wore a suit of hard, decent black.

On his knee rested a black hat held in a blunt clean hand shut, even on the soft felt of the hat, into a fist. Across his vest ran a heavy silver watch chain. His thick black shoes were planted side by side; they had been polished by hand. Even the child of five years, looking at him, knew that he did not use tobacco himself and would not tolerate it in others. But he did not look at the man because of his eyes.

He could feel the man looking at him though, with a stare cold and intent and yet not deliberately harsh. It was the same stare with which he might have examined a horse or a second hand plow, convinced beforehand that he would see flaws, convinced beforehand that he would buy. His voice was deliberate, infrequent, ponderous; the voice of a man who demanded that he be listened to not so much with attention but in silence. "And you either cannot or will not tell me anything more about his parentage."

The matron did not look at him. Behind her glasses her eyes apparently had jellied, for the time at least. She said immediately, almost a little too immediately: "We make no effort to ascertain their parentage. As I told you before, he was left on the doorstep here on Christmas eve will be five years this two weeks. If the child's parentage is important to you, you had better not adopt one at all."

"I would not mean just that," the stranger said. His tone now was a little placative. He contrived at once to apologise without surrendering one jot of his conviction. "I would have thought to talk with Miss Atkins (this was the dietitian's name) since it was with her I have been in correspondence."

Again the matron's voice was cold and immediate, speaking almost before his had ceased: "I can perhaps give you as much information about this or any other of our children as Miss Atkins can, since her official connection here is only with the diningroom and kitchen. It just

happened that in this case she was kind enough to act as secretary in our correspondence with you.”

“It’s no matter,” the stranger said. “It’s no matter. I had just thought . . .”

“Just thought what? We force no one to take our children, nor do we force the children to go against their wishes, if their reasons are sound ones. That is a matter for the two parties to settle between themselves. We only advise.”

“Ay,” the stranger said. “It’s no matter, as I just said to you. I’ve no doubt the tyke will do. He will find a good home with Mrs McEachern and me. We are not young now, and we like quiet ways. And he’ll find no fancy food and no idleness. Nor neither more work than will be good for him. I make no doubt that with us he will grow up to fear God and abhor idleness and vanity despite his origin.”

Thus the promissory note which he had signed with a tube of toothpaste on that afternoon two months ago was recalled, the yet oblivious executor of it sitting wrapped in a clean horse blanket, small, shapeless, immobile, on the seat of a light buggy jolting through the December twilight up a frozen and rutted lane. They had driven all that day. At noon the man had fed him, taking from beneath the seat a cardboard box containing country food cooked three days ago. But only now did the man speak to him. He spoke a single word, pointing up the lane with a mittened fist which clutched the whip, toward a single light which shown in the dusk. “Home,” he said. The child said nothing.

The man looked down at him. The man was bundled too against the cold, squat, big, shapeless, somehow rocklike, indomitable, not so much ungentle as ruthless. “I said, there is your home.” Still the child didn’t answer. He had never seen a home, so there was nothing for him to say about it.

And he was not old enough to talk and say nothing at the same time. “You will find food and shelter and the care of Christian people,” the

man said. "And the work within your strength that will keep you out of mischief. For I will have you learn soon that the two abominations are sloth and idle thinking, the two virtues are work and the fear of God."

Still the child said nothing. He had neither ever worked nor feared God. He knew less about God than about work. He had seen work going on in the person of men with rakes and shovels about the playground six days each week, but God had only occurred on Sunday. And then—save for the concomitant ordeal of cleanliness—it was music that pleased the ear and words that did not trouble the ear at all—on the whole, pleasant, even if a little tiresome. He said nothing at all. The buggy jolted on, the stout, wellkept team egering, homing, barning.

There was one other thing which he was not to remember until later, when memory no longer accepted his face, accepted the surface of remembering. They were in the matron's office; he standing motionless, not looking at the stranger's eyes which he could feel upon him, waiting for the stranger to say what his eyes were thinking. Then it came: "Christmas. A heathenish name. Sacrilege. I will change that."

"That will be your legal right," the matron said. "We are not interested in what they are called, but in how they are treated."

But the stranger was not listening to anyone anymore than he was talking to anyone. "From now on his name will be McEachern."

"That will be suitable," the matron said. "To give him your name."

"He will eat my bread and he will observe my religion," the stranger said. "Why should he not bear my name?"

The child was not listening. He was not bothered. He did not especially care, anymore than if the man had said the day was hot when it was not hot. He didn't even bother to say to himself My name aint McEachern. My name is Christmas There was no need to bother about that yet. There was plenty of time.

“Why not, indeed?” the matron said.

Chapter 7

And memory knows this; twenty years later memory is still to believe
On this day I became a man

The clean, spartan room was redolent of Sunday. In the windows the clean, darned curtains stirred faintly in a breeze smelling of turned earth and crabapple. Upon the yellow imitation oak melodeon with its pedals padded with pieces of frayed and outworn carpet sat a fruit jar filled with larkspur. The boy sat in a straight chair beside the table on which was a nickel lamp and an enormous Bible with brass clasps and hinges and a brass lock. He wore a clean white shirt without a collar.

His trousers were dark, harsh, and new. His shoes had been polished recently and clumsily, as a boy of eight would polish them, with small dull patches here and there, particularly about the heels, where the polish had failed to overlap. Upon the table, facing him and open, lay a Presbyterian catechism.

McEachern stood beside the table. He wore a clean, glazed shirt, and the same black trousers in which the boy had first seen him. His hair, damp, still unsilvered, was combed clean and stiff upon his round skull. His beard was also combed, also still damp. “You have not tried to learn it,” he said.

The boy did not look up. He did not move. But the face of the man was not more rocklike. “I did try.”

“Then try again. I’ll give you another hour.” From his pocket McEachern took a thick silver watch and laid it faceup on the table and drew up a second straight, hard chair to the table and sat down, his clean, scrubbed hands on his knees, his heavy polished shoes set squarely.

On them were no patches where the polish had failed to overlap. There had been last night at suppertime, though. And later the boy, undressed for bed and in his shirt, had received a whipping and then polished them again. The boy sat at the table. His face was bent, still, expressionless. Into the bleak, clean room the springfilled air blew in fainting gusts.

That was at nine o'clock. They had been there since eight. There were churches nearby, but the Presbyterian church was five miles away; it would take an hour to drive it. At half past nine Mrs McEachern came in. She was dressed, in black, with a bonnet—a small woman, entering timidly, a little hunched, with a beaten face. She looked fifteen years older than the rugged and vigorous husband. She did not quite enter the room. She just came within the door and stood there for a moment, in her bonnet and her dress of rusty yet often brushed black, carrying an umbrella and a palm leaf fan, with something queer about her eyes, as if whatever she saw or heard, she saw or heard through a more immediate manshape or manvoice, as if she were the medium and the vigorous and ruthless husband the control. He may have heard her. But he neither looked up nor spoke. She turned and went away.

Exactly on the dot of the hour McEachern raised his head. "Do you know it now?" he said.

The boy did not move. "No," he said.

McEachern rose, deliberately, without haste. He took up the watch and closed it and returned it to his pocket, looping the chain again through his suspender. "Come," he said. He did not look back. The boy followed, down the hall, toward the rear; he too walked erect and in silence, his head up.

There was a very kinship of stubbornness like a transmitted resemblance in their backs. Mrs McEachern was in the kitchen. She still wore the hat, still carried the umbrella and the fan. She was watching the door when they passed it. "Pa," she said. Neither of them so much

as looked at her. They might not have heard, she might not have spoken, at all.

They went on, in steady single file, the two backs in their rigid abnegation of all compromise more alike than actual blood could have made them. They crossed the back yard and went on toward the stable and entered. McEachern opened the crib door and stood aside. The boy entered the crib. McEachern took from the wall a harness strap. It was neither new nor old, like his shoes. It was clean, like the shoes, and it smelled like the man smelled: an odor of clean hard virile living leather. He looked down at the boy.

“Where is the book?” he said. The boy stood before him, still, his face calm and a little pale beneath the smooth parchment skin. “You did not bring it,” McEachern said. “Go back and get it.” His voice was not unkind. It was not human, personal, at all. It was just cold, implacable, like written or printed words. The boy turned and went out.

When he reached the house Mrs McEachern was in the hall. “Joe,” she said. He did not answer. He didn’t even look at her, at her face, at the stiff movement of one half lifted hand in stiff caricature of the softest movement which human hand can make. He walked stiffly past her, rigid-faced, his face rigid with pride perhaps and despair. Or maybe it was vanity, the stupid vanity of a man. He got the catechism from the table and returned to the stable.

McEachern was waiting, holding the strap. “Put it down,” he said. The boy laid the book on the floor. “Not there,” McEachern said, without heat. “You would believe that a stable floor, the stamping place of beasts, is the proper place for the word of God. But I’ll learn you that, too.” He took up the book himself and laid it on a ledge. “Take down your pants,” he said. “We’ll not soil them.”

Then the boy stood, his trousers collapsed about his feet, his legs revealed beneath his brief shirt. He stood, slight and erect. When the strap fell he did not flinch, no quiver passed over his face. He was looking straight ahead, with a rapt, calm expression like a monk in a

picture. McEachern began to strike methodically, with slow and deliberate force, still without heat or anger. It would have been hard to say which face was the more rapt, more calm, more convinced.

He struck ten times, then he stopped. "Take the book," he said. "Leave your pants be." He handed the boy the catechism. The boy took it. He stood so, erect, his face and the pamphlet lifted, his attitude one of exaltation. Save for surplice he might have been a Catholic choir boy, with for nave the looming and shadowy crib, the rough planked wall beyond which in the ammoniac and dry-scented obscurity beasts stirred now and then with snorts and indolent thuds. McEachern lowered himself stiffly to the top of a feed box, spreadkneed, one hand on his knee and the silver watch in the other palm, his clean, bearded face as firm as carved stone, his eyes ruthless, cold, but not unkind.

They remained so for another hour. Before it was up Mrs McEachern came to the back door of the house. But she did not speak. She just stood there, looking at the stable, in the hat, with the umbrella and the fan. Then she went back into the house.

Again on the exact second of the hour McEachern returned the watch to his pocket. "Do you know it now?" he said. The boy didn't answer, rigid, erect, holding the open pamphlet before his face. McEachern took the book from between his hands. Otherwise, the boy did not move at all. "Repeat your catechism," McEachern said.

The boy stared straight at the wall before him. His face was now quite white despite the smooth rich pallor of his skin. Carefully and deliberately McEachern laid the book upon the ledge and took up the strap. He struck ten times. When he finished, the boy stood for a moment longer motionless. He had had no breakfast yet; neither of them had eaten breakfast yet. Then the boy staggered and would have fallen if the man had not caught his arm, holding him up. "Come," McEachern said, trying to lead him to the feed box. "Sit down here."

"No," the boy said. His arm began to jerk in the man's grasp. McEachern released him.

“Are you all right? Are you sick?”

“No,” the boy said. His voice was faint, his face was quite white.

“Take the book,” McEachern said, putting it into the boy’s hand. Through the crib window Mrs McEachern came into view, emerging from the house. She now wore a faded Mother Hubbard and a sunbonnet, and she carried a cedar bucket. She crossed the window without looking toward the crib, and vanished. After a time the slow creak of a well pulley reached them, coming with a peaceful, startling quality upon the Sabbath air. Then she appeared again in the window, her body balanced now to the bucket’s weight in her hand, and reentered the house without looking toward the stable.

Again on the dot of the hour McEachern looked up from the watch. “Have you learned it?” he said. The boy did not answer, did not move. When McEachern approached he saw that the boy was not looking at the page at all, that his eyes were quite fixed and quite blank. When he put his hand on the book he found that the boy was clinging to it as if it were a rope or a post. When McEachern took the book forcibly from his hands, the boy fell at full length to the floor and did not move again.

When he came to it was late afternoon. He was in his own bed in the attic room with its lowpitched roof. The room was quiet, already filling with twilight. He felt quite well, and he lay for some time, looking peacefully up at the slanted ceiling overhead, before he became aware that there was someone sitting beside the bed. It was McEachern. He now wore his everyday clothes also not the overalls in which he went to the field, but a faded clean shirt without a collar, and faded, clean khaki trousers. “You are awake,” he said. His hand came forth and turned back the cover. “Come,” he said.

The boy did not move. “Are you going to whip me again?”

“Come,” McEachern said. “Get up.” The boy rose from the bed and stood, thin, in clumsy cotton underclothes. McEachern was moving

also, thickly, with clumsy, muscle-bound movements, as if at the expenditure of tremendous effort; the boy, watching with the amazeless interest of a child, saw the man kneel slowly and heavily beside the bed. "Kneel down," McEachern said. The boy knelt; the two of them knelt in the close, twilight room: the small figure in cutdown underwear, the ruthless man who had never known either pity or doubt.

McEachern began to pray. He prayed for a long time, his voice droning, soporific, monotonous. He asked that he be forgiven for trespass against the Sabbath and for lifting his hand against a child, an orphan, who was dear to God. He asked that the child's stubborn heart be softened and that the sin of disobedience be forgiven him also, through the advocacy of the man whom he had flouted and disobeyed, requesting that Almighty be as magnanimous as himself, and by and through and because of conscious grace.

He finished and rose, heaving to his feet. The boy still knelt. He did not move at all. But his eyes were open (his face had never been hidden or even lowered) and his face was quite calm; calm, peaceful, quite inscrutable. He heard the man fumble at the table on which the lamp sat. A match scraped, sputtered; the flame steadied upon the wick, beneath the globe upon which the man's hand appeared now as if it had been dipped in blood. The shadows whirled and steadied. McEachern lifted something from the table beside the lamp: the catechism. He looked down at the boy: a nose, a cheek jutting, granitelike, bearded to the caverned and spectacled eyesocket. "Take the book," he said.

It had begun that Sunday morning before breakfast. He had had no breakfast; likely neither he nor the man had once thought of that. The man himself had eaten no breakfast, though he had gone to the table and demanded absolution for the food and for the necessity of eating it. At the noon meal he had been asleep, from nervous exhaustion. And at supper time neither of them had thought of food. The boy did not even know what was wrong with him, why he felt weak and peaceful.

That was how he felt as he lay in bed. The lamp was still burning; it was now full dark outside. Some time had elapsed, but it seemed to him that if he turned his head he would still see the two of them, himself and the man, kneeling beside the bed, or anyway, in the rug the indentations of the twin pairs of knees without tangible substance. Even the air seemed still to excrete that monotonous voice as of someone talking in a dream, talking, adjuring, arguing with a Presence who could not even make a phantom indentation in an actual rug.

He was lying so, on his back, his hands crossed on his breasts like a tomb effigy, when he heard again feet on the cramped stairs. They were not the man's; he had heard McEachern drive away in the buggy, departing in the twilight to drive three miles and to a church which was not Presbyterian, to serve the expiation which he had set himself for the morning.

Without turning his head the boy heard Mrs McEachern toil slowly up the stairs. He heard her approach across the floor. He did not look, though after a time her shadow came and fell upon the wall where he could see it, and he saw that she was carrying something. It was a tray of food. She set the tray on the bed. He had not once looked at her. He had not moved. "Joe," she said. He didn't move. "Joe," she said. She could see that his eyes were open. She did not touch him.

"I aint hungry," he said.

She didn't move. She stood, her hands folded into her apron. She didn't seem to be looking at him, either. She seemed to be speaking to the wall beyond the bed. "I know what you think. It aint that. He never told me to bring it to you. It was me that thought to do it. He dont know. It aint any food he sent you." He didn't move. His face was calm as a graven face, looking up at the steep pitch of the plank ceiling. "You haven't eaten today. Sit up and eat. It wasn't him that told me to bring it to you. He dont know it. I waited until he was gone and then I fixed it myself."

He sat up then. While she watched him he rose from the bed and took the tray and carried it to the corner and turned it upside down, dumping the dishes and food and all onto the floor. Then he returned to the bed, carrying the empty tray as though it were a monstrosity and he the bearer, his surplice the cutdown undergarment which had been bought for a man to wear. She was not watching him now, though she had not moved. Her hands were still rolled into her apron. He got back into bed and lay again on his back, his eyes wide and still upon the ceiling.

He could see her motionless shadow, shapeless, a little hunched. Then it went away. He did not look, but he could hear her kneel in the corner, gathering the broken dishes back into the tray. Then she left the room. It was quite still then. The lamp burned steadily above the steady wick; on the wall the flitting shadows of whirling moths were as large as birds. From beyond the window he could smell, feel, darkness, spring, the earth.

He was just eight then. It was years later that memory knew what he was remembering; years after that night when, an hour later, he rose from the bed and went and knelt in the corner as he had not knelt on the rug, and above the outraged food kneeling, with his hands ate, like a savage, like a dog.

It was dusk; already he should have been miles toward home. Although his Saturday afternoons were free, he had never before been this far from home this late. When he reached home he would be whipped. But not for what he might have or might not have done during his absence. When he reached home he would receive the same whipping though he had committed no sin as he would receive if McEachern had seen him commit it.

But perhaps he did not yet know himself that he was not going to commit the sin. The five of them were gathered quietly in the dusk about the sagging doorway of a deserted sawmill shed where, waiting hidden a hundred yards away, they had watched the negro girl enter and look back once and then vanish. One of the older boys had

arranged it and he went in first. The others, boys in identical overalls, who lived within a three mile radius, who, like the one whom they knew as Joe McEachern, could at fourteen and fifteen plow and milk and chop wood like grown men, drew straws for turns. Perhaps he did not even think of it as a sin until he thought of the man who would be waiting for him at home, since to fourteen the paramount sin would be to be publicly convicted of virginity.

His turn came. He entered the shed. It was dark. At once he was overcome by a terrible haste. There was something in him trying to get out, like when he had used to think of toothpaste. But he could not move at once, standing there, smelling the woman, smelling the negro all at once; enclosed by the womanshenegro and the haste, driven, having to wait until she spoke: a guiding sound that was no particular word and completely unaware. Then it seemed to him that he could see her—something, prone, abject; her eyes perhaps.

Leaning, he seemed to look down into a black well and at the bottom saw two glints like reflection of dead stars. He was moving, because his foot touched her. Then it touched her again because he kicked her. He kicked her hard, kicking into and through a choked wail of surprise and fear. She began to scream, he jerking her up, clutching her by the arm, hitting at her with wide, wild blows, striking at the voice perhaps, feeling her flesh anyway, enclosed by the womanshenegro and the haste.

Then she fled beneath his fist, and he too fled backward as the others fell upon him, swarming, grappling, fumbling, he striking back, his breath hissing with rage and despair. Then it was male he smelled, they smelled; somewhere beneath it the She scuttling, screaming. They trampled and swayed, striking at whatever hand or body touched, until they all went down in a mass, he underneath. Yet he still struggled, fighting, weeping. There was no She at all now. They just fought; it was as if a wind had blown among them, hard and clean. They held him down now, holding him helpless. "Will you quit now? We got you. Promise to quit now."

“No,” he said. He heaved, twisting.

“Quit, Joe! You cant fight all of us. Dont nobody want to fight you, anyway.”

“No,” he said, panting, struggling. None of them could see, tell who was who. They had completely forgot about the girl, why they had fought, if they had ever known. On the part of the other four it had been purely automatic and reflex: that spontaneous compulsion of the male to fight with or because of or over the partner with which he has recently or is about to copulate. But none of them knew why he had fought. And he could not have told them. They held him to the earth, talking to one another in quiet, strained voices.

“Some of you all back there get away. Then the rest of us will turn him loose at the same time.”

“Who’s got him? Who is this I’ve got?”

“Here; turn loose. Now wait: here he is. Me and—” Again the mass of them surged, struggled. They held him again. “We got him here. You all turn loose and get out. Give us room.”

Two of them rose and backed away, into the door. Then the other two seemed to explode upward out of the earth, the duskfilled shed, already running. Joe struck at them as soon as he was free, but they were already clear. Lying on his back he watched the four of them run on in the dusk, slowing, turning to look back. He rose and emerged from the shed. He stood in the door, brushing himself off, this too purely automatic, while a short distance away they huddled quietly and looked back at him. He did not look at them.

He went on, his overalls duskcolored in the dusk. It was late now. The evening star was rich and heavy as a jasmine bloom. He did not look back once. He went on, fading, phantomlike; the four boys who watched him huddled quietly, their faces small and pale with dusk. From the group a voice spoke suddenly, loud: “Yaah!” He did not look

back. A second voice said quietly, carrying quietly, clear: "See you tomorrow at church, Joe." He didn't answer. He went on. Now and then he brushed at his overalls, mechanically, with his hands.

When he came in sight of home all light had departed from the west. In the pasture behind the barn there was a spring: a clump of willows in the darkness smelt and heard but not seen. When he approached the fluting of young frogs ceased like so many strings cut with simultaneous scissors. He knelt; it was too dark to discern even his silhouetted head. He bathed his face, his swollen eye. He went on, crossing the pasture toward the kitchen light. It seemed to watch him, biding and threatening, like an eye.

When he reached the lot fence he stopped, looking at the light in the kitchen window. He stood there for a while, leaning on the fence. The grass was aloud, alive with crickets. Against the dewgray earth and the dark bands of trees fireflies drifted and faded, erratic and random. A mockingbird sang in a tree beside the house. Behind him, in the woods beyond the spring, two whippoorwills whistled. Beyond them, as though beyond some ultimate horizon of summer, a hound howled. Then he crossed the fence and saw someone sitting quite motionless in the door to the stable in which waited the two cows which he had not yet milked.

He seemed to recognise McEachern without surprise, as if the whole situation were perfectly logical and reasonable and inescapable. Perhaps he was thinking then how he and the man could always count upon one another, depend upon one another; that it was the woman alone who was unpredictable. Perhaps he saw no incongruity at all in the fact that he was about to be punished, who had refrained from what McEachern would consider the cardinal sin which he could commit, exactly the same as if he had committed it.

McEachern did not rise. He still sat, stolid and rocklike, his shirt a white blur in the door's black yawn. "I have milked and fed," he said. Then he rose, deliberately. Perhaps the boy knew that he already held the strap in his hand. It rose and fell, deliberate, numbered, with deliberate, flat

reports. The boy's body might have been wood or stone; a post or a tower upon which the sentient part of him mused like a hermit, contemplative and remote with ecstasy and selfcrucifixion.

As they approached the kitchen they walked side by side. When the light from the window fell upon them the man stopped and turned, leaning, peering. "Fighting," he said. "What was it about?"

The boy did not answer. His face was quite still, composed. After a while he answered. His voice was quiet, cold. "Nothing."

They stood there. "You mean, you cant tell or you wont tell?" The boy did not answer. He was not looking down. He was not looking at anything. "Then, if you dont know you are a fool. And if you wont tell you have been a knave. Have you been to a woman?"

"No," the boy said. The man looked at him. When he spoke his tone was musing.

"You have never lied to me. That I know of, that is." He looked at the boy, at the still profile. "Who were you fighting with?"

"There was more than one."

"Ah," the man said. "You left marks on them, I trust?"

"I dont know. I reckon so."

"Ah," the man said. "Go and wash. Supper is ready."

When he went to bed that night his mind was made up to run away. He felt like an eagle: hard, sufficient, potent, remorseless, strong. But that passed, though he did not then know that, like the eagle, his own flesh as well as all space was still a cage.

McEachern did not actually miss the heifer for two days. Then he found the new suit where it was hidden in the barn; on examining it he knew

that it had never been worn. He found the suit in the forenoon. But he said nothing about it. That evening he entered the barn where Joe was milking. Sitting on the low stool, his head bent against the cow's flanks, the boy's body was now by height at least the body of a man. But McEachern did not see that.

If he saw anything at all, it was the child, the orphan of five years who had sat with the still and alert and unrecking passiveness of an animal on the seat of his buggy on that December evening twelve years ago. "I dont see your heifer," McEachern said. Joe didn't answer. He bent above the bucket, above the steady hissing of milk. McEachern stood behind and above him, looking down at him. "I said, your heifer has not come up."

"I know it," Joe said. "I reckon she is down at the creek. I'll look after her, being as she belongs to me."

"Ah," McEachern said. His voice was not raised. "The creek at night is no place for a fifty dollar cow."

"It'll be my loss, then," Joe said. "It was my cow."

"Was?" McEachern said. "Did you say was my cow?"

Joe did not look up. Between his fingers the milk hissed steadily into the pail. Behind him he heard McEachern move. But Joe did not look around until the milk no longer responded. Then he turned. McEachern was sitting on a wooden block in the door. "You had better take the milk on to the house first," he said.

Joe stood, the pail swinging from his hand. His voice was dogged though quiet. "I'll find her in the morning."

"Take the milk on to the house," McEachern said. "I will wait for you here."

For a moment longer Joe stood there. Then he moved. He emerged and went on to the kitchen. Mrs McEachern came in as he was setting the pail onto the table. "Supper is ready," she said. "Has Mr McEachern come to the house yet?"

Joe was turning away, back toward the door. "He'll be in soon," he said. He could feel the woman watching him. She said, in a tone tentative, anxious:

"You'll have just time to wash."

"We'll be in soon." He returned to the barn. Mrs McEachern came to the door and looked after him. It was not yet full dark and she could see her husband standing in the barn door. She did not call. She just stood there and watched the two men meet. She could not hear what they said.

"She will be down at the creek, you say?" McEachern said.

"I said she may be. This is a good-sized pasture."

"Ah," McEachern said. Both their voices were quiet. "Where do you think she will be?"

"I dont know. I aint no cow. I dont know where she might be."

McEachern moved. "We'll go see," he said. They entered the pasture in single file. The creek was a quarter of a mile distant. Against the dark band of trees where it flowed fireflies winked and faded. They reached these trees. The trunks of them were choked with marshy undergrowth, hard to penetrate even by day. "Call her," McEachern said. Joe did not answer. He did not move. They faced one another.

"She's my cow," Joe said. "You gave her to me. I raised her from a calf because you gave her to me to be my own."

“Yes,” McEachern said. “I gave her to you. To teach you the responsibility of possessing, owning, ownership. The responsibility of the owner to that which he owns under God’s sufferance. To teach you foresight and aggrandisement. Call her.”

For a while longer they faced one another. Perhaps they were looking at one another. Then Joe turned and went on along the marsh, McEachern following. “Why dont you call her?” he said. Joe did not answer. He did not seem to be watching the marsh, the creek, at all. On the contrary he was watching the single light which marked the house, looking back now and then as if he were gauging his distance from it. They did not go fast, yet in time they came to the boundary fence which marked the end of the pasture. It was now full dark. When he reached the fence Joe turned and stopped. Now he looked at the other. Again they stood face to face. Then McEachern said: “What have you done with that heifer?”

“I sold her,” Joe said.

“Ah. You sold her. And what did you get for her, might I ask?”

They could not distinguish one another’s face now. They were just shapes, almost of a height, though McEachern was the thicker. Above the white blur of his shirt McEachern’s head resembled one of the marble cannonballs on Civil War monuments. “It was my cow,” Joe said. “If she wasn’t mine, why did you tell me she was? Why did you give her to me?”

“You are quite right. She was your own. I have not yet chidden you for selling her, provided you got a good price. And even if you were beat in the trade, which with a boy of eighteen is more than like to be so, I will not chide you for that. Though you would better have asked the advice of some one older in the ways of the world. But you must learn, as I did. What I ask is, Where have you put the money for safekeeping?” Joe didn’t answer. They faced one another. “You gave it to your fostermother to keep for you, belike?”

“Yes,” Joe said. His mouth said it, told the lie. He had not intended to answer at all. He heard his mouth say the word with a kind of shocked astonishment. Then it was too late. “I gave it to her to put away,” he said.

“Ah,” McEachern said. He sighed; it was a sound almost luxurious, of satisfaction and victory. “And you will doubtless say also that it was your fostermother who bought the new suit which I found hid in the loft. You have revealed every other sin of which you are capable: sloth, and ingratitude, and irreverence and blasphemy. And now I have taken you in the remaining two: lying and lechery. What else would you want with a new suit if you were not whoring?” And then he acknowledged that the child whom he had adopted twelve years ago was a man. Facing him, the two of them almost toe to toe, he struck at Joe with his fist.

Joe took the first two blows; perhaps from habit, perhaps from surprise. But he took them, feeling twice the man’s hard fist crash into his face. Then he sprang back, crouched, licking blood, panting. They faced one another. “Dont you hit me again,” he said.

Later, lying cold and rigid in his bed in the attic, he heard their voices coming up the cramped stairs from the room beneath.

“I bought it for him!” Mrs McEachern said. “I did! I bought it with my butter money. You said that I could have—could spend— Simon! Simon!”

“You are a clumsier liar than even he,” the man said. His voice came, measured, harsh, without heat, up the cramped stair to where Joe lay in bed. He was not listening to it. “Kneel down. Kneel down. KNEEL DOWN, WOMAN. Ask grace and pardon of God; not of me.”

She had always tried to be kind to him, from that first December evening twelve years ago. She was waiting on the porch—a patient, beaten creature without sex demarcation at all save the neat screw of graying hair and the skirt—when the buggy drove up. It was as though

instead of having been subtly slain and corrupted by the ruthless and bigoted man into something beyond his intending and her knowing, she had been hammered stubbornly thinner and thinner like some passive and dully malleable metal, into an attenuation of dumb hopes and frustrated desires now faint and pale as dead ashes.

When the buggy stopped she came forward as though she had already planned it, practiced it: how she would lift him down from the seat and carry him into the house. He had never been carried by a woman since he was big enough to walk. He squirmed down and entered the house on his own feet, marched in, small, shapeless in his wrappings. She followed, hovering about him. She made him sit down; it was as though she hovered about with a kind of strained alertness, an air baffled and alert, waiting to spring it again and try to make himself and her act as she had planned for them to act.

Kneeling before him she was trying to take off his shoes, until he realised what she wanted. He put her hands away and removed the shoes himself, not setting them onto the floor though. He held to them. She stripped off his stockings and then she fetched a basin of hot water, fetched it so immediately that anyone but a child would have known that she must have had it ready and waiting all day probably. He spoke for the first time, then. "I done washed just yesterday," he said.

She didn't answer. She knelt before him while he watched the crown of her head and her hands fumbling a little clumsily about his feet. He didn't try to help her now. He didn't know what she was trying to do, not even when he was sitting with his cold feet in the warm water. He didn't know that that was all, because it felt too good. He was waiting for the rest of it to begin; the part that would not be pleasant, whatever it would be. This had never happened to him before either.

Later she put him to bed. For two years almost he had been dressing and undressing himself, unnoticed and unassisted save by occasional Alices. He was already too tired to go to sleep at once, and now he was puzzled and hence nervous, waiting until she went out so he could sleep. Then she did not go out. Instead she drew a chair up to the bed

and sat down. There was no fire in the room; it was cold. She had a shawl now about her shoulders, huddled into the shawl, her breath vaporising as though she were smoking. And he became wide awake now. He was waiting for the part to begin which he would not like, whatever it was, whatever it was that he had done. He didn't know that this was all. This had never happened to him before either.

It began on that night. He believed that it was to go on for the rest of his life. At seventeen, looking back he could see now the long series of trivial, clumsy, vain efforts born of frustration and fumbling and dumb instinct: the dishes she would prepare for him in secret and then insist on his accepting and eating them in secret, when he did not want them and he knew that McEachern would not care anyway; the times when, like tonight, she would try to get herself between him and the punishment which, deserved or not, just or unjust, was impersonal, both the man and the boy accepting it as a natural and inescapable fact until she, getting in the way, must give it an odor, an attenuation, and aftertaste.

Sometimes he thought that he would tell her alone, have her who in her helplessness could neither alter it nor ignore it, know it and need to hide it from the man whose immediate and predictable reaction to the knowledge would so obliterate it as a factor in their relations that it would never appear again. To say to her in secret, in secret payment for the secret dishes which he had not wanted: "Listen. He says he has nursed a blasphemer and an ingrate. I dare you to tell him what he has nursed. That he has nursed a nigger beneath his own roof, with his own food at his own table."

Because she had always been kind to him. The man, the hard, just, ruthless man, merely depended on him to act in a certain way and to receive the as certain reward or punishment, just as he could depend on the man to react in a certain way to his own certain doings and misdoings. It was the woman who, with a woman's affinity and instinct for secrecy, for casting a faint taint of evil about the most trivial and innocent actions. Behind a loose board in the wall of his attic room she had hidden a small hoard of money in a tin can. The amount was trivial

and it was apparently a secret to no one but her husband, and the boy believed that he would not have cared.

But it had never been a secret from him. Even while he was still a child she would take him with her when with all the intense and mysterious caution of a playing child she would creep to the attic and add to the hoard meagre and infrequent and terrific nickels and dimes (fruit of what small chicanery and deceptions with none anywhere under the sun to say her nay he did not know), putting into the can beneath his round grave eyes coins whose value he did not even recognise. It was she who trusted him, who insisted on trusting him as she insisted on his eating: by conspiracy, in secret, making a secret of the very fact which the act of trusting was supposed to exemplify.

It was not the hard work which he hated, nor the punishment and injustice. He was used to that before he ever saw either of them. He expected no less, and so he was neither outraged nor surprised. It was the woman: that soft kindness which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard and ruthless justice of men. 'She is trying to make me cry,' he thought, lying cold and rigid in his bed, his hands beneath his head and the moonlight falling across his body, hearing the steady murmur of the man's voice as it mounted the stairway on its first heavenward stage; 'She was trying to make me cry. Then she thinks that they would have had me.'

Chapter 8

Moving quietly, he took the rope from its hiding place. One end of it was already prepared for making fast inside the window. Now it took him no time at all to reach the ground and to return; now, with more than a year of practice, he could mount the rope hand over hand, without once touching the wall of the house, with the shadowlike agility of a cat. Leaning from the window he let the free end whisper down. In the moonlight it looked not less frail than a spider skein. Then, with his shoes tied together and strung through his belt behind him, he slid down the rope, passing swift as a shadow across the window where the old people slept. The rope hung directly before the window.

He drew it tautly aside, flat against the house, and tied it. Then he went on through the moonlight to the stable and mounted to the loft and took the new suit from its hiding place. It was wrapped in paper, carefully. Before unwrapping it he felt with his hands about the folds of the paper. 'He found it,' he thought. 'He knows.' He said aloud, whispering: "The bastard. The son of a bitch."

He dressed in the dark, swiftly. He was already late, because he had had to give them time to get to sleep after all the uproar about the heifer, the uproar which the woman had caused by meddling after it was all over, settled for the night, anyway. The bundle included a white shirt and a tie. He put the tie into his pocket, but he put on the coat so that the white shirt would not be so visible in the moonlight.

He descended and emerged from the stable. The new cloth, after his soft, oftenwashed overalls, felt rich and harsh. The house squatted in the moonlight, dark, profound, a little treacherous. It was as though in the moonlight the house had acquired personality: threatening, deceptive. He passed it and entered the lane. He took from his pocket a dollar watch. He had bought it three days ago, with some of the money. But he had never owned a watch before and so he had forgot to wind it. But he did not need the watch to tell him that he was already late.

The lane went straight beneath the moon, bordered on each side by trees whose shadowed branches lay thick and sharp as black paint upon the mild dust. He walked fast, the house now behind him, himself now not visible from the house. The highroad passed the lane a short distance ahead. He expected at any moment to see the car rush past, since he had told her that if he were not waiting at the mouth of the lane, he would meet her at the school house where the dance was being held.

But no car passed, and when he reached the highroad he could hear nothing. The road, the night, were empty. 'Maybe she has already passed,' he thought. He took out the dead watch again and looked at it. The watch was dead because he had had no chance to wind it. He had

been made late by them who had given him no opportunity to wind the watch and so know if he were late or not.

Up the dark lane, in the now invisible house, the woman now lay asleep, since she had done all she could to make him late. He looked that way, up the lane; he stopped in the act of looking and thinking; mind and body as if on the same switch, believing that he had seen movement among the shadows in the lane. Then he thought that he had not, that it might perhaps have been something in his mind projected like a shadow on a wall. 'But I hope it is him,' he thought. 'I wish it was him. I wish he would follow me and see me get into the car. I wish he would try to follow us. I wish he would try to stop me.' But he could see nothing in the lane. It was empty, intermittent with treacherous shadows. Then he heard, from far down the road toward town, the sound of the car. Looking, he saw presently the glare of the lights.

She was a waitress in a small, dingy, back street restaurant in town. Even a casual adult glance could tell that she would never see thirty again. But to Joe she probably did not look more than seventeen too, because of her smallness. She was not only not tall, she was slight, almost childlike. But the adult look saw that the smallness was not due to any natural slenderness but to some inner corruption of the spirit itself: a slenderness which had never been young, in not one of whose curves anything youthful had ever lived or lingered. Her hair was dark. Her face was prominently boned, always downlooking, as if her head were set so on her neck, a little out of line. Her eyes were like the button eyes of a toy animal: a quality beyond even hardness, without being hard.

It was because of her smallness that he ever attempted her, as if her smallness should have or might have protected her from the roving and predatory eyes of most men, leaving his chances better. If she had been a big woman he would not have dared. He would have thought, 'It wont be any use. She will already have a fellow, a man.'

It began in the fall when he was seventeen. It was a day in the middle of the week. Usually when they came to town it would be Saturday and they would bring food with them—cold dinner in a basket purchased and kept for that purpose—with the intention of spending the day. This time McEachern came to see a lawyer, with the intention of finishing his business and being home again by dinnertime. But it was almost twelve o'clock when he emerged onto the street where Joe waited for him.

He came into sight looking at his watch. Then he looked at a municipal clock in the courthouse tower and then at the sun, with an expression of exasperation and outrage. He looked at Joe also with that expression, the open watch in his hand, his eyes cold, fretted. He seemed to be examining and weighing for the first time the boy whom he had raised from childhood. Then he turned. "Come," he said. "It can't be helped now."

The town was a railroad division point. Even in midweek there were many men about the streets. The whole air of the place was masculine, transient: a population even whose husbands were at home only at intervals and on holiday—a population of men who led esoteric lives whose actual scenes were removed and whose intermittent presence was pandered to like that of patrons in a theatre.

Joe had never before seen the place to which McEachern took him. It was a restaurant on a back street—a narrow dingy doorway between two dingy windows. He did not know that it was a restaurant at first. There was no sign outside and he could neither smell nor hear food cooking. What he saw was a long wooden counter lined with backless stools, and a big, blonde woman behind a cigar case near the front and a clump of men at the far end of the counter, not eating, who all turned as one and looked at him and McEachern when they entered, through the smoke of cigarettes. Nobody said anything at all.

They just looked at McEachern and Joe as if breathing had stopped with talking, as if even the cigarette smoke had stopped and now drifted aimlessly of its own weight. The men were not in overalls and they all

wore hats, and their faces were all alike: not young and not old; not farmers and not townsmen either. They looked like people who had just got off a train and who would be gone tomorrow and who did not have any address.

Sitting on two of the backless stools at the counter, McEachern and Joe ate. Joe ate fast because McEachern was eating fast. Beside him the man, even in the act of eating, seemed to sit in a kind of stiffbacked outrage. The food which McEachern ordered was simple: quickly prepared and quickly eaten. But Joe knew that parsimony had no part in this. Parsimony might have brought them here in preference to another place, but he knew that it was a desire to depart quickly that had chosen the food.

As soon as he laid down his knife and fork, McEachern said, "Come," already getting down from his stool. At the cigar counter McEachern paid the brasshaired woman. There was about her a quality impervious to time: a belligerent and diamondsurfaced respectability. She had not so much as looked at them, even when they entered and even when McEachern gave her money.

Still without looking at them she made the change, correctly and swiftly, sliding the coins onto the glass counter almost before McEachern had offered the bill; herself somehow definite behind the false glitter of the careful hair, the careful face, like a carved lioness guarding a portal, presenting respectability like a shield behind which the clotted and idle and equivocal men could slant their hats and their thwartfacecurled cigarettes. McEachern counted his change and they went out, into the street. He was looking at Joe again. He said: "I'll have you remember that place. There are places in this world where a man may go but a boy, a youth of your age, may not.

That is one of them. Maybe you should never have gone there. But you must see such so you will know what to avoid and shun. Perhaps it was as well that you saw it with me present to explain and warn you. And the dinner there is cheap."

“What is the matter with it?” Joe said.

“That is the business of the town and not of yours. You will only mark my words: I’ll not have you go there again unless I am with you. Which will not be again. We’ll bring dinner next time, early or no early.”

That was what he saw that day while he was eating swiftly beside the unbending and quietly outraged man, the two of them completely isolated at the center of the long counter with at one end of it the brasshaired woman and at the other the group of men, and the waitress with her demure and downlooking face and her big, too big, hands setting the plates and cups, her head rising from beyond the counter at about the height of a tall child. Then he and McEachern departed. He did not expect ever to return.

It was not that McEachern had forbidden him. He just did not believe that his life would ever again chance there. It was as if he said to himself, ‘They are not my people. I can see them but I dont know what they are doing nor why. I can hear them but I dont know what they are saying nor why nor to whom. I know that there is something about it beside food, eating. But I dont know what. And I never will know.’

So it passed from the surface of thinking. Now and then during the next six months he returned to town, but he did not again even see or pass the restaurant. He could have. But he didn’t think to.

Perhaps he did not need to. More often than he knew perhaps thinking would have suddenly flowed into a picture, shaping, shaped: the long, barren, somehow equivocal counter with the still, coldfaced, violenthaired woman at one end as though guarding it, and at the other men with inwardleaning heads, smoking steadily, lighting and throwing away their constant cigarettes, and the waitress, the woman not much larger than a child going back and forth to the kitchen with her arms overladen with dishes, having to pass on each journey within touching distance of the men who leaned with their slanted hats and spoke to her through the cigarette smoke, murmured to her somewhere near

mirth or exultation, and her face musing, demure, downcast, as if she had not heard.

'I don't even know what they are saying to her,' he thought, thinking I don't even know that what they are saying to her is something that men do not say to a passing child believing I do not know yet that in the instant of sleep the eyelid closing prisons within the eye's self her face demure, pensive; tragic, sad, and young; waiting, colored with all the vague and formless magic of young desire. That already there is something for love to feed upon: that sleeping I know now why I struck refraining that negro girl three years ago and that she must know it too and be proud too, with waiting and pride

So he did not expect to see her again, since love in the young requires as little of hope as of desire to feed upon. Very likely he was as much surprised by his action and what it inferred and revealed as McEachern would have been. It was on Saturday this time, in the spring now. He had turned eighteen. Again McEachern had to see the lawyer. But he was prepared now. "I'll be there an hour," he said.

"You can walk about and see the town." Again he looked at Joe, hard, calculating, again a little fretted, like a just man forced to compromise between justice and judgment. "Here," he said. He opened his purse and took a coin from it. It was a dime. "You might try not to throw it away as soon as you can find someone who will take it. It's a strange thing," he said fretfully, looking at Joe, "but it seems impossible for a man to learn the value of money without first having to learn to waste it. You will be here in one hour."

He took that coin and went straight to the restaurant. He did not even put the coin into his pocket. He did it without plan or design, almost without volition, as if his feet ordered his action and not his head. He carried the dime clutched hot and small in his palm as a child might. He entered the screen door, clumsily, stumbling a little.

The blonde woman behind the cigar case (it was as if she had not moved in the six months, not altered one strand of her hard bright brassridged hair or even her dress) watched him.

At the far end of the counter the group of men with their tilted hats and their cigarettes and their odor of barbershops, watched him. The proprietor was among them. He noticed, saw, the proprietor for the first time. Like the other men, the proprietor wore a hat and was smoking.

He was not a big man, not much bigger than Joe himself, with a cigarette burning in one corner of his mouth as though to be out of the way of talking. From that face squinted and still behind the curling smoke from the cigarette which was not touched once with hand until it burned down and was spat out and ground beneath a heel, Joe was to acquire one of his own mannerisms. But not yet. That was to come later, when life had begun to go so fast that accepting would take the place of knowing and believing. Now he just looked at the man who leaned upon the counter from the inward side, in a dirty apron which he wore as a footpad might assume for the moment a false beard.

The accepting was to come later, along with the whole sum of entire outrage to credulity: these two people as husband and wife, the establishment as a business for eating, with the successive imported waitresses clumsy with the cheap dishes of simple food as business justified; and himself accepting, taking, during his brief and violent holiday like a young stallion in a state of unbelieving and ecstatic astonishment in a hidden pasture of tired and professional mares, himself in turn victim of nameless and unnumbered men.

But that was not yet. He went to the counter, clutching the dime. He believed that the men had all stopped talking to watch him, because he could hear nothing now save a vicious frying sound from beyond the kitchen door, thinking She's back there. That's why I dont see her He slid onto a stool. He believed that they were all watching him. He believed that the blonde woman behind the cigar case was looking at him, and the proprietor too, across whose face now the smoke of the

cigarette would have become quite still in its lazy vapping. Then the proprietor spoke a single word. Joe knew that he had not moved nor touched the cigarette. "Bobbie," he said.

A man's name. It was not thinking. It was too fast, too complete: She's gone. They have got a man in her place. I have wasted the dime, like he said He believed that he could not leave now; that if he tried to go out, the blonde woman would stop him. He believed that the men at the back knew this and were laughing at him. So he sat quite still on the stool, looking down, the dime clutched in his palm. He did not see the waitress until the two overlarge hands appeared upon the counter opposite him and into sight. He could see the figured pattern of her dress and the bib of an apron and the two bigknuckled hands lying on the edge of the counter as completely immobile as if they were something she had fetched in from the kitchen. "Coffee and pie," he said.

Her voice sounded downcast, quite empty. "Lemon cocoanut chocolate."

In proportion to the height from which her voice came, the hands could not be her hands at all. "Yes," Joe said.

The hands did not move. The voice did not move. "Lemon cocoanut chocolate. Which kind." To the others they must have looked quite strange. Facing one another across the dark, stained, greasecrusted and frictionsmooth counter, they must have looked a little like they were praying: the youth countryfaced, in clean and Spartan clothing, with an awkwardness which invested him with a quality unworldly and innocent; and the woman opposite him, downcast, still, waiting, who because of her smallness partook likewise of that quality of his, of something beyond flesh. Her face was highboned, gaunt. The flesh was taut across her cheekbones, circled darkly about the eyes; beneath the lowered lids her eyes seemed to be without depth, as if they could not even reflect. Her lower jaw seemed too narrow to contain two rows of teeth.

“Cocoanut,” Joe said. His mouth said it, because immediately he wanted to unsay it. He had only the dime. He had been holding it too hard to have realised yet that it was only a dime. His hand sweated about it, upon it. He believed that the men were watching him and laughing again. He could not hear them and he did not look at them. But he believed that they were. The hands had gone away. Then they returned, setting a plate and a cup before him. He looked at her now, at her face. “How much is pie?” he said.

“Pie is ten cents.” She was just standing there before him, beyond the counter, with her big hands again lying on the dark wood, with that quality spent and waiting. She had never looked at him. He said, in a faint, desperate voice:

“I reckon I dont want no coffee.”

For a while she did not move. Then one of the big hands moved and took up the coffee cup; hand and cup vanished. He sat still, downlooking too, waiting. Then it came. It was not the proprietor. It was the woman behind the cigar case. “What’s that?” she said.

“He dont want the coffee,” the waitress said. Her voice, speaking, moved on, as if she had not paused at the question. Her voice was flat, quiet. The other woman’s voice was quiet too.

“Didn’t he order coffee too?” she said.

“No,” the waitress said, in that level voice that was still in motion, going away. “I misunderstood.”

When he got out, when his spirit wrung with abasement and regret and passionate for hiding scuttled past the cold face of the woman behind the cigar case, he believed that he knew he would and could never see her again. He did not believe that he could bear to see her again, even look at the street, the dingy doorway, even from a distance, again, not thinking yet It’s terrible to be young.

It's terrible. Terrible When Saturdays came he found, invented, reasons to decline to go to town, with McEachern watching him, though not with actual suspicion yet. He passed the days by working hard, too hard; McEachern contemplated the work with suspicion. But there was nothing which the man could know, deduce.

Working was permitted him. Then he could get the nights passed, since he would be too tired to lie awake. And in time even the despair and the regret and the shame grew less. He did not cease to remember it, to react it. But now it had become worn-out, like a gramophone record: familiar only because of the worn threading which blurred the voices. After a while even McEachern accepted a fact. He said:

"I have been watching you lately. And now there is nothing for it but I must misdoubt my own eyes or else believe that at last you are beginning to accept what the Lord has seen fit to allot you. But I will not have you grow vain because I have spoken well of it. You'll have time and opportunity (and inclination too, I dont doubt) to make me regret that I have spoken. To fall into sloth and idleness again. However, reward was created for man the same as chastisement. Do you see that heifer yonder? From today that calf is your own. See that I do not later regret it."

Joe thanked him. Then he could look at the calf and say, aloud: "That belongs to me." Then he looked at it, and it was again too fast and too complete to be thinking: That is not a gift. It is not even a promise: it is a threat thinking, 'I didn't ask for it. He gave it to me. I didn't ask for it,' believing God knows, I have earned it

It was a month later. It was Saturday morning. "I thought you did not like town anymore," McEachern said.

"I reckon one more trip wont hurt me," Joe said. He had a half dollar in his pocket. Mrs McEachern had given it to him. He had asked for a nickel. She insisted that he take the half dollar. He took it, holding it on his palm, cold, contemptuously.

"I suppose not," McEachern said. "You have worked hard, too. But town is no good habit for a man who has yet to make his way."

He did not need to escape, though he would have, even by violence perhaps. But McEachern made it easy. He went to the restaurant, fast. He entered without stumbling now. The waitress was not there. Perhaps he saw, noticed that she wasn't. He stopped at the cigar counter, behind which the woman sat, laying the half dollar on the counter. "I owe a nickel. For a cup of coffee. I said pie and coffee, before I knew that pie was a dime. I owe you a nickel." He did not look toward the rear. The men were there, in their slanted hats and with their cigarettes. The proprietor was there; waiting, Joe heard him at last, in the dirty apron, speaking past the cigarette:

"What is it? What does he want?"

"He says he owes Bobbie a nickel," the woman said. "He wants to give Bobbie a nickel." Her voice was quiet. The proprietor's voice was quiet.

"Well for Christ's sake," he said. To Joe the room was full of listening. He heard, not hearing; he saw, not looking. He was now moving toward the door. The half dollar lay on the glass counter. Even from the rear of the room the proprietor could see it, since he said, "What's that for?"

"He says he owes for a cup of coffee," the woman said.

Joe had almost reached the door. "Here, Jack," the man said. Joe did not stop. "Give him his money," the man said, flat-voiced, not yet moving. The cigarette smoke would curl still across his face, unwinded by any movement. "Give it back to him," the man said. "I dont know what his racket is. But he cant work it here. Give it back to him. You better go back to the farm, Hiram. Maybe you can make a girl there with a nickel."

Now he was in the street, sweating the half dollar, the coin sweating his hand, larger than a cartwheel, feeling. He walked in laughter. He had passed through the door upon it, upon the laughing of the men. It

swept and carried him along the street; then it began to flow past him, dying away, letting him to earth, pavement. He and the waitress were facing one another. She did not see him at once, walking swiftly, downlooking, in a dark dress and a hat. Again, stopped, she did not even look at him, having already looked at him, allseeing, like when she had set the coffee and the pie on the counter. She said, "Oh. And you come back to give it to me. Before them. And they kidded you. Well, say."

"I thought you might have had to pay for it, yourself. I thought—"

"Well, say. Can you tie that. Can you, now."

They were not looking at one another, standing face to face. To another they must have looked like two monks met during the hour of contemplation in a garden path. "I just thought that I . . ."

"Where do you live?" she said. "In the country? Well, say. What's your name?"

"It's not McEachern," he said. "It's Christmas."

"Christmas? Is that your name? Christmas? Well, say."

On the Saturday afternoons during and after adolescence he and the other four or five boys hunted and fished. He saw girls only at church, on Sunday. They were associated with Sunday and with church. So he could not notice them. To do so would be, even to him, a retraction of his religious hatred. But he and the other boys talked about girls. Perhaps some of them—the one who arranged with the negro girl that afternoon, for instance—knew. "They all want to," he told the others. "But sometimes they cant." The others did not know that.

They did not know that all girls wanted to, let alone that there were times when they could not. They thought differently. But to admit that they did not know the latter would be to admit that they had not discovered the former. So they listened while the boy told them. "It's

something that happens to them once a month.” He described his idea of the physical ceremony. Perhaps he knew. Anyway he was graphic enough, convincing enough. If he had tried to describe it as a mental state, something which he only believed, they would not have listened.

But he drew a picture, physical, actual, to be discerned by the sense of smell and even of sight. It moved them: the temporary and abject helplessness of that which tantalised and frustrated desire; the smooth and superior shape in which volition dwelled doomed to be at stated and inescapable intervals victims of periodical filth.

That was how the boy told it, with the other five listening quietly, looking at one another, questioning and secret. On the next Saturday Joe did not go hunting with them. McEachern thought that he had already gone, since the gun was missing. But Joe was hidden in the barn. He stayed there all that day.

On the Saturday following he did go, but alone, early, before the boys called for him. But he did not hunt. He was not three miles from home when in the late afternoon he shot a sheep. He found the flock in a hidden valley and stalked and killed one with the gun. Then he knelt, his hands in the yet warm blood of the dying beast, trembling, drymouthed, backglaring. Then he got over it, recovered. He did not forget what the boy had told him. He just accepted it.

He found that he could live with it, side by side with it. It was as if he said, illogical and desperately calm All right. It is so, then. But not to me. Not in my life and my love Then it was three or four years ago and he had forgotten it, in the sense that a fact is forgotten when it once succumbs to the mind’s insistence that it be neither true nor false.

He met the waitress on the Monday night following the Saturday on which he had tried to pay for the cup of coffee. He did not have the rope then. He climbed from his window and dropped the ten feet to the earth and walked the five miles into town. He did not think at all about how he would get back into his room.

He reached town and went to the corner where she had told him to wait. It was a quiet corner and he was quite early, thinking I will have to remember. To let her show me what to do and how to do it and when. To not let her find out that I dont know, that I will have to find out from her

He had been waiting for over an hour when she appeared. He had been that early. She came up on foot. She came and stood before him, small, with that air steadfast, waiting, downlooking, coming up out of the darkness. "Here you are," she said.

"I got here soon as I could. I had to wait for them to go to sleep. I was afraid I would be late."

"Have you been here long? How long?"

"I dont know. I ran, most of the way. I was afraid I would be late."

"You ran? All them three miles?"

"It's five miles. It's not three."

"Well, say." Then they did not talk. They stood there, two shadows facing one another. More than a year later, remembering that night, he said, suddenly knowing It was like she was waiting for me to hit her "Well," she said.

He had begun now to tremble a little. He could smell her, smell the waiting: still, wise, a little weary; thinking She's waiting for me to start and I dont know how Even to himself his voice sounded idiotic. "I reckon it's late."

"Late?"

"I thought maybe they would be waiting for you. Waiting up until you . . ."

“Waiting for . . . Waiting for . . .” Her voice died, ceased. She said, not moving; they stood like two shadows: “I live with Mame and Max. You know. The restaurant. You ought to remember them, trying to pay that nickel . . .” She began to laugh. There was no mirth in it, nothing in it. “When I think of that. When I think of you coming in there, with that nickel.” Then she stopped laughing. There was no cessation of mirth in that, either. The still, abject, downlooking voice reached him. “I made a mistake tonight.

I forgot something.” Perhaps she was waiting for him to ask her what it was. But he did not. He just stood there, with a still, downspeaking voice dying somewhere about his ears. He had forgot about the shot sheep. He had lived with the fact which the older boy had told him too long now. With the slain sheep he had bought immunity from it for too long now for it to be alive.

So he could not understand at first what she was trying to tell him. They stood at the corner. It was at the edge of town, where the street became a road that ran on beyond the ordered and measured lawns, between small, random houses and barren fields—the small, cheap houses which compose the purlieus of such towns. She said, “Listen. I’m sick tonight.”

He did not understand. He said nothing. Perhaps he did not need to understand. Perhaps he had already expected some fateful mischance, thinking, ‘It was too good to be true, anyway’; thinking too fast for even thought: In a moment she will vanish. She will not be. And then I will be back home, in bed, not having left it at all Her voice went on: “I forgot about the day of the month when I told you Monday night. You surprised me, I guess. There on the street Saturday. I forgot what day it was, anyhow. Until after you had gone.”

His voice was as quiet as hers. “How sick? Haven’t you got some medicine at home that you can take?”

“Haven’t I got . . .” Her voice died. She said, “Well, say.” She said suddenly: “It’s late. And you with four miles to walk.”

“I’ve already walked it now. I’m here now.” His voice was quiet, hopeless, calm. “I reckon it’s getting late,” he said. Then something changed. Not looking at him, she sensed something before she heard it in his hard voice: “What kind of sickness have you got?”

She didn’t answer at once. Then she said, still, downlooking: “You haven’t ever had a sweetheart, yet. I’ll bet you haven’t.” He didn’t answer. “Have you?” He didn’t answer. She moved. She touched him for the first time. She came and took his arm, lightly, in both hands. Looking down, he could see the dark shape of the lowered head which appeared to have been set out of line a little on the neck when she was born. She told him, halting, clumsily, using the only words which she knew perhaps.

But he had heard it before. He had already fled backward, past the slain sheep, the price paid for immunity, to the afternoon when, sitting on a creek bank, he had been not hurt or astonished so much as outraged. The arm which she held jerked free. She did not believe that he had intended to strike her; she believed otherwise, in fact.

But the result was the same. As he faded on down the road, the shape, the shadow, she believed that he was running. She could hear his feet for some time after she could no longer see him. She did not move at once. She stood as he had left her, motionless, downlooking, as though waiting for the blow which she had already received.

He was not running. But he was walking fast, and in a direction that was taking him further yet from home, from the house five miles away which he had left by climbing from a window and which he had not yet planned any way of reentering. He went on down the road fast and turned from it and sprang over a fence, into plowed earth. Something was growing in the furrows. Beyond were woods, trees.

He reached the woods and entered, among the hard trunks, the branchshadowed quiet, hardfeeling, hardsmelling, invisible. In the notseeing and the hardknowing as though in a cave he seemed to see a

diminishing row of suavely shaped urns in moonlight, blanched. And not one was perfect. Each one was cracked and from each crack there issued something liquid, deathcolored, and foul. He touched a tree, leaning his propped arms against it, seeing the ranked and moonlit urns. He vomited.

On the next Monday night he had the rope. He was waiting at the same corner; he was quite early again. Then he saw her. She came up to where he stood. "I thought maybe you wouldn't be here," she said.

"Did you?" He took her arm, drawing her on down the road.

"Where are we going?" she said. He didn't answer, drawing her on. She had to trot to keep up. She trotted clumsily: an animal impeded by that which distinguished her from animals: her heels, her clothes, her smallness. He drew her from the road, toward the fence which he had crossed a week ago. "Wait," she said, the words jolting from her mouth. "The fence—I can't—" As she stooped to go through, between the strands of wire which he had stepped over, her dress caught. He leaned and jerked it free with a ripping sound.

"I'll buy you another one," he said. She said nothing. She let herself be half carried and half dragged among the growing plants, the furrows, and into the woods, the trees.

He kept the rope, neatly coiled, behind the same loose board in his attic room where Mrs McEachern kept her hoard of nickels and dimes, with the difference that the rope was thrust further back into the hole than Mrs McEachern could reach. He had got the idea from her. Sometimes, with the old couple snoring in the room beneath, when he lifted out the silent rope he would think of the paradox.

Sometimes he thought about telling her; of showing her where he kept hidden the implement of his sin, having got the idea, learned how and where to hide it, from her. But he knew that she would merely want to help him conceal it; that she would want him to sin in order that she could help him hide it; that she would at last make such a to-do of

meaningful whispers and signals that McEachern would have to suspect something despite himself.

Thus he began to steal, to take money from the hoard. It is very possible that the woman did not suggest it to him, never mentioned money to him. It is possible that he did not even know that he was paying with money for pleasure. It was that he had watched for years Mrs McEachern hide money in a certain place. Then he himself had something which it was necessary to hide. He put it in the safest place which he knew. Each time he hid or retrieved the rope, he saw the tin can containing money.

The first time he took fifty cents. He debated for some time between fifty cents and a quarter. Then he took the fifty cents because that was the exact sum he needed. With it he bought a stale and flyspecked box of candy from a man who had won it for ten cents on a punching board in a store. He gave it to the waitress. It was the first thing which he had ever given her. He gave it to her as if no one had ever thought of giving her anything before. Her expression was a little strange when she took the tawdry, shabby box into her big hands.

She was sitting at the time on her bed in her bedroom in the small house where she lived with the man and woman called Max and Mame. One night about a week before the man came into the room. She was undressing, sitting on the bed while she removed her stockings. He came in and leaned against the bureau, smoking.

“A rich farmer,” he said. “John Jacob Astor from the cowshed.”

She had covered herself, sitting on the bed, still, downlooking. “He pays me.”

“With what? Hasn’t he used up that nickel yet?” He looked at her. “A setup for hayseeds. That’s what I brought you down here from Memphis for. Maybe I’d better start giving away grub too.”

“I’m not doing it on your time.”

“Sure. I cant stop you. I just hate to see you. A kid, that never saw a whole dollar at one time in his life. With this town full of guys making good jack, that would treat you right.”

“Maybe I like him. Maybe you hadn’t thought of that.”

He looked at her, at the still and lowered crown of her head as she sat on the bed, her hands on her lap. He leaned against the bureau, smoking. He said, “Mame!” After a while he said again, “Mame! Come in here.” The walls were thin. After a while the big blonde woman came up the hall, without haste. They could both hear her. She entered. “Get this,” the man said. “She says maybe she likes him best. It’s Romeo and Juliet. For sweet Jesus!”

The blonde woman looked at the dark crown of the waitress’ head. “What about that?”

“Nothing. It’s fine. Max Confrey presenting Miss Bobbie Allen, the youth’s companion.”

“Go out,” the woman said.

“Sure. I just brought her change for a nickel.” He went out. The waitress had not moved. The blonde woman went to the bureau and leaned against it, looking at the other’s lowered head.

“Does he ever pay you?” she said.

The waitress did not move. “Yes. He pays me.”

The blonde woman looked at her, leaning against the bureau as Max had done. “Coming all the way down here from Memphis. Bringing it all the way down here to give it away.”

The waitress did not move. “I’m not hurting Max.”

The blonde woman looked at the other's lowered head. Then she turned and went toward the door. "See that you dont," she said. "This wont last forever. These little towns wont stand for this long. I know. I came from one of them."

Sitting on the bed, holding the cheap, florid candy box in her hands, she sat as she had sat while the blonde woman talked to her. But it was now Joe who leaned against the bureau and looked at her. She began to laugh.

She laughed, holding the gaudy box in her bigknuckled hands. Joe watched her. He watched her rise and pass him, her face lowered. She passed through the door and called Max by name. Joe had never seen Max save in the restaurant, in the hat and the dirty apron. When Max entered he was not even smoking. He thrust out his hand. "How are you, Romeo?" he said.

Joe was shaking hands almost before he had recognised the man. "My name's Joe McEachern," he said. The blonde woman had also entered. It was also the first time he had even seen her save in the restaurant. He saw her enter, watching her, watching the waitress open the box. She extended it.

"Joe brought it to me," she said.

The blonde woman looked at the box, once. She did not even move her hand. "Thanks," she said. The man also looked at the box, without moving his hand.

"Well, well, well," he said. "Sometimes Christmas lasts a good while. Hey, Romeo?" Joe had moved a little away from the bureau. He had never been in the house before. He was looking at the man, with on his face an expression a little placative and baffled though not alarmed, watching the man's inscrutable and monklike face. But he said nothing. It was the waitress who said,

"If you dont like it, you dont have to eat it." He watched Max, watching his face, hearing the waitress' voice; the voice downlooking: "Not doing you nor nobody else any harm. . . . Not on his time . . ." He was not watching her nor the blonde woman either. He was watching Max, with that expression puzzled, placative, not afraid. The blonde woman now spoke; it was as though they were speaking of him and in his presence and in a tongue which they knew that he did not know.

"Come on out," the blonde woman said.

"For sweet Jesus," Max said. "I was just going to give Romeo a drink on the house."

"Does he want one?" the blonde woman said. Even when she addressed Joe directly it was as if she still spoke to Max. "Do you want a drink?"

"Dont hold him in suspense because of his past behavior. Tell him it's on the house."

"I dont know," Joe said. "I never tried it."

"Never tried anything on the house," Max said. "For sweet Jesus." He had not looked at Joe once again after he entered the room. Again it was as if they talked at and because of him, in a language which he did not understand.

"Come on," the blonde woman said. "Come on, now."

They went out. The blonde woman had never looked at him at all, and the man, without looking at him, had never ceased. Then they were gone. Joe stood beside the bureau. In the middle of the floor the waitress stood, downlooking, with the open box of candy in her hand. The room was close, smelling of stale scent. Joe had never seen it before.

He had not believed that he ever would. The shades were drawn. The single bulb burned at the end of a cord, shaded by a magazine page pinned about it and already turned brown from the heat. "It's all right," he said. "It's all right." She didn't answer nor move. He thought of the darkness outside, the night in which they had been alone before. "Let's go," he said.

"Go?" she said. Then he looked at her. "Go where?" she said. "What for?" Still he did not understand her. He watched her come to the bureau and set the box of candy upon it. While he watched, she began to take her clothes off, ripping them off and flinging them down.

He said, "Here? In here?" It was the first time he had ever seen a naked woman, though he had been her lover for a month. But even then he did not even know that he had not known what to expect to see.

That night they talked. They lay in the bed, in the dark, talking. Or he talked, that is. All the time he was thinking, 'Jesus. Jesus. So this is it.' He lay naked too, beside her, touching her with his hand and talking about her. Not about where she had come from and what she had even done, but about her body as if no one had ever done this before, with her or with anyone else. It was as if with speech he were learning about women's bodies, with the curiosity of a child. She told him about the sickness of the first night.

It did not shock him now. Like the nakedness and the physical shape, it was like something which had never happened or existed before. So he told her in turn what he knew to tell. He told about the negro girl in the mill shed on that afternoon three years ago. He told her quietly and peacefully, lying beside her, touching her. Perhaps he could not even have said if she listened or not. Then he said, "You noticed my skin, my hair," waiting for her to answer, his hand slow on her body.

She whispered also. "Yes. I thought maybe you were a foreigner. That you never come from around here."

"It's different from that, even. More than just a foreigner. You cant guess."

"What? How more different?"

"Guess."

Their voices were quiet. It was still, quiet; night now known, not to be desired, pined for. "I cant. What are you?"

His hand was slow and quiet on her invisible flank. He did not answer at once. It was not as if he were tantalising her. It was as if he just had not thought to speak on. She asked him again. Then he told her. "I got some nigger blood in me."

Then she lay perfectly still, with a different stillness. But he did not seem to notice it. He lay peacefully too, his hand slow up and down her flank. "You're what?" she said.

"I think I got some nigger blood in me." His eyes were closed, his hand slow and unceasing. "I dont know. I believe I have."

She did not move. She said at once: "You're lying."

"All right," he said, not moving, his hand not ceasing.

"I dont believe it," her voice said in the darkness.

"All right," he said, his hand not ceasing.

The next Saturday he took another half dollar from Mrs McEachern's hiding place and gave it to the waitress. A day or two later he had reason to believe that Mrs McEachern had missed the money and that she suspected him of having taken it.

Because she lay in wait for him until he knew that she knew that McEachern would not interrupt them. Then she said, "Joe." He paused

and looked at her, knowing that she would not be looking at him. She said, not looking at him, her voice flat, level: "I know how a young man growing up needs money. More than p—Mr McEachern gives you. . . ." He looked at her, until her voice ceased and died away. Apparently he was waiting for it to cease. Then he said,

"Money? What do I want with money?"

On the next Saturday he earned two dollars chopping wood for a neighbor. He lied to McEachern about where he was going and where he had been and what he had done there. He gave the money to the waitress. McEachern found out about the work. Perhaps he believed that Joe had hidden the money. Mrs McEachern may have told him so.

Perhaps two nights a week Joe and the waitress went to her room. He did not know at first that anyone else had ever done that. Perhaps he believed that some peculiar dispensation had been made in his favor, for his sake. Very likely until the last he still believed that Max and Mame had to be placated, not for the actual fact, but because of his presence there. But he did not see them again in the house, though he knew that they were there. But he did not know for certain if they knew that he was there or had ever returned after the night of the candy.

Usually they met outside, went somewhere else or just loitered on the way to where she lived. Perhaps he believed up to the last that he had suggested it. Then one night she did not meet him where he waited. He waited until the clock in the courthouse struck twelve.

Then he went on to where she lived. He had never done that before, though even then he could not have said that she had ever forbidden him to come there unless she was with him. But he went there that night, expecting to find the house dark and asleep. The house was dark, but it was not asleep. He knew that, that beyond the dark shades of her room people were not asleep and that she was not there alone.

How he knew it he could not have said. Neither would he admit what he knew. 'It's just Max,' he thought. 'It's just Max.' But he knew better.

He knew that there was a man in the room with her. He did not see her for two weeks, though he knew that she was waiting for him. Then one night he was at the corner when she appeared. He struck her, without warning, feeling her flesh.

He knew then what even yet he had not believed. "Oh," she cried. He struck her again. "Not here!" she whispered. "Not here!" Then he found that she was crying. He had not cried since he could remember. He cried, cursing her, striking her. Then she was holding him. Even the reason for striking her was gone then. "Now, now," she said. "Now, now."

They did not leave the corner even that night. They did not walk on loitering nor leave the road. They sat on a sloping grass-bank and talked. She talked this time, telling him. It did not take much telling. He could see now what he discovered that he had known all the time: the idle men in the restaurant, with their cigarettes bobbing as they spoke to her in passing, and she going back and forth, constant, downlooking, and abject. Listening to her voice, he seemed to smell the odor reek of all anonymous men above dirt. Her head was a little lowered as she talked, the big hands still on her lap. He could not see, of course. He did not have to see. "I thought you knew," she said.

"No," he said. "I reckon I didn't."

"I thought you did."

"No," he said. "I dont reckon I did."

Two weeks later he had begun to smoke, squinting his face against the smoke, and he drank too. He would drink at night with Max and Mame and sometimes three or four other men and usually another woman or two, sometimes from the town, but usually strangers who would come in from Memphis and stay a week or a month, as waitresses behind the restaurant counter where the idle men gathered all day. He did not always know their names, but he could cock his hat as they did; during the evenings behind the drawn shades of the diningroom at Max's he

cocked it so and spoke of the waitress to the others, even in her presence, in his loud, drunken, despairing young voice, calling her his whore.

Now and then in Max's car he took her to dances in the country, always careful that McEachern should not hear about it. "I don't know which he would be madder at," he told her; "at you or at the dancing." Once they had to put him to bed, helpless, in the house where he had not even ever dreamed at one time that he could enter. The next morning the waitress drove him out home before daylight so he could get into the house before he was caught. And during the day McEachern watched him with dour and grudging approval.

"But you have still plenty of time to make me regret that heifer," McEachern said.

Chapter 9

McEachern lay in bed. The room was dark, but he was not asleep. He lay beside Mrs McEachern, whom he did believe to be sleeping, thinking fast and hard, thinking, 'The suit has been worn. But when.

It could not have been during the day, because he is beneath my eyes, except on Saturday afternoons. But on any Saturday afternoon he could go to the barn, remove and hide the fit clothing which I require him to wear, and then don apparel which he would and could need only as some adjunct to sinning.' It was as if he knew then, had been told. That would infer then that the garments were worn in secret, and therefore in all likelihood, at night.

And if that were so, he refused to believe that the boy had other than one purpose: lechery. He had never committed lechery himself and he had not once failed to refuse to listen to anyone who talked about it.

Yet within about thirty minutes of intensive thinking he knew almost as much of Joe's doings as Joe himself could have told him, with the exception of names and places. Very likely he would not have believed those even from Joe's mouth, since men of his kind usually have just as firmly fixed convictions about the mechanics, the theatring of evil as about those of good. Thus bigotry and clairvoyance were practically one, only the bigotry was a little slow, for as Joe, descending on his rope, slid like a fast shadow across the open and moonfilled window behind which McEachern lay, McEachern did not at once recognise him or perhaps believe what he saw, even though he could see the very rope itself.

And when he got to the window Joe had already drawn the rope back and made it fast and was now on his way toward the barn. As McEachern watched him from the window, he felt something of that pure and impersonal outrage which a judge must feel were he to see a man on trial for his life lean and spit on the bailiff's sleeve.

Hidden in the shadows of the lane halfway between the house and the road, he could see Joe at the mouth of the lane. He too heard the car and saw it come up and stop and Joe get into it. Possibly he did not even care who else was in it. Perhaps he already knew, and his purpose had been merely to see in which direction it went.

Perhaps he believed that he knew that too, since the car could have gone almost anywhere in a country full of possible destinations with roads that led to them. Because he turned now back toward the house, walking fast, in that same pure and impersonal outrage, as if he believed so that he would be guided by some greater and purer outrage that he would not even need to doubt personal faculties.

In carpet slippers, without a hat, his nightshirt thrust into his trousers and his braces dangling, he went straight as an arrow to the stable and saddled his big, old, strong white horse and returned back down the lane and to the road at a heavy gallop, though Mrs McEachern from the kitchen door called his name when he rode out of the lot.

He turned into the road at that slow and ponderous gallop, the two of them, man and beast, leaning a little stiffly forward as though in some juggernautish simulation of terrific speed though the actual speed itself was absent, as if in that cold and implacable and undeviating conviction of both omnipotence and clairvoyance of which they both partook known destination and speed were not necessary.

He rode at that same speed straight to the place which he sought and which he had found out of a whole night and almost a whole half of a county, though it was not that far distant. He had gone hardly four miles when he heard music ahead and then he saw beside the road lights in a school house, a one-room building. He had known where the building was, but he had had neither reason nor manner of knowing that there would be a dance held in it.

But he rode straight to it and into the random shadows of parked cars and buggies and saddled horses and mules which filled the grove which surrounded the school, and dismounted almost before the horse had stopped. He did not even tether it. He got down, and in the carpet slippers and the dangling braces and his round head and his short, blunt, outraged beard ran toward the open door and the open windows where the music came and where kerosenelit shadows passed in a certain orderly uproar.

Perhaps, if he were thinking at all, he believed that he had been guided and were now being propelled by some militant Michael Himself as he entered the room. Apparently his eyes were not even momentarily at fault with the sudden light and the motion as he thrust among bodies with turned heads as, followed by a wake of astonishment and incipient pandemonium, he ran toward the youth whom he had adopted of his own free will and whom he had tried to raise as he was convinced was right. Joe and the waitress were dancing and Joe had not seen him yet.

The woman had never seen him but once, but perhaps she remembered him, or perhaps his appearance now was enough. Because she stopped dancing and upon her face came an expression very like horror, which Joe saw and turned. As he turned, McEachern

was upon them. Neither had McEachern ever seen the woman but once, and very likely then he had not looked at her, just as he had refused to listen when men spoke of fornication. Yet he went straight to her, ignoring Joe for the moment. "Away, Jezebel!" he said. His voice thundered, into the shocked silence, the shocked surrounding faces beneath the kerosene lamps, into the ceased music, into the peaceful moonlit night of young summer. "Away, harlot!"

Perhaps it did not seem to him that he had been moving fast nor that his voice was loud. Very likely he seemed to himself to be standing just and rocklike and with neither haste nor anger while on all sides the sluttishness of weak human men seethed in a long sigh of terror about the actual representative of the wrathful and retributive Throne.

Perhaps they were not even his hands which struck at the face of the youth whom he had nurtured and sheltered and clothed from a child, and perhaps when the face ducked the blow and came up again it was not the face of that child. But he could not have been surprised at that, since it was not that child's face which he was concerned with: it was the face of Satan, which he knew as well.

And when, staring at the face, he walked steadily toward it with his hand still raised, very likely he walked toward it in the furious and dreamlike exaltation of a martyr who has already been absolved, into the descending chair which Joe swung at his head, and into nothingness. Perhaps the nothingness astonished him a little, but not much, and not for long.

Then to Joe it all rushed away, roaring, dying, leaving him in the center of the floor, the shattered chair clutched in his hand, looking down at his adopted father. McEachern lay on his back. He looked quite peaceful now. He appeared to sleep: bluntheaded, indomitable even in repose, even the blood on his forehead peaceful and quiet.

Joe was breathing hard. He could hear it, and also something else, thin and shrill and far away. He seemed to listen to it for a long time before he recognised it for a voice, a woman's voice. He looked and saw two

men holding her and she writhing and struggling, her hair shaken forward, her white face wrung and ugly beneath the splotches of savage paint, her mouth a small jagged hold filled with shrieking.

“Calling me a harlot!” she screamed, wrenching at the men who held her. “That old son of a bitch! Let go! Let go!” Then her voice stopped making words again and just screamed; she writhed and threshed, trying to bite the hands of the men who struggled with her.

Still carrying the shattered chair Joe walked toward her. About the walls, huddling, clotted, the others watched him: the girls in stiff offcolors and mailorder stockings and heels; the men, young men in illcut and boardlike garments also from the mailorder, with hard, ruined hands and eyes already revealing a heritage of patient brooding upon endless furrows and the slow buttocks of mules. Joe began to run, brandishing the chair. “Let her go!” he said. At once she ceased struggling and turned on him the fury, the shrieking, as if she had just seen him, realised that he was also there.

“And you! You brought me here. Goddamn bastard clodhopper. Bastard you! Son of a bitch you and him too. Putting him at me that never ever saw—” Joe did not appear to be running at anyone in particular, and his face was quite calm beneath the uplifted chair. The others fell back from about the woman, freeing her, though she continued to wrench her arms as if she did not yet realise it.

“Get out of here!” Joe shouted. He whirled, swinging the chair; yet his face was still quite calm. “Back!” he said, though no one had moved toward him at all. They were all as still and as silent as the man on the floor. He swung the chair, backing now toward the door. “Stand back! I said I would kill him some day! I told him so!” He swung the chair about him, calmfaced, backing toward the door. “Don’t a one of you move, now,” he said, looking steadily and ceaselessly at faces that might have been masks.

Then he flung the chair down and whirled and sprang out the door, into soft, dappled moonlight. He overtook the waitress as she was getting

into the car in which they had come. He was panting, yet his voice was calm too: a sleeping face merely breathing hard enough to make sounds. "Get on back to town," he said. "I'll be there soon as I . . ." Apparently he was not aware of what he was saying nor of what was happening; when the woman turned suddenly in the door of the car and began to beat him in the face he did not move, his voice did not change: "Yes. That's right. I'll be there soon as I—" Then he turned and ran, while she was still striking at him.

He could not have known where McEachern had left the horse, nor for certain if it was even there. Yet he ran straight to it, with something of his adopted father's complete faith in an infallibility in events. He got onto it and swung it back toward the road. The car had already turned into the road. He saw the taillight diminish and disappear.

The old, strong, farmbred horse returned home at its slow and steady canter. The youth upon its back rode lightly, balanced lightly, leaning well forward, exulting perhaps at that moment as Faustus had, of having put behind now at once and for all the Shalt Not, of being free at last of honor and law. In the motion the sweet sharp sweat of the horse blew, sulphuric; the invisible wind flew past. He cried aloud, "I have done it! I have done it! I told them I would!"

He entered the lane and rode through the moonlight up to the house without slowing. He had thought it would be dark, but it was not. He did not pause; the careful and hidden rope were as much a part of his dead life now as honor and hope, and the old wearying woman who had been one of his enemies for thirteen years and who was now awake, waiting for him. The light was in hers and McEachern's bedroom and she was standing in the door, with a shawl over her nightdress. "Joe?" she said.

He came down the hall fast. His face looked as McEachern had seen it as the chair fell. Perhaps she could not yet see it good. "What is it?" she said. "Paw rode away on the horse. I heard . . ." She saw his face then. But she did not even have time to step back. He did not strike her; his hand on her arm was quite gentle. It was just hurried, getting her out of

the path, out of the door. He swept her aside as he might have a curtain across the door.

“He’s at a dance,” he said. “Get away, old woman.” She turned, clutching the shawl with one hand, her other against the door face as she fell back, watching him as he crossed the room and began to run up the stairs which mounted to his attic. Without stopping he looked back. Then she could see his teeth shining in the lamp. “At a dance, you hear? He’s not dancing, though.” He laughed back, into the lamp; he turned his head and his laughing, running on up the stairs, vanishing as he ran, vanishing upward from the head down as if he were running headfirst and laughing into something that was obliterating him like a picture in chalk being erased from a blackboard.

She followed, toiling up the stairs. She began to follow almost as soon as he passed her, as if that implacable urgency which had carried her husband away had returned like a cloak on the shoulders of the boy and had been passed from him in turn to her. She dragged herself up the cramped stair, clutching the rail with one hand and the shawl with the other. She was not speaking, not calling to him. It was as though she were a phantom obeying the command sent back by the absent master.

Joe had not lighted his lamp. But the room was filled with refracted moonglow, and even without that very likely she could have told what he was doing. She held herself upright by the wall, fumbling her hand along the wall until she reached the bed and sank onto it, sitting. It had taken her some time, because when she looked toward where the loose plank was, he was already approaching toward the bed, where the moonlight fell directly, and she watched him empty the tin can onto the bed and sweep the small mass of coins and bills into his hand and ram the hand into his pocket.

Only then did he look at her as she sat, backfallen a little now, propped on one arm and holding the shawl with the other hand. “I didn’t ask you for it,” he said. “Remember that. I didn’t ask, because I was afraid you would give it to me. I just took it. Dont forget that.” He was turning

almost before his voice ceased. She watched him turn into the lamplight which fell up the stair, descending. He passed out of sight, but she could still hear him. She heard him in the hall again, fast, and after a while she heard the horse again, galloping; and after a while the sound of the horse ceased.

A clock was striking one somewhere when Joe urged the now spent old horse through the main street of town. The horse had been breathing hard for some time now, but Joe still held it at a stumbling trot with a heavy stick that fell rhythmically across its rump. It was not a switch: it was a section of broom handle which had been driven into Mrs McEachern's flower bed in front of the house for something to grow on. Though the horse was still going through the motion of galloping, it was not moving much faster than a man could walk.

The stick too rose and fell with the same spent and terrific slowness, the youth on the horse's back leaning forward as if he did not know that the horse had flagged, or as though to lift forward and onward the failing beast whose slow hooves rang with a measured hollow sound through the empty and moondappled street. It—the horse and the rider—had a strange, dreamy effect, like a moving picture in slow motion as it galloped steady and flagging up the street and toward the old corner where he used to wait, less urgent perhaps but not less eager, and more young.

The horse was not even trotting now, on stiff legs, its breathing deep and labored and rasping, each breath a groan. The stick still fell; as the progress of the horse slowed, the speed of the stick increased in exact ratio. But the horse slowed, sheering into the curb. Joe pulled at its head, beating it, but it slowed into the curb and stopped, shadowdappled, its head down, trembling, its breathing almost like a human voice.

Yet still the rider leaned forward in the arrested saddle, in the attitude of terrific speed, beating the horse across the rump with the stick. Save for the rise and fall of the stick and the groaning respirations of the animal, they might have been an equestrian statue strayed from its

pedestal and come to rest in an attitude of ultimate exhaustion in a quiet and empty street splotched and dappled by moonshadows.

Joe descended. He went to the horse's head and began to tug it, as if he would drag it into motion by main strength and then spring onto its back. The horse did not move. He desisted; he seemed to be leaning a little toward the horse. Again they were motionless: the spent beast and the youth, facing one another, their heads quite near, as if carved in an attitude of listening or of prayer or of consultation. Then Joe raised the stick and fell to beating the horse about its motionless head.

He beat it steadily until the stick broke. He continued to strike it with a fragment not much longer than his hand. But perhaps he realised that he was inflicting no pain, or perhaps his arm grew tired at last, because he threw the stick away and turned, whirled, already in full stride. He did not look back. Diminishing, his white shirt pulsing and fading in the moonshadows, he ran as completely out of the life of the horse as if it had never existed.

He passed the corner where he used to wait. If he noticed, thought, at all, he must have said My God how long. How long ago that was The street curved into the gravel road. He had almost a mile yet to go, so he ran not fast but carefully, steadily, his face lowered a little as if he contemplated the spurned road beneath his feet, his elbows at his sides like a trained runner. The road curved on, moonblanched, bordered at wide intervals by the small, random, new, terrible little houses in which people who came yesterday from nowhere and tomorrow will be gone where-not, dwell on the edges of towns. They were all dark save the one toward which he ran.

He reached the house and turned from the road, running, his feet measured and loud in the late silence. Perhaps he could see already the waitress, in a dark dress for travelling, with her hat on and her bag packed, waiting. (How they were to go anywhere, by what means depart, likely he had never thought.) And perhaps Max and Mame too, likely undressed—Max coatless or maybe even in his undershirt, and

Mame in the light blue kimono—the two of them bustling about in that loud, cheerful, seeing-someone-off way.

But actually he was not thinking at all, since he had never told the waitress to get ready to leave at all. Perhaps he believed that he had told her, or that she should know, since his recent doings and his future plans must have seemed to him simple enough for anyone to understand. Perhaps he even believed that he had told her he was going home in order to get money when she got into the car.

He ran onto the porch. Heretofore, even during his heyday in the house, his impulse had been always to glide from the road and into the shadow of the porch and into the house itself where he was expected, as swiftly and inconspicuously as possible. He knocked.

There was a light in her room, and another at the end of the hall, as he had expected; and voices from beyond the curtained windows too, several voices which he could discern to be intent rather than cheerful: that he expected too, thinking Perhaps they think I am not coming. That damn horse. That damn horse He knocked again, louder, putting his hand on the knob, shaking it, pressing his face against the curtained glass in the front door. The voices ceased.

Then there was no sound whatever from within the house. The two lights, the lighted shade to her room and the opaque curtain in the door, burned with a steady and unwavering glare, as if all the people in the house had suddenly died when he touched the knob. He knocked again, with scarce interval between; he was still knocking when the door (no shadow had fallen upon the curtain and no step had approached beyond it) fled suddenly and silently from under his rapping hand. He was already stepping across the threshold as if he were attached to the door, when Max emerged from behind it, blocking it. He was completely dressed, even to the hat.

“Well, well, well,” he said. His voice was not loud, and it was almost as if he had drawn Joe swiftly into the hall and shut the door and locked it before Joe knew that he was inside. Yet his voice held again that

ambiguous quality, that quality hearty and completely empty and completely without pleasure or mirth, like a shell, like something he carried before his face and watched Joe through it, which in the past had caused Joe to look at Max with something between puzzlement and anger. "Here's Romeo at last," he said. "The Beale Street Playboy." Then he spoke a little louder, saying Romeo quite loud. "Come in and meet the folks."

Joe was already moving toward the door which he knew, very nearly running again, if he had ever actually stopped. He was not listening to Max. He had never heard of Beale Street, that three or four Memphis city blocks in comparison with which Harlem is a movie set. Joe had not looked at anything. Because suddenly he saw the blonde woman standing in the hall at the rear. He had not seen her emerge into the hall at all, yet it was empty when he entered. And then suddenly she was standing there. She was dressed, in a dark skirt, and she held a hat in her hand.

And just beyond an open dark door beside him was a pile of luggage, several bags. Perhaps he did not see them. Or perhaps looking saw once, faster than thought I didn't think she would have that many. Perhaps he thought then for the first time that they had nothing to travel in, thinking How can I carry all those. But he did not pause, already turning toward the door which he knew. It was only as he put his hand on the door that he became aware of complete silence beyond it, a silence which he at eighteen knew that it would take more than one person to make. But he did not pause; perhaps he was not even aware that the hall was empty again, that the blonde woman had vanished again without his having seen or heard her move.

He opened the door. He was running now; that is, as a man might run far ahead of himself and his knowing in the act of stopping stock still. The waitress sat on the bed as he had seen her sitting so many times.

She wore the dark dress and the hat, as he had expected, known. She sat with her face lowered, not even looking at the door when it opened, a cigarette burning in one still hand that looked almost monstrous in its

immobility against the dark dress. And in the same instant he saw the second man. He had never seen the man before. But he did not realise this now. It was only later that he remembered that, and remembered the piled luggage in the dark room which he had looked at for an instant while thought went faster than seeing.

The stranger sat on the bed too, also smoking. His hat was tipped forward so that the shadow of the brim fell across his mouth. He was not old, yet he did not look young either. He and Max might have been brothers in the sense that any two white men strayed suddenly into an African village might look like brothers to them who live there. His face, his chin where the light fell upon it, was still. Whether or not the stranger was looking at him, Joe did not know. And that Max was standing just behind him Joe did not know either. And he heard their actual voices without knowing what they said, without even listening:
Ask him

How would he know Perhaps he heard the words. But likely not. Likely they were as yet no more significant than the rasping of insects beyond the closed window, or the packed bags which he had looked at and had not yet seen. He cleared out right afterward, Bobbie said

He might know. Let's find out if we can just what we are running from, at least

Though Joe had not moved since he entered, he was still running. When Max touched his shoulder he turned as if he had been halted in midstride. He had not been aware that Max was even in the room. He looked at Max over his shoulder with a kind of furious annoyance. "Let's have it, kid," Max said. "What about it?"

"What about what?" Joe said.

"The old guy. Do you think you croaked him? Let's have it straight. You don't want to get Bobbie in a jam."

“Bobbie,” Joe said, thinking Bobbie. Bobbie He turned, running again; this time Max caught his shoulder, though not hard.

“Come on,” Max said. “Aint we all friends here? Did you croak him?”

“Croak him?” Joe said, in that fretted tone of impatience and restraint, as if he were being detained and questioned by a child.

The stranger spoke. “The one you crowned with the chair. Is he dead?”

“Dead?” Joe said. He looked at the stranger. When he did so, he saw the waitress again and he ran again. He actually moved now. He had completely dismissed the two men from his mind. He went to the bed, dragging at his pocket, on his face an expression both exalted and victorious. The waitress did not look at him. She had not looked at him once since he entered, though very likely he had completely forgot that. She had not moved; the cigarette still burned in her hand. Her motionless hand looked as big and dead and pale as a piece of cooking meat. Again someone grasped him by the shoulder. It was the stranger now. The stranger and Max stood shoulder to shoulder, looking at Joe.

“Quit stalling,” the stranger said. “If you croaked the guy, say so. It cant be any secret long. They are bound to hear about it by next month at the outside.”

“I dont know, I tell you!” Joe said. He looked from one to the other, fretted but not yet glaring. “I hit him. He fell down. I told him I was going to do it someday.” He looked from one to the other of the still, almost identical faces. He began to jerk his shoulder under the stranger’s hand.

Max spoke. “What did you come here for, then?”

“What did—” Joe said. “What did I . . .” he said, in a tone of fainting amazement, glaring from face to face with a sort of outraged yet still patient exasperation. “What did I come for? I came to get Bobbie. Do you think that I—when I went all the way home to get the money to get

married—” Again he completely forgot, dismissed them. He jerked free and turned to the woman with once more that expression oblivious, exalted, and proud. Very likely at that moment the two men were blown as completely out of his life as two scraps of paper. Very likely he was not even aware when Max went to the door and called and a moment later the blonde woman entered. He was bending above the bed upon which sat the immobile and downlooking waitress, stooping above her, dragging the wadded mass of coins and bills from his pocket, onto her lap and onto the bed beside her. “Here! Look at it. Look. I’ve got. See?”

Then the wind blew upon him again, like in the school house three hours ago among the gaped faces there of which he had for the time been oblivious. He stood in a quiet, dreamlike state, erect now where the upward spring of the sitting waitress had knocked him, and saw her, on her feet, gather up the wadded and scattered money and fling it; he saw quietly her face strained, the mouth screaming, the eyes screaming too. He alone of them all seemed to himself quiet, calm; his voice alone quiet enough to register upon the ear: “You mean you wont?” he said. “You mean, you wont?”

It was very much like it had been in the school house: someone holding her as she struggled and shrieked, her hair wild with the jerking and tossing of her head; her face, even her mouth, in contrast to the hair as still as a dead mouth in a dead face. “Bastard! Son of a bitch! Getting me into a jam, that always treated you like you were a white man. A white man!”

But very likely to him even yet it was just noise, not registering at all: just a part of the long wind. He just stared at her, at the face which he had never seen before, saying quietly (whether aloud or not, he could not have said) in a slow amazement: Why, I committed murder for her. I even stole for her as if he had just heard of it, thought of it, been told that he had done it.

Then she too seemed to blow out of his life on the long wind like a third scrap of paper. He began to swing his arm as if the hand still clutched

the shattered chair. The blonde woman had been in the room some time. He saw her for the first time, without surprise, having apparently materialised out of thin air, motionless, with that diamondsurfaced tranquillity which invested her with a respectability as implacable and calm as the white lifted glove of a policeman, not a hair out of place. She now wore the pale blue kimono over the dark garment for travelling. She said quietly: "Take him. Let's get out of here. There'll be a cop out here soon. They'll know where to look for him."

Perhaps Joe did not hear her at all, nor the screaming waitress: "He told me himself he was a nigger! The son of a bitch! Me f—ing for nothing a nigger son of a bitch that would get me in a jam with clodhopper police. At a clodhopper dance!" Perhaps he heard only the long wind, as, swinging his hand as though it still clutched the chair, he sprang forward upon the two men.

Very likely he did not even know that they were already moving toward him. Because with something of the exaltation of his adopted father he sprang full and of his own accord into the stranger's fist. Perhaps he did not feel either blow, though the stranger struck him twice in the face before he reached the floor, where like the man whom he had struck down, he lay upon his back, quite still.

But he was not out because his eyes were still open, looking quietly up at them. There was nothing in his eyes at all, no pain, no surprise. But apparently he could not move; he just lay there with a profoundly contemplative expression, looking quietly up at the two men, and the blonde woman still as immobile and completely finished and surfaced as a cast statue. Perhaps he could not hear the voices either, or perhaps he did and they once more had no more significance than the dry buzzing of the steady insects beyond the window:

Bitching up as sweet a little setup as I could have wanted

He ought to stay away from bitches

He cant help himself. He was born too close to one

Is he really a nigger? He dont look like one

That's what he told Bobbie one night. But I guess she still dont know any more about what he is than he does. These country bastards are liable to be anything

We'll find out. We'll see if his blood is black Lying peaceful and still Joe watched the stranger lean down and lift his head from the floor and strike him again in the face, this time with a short slashing blow. After a moment he licked his lip a little, somewhat as a child might lick a cooking spoon. He watched the stranger's hand go back. But it did not fall.

That's enough. Let's get on to Memphis

Just one more Joe lay quietly and watched the hand. Then Max was beside the stranger, stooping too. We'll need a little more blood to tell for sure

Sure. He dont need to worry. This one is on the house too

The hand did not fall. Then the blonde woman was there too. She was holding the stranger's lifted arm by the wrist. I said that will do

Chapter 10

Knowing not grieving remembers a thousand savage and lonely streets. They run from that night when he lay and heard the final footfall and then the final door (they did not even turn the light out) and then lay quietly, on his back, with open eyes while above the suspended globe burned with aching and unwavering glare as though in the house where all the people had died. He did not know how long he lay there. He was not thinking at all, not suffering. Perhaps he was conscious of somewhere within him the two severed wireends of volition and

sentience lying, not touching now, waiting to touch, to knit anew so that he could move.

While they finished their preparations to depart they stepped now and then across him, like people about to vacate a house forever will across some object which they intend to leave. Here bobbie here kid heres your comb you forgot it heres romeos chicken feed too jesus he must have tapped the sunday school till on the way out its bobbies now didn't you see him give it to her didn't you see old big-hearted thats right pick it up kid you can keep it as an installment or a souvenir or something what dont she want it well say thats too bad now thats tough but we cant leave it lay here on the floor itll rot a hole in the floor its already helped to rot one hole pretty big for its size pretty big for any size hey bobbie hey kid sure ill just keep it for bobbie like hell you will well i mean ill keep half of it for bobbie leave it there you bastards what do you want with it it belongs to him well for sweet jesus what does he want with it he doesn't use money he doesn't need it ask bobbie if he needs money they give it to him that the rest of us have to pay for it leave it there i said like hell this aint mine to leave its bobbies it aint yours neither unless sweet jesus youre going to tell me he owes you jack too that he has been f—ing you too behind my back on credit i said leave it go chase yourself it aint but five or six bucks apiece Then the blonde woman stood above him and stooping, he watching quietly, she lifted her skirt and took from the top of her stocking a flat folded sheaf of banknotes and removed one and stopped and thrust it into the fob pocket of his trousers.

Then she was gone. get on get out of here you aint ready yet yourself you got to put that kimono in and close your bag and powder your face again bring my bag and hat in here go on now and you take bobbie and them other bags and get in the car and wait for me and max you think im going to leave either one of you here alone to steal that one off of him too go on now get out of here

Then they were gone: the final feet, the final door. Then he heard the car drown the noise of the insects, riding above, sinking to the level, sinking below the level so that he heard only the insects. He lay there

beneath the light. He could not move yet, as he could look without actually seeing, hear without actually knowing; the two wireends not yet knit as he lay peacefully, licking his lips now and then as a child does.

Then the wireends knit and made connection. He did not know the exact instant, save that suddenly he was aware of his ringing head, and he sat up slowly, discovering himself again, getting to his feet. He was dizzy; the room went round him, slowly and smoothly as thinking, so that thinking said Not yet But he still felt no pain, not even when, propped before the bureau, he examined in the glass his swollen and bloody face and touched his face. "Sweet Jesus," he said. "They sure beat me up." He was not thinking yet; it had not yet risen that far I reckon I better get out of here I reckon I better get out of here He went toward the door, his hands out before him like a blind man or a sleepwalker. He was in the hall without having remembered passing through the door, and he found himself in another bedroom while he still hoped perhaps not believed that he was moving toward the front door.

It was small too. Yet it still seemed to be filled with the presence of the blonde woman, its very cramped harsh walls bulged outward with that militant and diamondsurfaced respectability. On the bare bureau sat a pint bottle almost full of whiskey. He drank it, slowly, not feeling the fire at all, holding himself upright by holding to the bureau. The whiskey went down his throat cold as molasses, without taste. He set the empty bottle down and leaned on the bureau, his head lowered, not thinking, waiting perhaps without knowing it, perhaps not even waiting. Then the whiskey began to burn in him and he began to shake his head slowly from side to side, while thinking became one with the slow, hot coiling and recoiling of his entrails: 'I got to get out of here.' He reentered the hall. Now it was his head that was clear and his body that would not behave.

He had to coax it along the hall, sliding it along one wall toward the front, thinking, 'Come on, now; pull yourself together. I got to get out.' Thinking If I can just get it outside, into the air, the cool air, the cool

dark He watched his hands fumbling at the door, trying to help them, to coax and control them. 'Anyway, they didn't lock it on me,' he thought. 'Sweet Jesus, I could not have got out until morning then. It never would have opened a window and climbed through it.' He opened the door at last and passed out and closed the door behind him, arguing again with his body which did not want to bother to close the door, having to be forced to close it upon the empty house where the two lights burned with their dead and unwavering glare, not knowing that the house was empty and not caring, not caring anymore for silence and desolation than they had cared for the cheap and brutal nights of stale oftused glasses and stale oftused beds. His body was acquiescing better, becoming docile. He stepped from the dark porch, into the moonlight, and with his bloody head and his empty stomach hot, savage, and courageous with whiskey, he entered the street which was to run for fifteen years.

The whiskey died away in time and was renewed and died again, but the street ran on. From that night the thousand streets ran as one street, with imperceptible corners and changes of scene, broken by intervals of begged and stolen rides, on trains and trucks, and on country wagons with he at twenty and twentyfive and thirty sitting on the seat with his still, hard face and the clothes (even when soiled and worn) of a city man and the driver of the wagon not knowing who or what the passenger was and not daring to ask.

The street ran into Oklahoma and Missouri and as far south as Mexico and then back north to Chicago and Detroit and then back south again and at last to Mississippi. It was fifteen years long: it ran between the savage and spurious board fronts of oil towns where, his inevitable serge clothing and light shoes black with bottomless mud, he ate crude food from tin dishes that cost him ten and fifteen dollars a meal and paid for them with a roll of banknotes the size of a bullfrog and stained too with the rich mud that seemed as bottomless as the gold which it excreted.

It ran through yellow wheat fields waving beneath the fierce yellow days of labor and hard sleep in haystacks beneath the cold mad moon

of September, and the brittle stars: he was in turn laborer, miner, prospector, gambling tout; he enlisted in the army, served four months and deserted and was never caught. And always, sooner or later, the street ran through cities, through an identical and wellnigh interchangeable section of cities without remembered names, where beneath the dark and equivocal and symbolical archways of midnight he bedded with the women and paid them when he had the money, and when he did not have it he bedded anyway and then told them that he was a negro. For a while it worked; that was while he was still in the south. It was quite simple, quite easy. Usually all he risked was a cursing from the woman and the matron of the house, though now and then he was beaten unconscious by other patrons, to waken later in the street or in the jail.

That was while he was still in the (comparatively speaking) south. Because one night it did not work. He rose from the bed and told the woman that he was a negro. "You are?" she said. "I thought maybe you were just another wop or something." She looked at him, without particular interest; then she evidently saw something in his face: she said, "What about it? You look all right. You ought to seen the shine I turned out just before your turn came." She was looking at him. She was quite still now. "Say, what do you think this dump is, anyhow? The Ritz hotel?" Then she quit talking. She was watching his face and she began to move backward slowly before him, staring at him, her face draining, her mouth open to scream. Then she did scream. It took two policemen to subdue him. At first they thought that the woman was dead.

He was sick after that. He did not know until then that there were white women who would take a man with a black skin. He stayed sick for two years. Sometimes he would remember how he had once tricked or teased white men into calling him a negro in order to fight them, to beat them or be beaten; now he fought the negro who called him white. He was in the north now, in Chicago and then Detroit. He lived with negroes, shunning white people. He ate with them, slept with them, belligerent, unpredictable, uncommunicative. He now lived as man and wife with a woman who resembled an ebony carving. At night

he would lie in bed beside her, sleepless, beginning to breathe deep and hard.

He would do it deliberately, feeling, even watching, his white chest arch deeper and deeper within his ribcage, trying to breathe into himself the dark odor, the dark and inscrutable thinking and being of negroes, with each suspiration trying to expel from himself the white blood and the white thinking and being. And all the while his nostrils at the odor which he was trying to make his own would whiten and tauten, his whole being writhe and strain with physical outrage and spiritual denial.

He thought that it was loneliness which he was trying to escape and not himself. But the street ran on: catlike, one place was the same as another to him. But in none of them could he be quiet. But the street ran on in its moods and phases, always empty: he might have seen himself as in numberless avatars, in silence, doomed with motion, driven by the courage of flagged and spurred despair; by the despair of courage whose opportunities had to be flagged and spurred. He was thirtythree years old.

One afternoon the street had become a Mississippi country road. He had been put off a southbound freight train near a small town. He did not know the name of the town; he didn't care what word it used for name. He didn't even see it, anyway. He skirted it, following the woods, and came to the road and looked in both directions. It was not a gravelled road, though it looked to be fairly well used. He saw several negro cabins scattered here and there along it; then he saw, about a half mile away, a larger house. It was a big house set in a grove of trees; obviously a place of some pretensions at one time. But now the trees needed pruning and the house had not been painted in years. But he could tell that it was inhabited, and he had not eaten in twentyfour hours. 'That one might do,' he thought.

But he did not approach it at once, though the afternoon was drawing on. Instead he turned his back upon it and went on in the other direction, in his soiled white shirt and worn serge trousers and his

cracked, dusty, town-shaped shoes, his cloth cap set at an arrogant angle above a threeday's stubble. Yet even then he did not look like a tramp; at least apparently not to the negro boy whom he met presently coming up the road and swinging a tin bucket. He stopped the boy. "Who lives in the big house back there?" he said.

"That where Miz Burden stay at."

"Mr and Mrs Burden?"

"No, sir. Aint no Mr Burden. Aint nobody live there but her."

"Oh. An old woman, I guess."

"No, sir. Miz Burden aint old. Aint young neither."

"And she lives there by herself. Dont she get scared?"

"Who going to harm her, right here at town? Colored folks around here looks after her."

"Colored folks look after her?"

At once it was as if the boy had closed a door between himself and the man who questioned him. "I reckon aint nobody round here going to do her no harm. She aint harmed nobody."

"I guess not," Christmas said. "How far is it to the next town over this way?"

" 'Bout thirty miles, they say. You aint fixing to walk it, is you?"

"No," Christmas said. He turned then, going on. The boy looked after him. Then he too turned, walking again, the tin bucket swinging against his faded flank. A few steps later he looked back. The man who had questioned him was walking on, steadily though not fast. The boy went on again, in his faded, patched, scant overalls. He was barefoot.

Presently he began to shuffle, still moving forward, the red dust rising about his lean, chocolate-colored shanks and the frayed legs of the too short overalls; he began to chant, tuneless, rhythmic, musical, though on a single note:

Say dont didn't.

Didn't dont who.

Want dat yaller gal's

Pudden dont hide.

Lying in a tangle of shrubbery a hundred yards from the house, Christmas heard a far clock strike nine and then ten. Before him the house bulked square and huge from its mass of trees. There was a light in one window upstairs. The shades were not drawn and he could see that the light was a kerosene lamp, and now and then he saw through the window the shadow of a moving person cross the further wall. But he never saw the person at all. After a while the light went out.

The house was now dark; he quit watching it then. He lay in the copse, on his belly on the dark earth. In the copse the darkness was impenetrable; through his shirt and trousers it felt a little chill, close, faintly dank, as if the sun never reached the atmosphere which the copse held. He could feel the neversunned earth strike, slow and receptive, against him through his clothes: groin, hip, belly, breast, forearms. His arms were crossed, his forehead rested upon them, in his nostrils the damp rich odor of the dark and fecund earth.

He did not look once again toward the dark house. He lay perfectly still in the copse for more than an hour before he rose up and emerged. He did not creep. There was nothing skulking nor even especially careful about his approach to the house. He simply went quietly as if that were his natural manner of moving and passed around the now dimensionless bulk of the house, toward the rear, where the kitchen

would be. He made no more noise than a cat as he paused and stood for a while beneath the window where the light had shown.

In the grass about his feet the crickets, which had ceased as he moved, keeping a little island of silence about him like thin yellow shadow of their small voices, began again, ceasing again when he moved with that tiny and alert suddenness. From the rear of the house a single storey wing projected. 'That will be the kitchen,' he thought. 'Yes. That will be it.' He walked without sound, moving in his tiny island of abruptly ceased insects. He could discern a door in the kitchen wall. He would have found it unlocked if he had tried it. But he did not. He passed it and paused beneath a window. Before he tried it he remembered that he had seen no screen in the lighted window upstairs.

The window was even open, propped open with a stick. 'What do you think about that,' he thought. He stood beside the window, his hands on the sill, breathing quietly, not listening, not hurrying, as if there were no need for haste anywhere under the sun. 'Well. Well. Well. What do you know about that. Well. Well. Well.' Then he climbed into the window; he seemed to flow into the dark kitchen: a shadow returning without a sound and without locomotion to the allmother of obscurity and darkness. Perhaps he thought of that other window which he had used to use and of the rope upon which he had had to rely; perhaps not.

Very likely not, no more than a cat would recall another window; like the cat, he also seemed to see in the darkness as he moved as unerringly toward the food which he wanted as if he knew where it would be; that, or were being manipulated by an agent which did know. He ate something from an invisible dish, with invisible fingers: invisible food. He did not care what it would be. He did not know that he had even wondered or tasted until his jaw stopped suddenly in midchewing and thinking fled for twentyfive years back down the street, past all the imperceptible corners of bitter defeats and more bitter victories, and five miles even beyond a corner where he used to wait in the terrible early time of love, for someone whose name he had forgot; five miles even beyond that it went I'll know it in a minute.

I have eaten it before, somewhere. In a minute I will memory clicking knowing I see I see I more than see hear I hear I see my head bent I hear the monotonous dogmatic voice which I believe will never cease going on and on forever and peeping I see the indomitable bullet head the clean blunt beard they too bent and I thinking How can he be so nothungry and I smelling my mouth and tongue weeping the hot salt of waiting my eyes tasting the hot steam from the dish "It's peas," he said, aloud. "For sweet Jesus. Field peas cooked with molasses."

More of him than thinking may have been absent; he should have heard the sound before he did, since whoever was creating it was trying no more for silence and caution than he had. Perhaps he did hear it. But he did not move at all as the soft sound of slippered feet approached the kitchen from the house side of it, and when he did at last turn suddenly, his eyes glowing suddenly, he saw already beneath the door which entered the house itself, the faint approaching light.

The open window was at his hand: he could have been through it in a single step almost. But he did not move. He didn't even set down the dish. He did not even cease to chew. Thus he was standing in the center of the room, holding the dish and chewing, when the door opened and the woman entered. She wore a faded dressing gown and she carried a candle, holding it high, so that its light fell upon her face: a face quiet, grave, utterly unalarmed. In the soft light of the candle she looked to be not much past thirty. She stood in the door. They looked at one another for more than a minute, almost in the same attitude: he with the dish, she with the candle. He had stopped chewing now.

"If it is just food you want, you will find that," she said in a voice calm, a little deep, quite cold.

Chapter 11

By the light of the candle she did not look much more than thirty, in the soft light downfalling upon the softungirdled presence of a woman prepared for sleep. When he saw her by daylight he knew that she was better than thirtyfive. Later she told him that she was forty. 'Which means either fortyone or forty-nine, from the way she said it,' he thought. But it was not that first night, nor for many succeeding ones, that she told him that much even.

She told him very little, anyway. They talked very little, and that casually, even after he was the lover of her spinster's bed. Sometimes he could almost believe that they did not talk at all, that he didn't know her at all. It was as though there were two people: the one whom he saw now and then by day and looked at while they spoke to one another with speech that told nothing at all since it didn't try to and didn't intend to; the other with whom he lay at night and didn't even see, speak to, at all.

Even after a year (he was working at the planing mill now) when he saw her by day at all, it would be on Saturday afternoon or Sunday or when he would come to the house for the food which she would prepare for him and leave upon the kitchen table. Now and then she would come to the kitchen, though she would never stay while he ate, and at times she met him at the back porch, where during the first four or five months of his residence in the cabin below the house, they would stand for a while and talk almost like strangers. They always stood: she in one of her apparently endless succession of clean calico house dresses and sometimes a cloth sunbonnet like a countrywoman, and he in a clean white shirt now and the serge trousers creased now every week. They never sat down to talk. He had never seen her sitting save one time when he looked through a downstairs window and saw her writing at a desk in the room.

And it was a year after he had remarked without curiosity the volume of mail which she received and sent, and that for a certain period of each forenoon she would sit at the worn, scarred, rolltop desk in one of the scarceused and sparsely furnished downstairs rooms, writing steadily, before he learned that what she received were business and

private documents with fifty different postmarks and what she sent were replies—advice, business, financial and religious, to the presidents and faculties and trustees, and advice personal and practical to young girl students and even alumnæ, of a dozen negro schools and colleges through the south.

Now and then she would be absent from home three and four days at a time, and though he could now see her at his will on any night, it was a year before he learned that in these absences she visited the schools in person and talked to the teachers and the students. Her business affairs were conducted by a negro lawyer in Memphis, who was a trustee of one of the schools, and in whose safe, along with her will, reposed the written instructions (in her own hand) for the disposal of her body after death. When he learned that, he understood the town's attitude toward her, though he knew that the town did not know as much as he did. He said to himself: 'Then I wont be bothered here.'

One day he realised that she had never invited him inside the house proper. He had never been further than the kitchen, which he had already entered of his own accord, thinking, liplifted, 'She couldn't keep me out of here. I guess she knows that.' And he had never entered the kitchen by day save when he came to get the food which she prepared for him and set out upon the table. And when he entered the house at night it was as he had entered it that first night; he felt like a thief, a robber, even while he mounted to the bedroom where she waited. Even after a year it was as though he entered by stealth to despoil her virginity each time anew. It was as though each turn of dark saw him faced again with the necessity to despoil again that which he had already despoiled—or never had and never would.

Sometimes he thought of it in that way, remembering the hard, untearful and unselfpitying and almost manlike yielding of that surrender. A spiritual privacy so long intact that its own instinct for preservation had immolated it, its physical phase the strength and fortitude of a man. A dual personality: the one the woman at first sight of whom in the lifted candle (or perhaps the very sound of the slipped approaching feet) there had opened before him,

instantaneous as a landscape in a lightningflash, a horizon of physical security and adultery if not pleasure; the other the mantrained muscles and the mantrained habit of thinking born of heritage and environment with which he had to fight up to the final instant. There was no feminine vacillation, no coyness of obvious desire and intention to succumb at last. It was as if he struggled physically with another man for an object of no actual value to either, and for which they struggled on principle alone.

When he saw her next, he thought, 'My God. How little I know about women, when I thought I knew so much.' It was on the very next day; looking at her, being spoken to by her, it was as though what memory of less than twelve hours knew to be true could never have happened, thinking Under her clothes she cant even be made so that it could have happened He had not started to work at the mill then. Most of that day he spent lying on his back on the cot which she had loaned him, in the cabin which she had given him to live in, smoking, his hands beneath his head. 'My God,' he thought, 'it was like I was the woman and she was the man.' But that was not right, either.

Because she had resisted to the very last. But it was not woman resistance, that resistance which, if really meant, cannot be overcome by any man for the reason that the woman observes no rules of physical combat. But she had resisted fair, by the rules that decreed that upon a certain crisis one was defeated, whether the end of resistance had come or not. That night he waited until he saw the light go out in the kitchen and then come on in her room. He went to the house. He did not go in eagerness, but in a quiet rage. "I'll show her," he said aloud. He did not try to be quiet. He entered the house boldly and mounted the stairs; she heard him at once. "Who is it?" she said.

But there was no alarm in her tone. He didn't answer. He mounted the stairs and entered the room. She was still dressed, turning, watching the door as he entered. But she did not speak to him. She just watched him as he went to the table and blew out the lamp, thinking, 'Now she'll run.' And so he sprang forward, toward the door to intercept her.

But she did not flee. He found her in the dark exactly where the light had lost her, in the same attitude.

He began to tear at her clothes. He was talking to her, in a tense, hard, low voice: "I'll show you! I'll show the bitch!" She did not resist at all. It was almost as though she were helping him, with small changes of position of limbs when the ultimate need for help arose. But beneath his hands the body might have been the body of a dead woman not yet stiffened. But he did not desist; though his hands were hard and urgent it was with rage alone. 'At least I have made a woman of her at last,' he thought. 'Now she hates me. I have taught her that, at least.'

The next day he lay again all day long on his cot in the cabin. He ate nothing; he did not even go to the kitchen to see if she had left food for him. He was waiting for sunset, dusk. 'Then I'll blow,' he thought. He did not expect ever to see her again. 'Better blow,' he thought. 'Not give her the chance to turn me out of the cabin too. That much, anyway. No white woman ever did that. Only a nigger woman ever give me the air, turned me out.' So he lay on the cot, smoking, waiting for sunset. Through the open door he watched the sun slant and lengthen and turn copper. Then the copper faded into lilac, into the fading lilac of full dusk. He could hear the frogs then, and fireflies began to drift across the open frame of the door, growing brighter as the dusk faded.

Then he rose. He owned nothing but the razor; when he had put that into his pocket, he was ready to travel one mile or a thousand, wherever the street of the imperceptible corners should choose to run again. Yet when he moved, it was toward the house. It was as though, as soon as he found that his feet intended to go there, that he let go, seemed to float, surrendered, thinking All right All right floating, riding across the dusk, up to the house and onto the back porch and to the door by which he would enter, that was never locked. But when he put his hand upon it, it would not open. Perhaps for the moment neither hand nor believing would believe; he seemed to stand there, quiet, not yet thinking, watching his hand shaking the door, hearing the sound of the bolt on the inside. He turned away quietly.

He was not yet raging. He went to the kitchen door. He expected that to be locked also. But he did not realise until he found that it was open, that he had wanted it to be. When he found that it was not locked it was like an insult. It was as though some enemy upon whom he had wreaked his utmost of violence and contumely stood, unscathed and unscarred, and contemplated him with a musing and insufferable contempt. When he entered the kitchen, he did not approach the door into the house proper, the door in which she had appeared with the candle on the night when he first saw her. He went directly to the table where she set out his food. He did not need to see. His hands saw; the dishes were still a little warm, thinking Set out for the nigger. For the nigger.

He seemed to watch his hand as if from a distance. He watched it pick up a dish and swing it up and back and hold it there while he breathed deep and slow, intensely cogitant. He heard his voice say aloud, as if he were playing a game: "Ham," and watched his hand swing and hurl the dish crashing into the wall, the invisible wall, waiting for the crash to subside and silence to flow completely back before taking up another one. He held this dish poised, sniffing. This one required some time. "Beans or greens?" he said. "Beans or spinach? . . . All right. Call it beans." He hurled it, hard, waiting until the crash ceased.

He raised the third dish. "Something with onions," he said, thinking This is fun. Why didn't I think of this before? "Woman's muck." He hurled it, hard and slow, hearing the crash, waiting. Now he heard something else: feet within the house, approaching the door. 'She'll have the lamp this time,' he thought thinking If I were to look now, I could see the light under the door As his hand swung up and back. Now she has almost reached the door "Potatoes," he said at last, with judicial finality. He did not look around, even when he heard the bolt in the door and heard the door inyawn and light fell upon him where he stood with the dish poised. "Yes, it's potatoes," he said, in the preoccupied and oblivious tone of a child playing alone. He could both see and hear this crash. Then the light went away; again he heard the door yawn, again he heard the bolt. He had not yet looked around. He took up the next dish. "Beets," he said. "I dont like beets, anyhow."

The next day he went to work at the planing mill. He went to work on Friday. He had eaten nothing now since Wednesday night. He drew no pay until Saturday evening, working overtime Saturday afternoon. He ate Saturday night, in a restaurant downtown, for the first time in three days. He did not return to the house. For a time he would not even look toward it when he left or entered the cabin. At the end of six months he had worn a private path between the cabin and the mill.

It ran almost stringstraight, avoiding all houses, entering the woods soon and running straight and with daily increasing definition and precision, to the sawdust pile where he worked. And always, when the whistle blew at five thirty, he returned by it to the cabin, to change into the white shirt and the dark creased trousers before walking the two miles back to town to eat, as if he were ashamed of the overalls. Or perhaps it was not shame, though very likely he could no more have said what it was than he could have said that it was not shame.

He no longer deliberately avoided looking at the house; neither did he deliberately look at it. For a while he believed that she would send for him. 'She'll make the first sign,' he thought. But she did not; after a while he believed that he no longer expected it. Yet on the first time that he deliberately looked again toward the house, he felt a shocking surge and fall of blood; then he knew that he had been afraid all the time that she would be in sight, that she had been watching him all the while with that perspicuous and still contempt; he felt a sensation of sweating, of having surmounted an ordeal.

'That's over,' he thought. 'I have done that now.' So that when one day he did see her, there was no shock. Perhaps he was prepared. Anyway, there was no shocking surge and drop of blood when he looked up, completely by chance, and saw her in the back yard, in a gray dress and the sunbonnet. He could not tell if she had been watching him or had seen him or were watching him now or not. 'You dont bother me and I dont bother you,' he thought, thinking I dreamed it. It didn't happen. She has nothing under her clothes so that it could have happened

He went to work in the spring. One evening in September he returned home and entered the cabin and stopped in midstride, in complete astonishment. She was sitting on the cot, looking at him. Her head was bare. He had never seen it bare before, though he had felt in the dark the loose abandon of her hair, not yet wild, on a dark pillow. But he had never seen her hair before and he stood staring at it alone while she watched him; he said suddenly to himself, in the instant of moving again: 'She's trying to. I had expected it to have gray in it She's trying to be a woman and she dont know how.' Thinking, knowing She has come to talk to me Two hours later she was still talking, they sitting side by side on the cot in the now dark cabin. She told him that she was fortyone years old and that she had been born in the house yonder and had lived there ever since.

That she had never been away from Jefferson for a longer period than six months at any time and these only at wide intervals filled with homesickness for the sheer boards and nails, the earth and trees and shrubs, which composed the place which was a foreign land to her and her people; when she spoke even now, after forty years, among the slurred consonants and the flat vowels of the land where her life had been cast, New England talked as plainly as it did in the speech of her kin who had never left New Hampshire and whom she had seen perhaps three times in her life, her forty years. Sitting beside her on the dark cot while the light failed and at last her voice was without source, steady, interminable, pitched almost like the voice of a man, Christmas thought, 'She is like all the rest of them. Whether they are seventeen or fortyseven, when they finally come to surrender completely, it's going to be in words.'

Calvin Burden was the son of a minister named Nathaniel Burrington. The youngest of ten children, he ran away from home at the age of twelve, before he could write his name (or would write it, his father believed) on a ship. He made the voyage around the Horn to California and turned Catholic; he lived for a year in a monastery. Ten years later he reached Missouri from the west. Three weeks after he arrived he was married, to the daughter of a family of Huguenot stock which had emigrated from Carolina by way of Kentucky. On the day after the

wedding he said, "I guess I had better settle down." He began that day to settle down. The wedding celebration was still in progress, and his first step was to formally deny allegiance to the Catholic church. He did this in a saloon, insisting that every one present listen to him and state their objections; he was a little insistent on there being objections, though there were none; not, that is, up to the time when he was led away by friends.

The next day he said that he meant it, anyhow; that he would not belong to a church full of frogeating slaveholders. That was in Saint Louis. He bought a home there, and a year later he was a father. He said then that he had denied the Catholic church a year ago for the sake of his son's soul; almost as soon as the boy was born, he set about to imbue the child with the religion of his New England forebears. There was no Unitarian meetinghouse available, and Burden could not read the English Bible. But he had learned to read in Spanish from the priests in California, and as soon as the child could walk Burden (he pronounced it Burden now, since he could not spell it at all and the priests had taught him to write it laboriously so with a hand more apt for a rope or a gunbutt or a knife than a pen) began to read to the child in Spanish from the book which he had brought with him from California, interspersing the fine, sonorous flowing of mysticism in a foreign tongue with harsh, extemporised dissertations composed half of the bleak and bloodless logic which he remembered from his father on interminable New England Sundays, and half of immediate hellfire and tangible brimstone of which any country Methodist circuit rider would have been proud.

The two of them would be alone in the room: the tall, gaunt, Nordic man, and the small, dark, vivid child who had inherited his mother's build and coloring, like people of two different races. When the boy was about five, Burden killed a man in an argument over slavery and had to take his family and move, leave Saint Louis. He moved westward, "to get away from Democrats," he said.

The settlement to which he moved consisted of a store, a blacksmith shop, a church and two saloons. Here Burden spent much of his time

talking politics and in his harsh loud voice cursing slavery and slaveholders. His reputation had come with him and he was known to carry a pistol, and his opinions were received without comment, at least. At times, especially on Saturday nights, he came home, still full of straight whiskey and the sound of his own ranting. Then he would wake his son (the mother was dead now and there were three daughters, all with blue eyes) with his hard hand. "I'll learn you to hate two things," he would say, "or I'll flail the tar out of you. And those things are hell and slaveholders. Do you hear me?"

"Yes," the boy would say. "I cant help but hear you. Get on to bed and let me sleep."

He was no proselyter, missionary. Save for an occasional minor episode with pistols, none of which resulted fatally, he confined himself to his own blood. "Let them all go to their own benighted hell," he said to his children. "But I'll beat the loving God into the four of you as long as I can raise my arm." That would be on Sunday, each Sunday when, washed and clean, the children in calico or denim, the father in his broadcloth frockcoat bulging over the pistol in his hip pocket, and the collarless plaited shirt which the oldest girl laundered each Saturday as well as the dead mother ever had, they gathered in the clean crude parlor while Burden read from the once gilt and blazoned book in that language which none of them understood. He continued to do that up to the time when his son ran away from home.

The son's name was Nathaniel. He ran away at fourteen and did not return for sixteen years, though they heard from him twice in that time by word-of-mouth messenger. The first time was from Colorado, the second time from Old Mexico. He did not say what he was doing in either place. "He was all right when I left him," the messenger said. This was the second messenger; it was in 1863, and the messenger was eating breakfast in the kitchen, bolting his food with decorous celerity.

The three girls, the two oldest almost grown now, were serving him, standing with arrested dishes and softly open mouths in their full, coarse, clean dresses, about the crude table, the father sitting opposite

the messenger across the table, his head propped on his single hand. The other arm he had lost two years ago while a member of a troop of partisan guerilla horse in the Kansas fighting, and his head and beard were grizzled now. But he was still vigorous, and his frockcoat still bulged behind over the butt of the heavy pistol. "He got into a little trouble," the messenger said. "But he was still all right the last I heard."

"Trouble?" the father said.

"He killed a Mexican that claimed he stole his horse. You know how them Spanish are about white men, even when they dont kill Mexicans." The messenger drank some coffee. "But I reckon they have to be kind of strict, with the country filling up with tender-feet and all.—Thank you kindly," he said, as the oldest girl slid a fresh stack of corn cakes onto his plate; "yessum, I can reach the sweetening fine.—Folks claim it wasn't the Mexican's horse noways. Claim the Mexican never owned no horse. But I reckon even them Spanish have got to be strict, with these Easterners already giving the West such a bad name."

The father grunted. "I'll be bound. If there was trouble there, I'll be bound he was in it. You tell him," he said violently, "if he lets them yellowbellied priests bamboozle him, I'll shoot him myself quick as I would a Reb."

"You tell him to come on back home," the oldest girl said. "That's what you tell him."

"Yessum," the messenger said. "I'll shore tell him. I'm going east to Indianny for a spell. But I'll see him soon as I get back. I'll shore tell him. Oh, yes; I nigh forgot. He said to tell you the woman and kid was fine."

"Whose woman and kid?" the father said.

"His," the messenger said. "I thank you kindly again. And goodbye all."

They heard from the son a third time before they saw him again. They heard him shouting one day out in front of the house, though still some

distance away. It was in 1866. The family had moved again, a hundred miles further west, and it had taken the son two months to find them, riding back and forth across Kansas and Missouri in a buckboard with two leather sacks of gold dust and minted coins and crude jewels thrown under the seat like a pair of old shoes, before he found the sod cabin and drove up to it, shouting. Sitting in a chair before the cabin door was a man. "There's father," Nathaniel said to the woman on the buckboard seat beside him. "See?" Though the father was only in his late fifties, his sight had begun to fail. He did not distinguish his son's face until the buckboard had stopped and the sisters had billowed shrieking through the door. Then Calvin rose; he gave a long, booming shout. "Well," Nathaniel said; "here we are."

Calvin was not speaking sentences at all. He was just yelling, cursing. "I'm going to flail the tar out of you!" he roared. "Girls! Vangie! Beck! Sarah!" The sisters had already emerged. They seemed to boil through the door in their full skirts like balloons on a torrent, with shrill cries, above which the father's voice boomed and roared. His coat—the frockcoat of Sunday or the wealthy or the retired—was open now and he was tugging at something near his waist with the same gesture and attitude with which he might be drawing the pistol.

But he was merely dragging from about his waist with his single hand a leather strap, and flourishing it he now thrust and shoved through the shrill and birdlike hovering of the women. "I'll learn you yet!" he roared. "I'll learn you to run away!" The strap fell twice across Nathaniel's shoulders. It fell twice before the two men locked.

It was in play, in a sense: a kind of deadly play and smiling seriousness: the play of two lions that might or might not leave marks. They locked, the strap arrested: face to face and breast to breast they stood: the old man with his gaunt, grizzled face and his pale New England eyes, and the young one who bore no resemblance to him at all, with his beaked nose and his white teeth smiling. "Stop it," Nathaniel said. "Dont you see who's watching yonder in the buckboard?"

They had none of them looked at the buckboard until now. Sitting on the seat was a woman and a boy of about twelve. The father looked once at the woman; he did not even need to see the boy. He just looked at the woman, his jaw slacked as if he had seen a ghost. "Evangeline!" he said. She looked enough like his dead wife to have been her sister. The boy who could hardly remember his mother at all, had taken for wife a woman who looked almost exactly like her.

"That's Juana," he said. "That's Calvin with her. We come home to get married."

After supper that night, with the woman and child in bed, Nathaniel told them. They sat about the lamp: the father, the sisters, the returned son. There were no ministers out there where he had been, he explained; just priests and Catholics. "So when we found that the chico was on the way, she begun to talk about a priest. But I wasn't going to have any Burden born a heathen. So I begun to look around, to humor her.

But first one thing and then another come up and I couldn't get away to meet a minister; and then the boy came and so it wasn't any rush anymore. But she kept on worrying, about priests and such, and so in a couple of years I heard how there was to be a white minister in Santa Fe on a certain day. So we packed up and started out and got to Santa Fe just in time to see the dust of the stage that was carrying the minister on away. So we waited there and in a couple more years we had another chance, in Texas. Only this time I got kind of mixed up with helping some Rangers that were cleaning up some kind of a mess where some folks had a deputy treed in a dance hall. So when that was over we just decided to come on home and get married right. And here we are."

The father sat, gaunt, grizzled, and austere, beneath the lamp. He had been listening, but his expression was brooding, with a kind of violently slumbering contemplativeness and bewildered outrage. "Another damn black Burden," he said. "Folks will think I bred to a damn slaver. And now he's got to breed to one, too." The son listened quietly, not even

attempting to tell his father that the woman was Spanish and not Rebel.

“Damn, lowbuilt black folks: low built because of the weight of the wrath of God, black because of the sin of human bondage staining their blood and flesh.” His gaze was vague, fanatical, and convinced. “But we done freed them now, both black and white alike. They’ll bleach out now. In a hundred years they will be white folks again. Then maybe we’ll let them come back into America.” He mused, smoldering, immobile. “By God,” he said suddenly, “he’s got a man’s build, anyway, for all his black look. By God, he’s going to be as big a man as his grandpappy; not a runt like his pa. For all his black dam and his black look, he will.”

She told Christmas this while they sat on the cot in the darkening cabin. They had not moved for over an hour. He could not see her face at all now; he seemed to swing faintly, as though in a drifting boat, upon the sound of her voice as upon some immeasurable and drowsing peace evocative of nothing of any moment, scarce listening. “His name was Calvin, like grandpa’s, and he was as big as grandpa, even if he was dark like father’s mother’s people and like his mother. She was not my mother: he was just my halfbrother. Grandpa was the last of ten, and father was the last of two, and Calvin was the last of all.” He had just turned twenty when he was killed in the town two miles away by an ex-slaveholder and Confederate soldier named Sartoris, over a question of negro voting.

She told Christmas about the graves—the brother’s, the grandfather’s, the father’s and his two wives—on a cedar knoll in the pasture a half mile from the house; listening quietly, Christmas thought. ‘Ah. She’ll take me to see them. I will have to go.’ But she did not. She never mentioned the graves to him again after that night when she told him where they were and that he could go and see them for himself if he wished. “You probably cant find them, anyway,” she said. “Because when they brought grandfather and Calvin home that evening, father waited until after dark and buried them and hid the graves, levelled the mounds and put brush and things over them.”

“Hid them?” Christmas said.

There was nothing soft, feminine, mournful and retrospective in her voice. “So they would not find them. Dig them up. Maybe butcher them.” She went on, her voice a little impatient, explanatory: “They hated us here. We were Yankees. Foreigners. Worse than foreigners: enemies. Carpetbaggers. And it—the War—still too close for even the ones that got whipped to be very sensible. Stirring up the negroes to murder and rape, they called it. Threatening white supremacy. So I suppose that Colonel Sartoris was a town hero because he killed with two shots from the same pistol an old onearmed man and a boy who had never even cast his first vote. Maybe they were right. I dont know.”

“Oh,” Christmas said. “They might have done that? dug them up after they were already killed, dead? Just when do men that have different blood in them stop hating one another?”

“When do they?” Her voice ceased. She went on: “I dont know. I dont know whether they would have dug them up or not. I wasn’t alive then. I was not born until fourteen years after Calvin was killed. I dont know what men might have done then. But father thought they might have. So he hid the graves. And then Calvin’s mother died and he buried her there, with Calvin and grandpa. And so it sort of got to be our burying ground before we knew it. Maybe father hadn’t planned to bury her there. I remember how my mother (father sent for her up to New Hampshire where some of our kin people still live, soon after Calvin’s mother died. He was alone here, you see.

I suppose if it hadn’t been for Calvin and grandpa buried out yonder, he would have gone away) told me that father started once to move away, when Calvin’s mother died. But she died in the summer, and it would have been too hot then to take her back to Mexico, to her people. So he buried her here. Maybe that’s why he decided to stay here. Or maybe it was because he was getting old too then, and all the men who had fought in the War were getting old and the negroes hadn’t raped or murdered anybody to speak of.

Anyway, he buried her here. He had to hide that grave too, because he thought that someone might see it and happen to remember Calvin and grandfather. He couldn't take the risk, even if it was all over and past and done then. And the next year he wrote to our cousin in New Hampshire. He said, 'I am fifty years old. I have all she will ever need. Send me a good woman for a wife. I don't care who she is, just so she is a good housekeeper and is at least thirtyfive years old.'

He sent the railroad fare in the letter. Two months later my mother got here and they were married that day. That was quick marrying, for him. The other time it took him over twelve years to get married, that time back in Kansas when he and Calvin and Calvin's mother finally caught up with grandfather. They got home in the middle of the week, but they waited until Sunday to have the wedding. They had it outdoors, down by the creek, with a barbecued steer and a keg of whiskey and everybody that they could get word to or that heard about it, came.

They began to get there Saturday morning, and on Saturday night the preacher came. All that day father's sisters worked, making Calvin's mother a wedding gown and a veil. They made the gown out of flour sacks and the veil out of some mosquito netting that a saloon keeper had nailed over a picture behind the bar.

They borrowed it from him. They even made some kind of a suit for Calvin to wear. He was twelve then, and they wanted him to be the ringbearer. He didn't want to. He found out the night before what they intended to make him do, and the next day (they had intended to have the wedding about six or seven o'clock the next morning) after everybody had got up and eaten breakfast, they had to put off the ceremony until they could find Calvin.

At last they found him and made him put on the suit and they had the wedding, with Calvin's mother in the homemade gown and the mosquito veil and father with his hair slicked with bear's grease and the carved Spanish boots he had brought back from Mexico. Grandfather gave the bride away. Only he had been going back to the keg of

whiskey every now and then while they were hunting for Calvin, and so when his time came to give the bride away he made a speech instead.

He got off on Lincoln and slavery and dared any man there to deny that Lincoln and the negro and Moses and the children of Israel were the same, and that the Red Sea was just the blood that had to be spilled in order that the black race might cross into the Promised Land. It took them some time to make him stop so the wedding could go on. After the wedding they stayed about a month. Then one day father and grandfather went east, to Washington, and got a commission from the government to come down here, to help with the freed negroes.

They came to Jefferson, all except father's sisters. Two of them got married, and the youngest one went to live with one of the others, and grandfather and father and Calvin and his mother came here and bought the house. And then what they probably knew all the time was going to happen did happen, and father was alone until my mother came from New Hampshire.

They had never even seen one another before, not even a picture. They got married the day she got here and two years later I was born and father named me Joanna after Calvin's mother. I don't think he even wanted another son at all. I can't remember him very well. The only time I can remember him as somebody, a person, was when he took me and showed me Calvin's and grandpa's graves. It was a bright day, in the spring. I remember how I didn't want to go, without even knowing where it was that we were going. I didn't want to go into the cedars. I don't know why I didn't want to. I couldn't have known what was in there; I was just four then. And even if I had known, that should not have frightened a child.

I think it was something about father, something that came from the cedar grove to me, through him. A something that I felt that he had put on the cedar grove, and that when I went into it, the grove would put on me so that I would never be able to forget it. I don't know. But he made me go in, and the two of us standing there, and he said, 'Remember this. Your grandfather and brother are lying there,

murdered not by one white man but by the curse which God put on a whole race before your grandfather or your brother or me or you were even thought of. A race doomed and cursed to be forever and ever a part of the white race's doom and curse for its sins. Remember that. His doom and his curse. Forever and ever.

Mine. Your mother's. Yours, even though you are a child. The curse of every white child that ever was born and that ever will be born. None can escape it.' And I said, 'Not even me?' And he said, 'Not even you. Least of all, you.' I had seen and known negroes since I could remember. I just looked at them as I did at rain, or furniture, or food or sleep. But after that I seemed to see them for the first time not as people, but as a thing, a shadow in which I lived, we lived, all white people, all other people. I thought of all the children coming forever and ever into the world, white, with the black shadow already falling upon them before they drew breath.

And I seemed to see the black shadow in the shape of a cross. And it seemed like the white babies were struggling, even before they drew breath, to escape from the shadow that was not only upon them but beneath them too, flung out like their arms were flung out, as if they were nailed to the cross. I saw all the little babies that would ever be in the world, the ones not yet even born—a long line of them with their arms spread, on the black crosses. I couldn't tell then whether I saw it or dreamed it.

But it was terrible to me. I cried at night. At last I told father, tried to tell him. What I wanted to tell him was that I must escape, get away from under the shadow, or I would die. 'You cannot,' he said. 'You must struggle, rise. But in order to rise, you must raise the shadow with you. But you can never lift it to your level. I see that now, which I did not see until I came down here. But escape it you cannot. The curse of the black race is God's curse. But the curse of the white race is the black man who will be forever God's chosen own because He once cursed Him.' " Her voice ceased. Across the vague oblong of open door fireflies drifted. At last Christmas said:

“There was something I was going to ask you. But I guess I know the answer myself now.”

She did not stir. Her voice was quiet. “What?”

“Why your father never killed that fellow—what’s his name? Sartoris.”

“Oh,” she said. Then there was silence again. Across the door the fireflies drifted and drifted. “You would have. Wouldn’t you?”

“Yes,” he said, at once, immediately. Then he knew that she was looking toward his voice almost as if she could see him. Her voice was almost gentle now, it was so quiet, so still.

“You dont have any idea who your parents were?”

If she could have seen his face she would have found it sullen, brooding. “Except that one of them was part nigger. Like I told you before.”

She was still looking at him; her voice told him that. It was quiet, impersonal, interested without being curious. “How do you know that?”

He didn’t answer for some time. Then he said: “I dont know it.” Again his voice ceased; by its sound she knew that he was looking away, toward the door. His face was sullen, quite still. Then he spoke again, moving; his voice now had an overtone, unmirthful yet quizzical, at once humorless and sardonic: “If I’m not, damned if I haven’t wasted a lot of time.”

She in turn seemed to muse now, quiet, scarcebreathing, yet still with nothing of selfpity or retrospect: “I had thought of that. Why father didn’t shoot Colonel Sartoris. I think that it was because of his French blood.”

“French blood?” Christmas said. “Dont even Frenchmen get mad when a man kills his father and his son on the same day? I guess your father must have got religion. Turned preacher, maybe.”

She did not answer for a time. The fireflies drifted; somewhere a dog barked, mellow, sad, faraway. “I thought about that,” she said. “It was all over then. The killing in uniform and with flags, and the killing without uniforms and flags. And none of it doing or did any good. None of it. And we were foreigners, strangers, that thought differently from the people whose country we had come into without being asked or wanted. And he was French, half of him. Enough French to respect anybody’s love for the land where he and his people were born and to understand that a man would have to act as the land where he was born had trained him to act. I think that was it.”

Chapter 12

In this way the second phase began. It was as though he had fallen into a sewer. As upon another life he looked back upon that first hard and manlike surrender, that surrender terrific and hard, like the breaking down of a spiritual skeleton the very sound of whose snapping fibers could be heard almost by the physical ear, so that the act of capitulation was anticlimax, as when a defeated general on the day after the last battle, shaved overnight and with his boots cleaned of the mud of combat, surrenders his sword to a committee.

The sewer ran only by night. The days were the same as they had ever been. He went to work at half past six in the morning. He would leave the cabin without looking toward the house at all. At six in the evening he returned, again without even looking toward the house. He washed and changed to the white shirt and the dark creased trousers and went to the kitchen and found his supper waiting on the table and he sat and ate it, still without having seen her at all. But he knew that she was in the house and that the coming of dark within the old walls was breaking down something and leaving it corrupt with waiting. He knew

how she had spent the day; that her days also were no different from what they had always been, as if in her case too another person had lived them.

All day long he would imagine her, going about her housework, sitting for that unvarying period at the scarred desk, or talking, listening, to the negro women who came to the house from both directions up and down the road, following paths which had been years in the wearing and which radiated from the house like wheelspokes. What they talked about to her he did not know, though he had watched them approaching the house in a manner not exactly secret, yet purposeful, entering usually singly though sometimes in twos and threes, in their aprons and headrags and now and then with a man's coat thrown about their shoulders, emerging again and returning down the radiating paths not fast and yet not loitering.

They would be brief in his mind, thinking Now she is doing this. Now she is doing that not thinking much about her. He believed that during the day she thought no more about him than he did about her, too. Even when at night, in her dark bedroom, she insisted on telling him in tedious detail the trivial matters of her day and insisted on his telling her of his day in turn, it was in the fashion of lovers: that imperious and insatiable demand that the trivial details of both days be put into words, without any need to listen to the telling.

Then he would finish his supper and go to her where she waited. Often he would not hurry. As time went on and the novelty of the second phase began to wear off and become habit, he would stand in the kitchen door and look out across the dusk and see, perhaps with foreboding and premonition, the savage and lonely street which he had chosen of his own will, waiting for him, thinking This is not my life. I dont belong here

At first it shocked him: the abject fury of the New England glacier exposed suddenly to the fire of the New England biblical hell. Perhaps he was aware of the abnegation in it: the imperious and fierce urgency that concealed an actual despair at frustrate and irrevocable years,

which she appeared to attempt to compensate each night as if she believed that it would be the last night on earth by damning herself forever to the hell of her forefathers, by living not alone in sin but in filth. She had an avidity for the forbidden wordsymbols; an insatiable appetite for the sound of them on his tongue and on her own.

She revealed the terrible and impersonal curiosity of a child about forbidden subjects and objects; that rapt and tireless and detached interest of a surgeon in the physical body and its possibilities. And by day he would see the calm, coldfaced, almost manlike, almost middleaged woman who had lived for twenty years alone, without any feminine fears at all, in a lonely house in a neighborhood populated, when at all, by negroes, who spent a certain portion of each day sitting tranquilly at a desk and writing tranquilly for the eyes of both youth and age the practical advice of a combined priest and banker and trained nurse.

During that period (it could not be called a honeymoon) Christmas watched her pass through every avatar of a woman in love. Soon she more than shocked him: she astonished and bewildered him. She surprised and took him unawares with fits of jealous rage. She could have had no such experience at all, and there was neither reason for the scene nor any possible protagonist: he knew that she knew that.

It was as if she had invented the whole thing deliberately, for the purpose of playing it out like a play. Yet she did it with such fury, with such convincingness and such conviction, that on the first occasion he thought that she was under a delusion and the third time he thought that she was mad. She revealed an unexpected and infallible instinct for intrigue. She insisted on a place for concealing notes, letters. It was in a hollow fence post below the rotting stable. He never saw her put a note there, yet she insisted on his visiting it daily; when he did so, the letter would be there. When he did not and lied to her, he would find that she had already set traps to catch him in the lie; she cried, wept.

Sometimes the notes would tell him not to come until a certain hour, to that house which no white person save himself had entered in years

and in which for twenty years now she had been all night alone; for a whole week she forced him to climb into a window to come to her. He would do so and sometimes he would have to seek her about the dark house until he found her, hidden, in closets, in empty rooms, waiting, panting, her eyes in the dark glowing like the eyes of cats.

Now and then she appointed trysts beneath certain shrubs about the grounds, where he would find her naked, or with her clothing half torn to ribbons upon her, in the wild throes of nymphomania, her body gleaming in the slow shifting from one to another of such formally erotic attitudes and gestures as a Beardsley of the time of Petronius might have drawn. She would be wild then, in the close, breathing halfdark without walls, with her wild hair, each strand of which would seem to come alive like octopus tentacles, and her wild hands and her breathing: "Negro! Negro! Negro!"

Within six months she was completely corrupted. It could not be said that he corrupted her. His own life, for all its anonymous promiscuity, had been conventional enough, as a life of healthy and normal sin usually is. The corruption came from a source even more inexplicable to him than to her. In fact, it was as though with the corruption which she seemed to gather from the air itself, she began to corrupt him. He began to be afraid. He could not have said of what. But he began to see himself as from a distance, like a man being sucked down into a bottomless morass. He had not exactly thought that yet. What he was now seeing was the street lonely, savage, and cool. That was it: cool; he was thinking, saying aloud to himself sometimes, "I better move. I better get away from here."

But something held him, as the fatalist can always be held: by curiosity, pessimism, by sheer inertia. Meanwhile the affair went on, submerging him more and more by the imperious and overriding fury of those nights. Perhaps he realised that he could not escape. Anyway, he stayed, watching the two creatures that struggled in the one body like two moongleamed shapes struggling drowning in alternate throes upon the surface of a black thick pool beneath the last moon. Now it would be that still, cold, contained figure of the first phase who, even though

lost and damned, remained somehow impervious and impregnable; then it would be the other, the second one, who in furious denial of that impregnability strove to drown in the black abyss of its own creating that physical purity which had been preserved too long now even to be lost.

Now and then they would come to the black surface, locked like sisters; the black waters would drain away. Then the world would rush back: the room, the walls, the peaceful myriad sound of insects from beyond the summer windows where insects had whirred for forty years. She would stare at him then with the wild, despairing face of a stranger; looking at her then he paraphrased himself: "She wants to pray, but she dont know how to do that either."

She had begun to get fat.

The end of this phase was not sharp, not a climax, like the first. It merged into the third phase so gradually that he could not have said where one stopped and the other began. It was summer becoming fall, with already, like shadows before a westering sun, the chill and implacable import of autumn cast ahead upon summer; something of dying summer spurting again like a dying coal, in the fall. This was over a period of two years. He still worked at the planing mill, and in the meantime he had begun to sell a little whiskey, very judiciously, restricting himself to a few discreet customers none of whom knew the others. She did not know this, although he kept his stock hidden on the place and met his clients in the woods beyond the pasture. Very likely she would not have objected.

But neither would Mrs McEachern have objected to the hidden rope; perhaps he did not tell her for the same reason that he did not tell Mrs McEachern. Thinking of Mrs McEachern and the rope, and of the waitress whom he had never told where the money came from which he gave to her, and now of his present mistress and the whiskey, he could almost believe that it was not to make money that he sold the whiskey but because he was doomed to conceal always something from the women who surrounded him.

Meanwhile he would see her from a distance now and then in the daytime, about the rear premises, where moved articulate beneath the clean, austere garments which she wore that rotten richness ready to flow into putrefaction at a touch, like something growing in a swamp, not once looking toward the cabin or toward him. And when he thought of that other personality that seemed to exist somewhere in physical darkness itself, it seemed to him that what he now saw by daylight was a phantom of someone whom the night sister had murdered and which now moved purposeless about the scenes of old peace, robbed even of the power of lamenting.

Of course the first fury of the second phase could not last. At first it had been a torrent; now it was a tide, with a flow and ebb. During its flood she could almost fool them both. It was as if out of her knowledge that it was just a flow that must presently react was born a wilder fury, a fierce denial that could flag itself and him into physical experimentation that transcended imagining, carried them as though by momentum alone, bearing them without volition or plan.

It was as if she knew somehow that time was short, that autumn was almost upon her, without knowing yet the exact significance of autumn. It seemed to be instinct alone: instinct physical and instinctive denial of the wasted years. Then the tide would ebb. Then they would be stranded as behind a dying mistral, upon a spent and satiate beach, looking at one another like strangers, with hopeless and reproachful (on his part with weary: on hers with despairing) eyes.

But the shadow of autumn was upon her. She began to talk about a child, as though instinct had warned her that now was the time when she must either justify or expiate. She talked about it in the ebb periods. At first the beginning of the night was always a flood, as if the hours of light and of separation had damned up enough of the wasting stream to simulate torrent for a moment at least.

But after a while the stream became too thin for that: he would go to her now with reluctance, a stranger, already back-looking; a stranger he

would leave her after having sat with her in the dark bedroom, talking of still a third stranger. He noticed now how, as though by premeditation, they met always in the bedroom, as though they were married. No more did he have to seek her through the house; the nights when he must seek her, hidden and panting and naked, about the dark house or among the shrubbery of the ruined park were as dead now as the hollow fence post below the barn.

That was all dead: the scenes, the faultlessly played scenes of secret and monstrous delight and of jealousy. Though if she had but known it now, she had reason for jealousy. He made trips every week or so, on business, he told her. She did not know that the business took him to Memphis, where he betrayed her with other women, women bought for a price. She did not know it. Perhaps in the phase in which she now was she could not have been convinced, would not have listened to proof, would not have cared. Because she had taken to lying sleepless most of the night, making up the sleep in the afternoons. She was not sick; it was not her body.

She had never been better; her appetite was enormous and she weighed thirty pounds more than she had ever weighed in her life. It was not that that kept her awake. It was something out of the darkness, the earth, the dying summer itself: something threatful and terrible to her because instinct assured her that it would not harm her; that it would overtake and betray her completely, but she would not be harmed: that on the contrary, she would be saved, that life would go on the same and even better, even less terrible. What was terrible was that she did not want to be saved.

“I’m not ready to pray yet,” she said aloud, quietly, rigid, soundless, her eyes wide open, while the moon poured and poured into the window, filling the room with something cold and irrevocable and wild with regret. “Dont make me have to pray yet. Dear God, let me be damned a little longer, a little while.” She seemed to see her whole past life, the starved years, like a gray tunnel, at the far and irrevocable end of which, as unfading as a reproach, her naked breast of three short years

ago ached as though in agony, virgin and crucified; “Not yet, dear God. Not yet, dear God.”

So when he now came to her, after the passive and cold and seemly transports of sheer habit she began to speak of a child. She talked about it impersonally at first, discussing children. Perhaps it was sheer and instinctive feminine cunning and indirection, perhaps not. Anyway, it was some time before he discovered with a kind of shock that she was discussing it as a possibility, a practical thought. He said No at once.

“Why not?” she said. She looked at him, speculative. He was thinking fast, thinking She wants to be married. That’s it. She wants a child no more than I do ‘It’s just a trick,’ he thought. ‘I should have known it, expected it.

I should have cleared out of here a year ago.’ But he was afraid to tell her this, to let the word marriage come between them, come aloud, thinking, ‘She may not have thought of it, and I will just put the notion in her head.’ She was watching him. “Why not?” she said. And then something in him flashed Why not? It would mean ease, security, for the rest of your life. You would never have to move again. And you might as well be married to her as this thinking ‘No. If I give in now, I will deny all the thirty years that I have lived to make me what I chose to be.’ He said:

“If we were going to have one, I guess we would have had one two years ago.”

“We didn’t want one then.”

“We dont want one now, either,” he said.

That was in September. Just after Christmas she told him that she was pregnant. Almost before she ceased to speak, he believed that she was lying. He discovered now that he had been expecting her to tell him that for three months. But when he looked at her face, he knew that

she was not. He believed that she also knew that she was not. He thought, 'Here it comes. She will say it now: marry. But I can at least get out of the house first.'

But she did not. She was sitting quite still on the bed, her hands on her lap, her still New England face (it was still the face of a spinster: prominently boned, long, a little thin, almost manlike: in contrast to it her plump body was more richly and softly animal than ever) lowered. She said, in a tone musing, detached, impersonal: "A full measure. Even to a bastard negro child. I would like to see father's and Calvin's faces.

This will be a good time for you to run, if that's what you want to do." But it was as though she were not listening to her own voice, did not intend for the words to have any actual meaning: that final upflare of stubborn and dying summer upon which autumn, the dawning of halfdeath, had come unawares. 'It's over now,' she thought quietly; 'finished.' Except the waiting, for one month more to pass, to be sure; she had learned that from the negro women, that you could not always tell until after two months. She would have to wait another month, watching the calendar.

She made a mark on the calendar to be sure, so there would be no mistake; through the bedroom window she watched that month accomplish. A frost had come, and some of the leaves were beginning to turn. The marked day on the calendar came and passed; she gave herself another week, to be doubly sure. She was not elated, since she was not surprised. "I am with child," she said, quietly, aloud.

'I'll go tomorrow,' he told himself, that same day. 'I'll go Sunday,' he thought. 'I'll wait and get this week's pay, and then I am gone.' He began to look forward to Saturday, planning where he would go. He did not see her all that week. He expected her to send for him. When he entered or left the cabin he would find himself avoiding looking toward the house, as he had during the first week he was there. He did not see her at all. Now and then he would see the negro women, in nondescript garments against the autumn chill, coming or going along the worn paths, entering or leaving the house. But that was all. When Saturday

came, he did not go. 'Might as well have all the jack I can get,' he thought. 'If she aint anxious for me to clear out, no reason why I should be. I'll go next Saturday.'

He stayed on. The weather remained cold, bright and cold. When he went to bed now in his cotton blanket, in the draughty cabin, he would think of the bedroom in the house, with its fire, its ample, quilted, lintpadded covers. He was nearer to selfpity than he had ever been. 'She might at least send me another blanket,' he thought. So might he have bought one. But he did not. Neither did she. He waited. He waited what he thought was a long time. Then one evening in February he returned home and found a note from her on his cot. It was brief; it was an order almost, directing him to come to the house that night. He was not surprised.

He had never yet known a woman who, without another man available, would not come around in time. And he knew now that tomorrow he would go. 'This must be what I have been waiting for,' he thought; 'I have just been waiting to be vindicated.' When he changed his clothes, he shaved also. He prepared himself like a bridegroom, unaware of it. He found the table set for him in the kitchen, as usual; during all the time that he had not seen her, that had never failed. He ate and went upstairs. He did not hurry. 'We got all night,' he thought. 'It'll be something for her to think about tomorrow night and the next one, when she finds that cabin empty.' She was sitting before the fire. She did not even turn her head when he entered. "Bring that chair up with you," she said.

This was how the third phase began. It puzzled him for a while, even more than the other two. He had expected eagerness, a kind of tacit apology; or lacking that, an acquiescence that wanted only to be wooed. He was prepared to go that length, even. What he found was a stranger who put aside with the calm firmness of a man his hand when at last and in a kind of baffled desperation he went and touched her. "Come on," he said, "if you have something to tell me. We always talk better afterward. It wont hurt the kid, if that's what you have been afraid of."

She stayed him with a single word; for the first time he looked at her face: he looked upon a face cold, remote, and fanatic. "Do you realise," she said, "that you are wasting your life?" And he sat looking at her like a stone, as if he could not believe his own ears.

It took him some time to comprehend what she meant. She did not look at him at all. She sat looking into the fire, her face cold, still, brooding, talking to him as if he were a stranger, while he listened in outraged amazement. She wanted him to take over all her business affairs—the correspondence and the periodical visits—with the negro schools. She had the plan all elaborated. She recited it to him in detail while he listened in mounting rage and amazement. He was to have complete charge, and she would be his secretary, assistant: they would travel to the schools together, visit in the negro homes together; listening, even with his anger, he knew that the plan was mad. And all the while her calm profile in the peaceful firelight was as grave and tranquil as a portrait in a frame. When he left, he remembered that she had not once mentioned the expected child.

He did not yet believe that she was mad. He thought that it was because she was pregnant, as he believed that was why she would not let him touch her. He tried to argue with her. But it was like trying to argue with a tree: she did not even rouse herself to deny, she just listened quietly and then talked again in that level, cold tone as if he had never spoken. When he rose at last and went out he did not even know if she was aware that he had gone.

He saw her but once more within the next two months. He followed his daily routine, save that he did not approach the house at all now, taking his meals downtown again, as when he had first gone to work at the mill. But then, when he first went to work, he would not need to think of her during the day; he hardly ever thought about her.

Now he could not help himself. She was in his mind so constantly that it was almost as if he were looking at her, there in the house, patient, waiting, inescapable, crazy. During the first phase it had been as though

he were outside a house where snow was on the ground, trying to get into the house; during the second phase he was at the bottom of a pit in the hot wild darkness; now he was in the middle of a plain where there was no house, not even snow, not even wind.

He began now to be afraid, whose feeling up to now had been bewilderment and perhaps foreboding and fatality. He now had a partner in his whiskey business: a stranger named Brown who had appeared at the mill one day early in the spring, seeking work. He knew that the man was a fool, but at first he thought, 'At least he will have sense enough to do what I tell him to do. He wont have to think himself at all'; it was not until later that he said to himself: 'I know now that what makes a fool is an inability to take even his own good advice.' He took Brown because Brown was a stranger and had a certain cheerful and unscrupulous readiness about him, and not overmuch personal courage, knowing that in the hands of a judicious man, a coward within his own limitations can be made fairly useful to anyone except himself.

His fear was that Brown might learn about the woman in the house and do something irrevocable out of his own unpredictable folly. He was afraid that the woman, since he had avoided her, might take it into her head to come to the cabin some night. He had not seen her but once since February.

That was when he sought her to tell her that Brown was coming to live with him in the cabin. It was on Sunday. He called her, and she came out to where he stood on the back porch and listened quietly. "You didn't have to do that," she said. He didn't understand then what she meant. It was not until later that thinking again flashed, complete, like a printed sentence: She thinks that I brought him out here to keep her off. She believes that I think that with him there, she wont dare come down to the cabin; that she will have to let me alone

Thus he put his belief, his fear of what she might do, into his own mind by believing that he had put it into hers. He believed that, since she had thought that, that Brown's presence would not only not deter her: it would be an incentive for her to come to the cabin. Because of the fact

that for over a month now she had done nothing at all, made no move at all, he believed that she might do anything. Now he too lay awake at night. But he was thinking, 'I have got to do something. There is something that I am going to do.'

So he would trick and avoid Brown in order to reach the cabin first. He expected each time to find her waiting. When he would reach the cabin and find it empty, he would think in a kind of impotent rage of the urgency, the lying and the haste, and of her alone and idle in the house all day, with nothing to do save to decide whether to betray him at once or torture him a little longer. By ordinary he would not have minded whether Brown knew about their relations or not. He had nothing in his nature of reticence or of chivalry toward women. It was practical, material.

He would have been indifferent if all Jefferson knew he was her lover: it was that he wanted no one to begin to speculate on what his private life out there was because of the hidden whiskey which was netting him thirty or forty dollars a week. That was one reason. Another reason was vanity. He would have died or murdered rather than have anyone, another man, learn what their relations had now become. That not only had she changed her life completely, but that she was trying to change his too and make of him something between a hermit and a missionary to negroes. He believed that if Brown learned the one, he must inevitably learn the other. So he would reach the cabin at last, after the lying and the hurry, and as he put his hand on the door, remembering the haste and thinking that in a moment he would find that it had not been necessary at all and yet to neglect which precaution he dared not, he would hate her with a fierce revulsion of dread and impotent rage. Then one evening he opened the door and found the note on the cot.

He saw it as soon as he entered, lying square and white and profoundly inscrutable against the dark blanket. He did even stop to think that he believed he knew what the message would be, would promise. He felt no eagerness; he felt relief. 'It's over now,' he thought, not yet taking up the folded paper. 'It will be like it was before now. No more talking about niggers and babies. She has come around. She has worn the

other out, seen that she was getting nowhere. She sees now that what she wants, needs, is a man. She wants a man by night; what he does by daylight does not matter.' He should have realised then the reason why he had not gone away.

He should have seen that he was bound just as tightly by that small square of still undivulging paper as though it were a lock and chain. He did not think of that. He saw only himself once again on the verge of promise and delight. It would be quieter though, now. They would both want it so; besides the whiphand which he would now have. 'All that foolishness,' he thought, holding the yet unopened paper in his hands; 'all that damn foolishness. She is still she and I am still I. And now, after all this damn foolishness'; thinking how they would both laugh over it tonight, later, afterward, when the time for quiet talking and quiet laughing came: at the whole thing, at one another, at themselves.

He did not open the note at all. He put it away and washed and shaved and changed his clothes, whistling while he did so. He had not finished when Brown came in. "Well, well, well," Brown said. Christmas said nothing. He was facing the shard of mirror nailed to the wall, knotting his tie. Brown had stopped in the center of the floor: a tall, lean, young man in dirty overalls, with a dark, weakly handsome face and curious eyes. Beside his mouth there was a narrow scar as white as a thread of spittle. After a while Brown said: "Looks like you are going somewhere."

"Does it?" Christmas said. He did not look around. He whistled monotonously but truly: something in minor, plaintive and negroid.

"I reckon I wont bother to clean up none," Brown said, "seeing as you are almost ready."

Christmas looked back at him. "Ready for what?"

"Aint you going to town?"

"Did I ever say I was?" Christmas said. He turned back to the glass.

“Oh,” Brown said. He watched the back of Christmas’s head. “Well, I reckon from that that you’re going on private business.” He watched Christmas. “This here’s a cold night to be laying around on the wet ground without nothing under you but a thin gal.”

“Aint it, though?” Christmas said, whistling, preoccupied and unhurried. He turned and picked up his coat and put it on, Brown still watching him. He went to the door. ‘See you in the morning,’ he said. The door did not close behind him. He knew that Brown was standing in it, looking after him. But he did not attempt to conceal his purpose. He went on toward the house. ‘Let him watch,’ he thought. ‘Let him follow me if he wants to.’

The table was set for him in the kitchen. Before sitting down he took the unopened note from his pocket and laid it beside his plate. It was not enclosed, not sealed; it sprang open of its own accord, as though inviting him, insisting. But he did not look at it. He began to eat. He ate without haste. He had almost finished when he raised his head suddenly, listening. Then he rose and went to the door through which he had entered, with the noiselessness of a cat, and jerked the door open suddenly.

Brown stood just outside, his face leaned to the door, or where the door had been. The light fell upon his face and upon it was an expression of intent and infantile interest which became surprise while Christmas looked at it, then it recovered, falling back a little. Brown’s voice was gleeful though quiet, cautious, conspiratorial, as if he had already established his alliance and sympathy with Christmas, unasked, and without waiting to know what was going on, out of loyalty to his partner or perhaps to abstract man as opposed to all woman. “Well, well, well,” he said. “So this is where you tomcat to every night. Right at our front door, you might say—”

Without saying a word Christmas struck him. The blow did not fall hard, because Brown was already in innocent and gleeful back-motion, in midsnicker as it were. The blow cut his voice short off; moving,

springing backward, he vanished from the fall of light, into the darkness, from which his voice came, still not loud, as if even now he would not jeopardise his partner's business, but tense now with alarm, astonishment: "Dont you hit me!" He was the taller of the two: a gangling shape already in a ludicrous diffusion of escape as if he were on the point of clattering to earth in complete disintegration as he stumbled backward before the steady and still silent advance of the other.

Again Brown's voice came, high, full of alarm and spurious threat: "Dont you hit me!" This time the blow struck his shoulder as he turned. He was running now. He ran for a hundred yards before he slowed, looking back. Then he stopped and turned. "You durn yellowbellied wop," he said, in a tentative tone, jerking his head immediately, as if his voice had made more noise, sounded louder, than he had intended. There was no sound from the house; the kitchen door was dark again, closed again. He raised his voice a little: "You durn yellowbellied wop! I'll learn you who you are monkeying with." There came no sound anywhere. It was chilly. He turned and went back to the cabin, mumbling to himself.

When Christmas reentered the kitchen he did not even look back at the table on which lay the note which he had not yet read. He went on through the door which led into the house and on to the stairs. He began to mount, not fast. He mounted steadily; he could now see the bedroom door, a crack of light, firelight, beneath it. He went steadily on and put his hand upon the door. Then he opened it and he stopped dead still. She was sitting at a table, beneath the lamp.

He saw a figure that he knew, in a severe garment that he knew—a garment that looked as if it had been made for and worn by a careless man. Above it he saw a head with hair just beginning to gray drawn gauntly back to a knot as savage and ugly as a wart on a diseased bough. Then she looked up at him and he saw that she wore steelrimmed spectacles which he had never seen before. He stood in the door, his hand still on the knob, quite motionless. It seemed to him that he could actually hear the words inside him: You should have read

that note. You should have read that note thinking, 'I am going to do something. Going to do something.'

He was still hearing that while he stood beside the table on which papers were scattered and from which she had not risen, and listened to the calm enormity which her cold, still voice unfolded, his mouth repeating the words after her while he looked down at the scattered and enigmatic papers and documents and thinking fled smooth and idle, wondering what this paper meant and what that paper meant. "To school," his mouth said.

"Yes," she said. "They will take you. Any of them will. On my account. You can choose any one you want among them. We wont even have to pay."

"To school," his mouth said. "A nigger school. Me."

"Yes. Then you can go to Memphis. You can read law in Peebles's office. He will teach you law. Then you can take charge of all the legal business. All this, all that he does, Peebles does."

"And then learn law in the office of a nigger lawyer," his mouth said.

"Yes. Then I will turn over all the business to you, all the money. All of it. So that when you need money for yourself you could . . . you would know how; lawyers know how to do it so that it . . . You would be helping them up out of darkness and none could accuse or blame you even if they found out . . . even if you did not replace . . . but you could replace the money and none would ever know. . . ."

"But a nigger college, a nigger lawyer," his voice said, quiet, not even argumentative; just promptive. They were not looking at one another; she had not looked up since he entered.

"Tell them," she said.

“Tell niggers that I am a nigger too?” She now looked at him. Her face was quite calm. It was the face of an old woman now.

“Yes. You’ll have to do that. So they wont charge you anything. On my account.”

Then it was as if he said suddenly to his mouth: ‘Shut up. Shut up that drivel. Let me talk.’ He leaned down. She did not move. Their faces were not a foot apart: the one cold, dead white, fanatical, mad; the other parchmentcolored, the lip lifted into the shape of a soundless and rigid snarl. He said quietly: “You’re old. I never noticed that before. An old woman. You’ve got gray in your hair.” She struck him, at once, with her flat hand, the rest of her body not moving at all.

Her blow made a flat sound; his blow as close upon it as echo. He struck with his fist, then in that long blowing wind he jerked her up from the chair and held her, facing him, motionless, not a flicker upon her still face, while the long wind of knowing rushed down upon him. “You haven’t got any baby,” he said. “You never had one. There is not anything the matter with you except being old. You just got old and it happened to you and now you are not any good anymore.

That’s all that’s wrong with you.” He released her and struck her again. She fell huddled onto the bed, looking up at him, and he struck her in the face again and standing over her he spoke to her the words which she had once loved to hear on his tongue, which she used to say that she could taste there, murmurous, obscene, caressing. “That’s all. You’re just worn-out. You’re not any good anymore. That’s all.”

She lay on the bed, on her side, her head turned and looking up at him across her bleeding mouth. “Maybe it would be better if we both were dead,” she said.

He could see the note lying on the blanket as soon as he opened the door. Then he would go and take it up and open it. He would now remember the hollow fence post as something of which he had heard told, as having taken place in another life from any that he had ever

lived. Because the paper, the ink, the form and shape, were the same. They had never been long; they were not long now. But now there was nothing evocative of unspoken promise, of rich and unmentionable delights, in them. They were now briefer than epitaphs and more terse than commands.

His first impulse would be to not go. He believed that he dared not go. Then he knew that he dared not fail to go. He would not change his clothes now. In his sweatstained overalls he would traverse the late twilight of May and enter the kitchen. The table was never set with food for him now. Sometimes he would look at it as he passed and he would think, 'My God. When have I sat down in peace to eat.' And he could not remember.

He would go on into the house and mount the stairs. Already he would be hearing her voice. It would increase as he mounted and until he reached the door to the bedroom. The door would be shut, locked; from beyond it the monotonous steady voice came. He could not distinguish the words; only the ceaseless monotone. He dared not try to distinguish the words. He did not dare let himself know what she was at. So he would stand there and wait, and after a while the voice would cease and she would open the door and he would enter. As he passed the bed he would look down at the floor beside it and it would seem to him that he could distinguish the prints of knees and he would jerk his eyes away as if it were death that they had looked at.

Likely the lamp would not yet be lighted. They did not sit down. Again they stood to talk, as they used to do two years ago; standing in the dusk while her voice repeated its tale: ". . . not to school, then, if you dont want to go . . . Do without that . . . Your soul. Expiation of . . ." And he waiting, cold, still, until she had finished: ". . . hell . . . forever and ever and ever . . ."

"No," he said. And she would listen as quietly, and he knew that she was not convinced and she knew that he was not. Yet neither surrendered; worse: they would not let one another alone; he would not even go away. And they would stand for a while longer in the quiet

dusk peopled, as though from their loins, by a myriad ghosts of dead sins and delights, looking at one another's still and fading face, weary, spent, and indomitable.

Then he would leave. And before the door had shut and the bolt had shot to behind him, he would hear the voice again, monotonous, calm, and despairing, saying what and to what or whom he dared not learn nor suspect. And as he sat in the shadows of the ruined garden on that August night three months later and heard the clock in the courthouse two miles away strike ten and then eleven, he believed with calm paradox that he was the volitionless servant of the fatality in which he believed that he did not believe. He was saying to himself I had to do it already in the past tense; I had to do it. She said so herself

She had said it two nights ago. He found the note and went to her. As he mounted the stairs the monotonous voice grew louder, sounded louder and clearer than usual. When he reached the top of the stairs he saw why. The door was open this time, and she did not rise from where she knelt beside the bed when he entered. She did not stir; her voice did not cease. Her head was not bowed. Her face was lifted, almost with pride, her attitude of formal abjectness a part of the pride, her voice calm and tranquil and abnegant in the twilight. She did not seem to be aware that he had entered until she finished a period. Then she turned her head. "Kneel with me," she said.

"No," he said.

"Kneel," she said. "You wont even need to speak to Him yourself. Just kneel. Just make the first move."

"No," he said. "I'm going."

She didn't move, looking back and up at him. "Joe," she said, "will you stay? Will you do that much?"

"Yes," he said. "I'll stay. But make it fast."

She prayed again. She spoke quietly, with that abjectness of pride. When it was necessary to use the symbolwords which he had taught her, she used them, spoke them forthright and without hesitation, talking to God as if He were a man in the room with two other men. She spoke of herself and of him as of two other people, her voice still, monotonous, sexless. Then she ceased. She rose quietly. They stood in the twilight, facing one another. This time she did not even ask the question; he did not even need to reply. After a time she said quietly:

“Then there’s just one other thing to do.”

“There’s just one other thing to do,” he said.

‘So now it’s all done, all finished,’ he thought quietly, sitting in the dense shadow of the shrubbery, hearing the last stroke of the far clock cease and die away. It was a spot where he had overtaken her, found her on one of the wild nights two years ago. But that was in another time, another life. Now it was still, quiet, the fecund earth now coolly suspirant. The dark was filled with the voices, myriad, out of all time that he had known, as though all the past was a flat pattern. And going on: tomorrow night, all the tomorrows, to be a part of the flat pattern, going on. He thought of that with quiet astonishment: going on, myriad, familiar, since all that had ever been was the same as all that was to be, since tomorrow to-be and had-been would be the same. Then it was time.

He rose. He moved from the shadow and went around the house and entered the kitchen. The house was dark. He had not been to the cabin since early morning and he did not know if she had left a note for him or not, expected him or not. Yet he did not try for silence. It was as if he were not thinking of sleep, of whether she would be asleep or not. He mounted the stairs steadily and entered the bedroom. Almost at once she spoke from the bed. “Light the lamp,” she said.

“It wont need any light,” he said.

“Light the lamp.”

“No,” he said. He stood over the bed. He held the razor in his hand. But it was not open yet. But she did not speak again and then his body seemed to walk away from him. It went to the table and his hands laid the razor on the table and found the lamp and struck the match. She was sitting up in the bed, her back against the headboard. Over her nightdress she wore a shawl drawn down across her breast. Her arms were folded upon the shawl, her hands hidden from sight. He stood at the table. They looked at one another.

“Will you kneel with me?” she said. “I dont ask it.”

“No,” he said.

“I dont ask it. It’s not I who ask it. Kneel with me.”

“No.”

They looked at one another. “Joe,” she said, “for the last time. I dont ask it. Remember that. Kneel with me.”

“No,” he said. Then he saw her arms unfold and her right hand come forth from beneath the shawl. It held an old style, single action, cap-and-ball revolver almost as long and heavier than a small rifle. But the shadow of it and of her arm and hand on the wall did not waver at all, the shadow of both monstrous, the cocked hammer monstrous, backhooked and viciously poised like the arched head of a snake; it did not waver at all. And her eyes did not waver at all. They were as still as the round black ring of the pistol muzzle. But there was no heat in them, no fury. They were calm and still as all pity and all despair and all conviction. But he was not watching them. He was watching the shadowed pistol on the wall; he was watching when the cocked shadow of the hammer flicked away.

Standing in the middle of the road, with his right hand lifted full in the glare of the approaching car, he had not actually expected it to stop. Yet it did, with a squealing and sprawling suddenness that was almost

ludicrous. It was a small car, battered and old. When he approached it, in the reflected glare of the headlights two young faces seemed to float like two soft-colored and aghast balloons, the nearer one, the girl's, backshrank in a soft, wide horror. But Christmas did not notice this at the time. "How about riding with you, as far as you go?" he said. They said nothing at all, looking at him with that still and curious horror which he did not notice. So he opened the door to enter the rear seat.

When he did so, the girl began to make a choked wailing sound which would be much louder in a moment, as fear gained courage as it were. Already the car was in motion; it seemed to leap forward, and the boy, without moving his hands from the wheel or turning his head toward the girl hissed: "Shut up! Hush! It's our only chance! Will you hush now?" Christmas did not hear this either. He was sitting back now, completely unaware that he was riding directly behind desperate terror. He only thought with momentary interest that the small car was travelling at a pretty reckless speed for a narrow country road.

"How far does this road go?" he said.

The boy told him, naming the same town which the negro boy had named to him on that afternoon three years ago, when he had first seen Jefferson. The boy's voice had a dry, light quality. "Do you want to go there, cap'm?"

"All right," Christmas said. "Yes. Yes. That will do. That will suit me. Are you going there?"

"Sure," the boy said, in that light, flat tone. "Wherever you say." Again the girl beside him began that choked, murmurous, small-animal-like moaning; again the boy hissed at her, his face still rigidly front, the little car rushing and bouncing onward: "Hush! Shhhhhhhhhhh. Hush! Hush!" But again Christmas did not notice. He saw only the two young, rigidly forward-looking heads against the light glare, into which the ribbon of the road rushed swaying and fleeing.

But he remarked both them and the fleeing road without curiosity; he was not even paying attention when he found that the boy had apparently been speaking to him for some time; how far they had come or where they were he did not know. The boy's diction was slow now, recapitulant, each word as though chosen simply and carefully and spoken slowly and clearly for the ear of a foreigner: "Listen, cap'm. When I turn off up here. It's just a short cut. A short cutoff to a better road. I am going to take the cutoff. When I come to the short cut. To the better road. So we can get there quicker. See?"

"All right," Christmas said. The car bounced and rushed on, swaying on the curves and up the hills and fleeing down again as if the earth had dropped from under them. Mail boxes on posts beside the road rushed into the lights and flicked past. Now and then they passed a dark house. Again the boy was speaking:

"Now, this here cutoff I was telling you about. It's right down here. I'm going to turn into it. But it dont mean I am leaving the road. I am just going a little way across to a better road. See?"

"All right," Christmas said. Then for no reason he said: "You must live around here somewhere."

Now it was the girl who spoke. She turned in the seat, whirling, her small face wan with suspense and terror and blind and ratlike desperation: "We do!" she cried. "We both do! Right up yonder! And when my pappy and brothers—" Her voice ceased, cut short off; Christmas saw the boy's hand clapped upon her lower face and her hands tugging at the wrist while beneath the hand itself her smothered voice choked and bubbled. Christmas sat forward.

"Here," he said. "I'll get out here. You can let me out here."

"Now you've done it!" the boy cried, too, thinly, with desperate rage too. "If you'd just kept quiet—"

“Stop the car,” Christmas said. “I aint going to hurt either of you. I just want to get out.” Again the car stopped with sprawling suddenness. But the engine still raced, and the car leaped forward again before he was clear of the step; he had to leap forward running for a few steps to recover his balance. As he did so, something heavy and hard struck him on the flank. The car rushed on, fading at top speed. From it floated back the girl’s shrill wailing.

Then it was gone; the darkness, the now impalpable dust, came down again, and the silence beneath the summer stars. The object which had struck him had delivered an appreciable blow; then he discovered that the object was attached to his right hand. Raising the hand, he found that it held the ancient heavy pistol. He did not know that he had it; he did not remember having picked it up at all, nor why. But there it was. ‘And I flagged that car with my right hand,’ he thought. ‘No wonder she . . . they . . .’ He drew his right hand back to throw, the pistol balanced upon it. Then he paused, and he struck a match and examined the pistol in the puny dying glare.

The match burned down and went out, yet he still seemed to see the ancient thing with its two loaded chambers: the one upon which the hammer had already fallen and which had not exploded, and the other upon which no hammer had yet fallen but upon which a hammer had been planned to fall. ‘For her and for me,’ he said. His arm came back, and threw. He heard the pistol crash once through undergrowth. Then there was no sound again. ‘For her and for me.’

Chapter 13

Within five minutes after the countrymen found the fire, the people began to gather. Some of them, also on the way to town in wagons to spend Saturday, also stopped. Some came afoot from the immediate neighborhood. This was a region of negro cabins and gutted and outworn fields out of which a corporal’s guard of detectives could not have combed ten people, man, woman or child, yet which now within

thirty minutes produced, as though out of thin air, parties and groups ranging from single individuals to entire families. Still others came out from town in racing and blatting cars.

Among these came the sheriff of the county—a fat, comfortable man with a hard, canny head and a benevolent aspect—who thrust away those who crowded to look down at the body on the sheet with that static and childlike amaze with which adults contemplate their own inescapable portraits. Among them the casual Yankees and the poor whites and even the southerners who had lived for a while in the north, who believed aloud that it was an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by Negro and who knew, believed, and hoped that she had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward. The sheriff came up and looked himself once and then sent the body away, hiding the poor thing from the eyes.

Then there was nothing for them to look at except the place where the body had lain and the fire. And soon nobody could remember exactly where the sheet had rested, what earth it had covered, and so then there was only the fire to look at. So they looked at the fire, with that same dull and static amaze which they had brought down from the old fetid caves where knowing began, as though, like death, they had never seen fire before. Presently the fire truck came up gallantly, with noise, with whistles and bells. It was new, painted red, with gilt trim and a handpower siren and a bell gold in color and in tone serene, arrogant, and proud.

About it hatless men and youths clung with the astonishing disregard of physical laws that flies possess. It had mechanical ladders that sprang to prodigious heights at the touch of a hand, like opera hats; only there was now nothing for them to spring to. It had neat and virgin coils of hose evocative of telephone trust advertisements in the popular magazines; but there was nothing to hook them to and nothing to flow through them. So the hatless men, who had deserted counters and desks, swung down, even including the one who ground the siren. They came too and were shown several different places where the sheet had

lain, and some of them with pistols already in their pockets began to canvass about for someone to crucify.

But there wasn't anybody. She had lived such a quiet life, attended so to her own affairs, that she bequeathed to the town in which she had been born and lived and died a foreigner, an out-lander, a kind of heritage of astonishment and outrage, for which, even though she had supplied them at last with an emotional barbecue, a Roman holiday almost, they would never forgive her and let her be dead in peace and quiet. Not that. Peace is not that often. So they moiled and clotted, believing that the flames, the blood, the body that had died three years ago and had just now begun to live again, cried out for vengeance, not believing that the rapt infury of the flames and the immobility of the body were both affirmations of an attained bourne beyond the hurt and harm of man. Not that.

Because the other made nice believing. Better than the shelves and the counters filled with longfamiliar objects bought, not because the owner desired them or admired them, could take any pleasure in the owning of them, but in order to cajole or trick other men into buying them at a profit; and who must now and then contemplate both the objects which had not yet sold and the men who could buy them but had not yet done so, with anger and maybe outrage and maybe despair too.

Better than the musty offices where the lawyers waited lurking among ghosts of old lusts and lies, or where the doctors waited with sharp knives and sharp drugs, telling man, believing that he should believe, without resorting to printed admonishments, that they labored for that end whose ultimate attainment would leave them with nothing whatever to do. And the women came too, the idle ones in bright and sometimes hurried garments, with secret and passionate and glittering looks and with secret frustrated breasts (who have ever loved death better than peace) to print with a myriad small hard heels to the constant murmur Who did it? Who did it? periods such as perhaps Is he still free? Ah. Is he? Is he?

The sheriff also stared at the flames with exasperation and astonishment, since there was no scene to investigate. He was not yet thinking of himself as having been frustrated by a human agent. It was the fire. It seemed to him that the fire had been selfborn for that end and purpose. It seemed to him that that by and because of which he had had ancestors long enough to come himself to be, had allied itself with crime.

So he continued to walk in a baffled and fretted manner about that heedless monument of the color of both hope and catastrophe until a deputy came up and told how he had discovered in a cabin beyond the house, traces of recent occupation. And immediately the countryman who had discovered the fire (he had not yet got to town; his wagon had not progressed one inch since he descended from it two hours ago, and he now moved among the people, wildhaired, gesticulant, with on his face a dulled, spent, glaring expression and his voice hoarsed almost to a whisper) remembered that he had seen a man in the house when he broke in the door.

“A white man?” the sheriff said.

“Yes, sir. Blumping around in the hall like he had just finished falling down the stairs. Tried to keep me from going upstairs at all. Told me how he had already been up there and it wasn’t nobody up there. And when I come back down, he was gone.”

The sheriff looked about at them. “Who lived in that cabin?”

“I didn’t know anybody did,” the deputy said. “Niggers, I reckon. She might have had niggers living in the house with her, from what I have heard. What I am surprised at is that it was this long before one of them done for her.”

“Get me a nigger,” the sheriff said. The deputy and two or three others got him a nigger. “Who’s been living in that cabin?” the sheriff said.

"I dont know, Mr Watt," the negro said. "I aint never paid it no mind. I aint even knowed anybody lived in it."

"Bring him on down here," the sheriff said.

They were gathering now about the sheriff and the deputy and the negro, with avid eyes upon which the sheer prolongation of empty flames had begun to pall, with faces identical one with another. It was as if all their individual five senses had become one organ of looking, like an apotheosis, the words that flew among them wind- or air-engendered Is that him? Is that the one that did it? Sheriff's got him. Sheriff has already caught him The sheriff looked at them. "Go away," he said. "All of you.

Go look at the fire. If I need any help, I can send for you. Go on away." He turned and led his party down to the cabin. Behind him the repulsed ones stood in a clump and watched the three white men and the negro enter the cabin and close the door. Behind them in turn the dying fire roared, filling the air though not louder than the voices and much more unsourceless By God, if that's him, what are we doing, standing around here? Murdering a white woman the black son of a None of them had ever entered the house. While she was alive they would not have allowed their wives to call on her. When they were younger, children (some of their fathers had done it too) they had called after her on the street, "Nigger lover! Nigger lover!"

In the cabin the sheriff sat down on one of the cots, heavily. He sighed: a tub of a man, with the complete and rocklike inertia of a tub. "Now, I want to know who lives in this cabin," he said.

"I done told you I dont know," the negro said. His voice was a little sullen, quite alert, covertly alert. He watched the sheriff. The other two white men were behind him, where he could not see them. He did not look back at them, not so much as a glance. He was watching the sheriff's face as a man watches a mirror. Perhaps he saw it, as in a mirror, before it came. Perhaps he did not, since if change, flicker, there was in the sheriff's face it was no more than a flicker. But the negro did

not look back; there came only into his face when the strap fell across his back a wince, sudden, sharp, fleet, jerking up the corners of his mouth and exposing his momentary teeth like smiling. Then his face smoothed again, inscrutable.

“I reckon you aint tried hard enough to remember,” the sheriff said.

“I cant remember because I cant know,” the negro said. “I dont even live nowhere near here. You ought to know where I stay at, white folks.”

“Mr Buford says you live right down the road yonder,” the sheriff said.

“Lots of folks live down that road. Mr Buford ought to know where I stay at.”

“He’s lying,” the deputy said. His name was Buford. He was the one who wielded the strap, buckle end outward. He held it poised. He was watching the sheriff’s face. He looked like a spaniel waiting to be told to spring into the water.

“Maybe so; maybe not,” the sheriff said. He mused upon the negro. He was still, huge, inert, sagging the cot springs. “I think he just dont realise yet that I aint playing. Let alone them folks out there that aint got no jail to put him into if anything he wouldn’t like should come up. That wouldn’t bother to put him into a jail if they had one.” Perhaps there was a sign, a signal, in his eyes again; perhaps not. Perhaps the negro saw it; perhaps not. The strap fell again, the buckle raking across the negro’s back. “You remember yet?” the sheriff said.

“It’s two white men,” the negro said. His voice was cold, not sullen, not anything. “I dont know who they is nor what they does. It aint none of my business. I aint never seed them. I just heard talk about how two white men lived here. I didn’t care who they was. And that’s all I know. You can whup the blood outen me. But that’s all I know.”

Again the sheriff sighed. “That’ll do. I reckon that’s right.”

“It’s that fellow Christmas, that used to work at the mill, and another fellow named Brown,” the third man said. “You could have picked out any man in Jefferson that his breath smelled right and he could have told you that much.”

“I reckon that’s right, too,” the sheriff said.

He returned to town. When the crowd realised that the sheriff was departing, a general exodus began. It was as if there was nothing left to look at now. The body had gone, and now the sheriff was going. It was as though he carried within him, somewhere within that inert and sighing mass of flesh, the secret itself: that which moved and evoked them as with a promise of something beyond the sluttishness of stuffed entrails and monotonous days. So there was nothing left to look at now but the fire; they had now been watching it for three hours.

They were now used to it, accustomed to it; now it had become a permanent part of their lives as well as of their experiences, standing beneath its windless column of smoke taller than and impregnable as a monument which could be returned to at any time. So when the caravan reached town it had something of that arrogant decorum of a procession behind a catafalque, the sheriff’s car in the lead, the other cars honking and blatting behind in the sheriff’s and their own compounded dust.

It was held up momentarily at a street intersection near the square by a country wagon which had stopped to let a passenger descend. Looking out, the sheriff saw a young woman climbing slowly and carefully down from the wagon, with that careful awkwardness of advanced pregnancy. Then the wagon pulled aside; the caravan went on, crossing the square, where already the cashier of the bank had taken from the vault the envelope which the dead woman had deposited with him and which bore the inscription To be opened at my death. Joanna Burden The cashier was waiting at the sheriff’s office when the sheriff came in, with the envelope and its contents. This was a single sheet of paper on which was written, by the same hand which inscribed the envelope

Notify E. E. Peebles, Attorney, — Beale St., Memphis, Tenn., and Nathaniel Burrington, — St. Exeter, N. H. That was all.

“This Peebles is a nigger lawyer,” the cashier said.

“Is that so?” the sheriff said.

“Yes. What do you want me to do?”

“I reckon you better do what the paper says,” the sheriff said. “I reckon maybe I better do it myself.” He sent two wires. He received the Memphis reply in thirty minutes. The other came two hours later; within ten minutes afterward the word had gone through the town that Miss Burden’s nephew in New Hampshire offered a thousand dollars’ reward for the capture of her murderer. At nine o’clock that evening the man whom the countryman had found in the burning house when he broke in the front door, appeared. They did not know then that he was the man.

He did not tell them so. All they knew was that a man who had resided for a short time in the town and whom they knew as a bootlegger named Brown, and not much of a bootlegger at that, appeared on the square in a state of excitement, seeking the sheriff. Then it began to piece together. The sheriff knew that Brown was associated somehow with another man, another stranger named Christmas about whom, despite the fact that he had lived in Jefferson for three years, even less was known than about Brown; it was only now that the sheriff learned that Christmas had been living in the cabin behind Miss Burden’s house for three years. Brown wanted to talk; he insisted on talking, loud, urgent; it appeared at once that what he was doing was claiming the thousand dollars’ reward.

“You want to turn state’s evidence?” the sheriff asked him.

“I dont want to turn nothing,” Brown said, harsh, hoarse, a little wild in the face. “I know who done it and when I get my reward, I’ll tell.”

“You catch the fellow that done it, and you’ll get the reward,” the sheriff said. So they took Brown to the jail for safekeeping. “Only I reckon it aint no actual need of that,” the sheriff said. “I reckon as long as that thousand dollars is where he can smell it, you couldn’t run him away from here.” When Brown was taken away, still hoarse, still gesticulant and outraged, the sheriff telephoned to a neighboring town, where there was a pair of bloodhounds. The dogs would arrive on the early morning train.

About the bleak platform, in the sad dawn of that Sunday morning, thirty or forty men were waiting when the train came in, the lighted windows fleeing and jarring to a momentary stop. It was a fast train and it did not always stop at Jefferson. It halted only long enough to disgorge the two dogs: a thousand costly tons of intricate and curious metal glaring and crashing up and into an almost shocking silence filled with the puny sounds of men, to vomit two gaunt and cringing phantoms whose drooped and mild faces gazed with sad abjectness about at the weary, pale faces of men who had not slept very much since night before last, ringing them about with something terrible and eager and impotent. It was as if the very initial outrage of the murder carried in its wake and made of all subsequent actions something monstrous and paradoxical and wrong, in themselves against both reason and nature.

It was just sunrise when the posse reached the cabin behind the charred and now cold embers of the house. The dogs, either gaining courage from the light and warmth of the sun or catching the strained and tense excitement from the men, began to surge and yap about the cabin. Snuffing loudly and as one beast they took a course, dragging the man who held the leashes. They ran side by side for a hundred yards, where they stopped and began to dig furiously into the earth and exposed a pit where someone had buried recently emptied food tins.

They dragged the dogs away by main strength. They dragged them some distance from the cabin and made another cast. For a short time the dogs moiled, whimpering, then they set off again, full-tongued, drooling, and dragged and carried the running and cursing men at top

speed back to the cabin, where, feet planted and with backflung heads and backrolled eyeballs, they bayed the empty doorway with the passionate abandon of two baritones singing Italian opera. The men took the dogs back to town, in cars, and fed them. When they crossed the square the church bells were ringing, slow and peaceful, and along the streets the decorous people moved sedately beneath parasols, carrying Bibles and prayerbooks.

That night a youth, a countryboy, and his father came in to see the sheriff. The boy told of having been on the way home in a car late Friday night, and of a man who stopped him a mile or two beyond the scene of the murder, with a pistol. The boy believed that he was about to be robbed and even killed, and he told how he was about to trick the man into permitting him to drive right up into his own front yard, where he intended to stop the car and spring out and shout for help, but that the man suspected something and forced him to stop the car and let him out. The father wanted to know how much of the thousand dollars would become theirs.

“You catch him and we’ll see,” the sheriff said. So they waked the dogs and put them into another car and the youth showed them where the man had got out, and they cast the dogs, who charged immediately into the woods and with their apparent infallibility for metal in any form, found the old pistol with its two loaded chambers almost at once.

“It’s one of them old Civil War, cap-and-ball pistols,” the deputy said. “One of the caps has been snapped, but it never went off. What do you reckon he was doing with that?”

“Turn them dogs loose,” the sheriff said. “Maybe them leashes worry them.” They did so. The dogs were free now; thirty minutes later they were lost. Not the men lost the dogs; the dogs lost the men. They were just across a small creek and a ridge, and the men could hear them plainly. They were not baying now, with pride and assurance and perhaps pleasure.

The sound which they now made was a longdrawn and hopeless wailing, while steadily the men shouted at them. But apparently the animals could not hear either. Both voices were distinguishable, yet the belllike and abject wailing seemed to come from a single throat, as though the two beasts crouched flank to flank. After a while the men found them so, crouched in a ditch. By that time their voices sounded almost like the voices of children. The men squatted there until it was light enough to find their way back to the cars. Then it was Monday morning.

The temperature began to rise Monday. On Tuesday, the night, the darkness after the hot day, is close, still, oppressive; as soon as Byron enters the house he feels the corners of his nostrils whiten and tauten with the thick smell of the stale, mankept house. And when Hightower approaches, the smell of plump unwashed flesh and unfresh clothing—that odor of unfastidious sedentation, of static overflesh not often enough bathed—is wellnigh overpowering. Entering, Byron thinks as he has thought before: ‘That is his right. It may not be my way, but it is his way and his right.’ And he remembers how once he had seemed to find the answer, as though by inspiration, divination: ‘It is the odor of goodness. Of course it would smell bad to us that are bad and sinful.’

They sit again opposite one another in the study, the desk, the lighted lamp, between. Byron sits again on the hard chair, his face lowered, still. His voice is sober, stubborn: the voice of a man saying something which will be not only unpleasing, but will not be believed. “I am going to find another place for her. A place where it will be more private. Where she can . . .”

Hightower watches his lowered face. “Why must she move? When she is comfortable there, with a woman at hand if she should need one?” Byron does not answer. He sits motionless, downlooking; his face is stubborn, still; looking at it, Hightower thinks, ‘It is because so much happens. Too much happens. That’s it. Man performs, engenders, so much more than he can or should have to bear. That’s how he finds that he can bear anything. That’s it. That’s what is so terrible. That he

can bear anything, anything.’ He watches Byron. “Is Mrs Beard the only reason why she is going to move?”

Still Byron does not look up, speaking in that still, stubborn voice: “She needs a place where it will be kind of home to her. She aint got a whole lot more time, and in a boarding house, where it’s mostly just men . . . A room where it will be quiet when her time comes, and not every durn horsetrader or courtjury that passes through the hallway . . .”

“I see,” Hightower says. He watches Byron’s face. “And you want me to take her in here.” Byron makes to speak, but the other goes on: his tone too is cold, level: “It wont do, Byron. If there were another woman here, living in the house. It’s a shame too, with all the room here, the quiet. I’m thinking of her, you see. Not myself. I would not care what was said, thought.”

“I am not asking that.” Byron does not look up. He can feel the other watching him. He thinks He knows that is not what I meant, too. He knows. He just said that. I know what he is thinking. I reckon I expected it. I reckon it is not any reason for him to think different from other folks, even about me “I reckon you ought to know that.” Perhaps he does know it. But Byron does not look up to see. He talks on, in that dull, flat voice, downlooking, while beyond the desk Hightower, sitting a little more than erect, looks at the thin, weatherhardened, laborpurged face of the man opposite him.

“I aint going to get you mixed up in it when it aint none of your trouble. You haven’t even seen her, and I dont reckon you ever will. I reckon likely you have never seen him to know it either. It’s just that I thought maybe . . .” His voice ceases. Across the desk the unbending minister looks at him, waiting, not offering to help him. “When it’s a matter of not-do, I reckon a man can trust himself for advice. But when it comes to a matter of doing, I reckon a fellow had better listen to all the advice he can get. But I aint going to mix you up in it. I dont want you to worry about that.”

“I think I know that,” Hightower says. He watches the other’s downlooking face. ‘I am not in life anymore,’ he thinks. ‘That’s why there is no use in even trying to meddle, interfere. He could hear me no more than that man and that woman (ay, and that child) would hear or heed me if I tried to come back into life.’ “But you told me she knows that he is here.”

“Yes,” Byron says, brooding. “Out there where I thought the chance to harm ere a man or woman or child could not have found me. And she hadn’t hardly got there before I had to go and blab the whole thing.”

“I dont mean that. You didn’t know yourself, then. I mean, the rest of it. About him and the—that . . . It has been three days. She must know, whether you told her or not. She must have heard by now.”

“Christmas.” Byron does not look up. “I never said any more, after she asked about that little white scar by his mouth. All the time we were coming to town that evening I was afraid she would ask. I would try to think up things to talk to her about so she would not have a chance to ask me any more. And all the time I thought I was keeping her from finding out that he had not only run off and left her in trouble, he had changed his name to keep her from finding him, and that now when she found him at last, what she had found was a bootlegger, she already knew it.

Already knew that he was a nogood.” He says now, with a kind of musing astonishment: “I never even had any need to keep it from her, to lie it smooth. It was like she knew beforehand what I would say, that I was going to lie to her. Like she had already thought of that herself, and that she already didn’t believe it before I even said it, and that was all right too. But the part of her that knew the truth, that I could not have fooled anyway . . .” He fumbles, gropes, the unbending man beyond the desk watching him, not offering to help. “It’s like she was in two parts, and one of them knows that he is a scoundrel. But the other part believes that when a man and a woman are going to have a child, that the Lord will see that they are all together when the right time comes. Like it was God that looks after women, to protect them from

men. And if the Lord dont see fit to let them two parts meet and kind of compare, then I aint going to do it either.”

“Nonsense,” Hightower says. He looks across the desk at the other’s still, stubborn, ascetic face: the face of a hermit who has lived for a long time in an empty place where sand blows. “The thing, the only thing, for her to do is to go back to Alabama. To her people.”

“I reckon not,” Byron says. He says it immediately, with immediate finality, as if he has been waiting all the while for this to be said. “She wont need to do that. I reckon she wont need to do that.” But he does not look up. He can feel the other looking at him.

“Does Bu—Brown know that she is in Jefferson?”

For an instant Byron almost smiles. His lip lifts: a thin movement almost a shadow, without mirth. “He’s been too busy. After that thousand dollars. It’s right funny to watch him. Like a man that cant play a tune, blowing a horn right loud, hoping that in a minute it will begin to make music. Being drug across the square on a handcuff every twelve or fifteen hours, when likely they couldn’t run him away if they was to sick them bloodhounds on him. He spent Saturday night in jail, still talking about how they were trying to beat him out of his thousand dollars by trying to make out that he helped Christmas do the killing, until at last Buck Conner went up to his cell and told him he would put a gag in his mouth if he didn’t shut up and let the other prisoners sleep. And he shut up, and Sunday night they went out with the dogs and he raised so much racket that they had to take him out of jail and let him go too.

But the dogs never got started. And him hollering and cussing the dogs and wanting to beat them because they never struck a trail, telling everybody again how it was him that reported Christmas first and that all he wanted was fair justice, until the sheriff took him aside and talked to him. They didn’t know what the sheriff said to him. Maybe he threatened to lock him back up in jail and not let him go with them next time. Anyway, he calmed down some, and they went on. They never

got back to town until late Monday night. He was still quiet. Maybe he was wore out.

He hadn't slept none in some time, and they said how he was trying to outrun the dogs so that the sheriff finally threatened to handcuff him to a deputy to keep him back so the dogs could smell something beside him. He needed a shave already when they locked him up Saturday night, and he needed one bad by now. I reckon he must have looked more like a murderer than even Christmas. And he was cussing Christmas now, like Christmas had done hid out just for meanness, to spite him and keep him from getting that thousand dollars. And they brought him back to jail and locked him up that night. And this morning they went and took him out again and they all went off with the dogs, on a new scent. Folks said they could hear him hollering and talking until they were clean out of town."

"And she doesn't know that, you say. You say you have kept that from her. You had rather that she knew him to be a scoundrel than a fool: is that it?"

Byron's face is still again, not smiling now; it is quite sober. "I dont know. It was last Sunday night, after I came out to talk to you and went back home. I thought she would be asleep in bed, but she was still sitting up in the parlor, and she said, 'What is it? What has happened here?' And I didn't look at her and I could feel her looking at me. I told her it was a nigger killed a white woman. I didn't lie then. I reckon I was so glad I never had to lie then.

Because before I thought, I had done said 'and set the house afire.' And then it was too late. I had pointed out the smoke, and I had told her about the two fellows named Brown and Christmas that lived out there. And I could feel her watching me the same as I can you now, and she said, 'What was the nigger's name?' It's like God sees that they find out what they need to know out of men's lying, without needing to ask. And that they dont find out what they dont need to know, without even knowing they have not found it out. And so I dont know for sure what she knows and what she dont know. Except that I have kept it

from her that it was the man she is hunting for that told on the murderer and that he is in jail now except when he is out running with dogs the man that took him up and befriended him. I have kept that from her.”

“And what are you going to do now? Where does she want to move?”

“She wants to go out there and wait for him. I told her that he is away on business for the sheriff. So I didn’t lie altogether. She had already asked me where he lived and I had already told her. And she said that was the place where she belonged until he came back, because that is his house. She said that’s what he would want her to do. And I couldn’t tell her different, that that cabin is the last place in the world he would want her to ever see. She wanted to go out there as soon as I got home from the mill this evening. She had her bundle all tied up and her bonnet on, waiting for me to get home. ‘I started once to go on by myself,’ she said.

‘But I wasn’t sho I knowed the way.’ And I said ‘Yes; only it was too late today and we would go out there tomorrow, and she said, ‘It’s a hour till dark yet. It aint but two miles, is it?’ and I said to let’s wait because I would have to ask first, and she said, ‘Ask who? Aint it Lucas’s house?’ and I could feel her watching me and she said, ‘I thought you said that that was where Lucas lived,’ and she was watching me and she said, ‘Who is this preacher you keep on going to talk to about me?’ ”

“And you are going to let her go out there to live?”

“It might be best. She would be private out there, and she would be away from all the talking until this business is over.”

“You mean, she has got her mind set on it, and you wont stop her. You dont want to stop her.”

Byron does not look up. “In a way, it is his house. The nighest thing to a home of his own he will ever own, I reckon. And he is her . . .”

“Out there alone, with a child coming. The nearest house a few negro cabins a half mile away.” He watches Byron’s face.

“I have thought of that. There are ways, things that can be done . . .”

“What things? What can you do to protect her out there?”

Byron does not answer at once; he does not look up. When he speaks his voice is dogged. “There are secret things a man can do without being evil, Reverend. No matter how they might look to folks.”

“I dont think that you could do anything that would be very evil, Byron, no matter how it looked to folks. But are you going to undertake to say just how far evil extends into the appearance of evil? just where between doing and appearing evil stops?”

“No,” Byron says. Then he moves slightly; he speaks as if he too were waking: “I hope not. I reckon I am trying to do the right thing by my lights.”—‘And that,’ Hightower thinks, ‘is the first lie he ever told me. Ever told anyone, man or woman, perhaps including himself.’ He looks across the desk at the stubborn, dogged, sober face that has not yet looked at him. ‘Or maybe it is not lie yet because he does not know himself that it is so.’ He says:

“Well.” He speaks now with a kind of spurious brusqueness which, flabbyjowled and darkcaverneyed, his face belies. “That is settled, then. You’ll take her out there, to his house, and you’ll see that she is comfortable and you’ll see that she is not disturbed until this is over. And then you’ll tell that man—Bunch, Brown—that she is here.”

“And he’ll run,” Byron says. He does not look up, yet through him there seems to go a wave of exultation, of triumph, before he can curb and hide it, when it is too late to try. For the moment he does not attempt to curb it; backthrust too in his hard chair, looking for the first time at the minister, with a face confident and bold and suffused. The other meets his gaze steadily.

“Is that what you want him to do?” Hightower says. They sit so in the lamplight. Through the open window comes the hot, myriad silence of the breathless night. “Think what you are doing. You are attempting to come between man and wife.”

Byron has caught himself. His face is no longer triumphant. But he looks steadily at the older man. Perhaps he tried to catch his voice too. But he cannot yet. “They aint man and wife yet,” he says.

“Does she think that? Do you believe that she will say that?” They look at one another. “Ah, Byron, Byron. What are a few mumbled words before God, before the steadfastness of a woman’s nature? Before that child?”

“Well, he may not run. If he gets that reward, that money. Like enough he will be drunk enough on a thousand dollars to do anything, even marry.”

“Ah, Byron, Byron.”

“Then what do you think we—I ought to do? What do you advise?”

“Go away. Leave Jefferson.” They look at one another. “No,” Hightower says. “You dont need my help. You are already being helped by someone stronger than I am.”

For a moment Byron does not speak. They look at one another, steadily. “Helped by who?”

“By the devil,” Hightower says.

‘And the devil is looking after him, too,’ Hightower thinks. He is in midstride, halfway home, his laden small market basket on his arm. ‘Him, too. Him, too,’ he thinks, walking. It is hot. He is in his shirt sleeves, tall, with thin blackclad legs and spare, gaunt arms and shoulders, and with that flabby and obese stomach like some monstrous pregnancy. The shirt is white, but it is not fresh; his collar is

soiled, as is the white lawn cravat carelessly knotted, and he has not shaved for two or three days. His panama hat is soiled, and beneath it, between hat and skull against the heat, the edge and corners of a soiled handkerchief protrude. He has been to town to do his semiweekly marketing, where, gaunt, misshapen, with his gray stubble and his dark spectacleblurred eyes and his blackrimmed hands and the rank manodor of his sedentary and unwashed flesh, he entered the one odorous and cluttered store which he patronised and paid with cash for what he bought.

“Well, they found that nigger’s trail at last,” the proprietor said.

“Negro?” Hightower said. He became utterly still, in the act of putting into his pocket the change from his purchases.

“That bah—fellow; the murderer. I said all the time that he wasn’t right. Wasn’t a white man. That there was something funny about him. But you cant tell folks nothing until—”

“Found him?” Hightower said.

“You durn right they did. Why, the fool never even had sense enough to get out of the county. Here the sheriff has been telephoning all over the country for him, and the black son—uh was right here under his durn nose all the time.”

“And they have . . .” He leaned forward against the counter, above his laden basket. He could feel the counter edge against his stomach. It felt solid, stable enough; it was more like the earth itself were rocking faintly, preparing to move. Then it seemed to move, like something released slowly and without haste, in an augmenting swoop, and cleverly, since the eye was tricked into believing that the dingy shelves ranked with flyspecked tins, and the merchant himself behind the counter, had not moved; outraging, tricking sense. And he thinking, ‘I wont! I wont! I have bought immunity. I have paid. I have paid.’

“They aint caught him yet,” the proprietor said. “But they will. The sheriff taken the dogs out to the church before daylight this morning. They aint six hours behind him. To think that the durn fool never had no better sense . . . show he is a nigger, even if nothing else. . . .” Then the proprietor was saying, “Was that all today?”

“What?” Hightower said. “What?”

“Was that all you wanted?”

“Yes. Yes. That was . . .” He began to fumble in his pocket, the proprietor watching him. His hand came forth, still fumbling. It blundered upon the counter, shedding coins. The proprietor stopped two or three of them as they were about to roll off the counter.

“What’s this for?” the proprietor said.

“For the . . .” Hightower’s hand fumbled at the laden basket. “For—”

“You already paid.” The proprietor was watching him, curious. “That’s your change here, that I just gave you. For the dollar bill.”

“Oh,” Hightower said. “Yes. I . . . I just—” The merchant was gathering up the coins. He handed them back. When the customer’s hand touched his it felt like ice.

“It’s this hot weather,” the proprietor said. “It does wear a man out. Do you want to set down a spell before you start home?” But Hightower apparently did not hear him. He was moving now, toward the door, while the merchant watched him. He passed through the door and into the street, the basket on his arm, walking stiffly and carefully, like a man on ice. It was hot; heat quivered up from the asphalt, giving to the familiar buildings about the square a nimbus quality, a quality of living and palpitant chiaroscuro. Someone spoke to him in passing; he did not even know it. He went on, thinking And him too.

And him too walking fast now, so that when he turned the corner at last and entered that dead and empty little street where his dead and empty small house waited, he was almost panting. 'It's the heat,' the top of his mind was saying to him, reiterant, explanatory. But still, even in the quiet street where scarce anyone ever paused now to look at, remember, the sign, and his house, his sanctuary, already in sight, it goes on beneath the top of his mind that would cozen and soothe him: 'I wont. I wont. I have bought immunity.' It is like words spoken aloud now: reiterative, patient, justificative: 'I paid for it. I didn't quibble about the price. No man can say that.

I just wanted peace; I paid them their price without quibbling.' The street shimmers and swims; he has been sweating, but now even the air of noon feels cool upon him. Then sweat, heat, mirage, all, rushes fused into a finality which abrogates all logic and justification and obliterates it like fire would: I will not! I will not!

When, sitting in the study window in the first dark, he saw Byron pass into and then out of the street lamp, he sat suddenly forward in his chair. It was not that he was surprised to see Byron there, at that hour. At first, when he first recognised the figure, he thought Ah. I had an idea he would come tonight. It is not in him to support even the semblance of evil It was while he was thinking that that he started, sat forward: for an instant after recognising the approaching figure in the full glare of the light he believed that he was mistaken, knowing all the while that he could not be, that it could be no one except Byron, since he was already turning into the gate.

Tonight Byron is completely changed. It shows in his walk, his carriage; leaning forward Hightower says to himself As though he has learned pride, or defiance Byron's head is erect, he walks fast and erect; suddenly Hightower says, almost aloud: 'He has done something. He has taken a step.' He makes a clicking sound with his tongue, leaning in the dark window, watching the figure pass swiftly from sight beyond the window and in the direction of the porch, the entrance, and where in the next moment Hightower hears his feet and then his knock. 'And he didn't offer to tell me,' he thinks. 'I would have listened, let him

think aloud to me.' He is already crossing the room, pausing at the desk to turn on the light. He goes to the front door.

"It's me, Reverend," Byron says.

"I recognised you," Hightower says. "Even though you didn't stumble on the bottom step this time. You have entered this house on Sunday night, but until tonight you have never entered it without stumbling on the bottom step, Byron." This was the note upon which Byron's calls usually opened: this faintly overbearing note of levity and warmth to put the other at his ease, and on the part of the caller that slow and countrybred diffidence which is courtesy. Sometimes it would seem to Hightower that he would actually hale Byron into the house by a judicious application of pure breath, as though Byron wore a sail.

But this time Byron is already entering, before Hightower has finished his sentence. He enters immediately, with that new air born somewhere between assurance and defiance. "And I reckon you are going to find that you hate it worse when I dont stumble than when I do," Byron says.

"Is that a hope, or is it a threat, Byron?"

"Well, I dont mean it to be a threat," Byron says.

"Ah," Hightower says. "In other words, you can offer no hope. Well, I am forewarned, at least. I was forewarned as soon as I saw you in the street light. But at least you are going to tell me about it. What you have already done, even if you didn't see fit to talk about it beforehand." They are moving toward the study door. Byron stops; he looks back and up at the taller face.

"Then you know," he says. "You have already heard." Then, though his head has not moved, he is no longer looking at the other. "Well," he says. He says: "Well, any man has got a free tongue. Woman too. But I would like to know who told you. Not that I am ashamed. Not that I aimed to keep it from you. I come to tell you myself, when I could."

They stand just without the door to the lighted room. Hightower sees now that Byron's arms are laden with bundles, parcels that look like they might contain groceries. "What?" Hightower says. "What have you come to tell me?—But come in. Maybe I do know what it is already. But I want to see your face when you tell me. I forewarn you too, Byron." They enter the lighted room. The bundles are groceries: he has bought and carried too many like them himself not to know. "Sit down," he says.

"No," Byron says. "I aint going to stay that long." He stands, sober, contained, with that air compassionate still, but decisive without being assured, confident without being assertive: that air of a man about to do something which someone dear to him will not understand and approve, yet which he himself knows to be right just as he knows that the friend will never see it so. He says: "You aint going to like it. But there aint anything else to do. I wish you could see it so. But I reckon you cant. And I reckon that's all there is to it."

Across the desk, seated again, Hightower watches him gravely. "What have you done, Byron?"

Byron speaks in that new voice: that voice brief, terse, each word definite of meaning, not fumbling. "I took her out there this evening. I had already fixed up the cabin, cleaned it good. She is settled now. She wanted it so. It was the nearest thing to a home he ever had and ever will have, so I reckon she is entitled to use it, especially as the owner aint using it now. Being detained elsewhere, you might say. I know you aint going to like it. You can name lots of reasons, good ones. You'll say it aint his cabin to give to her. All right. Maybe it aint. But it aint any living man or woman in this country or state to say she cant use it. You'll say that in her shape she ought to have a woman with her.

All right. There is a nigger woman, one old enough to be sensible, that dont live over two hundred yards away. She can call to her without getting up from the chair or the bed. You'll say, but that aint a white woman. And I'll ask you what will she be getting from the white women

in Jefferson about the time that baby is due, when here she aint been in Jefferson but a week and already she cant talk to a woman ten minutes before that woman knows she aint married yet, and as long as that durn scoundrel stays above ground where she can hear of him now and then, she aint going to be married. How much help will she be getting from the white ladies about that time? They'll see that she has a bed to lay on and walls to hide her from the street all right. I dont mean that.

And I reckon a man would be justified in saying she dont deserve no more than that, being as it wasn't behind no walls that she got in the shape she is in. But that baby never done the choosing. And even if it had, I be durn if any poor little tyke, having to face what it will have to face in this world, deserves—deserves more than—better than— But I reckon you know what I mean. I reckon you can even say it.” Beyond the desk Hightower watches him while he talks in that level, restrained tone, not once at a loss for words until he came to something still too new and nebulous for him to more than feel. “And for the third reason. A white woman out there alone. You aint going to like that. You will like that least of all.”

“Ah, Byron, Byron.”

Byron's voice is now dogged. Yet he holds his head up still. “I aint in the house with her. I got a tent. It aint close, neither. Just where I can hear her at need. And I fixed a bolt on the door. Any of them can come out, at any time, and see me in the tent.”

“Ah, Byron, Byron.”

“I know you aint thinking what most of them think. Are thinking. I know you would know better, even if she wasn't—if it wasn't for—I know you said that because of what you know that the others will think.”

Hightower sits again in the attitude of the eastern idol, between his parallel arms on the armrests of the chair. “Go away, Byron. Go away. Now. At once. Leave this place forever, this terrible place, this terrible,

terrible place. I can read you. You will tell me that you have just learned love; I will tell you that you have just learned hope. That's all; hope. The object does not matter, not to the hope, not even to you. There is but one end to this, to the road that you are taking: sin or marriage.

And you would refuse the sin. That's it, God forgive me. It will, must be, marriage or nothing with you. And you will insist that it be marriage. You will convince her; perhaps you already have, if she but knew it, would admit it: else, why is she content to stay here and yet make no effort to see the man whom she has come to find? I cannot say to you, Choose the sin, because you would not only hate me: you would carry that hatred straight to her. So I say, Go away. Now. At once. Turn your face now, and don't look back. But not this, Byron."

They look at one another. "I knew you would not like it," Byron says. "I reckon I done right not to make myself a guest by sitting down. But I did not expect this. That you too would turn against a woman wronged and betrayed—"

"No woman who has a child is ever betrayed; the husband of a mother, whether he be the father or not, is already a cuckold. Give yourself at least the one chance in ten, Byron. If you must marry, there are single women, girls, virgins. It's not fair that you should sacrifice yourself to a woman who has chosen once and now wishes to renege that choice. It's not right. It's not just. God didn't intend it so when He made marriage. Made it? Women made marriage."

"Sacrifice? Me the sacrifice? It seems to me the sacrifice—"

"Not to her. For the Lena Groves there are always two men in the world and their number is legion: Lucas Burches and Byron Bunches. But no Lena, no woman, deserves more than one of them. No woman. There have been good women who were martyrs to brutes, in their cups and such. But what woman, good or bad, has ever suffered from any brute as men have suffered from good women? Tell me that, Byron."

They speak quietly, without heat, giving pause to weigh one another's words, as two men already impregnable each in his own conviction will. "I reckon you are right," Byron says. "Anyway, it aint for me to say that you are wrong. And I dont reckon it's for you to say that I am wrong, even if I am."

"No," Hightower says.

"Even if I am," Byron says. "So I reckon I'll say good night." He says, quietly: "It's a good long walk out there."

"Yes," Hightower says. "I used to walk it myself, now and then. It must be about three miles."

"Two miles," Byron says. "Well." He turns. Hightower does not move. Byron shifts the parcels which he has not put down. "I'll say good night," he says, moving toward the door. "I reckon I'll see you, sometime soon."

"Yes," Hightower says. "Is there anything I can do? Anything you need? bedclothes and such?"

"I'm obliged. I reckon she has a plenty. There was some already there. I'm obliged."

"And you will let me know? If anything comes up. If the child— Have you arranged for a doctor?"

"I'll get that attended to."

"But have you seen one yet? Have you engaged one?"

"I aim to see to all that. And I'll let you know."

Then he is gone. From the window again Hightower watches him pass and go on up the street, toward the edge of town and his two-mile walk, carrying his paperwrapped packages of food. He passed from

sight walking erect and at a good gait; such a gait as an old man already gone to flesh and short wind, an old man who has already spent too much time sitting down, could not have kept up with. And Hightower leans there in the window, in the August heat, oblivious of the odor in which he lives—that smell of people who no longer live in life: that odor of overplump desiccation and stale linen as though a precursor of the tomb—listening to the feet which he seems to hear still long after he knows that he cannot, thinking, ‘God bless him. God help him’; thinking To be young. To be young.

There is nothing else like it: there is nothing else in the world He is thinking quietly: ‘I should not have got out of the habit of prayer.’ Then he hears the feet no longer. He hears now only the myriad and interminable insects, leaning in the window, breathing the hot still rich maculate smell of the earth, thinking of how when he was young, a youth, he had loved darkness, of walking or sitting alone among trees at night. Then the ground, the bark of trees, became actual, savage, filled with, evocative of, strange and baleful half delights and half terrors. He was afraid of it. He feared; he loved in being afraid. Then one day while at the seminary he realised that he was no longer afraid. It was as though a door had shut somewhere. He was no longer afraid of darkness.

He just hated it; he would flee from it, to walls, to artificial light. ‘Yes,’ he thinks. ‘I should never have let myself get out of the habit of prayer.’ He turns from the window. One wall of the study is lined with books. He pauses before them, seeking, until he finds the one which he wants. It is Tennyson. It is dogeared. He has had it ever since the seminary. He sits beneath the lamp and opens it. It does not take long. Soon the fine galloping language, the gutless swooning full of sapless trees and dehydrated lusts begins to swim smooth and swift and peaceful. It is better than praying without having to bother to think aloud. It is like listening in a cathedral to a eunuch chanting in a language which he does not even need to not understand.

Chapter 14

“There’s somebody out there in that cabin,” the deputy told the sheriff.
“Not hiding: living in it.”

“Go and see,” the sheriff said.

The deputy went and returned.

“It’s a woman. A young woman. And she’s all fixed up to live there a good spell, it looks like. And Byron Bunch is camped in a tent about as far from the cabin as from here to the postoffice.”

“Byron Bunch?” the sheriff says. “Who is the woman?”

“I dont know. She is a stranger. A young woman. She told me all about it. She begun telling me almost before I got inside the cabin, like it was a speech. Like she had done got used to telling it, done got into the habit. And I reckon she has, coming here from over in Alabama somewhere, looking for her husband. He had done come on ahead of her to find work, it seems like, and after a while she started out after him and folks told her on the road that he was here. And about that time Byron come in and he said he could tell me about it. Said he aimed to tell you.”

“Byron Bunch,” the sheriff says.

“Yes,” the deputy says. He says: “She’s fixing to have a kid. It aint going to be long, neither.”

“A kid?” the sheriff says. He looks at the deputy. “And from Alabama. From anywhere. You cant tell me that about Byron Bunch.”

“No more am I trying to,” the deputy says. “I aint saying it’s Byron’s. Leastways, Byron aint saying it’s his. I’m just telling you what he told me.”

“Oh,” the sheriff says. “I see. Why she is out there. So it’s one of them fellows. It’s Christmas, is it?”

“No. This is what Byron told me. He took me outside and told me, where she couldn’t hear. He said he aimed to come and tell you. It’s Brown’s. Only his name aint Brown. It’s Lucas Burch. Byron told me. About how Brown or Burch left her over in Alabama. Told her he was just coming to find work and fix up a home and then send for her. But her time come nigh and she hadn’t heard from him, where he was at or anything, so she just decided to not wait any longer.

She started out afoot, asking along the road if anybody knowed a fellow named Lucas Burch, getting a ride here and there, asking everybody she met if they knew him. And so after a while somebody told her how there was a fellow named Burch or Bunch or something working at the planing mill in Jefferson, and she come on here. She got here Saturday, on a wagon, while we were all out at the murder, and she come out to the mill and found it was Bunch instead of Burch.

And Byron said he told her that her husband was in Jefferson before he knew it. And then he said she had him pinned down and he had to tell her where Brown lived. But he aint told her that Brown or Burch is mixed up with Christmas in this killing. He just told her that Brown was away on business. And I reckon you can call it business. Work, anyway. I never saw a man want a thousand dollars badder and suffer more to get it, than him.

And so she said that Brown’s house was bound to be the one that Lucas Burch had promised to get ready for her to live in, and so she moved out to wait until Brown come back from this here business he is away on. Byron said he couldn’t stop her because he didn’t want to tell her the truth about Brown after he had already lied to her in a way of speaking. He said he aimed to come and tell you about it before now, only you found it out too quick, before he had got her settled down good.”

“Lucas Burch?” the sheriff says.

"I was some surprised, myself," the deputy says. "What do you aim to do about it?"

"Nothing," the sheriff says. "I reckon they wont do no harm out there. And it aint none of my house to tell her to get out of it. And like Byron told her, Burch or Brown or whatever his name is, is going to be right busy for a while longer yet."

"Do you aim to tell Brown about her?"

"I reckon not," the sheriff says. "It aint any of my business. I aint interested in the wives he left in Alabama, or anywhere else. What I am interested in is the husband he seems to have had since he come to Jefferson."

The deputy guffaws. "I reckon that's a fact," he says. He sobers, muses. "If he dont get that thousand dollars, I reckon he will just die."

"I reckon he wont," the sheriff says.

At three o'clock Wednesday morning a negro rode into town on a saddleless mule. He went to the sheriff's home and waked him. He had come direct from a negro church twenty miles away, where a revival meeting was in nightly progress. On the evening before, in the middle of a hymn, there had come a tremendous noise from the rear of the church, and turning the congregation saw a man standing in the door. The door had not been locked or even shut yet the man had apparently grasped it by the knob and hurled it back into the wall so that the sound crashed into the blended voices like a pistol shot. Then the man came swiftly up the aisle, where the singing had stopped short off, toward the pulpit where the preacher leaned, his hands still raised, his mouth still open.

Then they saw that the man was white. In the thick, cavelike gloom which the two oil lamps but served to increase, they could not tell at once what he was until he was halfway up the aisle. Then they saw that his face was not black, and a woman began to shriek, and people in the

rear sprang up and began to run toward the door; and another woman on the mourners' bench, already in a semihysterical state, sprang up and whirled and glared at him for an instant with white rolling eyes and screamed, "It's the devil! It's Satan himself!" Then she ran, quite blind. She ran straight toward him and he knocked her down without stopping and stepped over her and went on, with the faces gaped for screaming falling away before him, straight to the pulpit and put his hand on the minister.

"Wasn't nobody bothering him, even then," the messenger said. "It was all happening so fast, and nobody knowed him, who he was or what he wanted or nothing. And the women hollering and screeching and him done retch into the pulpit and caught Brother Bedenberry by the throat, trying to snatch him outen the pulpit. We could see Brother Bedenberry talking to him, trying to pacify him quiet, and him jerking at Brother Bedenberry and slapping his face with his hand. And the womenfolks screeching and hollering so you couldn't hear what Brother Bedenberry was saying, cep he never tried to hit back nor nothing, and then some of the old men, the deacons, went up to him and tried to talk to him and he let Brother Bedenberry go and he whirled and he knocked seventy year old Pappy Thompson clean down into the mourners' pew and then he retch down and caught up a chair and whirled and made a pass at the others until they give back.

And the folks still yelling and screeching and trying to get out. Then he turned and clumb into the pulpit, where Brother Bedenberry had done clumb out the other side, and he stood there—he was all muddy, his pants and his shirt, and his jaw black with whiskers—with his hands raised like a preacher.

And he begun to curse, hollering it out, at the folks, and he cursed God louder than the women screeching, and some of the men trying to hold Roz Thompson, Pappy Thompson's daughter's boy, that was six foot tall and had a razor nekkid in his hand, hollering, 'I'll kill him. Lemme go, folks. He hit my grandpappy. I'll kill him. Lemme go. Please lemme go,' and the folks trying to get out, rushing and trompling in the aisle and through the door, an him in the pulpit cursing God and the men

dragging Roz Thompson out backwards and Roz still begging them to let him go. But they got Roz out and we went back into the bushes and him still hollering and cursing back there in the pulpit.

Then he quit after a while and we seed him come to the door and stand there. And they had to hold Roz again. He must have heard the racket they made holding Roz, because he begun to laugh. He stood there in the door, with the light behind him, laughing loud, and then he begun to curse again and we could see him snatch up a bench leg and swing it back. And we heard the first lamp bust, and it got dim in the church, and then we heard the other lamp bust and then it was dark and we couldn't see him no more. And where they was trying to hold Roz a terrible racket set up, with them hollerwhispering, 'Hold him! Hold him! Ketch him! Ketch him!' Then somebody hollered, 'He's done got loose,' and we could hear Roz running back toward the church and Deacon Vines says to me, 'Roz will kill him. Jump on a mule and ride for the sheriff. Tell him just what you seen.'

And wasn't nobody bothering him, captain," the negro said. "We never even knowed him to call his name. Never even seed him before. And we tried to hold Roz back. But Roz a big man, and him done knocked down Roz' seventy year old grandpappy and Roz with that nekkid razor in his hand, not caring much who else he had to cut to carve his path back to the church where that white man was. But 'fore God we tried to hold Roz."

That was what he told, because that was what he knew. He had departed immediately: he did not know that at the time he was telling it, the negro Roz was lying unconscious in a neighboring cabin, with his skull fractured where Christmas, just inside the now dark door, had struck him with the bench leg when Roz plunged into the church. Christmas struck just once, hard, savagely, at the sound of running feet, the thick shape which rushed headlong through the doorway, and heard it without pause plunge on crashing among the overturned benches and become still. Also without pausing Christmas sprang out and to the earth, where he stood lightly poised, still grasping the bench

leg, cool, not even breathing hard. He was quite cool, no sweat; the darkness cool upon him.

The churchyard was a pallid crescent of trampled and beaten earth, shaped and enclosed by undergrowth and trees. He knew that the undergrowth was full of negroes: he could feel the eyes. 'Looking and looking,' he thought. 'Dont even know they cant see me.' He breathed deeply; he found that he was hefting the bench leg, curiously, as though trying its balance, as if he had never touched it before. 'I'll cut a notch in it tomorrow,' he thought. He leaned the leg carefully against the wall beside him and took from his shirt a cigarette and a match. As he struck the match he paused, and with the yellow flame spurting punily into life he stood, his head turned a little. It was hooves which he heard.

He heard them come alive and grow swift, diminishing. "A mule," he said aloud, not loud. "Bound for town with the good news." He lit the cigarette and flipped the match away and he stood there, smoking, feeling the negro eyes upon the tiny living coal. Though he stood there until the cigarette was smoked down, he was quite alert. He had set his back against the wall and he held the bench leg in his right hand again. He smoked the cigarette completely down, then he flipped it, twinkling, as far as he could toward the undergrowth where he could feel the negroes crouching. "Have a butt, boys," he said, his voice sudden and loud in the silence. In the undergrowth where they crouched they watched the cigarette twinkle toward the earth and glow there for a time. But they could not see him when he departed, nor which way he went.

At eight o'clock the next morning the sheriff arrived, with his posse and the bloodhounds. They made one capture immediately, though the dogs had nothing to do with it. The church was deserted; there was not a negro in sight. The posse entered the church and looked quietly about at the wreckage. Then they emerged. The dogs had struck something immediately, but before they set out a deputy found, wedged into a split plank on the side of the church, a scrap of paper. It had been obviously put there by the hand of man, and opened, it proved to be an

empty cigarette container torn open and spread smooth, and on the white inner side was a pencilled message.

It was raggedly written, as though by an unpractised hand or perhaps in the dark, and it was not long. It was addressed to the sheriff by name and it was unprintable—a single phrase—and it was unsigned. “Didn’t I tell you?” one of the party said. He was unshaven too and muddy, like the quarry which they had not yet even seen, and his face looked strained and a little mad, with frustration, outrage, and his voice was hoarse, as though he had been doing a good deal of unheeded shouting or talking recently. “I told you all the time! I told you!”

“Told me what?” the sheriff said, in a cold, level voice, bearing upon the other a gaze cold and level, the pencilled message in his hand. “What did you tell me when?” The other looked at the sheriff, outraged, desperate, frayed almost to endurance’s limit; looking at him, the deputy thought, ‘If he dont get that reward, he will just die.’ His mouth was open though voiceless as he glared at the sheriff with a kind of baffled and unbelieving amaze. “And I done told you, too,” the sheriff said, in his bleak, quiet voice, “if you dont like the way I am running this, you can wait back in town. There’s a good place there for you to wait in. Cool, where you wont stay so heated up like out here in the sun. Aint I told you, now? Talk up.”

The other closed his mouth. He looked away, as though with a tremendous effort; as though with a tremendous effort he said “Yes” in a dry, suffocated voice.

The sheriff turned heavily, crumpling the message. “You try to keep that from slipping your mind again, then,” he said. “If you got any mind to even slip on you.” They were ringed about with quiet, interested faces in the early sunlight. “About which I got the Lord’s own doubts, if you or anybody else wants to know.” Someone guffawed, once. “Shet up that noise,” the sheriff said. “Let’s get going. Get them dogs started, Bufe.”

The dogs were cast, still on leash. They struck immediately. The trail was good, easily followed because of the dew. The fugitive had apparently made no effort whatever to hide it. They could even see the prints of his knees and hands where he had knelt to drink from a spring. "I never yet knew a murderer that had more sense than that about the folks that would chase him," the deputy said. "But this durn fool dont even suspect that we might use dogs."

"We been putting dogs on him once a day ever since Sunday," the sheriff said. "And we aint caught him yet."

"Them were cold trails. We aint had a good hot trail until today. But he's made his mistake at last. We'll get him today. Before noon, maybe."

"I'll wait and see, I reckon," the sheriff said.

"You'll see," the deputy said. "This trail is running straight as a railroad. I could follow it, myself almost. Look here. You can even see his footprints. The durn fool aint even got enough sense to get into the road, in the dust, where other folks have walked and where the dogs cant scent him. Them dogs will find the end of them footprints before ten o'clock."

Which the dogs did. Presently the trail bent sharply at right angles. They followed it and came onto a road, which they followed behind the lowheaded and eager dogs who, after a short distance, swung to the roadside where a path came down from a cotton house in a nearby field. They began to bay, milling, tugging, their voices loud, mellow, ringing; whining and surging with excitement. "Why, the durn fool!" the deputy said. "He set down here and rested: here's his footmarks: them same rubber heels. He aint a mile ahead right now! Come on, boys!" They went on, the leashes taut, the dogs baying, the men moving now at a trot. The sheriff turned to the unshaven man.

"Now's your chance to run ahead and catch him and get that thousand dollars," he said. "Why dont you do it?"

The man did not answer; none of them had much breath for talking, particularly when after about a mile the dogs, still straining and baying, turned from the road and followed a path which went quartering up a hill and into a corn field. Here they stopped baying, but if anything their eagerness seemed to increase; the men were running now. Beyond the headtall corn was a negro cabin. "He's in there," the sheriff said, drawing his pistol. "Watch yourselves now, boys. He'll have a gun now."

It was done with finesse and skill: the house surrounded by concealed men with drawn pistols, and the sheriff, followed by the deputy, getting himself for all his bulk swiftly and smartly flat against the cabin wall, out of range of any window. Still flat to the wall he ran around the corner and kicked open the door and sprang, pistol first, into the cabin. It contained a negro child. The child was stark naked and it sat in the cold ashes on the hearth, eating something.

It was apparently alone, though an instant later a woman appeared in an inner door, her mouth open, in the act of dropping an iron skillet. She was wearing a pair of man's shoes, which a member of the posse identified as having belonged to the fugitive. She told them about the white man on the road about daylight and how he had swapped shoes with her, taking in exchange a pair of her husband's brogans which she was wearing at the time. The sheriff listened. "That happened right by a cotton house, didn't it?" he said. She told him Yes. He returned to his men, to the leashed and eager dogs. He looked down at the dogs while the men asked questions and then ceased, watching him. They watched him put the pistol back into his pocket and then turn and kick the dogs, once each, heavily. "Get them durn eggsuckers on back to town," he said.

But the sheriff was a good officer. He knew as well as his men that he would return to the cotton house, where he believed that Christmas had been hidden all the while, though he knew now that Christmas would not be there when they returned. They had some trouble getting the dogs away from the cabin, so that it was in the hot brilliance of ten o'clock that they surrounded the cotton house carefully and skilfully

and quietly and surprised it with pistols, quite by the rules and without any particular hope; and found one astonished and terrified field rat.

Nevertheless the sheriff had the dogs—they had refused to approach the cotton house at all; they refused to leave the road, leaning and straining against the collars with simultaneous and reverted heads pointed back down the road toward the cabin from which they had been recently dragged away—brought up. It took two men by main strength to fetch them up, where as soon as the leashes were slacked, they sprang as one and rushed around the cotton house and through the very marks which the fugitive's legs had left in the tall and still dewed weeds in the house's shadow, and rushed leaping and straining back toward the road, dragging the two men for fifty yards before they succeeded in passing the leashes about a sapling and snubbing the dogs up. This time the sheriff did not even kick them.

At last the noise and the alarms, the sound and fury of the hunt, dies away, dies out of his hearing. He was not in the cotton house when the man and the dogs passed, as the sheriff believed. He paused there only long enough to lace up the brogans: the black shoes, the black shoes smelling of negro. They looked like they had been chopped out of iron ore with a dull axe. Looking down at the harsh, crude, clumsy shapelessness of them, he said "Hah" through his teeth. It seemed to him that he could see himself being hunted by white men at last into the black abyss which had been waiting, trying, for thirty years to drown him and into which now and at last he had actually entered, bearing now upon his ankles the definite and ineradicable gauge of its upward moving.

It is just dawn, daylight: that gray and lonely suspension filled with the peaceful and tentative waking of birds. The air, inbreathed, is like spring water. He breathes deep and slow, feeling with each breath himself diffuse in the neutral grayness, becoming one with loneliness and quiet that has never known fury or despair. 'That was all I wanted,' he thinks, in a quiet and slow amazement. 'That was all, for thirty years. That didn't seem to be a whole lot to ask in thirty years.'

He has not slept very much since Wednesday, and now Wednesday has come and gone again, though he does not know it. When he thinks about time, it seems to him now that for thirty years he has lived inside an orderly parade of named and numbered days like fence pickets, and that one night he went to sleep and when he waked up he was outside of them. For a time after he fled on that Friday night he tried to keep up with the days, after the old habit. Once, after lying all night in a haystack, he was awake in time to watch the farm house wake. He saw before daylight a lamp come yellowly alive in the kitchen, and then in the gray yetdark he heard the slow, clapping sound of an axe and movement, manmovement, among the waking cattle sounds in the nearby barn.

Then he could smell smoke, and food, the hot fierce food, and he began to say over and over to himself I have not eaten since I have not eaten since trying to remember how many days it had been since Friday in Jefferson, in the restaurant where he had eaten his supper, until after a while, in the lying still with waiting until the men should have eaten and gone to the field, the name of the day of the week seemed more important than the food.

Because when the men were gone at last and he descended, emerged, into the level, jonquilcolored sun and went to the kitchen door, he didn't ask for food at all. He had intended to. He could feel the harsh words marshalling in his mind, just behind his mouth. And then the gaunt, leatherhard woman come to the door and looked at him and he could see shock and recognition and fear in her eyes and while he was thinking She knows me. She has got the word too he heard his mouth saying quietly: "Can you tell me what day this is? I just want to know what day this is."

"What day it is?" Her face was gaunt as his, her body as gaunt and as tireless and as driven. She said: "You get away from here! It's Tuesday! You get away from here! I'll call my man!"

He said, "Thank you," quietly as the door banged. Then he was running. He did not remember starting to run. He thought for a while that he ran

because of and toward some destination that the running had suddenly remembered and hence his mind did not need to bother to remember why he was running, since the running was not difficult. It was quite easy, in fact. He felt quite light, weightless. Even in full stride his feet seemed to stray slowly and lightly and at deliberate random across an earth without solidity, until he fell.

Nothing tripped him. He just fell full length, believing for a while that he was still on his feet and still running. But he was down, lying on his face in a shallow ditch at the edge of a plowed field. Then he said suddenly, "I reckon I better get up." When he sat up he found that the sun, halfway up the sky, now shone upon him from the opposite direction. At first he believed that he was merely turned around. Then he realised that it was now evening. That it was morning when he fell running and that, though it seemed to him that he had sat up at once, it was now evening. 'I have been asleep,' he thought. 'I have slept more than six hours. I must have gone to sleep running without knowing it. That is what I did.'

He felt no surprise. Time, the spaces of light and dark, had long since lost orderliness. It would be either one now, seemingly at an instant, between two movements of the eyelids, without warning. He could never know when he would pass from one to the other, when he would find that he had been asleep without remembering having lain down, or find himself walking without remembering having waked.

Sometimes it would seem to him that a night of sleep, in hay, in a ditch, beneath an abandoned roof, would be followed immediately by another night without interval of day, without light between to see to flee by; that a day would be followed by another day filled with fleeing and urgency, without any night between or any interval for rest, as if the sun had not set but instead had turned in the sky before reaching the horizon and retraced its way. When he went to sleep walking or even kneeling in the act of drinking from a spring, he could never know if his eyes would open next upon sunlight or upon stars.

For a while he had been hungry all the time. He gathered and ate rotting and wormriddled fruit; now and then he crept into fields and dragged down and gnawed ripened ears of corn as hard as potato graters. He thought of eating all the time, imagining dishes, food. He would think of that meal set for him on the kitchen table three years ago and he would live again through the steady and deliberate backswinging of his arm as he hurled the dishes into the wall, with a kind of writhing and excruciating agony of regret and remorse and rage. Then one day he was no longer hungry. It came sudden and peaceful. He felt cool, quiet. Yet he knew that he had to eat.

He would make himself eat the rotten fruit, the hard corn, chewing it slowly, tasting nothing. He would eat enormous quantities of it, with resultant crises of bleeding flux. Yet immediately afterward he would be obsessed anew with the need and the urge to eat. It was not with food that he was obsessed now, but with the necessity to eat. He would try to remember when he had eaten last of cooked, of decent food. He could feel, remember, somewhere a house, a cabin. House or cabin, white or black: he could not remember which. Then, as he sat quite still, with on his gaunt, sick, stubbled face an expression of rapt bemusement, he smelled negro.

Motionless (he was sitting against a tree beside a spring, his head back, his hands upon his lap, his face worn and peaceful) he smelled and saw negro dishes, negro food. It was in a room. He did not remember how he got there. But the room was filled with flight and abrupt consternation, as though people had fled it recently and suddenly and in fear.

He was sitting at a table, waiting, thinking of nothing in an emptiness, a silence filled with flight. Then there was food before him, appearing suddenly between long, limber black hands fleeing too in the act of setting down the dishes. It seemed to him that he could hear without hearing them wails of terror and distress quieter than sighs all about him, with the sound of the chewing and the swallowing. 'It was a cabin that time,' he thought. 'And they were afraid. Of their brother afraid.'

That night a strange thing came into his mind. He lay ready for sleep, without sleeping, without seeming to need the sleep, as he would place his stomach acquiescent for food which it did not seem to desire or need. It was strange in the sense that he could discover neither derivation nor motivation nor explanation for it. He found that he was trying to calculate the day of the week. It was as though now and at last he had an actual and urgent need to strike off the accomplished days toward some purpose, some definite day or act, without either falling short or overshooting. He entered the coma state which sleeping had now become with the need in his mind. When he waked in the dewgray of dawn, it was so crystallised that the need did not seem strange anymore.

It is just dawn, daylight. He rises and descends to the spring and takes from his pocket the razor, the brush, the soap. But it is still too dim to see his face clearly in the water, so he sits beside the spring and waits until he can see better. Then he lathers his face with the hard, cold water, patiently. His hand trembles, despite the urgency he feels a lassitude so that he must drive himself. The razor is dull; he tries to whet it upon the side of one brogan, but the leather is ironhard and wet with dew. He shaves, after a fashion. His hand trembles; it is not a very good job, and he cuts himself three or four times, stanching the blood with the cold water until it stops.

He puts the shaving tools away and begins to walk. He follows a straight line, disregarding the easier walking of the ridges. After a short distance he comes out upon a road and sits down beside it. It is a quiet road, appearing and vanishing quietly, the pale dust marked only by narrow and infrequent wheels and by the hooves of horses and mules and now and then by the print of human feet. He sits beside it, coatless, the once white shirt and the once creased trousers muddy and stained, his gaunt face blotched with patches of stubble and with dried blood, shaking slowly with weariness and cold as the sun rises and warms him. After a time two negro children appear around the curve, approaching.

They do not see him until he speaks; they halt, dead, looking at him with white rolling eyes. "What day of the week is it?" he repeats. They

say nothing at all, staring at him. He moves his head a little. "Go on," he says. They go on. He does not watch them. He sits, apparently musing upon the place where they had stood, as though to him they had in moving merely walked out of two shells. He does not see that they are running.

Then, sitting there, the sun warming him slowly, he goes to sleep without knowing it, because the next thing of which he is conscious is a terrific clatter of jangling and rattling wood and metal and trotting hooves. He opens his eyes in time to see the wagon whirl slewing around the curve beyond and so out of sight, its occupants looking back at him over their shoulders, the whiphand of the driver rising and falling. 'They recognised me too,' he thinks. 'Them, and that white woman. And the negroes where I ate that day. Any of them could have captured me, if that's what they want. Since that's what they all want: for me to be captured. But they all run first. They all want me to be captured, and then when I come up ready to say Here I am Yes I would say Here I am I am tired I am tired of running of having to carry my life like it was a basket of eggs they all run away. Like there is a rule to catch me by, and to capture me that way would not be like the rule says.'

So he moves back into the bushes. This time he is alert and he hears the wagon before it comes into sight. He does not show himself until the wagon is abreast of him. Then he steps forth and says, "Hey." The wagon stops, jerked up. The negro driver's head jerks also; into his face also comes the astonishment, then the recognition and the terror. "What day is this?" Christmas says.

The negro glares at him, slackjawed. "W-what you say?"

"What day of the week is this? Thursday? Friday? What? What day? I am not going to hurt you."

"It's Friday," the negro says. "O Lawd God, it's Friday."

“Friday,” Christmas says. Again he jerks his head. “Get on.” The whip falls, the mules surge forward. This wagon too whirls from sight at a dead run, the whip rising and falling. But Christmas has already turned and entered the woods again.

Again his direction is straight as a surveyor’s line, disregarding hill and valley and bog. Yet he is not hurrying. He is like a man who knows where he is and where he wants to go and how much time to the exact minute he has to get there in. It is as though he desires to see his native earth in all its phases for the first or the last time. He had grown to manhood in the country, where like the unswimming sailor his physical shape and his thought had been molded by its compulsions without his learning anything about its actual shape and feel. For a week now he has lurked and crept among its secret places, yet he remained a foreigner to the very immutable laws which earth must obey. For some time as he walks steadily on, he thinks that this is what it is—the looking and seeing—which gives him peace and unhaste and quiet, until suddenly the true answer comes to him. He feels dry and light. ‘I dont have to bother about having to eat anymore,’ he thinks. ‘That’s what it is.’

By noon he has walked eight miles. He comes now to a broad gravelled road, a highway. This time the wagon stops quietly at his raised hand. On the face of the negro youth who drives it there is neither astonishment nor recognition. “Where does this road go?” Christmas says.

“Mottstown. Whar I gwine.”

“Mottstown. You going to Jefferson too?”

The youth rubs his head. “Dont know whar that is. I gwine to Mottstown.”

“Oh,” Christmas says. “I see. You dont live around here, then.”

“Naw, sir. I stays two counties back yonder. Been on the road three days. I gwine to Mottstown to get a yellin calf pappy bought. You want go to Mottstown?”

“Yes,” Christmas says. He mounts to the seat beside the youth. The wagon moves on. ‘Mottstown,’ he thinks. Jefferson is only twenty miles away. ‘Now I can let go for a while,’ he thinks. ‘I haven’t let go for seven days, so I guess I’ll let go for a while.’ He thinks that perhaps, sitting, with the wagon’s motion to lull him, he will sleep. But he does not sleep. He is not sleepy or hungry or even tired. He is somewhere between and among them, suspended, swaying to the motion of the wagon without thought, without feeling. He has lost account of time and distance; perhaps it is an hour later, perhaps three. The youth says:

“Mottstown. Dar tis.”

Looking, he can see the smoke low on the sky, beyond an imperceptible corner; he is entering it again, the street which ran for thirty years. It had been a paved street, where going should be fast. It had made a circle and he is still inside of it. Though during the last seven days he has had no paved street, yet he has travelled further than in all the thirty years before.

And yet he is still inside the circle. ‘And yet I have been further in these seven days than in all the thirty years,’ he thinks. ‘But I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo,’ he thinks quietly, sitting on the seat, with planted on the dashboard before him the shoes, the black shoes smelling of negro: that mark on his ankles the gauge definite and ineradicable of the black tide creeping up his legs, moving from his feet upward as death moves.

Chapter 15

On that Friday when Christmas was captured in Mottstown, there lived in the town an old couple named Hines. They were quite old. They lived in a small bungalow in a neighborhood of negroes; how, upon what, the

town in general did not know since they appeared to live in filthy poverty and complete idleness, Hines, as far as the town knew, not having done any work, steady work, in twentyfive years.

They came to Mottstown thirty years ago. One day the town found the woman established in the small house where they had lived ever since, though for the next five years Hines was at home only once a month, over the weekend. Soon it became known that he held some kind of a position in Memphis. Exactly what, was not known, since even at that time he was a secret man who could have been either thirtyfive or fifty, with something in his glance coldly and violently fanatical and a little crazed, precluding questioning, curiosity.

The town looked upon them both as being a little touched—lonely, gray in color, a little smaller than most other men and women, as if they belonged to a different race, species—even though for the next five or six years after the man appeared to have come to Mottstown to settle down for good in the small house where his wife lived, people hired him to do various odd jobs which they considered within his strength.

But in time he stopped this, too. The town wondered for a while, how they would live now, then it forgot to speculate about this just as later when the town learned that Hines went on foot about the county, holding revival services in negro churches, and that now and then negro women carrying what were obviously dishes of food would be seen entering from the rear the house where the couple lived, and emerging emptyhanded, it wondered about this for a time and then forgot it.

In time the town either forgot or condoned, because Hines was an old man and harmless, that which in a young man it would have crucified. It just said, "They are crazy; crazy on the subject of negroes. Maybe they are Yankees," and let it go at that. Or perhaps what it condoned was not the man's selfdedication to the saving of negro souls, but the public ignoring of the fact of that charity which they received from negro hands, since it is a happy faculty of the mind to slough that which conscience refuses to assimilate.

So for twentyfive years the old couple had had no visible means of support, the town blinding its collective eye to the negro women and the covered dishes and pans, particularly as some of the dishes and pans had in all likelihood been borne intact from white kitchens where the women cooked. Perhaps this was a part of the mind's sloughing. Anyway the town did not look, and for twentyfive years now the couple had lived in the slack backwater of their lonely isolation, as though they had been two muskoxen strayed from the north pole, or two homeless and belated beasts from beyond the glacial period.

The woman was hardly ever seen at all, though the man—he was known as Uncle Doc—was a fixture about the square: a dirty little old man with a face which had once been either courageous or violent—either a visionary or a supreme egoist—collarless, in dirty blue jean clothes and with a heavy piece of handpeeled hickory worn about the grip dark as walnut and smooth as glass. At first, while he held the Memphis position, on his monthly visits he had talked a little about himself, with a selfconfidence not alone of the independent man, but with a further quality, as though at one time in his life he had been better than independent, and that not long ago.

There was nothing beaten about him. It was rather that confidence of a man who has had the controlling of lesser men and who had voluntarily and for a reason which he believed that no other man could question or comprehend, changed his life. But what he told about himself and his present occupation did not make sense, for all its apparent coherence. So they believed that he was a little crazy, even then. It was not that he seemed to be trying to conceal one thing by telling another. It was that his words, his telling, just did not synchronise with what his hearers believed would (and must) be the scope of a single individual. Sometimes they decided that he had once been a minister.

Then he would talk about Memphis, the city, in a vague and splendid way, as though all his life he had been incumbent there of some important though still nameless municipal office. "Sure," the men in Mottstown said behind his back; "he was railroad superintendent there. Standing in the middle of the street crossing with a red flag every

time a train passed," or "He's a big newspaperman. Gathers up the papers from under the park benches." They did not say this to his face, not the boldest among them, not the ones with the most precariously nourished reputations for wit.

Then he lost the Memphis job, or quit it. One weekend he came home, and when Monday came he did not go away. After that he was downtown all day long, about the square, untalkative, dirty, with that furious and preclusive expression about the eyes which the people took for insanity: that quality of outworn violence like a scent, an odor; that fanaticism like a fading and almost extinct ember, of some kind of twofisted evangelism which had been one quarter violent conviction and three quarters physical hardihood. So they were not so surprised when they learned that he was going about the county, usually on foot, preaching in negro churches; not even when a year later they learned what his subject was.

That this white man who very nearly depended on the bounty and charity of negroes for sustenance was going singlehanded into remote negro churches and interrupting the service to enter the pulpit and in his harsh, dead voice and at times with violent obscenity, preach to them humility before all skins lighter than theirs, preaching the superiority of the white race, himself his own exhibit A, in fanatic and unconscious paradox. The negroes believed that he was crazy, touched by God, or having once touched Him. They probably did not listen to, could not understand much of, what he said. Perhaps they took him to be God Himself, since God to them was a white man too and His doings also a little inexplicable.

He was downtown that afternoon when Christmas' name first flew up and down the street, and the boys and men—the merchants, the clerks, the idle and the curious, with countrymen in overalls predominating—began to run. Hines ran too. But he could not run fast and he was not tall enough to see over the clotted shoulders when he did arrive. Nevertheless he tried, as brutal and intent as any there, to force his way into the loud surging group as though in a resurgence of the old violence which had marked his face, clawing at the backs and at

last striking at them with the stick until men turned and recognised him and held him, struggling, striking at them with the heavy stick. "Christmas?" he shouted. "Did they say Christmas?"

"Christmas!" one of the men who held him cried back, his face too strained, glaring. "Christmas! That white nigger that did that killing up at Jefferson last week!"

Hines glared at the man, his toothless mouth lightly foamed with spittle. Then he struggled again, violent, cursing: a frail little old man with the light, frail bones of a child, trying to fight free with the stick, trying to club his way into the center where the captive stood bleeding about the face. "Now, Uncle Doc!" they said, holding him; "now, Uncle Doc. They got him. He cant get away. Here, now."

But he struggled and fought, cursing, his voice cracked, thin, his mouth slavering, they who held him struggling too like men trying to hold a small threshing hose in which the pressure is too great for its size. Of the entire group the captive was the only calm one. They held Hines, cursing, his old frail bones and his stringlike muscles for the time inherent with the fluid and supple fury of a weasel.

He broke free of them and sprang forward, burrowing, and broke through and came face to face with the captive. Here he paused for an instant, glaring at the captive's face. It was a full pause, but before they could grasp him again he had raised the stick and struck the captive once and he was trying to strike again when they caught him at last and held him impotent and raging, with that light, thin foam about his lips. They had not stopped his mouth. "Kill the bastard!" he cried. "Kill him. Kill him."

Thirty minutes later two men brought him home in a car. One of them drove while the other held Hines up in the back seat. His face was pale now beneath the stubble and the dirt, and his eyes were closed. They lifted him bodily from the car and carried him through the gate and up the walk of rotting bricks and shards of concrete, to the steps. His eyes

were open now, but they were quite empty, rolled back into his skull until the dirty, bluish whites alone showed.

But he was still quite limp and helpless. Just before they reached the porch the front door opened and his wife came out and closed the door behind her and stood there, watching them. They knew that it was his wife because she came out of the house where he was known to live. One of the men, though a resident of the town, had never seen her before. "What is it?" she said.

"He's all right," the first man said. "We just been having a right smart of excitement downtown a while ago, and with this hot weather and all, it was a little too much for him." She stood before the door as if she were barring them from the house—a dumpy, fat little woman with a round face like dirty and unovened dough, and a tight screw of scant hair. "They just caught that nigger Christmas that killed that lady up at Jefferson last week," the man said. "Uncle Doc just got a little upset over it."

Mrs Hines was already turning back, as though to open the door. As the first man said later to his companion, she halted in the act of turning, as if someone had hit her lightly with a thrown pebble. "Caught who?" she said.

"Christmas," the man said. "That nigger murderer. Christmas."

She stood at the edge of the porch, looking down at them with her gray, still face. "As if she already knew what I would tell her," the man said to his companion as they returned to the car. "Like she wanted all at the same time for me to tell her it was him and it wasn't him."

"What does he look like?" she said.

"I never noticed much," the man said. "They had to bloody him up some, catching him. Young fellow. He dont look no more like a nigger than I do, either." The woman looked at them, down at them. Between the two men Hines stood on his own legs now, muttering a little now as

if he were waking from sleep. "What do you want us to do with Uncle Doc?" the man said.

She did not answer that at all. It was as though she had not even recognised her husband, the man told his companion later. "What are they going to do with him?" she said.

"Him?" the man said. "Oh. The nigger. That's for Jefferson to say. He belongs to them up there."

She looked down at them, gray, still, remote. "Are they going to wait on Jefferson?"

"They?" the man said. "Oh," he said. "Well, if Jefferson aint too long about it." He shifted his grip on the old man's arm. "Where do you want us to put him?" The woman moved then. She descended the steps and approached. "We'll tote him into the house for you," the man said.

"I can tote him," she said. She and Hines were about the same height, though she was the heavier. She grasped him beneath the arms. "Eupheus," she said, not loud; "Eupheus." She said to the two men, quietly: "Let go. I got him." They released him. He walked a little now. They watched her help him up the steps and into the door. She did not look back.

"She never even thanked us," the second man said. "Maybe we ought to take him back and put him in jail with the nigger, since he seemed to know him so well."

"Eupheus," the first man said. "Eupheus. I been wondering for fifteen years what his name might be. Eupheus."

"Come on. Let's get on back. We might miss some of it."

The first man looked at the house, at the closed door through which the two people had vanished. "She knowed him too."

“Knowed who?”

“That nigger. Christmas.”

“Come on.” They returned to the car. “What do you think about that durn fellow, coming right into town here, within twently miles of where he done it, walking up and down the main street until somebody recognised him. I wish it had been me that recognised him. I could have used that thousand dollars. But I never do have any luck.” The car moved on. The first man was still looking back at the blank door through which the two people had disappeared.

In the hall of that little house dark and small and rankly-odored as a cave, the old couple stood. The old man’s spent condition was still little better than coma, and when his wife led him to a chair and helped him into it, it seemed a matter of expediency and concern. But there was no need to return and lock the front door, which she did. She came and stood over him for a while. At first it seemed as if she were just watching him, with concern and solicitude.

Then a third person would have seen that she was trembling violently and that she had lowered him into the chair either before she dropped him to the floor or in order to hold him prisoner until she could speak. She leaned above him: dumpy, obese, gray in color, with a face like that of a drowned corpse. When she spoke her voice shook and she strove with it, shaking, her hands clenched upon the arms of the chair in which he half lay, her voice shaking, restrained: “Eupheus. You listen to me. You got to listen to me. I aint worried you before. In thirty years I aint worried you. But now I am going to. I am going to know and you got to tell me. What did you do with Milly’s baby?”

Through the long afternoon they clotted about the square and before the jail—the clerks, the idle, the countrymen in overalls; the talk. It went here and there about the town, dying and homing again like a wind or a fire until in the lengthening shadows the country people

began to depart in wagons and dusty cars and the townspeople began to move supperward.

Then the talk flared again, momentarily revived, to wives and families about suppertables in electrically lighted rooms and in remote hill cabins with kerosene lamps. And on the next day, the slow, pleasant country Sunday while they squatted in their clean shirts and decorated suspenders, with peaceful pipes about country churches or about the shady dooryards of houses where the visiting teams and cars were tethered and parked along the fence and the womenfolks were in the kitchen, getting dinner, they told it again: "He dont look any more like a nigger than I do. But it must have been the nigger blood in him.

It looked like he had set out to get himself caught like a man might set out to get married. He had got clean away for a whole week. If he had not set fire to the house, they might not have found out about the murder for a month. And they would not have suspected him then if it hadn't been for a fellow named Brown, that the nigger used to sell whiskey while he was pretending to be a white man and tried to lay the whiskey and the killing both on Brown and Brown told the truth.

"Then yesterday morning he come into Mottstown in broad daylight, on a Saturday with the town full of folks. He went into a white barbershop like a white man, and because he looked like a white man they never suspected him. Even when the bootblack saw how he had on a pair of second hand brogans that were too big for him, they never suspected. They shaved him and cut his hair and he payed them and walked out and went right into a store and bought a new shirt and a tie and a straw hat, with some of the very money he stole from the woman he murdered.

And then he walked the streets in broad daylight, like he owned the town, walking back and forth with people passing him a dozen times and not knowing it, until Halliday saw him and ran up and grabbed him and said, 'Aint your name Christmas?' and the nigger said that it was. He never denied it. He never did anything. He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made the folks so

mad. For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too.

“And so Halliday (he was excited, thinking about that thousand dollars, and he had already hit the nigger a couple of times in the face, and the nigger acting like a nigger for the first time and taking it, not saying anything: just bleeding sullen and quiet)—Halliday was hollering and holding him when the old man they call Uncle Doc Hines come up and begun to hit the nigger with his walking stick until at last two men had to hold Uncle Doc quiet and took him home in a car. Nobody knew if he really did know the nigger or not. He just come hobbling up, screeching, ‘Is his name Christmas? Did you say Christmas?’ and shoved up and took one look at the nigger and then begun to beat him with the walking stick.

He acted like he was hypnotised or something. They had to hold him, and his eyes rolling blue into his head and slobbering at the mouth and cutting with that stick at everything that come into reach, until all of a sudden he kind of flopped. Then two fellows carried him home in a car and his wife come out and took him into the house, and the two fellows come on back to town. They didn’t know what was wrong with him, to get so excited after the nigger was caught, but anyway they thought that he would be all right now. But here it was not a half an hour before he was back downtown again. He was pure crazy by now, standing on the corner and yelling at whoever would pass, calling them cowards because they wouldn’t take the nigger out of jail and hang him right then and there, Jefferson or no Jefferson. He looked crazy in the face, like somebody that had done slipped away from a crazy house and that knew he wouldn’t have much time before they come and got him again. Folks say that he used to be a preacher, too.

“He said that he had a right to kill the nigger. He never said why, and he was too worked up and crazy to make sense even when somebody would stop him long enough to ask a question. There was a right good crowd around him by then, and him yelling about how it was his right

to say first whether the nigger should live or should die. And folks were beginning to think that maybe the place for him was in the jail with the nigger, when here his wife come up.

“There are folks that have lived in Mottstown for thirty years and haven’t ever seen her. They didn’t know who she was then until she spoke to him, because the ones that had seen her, she was always around that little house in Niggertown where they live, in a mother hubbard and one of his woreout hats. But she was dressed up now. She had on a purple silk dress and a hat with a plume on it and she was carrying a umbrella and she come up to the crowd where he was hollering and yelling and she said, ‘Eupheus.’ He stopped yelling then and he looked at her, with that stick still raised in his hand and it kind of shaking, and his jaw dropped slack, slobbering. She took him by the arm.

A lot of folks had been scared to come nigh him because of that stick; he looked like he might hit anybody at any minute and not even knowed it or intended it. But she walked right up under the stick and took him by the arm and led him across to where there was a chair in front of a store and she set him down in the chair and she said, ‘You stay here till I come back. Dont you move, now. And you quit that yelling.’

“And he did. He sho did. He set right there where she put him, and she never looked back, neither. They all noticed that. Maybe it was because folks never saw her except around home, staying at home. And him being a kind of fierce little old man that a man wouldn’t cross without he thought about it first. Anyhow they were surprised. They hadn’t even thought of him taking orders from anybody. It was like she had got something on him and he had to mind her. Because he sat down when she told him to, in that chair, not hollering and talking big now, but with his head bent down and his hands shaking on that big walking stick and a little slobber still running out of his mouth, onto his shirt.

“She went straight to the jail. There was a big crowd in front of it, because Jefferson had sent word that they were on the way down to

get the nigger. She walked right through them and into the jail and she said to Metcalf, 'I want to see that man they caught.'

" 'What do you want to see him for?' Metcalf said.

" 'I aint going to bother him,' she said. 'I just want to look at him.'

"Metcalf told her there was a right smart of other folks that wanted to do that, and that he knew she didn't aim to help him escape, but that he was just the jailer and he couldn't let anybody in without he had permission from the sheriff. And her standing there, in that purple dress and the plume not even nodding and bending, she was that still. 'Where is the sheriff?' she said.

" 'He might be in his office,' Metcalf said. 'You find him and get permission from him. Then you can see the nigger.' Metcalf thought that that would finish it. So he watched her turn and go out and walk through the crowd in front of the jail and go back up the street toward the square. The plume was nodding now. He could see it nodding along above the fence. And then he saw her go across the square and in to the courthouse. The folks didn't know what she was doing, because Metcalf hadn't had time to tell them what happened at the jail.

They just watched her go on into the courthouse, and then Russell said how he was in the office and he happened to look up and there that hat was with the plume on it just beyond the window across the counter. He didn't know how long she had been standing there, waiting for him to look up. He said she was just tall enough to see over the counter, so that she didn't look like she had any body at all. It just looked like somebody had sneaked up and set a toy balloon with a face painted on it and a comic hat set on top of it, like the Katzenjammer kids in the funny paper. 'I want to see the sheriff,' she says.

" 'He aint here,' Russell says. 'I'm his deputy. What can I do for you?'

"He said she didn't answer for a while, standing there. Then she said, 'Where can I find him?'

“ ‘He might be at home,’ Russell says. ‘He’s been right busy, this week. Up at night some, helping those Jefferson officers. He might be home taking a nap. But maybe I can—’ But he said that she was already gone. He said he looked out the window and watched her go on across the square and turn the corner toward where the sheriff lived. He said he was still trying to place her, to think who she was.

“She never found the sheriff. But it was too late then, anyway. Because the sheriff was already at the jail, only Metcalf hadn’t told her, and besides she hadn’t got good away from the jail before the Jefferson officers came up in two cars and went into the jail. They came up quick and went in quick. But the word had already got around that they were there, and there must have been two hundred men and boys and women too in front of the jail when the two sheriffs come out onto the porch and our sheriff made a speech, asking the folks to respect the law and that him and the Jefferson sheriff both promised that the nigger would get a quick and fair trial; and then somebody in the crowd says, ‘Fair, hell. Did he give that white woman a fair trial?’

And they hollered then, crowding up, like they were hollering for one another to the dead woman and not to the sheriffs. But the sheriff kept on talking quiet to them, about how it was his sworn word given to them on the day they elected him that he was trying to keep. ‘I have no more sympathy with nigger murderers than any other white man here,’ he says. ‘But it is my sworn oath, and by God I aim to keep it. I dont want no trouble, but I aint going to dodge it. You better smoke that for a while.’ And Halliday was there too, with the sheriffs. He was the foremost one about reason and not making trouble. ‘Yaaah,’ somebody hollers; ‘we reckon you dont want him lynched.

But he aint worth any thousand dollars to us. He aint worth a thousand dead matches to us.’ And then the sheriff says quick: ‘What if Halliday dont want him killed? Dont we all want the same thing? Here it’s a local citizen that will get the reward: the money will be spent right here in Mottstown. Just suppose it was a Jefferson man was going to get it. Aint that right, men? Aint that sensible?’ His voice sounded little, like a

doll's voice, like even a big man's voice will sound when he is talking not against folks' listening but against their already half-made-up minds.

"Anyway, that seemed to convince them, even if folks did know that Mottstown or nowhere else was going to see enough of that thousand dollars to fat a calf, if Halliday was the one that had the spending of it. But that did it. Folks are funny. They can't stick to one way of thinking or doing anything unless they get a new reason for doing it ever so often. And then when they do get a new reason, they are liable to change anyhow. So they didn't give back exactly; it was like when before that the crowd had kind of milled from the inside out, now it begun to mill from the outside in.

And the sheriffs knew it, the same as they knew that it might not last very long, because they went back into the jail quick and then came out again, almost before they had time to turn around, with the nigger between them and five or six deputies following. They must have had him ready just inside the jail door all the time, because they come out almost at once, with the nigger between them with his face sullied up and his wrists handcuffed to the Jefferson sheriff; and the crowd kind of says, 'Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh.'"

"They made a kind of lane down to the street, where the first Jefferson car was waiting with the engine running and a man behind the wheel, and the sheriffs were coming along without wasting any time, when she come up again, the woman, Mrs Hines. She was shoving up through the crowd. She was so lowbuilt that all the folks could see was that plume kind of bumping along slow, like something that could not have moved very fast even if there wasn't anything in the way, and that couldn't anything stop, like a tractor. She shoved right on through and out into the lane the folks had made, right out in front of the two sheriffs with the nigger between them, so that they had to stop to keep from running over her.

Her face looked like a big hunk of putty and her hat had got knocked sideways so the plume hung down in front of her face and she had to

push it back to see. But she didn't do anything. She just stopped them dead for a minute while she stood there and looked at the nigger. She never said a word, like that was all she had wanted and had been worrying folks for, like that was the reason she had dressed up and come to town: just to look that nigger in the face once. Because she turned and begun to burrow back into the crowd again, and when the cars drove off with the nigger and the Jefferson law and the folks looked around, she was gone. And they went back to the square then, and Uncle Doc was gone too from the chair where she had set him and told him to wait. But all of the folks didn't go straight back to the square. A lot of them stayed there, looking at the jail like it might have been just the nigger's shadow that had come out.

"They thought that she had taken Uncle Doc home. It was in front of Dollar's store and Dollar told about how he saw her come back up the street ahead of the crowd. He said that Uncle Doc had not moved, that he was still sitting in the chair where she had left him like he was hypnotised, until she come up and touched his shoulder and he got up and they went on together with Dollar watching him. And Dollar said that from the look on Uncle Doc's face, home was where he ought to be.

"Only she never took him home. After a while folks saw that she wasn't having to take him anywhere. It was like they both wanted to do the same thing. The same thing but for different reasons, and each one knew that the other's reason was different and that whichever of them got his way, it would be serious for the other one. Like they both knew it without saying it and that each was watching the other, and that they both knew that she would have the most sense about getting them started.

"They went straight to the garage where Salmon keeps his rent car. She did all the talking. She said they wanted to go to Jefferson. Maybe they never dreamed that Salmon would charge them more than a quarter apiece, because when he said three dollars she asked him again, like maybe she could not believe her ears. 'Three dollars,' Salmon says. 'I couldn't do it for no less.' And them standing there and Uncle Doc not

taking any part, like he was waiting, like it wasn't any concern of his, like he knew that he wouldn't need to bother: that she would get them there.

" 'I cant pay that,' she says.

" 'You wont get it done no cheaper,' Salmon says. 'Unless by the railroad. They'll take you for fiftytwo cents apiece.' But she was already going away, with Uncle Doc following her like a dog would.

"That was about four o'clock. Until six o'clock the folks saw them sitting on a bench in the courthouse yard. They were not talking: it was like each one never even knew the other one was there. They just sat there side by side, with her all dressed up in her Sunday clothes. Maybe she was enjoying herself, all dressed up and downtown all Saturday evening. Maybe it was to her what being in Memphis all day would be to other folks.

"They set there until the clock struck six. Then they got up. Folks that saw it said she never said a word to him; that they just got up at the same time like two birds do from a limb and a man cant tell which one of them give the signal. When they walked, Uncle Doc walked a little behind her. They crossed the square this way and turned into the street toward the depot. And the folks knew that there wasn't any train due for three hours and they wondered if they actually were going somewhere on the train, before they found out that they were going to do something that surprised the folks more than that, even.

They went to that little café down by the depot and ate supper, that hadn't even been seen together on the street before, let alone eating in a café, since they come to Jefferson. But that's where she took him; maybe they were afraid they would miss the train if they ate downtown. Because they were there before half past six o'clock, sitting on two of them little stools at the counter, eating what she had ordered without asking Uncle Doc about it at all. She asked the café man about the train to Jefferson and he told her it went at two a.m. 'Lots of excitement in Jefferson tonight,' he says. 'You can get a car downtown

and be in Jefferson in fortyfive minutes. You dont need to wait until two o'clock on that train.' He thought they were strangers maybe; he told her which way town was.

"But she didn't say anything and they finished eating and she paid him, a nickel and a dime at a time out of a tied up rag that she took out of the umbrella, with Uncle Doc setting there and waiting with that dazed look on his face like he was walking in his sleep. Then they left, and the café man thought they were going to take his advice and go to town and get that car when he looked out and saw them going on across the switch tracks, toward the depot. Once he started to call, but he didn't. 'I reckon I misunderstood her,' he says he thought. 'Maybe it's the nine o'clock southbound they want.'

"They were sitting on the bench in the waitingroom when the folks, the drummers and loafers and such, begun to come in and buy tickets for the southbound. The agent said how he noticed there was some folks in the waitingroom when he come in after supper at half past seven, but that he never noticed particular until she come to the ticket window and asked what time the train left for Jefferson. He said he was busy at the time and that he just glanced up and says, 'Tomorrow,' without stopping what he was doing. Then he said that after a while something made him look up, and there was that round face watching him and that plume still in the window, and she says,

" 'I want two tickets on it.'

" 'That train is not due until two o'clock in the morning,' the agent says. He didn't recognise her either. 'If you want to get to Jefferson anytime soon, you'd better go to town and hire a car. Do you know which way town is?' But he said she just stood there, counting nickels and dimes out of that knotted rag, and he came and gave her the two tickets and then he looked past her through the window and saw Uncle Doc and he knew who she was. And he said how they sat there and the folks for the southbound come in and the train come and left and they still set there. He said how Uncle Doc still looked like he was asleep, or doped or something. And then the train went, but some of the folks didn't go

back to town. They stayed there, looking in the window, and now and then they would come in and look at Uncle Doc and his wife setting on the bench, until the agent turned off the lights in the waitingroom.

“Some of the folks stayed, even after that. They could look in the window and see them setting there in the dark. Maybe they could see the plume, and the white of Uncle Doc’s head. And then Uncle Doc begun to wake up. It wasn’t like he was surprised to find where he was, nor that he was where he didn’t want to be. He just roused up, like he had been coasting for a long time now, and now was the time to put on the power again. They could hear her saying ‘Shhhhhhh. Shhhhhhhhh,’ to him, and then his voice would break out. They were still setting there when the agent turned on the lights and told them that the two o’clock train was coming, with her saying ‘Shhhhhhh. Shhhhhhhhhhh’ like to a baby, and Uncle Doc hollering, ‘Bitchery and abomination! Abomination and bitchery!’ ”

Chapter 16

When his knock gets no response, Byron leaves the porch and goes around the house and enters the small, enclosed back yard. He sees the chair at once beneath the mulberry tree. It is a canvas deck chair, mended and faded and sagged so long to the shape of Hightower’s body that even when empty it seems to hold still in ghostly embrace the owner’s obese shapelessness; approaching, Byron thinks how the mute chair evocative of disuse and supineness and shabby remoteness from the world, is somehow the symbol and the being too of the man himself. ‘That I am going to disturb again,’ he thinks, with that faint lift of lip, thinking Again? The disturbing I have done him, even he will see that that disturbing is nothing now. And on Sunday again. But then I reckon Sunday would want to take revenge on him too, being as Sunday was invented by folks

He comes up behind the chair and looks down into it. Hightower is asleep. Upon the swell of his paunch, where the white shirt (it is a clean and fresh one now) balloons out of the worn black trousers, an open book lies face down. Upon the book Hightower’s hands are folded,

peaceful, benignant, almost pontifical. The shirt is made after an old fashion, with a pleated though carelessly ironed bosom, and he wears no collar.

His mouth is open, the loose and flabby flesh sagging away from the round orifice in which the stained lower teeth show, and from the still fine nose which alone age, the defeat of sheer years, has not changed. Looking down at the unconscious face, it seems to Byron as though the whole man were fleeing away from the nose which holds invincibly to something yet of pride and courage above the sluttishness of vanquishment like a forgotten flag above a ruined fortress. Again light, the reflection of sky beyond the mulberry leaves, glints and glares upon the spectacle lenses, so that Byron cannot tell just when Hightower's eyes open. He sees only the mouth shut, and a movement of the folded hands as Hightower sits up. "Yes," he says; "yes? Who is— Oh, Byron."

Byron looks down at him, his face quite grave. But it is not compassionate now. It is not anything: it is just quite sober and quite determined. He says, without any inflection at all: "They caught him yesterday. I dont reckon you have heard that any more than you heard about the killing."

"Caught him?"

"Christmas. In Mottstown. He came to town, and near as I can learn, he stood around on the street until somebody recognised him."

"Caught him." Hightower is sitting up in the chair now. "And you have come to tell me that he is—that they have . . ."

"No. Aint anybody done anything to him yet. He aint dead yet. He's in the jail. He's all right."

"All right. You say that he is all right. Byron says that he is all right— Byron Bunch has helped the woman's paramour sell his friend for a thousand dollars, and Byron says that it is all right. Has kept the woman hidden from the father of her child, while that—Shall I say, other

paramour, Byron? Shall I say that? Shall I refrain from the truth because Byron Bunch hides it?”

“If public talking makes truth, then I reckon that is truth. Especially when they find out that I have got both of them locked up in jail.”

“Both of them?”

“Brown too. Though I reckon most folks have about decided that Brown wasn’t anymore capable of doing that killing or helping in it than he was in catching the man that did do it or helping in that. But they can all say that Byron Bunch has now got him locked up safe in jail.”

“Ah, yes.” Hightower’s voice shakes a little, high and thin. “Byron Bunch, the guardian of public weal and morality. The gainer, the inheritor of rewards, since it will now descend upon the morganatic wife of— Shall I say that too? Shall I read Byron there too?” Then he begins to cry, sitting huge and lax in the sagging chair. “I dont mean that. You know I dont. But it is not right to bother me, to worry me, when I have—when I have taught myself to stay—have been taught by them to stay— That this should come to me, taking me after I am old, and reconciled to what they deemed—” Once before Byron saw him sit while sweat ran down his face like tears; now he sees the tears themselves run down the flabby cheeks like sweat.

“I know. It’s a poor thing. A poor thing to worry you. I didn’t know. I didn’t know, when I first got into it. Or I would have . . . But you are a man of God. You cant dodge that.”

“I am not a man of God. And not through my own desire. Remember that. Not of my own choice that I am no longer a man of God. It was by the will, the more than behest, of them like you and like her and like him in the jail yonder and like them who put him there to do their will upon, as they did upon me, with insult and violence upon those who like them were created by the same God and were driven by them to do that which they now turn and rend them for having done it. It was not my choice. Remember that.”

"I know that. Because a man aint given that many choices. You made your choice before that." Hightower looks at him. "You were given your choice before I was born, and you took it before I or her or him either was born. That was your choice. And I reckon them that are good must suffer for it the same as them that are bad. The same as her, and him, and me. And the same as them others, that other woman."

"That other woman? Another woman? Must my life after fifty years be violated and my peace destroyed by two lost women, Byron?"

"This other one aint lost now. She has been lost for thirty years. But she is found now. She's his grandmother."

"Whose grandmother?"

"Christmas'," Byron says.

Waiting, watching the street and the gate from the dark study window, Hightower hears the distant music when it first begins. He does not know that he expects it, that on each Wednesday and Sunday night, sitting in the dark window, he waits for it to begin. He knows almost to the second when he should begin to hear it, without recourse to watch or clock. He uses neither, has needed neither for twentyfive years now. He lives dissociated from mechanical time. Yet for that reason he has never lost it. It is as though out of his subconscious he produces without volition the few crystallizations of stated instances by which his dead life in the actual world had been governed and ordered once.

Without recourse to clock he could know immediately upon the thought just where, in his old life, he would be and what doing between the two fixed moments which marked the beginning and the end of Sunday morning service and Sunday evening service and prayer service on Wednesday night; just when he would have been entering the church, just when he would have been bringing to a calculated close prayer or sermon. So before twilight has completely faded he is saying to himself Now they are gathering, approaching along streets slowly

and turning in, greeting one another: the groups, the couples, the single ones.

There is a little informal talking in the church itself, lowtoned, the ladies constant and a little sibilant with fans, nodding to arriving friends as they pass in the aisle. Miss Carruthers (she was his organist and she has been dead almost twenty years) is among them; soon she will rise and enter the organloft Sunday evening prayer meeting. It has seemed to him always that at that hour man approaches nearest of all to God, nearer than at any other hour of all the seven days.

Then alone, of all church gatherings, is there something of that peace which is the promise and the end of the Church. The mind and the heart purged then, if it is ever to be; the week and its whatever disasters finished and summed and expiated by the stern and formal fury of the morning service; the next week and its whatever disasters not yet born, the heart quiet now for a little while beneath the cool soft blowing of faith and hope.

Sitting in the dark window he seems to see them Now they are gathering, entering the door. They are nearly all there now And then he begins to say, "Now. Now," leaning a little forward; and then, as though it had waited for his signal, the music begins. The organ strains come rich and resonant through the summer night, blended, sonorous, with that quality of abjectness and sublimation, as if the freed voices themselves were assuming the shapes and attitudes of crucifixions, ecstatic, solemn, and profound in gathering volume. Yet even then the music has still a quality stern and implacable, deliberate and without passion so much as immolation, pleading, asking, for not love, not life, forbidding it to others, demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon, like all Protestant music.

It was as though they who accepted it and raised voices to praise it within praise, having been made what they were by that which the music praised and symbolised, they took revenge upon that which made them so by means of the praise itself. Listening, he seems to hear within it the apotheosis of his own history, his own land, his own

enviored blood: that people from which he sprang and among whom he lives who can never take either pleasure or catastrophe or escape from either, without brawling over it. Pleasure, ecstasy, they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence, in drinking and fighting and praying; catastrophe too, the violence identical and apparently inescapable And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another? he thinks.

It seems to him that he can hear within the music the declaration and dedication of that which they know that on the morrow they will have to do. It seems to him that the past week has rushed like a torrent and that the week to come, which will begin tomorrow, is the abyss, and that now on the brink of cataract the stream has raised a single blended and sonorous and austere cry, not for justification but as a dying salute before its own plunge, and not to any god but to the doomed man in the barred cell within hearing of them and of the two other churches, and in whose crucifixion they too will raise a cross. 'And they will do it gladly,' he says, in the dark window.

He feels his mouth and jaw muscles tauten with something premonitory, something more terrible than laughing even. 'Since to pity him would be to admit selfdoubt and to hope for and need pity themselves. They will do it gladly, gladly. That's why it is so terrible, terrible, terrible.' Then, leaning forward, he sees three people approach and turn into the gate, in silhouette now against the street lamp, among the shadows. He has already recognised Byron and he looks at the two who follow him.

A woman and a man he knows them to be, yet save for the skirt which one of them wears they are almost interchangeable: of a height, and of a width which is twice that of ordinary man or woman, like two bears. He begins to laugh before he can prepare to stop it. 'If Byron just had a handkerchief about his head, and earrings,' he thinks, laughing and laughing, making no sound, trying to prepare to stop it in order to go to the door when Byron will knock.

Byron leads them into the study—a dumpy woman in a purple dress and a plume and carrying an umbrella, with a perfectly immobile face, and a man incredibly dirty and apparently incredibly old, with a tobaccostained goat's beard and mad eyes. They enter not with diffidence, but with something puppetlike about them, as if they were operated by clumsy springwork. The woman appears to be the more assured, or at least the more conscious, of the two of them. It is as though, for all her frozen and mechanically moved inertia, she had come for some definite purpose or at least with some vague hope. But he sees at once that the man is in something like coma, as though oblivious and utterly indifferent to his whereabouts, and yet with a quality latent and explosive, paradoxically rapt and alert at the same time.

“This is her,” Byron says quietly. “This is Mrs Hines.”

They stand there, motionless: the woman as though she had reached the end of a long journey and now among strange faces and surroundings waits, quiet, glacierlike, like something made of stone and painted, and the calm, rapt yet latently furious and dirty old man. It is as though neither of them had so much as looked at him, with curiosity or without. He indicates chairs. Byron guides the woman, who lowers herself carefully, clutching the umbrella. The man sits at once. Hightower takes his chair beyond the desk. “What is it she wants to talk to me about?” he says.

The woman does not move. Apparently she has not heard. She is like someone who has performed an arduous journey on the strength of a promise and who now ceases completely and waits. “This is him,” Byron says. “This is Reverend Hightower. Tell him. Tell him what you want him to know.” She looks at Byron when he speaks, her face quite blank. If there is inarticulateness behind it, articulateness is nullified by the immobility of the face itself; if hope or yearning, neither hope nor yearning show. “Tell him,” Byron says. “Tell him why you came. What you came to Jefferson for.”

“It was because—” she says. Her voice is sudden and deep, almost harsh, though not loud. It is as though she had not expected to make so much noise when she spoke; she ceases in a sort of astonishment as though at the sound of her own voice, looking from one to the other of the two faces.

“Tell me,” Hightower says. “Try to tell me.”

“It’s because I . . .” Again the voice ceases, dies harshly though still not raised, as though of its own astonishment. It is as if the three words were some automatic impediment which her voice cannot pass; they can almost watch her marshalling herself to go around them. “I aint never seen him when he could walk,” she says. “Not for thirty years I never saw him. Never once walking on his own feet and calling his own name—”

“Bitchery and abomination!” the man says suddenly. His voice is high, shrill, strong. “Bitchery and abomination!” Then he ceases. Out of his immediate and dreamlike state he shouts the three words with outrageous and prophetlike suddenness, and that is all. Hightower looks at him, and then at Byron. Byron says quietly:

“He is their daughter’s child. He—” with a slight movement of the head he indicates the old man, who is now watching Hightower with his bright, mad glare— “he took it right after it was born and carried it away. She didn’t know what he did with it. She never even knew if it was still alive or not until—”

The old man interrupts again, with that startling suddenness. But he does not shout this time: his voice now is as calm and logical as Byron’s own. He talks clearly, just a little jerkily: “Yes. Old Doc Hines took him. God give old Doc Hines his chance and so old Doc Hines give God His chance too. So out of the mouths of little children God used His will. The little children hollering Nigger! Nigger! at him in the hearing of God and man both, showing God’s will. And old Doc Hines said to God, ‘But that aint enough.

Them children call one another worse than nigger,' and God said, 'You wait and you watch, because I aint got the time to waste neither with this world's sluttishness and bitchery. I have put the mark on him and now I am going to put the knowledge. And I have set you there to watch and guard My will. It will be yours to tend to it and oversee.' "

His voice ceases; his tone does not drop at all. His voice just stops, exactly like when the needle is lifted from a phonograph record by the hand of someone who is not listening to the record. Hightower looks from him to Byron, also almost glaring.

"What's this? What's this?" he says.

"I wanted to fix it so she could come and talk to you without him being along," Byron says. "But there wasn't anywhere to leave him. She says she has to watch him. He was trying down in Mottstown yesterday to get the folks worked up to lynch him, before he even knew what he had done."

"Lynch him?" Hightower says. "Lynch his own grandson?"

"That's what she says," Byron says levelly. "She says that's what he come up here for. And she had to come with him to keep him from doing it."

The woman speaks again. Perhaps she has been listening. But there is no more expression on her face now than when she entered; woodenfaced, she speaks again in her dead voice, with almost the suddenness of the man. "For fifty years he has been like that. For more than fifty years, but for fifty years I have suffered it. Even before we were married, he was always fighting. On the very night that Milly was born, he was locked up in jail for fighting. That's what I have bore and suffered. He said he had to fight because he is littler than most men and so folks would try to put on him. That was his vanity and his pride. But I told him it was because the devil was in him. And that some day the devil was going to come on him and him not know it until too late, and the devil was going to say, 'Eupheus Hines, I have come to collect

my toll.' That's what I told him, the next day after Milly was born and me still too weak to raise my head, and him just out of jail again.

I told him so: how right then God had given him a sign and a warning: that him being locked up in a jail on the very hour and minute of his daughter's birth was the Lord's own token that heaven never thought him fitten to raise a daughter. A sign from God above that town (he was a brakeman then, on the railroad) was not doing him anything but harm. And he took it so himself then, because it was a sign, and we moved away from the towns then and after a while he got to be foreman at the sawmill, doing well because he hadn't begun then to take God's name in vain and in pride to justify and excuse the devil that was in him.

So when Lem Bush's wagon passed that night coming home from the circus and never stopped to let Milly out and Eupheus come back into the house and flung the things out of the drawer until he come to the pistol, I said, 'Eupheus, it's the devil. It's not Milly's safety that's quicking you now,' and he said, 'Devil or no devil. Devil or no devil,' and he hit me with his hand and I laid across the bed and watched him—" She ceases. But hers is on a falling inflection, as if the machine had run down in midrecord. Again Hightower looks from her to Byron with that expression of glaring amazement.

"That's how I heard it too," Byron says. "It was hard for me to get it straight too, at first. They were living at a sawmill that he was foreman of, over in Arkansas. The gal was about eighteen then. One night a circus passed the mill, on the way to town. It was December and there had been a lot of rain, and one of the wagons broke through a bridge close to the mill and the men come to their house to wake him up and borrow some log tackle to get the wagon out—"

"It's God's abomination of womanflesh!" the old man cries suddenly. Then his voice drops, lowers; it is as though he were merely gaining attention. He talks again rapidly, his tone plausible, vague, fanatic, speaking of himself again in the third person. "He knowed. Old Doc Hines knowed. He had seen the womansign of God's abomination

already on her, under her clothes. So when he went and put on his raincoat and lit the lantern and come back, she was already at the door, with a raincoat on too and he said, 'You get on back to bed,' and she said, 'I want to go too,' and he said, 'You get on back inside that room,' and she went back and he went down and got the big tackle from the mill and got the wagon out.

Till nigh daybreak he worked, believing she had obeyed the command of the father the Lord had given her. But he ought to knowed. He ought to knowed God's abomination of womanflesh; he should have knowed the walking shape of bitchery and abomination already stinking in God's sight. Telling old Doc Hines, that knowed better, that he was a Mexican. When old Doc Hines could see in his face the black curse of God Almighty. Telling him—"

"What?" Hightower says. He speaks loudly, as if he had anticipated having to drown the other's voice by sheer volume. "What is this?"

"It was a fellow with the circus," Byron says. "She told him that the man was a Mexican, the daughter told him when he caught her. Maybe that's what the fellow told the gal. But he"—again he indicates the old man—"knew somehow that the fellow had nigger blood. Maybe the circus folks told him. I dont know. He aint never said how he found out, like that never made any difference. And I reckon it didn't, after the next night."

"The next night?"

"I reckon she slipped out that night when the circus was stuck. He says she did. Anyway, he acted like it, and what he did could not have happened if he hadn't known and she hadn't slipped out. Because the next day she went in to the circus with some neighbors. He let her go, because he didn't know then that she had slipped out the night before. He didn't suspect anything even when she came out to get into the neighbor's wagon with her Sunday dress on. But he was waiting for the wagon when it came back that night, listening for it, when it came up the road and passed the house like it was not going to stop to let her

out. And he ran out and called, and the neighbor stopped the wagon and the gal wasn't in it.

The neighbor said that she had left them on the circus lot, to spend the night with another girl that lived about six miles away, and the neighbor wondered how Hines didn't know about it, because he said that the gal had her grip with her when she got into the wagon. Hines hadn't seen the grip. And she—" this time he indicates the stonefaced woman; she may or may not be listening to what he is saying—"she says it was the devil that guided him.

She says he could not have known anymore than she did, where the gal was then, and yet he come into the house and got his pistol and knocked her down across the bed when she tried to stop him and saddled his horse and rode off. And she said he took the only short cut he could possibly have taken, choosing it in the dark, out of a half a dozen of them, that would ever have caught up with them. And yet it wasn't any possible way that he could have known which road they had taken. But he did. He found them like he had known all the time just where they would be, like him and the man that his gal told him was a Mexican had made a date to meet there. It was like he knew.

It was pitch dark, and even when he caught up with a buggy, there wasn't any way he could have told it was the one he wanted. But he rode right up behind the buggy, the first buggy he had seen that night. He rode up on the right side of it and he leaned down, still in the pitch dark and without saying a word and without stopping his horse, and grabbed the man that might have been a stranger or a neighbor for all he could have known by sight or hearing. Grabbed him by one hand and held the pistol against him with the other and shot him dead and brought the gal back home behind him on the horse. He left the buggy and the man both there in the road. It was raining again, too."

He ceases. At once the woman begins to speak, as though she has been waiting with rigid impatience for Byron to cease. She speaks in the same dead, level tone: the two voices in monotonous strophe and antistrophe: two bodiless voices recounting dreamily something

performed in a region without dimension by people without blood: “I laid across the bed and I heard him go out and then I heard the horse come up from the barn and pass the house, already galloping.

And I laid there without undressing, watching the lamp. The oil was getting low and after a while I got up and took it back to the kitchen and filled it and cleaned the wick and then I undressed and laid down, with the lamp burning. It was still raining and it was cold too and after a while I heard the horse come back into the yard and stop at the porch and I got up and put on my shawl and I heard them come into the house. I could hear Eupheus’ feet and then Milly’s feet, and they come on down the hall to the door and Milly stood there with the rain on her face and her hair and her new dress all muddy and her eyes shut and then Eupheus hit her and she fell to the floor and laid there and she didn’t look any different in the face than when she was standing up. And Eupheus standing in the door wet and muddy too and he said, ‘You said I was at the devil’s work.

Well, I have brought you back the devil’s laidby crop. Ask her what she is toting now inside her. Ask her.’ And I was that tired, and it was cold, and I said, ‘What happened?’ and he said, ‘Go back yonder and look down in the mud and you will see. He might have fooled her that he was a Mexican. But he never fooled me. And he never fooled her. He never had to. Because you said once that someday the devil would come down on me for his toll. Well, he has. My wife has bore me a whore. But at least he done what he could when the time come to collect. He showed me the right road and he held the pistol steady.’

“And so sometimes I would think how the devil had conquered God. Because we found out Milly was going to have a child and Eupheus started out to find a doctor that would fix it. I believed that he would find one, and sometimes I thought it would be better so, if human man and woman was to live in the world. And sometimes I hoped he would, me being that tired and all when the trial was over and the circus owner come back and said how the man really was a part nigger instead of Mexican, like Eupheus said all the time he was, like the devil had told Eupheus he was a nigger.

And Eupheus would take the pistol again and say he would find a doctor or kill one, and he would go away and be gone a week at a time, and all the folks knowing it and me trying to get Eupheus to lets move away because it was just that circus man that said he was a nigger and maybe he never knew for certain, and besides he was gone too and we likely wouldn't ever see him again. But Eupheus wouldn't move, and Milly's time coming and Eupheus with that pistol, trying to find a doctor that would do it.

And then I heard how he was in jail again; how he had been going to church and to prayer meeting at the different places where he would be trying to find a doctor, and how one night he got up during prayer meeting and went to the pulpit and begun to preach himself, yelling against niggers, for the white folks to turn out and kill them all, and the folks in the church made him quit and come down from the pulpit and he threatened them with the pistol, there in the church, until the law came and arrested him and him like a crazy man for a while.

And they found out how he had beat up a doctor in another town and run away before they could catch him. So when he got out of jail and got back home Milly's time was about on her. And I thought then that he had give up, had seen God's will at last, because he was quiet about the house, and one day he found the clothes me and Milly had been getting ready and kept hid from him, and he never said nothing except to ask when it would be. Every day he would ask, and we thought that he had give up, that maybe going to them churches or being in jail again had reconciled him like it had on that night when Milly was born. And so the time come and one night Milly waked me and told me it had started and I dressed and told Eupheus to go for the doctor and he dressed and went out.

And I got everything ready and we waited and the time when Eupheus and the doctor should have got back come and passed and Eupheus wasn't back neither and I waited until the doctor would have to get there pretty soon and then I went out to the front porch to look and I saw Eupheus setting on the top step with the shotgun across his lap

and he said, 'Get back into that house, whore's dam,' and I said, 'Eupheus,' and he raised the shotgun and said, 'Get back into that house. Let the devil gather his own crop: he was the one that laid it by.' And I tried to get out the back way and he heard me and run around the house with the gun and he hit me with the barrel of it and I went back to Milly and he stood outside the hall door where he could see Milly until she died.

And then he come in to the bed and looked at the baby and he picked it up and held it up, higher than the lamp, like he was waiting to see if the devil or the Lord would win. And I was that tired, setting by the bed, looking at his shadow on the wall and the shadow of his arms and the bundle high up on the wall. And then I thought that the Lord had won. But now I dont know. Because he laid the baby back on the bed by Milly and he went out. I heard him go out the front door and then I got up and built up the fire in the stove and heated some milk." She ceases; her harsh, droning voice dies. Across the desk Hightower watches her: the still, stonefaced woman in the purple dress, who has not moved since she entered the room. Then she begins to speak again, without moving, almost without lip movement, as if she were a puppet and the voice that of a ventriloquist in the next room.

"And Eupheus was gone. The man that owned the mill didn't know where he had gone to. And he got a new foreman, but he let me stay in the house a while longer because we didn't know where Eupheus was, and it coming winter and me with the baby to take care of. And I didn't know where Eupheus was any more than Mr Gillman did, until the letter came. It was from Memphis and it had a postoffice moneypaper in it, and that was all. So I still didn't know. And then in November another moneypaper came, without any letter or anything. And I was that tired, and then two days before Christmas I was out in the back yard, chopping wood, and I come back into the house and the baby was gone. I hadn't been out of the house an hour, and it looked like I could have seen him when he come and went.

But I didn't. I just found the letter where Eupheus had left it on the pillow that I would put between the baby and the edge of the bed so he

couldn't roll off, and I was that tired. And I waited, and after Christmas Eupheus come home, and he wouldn't tell me. He just said that we were going to move, and I thought that he had already took the baby there and he had come back for me. And he wouldn't tell me where we were going to move to but it didn't take long and I was worried nigh crazy how the baby would get along until we got there and he still wouldn't tell me and it was like we wouldn't ever get there. Then we got there and the baby wasn't there and I said, 'You tell me what you have done with Joey. You got to tell me,' and he looked at me like he looked at Milly that night when she laid on the bed and died and he said, 'It's the Lord God's abomination, and I am the instrument of His will.'

And he went away the next day and I didn't know where he had gone, and another moneypaper came, and the next month Eupheus come home and said he was working in Memphis. And I knew he had Joey hid somewhere in Memphis and I thought that that was something because he could be there to see to Joey even if I wasn't. And I knew that I would have to wait on Eupheus' will to know, and each time I would think that maybe next time he will take me with him to Memphis. And so I waited. I sewed and made clothes for Joey and I would have them all ready when Eupheus would come home and I would try to get him to tell me if the clothes fit Joey and if he was all right and Eupheus wouldn't tell me. He would sit and read out of the Bible, loud, without nobody there to hear it but me, reading and hollering loud out of the Bible like he believed I didn't believe what it said. But he would not tell me for five years and I never knew whether he took Joey the clothes I made or not.

And I was afraid to ask, to worry at him, because it was something that he was there where Joey was, even if I wasn't. And then after five years he came home one day and he said, 'We are going to move,' and I thought that now it would be, I will see him again now; if it was a sin, I reckon we have all paid it out now, and I even forgave Eupheus. Because I thought that we were going to Memphis this time, at last. But it was not to Memphis. We come to Mottstown. We had to pass through Memphis, and I begged him. It was the first time I had ever

begged him. But I did then, just for a minute, a second; not to touch him or talk to him or nothing. But Eupheus wouldn't. We never even left the depot.

We got off of one train and we waited seven hours without even leaving the depot, until the other train come, and we come to Mottstown. And Eupheus never went back to Memphis to work anymore, and after a while I said, 'Eupheus,' and he looked at me and I said, 'I done waited five years and I aint never bothered you. Cant you tell me just once if he is dead or not?' and he said, 'He is dead,' and I said, 'Dead to the living world, or just dead to me? If he is just dead to me, even. Tell me that much, because in five years I have not bothered you,' and he said, 'He is dead to you and to me and to God and to all God's world forever and ever more.' "

She ceases again. Beyond the desk Hightower watches her with that quiet and desperate amazement. Byron too is motionless, his head bent a little. The three of them are like three rocks above a beach, above ebbtide, save the old man. He has been listening now, almost attentively, with that ability of his to flux instantaneously between complete attention that does not seem to hear, and that comalike bemusement in which the stare of his apparently inverted eye is as uncomfortable as though he held them with his hand. He cackles, suddenly, bright, loud, mad; he speaks, incredibly old, incredibly dirty. "It was the Lord. He was there.

Old Doc Hines give God His chance too. The Lord told old Doc Hines what to do and old Doc Hines done it. Then the Lord said to old Doc Hines, 'You watch, now. Watch My will a-working.' And old Doc Hines watched and heard the mouths of little children, of God's own fatherless and motherless, putting His words and knowledge into their mouths even when they couldn't know it since they were without sin yet, even the girl ones without sin and bitchery yet: Nigger! Nigger! in the innocent mouths of little children. 'What did I tell you?' God said to old Doc Hines.

'And now I've set My will to working and now I'm gone. There aint enough sin here to keep Me busy because what do I care for the fornications of a slut, since that is a part of My purpose too,' and old Doc Hines said, 'How is the fornications of a slut a part of Your purpose too?' and God said, 'You wait and see. Do you think it is just chanceso that I sent that young doctor to be the one that found My abomination laying wrapped in that blanket on that doorstep that Christmas night? Do you think it was just chanceso that the Madam should have been away that night and give them young sluts the chance and call to name him Christmas in sacrilege of My son?

So I am gone now, because I have set My will a-working and I can leave you here to watch it.' So old Doc Hines he watched and he waited. From God's own boiler room he watched them children, and the devil's walking seed unbeknownst among them, polluting the earth with the working of that word on him. Because he didn't play with the other children no more now. He stayed by himself, standing still, and then old Doc Hines knew that he was listening to the hidden warning of God's doom, and old Doc Hines said to him, 'Why dont you play with them other children like you used to?' and he didn't say nothing and old Doc Hines said, 'Is it because they call you nigger?' and he didn't say nothing and old Doc Hines said, 'Do you think you are a nigger because God has marked your face?' and he said, 'Is God a nigger too?' and old Doc Hines said, 'He is the Lord God of wrathful hosts, His will be done.

Not yours and not mine, because you and me are both a part of His purpose and His vengeance.' And he went away and old Doc Hines watched him hearing and listening to the vengeful will of the Lord, until old Doc Hines found out how he was watching the nigger working in the yard, following him around the yard while he worked, until at last the nigger said, 'What you watching me for, boy?' and he said, 'How come you are a nigger?' and the nigger said, 'Who told you I am a nigger, you little white trash bastard?' and he says, 'I aint a nigger,' and the nigger says, 'You are worse than that. You dont know what you are. And more than that, you wont never know. You'll live and you'll die and you wont never know,' and he says, 'God aint no nigger,' and the nigger says, 'I

reckon you ought to know what God is, because dont nobody but God know what you is.'

But God wasn't there to say, because He had set His will to working and left old Doc Hines to watch it. From that very first night, when He had chose His own Son's sacred anniversary to set it a-working on, He set old Doc Hines to watch it. It was cold that night, and old Doc Hines standing in the dark just behind the corner where he could see the doorstep and the accomplishment of the Lord's will, and he saw that young doctor coming in lechery and fornication stop and stoop down and raise the Lord's abomination and tote it into the house.

And old Doc Hines he followed and he seen and heard. He watched them young sluts that was desecrating the Lord's sacred anniversary with eggnog and whiskey in the Madam's absence, open the blanket. And it was her, the Jezebel of the doctor, that was the Lord's instrument, that said, 'We'll name him Christmas,' and another one said, 'What Christmas. Christmas what,' and God said to old Doc Hines, 'Tell them,' and they all looked at old Doc Hines with the reek of pollution on them, hollering, 'Why, it's Uncle Doc.

Look what Santa Claus brought us and left on the doorstep, Uncle Doc,' and old Doc Hines said, 'His name is Joseph,' and they quit laughing and they looked at old Doc Hines and the Jezebel said, 'How do you know?' and old Doc Hines said, 'The Lord says so,' and then they laughed again, hollering, 'It is so in the Book: Christmas, the son of Joe. Joe, the son of Joe. Joe Christmas,' they said, 'To Joe Christmas,' and they tried to make old Doc Hines drink too, to the Lord's abomination, but he struck the cup aside.

And he just had to watch and to wait, and he did and it was in the Lord's good time, for evil to come from evil. And the doctor's Jezebel come running from her lustful bed, still astink with sin and fear. 'He was hid behind the bed,' she says, and old Doc Hines said, 'You used that perfumed soap that tempted your own undoing, for the Lord's abomination and outrage. Suffer it,' and she said, 'You can talk to him.

I have seen you. You could persuade him,' and old Doc Hines said, 'I care no more for your fornications than God does,' and she said, 'He will tell and I will be fired. I will be disgraced.' Stinking with her lust and lechery she was then, standing before old Doc Hines with the working of God's will on her that minute, who had outraged the house where God housed His fatherless and motherless. 'You aint nothing,' old Doc Hines said. 'You and all sluts. You are a instrument of God's wrathful purpose that nere a sparrow can fall to earth. You are a instrument of God, the same as Joe Christmas and old Doc Hines.'

And she went away and old Doc Hines he waited and he watched and it wasn't long before she come back and her face was like the face of a ravening beast of the desert. 'I fixed him,' she said, and old Doc Hines said, 'How fixed him,' because it was not anything that old Doc Hines didn't know because the Lord did not keep His purpose hid from His chosen instrument, and old Doc Hines said, 'You have served the foreordained will of God. You can go now and abominate Him in peace until the Day,' and her face looked like the ravening beast of the desert, laughing out of her rotten colored dirt at God. And they come and took him away. Old Doc Hines saw him go away in the buggy and he went back to wait for God and God come and He said to old Doc Hines, 'You can go too now.'

You have done My work. There is no more evil here now but womanevil, not worthy for My chosen instrument to watch.' And old Doc Hines went when God told him to go. But he kept in touch with God and at night he said, 'That bastard, Lord,' and God said, 'He is still walking My earth,' and old Doc Hines kept in touch with God and at night he said, 'That bastard, Lord,' and God said, 'He is still walking My earth,' and old Doc Hines kept in touch with God and one night he wrestled and he strove and he cried aloud, 'That bastard, Lord! I feel! I feel the teeth and the fangs of evil!' and God said, 'It's that bastard. Your work is not done yet. He's a pollution and a abomination on My earth.' "

The sound of music from the distant church has long since ceased. Through the open window there comes now only the peaceful and

myriad sounds of the summer night. Beyond the desk Hightower sits, looking more than ever like an awkward beast tricked and befooled of the need for flight, brought now to bay by those who tricked and fooled it. The other three sit facing him; almost like a jury.

Two of them are also motionless, the woman with that stonevisaged patience of a waiting rock, the old man with a spent quality like a charred wick of a candle from which the flame has been violently blown away. Byron alone seems to possess life. His face is lowered. He seems to muse upon one hand which lies upon his lap, the thumb and forefinger of which rub slowly together with a kneading motion while he appears to watch with musing absorption. When Hightower speaks, Byron knows that he is not addressing him, not addressing anyone in the room at all. "What do they want me to do?" he says. "What do they think, hope, believe, that I can do?"

Then there is no sound; neither the man nor the woman have heard, apparently. Byron does not expect the man to hear. 'He dont need any help,' he thinks. 'Not him. It's hindrance he needs'; thinking remembering the comastate of dreamy yet maniacal suspension in which the old man had moved from place to place a little behind the woman since he had met them twelve hours ago. 'It's hindrance he needs. I reckon it's a good thing for more folks than her that he is wellnigh helpless.' He is watching the woman. He says quietly, almost gently: "Go on. Tell him what you want. He wants to know what you want him to do. Tell him."

"I thought maybe—" she says. She speaks without stirring. Her voice is not tentative so much as rusty, as if it were being forced to try to say something outside the province of being said aloud, of being anything save felt, known. "Mr Bunch said that maybe—"

"What?" Hightower says. He speaks sharply, impatiently, his voice a little high; he too has not moved, sitting back in the chair, his hands upon the armrests. "What? That what?"

"I thought . . ." The voice dies again. Beyond the window the steady insects whirr. Then the voice goes on, flat, toneless, she sitting also with her head bent a little, as if she too listened to the voice with the same quiet intentness: "He is my grandson, my girl's little boy. I just thought that if I . . . if he . . ." Byron listens quietly, thinking It's right funny.

You'd think they had done got swapped somewhere. Like it was him that had a nigger grandson waiting to be hung The voice goes on. "I know it aint right to bother a stranger. But you are lucky. A bachelor, a single man that could grow old without the despair of love. But I reckon you couldn't never see it even if I could tell it right. I just thought that maybe if it could be for one day like it hadn't happened. Like folks never knew him as a man that had killed . . ." The voice ceases again. She has not stirred. It is as though she listened to it cease as she listened to it begin, with the same interest, the same quiet unastonishment.

"Go on," Hightower says, in that high impatient voice; "go on."

"I never saw him when he could walk and talk. Not for thirty years I never saw him. I am not saying he never did what they say he did. Ought not to suffer for it like he made them that loved and lost suffer. But if folks could maybe just let him for one day. Like it hadn't happened yet. Like the world never had anything against him yet. Then it could be like he had just went on a trip and grew man grown and come back. If it could be like that for just one day. After that I would not interfere. If he done it, I would not be the one to come between him and what he must suffer. Just for one day, you see. Like he had been on a trip and come back, telling me about the trip, without any living earth against him yet."

"Oh," Hightower says, in his shrill, high voice. Though he has not moved, though the knuckles of the hands which grip the chairarms are taut and white, there begins to emerge from beneath his clothing a slow and repressed quivering. "Ah, yes," he says. "That's all. That's simple. Simple. Simple." Apparently he cannot stop saying it. "Simple.

Simple.” He has been speaking in a low tone; now his voice rises. “What is it they want me to do? What must I do now? Byron! Byron? What is it? What are they asking of me now?” Byron has risen. He now stands beside the desk, his hands on the desk, facing Hightower. Still Hightower does not move save for that steadily increasing quivering of his flabby body. “Ah, yes. I should have known. It will be Byron who will ask it. I should have known. That will be reserved for Byron and for me. Come, come. Out with it. Why do you hesitate now?”

Byron looks down at the desk, at his hands upon the desk. “It’s a poor thing. A poor thing.”

“Ah. Commiseration? After this long time? Commiseration for me, or for Byron? Come; out with it. What do you want me to do? For it is you: I know that. I have known that all along. Ah, Byron, Byron. What a dramatist you would have made.”

“Or maybe you mean a drummer, a agent, a salesman,” Byron says. “It’s a poor thing. I know that. You dont need to tell me.”

“But I am not clairvoyant, like you. You seem to know already what I could tell you, yet you will not tell me what you intend for me to know. What is it you want me to do? Shall I go plead guilty to the murder? Is that it?”

Byron’s face cracks with that grimace faint, fleeting, sardonic, weary, without mirth. “It’s next to that, I reckon.” Then his face sobers; it is quite grave. “It’s a poor thing to ask. God knows I know that.” He watches his slow hand where it moves, preoccupied and trivial, upon the desk top. “I mind how I said to you once that there is a price for being good the same as for being bad; a cost to pay. And it’s the good men that cant deny the bill when it comes around. They cant deny it for the reason that there aint any way to make them pay it, like a honest man that gambles. The bad men can deny it; that’s why dont anybody expect them to pay on sight or any other time. But the good cant. Maybe it takes longer to pay for being good than for being bad. And it

wont be like you haven't done it before, haven't already paid a bill like it once before. It oughtn't to be so bad now as it was then."

"Go on. Go on. What is it I am to do?"

Byron watches his slow and ceaseless hand, musing. "He aint never admitted that he killed her. And all the evidence they got against him is Brown's word, which is next to none. You could say he was here with you that night. Every night when Brown said he watched him go up to the big house and go in it. Folks would believe you. They would believe that, anyway. They would rather believe that about you than to believe that he lived with her like a husband and then killed her. And you are old now. They wouldn't do anything to you about it that would hurt you now. And I reckon you are used to everything else they can do."

"Oh," Hightower says. "Ah. Yes. Yes. They would believe it. That would be very simple, very good. Good for all. Then he will be restored to them who have suffered because of him, and Brown without the reward could be scared into making her child legitimate and then into fleeing again and forever this time. And then it would be just her and Byron. Since I am just an old man who has been fortunate enough to grow old without having to learn the despair of love."

He is shaking, steadily; he looks up now. In the lamplight his face looks slick, as if it had been oiled. Wrung and twisted, it gleams in the lamplight; the yellowed, oft-washed shirt which was fresh this morning is damp with sweat. "It's not because I cant, dont dare to," he says; "it's because I wont! I wont! do you hear?" He raises his hands from the chairarms. "It's because I wont do it!" Byron does not move. His hand on the desk top has ceased; he watches the other, thinking It aint me he is shouting at.

It's like he knows there is something nearer him than me to convince of that Because now Hightower is shouting, "I wont do it! I wont!" with his hands raised and clenched, his face sweating, his lip lifted upon his clenched and rotting teeth from about which the long sagging of flabby and putty-colored flesh falls away. Suddenly his voice rises higher yet.

“Get out!” he screams. “Get out of my house! Get out of my house!” Then he falls forward, onto the desk, his face between his extended arms and his clenched fists. As, the two old people moving ahead of him, Byron looks back from the door, he sees that Hightower has not moved, his bald head and his extended and clenched arms lying full in the pool of light from the shaded lamp. Beyond the open window the sound of insects has not ceased, not faltered.

Chapter 17

That was Sunday night. Lena’s child was born the next morning. It was just dawn when Byron stopped his galloping mule before the house which he had quitted not six hours ago. He sprang to the ground already running, and ran up the narrow walk toward the dark porch. He seemed to stand aloof and watch himself, for all his haste, thinking with a kind of grim unsurprise: ‘Byron Bunch borning a baby. If I could have seen myself now two weeks ago, I would not have believed my own eyes. I would have told them that they lied.’

The window was dark now beyond which six hours ago he had left the minister. Running, he thought of the bald head, the clenched hands, the prone flabby body sprawled across the desk. ‘But I reckon he has not slept much,’ he thought. ‘Even if he aint playing—playing—’ He could not think of the word midwife, which he knew that Hightower would use. ‘I reckon I dont have to think of it,’ he thought. ‘Like a fellow running from or toward a gun aint got time to worry whether the word for what he is doing is courage or cowardice.’

The door was not locked. Apparently he knew that it would not be. He felt his way into the hall, not quiet, not attempting to be. He had never been deeper into the house than the room where he had last seen the owner of it sprawled across the desk in the full downglare of the lamp. Yet he went almost as straight to the right door as if he knew, or could see, or were being led. ‘That’s what he’d call it,’ he thought, in the fumbling and hurried dark. ‘And she would too.’ He meant Lena, lying yonder in the cabin, already beginning to labor. ‘Only they would both have a different name for whoever did the leading.’ He could hear

Hightower snoring now, before he entered the room. 'Like he aint so much upset, after all,' he thought. Then he thought immediately: 'No. That aint right. That aint just. Because I dont believe that. I know that the reason he is asleep and I aint asleep is that he is an old man and he cant stand as much as I can stand.'

He approached the bed. The still invisible occupant snored profoundly. There was a quality of profound and complete surrender in it. Not of exhaustion, but surrender, as though he had given over and relinquished completely that grip upon that blending of pride and hope and vanity and fear, that strength to cling to either defeat or victory, which is the I-Am, and the relinquishment of which is usually death. Standing beside the bed Byron thought again A poor thing. A poor thing It seemed to him now that to wake the man from that sleep would be the sorest injury which he had ever done him. 'But it aint me that's waiting,' he thought. 'God knows that. Because I reckon He has been watching me too lately, like the rest of them, to see what I will do next.'

He touched the sleeper, not roughly, but firmly. Hightower ceased in midsnore; beneath Byron's hand he surged hugely and suddenly up. "Yes?" he said. "What? Who is it? Who is there?"

"It's me," Byron said. "It's Byron again. Are you awake now?"

"Yes. What—"

"Yes," Byron said. "She says it's about due now. That the time has come."

"She?"

"Tell me where the light . . . Mrs Hines. She is out there. I am going on for the doctor. But it may take some time. So you can take my mule. I reckon you can ride that far. Have you still got your book?"

The bed creaked as Hightower moved. "Book? My book?"

“The book you used when that nigger baby came. I just wanted to remind you in case you would need to take it with you. In case I dont get back with the doctor in time. The mule is out at the gate. He knows the way. I will walk on to town and get the doctor. I’ll get back out there as soon as I can.” He turned and recrossed the room. He could hear, feel, the other sitting up in the bed. He paused in the middle of the floor long enough to find the suspended light and turn it on. When it came on he was already moving on toward the door. He did not look back. Behind him he heard Hightower’s voice:

“Byron! Byron!” He didn’t pause, didn’t answer.

Dawn was increasing. He walked rapidly along the empty street, beneath the spaced and failing street lamps about which bugs still whirled and blundered. But day was growing; when he reached the square the façade of its eastern side was in sharp relief against the sky. He was thinking rapidly. He had made no arrangement with a doctor. Now as he walked he was cursing himself in all the mixed terror and rage of any actual young father for what he now believed to have been crass and criminal negligence. Yet it was not exactly the solicitude of an incipient father. There was something else behind it, which he was not to recognise until later.

It was as though there lurked in his mind, still obscured by the need for haste, something which was about to spring full clawed upon him. But what he was thinking was, ‘I got to decide quick. He delivered that nigger baby all right, they said. But this is different. I ought to done it last week, seen ahead about a doctor instead of waiting, having to explain now, at the last minute, hunt from house to house until I find one that will come, that will believe the lies that I will have to tell. I be dog if it dont look like a man that has done as much lying lately as I have could tell a lie now that anybody would believe, man or woman. But it dont look like I can.

I reckon it just aint in me to tell a good lie and do it well.’ He walked rapidly, his footsteps hollow and lonely in the empty street; already his decision was made, without his even being aware of it. To him there

was nothing either of paradox or of comedy about it. It had entered his mind too quickly and was too firmly established there when he became aware of it; his feet were already obeying it. They were taking him to the home of the same doctor who had arrived too late at the delivery of the negro child at which Hightower had officiated with his razor and his book.

The doctor arrived too late this time, also. Byron had to wait for him to dress. He was an oldish man now, and fussy, and somewhat disgruntled at having been wakened at this hour. Then he had to hunt for the switch key to his car, which he kept in a small metal strongbox, the key to which in turn he could not find at once. Neither would he allow Byron to break the lock. So when they reached the cabin at last the east was primrosecolor and there was already a hint of the swift sun of summer. And again the two men, both older now, met at the door of a one-room cabin, the professional having lost again to the amateur, for as he entered the door, the doctor heard the infant cry. The doctor blinked at the minister, fretfully.

“Well, doctor,” he said, “I wish Byron had told me he had already called you in. I’d still be in bed.” He thrust past the minister, entering. “You seem to have had better luck this time than you did the last time we consulted. Only you look about like you need a doctor yourself. Or maybe it’s a cup of coffee you need.” Hightower said something, but the doctor had gone on, without stopping to listen. He entered the room, where a young woman whom he had never seen before lay wan and spent on a narrow army cot, and an old woman in a purple dress whom he had also never seen before, held the child upon her lap. There was an old man asleep on a second cot in the shadow.

When the doctor noticed him, he said to himself that the man looked like he was dead, so profoundly and peacefully did he sleep. But the doctor did not notice the old man at once. He went to the old woman who held the child. “Well, well,” he said. “Byron must have been excited. He never told me the whole family would be on hand, grandpa and grandma too.” The woman looked up at him. He thought, ‘She looks about as much alive as he does, for all she is sitting up. Dont look

like she has got enough gumption to know she is even a parent, let alone a grandparent.'

"Yes," the woman said. She looked up at him, crouching over the child. Then he saw that her face was not stupid, vacuous. He saw that at the same time it was both peaceful and terrible, as though the peace and the terror had both died long ago and come to live again at the same time. But he remarked mainly her attitude at once like a rock and like a crouching beast. She jerked her head at the man; for the first time the doctor looked full at him where he lay sleeping upon the other cot. She said in a whisper at once cunning and tense with fading terror: "I fooled him. I told him you would come in the back way this time.

I fooled him. But now you are here. You can see to Milly now. I'll take care of Joey." Then this faded. While he watched, the life, the vividness, faded, fled suddenly from a face that looked too still, too dull to ever have harbored it; now the eyes questioned him with a gaze dumb, inarticulate, baffled as she crouched over the child as if he had offered to drag it from her. Her movement roused it perhaps; it cried once. Then the bafflement too flowed away. It fled as smoothly as a shadow; she looked down at the child, musing, wooden faced, ludicrous. "It's Joey," she said. "It's my Milly's little boy."

And Byron, outside the door where he had stopped as the doctor entered, heard that cry and something terrible happened to him. Mrs Hines had called him from his tent. There was something in her voice so that he put on his trousers as he ran almost, and he passed Mrs Hines, who had not undressed at all, in the cabin door and ran into the room. Then he saw her and it stopped him dead as a wall. Mrs Hines was at his elbow, talking to him; perhaps he answered, talked back. Anyway he had saddled the mule and was already galloping toward town while he still seemed to be looking at her, at her face as she lay raised on her propped arms on the cot, looking down at the shape of her body beneath the sheet with wailing and hopeless terror.

He saw that all the time he was waking Hightower, all the time he was getting the doctor started, while somewhere in him the clawed thing

lurked and waited and thought was going too fast to give him time to think. That was it. Thought too swift for thinking, until he and the doctor returned to the cabin. And then, just outside the cabin door where he had stopped, he heard the child cry once and something terrible happened to him.

He knew now what it was that seemed to lurk clawed and waiting while he crossed the empty square, seeking the doctor whom he had neglected to engage. He knew now why he neglected to engage a doctor beforehand. It is because he did not believe until Mrs Hines called him from his tent that he (she) would need one, would have the need. It was like for a week now his eyes had accepted her belly without his mind believing. 'Yet I did know, believe,' he thought. 'I must have knowed, to have done what I have done: the running and the lying and the worrying at folks.' But he saw now that he did not believe until he passed Mrs Hines and looked into the cabin.

When Mrs Hines' voice first came into his sleeping, he knew what it was, what had happened; he rose and put on, like a pair of hurried overalls, the need for haste, knowing why, knowing that for five nights now he had been expecting it. Yet still he did not believe. He knew now that when he ran to the cabin and looked in, he expected to see her sitting up; perhaps to be met by her at the door, placid, unchanged, timeless. But even as he touched the door with his hand he heard something which he had never heard before.

It was a moaning wail, loud, with a quality at once passionate and abject, that seemed to be speaking clearly to something in a tongue which he knew was not his tongue nor that of any man. Then he passed Mrs Hines in the door and he saw her lying on the cot. He had never seen her in bed before and he believed that when or if he ever did, she would be tense, alert, maybe smiling a little, and completely aware of him. But when he entered she did not even look at him.

She did not even seem to be aware that the door had opened, that there was anyone or anything in the room save herself and whatever it was that she had spoken to with that wailing cry in a tongue unknown

to man. She was covered to the chin, yet her upper body was raised upon her arms and her head was bent. Her hair was loose and her eyes looked like two holes and her mouth was as bloodless now as the pillow behind her, and as she seemed in that attitude of alarm and surprise to contemplate with a kind of outraged unbelief the shape of her body beneath the covers, she gave again that loud, abject, wailing cry. Mrs Hines was now bending over her. She turned her head, that wooden face, across her purple shoulder. "Get," she said. "Get for the doctor. It's come now."

He did not remember going to the stable at all. Yet there he was, catching his mule, dragging the saddle out and clapping it on. He was working fast, yet thinking went slow enough. He knew why now. He knew now that thinking went slow and smooth with calculation, as oil is spread slowly upon a surface above a brewing storm. 'If I had known then,' he thought. 'If I had known then. If it had got through then.' He thought this quietly, in aghast despair, regret. 'Yes. I would have turned my back and rode the other way. Beyond the knowing and memory of man forever and ever I reckon I would have rode.' But he did not. He passed the cabin at a gallop, with thinking going smooth and steady, he not yet knowing why. 'If I can just get past and out of hearing before she hollers again,' he thought.

'If I can just get past before I have to hear her again.' That carried him for a while, into the road, the hardmuscled small beast going fast now, thinking, the oil, spreading steady and smooth: 'I'll go to Hightower first. I'll leave the mule for him. I must remember to remind him about his doctor book. I mustn't forget that,' the oil said, getting him that far, to where he sprang from the still running mule and into Hightower's house. Then he had something else. 'Now that's done,' thinking Even if I cant get a regular doctor That got him to the square and then betrayed him; he could feel it, clawed with lurking, thinking Even if I dont get a regular doctor.

Because I have never believed that I would need one. I didn't believe It was in his mind, galloping in yoked and headlong paradox with the need for haste while he helped the old doctor hunt for the key to the

strongbox in order to get the switch key for the car. They found it at last, and for a time the need for haste went hand in hand with movement, speed, along the empty road beneath the empty dawn—that, or he had surrendered all reality, all dread and fear, to the doctor beside him, as people do. Anyway it got him back to the cabin, where the two of them left the car and approached the cabin door, beyond which the lamp still burned: for that interval he ran in the final hiatus of peace before the blow fell and the clawed thing overtook him from behind. Then he heard the child cry.

Then he knew. Dawn was making fast. He stood quietly in the chill peace, the waking quiet—small, nondescript, whom no man or woman had ever turned to look at twice anywhere. He knew now that there had been something all the while which had protected him against believing, with the believing protected him. With stern and austere astonishment he thought It was like it was not until Mrs Hines called me and I heard her and saw her face and knew that Byron Burch was nothing in this world to her right then, that I found out that she is not a virgin And he thought that that was terrible, but that was not all. There was something else. His head was not bowed.

He stood quite still in the augmenting dawn, while thinking went quietly And this too is reserved for me, as Reverend Hightower says. I'll have to tell him now. I'll have to tell Lucas Burch It was not unsurprise now. It was something like the terrible and irremediable despair of adolescence Why, I didn't even believe until now that he was so.

It was like me, and her, and all the other folks that I had to get mixed up in it, were just a lot of words that never even stood for anything, were not even us, while all the time what was us was going on and going on without even missing the lack of words. Yes. It aint until now that I ever believed that he is Lucas Burch. That there ever was a Lucas Burch

'Luck,' Hightower says; 'luck. I dont know whether I had it or not.' But the doctor has gone on into the cabin. Looking back for another moment, Hightower watches the group about the cot, hearing still the

doctor's cheery voice. The old woman now sits quietly, yet looking back at her it seems but a moment ago that he was struggling with her for the child, lest she drop it in her dumb and furious terror. But no less furious for being dumb it was as, the child snatched almost from the mother's body, she held it high aloft, her heavy, bearlike body crouching as she glared at the old man asleep on the cot. He was sleeping so when Hightower arrived.

He did not seem to breathe at all, and beside the cot the woman was crouching in a chair when he entered. She looked exactly like a rock poised to plunge over a precipice, and for an instant Hightower thought She has already killed him. She has taken her precautions well beforehand this time Then he was quite busy; the old woman was at his elbow without his being aware of it until she snatched the still unbreathing child and held it aloft, glaring at the old sleeping man on the other cot with the face of a tiger. Then the child breathed and cried, and the woman seemed to answer it, also in no known tongue, savage and triumphant. Her face was almost maniacal as he struggled with her and took the child from her before she dropped it. "See," he said. "Look! He's quiet. He's not going to take it away this time."

Still she glared at him, dumb, beastlike, as though she did not understand English. But the fury, the triumph, had gone from her face: she made a hoarse, whimpering noise, trying to take the child from him. "Careful, now," he said. "Will you be careful?" She nodded, whimpering, pawing lightly at the child. But her hands were steady, and he let her have it. And she now sits with it upon her lap while the doctor who had arrived too late stands beside the cot, talking in his cheerful, testy voice while his hands are busy. Hightower turns and goes out, lowering himself carefully down the broken step, to the earth like an old man, as if there were something in his flabby paunch fatal and highly keyed, like dynamite.

It is now more than dawn; it is morning: already the sun. He looks about, pausing; he calls: "Byron." There is no answer. Then he sees that the mule, which he had tethered to a fence post nearby, is also gone. He sighs. 'Well,' he thinks. 'So I have reached the point where the

crowning indignity which I am to suffer at Byron's hands is a two-mile walk back home. That's not worthy of Byron, of hatred. But so often our deeds are not. Nor we of our deeds.'

He walks back to town slowly—a gaunt, paunched man in a soiled panama hat and the tail of a coarse cotton nightshirt thrust into his black trousers. 'Luckily I did take time to put on my shoes,' he thinks. 'I am tired,' he thinks, fretfully. 'I am tired, and I shall not be able to sleep.' He is thinking it fretfully, wearily, keeping time to his feet when he turns into his gate. The sun is now high, the town has wakened; he smells the smoke here and there of cooking breakfasts. 'The least thing he could have done,' he thinks, 'since he would not leave me the mule, would have been to ride ahead and start a fire in my stove for me. Since he thinks it better for my appetite to take a two-mile stroll before eating.'

He goes to the kitchen and builds a fire in the stove, slowly, clumsily; as clumsily after twentyfive years as on the first day he had ever attempted it, and puts coffee on. 'Then I'll go back to bed,' he thinks. 'But I know I shall not sleep.' But he notices that his thinking sounds querulous, like the peaceful whining of a querulous woman who is not even listening to herself; then he finds that he is preparing his usual hearty breakfast, and he stops quite still, clicking his tongue as though in displeasure. 'I ought to feel worse than I do,' he thinks. But he has to admit that he does not.

And as he stands, tall, misshapen, lonely in his lonely and illkept kitchen, holding in his hand an iron skillet in which yesterday's old grease is bleakly caked, there goes through him a glow, a wave, a surge of something almost hot, almost triumphant. 'I showed them!' he thinks. 'Life comes to the old man yet, while they get there too late. They get there for his leavings, as Byron would say.' But this is vanity and empty pride. Yet the slow and fading glow disregards it, impervious to reprimand. He thinks, 'What if I do? What if I do feel it? triumph and pride? What if I do?' But the warmth, the glow, evidently does not regard or need buttressing either; neither is it quenched by the actuality of an orange and eggs and toast.

And he looks down at the soiled and empty dishes on the table and he says, aloud now: "Bless my soul. I'm not even going to wash them now." Neither does he go to his bedroom to try to sleep. He goes to the door and looks in, with that glow of purpose and pride, thinking, 'If I were a woman, now. That's what a woman would do: go back to bed to rest.' He goes to the study. He moves like a man with a purpose now, who for twentyfive years has been doing nothing at all between the time to wake and the time to sleep again. Neither is the book which he now chooses the Tennyson: this time also he chooses food for a man.

It is Henry IV and he goes out into the back yard and lies down in the sagging deck chair beneath the mulberry tree, plumping solidly and heavily into it. 'But I shant be able to sleep,' he thinks, 'because Byron will be in soon to wake me. But to learn just what else he can think of to want me to do, will be almost worth the waking.'

He goes to sleep soon, almost immediately, snoring. Anyone pausing to look down into the chair would have seen, beneath the twin glares of sky in the spectacles, a face innocent, peaceful, and assured. But no one comes, though when he wakes almost six hours later, he seems to believe that someone has called him. He sits up abruptly, the chair creaking beneath him. "Yes?" he says. "Yes? What is it?" But there is no one there, though for a moment longer he looks about, seeming to listen and to wait, with that air forceful and assured. And the glow is not gone either. 'Though I had hoped to sleep it off,' he thinks, thinking at once, 'No. I dont mean hoped. What is in my thought is feared.

And so I have surrendered too,' he thinks, quiet, still. He begins to rub his hands, gently at first, a little guiltily. 'I have surrendered too. And I will permit myself. Yes. Perhaps this too is reserved for me. And so I shall permit myself.' And then he says it, thinks it That child that I delivered. I have no namesake. But I have known them before this to be named by a grateful mother for the doctor who officiated. But then, there is Byron.

Byron of course will take the pas of me. She will have to have others, more remembering the young strong body from out whose travail even there shone something tranquil and unafraid. More of them. Many more. That will be her life, her destiny. The good stock peopling in tranquil obedience to it the good earth; from these hearty loins without hurry or haste descending mother and daughter. But by Byron engendered next. Poor boy. Even though he did let me walk back home

He enters the house. He shaves and removes the nightshirt and puts on the shirt which he had worn yesterday, and a collar and the lawn tie and the panama hat. The walk out to the cabin does not take him as long as the walk home did, even though he goes now through the woods where the walking is harder. 'I must do this more often,' he thinks, feeling the intermittent sun, the heat, smelling the savage and fecund odor of the earth, the woods, the loud silence. 'I should never have lost this habit, too. But perhaps they will both come back to me, if this itself be not the same as prayer.'

He emerges from the woods at the far side of the pasture behind the cabin. Beyond the cabin he can see the clump of trees in which the house had stood and burned, though from here he cannot see the charred and mute embers of what were once planks and beams. 'Poor woman,' he thinks. 'Poor, barren woman. To have not lived only a week longer, until luck returned to this place.

Until luck and life returned to these barren and ruined acres.' It seems to him that he can see, feel, about him the ghosts of rich fields, and of the rich fecund black life of the quarters, the mellow shouts, the presence of fecund women, the prolific naked children in the dust before the doors; and the big house again, noisy, loud with the treble shouts of the generations. He reaches the cabin. He does not knock; with his hand already opening the door he calls in a hearty voice that almost booms: "Can the doctor come in?"

The cabin is empty save for the mother and child. She is propped up on the cot, the child at breast. As Hightower enters, she is in the act of drawing the sheet up over her bared bosom, watching the door not

with alarm at all, but with alertness, her face fixed in an expression serene and warm, as though she were about to smile. He sees this fade. "I thought—" she says.

"Who did you think?" he says, booms. He comes to the cot and looks down at her, at the tiny, weazened, terracotta face of the child which seems to hang suspended without body and still asleep from the breast. Again she draws the sheet closer, modest and tranquil, while above her the gaunt, paunched, bald man stands with an expression on his face gentle, beaming, and triumphant. She is looking down at the child.

"It looks like he just cant get caught up. I think he is asleep again and I lay him down and then he hollers and I have to put him back again."

"You ought not to be here alone," he says. He looks about the room. "Where—"

"She's gone, too. To town. She didn't say, but that's where she has gone. He slipped out, and when she woke up she asked me where he was and I told her he went out, and she followed him."

"To town? Slipped out?" Then he says "Oh" quietly. His face is grave now.

"She watched him all day. And he was watching her. I could tell it. He was making out like he was asleep. She thought that he was asleep. And so after dinner she gave out. She hadn't rested any last night, and after dinner she set in the chair and dozed. And he was watching her, and he got up from the other cot, careful, winking and squinching his face at me. He went to the door, still winking and squinting back at me over his shoulder, and tiptoed out.

And I never tried to stop him nor wake her, neither." She looks at Hightower, her eyes grave, wide. "I was scared to. He talks funny. And the way he was looking at me. Like all the winking and squinching was not for me to not wake her up, but to tell me what would happen to me

if I did. And I was scared to. And so I laid here with the baby and pretty soon she jerked awake.

And then I knew she hadn't aimed to go to sleep. It was like she come awake already running to the cot where he had been, touching it like she couldn't believe he had done got away. Because she stood there at the cot, pawing at the blanket like maybe she thought he was mislaid inside the blanket somewhere. And then she looked at me, once. And she wasn't winking and squinting, but I nigh wished she was. And she asked me and I told her and she put on her hat and went out." She looks at Hightower. "I'm glad she's gone. I reckon I ought not to say it, after all she done for me. But . . ."

Hightower stands over the cot. He does not seem to see her. His face is very grave; it is almost as though it had grown ten years older while he stood there. Or like his face looks now as it should look and that when he entered the room, it had been a stranger to itself. "To town," he says. Then his eyes wake, seeing again. "Well. It cant be helped now," he says. "Besides, the men downtown, the sane . . . there will be a few of them. . . . Why are you glad they are gone?"

She looks down. Her hand moves about the baby's head, not touching it: a gesture instinctive, unneeded, apparently unconscious of itself. "She has been kind. More than kind. Holding the baby so I could rest. She wants to hold him all the time, setting there in that chair— You'll have to excuse me. I aint once invited you to set." She watches him as he draws the chair up to the cot and sits down. ". . . Setting there where she could watch him on the cot, making out that he was asleep." She looks at Hightower; her eyes are questioning, intent. "She keeps on calling him Joey. When his name aint Joey. And she keeps on . . ." She watches Hightower. Her eyes are puzzled now, questioning, doubtful. "She keeps on talking about— She is mixed up someway. And sometimes I get mixed up too, listening, having to . . ." Her eyes, her words, grope, fumble.

"Mixed up?"

“She keeps on talking about him like his pa was that . . . the one in jail, that Mr Christmas. She keeps on, and then I get mixed up and it’s like sometimes I cant—like I am mixed up too and I think that his pa is that Mr—Mr Christmas too—” She watches him; it is as though she makes a tremendous effort of some kind. “But I know that aint so. I know that’s foolish. It’s because she keeps on saying it and saying it, and maybe I aint strong good yet, and I get mixed up too. But I am afraid. . . .”

“Of what?”

“I dont like to get mixed up. And I am afraid she might get me mixed up, like they say how you might cross your eyes and then you cant uncross . . .” She stops looking at him. She does not move. She can feel him watching her.

“You say the baby’s name is not Joe. What is his name?”

For a moment longer she does not look at Hightower. Then she looks up. She says, too immediately, too easily: “I aint named him yet.”

And he knows why. It is as though he sees her for the first time since he entered. He notices for the first time that her hair has been recently combed and that she has freshened her face too, and he sees, half hidden by the sheet, as if she had thrust them hurriedly there when he entered, a comb and a shard of broken mirror. “When I came in, you were expecting someone. And it was not me. Who were you expecting?”

She does not look away. Her face is neither innocent nor dissimulating. Neither is it placid and serene. “Expecting?”

“Was it Byron Bunch you expected?” Still she does not look away. Hightower’s face is sober, firm, gentle. Yet in it is that ruthlessness which she has seen in the faces of a few good people, men usually, whom she has known. He leans forward and lays his hand on hers where it supports the child’s body. “Byron is a good man,” he says.

“I reckon I know that, well as anybody. Better than most.”

“And you are a good woman. Will be. I dont mean—” he says quickly. Then he ceases. “I didn’t mean—”

“I reckon I know,” she says.

“No. Not this. This does not matter. This is not anything yet. It all depends on what you do with it, afterward. With yourself. With others.” He looks at her; she does not look away. “Let him go. Send him away from you.” They look at one another. “Send him away, daughter. You are probably not much more than half his age. But you have already outlived him twice over. He will never overtake you, catch up with you, because he has wasted too much time. And that too, his nothing, is as irremediable as your all.

He can no more ever cast back and do, than you can cast back and undo. You have a manchild that is not his, by a man that is not him. You will be forcing into his life two men and only the third part of a woman, who deserves at the least that the nothing with which he has lived for thirtyfive years be violated, if violated it must be, without two witnesses. Send him away.”

“That aint for me to do. He is free. Ask him. I have not tried once to hold him.”

“That’s it. You probably could not have held him, if you had tried to. That’s it. If you had known how to try. But then, if you had known that, you would not be here in this cot, with this child at your breast. And you wont send him away? You wont say the word?”

“I can say no more than I have said. And I said No to him five days ago.”

“No?”

“He said for me to marry him. To not wait. And I said No.”

“Would you say No now?”

She looks at him steadily. “Yes. I would say it now.”

He sighs, huge, shapeless; his face is again slack, weary. “I believe you. You will continue to say it until after you have seen . . .” He looks at her again; again his gaze is intent, hard. “Where is he? Byron?”

She looks at him. After a while she says quietly: “I dont know.” She looks at him; suddenly her face is quite empty, as though something which gave it actual solidity and firmness were beginning to drain out of it. Now there is nothing of dissimulation nor alertness nor caution in it. “This morning about ten o’clock he came back. He didn’t come in. He just came to the door and he stood there and he just looked at me. And I hadn’t seen him since last night and he hadn’t seen the baby and I said, ‘Come and see him,’ and he looked at me, standing there in the door, and he said, ‘I come to find out when you want to see him,’ and I said, ‘See who?’ and he said, ‘They may have to send a deputy with him but I can persuade Kennedy to let him come,’ and I said, ‘Let who come?’ and he said, ‘Lucas Burch,’ and I said, ‘Yes,’ and he said, ‘This evening? Will that do?’ and I said, ‘Yes,’ and he went away.

He just stood there, and then he went away.” While he watches her with that despair of all men in the presence of female tears, she begins to cry. She sits upright, the child at her breast, crying, not loud and not hard, but with a patient and hopeless abjectness, not hiding her face. “And you worry me about if I said No or not and I already said No and you worry me and worry me and now he is already gone. I will never see him again.” And he sits there, and she bows her head at last, and he rises and stands over her with his hand on her bowed head, thinking Thank God, God help me. Thank God, God help me

He found Christmas’ old path through the woods to the mill. He did not know that it was there, but when he found in which direction it ran, it seemed like an omen to him in his exultation. He believes her, but he wants to corroborate the information for the sheer pleasure of hearing

it again. It is just four o'clock when he reaches the mill. He inquires at the office.

"Bunch?" the bookkeeper says. "You won't find him here. He quit this morning."

"I know, I know," Hightower says.

"Been with the company for seven years, Saturday evenings too. Then this morning he walked in and said he was quitting. No reason. But that's the way these hillbillies do."

"Yes, yes," Hightower says. "They are fine people, though. Fine men and women." He leaves the office. The road to town passes the planer shed, where Byron worked. He knows Mooney, the foreman. "I hear Byron Bunch is not with you anymore," he says, pausing.

"Yes," Mooney says. "He quit this morning." But Hightower is not listening; the overalled men watch the shabby, queershaped, not-quite-familiar figure looking with a kind of exultant interest at the walls, the planks, the cryptic machinery whose very being and purpose he could not have understood or even learned. "If you want to see him," Mooney says, "I reckon you'll find him downtown at the courthouse."

"At the courthouse?"

"Yes, sir. Grand Jury meets today. Special call. To indict that murderer."

"Yes, yes," Hightower says. "So he is gone. Yes. A fine young man. Goodday, goodday, gentlemen. Goodday to you." He goes on, while the men in overalls look after him for a time. His hands are clasped behind him. He paces on, thinking quietly, peacefully, sadly: 'Poor man. Poor fellow. No man is, can be, justified in taking human life; least of all, a warranted officer, a sworn servant of his fellowman. When it is sanctioned publicly in the person of an elected officer who knows that he has not himself suffered at the hands of his victim, call that victim by what name you will, how can we expect an individual to refrain when

he believes that he has suffered at the hands of his victim?' He walks on; he is now in his own street. Soon he can see his fence, the signboard; then the house beyond the rich foliage of August. 'So he departed without coming to tell me goodbye. After all he has done for me. Fetched to me. Ay; given, restored, to me. It would seem that this too was reserved for me. And this must be all.'

But it is not all. There is one thing more reserved for him.

Chapter 18

When Byron reached town he found that he could not see the sheriff until noon, since the sheriff would be engaged all morning with the special Grand Jury. "You'll have to wait," they told him.

"Yes," Byron said. "I know how."

"Know how what?" But he did not answer. He left the sheriff's office and stood beneath the portico which faced the south side of the square. From the shallow, flagged terrace the stone columns rose, arching, weathered, stained with generations of casual tobacco.

Beneath them, steady and constant and with a grave purposelessness (and with here and there, standing motionless or talking to one another from the sides of their mouths, some youngish men, townsmen, some of whom Byron knew as clerks and young lawyers and even merchants, who had a generally identical authoritative air, like policemen in disguise and not especially caring if the disguise hid the policeman or not) countrymen in overalls moved, with almost the air of monks in a cloister, speaking quietly among themselves of money and crops, looking quietly now and then upward at the ceiling beyond which the Grand Jury was preparing behind locked doors to take the life of a man whom few of them had ever seen to know, for having taken the life of a woman whom even fewer of them had known to see.

The wagons and the dusty cars in which they had come to town were ranked about the square, and along the streets and in and out of the stores the wives and daughters who had come to town with them moved in clumps, slowly and also aimlessly as cattle or clouds. Byron stood there for quite a while, motionless, not leaning against anything—a small man who had lived in the town seven years yet whom even fewer of the country people than knew either the murderer or the murdered, knew by name or habit.

Byron was not conscious of this. He did not care now, though a week ago it would have been different. Then he would not have stood here, where any man could look at him and perhaps recognise him: Byron Bunch, that weeded another man's laidby crop, without any halvers. The fellow that took care of another man's whore while the other fellow was busy making a thousand dollars. And got nothing for it. Byron Bunch that protected her good name when the woman that owned the good name and the man she had given it to had both thrown it away, that got the other fellow's bastard born in peace and quiet and at Byron Bunch's expense, and heard a baby cry once for his pay.

Got nothing for it except permission to fetch the other fellow back to her soon as he got done collecting the thousand dollars and Byron wasn't needed anymore. Byron Bunch 'And now I can go away,' he thought. He began to breathe deep. He could feel himself breathing deep, as if each time his insides were afraid that next breath they would not be able to give far enough and that something terrible would happen, and that all the time he could look down at himself breathing, at his chest, and see no movement at all, like when dynamite first begins, gathers itself for the now Now NOW, the shape of the outside of the stick does not change; that the people who passed and looked at him could see no change: a small man you would not look at twice, that you would never believe he had done what he had done and felt what he had felt, who had believed that out there at the mill on a Saturday afternoon, alone, the chance to be hurt could not have found him.

He was walking among the people. 'I got to go somewhere,' he thought. He could walk in time to that: 'I got to go somewhere.' That would get him along. He was still saying it when he reached the boarding house. His room faced the street. Before he realised that he had begun to look toward it, he was looking away. 'I might see somebody reading or smoking in the window,' he thought. He entered the hall.

After the bright morning, he could not see at once. He could smell wet linoleum, soap. 'It's still Monday,' he thought. 'I had forgot that. Maybe it's next Monday. That's what it seems like it ought to be.' He did not call. After a while he could see better. He could hear the mop in the back of the hall or maybe the kitchen. Then against the rectangle of light which was the rear door, also open, he saw Mrs Beard's head leaning out, then her body in full silhouette, advancing up the hall.

"Well," she said, "it's Mister Byron Bunch. Mister Byron Bunch."

"Yessum," he said, thinking, 'Only a fat lady that never had much more trouble than a mopping pail would hold ought not to try to be . . .' Again he could not think of the word that Hightower would know, would use without having to think of it. 'It's like I not only cant do anything without getting him mixed up in it, I cant even think without him to help me out.' — "Yessum," he said. And then he stood there, not even able to tell her that he had come to say goodbye. 'Maybe I aint,' he thought. 'I reckon when a fellow has lived in one room for seven years, he aint going to get moved in one day. Only I reckon that aint going to interfere with her renting out his room.' — "I reckon I owe you a little room rent," he said.

She looked at him: a hard, comfortable face, not unkind either. "Rent for what?" she said. "I thought you was settled. Decided to tent for the summer." She looked at him. Then she told him. She did it gently, delicately, considering. "I done already collected the rent for that room."

“Oh,” he said. “Yes. I see. Yes.” He looked quietly up the scoured, linoleumstripped stairway, scuffed bare by the aid of his own feet. When the new linoleum was put down three years ago, he had been the first of the boarders to mount upon it. “Oh,” he said. “Well, I reckon I better . . .”

She answered that too, immediately, not unkind. “I tended to that. I put everything you left in your grip. It’s back in my room. If you want to go up and look for yourself, though?”

“No. I reckon you got every . . . Well, I reckon I . . .”

She was watching him. “You men,” she said. “It aint a wonder womenfolks get impatient with you. You cant even know your own limits for devilment. Which aint more than I can measure on a pin, at that. I reckon if it wasn’t for getting some woman mixed up in it to help you, you’d ever one of you be drug hollering into heaven before you was ten years old.”

“I reckon you aint got any call to say anything against her,” he said.

“No more I aint. I dont need to. Dont no other woman need to that is going to. I aint saying that it aint been women that has done most of the talking. But if you had more than mansense you would know that women dont mean anything when they talk. It’s menfolks that take talking serious. It aint any woman that believes hard against you and her.

Because it aint any woman but knows that she aint had any reason to have to be bad with you, even discounting that baby. Or any other man right now. She never had to. Aint you and that preacher and ever other man that knows about her already done everything for her that she could think to want? What does she need to be bad for? Tell me that.”

“Yes,” Byron says. He was not looking at her now. “I just come . . .”

She answered that too, before it was spoken. "I reckon you'll be leaving us soon." She was watching him. "What have they done this morning at the courthouse?"

"I don't know. They aint finished yet."

"I bound that, too. They'll take as much time and trouble and county money as they can cleaning up what us women could have cleaned up in ten minutes Saturday night. For being such a fool. Not that Jefferson will miss him. Cant get along without him. But being fool enough to believe that killing a woman will do a man anymore good than killing a man would a woman. . . . I reckon they'll let the other one go, now."

"Yessum. I reckon so."

"And they believed for a while that he helped do it. And so they will give him that thousand dollars to show it aint any hard feelings. And then they can get married. That's about right, aint it?"

"Yessum." He could feel her watching him, not unkindly.

"And so I reckon you'll be leaving us. I reckon you kind of feel like you have wore out Jefferson, dont you?"

"Something like that. I reckon I'll move on."

"Well, Jefferson's a good town. But it aint so good but what a footloose man like you can find in another one enough devilment and trouble to keep him occupied too. . . . You can leave your grip here until you are ready for it, if you want."

He waited until noon and after. He waited until he believed that the sheriff had finished his dinner. Then he went to the sheriff's home. He would not come in. He waited at the door until the sheriff came out—the fat man, with little wise eyes like bits of mica embedded in his fat, still face.

They went aside, into the shade of a tree in the yard. There was no seat there; neither did they squat on their heels, as by ordinary (they were both countrybred) they would have done. The sheriff listened quietly to the man, the quiet little man who for seven years had been a minor mystery to the town and who had been for seven days wellnigh a public outrage and affront.

“I see,” the sheriff said. “You think the time has come to get them married.”

“I dont know. That’s his business and hers. I reckon he better go out and see her, though. I reckon now is the time for that. You can send a deputy with him. I told her he would come out there this evening. What they do then is her business and hisn. It aint mine.”

“Sho,” the sheriff said. “It aint yourn.” He was looking at the other’s profile. “What do you aim to do now, Byron?”

“I dont know.” His foot moved slowly upon the earth; he was watching it. “I been thinking about going up to Memphis. Been thinking about it for a couple of years. I might do that. There aint nothing in these little towns.”

“Sho. Memphis aint a bad town, for them that like city life. Of course, you aint got any family to have to drag around and hamper you. I reckon if I had been a single man ten years ago I’d have done that too. Been better off, maybe. You’re figuring on leaving right away, I reckon.”

“Soon, I reckon.” He looked up, then down again. He said: “I quit out at the mill this morning.”

“Sho,” the sheriff said. “I figured you hadn’t walked all the way in since twelve and aimed to get back out there by one o’clock. Well, it looks like—” He ceased. He knew that by night the Grand Jury would have indicted Christmas, and Brown—or Burch—would be a free agent save for his bond to appear as a witness at next month’s court. But even his presence would not be absolutely essential, since Christmas had made

no denial and the sheriff believed that he would plead guilty in order to save his neck.

‘And it wont do no harm, anyway, to throw the scare of God into that durn fellow, once in his life,’ he thought. He said: “I reckon that can be fixed. Of course, like you say, I will have to send a deputy with him. Even if he aint going to run so long as he has any hope of getting some of that reward money. And provided he dont know what he is going to meet when he gets there. He dont know that yet.”

“No,” Byron said. “He dont know that. He dont know that she is in Jefferson.”

“So I reckon I’ll just send him out there with a deputy. Not tell him why: just send him out there. Unless you want to take him yourself.”

“No,” Byron said. “No. No.” But he did not move.

“I’ll just do that. You’ll be gone by that time, I reckon. I’ll just send a deputy with him. Will four o’clock do?”

“It’ll be fine. It’ll be kind of you. It’ll be a kindness.”

“Sho. Lots of folks beside me has been good to her since she come to Jefferson. Well, I aint going to say goodbye. I reckon Jefferson will see you again someday. Never knowed a man yet to live here a while and then leave it for good. Except maybe that fellow in the jail yonder. But he’ll plead guilty, I reckon. Save his neck. Take it out of Jefferson though, anyway. It’s right hard on that old lady that thinks she is his grandmother.

The old man was downtown when I come home, hollering and ranting, calling folks cowards because they wouldn’t take him out of jail right then and there and lynch him.” He began to chuckle, heavily. “He better be careful, or Percy Grimm’ll get him with that army of his.” He sobered. “It’s right hard on her. On women.” He looked at Byron’s

profile. "It's been right hard on a lot of us. Well, you come back some day soon. Maybe Jefferson will treat you better next time."

At four o'clock that afternoon, hidden, he sees the car come up and stop, and the deputy and the man whom he knew by the name of Brown get out and approach the cabin. Brown is not handcuffed now, and Byron watches them reach the cabin and sees the deputy push Brown forward and into the door.

Then the door closes behind Brown, and the deputy sits on the step and takes a sack of tobacco from his pocket. Byron rises to his feet. 'I can go now,' he thinks. 'Now I can go.' His hiding place is a clump of shrubbery on the lawn where the house once stood. On the opposite side of the clump, hidden from the cabin and the road both, the mule is tethered. Lashed behind the worn saddle is a battered yellow suitcase which is not leather. He mounts the mule and turns it into the road. He does not look back.

The mild red road goes on beneath the slanting and peaceful afternoon, mounting a hill. 'Well, I can bear a hill,' he thinks. 'I can bear a hill, a man can.' It is peaceful and still, familiar with seven years. 'It seems like a man can just about bear anything. He can even bear what he never done. He can even bear the thinking how some things is just more than he can bear. He can even bear it that if he could just give down and cry, he wouldn't do it. He can even bear it to not look back, even when he knows that looking back or not looking back wont do him any good.'

The hill rises, cresting. He has never seen the sea, and so he thinks. 'It is like the edge of nothing. Like once I passed it I would just ride right off into nothing. Where trees would look like and be called by something else except trees, and men would look like and be called by something else except folks. And Byron Bunch he wouldn't even have to be or not be Byron Bunch. Byron Bunch and his mule not anything with falling fast, until they would take fire like the Reverend Hightower says about them rocks running so fast in space that they take fire and burn up and there aint even a cinder to have to hit the ground.'

But then from beyond the hill crest there begins to rise that which he knows is there: the trees which are trees, the terrific and tedious distance which, being moved by blood, he must compass forever and ever between two inescapable horizons of the implacable earth. Steadily they rise, not portentous, not threatening. That's it. They are oblivious of him. 'Dont know and dont care,' he thinks. 'Like they were saying All right. You say you suffer.'

All right. But in the first place, all we got is your naked word for it. And in the second place, you just say that you are Byron Bunch. And in the third place, you are just the one that calls yourself Byron Bunch today, now, this minute. . . . 'Well,' he thinks, 'if that's all it is, I reckon I might as well have the pleasure of not being able to bear looking back too.' He halts the mule and turns in the saddle.

He did not realise that he has come so far and that the crest is so high. Like a shallow bowl the once broad domain of what was seventy years ago a plantation house lies beneath him, between him and the opposite ridge upon which is Jefferson. But the plantation is broken now by random negro cabins and garden patches and dead fields erosion gutted and choked with blackjack and sassafras and persimmon and brier.

But in the exact center the clump of oaks still stand as they stood when the house was built, though now there is no house among them. From here he cannot even see the scars of the fire; he could not even tell where it used to stand if it were not for the oaks and the position of the ruined stable and the cabin beyond, the cabin toward which he is looking. It stands full and quiet in the afternoon sun, almost toylike; like a toy the deputy sits on the step.

Then, as Byron watches, a man appears as though by magic at the rear of it, already running, in the act of running out from the rear of the cabin while the unsuspecting deputy sits quiet and motionless on the front step. For a while longer Byron too sits motionless, half turned in the saddle, and watches the tiny figure flee on across the barren slope behind the cabin, toward the woods.

Then a cold, hard wind seems to blow through him. It is at once violent and peaceful, blowing hard away like chaff or trash or dead leaves all the desire and the despair and the hopelessness and the tragic and vain imagining too. With the very blast of it he seems to feel himself rush back and empty again, without anything in him now which had not been there two weeks ago, before he ever saw her. The desire of this moment is more than desire: it is conviction quiet and assured; before he is aware that his brain has telegraphed his hand he has turned the mule from the road and is galloping along the ridge which parallels the running man's course when he entered the woods. He has not even named the man's name to himself.

He does not speculate at all upon where the man is going, and why. It does not once enter his head that Brown is fleeing again, as he himself had predicted. If he thought about it at all, he probably believed that Brown was engaged, after his own peculiar fashion, in some thoroughly legitimate business having to do with his and Lena's departure. But he was not thinking about that at all; he was not thinking about Lena at all; she was as completely out of his mind as if he had never seen her face nor heard her name. He is thinking: 'I took care of his woman for him and I borned his child for him. And now there is one more thing I can do for him. I cant marry them, because I aint a minister. And I may not can catch him, because he's got a start on me. And I may not can whip him if I do, because he is bigger than me. But I can try it. I can try to do it.'

When the deputy called for him at the jail, Brown asked at once where they were going. Visiting, the deputy told him. Brown held back, watching the deputy with his handsome, spuriously bold face. "I dont want to visit nobody here. I'm a stranger here."

"You'd be strange anywhere you was at," the deputy said. "Even at home. Come on."

"I'm a American citizen," Brown said. "I reckon I got my rights, even if I dont wear no tin star on my galluses."

“Sho,” the deputy said. “That’s what I am doing now: helping you get your rights.”

Brown’s face lighted: it was a flash. “Have they— Are they going to pay—”

“That reward? Sho. I’m going to take you to the place myself right now, where if you are going to get any reward, you’ll get it.”

Brown sobered. But he moved, though he still watched the deputy suspiciously. “This here is a funny way to go about it,” he said. “Keeping me shut up in jail while them bastards tries to beat me out of it.”

“I reckon the bastard aint been whelped yet that can beat you at anything,” the deputy said. “Come on. They’re waiting on us.”

They emerged from the jail. In the sunlight Brown blinked, looking this way and that, then he jerked his head up, looking back over his shoulder with that horselike movement. The car was waiting at the curb. Brown looked at the car and then at the deputy, quite sober, quite wary. “Where are we going in a car?” he said. “It wasn’t too far for me to walk to the courthouse this morning.”

“Watt sent the car to help bring back the reward in,” the deputy said. “Get in.”

Brown grunted. “He’s done got mighty particular about my comfort all of a sudden. A car to ride in, and no handcuffs. And just one durn fellow to keep me from running away.”

“I aint keeping you from running,” the deputy said. He paused in the act of starting the car. “You want to run now?”

Brown looked at him, glaring, sullen, outraged, suspicious. “I see,” he said. “That’s his trick. Trick me into running and then collect that thousand dollars himself. How much of it did he promise you?”

“Me? I’m going to get the same as you, to a cent.”

For a moment longer Brown glared at the deputy. He cursed, pointless, in a weak, violent way. “Come on,” he said. “Let’s go if we are going.”

They drove out to the scene of the fire and the murder. At steady, almost timed intervals Brown jerked his head up and back with that movement of a free mule running in front of a car in a narrow road. “What are we going out here for?”

“To get your reward,” the deputy said.

“Where am I going to get it?”

“In that cabin yonder. It’s waiting for you there.”

Brown looked about, at the blackened embers which had once been a house, at the blank cabin in which he had lived for four months sitting weathered and quiet in the sunlight. His face was quite grave, quite alert. “There’s something funny about this. If Kennedy thinks he can tromple on my rights, just because he wears a darn little tin star . . .”

“Get on,” the deputy said. “If you dont like the reward, I’ll be waiting to take you back to jail any time you want. Just any time you want.” He pushed Brown on, opening the cabin door and pushing him into it and closing the door behind him and sitting on the step.

Brown heard the door close behind him. He was still moving forward. Then, in the midst of one of those quick, jerking, all-embracing looks, as if his eyes could not wait to take in the room, he stopped dead still. Lena on the cot watched the white scar beside his mouth vanish completely, as if the ebb of blood behind it had snatched the scar in passing like a rag from a clothesline. She did not speak at all. She just lay there, propped on the pillows, watching him with her sober eyes in which there was nothing at all—joy, surprise, reproach, love—while over his face passed shock, astonishment, outrage, and then downright terror, each one mocking in turn at the telltale little white scar, while

ceaselessly here and there about the empty room went his harried and desperate eyes. She watched him herd them by will, like two terrified beasts, and drive them up to meet her own.

“Well, well,” he said. “Well, well, well. It’s Lena.” She watched him, holding his eyes up to hers like two beasts about to break, as if he knew that when they broke this time he would never catch them, turn them again, and that he himself would be lost. She could almost watch his mind casting this way and that, ceaseless, harried, terrified, seeking words which his voice, his tongue, could speak. “If it aint Lena. Yes, sir. So you got my message. Soon as I got here I sent you a message last month as soon as I got settled down and I thought it had got lost— It was a fellow I didn’t know what his name was but he said he would take— He didn’t look reliable but I had to trust him but I thought when I gave him the ten dollars for you to travel on that he . . .” His voice died somewhere behind his desperate eyes.

Yet still she could watch his mind darting and darting as without pity, without anything at all, she watched him with her grave, unwinking, unbearable gaze, watched him fumble and flee and tack until at last all that remained in him of pride, of what sorry pride the desire for justification was, fled from him and left him naked. Then for the first time she spoke. Her voice was quiet, unruffled, cool.

“Come over here,” she said. “Come on. I aint going to let him bite you.” When he moved he approached on tiptoe. She saw that, though she was now no longer watching him. She knew that just as she knew that he was now standing with a kind of clumsy and diffident awe above her and the sleeping child. But she knew that it was not at and because of the child. She knew that in that sense he had not even seen the child. She could still see, feel, his mind darting and darting. He is going to make out like he was not afraid she thought. He will have no more shame than to lie about being afraid, just as he had no more shame than to be afraid because he lied

“Well, well,” he said. “So there it is, sho enough.”

“Yes,” she said. “Will you set down?” The chair which Hightower had drawn up was still beside the cot. He had already remarked it. She had it all ready for me he thought. Again he cursed, soundless, badgered, furious. Them bastards. Them bastards But his face was quite smooth when he sat down.

“Yes, sir. Here we are again. Same as I had planned it. I would have had it all fixed up ready for you, only I have been so busy lately. Which reminds me—” Again he made that abrupt, mulelike, backlooking movement of the head. She was not looking at him. She said:

“There is a preacher here. That has already come to see me.”

“That’s fine,” he said. His voice was loud, hearty. Yet the heartiness, like the timbre, seemed to be as impermanent as the sound of the words, vanishing, leaving nothing, not even a definitely stated thought in the ear or the belief. “That’s just fine. Soon as I get caught up with all this business—” He jerked his arm in a gesture vague, embracing, looking at her. His face was smooth and blank. His eyes were bland, alert, secret, yet behind them there lurked still that quality harried and desperate. But she was not looking at him.

“What kind of work are you doing now? At the planing mill?”

He watched her. “No. I quit that.” His eyes watched her. It was as though they were not his eyes, had no relation to the rest of him, what he did and what he said. “Slaving like a durn nigger ten hours a day. I got something on the string now that means money. Not no little piddling fifteen cents a hour. And when I get it, soon as I get a few little details cleared up, then you and me will . . .” Hard, intent, secret, the eyes watched her, her lowered face in profile. Again she heard that faint, abrupt sound as he jerked his head up and back. “And that reminds me—”

She had not moved. She said: “When will it be, Lucas?” Then she could hear, feel, utter stillness, utter silence.

“When will what be?”

“You know. Like you said. Back home. It was all right for just me. I never minded. But it’s different now. I reckon I got a right to worry now.”

“Oh, that,” he said. “That. Dont you worry about that. Just let me get this here business cleaned up and get my hands on that money. It’s mine by right. There cant nere a bastard one of them—” He stopped. His voice had begun to rise, as though he had forgot where he was and had been thinking aloud. He lowered it; he said: “You just leave it to me. Dont you worry none. I aint never give you no reason yet to worry, have I? Tell me that.”

“No. I never worried. I knowed I could depend on you.”

“Sho you knowed it. And these here bastards—these here—” He had risen from the chair. “Which reminds me—” She neither looked up nor spoke while he stood above her with those eyes harried, desperate, and importunate. It was as if she held him there and that she knew it. And that she released him by her own will, deliberately.

“I reckon you are right busy now, then.”

“For a fact, I am. With all I got to bother me, and them bastards—” She was looking at him now. She watched him as he looked at the window in the rear wall. Then he looked back at the closed door behind him. Then he looked at her, at her grave face which had either nothing in it, or everything, all knowledge. He lowered his voice. “I got enemies here. Folks that dont want me to get what I done earned. So I am going to—” Again it was as though she held him, forcing him to, trying him with, that final lie at which even his sorry dregs of pride revolted; held him neither with rods nor cords but with something against which his lying blew trivial as leaves or trash. But she said nothing at all. She just watched him as he went on tiptoe to the window and opened it without a sound. Then he looked at her.

Perhaps he thought that he was safe then, that he could get out the window before she could touch him with a physical hand. Or perhaps it was some sorry tagend of shame, as a while ago it had been pride. Because he looked at her, stripped naked for the instant of verbiage and deceit. His voice was not much louder than a whisper: "It's a man outside. In front, waiting for me." Then he was gone, through the window, without a sound, in a single motion almost like a long snake. From beyond the window she heard a single faint sound as he began to run. Then only did she move, and then but to sigh once, profoundly.

"Now I got to get up again," she said, aloud.

When Brown emerges from the woods, onto the railroad right-of-way, he is panting. It is not with fatigue, though the distance which he has covered in the last twenty minutes is almost two miles and the going was not smooth. Rather, it is the snarling and malevolent breathing of a fleeing animal: while he stands looking both ways along the empty track his face, his expression, is that of an animal fleeing alone, desiring no fellowaid, clinging to its solitary dependence upon its own muscles alone and which, in the pause to renew breath, hates every tree and grassblade in sight as if it were a live enemy, hates the very earth it rests upon and the very air it needs to renew breathing.

He has struck the railroad within a few hundred yards of the point at which he aimed. This is the crest of a grade where the northbound freights slow to a terrific and crawling gait of almost less than that of a walking man. A short distance ahead of him the twin bright threads appear to have been cut short off as though with scissors.

For a while he stands just within the screen of woods beside the right-of-way, still hidden. He stands like a man in brooding and desperate calculation, as if he sought in his mind for some last desperate cast in a game already lost. After standing for a moment longer in an attitude of listening, he turns and runs again, through the woods and paralleling the track.

He seems to know exactly where he is going; he comes presently upon a path and follows it, still running, and emerges into a clearing in which a negro cabin sits. He approaches the front, walking now. On the porch an old negro woman is sitting, smoking a pipe, her head wrapped in a white cloth. Brown is not running, but he is breathing fast, heavily. He quiets it to speak. "Hi, Aunty," he says, "who's here?"

The old negress removes the pipe. "Ise here. Who wanter know?"

"I got to send a message back to town. In a hurry." He holds his breathing down to talk. "I'll pay. Aint there somebody here that can take it?"

"If it's all that rush, you better tend to it yourself."

"I'll pay, I tell you!" he says. He speaks with a kind of raging patience, holding his voice, his breathing, down. "A dollar, if he just goes quick enough. Aint there somebody here that wants to make a dollar? Some of the boys?"

The old woman smokes, watching him. With an aged and inscrutable midnight face she seems to contemplate him with a detachment almost godlike but not at all benign. "A dollar cash?"

He makes a gesture indescribable, of hurry and leashed rage and something like despair. He is about to turn away when the negress speaks again. "Aint nobody here but me and the two little uns. I reckon they'd be too little for you."

Brown turns back. "How little? I just want somebody that can take a note to the sheriff in a hurry and—"

"The sheriff? Then you come to the wrong place. I aint ghy have none of mine monkeying around no sheriff. I done had one nigger that thought he knowed a sheriff well enough to go and visit with him. He aint never come back, neither. You look somewhere else."

But Brown is already moving away. He does not run at once. He has not yet thought about running again; for the moment he cannot think at all. His rage and impotence is now almost ecstatic. He seems to muse now upon a sort of timeless and beautiful infallibility in his unpredictable frustrations. As though somehow the very fact that he should be so consistently supplied with them elevates him somehow above the petty human hopes and desires which they abrogate and negate. Hence the negress has to shout twice at him before he hears and turns. She has said nothing, she has not moved: she merely shouted. She says, "Here one will take it for you."

Standing beside the porch now, materialised apparently from thin air, is a negro who may be either a grown imbecile or a hulking youth. His face is black, still, also quite inscrutable. They stand looking at one another. Or rather, Brown looks at the negro. He cannot tell if the negro is looking at him or not. And that too seems somehow right and fine and in keeping: that his final hope and resort should be a beast that does not appear to have enough ratiocinative power to find the town, let alone any given individual in it.

Again Brown makes an indescribable gesture. He is almost running now, back toward the porch, pawing at his shirt pocket. "I want you to take a note to town and bring me back an answer," he says. "Can you do it?" But he does not listen for a reply. He has taken from his shirt a scrap of soiled paper and a chewed pencil stub, and bending over the edge of the porch, he writes, laborious and hurried, while the negress watches him:

Mr Wat Kenedy Dear sir please give barer My reward Money for
captain Murder Xmas rapp it up in Paper 4 given it toe barer yrs truly

He does not sign it. He snatches it up, glaring at it, while the negress watches him. He glares at the dingy and innocent paper, at the labored and hurried pencilling in which he had succeeded for an instant in snaring his whole soul and life too. Then he claps it down and writes not Sined but All rigt You no who and folds it and gives it to the negro.

“Take it to the sheriff. Not to nobody else. You reckon you can find him?”

“If the sheriff dont find him first,” the old negress says. “Give it to him. He’ll find him, if he is above ground. Git your dollar and go on, boy.”

The negro had started away. He stops. He just stands there, saying nothing, looking at nothing. On the porch the negress sits, smoking, looking down at the white man’s weak, wolflike face: a face handsome, plausible, but drawn now by a fatigue more than physical, into a spent and vulpine mask. “I thought you was in a hurry,” she says.

“Yes,” Brown says. He takes a coin from his pocket. “Here. And if you bring me back the answer to that inside of an hour. I’ll give you five more like it.”

“Git on, nigger,” the woman says. “You aint got all day. You want the answer brought back here?”

For a moment longer Brown looks at her. Then again caution, shame, all flees from him. “No. Not here. Bring it to the top of the grade yonder. Walk up the track until I call to you. I’ll be watching you all the time too. Dont you forget that. Do you hear?”

“You needn’t to worry,” the negress says. “He’ll git there with it and git back with the answer, if dont nothing stop him. Git on, boy.”

The negro goes on. But something does stop him, before he has gone a half mile. It is another white man, leading a mule.

“Where?” Byron says. “Where did you see him?”

“Just now. Up yon at de house.” The white man goes on, leading the mule. The negro looks after him. He did not show the white man the note because the white man did not ask to see it. Perhaps the reason the white man did not ask to see the note was that the white man did not know that he had a note; perhaps the negro is thinking this,

because for a while his face mirrors something terrific and subterranean. Then it clears. He shouts. The white man turns, halting. "He aint dar now," the negro shouts. "He say he gwine up ter de railroad grade to wait."

"Much obliged," the white man says. The negro goes on.

Brown returned to the track. He was not running now. He was saying to himself, 'He wont do it. He cant do it. I know he cant find him, cant get it, bring it back.' He called no names, thought no names. It seemed to him now that they were all just shapes like chessmen—the negro, the sheriff, the money, all—unpredictable and without reason moved here and there by an Opponent who could read his moves before he made them and who created spontaneous rules which he and not the Opponent, must follow. He was for the time being even beyond despair as he turned from the rails and entered the underbrush near the crest of the grade. He moved now without haste, gauging his distance as though there were nothing else in the world or in his life at least, save that. He chose his place and sat down, hidden from the track but where he himself could see it.

'Only I know he wont do it,' he thinks. 'I dont even expect it. If I was to see him coming back with the money in his hand, I would not believe it. It wouldn't be for me. I would know that. I would know that it was a mistake. I would say to him You go on. You are looking for somebody else beside me. You aint looking for Lucas Burch. No, sir, Lucas Burch dont deserve that money, that reward. He never done nothing to get it.

No, sir' He begins to laugh, squatting, motionless, his spent face bent, laughing. 'Yes, sir. All Lucas Burch wanted was justice. Just justice. Not that he told them bastards the murderer's name and where to find him only they wouldn't try. They never tried because they would have had to give Lucas Burch the money. Justice.' Then he says aloud, in a harsh, tearful voice: "Justice. That was all. Just my rights. And them bastards with their little tin stars, all sworn everyone of them on oath, to protect a American citizen." He says it harshly, almost crying with rage and despair and fatigue: "I be dog if it aint enough to make a man turn

downright bowlsheyvick.” Thus he hears no sound at all until Byron speaks directly behind him:

“Get up onto your feet.”

It does not last long. Byron knew that it was not going to. But he did not hesitate. He just crept up until he could see the other, where he stopped, looking at the crouching and unwarned figure. ‘You’re bigger than me,’ Byron thought. ‘But I dont care. You’ve had every other advantage of me. And I dont care about that neither. You’ve done throwed away twice inside of nine months what I aint had in thirtyfive years. And now I’m going to get the hell beat out of me and I dont care about that, neither.’

It does not last long. Brown, whirling, takes advantage of his astonishment even. He did not believe that any man, catching his enemy sitting, would give him a chance to get on his feet, even if the enemy were not the larger of the two. He would not have done it himself. And the fact that the smaller man did do it when he would not have, was worse than insult: it was ridicule. So he fought with even a more savage fury than he would have if Byron had sprung upon his back without warning: with the blind and desperate valor of a starved and cornered rat he fought.

It lasted less than two minutes. Then Byron was lying quietly among the broken and trampled undergrowth, bleeding quietly about the face, hearing the underbrush crashing on, ceasing, fading into silence. Then he is alone. He feels no particular pain now, but better than that, he feels no haste, no urgency, to do anything or go anywhere. He just lies bleeding and quiet, knowing that after a while will be time enough to reenter the world and time.

He does not even wonder where Brown has gone. He does not have to think about Brown now. Again his mind is filled with still shapes like discarded and fragmentary toys of childhood piled indiscriminate and gathering quiet dust in a forgotten closet—Brown. Lena Grove. Hightower. Byron Bunch—all like small objects which had never been

alive, which he had played with in childhood and then broken and forgot. He is lying so when he hears the train whistle for a crossing a half mile away.

This rouses him; this is the world and time too. He sits up, slowly, tentatively. 'Anyway, I aint broke anything,' he thinks. 'I mean, he aint broke anything that belongs to me.' It is getting late: it is time now, with distance, moving, in it. 'Yes. I'll have to be moving. I'll have to get on so I can find me something else to meddle with.' The train is coming nearer. Already the stroke of the engine has shortened and become heavier as it begins to feel the grade; presently he can see the smoke.

He seeks in his pocket for a handkerchief. He has none, so he tears the tail from his shirt and dabs at his face gingerly, listening to the short, blasting reports of the locomotive exhaust just over the grade. He moves to the edge of the undergrowth, where he can see the track. The engine is in sight now, almost headon to him beneath the spaced, heavy blasts of black smoke.

It has an effect of terrific motion. Yet it does move, creeping terrifically up and over the crest of the grade. Standing now in the fringe of bushes he watches the engine approach and pass him, laboring, crawling, with the rapt and boylike absorption (and perhaps yearning) of his country raising. It passes; his eye moves on, watching the cars as they in turn crawl up and over the crest, when for the second time that afternoon he sees a man materialise apparently out of air, in the act of running.

Even then he does not realise what Brown is about. He has progressed too far into peace and solitude to wonder. He just stands there and watches Brown run to the train, stooping, fleeing, and grasp the iron ladder at the end of a car and leap upward and vanish from sight as though sucked into a vacuum. The train is beginning to increase its speed; he watches the approach of the car where Brown vanished. It passes; clinging to the rear of it, between it and the next car, Brown stands, his face leaned out and watching the bushes.

They see one another at the same moment: the two faces, the mild, nondescript, bloody one and the lean, harried, desperate one contorted now in a soundless shouting above the noise of the train, passing one another as though on opposite orbits and with an effect as of phantoms or apparitions. Still Byron is not thinking.

“Great God in the mountain,” he says, with childlike and almost ecstatic astonishment; “he sho knows how to jump a train. He’s sho done that before.” He is not thinking at all. It is as though the moving wall of dingy cars were a dyke beyond which the world, time, hope unbelievable and certainty incontrovertible, waited, giving him yet a little more of peace. Anyway, when the last car passes, moving fast now, the world rushes down on him like a flood, a tidal wave.

It is too huge and fast for distance and time; hence no path to be retraced, leading the mule for a good way before he remembers to get on it and ride. It is as though he has already and long since outstripped himself, already waiting at the cabin until he can catch up and enter. And then I will stand there and I will . . . He tries it again: Then I will stand there and I will . . . But he can get no further than that. He is in the road again now, approaching a wagon homeward bound from town. It is about six o’clock. He does not give up, however. Even if I cant seem to get any further than that: when I will open the door and come in and stand there. And then I will. Look at her. Look at her. Look at her— The voice speaks again:

“—excitement, I reckon.”

“What?” Byron says. The wagon has halted. He is right beside it, the mule stopped too. On the wagon seat the man speaks again, in his flat, complaining voice:

“Durn the luck. Just when I had to get started for home. I’m already late.”

“Excitement?” Byron says. “What excitement?”

The man is looking at him. "From your face, a man would say you had been in some excitement yourself."

"I fell down," Byron says. "What excitement in town this evening?"

"I thought maybe you hadn't heard. About an hour ago. That nigger, Christmas. They killed him."

Chapter 19

About the suppertables on that Monday night, what the town wondered was not so much how Christmas had escaped but why when free, he had taken refuge in the place which he did, where he must have known he would be certainly run to earth, and why when that occurred he neither surrendered nor resisted. It was as though he had set out and made his plans to passively commit suicide.

There were many reasons, opinions, as to why he had fled to Hightower's house at the last. "Like to like," the easy, the immediate, ones said, remembering the old tales about the minister. Some believed it to have been sheer chance; others said that the man had shown wisdom, since he would not have been suspected of being in the minister's house at all if someone had not seen him run across the back yard and run into the kitchen.

Gavin Stevens though had a different theory. He is the District Attorney, a Harvard graduate, a Phi Beta Kappa: a tall, loose-jointed man with a constant cob pipe, with an untidy mop of irongray hair, wearing always loose and unpressed dark gray clothes.

His family is old in Jefferson; his ancestors owned slaves there and his grandfather knew (and also hated, and publicly congratulated Colonel Sartoris when they died) Miss Burden's grandfather and brother.

He has an easy quiet way with country people, with the voters and the juries; he can be seen now and then squatting among the overalls on

the porches of country stores for a whole summer afternoon, talking to them in their own idiom about nothing at all.

On this Monday night there descended from the nine o'clock southbound train a college professor from the neighboring State University, a schoolmate of Stevens' at Harvard, come to spend a few days of the vacation with his friend. When he descended from the train he saw his friend at once. He believed that Stevens had come down to meet him until he saw that Stevens was engaged with a queer-looking old couple whom he was putting on the train. Looking at them, the professor saw a little, dirty old man with a short goat's beard who seemed to be in a state like catalepsy, and an old woman who must have been his wife—a dumpy creature with a face like dough beneath a nodding and soiled white plume, shapeless in a silk dress of an outmoded shape and in color regal and moribund.

For an instant the professor paused in a sort of astonished interest, watching Stevens putting into the woman's hand, as into the hand of a child, two railroad tickets; moving again and approaching and still unseen by his friend, he overheard Stevens' final words as the flagman helped the old people into the vestibule: "Yes, yes," Stevens was saying, in a tone soothing and recapitulant; "he'll be on the train tomorrow morning. I'll see to it. All you'll have to do is to arrange for the funeral, the cemetery. You take Granddad on home and put him to bed. I'll see that the boy is on the train in the morning."

Then the train began to move and Stevens turned and saw the professor. He began the story as they rode to town and finished it as they sat on the veranda of Stevens' home, and there recapitulated. "I think I know why it was, why he ran into Hightower's house for refuge at the last. I think it was his grandmother. She had just been with him in his cell when they took him back to the courthouse again; she and the grandfather—that little crazed old man who wanted to lynch him, who came up here from Mottstown for that purpose.

I don't think that the old lady had any hope of saving him when she came, any actual hope. I believe that all she wanted was that he die

'decent,' as she put it. Decently hung by a Force, a principle; not burned or hacked or dragged dead by a Thing.

I think she came here just to watch that old man, lest he be the straw that started the hurricane, because she did not dare let him out of her sight. Not that she doubted that Christmas was her grandchild, you understand. She just didn't hope. Didn't know how to begin to hope. I imagine that after thirty years the machinery for hoping requires more than twentyfour hours to get started, to get into motion again.

"But I believe that, having got started physically by the tide of the old man's insanity and conviction, before she knew it she had been swept away too. So they came here. They got here on the early train, about three o'clock Sunday morning. She made no attempt to see Christmas. Perhaps she was watching the old man. But I dont think so. I dont think that the hoping machine had got started then, either. I dont think that it ever did start until that baby was born out there this morning, born right in her face, you might say; a boy too. And she had never seen the mother before, and the father at all, and that grandson whom she had never seen as a man; so to her those thirty years just were not. Obliterated when that child cried. No longer existed.

"It was all coming down on her too fast. There was too much reality that her hands and eyes could not deny, and too much that must be taken for granted that her hands and eyes could not prove; too much of the inexplicable that hands and eyes were asked too suddenly to accept and believe without proof. After the thirty years it must have been like a person in solitary blundering suddenly into a room full of strange people all talking at once and she casting desperately about for anything that would hold sanity together by choosing some logical course of action which would be within her limitations, which she could have some assurance of being able to perform. Until that baby was born and she found some means by which she could stand alone, as it were, she had been like an effigy with a mechanical voice being hauled about on a cart by that fellow Bunch and made to speak when he gave the signal, as when he took her last night to tell her story to Doctor Hightower.

“And she was still groping, you see. She was still trying to find something which that mind which had apparently not run very much in thirty years, could believe in, admit to be actual, real. And I think that she found it there, at Hightower’s, for the first time: someone to whom she could tell it, who would listen to her. Very likely that was the first time she had ever told it. And very likely she learned it herself then for the first time, actually saw it whole and real at the same time with Hightower.

So I dont think it is so strange that for the time she got not only the child but his parentage as well mixed up, since in that cabin those thirty years did not exist—the child and its father whom she had never seen, and her grandson whom she had not seen since he was a baby like the other, and whose father likewise to her had never existed, all confused. And that, when hope did begin to move in her, she should have turned at once, with that sublime and boundless faith of her kind in those who are the voluntary slaves and the sworn bondsmen of prayer, to the minister.

“That’s what she was telling Christmas in the jail today, when the old man, watching his chance, had slipped away from her and she followed him to town and found him on the street corner again, mad as a hatter and completely hoarse, preaching lynching, telling the people how he had grandfathered the devil’s spawn and had kept it in trust for this day. Or perhaps she was on her way to see him in the jail when she left the cabin. Anyway she left the old man alone as soon as she saw that his audience was more interested than moved, and went on to the sheriff.

He had just got back from dinner and for a while he could not understand what she wanted. She must have sounded quite crazy to him, with that story of hers, in that hopelessly respectable Sunday dress, planning a jailbreak. But he let her go to the jail, with a deputy. And there, in the cell with him, I believe she told him about Hightower, that Hightower could save him, was going to save him.

“But of course I don't know what she told him. I don't believe that any man could reconstruct that scene. I don't think that she knew herself, planned at all what she would say, because it had already been written and worded for her on the night when she bore his mother, and that was now so long ago that she had learned it beyond all forgetting and then forgot the words. Perhaps that's why he believed her at once, without question. I mean, because she did not worry about what to say, about plausibility or the possibility of incredulity on his part: that somewhere, somehow, in the shape or presence or whatever of that old outcast minister was a sanctuary which would be inviolable not only to officers and mobs, but to the very irrevocable past; to whatever crimes had molded and shaped him and left him at last high and dry in a barred cell with the shape of an incipient executioner everywhere he looked.

“And he believed her. I think that is what gave him not the courage so much as the passive patience to endure and recognise and accept the one opportunity which he had to break in the middle of that crowded square, manacled, and run. But there was too much running with him, stride for stride with him. Not pursuers: but himself: years, acts, deeds omitted and committed, keeping pace with him, stride for stride, breath for breath, thud for thud of the heart, using a single heart. It was not alone all those thirty years which she did not know, but all those successions of thirty years before that which had put that stain either on his white blood or his black blood, whichever you will, and which killed him. But he must have run with believing for a while; anyway, with hope. But his blood would not be quiet, let him save it.

It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself. Because the black blood drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it. And it was the white blood which sent him to the minister, which rising in him for the last and final time, sent him against all reason and all reality, into the embrace of a chimera, a blind faith in something read in a printed Book. Then I believe that the white blood deserted him for the moment.

Just a second, a flicker, allowing the black to rise in its final moment and make him turn upon that on which he had postulated his hope of salvation. It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment. And then the black blood failed him again, as it must have in crises all his life. He did not kill the minister. He merely struck him with the pistol and ran on and crouched behind that table and defied the black blood for the last time, as he had been defying it for thirty years. He crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand.”

In the town on that day lived a young man named Percy Grimm. He was about twentyfive and a captain in the State national guard. He had been born in the town and had lived there all his life save for the periods of the summer encampments. He was too young to have been in the European War, though it was not until 1921 or '22 that he realised that he would never forgive his parents for that fact. His father, a hardware merchant, did not understand this.

He thought that the boy was just lazy and in a fair way to become perfectly worthless, when in reality the boy was suffering the terrible tragedy of having been born not alone too late but not late enough to have escaped first hand knowledge of the lost time when he should have been a man instead of a child. And now, with the hysteria passed away and the ones who had been loudest in the hysteria and even the ones, the heroes who had suffered and served, beginning to look at one another a little askance, he had no one to tell it, to open his heart to. In fact, his first serious fight was with an exsoldier who made some remark to the effect that if he had to do it again, he would fight this time on the German side and against France. At once Grimm took him up. “Against America too?” he said.

“If America’s fool enough to help France out again,” the soldier said. Grimm struck him at once; he was smaller than the soldier, still in his

teens. The result was foregone; even Grimm doubtless knew that. But he took his punishment until even the soldier begged the bystanders to hold the boy back. And he wore the scars of that battle as proudly as he was later to wear the uniform itself for which he had blindly fought.

It was the new civilian-military act which saved him. He was like a man who had been for a long time in a swamp, in the dark. It was as though he not only could see no path ahead of him, he knew that there was none. Then suddenly his life opened definite and clear. The wasted years in which he had shown no ability in school, in which he had been known as lazy, recalcitrant, without ambition, were behind him, forgotten.

He could now see his life opening before him, uncomplex and inescapable as a barren corridor, completely freed now of ever again having to think or decide, the burden which he now assumed and carried as bright and weightless and martial as his insignatory brass: a sublime and implicit faith in physical courage and blind obedience, and a belief that the white race is superior to any and all other races and that the American is superior to all other white races and that the American uniform is superior to all men, and that all that would ever be required of him in payment for this belief, this privilege, would be his own life.

On each national holiday that had any martial flavor whatever he dressed in his captain's uniform and came down town. And those who saw him remembered him again on the day of the fight with the exsoldier as, glittering, with his marksman's badge (he was a fine shot) and his bars, grave, erect, he walked among the civilians with about him an air half belligerent and half the selfconscious pride of a boy.

He was not a member of the American Legion, but that was his parents' fault and not his. But when Christmas was fetched back from Mottstown on that Saturday afternoon, he had already been to the commander of the local Post. His idea, his words, were quite simple and direct. "We got to preserve order," he said. "We must let the law take its course. The law, the nation. It is the right of no civilian to

sentence a man to death. And we, the soldiers in Jefferson, are the ones to see to that.”

“How do you know that anybody is planning anything different?” the legion commander said. “Have you heard any talk?”

“I dont know. I haven’t listened.” He didn’t lie. It was as though he did not attach enough importance to what might or might not have been said by the civilian citizens to lie about it. “That’s not the question. It’s whether or not we, as soldiers, that have worn the uniform, are going to be the first to state where we stand. To show these people right off just where the government of the country stands on such things. That there wont be any need for them even to talk.” His plan was quite simple. It was to form the legion Post into a platoon, with himself in command vide his active commission. “But if they dont want me to command, that’s all right too. I’ll be second, if they say. Or a sergeant or a corporal.” And he meant it. It was not vain glory that he wanted. He was too sincere. So sincere, so humorless, that the legion commander withheld the flippant refusal he was about to make.

“I still dont think that there is any need of it. And if there was, we would all have to act as civilians. I couldn’t use the Post like that. After all, we are not soldiers now. I dont think I would, if I could.”

Grimm looked at him, without anger, but rather as if he were some kind of bug. “Yet you wore the uniform once,” he said, with a kind of patience. He said: “I suppose you wont use your authority to keep me from talking to them, will you? As individuals?”

“No. I haven’t any authority to do that, anyway. But just as individuals, mind. You mustn’t use my name at all.”

Then Grimm gave him a shot on his own account. “I am not likely to do that,” he said. Then he was gone. That was Saturday, about four o’clock. For the rest of that afternoon he circulated about the stores and offices where the legion members worked, so that by nightfall he had enough of them also worked up to his own pitch to compose a fair

platoon. He was indefatigable, restrained yet forceful; there was something about him irresistible and prophetlike. Yet the recruits were with the commander in one thing: the official designation of the legion must be kept out of it—whereupon and without deliberate intent, he had gained his original end: he was now in command. He got them all together just before suppertime and divided them into squads and appointed officers and a staff; the younger ones, the ones who had not gone to France, taking proper fire by now. He addressed them, briefly, coldly: “. . . order . . . course of justice . . . let the people see that we have worn the uniform of the United States . . . And one thing more.” For the moment now he had descended to familiarity: the regimental commander who knows his men by their first names. “I’ll leave this to you fellows. I’ll do what you say. I thought it might be a good thing if I wear my uniform until this business is settled. So they can see that Uncle Sam is present in more than spirit.”

“But he’s not,” one said quickly, immediately; he was of the same cut as the commander, who by the way was not present. “This is not government trouble yet. Kennedy might not like it. This is Jefferson’s trouble, not Washington’s.”

“Make him like it,” Grimm said. “What does your legion stand for, if not for the protection of America and Americans?”

“No,” the other said. “I reckon we better not make a parade out of this. We can do what we want without that. Better. Aint that right, boys?”

“All right,” Grimm said. “I’ll do as you say. But every man will want a pistol. We’ll have a small arms’ inspection here in one hour. Every man will report here.”

“What’s Kennedy going to say about pistols?” one said.

“I’ll see to that,” Grimm said. “Report here in one hour exactly, with side arms.” He dismissed them. He crossed the quiet square to the sheriff’s office. The sheriff was at home, they told him. “At home?” he repeated. “Now? What’s he doing at home now?”

“Eating, I reckon. A man as big as him has got to eat several times a day.”

“At home,” Grimm repeated. He did not glare; it was again that cold and detached expression with which he had looked at the legion commander. “Eating,” he said. He went out, already walking fast. He recrossed the empty square, the quiet square empty of people peacefully at suppertables about that peaceful town and that peaceful country. He went to the sheriff’s home. The sheriff said No at once.

“Fifteen or twenty folks milling around the square with pistols in their pants? No, no. That wont do. I cant have that. That wont do. You let me run this.”

For a moment longer Grimm looked at the sheriff. Then he turned, already walking fast again. “All right,” he said. “If that’s the way you want it. I dont interfere with you and you dont interfere with me, then.” It didn’t sound like a threat. It was too flat, too final, too without heat. He went on, rapidly. The sheriff watched him; then he called. Grimm turned.

“You leave yours at home, too,” the sheriff said. “You hear me?” Grimm didn’t answer. He went on. The sheriff watched him out of sight, frowning.

That evening after supper the sheriff went back downtown—something he had not done for years save when urgent and inescapable business called. He found a picket of Grimm’s men at the jail, and another in the courthouse, and a third patrolling the square and the adjacent streets. The others, the relief, they told the sheriff, were in the cotton office where Grimm was employed, which they were using for an orderly room, a P.C. The sheriff met Grimm on the street, making a round of inspection. “Come here, boy,” the sheriff said. Grimm halted. He did not approach; the sheriff went to him. He patted Grimm’s hip with a fat hand. “I told you to leave that at home,” he said. Grimm said nothing. He watched the sheriff levelly. The sheriff sighed. “Well, if you wont, I

reckon I'll have to make you a special deputy. But you aint to even show that gun unless I tell you to. You hear me?"

"Certainly not," Grimm said. "You certainly wouldn't want me to draw it if I didn't see any need to."

"I mean, not till I tell you to."

"Certainly," Grimm said, without heat, patiently, immediately. "That's what we both said. Dont you worry. I'll be there."

Later, as the town quieted for the night, as the picture show emptied and the drug stores closed one by one, Grimm's platoon began to drop off too. He did not protest, watching them coldly; they became a little sheepish, defensive. Again without knowing it he had played a trump card. Because of the fact that they felt sheepish, feeling that somehow they had fallen short of his own cold ardor, they would return tomorrow if just to show him. A few remained; it was Saturday night anyhow, and someone got more chairs from somewhere and they started a poker game. It ran all night, though from time to time Grimm (he was not in the game; neither would he permit his second in command, the only other there who held the equivalent of commissioned rank, to engage) sent a squad out to make a patrol of the square. By this time the night marshal was one of them, though he too did not take a hand in the game.

Sunday was quiet. The poker game ran quietly through that day, broken by the periodical patrols, while the quiet church bells rang and the congregations gathered in decorous clumps of summer colors. About the square it was already known that the special Grand Jury would meet tomorrow. Somehow the very sound of the two words with their evocation secret and irrevocable and something of a hidden and unsleeping and omnipotent eye watching the doings of men, began to reassure Grimm's men in their own makebelieve.

So quickly is man unwittingly and unpredictably moved that without knowing that they were thinking it, the town had suddenly accepted

Grimm with respect and perhaps a little awe and a deal of actual faith and confidence, as though somehow his vision and patriotism and pride in the town, the occasion, had been quicker and truer than theirs. His men anyway assumed and accepted this; after the sleepless night, the tenseness, the holiday, the suttee of volition's surrender, they were almost at the pitch where they might die for him, if occasion rose. They now moved in a grave and slightly aweinspiring reflected light which was almost as palpable as the khaki would have been which Grimm wished them to wear, wished that they wore, as though each time they returned to the orderly room they dressed themselves anew in suave and austere splendid scraps of his dream.

This lasted through Sunday night. The poker game ran. The caution, the surreptitiousness, which had clothed it was now gone. There was something about it too assured and serenely confident to the braggadocio; tonight when they heard the marshal's feet on the stairs, one said, "Ware M.P.'s," and for an instant they glanced at one another with hard, bright, daredevil eyes; then one said, quite loud: "Throw the son of a bitch out," and another through pursed lips made the immemorial sound.

And so the next morning, Monday, when the first country cars and wagons began to gather, the platoon was again intact. And they now wore uniforms. It was their faces. Most of them were of an age, a generation, an experience.

But it was more than that. They now had a profound and bleak gravity as they stood where crowds milled, grave, austere, detached, looking with blank, bleak eyes at the slow throngs who, feeling, sensing without knowing, drifted before them, slowing, staring, so that they would be ringed with faces rapt and empty and immobile as the faces of cows, approaching and drifting on, to be replaced. And all morning the voices came and went, in quiet question and answer: "There he goes. That young fellow with the automatic pistol. He's the captain of them. Special officer sent by the governor. He's the head of the whole thing. Sheriff aint got no say in it today."

Later, when it was too late, Grimm told the sheriff: "If you had just listened to me. Let me bring him out of that cell in a squad of men, instead of sending him across the square with one deputy and not even handcuffed to him, in all that crowd where that damned Buford didn't dare shoot, even if he could hit a barn door."

"How did I know he aimed to break, would think of trying it right then and there?" the sheriff said. "When Stevens had done told me he would plead guilty and take a life sentence."

But it was too late then. It was all over then. It happened in the middle of the square, halfway between the sidewalk and the courthouse, in the midst of a throng of people thick as on Fair Day, though the first that Grimm knew of it was when he heard the deputy's pistol twice, fired into the air. He knew at once what had happened, though he was at the time inside the courthouse. His reaction was definite and immediate. He was already running toward the shots when he shouted back over his shoulder at the man who had tagged him now for almost fortyeight hours as half aide and half orderly: "Turn in the fire alarm!"

"The fire alarm?" the aide said. "What—"

"Turn in the fire alarm!" Grimm shouted back. "It dont matter what folks think, just so they know that something . . ." He did not finish; he was gone.

He ran among running people, overtaking and passing them, since he had an objective and they did not; they were just running, the black, blunt, huge automatic opening a way for him like a plow. They looked at his tense, hard, young face with faces blanched and gaped, with round, toothed orifices; they made one long sound like a murmuring sigh: "There . . . went that way . . ." But already Grimm had seen the deputy, running, his pistol aloft in his hand. Grimm glanced once about and sprang forward again; in the throng which had evidently been pacing the deputy and the prisoner across the square was the inevitable hulking youth in the uniform of the Western Union, leading his bicycle by the horns like a docile cow. Grimm rammed the pistol

back into the holster and flung the boy aside and sprang onto the bicycle, with never a break in motion.

The bicycle possessed neither horn nor bell. Yet they sensed him somehow and made way; in this too he seemed to be served by certitude, the blind and untroubled faith in the rightness and infallibility of his actions. When he overtook the running deputy he slowed the bicycle. The deputy turned upon him a face sweating, gaped with shouting and running. "He turned," the deputy screamed. "Into that alley by—"

"I know," Grimm said. "Was he handcuffed?"

"Yes!" the deputy said. The bicycle leaped on.

'Then he can't run very fast,' Grimm thought. 'He'll have to hole up soon. Get out of the open, anyway.' He turned into the alley, fast. It ran back between two houses, with a board fence on one side. At that moment the fire siren sounded for the first time, beginning and mounting to a slow and sustained scream that seemed at last to pass beyond the realm of hearing, into that of sense, like soundless vibration. Grimm wheeled on, thinking swiftly, logically, with a kind of fierce and constrained joy. 'The first thing he will want is to get out of sight,' he thought, looking about. On one hand the lane was open, on the other stood the board fence six feet high. At the end it was cut short off by a wooden gate, beyond which was a pasture and then a deep ditch which was a town landmark.

The tops of tall trees which grew in it just showed above the rim; a regiment could hide and deploy in it. "Ah," he said, aloud. Without stopping or slowing he swept the bicycle around and pedalled back down the lane toward the street which he had just quitted. The wail of the siren was dying now, descending back into hearing again, and as he slewed the bicycle into the street he saw briefly the running people and a car bearing down upon him. For all his pedalling the car overtook him; its occupants leaned shouting toward his set, forward-looking face.

“Get in here!” they shouted. “In here!” He did not answer. He did not look at them. The car had overshot him, slowing; now he passed it at his swift, silent, steady pace; again the car speeded up and passed him, the men leaning out and looking ahead. He was going fast too, silent, with the delicate swiftness of an apparition, the implacable undeviation of Juggernaut or Fate. Behind him the siren began again its rising wail. When next the men in the car looked back for him, he had vanished completely.

He had turned full speed into another lane. His face was rocklike, calm, still bright with that expression of fulfillment, of grave and reckless joy. This lane was more rutted than the other, and deeper. It came out at last upon a barren knoll where, springing to earth while the bicycle shot on, falling, he could see the full span of the ravine along the edge of town, his view of it broken by two or three negro cabins which lined the edge of it. He was quite motionless, still, alone, fateful, like a landmark almost. Again from the town behind him the scream of the siren began to fall.

Then he saw Christmas. He saw the man, small with distance, appear up out of the ditch, his hands close together. As Grimm watched he saw the fugitive’s hands glint once like the flash of a heliograph as the sun struck the handcuffs, and it seemed to him that even from here he could hear the panting and desperate breath of the man who even now was not free. Then the tiny figure ran again and vanished beyond the nearest negro cabin.

Grimm ran too now. He ran swiftly, yet there was no haste about him, no effort. There was nothing vengeful about him either, no fury, no outrage. Christmas saw that, himself. Because for an instant they looked at one another almost face to face. That was when Grimm, running, was in the act of passing beyond the corner of the cabin. At that instant Christmas leaped from the rear window of it, with an effect as of magic, his manacled hands high and now glinting as if they were on fire.

For an instant they glared at one another, the one stopped in the act of crouching from the leap, the other in midstride of running, before Grimm's momentum carried him past the corner. In that instant he saw that Christmas now carried a heavy nickelplated pistol. Grimm whirled and turned and sprang back past the corner, drawing the automatic.

He was thinking swiftly, calmly, with that quiet joy: 'He can do two things. He can try for the ditch again, or he can dodge around the house until one of us gets a shot. And the ditch is on his side of the house.' He reacted immediately. He ran at full speed around the corner which he had just turned. He did it as though under the protection of a magic or a providence, or as if he knew that Christmas would not be waiting there with the pistol. He ran on past the next corner without pausing.

He was beside the ditch now. He stopped, motionless in midstride. Above the blunt, cold rake of the automatic his face had that serene, unearthly luminousness of angels in church windows. He was moving again almost before he had stopped, with that lean, swift, blind obedience to whatever Player moved him on the Board. He ran to the ditch. But in the beginning of his plunge downward into the brush that choked the steep descent he turned, clawing. He saw now that the cabin sat some two feet above the earth. He had not noticed it before, in his haste. He knew now that he had lost a point. That Christmas had been watching his legs all the time beneath the house. He said, "Good man."

His plunge carried him some distance before he could stop himself and climb back out. He seemed indefatigable, not flesh and blood, as if the Player who moved him for pawn likewise found him breath. Without a pause, in the same surge that carried him up out of the ditch again, he was running again. He ran around the cabin in time to see Christmas fling himself over a fence three hundred yards away. He did not fire, because Christmas was now running through a small garden and straight toward a house. Running, he saw Christmas leap up the back steps and enter the house. "Hah," Grimm said. "The preacher's house. Hightower's house."

He did not slow, though he swerved and ran around the house and to the street. The car which had passed him and lost him and then returned was just where it should have been, just where the Player had desired it to be. It stopped without signal from him and three men got out. Without a word Grimm turned and ran across the yard and into the house where the old disgraced minister lived alone, and the three men followed, rushing into the hall, pausing, bringing with them into its stale and cloistral dimness something of the savage summer sunlight which they had just left.

It was upon them, of them: its shameless savageness. Out of it their faces seemed to glare with bodiless suspension as though from haloes as they stooped and raised Hightower, his face bleeding, from the floor where Christmas, running up the hall, his raised and armed and manacled hands full of glare and glitter like lightning bolts, so that he resembled a vengeful and furious god pronouncing a doom, had struck him down. They held the old man on his feet.

“Which room?” Grimm said, shaking him. “Which room, old man?”

“Gentlemen!” Hightower said. Then he said: “Men! Men!”

“Which room, old man?” Grimm shouted.

They held Hightower on his feet; in the gloomy hall, after the sunlight, he too with his bald head and his big pale face streaked with blood, was terrible. “Men!” he cried. “Listen to me. He was here that night. He was with me the night of the murder. I swear to God—”

“Jesus Christ!” Grimm cried, his young voice clear and outraged like that of a young priest. “Has every preacher and old maid in Jefferson taken their pants down to the yellowbellied son of a bitch?” He flung the old man aside and ran on.

It was as though he had been merely waiting for the Player to move him again, because with that unfailing certitude he ran straight to the kitchen and into the doorway, already firing, almost before he could

have seen the table overturned and standing on its edge across the corner of the room, and the bright and glittering hands of the man who crouched behind it, resting upon the upper edge. Grimm emptied the automatic's magazine into the table; later someone covered all five shots with a folded handkerchief.

But the Player was not done yet. When the others reached the kitchen they saw the table flung aside now and Grimm stooping over the body. When they approached to see what he was about, they saw that the man was not dead yet, and when they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit. Then Grimm too sprang back, flinging behind him the bloody butcher knife. "Now you'll let white women alone, even in hell," he said. But the man on the floor had not moved. He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth.

For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever.

They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatening, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. Again from the town, deadened a little by the walls, the scream of the siren mounted toward its unbelievable crescendo, passing out of the realm of hearing.

Now the final copper light of afternoon fades; now the street beyond the low maples and the low signboard is prepared and empty, framed by the study window like a stage.

He can remember how when he was young, after he first came to Jefferson from the seminary, how that fading copper light would seem almost audible, like a dying yellow fall of trumpets dying into an interval of silence and waiting, out of which they would presently come. Already, even before the falling horns had ceased, it would seem to him that he could hear the beginning thunder not yet louder than a whisper, a rumor, in the air.

But he had never told anyone that. Not even her. Not even her in the days when they were still the night's lovers, and shame and division had not come and she knew and had not forgot with division and regret and then despair, why he would sit here at this window and wait for nightfall, for the instant of night. Not even to her, to woman. The woman. Woman (not the seminary, as he had once believed): the Passive and Anonymous whom God had created to be not alone the recipient and receptacle of the seed of his body but of his spirit too, which is truth or as near truth as he dare approach.

He was an only child. When he was born his father was fifty years old, and his mother had been an invalid for almost twenty years. He grew up to believe that this was the result of the food which she had had to subsist on during the last year of the Civil War. Perhaps this was the reason. His father had owned no slaves, though he was the son of a man who did own slaves at the time. He could have owned them. But though born and bred and dwelling in an age and land where to own slaves was less expensive than not to own them, he would neither eat food grown and cooked by, nor sleep in a bed prepared by, a negro slave. Hence during the war and while he was absent from home, his wife had no garden save what she could make herself or with the infrequent aid of neighbors. And this aid the husband would not allow her to accept for the reason that it could not be repaid in kind. "God will provide," he said.

“Provide what? Dandelions and ditch weeds?”

“Then He will give us the bowels to digest them.”

He was a minister. For a year he had been leaving home early each Sunday morning before his father (this was before the son's marriage) who though a member in good standing of the Episcopal church had not entered any church since the son could remember, discovered where he went. He found that the son, then just turned twentyone, was riding sixteen miles each Sunday to preach in a small Presbyterian chapel back in the hills. The father laughed. The son listened to the laughter as he would if it had been shouts or curses: with a cold and respectful detachment, saying nothing. The next Sunday he went back to his congregation.

When the war began, the son was not among the first to go. Neither was he among the last. And he stayed with the troops for four years, though he fired no musket and wore instead of uniform the somber frockcoat which he had purchased to be married in and which he had used to preach in. When he returned home in '65 he still wore it, though he never put it on again after that day when the wagon stopped at the front steps and two men lifted him down and carried him into the house and laid him on the bed. His wife removed the coat and put it away in a trunk in the attic. It stayed there for twentyfive years, until one day his son opened the trunk and took it out and spread out the careful folds in which it had been arranged by hands that were now dead.

He remembers it now, sitting in the dark window in the quiet study, waiting for twilight to cease, for night and the galloping hooves. The copper light has completely gone now; the world hangs in a green suspension in color and texture like light through colored glass. Soon it will be time to begin to say Soon now. Now soon 'I was eight then,' he thinks. 'It was raining.' It seems to him that he can still smell the rain, the moist grieving of the October earth, and the musty yawn as the lid of the trunk went back.

Then the garment, the neat folds. He did not know what it was, because at first he was almost overpowered by the evocation of his dead mother's hands which lingered among the folds. Then it opened, tumbling slowly. To him, the child, it seemed unbelievably huge, as though made for a giant; as though merely from having been worn by one of them, the cloth itself had assumed the properties of those phantoms who loomed heroic and tremendous against a background of thunder and smoke and torn flags which now filled his waking and sleeping life.

The garment was almost unrecognisable with patches. Patches of leather, mansewn and crude, patches of Confederate grey weathered leafbrown now, and one that stopped his very heart: it was blue, dark blue; the blue of the United States. Looking at this patch, at the mute and anonymous cloth, the boy, the child born into the autumn of his mother's and father's lives, whose organs already required the unflagging care of a Swiss watch, would experience a kind of hushed and triumphant terror which left him a little sick.

That evening at supper he would be unable to eat. Looking up, the father, now a man nearing sixty, would find the child staring at him with terror and awe and with something else. Then the man would say, "What have you been into now?" and the child could not answer, could not speak, staring at his father with on his child's face an expression as of the Pit itself. That night in bed he would not be able to sleep.

He would lie rigid, not even trembling, in his dark bed while the man who was his father and his only remaining relative, and between whom and himself there was so much of distance in time that not even the decades of years could measure, that there was not even any physical resemblance, slept walls and floors away. And the next day the child would suffer one of his intestinal fits. But he would not tell what it was, not even to the negro woman who ran the household and who was his mother too and nurse. Gradually his strength would return.

And then one day he would steal again to the attic and open the trunk and take out the coat and touch the blue patch with that horrified triumph and sick joy and wonder if his father had killed the man from whose blue coat the patch came, wondering with still more horror yet at the depth and strength of his desire and dread to know. Yet on the very next day, when he knew that his father had gone to call upon one of his country patients and would not possibly return before dark, he would go to the kitchen and say to the negro woman: "Tell again about grandpa. How many Yankees did he kill?" And when he listened now it was without terror. It was not even triumph: it was pride.

This grandfather was the single thorn in his son's side. The son would no more have said that than he would have thought it, anymore than it would ever have occurred to either of them to wish mutually that he had been given a different son or a different father. Their relations were peaceable enough, being on the son's part a cold, humorless, automatically respectful reserve, and on the father's a bluff, direct, coarsely vivid humor which lacked less of purport than wit. They lived amicably enough in the twostorey house in town, though for some time now the son had refused, quiet and firm, to eat any food prepared by the slave woman who had raised him from babyhood. He cooked his own food in the kitchen, to the negress' outraged indignation, and put it on the table himself and ate it face to face with his father, who saluted him punctiliously and unfailingly with a glass of Bourbon whiskey: this too the son did not touch and had never tasted.

On the son's wedding day the father surrendered the house. He was waiting on the porch, with the key to the house in his hand, when the bride and groom arrived. He wore his hat and cloak. About him was piled his personal luggage and behind him stood the two slaves which he owned: the negro woman who cooked, and his 'boy,' a man older than himself and who did not have one remaining hair, who was the cook's husband.

He was not a planter; he was a lawyer, who had learned law somewhat as his son was to learn medicine, "by main strength and the devil's grace and luck" as he put it. He had already bought for himself a small

house two miles in the country, and his surrey and his matched team stood before the porch waiting while he too stood, his hat tilted back and his legs apart—a hale, bluff, rednosed man with the moustache of a brigand chief—while the son, and the daughter-in-law whom he had never seen before, came up the path from the gate. When he stooped and saluted her, she smelled whiskey and cigars. “I reckon you’ll do,” he said. His eyes were bluff and bold, but kind. “All the sanctimonious cuss wants anyway is somebody that can sing alto out of a Presbyterian hymnbook, where even the good Lord Himself couldn’t squeeze in any music.”

He drove away in the tasselled surrey, with his personal belongings about him—his clothes, his demijohn, his slaves. The slave cook did not even remain to prepare the first meal. She was not offered, and so not refused. The father never entered the house again alive. He would have been welcome. He and the son both knew this, without it ever being said. And the wife—she was one of many children of a genteel couple who had never got ahead and who seemed to find in the church some substitute for that which lacked upon the dinnertable—liked him, admired him in a hushed, alarmed, secret way: his swagger, his bluff and simple adherence to a simple code.

They would hear of his doings though, of how in the next summer after he removed to the country he invaded a protracted al fresco church revival being held in a nearby grove and turned it into a week of amateur horse racing while to a dwindling congregation gaunt, fanaticfaced country preachers thundered anathema from the rustic pulpit at his oblivious and unregenerate head. His reason for not visiting his son and his daughter-in-law was apparently frank: “You’d find me dull and I’d find you dull. And who knows? the cuss might corrupt me. Might corrupt me in my old age into heaven.” But that was not the reason. The son knew that it was not, who would have been first to fight the aspersion were it to come from another: that there was delicacy of behavior and thought in the old man.

The son was an abolitionist almost before the sentiment had become a word to percolate down from the North. Though when he learned that

the Republicans did have a name for it, he completely changed the name of his conviction without abating his principles or behavior one jot. Even then, not yet thirty, he was a man of Spartan sobriety beyond his years, as the offspring of a not overly particular servant of Chance and the bottle often is.

Perhaps that accounted for the fact that he had no child until after the war, from which he returned a changed man, 'deodorised,' as his dead father would have put it, of sanctity somewhat. Although during those four years he had never fired a gun, his service was not alone that of praying and preaching to troops on Sunday mornings. When he returned home with his wound and recovered and established himself as a doctor, he was only practising the surgery and the pharmacy which he had practiced and learned on the bodies of friend and foe alike while helping the doctors at the front. This probably of all the son's doings the father would have enjoyed the most: that the son had taught himself a profession on the invader and devastator of his country.

'But sanctity is not the word for him,' the son's son in turn thinks, sitting at the dark window while outside the world hangs in that green suspension beyond the faded trumpets. 'Grandfather himself would have been the first to confront any man that employed that term.' It was some throwback to the austere and not dim times not so long passed, when a man in that country had little of himself to waste and little time to do it in, and had to guard and protect that little not only from nature but from man too, by means of a sheer fortitude that did not offer, in his lifetime anyway, physical ease for reward. That was where his disapproval of slavery lay, and of his lusty and sacrilegious father. The very fact that he could and did see no paradox in the fact that he took an active part in a partisan war and on the very side whose principles opposed his own, was proof enough that he was two separate and complete people, one of whom dwelled by serene rules in a world where reality did not exist.

But the other part of him, which lived in the actual world, did as well as any and better than most. He lived by his principles in peace, and when war came he carried them into war and lived by them there; when

there was preaching on peaceful Sundays in quiet groves to be done, he had done it, without any particular equipment for it other than his will and his convictions and what he could pick up as he went along; when there was the saving of wounded men under fire and the curing of them without proper tools, he did that too, again without other equipment save his strength and courage and what he could pick up as he went along. And when the war was lost and the other men returned home with their eyes stubbornly reverted toward what they refused to believe was dead, he looked forward and made what he could of defeat by making practical use of that which he had learned in it. He turned doctor. One of his first patients was his wife. Possibly he kept her alive. At least, he enabled her to produce life, though he was fifty and she past forty when the son was born. That son grew to manhood among phantoms, and side by side with a ghost.

The phantoms were his father, his mother, and an old negro woman. The father who had been a minister without a church and a soldier without an enemy, and who in defeat had combined the two and become a doctor, a surgeon. It was as though the very cold and uncompromising conviction which propped him upright, as it were, between puritan and cavalier, had become not defeated and not discouraged, but wiser. As though it had seen in the smoke of cannon as in a vision that the laying on of hands meant literally that. As if he came suddenly to believe that Christ had meant that him whose spirit alone required healing, was not worth the having, the saving. That was one phantom. The second was the mother whom he remembers first and last as a thin face and tremendous eyes and a spread of dark hair on a pillow, with blue, still, almost skeleton hands.

If on the day of her death he had been told that he had ever seen her otherwise than in bed, he would not have believed it. Later he remembered differently: he did remember her moving about the house, attending to household affairs. But at eight and nine and ten he thought of her as without legs, feet; as being only that thin face and the two eyes which seemed daily to grow bigger and bigger, as though about to embrace all seeing, all life, with one last terrible glare of frustration and suffering and foreknowledge, and that when that finally

happened, he would hear it: it would be a sound, like a cry. Already, before she died, he could feel them through all walls.

They were the house: he dwelled within them, within their dark and all-embracing and patient aftermath of physical betrayal. He and she both lived in them like two small, weak beasts in a den, a cavern, into which now and then the father entered—that man who was a stranger to them both, a foreigner, almost a threat: so quickly does the body's wellbeing alter and change the spirit. He was more than a stranger: he was an enemy. He smelled differently from them. He spoke with a different voice, almost in different words, as though he dwelled by ordinary among different surroundings and in a different world; crouching beside the bed the child could feel the man fill the room with rude health and unconscious contempt, he too as helpless and frustrated as they.

The third phantom was the negro woman, the slave, who had ridden away in the surrey that morning when the son and his bride came home. She rode away a slave; she returned in '66 still a slave, on foot now—a huge woman, with a face both irascible and calm: the mask of a black tragedy between scenes. After her master's death and until she was convinced at last that she would never more see either him or her husband—the 'boy,' who had followed the master to the war and who also did not return—she refused to leave the house in the country to which her master had moved and of which he had left in her charge when he rode away.

After the father's death the son went out, to close the house and remove his father's private possessions, and he offered to make provision for her. She refused. She also refused to leave. She made her own small kitchen garden and she lived there, alone, waiting for her husband to return, the rumor of whose death she refused to believe. It was just rumor, vague: how, following his master's death in Van Dorn's cavalry raid to destroy Grant's stores in Jefferson, the negro had been inconsolable. One night he disappeared from the bivouac.

Presently there began to come back tales of a crazy negro who had been halted by Confederate pickets close to the enemy's front, who told the same garbled story about a missing master who was being held for ransom by the Yankees. They could not make him even entertain for a moment the idea that the master might be dead. "No, suh," he would say. "Not Marse Gail. Not him. Dey wouldn't dare to kill a Hightower. Dey wouldn't dare. Dey got 'im hid somewhar, tryin' to sweat outen him whar me and him hid Mistis' coffee pot and de gole waiter. Dat's all dey wants." Each time he would escape. Then one day word came back from the Federal lines of a negro who had attacked a Yankee officer with a shovel, forcing the officer to shoot him to protect his own life.

The woman would not believe this for a long time. "Not dat he aint fool enough to done it," she said. "He jest aint got ernough sense to know a Yankee to hit at wid a shovel if he wuz to see um." She said that for over a year. Then one day she appeared at the son's home, the house which she had quitted ten years ago and had not entered since, carrying her possessions in a handkerchief. She walked into the house and said: "Here I is. You got ernough wood in de box ter cook supper wid?"

"You're free, now," the son told her.

"Free?" she said. She spoke with still and brooding scorn. "Free? Whut's freedom done except git Marse Gail killed and made a bigger fool outen Pawmp den even de Lawd Hisself could do? Free? Dont talk ter me erbout freedom."

This was the third phantom. With this phantom the child ('and he little better than a phantom too, then,' that same child now thinks beside the fading window) talked about the ghost. They never tired: the child with rapt, wide, half dread and half delight, and the old woman with musing and savage sorrow and pride. But this to the child was just peaceful shuddering of delight. He found no terror in the knowledge that his grandfather on the contrary had killed men 'by the hundreds' as he was told and believed, or in the fact that the negro Pomp had been trying to kill a man when he died. No horror here because they

were just ghosts, never seen in the flesh, heroic, simple, warm; while the father which he knew and feared was a phantom which would never die. 'So it's no wonder,' he thinks, 'that I skipped a generation. It's no wonder that I had no father and that I had already died one night twenty years before I saw light. And that my only salvation must be to return to the place to die where my life had already ceased before it began.'

While at the seminary, after he first came there, he often thought how he would tell them, the elders, the high and sanctified men who were the destiny of the church to which he had willingly surrendered. How he would go to them and say, "Listen. God must call me to Jefferson because my life died there, was shot from the saddle of a galloping horse in a Jefferson street one night twenty years before it was ever born." He thought that he could say that, at first.

He believed that they would comprehend. He went there, chose that as his vocation, with that as his purpose. But he believed in more than that. He had believed in the church too, in all that it ramified and evoked. He believed with a calm joy that if ever there was shelter, it would be the Church; that if ever truth could walk naked and without shame or fear, it would be in the seminary. When he believed that he had heard the call it seemed to him that he could see his future, his life, intact and on all sides complete and inviolable, like a classic and serene vase, where the spirit could be born anew sheltered from the harsh gale of living and die so, peacefully, with only the far sound of the circumvented wind, with scarce even a handful of rotting dust to be disposed of. That was what the word seminary meant: quiet and safe walls within which the hampered and garmentworried spirit could learn anew serenity to contemplate without horror or alarm its own nakedness.

'But there are more things in heaven and earth too than truth,' he thinks, paraphrases, quietly, not quizzical, not humorous; not unquizzical and not humorless too. Sitting in the failing dusk, his head in its white bandage looming bigger and more ghostly than ever, he thinks, 'More things indeed,' thinking how ingenuity was apparently

given man in order that he may supply himself in crises with shapes and sounds with which to guard himself from truth. He had at least one thing to not repent: that he had not made the mistake of telling the elders what he had planned to say. He had not needed to live in the seminary a year before he learned better than that. And more, worse: that with the learning of it, instead of losing something he had gained, had escaped from something. And that that gain had colored the very face and shape of love.

She was the daughter of one of the ministers, the teachers, in the college. Like himself, she was an only child. He believed at once that she was beautiful, because he had heard of her before he ever saw her and when he did see her he did not see her at all because of the face which he had already created in his mind. He did not believe that she could have lived there all her life and not be beautiful. He did not see the face itself for three years. By that time there had already been for two years a hollow tree in which they left notes for one another. If he believed about that at all, he believed that the idea had sprung spontaneously between them, regardless of whichever one thought of it, said it, first.

But in reality he had got the idea not from her or from himself, but from a book. But he did not see her face at all. He did not see a small oval narrowing too sharply to chin and passionate with discontent (she was a year or two or three older than he was, and he did not know it, was never to know it). He did not see that for three years her eyes had watched him with almost desperate calculation, like those of a harassed gambler.

Then one night he saw her, looked at her. She spoke suddenly and savagely of marriage. It was without preamble or warning. It had never been mentioned between them. He had not even ever thought of it, thought the word. He had accepted it because most of the faculty were married. But to him it was not men and women in sanctified and living physical intimacy, but a dead state carried over into and existing still among the living like two shadows chained together with the shadow of a chain. He was used to that; he had grown up with a ghost. Then one

evening she talked suddenly, savagely. When he found out at last what she meant by escape from her present life, he felt no surprise. He was too innocent. "Escape?" he said. "Escape from what?"

"This!" she said. He saw her face for the first time as a living face, as a mask before desire and hatred: wrung, blind, headlong with passion. Not stupid: just blind, reckless, desperate. "All of it! All! All!"

He was not surprised. He believed at once that she was right, and that he just had not known better. He believed at once that his own belief about the seminary had been wrong all the while. Not seriously wrong, but false, incorrect. Perhaps he had already begun to doubt himself, without knowing it until now. Perhaps that was why he had not yet told them why he must go to Jefferson. He had told her, a year ago, why he wanted to, must, go there, and that he intended to tell them the reason, she watching him with those eyes which he had not yet seen. "You mean," he said, "that they would not send me? arrange for me to go? That that would not be reason enough?"

"Certainly it wouldn't," she said.

"But why? That's the truth. Foolish, maybe. But true. And what is the church for, if not to help those who are foolish but who want truth? Why wouldn't they let me go?"

"Why, I wouldn't let you go myself, if I were them and you gave me that as your reason."

"Oh," he said. "I see." But he did not see, exactly, though he believed that he could have been wrong and that she was right. And so when a year later she talked to him suddenly of marriage and escape in the same words, he was not surprised, not hurt. He just thought quietly, 'So this is love. I see. I was wrong about it too,' thinking as he had thought before and would think again and as every other man has thought: how false the most profound book turns out to be when applied to life.

He changed completely. They planned to be married. He knew now that he had seen all the while that desperate calculation in her eyes. 'Perhaps they were right in putting love into books,' he thought quietly. 'Perhaps it could not live anywhere else.' The desperation was still in them, but now that there were definite plans, a day set, it was quieter, mostly calculation. They talked now of his ordination, of how he could get Jefferson as his call. "We'd better go to work right away," she said. He told her that he had been working for that since he was four years old; perhaps he was being humorous, whimsical.

She brushed it aside with that passionate and leashed humorlessness, almost inattention, talking as though to herself of men, names, to see, to grovel to or threaten, outlining to him a campaign of abasement and plotting. He listened. Even the faint smile, whimsical, quizzical, perhaps of despair, did not leave his face. He said, "Yes. Yes. I see. I understand," as she talked. It was as if he were saying Yes. I see. I see now. That's how they do such, gain such. That's the rule. I see now

At first, when the demagoguery, the abasement, the small lying had its reverberation in other small lies and ultimate threats in the form of requests and suggestions among the hierarchate of the Church and he received the call to Jefferson, he forgot how he had got it for the time. He did not remember until after he was settled in Jefferson; certainly not while the train of the journey's last stage fled toward the consummation of his life across a land similar to that where he had been born. But it looked different, though he knew that the difference lay not outside but inside the car window against which his face was almost pressed like that of a child, while his wife beside him had also now something of eagerness in her face, beside hunger and desperation. They had been married now not quite six months. They had married directly after his graduation. Not once since then had he seen the desperation naked in her face. But neither had he seen passion again. And again he thought quietly, without much surprise and perhaps without hurt: I see. That's the way it is. Marriage. Yes. I see now

The train rushed on. Leaning to the window, watching the fleeing countryside, he talked in the bright, happy voice of a child: "I could have come to Jefferson before, at almost any time. But I didn't. I could have come at any time. There is a difference, you know, between civilian and military casualness. Military casualness? Ah, it was the casualness of desperation. A handful of men (he was not an officer: I think that was the only point on which father and old Cinthy were ever in accord: that grandfather wore no sword, galloped with no sword waving in front of the rest of them) performing with the grim levity of schoolboys a prank so foolhardy that the troops who had opposed them for four years did not believe that even they would have attempted it.

Riding for a hundred miles through a country where every grove and hamlet had its Yankee bivouac, and into a garrisoned town—I know the very street that they rode into town upon and then out again. I have never seen it, but I know exactly how it will look. I know exactly how the house that we will someday own and live in upon the street will look. It won't be at first, for a while. We will have to live in the parsonage at first. But soon, as soon as we can, where we can look out the window and see the street, maybe even the hoofmarks or their shapes in the air, because the same air will be there even if the dust, the mud, is gone— Hungry, gaunt, yelling, setting fire to the store depots of a whole carefully planned campaign and riding out again.

No looting at all: no stopping for even shoes, tobacco. I tell you, they were not men after spoils and glory; they were boys riding the sheer tremendous tidal wave of desperate living. Boys. Because this. This is beautiful. Listen. Try to see it. Here is that fine shape of eternal youth and virginal desire which makes heroes. That makes the doings of heroes border so close upon the unbelievable that it is no wonder that their doings must emerge now and then like gunflashes in the smoke, and that their very physical passing becomes rumor with a thousand faces before breath is out of them, lest paradoxical truth outrage itself.

Now this is what Cinthy told me. And I believe. I know. It's too fine to doubt. It's too fine, too simple, ever to have been invented by white

thinking. A negro might have invented it. And if Cinthy did, I still believe. Because even fact cannot stand with it. I dont know whether grandfather's squadron were lost or not. I dont think so. I think that they did it deliberately, as boys who had set fire to an enemy's barn, without taking so much as a shingle or a door hasp, might pause in flight to steal a few apples from a neighbor, a friend. Mind you, they were hungry. They had been hungry for three years. Perhaps they were used to that.

Anyway, they had just set fire to tons of food and clothing and tobacco and liquors, taking nothing though there had not been issued any order against looting, and they turn now, with all that for background, backdrop: the consternation, the conflagration; the sky itself must have been on fire. You can see it, hear it: the shouts, the shots, the shouting of triumph and terror, the drumming hooves, the trees uprearing against that red glare as though fixed too in terror, the sharp gables of houses like the jagged edge of the exploding and ultimate earth. Now it is a close place: you can feel, hear in the darkness horses pulled short up, plunging; clashes of arms; whispers overloud, hard breathing, the voices still triumphant; behind them the rest of the troops galloping past toward the rallying bugles.

That you must hear, feel: then you see. You see before the crash, in the abrupt red glare the horses with wide eyes and nostrils in tossing heads, sweatstained; the gleam of metal, the white gaunt faces of living scarecrows who have not eaten all they wanted at one time since they could remember; perhaps some of them had already dismounted, perhaps one or two had already entered the henhouse. All this you see before the crash of the shotgun comes: then blackness again.

It was just the one shot. 'And of course he would be right in de way of hit,' Cinthy said. 'Stealin' chickens. A man growed, wid a married son, gone to a war whar his business was killin' Yankees, killed in somebody else's henhouse wid a han'ful of feathers.' Stealing chickens." His voice was high, childlike, exalted. Already his wife was clutching his arm: Shhhhhhh! Shhhhhhhhh! People are looking at you! But he did not seem to hear her at all.

His thin, sick face, his eyes, seemed to exude a kind of glow. “That was it. They didn’t know who fired the shot. They never did know. They didn’t try to find out. It may have been a woman, likely enough the wife of a Confederate soldier. I like to think so. It’s fine so. Any soldier can be killed by the enemy in the heat of battle, by a weapon approved by the arbiters and rulemakers of warfare. Or by a woman in a bedroom. But not with a shotgun, a fowling piece, in a henhouse. And so is it any wonder that this world is peopled principally by the dead? Surely, when God looks about at their successors, He cannot be loath to share His own with us.”

“Hush! Shhhhhhhhh! They are looking at us!”

Then the train was slowing into the town; the dingy purlieus slid vanishing past the window. He still looked out—a thin, vaguely untidy man with still upon him something yet of the undimmed glow of his calling, his vocation—quietly surrounding and enclosing and guarding his urgent heart, thinking quietly how surely heaven must have something of the color and shape of whatever village or hill or cottage of which the believer says, This is my own. The train stopped: the slow aisle, still interrupted with outlooking, then the descent among faces grave, decorous, and judicial: the voices, the murmurs, the broken phrases kindly yet still reserved of judgment, not yet giving and (let us say it) prejudicial.

‘I admitted that’ he thinks. ‘I believe that I accepted it. But perhaps that was all I did do, God forgive me.’ The earth has almost faded from sight. It is almost night now. His bandaged distorted head has no depth, no solidity; immobile, it seems to hang suspended above the twin pale blobs which are his hands lying upon the ledge of the open window. He leans forward. Already he can feel the two instants about to touch: the one which is the sum of his life, which renews itself between each dark and dusk, and the suspended instant out of which the soon will presently begin. When he was younger, when his net was still too fine for waiting, at this moment he would sometimes trick himself and believe that he heard them before he knew that it was time.

‘Perhaps that is all I ever did, have ever done,’ he thinks, thinking of the faces: the faces of old men naturally dubious of his youth and jealous of the church which they were putting into his hands almost as a father surrenders a bride: the faces of old men lined by that sheer accumulation of frustration and doubt which is so often the other side of the picture of hale and respected full years—the side, by the way, which the subject and proprietor of the picture has to look at, cannot escape looking at. ‘They did their part; they played by the rules,’ he thinks. ‘I was the one who failed, who infringed.

Perhaps that is the greatest social sin of all; ay, perhaps moral sin.’ Thinking goes quietly, tranquilly, flowing on, falling into shapes quiet, not assertive, not reproachful, not particularly regretful. He sees himself a shadowy figure among shadows, paradoxical, with a kind of false optimism and egoism believing that he would find in that part of the Church which most blunders, dream-recovering, among the blind passions and the lifted hands and voices of men, that which he had failed to find in the Church’s cloistered apotheosis upon earth.

It seems to him that he has seen it all the while: that that which is destroying the Church is not the outward groping of those within it nor the inward groping of those without, but the professionals who control it and who have removed the bells from its steeples.

He seems to see them, endless, without order, empty, symbolical, bleak, skyspined not with ecstasy or passion but in adjuration, threat, and doom. He seems to see the churches of the world like a rampart, like one of those barricades of the middleages planted with dead and sharpened stakes, against truth and against that peace in which to sin and be forgiven which is the life of man.

‘And I accepted that,’ he thinks. ‘I acquiesced. Nay, I did worse: I served it. I served it by using it to forward my own desire. I came here where faces full of bafflement and hunger and eagerness waited for me, waiting to believe; I did not see them. Where hands were raised for what they believed that I would bring them; I did not see them. I

brought with me one trust, perhaps the first trust of man, which I had accepted of my own will before God; I considered that promise and trust of so little worth that I did not know that I had even accepted it.

And if that was all I did for her, what could I have expected? what could I have expected save disgrace and despair and the face of God turned away in very shame? Perhaps in the moment when I revealed to her not only the depth of my hunger but the fact that never and never would she have any part in the assuaging of it; perhaps at that moment I became her seducer and her murderer, author and instrument of her shame and death. After all, there must be some things for which God cannot be accused by man and held responsible. There must be.' Thinking begins to slow now. It slows like a wheel beginning to run in sand, the axle, the vehicle, the power which propels it not yet aware.

He seems to watch himself among faces, always among, enclosed and surrounded by, faces, as though he watched himself in his own pulpit, from the rear of the church, or as though he were a fish in a bowl. And more than that: the faces seem to be mirrors in which he watches himself. He knows them all; he can read his doings in them. He seems to see reflected in them a figure antic as a showman, a little wild: a charlatan preaching worse than heresy, in utter disregard of that whose very stage he preempted, offering instead of the crucified shape of pity and love, a swaggering and unchastened bravo killed with a shotgun in a peaceful henhouse, in a temporary hiatus of his own avocation of killing. The wheel of thinking slows; the axle knows it now but the vehicle itself is still unaware.

He sees the faces which surround him mirror astonishment, puzzlement, then outrage, then fear, as if they looked beyond his wild antics and saw behind him and looking down upon him, in his turn unaware, the final and supreme Face Itself, cold, terrible because of Its omniscient detachment. He knows that they see more than that: that they see the trust of which he proved himself unworthy, being used now for his chastisement; it seems to him now that he talks to the Face: "Perhaps I accepted more than I could perform. But is that criminal? Shall I be punished for that? Shall I be held responsible for that which

was beyond my power?" And the Face: "It was not to accomplish that that you accepted her. You took her as a means toward your own selfishness. As an instrument to be called to Jefferson; not for My ends, but for your own."

'Is that true?' he thinks. 'Could that have been true?' He sees himself again as when the shame came. He remembers that which he had sensed before it was born, hiding it from his own thinking. He sees himself offer as a sop fortitude and forbearance and dignity, making it appear that he resigned his pulpit for a martyr's reasons, when at the very instant there was within him a leaping and triumphant surge of denial behind a face which had betrayed him, believing itself safe behind the lifted hymnbook, when the photographer pressed his bulb.

He seems to watch himself, alert, patient, skillful, playing his cards well, making it appear that he was being driven, uncomplaining, into that which he did not even then admit had been his desire since before he entered the seminary. And still casting his sops as though he were flinging rotten fruit before a drove of hogs: the meagre income from his father which he continued to divide with the Memphis institution; allowing himself to be persecuted, to be dragged from his bed at night and carried into the woods and beaten with sticks, he all the while bearing in the town's sight and hearing, without shame, with that patient and voluptuous ego of the martyr, the air, the behavior, the How long, O Lord until, inside his house again and the door locked, he lifted the mask with voluptuous and triumphant glee: Ah. That's done now. That's past now. That's bought and paid for now

'But I was young then,' he thinks. 'I too had to do, not what I could, but what I knew.' Thinking is running too heavily now; he should know it, sense it. Still the vehicle is unaware of what it is approaching. 'And after all, I have paid. I have bought my ghost, even though I did pay for it with my life. And who can forbid me doing that? It is any man's privilege to destroy himself, so long as he does not injure anyone else, so long as he lives to and of himself—' He stops suddenly.

Motionless, unbreathing, there comes upon him a consternation which is about to be actual horror. He is aware of the sand now; with the realization of it he feels within himself a gathering as though for some tremendous effort. Progress now is still progress, yet it is now indistinguishable from the recent past like the already traversed inches of sand which cling to the turning wheel, raining back with a dry hiss that before this should have warned him: ' . . . revealed to my wife my hunger, my ego . . . instrument of her despair and shame . . .' and without his having thought it at all, a sentence seems to stand fullsprung across his skull, behind his eyes: I dont want to think this. I must not think this.

I dare not think this As he sits in the window, leaning forward above his motionless hands, sweat begins to pour from him, springing out like blood, and pouring. Out of the instant the sand-clutched wheel of thinking turns on with the slow implacability of a mediæval torture instrument, beneath the wrenched and broken sockets of his spirit, his life: 'Then, if this is so, if I am the instrument of her despair and death, then I am in turn instrument of someone outside myself. And I know that for fifty years I have not even been clay: I have been a single instant of darkness in which a horse galloped and a gun crashed. And if I am my dead grandfather on the instant of his death, then my wife, his grandson's wife . . . the debaucher and murderer of my grandson's wife, since I could neither let my grandson live or die . . .'

The wheel, released, seems to rush on with a long sighing sound. He sits motionless in its aftermath, in his cooling sweat, while the sweat pours and pours. The wheel whirls on. It is going fast and smooth now, because it is freed now of burden, of vehicle, axle, all. In the lambent suspension of August into which night is about to fully come, it seems to engender and surround itself with a faint glow like a halo. The halo is full of faces. The faces are not shaped with suffering, not shaped with anything: not horror, pain, not even reproach. They are peaceful, as though they have escaped into an apotheosis; his own is among them.

In fact, they all look a little alike, composite of all the faces which he has ever seen. But he can distinguish them one from another: his

wife's; townspeople, members of that congregation which denied him, which had met him at the station that day with eagerness and hunger; Byron Bunch's; the woman with the child; and that of the man called Christmas. This face alone is not clear. It is confused more than any other, as though in the now peaceful throes of a more recent, a more inextricable, compositeness.

Then he can see that it is two faces which seem to strive (but not of themselves striving or desiring it: he knows that, but because of the motion and desire of the wheel itself) in turn to free themselves one from the other, then fade and blend again. But he has seen now, the other face, the one that is not Christmas. 'Why, it's . . .' he thinks. 'I have seen it, recently . . . Why, it's that . . . boy. With that black pistol, automatic they call them.'

The one who . . . into the kitchen where . . . killed, who fired the . . .' Then it seems to him that some ultimate dammed flood within him breaks and rushes away. He seems to watch it, feeling himself losing contact with earth, lighter and lighter, emptying, floating. 'I am dying,' he thinks. 'I should pray. I should try to pray.' But he does not. He does not try. 'With all air, all heaven, filled with the lost and unheeded crying of all the living who ever lived, wailing still like lost children among the cold and terrible stars. . . . I wanted so little. I asked so little. It would seem . . .' The wheel turns on. It spins now, fading, without progress, as though turned by that final flood which had rushed out of him, leaving his body empty and lighter than a forgotten leaf and even more trivial than flotsam lying spent and still upon the window ledge which has no solidity beneath hands that have no weight; so that it can be now Now

It is as though they had merely waited until he could find something to pant with, to be reaffirmed in triumph and desire with, with this last left of honor and pride and life. He hears above his heart the thunder increase, myriad and drumming. Like a long sighing of wind in trees it begins, then they sweep into sight, borne now upon a cloud of phantom dust.

They rush past, forwardleaning in the saddles, with brandished arms, beneath whipping ribbons from slanted and eager lances; with tumult and soundless yelling they sweep past like a tide whose crest is jagged with the wild heads of horses and the brandished arms of men like the crater of the world in explosion. They rush past, are gone; the dust swirls skyward sucking, fades away into the night which has fully come.

Yet, leaning forward in the window, his bandaged head huge and without depths upon the twin blobs of his hands upon the ledge, it seems to him that he still hears them: the wild bugles and the clashing sabres and the dying thunder of hooves.

Chapter 21

There lives in the eastern part of the state a furniture repairer and dealer who recently made a trip into Tennessee to get some old pieces of furniture which he had bought by correspondence. He made the journey in his truck, carrying with him, since the truck (it had a housed-in body with a door at the rear) was new and he did not intend to drive it faster than fifteen miles an hour, camping equipment to save hotels.

On his return home he told his wife of an experience which he had had on the road, which interested him at the time and which he considered amusing enough to repeat. Perhaps the reason why he found it interesting and that he felt that he could make it interesting in the retelling is that he and his wife are not old either, besides his having been away from home (due to the very moderate speed which he felt it wise to restrict himself to) for more than a week. The story has to do with two people, passengers whom he picked up; he names the town, in Mississippi, before he entered Tennessee:

“I had done decided to get some gas and I was already slowing into the station when I saw this kind of young, pleasantfaced gal standing on the corner, like she was waiting for somebody to come along and offer her a ride. She was holding something in her arms. I didn’t see what it was

at first, and I didn't see the fellow that was with her at all until he come up and spoke to me. I thought at first that I didn't see him before was because he wasn't standing where she was. Then I saw that he was the kind of fellow you wouldn't see the first glance if he was alone by himself in the bottom of a empty concrete swimming pool.

"So he come up and I said, quick like: 'I aint going to Memphis, if that's what you want. I am going up past Jackson, Tennessee.' And he says,

" 'That'll be fine. That would just suit us. It would be a accommodation.' And I says,

" 'Where do you all want to go to?' And he looked at me, like a fellow that aint used to lying will try to think up one quick when he already knows that he likely aint going to be believed. 'You're just looking around, are you?' I says.

" 'Yes,' he says. 'That's it. We're just travelling. Wherever you could take us, it would be a big accommodation.'

"So I told him to get in. 'I reckon you aint going to rob and murder me.' He went and got her and come back. Then I saw that what she was carrying was a baby, a critter not yearling size. He made to help her into the back of the truck and I says, 'Whyn't one of you ride up here on the seat?' and they talked some and then she come and got on the seat and he went back into the filling station and got one of these leatherlooking paper suit cases and put it into the bed and got in too. And here we went, with her on the seat, holding the baby and looking back now and then to see if he hadn't maybe fell out or something.

"I thought they was husband and wife at first. I just never thought anything about it, except to wonder how a young, strapping gal like her ever come to take up with him. It wasn't anything wrong with him. He looked like a good fellow, the kind that would hold a job steady and work at the same job a long time, without bothering anybody about a raise neither, long as they let him keep on working. That was what he looked like. He looked like except when he was at work, he would just

be something around. I just couldn't imagine anybody, any woman, knowing that they had ever slept with him, let alone having anything to show folks to prove it."

Aint you shamed? his wife says. Talking that way before a lady They are talking in the dark.

Anyway, I cant see you blushing any he says. He continues: "I never thought anything about it until that night when we camped. She was sitting up on the seat by me, and I was talking to her, like a fellow would, and after a while it begun to come out how they had come from Alabama. She kept on saying, 'We come,' and so I thought she meant her and the fellow in the back. About how they had been on the road nigh eight weeks now. 'You aint had that chap no eight weeks,' I says. 'Not if I know color,' and she said it was just born three weeks ago, down at Jefferson, and I said, 'Oh. Where they lynched that nigger. You must have been there then,' and she clammed up. Like he had done told her not to talk about it. I knowed that's what it was. So we rode on and then it was coming toward night and I said, 'We'll be in a town soon. I aint going to sleep in town. But if you all want to go on with me tomorrow, I'll come back to the hotel for you in the morning about six o'clock,' and she sat right still, like she was waiting for him to say, and after a while he says,

" 'I reckon with this here truck house you dont need to worry about hotels,' and I never said anything and we was coming into the town and he said, 'Is this here any size town?'

" 'I dont know,' I says. 'I reckon they'll have a boarding house or something here though.' And he says,

" 'I was wondering if they would have a tourist camp.' And I never said anything and he said, 'With tents for hire. These here hotels are high, and with folks that have a long piece to go.' They hadn't never yet said where they was going. It was like they didn't even know themselves, like they was just waiting to see where they could get to. But I didn't know that, then. But I knowed what he wanted me to say, and that he

wasn't going to come right out and ask me himself. Like if the Lord aimed for me to say it, I would say it, and if the Lord aimed for him to go to a hotel and pay maybe three dollars for a room, he would do that too. So I says,

“ ‘Well, it's a warm night. And if you folks dont mind a few mosquitoes and sleeping on them bare boards in the truck.’ And he says,

“ ‘Sho. It will be fine. It'll be mighty fine for you to let her.’ I noticed then how he said her. And I begun to notice how there was something funny and kind of strained about him. Like when a man is determined to work himself up to where he will do something he wants to do and that he is scared to do. I dont mean it was like he was scared of what might happen to him, but like it was something that he would die before he would even think about doing it if he hadn't just tried everything else until he was desperate. That was before I knew. I just couldn't understand what in the world it could be then. And if it hadn't been for that night and what happened, I reckon I would not have known at all when they left me at Jackson.”

What was it he aimed to do? the wife says.

You wait till I come to that part. Maybe I'll show you, too He continues: “So we stopped in front of the store. He was already jumping out before the truck had stopped. Like he was afraid I would beat him to it, with his face all shined up like a kid trying to do something for you before you change your mind about something you promised to do for him. He went into the store on a trot and came back with so many bags and sacks he couldn't see over them, so that I says to myself, ‘Look a here, fellow. If you are aiming to settle down permanent in this truck and set up housekeeping.’ Then we drove on and came pretty soon to a likely place where I could drive the truck off the road, into some trees, and he jumps down and runs up and helps her down like she and the kid were made out of glass or eggs. And he still had that look on his face like he pretty near had his mind made up to do whatever it was he was desperated up to do, if only nothing I did or she did beforehand

would prevent it, and if she only didn't notice in his face that he was desperated up to something. But even then I didn't know what it was."

What was it? the wife says

I just showed you once. You aint ready to be showed again, are you?

I reckon I dont mind if you dont. But I still dont see anything funny in that. How come it took him all that time and trouble, anyway?

It was because they were not married the husband says. It wasn't even his child. I didn't know it then, though. I didn't find that out until I heard them talking that night by the fire, when they didn't know I heard, I reckon. Before he had done got himself desperated up all the way. But I reckon he was desperate enough, all right. I reckon he was just giving her one more chance He continues: "So there he was skirmishing around, getting camp ready, until he got me right nervous: him trying to do everything and not knowing just where to begin or something.

So I told him to go rustle up some firewood, and I took my blankets and spread them out in the truck. I was a little mad, then, at myself about how I had got into it now and I would have to sleep on the ground with my feet to the fire and nothing under me. So I reckon I was short and grumpy maybe, moving around, getting things fixed, and her sitting with her back to a tree, giving the kid his supper under a shawl and saying ever so often how she was ashamed to inconvenience me and that she aimed to sit up by the fire because she wasn't tired noway, just riding all day long and not doing anything. Then he came back, with enough wood to barbecue a steer, and she began to tell him and he went to the truck and taken out that suitcase and opened it and taken out a blanket. Then we had it, sho enough.

It was like those two fellows that used to be in the funny papers, those two Frenchmen that were always bowing and scraping at the other one to go first, making out like we had all come away from home just for the privilege of sleeping on the ground, each one trying to lie faster and bigger than the next. For a while I was a mind to say, 'All right. If you

want to sleep on the ground, do it. Because be durned if I want to.’ But I reckon you might say that I won. Or that me and him won. Because it wound up by him fixing their blanket in the truck, like we all might have known all the time it would be, and me and him spreading mine out before the fire. I reckon he knew that would be the way of it, anyhow. If they had come all the way from south Alabama like she claimed. I reckon that was why he brought in all that firewood just to make a pot of coffee with and heat up some tin cans. Then we ate, and then I found out.”

Found out what? What it was he wanted to do?

Not right then. I reckon she had a little more patience than you He continues: “So we had eaten and I was lying down on the blanket. I was tired, and getting stretched out felt good. I wasn’t aiming to listen, anymore than I was aiming to look like I was asleep when I wasn’t. But they had asked me to give them a ride; it wasn’t me that insisted on them getting in my truck. And if they seen fit to go on and talk without making sho nobody could hear them, it wasn’t any of my business. And that’s how I found out that they were hunting for somebody, following him, or trying to. Or she was, that is.

And so all of a sudden I says to myself, ‘Ah-ah. Here’s another gal that thought she could learn on Saturday night what her mammy waited until Sunday to ask the minister.’ They never called his name. And they didn’t know just which way he had run. And I knew that if they had known where he went, it wouldn’t be by any fault of the fellow that was doing the running. I learned that quick. And so I heard him talking to her, about how they might travel on like this from one truck to another and one state to another for the rest of their lives and not find any trace of him, and her sitting there on the log, holding the chap and listening quiet as a stone and pleasant as a stone and just about as nigh to being moved or persuaded.

And I says to myself, ‘Well, old fellow, I reckon it aint only since she has been riding on the seat of my truck while you rode with your feet hanging out the back end of it that she has travelled out in front on this

trip.’ But I never said anything. I just lay there and them talking, or him talking, not loud. He hadn’t even mentioned marriage, neither. But that’s what he was talking about, and her listening placid and calm, like she had heard it before and she knew that she never even had to bother to say either yes or no to him. Smiling a little she was. But he couldn’t see that.

“Then he give up. He got up from the log and walked away. But I saw his face when he turned and I knew that he hadn’t give up. He knew that he had just give her one more chance and that now he had got himself desperated up to risking all. I could have told him that he was just deciding now to do what he should have done in the first place. But I reckon he had his own reasons. Anyway he walked off into the dark and left her sitting there, with her face kind of bent down a little and that smile still on it. She never looked after him, neither. Maybe she knew he had just gone off by himself to get himself worked up good to what she might have been advising him to do all the time, herself, without saying it in out and out words, which a lady naturally couldn’t do; not even a lady with a Saturday night family.

“Only I dont reckon that was it either. Or maybe the time and place didn’t suit her, let alone a audience. After a while she got up and looked at me, but I never moved, and then she went and climbed into the truck and after a while I heard her quit moving around and I knew that she had done got fixed to sleep. And I lay there—I had done got kind of waked up myself, now—and it was a right smart while. But I knew that he was somewhere close, waiting maybe for the fire to die down or for me to get good to sleep. Because, sho enough, just about the time the fire had died down good, I heard him come up, quiet as a cat, and stand over me, looking down at me, listening.

I never made a sound; I dont know but I might have fetched a snore or two for him. Anyway, he goes on toward the truck, walking like he had eggs under his feet, and I lay there and watched him and I says to myself, ‘Old boy, if you’d a just done this last night, you’d a been sixty miles further south than you are now, to my knowledge. And if you’d a done it two nights ago, I reckon I wouldn’t ever have laid eyes on either

one of you.’ Then I got a little worried. I wasn’t worried about him doing her any harm she didn’t want done to her. In fact, I was pulling for the little cuss. That was it. I couldn’t decide what I had better do when she would begin to holler. I knew that she would holler, and if I jumped up and run to the truck, it would scare him off, and if I didn’t come running, he would know that I was awake and watching him all the time, and he’d be scared off faster than ever. But I ought not to worried. I ought to have known that from the first look I’d taken at her and at him.”

I reckon the reason you knew you never had to worry was that you had already found out just what she would do in a case like that the wife says.

Sho the husband says. I didn’t aim for you to find that out. Yes, sir. I thought I had covered my tracks this time

Well, go on. What happened?

What do you reckon happened, with a big strong gal like that, without any warning that it was just him, and a durn little cuss that already looked like he had reached the point where he could bust out crying like another baby? He continues: “There wasn’t any hollering or anything. I just watched him climb slow and easy into the truck and disappear and then didn’t anything happen for about while you could count maybe fifteen slow, and then I heard one kind of astonished sound she made when she woke up, like she was just surprised and then a little put out without being scared at all, and she says, not loud neither: ‘Why, Mr Bunch. Aint you ashamed. You might have woke the baby, too.’ Then he come out the back door of the truck. Not fast, and not climbing down on his own legs at all. I be dog if I dont believe she picked him up and set him back outside on the ground like she would that baby if it had been about six years old, say, and she says, ‘You go and lay down now, and get some sleep. We got another fur piece to go tomorrow.’

“Well, I was downright ashamed to look at him, to let him know that any human man had seen and heard what happened. I be dog if I didn’t want to find the hole and crawl into it with him. I did for a fact. And him standing there where she had set him down. The fire had burned down good now and I couldn’t hardly see him at all. But I knew about how I would have been standing and feeling if I was him. And that would have been with my head bowed, waiting for the Judge to say, ‘Take him out of here and hang him quick.’ And I didn’t make a sound, and after a while I heard him go on off. I could hear the bushes popping, like he had just struck off blind through the woods. And when daylight came he hadn’t got back.

“Well, I didn’t say anything. I didn’t know what to say. I kept on believing that he would show up, would come walking up out of the bushes, face or no face. So I built up the fire and got breakfast started, and after a while I heard her climbing out of the truck. I never looked around. But I could hear her standing there like she was looking around, like maybe she was trying to tell by the way the fire or my blanket looked if he was there or not. But I never said anything and she never said anything. I wanted to pack up and get started.

And I knew I couldn’t leave her in the middle of the road. And that if my wife was to hear about me travelling the country with a goodlooking country gal and a three weeks’ old baby, even if she did claim she was hunting for her husband. Or both husbands now. So we ate and then I said, ‘Well, I got a long road and I reckon I better get started.’ And she never said nothing at all. And when I looked at her I saw that her face was just as quiet and calm as it had ever been. I be dog if she was even surprised or anything. And there I was, not knowing what to do with her, and she done already packed up her things and even swept the truck out with a gum branch before she put in that paper suitcase and made a kind of cushion with the folded blanket at the back end of the truck; and I says to myself, ‘It aint any wonder you get along. When they up and run away on you, you just pick up whatever they left and go on.’ — —, ‘I reckon I’ll ride back here,’ she says.

“ ‘It’ll be kind of rough on the baby,’ I says.

“ ‘I reckon I can hold him up,’ she says.

“Suit yourself,’ I says. And we drove off, with me hanging out the seat to look back, hoping that he would show up before we got around the curve. But he never. Talk about a fellow being caught in the depot with a strange baby on his hands. Here I was with a strange woman and a baby too, expecting every car that come up from behind and passed us to be full of husbands and wives too, let alone sheriffs. We were getting close to the Tennessee line then and I had my mind all fixed how I would either burn that new truck up or get to a town big enough to have one of these ladies’ welfare societies in it that I could turn her over to. And now and then I would look back, hoping that maybe he had struck out afoot after us, and I would see her sitting there with her face as calm as church, holding that baby up so it could eat and ride the bumps at the same time. You cant beat them.” He lies in the bed, laughing. “Yes, sir. I be dog if you can beat them.”

Then what? What did she do then?

Nothing. Just sitting there, riding, looking out like she hadn’t ever seen country—roads and trees and fields and telephone poles—before in her life. She never saw him at all until he come around to the back door of the truck. She never had to. All she needed to do was wait. And she knew that

Him?

Sho. He was standing at the side of the road when we come around the curve. Standing there, face and no face, hangdog and determined and calm too, like he had done desperated himself up for the last time, to take the last chance, and that now he knew he wouldn’t ever have to desperate himself again He continues: “He never looked at me at all. I just stopped the truck and him already running back to go around to the door where she was sitting. And he come around the back of it and he stood there, and her not even surprised. ‘I done come too far now,’ he says. ‘I be dog if I’m going to quit now.’ And her looking at him like

she had known all the time what he was going to do before he even knew himself that he was going to, and that whatever he done, he wasn't going to mean it.

“ ‘Aint nobody never said for you to quit,’ she says.” He laughs, lying in the bed, laughing. “Yes, sir. You cant beat a woman. Because do you know what I think? I think she was just travelling. I dont think she had any idea of finding whoever it was she was following. I dont think she had ever aimed to, only she hadn't told him yet. I reckon this was the first time she had ever been further away from home than she could walk back before sundown in her life.

And that she had got along all right this far, with folks taking good care of her. And so I think she had just made up her mind to travel a little further and see as much as she could, since I reckon she knew that when she settled down this time, it would likely be for the rest of her life. That's what I think. Sitting back there in that truck, with him by her now and the baby that hadn't never stopped eating, that had been eating breakfast now for about ten miles, like one of these dining cars on the train, and her looking out and watching the telephone poles and the fences passing like it was a circus parade. Because after a while I says, ‘Here comes Saulsbury,’ and she says,

“ ‘What?’ and I says,

“ ‘Saulsbury, Tennessee,’ and I looked back and saw her face. And it was like it was already fixed and waiting to be surprised, and that she knew that when the surprise come, she was going to enjoy it. And it did come and it did suit her. Because she said,

“ ‘My, my. A body does get around. Here we aint been coming from Alabama but two months, and now it's already Tennessee.’ ”

1932

THE END

Pylon, William Faulkner

Pylon

First published in 1935, Faulkner's seventh novel is set in New Valois, a fictionalised version of New Orleans. It tells the story of a group of barnstormers (pilots that performed tricks in aviation groups known as flying circuses), whose lives are thoroughly unconventional. The 'pylon' of the title is the tower around which a pilot must turn as he competes in a race at an air fair. Though less famous than many of his other works, Pylon is one of Faulkner's most exciting books, set against the colourful backdrop of Mardi Gras.

The plot concerns how a flying team, comprising a pilot, a "jumper," or parachutist, and a mechanic, accompanied by a woman and her son, are short of money and hope to win at least one of the prizes at an air show. They live only on their winnings and they often have no place to stay, little to eat and no funds for transportation within the city.

Although the novel deals with the "romance" of flying, the hard physical conditions of the performers are never far from our view. The text examines Faulkner's concept of psychological necessity — that men and women must do what they are driven to do by their most profound inner motivations. Faulkner achieves this through solid, complex characters, who differ widely from one another and are sourced from a broad variety of social strata.

Contents

Dedication of an Airport

An Evening in New Valois

Night in the Vieux Carré

To-Morrow
And To-morrow
Love-song of J. A. Prufrock
The Scavengers

Dedication of an Airport

FOR A FULL minute Jiggs stood before the window in a light spatter of last night's confetti lying against the window-base like spent dirty foam, light-poised on the balls of his grease-stained tennis shoes, looking at the boots.

Slant-shimmered by the intervening plate they sat upon their wooden pedestal in unblemished and inviolate implication of horse and spur, of the posed country-life photographs in the magazine advertisements, beside the easel-wise cardboard placard with which the town had bloomed overnight as it had with the purple-and-gold tissue bunting and the trodden confetti and broken serpentine... the same lettering, the same photographs of the trim vicious fragile aeroplanes and the pilots leaning upon them in gargantuan irrelation as if the aeroplanes were a species of esoteric and fatal animals not trained or tamed but just for the instant inert, above the neat brief legend of name and accomplishment or perhaps just hope.

He entered the store, his rubber soles falling in quick hissing thuds on pavement and iron sill and then upon the tile floor of that museum of glass cases lighted suave and sourceless by an unearthly day-coloured substance in which the hats and ties and shirts, the belt-buckles and cuff-links and handkerchiefs, the pipes shaped like golf-clubs and the drinking-tools shaped like boots and barnyard fowls and the minute impedimenta for wear on ties and vest-chains shaped like bits and spurs, resembled biologic specimens put into the inviolate preservative before they had ever been breathed into. "Boots?" the clerk said. "The pair in the window?"

"Yair," Jiggs said. "How much?" But the clerk did not even move. He leaned back on the counter, looking down at the hard tough short-chinned face, blue-shaven, with a long thread-like and recently stanced razor-cut on it and in which the hot brown eyes seemed to snap and glare like a boy's approaching for the first time the aerial wheels and stars and serpents of a night time carnival; at the filthy raked swaggering peaked cap, the short thick muscle-bound body like the photographs of the one who two years before was light-middleweight champion of the army or Marine Corps or navy; the cheap breeches overcut to begin with and now skin-tight as if both they and their wearer had been recently and hopelessly rained on and enclosing a pair of short stocky thick fast legs like a polo pony's, which descended into the tops of a pair of boots, footless now and secured by two riveted straps beneath the insteps of the tennis shoes.

"They are twenty-two and a half," the clerk said.

"All right. I'll take them. How late do you keep open at night?"

"Until six."

"Hell! I'll be out at the airport then. I won't get back to town until seven. How about getting them then?" Another clerk came up: the manager, the floor-walker.

"You mean you don't want them now?" the first said.

"No," Jiggs said. "How about getting them at seven?"

"What is it?" the second clerk said.

"Says he wants a pair of boots. Says he can't get back from the airport before seven o'clock."

The second looked at Jiggs. "You a flyer?"

"Yair," Jiggs said. "Listen. Leave a guy here. I'll be back by seven. I'll need them to-night."

The second also looked down at Jiggs' feet. "Why not take them now?"

Jiggs didn't answer at all. He just said, "So I'll have to wait until tomorrow."

"Unless you can get back before six," the second said. "O.K.," Jiggs said.

"All right, mister. How much do you want down?" Now they both

looked at him: at the face, the hot eyes: the entire appearance articulate and complete, badge regalia and passport, of an oblivious and incorrigible insolvency. "To keep them for me. That pair in the window."

The second looked at the first. "Do you know his size?"

"That's all right about that," Jiggs said. "How much?"

The second looked at Jiggs. "You pay ten dollars and we will hold them for you until to-morrow."

"Ten dollars? Jesus, mister. You mean ten per cent. I could pay ten per cent, down and buy an aeroplane."

"You want to pay ten per cent, down?"

"Yair. Ten per cent. Call for them this afternoon if I can get back from the airport in time."

"That will be two and a quarter," the second said. When Jiggs put his hand into his pocket they could follow it, fingernail and knuckle, the entire length of the pocket, like watching the ostrich in the movie cartoon swallow the alarm clock. It emerged a fist and opened upon a wadded dollar bill and coins of all sizes. He put the bill into the first clerk's hand and began to count the coins on to the bill.

"There's fifty," he said. "Seventy-five. And fifteen's ninety, and twenty-five is..." His voice stopped; he became motionless, with the twenty-five-cent piece in his left hand and a half-dollar and four nickels on his right palm. The clerks watched him put the quarter back into his right hand and take up the four nickels. "Let's see," he said. "We had ninety, and twenty will be..."

"Two dollars and ten cents," the second said. "Take back two nickels and give him the quarter."

"Two and a dime," Jiggs said. "How about taking that down?"

"You were the one who suggested ten per cent."

"I can't help that. How about two and a dime?"

"Take it," the second said. The first took the money and went away. Again the second watched Jiggs' hand move downward along his leg,

and then he could even see the two coins at the end of the pocket, through the soiled cloth.

“Where do you get this bus to the airport?” Jiggs said. The other told him. Now the first returned, with the cryptic scribbled duplicate of the sale; and now they both looked into the hot interrogation of the eyes.

“They will be ready for you when you call,” the second said. “Yair; sure,” Jiggs said. “But get them out of the window.”

“You want to examine them?”

“No. I just want to see them come out of that window.” So again outside the window, his rubber soles resting upon that light confetti spatter more forlorn than spattered paint since it had neither inherent weight nor cohesiveness to hold it anywhere, which even during the time that Jiggs was in the store had decreased, thinned, vanishing particle by particle into nothing like foam does, he stood until the hand came into the window and drew the boots out.

Then he went on, walking fast with his short bouncing curiously stiff-kneed gait. When he turned into Grandlieu Street he could see a clock, though he was already hurrying or rather walking at his fast stiff hard gait like a mechanical toy that has but one speed, and though the clock’s face was still in the shadow of the opposite street side and what sunlight there was was still high, diffused, suspended in soft refraction by the heavy damp bayou-and-swamp-suspired air.

There was confetti here too, and broken serpentine, in neat narrow swept windrows against wall angles and lightly vulcanized along the gutter rims by the flushing fireplugs of the past dawn, while, upcaught and pinned by the cryptic significant shields to door-front and lamp-post, the purple-and-gold bunting looped unbroken as a trolley wire above his head as he walked, turning at last at right angles to cross the street itself and meet that one on the opposite side making its angle too, to join over the centre of the street as though to form an aerial and bottomless regal-coloured cattle chute suspended at first floor level above the earth, and suspending beneath itself in turn, the

outward-facing cheese-cloth-lettered interdiction which Jiggs, passing, slowed looking back to read: Grandlieu Street CLOSED To Traffic 8.0 P.M. — Midnight.

Now he could see the bus at the kerb, where they had told him it would be, with its cloth banner fastened by the four corners across its broad stem to ripple and flap in motion, and the wooden sandwich board at the kerb too: Bluehound to Feinman Airport 15c. The driver stood beside the open door; he too watched Jiggs' knuckles travel the length of the pocket. "Airport?" Jiggs said.

"Yes," the driver said. "You got a ticket?"
"I got seventy-five cents. Won't that do?"

"A ticket into the airport. Or a workman's pass. The passenger buses don't begin to run until noon." Jiggs looked at the driver with that hot pleasant interrogation, holding his breeches by one hand while he drew the other out of the pocket. "Are you working out there?" the driver said.

"Oh," Jiggs said. "Sure. I'm Roger Shumann's mechanic. You want to see my licence?"

"That'll be all right," the driver said. "Get aboard." In the driver's seat there lay folded a paper: one of the coloured ones, the pink or the green editions of the diurnal dog-watches, with a thick heavy type-splattered front page filled with ejaculations and pictures. Jiggs paused, stooped, turning.

"Have a look at your paper, cap," he said. But the driver did not answer. Jiggs took up the paper and sat in the next seat and took from his shirt pocket a crumpled cigarette-pack, up-ended it and shook into his other palm two cigarette-stubs and put the longer one back into the crumpled paper and into his shirt again. He lit the shorter one, pursing it away from his face and slanting his head aside to keep the match flame from his nose. Three more men entered the bus, two of them in overalls and the third in a kind of porter's cap made of or covered by

purple-and-gold cloth in alternate stripes, and then the driver came and sat sideways in his seat.

“You got a ship in the race to-day, have you?” he said.

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “In the three-seventy-five cubic inch.”

“How does it look to you? Do you think you will have a chance?”

“We might if they would let us fly it in the two hundred cubic inch,” Jiggs said. He took three quick draws from the cigarette-stub like darting a stick at a snake and snapped it through the still-open door as though it were the snake, or maybe a spider, and opened the paper. “Ship’s obsolete. It was fast two years ago, but that’s two years ago. We’d be O.K. now if they had just quit building racers when they finished the one we got.

There ain’t another pilot out there except Shumann that could have even qualified it.”

“Shumann’s good, is he?”

“They’re all good,” Jiggs said, looking at the paper. It spread its pale green surface: heavy, black-splotched, staccato: Airport Dedication Special; in the exact middle the photograph of a plump, bland, innocently sensual Levantine face beneath a raked fedora hat; the upper part of a thick body buttoned tight and soft into a peaked light-coloured double-breasted suit with a carnation in the lapel: the photograph inlaid like a medallion into a drawing full of scrolled wings and propeller symbols which enclosed a shield-shaped pen-and-ink reproduction of something apparently cast in metal and obviously in existence somewhere and lettered in gothic relief:

FEINMAN AIRPORT

NEW VALOIS, FRANCIANA Dedicated to

THE AVIATORS OF AMERICA

and

COLONEL H. I. FEINMAN,

Chairman Sewage Board

Through Whose Undeviating Vision and Unflagging

Effort This Airport was Raised Up and Created out of the Waste Land at the Bottom of Lake Rambaud at a Cost of One Million Dollars

"This Feinman," Jiggs said. "He must be a big son of a bitch."

"He's a son of a bitch all right," the driver said. "I guess you'd call him big too."

"He gave you guys a nice airport, anyway," Jiggs said.

"Yair," the driver said. "Somebody did."

"Yair," Jiggs said. "It must have been him. I notice he's got his name on it here and there."

"Here and there; yair," the driver said. "In electric lights on both hangars and on the floor and the ceiling of the lobby and four times on each lamp-post and a guy told me the beacon spells it too but I don't know about that because I don't know the Morse code."

"For Christ's sake," Jiggs said. Now a fair crowd of men, in the overalls or the purple-and-gold caps, appeared suddenly and began to enter the bus, so that for the time the scene began to resemble that comic stage one where the entire army enters one taxi-cab and drives away. But there was room for all of them and then the door swung in and the bus moved away and Jiggs sat back, looking out. The bus swung immediately away from Grandlieu Street and Jiggs watched himself plunging between iron balconies, catching fleeting glimpses of dirty paved courts as the bus seemed to rush with tremendous clatter and speed through cobbled streets which did not look wide enough to admit it, between low brick walls which seemed to sweat a rich slow over-fecund smell of fish and coffee and sugar, and another odour profound faint and distinctive as a musty priest's robe: of some spartan effluvium of mediaeval convents.

Then the bus ran out of this and began to run, faster still, through a long avenue between palm-bordered bearded live oak groves and then suddenly Jiggs saw that the live oaks stood not in earth but in water so motionless and thick as to make no reflection, as if it had been poured about the trunks and allowed to set. The bus ran suddenly past a row of flimsy cabins whose fronts rested upon the shell foundation of the road

itself and whose rears rested upon stilts to which row-boats were tied and between which nets hung drying, and he saw that the roofs were thatched with the smoke-coloured growth which hung from the trees, before they flicked away and the bus ran again over-arched by the oak boughs from which the moss hung straight and windless as the beards of old men sitting in the sun. “Jesus,” Jiggs said. “If a man don’t own a boat here he can’t even go to the can, can he?”

“Your first visit down here?” the driver said. “Where you from?”

“Anywhere,” Jiggs said. “The place I’m staying away from right now is Kansas.”

“Family there, huh?”

“Yair. I got two kids there; I guess I still got the wife too.”

“So you pulled out.”

“Yair. Jesus, I couldn’t even keep back enough to have my shoes half-soled. Every time I did a job her or the sheriff would catch the guy and get the money before I could tell him I was through; I would make a parachute jump and one of them would have the jack and be on the way back to town before I even pulled the rip-cord.” —

“For Christ’s sake,” the driver said.

“Yair,” Jiggs said, looking out at the back-rushing trees. “This guy Feinman could spend some more of the money giving these trees a haircut, couldn’t he?” Now the bus, the road, ran out of the swamp though without mounting, with no hill to elevate it; it ran now upon a flat plain of saw-grass and of cypress and oak stumps... a pocked desolation of some terrific and apparently purposeless reclamation across which the shell road ran ribbon-blanching towards something low and dead ahead of it — something low, unnatural: a chimera quality which for the moment prevented one from comprehending that it had been built by man and for a purpose.

The thick heavy air was full now of a smell thicker, heavier, though there was yet no water in sight; there was only the soft pale sharp chimera-shape above which pennons floated against a further drowsy

immensity which the mind knew must be water, apparently separated from the flat earth by a mirage line so that, taking shape now as a doublewinged building, it seemed to float lightly like the apocryphal turreted and battlemented cities in the coloured Sunday sections, where beneath sill-less and floorless arches people with yellow and blue flesh pass and repass: myriad, purposeless, and free from gravity.

Now the bus, swinging, presented in broadside the low broad main building with its two hangar wings, modernistic, crenellated, with its façade faintly Moorish or Californian beneath the gold-and-purple pennons whipping in a breeze definitely from water and giving to it an air both aerial and aquatic like a mammoth terminal for some species of machine of a yet unvisioned to-morrow, to which air earth and water will be as one. And viewed from the bus across a plaza of beautiful and incredible grass labyrinthed by concrete driveways which Jiggs will not for two or three days yet recognize to be miniature replicas of the concrete runways on the field itself, a mathematic monogram of two capital F's laid by compass to all the winds.

The bus ran into one of these, slowing between the bloodless grapes of lamp-globes on bronze poles; as Jiggs got out he stopped to look at the four F's cast into the quadrants of the base before going on.

He went around the main building and followed a narrow alley like a gutter, ending in a blank and knobless door; he put his hand too among the handprints in oil or grease on the door and pushed through it into a narrow alcove walled by neatly ranked and numbered tools from a faint and cavernous murmur. The alcove contained a lavatory, a row of hooks from which depended garments — civilian shirts and coats, one pair of trousers with dangling braces, the rest greasy dungarees, one of which Jiggs took down and stepped into and bounced lightly up and around his shoulders all in one motion, already moving towards a second door built mostly of chicken-wire and through which he could now see the hangar itself, the glass-and-steel cavern, the aeroplanes, the racers.

Wasp-waisted, wasp-light, still, trim, vicious, small and immobile, they seemed to poise without weight, as though made of paper for the sole purpose of resting upon the shoulders of the dungaree-clad men about them. With their soft bright paint tempered somewhat by the steel-filtered light of the hangar they rested for the most part complete and intact, with whatever it was that the mechanics were doing to them of such a subtle and technical nature as to be invisible to the lay eye, save for one.

Unbonneted, its spare entrails revealed as serrated top-and-bottom lines of delicate rocker arms and rods, inferential in their very myriad delicacy of a weightless and terrific speed any momentary faltering of which would be the irreparable difference between motion and mere matter, it appeared more profoundly derelict than the half-eaten carcass of a deer come suddenly upon in a forest.

Jiggs paused, still fastening the coverall's throat, and looked across the hangar at the three people busy about it — two of a size and one taller, all in dungarees although one of the two shorter ones was topped by a blob of savage meal-coloured hair which even from here did not look like man's hair.

He did not approach at once; still fastening the coverall he looked on and saw, in another clump of dungarees beside another aeroplane, a small tow-headed boy in khaki miniature of the men, even to the grease. "Jesus Christ," Jiggs thought. "He's done smeared oil on them already. Laverne will give him hell." He approached on his short bouncing legs; already he could hear the boy talking in the loud assured carrying voice of a spoiled middle-western child. He came up and put out his blunt hard grease-grained hand and scoured the boy's head.

"Look out," the boy said. Then he said, "Where you been?"

Laverne and Roger—" Jiggs scoured the boy's head again and then crouched, his fists up, his head drawn down into his shoulders in burlesque pantomime. But the boy just looked at him. "Laverne and Roger—" he said again.

“Who’s your old man to-day, kid?” Jiggs said. Now the boy moved. With absolutely no change of expression he lowered his head and rushed at Jiggs, his fists flailing at the man. Jiggs ducked, taking the blows while the boy hammered at him with puny and deadly purpose; now the other men had all turned to watch, with wrenches and tools and engine parts in their suspended hands.

“Who’s your old man, huh?” Jiggs said, holding the boy off and then lifting and holding him away while he still hammered at Jiggs’ head with that grim and puny purpose. “All right!” Jiggs cried. He set the boy down and held him off, still ducking and dodging and now blind since the peaked cap was jammed over his face and the boy’s hard light little fists hammering upon the cap. “Oke! Oke!” Jiggs cried.

“I quit! I take it back!” He stood back and tugged the cap off his face and then he found why the boy had ceased: that he and the men too with their arrested tools and safety wire and engine parts were now looking at something which had apparently crept from a doctor’s cupboard and, in the snatched garments of an etherized patient in a charity ward, escaped into the living world.

He saw a creature which, erect, would be better than six feet tall and which would weigh about ninety-five pounds, in a suit of no age or colour, as though made of air and doped like an aeroplane wing with the incrustation of all articulate life’s contact with the passing earth, which ballooned light and impedimentless about a skeleton frame as though suit and wearer both hung from a flapping clothes line; a creature with the leashed, eager loose-jointed air of a half-grown high-bred setter puppy, crouched facing the boy with its hands up too in more profound burlesque than Jiggs’ because it was obviously not intended to be burlesque.

“Come on, Dempsey,” the man said. “How about taking me on for an ice-cream cone? Hey?” The boy did not move. He was not more than six, yet he looked at the apparition before him with the amazed quiet immobility of the grown men. “How about it, huh?” the man said.

Still the boy did not move. "Ask him who's his old man," Jiggs said. The man looked at Jiggs. "So's his old man?" "No. Who's his old man."

Now it was the apparition who looked at Jiggs in a kind of shocked immobility. "Who's his old man?" he repeated. He was still looking at Jiggs when the boy rushed upon him with his fists flailing again and his small face grimly and soberly homicidal.

The man was still stooping, looking at Jiggs; it seemed to Jiggs and the other men that the boy's fists made a light wooden-sounding tattoo as though the man's skin and the suit too hung on a chair while the man ducked and dodged, trying to guard his face while still glaring at Jiggs with that skull-like amazement, repeating, "Who's his old man? Who's his old man?"

When Jiggs at last reached the unbonneted aeroplane the two men had the super-charger already off and dismantled. "Been to your grandmother's funeral or something?" the taller one said. "I been over there playing with Jack," Jiggs said. "You just never saw me because there ain't any women around here to be looking at yet."

"Yair?" the other said.

"Yair," Jiggs said. "Where's that crescent wrench we bought in Kansas City?" The woman had it in her hand; she gave it to him and drew the back of her hand across her forehead, leaving a smudge of grease up and into the meal-coloured, the strong pallid Iowa-com-coloured hair.

So he was busy then, though he looked back once and saw the apparition with the boy now riding on his shoulder, leaning into the heads and greasy backs busy again about the other aeroplane, and when he and Shumann lifted the super-charger back on to the engine he looked again and saw them, the boy still riding on the man's shoulder, going out the hangar door and towards the apron.

Then they put the cowling back on and Shumann set the propeller horizontal and Jiggs raised the aeroplane's tail, easily, already swinging it to pass through the door, the woman stepping back to let the wing pass her, looking back herself into the hangar now.

"Where did Jack go?" she said.

"Out towards the apron," Jiggs said. "With that guy."

"With what guy?"

"Tall guy. Says he is a reporter. That looks like they locked the graveyard up before he got in last night." The aeroplane passed her, swinging again into the thin sunshine, the tail high and apparently without weight on Jiggs' shoulder, his thick legs beneath it moving with tense stout piston-like thrusts, Shumann and the taller man pushing the wings.

"Wait a minute," the woman said. But they did not pause and she overtook and passed the moving tail group and reached down past the uptilted cockpit hatch and stepped clear, holding a bundle wrapped tightly in a dark sweater.

The aeroplane went on; already the guards in the purple-and-gold porter caps were lowering the barrier cable on to the apron; and now the band had begun to play, heard twice: once the faint light almost airy thump-thump-thump from where the sun glinted on the actual horn mouths on the platform facing the reserved section of the stands, and once where the disembodied noise blared brazen, metallic, and loud from the amplifier which faced the barrier.

She turned and re-entered the hangar, stepping aside to let another aeroplane and its crew pass; she spoke to one of the men: "Who was that Jack went out with, Art?"

"The skeleton?" the man said. "They went to get an icecream cone. He says he is a reporter." She went on, across the hangar and through the chicken-wire door and into the tool room with its row of hooks from which depended the coats and shirts and now one stiff linen collar and

tie such as might be seen on a barber-shop hook where a preacher was being shaved and which she recognized as belonging to the circuit-rider-looking man in steel spectacles who won the Graves Trophy race at Miami two months ago.

There was neither lock nor hook on this door, and the other, the one through which Jiggs had entered, hung perfectly blank too save for the grease-prints of hands. For less than a second she stood perfectly still, looking at the second door while her hand made a single quick stroking movement about the doorjamb where hook or lock would have been.

It was less than a second, then she went on to the corner where the lavatory was — the grease-streaked bowl, the cake of what looked like lava, the metal case for paper towels — and laid the bundle carefully on the floor next the wall where the floor was cleanest, and rose and looked at the door again for a pause that was less than a second — a woman not tall and not thin, looking almost like a man in the greasy coverall, with the pale strong rough ragged hair actually darker where it was sunburned, a tanned heavy-jawed face in which the eyes looked like pieces of china.

It was hardly a pause; she rolled her sleeves back, shaking the folds free and loose, and opened the coverall at the throat and freed it about her shoulders too like she had the sleeves, obviously and apparently arranging it so she would not need to touch the foul garment any more than necessary.

Then she scrubbed face neck and forearms with the harsh soap and rinsed and dried herself and, stooping, keeping her arms well away from the coverall, she opened the rolled sweater on the floor. It contained a comb, a cheap metal vanity and a pair of stockings rolled in turn into a man's clean white shirt and a worn wool skirt. She used the comb and the vanity's mirror, stopping to scrub again at the grease-smudge on her forehead.

Then she unbuttoned the shirt and shook out the skirt and spread paper towels on the lavatory and laid the garments on them, openings

upward and facing her and, holding the open edges of the coverall's front between two more paper towels, she paused and looked again at the door: a single still cold glance empty of either hesitation, concern, or regret while even here the faint beat of the band came in mute thuds and blares.

Then she turned her back slightly towards the door and in the same motion with which she reached for the skirt she stepped out of the coverall in a pair of brown walking shoes, not new now and which had not cost very much when they had been, and a man's thin cotton undershorts and nothing else.

Now the first starting bomb went... a jarring thud followed by a vicious light repercussion as if the bomb had set off another smaller one in the now empty hangar and in the rotunda too. Within the domed steel vacuum the single report became myriad, high and everywhere about the concave ceiling like invisible unearthly winged creatures of that yet unvisioned tomorrow, mechanical instead of blood, bone and meat, speaking to one another in vicious high-pitched ejaculations as though concerting an attack on something below.

There was an amplifier in the rotunda too and through it the sound of the aeroplanes turning the field pylon on each lap filled the rotunda and the restaurant where the woman and the reporter sat while the little boy finished the second dish of ice-cream. The amplifier filled rotunda and restaurant even above the sound of feet as the crowd moiled and milled and trickled through the gates on to the field, with the announcer's voice harsh masculine and disembodied.

At the end of each lap would come the mounting and then fading snarl and snore of engines as the aeroplanes came up and zoomed and banked away, leaving once more the scuffle and murmur of feet on tile and the voice of the announcer reverberant and sonorous within the domed shell of glass and steel in a running commentary to which apparently none listened, as if the voice were merely some unavoidable and inexplicable phenomenon of nature like the sound of wind or of erosion. Then the band would begin to play again, though faint and

almost trivial behind and below the voice, as if the voice actually were that natural phenomenon against which all man-made sounds and noises blew and vanished like leaves.

Then the bomb again, the faint fierce thwack-thwack-thwack, and the sound of engines again trivial and meaningless as the band, as though like the band mere insignificant properties which the voice used for emphasis as the magician uses his wand or handkerchief:

“... ending the second event, the two hundred cubic inch class dash, the correct time of the winner of which will be given you as soon as the judges report.

Meanwhile while we are waiting for it to come in I will run briefly over the afternoon's programme of events for the benefit of those who have come in late or have not purchased a programme which, by the way, may be purchased for twenty-five cents from any of the attendants in the purple-and-gold Mardi Gras caps....”

“I got one here,” the reporter said. He produced it, along with a mass of blank yellow copy and a folded newspaper of the morning, from the same pocket of his disreputable coat... a pamphlet already opened and creased back upon the faint mimeographed letters of the first page:
THURSDAY (DEDICATION DAY)

2.30 p m. Spot Parachute Jump. Purse \$25.00.

3.00 p m. 200 cu in. Dash. Qualifying Speed 100 in p h. Purse \$150.00
(1) 45%. (2) 30%. (3) 15%. (4) 10%.

3.30 p m. Aerial Acrobatics. Jules Despleins, France. Lieut.
Frank Burnham, United States.

4.30 p m. Scull Dash. 375 cu in. Qualifying Speed 160 in p h.
(1, 2, 3,4).

5.00 p m. Delayed Parachute Drop.

8.00 p m. Special Mardi Gras Evening Event. Rocket Plane
Lieut. Frank Burnham.

“Keep it,” the reporter said. “I don't need it.”

“Thanks,” the woman said. “I know the setup.” She looked at the boy. “Hurry and finish it,” she said. “You have already eaten more than you can hold.” The reporter looked at the boy too, with that expression leashed, eager, cadaverous; sitting forward on the flimsy chair in that attitude at once inert yet precarious and light-poised as though for violent and complete departure like a scarecrow in a winter field. “All I can do for him is buy him something to eat,” he said.

“To take him to see an air race would be like taking a colt out to Washington Park for the day. You are from Iowa and Shumann was born in Ohio and he was born in California and he has been across the United States four times, let alone Canada and Mexico. Jesus. He could take me and show me, couldn’t he?” But the woman was looking at the boy; she did not seem to have heard at all.

“Go on,” she said. “Finish it or leave it.”

“And then we’ll eat some candy,” the reporter said. “Hey, Dempsey?”

“No,” the woman said. “He’s had enough.”

“But maybe for later?” the reporter said. She looked at him now: the pale stare without curiosity, perfectly grave, perfectly blank, as he rose, moved, dry loose weightless and sudden and longer than a lath, the disreputable suit ballooning even in this windless conditioned air as he went towards the candy counter.

Above the shuffle and murmur of feet in the lobby and above the clash and clatter of crockery in the restaurant the amplified voice still spoke, profound and effortless, as though it were the voice of the steel-and-chromium mausoleum itself, talking of creatures imbued with motion though not with life and incomprehensible to the puny crawling pain-webbed globe, incapable of suffering, wombed and born complete and instantaneous, cunning, intricate and deadly, from out some blind iron bat-cave of the earth’s prime foundation:

“... dedication meet, Feinman million-dollar airport, New Valois, Franciana, held under the official auspices of the American Aeronautical Association.

And here is the official clocking of the winners of the two hundred cubic inch race which you just witnessed... Now they had to breast the slow current; the gatemen (these wore tunics of purple-and-gold as well as caps) would not let them pass because the woman and the child had no tickets. So they had to go back and out and around through the hangar to reach the apron.

And here the voice met them again... or rather it had never ceased; they had merely walked in it without hearing or feeling it like in the sunshine; the voice too almost as sourceless as light.

Now, on the apron, the third bomb went off, and looking up the apron from where he stood among the other mechanics about the aeroplanes waiting for the next race, Jiggs saw the three of them... the woman in an attitude of inattentive hearing without listening, the scarecrow man who even from here Jiggs could discern to be talking steadily and even now and then gesticulating, the small khaki spot of the little boy's dungarees riding high on his shoulder and the small hand holding a scarce-tasted chocolate bar in a kind of static surfeit.

They went on, though Jiggs saw them twice more, the second time the shadow of the man's and the little boy's heads falling for an incredible distance eastward along the apron. Then the taller man began to beckon him and already the five aeroplanes entered for the race were moving, the tails high on the shoulders of their crews, out towards the starting-line.

When he and the taller man returned to the apron the band was still playing. Faced by the bright stands with their whipping skyline of purple-and-gold pennons the amplifiers at regular intervals along the apron edge erupted snatched blares of ghostlike and ubiquitous sound which, as Jiggs and the other passed them, died each into the next without loss of beat or particular gain in sense or tune.

Beyond the amplifiers and the apron lay the flat triangle of reclaimed and tortured earth dragged with slow mechanical violence into air and

alternations of light — the ceaseless surface of the outraged lake notched by the oyster-and-shrimp-fossil bed, upon which the immaculate concrete runways lay in the attitude of two stiffly embracing capital F's, and on one of which the six aeroplanes rested like six motionless wasps, the slanting sun glinting on their soft bright paint and on the faint propeller blurs.

Now the band ceased; the bomb bloomed again on the pale sky and had already begun to fade even before the jarring thud, the thin vicious crack of reverberation; and now the voice again, amplified and ubiquitous, louder even than the spatter and snarl of the engines as the six aeroplanes rose raggedly and dissolved, converging, coveying, towards the scattering pylon out in the lake:

. fourth event, Scull Speed Dash, three hundred and seventy-five cubic inch, twenty-five miles, five times around, purse three hundred and twenty-five dollars.

I'll give you the names of the contestants as the boys, the other pilots on the apron here, figure they will come in. First and second will be Al Myers and Bob Bullitt, in number thirty-two and number five. You can take your choice, your guess is as good as ours; they are both good pilots — Bullitt won the Graves Trophy against a hot field in Miami in December — and they are both flying Chance Specials. It will be the pilot, and I'm not going to make anybody mad by making a guess. — Vas you dere, Sharlie? I mean Mrs. Bullitt.

The other boys are good too, but Myers and Bullitt have the ships. So I'll say third will be Jimmy Ott, and Roger Shumann and Joe Grant last, because as I said, the other boys have the ships. — There they are, coming in from the scattering pylon, and it's — Yes, it's Myers or Bullitt out front and Ott close behind, and Shumann and Grant pretty well back. And here they are coming in for the first pylon."

The voice was firm, pleasant, assured; it had an American reputation for announcing air meets as other voices had for football or music or prize-fights. A pilot himself, the announcer stood hip high among the caps and horns of the bandstand below the reserved seats,

bareheaded, in a tweed jacket even a little over-smart, reminiscent a trifle more of Hollywood Avenue than of Madison, with the modest winged badge of a good solid pilots' fraternity in the lapel and turned a little to face the box seats while he spoke into the microphone as the aeroplanes roared up and banked around the field pylon and faded again in irregular order.

"There's Feinman," Jiggs said. "In the yellow-and-blue pulpit. The one in the grey suit and the flower. The one with the women. Yair; he'd make lard, now."

"Yes," the taller man said. "Look yonder. Roger is going to take that guy on this next pylon." Although Jiggs did not look at once, the voice did, almost before the taller man spoke, as if it possessed some quality of omniscience beyond even vision: "Well, well, folks, here's a race that wasn't advertised. It looks like Roger Shumann is going to try to upset the boys' dope. That's him that went up into third place on that pylon then; he has just taken Ott on the lake pylon.

Let's watch him now; Mrs. Shumann's here in the crowd somewhere: maybe she knows what Roger's got up his sleeve to-day. A poor fourth on the first pylon and now coming in third on the third lap — oh, oh, oh, look at him take that pylon! If we were all back on the farm now I would say somebody has put a cockleburr under Roger's — well, you know where: maybe it was Mrs. Shumann did it.

Good boy, Roger! If you can just hold Ott now because Ott's got the ship on him, folks; I wouldn't try to fool you about that. — No; wait, w-a-i-t. — Folks, he's trying to catch Bullitt; oh, oh, did he take that pylon, folks, he gained three hundred feet on Bullitt on that turn. — Watch now, he's going to try to take Bullitt on the next pylon — there, there, there — watch him, WATCH him.

He's beating them on the pylons, folks, because he knows that on the straightaway he hasn't got a chance; oh, oh, oh, watch him now, up there from fourth place in four and a half laps and now he is going to pass Bullitt unless he pulls his wings off on this next. — Here they come

in now; oh, oh, oh, Mrs. Shumann's somewhere in the crowd here; maybe she told Roger if he don't come in on the money he needn't come in at all. — There it is, folks; here it is: Myers gets the flag and now it's Shumann or Bullitt, Shumann or — It's Schumann, folks, in as pretty a flown race as you ever watched—”

“There it is,” Jiggs said. “Jesus, he better had come in on somebody's money or we'd a all set up in the depot to-night with our bellies thinking our throats was cut. Come on. I'll help you put the 'chutes on.” But the taller man was looking up the apron. Jiggs paused too and saw the boy's khaki garment riding high above the heads below the bandstand, though he could not actually see the woman. The six aeroplanes which for six minutes had followed one another around the course at one altitude and in almost undeviating order like so many beads on a string, were now scattered about the adjacent sky for a radius of two or three miles as if the last pylon had exploded them like so many scraps of paper, jockeying in to land.

“Who's that guy?” the taller man said. “Hanging around Laverne?”

“Lazarus?” Jiggs said. “Jesus, if I was him I would be afraid to use myself. I would be even afraid to take myself out of bed, like I was a cut-glass monkey-wrench or something. Come on. Your guy is already warmed up and waiting for you.”

For a moment longer the taller man looked up the apron bleakly. Then he turned. “Go and get the 'chutes and find somebody to bring the sack; I will meet...”

“They are already at the ship,” Jiggs said. “I done already carried them over. Come on.”

The other, moving, stopped dead still. He looked down at Jiggs with a bleak handsome face whose features were regular, brutally courageous, the expression quick if not particularly intelligent, not particularly strong. Under his eyes the faint smudges of dissipation appeared to have been put there by a makeup expert. He wore a

narrow moustache above a mouth much more delicate and even feminine than that of the woman whom he and Jiggs called Laverne. "What?" he said.

"You carried the 'chutes and that sack of flour over to the ship? You did?" Jiggs did not stop. "You're next, ain't you? You're ready to go, ain't you? And it's getting late, ain't it? What are you waiting on? for them to turn on the boundary lights and maybe the floods? or maybe to have the beacon to come in on to land?" The other walked again, following Jiggs along the apron towards where an aeroplane, a commercial type, stood just without the barrier, its engine running. "I guess you have been to the office and collected my twenty-five bucks and saved me some more time too," he said.

"All right; I'll attend to that too," Jiggs said. "Come on, The guy's burning gas; he'll be trying to charge you six bucks instead of five if you don't snap it up." They went on to where the aeroplane waited, the pilot already in his cockpit, the already low sun, refracted by the invisible propeller blades, shimmering about the nose of it in a faint copper-coloured nimbus. The two parachutes and the sack of flour lay on the ground beside it. Jiggs held them up one at a time while the other backed into the harness, then he stooped and darted about the straps and buckles like a squirrel, still talking. "Yair, he come in on the money. I guess I will get my hooks on a little jack myself to-night. Jesus, I won't know how to count higher than two bucks."

"But don't try to learn again on my twenty-five," the other said. "Just get it and hold it until I get back."

"What would I want with your twenty-five?" Jiggs said. "With Roger just won thirty per cent, of three hundred and twenty-five, whatever that is. How do you think twenty-five bucks will look beside that?"

"I can tell you a bigger difference still," the other said. "The money Roger won ain't mine but this twenty-five is. Maybe you better not even collect it. I'll attend to that too."

“Yair,” Jiggs said, busy, bouncing on his short strong legs, snapping the buckles of the emergency parachute. “Yair, we’re jake now. We can eat and sleep again to-night.... O.K.” He stood back and the other waddled stiffly towards the aeroplane. The checker came up with his pad and took their names and the aeroplane’s number and went away.

“Where you want to land?” the pilot said.

“I don’t care,” the jumper said. “Anywhere in the United States except that lake.”

“If you see you’re going to hit the lake,” Jiggs said, “turn around and go back up and jump again.”

They paid no attention to him. They were both looking back and upward towards where in the high drowsy azure there was already a definite alteration towards night. “Should be about dead up there now,” the pilot said. “What say I spot you for the hangar roofs and you can slip either way you want.”

“All right,” the jumper said. “Let’s get away from here.”

With Jiggs shoving at him he climbed on to the wing and into the front cockpit and Jiggs handed up the sack of flour and the jumper took it on to his lap like it was a child. With his bleak humourless handsome face he looked exactly like the comedy young bachelor caught by his girl while holding a strange infant on a street corner. The aeroplane began to move; Jiggs stepped back as the jumper leaned out, shouting: “Leave that money alone, you hear?”

“Okey doke,” Jiggs said. The aeroplane waddled out and on to the runway and turned and stopped; again the bomb, the soft slow bulb of cotton batting flowered against the soft indefinite lake-haze where for a little while still evening seemed to wait before moving in; again the report, the thud and jar twice reverberant against the stands as if the report bounced once before becoming echo. And now Jiggs turned as if he had waited for that signal too and almost parallel he and the aeroplane began to move... the stocky purposeful man, and the

machine already changing angle and then lifting, banking in a long climbing turn.

It was two thousand feet high when Jiggs shoved past the purple-and-gold guards at the main gate and through the throng huddled in the narrow under-pass beneath the reserved seats. Someone plucked at his sleeve.

“When’s the guy going to jump out of the parachute?”

“Not until he gets back down here,” Jiggs said, butting on past the other purple-and-gold guards and so into the rotunda itself and likewise not into the amplified voice again for the reason that he had never moved out of it:

“... still gaining altitude now; the ship has a long way to go yet.

And then you will see a living man, a man like yourselves — a man like half of yourselves and that the other half of yourselves like, I should say — hurl himself into space and fall for almost four miles before pulling the ripcord of the parachute; by ripcord we mean the trigger that—”
Once inside, Jiggs paused, looking swiftly about, breasting now with immobility the now comparatively thin tide which still set towards the apron and talking to itself with one another in voices forlorn, baffled, and amazed:

“What is it now? What are they doing out there now?”

“Fella going to jump ten miles out of a parachute.”

“Better hurry too,” Jiggs said. “It may open before he can jump out of it.” The rotunda, filled with dusk, was lighted now, with a soft sourceless wash of no earthly colour or substance and which cast no shadow: spacious, suave, sonorous and monastic, wherein relief or mural-limning or bronze and chromium skilfully shadow-lurked presented the furious, still, and legendary tale of what man has come to call his conquering of the infinite and impervious air.

High overhead the dome of azure glass repeated the mosaiced twin F symbols of the runways to the brass twin F's let into the tile floor and which, bright polished, gleaming, seemed to reflect and find soundless and fading echo in turn monogrammed into the bronze grilling above the ticket-and-information windows and inlaid frieze-like into baseboard and cornice of the synthetic stone. "Yair," Jiggs said. "It must have set them back that million...."

Say, mister, where's the office?" The guard told him; he went to the small discreet door almost hidden in an alcove and entered it and for a time he walked out of the voice though it was waiting for him when, a minute later, he emerged:

"... still gaining altitude. The boys down here can't tell just how high he is but he looks about right. It might be any time now; you'll see the flour first and then you will know there is a living man falling at the end of it, a living man falling through space at the rate of four hundred feet a second...

When Jiggs reached the apron again (he too had no ticket and so though he could pass from the apron into the rotunda as often as he pleased, he could not pass from the rotunda to the apron save by going around through the hangar) the aeroplane was no more than a trivial and insignificant blemish against the sky which was now definitely that of evening, seeming to hang there without sound or motion. But Jiggs did not look at it.

He thrust on among the up-gazing motionless bodies and reached the barrier just as one of the racers was being wheeled in from the field. He stopped one of the crew; the bill was already in his hand. "Monk, give this to Jackson, will you? For flying that parachute jump. He'll know."

He went back into the hangar, walking fast now and already unfastening his coverall before he pushed through the chicken-wire door. He removed the coverall and hung it up and only for a second glanced at his hands. "I'll wash them when I get to town," he said.

Now the first port lights came on; he crossed the plaza, passing the bloomed bloodless grapes on their cast stalks on the quadrate bases of which four F's were discernible even in twilight. The bus was lighted too.

It had its quota of passengers though they were not inside. Including the driver they stood beside it, looking up, while the voice of the amplifier, apocryphal, sourceless, inhuman, ubiquitous and beyond weariness or fatigue, went on:

"...in position now; it will be any time now.... There. There. There goes the wing down; he has throttled back now now.

Now.... There he is, folks; the flour, the flour...." The flour was a faint stain unrolling ribbon-like, light, lazy, against the sky, and then they could see the falling dot at the head of it which, puny, increasing, became the tiny figure of a man plunging without movement towards a single long suspiration of human breath, until at last the parachute bloomed.

It unfolded swaying against the accomplished and ineradicable evening; beneath it the jumper oscillated slowly, settling slowly now towards the field.

The boundary and obstruction lights were on too now; he floated down as though out of a soundless and breathless void, towards the bright necklace of field lights and the electrified name on each hangar roof.

At the moment the green light above the beacon on the signal tower began to wink and flash too: dot-dot-dash-dot, dot-dot-dash-dot, dot-dot-dash-dot, across the nightbound lake. Jiggs touched the driver's arm.

"Come on, Jack," he said. "I got to be at Grandlieu Street before six o'clock."

An Evening in New Valois

THE DOWN-FUNNELLED LIGHT from the desk-lamp struck the reporter across the hips; to the city editor sitting behind the desk the reporter loomed from the hips upward for an incredible distance to where the cadaver face hung against the dusty gloom of the city room's upper spaces, in a green corpse glare as appropriate as water to fish. He saw the raked disreputable hat, the suit that looked as if someone else had just finished sleeping in it, and with one coat pocket sagging with yellow copy paper and from the other protruding, folded, the cold violent still damp black

ALITY OF BURNED

... the entire air and appearance of a last and cheerful stage of what old people call galloping consumption. This was the man whom the editor believed (certainly hoped) to be unmarried, though not through any knowledge or report but because of something which the man's living being emanated — a creature who apparently never had any parents either and who will not be old and never was a child, who apparently sprang full-grown and irrevocably mature out of some violent and instantaneous transition like the stories of dead steamboat men and mules.

If it were learned that he had a brother for instance it could create neither warmth nor surprise any more than finding the mate to a discarded shoe in a trashbin. The editor had heard how a girl in a Barricade Street crib said of him that it would be like assessing the invoked spirit at a séance held in a rented restaurant room with a cover-charge.

Upon the desk, in the full target of the lamp's glare, it lay too: the black bold still damp

FIRST FATALITY OF AIR MEET PILOT BURNED ALIVE

Beyond it, back-flung, shirt-sleeved, his bald head above the green eyeshade corpse glared too, the city editor looked at the reporter fretfully. "You have an instinct for events," he said.

"If you were turned into a room with a hundred people you never saw before and two of them were destined to enact a homicide, you would go straight to them as crow to carrion; you would be there from the very first: you would be the one to run out and borrow a pistol from the nearest policeman for them to use. Yet you never seem to bring back anything but information.

Oh, you have that, all right, because we seem to get everything that the other papers do and we haven't been sued yet and so doubtless it's all that anyone should expect for five cents and doubtless more than they deserve.

But it's not the living breath of news. It's just information. It's dead before you even get back here with it." Immobile beyond the lamp's hard radius the reporter stood, watching the editor with an air leashed, attentive, and alert. "It's like trying to read something in a foreign language. You know it ought to be there; maybe you know by God it is there.

But that's all. Can it be by some horrible mischance that without knowing it you listen and see in one language and then do what you call writing in another? How does it sound to you when you read it yourself?"

"When I read what?" the reporter said. Then he sat down in the opposite chair while the editor cursed him. He collapsed upon the chair with a loose dry scarecrow-like clatter as though of his own skeleton and the wooden chair's in contact, and leaned forward across the desk, eager, apparently not only on the verge of the grave itself but in actual sight of the other side of Styx: of the saloons which have never sounded with cash register or till; of that golden District where gleam with frankincense and scented oils the celestial anonymous bosoms of eternal and subsidized delight.

“Why didn’t you tell me this before?” he cried. “Why didn’t you tell me before that this is what you want? Here I have been running my ass ragged eight days a week trying to find something worth telling and then telling it so it won’t make eight thousand different advertisers and subscribers — But no matter now. Because listen.” He jerked off his hat and flung it on to the desk; as quickly the editor snatched it up as if it had been a crust of ant-laden bread on a picnic tablecloth and jerked it back into the reporter’s lap.

“Listen,” the reporter said. “She’s out there at the airport. She’s got a little boy, only it’s two of them, that fly those little ships that look like mosquitoes. No: just one of them flies the ship; the other makes the delayed parachute jump — you know, with the fifty-pound sack of flour and coming down like the haunt of Yuletide or something. Yair; they’ve got a little boy, about the size of this telephone, in dungarees like they w — —”

“What?” the editor cried. “Who have a little boy?”

“Yair. They don’t know. — In dungarees like they wear; when I come into the hangar this morning they were clean, maybe because the first day of a meet is the one they call Monday, and he had a stick and he was swabbing grease up off the floor and smearing it on to himself so he would look like they look....

Yair, two of them: this guy Shumann that took second money this afternoon, that come up from fourth in a crate that all the guys out there that are supposed to know said couldn’t even show.

She’s his wife, that is her name’s Shumann and the kid’s is Shumann too: out there in the hangar this morning in dungarees like the rest of them, with her hands full of wrenches and machinery and a gob of cotter keys in her mouth like they tell how women used to do with the pins and needles before General Motors begun to make their clothes for them, with this Harlow-coloured hair that they would pay her

money for in Hollywood and a smear of grease where she had swiped it back with her wrist.

She's his wife: they have been married almost ever since the kid was born six years ago in a hangar in California. Yair, this day Shumann comes down at whatever town it was in Iowa or Indiana or wherever it was she was a sophomore in the high school back before they had the air mail for farmers to quit ploughing and look up at; in the high school at recess, and so maybe that was why she come out without a hat even and got into the front seat of one of those Jennies the army used to sell them for cancelled stamps or whatever it was.

And maybe she sent a postcard back from the next cow pasture to the aunt or whoever it was that was expecting her to come home to dinner, granted that they have kin-folks or are descended from human beings, and he taught her to jump parachutes.

Because they ain't human like us; they couldn't turn those pylons like they do if they had human blood and senses and they wouldn't want to or dare to if they just had human brains. Burn them like this one tonight and they don't even holler in the fire; crash one and it ain't even blood when you haul him out: it's cylinder oil the same as in the crank-case.

"And listen: it's both of them; this morning I walk into the hangar where they are getting the ships ready and I see the kid and a guy that looks like a little horse squared off with their fists up and the rest of them watching with wrenches and things in their hands and the kid rushes in flailing his arms and the guy holding him off and the others watching and the guy put the kid down and I come up and square off too with my fists up too and I says, 'Come on, Dempsey.

How about taking me on next?' and the kid don't move, he just looks at me and then the guy says, 'Ask him who's his old man,' only I thought he said, 'So's his old man,' and I said, 'So's his old man?' and the guy says, 'No. Who's his old man,' and I said it, and here the kid comes with

his fists flailing, and if he had just been half as big as he wanted to be right then he would have beat hell out of me.

And so I asked them and they told me.” He stopped; he ran out of speech or perhaps out of breath not as a vessel runs empty but with the instantaneous cessation of some weightless wind-driven toy, say a celluloid pinwheel. Behind the desk, still back-flung, clutching the chair arms, the editor glared at him with outraged amazement.

“What?” he cried. “Two men, with one wife and child between them?”

“Yair. The third guy, the horse one, is just the mechanic; he ain’t even a husband, let alone a flyer. Yair. Shumann and the aeroplane landing at Iowa or Indiana or wherever it is, and her coming out of the schoolhouse without even arranging to have her books took home, and they went off maybe with a can opener and a blanket to sleep on under the wing of the aeroplane when it rained hard; and then the other guy, the parachute guy, dropping in, falling the couple or three miles with his sack of flour before pulling the ripcord.

They ain’t human, you see. No ties; no place where you were born and have to go back to it now and then even if it’s just only to hate the damn place good and comfortable for a day or two. From coast to coast and Canada in summer and Mexico in winter, with one suitcase and the same can opener because three can live on one can opener as easy as one or twelve. — Wherever they can find enough folks in one place to advance them enough money to get there and pay for the gasoline afterward.

Because they don’t need money; it ain’t money they are after any more than it’s glory because the glory can only last until the next race and so maybe it ain’t until to-morrow. And they don’t need money except only now and then when they come in contact with the human race like in a hotel to sleep or eat now and then or maybe to buy a pair of pants or a skirt to keep the police off of them.

Because money ain't that hard to make: it ain't up there, fourteen and a half feet off the ground in a vertical bank around a steel post at two or three hundred miles an hour in a damn gnat built like a Swiss watch that the top speed of ain't just a number on a little dial but where you burn the engine up or fly out from between the wings and the under-carriage.

Around the home pylon on one wing-tip and the fabric trembling like a bride and the crate cost four thousand dollars and good for maybe fifty hours if one ever lasted that long and five of them in the race and the top money at least two-hundred-thirty-eight-fifty-two, less fines, fees, commissions and gratuities.

And the rest of them, the wives and children and mechanics, standing on the apron and watching like they might have been stole out of a department store window and dressed in greasy khaki coveralls and not even thinking about the hotel bill over in town or where we are going to eat if we don't win and how we are going to get to the next meet if the engine melts and runs backward out of the exhaust pipe.

"And Shumann don't even own a ship; she told me about how they want Vic Chance to build one for them and how Vic Chance wants to build one for Shumann to fly, only neither Vic Chance nor them have managed to save up enough jack yet.

So he just flies whatever he can get that they will qualify. This one he copped with to-day he is flying on a commission; it was next to the slowest one in the race and they all said he never had a chance with it and he beat them on the pylons.

So when he don't cop they eat on the parachute guy, which is O.K. because the parachute guy makes almost as much as the guy at the microphone does, besides the mike guy having to work all afternoon for his while it don't only take the parachute guy a few seconds to fall the ten or twelve thousand feet with the flour blowing back in his face before pulling the ripcord.

“And so the kid was born on an unrolled parachute in a hangar in California; he got dropped already running like a colt or a calf from the fuselage of an aeroplane, on to something because it happened to be big enough to land on and then take off again.

And I thought about him having ancestors and hell and heaven like we have, and birth-pangs to rise up out of and walk the earth with your arm crooked over your head to dodge until you finally get the old blackjack at last and can lay back down again — All of a sudden I thought about him with a couple or three sets of grandparents and uncles and aunts and cousins somewhere, and I like to died.

I had to stop and lean against the hangar wall and laugh. Talk about your immaculate conceptions: born on a unrolled parachute in a California hangar and the doc went to the door and called Shumann and the parachute guy.

And the parachute guy got out the dice and says to her ‘Do you want to catch these?’ and she said ‘Roll them’ and the dice come out and Shumann rolled high, and that afternoon they fetched the J.P. out on the gasoline truck and so hers and the kid’s name is Shumann.

And they told me how it wasn’t them that started saying ‘Who’s your old man?’ to the kid; it was her, and the kid flailing away at her and her stooping that hard boy’s face that looks like any one of the four of them might cut her hair for her with a pocket knife when it needs it, down to where he can reach it and saying ‘Hit me. Hit me hard. Harder. Harder.’ And what do you think of that?”

He stopped again. The editor sat back in the swivel chair and drew a deep, full, deliberate breath while the reporter leaned above the desk like a dissolute and eager skeleton, with that air of worn and dreamy fury which Don Quixote must have had.

“I think you ought to write it,” the editor said. The reporter looked at him for almost half a minute without moving.
“Ought to write—” He murmured. “Ought to write...”

His voice died away in ecstasy; he glared down at the editor in bone-light exultation while the editor watched him in turn with cold and vindictive waiting.

“Yes. Go home and write it.”

“Go home and... Home, where I won't be dis — where I can... O pal, o pal, o pal! Chief, where have I been all your life or where have you been all mine?”

“Yes,” the editor said. He had not moved. “Go home and lock yourself in and throw the key out the window and write it.” He watched the gaunt ecstatic face before him in the dim corpse glare of the green shade. “And then set fire to the room.” The reporter's face sank slowly back, like a Halloween mask on a boy's stick being slowly withdrawn.

Then for a long time he too did not move save for a faint working of the lips as if he were tasting something either very good or very bad. Then he rose slowly, the editor watching him; he seemed to collect and visibly reassemble himself bone by bone and socket by socket.

On the desk lay a pack of cigarettes. He reached his hand towards it; as quickly as when he had flung back the hat and without removing his gaze from the reporter's face, the editor snatched the pack away. The reporter lifted from the floor his disreputable hat and stood gazing into it with musing attention, as though about to draw a lot from it.

“Listen,” the editor said; he spoke patiently, almost kindly: “The people who own this paper or who direct its policies or anyway who pay the salaries, fortunately or unfortunately I shan't attempt to say, have no Lewises or Hemingways or even Tchekovs on the staff: one very good reason doubtless being that they do not want them, since what they want is not fiction, not even Nobel Prize fiction, but news.

“You mean you don't believe this?” the reporter said. “About h — these guys?”

"I'll go you better than that: I don't even care. Why should I find news in this woman's supposed bed habits as long as her legal (so you tell me) husband does not?"

"I thought that women's bed habits were always news," the reporter said.

"You thought? You thought?. You listen to me a minute. If one of them takes his aeroplane or his parachute and murders her and the child in front of the grand-stand, then it will be news.

But until they do, what I am paying you to bring back here is not what you think about somebody out there nor what you heard about somebody out there nor even what you saw: I expect you to come in here to-morrow night with an accurate account of everything that occurs out there to-morrow that creates any reaction excitement or irritation on any human retina; if you have to be twins or triplets or even a regiment to do this, be so.

Now you go on home and go to bed. And remember. Remember. There will be someone out there to report to me personally at my home the exact moment at which you enter the gates. And if that report comes to me one minute after ten o'clock, you will need a racing aeroplane to catch your job Monday morning. Go home. Do you hear me?"

The reporter looked at him, without heat, perfectly blank, as if he had ceased several moments ago not alone to listen but even to hear, as though he were now watching the editor's lips courteously to tell when he had finished.

"O.K., chief," he said. "If that's the way you feel about it."

"That's exactly the way I feel about it. Do you understand?"

"Yair; sure. Good night."

"Good night," the editor said. The reporter turned away; he turned away quietly, putting the hat on his head exactly as he had laid it on the editor's desk before the editor flung it off, and took from the pocket containing the folded newspaper a crumpled cigarette pack. The editor

watched him put the cigarette into his mouth and then tug the incredible hat to a raked dissolute angle as he passed out the door, raking the match across the frame as he disappeared.

But the first match broke; the second one he struck on the bell-plate while the elevator was rising. The door opened and clashed behind him; already his hand was reaching into his pocket while with the other he lifted the top paper from the shallow stack on the second stool beside the one on which the elevator man sat, sliding the face-down dollar watch which weighted it on to the next one, the same, the identical: black harsh and restrained:

FIRST FATALITY OF AIR MEET PILOT BURNED ALIVE

Lieut. Frank Burnham in Crash of Rocket Plane

He held the paper off, his face tilted aside, his eyes squinted against the smoke. "Shumann surprises spectators by beating Bullitt for second place," he read. "What do you think of that, now?"

"I think they are all crazy," the elevator man said. He had not looked at the reporter again. He received the coin into the same hand which clutched a dead stained cob pipe, not looking at the other. "Them that do it and them that pay money to see it." Neither did the reporter look at him.

"Yair; surprised," the reporter said, looking at the paper. Then he folded it and tried to thrust it into the pocket with the other folded one just like it. "Yair. And in one more lap he would have surprised them still more by beating Myers for first place." The cage stopped. "Yair; surprised.... What time is it?" With the hand which now held both the coin and the pipe the elevator man lifted the face-down watch and held it out.

He said nothing, he didn't even look at the reporter; he just sat there, waiting, holding the watch out with a kind of weary patience like a house guest showing his watch to the last of several children. "Two minutes past ten?" the reporter said. "Just two minutes past ten? Hell."

“Get out of the door,” the elevator man said. “There’s a draught in here.” It clashed behind the reporter again; as he crossed the lobby he tried again to thrust the paper into the pocket with the other one.

Antic, repetitive, his reflection in the glass street doors glared and flicked away. The street was empty, though even here, fourteen minutes afoot from Grandlieu Street, the February darkness was murmurous with faint uproar, with faint and ordered pandemonium.

Overhead, beyond the palm tufts, the overcast sky reflected that interdict and light-glared canyon now adrift with serpentine and confetti, through which the floats, bearing grimacing and antic mimes dwarfed chalk white and forlorn and contemplated by static kerb mass of amazed confetti faces, passed as though through steady rain.

He walked, not fast exactly but with a kind of loose and purposeless celerity, as though it were not exactly faces that he sought but solitude that he was escaping, or even as if he actually were going home like the editor had told him, thinking already of Grandlieu Street which he would have to cross somehow in order to do so. “Yah,” he thought, “he should have sent me home by air mail.” As he passed from light to light his shadow in midstride resolved, pacing him, on pavement and wall.

In a dark plate window, sidelooking, he walked beside himself; stopping and turning so that for the moment shadow and reflection superposed, he stared full at himself as though he still saw the actual shoulder sagging beneath the dead afternoon’s phantom burden, and saw reflected beside him yet the sweater and the skirt and the harsh pallid hair as, bearing upon his shoulder the arch-fathered, he walked beside the oblivious and arch-adulteress.

“Yah,” he thought, “the damn little yellow-headed bastard.

.. Yair, going to bed, now, to sleep; the three of them in one bed or maybe they take it night about or maybe you just put your hat down on it first like in a barber shop.” He faced himself in the dark glass, long and light and untidy as a bundle of laths dressed in human garments.

“Yah,” he thought, “the poor little tow-headed son of a bitch.” When he moved it was to recoil from an old man almost overwalked — a face, a stick, a suit filthier even than his own. He extended the two folded papers along with the coin. “Here, pop,” he said. “Maybe you can get another dime for these. You can buy a big beer then.”

When he reached Grandlieu Street he discovered that the only way he could cross it would be by air, though even now he had not actually paused to decide whether he were really going home or not. And this, not alone because of police regulations but because of the physical kerb mass of heads and shoulders in moiling silhouette against the light glare, the serpentine and confetti-drift, the antic passing floats.

But even before he reached the corner he was assailed by a gust of screaming newsboys apparently as oblivious to the moment’s significance as birds are aware yet oblivious to the human doings which their wings brush and their droppings fall upon.

They swirled about him, screaming: in the reflected light of the passing torches the familiar black thick type and the raucous cries seemed to glare and merge faster than the mind could distinguish the sense through which each had been received: “Boinum Boins!” FIRST FATALITY OF AIR. “Read about it! Foist Moidigror foitality!” LIEUT. BURNHAM KILLED IN AIR CRASH. “Boinum Boins!”

“Naw!” the reporter cried. “Beat it! Should I throw away a nickel like it was into the ocean because another lunatic has fried himself? — Yah,” he thought, vicious, savage, “even they will have to sleep some of the time just to pass that much of the dark half of being alive.

Not to rest because they have to race again to-morrow, but because like now air and space ain’t passing them fast enough and time is passing them too fast to rest in except during the six and a half minutes it takes to go the twenty-five miles, and the rest of them standing there on the apron like that many window dummies because the rest of them ain’t even there, like in the girls’ school where one of them is gone off

first with all the fine clothes. Yair, alive only for six and a half minutes a day in one aeroplane.

And so every night they sleep in one bed, and why shouldn't either of them or both of them at once come drowsing unawake in one woman-drowsing and none of the three of them know which one nor care?... Yah," he thought, "maybe I was going home, after all." Then he saw Jiggs, the pony man, the man-pony of the afternoon, recoiled now into the centre of a small violent backwater of motionless back-turned faces.

"Why don't you use your own feet to walk on?" Jiggs snarled.

"Excuse me," one of the faces said. "I didn't mean..."

"Well, watch yourself," Jiggs cried. "Mine have got to last me to the end of my life. And likely even then I will have to walk a ways before I can catch a ride." The reporter watched him stand on alternate legs and scrub at his feet in turn with his cap, presenting to the smoky glare of the passing torches a bald spot neat as a tonsure and the colour of saddle leather.

As they stood side by side and looked at one another they resembled the tall and the short man of the orthodox and unfailing comic team — the one looking like a cadaver out of a medical school vat and dressed for the moment in garments out of a flood refugee warehouse, the other filling his clothing without any fraction of surplus cloth which might be pinched between two fingers, with that trim vicious economy of wrestlers' tights. Again Jiggs thought, since it had been good the first time, "Jesus. Don't they open the graveyards until midnight either?" About the two of them now the newsboys hovered and screamed: "Globe Stoytsman! Boinum boins!"

"Yair," Jiggs said. "Burn to death on Thursday night or starve to death on Friday morning. So this is Moddy Graw. Why ain't I where I have been all my life." But the reporter continued to glare down at him in bright amazement.

“At the Terrebonne?” he said. “She told me this afternoon you all had some rooms down in French town. You mean to tell me that just because he won a little money this afternoon he has got to pick up and move over to the hotel this time of night when he ought to been in bed an hour ago so he can fly to-morrow?”

“I don’t mean nothing, mister,” Jiggs said. “I just said I saw Roger and Laverne go into that hotel up the street a minute ago. I never asked them what for.... How about that cigarette?” The reporter gave it to him from the crumpled pack.

Beyond the barricade of heads and shoulders, in the ceaseless rain of confetti, the floats moved past with an air esoteric, almost apocryphal, without inference of motion, like an inhabited archipelago putting out to sea on a flood tide. And now another newsboy, a new face, young, ageless, the teeth gaped raggedly as though he had found them one by one over a period of years about the streets, shrieked at them a new sentence like a kind of desperate ace:

“Laughing Boy in fit at Woishndon Poik!”

“Yair!” the reporter cried, glaring down at Jiggs. “Because you guys don’t need to sleep. You ain’t human. I reckon the way he trains for a meet is to stay out on the town all the night before. Besides that — what was it? — thirty per cent, of three hundred and twenty-five dollars he won this afternoon.... Come on,” he said. “We won’t have to cross the street.”

“I thought you were going home so fast,” Jiggs said.

“Yair,” the reporter cried back over his shoulder, seeming not to penetrate the static human mass but to filter through it like a phantom, without alteration or diminution of bulk; now, turned sideways to cry back at Jiggs, passing between the individual bodies like a playing card, he cried, “I have to sleep at night. I ain’t a racing pilot; I ain’t got an aeroplane to sleep in; I can’t concentrate twenty-five miles of space at three miles an hour into six and a half minutes.

Come on.” The hotel was not far and the side, the carriage, entrance was comparatively clear in the outfalling of light beneath a suave canopy with its lettered frieze: Hotel Terrebonne. Above this from a jack-staff hung an oilcloth painted tabard: Headquarters, American-Aeronautical Association.

Dedication Meet, Feinman Airport. “Yair,” the reporter cried, “they’ll be here. Here’s where to find guys that don’t aim to sleep at the hotel. Yair; tiered identical cubicles of one thousand rented sleepings. And if you just got jack enough to last out the night you don’t even have to go to bed.”

“Did what?” Jiggs said, already working over towards the wall beside the entrance. “Oh. Teared Q pickles. Yair; of one thousand rented... if you got the jack too. I got the Q pickle all right. I got enough for one thousand. And if I just had the jack too it wouldn’t be teared. How about another cigarette?”

The reporter gave him another one from the crumpled pack. Jiggs now stood against the wall. “I’ll wait here,” he said.

“Come on in,” the reporter said. “They are bound to be here. It will be after midnight before they even find out that Grandlieu Street has been closed.... That’s a snappy pair of boots you got on there.”

“Yair,” Jiggs said. He looked down at his right foot again. “At least he wasn’t a football player or maybe driving a truck.

.. I’ll wait here. You can give me a call if Roger wants me.” The reporter went on; Jiggs stood again on his left leg and scrubbed at his right instep with his cap. “What a town,” he thought. “Where you got to wear a street closed sign on your back to walk around in it.”

“Because at least I am a reporter until one minute past ten to-morrow,” the reporter thought, mounting the shallow steps towards the lobby; “he said so himself. I reckon I will have to keep on being one until then. Because even if I am fired now, at this minute while I walk here, there won’t be anybody for him to tell to take my name off the pay roll until

noon to-morrow. So I can tell him it was my conscience. I can call him from the hotel here and tell him my conscience would not let me go home and go to sleep.”

He recoiled, avoiding here also the paper plumage, the parrot mask, a mixed party, whisky-and-gin reeking, and then gone, leaving behind them the dragged cumulant hillocks of trampled confetti minching across the tile floor before the minching pans and brooms of paid monkey-men who for three nights now will do little else; they vanished, leaving the reporter for the instant marooned beside the same easel-
plat with which the town bloomed — the photographs of man and machine each above its neat legend:

MATT ORD, NEW VALOIS. HOLDER, WORLD'S LAND PLANE SPEED
RECORD

AL MYERS. CALEXCO

JIMMY OTT. CALEXCO

R. Q. BULLITT. WINNER GRAVES TROPHY, MIAMI, FLA

LIEUT. FRANK BURNHAM

And here also the cryptic shield caught (i n r i) loops of bunting giving an appearance temporary and tentlike to interminable long corridors of machine plush and gilded synthetic plaster running between anonymous and rentable spaces or alcoves from sunrise to sunset across America, between the nameless faience woman-face behind the phallic ranks of cigars and the stuffed chairs sentinelled each by its spittoon and potted palm; — the congruous stripe of Turkey red beneath the recent-gleamed and homeless shoes running on into an interval of implacable circumspection: a silent and discreet inference of lysol and a bath — billboard stage and vehicle for what in the old lusty days called themselves drummers: among the brass spittoons of elegance and the potted palms of decorum, legion homeless and symbolic: the immemorial flying buttresses of ten million American Saturday nights, with shrewd heads filled with to-morrow's cosmic alterations in the form of price lists and the telephone numbers of discontented wives and high-school girls. “Until time to take the elevator up and telephone the bellhop for gals,” the reporter thought.

But the lobby to-night was crowded with more than these; already he saw them fallen definitely into two distinct categories: the one in Madison Avenue jackets, who perhaps once held transport ratings and perhaps still holds them, like the manufacturer who once wrote himself mechanic or clerk retains in the new chromium Geddes sanctuary the ancient primary die or mimeograph machine with which he started out, and perhaps have now only the modest Q.B. wings which clip to the odorous lapel the temperate silk ribbon stencilled Judge or Official, without the transport rating and perhaps the ribbon and the tweed but not even the wings; and the other with faces both sober and silent because they cannot drink to-night and fly to-morrow and have never learned to talk at any time, in blue serge cut apparently not only from the same bolt but folded at the same crease on the same shelf, who hold the severe transport rating and are here to-night by virtue of painfully drummed charter trips from a hundred little nameless bases known only to the Federal Department of Commerce, and whose equipment consists of themselves and a mechanic and one aeroplane which is not new.

The reporter thrust on among them, with that semblance of filtering rather than passing. "Yair," he thought, "you don't need to look. It's the smell, you can tell the bastards because they smell like pressing clubs instead of Harris tweed." Then he saw her, standing beside a Spanish jar filled with sand pocked by chewing gum and cigarettes and burnt matches, in a brown worn hat and a stained trench-coat from whose pocket protruded a folded newspaper.

"Yah," he thought, "because a trench-coat will fit anybody and so they can have two of them and then somebody can always stay at home with the kid." When he approached her she looked full at him for a moment, with pale blank complete unrecognition, so that while he crossed the crowded lobby towards her and during the subsequent three hours while at first he and she and Shumann and Jiggs, and later the little boy and the parachute jumper too, sat crowded in the taxicab while he watched the implacable meter figures compound, he seemed to walk solitary and chill and without progress down a steel corridor

like a fly in a gun barrel, thinking, “Yah, Hagood told me to go home and I never did know whether I intended to go or not.

But Jiggs told me she would be at the hotel, but I didn’t believe that at all”; thinking (while the irrevocable figures clocked and clicked beneath the dim insistent bulb and the child slept on his bony lap and the other four smoked the cigarette which he had bought for them and the cab spun along the dark swamp-smelling shell road out to the airport and then back to town again) — thinking how he had not expected to see her again because to-morrow and to-morrow do not count because that will be at the field, with air and earth full of snarling and they not even alive out there because they are not human.

But not like this, in clad decorous attitudes that the police will not even look once at, in the human night world of half-past ten o’clock and then eleven and then twelve: and then behind a million separate secret closed doors we will slack ourselves profoundly defenceless on our backs, opened for the profound unsleeping, the inescapable and compelling flesh.

Standing there beside the Basque chamber pot at twenty-two minutes past ten because one of her husbands flew this afternoon in a crate that three years ago was all right, that three years ago was so all right that ever since all the others have had to conjoin as one in order to keep it so that the word ‘race’ would still apply, so that now they cannot quit because if they once slow down they will be overreached and destroyed by their own spawning, like the Bornean what’s-its-name that has to spawn running to keep from being devoured by its own litter.

“Yah,” he thought, “standing there waiting so he can circulate in his blue serge suit and the other trench-coat among the whisky and the tweed when he ought to be at what they call home in bed except they ain’t human and don’t have to sleep”; thinking how it seems that he can bear either of them, either one of them alone. “Yair,” he thought, “tiered Q pickles of one thousand... nights. They will have to hurry before anybody can go to bed with her,” walking straight into the pale

cold blank gaze which waked only when he reached his hand and drew the folded paper from the trench-coat's pocket.

"Dempsey asleep, huh?" he said, opening the paper, the page which he could have recited off-hand before he even looked at it:

BURNHAM BURNS

VALOISIAN CLAIMS LOVENEST FRAMEUP

Myers Easy Winner in Opener at Feinman Airport

Laughing Boy in Fifth at Washington Park

"No news is good newspaper news," he said, folding the paper again.

"Dempsey in bed, huh?"

"Yes," she said. "Keep it. I've seen it." Perhaps it was his face. "Oh, I remember. You work on a paper yourself. Is it this one? or did you tell me?"

"Yair," he said. "I told you. No, it ain't this one." Then he turned too, though she had already spoken.

"This is the one that bought Jack the ice-cream to-day," she said.

Shumann wore the blue serge, but there was no trench-coat. He wore a new grey homburg hat, not raked like in the department store cuts but set square on the back of his head so that (not tall, with blue eyes in a square thin profoundly sober face) he looked out not from beneath it but from within it with open and fatal humourlessness, like an early Briton who has been assured that the Roman governor will not receive him unless he wear the borrowed centurion's helmet. He looked at the reporter for a single unwinking moment even blanker than the woman's had been.

"Nice race you flew in there to-day," the reporter said.

"Yair?" Shumann said. Then he looked at the woman. The reporter looked at her too. She had not moved, yet she now stood in a more complete and somehow terrific immobility, in the stained trench-coat, a cigarette burning in the grained and black-rimmed fingers of one

hand, looking at Shumann with naked and urgent concentration. "Come on," Shumann said. "Let's go." But she did not move.

"You didn't get it," she said. "You couldn't—"

"No. They don't pay off until Saturday night," Shumann said. ("Yah," the reporter thought, clashing the tight hermetic door behind him as the automatic dome light came on; "ranked coffin cubicles of dead tail; the Great American in one billion printings slave post-chained and scribble-scrawled: annotations of eternal electro deitch and bottom hope.")

"Deposit five cents for three minutes, please," the bland machine voice chanted. The metal stalk sweat-clutched, the gutta-percha bloom cupping his breathing back at him, he listened, fumbled, counting as the discreet click and cling died into wire hum.

"That's five," he bawled. "Hear them? Five nickels. Now don't cut me off in three hundred and eighty-one seconds and tell me to... Hello," he bawled, crouching, clutching the metal stalk as if he hung by it from the edge of a swimming pool; "listen. Get this.... Yair.

At the Terrebonne.... Yair, after midnight; I know. Listen. Chance for the goddamn paper to do something at last beside run our ass ragged between what Grandlieu Street kikes tell us to print in their half of the paper and tell you what you can't print in our half and still find something to fill the blank spaces under Connotator of theWorld's Doings and Moulder of the Peoples' Thought, ha ha ha ha...

"What?" the editor cried. "Terrebonne Hotel? I told you when you left here three hours ago to—"

"Yair," the reporter said. "Almost three hours, that's all. Just a taxi ride to get to the other side of Grandlieu Street first, and then out to the airport and back because they don't have but a hundred beds for visiting pilots out there and General Behind-man needs all of them for his reception. And so we come on back to the hotel because this is where they all are to tell him to come back Saturday night provided the bastard don't kill him to-morrow or Saturday.

And you can thank whatever tutelary ass scratcher you consider presides over the fate destiny and blunders of that office that me or somebody happened to come in here despite the fact that this is the logical place to find what we laughingly call news at ten o'clock at night, what with half the air-meet proprietors getting drunk here and all of Mardi Gras already drunk here.

And him that ought to been in bed three hours ago because he's got to race again to-morrow only he can't race to-morrow because he can't go to bed yet because he hasn't got any money to hire a place with a floor in it because he only won thirty per cent, of three hundred and twenty-five dollars this afternoon, and to the guys that own an air meet that ain't no more than a borrowed umbrella and the parachute guy can't do them any good now because Jiggs collected his twenty bucks and—”

“What? What? Are you drunk?”

“No. Listen. Just stop talking a minute and listen. When I saw her out at the airport to-day they were all fixed up for the night like I tried to tell you, but you said it was not news; yair, like you said, whether a man sleeps or not or why he can't sleep ain't news but only what he does while he ain't asleep, provided of course that what he does is what the guys that are ordained to pick and choose it consider news.

Yair, I tried to tell you, but I'm just a poor bastard of an ambulance chaser: I ain't supposed to know news when I see it at thirty-five bucks a week or I'd be getting more.... Where was I? O yair — Had a room for to-night because they have been here since Wednesday and so they must have had somewhere that they could lock the door and take off some of their clothes or at least put the trench-coat down and lay down themselves, because they had shaved somewhere: Jiggs has got a slash on his jaw that even at a barber college you don't get one like it.

So they were all fixed up, only I never asked them what hotel, because I knew it would not have a name, just a sign on the gallery post that the old man made on Saturday when his sciatica felt good enough for him

to go down town only she wouldn't let him leave until he made the sign and nailed it up: and so what was the use in me having to say, 'What street did you say? Where is that?' because I ain't a racing pilot, I am a reporter ha ha ha and so I would not know where these places are.

Yair, all fixed up, and so he come in on the money this afternoon and I was standing there holding the kid and she says, 'There,' just like that: 'There.' And then I know that she has not moved during the whole six and a half minutes or maybe six and forty-nine-fifty-two ten thousandths or whatever the time was; she just says 'There,' like that, and so it was O.K. even when he come in from the field with the ship and we couldn't find Jiggs to help roll the ship into the hangar, and he just says, 'Chasing a skirt, I guess,' and we put the ship away and he went to the office to get his one-O-seven-fifty and we stayed there waiting for the parachute guy to come down, and he did and wiped the flour out of his eyes and says, 'Where's Jiggs?'

'Why?' she says. 'Why?' he says. 'He went to collect my money,' and she says, 'My God—'

"Listen! Listen to me!" the editor cried. "Listen!"

"Yair, the mechanic. In a pair of britches that must have zippers so he can take them off at night like you would peel two bananas, and the tops of a pair of boots riveted under the insteps of a pair of tennis shoes.

He collected the parachute guy's twenty-five bucks for him while the parachute guy was still on the way back from work because the parachute guy gets twenty-five berries for the few seconds it takes except for the five bucks he has to pay the transport pilot to take him to the office you might say, and the eight cents a pound for the flour only to-day the flour was already paid for and so the whole twenty bucks was velvet.

And Jiggs collected it and beat it because they owed him some jack and he thought that since Shumann had won the race that he would win

the actual money too like the programme said and not only be able to pay last night's bill at the whore house where they—”

“Will you listen to me? Will you? Will you?”

“Yair; sure. I'm listening. So I come on to Grandlieu Street thinking about how you had told me to go home and wr — go home, and wondering how in hell you expected me to get across Grandlieu between then and midnight, and all of a sudden I hear this excitement and cursing and it is Jiggs where some guy has stepped on his foot and put a scratch on one of them new boots, only I don't get it then.

He just tells me he saw her and Shumann going into the Terrebonne because that was all he knew himself; I don't reckon he stayed to hear much when he beat it back to town with the parachute guy's jack and bought the boots and then walked in them to where they had just got in from the field and Shumann had tried to collect his one-O- seven-fifty but they wouldn't pay him.

So I couldn't cross Grandlieu and so we walked on to the Terrebonne even though this is the last place in town a reporter's got any business being half-past ten at night, what with all the air meet getting drunk here, and half of Mardi Gras already — but never mind; I already told you that. So we come on over and Jiggs won't come in and still I don't get it, even though I had noticed the boots.

So I come in and there she is, standing by this greaser chamber pot and the lobby full of drunk guys with ribbon badges and these kind of coats that look like they need a shave bad, and the guys all congratulating one another about how the airport cost a million dollars and how maybe in the three days more they could find out how to spend another million and make it balance. And he come up, Shumann come up, and her stiller than the pot even and looking at him, and he says they don't pay off until Saturday and she says, 'Did you try? Did you try?'

Yair, trying to collect an instalment on the hundred and seven bucks so they can go to bed, with the kid already asleep on the sofa in the madam's room and the parachute guy waiting with him if he happened to wake up.

And so they walked up to the hotel from Amboise Street because it ain't far, they are both inside the city limits, to collect something on the money he was under the delusion he had won and I said 'Amboise Street?' because in the afternoon she just said they had a room down in French town and she said 'Amboise Street' looking at me without batting an eye, and if you don't know what kind of bedding houses they have on Amboise Street your son or somebody ought to tell you: yair, you rent the bed and the two towels and furnish your own cover.

So they went to Amboise Street and got a room; they always do that because in the Amboise Streets you can sleep to-night and pay to-morrow because a whore will leave a kid sleep on credit.

Only they hadn't paid for last night yet and so to-night they don't want to take up the bed again for nothing, what with the air meet in town, let alone the natural course of Mardi Gras. So they left the kid asleep on the madam's sofa and they come on to the hotel and Shumann said they don't pay off until Saturday and I said 'Never mind; I got Jiggs outside' and they never even looked at me.

Because I hadn't got it then, that Jiggs had spent the money, you see: and so we went out to the taxi and Jiggs was still standing there against the wall and Shumann looked at him and says 'You can come on too.

If I could eat them I would have done it at dinner time' and Jiggs comes and gets in too, kind of sidling over and then ducking into the cab like it was a hen house and hunkering down on the little seat with his feet under him and I still don't get it even yet, not even when Shumann says to him 'You better find a manhole to stand in until Jack gets into the cab.'

So we got in and Shumann says 'We can walk' and I says 'Where? Out to Lanier Avenue to get across Grandlieu?' and so that was the first dollar-eighty and we eased up as soon as the door got unclogged a little; yair, they were having a rush; and we went in and there the kid was, awake now and eating a sandwich the madam had sent out for, and the madam and a little young whore and the whore's fat guy in his shirt sleeves and his galluses down, playing with the kid and the fat guy wanting to buy the kid a beer and the kid setting there and telling them how his old man flew the best pylon in America and Jiggs hanging back in the hall and jerking at my elbow until I could hear what he was whispering: 'Say, listen.

Find my bag and open it and you will find a pair of tennis shoes and a paper package that feels like it's got a... a... well, a bootjack in it and hand them out to me, will you?' and I says 'What? A what in it?' and then the parachute guy in the room says 'Who's that out there? Jiggs?' and nobody answered and the parachute guy says 'Come in here' and Jiggs kind of edged into the door where the parachute guy could just see his face and the guy says 'Come on' and Jiggs edges a little further in and the guy says 'Come on' and Jiggs edges into the light then, with his chin between his shirt pockets and his head turned to one side and the guy looking him slow from feet to his head and then back again and says 'The son of a bitch' and the madam says 'I think so myself.

The idea of them dirty bastard kikes holding him up on a purchase of that size for just forty cents' and the parachute guy says 'Forty cents?' Yair, it was like this.

The boots was twenty-two-fifty. Jiggs paid down two dollars and a dime on them and he had to pay the parachute guy's pilot five bucks and so he never had but twenty bucks left even when he beat the bus, and so he borrowed the forty cents from the madam; yair, he left the airport at five-thirty and did all that before the store closed at six; he got there just in time to stick one of the tennis shoes into the door before it shut.

So we paid the madam and that was the next five-forty because the room for last night she just charged them three bucks for because they

set in her room so she could use the other one for business until midnight when the rush slacked up and so she just charged them three bucks just to use the room to sleep in and the other two bucks was bus fare. And we had the kid and the parachute guy too now, but the driver said it would be O.K. because it would be a long haul out to the airport.

The programme said there was accommodations for a hundred visiting pilots out there and if there was more than two or three missing from the lobby of the Terrebonne it was because they was just lost and hadn't come in yet, and besides you had told me you would fire me if I wasn't out there at daylight to-morrow morning...no; to-day now... and it was eleven then, almost to-morrow then, and besides it would save the paper the cab fare for me back to town. Yair, that's how I figured too because it seems like I ain't used to air meets either and so we took all the baggage, both of them and Jiggs' meal sack too, and went out there and that was the next two dollars and thirty-five cents, only the kid was asleep again by that time and so maybe one of the dollars was Pullman extra fare.

And there was a big crowd still there, standing around and looking at the air where this guy Burnham had flew in it and at the scorched hole in the field where he had flew in that too, and we couldn't stay out there because they only got beds for a hundred visiting pilots and Colonel Feinman is using all of them for his reception. Yair, reception. You build the airport and you get some receptive women and some booze and you lock the entrances and the information and ticket windows and if they don't put any money into the tops of their stockings, it's a reception.

So they can't sleep out there and so we come on back to town and that's that next two dollars and sixty-five cents because we left the first cab go and we had to telephone for another one and the telephone was a dime and the extra twenty cents was because we didn't stop at Amboise Street, we come on to the hotel because they are still here and he can still ask them for his jack, still believing the air racing is a kind of sports or something run by men that have got time to stop at almost one o'clock in the morning and count up what thirty per cent, of

three hundred and twenty-five dollars is and give it to him for no other reason than that they told him they would if he would do something first. And so now is the chance for this connotator of the world's doings and moulder of the people's thought to..

"Deposit five cents for three minutes, please," the bland machine voice said. In the airless cuddy the reporter coin-fumbled, sweat-clutching the telephone; again the discreet click and cling died into dead wire hum.

"Hello! Hello!" he bawled. "You cut me off; gimme my.. But now the buzzing on the editor's desk has sounded again; now the interval out of outraged and apoplectic waiting: the wire hum clicked full voiced before the avalanched, the undammed:

"Fired! Fired! Fired! Fired!" the editor screamed.

He leaned half-way across the desk beneath the green-shaded light, telephone and receiver clutched to him like a tackled half-back lying half across the goal line, as he had caught the instrument up; as, sitting bolt upright in the chair, his knuckles white on the arms and his teeth glinting under his lips while he glared at the telephone in fixed and waiting fury, he had sat during the five minutes since putting the receiver carefully back and waiting for the buzzer to sound again. "Do you hear me?" he screamed.

"Yair," the reporter said. "Listen. I wouldn't even bother with that son of a bitch Feinman at all; you can have the right guy paged right here in the lobby. Or listen. You don't even need to do that. All they need is just a few dollars to eat and sleep until to-morrow; just call the desk and tell them to let me draw on the paper; I will just add the eleven-eighty I had to spend to—"

"WILL you listen to me?" the editor said. "Please! Will you?"
— "to ride out there and — Huh? Sure. Sure, chief. Shoot."

The editor gathered himself again; he seemed to extend and lie a little further and flatter across the desk even as the back, with the goal safe,

tries for an extra inch while already downed; now he even ceased to tremble. “No,” he said; he said it slowly and distinctly. “No. Do you understand? NO.” Now he too heard only dead wire hum, as if the other end of it extended beyond atmosphere, into cold space; as though he listened now to the profound sound of infinity, of void itself filled with the cold unceasing murmur of æon-weary and unflagging stars.

Into the round target of light a hand slid the first to-morrow’s galley; the still damp neat row of boxes which in the paper’s natural order had no scare-head, containing, since there was nothing new in them since time began, likewise no alarm: — that cross-section out of time space as though of a light ray caught by a speed lens for a second’s fraction between infinity and furious and trivial dust:

FARMERS REFUSE BANKERS DENY STRIKERS DEMAND PRESIDENT’S
YACHT ACREAGE REDUCTION QUINTUPLETS GAIN EX-SENATOR
RENAUD CELEBRATES TENTH ANNIVERSARY AS RESTAURATEUR

Now the wire hum came to life.

“You mean you won’t...” the reporter said. “You ain’t going to...”

“No. No. I won’t even attempt to explain to you why I will not or cannot. Now listen. Listen carefully. You are fired. Do you understand? You don’t work for this paper. You don’t work for anyone this paper knows. If I should learn to-morrow that you do, so help me God I will tear their advertisement out with my own hands. Have you a telephone at home?”

“No. But there’s one at the corner; I co—”

“Then go home. And if you call this office or this building again to-night I will have you arrested for vagrancy. Go home.”

“All right, chief. If that’s how you feel about it, O.K. We’ll go home; we got a race to fly to-morrow, see? — Chief! Chief!”

“Yes?”

“What about my eleven-eighty? I was still working for you when I sp—”

Night in the Vieux Carré

NOW THEY COULD cross Grandlieu Street. There was traffic in it now; to clash and clang of light and bell, trolley and automobile crashed and glared across the intersection, rushing in a light kerb-channelled spindrift of tortured and dragged serpentine and trodden confetti pending the dawn's white wings — spent tinsel dung of Momus' Nile barge clatter-falque.

Ordered and marked by light and bell and carrying the two imitation-leather bags and the drill meal sack they could now cross, the four others watching the reporter who, the little boy still asleep on his shoulder, stood at the extreme of the kerb edge's channel brim, in poised and swooping immobility like a scarecrow weathered gradually out of the earth which had supported it erect and intact and now poised for the first light vagrant air to blow it into utter dissolution.

He translated himself into a kind of flapping gallop, gaining fifteen or twenty feet on the others before they could move, passing athwart the confronting glares of automobiles apparently without contact with earth, like one of those apocryphal night-time bat creatures whose nest or home no man ever saw, which are seen only in mid-swoop, caught for a second in a light beam between nothing and nowhere.

"Somebody take Jack from him," the woman said. "I am afr—"

"Of him?" the parachute jumper said, carrying one of the bags, his other hand under her elbow. "A guy would no more hit him than he would a glass barber pole. Or a paper sack of empty beer bottles in the street."

"He might fall down, though, and cut the kid all to pieces," Jiggs said. Then he said (it was still good, it pleased him no less even though this was the third time): "When he gets to the other side he might find out that they have opened the cemetery, too, and that would not be so good for Jack."

He handed the sack to Shumann and passed the woman and the jumper, stepping quick on his short bouncing legs, the boots twinkling in the aligned tense immobility of the head-lights and overtook the reporter and reached up for the boy. "Gimme," he said. The reporter glared down at him without stopping, with a curious glazed expression like that of one who has not slept much lately.

"I got him," he said. "He ain't heavy."

"Yair; sure," Jiggs said, dragging the still sleeping boy down from the other's shoulder like a bolt of wing fabric from a shelf as they stepped together on to the other kerb. "But you want to have your mind free to find the way home."

"Yair," the reporter cried. They paused, turning, waiting for the others; the reporter glared down with that curious dazed look at Jiggs who carried the boy now with no more apparent effort than he had carried the aeroplane's tail, half-turned also, balanced like a short pair of tailor's shears stuck lightly upright into the table-top, leaning a little forward like a dropped bowie-knife.

The other three still walked in the street — the woman who somehow even contrived to wear the skirt beneath the sexless trench-coat as any one of the three men would; the tall parachute jumper with his handsome face now wearing an expression of sullen speculation; and Shumann behind them, in the neat serge suit and the new hat which even yet had the appearance of resting, exactly as the machine had stamped and moulded it, on the hat-block in the store — the three of them with that same air which in Jiggs was merely oblivious and lightly worn insolvency but which in them was that irrevocable homelessness of three immigrants walking down the steerage gang-plank of a ship.

As the woman and the parachute jumper stepped on to the kerb, light and bell clanged again and merged into the rising gear-whine as the traffic moved; Shumann sprang forward and on to the kerb with a stiff light movement of unbelievable and rigid celerity, without a hair's abatement of expression or hat-angle.

Again, behind them now, the light harried spindrift of tortured confetti and serpentine rose from the gutter in sucking gusts. The reporter glared at them all now with his dazed, strained and urgent face. "The bastards!" he cried. "The son of a bitches!"

"Yair," Jiggs said. "Which way now?" For an instant longer the reporter glared at them. Then he turned, as though put into motion not by any spoken word but by the sheer solid weight of their patient and homeless passivity, into the dark mouth of the street now so narrow of kerb that they followed in single file, walking beneath a shallow overhang of iron-grilled balconies.

The street was empty, unlighted save by the reflection from Grandlieu Street behind them, smelling of mud and of something else richly anonymous somewhere between coffee grounds and bananas. Looking back Jiggs tried to spell out the name, the letters inlaid into the kerb edge in tile-blurred mosaic, unable to discern at once that it was not only a word, a name which he had neither seen nor heard in his life, but that he was looking at it upside down. "Jesus," he thought, "it must have took a Frenchman to be polite enough to call this a street, let alone name it."

Carrying the sleeping boy on his shoulder he was followed in turn by the three others, the four of them hurrying quietly after the hurrying reporter as though Grandlieu Street and its light and movement were Lethe itself just behind them and they four shades this moment out of the living world and being hurried, grave, quiet and unalarmed, on towards complete oblivion by one not only apparently long enough in residence to have become a citizen of the shadows, but one who from all outward appearances had been born there, too.

The reporter was still talking, but they did not appear to hear him, as though they had arrived too recently to have yet unclogged their ears of human speech in order to even hear the tongue in which the guide spoke. Now he stopped again, turning upon them again his wild, urgent face.

It was another intersection — two narrow roofless tunnels like exposed mine galleries marked by two pale one-way arrows which seemed to have drawn to themselves and to hold in faint suspension what light there was. Then Jiggs saw that to the left the street ran into something of light and life — a line of cars along the kerb beneath an electric sign, a name, against which the shallow dark grill-work of the eternal balconies hung in weightless and lace-like silhouette.

This time Jiggs stepped from the kerb and spelled out the street's name. "Toulouse," he spelled. "Too loose," he thought. "Yair. Swell. Our house last night must have got lost on the way home." So at first he was not listening to the reporter, who now held them immobile in a tableau reminiscent (save for his hat) of the cartoon pictures of city anarchists; Jiggs looked up only to see him rushing away towards the lighted sign. They all looked, watching the thin, long, bat-like shape as it fled on.

"I don't want anything to drink," Shumann said. "I want to go to bed." The parachute jumper put his hand into the pocket of the woman's trench-coat and drew out a pack of cigarettes, the third of those which the reporter had bought before they left the hotel the first time. He lit one and jetted smoke viciously from his nostrils.

"I heard you tell him that," he said.

"Booze?" Jiggs said. "Jesus, is that what he was trying to tell us?" They watched the reporter, the gangling figure in the flapping suit running loosely towards the parked cars. They saw the newsboy emerge from somewhere, the paper already extended and then surrendered, the reporter scarcely pausing to take it and pay.

"That's the second one he has bought to-night since we met him," Shumann said. "I thought he worked on one." The parachute jumper inhaled and jetted the vicious smoke again.

"Maybe he can't read his own writing," he said. The woman moved abruptly; she came to Jiggs and reached for the little boy.

“I’ll take him awhile,” she said. “You and whatever his name is have carried him all evening.” But before Jiggs could even release the boy the parachute jumper came and took hold of the boy, too. The woman looked at him. “Get away, Jack,” she said.

“Get away yourself,” the jumper said. He lifted the boy from both of them, not gentle and not rough. “I’ll take him. I can do this much for my board and keep.” He and the woman looked at one another across the sleeping boy.

“Laverne,” Shumann said, “give me one of the cigarettes.” The woman and the jumper looked at one another.

“What do you want?” she said. “Do you want to walk the streets to-night? Do you want Roger to sit in the railroad station to night and then expect to win a race to-morrow? Do you want Jack to..

“Did I say anything?” the jumper said. “I don’t like his face. But all right about that. That’s my business. But did I say anything? Did I?”

“Laverne,” Shumann said, “give me that cigarette.” But it was Jiggs who moved; he went to the jumper and took the child from him.

“Jesus, gimme,” he said. “You never have learned how to carry him.” From somewhere among the dark, dead, narrow streets there came a sudden burst of sound, of revelry: shrill, turgid, wall-muted, as though emerging from beyond a low doorway or from a cave — some place airless and filled with smoke.

Then they saw the reporter. He appeared from beneath the electric sign, emerging from a tile-floored and walled cavern containing nothing, like an incomplete gymnasium shower-room, and lined with two rows of discreet and curtained booths, from one of which a faun-faced waiter with a few stumps of rotting teeth had emerged and recognized him.

“Listen,” the reporter had said. “I want a gallon of absinth. You know what kind. I want it for some friends, but I am going to drink it, too, and

besides they ain't Mardi Gras tourists. You tell Pete that. You know what I mean?"

"Sure, mike," the waiter said. He turned and went on to the rear and so into a kitchen, where at a zinc-covered table a man in a silk shirt, with a shock of black curls, eating from a single huge dish, looked up at the waiter with a pair of eyes like two topazes while the waiter repeated the reporter's name. "He says he wants it good," the waiter said in Italian. "He has friends with him. I guess I will have to give him gin."

"Absinth?" the other said, also in Italian. "Fix him up. Why not?"
"He said he wanted the good."

"Sure. Fix him up. Call mamma." He went back to eating. The waiter went out a second door; a moment later he returned with a gallon jug of something without colour and followed by a decent withered old lady in an immaculate apron. The waiter set the jug on the sink and the old lady took from the apron's pocket a small phial.

"Look and see if it's the paregoric she has," the man at the table said without looking up or ceasing to chew. The waiter leaned and looked at the phial from which the old lady was pouring into the jug. She poured about an ounce; the waiter shook the jug and held it to the light.

"A trifle more, madonna," he said. "The colour is not quite right." He carried the jug out; the reporter emerged from beneath the sign, carrying it; the four at the corner watched him approach at his loose gallop, as though on the verge not of falling down but of completely disintegrating at the next stride.

"Absinth!" he cried. "New Valois absinth! I told you I knew them. Absinth! We will go home and I will name you some real New Valois drinks and then to hell with them!" He faced them, glaring, with the actual jug now gesticulant. "The bastards!" he cried. "The son of a bitches!"

“Watch out!” Jiggs cried. “Jesus, you nearly hit that post with it!” He shoved the little boy at Shumann. “Here; take him,” he said. He sprang forward, reaching for the jug. “Let me carry it,” he said.

“Yair; home!” the reporter cried. He and Jiggs both clung to the jug while he glared at them all with his wild bright face. “Hagood didn’t know he would have to fire me to make me go there. And get this, listen! I don’t work for him now and so he will never know whether I went there or not!”

As the cage door clashed behind him, the editor himself reached down and lifted the face-down watch from the stack of papers, from that cryptic staccato cross-section of an instant crystallized and now dead two hours, though only the moment, the instant: the substance itself not only not dead, not complete, but in its very insoluble enigma of human folly and blundering possessing a futile and tragic immortality:
FARMERS BANKERS STRIKERS ACREAGE
WEATHER POPULATION

Now it was the elevator man who asked the time. “Halfpast two,” the editor said. He put the watch back, placing it without apparent pause or calculation in the finicking exact centre of the line of caps, so that now, in the shape of a cheap metal disc, the cryptic stripe was parted neatly in the exact centre by the blank backside of the greatest and most inescapable enigma of all. The cage stopped, the door slid back. “Good night,” the editor said.

“Good night, Mr. Hagood,” the other said. The door closed behind him again. Now in the glass street doors into which the reporter had watched himself walk five hours ago, the editor watched his reflection — a shortish, sedentary man in worn, cheap, near-tweed knickers and rubber-soled golf-shoes, a silk muffler, a shetland jacket which unmistakably represented money and from one pocket of which protruded the collar and tie which he had removed probably on a second or third tee some time during the afternoon, topped by a bare, bald head and the horn glasses — the face of an intelligent betrayed asceticism, the face of a Yale or perhaps a Cornell senior outrageously

surprised and overwhelmed by a sudden and vicious double decade — which marched steadily upon him as he crossed the lobby until just at the point where either he or it must give way, when it too flicked and glared away and he descended the two shallow steps and so into the chill and laggard pre-dawn of winter.

His roadster stood at the kerb, the ostler from the all-night garage beside it, the neat-gleamed and vaguely obstetrical shapes of golf-heads projecting, raked slightly, above the lowered top and repeating the glint and gleam of other chromium about the car's dull-silver body. The ostler opened the door, but Hagood gestured him in first.

"I've got to go down to French Town," he said. "You drive on to your corner." The ostler slid, lean and fast, past the golf bag and the gears and under the wheel. Hagood entered stiffly, like an old man, letting himself down into the low seat, whereupon without sound or warning the golf-bag struck him across the head and shoulder with an apparently calculated and lurking viciousness, emitting a series of dry clicks as though produced by the jaws of a beast domesticated though not tamed, half in fun and half in deadly seriousness, like a pet shark. Hagood flung the bag back and then caught it just before it clashed at him again. "Why in hell didn't you put it into the rumble?" he said.

"I'll do it now," the ostler said, opening the door.

"Never mind now," Hagood said. "Let's get on. I have to go clear across town before I can go home."

"Yair, I guess we will all be glad when Moddy Graw is over," the ostler said. The car moved; it accelerated smoothly and on its fading gear-whine it drifted down the alley, poising without actually pausing; then it swung into the Avenue, gaining speed — a machine expensive, complex, delicate and intrinsically useless, created for some obscure psychic need of the species if not the race, from the virgin resources of a continent, to be the individual muscles, bones and flesh of a new and legless kind — into the empty avenue between the purple-and-yellow paper bunting caught from post to post by cryptic shield symbolic of laughter and mirth now vanished and departed.

It rushed along the dark lonely street, its displacement and the sum of money it represented concentrated and reduced to a single suavely illuminated dial on which numerals without significance increased steadily towards some yet unrevealed crescendo of ultimate triumph whose only witnesses were waifs. It slowed and stopped as smoothly and skilfully as it had started; the ostler slid out before it came to a halt. "O.K., Mr. Hagood," he said. "Good night."

"Good night," Hagood said. As he slid across to the wheel the golf-bag fainted silently at him. This time he slammed it over and down into the other corner. The car moved again, though now it was a different machine. It got into motion with a savage overpowered lurch as if something of it besides the other and younger man had quitted it when it stopped; it rolled on and into Grandlieu Street, unchallenged now by light or bell.

Instead, only the middle eye on each post stared dimly and steadily yellow, the four corners of the intersection marked now by four milk-coloured jets from the fireplugs and standing one beside each plug, motionless and identical, four men in white like burlesqued internes in comedies, while upon each gutter-plaited stream now drifted the flotsam and jetsam of the dead evening's serpentine and confetti.

The car drifted on across the intersection and into that quarter of narrow canyons, the exposed mine-galleries hung with iron lace, going faster now, floored now with cobbles and roofed by the low overcast sky and walled by a thick and tremendous uproar as though all reverberation hung like invisible fog in the narrow streets, to be waked into outrageous and monstrous sound even by streamlining and air-wheels.

He slowed into the kerb at the mouth of an alley in which even as he got out of the car he could see the shape of a lighted second-storey window printing the balcony's shadow upon the flag paving, and then in the window's rectangle the shadow of an arm which even from here he could see holding the shadow of a drinking-glass as, closing the car

door, he trod upon the chipped mosaic words, The Drowned, set into the kerb and walked up the alley in outrage but not surprise.

When he came opposite the window he could see the living arm itself, though long before that he had begun to hear the reporter's voice. Now he could hear nothing else, scarcely his own voice, as he stood beneath the balcony, shouting, beginning to scream, until without warning a short trim-legged man bounced suddenly to the balustrade and leaned outward, blunt of face and with a tonsure like a priest's, as Hagood glared up at him and thought with raging impotence, "He told me they had a horse, too. Damn, damn, damn!"

"Looking for somebody up here, doc?" the man on the balcony said. "Yes!" Hagood screamed, shouting the reporter's name again.

"Who?" the man on the balcony said, cupping his ear downward. Again Hagood screamed the name. "Nobody up here by that name that I know of," the man on the balcony said; then he said, "Wait a minute." Perhaps it was Hagood's amazed, outraged face; the other turned his head and he too bawled the name into the room behind him.

"Anybody here named that?" he said. The reporter's voice ceased for a second, no more, then it shouted in the same tone which Hagood had been able to hear even from the end of the alley:

"Who wants to know?" But before the man on the balcony could answer, it shouted again: "Tell him he ain't here. Tell him he's moved away. He's married. He's dead." Then the voice roared: "Tell him he's gone to work!" The man on the balcony looked down again.

"Well, mister," he said, "I guess you heard him about as plain as I did."

—

"No matter," Hagood said. "You come down."

"Me?"

"Yes!" Hagood shouted. "You!" So he stood in the alley and watched the other go back into the room which he himself had never seen. He had never before been closer to what the reporter who had worked

directly under him for twenty months now called home than the file form which the reporter had filled out on the day he joined the paper.

That room, that apartment which the reporter called bohemian, he had hunted down in this section of New Valois's Vieux Carré and then hunted down piece by piece the furniture which cluttered it, with the eager and deluded absorption of a child hunting coloured easter eggs.

It was a gaunt cavern roofed like a barn, with scuffed and worn and even rotted floor-boards and scrofulous walls and cut into two uneven halves, bedroom and studio, by an old theatre curtain and cluttered with slovenly mended and useless tables draped with imitation batik bearing precarious lamps made of liquor bottles, and other objects of oxidized metal made for what original purpose no man knew, and hung with more batik and machine-made Indian blankets and indecipherable has-relief plaques vaguely religio-Italian primitive.

It was filled with objects whose desiccated and fragile inutility bore a kinship to their owner's own physical being as though he and they were all conceived in one womb and spawned in one litter — objects which possessed that quality of veteran prostitutes, of being overlaid by the ghosts of so many anonymous proprietors that even the present title-holder held merely rights but no actual possession — a room apparently exhumed from a theatrical morgue and rented intact from one month to the next.

It was about two months after the reporter had joined the paper without credentials or any past, documentary or hearsay, at all, with his appearance of some creature evolved by forced draught in a laboratory and both beyond and incapable of any need for artificial sustenance, like a tumble weed, with his eager, dog-like air and his child's aptitude for being not so much where news happened exactly but for being wherever were the most people at any given time rushing about the Vieux Carré for his apartment and his furniture and the decorations — the blankets and batik and the objects which he would buy and fetch into the office and then listen with incorrigible shocked amazement while Hagood would prove to him patiently how he had paid two or

three prices for them. — One day, Hagood looked up and watched a woman whom he had never seen before enter the city room.

“She looked like a locomotive,” he told the paper’s owner later with bitter outrage. “You know: when the board has been devilled and harried by the news reels of Diesel trains and by the reporters that ask them about the future of railroading until at last the board takes the old engine, the one that set the record back in nineteen-two or nineteen-ten or somewhere and send it to the shops and one day they unveil it (with the news reels and the reporters all there, too) with horseshoe rose wreaths and congress men and thirty-six high-school girls out of the beauty show in bathing-suits, and it is a new engine on the outside only, because everyone is glad and proud that inside it is still the old fast one of nineteen-two or -ten.

The same number is on the tender and the old fine, sound, time-proved working parts, only the cab and the boiler are painted robin’s egg blue and the rods and the bell look more like gold than gold does and even the supercharger don’t look so very noticeable except in a hard light, and the number is in neon now: the first number in the world to be in neon?”

He looked up from his desk and saw her enter on a blast of scent as arresting as mustard gas and followed by the reporter looking more than ever like a shadow whose projector had eluded it weeks and weeks ago... the fine big bosom like one of the walled, impervious towns of the Middle Ages whose origin antedates writing, which have been taken and retaken in uncountable fierce assaults which overran them in the brief fury of a moment and vanished, leaving no trace, the broad tomato-coloured mouth, the eyes pleasant, shrewd and beyond mere disillusion, the hair of that diamond-hard and imperviously recent lustre of a gilt service in a shop window, the gold-studded teeth square and white and big like those of a horse.

He saw all this beneath a plump, rich billowing of pink plumes so that he thought of himself as looking at a canvas out of the vernal equinox of pigment when they could not always write to sign their names to

them — a canvas conceived in and executed out of that fine innocence of sleep and open bowels capable of crowning the rich, foul, unchaste earth with rose cloud where lurk and sport oblivious and incongruous cherubim. “I just dropped into town to see who he really works for,” she said.

“May I... Thanks.” She took the cigarette from the pack on the desk before he could move, though she did wait for him to strike and hold the match. “And to ask you to sort of look out for him. Because he is a fool, you see. I don’t know whether he is a newspaper man or not.

Maybe you don’t know yet, yourself. But he is the baby.” Then she was gone — the scent, the plumes; the room which had been full of pink vapour and golden teeth darkened again, became niggard — and Hagood thought, “Baby of what?” because the reporter had told him before and now assured him again that he had neither brothers nor sisters, that he had no ties at all save the woman who had passed through the city room — and apparently through New Valois, too, without stopping, with something of that aura of dwarfed distances and self-sufficient bulk of a light cruiser passing through a canal lock — and the incredible name.

“Only the name is right,” the reporter told him. “Folks don’t always believe it at first, but it’s correct as far as I know.”

“But I thought she said her name was—” and Hagood repeated the name the woman had given.

“Yair,” the reporter said. “It is now.”

“You mean she has—” Hagood said.

“Yair,” the reporter said. “She’s changed it twice since I can remember. They were both good guys, too.” So then Hagood believed that he saw the picture — the woman not voracious, not rapacious; just omnivorous like the locomotive’s maw of his late symbology; he told himself with savage disillusion, Yes.

Come here to see just who he really worked for. What she meant was she came here to see that he really had a job and whether or not he was going to keep it. He believed now that he knew why the reporter cashed his pay-cheque before leaving the building each Saturday night; he could almost see the reporter, running now to reach the post office station before it closed — or perhaps the telegraph office — in the one case the flimsy blue strip of money order, in the other the yellow duplicate receipt.

So that, on that first midweek night when the reporter opened the subject diffidently, Hagood set a precedent out of his own pocket which he did not break for almost a year, cursing the big woman whom he had seen but once, who had passed across the horizon of his life without stopping, yet for ever after disarranging it, like the air-blast of the oblivious locomotive crossing a remote and trash-filled suburban street.

But he said nothing until the reporter came and requested a loan twice the size of an entire week's pay, and even then he did not open the matter. It was his face which caused the reporter to explain; it was for a wedding present. "A wedding present?" Hagood said.

"Yair," the reporter said. "She's been good to me. I reckon I better send her something, even if she won't need it."

"Won't need it?" Hagood cried.

"No. She won't need what I could send her. She's always been lucky that way."

"Wait," Hagood said. "Let me get this straight. You want to buy a wedding present. I thought you told me you didn't have any sisters or br—"

"No," the reporter said. "It's for mamma."

"Oh," Hagood said after a time, though perhaps it did not seem very long to the reporter; perhaps it did not seem long before Hagood spoke again: "I see. Yes. Am I to congratulate you?"

“Thanks,” the reporter said. “I don’t know the guy. But the two I did know were O.K.”

“I see,” Hagood said. “Yes. Well. Married. The two you did know. Was one of them your — But no matter. Don’t tell me. Don’t tell me!” he cried. “At least it is something. Anyway, she did what she could for you!” Now it was the reporter looking at Hagood with courteous interrogation. “It will change your life some now,” Hagood said.

“Well, I hope not,” the reporter said. “I don’t reckon she has done any worse this time than she used to. You saw yourself she’s still a fine-looking old gal and a good goer still, even if she ain’t any longer one of the ones you will find in the dance marathons at 6 a m. So I guess it’s O.K. still. She always has been lucky that way.”

“You hope—” Hagood said. “You... Wait,” he said. He took a cigarette from the pack on the desk, though at last the reporter himself leaned and struck the match for him and held it. “Let me get this straight. You mean you haven’t been — that that money you borrowed from me, that you send—”

“Send what where?” the reporter said after a moment. “Oh, I see. No. I ain’t sent her money. She sends me money. And I don’t reckon that just getting married again will...” Hagood did not even sit back in the chair.

“Get out of here!” he screamed. “Get out! Out!” For a moment longer the reporter looked down at him with that startled interrogation, then he turned and retreated. But before he had cleared the railing around the desk Hagood was calling him back in a voice hoarse and restrained. He returned to the desk and watched the editor snatch from a drawer a pad of note forms and scrawl on the top one and thrust pad and pen towards him.

“What’s this, chief?” the reporter said.

“It’s a hundred and eighty dollars,” Hagood said in that tense careful voice, as though speaking to a child. “With interest at six per cent, per annum and payable at sight Not even on demand: on sight. Sign it.”

“Jesus,” the reporter said. “Is it that much already?”
“Sign it,” Hagood said.

“Sure, chief,” the reporter said. “I never did mean to try to beat you out of it.”

But that was eighteen months ago; now Hagood and Jiggs stood side by side on the old uneven flags which the New Valoisians claim rang more than once to the feet of the pirate Lafitte, looking up towards the window and the loud drunken voice beyond it.

“So that’s his name,” Jiggs said. “That what?”

“That nothing!” Hagood said. “It’s his last name. Or the only name he has except the one initial as far as I or anyone else in this town knows. But it must be his; I never heard anyone else named that and so no one intelligent enough to have anything to hide from would deliberately assume it. You see? Anyone, even a child, would know it is false.”

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “Even a kid wouldn’t be fooled by it.” They looked up at the window.

“I know his mother,” Hagood said. “Oh, I know what you are thinking. I thought the same thing myself when I first saw him: what anyone would think if he were to begin to explain where and when and why he came into the world, like what you think about a bug or a worm: ‘All right! All right! For God’s sake, all right!’ And now he has doubtless been trying ever since, I think it was about half-past twelve, to get drunk and I daresay successfully.”

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “You’re safe there. He’s telling Jack how to fly, about how Matt Ord gave him an hour’s dual once. About how when you take off and land on them concrete Fs out at the airport he says it’s like flying in and out of a — organization maybe.

He said organization or organism but maybe he never knew himself what he was trying to say; something about a couple of gnats hanging around a couple of married elephants in bed together like they say it takes them days and days and even weeks to get finished.

Yair, him and Jack both, because Laverne and Roger have gone to bed in the bed with the kid and so maybe him and Jack are trying to get boiled enough to sleep on the floor, because Jesus, he spent enough on that taxi to have taken us all to the hotel. But nothing would do but we must come home with him.

Yair, he called it a house too; and on the way he rushes into this dive and rushes out with a gallon of something that he is hollering is absinth only I never drank any absinth but I could have made him all he wanted of it with a bath tub and enough grain alcohol and a bottle of paregoric or maybe it's laudanum.

But you can come up and try it yourself. Besides, I better get on back; I am kind of keeping an eye on him and Jack, see?"

"Watching them?" Hagood said.

"Yair. It won't be no fight though; like I told Jack, it would be like pushing over your grandmother. It happened that Jack kept on seeing him and Laverne this afternoon standing around on the apron or coming out of the—" Hagood turned upon Jiggs-

"Do I," Hagood cried with thin outrage, "do I have to spend half my life listening to him telling me about you people and the other half listening to you telling me about him?" Jiggs' mouth was still open. He closed it slowly; he looked at Hagood steadily with his hot bright regard, his hand on his hips, light poised on his bronco legs, leaning a little forward.

"You don't have to listen to anything I can tell you if you don't want to, mister," he said. "You called me down here. I never called you. What is it you want with me or him?"

“Nothing!” Hagood said. “I only came here in the faint hope that he would be in bed, or at least sober enough to come to work to-morrow.”

“He says he don’t work for you. He says you fired him.”

“He lied!” Hagood cried. “I told him to be there at ten o’clock to-morrow morning. That’s what I told him.”

“Is that what you want me to tell him, then?”

“Yes! Not to-night. Don’t try to tell him to-night. Wait until to-morrow, when he...You can do that much for your night’s lodging, can’t you?”
Again Jiggs looked at him with that hot steady speculation.

“Yair. I’ll tell him. But it won’t be just because I am trying to pay him back for what he done for us to-night. See what I mean?”

“I apologize,” Hagood said. “But tell him. Do it any way you want to, but just tell him, see that he is told before he leaves to-morrow. Will you?”

“O.K.,” Jiggs said. He watched the other turn and go back down the alley, then he turned too and entered the house, the corridor, and mounted the cramped, dark, treacherous stairs and into the drunken voice again. The parachute jumper sat on an iron cot disguised thinly by another Indian blanket and piled with bright faded pillows about which dust seemed to lurk in a thin nimbus cloud even at the end of the couch which the jumper had not disturbed.

The reporter stood beside a slopped table on which the gallon jug sat and a dish-pan containing now mostly dirty ice-water, though a few fragments of the actual ice still floated in it. He was in his shirt sleeves, his collar open and the knot of his tie slipped downward and the ends of the tie darkly wet, as if he had leaned them downward into the dish-pan; against the bright, vivid even though machine-dyed blanket on the wall behind him he resembled some slain curious trophy of a western vacation, half finished by a taxidermist and then forgotten and then salvaged again.

“Who was it?” he said. “Did he look like if you wanted to see him right after supper on Friday night you would have to go around to the church annex where the Boy Scouts are tripping one another up from behind?”

“What?” Jiggs said. “I guess so.” Then he said, “Yair. That’s him.” The reporter looked at him, holding in his hand a glass such as chain-store jam comes in.

“Did you tell him I was married? Did you tell him I got two husbands now?”

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “How about going to bed?”

“Bed?” the reporter cried. “Bed? When I got a widowed guest in the house and the least thing I can do for him is to get drunk with him because I can’t do anything else because I am in the same fix he is only I am in this fix all the time and not j just to-night?”

“Sure,” Jiggs said. “Let’s go to bed.” The reporter leaned against the table and with his bright reckless face he watched j Jiggs go to the bags in the corner and take from the stained canvas sack a paper-wrapped parcel and open it and take out a brand-new bootjack; he watched Jiggs sit on one of the chairs and try to remove the right boot; then at the sound he turned and looked with that bright speculation at the parachute jumper completely relaxed on the cot, his long legs crossed and extended, laughing at Jiggs with vicious and humourless steadiness. Jiggs sat on the floor and extended his leg towards the reporter. “Give it a yank,” he said.

“Sure,” the jumper said. “We’ll give it a yank for you.” The reporter had already taken hold of the boot; the jumper struck him aside with a back-handed blow. The reporter staggered back into the wall and watched the jumper, his handsome face tense and savage in the lamplight, his teeth showing beneath the slender moustache, take hold of the boot and then lift his foot suddenly towards Jiggs’ groin before Jiggs could move. The reporter half fell into the jumper, jolting him away so that the jumper’s foot only struck Jiggs’ turned flank.

“Here!” he cried. “You ain’t playing!”

“Playing?” the jumper said. “Sure I’m playing. That’s all I do — like this.” The reporter did not see Jiggs rise from the floor at all; he just saw Jiggs in mid-bounce, as though he had risen with no recourse to his legs at all, and Jiggs’ and the jumper’s hands flick and lock as with the other hand Jiggs now hurled the reporter back into the wall.

“Quit it, now,” Jiggs said. “Look at him. What’s the fun in that, huh?” He looked back over his shoulder at the reporter. “Go to bed,” he said. “Go on, now. You got to be at work at ten o’clock. Go on.” The reporter did not move. He leaned back against the wall, his face fixed in a thin grimace of smiling as though glazed.

Jiggs sat on the floor again, his right leg extended again, holding it extended between his hands. “Come on,” he said. “Give them a yank.” The reporter took hold of the boot and pulled; abruptly he too was sitting on the floor facing Jiggs, listening to himself laughing. “Hush,” Jiggs said. “Do you want to wake up Roger and Laverne and the kid? Hush now. Hush.”

“Yair,” the reporter whispered. “I’m trying to quit. But I can’t. See? Just listen to me.”

“Sure you can quit,” Jiggs said. “Look. You done already quit. Ain’t you? See now?”

“Yair,” the reporter said. “But maybe it’s just free-wheeling.” He began to laugh again, and then Jiggs was leaning forward, slapping his thigh with the flat of the bootjack until he stopped.

“Now,” Jiggs said. “Pull.” The boot loosened, since it had already been worked at; Jiggs slipped it off. But when the left one came it gave way so suddenly that the reporter went over on his back, though this time he did not laugh; he lay there saying, “It’s O.K. I ain’t going to laugh.”

Then he was looking up at Jiggs standing over him in a pair of cotton socks which, like the home-made putties of the morning, consisted of legs and insteps only.

“Get up,” Jiggs said, lifting the reporter.

“All right,” the reporter said. “Just make the room stop.” He began to struggle to stay down, but Jiggs hauled him up and he leaned outward against the arms which held him on his feet, towards the couch, the cot.

“Wait till it comes around again,” he cried; then he lunged violently, sprawling on to the cot and then he could feel someone tumbling on to the cot and he struggled again to be free, saying thickly through a sudden, hot, violent, liquid mass in his mouth, “Look out! Look out! I’m on now. Let go!” Then he was free, though he could not move yet.

Then he saw Jiggs lying on the floor next the wall, his back to the room and his head pillowed on the canvas sack, and the parachute jumper at the slopped table, pouring from the jug.

The reporter got up, unsteadily, though he spoke quite distinctly: “Yair. That’s the old idea. Little drink, hey?” He moved towards the table, walking carefully, his face wearing again the expression of bright and desperate recklessness, speaking apparently in soliloquy to an empty room: “But nobody to drink with now.

Jiggs gone to bed and Roger gone to bed and Laverne can’t drink to-night because Roger won’t let her drink. See?” Now he looked at the jumper across the table, above the jug, the jam glasses, the dish-pan, with that bright dissolute desperation though he still seemed to speak into an empty room: “Yair.

It was Roger, see. Roger was the one that wouldn’t let her have anything to drink to-night, that took the glass out of her hand after a friend gave it to her. And so she and Roger have gone to bed. See?” They looked at one another.

“Maybe you wanted to go to bed with her yourself?” the jumper said. For a moment longer they looked at one another. The reporter’s face had changed. The bright recklessness was still there, but now it was overlaid with that abject desperation which, lacking anything better, is courage.

“Yes!” he cried. “Yes!” flinging himself backward and crossing his arms before his face at the same time. At first he did not even realize that it was only the floor which had struck him until he lay prone again, his arms above his face and head and looking between them at the feet of the parachute jumper who had not moved.

He watched the jumper’s hand go out and strike the lamp from the table and then when the crash died he could see nothing and hear nothing, lying on the floor perfectly and completely passive and waiting. “Jesus,” he said quietly, “for a minute I thought you were trying to knock the jug off.”

But there was no reply, and again his insides had set up that fierce maelstrom to which there was no focal point, not even himself. He lay motionless and waiting and felt the quick faint airblast and then the foot, the shoe, striking him hard in the side, once, and then he heard the jumper’s voice from above him speaking apparently from somewhere within the thick instability of the room, the darkness, whirling and whirling away, in a tone of quiet detachment saying the same words and in the same tone in which he had spoken them to Jiggs in the brothel six hours ago.

They seemed to continue, to keep on speaking, clapping quietly down at him even after he knew by sound that the jumper had gone to the cot and stretched out on it; he could hear the quiet savage movements as the other arranged the dusty pillows and drew the blanket up.

“That must be at least twelve times,” the reporter thought. “He must have called me a son of a bitch at least eight times after he went to

sleep.... Yair," he thought, "I told you. I'll go, all right. But you will have to give me time, until I can get up and move....

Yair," he thought, while the long vertiginous darkness completed a swirl more profound than any yet; now he felt the thick cold oil start and spring from his pores which, when his dead hand found his dead face, did not sop up nor wipe away beneath the hand but merely doubled as though each drop were the atom which instantaneously divides not only into two equal parts but into two parts each of which is equal to the recent whole; "yesterday I talked myself out of a job, but to-night I seem to have talked myself out of my own house."

But at last he began to see: it was the dim shape of the window abruptly against some outer light-coloured space or air; vision caught, snagged and clung desperately and blindly like the pinafore of a child falling from a fence or a tree. On his hands and knees and still holding to the window by vision he found the table and got to his feet.

He remembered exactly where he had put the key, carefully beneath the edge of the lamp, but now with the lamp gone his still nerveless hand did not feel the key at all when he knocked it from the table; it was hearing alone: the forlorn faint clink.

He got down and found it at last and rose again, carefully, and wiped the key on the end of his necktie and laid it in the centre of the table, putting it down with infinite care as though it were a dynamite cap, and found one of the sticky glasses and poured from the jug by sound and feel and raised the glass, gulping, while the icy almost pure alcohol channelled fiercely down his chin and seemed to blaze through his cold wet shirt and on to and into his flesh. It tried to come back at once; he groped to the stairs and down them, swallowing and swallowing the vomit which tried to fill his throat.

There was something else that he had intended to do which he remembered only when the door clicked irrevocably behind him and the cold thick pre-dawn breathed against his damp shirt which had no coat to cover it and warm it.

And now he could not recall at once what he had intended to do, where he had intended to go, as though destination and purpose were some theoretical point like latitude or time which he had passed in the hall, or something like a stamped and forgotten letter in the coat which he had failed to bring.

Then he remembered; he stood on the cold flags, shaking with slow and helpless violence inside his wet shirt, remembering that he had started for the newspaper to spend the rest of the night on the floor of the now empty city room (he had done it before), having for the time forgotten that he was now fired. If he had been sober he would have tried the door, as people will, out of that vague hope for, even though not belief in, miracles.

But, drunk, he did not. He just began to move carefully away, steadying himself along the wall until he should get into motion, waiting to begin again to try to keep the vomit swallowed, thinking quietly out of peaceful and profound and detached desolation and amazement: "Four hours ago they were out and I was in, and now it's turned around exactly backward.

It's like there was a kind of cosmic rule for poverty like there is for water-level, like there has to be a certain weight of burns on park benches or in railroad waiting-rooms waiting for morning to come or the world will tilt up and spill all of us wild and shrieking and grabbing like so many shooting stars, off into nothing."

But it would have to be a station, walls, even though he had long since surrendered to the shaking and felt no cold at all any more. There were two stations, but he had never walked to either of them and he could not decide nor remember which was the nearer, when he stopped abruptly, remembering the Market, thinking of coffee. "Coffee," he said. "Coffee. When I have had some coffee, it will be to-morrow. Yair. When you have had coffee, then it is already to-morrow and so you don't have to wait for it."

He walked pretty fast now, breathing with his mouth wide open as if he hoped (or were actually doing it) to soothe and quiet his stomach with the damp and dark and the cold.

Now he could see the Market — a broad, low, brilliant, wallless cavern filled with ranked vegetables as bright and impervious in appearance as artificial flowers, among which men in sweaters and women in men's sweaters and hats too sometimes, with Latin faces still swollen with sleep and vapoured faintly about the mouth and nostrils by breathing still warm from slumber, paused and looked at the man in shirt sleeves and loosened collar, with a face looking more than ever like that of a corpse roused and outraged out of what should have been the irrevocable and final sleep.

He went on towards the coffee-stall; he felt fine now. "Yair, I'm all right now," he thought, because almost at once he had quit trembling and shaking, and when at last the cup of hot pale liquid was set before him he told himself again that he felt fine; indeed, the very fact of his insistence to himself should have been intimation enough that things were not all right.

And then he sat perfectly motionless, looking down at the cup in that rapt concern with which one listens to his own insides. "Jesus," he thought. "Maybe I tried it too quick. Maybe I should have walked around a while longer."

But he was here, the coffee waited before him; already the counterman was watching him coldly. "And Jesus, I'm right; after a man has had his coffee it's to-morrow: it has to be!" he cried, with no sound, with that cunning, self-deluding logic of a child. "And to-morrow it's just a hang over; you ain't still drunk to-morrow; to-morrow you can't feel this bad."

So he raised the cup as he had the final glass before he left home; he felt the hot liquid channelling down his chin too and striking through his shirt against his flesh. With his throat surging and trying to gag and his gaze holding desperately to the low cornice above the coffee-urn he

thought of the cup exploding from his mouth, shooting upward and without trajectory like a champagne cork.

He put the cup down, already moving, though not quite running, out of the stall and between the bright tables, passing from one to another by his hands like a monkey runs until he brought up against a table of strawberry boxes, holding to it without knowing why he had stopped nor when, while a woman in a black shawl behind the table repeated: "How many, mister?" After awhile he heard his mouth saying something, trying to.

"Qu'est-ce qu'il voulait?" a man's voice said from the end of the table. "D' journal d' matin," the woman said.

"Donne-t-il," the man said. The woman stopped and reappeared with a paper, folded back upon an inner sheet, and handed it to the reporter.

"Yair," he said. "That's it." But when he tried to take it he missed it; it floated down between his and the woman's hands, opening on to the first page. She folded it right now and he took it, swaying, holding to the table with the other hand, reading from the page in a loud declamatory voice: "Bankers strike! Farmers yacht! Quintuplets acreage! Reduction gains! — No; wait."

He swayed, staring at the shawled woman with gaunt concentration. He fumbled in his pocket; the coins rang on the floor with the same sound which the key made, but now as he began to stoop the cold floor struck him a shocking blow on the face and then hands were holding him again while he struggled to rise.

Now he was plunging toward the entrance; he caromed from the last table without even feeling it, the hot corrupted coffee gathering inside him like a big heavy bird beginning to fly as he plunged out the door and struck a lamp-post and clinging to it surrendered, as life, sense, all, seemed to burst out of his mouth as though his entire body were trying in one fierce orgasm to turn itself wrong side out.

Now it was dawn. It had come unremarked; he merely realized suddenly that he could now discern faintly the words on the paper and that he now stood in a grey palpable substance without weight or light, leaning against the wall which he had not yet tried to leave.

“Because I don’t know whether I can make it yet or not,” he thought, with peaceful and curious interest as if he were engaged in a polite parlour game for no stakes. When he did move at last he seemed to blow leaf light along the greying wall to which he did not exactly cling but rather moved in some form of light slow attrition, like the leaf without quite enough wind to keep it in motion.

The light grew steadily, without seeming to come from any one source or direction; now he could read the words, the print, quite well, though they still had a tendency to shift and flow in smooth elusion of sense, meaning while he read them aloud: “Quintuplets bank... No; there ain’t any pylon.... Wait. Wait....

Yair, it was a pylon only it was pointed down and buried at the time and they were not quintuplets yet when they banked around it.... Farmers bank. Yair. Farmer’s boy, two farmers’ boys, at least one from Ohio anyway she told me. And the ground they plough from Iowa; yair, two farmers’ boys down banked; yair, two buried pylons in the one Iowa drowsing woman drowsing pylon drowsing....No; wait.”

He had reached the alley now and he would have to cross it since his doorway was in the opposite wall: so that now the paper was in the hand on the side which now clung creeping to the wall and he held the page up into the grey dawn as though for one last effort, concentrating sight, the vision without mind or thought, on the symmetrical line of box heads:

FARMERS REFUSE — BANKERS DENY — STRIKERS

DEMAND PRESIDENT’S YACHT ACREAGE REDUCTION QUINTUPLETS
GAIN EX-SENATOR RENAUD CELEBRATES TENTH ANNIVERSARY AS
RESTAURATEUR

. . . the fragile web of ink and paper, assertive, proclamative; profound and irrevocable if only in the sense of being profoundly and irrevocably unimportant... the dead instant's fruit of forty tons of machinery and an entire nation's antic delusion. The eye, the organ without thought, speculation, or amaze, ran off the last word and then, ceasing again, vision went on ahead and gained the door beneath the balcony and clung and completely ceased. "Yair," the reporter thought. "I'm almost there but still I don't know if I am going to make it or not."

To-Morrow

IT WAS A foot in his back prodding him that waked Jiggs. He rolled over to face the room and the daylight and saw Shumann standing over him, dressed save for his shirt, and the parachute jumper awake too, lying on his side on the couch with the Indian blanket drawn to his chin and across his feet the rug which last night had been on the floor beside the cot. "It's half-past eight," Shumann said. "Where's what's his name?"

"Where's who?" Jiggs said. Then he sat up, bounced up into sitting, his feet in the sock legs projecting before him as he looked about the room in surprised recollection. "Jesus, where is he?" he said. "I left him and Jack... Jesus, his boss came down here about three o'clock and said for him to be somewhere at work at ten o'clock." He looked at the parachute jumper, who might have been asleep save for his open eyes. "What became of him?" he said.

"How should I know?" the jumper said. "I left him lying there on the floor, about where you are standing," he said to Shumann. Shumann looked at the jumper too.

"Were you picking on him again?" he said.

"Yair, he was," Jiggs said. "So that's what you were staying awake until I went to sleep for." The jumper did not answer. They watched him throw the blanket and the rug back and rise, dressed as he had been the night before — coat, vest and tie — save for his shoes; they watched him put the shoes on and stand erect again and contemplate

his now wrinkled trousers in bleak and savage immobility for a moment, then turn towards the faded theatre curtain.

“Going to wash,” he said. Shumann watched Jiggs, seated now, delve into the canvas sack and take out the tennis shoes and the boot legs which he had worn yesterday and put his feet into the shoes. The new boots sat neatly, just the least bit wrinkled about the ankles, against the wall where Jiggs’ head had been. Shumann looked at the boots and then at the worn tennis shoes which Jiggs was lacing, but he said nothing: he just said:

“What happened last night? Did Jack—”

“Nah,” Jiggs said. “They were all right. Just drinking. Now and then Jack would try to ride him a little, but I told him to let him alone. And Jesus, his boss said for him to be at work at ten o’clock. Have you looked downstairs? Did you look under the bed in there? Maybe he — — —”

“Yair,” Shumann said. “He ain’t here.” He watched Jiggs now forcing the tennis shoes slowly and terrifically through the boot legs, grunting and cursing. “How do you expect them to go on over the shoes?”

“How in hell would I get the strap on the outside of the shoes if I didn’t?” Jiggs said. “You ought to know what become of him; you wasn’t drunk last night, were you? I told his boss I would—”

“Yair,” Shumann said. “Go back and wash.” With his legs drawn under him to rise Jiggs paused and glanced at his hands for an instant.

“I washed good at the hotel last night,” he said. He began to rise, then he stopped and took from the floor a half-smoked cigarette and bounced up, already reaching into his shirt pocket as he came up facing the table. With the stub in his mouth and the match in his hand, he paused.

On the table, amid the stained litter of glasses and matches burnt and not burnt and ashes which surrounded the jug and the dish-pan, lay a pack of cigarettes, another of those which the reporter had bought last

night. Jiggs put the stub in his shirt pocket and reached for the pack. "Jesus," he said, "during the last couple months I have got to where a whole cigarette ain't got any kick to it."

Then his hand paused again, but for less than a watch-tick, and Shumann watched it go on to the jug's neck while the other hand broke free from the table's sticky top the glass from which the reporter had drunk in the darkness.

"Leave that stuff alone," Shumann said. He looked at the blunt watch on his naked wrist. "It's twenty to nine. Let's get out of here."

"Yair," Jiggs said, pouring into the glass. "Get your clothes on; let's go check them valves. Jesus, I told the guy's boss I would.... Say, I found out last night what his name is. Jesus, you wouldn't never guess in—" He stopped; he and Shumann looked at one another.

"Off again, huh?" Shumann said.

"I'm going to take one drink that I saved out from last night to take this morning. Didn't you just say let's get out to the field? How in hell am I going to get anything to drink out there, even if I wanted it, when for Christ's sake the only money I have had in three months I was accused of stealing? When the only guy that's offered me a drink in three months we took both his beds away from him and left him the floor to sleep on and now we never even kept up with him enough to deliver a message from his boss where he is to go to work—"

"One drink, huh?" Shumann said. "There's a slop jar back there; why not get it and empty the jug into it and take a good bath?" He turned away. Jiggs watched him lift the curtain aside and pass beyond it. Then Jiggs began to raise the glass, making already the preliminary grimace and shudder, when he paused again.

This time it was the key, where the reporter had carefully placed it and beside which Shumann had set the broken lamp which he had raised

from the floor. Touching the key, Jiggs found it, too, vulcanized lightly to the table's top by spilt liquor.

"He must be here, then," he said. "But for Christ's sake where?" He looked about the room again; suddenly he went to the couch and lifted the tumbled blanket and looked under the cot. "He must be somewheres though," he thought. "Maybe behind the baseboard.

Jesus, he wouldn't make no more bulge behind it than a snake would." He went back to the table and raised the glass again; this time it was the woman and the little boy. She was dressed, the trench-coat belted; she gave the room a single pale comprehensive glance, then she looked at him, brief, instantaneous, blank. "Drinking a little breakfast," he said.

"You mean supper," she said. "You'll be asleep in two hours."
"Did Roger tell you we have mislaid the guy?" he said.

"Go on and drink it," she said. "It's almost nine o'clock. We have got to pull all those valves to-day." But again he did not get the glass to his mouth. Shumann was also dressed now. Across the arrested glass Jiggs watched the jumper go to the bags and jerk them and then the boots out into the floor and then turn upon Jiggs, snarling:
"Go on. Drink it."

"Don't either of them know where he went?" the woman said. "I don't know," Shumann said. "They say they don't."

"I told you No," the jumper said. "I didn't do anything to him. He flopped down there on the floor and I put the light out and went to bed and Roger woke me up and he was gone and it's damned high time we were doing the same thing if we are going to get those valves miked and back in the engine before three o'clock."

"Yair," Shumann said, "he can find us if he wants us. We are easier, for him to find than he is for us to find." He took one of the bags; the jumper already had the other. "Go on," he said, without looking at Jiggs. "Drink it and come on."

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “Let’s get started.” He drank now and set the glass down while the others moved towards the stairs and began to descend. Then he looked at his hands; he looked at them as if he had just discovered he had them and had not yet puzzled out what they were for. “Jesus, I had better wash,” he said. “You all go ahead; I’ll catch you before you get to the bus stop.”

“Sure; to-morrow,” the jumper said. “Take the jug too. No; leave it. If he’s going to lay around drunk all day long too, better here than out there in the way.” He was last; he kicked the boots savagely out of his path. “What are you going to do with these — carry them in your hands?”

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “Until I get them paid for.”

“Paid for? I thought you did that yesterday, with my—”

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “So I did.”

“Come on, come on,” Shumann said from the stairs. “Go on, Laverne.” The jumper went on to the stairs, Shumann now herded them all before him. Then he paused and looked back at Jiggs, dressed, neat, profoundly serious beneath the new hat which Jiggs might still have been looking at through plate glass. “Listen,” he said. “Are you starting out on a bat to-day? I ain’t trying to stop you because I know I can’t, I have tried that before. I just want you to tell me so I can get somebody else to help Jack and me pull those valves.”

“Don’t you worry about me,” Jiggs said. “Jesus, don’t I know we are in a jam as well as you do? You all go on; I’ll wash up and catch you before you get to Main Street.” They went on; Shumann’s bat sank from sight.

Then Jiggs moved with rubber-soled and light celerity. He caught up the boots and passed on beyond the curtain and into a cramped alcove hung with still more blankets and pieces of frayed and faded dyed or painted cloth enigmatic of significance and inscrutable of purpose, and containing a chair, a table, a washstand, a chest of drawers bearing a celluloid comb and two ties such as might be salvaged from a trashbin

but for the fact that anyone who would have salvaged them would not wear ties, and a bed neatly made up, so neatly restored that it shouted the fact that it had been recently occupied by a woman who did not live there.

Jiggs went to the washstand but it was not his hands and face that he bathed. It was the boots, examining with grim concern a long scratch across the instep of the right one where he believed that he could even discern the reversed trademark of the assaulting heel-tap, scrubbing at the mark with the damp towel. "Maybe it won't show through a shine," he thought. "Anyway I can be glad the bastard wasn't a football player."

It did not improve any now, however, so he wiped both the boots, upper and sole, and hung the now filthy towel carefully and neatly back and returned to the other room. He may have looked at the jug in passing, but first he put the boots carefully into the canvas sack before going to the table.

He could have heard sounds, even voices, from the alley beneath the window if he had been listening. But he was not.

All he heard now was that thunderous silence and solitude in which man's spirit crosses the eternal repetitive rubicon of his vice in the instant after the terror and before the triumph becomes dismay — the moral and spiritual waif shrieking his feeble I-am-I into the desert of chance and disaster.

He raised the jug; his hot bright eyes watched the sticky glass run almost half full; he gulped it, raw, scooping blindly the stale and trashladen water from the dish-pan and gulping that too; for one fierce and immolated instant he thought about hunting and finding a bottle which he could fill and carry with him in the bag along with the boots, the soiled shirt, the sweater, the cigar box containing a cake of laundry soap and a cheap straight razor and a pair of pliers and a spool of safety wire, but he did not.

“Be damned if I will,” he cried silently, even while his now ruthless inside was telling him that within the hour he would regret it; “be damned if I will steal any man’s whiskey behind his back,” he cried, catching up the sack and hurrying down the stairs, fleeing at least from temptation’s protagonist, even if it was rather that virtue which is desire’s temporary assuagement than permanent annealment, since he did not want the drink right now and so when he did begin to want it, he would be at least fifteen miles away from the particular jug. It was not the present need for another drink that he was running from. “I ain’t running from that,” he told himself, hurrying down the corridor towards the street door.

“It’s because even if I am a burn there is some muck I will not eat,” he cried out of the still white glare of honour and even pride, jerking the door open and then leaping up and outward as the reporter, the last night’s missing host, tumbled slowly into the corridor at Jigg’s feet as he had at the feet of the others when the parachute jumper opened the door five minutes before.

Shumann had dragged the reporter up and the door of its own weight swung to behind them; the reporter half lay again in the frame of it, his nondescript hair broken down about his brow and his eyes closed and peaceful, his shirt and awry tie stiff and sour with vomit.

When Jiggs in turn jerked open the door once more the reporter tumbled slowly sideways into the corridor as Shumann caught him and Jiggs hurdled them both as the door swung to with its own weight and locked itself.

Whereupon something curious and unpresaged happened to Jiggs. It was not that his purpose had flagged or intention and resolution had reversed, switched back on him. It was as though the entire stable world across which he hurried from temptation, victorious and in good faith and unwarned, had reversed ends while he was in mid-air above the two men in the doorway; as though his own body had become corrupt too and without consulting him at all had made that catlike turn in mid-air and presented to him the blank and now irrevocable panel

upon which like on the screen he saw the jug sitting on the table in the empty room above plain enough to have touched it.

“Catch that door!” he cried; he seemed to bounce back to it before even touching the flags, scrabbling at its blank surface with his hands. “Why didn’t somebody catch it?” he cried. “Why in hell didn’t you holler?” But they were not even looking at him; now the parachute jumper stooped with Shumann over the reporter. “What?” Jiggs said. “Breakfast, huh?” They did not even look at him.

“Go on,” the jumper said. “See what he’s got or get away and let me do it.”

“Wait,” Jiggs said. “Let’s find some way to get him back into the house first.” He leaned across them and tried the door again. He could even see the key now, still on the table beside the jug — an object trivial in size, that a man could almost swallow without it hurting him much probably and which now, even more than the jug, symbolized taunting and fierce regret since it postulated frustration not in miles but in inches; the gambit itself had refused, confounding him and leaving him hung up on a son of a bitch who couldn’t even get into his own house. “Come on,” the jumper said to Shumann. “See what he’s got — unless somebody has already beat us to him.”

“Yair,” Jiggs said, putting his hand on the reporter’s flank. “But if we could just find some way to get him back into the house—” The jumper caught him by the shoulder and jerked him backwards; again Jiggs caught balance, bouncing back, and saw the woman catch the jumper’s arm as the jumper reached toward’s the reporter’s pocket.

“Get away yourself,” she said. The jumper rose; he and the woman glared at one another — the one cold, hard, calm; the other tense, furious, restrained. Shumann had risen too; Jiggs looked quietly and intently from him to the others and back again.

“So you’re going to do it yourself,” the jumper said.

“Yes. I’m going to do it myself.” They stared at one another for an instant longer, then they began to curse each other in short, hard, staccato syllables that sounded like slaps while Jiggs, his hands on his hips and leaning a little forward on his light-poised rubber soles, looked from them to Shumann and back again.

“All right,” Shumann said. “That’ll do now.” He stepped between them, shoving the jumper a little. Then the woman stooped and while Jiggs turned the reporter’s inert body from thigh to thigh she took from his pockets a few crumpled bills and a handful of silver.

“There’s a five and four ones,” Jiggs said. “Let me count that change.”
“Three will pay the bus,” Shumann said. “Just take three more.”

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “Seven or eight will be plenty. Look. Leave him the five and one of the ones for change.” He took the five and one of the ones from the woman’s hand, folded them and thrust them into the reporter’s fob pocket, and was about to rise when he saw the reporter looking at him, lying sprawled in the door with his eyes open and quiet and profoundly empty — that vision without contact yet with mind or thought, like two dead electric bulbs set into his skull.

“Look,” Jiggs said, “he’s—” He sprang up, then he saw the jumper’s face for the second before the jumper caught the woman’s wrist and wrenched the money from her hand and flung it like a handful of gravel against the reporter’s peaceful and open-eyed and sightless face and said in a tone of thin and despairing fury:

“I will eat and sleep on Roger and I will eat and sleep on you.

But I won’t eat and sleep on your ass, see?” He took up his bag and turned; he walked fast; Jiggs and the little boy watched him turn the alley mouth and vanish. Then Jiggs looked back at the woman who had not moved and at Shumann kneeling and gathering up the scattered coins and bills from about the reporter’s motionless legs.

“Now we got to find some way to get him into the house,” Jiggs said. They did not answer. But then he did not seem to expect or desire any

answer. He knelt too and began to pick up the scattered coins. "Jesus," he said. "Jack sure threw them away. We'll be lucky to find half of them." But still they seemed to pay him no heed.

"How much was it?" Shumann said to the woman, extending his palm towards Jiggs.

"Six dollars and seventy cents," the woman said. Jiggs put the coins into Shumann's hand; as motionless as Shumann, Jiggs' hot eyes watched Shumann count the coins by sight.

"All right," Shumann said. "That other half."

"I'll just pick up some cigarettes with it," Jiggs said. Now Shumann didn't say anything at all; he just knelt with his hand out. After a moment Jiggs put the last coin into it. "O.K.," Jiggs said. His hot bright eyes were now completely unreadable; he did not even watch Shumann put the money into his pocket, he just took up his canvas bag. "Too bad we ain't got any way to get him off the street," he said.

"Yair," Shumann said, taking up the other bag. "We ain't, though. So let's go." He went on; he didn't even look back. It's a valve stem has stretched," he said. "I'll bet a quarter. That must be why she ran hot yesterday. We'll have to pull them all."

"Yair," Jiggs said. He walked behind the others, carrying the canvas bag. He didn't look back either yet; he stared at the back of Shumann's head with intent secret speculation, blank and even tranquil; he spoke to himself out of a sardonic reserve almost of humour: "Yair.

I knew I would be sorry. Jesus, you would think I would have learned by now to save being honest for Sunday. Because I was all right until... and now to be hung up on a bastard that..."

He looked back. The reporter still lay propped in the doorway; the quiet, thoughtful, empty eyes seemed still to watch them gravely, without either surprise or reproach. "Jesus," Jiggs said aloud, "I told that guy last night it wasn't paregoric: it was laudanum or something..."

because for a little while now he had forgot the jug, he was thinking about the reporter and not about the jug, until now.

“And it won’t be long now,” he thought, with a sort of desperate outrage, his face perfectly calm, the boots striking through the canvas sack against his legs at each step as he walked behind the other three, his eyes hot, blank and dead as if they had been reversed in his skull and only the blank backsides showed while sight contemplated the hot wild secret coiling of drink netted and snared by the fragile web of flesh and nerves in which he lived, resided.

“I will call the paper and tell them he is sick,” he said out of that specious delusion of need and desire which even in this inviolable privacy brushed ruthlessly aside all admission of or awareness of lying or truth: “Maybe some of them will know some way to get in. I will tell him and Laverne that they asked me to wait and show them where...”

They reached the alley’s mouth. Without pausing Shumann craned and peered up the street where the jumper had vanished. “Get on,” Jiggs said. “We’ll find him at the bus stop. He ain’t going to walk out there no matter how much his feelings are hurt.” But the jumper was not at the bus stop. The bus was about to depart but the jumper was not in it.

Another had gone ten minutes before and Shumann and the woman described the jumper to the starter and he had not been in that one either. “He must have decided to walk out, after all,” Jiggs said, moving towards the step. “Let’s grab a seat.”

“We might as well eat now,” Shumann said. “Maybe he will come along before the next bus leaves.”

“Sure,” Jiggs said. “We could ask the bus driver to start taking off his overhead.”

“Yes,” the woman said, suddenly. “We can eat out there.”

“We might miss him,” Shumann said. “And he hasn’t—”

“All right,” she said; she spoke in a cold harsh tone, without looking at Jiggs. “Do you think that Jack will need more watching this morning than he will?” Now Jiggs could feel Shumann looking at him too, thoughtfully from within the machine symmetry of the new hat.

But he did not move; he stood immobile, like one of the dummy figures which are wheeled out of slum-district stores and pawnshops at 8 a m., quiet waiting and tranquil; and bemused too, the intumed vision watching something which was not even thought, supplying him, out of an inextricable whirl of half-caught pictures like a roulette wheel bearing printed sentences in place of numbers, with furious tag ends of plans and alternatives — telling them he had heard the jumper say he was going back to the place on Amboise Street and that he, Jiggs, would go there and fetch him — of escaping even for five minutes and striking the first person he met and then the next and the next and the next until he got a half-dollar; and lastly and this steadily, with a desperate conviction of truth and regret, that if Shumann would just hand him the coin and say go get a shot, he would not even take it, or lacking that, would take the one drink and then no more, out of sheer gratitude for having been permitted to escape from impotence and need and thinking and calculation by means of which he must even now keep his tone casual and innocent.

“Who, me?” he said. “Hell, I drank enough last night to do me a long time. Let’s get on; he must have deadheaded out somehow.”

“Yair,” Shumann said, still watching him with that open and deadly seriousness. “We got to pull those valves and mike them. Listen. If things break right to-day, to-night I’ll get you a bottle. O.K.?”

“Jesus,” Jiggs said. “Have I got to get drunk again? Is that it? Come on; let’s get a seat.” They got in. The bus moved. It was better then, because even if he had the half-dollar he could not buy a drink with it until the bus either stopped or reached the airport, and also he was moving towards it at last; he thought again out of the thunder of solitude, the instant of exultation between the terror and the dismay: “They can’t stop me. There ain’t enough of them to stop me.

All I got to do is wait.” — “Yair,” he said, leaning forward between Shumann’s and the woman’s heads above the seat back in front of the one on which he and the boy sat, “he’s probably already on the ship. I’ll go right over and get on those valves and I can send him back to the restaurant.”

But they did not find the jumper at once at the airport either, though Shumann stood for a while and looked about the forenoon’s deserted plaza as though he had expected to see the parachute jumper still in the succeeding elapse second from that in which he had walked out of sight beyond the alley’s mouth. “I’ll go on and get started,” Jiggs said. “If he’s in the hangar I’ll send him on to the restaurant.”

“We’ll eat first,” Shumann said. “You wait.”

“I ain’t hungry,” Jiggs said. “I’ll eat later. I want to get started—”

“No,” the woman said; “Roger, don’t—”

“Come on and eat some breakfast,” Shumann said. It seemed to Jiggs that he stood a long time in the bright hazy sunlight with his jaws and the shape of his mouth aching a little, but it was not long probably, and anyway his voice seemed to sound all right too.

“O.K.,” he said. “Let’s go. They ain’t my valves. I ain’t going to ride behind them at three o’clock this afternoon.” The rotunda was empty, the restaurant empty too save for themselves. “I just want some coffee,” he said.

“Eat some breakfast,” Shumann said. “Come on, now.”

“I ain’t any hungrier now than I was out there by that lamp-post two minutes ago,” Jiggs said. But his voice was still all right. “I just said I would come in, see,” he said. “I never said I would eat, see.” Shumann watched him bleakly.

“Listen,” he said. “You have had... was it two or three drinks this morning? Eat something. And to-night I will see that you have a couple or three drinks if you want. You can even get tight if you want. But now let’s get those valves out.” Jiggs sat perfectly still, looking at his hands

on the table and then at the waitress's arm propped beside him, wrist nestled by four Woolworth bracelets, the finger-nails five spots of crimson glitter as if they had been bought and clipped on to the finger-ends too.

"All right," he said. "Listen too. What do you want? A guy with two or three drinks in him helping you pull valves, or a guy with a gut full of food on top of the drinks, asleep in a corner somewhere? Just tell me what you want, see? I'll see you get it. Because listen.

I just want coffee. I ain't even telling you; I'm just asking you. Jesus, would please do any good?"

"All right," Shumann said, "Just three breakfasts then," he said to the waitress. "And two extra coffees. — Damn Jack," he said. "He ought to eat too."

"We'll find him at the hangar," Jiggs said. They found him there, though not at once. When Shumann and Jiggs emerged from the tool-room in their dungarees and waited outside the chicken-wire door for the woman to change and join them, they saw first five or six other dungaree figures gathered about a sandwich board which had not been there yesterday, set in the exact centre of the hangar entrance — a big board lettered heavily by hand and possessing a quality cryptic and peremptory and for the time incomprehensible as though the amplifier had spoken the words:

NOTICE

All contestants, all pilots and parachute jumpers and all others eligible to win cash prizes during this meet, are requested to meet in Superintendent's office at 12 noon to-day. All absentees will be considered to acquiesce and submit to the action and discretion of the race committee.

The others watched quietly while Shumann and the woman read it.

"Submit to what?" one of the others said. "What is it? Do you know?"

"I don't know," Shumann said. "Is Jack Holmes on the field yet? Has anybody seen him this morning?"

"There he is," Jiggs said. "Over at the ship, like I told you."

Shumann looked across the hangar. "He's already got the cowling off. Seer."

"Yair," Shumann said. He moved at once. Jiggs spoke to the man beside whom he stood, almost without moving his lips.

"Lend me half a buck," he said. "I'll hand it back to-night. Quick." He took the coin; he snatched it; when Shumann reached the aeroplane Jiggs was right behind him. The jumper, crouched beneath the engine, looked up at them, briefly and without stopping, as he might have glanced up at the shadow of a passing cloud.

"You had some breakfast?" Shumann said.

"Yes," the jumper said, not looking up again.

"On what?" Shumann said. The other did not seem to have heard. Shumann took the money from his pocket — the remaining dollar bill, three quarters and some nickels, and laid two of the quarters on the engine mount at the jumper's elbow. "Go and get some coffee," he said.

The other did not seem to hear, busy beneath the engine. Shumann stood watching the back of his head. Then the jumper's elbow struck the engine mount. The coins rang on the concrete floor and Jiggs stooped, ducking, and rose again, extending the coins before Shumann could speak or move.

"There they are," Jiggs said, not loud; he could not have been heard ten feet away: the fierceness, the triumph. "There they are. Count them. Count both sides so you will be sure." After that they did not talk any more.

They worked quiet and fast, like a circus team, with the trained team's economy of motion, while the woman passed them the tools as

needed; they did not even have to speak to her, to name the tool. It was easy now, like in the bus; all he had to do was to wait as the valves came out one by one and grew in a long neat line on the work-bench and then, sure enough, it came.

“It must be nearly twelve,” the woman said. Shumann finished what he was doing. Then he looked at his watch and stood up, flexing his back and legs. He looked at the jumper.

“You ready?” he said.

“You are not going to wash up and change?” the woman said.

“I guess not,” Shumann said. “It will be that much more time wasted.” He took the money again from his pocket and gave the woman the three quarters. “You and Jiggs can get a bite when Jiggs gets the rest of the valves out.

And, say” — he looked at Jiggs— “don’t bother about trying to put the micrometer on them yourself. I’ll do that when I get back. You can clean out the super-charger; that ought to hold you until we get back.” He looked at Jiggs. “You ought to be hungry now.”

“Yair,” Jiggs said. He had not stopped; he did not watch them go out. He just squatted beneath the engine with the spraddled tenseness of an umbrella rib, feeling the woman looking at the back of his head.

He spoke now without fury, without triumph, without sound: “Yair, beat it. You can’t stop me. You couldn’t stop me but for a minute even if you tried to hold me.” He was not thinking of the woman as Laverne, as anyone: she was just the last and now swiftly fading residuum of the it, the they, watching the back of his head as he removed the super-charger without even knowing that she was all ready defeated.

“Do you want to eat now?” she said. He didn’t answer. “Do you want me to bring you a sandwich?” He didn’t answer. “Jiggs,” she said. He looked up and back, his eyebrows rising and vanishing beyond the cap’s peak, the hot bright eyes blank, interrogatory, arrested.

“What? How was that?” he said: “Did you call me?”

“Yes. Do you want to go and eat now or do you want me to bring you something?”

“No. I ain’t hungry yet. I want to get done with this supercharger before I wash my hands. You go on.” But she didn’t move yet; she stood looking at him.

“I’ll leave you some money and you can go when you are ready, then.” touching the coin in his pocket through the cloth, though he did not need to since he had never ceased to feel it. He was not thinking about her, not talking to her; he spoke without triumph or exultation, quietly: “Good-bye, you snooping bitch,” he said.

But they had not been able to tell if the reporter had seen them or not, though he probably could neither see nor hear; certainly the thin youngish light-coloured negress who came up the alley about half-past nine, in a modish though not new hat and coat and carrying a wicker market-basket covered neatly with a clean napkin, decided almost immediately that he could not.

She looked down at him for perhaps ten seconds with complete and impersonal speculation, then she waggled one hand before his face and called him by name: and when she reached into his pockets she did not move or shift his body at all; her hand reached in and drew out the two folded bills where Jiggs had put them with a single motion limber and boneless and softly rapacious as that of an octopus, then the hand made a second limber swift motion, inside her coat now, and emerged empty.

It was her racial and sex nature to have taken but one of the bills, no matter how many there might have been — either the five or the one, depending upon her own need or desire of the moment or upon the situation itself — but now she took them both and stood again, looking down at the man in the doorway with a kind of grim though still impersonal sanctimoniousness.

“If he found any of hit left hit wouldn’t learn him no lesson,” she said, aloud. “Laying out here in the street, drunk. Ain’t no telling where he been at, but hit couldn’t a been much for them to let him git back out and that much money in his pocket.”

She took a key from somewhere beneath the coat and unlocked the door and caught him back in her turn as he began to tumble slowly and deliberately into the corridor, and entered herself. She was not gone long and now she carried the dish-pan of dirty water, which she flung suddenly into his face and caught him again as he gasped and started. “I hopes you had sense enough to left your pocket-book in the house for you decided to take a nap out here,” she cried, shaking him. “If you didn’t, I bound all you got left now is the pocket-book.” She carried him “Money?” he said.

“What do I need with money up to my elbows in this engine?” She turned away then. He watched her pause and call the little boy, who came out of a group across the hangar and joined her; they went on towards the apron and disappeared. Then Jiggs rose; he laid the tool down carefully, up the cramped stairs almost bodily, like that much firehose, and left him apparently unconscious again on the cot and went beyond the curtain and looked once with a perfectly inscrutable face at the neat bed which but one glance told her was not her handiwork.

From the basket she took an apron and a bright handkerchief; when she returned to the reporter she wore the apron and the handkerchief about her head in place of the hat and coat, and she carried the dish-pan filled now with fresh water, and soap and towels.

She had done this before too, apparently, stripping the fouled shirt from the man who was her employer for this half-hour of the six weekdays, and both washing him off and slapping him awake during the process until he could see and hear again. “It’s past ten o’clock,” she said. “I done lit the gas so you can shave.”

“Shave?” he said. “Didn’t you know? I don’t have to ever shave again. I’m fired.”

“The more reason for you to git up from here and try to look like something.” His hair, soaked, was plastered to his skull, yet it fitted no closer to the bones and ridges and joints than the flesh of his face did, and now his eyes did indeed look like holes burned with a poker in a parchment diploma, some post-graduate certificate of excess.

Naked from the waist up, it seemed as if you not only saw his ribs front and side and rear, but that you also saw the entire rib-cage complete from any angle like you can see both warp and woof of screen wire from either side. He swayed laxly beneath her limber soft and ungentle hands, articulate and even collected though moving for a while yet in the twilight between the delusion of drunkenness and the delusion of sobriety.

“Are they gone?” he said. The negress’s face and manner did not change at all.

“Is who gone?” she said.

“Yair,” he said drowsily. “She was here last night. She slept yonder in the bed last night. There was just one of them slept with her and there could have been both of them. But she was here.

And it was him himself that wouldn’t let her drink, that took the glass out of her hand. Yair. I could hear all the long soft waiting sound of all woman-meat in bed beyond the curtain.”

At first, for the moment, the negress did not even realize what it was touching her thigh until she looked down and saw the stick-like arm, the brittle light and apparently senseless hand like a bundle of dried twigs too, blundering and fumbling stiffly at her while in the gaunt eye-sockets the eyes looked like two spots of dying daylight caught by water at the bottom of abandoned wells.

The negress did not become coy or outraged; she avoided the apparently blind or possibly just still insensible hand with a single supple shift of her hips, speaking to him, calling him by name, pronouncing the *i n i s t e r* in full, in the flat lingering way of negroes, like it had two sets of two or three syllables each.

“Now then,” she said, “if you feel like doing something yourself, take a holt of this towel. Or see how much of whatever money you think you had folks is left you, besides leaving you asleep on the street.”

“Money?” he said. He waked completely now, his mind did, though even yet his hands fumbled for awhile before finding the pocket while the negress watched him, standing now with her hands on her hips.

She said nothing else, she just watched his quiet bemused and intent face as he plumbed his empty pockets one by one. She did not mention company again; it was he who cried, “I was out there, asleep in the alley. You know that, you found me.

I left here, I was out there asleep because I forgot the key and I couldn’t get in again; I was out there a long time even before daylight. You know I was.” Still she said nothing, watching him. “I remember just when I quit remembering!”

“How much did you have when you quit remembering?”

“Nothing!” he said. “Nothing. I spent it all. See?” When he got up she offered to help him back to the bedroom, but he refused. He walked unsteadily still, but well enough, and when after a time she followed him she could hear him through the beaver-board wall of the alcove somewhat larger than a clothes closet which she entered too and set water to heat on the gas plate beside which he was shaving, and prepared to make coffee.

She gave the undisturbed bedroom another cold inscrutable look and returned to the front room and restored the tumbled cot, spreading the blanket and the pillows.

Picking up the soiled shirt and the towel from the floor and pausing, laying the shirt on the couch but still carrying the towel, she went to the table and looked at the jug now with that bemused inscrutable expression.

She wiped one of the stick glasses with finicking care and poured into it from the jug almost what a thimble would have held and drank it, the smallest finger of that hand crooked delicately, in a series of birdlike and apparently extremely distasteful sips.

Then she gathered up what she could conveniently carry of the nights misplaced litter and returned beyond the curtain, though when she went to where she had set the basket on the floor against the wall with the hat and coat lying upon it, you could not hear her cross the floor at all nor stoop and take from the basket an empty pint bottle sparklingly clean as a sterilized milk bottle.

Ordinarily she would not have filled the flask at any single establishment of her morning round, on the contrary filling the bottle little by little with a sort of niggard and foresighted husbandry and arriving at home in mid-afternoon with a pint of liquid weird, potent, anonymous, and strange; but once more she seemed to find the situation its own warrant, returning and putting the filled flask back into the basket still without any sound.

The reporter heard only the broom for a time, and other muted sounds as though the room were putting itself to rights by means of some ghostly and invisible power of its own, until she came at last to the alcove's doorway, where he stood tying his tie, with the hat and coat on again and the basket beneath its neat napkin again on her arm.

"I'm through," she said. "The coffee's ready, but you better not waste no time over drinking hit."

"All right," he said. "I'll have to make another loan from you."

"You won't need but a dime to get to the paper. Ain't you got even that much left?"

"I ain't going to the paper. I'm fired, I tell you. I want two dollars."

"I has to work for my money. Last time I lent you hit took you three weeks to start paying me back."

"I know. But I have to have it. Come on, Leonora. I'll pay you back Saturday." She reached inside her coat; one of the bills was his own.

"The key's on the table," she said. "I washed hit off too." It lay there, on the table clean and empty save for the key; he took it up and mused upon it with that face which the few hours of violent excess had altered from that of one brightly and peacefully dead to that of one coming back from, or looking out of, hell itself.

"But it's all right," he said. "It don't matter. It ain't anything." He stood in the clean empty room where there was not even a cigarette-stub or a burned match to show any trace. "Yair. She didn't even leave a hair-pin," he thought. "Or maybe she don't use them.

Or maybe I was drunk and they were not even here"; looking down at the key with a grimace faint and tragic which might have been called smiling while he talked to himself, giving himself the advice which he knew he was not going to take when he insisted on borrowing the two dollars.

"Because I had thirty before I spent the eleven-eighty and then the five for the absinth. That left about thirteen." Then he cried, not loud, not moving: "Besides, maybe she will tell me.

Maybe she intended to all the time but they couldn't wait for me to come to," without even bothering to tell himself that he knew he was lying, just saying quietly and stubbornly, "All right. But I'm going anyway. Even if I don't do anything but walk up where she can see me and stand there for a minute."

He held the key in his hand now while the door clicked behind him, standing for a moment longer with his eyes shut against the impact of

light, of the thin sun, and then opening them, steadying himself against the door frame where he had slept, remembering the coffee which the negress had made and he had forgot about until now, while the alley swam away into mirage shapes, tilting like the sea or say the lake surface, against which the ordeal of destination, of hope and dread, shaped among the outraged nerves of vision the bright vague pavilion glitter beneath the whipping purple-and-gold pennons. "It's all right," he said. "It ain't nothing but money. It don't matter."

It was not two when he reached the airport, but already the parking lots along the boulevard were filling, with the young men paid doubtless out of some wearily initialled national fund, in the purple-and-gold caps lent or perhaps compulsory, clinging to running-boards, moving head-and-shoulders above the continuous top-line of already parked cars as though they consisted of torsos alone and ran on wires for no purpose and towards no discernible destination.

A steady stream of people flowed along the concrete gutters, converging towards the entrances, but the reporter did not follow. To the left was the hangar where they would be now but he did not go there either; he just stood in the bright hazy-damp-filled sunlight, with the pennons whipping stiffly overhead and the wind which blew them seeming to blow through him too, not cold, not unpleasant: just whipping his clothing about him as if it blew unimpeded save by the garment, through his rib-cage and among his bones. "I ought to eat," he thought.

"I ought to," not moving yet as though he hung static in a promise made to someone which he did not believe even yet that he was going to break. The restaurant was not far; already it seemed to him that he could hear the clash and clatter and the voices and smell the food, thinking of the three of them yesterday while the little boy burrowed with flagging determination into the second plate of ice-cream.

Then he could hear the sounds, the noise, and smell the food itself as he stood looking at the table where they had sat yesterday, where a

family group from a grandmother to an infant in arms now sat. He went to the counter. "Breakfast," he said.

"What do you want to eat?" the waitress said.

"What do people eat for breakfast?" he said, looking at her — a porcelain-faced woman whose hair, complexion and uniform appeared to have been made of various shades of that material which old-time book-keepers used to protect their sleeves with — and smiling: or he would have called it smiling. "That's right. It ain't breakfast now, is it?"

"What do you want to eat?"

"Roast beef," his mind said at last. "Potatoes," he said. "It don't matter."

"Sandwich or lunch?"

"Yes," he said.

"Yes, what? You wanna order don't you wanna?"

"Sandwich," he said.

"Mash one!" the waitress cried.

"And that's that," he thought, as though he had discharged the promise; as though by ordering, acquiescing to the idea, he had eaten the food too. "And then I will..." Only the hangar was not the mirage but the restaurant, the counter, the clash and clatter, the sound of food and of eating.

It seemed to him that he could see the group: the aeroplane, the four dungaree figures, the little boy in dungarees too, himself approaching: I hope you found everything you wanted before you left? Yes, thank you. It was thirteen dollars. Just till Saturday — No matter; it don't matter; don't even think of it. Now suddenly he heard the amplifier too in the rotunda; it had been speaking for some time but he had just noticed it: "... second day of the Feinman Airport dedication invitation meet held under the official rules of the American Aeronautical Association and through the courtesy of the city of New Valois and of Colonel H. I. Feinman, Chairman of the Sewage Board of New Valois.

Events for the afternoon as follows..."He quit listening to it then, drawing from his pocket the pamphlet programme of yesterday and opening it at the second fading imprint of the mimeograph:

FRIDAY

2.30 — p m. Spot Parachute Jump. Purse \$25.00.

3.00 — p m. Scull Speed Dash. 375 cu in. Qualifying speed 180 in p h. Purse \$325.00 (1, 2, 3, 4).

3.30 — p m. Aerial Acrobatics. Jules Despleins, France. Lieut. Frank Burnham, United States.

4.30 — p m. Scull Speed Dash. 575 cu in. Qualifying speed, 200 in p h. Purse \$650.00 (1, 2, 3, 4).

5.00 — p m. Delayed Parachute Drop.

8.00 — p m. Special Mardi Gras Evening Event. Rocket Plane. Lieut. Frank Burnham.

He continued to look at the page long after the initial impact of optical surprise had faded. "That's all," he said. "That's all she would have to do. Just tell me they... It ain't the money. She knows it ain't that. It ain't the money with me any more than it is with them," he said; the man had to speak to him twice before the reporter knew he was there. "Hello," he said.

"So you got out here after all," the other said. Behind the man stood another, a short man with morose face, carrying a newspaper camera. "Yes," the reporter said. "Hi, Jug," he said to the second man. The first looked at him curiously.

"You look like you have been dragged through hell by the heels," he said. "You going to cover this to-day too?"

"Not that I know of," the reporter said. "I understand I am fired. Why?"

"I was about to ask you. Hagood phoned me at four this morning, out of bed. He told me to come out to-day and if you were not here, to cover it. But mostly to watch out for you if you came and to tell you to call him at this number." He took a folded strip of paper from his vest and

gave it to the reporter. "It's the country club. He said to call him as soon as I found you."

"Thanks," the reporter said. But he did not move. The other looked at him.

"Well, what do you want to do? You want to cover it or you want me to?"

"No. I mean, yes. You take it. It don't matter. Jug knows better what Hagood wants than you or I either."

"O.K.," the other said. "Better call Hagood right away, though."

"I will," the reporter said. Now the food came; the heaped indestructible plate and the hand scrubbed, with vicious coral nails, the hand too looking as if it had been conceived formed and baked in the kitchen, or perhaps back in town and sent out by light and speedy truck along with the scrolled squares of pastry beneath the plate-glass counter. He looked at both the food and the hand from the crest of a wave of pure almost physical flight. "Jesus, sister," he said, "I was joking with the wrong man, wasn't I?"

But he drank the coffee and ate some of the food; he seemed to watch himself creeping slowly and terrifically across the plate like a mole, blind to all else and deaf now even to the amplifier; he ate a good deal of it, sweating, seeming to chew for ever and ever before getting each mouthful in position to be swallowed. "I guess that'll be enough," he said at last.

"Jesus, it will have to be," he said. He was in the rotunda now and moving towards the gates into the stands before he remembered and turned and breasted the stream towards the entrance and so outside and into the bright soft hazy sunlight with its quality of having been recently taken out of water and not yet thoroughly dried and full of the people, the faces, the cars coming up and discharging and moving on.

Across the plaza the hangar wing seemed to sway and quiver like a grounded balloon. "But I feel better," he thought. "I must. They would not have let me eat all that and not feel better because I can't possibly

feel as bad as I still think I do.” He could hear the voice again now from the amplifier above the entrance.

“... wish to announce that due to the tragic death of Lieutenant Frank Burnham last night, the airport race committee has discontinued the evening events.... The time is now one-forty-two. The first event on today’s programme will...” The reporter stopped.

“One-forty-two,” he thought. Now he could feel something which must have been the food he had just eaten beating slow and steady against his skull which up to this time had been empty, had hardly troubled him at all except for the sensation of being about to float off like one of the small balloons escaped from the hand of a child at a circus, trying to remember what hour the programme had allotted to the three hundred and seventy-five cubic inch race, thinking that perhaps when he got into the shade he could bear to look at the programme again.

“Since it seems I am bound to offer her the chance to tell me that they stole... not the money. It’s not the money. It’s not that.” Now the shade of the hangar fell upon him and he could see the programme again, the faint mimeographed letters beating and pulsing against his cringing eyeballs and steadying at last so that he could read his watch.

It would be an hour still before he could expect to find her alone.

He turned and followed the hangar wall and passed beyond it. Across the way the parking lot was almost full and there was another stream here, moving towards the bleachers. Though he stood on the edge of it while his eyeballs still throbbed and watched the other fringe, slowing and clotting before one of the temporary wooden refreshment booths which had sprung up about the borders of the airport property as the photographs of the pilots and machines had bloomed in the shop windows down town, it was some time before he began to realize that something beside the spectacle (still comparatively new) of outdoors drinking must be drawing them.

Then he thought he recognized the voice and then he did recognize the raked filthy swagger of the cap and moved, pressing, filtering, on and into the crowd and so came between Jiggs' drunken belligerent face and the Italian face of the booth's proprietor who was leaning across the counter and shouting, "Bastard, huh? You theenk bastard, hey?"

"What is it?" the reporter said. Jiggs turned and looked at him for a moment of hot blurred concentration without recognition; it was the Italian who answered.

"For me, nothing!" he shouted. "He come here, he have one drink two drink; he no need either one of them but O.K.; he pay; that O.K. for me. Then he say he wait for friend, that he have one more drink to surprise friend.

That not so good, but my wife she give it to him and that maka three drink he don't need and I say, You pay and go, eh? Beat it. And he say, O.K., good-bye and I say Why you no pay, eh? and he say That drink to surprise friend; looka like it surprise you too, eh? and I grab to hold and call policaman because I don't want for trouble with drunk and he say bastard to me before my wife...." Still Jiggs did not move.

Even while holding himself upright by the counter he gave that illusion of tautly sprung steel set delicately on a hair trigger.

"Yair," he said. "Three drinks, and just look what they done to me!" on a rising note which stopped before it became idiotic laughter; whereupon he stared again at the reporter with that blurred gravity, watching while the reporter took the second of the two dollar bills which the negress had loaned him and gave it to the Italian.

"There you are, Columbus," Jiggs said. "Yair. I told him. Jesus, I even tried to tell him your name, only I couldn't remember it." He looked at the reporter with hot intensity, like an astonished child. "Say, that guy last night told me your name. Is that it, sure enough? you swear to Christ, no kidding?"

“Yair,” the reporter said. He put his hand on Jiggs’ arm. “Come on. Let’s go.” The spectators had moved on now. Behind the counter the Italian and his wife seemed to pay them no more attention. “Come on,” the reporter said. “It must be after two. Let’s go help get the ship ready and then I’ll buy another drink.”

But Jiggs did not move, and then the reporter found Jiggs watching him with something curious, calculating and intent, behind the hot eyes; they were not blurred now at all, and suddenly Jiggs stood erect before the reporter could steady him.

“I was looking for you,” Jiggs said.

“I came along at the right time, didn’t I, for once in my life. Come on. Let’s go to the hangar. I imagine they are waiting for you there. Then I will buy a—”

“I don’t mean that,” Jiggs said. “I was kidding the guy. I had the quarter, all right. I’ve had all I want. Come on.” He led the way, walking a little carefully yet still with the light spring-like steps, bumping and butting through the gateward stream of people, the reporter following, until they were beyond it and clear; anyone who approached them now would have to do so deliberately and should have been visible a hundred yards away, though neither of them saw the parachute jumper who was doing just that.

“You mean the ship’s all ready?” the reporter said.

“Sure,” Jiggs said. “Roger and Jack ain’t even there. They have gone to the meeting.”

“Meeting?”

“Sure. Contestants’ meeting. To strike, see? But listen—”

“To strike?”

“Sure. For more jack. It ain’t the money: it’s the principle of the thing. Jesus, what do we need with money?” Jiggs began to laugh again on that harsh note which stopped just as it became laughter and started before it was mirth. “But that ain’t it.

I was looking for you.” Again the reporter looked at the hot unreadable eyes. “Laverne sent me. She said to give me five dollars for her.” The reporter’s face did not change at all. Neither did Jiggs’; the hot impenetrable eyes, the membrane and fibre netting and webbing the unrecking and the undismayed.

“Roger was in the money yesterday; you’ll get it back Saturday. Only if it was me, I wouldn’t even wait for that. Just let her underwrite you, see?”

“Underwrite me?”

“Sure. Then you wouldn’t even have to bother to put anything back into your pocket. All you would have to do would be to button up your pants.” Still the reporter’s face did not change, his voice did not change, not loud, without amazement.

“Do you reckon I could?”

“I don’t know,” Jiggs said. “Didn’t you ever try it? It’s done every night somewhere, so I hear. Probably done right here in New Valois, even. And if you can’t, she can show you how.” The reporter’s face did not change; he was just looking at Jiggs and then suddenly Jiggs moved, sudden and complete; the reporter saw the hot secret eyes come violently alive and, turning, the reporter also saw the parachute jumper’s face.

That was a little after two o’clock; Shumann and the jumper had been in the Superintendent’s office from twelve until fifteen to one. They had passed through the same discreet door which Jiggs had used the afternoon before and had gone on through the ante-room and into a place like a board-room in a bank — a long table with a row of comfortable chairs behind it, in which sat perhaps a dozen men who might have been found about any such table back in town, and another group of chairs made out of steel and painted to resemble wood, in which with a curious gravity something like that of the older and better behaved boys in a reform school on Christmas Eve, sat the other men

who ordinarily at this hour would have been working over the aeroplanes in the hangar — the pilots and parachute jumpers, in greasy dungarees or leather jackets almost as foul — the quiet sober faces looking back as Shumann and the jumper entered.

Just as the blue serge of last night was absent, so were the tweed coats and ribbon badges, with one exception. This was the microphone's personified voice. He sat with neither group, his chair which should have been at the end of the table drawn several feet away as though he were preparing to tip it back against the wall.

But he was as grave as either group; the scene was exactly that of the conventional conference between the mill owners and the delegation from the shops, the announcer representing the labour lawyer — that man who was once a labourer himself but from whose hands the calluses have now softened and whitened away so that, save for something nameless and ineradicable about his clothing — a quality incorrigibly dissenting and perhaps even bizarre — which distinguishes him for ever from the men behind the table as well as from the men before it, as the badge of the labour organization in his lapel establishes him for ever as one of them, he might actually sit behind the table too.

But he did not. But the very slightness of the distance between him and the table established a gap more unbridgable even than that between the table and the second group, as if he had been stopped in the midst of a violent movement, if not of protest at least of dissent, by the entrance into the room of the men in whose absent names he dissented. He nodded to Shumann and the jumper as they found chairs, then he turned to the thick-faced man at the centre of the table. "They're all here now," he said. The men behind the table murmured to one another.

"We must wait for him," the thick-faced man said. He raised his voice. "We are waiting for Colonel Feinman, men," he said. He took a watch from his vest; three or four others looked at their watches. "He instructed us to have everyone present at twelve o'clock. He has been delayed. You can smoke, if you like."

Some of the second group began to smoke, passing lighted matches, speaking quietly like a school class which has been told that it can talk for a moment:

“What is it?”

“I don’t know. Maybe something about Burnham.”

“Oh, yair. Probably that’s it.”

“Hell, they don’t need all of us to—”

“Say, what do you suppose happened?”

“Blinded, probably.”

“Yair. Blinded.”

“Yair. Probably couldn’t read his altimeter at all. Or maybe forgot to watch it. Flew it right into the ground.”

“Yair. Jesus, I remember one time I was—” They smoked.

Sometimes they held the cigarettes like dynamite caps so as not to spill the ash, looking quietly about the clean new floor; sometimes they spilled the ashes discreetly down their legs. But finally the stubs were too short to hold. One of them rose; the whole room watched him cross to the table and take up an ash-tray made to resemble a radial engine and bring it back and start it passing along the three rows of chairs like a church collection plate.

Shumann looked at his watch and it was twenty-five minutes past twelve. He spoke quietly to the announcer, as though they were alone in the room:

“Listen, Hank. I’ve got all my valves out. I have got to put the micrometer on them before!”

“Yair,” the announcer said. He turned to the table. “Listen,” he said. “They are all here now. And they have got to get the ships ready for the race at three; Mr. Shumann there has got all his valves out.

So can't you tell them without waiting for F — Colonel Feinman? They will agree, all right. I told you that. There ain't anything else they can — I mean they will agree."

"Agree to what?" the man beside Shumann said. But the chairman, the thick-faced man, was already speaking.

"Colonel Feinman said—"

"Yair." The announcer spoke patiently. "But these boys have got to get their ships ready. We've got to be ready to give these people that are buying the tickets out there something to look at." The men behind the table murmured again, the others watching them quietly.

"Of course we can take a straw vote now," the chairman said. Now he looked at them and cleared his throat. "Gentlemen, the committee representing the business men of New Valois who have sponsored this meet and offered you the opportunity to win these cash prizes—" The announcer turned to him.

"Wait," he said. "Let me tell them." He turned now to the grave almost identical faces of the men in the hard chairs; he spoke quietly too. "It's about the programmes. The printed ones — you know. With the setup for each day. They were all printed last week and so they have still got Frank's name on them—" The chairman interrupted him now:

"And the committee wants to express here and now to you other pilots who were con—" Now he was interrupted by one of the men beside him:

" — and on behalf of Colonel Feinman."

"Yes — and on behalf of Colonel Feinman — contemporaries and friends of Lieutenant Burnham, its sincere regret at last night's unfortunate accident."

"Yair," the announcer said; he had not even looked towards the speaker, he just waited until he had got through. "So they — the committee — feel that they are advertising something they can't produce. They feel that Frank's name should come off the programme. I agree with them there and I know you will too."

“Why not take it off, then?” one of the second group said. “Yes,” the announcer said. “They are going to. But the only way they can do that is to have new programmes printed, you see.” But they did not see yet. They just looked at him, waiting. The chairman cleared his throat, though at the moment there was nothing for him to interrupt.

“We had these programmes printed for your benefit and convenience as contestants, as well as that of the spectators, without whom I don’t have to remind you there would be no cash prizes for you to win.

So you see, in a sense you contestants are the real benefactors of these printed programmes. Not us; the schedule of these events can be neither information nor surprise to us, since we were privy to the arranging of them even if we are not to the winning — since we have been given to understand (and I may add, have seen for ourselves) that air racing has not yet reached the, ah, scientific heights of horse-racing—”

He cleared his throat again; a thin polite murmur of laughter rose from about the table and died away. “We had these programmes printed at considerable expense, none of which devolved on you, yet they were planned and executed for your — I won’t say profit, but convenience and benefit. We had them printed in good faith that what we guaranteed in them would be performed; we knew no more than you did that that unfortunate ac—”

“Yes,” the announcer said. “It’s like this. Somebody has got to pay to have new programmes printed. These g — this... they say we — the contestants and announcers and everybody drawing jack from the meet, should do it.”

They did not make a sound, the still faces did not change expression; it was the announcer himself, speaking now in a tone urgent, almost pleading, where no dissent had been offered or intimated: “It’s just two and a half per cent. We’re all in it; I’m in it, too. Just two and a half per

cent.; when it comes out of prize money, like they say, you won't notice it because you haven't got it anyway until after the cut is taken out.

Just two and a half per cent., and—" The man in the second group spoke for the second time:

"Or else?" he said. The announcer did not answer. After a moment Shumann said:

"Is that all?"

"Yes," the announcer said. Shumann rose.

"I better get back on my valves," he said. Now when he and the jumper crossed the rotunda the crowd was trickling steadily through the gates. They worked into line and shuffled up to the gates too before they learned that they would have to have grand-stand tickets to pass.

So they turned and worked towards the hangar, walking now in a thin deep drone from somewhere up in the sun, though presently they could see them — a flight of army pursuit single seaters circling the field in formation to land and then coming in, fast, blunt-nosed, fiercely-raked, viciously powerful. "They're over-souped," Shumann said. "They will kill you if you don't watch them. I wouldn't want to do that for two-fifty-six a month."

"You wouldn't be cut two and a half per cent, while you were out to lunch though," the jumper said savagely. "What's two and a half per cent, of twenty-five bucks?"

"It ain't the whole twenty-five," Shumann said. "I hope Jiggs has got that super-charger ready to go back." So they had almost reached the aeroplane before they discovered that it was the woman and not Jiggs at work on it and that she had put the super-charger back on with the engine head still off and the valves still out. She rose and brushed her hair back with the flat of her wrist, though they had asked no question.

"Yes," she said. "I thought he was all right. I went out to eat and left him here."

“Have you seen him since?” Shumann said. “Do you know where he is now?”

“What the hell does that matter?” the jumper said in a tense furious voice. “Let’s get the damned super-charger off and put the valves in.” He looked at the woman, furious, restrained. “What has this guy done to you? given you a dose of faith in mankind like he would syphilis or consumption or whatever it is, that will even make you trust Jiggs?”

“Come on,” Shumann said. “Let’s get the super-charger off. I guess he didn’t check the valve stems either, did he?”

“I don’t know,” she said.

“Well, no matter. They lasted out yesterday. And we haven’t time now. But maybe we can get on the line by three if we don’t stop to check them.” They were ready before that; they had the aeroplane on the apron and the engine running before three, and then the jumper who had worked in grimy fury turned away, walking fast even though Shumann called after him.

He went straight to where Jiggs and the reporter stood. He could not have known where to find them, yet he went straight to them as though led by some blind instinct out of fury. He walked into Jiggs’ vision and struck him on the jaw so that the surprise the alarm and the shock were almost simultaneous, hitting him again before he finished falling and then whirling as the reporter caught his arm.

“Here! here!” the reporter cried. “He’s drunk! You can’t hit a—” But the jumper didn’t say a word; the reporter saw the continuation of the turning become the blow of the fist. He didn’t feel the blow at all.

“I’m too light to be knocked down or even hit hard,” he thought; he was still telling himself that while he was being raised up again and while the hands held him upright on his now boneless legs and while he looked at Jiggs sitting up now in a small stockade of legs and a policeman shaking him. “Hello, Leblanc,” the reporter said. The policeman looked at him now.

“So it’s you, hey?” the policeman said. “You got some news this time, ain’t you? Something to put in the paper that people will like to read. Reporter knocked down by irate victim, hey? That’s news.” He began to prod Jiggs with the side of his shoe. “Who’s this? Your substitute? Get up. On your feet now.”

“Wait,” the reporter said. “It’s all right. He wasn’t in it. He’s one of the mechanics here. An aviator.”

“I see,” the policeman said, hauling at Jiggs’ arm. “Aviator, hey? He don’t look very high to me. Or may be it was a cloud hit him in the jaw, hey?”

“Yes. He’s just drunk. I’ll be responsible; I tell you he wasn’t even in it; the guy hit him by mistake. Leave him be, Leblanc.”

“What do I want with him?” the policeman said. “So you’re responsible, are you? Get him up out of the street, then.” He turned and began to shove at the ring of people. “Go; beat it; get on, now,” he said. “The race is about to start. Go on, now.”

So presently they were alone again, the reporter standing carefully, balancing, on his weightless legs (“Jesus,” he thought, “I’m glad now I am light enough to float”), feeling gingerly his jaw, thinking with peaceful astonishment, “I never felt it at all. Jesus, I didn’t think I was solid enough to be hit that hard but I must have been wrong.” He stooped, still gingerly, and began to pull at Jiggs’ arm until after a time Jiggs looked up at him blankly.

“Come on,” the reporter said. “Let’s get up.”

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “Yair. Get up.”

“Yes,” the reporter said. “Come on, now.” Jiggs rose slowly, the reporter steadying him; he stood blinking at the reporter.

“Jesus,” he said. “What happened?”

“Yes,” the reporter said. “But it’s all right now. It’s all over now. Come on. Where do you want to go?” Jiggs moved, the reporter beside him, supporting him; suddenly Jiggs recoiled; looking up, the reporter also saw the hangar door a short distance away.

“Not there,” Jiggs said.

“Yes,” the reporter said. “We don’t want to go there.” They turned; the reporter led the way now, working them clear again of the people passing towards the stands. He could feel his jaw beginning to ache now, and looking back and upward he watched the aeroplanes come into position one by one as beneath them each dropping body bloomed into parachute. “And I never even heard the bomb,” he thought. “Or maybe that was what I thought hit me.”

He looked at Jiggs walking stiffly beside him, as though the spring steel of his legs had been reft by enchantment of temper and were now mere dead iron. “Listen,” he said.

He stopped and stopped Jiggs too, looking at him and speaking to him tediously and carefully as though Jiggs were a child. “I’ve got to go to town. To the paper. The boss sent for me to come in, see? Now you tell me where you want to go. You want to go somewhere and lie down awhile? Maybe I can find a car where you can—”

“No,” Jiggs said. “I’m all right. Go on.”

“Yes. Sure. But you ought—” Now all the parachutes were open; the sunny afternoon was filled with down-cupped blooms like inverted water hyacinths; the reporter shook Jiggs a little. “Come on, now. What’s next now, after the chute jumps?”

“What?” Jiggs said. “Next? What next?”

“Yes. What? Can’t you remember?”

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “Next.” For a full moment the reporter looked down at Jiggs with a faint lift of one side of his mouth as though favouring his

jaw, not of concern or regret or even hopelessness so much as of faint and quizzical foreknowledge.

“Yes,” he said. He took the key from his pocket. “Can you remember this, then?” Jiggs looked at the key, blinking. Then he stopped blinking.

“Yair,” he said. “It was on the table right by the jug. And then we got hung up on the bastard laying there in the door and I let the door shut behind.. He looked at the reporter, peering at him, blinking again. “For Christ’s sake,” he said. “Did you bring it too?”

“No,” the reporter said.

“Hell. Gimme the key; I will go and—”

“No,” the reporter said. He put the key back into his pocket and took out the change which the Italian had given him, the three quarters. “You said five dollars. But I haven’t got that much. This is all I have. But that will be all right because if it was a hundred it would be the same; it would not be enough because all I have never is, you see? Here.”

He put the three quarters into Jiggs’ hand. For a moment Jiggs looked at his hand without moving. Then the hand closed; he looked at the reporter while his face seemed to collect, to become sentient.

“Yair,” he said. “Thanks. It’s O.K. You’ll get it back Saturday. We’re in the money now; Roger and Jack and the others struck this afternoon, see? Not for the money: for the principle of the thing, see?”

“Yes,” the reporter said. He turned and went on. Now he could feel his jaw quite distinctly through the faint grimace of smiling, the grimace thin, bitter and wrung. “Yes. It ain’t the money. That ain’t it. That don’t matter.” He heard the bomb this time and saw the five aeroplanes dart upward, diminishing, as he reached the apron, beginning to pass the spaced amplifiers and the rich voice:

“... second event. Three-seventy-five cubic inch class. Some of the same boys that gave you a good race yesterday, except Myers, who is out of this race to save up for the five-fifty later this afternoon.

But Ott and Bullitt are out there, and Roger Shumann who surprised us all yesterday by taking second in a field that—” He found her almost at once; she had not changed from the dungarees this time. He extended the key, feeling his jaw plainer and plainer through his face’s grimace.

“Make yourselves at home,” he said. “As long as you want to. I’m going to be out of town for a few days. So I may not even see you again. But you can just drop the key in an envelope and address it to the paper.

And make yourselves at home; there is a woman comes every morning but Sunday to clean up....” The five aeroplanes came in on the first lap: the snarl, the roar banking into a series of down-wind scuttering pops as each one turned the pylon and went on.

“You mean you’re not going to need the place yourself at all?” she said. “No. I won’t be there. I am going out of town on an assignment.” “I see. Well, thanks. I wanted to thank you for last night, but...”

“Yair,” he said. “So I’ll beat it. You can say good-bye to the others for me.”

“Yes. But are you sure it won’t...”

“Sure. It’s all right. You make yourselves at home.” He turned; he began to walk fast, thinking fast, “Now if I only can just...” He heard her call him twice; he thought of trying to run on his boneless legs and knew that he would fall, hearing her feet just behind him now, thinking, “No. No. Don’t.

That’s all I ask. No. No.” Then she was beside him; he stopped and turned, looking down at her.

“Listen,” she said. “We took some money out of your...”

“Yes. I knew. It’s O.K. You can hand it back. Put it in the envelope with the...”

“I intended to tell you as soon as I saw you to-day. It was...”

“Yair; sure.” He spoke loudly now, turning again, fleeing before yet beginning to move. “Any time. Good-bye now.”

“We took six-seventy. We left...” Her voice died away; she stared at him, at the thin rigid grimace which could hardly have been called smiling but which could have been called nothing else. “How much did you find in your pocket this morning?”

“It was all there,” he said. “Just the six-seventy was missing. It was all right.” He began to walk. The aeroplanes came in and turned the field pylon again as he was passing through the gate and into the rotunda. When he entered the bar the first face he saw was that of the photographer whom he had called Jug.

“I ain’t going to offer you a drink,” the photographer said, “because I never buy them for nobody. I wouldn’t even buy Hagood one.” —

“I don’t want a drink,” the reporter said. “I just want a dime.”

“A dime? Hell, that’s damn near the same as a drink.”

“It’s to call Hagood with. That will look better on your expense account than a drink would.” There was a booth in the corner; he called the number from the slip which the substitute had given him. After awhile Hagood answered. “Yair, I’m out here,” the reporter said. “Yair, I feel O.K.... Yair, I want to come in. Take something else, another assignment.... Yair, out of town if you got anything, for a day or so if you... Yair. Thanks, chief. I’ll come right on in.”

He had to walk through the voice again to pass through the rotunda, and again it met him outside though for the moment he did not listen to it for listening to himself: “It’s all the same! I did the same thing myself! I don’t intend to pay Hagood either! I lied to him about money too!” and the answer, loud too: “You lie, you bastard. You’re lying, you son of a bitch.”

So he was hearing the amplifier before he knew that he was listening, just as he had stopped and half turned before he knew that he had stopped, in the bright thin sunlight filled with mirage shapes which pulsed against his painful eyelids: so that when two uniformed policemen appeared suddenly from beyond the hangar with Jiggs struggling between them, his cap in one hand and one eye completely closed now and a long smear of blood on his jaw, the reporter did not even recognize him; he was now staring at the amplifier above the door as though he were actually seeing in it what he merely heard:

“ — Shumann’s in trouble; he’s out of the race; he’s turning out to — He’s cut his switch and he’s going to land; I don’t know what it is, but he’s swinging wide; he’s trying to keep clear of the other ships and he’s pretty wide and that lake’s pretty wet to be out there without any motor.

— Come on, Roger; get back into the airport, guy! — He’s in now; he’s trying to get back on to the runway to land and it looks like he’ll make it all right, but the sun is right in his eyes and he swung mighty wide to keep clear of — I don’t know about this — I don’t — Hold her head up, Roger! Hold her head up! Hold—”

The reporter began to run; it was not the crash that he heard: it was a single long exhalation of human breath as though the microphone had reached out and caught that too out of all the air which people had ever breathed.

He ran back through the rotunda and through the suddenly clamorous mob at the gate, already tugging out his police card; it was as though all the faces, all the past twenty-four hours’ victories and defeats and hopes and renunciations and despairs, had been blasted completely out of his life as if they had actually been the random sheets of that organ to which he dedicated his days, caught momentarily upon one senseless member of the scarecrow which he resembled, and then blown away.

A moment later, above the beads streaming up the apron and beyond the ambulance and the fire truck and the motor-cycle squad rushing across the field, he saw the aeroplane lying on its back, the under-carriage projecting into the air rigid and delicate and motionless as the legs of a dead bird.

Two hours later, at the bus stop on the Grandlieu Street corner, from where she and Shumann stood a few feet away, the woman could see the reporter standing quietly as he had emerged from the bus and surrendered the four tickets for which he had paid.

She could not tell who or what he was looking at: his face was just peaceful, waiting, apparently inattentive even when the parachute jumper limped over to him, dragging savagely the leg which even through the cloth of the trousers appeared thick, stiff and ungainly with the emergency dressing from the airport's surgery, result of having been drifted by an unforeseen wind-gust over the stands and then slammed into one of the jerry-built refreshment booths when landing his parachute.

"Look here," he said. "This afternoon, I was mad at Jiggs. I never meant to sock you. I was worried and mad. I even thought it was still Jiggs' face until too late."

"It's all right," the reporter said. He was not smiling: he was just peaceful and serene. "I guess I just got in the way."

"I didn't plan to. If you want any satisfaction—"

"It's all right," the reporter said. They didn't shake hands; the jumper just turned after a moment and dragged his leg back to where he had been standing, leaving the reporter as before, in that attitude of peaceful waiting. The woman looked at Shumann again.

"Then if the ship's all right, why won't Ord fly it himself, race it himself?" she said.

“Maybe he don’t have to,” Shumann said. “If I had his Ninety-Two I wouldn’t need this ship either. I guess Ord would do the same. Besides, I — we haven’t got it yet. So there ain’t anything to worry about. Because if it is a burn, Ord won’t let us have it. Yair, you see? if we can get it, that’s proof that it’s O.K. because Ord wouldn’t...” She was looking down now, motionless save for her hands, with the heel of one of which she was striking lightly the other’s palm.

Her voice was flat, hard, and low, not carrying three feet:

“We. We. He has boarded and lodged us for a day and night now, and now he is even going to get us another ship to fly.

And all I want is just a house, a room; a cabin will do, a coal-shed where I can know that next Monday and the Monday after that and the Monday after that.... Do you suppose he would have something like that he could give to me?” She turned; she said, “We better get on and get that stuff for Jack’s leg.”

The reporter had not heard her, he had not been listening; now he found that he had not even been watching; his first intimation was when he saw her walking towards him. “We’re going on to your house,” she said. “I guess we’ll see you and Roger when we see you. You have changed your plan about leaving town, I imagine?”

“Yes,” the reporter said. “I mean no. I’m going home with a guy on the paper to sleep. Don’t you bother about me.” He looked at her, his face gaunt, serene, peaceful. “Don’t you worry. I’ll be O.K.”

“Yes,” she said. “About that money. That was the truth. You can ask Roger and Jack.”

“It’s all right,” he said. “I would believe you even if I knew you had lied.”

And To-morrow

SO YOU SEE how it is,” the reporter said. He looked down at Ord too, as he seemed doomed to look down at everyone with whom he seemed

perennially and perpetually compelled either to plead or just to endure: perhaps enduring and passing the time until that day when time and age would have thinned still more what blood he had and so permit him to see himself actually as the friendly and lonely ghost peering timidly down from the hayloft at the other children playing below.

“The valves went bad and then he and Holmes had to go to that meeting so they could tell them that thirty per cent, exceeded the code or something: and then Jiggs went and then they didn’t have time to check the valve stems and take out the bad ones and then the whole engine went and the rudder post and a couple of longerons and tomorrow’s the last day. That’s tough luck, ain’t it?”

“Yes,” Ord said. They all three still stood. Ord had probably invited them to sit out of habit, courtesy, when they first came in, though probably he did not remember now doing so any more than the reporter and Shumann could remember declining if they had declined. But probably neither invitation nor refusal had passed at all.

The reporter had brought with him into the house, the room, that atmosphere of a fifteenth-century Florentine stage scene — an evening call with formal courteous words in the mouth and naked rapiers under the cloaks.

In the impregnably new glow of two rose-shaded lamps which looked like the ones that burn for three hours each night in a living-room suite in the store windows dressed by a junior man clerk, they all stood now, as they had come from the airport, the reporter in that single suit which apparently composed his wardrobe, and Shumann and Ord in grease-stained suède jackets which a third person could not have told apart, standing in the living-room of Ord’s new, neat, little flower-cluttered house built with the compact economy of an aeroplane itself, with the new matched divan and chairs and tables and lamps arranged about it with the myriad compactness of the dials and knobs of an instrument panel.

From somewhere towards the rear they could hear a dinner-table being set, and a woman's voice singing obviously to a small child. "All right," Ord said. He did not move; his eyes seemed to watch them both without looking at either, as though they actually were armed invaders. "What do you want me to do?"

"Listen," the reporter said. "It's not the money, the prize; I don't have to tell you that. You were one too, not so long ago, before you met Atkinson and got a break. Hell, look at you now, even when you got Atkinson and all you have to do is just build them without even seeing a pylon closer to it than the grand-stand, without ever taking your other foot off the ground except to get into bed. But do you? Yair; maybe it was somebody else pulling that Ninety-Two around those pylons at Chicago last summer that day; maybe that wasn't Matt Ord at all.

So you know it ain't the money, the damn cash: Jesus Christ, he ain't got the jack he won yesterday yet. Because if it was just the money, if he just had to have it and he come to you and told you, you would lend it to him. Yair, I know. I don't have to tell you. Jesus, I don't have to tell anybody that after to-day, after up there in that office at noon.

Yair; listen. Suppose instead of them up there on those damn hard chairs to-day it had been a gang of men hired to go down into a mine say, not to do anything special down there but just to see if the mine would cave in on top of them, and five minutes before they went down the big-bellied guys that own the mine would tell them that everybody's pay had been cut two and a half per cent, to print a notice how the elevator or something had fell on one of them the night before: would they go down?

Naw. But did these guys refuse to fly that race? Maybe it was not a valve that Shumann's ship swallowed but a peanut somebody in the grand-stand threw down on the apron. Yair; they could have kept back the ninety-seven and a half and give them the two and a half and it would—"

“No,” Ord said. He spoke with complete and utter finality. “I wouldn’t even let Shumann make a field hop in it. I wouldn’t let any man, let alone fly it around a closed course. Even if it was qualified.” Now it was as though with a word Ord had cut through the circumlocution like through a light net and that the reporter, without breaking stride, had followed him on to new ground as bleak and forthright as a prize-ring.

“But you have flown it. I don’t mean that Shumann can fly as good as you can; I don’t believe anybody can do that even though I know mine ain’t even an opinion: it’s just that hour’s dual you give me talking. But Shumann can fly anything that will fly. I believe that. And we will get it qualified; the licence is still O.K.”

“Yes. The licence is O.K. But the reason it hasn’t been revoked yet is the Department knows I ain’t going to let it off the ground again. Only to revoke it would not be enough: it ought to be broken up and then burned, like you would kill a mad dog. Hell, no. I won’t do it. I feel sorry for Shumann, but not as sorry as I would feel to-morrow night if that ship was over at Feinman Airport to-morrow afternoon.”

“But listen, Matt,” the reporter said. Then he stopped. He did not speak loudly, and with no especial urgency, but he emanated the illusion still of having long since collapsed yet being still intact in his own weightlessness like a dandelion burr moving where there is no wind.

In the soft pink glow his face appeared gaunter than ever, as though following the excess of the past night, his vital spark now fed on the inner side of the actual skin itself, paring it steadily thinner and more and more transparent, as parchment is made. Now his face was completely inscrutable. “So even if we could get it qualified, you wouldn’t let Shumann fly it.”

“Right,” Ord said. “It’s tough on him. I know that. But he don’t want to commit suicide.”

“Yair,” the reporter said. “He ain’t quite got to where won’t nothing else content him. Well, I guess we better get on back to town.”

“Stay and eat some dinner,” Ord said. “I told Mrs. Ord you fellows—”

“I reckon we better get on back,” the reporter said. “It looks like we will have all day to-morrow with nothing to do but eat.”

“We could eat and then drive over to the hangar and I will show you the ship and try to explain—”

“Yair,” the reporter said pleasantly. “But what we want is one that Shumann can look at from inside the cockpit three o’clock tomorrow afternoon. Well, sorry we troubled you.” The station was not far; they followed a quiet gravelled village street in the darkness, the Franciana February darkness already heavy with spring — the Franciana spring which emerges out of the Indian summer of fall almost, like a mistimed stage resurrection which takes the curtain even before rigor mortis has made its bow, where the decade’s phenomenon of ice occurs simultaneous with bloomed stalk and budded leaf.

They walked quietly; even the reporter was not talking now — the two of them who could have had nothing in common save the silence which for the moment the reporter permitted them — the one volatile, irrational, with his ghost-like quality of being beyond all mere restrictions of flesh and time; the other single-purposed, fatally and grimly without any trace of introversion or any ability to objectivate or ratiocinate, as though like the engine, the machine for which he apparently existed, he functioned, moved, only in the vapour of gasoline and the film slick of oil — the two of them taken in conjunction and because of this dissimilarity capable of almost anything.

Walking, they seemed to communicate by some means or agency the purpose, the disaster, towards which, without yet being conscious of it apparently, they moved. “Well,” the reporter said. “That’s about what we expected.”

“Yair,” Shumann said. They walked on in silence again; it was as though the silence were the dialogue and the actual speech the soliloquy, the marshalling of thought:

“Are you afraid of it?” the reporter said. “Let’s get that settled; we can do that right now.”

“Tell me about it again,” Shumann said.

“Yes. The guy brought it down here from Saint Louis for Matt to rebuild it; it wouldn’t go fast enough for him. He had it all doped out, about how they would pull the engine and change the body a little and put in a big engine and Matt told him he didn’t think that was so good, that the ship had all the engine then it had any business with and the guy asked Matt whose ship it was and Matt said it was the guy’s and the guy asked Matt whose money it was and so Matt said O.K.

Only Matt thought they ought to change the body more than the guy thought they ought to and at last Matt refused to have anything to do with it unless the guy compromised with him and even then Matt didn’t think so much of it, he didn’t want to butcher it up because it was a good ship, even I can tell that by looking at it.

And so they compromised because Matt told him he would not test it otherwise, besides getting the licence back on it and the guy saying how he seemed to have been misinformed in what he had heard about Matt and so Matt told him O.K., if he wanted to take the ship to somebody else he would put it back together and not even charge the guy storage space on it.

So finally the guy agreed to let Matt make the changes he absolutely insisted on and then he wanted Matt to guarantee the ship and Matt told the guy his guarantee would be when Matt got into the cockpit and took it off and the guy said he meant to turn a pylon with it and Matt told the guy maybe he had been misinformed about him and maybe he had better take the ship to somebody else and so the guy cooled down and Matt made the changes and put in the big engine and he brought Sales, the inspector, out there and they stressed it and Sales O.K.’d the job and then Matt told the guy he was ready to test it. The guy had been kind of quiet for some time now, he said O.K., he would go into town and get the money while Matt was testing it, flying it in, and so Matt took it off.”

They didn't stop walking, the reporter talking quietly: "Because I don't know much; I just had an hour's dual with Matt because he gave it to me one day: I don't know why he did it and I reckon he don't either. So I don't know: only what I could understand about what Matt said, that it flew O.K. because Sales passed it.

It flew O.K. and it stalled O.K. and did everything it was supposed to do up in the air, because Matt wasn't even expecting it when it happened: he was coming in to land, he said how he was getting the stick back and the ship coming in fine and then all of a sudden his belt caught him and he saw the ground up in front of his nose instead of down under it where it ought to be, and how he never took time to think, he just jammed the stick forward like he was trying to dive it into the ground and sure enough the nose came up just in time; he said the slip stream on the tail group made a — a—"

"Burple," Shumann said.

"Yair. Burple. He don't know if it was going slow to land, or being close to the ground, that changed the slip-stream, he just levelled it off with the stick jammed against the fire wall until it lost speed and the burple went away and he got the stick back and blasted the nose up with the gun and he managed to stay inside the field by ground-looping it. And so they waited awhile for the guy to get back from town with the money and after awhile Matt put the ship back in the hangar and it's still there. So you say now if you think you better not."

"Yair," Shumann said. "Maybe it's weight distribution."

"Yair. That may be it. Maybe we will find out right away it's just that, maybe as soon as you see the ship you will know." They came to the quiet little station lighted by a single bulb, almost hidden in a mass of oleander and vines and palmettos. In either direction the steady green eye of a switch-lamp gleamed faintly on the rails where they ran, sparsely strung with the lighted windows of houses, through a dark canyon of moss-hung live oaks. To the south, on the low night overcast, lay the glare of the city itself. They had about ten minutes to wait.

"Where you going to sleep to-night?" Shumann said.

“I got to go to the office for awhile. I’ll go home with one of the guys there.”

“You better come on home. You got enough rugs and things for us all to sleep. It wouldn’t be the first time Jiggs and Jack and me have slept on the floor.”

“Yes,” the reporter said. He looked down at the other; they were little better than blurs to one another; the reporter said in a tone of hushed quiet amazement: “You see, it don’t matter where I would be.

I could be ten miles away or just on the other side of that curtain, and it would be the same. Jesus, it’s funny: Holmes is the one that ain’t married to her and if I said anything like that to him I would have to dodge — if I had time. And you are married to her, and I can.... Yair. You can go on and hit me too.

Because maybe if I was to even sleep with her, it would be the same. Sometimes I think about how it’s you and him and how maybe sometimes she don’t even know the difference, one from another, and I would think how maybe if it was me too she wouldn’t even know I was there at all.”

“Here, for Christ’s sake,” Shumann said. “You’ll have me thinking you are ribbing me up in this crate of Ord’s so you can marry her maybe.”

“Yair,” the reporter said; “all right. I’d be the one. Yair. Because listen. I don’t want anything. Maybe it’s because I just want what I am going to get, only I don’t think it’s just that. Yair, I’d just be the name, my name, you see; the house and the beds and what we would need to eat. Because, Jesus, I’d just be walking: it would still be the same: you and him and I’d just be walking, on the ground; I would maybe keep up with Jiggs and that’s all.

Because it’s thinking about the day after to-morrow and the day after that and after that and me smelling the same burnt coffee and dead shrimp and oysters and waiting for the same light to change, like me

and the red light worked on the same clock so I could cross and get home and go to bed so I could get up and start smelling the coffee and fish and waiting for the light to change again; yair, smelling the paper and the ink too where it says how among those who beat or got beat at Omaha or Miami or Cleveland or Los Angeles was Roger Shumann and family.

Yes. I would be the name; I could anyway buy her the pants and the nightgowns and it would be my sheets on the bed and even my towels.... Well, come on. Ain't you going to sock me?" Now the far end of the canyon of live oaks sprang into more profound impenetrability yet as the headlight of the train fell upon it and then swept down the canyon itself. Now Schumann could see the other's face.

"Does this guy you are going to stay with to-night expect you?" he said. "Yes. I'll be all right. And listen. We better catch the eight-twenty back here."

"All right," Shumann said. "Listen. About that money—" "It's all right," the reporter said. "It was all there."

"We put a five and a one back into your pocket. But if it was gone, I'll make it good Saturday, along with the other. It was our fault for leaving it there. But we couldn't get in; the door had locked when it shut."

"It don't matter," the reporter said. "It's just money. It don't matter if you don't ever pay it back." The train came up, slowing, the lighted windows jarred to a halt. The car was full, since it was not yet eight o'clock, but they found two seats at last, in tandem, so they could not talk any more until they got out in the station.

The reporter still had a dollar of the borrowed five; they took a cab.

"We'll go by the paper first," he said. "Jiggs ought to be almost sober now." The cab, even at the station, ran at once into confetti, emerging beneath dingy gouts of the purple-and-goldbunting three days old now dropped across the smoke-grimed façade of the station like flotsam left

by a spent and falling tide and murmuring even yet of the chalk-white, the forlorn, the glare and pulse of Grandlieu Street miles away.

Now the cab began to run between loops of it stretched from lamp-post to lamp-post; then it ran between the lofty and urbane palms and turned slowing and then drew up at the twin glass doors. "I won't be but a minute," the reporter said. "You can stay here in the cab."

"We can walk from here," Shumann said. "The police station ain't far."

"We'll need the cab to get around Grandlieu," the reporter said. "I won't be long." He walked into no reflection now, since darkness was behind him; the doors swung too. The elevator door was slightly ajar and he could see the stack of papers beneath the face-down watch and he could smell the stinking pipe but he did not pause, taking the steps two at a time, and on into the city room.

Beneath his green eyeshade Hagood looked up and saw the reporter. But this time the reporter neither sat down nor removed his hat: he stood, loomed, into the green diffusion above the desk-lamp, looking down at Hagood with gaunt and quiet immobility as though he had been blown for a second against the desk by a wind and would in another second be blown onward once more.

"Go home and go to bed," Hagood said. "The story you phoned in is already set up."

"Yes," the reporter said. "I must have fifty dollars, chief." After awhile Hagood said:

"Must, do you?" He did not move at all. "Must, eh?" he said. The reporter did not move either.

"I can't help it. I know that I... yesterday, whenever it was. When I thought I was fired. I got the message, all right. I ran into Cooper about noon and I didn't call you until after three. And I didn't report in here, like I said. But I did phone in the story; I will come back in about an hour and clean it.... But I got to have fifty dollars."

"It's because you know I won't fire you," Hagood said. "Is that it?" The reporter said nothing. "All right. Come on. What is it this time? I know, all right.

But I want to hear it from you — or are you still married or moved away or dead?" The reporter did not move; he spoke quietly, apparently into the green lamp-shade as if it was a microphone:

"The cops got him. It happened just about the time Shumann nosed over, and so I...So he's in the can.

And they will need some jack too until Shumann gets his money tomorrow night."

"So," Hagood said. He looked up at the still face above him which for the time had that calm sightless contemplation of a statue. "Why don't you let these people alone?" he said. Now the blank eyes waked; the reporter looked at Hagood for a full minute. His voice was as quiet as Hagood's.

"I can't," he said.

"You can't?" Hagood said. "Did you ever try to?"

"Yes," the reporter said in his dead flat voice, looking at the lamp again; that is, Hagood knew that the reporter was not looking at him. "I tried." After a moment Hagood turned, heavily. His coat hung on the back of his chair. He took his wallet from it and counted fifty dollars on to the desk and pushed it over to the reporter and saw the bony, clawlike hand come into the lamp's glare and take up the money. "Do you want me to sign anything now?" the reporter said.

"No," Hagood said without looking up. "Go home and go to bed. That's all I want."

"I'll come in later and clean up the story."

"It's already in galley," Hagood said. "You go home." The reporter moved away from the desk quietly enough, but as he entered the corridor it was as though the wind which had blown him against Hagood's desk and left him there had now begun to blow him again.

He was passing the elevator shaft towards the stairs with only a glance at it when the door clashed back and someone got out, whereupon he turned and entered, reaching with one hand into his pocket as with the other he lifted the top paper beneath the sliding face-down watch. But he did not even glance at it now; he thrust it, folded, into his pocket as the cage stopped and the door clashed open.

“Well, I see where another of them tried to make a headline out of himself this afternoon,” the elevator man said.

“Is that so?” the reporter said. “Better close that door; I think you got a draught in there.” He ran into the swinging reflection in the glass doors this time, on his long loose legs, with the long loose body which had had no food since noon and little enough before that but which, weightless anyway, had the less to carry now. Shumann opened the cab door for him. “Bayou Street police station,” the reporter told the driver. “Make it snappy.”

“We could walk,” Shumann said.

“Hell, I got fifty bucks now,” the reporter said. They travelled cross town now; the cab could rush fast down each block of the continuous alley, pausing only at the intersections where, to the right, canyon niched, the rumour of Grandlieu Street swelled and then faded in repetitive and indistinguishable turmoil, flicking on and past as though the cab ran along the rimless periphery of a ghostly wheel spoked with light and sound. “Yair,” the reporter said, “I reckon they took Jiggs to the only quiet place in New Valois for a man to sober up in.

He’ll be sober now.” He was sober; a turnkey fetched him in to where the reporter and Shumann waited at the desk. His eye was closed now and his lip swollen, though the blood had been cleaned away except where it had dried on his shirt.

“Got enough for awhile?” Shumann said.

“Yair,” Jiggs said. “Give me a cigarette, for God’s sake.” The reporter gave him the cigarette and held the match while Jiggs tried to bring the cigarette into the flame, jerking and twitching until at last the reporter grasped Jiggs’ hand and steadied it to make the contact.

“We’ll get a piece of steak and put it on your eye,” the reporter said. “You better put it inside of him,” the desk man said.

“How about that?” the reporter said. “You want to eat?” Jiggs held the cigarette in both shaking hands.

“All right,” Jiggs said.

“What?” the reporter said. “Would you feel better if you ate something?”

“All right,” Jiggs said. “Do we go now or do I go back in there?”

“No, we’re going right now,” the reporter said. He said to Shumann, “You take him on to the cab; I’ll be right out.” He turned to the desk.

“What’s it, Mac? Drunk or vag?”

“You springing him, or the paper?”

“I am.”

“Call it vag,” the desk man said. The reporter took out Hagood’s money and laid ten dollars on the desk.

“O.K.,” he said. “Will you give the other five to Leblanc? I borrowed it off of him out at the airport this afternoon.” He went out too. Shumann and Jiggs waited beside the cab. The reporter saw now the once raked and swaggering cap crumpled and thrust into Jiggs’ hip pocket and that the absence of the raked and filthy object from Jiggs’ silhouette was like the dropped flag from the shot buck’s — the body still ran, still retained a similitude of power and even speed, would even run on for yards and even perhaps miles, and then for years in a gnawing burrowing of worms, but that which tasted air and drank the sun was dead.

"The poor bastard," the reporter thought; he still carried the mass of bills as he had thrust them into and withdrawn them from his pocket. "You're O.K. now," he said, loudly, heartily. "Roger can stop somewhere and get you something to eat and then you will be all right. Here." He nudged his hand at Shumann.

"I won't need it," Shumann said. "Jack collected his eighteen-fifty for the jump this afternoon."

"Yair; I forgot," the reporter said. Then he said, "But what about tomorrow? We'll be gone all day, see? Here, take it; you can leave it with her in case....You can just keep it and pay it all back, then."

"Yair," Shumann said. "Thanks then." He took the crumpled wad without looking at it and put it into his pocket and pushed Jiggs into the cab.

"Besides, you can pay the cab, too," the reporter said. "We forgot about that.... I told him where to go. See you in the morning." He leaned to the window; beyond Shumann, Jiggs sat in the other corner, smoking the cigarette out of both shaking hands. The reporter spoke in a tone repressed, conspiratorial: "Train leaves at eight-twenty-two. O.K.?"

"O.K.," Shumann said.

"I'll have everything fixed up and meet you at the station."

"O.K.," Shumann said. The cab moved on. Through the back window Shumann saw the reporter standing at the kerb in the glare of the two unmistakable pariah-green globes on either side of the entrance, still, gaunt, the garments which hung from the skeleton frame seeming to stir faintly and steadily even when and where there was no wind.

As though having chosen that one spot out of the entire sprawled and myriad city he stood there without impatience or design: patron (even if no guardian) saint of all waifs, all the homeless, the desperate and the starved. Now the cab turned its back on Grandlieu Street, though presently it turned parallel to it or to where it must be now, since now

there was no rumour, no sound, save the light glare on the sky which held to their right even after the cab turned and now ran towards where the street should be.

Shumann did not know they had crossed it until they plunged suddenly into the region of narrow gashes between balconies, crossing intersections marked by the ghostly one-way arrows. "We must be almost there," he said. "You want to stop and eat?"

"All right," Jiggs said.

"Do you or don't you?"

"Yair," Jiggs said. "Whatever you want me to do." Then Shumann looked at him and saw him trying to hold the cigarette to his mouth with both hands, and that the cigarette was dead.

"What do you want?" Shumann said.

"I want a drink," Jiggs said quietly.

"Do you have to have one?"

"I guess I don't if I can't get one." Shumann watched him holding the dead cigarette to his mouth, drawing at it.

"If I give you a drink, will you eat something?"

"Yair. I'll do anything." Shumann leaned forward and tapped on the glass. The driver turned his head.

"Where can I get something to eat?" Shumann said. "A bowl of soup?"

"You'll have to go back up towards Grandlieu for that."

"Ain't there any place close around here?"

"You can get a ham sandwich at these wop stores, if you can find one open."

"All right. Stop at the next one you see, will you?" It was not far; Shumann recognized the corner, though he asked to be sure as they got out. "Noy-dees Street ain't far from here, is it?"

“Noyades?” the driver said. “That’s it in the next block there. On the right.”

“We’ll get out here then,” Shumann said. He drew out the crumpled money which the reporter had given him, glancing down at the plump neat figure five in the corner. “That makes eleven-seventy,” he thought, then he discovered a second bill crumpled into the first one; he passed it to the driver, still looking at the compact “5” on the one in his hand. “Damn,” he thought, “that’s seventeen dollars,” as the driver spoke to him:

“It’s just two-fifteen. Ain’t you got anything smaller than this?”

“Smaller?” Shumann said. He looked at the bill in the driver’s hand, held so that the light from the meter fell upon it. It was a ten. “No,” he thought; he didn’t even swear now. “It’s twenty-two dollars.” The store was a room the size, shape and temperature of a bank vault.

It was illuminated by one kerosene lamp which seemed to cast not light but shadows, out of whose brown Rembrandt gloom the hushed bellies of ranked cans gleamed behind a counter massed with an unbelievable quantity of indistinguishable objects which the proprietor must vend by feel alone to distinguish not only object from object but object from chiaroscuro.

It smelled of cheese and garlic and of heated metal; sitting on either side of a small fiercely burning kerosene heater a man and a woman, whom Shumann had not seen until now, both wrapped in shawls and distinguishable by gender only because the man wore a cap, looked up at him.

The sandwich was the end of a hard French loaf, with ham and cheese. He gave it to Jiggs and followed him out, where Jiggs stopped again and stood looking at the object in his hand with a sort of ox-like despair.

“Could I have the drink first?” he said.

“You eat while we walk home,” Shumann said. “I’ll give you the drink later.”

"It would be better if I had the drink first," Jiggs said.

"Yes," Shumann said. "You thought that this morning too."

"Yair," Jiggs said. "That's right." He became motionless again, looking at the sandwich.

"Go on," Shumann said. "Eat it."

"All right," Jiggs said. He began to eat; Shumann watched him bring the sandwich to his mouth with both hands and turn his face sideways to bite into it; he could see Jiggs shaking and jerking all over now as he worried the bite off and began to chew.

Chewing, Jiggs looked full at Shumann, holding the bitten sandwich in both grimed hands before his breast as though it were a crucifix, chewing with his mouth open, looking full at Shumann until Shumann realized that Jiggs was not looking at him at all, that the one good eye was merely open and filled with a profound and hopeless abnegation as if the despair which both eyes should have divided between them had now to be concentrated and contained in one alone, and that Jiggs' face was now slicked over with something which in the faint light resembled oil in the instant before Jiggs began to vomit. Shumann held him up, holding the sandwich clear with the other hand, while Jiggs' stomach continued to go through the motions of refusal long after there was nothing left to abdicate.

"Try to stop it now," Shumann said.

"Yair," Jiggs said. He dragged his sleeve across his mouth.

"Here," Shumann said. He extended his handkerchief. Jiggs took it, but at once he reached his hand again, groping. "What?" Shumann said.

"The sandwich."

"Could you hold it down if you had a drink?"

"I could do anything if I had a drink," Jiggs said.

"Come on," Shumann said. When they entered the alley they could see the outfall of light from the window beyond the balcony as Hagood had

seen it last night, though there was now no arm shadow, no voice. Shumann halted beneath the balcony. "Jack," he said. "Laverne." But still there was nothing to see: just the parachute jumper's voice from beyond the window:

"It's off the latch. Lock it when you come in."

When they came up the stairs the jumper was sitting on the cot, in his underclothes, his clothing arranged neatly on a chair and his foot on the chair too while with a stained wad of cotton he swabbed liquid from a bottle into the long raw abrasion like a paint smear from his ankle to his thigh.

On the floor lay the bandage and tape which he had worn in from the airport. He had already arranged the cot for the night; the blanket was turned neatly back and the rug from the floor spread over the foot.

"You better sleep in the bed to-night," Shumann said. "That blanket will give that skinned place hell." The jumper did not answer, bent over his leg, swabbing the medicine in with a sort of savage concentration. Shumann turned; he seemed to notice for the first time the sandwich in his hand and then to remember Jiggs who now stood quietly beside his canvas bag, watching Shumann quietly and patiently with the one eye, with that patient inarticulate quality of a dog.

"Oh yes," Shumann said, turning on towards the table. The jug still sat there, though the glasses and the dish-pan were gone and the jug itself appeared to have been washed. "Get a glass and some water," he said. When the curtain fell behind Jiggs, Shumann laid the sandwich on the table and looked at the jumper again. After a moment the jumper looked up at him.

"Well?" the jumper said. "What about it?"

"I guess I can get it," Shumann said.

"You mean you didn't see Ord?"

"Yair. We found him."

“Suppose you do get it. How are you going to get it qualified in time to race to-morrow?”

“I don’t know,” Shumann said. He lit a cigarette. “He said he could get that fixed up. I don’t know, myself.”

“How? Does the race committee think he is Jesus too, the same as the rest of you do?”

“I said I don’t know,” Shumann said. “If we can’t get it qualified, that’s all there is to it. But if we can...” He smoked. The jumper swabbed carefully and viciously at his leg. “There’s two things I could do,” Shumann said. “It will qualify under five hundred and seventy-five cubic inches.

I could enter it in that and loaf back on half throttle and take third without having to make a vertical turn, and the purse to-morrow is eight-ninety. Or I could enter the other, the Trophy. It will be the only thing out there that will even stay in sight of Ord.

And Ord is just in it so his home folks can see him fly; I don’t believe he would beat that Ninety-Two to death just to win two thousand dollars. Not on a five-mile course. Because it must be fast. We would be fixed then.”

“Yes; fixed. We’d owe Ord about five thousand for the crate and the motor. What’s wrong with it?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t ask Ord. All I know is what Ord told him” — he made a brief indescribable motion with his head as though to indicate the room but which indicated the reporter as plainly as if Shumann had spoken his name—” he said the controls cross when it lands. Whether it’s slowing up or whether it’s the air off the ground. Because he said that Ord stalled it out when he... Or maybe a different weight distribution, a couple of sandbags in the—”

“Yair. Or maybe when he gets it qualified to-morrow he will have them move the pylons up to around four thousand feet and hold the race up there instead of at General Behindman’s country club.” He ceased and

bent over his leg again, then Shumann also saw Jiggs. He had apparently been in the room for some time, standing beside the table with two of the jam glasses, one of them containing water, in his hands. Shumann went to the table and poured into the empty glass and looked at Jiggs who now mused upon the drink.

“Ain’t that enough?” Shumann said.

“Yair,” Jiggs said, rousing; “yair.” When he poured water from the other glass into the drink the two rims clicked together with a faint chattering. Shumann watched him set the water glass down, where it chattered again on the table before he released it, and then with both hands attempt to raise the other one to his lips.

As the glass approached Jiggs’ whole head began to jerk so that he could not make contact with his mouth, the rim of the glass clicking against his teeth while he tried to still it. “Jesus,” he said quietly, “Jesus. I tried for two hours to sit on the bed because when I would walk up and down the guy would come and hollar at me through the bars.”

“Here,” Shumann said. He put his hand on the glass and stopped it and tilted it; he could watch Jiggs swallowing now and the liquid trickling down his blue-stubbled chin from each corner of his mouth and splotching dark on his shirt until Jiggs pushed the glass away, panting.

“Wait,” he said. “It’s wasting. Maybe if you won’t look at me I can drink it.”

“And then get on the sandwich again,” Shumann said. He took the jug from the table and looked back at the jumper again. “Go on and take the bed to-night,” he said. “You’ll have that leg infected under a blanket. Are you going to put the bandage back on?”

“I’ll sleep in a cuckold’s bed but not in a pimp’s,” the jumper said. “Go on. Get yourself a piece to take to hell with you to-morrow.”

“I can take third in the five-seventy-five without even crossing the airport,” Shumann said. “Anyway, by the time it is qualified I’ll know whether I can land it or not.... How about putting that bandage back on?” But the jumper did not answer or even look at him.

The blanket was already turned back; with the injured leg swinging stiffly he turned on the ball of his buttocks and swung into the cot and drew the blanket up in one motion. For awhile longer Shumann looked at him, the jug against his leg. Then he realized that for some time he had been hearing Jiggs chewing and he looked at him and saw Jiggs squatting on the floor beside the canvas bag, chewing, holding the sandwich in both hands. “You, too,” Shumann said. “You going to sleep there?” Jiggs looked up at him with the one eye.

His whole face was swollen and puffed now; he chewed slowly and gingerly, looking up at Shumann with that dog-like quality, abject, sad, and at peace. “Go on,” Shumann said. “Get settled. I’m going to turn out the light.”

Without ceasing to chew Jiggs disengaged one hand and dragged the canvas sack over and lay down, his head upon it. Shumann could still hear him chewing as he groped in the darkness towards the curtain and lifted it and passed beyond it. Groping on to the lamp beside the bed, moving quietly now, he snapped it on and found the woman, the boy asleep beside her, watching him. She lay in the middle of the bed with the boy between her and the wall.

Her clothes were laid neatly too on a chair and then Shumann saw the nightgown, the only silk one she had, lying across the chair too. Stooping to set the jug beneath the bed he paused and then lifted from the floor the cotton shorts which she wore, or had worn, from where they had either been dropped or flung, and put them on the chair too. He removed his jacket and began to unbutton his shirt while she watched him, the bedclothes huddled to her chin.

“So you got the ship,” she said.

“I don’t know. We’re going to try.” He removed the watch from his wrist and wound it carefully and put it on the table; when the faint clicking ceased he could hear again from beyond the curtain the sound of Jiggs chewing. He set his feet in turn on the corner of the chair and unlaced his shoes, feeling her watching him.

“I can take at least third in the five-seventy-five without passing the pylons close enough for anybody on them to read the ship’s number. And that’s fifteen per cent, of eight-ninety. Or there’s two thousand in the Trophy and I don’t believe Ord will—”

“Yes. I heard you through the curtain. But why?” He set the shoes neatly side by side and stepping out of his trousers shook them into crease by the cuffs, folded them, and put them on the chest of drawers beside the celluloid comb and brush and the cravat, and stood in shorts. “And the ship is all right except you won’t know until you are in the air whether or not you can take it off and you won’t know until you are back on the ground and standing up again whether or not you can land it.”

“I guess I can land it, all right.” He lit? cigarette and then stood with his hand on the light-switch, looking at her. She had not moved, lying with the covers drawn smooth and nun-like up to her chin. Again from beyond the curtain he could hear Jiggs chewing, mouthing at the bard sandwich with that painful patience.

“You’re lying,” she said. “We got along before.”

“Because we had to. This time we don’t have to.”

“But it’s seven months yet.”

“Yair. Just seven months. And one more meet, and the only ship we have with a shot engine and two wrenched longerons.” He looked at her a moment longer; at last she opened the covers; as he snapped off the light his retina carried into the darkness the imprint of one bare shoulder and breast down to the waist. Want to move Jack to the middle?” he said.

She did not answer, though it was not until he drew the covers up himself discovered that she was lying rigid, her flank tense and hard with rigid muscles where his own touched it as he settled himself. He withdrew the cigarette and held it suspended above his mouth, hearing Jiggs chewing beyond the curtain and then the jumpers voice: "Jesus God, stop eating that! You sound just like a dog."

"You bastard," she said in a tense rigid whisper. "You rotten pilot, you bastard rotten pilot. Hanging off there with a dead stick so you wouldn't interfere in their damn race and then mushing in over that sea-wall and you wouldn't even hold its head up! you wouldn't even hold—" Her hand shot out and snatched the cigarette from him; he felt his own fingers wrench and bend and then saw the red coal twinkle and arc across the dark and strike the invisible floor.

"Here," he whispered. "Let me pick it up off the..." But now the hard hand struck his cheek, clutching and scrabbling about his jaw and throat and shoulder until he caught it and held it, wrenching and jerking.

"You bastard rotten, you rotten—" she panted.

"All right," he said. "Steady, now." She ceased, breathing hard and fast. But he still held the wrist, wary and without gentleness too. "All right, now....You want to take your pants off?"

"They're already off."

"Oh yair," he said. "I forgot."

When she made her first parachute jump they had not been together very long. She was the one who suggested that he teach her to jump, and he already had a parachute, the exhibition kind; when he used it he either flew the aeroplane or made the jump, depending on whether the casual partner with whom he would join forces for a day or a week or a season were a pilot himself or not.

She made the suggestion herself and he showed her, drilled her in the simple mechanics of climbing out on to the wing with the parachute

harness buckled on and then dropping off and letting her own weight pull the parachute from the case attached to the wing.

The act was billed for a Saturday afternoon in a small Kansas town and he did not know that she was frightened until they were in the air, the money collected and the crowd waiting, and she had begun to climb out along the wing.

She wore skirts; they had decided that her exposed legs would not drawing card but that in the skirt no one would doubt that she was a woman; and now she was clinging to the inner bay strut and looking back at him with an expression that he was later to realize was not at all fear of death but on the contrary a wild and now mindless repudiation of bereavement as if it were he who was the one about to die and not her.

He sat in the back cockpit with the aeroplane in position, holding the wing up under her weight, gesturing her on out towards the wing-tip, almost angrily, when he saw her leave the strut and with that blind and completely irrational expression of protest and wild denial on her face, the hem of the skirt, whipping out of the parachute harness about her loins, climb, not back into the front seat which she had left but on towards the one in which he sat holding the aeroplane level, scrambling and sprawling into the cockpit (he saw her knuckles perfectly white where she gripped the cockpit's edge) and then facing him.

She told him later that she had not planned or thought at all until she looked back at him from the strut and realized that she might have to die before she touched him again. So he tried to fight her off for awhile but he had to fly the aeroplane, keep it in position over the field.

It was some blind instinct that made him remember to roll the aeroplane towards the wing to which the parachute-case was attached because the next that he remembered was the belt catching him across the legs as, looking out, he saw the parachute floating between him and the ground.

He had to land the aeroplane, the rest he learned later: how she had come down, with the dress, pulled or blown free of the parachute harness, up about her armpits, and had been dragged along the ground until overtaken by a yelling mob of men and youths, in the centre of which she now lay dressed from the waist down in dirt and parachute straps and stockings.

When he fought through the mob to where she was she had been arrested by three village officers one of whose faces Shumann remarked even then with a violent foreboding — a youngish man with a hard handsome face sadistic rather than vicious, who was using the butt of a pistol to keep the mob back and who struck at Shumann with it with the same blind fury.

They carried her to jail, the younger one threatening her with the pistol now; already Shumann realized that in the two other officers he had only bigotry and greed to contend with.

It was the younger one that he had to fear — a man besotted and satiated by his triumphs over abased human flesh which his corrupt and picayune office supplied him, seeing now and without forewarning the ultimate shape of his jaded desires fall upon him out of the sky, not merely naked but clothed in the very traditional symbology — the ruined dress with which she was trying wildly to cover her loins, and the parachute harness — of female bondage.

They would neither arrest Shumann too nor allow him access to her. After he was driven back along with the mob from the jail door by the younger officer's pistol — it was a square building of fierce new brick into which he saw her forced, struggling still — he had a single glimpse of her indomitable and terrified face beyond the younger officer's shoulder as the now alarmed older officers hurried her inside.

For the time he became one of the mob, though even then, mad with rage and terror, he knew that it was merely because his and the mob's immediate object happened to be the same, to see, touch her, again. He knew too that the two older craven officers were at least neutral,

pulled to his side by their own physical fear of the mob, and that actually the one had for support only his dispensation for impunitive violence with which the dingy cadaver of the law invested him. But it seemed to be enough.

It was for the next hour anyway, during which, followed by his ragamuffin train of boys and youths and drunken men, Shumann accomplished his nightmare's orbit about the town, from mayor to lawyer to lawyer to lawyer and back again.

They were at supper, or about to sit down to it or just finishing; he would have to tell his story with the round eyes of children and the grim implacable faces of wives and aunts watching him while the empowered men from whom he sought what he sincerely believed to be justice and no more forced him step by step to name what he feared, whereupon one of them threatened to have him arrested for criminal insinuations against the town's civil structure.

It was a minister (and two hours after dark) who finally telephoned to the mayor. Shumann learned only from the over-heard conversation that the authorities were apparently seeking him now. Five minutes later a car called for him, with one of the two older officers in it and two others whom he had not seen before. "Am I under arrest too?" he said.

"You can try to get out and run if you want to," the officer said. That was all. The car stopped at the jail and the officer and one of the others got out. "Hold him," the officer said.

"I'll hold him all right," the second deputy said. So Shumann sat in the car with the deputy's shoulder jammed into his and watched the two others hurry up the bricked walk.

The door of the jail opened for them and closed; then it opened again and he saw her. She wore a rain-coat now; he saw her for an instant as the two men hurried her out and the door closed again.

It was not until the next day that she showed him the dress now in shreds and the scratches and bruises on the insides of her legs and on her jaw and face and the cut in her lip.

They thrust her into the car, beside him. The officer was about to follow when the second deputy shoved him roughly away. "Ride in front," the deputy said. "I'll ride back here." There were now four in the back seat; Shumann sat rigid with the first deputy's shoulder jammed into his and Laverne's rigid flank and side jammed against him so that it seemed to him that he could feel through her rigidity the second deputy crowding and dragging his flank against Laverne's other side.

"All right," the officer said. "Let's get away from here while we can." "Where are we going?" Shumann asked. The officer did not answer. He leaned out, looking back at the jail as the car gathered speed, going fast now.

"Go on," he said. "Them boys may not be able to hold him and there's been too much whore's hell here already." The car rushed on, out of the village; Shumann realized that they were going in the direction of the field, the airport. The car swung in from the road; its headlights fell upon the aeroplane standing as he had jumped out of it, already running, in the afternoon.

As the car stopped the lights of a second one came into sight, coming fast down the road. The officer began to curse. "Durn him.

Durn them boys. I knew they couldn't—" He turned to Shumann.

"There's your airship. You and her get out of here."

"What do you want us to do?" Shumann said.

"You're going to crank up that flying machine and get out of this town. And you do it quick; I was afraid them boys couldn't hold him."

"To-night?" Shumann said. "I haven't got any lights."

"Ain't nothing going to run into you up there, I guess," the officer said.

"You get her into it and get away from here and don't you never come

back.” Now the second car slewed from the road, the lights swung full upon them; it rushed up, slewing again, with men already jumping out of it before it had stopped. “Hurry!” the officer cried. “We’ll try to hold him.”

“Get into the ship,” Shumann told her. At first he thought that the man was drunk. He watched Laverne, holding the raincoat about her, run down the long tunnel of the cars’ lights and climb into the aeroplane and vanish, then he turned and saw the man struggling while the others held him.

But he was not drunk, he was mad, he was insane for the time; he struggled towards Shumann who saw in his face not rage, not even lust, but almost a counterpart of that terror and wild protest against bereavement and division which he had seen in Laverne’s face while she clung to the strut and looked back at him.

“I’ll pay you!” the man screamed. “I’ll pay her! I’ll pay either of you! Name it! Let me... her once and you can cut me if you want!”

“Go on, I tell you!” the older officer panted at him. Shumann ran too; for an instant the man ceased to struggle; perhaps for the instant he believed that Shumann had gone to fetch her back.

Then he began to struggle” and scream again, cursing now, screaming at Laverne, calling her whore and bitch and pervert in a tone wild with despair until the engine blotted it. But Shumann could still see him struggling with the men who held him, the group silhouetted by the lights of the two cars, while he sat and warmed the engine as long as he dared.

But he had to take it off cold after all; he could hear the shouts now and against the headlights he saw the man running towards him, towards the aeroplane; he took it off from where it stood, with nothing to see ahead but the blue flames at the exhaust ports, into a night without moon.

Thirty minutes later, using a dimly seen windmill to check his altitude and making a fast blind landing in an alfalfa field, he struck an object which the next morning, fifty feet from the overturned aeroplane, he found to be a cow.

It was now about nine-thirty. The reporter thought for a moment of walking on over to Grandlieu Street and its celluloid-and confetti-rained uproar and down it to Saint Jules and so back to the paper that way, but he did not. When he moved it was to turn back into the dark cross street out of which the cab had emerged a half-hour before.

When the reporter entered the twin glass doors and the elevator cage clashed behind him this time, stooping to lift the face-down watch alone and look at it, he would contemplate the inexplicable and fading fury of the past twenty-four hours circled back to itself and become whole and intact and objective and already vanishing slowly like the damp print of a lifted glass on a bar.

Because he was not thinking about time, about any angle of clock-hands on a dial since the one moment out of all the future which he could see where his body would need to coincide with time or dial would not occur for almost twelve hours yet.

He was not even to recognize at once the cycle's neat completion towards which he walked steadily, not fast, from block to block of the narrow cross street notched out of the blunt and now slumbering back ends of commerce while at each intersection where he waited during the traffic-dammed moment there reached him, as in the cab previously, the faint rumour, the sound felt rather than heard, of Grandlieu Street: the to-night's Nile barge clatterfalque — the butterfly spawn against the choral drop of the dawn's biding white wings — and at last Saint Jules' Avenue itself running broad and suave between the austere palms springing, immobile and monstrous like burlesqued bunches of country broom sedge set on scabby posts, and then the twin doors and the elevator cage where the elevator man, glancing up at him from beneath shaggy pepper-and-salt brows that looked as if his moustache had had twins suddenly, said with grim and vindictive

unction, “Well, I see how this afternoon another of them tried to make the front page, only he never quite—”

“Is that so,” the reporter said pleasantly, laying the watch back. “Two past ten, huh? That’s a fine hour for a man not to have nothing to do until to-morrow but go to work, ain’t it?”

“That ought not to be much hardship on a man that don’t only work except when he ain’t got nothing else to do,” the elevator man said.

“Is that so too,” the reporter said pleasantly. “You better close that door; I think I felt a—” It clashed behind him.

“Two minutes past ten,” he thought. “That leaves...” But that fled before he had begun to think it; he hung in a slow long backwash of peaceful and serene waiting, thinking Now she will be... Just above the button on the bellplate the faintly oxidized streak of last night’s match still showed; the match now, without calculation, without sight to guide it, almost followed the mark.

The wash-room was the last door: a single opaque sheet of glass stencilled GENTLEMEN in a frame without knob (“Maybe that’s why only gentlemen,” the reporter thought) in-swinging into eternal creosote.

He removed even his shirt to wash, fingering gingerly the left side of his face, leaning to the blunt wavering mirror the replica of his gingerly grimace as he moved his jaw back and forth and contemplated the bluish autograph of violence like tattooing upon his diploma-coloured flesh, thinking quietly, “Yair. Now she will be..

Now the city room (he scratched this match on the door itself), the barn cavern, loomed: the copy-desk like a cluttered island, the other single desks beneath the single green-shaded bulbs, had that quality of profound and lonely isolation of buoy-marked shoals in an untravelled and forgotten sea, his own among them.

He had not seen it in twenty-four hours it is true, yet as he stood beside it he looked down at its cluttered surface — the edge-notching of countless vanished cigarettes, the half-filled sheet of yellow copy in the typewriter — with slow and quiet amaze as though not only at finding anything of his own on the desk but at finding the desk itself still in its old place, thinking how he could not possibly have got that drunk and got that sober in just that time.

There was someone else at Hagood's desk when he passed and so Hagood had not seen him yet. He had been at his desk for almost an hour, while yellow sheet after yellow sheet passed steadily through the typewriter, when the copy-boy came.

"He wants you," the boy said.

"Thanks," the reporter said. In his shirt sleeves, and with his tie loose again though still wearing his hat, he stopped at the desk and looked down at Hagood with pleasant and courteous interrogation. "You wanted me, chief?" he said.

"I thought you went home. It's eleven o'clock. What are you doing?"
"Dolling up a Sunday feature for Smitty. He asked me to do it."

"Asked you to?"

"Yair. I had caught up. I was all through."

"What is it?"

"It's all right. It's about how the loves of Antony and Cleopatra had been prophesied all the time in Egyptian architecture only they never knew what it meant; maybe they had to wait on the Roman papers. But it's all right.

Smitty's got some books and a couple or three cuts to run, and all you have to do is try to translate the books so that any guy with a dime can understand what it means, and when you don't know yourself you just put it down like the book says it and that makes it better still because

even the censors don't know what it says they were doing.'" But Hagood was not listening.

"You mean you are not going home to-night?" The reporter looked down at Hagood, gravely and quietly. "They are still down yonder at your place, are they?" The reporter looked at him. "What are you going to do to-night?"

"I'm going home with Smitty. Sleep on his sofa."

"He's not even here," Hagood said.

"Yair. He's at home. I told him I would finish this for him first."

"All right," Hagood said. The reporter returned to his desk.

"And now it's eleven o'clock," he thought. "And that leaves... Yair. She will be..." There were three or four others at the single desks, but by midnight they had snapped off their lights and gone; now there was only the group about the copy-desk and the whole building began to tremble to the remote travail of the presses.

Now about the copy-desk the six or seven men, coatless and collarless, in their green eyeshades like a uniform, seemed to concentrate towards a subterranean crisis, like so many puny humans conducting the lying in of a mastodon.

At half-past one Hagood himself departed; he looked across the room towards the desk where the reporter sat immobile now, his hands still on the keyboard and his lowered face shaded and so hidden by his hat-brim.

It was at two o'clock that one of the proof readers approached the desk and found that the reporter was not thinking but asleep, sitting bolt upright, his bony wrists and his thin hands projecting from his frayed clean too short cuffs and lying peaceful and inert on the typewriter before him.

"We're going over to Joe's," the proof reader said. "Want to come?"

"I'm on the wagon," the reporter said. "I ain't through here, anyway."

"So I noticed," the other said. "Only you better finish it in bed.... What do you mean, on the wagon? That you are going to start buying your own? You can do that with us; maybe Joe won't drop dead."

"No," the reporter said. "On the wagon."

"Since when, for Christ's sake?"

"I don't know. Some time this morning. — Yair. I got to finish this. Don't you guys wait on me." So they went out, putting on their coats, though almost at once two charwomen came in. But the reporter did not heed them. He removed the sheet from the typewriter and laid it on the stack and evened them meticulously, his face peaceful. "Yair," he thought. "It ain't the money. It ain't that.... Yair. And now she will be..."

The women did not pay him any mind either as he went to Hagood's desk and turned on the light above it. He chose the right drawer at once and took out the pad of blank note forms and tore off the top one and put the pad back into the drawer. He did not return to his own desk, neither did he pause at the nearest one because one of the women was busy there.

So he snapped on the light above the next one and sat down and racked the note form into the typewriter and began to fill it in, carefully — the neat convenient flimsy scrap of paper which by a few marks became transposed into an implement sharper than steel and more enduring than stone and by means of which the final and fatal step became anaesthetized out of the realm not only of dread but of intelligence too, into that of delusion and mindless hope like the superscription on a love letter:...

February 16, 1935... February 16, 1936 we... The Ord-Atkinson Aircraft Corp., Blaisedell, Franciana... He did not pause at all, his fingers did not falter; he wrote in the sum exactly as though he were writing two words of a column head: Five Thousand Dollars (\$5000.00)....

Now he did not pause, his fingers poised, thinking swiftly while the charwoman did something in the waste-basket beside the desk in front of him, producing a mute deliberate scratching like a huge rat: "There's one of them is against the law, only if I put in the other one it might look fishy." So he wrote again, striking the keys clean and firm, spelling out the e-i-g-b-t per cent, and flipping the note out.

Now he went to the copy-desk itself, since he did not own a fountain pen, and turning on the light there signed the note on the first signature line, blotted it, and sat looking at it quietly for a moment, thinking, "Yair. In bed now. And now he will... Yair," he said aloud, quietly, "that looks O.K." He turned, speaking to either of the two women: "You all know what time it is?" One of them leaned her mop against a desk and began to draw from the front of her dress an apparently interminable length of shoe-string, though at last the watch — a heavy old-fashioned gold one made for a man to carry — came up.

"Twenty-six minutes to three," she said.

"Thanks," the reporter said. "Don't neither of you smoke cigarettes, do you?"

"Here's one I found on the floor," the second one said. "It don't look like much. It's been walked on." Nevertheless some of the tobacco remained in it, though it burned fast; at each draw the reporter received a sensation precarious and lightly temporary, as though at a breath tobacco fire and all would evacuate the paper tube and stop only when it struck the back of his throat or the end of his lungs; three draws consumed it.

"Thanks," he said. "If you find any more, will you put them on that desk back there where the coat is? Thanks. — Twenty-two to three," he thought. "That don't even leave six hours." — Yair, he thought, then it blew out of his mind, vanished again into the long peaceful slack not hope, not joy: just waiting, thinking how he ought to eat.

Then he thought how the elevator would not be running now, so that should settle that. "Only I could get some cigarettes," he thought.

“Jesus, I ought to eat something.” There was no light now in the corridor, but there would be one in the wash-room.

He returned to his desk, took the folded paper from his coat and went out again; and now, leaning against the carbolized wall he opened the paper upon the same box-headings, the identical from day to day — the bankers the farmers the strikers, the foolish the unlucky and the merely criminal — distinguishable from one day to another not by what they did but by the single brief typeline beneath the paper’s registered name.

He could stand easily so, without apparent need to shift his weight in rotation among the members which bore it; now with mere inertia and not gravity to contend with he had even less of bulk and mass to support than he had carried running up the stairs at eight o’clock; so that he moved only when he said to himself, “It must be after three now.” —

He folded the paper neatly and returned to the corridor, where one glance into the dark city-room showed him that the women were done. “Yair. It’s making towards four,” he thought, wondering if it were actually dawn which he felt, or that anyway the dark globe on which people lived had passed the dead point at which the ill and the weary were supposed to be prone to die and now it was beginning to turn again, soon beginning to spin again out of the last laggard reluctance of darkness — the garblement which was the city: the scabby hop poles which elevated the ragged palm-crests like the monstrous broom-sage out of an old country thought, the spent stage of last night’s clatterfalque Nile barge supine now beneath today’s white wings treading, the hydrant gouts gutter plaited with the trodden tinsel-dung of stars.

“And at Alphonse’s and Renaud’s the waiters that can not only understand Mississippi Valley French but they can even fetch back from the kitchen what you were not so sure yourself you told them to,” he thought, passing among the desks by feel now and rolling the paper into his coat for pillow before stretching out on the floor.

“Yair,” he thought, “in bed now, and he will come in and she will say Did you get it? and he will say What? Get what? Ob, you mean the ship. Yair, we got it. That’s what we went over there for.”

It was not the sun that waked him, nor what would have been the sun save for the usual winter morning’s overcast: he just waked, regardless of the fact that during the past forty-eight hours he had slept but little more than he had eaten, like so many people who, living always on the outside of the mechanical regimentation of hours, seem able at need to coincide with a given moment a sort of unflagging instinctive facility.

But the train would be ordered by mechanical postulation, and there would be no watch or clock in the building yet. Gaunt, worn (he had not even paused to wash his face), he ran down the stairs and along the street itself; still running he turned in this side of the window and the immemorial grape-fruit halves which apparently each morning at the same moment at which the street lamps went out would be set out, age-and time-proved for intactness and imperviousness like the peasant vases exhumed from Greek and Roman ruins, between the paper poinsettias and the easel bearing the names of food printed upon interchangeable metal strips.

In the city-room they called it the Dirty Spoon: one of ten thousand narrow tunnels furnished with a counter, a row of buttock-polished backless stools, a coffee urn and a Greek proprietor resembling a retired wrestler adjacent to ten thousand newspapers and dubbed by ten thousand variations about the land; the same thick-bodied Greek in the same soiled drill jacket might have looked at him across the same glass coffin filled with bowls of cereal and oranges and plates of buns apparently exhumed along with the grape-fruit in the window, only just this moment varnished. Then the reporter was able to see the clock on the rear wall; it was only fifteen past seven. “Well, for Christ’s sake,” he said.

“Coffee?” the Greek said.

“Yair,” the reporter said. “I ought to eat too,” he thought. Looking down into the glass-walled and topped gutter beneath his hands, not with any revulsion now, but with a kind of delicate distasteful abstemiousness like the old women in novels.

And not from impatience, hurry: just as last night he seemed to see his blind furious course circling implacably back to the point where he had lost control of it like a kind of spiritual ground-loop, now he seemed to feel it straighten out at last, already lifting him steadily and undeviatingly onward so that now he need make no effort to move with it; all he had to do now was to remember to carry along with him everything which he was likely to need because this time he was not coming back.

“Gimme one of these,” he said, tapping the glass with one hand while with the other he touched, felt, the folded slip of paper in his watch-pocket. He ate the bun along with his coffee, tasting neither, feeling only the coffee’s warmth; it was now twenty-five past seven. “I can walk,” he thought. The overcast would burn away later. But it still lay overhead when he entered the station where Shumann rose from the bench. “Had some breakfast yet?” the reporter said.

“Yes,” Shumann said. The reporter looked at the other with a kind of bright grave intensity.

“Come on,” he said. “We can get on now.” The lights still burned in the train shed; the skylight was the same colour of the sky outside. “It will be gone soon though,” the reporter said. “Maybe by the time we get there; you will probably fly the ship back in the sun. Just think of that.”

But it was gone before that; it was gone when they ran clear of the city; the car (they had the entire end of it to themselves) ran almost at once into thin sunlight. “I told you you would fly back in the sunshine,” the reporter said. “I guess we had better fix this up now, too.” He took out the note; he watched with that grave bright intensity while Shumann read it and then seemed to muse upon it soberly.

“Five thousand,” Shumann said. “That’s...”

“High?” the reporter said. “Yair. I didn’t want there to be any hitch until we got into the air with it, got back to the airport with it. To look like a price that even Marchand wouldn’t dare refuse to...” He watched Shumann, bright, quiet, grave.

“Yair,” Shumann said. “I see.” He reached into his coat. Then perhaps it was the fountain pen, though the reporter did not move yet and the brightness and intensity and gravity had not altered as he watched the deliberate, unhurried, slightly awkward movement of the pen across the blank signature line beneath the one where he had signed, watching the letters emerge: Roger Shumann.

But he did not move even then; it was not until the pen without stopping dropped down to the third line and was writing again that he leaned and stopped it with his hand, looking at the half-finished third name: Dr. Carl S —

“Wait,” he said. “What’s that?”

“It’s my father’s name.”

“Would he let you sign it on this?”

“He’d have to, after it was done. Yes. He would help you out on it.”

“Help me out on it?”

“I wouldn’t be worth even five hundred unless I managed to finish that race first.” A train-man passed, swinging from seat-back to seat-back, pausing above them for a moment.

“Blaisedell,” he said. “Blaisedell.”

“Wait,” the reporter said. “Maybe I didn’t understand. I ain’t a flyer; all I know is that hour’s dual Matt gave me that time. I thought maybe what Matt meant was he didn’t want to risk having the under-carriage busted or the propeller bent or maybe a wing-tip....” He looked at Shumann, bright, grave, his hand still holding Shumann’s wrist.

“I guess I can land it all right,” Shumann said. But the reporter did not move, looking at Shumann.

“Then it will be all right? It’ll just be landing it, like what Matt said about the time he landed it?”

“I guess so,” Shumann said. The train began to slow; the oleander bushes, the moss-hung live-oaks in which light threads of mist-snared gossamer glinted in the sun; the vine-shrouded station flowed up, slowing; it would not quite pass.

“Because, Jesus, it’s just the money prize; it’s just one afternoon. And Matt will help you build your ship back and you will be all set with it for the next meet.” They looked at one another.

“I guess I can get it back down,” Shumann said.

“Yair. But listen—”

“I can land it,” Shumann said; “All right,” the reporter said. He released the other’s wrist; the pen moved again, completing the signature steadily: Dr. Carl Shumann, by Roger Shumann. The reporter took the note, rising.

“All right,” he said. “Let’s go.” They walked again; it was about a mile; presently the road ran beside the field beyond which they could see the buildings — the detached office, the shop, the hangar with a broad legend above the open doors: ORD-ATKINSON AIRCRAFT CORPORATION — all of pale brick, as neat as and apparently contemporaneous with Ord’s new house. Sitting on the ground a little back from the road they watched two mechanics wheel out the red-and-white monoplane with which Ord had set his record and start it and warm it, and then they saw Ord himself come out of the office, get into the racer, taxi to the end of the field and turn and take off straight over their heads, already travelling a hundred feet ahead of his own sound.

“It’s forty miles over to Feinman from here,” the reporter said. “He flies it in ten minutes. Come on. You let me do the talking. Jesus,” he cried,

in a kind of light amazed exultation, "I never told a lie in my life that anybody believed; maybe this is what I have been needing all the time!" When they reached the hangar the doors were now closed to a crack just large enough for a man to enter.

Shumann entered, already looking about, until he found the aeroplane — a low-wing monoplane with a big nose and a tubular fuselage ending in a curiously flattened tail-group which gave it the appearance of having been drawn lightly and steadily through a huge lightly-closed gloved fist. "There it is," the reporter said.

"Yair," Shumann said. "I see.... Yes," he thought, looking quietly at the queer empennage, the blunt short cylindrical body; "I guess Ord wasn't so surprised, at that." Then he heard the reporter speaking to someone and he turned and saw a squat man with a shrewd Cajun face above a scrupulously clean coverall.

"This is Mr. Shumann," the reporter said, saying in a tone of bright amazement: "You mean Matt never told you? We have bought that ship." Shumann did not wait. For a moment he watched Marchand, the note in both hands, looking at it with that baffled immobility behind which the mind flicks and darts like a terrier inside a fence.

"Yair," Shumann thought, without grimness, "he can't pass five thousand dollars any more than I could.

Not without warning, anyway." He went on to the aeroplane, though once or twice he looked back and saw Marchand and the reporter, the Cajun still emanating that stubborn and slowly crystallizing bewilderment while the reporter talked, flapped, before him with an illusion of being held together only by the clothes he wore; once he even heard the reporter:

"Sure, you could telephone to Feinman and catch him.

But for God's sake don't let anybody overhear how Matt stuck us for five thousand bucks for the damn crate. He promised he wouldn't tell." But there was no telephoning done apparently, because almost at once

(or so it seemed to Shumann) the reporter and Marchand were beside him, the reporter quiet now, watching him with that bright attention.

“Let’s get it out where we can look at it,” Shumann said. They rolled it out on to the apron, where it squatted again, seemed to. It had none of the wasp-waisted trimness of the ones at the airport. It was blunt, a little thick-bodied, almost sluggish looking; its lightness when moved by hand seemed curiously paradoxical. For a good minute the reporter and Marchand watched Shumann stand looking at it with thoughtful gravity. “All right,” he said at last.

“Let’s wind her up.” Now the reporter spoke, leaning lightly and slightly just off balance like a ragged penstaff dropped point first into the composition apron:

“Listen.

You said last night maybe it was the distribution of the weight; you said how maybe if we could shift the weight somehow while it was in the air that maybe you could find...” Later (almost as soon as Shumann was out of sight the reporter and Marchand were in Marchand’s car on the road to the village, where the reporter hired a cab, scrambling into it even before he had asked the price and yelling out of his gaunt and glare-fixed face, “Hell, no! Not New Valois! Feinmann Airport!”) he lived and relived the blind timeless period during which he lay on his stomach in the barrel, clutching the two body members, with nothing to see but Shumann’s feet on the rudder pedals and the movement of the aileron balance-rod and nothing to feel but terrific motion — not speed and not progress — just blind, furious motion like a sealed force trying to explode the monococque barrel in which he lay from the waist down on his stomach, leaving him clinging to the body members in space.

He was still thinking, “Jesus, maybe we are going to die and all it is is a taste like sour hot salt in your mouth,” even while looking out the car window at the speeding march and swamp through which they skirted the city, thinking with a fierce and triumphant conviction of immortality, “We flew it! We flew it!”

Now the airport; the forty miles accomplished before he knew it, what with his skull still cloudy with the light tag ends of velocity and speed like the drifting feathers from a shot bird so that he had never become conscious of the sheer inertia of dimension, space, distance, through which he had had to travel.

He was thrusting the five-dollar bill at the driver before the car began to turn into the plaza and he was out of it before it had stopped, running towards the hangar, probably not even aware that the first race was in progress.

Wild-faced, gaunt and sunken-eyed from lack of sleep and from strain, his clothes ballooning about him, he ran into the hangar and on to where Jiggs stood at the work-bench with a new bottle of polish and a new tin of paste open before him, shining the boots, working now with tedious and intent concern at the scar on the instep of the right one. "Did he—" the reporter cried.

"Yair, he landed it, all right," Jiggs said. "He used all the field, though. Jesus, I thought for a while he was going to run out of airport before he even cut the gun; when he stopped you couldn't have dropped a match between the prop and the sea wall. They are all upstairs now, holding the caucus."

"It'll qualify itself!" the reporter cried. "I told him that. I may not know aeroplanes but I know sewage Board Jews!"

"Yair," Jiggs said. "Anyway, he won't have to make but two landings with it. And he's already made one of them."

"Two?" the reporter cried; now he glared at Jiggs with more than exultation: with ecstasy. "He's already made two! We made one before he left Ord's!"

"We?" Jiggs said. With the boot and the rag poised he blinked painfully at the reporter with the one good hot bright eye. "We?"

“Yair; him and me! He said how it was the weight — that maybe if we could just shift the weight somehow while it was in the air — and he said, ‘Are you afraid?’ and I said, ‘Hell, yes. But not if you ain’t, because Matt gave me an hour once, or maybe if I had had more than an hour I wouldn’t have been.’ So Marchand helped us take the seat out and we rigged another one so there would be room under it for me and I slid back into the fuselage because it ain’t got any cross-bracing, it’s mon — mon—”

“Monococque,” Jiggs said. “Jesus Christ, do you mean—”

“Yair. And him and Marchand rigged the seat again and he showed me where to hold on and I could just see his heels and that was all; I couldn’t tell; yair, after a while I knew we were flying, but I couldn’t tell forward nor backward or anything because, Jesus, I just had one hour with Matt and then he cut the gun and then I could hear him — Jesus, we might have been standing on the ground — he said quiet, ‘Now slide back. Easy. But hold tight.’”

And then I was hanging just by my hands; I wasn’t even touching the floor of it at all. Jesus, I was thinking, ‘Well, here it is then; it will be tough about that race this afternoon’; I didn’t even know we were on the ground again until I found out it was him and Marchand lifting the seat out and Marchand saying, ‘Goddamn. Goddamn. Goddamn,’ and him looking at me and the bastard crate standing there quiet as one of them photographs on Grandlieu Street, and then he says, ‘Would you go up again?’ and I said, ‘Yes. You want to go now?’ and he said, ‘Let’s get her on over to the field and qualify.’”

“Sweet Jesus Christ,” Jiggs said.

“Yair,” the reporter cried. “It was just weight distribution: him and Marchand rigged up a truck inner tube full of sand on a pulley so he can — And put the seat back and even if they see the end of the cable they wouldn’t — Because the only ship in it that can beat him is Ord’s and the purse ain’t but two thousand and Ord don’t need it, he is only in it

so New Valois folks can see him fly the Ninety-Two once, and he ain't going to beat that fifteen-thousand-dollar ship to death just to—"

"Here; here," Jiggs said. "You're going to blow all to pieces in a minute. Smoke a cigarette; ain't you got some?" The reporter fumbled the cigarettes out at last, though it was Jiggs who took two from the pack and struck the match while the reporter stooped to it, trembling. The dazed, spent, wild look was still on his face, but he was quieter now.

"So they were all out to meet him, were they?"

"Jesus, did they," Jiggs said. "And Ord out in front; he recognized the ship as soon as it come in sight; Jesus, I bet he recognized it before Roger even recognized the airport, and by the time he landed you would have thought he was Lindbergh.

And him sitting there in the cockpit and looking at them and Ord hollering at him and then they all come back up the apron like Roger was a kidnapper or something and went into the administration building and a minute later the microphone begun to holler for the inspector, what's his—"

"Sales," the reporter said. "It's licensed; they can't stop him."

"Sales can ground it, though," Jiggs said.

"Yair." The reporter was already turning, moving. "But Sales ain't nothing but a Federal officer; Feinman is a Jew and on the sewage board."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"What?" the reporter cried, glaring, gaunt, apparently having already rushed on and out of his precarious body so that only the shell glared back at Jiggs. "What? What's he holding this meet for? What did he — do you think maybe he built this airport just for a smooth place for aeroplanes to land on?"

He went on, not running yet but fast. As he hurried up the apron the aeroplanes overtook and passed him, banked around the field pylon and faded on; he did not even look at them. Then suddenly he saw her, leading the little boy by the hand, emerge from the crowd about the gate to intercept him, wearing now a clean linen dress under the trench-coat, and a hat, the brown hat of the first evening.

He stopped. His hand went into his pocket and into his face came the expression, bright, quiet, almost smiling, as she walked fast up to him, staring at him with pale and urgent intensity.

“What is it?” she said. “What is this you have got him into?” He looked down at her with that expression, not yearning nor despair, but profound, tragic and serene like in the eyes of bird dogs.

“It’s all right,” he said. “My signature is on the note, too. It will hold. I am going in right now to testify; that’s all that’s holding them; that’s all that Ord has to—” He drew out the nickel and gave it to the boy.

“What?” she said. “Note? Note? The ship, you idiot!”

“Oh.” He smiled down at her. “The ship. We flew it, tested it over there. We made a field hop before we—”

“We?”

“Yes. I went with him. I laid on the floor in the tail, so we could find out where the weight ought to be to pass the burble. That’s all it was. We have a sandbag rigged now on a cable so he can let it slide back. It’s all right.”

“All right?” she said. “Good God, what can you know about it? Did he say it was all right?”

“Yes. He said last night he could land it. I knew he could. And now he won’t need to make but one more....” She stared at him, the eyes pale, cold and urgent, at the face worn, dreamy, and peaceful in the soft bright sun; again the aeroplanes came in and snored on and away.

Then he was interrupted; it was the amplifier; all the amplifiers up and down the apron began to call his name, telling the stands, the field, the land and lake and air, that he was wanted in the superintendent's office at once.

"There it is," he said. "Yair. I knew that the note would be the only thing that Ord could... That was why I signed it, too. And don't you worry; all I need to do is walk in and say, 'Yes, that's my signature.' And don't you worry. He can fly it. He can fly anything. I used to think that Matt Ord was the best pilot alive, but now I"

The amplifier began to repeat itself. It faced him; it seemed to stare straight at him while it roared his name deliberately as though he had to be summoned not out of the living world of population but evoked, peremptory and repetitive, out of the air itself.

The one in the rotunda was just beginning again when he entered; the sound followed him through the door and across the ante-room, though beyond that it did not reach — not into the board room of yesterday where now Ord and Shumann alone occupied the hard chairs.

They had been ushered in a half-hour ago and sat down facing the men behind the table; Shumann saw Feinman for the first time, sitting not in the centre but at one end of the table where the announcer had sat yesterday, his suit, double-breasted still, tan instead of grey beneath the bright splash of the carnation.

He alone wore his hat; it appeared to be the smallest object about him; from beneath it his dark smooth face began at once to droop into folds of flesh which, constricted for the instant by his collar, swelled and rolled again beneath the tight creases of his coat. On the table one hand bearing a gold-clamped ruby held a burning cigar.

He did not even glance at Shumann and Ord; he was looking at Sales, the inspector... a square bald man with a blunt face which ordinarily would be quite pleasant, though not now... who was saying:

“Because I can ground it. I can forbid it to fly.”

“You mean, you can forbid anybody to fly it, don’t you?” Feinman said.
“Put it that way if you want to,” Sales said.

“Let’s say, put it that way for the record,” another voice said — a young man, sleek, in horn-rim glasses, sitting just back of Feinman. He was Feinman’s secretary; he spoke now with a kind of silken insolence, like the pampered, intelligent, hate-ridden eunuch mountebank of an eastern despot: “Colonel Feinman is, even before a public servant, a lawyer.”

“Yes; lawyer,” Feinman said. “Maybe country lawyer to Washington. Let me get this straight. You’re a government agent. All right. We have had our crops regimented and our fisheries regimented and even our money in the bank regimented.

All right. I still don’t see how they did it, but they did, and so we are used to that. If he was trying to make his living out of the ground and Washington come in and regimented him, all right. We might not understand it any more than he did, but we would say all right.

And if he was trying to make his living out of the river and the government come in and regimented him, we would say all right, too. But do you mean to tell me that Washington can come in and regiment a man that’s trying to make his living out of the air? Is there a crop reduction in the air, too?”

They — the others about the table (three of them were reporters) — laughed. They laughed with a kind of sudden and loud relief, as though they had been waiting all the time to find out just how they were supposed to listen, and now they knew.

Only Sales and Shumann and Ord did not laugh; then they noticed that the secretary was not laughing either and that he was already speaking, seemed to slide his silken voice into the laughter and stop it as abruptly as a cocaine needle in a nerve:

“Yes. Colonel Feinman is lawyer enough (perhaps Mr. Sales will add, country enough) to ask even a government official to show cause.

As the colonel understands it, this aeroplane bears a licence which Mr. Sales approved himself. Is that true, Mr. Sales?” For a moment Sales did not answer. He just looked at the secretary grimly.

“Because I don’t believe it is safe to fly,” he said. “That’s the cause.”

“Ah,” the secretary said. “For a moment I almost expected Mr. Sales to tell us that it would not fly; that it had perhaps walked over here from Blaisedell. Then all we would need to say would be ‘Good; we will not make it fly; we will just let it walk around the pylons during the race this afternoon — — —’”

Now they did laugh, the three reporters scribbling furiously. But it was not for the secretary: it was for Feinman. The secretary seemed to know this; while he waited for it to subside his unsmiling, insolent contempt touched them all face by face.

Then he spoke to Sales again. “You admit that it is licensed, that you approved it yourself — meaning, I take it, that it is registered at Washington as being fit and capable of discharging the function of an aeroplane, which is to fly.

Yet you later state that you will not permit it to fly because it is not capable of discharging the function for which you yourself admit having approved it — in simple language for us lawyers, that it cannot fly. Yet Mr. Ord has just told us that he flew it in your presence.

And Mr.” — he glanced down, the pause was less than pause—
“Shumann states that he flew it once at Blaisedell before witnesses, and we know that he flew it here because we saw him. We all know that Mr. Ord is one of the best (we New Valoisians believe the best) pilots in the world, but don’t you think it barely possible, barely, I say, that the man who has flown it twice where Mr. Ord has flown it but

once... Wouldn't this almost lead one to think that Mr. Ord has some other motive for not wanting this aeroplane to compete in this race—"

"Yair," Feinman said. He turned to look at Ord. "What's the matter? Ain't this airport good enough for your ships? Or ain't this race important enough for you? Or do you just think he might beat you? Ain't you going to use the aeroplane you broke the record in? Then what are you afraid of?" Ord glared from face to face about the table, then at Feinman again.

"Why do you want this ship in there this afternoon? What is it? I'd lend him the money, if that's all it is."

"Why?" Feinman said. "Ain't we promised these folks out there" — he made a jerking sweep with the cigar— "a series of races? Ain't they paying their money in here to see them? And ain't it the more aeroplanes they will have to look at the better they will think they got for the money?"

And why should he want to borrow money from you when he can maybe earn it at his job where he won't have to pay it back or even the interest? Now, let's settle this business." He turned to Sales. "The ship is licensed, ain't it?" After a moment Sales said:

"Yes." Feinman turned to Ord.

"And it will fly, won't it?" Ord looked at him for a long moment too.

"Yes," he said. Now Feinman turned to Shumann.

"Is it dangerous to fly?" he said.

"They all are," Shumann said.

"Well, are you afraid to fly it?" Shumann looked at him. "Do you expect it to fall with you this afternoon?"

"If I did I wouldn't take it up," Shumann said. Suddenly Ord rose; he was looking at Sales.

“Mac,” he said, “this ain’t getting anywhere. I will ground the ship myself.” He turned to Shumann. “Listen, Roger—”
“On what grounds, Mr. Ord?” the secretary said.

“Because it belongs to me. Is that grounds enough for you?”
“When an authorized agent of your corporation has accepted a legal monetary equivalent for it and surrendered the machine?”

“But they are not good for the note. I know that. I was a damn stick-straddler myself until I got a break. Why, damn it, one of the names on it is admitted to not be signed by the owner of it. And listen: yair; I don’t even know whether Shumann did the actual signing; whoever signed it signed it before I saw it or even before Marchand saw it. See?”
He glared at the secretary, who looked at him in turn with his veiled, contemptuous glance.

“I see,” the secretary said pleasantly. “I was waiting for you to bring that up. You seem to have forgotten that the note has a third signer.”
Ord stared at him for a minute.
“But he ain’t good for it either,” he said.

“Possibly not, alone. But Mr. Shumann tells us that his father is and that his father will honour this signature. So by your own token, the question seems to resolve to whether or not Mr. Shumann did or did not sign his and his father’s name to the note.

And we seem to have a witness to that. It is not exactly legal, I grant you. But this other signer is known to some of us here; you know him yourself, you tell us, to be a person of unassailable veracity.

We will have him in.” Then it was that the amplifiers began to call the reporter’s name; he entered; he came forward while they watched him. The secretary extended the note towards him. (“Jesus,” the reporter thought, “they must have sent a ship over for Marchand.”)

“Will you examine this?” the secretary said.
“I know it,” the reporter said.

“Will you state whether or not you and Mr. Shumann signed it in each other’s presence and in good faith?” The reporter looked about, at the faces behind the table, at Shumann sitting with his head bent a little and at Ord half-risen, glaring at him. After a moment Shumann turned his head and looked quietly at him.

“Yes,” the reporter said. “We signed it.”

“There you are,” Feinman said. He rose. “That’s all. Shumann has possession; if Ord wants any more to be stubborn about it we will just let him run to town and see if he can get back with a writ of replevin before time for the race.”

“But he can’t enter it!” Ord said. “It ain’t qualified.” Feinman paused long enough to look at Ord for a second with impersonal inscrutability.

“Speaking for the citizens of Franciana who donated the ground and for the citizens of New Valois that built the airport the race is going to be run on, I will waive qualifications.”

“You can’t waive the A.A.A.,” Ord said. “You can’t make it official if he wins the whole damn meet.”

“Then he will not need to rush back to town to pawn a silver cup,” Feinman said. He went out; the others rose from the table and followed. After a moment Ord turned quietly to Shumann.

“Come on,” he said. “We’d better check her over.”

The reporter did not see them again. He followed them through the rotunda, through the amplifier’s voice and through the throng at the gates, or so he thought because his police card had passed him before he remembered that they would have had to go around to reach the apron.

But he could see the aeroplane with a crowd standing around it. The woman had forgotten too that Shumann and Ord would have to go

around and through the hangar; she emerged again from the crowd beneath the bandstand. "So they did it," she said. "They let him."

"Yes. It was all right. Like I told you."

"They did it," she said, staring at him, yet speaking as though in amazed soliloquy. "Yes. You fixed it."

"Yes. I knew that's all it would be. I wasn't worried. And don't you..." She didn't move for a moment; there was nothing of distraction especially; he just seemed to hang substance-less in the long peaceful backwash of waiting, saying quietly out of the dreamy smiling, "Yair.

Ord talking about how he would be disqualified for the cup, the prize, like that would stop him, like that was what.. not even aware that it was only the shell of her speaking quietly back to him, asking him if he would mind the boy.

"Since you seem to be caught up for the time."

"Yair," he said. "Of course." Then she was gone, the white dress and the trench-coat lost in the crowd — the ones with ribbon badges and the ones in dungarees — which streamed suddenly down the apron towards the dark horse, the sensation.

As he stood so, holding the little boy by one damp sticky hand, the Frenchman Despleins passed again down the runway which paralleled the stands, on one wheel; the reporter watched him take off and half roll, climbing upside down.

Now he heard the voice; he had not heard it since it called his own name, despite the fact that it had never ceased, perhaps because of the fact:

"... oh oh oh, mister, don't, don't! Oh, mister! Please get up high enough so your parachute can try to open! Now, now; now, now.... Oh, Mac! Oh, Mr. Sales! Make him stop!" The reporter looked down at the boy.

"I bet you a dime you haven't spent that nickel," he said.

"Naw," the boy said. "I ain't had a chance to. She wouldn't let me."

"Well, my goodness!" the reporter said. "I owe you twenty cents then, don't I? Come—" He paused, turning; it was the photographer, the man whom he had called Jug, laden again with the enigmatic and faintly macabre utensils of his calling so that he resembled vaguely a trained dog belonging to a country doctor.

"Where in hell you been?" the photographer said. "Hagood told me to find you at ten o'clock."

"Here I am," the reporter said. "We're just going inside to spend twenty cents. Want to come?" Now the Frenchman came up the runway about twenty feet high and on his back, his head and face beneath the cockpit-rim motionless and alert like that of a roach or a rat immobile behind a crack in a wainscot, his neat short beard unstirred by any wind as though cast in one piece of bronze.

"Yair," the photographer said; perhaps it was the bilious aspect of an inverted world seen through a hooded lens or emerging in grimacing and attitudinal miniature from stinking trays in a celibate and stygian cell lighted by a red lamp: "and have that guy come down on his whiskers and me not here to get it?"

"All right," the reporter said. "Stay and get it." He turned to go on. —
"Yair; but Hagood told me—" the photographer said.

The reporter turned back.

"All right," he said. "But hurry up."

"Hurry up what?"

"Snap me. You can show it to Hagood when you go in." He and the boy went on; he did not walk back into the voice, he had never walked out of it:

“...an inverted spin, folks; he’s going into it still upside down — oh oh oh oh — —” The reporter stooped suddenly and lifted the boy to his shoulder.

“We can make better time,” he said. “We will want to get back in a few minutes.” They passed through the gate, among the gaped and upturned faces which choked the gangway. “That’s it,” he thought quietly, with that faint quiet grimace almost like smiling; “they ain’t human.

It ain’t adultery; you can’t any more imagine two of them making love than you can two of them aeroplanes back in the corner of the hangar, coupled.” With one hand he supported the boy on his shoulder, feeling through the harsh khaki the young brief living flesh. “Yair; cut him and it’s cylinder oil; dissect him and it ain’t bones: it’s little rocker arms and connecting rods....”

The restaurant was crowded; they did not wait to eat the ice-cream there on a plate; with one cone in his hand and one in the boy’s and the two chocolate bars in his pocket they were working back through the crowded gangway when the bomb went off and then the voice: “... fourth event unlimited free-for-all, Vaughn Trophy race, prize two thousand dollars.

You will not only have a chance to see Matt Ord in his famous Ninety-Two Ord-Atkinson Special in which he set a new land plane speed record, but as a surprise entry through the courtesy of the American Aeronautical Association and the Feinman Airport Commission, Roger Shumann, who yesterday nosed over in a forced landing, in a special rebuilt job that Matt Ord rebuilt himself.

Two horses from the same stable, folks, and two pilots both of whom are so good that it is a pleasure to give the citizens of New Valois and Franciana the chance to see them pitted against each other....” He and the boy watched the take-off, then they went on.

Presently he found her — the brown hat and the coat — and he came up and stood a little behind her, steadying the boy on his shoulder and carrying the second melting cone in his other hand as the four aeroplanes came in on the first lap — the red-and-white monoplane in front and two more side by side and some distance back, so that at first he did not even see Shumann.

Then he saw him, higher than the others and well outside, though the voice now was not from the amplifier but from a mechanic:

“Jesus, look at Shumann! It must be fast: he’s flying twice as far as the rest of them — or maybe Ord ain’t trying.

— Why in hell don’t he bring it on in?” Then the voice was drowned in the roar, the snarl, as the aeroplanes turned the field pylon and, followed by the turning heads along the apron as if the faces were geared to the sound, diminished singly out and over the lake again, Shumann still quite wide, making a turn that was almost a skid yet holding his position.

They converged towards the second pylon, the lake one, in slightly irregular order and tiny now with distance and with Shumann still cautiously high and outside, they wafted lightly upwards and around the pylon.

Now the reporter could hear the mechanic again: “He’s coming in now, watch him. Jesus, he’s second — he’s diving in — Jesus, he’s going to be right behind Ord on this pylon; maybe he was just feeling it out—” The noise was faint now and disseminated; the drowsy afternoon was domed with it and the four machines seemed to hover like dragon-flies silently in vacuum, in various distance-softened shades of pastel against the ineffable blue, with now a quality trivial, random, almost like notes of music — a harp, say — as the sun glinted and lost them.

The reporter leaned down to the woman who was not yet aware of his presence, crying:

“Watch him! Oh, can he fly! Can he fly!

And Ord ain't going to beat the Ninety-Two to — Second money Thursday, and if Ord ain't going to — Oh, watch him! Watch him!" She turned: the jaw, pale eyes, the voice which he did not even listen to: "Yes. The money will be fine." Then he even stopped looking at her, staring down the runway as the four aeroplanes, now in two distinct pairs, came in towards the field, increasing fast. The mechanic was talking again:

"He's in! Jesus, he's going to try Ord here! And look at Ord giving him room—" The two in front began to bank at the same time, side by side, the droning roar drawing down and in as though sucked down out of the sky by them in place of being produced by them.

The reporter's mouth was still open; he knew that by the needling of nerves in his sore jaw. Later he was to remember seeing the ice-cream cone crush in his fist and begin to ooze between his fingers as he let the little boy slide to the ground and took his hand.

Not now though; now the two aeroplanes, side by side, and Shumann outside and above, banked into the pylon as though bolted together, when the reporter suddenly saw something like a light scattering of burnt paper or feathers floating in the air above the pylon-tip He was watching this, his mouth still open, when a voice somewhere said, "Ahhhhhhh!" and he saw Shumann now shooting almost straight upward and then a whole waste-basketful of the light trash blew out of the aeroplane.

They said later about the apron that he used the last of his control before the fuselage broke to zoom out of the path of the two aeroplanes behind while he looked down at the close-peopled land and the empty lake, and made a choice before the tail-group came completely free.

But most of them were busy saying how his wife took it, how she did not scream or faint (she was standing quite near the microphone, near enough for it to have caught the scream) but instead just stood there and watched the fuselage break in two and said, "Oh, damn you, Roger!

Oh, damn you! damn you!” and turning, snatched the little boy’s hand and ran towards the sea-wall, the little boy dangling vainly on his short legs between her and the reporter who, holding the little boy’s other hand, ran at his loose lightly-clattering gallop like a scarecrow in a gale, after the bright plain shape of love.

Perhaps it was the added weight because she turned, still running, and gave him a single pale, cold, terrible look, crying:

“God damn you to hell! Get away from me!”

Love-song of J. A. Prufrock

ON THE SHELL beach between the boulevard and the seaplane slip one of the electric company’s trucks stood while its crew set up a searchlight at the-water’s edge. When the photographer called Jug saw the reporter; he was standing beside the empty truck, in the backwash which it created between the faces beyond the police line, and the men — police and newspaper men and airport officials and the others, the ones without authority or object who manage to pass police lines at all scenes of public violence — gathered along the beach. The photographer approached at a flagging trot, the camera banging against his flank. “Christ Almighty,” he said. “I got that, all right. Only Jesus, I near vomited into the box while I was changing plates.” Beyond the crowd at the water-edge and just beyond the outer markers of the seaplane basin a police-launch was scattering the fleet of small boats which, like most of the people on the beach itself, had appeared as though by magic from nowhere like crows, to make room for the dredge-boat to anchor over the spot where the aeroplane was supposed to have sunk. The seaplane slip, dredged out, was protected from the sluggish encroachment of the lake’s muddy bottom by a sunken mole composed of refuse from the city itself — shards of condemned paving and masses of fallen walls and even discarded automobile bodies — any and all the refuse of man’s twentieth century clotting into communities large enough to pay a mayor’s salary —

dumped into the lake. Either directly above or just outside of this mass the aeroplane was believed, from the accounts of three oystermen in a dory who were about two hundred yards away, to have struck the water. The three versions varied as to the exact spot, despite the fact that both wings had reappeared on the surface almost immediately and been towed ashore, but then one of the oystermen (from the field, the apron, Shumann had been seen struggling to open the cockpit hatch as though to jump, as though with the intention of trying to open his parachute despite his lack of height) — one of the oystermen claimed that the body had fallen off the machine, having either extricated itself or been flung out. But the three agreed that the body and the machine were both either upon or beside the mole from whose vicinity the police-launch was now harrying the small boats.

It was after sunset. Upon the mirror-smooth water even the little foul skiffs — the weathered and stinking dories and dinghies of oyster-and shrimp-men — had a depthless and fairy-light quality as they scattered like butterflies or moths before a mechanical reaper, just ahead of the trim, low, martial-coloured police-launch, on to at which the moment the photographer saw being transferred from one of the skiffs two people whom he recognized as being the dead pilot's wife and child. Among them the dredge looked like something antediluvian crawled for the first time into light, roused but not alarmed by the object or creature out of the world of light and air which had plunged without warning into the watery fastness where it had been asleep. "Jesus," the photographer said. "Why wasn't I standing right here: Hagood would have had to raise me then. Jesus God," he said in a hoarse tone of hushed and unbelieving amazement, "how's it now for being a poor bastard that never even learned to roller-skate?" The reporter looked at him, for the first time. The reporter's face was perfectly calm; he looked down at the photographer, turning carefully as though he were made of glass and knew it, blinking a little, and spoke in a peaceful dreamy voice such as might be heard where a child is sick — not sick for a day or even two days, but for so long that even wasting anxiety has become mere surface habit:

"She told me to go away. I mean, to go clean away, like to another town."

"She did?" the photographer said. "To what town?"

“You don’t understand,” the reporter said, in that peaceful baffled voice. “Let me explain to you.”

“Yair; sure,” the photographer said. “I still feel like vomiting too. But I got to get on in with these plates. And I bet you ain’t even phoned in. Have you?”

“What?” the reporter said. “Yes. I phoned in. But listen. She didn’t understand. She told me—”

“Come on, now,” the other said. “You will have to call in with the build-up on it. Jesus, I tell you I feel bad too. Here, smoke a cigarette. Yair. I could vomit too. But what the hell? He ain’t our brother. Come on, now.” He took the cigarettes from the reporter’s coat and took two from the pack and struck a match. The reporter roused somewhat; he took the burning match himself and held it to the two cigarettes. But then at once the photographer seemed to watch him sink back into that state of peaceful physical anæsthesia as though the reporter actually were sinking slowly away from him into clear and limpid water out of which the calm, slightly distorted face looked and the eyes blinked at the photographer with that myopic earnestness while the voice repeated patiently:

“But you don’t understand. Let me explain it to — —”

“Yair; sure,” the other said. “You can explain it to Hagood while we are getting a drink.” The reporter moved obediently. But before they had gone very far the photographer realized that they had reassumed their customary mutual physical complementing when working together: the reporter striding on in front and the photographer trotting to keep up. “That’s the good thing about being him,” the photographer thought. “He don’t have to move very far to go nuts in the first place and so he don’t have so far to come back.”

“Yair,” the reporter said. “Let’s move. We got to eat, and the rest of them have got to read. And if they ever abolish fornication and blood, where in hell will we all be? — Yair.

You go on in with what you got; if they get it up right away it will be too dark to take anything. I’ll stay out here and cover it. You can tell Hagood.”

“Yair; sure,” the photographer said, trotting, the camera bouncing against his flank. “We’ll have a shot and we’ll feel better. For Christ’s sake, we never made him go up in it.” Before they reached the rotunda

the sunset had faded; even while they walked up the apron the boundary lights came on, and now the flat sword-like sweep of the beacon swung in across the lake and vanished for an instant in a long flick! as the turning eye faded them full, and then reappeared again as it swung now over the land to complete its arc. The field, the apron, was empty, but the rotunda was full of people, and with a cavernous murmuring sound which seemed to linger not about the mouths which uttered it but to float somewhere about the high serene shadowy dome overhead. As they entered a newsboy screamed at them, flapping the paper, the headline: PILOT KILLED. Shumann Crashes Into Lake. SECOND FATALITY OF AIR-MEET as it too flicked away. The bar was crowded too, warm with lights and with human bodies. The photographer led the way now, shouldering into the rail, making room for the reporter beside him. "Rye, huh?" he said, then to the bartender, loudly: "Two ryes."

"Yair; rye," the reporter said. Then he thought quietly, "I can't. I cannot." He felt no revulsion from his insides; it was as though his throat and the organs of swallowing had experienced some irrevocable alteration of purpose from which he would suffer no inconvenience whatever, but which would for ever more mark the exchange of an old psychic as well as physical state for a new one, like the surrendering of a maidenhead. He felt profoundly and peacefully empty inside, as though he had vomited and very emptiness had supplied into his mouth or somewhere about his palate like a lubricant a faint thin taste of salt which was really pleasant: the taste not of despair but of Nothing. "I'll go and call in now," he said.

"Wait," the photographer said. "Here comes your drink."

"Hold it for me," the reporter said. "It won't take but a minute." There was a booth in the corner, the same from which he had called Hagood yesterday. As he dropped the coin in he closed the door behind him. The automatic dome light came on; he opened the door until the light went off again. He spoke, not loudly, his voice murmuring back from the close walls as he recapitulated at need with succinct and patient care as though reading into the telephone in a foreign tongue: "... yes, f-u-s-e-l-a-g-e. The body of the aeroplane, broke off at the tail.... No, he couldn't have landed it. The pilots here said he used up what control he

had left getting out of the way of the others and to head towards the lake instead of the grandst —

No, they say not. He wasn't high enough for the chute to have opened even if he had got out of the ship... yair, dredge-boat was just getting into position when I... they say probably right against the mole; it may have struck the rocks and slid down.... Yair, if he should be close enough to all that muck the dredge-boat can't... yair, probably a diver to-morrow, unless sometime during the night. And by that time the crabs and gars will have... yair, I'll stay out here and flash you at midnight."

When he came out of the booth, back into the light, he began to blink again as if he had a little sand in his eyes, trying to recall exactly what eye-moisture tasted like, wondering if perhaps the thin moist salt in his mouth might not somehow have got misplaced from where it belonged. The photographer still held his place at the bar and the drink was waiting, though this time he only looked down at the photographer, blinking, almost smiling. "You go on and drink it," he said. "I forgot I went on the wagon yesterday." When they went out to the cab, it was dark; the photographer, ducking, the camera jouncing on its strap, scuttled into the cab, turning a face likewise amazed and spent.

"It's cold out here," he said. "Jesus, I'm going to lock the damn door and turn on both them red lamps and fill me a good big tray to smell and I'm going to just sit there and get warm. I'll tell Hagood you are on the job." The face vanished, the cab went on, curving away towards the boulevard where beyond and apparently just behind the ranked palms which lined it the glare of the city was visible even from here upon the overcast. People were still moiling back and forth across the plaza and in and out of the rotunda, and the nightly overcast had already moved in from the lake; against it the measured and regular sword-sweep of the beacon was quite distinct, and there was some wind in it too; a long breath of it at the moment came down over the building and across the plaza and the palms along the boulevard began to clash and hiss with a dry wild sound. The reporter began to inhale the dark chill wind; it seemed to him that he could taste the lake, water, and he began to pant, drawing the air in by lungful and expelling it and snatching another lungful of it as if he were locked inside a burning room and

were hunting handful by handful through a mass of cotton batting for the door key. Ducking his head he hurried past the lighted entrance and the myriad eyes; his face for the time had frozen, like a piece of uncoiled machinery freezes, into a twisted grimace which filled his sore jaw with what felt like icy needles, so that Ord had to call him twice before he turned and saw the other getting out of his roadster, still in the suède jacket and the hind-part-before cap in which he flew.

"I was looking for you," Ord said, taking something from his pocket — the narrow strip of paper folded again as it had lain in the reporter's fob pocket this morning before he gave it to Marchand. "Wait; don't tear it," Ord said. "Hold it a minute." The reporter held it while Ord struck the match. "Go on," Ord said. "Look at it." With his other hand he opened the note out, holding the match so that the reporter could see it, identify it, waiting while the reporter stood with the note in his hand long enough to have examined it anyway. "That's it, ain't it?" Ord said.

"Yes," the reporter said.

"All right. Stick it to the match. I want you to do it yourself.... Damn it, drop it! Do you want to—" As it floated down the flame seemed to turn back and upward, to climb up the falling scrap and on into space, vanishing; the charred carbon leaf drifted on without weight or sound and Ord ground his foot on it. "You bastard," he said. "You bastard." "God, yes," the reporter said, as quietly. "I'll make out another one tomorrow. You will just have to take me alone—"

"Like hell. What are they going to do now?"

"I don't know," the reporter said. Then at once he began to speak in that tone of peaceful and bemused incomprehensibility. "You see, she didn't understand. She told me to go away. I mean, away. Let me ex—" But he stopped, thinking quietly, "Wait. I mustn't start that. I might not be able to stop it next time." He said: "They don't know yet, of course, until after the dredge... I'll be there. I'll see to them."

"Bring her on over home if you want to. But you better go yourself and take a couple of drinks. You don't look so good either."

"Yair," the reporter said. "Only I quit yesterday. I got mixed up and went on the wagon."

"Yes?" Ord said. "Well, I'm going home. You better get in touch with her right away. Get her away from here. Just put her in a car and come

on over home. If it's where they say it is, it will take a diver to get him out." He returned to the roadster; the reporter had already turned on too, back towards the entrance before he was aware of it, stopping again; he could not do it — the lights and the faces, not even for the warmth of lights and human suspirations — thinking, "Jesus, if I was to go in there I would drown." He could go around the opposite hangar and reach the apron and be on his way back to the seaplane slip. But when he moved it was towards the first hangar, the one in which it seemed to him that he had spent enough of incomprehensible and unpredictable frenzy and travail to have been born and raised there, walking away from the lights and sound and faces, walking in solitude where despair and regret could sweep down over the building and across the plaza and on into the harsh thin hissing of the palms and so at least he could breathe it in, at least endure. It was as though some sixth sense, some economy out of profound inattention guided him, on through the blank door and the tool-room and into the hangar itself where in the hard light of the overhead clusters the motionless aeroplanes squatted in fierce and depthless relief among one another's monstrous shadows, and on to where Jiggs sat on the tongue of a dolly, the shined boots rigid and fiercely high lighted on his out-thrust feet, gnawing painfully at a sandwich with one side of his face, his head turned parallel to the earth like a dog eats while the one good eye rolled, painful and bloodshot, up at the reporter.

"What is it you want me to do?" Jiggs said. The reporter blinked down at him with quiet and myopic intensity.

"You see, she didn't understand," he said. "She told me to go away. To let her alone. And so I can't..."

"Yair," Jiggs said. He drew the boots under him and prepared to get up, but he stopped and sat so for a moment, his head bent and the sandwich in one hand, looking at what the reporter did not know, because at once the single eye was looking at him again. "Will you look behind that junk over in the corner there and get my bag?" Jiggs said. The reporter found the canvas bag hidden carefully beneath a rubbish-heap of empty oil cans and boxes and such; when he returned with it Jiggs was already holding one foot out. "Would you mind giving it a pull?" The reporter took hold of the boot. "Pull it easy."

"Have they made your feet sore?" the reporter said.

“No. Pull it easy.” The boots came off easier than they did two nights ago; the reporter watched Jiggs take from the sack a shirt not soiled but filthy, and wipe the boots carefully, upper sole and all, with an air thoughtful, intent, bemused, and wrap them in the shirt, put them into the sack and, again in the tennis shoes and the makeshift leggings, hide the sack once more in the corner, the reporter following him to the corner and then back as if it were now the reporter who was the dog. “You see,” he said (even as he spoke it seemed to him to be not himself speaking but something inside him which insisted on pre-empting his tongue)— “you see, I keep on trying to explain to somebody that she didn’t understand. Only she understands exactly, don’t she? He’s out there in the lake and I can’t think of anything plainer than that. Can you?” The main doors were locked now; they had to return through the tool-room as the reporter had entered. As they emerged the beacon’s beam swept overhead again with its illusion of powerful and slow acceleration. “So they gave you all a bed this time,” he said. “Yair,” Jiggs said. “The kid went to sleep on the police boat. Jack brought him in and they let them have a bed this time. She didn’t come in. She ain’t going to leave now, anyway. I’ll try if you want to, though.” “Yes,” the reporter said. “I guess you are right. I didn’t mean to try to make... I just wanted to...” He began to think now, now, NOW, and it came: the long nebulous sword-stroke sweeping steadily up from beyond the other hangar until almost overhead and then accelerating with that illusion of terrific strength and speed which should have left a sound, a swish, behind it but did not. “You see, I don’t know about these things. I keep on thinking about fixing it up so that a woman, another woman—” “All right,” Jiggs said. “I’ll try.” “Just so she can see you and call you if she needs — wants... if... She won’t even need to know I am... but if she should—” “Yair. I’ll fix it if I can.” They went on around the other hangar. Now they could see half of the beacon’s entire arc; the reporter could watch it as it swung across the lake, watching the skeleton-lattice of the empty bleachers come into relief against it, and the parapet of staffs from which the purple-and-gold pennons, black now, streamed rigid in the rising wind from the lake as the beam picked them up one by one and discarded them in swift and accelerating succession as it swept in

and overhead and on. They could see the looped bunting too tossing and labouring and even here and there blown out of the careful loops of three days ago and whipping in forlorn and ceaseless shreds as though, sentient itself, it had anticipated the midnight bells from town which would signal the beginning of Lent.

And now, beyond the black rampart of the sea-wall, the searchlight beside whose truck the photographer had found the reporter was burning — a fierce white downward-glaring beam brighter though smaller than the beacon — and they saw presently another one on the tower of the dredge-boat itself. In fact, it was as though when they reached the sea-wall they would look down into a pit filled not by one steady source of light but by a luminous diffusion as though from the air-particles, beyond which the shore-line curved twinkling faintly away into darkness. But it was not until they reached the wall that they saw that the light came not from the searchlight on the shore nor the one on the dredge-boat nor the one on the slowly cruising police-launch engaged still in harrying away the little skiffs from some of which puny flashlights winked but in most of which burned the weak turgid flame of kerosene — but from a line of automobiles drawn up along the boulevard. Extending for almost a mile along the shore and facing the water, their concerted refulgence, broken at short intervals by the buttons and shields of policemen and now by the sidearms and putties of a national guard company, glared down upon the disturbed and ceaseless dark water which seemed to surge and fall and surge and fall as though in travail of amazement and outrage.

There was a skiff just landing from the dredge-boat. While the reporter waited for Jiggs to return the dark steady chill wind pushed hard against him, through his thin clothes; it seemed to have passed through the lights, the faint human sounds and movement, without gaining anything of warmth or light. After a while he believed that he could discern the faint hissing plaint of the ground and powdered oyster shells on which he stood even above the deep steady humming of the searchlight not far away. The men from the skiff came up and passed him, Jiggs following. "It's like they said," Jiggs said. "It's right up against the rocks. I asked the guy if they had hooked anything yet and he said hooked, hell; they had hooked something the first throw with one hook and ain't even got the hook loose yet. But the other hook came up with

a piece of that damn monococque plywood, and he said there was oil on it." He looked at the reporter. "So that will be from the belly."
"Yes," the reporter said.

"So it's bottom upwards. The guy says they think out there that it is fouled on some of them old automobiles and junk they threw in to build it with. — Yair," he said, though the reporter had not spoken, but had only looked at him: "I asked that too. She's up yonder at that lunch-wagon getting — —" The reporter turned; like the photographer Jiggs now had to trot to keep up, scrabbling up the shelving beach towards the ranked automobiles until he bumped into the reporter who had paused in the headlights' glare with his head lowered and one arm raised before his face. "Over this way," Jiggs said, "I can see." He took the reporter's arm and guided him on to the gap in the cars where the steps led up from the beach and through the gap to where, across the boulevard, they could see the heads and shoulders against the broad low dingy window. Jiggs could hear the reporter breathing, panting, though the climb up from the beach had not been that hard. When the reporter's fumbling hand touched his own it felt like ice. "She hasn't got any money," the reporter said. "Hurry. Hurry." Jiggs went on. Then the reporter could still see them — the faces pressed to the glass (for the instant he made one as he pushed through them and went around the end of the lunch-wagon to the smaller window) — looking in at her where she sat on one of the backless stools at the counter between a policeman and one of the mechanics whom the reporter had seen about the hangar. The trench-coat was open and there was a long smear either of oil or mud across the upper part of her white dress; she was eating a sandwich, wolfing it and talking to the two men; he watched her drop the fragments back into the plate, wipe her hand across her mouth and lift the thick mug of coffee and drink, wolfing the coffee too, the coffee, like the food, running down her chin from too fast swallowing. At last Jiggs finally found him, still standing there though now the counter was vacant and the faces had gone away too, followed back to the beach.

"Even the proprietor wanted to wash out the cheque, but I got there in time," Jiggs said. "She was glad to get it, too; you were right, she never had any money with her. Yair. She's like a man about not bumming from just any guy. Always was. So it's O.K." But he was still looking at

the reporter with an expression which a more observing person than the reporter could not have read now in the tough face to which the blue and swollen eye and lip lent no quality evoking compassion or warmth but on the contrary merely increased a little the face's brutality. When he spoke again it was not in a rambling way exactly but with a certain curious alertness as of imminent and irrevocable dispersion; the reporter thought of a man trying to herd a half-dozen blind sheep through a passage a little wider than he could span with his extended arms. Jiggs now had one hand in his pocket but the reporter did not notice it. "So she's going to have to be out here all night, in case they begin to... And the kid's already asleep; yair, no need to wake him up, and maybe to-morrow we will all know better where we... Yair, a night or two to sleep on it makes a lot of difference about anything, no matter how bad you think you h — I mean..."

He stopped. ("He ain't only not held the sheep, he ain't even holding out his arms any more," the reporter thought.) The hand came out of his pocket, opening; the door key glinted faintly on the grained palm. "She told me to give it back to you when I saw you," Jiggs said. "You come on and eat something yourself, now."

"Yes," the reporter said. "It will be a good chance to, won't it. Besides, we will be in out of the cold for a little while."

"Sure," Jiggs said. "Come on." It was warm inside the lunch-wagon; the reporter stopped shaking even before the food came. He ate a good deal of it, then he realized that he was going to eat all of it, without taste or enjoyment especially but with a growing conviction of imminent satisfaction like when a tooth cavity that has not been either pleasant or unpleasant is about to be filled without pain. The faces were gone from the window now, following her doubtless back to the beach, or as near to it as the police and soldiers would let them, where they now gazed no doubt at the police-boat or whatever other boat she had re-embarked in; nevertheless he and Jiggs still sat in it, breathed and chewed it along with the stale hot air and the hot rancid food — the breathing, the exhalation, the variations of the remark which the photographer had made; the ten thousand different smug and gratulant behind-sighted forms of I might be a burn and a bastard but I am not out there in that lake. But he did not see her again.

During the next three hours until midnight he did not leave the beach, while the ranked cars glared steadily downward and the searchlights hummed and the police-launch cruised in slow circles while the little boats moved outward before its bows and inward again behind its stem like so many minnows in the presence of a kind of harmless and vegetarian whale. Steadily, with clock-like and deliberate precision, the long sickle-bar of the beacon swept inward from the lake, to vanish at the instant when the yellow eye came broadside on and apparently halted there with only a slow and terrific centrifugal movement within the eye itself until with that gigantic and soundless flick! the beam shot incredibly outward across the dark sky. But he did not see her, though presently one of the little skiffs came in and beached to take on another bootleg cargo of twenty-five-cent passengers and Jiggs got out. "They are still fast to it," he said. "They thought they had it started once but something happened down there and when they hauled up all they had was the cable; they were even short the hook. They say now it must have hit on one of those big blocks of concrete and broke it loose and they both went down together only the ship got there first. They're going to send the diver down at daylight to see what to do. Only they don't want to use dynamite because even if it starts him back up it will bust the mole all to pieces. But they'll know to-morrow. — Didn't you want to call the paper at midnight or something?"

There was a pay-station in the lunch-wagon, on the wall. Since there was no booth the reporter had to talk into the telephone with his other ear plugged with his hand against the noise and again spending most of the time answering questions; when he turned away he saw that Jiggs was asleep on the backless stool, his arms folded on the counter and his forehead resting on them. It was quite warm inside, what with the constant frying of meat and with the human bodies with which the room was filled now long after its usual closing hour. The window facing the lake was fogged over so that the lighted scene beyond was one diffused glow such as might be shining behind falling snow; looking at it the reporter began to shake again, slowly and steadily inside the suit to which there was apparently no waistcoat, while there grew within him the first active sensation or impulse which he could remember since he watched Shumann begin to bank into the field pylon for the last time — a profound reluctance to go out which acted

not on his will but on his very muscles. He went to the counter; presently the proprietor saw him and took up one of the thick cups. "Coffee?"

"No," the reporter said. "I want a coat. Overcoat. Have you got one you could lend me or rent me? I'm a reporter," he added. "I got to stick around down there at the beach until they get through."

"I ain't got a coat," the proprietor said. "But I got a piece of tarpaulin I keep my car under. You can use that if you will bring it back."

"All right," the reporter said. He did not disturb Jiggs; when he emerged into the cold and the dark this time he resembled a soiled and carelessly set-up tent. The tarpaulin was stiff and heavy to hold and presently heavy to carry too, but inside it he ceased to shake. It was well after midnight now and he had expected to find that the cars drawn up along the boulevard to face the lake would have thinned somewhat, but they had not. Individually they might have changed, but the ranked line was still intact — a silhouetted row of oval rear windows framing the motionless heads whose eyes, along with the headlights, stared with immobile and unmurmuring patience down upon the scene in which they were not even aware that nothing was happening — that the dredge squatted inactive now, attached as though by one steel umbilical cord not to one disaster but to the prime oblivious mother of all living and derelict too.

Steady and unflagging the long single spoke of the beacon swept its arc across the lake and vanished into the full broadside of the yellow eye and, already outshooting, swept on again, leaving that slow terrific vacuum in mind or sense which should have been filled with the flick and the swish which never came. The sight-seeing skiff had ceased to ply, perhaps having milked the business or perhaps having been stopped by authority; the next boat to land came direct from the dredge, one of the passengers the mechanic who had sat beside the woman in the lunch-wagon. This time the reporter did his own asking. "No," the other said. "She went back to the field about an hour ago, when they found out they would have to wait for the diver. I'm going to turn in, myself. I guess you can knock off now yourself, can't you?"

"Yes," the reporter said. "I can knock off-now too." At first he thought that perhaps he was going in, walking in the dry light treacherous shell-powder, holding the harsh stiff tarpaulin with both hands to ease the

dead weight of it on his neck and shoulders; it was the weight he felt, the cold rasp of it on his fingers and palms. "I'll have to take it back first, like I promised," he thought. "If I don't now, I won't do it at all." The ramp of the boulevard rose here, so that the car-lights passed over his head and he walked now in comparative darkness where the sea-wall made its right angle with the boulevard. The wind did not reach here and since he could sit on the edge of the tarpaulin and fold it about him, knees and all, soon his body heated it inside like a tent. Now he did not have to watch the beacon sweep in from across the lake in its full arc except when the beam materialized slicing across the pie-shaped quarter of sky framed by the right angle of wall and ramp. It was the warmth; all of a sudden he had been telling Shumann for some time that she did not understand. And he knew that that was not right; all the while that he was telling Shumann he was also telling himself that that was not right. His cramped chin came up from the bony peaks of his knees; his feet were cold too or were probably cold because at first he did not feel them at all until they filled suddenly with the cold needles.

Now (the searchlight on the shore was black and only the one on the dredge stared as before downward into the water) the police-boat lay to and there was not one of the small boats in sight and he saw that most of the cars were gone too from the ramp overhead even while he was thinking that it could not possibly have been that long. But it had; the steady clock-like sweep flick! sweep, sweep flick! sweep of the beacon had accomplished something apparently, it had checked something off; as he looked upward the dark sea-wall overhead came into abrupt sharp relief and then simultaneous with the recognition of the glow as floodlights he heard the displacing of air and then saw the navigation lights of the transport as it slid, quite low, across the black angle and on to the field. "That means it's after four o'clock," he thought. "That means it's to-morrow." It was not dawn yet though; before that he was trying to draw himself back as though by the arm while he was saying again to Shumann, "You see, it looks like I have just got to try to explain to somebody that she—" and jerked himself upward (he had not even leaned his head down to his knees this time and so had nowhere to jerk back to), the needles not needles now but actual ice and his mouth open as though it were not large enough to

accommodate the air which his lungs required or the lungs not large enough to accommodate the air which his body had to have, and the long arm of the beacon sweeping athwart his gaze with a motion peremptory, ruthless and unhurried and already fading; it was some time even yet before he realized that it was not the beacon fading but the brightening sky.

The sun had risen before the diver went down and came up, and most of the cars were back by then too, ranked into the ubiquitous blue-and-drab rampart. The reporter had returned the tarpaulin; relieved of its stiff and chafing weight he now shook steadily in the pink chill of the first morning of the entire four days to be ushered in by no overcast. But he did not see her again at all. There was a somewhat larger crowd than there had been the evening before (it was Sunday, and there were now two police-launches and the number of skiffs and dories had trebled as though the first lot had spawned somewhere during the night) yet he had daylight to assist him now. But he did not see her. He saw Jiggs from a distance several times, but he did not see her; he did not even know that she had been to the beach again until after the diver came up and reported and he (the reporter) was climbing back towards the boulevard and the telephone and the parachute jumper called to him. The jumper came down the beach, not from the water but from the direction of the field, jerking savagely after him the injured leg from which he had burst the dressing and the fresh scab in making his jump yesterday.

"I was looking for you," he said. From his pocket he took a neatly folded sheaf of bills. "Roger said he owed you twenty-two dollars. Is that right?"

"Yes," the reporter said. The jumper held the money clipped between two fingers and folded over under his thumb.

"You got time to attend to some business for us or are you going to be busy?" he said.

"Busy?" the reporter said.

"Yes. Busy. If you are, say so, so I can find somebody else to do it."

"Yes," the reporter said. "I'll do it."

"You sure? If not, say so. It won't be much trouble; anybody can do it. I just thought of you because you seem to have already got yourself pretty well mixed up with us, and you will be here."

“Yes,” the reporter said. “I’ll do it.”

“All right, then. We’re going to get away to-day. No use hanging around here. Those bastards out there” — he jerked his head towards the lake, the clump of boats on the rosy water— “ain’t going to get him out from under all that muck with just a handful of ropes. So we’re going. What I want to do is leave some money with you in case they do... around out there and finally get him up.”

“Yes,” the reporter said. “I see.” The jumper stared at him with that bleak tense quiet.

“Don’t think I like to ask this any more than you like to hear it. But maybe you never sent for us to come here, and maybe we never asked you to move in on us: you’ll have to admit that. Anyway, it’s all done now; I can’t help it any more than you can.” The jumper’s other hand came to the money; the reporter saw how the bills had already been separated carefully into two parts and that the part which the jumper extended towards him was clipped neatly with two paper clips beneath a strip of paper bearing a neatly printed address, a name which the reporter read at a glance because he had seen it before when he watched Shumann write it on the note. “Here’s seventy-five bucks, and that’s the address. I don’t know what it will cost to ship him.

But if it is enough to ship him and still pay you your twenty-two bucks, do it. And if it ain’t enough to pay you your twenty-two and still ship him, ship him and write me and I will send you the difference.” This time the slip of paper came, folded, from his pocket. “This is mine. I kept them separate so you wouldn’t get them mixed. Do you understand? Send him to the first address, the one with the money. And if there ain’t enough left to pay you your twenty-two, write to me at the second one and I will send it to you. It may take some time for the letter to catch up with me, but I will get it sooner or later and I will send you the money. Understand?”

“Yes,” the reporter said.

“All right. I asked you if you would attend to it and you said you would. But I didn’t say anything about promise. Did I?”

“I promise,” the reporter said.

“I don’t want you to promise that. What I want you to promise is another thing. Something else. Don’t think I want to ask it; I told you

that; I don't want to ask it any more than you want to hear it. What I want you to promise is, don't send him collect."

"I promise," the reporter said.

"All right. Call it a gamble on your twenty-two dollars, if you want to. But not collect. The seventy-five may not be enough. But all we got now is my nineteen-fifty from yesterday and the prize-money from Thursday. That was a hundred and four. So I can't spare more than seventy-five. You'll have to chance it. If the seventy-five won't ship him home — — — to that address I gave you, you can do either of two things. You can pay the difference yourself and write me and I will send you the difference and your twenty-two. Or if you don't want to take a chance on me, use the seventy-five to bury him here; there must be some way you can do it so they can find him later if they want to. But don't send him collect. I am not asking you to promise to put out any money of your own to send him back; I am just asking you to promise not to leave it so they will have to pay him out of the freight or the express office. Will you?"

"Yes," the reporter said. "I promise."

"All right," the jumper said. He put the money into the reporter's hand. "Thanks. I guess we will leave to-day. So I guess I will tell you good-bye." He looked at the reporter, bleak, his face spent with sleeplessness too, standing with the injured leg propped stiffly in the shell-dust. "She took a couple of big drinks and she is asleep now." He looked at the reporter with that bleak speculation which seemed to be almost clairvoyant. "Don't take it too hard. You never made him try to fly that crate any more than you could have kept him from it. No man will hold that against you, and what she might hold against you won't hurt you because you won't ever see her again, see?"

"Yes," the reporter said. "That's true."

"Yair. So sometime when she is feeling better about it I will tell her how you attended to this and she will be obliged to you, and for the rest of it too. Only take a tip from me and stick to the kind of people you are used to after this."

"Yes," the reporter said.

"Yair." The jumper moved, shifting the injured leg stiffly to turn, then he paused again, looking back. "You got my address; it may take some time for the letter to catch up with me. But you will get your money.

Well—” He extended his hand; it was hard, not clammy, just absolutely without warmth. “Thanks for attending to this and for trying to help us out. Be good to yourself.” Then he was gone, limping savagely away. The reporter did not watch him; after awhile it was one of the soldiers who called him and showed him the gap in the barricade.

“Better put that stuff into your pocket, doc,” the soldier said. “Some of these guys will be cutting your wrist off.” The cab, the taxi, ran with the sun, yet a ray of it fell through the back window and glinted on a chromium fitting on the collapsible seat, and though after awhile the reporter gave up trying to move the seat and finally thought of laying his hat over the light-point, he still continued to try to blink away that sensation of light fine sand inside his lids. It didn’t matter whether he watched the backward-streaming wall of moss and live oaks above the dark water-glints or whether he tried to keep vision, sight, inside the cab. As soon as he closed them he would find himself, out of some attenuation of weariness, sleeplessness, confusing both the living and the dead without concern now, with profound conviction of the complete unimportance of either or of the confusion itself, trying with that mindless and unflagging optimism to explain to someone that she did not understand and now without bothering to decide or care whether or not and why or not he was asleep.

The cab did not have to go as far up as Grandlieu Street and so the reporter did not see a clock, though by the position of the balcony’s shadow across the door beneath it he guessed it to be about nine. In the corridor he quit blinking, and on the stairs too; but no sooner had he entered the room with the sun coming into the windows and falling across the bright savage bars of the blanket on the cot (even the other blankets on the walls, which the sun did not reach, seemed to have confiscated light into their harsh red-white-and-black lightnings which they released slowly into the room as other blankets might have soaked up and then emitted the smell of horses) he began to blink again, with that intent myopic bemusement. He seemed to await the office of something outside himself before he moved and closed the jalousies before the window. It was better then because for awhile he could not see at all; he just stood there in some ultimate distillation of the savage, bright, near-tropical day, not knowing now whether he was still blinking or not, in an implacable infiltration which not even walls could

stop. He came from the circumambient breathing of fish and coffee and fruit and hemp and swamp land dyked away from the stream because of which they came to exist, so that the very commerce-bearing units of their breath and life came and went not beside or among them but above them like straying skyscrapers putting in from and out to the sea. There was even less light beyond the curtain, though it was not completely dark. "How could it be," he thought, standing quietly with his coat in one hand and the other already slipping the knot of his tie, thinking how no place where a man has lived for almost two years or even two weeks or even two days is completely dark to him unless he has got so fat in the senses that he is already dead walking and breathing and all places are dark to him even in sunlight. It was not completely dark but just enough so that now the room's last long instant of illimitable unforgetting seemed to draw in quietly in a long immobility of fleeing, with a quality poised and imminent but which could not be called waiting and which contained nothing in particular of farewell, but just paused unbreathing and without impatience and incurious, for him to make the move. His hand was already on the light, the switch.

He had just finished shaving when Jiggs began to call his name from the alley. He took from the bed in passing the fresh shirt which he had laid out, and went to the window and opened the jalousie. "It's on the latch," he said. "Come on in." He was buttoning the shirt when Jiggs mounted the stairs, carrying the canvas sack, wearing the tennis shoes and the boot legs.

"Well, I guess you have heard the news," Jiggs said.

"Yes. I saw Holmes before I came to town. So I guess you'll all be moving now."

"Yair," Jiggs said. "I'm going with Art Jackson. He's been after me a good while. He's got the chutes, see, and I have done some exhibition jumping and so it won't take me long to pick up free jumping, delayed.... Then we can split the whole twenty-five bucks between ourselves. But Jesus, it won't be like racing. Maybe I'll go back to racing after awhile, after I have..." He stood motionless in the centre of the room, holding the dragging canvas bag, the battered brutal face lowered and sober and painfully bemused. Then the reporter discovered what he was looking at. "Jesus," Jiggs said, "I tried again to

put them on this morning and I couldn't even seem to open the bag and take them out." That was about ten o'clock because almost immediately the negress Leonora came in, in her coat and hat, and carrying the neat basket beneath its neat cloth so fresh that the ironed creases were still visible. But the reporter only allowed her to put the basket down.

"A bottle of wood alcohol and a can of that stuff you take grease out of clothes with," he told her, giving her the bill; then to Jiggs: "What do you want to fix that scratch with?"

"I got something for that," Jiggs said. "I brought that with me." He took it from the bag — a coca cola bottle stoppered with paper and containing wing-dope. The negress left the basket and went out and returned with the two bottles, made a pot of coffee and set it with cups and sugar on the table. Then she looked again about the untouched, unused rooms, took up the basket and stood for a while and watched what they were doing with prim and grim inscrutability before departing for good. And the reporter too, sitting on the couch and blowing quietly into his cup to cool it, watched Jiggs squatting before the two gleaming boots, in the tight soiled clothes and the tennis shoes now upturned behind him, and he thought how never before had he ever heard of rubber soles wearing through. "Because what the hell do I need with a pair of new boots for Christ's sake, when probably this time next month I won't even have on anything to stuff into the tops of them?" Jiggs said. That stale cup between his hands, the reporter had watched Jiggs remove the polish from the boots, first with the alcohol, watching the cold dark flowing of the liquid move, already fading, up the length of each boot like the shadow of a cloud travelling along a road, and then by scraping them with the back of a knife-blade, so that at last the boots had returned to the mere shape of what they were, like the blank gunstocks manufactured for sale to fire-arms amateurs. He watched Jiggs, sitting on the couch now and with the soiled shirt for padding and the inverted boot clamped between his knees, remove delicately from the sole with sandpaper all trace of contact with the earth; and last of all, intent, his blunt grained hands, moving with minute and incredible lightness and care, begin to fill in with the wing-dope the heel-mark on the right boot's instep so that presently it was invisible to the casual glance of anyone who did not know that it had

been there. "Jesus," Jiggs said, "if I only hadn't walked in them. Just hadn't creased them at the ankle. But maybe after I get them rubbed smooth again—" But when the cathedral clock struck one they had not accomplished that. Rubbing only smoothed them and left them without life; the reporter suggested floor-wax and went out and got it, and it had to be removed.

"Wait," he said, looking at Jiggs, the gaunt face worn with fatigue and lack of sleep and filled with a spent unflagging expression of quiet endurance like a hypnotized person. "Listen. That magazine with the pictures of what you wish you could get your white American servants to wear so you could think they were English butlers, and what if you wore yourself maybe the horse would think he was in England too unless the fox happened to run under a billboard or something... About how a fox's tail is the only..." He stared at Jiggs, who stared back at him with blinking a«d one-eyed attention. "Wait. No. It's the horse's bone. Not the fox; the horse's shin-bone. That's what we need."

"A horse's shin-bone?"

"For the boots. That's what you use."

"All right. But where—"

"I know where. We can pick it up on the way out to see Hagood. We can rent a car." They had to walk up to Grandlieu Street to rent the car.

"Want me to drive?" Jiggs said.

"Can you?"

"Sure."

"Then I guess you will have to," the reporter said. "I can't." It was a bright, soft, sunny day, quite warm, the air filled, breathing, with a faint suspiration which made the reporter think of organs and bells — of mortification and peace and shadowy kneeling — though he heard neither. The streets were crowded, though the throngs were quiet, not only with ordinary Sunday decorum but with a certain slow tranquillity as though the very brick and stone had just recovered from fever. Now and then, in the lees of walls and gutters as they left down town behind them, the reporter saw little drifts of the spent confetti but soiled and stained now until it resembled more dingy sawdust or even dead leaves. Once or twice he saw tattered loops of the purple-and-gold bunting and once at a corner a little boy darted almost beneath the wheels with a tattered streamer of it whipping behind him. Then the

city dissolved into swamp and marsh again; presently the road ran into a broad expanse of saltmarsh broken by the dazzling sun-blached dyke of a canal; presently a rutted lane turned off into the saltgrass. "Here we are," the reporter said. The car turned into the lane and they began to pass the débris, the silent imperishable monument tranquil in the bright sun — the old car-bodies without engines or wheels, the old engines and wheels without bodies; the rusted scraps and sections of iron machinery and standpipes and culverts rising half-buried out of the blached sand and shell-dust which was so white itself that for a time Jiggs saw no bones at all. "Can you tell a horse from a cow?" the reporter said.

"I don't know," Jiggs said. "I ain't very certain whether I can even tell a shin-bone or not."

"We'll get some of everything and try them all," the reporter said. So they did; moving about, stooping (the reporter was blinking again now between the fierce quiet glare of the pigmentless sand and the ineffable and cloudless blue), they gathered up about thirty pounds of bones. They had two complete forelegs, both of which were horses' though they did not know it, a set of shoulder-blades from a mule, and Jiggs came up with a full set of ribs which he insisted belonged to a colt but which were actually those of a big dog, and the reporter had one object which turned out not to be bone at all but the forearm from a piece of statuary. "We ought to have something in here that will do," he said.

"Yair," Jiggs said. "Now which way?" They did not need to return through the city. They skirted it, leaving the saltmarsh behind and now, crossing no actual boundary or demarcation and challenged by no sentry, they entered a region where even the sunlight seemed different, where it filtered among the ordered live oaks and fell suavely upon parked expanses and vistas beyond which the homes of the rich, oblivious and secure, presided above clipped lawns and terraces, with a quality of having itself been passed by appointment through a walled gate by a watchman. Presently they ran along a picket-line of palm-trunks beyond which a clipped fairway stretched, broken only by sedate groups of apparently armed men and boys all moving in one direction like a kind of decorously embattled skirmish advance.

“It ain’t four yet,” the reporter said. “We can wait for him right here, at number fifteen.” So after a time Hagood, preparing to drive with his foursome, his ball teed and addressed, looked up and saw them standing quietly just inside the club’s grounds, the car waiting in the road behind them, watching him — the indefatigable and now ubiquitous cadaver and the other, the vicious half-metamorphosis between thug and horse — the tough, hard, blunt face to which the blue swollen eye lent no quality of pity or suffering, made it look not at all like a victim or one deserving compassion, but merely like a pirate. Hagood stepped down from the tee.

“A message from the office,” he said quietly. “You fellows drive and play on; I’ll catch you.” He approached Jiggs and the reporter. “How much do you want this time?” he said.

“Whatever you will let me have,” the reporter said.

“So,” Hagood said quietly. “It’s that bad this time, is it?” The reporter said nothing; they watched Hagood take his wallet from his hip-pocket and open it. “This is the last, this time, I suppose?” he said.

“Yes,” the reporter said. “They’re leaving to-night.” From the wallet Hagood took a thin sheaf of cheque blanks, “So you won’t suggest a sum yourself,” Hagood said. “You are using psychology on me.”

“Whatever you can. Will. I know I have borrowed more from you than I have paid back. But this time maybe I can...” He drew something from his coat now and extended it — a postcard, a coloured lithograph; Hagood read the legend: Hotel Vista del Mar, Santa Monica, California, the plump arrow drawn by a hotel pen and pointing to a window.

“What?” Hagood said.

“Read it,” the reporter said. “It’s from mamma. Where they are spending their honeymoon, her and Mr. Hurtz. She said how she has told him about me and he seems to like me all right and that maybe when my birthday comes on the first of April...”

“Ah,” Hagood said. “That will be very nice, won’t it?” He took a short fountain-pen from his shirt and glanced about; now the second man, the cartoon comedy centaur who had been watching him quietly and steadily with the one bright hot eye, spoke for the first time.

“Write on my back if you want to, mister,” he said, turning and stooping, presenting a broad skin-tight expanse of soiled shirt, apparently as hard as a section of concrete, to Hagood.

“And get the hell kicked out of me and serve me right,” Hagood thought viciously. He spread the blank on Jiggs’ back and wrote the cheque and waved it dry and folded it and handed it to the reporter.

“Do you want me to sign anyth—” the reporter began.

“No. But will you let me ask a favour of you?”

“Yes, chief. Of course.”

“Go to town and look in the book and find where Doctor Legendre lives and go out there. Don’t telephone; go out there; tell him I sent you, tell him I said to give you some pills that will put you to sleep for about twenty-four hours, and go home and take them. Will you?”

“Yes, chief,” the reporter said. “To-morrow when you fix the note for me to sign you can pin the postcard to it. It won’t be legal, but it will be...”

“Yes,” Hagood said. “Go on, now. Please go on.”

“Yes, chief,” the reporter said. They went on. When they reached home it was almost five o’clock. They unloaded the bones and now they both worked, each with a boot, fast. It seemed to be slow work, nevertheless the boots were taking on a patina deeper and less brilliant than wax or polish.

“Jesus,” Jiggs said. “If I just hadn’t creased the ankles, and if I just had kept the box and paper when I unwrapped them—”

Because he had forgotten that it was Sunday. He knew it; he and the reporter had known it was Sunday all day but they had both forgotten it; they did not remember it until, at half-past five, Jiggs halted the car before the window into which he had looked four days ago — the window from which now both boots and photographs were missing. They looked at the locked door quietly for a good while. “So we didn’t need to hurry after all,” he said. “Well, maybe I couldn’t have fooled them, anyway. Maybe I’d a had to went to the pawnshop just the same anyway.... We might as well take the car back.”

“Let’s go to the paper and cash the cheque first,” the reporter said. He had not yet looked at it; while Jiggs waited in the car he went in and returned. “It was for a hundred,” he said. “He’s a good guy. He’s been white to me, Jesus.” He got into the car.

“Now where?” Jiggs said.

“Now we got to decide now. We might as well take the car back while we are deciding.” The lights were on now; when they emerged from the

garage, walking, they moved in red-green-and-white glare and flicker, crossing the outfall from the theatre entrances and the eating-places, passing athwart the hour's rich resurgence of fish and coffee. "You can't give it to her yourself," the reporter said. "They would know you never had that much."

"Yair," Jiggs said. "All I could risk would have been that twenty bucks. But I'll have room for some of it, though. If I get as much as ten from Uncle Isaac I will want to pinch myself."

"And if we slipped it to the kid, it would be the — Wait," he said: he stopped and looked at Jiggs. "I got it. Yair. Come on." Now he was almost running, weaving on through the slow Sunday-evening throng, Jiggs following. They tried five drugstores before they found it — a blue-and-yellow toy hanging by a piece of cord before a rotary ventilator in similitude of flight. It had not been for sale; Jiggs and the reporter fetched the step-ladder from the rear of the store in order to take it down. "You said the train leaves at eight," the reporter said. "We got to hurry some." It was half-past six now as they left Grandlieu Street; when they reached the corner where Shumann and Jiggs had bought the sandwich two nights ago, they parted.

"I can see the balls from here," Jiggs said. "Ain't any need of you going with me; I guess I won't have any trouble carrying what they will give me for them. You get the sandwiches and leave the door unlocked for me." He went on, the newspaper-wrapped boots under his arm; even now as each foot flicked backward with that motion like a horse's hock, the reporter believed that he could see the coin-shaped patch of blackened flesh in each pale sole: so that when he entered the corridor and set the door ajar, and mounted the stairs and turned on the light, he did not open the sandwiches at once. He put them and the toy aeroplane on the table and went beyond the curtain. When he emerged he carried in one hand the gallon jug (it contained now about three pints) and in the other a pair of shoes which looked as much like him as his hair or hands looked. He was sitting on the cot, smoking, when Jiggs entered, carrying now a biggish bundle, a bundle bigger even though shorter than the boots had been. "He gave me five bucks for them," Jiggs said. "I give twenty-two and a half and wear them twice and he gives me five. Yair. He throws it away." He laid the bundle on the couch. "So I decided that wasn't even worth the trouble of

handing to her. So I just got some presents for all of them.” He opened the parcel. It contained a box or chest of candy about the size of a suitcase and resembling a miniature bale of cotton lettered heavily by some pyrographic process: Souvenir of New Valois. Come back again and three magazines — Boys’ Life, The Ladies’ Home Journal, and one of the pulp magazines of war stories in the air. Jiggs’ blunt grained hands rifled them and evened the edges again; his brutal battered face was curiously serene. “It will give them something to do on the train, see? Now let me get my pliers and we will fix that ship.” Then he saw the jug on the table as he turned. But he did not go to it; he just stopped, looking at it, and the reporter saw the good eye rush sudden and inarticulate and hot. But he did not move. It was the reporter who went and poured the first drink and gave it to him, and then the second one. “You need one too,” Jiggs said.

“Yes,” the reporter said. “I will in a minute.” But he didn’t for awhile, though he took one of the sandwiches when Jiggs opened them and then watched Jiggs, his jaw bulged by a huge bite, stoop and take from the canvas sack the cigar box and from the box produce a pair of pliers; not beginning yet to eat his own sandwich the reporter watched Jiggs raise the metal clamps which held the toy aeroplane’s tin body together and open it. The reporter produced the money — the seventy-five which the jumper had given him and the hundred from Hagood — and they wedged it into the toy and Jiggs clamped it to again.

“Yair, he’ll find it, all right,” Jiggs said. “Every toy he gets he plays with it a couple of days and then he takes it apart. To fix it, he says. But Jesus, he came by that natural; Roger’s old man is a doctor, see. A little country town where it’s mostly Swede farmers and the old man gets up at any hour of the night and rides twenty or thirty miles in a sleigh and borns the babies and cuts off arms and legs and a lot of them even pay him; sometimes it ain’t but a couple or three years before they will bring him in a ham or a bedspread or something on the instalment. So the old man wanted Roger to be a doctor too, see, and he was hammering that at Roger all the time Roger was a kid and watching Roger’s grades in school and all: so that Roger would have to doctor up his report cards for the old man but the old man never found it out; he would see Roger start off for school every morning over in town (they lived in a kind of big place, half farm, a little ways out of town that

never nobody tried to farm much, Roger said, but his old man kept it because it was where his old man, his father's old man, had settled when he come into the country) and he never found it out until one day he found out how Roger hadn't even been inside the school in six months because he hadn't never been off the place any further than out of sight down the road where he could turn and come back through the woods to an old mill his grandfather had built; and Roger had built him a motor-cycle in it out of scraps saved up from mowing-machines and clocks and such, and it run, see? That's what saved him. When his old man saw that it would run he let Roger go then and quit worrying him to be a doctor; he bought Roger the first ship, the Hisso Standard, with the money he had been saving up to send Roger to the medical school, but when he saw that the motor-cycle would run, I guess he knew he was whipped. And then one night Roger had to make a landing without any lights and he run over a cow and cracked it up and the old man paid for having it rebuilt; Roger told me once the old man must have borrowed the jack to do it with on the farm and that he aimed to pay his old man back the first thing as soon as he could but I guess it's O.K. because a farm without a mortgage on it would probably be against the law or something. Or maybe the old man didn't have to mortgage the farm but he just told Roger that so Roger would pick out a vacant field next time." The cathedral clock had struck seven shortly after Jiggs came in with his bundle; it must be about half-past seven now. Jiggs squatted, holding one of the shoes in his hand. "Jesus," he said. "I sure won't say I don't need them. But what about you?" "I couldn't wear but one pair of them, no matter how many I had," the reporter said. "You better go ahead and try them on." "They'll fit, all right. There are two garments that will fit anybody: a handkerchief when your nose is running and a pair of shoes when your feet are on the ground." "Yes," the reporter said. "That was the same ship that he and Laverne—"

"Yair. Jesus, they were a pair. She was glad to see him when he come into town that day in it. One day she told me something about it. She was an orphan, see; her older sister that was married sent for her to come live with them when her folks died. The sister was about twenty years older than Laverne and the sister's husband was about six or

eight years younger than the sister and Laverne was about fourteen or fifteen; she hadn't had much fun at home with a couple of old people like her father and mother, and she never had much with her sister neither, being that much younger; yair, I don't guess the sister had a whole lot of fun either with the kind of guy the husband seemed to be. So when the husband started teaching Laverne how to slip out and meet him and they would drive to some town forty or fifty miles away when the husband was supposed to be at work or something and he would buy her a glass of soda-water or maybe stop at a dive where the husband was sure nobody he knowed would see them and dance, I guess she thought that was all the fun there was in the world and that since he would tell her it was all right to twotime the sister that way, that it was all right for her to do the rest of it he wanted. Because he was the big guy, see, the one that paid for what she wore and what she ate. Or maybe she didn't think it was all right so much as she just thought that that was the way it was — that you was either married and wore down with housework to where your husband was just the guy that twotimed you and you knew it and all you could do about it was nag at him while he was awake and go through his clothes while he was asleep to see if you found any hairpins or letters or rubbers in his pockets, and then cry and moan about him to your younger sister while he was gone; or you were the one that somebody else's husband was easing out with and that all the choice you had was the dirty dishes to wash against the nickel sodas and a half an hour of dancing to a back-alley orchestra in a dive where nobody give his right name and then being wallowed around on the back seat of a car and then go home and slip in and lie to your sister and when it got too close, having the guy jump on you too to save his own face and then make it up by buying you two sodas next time. Or maybe at fifteen she just never saw any way of doing better because for awhile she never even knowed that the guy was holding her down himself, see, that he was hiding her out at the cheapdives not so they would not be recognized but so he would not have any competition from anybody but guys like himself; no young guys for her to see or to see her. Only the competition come; somehow she found out there was sodas that cost more than a dime and that all the music never had to be played in a back room with the shades down. Or maybe it was just him, because one night she had used him for a

stalking horse and he hunted her down and the guy she was with this time finally had to beat him up and so he went back home and told the sister on her — —”

The reporter rose, quickly. Jiggs watched him go to the table and pour into the glass, splashing the liquor on to the table. “That’s right,” Jiggs said. “Take a good one.” The reporter lifted the glass, gulping, his throat filled with swallowing and the liquor cascading down his chin; Jiggs sprang up quickly too but the other passed him, running towards the window and on to the balcony where Jiggs, following, caught him by the arms as he lunged outwards and the liquor, hardly warmed, burst from his mouth. The cathedral clock struck the half-hour; the sound followed them back into the room and seemed to die away too, like the light, into the harsh, bright, savage zigzags of colour on the blanket-hung walls. “Let me get you some water,” Jiggs said. “You sit down now, and I will—”

“I’m all right now,” the reporter said. “You put on your shoes. That was half-past seven then.”

“Yair. But you better—”

“No. Sit down; I’ll pull your leggings for you.”

“You sure you feel like it?”

“Yes. I’m all right now.” They sat facing one another on the floor again as they had sat the first night, while the reporter took hold of the riveted strap of the right boot leg. Then he began to laugh. “You see, it got all mixed up,” he said, laughing, not loud yet. “It started out to be a tragedy. A good orthodox Italian tragedy. You know: one Florentine falls in love with another Florentine’s wife and he spends three acts fixing it up to put the bee on the second Florentine and so just as the curtain falls on the third act the Florentine and the wife crawl down the fire escape and you know that the second Florentine’s brother won’t catch them until daylight and they will be asleep in the monk’s bed in the monastery? But it went wrong. When he come climbing up to the window to tell her the horses was ready, she refused to speak to him. It turned into a comedy, see?” He looked at Jiggs, laughing, not laughing louder but just faster. “Here, fellow!” Jiggs said. “Here now! Quit it!” “Yes,” the reporter said. “It’s not that funny. I’m trying to quit it. I’m trying to. But I can’t quit. See? See how I can’t quit?” he said, still holding to the strap, his face twisted with laughing, which as Jiggs

looked, burst suddenly with drops of moisture running down the cadaverous grimace which for an instant Jiggs thought was sweat until he saw the reporter's eyes.

It was after half-past seven; they would have to hurry now.

But they found a cab at once and they got the green light at once at Grandlieu Street even before the cab began to slow, shooting athwart the glare of neon, the pulse and glitter of electrics which bathed the idle slow Sunday pavement throng as it drifted from window to window beyond which the immaculate, the unbelievable wax men and women gazed back at them with expressions inscrutable and delphic. Then the palms in Saint Jules Avenue began to swim and flee past — the scabby picket posts, the sage dusters out of the old Southern country thought; the lighted clock in the station façade said six minutes to eight.

"They are probably already on the train," Jiggs said.

"Yes," the reporter said. "They'll let you through the gate, though."

"Yair," Jiggs said, taking up the toy aeroplane and the package which he had rewrapped. "Don't you want to come inside?"

"I'll just wait here," the reporter said. He watched Jiggs enter the waiting-room and vanish. He could hear the announcer calling another train; moving towards the doors he could see passengers begin to rise and take up bags and bundles and move towards the numbered gates, though quite a few still remained for other trains. "But not long," the reporter thought. "Because they can go home now"; thinking of all the names of places which railroads go to, fanning out from the River's mouth to all of America; of the cold February names: Minnesota and Dakota and Michigan, the high ice-clad river reaches and the long dependable snow; "yair, home now, knowing that they have got almost a whole year before they will have to get drunk and celebrate the fact that they will have more than eleven months before they will have to wear masks and get drunk and blow horns again."

Now the clock said two minutes to eight; they had probably got off the car to talk to Jiggs, perhaps standing now on the platform, smoking maybe; he could cross the waiting-room and doubtless even see them, standing beside the hissing train while the other passengers and the redcaps hurried past; she would carry the bundle and the magazines and the little boy would have the aeroplane already, probably performing wing-overs or vertical turns by hand. "Maybe I will go and

look," he thought, waiting to see if he would, until suddenly he realized that now it was different from when he had stood in the bedroom before turning on the light. It was himself now who was the nebulous and quiet ragtag and bobend of touching and breath and experience without visible scars, the waiting incurious unbreathing and without impatience, and there was another save him this time to make the move. There was a second hand on the clock too — a thin spidery splash; he watched it now as it moved too fast to follow save between the intervals of motion when it became instantaneously immobile as though drawn across the clock's face by a pen and a ruler — 9. 8. 7. 6. 5. 4. 3. 2. and done; it was now the twenty-first hour, and that was all. No sound, as though it had not been a steam train which quitted the station two seconds ago but rather the shadow of one on a magic-lantern screen until the child's vagrant and restless hand came and removed the slide.

"Well," Jiggs said, "I guess you'll be wanting to get home and catch some shuteye."

"Yair," the reporter said, "we might as well be moving." They got into the cab, though this time Jiggs lifted the canvas sack from the floor and sat with it on his lap.

"Yair," Jiggs said. "He'll find it. He already dropped it a couple of times trying to make it spin on the platform. — You told him to stop at Main Street, didn't you?"

"I'll take you on to the hotel," the reporter said.

"No, I'll get out at Main. Jesus, it's a good thing I don't live here; I never would get back home unless somebody took me; I couldn't even remember the name of the street I lived on even if I could pronounce it to ask where it was."

"Grandlieu," the reporter said. "I will take you—" The cab slowed into the corner and stopped; Jiggs gathered up the canvas bag and opened the door.

"This'll be fine. It ain't but eight-fifteen; I ain't to meet Art until nine. I'll just walk up the street a ways and get a little air."

"I wish you'd let me — Or if you'd like to come on back home and—"

"No; you get on home and go to bed; we have kept you up enough, I guess." He leaned into the cab, the cap raked above his hard blue face and the violent plum-coloured eye; suddenly the light changed to green

and the bell clanged and shrilled. Jiggs stuck out his hand; for an instant the hot hard limp rough palm sweated against the reporter's as if the reporter had touched a piece of machinery belting. "Much obliged. And thanks for the drinks. I'll be seeing you." The cab moved; Jiggs banged the door; his face fled backward past the window; the green and red and white electrics waned and pulsed and flicked away too as through the rear window the reporter watched Jiggs swing the now limp dirty sack over his shoulder and turn on into the crowd. The reporter leaned forward and tapped on the glass.

"Out to the airport," he said.

"Airport?" the driver said. "I thought the other fellow said you wanted to go to Noyades Street."

"No; airport," the reporter said. The driver looked forward again; he seemed to settle himself, to shape his limbs for comfort for the long haul even while the one-way arrows of the old constricted city flicked past. But presently the old quarter gave way to out-ravelling and shabby purlieus, mostly lightless now, and the cab went faster; presently the street straightened and became the ribbon-straight road running across the terraqueous plain and the cab was going quite fast, and now the illusion began, the sense of being suspended in a small airtight glass box clinging by two puny fingers of light in the silent and rushing immensity of space. By looking back he could still see the city, the glare of it, no further away; if he were moving, regardless at what terrific speed and in what loneliness, so was it, paralleling him. He was not escaping it; symbolic and encompassing, it outlay all gasoline-spanned distances and all clock-or sun-stipulated destinations. It would be there — the eternal smell of the coffee the sugar the hemp sweating slow iron plates above the forked deliberate brown water and lost lost lost all ultimate blue of latitude and horizon; the hot rain gutterful plaiting the eaten heads of shrimp; the ten thousand inescapable mornings wherein ten thousand swinging airplants stippleprop the soft scrofulous soaring of sweating brick and ten thousand pairs of splayed brown hired Leonora feet tiger-barred by jaloused armistice with the invincible sun: the thin black coffee, the myriad fish stewed in a myriad oil — to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow; not only not to hope, not even to wait: just to endure.

The Scavengers

AT MIDNIGHT — one of the group of newspaper men on the beach claimed to have watched the mate of the dredge-boat and the sergeant of the police-launch holding flashlights on their watches for fifteen minutes... the dredge upped anchor and stood off shore and steamed away while the police-launch, faster, had taken its white bone almost beyond the sea-wall before the dredge had got enough offing to turn.

Then the five newspaper men — four in overcoats with upturned collars — turned too and mounted the beach towards where the ranked glaring cars were beginning to disperse while the policemen — there were not so many of them now — tried to forestall the inevitable jam. There was no wind to-night, neither was there any overcast.

The necklace of lights along the lake shore curved away faint and clear, with that illusion of tremulous wavering which distance and clarity gave them, like bright not-quite-settled roosting birds, as did the boundary lights along the seawall; and now the steady and measured rake of the beacon seemed not to travel so much as to murmur like a moving forefoot of wind across the water, among the thick faint stars.

They mounted the beach to where a policeman, hands on hips, stood as though silhouetted not against the criss-crossing of headlights but against the blatting and honking uproar as well, as though contemplating without any emotion whatever the consummation of that which he had been waiting on for twenty hours now. "Ain't you talking to us too, sergeant?" the first newspaper man said. The policeman looked back over his shoulder, squinting down at the group from under his raked cap.

"Who are you?" he said.

"We are the press," the other said in a smirking affected voice.

“Get on, get on,” a second said behind him. “Let’s get indoors somewhere.” The policeman had already turned back to the cars, the racing engines, the honking and blatting.

“Come, come, sergeant,” the first said. “Come come come come. Ain’t you going to send us back to town too?” The policeman did not even look back. “Well, won’t you at least call my wife and tell her you won’t make me come home, since you wear the dark blue of honour integrity and purity—” The policeman spoke without turning his head.

“Do you want to finish this wake out here or do you really want to finish it in the wagon?”

“Exactly. You have got the idea at last. Boys, he’s even com—”

“Get on, get on,” the second said. “Let him buy a paper and read it.” They went on, the reporter (he was the one without an overcoat) last, threading their way between the blatting and honking, the whining and clashing of gears, the glare of back-bouncing and crossing headlight beams, and reached the boulevard and crossed it towards the lunch-stand.

The first led the way in, his hat-brim crumpled on one side and his overcoat caught one button awry and a bottle neck protruding from one pocket. The proprietor looked up at them with no especial pleasure; he was about to close up.

“That fellow out there kept me up all last night and I am about wore out,” he said.

“You would think we were from the District Attorney’s office and trying to padlock him instead of a press delegation trying to persuade him to stay open and accept our pittances,” the first said. “You are going to miss the big show at daylight, let alone all the country trade that never heard about it until the noon train got in with the papers.”

“How about coming to the back room and letting me lock the door and turn out the lights up here, then?” the proprietor said.

“Sure,” they told him. So he locked up and turned off the lights and led them to the back, to the kitchen — a stove, a zinc table encrusted with week-end after week-end of slain meat and fish — and supplied them with glasses, bottles of coca cola, a deck of cards, beer-cases to sit on, and a barrel head for table, and prepared to retire.

“If anybody knocks, just sit quiet,” he said. “And you can beat on that wall there when they get ready to begin; I’ll wake up.”

“Sure,” they told him. He went out. The first opened the bottle and began to pour into the five glasses. The reporter stopped him.

“None for me. I’m not drinking.”

“What?” the first said. He set the bottle carefully down and took out his handkerchief and went through the pantomime of removing his glasses, polishing them, and replacing them and staring at the reporter, though before he had finished the fourth took up the bottle and finished pouring the drinks. “You what?” the first said. “Did I hear my ears, or was it just blind hope I heard?”

“Yes,” the reporter said; his face wore that faint, spent, aching expression which a man might wear towards the end of a private baby show, “I’ve quit for a while.”

“Thank God for that,” the first breathed, then he turned and began to scream at the one who now held the bottle, with that burlesque outrage and despair of the spontaneous amateur buffoon. But he ceased at once and then the four of them (again the reporter declined) sat about the barrel and began to deal blackjack. The reporter did not join them.

He drew his beer-case aside, whereupon the first, the habitual opportunist who must depend upon all unrehearsed blundering and recalcitrant circumstance to be his stooge, noticed at once that he had set his beer-case beside the now cold stove. “If you ain’t going to take the drink yourself maybe you better give the stove one,” he said.

"I'll begin to warm up in a minute," the reporter said. They played; the fourth had the deal; their voices came quiet and brisk and impersonal above the faint slapping of the cards.

"That's what I call a guy putting himself away for keeps," he said.

"What do you suppose he was thinking about while he was sitting up there waiting for that water to smack him?" the first said.

"Nothing," the second said shortly. "If he had been a man that thought, he would not have been up there in the first place."

"Meaning he would have had a good job on a newspaper, huh?" the first said.

"Yes," the second said. "That's what I mean." The reporter rose quietly. He lit a cigarette, his back turned a little to them, and dropped the match carefully into the cold stove and sat down again. None of the others appeared to have noticed him.

"While you are supposing," the fourth said, "what do you suppose his wife was thinking about?"

"That's easy," the first said. "She was thinking, 'Thank God I carry a spare.'" They did not laugh; the reporter heard no sound of laughter, sitting quiet and immobile on his beer-case while the cigarette smoke lifted in the unwinded stale air and broke about his face, streaming on, and the voices spoke back and forth with a sort of brisk dead slap-slap-slap like that of the cards.

"Do you suppose it's a fact that they were both laying her?" the third said.

"That's not news," the first said. "But how about the fact that Shumann knew it too? Some of these mechanics that have known them for some time say they don't even know who the kid belongs to."

“Maybe both,” the fourth said. “A dual personality: the flying Jekyll and Hyde brother, who flies the ship and makes the parachute jump all at once.”

The reporter did not move, only his hand, the arm bending at the elbow which rested upon his knee, rose with the cigarette to his mouth and became motionless again while he drew in the smoke with an outward aspect of intense bemused concentration, trembling quietly and steadily and apparently not only untroubled by it but not even aware of it, like a man who has had palsy for years and years; the voices might have indeed been the sound of the cards or perhaps leaves blowing past him.

“You bastards,” the second said. “You dirty-mouthed bastards. Why don’t you let the guy rest? Let them all rest. They were trying to do what they had to do, with what they had to do it with, the same as all of us only maybe a little better than us. At least without squealing and belly-aching.”

“Sure,” the first said. “You get the point exactly. What they could do, with what they had to do it with: that’s just what we were talking about when you called us dirty-minded bastards.”

“Yes,” the third said. “Grady’s right. Let him rest; that’s what she seems to have done herself. But what the hell: probably nowhere to send him, even if she had him out of there. So it would be the same whether she stayed any longer or not, besides the cost. Where do you suppose they are going?”

“Where do people like that go?” the second said. “Where do mules and vaudeville acts go? You see a wagon broken down in the ditch or you see one of those trick bicycles with one wheel and the seat fourteen feet from the earth in a pawnshop. But do you wonder whatever became of whatever it was that used to make them move?”

“Do you mean you think she cleared out just to keep from having to pay out some jack to bury him if they get him up?” the fourth said.

“Why not?” the second said. “People like that don’t have money to spend on corpses because they don’t use money. It don’t take money especially to live; it’s only when you die that you or somebody has got to have something put away in the sock. A man can eat and sleep and keep the purity squad off of him for six months on what the undertaker will make you believe you can’t possibly be planted for a cent less and preserve your self-respect. So what would they have to bury him with even if they had him to bury?”

“You talk like he didn’t kill himself taking a chance to win two thousand dollars,” the third said.

“That’s correct. Oh, he would have taken the money, all right. But that wasn’t why he was flying that ship up there. He would have entered it if he hadn’t had anything but a bicycle, just so it would have got off the ground. But it ain’t for money.

It’s because they have got to do it, like some women have got to be whores. They can’t help themselves. Ord knew that the ship was dangerous, and Shumann must have known it as well as Ord did — don’t you remember how for the first lap he stayed so far away he didn’t even look like he was in the same race, until he forgot and came in and tried to catch Ord?

If it had just been the money, do you think he could have thought about money hard enough to have decided to risk his life to get it in a machine that he knew was unsafe, and then have forgot about the money for a whole lap of the race while he hung back there not half as close to the pylons as the judges were, just riding around? Don’t kid yourself.”

“And don’t kid yourself,” the first said. “It was the money. Those guys like money as well as you and me. What would he have done with it? Hell, what would any other three people do with two thousand bucks?

She would have bought herself a batch of new clothes and they would have moved to the hotel from wherever it was they were staying, and

they would have taken a couple of days and blowed it out good. That's what they would have done. But they didn't get it and so you are right, by God: what she did was the sensible thing: when a game blows up in your face you don't sit down on the pocket-book that used to make a bump on your ass and cry about it, you get out and hustle up another roll and go on and find another game that maybe you can beat.

Yes. They want money, all right. But it ain't to sweat just to have something in the sock when the snow flies, or to be buried with either. So I don't know any more than you guys do, but if somebody told me that Shumann had some folks somewhere and then they told me the name of the town she bought hers and the kid's tickets to, I would tell you where Shumann used to live.

And then I would bet a quarter maybe that the next time you see them, the kid won't be there. Because why? Because that's what I would do if I were her. And so would you guys."

"No," the second said.

"You mean you wouldn't or she wouldn't?" the first said. The reporter sat motionless the cigarette's windless upstream breaking upon his face. "Yes," the first said. "Before, they might not have known whose the kid was, but it was Shumann's name he went under and so in comparison to the whole mess they must have lived in, who had actually fathered the kid didn't matter. But now Shumann's gone; you asked a while ago what she was thinking about while he was sitting up there waiting for the water to hit him.

I'll tell you what she and the other guy were both thinking about: that now that Shumann was gone, they would never get rid of him. Maybe they took it right about: I don't know. But now they couldn't even get him out of the room; even turning off the light won't do any good, and all the time they would be awake and moving there he will be, watching them right out of the mixed-up name, Jack Shumann, that the kid has.

It used to be the guy had one competitor; now he will have to compete with every breath the kid draws and be cuckolded by every ghost that

walks and refuses to give his name. So if you will tell me that Shumann has some folks in a certain town, I will tell you where she and the kid—”

The reporter did not move. He sat quite still while the voice ceased on that note of abrupt transition, hearing out of the altered silence the voices talking at him and the eyes talking at him while he held himself rigid, watching the calculated hand flick the ash carefully from the cigarette. “You hung around them a lot,” the first said. “Did you ever hear any of them mention any kin that Shumann or she had?”

The reporter did not move; he let the voice repeat the question; he even raised the cigarette again and flicked the ash off, or what would have been ash if he had not flicked it only a second ago. Then he started; he sat up, looking at them with an expression of startled interrogation.

“What?” he said. “What was that? I wasn’t listening.”

“Did you ever hear any mention of Shumann having any kinsfolks, mother and father and such?” the first said. The reporter’s face did not alter.

“No,” he said. “I don’t believe I did. I believe his mechanic told me that he was an orphan.”

It was two o’clock then but the cab went fast, so it was just past two-thirty when the cab reached the Terrebonne and the reporter entered and leaned his gaunt desperate face across the desk while he spoke to the clerk.

“Don’t you call yourselves the headquarters of the American Aeronautical Association?” he said. “You mean you didn’t keep any registration of contestants and such? that the committee just let them scatter to hell and gone over New Valois without—”

“Who is it you want to find?” the clerk said.

“Art Jackson. A stunt flyer.”

“I’ll see if there is any record. The meet was over yesterday.” The clerk left the window. The reporter leaned in it, not panting, just completely motionless until the clerk returned.

“There is an Arthur Jackson registered as staying at the Bienville hotel yesterday. But whether or not he is—” But the reporter was gone, not running, but walking fast, back towards the entrance; a porter with a long-handled brush sweeping the floor jerked it back just before the reporter was about to walk through the brush-handle as if it were a spiderweb.

The taxi-driver did not know exactly where the Bienville was, but at last they found it — a side street, a sign reading mostly Turkish Bath, then a narrow entrance, a corridor dimly lighted and containing a few chairs, a few palms, more spittoons than either, and a desk beside which a negro in no uniform slept — a place ambiguous, redolent of hard Saturday nights, whose customers seldom had any baggage and beyond the turnings of whose dim and threadbare corridors there seemed to whisk for ever bright tawdry kimonos in a kind of hopeful nostalgic convocation of all the bought female flesh which ever breathed and perished.

The negro waked; there was no elevator; the reporter was directed to the room from his description of Jiggs and knocked beneath the ghost of two numbers attached to the door’s surface by the ghost of four tacks until the door opened and Jiggs blinked at him with the good eye and the injured one, wearing now only the shirt.

The reporter held in his hand the slip of paper which had been clipped to the money the jumper gave him. He did not blink, himself: he just stared at Jiggs with that desperate urgency.

“The tickets,” he said. “Where—”

“Oh,” Jiggs said. “Myron, Ohio. Yair, that’s it on the paper.

Roger’s old man. They’re going to leave the kid there. I thought you knew. You said you saw Jack at the — Here, doc! What is this?” He

opened the door wider and put out his hand, but the reporter had already caught the door-jamb. "You come on in and set down a—"

"Myron, Ohio," the reporter said. His face wore again that faint wrung quiet grimace as with the other hand he continued to try to put Jiggs' hand aside even after Jiggs was no longer offering to touch him. He began to apologize to Jiggs for having disturbed him, talking through that thin wash over his wasted gaunt face which would have been called smiling for lack of anything better.

"It's all right, doc," Jiggs said, watching him, blinking still with a sort of brutal concern. "Jesus, ain't you been to bed yet? Here; you better come in here; me and Art can make room—"

"Yes, I'll be getting on."

He pushed himself carefully back from the door as though he were balancing himself before turning the door loose, feeling Jiggs watching him. "I just happened to drop in. To say good-bye." He looked at Jiggs with that thin fixed grimace while Jiggs blinked at him.

"Good-bye, doc. Only you better—"

"And good luck to you. Or do you say happy landings to a parachute jumper?"

"Jesus," Jiggs said. "I hope so."

"Then happy landings too."

"Yair. Thanks. The same to you, doc." The reporter turned away. Jiggs watched him go down the corridor, walking with that curious light stiff care, and turn the corner and vanish.

The light was even dimmer on the stairs than it had been in the corridor, though the brass strips which bound the rubber tread to each step glinted bright and still in the centre where the heels had kept it polished.

The negro was already asleep again in the chair beside the desk; he did not stir as the reporter passed him and went on and got into the cab, stumbling a little on the step.

“Back to the airport,” he said. “You needn’t hurry. We got until daylight.” He was back on the beach before daylight, though it was dawn before the other four saw him again, before they came out of the dark lunch-stand and passed again through another barricade of parked cars (though not so many this time since it was now Monday), and descended to the beach.

They saw him then. The smooth water was a pale rose colour from the waxing east, so that the reporter in silhouette against it resembled a tatting Christmas gift made by a little girl and supposed to represent a sleeping crane.

“Good Lord,” the third said. “You suppose he has been down here by himself all the time?” But they did not have much time to wonder about it; they were barely on time themselves; they heard the aeroplane taking off before they reached the beach and then they watched it circling; it came over into what they thought was position and the sound of the engine died for a time and then began again and the aeroplane went on, though nothing else happened.

They saw nothing fall from it at all, they just saw three gulls converge suddenly from nowhere and begin to slant and tilt and scream above a spot on the water some distance away, making a sound like rusty shutters in a wind. “So that’s that,” the third said. “Let’s go to town.” Again the fourth one spoke the reporter’s name.

“Are we going to wait for him?” he said. They looked back, but the reporter was gone.

“He must have got a ride with somebody,” the third said. “Come on. Let’s go.”

When the reporter got out of the car at the Saint Jules Avenue corner the clock beyond the restaurant’s window said eight o’clock. He did not

look at the clock; he was looking at nothing for the time, shaking slowly and steadily.

It was going to be another bright vivid day; the sunlight, the streets and walls themselves emanated that brisk up-and-doing sobriety of Monday morning.

But he was not looking at that either; he was not looking at anything. When he began to see it was as if the letters were beginning to emerge from the back of his skull — the broad page under a rusting horseshoe, the quality of grateful astonishment which Monday headlines have like when you learn that the uncle whom you believed to have perished two years ago in a poor-house fire died yesterday in Tucson, Arizona and left you five hundred dollars:

AVIATOR'S BODY RESIGNED TO LAKE GRAVE

Then he quit seeing it. He had not moved; his pupils would still have repeated the page in inverted miniature, but he was not seeing it at all, shaking quietly and steadily in the bright warm sun until he turned and looked into the window with an expression of quiet and bemused despair — the not-flies or were-flies, the two grape-fruit halves, the printed names of food like the printed stations in a train schedule and set on an easel like a family portrait — and experienced not only that profound and unshakable reluctance but actual absolute refusal of his entire organism.

“All right,” he said. “If I won’t eat, then I am going to take a drink. If I won’t go in here then I am going to Joe’s.” It was not far: just down an alley and through a barred door — one of the places where for fifteen years the United States had tried to keep them from selling whiskey and where for one year now it had been trying to make them sell it.

The porter let him in and poured him a drink in the empty bar while starting the cork in another bottle. “Yair,” the reporter said. “I was on the wagon for an entire day. Would you believe that?”
“Not about you,” the porter said.

“Neither would I. It surprised me. It surprised the hell out of me until I found out it was two other guys. See?” He laughed too; it wasn’t loud; it still didn’t seem loud even after the porter was holding him up, calling him by name too, mister too, like Leonora, saying:
“Come on, now; try to quit now.”

“All right,” the reporter said. “I’ve quit now. If you ever saw any man quitter than me right now I will buy you an aeroplane.”
“O.K.,” the porter said. “Only make it a taxi-cab and you go on home.”

“Home? I just come from home. I’m going to work now. I’m O.K. now. Give me another shot and just point me towards the door and I will be all right. All right, see? Then I learned by mistake that it was two other guys—” But he stopped himself, this time; he held himself fine while the porter poured the other drink and brought it to him.

He had himself in hand fine now; he did not feel at all: just the liquor flowing slowly down him, fiery, dead, and cold.

Soon he would even quit shaking, soon he did quit; walking now with the bright unsoiled morning falling upon him he did not have anything to shake with. “So I feel better,” he said.

Then he began to say it fast: “Oh God, I feel better! I feel better! I feel! I feel!” until he quit that too and said quietly, with tragic and passive clairvoyance, looking at the familiar wall, the familiar twin door through which he was about to pass: “Something is going to happen to me. I have got myself stretched out too far and too thin and something is going to bust.”

He mounted the quiet stairs; in the empty corridor he drank from the bottle, though this time it was merely cold and felt like water. But when he entered the deserted city room he remembered that he could have drunk here just as well, and so he did.

“I see so little of it,” he said. “I don’t know the family’s habits yet.” But it was empty, or comparatively so, because he kept on making that vertical reverse without any rudder or flippers and looking down on the close-peopled land and the empty lake and deciding, and the dredge-boat hanging over him for twenty hours and then having to lie there too and look up at the wreath dissolving, faintly rocking and stared at by gulls, away and trying to explain that he did not know.

“I didn’t think of that!” he cried. “I just thought they were all going. I don’t know where, but I thought that all three of them, that maybe the hundred and seventy-five would be enough until Homes could... and that then he would be big enough and I would be there; I would maybe see her first and she would not look different even though he was out there around the pylon, and so I wouldn’t either even if I was forty-two instead of twenty-eight, and he would come on in off the pylons and we would go up and she maybe holding my arm and him looking at us over the cockpit and she would say, ‘This is the one back in New Valois that time. That used to buy you the ice-cream.’”

Then he had to hurry, saying, “Wait. Stop now. Stop,” until he did stop, tall, humped a little, moving his mouth faintly as if he were tasting, blinking fast now and now stretching his eyelids to their full extent like a man trying to keep himself awake while driving a car; again it tasted, felt, like so much dead icy water, cold and heavy and lifeless in his stomach; when he moved he could both hear and feel it sluggish and dead within him as he removed his coat and hung it on the chairback and sat down and racked a sheet of yellow paper into the machine. He could not feel his fingers on the keys either; he just watched the letters materialize out of thin air, black, sharp and fast, along the creeping yellow.

During the night the little boy slept on the seat facing the woman and the parachute jumper, the toy aeroplane clutched to his chest; when daylight came the train was running in snow. They changed trains in snow too, and when in mid-afternoon the train-man called the town and looking out the window the woman read the name on the little station, it was snowing hard.

They got out and crossed the platform, among the milk-cans and the fowl-crates, and entered the waiting-room where a porter was putting coal into the stove. "Can we get a cab here?" the jumper asked him.

"There's one outside now," the porter said. "I'll call him."

"Thanks," the jumper said. The jumper looked at the woman; she was buttoning the trench-coat. "I'll wait here," he said.

"Yes," she said. "All right. I don't know how—"

"I'll wait. No use standing around anywhere else."

"Ain't he coming with us?" the little boy said. He looked at the jumper, the toy aeroplane under his arm now, though he still spoke to the woman. "Don't he want to see Roger's old man too?"

"No," the woman said. "You tell him good-bye now."

"Good-bye?" the boy said. He looked from one to the other. "Ain't we coming back?" He looked from one to the other. "I'll stay here with him until you get back. I'll see Roger's old man some other time."

"No," the woman said. "Now." The boy looked from one to the other. Suddenly the jumper said:

"So long, kid. I'll be seeing you."

"You're going to wait? You ain't going off?"

"No. I'll wait. You and Laverne go on." The porter came in.

"He's waiting for you folks," he said.

"The cab's waiting," the woman said. "Tell Jack so long."

"O.K.," the boy said. "You wait here for us. Soon as we get back we'll eat."

"Yair; sure," the jumper said. Suddenly he set the bag down and stooped and picked the boy up.

"No," the woman said; "you wait here out of the—" But the jumper went on, carrying the little boy, swinging his stiff leg along. The woman followed him, into the snow again. The cab was a small touring car with

a lettered sign on the wind-shield and a blanket over the hood and driven by a man with a scraggly greyish moustache.

The driver opened the door; the jumper swung the boy in, stepped back and helped the woman in, and leaned again into the door; now his face wore an expression which anyone who had seen very much of the reporter lately would have recognized — that faint grimace (in this instance savage too) which would have been called smiling for lack of anything better.

“So long, old fellow,” he said. “Be good now.”

“O.K.,” the boy said. “You be looking around for somewhere to eat before we get back.”

“O.K.,” the jumper said.

“All right, mister,” the woman said. “Let’s go.” The car moved, swinging away from the station; the woman was still leaning forward. “Do you know where Doctor Carl Shumann lives?” she said. For an instant the driver did not move.

The car still swung on, gaining speed, and there was little possible moving for the driver to do. Yet during that moment he seemed to have become caught in that sort of instantaneous immobility like when a sudden light surprises a man or an animal out of darkness. Then it was gone.

“Doctor Shumann? Sure. You want to go there?”

“Yes,” the woman said. It was not far; the town was not large; it seemed to the woman that almost at once the car had stopped, and looking out through the falling snow she saw a kind of cenotaph, penurious and without majesty or dignity, of forlorn and victorious desolation — a bungalow, a tight flimsy mass of stoops and porte-cochères and flat gables and bays not five years old and built in that coloured mud-and-chicken-wire tradition which California moving-picture films have scattered across North America as if the celluloid carried germs.

It was not five years old, yet it wore already an air of dilapidation and rot; a quality furious and recent as if immediate disintegration had been included in the architect's blueprints and inherent in the wood and plaster and sand of its mushroom growth. Then she found the driver looking at her.

"This is it," he said. "Or maybe you were thinking about his old place? or are you acquainted with him that well?"

"No," the woman said. "This is it." He made no move to open the door; he just sat half-turned, watching her struggling with the door handle.

"He used to have a big old place out in the country until he lost it a few years back. His son took up av-aytion and he mortgaged the place to buy his son a flying machine and then his son wrecked the machine and so the doctor had to borrow some more money on the place to fix the machine up.

I guess the boy aimed to pay it back but he just never got around to it maybe. So he lost the old place and built this one. Prob'ly this one suits him just as well, though; womenfolks usually like to live close to town—
" But she had got the door open now and she and the boy got out.

"Do you mind waiting?" she said. "I don't know how long I'll be. I'll pay you for the time."

"Sure," he said. "That's my business. What you do with the car while you are hiring it is yours, not mine." He watched them enter the gate and go on up the narrow concrete walk in the snow. "So that's her," he thought. "Only she don't look a whole lot like a widow. But then I hear tell she never acted a whole lot like a wife."

He had a robe, another horse-blanket, in the seat beside him. He bundled himself into it, which was just as well because dark had come and the snow drifted and whirled, funnelled now by the down-glare of a street-lamp nearby before the door opened and he recognized against the light the silhouette of the trench-coat and then that of

Doctor Shumann as they came out and the door shut behind them. He threw the robe off and started the engine.

But after a while he cut the switch and drew the robe about him again, though it was too dark and the snow was falling too fast for him to see the two people standing on the stoop before the entrance of the house.

“You are going to leave him like this?” Dr. Shumann said. “You are going to leave him asleep and go away?”

“Can you think of any better way?” she said.

“No. That’s true.” He was speaking loudly, too loudly. “Let us understand one another. You leave him here of your own free will; we are to make a home for him until we die: that is understood.”

“Yes. I agreed to that inside,” she said patiently.

“No; but let us understand. I” He talked in that curious, loud, wild, rushing manner, as though she were still moving away and were at some distance now: “We are old; you cannot understand that, that you will or can ever reach a time when you can bear so much and no more; that nothing else is worth the bearing; that you not only cannot, you will not; that nothing is worth anything but peace, peace, peace, even with bereavement and grief — nothing! nothing!

But we have reached that stage. When you came here with Roger that day before the boy was born, you and I talked and I talked different to you. I was different then; I meant it when you told me you did not know whether or not Roger was the father of your unborn child and that you would never know, and I told you, do you remember?

I said, ‘Then make Roger his father from now on.’ And you told me the truth that you would not promise, that you were born bad and could not help it or did not think you were going to try to help it; and I told you nobody is born anything, bad or good, God help us, any more than anybody can do anything save what they must: do you remember? I

meant that then. But I was younger then. And now I am not young. And now I can't — I cannot — I"

"I know. If I leave him with you, I must not try to see him again until you and she are dead."

"Yes. I must; I cannot help it. I just want peace now. I don't want equity or justice, I don't want happiness; I just want peace. We won't live very much longer, and then—"

She laughed, short, mirthless, not moving. "And then he will have forgotten me."

"That's your risk. Because, remember," he cried; "remember! I don't ask this. I did not ask you to leave him, to bring him to us. You can go up now and wake him and take him with you. But if you do not, if you leave him with us and turn your back on this house and go away — Think well.

If you like, take him with you to-night, to the hotel or wherever and think about it and make up your mind and bring him back to-morrow or come yourself and tell me what you have decided."

"I have decided now," she said.

"That you leave him here of your own free will. That we give him the home and care and affection which is his right both as a helpless child and as our gra — grand — and that in return for this, you are to make no attempt to see him or communicate with him as long as we live. That is your understanding, your agreement? Think well."

"Yes," she said. "I have to do it."

"But you do not. You can take him with you now; all this to-night can be as if it had never happened. You are his mother; I still believe that any mother is better — better than — How do you have to?"

“Because I don’t know whether I can buy him enough food to eat and enough clothes to keep him warm and medicine if he is sick,” she said. “Do you understand that?”

“I understand that this — your — this other man does not earn as much in his line as Roger did in his. But you tell me Roger did not always earn enough for the four of you: nevertheless you never thought while Roger was alive of leaving the boy with us. And now, with one less mouth to feed, you try to tell me that you—”

“I’ll tell you, if you will listen a minute,” she said. “I’m going to have another child.”

Now he did not speak at all; his unfinished sentence seemed to hang between them. They stood face to face but they could not see one another: just the two vague shapes with the snow falling between them and upon them, though since her back was to the street lamp she could see him the better of the two. After a while he said quietly:

“I see. Yes. And you know that this other child is — is not—”

“Not Roger’s. Yes. Roger and I were — But no matter. I know, this time. Roger and I both know. So we will need money and that’s what Roger was trying to do in that meet. The ship he won a prize with the first day was too slow, obsolete.

But that was all we could get and he outflew them, beat them on the pylons, by turning the pylons closer than the others dared for that little money. Then Saturday he had a chance to fly a ship that was dangerous, but he had a chance to win two thousand dollars in the race.

That would have fixed us up. But the ship came to pieces in the air. Maybe I could have stopped him. I don’t know. But maybe I could have. But I didn’t. I didn’t try, anyhow. So now we didn’t get that money, and we left most of the first day’s prize to send his body here when they get it out of the lake.”

“Ah,” Dr. Shumann said. “I see. Yes. So you are giving us the chance to — the opportunity to—” Suddenly he cried: “If I just knew that he is Roger’s! If I just knew! Can’t you tell me? Can’t you give me some sign, some little sign? Any little sign?”

She didn’t move. The light came through the snow, across her shoulder, and she could see him a little — a small thin man with untidy, thin, iron-grey hair and the snow whispering in it, standing with his face turned aside and his hand not before it exactly but held palm out between his face and hers. After a while she said:

“Maybe you would rather take a little time to think about it.

To decide.” She could not see his face now: only the lifted hand; she seemed to be speaking to the hand: “Suppose I wait at the hotel until to-morrow, so—” The hand moved, a faint motion from the wrist as though it were trying to push her voice away.

But she repeated, once more, as though for a record: “You mean you don’t want me to wait?” But only the hand moved again, replied; she turned quietly and went down the steps, feeling for each step beneath the snow, and went on down the walk, vanishing into the drowsing pantomime of the snow, not fast. She did not look back. Dr. Shumann did not watch her.

He heard the engine of the car start, but he was already turning, entering the house, fumbling at the door for a moment before he found the knob and entered, his hair and shoulders (he was in his shirt-sleeves) powdered with snow. He went on down the hall; his wife, sitting beside the bed in the darkened room where the boy was asleep, heard him blunder against something in the hall and then saw him come into the door, framed against the lighted hall, holding to the door frame, the light glinting in the melting snow in his untidy hair.

“If we just had a sign,” he said. He entered, stumbling again. She rose and approached him, but he pushed her aside, entering. “Let me be,” he said.

“Shhhhhh,” she said. “Don’t wake him. You come on and eat your supper.”

“Let me alone,” he said, pushing with his hand at the empty air now since she stood back, watching him approach the bed, fumbling at the foot-board. But his voice was quiet enough. “Go out,” he said. “Leave me be. Go away and leave me be.”

“You come on and eat your supper and lay down.”

“Go on. I’m all right, I tell you.” She obeyed; he stood holding to the bed’s foot-board and heard her feet move slowly up the hall and cease. Then he moved, fumbling until he found the light-cord, the bulb, and turned it on.

The little boy stirred, turning his face from the light. The garment in which he slept was a man’s shirt, an old-fashioned garment with a once-glazed bosom, soft now from many washings, pinned about his throat with a gold brooch and with the sleeves cut recently off at his wrists.

On the pillow beside him the toy aeroplane rested. Suddenly Dr. Shumann stooped and took the boy by the shoulder and began to shake him. The toy aeroplane slid from the pillow; with his other hand Dr. Shumann flipped it to the floor, still shaking the little boy. “Roger,” he said, “wake up. Wake up, Roger.”

The boy waked; without moving he blinked up at the man’s face bending over him.

“Laverne,” he said. “Jack. Where’s Laverne? Where’m I at?”

“Laverne’s gone,” Dr. Shumann said, still shaking the boy as though he had forgot to tell his muscles to desist. “You’re at home, but Laverne is gone. Gone, I tell you. Are you going to cry? Hey?” The boy blinked up at him, then he turned and put out his hand towards the pillow beside him.

“Where’s my new job?” he said. “Where’s my ship?”

“Your ship, hey?” Dr. Shumann said. “Your ship, hey?” He stooped and caught up the toy and held it up, his face twisted into a grimace of gnome-like rage, and whirled and hurled the toy at the wall and, while the boy watched him, ran to it and began to stamp upon it with blind maniacal fury.

The little boy made one sharp sound: then, silent, raised on one elbow, his eyes a little wide as though with curious interest alone, he watched the shabby wild-haired old man jumping up and down upon the shapeless trivial mass of blue-and-yellow tin in maniacal ludicrousness.

Then the little boy saw him pause, stoop, take up the ruined toy and apparently begin to try to tear it to pieces with his hands. His wife, sitting beside the living-room stove, heard his feet too through the flimsy walls, feeling the floor shake too, then she heard him approaching up the hall, fast now.

She was small — a faded woman with faded eyes and a quiet faded face sitting in the stuffy room containing a worn divan and fumed oak chairs and a fumed oak revolving bookcase racked neatly with battered medical books from whose bindings the gilt-embossed titles had long since vanished, and a table littered with medical magazines on which lay at the moment a thick cap with ear-muffs, a pair of mittens and a small scuffed black bag.

She did not move: she was sitting there watching the door when Dr. Shumann came in, holding one hand out before him; she did not stir even then: she just looked quietly at the mass of money. “It was in that aeroplane!” he said. “He even had to hide his money from her!”

“No,” the wife said. “She hid it from him.”

“No!” he shouted. “He hid it from her. For the boy. Do you think a woman would ever hide money or anything else and then forget where

she put it? And where would she get a hundred and seventy-five dollars, anyway?"

"Yes," the wife said, the faded eyes filled with immeasurable and implacable unforgiving; "where would she get a hundred and seventy-five dollars that she would have to hide from both of them in a child's toy?" He looked at her for a long moment.

"Ah," he said. He said it quietly: "Oh. Yes. I see." Then he cried, "But no matter! It don't matter now!" He stooped and swung open the door of the stove and shut it again; she did not move, not even when, glancing past him as he stooped, she saw in the door and looking in at them, the little boy in the man's shirt carrying against his chest the battered mass of the toy in one hand and the clothes which he had worn wadded in the other, his cap already on.

Dr. Shumann had not seen him yet; he rose from the stove; it was the draught of course, from the opening and closing of the door, but it did seem as though it were the money itself passing in flame and fire up the pipe with a deep faint roar into nothing as Dr. Shumann stood again, looking down at her.

"It's our boy," he said; then he shouted: "It's our boy, I tell you!" Then he collapsed; he seemed to let go all at once, though not hard because of his spareness, on to his knees beside the chair, his head in her lap, crying.

When the city room began to fill that evening a copy-boy noticed the overturned waste-basket beside the reporter's desk and the astonishing amount of savagely defaced and torn copy which littered the adjacent floor. The copy-boy was a bright lad, about to graduate from high-school; he had not only ambitions but dreams too.

He gathered up from the floor all the sheets, whole and in fragments, emptied the waste-basket and, sitting at the reporter's desk he began to sort them, discarding and fitting and resorting at the last to paste; then, his eyes big with excitement and exultation and then downright

triumph, he regarded what he had salvaged and restored to order and coherence — the sentences and paragraphs which he believed to be not only news but the beginning of literature:

“On Thursday Roger Shumann flew a race against four competitors, and won.

On Saturday he flew against but one competitor. But that competitor was Death, and Roger Shumann lost. And so to-day a lone aeroplane flew out over the lake on the wings of dawn and circled the spot where Roger Shumann got the Last Checkered Flag, and vanished back into the dawn from whence it came.

“Thus two friends told him farewell. Two friends, yet two competitors too, whom he had met in fair contest and conquered in the lonely sky from which he fell, dropping a simple wreath to mark his Last Pylon.”

It stopped there, but the copy-boy did not. “O Jesus,” he whispered. “Maybe Hagood will let me finish it!” already moving towards the desk where Hagood now sat, though the copy-boy had not seen him enter.

Hagood had just sat down; the copy-boy, his mouth already open, paused behind Hagood. Then he became more complete vassal to surprise than ever, for lying on Hagood’s desk and and weighted down neatly by an empty whiskey bottle was another sheet of copy which Hagood and the copy-boy read together:

“At midnight last night the search for the body of Roger Shumann, racing pilot who plunged into the lake Saturday p m., was finally abandoned by a three-place biplane of about eighty horse-power which managed to fly out over the water and return without falling to pieces and dropping a wreath of flowers into the water approximately three-quarters of a mile away from where Shumann’s body is generally supposed to be since they were precision pilots and so did not miss the entire lake.

Mrs. Shumann departed with her husband and children for Ohio, where it is understood that their six-year-old son will spend an indefinite time

with some of his grandparents and where any and all finders of Roger Shumann are kindly requested to forward any and all of same.”

And beneath this, savagely in pencil: I guess this is what you want, you bastard, and now I am going down to Amboise St and get drunk awhile and if you don't know where Amboise St is ask your son to tell you and if you don't know what drunk is come down there and look at me and when you come bring some jack because I am on a credit.

The End

Absalom, Absalom! William Faulkner

ABSALOM, ABSALOM!

Absalom, Absalom! (1936) concerns events during and after the Civil War, telling the story of three families of the American South, focusing on the rise and fall of Thomas Sutpen. A white man born into poverty in West Virginia, Sutpen comes to Mississippi with the complementary aims of gaining wealth and becoming a powerful family patriarch. The story is mostly narrated in flashbacks by Quentin Compson to his roommate at Harvard University, Shreve, who frequently contributes his own suggestions and surmises.

The narration of Rosa Coldfield, and Quentin's father and grandfather, are also included and re-interpreted by Shreve and Quentin, with the events of the story unfolding in non-chronological order and often with differing details, as the true story of the Sutpens is gradually revealed in subtle stages. Rosa initially narrates the story, with long digressions and a biased memory, to Quentin Compson, whose grandfather was a friend of Sutpen's.

Quentin's father then fills in several details to Quentin. Finally, Quentin relates the story to his roommate Shreve, and in each retelling, the reader is given more details as the parties augment the story with new layers of information. The final effect leaves the reader more certain about the attitudes and biases of the characters than about the facts of Sutpen's history.

As with many of Faulkner's novels, *Absalom, Absalom!* allegorises Southern history. The title is an allusion to a wayward son fighting the empire his father built, as told the Biblical story of King David and Absalom. The history of Thomas Sutpen mirrors the rise and fall of Southern plantation culture, as Sutpen's failures replicate the weaknesses of the idealistic South. Along with *The Sound and the Fury*, the novel played an important part in Faulkner winning the Nobel Prize in Literature and today it is regarded as a staple work of modernist literature.

Interestingly, the 1983 Guinness Book of World Records claims that the "Longest Sentence in Literature" is a sentence from *Absalom, Absalom!* containing 1,288 words. The sentence can be found in Chapter 6; it begins with the words "Just exactly like father", and ends with "the eye could not see from any point". The passage is entirely italicised and incomplete.

Contents

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

IX

CHRONOLOGY

GENEALOGY

ABSALOM, ABSALOM! William Faulkner

I

FROM a little after two o'clock until almost sundown of the long still hot weary dead September afternoon they sat in what Miss Coldfield still called the office because her father had called it that—a dim hot airless room with the blinds all closed and fastened for forty-three summers because when she was a girl someone had believed that light and moving air carried heat and that dark was always cooler, and which (as the sun shone fuller and fuller on that side of the house) became latticed with yellow slashes full of dust motes which Quentin thought of as being flecks of the dead old dried paint itself blown inward from the scaling blinds as wind might have blown them.

There was a wistaria vine blooming for the second time that summer on a wooden trellis before one window, into which sparrows came now and then in random gusts, making a dry vivid dusty sound before going away: and opposite Quentin, Miss Coldfield in the eternal black which she had worn for forty-three years now, whether for sister, father, or nothusband none knew, sitting so bolt upright in the straight hard chair that was so tall for her that her legs hung straight and rigid as if she had iron shinbones' and ankles, clear of the floor with that air of impotent and static rage like children's feet, and talking in that grim haggard amazed Voice until at last listening would renege and hearing-sense self-confound and the long-dead object of her impotent yet indomitable frustration would appear, as though by outraged recapitulation evoked, quiet inattentive and harmless, out of the biding and dreamy and victorious dust.

Her voice would not cease, it would just vanish. There would be the dim coffin-smelling gloom sweet and oversweet with the twice-bloomed wistaria against the outer wall by the savage quiet September sun impacted distilled and hyperdistilled, into which came now and then the loud cloudy flutter of the sparrows like a flat limber stick whipped by an idle boy, and the rank smell of female old flesh long embattled in virginity while the wan haggard face watched him above

the faint triangle of lace at wrists and throat from the too tall chair in which she resembled a crucified child; and the voice not ceasing but vanishing into and then out of the long intervals like a stream, a trickle running from patch to patch of dried sand, and the ghost mused with shadowy docility as if it were the voice which he haunted where a more fortunate one would have had a house.

Out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a schoolprize water color, faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard, with grouped behind him his band of wild niggers like beasts half tamed to walk upright like men, in attitudes wild and reposed, and manacled among them the French architect with his air grim, haggard, and taller-ran. Immobile, bearded, and hand palm lifted the horseman sat; behind him the wild blacks and the captive architect huddled quietly, carrying in bloodless paradox the shovels and picks and axes of peaceful conquest.

Then in the long unamaze Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the Be Sutpen's Hundred like the oldentime Be Light.

Then hearing would reconcile and he would seem to listen to two separate Quentins now the Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and people with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of the ghosts which had refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling him about old ghost-times; and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost, but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South the same as she was the two separate Quentins now talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople, in notlanguage, like this: It seems that this demon—his name was Sutpen (Colonel Sutpen)—Colonel Sutpen.

Who came out of nowhere and without warning upon the land with a band of strange niggers and built a plantation—(Tore violently a plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)—tore violently. and married her sister Ellen and begot a son and a daughter which—(without gentleness begot, Miss Rosa Coldfield says)—without gentleness.

Which should have been the jewels of his pride and the shield and comfort of his old age, only—(Only they destroyed him or something or he destroyed them or something And died)—and died. Without regret, Miss Rosa Coldfield says—(Save by her) Yes, save by her. (And by Quentin Compson) Yes. And by Quentin Compson.

'Because you are going away to attend the college at Harvard they tell me,' Miss Coldfield said. 'So I don't imagine you will ever come back here and settle down as a country lawyer in a little town like Jefferson, since Northern people have already seen to it that there is little left in the South for a young man. So maybe you will enter the literary profession as so many Southern gentlemen and gentlewomen too are doing now and maybe some day you will remember this and write about it. You will be married then I expect and perhaps your wife will want a new gown or a new chair for the house and you can write this and submit it to the magazines. Perhaps you will even remember kindly then the old woman who made you spend a whole afternoon sitting indoors and listening while she talked about people and events you were fortunate enough to escape yourself when you wanted to be out among young friends of your own age.'

'Yessum,' Quentin said. Only she don't mean that, he thought. It's because she wants it told. It was still early then. He had yet in his pocket the note which he had received by the hand of a small Negro boy just before noon, asking him to call and see her—the quaint, stiffly formal request which was actually a summons, out of another world almost—the queer archaic sheet of ancient good notepaper written over with the neat faded cramped script which, due to his astonishment at the request from a woman three times his age and whom he had known all his life without having exchanged a hundred words with her or perhaps to the fact that he was only twenty years

old, he did not recognize as revealing a character cold, implacable, and even ruthless. He obeyed it immediately after the noon meal, walking the half mile between his home and hers through the dry dusty heat of early September and so into the house.

It too was somehow smaller than its actual size—it was of two storeys—unpainted and a little shabby, yet with an air, a quality of grim endurance as though like her it had been created to fit into and complement a world in all ways a little smaller than the one in which it found itself. There in the gloom of the shuttered hallway whose air was even hotter than outside, as if there were prisoned in it like in a tomb all the suspiration of slow heatladen time which had recurred during the forty-five years, the small figure in black which did not even rustle, the wan triangle of lace at wrists and throat, the dim face looking at him with an expression speculative, urgent, and intent, waited to invite him in.

It's because she wants it told, he thought, so that people whom she will never see and whose names she will never hear and who have never heard her name nor seen her face will read it and know at last why God let us lose the war: that only through the blood of our men and the tears of our women could He slay this demon and efface his name and lineage from the earth. Then almost immediately he decided that neither was this the reason why she had sent the note, and sending it, why to him, since if she had merely wanted it told, written, and even printed, she would not have needed to call in anybody—a woman who even in his (Quentin's) father's youth had already established herself as the town's and the county's poetess laureate by issuing to the stern and meager subscription list of the county newspaper poems, ode, eulogy, and epitaph, out of some bitter and implacable reserve of undefeat.

It would be three hours yet before he would learn why she had sent for him because part of it, the first part of it, Quentin already knew.

It was a part of his twenty years' heritage of breathing the same air? and hearing his father talk about the man Sutpen; a part of the town's—Jefferson's—eighty years' heritage of the same air which the man

himself had breathed between this September afternoon in 1909 and that Sunday morning in June in 1833 when he first rode into town out of no discernible past and acquired his land no one knew how and built his house, his mansion, apparently out of nothing and married Ellen Coldfield and begot his two children—the son who widowed the daughter who had not yet been a bride—and so accomplished his allotted course to its violent (Miss Coldfield at least would have said, just) end.

Quentin had grown up with that; the mere names were interchangeable and almost myriad. His childhood was full of them; his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth.

He was a barracks filled with stubborn backlooking ghosts still recovering, even forty-three years afterward, from the fever which had cured the disease, waking from the fever without even knowing that it had been the fever itself which they had fought against and not the sickness, looking with stubborn recalcitrance backward beyond the fever and into the disease with actual regret, weak from the fever yet free of the disease and not even aware that the freedom was that of impotence. ('But why tell me about it?' he said to his father that evening, when he returned home, after she had dismissed him at last with his promise to return for her in the buggy; 'why tell me about it? What is it to me that the land of the earth or whatever it was got tired of him at last and turned and destroyed him? What if it did destroy her family too?

It's going to turn and destroy us all some day, whether our name happens to be Sutpen or Coldfield or not." 'Ah,' Mr Compson said. 'Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made the ladies into ghosts. So what else can we do, being gentlemen, but listen to them being ghosts?' Then he said, 'Do you want to know the real reason why she chose you?

They were sitting on the gallery after supper, waiting for the time Miss Coldfield had set for Quentin to call for her. 'It's because she will need

someone to go with her—a man, a gentleman, yet one still young enough to do what she wants, do it the way she wants it done. And she chose you because your grandfather was the nearest thing to a friend Sutpen ever had in this county, and she probably believes that Sutpen may have told your grandfather something about himself and her, about that engagement which did not engage, that troth which failed to plight.

Might even have told your grandfather the reason why at the last she refused to marry him. —And that your grandfather might have told me and I might have told you. And so, in a sense, the affair, no matter what happens out there tonight, will still be in the family; the skeleton (if it be a skeleton) still in the closet. She may believe that if it hadn't been for your grandfather's friendship, Sutpen could never have got a foothold here, and that if he had not got that foothold, he could not have married Ellen. So maybe she considers you partly responsible through heredity for what happened to her and her family through him." Whatever her reason for choosing him, whether it was that or not, the getting to it, Quentin thought, was taking a long time. Meanwhile, as though in inverse ratio to the vanishing voice, the invoked ghost of the man whom she could neither forgive nor revenge herself upon began to assume a quality almost of solidity, permanence.

Itself circumambient and enclosed by its effluvium of hell, its aura of unregeneration, it mused (mused, thought, seemed to possess sentience, as if, though dispossessed of the peace—who was impervious anyhow to fatigue—which she declined to give it, it was still irrevocably outside the scope of her hurt or harm) with that quality peaceful and now harmless and not even very attentive—the ogre-shape which, as Miss Coldfield's voice went on, resolved out of itself before Quentin's eyes the two half-ogre children, the three of them forming a shadowy background for the fourth one. This was the mother, the dead sister Ellen: this Niobe without tears who had conceived to the demon in a kind of nightmare, who even while alive had moved but without life and grieved but without weeping, who—now had an air of tranquil and unwitting desolation, not as if she had

either outlived the others or had died first, but as if she had never lived at all.

Quentin seemed to see them, the four of them arranged into the conventional family group of the period, with formal and lifeless decorum, and seen now as the fading and ancient photograph itself would have been seen enlarged and hung on the wall behind and above the voice and of whose presence there the voice's owner was not even aware, as if she (Miss Coldfield) had never seen this room before—a picture, a group which even to Quentin had a quality strange, contradictory, and bizarre; not quite comprehensible, not (even to twenty) quite right—a group the last member of which had been dead twenty-five years and the first, fifty, evoked now out of the airless gloom of a dead house between an old woman's grim and implacable unforgiving and the passive chafing of a youth of twenty telling himself even amid the voice maybe you have to know anybody awful well to love them but when you have hated somebody for forty-three years you will know them awful well so maybe it's better then, maybe it's fine then because after forty-three years they cant any longer surprise you or make you either very contented or very mad.

And maybe it (the voice, the talking, the incredulous and unbearable amazement) had even been a cry aloud once, Quentin thought, long ago when she was a girl of young and indomitable unregret, of indictment of blind circumstance and savage event; but not now: now only the lonely thwarted old female flesh embattled for forty-three years in the old insult, the old unforgiving outraged and betrayed by the final and complete affront which was Sutpen's death: 'He wasn't a gentleman. He wasn't even a gentleman. He came here with a horse and two pistols and a name which nobody ever heard before, knew for certain was his own any more than the horse was his own or even the pistols, seeking some place to hide himself, and Yoknapatawpha County supplied him with it.

He sought the guarantee of reputable men to barricade him from the other and later strangers who might come seeking him in turn, and Jefferson gave him that. Then he needed respectability, the shield of a

virtuous woman, to make his position impregnable even against the men who had given him protection on that inevitable day and hour when even they must rise against him in scorn and horror and outrage; and it was mine and Ellen's father who gave him that.

Oh, I hold no brief for Ellen: blind romantic fool who had only youth and inexperience to excuse her even if that; blind romantic fool, then later blind woman mother fool when she no longer had either youth or inexperience to excuse her, when she lay dying in that house for which she had exchanged pride and peace both and nobody there but the daughter who was already the same as a widow without ever having been a bride and was, three years later, to be a widow sure enough without having been anything at all, and the son who had repudiated the very roof under which he had been born and to which he would return but once more before disappearing for good, and that as a murderer and almost a fratricide; and he, fiend blackguard and devil, in Virginia fighting, where the chances of the earth's being rid of him were the best anywhere under the sun, yet Ellen and I both knowing that he would return, that every man in our armies would have to fall before bullet or ball found him; and only I, a child, a child, mind you, four years younger than the very niece I was asked to save, for Ellen to turn to and say, "Protect her. Protect Judith at least."

Yes, blind romantic fool, who did not even have that hundred miles of plantation which apparently moved our 'father nor that big house and the notion of slaves underfoot day and night which reconciled, I wont say moved, her aunt. No: just the face of a man who contrived somehow to swagger even on a horse—a man who so far as anyone (including the father who was to give him a daughter in marriage) knew either had no past at all or did not dare reveal it—a man who rode into town out of nowhere with a horse and two pistols and a herd of wild beasts that he had hunted down singlehanded because he was stronger in fear than even they were in whatever heathen place he had fled from, and that French architect who looked like he had been hunted down and caught in turn by the Negroes—a man who fled here and hid, concealed himself behind respectability, behind that hundred miles of land which he took from a tribe of ignorant Indians, nobody knows

how, and a house the size of a courthouse where he lived for three years without a window or door or bedstead in it and still called it Sutpen's Hundred as if it had been a king's grant in unbroken perpetuity from his great grandfather—a home, position: a wife and family which, being necessary: to concealment, he accepted along with the rest of respectability as he would have accepted the necessary discomfort and even pain of the briars and thorns in a thicket if the thicket could have given him the protection he sought.

'No: not even a gentleman. Marrying Ellen or marrying ten thousand Ellens could not have made him one. Not that he wanted to be one, or even be taken for one. No. That was not necessary, since all he would need would be Ellen's and our father's names on a wedding license (or on any other patent of respectability) that people could look at and read just as he would have wanted our father's (or any other reputable man's) signature on a note of hand because our father knew who his father was in Tennessee and who his grandfather had been in Virginia and our neighbors and the people we lived among knew that we knew and we knew they knew we knew and we knew that they would have believed us about whom and where he came from even if we had lied, just as anyone could have looked at him once and known that he would be lying about who and where and why he came from by the very fact that apparently he had to refuse to say at all. —And the very fact that he had had to choose respectability to hide behind was proof enough (if anyone needed further proof) that what he fled from must have been some opposite of respectability too dark to talk about.

Because he was too young. He was just twenty-five and a man of twenty-five does not voluntarily undertake the hardship and privation of clearing virgin land and establishing a plantation in a new country just for money; not a young man without any past that he apparently cared to discuss, in Mississippi in 1833 with a river full of steamboats loaded with drunken fools covered with diamonds and bent on throwing away their cotton and slaves before the boat reached New Orleans—not with all this just one night's hard ride away and the only handicap or obstacle being the other blackguards or the risk of being put ashore on a sandbar, and at the remotest, a hemp rope.

And he was no younger son sent out from some old quiet country like Virginia or Carolina with the surplus Negroes to take up new land, because anyone could look at those Negroes of his and tell that they may have come (and probably did) from a much older country than Virginia or Carolina but it wasn't a quiet one. And anyone could have looked once at his face and known that he would have chosen the river and even the certainty of the hemp rope, to undertaking what he undertook even if he had known that he would find gold buried and waiting for him in the very land which he had bought.

'No. I hold no more brief for Ellen than I do for myself. I hold even less for myself, because I had had twenty years in which to watch him, where Ellen had had but five. And not even those five to see him but only to hear at second hand what he was doing, and not even to hear more than half of that, since apparently half of what he actually did during those five years nobody at all knew about, and half of the remainder no man would have repeated to a wife, let alone a young girl; he came here and set up a raree show which lasted five years and Jefferson paid him for the entertainment by at least shielding him to the extent of not telling their womenfolks what he was doing.

But I had had all my life to watch him in, since apparently and for what reason Heaven has not seen fit to divulge, my life was destined to end on an afternoon in April forty-three years ago, since anyone who even had as little to call living as I had had up to that time would not call what I have had since living. I saw what had happened to Ellen, my sister. I saw her almost a recluse, watching those two doomed children growing up whom she was helpless to save. I saw the price which she had paid' for that house and that pride; I saw the notes of hand on pride and contentment and peace and all to which she had put her signature when she walked into the church that night, begin to fall due in succession.

I saw Judith's marriage forbidden without rhyme or reason or shadow of excuse; I saw Ellen die with only me, a child, to turn to and ask to protect her remaining child; I saw Henry repudiate his home and

birthright and then return and practically fling the bloody corpse of his sister's sweetheart at the hem of her wedding gown; I saw that man return the evil's source and head which had outlasted all its victims—who had created two children not only to destroy one another and his own line, but my line as well, yet I agreed to marry him.

'No. I hold no brief for myself. I don't plead youth, since what creature in the South since 1861, man woman nigger or mule, had had time or opportunity not only to have been young, but to have heard what being young was like from those who had. I don't plead propinquity: the fact that I, a woman young and at the age for marrying and in a time when most of the young men whom I would have known ordinarily were dead on lost battlefields, that I lived for two years under the same roof with him. I don't plead material necessity: the fact that, an orphan a woman and a pauper, I turned naturally not for protection but for actual food to my only kin: my dead sister's family: though I defy anyone to blame me, an orphan of twenty, a young woman without resources, who should desire not only to justify her situation but to vindicate the honor of a family the good name of whose women has never been impugned, by accepting the honorable proffer of marriage from the man whose food she was forced to subsist on.

And most of all, I do not plead myself: a young woman emerging from a holocaust which had taken parents security and all from her, who had seen all that living meant to her fall into ruins about the feet of a few figures with the shapes of men but with the names and statures of heroes—a young woman, I say, thrown into daily and hourly contact with one of these men who, despite what he might have been at one time and despite what she might have believed or even known about him, had fought for four honorable years for the soil and traditions of the land where she had been born.

And the man who had done that, villain dyed though he be, would have possessed in her eyes, even if only from association with them, the stature and shape of a hero too, and now he also emerging from the same holocaust in which she had suffered, with nothing to face what the future held for the South but his bare hands and the sword which

he at least had never surrendered and the citation for valor from his defeated Commander-in-Chief. Oh, he was brave. I have never gainsaid that. But that our cause, our very life and future hopes and past pride, should have been thrown into the balance with men like that to buttress it—men with valor and strength but without pity or honor.

Is it any wonder that Heaven saw fit to let us lose?" 'No'me,' Quentin said.

'But that it should have been our father, mine and Ellen's father of all of them that he knew, out of all the ones who used to go out there and drink and gamble with him and watch him fight those wild Negroes, whose daughters he might even have won at cards. That it should have been our father. How he could have approached papa, on what grounds; what there could have been besides the common civility of two men meeting on the street, between a man who came from nowhere or dared not tell where and our father; what there could have been between a man like that and papa—a Methodist steward, a merchant who was not rich and who not only could have done nothing under the sun to advance his fortunes or prospects but could by no stretch of the imagination even have owned anything that he would have wanted, even picked up in the road—a man who owned neither land nor slaves except two house servants whom he had freed as soon as he got them, bought them, who neither drank nor hunted nor gambled—what there could have been between a man who to my certain knowledge was never in a Jefferson church but three times in his life—the once when he first saw Ellen, the once when they rehearsed the wedding, the once when they performed it—a man that anyone could look at and see that, even if he apparently had none now, he was accustomed to having money and intended to have it again and would have no scruples about how he got it—that man to discover Ellen inside a church.

In church, mind you, as though there were a fatality and curse on our family and God Himself were seeing to it that it was performed and discharged to the last drop and dreg. Yes, fatality and curse on the South and on our family as though because some ancestor of ours had

elected to establish his descent in a land primed for fatality and already cursed with it, even if it had not rather been our family, our father's progenitors, who had incurred the curse long years before and had been coerced by Heaven into establishing itself in the land and the time already cursed. So that even I, a child still too young to know more than that, though Ellen was my own sister and Henry and Judith my own nephew and niece, I was not even to go out there save when papa or my aunt was with me and that I was not to play with Henry and Judith at all except in the house (and not because I was four years younger than Judith and six years younger than Henry: wasn't it to me that Ellen turned before she died and said "Protect them"?)—even I used to wonder what our father or his father could have done before he married our mother that Ellen and I would have to expiate and neither of us alone be sufficient; what crime committed that would leave our family cursed to be instruments not only for that man's destruction, but for our own." 'Yessum,' Quentin said.

'Yes,' the grim quiet voice said from beyond the unmoving triangle of dim lace; and now, among the musing and decorous wraiths Quentin seemed to watch resolving the figure of a little girl, in the prim skirts and pantalettes, the smooth prim decorous braids, of the dead time. She seemed to stand, to lurk, behind the neat picket fence of a small, grimly middleclass yard or lawn, looking out upon the whatever ogre-world of that quiet village street with that air of children born too late into their parents' lives and doomed to contemplate all human behavior through the complex and needless follies of adults—an air Cassandralike and humorless and profoundly and sternly prophetic out of all proportion to the actual years even of a child who had never been young. ' Because I was born too late. I was born twenty-two years too late—a child to whom out of the overheard talk of adults my own sister's and my sister's children's faces had come to be like the faces in an ogre-tale between supper and bed long before I Was old enough or big enough to be permitted to play with them, yet to whom that sister must have to turn at the last when she lay dying, with one of the children vanished and doomed to be a murderer and the other doomed to be a widow before she had even been a bride, and say, "Protect her, at least. At least save Judith."

A child, yet whose child's vouchsafed instinct could make that reply which the mature wisdom of her elders apparently could not make: "Protect her? From whom and from what? He has already given them life: he does not need to harm them further. It is from themselves that they need protection." ' It should have been later than it was; it should have been late, yet the yellow slashes of mote-palpitant sunlight were latticed no higher up the impalpable wall of gloom which separated them; the sun seemed hardly to have moved. It (the talking, the telling) seemed (to him, to Quentin) to partake of that logic—and reason-flouting quality of a dream which the sleeper knows must have occurred, stillborn and complete, in a second, yet the very quality upon which it must depend to move the dreamer (verisimilitude) to credulity horror or pleasure or amazement—depends as completely upon a formal recognition of and acceptance of elapsed and yet-elapsing time as music or a printed tale. 'Yes. I was born too late. I was a child who was to remember those three faces (and his, too) as seen for the first time in the carriage on that first Sunday morning when this town finally realized that he had turned that road from Sutpen's Hundred in to the church into a race track. I was three then, and doubtless I had seen them before; I must have. But I do not remember it. I do not even remember ever having seen Ellen before that Sunday.

It was as though the sister whom I had never laid eyes on, who before I was born had vanished into the stronghold of an ogre or a djinn, was now to return through a dispensation of one day only, to the world which she had quitted, and I a child' of three, waked early for the occasion, dressed and curled as if for Christmas, for an occasion more serious than Christmas even, since now and at last this ogre or djinn had agreed for the sake of the wife and the children to come to church, to permit them at least to approach the vicinity of salvation, to at least give Ellen one chance to struggle with him for those children's souls on a battleground where she could be supported not only by Heaven but by her own family and people of her own kind; yes, even for the moment submitting himself to redemption, or lacking that, at least chivalrous for the instant even though still unregenerate.

That is what I expected. This is what I saw as I stood there before the church between papa and our aunt and waited for the carriage to arrive from the twelve-mile drive. And though I must have seen Ellen and the children before this, this is the vision of my first sight of them which I shall carry to my grave: a glimpse like the forefront of a tornado, of the carriage and Ellen's high white face within it and the two replicas of his face in miniature flanking her, and on the front seat the face and teeth of the wild Negro who was driving, and he, his face exactly like the Negro's save for the teeth (this because of his beard, doubtless)—all in a thunder and a fury of wild-eyed horses and of galloping and of dust.

'Oh, there were plenty of them to abet him, assist him, make a race of it; ten o' clock on Sunday morning, the carriage racing on two wheels up to the very door to the church with that wild Negro in his Christian clothes looking exactly like a performing tiger in a linen duster and a top hat, and Ellen with no drop of blood in her face, holding those two children who were not crying and who did not need to be held, who sat on either side of her, perfectly Still too, with in their faces that infantile enormity which we did not then quite comprehend.

Oh, yes, there were plenty to aid and abet him; even he could not have held a horse race without someone to race against. Because it was not even public opinion that stopped him, not even the men who might have had wives and children in carriages to be ridden down and into ditches: it was the minister himself, speaking in the name of the women of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County. So he quit coming to church himself; now it would be just Ellen and the children in the carriage on Sunday morning, so we knew now that at least there would be no betting now, since no one could say if it was an actual race or not, since now, with his face absent, it was only the wild Negro's perfectly inscrutable one with the teeth glinting a little, so that now we could never know if it were a race or a runaway, and if there was triumph, it was on the face twelve miles back there at Sutpen's Hundred, which did not even require to see or be present.

It was the Negro now, who in the act of passing another carriage spoke to that team too as well as to his own—something without words, not

needing words probably, in that tongue in which they slept in the mud of that swamp and brought here out of whatever dark swamp he had found them in and brought them here—the dust, the thunder, the carriage whirling up to the church door while women and children scattered and screamed before it and men caught at the bridles of the other team.

And the Negro would let Ellen and the children out at the door and take the carriage on around to the hitching grove and beat the horses for running away; there was even a fool who tried to interfere once, whereupon the Negro turned upon him with the stick lifted and his teeth showing a little and said, "Marster say; I do. You tell Marster." 'Yes. From them; from themselves. And this time it was not even the minister. It was Ellen. Our aunt and papa were talking and I came in and my aunt said "Go out and play", though even if I could not have heard through the door at all, I could have repeated the conversation for them: "Your daughter, your own daughter" my aunt said; and papa: "Yes. She is my daughter. When she wants me to interfere she will tell me so herself."

Because this Sunday when Ellen and the children came out of the front door, it was not the carriage waiting, it was Ellen's phaeton with the old gentle mare which 'she drove and the stableboy that he had bought instead of the wild Negro. And Judith looked once at the phaeton and realized what it meant and began to scream, screaming and kicking while they carried her back into the house and put her to bed. No, he was not present. Nor do I claim a lurking triumphant face behind a window curtain. Probably he would have been as amazed as we were since we would all realize now that we were faced by more than a child's tantrum or even hysteria: that his face had been in that carriage all the time; that it had been Judith, a girl of six, who had instigated and authorized that Negro to make the team run away. Not Henry, mind; not the boy, which would have been outrageous enough; but Judith, the girl.

'As soon as papa and I entered those gates that afternoon and began to go up the drive toward the house, I could feel it. It was as though

somewhere in that Sunday afternoon's quiet and peace the screams of that child still existed, lingered, not as sound now but as something for the skin to hear, the hair on the head to hear. But I did not ask at once. I was just four then; I sat in the buggy beside papa as I had stood between him and our aunt before the church on that first Sunday when I had been dressed to come and see my sister and my nephew and niece for the first time, looking at the house.

I had been inside it before too, of course, but even when I saw it for the first time that I could remember I seemed already to know how it was going to look just as I seemed to know how Ellen and Judith and Henry would look before I saw them for the time which I always remember as being the first. No, not asking even then, but just looking at that huge quiet house, saying "What room is Judith sick in, papa?" with that quiet aptitude of a child for accepting the inexplicable, though I now know that even then I was wondering what Judith saw when she came out the door and found the phaeton instead of the carriage, the tame stableboy instead of the wild man; what she had seen in that phaeton which looked so innocent to the rest of us or worse, what she had missed when she saw the phaeton and began to scream.

Yes, a still hot quiet Sunday afternoon like this afternoon; I remember yet the utter quiet of that house when we went in and from which I knew at once that he was absent without knowing that he would now be in the scuppernong arbor drinking with Wash Jones. I only knew, as soon as papa and I crossed the threshold, that he was not there: as though with some almost omniscient conviction, knowing that he did not need to stay and observe his triumph—and that, in comparison with what was to be, this one was a mere trivial business even beneath our notice too. Yes, that quiet darkened room with the blinds closed and a Negro woman sitting beside the bed with a fan and Judith's white face on the pillow beneath a camphor cloth, asleep as I supposed then: possibly it was sleep, or would be called sleep: and Ellen's face white and calm and papa said "Go out and find Henry and ask him to play with you, Rosa" and so I stood just outside that quiet door in that quiet upper hall because I was afraid to go away even from it, because I could

hear the sabbath afternoon quiet of that house louder than thunder, louder than laughing even with triumph."

"Think of the children," papa said.

' "Think?" Ellen said. "What else do I do? What else do I lie awake at night and do but think of them?" Neither papa nor Ellen said: Come back home.

No: This occurred before it became fashionable to repair your mistakes by turning your back on them and running. It was just the two quiet voices beyond that blank door which might have been discussing something printed in a magazine; and I, a child standing close beside that door because I was afraid to be there but more afraid to leave it, standing motionless beside that door as though trying to make myself blend with the dark wood and become invisible, like a chameleon, listening to the living spirit, presence, of that house, since some of Ellen's life and breath had now gone into it as well as his, breathing away in a long neutral sound of victory and despair, of triumph and terror too.

' "Do you love this..." papa said.

' "Papa," Ellen said. That was all. But I could see her face then as clearly as papa could have, with that same expression which it had worn in the carriage on that first Sunday and the others. Then a servant came and said our buggy was ready.

'Yes. From themselves. Not from him, not from anybody, just as nobody could have saved them, even himself. Because he now showed us why that triumph had been beneath his notice. He showed Ellen, that is: not me. I was not there; it was six years now, during which I had scarcely seen him. Our aunt was gone now and I was keeping house for papa. Perhaps once a year papa and I would go out there and have dinner, and maybe four times a year Ellen and the children would come in and spend the day with us. Not he; that I know of, he never entered this house again after he and Ellen married. I was young then; I was

even young enough to believe that this was due to some stubborn coal of conscience, if not remorse, even in him. But I know better now I know now that it was simply because since papa had: given him respectability through a wife there was nothing else he could want from papa and so not even sheer gratitude, let alone appearances, could force him to forgo his own pleasure to the extent of taking a family meal with his wife's people.

So I saw little of them. I did not have time now to play, even if I had ever had any inclination. I had never learned how and I saw no reason to try to learn now even if I had had the time. ' So it was six years now, though it was actually no secret to Ellen since it had apparently been going on ever since he drove the last nail in the house, the only difference between now and the time of his bachelorhood being that now they would hitch the teams and saddle horses and mules in' the grove beyond the stable and so come up across the pasture unseen from the house.

Because there were plenty of them still; it was as if God or the devil had taken advantage of his very vices in order to supply witnesses to the discharge of our curse not only from among gentlefolks, our own kind, but from the very scum and riffraff who could not have approached the house itself under any other circumstances, not even from the rear. Yes, Ellen and those two children alone in that house twelve miles from town, and down there in the stable a hollow square of faces in the lantern light, the white faces on three sides, the black ones on the fourth, and in the center two of his wild Negroes fighting, naked, fighting not as white men fight, with rules and weapons, but as Negroes fight to hurt one another quick and bad, Ellen knew that, or thought she did; that was not it.

She accepted that—not reconciled: accepted—as though there is a breathing-point in outrage where you can accept it almost with gratitude since you can say to yourself, thank God, this is all; at least I now know all of it—thinking that, clinging still to that when she ran into the stable that night while the very men who had stolen into it from the rear fell back away from her with at least some grain of decency, and

Ellen seeing not the two black beasts she had expected to see but instead a white one and a black one, both naked to the waist and gouging at one another's eyes as if they should not only have been the same color, but should have been covered with fur too.

Yes. It seems that on certain occasions, perhaps at the end of the evening, the spectacle, as a grand finale or perhaps as a matter of sheer deadly forethought toward the retention of supremacy, domination, he would enter the ring with one of the Negroes himself. Yes.

That's what Ellen saw: her husband and the father of her children standing there naked and panting and bloody to the waist and the Negro just fallen evidently, lying at his feet and bloody too, save that on the Negro it merely looked like grease or sweat—Ellen running down the hill from the house, bareheaded, in time to hear the sound, the screaming, hearing it while she still ran in the darkness and before the spectators knew that she was there, hearing it even before it occurred to one spectator to say, "It's a horse" then "It's a woman" then "My God, it's a child" —ran in, and the spectators falling back to permit her to see Henry plunge out from among the Negroes who had been holding him, screaming and vomiting—not pausing, not even looking at the faces which shrank back away from her as she knelt in the stable filth to raise Henry and not looking at Henry either but up at him as he stood there with even his teeth showing beneath his beard now and another Negro wiping the blood from his body with a trowsack.

"I know you will excuse us, gentlemen," Ellen said. But they were already departing, nigger and white, slinking out again as they had slunk in, and Ellen not watching them now either but kneeling in the dirt while Henry clung to her, crying, and he standing there yet while a third nigger prodded his shirt or coat at him as though the coat were a stick and he a caged snake. "Where is Judith, Thomas?" Ellen said.

"Judith?" he said. Oh, he was not lying; his own triumph had outrun him; he had builded even better in evil than even he could have hoped. "Judith? Isn't she in bed?"

' "Dont lie to me, Thomas," Ellen said. "I can understand your bringing Henry here to see this, wanting Henry to see this; I will try to understand it; yes, I will make myself try to understand it. But not Judith, Thomas. Not my baby girl, Thomas."

' "I don't expect you to understand it," he said. "Because you are a woman."

But I didn't bring Judith down here. I would not bring her down here. I don't expect you to believe that. But I swear to it."

"I wish I could believe you," Ellen said. "I want to believe you." Then she began to call. "Judith!" she called in a voice calm and sweet and filled with despair: "Judith honey! Time to come to bed."

'But I was not there. I was not there to see the two Sutpen faces this time—once on Judith and once on the Negro girl beside her looking down through the square entrance to the loft."

II

It was a summer of wistaria. The twilight was full of it and of the smell of his father's cigar as they sat on the front gallery' after supper until it would be time for Quentin to start, while in the deep shaggy lawn below the veranda the fireflies blew and drifted in soft random—the odor, the scent, which five months later Mr Compson's letter would carry up from Mississippi and over the long iron New England snow and into Quentin's sitting-room at Harvard. It was a day of listening too—the listening, the hearing in 1909 mostly about that which he already knew, since he had been born in and still breathed the same air in which the church bells had rung on that Sunday morning in 1833 and, on Sundays, heard even one of the original three bells in the same steeple where descendants of the same pigeons strutted and crooned or wheeled in short courses resembling soft fluid paint-smears on the soft summer sky.

That Sunday morning in June with the bells ringing peaceful and peremptory and a little cacophonous—the denominations in concord though not in tune—and the ladies and children, and house Negroes to carry the parasols and flywhisks, and even a few men (the ladies moving in hoops among the miniature broadcloth of little boys and the pantalettes of little girls, in the skirts of the time when ladies did not walk but floated) when the other men sitting with their feet on the railing of the Holston House gallery looked up, and there the stranger was.

He was already halfway across the Square when they saw him, on a big hardridden roan horse, man and beast looking as though they had been created out of thin air and set down in the bright summer sabbath sunshine in the middle of a tired foxtrot face and horse that none of them had ever seen before, name that none of them had ever heard, and origin and purpose which some of them were never to learn. So that in the next four weeks (Jefferson was a village then: the Holston House, the courthouse, six stores, a blacksmith and livery stable, a saloon frequented by drovers and peddlers, three churches and perhaps thirty residences) the stranger's name went back and forth among the places of business and of idleness and among the residences in steady strophe and antistrophe: Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen. Sutpen.

That was all that the town was to know about him for almost a month. He had apparently come into town from the South—a man of about twenty-five as the town learned later, because at the time his age could not have been guessed his age could not have been guessed because he looked like a man who had been sick." Not like a man who had been peacefully ill in bed and had recovered to move with a sort of diffident and tentative amazement in a world which he had believed himself on the point of surrendering, but like a man who had been through some solitary furnace experience which was more than just fever, like an explorer ay, who not only had to face the normal hardship of the pursuit which he chose but was overtaken by the added and unforeseen handicap of the fever also and fought through it at enormous cost not so much physical as 'mental, alone and unaided and not through blind instinctive will to endure and survive but to gain and

keep to enjoy it the material prize for which he accepted the original gambit.

A man with a big frame but gaunt now almost to emaciation, with a short reddish beard which resembled a disguise and above which his pale eyes had a quality at once visionary and alert, ruthless and reposed in a face whose flesh had the appearance of pottery, of having been colored by that oven's fever either of soul or environment, deeper than sun alone beneath a dead impervious surface as of glazed clay. That was what they saw,' though it was years before the town learned that that was all which he possessed at the time—the strong spent horse and the clothes on his back and a small saddlebag scarcely large enough to contain the spare linen and the razors, and the two pistols of which Miss Coldfield told Quentin, with the butts worn smooth as pickhandles and which he used with the precision of knitting needles; later Quentin's grandfather saw him ride at a canter around a sapling at twenty feet and put both bullets into a playing card fastened to the tree. He had a room in the Holston House but he carried the key with him and each morning he fed and saddled the horse and rode away before daylight, where to the town likewise failed to learn, probably due to the fact that he bore the pistol demonstration on the third day after his arrival.

So they had to depend on inquiry to find out what they told about him, which would of necessity be at night, at the supper table in the Holston House dining-room or in the lounge which he would have to cross to gain his room and lock the door again, which he would do as soon as he finished eating. The bar opened into the lounge too, and that would or should have been the place to accost him and even inquire, except for the fact that he did not use the bar. He did not drink at all, he told them. He did not say that he used to drink and had quit, nor that he had never used alcohol.

He just said that he would not care for a drink; it was years later before even Quentin's grandfather (he was a young man too then; it would be years yet before he would become General Compson) learned that the reason Sutpen did not drink was that he did not have the money with

which to pay his share or return the courtesy; it was General Compson who first realized that at this time Sutpen lacked not only the money to spend for drink and conviviality, but the time and inclination as well: that he was at this time completely the slave of his secret and furious impatience, his conviction gained from whatever that recent experience had been—that fever mental or physical—of a need for haste, of time fleeing beneath him, which was to drive him for the next five years—as General Compson computed it, roughly until about nine months before his son was born. So they would catch him, run him to earth, in the lounge between the supper table and his locked door to give him the opportunity to tell them who he was and where he came from and what he was up to, whereupon he would move gradually and steadily until his back came in contact with something—a post or a wall—and then stand there and tell them nothing whatever as pleasantly and courteously as a hotel clerk.

It was the Chickasaw Indian agent with or through whom he dealt and so it was not until he waked the County Recorder that Saturday night with the deed, patent, to the land and the gold Spanish coin, that the town learned that he now owned a hundred square miles of some of the best virgin bottom land in the country, though even that knowledge came too late because Sutpen himself was gone, where to again they did not know. But he owned land among them now and some of them began to suspect what General Compson apparently knew: that the Spanish coin with which he had paid to have his patent recorded was the last one of any kind which he possessed. So they were certain now that he had departed to get more; there were several who even anticipated in believing (and even in saying aloud, now that he was not present) what Sutpen's future and then unborn sister-in-law was to tell Quentin almost eighty years later: that he had found some unique and practical way of hiding loot and that he had returned to the cache to replenish his pockets, even if he had not actually ridden with the two pistols back to the River and the steamboats full of gamblers and cotton and slave-dealers to replenish the cache.

At least some of them were telling one another that when two months later he returned, again without warning and accompanied this time by

the covered wagon with a Negro driving it and on the seat with the Negro a small, alertly resigned man with a grim, harried Latin face, in a frock coat and a flowered waistcoat and a hat which would have created no furore on a Paris boulevard, all of which he was to wear constantly for the next two years—the somberly theatric clothing and the expression of fatalistic and amazed determination—while his white client and the Negro crew which he was to advise though not direct went stark naked save for a coating of dried mud.

This was the French architect. Years later the town learned that he had come all the way from Martinique on Sutpen's bare promise and lived for two years on venison cooked over a campfire, in an unfloored tent made of the wagon hood, before he so much as saw any color or shape of pay. And until he passed through town on his way back to New Orleans two years later, he was not even to see Jefferson again; he would not come, or Sutpen would not bring him, to town even on the few occasions when Sutpen would be seen there, and he did not have much chance to look at Jefferson on that first day because the wagon did not stop. Apparently it was only by sheer geographical hap that Sutpen passed through town at all, pausing only long enough for someone (not General Compson) to look beneath the wagon hood and into a black tunnel filled with still eyeballs and smelling like a wolfden.

But the legend of Sutpen's wild Negroes was not to begin at once, because the wagon went on as though even the wood and iron which composed it, as well as the mules which drew it, had become imbued by sheer association with him with that quality of gaunt and tireless driving, that conviction for haste and of fleeing time; later Sutpen told Quentin's grandfather that on that afternoon when the wagon passed through Jefferson they had been without food since the previous night and that he was trying to reach Sutpen's Hundred and the river bottom to try to kill a deer before dark, so he and the architect and the Negroes would not have to spend another night without food.

So the legend of the wild men came gradually back to town, brought by the men who would ride out to watch what was going on, who began to tell how Sutpen would take stand beside a game trail with the pistols

and send the Negroes in to drive the swamp like a pack of hounds; it was they who told how during that first summer and fall the Negroes did not even have (or did not use) blankets to sleep in, even before the coon-hunter Akers claimed to have walked one of them out of the absolute mud like a sleeping alligator and Screamed just in time. The Negroes could speak no English yet and doubtless there were more than Akers who did not know that the language in which they and Sutpen communicated was a sort of French and not some dark and fatal tongue of their own. There were many more than Akers, though the others were responsible citizens and landowners and so did not have to lurk about the camp at night.

In fact, as Miss Coldfield told Quentin, they would make up parties to meet at the Holston House and go out horseback, often carrying lunch. Sutpen had built a brick kiln and he had set up the saw and planer which he had brought in the wagon—a capstan with a long sapling walking-beam, with the wagon team and the Negroes in shifts and himself too when necessary, when the machinery slowed, hitched to it—as if the Negroes actually were wild men; as General Compson told his son, Quentin's father, while the Negroes were working Sutpen never raised his voice at them, that instead he led them, caught them at the psychological instant by example, by some ascendancy of forbearance rather than by brute fear.

Without dismounting (usually Sutpen did not even greet them with as much as a nod, apparently as unaware of their presence as if they had been idle shades) they would sit in a curious quiet clump as though for mutual protection and watch his mansion rise, carried plank by plank and brick by brick out of the swamp where the clay and timber waited—the bearded white man and the twenty black ones and all stark naked beneath the croaching and pervading mud. Being men, these spectators did not realize that the garments which Sutpen had worn when he first rode into Jefferson were the only ones in which they had ever seen him, and few of the women in the county had seen him at all.

Otherwise, some of them would have anticipated Miss Coldfield in this too: in divining that he was saving his clothes, since decorum even if not elegance of appearance would be the only weapon (or rather, ladder) with which he could conduct the last assault upon what Miss Coldfield and perhaps others believed to be respectability that respectability which, according to General Compson, consisted in Sutpen's secret mind of a great deal more than the mere acquisition of a chatelaine for his house. So he and the twenty Negroes worked together, plastered over with mud against the mosquitoes and, as Miss Coldfield told Quentin, distinguishable one from another by his beard and eyes alone and only the architect resembling a human creature because of the French clothes which he wore constantly with a sort of invincible fatality until the day after the house was completed save for the windowglass and the ironware which they could not make by hand and the architect departed—working in the sun and heat of summer and the mud and ice of winter, with quiet and unflagging fury.

It took him two years, he and his crew of imported slaves which his adopted fellow citizens still looked on as being a good deal more deadly than any beast he could have started and slain in that country.

They worked from sunup to sundown while parties of horsemen rode up and sat their horses quietly and watched, and the architect in his formal coat and his Paris hat and his expression of grim and embittered amazement lurked about the environs of the scene with his air something between a casual and bitterly disinterested spectator and a condemned and conscientious ghost—amazement, General Compson said, not at the others and what they were doing so much as at himself, at the inexplicable and incredible fact of his own presence. But he was a good architect; Quentin knew the house, twelve miles from Jefferson, in its grove of cedar and oak, seventy-five years after it was finished.

And not only an architect as General Compson said, but an artist since only an artist could have borne those two years in order to build a house which he doubtless not only expected but firmly intended never to see again. Not, General Compson said, the hardship to sense and the outrage to sensibility of the two years' sojourn, but Sutpen: that only an

artist could have borne Sutpen's ruthlessness and hurry and still manage to curb the dream of grim and castlelike magnificence at which Sutpen obviously aimed, since the place as Sutpen planned it would have been almost as large as Jefferson itself at the time; that the little grim harried foreigner had singlehanded given battle to and vanquished Sutpen's fierce and overweening vanity or desire for magnificence or for vindication or whatever it was (even General Compson did not know yet) and so created of Sutpen's very defeat the victory which, in conquering, Sutpen himself would have failed to gain.

So it was finished then, down to the last plank and brick and wooden pin which they could make themselves. Unpainted and unfurnished, without a pane of glass or a doorknob or hinge in it, twelve miles from town and almost that far from any neighbor, it stood for three years more surrounded by its formal gardens and promenades, its slave quarters and stables and smokehouses; wild turkey ranged within a mile of the house and deer came light and colored like smoke and left delicate prints in the formal beds where there would be no flowers for four years yet. Now there began a period, a phase, during which the town and the county watched him with more puzzlement yet.

Perhaps it was because the next step toward that secret end which General Compson claimed to have known but which the town and the county comprehended but dimly or not at all, now required patience or passive time instead of that driving fury to which he had accustomed them; now it was the women who first suspected what he wanted, what the next step would be. None of the men, certainly not those who knew him well enough to call him by name, suspected that he wanted a wife. Doubtless there were some of them, husbands and bachelors both, who not only would have refused to entertain the idea but would even have protested against it, because for the next three years he led what must have been to them a perfect existence.

He lived out there, eight miles from any neighbor, in masculine solitude in what might be called the halfacre gunroom of a baronial splendor. He lived in the Spartan shell of the largest edifice in the county, not excepting the courthouse itself, whose threshold no woman had so

much as seen, without any feminized softness of window-pane or door or mattress; where there was not only no woman to object if he should elect to have his dogs in to sleep on the pallet bed with him, he did not even need dogs to kill the game which left footprints within sight of the kitchen door but hunted it instead with human beings who belonged to him body and soul and of whom it was believed (or said) that they could creep up to a bedded buck and cut its throat before it could move.

It was at this time that he began to invite the parties of men of which Miss Coldfield told Quentin, out to Sutpen's Hundred to camp in blankets in the naked rooms of his embryonic formal opulence; they hunted, and at night played cards and drank, and on occasion he doubtless pitted his Negroes against one another and perhaps even at this time participated now and then himself-that spectacle which, according to Miss Coldfield, his son was unable to bear the sight of while his daughter looked on unmoved.

Sutpen drank himself now, though there were probably others besides Quentin's grandfather who remarked that he drank very sparingly save when he himself had managed to supply some of the liquor. His guests would bring whiskey out with them but he drank of this with a sort of sparing calculation as though keeping mentally, General Compson said, a sort of balance of spiritual solvency between the amount of whiskey he accepted and the amount of running meat which he supplied to the guns.

He lived like that for three years. He now had a plantation; inside of two years he had dragged house and gardens out of virgin swamp, and plowed and planted his land with seed cotton which General Compson loaned him. Then he seemed to quit. He seemed to just sit down in the middle of what he had almost finished, and to remain so for three years during which he did not even appear to intend or want anything more. Perhaps it is not to be wondered at that the men in the county came to believe that the life he now led had been his aim all the time; it was General Compson, who seemed to have known him well enough to offer to lend him seed cotton for his start, who knew any better, to

whom Sutpen ever told anything about his past. It was General Compson who knew first about the Spanish coin being his last one, as it was Compson (so the town learned later) who offered to lend Sutpen the money to finish and furnish his house, and was refused.

So doubtless General Compson was the first man in the county to tell himself that Sutpen did not need to borrow money with which to complete the house, supply what it yet lacked, because he intended to marry. Not the first person to know: rather the first man, since, according to what Miss Coldfield told Quentin seventy-five years later, the women in the county had been telling one another and their husbands as well that Sutpen did not intend to quit there, that he had already gone to too much trouble, gone through too much privation and hardship to settle down and live exactly as he had lived. While the house was being built save that now he had a roof to sleep under in place of an unfloored wagon hood. Probably the women had already cast about among the families of the men who might now be called his friends, for that prospective bride whose dowry might complete the shape and substance of that respectability Miss Coldfield anyway believed to be his aim.

So when, at the expiration of this second phase, three years after the house was finished and the architect departed, and again on Sunday morning and again without warning, the town saw him cross the square, on foot now but in the same garments in which he had ridden into town five years ago and which no one had seen since (he or one of the Negroes had ironed the coat with heated bricks, General Compson told Quentin's father) and enter the Methodist church, only some of the men were surprised. The women merely said that he had exhausted the possibilities of the families of the men with whom he had hunted and gambled and that he had now come to town to find a wife exactly as he would have gone to the Memphis market to buy livestock or slaves. But when they comprehended whom it was that he had apparently come to town and into church to invest with his choice, the assurance of the women became one with the men's surprise, and then even more than that: amazement.

Because the town now believed that it knew him. For two years it had watched him as with that grim and unflagging fury he had erected that shell of a house and laid out his fields, then for three years he had remained completely static, as if he were run by electricity and someone had come along and removed, dismantled the wiring or the dynamo. So that when he entered the Methodist church that Sunday morning in his ironed coat, there were men as well as women who believed that they had only to look around the congregation in order to anticipate the direction his feet would take him, until they became aware that he had apparently marked down Miss Coldfield's father with the same cold and ruthless deliberation with which he had probably marked down the French architect.

They watched in shocked amazement while he laid deliberate siege to the one man in the town with whom he could have had nothing in common, least of all, money—a man who obviously could do nothing under the sun for him save give him credit at a little cross-roads store or cast a vote in his favor if he should ever seek ordination as a Methodist minister—a Methodist steward, a merchant not only of modest position and circumstances but who already had a wife and family of his own, let alone a dependent mother and sister, to support out of the proceeds of a business which he had brought to Jefferson ten years ago in a single wagon—a man with a name for absolute and undeviating and even Puritan uprightness in a country and time of lawless opportunity, who neither drank nor gambled nor even hunted. In their surprise they forgot that Mr Coldfield had a marriageable daughter. They did not consider the daughter at all. They did not think of love in connection with Sutpen.

They thought of ruthlessness rather than justice and of fear rather than respect, but not of pity or love: besides being too lost in amazed speculation as to just how Sutpen intended or could contrive to use Mr Coldfield to further whatever secret ends he still had. They were never to know: even Miss Rosa Coldfield did not. Because from that day there were no more hunting parties out at Sutpen's Hundred, and when they saw him now it would be in town. But not loafing, idling. The men who had slept and matched glasses with him under his roof (some of them

had even come to call him Sutpen without the formal Mister) watched him pass along the street before the Holston House with a single formal gesture to his hat and go on and enter Mr Coldfield's store, and that was all.

'Then one day he quitted Jefferson for the second time,' Mr Compson told Quentin. 'The town should have been accustomed to that by now. Nevertheless, his position had subtly changed, as you will see by the town's reaction to this second return. Because when he came back this time, he was in a sense a public enemy. Perhaps this was because of what he brought back with him this time: the material he brought back this time, as compared to the simple wagonload of wild niggers which he had brought back before. But I don't think so. That is, I think it was a little more involved than the sheer value of his chandeliers and mahogany and rugs. I think that the affront was born of the town's realization that he was getting it involved with himself; that whatever the felony which produced the mahogany and crystal, he was forcing the town to compound it.

Heretofore, until that Sunday when he came ' to church, if he had misused or injured anybody, it was only old Ikkemotubbe, from whom he got his land—a matter between his conscience and Uncle Sam and God. But now his position had changed, because when, about three months after he departed, four wagons left Jefferson to go to the River and meet him, it was known that Mr Coldfield was the man who hired and dispatched them. They were big wagons, drawn by oxen, and when they returned the town looked at them and knew, no matter what they might have contained, that Mr Coldfield could not have mortgaged everything that he owned for enough to fill them; doubtless this time there were more men than women even who pictured him during this absence with a handkerchief over his face and the two pistol barrels glinting beneath the candelabra of a steamboat's saloon, even if no worse: if not something performed in the lurking dark of a muddy landing and with a knife from behind.

They saw him pass, on the roan horse beside his four wagons; it seems that even the ones who had eaten his food and shot his game and even

called him "Sutpen" without the "Mister", didn't accost him now. They just waited while reports and rumors came back to town of how he and his now somewhat tamed Negroes had installed the windows and doors and the spits and pots in the kitchen and the crystal chandeliers in the parlors and the furniture and the curtains and the rugs; it was that same Akers who had blundered onto the mudcoughed Negro five years ago who came, a little wild-eyed and considerably slack-mouthed, into the Holston House bar one evening and said, "Boys, this time he stole the whole durn steamboat!"

'So at last civic virtue came to a boil. One day and with the sheriff of the county among them, a party of eight or ten took the road out to Sutpen's Hundred. They did not go all the way because about six miles from town they met Sutpen himself. He was riding the roan horse, in the frock coat and the beaver hat which they knew and with his legs wrapped in a piece of tarpaulin; he had a portmanteau on his pommel and he was carrying a small woven basket on his arm.

He stopped the roan (it was April then, and the road was still a quagmire) and sat there in his splashed tarpaulin and looked from one face to the next; your grandfather said that his eyes looked like pieces of a broken plate and that his beard was strong as a curry-comb. That was how he put it: strong as a curry-comb. "Good morning, gentlemen," he said. "Were you looking for me?" 'Doubtless something more than this transpired at the time, though none of the vigilance committee ever told it that I know of.

All I ever heard is how the town, the men on the gallery of the Holston House saw Sutpen and the committee ride onto the square together, Sutpen a little in front and the others bunched behind him—Sutpen with his legs and feet wrapped neatly in his tarpaulin and his shoulders squared inside the worn broadcloth coat and that worn brushed beaver cocked a little, talking to them over his shoulder and those eyes hard and pale and reckless and probably quizzical and maybe contemptuous even then.

He pulled up at the door and the Negro hostler ducked out and took the roan's head and Sutpen got down, with his portmanteau and the basket and mounted the steps, and I heard how he turned there kind looked at them again where they huddled on their horses, not knowing what to do exactly. And it might have been a good thing that he had that beard and they could not see his mouth. Then he turned, and he looked at the other men sitting with their feet on the railing and watching him too, men who used to come out to his place and sleep on the floor and hunt with him, and he saluted them with that florid, swaggering gesture to the hat (yes, he was underbred.

It showed like this always, your grandfather said, in all his formal contacts with people. He was like John L. Sullivan having taught himself painfully and tediously to do the schottische, having drilled himself and drilled himself in secret until he now believed it no longer necessary to count the music's beat, say. He may have believed that your grandfather or Judge Benbow might have done it a little more effortlessly than he, but he would not have believed that anyone could have beat him in knowing when to do it and how. And besides, it was in his face; that was where his power lay, your grandfather said: that anyone could look at him and say, Given the occasion and the need, this man can and will do anything). Then he went on into the house and commanded a chamber. 'So they sat on their horses and waited for him. I suppose they knew that he would have to come out some time: I suppose they sat there and thought about those two pistols.

Because there was still no warrant for him, you see: it was just public opinion in an acute state of indigestion; and now other horsemen rode into the square and became aware of the situation, so that there was quite a posse waiting when he walked out onto the gallery. He wore a new hat now, and a new broadcloth coat, so they knew what the portmanteau had contained. They even knew now what the basket had contained because he did not have that with him now either. Doubtless at the time it merely puzzled them more than ever, because, you see, they had been too busy speculating on just how he was planning to use Mr Coldfield and, since his return, too completely outraged by the

belief that they now saw the results even if the means were still an enigma, to remember about Miss Ellen at all.

'So he stopped again doubtless and looked from face to face again, doubtless memorizing the new faces, without any haste, with still the beard to hide whatever his mouth might have shown. But he seems to have said nothing at all this time. He just descended the steps and walked on across the square, the committee (your grandfather said it had grown to almost fifty by now) moving too, following him across the square. They say he did not even look back.

He just walked on, erect, with the new hat cocked and carrying in his hand now that which must have seemed to them the final gratuitous insult, with the committee riding along in the street beside him and not quite parallel, and others who did not happen to have horses at the moment joining in and following the committee in the road, and ladies and children and women slaves coming to the doors and windows of the homes as they passed to watch as they went on in grim tableau, and Sutpen, still without once looking back, entered Mr Coldfield's gate and strode on up the brick walk to the door, carrying his newspaper cornucopia of flowers.

'They waited for him again. The crowd was growing fast now other men and a few boys and even some Negroes from the adjacent houses, clotting behind the eight original members of the committee who sat watching Mr Coldfield's door until he emerged. It was a good while and he no longer carried the flowers, and when he returned to the gate, he was engaged to be married. But they did not know this, and as soon as he reached the gate, they arrested him.

They took him back to town, with the ladies and children and house niggers watching from behind curtains and behind the shrubbery in the yards and the corners of the houses, the kitchens where doubtless food was already beginning to scorch, and so back to the square where the rest of the able-bodied men left their offices and stores to follow, so that when he reached the courthouse, Sutpen had a larger following than if he actually had been the runaway slave.

They arraigned him before a justice, but by that time your grandfather and Mr Coldfield had got there. They signed his bond and late that afternoon he returned home with Mr Coldfield, walking along the same street as of the forenoon, with doubtless the same faces watching him from behind the window curtains, to the betrothal supper with no wine at table and no whiskey before or after.

During none of his three passages that day through that street did his bearing alter—the same unhurried stride to which that new frock coat swung, the same angle to the new hat above the eyes and the beard.

Your grandfather said that some of the faience appearance which the flesh of his face had had when he came to town five years ago was gone now and that his face had an honest sunburn. And he was not fleshier either; your grandfather said that was not it: it was just that the flesh on his bones had become quieter, as though passive after some actual breasting of atmosphere like in running, so that he actually filled his clothes now, with that quality still swaggering but without braggadocio or belligerence, though according to your grandfather the quality had never been belligerence, only watchfulness.

And now that was gone, as though after the three years he could trust his eyes alone to do the watching, without the flesh on his bones standing sentry also. Two months later, he and Miss Ellen were married.

'It was in June of 1838, almost five years to the day from that Sunday morning when he rode into town on the roan horse. It (the wedding) was in the same Methodist church where he saw Ellen for the first time, according to Miss Rosa. The aunt had even forced or nagged (not cajoled: that would not have done it) Mr Coldfield into allowing Ellen to wear powder on her face for the occasion. The powder was to hide the marks of tears, But before the wedding was over the powder was streaked, caked and channelled. Ellen seems to have entered the church that night out of weeping as though out of rain, gone through the ceremony and then walked back out of the church and into the

weeping again, the tears again, the same tears even, the same rain. She got into the carriage and departed in it (the rain) for Sutpen's Hundred. 'It was the wedding which caused the tears: not marrying Sutpen.

Whatever tears there were for that, granted there were tears, came later. It was not intended to be a big wedding. That is, Mr Coldfield seems not to have intended it to be. You will notice that most divorces occur with women who were married by tobacco-chewing J. P. s in country courthouses or by ministers waked after midnight, with their suspenders showing beneath their coat-tails and no collar on and a wife or spinster sister in curl papers for witness. So is it too much to believe that these women come to long for divorce from a sense not of incompleteness but of actual frustration and betrayal? that regardless of the breathing evidence of children and all else, they still have in their minds the image of themselves walking to music and turning heads, in all the symbolical trappings and circumstances of ceremonial surrender of that which they no longer possess? and why not, since to them the actual and authentic surrender can only be (and has been) a ceremony like the breaking of a banknote to buy a ticket for the train.

Of the two men, it was Sutpen who desired the big wedding, the full church and all the ritual.-I have this from something your grandfather let drop one day and which he doubtless had from Sutpen himself in the same accidental fashion, since Sutpen never even told Ellen that he wanted it, and the fact that at the last minute he refused to support her in her desire and insistence upon it accounts partly for the tears. Mr Coldfield apparently intended to use the church into which he had invested a certain amount of sacrifice and doubtless self-denial and certainly actual labor and money for the sake of what might be called a demand balance of spiritual solvency, exactly as he would have used a cotton gin in which he considered himself to have incurred either interest or responsibility, for the ginning of any cotton which he or any member of his family, by blood or by marriage, had raised—that, and no more. Perhaps his wanting a small wedding was due to the same tedious and unremitting husbandry which had enabled him to support mother and sister and marry and raise a family on the proceeds of that store which ten years ago had fitted into a single wagon; or perhaps it

was some innate sense of delicacy and fitness (which his sister and daughter did not seem to possess, by the way) regarding the prospective son-in-law whom just two months ago he had been instrumental in getting out of jail.

But it was not due to any lack of courage regarding the son-in-law's still anomalous position in the town. Regardless of what their relations before that had been and of what their future relations might be, if Mr Coldfield had believed Sutpen guilty at the time of any crime, he would not have raised a finger to take Sutpen out. He might not have gone out of his way to keep Sutpen in jail, but doubtless the best possible moral fumigation which Sutpen could have received at the time in the eyes of his fellow citizens was the fact that Mr Coldfield signed his bond ' something he would not have done to save his own good name even though the arrest had been a direct result of the business between himself and Sutpen that affair which, when it reached a point where his conscience refused to sanction it, he had withdrawn from and let Sutpen take all the profit, refusing even to allow Sutpen to reimburse him for the loss which, in withdrawing, he had suffered, though he did permit his daughter to marry this man of whose actions his conscience did not approve.

This was the second time he did something like that. 'When they were married, there were just ten people in the church, including the wedding party, of the hundred who had been invited; though when they emerged from the church (it was at night: Sutpen had brought in a half-dozen of his wild Negroes to wait at the door with burning pine knots) the rest of the hundred were there in the persons of boys and youths and men from the drovers' tavern on the edge of town—stock traders and hostlers and such who had not been invited. That was the other half of the reason for Ellen's tears.

It was the aunt who persuaded or cajoled Mr Coldfield into the big wedding. But Sutpen wanted it. He wanted, not the anonymous wife and the anonymous children, but the two names, the stainless wife and the unimpeachable father-in-law, on the license, the patent. Yes, patent, with a gold seal and red ribbons too if that had been

practicable. But not for himself. She (Miss Rosa) would have called the gold seal and the ribbons vanity. But then, so had vanity conceived that house and built it in a strange place and with little else but his bare hands and further handicapped by the chance and probability of meddling interference arising out of the disapprobation of all communities of men toward any situation which they do not understand. And pride: Miss Rosa had admitted that he was brave; perhaps she even allowed him pride: the same pride which wanted such a house, which would accept nothing less, and drove through to get it at whatever cost.

And then he lived in it, alone, on a pallet on the floor for three years until he could furnish it as it should be furnished—not the least of which furniture was that wedding license, She was quite right: It was not just shelter, just anonymous wife and children that he wanted, just as he did not want just wedding. But when the female crisis came, when Ellen and the aunt tried to enlist him on their side to persuade Mr Coldfield to the big wedding, he refused to support them.

He doubtless remembered even better than Mr Coldfield that two months ago he had been in jail; that public opinion which at some moment during the five preceding years had 'swallowed him even though he never had quite ever lain quiet on its stomach, and performed one of mankind's natural and violent and inexplicable voltefaces and regurgitated him. And it did not help him any that at least two of the citizens who should have made two of the teeth in the outraged jaw served instead as props to hold the jaw open and impotent while he walked out of it unharmed.

'Ellen and the aunt remembered this too. The aunt did. Being a woman, she was doubtless one of that league of Jefferson women who on the second day after the town saw him five years ago, had agreed never to forgive him for not having any past, and who had remained consistent. Since the marriage was now a closed incident, she probably looked upon it as the one chance not only to secure her niece's future as his wife, but to justify the action of her brother in getting him out of

jail and her own position as having apparently sanctioned and permitted the wedding which in reality she could not have prevented.

It may have been for the sake of that big house and the position and state which the women realized long before the men did that he not only aimed at but was going to attain. Or maybe women are even less complex than that and to them any wedding is better than no wedding and a big wedding with a villain preferable to a small one with a saint. 'So the aunt even used Ellen's tears; and Sutpen, who probably knew about what was going to happen, becoming as the time drew near graver and graver.

Not concerned: just watchful, like he must have been from the day when he turned his back upon all that he knew—the faces and the customs—and (he was just fourteen then, he told your grandfather) set out into a world which even in theory he knew nothing about, and with a fixed goal in his mind which most men do not set up until the blood begins to slow at thirty or more and then only because the image represents peace and indolence or at least a crowning of vanity.

Even then he had that same alertness which he had to wear later day and night without changing or laying aside, like the clothing which he had to sleep in as well as live in, and in a country and among a people whose very language he had to learn that unsleeping care which must have known that it could permit itself but one mistake; that alertness for measuring and weighing event against eventuality, circumstance against human nature, his own fallible judgement and mortal clay against not only human but natural forces, choosing and discarding, compromising with his dream and his ambition like you must with the horse which you take across country, over timber, which you control only through your ability to keep the animal from realizing that actually you cannot, that actually it is the stronger.

'His was the curious position now. He was the solitary one. Not Ellen. She not only had the aunt to support her, but the fact that women never plead nor claim loneliness until impenetrable and insurmountable circumstance forces them to give up all hope of

attaining the particular bauble which at the moment they happen to want. And not Mr Coldfield. He had not only public opinion but his own disinclination for the big wedding to support it without incongruity or paradox.

Then (the tears won; Ellen and the aunt wrote out a hundred invitations—Sutpen brought in one of the wild Negroes who carried them from door to door by hand—and even sent out a dozen more personal ones for the dress rehearsal) when they reached the church for the rehearsal on the night before the wedding and found the church itself empty and a handful of men from the town's purlieus (including two of old Ikkemotubbe's Chickasaws) standing in the shadows outside the door, the tears came down again. Ellen went through the rehearsal, but afterward the aunt took her home in a state very near hysteria, though by the next day it had become just quiet intermittent weeping again.

There was some talk even of putting the wedding off. I don't know who it came from, perhaps from Sutpen. But I know who vetoed it. It was as though the aunt were now bent, no longer on merely thrusting Sutpen down the town's throat, but thrusting the wedding itself. She spent all the next day going from house to house, the invitation list in her hand, in a house dress and a shawl and one of the Coldfield Negroes (they were both women) following her, perhaps for protection, perhaps just sucked along like a leaf in the wake of that grim virago fury of female affront; yes, she came to our house too, though your grandfather had never intended anything else but to attend the wedding: the aunt must have had no doubts about father since father had helped take Sutpen out of jail, though she was probably past all ratiocination by then.

Father and your grandmother were just married then and mother was a stranger in Jefferson and I don't know what she thought except that she would never talk about what happened: about the mad woman whom she had never seen before, who came bursting into the house, not to invite her to a wedding but to dare her not to come, and then rushed out again. Mother could not even tell what' wedding she meant at first,

and when father came home he found mother in hysterics too, and even twenty years later mother could not tell what actually happened.

There was nothing comic in it to her. Father used to tease her about it, but even twenty years after that day, when he would tease her I have seen her begin to raise her hand (perhaps with the thimble on one finger) as though to protect herself and the same look come into her face that must have been there when Ellen's aunt departed.

'The aunt covered the town that morning. It did not take her long and it was complete; by nightfall the circumstances of the situation had spread not only beyond the town but beneath it, penetrating the livery stable and the drovers' tavern which was to supply the guests who did attend it. Ellen of course was not aware of this, anymore than the aunt herself was, or would have believed what was going to happen even if she had been clairvoyant and could actually have seen the rehearsal of events before time produced them. Not that the aunt would have considered herself insulated against being thus affronted, she simply could not have believed that her intentions and actions of the day could have any result other than the one for which she had surrendered for the time not only all Coldfield dignity but all female modesty as well.

Sutpen I suppose could have told her, but doubtless he knew that the aunt would not have believed him. Probably he did not even try: he just did the only thing he could do, which was to send out to Sutpen's Hundred and bring in six or seven more of his Negroes, men on whom he could depend, the only men on whom he could depend, and arm them with the lighted pine knots which they were holding at the door when the carriage came up and the wedding party got out. —And this is where the tears stopped, because now the street before the church was lined with carriages and buggies, though only Sutpen and possibly Mr Coldfield remarked that instead of being drawn up before the door and empty, they were halted across the street and still occupied, and that now the banquettes before the church door was a sort of arena lighted by the smoking torches which the Negroes held above their heads, the light of which wavered and gleamed upon the two lines of faces between which the party would have to pass to enter the church.

There were no catcalls yet, no jeering; evidently neither Ellen nor the aunt suspected that anything was wrong.

'For a time Ellen walked out of the weeping, the tears, and so into the church. It was empty yet save for your grandfather and grandmother and perhaps a half dozen more who might have come out of loyalty to the Coldfields or perhaps to be close and so miss nothing of that which the town, as represented by the waiting carriages, seemed to have anticipated as well as Sutpen did. It was still empty even after the ceremony started and concluded. Ellen had something of pride too, or at least that vanity which at times can assume the office of pride and fortitude; besides, nothing had happened yet. The crowd outside was quiet yet, perhaps out of respect for the church, out of that aptitude and eagerness of the Anglo-Saxon for complete mystical acceptance of immolated sticks and stones.

She seems to have walked out of the church and so into it without any warning whatever. Perhaps she was still moving beneath that pride which would not allow the people inside the church to see her weep. She just walked into it, probably hurrying toward the seclusion of the carriage where she could weep; perhaps her first intimation was the voice shouting, 'Look out! Dont hit her now!' and then the object—dirt, frith, whatever it was passing her, or perhaps the changing light itself as she turned and saw one of the Negroes, his torch raised and in the act of springing toward the crowd, the faces, when Sutpen spoke to him in that tongue which even now a good part of the county did not know was a civilized language.

That was what she saw, what the others saw from the halted carriages across the street—the bride shrinking into the shelter of his arm as he drew her behind him and he standing there, not moving even after another object (they threw nothing which could actually injure: it was only clods of dirt and vegetable refuse) struck the hat from his head, and a third struck him full in the chest—standing there motionless, with an expression almost of smiling where his teeth showed through the beard, holding his wild Negroes with that one word (there were doubtless pistols in the crowd; certainly knives: the Negro would not

have lived ten seconds if he had sprung) while about the wedding party the circle of faces with open mouths and torch-reflecting eyes seemed to advance and waver and shift and vanish in the smoky glare of the burning pine.

He retreated to the carriage, shielding the two women with his body, ordering the Negroes to follow with another word. But they threw nothing else. Apparently it was that first spontaneous outburst, though they had come armed and prepared with the ones they did throw. In fact, that seemed to have been the entire business which had come to a head when the vigilance committee followed him to Mr Coldfield's gate that day two months before.

Because the men who had composed the mob, the traders and drovers and teamsters, returned, vanished back into the region from which they had emerged for this one occasion like rats; scattered, parted about the country faces which even Ellen was not to remember, seen for the night or the meal or just the drink at other taverns twenty and fifty and a hundred miles further on along nameless roads and then gone from there too; and those who had come in the Carriages and buggies to see a Roman holiday, driving out to Sutpen's Hundred to call and (the men) to hunt his game and eat his food again and on occasions gathering at night in his stable while he matched two of his wild Negroes against one another as men match game cocks or perhaps even entered the ring himself. It blew away, though not out of memory.

He did not forget that night, even though Ellen, I think, did, since she washed it out of her remembering with tears. Yes, she was weeping again now; it did, indeed, rain on that marriage."

III

IF he threw Miss Rosa over, I wouldn't think she would want to tell anybody about it Quentin said. Ah Mr Compson said again. After Mr Coldfield died in '64, Miss Rosa moved out to Sutpen's Hundred to live with Judith. She was twenty then, four years younger than her niece

whom, in obedience to her sister's dying request, she set out to save from the family's doom which Sutpen seemed bent on accomplishing, apparently by the process of marrying him. She (Miss Rosa) was born in 1845, with her sister already seven years married and the mother of two children and Miss Rosa born into her parents' middle age (her mother must have been at least forty and she died in that childbed and Miss Rosa never forgave her father for it) and at a time when—granted that Miss Rosa merely mirrored her parents' attitude toward the son-in-law—the family wanted only peace and quiet and probably did not expect and maybe did not even want another child.

But she was born, at the price of her mother's life and was never to be permitted to forget it. She was raised by the same spinster aunt who tried to force not only the older sister's bridegroom but the wedding too down the throat of a town which did not want it, growing up in that closed masonry of females to see in the fact of her own breathing not only the lone justification for the sacrifice of her mother's life, not only a living and walking reproach to her father, but a breathing indictment, ubiquitous and even transferable, of the entire male principle (that principle which had left the aunt a virgin at thirty-five). So for the first sixteen years of her life she lived in that grim tight little house with the father whom she hated without knowing it—that queer silent man whose only companion and friend seems to have been his conscience and the only thing he cared about his reputation for probity among his fellow men that man who was later to nail himself in his attic and starve to death rather than look upon his native land in the throes of repelling an invading army—and the aunt who even ten years later was still taking revenge for the fiasco of Ellen's wedding by striking at the town, the human race, through any and all of its creatures brother nieces nephew-in-law herself and all—with the blind irrational fury of a shedding snake.

The aunt had taught Miss Rosa to look upon her sister as a woman who had vanished, not only out of the family and the house but out of life too, into an edifice like Bluebeard's and there transmogrified into a mask looking back with passive and hopeless grief upon the irrevocable world, held there not in duration but in a kind of jeering suspension by a

man who had entered hers and her family's life before she was born with the abruptness of a tornado, done irrevocable and incalculable damage, and gone on.

In a grim mausoleum air of Puritan righteousness and outraged female vindictiveness Miss Rosa's childhood was passed, that aged and ancient and timeless absence of youth which consisted of a Cassandralike listening beyond closed doors, of lurking in dim halls filled with that presbyterian effluvium of lugubrious and vindictive anticipation, while she waited for the infancy and childhood with which nature had confounded and betrayed her to overtake the disapprobation regarding any and every thing which could penetrate the walls of that house through the agency of any man, particularly her father, which the aunt seems to have invested her with at birth along with the swaddling clothes.

Perhaps she saw in her father's death, in the resulting necessity upon her as an orphan and a pauper, to turn to her next of kin for food and shelter and protection—and this kin the niece whom she had been asked to save—perhaps in this she saw fate itself supplying her with the opportunity to observe her sister's dying request.

Perhaps she even saw herself as an instrument of retribution: if not in herself an active instrument strong enough to cope with him, at least as a kind of passive symbol of inescapable reminding to rise bloodless and without dimension from the sacrificial stone of the marriagebed. Because until he came back from Virginia in '66 and found her living there with Judith and Clytie (Yes, Clytie was his daughter too: Clytemnestra. He named her himself. He named them all himself: all his own get and all the get of his wild niggers after the country began to assimilate them. Miss Rosa didn't tell you that two of the niggers in the wagon that day were women? No, sir, Quentin said.

Yes. Two of them. And brought here neither by chance nor oversight. He saw to that, who had doubtless seen even further ahead than the two years it actually took him to build his house and show his good intentions to his neighbors until they allowed him to mix his wild stock

with their tame, since the difference in tongue between his niggers and theirs could have been a barrier only for a matter of weeks or perhaps even days. He brought the two women deliberately; he probably chose them with the same care and shrewdness with which he chose the other livestock—the horses and mules and cattle which he bought later on. And he lived out there for almost five years before he had speaking acquaintance with any white woman in the county, just as he had no furniture in his house and for the same reason: he had at the time nothing to exchange for them. Yes.

He named Clytie as he named them all, the one before Clytie and Henry and Judith even, with that same robust and sardonic temerity, naming with his own mouth his own ironic fecundity of dragon's teeth. Only I have always liked to believe that he intended to name Clytie, Cassandra, prompted by some pure dramatic economy not only to beget but to designate the presiding augur of his own disaster, and that he just got the name wrong through a mistake natural in a man who must have almost taught himself to read... When he returned home in '66, Miss Rosa had not seen him a hundred times in her whole life. And what she saw then was just that ogre face of her childhood seen once and then repeated at intervals and on occasions which she could neither count nor recall, like the mask in Greek tragedy, interchangeable not only from scene to scene, but from actor to actor and behind which the events and occasions took place without chronology or sequence, leaving her actually incapable of saying how many separate times she had seen him for the reason that, waking or sleeping, the aunt had taught her to see nothing else.

On those guarded and lugubrious and even formal occasions when she and the aunt went out to Sutpen's Hundred to 'spend the day and the aunt would order her to go and play with her nephew and niece exactly as she might have ordered her to play a piece for company on the piano, she would not see him even at the dinner table because the aunt would have arranged the visit to coincide with his absence; and probably Miss Rosa would have tried to avoid meeting him even if he had been there. And on the four or five occasions during the year when Ellen would bring the children in to spend the day at her father's, the

aunt (that strong vindictive consistent woman who seems to have been twice the man that Mr Coldfield was and who in very truth was not only Miss Rosa's mother but her father too) cast over these visits also that same atmosphere of grim embattled conspiracy and alliance against the two adversaries, one of whom—Mr Coldfield—whether he could have held his own or not, had long since drawn in his picquets and dismantled his artillery and retired into the impregnable citadel of his passive rectitude: and the other—Sutpen—who probably could have engaged and even routed them but who did not even know that he was an embattled foe. Because he would not even come to the house to the noon meal.

His reason may have been because of some delicacy for his father-in-law. The true reason for and beginning of the relationship between Mr Coldfield and himself neither aunt, Ellen, or Miss Rosa ever knew, and Sutpen was to divulge to but one man—and that under the pledge of confidence as long as Mr Coldfield lived—out of regard for Mr Coldfield's carefully nurtured name for immaculate morality—and which, your grandfather said, Mr Coldfield himself never divulged for the same reason. Or perhaps the reason was that now since he had got out of his father-in-law all that Mr Coldfield possessed that Sutpen could have used or wanted, he had neither the courage to face his father-in-law nor the grace and decency to complete the ceremonial family group even four times a year. Or perhaps it was the reason which Sutpen gave himself and which the aunt refused to believe because of that very fact: that he did not get to town every day and when he did he preferred to spend it (he used the bar now) with the men who gathered each noon at the Holston House.

That was the face which, when Miss Rosa saw it at all, was across his own dining table—the face of a foe who did not even know that it was embattled.

She was ten now and following the aunt's dereliction (Miss Rosa now kept her father's house as the aunt had done, until the night the aunt climbed out the window and vanished) there was not only no one to make her try to play with her nephew and niece on those days formal

and funereal, she did not even have to go out there and breathe the same air which he breathed and where, even though absent, he still remained, lurked, in what seemed to her sardonic and watchful triumph. She went out to Sutpen's Hundred just once a year now when, in their Sunday clothes she and her father drove the twelve miles in a stout battered buggy behind the stout scrubby team, to spend the day.

It was now Mr Coldfield who insisted on the visits, who had never gone out with them while the aunt was there, perhaps from a sense of duty, which was the reason he gave and which in this case even the aunt would have believed, perhaps because it was not the true one, since doubtless even Miss Rosa would not have believed the true one: which was that Mr Coldfield wanted to see his grandchildren regarding whom he was in a steadily increasing unease of that day when their father would tell the son at least of that old business between them which Mr Coldfield was not yet sure that his son-in-law had never told. Though the aunt was gone, she still managed to bequeath and invoke upon each of these expeditions something of the old flavor of grim sortie, more than ever now against a foe who did not know that he was at war.

Because now that the aunt was gone, Ellen had reneged from that triumvirate of which Miss Rosa tried without realizing it to make two. Now she was completely alone, facing him across the dinner table, without support even from Ellen (at this time Ellen went through a complete metamorphosis, emerging into her next lustrum with the finality of actual re-birth);—facing across the table the foe who was not even aware that he sat there not as host and brother-in-law but as the second party to an armistice. He probably did not even look at her twice as weighed against his own family and children—the small slight child whose feet, even when she would be grown, would never quite reach the floor even from her own chairs—as against Ellen who, though small-boned also, was what is known as fullbodied (and who would have been, if her life had not declined into a time when even men found little enough to eat and the end of her days had been without trouble, fullbodied indeed.

Not fat: just rounded and complete, the hair white, the eyes still even young, even a faint bloom yet on what would be dewlaps and not cheeks any longer, the small plump ringed unscarified hands folded in tranquil anticipation of the food, on the damask before the Haviland beneath the candelabra) and against Judith already taller than Ellen, and Henry though not as tall for sixteen as Judith was for fourteen, yet giving promise of someday standing eye to eye with his father; this face which rarely spoke during the meal, with eyes like (as you might put it) pieces of coal pressed into soft dough and prim hair of that peculiar mouse-like shade of hair on which the sun does not often shine, against Judith's and Henry's out-of-doors faces: Judith with her mother's hair and her father's eyes and Henry with his hair halfway between his father's red and Ellen's black and eyes of a bright dark hazel—this small body of Miss Rosa's with its air of curious and paradoxical awkwardness like a costume borrowed at the last moment and of necessity for a masquerade which she did not want to attend: that aura of a creature cloistered now by deliberate choice and still in the throes of enforced apprenticeship to, rather than voluntary or even acquiescent participation in, breathing—this bound maidservant to flesh and blood waiting even now to escape it by writing a schoolgirl's poetry about the also-dead.

The face, the smallest face in the company, watching him across the table with still and curious and profound intensity as though she actually had some intimation gained from that rapport with the fluid cradle of events (time) which she had acquired or 'cultivated by listening beyond closed doors not to what she heard there, but by becoming supine and receptive, incapable of either discrimination or opinion or incredulity, listening to the prefever's temperature of disaster, which makes soothsayers and sometimes makes them right, and of the future catastrophe in which the ogre-face of her childhood would apparently vanish so completely that she would agree to marry the late owner of it.

That may have been the last time she saw him. Because they quit going out there. Mr Coldfield quit. There had never been any day set for the visit. One morning he would merely appear at breakfast in the decent

and heavy black coat in which he had been married and had worn fifty-two times each year since until Ellen married, and then fiftythree times a year after the aunt deserted them, until he put it on for good the day he climbed to the attic and nailed the door behind him and threw the hammer out the window and so died in it. Then after breakfast Miss Rosa would retire and reappear in the formidable black or brown silk which the aunt had chosen for her years ago and which she continued to wear on Sundays and occasions even after it was worn out, until the day when her father decided that the aunt would not return and permitted Miss Rosa to use the clothing which the aunt had left in the house the night of her elopement.

Then they would get into the buggy and depart, Mr Coldfield first docking the two Negroes for the noon meal which they would not have to prepare and (so the town believed) charging them for the crude one of leftovers which they would have to eat. Then one year they did not go. Doubtless Mr Coldfield failed to come to breakfast in the black coat, and more days passed and still he did not, and that was all.

Perhaps he felt, now that the grandchildren were grown, that the draft on his conscience had been discharged what with Henry away at the State University at Oxford and Judith gone even further than that—into that transition stage between childhood and womanhood where she was even more inaccessible to the grandfather of whom she had seen but little during her life and probably cared less anyway—that state where, though still visible, young girls appear as though seen through glass and where even the voice cannot reach them; where they exist (this the hoyden who could and did outrun and outclimb, and ride and fight both with and beside her brother) in a pearly lambence without shadows and themselves partaking of it; in nebulous suspension held, strange and unpredictable, even their very shapes fluid and delicate and without substance; not in themselves floating and seeking but merely waiting, parasitic and potent and serene, drawing to themselves without effort the post-genitive upon and about which to shape, flow into back, breast; bosom, flank, thigh.

Now the period began which ended in the catastrophe which caused a reversal so complete in Miss Rosa as to permit her to agree to marry the man whom she had grown up to look upon as an ogre. It was not a volte-face of character: that did not change. Even her behavior did not change to any extent. Even if Charles Bon had not died, she would in all probability have gone out to Sutpen's Hundred to live after her father's death sooner or later, and once she had done so she would have probably passed the remainder of her life there.

But if Bon had lived and he and Judith had married and Henry had remained in the known world, she would have moved out there only when she was ready to, and she would have lived in her dead sister's family only as the aunt which she actually was. It was not her character that changed: despite the six years or so since she had actually seen him and certainly the four years which she had spent feeding her father secretly at night while he hid from Confederate provost marshals in the attic.

At the same time she was writing heroic poetry about the very men from whom her father was hiding and who would have shot him or hung him without trial if they had found him—and incidentally the ogre of her childhood was one of them and (he brought home with him a citation for valor in Lee's own hand) a good one. The face which Miss Rosa carried out there to live for the rest of her life was the same face which had watched him across the dinner table and which he likewise could not have said how many times he had seen, nor when and where, not for the reason that he was unable to forget it but because he could probably not have remembered it enough to have described it ten minutes after looking away, and from behind the face the same woman who had been that child now watched him with that same grim and cold intensity.

Although she was not to see Sutpen again for years, she now saw her sister and niece more often than ever. Ellen was now at the full peak of what the aunt would have called her renegadery. She seemed not only to acquiesce, to be reconciled to her life and marriage, but to be actually proud of it. She had bloomed, as if Fate were crowding the

normal Indian summer which should have bloomed gradually and faded gracefully through six or eight years, into three or four, either for compensation for what was to come or to clear the books, pay the check to which Fate's wife, Nature, had signed his name. Ellen was in her late thirties, plump, her face unblemished still.

It was as though whatever marks being in the world had left upon it up to the time the aunt vanished had been removed from between the skeleton and the skin, between the sum of experience and the envelope in which it resides, by the intervening years of annealing and untroubled flesh. Her carriage, air, now was a little regal she and Judith made frequent trips to town now, calling upon the same ladies, some of whom were now grandmothers, whom the aunt had tried to force to attend the wedding twenty years ago, and, to the meager possibilities which the town offered, shopping—as though she had succeeded at last in evacuating not only the puritan heritage but reality itself; had immolated outrageous husband and incomprehensible children into shades; escaped at last into a world of pure illusion in which, safe from any harm, she moved, lived, from attitude to attitude against her background of Chatelaine to the largest, wife to the wealthiest, mother of the most fortunate.

When she shopped (there were twenty stores in Jefferson now) she unbent without even getting out of the carriage, gracious and assured' and talking the most complete nonsense, speaking her bright set meaningless phrases out of the part which she had written for herself, of the duchess peripatetic with property soups and medicines among a soilless and uncompelled peasantry—a woman who, if she had had the fortitude to bear sorrow and trouble, might have risen to actual stardom in the role of the matriarch, arbitrating from the fireside corner of a crone the pride and destiny of her family, instead of turning at the last to the youngest member of it and asking her to protect the others.

Often twice and sometimes three times a week the two of them came to town and into the house—the foolish unreal voluble preserved woman now six years absent from the world—the woman who had

quitted home and kin on a flood of tears and in a shadowy miasmic region something like the bitter purlieus of Styx had produced two children and then rose like the swamp-hatched butterfly, unimpeded by weight of stomach and all the heavy organs of suffering and experience, into a perennial bright vacuum of arrested sun—and Judith, the young girl dreaming, not living, in her complete detachment and imperviousness to actuality almost like physical deafness.

To them, Miss Rosa must not have been anything at all now: not the child who had been the object and victim of the vanished aunt's vindictive unflagging care and attention, and not even the woman which her office as housekeeper would indicate, and certainly not the factual aunt herself. And it would be hard to say which of the two, sister or niece, was the most unreal to Miss Rosa in turn—the adult who had escaped reality into a bland region peopled by dolls, or the young girl who slept waking in some suspension so completely physical as to resemble the state before birth and as far removed from reality's other extreme as Ellen was from hers, driving up to the house twice and three times a week, and one time, in the summer when Judith was seventeen, stopping in on their way overland to Memphis to buy Judith clothes; yes: a trousseau..

That was the summer following Henry's first year at the University, after he had brought Charles Bon home with him for Christmas and then again to spend a week or so of the summer vacation before Bon rode on to the River to take the steamboat home to New Orleans; the summer in which Sutpen himself went away, on business, Ellen said, doubtless unaware, such was her existence then, that she did not know where her husband had gone and not even conscious that she was not curious. No one but your grandfather and perhaps Clytie was ever to know that Sutpen had gone to New Orleans too.

They would enter Miss Rosa's house, that dim grim tight little house where even yet, four years after she had left the aunt still seemed to be just beyond any door with her hand already on the knob, and which Ellen would fill with ten or fifteen minutes of shrill uproar and then depart, taking with her the dreamy and volitionless daughter who had

not spoken one word; and Miss Rosa who in actual fact was the girl's aunt and who by actual years should have been her sister ignoring the mother to follow the departing and inaccessible daughter with myopic and inarticulate yearning and not one whir of jealousy, projecting upon Judith all the abortive dreams and delusions of her own doomed and frustrated youth, offering Judith the only gift (it was Ellen who told this, with shrieks of amusement, more than once) in her power: she offered to teach Judith how to keep house and plan meals and count laundry, receiving for the offer the blank fathomless stare, the unhearing 'What? What did you say?' while even now Ellen was shrieking with astonished appreciation. Then they were gone—carriage, bundles, Ellen's peacock amusement, the niece's impenetrable dreaming. When they came to town next and the carriage stopped before Mr Coldfield's house, one of the Negresses came out and said that Miss Rosa was not at home.

That summer she saw Henry again too. She had not seen him since the summer before although he had been home Christmas with Charles Bon, his friend from the University, and she had heard about the balls and parties at Sutpen's Hundred during the holidays, but she and her father had not gone out. And when Henry stopped with Bon on the way back to school the day after New Year's to speak to his aunt, she actually was not at home. So she did not see him until the following summer, after a full year. She was downtown, shopping; she was standing on the street talking to your grandmother when he rode past. He didn't see her; he passed on a new mare which his father had given him, in the coat and hat of a man now; your grandmother said he was as tall as his father and that he sat the mare with the same swagger although lighter in the bone than Sutpen, as if his bones were capable of bearing the swagger but were still too light and quick to support the pomposity.

Because Sutpen was acting his role too. He had corrupted Ellen in more ways than one. He was the biggest single landowner and cotton-planter in the county now, attained by the same tactics with which he had built his house—the same singleminded unflagging effort and utter disregard of how his actions which the town could see might look and how the ones which the town could not see must appear to it. There were some

among his fellow citizens who believed even yet that there was a nigger in the woodpile somewhere, ranging from the ones who believed that the plantation was just a blind to his actual dark avocation, through the ones who believed that he had found some way to juggle the cotton market itself and so get more per bale for his cotton than honest men could, to those who believed apparently that the wild niggers which he had brought there had the power to actually conjure more cotton per acre from the soil than any tame ones had ever done.

He was not liked (which he evidently did not want, anyway) but feared, which seemed to amuse, if not actually please, him. But he was accepted; he obviously had too much money now to be rejected or even seriously annoyed any more. He accomplished this—got his plantation to running smoothly (he had an overseer now; it was the son of that same sheriff who had arrested him at his bride-to-He's gate on the day of the betrothal) within ten years of the wedding, and now he acted his role too a role of arrogant ease and leisure which, as the leisure and ease put flesh on him, became a little pompous. Yes, he had corrupted Ellen to more than renegadery, though, like her, he was unaware that his flowering was a forced blooming too and that while he was still playing the scene to the audience, behind him Fate, destiny, retribution, irony—the stage manager, call him what you will—was already striking the set and dragging on the synthetic and spurious shadows and shapes of the next one.

'There goes—' your grandmother said. But Miss Rosa had already seen Henry. She was standing there beside your grandmother, her head hardly reaching your grandmother's shoulder, thin, in one of the dresses which the aunt had left in the house and which Miss Rosa had cut down to fit herself, who had never been taught to sew either, just as she had assumed the housekeeping and offered to teach Judith to do the same, who had never been taught to cook nor taught to do anything save listen through closed doors, standing there with a shawl over her head like she might have been fifty instead of fifteen, looking after her nephew and saying, 'Why... he's shaved.' Then she stopped seeing Ellen even. That is, Ellen also stopped coming to the house, stopped breaking the carriage's weekly ritual of store to store where,

without getting out, Ellen bade merchant and clerk fetch out to her the cloth and the meager fripperies and baubles which they carried and which they knew even better than she that she would not buy but instead would merely finger and handle and disarrange and then reject, all in that flow of bright pettish volubility.

Not contemptuous, not even patronizing exactly, but with a bland and even childlike imposition upon the sufferance or good manners or sheer helplessness of the men, the merchants and clerks; then to come to the house and fill it too with that meaningless uproar of vanity, of impossible and foundationless advice about Miss Rosa and her father and the house, about Miss Rosa's clothes and the arrangement of the furniture and how the food was prepared and even the hours at which it was eaten.

Because the time now approached (it was 1860, even Mr Coldfield probably admitted that war was unavoidable) when the destiny of Sutpen's family which for twenty years now had been like a lake welling from quiet springs into a quiet valley and spreading, rising almost imperceptibly and in which the four members of it floated in sunny suspension, felt the first subterranean movement toward the outlet, the gorge which would be the land's catastrophe too, and the four peaceful swimmers turning suddenly to face one another, not yet with alarm or distrust but just alert, feeling the dark set, none of them yet at that point where man looks about at his companions in disaster and thinks when will I stop trying to save them and save only myself? and not even aware that that point was approaching.

So Miss Rosa did not see any of them; she had never seen (and was never to see alive) Charles Bon at all; Charles Bon of New Orleans, Henry's friend who was not only some few years older than Henry but actually a little old to be still in college and certainly a little out of place in that one where he was—a small new college in the Mississippi hinterland and even wilderness, three hundred miles from that worldly and even foreign city which was his home—a young man of a worldly elegance and assurance beyond his years, handsome, apparently wealthy and with for background the shadowy figure of a legal guardian

rather than any parents—a personage who in the remote Mississippi of that time must have appeared almost phoenix-like, fullsprung from no childhood, born of no woman and impervious to time and, vanished, leaving no bones nor dust anywhere—a man with an ease of manner and a swaggering gallant air in comparison with which Sutpen's pompous arrogance was clumsy bluff and Henry actually a hobble-de-hoy.

Miss Rosa never saw him; this was a picture, an image. It was not what Ellen told her: Ellen at the absolute halcyon of her butterfly's summer and now with the added charm of gracious and graceful voluntary surrendering of youth to her blood's and sex's successor, that concurrent attitude and behavior with the engagement's span with which mothers who want to can almost make themselves the brides of their daughters' weddings. Listening to Ellen, a stranger would have almost believed that the marriage, which subsequent events would indicate had not even been mentioned between the young people and the parents, had been actually performed. Ellen did not once mention love between Judith and Bon. She did not hint around it.

Love, with reference to them was just a finished and perfectly dead subject like the matter of virginity would be after the birth of the first grandchild.

She spoke of Bon as if he were three inanimate objects in one, or perhaps one inanimate object for which she and her family would find three concordant uses: a garment which Judith might wear as she would a riding habit or a ball gown, a piece of furniture which would complement and complete the furnishing of her house and position, and a mentor and example to correct Henry's provincial manners and speech and clothing. She seemed to have encompassed time.

She postulated the elapsed years during which no honeymoon nor any change had taken place, out of which the (now) five faces looked with a sort of lifeless and perennial bloom like painted portraits hung in a vacuum, each taken at its forewarned peak and smoothed of all thought and experience, the originals of which had lived and died so

long ago that their joys and griefs must now be forgotten even by the very boards on which they had strutted and postured and laughed and wept.

This, while Miss Rosa, not listening, who had got the picture from the first word, perhaps from the name, Charles Bon; the spinster doomed for life at sixteen, sitting beneath this bright glitter of delusion like it was one of those colored electric beams in cabarets and she there for the first time in her life and the beam filled with a substanceless glitter of tinsel motes darting suddenly upon her, halting for a moment then going on.

She wasn't jealous of Judith. It was not selfpity either, sitting there blinking steadily at her sister, while Ellen talked, in one of those botched-over house dresses (the clothes, castoff sometimes but usually new, which Ellen gave her from time to time were always silk, of course) which the aunt had abandoned when she eloped with the horse-and mule-trader, perhaps in the hope or even the firm intention of never wearing anything like them again.

It was probably just peaceful despair and relief at final and complete abnegation, now that Judith was about to immolate the frustration's vicarious recompense into the living fairy tale. It sounded like a fairy tale when Ellen told it later to your grandmother, only it was a fairy tale written for and acted by a fashionable ladies' club. But to Miss Rosa it must have been authentic, not only plausible but justified: hence the remark which sent Ellen again (she told this too, for the childish joke it was) into shrieks of amused and fretted astonishment. 'We deserve him,' Miss Rosa said. 'Deserve? Him?' Ellen said, probably shrieked too.

'Of course we deserve him—if you want to put it that way. I certainly hope and expect you to feel that the Coldfields are qualified to reciprocate whatever particularly signal honor marriage with anyone might confer upon them.' Naturally there is no known rejoinder to this. At least, as far as Ellen ever told, Miss Rosa did not try to make one. She just saw Ellen depart and then set about to make Judith the second only gift in her power. She possessed two now, this one likewise

bequeathed to her by the aunt who taught her both to keep house and how to fit clothes by climbing out a window one night, though this second gift developed late (you might say, reperculated) due to the fact that when the aunt left, Miss Rosa was not yet large enough to be able to use the discarded clothing even by cutting the garments down.

She set about secretly making garments for Judith's trousseau. She got the cloth from her father's store. She could not have got it anywhere else. Your grandmother told me that at that time Miss Rosa actually could not count money, that she knew the progression of the coins in theory but that apparently she had never had the actual cash to see, touch, experiment and prove with; that on certain days of the week she would go down town with a basket and shop at certain stores which Mr Coldfield had already designated, with no coin nor sum of money changing lip or hand, and that later in the day Mr Coldfield would trace her course by the debits scratched on paper or on walls and counters, and pay them. So she would have to get the material from him, though his stock which had begun as a collection of the crudest necessities and which apparently could not even feed himself and his daughter from its own shelves, had not increased, let alone diversified.

Yet this was where she had to go to get the material to make those intimate young girl garments which were to be for her own vicarious bridal and you can imagine too what Miss Rosa's notion of such garments would be, let alone what her notion of them would look like when she had finished them unassisted. Nobody knows how she managed to get the material from her father's store. He didn't give it to her. He would have felt it incumbent on him to supply his granddaughter with clothes if she were indecently clad or if she were ragged or cold, but not to marry in. So I believe she stole it. She must have. She must have taken it almost from under her father's nose (it was a small store and he was his own clerk and from any point in it he could see any other point) with that amoral boldness, that affinity for brigandage in women, but more likely, or so I would like to think, by some subterfuge of such bald and desperate transparency concocted by innocence that its very simplicity fooled him.

So she didn't even see Ellen anymore. Apparently Ellen had now served her purpose, completed the bright pointless noon and afternoon of the butterfly's summer and vanished, perhaps not out of Jefferson, but out of her sister's life any way, to be seen but the one time more dying in bed in a darkened room in the house on which fateful mischance had already laid its hand to the extent of scattering the black foundation on which it had been erected and removing its two male mainstays, husband and son—the one into the risk and danger of battle, the other apparently into oblivion. Henry had just vanished.

She heard of that too while she was spending her days (and nights; she would have to wait until her father was asleep) sewing tediously and without skill on the garments which she was making for her niece's trousseau and which she had to keep hidden not only from her father but from the two Negresses, who might have told Mr Coldfield—whipping lace out of raveled and hoarded string and thread and sewing it onto garments while news came of Lincoln's election and of the fall of Sumpter, and she scarce listening, hearing and losing the knell and doom of her native land between two tedious and clumsy stitches on a garment which she would never wear and never remove for a man whom she was not even to see alive.

Henry just vanished: she heard just what the town heard—that on this next Christmas Henry and Bon came home again to spend the holidays, the handsome and wealthy New Orleansian whose engagement to the daughter the mother had been filling the town's ears with for six months now. They came again and now the town listened for the announcement of the actual day. And then something happened. Nobody knew what: whether something between Henry and Bon on one hand and Judith on the other, or between the three young people on one hand and the parents on the other.

But anyway, when Christmas day came, Henry and Bon were gone. And Ellen was not visible (she seemed to have retired to the darkened room which she was not to quit until she died two years later) and nobody could have told from either Sutpen's or Judith's faces or actions or behavior, and so the tale came through the Negroes: of how on the

night before Christmas there had been a quarrel between, not Bon and Henry or Bon and Sutpen, but between the son and the father and that Henry had formally abjured his father and renounced his birthright and the roof under which he had been born and that he and Bon had ridden away in the night and that the mother was prostrate though, the town believed, not at the upset of the marriage but at the shock of reality entering her life: this the merciful blow of the axe before the beast's throat is cut.

That's what Miss Rosa heard. Nobody knows what she thought. The town believed that Henry's action was just the fiery nature of youth, let alone a Sutpen, and that time would cure it. Doubtless Sutpen's and Judith's behavior toward one another and toward the town had something to do with this. They would be seen together in the carriage in town now and then as though nothing had occurred between them at least, which certainly would not have been the case if the quarrel had been between Bon and the father, and probably not the case if the trouble had been between Henry and his father because the town knew that between Henry and Judith there had been a relationship closer than the traditional loyalty of brother and sister even; a curious relationship: something of that fierce impersonal rivalry between two cadets in a crack regiment who eat from the same dish and sleep under the same blanket and chance the same destruction and who would risk death for one another, not for the other's sake but for the sake of the unbroken front of the regiment itself.

That's all Miss Rosa knew. She could have known no more about it than the town knew because the ones who did know (Sutpen or Judith: not Ellen, who would have been told nothing in the first place and would have forgot, failed to assimilate, it if she had been told Ellen the butterfly, from beneath whom without warning the very sunbuoyed air had been withdrawn, leaving her now with the plump hands folded on the coverlet in the darkened room and the eyes above them probably not even suffering but merely filled with baffled incomprehension) would not have told her anymore than they would have told anyone in Jefferson or anywhere else. Miss Rosa probably went out there, probably once and then no more. And she must have told Mr Coldfield

that there was nothing wrong and evidently she believed that herself since she continued to sew on the garments for Judith's wedding.

She was still doing that when Mississippi seceded and when the first Confederate uniforms began to appear in Jefferson where Colonel Sartoris and Sutpen were raising the regiment which departed in '61, with Sutpen, second in command, siding at Colonel Sartoris' left hand, on the black stallion named out of Scott, beneath the regimental colors which he and Sartoris had designed and which Sartoris' womenfolks had sewed together out of silk dresses. He had filled out physically from what he had been not only when he first rode into Jefferson that Sunday in '33, but from what he had been when he and Ellen married.

He was not portly yet, though he was now getting on toward fifty-five. The fat, the stomach, came later. It came upon him suddenly, all at once, in the year after whatever it was happened to his engagement to Miss Rosa and she quitted his roof and returned to town to live alone in her father's house and did not ever speak to him again except when she addressed him that one time when they told her that he was dead. The flesh came upon him suddenly, as though what the Negroes and Wash Jones, too, called the fine figure of a man had reached and held its peak after the foundation had given away and something between the shape of him that people knew and the uncompromising skeleton of what he actually was had gone fluid and, earthbound, had been snubbed up and restrained, balloonlike, unstable and lifeless, by the envelope which it had betrayed.

She did not see the regiment depart because her father forbade her to leave the house until it was gone, refusing to allow her to take part in or be present with the other women and girls in the ceremony of its departure, though not because his son-in-law happened to be in it. He had never been an irascible man and before war was actually declared and Mississippi seceded, his acts and speeches of protest had been not only calm but logical and quite sensible. But after the die was cast he seemed to change overnight, just as his daughter Ellen changed her nature a few years before. As soon as troops began to appear in Jefferson he closed his store and kept it closed all during the period

that soldiers were being mobilized and drilled, and later, after the regiment was gone, whenever casual troops would bivouac for the night in passing, refusing to sell any goods for any price to the military and, so it was told, to the families not only of soldiers but of men or women who had supported secession and war only in talk, opinion.

He refused to permit his sister to come back home to live while her horse-trader husband was in the army, he would not even allow Miss Rosa to look out the window at passing soldiers. He had closed his store permanently and was at home all day now. He and Miss Rosa lived in the back of the house, with the front door locked and the front shutters closed and fastened. He spent the day, the neighbors said, behind one of the slightly opened blinds like a picquet on post, armed not with a musket but with the big family Bible in which his and his sister's birth and his marriage and Ellen's birth and marriage and the birth of his two grandchildren and of Miss Rosa, and his wife's death (but not the marriage of the aunt; it was Miss Rosa who entered that, along with Ellen's death, on the day when she entered Mr Coldfield's own, and Charles Bon's and even Sutpen's) had been duly entered in his neat clerk's hand, until a detachment of troops would pass: whereupon he would open the Bible and declaim in a harsh loud voice even above the sound of the tramping feet, the passages of the old violent vindictive mysticism which he had already marked as the actual picquet would have ranged his row of cartridges along the window sill.

Then one morning he learned that his store had been broken into and looted, doubtless by a company of strange troops bivouacked on the edge of town and doubtless abetted, if only vocally, by his own fellow citizens. That night he mounted to the attic with his hammer and his handful of nails and nailed the door behind him and threw the hammer out the window. He was not a coward. He was a man of uncompromising moral strength, coming into a new country with a small stock of goods and supporting five people out of it in comfort and security at least.

He did it by close trading, to be' sure: he could not have done it save by close trading or dishonesty; and as your grandfather said, a man who,

in a country such as Mississippi was then, would restrict dishonesty to the selling of straw hats and hame strings and salt meat would have been already locked up by his own family as a kleptomaniac.

But he was not a coward, even though his conscience may have objected, as your grandfather said, not so much to the idea of pouring out human blood and life, but at the idea of waste: of wearing out and eating up and shooting away material in any cause whatever. Now Miss Rosa's life consisted of keeping life in herself and her father.

Up to the night when it was looted, they had lived out of the store. She would go to the store after dark with a basket and fetch back enough food to last for a day or two. So the stock, not renewed for some time before that, was considerably reduced even before the looting; and soon she, who had never been taught to do anything practical because the aunt had raised her to believe that she was not only delicate but actually precious, was cooking the food which as time passed became harder and harder to come by and poorer and poorer in quality, and hauling it up to her father at night by means of a well pulley and rope attached to the attic window. She did this for three years, feeding in secret and at night and with food which in quantity was scarcely sufficient for one, the man whom she hated.

And she may not have known before that she hated him and she may not have known it now even, nevertheless the first of the odes to Southern soldiers in that portfolio which when your grandfather saw it in 1885 contained a thousand or more, was dated in the first year of her father's voluntary incarceration and dated at two o'clock in the morning. Then he died. One morning the hand did not come out to draw up the basket.

The old nails were still in the door and neighbors helped her break it in with axes and they found him, who had seen his sole means of support looted by the defenders of his cause, even if he had repudiated it and them, with three days' uneaten food beside his pallet bed as if he had spent the three days in a mental balancing of his terrestrial accounts, found the result and proved it and then turned upon his contemporary

scene of folly and outrage and injustice the dead and consistent impassivity of a cold and inflexible disapproval. Now Miss Rosa was not only an orphan, but a pauper too. The store was just a shell, the deserted building vacated even by rats and containing nothing, not even goodwill since he had irrevocably estranged himself from neighbors, town, and embattled land, all three by his behavior.

Even the two Negresses were gone now—whom he had freed as soon as he came into possession of them (through a debt, by the way, not purchase), writing out their papers of freedom which they could not read and putting them on a weekly wage which he held back in full against the discharge of their current market value—and in return for which they had been among the first Jefferson Negroes to desert and follow the Yankee troops. So when he died, he had nothing, not only saved but kept. Doubtless the only pleasure which he had ever had was not in the meager spartan hoard which he had accumulated before his path crossed that of his future son-in-law—not in the money but in its representation of a balance in whatever spiritual countinghouse he believed would some day pay his sight drafts on self-denial and fortitude.

And doubtless what hurt him most in the whole business with Sutpen was not the loss of the 'money but the fact that he had had to sacrifice the hoarding, the symbol of the fortitude and abnegation, to keep intact the spiritual solvency which he believed that he had already established and secured. It was as if he had had to pay the same note twice because of some trifling oversight of date or signature. SO Miss Rosa was both pauper and orphan, with no kin above dust but Judith and the aunt who had been last heard of two years ago while trying to pass the Yankee lines to reach Illinois and so be near the Rock Island prison where her husband, who had offered his talents for horse—and mulegetting to the Confederate cavalry remount corps and had been caught at it, now was. Ellen was dead two years now the butterfly, the moth caught in a gale and blown against a wall and clinging there beating feebly, not with any particular stubborn clinging to life, not in particular pain since it was too light to have struck hard, nor even with very much remembrance of the bright vacuum before the gale, but just

in bewildered and uncomprehending amazement the bright trivial shell not even changed to any great extent despite the year of bad food, since all of Sutpen's Negroes had deserted also to follow the Yankee troops away; the wild blood which he had brought into the country and tried to mix, blend, with the tame which was already there, with the same care and for the same purpose which he blended that of the stallion and that of his own.

And with the same success: as though his presence alone compelled that house to accept and retain human life; as though houses actually possess a sentience, a personality and character acquired, not so much from the people who breathe or have breathed in them inherent in the wood and brick or begotten upon the wood and brick by the man or men who conceived and built them—in this house an incontrovertible affirmation for emptiness, desertion; an insurmountable resistance to occupancy save when sanctioned and protected by the ruthless and the strong. Ellen had lost some flesh of course, but it was as the butterfly itself enters dissolution by actually dissolving: the area of wing and body decreasing a little, the pattern of the spots drawing a little closer together, but with no wrinkle to show—the same smooth, almost girlish face on the pillow (though Miss Rosa now discovered that Ellen had been dyeing her hair evidently for years), the same almost plump soft (though now unringed) hands on the coverlet, and only the bafflement in the dark uncomprehending eyes to indicate anything of present life by which to postulate approaching death as she asked the seventeen-year-old sister to protect the remaining child. (Henry up to now was just vanished, his birthright voluntarily repudiated; he had not yet returned to play his final part in his family's doom—and this, your grandfather said, spared Ellen too, not that it would have been the crushing and crowning blow but that it would have been wasted on her since the clinging moth, even alive, would have been incapable now of feeling anymore of wind or violence.)

So the natural thing would have been for her to go out and live with Judith, the natural thing for her or any Southern woman, gentlewoman. She would not have needed to be asked; no one 'would expect her to wait to be. Because that's what a Southern lady is. Not the fact that,

penniless and with no prospect of ever being otherwise and knowing that all who know her know this, yet moving with a parasol and a private chamber pot and three trunks into your home and into the room where your wife uses the hand-embroidered linen, she not only takes command of all the servants who likewise know that she will never tip them, because they know as well as the white folks that she will never have anything to tip them with, but goes into the kitchen and dispossesses the cook and seasons the very food you are going to eat to suit her own palate—it's not this, not this that she is depending on to keep body and soul together: it was as though she were living on the actual blood itself, like a vampire, not with insatiability, certainly not with voracity, but with that serene and idle splendor of flowers abrogating to herself, because it fills her veins also, nourishment from the old blood that crossed uncharted seas and continents and battled wilderness hardships and lurking circumstances and fatalities.

That's what she would have been expected to do. But she didn't.

Yet Judith still had those abandoned acres to draw from, let alone Clytie to help her, keep her company, and Wash Jones to feed her as Wash had fed Ellen before she died. But Miss Rosa didn't go out there at once. Perhaps she never would have gone. Although Ellen had asked her to protect Judith, possibly she felt that Judith did not need protection yet, since if even deferred love could have supplied her with the will to exist, endure for this long, then that same love, even though deferred, must and would preserve Bon until the folly of men would stalemate from sheer exhaustion and he would return from wherever he was and bring Henry with him—Henry, victim too of the same folly and mischance. She must have seen Judith now and then and Judith probably urged her to come out to Sutpen's Hundred to live, but I believe that this is the reason she did not go, even though she did not know where Bon and Henry were and Judith apparently never thought to tell her. Because Judith knew. She may have known for some time; even Ellen may have known. Or perhaps Judith never told her mother either.

Perhaps Ellen did not know before she died that Henry and Bon were now privates in the company which their classmates at the University had organized. The first intimation Miss Rosa had had in four years that her nephew was still alive was the afternoon when Wash Jones, riding Sutpen's remaining mule, stopped in front of the house and began to shout her name. She had seen him before but she did not recognize him—a gaunt gangling man malaria-ridden with pale eyes and a face that might have been any age between twenty-five and sixty, sitting on the saddleless mule in the street before the gate, shouting 'Hello, Hello,' at intervals until she came to the door; whereupon he lowered his voice somewhat, though not much. 'Air you Rosie Coldfield?' he said.

IV

It was still not dark enough for Quentin to start, not yet dark enough to suit Miss Coldfield at least, even discounting the twelve miles out there and the twelve miles back. Quentin knew that. He could almost see her, waiting in one of the dark airless rooms in the little grim house's impregnable solitude. She would have no light burning because she would be out of the house soon, and probably some mental descendant or kinsman of him or her who had told her once that light and moving air carried heat had also told her that the cost of electricity was not in the actual time the light burned but in the retroactive overcoming of primary inertia when the switch was snapped: that that was what showed on the meter.

She would be wearing already the black bonnet with jet sequins; he knew that: and a shawl, sitting there in the augmenting and defunctive twilight; she would have even now in her hand or on her lap the reticule with all the keys, entrance closet and cupboard, that the house possessed which she was about to desert for perhaps six hours; and a parasol, an umbrella too, he thought, thinking how she would be impervious to weather and season since although he had not spoken a hundred words to her in his life before this afternoon, he did know that she had never before tonight quitted that house after sundown save on

Sundays and Wednesdays for prayer meeting, in the entire forty-three years probably.

Yes, she would have the umbrella. She would emerge with it when he called for her and carry it invincibly into the spent suspiration of an evening without even dew, where even now the only alteration toward darkness was in the soft and fuller random of the fireflies below the gallery, where he rose from his chair as Mr Compson, carrying the letter, emerged from the house, snapping on the porch light as he passed. 'You will probably have to go inside to read it,' Mr Compson said.

'Maybe I can read it here all right,' Quentin said.

'Perhaps you are right,' Mr Compson said. 'Maybe even the light of day, let alone this—' he indicated the single globe stained and bug-fouled from the long summer and which even when clean gave off but little light—'would be too much for it, for them. Yes, for them: of that day and time, of a dead time; people too as we are, and victims too as we are, but victims of a different circumstance, simpler and therefore, integer for integer, larger, more heroic and the figures therefore more heroic too, not dwarfed and involved but distinct, uncomplex who had the gift of loving once or dying once instead of being diffused and scattered creatures drawn blindly limb from limb from a grab bag and assembled, author and victim too of a thousand homicides and a thousand copulations and divorcements. Perhaps you are right. Perhaps any more light than this would be too much for it ' But he did not give Quentin the letter at once.

He sat again, Quentin sitting again too, and took up the cigar from the veranda rail, the coal glowing again, the wistaria colored smoke drifting again unwinded across Quentin's face as Mr Compson raised his feet once more to the railing, the letter in his hand and the hand looking almost as dark as a Negro's against his linen leg.

'Because Henry loved Bon. He repudiated blood birthright and material security for his sake, for the sake of this man who was at least an

intending bigamist even if not an out and out blackguard, and on whose dead body four years later Judith was to find the photograph of the other woman and the child. So much so that he (Henry) could give his father the lie about a statement which he must have realized that his father could not and would not have made without foundation and proof.

Yet he did it, Henry himself striking the blow with his own hand, even though he must have known that what his father told him about the woman and the child was true. He must have said to himself, must have said when he closed the library door for the last time behind himself that Christmas eve and must have repeated while he and Bon rode side by side through the iron dark of that Christmas morning, away from the house where he had been born and which he would see but one time more and that with the fresh blood of the man who now rode beside him, on his hands: I will believe; I will. I will. Even if it is so, even if what my father told me is true and which, in spite of myself, I cannot keep from knowing is true, I will still believe. Because what else could he have hoped to find in New Orleans, if not the truth?

But who knows why a man, though suffering, clings, above all the other well members, to the arm or leg which he knows must come off? Because he loved Bon. I can imagine him and Sutpen in the library that Christmas eve, the father and the brother, percussion and repercussion like a thunderclap and its echo, and as close together; the statement and the giving of the lie, the decision instantaneous and irrevocable between father and friend, between (so Henry must have believed) that where honor and love lay and this where blood and profit ran, even though at the instant of giving the lie he knew that it was the truth. That was why the four years, the probation.

He must have known that it would be vain, even then, on that Christmas eve, not to speak of what he learned, saw with his own eyes in New Orleans. He may even have known Bon that well by then, who had not changed until then and so would in all probability not change later; and he (Henry) who could not say to his friend, I did that for love of you; do this for love of me. He couldn't say that, you see this man,

this youth scarcely twenty, who had turned his back upon all that he knew, to cast his lot with the single friend whom, even as they rode away that night, he must have known, as he knew that what his father had told him was true, that he was doomed and destined to kill.

He must have known that just as he knew that his hope was vain, what hope and what for he could not have said; what hope and dream of change in Bon or in the situation, what dream that he could someday wake from and find it had been a dream, as in the injured man's fever dream the dear suffering arm or leg is strong and sound and only the well ones sick.

'It was Henry's probation; Henry holding all three of them in that duration to which even Judith acquiesced up to a certain point. She did not know what happened in the library that night. I don't think she ever suspected, until that afternoon four years later when she saw them again, when they brought Bon's body into the house and she found in his coat the photograph which was not her face, not her child; she just waked the next morning and they were gone and only the letter, the note, remaining, the note written by Henry since doubtless he refused to allow Bon to write—this announcement of the armistice, the probation, and Judith acquiescing up to that point, who would have refused as quickly to obey any injunction of her father as Henry had been to defy him yet who did obey Henry in this matter—not the male relative, the brother, but because of that relationship between them that single personality with two bodies both of which had been seduced almost simultaneously by a man whom at the time Judith had never even seen—she and Henry both knowing that she would observe the probation, give him (Henry) the benefit of that interval, only up to that mutually recognized though unstated and undefined point and both doubtless aware that when that point was reached she would, and with the same calm, the same refusal to accept or give because of any traditional weakness of sex, recall the armistice and face him as a foe, not requiring or even wishing that Bon be present to support her, doubtless even refusing to allow him to intervene if he were, fighting the matter out with Henry like a man first, before consenting to revert to the woman, the loved, the bride. And Bon: Henry would have no

more told Bon what his father had told him than he would have returned to his father and told him that Bon denied it, since to do one he would have to do the other and he knew that Bon's denial would be a lie and though he could have borne Bon's lie himself, he could not have borne for either Judith or his father to hear it.

Besides, Henry would not need to tell Bon what had happened. 'Bon must have learned of Sutpen's visit to New Orleans as soon as he (Bon) reached home that first summer. He must have known that Sutpen now knew his secret—if Bon, until he saw Sutpen's reaction to it, ever looked upon it as a cause for secrecy, certainly not as a valid objection to marriage with a white woman—a situation in which probably all his contemporaries who could afford it were likewise involved and which it would no more have occurred to him to mention to his bride or wife or to her family than he would have told them the secrets of a fraternal organization which he had joined before he married. In fact, the manner in which his intended bride's family reacted to the discovery of it was doubtless the first and last time when the Sutpen family ever surprised him.

He is the curious one to me. He came into that isolated puritan country household almost like Sutpen himself came into Jefferson: apparently complete, without background or past or childhood—a man a little older than his actual years and enclosed and surrounded by a sort of Scythian glitter, who seems to have seduced the country brother and sister without any effort or particular desire to do so, who caused all the pother and uproar, yet from the moment when he realized that Sutpen was going to prevent the marriage if he could, he (Bon) seems to have withdrawn into a mere spectator, passive, a little sardonic, and completely enigmatic. He seems to hover, shadowy, almost substanceless, a little behind and above all the other straightforward and logical, even though (to him) incomprehensible, ultimatums and affirmations and defiances and challenges and repudiations, with an air of sardonic and indolent detachment like that of a youthful Roman consul making the Grand Tour of his day among the barbarian hordes which his grandfather conquered, benighted in a brawling and childish

and quite deadly mud-castle household in a miasmic and spirit-ridden forest.

It was as if he found the whole business, not inexplicable of course, just unnecessary; that he knew at once that Sutpen had found out about the mistress and child and he now found Sutpen's action and Henry's reaction a fetish-ridden moral blundering which did not deserve to be called thinking, and which he contemplated with the detached attentiveness of a scientist watching the muscles in an anesthetized frog—watching, contemplating them from behind that barrier of sophistication in comparison with which Henry and Sutpen were troglodytes. Not just the outside, the way he walked and talked and wore his clothes and handed Ellen into the dining-room or into the carriage and (perhaps, probably) kissed her hand and which Ellen envied for Henry, but the man himself—that fatalistic and impenetrable imperturbability with which he watched them while he waited for them to do whatever it would be that they would do, as if he had known all the while that the occasion would arise when he would have to wait and that all he would need to do would be to wait; had known that he had seduced Henry and Judith both too thoroughly to have any fear that he might not marry Judith when he wished to.

Not that stupid shrewdness part instinct and part belief in luck, and part muscular habit of the senses and nerves of the gambler waiting to take what he can from what he sees, but a certain reserved and inflexible pessimism stripped long generations ago of all the rubbish and claptrap of people (yes, Sutpen and Henry and the Coldfields too) who have not quite emerged from barbarism, who two thousand years hence will still be throwing triumphantly off the yoke of Latin culture and intelligence of which they were never in any great permanent danger to begin with.

'Because he loved Judith. He would have added doubtless "after his fashion" since, as his intended father-in-law soon learned, this was not the first time he had played this part, pledged what he had pledged to Judith, let alone the first time he would have gone through a ceremony

to commemorate it, make what distinction (he was a Catholic of sorts) he might between this one with a white woman and that other.

Because you will see the letter, not the first one he ever wrote to her but at least the first, the only one she ever showed, as your grandmother knew then: and, so we believe now that she is dead, the only one which she kept unless of course Miss Rosa or Clytie destroyed the others after she herself died: and this one here preserved not because Judith put it away to keep but because she brought it herself and gave it to your grandmother after Bon's death, possibly on the same day when she destroyed the others which he had written her (provided of course it was she herself who destroyed them) which would have been when she found in Bon's coat the picture of the octoroon mistress and the little boy. Because he was her first and last sweetheart.

She must have seen him in fact with exactly the same eyes that Henry saw him with. And it would be hard to say to which of them he appeared the more splendid—to the one with hope, even though unconscious, of making the image hers through possession; to the other with the knowledge of the insurmountable barrier which the similarity of gender hopelessly intervened—this man whom Henry first saw riding perhaps through the grove at the University on one of the two horses which he kept there or perhaps crossing the campus on foot in the slightly Frenchified cloak and hat which he wore, or perhaps (I like to think this) presented formally to the man reclining in a flowered, almost feminized gown, in a sunny window in his chambers—this handsome elegant and even catlike and too old to be where he was, too old not in years but in experience, with some tangible effluvium of knowledge, surfeit: of actions done and satiations plumbed and pleasures exhausted and even forgotten.

So that he must have appeared, not only to Henry but to the entire undergraduate body of that small new provincial college, as a source not of envy, because you only envy whom you believe to be, but for accident, in no way superior to yourself: and what you believe, granted a little better luck than you have had heretofore, you will someday

possess not of envy but of despair: that sharp shocking terrible hopeless despair of the young which sometimes takes the form of insult toward and even physical assault upon the human subject of it or, in extreme cases like Henry's, insult toward and assault upon any and all detractors of the subject, as witness Henry's violent repudiation of his father and his birthright when Sutpen forbade the marriage.

Yes, he loved Bon, who seduced him as surely as he seduced Judith the country boy born and bred who, with the five or six others of that small undergraduate body composed of other planters' sons whom Bon permitted to become intimate with him, who aped his clothing and manner and (to the extent which they were able) his very manner of living, looked upon Bon as though he were a hero out of some adolescent Arabian Nights who had stumbled upon a talisman or touchstone not to invest him with wisdom or power or wealth, but with the ability and opportunity to pass from the scene of one scarce imaginable delight to the next one without interval or pause or satiety.

And the very fact that, lounging before them in the outlandish and almost feminine garments of his sybaritic privacy, the professed satiety only increased the amazement and the bitter and hopeless outrage. Henry was the provincial, the clown almost, given to instinctive and violent action rather than to thinking who may have been conscious that his fierce provincial's pride in his sister's virginity was a false quantity which must incorporate in itself an inability to endure in order to be precious, to exist, and so must depend upon its loss, absence, to have existed at all. In fact, perhaps this is the pure and perfect incest: the brother realizing that the sister's virginity must be destroyed in order to have existed at all, taking that virginity in the person of the brother-in-law, the man whom he would be if he could become, metamorphose into, the lover, the husband; by whom he would be despoiled, choose for despoiler, if he could become, metamorphose into the sister, the mistress, the bride.

Perhaps that is what went on, not in Henry's mind but in his soul. Because he never thought. He felt, and acted immediately.

He knew loyalty and acted it, he knew pride and jealousy; he loved grieved and killed, still grieving and, I believe, still loving Bon, the man to whom he gave four years of probation, four years in which to renounce and dissolve the other marriage, knowing that the four years of hoping and waiting would be in vain.

' Yes, it was Henry who seduced Judith: not Bon, as witness the entire queerly placid course of Bon's and Judith's courtship—an engagement, if engagement it ever was, lasting for a whole year yet comprising two holiday visits as her brother's guest which Bon seems to have spent either in riding and hunting with Henry or as acting as an elegant and indolent esoteric hothouse bloom, possessing merely the name of a city for origin history and past, about which Ellen preened and fluttered out her unwitting butterfly's Indian summer; he, the living man, was usurped, you see. There was no time, no interval, no niche in the crowded days when he could have courted Judith.

You cannot even imagine him and Judith alone together. Try to do it and the nearest you can come is a projection of them while 'the two actual people were doubtless separate and elsewhere—two shades pacing, serene and untroubled by flesh, in a summer garden—the same two serene phantoms who seem to watch, hover, impartial attentive and quiet, above and behind the inexplicable thunderhead of interdictions and defiances and repudiations out of which the rocklike Sutpen and the volatile and violent Henry flashed and glared and ceased—Henry who up to that time had never even been to Memphis, who had never been away from home before that September when he went to the University with his countrified clothes and his saddle horse and Negro groom; the six or seven of them, of an age and background, only in the surface matter of food and clothing and daily occupation any different from the Negro slaves who supported them—the same sweat, the only difference being that on the one hand it went for labor in fields where on the other it went as the price of the spartan and meager pleasures which were available to them because they did not have to sweat in the fields: the hard violent hunting and riding; the same pleasures: the one, gambling for worn knives and brass jewelry and twists of tobacco and buttons and garments because they

happened to be easiest and quickest to hand; on the other for the money and horses, the guns and watches, and for the same reason; the same parties: the identical music from identical instruments, crude fiddles and guitars, now in the big house with candles and silk dresses and champagne, now in dirt-floored cabins with smoking pine knots and calico and water sweetened with molasses—it was Henry, because at that time Bon had not even seen Judith.

He had probably not paid enough attention to Henry's inarticulate recounting of his brief and conventional background and history to have remembered that Henry had a sister—this indolent man too old to find even companionship among the youths, the children, with whom he now lived; this man miscast for the time and knowing it, accepting it for a reason obviously good enough to cause him to endure it and apparently 'too serious or at least too private to be divulged to what acquaintances he now possessed—this man who later showed the same indolence, almost uninterest, the same detachment when the uproar about that engagement which, so far as Jefferson knew, never formally existed, which Bon himself never affirmed or denied, arose and he in the background, impartial and passive as though it were not himself involved or he acting on behalf of some absent friend, but as though the person involved and interdict were someone whom he had never heard of and cared nothing about.

There does not even seem to have been any courtship. Apparently he paid Judith the dubious compliment of not even trying to ruin her, let alone insisting on the marriage either before or after Sutpen forbade it—this, mind you, in a man who had already acquired a name for prowess among women while at the University, long before Sutpen was to find actual proof. No engagement, no courtship even: he and Judith saw one another three times in two years, for a total period of seventeen days, counting the time which Ellen consumed; they parted without even saying good-bye.

And yet, four years later, Henry had to kill Bon to keep them from marrying. So it must have been Henry who seduced Judith, not Bon: seduced her along with himself from that distance between Oxford and

Sutpen's Hundred, between herself and the man whom she had not even seen yet, as though by means of that telepathy with which as children they seemed at times to anticipate one another's actions as two birds leave a limb at the same instant; that rapport not like the conventional delusion of that between twins but rather such as might exist between two people who, regardless of sex or age or heritage of race or tongue, had been marooned at birth on a desert island: the island here Sutpen's Hundred; the solitude, the shadow of that father with whom not only the town but their mother's family as well had merely assumed armistice rather than accepting and assimilating.

'You see? there they are: this girl, this young countrybred girl who sees a man for an average of one hour a day for twelve days during his life and that over a period of a year and a half, yet is bent on marrying him to the extent of forcing her brother to the last resort of homicide, even if not murder, to prevent it, and that after a period of four years during which she could not have been always certain that he was still alive; this father who had seen that man once, yet had reason to make a six hundred mile journey to investigate him and either discover what he already and apparently by clairvoyance suspected, or at least something which served just as well as reason for forbidding the marriage; this brother in whose eyes that sister's and daughter's honor and happiness, granted that curious and unusual relationship which existed between them, should have been more jealous and precious than to the father even, yet who must champion the marriage to the extent of repudiating father and blood and home to become a follower and dependent of the rejected suitor for four years before killing him apparently for the very identical reason which four years ago he quitted home to champion; and this lover who apparently without volition or desire became involved in an engagement which he seems neither to have sought nor avoided, who took his dismissal in the same passive and sardonic spirit, yet four years later was apparently so bent upon the marriage to which up to that time he had been completely indifferent as to force the brother who had championed it to kill him to prevent it.

Yes, granted that, even to the unworldly Henry, let alone the more travelled father, the existence of the eighth part Negro mistress and the sixteenth part Negro son, granted even the morganatic ceremony—a situation which was as much a part of a wealthy young New Orleansian's social and fashionable equipment as his dancing slippers was reason enough, which is drawing honor a little fine even for the shadowy paragons which are our ancestors born in the South and come to man—and womanhood about eighteen sixty or sixty one. It's just incredible. It just does not explain. Or perhaps that's it: they don't explain and we are not supposed to know.

We have a few old mouth-to-mouth tales; we exhume from old trunks and boxes and drawers letters without salutation or signature, in which men and women who once lived and breathed are now merely initials or nicknames out of some now incomprehensible affection which sound to us like Sanskrit or Chocktaw; we see dimly people, the people in whose living blood and seed we ourselves lay dormant and waiting, in this shadowy attenuation of time possessing now heroic proportions, performing their acts of simple passion and simple violence, impervious to time and inexplicable Yes, Judith, Bon, Henry, Sutpen: all of them.

They are there, yet something is missing; they are like a chemical formula exhumed along with the letters from that forgotten chest, carefully, the paper old and faded and falling to pieces, the writing faded, almost indecipherable, yet meaningful, familiar in shape and sense, the name and presence of volatile and sentient forces; you bring them together in the proportions called for, but nothing happens; you re-read, tedious and intent, poring, making sure that you have forgotten nothing, made no miscalculation; you bring them together again and again nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against that turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs.

'Bon and Henry came from the University to spend that first Christmas.

Judith and Ellen and Sutpen saw him for the first time—Judith, the man whom she was to see for an elapsed time of twelve days, yet to

remember so that four years later (he never wrote her during that time.

Henry would not let him; it was the probation, you see) when she received a letter from him saying We have waited long enough, she and Clytie should begin at once to fashion a wedding dress and veil out of rags and scraps; Ellen, the esoteric, the almost baroque, the almost epicene objet d'art which with childlike voracity she essayed to include in the furnishing and decoration of her house; Sutpen, the man whom, after seeing once and before any engagement existed anywhere save in his wife's mind, he saw as a potential threat to the (now and at last) triumphant coronation of his old hardships and ambition, of which threat he was apparently sure enough to warrant a six hundred mile journey to 'prove it—this in a man who might have challenged and shot someone whom he disliked or feared but who would not have made even a ten mile journey to investigate him.

You see? You would almost believe that Sutpen's trip to New Orleans was just sheer chance, just a little more of the illogical machinations of a fatality which had chosen that family in preference to any other in the county or the land exactly as a small boy chooses one ant-hill to pour boiling water into in preference to any other, not even himself knowing why. Bon and Henry stayed two weeks and rode back to school, stopping to see Miss Rosa but she was not at home; they passed the long term before the summer vacation talking together and riding and reading (Bon was reading law.

He would be, would almost have to, since only that could have made his residence bearable, regardless of what reason he may have brought with him for remaining this, the perfect setting for his dilatory indolence: this digging into musty Blackstone and Coke where, of an undergraduate body still numbered in two figures, the law school probably consisted of six others beside Henry and himself—yes, he corrupted Henry to the law also; Henry changed in midterm) while Henry aped his clothing and speech, caricatured rather, perhaps.

And Bon, though he had now seen Judith, was very likely the same lazy and catlike man on whom Henry foisted now the role of his sister's intended, as during the fall term Henry and his companions had foisted upon Bon the role of Lothario; and Ellen and Judith now shopping two and three times a week in town and stopping once to see Miss Rosa while on their way by carriage to Memphis, with a wagon preceding them to fetch back the plunder and an extra nigger on the box with the coachman to stop every few miles and build a fire and re-heat the bricks on which Ellen's and Judith's feet rested, shopping, buying the trousseau for that wedding whose formal engagement existed nowhere yet save in Ellen's mind; and Sutpen, who had seen Bon once and was in New Orleans investigating him when Bon next entered the house: who knows what he was thinking, what waiting for, what moment, day, to go to New Orleans and find what he seems to have known all the while that he would find?

There was no one for him to tell, talk to about his fear and suspicion. He trusted no man nor woman, who had no man's nor woman's love, since Ellen was incapable of love and Judith was too much like him and he must have seen at a glance that Bon, even though the daughter might still be saved from him, had already corrupted the son.

He had been too successful, you see; his was that solitude of contempt and distrust which success brings to him who gained it because he was strong instead of merely lucky.

'Then June came and the end of the school year and Henry and Bon returned to Sutpen's Hundred, Bon to spend a day or two before riding on to the River to take the steamboat home, to New Orleans where Sutpen had already gone. He stayed but two days, yet now if ever was his chance to come to an understanding with Judith, perhaps even to fall in love with her. It was his only chance, his last chance, though of course neither he nor Judith could have known it, since Sutpen, though but two weeks absent from home, had doubtless already found out about the octoroon mistress and the child.

So for the first and last time Bon and Judith might have been said to have a free field—might have been, since it was really Ellen who had the free field. I can imagine her engineering that courtship, supplying Judith and Bon with opportunities for trysts and pledges with a coy and unflagging ubiquity which they must have tried in vain to evade and escape, Judith with annoyed yet still serene concern, Bon with that sardonic and surprised distaste which seems to have been the ordinary manifestation of the impenetrable and shadowy character. Yes, shadowy: a myth, a phantom: something which they engendered and created whole themselves; some effluvium of Sutpen blood and character, as though as a man he did not exist at all.

'Yet there was the body which Miss Rosa saw, which Judith buried in the family plot beside her mother. And this: the fact that even an undefined and never-spoken engagement survived, speaking well for the postulation that they did love one another, since during that two days mere romance would have perished, died of sheer saccharinity and opportunity. Then Bon rode on to the River and took the boat.

And now this: who knows, perhaps if Henry had gone with him that summer instead of waiting until the next, Bon would not have had to die as he did; if Henry had only gone then to New Orleans and found out then about the mistress and the child; Henry who, before it was too late, might have reacted to the discovery exactly as Sutpen did, as a jealous brother might have been expected to react, since who knows but what it was not the fact of the mistress and child, the possible bigamy, to which Henry gave the lie, but to the fact that it was his father who told him, his father who anticipated him, the father who is the natural enemy of any son and son-in-law of whom the mother is the ally, just as after the wedding the father will be the ally of the actual son-in-law who has for mortal foe the mother of his wife. But Henry did not go this time.

He rode to the River with Bon and then returned; after a time Sutpen returned home too, from where and for what purpose none were to know until the next Christmas, and that summer passed, the last summer, the past summer of peace and content, with Henry, doubtless

without deliberate intent, pleading Bon's suit far better than Bon, than that indolent fatalist had ever bothered to plead it himself, and Judith listening with that serenity, that impenetrable tranquillity which a year or so before had been the young girl's vague and pointless and dreamy unvolition but was now already a mature woman's—a mature woman in love—repose. That's when the letters came, and Henry reading them all, without jealousy, with that complete abnegant transference, metamorphosis into the body which was to become his sister's lover.

And Sutpen saying nothing yet about what he had learned in New Orleans but just waiting, unsuspected even by Henry and Judith, waiting for what nobody knows, perhaps in the hope that when Bon learned, as he would be obliged to, that Sutpen had discovered his secret, he (Bon) would realize that the game was up and not even return to school the next year. But Bon did return. He and Henry met again at the University; the letters—from Henry and Bon both now making weekly journeys by the hand of Henry's groom; and Sutpen still waiting, certainly no one could say for what now, incredible that he should wait for Christmas, for the crisis to come to him—this man of whom it was said that he not only went out to meet his troubles, he sometimes went out and manufactured them.

But this time he waited and it came to him: Christmas, and Henry and Bon rode again to Sutpen's Hundred and even the town convinced now by Ellen that the engagement existed; that twenty-fourth of December, 1860, and the nigger children, with branches of mistletoe and holly for excuses, already lurking about the rear of the big house to shout "Christmas gift" at the white people, the rich city man come to court Judith, and Sutpen saying nothing even yet, not suspected yet unless possibly by Henry who brought the matter to its crisis that same night, and Ellen at the absolute flood's peak of her unreal and weightless life which with the next dawn was to break beneath her and wash her, spent amazed and uncomprehending, into the shuttered room where she died two years later—the Christmas Eve, the explosion, and none to ever know just why or just what happened between Henry and his father and only the cabin-to-cabin whispering of Negroes to spread the

news that Henry and Bon had ridden away in the dark and that Henry had formally abjured his home and birthright.

'They went to New Orleans. They rode through the bright cold of that Christmas day, to the River and took the steamboat, Henry still doing the leading, the bringing, as he always did until the very last, when for the first time during their entire relationship Bon led and Henry followed. Henry didn't have to go. He had voluntarily made himself a pauper but he could have gone to his grandfather. No, he didn't have to go. Bon was riding beside him, trying to find out from him what had happened.

Bon knew of course what Sutpen had discovered in New Orleans, but he would need to know just what, just how much, Sutpen had told Henry, and Henry not telling him. Doubtless Henry was riding the new mare which he probably knew he would have to surrender, sacrifice too, along with all the rest of his life, inheritance, going fast now and his back rigid and irrevocably turned upon the house, his birthplace and all the familiar scene of his childhood and youth which he had repudiated for the sake of that friend with whom, despite the sacrifice which he had just made out of love and loyalty, he still could not be perfectly frank. Because he knew that what Sutpen had told him was true. He must have known that at the very instant when he gave his father the lie.

So he dared not ask Bon to deny it; he dared not, you see. He could face poverty, disinheritance, but he could not have borne that lie from Bon. Yet he went to New Orleans. He went straight there, to the only place, the very place, where he could not help but prove conclusively the very statement which, coming from his father, he had called a lie. He went there for that purpose; he went there to prove it.

And Bon, riding beside him, trying to find out what Sutpen had told him—Bon who for a year and a half now had been watching Henry ape his clothing and speech, who for a year and a half now had seen himself as the object of that complete and abnegant devotion which only a youth, never a woman, gives to another youth or a man; who for

exactly a year now had seen the sister succumb to that same spell which the brother had already succumbed to, and this with no volition on the seducer's part, without so much as the lifting of a finger, as though it actually were the brother who had put the spell on the sister, seduced her to his own vicarious image which walked and breathed with Bon's body.

Yet here is the letter, sent four years afterward, written on a sheet of paper salvaged from a gutted house in Carolina, with stove polish found in some captured Yankee stores; four years after she had had any message from him save the messages from Henry that he (Bon) was still alive. So whether Henry now knew about the other woman or not, he would now have to know. Bon realized that.

I can imagine them as they rode, Henry still in the fierce repercussive flush of vindicated loyalty, and Bon, the wiser, the shrewder even if only from wider experience and a few more years of age, learning from Henry without Henry's being aware of it, what Sutpen had told him. Because Henry would have to know now. And I don't believe it was just to preserve Henry as an ally, for the crisis of some future need. It was because Bon not only loved Judith after his fashion but he loved Henry too and I believe in a deeper sense than merely after his fashion.

Perhaps in his fatalism he loved Henry the better of the two, seeing perhaps in the sister merely the shadow, the woman vessel with which to consummate the love whose actual object was the youth this cerebral Don Juan who, reversing the order, had learned to love what he had injured; perhaps it was even more than Judith or Henry either: perhaps the life, the existence, which they represented. Because who knows what picture of peace he might have seen in that monotonous provincial backwater; what alleviation and escape for a parched traveler who had traveled too far at too young an age, in this granitebound and simple country spring.

'And I can imagine how Bon told Henry, broke it to him. I can imagine Henry in New Orleans, who had not yet even been in Memphis, whose entire worldly experience consisted of sojourns at other houses,

plantations, almost interchangeable with his own, where he followed the same routine which he did at home—the same hunting and cockfighting, the same amateur racing of horses on crude homemade tracks, horses sound enough in blood and lineage yet not bred to race and perhaps not even thirty minutes out of the shafts of a trap or perhaps even a carriage; the same square dancing with identical and also interchangeable provincial virgins, to music exactly like that at home, the same champagne, the best doubtless yet crudely dispensed out of the burlesqued pantomime elegance of Negro butlers who (and likewise the drinkers who gulped it down like neat whiskey between flowery and unsubtle toasts) would have treated lemonade the same way.

I can imagine him, with his puritan heritage that heritage peculiarly Anglo-Saxon—of fierce proud mysticism and that ability to be ashamed of ignorance and inexperience, in that city foreign and paradoxical, with its atmosphere at once fatal and languorous, at once feminine and steel-hard—this grim humorless yokel out of a granite heritage where even the houses, let alone clothing and conduct, are built in the image of a jealous and sadistic Jehovah, put suddenly down in a place whose denizens had created their All-Powerful and His supporting hierarchy-chorus of beautiful saints and handsome angels in the image of their houses and personal ornaments and voluptuous lives.

Yes, I can imagine how Bon led up to it, to the shock: the skill, the calculation, preparing Henry's puritan mind as he would have prepared a cramped and rocky field and planted it and raised the crop which he wanted. It would be the fact of the ceremony, regardless of what kind, that Henry would balk at: Bon knew this. It would not be the mistress or even the child, not even the Negro mistress and even less the child because of that fact, since Henry and Judith had grown up with a Negro half-sister of their own; not the mistress to Henry, certainly not the nigger mistress to a youth with Henry's background, a young man grown up and living in a milieu where the other sex is separated into three sharp divisions, separated (two of them) by a chasm which could be crossed but one time and in but one direction—ladies, women, females—the virgins whom gentlemen someday married, the

courtesans to whom they went while on sabbaticals to the cities, the slave girls and women upon whom that first caste rested and to whom in certain cases it doubtless owed the very fact of its virginity—not this to Henry, young, strong-blooded, victim of the hard celibacy of riding and hunting to heat and make importunate the blood of a young man, to which he and his kind were forced to pass time away, with girls of his own class interdict and inaccessible and women of the second class just as inaccessible because of money and distance, and hence only the slave girls, the housemaids heated and cleaned by white mistresses or perhaps girls with sweating bodies out of the fields themselves and the young man rides up and beckons the watching overseer and says Send me Juno or Missylena or Chlory and then rides on into the trees and dismounts and waits.

No: it would be the ceremony, a ceremony entered into, to be sure, with a Negro, yet still a ceremony; this is 'what Bon doubtless thought. So I can imagine him, the way he did it: the way in which he took the innocent and negative plate of Henry's provincial soul and intellect and exposed it by slow degrees to this esoteric milieu, building gradually toward the picture which he desired it to retain, accept.

I can see him corrupting Henry gradually into the purlieus of elegance, with no foreword, no warning, the postulation to come after the fact, exposing Henry slowly to the surface aspect—the architecture a little curious, a little femininely flamboyant and therefore to Henry opulent, sensuous, sinful; the inference of great and easy wealth measured by steamboat loads in place of a tedious inching of sweating human figures across cotton fields; the flash and glitter of a myriad carriage wheels, in which women, enthroned and immobile and passing rapidly across the vision, appeared like painted portraits beside men in linen a little finer and diamonds a little brighter and in broadcloth a little trimmer and with hats raked a little more above faces a little more darkly swaggering than any Henry had ever seen before: and the mentor, the man for whose sake he had repudiated not only blood and kin but food and shelter and clothing too, whose clothing and walk and speech he had tried to ape, along with his attitude toward women and his ideas of honor and pride too, watching him with that cold and

catlike inscrutable calculation, watching the picture resolve and become fixed and then telling Henry, "But that's not it. That's just the base, the foundation. It can belong to anyone": and Henry, "You mean, this is not it? That it is above this, higher than this, more select than this?": and Bon, "Yes.

This is only the foundation. This belongs to anybody.": a dialogue without words, speech, which would fix and then remove without obliterating one line of the picture, this background, leaving the background, the plate prepared innocent again: the plate docile, with that puritan's humility toward anything which is a matter of sense, rather than logic, fact, the man, the struggling and suffocating heart behind it saying I will believe! I will! I will! whether it is true or not, I will believe! waiting for the next picture which the mentor, the corrupter, intended for it: that next picture, following the fixation and acceptance of which the mentor would say again perhaps with words now, still watching the sober and thoughtful face but still secure in his knowledge and trust in that puritan heritage which must show disapproval instead of surprise or even despair and nothing at all rather than have the disapprobation construed as surprise or despair: "But even this is not": and Henry, "You mean, it is still higher than this, still above this?"

Because he (Bon) would be talking now, lazily, almost cryptically, stroking onto the plate himself now the picture which he wanted there; I can imagine how he did it—the calculation, the surgeon's alertness and cold detachment, the exposures brief as to be cryptic, almost staccato, the plate unaware Of what the complete picture would show, scarce seen yet ineradicable—a trap, a riding horse standing before a closed and curiously monastic doorway in a neighborhood a little decadent, even a little sinister, and Bon mentioning the owner's name casually—this, corruption subtly anew by putting into Henry's mind the notion of one man of the world speaking to another, that Henry knew that Bon believed that Henry would know even from a disjointed word what Bon was talking about, and Henry the puritan who must show nothing at all rather than surprise or incomprehension—a facade shuttered and blank, drowsing in steamy morning sunlight, invested by

the bland and cryptic voice with something of secret and curious and unimaginable delights.

Without his knowing what he saw it was as though to Henry the blank and scaling barrier in dissolving produced and revealed not comprehension to the mind, the intellect which weighs and discards, but striking instead straight and true to some primary blind and mindless 'foundation of all young male living dream and hope—a row of faces like a bazaar of flowers, the supreme apotheosis of chattelry, of human flesh bred of the two races for that sale—a corridor of doomed and tragic flower faces walled between the grim duenna row of old women and the elegant shapes of young men trim predatory and (at the moment) goatlike: this seen by Henry quickly, exposed quickly and then removed, the mentor's voice still bland, pleasant, cryptic, postulating still the fact of one man of the world talking to another about something they both understand, depending upon, counting upon still, the puritan's provincial horror of revealing surprise or ignorance, who knew Henry so much better than Henry knew him, and Henry not showing either, suppressing still that first cry of terror and grief, I will believe! I will! I will! Yes, that brief, before Henry had had time to know what he had seen, but now slowing: now would come the instant for which Bon had builded—a wall, unscalable, a gate ponderously locked, the sober and thoughtful country youth just waiting, looking, not yet asking why? or what? the gate of solid beams in place of the lacelike iron grilling and they passing on, Bon knocking at a small adjacent doorway from which a swarthy man resembling a creature out of an old woodcut of the French Revolution erupts, concerned, even a little aghast, looking first at the daylight and then at Henry and speaking to Bon in French which Henry does not understand and Bon's teeth glinting for an instant before he answers in French: "With him? An American? He is a guest; I would have to let him choose weapons and I decline to fight with axes.

No, no; not that. Just the key." Just the key; and now, the solid gates closed behind them instead of before, no sight or evidence above the high thick walls of the low city and scarce any sound of it, the labyrinthine mass of oleander and jasmine, lantana, and mimosa

walling yet again the strip of bare earth combed and curried with powdered shell, raked and immaculate and only the most recent of the brown stains showing now, and the voice—the mentor, the guide standing aside now to watch the grave provincial face—casually and pleasantly anecdotal: "The customary way is to stand back to back, the pistol in your right hand and the corner of the other cloak in your left.

Then at the signal you begin to walk and when you feel the cloak tauten you turn and fire. Though there are some now and then, when the blood is especially hot or when it is still peasant blood, who prefer knives and one cloak. They face one another inside the same cloak, you see, each holding the other's wrist with the left hand. But that was never my way" casual, chatty, you see, waiting for the countryman's slow question, who knew already now before he asked it: "What would you they be fighting for?"

'Yes, Henry would know now, or believe that he knew now; anymore he would probably consider anticlimax though it would not be, it would be anything but that, the final blow, stroke, touch, the keen surgeonlike compounding which the now shocked nerves of the patient would not even feel, not know that the first hard shocks were the random and crude. Because there was that ceremony. Bon knew that that would be what Henry would resist, find hard to stomach and retain.

Oh he was shrewd, this man whom for weeks now Henry was realizing that he knew less and less, this stranger immersed and oblivious now in the formal, almost ritual, preparations for the visit, finicking almost like a woman over the fit of the new coat which he would have ordered for Henry, forced Henry to accept for this occasion, by means of which the entire impression which Henry was to receive from the visit would be established before they even left the house, before Henry ever saw the woman: and Henry, the countryman, the bewildered, with the subtle tide already setting beneath him toward the point where he must either betray himself and his entire upbringing and thinking, or deny the friend for whom he had already repudiated home and kin and all; the bewildered, the (for that time) helpless, who wanted to believe yet did not see how he could, being carried by the friend, the mentor,

through one of those inscrutable and curiously lifeless doorways like that before which he had seen the horse or the trap, and so into a place which to his puritan's provincial mind all of morality was upside down and all of honor perished—a place created for and by voluptuousness, the abashless and unabashed senses, and the country boy with his simple and erstwhile untroubled code in which females were ladies or whores or slaves looked at the apotheosis of two doomed races presided over by its own victim—a woman with a face like a tragic magnolia, the eternal female, the eternal Who-suffers; the child, the boy, sleeping in silk and lace to be sure yet complete chattel of him who, begetting him, owned him body and soul to sell (if he chose) like a calf or puppy or sheep; and the mentor watching again, perhaps even the gambler now thinking Have I won or lost? as they emerged and returned to Bon's rooms, for that while impotent even with talk, shrewdness, no longer counting upon that puritan character which must show neither surprise nor despair, having to count now (on anything) on the corruption itself, the love; he could not even say, "Well? What do you say bout it?" He could only wait, and that upon the absolutely unpredictable actions of a man who lived by instinct and not reason, until Henry should speak, "But a bought woman. A whore": and Bon, even gently now, "Not whore. Dont say that.

In fact, never refer to one of them by that name in New Orleans: otherwise you may be forced to purchase that privilege with some of your blood from probably a thousand men", and perhaps still gently,... perhaps now even with something of pity: that pessimistic and '

' sardonic cerebral pity of the intelligent for any human injustice or folly or suffering:'... "'Not whores. And not whores because of us, the thousand. We the thousand, the white men made them, created and produced them; we even made the laws which declare that one eighth of a specified kind of blood shall outweigh seven eighths of another kind. I admit that. But that same white race would have made them slaves too, laborers, cooks, maybe even field hands, if it were not for this thousand, these few men like myself without principles or honor either, perhaps you will say. We cannot, perhaps we do not even want

to, save all of them; perhaps the thousand we save are not one in a thousand.

But we save that one. God may mark every sparrow, but we do not pretend to be God, you see. Perhaps we do not even want to be God, since no man would want but one of these sparrows. And perhaps when God looks into one of these establishments like you saw tonight, He would not choose one of us to be God either, now that He is old. Though He must have been young once, surely He was young once, and surely someone who has existed as long as He has, who has looked at as much crude and promiscuous sinning without grace or restraint or decorum as He has had to, to contemplate at last, even though the instances are not one in a thousand thousand, the principles of honor, decorum and gentleness applied to perfectly normal human instinct which you Anglo-Saxons insist upon calling lust and in whose service you revert in sabbaticals to the primordial caverns, the fall from what you call grace fogged and clouded by Heaven-defying words of extenuation, and explanation, the return to grace heralded by Heavenplacating cries of satiated abasement and flagellation, in neither of which—the defiance or the placation—can Heaven find interest or even, after the first two or three times, diversion.

So perhaps, now that God is an old man, he is not interested in the way we serve what you call lust either, perhaps He does not even require of us that we save this one sparrow, anymore than we save the one sparrow which we do save for any commendation from Him. But we do save that one, who but for us would have been sold to any brute who had the price, not sold to him for the night like a white prostitute, but body and soul for life to him who could have used her with more impunity than he would dare to use an animal, heifer, or mare, and then discarded or sold or even murdered when worn out or when her keep and her price no longer balanced. Yes: a sparrow which God himself neglected to mark.

Because though men, white men, created her, God did not stop it. He planted the seed which brought her to flower—the white blood to give the shape and pigment of what the white man calls female beauty, to a

female principle which existed, queenly and complete, in the hot equatorial groin of the world long before that white one of ours came down from trees and lost its hair and bleached out—a principle apt docile and instinct with strange and ancient curious pleasures of the flesh (which is all: there is nothing else) which her white sisters of a mushroom yesterday flee from in moral and outraged horror—a principle which, where her white sister must needs try to make an economic matter of it like someone who insists upon installing a counter or a scales or a safe in a store or business for a certain percentage of the profits, reigns, wise supine and all-powerful, from the sunless and silken bed which is her throne. No: not whores.

Not even courtesans—creatures taken at childhood, culled and chosen and raised more carefully than any white girl, any nun, than any blooded mare even, by a person who gives them the unsleeping care and attention which no mother ever gives. For a price, of course, but a price offered and accepted or declined through a system more formal than any that white girls are sold under since they are more valuable as commodities than white girls, raised and trained to fulfill a woman's sole end and purpose: to love, to be beautiful, to divert; never to see a man's face hardly until brought to the ball and offered to and chosen by some man who in return, not can and not will but must, supply her with the surroundings proper in which to love and be beautiful and divert, and who must usually risk his life or at least his blood for that privilege.

No, not whores. Sometimes I believe that they are the only true chaste women, not to say virgins, in America, and they remain true and faithful to that man not merely until he dies or frees them, but until they die. And where will you find whore or lady either whom you can count on to do that?" and Henry, "But you married her. You married her": and Bon—it would be a little quicker now, sharper now, though still gentle, still patient, though still the iron, the steel the gambler not quite yet reduced to his final trump: "Ah. That ceremony. I see. That's it, then.

A formula, a shibboleth meaningless as a child's game, performed by someone created by the situation whose need it answered: a crone

mumbling in a dungeon lighted by a handful of burning hair, something in a tongue which not even the girls themselves understand anymore, maybe not even the crone herself, rooted in nothing of economics for her or for any possible progeny since the very fact that we acquiesced, suffered the farce, was her proof and assurance of that which the ceremony itself could never enforce; vesting no new rights in no one, denying to none the old—a ritual as meaningless as that of college boys in secret rooms at night, even to the same archaic and forgotten symbols?—you call that a marriage, when the night of a honeymoon and the casual business with a hired prostitute consists of the same suzerainty over a (temporarily) private room, the same order of removing the same clothes, the same conjunction in a single bed? Why not call that a marriage too?" and Henry: "Oh I know. I know. You give me two and two and you tell me it makes five and it does make five. But there is still the marriage.

Suppose I assume an obligation to a man who cannot speak my language, the obligation stated to him in his own and I agree to it: am I any the less obligated because I did not happen to know the tongue in which he accepted me in good faith? No: the more, the more." and Bon—the trump now, the voice gentle now: "Have you forgot that this woman, this child, are niggers? You, Henry Sutpen of Sutpen's Hundred in Mississippi? You, talking of marriage, a wedding, here?" and Henry the despair now, the last bitter cry of irrevocable defeat: "Yes. I know. I know that. But it's still there. It's not right. Not even you doing it makes it right. Not even you."

'So that was all. It should have been all; that afternoon four years later should have happened the next day, the four years, the interval, mere anti-climax: an attenuation and prolongation of a conclusion already ripe to happen, by the War by a stupid and bloody aberration in the high (and impossible) destiny of the United States, maybe instigated by that family fatality which possessed, along with all circumstance, that curious lack of economy between cause and effect which is always a characteristic of fate when reduced to using human beings for tools, material. Anyway, Henry waited four years, holding the three of them in that abeyance, that duration, waiting, hoping, for Bon to renounce

the woman and dissolve the marriage which he (Henry) admitted was no marriage, and which he must have known as soon as he saw the woman and the child that Bon would not renounce.

In fact, as time passed and Henry became accustomed to the idea of that ceremony which was still no marriage, that may have been the trouble with Henry—not the two ceremonies but the two women; not the fact that Bon's intention was to commit bigamy but that it was apparently to make his (Henry's) sister a sort of junior partner in a harem. Anyway, he waited, hoped, for four years. That spring they returned north, into Mississippi.

Bull Run had been fought and there was a company organizing at the University, among the student body. Henry and Bon joined it. Probably Henry wrote Judith where they were and what they intended to do. They enlisted together, you see, Henry watching Bon and Bon permitting himself to be watched, the probation, the durance: the one who dared not let the other out of his sight, not from fear that Bon would marry Judith with Henry not there to stop it, but that Bon would marry Judith and then he (Henry) would have to live for the rest of his life with the knowledge that he was glad that he had been so betrayed, with the coward's joy of surrendering without having been vanquished; the other for that same reason too, who could not have wanted Judith without Henry since he must never have doubted but what he could marry Judith when he wished, in spite of brother and father both, because as I said before, it was not Judith who was the object of Bon's love or of Henry's solicitude.

She was just the blank shape, the empty vessel in which each of them strove to preserve, not the illusion of himself nor his illusion of the other but what each conceived the other to believe him to be the man and the youth, seducer and seduced, who had known one another, seduced and been seduced, victimized in turn each by the other, conquerer vanquished by his own strength, vanquished conquering by his own weakness, before Judith came into their joint lives even by so much as girlname. And who knows? there was the War now; who knows but what the fatality and the fatality's victims did not both think,

hope, that the War would settle the matter, leave free one of the two irreconcilables, since it would not be the first time that youth has taken catastrophe as a direct act of Providence for the sole purpose of solving a personal problem which youth itself could not solve.

'And Judith: how else to explain her but this way? Surely Bon could not have corrupted her to fatalism in twelve days, who not only had not tried to corrupt her to unchastity but not even to defy her father. No: anything but a fatalist, who was the Sutpen with the ruthless Sutpen code of taking what it wanted provided it were strong enough, of the two children as Henry was the Coldfield with the Coldfield cluttering of morality and rules of right and wrong; who while Henry screamed and vomited, looked down from the loft that night on the spectacle of Sutpen fighting halfnaked with one of his halfnaked niggers with the same cold and attentive interest with which Sutpen would have watched Henry fighting with a Negro boy of his own age and weight. Because she could not have known the reason for her father's objection to the marriage.

Henry would not have told her, and she would not have asked her father. Because, even if she had known it, it would have made no difference to her. She would have acted as Sutpen would have acted with anyone who tried to cross him: she would have taken Bon anyway. I can imagine her if necessary even murdering the other woman. But she certainly would have made no investigation and then held a moral debate between what she wanted and what she thought was right. Yet she waited. She waited four years, with no word from him save through Henry that he (Bon) was alive. It was the probation, the durance; they all three accepted it; I don't believe there was ever any promise between Henry and Bon demanded or offered.

But Judith, who could not have known what happened nor why. —Have you noticed how so often when we try to reconstruct the causes which lead up to the actions of men and women, how with a sort of astonishment we find ourselves now and then reduced to the belief, the only possible belief, that they stemmed from some of the old virtues? the thief who steals not for greed but for love, the murderer

who kills not out of lust but pity? Judith, giving implicit trust where she had given love, giving implicit love where she had derived breath and pride: that true pride, not that false kind which transforms what it does not at the moment understand into scorn and outrage and so vents itself in pique and lacerations, but true pride which can say to itself without abasement I love, I will accept no substitute; something has happened between him and my father; if my father was right, I will never see him, again, if wrong he will come or send for me; if happy I can be I will, if suffer I must I can.

Because she waited; she made no effort to do anything else; her relations with her father had not altered one jot; to see them together, Bon might never have even existed—the same two calm impenetrable faces seen together in the carriage in town during the next few months after Ellen took to her bed, between that Christmas day and the day when Sutpen rode away with his and Sartoris' regiment. They didn't talk, tell one another anything, you see—Sutpen, what he had learned about Bon; Judith, that she knew where Bon and Henry now were. They did not need to talk.

They were too much alike. They were as two people become now and then, who seem to know one another so well or are so much alike that the power, the need, to communicate by speech atrophies from disuse and, comprehending without need of the medium of ear or intellect, they no longer understand one another's actual words. So she did not tell him where Henry and Bon were and he did not discover it until after the University company departed, because Bon and Henry enrolled and then hid themselves somewhere. They must have; they must have paused in Oxford only long enough to enroll before riding on, because no one who knew them either in Oxford or in Jefferson knew that they were members of the company at the time, which would have been almost impossible to conceal otherwise.

Because now people—fathers and mothers and sisters and kin and sweethearts of those young men—were coming to Oxford from further away than Jefferson—families with food and bedding and servants, to bivouac among the families, the houses, of Oxford itself, to watch the

gallant mimic marching and countermarching of the sons and the brothers, drawn all of them, rich and poor, aristocrat and redneck, by what is probably the most moving mass-sight of all human mass-experience, far more so than the spectacle of so many virgins going to be sacrificed to some heathen Principle, some Priapus—the sight of young men, the light quick bones, the bright gallant deluded blood and flesh dressed in a martial glitter of brass and plumes, marching away to a battle.

And there would be music at night—fiddle and triangle among the blazing candles, the blowing of curtains in tall windows on the April darkness, the swing of crinoline indiscriminate within the circle of plain gray cuff of the soldier or the banded gold of rank, of an army even if not a war of gentlemen, where private and colonel called each other by their given names not as one farmer to another across a halted plow in a field or across a counter in a store laden with calico and cheese and strap oil, but as one man to another above the suave powdered shoulders of women, above the two raised glasses of scuppernong claret or bought champagne music, the nightly repetitive last waltz as the days passed and the company waited to move, the brave trivial glitter against a black night not catastrophic but merely background, the perennial last scented spring of youth; and Judith not there and Henry the romantic not there and Bon the fatalist, hidden somewhere, the watcher and the watched: and the recurrent flower-laden dawns of that April and May and June filled with bugles, entering a hundred windows where a hundred still unbridled widows dreamed virgin unmeditant upon the locks of black or brown or yellow hair and Judith not one of these: and five of the company, mounted, with grooms and body servants in a forage wagon, in their new and unstained gray made a tour of the State with the flag, the company's colors, the segments of silk cut and fitted but not sewn, from house to house until the sweetheart of each man in the company had taken a few stitches in it, and Henry and Bon not of these either, since they did not join the company until after it departed.

They must have emerged from whatever place it was that they lurked in, emerging as though unnoticed from the roadside brake or thicket, to

fall in as the marching company passed; the two of them—the youth and the man, the youth deprived twice now of his birthright, who should have made one among the candles and fiddles, the kisses and the desperate tears, who should have made one of the color guard itself which toured the State with the unsewn flag; and the man who should not have been there at all, who was too old to be there at all, both in years and experience: that mental and spiritual orphan whose fate it apparently was to exist in some limbo halfway between where his corporeality was and his mentality and moral equipment desired to be—an undergraduate at the University, yet by the sheer accumulation of too full years behind him forced into the extra-academic of a law class containing six members; in the War, by that same force removed into the isolation of commissioned rank.

He received a lieutenancy before the company entered its first engagement even. I don't think he wanted it; I can even imagine him trying to avoid it, refuse it. But there it was, he was, orphaned once more by the very situation to which and by which he was doomed—the two of them officer and man now but' still watcher and watched, waiting for something but not knowing what, what act of fate, destiny, what irrevocable sentence of what Judge or Arbiter between them since nothing less would do, nothing halfway or reversible would seem to suffice—the officer, the lieutenant who possessed the slight and authorized advantage of being able to say You go there, of at least sometimes remaining behind the platoon which he directed; the private who carried that officer, shot through the shoulder, on his back while the regiment fell back under the Yankee guns at Pittsburgh Landing, carried him to safety apparently for the sole purpose of watching him for two years more, writing Judith meanwhile that they were both alive, and that was all.

'And Judith. She lived alone now. Perhaps she had lived alone ever since that Christmas day last year and then year before last and then three years and then four years ago, since though Sutpen was gone now with his and Sartoris' regiment and the Negroes—the wild stock with which he had created Sutpen's Hundred—had followed the first Yankee troops to pass through Jefferson, she lived in anything but

solitude, what with Ellen in bed in the shuttered room, requiring the unremitting attention of a child while she waited with that amazed and passive incomprehension to die; and she (Judith) and Clytie making and keeping a kitchen garden of sorts to keep them alive; and Wash Jones, living in the abandoned and rotting fishing camp in the river bottom which Sutpen had built after the first woman—Ellen—entered his house and the last deer and bear hunter went out of it, where he now permitted Wash and his daughter and infant granddaughter to live, performing the heavy garden work and supplying Ellen and Judith and then Judith with fish and game now and then, even entering the house now, who until Sutpen went away, had never approached nearer than the scuppernong arbor behind the kitchen where on Sunday afternoons he and Sutpen would drink from the demijohn and the bucket of spring water which Wash fetched from almost a mile away, Sutpen in the barrel stave hammock talking and Wash squatting against a post, chortling and guffawing.

It was not solitude and certainly not idleness for Judith: the same impenetrable and serene face, only a little older now, a little thinner now, which had appeared in town in the carriage beside her father's within a week after it was learned that her fiance and her brother had quitted the house in the night and vanished. When she came to town now, in the made-over dress which all Southern women now wore, in the carriage still but drawn now by a mule, a plow mule, soon the plow mule, and no coachman to drive it either, to put the mule in the harness and take it out, to join the other women—there were wounded in Jefferson then—in the improvised hospital where (the nurtured virgin, the supremely and traditionally idle) they cleaned and dressed the self-fouled bodies of strange injured and dead and made lint of the window curtains and sheets and linen of the houses in which they had been born; there were none to ask her about brother and sweetheart, while they talked among themselves of sons and brothers and husbands with tears and grief perhaps, but at least with certainty, knowledge.

Judith waiting too, like Henry and Bon, not knowing for what, but unlike Henry and Bon, not even knowing for why. Then Ellen died, the

butterfly of a forgotten summer two years defunctive now the substanceless shell, the shade impervious to any alteration of dissolution because of its very weightlessness: no body to be buried: just the shape, the recollection, translated on some peaceful afternoon without bell or catafalque into that cedar grove, to lie in powder light paradox beneath the thousand pounds of marble monument which Sutpen (Colonel Sutpen now, since Sartoris had been deposed at the annual election of regimental officers the year before) brought in the regimental forage wagon from Charleston, South Carolina and set above the faint grassy depression which Judith told him was Ellen's grave.

And then her grandfather died, starved to death nailed up in his own attic, and Judith doubtless inviting Miss Rosa to come out to Sutpen's Hundred to live and Miss Rosa declining, waiting, too, apparently upon this letter, this first direct word from Bon in four years and which, a week after she buried him, too, beside her mother's tombstone, she brought to town herself, in the surrey drawn by the mule which both she and Clytie had learned to catch and harness, and gave to your grandmother, bringing the letter voluntarily to your grandmother, who (Judith) never called on anyone now, had no friends now, doubtless knowing no more why she chose your grandmother to give the letter to than your grandmother knew; not thin now but gaunt, the Sutpen skull showing indeed now through the worn, the Coldfield, flesh, the face which had long since forgotten how to be young and yet absolutely impenetrable, absolutely serene: no mourning, not even grief, and your grandmother saying, "Me? You want me to keep it?"

' "Yes," Judith said. "Or destroy it. As you like. Read it if you like or don't read it if you like. Because you make so little impression, you see. You get born and you try this and you don't know why only you keep on trying it and you are born at the same time with a lot of other people, all mixed up with them, like trying to, having to, move your arms and legs with strings only the same strings are hitched to all the other arms and legs and the others all trying and they don't know why either except that the strings are all in one another's way like five or six people all trying to make a rug on the same loom only each one wants

to weave his own pattern into the rug; and it can't matter, you know that, or the Ones that set up the loom would have arranged things a little better, and yet it must matter because you keep on trying or having to keep on trying and then all of a sudden it's all over and all you have left is a block of stone with scratches on it provided there was someone to remember to have the marble scratched and set up or had time to, and it rains on it and the sun shines on it and after a while they don't even remember the name and what the scratches were trying to tell, and it doesn't matter.

And so maybe if you could go to someone, the stranger the better, and give them something—a scrap of paper—something, anything, it not to mean anything in itself and them not even to read it or keep it, not even bother to throw it away or destroy it, at least it would be something just because it would have happened, be remembered even if only from passing from one hand to another, one mind to another, and it would be at least a scratch, something, something that might make a mark on something that was once for the reason that it can die someday, while the block of stone can't be is because it never can become was because it can't ever die or perish..." and your grandmother watching her, the impenetrable, the calm, the absolutely serene face, and crying: "No!

No! Not that! Think of your—" and the face watching her, comprehending, still serene, not even bitter: "Oh. I? No, not that.

Because somebody will have to take care of Clytie, and father, too, soon, who will want something to eat after he comes home because it won't last much longer since they have begun to shoot one another now.

No. Not that. Women don't do that for love. I don't even believe that men do. And not now, anyway. Because there wouldn't be any room now, for them to go to, wherever it is, if it is. It would be full already. Glutted. Like a theater, an opera house, if what you expect to find is forgetting, diversion, entertainment; like a bed already too full if what you want to find is a chance to lie still and sleep and sleep and sleep"—

Mr Compson moved. Half rising, Quentin took the letter from him and beneath the dim bug-fouled globe opened it, carefully, as though the sheet, the desiccated square, were not the paper but the intact ash of its former shape and substance: and meanwhile Mr Compson's voice speaking on while Quentin heard it without listening: 'Now you can see why I said that he loved her.

Because there were other letters, many of them, gallant flowery indolent frequent and insincere, sent by hand over that forty miles between Oxford and Jefferson after that first Christmas—the metropolitan gallant's idle and delicately flattering (and doubtless to him, meaningless) gesture to the bucolic maiden—and that bucolic maiden, with that profound and absolutely inexplicable tranquil patient clairvoyance of women against which that metropolitan gallant's foppish posturing was just the jackanape antics of a small boy, receiving the letters without understanding them, not even keeping them, for all their elegant and gallant and tediously contrived turns of form and metaphor, until the next one arrived.

But keeping this one which must have reached her out of a clear sky after an interval of four years, considering this one worthy to give to a stranger to keep or not to keep, even to read or not to read as the stranger saw fit, to make that scratch, that undying mark on the blank face of the oblivion to which we are all doomed, of which she spoke—' Quentin hearing without having to listen as he read the faint spidery script not like something impressed upon the paper by a once-living hand but like a shadow cast upon it which had resolved on the paper the instant before he looked at it and which might fade, vanish, at any instant while he still read: the dead tongue speaking after the four years and then after almost fifty more, gentle sardonic whimsical and incurably pessimistic, without date or salutation or signature: You will notice how I insult neither of us by claiming this to be a voice from the defeated even, let alone from the dead.

In fact, if I were a philosopher I should deduce and derive a curious and apt commentary on the times and augur of the future from this letter which you now hold in your hands—a sheet of notepaper with, as you

can see, the best of French watermarks dated seventy years ago, salvaged (stolen if you will) from the gutted mansion of a ruined aristocrat; and written upon in the best of stove polish manufactured not twelve months ago in a New England factory.

Yes. Stove polish. We captured it: a story in itself. Imagine us, an assortment of homogeneous scarecrows, I won't say hungry because to a woman, lady or female either, below Mason's and Dixon's in this year of grace 1865, that word would be sheer redundancy, like saying that we were breathing. And I won't say ragged or even shoeless, since we have been both long enough to have grown accustomed to it, only thank God (and this restores my faith not in human nature perhaps but at least in man) that he really does not become inured to hardship and privation: it is only the mind, the gross omnivorous carrion-heavy soul which becomes inured; the body itself, thank God, never reconciled from the old soft feel of soap and clean linen and something between the sole of the foot and the earth to distinguish it from the foot of a beast. So say we merely needed ammunition.

And imagine us, the scarecrows with one of those concocted plans of scarecrow desperation which not only must but do work, for the reason that there is absolutely no room for alternative before man or heaven, no niche on earth or under it for failure to find space either to pause or breathe or be graved and sepulchered; and we (the scarecrows) bringing it off with a great deal of elan, not to say noise; imagine, I say, the prey and prize, the ten plump defenseless sutlers' wagons, the scarecrows tumbling out box after beautiful box after beautiful box stenciled each with that U. and that S. which for four years now has been to us the symbol of the spoils which belong to the vanquished, of the loaves and the fishes as was once the incandescent Brow, the shining nimbus of the Thorny Crown; and the scarecrows clawing at the boxes with stones and bayonets and even with bare hands and opening them at last and finding—What? Stove polish.

Gallons and gallons and gallons of the best stove polish, not a box of it a year old yet and doubtless still trying to overtake General Sherman with some belated amended field order requiring him to polish the stove

before firing the house. How we laughed. Yes, we laughed, because I have learned this at least during these four years that, it really requires an empty stomach to laugh with, that only when you are hungry or frightened do you extract some ultimate essence out of laughing just as the empty stomach extracts the ultimate essence out of alcohol. But at least we have stove polish. We have plenty of it. We have too much, because it does not take much to say what I have to say, as you can see. And so the conclusion and augury which I draw, even though no philosopher, is this.

We have waited long enough. You will notice how I do not insult you either by saying I have waited long enough. And therefore, since I do not insult you by saying that only I have waited, I do not add, expect me. Because I cannot say when to expect me. Because what WAS is one thing, and now it is not because it is dead, it died in 1861, and therefore what IS—(There. They have started firing again. which—to mention it—is redundancy too, like the breathing or the need of ammunition. Because sometimes I think it has never stopped.

It hasn't stopped of course; I don't mean that. I mean, there has never been any more of it, that there was that one fusillade four years ago which sounded once and then was arrested, mesmerized raised muzzle by raised muzzle, in the frozen attitude of its own aghast amazement and never repeated and it now only the loud aghast echo jarred by the dropped musket of a weary sentry or by the fall of the spent body itself, out of the air which lies over the land where that fusillade first sounded and where it must remain yet because no other space under Heaven will receive it.

So that means that it is dawn again and that I must stop. Stop what? you will say. (Why, thinking, remembering-remark that do not say, hoping—; to become once more for a period without boundaries or location in time, mindless and irrational companion and inmate of a body which, even after four years, with a sort of dismal and incorruptible fidelity which is incredibly admirable to me, is still immersed and obliviously bemused in recollections of old peace and contentment the very names of whose scents and sounds I do not know

that I remember, which ignores even the presence and threat of a torn arm or leg as though through some secretly incurred and infallible promise and conviction of mortality.

But to finish.) I cannot say when to expect me. Because what IS is something else again because it was not even alive then. and since because within this sheet of paper you now hold the best of the old South which is dead, and the words you read were written upon it with the best (each box said, the very best) of the new North which has conquered and which therefore, whether it likes it or not, will have to survive, I now believe that you and I are, strangely enough, included among those who are doomed to live.

'And that's all,' Mr Compson said. 'She received it and she and Clytie made the wedding gown and the veil from scraps—perhaps scraps intended for, which should have gone for, lint and did not. She didn't know when he would come because he didn't know himself: and maybe he told Henry, showed Henry the letter before he sent it, and maybe he did not; maybe still just the watching and the waiting, the one saying to Henry I have waited long enough and Henry saying to the other Do you renounce then?

Do you renounce? and the other saying I do not renounce. For four years now I have given chance the opportunity to renounce for me, but it seems that I am doomed to live, that she and I both are doomed to live—the defianceeeeeee and the ultimatum delivered beside a bivouac fire, the ultimatum discharged before the gate to which the two of them must have ridden side by side almost: the one calm and undeviating, perhaps unresisting even, the fatalist to the last; the other remorseless with implacable and unalterable grief and despair—' (It seemed to Quentin that he could actually see them, facing one another at the gate.

Inside the gate what was once a park now spread, unkempt, in shaggy desolation, with an air dreamy, remote and aghast like the unshaven face of a man just waking from ether, up to a huge house where a young girl waited in a wedding dress made from stolen scraps, the

house partaking too of that air of scaling desolation, not having suffered from invasion but a shell marooned and forgotten in a backwater of catastrophe—a skeleton giving of itself in slow dribblets of furniture and carpet, linen, and silver, to help to die torn and anguished men who knew, even while dying, that for months now the sacrifice and the anguish were in vain.

They faced one another on the two gaunt horses, two men, young, not yet in the world, not yet breathed over long enough, to be old but with old eyes, with unkempt hair and faces gaunt and weathered as if cast by some spartan and even niggard hand from bronze, in worn and patched gray weathered now to the color of dead leaves, the one with the tarnished braid of an officer, the other plain of cuff, the pistol lying yet across the saddle bow unaimed, the two faces calm, the voices not even raised: Don't you pass the shadow of this post, this branch, Charles; and I am going to pass it, Henry) '—and then Wash Jones sitting that saddleless mule before Miss Rosa's gate, shouting her name into the sunny and peaceful quiet of the street, saying, "Air you Rosie Coldfield ? Then you better come on out yon. Henry has done shot that durn French feller. Kilt him dead as a beef." '

V

So they will have told you doubtless already how I told that Jones to take that mule which was not his around to the barn and harness it to our buggy while I put on my hat and shawl and locked the house.

That was all I needed to do since they will have told you doubtless that I would have had no need for either trunk or bag since what clothing I possessed, now that the garments which I had been fortunate enough to inherit from my aunt's kindness or haste or oversight were long since worn out, consisted of the ones which Ellen had remembered from time to time to give me and now Ellen these two years dead; that I had only to lock the house and take my place in the buggy and traverse those twelve miles which I had not done since Ellen died, beside that brute who until Ellen died was not even permitted to approach the

house from the front that brute progenitor of brutes whose granddaughter was to supplant me, if not in my sister's house at least in my sister's bed to which (so they will tell you) I aspired—that brute who (brute instrument of that justice which presides over human events which, incept in the individual, runs smooth, less clam than velvet: but which, by man or woman flouted, drives on like fiery steel and overrides both weakly just and unjust strong, both vanquisher and innocent victimized, ruthless for appointed right and truth) brute who was not only to preside upon the various shapes and avatars of Thomas Sutpen's devil's fate but was to provide at the last the female flesh in which his name and lineage should be sepulchered—that brute who appeared to believe that he had served and performed his appointed end by yelling of blood and pistols in the street before my house, who seemed to believe that what further information he might have given me was too scant or too bland and free of moment to warrant the discarding of his tobacco cud, because during the entire subsequent twelve miles he could not even tell me what had happened.

And how I traversed those same twelve miles once more after the two years since Ellen died (or was it the four years since Henry vanished or was it the nineteen years since I saw light and breathed?) knowing nothing, able to learn nothing save this: a shot heard, faint and far away and even direction and source indeterminate, by two women, two young women alone in a rotting house where no man's footstep had sounded in two years—a shot, then an interval of aghast surmise above the cloth and needles which engaged them, then feet, in the hall and then on the stairs, running, hurrying, the feet of man: and Judith with just time to snatch up the unfinished dress and hold it before her as the door burst open upon her brother, the wild murderer whom she had not seen in four years and whom she believed to be (if he was, still lived and breathed at all) a thousand miles away: and then the two of them, the two accursed children on whom the first blow of their devil's heritage had but that moment fallen, looking at one another across the up-raised and unfinished wedding dress.

Twelve miles toward that I rode, beside an animal who could stand in the street before my house and bellow placidly to the populous and

listening solitude that my nephew had just murdered his sister's fiance, yet who could not permit himself to force the mule which drew us beyond a walk because 'hit warn't none of mine nor hisn neither and besides hit aint had a decent bait of vittles since the corn give out in February'; who, turning into the actual gate at last, must stop the mule and, pointing with the whip and spitting first, say ' Hit was right yonder.' ' What was right there, fool?" I cried, and he: 'Hit was' until I took the whip from him into my own hand and struck the mule.

But they cannot tell you how I went on up the drive, past Ellen's ruined and weed-choked flower beds and reached the house, the shell, the (so I thought) cocoon-casket marriage-bed of youth and grief and found that I had come, not too late as I had thought, but come too soon. Rotting portico and scaling walls, it stood, not ravaged, not invaded, marked by no bullet nor soldier's iron heel but rather as though reserved for something more: some desolation more profound than ruin, as if it had stood in iron juxtaposition to iron flame, to a holocaust which had found itself less fierce and less implacable, not hurled but rather fallen back before the impervious and indomitable skeleton which the flames durst not, at the instant's final crisis, assail; there was even one step, one plank rotted free and tilting beneath the foot (or would have if I had not touched it light and fast) as I ran up and into the hallway whose carpet had long since gone with the bed—and table-linen for lint, and saw the Sutpen face and even as I cried 'Henry! Henry!

What have you done? What has that fool been trying to tell me?" realized that I had come, not too late as I had thought, but come too soon. Because it was not Henry's face. It was Sutpen face enough, but not his; Sutpen coffee-colored face enough there in the dim light, barring the stairs: and I running out of the bright afternoon, into the thunderous silence of that brooding house where I could see nothing at first: then gradually the face, the Sutpen face not approaching, not swimming up out of the gloom, but already there, rocklike and firm and antedating time and house and doom and all, waiting there (oh yes, he chose well; he bettered choosing, who created in his own image the cold Cerberus of his private hell) the face without sex or age because it

had never possessed either: the same sphinx face which she had been born with, which had looked down from the loft that night beside Judith's and which she still wears now at seventy-four, looking at me with no change, no alteration in it at all, as though it had known to the second when I was to enter, had waited there during that entire twelve miles behind that walking mule and watched me draw nearer and nearer and enter the door at last as it had known (ay, perhaps decreed, since there is that justice whose Moloch's palate-paunch makes no distinction between gristle bone and tender flesh) that I would enter— The face stopping me dead (not my body: it still advanced, ran on." but I, myself, that deep existence which we lead, to which the movement of limbs is but a clumsy and belated accompaniment like so many unnecessary instruments played crudely and amateurishly out of time to the tune itself) in that barren hall with its naked stair (that carpet gone too) rising into the dim upper hallway where an echo spoke which was not mine but rather that of the lost irrevocable might-have-been which haunts all houses, all enclosed walls erected by human hands, not for shelter, not for warmth, but to hide from the world's curious looking and seeing the dark turnings which the ancient young delusions of pride and hope and ambition (ay, and love too) take.

'Judith!' I said. 'Judith!' There was no answer. I had expected none; possibly even then I did not expect Judith to answer, just as a child, before the full instant of comprehended terror, calls on the parent whom it actually knows (this before the terror destroys all judgement whatever) is not even there to hear it. I was crying not to someone, something, but (trying to cry) through something, through that force, that furious yet absolutely rocklike and immobile antagonism which had stopped me—that presence, that familiar coffee-colored face, that body (the bare coffee-colored feet motionless on the bare floor, the curve of the stair rising just beyond her) no larger than my own which, without moving, with no alteration of visual displacement whatever (she did not even remove her gaze from mine for the reason that she was not looking at me but through me, apparently still musing upon the open door's serene rectangle which I had broken) seemed to elongate and project upward something—not soul, not spirit, but something rather of a profoundly attentive and distracted listening to or for

something which I myself could not hear and was not intended to hear—a brooding awareness and acceptance of the inexplicable unseen, herited from an older and a purer race than mine, which created postulated and shaped in the empty air between us that which I believed I had come to find (nay, which I must find, else breathing and standing there, I would have denied that I was ever born)—that bedroom long-closed and musty, that sheetless bed (that nuptial couch of love and grief) with the pale and bloody corpse in its patched and weathered gray crimsoning the bare mattress, the bowed and unwived widow kneeling beside it—and I (my body) not stopping yet (yes, it needed the hand, the touch, for that)—I self-mesmered fool who still believed that what must be would be, could not but be, else I must deny sanity as well as breath, running, hurling myself into that inscrutable coffeecolored face, that cold implacable mindless (no, not mindless: anything but mindless: his own clairvoyant will tempered to amoral evil's undeviating absolute by the black willing blood with which he had crossed it) replica of his own which he had created and decreed to preside upon his absence, as you might watch a wild distracted nightbound bird flutter into the brazen and fatal lamp.

'Wait,' she said. 'Dont you go up there.'" Still I did not stop; it would require the hand; and I still running on, accomplishing those last few feet across which we seemed to glare at one another not as two faces but as the two abstract contradictions which we actually were, neither of our voices raised, as though we spoke to one another free of the limitations and restrictions of speech and hearing. ' What?" I said. 'Dont you go up there, Rosa.'" That was how she said it: that quiet that still, and again it was as though it had not been she who spoke but the house itself that said the words—the house which he had built, which some suppuration of himself had created about him as the sweat of his body might have produced some (even if invisible) cocoon-like and complementary shell in which Ellen had had to live and die a stranger, in which Henry and Judith would have to be victims and prisoners, or die.

Because it was not the name, the word, the fact that she had called me Rosa. As children she had called me that, just as she had called them

Henry and Judith; I know that even now she still called Judith (and Henry too when she spoke of him) by her given name. And she might very naturally have called me Rosa still, since to everyone else whom I knew I was still a child. But it was not that. That was not what she meant at all; in fact, during that instant while we stood face to face (that instant before my still advancing body should brush past her and reach the stair) she did me more grace and respect than anyone else I knew; I knew that from the instant I had entered that door, to her of all who knew me I was no child. 'Rosa?' I cried.

'To me? To my face?' Then she touched me, and then I did stop dead. Possibly even then my body did not stop, since I seemed to be aware of it thrusting blindly still against the solid yet imponderable weight (she not owner: instrument; I still say that) of that will to bar me from the stairs; possibly the sound of the other voice, the single word spoken from the stairhead above us, had already broken and parted us before it (my body) had even paused. I do not know. I know only that my entire being seemed to run at blind full tilt into something monstrous and immobile, with a shocking impact too soon and too quick to be mere amazement and outrage at that black arresting and untimorous hand on my white woman's flesh.

Because there is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering, which enemies as well as lovers know because it makes them both—touch and touch of that which is the citadel of the central I-Am's private own: not spirit, the liquorish and ungirdled mind is anyone's to take in any darkened hallway of this earthly tenement. But let flesh touch with flesh, and watch the fall of all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too. Yes, I stopped dead no woman's hand, no Negro's hand, but bitted bridle-curb to check and guide the furious and unbending will—I crying not to her, to it; speaking to it through the Negro, the woman, only because of the shock which was not yet outrage because it would be terror soon, expecting and receiving no answer because we both new it was not to her I spoke: 'Take your hand off me, nigger!' I got none.

We just stood there—I motion the attitude and action of running, she rigid in that furious immobility, the two of us joined by that hand and arm which held us, like a fierce rigid umbilical cord, twin sistered to the fell darkness which had produced her. As a child I had more than once watched her and Judith and even Henry scuffling in the rough games which they (possibly all children; I do not know) played, and (so I have heard) she and Judith even slept together, in the same room but with Judith in the bed and she on a pallet on the floor ostensibly.

But I have heard how on more than one occasion Ellen has found them both on the pallet, and once in the bed together. But not I Even as a child, would not even play with the same objects which she and Judith played with, as though that warped and spartan solitude which I called my childhood, which had taught me (and little else) to listen before I could comprehend and to understand before I even heard, had also taught me not only to instinctively fear her and what she was, but to shun the very objects which she had touched. We stood there so. And then suddenly it was not outrage that I waited for, out of which I had instinctively cried; it was not terror: it was some cumulative overreach of despair itself.

I remember how as we stood there joined by that volitionless (yes: it too sentient victim just as she and I were) hand, I cried—perhaps not aloud, not with words (and not to Judith, mind: perhaps I knew already, on the instant I entered the house and saw that face which was at once both more and less than Sutpen, perhaps I knew even then what I could not, would not, must not believe)—I cried 'And you too? And you too, sister, sister?' What did I expect? I, self-mesmered fool, come twelve miles expecting what? Henry perhaps, to emerge from some door which knew his touch, his hand on the knob, the weight of his foot on a sill which knew that weight: and so to find standing in the hall a small plain frightened creature whom neither man nor woman had ever looked at twice, whom he had not seen himself in four years and seldom enough before that but whom he would recognize if only because of the worn brown silk which had once become his mother and because the creature stood there calling him by his given name? Henry to emerge and say 'Why, it's Rosa, Aunt Rosa. wake up, Aunt Rosa;

wake up'?—I, the dreamer clinging yet to the dream as the patient clings to the last thin unbearable ecstatic instant of agony in order to sharpen the savor of the pain's surcease, waking into the reality, the more than reality, not to the unchanged and unaltered old time but into a time altered to fit the dream which, conjunctive with the dreamer, becomes immolated and apotheosied: 'Mother and Judith are in the nursery with the children, and Father and Charles are walking in the garden.

Wake up, Aunt Rosa; wake up'? Or not expect perhaps, not even hope; not even dream since dreams don't come in pairs, and had I not come twelve miles drawn not by mortal mule but by some chimera-foal of nightmare's very self? (Ay, wake up, Rosa; wake up—not from what was, what used to be, but from what had not, could not have ever, been; wake, Rosa—not to what should, what might have been, but to what cannot, what must not, be; wake, Rosa, from the hoping, who did believe there is a seemliness to bereavement even though grief be absent; believed there would be need for you to save not love perhaps, not happiness nor peace, but what was left behind by widowing—and found that there was nothing there to save; who hoped to save her as you promised Ellen (not Charles Bon, not Henry: not either one of these from him or even from one another) and now too late, who would have been too late if you had come there from the womb or had been there already at the full strong capable mortal peak when she was born; who came twelve miles and nineteen years to save what did not need the saving, and lost instead yourself) I do not know, except that I did not find it.

I found only that dream-state in which you run without moving from a terror in which you cannot believe, toward a safety in which you have no faith, held so not by the shifting and foundationless quicksand of nightmare but by a face which was its soul's own inquisitor, a hand which was the agent of its own crucifixion, until the voice parted us, broke the spell. It said one word: 'Clytie.'" like that, that cold, that still: not Judith, but the house itself speaking again, though it was Judith's voice. Oh, I knew it well, who had believed in grieving's seemliness; I knew it as well as she—Clytie—knew it.

She did not move; it was only the hand, the hand gone before I realized that it had been removed. I do not know if she removed it or if I ran out from beneath its touch. But it was gone; and this too they cannot tell you: How I ran, fled, up the stairs and found no grieving widowed bride but Judith standing before the closed door to that chamber, in the gingham dress which she had worn each time I had seen her since Ellen died, holding something in one hanging hand; and if there had been grief or anguish she had put them too away, complete or not complete I do not know, along with that unfinished wedding dress.

' Yes, Rosa?' she said, like that again, and I stopped in running's midstride again though my body, blind un sentient barrow of deluded clay and breath, still advanced: And now I saw that what she held in that lax and negligent hand was the photograph, the picture of herself in its metal case which she had given him, held casual and forgotten against her flank as any interrupted pastime book.

That's what I found. Perhaps it's what I expected, knew (even at nineteen knew, I would say if it were not for my nineteen, my own particular kind of nineteen years) that I should find. Perhaps I couldn't even have wanted more than that, couldn't have accepted less, who even at nineteen must have known that living is one constant and perpetual instant when the arras-veil before what-is-to-be hangs docile and even glad to the lightest naked thrust if we had dared, were brave enough (not wise enough: no wisdom needed here) to make the rending gash.

Or perhaps it is no lack of courage either: not cowardice which will not face that sickness somewhere at the prime foundation of this factual scheme from which the prisoner soul, miasmal-distillant boils ever upward sunward, tugs its tenuous prisoner arteries and veins and prisoning in its turn that spark, that dream which, as the globy and complete instant of its freedom mirrors and repeats (repeats? creates, reduces to a fragile evanescent iridescent sphere) all of space and time and massy earth, relicts the seething and anonymous miasmal mass which in all the years of time has taught itself no boon of death but

only how to recreate, renew; and die, is gone, vanished: nothing—but is that true wisdom which can comprehend that there is a might-have-been which is more true than truth, from which the dreamer, waking, says not 'Did I but dream?' but rather says, indicts high heaven's very self with: 'Why did I wake since waking I shall never sleep again?' Once there was—Do you mark how the wistaria, sunimpacted on this wall here, distills and penetrates this room as though (lightunimpeded) by secret and attritive progress from mote to mote of obscurity's myriad components?

That is the substance of remembering—sense, sight, smell: the muscles with which we see and hear and feel not mind, not thought: there is no such thing as memory: the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for: no more, no less; and its resultant sum is usually incorrect and false and worthy only of the name of dream. —See how the sleeping outflung hand, touching the bedside candle, remembers pain, springs back and free while mind and brain sleep on and only make of this adjacent heat some trashy myth of really's escape: or that same sleeping hand, in sensuous marriage with some dulcet surface, is transformed by that same sleeping brain and mind into that same figment-stuff warped out of all experience. Ay, grief goes, fades; we know that—but ask the tear ducts if they have forgotten how to weep.

—Once there was (they cannot have told you this either) a summer of wistaria. It was a pervading everywhere of wistaria (I was fourteen then) as though of all springs yet to capitulate condensed into one spring, one summer: the spring and summertime which is every female's who breathed above dust, beholden of all betrayed springs held over from all irrevocable time, repercussed, bloomed again.

It was a vintage year of wistaria: vintage year being that sweet conjunction of root bloom and urge and hour and weather,' and I (I was fourteen)—I will not insist on bloom, at whom no man had yet to look—nor would ever—twice, as not as child but less than even child; as not more child than woman but even as less than any female flesh. Nor do I say leaf—warped bitter pale and crimped half-fledging intimidate of any claim to green which might have drawn to it the

tender mayfly childhood sweetheart games or given pause to the male predacious wasps and bees of later lust. But root and urge I do insist and claim, for had I not heired too far all the unsistered Eves since the Snake?

Yes, urge I do: warped chrysalis of what blind perfect seed: for who shall say what gnarled forgotten root might not bloom yet with some globed concentrate more globed and concentrate and heady-perfect because the neglected root was planted warped and lay not dead but merely slept forgot?

That was the miscast summer of my barren youth which (for that short time, that short brief unreturning springtime of the female heart) I lived out not as a woman, a girl, but rather as the man which I perhaps should have been.

I was fourteen then, fourteen in years if they could have been called years while in that unpaced corridor which I called childhood, which was not living but rather some projection of the lightless womb itself; I gestate and complete, not aged, just overdue because of some caesarean lack, some cold head-nuzzling forceps of the savage time which should have torn me free, I waited not for light but for that doom which we call female victory which is: endure and then endure, without rhyme or reason or hope of reward—and then endure; I like that blind subterranean fish, that insulated spark whose origin the fish no longer remembers, which pulses and beats at its crepuscular and lethargic tenement with the old unsleeping itch which has no words to speak with other than 'This was called light', that 'smell', that 'touch', that other something which has bequeathed not even name for sound of bee or bird or flower's scent or light or sun or love—yes, not even growing and developing, beloved by and loving light, but equipped only with that cunning, that inverted canker-growth of solitude which substitutes the omnivorous and unrational hearingsense for all the others: so that instead of accomplishing the processional and measured milestones of the childhood's time I lurked, unapprehended as though, shod with the very damp and velvet silence of the womb, I displaced no air, gave off no betraying sound, from one closed forbidden door to the

next and so acquired all I knew of that light and space in which people moved and breathed as I (that same child) might have gained conception of the sun from seeing it through a piece of smoky glass—fourteen, four years younger than Judith, four years later than Judith's moment which only virgins know: when the entire delicate spirit's bent is one anonymous climaxless epicene and unravished nuptial—not that widowed and nightly violation by the inescapable and scornful deed which is the need of twenty and thirty and forty, but a world filled with living marriage like the light and air which she breathes.

But it was no summer of a virgin's itching discontent; no summer's caesarean lack which should have torn me, dead flesh or even embryo, from the living: or else, by friction's ravishing of the male-furrowed meat, also weaponed and panoplied as a man instead of hollow woman.

It was the summer after that first Christmas that Henry brought him home, the summer following the two days of that June vacation which he spent at Sutpen's Hundred before he rode on to the River to take the steamboat home, that summer after my aunt left and papa had to go away on business and I was sent out to Ellen (possibly my father chose Ellen as a refuge for me because at that time Thomas Sutpen was also absent) to stay so that she could take care of me, who had been born too late, born into some curious disjoint of my father's life and left on his (now twice) widowed hands, I competent enough to reach a kitchen shelf, count spoons and hem a sheet and measure milk into a churn yet good for nothing else, yet still too valuable to be left alone. I had never seen him (I never saw him. I never even saw him 'dead.

I heard a name, I saw a photograph, I helped to make a grave: and that was all) though he had been in my house once, that first New Year's Day when Henry brought him from nephew duty to speak to me on their way back to school and I was not at home. Until then I had not even heard his name, did not know that he existed. Yet on the day when I went out there to stay that summer, it was as though that casual pause at my door had left some seed, some minute virulence in this cellar earth of mine quick not for love perhaps (I did not love him;

how could I? I had never even heard his voice, had only Ellen's word for it that there was such a person) and quick not for the spying which you will doubtless call it, which during the past six months between that New Year's and that June gave substance to that shadow with a name emerging from Ellen's vain and garrulous folly, that shape without even a face yet because I had not even seen the photograph then, reflected in the secret and bemused gaze of a young girl: because I who had learned nothing of love, not even parents' love—that fond dear constant violation of privacy, that stultification of the burgeoning and incorrigible I which is the need and due of all mammalian meat, became not mistress, not beloved, but more than even love; I became all polymath love's androgynous advocate. ' There must have been some seed he left, to cause a child's vacant fairy-tale to come alive in that garden. Because I was not spying when I would follow her.

I was not spying, though you will say I was And even if it was spying, it was not jealousy, because I did not love him. (How could I have, when I had never seen him?) And even if I did, not as women love, as Judith loved him, or as we thought she did. If it was love (and I still say, How could it be?) it was the way that mothers love when, punishing the child she strikes not it but through it strikes the neighbor boy whom it has just whipped or been whipped by; caresses not the rewarded child but rather the nameless man or woman who have the palm-sweated penny. But not as women love. Because I asked nothing of him, you see. And more than that: I gave nothing, which is the sum of loving. Why, I didn't even miss him. I don't know even now if I was ever aware that I had seen nothing of his face but that photograph, that shadow, that picture in a young girl's bedroom: a picture casual and framed upon a littered dressing table yet bowered and dressed (or so I thought) with all the maiden and invisible lily roses, because even before I saw the photograph I could have recognized, nay, described, the very face. But I never saw it.

I do not even know of my own knowledge that Ellen ever saw it, that Judith ever loved it, that Henry slew it: so who will dispute me when I say, Why did I not invent, create it? —And I know this: if I were God I would invent out of this seething turmoil we call progress something (a

machine perhaps) which would adorn the barren mirror altars of every plain girl who breathes with such as this—which is so little since we want so little—this pictured face. It would not even need a skull behind it; almost anonymous, it would only need vague inference of some walking flesh and blood desired by someone else even if only in some shadow-realm of make-believe. —A picture seen by stealth, by creeping (my childhood taught me that instead of love and it stood me in good stead; in fact, if it had taught me love, love could not have stood me so) into the deserted midday room to look at it. Not to dream, since I dwelt in the dream, but to renew, rehearse, the part as the faulty though eager amateur might steal wingward in some interim of the visible scene to hear the prompter's momentary voice.

And if jealousy, not man's jealousy, the jealousy of the lover, not even the lover's self who spies from love, who spies to watch, taste, touch that maiden revery of solitude which is the first thinning of that veil we call virginity; not to spring out, force that shame which is such a part of love's declaring, but to gloat upon the rich instantaneous bosom already rosy with the flushy sleep though shame itself does not yet need to wake.

No, it was not that; I was not spying, who would walk those raked and sanded garden paths and think 'This print was his save for this obliterating rake, that even despite the rake it is still there and hers beside it in that slow and mutual rhythm wherein the heart, the mind, does not need to watch the docile (ay, the willing) feet'; would think 'What suspiration of the twinning souls have the murmurous myriad ears of this secluded vine or shrub listened to? what vow, what promise, what rapt bidding fire has the lilac rain of this wistaria, this heavy rose's dissolution, crowned?' But best of all, better far than this, the actual living and the dreamy flesh itself.

Oh no, I was not spying while I dreamed in the lurking harborage of my own shrub or vine as I believed she dreamed upon the nooky seat which held invisible imprint of his absent thighs just as the obliterating sand, the million finger-nerves of frond and leaf, the very sun and moony constellations which had looked down at him, the

circumambient air, held somewhere yet his foot, his passing shape, his face, his speaking voice, his name: Charles Bon, Charles Good, Charles Husband-soon-to-be. No, not spying, not even hiding, who was child enough not to need to hide, whose presence would have been no violation even though he sat with her, yet woman enough to have gone to her entitled to be received (perhaps with pleasure, gratitude) into that maiden shameless confidence where young girls talk of love.

Yes, child enough to go to her and say 'Let me sleep with you'; woman enough to say 'Let us lie in bed together while you tell me what love is,' yet who did not do it because I should have had to say 'Don't talk to me of love but let me tell you, who know already more of love than you will ever know or need.'" Then my father returned and came for me and took me home and I became again that nondescript too long a child yet too short a woman, in the fitless garments which my aunt had left behind, keeping a fitless house, who was not spying, hiding, but waiting, watching, for no reward, no thanks, who did not love him in the sense we mean it because there is no love of that sort without hope; who (if it were love) loved with that sort beyond the compass of glib books: that love which gives up what it never had that penny's modicum which is the donor's all yet whose infinitesimal weight adds nothing to the substance of the loved—and yet I gave it.

And not to him, to her; it was as though I said to her, 'Here, take this too. You cannot love him as he should be loved, and though he will no more feel this giving's weight than he would ever know its lack, yet there may come some moment in your married lives when he will find this atom's particle as you might find a cramped small pallid hidden shoot in a familiar flower bed and pause and say, "where did this come from?"; you need only answer, "I don't know." ' And then I went back home and stayed five years, heard an echoed shot, ran up a nightmare flight of stairs, and found why, a woman standing calmly in a gingham dress before a closed door which she would not allow me to enter—a woman more strange to me than to any grief for being so less its partner—a woman saying 'Yes, Rosa?' calmly into the midstride of my running which (I know it now) had begun five years ago, since he had been in my house too, and had left no more trace than he had left in

Ellen's, where he had been but a shape, a shadow: not of a man, a being, but of some esoteric piece of furniture—vase or chair or desk—which Ellen wanted, as though his very impression (or lack of it) on Coldfield or Sutpen walls held portentous prophecy of what was to be. Yes, running out of that first year (that year before the war) during which Ellen talked to me of trousseau (and it my trousseau), of all the dreamy panoply of surrender which was my surrender, who had so little to surrender that it was all I had because there is that might-have-been which is the single rock we cling to above the maelstrom of unbearable reality—The four years while I believed she waited as I waited, while the stable world we had been taught to know dissolved in fire and smoke until peace and security were gone, and pride and hope, and there was left only maimed honor's veterans, and love.

Yes, there should, there must, be love and faith: these left with us by fathers, husbands, sweethearts, brothers, who carried the pride and the hope of peace in honor's vanguard as they did the flags; there must be these, else what do men fight for? what else worth dying for? Yes, dying not for honor's empty sake, nor pride nor even peace, but for that love and faith they left behind. Because he was to die; I know that, knew that, as both pride and peace were: else how to prove love's immortality? But not love, not faith itself, themselves. Love without hope perhaps, faith with little to be proud with: but love and faith at least above the murdering and the folly, to salvage at least from the humbled indicted dust something anyway of the old lost enchantment of the heart. —Yes, found her standing before that closed door which I was not to enter (and which she herself did not enter again to my knowledge until Jones and the other 'man carried the coffin up the stairs) with the photograph hanging at her side and her face absolutely calm, looking at me for a moment and just raising her voice enough to be heard in the hall below: 'Clytie. Miss Rosa will be here for dinner; you had better get out some more meal': then 'Shall we go down stairs?

I will have to speak to Mr Jones about some planks and nails." That was all. Or rather, not all, since there is no all, no finish; it's not the blow we suffer from but the tedious repercussive anticlimax of it, the rubbishy

aftermath to clear away from off the very threshold of despair. You see, I never saw him. I never even saw him dead. I heard an echo, but not the shot; I saw a closed door but did not enter it."

I remember how that afternoon when we carried the coffin from the house (Jones and another white man which he produced, exhumed, from somewhere made it of boards torn from the carriage house; I remember how while we ate the food which Judith yes, Judith, the same face calm, cold and tranquil above the stove had cooked, ate it in the very room which he lay over, we could hear them hammering and sawing in the backyard, and how I saw Judith once, in a faded gingham sunbonnet to match the dress, giving them directions about making it; I remember how during all that slow and sunny afternoon they hammered and sawed right under the back parlor window—the slow, maddening rasp, rasp, rasp, of the saw, the flat deliberate hammer blows that seemed as though each would be the last but was not, repeated and resumed just when the dulled attenuation of the wearied nerves, stretched beyond all resiliency, relaxed to silence and then had to scream again: until at last I went out there (and saw Judith in the barnlot in a cloud of chickens, her apron cradled about the gathered eggs) and asked them why? why there? why must it be just there? and they both stopped long and more than long enough for Jones to turn and spit again and say, ' Because hit wouldn't be so fur to tote the box': and how before my very back was turned he—one of them—added further, out of some amazed and fumbling ratiocination of inertia, how 'Hit would be simpler yit to fetch him down and nail the planks around him, only maybe Missus Judy wouldn't like hit.")—I remember how as we carried him down the stairs and out to the waiting wagon I tried to take the full weight of the coffin to prove to myself that he was really in it. And I could not tell. I was one of his pallbearers, yet I could not, would not believe something which I knew could not but be so. Because I never saw him.

You see? There are some things which happen to us which the intelligence and the senses refuse just as the stomach sometimes refuses what the palate has accepted but which digestion cannot compass—occurrences which stop us dead as though by some

impalpable intervention, like a sheet of glass through which we watch all subsequent events transpire as though in a soundless vacuum, and fade, vanish; are gone, leaving us immobile, impotent, helpless; fixed, until we can die. That was I. I was there; something of me walked in measured cadence with the measured tread of Jones and his companion, and Theophilus McCaslin who had heard the news somehow back in town, and Clytie as we bore the awkward and unmanageable box past the stair's close turning while Judith, following, steadied it from behind, and so down and out to the wagon; something of me helped to raise that which it could not have raised alone yet which it still could not believe, into the waiting wagon; something of me stood beside the gashy earth in the cedars' somber gloom and heard the clumsy knell of clods upon the wood and answered No when Judith at the grave's wounded end said, ' He was a Catholic.

Do any of you all know how Catholics—' and Theophilus McCaslin said, 'Catholic be damned,' he was a soldier. And I can pray for any Confedrit soldier' and then cried in his old man's shrill harsh loud cacophonous voice: 'Yaaaay, Forrest! Yaaaay, John Sartoris! Yaaaaaay!" And something walked with Judith and Clytie back across that sunset field and answered in some curious serene suspension to the serene quiet voice which talked of plowing corn and cutting winter wood, and in the lamplit kitchen helped this time to cook the meal and helped to eat it too within the room beyond whose ceiling he no longer lay, and went to bed (yes, took a candle from that firm untrembling hand and thought 'She did not even weep' and then in a lamp-gloomed mirror saw my own face and thought 'Nor did you either') within that house where he had sojourned for another brief (and this time final) space and left no trace of him, not even tears. Yes. One day he was not. Then he was. Then he was not. It was too short, too fast, too quick; six hours of a summer afternoon saw it all—a space too short to leave even the imprint of a body on a mattress, and blood can come from anywhere—if there was blood, since I never saw him.

For all I was allowed to know, we had no corpse; we even had no murderer (we did not even speak of Henry that day, not one of us; I did not say—the aunt, the spinster—' Did he look well or ill?" I did not say

one of the thousand trivial things with which the indomitable woman-blood ignores the man's world in which the blood kinsman shows the courage or cowardice, the folly or lust or fear, for which his fellows praise or crucify him) who came and crashed a door and cried his crime and vanished, who for the fact that he was still alive was just that much more shadowy than the abstraction which we had nailed into a box—a shot heard only by its echo, a strange gaunt half-wild horse, bridled and with empty saddle, the saddle bags containing a pistol, a worn clean shirt, a lump of iron-like bread, captured by a man four miles away and two days later while trying to force the crib door in his stable. Yes, more than that: he was absent, and he was; he returned, and he was not; three women put something into the earth and covered it, and he had never been.

Now you will ask me why I stayed there. I could say, I do not know, could give ten thousand paltry reasons, all untrue, and be believed—that I stayed for food, who could have combed ditchbanks and weed-beds, made and worked a garden as well at my own home in town as here, not to speak of neighbors, friends whose alms I might have accepted, since necessity has a way of obliterating from our conduct various delicate scruples regarding honor and pride; that I stayed for shelter, who had a roof of my own in fee simple now indeed; or that I stayed for company, who at home could have had the company of neighbors who were at least of my own kind, who had known me all my life and even longer in the sense that they thought not only as I thought but as my forbears thought, while here I had for company one woman whom, for all she was blood kin to me, I did not understand and, if what my observation warranted me to believe was true, I did not wish to understand, and another who was so foreign to me and to all that I was that we might have been not only of different races (which we were), not only of different sexes (which we were not), but of different species, speaking no language which the other understood, the very simple words with which we were forced to adjust our days to one another being even less inferential of thought or intention than the sounds which a beast and a bird might make to each other. But I don't say any of these. I stayed there and waited for Thomas Sutpen to come

home. Yes. You will say (or believe) that I waited even then to become engaged to him; if I said I did not, you would believe I lied.

But I do say I did not. I waited for him exactly as Judith and Clytie waited for him: because now he was all we had, all that gave us any reason for continuing to exist, to eat food and sleep and wake and rise again: knowing that he would need us, knowing as we did (who knew him) that he would begin at once to salvage what was left of Sutpen's Hundred and restore it. Not that we would or did need him. (I had never for one instant thought of marriage, never for one instant imagined that he would look at me, see me, since he never had. You may believe me, because I shall make no bones to say so when the moment comes to tell you when I did think of it.)

No. It did not even require the first day of the life we were to lead together to show us that we did not need him had not the need for any man so long as Wash Jones lived or stayed there—I who had kept my father's house and he alive for almost four years, Judith who had done the same out here, and Clytie who could cut a cord of wood or run a furrow better (or at least quicker) than Jones himself. —And this the sad fact, one of the saddest: that weary tedium which the heart and spirit feel when they no longer need that to whose need they (the spirit and the heart) are necessary.

No. We did not need him, not even vicariously, who could not even join him in his furious (that almost mad intention which he brought home with him, seemed to project, radiate ahead of him before he even dismounted) desire to restore the place to what it had been that he had sacrificed pity and gentleness and love and all the soft Virtues for—if he had ever had them to sacrifice, felt their lack, desired them of others. Not even that. Neither Judith nor I wanted that. Perhaps it was because we did not believe it could be done, but I think it was more than that: that we now existed in an apathy which was almost peace, like that of the blind un sentient earth itself which dreams after no flower's stalk nor bud, envies not the airy musical solitude of the springing leaves it nourishes.

So we waited for him. We led the busy eventless lives of three nuns in a barren and poverty-stricken convent: the walls we had were safe, impervious enough, even if it did not matter to the walls whether we ate or not. And amicably, not as two white women and a Negress, not as three Negroes or three white, not even as three women, but merely as three creatures who still possessed the need to eat but took no pleasure in it, the need to sleep but from no joy in weariness or regeneration, and in whom sex was some forgotten atrophy like the rudimentary gills we call the tonsils or the still opposable thumbs for old climbing. We kept the house, what part of it we lived in, used; we kept the room which Thomas Sutpen would return to—not that one which he left, a husband, but the one to which he should return a sonless widower, barren of that posterity which he doubtless must have wanted who had gone to the trouble and expense of getting children and housing them among imported furniture beneath crystal chandeliers, just as we kept Henry's room, as Judith and Clytie kept it that is, as if he had not run up the stairs that summer afternoon and then ran down again; we grew and tended and harvested with our own hands the food we ate, made and worked that garden just as we cooked and ate the food which came out of it: with no distinction among the three of us of age or color but just as to who could build this fire or stir this pot or weed this bed or carry this apron full of corn to the mill for meal with least cost to the general good in time or expense of other duties.

It was as though we were one being, interchangeable and indiscriminate, which kept that garden growing, spun thread and wove the cloth we wore, hunted and found and rendered the meager ditch-side herbs to protect and guarantee what spartan compromise we dared or had the time to make with illness, harried and nagged that Jones into working the corn and cutting the wood which was to be our winter's warmth and sustenance the three of us, three women." I drafted by circumstance at too soon an age into a pinchpenny housewifery which might have existed just as well upon a lighthouse rock, which had not even taught me how to cultivate a bed of flowers, let alone a kitchen garden, which had taught me to look upon fuel and meat as something appearing by its own volition in a woodbox or on a

pantry shelf; Judith created by circumstance (circumstance? a hundred years of careful nurturing, perhaps not by blood, not even Coldfield blood, but certainly by the tradition in which Thomas Sutpen's ruthless will had carved a niche) to pass through the soft insulated and unscathed cocoon stages: bud, served prolific queen, then potent and soft-handed matriarch of old age's serene and welllived content— Judith handicapped by what in me was a few years' ignorance but which in her was ten generations of iron prohibition, who had not learned that first principle of penury which is to scrimp and save for the sake of scrimping and saving, who (and abetted by Clytie) would cook twice what we could eat and three times what we could afford and give it to anyone, any stranger in a land already beginning to fill with straggling soldiers who stopped and asked for it; and (but not least) Clytie.

Clytie, not inept, anything but inept: perverse inscrutable and paradox: free, yet incapable of freedom who had never once called herself a slave, holding fidelity to none like the indolent and solitary wolf or bear (yes, wild: half untamed black, half Sutpen blood: and if 'untamed' be synonymous with 'wild', then 'Sutpen' is the silent unsleeping viciousness of the tamer's lash) whose false seeming holds it docile to fear's hand but which is not, which if this be fidelity, fidelity only to the prime fixed principle of its own savageness; —Clytie who in the very pigmentation of her flesh represented that debacle which had brought Judith and me to what we were and which had made of her (Clytie) that which she declined to be just as she had declined to be that from which its purpose had been to emancipate her, as though presiding aloof upon the new, she deliberately remained to represent to us the threatful portent of the old.

We were three strangers. I do not know what Clytie thought, what life she led which the food we raised and cooked in unison, the cloth we spun and wove together, nourished and sheltered. But I expected that because she and I were open, ay honorable, enemies. But I did not even know what Judith thought and felt. We slept in the same room, the three of us (this for more than to conserve the firewood which we had to carry in ourselves. We did it for safety. It was winter soon and

already soldiers were beginning to come back the stragglers, not all of them tramps, ruffians, but men who had risked and lost everything, suffered beyond endurance and had returned now to a ruined land, not the same men who had marched away, but transformed—and this the worst, the ultimate degradation to which war brings the spirit, the soul into the likeness of that man who abuses from very despair and pity the beloved wife or mistress who in his absence has been raped. We were afraid. We fed them; we gave them what and all we had and we would have assumed their wounds and left them whole again if we could.

But we were afraid of them.), we waked and fulfilled the endless tedious obligations which the sheer holding to life and breath entailed; we would sit before the fire after supper, the three of us in that state where the very bones and muscles are too tired to rest, when the attenuated and invincible spirit has changed and shaped even hopelessness into the easy obliviousness of a worn garment, and talk, talk of a hundred things—the weary recurrent trivia of our daily lives, of a thousand things but not of one. We talked of him, Thomas Sutpen, of the end of the war (we could all see it now) and when he would return, of what he would do: how begin the Herculean task which we knew he would set himself, into which (oh yes, we knew this too) he would undoubtedly sweep us with the old ruthlessness whether we would or no; we talked of Henry, quietly—that normal useless impotent woman-worrying about the absent male—as to how he fared, if he were cold or hungry or not, just as we talked of his father, as if both they and we still lived in that time which that shot, those running mad feet, had put a period to and then obliterated, as though that afternoon had never been. But not once did we mention Charles Bon.

There were two afternoons in the late fall when Judith was absent, returning at supper time serene and calm. I did not ask and I did not follow her, yet I knew and I knew that Clytie knew that she had gone to clear that grave of dead leaves and the sere brown refuse of the cedars that would vanishing slowly back into the earth, beneath which we had buried nothing. No, there had been no shot. That sound was merely the sharp and final clap-to of a door between us and all that was, all that might have been—a retroactive severance of the stream of event, a

forever crystallized instant in imponderable time accomplished by three weak yet indomitable women which, preceding the accomplished fact which we declined, refused, robbed the brother of the prey, left the murderer of a victim for his very bullet.

That was how we lived for seven months. And then one afternoon in January Thomas Sutpen came home; someone looked up where we were preparing the garden for another year's food and saw him riding up the drive. And then one evening I became engaged to marry him. It took me just three months. (Do you mind that I don't say he, but I?) Yes, I, just three months, who for twenty years had looked on him (when I did—had to too—look) as an ogre, some beast out of a tale to frighten children with; who had seen his own get upon my dead sister's body already begin to destroy one another, yet who must come to him like a whistled dog at that first opportunity, that noon when he who had been seeing me for twenty years should first raise his head and pause and look at me.

Oh, I hold no brief for myself who could (and would; ay, doubtless have already) give you a thousand specious reasons good enough for women, ranging from woman's natural inconsistency to the desire (or even hope) for possible wealth, position, or even the fear of dying manless which (so they will doubtless tell you) old maids always have, or for revenge. No. I hold no brief for me. I could have gone home and I did not. Perhaps I should have gone home. But I did not.

As Judith and Clytie did, I stood there before the rotting portico and watched him ride up on that gaunt and jaded horse on which he did not seem to sit but rather seemed to project himself ahead like a mirage, in some fierce dynamic rigidity of impatience which the gaunt horse, the saddle, the boots, the leaf-colored and threadbare coat with its tarnished and flapping braid containing the sentient though nerveless shell, which seemed to precede him as he dismounted and out of which he said 'Well, daughter' and stooped and touched his beard to Judith's forehead, who had not, did not, move, who stood rigid and still and immobile of face, and within which they spoke four sentences, four sentences of simple direct words behind beneath above which I felt

that same rapport of communal blood which I had sensed that day while Clytie held me from the stairs: 'Henry's not—?' 'No. He's not here.'—Ah. And—?' ' Yes.

Henry killed him." And then burst into tears. Yes, burst, who had not wept yet, who had brought down the stairs that afternoon and worn ever since that cold, calm face which had stopped me in midrunning at that closed door; yes, burst, as if that entire accumulation of seven months were erupting spontaneously from every pore in one incredible evacuation (she not moving, not moving a muscle) and then vanishing, disappearing as instantaneously as if the very fierce and arid aura which he had enclosed her in were drying the tears faster than they emerged: and still standing with his hands on her shoulders and looked at Clytie and said, 'Ah, Clytie' and then at me—the same face which he'd last seen, only a little thinner, the same ruthless eyes, the hair grizzled a little now, and no recognition in the face at all until Judith said, ' It's Rosa. Aunt Rosa. She lives here now. ' That was all. He rode up the drive and into our lives again and left no ripple save those instantaneous and incredible tears. Because he himself was not there, not in the house where we spent our days, had not stopped there.

The shell of him was there, using the room which we had kept for him and eating the food which we produced and prepared as if it could neither feel the softness of the bed nor make distinction between the viands either as to quality or taste.

Yes. He wasn't there. Something ate with us; we talked to it and it answered questions; it sat with us before the fire at night and, rousing without any roaming from some profound and bemused complete inertia, talked, not to us, the six ears, the three minds capable of listening, but to the air, the waiting grim decaying presence, spirit, of the house itself, talking that which sounded like the bombast of a madman who creates within his very coffin walls his fabulous immeasurable Camelots and Carcassonnes. Not absent from the place, the arbitrary square of earth which he had named Sutpen's Hundred: not that at all.

He was absent only from the room, and that because he had to be elsewhere, a part of him encompassing each ruined field and fallen fence and crumbling wall of cabin or cotton house or crib; himself diffused and in solution held by that electric furious immobile urgency and awareness of short time and the need for haste as if he had just drawn breath and looked about and realized that he was old (he was fifty-nine) and was concerned (not afraid: concerned) not that old age might have left him impotent to do what he intended to do, but that he might not have time to do it in before he would have to die. We were right about what he would intend to do: that he would not even pause for breath before undertaking to restore his house and plantation as near as possible to what it had been.

We did not know how he would go about it, nor I believe did he. He could not have known, who came home with nothing, to nothing, to four years less than nothing. But it did not stop him, intimidate him. His was that cold alert fury of the gambler who knows that he may lose anyway but that with a second's flagging of the fierce constant will he is sure to: and who keeps suspense from ever quite crystallizing by sheer fierce manipulation of the cards or dice until the ducts and glands of luck begin to flow again.

He did not pause, did not take that day or two to let the bones and flesh of fifty-nine recuperate—the day or two in which he might have talked, not about us and what we had been doing, but about himself, the past four years (for all he ever told us, there might not have been any war at all, or it on another planet and no stake of his risked on it, no flesh and blood of his to suffer by it) that natural period during which bitter though unmaimed defeat might have exhausted itself to something like peace, like quiet in the raging and incredulous recounting (which enables man to bear with living) of that feather's balance between victory and disaster which makes that defeat unbearable which, turning against him, yet declined to slay him who, still alive, yet cannot bear to live with it.

We hardly ever saw him. He would be gone from dawn until dark, he and Jones and another man or two that he had got from somewhere

and paid with something, perhaps the same coin in which he had paid that foreign architect—cajolery, promise, threat and at last force. That was the winter when we began to learn what carpetbagger meant and people—women—locked doors and windows at night and began to frighten each other with tales of Negro uprisings, when the ruined, the four years' fallow and neglected land lay more idle yet while men with pistols in their pockets gathered daily at secret meeting places in the towns.

He did not make one of these; I remember how one night a deputation called, rode out through the mud of early March and put him to the point of definite yes or no, with them or against them, friend or enemy: and he refused, declined, offered them (with no change of gaunt ruthless face nor level voice) defiance if it was defiance they wanted, telling them that if every man in the South would do as he himself was doing, would see to the restoration of his own land the general land and South would save itself: and ushered them from the room and from the house and stood plain in the doorway holding the lamp above his head while their spokesman delivered his ultimatum: 'There be war, Sutpen,' and answered, 'I am used to it.'

Oh yes, I watched him, watched his old man's solitary fury fighting now not with the stubborn yet slowly tractable earth as it had done before, but now against the ponderable weight of the changed new time itself as though he were trying to dam a river with his bare hands and a shingle: and this for the same spurious delusion of reward which had failed (failed? betrayed: and would this time destroy) him once; I see the analogy myself now: the accelerating circle's fatal curving course of his ruthless pride, his lust for vain magnificence, though I did not then.

And how could I? turned twenty true enough yet still a child, still living in that womb-like corridor where the world came not even as living echo but as dead incomprehensible shadow, where with the quiet and unalarmed amazement of a child I watched the miragical antics of men and women—my father, my sister, Thomas Sutpen, Judith, Henry, Charles Bon—called honor, principle, marriage, love, bereavement, death; the child who watching him was not a child but one of that

triumvirate mother-woman which we three, Judith, Clytie, and I made, which fed and clothed and warmed the static shell and so gave vent and scope to the fierce vain illusion and so said, 'at last my life is worth something, even though it only shields and guards the antic fury of an insane child.' And then one afternoon (I was in the garden with a hoe, where the path came up from the stable-lot) I looked up and saw him looking at me.

He had seen me for twenty years, but now he was looking at me; he stood there in the path looking at me, in the middle of the afternoon.

That was it: that it should have been in the middle of the afternoon, when he should not have been anywhere near the house at all but miles away and invisible somewhere among his hundred square miles which they had not troubled to begin to take away from him yet, perhaps not even at this point or at that point but diffused (not attenuated to thinness but enlarged, magnified, encompassing as though in a prolonged and unbroken instant of tremendous effort embracing and holding intact that ten-mile square while he faced from the brink of disaster, invincible and unafraid, what he must have known would be the final defeat) but instead of that standing there in the path looking at me with something curious and strange in his face as if the barnlot, the path at the instant when he came in sight of me had been a swamp out of which he' had emerged without having been forewarned that he was about to enter light, and then went on—the face, the same face: it was not love; I do not say that, not gentleness or pity: just a sudden over-burst of light, illumination, who had been told that his son had done murder and vanished and said 'Ah. —well, Clytie.'" He went on to the house. But it was not love: I do not claim that; I hold no brief for myself, I do not excuse it. I could have said that he had needed, used me; why should I rebel now, because he would use me more? but I did not say it; I could say this time, I do not know, and I would tell the truth.

Because I do not know. He was gone; I did not even know that either since there is a metabolism of the spirit as well as of the entrails, in which the stored accumulations of long time burn, generate, create,

and break some maidenhead of the ravening meat; ay in a second's time—yes, lost all the shibboleth erupting of cannot, will not, never will in one red instant's fierce obliteration.

This was my instant, who could have fled then and did not, who found that he had gone on and did not remember when he had walked away, who found my okra bed finished without remembering the completing of it, who sat at the supper table that night with the familiar dream-cloudy shell which we had grown used to (he did not look at me again during the meal; I might have said then, To what deluded sewer-gush of dreaming does the incorrigible flesh betray us: but I did not) and then before the fire in Judith's bedroom sat as we always did until he came in the door and looked at us and said, 'Judith, you and Clytie—' and ceased, still entering, then said, 'No, never mind. Rosa will not mind if you both hear it too, since we are short for time and busy with what we have of it' and came and stopped and put his hand on my head and (I do not know what he looked at while he spoke, save that by the sound of his voice it was not at us nor at anything in that room) said, 'You may think I made your sister Ellen no very good husband. You probably do think so.

But even if you will not discount the fact that I am older now, I believe I can promise that I shall do no worse at least for you." That was my courtship. That minute's exchanged look in a kitchen garden, that hand upon my head in his daughter's bedroom; a ukase, a decree, a serene and florid boast like a sentence (ay, and delivered in the same attitude) not to be spoken and heard but to be read carved in the bland stone which pediments a forgotten and nameless effigy. I do not excuse it. I claim no brief, no pity, who did not answer 'I will' not because I was not asked, because there was no place, no niche, no interval for reply. Because I could have made one.

I could have forced that niche myself if I had willed to—a niche not shaped to fit mild 'Yes' but some blind desperate)male weapon's frenzied slash whose very gaping wound had cried 'No! No!' and 'Help!' and 'Save me!' No, no brief, no pity, who did not even move, who sat beneath that hard oblivious childhood ogre's hand and heard

him speak to Judith now, heard Judith's feet, saw Judith's hand, not Judith—that palm in which I read as from a printed chronicle the orphaning, the hardship, the bereave of love; the four hard barren years of scoriating loom, of axe and hoe and all the other tools decreed for men to use: and upon it lying the ring which he gave Ellen in the church almost thirty years ago. Yes, analogy and paradox and madness too.

I sat there and felt, not watched, him slip the ring onto my finger in my turn (he was sitting now also, in the chair which we called Clytie's while she stood just beyond the firelight's range beside the chimney) and listened to his voice as Ellen must have listened in her own spirit's April thirty years ago: he talking not about me or love or marriage, not even about himself and to no sane mortal listening nor out of any sanity, but to the very dark forces of fate which he had evoked and dared, out of that wild braggart dream where an intact Sutpen's Hundred which no more had actual being now (and would never have again) than it had when Ellen first heard it, as though in the restoration of that ring to a living finger he had turned all time back twenty years and stopped it, froze it. Yes.

I sat there and listened to his voice and told myself, ' Why, he is mad. He will decree this marriage for tonight and perform his own ceremony, himself both groom and minister; pronounce his own wild benediction on it with the very bedward candle in his hand: and I mad too, for I will acquiesce, succumb; abet him and plunge down.' No, I hold no brief, ask no pity. If I was saved that night (and I was saved; mine was to be some later, colder sacrifice when we—I—should be free of all excuse of the surprised importunate traitorous flesh) it was no fault, no doing of my own but rather because, once he had restored the ring, he ceased to look at me save as he had looked for the twenty years before that afternoon, as if he had reached for the moment some interval of sanity such as the mad know, just as the sane have intervals of madness to keep them aware that they are sane.

It was more than that even. For three months now he had seen me daily though he had not looked at me since I merely made one of that

triumvirate who received his gruff unspoken man's gratitude for the spartan ease we supplied, not to his comfort perhaps but at least to the mad dream he lived in. But for the next two months he did not even see me. Perhaps the reason was the obvious one: he was too busy; that having accomplished his engagement (granted that was what he wanted) he did not need to see me. Certainly he did not: there was not even any date set for the wedding. It was almost as though that very afternoon did not exist, had never happened. I might not have even been there in the house.

Worse: I could have gone, returned home, and he would not have missed me. I was (whatever it was he wanted of me—not my being, my presence: just my existence, whatever it was that Rosa Coldfield or any young female no blood kin to him represented in whatever it was he wanted—because I will do him this credit: he had never once thought about what he asked me to do until the moment he asked it because I know that he would not have waited two months or even two days to ask it)—my presence was to him only the absence of black morass and snarled vine and creeper to that man who had struggled through a swamp with nothing to guide or drive him—no hope, no light: only some incorrigibility of undefeat—and blundered at last and without warning onto dry solid ground and sun and air—if there could have been such thing as sun to him, if anyone or anything could have competed with the white glare of his madness.

Yes, mad, yet not so mad. Because there is a practicality to viciousness: the thief, the liar, the murderer even, has faster rules than virtue ever has; why not madness to? If he was mad, it was only his compelling dream which was insane and not his methods: it was no madman who bargained and cajoled hard manual labor out of men like Jones; it was no madman who kept clear of the sheets and hoods and night-galloping horses with which men who were once his acquaintances even if not his friends discharged the canker suppuration of defeat; it was no madman's plan or tactics which gained him at the lowest possible price the sole woman available to wive him, and by the one device which could have gained his point—not madman, no: since surely there is something in madness, even the demoniac, which Satan flees, aghast at

his own handiwork, and which God looks on in pity—some spark, some crumb to leaven and redeem that articulated flesh, that speech sight hearing taste and being which we call human man.

But no matter. I will tell you what he did and let you be the judge. (Or try to tell you, because there are some things for which three words are three too many, and three thousand words that many words too less, and this is one of them. It can be told; I could take that many sentences, repeat the bold blank naked and outrageous words just as he spoke them, and bequeath you only that sane aghast and outraged unbelief I knew when I comprehended what he meant; or take three thousand sentences and leave you only that Why? Why? and Why? that I have asked and listened to for almost fifty years.) But I will let you be the judge and let you tell me if I was not right.

You see, I was that sun, or thought I was who did believe there was that spark, that crumb in madness which is divine, though madness knows no word itself for terror or for pity. There was an ogre of my childhood which before my birth removed my only sister to its grim ogre-bourne and produced two half phantom children whom I was not encouraged, and did not desire, to associate with as if my lateborn solitude had taught me presentiment of that fateful intertwining, warned me of that fatal snarly climax before I knew the name for murder—and I forgave it; there was a shape which rode away beneath a flag and (demon or no) courageously suffered—and I did more than just forgive: I slew it, because the body, the blood, the memory which that ogre had dwelt in returned five years later and held out its hand and said 'Come' as you might say it to a dog, and I came.

Yes, the body, the face, with the right name and memory, even the correct remembering of what and whom (except myself: and was that not but further proof?) it had left behind and returned to: but not the ogre; villain true enough, but a mortal fallible one less to invoke fear than pity: but no ogre; mad true enough, but I told myself, why should not madness be its own victim also? or, Why may it be not even madness but solitary despair in titan conflict with the lonely and foredoomed and indomitable iron spirit: but no ogre, because it was

dead, vanished, consumed somewhere in flame and sulphur-reek perhaps among the lonely craggy peaks of my childhood's solitary remembering—or forgetting; I was that sun, who believed that he (after that evening in Judith's room) was not oblivious of me but only unconscious and receptive like the swamp-freed pilgrim feeling earth and tasting sun and light again and aware of neither but only of darkness' and morass' lack—who did believe there was that magic in unkin blood which we call by the pallid name of love that would be, might be sun for him (though I the youngest, weakest) where Judith and Clytie both would cast no shadow; yes, I the youngest there yet potently without measured and measurable age since I alone of them could say, 'O furious mad old man, I hold no substance that will fit your dream but I can give you airy space and scope for your delirium.'

And then one afternoon—oh there was a fate in it: afternoon and afternoon and afternoon: do you see? the death of hope and love, the death of pride and principle, and then the death of everything save the old outraged and aghast unbelieving which has lasted for forty-three years—he returned to the house and called me, shouting from the back gallery until I came down; oh I told you he had not thought of it until that moment, that prolonged moment which contained the distance between the house and wherever it was he had been standing when he thought of it: and this too coincident: it was the very day on which he knew definitely and at last exactly how much of his hundred square miles he would be able to save and keep and call his own on the day when he would have to die, that no matter what happened to him now, he would at least retain the shell of Sutpen's Hundred even though a better name for it would now be Sutpen's One—called, shouted for me until I came down. He had not even waited to tether his horse; he stood with the reins over his arm (and no hand on my head now) and spoke the bald outrageous words exactly as if he were consulting with Jones or with some other man about a bitch dog or a cow or mare.

They will have told you how I came back home. Oh yes, I know: 'Rosie Coldfield, lose him, weep him; caught a man but couldn't keep him' — Oh yes, I know (and kind too; they would be kind): Rosa Coldfield, warped bitter orphaned country stick called Rosa Coldfield, safely

engaged at last and so Off the town, the country; they will have told you: How I went out there to live for the rest of my life, seeing in my nephew's murdering an act of God enabling me ostensibly to obey my dying sister's request that I save at least one of the two children which she had doomed by conceiving them but actually to be in the house when he returned who, being a demon, would therefore be impervious to shot and shell and so would return; I waiting for him because I was young still (who had buried no hopes to bugles, beneath a flag) and ripe for marrying in this time and place where most of the young men were dead and all the living ones either old or already married or tired, too tired for love; he my best, my only chance in this: an environment where at best and even lacking war my chances would have been slender enough since I was not only a Southern gentlewoman but the very modest character of whose background and circumstances must needs be their own affirmation since had I been the daughter of a wealthy planter I could have married almost anyone but being the daughter merely of a small store-keeper I could even afford to accept flowers from almost no one and so would have been doomed to marry at last some casual apprentice-clerk in my father's business—Yes, they will have told you:

who was young and had buried hopes only during that night which was four years long when beside a shuttered and unsleeping candle she embalmed the War and its heritage of suffering and injustice and sorrow on the backsides of the pages within an old account book, embalming blotting from the breathable air the poisonous secret effluvium of lusting and hating and killing—they will have told you: daughter of an embusque who had to turn to a demon, a villain: and therefore she had been right in hating her father since if he had not died in that attic she would not have had to go out there to find food and protection and shelter and if she had not had to depend on his food and clothing (even if she did help to grow and weave it) to keep her alive and warm, until simple justice demanded that she make what return for it he might require of her commensurate with honor, she would not have become engaged to him and if she had not become engaged to him she would not have had to lie at night asking herself why and Why and Why as she has done for forty-three years: as if she

had been instinctively right even as a child in hating her father and so these forty-three years of impotent and unbearable outrage were the revenge on her of some sophisticated and ironic sterile nature for having hated that which gave her life.

—Yes, Rosa Coldfield engaged at last who, lacking the fact that her sister had bequeathed her at least something of shelter and kin, might have become a charge upon the town: and now Rosie Coldfield, lose him, weep him; found a man but failed to keep him; Rosa Coldfield who would be right, only being right is not enough for women, who had rather be wrong than just that; who want the man who was wrong to admit it. And that's what she cant forgive him for: not for the insult, not even for having jilted him: but for being dead.

Oh yes, I know, I know. How two months later they learned that she had packed up her belongings (that is, put on the shawl and hat again) and come back to town, to live alone in the house where her parents were dead and gone and where Judith would come now and then and bring her some of what food they had out at Sutpen's Hundred and which only dire necessity, the brute inexplicable flesh's stubborn will to live, brought her (Miss Coldfield) to accept. And it dire indeed: because now the town—farmers passing, Negro servants going to work in white kitchens—would see her before sun-up gathering greens along garden fences, pulling them through the fence since she had no garden of her own, no seed to plant one with, no tools to work it with herself, even if she had known completely how, who had had only the freshman year at gardening and doubtless would not have worked it if she had known; reaching through the garden fence and gathering vegetables though she would have been welcome to enter the garden and get them, and they would have even done the gathering and sent them to her, since there were more people than Judge Benbow who would leave baskets of provisions on her front porch at night. But she would not permit them and would not even use a stick to reach through the fence and draw the vegetables to where she could grasp them, the reach of her unaided arm being the limit of brigandage which she never passed.

It was not to keep from being seen stealing that sent her forth before the town was awake, because if she had had a nigger she would have sent him forth in broad daylight to forage, where, she would not have cared, exactly as the cavalry heroes whom she wrote verse about would have sent their men. —Yes, Rosie Coldfield, lose him, weep him; caught a beau but couldn't keep him; (oh yes, they will tell you) found a beau and was insulted, something heard and not forgiven, not so much for the saying of it but for having thought it about her so that when she heard it she realized like thunderclap that it must have been in his mind for a day, a week, even a month maybe, he looking at her daily with that in his mind and she not even knowing it. But I forgave him.

They will tell you different, but I did. Why shouldn't I? I had nothing to forgive; I had not lost him because I never owned him: a certain segment of rotten mud walked into my life, spoke that to me which I had never heard before and never shall again, and then walked out; that was all. I never owned him; certainly not in that sewer sense which you would mean by that and maybe think (but you are wrong) I mean. That did not matter. That was not even the nub of the insult. I mean that he was not owned by anyone or anything in this world, had never been, would never be, not even by Ellen, not even by Jones' granddaughter. Because he was not articulated in this world.

He was a walking shadow. He was the lightblinded batlike image of his own torment cast by the fierce demoniac lantern up from beneath the earth's crust and hence in retrograde, reverse; from abysmal and chaotic dark to eternal and abysmal dark completing his descending (do you mark the gradation?) ellipsis, clinging, trying to cling with vain unsubstantial hands to what he hoped would hold him, save him, arrest him—Ellen (do you mark them?), myself, then last of all that fatherless daughter of Wash Jones' only child who, so I heard once, died in a Memphis brothel—to find severence (even if not rest and peace) at last in the stroke of a rusty scythe. I was told, informed of that too, though not by Jones this time but by someone else kind enough to turn aside and tell me he was dead. 'Dead?' I cried. 'Dead? You? You lie; you're not dead; heaven cannot, and hell dare not, have you!'

But Quentin was not listening, because there was also something which he too could not pass—that door, the running feet on the stairs beyond it almost a continuation of the faint shot, the two women, the Negress and the white girl in her underthings (made of flour sacking when there had been flour, of window curtains when not) pausing, looking at the door, the yellowed creamy mass of old intricate satin and lace spread carefully on the bed and then caught swiftly up by the white girl and held before her as the door crashed in and the brother stood there, hatless, with his shaggy bayonet-trimmed hair, his gaunt worn unshaven face, his patched and faded gray tunic, the pistol still hanging against his flank: the two of them, brother and sister, curiously alike as if the difference in sex had merely sharpened the common blood to a terrific, an almost unbearable, similarity, speaking to one another in short brief staccato sentences like slaps, as if they stood breast to breast striking one another in turn neither making any attempt to guard against the blows.

Now you cant marry him. Why cant I marry him? Because he's dead. Dead? Yes. I killed him.

He (Quentin) couldn't pass that. He was not even listening to her; he said, 'Ma'am? What's that? What did you say?' 'There's something in that house.' 'In that house? It's Clytie. Dont she—'

'No. Something living in it. Hidden in it. It has been out there for four years, living hidden in that house.'

VI

THERE was snow on Shreve's overcoat sleeve, his ungloved blond square hand red and raw with cold, vanishing. Then on the table before Quentin, lying on the open text book beneath the lamp, the white oblong of envelope, the familiar blurred mechanical Jefferson Jan 10 1910 Miss and then, opened, the My dear son in his father's sloped fine hand out of that dead dusty summer where he had prepared for Harvard so that his father's hand could lie on a strange lamplit table in

Cambridge; that dead summer twilight—the wistaria, the cigar-smell, the fireflies—attenuated up from Mississippi and into this strange room, across this strange iron New England snow: My dear son, Miss Rosa Coldfield was buried yesterday.

She remained in the coma for almost two weeks and two days ago she died without regaining consciousness and without pain they say, and whatever they mean by that since it has always seemed to me that the only painless death must be that which takes the intelligence by violent surprise and from the rear so to speak, since if death be anything at all beyond a brief and peculiar emotional state of the bereaved it must be a brief and likewise peculiar state of the subject as well. And if aught can be more painful to any intelligence above that of a child or an idiot than a slow and gradual confronting with that which over a long period of bewilderment and dread it has been taught to regard as an irrevocable and unplumable finality, I do not know it.

And if there can be either access of comfort or cessation of pain in the ultimate escape from a stubborn and dreaded outrage which over a period of forty-three years has been companionship and bread and fire and all, I do not know that either—the letter bringing with it that very September evening itself (and he soon needing, required, to say 'No, neither aunt, cousin, nor uncle, Rosa. Miss Rosa Coldfield, an old lady that died young of outrage in 1866 one summer' and then Shreve said, 'You mean she was no kin to you, no kin to you at all, that there was actually one Southern Bayard or Guinevere who was no kin to you? then what did she die for?' and that not Shreve's first time, nobody's first time in Cambridge since September: Tell about the South. What's it like there.

What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all) that very September evening when Mr Compson stopped talking at last, he (Quentin) walked out of his father's talking at last because it was now time to go, not because he had heard it all because he had not been listening, since he had something which he still was unable to pass: that door, that gaunt tragic dramatic self-hypnotized youthful face like the tragedian in a college play, an academic Hamlet waked

from some trance merit of the curtain's falling and blundering across the dusty stage from which the rest of the cast had departed last Commencement, the sister facing him across the wedding dress which she was not to use, not even to finish, the two of them slashing at one another with twelve or fourteen words and most of these the same words repeated two or three times so that when you boiled it down they did it with eight or ten.

And she (Miss Coldfield) had on the shawl, as he had known she would, and the bonnet (black once but faded now to that fierce muted metallic green of old peacock feathers) and the black reticule almost as large as a carpet-bag containing all the keys which the house possessed: cupboard closet and door, some of which would not even turn in locks which, shot home, could be solved by any child with a hairpin or a wad of chewing gum, some of which no longer even fitted the locks they had been made for like old married people who no longer have anything in common, to do or to talk about, save the same general weight of air to displace and breathe and general oblivious biding earth to bear their weight—That evening, the twelve miles behind the fat mare in the moonless September dust, the trees along the road not rising soaring as trees should but squatting like huge fowl, their leaves ruffled and heavily separate like the feathers of panting fowls, heavy with sixty days of dust, the roadside undergrowth coated with heat-vulcanized dust and, seen through the dustcloud in which the horse and buggy moved, appeared like masses straining delicate and rigid and immobly upward at perpendicular's absolute in some old dead volcanic water refined to the oxygenless first principle of liquid, the dustcloud in which the buggy moved not blowing away because it had been raised by no wind and was supported by no air but evoked, materialized about them, instantaneous and eternal, cubic foot for cubic foot of dust to cubic foot for cubic foot of horse and buggy, peripatetic beneath the branch-shredded vistas of flat black fiercely and heavily starred sky, the dust cloud moving on, enclosing them with not threat exactly but maybe warning, bland, almost friendly, warning, as if to say, Come on if you like.

But I will get there first; accumulating ahead of you I will arrive first, lifting, sloping gently upward under hooves and wheels so that you will find no destination but will merely abrupt gently onto a plateau and a panorama of harmless and inscrutable night and there will be nothing for you to do but return and so I would advise you not to go, to turn back now and let what is, be; he (Quentin) agreeing to this, sitting in the buggy beside the implacable doll-sized old woman clutching her cotton umbrella, smelling the heatdistilled old woman-flesh, the heat-distilled camphor in the old fold-creases of the shawl, feeling exactly like an electric bulb, blood and skin, since the buggy disturbed not enough air to cool him with motion, created not enough motion within him to make his skin sweat, thinking Good Lord yes, let's don't find him or it, try to find him or it, risk disturbing him or it: (then Shreve again, 'Wait. Wait.

You mean that this old gal, this Aunt Rosa—'

'Miss Rosa,' Quentin said.

'All right all right. —that this old dame, this Aunt Rosa 'Miss Rosa, I tell you.'" 'All right all right all right. —that this old this Aunt R-All right all right all right all right. —that hadn't been out there, hadn't set foot in the house even in forty-three years, yet who not only said there was somebody hidden in it but found somebody that would believe her, would drive that twelve miles out there in a buggy at midnight to see if she was right or not?" 'Yes,' Quentin said.

'That this old dame that grew up in a household like an overpopulated mausoleum, with no call or claim on her time but the hating of her father and aunt and her sister's husband in peace and comfort and waiting for the day when they would prove not only to themselves but to everybody else that she had been right, So one night the aunt slid down the rainpipe with a horse trader, and she was right about the aunt so that fixed that: then her father nailed himself up in the attic to keep from being drafted into the Rebel army and starved to death, so that fixed that except for the unavoidable possibility that when the moment came for him to admit to himself that she had been right he

may not have been able to speak or may not have had anyone to tell it to: so she was right about the father too, since if he hadn't made General Lee and Jeff Davis mad he wouldn't have had to nail himself up and die and if he hadn't died he wouldn't have left her an orphan and a pauper and so situated, left susceptible to a situation where she could receive this mortal affront: and right about the brother-in-law because if he hadn't been a demon his children wouldn't have needed protection from him and she wouldn't have had to go out there and be betrayed by the old meat and find instead of a widowed Agamemnon to her Cassandra an ancient stiff-jointed Pyramus to her eager though untried Thisbe who could approach her in this unbidden April's compounded demonry and suggest that they breed together for test and sample and if it was a boy they would marry; would not have had to be blown back to town on the initial blast of that horror and outrage to eat of gall and wormwood stolen through paling fences at dawn.

So this was not fixed at all and forever because she couldn't even tell it because of who her successor was, not because he found a successor by just turning around, and no day's loss of time even, but because of who the successor was, that she might conceivably have ever suffered a situation where she could or would have to decline any office which her successor could have been deemed worthy, even by a demon, to fill; this not fixed at all since when the moment came for him to admit he had been wrong she would have the same trouble with him she had with her father, he would be dead too since she doubtless foresaw the scythe if for no other reason than that it would be the final outrage and affront like the hammer and nails in her father's business that scythe, symbolic laurel of a caesar's triumph—that rusty scythe loaned by the demon himself to Jones more than two years ago to cut the weeds away from the shanty doorway to smooth the path for rutting—that rusty blade garlanded with each successive day's gaudy ribbon or cheap bead for the (how did she put it? slut wasn't all, was it?) to walk in—that scythe beyond whose symbolic shape he, even though dead, even when earth itself declined any longer to bear his weight, jeered at her?" 'Yes,' Quentin said.

'That this Faustus, this demon, this Beelzebub fled hiding from some momentary flashy glare of his Creditor's outraged face exasperated beyond all endurance, hiding, scuttling into respectability like a jackal into a rockpile, so she thought at first, until she realized that he was not hiding, did not want to hide, was merely engaged in one final frenzy of evil and harm-doing before the Creditor overtook him next time for good and all—this Faustus who appeared suddenly one Sunday with two pistols and twenty subsidiary demons and skulldugged a hundred miles of land out of a poor ignorant Indian and built the biggest house on it you ever saw and went away with six wagons and came back with the crystal tapestries and the Wedgwood chairs to furnish it and nobody knew if he had robbed another steamboat or had just dug up a little more of the old loot, who hid horns and tail beneath human raiment and a beaver hat and chose (bought her, outswapped his father-in-law, wasn't it) a wife after three years to scrutinize, weigh, and compare, not from one of the local ducal houses but from the lesser baronage whose principality was so far decayed that there would be no risk of his wife bringing him for dowry delusions of grandeur before he should be equipped for it, yet not so far decayed but that she might keep them both from getting lost among the new knives and forks and spoons that he had bought—a wife who not only would consolidate the hiding but could would and did breed him two children to fend and shield both in themselves and in their progeny the brittle bones and tired flesh of an old man against the day when the Creditor would run him to earth for the last time and he couldn't get away: and so sure enough the daughter fell in love, the son the agent for the providing of that living bulwark between him (the demon) and the Creditor's bailiff hand until the son should marry and thus insure him doubled and compounded and then the demon must turn square around and run not only the fiance out of the house and not only the son out of the house but so corrupt, seduce, and mesmerize the son that he (the son) should do the office of the outraged father's pistolhand when fornication threatened: so that the demon should return from the War five years later and find accomplished and complete the situation he had been working for: son fled for good now with a noose behind him, daughter doomed to spinsterhood—and then almost before his foot was out of the stirrup he (the demon) set out

and got himself engaged again in order to replace that progeny the hopes of which he had himself destroyed?" 'Yes,' Quentin said.

'Came back home and found his chances of descendants gone where his children had attended to that, and his plantation ruined, fields fallow except for a fine stand of weeds, and taxes and levies and penalties sowed by United States marshals and such and all his niggers gone where the Yankees had attended to that, and you would have thought he would have been satisfied: yet before his foot was out of the stirrup he not only set out to try to restore his plantation to what it used to be, like maybe he was hoping to fool the Creditor by illusion and obfuscation by concealing behind the illusion that time had not elapsed and change occurred the fact that he was now almost sixty years old, until he could get himself a new batch of children to bulwark him, but chose for this purpose the last woman on earth he might have hoped to prevail on, this Aunt R—all right all right all right. —that hated him, that had always hated him, yet choosing her with a kind of outrageous bravado as if a kind of despairing conviction of his irresistibility or invulnerability were a part of the price he had got for whatever it was he had sold the Creditor, since according to the old dame he never had had a soul; proposed to her and was accepted then three months later, with no date ever set for the wedding and marriage itself not mentioned one time since, and on the very day when he established definitely that he would be able to keep at least some of his land and how much, he approached her and suggested they breed a couple of dogs together, inventing with fiendish cunning the thing which husbands and fiances have been trying to invent for ten million years: the thing that without harming her or giving her grounds for civil or tribal action would not only blast the little dream-woman out of the dovecote but leave her irrevocably husbanded (and himself, husband or fiance, already safely cuckolded before she can draw breath) with the abstract carcass of outrage and revenge.

He said it and was free now, forever more now of threat or meddling from anyone since he had at last eliminated the last member of his late wife's family, free now: son fled to Texas or California or maybe even South America, daughter doomed to spinsterhood to live until he died,

since after that it wouldn't matter, in that rotting house, caring for him and feeding him, raising chickens and peddling the eggs for the clothes she and Clytie couldn't make: so that he didn't even need to be a demon now but just mad impotent old man who had realized at last that his dream of restoring his Sutpen's Hundred was not only vain but that what he had left of it would never support him and his family and so running his little crossroads store with a stock of plowshares and hame strings and calico and kerosene and cheap beads and ribbons and a clientele of freed niggers and (what is it? the words? white what? — Yes, trash) with Jones for clerk and who knows maybe what delusions of making money out of the store to rebuild the plantation; who had escaped twice now, got himself into it and been freed by the Creditor who set his children to destroying one another before he had posterity, and he decided that maybe he was wrong in being free and so got into it again and then decided that he was wrong in being unfree and so got out of it again and then turned right around and bought his way back into it with beads and calico and striped candy out of his own showcase and off his shelves?" 'Yes,' Quentin said.

He sounds just like father he thought, glancing (his face quiet, reposed, curiously almost sullen) for a moment at Shreve leaning forward into the lamp, his naked torso pink-gleaming and baby-smooth, cherubic, almost hairless, the twin moons of his spectacles glinting against his moonlike rubicund face, smelling (Quentin) the cigar and the wistaria, seeing the fireflies blowing and winking in the September dusk.

Just exactly like father if father had known as much about it the night before I went out there as he did the day after I came back thinking Mad impotent old man who realized at last that there must be some limit even to the capabilities of a demon for doing harm, who must have seen his situation as that of the show girl, the pony, who realizes that the principle tune she prances comes not from horn and fiddle and drum but from a clock and calendar, must have seen himself as the old wornout cannon which realizes that it can deliver just one more fierce shot and crumble to dust in its own furious blast and recoil, who looked about upon the scene which was still within his scope and compass and saw son gone, vanished, more insuperable to him now than if the son

were dead since now (if the son still lived) his name would be different and those to call him by it strangers, and whatever dragon's outcropping of Sutpen blood the son might sow on the body of whatever strange woman would therefore carry on the tradition, accomplish the hereditary evil and harm under another name and upon and among people who will never have heard the right one; daughter doomed to spinsterhood who had chosen spinsterhood already before there was anyone named Charles Bon since the aunt who came to succor her in bereavement and sorrow found neither but instead that calm absolutely impenetrable face between a homespun dress and sunbonnet seen before a closed door and again in a cloudy swirl of chickens while Jones was building the coffin and which she wore during the next year while the aunt lived there and the three women wove their own garments and raised their own food and cut the wood they cooked it with (excusing what help they had from Jones who lived with his granddaughter in the abandoned fishing camp with its collapsing roof and rotting porch against which the rusty scythe which Sutpen was to lend him, make him borrow to cut away the weeds from the door—at last forced him to use though not to cut weeds, at least not vegetable weeds—would lean for war years) and wore still after the aunt's indignation had swept her back to town to live on stolen garden truck and out of anonymous baskets left on her front steps at night, the three of them, the two daughters Negro and white and the aunt twelve miles away watching from her distance as the two daughters watched from theirs the old demon, the ancient varicose and despairing Faustus fling his final main now with the Creditor's hand already on his shoulder, running his little country store now for his bread and meat, haggling tediously over nickels and dimes with rapacious and poverty-stricken whites and Negroes, who at one time could have galloped for ten miles in any direction without crossing his own boundary, using out of his meager stock the cheap ribbons and beads and the stale violently colored candy with which even an old man can seduce a fifteen-year-old country girl, to ruin the granddaughter of his partner, this Jones—this gangling malaria-ridden white man whom he had given permission fourteen years ago to squat in the abandoned fishing camp with the year-old grandchild—Jones, partner porter and clerk who at the demon's command removed with his own hand (and maybe delivered

too) from the showcase the candy beads and ribbons, measured the very cloth from which Judith (who had not been bereaved and did not mourn) helped the granddaughter to fashion a dress to walk past the lounging men in, the sidelooking and the tongues, until her increasing belly taught her embarrassment—or perhaps fear—Jones who before '62 had not even been allowed to approach the front of the house and who during the next four years got no nearer than the kitchen door and that only when he brought the game and fish and vegetables on which the seducer-to-He's wife and daughter (and Clytie too, the one remaining servant, Negro, the one who would forbid him to pass the kitchen door with what he brought) depended on to keep life in them, but who now entered the house itself on the (quite frequent now) afternoons when the demon would suddenly curse the store empty of customers and lock the door and repair to the rear and in the same tone in which he used to address his orderly or even his house servants when he had them (and in which he doubtless ordered Jones to fetch from the showcase the ribbons and beads and candy) direct Jones to fetch the jug, the two of them (and Jones even sitting now who in the old days, the old dead Sunday afternoons of monotonous peace which they spent beneath the scuppernong arbor in the backyard, the demon lying in the hammock while Jones squatted against a post, rising from time to time to pour for the demon from the demijohn and the bucket of spring water which he had fetched from the spring more than a mile away then squatting again, chortling and chuckling and saying 'Sho, Mister Tawm' each time the demon paused)—the two of them drinking turn and turn about from the jug and the demon not lying down now nor even sitting but reaching after the third or second drink that old man's state of impotent and furious undefeat in which he would rise, swaying and plunging and shouting for his horse and pistols to ride single-handed into Washington and shoot Lincoln (a year or so too late here) and Sherman both, shouting, 'Kill them! Shoot them down like the dogs they are!' and Jones."

Sho, Kernel; sho now' and catching him as he fell and commandeering the first passing wagon to take him to the house and carry him up the front steps and through the pointless formal door beneath its fanlight imported pane by pane from Europe which Judith held open for him to

enter with no change, no alteration in that calm frozen face which she had worn for four years now, and on up the stairs and into the bedroom and put him to bed like a baby and then lie down himself on the floor beside the bed though not to sleep since before dawn the man on the bed would stir and groan and Jones would say, ' Hyer I am, Kernel.

Hit's all right. They aint whupped us yit, air they?" —this Jones who after the demon rode away with the regiment when the granddaughter was only eight years old would tell people that he 'was looking after Major's place and niggers' even before they had time to ask him why he was not with the troops and perhaps in time came to believe the lie himself, who was among the first to greet the demon when he returned, to meet him at the gate and say, ' Well, Kernel, they kilt us but they aint whupped us yit, air they?" who even worked, labored, sweat at the demon's behest during that first furious period while the demon believed he could restore by sheer indomitable willing the Sutpen's Hundred which he remembered and had lost, labored with no hope of pay or reward who must have seen long before the demon did (or would admit it) that the task was hopeless—blind Jones who apparently saw still in that furious lecherous wreck the old fine figure of the man who once galloped on the black thoroughbred about that domain two boundaries of which the eye could not see from any point. 'Yes,' Quentin said.

So that Sunday morning came and the demon up and away before dawn, Judith thinking she knew why since that morning the black stallion which he rode to Virginia and led back had a son born on his wife Penelope, only it was not that foal which the demon had got up early to look at and it was almost a week before they caught, found, the old Negress, the midwife who was squatting beside the quilt pallet that dawn while Jones sat on the porch where the rusty scythe had leaned for two years, so that she could tell how she heard the horse and then the demon entered and stood over the pallet with the riding whip in his hand and looked down at the mother and the child and said, ' Well, Milly, too bad you're not a mare like Penelope. Then I could give you a

decent stall in the stable' and turned and went out and the old Negress squatted there and heard them, the voices, he and Jones: 'Stand back.

Don't you touch me, Wash'. 'I'm going to tech you, Kernel' and she heard the whip too though not the scythe, no whistling air, no blow, nothing since always that which merely consummates punishment evokes a cry while that which evokes the last silence occurs in silence. And that night they finally found him and fetched him home in a wagon and carried him, quiet and bloody and with his teeth still showing in his parted beard (which was hardly grizzled although his hair was almost white now) in the light of the lanterns and the pine torches, up the steps where the tearless and stone-faced daughter held the door open for him too who used to like to drive fast to church and who rode fast there this time, only when it was all over he had never reached the church, since the daughter decided that he should be driven into that same Methodist Church in town where he had married her mother, before returning to the grave in the cedar grove.

Judith was a woman of thirty now and looking older, not as the weak grow old, either enclosed in a static ballooning of already lifeless flesh or through a series of stages of gradual collapsing whose particles adhere, not to some iron and still impervious framework but to one another, as though in some communal and oblivious and mindless life of their own like a colony of maggots, but as the demon himself had grown old: with a kind of condensation, an anguished emergence of the primary indomitable ossification which the soft color and texture, the light electric aura of youth, had merely temporarily assuaged but never concealed.

The spinster in homemade and shapeless clothing, with hands which could either transfer eggs or hold a plow straight in furrow, borrowed two half-wild young mules to pull the wagon: so he rode fast toward church as far as he went, in his homemade coffin, in his regimentals and saber and embroidered gauntlets, until the young mules bolted and turned the wagon over and tumbled him, saber plumes and all, into a ditch from which the daughter extricated him and fetched him back to the cedar grove and read the service herself.

And no tears, no bereavement this time too, whether or not it was because she had no time to mourn she ran the store herself now until she found a buyer for it, not keeping it open but carrying the keys to it in her apron pocket, hailed from the kitchen or the garden or even from the field since she and Clytie now did all the plowing which was done, now that Jones was gone too.

He had followed the demon within twelve hours on that same Sunday (and maybe to the same place; maybe They would even have a scuppernong vine for them there and no compulsions now of bread or ambition of fornication or vengeance, and maybe they wouldn't even have to drink, only they would miss this now and then without knowing what it was that they missed but not often; serene, pleasant, unmarked by time or change of weather, only just now and then something, a wind, a shadow, and the demon would stop talking and Jones would stop guffawing and they would look at one another, groping, grave, intent, and the demon would say, 'What was it, Wash?

Something happened. What was it?" and Jones looking at the demon, groping too, sober too, saying, 'I don't know, Kernel whut?" each watching the other. Then the shadow would fade, the mind die away until at last Jones would say, serene, not even triumphant: ' They mought have kilt us, but they aint whupped us yit, air they?") She would be hailed by women and children with pails and baskets, whereupon she or Clytie would go to the store, unlock it, serve the customer, lock the store and return: until she sold the store at last and spent the money for a tombstone. ('How was it?" Shreve said. 'You told me; how was it? you and your father shooting quail, the gray day after it had rained all night and the ditch the horses couldn't cross so you and your father got down and gave the reins to what was his name? the nigger on the mule? Luster.

—Luster to lead them around the ditch') and he and his father crossed just as the rain began to come down again gray and solid and slow, making no sound, Quentin not aware yet of just where they were because he had been riding with his head lowered against the drizzle,

until he looked up the slope before them where the wet yellow sedge died upward into the rain like melting gold and saw the grove, the clump of cedars on the crest of the hill dissolving into the rain as if the trees had been drawn in ink on a wet blotter—the cedars beyond which, beyond the ruined fields beyond which, would be the oak grove and the gray huge rotting deserted house half a mile away. Mr Compson had stopped to look back at Luster on the mule, the towsack he had been using for saddle now wrapped around his head, his knees drawn up under it, leading the horses on down the ditch to find a place to cross.

'Better get on out of the rain,' Mr Compson said. 'He's not going to come within a hundred yards of those cedars anyway.'" They went on up the slope. They could not see the two dogs at all, only the steady furrowing of the sedge where, invisible, the dogs quartered the slope until one of them flung up his head to look back. Mr Compson gestured with his hand toward the trees, he and Quentin following.

It was dark among the cedars, the light more dark than gray even, the quiet rain, the faint pearly globules, materializing on the gun barrels and the five headstones like drops of not-quite-congealed meltings from cold candles on the marble: the two flat heavy vaulted slabs, the other three headstones leaning a little awry, with here and there a carved letter or even an entire word momentary and legible in the faint light which the raindrops brought particle by particle into the gloom and released; now the two dogs came in, drifted in like smoke, their hair close-plastered with damp, and curled down in one indistinguishable and apparently inextricable ball for warmth.

Both the flat slabs were cracked across the middle by their own weight (and vanishing into the hole where the brick coping of one vault had fallen in was a smooth faint path worn by some small animal—possum probably—by generations of some small animal since there could have been nothing to eat in the grave for a long time) though the lettering was quite legible: Ellen Coldfield Sutpen. Born October 9, 1817. Died January 23, 1863 and the other: Thomas Sutpen, Colonel, 3rd Mississippi Infantry, C.S.A.

Died August 12, 1869: this last, the date, added later, crudely with a chisel, who even dead did not divulge where and when he had been born.

Quentin looked at the stones quietly, thinking Not beloved wife of.

No. Ellen Coldfield Sutpen 'I wouldn't have thought they would have had any money to buy marble with in 1869,' he said.

'He bought them himself,' Mr Compson said. 'He bought the two of them while the regiment was in Virginia, after Judith got word to him that her mother was dead. He ordered them from Italy, the best, the finest to he had—his wife's complete and his with the date left blank: and this while on active service with an army which had not only the highest mortality rate of any before or since but which had a custom of electing a new set of regimental officers each year (and by which system he was at the moment entitled to call himself colonel, since he had been voted in and Colonel Sartoris voted out only last summer) so that for all he could know, before his order could be filled or even received he might be already under ground and his grave marked (if at all) by a shattered musket thrust into the earth, or lacking that he might be a second lieutenant or even a private—provided of course that his men would have the courage to demote him—yet he not only ordered the stones and managed to pay for them, but stranger still he managed to get them past a seacoast so closely blockaded that the incoming runners refused any cargo except ammunition—'

It seemed to Quentin that he could actually see them: the ragged and starving troops without shoes, the gaunt powder-blackened faces looking backward over tattered shoulders, the glaring eyes in which burned some indomitable desperation of undefeat watching that dark interdict ocean across which a grim lightless solitary ship fled with in its hold two thousand precious pounds-space containing not bullets, not even something to eat, but that much bombastic and inert carven rock which for the next year was to be a part of the' regiment, to follow it into Pennsylvania and be present at Gettysburg, moving behind the

regiment in a wagon driven by the demon's body servant through swamp and plain and mountain pass, the regiment moving no faster than the wagon could, with starved gaunt men and gaunt spent horses knee deep in icy mud or snow, sweating and cursing it through bog and morass like a piece of artillery, speaking of the two stones as 'Colonel' and 'Mrs Colonel'; then through the Cumberland Gap and down through the Tennessee mountains, traveling at night to dodge Yankee patrols, and into Mississippi in the late fall of '64, where the daughter waited whose marriage he had interdict and who was to be a widow the next summer though apparently not bereaved, where his wife was dead and his son self-excommunicated and—banished, and put one of the stones over his wife's grave and set the other upright in the hall of the house, where Miss Coldfield possibly (maybe doubtless) looked at it every day as though it were his portrait, possibly (maybe doubtless here too) reading among the lettering more of maiden hope and virgin expectation than she ever told Quentin about, since she never mentioned the stone to him at all, and (the demon) drank the parched corn coffee and ate the hoe cake which Judith and Clytie prepared for him and kissed Judith on the forehead and said, 'Well, Clytie' and returned to the war, all in twenty-four hours; he could see it; he might even have been there.

Then he thought No. If I had been there I could not have seen it this plain.

'But that don't explain the other three,' he said. 'They must have cost something too.' 'Who would have paid for them?' Mr Compson said.

Quentin could feel him looking at him. 'Think.' Quentin looked at the three identical headstones with their faint identical lettering, slanted a little in the soft loamy decay of accumulated cedar needles, these decipherable too when he looked close, the first one: Charles Bon. Born in New Orleans, Louisiana. Died at Sutpen's Hundred, Mississippi, May 3, 1856. Aged 33 years and 5 months. He could feel his father watching him.

'She did it,' he said. 'With that money she got when she sold the store.'
'Yes,' Mr Compson said.

Quentin had to stoop and brush away some of the cedar needles to read the next one. As he did so one of the dogs rose and approached him, thrusting its head in to see what he was looking at like a human being would, as if from association with human beings it had acquired the quality of curiosity which is an attribute only of men and apes.

'Get away,' he said, thrusting the dog back with one hand while with the other he brushed the cedar needles away, smoothing with his hand into legibility the faint lettering, the grayed words: Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon .1859-1884 feeling his father watching him, remarking before he rose that the third stone bore that same date, 1884. 'It couldn't have been the store this time,' he said. 'Because she sold the store in '70, and besides 1884 is the same date that's on hers' thinking how it would have been terrible for her sure enough if she had wanted to put Beloved Husband of on that first one.

'Ah,' Mr Compson said. 'That was the one your grandfather attended to.

Judith came into town one day and brought him the money, some Of it, where she got it from he never knew, unless it was what she had left out of the price of the store which he sold for her; brought the money in with the inscription (except the date of death of course) all written out as you see it, during that three weeks while Clytie was in New Orleans finding the boy to fetch him back, though your grandfather of course did not know this, money and inscription not for herself but for him."

'Oh,' Quentin said.

'Yes. They lead beautiful lives—women. Lives not only divorced from, but irrevocably excommunicated from, all reality. That's why although their deaths, the instant of dissolution, are of no importance to them since they have a courage and fortitude in the face of pain and

annihilation which would make the most spartan man resemble a pulling boy, yet to them their funerals and graves, the little puny affirmations of spurious immortality set above their slumber, are of incalculable importance.

You had an aunt once (you do not remember her because I never saw her myself but only heard the tale) who was faced with a serious operation which she became convinced she would not survive, at a time when her nearest female kin was a woman between whom and herself there had existed for years one of those bitter inexplicable (to the man mind) amicable enmities which occur between women of the same blood, whose sole worry about departing this world was to get rid of a certain brown dress which she owned and knew that the kinswoman knew she had never liked, which must be burned, not given away but burned in the back yard beneath the window where, by being held up to the window (and suffering excruciating pain) she could see it burned with her own eyes, because she was convinced that after she died the kinswoman, the logical one to take charge, would bury her in it."

'And did she die?" Quentin said.

'No. As soon as the dress was consumed she began to mend. She stood the operation and recovered and outlived the kinswoman by several years. Then one afternoon she died peacefully of no particular ailment and was buried in her wedding gown."

'Oh,' Quentin said. 'Yes. But there was one afternoon in the summer of '70 when one of these graves (there were only three here then) was actually watered by tears. Your grandfather saw it; that was the year Judith sold the store and your grandfather attended to it for her and he had ridden' out to see her about the matter and he witnessed it: the interlude, the ceremonial widowhood's bright dramatic pageantry. He didn't know at the time how the octoroon came to be here, how Judith could even have known about her to write her where Bon was dead. But there she was, with the eleven-year-old boy who looked more like eight.

It must have resembled a garden scene by the Irish poet, Wilde: the late afternoon, the dark cedars with the level sun in them, even the light exactly right and the graves, the three pieces of marble (your grandfather had advanced Judith the money to buy the third stone with against the price of the store) looking as though they had been cleaned and polished and arranged by scene shifters who with the passing of twilight would return and strike them and carry them, hollow fragile and without weight, back to the warehouse until they should be needed again; the pageant, the scene, the act, entering upon the stage—the magnolia-faced woman a little plumper now, a woman created of by and for darkness whom the artist Beardsley might have dressed, in a soft flowing gown designed not to infer bereavement or widowhood but to dress some interlude of slumbrous and fatal insatiation, of passionate and inexorable hunger of the flesh, walking beneath a lace parasol and followed by a bright gigantic Negress carrying a silk cushion and leading by the hand the little boy whom Beardsley might not only have dressed but drawn—a thin delicate child with a smooth ivory sexless face who, after his mother handed the Negress the parasol and took the cushion and knelt beside the grave and arranged her skirts and wept, never released the Negress' apron but stood blinking quietly who, having been born and lived all his life in a kind of silken prison lighted by perpetual shaded candles, breathing for air the milklike and absolutely physical lambence which his mother's days and hours emanated, had seen little enough of sunlight before, let alone out-of-doors, trees and grass and earth; and last of all, the other woman, Judith (who, not bereaved, did not need to mourn Quentin thought, thinking Yes, I have had to listen too long) who stood just inside the cedars, in the calico dress and the sunbonnet to match it, both faded and shapeless—the calm face, the hands which could plow or cut wood and cook or weave cloth folded before her, standing in the attitude of an indifferent guide in a museum, waiting, probably not even watching.

Then the Negress came and handed the octoroon a crystal bottle to smell and helped her to rise and took up the silk cushion and gave the octoroon the parasol and they returned to the house, the little boy still

holding to the Negress' apron, the Negress supporting the woman with one arm and Judith following with that face like a mask or like marble, back to the house, across the tall scaling portico and into the house where Clytie was cooking the eggs and the corn bread on which she and Judith lived.

'She stayed a week. She passed the rest of that week in the one remaining room in the house whose bed had linen sheets, passed it in bed, in the new lace and silk and satin negligees subdued to the mauve and lilac of mourning—that room airless and shuttered, impregnated behind the sagging closed blinds with the heavy fainting odor of her flesh, her days, her hours, her garments, of eau-de-cologne from the cloth upon her temples, of the crystal phial which the Negress alternated with the fan as she sat beside the bed between trips to the door to receive the trays which Clytie carried up the stairs Clytie, who did that fetching and carrying as Judith made her, who must have perceived whether Judith told her or not that it was another Negro whom she served, yet who served the Negress just as she would quit the kitchen from time to time and search the rooms downstairs until she found that little strange lonely boy sitting quietly on a straight hard chair in the dim and shadowy library or parlor, with his four names and his sixteenth-part black blood and his expensive esoteric Fauntleroy clothing who regarded with an aghast fatalistic terror the grim coffee-colored woman who would come on bare feet to the door and look in at him, who gave him not teacakes but the coarsest cornbread spread with as coarse molasses (this surreptitiously, not that the mother or the duenna might object, but because the household did not have food for eating between meals), gave it to him, thrust it at him with restrained savageness, and who found him one afternoon playing with a Negro boy about his own size in the road outside the gates and cursed the Negro child out of sight with level and deadly violence and sent him, the other, back to the house in a voice from which the very absence of vituperation or rage made it seem just that much more deadly and cold.

'Yes, Clytie, who stood impassive beside the wagon on that last day, following the second ceremonial to the grave with the silk cushion and

the parasol and the smelling-bottle, when mother and child and duenna departed for New Orleans. And your grandfather never knew if it was Clytie who watched, kept in touch by some means, waited for the day, the moment, to come, the hour when the little boy would be an orphan, and so went herself to fetch him; or if it was Judith who did the waiting and the watching and sent Clytie for him that winter, that December of 1871—Clytie who had never been further from Sutpen's Hundred than Jefferson in her life, yet who made that journey alone to New Orleans and returned with the child, the boy of twelve now and looking ten, in one of the outgrown Fauntleroy suits but with a new oversize overall jumper coat which Clytie had bought for him (and made him wear, whether against the cold or whether not your grandfather could not say either) over it and what else he owned tied up in a bandanna handkerchief—this child who could speak no English as the woman could speak no French, who had found him, hunted him down, in a French city and brought him away, this child with a face not old but without age, as if he had had no childhood, not in the sense that Miss Rosa Coldfield says she had no childhood, but as if he had not been human born but instead created without agency of man or agony of woman and orphaned by no human being.

Your grandfather said you did not wonder what had become of the mother, you did not even care: death or elopement or marriage: she would not grow from one metamorphosis dissolution or adultery—to the next carrying along with her all the old accumulated rubbish-years which we call memory, the recognizable I, but changing from phase to phase as the butterfly changes once the cocoon is cleared, carrying nothing of what was into what is, leaving nothing of what is behind but eliding complete and intact and unresisting into the next avatar as the overblown rose or magnolia elides from one rich June to the next, leaving no bones, no substance, no dust of whatever dead pristine soulless rich surrender anywhere between sun and earth.

The boy had been produced complete and subject to no microbe in that cloyed and scented maze of shuttered silk as if he were the delicate and perverse spiritsymbol, immortal page of the ancient immortal Lilith, entering the actual world not at the age of one second but of twelve

years, the delicate garments of his pagehood already half concealed beneath that harsh and shapeless denim cut to an iron pattern and sold by the millions—that burlesque uniform and regalia of the tragic burlesque of the sons of Ham—a slight silent child who could not even speak English, picked suddenly up out of whatever debacle the only life he knew had disintegrated into, by a creature whom he had seen once and learned to dread and fear yet could not flee, held helpless and passive in a state which must have been some incredible compound of horror and trust, since although he could not even talk to her (they made, they must have made, that week's journey by steamboat among the cotton bales on the freight deck, eating and sleeping with Negroes, where he could not even tell his companion when he was hungry or when he had to relieve himself) and so could have only suspected, surmised, where she was taking him, could have known nothing certainly except that all he had ever been familiar with was vanishing about him like smoke.

Yet he made no resistance, returning quietly and docilely to that decaying house which he had seen one time, where the fierce brooding woman who had come and got him lived with the calm white one who was not even fierce, who was not anything except calm, who to him did not even have a name yet, but who was somehow so closely related to him as to be the owner of the one spot on earth where he had ever seen his mother weep. He crossed that strange threshold, that irrevocable demarcation, not led, not dragged, but driven and herded by that stern implacable presence, into that gaunt and barren household where his very silken remaining clothes, his delicate shirt and stockings and shoes which still remained to remind him of what he had once been, vanished, fled from arms and body and legs as if they had been woven of chimeras or of smoke.

—Yes, sleeping in the trundle bed beside Judith's, beside that of the woman who looked upon him and treated him with a cold unbending detached gentleness more discouraging than the fierce ruthless constant guardianship of the Negress who, with a sort of invincible spurious humility slept on a pallet on the floor, the child lying there between them unasleep in some hiatus of passive and hopeless despair

aware of this, aware of the woman on the bed whose every look and action toward him, whose every touch of the capable hands seemed at the moment of touching his body to lose all warmth and become imbued with cold implacable antipathy, and the woman on the pallet upon whom he had already come to look as might some delicate talonless and fangless wild beast crouched in its cage in some hopeless and desperate similitude of ferocity look upon the human creature who feeds it (and your grandfather said, "Suffer little children to come unto Me": and what did He mean by that? how, if He meant that little children should need to be suffered to approach Him, what sort of earth had He created; that if they had to suffer in order to approach Him, what sort of Heaven did He have?) who fed him, thrust food which he himself could discern to be the choicest of what they had, food which he realized had been prepared for him by deliberate sacrifice, with that curious blend of savageness and pity, of yearning and hatred; who dressed him and washed him, thrust him into tubs of water too hot or too cold yet against which he dared make no outcry, and scrubbed him with harsh rags and soap, sometimes scrubbing at him with repressed fury as if she were trying to wash the smooth faint tinge from his skin as you might watch a child scrubbing at a wall long after the epithet, the chalked insult, has been obliterated lying there unsleeping in the dark between them, feeling them unasleep too, feeling them thinking about him, projecting about him and filling the thunderous solitude of his despair louder than speech could: You are not up here in this bed with me, where through no fault nor willing of your own you should be, and you are not down here on this pallet floor with me, where through no fault nor willing of your own you must and will be, not through any fault or willing of our own who would not what we cannot.

'And your grandfather did not know either just which of them it was who told him that he was, must be, a Negro. He could neither have heard yet nor recognized the term "nigger," who even had no word for it in the tongue he knew who had been born and grown up in a padded silken vacuum cell which might have been suspended on a cable a thousand fathoms in the sea, where pigmentation had no more moral value than the silk walls and the scent and the rose-colored candle

shades, where the very abstractions which he might have observed— monogamy and fidelity and decorum and gentleness and affection were as purely rooted in the flesh's offices as the digestive process. Your grandfather did not know if he was sent from the trundle bed at last or if he quitted it by his own wish and will; if when the time came when his loneliness and grief became calloused, he retired himself from Judith's bedroom or was sent from it, to sleep in the hall (where Clytie had likewise moved her pallet) though not on a pallet like her but on a cot, elevated still and perhaps not by Judith's decree either but by the Negress' fierce inexorable spurious humility.

And then the cot was moved in the attic, and the few garments hanging behind a curtain contrived of a piece of old carpet nailed across a corner, the rags of the silk and broadcloth in which he had arrived, the harsh jeans and homespun which the two women bought and made for him, he accepting them with no thanks, no comment, accepting his garret room in the same way, asking for and making no alteration in its spartan arrangements that they knew of until that second year when he was fourteen and one of them, Clytie or Judith, found hidden beneath his mattress the shard of broken mirror: and who to know what hours of amazed and tearless grief he might have spent before it, examining himself in the delicate and outgrown tatters in which he perhaps could not even remember himself, with quiet and incredulous incomprehension.

And Clytie sleeping in the hall below, barring the foot of the attic stairs, guarding his escape or exit as inexorably as a Spanish duenna, teaching him to chop wood and to work the garden and then to plow as his strength increased. His resiliency rather, since he would never be other than light in the bone and almost delicate—the boy with his light bones and womanish hands struggling with what anonymous avatar of intractable Mule, whatever tragic and barren clown was his bound fellow and complement beneath his first father's curse, getting the hang of it gradually and the two of them, linked by the savage steel-and-wood male symbol, ripping from the prone rich female earth corn to feed them both.

While Clytie watched, never out of sight of him, with that brooding fierce unflagging jealous care, hurrying out whenever anyone white or black stopped in the road as if to wait for the boy to complete the furrow and pause long enough to be spoken to, sending the boy on with a single quiet word or even gesture a hundred times more fierce than the level murmur of vituperation with which she drove the passerby on. So he (your grandfather) believed that it was neither of them Who was responsible for his going with Negroes.

Not Clytie, who guarded him as if he were a Spanish virgin, who even before she could have even suspected that he would ever come there to live, had interrupted his first contact with a nigger and sent him back to the house; not Judith who could have refused at any time to let him sleep in that white child's bed in her room, who even if she could not have reconciled herself to his sleeping on the floor could have forced Clytie to take him into another bed with her, who would have made a monk, a celibate, of him, perhaps yet not a eunuch, who may not have permitted him to pass himself for a foreigner, yet who certainly would not have driven him to consort with Negroes.

Your grandfather didn't know, even though he did know more than the town, the countryside, knew, which was that there was a strange little boy living out there who had apparently emerged from the house for the first time at the age of about twelve years, whose presence was not even unaccountable to the town and county since they now believed they knew why Henry had shot Bon. They wondered only where and how Clytie and Judith had managed to keep him concealed all the time, believing now that it had been a widow who had buried Bon, even though she had no paper to show for it, and only the incredulous (and shocked) speculation of your grandfather (who, though he had that hundred dollars and the written directions in Judith's hand for this fourth tombstone in his safe at the time, had not yet associated the boy with the child he had seen two years ago when the octoroon came there to weep at the grave), to believe that the child might be Clytie's got by its father on the body of his own daughter.

A boy seen always near the house with Clytie always nearby, then a youth learning to plow and Clytie somewhere nearby too and it soon well known with what grim and unflagging alertness she discovered and interrupted any attempt to speak to him, and there was only your grandfather to couple at last the boy, the youth, with the child who had been there three or four years ago to visit that grave.

'It was your grandfather to whose office Judith came that afternoon five years later, and he could not remember when he had seen her in Jefferson before—the woman of forty now, in the same shapeless calico and faded sunbonnet, who would not even sit down, who despite the impenetrable mask which she used for face emanated a terrible urgency, who insisted that they walk on toward the courthouse while she talked, toward the crowded room where the justice's court sat, the crowded room which they entered and where your grandfather saw him, the boy (only a man now) handcuffed to an officer, his other arm in a sling and his head bandaged since they had taken him to the doctor first, your grandfather gradually learning what had happened or as much of it as he could since the court itself couldn't get very much out of the witnesses, the ones who had fled and sent for the sheriff, the ones (excepting that one whom he had injured too badly to be present) with whom he had fought.

It had happened at a Negro ball held in a cabin a few miles from Sutpen's Hundred and he there, present and your grandfather never to know how often he had done this before, whether he had gone there to engage in the dancing or for the dice game in progress in the kitchen where the trouble started, trouble which he and not the Negroes started according to the witnesses and for no reason, for no accusation of cheating, nothing. And he made no denial, saying nothing, refusing to speak at all, sitting here in court sullen, pale and silent: so that at this point all truth, evidence vanished into a moiling clump of Negro backs and heads and black arms and hands clutching sticks of stove wood and cooking implements and razors, the white man the focal point of it and using a knife which he had produced from somewhere, clumsily, with obvious lack of skill and practice, yet with deadly earnestness and a strength which his slight build denied, a strength composed of sheer

desperate will and imperviousness to the punishment, the blows and slashes which he took in return and did not even seem to feel.

There had been no cause, no reason for it; none to ever know exactly what happened, what curses and ejaculations which might have indicated what it was that drove him, and there was only your grandfather to fumble, grope, grasp the presence of that furious protest, that indictment of heaven's ordering, that gage flung into the face of what is with a furious and indomitable desperation which the demon himself might have shown, as if the child and then the youth had acquired it from the walls in which the demon had lived, the air which he had once walked in and breathed until that moment when his own fate which he had dared in his turn struck back at him; only your grandfather to sense that protest, because the justice and the others present did not recognize him, did not recognize this slight man with his bandaged head and arm, his sullen impassive (and now bloodless) olive face, who refused to answer any questions, make any statement: so that the justice (Jim Hamblett it was) was already making his speech of indictment when your grandfather entered, utilizing opportunity and audience to orate, his eyes already glazed with that cessation of vision of people who like to hear themselves talk in public: "At this time, while our country is struggling to rise from beneath the iron heel of a tyrant oppressor, when the very future of the South as a place bearable for our women and children to live in depends on the labor of our own hands, when the tools which we have to use, to depend on, are the pride and integrity and forbearance of black men and the pride and integrity and forbearance of white; that you, I say, a white man, a white—" and your grandfather trying to reach him, stop him, trying to push through the crowd, saying "Jim.

Jim. Jim!" and it already too late, as if Hamblett's own voice had waked him at last or as if someone had snapped his fingers under his nose and waked him, he looking at the prisoner now but saying "white" again even while his voice died away as if the order to stop the voice had been shocked into short circuit, and every face in the room turned toward the prisoner as Hamblett cried, "What are you? Who and where did you come from?" ' Your grandfather got him out, quashed the

indictment and paid the fine and brought him back to his office and talked to him while Judith waited in the anteroom. "You are Charles Bon's son," he said.

"I don't know," the other answered, harsh and sullen. "You don't remember?" your grandfather said. The other did not answer. Then your grandfather told him he must go away, disappear, giving him money to go on: "What ever you are, once you are among strangers, people who don't know you, you can be whatever you will. I will make it all right; I will talk to—to—What do you call her?" And he had gone too far now, but it was too late to stop; he sat there and looked at that still face which had no more expression than Judith's, nothing of hope nor pain: just sullen and inscrutable and looking down at the calloused womanish hands with their cracked nails which held the money while your grandfather thought how he could not say "Miss Judith," since that would postulate the blood more than ever. Then he thought I don't even know whether he wants to hide it or not. So he said Miss Sutpen. "I will tell Miss Sutpen, not where you are going of course, because I won't know that myself. But just that you are gone and that I knew you were going and that you will be all right."

'So he departed, and your grandfather rode out to tell Judith, and Clytie came to the door and looked full and steadily at his face and said nothing and went to call Judith, and your grandfather waited in that dim shrouded parlor and knew that he would not have to tell either of them. He did not have to.

Judith came presently and stood and looked at him and said, "I suppose you wont tell me." —"Not wont, cant," your grandfather said.

"But not now because of any promise I made him. But he has money; he will be—" and stopped, with that forlorn little boy invisible between them who had come there eight years ago with the overall jumper over what remained of his silk and broadcloth, who had become the youth in the uniform—the tattered hat and the overalls—of his ancient curse, who had become the young man with a young man's potence, yet was still that lonely child in his parchment-and-denim hairshirt, and your

grandfather speaking the lame vain words, the specious and empty fallacies which we call comfort, thinking Better that he were dead, better that he had never lived: then thinking what vain and empty recapitulation that would be to her if he were to say it, who doubtless had already said it, thought it, changing only the person and the number.

He returned to town. And now, next time, he was not sent for; he learned it as the town learned it: by that country grapevine whose source is among Negroes, and he, Charles Etienne Saint-Valery Bon, already returned (not home again; returned) before your grandfather learned how he had come back, appeared, with a coal black and ape-like woman and an authentic wedding license, brought back by the woman since he had been so severely beaten and mauled recently that he could not even hold himself on the spavined and saddleless mule on which he rode while his wife walked beside it to keep him from falling off; rode up to the house and apparently flung the wedding license in Judith's face with something of that invincible despair with which he had attacked the Negroes in the dice game.

And none ever to know what incredible tale lay behind that year's absence which he never referred to and which the woman, who, even a year later and after their son was born, still existed in that aghast and automatonlike state in which she had arrived, did not, possibly could not, recount but which she seemed to exude gradually and by a process of terrific and incredulous excretion like the sweat of fear or anguish: how he had found her, dragged her out of whatever two dimensional backwater (the very name of which, town or village, she either had never known or the shock of her exodus from it had driven the name forever from her mind and memory) her mentality had been capable of coercing food and shelter from, and married her, held her very hand doubtless while she made the laborious cross on the register before she even knew his name or knew that he was not a white man (and this last none knew even now if she knew for certain, even after the son was born in one of the dilapidated slave cabins which he rebuilt after renting his parcel of land from Judith); how there followed something like a year composed of a succession of periods of utter immobility like

a broken cinema film, which the whitecolored man who had married her spent on his back recovering from the last mauling he had received, in frowzy stinking rooms in places—towns and cities—which likewise had no names to her, broken by other periods, intervals, of furious and incomprehensible and apparently reasonless moving, progression—a maelstrom of faces and bodies through which the man thrust, dragging her behind him, toward or from what, driven by what fury which would not let him rest, she did not know, each one to end, finish, as the one before it had so that it was almost a ritual.

The man apparently hunting out situations in order to flaunt and fling the ape-like body of his charcoal companion in the faces of all and any who would retaliate: the Negro stevedores and deckhands on steamboats or in city honky-tonks who thought he was a white man and believed it only the more strongly when he denied it; the whitemen who, when he said he was a Negro, believed that he lied in order to save his skin, or worse: from sheer besotment of sexual perversion; in either case the result the same: the man with body and limbs almost as light and delicate as a girl's giving the first blow, usually unarmed and heedless of the numbers opposed to him, with that same fury and implacability and physical imperviousness to pain and punishment, neither cursing nor panting, but laughing.

' So he showed Judith the license and took his wife, already far gone with the child, to the ruined cabin which he had chosen to repair and installed her, kenneled her with a gesture perhaps, and returned to the house. And there was nobody to know what transpired that evening between him and Judith, in whatever carpetless room furnished with whatever chairs and such which they had not had to chop up and burn to cook food or for warmth or maybe to heat water for illness from time to time—between the woman who had been widowed before she had been a bride, and the son of the man who had bereaved her and a hereditary Negro concubine, who had not resented his black blood so much as he had denied the white, and this with a curious and outrageous exaggeration in which was inherent its own irrevocability, almost exactly as the demon himself might have done it. (Because

there was love Mr Compson said There was that letter she brought and gave to your grandmother to keep.

He (Quentin) could see it, as plainly as he saw the one open upon the open text book on the table before him, white in his father's dark hand against his linen leg in the September twilight where the cigar-smell, the wistaria-smell, the fireflies drifted, thinking Yes. I have heard too much, I have been told too much; I have had to listen to too much, too long thinking Yes, Shreve sounds almost exactly like father: that letter. And who to know what moral restoration she might have contemplated in the privacy of that house, that room, that night, what hurdling of iron old traditions since she had seen almost everything else she had learned to call stable vanish like straws in a gale—she sitting there beside the lamp in a straight chair, erect, in the same calico save that the sunbonnet would be missing now, the head bare now, the once coal-black hair streaked with gray now while he faced her, standing. He would not have sat; perhaps she would not even have asked him to, and the cold level voice would not be much louder than the sound of the lamp's flame: "I was wrong. I admit it.

I believed that there were things which still mattered just because they had mattered once. But I was wrong. Nothing matters but breath, breathing, to know and to be alive. and the child, the license, the paper. What about it? That paper is between you and one who is inescapably Negro; it can be put aside, no one will anymore dare bring it up than any other prank of a young man in his wild youth, and as for the child, all right. Didn't my own father beget one? and he none the worse for it? We will even keep the woman and the child if you wish; they can stay here and Clytie will..." watching him, staring at him yet not moving, immobile, erect, her hands folded motionless on her lap, hardly breathing as if he were some wild bird or beast which might take flight at the expansion and contraction of her nostrils or the movement of her breast: "No: I. I will. I will raise it, see that it... It does not need to have any name; you will neither have to see it again nor to worry.

We will have General Compson sell some of the land; he will do it, and you can go. Into the North, the cities, where it will not matter even if-

But they will not. They will not dare. I will tell them that you are Henry's son and who could or would dare to dispute—" and he standing there, looking at her or not looking at her she cannot tell since his face would be lowered the still expressionless thin face, she watching him, not daring to move, her voice murmuring, clear enough and full enough yet hardly reaching him: "Charles": and he: "No, Miss Sutpen": and she again, still without moving, not stirring so much as a muscle, as if she stood on the outside of the thicket into which she had cajoled the animal which she knew was watching her though she could not see it, not quite cringing, not in any terror or even alarm but in that restive light incorrigibility of the free which would leave not even a print on the earth which lightly bore it and she not daring to put out the hand with which she could have actually touched it but instead just speaking to it, her voice soft and swooning, filled with that seduction, that celestial promise which is the female's weapon: "Call me aunt Judith, Charles") Yes, who to know if he said anything or nothing, turning, going out, she still sitting here, not moving, not stirring, watching him, still seeing him, penetrating walls and darkness too to watch him walk back down the weedy lane between the deserted collapsed cabins toward that one where his wife waited, treading the thorny and flint-paved path toward the Gethsemane which he had decreed and created for himself, where he had crucified himself and come down from his cross for a moment and now returned to it.

'Not your grandfather. He knew only what the town, the county, knew: that the strange little boy whom Clytie had used to watch and had taught to farm, who had sat, a grown man, in the justice's court that day with his head bandaged and one arm in a sling and the other in a handcuff, who had vanished and then returned with an authentic wife resembling something in a zoo, now farmed on shares a portion of the Sutpen plantation, farmed it pretty well, with solitary and steady husbandry within his physical limitations, the body and limbs which still looked too light for the task which he had set himself, who lived like a hermit in the cabin which he rebuilt and where his son was presently born, who consorted with neither white nor black (Clytie did not watch him now; she did not need to) and who was not seen in Jefferson but three times during the next four years and then to appear, be reported

by the Negroes who seemed to fear either him or Clytie or Judith, as being either blind or violently drunk in the Negro store district on Depot Street, where your grandfather would come and take him away (or if he were too drunk, had become violent, the town officers) and keep him until his wife, the black gargoyle, could hitch the team back into the wagon and come, with nothing alive about her but her eyes and hands, and load him into it and take him home.

So they did not even miss him from town at first; it was the County Medical Officer who told your grandfather that he had yellow fever and, that Judith had had him moved into the big house and was nursing him and now Judith had the disease too, and your grandfather told him to notify Miss Coldfield and he (your grandfather) rode out there one day. He did not dismount; he sat his horse and called until Clytie looked down at him from one of the upper windows and told him "they didn't need nothing." Within the week your grandfather learned that Clytie had been right, or was right, now anyway, though it was Judith who died first."

'Oh,' Quentin said—Yes he thought Too much, too long remembering how he had looked at the fifth grave and thought how whoever had buried Judith must have been afraid that the other dead would contract the disease from her, since her grave was at the opposite side of the enclosure, as far from the other four as the enclosure would permit, thinking Father won't have to say "think" this time because he knew who had ordered and bought that headstone before he read the inscription on it, thinking about, imagining what careful printed directions Judith must have roused herself (from delirium possibly) to write down for Clytie when she knew that she was going to die; and how Clytie must have lived during the next twelve years while she raised the child which had been born in the old slave cabin and scrimped and saved the money to finish paying out for the stone on which Judith had paid his grandfather the hundred dollars twenty-four years ago and which, when his grandfather tried to refuse it, she (Clytie) set the rusty can full of nickels and dimes and frayed paper money on the desk and walked out of the office without a word.

He had to brush the clinging cedar needles from this one also to read it, watching these letters also emerge beneath his hand, wondering quietly how they could have clung there, not have been blistered to ashes at the instant of contact with the harsh and unforgiving threat: Judith Coldfield Sutpen. Daughter of Ellen Coldfield. Born October 3, 1841. Suffered the Indignities and Travails of this world for 24 Years, 4 Months, 9 Days, and went to Rest at Last February 12, 1884.

Pause, Mortal; Remember vanity and Folly and Beware thinking (Quentin) Yes. I didn't need to ask who invented that, put that one up thinking Yes, too much, too long. I didn't need to listen then but I had to hear it and now I am having to hear it all over again because he sounds just like father: Beautiful lives women live—women do. In very breathing they draw meat and drink from some beautiful attenuation of unreality in which the shades and shapes of facts—of birth and bereavement, of suffering and bewilderment and despair—move with the substanceless decorum of lawn party charades, perfect in gesture and without significance or any ability to hurt.

Miss Rosa ordered that one. She decreed that headstone of Judge Benbow. He had been the executor of her father's estate, appointed by no will since Mr Coldfield left neither will nor estate except the house and the rifled shell of the store.

So he appointed himself, elected himself probably out of some conclave of neighbors and citizens who came together to discuss her affairs and what to do with her after they realized that nothing under the sun, certainly no man nor committee of men, would ever persuade her to go back to her niece and brother-in-law—the same citizens and neighbors who left baskets of food on her doorstep at night, the dishes (the plate containing the food, the napkins which covered it) from which she never washed but returned soiled to the empty basket and set the basket back on the same step where she had found it as to carry completely out the illusion that it had never existed or at least that she had never touched, emptied, it, had not come out and taken the basket up with that air which had nothing whatever of furtiveness in it nor even defiance, who doubtless tasted the food, criticized its quality or

cooking, chewed and swallowed it and felt it digest yet still clung to that delusion, that calm incorrigible insistence that that which all incontrovertible evidence tells her is so does not exist, as women can—that same self deluding which declined to admit that the liquidation of the store had left her something, that she had been left anything but a complete pauper, she would not accept the actual money from the sale of the store from Judge Benbow yet would accept the money's value (and after a few years, over-value) in a dozen ways: would use casual Negro boys who happened to pass the house, stopping them and commanding them to rake her yard and they doubtless as aware as the town was that there would be no mention of pay from her, that they would not even see her again though they knew she was watching them from behind the curtains of a window, but that Judge Benbow would pay them.

She would enter the stores and command objects from the shelves and showcases exactly as she commanded that two hundred dollar headstone from Judge Benbow, and walk out of the store with them—and with the same aberrant cunning which would not wash the dishes and napkins from the baskets she declined to have any discussion of her affairs with Benbow since she must have known that the sums which she had received from him must have years ago over-balanced (he, Benbow, had in his office a portfolio, a fat one, with Estate of Goodhue Coldfield.

Private written across it in indelible ink. After the Judge died his son Percy opened it. It was filled with racing forms and cancelled betting tickets on horses whose very bones were no man knew where now, which had won and lost races on the Memphis track forty years ago, and a ledger, a careful tabulation in the Judge's hand, each entry indicating the date and the horse's name and his wager and whether he won or lost; and another one showing how for forty years he had put each winning and an amount equal to each loss, to that mythical account) whatever the store had brought.

But you were not listening, because you knew it all already, had learned, absorbed it already without the medium of speech somehow

from having been born and living beside it, with it, as children will and do: so that what your father was saying did not tell you anything so much as it struck, word by word, the resonant strings of remembering.

You had been here before, seen these graves more than once in the rambling expeditions of boyhood whose aim was more than the mere hunting of game, just as you had seen the old house too, been familiar with how it would look before you even saw it, became large enough to go out there one day with four or five other boys of your size and age and dare one another to evoke the ghost, since it would have to be haunted, could not but be haunted although it had stood there empty and unthreatening for twenty-six years and nobody to meet or report any ghost, until the wagon full of strangers moving from Arkansas tried to stop and spend the night in it and something happened before they could begin to unload the wagon even.

What it was they did not or could not or would not tell but it had them back in the wagon, and the mules going back down the drive at a gallop, all in about ten minutes, not to stop until they reached Jefferson. You have seen the rotting shell of the house with its sagging portico and scaling walls, its sagging blinds and plank-shuttered windows, set in the middle of the domain which had reverted to the state and had been bought and sold and bought and sold again and again and again. No, you were not listening; you didn't have to: then the dogs stirred, rose; you looked up and sure enough, just as your father had said he would, Luster had halted the mule and the two horses in the rain about fifty yards from the cedars, sitting there with his knees drawn up under the towsack and enclosed by the cloudy vapor of the streaming animals as though he were looking at you and your father out of some lugubrious and painless purgatory.

"Come on in out of the rain, Luster," your father said. "I won't let the old Colonel hurt you"—"Yawl come on and less go home," Luster said. "Aint no more hunting today"

"We'll get wet," your father said.

"I'll tell you what: we'll ride on over to that old house. We can keep good and dry there." But Luster didn't budge, sitting there in the rain and inventing reasons not to go to the house—that the roof would leak or that you would all three catch cold with no fire or that you would all get so wet before you reached it that the best thing to do would be to go straight home: and your father laughing at Luster but you not laughing so much because even though you were not black like Luster was, you were not any older, and you and Luster had both been there that day when the five of you, the five boys all of an age, began daring on another to enter the house long before you reached it, coming up from the rear, into the old street of the slave quarters—a jungle of sumach and persimmon and briars and honeysuckle, and the rotting piles of what had once been log walls and stone chimneys and shingle roofs among the undergrowth except one, that one;

you coming up to it; you didn't see the old woman at all at first because you were watching the boy, the Jim Bond, the hulking slack-mouthed saddle-colored boy a few years older and bigger than you were, in patched and faded yet quite clean shirt and overalls too small for him, working in the garden patch beside the cabin: so you didn't even know she was there until all of you started and whirled as one and found her watching you from a chair tilted back against the cabin wall—a little dried-up woman not much bigger than a monkey and who might have been any age up to ten thousand years, in faded voluminous skirts and an immaculate headrag, her bare coffee-colored feet wrapped around the chair rung like monkeys do, smoking a clay pipe and watching you with eyes like two shoe buttons buried in the myriad wrinkles of her coffee-colored face, who just looked at you and said without even removing the pipe and in a voice almost like a white woman's: "What do you want?" and after a moment one of you said "Nothing" and then you were all running without knowing which of you began to run first nor why since you were not scared, back across the fallow and rain-gutted and brier-choked old fields until you came to the old rotting snake fence and crossed it, hurled yourselves over it, and then the earth, the land, the sky and trees and woods, looked different again, all right again. 'Yes,' Quentin said.

'And that was the one Luster was talking about now,' Shreve said.

'And your father watching you again because you hadn't heard the name before, hadn't even thought that he must have a name that day when you saw him in the vegetable patch, and you said, "Who? Jim what?" and Luster said, "Das him.

Bright-colored boy whut stay wid dat ole woman" and your father still watching you and you said, "Spell it" and Luster said, "Dat's a lawyer word. Whut dey puts you under when de Law ketches you. I des spells readin' words." And that was him, the name was Bond now, and he wouldn't care about that, who had inherited what he was from his mother and only what he could never have been from his father. And if your father had asked him if he was Charles Bon's son he not only would not have known either, he wouldn't have cared: and if you had told him he was, it would have touched and then vanished from what you (not he) would have had to call his mind long before it could have set up any reaction at all, either of pride or pleasure, anger or grief?" 'Yes,' Quentin said.

'And he lived in that cabin behind the haunted house for twenty-six years, he and the old woman who must be more than seventy now yet who had no white hair under that headrag, whose flesh had not sagged but looked instead like she had grown old up to a certain point just like normal people do, then had stopped, and instead of turning gray and soft she had begun to shrink so that the skin of her face and hands broke into a million tiny cross-hair wrinkles and her body just grew smaller and smaller like something being shrunk in a furnace, like the Bornese do their captured heads—who might well have been the ghost if one was ever needed, if anybody ever had so little else to do as to prowl around the house, which there was not; if there could have been anything in it to protect from prowlers, which there was not;

if there had been any one of them left to hide or need concealment in it, which there was not. And yet this old gal, this Aunt Rosa, told you that someone was hiding out there and you said it was Clytie or Jim Bond and she said No and you said it would have to be because the

demon was dead and Judith was dead and Bon was dead and Henry gone so far he hadn't even left a grave: and she said No and so you went out there, drove the twelve miles at night in a buggy and you found Clytie and Jim Bond both in it and you said You see? and she (the Aunt Rosa) still said No and so you went on: and there was?" " Yes."

'Wait then,' Shreve said. 'For God's sake wait.'

VII

THERE was no snow on Shreve's arm now, no sleeve on his arm at all now: only the smooth cupid-fleshed forearm and hand coming back into the lamp and taking a pipe from the empty coffee can where he kept them, filling it and lighting it. So it is zero outside, Quentin thought; soon he will raise the window and do deep-breathing in it, clench-fisted and naked to the waist, in the warm and rosy orifice above the iron quad. But he had not done so yet, and now the moment, the thought, was an hour past and the pipe lay smoked out and overturned and cold, with a light sprinkling of ashes about it, on the table before Shreve's crossed pink bright-haired arms while he watched Quentin from behind the two opaque and lampglared moons of his spectacles. ' So he just wanted a grandson,' Shreve said. 'That was all he was after. Jesus, the South is fine, isn't it.

It's better than the theater, isn't it. It's better than Ben Hur, isn't it. No wonder you have to come away now and then, isn't it." Quentin did not answer. He sat quite still, facing the table, his hands lying on either side of the open text book on which the letter rested: the rectangle of paper folded across the middle and now open, three quarters open, whose bulk had raised half itself by the leverage of the old crease in weightless and paradoxical levitation, lying at such an angle that he could not possibly have read it, deciphered it, even without this added distortion.

Yet he seemed to be looking at it, or as near as Shreve could tell, he was, his face lowered a little, brooding, almost sullen. 'He told Grandfather about it,' he said. 'That time when the architect escaped,

tried to escape into the river bottom and go back to New Orleans or wherever it was, and he—' ('The demon, hey?" Shreve said.

Quentin did not answer him, did not pause, his voice level, curious, a little dreamy yet still with that overtone of sullen bemusement, of smoldering outrage: so that Shreve, still too, resembling in his spectacles and nothing else (from the waist down the table concealed him; so anyone entering the room would have taken him to be stark naked) a baroque effigy created out of colored cake dough by someone with a faintly nightmarish affinity for the perverse, watched him with thoughtful and intent curiosity.) '—and he sent word in to Grandfather,' Quentin said, 'and some others and got his dogs and his wild niggers out and hunted the architect down and made him take earth in a cave under the river bank two days later.

That was in the second summer, when they had finished all the brick and had the foundations laid and most of the big timbers cut and trimmed, and one day the architect couldn't stand it anymore or he was afraid he would starve or that the wild niggers (and maybe Colonel Sutpen too) would run out of grub and eat him or maybe he got homesick or maybe he just had to go ('Maybe he had a girl,' Shreve said. 'Or maybe he just wanted a girl.

You said the demon and the niggers didn't have but two." Quentin did not answer this either; again he might not have heard, talking in that curious repressed calm voice as though to the table before him or the book upon it or the letter upon the book or his hands lying on either side of the book.) '—and so he went.

He seemed to vanish in broad daylight, right out from the middle of twenty-one people. Or maybe it was just Sutpen's back that was turned, and that the niggers saw him go and didn't think it needed mentioning; that being wild men they probably didn't know what Sutpen himself was up to and him naked in the mud with them all day.

So I reckon the niggers never did know what the architect was there for, supposed to do or had done or could do or was, so maybe they

thought Sutpen had sent him, told him to go away and drown himself, go away and die, or maybe just go away.

So he did, jumped up in broad daylight, in his embroidered vest and Fautleroy tie and a hat like a Baptist congressman and probably carrying the hat in his hand, and ran into the swamp and the niggers watched him out of sight and then went back to work and Sutpen didn't even miss him until night, suppertime probably, and the niggers told him and he declared a holiday tomorrow because he would have to get out and borrow some dogs.

Not that he would have needed dogs, with his niggers to trail, but maybe he thought that the guests, the others, would not be used to trailing with niggers and would expect dogs. And Grandfather (he was young then too) brought some champagne and some of the others brought whiskey and they began to gather out there a little after sundown, at Sutpen's house that didn't even have walls yet, that wasn't anything yet but some lines of bricks sunk into the ground but that was all right because they didn't go to bed anyhow, Grandfather said. They just sat around the fire with the champagne and the whiskey and a quarter of the last venison Sutpen had killed, and about midnight the man with the dogs came.

Then it was daylight and the dogs had a little trouble at first because some of the wild niggers had run out about a mile of the trail just for fun. But they got the trail straightened out at last, the dogs and the niggers in the bottom and most of the men riding along the edge of it where the going was good.

But Grandfather and Colonel Sutpen went with the dogs and the niggers because Sutpen was afraid the niggers might catch the architect before he could reach them. He and Grandfather had to walk a good deal, sending one of the niggers to lead the horses on around the bad places until they could ride again.

Grandfather said it was fine weather and the trail lay pretty good but Sutpen said it would have been fine if the architect had just waited until

October or November. And so he told Grandfather something about himself.

'Sutpen's trouble was innocence. All of a sudden he discovered, not what he wanted to do but what he just had to do, had to do it whether he wanted to or not, because if he did not do it he knew that he could never live with himself for the rest of his life, never live with what all the men and women that had died to make him had left inside of him for him to pass on, with all the dead ones waiting and watching to see if he was going to do it right, fix things right so that he would be able to look in the face not only the old dead ones but all the living ones that would come after him when he would be one of the dead.

And that at the very moment when he discovered what it was, he found out that this was the last thing in the world he was equipped to do because he not only had not known that he would have to do this, he did not even know that it existed to be wanted, to need to be done, until he was almost fourteen years old. Because he was born in West Virginia, in the mountains—' ('Not in West Virginia,' Shreve said.— 'What?' Quentin said. ' Not in West Virginia,' Shreve said.

' Because if he was twenty-five years old in Mississippi in 1833, he was born in 1808. And there wasn't any West Virginia in 1808 because—'

'All right,' Quentin said. '—West Virginia wasn't admitted—'

'All right all right,' Quentin said. '—into the United States until—'

'All right all right all right,' Quentin said.) '—he was born where what few other people he knew lived in log cabins boiling with children like the one he was born in—men and grown boys who hunted or lay before the fire on the floor while the women and older girls stepped back and forth across them to reach the fire to cook, where the only colored people were Indians and you only looked down at them over your rifle sights, where he had never even heard of, never imagined, a place, a land divided neatly up and actually owned by men who did nothing but ride over it on fine horses or sit in fine clothes on the

galleries of big houses while Other people worked for them; he did not even imagine then that there was any such way to live or to want to live, or that there existed all the objects to be wanted which there were, or that the ones who owned the objects not only could look down on the ones that didn't, but could be supported in the down-looking not only by the others who owned objects too but by the very ones that were looked down on that didn't own objects and knew they never would.

Because where he lived the land belonged to anybody and everybody and so the man who would go to the trouble and work to fence off a piece of it and say "This is mine" was crazy; and as for objects, nobody had any more of them than you did because everybody had just what he was strong enough or energetic enough to take and keep, and only that crazy man would go to the trouble to take or even want more than he could eat or swap for powder and whiskey.

So he didn't even know there was a country all divided and fixed and neat with a people living on it all divided and fixed and neat because of what color their skins happened to be and what they happened to own, and where a certain few men not only had the power of life and death and barter and sale over others, but they had living human men to perform the endless repetitive personal offices, such as pouring the very whiskey from the jug and putting the glass into a man's hand or pulling off his boots for him to go to bed, that all men have had to do for themselves since time began and would have to do until they died and which no man ever has or ever will like to do, but which no man that he knew had ever thought of evading anymore than he had thought of evading the effort of chewing and swallowing and breathing.

When he was a child he didn't listen to the vague and cloudy tales of Tidewater splendor that penetrated even his mountains because then he could not understand what the people who told about it meant, and when he became a boy he didn't listen to them because there was nothing in sight to compare and gauge the tales by and so give the words life and meaning, and no chance that he ever would understand what they meant because he was too busy doing the things that boys

do; and when he got to be a youth and curiosity itself exhumed the tales which he did not know he had heard and speculated on, he was interested and would have liked to see the places once, but without envy or regret, because he just thought that some people were spawned in one place and some in another, some spawned rich (lucky, he may have called it) and some not, and that (so he told Grandfather) the men themselves had little to do with the choosing and less of the regret because it had never once occurred to him that any man should take any such blind accident as that as authority or warrant to look down at others, any others. So he had hardly heard of such a world until he fell into it.

'That's how it was. They fell into it, the whole family, returned to the coast from which the first Sutpen had come (when the ship from the Old Bailey reached Jamestown probably), tumbled head over heels back to Tidewater by sheer altitude, elevation, and gravity, as if whatever slight hold the family had had on the mountain had broken. He said something to Grandfather about his mother dying about that time and how his pap said she was a fine wearying woman and that he would miss her; and something about how it was the wife that had got his father even that far West.

And now the whole passel of them from the father through the grown daughters down to one that couldn't even walk yet, slid back down out of the mountains, skating in a kind of accelerating and sloven and inert coherence like a useless collection of flotsam on a flooded river, moving by some perverse automotivation such as inanimate objects sometimes show, backward against the very current of the stream, across the Virginia plateau and into the slack lowlands about the mouth of the James River.

He didn't know why they moved, or didn't remember the reason if he ever knew it—whether it was optimism, hope in his father's breast or nostalgia, since he didn't know just where his father had come from, whether from the country to which they returned or not, or even if his father knew, remembered, wanted to remember and find it again. He didn't know whether somebody, some traveler, had told him of some

easy place or time, some escape from the hardship of getting food and keeping warm in the mountain way, or if perhaps somebody his father knew once or who knew his father once and remembered him, happened to think about him, or someone kin to him who had tried to forget him and couldn't quite do it, had sent for him and he had obeyed, going not for the promised job but for the ease, having faith perhaps in the blood kinship to evade the labor, if it was kinship and in his own inertia and in whatever gods had watched over him this far if it were not.

But all he remembered—' (' The demon,' Shreve said) 'was that one morning the father rose and told the older girls to pack what food they had, and somebody wrapped up the baby and somebody else threw water on the fire and they walked down the mountain to where roads existed. They had a lopsided two-wheeled cart and two spavined oxen now. He told Grandfather he did not remember just where nor when nor how his father had got it. He was ten then; the two older boys had left home some time before and had not been heard of since.

He drove the oxen, since almost as soon as they got the cart his father began the practice of accomplishing that part of the translation devoted to motion flat on his back in the cart, oblivious among the quilts and lanterns and well buckets and bundles of clothing and children, snoring with alcohol. That was how he told it.

He didn't remember if it was weeks or months or a year they traveled, except that one of the older girls who had left the cabin unmarried was still unmarried when they finally stopped, though she had become a mother before they lost the last blue mountain range. He didn't remember whether it was that winter and then spring and then summer that overtook and passed them on the road, or whether they overtook and passed in slow succession the seasons as they descended, or whether it was the descent itself that did it, and they not progressing parallel in time but descending perpendicularly through temperature and climate—a (you couldn't call it a period because as he remembered it or as he told Grandfather he did, it didn't have either a definite beginning or a definite ending.

Maybe attenuation is better)—an attenuation from a kind of furious inertness and patient immobility, while they sat in the cart outside the doors of doggeries and taverns and waited for the father to drink himself insensible, to a sort of dreamy and destinationless locomotion after they had got the old man out of whatever shed or outhouse or barn or ditch and loaded him into the cart again, and during which they did not seem to progress at all but just to hang suspended while the earth itself altered, flattened and broadened out of the mountain cove where they had all been born, mounting, rising about them like a tide in which the strange harsh rough faces about the doggery doors into which the old man was just entering or was just being carried or thrown out (and this one time by a huge bull of a nigger, the first black man, slave, they had ever seen, who emerged with the old man over his shoulder like a sack of meal and his—the nigger's—mouth loud with laughing and full of teeth like tombstones) swam up and vanished and were replaced; the earth, the world, rising about them and flowing past as if the cart moved on a treadmill.

And it was now spring and now summer and they still were moving on toward a place they had never seen and had no conception of, let alone wanted to go to; and from a place, a little lost spot on the side of a hill back to which probably not one of them could have led the way—excepting possibly the usually insensible father who made one stage of the journey accompanied by the raspberry-colored elephants and snakes which he seems to have been hunting—bringing into and then removing from their sober static country astonishment the strange faces and places, both faces and places—doggeries and taverns now become hamlets, hamlets now become villages, villages now towns, and the country flattened out now with good roads and fields and niggers working in the fields while white men sat fine horses and watched them, and more fine horses and men in fine clothes, with a different look in the face from mountain men about the taverns where the old man was not even allowed to come in by the front door and from which his mountain drinking manners got him ejected before he would have time to get drunk good (so that now they began to make really pretty good time) and no laughter and jeers to the ejecting now,

even if the laughter and jeers had been harsh and without much gentleness in them.

'That's the way he got it. He had learned the difference not only between white men and black ones, but he was learning that there was a difference between white men and white men, not to be measured by lifting anvils or gouging eyes or how much whiskey you could drink then get up and walk out of the room. He had begun to discern that without being aware of it yet. He still thought that that was just a matter of where you were spawned and how; whether you were lucky or not lucky; and that the lucky ones would be even slower and loather than the unlucky to take any advantage of it or credit for it, or to feel that it gave them anything more than the luck; and he still thought that they would feel if anything more tender toward the unlucky than the unlucky would ever need to feel toward them.

He was to find all that out later. He remembered when he found it out, because that was the same second when he discovered his innocence. It was not the second, the moment, that he was long about: it was the getting to it: the moment when they must have realized, believed at last that they were no longer traveling, moving, going somewhere—not the being still at last and in a fashion settled, because they had done that before on the road; he remembered how one time the gradual difference in comfort between the presence and absence of shoes and warm clothing occurred in one place: a cowshed where the sister's baby was born and, as he told Grandfather, for all he could remember, conceived too.

Because they were stopped now at last. He didn't know where they were. For a time, during the first days or weeks or months, the woodsman's instinct which he had acquired from the environment where he grew up or that maybe had been bequeathed him by the two brothers who had vanished, one of whom had been as far West as the Mississippi River one time—the instinct bequeathed him along with the worn-out buckskin garments and such which they left in the cabin when they departed the last time for good, and which he had sharpened by boy's practice at small game and such—kept him oriented so that he

could have (so he said) found his way back to the mountain cabin in time.

But that was past now, behind him the moment when he last could have said exactly where he had been born. He was now weeks and months, maybe a year, since he became confused about his age and was never able to straighten it out again, so that he told Grandfather that he did not know within a year on either side just how old he was. So he knew neither where he had come from nor where he was nor why.

He was just there, surrounded by the faces, almost all the faces which he had ever known (though the number of them was decreasing, thinning out, despite the efforts of the unmarried sister who pretty soon, so he told Grandfather, and still without any wedding had another baby, decreasing because of the climate, the warmth, the dampness) living in a cabin that was almost a replica of the mountain one except that it didn't sit up in the bright wind but sat instead beside a big flat river that sometimes showed no current at all and even sometimes ran backward, where his sisters and brothers seemed to take sick after supper and die before the next meal, where regiments of niggers with white men watching them planted and raised things that he had never heard of.

The old man did something besides drink now, at least, he would leave the cabin after breakfast and return sober to supper, and he fed them somehow. And the man was there who owned all the land and the niggers and apparently the white men who superintended the work, and who lived in the biggest house he had ever seen and who spent most of the afternoon (he told how he would creep up among the tangled shrubbery of the lawn and lie hidden and watch the man) in a barrel stave hammock between two trees, with his shoes off, and a nigger who wore every day better clothes than he or his father and sisters had ever owned and ever expected to, who did nothing else but fan him and bring him drinks.

And he (he was eleven or twelve or thirteen now because this was where he realized that he had irrevocably lost count of his age) would lie there all afternoon while the sisters would come from time to time to the door of the cabin two miles away and scream at him' for wood or water, watching that man who not only had shoes in the summertime too, but didn't even have to wear them.

'But he still didn't envy the man he was watching. He coveted the shoes, and probably he would have liked for his father to have a broadcloth monkey to hand him the jug and to carry the wood and water into the cabin for his sisters to wash and cook with and keep the house warm so that he himself would not have to do it. Maybe he even realized, understood the pleasure it would have given his sisters for their neighbors (other whites like them, who lived in other cabins not quite as well built and not at all as well kept and preserved as the ones the nigger slaves lived in but still imbued with freedom's bright aura, which the slave quarters were not for all their sound roofs and whitewash) to see them being waited on. Because he had not only not lost the innocence yet, he had not yet discovered that he possessed it.

He no more envied the man than he would have envied a mountain man who happened to own a fine rifle. He would have coveted the rifle, but he would himself have supported and confirmed the owner's pride and pleasure in its ownership because he could not have conceived of the owner taking such crass advantage of the luck which gave the rifle to him rather than to another as to say to other men: Because I own his rifle, my arms and legs and blood and bones are superior to yours except as the victorious outcome of a fight with rifles: and how in the world could a man fight another man with dressed-up niggers and the fact that he could lie in a hammock all afternoon with his shoes off? and what in the world would he be fighting for if he did? He didn't even know he was innocent that day when his father sent him to the big house with the message.

He didn't remember (or did not say) what the message was, apparently he still didn't know exactly just what his father did (or maybe was supposed to do), what work the old man had in relation to the

plantation. He was a boy either thirteen or fourteen, he didn't know which, in garments his father had got from the plantation commissary and had worn out and which one of the sisters had patched and cut down to fit him, and he was no more conscious of his appearance in them or of the possibility that anyone else would be than he was of his skin, following the road and turning into the gate and following the drive up past where still more niggers with nothing to do all day but plant flowers and trim grass were working, and so to the house, the portico, the front door, thinking how at last he was going to see the inside of it, see what else a man was bound to own who could have a special nigger to hand him his liquor and pull off his shoes that he didn't even need to wear, never for one moment thinking but what the man would be as pleased to show him the balance of his things as the mountain man would have been to show the powder horn and bullet mold that went with the rifle.

Because he was still innocent. He knew it without being aware that he did; he told Grandfather how, before the monkey nigger who came to the door had finished saying what he said, he seemed to kind of dissolve and a part of him turn and rush back through the two years they had lived there, like when you pass through a room fast and look at all the objects in it and you turn and go back through the room again and look at all the objects from the other side and you find out you had never seen them before, rushing back through those two years and seeing a dozen things that had happened and he hadn't even seen them before: the certain flat level silent way his older sisters and the other white women of their kind had of looking at niggers, not with fear or dread but with a kind of speculative antagonism not because of any known fact or reason but inherited, by both white and black, the sense, effluvium of it passing between the white women in the doors of the sagging cabins and the niggers in the road and which was not quite explainable by the fact that the niggers had better clothes, and which the niggers did not return as antagonism or in any sense of dare or taunt but through the very fact that they were apparently oblivious of it, too oblivious of it.

You knew that you could hit them, he told Grandfather, and they would not hit back or even resist. But you did not want to, because they (the niggers) were not it, not what you wanted to hit; that you knew when you hit them you would just be hitting a child's toy balloon with a face painted on it, a face slick and smooth and distended and about to burst into laughing, and so you did not dare strike it because it would merely burst and you would rather let it walk on out of your sight than to have stood there in the loud laughing. He remembered talk at night before the fire when they had company or had themselves gone visiting after supper to another cabin, the voices of the women sober enough, even calm, yet filled with a quality dark and sullen and only some man, usually his father in drink, to break out into harsh recapitulation of his own worth, the respect which his own physical prowess commanded from his fellows, and the boy of either thirteen or fourteen or maybe twelve knowing that the men and the women were talking about the same thing though it had never once been mentioned by name, as when people talk about privation without mentioning the siege, about sickness without ever naming the epidemic.

He remembered one afternoon when he and his sister were walking along the road and he heard the carriage coming up behind them and stepped off the road and then realized that his sister was not going to give way to it, that she still walked in the middle of the road with a sort of sullen implacability in the very angle of her head and he shouted at her: and then it was all dust and rearing horses and glinting harness buckles and wheel spokes; he saw two parasols in the carriage and the nigger coachman in a plug hat shouting: "Hoo dar, gal! Git outen de way dar?" and then it was over, gone: the carriage and the dust, the two faces beneath the parasols glaring down at his sister: then he was throwing vain clods of dirt after the dust as it spun on. He knew now, while the monkey-dressed nigger butler kept the door barred with his body while he spoke, that it had not been the nigger coachman that he threw at at all, that it was the actual dust raised by the proud delicate wheels, and just that vain.

He thought of one night late when his father came home, blundered into the cabin; he could smell the whiskey even while still dulled with

broken sleep, hearing that same fierce exultation, vindication, in his father's voice: "We whupped one of Pettibone's niggers tonight" and he roused at that, waked at that, asking which one of Pettibone's niggers and his father said he did not know, had never seen the nigger before: and he asked what the nigger had done and his father said, "Hell fire, that goddam son of a bitch Pettibone's nigger." He must have meant the question the same way his father meant the answer without knowing it then, since he had not yet discovered innocence: no actual nigger, living creature, living flesh to feel pain and writhe and cry out.

He could even seem to see them: the torch-disturbed darkness among trees, the fierce hysterical faces of the white men, the balloon face of the nigger. Maybe the nigger's hands would be tied or held but that would be all right because they were not the hands with which the balloon face would struggle and writhe for freedom, not the balloon face: it was just poised among them, levitative and slick with paper-thin distension. Then someone would strike the balloon one single desperate and despairing blow and then he would seem to see them fleeing, running, with all about them, overtaking them and passing and going on and then returning to overwhelm them again, the roaring waves of mellow laughter meaningless and terrifying and loud.

And now he stood there before that white door with the monkey nigger barring it and looking down at him in his patched made-over jeans clothes and no shoes, and I don't reckon he had even ever experimented with a comb because that would be one of the things that his sisters would keep hidden good. He had never thought about his own hair or clothes or anybody else's hair or clothes until he saw that monkey nigger, who through no doing of his own happened to have had the felicity of being housebred in Richmond maybe, looking— ('Or maybe even in Charleston,' Shreve breathed.) 'at them and he never even remembered what the nigger said, how it was the nigger told him, even before he had had time to say what he came for, never to come to that front door again but to go around to the back.

'He didn't even remember leaving. All of a sudden he found himself running and already some distance from the house, and not toward

home. He was not crying, he said. He wasn't even mad. He just had to think, so he was going to where he could be quiet and think, and he knew where that place was. He went into the woods. He says he did not tell himself where to go: that his body, his feet, just went there—a place where a game trail entered a canebrake and an oak tree had fallen across it and made a kind of cave where he kept an iron griddle that he would cook small game on sometimes. He said he crawled back into the cave and sat with his back against the uptorn roots, and thought.

Because he couldn't get it straight yet. He couldn't even realize yet that his trouble, his impediment, was innocence because he would not be able to realize that until he got it straight. So he was seeking among what little he had to call experience for something to measure it by, and he couldn't find anything.

He had been told to go around to the back door even before he could state his errand, who had sprung from a people whose houses didn't have back doors but only windows and anyone entering or leaving by a window would be either hiding or escaping, neither of which he was doing. In fact, he had actually come on business, in the good faith of business which he had believed that all men accepted. Of course he had not expected to be invited in to eat a meal since time, the distance from one cooking pot to the next, did not need to be measured in hours or days; perhaps he had not expected to be asked into the house at all.

But he did expect to be listened to because he had come, been sent, on some business which, even though he didn't remember what it was and maybe at the time (he said) he might not even have comprehended, was certainly connected somehow with the plantation that supported and endured that smooth white house and that smooth white brass-decorated door and the very broadcloth and linen and silk stockings the monkey nigger stood in to tell him to go around to the back before he could even state the business. It was like he might have been sent with a lump of lead or even a few molded bullets so that the man who owned the fine rifle could shoot it, and the man came to the door and

told him to leave the bullets on a stump at the edge of the woods, not even letting him come close enough to look at the rifle. ' Because he was not mad.

He insisted on that to Grandfather. He was just thinking, because he knew that something would have to be done about it; he would have to do something about it in order to live with himself for the rest of his life and he could not decide what it was because of that innocence which he had just discovered he had, which (the innocence, not the man, the tradition) he would have to compete with. He had nothing to compare and gauge it by but the rifle analogy, and it would not make sense by that. He was quite calm about it, he said, sitting there with his arms around his knees in his little den beside the game trail where more than once when the wind was right he had seen deer pass within ten feet of him, arguing with himself quietly and calmly while both debaters agreed that if there were only someone else, some older and smarter person to ask. But there was not, there was only himself, the two of them inside that one body, arguing quiet and calm: But I can shoot him. (Not the monkey nigger. It was not the nigger anymore than it had been the nigger that his father had helped to whip that night.

The nigger was just another balloon face slick and distended with that mellow loud and terrible laughing so that he did not dare to burst it, looking down at him from within the halfclosed door during that instant in which, before he knew it, something in him had escaped and—he unable to close the eyes of it—was looking out from within the balloon face just as the man who did not even have to wear the shoes he owned, whom the laughter which the balloon held barricaded and protected from such as he, looked out from whatever invisible place he (the man) happened to be at the moment, at the boy outside the barred door in his patched garments and splayed bare feet, looking through and beyond the boy, he himself seeing his own father and sisters and brothers as the owner, the rich man (not the nigger) must have been seeing them all the time—as cattle, creatures heavy and without grace, brutally evacuated into a world without hope or purpose for them, who would in turn spawn with brutish and vicious prolixity, populate, double treble and compound, fill space and earth with a race

whose future would be a succession of cut-down and patched and made-over garments bought on exorbitant credit because they were white people, from stores where niggers were given the garments free, with for sole heritage that expression on a balloon face bursting with laughter which had looked out at some unremembered and nameless progenitor who had knocked at a door when he was a little boy and had been told by a nigger to go around to the back): But I can shoot him: he argued with himself and the other: No. That wouldn't do no good: and the first: What shall we do then? and the other: I don't know: and the first: But I can shoot him. I could slip right up there through them bushes and lay there until he come out to lay in the hammock and shoot him: and the other: No. That wouldn't do no good: and the first: Then what shall we do? and the other: I don't know.

'Now he was hungry. It was before dinner when he went to the big house, and now there was no sun at all where he crouched though he could still see sun in the tops of the trees around him. But his stomach had already told him it was late and that it would be later still when he reached home. And then he said he began to think Home.

Home and that he thought at first that he was trying to laugh and that he kept on telling himself it was laughing even after he knew better; home, as he came out of the woods and approached it, still hidden yet, and looked at it—the rough partly rotten log walls, the sagging roof whose missing shingles they did not replace but just set pans and buckets under the leaks, the lean-to room which they used for kitchen and which was all right because in good weather it didn't even matter that it had no chimney since they did not attempt to use it at all when it rained, and his sister pumping rhythmic up and down above a washtub in the yard, her back toward him, shapeless in a calico dress and a pair of the old man's shoes unlaced and flapping about her bare ankles and broad in the beam as a cow, the very labor she was doing brutish and stupidly out of all proportion to its reward: the very primary essence of labor, toil, reduced to its crude absolute which only a beast could and would endure; and now (he said) the thought striking him for the first time as to what he would tell his father when the old man asked him if he had delivered the message, whether he would lie or not, since if he

did lie he would be found out maybe at once, since probably the man had already sent a nigger down to see why whatever it was his father had failed to do was not done, and had sent the excuse for—granted that that was what his errand to the house had been, which (granted his old man) it probably was. But it didn't happen at once because his father was not at home yet.

So it was only the sister, as if she had been waiting not for the wood but just for him to return, for the opportunity to use her vocal cords, nagging at him to fetch the wood and he not refusing, not objecting, just not hearing her, paying any attention to her because he was still thinking.

Then the old man came and the sister told on him and the old man made him fetch the wood: and still nothing said about the errand while they ate supper nor when he went and lay down on the pallet where he slept and where he went to bed by just lying down, only not to sleep now, just lying there with his hands under his head and still nothing said about it, and he still not knowing if he was going to lie or not. Because, he said to Grandfather, the terrible part of it had not occurred to him yet, he just lay there while the two of them argued inside of him, speaking in orderly turn, both calm, even leaning backward to be calm and reasonable and unrancorous: But I can kill him.

No. That wouldn't do no good—Then what shall we do about it?—I don't know: and he just listening, not especially interested, he said, hearing the two of them without listening. Because what he was thinking about now he hadn't asked for. It was just there, natural in a boy, a child, and he not paying any attention to it either because it was what a boy would have thought, and he knew that to do what he had to do in order to live with himself he would have to think it out straight as a man would, thinking The nigger never give me a chance to tell him what it was and so he (not the nigger now either) wont know it and whatever it is wont get done and he wont know it aint done until too late so he will get paid back that much for what he set that nigger to do and if it only was to tell him that the stable, the house, was on fire and the nigger wouldn't even let me tell him, warn him.

And then he said that all of a sudden it was not thinking, it was something shouting it almost loud enough for his sisters on the other pallet and his father in the bed with the two youngest and filling the room with alcohol snoring, to hear too: He never even give me a chance to say it: it too fast, too mixed up to be thinking, it all kind of shouting at him at once, boiling out and over him like the nigger laughing: He never give me a chance to say it and Pap never asked me if I told him or not and so he cant even know that Pap sent him any message and so whether he got it or not cant even matter, not even to Pap; I went up to that door for that nigger to tell me never to come to that front door again and I not only wasn't doing any good to him by telling it or any harm to him by not telling it, there aint any good or harm either in the living world that I can do to him.

It was like that, he said, like an explosion—a bright glare that vanished and left nothing, no ashes nor refuse; just a limitless flat plain with the severe shape of his intact innocence rising from it like a monument; that innocence instructing him as calm as the others had ever spoken, using his own rifle analogy to do it with, and when it said them in place of he or him, it meant more than all the human puny mortals under the sun that might lie in hammocks all afternoon with their shoes off: He thought "If you were fixing to combat them that had the fine rifles, the first thing you would do would be to get yourself the nearest thing to a fine rifle you could borrow or steal or make, wouldn't it?" and he said Yes. "But this aint a question of rifles. So to combat them you have got to have what they have that made them do what the man did. You got to have land and niggers and a fine house to combat them with.

You see?" and he said Yes again. He left that night. He waked before day and departed just like he went to bed: by rising from the pallet and tiptoeing out of the house. He never saw any of his family again.

'He went to the West Indies.'" Quentin had not moved, not even to raise his head from its attitude of brooding bemusement upon the open letter which lay on the open textbook, his hands lying on the table before him on either side of the book and the letter, one half of which

slanted upward from the transverse crease without support, as if it had learned half the secret of levitation. 'That was how Sutpen said it.

He and Grandfather were sitting on a log now because the dogs had faulted. That is, they had treed—a tree from which he (the architect) could not have escaped yet which he had undoubtedly mounted because they found the sapling pole with his suspenders still knotted about one end of it that he had used to climb the tree, though at first they could not understand why the suspenders, and it was three hours before they comprehended that the architect had used architecture, physics, to elude them as a man always falls back upon what he knows best in a crisis—the murderer upon murder, the thief thieving, the liar lying.

He (the architect) knew about the wild Negroes even if he couldn't have known that Sutpen would get dogs; he had chosen that tree and hauled that pole up after him and calculated stress and distance and trajectory and had crossed a gap to the next nearest tree that a flying squirrel could not have crossed and traveled from there on from tree to tree for almost half a mile before he put foot on the ground again. It was three hours before one of the wild niggers (the dogs wouldn't leave the tree; they said he was in it) found where he had come down.

So he and Grandfather, sat on the log and talked, and one of the wild niggers went back to camp for grub and the rest of the whiskey and they blew the other men in with horns and they ate, and he told Grandfather some more of it while they waited.

'He went to the West Indies. That's how Sutpen said it: not how he managed to find where the West Indies were nor where ships departed from to go there, not how he got to where the ships were and got in one, nor how he liked the sea, nor about the hardships of a sailor's life and it must have been hardship indeed for him, a boy of fourteen or fifteen who had never seen the ocean before, going to sea in 1823.

He just said, "So I went to the West Indies," sitting there on the log with Grandfather while the dogs still bayed the tree where they

believed the architect was because he would have to be there saying it just like that day thirty years later when he sat in Grandfather's office (in his fine clothes now, even though they were a little soiled and worn with three years of war, with money to rattle in his pocket and his beard at its prime too: beard, body and intellect at that peak which all the different parts that make a man reach, where he can say I did all that I set out to do and I could stop here if I wanted to and no man to chide me with sloth, not even myself—and maybe this the instant which Fate always picks out to blackjack you, only the peak feels so sound and stable that the beginning of the falling is hidden for a little while—saying it with his head flung up a little in that attitude that nobody ever knew exactly who he had aped it from or if he did not perhaps learn it too from the same book out of which he taught himself the words, the bombastic phrases with which Grandfather said he even asked you for a match for his cigar or offered you the cigar—and there was nothing of vanity, nothing comic in it either Grandfather said, because of that innocence which he had never lost, because after it finally told him what to do that night he forgot about it and didn't know that he still had it) and he told Grandfather—told him, mind; not excusing, asking for no pity; not explaining, asking for no exculpation: just told Grandfather how he had put his first wife aside like eleventh—and twelfth-century kings did: "I found that she was not and could never be, through no fault of her own, adjunctive or incremental to the design which I had in mind, so I provided for her and put her aside."—telling Grandfather in that same tone while they sat on the log waiting for the niggers to come back with the other guests and the whiskey:

"So I went to the West Indies. I had had some schooling during a part of one winter, enough to have learned something about them, to realize that they would be most suitable to the expediency of my requirements." He didn't remember how he came to go to the school. That is, why his father decided all of a sudden to send him, what nebulous vision or shape might have evolved out of the fog of alcohol and nigger-beating and scheming to avoid work which his old man called his mind—the image not of ambition nor glory, not to see his son better himself for his own sake, probably not even some blind instant of revolt against that same house whose roof had leaked on probably a

hundred families like his which had come and lived beneath it and vanished and left no trace, nothing, not even rags and broken crockery, but was probably mere vindictive envy toward one or two men, planters, whom he had to see every now and then.

Anyway, he was sent to school for about three months one winter—an adolescent boy of thirteen or fourteen in a room full of children three or four years younger than he and three or four years further advanced, and he not only probably bigger than the teacher (the kind of teacher that would be teaching a one-room country school in a nest of Tidewater plantations) but a good deal more of a man, who probably brought into the school with him along with his sober watchful mountain reserve a good deal of latent insubordination that he would not be aware of any more than he would be aware at first that the teacher was afraid of him.

It would not be intractability and maybe you couldn't call it pride either, but maybe just the self-reliance of mountains and solitude, since some of his blood at least (his mother was a mountain woman, a Scottish woman who, so he told Grandfather, never did quite learn to speak English) had been bred in mountains, but which, whatever it was, was that which forbade him to condescend to memorize dry sums and such but which did permit him to listen when the teacher read aloud. —Sent to school, "where," he told Grandfather, "I learned little save that most of the deeds, good and bad both, incurring opprobrium or plaudits or reward either, within the scope of man's abilities, had already been performed and were to be learned about only from books.

So I listened when he would read to us. I realize now that on most of these occasions he resorted to reading aloud only when he saw that the moment had come when his entire school was on the point of rising and leaving the room. But whatever the reason, he read to us and I anyway listened, though I did not know that in that listening I was equipping myself better for what I should later design to do than if I had learned all the addition and subtraction in the book. That was how I learned of the West Indies. Not where they were, though if I had

known at the time that that knowledge would someday serve me, I would have learned that too.

What I learned was that there was a place called the West Indies to which poor men went in ships and became rich, it didn't matter how, so long as that man was clever and courageous: the latter of which I believed that I possessed, the former of which I believed that, if it were to be learned by energy and will in the school of endeavor and experience, I should learn. I remember how I remained one afternoon when school was out and waited for the teacher, waylaid him; he was a smallish man who always looked dusty, as if he had been born and lived all his life in attics and store rooms.

I recall how he started back when he saw me and how I thought at the time that if I were to strike him there would be no resulting outcry but merely the sound of the blow and a puff of dust in the air as when you strike a rug hanging from a line. I asked him if it were true, if what he had read us about the men who got rich in the West Indies were true. 'Why not?' he answered, starting back. 'Didn't you hear me read it from the book?' 'How do I know that what you read was in the book?' I said.

I was that green, that countrified, you see. I had not then learned to read my own name; although I had been attending the school for almost three months, I daresay I knew no more than I did when I entered the schoolroom for the first time. But I had to know, you see. Perhaps a man builds for his future in more ways than one, builds not only toward the body which will be his tomorrow or next year, but toward actions and the subsequent irrevocable courses of resultant action which his weak senses and intellect cannot foresee but which ten or twenty or thirty years from now he will take, will have to take in order to survive the act. Perhaps it was that instinct and not I who grasped one of his arms as he drew back (I did not actually doubt him.

I think that even then, even at my age, I realized that he could not have invented it, that he lacked that something which is necessary in a man to enable him to fool even a child by lying. But you see, I had to be sure,

had to take whatever method that came to my hand to make sure. And there was nothing else to hand except him) glaring at me and beginning to struggle, and I holding him and saying—I was quite calm, quite calm; I just had to know saying, 'Suppose I went there and found out that it was not so?' and he shrieking now, shouting ' Help! Help!' so that I let him go. So when the time came when I realized that to accomplish my design I should need first of all and above all things money in considerable quantities and in the quite immediate future, I remembered what he had read to us and I went to the West Indies."

'Then the other guests began to ride up, and after a while the niggers came back with the coffee pot and a deer haunch and the whiskey (and one bottle of champagne which they had overlooked, Grandfather said) and Sutpen stopped talking for a while. He didn't tell anymore of it until they had eaten and were sitting around smoking while the niggers and the dogs made casts in all directions. They had to drag the dogs away from the tree, but especially away from the sapling pole with the architect's suspenders tied to it, as if it was not only that the pole was the last thing the architect had touched but it was the thing his exultation had touched when he saw another chance to elude them, and so it was not only the man but the exultation too which the dogs smelled that made them wild.

The niggers and the dogs were getting further and further away until just before sundown one of the niggers whooped and he (he hadn't spoken for some time, Grandfather said, lying there on one elbow, in the fine boots and the only pants he had and the shirt he had put on when he came out of the mud and washed himself off after he realized that he would have to hunt the architect down himself if he wanted him back alive probably, not talking himself and maybe not even listening while the men talked about cotton and politics, just smoking the cigar Grandfather had given him and looking at the fire embers and maybe making that West Indian voyage again that he had made when he was fourteen and didn't even know where he was going or if he would ever get there or not, no more way of knowing whether the men who said the ship was going there were lying or not than he had of knowing whether or not the school teacher was telling the truth about

what was in the book. And he never told whether the voyage was hard or not, how much he must have had to endure to make it.

But then he believed that all that was necessary was courage and shrewdness and the one he knew he had and the other he believed he could learn if it were to be taught, and it probably was the hardship of the voyage which comforted him and that the men who said the ship was going to the West Indies had not lied to him, because at that time, Grandfather said, he probably could not have believed in anything that was easy) he said, "There it is" and got up and they all went on and found where the architect had come back to the ground again, with a gain of almost three hours.

So they had to go fast now and there wasn't much time to talk, or at least, Grandfather said, he did not appear to intend to resume. Then the sun went down and the other men had to start back to town; they all went except Grandfather, because he wanted to listen some more. So he sent word in by one of the others (he was not married then either) that he would not be home, and he and Sutpen went on until the light failed. Two of the niggers (they were thirteen miles from Sutpen's camp then) had already gone back to get blankets and more grub.

Then it was dark and the niggers began to light pine knots and they went on for a little while yet, gaining what they could now since they knew that the architect would have had to den soon after dark to keep from traveling in a circle. That was how Grandfather remembered it: he and Sutpen leading their horses (he would look back now and then and see the horses' eyes shining in the torch light and the horses' heads tossing and the shadows slipping along their shoulders and flanks) and the dogs and the niggers (the niggers mostly still naked except for a pair of pants here and there) with the pine torches smoking and flaring above them and the red light on their round heads and arms and the mud they wore in the swamp to keep the mosquitoes off dried hard and shiny, glinting like glass or china and the shadows they cast taller than they were at one moment then gone the next and even the trees and brakes and thickets there one moment and gone the next though

you knew all the time that they were still there because you could feel them with your breathing, as though, invisible, they pressed down and condensed the invisible air you breathed.

And he said how Sutpen was talking about it again, telling him again before he realized that this was some more of it, and he said how he thought there was something about a man's destiny (or about the man) that caused the destiny to shape itself to him like his clothes did, like the same coat that new might have fitted a thousand men, yet after one man has worn it for a while it fits no one else and you can tell it anywhere you see it even if all you see is a sleeve or a lapel: so that his—' ('the demon's,' Shreve said) 'destiny had fitted itself to him, to his innocence, his pristine aptitude for platform drama and childlike heroic simplicity, just as the fine broad-cloth uniform which you could have seen on ten thousand men during those four years, which he wore when he came in the office on that afternoon thirty years later, had fitted itself to the swaggering of all his gestures and to the forensic verbiage in which he stated calmly, with that frank innocence which we call "of a child" except that a human child is the only living creature that is never either frank or innocent, the most simple and the most outrageous things.

He was telling some more of it, was leading into what he was telling yet still without telling how he got to where he was, nor even how what he was now involved in came to occur (he was obviously at least twenty years old at the time he was telling about, crouching behind a window in the dark and firing the muskets through it which someone else loaded and handed to him), getting himself and Grandfather both into that besieged Haitian room as simply as he got himself to the West Indies by saying that he decided to go to the West Indies and so he went there.

This anecdote was no deliberate continuation of the other one but was merely called to his mind by the picture of the niggers and torches in front of them; he not telling how he got there, what had happened during the six years between that day when he had decided to go to the West Indies and become rich, and this night when, overseer or foreman

or something to a French sugar planter, he was barricaded in the house with the planter's family.

And now Grandfather said there was the first mention—a shadow that almost emerged for a moment and then faded again but not completely away—of the—' ('It's a girl,' Shreve said. 'Dont tell me. Just go on.') '—woman whom he was to tell Grandfather thirty years afterward he had found unsuitable to his purpose and so put aside, though providing for her and there were a few frightened half-breed servants with them who he would have to turn from the window from time to time and kick and curse into helping the girl load the muskets which he and the planter fired through the windows.

And I reckon Grandfather was saying "Wait, wait for God's sake wait" about like you are, until he finally did stop and back up and start over again with at least some regard for cause and effect even if none for logical sequence and continuity.

Or maybe it was the fact that they were sitting again now, having decided that they had gone far enough for that night, and the niggers had made camp and cooked supper and they (he and Grandfather) drank some of the whiskey and ate and then sat before the fire drinking some more of the whiskey and he telling it all over and still it was not absolutely clear—the how and the why he was there and what he was—since he was not talking about himself.

He was telling a story. He was not bragging about something he had done; he was just telling a story about something a man named Thomas Sutpen had experienced, which would still have been the same story if the man had had no name at all, if it had been told about any man or no man over whiskey at night.

'That may have been what slowed him down. But it was not enough to clarify the story much. He still was not recounting to Grandfather the career of somebody named Thomas Sutpen. Grandfather said the only mention he ever made to those six or seven years which must have existed somewhere, must have actually occurred, was about the patois

he had to learn in order to oversee the plantation, and the French he had to learn, maybe not to get engaged to be married, but which he would certainly need to be able to repudiate the wife after he had already got her—how, so he told Grandfather, he had believed that courage and shrewdness would be enough but found that he was wrong and how sorry he was that he had not taken the schooling along with the West Indian lore when he discovered that all people did not speak the same tongue and realized that he would not only need courage and skill, he would have to learn to speak a new language, else that design to which he had dedicated himself would die still-born.

So he learned the language just like he learned to be a sailor I reckon, because Grandfather asked him why he didn't get himself a girl to live with and learn it the easy way and Grandfather said how he sat here with the firelight on his face and the beard and his eyes quiet and sort of bright, and said—and Grandfather said it was the only time he ever knew him to say anything quiet and simple: "On this night I am speaking of (and until my first marriage, I might add) I was still a virgin. You will probably not believe that, and if I were to try to explain it you would disbelieve me more than ever. So I will only say that that too was a part of the design which I had in my mind" and Grandfather said, "Why shouldn't I believe it?" and he looking at Grandfather still with that quiet bright expression about the eyes, saying, "But do you? Surely you don't hold me in such small contempt as to believe that at twenty I could neither have suffered temptation nor offered it?" and Grandfather said, "You're right. I shouldn't believe it. But I do."

So it was no tale about women, and certainly not about love: the woman, the girl, just that shadow which could load a musket but could not have been trusted to fire one out the window that night (or the seven or eight nights while they huddled in the dark and watched from the windows the barns or granaries or whatever it is you harvest sugar into, and the fields too, blazing and smoking: he said how you could smell it, you could smell nothing else, the rank sweet rich smell as if the hatred and the implacability, the thousand secret dark years which had created the hatred and implacability, had intensified the smell of the sugar: and Grandfather said how he remembered then that he had

seen Sutpen each time decline sugar for his coffee and so he (Grandfather) knew why now but he asked anyway to be sure and Sutpen told him it was true; that he had not been afraid until after the fields and barns were all burned and they had even forgot about the smell of the burning sugar, but that he had never been able to bear sugar since)—the girl just emerging for a second of the telling, in a single word almost, so that Grandfather said it was like he had just seen her too for a second by the flash of one of the muskets—a bent face, a single cheek, a chin for an instant beyond a curtain of fallen hair, a white slender arm raised, a delicate hand clutching a ramrod, and that was all.

No more detail and information about that than about how he got from the field, his overseeing, into the besieged house when the niggers rushed at him with their machetes, than how he got from the rotting cabin in Virginia to the fields he oversaw: and this, Grandfather said, was more incredible to him than the getting there from Virginia, because that did infer time, a space the getting across which did indicate something of leisureliness since time is longer than any distance, while the other, the getting from the fields into the barricaded house, seemed to have occurred with a sort of violent abrogation which must have been almost as short as his telling about it—a very condensation of time which was the gauge of its own violence, and he telling it in that pleasant faintly forensic anecdotal manner apparently just as he remembered it, was impressed by it through detached and impersonal interest and curiosity which even fear (that once when he mentioned fear by that same inverse process of speaking of a time when he was not afraid, before he became afraid, he put it) failed to leaven very much.

Because he was not afraid until after it was all over, Grandfather said, because that was all it was to him—a spectacle, something to be watched because he might not have a chance to see it again, since his innocence still functioned and he not only did not know what fear was until afterward, he did not even know that at first he was not terrified; did not even know that he had found the place where money was to be had quick if you were courageous and shrewd (he did not mean

shrewdness, Grandfather said. What he meant was unscrupulousness only he didn't know that word because it would not have been in the book from which the school teacher read.

Or maybe that was what he meant by courage, Grandfather said) but where high mortality was concomitant with the money and the sheen on the dollars was not from gold but from blood—a spot of earth which might have been created and set aside by Heaven itself, Grandfather said, as a theater for violence and injustice and bloodshed and all the satanic lusts of human greed and cruelty, for the last despairing fury of all the pariah-interdict and all the doomed—a little island set in a smiling and fury-lurked and incredible indigo sea, which was the halfway point between what we call the jungle and what we call civilization, halfway between the dark inscrutable continent from which the black blood, the black bones and flesh and thinking and remembering and hopes and desires, was ravished by violence, and the cold known land to which it was doomed, the civilized land and people which had expelled some of its own blood and thinking and desires that had become too crass to be faced and borne longer, and set it homeless and desperate on the lonely ocean a little lost island in a latitude which would require ten thousand years of equatorial heritage to bear its climate, a soil manured with black blood from two hundred years of oppression and exploitation until it sprang with an incredible paradox of peaceful greenery and crimson flowers and sugar cane sapling size and three times the height of a man and a little bulkier of course but valuable pound for pound almost with silver ore, as if nature held a balance and kept a book and offered a recompense for the torn limbs and outraged hearts even if man did not, the planting of nature and man too watered not only by the wasted blood but breathed over by the winds in which the doomed ships had fled in vain, out of which the last taller of sail had sunk into the blue sea, along which the last vain despairing cry of woman or child had blown away the planting of men too; the yet intact bones and brains in which the old unsleeping blood that had vanished into the earth they trod still cried out for vengeance.

And he overseeing it, riding peacefully about on his horse while he learned the language (that meager and fragile thread, Grandfather said, by which the little surface corners and edges of men's secret and solitary lives may be joined for an instant now and then before sinking back into the darkness where the spirit cried for the first time and was not heard and will cry for the last time and will not be heard then either), not knowing that what he rode upon was a volcano, hearing the air tremble and throb at night with the drums and the chanting and not knowing that it was the heart of the earth itself he heard, who believed (Grandfather said) that earth was kind and gentle and that darkness was merely something you saw, or could not see in; overseeing what he oversaw and not knowing that he was overseeing it, making his daily expeditions from an armed citadel until the day itself came.

And he not telling that either, how that day happened, the steps leading up to it because Grandfather said he apparently did not know, comprehend, what he must have been seeing every day because of that innocence—a pig's bone with a little rotten flesh still clinging to it, a few chicken feathers, a stained dirty rag with a few pebbles tied up in it found on the old man's pillow one morning and none knew (least of all, the planter himself who had been asleep on the pillow) how it had come there because they learned at the same time that all the servants, the half-breeds, were missing, and he did not know until the planter told him that the stains on the rag were neither dirt nor grease but blood, nor what he took to be the planter's gallic rage was actually fear, terror, and he just curious and quite interested because he still looked upon the planter and the daughter both as foreigners.

He told Grandfather how until that first night of the siege he had not once thought that he did not know the girl's Christian name, whether he had ever heard it or not. He also told Grandfather, dropped this into the telling as you might flick the joker out of a pack of fresh cards without being able to remember later whether you had removed the joker or not, that the old man's wife had been a Spaniard, and so it was Grandfather and not Sutpen who realized that until that first night of the attack he had possibly not seen the girl as much as a dozen times.

The body of one of the half-breeds was found at last; Sutpen found it, hunted for it for two days without even knowing that what he was meeting was a blank wall of black secret faces, a wall behind which almost anything could be preparing to happen and, as he learned later, almost anything was, and on the third day he found the body where he could not possibly have missed it during the first hour of the first day if it had been there. All the time he was speaking he was sitting on the log, Grandfather said, telling it, making the gestures to tell it with, the man Grandfather himself had seen fight naked chest to chest with one of his wild niggers by the light of the camp fire while his house was building and who still fought with them by lantern light in the stable after he had got at last that wife who would be adjunctive to the forwarding of that design he had in mind, and no bones made about the fighting either, no handshaking and congratulations while he washed the blood off and donned his shirt because at the end of it the nigger would be flat on his back with his chest heaving and another nigger throwing water on him.

He was sitting there on the log telling Grandfather how at last he found the half-breed, or what used to be the half-breed, and so began to comprehend that the situation might become serious; then the house, the barricade, the five of them—the planter, the daughter, two women servants and himself—shut up in it and the air filled with the smoke and smell of burning cane and the glare and smoke of it on the sky and the air throbbing and trembling with the drums and the chanting—the little lost island beneath its down-cupped bowl of alternating day and night like a vacuum into which no help could come, where not even winds from the outer world came but only the trades, the same weary winds blowing back and forth across it and burdened still with the weary voices of murdered women and children homeless and graveless about the isolating and solitary sea—while the two servants and the girl whose Christian name he did not yet know loaded the muskets which he and the father fired at no enemy but at the Haitian night itself, lancing their little vain and puny flashes into the brooding and blood-weary and throbbing darkness: and it the very time of year, the season between hurricanes and any hope of rain.

And he told how on the eighth night the water gave out and something had to be done so he put the musket down and went out and subdued them. That was how he told it: he went out and subdued them, and when he returned he and the girl became engaged to marry and Grandfather saying "Wait wait" sure enough now, saying, "But you didn't even know her; you told me that when the siege began you didn't even know her name" and he looked at Grandfather and said, "Yes. But you see, it took me some time to recover." Not how he did it.

He didn't tell that either, that of no moment to the story either; he just put the musket down and had someone unbar the door and then bar it behind him, and walked out into the darkness and subdued them, maybe by yelling louder, maybe by standing, bearing more than they believed any bones and flesh could or should (should, yes: that would be the terrible thing: to find flesh to stand more than flesh should be asked to stand); maybe at last they themselves turning in horror and fleeing from the white arms and legs shaped like theirs and from which blood could be made to spurt and flow as it could from theirs and containing an indomitable spirit which should have come from the same primary fire which theirs came from but which could not have, could not possibly have.

He showed Grandfather the scars, one of which, Grandfather said, came pretty near leaving him that virgin for the rest of his life too. And then daylight came with no drums in it for the first time in eight days, and they emerged (probably the man and the daughter) and walked across the burned land with the bright sun shining down on it as if nothing had happened, walking now in what must have been an incredible desolate solitude and peaceful quiet, and found him and brought him to the house: and when he recovered he and the girl were engaged. Then he stopped." 'All right,' Shreve said. 'Go on.'" 'I said he stopped,' Quentin said.

'I heard you. Stopped what? How got engaged and then stopped, yet still had a wife to repudiate later? You said he didn't remember how he got to Haiti, and then he didn't remember how he got into the house with the niggers surrounding it. Now are you going to tell me he didn't

even remember getting married? That he got engaged and then he decided he would stop, only one day he found out he hadn't stopped but on the contrary he was married? And all you called him was just a virgin?" 'He stopped talking, telling it,' Quentin said.

He had not moved, talking apparently (if to anything) to the letter lying on the open book on the table between his hands. Opposite him Shreve had filled the pipe and smoked it out again. It lay again overturned, a scattering of white ashes fanning out from the bowl, onto the table before his crossed naked arms with which he appeared at the same time both to support and hug himself, since although it was only eleven o'clock the room was beginning to cool toward that point where about midnight there would be only enough heat in the radiators to keep the pipes from freezing, though (he would not perform his deep-breathing in the open window tonight at all) he had yet to go to the bedroom and return first with his bathrobe on and next with his overcoat on top of the bathrobe and Quentin's overcoat on his arm.

'He just said that he was now engaged to be married' Quentin said, 'and then he stopped telling it. He just stopped, Grandfather said, flat and final like that, like that was all there was, all there could be to it, all of it that made good listening from one man to another over whiskey at night.

Maybe it was." His (Quentin's) face was lowered. He spoke still in that curious, that almost sullen flat tone which had caused Shreve to watch him from the beginning with intent detached speculation and curiosity, to watch him still from behind his (Shreve's) expression of cherubic and erudite amazement which the spectacles intensified or perhaps actually created. 'Sutpen just got up and looked at the whiskey bottle and said, "No more tonight. We'll get to sleep; we want to get an early start tomorrow. Maybe we can catch him before he limbers up."

'But they didn't. It was late afternoon before they caught him the architect I mean—and then only because he had hurt his leg trying to architect himself across the river. But he made a mistake in the

calculation this time so the dogs and the niggers bayed him and the niggers making the racket now as they hauled him out.

Grandfather said how maybe the niggers believed that by fleeing the architect had voluntarily surrendered his status as interdict meat, had voluntarily offered the gambit by fleeing, which the niggers had accepted by chasing him and won by catching him, and that now they would be allowed to cook and eat him, both victors and vanquished accepting this in the same spirit of sport and sportsmanship and no rancor or hard feelings on either side. All the men who had started the race yesterday had come back except three, and the ones that returned had brought others, so there were more of them now than when the race started, Grandfather said.

So they hauled him out of his cave under the river bank: a little man with one sleeve missing from his frock coat and his flowered vest ruined by water and mud where he had fallen in the river and one pants leg ripped down so they could see where he had tied up his leg with a piece of his shirt tail and the rag bloody and the leg swollen, and his hat was completely gone. They never did find it so Grandfather gave him a new hat the day he left when the house was finished.

It was in Grandfather's office and Grandfather said the architect took the new hat and looked at it and burst into tears—a little harried wild-faced man with a two-days' stubble of beard, who came out of the cave fighting like a wildcat, hurt leg and all, with the dogs barking and the niggers whooping and hollering with deadly and merry anticipation, like they were under the impression that since the race had lasted more than twenty-four hours the rules would be automatically abrogated and they would not have to wait to cook him until Sutpen waded in with a short stick and beat niggers and dogs all away, leaving the architect standing there, not scared worth a damn either, just panting a little and Grandfather said a little sick in the face where the niggers had mishandled his leg in the heat of the capture, and making them a speech in French, a long one and so fast that Grandfather said probably another Frenchman could not have understood all of it.

But it sounded fine; Grandfather said even he—all of them—could tell that the architect was not apologizing; it was fine, Grandfather said, and he said how Sutpen turned toward him but he (Grandfather) was already approaching the architect, holding out the bottle of whiskey already uncorked. And Grandfather saw the eyes in the gaunt face, the eyes desperate and hopeless but indomitable too, invincible too, not beaten yet by a damn sight Grandfather said, and all that fifty-odd hours of dark and swamp and sleeplessness and fatigue and no grub and nowhere to go and no hope of getting there: just a will to endure and a foreknowing of defeat but not beat yet by a damn sight: and he took the bottle in one of his little dirty coon-like hands and raised the other hand and even fumbled about his head for a second before he remembered that the hat was gone, then flung the hand up in a gesture that Grandfather said you simply could not describe, that seemed to gather all misfortune and defeat that the human race ever suffered into a little pinch in his fingers like dust and fling it backward over his head, and raised the bottle and bowed first to Grandfather then to all the other men sitting their horses in a circle and looking at him, and then he took not only the first drink of neat whiskey he ever took in his life but the drink of it that he could no more have conceived himself taking than the Brahmin can believe that that situation can conceivably arise in which he will eat dog."

Quentin ceased. At once Shreve said, ' All right. Dont bother to say he stopped talking now; just go on.'" But Quentin did not continue at once—the flat, curiously dead voice, the downcast face, the relaxed body not stirring except to breathe; the two of them not moving except to breathe, both young, both born within the same year: the one in Alberta, the other in Mississippi; born half a continent apart yet joined, connected after a fashion in a sort of geographical transubstantiation by that Continental Trough, that River which runs not only through the physical land of which it is the geologic umbilical, not only runs through the spiritual lives of the beings within its scope, but is very Environment itself which laughs at degrees of latitude and temperature, though some of these beings, like Shreve, have never seen it the two of them who four months ago had never laid eyes on one another yet who since had slept in the same room and eaten side by side of the same food

and used the same books from which to prepare to recite in the same freshman courses, facing one another across the lamplit table on which lay the fragile Pandora's box of scrawled paper which had filled with violent and unratiocinative djinns and demons this snug monastic coign, this dreamy and heatless alcove of what we call the best of thought. 'Just don't bother,' Shreve said. 'Just get on with it.'

'That would take thirty years,' Quentin said. 'It was thirty years before Sutpen told Grandfather any more of it. Maybe he was too busy. All his time for spare talking taken up with furthering that design which he had in mind, and his only relaxation fighting his wild niggers in the stable where the men could hitch their horses and come up from the back and not be seen from the house because he was already married now, his house finished and he already arrested for stealing it and freed again so that was all settled, with a wife and two children—no, three—in it and his land cleared and planted with the seed Grandfather loaned him and him getting rich good and steady now—'

'Yes,' Shreve said; 'Mr Coldfield: what was that?' 'I don't know,' Quentin said. 'Nobody ever did know for certain. It was something about a bill of lading, some way he persuaded Mr Coldfield to use his credit: one of those things that when they work you were smart and when they don't you change your name and move to Texas: and Father said how Mr Coldfield must have sat back there in his little store and watched his wagonload of stock double maybe every ten years or at least not lose any ground and seen the chance to do that very same thing all the time, only his conscience (not his courage: Father said he had plenty of that) wouldn't let him.'

Then Sutpen came along and offered to do it, he and Mr Coldfield to divide the loot if it worked, and he (Sutpen) to take all the blame if it didn't. And Mr Coldfield let him. Father said it was because Mr Coldfield did not believe it would work, that they would get away with it, only he couldn't quit thinking about it, and so when they tried it and it failed he (Mr Coldfield) would be able to get it out of his mind then; and that when it did fail and they were caught, Mr Coldfield would insist on

taking his share of the blame as penance and expiation for having sinned in his mind all those years.

Because Mr Coldfield never did believe it would work, so when he saw that it was going to work, had worked, the least thing he could do was to refuse to take his share of the profits; that when he saw that it had worked it was his conscience he hated, not Sutpen—his conscience and the land, the country which had created his conscience and then offered the opportunity to have made all that money to the conscience which it had created, which could do nothing but decline; hated that country so much that he was even glad when he saw it drifting closer and closer to a doomed and fatal war; that he would have joined the Yankee army, Father said, only he was not a soldier and knew that he would either be killed or die of hardship, and so he would not be present on that day when the South would realize that it was now paying the price for having erected its economic edifice not on the rock of stern morality but on the shifting sands of opportunism and moral brigandage. So he chose the only gesture he could think of to impress his disapproval on those who should outlive the fighting and so participate in the remorse—'

'Sure,' Shreve said. 'That's fine. But Sutpen. The design. Get on, now.'
'Yes,' Quentin said. 'The design. —Getting richer and richer. It must have looked fine and clear ahead for him now: house finished, and even bigger and whiter than the one he had gone to the door of that day and the nigger came in his monkey clothes and told him to go to the back, and he with his own brand of niggers even, which the man who lay in the hammock with his shoes off didn't have, to cull one from and train him to go to the door when his turn came for a little boy without any shoes on and with his pap's cutdown pants for clothes to come and knock on it.

Only Father said that that wasn't it now, that when he came to Grandfather's office that day after the thirty years, and not trying to excuse now anymore than he had tried in the bottom that night when they ran the architect, but just to explain now, trying hard to explain now because now he was old and knew it, knew it was being old that

he had to talk against: time shortening ahead of him that could and would do things to his chances and possibilities even if he had no more doubt of his bones and flesh than he did of his will and courage, telling Grandfather that the boy-symbol at the door wasn't it because the boy-symbol was just the figment of the amazed and desperate child; that now he would take that boy in where he would never again need to stand on the outside of a white door and knock at it: and not at all for mere shelter but so that that boy, that whatever nameless stranger, could shut that door himself forever behind him on all that he had ever known, and look ahead along the still undivulged light rays in which his descendants who might not even ever hear his (the boy's) name, waited to be born without even having to know that they had once been riven forever free from brutehood just as his own (Sutpen's) children were—'

'Dont say it's just me that sounds like your old man,' Shreve said. 'But go on. Sutpen's children. Go on.'" 'Yes,' Quentin said.

'The two children' thinking Yes. Maybe we are both Father. Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm thinking Yes, we are both Father. Or maybe Father and I are both Shreve, maybe it took Father and me both to make Shreve or Shreve and me both to make Father or maybe Thomas Sutpen to make all of us.

'Yes, the two children, the son and the daughter by sex and age so glib to the design that he might have planned that too, by character mental and physical so glib to it that he might have culled them out of the celestial herd of seraphs and cherubim like he chose his twenty niggers out of whatever swapping there must have been when he repudiated

that first wife and that child when he discovered that they would not be adjunctive to the forwarding of the design.

And Grandfather said there was no conscience about that, that Sutpen sat in the office that afternoon after thirty years and told him how his conscience had bothered him somewhat at first but that he had argued calmly and logically with his conscience until it was settled, just as he must have argued with his conscience about his and Mr Coldfield's bill of lading (only probably not as long here, since time here would be pressing) until that was settled—how he granted that by certain lights there was injustice in what he did but that he had obviated that as much as lay in his power by being aboveboard in the matter; that he could have simply deserted her, could have taken his hat and walked out, but he did not: and that he had what Grandfather would have to admit was a good and valid claim, if not to the whole place which he alone had saved, as well as the lives of all the white people on it, at least to that portion of it which had been specifically described and deeded to him in the marriage settlement which he had entered in good faith, with no reservations as to his obscure origin and material equipment, while there had been not only reservation but actual misrepresentation on their part and misrepresentation of such a crass nature as to have not only voided and frustrated without his knowing it the central motivation of his entire design, but to have made an ironic delusion of all that he had suffered and endured in the past and all that he could ever accomplish in the future toward that design—which claim he had voluntarily relinquished, taking only the twenty niggers out of all he might have claimed and which many another man in his place would have insisted upon keeping and (in which contention) would have been supported by both legal and moral sanction even if not the delicate one of conscience: and Grandfather not saying "Wait wait" now because it was that innocence again, that innocence which believed that the ingredients of morality were like the ingredients of pie or cake and once you had measured them and balanced them and mixed them and put them into the oven it was all finished and nothing but pie or cake could come out.

—Yes, sitting there in Grandfather's office trying to explain with that patient amazed recapitulation, not to Grandfather and not to himself because Grandfather said that his very calmness was indication that he had long since given up any hope of ever understanding it, but trying to explain to circumstance, to fate itself, the logical steps by which he had arrived at a result absolutely and forever incredible, repeating the clear and simple synopsis of his history (which he and Grandfather both now knew) as if he were trying to explain it to an intractable and unpredictable child: ' "You see, I had a design in my mind.

Whether it was a good or a bad design is beside the point; the question is, Where did I make the mistake in it, what did I do or misdo in it, whom or what injure by it to the extent which this would indicate. I had a design. To accomplish it I should require money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family—incidentally of course, a wife. I set out to acquire these, asking no favor of any man. I even risked my life at one time, as I told you, though as I also told you I did not undertake this risk purely and simply to gain a wife, though it did have that result. But that is beside the point also: suffice that I had the wife, accepted her in good faith, with no reservations about myself, and I expected as much from them. I did not even demand, mind, as one of my obscure origin might have been expected to do (or at least be condoned in the doing) out of ignorance of gentility in dealing with gentleborn people.

I did not demand; I accepted them at their own valuation while insisting on my own part upon explaining fully about myself and my progenitors: yet they deliberately withheld from me the one fact which I have reason to know they were aware would have caused me to decline the entire matter, otherwise they would not have withheld it from me—a fact which I did not learn until after my son was born. And even then I did not act hastily. I could have reminded them of these wasted years, these years which would now leave me behind with my schedule not only the amount of elapsed time which their number represented, but that compensatory amount of time represented by their number which I should now have to spend to advance myself once more to the point I had reached and lost.

But I did not. I merely explained how this new fact rendered it impossible that this woman and child be incorporated in my design, and following which, as I told you, I made no attempt to keep not only that which I might consider myself to have earned at the risk of my life but which had been given to me by signed testimonials, but on the contrary I declined and resigned all right and claim to this in order that I might repair whatever injustice I might be considered to have done by so providing for the two persons whom I might be considered to have deprived of anything I might later possess: and this was agreed to, mind; agreed to between the two parties.

And yet, and after more than thirty years, more than thirty years after my conscience had finally assured me that if I had done an injustice, I had done what I could to rectify it—" and Grandfather not saying "Wait" now but saying, hollering maybe even: "Conscience? Conscience? Good God, man, what else did you expect? Didn't the very affinity and instinct for misfortune of a man who had spent that much time in a monastery even, let alone one who had lived that many years as you lived them, tell you better than that? didn't the dread and fear of females which you must have drawn in with the primary mammalian milk teach you better? What kind of abysmal and purblind innocence could that have been which someone told you to call virginity? what conscience to trade with which would have warranted you in the belief that you could have bought immunity from her for no other coin but justice?"

It was at this point that Shreve went to the bedroom and put on the bathrobe.

He did not say Wait, he just rose and left Quentin sitting before the table, the open book and the letter, and went out and returned in the robe and sat again and took up the cold pipe, though without filling it anew or lighting it as it was. 'All right,' he said. 'So that Christmas Henry brought him home, into the house, and the demon looked up and saw the face he believed he had paid off and discharged twenty-eight years ago. Go on.' 'Yes,' Quentin said. 'Father said he probably named him himself. Charles Bon.

Charles Good. He didn't tell Grandfather that he did, but Grandfather believed he did, would have. That would have been a part of the cleaning up, just as he would have done his share toward cleaning up the exploded caps and musket cartridges after the siege if he hadn't been sick (or maybe engaged); he would have insisted on it maybe, the conscience again which could not allow her and the child any place in the design even though he could have closed his eyes and, if not fooled the rest of the world as they had fooled him, at least have frightened any man out of speaking the secret aloud—the same conscience which would not permit the child, since it was a boy, to bear either his name or that of its maternal grandfather, yet which would also forbid him to do the customary and provide a quick husband for the discarded woman and so give his son an authentic name.

He chose the name himself, Grandfather believed, just as he named them all—the Charles Goods and the Clytemnestras and Henry and Judith and all of them—that entire fecundity of dragons' teeth as father called it. And Father said—'

'Your father,' Shreve said. 'He seems to have got an awful lot of delayed information awful quick, after having waited forty-five years. If he knew all this, what was his reason for telling you that the trouble between Henry and Bon was the octeroon woman?' 'He didn't know it then. Grandfather didn't tell him all of it either, like Sutpen never told Grandfather quite all of it.' 'Then who did tell him?' 'I did.' Quentin did not move, did not look up while Shreve watched him. 'The day after we—after that night when we—'

'Oh,' Shreve said.

'After you and the old aunt. I see. Go on. And father said—'

'—said how he must have stood there on the front gallery that afternoon and waited for Henry and the friend Henry had been writing home about all fall to come up the drive, and that maybe after Henry wrote the name in the first letter Sutpen probably told himself it

couldn't be, that there was a limit even to irony beyond which it became either just vicious but not fatal horseplay or harmless coincidence, since Father said that even Sutpen probably knew that nobody yet ever invented a name that somebody didn't own now or hadn't owned once: and they rode up at last and Henry said, "Father, this is Charles" and he—' ('the demon,' Shreve said) '—saw the face and knew that there are situations where coincidence is no more than the little child that rushes out onto a football field to take part in the game and the players run over and around the unscathed head and go on and shock together, and in the fury of the struggle for the facts called gain or loss nobody even remembers the child nor saw who came and snatched it back from dissolution—that he stood there at his own door, just as he had imagined, planned, designed, and sure enough and after fifty years the forlorn nameless and homeless lost child came to knock at it and no monkeydressed nigger anywhere under the sun to come to the door and order the child away; and Father said that even then, even though he knew that Bon and Judith had never laid eyes on one another, he must have felt and heard the design—house, position, posterity and all come down like it had been built out of smoke, making no sound, creating no rush of displaced air and not even leaving any debris.

And he not calling it retribution, no sins of the father come home to roost; not even calling it bad luck, but just a mistake: that mistake which he could not discover himself and which he came to Grandfather, not to excuse but just to review the facts for an impartial (and Grandfather said he believed, a legally trained) mind to examine and find and point out to him.

Not moral retribution you see: just an old mistake in fact which a man of courage and shrewdness (the one of which he now knew he possessed, the other of which he believed that he had now learned, acquired) could still combat if he could only find out what the mistake had been. Because he did not give up. He never did give up; Grandfather said that his subsequent actions (the fact that for a time he did nothing and so perhaps helped to bring about the very situation which he dreaded) were not the result of any failing of courage or

shrewdness or ruthlessness, but were the result of his conviction that it had all come from a mistake and until he discovered what that mistake had been he did not intend to risk making another one.

'So he invited Bon into the house, and for the two weeks of the vacation (only it didn't take that long; Father said that probably Mrs Sutpen had Judith and Bon already engaged from the moment she saw Bon's name in Henry's first letter) he watched Bon and Henry and Judith, or watched Bon and Judith rather because he would have already known about Henry and Bon from Henry's letters about him from the school; watched them for two weeks, and did nothing.

Then Henry and Bon went back to school and now the nigger groom that fetched the mail back and forth each week between Oxford and Sutpen's Hundred brought letters to Judith now that were not in Henry's hand (and that not necessary either, Father said, because Mrs Sutpen was already covering the town and county both with news of that engagement that Father said didn't exist yet) and still he did nothing. He didn't do anything at all until spring was almost over and Henry wrote that he was bringing Bon home with him to stay a day or two before Bon went home.

Then Sutpen went to New Orleans. Whether he chose that time to go in order to get Bon and his mother together and thrash the business out for good and all or not, nobody knows, just as nobody knows whether he ever saw the mother or not while he was there, if she received him or refused to receive him; or if she did and he tried once more to come to terms with her, buy her off maybe with money now, since Father said that a man who could believe that a scorned and outraged and angry woman could be bought off with formal logic would believe that she could be placated with money too, and it didn't work; or if Bon was there and it was Bon himself who refused the offer, though nobody ever did know if Bon ever knew Sutpen was his father or not, whether he was trying to revenge his mother or not at first and only later fell in love, only later succumbed to the current of retribution and fatality which Miss Rosa said Sutpen had started and had doomed all his blood to, black and white both.

But it didn't work evidently, and the next Christmas came and Henry and Bon came to Sutpen's Hundred again and now Sutpen saw that there was no help for it, that Judith was in love with Bon and whether Bon wanted revenge or was just caught and sunk and doomed too, it was all the same. So it seems that he sent for Henry that Christmas eve just before supper time (Father said that maybe by now, after his New Orleans trip, he had learned at last enough about women to know it wouldn't do any good to go to Judith first) and told Henry. And he knew what Henry would say and Henry said it and he took the lie from his son and Henry knew by his father taking the lie that what his father had told him was true; and Father said that he (Sutpen) probably knew what Henry would do too and counted on Henry doing it because he still believed that it had been only a minor tactical mistake.

So he was like a skirmisher who is outnumbered yet cannot retreat who believes that if he is just patient enough and clever enough and calm enough and alert enough he can get the enemy scattered and pick them off one by one. And Henry did it. And he (Sutpen) probably knew what Henry would do next too, that Henry too would go to New Orleans to find out for himself. Then it was '61 and Sutpen knew what they would do now, not only what Henry would do but what he would force Bon to do; maybe (being a demon—though it would not require a demon to foresee war now) he even foresaw that Henry and Bon would join that student company at the University; he may have had some way of watching, knowing the day their names appeared on the roster, some way of knowing where the company was even before Grandfather became colonel of the regiment the company was in until he got hurt at Pittsburgh Landing (where Bon was wounded) and came home to get used to not having any right arm and Sutpen came home in '64 with the two tombstones and talked to Grandfather in the office that day before both of them went back to the war.

Maybe he knew all the time where Henry and Bon were, that they had been all the time in Grandfather's regiment where Grandfather could look after them in a fashion even if Grandfather didn't know that he was doing it—even if they needed watching, because Sutpen must have

known about the probation too, what Henry was doing now: holding all three of them himself and Judith and Bon in that suspension while he wrestled with his conscience to make it come to terms with what he wanted to do just like his father had that time more than thirty years ago, maybe even turned fatalist like Bon now and giving the war a chance to settle the whole business by killing him or Bon or both of them (but with no help, no fudging, on his part because it was him that carried Bon to the rear after Pittsburgh Landing) or maybe he knew that the South would be whipped and then there wouldn't be anything left that mattered that much, worth getting that heated over, worth protesting against or suffering for or dying for or even living for.

That was the day he came to the office, his—' ('the demon's,' Shreve said) '—one day of leave at home, came home with his tombstones. Judith was there and I reckon he looked at her and she looked at him and he said, "You know where he is" and Judith didn't lie to him, and (he knew Henry) he said, "But you have not heard from him yet" and Judith didn't lie about that either and she didn't cry either because both of them knew what would be in the letter when it came so he didn't have to ask, "When he writes you that he is coming, you and Clytie will start making the wedding dress" even if Judith would have lied to him about that, which she would not have: so he put one of the stones on Ellen's grave and set the other one up in the hall and came in to see Grandfather, trying to explain it, seeing if Grandfather could discover that mistake which he believed was the sole cause of his problem, sitting there in his worn and shabby uniform, with his worn gauntlets and faded sash and (he would have had the plume by all means.

He might have had to discard his saber, but he would have had the plume) the plume in his hat broken and frayed and soiled, with his horse saddled and waiting in the street below and a thousand miles to ride to find his regiment, yet he sitting there on the one afternoon of his leave as though he had a thousand of them, as if there were no haste nor urgency anywhere under the sun and that when he departed he had no further to go than the twelve miles out to Sutpen's Hundred and a thousand days or maybe even years of monotony and rich peace, and he, even after he would become dead, still there, still watching the

fine grandsons and great-grandsons springing as far as eye could reach; he still, even though dead in the earth, that same fine figure of a man that Wash Jones called him, but not now.

Now fog-bound by his own private embattlement of personal morality: that picayune splitting of abstract hairs while (Grandfather said) Rome vanished and Jericho crumbled, that this would be right if or that would be wrong but of slowing blood and stiffening bones and arteries that Father says men resort to in senility who while young and supple and strong reacted to a single simple Yes and a single simple No as instantaneous and complete and unthinking as the snapping on and off of electricity, sitting there and talking and now Grandfather not knowing what he was talking about because now Grandfather said he did not believe that Sutpen himself knew because even yet Sutpen had not quite told him all of it.

And this that morality again, Grandfather said: that morality which would not permit him to malign or traduce the memory of his first wife, or at least the memory of the marriage even though he felt that he had been tricked by it, not even to an acquaintance in whose confidence and discretion he trusted enough to wish to justify himself, not even to his son by another marriage in order to preserve the status of his life's attainment and desire, except as a last resort. Not that he would hesitate then, Grandfather said: but not until then.

He had been tricked by it himself, but he had extricated himself without asking or receiving help from any man; let anyone else who might be so imposed upon do the same. —Sitting there and moralizing on the fact that, no matter which course he chose, the result would be that that design and plan to which he had given fifty years of his life had just as well never have existed at all by almost exactly fifty years, and Grandfather not knowing what choice he was talking about even, what second choice he was faced with until the very last word he spoke before he got up and put on his hat and shook Grandfather's left hand and rode away; this second choice, need to choose, as obscure to Grandfather as the reason for the first, the repudiation, had been: so that Grandfather did not even say "I don't know which you should

choose" not because that was all he could have said and so to say that would be less than no answer at all, but that anything he might have said would have been less than no answer at all since Sutpen was not listening, did not expect an answer, who had not come for pity and there was no advice that he could have taken, and justification he had already coerced from his conscience thirty years ago.

And he still knew that he had courage, and though he may have come to doubt lately that he had acquired that shrewdness which at one time he believed he had, he still believed that it existed somewhere in the world to be learned and that if it could be learned he would yet learn it—and maybe even this, Grandfather said: if shrewdness could not extricate him this second time as it had before, he could at least depend on the courage to find him will and strength to make a third start toward that design as it had found him to make the second with—who came into the office not for pity and not for help because Grandfather said he had never learned how to ask anybody for help or anything else and so he would not have known what to do with the help if Grandfather could have given it to him, but came just with that sober and quiet bemusement, hoping maybe (if he hoped at all, if he were doing anything but just thinking out loud at all) that the legal mind might perceive and clarify that initial mistake which he still insisted on, which he himself had not been able to find: "I was faced with condoning a fact which had been foisted upon me without my knowledge during the process of building toward my design, which meant the absolute and irrevocable negation of the design; or in holding to my original plan for the design in pursuit of which I had incurred this negation.

I chose, and I made to the fullest what atonement lay in my power for whatever injury I might have done in choosing, paying even more for the privilege of choosing as I chose than I might have been expected to, or even (by law) required. Yet I am now faced with a second necessity to choose, the curious factor of which is not, as you pointed out and as first appeared to me, that the necessity for a new choice should have arisen, but that either choice which I might make, either course which I might choose, leads to the same result: either I destroy my design with

my own hand, which will happen if I am forced to play my last trump card, or do nothing, let matters take the course which I know they will take and see my design complete itself quite normally and naturally and successfully to the public eye, yet to my own in such fashion as to be a mockery and a betrayal of that little boy who approached that door fifty years ago and was turned away, for whose vindication the whole plan was conceived and carried forward to the moment of this choice, this second choice devolving out of that first one which in its turn was forced on me as the result of an agreement, an arrangement which I had entered in good faith, concealing nothing, while the other party or parties to it concealed from me the one very factor which would destroy the entire plan and design which I had been working toward, concealed it so well that it was not until after the child was born that I discovered that this factor existed"

'Your old man,' Shreve said. 'When your grandfather was telling this to him, he didn't know any more what your grandfather was talking about than your grandfather knew what the demon was talking about when the demon told it to him, did he? And when your old man told it to you, you wouldn't have known what anybody was talking about if you hadn't been out there and seen Clytie.

Is that right?"

'Yes,' Quentin said. 'Grandfather was the only friend he had.'

'The demon had?' Quentin didn't answer, didn't move.

It was cold in the room now. The heat was almost gone out of the radiators: the cold iron fluting stern signal and admonition for sleeping, the little death, the renewal. It had been some time now since the chimes had rung eleven. 'All right,' Shreve said.

He was hugging himself into the bathrobe now as he had formerly hugged himself inside his pink naked almost hairless skin. 'He chose.

He chose lechery. So do I. But go on." His remark was not intended for flippancy nor even derogation.

It was born (if from any source) of that incorrigible unsentimental sentimentality of the young which takes the form of hard and often crass levity— to which, by the way, Quentin paid no attention whatever, resuming as if he had never been interrupted, his face still lowered, still brooding apparently on the open letter upon the open book between his hands.

'He left for Virginia that night.

Grandfather said how he went to the window and watched him ride across the square on the gaunt black stallion, erect in his faded gray, the hat with its broken plume cocked a little yet not quite so much as the beaver of the old days, as if (Grandfather said) even with his martial rank and prerogatives he did not quite swagger like he used to do, not because he was chastened by misfortune or spent or even war-wearied but as though even while riding he was still bemused in that state in which he struggled to hold clear and free above a maelstrom of unpredictable and unreasoning human beings, not his head for breath and not so much his fifty years of effort and striving to establish a posterity, but his code of logic and morality, his formula and recipe of fact and deduction whose balanced sum and product declined, refused to swim or even float.

Grandfather saw him approach the Holston House and saw old Mr McCaslin and two other old men hobble out and stop him, he sitting the stallion and talking to them and his voice not raised, Grandfather said, yet the very sober quality of his gestures and the set of his shoulders forensic, oratorical. Then he went on. He could still reach Sutpen's Hundred before dark, so it was probably after supper that he headed the stallion toward the Atlantic Ocean, he and Judith facing one another again for maybe a full minute, he not needing to say "I will stop it if I can," she not needing to say "Stop it then if you can" but just good-bye, the kiss on the brow and no tears; a word to Clytie and to

Wash: master to slave, baron to retainer: "Well, Clytie, take care of Miss Judith.

Wash, I'll send you a piece of Abe Lincoln's coat tail from Washington" and I reckon Wash answering like it used to be under the scuppernongs with the demijohn and the well bucket: "Sho, Kernel; kill ever one of the varmints!" So he ate the hoecake and drank the parched acorn coffee and rode away. Then it was '65 and the army (Grandfather had gone back to it too; he was a brigadier now though I reckon this was for more reason than because he just had one arm) had retreated across Georgia and into Carolina and they all knew it wouldn't be very much longer now.

Then one day Lee sent Johnston some reinforcements from one of his corps and Grandfather found out that the Twenty-third Mississippi was one of the regiments. And he (Grandfather) didn't know what had happened: whether Sutpen had found out in some way that Henry had at last coerced his conscience into agreeing with him as his (Henry's) father had done thirty years ago, whether Judith perhaps had written her father that she had heard from Bon at last and what she and Bon intended to do, or if the four of them had just reached as one person that point where something had to be done, had to happen, he (Grandfather) didn't know.

He just learned one morning that Sutpen had ridden up to Grandfather's old regiment's headquarters and asked and received permission to speak to Henry and did speak to him and then rode away again before midnight."

'So he got his choice made, after all,' Shreve said. 'He played that trump after all. And so he came home and found—'

'Wait,' Quentin said.

'—what he must have wanted to find or anyway what he was going to find—'

'Wait, I tell you!" Quentin said, though still he did not move nor even raise his voice—that voice with its tense suffused restrained quality: 'I am telling' Am I going to have to hear it all again he thought I am going to have to hear it all over again I am already hearing it all over again I am listening to it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do—he came home and found that at least regarding which he should have needed no word nor warning even if Judith would have sent him one, sent him acknowledgement that she was beaten, who according to Mr Compson would no more have sent him acknowledgement that he had beat her than she waited (whom Miss Coldfield said was not bereaved) and met him on his return, not with the fury and despair perhaps which he might have expected even though knowing as little, having learned as little, about women as Mr Compson said he had, yet certainly with something other than the icy calm with which, according to Miss Coldfield, she met him—the kiss again after almost two years, on the brow; the voices, the speeches, quiet, contained, almost impersonal: "And—?....

Yes. Henry killed him" followed by the brief tears which ceased on the instant when they began, as if the moisture consisted of a single sheet or layer thin as a cigarette paper and in the shape of a human face; the "Ah, Clytie. Ah, Rosa. —Well, Wash. I was unable to penetrate far enough behind the Yankee lines to cut a piece from that coat tail as I promised you"; the (from Jones) guffaw, the chortle, the old imbecile stability of the articulated mud which, Mr Compson said, outlasts the victories and the defeats both: "Well, Kernel they kilt us but they aint whupped us yit, air they?": and that was all. He had returned.

He was home again where his problem now was haste, passing time, the need to hurry. He was not concerned, Mr Compson said, about the courage and the will, nor even about the shrewdness now. He was not for one moment concerned about his ability to start the third time. All that he was concerned about was the possibility that he might not have time sufficient to do it in, regain his lost ground in. He did not waste any of what time he had either. The will and the shrewdness too he did

not waste, though he doubtless did not consider it to have been either his will or his shrewdness which supplied waiting to his hand the opportunity, and it was probably less of shrewdness and more of courage than even will which got him engaged to Miss Rosa within a period of three months and almost before she was aware of the fact Miss Rosa, the chief disciple and advocate of that cult of demon-harrying of which he was the chief object (even though not victim), engaged to him before she had got accustomed to having him in the house, yes, more of courage than even will, yet something of shrewdness too: the shrewdness acquired in excruciating dribbles through the fifty years suddenly capitulant and retroactive or suddenly sprouting and flowering like a seed lain fallow in a vacuum or in a single iron clod.

Because he seemed to perceive without stopping, in that passage through the house which was an unbroken continuation of the long journey from Virginia, the pause not to greet his family but merely to pick up Jones and drag him on out to the brier-choked fields and fallen fences and clap ax or mattock into his hands, the one weak spot, the one spot vulnerable to assault in Miss Rosa's embattled spinsterhood, and to assault and carry this in one stride, with something of the ruthless tactical skill of his old master (the Twenty-third Mississippi was in Jackson's corps at one time). And then the shrewdness failed him again.

It broke down, it vanished into that old impotent logic and morality which had betrayed him before: and what day might it have been, what furrow might he have stopped dead in, on foot advanced, the unsentient plow handles in his instantaneous unsentient hands, what fence panel held in midair as though it had no weight by muscles which could not rid it, when he realized that there was more in his problem than just lack of time, that the problem contained some superdistillation of this lack: that he was now past sixty and that possibly he could get but one more son, had at best but one more son in his loins, as the old cannon might know when it has just one more shot in its corporeality.

So he suggested what he suggested to her, and she did what he should have known she would do and would have known probably if he had not bogged himself again in his morality which had all the parts but which refused to run, to move.

Hence the proposal, the outrage and unbelief; the tide, the blast of indignation and anger upon which Miss Rosa vanished from Sutpen's Hundred, her air-ballooned skirts spread upon the flood, chiplight, her bonnet (possibly one of Ellen's which she had prowled out of the attic) clapped fast onto her head rigid and precarious with rage.

And he standing there with the reins over his arm, with perhaps something like smiling inside his beard and about the eyes which was not smiling but the crinkled concentration of furious thinking—the haste, the need for it; the urgency but not fear, not concern: just the fact that he had missed that time, though luckily it was just a spotting shot with a light charge, and the old gun, the old barrel and carriage none the worse; only next time there might not be enough powder for both a spotting shot and then a full-sized load—the fact that the thread of shrewdness and courage and will ran onto the same spool which the thread of his remaining days ran onto and that spool almost near enough for him to reach out his hand and touch it.

But this was no grave concern yet since it (the old logic, the old morality which had never yet failed to fail him) was already falling into pattern, already showing him conclusively that he had been right just as he knew he had been, and therefore what had happened was just a delusion and did not actually exist.

'No,' Shreve said; 'you wait. Let me play a while now. Now, Wash. Him (the demon) standing there with the horse, the saddled charger, the sheathed saber, the gray waiting to be laid peaceful away among the moths and all lost save dishonor: then the voice of the faithful gravedigger who opened the play and would close it, coming out of the wings like Shakespeare's very self: "Well, Kernel, they mought have whupped us but they aint kilt us yit, air they?" —This was not flippancy either.

It too was just that protective coloring of levity behind which the youthful shame of being moved hid itself, out of which Quentin also spoke, the reason for Quentin's sullen bemusement, the (on both their parts) flipness, the strained clowning: the two of them, whether they knew it or not, in the cold room (it was quite cold now) dedicated to that best of ratiocination which after all was a good deal like Sutpen's morality and Miss Coldfield's demonizing—this room not only dedicated to it but set aside for it and suitably so since it would be here above any other place that it (the logic and the morality) could do the least amount of harm—the two of them back to back as though at the last ditch, saying No to Quentin's Mississippi shade who in life had acted and reacted to the minimum of logic and morality, who dying had escaped it completely, who dead remained not only indifferent but impervious to it, somehow a thousand times more potent and alive. There was no harm intended by Shreve and no harm taken, since Quentin did not even stop.

He did not even falter, taking Shreve up in stride without comma or colon or paragraph: '—no reserve to risk a spotting shot with now so he started this one like you start a rabbit out of a briar patch, with a little chunk of dried mud thrown by hand. Maybe it was the first string of beads out of his and Wash's little store where he would get mad at his customers, the niggers and the trash and the haggling, and turn them out and lock the door and drink himself blind. And maybe Wash delivered the beads himself, Father said, that was down at the gate when he rode back from the war that day that after he went away with the regiment would tell folks that he (Wash) was looking after Kernel's place and niggers until after a while maybe he even believed it.

Father's mother said how when the Sutpen niggers first heard about what he was saying, they would stop him in the road that came up out of the bottom where the old fishing camp was that Sutpen let him and the granddaughter (she was about eight then) live in. There would be too many of them for him to whip them all, to even try to, risk trying to: and they would ask him why he wasn't at the war and he would say, "Git outen my road, niggers!" and then it would be the outright laughing, asking one another (except it was not one another but him):

"Who him, calling us niggers?" and he would rush at them with a stick and them avoiding him just enough, not mad at all, just laughing. And he was still carrying fish and animals he killed (or maybe stole) and vegetables up to the house when that was about all Mrs Sutpen and Judith (and Clytie too) had to live on, and Clytie would not let him come into the kitchen with the basket even, saying, "Stop right there, white man Stop right where you is.

You aint never crossed this door while Colonel was here and you aint going to cross it now." Which was true, only Father said there was a kind of pride in it: that he had never tried to enter the house, even though he believed that if he had tried, Sutpen would not have let them repulse him; like (Father said) he might have said to himself The reason I won't try it aint that I refuse to give any black nigger the chance to tell me I cant but because I aint going to force Mister Tom to have to cuss a nigger or take a cussing from his vile on my account. But they would drink together under the scuppernong arbor on the Sunday afternoons, and on the weekdays he would see Sutpen (the fine figure of the man as he called it) on the black stallion, galloping about the plantation, and Father said how for that moment Wash's heart would be quiet and proud both and that maybe it would seem to him that this world where niggers, that the Bible said had been created and cursed by God to be brute and vassal to all men of white skin, were better found and housed and even clothed than he and his granddaughter—that this world where he walked always in mocking and jeering echoes of nigger laughter, was just a dream and an illusion and that the actual world was the one where his own lonely apotheosis (Father said) galloped on the black thoroughbred, thinking maybe, Father said, how the Book said that all men were created in the image of God and so all men were the same in God's eyes anyway, looked the same to God at least, and so he would look at Sutpen and think A fine proud man.

If God Himself was to come down and rid the natural earth, that's what He would aim to look like. Maybe he even delivered the first string of beads himself, and Father said maybe each of the ribbons afterward during the next three years while the girl matured fast like girls of that kind do; or anyway he would know and recognize each and every

ribbon when he saw it on her even when she lied to him about where and how she got it, which she probably did not, since she would be bound to know that he had been seeing the ribbons in the showcase every day for three years and would have known them as well as he knew his own shoes.

And not only he knew them, but all the other men the customers and the loungers, the white and the black that would be sitting and squatting about the store's gallery to watch her pass, not quite defiant and not quite cringing and not quite flaunting the ribbons and the beads, but almost; not quite any of them but a little of all: bold, sullen, and fearful. But Father said how Wash's heart was probably still quiet even after he saw the dress and spoke about it, probably only a little grave now and watching her secret defiant frightened face while she told him (before he had asked, maybe too insistent, too quick to volunteer it) that Miss Judith had given it to her, helped her to make it: and Father said maybe he realized all of a sudden and without warning that when he passed the men on the gallery they would look after him too and that they already knew that which he had just thought they were probably thinking. But Father said his heart was still quiet, even now, and that he answered, if he answered at all, stopped the protestations and disclaimers at all: "Sho, now.

Ef Kernel and Miss Judith wanted to give hit to you, I hope you minded to thank them." —Not alarmed, Father said: just thoughtful, just grave; and Father said how that afternoon Grandfather rode out to see Sutpen about something and there was nobody in the front of the store and he was about to go out and go up to the house when he heard the voices from the back and he walked on toward them and so he overheard them before he could begin to not listen and before he could make them hear him calling Sutpen's name.

Grandfather couldn't see them yet, he hadn't even got to where they could hear him yet, but he said he knew exactly how they would be: Sutpen having already told Wash to get the jug out and then Wash spoke and Sutpen beginning to turn, realizing that Wash wasn't getting the jug before he comprehended the import of what Wash was saying,

then comprehending that and still half turned and then all of a sudden kind of reared back and flinging his head up, looking at Wash and Wash standing there, not cringing either, in that attitude dogged and quiet and not cringing, and Sutpen said, "What about the dress?" and Grandfather said it was Sutpen's voice that was short and sharp: not Wash's; that Wash's voice was just flat and quiet, not abject: just patient and slow: "I have knowed you for going on twenty years now.

I aint never denied yit to do what you told me to do. And I'm a man past sixty. And she aint nothing but a fifteen-year-old gal." and Sutpen said, "Meaning that I'd harm the girl? I, a man as old as you are?" and Wash: "If you was arra other man, I'd say you was as old as me. And old or no old, I wouldn't let her keep that dress nor nothing else that come from your hand. But you are different." and Sutpen: "How different?" and Grandfather said how Wash did not answer and that he called again now and neither of them heard him; and then Sutpen said: "So that's why you are afraid of me?" and Wash said, "I aint afraid.

Because you are brave. It aint that you were a brave man at one second or minute or hour of your life and got a paper to show hit from General Lee. But you are brave, the same as you are alive and breathing. That's where it's different. Hit don't need no ticket from nobody to tell me that. And I know that whatever your hands tech, whether hit's a regiment of men or a ignorant gal or just a hound dog, that you will make hit right." Then Grandfather heard Sutpen move, sudden and sharp, and Grandfather said he reckoned, thought just about what he imagined Wash was thinking. But all Sutpen said was, "Get the jug."—"Sho, Kernel," Wash said.

'So that Sunday came, a year after that day and three years after he had suggested to Miss Rosa that they try it first and if it was a boy and lived, they would be married. It was before daylight and he was expecting his mare to foal to the black stallion, so when he left the house before day that morning Judith thought he was going to the stable. What Judith knew and how much about her father and Wash's granddaughter nobody knew, how much she could not have helped but know from what Clytie must have known (may have or may not have

told her, whether or no) since everybody else white or black in the neighborhood knew who had ever seen the girl in the ribbons and beads which they all recognized, how much she may have refused to discover during the fitting and sewing of that dress (Father said Judith actually did this; this was no lie that the girl told Wash: the two of them alone all day long for about a week in the house: and what they must have talked about, what Judith must have talked about while the girl stood around in what she possessed to call underclothes, with her sullen defiant secret watchful face, answering what, telling what that Judith may or may not have tried to shut her eyes to, nobody knew).

So it was not until he failed to return at dinner time that she went or sent Clytie to the stable and found that the mare had foaled in the night but that her father was not there. And it was not until midafternoon that she found a half-grown boy and paid him a nickel to go down to the old fish camp and ask Wash where Sutpen was, and the boy walked whistling around the corner of the rotting cabin and saw maybe the scythe first, maybe the body first lying in the weeds which Wash had not yet cut, and as he screamed he looked up and saw Wash in the window, watching him. Then about a week later they caught the nigger, the midwife, and she told how she didn't know that Wash was there at all that dawn when she heard the horse and then Sutpen's feet and he came in and stood over the pallet where the girl and the baby were and said, "Penelope—" (that was the mare) "—foaled this morning.

A damned fine colt. Going to be the spit and image of his daddy when I rode him North in '61. Do you remember?" and the old nigger said she said, "Yes, Marster" and that he jerked the riding whip toward the pallet and said, "Well? Damn your black hide: horse or mare?" and that she told him and that he stood there for a minute and he didn't move at all, with the riding whip against his leg and the lattices of sunlight from the unchinked wall falling upon him, across his white hair and his beard that hadn't turned at all yet, and she said she saw his eyes and then his teeth inside his beard and that she would have run then only she couldn't, couldn't seem to make her legs bear to get up and run: and then he looked at the girl on the pallet again and said, "Well, Milly;

too bad you're not a mare too. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable" and turned and went out. Only she could not move even yet, and she didn't even know that Wash was outside there; she just heard Sutpen say, "Stand back, Wash.

Don't you touch me," and then Wash, his voice soft and hardly loud enough to reach her: "I'm going to tech you, Kernel": and Sutpen again: "Stand back, Wash!" sharp now, and then she heard the whip on Wash's face but she didn't know if she heard the scythe or not because now she found out that she could move, get up, run out of the cabin and into the weeds, running—'

'Wait,' Shreve said; 'wait. You mean that he had got the son at last that he wanted, yet still he—'

'—walked the three miles and back before midnight to fetch the old nigger, then sat on the sagging gallery until daylight came and the granddaughter stopped screaming inside the cabin and he even heard the baby once, waiting for Sutpen. And Father said his heart was quiet then too, even though he knew what they would be saying in every cabin about the land by nightfall, just as he had known what they were saying during the last four or five months while his granddaughter's condition (which he had never tried to conceal) could no longer be mistaken: Wash Jones has fixed old Sutpen at last.

It taken him twenty years to do it, but he has got a holt of old Sutpen at last where Sutpen will either have to tear meat or squeal That's what Father said he was thinking while he waited outside on the gallery where the old nigger had sent him, ordered him out, standing there maybe by the very post where the scythe had leaned rusting for two years, while the granddaughter's screams came steady as a clock now but his own heart quiet, not at all concerned nor alarmed; and Father said that maybe while he stood befogged in his fumbling and groping (that morality of his that was a good deal like Sutpen's, that told him he was right in the face of all fact and usage and everything else) which had always been somehow mixed up and involved with galloping hoofs even during the old peace that nobody remembered, and in which

during the four years of the war which he had not attended the galloping had been only the more gallant and proud and thunderous— Father said that maybe he got his answer; that maybe there broke free and plain in midgallop against the yellow sky of dawn the fine proud image of the man on the fine proud image of the stallion and that the fumbling and the groping broke clear and free too, not in justification or explanation or extenuation or excuse, Father said, but as the apotheosis lonely, explicable, beyond all human frowning: He is bigger than all them Yankees that killed us and ourn, that killed his wife and widowed his daughter and druv his son from home, that stole his niggers and ruined his land; bigger than this whole county that he fit for and in payment for which has brung him to keeping a little country store for his bread and meat; bigger than the scorn and denial which hit helt to his lips like the bitter cup in the Book.

And how could I have lived nigh to him for twenty years without being touched and changed by him? Maybe I am not as big as he is and maybe I did not do any of the galloping. But at least I was drug along where he went. And me and him can still do hit and will ever so, if so be he will show me what he aims for me to do; and maybe still standing there and holding the stallion's reins after Sutpen had entered the cabin, still hearing the galloping, watching the proud galloping image merge and pass, galloping through avatars which marked the accumulation of years, time, to the fine climax where it galloped without weariness or progress, forever and forever immortal beneath the brandished saber and the shot-torn flags rushing down a sky in color like thunder; stood there and heard Sutpen inside the house speak his single sentence of salutation, inquiry and farewell to the granddaughter, and Father said that for a second Wash must not have felt the very earth under this feet while he watched Sutpen emerge from the house, the riding whip in his hand, thinking quietly, like in a dream: I kaint have heard what I know I heard.

I just know I kaint thinking That was what got him up. It was that colt. It aint me or mine either. It wasn't even his own that got him out of bed maybe feeling no earth, no stability, even yet, maybe not even hearing his own voice when Sutpen saw his face (the face of the man who in

twenty years he had no more known to make any move save at command than he had the stallion which he rode) and stopped: "You said if she was a mare you could give her a decent stall in the stable," maybe not even hearing Sutpen when he said, sudden and sharp: "Stand back. Dont you touch me" only he must have heard that because he answered it: "I'm going to tech you, Kernel" and Sutpen said "Stand back, Wash" again before the old woman heard the whip. Only there were two blows with the whip; they found the two welts on Wash's face that night. Maybe the two blows even knocked him down; maybe it was while he was getting up that he put his hand on the scythe—'

'Wait,' Shreve said; 'for Christ's sake wait. You mean that he—'

'—sat there all that day in the little window where he could watch the road; probably laid the scythe down and went straight into the house where maybe the granddaughter on the pallet asked querulously what it was and he answered, "Whut? Whut racket, honey?" and maybe he tried to persuade her to eat too—the side meat he had probably brought home from the store Saturday night or maybe the candy, trying to tempt her with it maybe—the nickel's worth of stale jellified glue out of a striped sack, and maybe ate and then sat at the window where he could look out above the body and the scythe in the weeds below, and watch the road.

Because he was sitting there when the half-grown boy came around the corner of the house whistling and saw him. And Father said he must have realized then that it would not be much after dark when it would happen; that he must have sat there and sensed, felt them gathering with the horses and dogs and guns—the curious and the vengeful men of Sutpen's own kind, who used to eat at his table with him back when he (Wash) had yet to approach nearer the house than the scuppernong arbor—men who had led the way, shown the other and lesser ones how to fight in battles, who might also possess signed papers from the generals saying that they were among the first and foremost of the brave—who had galloped also in the old days arrogant and proud on the fine horses about the fine plantations—symbol also of admiration

and hope, instruments too of despair and grief; these it was whom he was expected to run from and it seeming to him probably that he had no less to run from than he had to run to; that if he ran he would be fleeing merely one set of bragging and evil shadows for another, since they (men) were all of a kind throughout all of earth which he knew, and he old, too old to run far even if he were to run who could never escape them, no matter how much or how far he ran; a man past sixty could not expect to run that far, far enough to escape beyond the boundaries of earth where such men lived, set the order and the rule of living: and Father said that maybe for the first time in his life he began to comprehend how it had been possible for Yankees or any other army to have whipped them the gallant, the proud, the brave; the acknowledged and chosen best among them all to bear the courage and honor and pride.

It would probably be about sunset now and probably he could feel them quite near now; Father said it probably seemed to him that he could even hear them: all the voices, the murmuring of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow beyond the immediate fury: Old Wash Jones come a tumble at last. He thought he had Sutpen, but Sutpen fooled him. He thought he had him, but old Wash Jones got fooled and then maybe even saying it aloud, shouting it Father said: "But I never expected that, Kernel! You know I never?" until maybe the granddaughter stirred and spoke querulously again and he went and quieted her and returned to talk to himself again but careful now, quiet now since Sutpen was close enough to hear him easy, without shouting: "You know I never. You know I never expected or asked or wanted nothing from any living man but what I expected from you. And I never asked that. I didn't think hit would need: I just said to myself I don't need to.

What need has a fellow like Wash Jones to question or doubt the man that General Lee himself said in a hand-wrote ticket that he was brave? Brave" (and maybe it would be loud again, forgetting again) "Brave!

Better if narra one of them had ever rid back in '65" thinking Better if his kind and mine too had never drawn the breath of life on this earth.

Better that all who remain of us be blasted from the face of it than that another Wash Jones should see his whole life shredded from him and shrivel away like a dried shuck thrown onto the fire. Then they rode up. He must have been listening to them as they came down the road, the dogs and the horses, and seen the lanterns since it was dark now. And Mayor de Spain who was sheriff then got down and saw the body, though he said he did not see Wash nor know that he was there until Wash spoke his name quietly from the window almost in his face: "That you, Mayor?" De Spain told him to come on out and he said how Wash's voice was quite quiet when he said he would be out in just a minute; it was too quiet, too calm; so much too quiet and calm that de Spain said he did not realize for a moment that it was too calm and quiet: "In just a minute. Soon as I see about my granddaughter."

"We'll see to her," de Spain said. "You come on out."

"Sho, Mayor," Wash said, "In just a minute." So they waited in front of the dark house, and the next day Father said there were a hundred that remembered about the butcher knife that he kept hidden and razor-sharp—the one thing in his sloven life that he was ever known to take pride in or care of—only by the time they remembered all this it was too late. So they didn't know what he was about. They just heard him moving inside the dark house, then they heard the granddaughter's voice, fretful and querulous: "Who is it? Light the lamp, Grandpaw" then his voice: "Hit wont need no light, honey. Hit wont take but a minute" then de Spain drew his pistol and said, "You, Wash! Come out of there!" and still Wash didn't answer, murmuring still to the granddaughter: "Wher air you?" and the fretful voice answering, "Right here. Where else would I be?"

What is—" then de Spain said, "Jones?" and he was already fumbling at the broken steps when the granddaughter screamed; and now all the men there claimed that they heard the knife on both the neckbones, though de Spain didn't. He just said he knew that Wash had come out onto the gallery and that he sprang back before he found out that it was not toward him Wash was running but toward the end of the gallery, where the body lay, but that he did not think about the scythe:

he just ran backward a few feet when he saw Wash stoop and rise again and now Wash was running toward him.

Only he was running toward them all, de Spain said, running into the lanterns so that now they could see the scythe raised above his head; they could see his face, his eyes too, as he ran with the scythe above his head, straight into the lanterns and the gun barrels, making no sound, no outcry while de Spain ran backward before him, saying, "Jones! Stop! Stop, or I'll kill you.

Jones! Jones! Jones!"

'Wait,' Shreve said. 'You mean that he got the son he wanted, after all that trouble, and then turned right around and—'

'Yes. Sitting in Grandfather's office that afternoon, with his head kind of flung back a little, explaining to Grandfather like he might have been explaining arithmetic to Henry back in the fourth grade: "You see, all I wanted was just a son. Which seems to me, when I look about at my contemporary scene, no exorbitant gift from nature or circumstance to demand—"

'will you wait?" Shreve said. '—that with the son he went to all that trouble to get lying right there behind him in the cabin, he would have to taunt the grandfather into killing first him and then the child too ?"

'—What?" Quentin said. 'It wasn't a son. It was a girl."

'Oh,' Shreve said.

'—Come on. Let's get out of this damn icebox and go to bed."

VIII

THERE would be no deep breathing tonight. The window would remain closed above the frozen and empty quad beyond which the windows in

the opposite wall were, with two or three exceptions, already dark; soon the chimes would ring for midnight, the notes melodious and tranquil, faint and clear as glass in the fierce (it had quit snowing) still air.

'So the old man sent the nigger for Henry,' Shreve said. 'And Henry came in and the old man said "They cannot marry because he is your brother" and Henry said "You lie" like that, that quick: no space, no interval, no nothing between like when you press the button and get light in the room.

And the old man just sat there, didn't even move and strike him and so Henry didn't say "You lie" again because he knew now it was so; he just said "It's not true," not "I don't believe it" but "It's not true" because he could maybe see the old man's face again now and demon or no it was a kind of grief and pity, not for himself but for Henry, because Henry was just young while he (the old man) knew that he still had the courage and even all the shrewdness too—' Shreve stood beside the table, facing Quentin again though not seated now.

In the overcoat buttoned awry over the bathrobe he looked huge and shapeless like a disheveled bear as he stared at Quentin (the Southerner, whose blood ran quick to cool, more supple to compensate for violent changes of temperature perhaps, perhaps merely nearer the surface) who sat hunched in his chair, his hands thrust into his pockets as if he were trying to hug himself warm between his arms, looking somehow fragile and even wan in the lamplight, the rosy glow which now had nothing of warmth, coziness, in it, while both their breathing vaporized faintly in the cold room where there was now not two of them but four, the two who breathed not individuals now yet something both more and less than twins, the heart and blood of youth.

Shreve was nineteen, a few months younger than Quentin. He looked exactly nineteen; he was one of those people whose correct age you never know because they look exactly that and so you tell yourself that he or she cannot possibly be that because he or she looks too exactly

that not to take advantage of the appearance: so you never believe implicitly that he or she is either that age which they claim or that which in sheer desperation they agree to or which someone else reports them to be, strong enough, and willing enough for two, for two thousand, for all. Not two of them in a New England college sitting-room but one in a Mississippi library sixty years ago, with holly and mistletoe in vases on the mantel or thrust behind, crowning and garlanding with the season and time the pictures on the walls, and a sprig or so decorating the photograph, the group—mother and two children—on the desk, behind which the father sat when the son entered; and they—Quentin and Shreve—thinking how after the father spoke and before what he said stopped being shock and began to make sense, Henry would recall later how he had seen through the window beyond his father's head the sister and the lover in the garden, pacing slowly, the sister's head bent with listening, the lover's head leaned above it while they paced slowly on in that rhythm which not the eyes but the heart marks and calls the beat and measure for, to disappear slowly beyond some bush or shrub starred with white bloom—jasmine, spiraea, honeysuckle, perhaps myriad scentless unpickable Cherokee roses—names, blooms which Shreve possibly had never heard and never seen although the air had blown over him first which became tempered to nourish them.

It would not matter here in Cambridge that the time had been winter in that garden too, and hence no bloom nor leaf even if there had been someone to walk there and be seen there since, judged by subsequent events, it had been night in the garden also. But that did not matter because it had been so long ago. It did not matter to them (Quentin and Shreve) anyway, who could without moving, as free now of flesh of the father who decreed and forbade, the son who denied and repudiated, the lover who acquiesced, the beloved who was not bereaved, and with no tedious transition from hearth and garden to saddle, who could be already clattering over the frozen ruts of that December night and that Christmas dawn, that day of peace and cheer, of holly and goodwill and logs on the hearth; not two of them there and then either but four of them riding the two horses through the iron darkness, and that not mattering either: what faces and what names

they called themselves and were called by so long as the blood coursed—the blood, the immortal brief recent intransient blood which could hold honor above slothy unregret and love above fat and easy shame.

'And Bon didn't know it,' Shreve said. 'The old man didn't move and this time Henry didn't say "You lie," he said "It's not true" and the old man said, "Ask him. Ask Charles then" and then Henry knew that that was what his father had meant all the time and that that was what he meant himself when he told his father he lied, because what the old man said wasn't just "He is your brother" but "He has known all the time that he is yours and your sister's brother." But Bon didn't know.

Listen, don't you remember how your father said it, that not one time did he—the old guy, the demon—ever seem to wonder how the other wife managed to find him, track him down, had never once seemed to wonder what she might have been doing all that time, the thirty years since that day when he paid his bill with her and got it receipted, so he thought, and saw with his own eyes that it was (so he thought) destroyed, torn up, and thrown to the wind; never once wondered about this but only that she had done it, could have and would have wanted to track him down? So it wasn't her that told Bon. She wouldn't have wanted to, maybe for the reason that she knew he—the demon would believe she had.

Or maybe she didn't get around to telling him. Maybe she just never thought that there could be anyone as close to her as a lone child out of her own body who would have to be told how she had been scorned and suffered. Or maybe she was already telling it before he was big enough to know words and so by the time he was big enough to understand what was being told him she had told it so much and so hard that the words didn't make sense to her anymore either because they didn't have to make sense to her, and so she had got to the point where when she thought she was saying it she was quiet, and when she thought she was quiet it was just the hate and the fury and the unsleeping and the unforgetting. Or maybe she didn't intend for him to know it then.

Maybe she was grooming him for that hour and moment which she couldn't foresee but that she knew would arrive some day because it would have to arrive or else she would have to do like the Aunt Rosa and deny that she had ever breathed—the moment when he (Bon) would stand side by side (not face to face) with his father where fate or luck or justice or whatever she called it could do the rest (and it did, better than she could have invented or hoped or even dreamed, and your father said how being a woman she probably wasn't even surprised)—grooming him herself, bringing him on by hand herself, washing and feeding and putting him to bed and giving him the candy and the toys and the other child's fun and diversion and needs in measured doses like medicine with her own hand: not because she had to, who could have hired a dozen or bought a hundred to do it for her with the money, the jack that he (the demon) had voluntarily surrendered, repudiated to balance his moral ledger: but like the millionaire who could have a hundred hostlers and handlers but who has just the one horse, the one maiden, the one moment, the one matching of heart and muscle and will with the one instant: and himself (the millionaire) patient in the overalls and the sweat and the stable muck, and the mother bringing him along to the moment when she would say "He is your father.

He cast you and me aside and denied you his name. Now go" and then sit down and let God finish it: pistol or knife or rack; destruction or grief or anguish: God to call the shot or turn the wheel. Jesus, you can almost see him: a little boy already come to learn, to expect, before he could remember having learned his own name or the name of the town where he lived or how to say either of them, that every so often he would be snatched up from playing and held, gripped between the two hands fierce with (what passed at least with him for it) love, against the two fierce rigid knees, the face that he remembered since before remembering began as supervising all the animal joys of palate and stomach and entrails, of warmth and pleasure and security, swooping down at him in a kind of blazing immobility: he taking the interruption as a matter of course, as just another natural phenomenon of existence; the face filled with furious and almost unbearable

unforgiving almost like fever (not bitterness and despair: just implacable will for revenge) as just another manifestation of mammalian love and he not knowing what in hell it was all about.

He would be too young to curvy any connected fact out of the fury and hate and the tumbling speed; not comprehending or caring: just curious, creating for himself (without help since who to help him) his own notion of that Porto Rico or Haiti or wherever it was he understood vaguely that he had come from, like orthodox children do of Heaven or the cabbage patch or wherever it was that they came from, except that his was different in that you were not supposed (your mother didn't intend to, anyway) to ever go back there (and maybe when you got as old as she was you would be horrified too, every time you found hidden in your thoughts anything that just smelled or tasted like it might be a wish to go back there).

You were not supposed to know when and why you left but only that you had escaped, that whatever power had created the place for you to hate it had likewise got you away from the place so you could hate it good and never forgive it in quiet and monotony (though not exactly in what you would call peace); that you were to thank God you didn't remember anything about it yet at the same time you were not to, maybe dared not to, ever forget it—he not even knowing maybe that he took it for granted that all kids didn't have fathers too and that getting snatched every day or so from whatever harmless pursuit in which you were not bothering anybody or even thinking about them, by someone because that someone was bigger than you, stronger than you, and being held for a minute or five minutes under a kind of busted water pipe of incomprehensible fury and fierce yearning and vindictiveness and jealous rage was part of childhood which all mothers of children had received in turn from their mothers and from their mothers in turn from that Porto Rico or Haiti or wherever it was we all came from but none of us ever lived in.

So that when he grew up and had children he would have to pass it on too (and maybe deciding then and there that it was too much trouble and bother and that he would not have any children or at least hoped

he would not) and hence no man had a father, no one personal Porto Rico or Haiti, but all mother faces which ever bred swooping down at those almost calculable moments out of some obscure ancient general affronting and outraging which the actual living articulate meat had not even suffered but merely inherited; all boy flesh that walked and breathed stemming from that one ambiguous eluded dark fatherhead and so brothered perennial and ubiquitous everywhere under the sun-'

Quentin and Shreve stared at one another—glared rather their quiet regular breathing vaporizing faintly and steadily in the now tombl-like air.

There was something curious in the way they looked at one another, curious and quiet and profoundly intent, not at all as two young men might look at each other but almost as a youth and a very young girl might out of virginity itself—a sort of hushed and naked searching, each look burdened with youth's immemorial obsession not with time's dragging weight which the old live with but with its fluidity: the bright heels of all the lost moments of fifteen and sixteen. 'Then he got older and got out from under the apron despite her (despite him too maybe; maybe the both of them) and he didn't even care.

He found out that she was up to something and he not only didn't care, he didn't even care that he didn't know what it was; he got older and found out that she had been shaping and tempering him to be the instrument for whatever it was her hand was implacable for, maybe came to believe (or saw) that she had tricked him into receiving that shape and temper, and didn't care about that too because probably by that time he had learned that there were three things and no more: breathing, pleasure, darkness; and without money there could be no pleasure, and without pleasure it would not even be breathing but mere protoplasmic inhale and collapse of blind unorganism in a darkness where light never began.

And he had the money because he knew that she knew that the money was the only thing she could coerce and smooth him into the barrier with when Derby Day came, so she didn't dare pinch him there and she

knew he knew it: so that maybe he even blackmailed her, bought her off that way: "You give me the jack as I want it and I wont ask why or what for yet." Or maybe she was so busy grooming him that she never thought of the money now, who probably never had had much time to remember it or count it or wonder how much there was in the intervals of the hating and the being mad, and so all to check him up about the money would be the lawyer.

He (Bon) probably learned that the first thing: that he could go to his mother and hold the lawyer's feet to the fire anytime, like the millionaire horse has only to come in one time with a little extra sweat on him, and tomorrow he will have a new jock. Sure, that's who it would be: the lawyer, that lawyer with his private mad female millionaire to farm, who probably wasn't interested enough in the money to see whether the checks had any other writing on them when she signed them—that lawyer who, with Bon's mother already plotting and planning him since before he could remember for that day when he should be translated quick into so much rich and rotting dirt, had already been plowing and planting and harvesting him and the mother both as if he already was that lawyer who maybe had the secret drawer in the secret safe and the secret paper in it, maybe a chart with colored pins stuck into it like generals have in campaigns, and all the notations in code: Today Sutpen finished robbing a drunken Indian of a hundred miles of virgin land, val. \$25,000.

At 2:31 today came up out of swamp with final plank for house. val in conj. with land 40,000.

7:52 p.m. today married. Bigamy threat val. minus nil. unless quick buyer. Not probable. Doubtless conjoined with wife same day. Say 1 year and then with maybe the date and the hour too: Son.

Intrinsic val. possible though not probable forced sale of house land plus val. crop minus child's one quarter. Emotional val. plus 100% times nil. plus val. crop. Say 10 years, one or more children.

Intrinsic val. forced sale house improved land plus liquid assets minus children's share. Emotional val .100% times increase yearly for each child plus intrinsic val. plus liquid assets plus working acquired credit and maybe here with the date too: Daughter and you could maybe even have seen the question mark after it and the other words even: daughter? daughter? daughter? trailing off not because thinking trailed off, but on the contrary thinking stopping right still then, backing up a little and spreading like when you lay a stick across a trickle of water, spreading and rising slow all around him in whatever place it was that he could lock the door to and sit quiet and subtract the money that Bon was spending on his whores and his champagne from what his mother had, and figure up how much would be left of it tomorrow and next month and next year or until Sutpen would be good and ripe—thinking about the good hard cash that Bon was throwing away on his horses and clothes and the champagne and gambling and women (he would have known about the octoroon and the left-handed marriage long before the mother did even if it had been any secret; maybe he even had a spy in the bedroom like he seems to have had in Sutpen's; maybe he even planted her, said to himself like you do about a dog: He is beginning to ramble.

He needs a block. Not a tether: just a light block of some sort, so he cant get inside of anything that might have a fence around it) and only him to try to check it, or as much as he dared, and not getting far because he knew too that all Bon had to do was to go to his mother and the race horse would have a gold eatingtrough if he wanted it and, if the jock wasn't careful, a new jockey too counting up the money, figuring what he would net at this normal rate over the next few years, and meanwhile crucified between his two problems: whether maybe what he ought to do was to wash his hands of the Sutpen angle and clean up what was left and light out for Texas.

Except that whenever he thought about doing that he would have to think about all the money that Bon had already spent, and that if he had only gone to Texas ten years ago or five years ago or even last year he would have made more: so that maybe at night while he would be waiting for the window to begin to turn gray he would be like what

Aunt Rosa said she was and he would have to deny that he breathed (or maybe wished he didn't) except for that two hundred per cent times the intrinsic value every New Year's—the water backing up from the stick and rising and spreading about him steady and quiet as light and him sitting there in the actual white glare of clairvoyance (or second sight or faith in human misfortune and folly or whatever you want to call it) that was showing him not only what might happen but what was actually going to happen and him declining to believe it was going to happen, not because it had come to him as a vision, but because it would have to have love and honor and courage and pride in it; and believing it might happen, not because it was logical and possible, but because it would be the most unfortunate thing for all concerned that could occur; and though you could no more have proved vice or virtue or courage or cowardice to him without showing him the moving people than you could have proved death to him without showing him a corpse, he did believe in misfortune because of that rigorous and arduous dusty eunuch's training which taught to leave man's good luck and joys to God, who would in return surrender all his miseries and follies and misfortunes to the lice and fleas of Coke and Littleton. And the old Sabine—'

They stared—glared—at one another. It was Shreve speaking, though save for the slight difference which the intervening degrees of latitude had inculcated in them (differences not in tone or pitch but of turns of phrase and usage of words), it might have been either of them and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal; the two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere, who, shadows, were shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what were (to one of them at least, to Shreve) shades too, quiet as the visible murmur of their vaporizing breath.

The chimes now began to ring for midnight, melodious, slow and faint beyond the closed, the snow-sealed, window. '—the old Sabine, who couldn't to save her life have told you or the lawyer or Bon or anybody

else probably what she wanted, expected, hoped for because she was a woman and didn't need to want or hope or expect anything, but just to want and expect and hope (and besides, your father said that when you have plenty of good strong hating you don't need hope because the hating will be enough to nourish you) the old Sabine (not so old yet, but she would have just let herself go in the sense that you keep the engines clean and oiled and the best of coal in the bunkers but you don't bother to shine the brightwork or holystone the decks anymore; just let herself go on the outside.

Not fat; she would burn it up too fast for that, shrivel it away in the gullet between swallowing and stomach; no pleasure in the chewing; having to chew just another nuisance like no pleasure in the clothing; having the old wear out and having to choose the new just another nuisance: and no pleasure in the fine figure he—' neither of them said ' Bon'

'—cut in the fine pants that fit his leg and the fine coats that fit his shoulders nor in the fact that he had more watches and cuff buttons and finer linen and horses and yellow-wheeled buggies (not to mention the gals) than most others did, but all that too just an unavoidable nuisance that he would have to get shut of before he could do her any good just like he had to get shut of the teething and the chicken pox and the light boy's bones in order to be able to do her any good)—the old Sabine getting the faked reports from the lawyer like reports sent back to headquarters from a battle front, with maybe a special nigger in the lawyer's anteroom to do nothing else but carry them and that maybe once in two years or five times in two days, depending on when she would begin to itch for news and began to worry him—the report, the communique about how we are not far behind him (Sutpen) in Texas or Missouri or maybe California (California would be fine, that far away; convenient, proof inherent in the sheer distance, the necessity to accept and believe) and we are going to catch up with him any day now and so do not worry.

So she wouldn't, she wouldn't worry at all: she would just have out the carriage and go to the lawyer, busting in in the black dress that looked

like a section of limp stove pipe and maybe not even a hat but just a shawl over her head, so that the only things missing would be the mop and the pail busting in and saying "He's dead. I know he is dead and how can he, how can he be," not meaning what the Aunt Rosa meant: where did they find or invent a bullet that could kill him but How can he be allowed to die without having to admit that he was wrong and suffer and regret it.

And so in the next two seconds they would almost catch him (he the lawyer—would show her the actual letter, the writing in the English she couldn't read, that had just come in, that he had just sent for the nigger to carry to her when she came in, and the lawyer done practised putting the necessary date on the letter until he could do it now while his back would be toward her, in the two seconds it would take him to get the letter out of the file)—catch him, get so close to him as to have ample satisfaction that he was alive; so close indeed that he would be able to get her out of the office before she had sat down and into the carriage again and on the way home again where, among the Florentine mirrors and Paris drapes and tufted camisoles, she would still look like the one that had come in to scrub the floors, in the black dress that the cook wouldn't have looked at even when it was new five or six years ago, holding, clutching the letter she couldn't read (maybe the only word in it she could even recognize would be the word "Sutpen") in one hand and brushing back a rope of lank iron-colored hair with the other and not looking at the letter like she was reading it even if she could have, but swooping at it, blazing down at it as if she knew she would have only a second to read it in, only a second for it to remain intact in after her eyes would touch it, before it took fire and so would not be perused but consumed, leaving her sitting there with a black crumbling blank carbon ash in her hand.

'And him—' (Neither of them said 'Bon') '—there watching her, who had got old enough to have learned that what he thought was childhood wasn't childhood, that other children had been made by fathers and mothers where he had been created new when he began to remember, new again when he came to the point where his carcass quit being a baby and became a boy, new again when he quit being a

boy and became a man; created between a lawyer and a woman whom he had thought was feeding and washing and putting him to bed and finding him in the extra ticklings for his palate and his pleasure because he was himself, until he got big enough to find out that it wasn't him at all she was washing and feeding the candy and the fun to but it was a man that hadn't even arrived yet, whom even she had never seen yet, who would be something else beside that boy when he did arrive like the dynamite which destroys the house and the family and maybe even the whole community aint the old peaceful paper that maybe would rather be blowing aimless and light along the wind or the old merry sawdust or the old quiet chemicals that had rather be still and dark in the quiet earth like they had been before the meddling guy with ten-power spectacles came and dug them up and strained, warped and kneaded them created between this woman and a hired lawyer (the woman who since before he could remember he now realized had been planning and grooming him for some moment that would come and pass and following which he saw that to her he would be little more than so much rich rotting dirt; the lawyer who since before he could remember he now realized had been plowing and planting and watering and manuring and harvesting him as if he already was) and Bon watching her, lounging there against the mantel maybe in the fine clothes, in the harem incense odor of what you might call easy sanctity, watching her looking at the letter, not even thinking I am looking upon my mother naked since if the hating was nakedness, she had worn it long enough now for it to do the office of clothing like they say that modesty can do, does 'So he went away.

He went away to school at the age of twenty-eight. And he wouldn't know nor care about that either: which of them—mother or lawyer—it was who decided he should go to school nor why, because he had known all the time that his mother was up to something and that the lawyer was up to something, and he didn't care enough about what either of them was to try to find out, who knew that the lawyer knew that his mother was up to something but that his mother didn't know that the lawyer was up to something, and that it would be all right with the lawyer if his mother got whatever it was she wanted, provided he

(the lawyer) got what he wanted one second before or at least at the same time.

He went away to school; he said "All right" and told the octoroon goodbye and went to school, who not in all the twenty-eight years had ever been told by anyone, "Do as these others do; have this task done at nine a. m. tomorrow or Friday or Monday"; maybe it was even the octoroon whom they (or the lawyer) used—the light block (not tether) which the lawyer had put on him to keep him from getting inside of something which might be found to have a fence around it later.

Maybe the mother found out about the octoroon and the child and the ceremony and discovered more than the lawyer had (or would believe, who considered Bon only dull, not a fool) and sent for him and he came and lounged against the mantel again and maybe knowing what was up, what had happened before she told him, lounging there with an expression on his face you might call smiling except it was not that but just something you couldn't see through or past, and she watching him with maybe the lank iron-colored strand of hair down again and not even bothering to brush it back now because she was not looking at any letter now but her eyes blazing at him, her voice trying to blaze at him out of the urgency of alarm and fear, but she managing to keep it down since she could not talk about betrayal because she had not told him yet, and now, at this moment, she would not dare risk it—he looking at her from behind the smiling that wasn't smiling but was just something you were not supposed to see beyond, saying, admitting it: "Why not?"

All young men do it. The ceremony too. I didn't set out to get the child, but now that I have.... It's not a bad child, either" and she watching him, glaring at him and not being able to say what she would because she had put off too long now saying what she could: "But you.

This is different" and he (she would not need to say it. He would know because he already knew why she had sent for him, even if he did not know and did not care what she had been up to since before he could remember, since before he could take a woman whether in love or

not): "Why not? Men seem to have to marry some day, sooner or later. And this is one whom I know, who makes me no trouble. And with the ceremony, that bother, already done. And as for a little matter like a spot of Negro blood—' not needing to talk much, say much either, not needing to say I seem to have been born into this world with so few fathers that I have too many brothers to outrage and shame while alive and hence too many descendants to bequeath my little portion of hurt and harm to, dead; not that, just 'a little spot of Negro blood—' and then to watch the face, the desperate urgency and fear, then to depart, kissing her maybe, her hand maybe which would lie in his and even touch his lips like a dead hand because of the desperate casting for this straw or that; maybe as he went out he said she will go to him (the lawyer); if I were to wait five minutes I could see her in the shawl.

So probably by tonight I will be able to know—if I cared to know. Maybe by night he did, maybe before that if they managed to find him, get word to him, because she went to the lawyer. And it was right in the lawyer's alley. Maybe before she even got started telling it good that gentle white glow began like when you turn up a wick; maybe he could even almost see his hand writing on into the space where the daughter? daughter? daughter? never had quite showed. Because maybe that had been the lawyer's trouble and worry and concern all the time; that ever since she had made him promise he would never tell Bon who his father was, he had been waiting and wondering how to do it, since maybe he knew that if he were to tell Bon, Bon might believe it or he might not, but certainly he would go and tell his mother that the lawyer had told him and then he (the lawyer) would be sunk, not for any harm done because there would be no harm, since this could not alter the situation, but for having crossed his paranoiac client.

Maybe while he would sit in his office adding and subtracting the money and adding what they would get out of Sutpen (he was never worried about what Bon would do when he found out; he had probably a long time ago paid Bon that compliment of thinking that even if he was too dull or too indolent to suspect or find out about his father himself, he wasn't fool enough not to be able to take advantage of it once somebody showed him the proper move; maybe if the thought

had ever occurred to him that because of love or honor or anything else under Heaven or jurisprudence either, Bon would not, would refuse to, he (the lawyer) would even have furnished proof that he no longer breathed) maybe all the time it was this that racked him: how to get Bon where he would either have to find it out himself, or where somebody—the father or the mother—would have to tell him.

So maybe she wasn't out of the office good or at least as soon as he had had time to open the safe and look in the secret drawer and make sure that it was the University of Mississippi that Henry attended—before his hand was writing steady and even into the space where the daughter? daughter? daughter? never had showed—and when the date here too: 1859. Two children. Say 1860, 20 years. Increase 200% times intrinsic val. yearly plus liquid assets plus credit earned. Approx'te val.

1860, 100,000. Query: bigamy threat, Yes or No. Possible. No.

Incest threat: Credible Yes and the hand going back before it put down the period, lining out the Credible, writing in Certain, underlining it.

'And he didn't care about that too; he just said, "All right."

Because maybe he knew now that his mother didn't know and never would know what she wanted, and so he couldn't beat her (maybe he had learned from the octoroon that you cant beat women anyhow and that if you are wise or dislike trouble and uproar you don't even try to), and he knew that all the lawyer wanted was just the money; and so if he just didn't make the mistake of believing that he could beat all of it, if he just remembered to be quiet and be alert he could beat some of it. —So he said, "All right" and let his mother pack the fine clothes and the fine linen into the bags and trunks, and maybe he lounged into the lawyer's office and watched from behind that something which could have been called smiling while the lawyer made the elbow motion about getting his horses onto the steamboat and maybe buying him an extra special body servant and arranging about the money and all; watching from behind the smiling while the lawyer did the heavy father

even, talking about the scholarship, the culture, the Latin and the Greek that would equip and polish him for the position which he would hold in life and how a man to be sure could get that anywhere, in his own library even, who had the will; but how there was something, some quality to culture which only the monastic, the cloistral monotony of a—say obscure and small (though high class, high class) college—and he—' (neither of them said ' Bon'.

Never at any time did there seem to be any confusions between them as to whom Shreve meant by 'he') 'listening courteous and quiet behind that expression which you were not supposed to see past, asking at last, interrupting maybe, courteous and affable nothing of irony, nothing of sarcasm—"What did you say this college was?": and now a good deal of elbow motion here while the lawyer would shuffle through the papers to find the one from which he could read that name which he had been memorizing ever since he first talked to the mother: "The University of Mississippi, at"—Where did you say?" 'Oxford,' Quentin said. 'It's about forty miles from—'

"—Oxford."

And then the papers could be still again because he would be talking: about a small college only ten years old, about how there wouldn't be anything to distract him from his studies there (where, in a sense, wisdom herself would be a virgin or at least not very secondhand) and how he would have a chance to observe another and a provincial section of the country in which his high destiny was rooted; (granted the outcome of this war which was without doubt imminent, the successful conclusion of which we all hoped for, had no doubt of) as the man he would be and the economic power he would represent when his mother passed on, and he listening behind that expression, saying, "Then you don't recommend the law as a vocation?" and now for just a moment the lawyer would stop, but not long; maybe not long enough or perceptible enough for you to call it pause: and he would be looking at Bon too: "It hadn't occurred to me that the law might appeal to you" said Bon: "Neither did practising with a rapier appeal to me while I was doing it.

But I can recall at least one occasion in my life when I was glad I had" and then the lawyer, smooth and easy: "Then by all means let it be the law. Your mother will ag—be pleased."

"All right," he said, not "good-bye"; he didn't care. Maybe he didn't even say good-bye to the octoroon, to those tears and lamentations and maybe even the clinging, the soft despairing magnolia-colored arms about his knees, and (say) three and a half feet above those boneless steel gyves that expression of his which was not smiling but just something not to be seen through.

Because you cant beat them: you just flee (and thank God you can flee, can escape from that massy five-foot-thick maggot-cheesy solidarity which overlays the earth, in which men and women in couples are ranked and racked like ninepins; thanks to whatever Gods for that masculine hipless tapering peg which fits light and glib to move where the cartridge-chambered hips of women hold them fast)—not good-bye: all right: and one night he walked up the gangplank between the torches and probably only the lawyer there to see him off and this not for godspeed but to make sure that he actually took the boat.

And the new extra nigger opening the bags in the stateroom, spreading the fine clothes, and the ladies already gathered in the saloon for supper and the men in the bar, preparing for it, but not he; he alone, at the rail, with a cigar maybe, watching the city drift and wink and glitter and sink away and then all motion cease, the boat suspended immobile and without progress from the stars themselves by the two ropes of spark-filled smoke streaming upward from the stacks.

And who knows what thinking, what sober weighing and discarding, who had known for years that his mother was up to something; that the lawyer was up to something and though he knew that was just money, yet he knew that within his (the lawyer's) known masculine limitations he (the lawyer) could be almost as dangerous as the unknown quantity which was his mother; and now this—school, college—and he twenty-eight years old. And not only that, but this

particular college, which he had never heard of, which ten years ago did not even exist; and knowing too that it was the lawyer who had chosen it for him—what sober, what intent, what almost frowning Why? Why? Why this college, this particular one above all others?

Maybe leaning there in that solitude between panting smoke and engines and almost touching the answer, aware of the jigsaw puzzle picture integers of it waiting, almost lurking, just beyond his reach, inextricable, jumbled, and unrecognizable yet on the point of falling into pattern which would reveal to him at once, like a flash of light, the meaning of his whole life, past—the Haiti, the childhood, the lawyer, the woman who was his mother. And maybe the letter itself right there under his feet, somewhere in the darkness beneath the deck on which he stood—the letter addressed not to Thomas Sutpen at Sutpen's Hundred but to Henry Sutpen, Esquire, in Residence at the University of Mississippi, near Oxford, Mississippi.

One day Henry showed it to him and there was no gentle spreading glow but a flash, a glare (showed it to him who not only had no visible father but had found himself to be, even in infancy, enclosed by an unsleeping cabal bent apparently on teaching him that he had never had a father, that his mother had emerged from a sojourn in limbo, from that state of blessed amnesia in which the weak senses can take refuge from the godless dark forces and powers which weak human flesh cannot stand, to wake pregnant, shrieking and screaming and thrashing, not against the ruthless agony of labor but in protest against the outrage of her swelling loins; that he had been fathered on her not through that natural process but had been blotted onto and out of her body by the old infernal immortal male principle of all unbridled terror and darkness) a glare in which he stood looking at the innocent face of the youth almost ten years his junior, while one part of him said. He has my brow my skull my jaw my hands and the other said Wait.

Wait. You cant know yet. You cannot know yet whether what you see is what you are looking at or what you are believing. Wait. Wait.

'The letter which he—' it was not Bon Shreve meant now, yet again Quentin seemed to comprehend without difficulty or effort whom he meant '—wrote maybe as soon as he finished that last entry in the record, into the daughter? daughter? daughter? while he thought By all means he must not know now, must not be told before he can get there and he and the daughter—not remembering anything about young love from his own youth and would not have believed it if he had, yet willing to use that too as he would have used courage and pride, thinking not of any hushed wild importunate blood and light hands hungry for touching, but of the fact that this Oxford and this Sutpen's Hundred were only a day's ride apart and Henry already established in the University and so maybe for once in his life the lawyer even believed in God: My Dear Mr Sutpen: The undersigned name will not be known to you, nor are the writer's position and circumstances, for all their reflected worth and (I hope) value, so unobscure as to warrant the hope that he will ever see you in person or you he—worth reflected from and value rendered to two persons of birth and position, one of whom, a lady and widowed mother, resides in that seclusion befitting her condition in the city from which this letter is inscribed, the other of whom, a young gentleman her son, will either be as you read this, or will shortly thereafter be a petitioner before the same Bar of knowledge and wisdom as yourself.

It is in his behalf that I write. No: I will not say behalf; certainly I shall not let his lady mother nor the young gentleman himself suspect that I used that term, even to one, Sir, scion of the principal family of that county as it is your fortunate lot to be. Indeed, it were better for me if I had not written at all. But I do; I have; it is irrevocable now; if you discern aught in this letter which smacks of humility, take it as coming not from the mother and certainly not from the son, but from the pen of one whose humble position as legal adviser and man of business to the above described lady and young gentleman, whose loyalty and gratitude toward one whose generosity has found him (I do not confess this; I proclaim it) in bread and meat and fire and shelter over a period long enough to have taught him gratitude and loyalty even if he had not known them, has led him into an action whose means fall behind its

intention for the reason that he is only what he is and professes himself to be, not what he would.

So take this, Sir, neither as the unwarranted insolence which an unsolicited communication from myself to you would be, not as a plea for sufrance on behalf of an unknown, but as an introduction (clumsy though it be) to one young gentleman whose position needs neither detailing nor recapitulation in the place where this letter is read, of another young gentleman whose position requires neither detailing nor recapitulation in the place where it was written.-Not goodbye; all right, who had had so many fathers as to have neither love nor pride to receive or inflict, neither honor nor shame to share or bequeath; to whom one place was the same as another, like to a cat—cosmopolitan New Orleans or bucolic Mississippi: his own inherited and heritable Florentine lamps and gilded toilet seats and tufted mirrors, or a little jerkwater college not ten years old; champagne in the octoroon's boudoir or whiskey on a harsh new table in a monk's cell and a country youth, a bucolic heir apparent who had probably never spent a dozen nights outside of his paternal house (unless perhaps to lie fully dressed beside a fire in the woods listening to dogs running) until he came to school, whom he watched aping his clothing carriage speech and all and (the youth) completely unaware that he was doing it, who (the youth) over the bottle one night said, blurted—no, not blurted: it would be fumbling, groping: and he (the cosmopolite ten years the youth's senior almost, lounging in one of the silk robes the like of which the youth had never seen before and believed that only women wore) watching the youth blush fiery red yet still face him, still look him straight in the eye while he fumbled, groped, blurted with abrupt complete irrelevance: "If I had a brother, I wouldn't want him to be a younger brother" and he: "Ah?" and the youth: "No. I would want him to be older than me" and he: "No son of a landed father wants an older brother" and the youth: "Yes.

I do," looking straight at the other, the esoteric, the sybarite, standing (the youth) now, erect, thin (because he was young), his face scarlet but his head high and his eyes steady: "Yes. And I would want him to be

just like you" and he: "Is that so? The whiskey's your side. Drink or pass."

'And now,' Shreve said, 'we're going to talk about love.'" But he didn't need to say that either, any more than he had needed to specify which he meant by he, since neither of them had been thinking about anything else; all that had gone before just so much that had to be overpassed and none else present to overpass it but them, as someone always has to rake the leaves up before you can have the bonfire. That was why it did not matter to either of them which one did the talking, since it was not the talking alone which did it, performed and accomplished the overpassing, but some happy marriage of speaking and hearing wherein each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other—faultings both in the creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true, or fit the preconceived—in order to overpass to love, where there might be paradox and inconsistency but nothing fault nor false.

'And now, love. He must have known all about her before he ever saw her—what she looked like, her private hours in that provincial women's world that even men of the family were not supposed to know a great deal about; he must have learned it without even having to ask a single question. Jesus, it must have kind of boiled out all over him.

There must have been nights and nights while Henry was learning from him how to lounge about a bedroom in a gown and slippers such as women wore, in a faint though unmistakable effluvium of scent such as women used, smoking a cigar almost as a woman might smoke it, yet withal such an air of indolent and lethal assurance that only the most reckless man would have gratuitously drawn the comparison (and with no attempt to teach, train, play the mentor on his part—and then maybe yes; maybe who could know what times he looked at Henry's face and thought, not there but for the intervening leaven of that blood which we do not have in common is my skull, my brow, sockets, shape and angle of jaw and chin and some of my thinking behind it, and which

he could see in my face in his turn if he but knew to look as I know but there, just behind a little, obscured a little by that alien blood whose admixing was necessary in order that he exist is the face of the man who shaped us both out of that blind chancy darkness which we call the future; there—there—at any moment second, I shall penetrate by something of will and intensity and dreadful need, and strip that alien leavening from it and look not on my brother's face whom I did not know I possessed and hence never missed, but my father's, out of the shadow of whose absence my spirit's posthumeity has never escaped—at what moment thinking, watching the eagerness which was without abjectness, the humility which surrendered no pride—the entire proffering of the spirit of which the unconscious aping of clothes and speech and mannerisms was but the shell—thinking what cannot I do with this willing flesh and bone if I wish; this flesh and bone and spirit which stemmed from the same source that mine did, but which sprang in quiet peace and contentment and ran in steady even though monotonous sunlight, where that which he bequeathed me sprang in hatred and outrage and unforgiving and ran in shadow—what could I not mold of this malleable and eager clay which that father himself could not to what shape of what good there might, must, be in that blood and none handy to take and mold that portion of it in me until too late: of what moments when he might have told himself that it was nonsense, it could not be true; that such coincidences only happened in books, thinking the weariness, the fatalism, the incorrigible cat for solitude—That young clodhopper bastard.

How shall I get rid of him: and then the voice, the other voice: You don't mean that: and he: No. But I do mean the clodhopper bastard) and the days, the afternoons, while they rode together (and Henry aping him here too, who was the better horseman, who maybe had nothing of what Bon would have called style but who had done more of it, to whom a horse was as natural as walking, who would ride anything anywhere and at anything) while he must have watched himself being swamped and submerged in the bright unreal flood of Henry's speech, translated (the three of them: himself and Henry and the sister whom he had never seen and perhaps did not even have any curiosity to see) into a world like a fairy tale in which nothing else save them existed,

riding beside Henry, listening, needing to ask no questions, to prompt to further speech in any manner that youth who did not even suspect that he and the man beside him might be brothers, who each time his breath crossed his vocal chords was saying From now on mine and my sister's house will be your house and mine and my sister's lives your life, wondering (Bon) or maybe not wondering at all—how if conditions were reversed and Henry was the stranger and he (Bon) the scion and still knew what he suspected, if he would say the same; then (Bon) agreeing at last, saying at last, "All right.

I'll come home with you for Christmas," not to see the third inhabitant of Henry's fairy tale, not to see the sister because he had not once thought of her: he had merely listened about her: but thinking So at last I shall see him, whom it seems I was bred up never to expect to see, whom I had even learned to live without, thinking maybe how he would walk into the house and see the man who made him and then he would know; there would be that flash, that instant of indisputable recognition between them and he would know for sure and forever thinking maybe That's all I want. He need not even acknowledge me; I will let him understand just as quickly that he need not do that, that I do not expect that, will not be hurt by that, just as he will let me know that quickly that I am his son, thinking maybe, maybe again with that expression you might call smiling but which was not, which was just something that even just a clodhopper bastard was not intended to see beyond: I am my mother's son, at least: I do not seem to know what I want either.

Because he knew exactly What he wanted; it was just the saying of it—the physical touch even though in secret, hidden—the living touch of that flesh warmed before he was born by the same blood which it had bequeathed him to warm his own flesh with, to be bequeathed by him in turn to run hot and loud in veins and limbs after that first flesh and then his own were dead. So the Christmas came and he and Henry rode the forty miles to Sutpen's Hundred, with Henry still talking, still keeping distended and light and iridescent with steady breathing that fairy balloon-vacuum in which the three of them existed, lived, moved even maybe, in attitudes without flesh—himself and the friend and the

sister whom the friend had never seen and (though Henry did not know it) had not even thought about yet but only listened about from behind the more urgent thinking, and Henry probably not even noticing that the nearer they came to home the less Bon talked, had to say on any subject, and maybe even (and certainly Henry would not know this) listening less.

And so he went into the house: and maybe somebody looking at him would have seen on his face an expression a good deal like the one—that proffering with humility yet with pride too, of complete surrender—which he had used to see on Henry's face, and maybe he telling himself I not only don't know what it is I want but apparently I am a good deal younger than I thought also: and saw face to face the man who might be his father, and nothing happened—no shock, no hot communicated flesh that speech would have been too slow even to impede—nothing. And he spent ten days there, not only the esoteric, the sybarite, the steel blade in the silken tessellated sheath which Henry had begun to ape at the University, but the object of art, the mold and mirror of form mad fashion which Mrs Sutpen (so your father said) accepted him as and insisted (didn't your father say?) that he be (and would have purchased him as and paid for him with Judith even, if there had been no other bidder among the four of them or didn't your father say?) and which he did remain to her until he disappeared, taking Henry with him, and she never saw him again and war and trouble and grief and bad food filled her days until maybe she didn't even remember after a while that she had ever forgot him. (And the girl, the sister, the virgin—Jesus, who to know what she saw that afternoon when they rode up the drive, what prayer, what maiden meditative dream ridden up out of whatever fabulous land, not in harsh stove iron but the silken and tragic Lancelot nearing thirty, ten years older than she was and wearied, sated with what experiences and pleasures, which Henry's letters must have created for her.)

And the day came to depart and no sign yet; he and Henry rode away and still no sign, no more sign at parting than when he had seen it first, in that face where he might (he would believe) have seen for himself the truth and so would have needed no sign, if it hadn't been for the

beard; no sign in the eyes which could see his face because there was no beard to hide it, could have seen the truth if it were there: yet no flicker in them: and so he knew it was in his face because he knew that the other had seen it there just exactly as Henry was to know the next Christmas eve in the library that his father was not lying by the fact that the father said nothing, did nothing.

Maybe he even thought, wondered if perhaps that was not why the beard, if maybe the other had not hidden behind that beard against this very day, and if so, why? why? thinking But why? Why? since he wanted so little, could have understood if the other had wanted the signal to be in secret, would have been quick and glad to let it be in secret even if he could not have understood why, thinking in the middle of this My God, I am young, young, and I didn't even know it; they didn't even tell me, that I was young, feeling that same despair and shame like when you have to watch your father fail in physical courage, thinking, It should have been me that failed; me, I, not he who stemmed from that blood which we both bear before it could have become corrupt and tainted by whatever it was in mother's that he could not brook.

—Wait,' Shreve cried, though Quentin had not spoken: it had been merely some quality, some gathering of Quentin's still lax and hunched figure which presaged speech, because Shreve said Wait. Wait. before Quentin could have begun to speak. 'Because he hadn't even looked at her. Oh, he had seen her all right, he had had plenty of opportunity for that; he could not have helped but that because Mrs Sutpen would have seen to it—ten days of that kind of planned and arranged and executed privacies like the campaigns of dead generals in the textbooks, in libraries and parlors and drives in the buggy in the afternoons—all planned three months ago when Mrs Sutpen read Henry's first letter with Bon's name in it, until maybe even Judith too began to feel like the other one to a pair of goldfish: and him even talking to her too, or what talking he could have found to do to a country girl who probably never saw a man young or old before who sooner or later didn't smell like manure; talking to her about like he would talk to the old dame on the gold chairs in the parlor, except that

in the one case he would have to make all the conversation and in the other he would not even be able to make his own escape but would have to wait for Henry to come and get him.

And maybe he had even thought about her by that time; maybe at the times when he would be telling himself it can't be so; he could not look at me like this every day and make no sign if it were so he would even tell himself She would be easy like when you have left the champagne on the supper table and are walking toward the whiskey on the sideboard and you happen to pass a cup of lemon sherbet on a tray and you look at the Sherbet and tell yourself, That would be easy too only who wants it. Does that suit you?" 'But it's not love,' Quentin said.

'Because why not? Because listen. What was it the old dame, the Aunt Rosa, told you about how there are some things that just have to be whether they are or not, have to be a damn sight more than some other things that maybe are and it don't matter a damn whether they are or not? That was it. He just didn't have time yet. Jesus, he must have known it would be. Like that lawyer thought, he wasn't a fool; the trouble was, he wasn't the kind of not-fool the lawyer thought he would be. He must have known it was going to happen. It would be like you passed that sherbet and maybe you knew you would even reach the sideboard and the whiskey, yet you knew that tomorrow morning you would want that sherbet, then you reached the whiskey and you knew you wanted that sherbet now; maybe you didn't even go to the sideboard, maybe you even looked back at that champagne on the supper table among the dirty haviland and the crumpled damask, and all of a sudden you knew you didn't want to go back there even.

It would be no question of choosing, having to choose between the champagne or whiskey and the sherbet, but all of a sudden (it would be spring then, in that country where he had never spent a spring before and you said North Mississippi is a little harder country than Louisiana, with dogwood and violets and the early scentless flowers but the earth and the nights still a little cold and the hard tight sticky buds like young girls' nipples on alder and Judas trees and beech and maple and even something in the cedars like he never saw before) you find that you

don't want anything but that sherbet and that you haven't been wanting anything else but that and you have been wanting that pretty hard for some time—besides knowing that that sherbet is there for you to take. Not just for anybody to take but for you to take, knowing just from looking at that cup that it would be like a flower that, if any other hand reached for it, it would have thorns on it but not for your hand; and him not used to that since all the other cups that had been willing and easy for him to take up hadn't contained sherbet but champagne or at least kitchen wine.

And more than that. There was the knowing what he suspected might be so, or not knowing if it was so or not. And who to say if it wasn't maybe the possibility of incest, because who (without a sister: I don't know about the others) has been in love and not discovered the vain evanescence of the fleshly encounter; who has not had to realize that when the brief all is done you must retreat from both love and pleasure, gather up your own rubbish and refuse—the hats and pants and shoes which you drag through the world—and retreat since the gods condone and practise these and the dreamy immeasurable coupling which floats oblivious above the tramping and hurried instant, the: was-not: is: was: is a perquisite only of balloony and weightless elephants and whales: but maybe if there were sin too maybe you would not be permitted to escape, uncouple, return.

—Aint that right?" He ceased, he could have been interrupted easily now. Quentin could have spoke now, but Quentin did not. He just sat as before, his hands in his trousers pockets, his shoulders hugged inward and hunched, his face lowered and he looking somehow curiously smaller than he actually was because of his actual height and spareness—that quality of delicacy about the bones, articulation, which even at twenty still had something about it, some last echo about it, of adolescence—that is, as compared with the cherubic burliness of the other who faced him, who looked younger, whose very superiority in bulk and displacement made him look even younger, as a plump boy of twelve who outweighs the other by twenty or thirty pounds still looks younger than the boy of fourteen who had that plumpness once and

lost it, sold it (whether with his consent or not) for that state of virginity which is neither boy's nor girl's.

'I don't know,' Quentin said. 'All right,' Shreve said. 'Maybe I don't either. Only, Jesus, some day you are bound to fall in love. They just wouldn't beat you that way. It would be like if God had got Jesus born and saw that he had the carpenter tools and then never gave him anything to build with them. Don't you believe that?'

'I don't know,' Quentin said. He did not move. Shreve looked at him. Even while they were not talking their breaths in the tomblike air vaporized gently and quietly. The chimes for midnight would have rung some time ago now.

'You mean, it don't matter to you?' Quentin did not answer. 'That's right.

Don't say it. Because I would know you are lying. —All right then. Listen.

Because he never had to worry about the love because that would take care of itself. Maybe he knew there was a fate, a doom on him, like what the old Aunt Rosa told you about some things that just have to be whether they are or not, just to balance the books, write Paid on the old sheet so that whoever keeps them can take it out of the ledger and burn it, get rid of it.

Maybe he knew then that whatever the old man had done, whether he meant well or ill by it, it wasn't going to be the old man who would have to pay the check; and now that the old man was bankrupt with the incompetence of age, who should do the paying if not his sons, his get, because wasn't it done that way in the old days; the old Abraham full of years and weak and incapable now of further harm, caught at last and the captains and the collectors saying, "Old man, we don't want you" and Abraham would say, "Praise the Lord, I have raised about me sons to bear the burden of mine iniquities and persecutions; yea, perhaps even to restore my flocks and herds from the hand of the

ravisher: that I might rest mine eyes upon my goods and chattels, upon the generations of them and of my descendants increased an hundred fold as my soul goeth out from me." He knew all the time that the love would take care of itself.

Maybe that was why he didn't have to think about her during those three months between that September and that Christmas while Henry talked about her to him, saying every time he breathed: Hers and my lives are to exist within and upon yours; did not need to waste any time over the love after it happened, backfired on him, why he never bothered to write her any letters (except that last one) which she would want to save, why he never actually proposed to her and gave her a ring for Mrs Sutpen to show around.

Because the fate was on her too: the same old Abraham. who was so old and weak now nobody would want him in the flesh on any debt; maybe he didn't even have to wait for that Christmas to see her to know this; maybe that's what it was that came out of the three months of Henry's talking that he heard without listening to: I am not hearing about a young girl, a virgin; I am hearing about a narrow delicate fenced virgin field already furrowed and bedded so that all I shall need to do is drop the seeds in, caress it smooth again, saw her that Christmas and knew it for certain and then forgot it, went back to school and did not even remember that he had forgotten it, because he did not have time then; maybe it was just one day in that spring you told about when he stopped and said, right quiet: All right. I want to go to bed with who might be my sister.

All right and then forgot that too. Because he didn't have time. That is, he didn't have anything else but time, because he had to wait.

But not for her. That was all fixed. It was the other. Maybe he thought it would be in the mail bag each time the nigger rode over from Sutpen's Hundred, and Henry believing it was the letter from her that he was waiting for, when what he was thinking was Maybe he will write it then. He would just have to write "I am your father. Burn this" and I would do it. Or if not that, a sheet, a scrap of paper with the one word

"Charles" in his hand, and I would know what he meant and he would not even have to ask me to burn it. Or a lock of his hair or a paring from his fingernail and I would know them because I believe now that I have known what his hair and his fingernails would look like all my life, could choose that lock and that paring out of a thousand. And it did not come, and his letter went to her every two weeks and hers came back to him, and maybe he thought if one of mine to her should come back to me unopened then.

That would be a sign. And that didn't happen: and then Henry began to talk about his stopping at Sutpen's Hundred for a day or so on his way home and he said all right to it, said it will be Henry who will get the letter, the letter saying it is inconvenient for me to come at that time; so apparently he does not intend to acknowledge me as his son, but at least I shall have forced him to admit that I am. And that one did not come either and the date was set and the family at Sutpen's Hundred notified of it and that letter did not come either and he thought it will be then; I wronged him; maybe this is what he has been waiting for and maybe his heart sprang then, maybe he said Yes. Yes. I will renounce her; I will renounce love and all; that will be cheap, cheap, even though he say to me "never look upon my face again; take my love and my acknowledgement in secret, and go" I will do that; I will not even demand to know of him what it was my mother did that justified his action toward her and me.

So the day came and he and Henry rode the forty miles again, into the gates and up the drive to the house. He knew what would be there the woman whom he had seen once and seen through, the girl whom he had seen through without even having to see once, the man whom he had seen daily, watched out of his fearful intensity of need and had never penetrated—the mother who had taken Henry aside before they had been six hours in the house on that Christmas visit and informed him of the engagement almost before the fiancee had had time to associate the daughter's name with the daughter's face: so that probably before they even reached school again, and without his being aware that he had done so, Henry had already told Bon what was in his mother's mind, (who had already told Bon what was in his); so that

maybe before they even started on Bon's second visit (It would be June now and what would it be in North Mississippi? what was it you said? the magnolias in bloom and the mockingbirds, and in fifty years more, after they had gone and fought it and lost it and come back home, the Decoration Day and the veterans in the neat brushed handironed gray and the spurious bronze medals that never meant anything to begin with, and the chosen young girls in white dresses bound at the waist with crimson sashes and the band would play Dixie and all the old doddering men would yell that you would not have thought would have had wind enough to get there, walk down town to sit on the rostrum even)—it would be June now, with the magnolias and mockingbirds in the moonlight and the curtains blowing in the June air of Commencement, and the music, fiddles, and triangles, inside among the swirling and dipping hoops: and Henry would be a little tight, that should have been saying "I demand to know your intentions toward my sister" but wasn't saying it, instead maybe blushing again even in the moonlight, but standing straight and blushing because when you are proud enough to be humble you don't have to cringe (who every time he breathed over his vocal chords he was saying We belong to you; do as you will with us), saying "I used to think that I would hate the man that I would have to look at every day and whose every move and action and speech would say to me, I have seen and touched parts of your sister's body that you will never see and touch: and now I know that I shall hate him and that's why I want that man to be you," knowing that Bon would know what he meant, was trying to say, tell him, thinking, telling himself (Henry): Not just because he is older than I am and has known more than I shall ever know and has remembered more of it; but because of my own free will, and whether I knew it at the time or not does not matter, I gave my life and Judith's both to him—'

'That's still not love,' Quentin said.

'All right,' Shreve said. 'Just listen. —They rode the forty miles and into the gates and up to the house. And this time Sutpen wasn't even there.'

And Ellen didn't even know where he had gone, believing blandly and volubly that he had gone to Memphis or maybe even to Saint Louis on business, and Henry and Judith not even caring that much, and only he, Bon, to know where Sutpen had gone, saying to himself Of course; he wasn't sure; he had to go there to make sure, telling himself that loud now, loud and fast too so he would not, could not, hear the thinking, the But if he suspected, why not have told me? I would have done that, gone to him first, who have the blood after it was tainted and corrupt by whatever it was in mother; loud and fast now, telling himself That's what it is; maybe he has gone on ahead to wait for me; he left no message for me here because the others are not to suspect yet and he knows that I will know at once where he is when I find him gone, thinking of the two of them, the somber vengeful woman who was his mother and the grim rocklike man who had looked at him every day for ten days with absolutely no alteration of expression at all, facing one another in grim armistice after almost thirty years in that rich baroque drawing room in that house which he called home since apparently everybody seemed to have to have a home, the man whom he was now sure was his father not humble now either (and he, Bon, proud of that), not saying even now I was wrong but I admit that it is so Jesus, think of his heart then, during those two days, with the old gal throwing Judith at him every minute now because she had been spreading the news of the engagement confidentially through the county ever since Christmas—didn't your father say how she had even taken Judith to Memphis in the spring to buy the trousseau? and Judith neither having to accede to the throwing nor to resist it but just being, just existing and breathing like Henry did who maybe one morning during that spring waked up and lay right still in the bed and took stock, added the figures and drew the balance and told himself, All right.

I am trying to make myself into what I think he wants me to be; he can do anything he wants to with me; he has only to tell me what to do and I will do it; even though what he asked me to do looked to me like dishonor, I would still do it, only Judith, being a female and so wiser than that, would not even consider dishonor: she would just say, All right. I will do anything he might ask me to do and that is why he will never ask me to do anything that I consider dishonorable: so that

(maybe he even kissed her that time, the first time she had ever been kissed maybe and she too innocent to be coy or modest or even to know that she had been temporized with, maybe afterward just looking at him with a kind of peaceful and blank surprise at the fact that your sweetheart apparently kissed you the first time like your brother would—provided of course that your brother ever thought of, could be brought to, kissing you on the mouth)—so that when the two days were up and he was gone again and Ellen shrieking at her, "What? No engagement, no troth, no ring?" she would be too astonished even to lie about it because that would be the first time it would have occurred to her that there had been no proposal.

—Think of his heart then, while he rode to the River, and then on the steamboat itself where he walked up and down the deck, feeling through the deck the engines driving him nearer and nearer day and night to the moment which he must have realized now he had been waiting for ever since he had got big enough to comprehend. Of course every now and then he would have to say it pretty fast and loud, That's all it is. He just wants to make sure first to drown out the old But why do it this way? Why not back there? He knows that I shall never make any claim upon any part of what he now possesses, gained at the price of what sacrifice and endurance and scorn (so they told me; not he: they) only he knows; knows that so well that it would never have occurred to him just as he knows it would never occur to me that this might be his reason, who is not only generous but ruthless, who must have surrendered everything he and mother owned to her and to me as the price of repudiating her, not because the doing it this way hurt him, flouted him and kept him in suspense that much unnecessary longer, because he didn't matter; whether he was irked or even crucified didn't matter: it was the fact that he had to be kept constantly reminded that he would not have done it this way himself, yet he had stemmed from the blood after whatever it was his mother had been or done had tainted and corrupted it.

Nearer and nearer, until suspense and puzzlement and haste and all seemed blended into one sublimation of passive surrender in which he thought only All right. All right. Even this may, Even if he wants to do it

this may. I will promise never to see her again. Never to see him again. Then he reached home. And he never learned if Sutpen had been there or not. He never knew. He believed it, but he never knew—his mother the same somber unchanged fierce paranoiac whom he had left in September, from whom he could learn nothing by indirection and whom he dared not ask outright—the very fact that he saw through the skillful questions of the lawyer (as to how he had liked the school and the people of that country and how perhaps—or had he not perhaps? he had made friends up there among the country families) only that much more proof to him at that time that Sutpen had not been there, or at least the lawyer was not aware that he had, since now that he believed he had fathomed the lawyer's design in sending him to that particular school to begin with, he saw nothing in the questions to indicate that the lawyer had learned anything new since. (Or what he could have learned in that interview with the lawyer, because it would be a short one; it would be next to the shortest one ever to transpire between them, the shortest one of all next to the last one of course, the one which would occur in the next summer, when Henry would be with him.)

Because the lawyer would not dare risk asking him outright, just as he (Bon) did not dare to ask his mother outright. Because, though the lawyer believed him to be rather a fool than dull or dense, yet even he (the lawyer) never for one moment believed that even Bon was going to be the kind of a fool he was going to be. So he told the lawyer nothing and the lawyer told him nothing, and the summer passed and September came and still the lawyer (his mother too) had not once asked him if he wanted to return to the school. So that at last he had to say it himself, that he intended to return; and maybe he knew that he had lost that move since there was nothing whatever in the lawyer's face save an agent's acquiescence. So he returned to school, where Henry was waiting (oh yes; waiting) for him, who did not even say "You didn't answer my letters.

You didn't even write to Judith" who had already said What my sister and I have and are belongs to you but maybe he did write to Judith now, by the first nigger post which rode to Sutpen's Hundred, about

how it had been an uneventful summer and hence nothing to write about, with maybe Charles Bon plain and inelidable on the outside of the envelope and he thinking He will have to see that. Maybe he will send it back thinking Maybe if it comes back nothing will stop me then and so maybe at last I will know what I am going to do. But it didn't come back. And the others didn't come back. And the fall passed and Christmas came and they rode again to Sutpen's Hundred and this time Sutpen was not there again, he was in the field, he had gone to town, he was hunting—something; Sutpen not there when they rode up and Bon knew he had not expected him to be there, saying Now. Now. Now. It will come now.

It will come this time, and I am young, young, because I still don't know what I am going to do. So maybe what he was doing that twilight (because he knew that Sutpen had returned, was now in the house; it would be like a wind, something, dark and chill, breathing upon him and he stopping, grave, quiet, alert, thinking What? What is it? Then he would know; he could feel the other entering the house, and he would let his held breath go quiet and easy, a profound exhalation, his heart quiet too) in the garden while he walked with Judith and talked to her, gallant and elegant and automatic (and Judith thinking about that like she thought about that first kiss back in the summer: So that's it.

That's what love is, bludgeoned once more by disappointment but still unbowed)—maybe what he was doing there now was waiting, telling himself Maybe even yet he will send for me. At least say it to me even though he knew better: He is in the library now, he has sent the nigger for Henry, now Henry is entering the room: so that maybe he stopped and faced her, with something in his face that was smiling now, and took her by the elbows and turned her, easy and gentle, until she faced the house, and said "Go.

I wish to be alone to think about love" and she went just as she took the kiss that day, with maybe the feel of the flat of his hand light and momentary upon her behind. And he stood there facing the house until Henry came out, and they looked at one another for a while with no word said and then turned and walked together through the garden,

across the lot and into the stable, where maybe there was a nigger there and maybe they saddled the two horses themselves and waited until the house nigger came with the two repacked saddlebags. And maybe he didn't even say then, "But he sent no word to me?"

Shreve ceased. That is, for all the two of them, Shreve and Quentin, knew he had stopped, since for all the two of them knew he had never begun, since it did not matter (and possibly neither of them conscious of the distinction) which one had been doing the talking. So that now it was not two but four of them riding the two horses through the dark over the frozen December ruts of that Christmas Eve: four of them and then just two—Charles-Shreve and Quentin-Henry, the two of them both believing that Henry was thinking He (meaning his father) has destroyed us all, not for one moment thinking He (meaning Bon) must have known or at least suspected this all the time; that's why he has acted as he has, why he did not answer my letters last summer nor write to Judith, why he has never asked her to marry him; believing that that must have occurred to Henry, certainly during that moment after Henry emerged from the house and he and Bon looked at one another for a while without a word then walked down to the stable and saddled the horses, but that Henry had just taken that in stride because he did not yet believe it even though he knew that it was true, because he must have now understood with complete despair the secret of his whole attitude toward Bon from that first instinctive moment when he had seen him a year and a quarter ago; he knew, yet he did not, had to refuse to, believe.

So it was four of them who rode the two horses through that night and then across the bright frosty North Mississippi Christmas day, in something very like pariah-hood passing the plantation houses with sprigs of holly thrust beneath the knockers on the doors and mistletoe hanging from the chandeliers and bowls of eggnog and toddy on tables in the halls and the blue unwinded wood smoke standing above the plastered chimneys of the slave quarters, to the River and the steamboat.

There would be Christmas on the boat too: the same holly and mistletoe, the same eggnog and toddy; perhaps, doubtless, a Christmas supper and a ball, but not for them: the two of them in the dark and the cold standing at the guard rail above the dark water and still not talking since there was nothing to say, the two of them (the four of them) held in that probation, that suspension, by Henry who knew but still did not believe, who was going deliberately to look upon and prove to himself that which, so Shreve and Quentin believed, would be like death for him to learn.

So it was four of them still who got off the boat in New Orleans, which Henry had never seen before (whose entire cosmopolitan experience, apart from his sojourn at the school, consisted probably of one or two trips to Memphis with his father to buy livestock or slaves) and had no time to look at now—Henry who knew yet did not believe, and Bon whom Mr Compson had called a fatalist but who, according to Shreve and Quentin, did not resist Henry's dictum and design for the reason that he neither knew nor cared what Henry intended to do because he had long since realized that he did not know yet what he himself was going to do—four of them who sat in that drawing room of baroque and fusty magnificence which Shreve had invented and which was probably true enough, while the Haiti-born daughter of the French sugar planter and the woman whom Sutpen's first father-in-law had told him was a Spaniard (the slight dowdy woman with untidy gray-streaked raven hair coarse as a horse's tail, with parchment-colored skin and implacable pouched black eyes which alone showed no age because they showed no forgetting, whom Shreve and Quentin had likewise invented and which was likewise probably true enough) told them nothing because she did not need to because she had already told it, who did not say, "My son is in love with your sister?" but "So she has fallen in love with him," and then sat laughing harshly and steadily at Henry who could not have lied to her even if he would have, who did not even have to answer at all either Yes or No.

Four of them there, in that room in New Orleans in 1860, just as in a sense there were four of them here in this tomblike room in Massachusetts in 1910. And Bon may have, probably did, take Henry to

call on the octoroon mistress and the child, as Mr Compson said, though neither Shreve nor Quentin believed that the visit affected Henry as Mr Compson seemed to think. In fact, Quentin did not even tell Shreve what his father had said about the visit.

Perhaps Quentin himself had not been listening when Mr Compson related it that evening at home; perhaps at that moment on the gallery in the hot September twilight Quentin took that in stride without even hearing it just as Shreve would have, since both he and Shreve believed—and were probably right in this too—that the octoroon and the child would have been to Henry only something else about Bon to be, —not envied but aped if that had been possible, if there had been time and peace to ape it in peace not between men of the same race and nation but peace between two young embattled spirits and the incontrovertible fact which embattled them, since neither Henry and Bon, anymore than Quentin and Shreve, were the first young men to believe (or at least apparently act on the assumption) that wars were sometimes created for the sole aim of settling youth's private difficulties and discontents.

'So the old dame asked Henry that one question and then sat there laughing at him, so he knew then, they both knew then. And so now it would be short, this time with the lawyer, the shortest one of all.

Because the lawyer would have been watching him; maybe there had even been a letter during that second fall while the lawyer was waiting and still nothing seemed to be happening up there (and maybe the lawyer was the reason why Bon never answered Henry's and Judith's letters during that summer: because he never got them)—a letter, two or maybe three pages of your humble and obedient e and t and c that boiled down to eighteen words I know you are a fool, but just what kind of a fool are you going to be? and Bon was at least enough of a not-fool to do the boiling down. —Yes, watching him, not concerned yet, just considerably annoyed, giving Bon plenty of time to come to him, giving him all of a week maybe (after he—the lawyer—would have contrived to get hold of Henry and find out a good deal of what Henry was thinking without Henry ever knowing it) before he would contrive Bon

too, and maybe so good at the contriving that even Bon would not know at once what was coming.

It would be a short one. It would be no secret between them now; it would just be unsaid: the lawyer behind the desk (and maybe in the secret drawer the ledger where he had just finished adding in the last past year's interest compounded between the intrinsic and the love and pride at two hundred percent)—the lawyer fretted, annoyed, but not at all concerned since he not only knew he had the screws, but he still did not really believe that Bon was that kind of a fool, though he was about to alter his opinion somewhat about the dullness, or at least the backwardness the lawyer watching him and saying, smooth and oily, since it would be no secret now, who would know now that Bon knew all he would ever know or would need to know to make the coup: "Do you know that you are a very fortunate young man?"

With most of us, even when we are lucky enough to get our revenge, we must pay for it, sometimes in actual dollars. While you are not only in a position to get your revenge, clear your mother's name, but the balm with which you will assuage her injury will have a collateral value which can be translated into the things which a young man needs, which are his due and which, whether we like it or not, may he had only in exchange for hard dollars—" and Bon not saying What do you mean? and not moving yet; that is, the lawyer would not be aware that he was beginning to move, continuing (the lawyer) smooth and easy: "And more than this, than the revenge, as lagniappe to the revenge as it were, this nosegay of an afternoon, this scentless prairie flower which will not be missed and which might as well bloom in your lapel as in another's; this—How do you young men put it? —a nice little piece—" and then he would see Bon, maybe the eyes, maybe he would just hear the feet moving. And then, pistol (derringer, horse pistol, revolver, whatever it was) and all, he would be crouched back against the wall behind the overturned chair, snarling, "Stand back! Stop!" then screaming "Help! Help! He—!" then just screaming, because he would hear and feel his own wrenching bones before he could free his fingers of the pistol, and his neck bone too as Bon would strike him with the

palm on one cheek and then with the back of the hand on the other; maybe he could even hear Bon too saying, "Stop it. Hush.

I'm not going to hurt you" or maybe it was the lawyer in him that said the Hush which he obeyed, who got him back into the righted chair again, half lying upon the desk; the lawyer in him that warned him not to say You will pay for this but instead to half lie there, nursing his wrenched hand in his handkerchief while Bon stood looking down at him, holding the pistol by the barrel against his leg, saying, "If you feel that you require satisfaction, of course you know—" and the lawyer, sitting back now, dabbing the handkerchief at his cheek now: "I was wrong.

I misunderstood your feeling about the matter. I ask your pardon" and Bon: "Granted. As you wish. I will accept either an apology or a bullet, as you prefer" and the lawyer (there would be a faint fading red in his cheek, but that would be all: nothing in the voice or in the eyes): "I see you are going to collect full measure for my unfortunate misconception—even ridicule.

Even if I felt that right was on my side (which I do not) I would still have to decline your offer. I would not be your equal with pistols" and Bon: "Nor with knives or rapiers too?" and the lawyer, smooth and easy: "Nor knives or rapiers too." So that now the lawyer wouldn't even need to say You will pay for this because Bon would be saying that for him, who would stand there with the lax pistol, thinking But only with knives or pistols or rapiers.

So I cant beat him. I could shoot him. I would shoot him with no more compunction than I would a snake or a man who cuckolded me. But he would still beat me. Thinking Yes. He did beat me while he—he— ("Listen," Shreve said, cried. 'It would be while he would be lying in a bedroom of that private house in Corinth after Pittsburg Landing while his shoulder got well two years later and the letter from the octoroon (maybe even the one that contained the photograph of her and the child) finally overtaking him, wailing for money and telling him that the lawyer had departed for Texas or Mexico or somewhere at last and that

she (the octoroon) could not find his mother either and so without doubt the lawyer had murdered her before he stole the money, since it would be just like both of them to flee or get themselves killed without providing for her at all.)—Yes, they knew now.

And Jesus, think of him, Bon, who had wanted to know, who had had the most reason to want to know, who as far as he knew had never had any father but had been created somehow between that woman who wouldn't let him play with other children, and that lawyer who even told the woman whether or not each time she bought a piece of meat or a loaf of bread—two people neither of whom had taken pleasure or found passion in getting him or suffered pain and travail in horning him—who perhaps if one of the two had only told him the truth, none of what happened would ever have come to pass; while there was Henry who had father and security and contentment and all, yet was told the truth by both of them while he (Bon) was told by neither.

And think of Henry, who had said at first it was a lie and then when he knew it was not a lie had still said "I don't believe it," who had found even in that "I don't believe it" enough of strength to repudiate home and blood in order to champion his defiance, and in which championing he proved his contention to be the false one and was more than ever interdict against returning home; Jesus, think of the load he had to carry, born of two Methodists (or of one long invincible line of Methodists) and raised in provincial North Mississippi, faced with incest, incest of all things that might have been reserved for him, that all his heredity and training had to rebel against on principle, and in a situation where he knew that neither incest nor training was going to help him solve it. So that maybe when they left and walked the streets that night and at last Bon said, "Well? Now what?" Henry said, "Wait. Wait. Let me get used to it."

And maybe it was two days or three days, and Henry said, "You shall not. Shall not" and then it was Bon that said, "Wait. I am your older brother: do you say shall not to me?" And maybe it was a week, maybe Bon took Henry to see the octoroon and Henry looked at her and said, "Aint that enough for you?" and Bon said, "Do you want it to be

enough?" and Henry said, "Wait. Wait. I must have time to get used to it.

You will have to give me time." Jesus, think how Henry must have talked during that winter and then that spring with Lincoln elected and the Alabama convention and the South began to draw out of the Union, and then there were two presidents in the United States and the telegraph brought the news about Charleston and Lincoln called out his army and it was done, irrevocable now, and Henry and Bon already decided to go without having to consult one another, who would have gone anyway even if they had never seen one another but certainly now, because after all you don't waste a war—think how they must have talked, how Henry would say, "But must you marry her? Do you have to do it?" and Bon would say, "He should have told me.

He should have told me, myself, himself. I was fair and honorable with him. I waited. You know now why I waited. I gave him every chance to tell me himself. But he didn't do it. If he had, I would have agreed and promised never to see her or you or him again.

But he didn't tell me. I thought at first it was because he didn't know. Then I knew that he did know, and still I waited. But he didn't tell me. He just told you, sent me a message like you send a command by a nigger servant to a beggar or a tramp to clear out. Dont you see that?" and Henry would say, "But Judith. Our sister. Think of her" and Bon: "All right. Think of her.

Then what?" because they both knew what Judith would do when she found it out because they both knew that women will show pride and honor about almost anything except love, and Henry said, "Yes. I see. I understand. But you will have to give me time to get used to it. You are my older brother; you can do that little for me." Think of the two of them: Bon who didn't know what he was going to do and had to say, pretend, he did; and Henry who knew what he was going to do and had to say he didn't.

Then it was Christmas again, then 1861, and they hadn't heard from Judith because Judith didn't know for sure where they were because Henry wouldn't let Bon write to her yet; then they heard about the company, the University Grays, organizing up at Oxford and maybe they had been waiting for that. So they took the steamboat North again, and more gaiety and excitement on the boat now than Christmas even, like it always is when a war starts, before the scene gets cluttered up with bad food and wounded soldiers and widows and orphans, and them taking no part in it now either but standing at the rail again above the churning water, and maybe it would be two or three days, then Henry said suddenly, cried suddenly: "But kings have done it! Even dukes! There was that Lorraine duke named John something that married his sister.

The Pope excommunicated him but it didn't hurt! It didn't hurt! They were still husband and wife. They were still alive. They still loved!" then again, loud, fast: "But you will have to wait! You will have to give me time! Maybe the war will settle it and we wont need to!" And maybe this was one place where your old man was right: and they rode into Oxford without touching Sutpen's Hundred and signed the company roster and then hid somewhere to wait, and Henry let Bon write Judith one letter; they would send it by hand, by a nigger that would steal into the quarters by night and give it to Judith's maid, and Judith sent the picture in the metal case and they rode on ahead to wait until the company got through making flags and riding about the state telling girls farewell and started for the front.

'Jesus, think of them. Because Bon would know what Henry was doing, just as he had always known what Henry was thinking since that first day when they had looked at one another. Maybe he would know all the better what Henry was doing because he did not know what he himself was going to do, that he would not know until all of a sudden some day it would burst clear and he would know then that he had known all the time what it would be, so he didn't have to bother about himself and so all he had to do was just to watch Henry trying to reconcile what he (Henry) knew he was going to do with all the voices

of his heredity and training which said No. No. You cannot, You must not. You shall not.

Maybe they would even be under fire now, with the shells rushing and rumbling past overhead and bursting and them lying there waiting to charge and Henry would cry again, "But that Lorraine duke did it!

There must have been lots in the world who have done it that people don't know about, that maybe they suffered for it and died for it and are in hell now for it. But they did it and it don't matter now; even the ones we do know about are just names now and it don't matter now" and Bon watching him and listening to him and thinking It's because I don't know myself what I am going to do and so he is aware that I am undecided without knowing that he is aware. Perhaps if I told him now that I am going to do it, he would know his own mind and tell me, You shall not.

And maybe your old man was right that time and they did think maybe the war would settle it and they would not have to themselves, or at least maybe Henry hoped it would because maybe your old man was right here too and Bon didn't care that since both of the two people Who could have given him a father had declined to do it, nothing mattered to him now, revenge or love or all, since he knew now that revenge could not compensate him nor love assuage. Maybe it wasn't even Henry who wouldn't let him write to Judith but Bon himself who did not write her because he didn't care about anything, not even that he didn't know yet what he was going to do.

Then it was the next year and Bon was an officer now and they were moving toward Shilo without knowing that either, talking again as they moved along in column, the officer dropping back alongside the file in which the private marched and Henry crying again, holding his desperate and urgent voice down to undertone: "Dont you know yet what you are going to do?" while Bon would look at him for a moment with that expression which could have been smiling: "Suppose I told you I did not intend to go back to her?" and Henry would walk there beside him, with his pack and his eight feet of musket, and he would

begin to pant, panting and panting while Bon watched him: "I am out in front of you a lot now; going into battle, charging, I will be out in front of you—" and Henry panting, "Stop! Stop!" and Bon watching him with that faint thin expression about the mouth and eyes: "—and who would ever know? You would not even have to know for certain yourself, because who could say but what a Yankee ball might have struck me at the exact second you pulled your trigger, or even before—" and Henry panting and looking, glaring at the sky, with his teeth showing and the sweat on his face and the knuckles of the hand on his musket butt white, saying, panting, "Stop! Stop! Stop! Stop!" Then it was Shilo, the second day and the lost battle and the brigade falling back from Pittsburgh Landing And listen,' Shreve cried; 'wait, now; wait!' (glaring at Quentin, panting himself, as if he had had to supply his shade not only with a cue but with breath to obey it in): 'Because your old man was wrong here, too! He said it was Bon who was wounded, but it wasn't.

Because who told him? Who told Sutpen, or your grandfather either, which of them it was who was hit? Sutpen didn't know because he wasn't there, and your grandfather wasn't there either because that was where he was hit too, where he lost his arm. So who told them? Not Henry, because his father never saw Henry but that one time and maybe they never had time to talk about wounds and besides to talk about wounds in the Confederate army in 1865 would be like coal miners talking about soot; and not Bon, because Sutpen never saw him at all because he was dead—it was not Bon, it was Henry; Bon that found Henry at last and stooped to pick him up and Henry fought back, struggled, saying, "Let be! Let me die! I wont have to know it then" and Bon said, "So you do want me to go back to her" and Henry lay there struggling and panting, with the sweat on his face and his teeth bloody inside his chewed lip, and Bon said, "Say you do want me to go back to her. Maybe then I wont do it. Say it" and Henry lay there struggling, with the fresh red staining through his shirt and his teeth showing and the sweat on his face until Bon held his arms and lifted him onto his back—'

First, two of them, then four; now two again. The room was indeed tomblike: a quality stale and static and moribund beyond any mere vivid and living cold. Yet they remained in it, though not thirty feet away was bed and warmth.

Quentin had not even put on his overcoat, which lay on the floor where it had fallen from the arm of the chair where Shreve had put it down. They did not retreat from the cold.

They both bore it as though in deliberate flagellant exaltation of physical misery transmogrified into the spirits' travail of the two young men during that time fifty years ago, or forty-eight rather, then forty-seven and then forty-six, since it was '64 and then '65 and the starved and ragged remnant of an army having retreated across Alabama and Georgia and into Carolina, swept onward not by a victorious army behind it but rather by a mounting tide of the names of lost battles from either side Chickamauga and Franklin, Vicksburg and Corinth and Atlanta—battles lost not alone because of superior numbers and failing ammunition and stores, but because of generals who should not have been generals, who were generals not through training in contemporary methods or aptitude for learning them, but by the divine right to say "Go there" conferred upon them by an absolute caste system; or because the generals of it never lived long enough to learn how to fight massed cautious accretionary battles, since they were already as obsolete as Richard or Roland or du Guesclin, who wore plumes and cloaks lined with scarlet at twenty-eight and thirty and thirty-two and captured warships with cavalry charges but not grain nor meat nor bullets, who would whip three separate armies in as many days and then tear down their own fences to cook meat robbed from their own smokehouses, who on one night and with a handful of men would gallantly set fire to and destroy a million dollar garrison of enemy supplies and on the next night be discovered by a neighbor in bed with his wife and be shot to death—two, four, now two again, according to Quentin and Shreve, the two the four the two still talking—the one who did not yet know what he was going to do, the other who knew what he would have to do yet could not reconcile himself—Henry citing himself authority for incest, talking about his Duke

John of Lorraine as if he hoped possibly to evoke that condemned and excommunicated shade to tell him in person that it was all right, as people both before and since have tried to evoke God or devil to justify them in what their glands insisted upon—the two the four the two facing one another in the tomblike room: Shreve, the Canadian, the child of blizzards and of cold in a bathrobe with an overcoat above it, the collar turned up about his ears; Quentin, the Southerner, the morose and delicate offspring of rain and steamy heat in the thin suitable clothing which he had brought from Mississippi, his overcoat (as thin and vain for what it was as the suit) lying on the floor where he had not even bothered to raise it: (—the winter of '64 now, the army retreated across Alabama, into Georgia; now Carolina was just at their backs and Bon, the officer, thinking 'We will either be caught and annihilated or Old Joe will extricate us and we will make contact with Lee in front of Richmond and then we will at least have the privilege of surrender': and then one day all of a sudden he thought of it, remembered, how that Jefferson regiment of which his father was now colonel was in Longstreet's corps, and maybe from that moment the whole purpose of the retreat seemed to him to be that of bringing him within reach of his father, to give his father one more chance.

So that it must have seemed to him now that he knew at last why he had not been able to decide what he wanted to do. Maybe he thought for just a second, ' My God, I am still young; even after these four years I am still young' but just for a second, because maybe in the same breath he said, 'All right. Then I am young. But I still believe, even though what I believe probably is that war, suffering, these four years of keeping his men alive and able in order to swap them blood and flesh for the largest amount of ground at its bargain price, will have changed him (which I know that it does not do) to where he will say to me not: Forgive me: but: You are my oldest son.

Protect your sister; never see either of us again!' Then it was '65 and what was left of the army of the West with nothing remaining now but the ability to walk backward slow and stubborn and to endure musketry and shelling; maybe they didn't even miss the shoes and overcoats and food any more now and that was why he could write about the

captured stove polish like he did in the letter to Judith when he finally knew what he was going to do at last and told Henry and Henry said 'Thank God. Thank God,' not for the incest of course but because at last they were going to do something, at last he could be something even though that something was the irrevocable repudiation of the old heredity and training and the acceptance of eternal damnation. Maybe he could even quit talking about his Lorraine duke then, because he could say now, 'It isn't yours nor his nor the Pope's hell that we are all going to: it's my mother's and her mother's and father's and their mother's and father's hell, and it isn't you who are going there, but we, the three—no: four of us.

And so at least we will all be together where we belong, since even if only he went there we would still have to be there too since the three of us are just illusions that he begot, and your illusions are a part of you like your bones and flesh and memory And we will all be together in torment and so we will not need to remember love and fornication, and maybe in torment you cannot even remember why you are there. And if we cannot remember all this, it cant be much torment." Then they were in Carolina, that January and February of '65 and what was left of them had been walking backward for almost a year now and the distance between them and Richmond was less far than the distance they had come; the distance between them and the end a good deal less far.

But to Bon it was not the space between them and defeat but the space between him and the other regiment, between him and the hour, the moment: He will not even have to ask me; I will just touch flesh with him and I will say it myself: You will not need to worry; she shall never see me again." Then March in Carolina and still the walking backward slow and stubborn and listening to the Northward now because there was nothing to hear from any other direction because in all the other directions it was finished now, and all they expected to hear from the North was defeat. Then one day (he was an officer; he would have known, heard, that Lee had detached some troops and sent them down to reinforce them; perhaps he even knew the names and numbers of the regiments before they arrived) he saw Sutpen. Maybe that first

time Sutpen actually did not see him, maybe that first time he could tell himself, 'That was why; he didn't see me,' so that he had to put himself in Sutpen's way, make his chance and situation.

Then for the second time he looked at the expressionless and rocklike face, at the pale boring eyes in which there was no flicker, nothing, the face in which he saw his own features, in which he saw recognition, and that was all. That was all, there was nothing further now; perhaps he just breathed once quietly, with on his own face that expression which might at a glance have been called smiling while he thought, 'I could force him. I could go to him and force him,' knowing that he would not because it was all finished now, that was all of it now and at last. And maybe it was that same night or maybe a night a week later while they were stopped (because even Sherman would have to stop sometimes at night) with the fires burning for warmth at least because at least warmth is cheap and doesn't remain consumed, that Bon said, 'Henry' and said, 'It wont be much longer now and then there wont be anything left: we wont even have anything to do left, not even the privilege of walking backward slowly for a reason, for the sake of honor and what's left of pride.

Not God; evidently we have done without Him for four years, only He just didn't think to notify us; and not only not shoes and clothing but not even any need for them, and not only no land nor any way to make food, but no need for the food since we have learned to live without that too; and so if you don't have God and you don't need food and clothes and shelter, there isn't anything for honor and pride to climb on and hold to and flourish. And if you haven't got honor and pride, then nothing matters.

Only there is something in you that doesn't care about honor and pride yet that lives, that even walks backward for a whole year just to live; that probably even when this is over and there is not even defeat left, will still decline to sit still in the sun and die, but will be out in the woods, moving and seeking where just will and endurance could not move it, grubbing for roots and such—the old mindless sentient undreaming meat that doesn't even know any difference between

despair and victory, Henry." And then Henry would begin to say 'Thank God. Thank God' panting and saying 'Thank God,' saying, 'Dont try to explain it. Just do it' and Bon: 'You authorize me? As her brother you give me permission?' and Henry: 'Brother? Brother?'

You are the oldest: why do you ask me?" and Bon: 'No. He has never acknowledged me. He just warned me. You are the brother and the son. Do I have your permission, Henry?' and Henry: 'Write. Write. Write.'" So Bon wrote the letter, after the four years, and Henry read it and sent it off.

But they didn't quit then and follow the letter. They still walked backward, slow and stubborn, listening toward the North for the end of it because it takes an awful lot of character to quit anything when you are losing, and they had been walking backward slow for a year now So all they had left was not the will but just the ability, the grooved habit to endure. Then one night they had stopped again since Sherman had stopped again, and an orderly came along the bivouac line and found Henry at last and said, ' Sutpen, the colonel wants you in his tent.")

'And so you and the old dame, the Aunt Rosa, went out there that night and the old nigger Clytie tried to stop you, stop her; she held your arm and said, "Dont let her go up there, young marster" but you couldn't stop her either because she was strong with forty-five years of hate like forty-five years of raw meat and all Clytie had was just forty-five or fifty years of despair and waiting; and you, you didn't even want to be there at all to begin with. And you couldn't stop her either and then you saw that Clytie's trouble wasn't anger nor even distrust; it was terror, fear.

And she didn't tell you in so many words because she was still keeping that secret for the sake of the man who had been her father too as well as for the sake of the family which no longer existed, whose heretofore inviolate and rotten mausoleum she still guarded—didn't tell you in so many words anymore than she told you in so many words how she had been in the room that day when they brought Bon's body in and Judith took from his pocket the metal case she had given him with her picture

in it; she didn't tell you, it just came out of the terror and the fear after she turned you loose and caught the Aunt Rosa's arm and the Aunt Rosa turned and struck her hand away and went on to the stairs and Clytie ran at her again and this time the Aunt Rosa stopped and turned on the second step and knocked Clytie down with her fist like a man would and turned and went on up the stairs: and Clytie lay there on the floor, more than eighty years old and not much more than five feet tall and looking like a little bundle of clean rags so that you went and took her arm and helped her up and her arm felt like a stick, as light and dry and brittle as a stick: and she looked at you and you saw it was not rage but terror, and not nigger terror because it was not about herself but was about whatever it was that was upstairs, that she had kept hidden up there for almost four years; and she didn't tell you in the actual words because even in the terror she kept the secret; nevertheless she told you, or at least all of a sudden you knew—'

Shreve ceased again. It was just as well, since he had no listener. Perhaps he was aware of it.

Then suddenly he had no talker either, though possibly he was not aware of this. Because now neither of them were there. They were both in Carolina and the time was forty-six years ago, and it was not even four now but compounded still further, since now both of them were Henry Sutpen and both of them were Bon, compounded each of both yet either neither, smelling the very smoke which had blown and faded away forty-six years ago from the bivouac fires burning in a pine grove, the gaunt and ragged men sitting or lying about them, talking not about the war yet all curiously enough (or perhaps not curiously at all) facing the South where further on in the darkness the pickets stood—the pickets who, watching to the South, could see the flicker and gleam of the Federal bivouac fires myriad and faint and encircling half the horizon and counting ten fires for each Confederate one, and between whom and which (Rebel picket and Yankee fire) the Yankee outposts watched the darkness also, the two picket lines so close that each could hear the challenge of the other's officers passing from post to post and dying away: and when gone, the voice, invisible cautious, not loud yet carrying:

—Hey, Reb.

—Yah.

—where you fellers going?

—Richmond.

—So are we. why not wait for us?

—We air.

The men about the fires would not hear this exchange, though they would presently hear the orderly plainly enough as he passes from fire to fire, asking for Sutpen and being directed on and so reaches the fire at last, the smoldering log, with his monotonous speech: 'Sutpen?

I'm looking for Sutpen' until Henry sits up and says, 'Here.'" He is gaunt and ragged and unshaven; because of the last four years and because he had not quite got his height when the four years began, he is not as tall by two inches as he gave promise of being, and not as heavy by thirty pounds as he probably will be a few years after he has outlived the four years, if he do outlive them.

—Here, he says—What is it?

—The colonel wants you.

The orderly does not return with him. Instead, he walks alone through the darkness along a rutted road, a road rutted and cut and churned where the guns have passed over it that afternoon, and reaches the tent at last, one of the few tents, the canvas wall gleaming faintly from a candle within, the silhouette of a sentry before it, who challenges him.

—Sutpen, Henry says—The colonel sent for me.

The sentry gestures him into the tent. He stoops through the entrance, the canvas falls behind him as someone, the only occupant of the tent, rises from a camp chair behind the table on which the candle sits, his shadow swooping high and huge up the canvas wall. He (Henry) comes to salute facing a graff sleeve with colonel's braid on it, one beard cheek, a jutting nose, a shaggy droop of iron-riddle hair—a face which Henry does not recognize, not because he has not seen it in four years and does not expect to see it here and now, but rather because he is not looking at it. He just salutes the braided cuff and stands so until the other says, —Henry.

Even now Henry does not start. He just stands so, the two of them stand so, looking at one another. It is the older man who moves first, though they meet in the center of the tent, where they embrace and kiss before Henry is aware that he has moved, was going to move, moved by what of close blood which in the reflex instant abrogates and reconciles even though it does not yet (perhaps never will) forgive, who stands now while his father holds his face between both hands, looking at it.

—Henry, Sutpen says—My son.

Then they sit, one on either side of the table, in the chairs reserved for officers, the table (an open map lies on it) and the candle between them.

—You were hit at Shilo, Colonel Willow tells me, Sutpen says.

—Yes, sir, Henry says.

He is about to say Charles carried me back but he does not, because already he knows what is coming. He does not even think Surely Judith didn't write him about that letter or It was Clytie who sent him word somehow that Charles has written her. He thinks neither of these. To him it is logical and natural that their father should know of his and Bon's decision: that rapport of blood which should bring Bon to decide

to write, himself to agree to it and their father to know of it at the same identical instant, after a period of four years, out of all time. Now it does come, almost exactly as he had known that it will: —I have seen Charles Bon, Henry.

Henry says nothing. It is coming now. He says nothing, he merely stares at his father—the two of them in leaf-faded graff, a single candle, a crude tent walling them away from a darkness where alert pickets face one another and where weary men sleep without shelter, waiting for dawn and the firing, the weary backward walking to commence again: yet in a second tent candle gray and all are gone and it is the hollydecked Christmas library at Sutpen's Hundred four years ago and the table not a camp table suitable for the spreading of maps but the heavy carved rosewood one at home with the group photograph of his mother and sister and himself sitting upon it, his father behind the table and behind his father the window above the garden where Judith and Bon strolled in that slow rhythm where the heart matches the footsteps and the eyes need only look at one another.

—You are going to let him marry Judith, Henry.

Still Henry does not answer. It has all been said before, and now he has had four years of bitter struggle following which, whether it be victory or defeat which he has gained, at least he has gained it and has peace now, even if the peace be mostly despair.

—He cannot marry her, Henry.

Now Henry speaks.

—You said that before. I told you then. And now, and now it wont be much longer now and then we wont have anything left: honor nor pride not God since God quit us four years ago only He never thought it necessary to tell us; no shoes nor clothes and no need for them; not only no land to make food out of but no need for the food and when you don't have God and honor and pride, nothing matters except that there is the old mindless meat that don't even care if it was defeat or

victory, that wont even die, that will be out in the woods and fields, grubbing up mots and weeds. —Yes. I have decided, Brother or not, I have decided. I will. I will.

—He must not marry her, Henry.

—Yes. I said Yes at first, but I was not decided then. I didn't let him.

But now I have had four years to decide in. I will. I am going to.

—He must not marry her, Henry. His mother's father told me that her mother had been a Spanish woman. I believed him; it was not until after he was born that I found out that his mother was part Negro.

Nor did Henry ever say that he did not remember leaving the tent.

He remembers all of it. He remembers stooping through the entrance again and passing the sentry again; he remembers walking back down the cut and rutted road, stumbling in the dark among the ruts on either side of which the fires have now died to embers, so that he can barely distinguish the men sleeping on the earth about them. It must be better than eleven oclock, he thinks. And another eight miles tomorrow. If it were only not for those damned guns. Why doesn't Old Joe give the guns to Sherman. Then we could make twenty miles a day.

We could join Lee then. At least Lee stops and fights some of the time. He remembers it. He remembers how he did not return to his fire but stopped presently in a lonely place and leaned against a pine, leaning quietly and easily, with his head back so he could look up at the shabby shaggy branches like something in wrought iron spreading motionless against the chill vivid stars of early spring, thinking I hope he remembers to thank Colonel Willow for letting us use his tent, thinking not what he would do but what he would have to do.

Because he knew what he would do; it now depended on what Bon would do, would force him to do, since he knew that he would do it. So

I must go to him, he thought, thinking, Now it is better than two o'clock and it will be dawn soon.

Then it was dawn, or almost, and it was cold: a chill which struck through the worn patched thin clothing, through the something of weariness and undernourishment; the passive ability, not the volitional will, to endure; there was light somewhere, enough of it for him to distinguish Bon's sleeping face from among the others where he lay wrapped in his blankets, beneath his spread cloak; enough light for him to wake Bon by and for Bon to distinguish his face (or perhaps something communicated by Henry's hand) because Bon does not speak, demand to know who it is: he merely rises and puts the cloak about his shoulders and approaches the smoldering fire and is kicking it into a blaze when Henry speaks: —Wait.

Bon pauses and looks at Henry; now he can see Henry's face. He says, —You will be cold. You are cold now. You haven't been asleep, have you? Here.

He swings the cloak from his shoulders and holds it out.

—No, Henry says.

—Yes. Take it. I'll get my blanket.

Bon puts the cloak about Henry and goes and takes up his tumbled blanket and swings it about his shoulders, and they move aside and sit on a log. Now it is dawn. The east is gray; it will be primrose soon and then red with firing and once more the weary backward marching will begin, retreating from annihilation, falling back upon defeat, though not quite yet. There will be a little time yet for them to sit side by side upon the log in the making light of dawn, the one in the cloak, the other in the blanket; their voices are not much louder than the silent dawn itself: —So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear.

Henry doesn't answer.

—And he sent me no word? He did not ask you to send me to him?

No word to me, no word at all? That was all he had to do, now, today; four years ago or at any time during the four years. That was all. He would not have needed to ask it, require it, of me. I would have offered it. I would have said, I will never see her again before he could have asked it of me. He did not have to do this, Henry. He didn't need to tell you I am a nigger to stop me. He could have stopped me without that, Henry.

—No! Henry cries. —No! No! I will—I'll He springs up; his face is working; Bon can see his teeth within the soft beard which covers his sunken cheeks, and the whites of Henry's eyes as though the eyeballs struggled in their sockets as the panting breath struggled in his lungs—the panting which ceased, the breath held, the eyes too looking down at him where he sat on the log, the voice now not much louder than an expelled breath: —You said, could have stopped you.

What do you mean by that?

Now it is Bon who does not answer, who sits on the log looking at the face stooped above him.

Henry says, still in that voice no louder than breathing: —But now? You mean you—Yes. What else can I do now? I gave him the choice. I have been giving him the choice for four years.

Think of her. Not of me: of her.

—I have. For four years. Of you and her. Now I am thinking of myself.

—No, Henry says. —No. No.

—I cannot?

—You shall not.

—Who will stop me, Henry?

—No, Henry says. —No. No. No.

Now it is Bon who watches Henry; he can see the whites of Henry's eyes again as he sits looking at Henry with that expression which might be called smiling. His hand vanishes beneath the blanket and reappears, holding his pistol by the barrel, the butt extended toward Henry.

—Then do it now, he says.

Henry looks at the pistol; now he is not only panting, he is trembling; when he speaks now his voice is not even the exhalation, it is the suffused and suffocating inbreath itself:

—You are my brother.

—No I'm not. I'm the nigger that's going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry.

Suddenly Henry grasps the pistol, jerks it free of Bon's hand stands so, the pistol in his hand, panting and panting; again Bon can see the whites of his inrolled eyes while he sits on the log and watches Henry with that faint expression about the eyes and mouth which might be smiling.

—Do it now, Henry, he says.

Henry whirls; in the same motion he hurls the pistol from him and stoops again, gripping Bon by both shoulders, panting.

—You shall not! he says. —You shall not! Do you hear me?

Bon does not move beneath the gripping hands; he sits motionless, with his faint fixed grimace; his voice is gentler than that first breath in

which the pine branches begin to move a little: —You will have to stop me, Henry. 'And he never slipped away,' Shreve said. 'He could have, but he never even tried. Jesus, maybe he even went to Henry and said, "I'm going, Henry" and maybe they left together and rode side by side dodging Yankee patrols all the way back to Mississippi and right up to that gate; side by side and it only then that one of them ever rode ahead or dropped behind and that only then Henry spurred ahead and turned his horse to face Bon and took out the pistol; and Judith and Clytie heard the shot, and maybe Wash Jones was hanging around somewhere in the back yard and so he was there to help Clytie and Judith carry him into the house and lay him on the bed, and Wash went to town to tell the Aunt Rosa and the Aunt Rosa comes boiling out that afternoon and finds Judith standing without a tear before the closed door, holding the metal case she had given him with her picture in it but that didn't have her picture in it now but that of the octoroon and the kid.

And your old man wouldn't know about that too: why the black son of a bitch should have taken her picture out and put the octoroon's picture in, so he invented a reason for it. But I know. And you know too. Don't you? Don't you, huh?" He glared at Quentin, leaning forward over the table now, looking huge and shapeless as a bear in his swaddling of garments. 'Dont you know? It was because he said to himself, "If Henry don't mean what he said, it will be all right; I can take it out and destroy it. But if he does mean what he said, it will be the only way I will have to say to her, I was no good; do not grieve for me." Aint that right?

Aint it? By God, aint it?"

'Yes,' Quentin said.

'Come on,' Shreve said. 'Let's get out of this refrigerator and go to bed.'

At first, in bed in the dark, it seemed colder than ever, as if there had been some puny quality of faint heat in the single light bulb before Shreve turned it off and that now the iron and impregnable dark had become one with the iron and icelike bedclothing lying upon the flesh slacked and thin-clad for sleeping. Then the darkness seemed to breathe, to flow back; the window which Shreve had opened became visible against the faintly unearthly glow of the outer snow as, forced by the weight of the darkness, the blood surged and ran warmer, warmer. 'University of Mississippi,' Shreve's voice said in the darkness to Quentin's right. 'Bayard attenuated forty miles (it was forty miles, wasn't it?); out of the wilderness proud honor semesterial regurgitant.'

'Yes,' Quentin said. 'They were in the tenth graduating class since it was founded.'

'I didn't know there were ten in Mississippi that went to school at one time,' Shreve said.

Quentin didn't answer. He lay watching the rectangle of window, feeling the warming blood driving through his veins, his arms and legs. And now, although he was warm and though while he had sat in the cold room he merely shook faintly and steadily, now he began to jerk all over, violently and uncontrollably until he could even hear the bed, until even Shreve felt it and turned, raising himself (by the sound) onto his elbow to look at Quentin, though Quentin himself felt perfectly all right. He felt fine even, lying there and waiting in peaceful curiosity for the next violent unharbingered jerk to come.

'Jesus, are you that cold?' Shreve said. 'Do you want me to spread the overcoats on you?'

'No,' Quentin said. 'I'm not cold. I'm all right. I feel fine.'

'Then what are you doing that for?'

'I don't know. I cant help it. I feel fine.'

'All right. But let me know if you want the coats. Jesus, if I was going to have to spend nine months in this climate, I would sure hate to have come from the South. Maybe I wouldn't come from the South anyway, even if I could stay there.

Wait. Listen. I'm not trying to be funny, smart. I just want to understand it if I can and I don't know how to say it better. Because it's something my people haven't got. Or if we have got it, it all happened long ago across the water and so now here aint anything to look at every day to remind us of it. We don't live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves (or have I got it backward and was it your folks that are free and the niggers that lost?) and bullets in the dining-room table and such, to be always reminding us to never forget. What is it? something you live and breathe in like air? a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago? a kind of entailed birthright father and son and father and son of never forgiving General Sherman, so that forevermore as long as your childrens' children produce children you wont be anything but a descendant of a long line of colonels killed in Pickett's charge at Manassas?"

'Gettysburg,' Quentin said. 'You cant understand it. You would have to be born there.'

'Would I then?' Quentin did not answer.

'Do you understand it?'

'I don't know,' Quentin said. 'Yes, of course I understand it.' They breathed in the darkness.

After a moment Quentin said: 'I don't know.'

'Yes. You don't know. You don't even know about the old dame, the Aunt Rosa.'

'Miss Rosa,' Quentin said.

'All right. You don't even know about her. Except that she refused at the last to be a ghost.

That after almost fifty years she couldn't reconcile herself to letting him lie dead in peace. That even after fifty years she not only could get up and go out there to finish up what she found she hadn't quite completed, but she could find someone to go with her and bust into that locked house because instinct or something told her it was not finished yet. Do you?"

'No,' Quentin said peacefully. He could taste the dust. Even now, with the chill pure weight of the snow-breathed New England air on his face, he could taste and feel the dust of that breathless (rather, furnace-breathed) Mississippi September night. He could even smell the old woman in the buggy beside him, smell the fusty camphor-reeking shawl and even the airless black cotton umbrella in which (he would not discover until they had reached the house) she had concealed a hatchet and a flashlight.

He could smell the horse; he could hear the dry plaint of the light wheels in the weightless permeant dust and he seemed to feel the dust itself move sluggish and dry across his sweating flesh just as he seemed to hear the single profound suspiration of the parched earth's agony rising toward the imponderable and aloof stars.

Now she spoke, for the first time since they had left Jefferson, since she had climbed into the buggy with a kind of clumsy and fumbling and trembling eagerness (which he thought derived from terror, alarm, until he found that he was quite wrong) before he could help her, to sit on the extreme edge of the seat, small, in the fusty shawl and clutching the umbrella, leaning forward as if by leaning forward she would arrive the sooner, arrive immediately after the horse and before he, Quentin, would, before the prescience of her desire and need could warn its consummation. 'Now,' she said. 'We are on the Domain.

On his land, his and Ellen's and Ellen's descendants. They have taken it away from them since, I understand. But it still belongs to him, to Ellen and her descendants." But Quentin was already aware of that. Before she spoke he had said to himself, "Now. Now" and (as during the long hot afternoon in the dim hot little house) it seemed to him that if he stopped the buggy and listened, he might even hear the galloping hoofs; might even see at any moment now the black stallion and the rider rush across the road before them and gallop on—the rider who at one time owned, lock stock and barrel, everything he could see from a given point, with every stick and blade and hoof and heel on it to remind him (if he ever forgot it) that he was the biggest thing in their sight and in his own too; who went to war to protect it and lost the war and returned home to find that he had lost more than the war even, though not absolutely all; who said At least I have life left but did not have life but only old age and breathing and horror and scorn and fear and indignation: and all remaining to look at him with unchanged regard was the girl who had been a child when he saw her last, who doubtless used to watch him from window or door as he passed unaware of her as she would have looked at God probably, since everything else within her view belonged to him too.

Maybe he would even stop at the cabin and ask for water and she would take the bucket and walk the mile and back to the spring to fetch it fresh and cool for him, no more thinking of saying 'The bucket is empty' to him than she would have said it to God—this the not-all, since at least there was breathing left.

Now Quentin began to breathe hard again, who had been peaceful for a time in the warm bed, breathing hard the heavy pure snowborn darkness.

She (Miss Coldfield) did not let him enter the gate. She said 'Stop' suddenly; he felt her hand flutter on his arm and he thought, "Why, she is afraid." He could hear her panting now, her voice almost a wall of diffident yet iron determination: 'I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do.' ("I do," he thought. "Go back to town and go to bed.") But he did not say it.

He looked at the two huge rotting gate posts in the starlight, between which no gates swung now, wondering from what direction Bon and Henry had ridden up that day, wondering what had cast the shadow which Bon was not to pass alive; if some living tree which still lived and bore leaves and shed or if some tree gone, vanished, burned for warmth and food years ago now or perhaps just gone; or if it had been one of the two posts themselves, thinking, wishing that Henry were there now to stop Miss Coldfield and turn them back, telling himself that if Henry were there now, there would be no shot to be heard by anyone. 'She's going to try to stop me,' Miss Coldfield whimpered. 'I know she is. Maybe this far from town, out here alone at midnight, she will even let that Negro man—And you didn't even bring a pistol. Did you?' 'Nome,' Quentin said.

'What is it she's got hidden there? What could it be? And what difference does it make? Let's go back to town, Miss Rosa.'

She didn't answer this at all. She just said, 'That's what I have got to find out,' sitting forward on the seat, trembling now and peering up the tree-arched drive toward where the rotting shell of the house would be.

'And now I will have to find it out,' she whimpered, in a kind of amazed self-pity. She moved suddenly. 'Come,' she whispered, beginning to get out of the buggy. 'Wait,' Quentin said. 'Let's drive up to the house. It's a half a mile.'

'No, no,' she whispered, a tense fierce hissing of words filled with that same curious terrified yet implacable determination, as though it were not she who had to go and find out but she only the helpless agent of someone or something else who must know. 'Hitch the horse here. Hurry.'

She got out, scrambled awkwardly down, before he could help her, clutching the umbrella. It seemed to him that he could still hear her whimpering panting where she waited close beside one of the posts

while he led the mare from the road and tied one rein about a sapling in the weed-choked ditch. He could not see her at all, so close she stood against the post: she just stepped out and fell in beside him when he passed and turned into the gate, still breathing in those whimpering pants as they walked on up the rutted tree-arched drive. The darkness was intense; she stumbled; he caught her. She took his arm, clutching it in a dead rigid hard grip as if her fingers, her hand, were a small mass of wire. 'I will have to take your arm,' she whispered, whimpered. 'And you haven't even got a pistol—Wait,' she said. She stopped. He turned; he could not see her but he could hear her hurried breathing and then a rustling of cloth. Then she was prodding something at him.

Here,' she whispered. 'Take it.'" It was a hatchet; not sight but touch told him—a hatchet with a heavy worn handle and a heavy gapped rust-dulled blade.

'What?" he said.

'Take it!" she whispered, hissed. 'You didn't bring a pistol.

It's something."

'Here,' he said; 'wait."

'Come,' she whispered. 'You will have to let me take your arm, I am trembling so bad.'" They went on again, she clinging to one of his arms, the hatchet in his other hand.

'We will probably need it to get into the house, anyway,' she said, stumbling along beside him, almost dragging him. 'I just know she is somewhere watching us,' she whimpered. 'I can feel her.

But if we can just get to the house, get into the house—' The drive seemed interminable.

He knew the place. He had walked from the gate to the house as a child, a boy, when distances seem really long (so that to the man grown

the long crowded mile of his boyhood becomes less than the throw of a stone) yet now it seemed to him that the house would never come in sight: so that presently he found himself repeating her words: "If we can just get to the house, get inside the house," telling himself, recovering himself in that same breath: "I am not afraid. I just don't want to be here. I just don't want to know about whatever it is she keeps hidden in it." But they reached it at last.

It loomed, bulked, square and enormous, with jagged half-toppled chimneys, its roofline sagging a little; for an instant as they moved, hurried, toward it Quentin saw completely through it a ragged segment of sky with three hot stars in it as if the house were of one dimension, painted on a canvas curtain in which there was a tear; now, almost beneath it, the dead furnace-breath of air in which they moved seemed to reek in slow and protracted violence with a smell of desolation and decay as if the wood of which it was built were flesh. She was trotting beside him now, her hand trembling on his arm yet gripping it still with that lifeless and rigid strength; not talking, not saying words, yet producing a steady whimpering, almost a moaning, sound.

Apparently she could not see at all now, so that he had to guide her toward where he knew the steps would be and then restrain her, whispering, hissing, aping without knowing it her own tense fainting haste: ' Wait. This way. Be careful, now. They're rotten." He almost lifted, carried, her up the steps, supporting her from behind by both elbows as you lift a child; he could feel something fierce and implacable and dynamic driving down the thin rigid arms and into his palms and up his own arms; lying in the Massachusetts bed he remembered how he thought, knew, said suddenly to himself, "Why, she's not afraid at all. It's something. But she's not afraid," feeling her flee out of his hands, hearing her feet cross the gallery, overtaking her where she now stood beside the invisible front door, panting.

'Now what?" he whispered.

'Break it,' she whispered. 'It will be locked, nailed. You have the hatchet. Break it.'

'But—' he began.

'Break it!' she hissed, 'It belonged to Ellen. I am her sister, her only living heir. Break it.'

Hurry." He pushed against the door.

It did not move.

She panted beside him. 'Hurry,' she said. ' Break it.'

'Listen, Miss Rosa,' he said. 'Listen.'

'Give me the hatchet.'

'Wait,' he said.

'Do you really want to go inside?'

'I'm going inside,' she whimpered.

'Give me the hatchet.'

'Wait,' he said. He moved along the gallery, guiding himself by the wall, moving carefully since he did not know just where the floor planks might be rotten or even missing, until he came to a window. The shutters were closed and apparently locked, yet they gave almost at once to the blade of the hatchet, making not very much sound—a flimsy and sloven barricading done either by an old feeble person—woman—or by a shiftless man; he had already inserted the hatchet blade beneath the sash before he discovered that there was no glass in it, that all he had to do now was to step through the vacant frame. Then he stood there for a moment, telling himself to go on in, telling himself that he was not afraid, he just didn't want to know what might be inside. 'Well?' Miss Coldfield whispered from the door. 'Have you opened it?'

'Yes,' he said. He did not whisper, though he did not speak overloud; the dark room which he faced repeated his voice with hollow profundity, as an unfurnished room will. 'You wait there. I'll see if I can open the door.'—"So now I shall have to go in," he thought, climbing over the sill. He knew that the room was empty; the echo of his voice had told him that, yet he moved as slowly and carefully here as he had along the gallery, feeling along the wall with his hand, following the wall when it turned, and found the door and passed through it. He would be in the hall now; he almost believed that he could hear Miss Coldfield breathing just beyond the wall beside him.

It was pitch dark; he could not see, he knew that he could not see, yet he found that his eyelids and muscles were aching with strain while merging and dissolving red spots wheeled and vanished across the retinae. He went on; he felt the door under his hand at last and now he could hear Miss Coldfield's whimpering breathing beyond it as he fumbled for the lock. Then behind him the sound of the scraped match was like an explosion, a pistol; even before the puny following light appeared all his organs lifted sickeningly; he could not even move for a moment even though something of sanity roared silently inside his skull: "It's all right! If it were danger, he would not have struck the match!" Then he could move, and turned to see the tiny gnomelike creature in headrag and voluminous skirts, the worn coffee-colored face staring at him, the match held in one coffee-colored and doll-like hand above her head.

Then he was not watching her but watching the match as it burned down toward her fingers; he watched quietly as she moved at last and lit a second match from the first and turned; he saw then the square-ended saw chunk beside the wall and the lamp sitting upon it as she lifted the chimney and held the match to the wick. He remembered it, lying here in the Massachusetts bed and breathing fast now, now that peace and quiet had fled again.

He remembered how she did not say one word to him, not Who are you? or What do you want here? but merely came with a bunch of

enormous old-fashioned iron keys, as if she had known all the time that this hour must come and that it could not be resisted, and opened the door and stepped back a little as Miss Coldfield entered.

And how she (Clytie) and Miss Coldfield said no word to one another, as if Clytie had looked once at the other woman and knew that that would do no good; that it was to him, Quentin, that she turned, putting her hand on his arm and saying, 'Dont let her go up there, young marster.'" And how maybe she looked at him and knew that would do no good either, because she turned and overtook Miss Coldfield and caught her arm and said, 'Dont you go up there, Rosie' and Miss Coldfield struck the hand away and went on toward the stairs (and now he saw that she had a flashlight; he remembered how he thought, "It must have been in tie umbrella too along with the axe") and Clytie said; 'Rosie' and ran after the other again, whereupon Miss Coldfield turned on the step and struck Clytie to the floor with a full-armed blow like a man would have, and turned and went on up the stairs.

She (Clytie) lay on the bare floor of the scaling and empty hall like a small shapeless bundle of quiet clean rags. When he reached her he saw that she was quite conscious, her eyes wide open and calm; he stood above her, thinking, "Yes. She is the one who owns the terror."

When he raised her it was like picking up a handful of sticks concealed in a rag bundle, so light she was.

She could not stand; he had to hold her up, aware of some feeble movement or intention in her limbs until he realized that she was trying to sit on the bottom step. He lowered her to it. 'Who are you?' she said. 'I'm Quentin Compson,' he answered.

'Yes. I remember your grandpaw. You go up there and make her come down.

Make her go away from here. Whatever he done, me and Judith and him have paid it out. You go and get her. Take her away from here." So he mounted the stairs, the worn bare treads, the cracked and scaling

wall on one side, the balustrade with its intermittent missing spindles on the other. He remembered how he looked back and she was still sitting as he had left her, and that now (and he had not heard him enter) there stood in the hall below a hulking young lightcolored Negro man in clean faded overalls and shirt, his arms dangling, no surprise, no nothing in the saddle-colored and slack-mouthed idiot face.

He remembered how he thought, "The scion, the heir, the apparent (though not obvious)" and how he heard Miss Coldfield's feet and saw the light of the torch approaching along the upper hall and how she came and passed him, how she stumbled a little and caught herself and looked full at him as if she had never seen him before—the eyes wide and unseeing like a sleepwalker's, the face which had always been tallow-hued now possessing some still profounder, some almost unbearable, quality of bloodlessness and he thought, "What? What is it now? It's not shock. And it never has been fear.

Can it be triumph?" and how she passed him and went on. He heard Clytie say to the man, "Take her to the gate, the buggy" and he stood there thinking, "I should go with her" and then, "But I must see too now. I will have to. Maybe I shall be sorry tomorrow, but I must see." So when he came back down the stairs (and he remembered how he thought, "Maybe my face looks like hers did, but it's not triumph") there was only Clytie in the hall, sitting still on the bottom step, sitting still in the attitude in which he had left her.

She did not even look at him when he passed her. Nor did he overtake Miss Coldfield and the Negro. It was too dark to go fast, thought he could presently hear them ahead of him. She was not using the flashlight now; he remembered how he thought, "Surely she cant be afraid to show a light now." But she was not using it and he wondered if she were holding to the Negro's arm now; he wondered that until he heard the Negro's voice, flat, without emphasis or interest: "Wawkin better over here" and no answer from her, though he was close enough now to hear (or believe he did) her whimpering panting breath.

Then he heard the other sound and he knew that she had stumbled and fallen; he could almost see the hulking slack-faced Negro stopped in his tracks, looking toward the sound of the fall, waiting, without interest or curiosity, as he (Quentin) hurried forward, hurried toward the voices: 'You, nigger! What's your name?' 'Calls me Jim Bond.'

'Help me up! You aint any Sutpen! You don't have to leave me lying in the dirt!'

When he stopped the buggy at her gate she did not offer to get out alone this time. She sat there until he got down and came round to her side; she still sat there, clutching the umbrella in one hand and the hatchet in the other, until he spoke her name. Then she stirred; he helped, lifted her down; she was almost as light as Clytie had been; when she moved it was like a mechanical doll, so that he supported and led her through the gate and up the short walk and into the dollsized house and turned on the light for her and looked at the fixed sleep-walking face, the wide dark eyes as she stood there, still clutching the umbrella and the hatchet, the shawl and the black dress both stained with dirt where she had fallen, the black bonnet jerked forward and awry by the shock of the fall. 'Are you all right now?' he said.

'Yes,' she said. 'Yes. I'm all right. Goodnight.'—"Not thank you," he thought: "Just goodnight," outside the house now, breathing deep and fast now as he returned to the buggy, finding that he was about to begin to run, thinking quietly, "Jesus. Jesus. Jesus," breathing fast and hard of the dark dead furnace-breath of air, of night where the fierce aloof stars hung. His own home was dark; he was still using the whip when he turned into the lane and then into the stable lot. He sprang out and took the mare from the buggy, stripping the harness from her and tumbling it into the harness room without stopping to hang it up, sweating, breathing fast and hard; when he turned at last toward the house he did begin to run. He could not help it.

He was twenty years old; he was not afraid, because what he had seen out there could not harm him, yet he ran; even inside the dark familiar house, his shoes in his hand, he still ran, up the stairs and into his room

and began to undress, fast, sweating, breathing fast. "I ought to bathe," he thought: then he was lying on the bed, naked, swabbing his body steadily with the discarded shirt, sweating still, panting: so that when, his eye-muscles aching and straining into the darkness and the almost dried shirt still clutched in his hand, he said "I have been asleep" it was all the same, there was no difference: waking or sleeping he walked down that upper hall between the scaling walls and beneath the cracked ceiling, toward the faint light which fell outward from the last door and paused there, saying "No. No" and then "Only I must.

I have to" and went in, entered the bare, stale room whose shutters were closed too, where a second lamp burned dimly on a crude table; waking or sleeping it was the same; the bed, the yellow sheets and pillow, the wasted yellow face with closed, almost transparent eyes on the pillow, the wasted hands, crossed on the breast as if he were already a corpse; waking or sleeping it was the same and would be the same forever as long as he lived: And you are—? Henry Sutpen. And you have been here—? Four years. And you came home—? To die. Yes.

To die-? Yes. To die. And you have been here—? Four years. And you are—? Henry Sutpen.

It was quite cold in the room now; the chimes would ring for one any time now; the chill had a compounded, a gathered quality, as though preparing for the dead moment before dawn. 'And she waited three months before she went back to get him,' Shreve said. 'Why did she do that?' Quentin didn't answer. He lay still and rigid on his back with the cold New England night on his face and the blood running warm in his rigid body and limbs, breathing hard but slow, his eyes wide open upon the window, thinking "Nevermore of peace. Nevermore of peace.

Nevermore Nevermore Nevermore." 'Do you suppose it was because she knew what was going to happen when she told it, took any steps, that it would be over then, finished, and that hating is like drink or drugs and she had used it so long that she did not dare risk cutting off the supply, destroying the source, the very poppy's root and seed?' Still Quentin didn't answer. ' But at last she did reconcile herself to it, for his

sake, to save him, to bring him into town where the doctors could save him, and so she told it then, got the ambulance and the men and went out there. And old Clytie maybe watching for just that out of the upstairs window for three months now: and maybe even your old man was right this time and when she saw the ambulance turn into the gate she believed it was that same black wagon for which she probably had had that nigger boy watching for three months now, coming to carry Henry into town for the white folks to hang him for shooting Charles Bon.

And I guess it had been him who had kept that closet under the stairs full of tinder and trash all that time too, like she told him to, maybe he not getting it then either but keeping it full just like she told him, the kerosene and all, for three months now, until the hour when he could begin to howl—' Now the chimes began, ringing for one o'clock. Shreve ceased, as if he were waiting for them to cease or perhaps were even listening to them. Quentin lay still too, as if he were listening too, though he was not; he just heard them without listening as he heard Shreve without listening or answering, until they ceased, died away into the icy air delicate and faint and musical as struck glass.

And he, Quentin, could see that too, though he had not been there—the ambulance with Miss Coldfield between the driver and the second man, perhaps a deputy sheriff, in the shawl surely and perhaps even with the umbrella too, though probably no hatchet nor flashlight in it now, entering the gate and picking its way gingerly up the rutted and frozen (and now partially thawed) drive; and it may have been the howling or it may have been the deputy or the driver or it may have been she who cried first: "It's on fire!" though she would not have cried that; she would have said, 'Faster. Faster,' leaning forward on this seat too the small furious grim implacable woman not much larger than a child.

But the ambulance could not go fast in that drive; doubtless Clytie knew, counted upon, that; it would be a good three minutes before it could reach the house, the monstrous tinder-dry rotten shell seeping smoke through the warped cracks in the weather-boarding as if it were

made of gauze wire and filled with roaring and beyond which somewhere something lurked which bellowed, something human since the bellowing was in human speech, even though the reason for it would not have seemed to be. And the deputy and the driver would spring out and Miss Coldfield would stumble out and follow them, running too, onto the gallery too, where the creature which bellowed followed them, wraith-like and insubstantial, looking at them out of the smoke, whereupon the deputy even turned and whereupon he retreated, fled, though the howling did not diminish nor even seem to get any further away.

They ran onto the gallery too, into the seeping smoke, Miss Coldfield screaming harshly, 'The window! The window!' to the second man at the door. But the door was not locked; it swung inward; the blast of heat struck them. The entire staircase was on fire. Yet they had to hold her; Quentin could see it: the light thin furious creature making no sound at all now, struggling with silent and bitter fury, clawing and scratching and biting at the two men who held her, who dragged her back and down the steps as the draft created by the open door seemed to explode like powder among the flames as the whole lower hall vanished.

He, Quentin, could see it, could see the deputy holding her while the driver backed the ambulance to safety and returned, the three faces all a little wild now since they must have believed her—the three of them staring, glaring at the doomed house: and then for a moment maybe Clytie appeared in that window from which she must have been watching the gates constantly day and night for three months—the tragic gnome's face beneath the clean headrag, against a red background of fire, seen for a moment between two swirls of smoke, looking down at them, perhaps not even now with triumph and no more of despair than it had ever worn, possibly even serene above the melting clapboards before the smoke swirled across it again—and he, Jim Bond, the scion, the last of his race, seeing it too now and howling with human reason now since now even he could have known what he was howling about.

But they couldn't catch him. They could hear him; he didn't seem to ever get any further away but they couldn't get any nearer and maybe in time they could not even locate the direction any more of the howling. They—the driver and the deputy—held Miss Coldfield as she struggled: he (Quentin) could see her, them; he had not been there but he could see her, struggling and fighting like a doll in a nightmare, making no sound, foaming a little at the mouth, her face even in the sunlight lit by one last wild crimson reflection as the house collapsed and roared away, and there was only the sound of the idiot Negro left.

'And so it was the Aunt Rosa that came back to town inside the ambulance,' Shreve said. Quentin did not answer; he did not even say, Miss Rosa. He just lay there staring at the window without. even blinking, breathing the chill heady pure snowgleamed darkness. 'And she went to bed because it was all finished now, there was nothing left now, nothing out there now but that idiot boy to lurk around those ashes and those four gutted chimneys and howl until someone came and drove him away.

They couldn't catch him and nobody ever seemed to make him go very far away, he just stopped howling for a little while. Then after awhile they would begin to hear him again. And so she died." Quentin did not answer, staring at the window; then he could not tell if it was the actual window or the window's pale rectangle upon his eyelids, though after a moment it began to emerge. It began to take shape in its same curious, light, gravity-defying attitude—the oncefolded sheet out of the wistaria Mississippi summer, the cigar smell, the random blowing of the fireflies. 'The South,' Shreve said.

'The South. Jesus. No wonder you folks all outlive yourselves by years and years and years.'" It was becoming quite distinct; he would be able to decipher the words soon, in a moment; even almost now, now, now.

'I am older at twenty than a lot of people who have died,' Quentin said.

'And more people have died than have been twenty-one,' Shreve said. Now he (Quentin) could read it, could finish it—the sloped whimsical

ironic hand out of Mississippi attenuated, into the iron snow: —or perhaps there is. Surely it can harm no one to believe that perhaps she has escaped not at all the privilege of being outraged and dreaded and of not forgiving but on the contrary has herself gained that place or bourne where the objects of the outrage and of the commiseration also are no longer ghosts but are actual people to be actual recipients of the hatred and the pity.

It will do no harm to hope—You see I have written hope, not think. So let it be hope. —that the one cannot escape the censure which no doubt he deserves, that the other no longer lack the commiseration which let us hope (while we are hoping) that they have longed for, if only for the reason that they are about to receive it whether they will or no. The weather was beautiful though cold and they had to use picks to break the earth for the grave yet in one of the deeper clods I saw a redworm doubtless alive when the clod was thrown up though by afternoon it was frozen again.

'So it took Charles Bon and his mother to get rid of old Tom, and Charles Bon and the octoroon to get rid of Judith, and Charles Bon and Clytie to get rid of Henry; and Charles Bon's mother and Charles Bon's grandmother got rid of Charles Bon. So it takes two niggers to get rid of one Sutpen, don't it?' Quentin did not answer; evidently Shreve did not want an answer now; he continued almost without a pause: 'Which is all right, it's fine; it clears the whole ledger, you can tear all the pages out and burn them, except for one thing. And do you know what that is?'

Perhaps he hoped for an answer this time, or perhaps he merely paused for emphasis, since he got no answer. 'You've got one nigger left. One nigger Sutpen left. Of course you can't catch him and you don't even always see him and you never will be able to use him. But you've got him there still.

You still hear him at night sometimes. Don't you?'

'Yes,' Quentin said.

'And so do you know what I think?" Now he did expect an answer, and now he got one: 'No,' Quentin said.

'Do you want to know what I think?"

'No,' Quentin said.

'Then I'll tell you. I think that in time the Jim Bonds are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it won't quite be in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do, so they won't show up so sharp against the snow. But it will still be Jim Bond; and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings. Now I want you to tell me just one thing more. Why do you hate the South?"

'I don't hate it,' Quentin said, quickly, at once, immediately; 'I don't hate it,' he said. I don't hate it he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark; I don't. I don't!

I don't hate it! I don't hate it!

CHRONOLOGY

1807 Thomas Sutpen born in West Virginia mountains. Poor whites of Scottish-English stock. Large family.

1817 Sutpen family moved down into Tidewater Virginia, Sutpen ten years old.

1818 Ellen Coldfield born in Tennessee.

1820 Sutpen ran away from home. Fourteen years old.

1827 Sutpen married first wife in Haiti.

1828 Goodhue Coldfield moved to Yoknapatawpha County (Jefferson) Mississippi: mother, sister, wife and daughter Ellen.

1829 Charles Bon born, Haiti.

1831 Sutpen learns his wife has negro blood, repudiates her and child.
1833 Sutpen appears in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, takes up land, builds his house.
1834 Clytemnestra (Clytie) born to slave woman.
1838 Sutpen married Ellen Coldfield.
1839 Henry Sutpen born, Sutpen's Hundred.
1841 Judith Sutpen born.
1845 Rosa Coldfield born.
1850 Wash Jones moves into abandoned fishing camp on Sutpen's plantation, with his daughter.
1853 Milly Jones born to Wash Jones' daughter.
1859 Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon meet at University of Mississippi. Judith and Charles meet that Xmas. Charles Etienne St. Velery Bon born, New Orleans.
1860 Xmas, Sutpen forbids marriage between Judith and Bon. Henry repudiates his birthright, departs with Bon.
1861 Sutpen, Henry, and Bon depart for war.
1862 Ellen Coldfield dies.
1864 Goodhue Coldfield dies.
1865 Henry kills Bon at gates. Rosa Coldfield moves out to Sutpen's Hundred.
1866 Sutpen becomes engaged to Rosa Coldfield, insults her. She returns to Jefferson.
1867 Sutpen takes up with Milly Jones.
1869 Milly's child is born. Wash Jones kills Sutpen.
1870 Charles E. St. V. Bon appears at Sutpen's Hundred.
1871 Clytie fetches Charles E. St. V. Bon to Sutpen's Hundred to live.
1881 Charles E. St. V. Bon returns with negro wife.
1882 Jim Bond born.
1884 Judith and Charles E. St. V. Bon die of smallpox.
1909 September, Rosa Coldfield and Quentin find Henry Sutpen hidden in the house.
1909 December, Rosa Coldfield goes out to fetch Henry to town, Clytie sets fire to the house.

GENEALOGY

THOMAS SUTPEN

Born in West Virginia mountains, 1807. One of several children of poor whites, Scotch-English stock. Established plantation of Sutpen's Hundred in Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, 1833. Married (1) Eulalia Bon, Haiti, 1827. (2) Ellen Coldfield, Jefferson, Mississippi, 1838. Major, later Colonel, th Mississippi Infantry, C.S.A. Died, Sutpen's Hundred, 1869.

EULALIA BON.

Born in Haiti. Only child of Haitian sugar planter of French descent. Married Thomas Sutpen, 1827, divorced from him, 1831. Died in New Orleans, date unknown.

CHARLES BON.

Son of Thomas and Eulalia Bon Sutpen. Only child. Attended University of Mississippi, where he met Henry Sutpen and became engaged to Judith. Private, later lieutenant, th Company, (University Greys) ——th Mississippi Infantry, C.S.A. Died, Sutpen's Hundred, 1865.

GOODHUE COLDFIELD.

Born in Tennessee. Moved to Jefferson, Miss., 1828, established small mercantile business. Died, Jefferson, 1864.

ELLEN COLDFIELD.

Daughter of Goodhue Coldfield. Born in Tennessee, 1818. Married Thomas Sutpen, Jefferson, Miss., 1838. Died, Sutpen's Hundred, 1862.

ROSA COLDFIELD.

Daughter of Goodhue Coldfield. Born, Jefferson, 1845. Died, Jefferson, 1910.

HENRY SUTPEN.

Born, Sutpen's Hundred, 1839, son of Thomas and Ellen Coldfield Sutpen. Attended University of Mississippi. Private, ——th Company,

(University Greys) ——th Mississippi Infantry, C.S.A. Died, Sutpen's Hundred, 1910.

JUDITH SUTPEN.

Daughter of Thomas and Ellen Coldfield Sutpen. Born, Sutpen's Hundred, 1841. Became engaged to Charles Bon, 1860. Died, Sutpen's Hundred, 1884.

CLYTEMNESTRA SUTPEN.

Daughter of Thomas Sutpen and a negro slave. Born, Sutpen's Hundred, 1834. Died, Sutpen's Hundred, 1910.

WASH JONES.

Date and location of birth unknown. Squatter, residing in an abandoned fishing camp belonging to Thomas Sutpen, hanger-on of Sutpen, handy man about Sutpen's place while Sutpen was away between '61-65. Died, Sutpen's Hundred, 1869.

MELICENT JONES.

Daughter of Wash Jones. Date of birth unknown. Rumored to have died in a Memphis brothel.

MILLY JONES.

Daughter of Melicent Jones. Born 1853. Died, Sutpen's Hundred, 1869.

UNNAMED INFANT.

Daughter of Thomas Sutpen and Milly Jones. Born, died, Sutpen's Hundred, same day, 1869.

CHARLES ETIENNE DE SAINT VELERY BON.

Only child of Charles Bon and an octoroon mistress whose name is not recorded. Born, New Orleans, 1859. Married a full-blood negress, name unknown, 1879. Died, Sutpen's Hundred, 1884.

JIM BOND (BON).

Son of Charles Etienne de Saint Velery Bon. Born, Sutpen's Hundred, 1882. Disappeared from Sutpen's Hundred, 1910. Whereabouts unknown.

QUENTIN COMPSON.

Grandson of Thomas Sutpen's first Yoknapatawpha County friend. Born, Jefferson, 1891. Attended Harvard, 1909-1910. Died, Cambridge, Mass., 1910.

SHREVLIN McCANNON.

Born, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 1890. Attended Harvard, 1909-1914. Captain, Royal Army Medical Corps, Canadian Expeditionary Forces, France, 1914-1918. Now a practising surgeon, Edmonton, Alta.

1936

The End

The Unvanquished, William Faulkner

The Unvanquished

This 1938 novel tells the story of the Sartoris family, who first appeared in the novel *Sartoris*. *The Unvanquished* takes place before the previous work and is set during the American Civil War. The text consists of seven short stories, which were originally published separately in magazines, mostly *The Saturday Evening Post*.

The plot spans the years 1862 to 1873 and the principal character is Bayard Sartoris, tracing his coming of age until he is a grown man and the head of a family. Bayard is decent, honourable, courageous and intelligent, a model Southern aristocrat of the post-war era. As a boy,

he is occasionally given to impetuosity and rashness. In the course of the novel, he greatly matures, gaining a sense of the tragedy of life and learning to balance the rash chivalry of the traditional Southern gentleman with sensitivity and mercy.

Contents

Ambuscade

Retreat

Raid

Riposte In Tertio

Vendée

Skirmish At Sartoris

An Odor Of Verbena

AMBUSCADE

1

BEHIND THE SMOKEHOUSE that summer, Ringo and I had a living map. Although Vicksburg was just a handful of chips from the woodpile and the River a trench scraped into the packed earth with the point of a hoe, it (river, city, and terrain) lived, possessing even in miniature that ponderable though passive recalcitrance of topography which outweighs artillery, against which the most brilliant of victories and the most tragic of defeats are but the loud noises of a moment.

To Ringo and me it lived, if only because of the fact that the sunimpacted ground drank water faster than we could fetch it from the well, the very setting of the stage for conflict a prolonged and wellnigh hopeless ordeal in which we ran, panting and interminable, with the leaking bucket between wellhouse and battlefield, the two of us needing first to join forces and spend ourselves against a common enemy, time, before we could engender between us and hold intact the pattern of recapitulant mimic furious victory like a cloth, a shield between ourselves and reality, between us and fact and doom.

This afternoon it seemed as if we would never get it filled, wet enough, since there had not even been dew in three weeks. But at last it was damp enough, damp-colored enough at least, and we could begin. We were just about to begin. Then suddenly Loosh was standing there, watching us.

He was Joby's son and Ringo's uncle; he stood there (we did not know where he had come from; we had not seen him appear, emerge) in the fierce dull early afternoon sunlight, bareheaded, his head slanted a little, tilted a little yet firm and not askew, like a cannonball (which it resembled) bedded hurriedly and carelessly in concrete, his eyes a little red at the inner corners as Negroes' eyes get when they have been drinking, looking down at what Ringo and I called Vicksburg. Then I saw Philadelphia, his wife, over at the woodpile, stooped, with an armful of wood already gathered into the crook of her elbow, watching Loosh's back.

"What's that?" Loosh said.

"Vicksburg," I said.

Loosh laughed. He stood there laughing, not loud, looking at the chips.

"Come on here, Loosh," Philadelphia said from the woodpile. There was something curious in her voice too — urgent, perhaps frightened. "If you wants any supper, you better tote me some wood." But I didn't know which, urgency or fright; I didn't have time to wonder or speculate, because suddenly Loosh stooped before Ringo or I could have moved, and with his hand he swept the chips flat.

"There's your Vicksburg," he said.

"Loosh!" Philadelphia said. But Loosh squatted, looking at me with that expression on his face. I was just twelve then; I didn't know triumph; I didn't even know the word.

"And I tell you nother un you ain't know," he said. "Corinth."

“Corinth?” I said. Philadelphia had dropped the wood and she was coming fast toward us. “That’s in Mississippi too. That’s not far. I’ve been there.”

“Far don’t matter,” Loosh said. Now he sounded as if he were about to chant, to sing; squatting there with the fierce dull sun on his iron skull and the flattening slant of his nose, he was not looking at me or Ringo either; it was as if his redcornered eyes had reversed in his skull and it was the blank flat obverses of the balls which we saw. “Far don’t matter. Case hit’s on the way!”

“On the way? On the way to what?”

“Ask your paw. Ask Marse John.”

“He’s at Tennessee, fighting. I can’t ask him.”

“You think he at Tennessee? Ain’t no need for him at Tennessee now.” Then Philadelphia grabbed him by the arm.

“Hush your mouth, nigger!” she cried, in that tense desperate voice.

“Come on here and get me some wood!”

Then they were gone. Ringo and I didn’t watch them go. We stood there above our ruined Vicksburg, our tedious hoe-scratch not even damp-colored now, looking at one another quietly. “What?” Ringo said. “What he mean?”

“Nothing,” I said. I stooped and set Vicksburg up again. “There it is.” But Ringo didn’t move, he just looked at me. “Loosh laughed. He say Corinth too. He laughed at Corinth too. What you reckon he know that we ain’t?”

“Nothing!” I said. “Do you reckon Loosh knows anything that Father don’t know?”

“Marse John at Tennessee. Maybe he ain’t know either.”

“Do you reckon he’d be away off at Tennessee if there were Yankees at Corinth? Do you reckon that if there were Yankees at Corinth, Father and General Van Dorn and General Pemberton all three wouldn’t be there too?” But I was just talking too, I knew that, because niggers

know, they know things; it would have to be something louder, much louder, than words to do any good. So I stooped and caught both hands full of dust and rose: and Ringo still standing there, not moving, just looking at me even as I flung the dust. "I'm General Pemberton!" I cried. "Yaaay! Yaay!" stooping and catching up more dust and flinging that too.

Still Ringo didn't move. "All right!" I cried. "I'll be Grant this time, then. You can be General Pemberton." Because it was that urgent, since Negroes knew. The arrangement was that I would be General Pemberton twice in succession and Ringo would be Grant, then I would have to be Grant once so Ringo could be General Pemberton or he wouldn't play anymore. But now it was that urgent even though Ringo was a nigger too, because Ringo and I had been born in the same month and had both fed at the same breast and had slept together and eaten together for so long that Ringo called Granny 'Granny' just like I did, until maybe he wasn't a nigger anymore or maybe I wasn't a white boy anymore, the two of us neither, not even people any longer: the two supreme undefeated like two moths, two feathers riding above a hurricane.

So we were both at it; we didn't see Louvinia, Joby's wife and Ringo's grandmother, at all. We were facing one another at scarcely arms' length, to the other each invisible in the furious slow jerking of the flung dust, yelling "Kill the bastuds! Kill them! Kill them!" when her voice seemed to descend upon us like an enormous hand, flattening the very dust which we had raised, leaving us now visible to one another, dust-colored ourselves to the eyes and still in the act of throwing:

"You, Bayard! You, Ringo!" She stood about ten feet away, her mouth still open with shouting. I noticed that she did not now have on the old hat of Father's which she wore on top of her head rag even when she just stepped out of the kitchen for wood. "What was that word?" she said. "What did I hear you say?" Only she didn't wait to be answered, and then I saw that she had been running too. "Look who coming up the big road!" she said.

We — Ringo and I — ran as one, in midstride out of frozen immobility, across the back yard and around the house, where Granny was standing at the top of the front steps and where Loosh had just come around the house from the other side and stopped, looking down the drive toward the gate. In the spring, when Father came home that time, Ringo and I ran down the drive to meet him and return, I standing in one stirrup with Father's arm around me, and Ringo holding to the other stirrup and running beside the horse.

But this time we didn't. I mounted the steps and stood beside Granny, and with Ringo and Loosh on the ground below the gallery we watched the claybank stallion enter the gate which was never closed now, and come up the drive.

We watched them — the big gaunt horse almost the color of smoke, lighter in color than the dust which had gathered and caked on his wet hide where they had crossed at the ford three miles away, coming up the drive at a steady gait which was not a walk and not a run, as if he had held it all the way from Tennessee because there was a need to encompass earth which abrogated sleep or rest and relegated to some insulated bourne of perennial and pointless holiday so trivial a thing as galloping; and Father damp too from the ford, his boots dark and dustcaked too, the skirts of his weathered grey coat shades darker than the breast and back and sleeves where the tarnished buttons and the frayed braid of his field officer's rank glinted dully, the sabre hanging loose yet rigid at his side as if it were too heavy to jounce or perhaps were attached to the living thigh itself and took no more motion from the horse than he did. He stopped; he looked at Granny and me on the porch and at Ringo and Loosh on the ground.

"Well, Miss Rosa," he said. "Well, boys."

"Well, John," Granny said. Loosh came and took Jupiter's head; Father dismounted stiffly, the sabre clashing dully and heavily against his wet boot and leg.

“Curry him,” Father said. “Give him a good feed, but don’t turn him into the pasture. Let him stay in the lot. . . . Go with Loosh,” he said, as if Jupiter were a child, slapping him on the flank as Loosh led him on. Then we could see him good. I mean, Father.

He was not big; it was just the things he did, that we knew he was doing, had been doing in Virginia and Tennessee, that made him seem big to us. There were others besides him that were doing the things, the same things, but maybe it was because he was the only one we knew, had ever heard snoring at night in a quiet house, had watched eating, had heard when he talked, knew how he liked to sleep and what he liked to eat and how he liked to talk.

He was not big, yet somehow he looked even smaller on the horse than off of him, because Jupiter was big and when you thought of Father you thought of him as being big too and so when you thought of Father being on Jupiter it was as if you said. ‘Together they will be too big; you won’t believe it.’ So you didn’t believe it and so it wasn’t. He came toward the steps and began to mount, the sabre heavy and flat at his side.

Then I began to smell it again, like each time he returned, like the day back in the spring when I rode up the drive standing in one of his stirrups — that odor in his clothes and beard and flesh too which I believed was the smell of powder and glory, the elected victorious but know better now: know now to have been only the will to endure, a sardonic and even humorous declining of self-delusion which is not even kin to that optimism which believes that that which is about to happen to us can possibly be the worst which we can suffer.

He mounted four of the steps, the sabre (that’s how tall he actually was) striking against each one on the steps as he mounted, then he stopped and removed his hat. And that’s what I mean: about his doing bigger things than he was. He could have stood on the same level with Granny and he would have only needed to bend his head a little for her to kiss him.

But he didn't. He stopped two steps below her, with his head bared and his forehead held for her to touch her lips to, and the fact that Granny had to stoop a little now took nothing from the illusion of height and size which he wore for us at least.

"I've been expecting you," Granny said.

"Ah," Father said. Then he looked at me, who was still looking at him, as Ringo at the foot of the steps beneath still was.

"You rode hard from Tennessee," I said.

"Ah," Father said again.

"Tennessee sho gaunted you," Ringo said. "What does they eat up there, Marse John? Does they eat the same things that folks eat?" Then I said it, looking him in the face while he looked at me: "Loosh says you haven't been at Tennessee."

"Loosh?" Father said. "Loosh?"

"Come in," Granny said. "Louvinia is putting your dinner on the table. You will just have time to wash."

2

That afternoon we built the stock pen. We built it deep in the creek bottom, where you could not have found it unless you had known where to look, and you could not have seen it until you came to the new sap-sweating, axe-ended rails woven through and into the jungle growth itself.

We were all there — Father and Joby and Ringo and Loosh and me — Father in the boots still but with his coat off now, so that we saw for the first time that his trousers were not Confederate ones but were Yankee ones, of new strong blue cloth, which they (he and his troop) had captured, and without the sabre now too. We worked fast, felling the saplings — the willow and pin oak, the swamp maple and chinkapin — and, without even waiting hardly to trim them, dragging them behind the mules and by hand too, through the mud and the briers to where Father waited.

And that was it too; Father was everywhere, with a sapling under each arm going through the brush and briars almost faster than the mules; racking the rails into place while Joby and Loosh were still arguing about which end of the rail went where.

That was it: not that Father worked faster and harder than anyone else, even though you do look bigger (to twelve, at least, to me and Ringo at twelve, at least) standing still and saying, 'Do this or that' to the ones who are doing; it was the way he did it.

When he sat at his old place at the table in the dining room and finished the side meat and greens and the cornbread and milk which Louvinia brought him (and we watching and waiting, Ringo and I at least, waiting for night and the talking, the telling) and wiped his beard and said, "Now we're going to build a new pen. We'll have to cut the rails, too"; when he said that, Ringo and I probably had exactly the same vision.

There would be all of us there — Joby and Loosh and Ringo and me on the edge of the bottom and drawn up into a kind of order — an order partaking not of any lusting and sweating for assault or even victory, but rather of that passive yet dynamic affirmation which Napoleon's troops must have felt — and facing us, between us and the bottom, between us and the waiting sap-running boles which were about to be transposed into dead rails, Father. He was on Jupiter now; he wore the frogged grey field-officer's tunic; and while we watched he drew the sabre.

Giving us a last embracing and comprehensive glance he drew it, already pivoting Jupiter on the tight snaffle; his hair tossed beneath the cocked hat, the sabre flashed and glinted; he cried, not loud yet stentorian: "Trot! Canter! Charge!" Then, without even having to move, we could both watch and follow him — the little man (who in conjunction with the horse looked exactly the right size because that was as big as he needed to look and — to twelve years old — bigger than most folks could hope to look) standing in the stirrups above the

smoke-colored diminishing thunderbolt, beneath the arcy and myriad glitter of the sabre from which the chosen saplings, sheared trimmed and lopped, sprang into neat and waiting windrows, requiring only the carrying and the placing to become a fence.

The sun had gone out of the bottom when we finished the fence, that is, left Joby and Loosh with the last three panels to put up, but it was still shining up the slope of the pasture when we rode across it, I behind Father on one of the mules and Ringo on the other one.

But it was gone even from the pasture by the time I had left Father at the house and returned to the stable, where Ringo already had a lead rope on the cow. So we went back to the new pen, with the calf following nuzzling and prodding at the cow every time she stopped to snatch a mouthful of grass, and the sow trotting on ahead.

She (the sow) was the one who moved slow. She seemed to be moving slower than the cow even while the cow was stopped with Ringo leaned to the taut jerk of the rope and hollering at the cow, so it was dark sure enough when we reached the new pen. But there was still plenty of gap left to drive the stock through. But then, we never had worried about that.

We drove them in — the two mules, the cow and calf, the sow; we put up the last panel by feel, and went back to the house. It was full dark now, even in the pasture; we could see the lamp in the kitchen and the shadow of someone moving across the window. When Ringo and I came in, Louvinia was just closing one of the big trunks from the attic, which hadn't been down stairs since the Christmas four years ago which we spent at Hawkhurst, when there wasn't any war and Uncle Dennison was still alive.

It was a big trunk and heavy even when empty; it had not been in the kitchen when we left to build the pen so it had been fetched down some time during the afternoon, while Joby and Loosh were in the bottom and nobody there to carry it down but Granny and Louvinia, and then Father later, after we came back to the house on the mule, so

that was a part of the need and urgency too; maybe it was Father who carried the trunk down from the attic too.

And when I went in to supper, the table was set with the kitchen knives and forks in place of the silver ones, and the sideboard (on which the silver service had been sitting when I began to remember and where it had been sitting ever since except on each Tuesday afternoon, when Granny and Louvinia and Philadelphy would polish it, why, nobody except Granny maybe knew, since it was never used) was bare.

It didn't take us long to eat. Father had already eaten once early in the afternoon, and besides that was what Ringo and I were waiting for: for after supper, the hour of laxed muscles and full entrails, the talking. In the spring when he came home that time, we waited as we did now, until he was sitting in his old chair with the hickory logs popping and snapping on the hearth and Ringo and I squatting on either side of the hearth, beneath the mantel above which the captured musket which he had brought home from Virginia two years ago rested on two pegs, loaded and oiled for service.

Then we listened. We heard: the names — Forrest and Morgan and Barksdale and Van Dorn; the words like Gap and Run which we didn't have in Mississippi even though we did own Barksdale, and Van Dorn until somebody's husband killed him, and one day General Forrest rode down South Street in Oxford where there watched him through a window pane a young girl who scratched her name on it with a diamond ring: Celia Cook.

But we were just twelve; we didn't listen to that. What Ringo and I heard was the cannon and the flags and the anonymous yelling. That's what we intended to hear tonight.

Ringo was waiting for me in the hall; we waited until Father was settled in his chair in the room which he and the Negroes called the Office — Father because his desk was here in which he kept the seed cotton and corn and in this room he would remove his muddy boots and sit in his stocking feet while the boots dried on the hearth and where the dogs

could come and go with impunity, to lie on the rug before the fire or even to sleep there on the cold nights — these whether Mother, who died when I was born, gave him this dispensation before she died or whether Granny carried it on afterward or whether Granny gave him the dispensation herself because Mother died I don't know: and the Negroes called the Office because into this room they would be fetched to face the Patroller (sitting in one of the straight hard chairs and smoking one of Father's cigars too but with his hat off) and swear that they could not possibly have been either whom or where he (the Patroller) said they were — and which Granny called the library because there was one bookcase in it containing a Coke upon Littleton, a Josephus, a Koran, a volume of Mississippi Reports dated 1848, a Jeremy Taylor, a Napoleon's Maxims, a thousand and ninety-eight page treatise on astrology, a History of Werewolf Men in England, Ireland and Scotland and Including Wales by the Reverend Ptolemy Thorndyke, M.A. (Edinburgh), F.R.S.S., a complete Walter Scott, a complete Fenimore Cooper, a paper-bound Dumas complete, too, save for the volume which Father lost from his pocket at Manassas (retreating, he said).

So Ringo and I squatted again and waited quietly while Granny sewed beside the lamp on the table and Father sat in his old chair in its old place, his muddy boots crossed and lifted into the old heel-marks beside the cold and empty fireplace, chewing the tobacco which Joby had loaned him.

Joby was a good deal older than Father. He was too old to have been caught short of tobacco just by a war. He had come to Mississippi from Carolina with Father and he had been Father's body servant all the time that he was raising and training Simon, Ringo's father, to take over when he (Joby) got too old, which was to have been some years yet except for the War.

So Simon went with Father; he was still in Tennessee with the army. We waited for Father to begin; we waited so long that we could tell from the sounds that Louvinia was almost through in the kitchen: so that I

decided Father was waiting for Louvinia to finish and come in to hear too, so I said, “How can you fight in mountains, Father?”

And that’s what he was waiting for, though not in the way Ringo and I thought, because he said, “You can’t. You just have to. Now you boys run on to bed.”

We went up the stairs. But not all the way; we stopped and sat on the top step, just out of the light from the hall lamp, watching the door to the Office, listening; after a while Louvinia crossed the hall without looking up and entered the Office; we could hear Father and her: “Is the trunk ready?”

“Yes sir. Hit’s ready.”

“Then tell Loosh to get the lantern and the shovels and wait in the kitchen for me.”

“Yes sir,” Louvinia said. She came out; she crossed the hall again without even looking up the stairs, who used to follow us up and stand in the bedroom door and scold at us until we were in bed — I in the bed itself, Ringo on the pallet beside it. But this time she not only didn’t wonder where we were, she didn’t even think about where we might not be.

“I knows what’s in that trunk,” Ringo whispered. “Hit’s the silver. What you reckon—”

“Shhhh,” I said. We could hear Father’s voice, talking to Granny. After a while Louvinia came back and crossed the hall again. We sat on the top step, listening to Father’s voice telling Granny and Louvinia both.

“Vicksburg?” Ringo whispered. We were in the shadow; I couldn’t see anything but his eyeballs. “Vicksburg fell? Do he mean hit fell off in the River? With Ginrul Pemberton in hit too?”

“Shhhhh!” I said. We sat close together in the shadow, listening to Father.

Perhaps it was the dark or perhaps we were the two moths, the two feathers again or perhaps there is a point at which credulity firmly and

calmly and irrevocably declines, because suddenly Louvinia was standing over us, shaking us awake. She didn't even scold us.

She followed us up stairs and stood in the door to the bedroom and she didn't even light the lamp; she couldn't have told whether or not we had undressed even if she had been paying enough attention to suspect that we had not. She may have been listening as Ringo and I were, to what we thought we heard, though I knew better, just as I knew that we had slept on the stairs for some time; I was telling myself, 'They have already carried it out, they are in the orchard now, digging.'

Because there is that point at which credulity declines; somewhere between waking and sleeping I believed I saw or I dreamed that I did see the lantern in the orchard, under the apple trees. But I don't know whether I saw it or not, because then it was morning and it was raining and Father was gone.

3

He must have ridden off in the rain, which was still falling at breakfast and then at dinnertime too, so that it looked as if we wouldn't have to leave the house at all, until at last Granny put the sewing away and said, "Very well. Get the cook book, Marengo." Ringo got the cook book from the kitchen and he and I lay on our stomachs on the floor while Granny opened the book. "What shall we read about today?" she said.

"Read about cake," I said.

"Very well. What kind of cake?" Only she didn't need to say that because Ringo was already answering that before she spoke: "Cokynut cake, Granny."

He said coconut cake every time because we never had been able to decide whether Ringo had ever tasted coconut cake or not. We had had some that Christmas before it started and Ringo had tried to remember whether they had had any of it in the kitchen or not, but he couldn't remember. Now and then I used to try to help him decide, get him to

tell me how it tasted and what it looked like and sometimes he would almost decide to risk it before he would change his mind.

Because he said that he would rather just maybe have tasted coconut cake without remembering it than to know for certain he had not; that if he were to describe the wrong kind of cake, he would never taste coconut cake as long as he lived.

“I reckon a little more won’t hurt us,” Granny said.

The rain stopped in the middle of the afternoon; the sun was shining when I stepped out onto the back gallery, with Ringo already saying, “Where we going?” behind me and still saying it after we passed the smokehouse where I could see the stable and the cabins: “Where we going now?” Before we reached the stable Joby and Loosh came into sight beyond the pasture fence, bringing the mules up from the new pen. “What we ghy do now?” Ringo said.

“Watch him,” I said.

“Watch him? Watch who?” I looked at Ringo. He was staring at me, his eyeballs white and quiet like last night. “You talking about Loosh. Who tole us to watch him?”

“Nobody. I just know.”

“Bayard, did you dream hit?”

“Yes. Last night. It was Father and Louvinia. Father said to watch Loosh, because he knows.”

“Knows?” Ringo said. “Knows what?” But he didn’t need to ask that either; in the next breath he answered it himself, staring at me with his round quiet eyes, blinking a little: “Yestiddy. Vicksburg. When he knocked it over. He knowed it then, already. Like when he said Marse John wasn’t at no Tennessee and sho enough Marse John wasn’t. Go on; what else did the dream tole you?”

“That’s all. To watch him. That he would know before we did. Father said that Louvinia would have to watch him too, that even if he was her

son, she would have to be white a little while longer. Because if we watched him, we could tell by what he did when it was getting ready to happen.”

“When what was getting ready to happen?”

“I don’t know.” Ringo breathed deep, once.

“Then hit’s so,” he said. “If somebody tole you, hit could be a lie. But if you dremp hit, hit can’t be a lie case ain’t nobody there to tole hit to you. So we got to watch him.”

We followed them when they put the mules to the wagon and went down beyond the pasture to where they had been cutting wood. We watched them for two days, hidden.

We realised then what a close watch Louvinia had kept on us all the time. Sometimes while we were hidden watching Loosh and Joby load the wagon, we would hear her yelling at us, and we would have to sneak away and then run to let Louvinia find us coming from the other direction.

Sometimes she would even meet us before we had time to circle, and Ringo hiding behind me then while she scolded at us: “What devilment yawl into now? Yawl up to something. What is it?” But we didn’t tell her, and we would follow her back to the kitchen while she scolded at us over her shoulder, and when she was inside the house we would move quietly until we were out of sight again, and then run back to hide and watch Loosh.

So we were outside of his and Philadelphy’s cabin that night when he came out. We followed him down to the new pen and heard him catch the mule and ride away. We ran, but when we reached the road, too, we could only hear the mule loping, dying away. But we had come a good piece, because even Louvinia calling us sounded faint and small. We looked up the road in the starlight, after the mule. “That’s where Corinth is,” I said.

He didn't get back until after dark the next day. We stayed close to the house and watched the road by turns, to get Louvinia calmed down in case it would be late before he got back. It was late; she had followed us up to bed and we had slipped out again; we were just passing Joby's cabin when the door opened and Loosh kind of surged up out of the darkness right beside us.

He was almost close enough for me to have touched him and he did not see us at all; all of a sudden he was just kind of hanging there against the lighted doorway like he had been cut out of tin in the act of running and was inside the cabin and the door shut black again almost before we knew what we had seen.

And when we looked in the window he was standing in front of the fire, with his clothes torn and muddy where he had been hiding in swamps and bottoms from the Patrollers and with that look on his face again which resembled drunkenness but was not, as if he had not slept in a long time and did not want to sleep now, and Joby and Philadelphy leaning into the firelight and looking at him and Philadelphy's mouth open too and the same look on her face.

Then I saw Louvinia standing in the door. We had not heard her behind us yet there she was, with one hand on the door jamb, looking at Loosh, and again she didn't have on Father's old hat.

"You mean they gwinter free us all?" Philadelphy said.

"Yes," Loosh said, loud, with his head flung back; he didn't even look at Joby when Joby said, "Hush up, Loosh!" "Yes!" Loosh said, "Gin'ral Sherman gonter sweep the earth and the race gonter all be free!"

Then Louvinia crossed the floor in two steps and hit Loosh across the head hard with her flat hand. "You black fool!" she said. "Do you think there's enough Yankees in the whole world to whip the white folks?"

We ran to the house, we didn't wait for Louvinia; again we didn't know that she was behind us. We ran into the room where Granny was sitting beside the lamp with the Bible open on her lap and her neck arched to

look at us across her spectacles. “They’re coming here!” I said. “They’re coming to set us free!”

“What?” she said.

“Loosh saw them! They’re just down the road. It’s General Sherman and he’s going to make us all free!” And we watching her, waiting to see who she would send for to take down the musket — whether it would be Joby, because he was the oldest, or Loosh, because he had seen them and would know what to shoot at.

Then she shouted, too, and her voice was strong and loud as Louvinia’s: “You Bayard Sartoris! Ain’t you in bed yet? . . . Louvinia!” she shouted. Louvinia came in.

“Take these children up to bed, and if you hear another sound out of them tonight, you have my permission and my insistence, too, to whip them both.”

It didn’t take us long to get to bed. But we couldn’t talk, because Louvinia was going to bed on the cot in the hall. And Ringo was afraid to come up in the bed with me, so I got down on the pallet with him. “We’ll have to watch the road,” I said. Ringo whimpered.

“Look like hit haf to be us,” he said.

“Are you scared?”

“I ain’t very,” he said. “I just wish Marse John was here.”

“Well, he’s not,” I said. “It’ll have to be us.”

We watched the road for two days, lying in the cedar copse. Now and then Louvinia hollered at us, but we told her where we were and that we were making another map, and besides, she could see the cedar copse from the kitchen. It was cool and shady there, and quiet, and Ringo slept most of the time, and I slept some too.

I was dreaming — it was like I was looking at our place and suddenly the house and stable and cabins and trees and all were gone and I was looking at a place flat and empty as the sideboard, and it was growing darker and darker, and then all of a sudden I wasn't looking at it; I was there — a sort of frightened drove of little tiny figures moving on it; they were Father and Granny and Joby and Louvinia and Loosh and Philadelphly and Ringo and me — and then Ringo made a choked sound and I was looking at the road, and there in the middle of it, sitting on a bright bay horse and looking at the house through a field glass, was a Yankee.

For a long time we just lay there looking at him. I don't know what we had expected to see, but we knew what he was at once; I remember thinking, "He looks just like a man," and then Ringo and I were glaring at each other, and then we were crawling backward down the hill without remembering when we started to crawl, and then we were running across the pasture toward the house without remembering when we got to our feet.

We seemed to run forever, with our heads back and our fists clenched, before we reached the fence and fell over it and ran on into the house. Granny's chair was empty beside the table where her sewing lay.

"Quick!" I said. "Shove it up here!" But Ringo didn't move; his eyes looked like door knobs while I dragged the chair up and climbed onto it and began to lift down the musket. It weighed about fifteen pounds, though it was not the weight so much as the length; when it came free, it and the chair and all went down with a tremendous clatter. We heard Granny sit up in her bed upstairs, and then we heard her voice: "Who is it?"

"Quick!" I said. "Hurry!"

"I'm scared," Ringo said.

"You, Bayard!" Granny said. . . . "Louvinia!"

We held the musket between us like a log of wood. "Do you want to be free?" I said. "Do you want to be free?"

We carried it that way, like a log, one at each end, running. We ran through the grove toward the road and ducked down behind the honeysuckle just as the horse came around the curve. We didn't hear anything else, maybe because of our own breathing or maybe because we were not expecting to hear anything else.

We didn't look again either; we were too busy cocking the musket. We had practiced before, once or twice when Granny was not there and Joby would come in to examine it and change the cap on the nipple. Ringo held it up and I took the barrel in both hands, high, and drew myself up and shut my legs about it and slid down over the hammer until it clicked.

That's what we were doing, we were too busy to look; the musket was already riding up across Ringo's back as he stooped, his hands on his knees and panting, "Shoot the bastud! Shoot him!" and then the sights came level, and as I shut my eyes I saw the man and the bright horse vanish in smoke.

It sounded like thunder and it made as much smoke as a brush fire, and I heard the horse scream, but I didn't see anything else; it was Ringo wailing, "Great God, Bayard! Hit's the whole army!"

4

The house didn't seem to get any nearer; it just hung there in front of us, floating and increasing slowly in size, like something in a dream, and I could hear Ringo moaning behind me, and farther back still the shouts and the hoofs. But we reached the house at last; Louvinia was just inside the door, with Father's old hat on her head rag and her mouth open, but we didn't stop. We ran on into the room where Granny was standing beside the righted chair, her hand at her chest.

"We shot him, Granny!" I cried. "We shot the bastud!"

“What?” She looked at me, her face the same color as her hair almost, her spectacles shining against her hair above her forehead. “Bayard Sartoris, what did you say?”

“We killed him, Granny! At the gate! Only there was the whole army, too, and we never saw them, and now they are coming.”

She sat down; she dropped into the chair, hard, her hand at her breast. But her voice was strong as ever:

“What’s this? You, Marengo! What have you done?”

“We shot the bastud, Granny!” Ringo said. “We kilt him!”

Then Louvinia was there, too, with her mouth still open, too, and her face like somebody had thrown ashes at her. Only it didn’t need her face; we heard the hoofs jerking and sliding in the dirt, and one of them hollering, “Get around to the back there, some of you!” and we looked up and saw them ride past the window — the blue coats and the guns.

Then we heard the boots and spurs on the porch.

“Granny!” I said. “Granny!” But it seemed like none of us could move at all; we just had to stand there looking at Granny with her hand at her breast and her face looking like she had died and her voice like she had died too:

“Louvinia! What is this? What are they trying to tell me?” That’s how it happened — like when once the musket decided to go off, all that was to occur afterward tried to rush into the sound of it all at once. I could still hear it, my ears were still ringing, so that Granny and Ringo and I all seemed to be talking far away.

Then she said, “Quick! Here!” and then Ringo and I were squatting with our knees under our chins, on either side of her against her legs, with the hard points of the chair rockers jammed into our backs and her skirts spread over us like a tent, and the heavy feet coming in and — Louvinia told us afterward — the Yankee sergeant shaking the musket at Granny and saying:

“Come on, grandma! Where are they? We saw them run in here!”

We couldn't see; we just squatted in a kind of faint gray light and that smell of Granny that her clothes and bed and room all had, and Ringo's eyes looking like two plates of chocolate pudding and maybe both of us thinking how Granny had never whipped us for anything in our lives except lying, and that even when it wasn't even a told lie, but just keeping quiet, how she would whip us first and then make us kneel down and kneel down with us herself to ask the Lord to forgive us.

"You are mistaken," she said. "There are no children in this house nor on this place. There is no one here at all except my servant and myself and the people in the quarters."

"You mean you deny ever having seen this gun before?"

"I do." It was that quiet; she didn't move at all, sitting bolt upright and right on the edge of the chair, to keep her skirts spread over us. "If you doubt me, you may search the house."

"Don't you worry about that; I'm going to. . . . Send some of the boys upstairs," he said. "If you find any locked doors, you know what to do. And tell them fellows out back to comb the barn and the cabins too."

"You won't find any locked doors," Granny said. "At least, let me ask you—"

"Don't you ask anything, grandma. You set still. Better for you if you had done a little asking before you sent them little devils out with this gun."

"Was there—" We could hear her voice die away and then speak again, like she was behind it with a switch, making it talk. "Is he — it — the one who—"

"Dead? Hell, yes! Broke his back and we had to shoot him!"

"Had to — you had — shoot—" I didn't know horrified astonishment either, but Ringo and Granny and I were all three it.

"Yes, by God! Had to shoot him! The best horse in the whole army! The whole regiment betting on him for next Sunday—" He said some more,

but we were not listening. We were not breathing either, glaring at each other in the gray gloom, and I was almost shouting, too, until Granny said it:

“Didn’t — they didn’t — Oh, thank God! Thank God!”

“We didn’t—” Ringo said.

“Hush!” I said. Because we didn’t have to say it, it was like we had had to hold our breaths for a long time without knowing it, and that now we could let go and breathe again. Maybe that was why we never heard the other man, when he came in, at all; it was Louvinia that saw that, too — a colonel, with a bright short beard and hard bright gray eyes, who looked at Granny sitting in the chair with her hand at her breast, and took off his hat. Only he was talking to the sergeant.

“What’s this?” he said. “What’s going on here, Harrison?”

“This is where they run to,” the sergeant said. “I’m searching the house.”

“Ah,” the colonel said. He didn’t sound mad at all. He just sounded cold and short and pleasant. “By whose authority?”

“Well, somebody here fired on United States troops. I guess this is authority enough.” We could just hear the sound; it was Louvinia that told us how he shook the musket and banged the butt on the floor.

“And killed one horse,” the colonel said.

“It was a United States horse. I heard the general say myself that if he had enough horses, he wouldn’t always care whether there was anybody to ride them or not. And so here we are, riding peaceful along the road, not bothering nobody yet, and these two little devils — The best horse in the army; the whole regiment betting—”

“Ah,” the colonel said. “I see. Well? Have you found them?”

“We ain’t yet. But these rebels are like rats when it comes to hiding. She says that there ain’t even any children here.”

“Ah,” said the colonel. And Louvinia said how he looked at Granny now for the first time. She said how she could see his eyes going from Granny’s face down to where her skirt was spread, and looking at her skirt for a whole minute and then going back to her face. And that Granny gave him look for look while she lied. “Do I understand, madam, that there are no children in or about this house?”

“There are none, sir,” Granny said.

Louvinia said he looked back at the sergeant. “There are no children here, sergeant. Evidently the shot came from somewhere else. You may call the men in and mount them.”

“But, colonel, we saw them two kids run in here! All of us saw them!”

“Didn’t you just hear this lady say there are no children here? Where are your ears, sergeant? Or do you really want the artillery to overtake us, with a creek bottom not five miles away to be got over?”

“Well, sir, you’re colonel. But if it was me was colonel—”

“Then, doubtless, I should be Sergeant Harrison. In which case, I think I should be more concerned about getting another horse to protect my wager next Sunday than over a grandchildless old lady” — Louvinia said his eyes just kind of touched Granny now and flicked away— “alone in a house which, in all probability — and for her pleasure and satisfaction, I am ashamed to say, I hope — I shall never see again. Mount your men and get along.”

We squatted there, not breathing, and heard them leave the house; we heard the sergeant calling the men up from the barn and we heard them ride away. But we did not move yet, because Granny’s body had not relaxed at all, and so we knew that the colonel was still there, even before he spoke — the voice short, brisk, hard, with that something of laughing behind it: “So you have no grandchildren.

What a pity in a place like this which two boys would enjoy — sports, fishing, game to shoot at, perhaps the most exciting game of all, and

none the less so for being, possibly, a little rare this near the house. And with a gun — a very dependable weapon, I see.” Louvinia said how the sergeant had set the musket in the corner and how the colonel looked at it now, and now we didn’t breathe. “Though I understand that this weapon does not belong to you.

Which is just as well. Because if it were your weapon — which it is not — and you had two grandsons, or say a grandson and a Negro playfellow — which you have not — and if this were the first time — which it is not — someone next time might be seriously hurt. But what am I doing?

Trying your patience by keeping you in that uncomfortable chair while I waste my time delivering a homily suitable only for a lady with grandchildren — or one grandchild and a Negro companion.” Now he was about to go, too; we could tell it even beneath the skirt; this time it was Granny herself:

“There is little of refreshment I can offer you, sir. But if a glass of cool milk after your ride—”

Only, for a long time he didn’t answer at all; Louvinia said how he just looked at Granny with his hard bright eyes and that hard bright silence full of laughing. “No, no,” he said. “I thank you. You are taxing yourself beyond mere politeness and into sheer bravado.”

“Louvinia,” Granny said, “conduct the gentleman to the dining room and serve him with what we have.”

He was out of the room now, because Granny began to tremble now, trembling and trembling, but not relaxing yet; we could hear her panting now. And we breathed, too, now, looking at each other. “We never killed him!” I whispered. “We haven’t killed anybody at all!” So it was Granny’s body that told us again; only this time I could almost feel him looking at Granny’s spread skirt where we crouched while he thanked her for the milk and told her his name and regiment.

“Perhaps it is just as well that you have no grandchildren,” he said. “Since, doubtless, you wish to live in peace. I have three boys myself, you see. And I have not even had time to become a grandparent.”

And now there wasn't any laughing behind his voice, and Louvinia said he was standing there in the door, with the brass bright on his dark blue and his hat in his hand and his bright beard and hair, looking at Granny without the laughing now: “I won't apologise; fools cry out at wind or fire.

But permit me to say and hope that you will never have anything worse than this to remember us by.” Then he was gone. We heard his spurs in the hall and on the porch, then the horse, dying away, ceasing, and then Granny let go.

She went back into the chair with her hand at her breast and her eyes closed and the sweat on her face in big drops; all of a sudden I began to holler, “Louvinia! Louvinia!” But she opened her eyes then and looked at me; they were looking at me when they opened. Then she looked at Ringo for a moment, but she looked back at me, panting.

“Bayard,” she said, “what was that word you used?”

“Word?” I said. “When, Granny?” Then I remembered; I didn't look at her, and she lying back in the chair, looking at me and panting.

“Don't repeat it. You cursed. You used obscene language, Bayard.”

I didn't look at her. I could see Ringo's feet too. “Ringo did too,” I said. She didn't answer, but I could feel her looking at me; I said suddenly: “And you told a lie. You said we were not here.”

“I know it,” she said. She moved. “Help me up.” She got out of the chair, holding to us. We didn't know what she was trying to do. We just stood there while she held to us and to the chair and let herself down to her knees beside it. It was Ringo that knelt first. Then I knelt, too, while she asked the Lord to forgive her for telling the lie. Then she rose; we didn't have time to help her. “Go to the kitchen and get a pan of water and the soap,” she said. “Get the new soap.”

It was late, as if time had slipped up on us while we were still caught, enmeshed by the sound of the musket and were too busy to notice it; the sun shone almost level into our faces while we stood at the edge of the back gallery, spitting, rinsing the soap from our mouths turn and turn about from the gourd dipper, spitting straight into the sun. For a while, just by breathing we could blow soap bubbles, but soon it was just the taste of the spitting.

Then even that began to go away although the impulse to spit did not, while away to the north we could see the cloudbank, faint and blue and faraway at the base and touched with copper sun along the crest. When Father came home in the spring, we tried to understand about mountains. At last he pointed out the cloud bank to tell us what mountains looked like. So ever since then Ringo believed that the cloudbank was Tennessee.

“Yonder they,” he said, spitting. “Yonder hit. Tennessee, where Marse John use to fight um at. Looking mighty far, too.”

“Too far to go just to fight Yankees,” I said, spitting too. But it was gone now — the suds, the glassy weightless iridescent bubbles; even the taste of it.

RETREAT

1

IN THE AFTERNOON Loosh drove the wagon up beside the back gallery and took the mules out; by suppertime we had everything loaded into the wagon but the bedclothes we would sleep under that night. Then Granny went up stairs and when she came back down she had on her Sunday black silk and her hat, and there was color in her face now and her eyes were bright.

“Is we gonter leave tonight?” Ringo said. “I thought we wasn’t going to start until in the morning.”

“We’re not,” Granny said. “But it’s been three years now since I have started anywhere; I reckon the Lord will forgive me for getting ready one day ahead of time.” She turned (we were in the diningroom then, the table set with supper) to Louvinia. “Tell Joby and Loosh to be ready with the lantern and the shovels as soon as they have finished eating.”

Louvinia had set the cornbread on the table and was going out when she stopped and looked at Granny. “You mean you gonter take that heavy trunk all the way to Memphis with you? You gonter dig hit up from where hit been hid safe since last summer, and take hit all the way to Memphis?”

“Yes,” Granny said. “I am following Colonel Sartoris’ instructions as I believe he meant them.” She was eating; she didn’t even look at Louvinia. Louvinia stood there in the pantry door, looking at the back of Granny’s head.

“Whyn’t you leave hit here where hit hid good and I can take care of hit? Who gonter find hit, even if they was to come here again? Hit’s Marse John they done called the reward on; hit ain’t no trunk full of—”

“I have my reasons,” Granny said. “You do what I told you.”

“All right. But how come you wantter dig hit up tonight when you ain’t leaving until tomor—”

“You do what I said,” Granny said.

“Yessum,” Louvinia said. She went out. I looked at Granny eating, with her hat sitting on the exact top of her head, and Ringo looking at me across the back of Granny’s chair with his eyes rolling a little.

“Why not leave it hid?” I said. “It’ll be just that much more load on the wagon. Joby says that trunk will weigh a thousand pounds.”

“A thousand fiddlesticks!” Granny said. “I don’t care if it weighed ten thousand—” Louvinia came in.

"They be ready," she said. "I wish you'd tell me why you got to dig hit up tonight."

Granny looked at her. "I had a dream about it last night."

"Oh," Louvinia said. She and Ringo looked exactly alike, except that Louvinia's eyes were not rolling so much as his.

"I dreamed I was looking out my window, and a man walked into the orchard and went to where it is and stood there pointing at it," Granny said. She looked at Louvinia. "A black man."

"A nigger?" Louvinia said.

"Yes."

For a while Louvinia didn't say anything. Then she said. "Did you know him?"

"Yes," Granny said.

"Is you going to tell who hit was?"

"No," Granny said.

Louvinia turned to Ringo. "Gawn tell your pappy and Loosh to get the lantern and the shovels and come on up here."

Joby and Loosh were in the kitchen. Joby was sitting behind the stove with a plate on his knees, eating. Loosh was sitting on the wood box, still, with the two shovels between his knees, but I didn't see him at first because of Ringo's shadow. The lamp was on the table, and I could see the shadow of Ringo's head bent over and his arm working back and forth, and Louvinia standing between us and the lamp, her hands on her hips and her elbows spread and her shadow filling the room.

"Clean that chimney good," she said.

Joby carried the lantern, with Granny behind him, and then Loosh; I could see her bonnet and Loosh's head and the two shovel blades over his shoulder. Ringo was breathing behind me. "Which un you reckon she drempt about?" he said.

“Why don’t you ask her?” I said. We were in the orchard now.

“Hoo,” Ringo said. “Me ask her? I bet if she stayed here wouldn’t no Yankee nor nothing else bother that trunk, nor Marse John neither, if he knowed hit.”

Then they stopped — Joby and Granny, and while Granny held the lantern at arm’s length, Joby and Loosh dug the trunk up from where they had buried it that night last summer while Father was at home, while Louvinia stood in the door of the bedroom without even lighting the lamp while Ringo and I went to bed and later I either looked out or dreamed I looked out the window and saw (or dreamed I saw) the lantern.

Then, with Granny in front and still carrying the lantern and with Ringo and I both helping to carry it, we returned toward the house. Before we reached the house Joby began to bear away toward where the loaded wagon stood.

“Take it into the house,” Granny said.

“We’ll just load hit now and save having to handle hit again in the morning,” Joby said. “Come on here, nigger,” he said to Loosh.

“Take it into the house,” Granny said. So, after a while, Joby moved on toward the house. We could hear him breathing now, saying “Hah!” every few steps. Inside the kitchen he let his end down, hard.

“Hah!” he said. “That’s done, thank God.”

“Take it upstairs,” Granny said.

Joby turned and looked at her. He hadn’t straightened up yet; he turned, half stooping, and looked at her. “Which?” he said.

“Take it upstairs,” Granny said. “I want it in my room.”

“You mean you gonter tote this thing all the way upstairs and then tote it back down tomorrow?”

“Somebody is,” Granny said. “Are you going to help or are me and Bayard going to do it alone?”

Then Louvinia came in. She had already undressed. She looked tall as a ghost, in one dimension like a bolster case, taller than a bolster case in her nightgown; silent as a ghost on her bare feet which were the same color as the shadow in which she stood so that she seemed to have no feet, the twin rows of her toenails lying weightless and faint and still as two rows of faintly soiled feathers on the floor about a foot below the hem of her nightgown as if they were not connected with her.

She came and shoved Joby aside and stooped to lift the trunk. “Git away, nigger,” she said. Joby groaned, then he shoved Louvinia aside.

“Git away, woman,” he said. He lifted his end of the trunk, then he looked back at Loosh, who had never let his end down. “If you gonter ride on hit, pick up your feet,” he said. We carried the trunk up to Granny’s room, and Joby was setting it down again, until Granny made him and Loosh pull the bed out from the wall and slide the trunk in behind it; Ringo and I helped again. I don’t believe it lacked much of weighing a thousand pounds.

“Now I want everybody to go right to bed, so we can get an early start tomorrow,” Granny said.

“That’s you,” Joby said. “Git everybody up at crack of day and it be noon ‘fore we get started.”

“Nummine about that,” Louvinia said. “You do like Miss Rosa tell you.” We went out; we left Granny there beside her bed now well away from the wall and in such an ungainly position that anyone would have known at once that something was concealed, even if the trunk which Ringo and I as well as Joby believed now to weigh at least a thousand pounds, could have been hidden.

As it was, the bed merely underlined it. Then Granny shut the door behind us and then Ringo and I stopped dead in the hall and looked at one another. Since I could remember, there had never been a key to any door, inside or outside, about the house. Yet we had heard a key turn in the lock.

“I didn’t know there was ere a key would fit hit,” Ringo said, “let alone turn.”

“And that’s some more of yawls’ and Joby’s business,” Louvinia said. She had not stopped; she was already reclining on her cot and as we looked toward her she was already in the act of drawing the quilt up over her face and head. “Yawl get on to bed.”

We went on to our room and began to undress. The lamp was lighted and there was already laid out across two chairs our Sunday clothes which we too would put on tomorrow to go to Memphis in. “Which un you reckon she drempt about?” Ringo said. But I didn’t answer that; I knew that Ringo knew I didn’t need to.

2

We put on our Sunday clothes by lamplight, we ate breakfast by it and listened to Louvinia above stairs as she removed from Granny’s and my beds the linen we had slept under last night and rolled up Ringo’s pallet and carried them downstairs; in the first beginning of day we went out to where Loosh and Joby had already put the mules into the wagon and where Joby stood in what he called his Sunday clothes too — the old frock coat, the napless beaver hat, of Father’s.

When Granny came out (still in the black silk and the bonnet as if she had slept in them, passed the night standing rigidly erect with her hand on the key which she had produced from we knew not where and locked her door for the first time Ringo and I knew of) with her shawl over her shoulders and carrying her parasol and the musket from the pegs over the mantel. She held out the musket to Joby. “Here,” she said. Joby looked at it.

“We won’t need hit,” he said.

“Put it in the wagon,” Granny said.

“Nome. We won’t need nothing like that. We be in Memphis so quick won’t nobody even have time to hear we on the road. I speck Marse John got the Yankees pretty well cleant out between here and Memphis anyway.”

This time Granny didn’t say anything at all. She just stood there holding out the musket until after a while Joby took it and put it into the wagon. “Now go get the trunk,” Granny said. Joby was still putting the musket into the wagon; he stopped, his head turned a little.

“Which?” he said. He turned a little more, still not looking at Granny standing on the steps and looking at him; he was not looking at any of us, not speaking to any of us in particular. “Ain’t I tole you?” he said.

“If anything ever came into your mind that you didn’t tell to somebody inside of ten minutes, I don’t remember it,” Granny said. “But just what do you refer to now?”

“Nummine that,” Joby said. “Come on here, Loosh. Bring that boy with you.” They passed Granny and went on. She didn’t look at them; it was as if they had walked not only out of her sight but out of her mind. Evidently Joby thought they had.

He and Granny were like that; they were like a man and a mare, a blooded mare, which takes just exactly so much from the man and the man knows the mare will take just so much and the man knows that when that point is reached, just what is going to happen.

Then it does happen: the mare kicks him, not viciously but just enough, and the man knows it was going to happen and so he is glad then, it is over then, or he thinks it is over, so he lies or sits on the ground and cusses the mare a little because he thinks it is over, finished, and then the mare turns her head and nips him. That’s how Joby and Granny

were and Granny always beat him, not bad: just exactly enough, like now; he and Loosh were just about to go in the door and Granny still not even looking after them, when Joby said, "I done tole um.

And I reckon even you can't dispute hit." Then Granny, without moving anything but her lips, still looking out beyond the waiting wagon as if we were not going anywhere and Joby didn't even exist, said, "And put the bed back against the wall." This time Joby didn't answer.

He just stopped perfectly still, not even looking back at Granny, until Loosh said quietly, "Gawn, pappy. Get on." They went on; Granny and I stood at the end of the gallery and heard them drag the trunk out, then shove the bed back where it had been yesterday; we heard them on the stairs with the trunk — the slow, clumsy, coffinsounding thumps. Then they came out onto the gallery.

"Go and help them," Granny said without looking back. "Remember, Joby is getting old." We put the trunk into the wagon, along with the musket and the basket of food and the bedclothing, and got in ourselves — Granny on the seat beside Joby, the bonnet on the exact top of her head and the parasol raised even before the dew had begun to fall — and we drove away. Loosh had already disappeared, but Louvinia still stood at the end of the gallery with Father's old hat on top of her head rag.

Then I stopped looking back, though I could feel Ringo beside me on the trunk turning every few yards, even after we were outside the gate and in the road to town. Then we came to the curve where we had seen the Yankee sergeant on the bright horse last summer.

"Hit gone now," Ringo said. "Goodbye, Sartoris; Memphis, how-dy-do!"

The sun was just rising when we came in sight of Jefferson; we passed a company of troops bivouacked in a pasture beside the road, eating breakfast. Their uniforms were not gray anymore now; they were almost the color of dead leaves and some of them didn't even have

uniforms and one man waved a skillet at us and he had on a pair of blue Yankee pants with a yellow cavalry stripe like Father wore home last summer. "Hey, Miss-ippi!" he shouted. "Hooraw for Arkansaw!"

We left Granny at Mrs. Compson's, to tell Mrs. Compson goodbye and to ask her to drive out home now and then and look after the flowers. Then Ringo and I drove the wagon on to the store and we were just coming out with the sack of salt when Uncle Buck McCaslin came hobbling across the square, waving his stick and hollering, and behind him the captain of the company we had passed eating breakfast in the pasture. There were two of them; I mean, there were two McCaslins, Amodeus and Theophilus, twins, only everybody called them Buck and Buddy except themselves.

They were bachelors, they had a big bottom-land plantation about fifteen miles from town. It had a big colonial house on it which their father had built and which people said was still one of the finest houses in the country when they inherited it.

But it wasn't now, because Uncle Buck and Buddy didn't live in it. They never had lived in it since their father died. They lived in a two-room log house with about a dozen dogs, and they kept their niggers in the manor house.

It didn't have any windows now and a child with a hairpin could unlock any lock in it, but every night when the niggers came up from the fields Uncle Buck or Uncle Buddy would drive them into the house and lock the door with a key almost as big as a horse pistol; probably they would still be locking the front door long after the last nigger had escaped out the back.

And folks said that Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy knew this and that the niggers knew they knew it, only it was like a game with rules — neither one of Uncle Buck or Uncle Buddy to peep around the corner of the house while the other was locking the door, none of the niggers to escape in such a way as to be seen even by unavoidable accident, nor to escape at any other time; they even said that the ones who couldn't

get out while the door was being locked voluntarily considered themselves interdict until the next evening.

Then they would hang the key on a nail beside the door and go back to their own little house full of dogs and eat supper and play head-and-head poker; and they said how no man in the state or on the River either would have dared to play with them even if they did not cheat, but that in the game as they played it between themselves, betting niggers and wagon-loads of cotton with one another on the turn of a single card, the Lord Himself might have held His own with one of them at a time, but that with both of them even He would have lost His shirt.

There was more to Uncle Buck and Buddy than just that. Father said they were ahead of their time; he said they not only possessed, but put into practice, ideas about social relationship that maybe fifty years after they were both dead people would have a name for. These ideas were about land.

They believed that land did not belong to people but that people belonged to land and that the earth would permit them to live on and out of it and use it only so long as they behaved and that if they did not behave right, it would shake them off just like a dog getting rid of fleas. They had some kind of a system of bookkeeping which must have been even more involved than their betting score against one another, by which all their niggers were to be freed, not given freedom, but earning it, buying it not in money from Uncle Buck and Buddy, but in work from the plantation.

Only there were others besides niggers, and this was the reason why Uncle Buck came hobbling across the square, shaking his stick at me and hollering, or at least why it was Uncle Buck who was hobbling and hollering and shaking the stick. One day Father said how they suddenly realised that if the county ever split up into private feuds either with votes or weapons, no family could contend with the McCaslins because all the other families would have only their cousins and kin to recruit from, while Uncle Buck and Buddy would already have an army.

These were the dirt farmers, the people whom the niggers called 'white trash' — men who had owned no slaves and some of whom even lived worse than the slaves on big plantations. It was another side of Uncle Buck's and Buddy's ideas about men and land, which Father said people didn't have a name for yet, by which Uncle Buck and Buddy had persuaded the white men to pool their little patches of poor hill land along with the niggers and the McCaslin plantation, promising them in return nobody knew exactly what, except that their women and children did have shoes, which not all of them had had before, and a lot of them even went to school.

Anyway, they (the white men, the trash) looked on Uncle Buck and Buddy like Deity Himself, so that when Father began to raise his first regiment to take to Virginia and Uncle Buck and Buddy came to town to enlist and the others decided they were too old (they were past seventy), it looked for a while as if Father's regiment would have to fight its first engagement right there in our pasture.

At first Uncle Buck and Buddy said they would form a company of their own men in opposition to Father's. Then they realised that this wouldn't stop Father, so then Uncle Buck and Buddy put the thumbscrews on Father sure enough.

They told Father that if he did not let them go, the solid bloc of private soldier white trash votes which they controlled would not only force Father to call a special election of officers before the regiment left the pasture, it would also demote Father from colonel to major or maybe only a company commander.

Father didn't mind what they called him; colonel or corporal, it would have been all the same to him, as long as they let him tell them what to do, and he probably wouldn't have minded being demoted even to private by God Himself; it was the idea that there could be latent within the men he led the power, let alone the desire, to so affront him. So they compromised; they agreed at last that one of the McCaslins should be allowed to go.

Father and Uncle Buck and Buddy shook hands on it and they stuck to it; the following summer after Second Manassas when the men did demote Father, it was the McCaslin votes who stuck with and resigned from the regiment along with Father and returned to Mississippi with him and formed his irregular cavalry.

So one of them was to go, and they decided themselves which one it would be; they decided in the one possible manner in which the victor could know that he had earned his right, the loser that he had been conquered by a better man; Uncle Buddy looked at Uncle Buck and said, "All right, 'Philus, you old butter-fingered son of a bitch. Get out the cards."

Father said it was fine, that there were people there who had never seen anything like it for cold and ruthless artistry. They played three hands of draw poker, the first two hands dealt in turn, the winner of the second hand to deal the third; they sat there (somebody had spread a blanket and the whole regiment watched) facing each other with the two old faces that did not look exactly alike so much as they looked exactly like something which after a while you remembered — the portrait of someone who had been dead a long time and that you knew just by looking at him he had been a preacher in some place like Massachusetts a hundred years ago; they sat there and called those face-down cards correctly without even looking at the backs of them apparently, so that it took sometimes eight and ten deals before the referees could be certain that neither of them knew exactly what was in the other's hand.

And Uncle Buck lost: so that now Uncle Buddy was a sergeant in Tennant's brigade in Virginia and Uncle Buck was hobbling across the square, shaking his stick at me and hollering:
"By Godfrey, there he is! There's John Sartoris' boy!"

The captain came up and looked at me. "I've heard of your father," he said.

“Heard of him?” Uncle Buck shouted. By now people had begun to stop along the walk and listen to him, like they always did, not smiling so he could see it. “Who ain’t heard about him in this country? Get the Yankees to tell you about him sometime.

By Godfrey, he raised the first damn regiment in Mississippi out of his own pocket, and took ’em to Ferginny and whipped Yankees right and left with ’em before he found out that what he had bought and paid for wasn’t a regiment of soldiers but a congress of politicians and fools.

Fools I say!” he shouted, shaking the stick at me and glaring with his watery fierce eyes like the eyes of an old hawk, with the people along the street listening to him and smiling where he couldn’t see it and the strange captain looking at him a little funny because he hadn’t heard Uncle Buck before; and I kept on thinking about Louvinia standing there on the porch with Father’s old hat on, and wishing that Uncle Buck would get through or hush so we could go on.

“Fools, I say!” he shouted. “I don’t care if some of you folks here do still claim kin with men that elected him colonel and followed him and Stonewall Jackson right up to spitting distance of Washington without hardly losing a man, and then next year turned around and voted him down to major and elected in his stead a damn feller that never even knowed which end of a gun done the shooting until John Sartoris showed him.”

He quit shouting just as easy as he started but the shouting was right there, waiting to start again as soon as he found something else to shout about. “I won’t say God take care of you and your grandma on the road, boy, because by Godfrey you don’t need God’s nor nobody else’s help; all you got to say is ‘I’m John Sartoris’ boy; rabbits, hunt the canebrake’ and then watch the blue-bellied sons of bitches fly.”

“Are they leaving, going away?” the captain said.

Then Uncle Buck begun to shout again, going into the shouting easy, without even having to draw a breath: “Leaving? Hell’s skillet, who’s

going to take care of them around here? John Sartoris is a damn fool; they voted him out of his own private regiment in kindness, so he could come home and take care of his family, knowing that if he didn't wouldn't nobody around here be likely to.

But that don't suit John Sartoris because John Sartoris is a damned confounded selfish coward, askeered to stay at home where the Yankees might get him. Yes, sir. So skeered that he has to raise him up another batch of men to protect him every time he gets within a hundred foot of a Yankee brigade. Scouring all up and down the country, finding Yankees to dodge; only if it had been me I would have took back to Ferginny and I'd have showed that new colonel what fighting looked like. But not John Sartoris. He's a coward and a fool.

The best he can do is dodge and run away from Yankees until they have to put a price on his head, and now he's got to send his family out of the country; to Memphis where maybe the Union Army will take care of them, since it don't look like his own government and fellow citizens are going to." He ran out of breath then, or out of words anyway, standing there with his tobacco-stained beard trembling and more tobacco running onto it out of his mouth, and shaking his stick at me. So I lifted the reins; only the captain spoke; he was still watching me.

"How many men has your father got in his regiment?" he said. "It's not a regiment, sir," I said. "He's got about fifty, I reckon."

"Fifty?" the captain said. "Fifty? We had a prisoner last week who said he had more than a thousand. He said that Colonel Sartoris didn't fight; he just stole horses."

Uncle Buck had enough wind to laugh though. He sounded just like a hen, slapping his leg and holding to the wagon wheel like he was about to fall. "That's it! That's John Sartoris! He gets the horses; any fool can step out and get a Yankee. These two damn boys here did that last summer — stepped down to the gate and brought back a whole regiment, and them just — How old are you, boy?"

"Fourteen," I said.

"We ain't fourteen yit," Ringo said. "But we will be in September, if we live and nothing happens. . . . I reckon Granny waiting on us, Bayard."

Uncle Buck quit laughing. He stepped back. "Git on," he said. "You got a long road." I turned the wagon. "You take care of your grandma, boy, or John Sartoris will skin you alive. And if he don't, I will!" When the wagon straightened out, he began to hobble along beside it. "And when you see him, tell him I said to leave the horses go for a while and kill the blue-bellied sons of bitches. Kill them!"

"Yes, sir," I said. We went on.

"Good thing for his mouth Granny ain't here," Ringo said. She and Joby were waiting for us at the Compsons' gate. Joby had another basket with a napkin over it and a bottle neck sticking out and some rose cuttings. Then Ringo and I sat behind again, and Ringo turning to look back every few feet and saying, "Goodbye, Jefferson.

Memphis, how-de-do!" And then we came to the top of the first hill and he looked back, quiet this time, and said, "Suppose they don't never get done fighting."

"All right," I said. "Suppose it." I didn't look back.

At noon we stopped by a spring and Granny opened the basket, and she took out the rose cuttings and handed them to Ringo.

"Dip the roots into the spring after you drink," she said. They had earth still on the roots, in a cloth; when Ringo stooped down to the water, I watched him pinch off a little of the dirt and start to put it into his pocket. Then he looked up and saw me watching him, and he made like he was going to throw it away. But he didn't.

"I reckon I can save dirt if I want to," he said.

"It's not Sartoris dirt though," I said.

"I know hit," he said. "Hit's closer than Memphis dirt though. Closer than what you got."

"What'll you bet?" I said. He looked at me. "What'll you swap?" I said. He looked at me.

"What you swap?" he said.

"You know," I said. He reached into his pocket and brought out the buckle we had shot off the Yankee saddle when we shot the horse last summer. "Gimmit here," he said.

So I took the snuff box from my pocket and emptied half the soil (it was more than Sartoris earth; it was Vicksburg too: the yelling was in it, the embattled, the iron-worn, the supremely invincible) into his hand. "I know hit," he said. "Hit come from 'hind the smokehouse. You brung a lot of hit."

"Yes," I said. "I brought enough to last."

We soaked the cuttings every time we stopped and opened the basket, and there was some of the food left on the fourth day because at least once a day we stopped at houses on the road and ate with them, and on the second night we had supper and breakfast at the same house.

But even then Granny would not come inside to sleep. She made her bed down in the wagon by the chest and Joby slept under the wagon with the gun beside him like when we camped on the road.

Only it would not be exactly on the road but back in the woods a way; on the third night Granny was in the wagon and Joby and Ringo and I were under the wagon and some cavalry rode up and Granny said, "Joby! the gun!" and somebody got down and took the gun away from Joby and they lit a pine knot and we saw the gray.

"Memphis?" the officer said. "You can't get to Memphis. There was a fight at Cockrum yesterday and the roads ahead are full of Yankee patrols. How in hell — Excuse me, ma'am (behind me Ringo said, "Git

the soap”) — you ever got this far I don’t see. If I were you, I wouldn’t even try to go back, I’d stop at the first house I came to and stay there.”

“I reckon we’ll go on,” Granny said, “like John — Colonel Sartoris told us to. My sister lives in Memphis; we are going there.”

“Colonel Sartoris?” the officer said. “Colonel Sartoris told you?”
“I’m his mother-in-law,” Granny said. “This is his son.”

“Good Lord, ma’am! You can’t go a step farther. Don’t you know that if they captured you and this boy, they could almost force him to come in and surrender?”

Granny looked at him; she was sitting up in the wagon and her hat was on. “My experience with Yankees has evidently been different from yours. I have no reason to believe that their officers — I suppose they still have officers among them — will bother a woman and two children. I thank you, but my son has directed us to go to Memphis. If there is any information about the roads which my driver should know, I will be obliged if you will instruct him.”

“Then let me give you an escort. Or better still, there is a house about a mile back; return there and wait. Colonel Sartoris was at Cockrum yesterday; by tomorrow night I believe I can find him and bring him to you.”

“Thank you,” Granny said. “Wherever Colonel Sartoris is, he is doubtless busy with his own affairs. I think we will continue to Memphis as he instructed us.”

So they rode away and Joby came back under the wagon and put the musket between us; only, every time I turned over I rolled on it, so I made him move it and he tried to put it in the wagon with Granny, and she wouldn’t let him, so he leaned it against a tree and we slept and ate breakfast and went on, with Ringo and Joby looking behind every tree we passed.

“You ain’t going to find them behind a tree we have already passed,” I said. We didn’t. We had passed where a house had burned, and then we were passing another house with an old white horse looking at us out of the stable door behind it, and then I saw six men running in the next field, and then we saw a dust cloud coming fast out of a lane that crossed the road.

Joby said, “Them folks look like they trying to make the Yankees take they stock, running hit up and down the big road in broad daylight like that.”

They rode right out of the dust cloud without seeing us at all, crossing the road, and the first ten or twelve had already jumped the ditch with pistols in their hands, like when you run with a stick of stove wood balanced on your palm; and the last ones came out of the dust with five men running and holding to stirrups, and us sitting there in the wagon with Joby holding the mules like they were sitting down on the whiffletrees and his mouth hanging open and his eyes like two eggs, and I had forgotten what the blue coats looked like.

It was fast — like that — all sweating horses with wild eyes, and men with wild faces full of yelling, and then Granny standing up in the wagon and beating the five men about their heads and shoulders with the umbrella while they unfastened the traces and cut the harness off the mules with pocket knives.

They didn’t say a word; they didn’t even look at Granny while she was hitting them; they just took the mules out of the wagon, and then the two mules and the five men disappeared together in another cloud of dust, and the mules came out of the dust, soaring like hawks, with two men on them and two more just falling backward over the mules’ tails and the fifth man already running, too, and the two that were on their backs in the road getting up with little scraps of cut leather sticking to them like a kind of black shavings in a sawmill.

The three of them went off across the field after the mules, and then we heard the pistols away off like striking a handful of matches at one

time, and Joby still sitting on the seat with his mouth still open and the ends of the cut reins in his hands, and Granny still standing in the wagon with the bent umbrella lifted and hollering at Ringo and me while we jumped out of the wagon and ran across the road.

“The stable,” I said. “The stable!” While we were running up the hill toward the house, we could see our mules still galloping in the field, and we could see the three men running too.

When we ran around the house, we could see the wagon, too, in the road, with Joby on the seat above the wagon tongue sticking straight out ahead, and Granny standing up and shaking the umbrella toward us, and even though I couldn’t hear her I knew she was still shouting.

Our mules had run into the woods, but the three men were still in the field and the old white horse was watching them, too, in the barn door; he never saw us until he snorted and jerked back and kicked over something behind him. It was a homemade shoeing box, and he was tied by a rope halter to the ladder to the loft, and there was even a pipe still burning on the ground.

We climbed onto the ladder and got on him, and when we came out of the barn we could still see the three men; but we had to stop while Ringo got down and opened the lot gate and got back on again, and so they were gone, too, by then.

When we reached the woods, there was no sign of them and we couldn’t hear anything, either, but the old horse’s insides. We went on slower then, because the old horse wouldn’t go fast again, anyway, and so we tried to listen, and so it was almost sunset when we came out into a road.

“Here where they went,” Ringo said. They were mule tracks. “Tinney and Old Hundred’s tracks bofe,” Ringo said. “I know um anywhere. They done throwed them Yankees and heading back home.”

“Are you sure?” I said.

“Is I sure? You reckon I ain’t followed them mules all my life and can’t tell they tracks when I see um? . . . Git up there, horse!”

We went on, but the old horse could not go very fast. After a while the moon came up, but Ringo still said he could see the tracks of our mules. So we went on, only now the old horse went even slower than ever because presently I caught Ringo and held him as he slipped off and then a little later Ringo caught and held me from slipping before I even knew that I had been asleep.

We didn’t know what time it was, we didn’t care; we only heard after a time the slow hollow repercussion of wood beneath the horse’s feet and we turned from the road and hitched the bridle to a sapling; we probably both crawled beneath the bridge already asleep; still sleeping, we doubtless continued to crawl.

Because if we had not moved, they would not have found us. I waked, still believing I dreamed of thunder. It was light; even beneath the close weed-choked bridge Ringo and I could sense the sun though not at once; for the time we just sat there beneath the loud drumming, while the loose planks of the bridge floor clattered and danced to the hooves; we sat there for a moment staring at one another in the pale jonquil-colored light almost before we were awake.

Perhaps that was it, perhaps we were still asleep, were taken so suddenly in slumber that we had not time to think of Yankees or anything else; we were out from beneath the bridge and already running before we remembered having begun to move; I looked back one time and (the road, the bridge, was five or six feet higher than the earth beside it) it looked as if the whole rim of the world was full of horses running along the sky.

Then everything ran together again as it had yesterday; even while our legs still continued to run Ringo and I had dived like two rabbits into a brier patch, feeling no thorn, and lay on our faces in it while men shouted and horses crashed around us, then hard hands dragged us,

clawing and kicking and quite blind, out of the thicket and onto our feet.

Then sight returned — a vacuum, an interval, of amazing and dewy-breathed peace and quiet while Ringo and I stood in a circle of mounted and dismounted men and horses. Then I recognised Jupiter standing big and motionless and pale in the dawn as a mesmerised flame, then Father was shaking me and shouting, “Where’s your grandmother? Where’s Miss Rosa?” and then Ringo, in a tone of complete amazement: “We done fergot Granny!”

“Forgot her?” Father shouted. “You mean you ran away and left her sitting there in that wagon in the middle of the road?”

“Lord, Marse John,” Ringo said. “You know hit ain’t no Yankee gonter bother her if he know hit.”

Father swore. “How far back did you leave her?”

“It was about three o’clock yesterday,” I said. “We rode some last night.”

Father turned to the others. “Two of you boys take them up behind you; we’ll lead that horse.” Then he stopped and turned back to us. “Have you-all had anything to eat?”

“Eat?” Ringo said. “My stomach think my throat been cut.”

Father took a pone of bread from his saddle bag and broke it and gave it to us. “Where did you get that horse?” he said.

After a while I said, “We borrowed it.”

“Who from?” Father said.

After a while Ringo said, “We ain’t know. The man wasn’t there.” One of the men laughed. Father looked at him quick, and he hushed. But just for a minute, because all of a sudden they all began to whoop and holler, and Father looking around at them and his face getting redder and redder.

“Don’t you say a word, Colonel,” one of them said. “Hooraw for Sartoris!”

We galloped back; it was not far; we came to the field where the men had run, and the house with the barn, and in the road we could still see the scraps of harness where they had cut it. But the wagon was gone.

Father led the old horse up to the house himself and knocked on the porch floor with his pistol, and the door of the house was still open, but nobody came. We put the old horse back into the barn; the pipe was still on the ground by the overturned shoeing box. We came back to the road and Father sat Jupiter in the middle of the litter of harness scraps.

“You damn boys,” he said. “You damn boys.”

When we went on now, we went slower; there were three men riding on ahead out of sight. In the afternoon, one of them came galloping back, and Father left Ringo and me three others, and he and the rest rode on; it was almost sunset when they came back with their horses sweated a little and leading two new horses with blue blankets under the saddles and U. S. burned on the horses’ hips.

“I tole you they wasn’t no Yankees gonter stop Granny,” Ringo said. “I bet she in Memphis right now.”

“I hope for your sake she is,” Father said. He jerked his hand at the new horses. “You and Bayard get on them.” Ringo went to one of the new horses. “Wait,” Father said; “the other one is yours.”

“You mean hit belong to me?” Ringo said.

“No,” Father said. “You borrowed it.”

Then we all stopped and watched Ringo trying to get on his horse. The horse would stand perfectly still until he would feel Ringo’s weight on the stirrup; then he would whirl completely around until his off side faced Ringo; the first time Ringo wound up lying on his back in the road.

“Get on him from that side,” Father said laughing.

Ringo looked at the horse and then at Father. “Git up from the wrong side?” Ringo said. “I knowed Yankees wasn’t folks, but I never knowed before they horses ain’t horses.”

“Get on up,” Father said. “He’s blind in his near eye.”

It got dark while we were still riding, and after a while I waked up with somebody holding me in the saddle, and we were stopped in some trees and there was a fire, but Ringo and I didn’t even stay awake to eat, and then it was morning again and all of them were gone but Father and eleven more, but we didn’t start off even then; we stayed there in the trees all day. “What are we going to do now?” I said.

“I’m going to take you damn boys home, and then I’ve got to go to Memphis and find your grandmother,” Father said.

Just before dark we started; we watched Ringo trying to get on his horse from the nigh side for a while and then we went on. We rode until dawn and stopped again. This time we didn’t build a fire; we didn’t even unsaddle right away; we lay hidden in the woods, and then Father was waking me with his hand. It was after sunup and we lay there and listened to a column of Yankee infantry pass in the road, and then I slept again. It was noon when I waked. There was a fire now and a shote cooking over it, and we ate. “We’ll be home by midnight,” Father said.

Jupiter was rested. He didn’t want the bridle for a while and then he didn’t want Father to get on him, and even after we were started he still wanted to go; Father had to hold him back between Ringo and me. Ringo was on his right. “You and Bayard better swap sides,” Father told Ringo, “so your horse can see what’s beside him.”

“He going all right,” Ringo said. “He like hit this way. Maybe because he can smell Jupiter another horse, and know Jupiter ain’t fixing to get on him and ride.”

“All right,” Father said. “Watch him though.” We went on. Mine and Ringo’s horses could go pretty well, too; when I looked back, the others were a good piece behind, out of our dust. It wasn’t far to sundown.

“I wish I knew your grandmother was all right,” Father said.

“Lord, Marse John,” Ringo said, “is you still worrying about Granny? I been knowed her all my life; I ain’t worried about her.”

Jupiter was fine to watch, with his head up and watching my horse and Ringo’s, and boring a little and just beginning to drive a little. “I’m going to let him go a little,” Father said. “You and Ringo watch yourselves.” I thought Jupiter was gone then. He went out like a rocket, flattening a little.

But I should have known that Father still held him, because I should have seen that he was still boring, but there was a snake fence along the road, and all of a sudden it began to blur, and then I realised that Father and Jupiter had not moved up at all, that it was all three of us flattening out up toward the crest of the hill where the road dipped like three swallows, and I was thinking, ‘We’re holding Jupiter. We’re holding Jupiter,’ when Father looked back, and I saw his eyes and his teeth in his beard, and I knew he still had Jupiter on the bit.

He said, “Watch out, now,” and then Jupiter shot out from between us; he went out exactly like I have seen a hawk come out of a sage field and rise over a fence.

When they reached the crest of the hill, I could see sky under them and the tops of the trees beyond the hill like they were flying, sailing out into the air to drop down beyond the hill like the hawk; only they didn’t.

It was like Father stopped Jupiter in mid-air on top of the hill; I could see him standing in the stirrups and his arm up with his hat in it, and then Ringo and I were on them before we could even begin to think to pull, and Jupiter reined back onto his haunches, and then Father hit

Ringo's horse across the blind eye with the hat and I saw Ringo's horse swerve and jump clean over the snake fence, and I heard Ringo hollering as I went on over the crest of the hill, with Father just behind me shooting his pistol and shouting, "Surround them, boys! Don't let a man escape!"

There is a limit to what a child can accept, assimilate; not to what it can believe because a child can believe anything, given time, but to what it can accept, a limit in time, in the very time which nourishes the believing of the incredible.

And I was still a child at that moment when Father's and my horses came over the hill and seemed to cease galloping and to float, hang suspended rather in a dimension without time in it while Father held my horse reined back with one hand and I heard Ringo's half-blind beast crashing and blundering among the trees to our right and Ringo yelling, and looked quietly down at the scene beneath rather than before us — the dusk, the fire, the creek running quiet and peaceful beneath a bridge, the muskets all stacked carefully and neatly and nobody within fifty feet of them; and the men, the faces, the blue Yankee coats and pants and boots, squatting about the fire with cups in their hands and looking toward the crest of the hill with the same peaceful expression on all their faces like so many dolls. Father's hat was flung onto his head now, his teeth were showing and his eyes were bright as a cat's.

"Lieutenant," he said, loud, jerking my horse around, "ride back up the hill and close in with your troop on their right. Git!" he whispered, slapping my horse across the rump with his hand. "Make a fuss! Holler! See if you can keep up with Ringo. — Boys," he said, while they still looked up at him; they hadn't even put the cups down: "Boys, I'm John Sartoris, and I reckon I've got you."

Ringo was the only difficult one to capture. The rest of Father's men came piling over the hill, reining back, and I reckon that for a minute their faces looked about like the Yankees' faces did, and now and then I would quit thrashing the bushes and I could hear Ringo on his side

hollering and moaning and hollering again, "Marse John! You, Marse John! You come here quick!" and hollering for me, calling Bayard and Colonel and Marse John and Granny until it did sound like a company at least, and then hollering at his horse again, and it running back and forth. I reckon he had forgotten again and was trying to get up on the nigh side again, until at last Father said, "All right, boys. You can come on in."

It was almost dark then. They had built up the fire, and the Yankees still sitting around it and Father and the others standing over them with their pistols while two of them were taking the Yankees' pants and boots off. Ringo was still hollering off in the trees. "I reckon you better go and extricate Lieutenant Marengo," Father said.

Only about that time Ringo's horse came bursting out with his blind eye looking big as a plate and still trotting in a circle with his knees up to his chin, and then Ringo came out. He looked wilder than the horse; he was already talking, he was saying, "I'm gonter tell Granny on you, making my horse run—" when he saw the Yankees.

His mouth was already open, and he kind of squatted for a second, looking at them. Then he hollered, "Look out! Ketch um! Ketch um, Marse John! They stole Old Hundred and Tinney!"

We all ate supper together — Father and us and the Yankees in their underclothes.

The officer talked to Father. He said, "Colonel, I believe you have fooled us. I don't believe there's another man of you but what I see."

"You might try to depart, and prove your point," Father said.

"Depart? Like this? And have every darky and old woman between here and Memphis shooting at us for ghosts? . . . I suppose we can have our blankets to sleep in, can't we?"

"Certainly, Captain," Father said. "And with your permission, I shall now retire and leave you to set about that business."

We went back into the darkness. We could see them about the fire, spreading their blankets on the ground. "What in thearnation do you want with sixty prisoners, John?" one of Father's men said.

"I don't," Father said. He looked at me and Ringo. "You boys captured them. What do you want to do with them?"

"Shoot 'em," Ringo said. "This ain't the first time me and Bayard ever shot Yankees."

"No," Father said. "I have a better plan than that. One that Joe Johnston will thank us for." He turned to the others behind him. "Have you got the muskets and ammunition?"

"Yes, Colonel," somebody said.

"Grub, boots, clothes?"

"Everything but the blankets, Colonel."

"We'll pick them up in the morning," Father said. "Now wait."

We sat there in the dark. The Yankees were going to bed. One of them went to the fire and picked up a stick. Then he stopped. He didn't turn his head and we didn't hear anything or see anybody move. Then he put the stick down again and came back to his blanket.

"Wait," Father whispered. After a while the fire had died down. "Now listen," Father whispered. So we sat there in the dark and listened to the Yankees sneaking off into the bushes in their underclothes. Once we heard a splash and somebody cursing, and then a sound like somebody had shut his hand over his mouth. Father didn't laugh out loud; he just sat there shaking.

"Look out for moccasins," one of the others whispered behind us. It must have taken them two hours to get done sneaking off into the bushes. Then Father said, "Everybody get a blanket and let's go to bed."

The sun was high when he waked us. "Home for dinner," he said. And so, after a while, we came to the creek; we passed the hole where

Ringo and I learned to swim and we began to pass the fields, too, and we came to where Ringo and I hid last summer and saw the first Yankee we ever saw, and then we could see the house, too, and Ringo said, "Sartoris, here we is; let them that want Memphis take hit and keep hit bofe." Because we were looking at the house, it was like that day when we ran across the pasture and the house would not seem to get any nearer at all.

We never saw the wagon at all; it was Father that saw it; it was coming up the road from Jefferson, with Granny sitting thin and straight on the seat with Mrs. Compson's rose cuttings wrapped in a new piece of paper in her hand, and Joby yelling and lashing the strange horses, and Father stopping us at the gate with his hat raised while the wagon went in first.

Granny didn't say a word. She just looked at Ringo and me, and went on, with us coming behind, and she didn't stop at the house. The wagon went on into the orchard and stopped by the hole where we had dug the trunk up, and still Granny didn't say a word; it was Father that got down and got into the wagon and took up one end of the trunk and said over his shoulder, "Jump up here, boys."

We buried the trunk again, and we walked behind the wagon to the house. We went into the back parlor, and Father put the musket back onto the pegs over the mantel, and Granny put down Mrs. Compson's rose cuttings and took off her hat and looked at Ringo and me.

"Get the soap," she said.

"We haven't cussed any," I said. "Ask Father."

"They behaved all right, Miss Rosa," Father said.

Granny looked at us. Then she came and put her hand on me and then on Ringo. "Go upstairs—" she said.

"How did you and Joby manage to get those horses?" Father said.

Granny was looking at us. "I borrowed them," she said. — "upstairs and take off your—"

"Who from?" Father said.

Granny looked at Father for a second, then back at us. "I don't know. There was nobody there. — take off your Sunday clothes," she said.

It was hot the next day, so we only worked on the new pen until dinner and quit. It was even too hot for Ringo and me to ride our horses. Even at six o'clock it was still hot; the rosin was still cooking out of the front steps at six o'clock.

Father was sitting in his shirt sleeves and his stockings, with his feet on the porch railing, and Ringo and I were sitting on the steps waiting for it to get cool enough to ride, when we saw them coming into the gate — about fifty of them, coming fast, and I remember how hot the blue coats looked. "Father," I said. "Father!"

"Don't run," Father said. "Ringo, you go around the house and catch Jupiter. Bayard, you go through the house and tell Louvinia to have my boots and pistols at the back door; then you go and help Ringo. Don't run, now; walk."

Louvinia was shelling peas in the kitchen. When she stood up, the bowl broke on the floor. "Oh Lord," she said. "Oh Lord. Again?"

I ran then. Ringo was just coming around the corner of the house; we both ran. Jupiter was in his stall, eating; he slashed out at us, his feet banged against the wall right by my head twice, like pistols, before Ringo jumped down from the hayrack onto his head.

We got the bridle on him, but he wouldn't take the saddle. "Get your horse and shove his blind side up!" I was hollering at Ringo when Father came in, running, with his boots in his hand, and we looked up the hill toward the house and saw one of them riding around the corner with a short carbine, carrying it in one hand like a lamp.

“Get away,” Father said. He went up onto Jupiter’s bare back like a bird, holding him for a moment and looking down at us. He didn’t speak loud at all; he didn’t even sound in a hurry. “Take care of Granny,” he said. “All right, Jupe. Let’s go.”

Jupiter’s head was pointing down the hallway toward the lattice half doors at the back; he went out again, out from between me and Ringo like he did yesterday, with Father already lifting him and I thinking, “He can’t jump through that little hole.”

Jupiter took the doors on his chest, only they seemed to burst before he even touched them, and I saw him and Father again like they were flying in the air, with broken planks whirling and spinning around them when they went out of sight.

And then the Yankee rode into the barn and saw us, and threw down with the carbine and shot at us point-blank with one hand, like it was a pistol, and said, “Where’d he go, the rebel son of a bitch?”

Louvinia kept on trying to tell us about it while we were running and looking back at the smoke beginning to come out of the downstairs windows: “Marse John setting on the porch and them Yankees riding through the flower beds and say, ‘Brother, we wanter know where the rebel John Sartoris live,’ and Marse John say, ‘Hey?’ with his hand to his ear and his face look like he born loony like Unc Few Mitchell, and Yankee say, ‘Sartoris, John Sartoris,’ and Marse John say, ‘Which? Say which?’ until he know Yankee stood about all he going to, and Marse John say, ‘Oh, John Sartoris.

Whyn’t you say so in the first place?’ and Yankee cussing him for idiot fool, and Marse John say, ‘Hey? How’s that?’ and Yankee say, ‘Nothing! Nothing! Show me where John Sartoris is ‘fore I put rope round your neck too!’ and Marse John say, ‘Lemme git my shoes and I show you,’ and come into house limping, and then run down the hall at me and say, ‘Boots and pistols, Louvinia.

Take care of Miss Rosa and the chillen,' and I go to the door, but I just a nigger. Yankee say, 'That woman's lying. I believe that man was Sartoris himself. Go look in the barn quick and see if that claybank stallion there'" — until Granny stopped and began to shake her.

"Hush!" Granny said. "Hush! Can't you understand that Loosh has shown them where the silver is buried? Call Joby. Hurry!" She turned Louvinia toward the cabins and hit her exactly like Father turned my horse and hit him when we rode down the hill and into the Yankees, and then Granny turned to run back toward the house; only now it was Louvinia holding her and Granny trying to get away.

"Don't you go back there, Miss Rosa!" Louvinia said. "Bayard, hold her; help me, Bayard! They'll kill her!"

"Let me go!" Granny said. "Call Joby! Loosh has shown them where the silver is buried!" But we held her; she was strong and thin and light as a cat, but we held her. The smoke was boiling up now, and we could hear it or them — something — maybe all of them making one sound — the Yankees and the fire.

And then I saw Loosh. He was coming up from his cabin with a bundle on his shoulder tied up in a bandanna and Philadelphy behind him, and his face looked like it had that night last summer when Ringo and I looked into the window and saw him after he came back from seeing the Yankees. Granny stopped fighting. She said, "Loosh."

He stopped and looked at her; he looked like he was asleep, like he didn't even see us or was seeing something we couldn't. But Philadelphy saw us; she cringed back behind him, looking at Granny. "I tried to stop him, Miss Rosa," she said. "'Fore God I tried."

"Loosh," Granny said, "are you going too?"

"Yes," Loosh said, "I going. I done been freed; God's own angel proclaimed me free and gonter general me to Jordan. I don't belong to John Sartoris now; I belongs to me and God."

“But the silver belongs to John Sartoris,” Granny said. “Who are you to give it away?”

“You ax me that?” Loosh said. “Where John Sartoris? Whyn’t he come and ax me that? Let God ax John Sartoris who the man name that give me to him. Let the man that buried me in the black dark ax that of the man what dug me free.” He wasn’t looking at us; I don’t think he could even see us. He went on.

“Fore God, Miss Rosa,” Philadelphy said, “I tried to stop him. I done tried.”

“Don’t go, Philadelphy,” Granny said. “Don’t you know he’s leading you into misery and starvation?”

Philadelphy began to cry. “I knows hit. I knows whut they tole him can’t be true. But he my husband. I reckon I got to go with him.”

They went on. Louvinia had come back; she and Ringo were behind us. The smoke boiled up, yellow and slow, and turning copper-colored in the sunset like dust; it was like dust from a road above the feet that made it, and then went on, boiling up slow and hanging and waiting to die away.

“The bastuds, Granny!” I said. “The bastuds!”

Then we were all three saying it — Granny and me and Ringo, saying it together: “The bastuds!” we cried. “The bastuds! The bastuds!”

RAID

1

GRANNY WROTE THE note with pokeberry juice. “Take it straight to Mrs. Compson and come straight back,” she said. “Don’t you-all stop anywhere.”

“You mean we got to walk?” Ringo said. “You gonter make us walk all them four miles to Jefferson and back, with them two horses standing in the lot doing nothing?”

“They are borrowed horses,” Granny said. “I’m going to take care of them until I can return them.”

“I reckon you calls starting out to be gone you don’t know where and you don’t know how long taking care of—” Ringo said.

“Do you want me to whup you?” Louvinia said.

“Nome,” Ringo said.

We walked to Jefferson and gave Mrs. Compson the note, and got the hat and the parasol and the hand mirror, and walked back home. That afternoon we greased the wagon, and that night after supper Granny got the pokeberry juice again and wrote on a scrap of paper, “Colonel Nathaniel G. Dick, — th Ohio Cavalry,” and folded it and pinned it inside her dress. “Now I won’t forget it,” she said.

“If you was to, I reckon these hellion boys can remind you,” Louvinia said. “I reckon they ain’t forgot him. Walking in that door just in time to keep them others from snatching them out from under your dress and nailing them to the barn door like two coon hides.”

“Yes,” Granny said. “Now we’ll go to bed.”

We lived in Joby’s cabin then, with a red quilt nailed by one edge to a rafter and hanging down to make two rooms. Joby was waiting with the wagon when Granny came out with Mrs. Compson’s hat on, and got into the wagon and told Ringo to open the parasol and took up the reins. Then we all stopped and watched Joby stick something into the wagon beneath the quilts; it was the barrel and the iron parts of the musket that Ringo and I found in the ashes of the house.

“What’s that?” Granny said. Joby didn’t look at her.

“Maybe if they just seed the end of hit they mought think hit was the whole gun,” he said.

“Then what?” Granny said. Joby didn’t look at anybody now.

“I was just doing what I could to help git the silver and the mules back,” he said.

Louvinia didn't say anything either. She and Granny just looked at Joby. After a while he took the musket barrel out of the wagon. Granny gathered up the reins.

“Take him with you,” Louvinia said. “Leastways he can tend the horses.”

“No,” Granny said. “Don't you see I have got about all I can look after now?”

“Then you stay here and lemme go,” Louvinia said. “I'll git um back.”

“No,” Granny said. “I'll be all right. I shall inquire until I find Colonel Dick, and then we will load the chest in the wagon and Loosh can lead the mules and we will come back home.”

Then Louvinia began to act just like Uncle Buck McCaslin did the morning we started to Memphis.

She stood there holding to the wagon wheel and looked at Granny from under Father's old hat, and began to holler. “Don't you waste no time on colonels or nothing!” she hollered. “You tell them niggers to send Loosh to you, and you tell him to get that chest and them mules, and then you whup him!”

The wagon was moving now; she had turned loose the wheel, and she walked along beside it, hollering at Granny: “Take that pairsawl and wear hit out on him!”

“All right,” Granny said. The wagon went on; we passed the ash pile and the chimneys standing up out of it; Ringo and I found the insides of the big clock too. The sun was just coming up, shining back on the chimneys; I could still see Louvinia between them, standing in front of the cabin, shading her eyes with her hand to watch us. Joby was still standing behind her, holding the musket barrel. They had broken the gates clean off; and then we were in the road.

“Don’t you want me to drive?” I said.

“I’ll drive,” Granny said. “These are borrowed horses.”

“Case even Yankee could look at um and tell they couldn’t keep up with even a walking army,” Ringo said. “And I like to know how anybody can hurt this team lessen he ain’t got strength enough to keep um from laying down in the road and getting run over with they own wagon.”

We drove until dark, and camped. By sunup we were on the road again.

“You better let me drive a while,” I said.

“I’ll drive,” Granny said. “I was the one who borrowed them.”

“You can tote this pairsawl a while, if you want something to do,” Ringo said. “And give my arm a rest.” I took the parasol and he laid down in the wagon and put his hat over his eyes. “Call me when we gitting nigh to Hawkhurst,” he said, “so I can commence to look out for that railroad you tells about.”

That was how he travelled for the next six days — lying on his back in the wagon bed with his hat over his eyes, sleeping, or taking his turn holding the parasol over Granny and keeping me awake by talking of the railroad which he had never seen though I had seen it that Christmas we spent at Hawkhurst. That’s how Ringo and I were.

We were almost the same age, and Father always said that Ringo was a little smarter than I was, but that didn’t count with us, anymore than the difference in the color of our skins counted. What counted was, what one of us had done or seen that the other had not, and ever since that Christmas I had been ahead of Ringo because I had seen a railroad, a locomotive.

Only I know now it was more than that with Ringo, though neither of us were to see the proof of my belief for some time yet and we were not to recognise it as such even then. It was as if Ringo felt it too and that the railroad, the rushing locomotive which he hoped to see symbolised it — the motion, the impulse to move which had already seethed to a head among his people, darker than themselves, reasonless, following

and seeking a delusion, a dream, a bright shape which they could not know since there was nothing in their heritage, nothing in the memory even of the old men to tell the others, 'This is what we will find'; he nor they could not have known what it was yet it was there — one of those impulses inexplicable yet invincible which appear among races of people at intervals and drive them to pick up and leave all security and familiarity of earth and home and start out, they don't know where, emptyhanded, blind to everything but a hope and a doom.

We went on; we didn't go fast. Or maybe it seemed slow because we had got into a country where nobody seemed to live at all; all that day we didn't even see a house. I didn't ask and Granny didn't say; she just sat there under the parasol with Mrs. Compson's hat on and the horses walking and even our own dust moving ahead of us; after a while even Ringo sat up and looked around.

"We on the wrong road," he said. "Ain't even nobody live here, let alone pass here."

But after a while the hills stopped, the road ran out flat and straight; and all of a sudden Ringo hollered, "Look out! Here they come again to git these uns!" We saw it, too, then — a cloud of dust away to the west, moving slow — too slow for men riding — and then the road we were on ran square into a big broad one running straight on into the east, as the railroad at Hawkhurst did when Granny and I were there that Christmas before the war; all of a sudden I remembered it.

"This is the road to Hawkhurst," I said. But Ringo was not listening; he was looking at the dust, and the wagon stopped now with the horses' heads hanging and our dust overtaking us again and the big dust cloud coming slow up in the west.

"Can't you see um coming?" Ringo hollered. "Git on away from here!"

"They ain't Yankees," Granny said. "The Yankees have already been here." Then we saw it, too — a burned house like ours, three chimneys standing above a mound of ashes, and then we saw a white woman and

a child looking at us from a cabin behind them. Granny looked at the dust cloud, then she looked at the empty broad road going on into the east. "This is the way," she said.

We went on. It seemed like we went slower than ever now, with the dust cloud behind us and the burned houses and gins and thrown-down fences on either side, and the white women and children — we never saw a nigger at all — watching us from the nigger cabins where they lived now like we lived at home; we didn't stop. "Poor folks," Granny said. "I wish we had enough to share with them."

At sunset we drew off the road and camped; Ringo was looking back. "Whatever hit is, we done went off and left hit," he said. "I don't see no dust." We slept in the wagon this time, all three of us. I don't know what time it was, only that all of a sudden I was awake.

Granny was already sitting up in the wagon. I could see her head against the branches and the stars. All of a sudden all three of us were sitting up in the wagon, listening. They were coming up the road. It sounded like about fifty of them; we could hear the feet hurrying, and a kind of panting murmur.

It was not singing exactly; it was not that loud. It was just a sound, a breathing, a kind of gasping, murmuring chant and the feet whispering fast in the deep dust. I could hear women, too, and then all of a sudden I began to smell them.

"Niggers," I whispered. "Sh-h-h-h," I whispered.

We couldn't see them and they did not see us; maybe they didn't even look, just walking fast in the dark with that panting, hurrying murmuring, going on. And then the sun rose and we went on, too, along that big broad empty road between the burned houses and gins and fences.

Before, it had been like passing through a country where nobody had ever lived; now it was like passing through one where everybody had

died at the same moment. That night we waked up three times and sat up in the wagon in the dark and heard niggers pass in the road. The last time it was after dawn and we had already fed the horses. It was a big crowd of them this time, and they sounded like they were running, like they had to run to keep ahead of daylight. Then they were gone.

Ringo and I had taken up the harness again when Granny said, "Wait. Hush." It was just one, we could hear her panting and sobbing, and then we heard another sound. Granny began to get down from the wagon. "She fell," she said. "You-all hitch up and come on."

When we turned into the road, the woman was kind of crouched beside it, holding something in her arms, and Granny standing beside her. It was a baby, a few months old; she held it like she thought maybe Granny was going to take it away from her. "I been sick and I couldn't keep up," she said. "They went off and left me."

"Is your husband with them?" Granny said.

"Yessum," the woman said. "They's all there."

"Who do you belong to?" Granny said. Then she didn't answer. She squatted there in the dust, crouched over the baby. "If I give you something to eat, will you turn around and go back home?" Granny said. Still she didn't answer. She just squatted there. "You see you can't keep up with them and they ain't going to wait for you," Granny said. "Do you want to die here in the road for buzzards to eat?" But she didn't even look at Granny; she just squatted there.

"Hit's Jordan we coming to," she said. "Jesus gonter see me that far."

"Get in the wagon," Granny said. She got in; she squatted again just like she had in the road, holding the baby and not looking at anything — just hunkered down and swaying on her hams as the wagon rocked and jolted. The sun was up; we went down a long hill and began to cross a creek bottom.

"I'll get out here," she said. Granny stopped the wagon and she got out. There was nothing at all but the thick gum and cypress and thick underbrush still full of shadow.

"You go back home, girl," Granny said. She just stood there. "Hand me the basket," Granny said. I handed it to her and she opened it and gave the woman a piece of bread and meat. We went on; we began to mount the hill. When I looked back she was still standing there, holding the baby and the bread and meat Granny had given her. She was not looking at us. "Were the others there in that bottom?" Granny asked Ringo.

"Yessum," Ringo said. "She done found um. Reckon she gonter lose um again tonight though." We went on; we mounted the hill and crossed the crest of it. When I looked back this time the road was empty. That was the morning of the sixth day.

2

Late that afternoon we were descending again; we came around a curve in the late level shadows and our own quiet dust and I saw the graveyard on the knoll and the marble shaft at Uncle Dennison's grave; there was a dove somewhere in the cedars. Ringo was asleep again under his hat in the wagon bed but he waked as soon as I spoke, even though I didn't speak loud and didn't speak to him. "There's Hawkhurst," I said.

"Hawkhurst?" he said, sitting up. "Where's that railroad?" on his knees now and looking for something which he would have to find in order to catch up with me and which he would have to recognise only through hearsay when he saw it: "Where is it? Where?"

"You'll have to wait for it," I said.

"Seem like I been waiting on hit all my life," he said. "I reckon you'll tell me next the Yankees done moved hit too."

The sun was going down. Because suddenly I saw it shining level across the place where the house should have been and there was no house there. And I was not surprised; I remember that; I was just feeling sorry for Ringo, since (I was just fourteen then) if the house was gone, they would have taken the railroad too, since anybody would rather have a railroad than a house.

We didn't stop; we just looked quietly at the same mound of ashes, the same four chimneys standing gaunt and blackened in the sun like the chimneys at home. When we reached the gate Cousin Denny was running down the drive toward us. He was ten; he ran up to the wagon with his eyes round and his mouth already open for hollering.

"Denny," Granny said, "do you know us?"

"Yessum," Cousin Denny said. He looked at me, hollering, "Come see—"

"Where's your mother?" Granny said.

"In Jingus' cabin," Cousin Denny said; he didn't even look at Granny.

"They burnt the house!" he hollered. "Come see what they done to the railroad!"

We ran, all three of us. Granny hollered something and I turned and put the parasol back into the wagon and hollered "Yessum!" back at her, and ran on and caught up with Cousin Denny and Ringo in the road, and we ran on over the hill, and then it came in sight.

When Granny and I were here before, Cousin Denny showed me the railroad, but he was so little then that Jingus had to carry him. It was the straightest thing I ever saw, running straight and empty and quiet through a long empty gash cut through the trees, and the ground, too, and full of sunlight like water in a river, only straighter than any river, with the cross-ties cut off even and smooth and neat, and the light shining on the rails like on two spider threads, running straight on to where you couldn't even see that far.

It looked clean and neat, like the yard behind Louvinia's cabin after she had swept it on Saturday morning, with those two little threads that

didn't look strong enough for anything to run on running straight and fast and light, like they were getting up speed to jump clean off the world.

Jingus knew when the train would come; he held my hand and carried Cousin Denny, and we stood between the rails and he showed us where it would come from, and then he showed us where the shadow of a dead pine would come to a stop he had driven in the ground, and then you would hear the whistle.

And we got back and watched the shadow, and then we heard it; it whistled and then it got louder and louder fast, and Jingus went to the track and took his hat off and held it out with his face turned back toward us and his mouth hollering, "Watch now! Watch!" even after we couldn't hear him for the train; and then it passed.

It came roaring up and went past; the river they had cut through the trees was all full of smoke and noise and sparks and jumping brass, and then empty again, and just Jingus' old hat bouncing and jumping along the empty track behind it like the hat was alive.

But this time what I saw was something that looked like piles of black straws heaped up every few yards, and we ran into the cut and we could see where they had dug the ties up and piled them and set them on fire. But Cousin Denny was still hollering, "Come see what they done to the rails!" he said.

They were back in the trees; it looked like four or five men had taken each rail and tied it around a tree like you knot a green cornstalk around a wagon stake, and Ringo was hollering, too, now.

"What's them?" he hollered. "What's them?"
"That's what it runs on!" Cousin Denny hollered.

"You mean hit have to come in here and run up and down around these here trees like a squirrel?" Ringo hollered. Then we all heard the horse at once; we just had time to look when Bobolink came up the road out

of the trees and went across the railroad and into the trees again like a bird, with Cousin Drusilla riding astride like a man and sitting straight and light as a willow branch in the wind. They said she was the best woman rider in the country.

“There’s Dru!” Cousin Denny hollered. “Come on! She’s been up to the river to see them niggers! Come on!” He and Ringo ran again. When I passed the chimneys, they were just running into the stable. Cousin Drusilla had already unsaddled Bobolink, and she was rubbing him down with a crokersack when I came in. Cousin Denny was still hollering, “What did you see? What are they doing?”

“I’ll tell about it at the house,” Cousin Drusilla said. Then she saw me. She was not tall; it was the way she stood and walked. She had on pants, like a man. She was the best woman rider in the country. When Granny and I were here that Christmas before the war and Gavin Breckbridge had just given Bobolink to her, they looked fine together; it didn’t need Jingus to say that they were the finest-looking couple in Alabama or Mississippi either. But Gavin was killed at Shiloh and so they didn’t marry. She came and put her hand on my shoulder.

“Hello,” she said. “Hello, John Sartoris.” She looked at Ringo. “Is this Ringo?” she said.

“That’s what they tells me,” Ringo said. “What about that railroad?”

“How are you?” Cousin Drusilla said.

“I manages to stand hit,” Ringo said. “What about that railroad?”

“I’ll tell you about that tonight too,” Drusilla said.

“I’ll finish Bobolink for you,” I said.

“Will you?” she said. She went to Bobolink’s head. “Will you stand for Cousin Bayard, lad?” she said. “I’ll see you-all at the house, then,” she said. She went out.

“Yawl sho must ‘a’ had this horse hid good when the Yankees come,” Ringo said.

“This horse?” Cousin Denny said. “Ain’t no damn Yankee going to fool with Dru’s horse no more.” He didn’t holler now, but pretty soon he began again: “When they come to burn the house, Dru grabbed the pistol and run out here — she had on her Sunday dress — and them right behind her.

She run in here and she jumped on Bobolink bareback, without even waiting for the bridle, and one of them right there in the door hollering, ‘Stop,’ and Dru said, ‘Get away, or I’ll ride you down,’ and him hollering, ‘Stop! Stop!’ with his pistol out too” — Cousin Denny was hollering good now— “and Dru leaned down to Bobolink’s ear and said, ‘Kill him, Bob,’ and the Yankee jumped back just in time.

The lot was full of them, too, and Dru stopped Bobolink and jumped down in her Sunday dress and put the pistol to Bobolink’s ear and said, ‘I can’t shoot you all, because I haven’t enough bullets, and it wouldn’t do any good anyway; but I won’t need but one shot for the horse, and which shall it be?’ So they burned the house and went away!” He was hollering good now, with Ringo staring at him so you could have raked Ringo’s eyes off his face with a stick. “Come on!” Cousin Denny hollered. “Le’s go hear about them niggers at the river!”

“I been having to hear about niggers all my life,” Ringo said. “I got to hear about that railroad.”

When we reached the house Cousin Drusilla was already talking, telling Granny mostly, though it was not about the railroad. Her hair was cut short; it looked like Father’s would when he would tell Granny about him and the men cutting each other’s hair with a bayonet.

She was sunburned and her hands were hard and scratched like a man’s that works. She was telling Granny mostly: “They began to pass in the road yonder while the house was still burning. We couldn’t count them; men and women carrying children who couldn’t walk and carrying old men and women who should have been at home waiting to die.

They were singing, walking along the road singing, not even looking to either side. The dust didn't even settle for two days, because all that night they still passed; we sat up listening to them, and the next morning every few yards along the road would be the old ones who couldn't keep up any more, sitting or lying down and even crawling along, calling to the others to help them; and the others — the young strong ones — not stopping, not even looking at them. I don't think they even heard or saw them. 'Going to Jordan,' they told me. 'Going to cross Jordan.'"

"That was what Loosh said," Granny said. "That General Sherman was leading them all to Jordan."

"Yes," Cousin Drusilla said. "The river. They have stopped there; it's like a river itself, dammed up. The Yankees have thrown out a brigade of cavalry to hold them back while they build the bridge to cross the infantry and artillery; they are all right until they get up there and see or smell the water.

That's when they go mad. Not fighting; it's like they can't even see the horses shoving them back and the scabbards beating them; it's like they can't see anything but the water and the other bank.

They aren't angry, aren't fighting; just men, women and children singing and chanting and trying to get to that unfinished bridge or even down into the water itself, and the cavalry beating them back with sword scabbards. I don't know when they have eaten; nobody knows just how far some of them have come.

They just pass here without food or anything, exactly as they rose up from whatever they were doing when the spirit or the voice or whatever it was told them to go. They stop during the day and rest in the woods; then, at night, they move again. We will hear them later — I'll wake you — marching on up the road until the cavalry stops them.

There was an officer, a major, who finally took time to see I wasn't one of his men; he said, 'Can't you do anything with them? Promise them

anything to go back home?’ But it was like they couldn’t see me or hear me speaking; it was only that water and that bank on the other side. But you will see for yourself tomorrow, when we go back.”

“Drusilla,” Aunt Louise said, “you’re not going back tomorrow or any other time.”

“They are going to mine the bridge and blow it up when the army has crossed,” Cousin Drusilla said. “Nobody knows what they will do then.” “But we cannot be responsible,” Aunt Louise said. “The Yankees brought it on themselves; let them pay the price.”

“Those Negroes are not Yankees, Mother,” Cousin Drusilla said. “At least there will be one person there who is not a Yankee either.” She looked at Granny. “Four, counting Bayard and Ringo.”

Aunt Louise looked at Granny. “Rosa, you shan’t go. I forbid it. Brother John will thank me to do so.”

“I reckon I will,” Granny said. “I’ve got to get the silver anyway.”

“And the mules,” Ringo said; “don’t forget them. And don’t yawl worry about Granny. She ‘cide what she want and then she kneel down about ten seconds and tell God what she aim to do, and then she git up and do hit. And them that don’t like hit can git outen the way or git trompled. But that railroad—”

“And now I reckon we better go to bed,” Granny said. But we didn’t go to bed then. I had to hear about the railroad too; possibly it was more the need to keep even with Ringo (or even ahead of him, since I had seen the railroad when it was a railroad, which he had not) than a boy’s affinity for smoke and fury and thunder and speed.

We sat there in that slave cabin partitioned, like Louvinia’s cabin at home, into two rooms by that suspended quilt beyond which Aunt Louisa and Granny were already in bed and where Cousin Denny should have been too except for the evening’s dispensation he had received, listening too who did not need to hear it again since he had been there

to see it when it happened; — we sat there, Ringo and I, listening to Cousin Drusilla and staring at each other with the same amazed and incredulous question: Where could we have been at that moment? What could we have been doing, even a hundred miles away, not to have sensed, felt this, paused to look at one another, aghast and uplifted, while it was happening? Because this, to us, was it.

Ringo and I had seen Yankees; we had shot at one; we had crouched like two rats and heard Granny, unarmed and not even rising from her chair, rout a whole regiment of them from the library. And we had heard about battles and fighting and seen those who had taken part in them, not only in the person of Father when once or twice each year and without warning he would appear on the strong gaunt horse, arrived from beyond that cloudbank region which Ringo believed was Tennessee, but in the persons of other men who returned home with actual arms and legs missing.

But that was it: men had lost arms and legs in sawmills; old men had been telling young men and boys about wars and fighting before they discovered how to write it down: and what petty precisian to quibble about locations in space or in chronology, who to care or insist Now come, old man, tell the truth: did you see this? were you really there? Because wars are wars: the same exploding powder when there was powder, the same thrust and parry of iron when there was not — one tale, one telling, the same as the next or the one before.

So we knew a war existed; we had to believe that, just as we had to believe that the name for the sort of life we had led for the last three years was hardship and suffering. Yet we had no proof of it. In fact, we had even less than no proof; we had had thrust into our faces the very shabby and unavoidable obverse of proof, who had seen Father (and the other men too) return home, afoot like tramps or on crowbait horses, in faded and patched (and at times obviously stolen) clothing, preceded by no flags nor drums and followed not even by two men to keep step with one another, in coats bearing no glitter of golden braid and with scabbards in which no sword reposed, actually almost sneaking home to spend two or three or seven days performing actions

not only without glory (plowing land, repairing fences, killing meat for the smoke house) and in which they had no skill but the very necessity for which was the fruit of the absent occupations from which, returning, they bore no proof — actions in the very clumsy performance of which Father's whole presence seemed (to us, Ringo and me) to emanate a kind of humility and apology, as if he were saying, "Believe me, boys; take my word for it: there's more to it than this, no matter what it looks like.

I can't prove it, so you'll just have to believe me." And then to have it happen, where we could have been there to see it, and were not: and this no poste and riposte of sweat-reeking cavalry which all war-telling is full of, no galloping thunder of guns to wheel up and unlimber and crash and crash into the lurid grime-glare of their own demon-served inferno which even children would recognise, no ragged lines of gaunt and shrill-yelling infantry beneath a tattered flag which is a very part of that child's make-believe.

Because this was it: an interval, a space, in which the toad-squatting guns, the panting men and the trembling horses paused, amphitheatric about the embattled land, beneath the fading fury of the smoke and the puny yelling, and permitted the sorry business which had dragged on for three years now to be congealed into an irrevocable instant and put to an irrevocable gambit, not by two regiments or two batteries or even two generals, but by two locomotives.

Cousin Drusilla told it while we sat there in the cabin which smelled of new whitewash and even (still faintly) of Negroes. She probably told us the reason for it (she must have known) — what point of strategy, what desperate gamble not for preservation, since hope of that was gone, but at least for prolongation, which it served. But that meant nothing to us. We didn't hear, we didn't even listen; we sat there in that cabin and waited and watched that railroad which no longer existed, which was now a few piles of charred ties among which green grass was already growing, a few threads of steel knotted and twisted about the trunks of trees and already annealing into the living bark, becoming one and indistinguishable with the jungle growth which had now accepted it,

but which for us ran still pristine and intact and straight and narrow as the path to glory itself, as it ran for all of them who were there and saw when Ringo and I were not.

Drusilla told about that too; 'Atlanta' and 'Chattanooga' were in it — the names, the beginning and the end — but they meant no more to us than they did to the other watchers — the black and the white, the old men, the children, the women who would not know for months yet if they were widows or childless or not — gathered, warned by grapevine, to see the momentary flash and glare of indomitable spirit starved by three years free of the impeding flesh.

She told it (and now Ringo and I began to see it; we were there too) — the roundhouse in Atlanta where the engine waited; we were there, we were of them who (they must have) would slip into the roundhouse in the dark, to caress the wheels and pistons and iron flanks, to whisper to it in the darkness like lover to mistress or rider to horse, cajoling ruthlessly of her or it one supreme effort in return for making which she or it would receive annihilation (and who would not pay that price), cajoling, whispering, caressing her or it toward the one moment; we were of them — the old men, the children, the women — gathered to watch, drawn and warned by that grapevine of the oppressed, deprived of everything now save the will and the ability to deceive, turning inscrutable and impassive secret faces to the blue enemies who lived among them.

Because they knew it was going to happen; Drusilla told that too: how they seemed to know somehow the very moment when the engine left Atlanta; it was as if the gray generals themselves had sent the word, had told them, "You have suffered for three years; now we will give to you and your children a glimpse of that for which you have suffered and been denied." Because that's all it was.

I know that now. Even the successful passage of a hundred engines with trains of cars could not have changed the situation or its outcome; certainly not two free engines shrieking along a hundred yards apart up that drowsing solitude of track which had seen no smoke and heard no

bell in more than a year. I don't think it was intended to do that. It was like a meeting between two iron knights of the old time, not for material gain but for principle — honor denied with honor, courage denied with courage — the deed done not for the end but for the sake of the doing — put to the ultimate test and proving nothing save the finality of death and the vanity of all endeavor.

We saw it, we were there, as if Drusilla's voice had transported us to the wandering light-ray in space in which was still held the furious shadow — the brief section of track which existed inside the scope of a single pair of eyes and nowhere else, coming from nowhere and having, needing, no destination, the engine not coming into view but arrested in human sight in thunderous yet dreamy fury, lonely, inviolate and forlorn, wailing through its whistle precious steam which could have meant seconds at the instant of passing and miles at the end of its journey (and cheap at ten times this price) — the flaring and streaming smoke stack, the tossing bell, the starred Saint Andrew's cross nailed to the cab roof, the wheels and the flashing driving rods on which the brass fittings glinted like the golden spurs themselves — then gone, vanished. Only not gone or vanished either, so long as there should be defeated or the descendants of defeated to tell it or listen to the telling.

"The other one, the Yankee one, was right behind it," Drusilla said. "But they never caught it. Then the next day they came and tore the track up. They tore the track up so we couldn't do it again; they could tear the track up but they couldn't take back the fact that we had done it. They couldn't take that from us."

We — Ringo and I — knew what she meant; we stood together just outside the door before Ringo went on to Missy Lena's cabin, where he was to sleep. "I know what you thinking," Ringo said. Father was right; he was smarter than me. "But I heard good as you did. I heard every word you heard."

"Only I saw the track before they tore it up. I saw where it was going to happen."

“But you didn’t know hit was fixing to happen when you seed the track. So nemmine that. I heard. And I reckon they ain’t gonter git that away from me, neither.”

He went on, then I went back into the house and behind the quilt where Denny was already asleep on the pallet. Drusilla was not there only I didn’t have time to wonder where she was because I was thinking how I probably wouldn’t be able to go to sleep at all now though it was late.

Then it was later still and Denny was shaking me and I remember how I thought then that he did not seem to need sleep either, that just by having been exposed for three or four seconds to war he had even at just ten acquired that quality which Father and the other men brought back from the front — the power to do without sleep and food both, needing only the opportunity to endure.

“Dru says to come on out doors if you want to hear them passing,” he whispered.

She was outside the cabin; she hadn’t undressed even. I could see her in the starlight — her short jagged hair and the man’s shirt and pants. “Hear them?” she said. We could hear it again, like we had in the wagon — the hurrying feet, the sound like they were singing in panting whispers, hurrying on past the gate and dying away up the road. “That’s the third tonight,” Cousin Drusilla said. “Two passed while I was down at the gate. You were tired, and so I didn’t wake you before.”

“I thought it was late,” I said. “You haven’t been to bed even. Have you?”

“No,” she said. “I’ve quit sleeping.”

“Quit sleeping?” I said. “Why?”

She looked at me. I was as tall as she was; we couldn’t see each other’s faces; it was just her head with the short jagged hair like she had cut it herself without bothering about a mirror, and her neck that had got thin and hard like her hands since Granny and I were here before. “I’m keeping a dog quiet,” she said.

“A dog?” I said. “I haven’t seen any dog.”

“No. It’s quiet now,” she said. “It doesn’t bother anybody any more now. I just have to show it the stick now and then.” She was looking at me. “Why not stay awake now? Who wants to sleep now, with so much happening, so much to see? Living used to be dull, you see. Stupid. You lived in the same house your father was born in, and your father’s sons and daughters had the sons and daughters of the same Negro slaves to nurse and coddle; and then you grew up and you fell in love with your acceptable young man, and in time you would marry him, in your mother’s wedding gown, perhaps, and with the same silver for presents she had received; and then you settled down forevermore while you got children to feed and bathe and dress until they grew up, too; and then you and your husband died quietly and were buried together maybe on a summer afternoon just before suppertime.

Stupid, you see. But now you can see for yourself how it is; it’s fine now; you don’t have to worry now about the house and the silver, because they get burned up and carried away; and you don’t have to worry about the Negroes, because they tramp the roads all night waiting for a chance to drown in homemade Jordan; and you don’t have to worry about getting children to bathe and feed and change, because the young men can ride away and get killed in the fine battles; and you don’t even have to sleep alone, you don’t even have to sleep at all; and so, all you have to do is show the stick to the dog now and then and say, ‘Thank God for nothing.’ You see? There. They’ve gone now. And you’d better get back to bed, so we can get an early start in the morning. It will take a long time to get through them.”

“You’re not coming in now?” I said.

“Not yet,” she said. But we didn’t move. And then she put her hand on my shoulder. “Listen,” she said. “When you go back home and see Uncle John, ask him to let me come there and ride with his troop. Tell him I can ride, and maybe I can learn to shoot. Will you?”

“Yes,” I said. “I’ll tell him you are not afraid too.”

“Aren’t I?” she said. “I hadn’t thought about it. It doesn’t matter anyway. Just tell him I can ride and that I don’t get tired.” Her hand was on my shoulder; it felt thin and hard. “Will you do that for me? Ask him to let me come, Bayard.”

“All right,” I said. Then I said, “I hope he will let you.”

“So do I,” she said. “Now you go back to bed. Good night.”

I went back to the pallet and then to sleep; again it was Denny shaking me awake; by sunup we were on the road again, Drusilla on Bobolink riding beside the wagon. But not for long.

We began to see the dust almost at once and I even believed that I could already smell them though the distance between us did not appreciably decrease, since they were travelling almost as fast as we were. We never did overtake them, just as you do not overtake a tide. You just keep moving, then suddenly you know that the set is about you, beneath you, overtaking you, as if the slow and ruthless power, become aware of your presence at last, had dropped back a tentacle, a feeler, to gather you in and sweep you remorselessly on.

Singly, in couples, in groups and families they began to appear from the woods, ahead of us, alongside of us and behind; they covered and hid from sight the road exactly as an infiltration of flood water would have, hiding the road from sight and then the very wheels of the wagon in which we rode, our two horses as well as Bobolink breasting slowly on, enclosed by a mass of heads and shoulders — men and women carrying babies and dragging older children by the hand, old men and women on improvised sticks and crutches, and very old ones sitting beside the road and even calling to us when we passed; there was one old woman who even walked along beside the wagon, holding to the bed and begging Granny to at least let her see the river before she died.

But mostly they did not look at us. We might not have even been there. We did not even ask them to let us through because we could look at their faces and know they couldn’t have heard us.

They were not singing yet, they were just hurrying, while our horses pushed slow through them, among the blank eyes not looking at anything out of faces caked with dust and sweat, breasting slowly and terrifically through them as if we were driving in midstream up a creek full of floating logs and the dust and the smell of them everywhere and Granny in Mrs. Compson's hat sitting bolt upright under the parasol which Ringo held and looking sicker and sicker, and it already afternoon though we didn't know it anymore than we knew how many miles we had come. Then all of a sudden we reached the river, where the cavalry was holding them back from the bridge.

It was just a sound at first, like wind, like it might be in the dust itself. We didn't even know what it was until we saw Drusilla holding Bobolink reined back, her face turned toward us wan and small above the dust and her mouth open and crying thinly: "Look out, Aunt Rosa! Oh, look out!"

It was like we all heard it at the same time — we in the wagon and on the horse, they all around us in the sweat-caking dust. They made a kind of long wailing sound, and then I felt the whole wagon lift clear of the ground and begin to rush forward.

I saw our old rib-gaunted horses standing on their hind feet one minute and then turned sideways in the traces the next, and Drusilla leaning forward a little and taut as a pistol hammer holding Bobolink, and I saw men and women and children going down under the horses and we could feel the wagon going over them and we could hear them screaming. And we couldn't stop anymore than if the earth had tilted up and was sliding us all down toward the river.

It went fast, like that, like it did every time anybody named Sartoris or Millard came within sight, hearing or smell of Yankees, as if Yankees were not a people nor a belief nor even a form of behavior, but instead were a kind of gully, precipice, into which Granny and Ringo and I were sucked pell-mell every time we got close to them.

It was sunset; now there was a high bright rosy glow quiet beyond the trees and shining on the river, and now we could see it plain — the tide of niggers dammed back from the entrance to the bridge by a detachment of cavalry, the river like a sheet of rosy glass beneath the delicate arch of the bridge which the tail of the Yankee column was just crossing.

They were in silhouette, running tiny and high above the placid water; I remember the horses' and mules' heads all mixed up among the bayonets, and the barrels of cannon tilted up and kind of rushing slow across the high peaceful rosy air like splitcane clothespins being jerked along a clothesline, and the singing everywhere up and down the river bank, with the voices of the women coming out of it thin and high: "Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!"

They were fighting now, the horses rearing and shoving against them, the troopers beating at them with their scabbards, holding them clear of the bridge while the last of the infantry began to cross; all of a sudden there was an officer beside the wagon, holding his scabbarded sword by the little end like a stick and hanging onto the wagon and screaming at us. I don't know where he came from, how he ever got to us, but there he was with his little white face with a stubble of beard and a long streak of blood on it, bareheaded and with his mouth open. "Get back!" he shrieked. "Get back!

We're going to blow the bridge!" screaming right into Granny's face while she shouted back at him with Mrs. Compson's hat knocked to one side of her head and hers and the Yankee's faces not a yard apart: "I want my silver! I'm John Sartoris' mother-in-law! Send Colonel Dick to me!" Then the Yankee officer was gone, right in the middle of shouting and beating at the nigger heads with his sabre, with his little bloody shrieking face and all. I don't know where he went anymore than I know where he came from; he just vanished still holding onto the wagon and flailing about him with the sabre, and then Cousin Drusilla was there on Bobolink; she had our nigh horse by the head-stall and was trying to turn the wagon sideways. I started to jump down to help.

“Stay in the wagon,” she said. She didn’t shout; she just said it. “Take the lines and turn them.” When we got the wagon turned sideways we stopped. And then for a minute I thought we were going backward, until I saw it was the niggers. Then I saw that the cavalry had broken; I saw the whole mob of it — horses and men and sabres and niggers — rolling on toward the end of the bridge like when a dam breaks, for about ten clear seconds behind the last of the infantry.

And then the bridge vanished. I was looking right at it; I could see the clear gap between the infantry and the wave of niggers and cavalry, with a little empty thread of bridge joining them together in the air above the water, and then there was a bright glare and I felt my insides suck and a clap of wind hit me on the back of the head. I didn’t hear anything at all.

I just sat there in the wagon with a funny buzzing in my ears and a funny taste in my mouth, and watched little toy men and horses and pieces of plank floating along in the air above the water. But I didn’t hear anything at all; I couldn’t even hear Cousin Drusilla. She was right beside the wagon now, leaning toward us, her mouth urgent and wide and no sound coming out of it at all.

“What?” I said.

“Stay in the wagon!”

“I can’t hear you!” I said. That’s what I said, that’s what I was thinking; I didn’t realise even then that the wagon was moving again. But then I did; it was like the whole long bank of the river had turned and risen under us and was rushing us down toward the water, we sitting in the wagon and rushing down toward the water on another river of faces that couldn’t see or hear either. Cousin Drusilla had the nigh horse by the bridle again, and I dragged at them, too, and Granny was standing up in the wagon and beating at the faces with Mrs. Compson’s parasol, and then the whole rotten bridle came off in Cousin Drusilla’s hand.

“Get away!” I said. “The wagon will float!”

“Yes,” she said, “it will float. Just stay in it. Watch Aunt Rosa and Ringo.”

“Yes,” I said. Then she was gone. We passed her; turned, and holding Bobolink like a rock again and leaning down talking to him and patting his cheek, she was gone. Then maybe the bank did cave. I don’t know. I didn’t even know we were in the river.

It was just like the earth had fallen out from under the wagon and the faces and all, and we all rushed down slow, with the faces looking up and their eyes blind and their mouths open and their arms held up. High up in the air across the river I saw a cliff and a big fire on it running fast sideways; and then all of a sudden the wagon was moving fast sideways, and then a dead horse came shining up from out of the yelling faces and went down slow again, exactly like a fish feeding, with, hanging over his rump by one stirrup, a man in a black uniform, and then I realised that the uniform was blue, only it was wet.

They were screaming then, and now I could feel the wagon bed tilt and slide as they caught at it. Granny was kneeling beside me now, hitting at the screaming faces with Mrs. Compson’s parasol. Behind us they were still marching down the bank and into the river, singing.

3

A Yankee patrol helped Ringo and me cut the drowned horses out of the harness and drag the wagon ashore. We sprinkled water on Granny until she came to, and they rigged harness with ropes and hitched up two of their horses. There was a road on top of the bluff, and then we could see the fires along the bank. They were still singing on the other side of the river, but it was quieter now.

But there were patrols still riding up and down the cliff on this side, and squads of infantry down at the water where the fires were. Then we began to pass between rows of tents, with Granny lying against me, and I could see her face then; it was white and still, and her eyes were shut. She looked old and tired; I hadn’t realised how old and little she

was. Then we began to pass big fires, with niggers in wet clothes crouching around them and soldiers going among them passing out food; then we came to a broad street, and stopped before a tent with a sentry at the door and a light inside. The soldiers looked at Granny.

“We better take her to the hospital,” one of them said.

Granny opened her eyes; she tried to sit up. “No,” she said. “Just take me to Colonel Dick. I will be all right then.”

They carried her into the tent and put her in a chair. She hadn’t moved; she was sitting there with her eyes closed and a strand of wet hair sticking to her face when Colonel Dick came in. I had never seen him before — only heard his voice while Ringo and I were squatting under Granny’s skirt and holding our breath — but I knew him at once, with his bright beard and his hard bright eyes, stooping over Granny and saying, “Damn this war. Damn it. Damn it.”

“They took the silver and the darkies and the mules,” Granny said. “I have come to get them.”

“Have them you shall,” he said, “if they are anywhere in this corps. I’ll see the general myself.” He was looking at Ringo and me now. “Ha!” he said. “I believe we have met before also.” Then he was gone again.

It was hot in the tent, and quiet, with three bugs swirling around the lantern, and outside the sound of the army like wind far away. Ringo was already asleep, sitting on the ground with his head on his knees, and I wasn’t much better, because all of a sudden Colonel Dick was back and there was an orderly writing at the table, and Granny sitting again with her eyes closed in her white face.

“Maybe you can describe them,” Colonel Dick said to me.

“I will do it,” Granny said. She didn’t open her eyes. “The chest of silver tied with hemp rope. The rope was new. Two darkies, Loosh and Philadelphly. The mules, Old Hundred and Tinney.”

Colonel Dick turned and watched the orderly writing. "Have you got that?" he said.

The orderly looked at what he had written. "I guess the general will be glad to give them twice the silver and mules just for taking that many niggers," he said.

"Now I'll go see the general," Colonel Dick said.

Then we were moving again. I don't know how long it had been, because they had to wake me and Ringo both; we were in the wagon again, with two Army horses pulling it on down the long broad street, and there was another officer with us and Colonel Dick was gone.

We came to a pile of chests and boxes that looked higher than a mountain. There was a rope pen behind it full of mules and then, standing to one side and waiting there, was what looked like a thousand niggers, men, women and children, with their wet clothes dried on them.

And now it began to go fast again; there was Granny in the wagon with her eyes wide open now and the lieutenant reading from the paper and the soldiers jerking chests and trunks out of the pile. "Ten chests tied with hemp rope," the lieutenant read. "Got them? . . . A hundred and ten mules. It says from Philadelphia — that's in Mississippi. Get these Mississippi mules. They are to have rope and halters."

"We ain't got a hundred and ten Mississippi mules," the sergeant said. "Get what we have got. Hurry." He turned to Granny. "And there are your niggers, madam."

Granny was looking at him with her eyes wide as Ringo's. She was drawn back a little, with her hand at her chest. "But they're not — they ain't—" she said.

"They ain't all yours?" the lieutenant said. "I know it. The general said to give you another hundred with his compliments."

"But that ain't — We didn't—" Granny said.

“She wants the house back, too,” the sergeant said. “We ain’t got any houses, grandma,” he said. “You’ll just have to make out with trunks and niggers and mules. You wouldn’t have room for it on the wagon, anyway.”

We sat there while they loaded the ten trunks into the wagon. It just did hold them all. They got another set of trees and harness, and hitched four mules to it. “One of you darkies that can handle two span come here,” the lieutenant said. One of the niggers came and got on the seat with Granny; none of us had ever seen him before. Behind us they were leading the mules out of the pen.

“You want to let some of the women ride?” the lieutenant said.
“Yes,” Granny whispered.

“Come on,” the lieutenant said. “Just one to a mule, now.” Then he handed me the paper. “Here you are. There’s a ford about twenty miles up the river; you can cross there. You better get on away from here before any more of these niggers decide to go with you.”

We rode until daylight, with the ten chests in the wagon and the mules and our army of niggers behind. Granny had not moved, sitting there beside the strange nigger with Mrs. Compson’s hat on and the parasol in her hand. But she was not asleep, because when it got light enough to see, she said, “Stop the wagon.” The wagon stopped. She turned and looked at me. “Let me see that paper,” she said.

We opened the paper and looked at it, at the neat writing:
Field Headquarters,
— th Army Corps,
Department of Tennessee,
August 14, 1863.

To all Brigade, Regimental and Other Commanders: You will see that bearer is repossessed in full of the following property, to wit: Ten (10) chests tied with hemp rope and containing silver. One hundred ten

(110) mules captured loose near Philadelphia in Mississippi. One hundred ten (110) Negroes of both sexes belonging to and having strayed from the same locality.

You will further see that bearer is supplied with necessary food and forage to expedite his passage to his destination.

By order of the General Commanding.

We looked at one another in the gray light. "I reckon you gonter take um back now," Ringo said.

Granny looked at me. "We can get food and fodder too," I said.

"Yes," Granny said. "I tried to tell them better. You and Ringo heard me. It's the hand of God."

We stopped and slept until noon. That afternoon we came to the ford. We had already started down the bluff when we saw the troop of cavalry camped there. It was too late to stop.

"They done found hit out and headed us off," Ringo said. It was too late; already an officer and two men were riding toward us.

"I will tell them the truth," Granny said. "We have done nothing." She sat there, drawn back a little again, with her hand already raised and holding the paper out in the other when they rode up. The officer was a heavy-built man with a red face; he looked at us and took the paper and read it and began to swear. He sat there on his horse swearing while we watched him.

"How many do you lack?" he said.

"How many do I what?" Granny said.

"Mules!" the officer shouted. "Mules! Mules! Do I look like I had any chests of silver or niggers tied with hemp rope?"

"Do we—" Granny said, with her hand to her chest, looking at him; I reckon it was Ringo that knew first what he meant.

"We like fifty," Ringo said.

“Fifty, hey?” the officer said. He cursed again; he turned to one of the men behind him and cursed him now. “Count ‘em!” he said. “Do you think I’m going to take their word for it?”

The man counted the mules; we didn’t move; I don’t think we even breathed hardly. “Sixty-three,” the man said.

The officer looked at us. “Sixty-three from a hundred and ten leaves forty-seven,” he said. He cursed. “Get forty-seven mules! Hurry!” He looked at us again. “Think you can beat me out of three mules, hey?”

“Forty-seven will do,” Ringo said. “Only I reckon maybe we better eat something, like the paper mention.”

We crossed the ford. We didn’t stop; we went on as soon as they brought up the other mules, and some more of the women got on them. We went on. It was after sundown then, but we didn’t stop.

“Hah!” Ringo said. “Whose hand was that?”

We went on until midnight before we stopped. This time it was Ringo that Granny was looking at. “Ringo,” she said.

“I never said nothing the paper never said,” Ringo said. “Hit was the one that said it; hit wasn’t me. All I done was to told him how much the hundred and ten liked; I never said we liked that many. ‘Sides, hit ain’t no use in praying about hit now; ain’t no telling what we gonter run into ‘fore we gits home.

The main thing now is, whut we gonter do with all these niggers.”

“Yes,” Granny said. We cooked and ate the food the cavalry officer gave us; then Granny told all the niggers that lived in Alabama to come forward. It was about half of them. “I suppose you all want to cross some more rivers and run after the Yankee Army, don’t you?” Granny said. They stood there, moving their feet in the dust. “What? Don’t any of you want to?” They just stood there. “Then who are you going to mind from now on?”

After a while, one of them said, “You, missy.”

“All right,” Granny said. “Now listen to me. Go home. And if I ever hear of any of you straggling off like this again, I’ll see to it. Now line up and come up here one at a time while we divide the food.”

It took a long time until the last one was gone; when we started again, we had almost enough mules for everybody to ride, but not quite, and Ringo drove now. He didn’t ask; he just got in and took the reins, with Granny on the seat by him; it was just once that she told him not to go so fast. So I rode in the back then, on one of the chests, and that afternoon I was asleep; it was the wagon stopping that woke me. We had just come down a hill onto a flat, and then I saw them beyond a field, about a dozen of them, cavalry in blue coats. They hadn’t seen us yet, trotting along, while Granny and Ringo watched them.

“They ain’t hardly worth fooling with,” Ringo said. “Still, they’s horses.” “We’ve already got a hundred and ten,” Granny said. “That’s all the paper calls for.”

“All right,” Ringo said. “You want to go on?” Granny didn’t answer, sitting there drawn back a little, with her hand at her breast again. “Well, what you want to do?” Ringo said. “You got to ‘cide quick, or they be gone.” He looked at her; she didn’t move. Ringo leaned out of the wagon. “Hey!” he hollered. They looked back quick and saw us and whirled about. “Granny say come here!” Ringo hollered.

“You, Ringo,” Granny whispered.

“All right,” Ringo said. “You want me to tell um to never mind?” She didn’t answer; she was looking past Ringo at the two Yankees who were riding toward us across the field, with that kind of drawn-back look on her face and her hand holding the front of her dress. It was a lieutenant and a sergeant; the lieutenant didn’t look much older than Ringo and me. He saw Granny and took off his hat. And then all of a sudden she took her hand away from her chest; it had the paper in it; she held it out to the lieutenant without saying a word. The lieutenant opened it, the sergeant looking over his shoulder. Then the sergeant looked at us.

“This says mules, not horses,” he said.

“Just the first hundred was mules,” Ringo said. “The extra twelve is horses.”

“Damn it!” the lieutenant said. He sounded like a girl swearing. “I told Captain Bowen not to mount us with captured stock!”

“You mean you’re going to give them the horses?” the sergeant said.

“What else can I do?” the lieutenant said. He looked like he was fixing to cry. “It’s the general’s own signature!”

So then we had enough stock for all of them to ride except about fifteen or twenty. We went on. The soldiers stood under a tree by the road, with their saddles and bridles on the ground beside them — all but the lieutenant. When we started again, he ran along by the wagon; he looked like he was going to cry, trotting along by the wagon with his hat in his hand, looking at Granny.

“You’ll meet some troops somewhere,” he said. “I know you will. Will you tell them where we are and to send us something — mounts or wagons — anything we can ride in? You won’t forget?”

“They’s some of yawl about twenty or thirty miles back that claim to have three extry mules,” Ringo said. “But when we sees any more of um, we’ll tell um about yawl.”

We went on. We came in sight of a town, but we went around it; Ringo didn’t even want to stop and send the lieutenant’s message in, but Granny made him stop and we sent the message in by one of the niggers.

“That’s one more mouth to feed we got shed of,” Ringo said.

We went on. We went fast now, changing the mules every few miles; a woman told us we were in Mississippi again, and then, in the afternoon, we came over the hill, and there our chimneys were, standing up into the sunlight, and the cabin behind them and Louvinia

bending over a washtub and the clothes on the line, flapping bright and peaceful.

“Stop the wagon,” Granny said.

We stopped — the wagon, the hundred and twenty-two mules and horses, and the niggers we never had had time to count.

Granny got out slow and turned to Ringo. “Get out,” she said; then she looked at me. “You too,” she said. “Because you said nothing at all.” We got out of the wagon. She looked at us. “We have lied,” she said.

“Hit was the paper that lied; hit wasn’t us,” Ringo said.

“The paper said a hundred and ten. We have a hundred and twenty-two,” Granny said. “Kneel down.”

“But they stole them ‘fore we did,” Ringo said.

“But we lied,” Granny said. “Kneel down.” She knelt first. Then we all three knelt by the road while she prayed. The washing blew soft and peaceful and bright on the clothesline. And then Louvinia saw us; she was already running across the pasture while Granny was praying.

RIPOSTE IN TERTIO

1

WHEN AB SNOPEs left for Memphis with the nine mules, Ringo and Joby and I worked on a new fence. Then Ringo went off on his mule and there was just Joby and me. Once Granny came down and looked at the new section of rails; the pen would be almost two acres larger now. That was the second day after Ringo left. That night, while Granny and I were sitting before the fire, Ab Snopes came back. He said that he had got only four hundred and fifty dollars for the nine mules.

That is, he took some money out of his pocket and gave it to Granny, and she counted it and said:

“That’s only fifty dollars apiece.”

“All right,” Ab said. “If you can do any better, you are welcome to take the next batch in yourself. I done already admitted I can’t hold a candle to you when it comes to getting mules; maybe I can’t even compete with you when it comes to selling them.”

He chewed something — tobacco when he could get it, willow bark when he couldn’t — all the time, and he never wore a collar, and nobody ever admitted they ever saw him in a uniform, though when Father was away, he would talk a lot now and then about when he was in Father’s troop and about what he and Father used to do. But when I asked Father about it once.

Father said, “Who? Ab Snopes?” and then laughed. But it was Father that told Ab to kind of look out for Granny while he was away; only he told me and Ringo to look out for Ab, too, that Ab was all right in his way, but he was like a mule: While you had him in the traces, you better watch him. But Ab and Granny got along all right, though each time Ab took a batch of mules to Memphis and came back with the money, it would be like this: “Yes, ma’am,” Ab said. “It’s easy to talk about hit, setting here without no risk.

But I’m the one that has to dodge them durn critters nigh a hundred miles into Memphis, with Forrest and Smith fighting on ever side of me and me never knowing when I wull run into a Confed’rit or Yankee patrol and have ever last one of them confiscated off of me right down to the durn halters.

And then I got to take them into the very heart of the Yankee Army in Memphis and try to sell them to a e-equipment officer that’s liable at any minute to recognise them as the same mules he bought from me not two weeks ago. Yes. Hit’s easy enough for them to talk that sets here getting rich and takes no risk.”

“I suppose you consider getting them back for you to sell taking no risk,” Granny said.

“The risk of running out of them printed letterheads, sho,” Ab said. “If you ain’t satisfied with making just five or six hundred dollars at a time, why don’t you requisition for more mules at a time?”

Why don’t you write out a letter and have General Smith turn over his commissary train to you, with about four wagonloads of new shoes in hit? Or, better than that, pick out the day when the pay officer is coming around and draw for the whole pay wagon; then we wouldn’t even have to bother about finding somebody to buy hit.”

The money was in new bills. Granny folded them carefully and put them into the can, but she didn’t put the can back inside her dress right away (and she never put it back under the loose board beneath her bed while Ab was about the place).

She sat there looking at the fire, with the can in her hands and the string which suspended it looping down from around her neck. She didn’t look any thinner or any older. She didn’t look sick either. She just looked like somebody that has quit sleeping at night.

“We have more mules,” she said, “if you would just sell them. There are more than a hundred of them that you refuse—”

“Refuse is right,” Ab said; he began to holler now: “Yes, sir! I reckon I ain’t got much sense, or I wouldn’t be doing this a-tall. But I got better sense than to take them mules to a Yankee officer and tell him that them hip patches where you and that durn nigger burned out the U. S. brand are trace galls. By Godfrey, I—”

“That will do,” Granny said. “Have you had some supper?”

“I—” Ab said. Then he quit hollering. He chewed again. “Yessum,” he said. “I done et.”

“Then you had better go home and get some rest,” Granny said. “There is a new relief regiment at Mottstown. Ringo went down two days ago to see about it. So we may need that new fence soon.”

Ab stopped chewing. "Is, huh?" he said. "Out of Memphis, likely. Likely got them nine mules in it we just got shet of."

Granny looked at him. "So you sold them further back than three days ago, then," Granny said. Ab started to say something, but Granny didn't give him time. "You go on home and rest up," she said. "Ringo will probably be back tomorrow, and then you'll have a chance to see if they are the same mules. I may even have a chance to find out what they say they paid you for them."

Ab stood in the door and looked at Granny. "You're a good un," he said. "Yessum. You got my respect. John Sartoris, himself, can't tech you. He hells all over the country day and night with a hundred armed men, and it's all he can do to keep them in crowbait to ride on. And you set here in this cabin, without nothing but a handful of durn printed letterheads, and you got to build a bigger pen to hold the stock you ain't got no market yet to sell. How many head of mules have you sold back to the Yankees?"

"A hundred and five," Granny said.

"A hundred and five," Ab said. "For how much active cash money, in round numbers?" Only he didn't wait for her to answer; he told her himself: "For six thousand and seven hundred and twenty-two dollars and sixty-five cents, lessen the dollar and thirty-five cents I spent for whisky that time the snake bit one of the mules."

It sounded round when he said it, like big sawn-oak wheels running in wet sand. "You started out a year ago with two. You got forty-odd in the pen and twice that many out on receipt. And I reckon you have sold about fifty-odd more back to the Yankees a hundred and five times, for a grand total of six thousand, seven hundred and twenty-two dollars and sixty-five cents, and in a day or so you are aiming to requisition a few of them back again, I understand."

He looked at me. "Boy," he said, "when you grow up and start out for yourself, don't you waste your time learning to be a lawyer or nothing.

You just save your money and buy you a handful of printed letterheads — it don't matter much what's on them, I reckon — and you hand them to your grandmaw here and just ask her to give you the job of counting the money when hit comes in."

He looked at Granny again. "When Kernel Sartoris left here, he told me to look out for you against General Grant and them. What I wonder is, if somebody hadn't better tell Abe Lincoln to look out for General Grant against Miz Rosa Millard. I bid you one and all good night."

He went out. Granny looked at the fire, the tin can in her hand. But it didn't have any six thousand dollars in it. It didn't have a thousand dollars in it. Ab Snopes knew that, only I don't suppose that it was possible for him to believe it. Then she got up; she looked at me, quiet.

She didn't look sick; that wasn't it. "I reckon it's bedtime," she said. She went beyond the quilt; it came back and hung straight down from the rafter, and I heard the loose board when she put the can away under the floor, and then I heard the sound the bed made when she would hold to the post to kneel down. It would make another sound when she got up, but when it made that sound, I was already undressed and in my pallet. The quilts were cold, but when the sound came I had been there long enough for them to begin to get warm.

Ab Snopes came and helped me and Joby with the new fence the next day, so we finished it early in the afternoon and I went back to the cabin. I was almost there when I saw Ringo on the mule turning in at the gates. Granny had seen him, too, because when I went inside the quilt, she was kneeling in the corner, taking the window shade from under the loose floor board. While she was unrolling the shade on the bed we heard Ringo getting off the mule, hollering at it while he hitched it to Louvinia's clothesline.

Then Granny stood up and looked at the quilt until Ringo pushed it aside and came in. And then they sounded like two people playing a guessing game in code.

“ — th Illinois Infantry,” Ringo said. He came on toward the map on the bed. “Col. G. W. Newberry. Eight days out of Memphis.”

Granny watched him while he came toward the bed. “How many?” she said.

“Nineteen head,” Ringo said. “Four with; fifteen without.” Granny just watched him; she didn’t have to speak at all for the next one. “Twelve,” Ringo said. “Out of that Oxford batch.”

Granny looked at the map; they both looked at it. “July the twenty-second,” Granny said.

“Yessum,” Ringo said. Granny sat down on the saw chunk before the map. It was the only window shade Louvinia had; Ringo had drawn it (Father was right; he was smarter than me; he had even learned to draw, who had declined even to try to learn to print his name when Loosh was teaching me; who had learned to draw immediately by merely taking up the pen, who had no affinity for it and never denied he had not but who learned to draw simply because somebody had to.) with Granny showing him where to draw in the towns.

But it was Granny who had done the writing, in her neat spidery hand like she wrote in the cook-book with, written on the map by each town: Colonel or Major or Captain So-and-So, Such-and-Such Regiment or Troop Then, under that: 12 or 9 or 21 mules And around four of them, town and writing and all, in purple pokeberry juice instead of ink, a circle with a date in it, and in big neat letters Complete.

They looked at the map, Granny’s head white and still where the light came through the window on it, and Ringo leaning over her. He had got taller during the summer; he was taller than me now, maybe from the exercise of riding around the country, listening out for fresh regiments with mules, and he had got to treating me like Granny did — like he and Granny were the same age instead of him and me.

“We just sold that twelve in July,” Granny said. “That leaves only seven. And you say that four of them are branded.”

“That was back in July,” Ringo said. “It’s October now. They done forgot about hit. ‘Sides, look here” — he put his finger on the map. “We captived these here fourteen at Madison on the twelf of April, sont um to Memphis and sold um, and had all fourteen back and three more besides, here at Caledonia on the third of May.”

“But that was four counties apart,” Granny said. “Oxford and Mottstown are only a few miles apart.”

“Phut,” Ringo said, “these folks is too busy keeping us conquered to recognise no little ten or twelve head of stock. ‘Sides, if they does recognise um in Memphis, that’s Ab Snope’s trouble, not ourn.”

“Mister Snopes,” Granny said.

“All right,” Ringo said. He looked at the map. “Nineteen head, and not two days away. Jest forty-eight hours to have um in the pen.”

Granny looked at the map. “I don’t think we ought to risk it. We have been successful so far. Too successful perhaps.”

“Nineteen head,” Ringo said. “Four to keep and fifteen to sell back to um. That will make a even two hundred and forty-eight head of Confed’rit mules we done recovered and collected interest on, let alone the money.”

“I don’t know what to do,” Granny said. “I want to think about it.”

“All right,” Ringo said. Granny sat still beside the map. Ringo didn’t seem patient or impatient either; he just stood there, thin and taller than me against the light from the window, scratching himself. Then he began to dig with his right-hand little fingernail between his front teeth; he looked at his fingernail and spat something, and then he said, “Must been five minutes now.” He turned his head a little toward me without moving. “Get the pen and ink,” he said.

They kept the paper under the same floor board with the map and the tin can. I don’t know how or where Ringo got it. He just came back one

night with about a hundred sheets of it, stamped with the official letterhead: UNITED STATES FORCES. DEPARTMENT OF TENNESSEE. He had got the pen and the ink at the same time, too; he took them from me, and now it was Ringo sitting on the saw chunk and Granny leaning over him. Granny still had the first letter — the order that Colonel Dick had given us in Alabama last year — she kept it in the can, too, and by now Ringo had learned to copy it so that I don't believe that Colonel Dick himself could have told the difference.

All they had to do was to put in the right regiment and whatever number of mules Ringo had examined and approved, and sign the right general's name to it. At first Ringo had wanted to sign Grant's name every time, and when Granny said that would not do anymore, Lincoln's.

At last Granny found out that Ringo objected to having the Yankees think that Father's folks would have any dealings with anybody under the General-in-Chief. But at last he realised that Granny was right, that they would have to be careful about what general's name was on the letter, as well as what mules they requisitioned. They were using General Smith now; he and Forrest were fighting every day up and down the road to Memphis, and Ringo always remembered to put in rope.

He wrote the date and the town, the headquarters; he wrote in Colonel Newberry's name and the first line. Then he stopped; he didn't lift the pen.

"What name you want this time?" he said.

"I'm worried about this," Granny said. "We ought not to risk it."

"We was on 'F' last time," Ringo said. "It's 'H' now. Think of a name in 'H.'"

"Mrs. Mary Harris," Granny said.

"We done used Mary before," Ringo said. "How about Plurella Harris?"

"I'm worried about this time," Granny said.

“Miz Plurella Harris,” Ringo said, writing. “Now we done used up ‘P’ too. ‘Member that, now. I reckon when we run out of letters, maybe we can start in on numbers. We will have nine hundred and ninety-nine before we have to worry, then.” He finished the order and signed “General Smith” to it; it looked exactly like the man who had signed the one Colonel Dick gave us was named General Smith, except for the number of mules. Then Granny turned and looked at me.

“Tell Mr. Snopes to be ready at sunup,” she said.

We went in the wagon, with Ab Snopes and his two men following on two of the mules. We went just fast enough so that we would reach the bivouac at suppertime, because Granny and Ringo had found out that that was the best time — that the stock would all be handy, and the men would be too hungry or sleepy or something to think very quick in case they happened to think, and we would just have time to get the mules and get out of sight before dark came. Then, if they should decide to chase us, by the time they found us in the dark, there wouldn’t be anything but the wagon with me and Granny in it to capture.

So we did; only this time it was a good thing we did. We left Ab Snopes and his men in the woods beyond the bivouac, and Granny and Ringo and I drove up to Colonel Newberry’s tent at exactly the right time, and Granny passed the sentry and went into the tent, walking thin and straight, with the shawl over her shoulders and Mrs. Compson’s hat on her head and the parasol in one hand and hers and Ringo’s General Smith order in the other, and Ringo and I sat in the wagon and looked at the cook fires about the grove and smelled the coffee and the meat. It was always the same.

Granny would disappear into the tent or the house, and then, in about a minute, somebody would holler inside the tent or the house, and then the sentry at the door would holler, and then a sergeant, or even sometimes an officer, only it would be a lieutenant, would hurry into the tent or the house, and then Ringo and I would hear somebody cursing, and then they would all come out, Granny walking straight and

stiff and not looking much bigger than Cousin Denny at Hawkhurst, and three or four mad Yankee officers behind her, and getting madder all the time.

Then they would bring up the mules, tied together. Granny and Ringo could guess to the second now; it would be just enough light left to tell that they were mules, and Granny would get into the wagon and Ringo would hang his legs over the tail gate, holding the lead rope, and we would go on, not fast, so that when we came back to where Ab Snopes and his men waited in the woods you could not even tell that they were mules. Then Ringo would get onto the lead mule and they would turn off into the woods and Granny and I would go on home.

That's what we did this time; only this time it happened. We couldn't even see our own team when we heard them coming, the galloping hoofs. They came up fast and mad; Granny jerked up quick and straight, holding Mrs. Compson's parasol.

"Damn that Ringo!" she said. "I had my doubts about this time all the while."

Then they were all around us, like the dark itself had fallen down on us, full of horses and mad men shouting "Halt! Halt! If they try to escape, shoot the team!" with me and Granny sitting in the wagon and men jerking the team back and the team jerking and clashing in the traces, and some of them hollering "Where are the mules? The mules are gone!" and the officer cursing and shouting "Of course they are gone!" and cursing Granny and the darkness and the men and mules. Then somebody struck a light and we saw the officer sitting his horse beside the wagon while one of the soldiers lit one light-wood splinter from another.

"Where are the mules?" the officer shouted.

"What mules?" Granny said.

"Don't lie to me!" the officer shouted. "The mules you just left camp with on that forged order! We have got you this time! We knew you'd

turn up again. Orders went out to the whole department to watch for you a month ago! That damn Newberry had his copy in his pocket while you were talking to him." He cursed Colonel Newberry now. "They ought to let you go free and court-martial him! Where's the nigger boy and the mules, Mrs. Plurella Harris?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," Granny said. "I have no mules except this team I am driving. And my name is Rosa Millard. I am on my way home beyond Jefferson."

The officer began to laugh; he sat on the horse, laughing. "So that's your real name, hey? Well, well, well. So you have begun to tell the truth at last. Come now, tell me where those mules are, and tell me where the others you have stolen from us are hid."

Then Ringo hollered. He and Ab Snopes and the mules had turned off into the woods on the right side of the road, but when he hollered now he was on the left side. "Heyo the road!" he hollered. "One busted loose! Head um off the road!"

And that was all of that. The soldier dropped the light-wood splinter and the officer whirled his horse, already spurring him, hollering, "Two men stay here." Maybe they all thought he meant two others, because there was just a big noise of bushes and trees like a cyclone was going through them, and then Granny and I were sitting in the wagon like before we had even heard the hoofs.

"Come on," Granny said. She was already getting out of the wagon.

"Are we going to leave the team and wagon?" I said.

"Yes," Granny said. "I misdoubted this all the time."

We could not see at all in the woods; we felt our way, and me helping Granny along and her arm didn't feel any bigger than a pencil almost, but it wasn't trembling. "This is far enough," she said. I found a log and we sat down. Beyond the road we could hear them, thrashing around, shouting and cursing. It sounded far away now. "And the team too," Granny said.

“But we have nineteen new ones,” I said. “That makes two hundred and forty-eight.” It seemed like a long time, sitting there on the log in the dark. After a while they came back, we could hear the officer cursing and the horses crashing and thumping back into the road.

And then he found the wagon was empty and he cursed sure enough — Granny and me, and the two men he had told to stay there. He was still cursing while they turned the wagon around. Then they went away. After a while we couldn’t hear them. Granny got up and we felt our way back to the road, and we went on, too, toward home.

After a while I persuaded her to stop and rest, and while we were sitting beside the road we heard the buggy coming. We stood up, and Ringo saw us and stopped the buggy.

“Did I holler loud enough?” he said.

“Yes,” Granny said. Then she said, “Well?”

“All right,” Ringo said. “I told Ab Snopes to hide out with them in Hickahala bottom until tomorrow night. All ‘cep’ these two.”

“Mister Snopes,” Granny said.

“All right,” Ringo said. “Get in and le’s go home.”

Granny didn’t move; I knew why, even before she spoke. “Where did you get this buggy?”

“I borrowed hit,” Ringo said. “‘Twarn’t no Yankees handy, so I never needed no paper.”

We got in. The buggy went on. It seemed to me like it had already been all night, but it wasn’t midnight yet — I could tell by the stars — we would be home by midnight almost. We went on. “I reckon you went and told um who we is now,” Ringo said.

“Yes,” Granny said.

“Well, I reckon that completes that,” Ringo said. “Anyway, we handled two hundred and forty-eight head while the business lasted.”

“Two hundred and forty-six,” Granny said. “We have lost the team.”

It was after midnight when we reached home; it was already Sunday and when we reached the church that morning there was the biggest crowd waiting there had ever been, though Ab Snopes would not get back with the new mules until tomorrow. So I believed that somehow they had heard about last night and they knew too, like Ringo, that this was the end and that now the books would have to be balanced and closed.

We were late, because Granny made Ringo get up at sunup and take the buggy back where he had got it. So when we reached the church they were already inside, waiting. Brother Fortinbride met us at the door, and they all turned in the pews and watched Granny — the old men and the women and the children and the maybe a dozen niggers that didn't have any white people now — they looked at her exactly like Father's fox hounds would look at him when he would go into the dog run, while we went up the aisle to our pew. Ringo had the book; he went up to the gallery; I looked back and saw him leaning his arms on the book on the balustrade.

We sat down in our pew, like before there was a war, only for Father — Granny still and straight in her Sunday calico dress and the shawl and the hat Mrs. Compson had loaned her a year ago; straight and quiet, with her hands holding her prayer book in her lap like always, though there hadn't been an Episcopal service in the church in almost three years now. Brother Fortinbride was a Methodist, and I don't know what the people were.

Last summer when we got back with the first batch of mules from Alabama, Granny sent for them, sent out word back into the hills where they lived in dirt-floored cabins, on the little poor farms without slaves. It took three or four times to get them to come in, but at last they all came — men and women and children and the dozen niggers that had got free by accident and didn't know what to do about it.

I reckon this was the first church with a slave gallery some of them had ever seen, with Ringo and the other twelve sitting up there in the high shadows where there was room enough for two hundred; and I could remember back when Father would be in the pew with us and the grove outside would be full of carriages from the other plantations, and Doctor Worsham in his stole beneath the altar, and for each white person in the auditorium there would be ten niggers in the gallery. And I reckon that on that first Sunday when Granny knelt down in public, it was the first time they had ever seen anyone kneel in a church.

Brother Fortinbride wasn't a minister either. He was a private in Father's regiment, and he got hurt bad in the first battle the regiment was in; they thought that he was dead, but he said that Jesus came to him and told him to rise up and live, and Father sent him back home to die, only he didn't die. But they said that he didn't have any stomach left at all, and everybody thought that the food we had to eat in 1862 and '63 would finish killing him, even if he had eaten it with women to cook it instead of gathering weeds from ditch banks and cooking them himself. But it didn't kill him, and so maybe it was Jesus, after all, like he said.

And so, when we came back with the first batch of mules and the silver and the food, and Granny sent word out for all that needed, it was like Brother Fortinbride sprang right up out of the ground with the names and histories of all the hill folks at his tongue's end, like maybe what he claimed was true — that the Lord had both him and Granny in mind when He created the other.

So he would stand there where Doctor Worsham used to stand, and talk quiet for a little while about God, with his hair showing where he cut it himself and the bones looking like they were coming right out through his face, in a frock coat that had turned green a long time ago and with patches on it that he had sewed on himself — one of them was green horsehide and the other was a piece of tent canvas with the U. S. A. stencil still showing a little on it. He never talked long; there wasn't much anybody could say about Confederate armies now.

I reckon there is a time when even preachers quit believing that God is going to change His plan and give victory where there is nothing left to hang victory on. He just said how victory without God is mockery and delusion, but that defeat with God is not defeat.

Then he quit talking, and he stood there with the old men and the women and children and the eleven or twelve niggers lost in freedom, in clothes made out of cotton bagging and floursacks, still watching Granny — only now it was not like the hounds used to look at Father, but like they would watch the food in Loosh's hands when he would go in to feed them — and then he said:
“Brethren and sisters, Sister Millard wishes to bear public witness.”

Granny stood up. She would not go to the altar; she just stood there in our pew with her face straight ahead, in the shawl and Mrs. Compson's hat and the dress that Louvinia washed and ironed every Saturday, holding the prayer book. It used to have her name on it in gold letters, but now the only way you could read them was to run your finger over them; she said quiet, too — quiet as Brother Fortinbride— “I have sinned. I want you all to pray for me.”

She knelt down in the pew; she looked littler than Cousin Denny; it was only Mrs. Compson's hat above the pew back they had to look at now. I don't know if she prayed herself or not. And Brother Fortinbride didn't pray either — not aloud anyway. Ringo and I were just past fifteen then, but I could imagine what Doctor Worsham would have thought up to say — about all soldiers did not carry arms, and about they also serve, and how one child saved from hunger and cold is better in heaven's sight than a thousand slain enemies.

But Brother Fortinbride didn't say it. I reckon he thought of that; he always had plenty of words when he wanted to. It was like he said to himself, “Words are fine in peacetime, when everybody is comfortable and easy.

But now I think that we can be excused.” He just stood there where Doctor Worsham used to stand and where the bishop would stand, too, with his ring looking big as a pistol target.

Then Granny rose up; I didn’t have time to help her; she stood up, and then the long sound went through the church, a sound kind of like a sigh that Ringo said was the sound of the cotton bagging and the floursacking when they breathed again, and Granny turned and looked back toward the gallery; only Ringo was already moving.

“Bring the book,” she said.

It was a big blank account book; it weighed almost fifteen pounds. They opened it on the reading desk, Granny and Ringo side by side, while Granny drew the tin can out of her dress and spread the money on the book. But nobody moved until she began to call out the names. Then they came up one at a time, while Ringo read the names off the book, and the date, and the amount they had received before.

Each time Granny would make them tell what they intended to do with the money, and now she would make them tell her how they had spent it, and she would look at the book to see whether they had lied or not. And the ones that she had loaned the brand-blotted mules that Ab Snopes was afraid to try to sell would have to tell her how the mule was getting along and how much work it had done, and now and then she would take the mule away from one man or woman and give it to another, tearing up the old receipt and making the man or the woman sign the new one, telling them on what day to go and get the mule.

So it was afternoon when Ringo closed the book and got the new receipts together, and Granny stopped putting the rest of the money back into the can and she and Brother Fortinbride did what they did each time. “I’m making out fine with the mule,” he said. “I don’t need any money.”

“Fiddlesticks,” Granny said. “You’ll never grow enough food out of the ground to feed a bird the longest day you live. You take this money.”
“No,” Brother Fortinbride said. “I’m making out fine.”

We walked back home, Ringo carrying the book. "You done receipted out four mules you ain't hardly laid eyes on yet," he said. "What you gonter do about that?"

"They will be here tomorrow morning, I reckon," Granny said. They were; Ab Snopes came in while we were eating breakfast; he leaned in the door with his eyes a little red from lack of sleep and looked at Granny.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, "I don't never want to be rich; I just want to be lucky. Do you know what you done?" Only nobody asked him what, so he told us anyway: "Hit was taking place all day yestiddy; I reckon by now there ain't a Yankee regiment left in Mississippi.

You might say that this here war has turned around at last and went back North. Yes, sir. That regiment you requisitioned on Sattidy never even stayed long enough to warm the ground. You managed to requisition the last batch of Yankee livestock at the last possible moment hit could have been done by living man. You made just one mistake: You drew them last nineteen mules just too late to have anybody to sell them back to."

3

It was a bright warm day; we saw the guns and the bits shining a long way down the road. But this time Ringo didn't even move. He just quit drawing and looked up from the paper and said, "So Ab Snopes was lying. Gre't God, ain't we gonter never get shet of them?"

It was just a lieutenant; by this time Ringo and I could tell the different officers' ranks better than we could tell Confederate ranks, because one day we counted up and the only Confederate officers we had ever seen were Father and the captain that talked to us with Uncle Buck McCaslin that day in Jefferson before Grant burned it. And this was to be the last time we would see any uniforms at all except as the walking symbols of defeated men's pride and indomitable unregret, but we didn't know that now.

So it was just a lieutenant. He looked about forty, and kind of mad and gleeful, both at the same time. Ringo didn't recognise him because he had not been in the wagon with us, but I did — from the way he sat the horse, or maybe from the way he looked mad and happy both, like he had been mad for several days, thinking about how much he was going to enjoy being mad when the right time came. And he recognised me, too; he looked at me once and said "Hah!" with his teeth showing, and pushed his horse up and looked at Ringo's picture. There were maybe a dozen cavalry behind him; we never noticed especially. "Hah!" he said again, then he said, "What's that?"

"A house," Ringo said. Ringo had never even looked at him good yet; he had seen even more of them than I had. "Look at it."

The lieutenant looked at me and said "Hah!" again behind his teeth; every now and then while he was talking to Ringo he would do that. He looked at Ringo's picture. Then he looked up the grove to where the chimneys rose out of the pile of rubble and ashes. Grass and weeds had come up out of the ashes now, and unless you knew better, all you saw was the four chimneys. Some of the goldenrod was still in bloom. "Oh," the officer said. "I see. You're drawing it like it used to be."

"Co-rect," Ringo said. "What I wanter draw hit like hit is now? I can walk down here ten times a day and look at hit like hit is now. I can even ride in that gate on a horse and do that."

The lieutenant didn't say "Hah!" this time.

He didn't do anything yet; I reckon he was still enjoying waiting a little longer to get good and mad. He just kind of grunted. "When you get done here, you can move into town and keep busy all winter, can't you?" he said. Then he sat back in the saddle. He didn't say "Hah!" now either; it was his eyes that said it, looking at me.

They were a kind of thin milk color, like the chine knucklebone in a ham. "All right," he said. "Who lives up there now? What's her name today, hey?"

Ringo was watching him now, though I don't think he suspected yet who he was. "Don't nobody," he said. "The roof leaks." One of the men made a kind of sound; maybe it was laughing. The lieutenant started to whirl around, and then he started not to; then he sat there glaring down at Ringo with his mouth beginning to open. "Oh," Ringo said, "you mean way back yonder in the quarters. I thought you was still worrying about them chimneys."

This time the soldier did laugh, and this time the lieutenant did whirl around, cursing at the soldier; I would have known him now even if I hadn't before. He cursed at them all now, sitting there with his face swelling up. "Blank-blank-blank!" he shouted.

"Get to hell on out of here! He said that pen is down there in the creek bottom beyond the pasture. If you meet man, woman or child and they so much as smile at you, shoot them! Get!" The soldiers went on, galloping up the drive; we watched them scatter out across the pasture. The lieutenant looked at me and Ringo; he said "Hah!" again, glaring at us. "You boys come with me. Jump!"

He didn't wait for us; he galloped, too, up the drive. We ran; Ringo looked at me. "'He' said the pen was in the creek bottom," Ringo said. "Who you reckon 'he' is?" "I don't know," I said.

"Well, I reckon I know," Ringo said. But we didn't talk any more. We ran on up the drive. The lieutenant had reached the cabin now, and Granny came out the door. I reckon she had seen him, too, because she already had her sunbonnet on. They looked at us once, then Granny went on, too, walking straight, not fast, down the path toward the lot, with the lieutenant behind her on the horse. We could see his shoulders and his head, and now and then his hand and arm, but we couldn't hear what he was saying. "I reckon this does complete hit," Ringo said.

But we could hear him before we reached the new fence. Then we could see them standing at the fence that Joby and I had just finished

— Ganny straight and still, with her sunbonnet on and the shawl drawn tight over her shoulders where she had her arms folded in it so that she looked littler than anybody I could remember, like during the four years she hadn't got any older or weaker, but just littler and littler and straighter and straighter and more and more indomitable; and the lieutenant beside her with one hand on his hip and waving a whole handful of letters at Granny's face with the other.

"Look like he got all we ever wrote there," Ringo said. The soldiers' horses were all tied along the fence; they were inside the pen now, and they and Joby and Ab Snopes had the forty-odd old mules and the nineteen new ones hemmed into the corner. The mules were still trying to break out, only it didn't look like that. It looked like every one of them was trying to keep the big burned smear where Granny and Ringo had blotted the U. S. brand turned so that the lieutenant would have to look at it.

"And I guess you will call those scars left-handed trace galls!" the lieutenant said. "You have been using cast-off band-saw bands for traces, hey? I'd rather engage Forrest's whole brigade every morning for six months than spend that same length of time trying to protect United States property from defenseless Southern women and niggers and children. Defenseless!" he shouted. "Defenseless! God help the North if Davis and Lee had ever thought of the idea of forming a brigade of grandmothers and nigger orphans, and invading us with it!" he hollered, shaking the letters at Granny.

In the pen the mules huddled and surged, with Ab Snopes waving his arms at them now and then. Then the lieutenant quit shouting; he even quit shaking the letters at Granny.

"Listen," he said. "We are on evacuation orders now. Likely I am the last Federal soldier you will have to look at. And I'm not going to harm you — orders to that effect too. All I'm going to do is take back this stolen property. And now I want you to tell me, as enemy to enemy, or even man to man, if you like. I know from these forged orders how many head of stock you have taken from us, and I know from the

records how many times you have sold a few of them back to us; I even know what we paid you. But how many of them did you actually sell back to us more than one time?"

"I don't know," Granny said.

"You don't know," the lieutenant said. He didn't start to shout now, he just stood there, breathing slow and hard, looking at Granny; he talked now with a kind of furious patience, as if she were an idiot or an Indian: "Listen. I know you don't have to tell me, and you know I can't make you. I ask it only out of pure respect. Respect? Envy. Won't you tell me?"

"I don't know," Granny said.

"You don't know," the lieutenant said. "You mean, you—" He talked quiet now. "I see. You really don't know. You were too busy running the reaper to count the—" We didn't move. Granny wasn't even looking at him; it was Ringo and me that watched him fold the letters that Granny and Ringo had written and put them carefully into his pocket. He still talked quiet, like he was tired: "All right, boys. Rope them together and haze them out of there."

"The gate is a quarter of a mile from here," a soldier said.

"Throw down some fence," the lieutenant said. They began to throw down the fence that Joby and I had worked two months on. The lieutenant took a pad from his pocket, and he went to the fence and laid the pad on the rail and took out a pencil. Then he looked back at Granny; he still talked quiet: "I believe you said the name now is Rosa Millard?"

"Yes," Granny said.

The lieutenant wrote on the pad and tore the sheet out and came back to Granny. He still talked quiet, like when somebody is sick in a room.

"We are under orders to pay for all property damaged in the process of evacuation," he said. "This is a voucher on the quartermaster at Memphis for ten dollars."

For the fence.” He didn’t give the paper to her at once; he just stood there, looking at her. “Confound it, I don’t mean promise. If I just knew what you believed in, held—” He cursed again, not loud and not at anybody or anything. “Listen. I don’t say promise; I never mentioned the word.

But I have a family; I am a poor man; I have no grandmother. And if in about four months the auditor should find a warrant in the records for a thousand dollars to Mrs. Rosa Millard, I would have to make it good. Do you see?”

“Yes,” Granny said. “You need not worry.”

Then they were gone. Granny and Ringo and Joby and I stood there and watched them drive the mules up across the pasture and out of sight. We had forgot about Ab Snopes until he said, “Well, hit looks like that’s all they are to hit. But you still got that ere hundred-odd that are out on receipt, provided them hill folks don’t take a example from them Yankees.

I reckon you can still be grateful for that much anyway. So I’ll bid you, one and all, good day and get on home and rest a spell. If I can help you again, just send for me.” He went on too.

After a while Granny said:

“Joby, put those rails back up.” I reckon Ringo and I were both waiting for her to tell us to help Joby, but she didn’t. She just said “Come,” and turned and went on, not toward the cabin but across the pasture toward the road. We didn’t know where we were going until we reached the church.

She went straight up the aisle to the chancel and stood there until we came up. “Kneel down,” she said.

We knelt in the empty church. She was small between us, little; she talked quiet, not loud, not fast and not slow; her voice sounded quiet and still, but strong and clear: “I have sinned. I have stolen, and I have borne false witness against my neighbor, though that neighbor was an

enemy of my country. And more than that, I have caused these children to sin.

I hereby take their sins upon my conscience.” It was one of those bright soft days. It was cool in the church; the floor was cold to my knees. There was a hickory branch just outside the window, turning yellow; when the sun touched it, the leaves looked like gold. “But I did not sin for gain or for greed,” Granny said. “I did not sin for revenge.

I defy You or anyone to say I did. I sinned first for justice. And after that first time, I sinned for more than justice; I sinned for the sake of food and clothes for Your own creatures who could not help themselves — for children who had given their fathers, for wives who had given their husbands, for old people who had given their sons to a holy cause, even though You have seen fit to make it a lost cause. What I gained, I shared with them. It is true that I kept some of it back, but I am the best judge of that because I, too, have dependents who may be orphans, too, at this moment, for all I know. And if this be sin in Your sight, I take this on my conscience too. Amen.”

She rose up. She got up easy, like she had no weight to herself. It was warm outside; it was the finest October that I could remember. Or maybe it was because you are not conscious of weather until you are fifteen. We walked slow back home, though Granny said she wasn't tired. “I just wish I knew how they found out about that pen,” she said.

“Don't you know?” Ringo said. Granny looked at him. “Ab Snopes told them.”

This time she didn't even say, “Mister Snopes.” She just stopped dead still and looked at Ringo. “Ab Snopes?”

“Do you reckon he was going to be satisfied until he had sold them last nineteen mules to somebody?” Ringo said.

“Ab Snopes,” Granny said. “Well.” Then she walked on; we walked on. “Ab Snopes,” she said. “I reckon he beat me, after all. But it can't be helped now. And anyway, we did pretty well, taken by and large.”

“We done damn well,” Ringo said. He caught himself, but it was already too late. Granny didn’t even stop.

“Go on home and get the soap,” she said.

He went on. We could watch him cross the pasture and go into the cabin, and then come out and go down the hill toward the spring. We were close now; when I left Granny and went down to the spring, he was just rinsing his mouth, the can of soap in one hand and the gourd dipper in the other.

He spit and rinsed his mouth and spit again; there was a long smear of suds up his cheek; a light froth of colored bubbles flicking away while I watched them, without any sound at all. “I still says we done damn well,” he said.

4

We tried to keep her from doing it — we both tried. Ringo had told her about Ab Snopes, and after that we both knew it. It was like all three of us should have known it all the time. Only I don’t believe now that he meant to happen what did happen. But I believe that if he had known what was going to happen, he would still have egged her on to do it.

And Ringo and I tried — we tried — but Granny just sat there before the fire — it was cold in the cabin now — with her arms folded in the shawl and with that look on her face when she had quit either arguing or listening to you at all, saying just this one time more and that even a rogue will be honest for enough pay.

It was Christmas; we had just heard from Aunt Louisa at Hawkhurst and found out where Drusilla was; she had been missing from home for almost a year now, and at last Aunt Louisa found out that she was with Father away in Carolina, like she had told me, riding with the troop like she was a man.

Ringo and I had just got back from Jefferson with the letter, and Ab Snopes was in the cabin, telling Granny about it, and Granny listening and believing him because she still believed that what side of a war a man fought on made him what he is.

And she knew better with her own ears; she must have known; everybody knew about them and were either mad if they were men or terrified if they were women. There was one Negro in the county that everybody knew that they had murdered and burned him up in his cabin.

They called themselves Grumby's Independents — about fifty or sixty of them that wore no uniform and came from nobody knew where as soon as the last Yankee regiment was out of the country, raiding smokehouses and stables, and houses where they were sure there were no men, tearing up beds and floors and walls, frightening white women and torturing Negroes to find where money or silver was hidden.

They were caught once, and the one that said he was Grumby produced a tattered raiding commission actually signed by General Forrest; though you couldn't tell if the original name was Grumby or not.

But it got them off, because it was just some old men that captured them; and now women who had lived alone for three years surrounded by invading armies were afraid to stay in the houses at night, and the Negroes who had lost their white people lived hidden in caves back in the hills like animals.

That's who Ab Snopes was talking about, with his hat on the floor and his hands flapping and his hair bent up across the back of his head where he had slept on it. The band had a thoroughbred stallion and three mares — how Ab Snopes knew it he didn't say — that they had stolen; and how he knew they were stolen, he didn't say.

But all Granny had to do was to write out one of the orders and sign Forrest's name to it; he, Ab, would guarantee to get two thousand dollars for the horses. He swore to that, and Granny, sitting there with her arms rolled into the shawl and that expression on her face, and Ab Snopes' shadow leaping and jerking up the wall while he waved his arms and talked about that was all she had to do; to look at what she had made out of the Yankees, enemies, and that these were Southern men and, therefore, there would not even be any risk to this, because Southern men would not harm a woman, even if the letter failed to work.

Oh, he did it well. I can see now that Ringo and I had no chance against him — about how the business with the Yankees had stopped without warning, before she had made what she had counted on, and how she had given most of that away under the belief that she would be able to replace that and more, but as it was now, she had made independent and secure almost everyone in the county save herself and her own blood; that soon Father would return home to his ruined plantation and most of his slaves vanished; and how it would be if, when he came home and looked about at his desolate future, she could take fifteen hundred dollars in cash out of her pocket and say, "Here.

Start over with this" — fifteen hundred dollars more than she had hoped to have. He would take one of the mares for his commission and he would guarantee her fifteen hundred dollars for the other three.

Oh, we had no chance against him. We begged her to let us ask advice from Uncle Buck McCaslin, anyone, any man. But she just sat there with that expression on her face, saying that the horses did not belong to him, that they had been stolen, and that all she had to do was to frighten them with the order, and even Ringo and I knowing at fifteen that Grumby, or whoever he was, was a coward and that you might frighten a brave man, but that nobody dared frighten a coward; and Granny, sitting there without moving at all and saying, "But the horses do not belong to them because they are stolen property," and we said, "Then no more will they belong to us," and Granny said, "But they do not belong to them."

But we didn't quit trying; all that day — Ab Snopes had located them; it was an abandoned cotton compress on Tallahatchie River, sixty miles away — while we rode in the rain in the wagon Ab Snopes got for us to use, we tried.

But Granny just sat there on the seat between us, with the order signed by Ringo for General Forrest in the tin can under her dress and her feet on some hot bricks in a crokersack that we would stop every ten miles and build a fire in the rain and heat again, until we came to the crossroads, where Ab Snopes told us to leave the wagon and walk. And then she would not let me and Ringo go with her. "You and Ringo look like men," she said. "They won't hurt a woman."

It had rained all day; it had fallen gray and steady and slow and cold on us all day long, and now it was like twilight had thickened it without being able to make it any grayer or colder. The crossroad was not a road any more; it was no more than a faint gash turning off at right angles into the bottom, so that it looked like a cave. We could see the hoof marks in it.

"Then you shan't go," I said. "I'm stronger than you are; I'll hold you." I held her; her arm felt little and light and dry as a stick. But it wasn't that; her size and appearance had no more to do with it than it had in her dealings with the Yankees; she just turned and looked at me, and then I began to cry.

I would be sixteen years old before another year was out, yet I sat there in the wagon, crying. I didn't even know when she freed her arm. And then she was out of the wagon, standing there looking at me in the gray rain and the gray darkening light.

"It's for all of us," she said. "For John and you and Ringo and Joby and Louvinia. So we will have something when John comes back home. You never cried when you knew he was going into a battle, did you? And now I am taking no risk; I am a woman. Even Yankees do not harm old women. You and Ringo stay here until I call you."

We tried. I keep on saying that because I know now that I didn't. I could have held her, turned the wagon, driven away, holding her in it. I was just fifteen, and for most of my life her face had been the first thing I saw in the morning and the last thing I saw at night, but I could have stopped her, and I didn't.

I sat there in the wagon in the cold rain and let her walk on into the wet twilight and never come out of it again. How many of them there were in the old compress, I don't know, and when and why they took fright and left, I don't know.

We just sat there in the wagon in that cold dissolving December twilight until at last I couldn't bear it any longer. Then Ringo and I were both running, trying to run, in the ankle-deep mud of that old road pocked with the prints of ingoing hoofs, but of no wheel, knowing that we had waited too long either to help her or to share in her defeat.

Because there was no sound nor sign of life at all; just the huge rotting building with the gray afternoon dying wetly upon it, and then at the end of the hall a faint crack of light beneath a door.

I don't remember touching the door at all, because the room was a floor raised about two feet from the earth, so that I ran into the step and fell forward into and then through the door, onto my hands and knees in the room, looking at Granny. There was a tallow dip still burning on a wooden box, but it was the powder I smelled, stronger even than the tallow. I couldn't seem to breathe for the smell of the powder, looking at Granny.

She had looked little alive, but now she looked like she had collapsed, like she had been made out of a lot of little thin dry light sticks notched together and braced with cord, and now the cord had broken and all the little sticks had collapsed in a quiet heap on the floor, and somebody had spread a clean and faded calico dress over them.

VENDÉE

THEY ALL CAME in again when we buried Granny, Brother Fortinbride and all of them — the old men and the women and the children, and the niggers — the twelve who used to come in when word would spread that Ab Snopes was back from Memphis, and the hundred more who had returned to the county since, who had followed the Yankees away and then returned, to find their families and owners gone, to scatter into the hills and live in caves and hollow trees like animals I suppose, not only with no one to depend on but with no one depending on them, caring whether they returned or not or lived or died or not: and that I suppose is the sum, the sharp serpent's fang, of bereavement and loss — all coming in from the hills in the rain.

Only there were no Yankees in Jefferson now so they didn't have to walk in; I could look across the grave and beyond the other headstones and monuments and see the dripping cedar grove full of mules with long black smears on their hips where Granny and Ringo had burned out the U. S. brand.

Most of the Jefferson people were there too, and there was another preacher — a big preacher refugeeing from Memphis or somewhere — and I found out how Mrs. Compson and some of them had arranged for him to preach the funeral. But Brother Fortinbride didn't let him. He didn't tell him not to; he just didn't say anything to him at all, he just acted like a grown person coming in where the children are getting ready to play a game and telling the children that the game is all right but that the grown folks need the room and the furniture for a while.

He came walking fast up from the grove where he had hitched his mule with the others, with his gaunted face and his frock coat with the horsehide and the Yankee-tent patches, into where the town people were standing around under umbrellas with Granny in the middle and the big refugeeing preacher with his book already open and one of the Compson niggers holding an umbrella over him and the rain splashing slow and cold and gray on the umbrella and splashing slow on the

yellow boards where Granny was and into the dark red dirt beside the red grave without splashing at all.

Brother Fortinbride just walked in and looked at the umbrellas and then at the hill people in cotton bagging and split floursack clothes that didn't have umbrellas, and went to Granny and said, "Come, you men."

The town men would have moved. Some of them did. Uncle Buck McCaslin was the first man of them all, town and hill, to come forward. By Christmas his rheumatism would be so bad that he couldn't hardly lift his hand, but he was there now, with his peeled hickory stick, shoving up through the hill men with crokersacks tied over their heads and the town men with umbrellas getting out of his way; then Ringo and I stood there and watched Granny going down into the earth with the quiet rain splashing on the yellow boards until they quit looking like boards and began to look like water with thin sunlight reflected in it, sinking away into the ground.

Then the wet red dirt began to flow into the grave, with the shovels darting and flicking slow and steady and the hill men waiting to take turns with the shovels because Uncle Buck would not let anyone spell him with his.

It didn't take long, and I reckon the refugeeing preacher would have tried again even then, but Brother Fortinbride didn't give him a chance. Brother Fortinbride didn't even put down his shovel; he stood there leaning on it like he was in the field, and he sounded just like he used to in the church when Ab Snopes would be home from Memphis again — strong and quiet and not loud:

"I don't reckon that Rosa Millard or anybody that ever knew her has to be told where she has gone.

And I don't reckon that anybody that ever knew her would want to insult her by telling her to rest anywhere in peace. And I reckon that God has already seen to it that there are men, women and children, black, white, yellow or red, waiting for her to tend and worry over. And

so you folks go home. Some of you ain't come far, and you came that distance in carriages with tops.

But most of you didn't, and it's by the grace of Rosa Millard that you didn't come on foot. I'm talking to you. You have wood to cut and split, at least. And what do you reckon Rosa Millard would say about you all standing around here, keeping old folks and children out here in the rain?"

Mrs. Compson asked me and Ringo to come home and live with her until Father came back, and some others did — I don't remember who — and then, when I thought they had all gone, I looked around, and there was Uncle Buck. He came up to us with one elbow jammed into his side and his beard drawn over to one side like it was another arm, and his eyes red and mad like he hadn't slept much, and holding his stick like he was fixing to hit somebody with it and he didn't much care who.

"What you boys going to do now?" he said.

The earth was loose and soft now, dark and red with rain, so that the rain didn't splash on Granny at all; it just dissolved slow and gray into the darkred mound, so that after a while the mound began to dissolve, too, without changing shape, like the soft yellow color of the boards had dissolved and stained up through the earth, and mound and boards and rain were all melting into one vague quiet reddish gray.

"I want to borrow a pistol," I said.

He began to holler then, but quiet. Because he was older than us; it was like it had been at the old compress that night with Granny. "Need me or not," he hollered, "by Godfrey, I'm going! You can't stop me! You mean to tell me you don't want me to go with you?"

"I don't care," I said. "I just want a pistol. Or a gun. Ours got burned up with the house."

“All right!” he hollered. “Me and the pistol, or you and this nigger horse thief and a fence rail. You ain’t even got a poker at home, have you?”
“We got the bar’l of the musket yet,” Ringo said. “I reckon that’s all we’ll need for Ab Snopes.”

“Ab Snopes?” Uncle Buck hollered. “Do you think it’s Ab Snopes this boy is thinking about? . . . Hey?” he hollered, hollering at me now.
“Hey, boy?” It was changing all the time, with the slow gray rain lancing slow and gray and cold into the red earth, yet it did not change.

It would be some time yet; it would be days and weeks and then months before it would be smooth and quiet and level with the other earth. Now Uncle Buck was talking at Ringo, and not hollering now.
“Catch my mule,” he said. “I got the pistol in my britches.”

Ab Snopes lived back in the hills too. Uncle Buck knew where; it was midafternoon by then and we were riding up a long red hill between pines when Uncle Buck stopped. He and Ringo had crokersacks tied over their heads. Uncle Buck’s hand-worn stick stuck out from under his sack with the rain shining on it like a long wax candle.

“Wait,” he said. “I got a idea.” We turned from the road and came to a creek bottom; there was a faint path. It was dark under the trees and the rain didn’t fall on us now; it was like the bare trees themselves were dissolving slow and steady and cold into the end of the December day.

We rode in single file, in our wet clothes and in the wet ammonia steam of the mules.

The pen was just like the one he and Ringo and Joby and I had built at home, only smaller and better hidden; I reckon he had got the idea from ours. We stopped at the wet rails; they were still new enough for the split sides to be still yellow with sap, and on the far side of the pen there was something that looked like a yellow cloud in the twilight, until it moved. And then we saw that it was a claybank stallion and three mares.

“I thought so,” Uncle Buck said.

Because I was mixed up. Maybe it was because Ringo and I were tired and we hadn't slept much lately. Because the days were mixed up with the nights, all the while we had been riding I would keep on thinking how Ringo and I would catch it from Granny when we got back home, for going off in the rain without telling her. Because for a minute I sat there and looked at the horses and I believed that Ab Snopes was Grumby. But Uncle Buck begun to holler again.

“Him, Grumby?” he hollered. “Ab Snopes? Ab Snopes? By Godfrey, if he was Grumby, if it was Ab Snopes that shot your grandmaw, I'd be ashamed to have it known. I'd be ashamed to be caught catching him. No, sir. He ain't Grumby; he's better than that.”

He sat sideways on his mule with the sack over his head and his beard jerking and wagging out of it while he talked. “He's the one that's going to show us where Grumby is. They just hid them horses here because they thought this would be the last place you boys would think to look for them.

And now Ab Snopes has went off with Grumby to get some more, since your grandmaw has gone out of business, as far as he is concerned. And thank Godfrey for that. It won't be a house or a cabin they will ever pass as long as Ab Snopes is with them, that he won't leave an indelible signature, even if it ain't nothing to capture but a chicken or a kitchen clock. By Godfrey, the one thing we don't want is to catch Ab Snopes.”

And we didn't catch him that night. We went back to the road and went on, and then we came in sight of the house. I rode up to Uncle Buck.

“Give me the pistol,” I said.

“We ain't going to need a pistol,” Uncle Buck said. “He ain't even here, I tell you. You and that nigger stay back and let me do this. I'm going to find out which a way to start hunting. Get back, now.”

“No,” I said, “I want—”

He looked at me from under the crokersack. "You want what? You want to lay your two hands on the man that shot Rosa Millard, don't you?" He looked at me. I sat there on the mule in the slow gray cold rain, in the dying daylight. Maybe it was the cold. I didn't feel cold, but I could feel my bones jerking and shaking. "And then what you going to do with him?" Uncle Buck said. He was almost whispering now. "Hey? Hey?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes."

"Yes. That's what. Now you and Ringo stay back. I'll do this."

It was just a cabin. I reckon there were a thousand of them just like it about our hills, with the same canted plow lying under a tree and the same bedraggled chickens roosting on the plow and the same gray twilight dissolving onto the gray shingles of the roof. Then we saw a faint crack of fire and a woman's face looking at us around the crack of the door.

"Mr. Snopes ain't here, if that's what you want," she said. "He's done gone to Alabama on a visit."

"Sho, now," Uncle Buck said. "To Alabama. Did he leave any word when to expect him home?"

"No," the woman said.

"Sho, now," Uncle Buck said. "Then I reckon we better get on back home and out of the rain."

"I reckon you had," the woman said. Then the door closed.

We rode away. We rode back toward home. It was like it had been while we waited at the old compress; it hadn't got darker exactly, the twilight had just thickened.

"Well, well, well," Uncle Buck said. "They ain't in Alabama, because she told us so. And they ain't toward Memphis, because there are still Yankees there yet. So I reckon we better try down toward Grenada first. By Godfrey, I'll bet this mule against that nigger's pocket knife that we won't ride two days before we come on a mad woman hollering

down the road with a handful of chicken feathers in her hand. You come on here and listen to me. By Godfrey, we're going to do this thing but by Godfrey we're going to do it right."

2

So we didn't get Ab Snopes that day. We didn't get him for a lot of days, and nights too — days in which we rode, the three of us, on relays of Granny's and Ringo's Yankee mules along the known roads and the unknown (and sometimes unmarked) trails and paths, in the wet and the iron frost, and nights when we slept in the same wet and the same freeze and (once) in the snow, beneath whatever shelter we found when night found us.

They had neither name nor number. They lasted from that December afternoon until late February, until one night we realised that we had been hearing geese and ducks going north for some time. At first Ringo kept a pine stick and each night he would cut a notch in it, with a big one for Sunday and two long ones which meant Christmas and New Year's.

But one night when the stick had almost forty notches in it, we stopped in the rain to make camp without any roof to get under and we had to use the stick to start a fire, because of Uncle Buck's arm.

And so, when we came to where we could get another pine stick, we couldn't remember whether it had been five or six or ten days, and so Ringo didn't start another. Because he said he would fix the stick up the day we got Grumby and that it wouldn't need but two notches on it — one for the day we got him and one for the day Granny died.

We had two mules apiece, to swap onto at noon each day. We got the mules back from the hill people; we could have got a cavalry regiment if we had wanted it — of old men and women and children, too — with cotton bagging and flour sacking for uniforms and hoes and axes for arms, on the Yankee mules that Granny had loaned to them. But Uncle

Buck told them that we didn't need any help; that three was enough to catch Grumby.

They were not hard to follow. One day we had about twenty notches on the stick and we came onto a house where the ashes were still smoking and a boy almost as big as Ringo and me still unconscious in the stable with even his shirt cut to pieces like they had had a wire snapper on the whip, and a woman with a little thread of blood still running out of her mouth and her voice sounding light and far away like a locust from across the pasture, telling us how many there were and which way they would likely go saying, "Kill them. Kill them."

It was a long way, but it wasn't far. You could have put a silver dollar down on the geography page with the center of it at Jefferson and we would have never ridden out from under it.

And we were closer behind them than we knew, because one night we had ridden late without coming to a house or a shed to camp in, and so we stopped and Ringo said he would scout around a little, because all we had left to eat was the bone of a ham; only it was more likely Ringo was trying to dodge helping to get in the firewood.

So Uncle Buck and I were spreading down pine branches to sleep on when we heard a shot and then a sound like a brick chimney falling onto a rotten shingle roof, and then the horses, starting fast and dying away, and then I could hear Ringo yelling. He had come onto a house; he thought it was deserted, and then he said it looked too dark, too quiet.

So he climbed onto a shed against the back wall, and he said he saw the crack of light and he was trying to pull the shutter open careful, but it came loose with a sound like a shot, and he was looking into a room with a candle stuck into a bottle and either three or thirteen men looking right at him; and how somebody hollered, "There they are!" and another man jerked out a pistol and one of the others grabbed his arm as it went off, and then the whole shed gave way under him, and

he said how he lay there hollering and trying to get untangled from the broken planks and heard them ride away.

“So he didn’t shoot at you,” Uncle Buck said.

“Hit warn’t none of his fault if he never,” Ringo said.

“But he didn’t,” Uncle Buck said. But he wouldn’t let us go on that night. “We won’t lose any distance,” he said. “They are flesh and blood, the same as we are. And we ain’t scared.”

So we went on at daylight, following the hoof-prints now. Then we had three more notches in the stick; that night Ringo put the last notch in it that he was going to, but we didn’t know it.

We were sitting in front of a cotton pen where we were going to sleep, eating a shote that Ringo had found, when we heard the horse. Then the man begun to holler, “Hello! Hello!” and then we watched him ride up on a good short-coupled sorrel mare, with his neat little fine made boots, and his linen shirt without any collar, and a coat that had been good, too, once, and a broad hat pulled down so that all we could see was his eyes and nose between the hat and his black beard.

“Howdy, men,” he said.

“Howdy,” Uncle Buck said. He was eating a sparerib; he sat now with the rib in his left hand and his right hand lying on his lap just inside his coat; he wore the pistol on a loop of lace leather around his neck and stuck into his pants like a lady’s watch. But the stranger wasn’t looking at him; he just looked at each of us once and then sat there on the mare, with both his hands on the pommel in front of him.

“Mind if I light and warm?” he said.

“Light,” Uncle Buck said.

He got off. But he didn’t hitch the mare. He led her up and he sat down opposite us with the reins in his hand. “Give the stranger some meat, Ringo,” Uncle Buck said. But he didn’t take it. He didn’t move.

He just said that he had eaten, sitting there on the log with his little feet side by side and his elbows out a little and his two hands on his knees as small as a woman's hands and covered with a light mat of fine black hair right down to the finger nails, and not looking at any of us now. I don't know what he was looking at now.

"I have just ridden out from Memphis," he said. "How far do you call it to Alabama?"

Uncle Buck told him, not moving either, with the sparerib still raised in his left hand and the other hand lying just inside his coat. "You going to Alabama, hey?"

"Yes," the stranger said. "I'm looking for a man." And now I saw that he was looking at me from under his hat. "A man named Grumby. You people in these parts may have heard of him too."

"Yes," Uncle Buck said, "we have heard of him."

"Ah," the stranger said. He smiled; for a second his teeth looked white as rice inside his ink-colored beard. "Then what I am doing does not have to be secret." He looked at Uncle Buck now. "I live up in Tennessee. Grumby and his gang killed one of my niggers and ran my horses off. I'm going to get the horses back. If I have to take Grumby in the bargain, that will suit me too."

"Sho, now," Uncle Buck said. "So you look to find him in Alabama?"

"Yes. I happen to know that he is now headed there. I almost caught him yesterday; I did get one of his men, though the others escaped me. They passed you all sometime last night, if you were in this neighborhood then. You would have heard them, because when I last saw them, they were not wasting any time. I managed to persuade the man I caught to tell me where they are to ronyvoo."

"Alabama?" Ringo said. "You mean they headed back toward Alabama?"

“Correct,” the stranger said. He looked at Ringo now. “Did Grumby steal your hog, too, boy?”

“Hawg,” Ringo said. “Hawg?”

“Put some wood on the fire,” Uncle Buck told Ringo. “Save your breath to snore with tonight.”

Ringo hushed, but he didn’t move; he sat there staring back at the stranger, with his eyes looking a little red in the firelight.

“So you folks are out to catch a man, too, are you?” the stranger said.

“Two is correct,” Ringo said. “I reckon Ab Snopes can pass for a man.”

So then it was too late; we just sat there, with the stranger facing us across the fire with the mare’s reins in his little still hand, looking at the three of us from between his hat and his beard. “Ab Snopes,” he said. “I don’t believe I am acquainted with Ab Snopes. But I know Grumby. And you want Grumby too.” He was looking at all of us now. “You want to catch Grumby. Don’t you think that’s dangerous?”

“Not exactly,” Uncle Buck said. “You see, we done got a little Alabama Grumby evidence ourselves. That something or somebody has give Grumby a change of heart about killing women and children.” He and the stranger looked at each other. “Maybe it’s the wrong season for women and children.

Or maybe it’s public opinion, now that Grumby is what you might call a public character. Folks hereabouts is got used to having their menfolks killed and even shot from behind. But even the Yankees never got them used to the other. And evidently somebody has done reminded Grumby of this. Ain’t that correct?”

They looked at each other; they didn’t move. “But you are neither a woman nor a child, old man,” the stranger said. He stood up, easy; his eyes glinted in the firelight as he turned and put the reins over the mare’s head. “I reckon I’ll get along,” he said.

We watched him get into the saddle and sit there again, with his little black-haired hands lying on the pommel, looking down at us — at me and Ringo now. “So you want Ab Snopes,” he said. “Take a stranger’s advice and stick to him.”

He turned the mare. I was watching him, then I was thinking “I wonder if he knows that her off back shoe is gone,” when Ringo hollered, “Look out!” and then it seemed to me that I saw the spurred mare jump before I saw the pistol flash; and then the mare was galloping and Uncle Buck was lying on the ground cussing and yelling and dragging at his pistol, and then all three of us were dragging and fighting over it, but the front sight was caught in his suspenders, and the three of us fighting over it, and Uncle Buck panting and cussing, and the sound of the galloping mare dying away.

The bullet went through the flesh of the inner side of the arm that had the rheumatism; that was why Uncle Buck cussed so bad; he said the rheumatism was bad enough, and the bullet was bad enough, but to have them both at once was too much for any man. And then, when Ringo told him he ought to be thankful, that suppose the bullet had hit his good arm and then he wouldn’t even be able to feed himself, he reached back and, still lying down, he caught up a stick of firewood and tried to hit Ringo with it.

We cut his sleeve away and stopped the blood, and he made me cut a strip off his shirt tail, and Ringo handed him his stick and he sat there cussing us while we soaked the strip in hot salt water, and he held the arm himself with his good hand, cussing a steady streak, and made us run the strip back and forth through the hole the bullet had made.

He cussed then sure enough, looking a little like Granny looked, like all old people look when they have been hurt, with his beard jerking and his eyes snapping and his heels and the stick jabbing into the ground like the stick had been with him so long that it felt the rag and the salt too.

And at first I thought that the black man was Grumby, like I had thought that maybe Ab Snopes was. But Uncle Buck said not. It was the next morning; we hadn't slept much because Uncle Buck wouldn't go to sleep; only we didn't know then that it was his arm, because he wouldn't even let us talk about taking him back home.

And now we tried again, after we had finished breakfast, but he wouldn't listen, already on his mule with his left arm tied across his chest and the pistol stuck between the arm and his chest, where he could get to it quick, saying, "Wait. Wait," and his eyes hard and snapping with thinking. "It's something I ain't quite got yet," he said. "Something he was telling us last night without aiming to have us know yet that he had told us. Something that we are going to find out today."

"Likely a bullet that's fixing to hit you halfway betwixt both arms stid of halfway betwixt one," Ringo said.

Uncle Buck rode fast; we could watch his stick rising and falling against the mule's flank, not hard, just steady and fast, like a crippled man in a hurry that has used the stick so long he don't even know it any more. Because we didn't know that his arm was making him sick yet; he hadn't given us time to realise it. So we hurried on, riding along beside a slough, and then Ringo saw the snake.

It had been warm for a week, until last night. But last night it made ice, and now we saw the moccasin where it had crawled out and was trying to get back into the water when the cold got it, so that it lay with its body on the land and its head fixed in the skim ice like it was set into a mirror, and Uncle Buck turned sideways on his mule, hollering at us: "There it is, by Godfrey! There's the sign! Didn't I tell you we would—"

We all heard it at once — the three or maybe four shots and then the sound of horses galloping, except that some of the galloping came from Uncle Buck's mule, and he had his pistol out now before he turned from the road and into the trees, with the stick jammed under his hurt arm and his beard flying back over his shoulder. But we didn't find anything.

We saw the marks in the mud where the five horses had stood while the men that rode them had watched the road, and we saw the sliding tracks where the horses had begun to gallop, and I thinking quietly, "He still don't know that that shoe is gone." But that was all, and Uncle Buck sitting on his mule with the pistol raised in his hand and his beard blown back over his shoulder and the leather thong of the pistol hanging down his back like a girl's pigtail, and his mouth open and his eyes blinking at me and Ringo.

"What in thearnation hell!" he said. "Well, let's go back to the road. Whatever it was has done gone that way too."

So we had turned. Uncle Buck had put the pistol up and his stick had begun to beat the mule again when we saw what it was, what it meant.

It was Ab Snopes. He was lying on his side, tied hand and foot, and hitched to a sapling; we could see the marks in the mud where he had tried to roll back into the underbrush until the rope stopped him.

He had been watching us all the time, lying there with his face in the shape of snarling and not making a sound after he found out he could not roll out of sight. He was watching our mules' legs and feet under the bushes; he hadn't thought to look any higher yet, and so he did not know that we could see him; he must have thought that we had just spied him, because all of a sudden he began to jerk and thrash on the ground, hollering, "Help! Help! Help!"

We untied him and got him onto his feet, and he was still hollering, loud, with his face and his arms jerking, about how they had caught and robbed him, and they would have killed him if they hadn't heard us coming and run away; only his eyes were not hollering. They were watching us, going fast and quick from Ringo to me to Uncle Buck, and then at Ringo and me again, and they were not hollering, like his eyes belonged to one man and his gaped and yelling mouth belonged to another.

“So they caught you, hey?” Uncle Buck said. “A innocent and unsuspecting traveler. I reckon the name of them would never be Grumby now, would it?”

It was like we might have stopped and built a fire and thawed out that moccasin — just enough for it to find out where it was, but not enough for it to know what to do about it.

Only I reckon it was a high compliment to set Ab Snopes up with a moccasin, even a little one. I reckon it was bad for him. I reckon he realised that they had thrown him back to us without mercy, and that if he tried to save himself from us at their expense, they would come back and kill him.

I reckon he decided that the worst thing that could happen to him would be for us not to do anything to him at all. Because he quit jerking his arms; he even quit lying; for a minute his eyes and his mouth were telling the same thing.

“I made a mistake,” he said. “I admit hit. I reckon everybody does. The question is, what are you fellows going to do about hit?”

“Yes,” Uncle Buck said. “Everybody makes mistakes. Your trouble is, you make too many. Because mistakes are bad. Look at Rosa Millard. She just made one, and look at her. And you have made two.”

Ab Snopes watched Uncle Buck. “What’s them?”

“Being born too soon and dying too late,” Uncle Buck said.

He looked at all of us, fast; he didn’t move, still talking to Uncle Buck.

“You ain’t going to kill me. You don’t dast.”

“I don’t even need to,” Uncle Buck said. “It wasn’t my grandmaw you sicked onto that snake den.”

He looked at me now, but his eyes were going again, back and forth across me at Ringo and Uncle Buck; it was the two of them again now, the eyes and the voice. “Why, then I’m all right. Bayard ain’t got no hard feelings against me.

He knows hit was a pure accident; that we was doing hit for his sake and his paw and them niggers at home. Why, here hit's a whole year and it was me that holp and tended Miss Rosa when she never had ara living soul but them chil—" Now the voice began to tell the truth again; it was the eyes and the voice that I was walking toward. He fell back, crouching, his hands flung up.

Behind me, Uncle Buck said, "You, Ringo! Stay back."
He was walking backward now, with his hands flung up, hollering, "Three on one! Three on one!"

"Stand still," Uncle Buck said. "Ain't no three on you. I don't see nobody on you but one of them children you was just mentioning." Then we were both down in the mud; and then I couldn't see him, and I couldn't seem to find him any more, not even with the hollering; and then I was fighting three or four for a long time before Uncle Buck and Ringo held me, and then I could see him again, lying on the ground with his arms over his face. "Get up," Uncle Buck said.

"No," he said. "Three of you can jump on me and knock me down again, but you got to pick me up first to do hit. I ain't got no rights and justice here, but you can't keep me from protesting hit."

"Lift him up," Uncle Buck said. "I'll hold Bayard."

Ringo lifted him; it was like lifting up a half-filled cotton sack. "Stand up, Mr. Ab Snopes," Ringo said. But he would not stand, not even after Ringo and Uncle Buck tied him to the sapling and Ringo had taken off his and Uncle Buck's and Ab Snopes' galluses and knotted them together with the bridle reins from the mules.

He just hung there in the rope, not even flinching when the lash fell, saying, "That's hit. Whup me. Lay hit on me; you got me three to one."

"Wait," Uncle Buck said. Ringo stopped. "You want another chance with one to one? You can take your choice of the three of us."

“I got my rights,” he said. “I’m helpless, but I can still protest hit. Whup me.”

I reckon he was right. I reckon if we had let him go clean, they would have circled back and killed him themselves before dark. Because — that was the night it began to rain and we had to burn Ringo’s stick because Uncle Buck admitted now that his arm was getting bad — we all ate supper together, and it was Ab Snopes that was the most anxious about Uncle Buck, saying how it wasn’t any hard feelings and that he could see himself that he had made a mistake in trusting the folks he did, and that all he wanted to do now was to go back home, because it was only the folks you had known all your life that you could trust, and when you put faith in a stranger you deserved what you got when you found that what you had been eating and sleeping with was no better than a passel of rattlesnakes.

But as soon as Uncle Buck tried to find out if it actually was Grumby, he shut up and denied that he had ever seen him.

They left us early the next morning. Uncle Buck was sick by then; we offered to ride back home with him, or to let Ringo ride back with him, and I would keep Ab Snopes with me, but Uncle Buck wouldn’t have it.

“Grumby might capture him again and tie him to another sapling in the road, and you would lose time burying him,” Uncle Buck said. “You boys go on. It ain’t going to be long now. And catch them!” He begun to holler, with his face flushed and his eyes bright, taking the pistol from around his neck and giving it to me, “Catch them! Catch them!”

3

So Ringo and I went on. It rained all that day; now it began to rain all the time. We had the two mules apiece; we went fast. It rained; sometimes we had no fire at all; that was when we lost count of time, because one morning we came to a fire still burning and a hog they had not even had time to butcher; and sometimes we would ride all night, swapping mules when we had guessed that it had been two hours; and

so, sometimes it would be night when we slept and sometimes it would be daylight, and we knew that they must have watched us from somewhere every day and that now that Uncle Buck was not with us, they didn't even dare to stop and try to hide.

Then one afternoon — the rain had stopped but the clouds had not broken and it was turning cold again — it was about dusk and we were galloping along an old road in the river bottom; it was dim and narrow under the trees and we were galloping when my mule shied and swerved and stopped, and I just did catch myself before I went over his head; and then we saw the thing hanging over the middle of the road from a limb.

It was an old Negro man, with a rim of white hair and with his bare toes pointing down and his head on one side like he was thinking about something quiet.

The note was pinned to him, but we couldn't read it until we rode on into a clearing. It was a scrap of dirty paper with big crude printed letters, like a child might have made them:

Last woning not thret. Turn back. The barer of this my promise and garntee. I have stood all I aim to stand children no children.

G.

And something else written beneath it in a hand neat and small and prettier than Granny's, only you knew that a man had written it; and while I looked at the dirty paper I could see him again, with his neat little feet and his little black-haired hands and his fine soiled shirt and his fine muddy coat, across the fire from us that night.

This is signed by others beside G., one of whm in particular havng less scruples re children than he has. Nethless undersand desires to give both you and G. one more chance. Take it, and some day become a man. Refuse it, and cease even to be a child.

Ringo and I looked at each other. There had been a house here once, but it was gone now. Beyond the clearing the road went on again into

the thick trees in the gray twilight. "Maybe it will be tomorrow," Ringo said.

It was tomorrow; we slept that night in a haystack, but we were riding again by daylight, following the dim road along the river bottom. This time it was Ringo's mule that shied; the man had stepped out of the bushes that quick, with his fine muddy boots and coat and the pistol in his little black-haired hand, and only his eyes and his nose showing between his hat and his beard.

"Stay where you are," he said. "I will still be watching you."

We didn't move. We watched him step back in to the bushes, then the three of them came out — the bearded man and another man walking abreast and leading two saddled horses, and the third man walking just in front of them with his hands behind him — a thick-built man with a reddish stubble and pale eyes, in a faded Confederate uniform coat and Yankee boots, bare-headed, with a long smear of dried blood on his cheek and one side of his coat caked with dried mud and that sleeve ripped away at the shoulder, but we didn't realise at once that what made his shoulders look so thick was that his arms were tied tight behind him.

And then all of a sudden we knew that at last we were looking at Grumby. We knew it long before the bearded man said, "You want Grumby. Here he is."

We just sat there. Because from then on, the other two men did not even look at us again. "I'll take him now," the bearded man said. "Get on your horse." The other man got on one of the horses. We could see the pistol in his hand then, pointed at Grumby's back. "Hand me your knife," the bearded man said.

Without moving the pistol, the other man passed his knife to the bearded man. Then Grumby spoke; he had not moved until now; he just stood there with his shoulders hunched and his little pale eyes blinking at me and Ringo.

“Boys,” he said, “boys—”

“Shut your mouth,” the bearded man said, in a cold, quiet, almost pleasant voice. “You’ve already talked too much. If you had done what I wanted done that night in December, you wouldn’t be where you are now.” We saw his hand with the knife; I reckon maybe for a minute Ringo and I and Grumby, too, all thought the same thing. But he just cut Grumby’s hands loose and stepped back quick. But when Grumby turned, he turned right into the pistol in the bearded man’s hand.

“Steady,” the bearded man said. “Have you got him, Bridger?”

“Yes,” the other man said. The bearded man backed to the other horse and got on it without lowering his pistol or ceasing to watch Grumby. Then he sat there, too, looking down at Grumby, with his little hooked nose and his eyes alone showing between the hat and the ink-colored beard. Grumby began to move his head from side to side.

“Boys,” he said, “boys, you ain’t going to do this to me.”

“We’re not going to do anything to you,” the bearded man said. “I can’t speak for these boys there. But since you are so delicate about children, maybe they will be delicate with you. But we’ll give you a chance though.”

His other hand went inside his coat too fast to watch; it had hardly disappeared before the other pistol flicked out and turned once and fell at Grumby’s feet; again Grumby moved, but the pistols stopped him. The bearded man sat easy on the horse, looking down at Grumby, talking in that cold, still, vicious voice that wasn’t even mad:

“We had a good thing in this country.

We would have it yet, if it hadn’t been for you. And now we’ve got to pull out. Got to leave it because you lost your nerve and killed an old woman and then lost your nerve again and refused to cover the first mistake. Scruples,” he said. “Scruples.

So afraid of raising the country that there ain't a man, woman or child, black or white, in it that ain't on the watch for us. And all because you got scared and killed an old woman you never saw before. Not to get anything; not for one single Confed bank note.

But because you got scared of a piece of paper on which someone had signed Bedford Forrest's name. And you with one exactly like it in your pocket now."

He didn't look at the other man, Bridger; he just said, "All right. Ease off. But watch him. He's too tender-hearted to turn your back on."

They backed the horses away, side by side, the two pistols trained on Grumby's belly, until they reached the underbrush. "We're going to Texas. If you should leave this place, I would advise you to go at least that far also. But just remember that Texas is a wide place, and use that knowledge. Ride!" he shouted.

He whirled the mare. Bridger whirled too. As they did so, Grumby leaped and caught the pistol from the ground and ran forward, crouching and shouting into the bushes, cursing. He shot three times toward the fading sound of the horses, then he whirled back to face us.

Ringo and I were on the ground, too; I don't remember when we got down nor why, but we were down, and I remember how I looked once at Ringo's face and then how I stood there with Uncle Buck's pistol feeling heavy as a firedog in my hand. Then I saw that he had quit whirling; that he was standing there with the pistol hanging against his right leg and that he was looking at me; and then all of a sudden he was smiling.

"Well, boys," he said, "it looks like you have got me. Durn my hide for letting Matt Bowden fool me into emptying my pistol at him."

And I could hear my voice; it sounded faint and far away, like the woman's in Alabama that day, so that I wondered if he could hear me: "You shot three times. You have got two more shots in it."

His face didn't change, or I couldn't see it change. It just lowered, looking down, but the smile was gone from it. "In this pistol?" he said. It was like he was examining a pistol for the first time, so slow and careful it was that he passed it from his right to his left hand and let it hang again, pointing down again.

"Well, well, well. Sholy I ain't forgot how to count as well as how to shoot." There was a bird somewhere — a yellowhammer — I had been hearing it all the time; even the three shots hadn't frightened it. And I could hear Ringo, too, making a kind of whimpering sound when he breathed, and it was like I wasn't trying to watch Grumby so much as to keep from looking at Ringo. "Well, she's safe enough now, since it don't look like I can even shoot with my right hand."

Then it happened. I know what did happen, but even now I don't know how, in what order. Because he was big and squat, like a bear. But when we had first seen him he was a captive, and so, even now he seemed more like a stump than even an animal, even though we had watched him leap and catch up the pistol and run firing after the other two.

All I know is, one second he was standing there in his muddy Confederate coat, smiling at us, with his ragged teeth showing a little in his red stubble, with the thin sunlight on the stubble and on his shoulders and cuffs, on the dark marks where the braid had been ripped away; and the next second there were two bright orange splashes, one after the other, against the middle of the gray coat and the coat itself swelling slow down on me like when Granny told us about the balloon she saw in St. Louis and we would dream about it.

I reckon I heard the sound, and I reckon I must have heard the bullets, and I reckon I felt him when he hit me, but I don't remember it. I just

remember the two bright flashes and the gray coat rushing down, and then the ground hitting me.

But I could smell him — the smell of man sweat, and the gray coat grinding into my face and smelling of horse sweat and wood smoke and grease — and I could hear him, and then I could hear my arm socket, and I thought “In a minute I will hear my fingers breaking, but I have got to hold onto it” and then — I don’t know whether it was under or over his arm or his leg — I saw Ringo, in the air, looking exactly like a frog, even to the eyes, with his mouth open too and his open pocket knife in his hand.

Then I was free. I saw Ringo straddle of Grumby’s back and Grumby getting up from his hands and knees and I tried to raise the pistol only my arm wouldn’t move. Then Grumby bucked Ringo off just like a steer would and whirled again, looking at us, crouched, with his mouth open too; and then my arm began to come up with the pistol and he turned and ran.

He shouldn’t have tried to run from us in boots. Or maybe that made no difference either, because now my arm had come up and now I could see Grumby’s back (he didn’t scream, he never made a sound) and the pistol both at the same time and the pistol was level and steady as a rock.

4

It took us the rest of that day and part of the night to reach the old compress. But it didn’t take very long to ride home because we went fast with the two mounts apiece to change to, and what we had to carry now, wrapped in a piece of the skirt of Grumby’s coat, didn’t weigh anything.

It was almost dark when we rode through Jefferson; it was raining again when we rode past the brick piles and the sooty walls that hadn’t fallen down yet, and went on through what used to be the square. We hitched the mules in the cedars and Ringo was just starting off to find a

board when we saw that somebody had already put one up — Mrs. Compson, I reckon, or maybe Uncle Buck when he got back home. We already had the piece of wire.

The earth had sunk too now, after two months; it was almost level now, like at first Granny had not wanted to be dead either but now she had begun to be reconciled. We unwrapped it from the jagged square of stained faded gray cloth and fastened it to the board. “Now she can lay good and quiet,” Ringo said.

“Yes,” I said. And then we both began to cry. We stood there in the slow rain, crying. We had ridden a lot, and during the last week we hadn’t slept much and we hadn’t always had anything to eat.

“It wasn’t him or Ab Snopes either that kilt her,” Ringo said. “It was them mules. That first batch of mules we got for nothing.”

“Yes,” I said. “Let’s go home. I reckon Louvinia is worried about us.”

So it was good and dark when we came to the cabin. And then we saw that it was lighted like for Christmas; we could see the big fire and the lamp, clean and bright, when Louvinia opened the door long before we had got to it and ran out into the rain and began to paw at me, crying and hollering.

“What?” I said. “Father? Father’s home? Father?”

“And Miss Drusilla!” Louvinia hollered, crying and praying and pawing at me, and hollering and scolding at Ringo all at once. “Home! Hit done finished! All but the surrendering. And now Marse John done home.” She finally told us how Father and Drusilla had come home about a week ago and Uncle Buck told Father where Ringo and I were, and how Father had tried to make Drusilla wait at home, but she refused, and how they were looking for us, with Uncle Buck to show the way.

So we went to bed. We couldn’t even stay awake to eat the supper Louvinia cooked for us; Ringo and I went to bed in our clothes on the pallet, and went to sleep all in one motion, with Louvinia’s face hanging

over us and still scolding, and Joby in the chimney corner where Louvinia had made him get up out of Granny's chair.

And then somebody was pulling at me, and I thought I was fighting Ab Snopes again, and then it was the rain in Father's beard and clothes that I smelled. But Uncle Buck was still hollering, and Father holding me, and Ringo and I held to him, and then it was Drusilla kneeling and holding me and Ringo, and we could smell the rain in her hair, too, while she was hollering at Uncle Buck to hush.

Father's hand was hard; I could see his face beyond Drusilla and I was trying to say, "Father, Father," while she was holding me and Ringo with the rain smell of her hair all around us, and Uncle Buck hollering and Joby looking at Uncle Buck with his mouth open and his eyes round.

"Yes, by Godfrey! Not only tracked him down and caught him but brought back the actual proof of it to where Rosa Millard could rest quiet."

"The which?" Joby hollered. "Fotch back the which?"

"Hush! Hush!" Drusilla said. "That's all done, all finished. You, Uncle Buck!"

"The proof and the expiation!" Uncle Buck hollered. "When me and John Sartoris and Drusilla rode up to that old compress, the first thing we see was that murdering scoundrel pegged out on the door to it like a coon hide, all except the right hand. 'And if anybody wants to see that, too,' I told John Sartoris, 'just let them ride into Jefferson and look on Rosa Millard's grave!' Ain't I told you he is John Sartoris' boy? Hey? Ain't I told you?"

SKIRMISH AT SARTORIS

WHEN I THINK of that day, of Father's old troop on their horses drawn up facing the house, and Father and Drusilla on the ground with that Carpet Bagger voting box in front of them, and opposite them the women — Aunt Louisa, Mrs. Habersham and all the others — on the porch and the two sets of them, the men and the women, facing one another like they were both waiting for a bugle to sound the charge, I think I know the reason.

I think it was because Father's troop (like all the other Southern soldiers too), even though they had surrendered and said that they were whipped, were still soldiers. Maybe from the old habit of doing everything as one man; maybe when you have lived for four years in a world ordered completely by men's doings, even when it is danger and fighting, you don't want to quit that world: maybe the danger and the fighting are the reasons, because men have been pacifists for every reason under the sun except to avoid danger and fighting.

And so now Father's troop and all the other men in Jefferson, and Aunt Louisa and Mrs. Habersham and all the women in Jefferson were actually enemies for the reason that the men had given in and admitted that they belonged to the United States but the women had never surrendered.

I remember the night we got the letter and found out at last where Drusilla was. It was just before Christmas in 1864, after the Yankees had burned Jefferson and gone away, and we didn't even know for sure if the war was still going on or not.

All we knew was that for three years the country had been full of Yankees, and then all of a sudden they were gone and there were no men there at all anymore. We hadn't even heard from Father since July, from Carolina, so that now we lived in a world of burned towns and houses and ruined plantations and fields inhabited only by women. Ringo and I were fifteen then; we felt almost exactly like we had to eat and sleep and change our clothes in a hotel built only for ladies and children.

The envelope was worn and dirty and it had been opened once and then glued back, but we could still make out Hawkhurst, Gihon County, Alabama on it even though we did not recognise Aunt Louisa's hand at first.

It was addressed to Granny; it was six pages cut with scissors from wallpaper and written on both sides with pokeberry juice and I thought of that night eighteen months ago when Drusilla and I stood outside the cabin at Hawkhurst and listened to the niggers passing in the road, the night when she told me about the dog, about keeping the dog quiet, and then asked me to ask Father to let her join his troop and ride with him.

But I didn't tell Father. Maybe I forgot it. Then the Yankees went away, and Father and his troop went away too. Then, six months later, we had a letter from him about how they were fighting in Carolina, and a month after that we had one from Aunt Louisa that Drusilla was gone too, a short letter on the wallpaper that you could see where Aunt Louisa had cried in the pokeberry juice about how she did not know where Drusilla was but that she had expected the worst ever since Drusilla had deliberately tried to unsex herself by refusing to feel any natural grief at the death in battle not only of her affianced husband but of her own father and that she took it for granted that Drusilla was with us and though she did not expect Drusilla to take any steps herself to relieve a mother's anxiety, she hoped that Granny would. But we didn't know where Drusilla was either.

She had just vanished. It was like the Yankees in just passing through the South had not only taken along with them all living men blue and gray and white and black, but even one young girl who had happened to try to look and act like a man after her sweetheart was killed.

So then the next letter came. Only Granny wasn't there to read it because she was dead then (it was the time when Grumby doubled back past Jefferson and so Ringo and I spent one night at home and found the letter when Mrs. Compson had sent it out) and so for a while Ringo and I couldn't make out what Aunt Louisa was trying to tell us.

This one was on the same wallpaper too, six pages this time, only Aunt Louisa hadn't cried in the pokeberry juice this time: Ringo said because she must have been writing too fast:

Dear Sister:

I think this will be news to you as it was to me though I both hope and pray it will not be the heart-rending shock to you it was to me as naturally it cannot since you are only an aunt while I am the mother.

But it is not myself I am thinking of since I am a woman, a mother, a Southern woman, and it has been our lot during the last four years to learn to bear anything. But when I think of my husband who laid down his life to protect a heritage of courageous men and spotless women looking down from heaven upon a daughter who had deliberately cast away that for which he died, and when I think of my half-orphan son who will one day ask of me why his martyred father's sacrifice was not enough to preserve his sister's good name —

That's how it sounded. Ringo was holding a pineknot for me to read by, but after a while he had to light another pineknot and all the farther we had got was how when Gavin Breckbridge was killed at Shiloh before he and Drusilla had had time to marry, there had been reserved for Drusilla the highest destiny of a Southern woman — to be the bride-widow of a lost cause — and how Drusilla had not only thrown that away, she had not only become a lost woman and a shame to her father's memory but she was now living in a word that Aunt Louisa would not even repeat but that Granny knew what it was, though at least thank God that Father and Drusilla were not actually any blood kin, it being Father's wife who was Drusilla's cousin by blood and not Father himself.

So then Ringo lit the other pineknot and then we put the sheets of wallpaper down on the floor and then we found out what it was: how Drusilla had been gone for six months and no word from her except she was alive, and then one night she walked into the cabin where Aunt Louisa and Denny were (and now it had a line drawn under it, like this:) in the garments not alone of a man but of a common private soldier

and told them how she had been a member of Father's troop for six months, bivouacking at night surrounded by sleeping men and not even bothering to put up the tent for her and Father except when the weather was bad, and how Drusilla not only showed neither shame nor remorse but actually pretended she did not even know what Aunt Louisa was talking about; how when Aunt Louisa told her that she and Father must marry at once, Drusilla said, "Can't you understand that I am tired of burying husbands in this war? That I am riding in Cousin John's troop not to find a man but to hurt Yankees?" and how Aunt Louisa said:

"At least don't call him Cousin John where strangers can hear you."

2

The third letter did not come to us at all. It came to Mrs. Compson. Drusilla and Father were home then. It was in the spring and the war was over now, and we were busy getting the cypress and oak out of the bottom to build the house and Drusilla working with Joby and Ringo and Father and me like another man, with her hair shorter than it had been at Hawkhurst and her face sunburned from riding in the weather and her body thin from living like soldiers lived.

After Granny died Ringo and Louvinia and I all slept in the cabin, but after Father came Ringo and Louvinia moved back to the other cabin with Joby and now Father and I slept on Ringo's and my pallet and Drusilla slept in the bed behind the quilt curtain where Granny used to sleep.

And so one night I remembered Aunt Louisa's letter and I showed it to Drusilla and Father, and Father found out that Drusilla had not written to tell Aunt Louisa where she was and Father said she must, and so one day Mrs. Compson came out with the third letter.

Drusilla and Ringo and Louvinia too were down in the bottom at the sawmill and I saw that one too, on the wallpaper with the pokeberry juice and the juice not cried on this time either, and this the first time Mrs. Compson had come out since Granny died and not even getting

out of her surrey but sitting there holding to her parasol with one hand and her shawl with the other and looking around like when Drusilla would come out of the house or from around the corner it would not be just a thin sunburned girl in a man's shirt and pants but maybe something like a tame panther or bear.

This one sounded just like the others: about how Aunt Louisa was addressing a stranger to herself but not a stranger to Granny and that there were times when the good name of one family was the good name of all and that she naturally did not expect Mrs. Compson to move out and live with Father and Drusilla because even that would be too late now to preserve the appearance of that which had never existed anyway.

But that Mrs. Compson was a woman too, Aunt Louisa believed, a Southern woman too, and had suffered too, Aunt Louisa didn't doubt, only she did hope and pray that Mrs. Compson had been spared the sight of her own daughter if Mrs. Compson had one flouting and outraging all Southern principles of purity and womanhood that our husbands had died for, though Aunt Louisa hoped again that Mrs. Compson's husband (Mrs. Compson was a good deal older than Granny and the only husband she had ever had had been locked up for crazy a long time ago because in the slack part of the afternoons he would gather up eight or ten little niggers from the quarters and line them up across the creek from him with sweet potatoes on their heads and he would shoot the potatoes off with a rifle; he would tell them he might miss a potato but he wasn't going to miss a nigger, and so they would stand mighty still) had not made one of the number. So I couldn't make any sense out of that one too and I still didn't know what Aunt Louisa was talking about and I didn't believe that Mrs. Compson knew either.

Because it was not her: it was Mrs. Habersham, that never had been out here before and that Granny never had been to see that I knew of. Because Mrs. Compson didn't stay, she didn't even get out of the surrey, sitting there kind of drawn up under the shawl and looking at me and then at the cabin like she didn't know just what might come out of it or out from behind it.

Then she began to tap the nigger driver on his head with the parasol and they went away, the two old horses going pretty fast back down the drive and back down the road to town. And the next afternoon when I came out of the bottom to go to the spring with the water bucket there were five surreys and buggies in front of the cabin and inside the cabin there were fourteen of them that had come the four miles out from Jefferson, in the Sunday clothes that the Yankees and the war had left them, that had husbands dead in the war or alive back in Jefferson helping Father with what he was doing, because they were strange times then.

Only like I said, maybe times are never strange to women: that it is just one continuous monotonous thing full of the repeated follies of their menfolks. Mrs. Compson was sitting in Granny's chair, still holding the parasol and drawn up under her shawl and looking like she had finally seen whatever it was she had expected to see, and it had been the panther.

It was Mrs. Habersham who was holding back the quilt for the others to go in and look at the bed where Drusilla slept and then showing them the pallet where Father and I slept. Then she saw me and said, "And who is this?"

"That's Bayard," Mrs. Compson said.

"You poor child," Mrs. Habersham said. So I didn't stop. But I couldn't help but hear them. It sounded like a ladies' club meeting with Mrs. Habersham running it, because every now and then Mrs. Habersham would forget to whisper: " — Mother should come, be sent for at once.

But lacking her presence . . . we, the ladies of the community, mothers ourselves . . . child probably taken advantage of by gallant romantic . . . before realising the price she must—" and Mrs. Compson said, "Hush! Hush!" and then somebody else said, "Do you really suppose—" and then Mrs. Habersham forgot to whisper good: "What else? What other

reason can you name why she should choose to conceal herself down there in the woods all day long, lifting heavy weights like logs and—”

Then I went away. I filled the bucket at the spring and went back to the log-yard where Drusilla and Ringo and Joby were feeding the bandsaw and the blindfolded mule going round and round in the sawdust.

And then Joby kind of made a sound and we all stopped and looked and there was Mrs. Habersham, with three of the others kind of peeping out from behind her with their eyes round and bright, looking at Drusilla standing there in the sawdust and shavings, in her dirty sweated overalls and shirt and brogans, with her face sweat-streaked with sawdust and her short hair yellow with it. “I am Martha Habersham,” Mrs. Habersham said. “I am a neighbor and I hope to be a friend.” And then she said, “You poor child.”

We just looked at her; when Drusilla finally spoke, she sounded like Ringo and I would when Father would say something to us in Latin for a joke. “Ma’am?” Drusilla said. Because I was just fifteen; I still didn’t know what it was all about; I just stood there and listened without even thinking much, like when they had been talking in the cabin. “My condition?” Drusilla said. “My—”

“Yes,” Mrs. Habersham said. “No mother, no woman to . . . forced to these straits—” kind of waving her hand at the mules that hadn’t stopped and at Joby and Ringo goggling at her and the three others still peeping around her at Drusilla. “— to offer you not only our help, but our sympathy.”

“My condition,” Drusilla said. “My con . . . Help and sym—” Then she began to say, “Oh. Oh. Oh.” standing there, and then she was running. She began to run like a deer, that starts to run and then decides where it wants to go; she turned right in the air and came toward me, running light over the logs and planks, with her mouth open, saying “John, John” not loud; for a minute it was like she thought I was Father until she waked up and found I was not; she stopped without even ceasing

to run, like a bird stops in the air, motionless yet still furious with movement.

“Is that what you think too?” she said. Then she was gone. Every now and then I could see her footprints, spaced and fast, just inside the woods, but when I came out of the bottom, I couldn’t see her. But the surreys and buggies were still in front of the cabin and I could see Mrs. Compson and the other ladies on the porch, looking out across the pasture toward the bottom, so I did not go there.

But before I came to the other cabin, where Louvinia and Joby and Ringo lived, I saw Louvinia come up the hill from the spring, carrying her cedar water bucket and singing. Then she went into the cabin and the singing stopped short off and so I knew where Drusilla was. But I didn’t hide.

I went to the window and looked in and saw Drusilla just turning from where she had been leaning her head in her arms on the mantel when Louvinia came in with the water bucket and a gum twig in her mouth and Father’s old hat on top of her head rag. Drusilla was crying. “That’s what it is, then,” she said.

“Coming down there to the mill and telling me that in my condition — sympathy and help — Strangers; I never saw any of them before and I don’t care a damn what they — But you and Bayard. Is that what you believe? that John and I — that we—” Then Louvinia moved.

Her hand came out quicker than Drusilla could jerk back and lay flat on the belly of Drusilla’s overalls, then Louvinia was holding Drusilla in her arms like she used to hold me and Drusilla was crying hard. “That John and I — that we — And Gavin dead at Shiloh and John’s home burned and his plantation ruined, that he and I — We went to the war to hurt Yankees, not hunting women!”

“I knows you ain’t,” Louvinia said. “Hush now. Hush.”

And that's about all. It didn't take them long. I don't know whether Mrs. Habersham made Mrs. Compson send for Aunt Louisa or whether Aunt Louisa just gave them a deadline and then came herself. Because we were busy, Drusilla and Joby and Ringo and me at the mill, and Father in town; we wouldn't see him from the time he would ride away in the morning until when he would get back, sometimes late, at night.

Because they were strange times then. For four years we had lived for just one thing, even the women and children who could not fight: to get Yankee troops out of the country; we thought that when that happened, it would be all over.

And now that had happened, and then before the summer began I heard Father say to Drusilla, "We were promised Federal troops; Lincoln himself promised to send us troops. Then things will be all right." That, from a man who had commanded a regiment for four years with the avowed purpose of driving Federal troops from the country.

Now it was as though we had not surrendered at all, we had joined forces with the men who had been our enemies against a new foe whose means we could not always fathom but whose aim we could always dread. So he was busy in town all day long.

They were building Jefferson back, the courthouse and the stores, but it was more than that which Father and the other men were doing; it was something which he would not let Drusilla or me or Ringo go into town to see. Then one day Ringo slipped off and went to town and came back and he looked at me with his eyes rolling a little.

"Do you know what I ain't?" he said.

"What?" I said.

"I ain't a nigger any more. I done been abolished." Then I asked him what he was, if he wasn't a nigger any more and he showed me what he had in his hand. It was a new scrip dollar; it was drawn on the United States Resident Treasurer, Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, and

signed "Cassius Q. Benbow, Acting Marshal" in a neat clerk's hand, with a big sprawling X under it.

"Cassius Q. Benbow?" I said.

"Co-rect," Ringo said. "Uncle Cash that druv the Benbow carriage twell he run off with the Yankees two years ago. He back now and he gonter be elected Marshal of Jefferson. That's what Marse John and the other white folks is so busy about."

"A nigger?" I said. "A nigger?"

"No," Ringo said. "They ain't no more niggers, in Jefferson nor nowhere else." Then he told me about the two Burdens from Missouri, with a patent from Washington to organise the niggers into Republicans, and how Father and the other men were trying to prevent it. "Naw, suh," he said.

"This war ain't over. Hit just started good. Used to be when you seed a Yankee you knowed him because he never had nothing but a gun or a mule halter or a handful of hen feathers.

Now you don't even know him and stid of the gun he got a clutch of this stuff in one hand and a clutch of nigger voting tickets in the yuther." So we were busy; we just saw Father at night and sometimes then Ringo and I and even Drusilla would take one look at him and we wouldn't ask him any questions.

So it didn't take them long, because Drusilla was already beaten; she was just marking time without knowing it from that afternoon when the fourteen ladies got into the surreys and buggies and went back to town until one afternoon about two months later when we heard Denny hollering even before the wagon came in the gates, and Aunt Louisa sitting on one of the trunks (that's what beat Drusilla: the trunks.

They had her dresses in them that she hadn't worn in three years; Ringo never had seen her in a dress until Aunt Louisa came) in mourning even to the crepe bow on her umbrella handle, that hadn't

worn mourning when we were at Hawkhurst two years ago though Uncle Dennison was just as dead then as he was now.

She came to the cabin and got out of the wagon, already crying and talking just like the letters sounded, like even when you listened to her you had to skip around fast to make any sense:

“I have come to appeal to them once more with a mother’s tears though I don’t think it will do any good though I had prayed until the very last that this boy’s innocence might be spared and preserved but what must be must be and at least we can all three bear our burden together”; sitting in Granny’s chair in the middle of the room, without even laying down the umbrella or taking her bonnet off, looking at the pallet where Father and I slept and then at the quilt nailed to the rafter to make a room for Drusilla, dabbing at her mouth with a handkerchief that made the whole cabin smell like dead roses.

And then Drusilla came in from the mill, in the muddy brogans and the sweaty shirt and overalls and her hair sunburned and full of sawdust, and Aunt Louisa looked at her once and begun to cry again, saying, “Lost, lost. Thank God in His mercy that Dennison Hawk was taken before he lived to see what I see.”

She was already beaten. Aunt Louisa made her put on a dress that night; we watched her run out of the cabin in it and run down the hill toward the spring while we were waiting for Father. And he came and walked into the cabin where Aunt Louisa was still sitting in Granny’s chair with the handkerchief before her mouth. “This is a pleasant surprise, Miss Louisa,” Father said.

“It is not pleasant to me, Colonel Sartoris,” Aunt Louisa said. “And after a year, I suppose I cannot call it surprise. But it is still a shock.”

So Father came out too and we went down to the spring and found Drusilla hiding behind the big beech, crouched down like she was trying to hide the skirt from Father even while he raised her up. “What’s a dress?” he said. “It don’t matter. Come. Get up, soldier.”

But she was beaten, like as soon as she let them put the dress on her she was whipped; like in the dress she could neither fight back nor run away. And so she didn't come down to the log-yard any more, and now that Father and I slept in the cabin with Joby and Ringo, I didn't even see Drusilla except at mealtime. And we were busy getting the timber out, and now everybody was talking about the election and how Father had told the two Burdens before all the men in town that the election would never be held with Cash Benbow or any other nigger in it and how the Burdens had dared him to stop it.

And besides, the other cabin would be full of Jefferson ladies all day; you would have thought that Drusilla was Mrs. Habersham's daughter and not Aunt Louisa's. They would begin to arrive right after breakfast and stay all day, so that at supper Aunt Louisa would sit in her black mourning except for the bonnet and umbrella, with a wad of some kind of black knitting she carried around with her and that never got finished and the folded handkerchief handy in her belt (only she ate fine; she ate more than Father even because the election was just a week off and I reckon he was thinking about the Burdens) and refusing to speak to anybody except Denny; and Drusilla trying to eat, with her face strained and thin and her eyes like somebody's that had been whipped a long time now and is going just on nerve.

Then Drusilla broke; they beat her. Because she was strong; she wasn't much older than I was, but she had let Aunt Louisa and Mrs. Habersham choose the game and she had beat them both until that night when Aunt Louisa went behind her back and chose a game she couldn't beat.

I was coming up to supper; I heard them inside the cabin before I could stop: "Can't you believe me?" Drusilla said. "Can't you understand that in the troop I was just another man and not much of one at that, and since we came home here I am just another mouth for John to feed, just a cousin of John's wife and not much older than his own son?"

And I could almost see Aunt Louisa sitting there with that knitting that never progressed:

“You wish to tell me that you, a young woman, associated with him, a still young man, day and night for a year, running about the country with no guard nor check of any sort upon — Do you take me for a complete fool?”

So that night Aunt Louisa beat her; we had just sat down to supper when Aunt Louisa looked at me like she had been waiting for the noise of the bench to stop: “Bayard, I do not ask your forgiveness for this because it is your burden too; you are an innocent victim as well as Dennison and I—”

Then she looked at Father, thrust back in Granny’s chair (the only chair we had) in her black dress, the black wad of knitting beside her plate. “Colonel Sartoris,” she said, “I am a woman; I must request what the husband whom I have lost and the man son which I have not would demand, perhaps at the point of a pistol. — Will you marry my daughter?”

I got out. I moved fast; I heard the light sharp sound when Drusilla’s head went down between her flungout arms on the table, and the sound the bench made when Father got up too; I passed him standing beside Drusilla with his hand on her head. “They have beat you, Drusilla,” he said.

3

Mrs. Habersham got there before we had finished breakfast the next morning. I don’t know how Aunt Louisa got word in to her so quick. But there she was, and she and Aunt Louisa set the wedding for the day after tomorrow. I don’t reckon they even knew that that was the day Father had told the Burdens Cash Benbow would never be elected marshal in Jefferson. I don’t reckon they paid any more attention to it than if all the men had decided that day after tomorrow all the clocks in Jefferson were to be set back or up an hour.

Maybe they didn’t even know there was to be an election, that all the men in the county would be riding toward Jefferson tomorrow with

pistols in their pockets, and that the Burdens already had their nigger voters camped in a cotton gin on the edge of town under guard. I don't reckon they even cared. Because like Father said, women cannot believe that anything can be right or wrong or even be very important that can be decided by a lot of little scraps of scribbled paper dropped into a box.

It was to be a big wedding; all Jefferson was to be invited and Mrs. Habersham planning to bring the three bottles of Madeira she had been saving for five years now when Aunt Louisa began to cry again. But they caught on quick now; now all of them were patting Aunt Louisa's hands and giving her vinegar to smell and Mrs. Habersham saying, "Of course. You poor thing.

A public wedding now, after a year, would be a public notice of the . . ." So they decided it would be a reception, because Mrs. Habersham said how a reception could be held for a bridal couple at any time, even ten years later. So Drusilla was to ride into town, meet Father and be married as quick and quiet as possible, with just me and one other for witnesses to make it legal; none of the ladies themselves would even be present. Then they would come back home and we would have the reception.

So they began to arrive early the next morning, with baskets of food and tablecloths and silver like for a church supper. Mrs. Habersham brought a veil and a wreath and they all helped Drusilla to dress, only Aunt Louisa made Drusilla put on Father's big riding cloak over the veil and wreath too, and Ringo brought the horses up, all curried and brushed, and I helped Drusilla on with Aunt Louisa and the others all watching from the porch.

But I didn't know that Ringo was missing when we started, not even when I heard Aunt Louisa hollering for Denny while we rode down the drive. It was Louvinia that told about it, about how after we left the ladies set and decorated the table and spread the wedding breakfast and how they were all watching the gate and Aunt Louisa still hollering for Denny now and then when they saw Ringo and Denny come up the

drive riding double on one of the mules at a gallop, with Denny's eyes round as doorknobs and already hollering, "They kilt um! They kilt um!"

"Who?" Aunt Louisa hollered. "Where have you been?"

"To town!" Denny hollered. "Them two Burdens! They kilt um!"

"Who killed them?" Aunt Louisa hollered.

"Drusilla and Cousin John!" Denny hollered. Then Louvinia said how Aunt Louisa hollered sure enough.

"Do you mean to tell me that Drusilla and that man are not married yet?"

Because we didn't have time. Maybe Drusilla and Father would have, but when we came into the square we saw the crowd of niggers kind of huddled beyond the hotel door with six or eight strange white men herding them, and then all of a sudden I saw the Jefferson men, the men that I knew, that Father knew, running across the square toward the hotel with each one holding his hip like a man runs with a pistol in his pocket.

And then I saw the men who were Father's troop lined up before the hotel door, blocking it off. And then I was sliding off my horse too and watching Drusilla struggling with George Wyatt. But he didn't have hold of her, he just had hold of the cloak, and then she was through the line of them and running toward the hotel with her wreath on one side of her head and the veil streaming behind. But George held me. He threw the cloak down and held me. "Let go," I said. "Father."

"Steady, now," George said, holding me. "John's just gone in to vote."

"But there are two of them!" I said. "Let me go!"

"John's got two shots in the derringer," George said. "Steady, now."

But they held me. And then we heard the three shots and we all turned and looked at the door. I don't know how long it was. "The last two was that derringer," George said. I don't know how long it was. The old nigger that was Mrs. Holston's porter, that was too old even to be free, stuck his head out once and said "Gret Gawd" and ducked back.

Then Drusilla came out, carrying the ballot box, the wreath on one side of her head and the veil twisted about her arm, and then Father came out behind her, brushing his new beaver hat on his sleeve. And then it was loud; I could hear them when they drew in their breath like when the Yankees used to hear it begin:

“Yaaaaa—” But Father raised his hand and they stopped. Then you couldn’t hear anything.

“We heard a pistol too,” George said. “Did they touch you?”

“No,” Father said. “I let them fire first. You all heard. You boys can swear to my derringer.”

“Yes,” George said. “We all heard.” Now Father looked at all of them, at all the faces in sight, slow.

“Does any man here want a word with me about this?” he said. But you could not hear anything, not even moving. The herd of niggers stood like they had when I first saw them, with the Northern white men herding them together. Father put his hat on and took the ballot box from Drusilla and helped her back onto her horse and handed the ballot box up to her.

Then he looked around again, at all of them. “This election will be held out at my home,” he said.

“I hereby appoint Drusilla Hawk voting commissioner until the votes are cast and counted. Does any man here object?” But he stopped them again with his hand before it had begun good. “Not now, boys,” he said. He turned to Drusilla. “Go home, I will go to the sheriff, and then I will follow you.”

“Like hell you will,” George Wyatt said. “Some of the boys will ride out with Drusilla. The rest of us will come with you.”

But Father would not let them. “Don’t you see we are working for peace through law and order?” he said. “I will make bond and then follow you. You do as I say.”

So we went on; we turned in the gates with Drusilla in front, the ballot box on her pommel — us and Father’s men and about a hundred more, and rode on up to the cabin where the buggies and surreys were standing, and Drusilla passed the ballot box to me and got down and took the box again and was walking toward the cabin when she stopped dead still.

I reckon she and I both remembered at the same time and I reckon that even the others, the men, knew all of a sudden that something was wrong. Because like Father said, I reckon women don’t ever surrender: not only victory, but not even defeat.

Because that’s how we were stopped when Aunt Louisa and the other ladies came out on the porch, and then Father shoved past me and jumped down beside Drusilla. But Aunt Louisa never even looked at him.

“So you are not married,” she said.

“I forgot,” Drusilla said.

“You forgot? You forgot?”

“I . . .” Drusilla said. “We . . .”

Now Aunt Louisa looked at us; she looked along the line of us sitting there in our saddles; she looked at me too just like she did at the others, like she had never seen me before. “And who are these, pray? Your wedding train of forgetters? Your groomsmen of murder and robbery?”

“They came to vote,” Drusilla said.

“To vote,” Aunt Louisa said. “Ah. To vote. Since you have forced your mother and brother to live under a roof of license and adultery you think you can also force them to live in a polling booth refuge from violence and bloodshed, do you?”

Bring me that box.” But Drusilla didn’t move, standing there in her torn dress and the ruined veil and the twisted wreath hanging from her hair by a few pins. Aunt Louisa came down the steps; we didn’t know what she was going to do: we just sat there and watched her snatch the polling box from Drusilla and fling it across the yard. “Come into the house,” she said.

“No,” Drusilla said.

“Come into the house. I will send for a minister myself.”

“No,” Drusilla said. “This is an election. Don’t you understand? I am voting commissioner.”

“So you refuse?”

“I have to. I must.” She sounded like a little girl that has been caught playing in the mud. “John said that I—”

Then Aunt Louisa began to cry. She stood there in the black dress, without the knitting and for the first time that I ever saw it, without even the handkerchief, crying, until Mrs. Habersham came and led her back into the house. Then they voted. That didn’t take long either.

They set the box on the sawchunk where Louvinia washed, and Ringo got the pokeberry juice and an old piece of window shade, and they cut it into ballots.

“Let all who want the Honorable Cassius Q. Benbow to be Marshal of Jefferson write Yes on his ballot; opposed, No,” Father said.

“And I’ll do the writing and save some more time,” George Wyatt said. So he made a pack of the ballots and wrote them against his saddle and fast as he would write them the men would take them and drop them into the box and Drusilla would call their names out.

We could hear Aunt Louisa still crying inside the cabin and we could see the other ladies watching us through the window. It didn’t take long.

“You needn’t bother to count them,” George said. “They all voted No.”

And that's all. They rode back to town then, carrying the box, with Father and Drusilla in the torn wedding dress and the crooked wreath and veil standing beside the sawchunk, watching them. Only this time even Father could not have stopped them.

It came back high and thin and ragged and fierce, like when the Yankees used to hear it out of the smoke and the galloping: "Yaaaaay, Drusilla!" they hollered. "Yaaaaay, John Sartoris! Yaaaaay!"

AN ODOR OF VERBENA

1

IT WAS JUST after supper. I had just opened my Coke on the table beneath the lamp; I heard Professor Wilkins' feet in the hall and then the instant of silence as he put his hand to the door knob, and I should have known.

People talk glibly of presentiment, but I had none. I heard his feet on the stairs and then in the hall approaching and there was nothing in the feet because although I had lived in his house for three college years now and although both he and Mrs. Wilkins called me Bayard in the house, he would no more have entered my room without knocking than I would have entered his — or hers.

Then he flung the door violently inward against the doorstep with one of those gestures with or by which an almost painfully unflagging preceptory of youth ultimately aberrates, and stood there saying, "Bayard. Bayard, my son, my dear son."

I should have known; I should have been prepared. Or maybe I was prepared because I remember how I closed the book carefully, even marking the place, before I rose. He (Professor Wilkins) was doing something, bustling at something; it was my hat and cloak which he handed me and which I took although I would not need the cloak, unless even then I was thinking (although it was October, the equinox

had not occurred) that the rains and the cool weather would arrive before I should see this room again and so I would need the cloak anyway to return to it if I returned, thinking 'God, if he had only done this last night, flung that door crashing and bouncing against the stop last night without knocking so I could have gotten there before it happened, been there when it did, beside him on whatever spot, wherever it was that he would have to fall and lie in the dust and dirt.'

"Your boy is downstairs in the kitchen," he said. It was not until years later that he told me (someone did; it must have been Judge Wilkins) how Ringo had apparently flung the cook aside and come on into the house and into the library where he and Mrs. Wilkins were sitting and said without preamble and already turning to withdraw: "They shot Colonel Sartoris this morning.

Tell him I be waiting in the kitchen" and was gone before either of them could move. "He has ridden forty miles yet he refuses to eat anything." We were moving toward the door now — the door on my side of which I had lived for three years now with what I knew, what I knew now I must have believed and expected, yet beyond which I had heard the approaching feet yet heard nothing in the feet. "If there was just anything I could do."

"Yes, sir," I said. "A fresh horse for my boy. He will want to go back with me."

"By all means take mine — Mrs. Wilkins'," he cried. His tone was no different yet he did cry it and I suppose that at the same moment we both realised that was funny — a short-legged deep-barrelled mare who looked exactly like a spinster music teacher, which Mrs. Wilkins drove to a basket phaeton — which was good for me, like being doused with a pail of cold water would have been good for me.

"Thank you, sir," I said. "We won't need it. I will get a fresh horse for him at the livery stable when I get my mare." Good for me, because even before I finished speaking I knew that would not be necessary either, that Ringo would have stopped at the livery stable before he

came out to the college and attended to that and that the fresh horse for him and my mare both would be saddled and waiting now at the side fence and we would not have to go through Oxford at all.

Loosh would not have thought of that if he had come for me, he would have come straight to the college, to Professor Wilkins', and told his news and then sat down and let me take charge from then on. But not Ringo.

He followed me from the room. From now until Ringo and I rode away into the hot thick dusty darkness quick and strained for the overdue equinox like a laboring delayed woman, he would be somewhere either just beside me or just behind me and I never to know exactly nor care which. He was trying to find the words with which to offer me his pistol too. I could almost hear him: "Ah, this unhappy land, not ten years recovered from the fever yet still men must kill one another, still we must pay Cain's price in his own coin." But he did not actually say it.

He just followed me, somewhere beside or behind me as we descended the stairs toward where Mrs Wilkins waited in the hall beneath the chandelier — a thin gray woman who reminded me of Granny, not that she looked like Granny probably but because she had known Granny — a lifted anxious still face which was thinking Who lives by the sword shall die by it just as Granny would have thought, toward which I walked, had to walk not because I was Granny's grandson and had lived in her house for three college years and was about the age of her son when he was killed in almost the last battle nine years ago, but because I was now The Sartoris. (The Sartoris: that had been one of the concomitant flashes, along with the at last it has happened when Professor Wilkins opened my door.)

She didn't offer me a horse and pistol, not because she liked me any less than Professor Wilkins but because she was a woman and so wiser than any man, else the men would not have gone on with the War for two years after they knew they were whipped. She just put her hands (a small woman, no bigger than Granny had been) on my shoulders and

said, "Give my love to Drusilla and your Aunt Jenny. And come back when you can."

"Only I don't know when that will be," I said. "I don't know how many things I will have to attend to." Yes, I lied even to her; it had not been but a minute yet since he had flung that door bouncing into the stop yet already I was beginning to realise, to become aware of that which I still had no yardstick to measure save that one consisting of what, despite myself, despite my raising and background (or maybe because of them) I had for some time known I was becoming and had feared the test of it; I remember how I thought while her hands still rested on my shoulders: At least this will be my chance to find out if I am what I think I am or if I just hope; if I am going to do what I have taught myself is right or if I am just going to wish I were.

We went on to the kitchen, Professor Wilkins still somewhere beside or behind me and still offering me the pistol and horse in a dozen different ways. Ringo was waiting; I remember how I thought then that no matter what might happen to either of us, I would never be The Sartoris to him.

He was twenty-four too, but in a way he had changed even less than I had since that day when we had nailed Grumby's body to the door of the old compress. Maybe it was because he had outgrown me, had changed so much that summer while he and Granny traded mules with the Yankees that since then I had had to do most of the changing just to catch up with him.

He was sitting quietly in a chair beside the cold stove, spent-looking too who had ridden forty miles (at one time, either in Jefferson or when he was alone at last on the road somewhere, he had cried; dust was now caked and dried in the tear-channels on his face) and would ride forty more yet would not eat, looking up at me a little red-eyed with weariness (or maybe it was more than just weariness and so I would never catch up with him) then rising without a word and going on toward the door and I following and Professor Wilkins still offering the

horse and the pistol without speaking the words and still thinking (I could feel that too) Dies by the sword. Dies by the sword.

Ringo had the two horses saddled at the side gate, as I had known he would — the fresh one for himself and my mare father had given me three years ago, that could do a mile under two minutes any day and a mile every eight minutes all day long. He was already mounted when I realised that what Professor Wilkins wanted was to shake my hand.

We shook hands; I knew he believed he was touching flesh which might not be alive tomorrow night and I thought for a second how if I told him what I was going to do, since we had talked about it, about how if there was anything at all in the Book, anything of hope and peace for His blind and bewildered spawn which He had chosen above all others to offer immortality, Thou shalt not kill must be it, since maybe he even believed that he had taught it to me except that he had not, nobody had, not even myself since it went further than just having been learned.

But I did not tell him. He was too old to be forced so, to condone even in principle such a decision; he was too old to have to stick to principle in the face of blood and raising and background, to be faced without warning and made to deliver like by a highwayman out of the dark: only the young could do that — one still young enough to have his youth supplied him gratis as a reason (not an excuse) for cowardice.

So I said nothing. I just shook his hand and mounted too, and Ringo and I rode on. We would not have to pass through Oxford now and so soon (there was a thin sickle of moon like the heel print of a boot in wet sand) the road to Jefferson lay before us, the road which I had travelled for the first time three years ago with Father and travelled twice at Christmas time and then in June and September and twice at Christmas time again and then June and September again each college term since alone on the mare, not even knowing that this was peace; and now this time and maybe last time who would not die (I knew that) but who maybe forever after could never again hold up his head.

The horses took the gait which they would hold for forty miles. My mare knew the long road ahead and Ringo had a good beast too, had talked Hilliard at the livery stable out of a good horse too.

Maybe it was the tears, the channels of dried mud across which his strain-reddened eyes had looked at me, but I rather think it was that same quality which used to enable him to replenish his and Granny's supply of United States Army letterheads during that time — some outrageous assurance gained from too long and too close association with white people: the one whom he called Granny, the other with whom he had slept from the time we were born until Father rebuilt the house. We spoke one time, then no more:

"We could bushwhack him," he said. "Like we done Grumby that day. But I reckon that wouldn't suit that white skin you walks around in."

"No," I said. We rode on; it was October; there was plenty of time still for verbena although I would have to reach home before I would realise there was a need for it; plenty of time for verbena yet from the garden where Aunt Jenny pattered beside old Joby, in a pair of Father's old cavalry gauntlets, among the coaxed and ordered beds, the quaint and odorous old names, for though it was October no rain had come yet and hence no frost to bring (or leave behind) the first half-warm half-chill nights of Indian Summer — the drowsing air cool and empty for geese yet languid still with the old hot dusty smell of fox grape and sassafras — the nights when before I became a man and went to college to learn law Ringo and I, with lantern and axe and crokersack and six dogs (one to follow the trail and five more just for the tonguing, the music) would hunt possum in the pasture where, hidden, we had seen our first Yankee that afternoon on the bright horse, where for the last year now you could hear the whistling of the trains which had no longer belonged to Mr. Redmond for a long while now and which at some instant, some second during the morning Father too had relinquished along with the pipe which Ringo said he was smoking, which slipped from his hand as he fell.

We rode on, toward the house where he would be lying in the parlor now, in his regimentals (sabre too) and where Drusilla would be waiting

for me beneath all the festive glitter of the chandeliers, in the yellow ball gown and the sprig of verbena in her hair, holding the two loaded pistols (I could see that too, who had had no presentiment; I could see her, in the formal brilliant room arranged formally for obsequy, not tall, not slender as a woman is but as a youth, a boy, is, motionless, in yellow, the face calm, almost bemused, the head simple and severe, the balancing sprig of verbena above each ear, the two arms bent at the elbows, the two hands shoulder high, the two identical duelling pistols lying upon, not clutched in, one to each: the Greek amphora priestess of a succinct and formal violence).

2

Drusilla said that he had a dream. I was twenty then and she and I would walk in the garden in the summer twilight while we waited for Father to ride in from the railroad. I was just twenty then: that summer before I entered the University to take the law degree which Father decided I should have and four years after the one, the day, the evening when Father and Drusilla had kept old Cash Benbow from becoming United States Marshal and returned home still unmarried and Mrs. Habersham herded them into her carriage and drove them back to town and dug her husband out of his little dim hole in the new bank and made him sign Father's peace bond for killing the two carpet baggers, and took Father and Drusilla to the minister herself and saw that they were married.

And Father had rebuilt the house too, on the same blackened spot, over the same cellar, where the other had burned, only larger, much larger: Drusilla said that the house was the aura of Father's dream just as a bride's trousseau and veil is the aura of hers.

And Aunt Jenny had come to live with us now so we had the garden (Drusilla would no more have bothered with flowers than Father himself would have, who even now, even four years after it was over, still seemed to exist, breathe, in that last year of it while she had ridden in man's clothes and with her hair cut short like any other member of Father's troop, across Georgia and both Carolinas in front of Sherman's

army) for her to gather sprigs of verbena from to wear in her hair because she said verbena was the only scent you could smell above the smell of horses and courage and so it was the only one that was worth the wearing.

The railroad was hardly begun then and Father and Mr. Redmond were not only still partners, they were still friends, which as George Wyatt said was easily a record for Father, and he would leave the house at daybreak on Jupiter, riding up and down the unfinished line with two saddlebags of gold coins borrowed on Friday to pay the men on Saturday, keeping just two cross-ties ahead of the sheriff as Aunt Jenny said.

So we walked in the dusk, slowly between Aunt Jenny's flower beds while Drusilla (in a dress now, who still would have worn pants all the time if Father had let her) leaned lightly on my arm and I smelled the verbena in her hair as I had smelled the rain in it and in Father's beard that night four years ago when he and Drusilla and Uncle Buck McCaslin found Grumby and then came home and found Ringo and me more than just asleep: escaped into that oblivion which God or Nature or whoever it was had supplied us with for the time being, who had had to perform more than should be required of children because there should be some limit to the age, the youth at least below which one should not have to kill.

This was just after the Saturday night when he returned and I watched him clean the derringer and reload it and we learned that the dead man was almost a neighbor, a hill man who had been in the first infantry regiment when it voted Father out of command: and we never to know if the man actually intended to rob Father or not because Father had shot too quick, but only that he had a wife and several children in a dirt-floored cabin in the hills, to whom Father the next day sent some money and she (the wife) walked into the house two days later while we were sitting at the dinner table and flung the money at Father's face.

“But nobody could have more of a dream than Colonel Sutpen,” I said. He had been Father’s second-in-command in the first regiment and had been elected colonel when the regiment deposed Father after Second Manassas, and it was Sutpen and not the regiment whom father never forgave. He was underbred, a cold ruthless man who had come into the country about thirty years before the War, nobody knew from where except Father said you could look at him and know he would not dare to tell.

He had got some land and nobody knew how he did that either, and he got money from somewhere — Father said they all believed he robbed steamboats, either as a card sharper or as an out-and-out highwayman — and built a big house and married and set up as a gentleman. Then he lost everything in the War like everybody else, all hope of descendants too (his son killed his daughter’s fiancé on the eve of the wedding and vanished) yet he came back home and set out singlehanded to rebuild his plantation.

He had no friends to borrow from and he had nobody to leave it to and he was past sixty years old, yet he set out to rebuild his place like it used to be; they told how he was too busy to bother with politics or anything; how when Father and the other men organised the night riders to keep the carpet baggers from organising the Negroes into an insurrection, he refused to have anything to do with it.

Father stopped hating him long enough to ride out to see Sutpen himself and he (Sutpen) came to the door with a lamp and did not even invite them to come in and discuss it; Father said, “Are you with us or against us?” and he said, “I’m for my land. If every man of you would rehabilitate his own land, the country will take care of itself” and Father challenged him to bring the lamp out and set it on a stump where they could both see to shoot and Sutpen would not. “Nobody could have more of a dream than that.”

“Yes. But his dream is just Sutpen. John’s is not. He is thinking of this whole country which he is trying to raise by its bootstraps, so that all the people in it, not just his kind nor his old regiment, but all the

people, black and white, the women and children back in the hills who don't even own shoes — Don't you see?"

"But how can they get any good from what he wants to do for them if they are — after he has—"

"Killed some of them? I suppose you include those two carpet baggers he had to kill to hold that first election, don't you?"

"They were men. Human beings."

"They were Northerners, foreigners who had no business here. They were pirates." We walked on, her weight hardly discernible on my arm, her head just reaching my shoulder. I had always been a little taller than she, even on that night at Hawkhurst while we listened to the niggers passing in the road, and she had changed but little since — the same boy-hard body, the close implacable head with its savagely cropped hair which I had watched from the wagon above the tide of crazed singing niggers as we went down into the river — the body not slender as women are but as boys are slender.

"A dream is not a very safe thing to be near, Bayard. I know; I had one once. It's like a loaded pistol with a hair trigger: if it stays alive long enough, somebody is going to be hurt. But if it's a good dream, it's worth it. There are not many dreams in the world, but there are a lot of human lives. And one human life or two dozen—"

"Are not worth anything?"

"No. Not anything. — Listen. I hear Jupiter. I'll beat you to the house." She was already running, the skirts she did not like to wear lifted almost to her knees, her legs beneath it running as boys run just as she rode like men ride.

I was twenty then. But the next time I was twenty-four; I had been three years at the University and in another two weeks I would ride back to Oxford for the final year and my degree. It was just last summer, last August, and Father had just beat Redmond for the State legislature. The railroad was finished now and the partnership between

Father and Redmond had been dissolved so long ago that most people would have forgotten they were ever partners if it hadn't been for the enmity between them.

There had been a third partner but nobody hardly remembered his name now; he and his name both had vanished in the fury of the conflict which set up between Father and Redmond almost before they began to lay the rails, between Father's violent and ruthless dictatorialness and will to dominate (the idea was his; he did think of the railroad first and then took Redmond in) and that quality in Redmond (as George Wyatt said, he was not a coward or Father would never have teamed with him) which permitted him to stand as much as he did from Father, to bear and bear and bear until something (not his will nor his courage) broke in him.

During the War Redmond had not been a soldier, he had had something to do with cotton for the Government; he could have made money himself out of it but he had not and everybody knew he had not, Father knew it, yet Father would even taunt him with not having smelled powder.

He was wrong; he knew he was when it was too late for him to stop just as a drunkard reaches a point where it is too late for him to stop, where he promises himself that he will and maybe believes he will or can but it is too late.

Finally they reached the point (they had both put everything they could mortgage or borrow into it for Father to ride up and down the line, paying the workmen and the waybills on the rails at the last possible instant) where even Father realised that one of them would have to get out.

So (they were not speaking then; it was arranged by Judge Benbow) they met and agreed to buy or sell, naming a price which, in reference to what they had put into it, was ridiculously low but which each believed the other could not raise — at least Father claimed that

Redmond did not believe he could raise it. So Redmond accepted the price, and found out that Father had the money.

And according to Father, that's what started it, although Uncle Buck McCaslin said Father could not have owned a half interest in even one hog, let alone a railroad, and not dissolve the business either sworn enemy or death-pledged friend to his recent partner. So they parted and Father finished the road.

By that time, seeing that he was going to finish it, some Northern people sold him a locomotive on credit which he named for Aunt Jenny, with a silver oil can in the cab with her name engraved on it; and last summer the first train ran into Jefferson, the engine decorated with flowers and Father in the cab blowing blast after blast on the whistle when he passed Redmond's house; and there were speeches at the station, with more flowers and a Confederate flag and girls in white dresses and red sashes and a band, and Father stood on the pilot of the engine and made a direct and absolutely needless allusion to Mr. Redmond. That was it. He wouldn't let him alone.

George Wyatt came to me right afterward and told me. "Right or wrong," he said, "us boys and most of the other folks in this county know John's right. But he ought to let Redmond alone. I know what's wrong: he's had to kill too many folks, and that's bad for a man. We all know Colonel's brave as a lion, but Redmond ain't no coward either and there ain't any use in making a brave man that made one mistake eat crow all the time. Can't you talk to him?"

"I don't know," I said. "I'll try." But I had no chance. That is, I could have talked to him and he would have listened, but he could not have heard me because he had stepped straight from the pilot of that engine into the race for the Legislature.

Maybe he knew that Redmond would have to oppose him to save his face even though he (Redmond) must have known that, after that train ran into Jefferson, he had no chance against Father, or maybe

Redmond had already announced his candidacy and Father entered the race just because of that, I don't remember.

Anyway they ran, a bitter contest in which Father continued to badger Redmond without reason or need, since they both knew it would be a landslide for Father. And it was, and we thought he was satisfied.

Maybe he thought so himself, as the drunkard believes that he is done with drink; and it was that afternoon and Drusilla and I walked in the garden in the twilight and I said something about what George Wyatt had told me and she released my arm and turned me to face her and said, "This from you? You? Have you forgotten Grumby?"

"No," I said. "I never will forget him."

"You never will. I wouldn't let you. There are worse things than killing men, Bayard. There are worse things than being killed. Sometimes I think the finest thing that can happen to a man is to love something, a woman preferably, well, hard hard hard, then to die young because he believed what he could not help but believe and was what he could not (could not? would not) help but be." Now she was looking at me in a way she never had before.

I did not know what it meant then and was not to know until tonight since neither of us knew then that two months later Father would be dead. I just knew that she was looking at me as she never had before and that the scent of the verbena in her hair seemed to have increased a hundred times, to have got a hundred times stronger, to be everywhere in the dusk in which something was about to happen which I had never dreamed of. Then she spoke. "Kiss me, Bayard."

"No. You are Father's wife."

"And eight years older than you are. And your fourth cousin too. And I have black hair. Kiss me, Bayard."

"No."

“Kiss me, Bayard.” So I leaned my face down to her. But she didn’t move, standing so, bent lightly back from me from the waist, looking at me; now it was she who said, “No.” So I put my arms around her. Then she came to me, melted as women will and can, the arms with the wrist- and elbow-power to control horses about my shoulders, using the wrists to hold my face to hers until there was no longer need for the wrists; I thought then of the woman of thirty, the symbol of the ancient and eternal Snake and of the men who have written of her, and I realised then the immitigable chasm between all life and all print — that those who can, do, those who cannot and suffer enough because they can’t, write about it.

Then I was free, I could see her again, I saw her still watching me with that dark inscrutable look, looking up at me now across her down-slanted face; I watched her arms rise with almost the exact gesture with which she had put them around me as if she were repeating the empty and formal gesture of all promise so that I should never forget it, the elbows angling outward as she put her hands to the sprig of verbena in her hair, I standing straight and rigid facing the slightly bent head, the short jagged hair, the rigid curiously formal angle of the bare arms gleaming faintly in the last of light as she removed the verbena sprig and put it into my lapel, and I thought how the War had tried to stamp all the women of her generation and class in the South into a type and how it had failed — the suffering, the identical experience (hers and Aunt Jenny’s had been almost the same except that Aunt Jenny had spent a few nights with her husband before they brought him back home in an ammunition wagon while Gavin Breckbridge was just Drusilla’s fiancé) was there in the eyes, yet beyond that was the incorrigibly individual woman: not like so many men who return from wars to live on Government reservations like so many steers, emasculate and empty of all save an identical experience which they cannot forget and dare not, else they would cease to live at that moment, almost interchangeable save for the old habit of answering to a given name.

“Now I must tell Father,” I said.

“Yes,” she said. “You must tell him. Kiss me.” So again it was like it had been before. No. Twice, a thousand times and never like — the eternal and symbolical thirty to a young man, a youth, each time both cumulative and retroactive, immitigably unrepentive, each wherein remembering excludes experience, each wherein experience antedates remembering; the skill without weariness, the knowledge virginal to surfeit, the cunning secret muscles to guide and control just as within the wrists and elbows lay slumbering the mastery of horses: she stood back, already turning, not looking at me when she spoke, never having looked at me, already moving swiftly on in the dusk: “Tell John. Tell him tonight.”

I intended to. I went to the house and into the office at once; I went to the center of the rug before the cold hearth, I don't know why, and stood there rigid like soldiers stand, looking at eye level straight across the room and above his head and said “Father” and then stopped. Because he did not even hear me.

He said, “Yes, Bayard?” but he did not hear me although he was sitting behind the desk doing nothing, immobile, as still as I was rigid, one hand on the desk with a dead cigar in it, a bottle of brandy and a filled and untasted glass beside his hand, clothed quiet and bemused in whatever triumph it was he felt since the last overwhelming return of votes had come in late in the afternoon. So I waited until after supper.

We went to the diningroom and stood side by side until Aunt Jenny entered and then Drusilla, in the yellow ball gown, who walked straight to me and gave me one fierce inscrutable look then went to her place and waited for me to draw her chair while Father drew Aunt Jenny's.

He had roused by then, not to talk himself but rather to sit at the head of the table and reply to Drusilla as she talked with a sort of feverish and glittering volubility — to reply now and then to her with that courteous intolerant pride which had lately become a little forensic, as if merely being in a political contest filled with fierce and empty oratory had retroactively made a lawyer of him who was anything and everything except a lawyer.

Then Drusilla and Aunt Jenny rose and left us and he said, "Wait" to me who had made no move to follow and directed Joby to bring one of the bottles of wine which he had fetched back from New Orleans when he went there last to borrow money to liquidate his first private railroad bonds.

Then I stood again like soldiers stand, gazing at eye level above his head while he sat half-turned from the table, a little paunchy now though not much, a little grizzled too in the hair though his beard was as strong as ever, with that spurious forensic air of lawyers and the intolerant eyes which in the last two years had acquired that transparent film which the eyes of carnivorous animals have and from behind which they look at a world which no ruminant ever sees, perhaps dares to see, which I have seen before on the eyes of men who have killed too much, who have killed so much that never again as long as they live will they ever be alone. I said again, "Father," then I told him.

"Hah?" he said. "Sit down." I sat down, I looked at him, watched him fill both glasses and this time I knew it was worse with him than not hearing: it didn't even matter. "You are doing well in the law, Judge Wilkins tells me.

I am pleased to hear that. I have not needed you in my affairs so far, but from now on I shall. I have now accomplished the active portion of my aims in which you could not have helped me; I acted as the land and the time demanded and you were too young for that, I wished to shield you.

But now the land and the time too are changing; what will follow will be a matter of consolidation, of pettifogging and doubtless chicanery in which I would be a babe in arms but in which you, trained in the law, can hold your own — our own. Yes. I have accomplished my aim, and now I shall do a little moral housecleaning. I am tired of killing men, no matter what the necessity nor the end. Tomorrow, when I go to town and meet Ben Redmond, I shall be unarmed."

We reached home just before midnight; we didn't have to pass through Jefferson either. Before we turned in the gates I could see the lights, the chandeliers — hall, parlor, and what Aunt Jenny (without any effort or perhaps even design on her part) had taught even Ringo to call the drawing room, the light falling outward across the portico, past the columns.

Then I saw the horses, the faint shine of leather and buckle-glints on the black silhouettes and then the men too — Wyatt and others of Father's old troop — and I had forgot that they would be there.

I had forgot that they would be there; I remember how I thought, since I was tired and spent with strain, Now it will have to begin tonight. I won't even have until tomorrow in which to begin to resist. They had a watchman, a picquet out, I suppose, because they seemed to know at once that we were in the drive. Wyatt met me, I halted the mare, I could look down at him and at the others gathered a few yards behind him with that curious vulture-like formality which Southern men assume in such situations.

"Well, boy," George said.

"Was it—" I said. "Was he—"

"It was all right. It was in front. Redmond ain't no coward. John had the derringer inside his cuff like always, but he never touched it, never made a move toward it." I have seen him do it, he showed me once: the pistol (it was not four inches long) held flat inside his left wrist by a clip he made himself of wire and an old clock spring; he would raise both hands at the same time, cross them, fire the pistol from beneath his left hand almost as if he were hiding from his own vision what he was doing; when he killed one of the men he shot a hole through his own coat sleeve.

"But you want to get on to the house," Wyatt said. He began to stand aside, then he spoke again: "We'll take this off your hands, any of us.

Me.” I hadn’t moved the mare yet and I had made no move to speak, yet he continued quickly, as if he had already rehearsed all this, his speech and mine, and knew what I would say and only spoke himself as he would have removed his hat on entering a house or used ‘sir’ in conversing with a stranger: “You’re young, just a boy, you ain’t had any experience in this kind of thing. Besides, you got them two ladies in the house to think about. He would understand, all right.”

“I reckon I can attend to it,” I said.

“Sure,” he said; there was no surprise, nothing at all, in his voice because he had already rehearsed this: “I reckon we all knew that’s what you would say.” He stepped back then; almost it was as though he and not I bade the mare to move on. But they all followed, still with that unctuous and voracious formality. Then I saw Drusilla standing at the top of the front steps, in the light from the open door and the windows like a theatre scene, in the yellow ball gown and even from here I believed that I could smell the verbena in her hair, standing there motionless yet emanating something louder than the two shots must have been — something voracious too and passionate.

Then, although I had dismounted and someone had taken the mare, I seemed to be still in the saddle and to watch myself enter that scene which she had postulated like another actor while in the background for chorus Wyatt and the others stood with the unctuous formality which the Southern man shows in the presence of death — that Roman holiday engendered by mist-born Protestantism grafted onto this land of violent sun, of violent alteration from snow to heat-stroke which has produced a race impervious to both.

I mounted the steps toward the figure straight and yellow and immobile as a candle which moved only to extend one hand; we stood together and looked down at them where they stood clumped, the horses too gathered in a tight group beyond them at the rim of light from the brilliant door and windows. One of them stamped and blew his breath and jangled his gear.

“Thank you, gentlemen,” I said. “My aunt and my — Drusilla thank you. There’s no need for you to stay. Goodnight.” They murmured, turning. George Wyatt paused, looking back at me. “Tomorrow?” he said.

“Tomorrow.” Then they went on, carrying their hats and tiptoeing, even on the ground, the quiet and resilient earth, as though anyone in that house awake would try to sleep, anyone already asleep in it whom they could have wakened.

Then they were gone and Drusilla and I turned and crossed the portico, her hand lying light on my wrist yet discharging into me with a shock like electricity that dark and passionate voracity, the face at my shoulder — the jagged hair with a verbena sprig above each ear, the eyes staring at me with that fierce exaltation.

We entered the hall and crossed it, her hand guiding me without pressure, and entered the parlor. Then for the first time I realised it — the alteration which is death — not that he was now just clay but that he was lying down.

But I didn’t look at him yet because I knew that when I did I would begin to pant; I went to Aunt Jenny who had just risen from a chair behind which Louvinia stood. She was Father’s sister, taller than Drusilla but no older, whose husband had been killed at the very beginning of the War, by a shell from a Federal frigate at Fort Moultrie, come to us from Carolina six years ago. Ringo and I went to Tennessee Junction in the wagon to meet her.

It was January, cold and clear and with ice in the ruts; we returned just before dark with Aunt Jenny on the seat beside me holding a lace parasol and Ringo in the wagon bed nursing a hamper basket containing two bottles of old sherry and the two jasmine cuttings which were bushes in the garden now, and the panes of colored glass which she had salvaged from the Carolina house where she and Father and Uncle Bayard were born and which Father had set in a fanlight about one of the drawing room windows for her — who came up the drive

and Father (home now from the railroad) went down the steps and lifted her from the wagon and said, "Well, Jenny," and she said, "Well, Johnny," and began to cry.

She stood too, looking at me as I approached — the same hair, the same high nose, the same eyes as Father's except that they were intent and very wise instead of intolerant. She said nothing at all, she just kissed me, her hands light on my shoulders. Then Drusilla spoke, as if she had been waiting with a sort of dreadful patience for the empty ceremony to be done, in a voice like a bell: clear, unsentient, on a single pitch, silvery and triumphant: "Come, Bayard."

"Hadn't you better go to bed now?" Aunt Jenny said.

"Yes," Drusilla said in that silvery ecstatic voice, "Oh yes. There will be plenty of time for sleep." I followed her, her hand again guiding me without pressure; now I looked at him.

It was just as I had imagined it — sabre, plumes, and all — but with that alteration, that irrevocable difference which I had known to expect yet had not realised, as you can put food into your stomach which for a while the stomach declines to assimilate — the illimitable grief and regret as I looked down at the face which I knew — the nose, the hair, the eyelids closed over the intolerance — the face which I realised I now saw in repose for the first time in my life; the empty hands still now beneath the invisible stain of what had been (once, surely) needless blood, the hands now appearing clumsy in their very inertness, too clumsy to have performed the fatal actions which forever afterward he must have waked and slept with and maybe was glad to lay down at last — those curious appendages clumsily conceived to begin with yet with which man has taught himself to do so much, so much more than they were intended to do or could be forgiven for doing, which had now surrendered that life to which his intolerant heart had fiercely held; and then I knew that in a minute I would begin to pant.

So Drusilla must have spoken twice before I heard her and turned and saw in the instant Aunt Jenny and Louvinia watching us, hearing Drusilla now, the unsentient bell quality gone now, her voice whispering into that quiet death-filled room with a passionate and dying fall: “Bayard.” She faced me, she was quite near; again the scent of the verbena in her hair seemed to have increased a hundred times as she stood holding out to me, one in either hand, the two duelling pistols.

“Take them, Bayard,” she said, in the same tone in which she had said “Kiss me” last summer, already pressing them into my hands, watching me with that passionate and voracious exaltation, speaking in a voice fainting and passionate with promise: “Take them. I have kept them for you. I give them to you. Oh you will thank me, you will remember me who put into your hands what they say is an attribute only of God’s, who took what belongs to heaven and gave it to you.

Do you feel them? the long true barrels true as justice, the triggers (you have fired them) quick as retribution, the two of them slender and invincible and fatal as the physical shape of love?” Again I watched her arms angle out and upward as she removed the two verbena sprigs from her hair in two motions faster than the eye could follow, already putting one of them into my lapel and crushing the other in her other hand while she still spoke in that rapid passionate voice not much louder than a whisper: “There. One I give to you to wear tomorrow (it will not fade), the other I cast away, like this—” dropping the crushed bloom at her feet. “I abjure it.

I abjure verbena forever more; I have smelled it above the odor of courage; that was all I wanted. Now let me look at you.” She stood back, staring at me — the face tearless and exalted, the feverish eyes brilliant and voracious.

“How beautiful you are: do you know it? How beautiful: young, to be permitted to kill, to be permitted vengeance, to take into your bare hands the fire of heaven that cast down Lucifer. No; I. I gave it to you; I put it into your hands; Oh you will thank me, you will remember me when I am dead and you are an old man saying to himself, ‘I have

tasted all things.’ — It will be the right hand, won’t it?” She moved; she had taken my right hand which still held one of the pistols before I knew what she was about to do; she had bent and kissed it before I comprehended why she took it.

Then she stopped dead still, still stooping in that attitude of fierce exultant humility, her hot lips and her hot hands still touching my flesh, light on my flesh as dead leaves yet communicating to it that battery charge dark, passionate and damned forever of all peace. Because they are wise, women are — a touch, lips or fingers, and the knowledge, even clairvoyance, goes straight to the heart without bothering the laggard brain at all.

She stood erect now, staring at me with intolerable and amazed incredulity which occupied her face alone for a whole minute while her eyes were completely empty; it seemed to me that I stood there for a full minute while Aunt Jenny and Louvinia watched us, waiting for her eyes to fill. There was no blood in her face at all, her mouth open a little and pale as one of those rubber rings women seal fruit jars with. Then her eyes filled with an expression of bitter and passionate betrayal.

“Why, he’s not—” she said. “He’s not — And I kissed his hand,” she said in an aghast whisper; “I kissed his hand!” beginning to laugh, the laughter rising, becoming a scream yet still remaining laughter, screaming with laughter, trying herself to deaden the sound by putting her hand over her mouth, the laughter spilling between her fingers like vomit, the incredulous betrayed eyes still watching me across the hand.

“Louvinia!” Aunt Jenny said. They both came to her. Louvinia touched and held her and Drusilla turned her face to Louvinia.

“I kissed his hand, Louvinia!” she cried. “Did you see it? I kissed his hand!” the laughter rising again, becoming the scream again yet still remaining laughter, she still trying to hold it back with her hand like a small child who has filled its mouth too full.

“Take her upstairs,” Aunt Jenny said. But they were already moving toward the door, Louvinia half-carrying Drusilla, the laughter diminishing as they neared the door as though it waited for the larger space of the empty and brilliant hall to rise again. Then it was gone; Aunt Jenny and I stood there and I knew soon that I would begin to pant.

I could feel it beginning like you feel regurgitation beginning, as though there were not enough air in the room, the house, not enough air anywhere under the heavy hot low sky where the equinox couldn't seem to accomplish, nothing in the air for breathing, for the lungs. Now it was Aunt Jenny who said “Bayard” twice before I heard her. “You are not going to try to kill him. All right.”

“All right?” I said.

“Yes. All right. Don't let it be Drusilla, a poor hysterical young woman. And don't let it be him, Bayard, because he's dead now. And don't let it be George Wyatt and those others who will be waiting for you tomorrow morning. I know you are not afraid.”

“But what good will that do?” I said. “What good will that do?” It almost began then; I stopped it just in time. “I must live with myself, you see.”

“Then it's not just Drusilla? Not just him? Not just George Wyatt and Jefferson?”

“No,” I said.

“Will you promise to let me see you before you go to town tomorrow?” I looked at her; we looked at one another for a moment. Then she put her hands on my shoulders and kissed me and released me, all in one motion. “Goodnight, son,” she said. Then she was gone too and now it could begin.

I knew that in a minute I would look at him and it would begin and I did look at him, feeling the long-held breath, the hiatus before it started, thinking how maybe I should have said, "Goodbye, Father" but did not.

Instead I crossed to the piano and laid the pistols carefully on it, still keeping the panting from getting too loud too soon. Then I was outside on the porch and (I don't know how long it had been) I looked in the window and saw Simon squatting on a stool beside him.

Simon had been his body servant during the War and when they came home Simon had a uniform too — a Confederate private's coat with a Yankee brigadier's star on it and he had put it on now too, like they had dressed Father, squatting on the stool beside him, not crying, not weeping the facile tears which are the white man's futile trait and which Negroes know nothing about but just sitting there, motionless, his lower lip slacked down a little; he raised his hand and touched the coffin, the black hand rigid and fragile-looking as a clutch of dead twigs, then dropped the hand; once he turned his head and I saw his eyes roll red and unwinking in his skull like those of a cornered fox.

It had begun by that time; I panted, standing there, and this was it — the regret and grief, the despair out of which the tragic mute insensitive bones stand up that can bear anything, anything.

4

After a while the whippoorwills stopped and I heard the first day bird, a mockingbird. It had sung all night too but now it was the day song, no longer the drowsy moony fluting. Then they all began — the sparrows from the stable, the thrush that lived in Aunt Jenny's garden, and I heard a quail too from the pasture and now there was light in the room. But I didn't move at once.

I still lay on the bed (I hadn't undressed) with my hands under my head and the scent of Drusilla's verbena faint from where my coat lay on a chair, watching the light grow, watching it turn rosy with the sun. After a while I heard Louvinia come up across the back yard and go into the

kitchen; I heard the door and then the long crash of her armful of stovewood into the box.

Soon they would begin to arrive — the carriages and buggies in the drive — but not for a while yet because they too would wait first to see what I was going to do. So the house was quiet when I went down to the diningroom, no sound in it except Simon snoring in the parlor, probably still sitting on the stool though I didn't look in to see. Instead I stood at the diningroom window and drank the coffee which Louvinia brought me, then I went to the stable; I saw Joby watching me from the kitchen door as I crossed the yard and in the stable Loosh looked up at me across Betsy's head, a curry comb in his hand, though Ringo didn't look at me at all.

We curried Jupiter then. I didn't know if we would be able to without trouble or not, since always Father would come in first and touch him and tell him to stand and he would stand like a marble horse (or pale bronze rather) while Loosh curried him. But he stood for me too, a little restive but he stood, then that was done and now it was almost nine o'clock and soon they would begin to arrive and I told Ringo to bring Betsy on to the house.

I went on to the house and into the hall. I had not had to pant in some time now but it was there, waiting, a part of the alteration, as though by being dead and no longer needing air he had taken all of it, all that he had compassed and claimed and postulated between the walls which he had built, along with him.

Aunt Jenny must have been waiting; she came out of the diningroom at once, without a sound, dressed, the hair that was like Father's combed and smooth above the eyes that were different from Father's eyes because they were not intolerant but just intent and grave and (she was wise too) without pity. "Are you going now?" she said.

"Yes." I looked at her. Yes, thank God, without pity. "You see, I want to be thought well of."

“I do,” she said. “Even if you spend the day hidden in the stable loft, I still do.”

“Maybe if she knew that I was going. Was going to town anyway.”

“No,” she said. “No, Bayard.” We looked at one another. Then she said quietly, “All right. She’s awake.” So I mounted the stairs. I mounted steadily, not fast because if I had gone fast the panting would have started again or I might have had to slow for a second at the turn or at the top and I would not have gone on. So I went slowly and steadily, across the hall to her door and knocked and opened it.

She was sitting at the window, in something soft and loose for morning in her bedroom only she never did look like morning in a bedroom because here was no hair to fall about her shoulders. She looked up, she sat there looking at me with her feverish brilliant eyes and I remembered I still had the verbena sprig in my lapel and suddenly she began to laugh again.

It seemed to come not from her mouth but to burst out all over her face like sweat does and with a dreadful and painful convulsion as when you have vomited until it hurts you yet still you must vomit again — burst out all over her face except her eyes, the brilliant incredulous eyes looking at me out of the laughter as if they belonged to somebody else, as if they were two inert fragments of tar or coal lying on the bottom of a receptacle filled with turmoil: “I kissed his hand! I kissed his hand!” Louvinia entered, Aunt Jenny must have sent her directly after me; again I walked slowly and steadily so it would not start yet, down the stairs where Aunt Jenny stood beneath the chandelier in the hall as Mrs Wilkins had stood yesterday at the University. She had my hat in her hand. “Even if you hid all day in the stable, Bayard,” she said.

I took the hat; she said quietly, pleasantly, as if she were talking to a stranger, a guest: “I used to see a lot of blockade runners in Charleston. They were heroes in a way, you see — not heroes because they were helping to prolong the Confederacy but heroes in the sense that David Crockett or John Sevier would have been to small boys or fool young women.

There was one of them, an Englishman. He had no business there; it was the money of course, as with all of them. But he was the Davy Crockett to us because by that time we had all forgot what money was, what you could do with it.

He must have been a gentleman once or associated with gentlemen before he changed his name, and he had a vocabulary of seven words, though I must admit he got along quite well with them. The first four were, 'I'll have rum, thanks,' and then, when he had the rum, he would use the other three — across the champagne, to whatever ruffled bosom or low gown: 'No bloody moon.' No bloody moon, Bayard." Ringo was waiting with Betsy at the front steps.

Again he did not look at me, his face sullen, downcast even while he handed me the reins. But he said nothing, nor did I look back. And sure enough I was just in time; I passed the Compson carriage at the gates, General Compson lifted his hat as I did mine as we passed. It was four miles to town but I had not gone two of them when I heard the horse coming up behind me and I did not look back because I knew it was Ringo.

I did not look back; he came up on one of the carriage horses, he rode up beside me and looked me full in the face for one moment, the sullen determined face, the eyes rolling at me defiant and momentary and red; we rode on.

Now we were in town — the long shady street leading to the square, the new courthouse at the end of it; it was eleven o'clock now: long past breakfast and not yet noon so there were only women on the street, not to recognise me perhaps or at least not the walking stopped sudden and dead in midwalking as if the legs contained the sudden eyes, the caught breath, that not to begin until we reached the square and I thinking If I could only be invisible until I reach the stairs to his office and begin to mount.

But I could not, I was not; we rode up to the Holston House and I saw the row of feet along the gallery rail come suddenly and quietly down and I did not look at them, I stopped Betsy and waited until Ringo was down then I dismounted and gave him the reins. "Wait for me here," I said.

"I'm going with you," he said, not loud; we stood there under the still circumspect eyes and spoke quietly to one another like two conspirators. Then I saw the pistol, the outline of it inside his shirt, probably the one we had taken from Grumby that day we killed him.

"No you ain't," I said.

"Yes I am."

"No you ain't." So I walked on, along the street in the hot sun. It was almost noon now and I could smell nothing except the verbena in my coat, as if it had gathered all the sun, all the suspended fierce heat in which the equinox could not seem to occur and were distilling it so that I moved in a cloud of verbena as I might have moved in a cloud of smoke from a cigar. Then George Wyatt was beside me (I don't know where he came from) and five or six others of Father's old troop a few yards behind, George's hand on my arm, drawing me into a doorway out of the avid eyes like caught breaths.

"Have you got that derringer?" George said.

"No," I said.

"Good," George said. "They are tricky things to fool with. Couldn't nobody but Colonel ever handle one right; I never could. So you take this. I tried it this morning and I know it's right. Here." He was already fumbling the pistol into my pocket, then the same thing seemed to happen to him that happened to Drusilla last night when she kissed my hand — something communicated by touch straight to the simple code by which he lived, without going through the brain at all: so that he too stood suddenly back, the pistol in his hand, staring at me with his pale outraged eyes and speaking in a whisper thin with fury: "Who are you? Is your name Sartoris? By God, if you don't kill him, I'm going to." Now

it was not panting, it was a terrible desire to laugh, to laugh as Drusilla had, and say, "That's what Drusilla said." But I didn't. I said, "I'm tending to this. You stay out of it. I don't need any help." Then his fierce eyes faded gradually, exactly as you turn a lamp down.

"Well," he said, putting the pistol back into his pocket. "You'll have to excuse me, son. I should have knowned you wouldn't do anything that would keep John from laying quiet. We'll follow you and wait at the foot of the steps. And remember: he's a brave man, but he's been sitting in that office by himself since yesterday morning waiting for you and his nerves are on edge."

"I'll remember," I said. "I don't need any help." I had started on when suddenly I said it without having any warning that I was going to: "No bloody moon."

"What?" he said. I didn't answer. I went on across the square itself now, in the hot sun, they following though not close so that I never saw them again until afterward, surrounded by the remote still eyes not following me yet either, just stopped where they were before the stores and about the door to the courthouse, waiting. I walked steadily on enclosed in the now fierce odor of the verbena sprig.

Then shadow fell upon me; I did not pause, I looked once at the small faded sign nailed to the brick B. J. Redmond. Atty at Law and began to mount the stairs, the wooden steps scuffed by the heavy bewildered boots of countrymen approaching litigation and stained by tobacco spit, on down the dim corridor to the door which bore the name again, B. J. Redmond and knocked once and opened it.

He sat behind the desk, not much taller than Father but thicker as a man gets who spends most of his time sitting and listening to people, freshly shaven and with fresh linen; a lawyer yet it was not a lawyer's face — a face much thinner than the body would indicate, strained (and yes, tragic; I know that now) and exhausted beneath the neat recent steady strokes of the razor, holding a pistol flat on the desk before him, loose beneath his hand and aimed at nothing.

There was no smell of drink, not even of tobacco in the neat clean dingy room although I knew he smoked. I didn't pause. I walked steadily toward him. It was not twenty feet from door to desk yet I seemed to walk in a dreamlike state in which there was neither time nor distance, as though the mere act of walking was no more intended to encompass space than was his sitting.

We didn't speak. It was as if we both knew what the passage of words would be and the futility of it; how he might have said, "Go out, Bayard. Go away, boy" and then, "Draw then. I will allow you to draw" and it would have been the same as if he had never said it. So we did not speak; I just walked steadily toward him as the pistol rose from the desk. I watched it, I could see the foreshortened slant of the barrel and I knew it would miss me though his hand did not tremble.

I walked toward him, toward the pistol in the rocklike hand, I heard no bullet. Maybe I didn't even hear the explosion though I remember the sudden orange bloom and smoke as they appeared against his white shirt as they had appeared against Grumby's greasy Confederate coat; I still watched that foreshortened slant of barrel which I knew was not aimed at me and saw the second orange flash and smoke and heard no bullet that time either. Then I stopped; it was done then.

I watched the pistol descend to the desk in short jerks; I saw him release it and sit back, both hands on the desk, I looked at his face and I knew too what it was to want air when there was nothing in the circumambience for the lungs. He rose, shoved the chair back with a convulsive motion and rose, with a queer ducking motion of his head; with his head still ducked aside and one arm extended as though he couldn't see and the other hand resting on the desk as if he couldn't stand alone, he turned and crossed to the wall and took his hat from the rack and with his head still ducked aside and one hand extended he blundered along the wall and passed me and reached the door and went through it.

He was brave; no one denied that. He walked down those stairs and out onto the street where George Wyatt and the other six of Father's old

troop waited and where the other men had begun to run now; he walked through the middle of them with his hat on and his head up (they told me how someone shouted at him: "Have you killed that boy too?"), saying no word, staring straight ahead and with his back to them, on to the station where the south-bound train was just in and got on it with no baggage, nothing, and went away from Jefferson and from Mississippi and never came back.

I heard their feet on the stairs then in the corridor then in the room, but for a while yet (it wasn't that long, of course) I still sat behind the desk as he had sat, the flat of the pistol still warm under my hand, my hand growing slowly numb between the pistol and my forehead. Then I raised my head; the little room was full of men. "My God!" George Wyatt cried. "You took the pistol away from him and then missed him, missed him twice?"

Then he answered himself — that same rapport for violence which Drusilla had and which in George's case was actual character judgment: "No; wait. You walked in here without even a pocket knife and let him miss you twice. My God in heaven." He turned, shouting: "Get to hell out of here! You, White, ride out to Sartoris and tell his folks it's all over and he's all right. Ride!" So they departed, went away; presently only George was left, watching me with that pale bleak stare which was speculative yet not at all ratiocinative. "Well by God," he said. " — Do you want a drink?"

"No," I said. "I'm hungry. I didn't eat any breakfast."

"I reckon not, if you got up this morning aiming to do what you did. Come on. We'll go to the Holston House."

"No," I said. "No. Not there."

"Why not? You ain't done anything to be ashamed of. I wouldn't have done it that way, myself. I'd a shot at him once, anyway. But that's your way or you wouldn't have done it."

"Yes," I said. "I would do it again."

“Be damned if I would. — You want to come home with me? We’ll have time to eat and then ride out there in time for the—” But I couldn’t do that either.

“No,” I said. “I’m not hungry after all. I think I’ll go home.”

“Don’t you want to wait and ride out with me?”

“No. I’ll go on.”

“You don’t want to stay here, anyway.” He looked around the room again, where the smell of powder smoke still lingered a little, still lay somewhere on the hot dead air though invisible now, blinking a little with his fierce pale unintroverted eyes. “Well by God,” he said again. “Maybe you’re right, maybe there has been enough killing in your family without — Come on.”

We left the office. I waited at the foot of the stairs and soon Ringo came up with the horses. We crossed the square again. There were no feet on the Holston House railing now (it was twelve o’clock) but a group of men stood before the door who raised their hats and I raised mine and Ringo and I rode on.

We did not go fast. Soon it was one, maybe after; the carriages and buggies would begin to leave the square soon, so I turned from the road at the end of the pasture and I sat the mare, trying to open the gate without dismounting, until Ringo dismounted and opened it.

We crossed the pasture in the hard fierce sun; I could have seen the house now but I didn’t look. Then we were in the shade, the close thick airless shade of the creek bottom; the old rails still lay in the undergrowth where we had built the pen to hide the Yankee mules. Presently I heard the water, then I could see the sunny glints. We dismounted. I lay on my back, I thought Now it can begin again if it wants to. But it did not.

I went to sleep. I went to sleep almost before I had stopped thinking. I slept for almost five hours and I didn’t dream anything at all yet I waked myself up crying, crying too hard to stop it.

Ringo was squatting beside me and the sun was gone though there was a bird of some sort still singing somewhere and the whistle of the north-bound evening train sounded and the short broken puffs of starting where it had evidently stopped at our flag station. After a while I began to stop and Ringo brought his hat full of water from the creek but instead I went down to the water myself and bathed my face.

There was still a good deal of light in the pasture, though the whippoorwills had begun, and when we reached the house there was a mockingbird singing in the magnolia, the night song now, the drowsy moony one, and again the moon like the rim print of a heel in wet sand. There was just one light in the hall now and so it was all over though I could still smell the flowers even above the verbena in my coat. I had not looked at him again.

I had started to before I left the house but I did not, I did not see him again and all the pictures we had of him were bad ones because a picture could no more have held him dead than the house could have kept his body. But I didn't need to see him again because he was there, he would always be there; maybe what Drusilla meant by his dream was not something which he possessed but something which he had bequeathed us which we could never forget, which would even assume the corporeal shape of him whenever any of us, black or white, closed our eyes.

I went into the house. There was no light in the drawing room except the last of the afterglow which came through the western window where Aunt Jenny's colored glass was; I was about to go on up stairs when I saw her sitting there beside the window.

She didn't call me and I didn't speak Drusilla's name, I just went to the door and stood there. "She's gone," Aunt Jenny said. "She took the evening train. She has gone to Montgomery, to Dennison." Denny had been married about a year now; he was living in Montgomery, reading law.

“I see,” I said. “Then she didn’t—” But there wasn’t any use in that either; Jed White must have got there before one o’clock and told them. And besides, Aunt Jenny didn’t answer. She could have lied to me but she didn’t, she said,

“Come here.” I went to her chair. “Kneel down. I can’t see you.”

“Don’t you want the lamp?”

“No. Kneel down.” So I knelt beside the chair. “So you had a perfectly splendid Saturday afternoon, didn’t you? Tell me about it.” Then she put her hands on my shoulders. I watched them come up as though she were trying to stop them; I felt them on my shoulders as if they had a separate life of their own and were trying to do something which for my sake she was trying to restrain, prevent.

Then she gave up or she was not strong enough because they came up and took my face between them, hard, and suddenly the tears sprang and streamed down her face like Drusilla’s laughing had. “Oh, damn you Sartorises!” she said. “Damn you! Damn you!”

As I passed down the hall the light came up in the diningroom and I could hear Louvinia laying the table for supper. So the stairs were lighted quite well. But the upper hall was dark. I saw her open door (that unmistakable way in which an open door stands open when nobody lives in the room any more) and I realised I had not believed that she was really gone.

So I didn’t look into the room. I went on to mine and entered. And then for a long moment I thought it was the verbena in my lapel which I still smelled. I thought that until I had crossed the room and looked down at the pillow on which it lay — the single sprig of it (without looking she would pinch off a half dozen of them and they would be all of a size, almost all of a shape, as if a machine had stamped them out) filling the room, the dusk, the evening with that odor which she said you could smell alone above the smell of horses.

1938

The End

The Wild Palms, William Faulkner

Contents

Chapter I The Wild Palms

Chapter II Old Man

Chapter III The Wild Palms

Chapter IV Old Man

Chapter V The Wild Palms

Chapter VI Old Man

Chapter VII The Wild Palms

Chapter VIII Old Man

Chapter IX The Wild Palms

Chapter X Old Man

Chapter I The Wild Palms

The knocking sounded again, at once discreet and peremptory, while the doctor was descending the stairs, the flashlight's beam lancing on before him down the brown-stained stairwell and into the brown-stained tongue-and-groove box of the lower hall. It was a beach cottage, even though of two stories, and lighted by oil lamps—or an oil lamp, which his wife had carried up stairs with them after supper.

And the doctor wore a nightshirt too, not pajamas, for the same reason that he smoked the pipe which he had never learned and knew that he would never learn to like, between the occasional cigar which clients gave him in the intervals of Sundays on which he smoked the three cigars which he felt he could buy for himself even though he owned the beach cottage as well as the one next door to it and the one, the residence with electricity and plastered walls, in the village four miles away. Because he was now forty-eight years old and he had been

sixteen and eighteen and twenty at the time when his father could tell him (and he believe it) that cigarettes and pajamas were for dudes and women.

It was after midnight, though not much. He could tell that, even apart from the wind, the taste and smell and feel of wind even here behind the closed and locked doors and shutters. Because he had been born here, on this coast though not in this house but in the other, the residence in town, and had lived here all his life, including the four years at the State University's medical school and the two years as an intern in New Orleans where (a thick man even when young, with thick soft woman's hands, who should never have been a doctor at all, who even after the six more or less metropolitan years looked out from a provincial and insulated amazement at his classmates and fellows: the lean young men swaggering in their drill jackets on which—to him—they wore the myriad anonymous faces of the probationer nurses with a ruthless and assured braggadocio like decorations, like flower trophies) he had sickened for it.

So he graduated, nearer the foot of the class than the head though not at either, and came home and within the year married the wife his father had picked out for him and within four years owned the house which his father had built and assumed the practice which his father had created, losing nothing from it and adding nothing to it, and within ten years owned not only the beach house where he and his wife spent their childless summers but the adjoining property as well, which he rented to summer visitors or even parties—picnickers or fishermen. On the evening of the wedding he and his wife went to New Orleans and spent two days in a hotel room, though they never had a honeymoon. And though they had slept in the same bed for twenty-three years now they still had no children.

But even apart from the wind he could still tell the approximate time by the staling smell of gumbo now cold in the big earthen pot on the cold stove beyond the flimsy kitchen wall—the big pot of it which his wife had made that morning in order to send some over to their neighbors and renters in the next house: the man and the woman who four days

ago had rented the cottage and who probably did not even know that the donors of the gumbo were not only neighbors but landlords too—the dark-haired woman with queer hard yellow eyes in a face whose skin was drawn thin over prominent cheekbones and a heavy jaw (the doctor called it sullen at first, then he called it afraid), young, who sat all day long in a new cheap beach chair facing the water, in a worn sweater and a pair of faded jean pants and canvas shoes, not reading, not doing anything, just sitting there in that complete immobility which the doctor (or the doctor in the Doctor) did not need the corroboration of the drawn quality of the skin and the blank inverted fixity of the apparently unseeing eyes to recognise at once—that complete immobile abstraction from which even pain and terror are absent, in which a living creature seems to listen to and even watch some one of its own flagging organs, the heart say, the secret irreparable seeping of blood; and the man young too, in a pair of disreputable khaki slacks and a sleeveless jersey undershirt and no hat in a region where even young people believed the summer sun to be fatal, seen usually walking barefoot along the beach at tide-edge, returning with a faggot of driftwood strapped into a belt, passing the immobile woman in the beach chair with no sign from her, no movement of the head or perhaps even of the eyes.

But it was not the heart, the doctor told himself. He decided that on the first day from where, without intending to eavesdrop, he watched the woman through the screen of oleander bushes which separated the two lots. Yet this very postulation of what it was not seemed to him to contain the secret, the answer. It seemed to him that he saw the truth already, the shadowy indefinite shape of truth, as though he were separated from the truth only by a veil just as he was separated from the living woman by the screen of oleander leaves.

He was not eavesdropping, not spying; perhaps he thought, I will have plenty of time in which to learn just which organ it is she is listening to; they have paid their rent for two weeks (perhaps at that time also the doctor in the Doctor knowing that it would not require weeks but just days), thinking how if she should need assistance it would be fortunate that he, the landlord, was also a doctor until it occurred to him that

since they probably did not even know he was the landlord, they would probably not know either that he was a doctor.

The real estate agent told him over the telephone of the renting of the house. "She's got on pants," the agent said. "I mean, not these ladies' slacks but pants, man's pants. I mean, they are too little for her in just exactly the right places any man would want to see them too little but no woman would unless she had them on herself. I reckon Miss Martha aint going to like that much."

"That will be all right with her if they pay their rent on time," the doctor said.

"No damn fear," the agent said. "I saw to that. I aint been in this business this long for nothing. I said, 'It will have to be in advance,' and he said, 'All right. All right. How much?' like he was Vanderbilt or somebody, in them dirty fishing pants and nothing but an undershirt under his coat, hauling the wad of money out and one of the bills wasn't but a ten and I just gave him ten change back out of the other one and there wasn't but two of them to begin with and I says 'Of course if you want to take the house like it is, with just what furniture is in it now, you can get out pretty cheap,' and he says 'All right. All right. How much?' I believe I could have got more than I did because if you ask me he dont want any furniture, all he wants is four walls to get inside of and a door to close afterward. She never even got out of the taxi. She just sat there, waiting, in them pants that was just exactly too little for her in just exactly the right places." The voice ceased; the doctor's head filled now with suspended wirehum, the rising inflection of a risible silence, so that he said almost sharply:

"Well? Do they want more furniture or not? There's nothing in the house but one bed, and the mattress on it aint—"

"No, no, they dont want any more. I told him the house had a bed and a stove in it, and they had a chair with them—one of these canvas ones that fold up in the taxi along with the grip. So they are all fixed." Now that suspension of silent laughing filled the doctor's head again.

“Well?” the doctor said. “What is it? What’s the matter with you?” though he seemed to know already, before the other spoke, what the voice would say:

“I reckon Miss Martha is going to have something that will set heavier on her stomach than them pants even. I dont think they are married. Oh, he says they are and I dont think he is lying about her and maybe he aint even lying about himself. The trouble is, they aint married to each other, she aint married to him. Because I can smell a husband. Show me a woman I never saw before on the streets of Mobile or New Orleans either and I can smell whether—”

They took possession that afternoon of the cottage, the shack, which contained the one bed whose springs and mattress were not very good, and the stove with its one frying pan incrustated by generations of cooking fish, and the coffee pot and the meager collection of mismatched iron spoons and forks and knives and cracked cups and saucers and drinking vessels which had once been containers of bought jams and jellies, and the new beach chair in which the woman lay all day long apparently watching the palm fronds clashing with their wild dry bitter sound against the bright glitter of the water while the man carried driftwood into the kitchen.

Two mornings ago the milk wagon which made the beach route stopped there and the doctor’s wife saw the man once returning up the beach from a small grocery store owned by a Portuguese ex-fisherman, carrying a loaf of bread and a bulky paper sack. And she told the doctor about watching him cleaning (or trying to clean) a mess of fish at the kitchen steps, told the doctor about it with bitter and outraged conviction—a shapeless woman yet not fat, not anywhere near as plump as the doctor himself, who had begun to turn gray all over about ten years ago, as if hair and complexion both were being subtly altered, along with the shade of her eyes, by the color of the house dresses which she apparently chose to match them. “And a mess of it he was making!” she cried. “A mess outside the kitchen and a mess on the stove too probably!”

“Maybe she can cook,” the doctor said mildly.

“Where, how? Sitting out there in the yard? When he carries stove and all out to her?” But even that was not the real outrage, though she did not say so. She did not say “They are not married” though it was in both their minds. They both knew that, once it was said aloud between them, he would turn the renters out. Yet they both refused to say it and for more reason than because when he turned them out he would feel conscience-bound to return the rent money; more than this on his part anyway, who was thinking They had only twenty dollars. And that was three days ago. And there is something wrong with her, the doctor now speaking louder than the provincial protestant, the Baptist born.

And something (perhaps the doctor here too) talking louder than the provincial Baptist in her too because this morning she waked the doctor, calling him from the window where she stood shapeless in the cotton nightgown shaped like a shroud and with her gray hair screwed into papers, to show him the man coming up the beach at sunrise with his belted faggot of driftwood. And when he (the doctor) came home at noon she had the gumbo made, an enormous quantity of it, enough for a dozen people, made with that grim Samaritan husbandry of good women, as if she took a grim and vindictive and masochistic pleasure in the fact that the Samaritan deed would be performed at the price of its remainder which would sit invincible and inexhaustible on the stove while days accumulated and passed, to be warmed and rewarmed and then rewarmed until consumed by two people who did not even like it, who born and bred in sight of the sea had for taste in fish a predilection for the tuna, the salmon, the sardines bought in cans, immolated and embalmed three thousand miles away in the oil of machinery and commerce.

He delivered the bowl himself—a shortish fattish untidy man with linen not quite fresh, sidling a little clumsily through the oleander hedge with the bowl covered by a yet-creased (and not yet even laundered, it was that new) linen napkin, lending an air of awkward kindness even to the symbol which he carried of the uncompromising Christian deed

performed not with sincerity or pity but through duty—and lowered it (she had not risen from the chair nor moved save the hard cat's eyes) as if the bowl contained nitroglycerin, the fattish unshaven mask beaming foolishly but behind the mask the eyes of the doctor within the Doctor shrewd, missing nothing, examining without smiling and without diffidence the face of the woman who was not thin but actually gaunt, thinking Yes.

A degree or two. Perhaps three. But not the heart then waking, rousing, to find the blank feral eyes staring at him, whom to his certain knowledge they could scarcely have seen before, with profound and illimitable hatred. It was quite impersonal, as when the person in whom joy already exists looks out at any post or tree with pleasure and happiness. He (the doctor) was without vanity; it was not at him the hatred was directed. It's at the whole human race, he thought. Or no, no. Wait. Wait—the veil about to break, the cogs of deduction about to mesh—Not at the race of mankind but at the race of man, the masculine.

But why? Why? His wife would have noticed the faint mark of the absent wedding ring, but he, the doctor, saw more than that: She has borne children, he thought. One, anyway; I would stake my degree on that. And if Cofer (he was the agent) is right about his not being her husband—and he should be, should be able to tell, smell, as he says, since he is apparently in the business of renting beach cottages for the same reason or under the same compulsion, vicarious need, which drives certain people in the cities to equip and supply rooms to clandestine and fictitious names. . . .

Say she had come to hate the race of men enough to desert husband and children; good. Yet, to have gone not only to another man, but to live apparently in penury, and herself sick, really sick. Or to have deserted husband and children for another man and poverty, and then to have—to have—to . . . He could feel, hear them: the cogs, clicking, going fast; he felt a need for terrific haste in order to keep up, a premonition that the final cog would click and the bell of comprehension ring and he would not be quite near enough to see and

hear: Yes. Yes. What is it that man as a race can have done to her that she would look upon such a manifestation of it as I, whom she has never seen before and would not look at twice if she had, with that same hatred through which he must walk each time he comes up from the beach with an armful of firewood to cook the very food which she eats?

She did not even offer to take the dish from him. "It's not soup, it's gumbo," he said. "My wife made it. She—we . . ." She did not move, looking at him as he stooped fatly in his crumpled seersucker, with the careful tray; he did not even hear the man until she spoke to him.

"Thanks," she said. "Take it into the house, Harry." Now she was not even looking at the doctor any more. "Thank your wife," she said.

He was thinking about his two tenants as he descended the stairs behind the jerking pencil of light, into the staling odor of gumbo in the lower hall, toward the door, the knocking. It was from no presentiment, premonition that the knocker was the man named Harry. It was because he had thought of nothing else for four days—this snuffy middleaging man in the archaic sleeping garment now become one of the national props of comedy, roused from slumber in the stale bed of his childless wife and already thinking of (perhaps having been dreaming of) the profound and distracted blaze of objectless hatred in the strange woman's eyes; and he again with that sense of imminence, of being just beyond a veil from something, of groping just without the veil and even touching but not quite, almost seeing but not quite, the shape of truth, so that without being aware of it he stopped dead on the stairs in his old-fashioned list slippers, thinking swiftly: Yes. Yes. Something which the entire race of men, males, has done to her or she believes has done to her.

The knocking came again now, as if the knocker had become aware that he had stopped through some alteration of the torch's beam seen beneath the door itself and now began to knock again with that diffident insistence of a stranger seeking aid late at night, and the doctor moved again, not in response to the renewed knocking, who

had had no presentiment, but as though the renewal of the knocking had merely coincided with the recurrent old stale impasse of the four days' bafflement and groping, caputlant and recaputlant; as though instinct perhaps moved him again, the body capable of motion, not the intellect, believing that physical advancement might bring him nearer the veil at the instant when it would part and reveal in inviolable isolation that truth which he almost touched. So it was without premonition that he opened the door and peered out, bringing the torch's beam on the knocker. It was the man called Harry. He stood there in the darkness, in the strong steady seawind filled with the dry clashing of invisible palm fronds, as the doctor had always seen him, in the soiled ducks and the sleeveless undershirt, murmuring the conventional amenities about the hour and the need, asking to use the telephone while the doctor, his nightshirt streaming about his flabby calves, peered at the caller and thought in a fierce surge of triumph: Now I am going to find out what it is. "Yes," he said, "you wont need the telephone. I am a doctor myself."

"Oh," the other said. "Can you come at once?"

"Yes. Just let me slip on my pants. What's the trouble? So I shall know what to bring."

For an instant the other hesitated; this familiar to the doctor too who had seen it before and believed he knew its source: that innate and ineradicable instinct of mankind to attempt to conceal some of the truth even from the doctor or lawyer for whose skill and knowledge they are paying. "She's bleeding," he said. "What will your fee—"

But the doctor did not notice this. He was talking to himself: Ah. Yes. Why didn't I . . . Lungs, of course. Why didn't I think of that? "Yes," he said. "Will you wait here? Or perhaps inside? I wont be but a minute."

"I'll wait here," the other said. But the doctor did not hear that either. He was already running back up the stairs; he trotted into the bedroom where his wife rose on one elbow in the bed and watched him struggle into his trousers, his shadow, cast by the lamp on the low table by the

bed, antic on the wall, her shadow also monstrous, gorgonlike from the rigid paper-wrapped twists of gray hair above the gray face above the high-necked night-dress which also looked gray, as if every garment she owned had partaken of that grim iron-color of her implacable and invincible morality which, the doctor was to realise later, was almost omniscient. "Yes," he said, "bleeding. Probably hemorrhage. Lungs. And why in the world I didn't—"

"More likely he has cut or shot her," she said in a cold quiet bitter voice. "Though from the look in her eyes the one time I saw her close I would have said she would be the one to do the cutting and shooting."

"Nonsense," he said, hunching into his suspenders. "Nonsense." Because he was not talking to her now either. "Yes. The fool. To bring her here, of all places. To sealevel. To the Mississippi coast—Do you want me to put out the lamp?"

"Yes. You'll probably be there a long time if you are going to wait until you are paid." He blew out the lamp and descended the stairs again behind the torch. His black bag sat on the hall table beside his hat. The man Harry still stood just outside the front door.

"Maybe you better take this now," he said.

"What?" the doctor said. He paused, looking down, bringing the torch to bear on the single banknote in the other's extended hand. Even if he has spent nothing, now he will have only fifteen dollars, he thought. "No, later," he said. "Maybe we had better hurry." He bustled on ahead, following the torch's dancing beam, trotting while the other walked, across his own somewhat sheltered yard and through the dividing oleander hedge and so into the full sweep of the unimpeded seawind which thrashed among the unseen palms and hissed in the harsh salt grass of the unkempt other lot; now he could see a dim light in the other house. "Bleeding, hey?" he said. It was overcast; the invisible wind blew strong and steady among the invisible palms, from the invisible sea—a harsh steady sound full of the murmur of surf on

the outside barrier islands, the spits and scars of sand bastioned with tossing and shabby pines. "Hemorrhage?"

"What?" the other said. "Hemorrhage?"

"No?" the doctor said. "She's just coughing a little blood then? Just spitting a little blood when she coughs, eh?"

"Spitting?" the other said. It was the tone, not the words. It was not addressed to the doctor and it was beyond laughter, as if that which it addressed were impervious to laughter; it was not the doctor who stopped; the doctor still trotted onward on his short sedentary legs, behind the jolting torch-beam, toward the dim waiting light, it was the Baptist, the provincial, who seemed to pause while the man, not the doctor now, thought not in shock but in a sort of despairing amazement: Am I to live forever behind a barricade of perennial innocence like a chicken in a pen? He spoke aloud quite carefully; the veil was going now, dissolving now, it was about to part now and now he did not want to see what was behind it; he knew that for the sake of his peace of mind forever afterward he did not dare and he knew that it was too late now and that he could not help himself; he heard his voice ask the question he did not want to ask and get the answer he did not want to hear:

"You say she is bleeding. Where is she bleeding?"

"Where do women bleed?" the other said, cried, in a harsh exasperated voice, not stopping. "I'm no doctor. If I were, do you think I would waste five dollars on you?"

Nor did the doctor hear this either. "Ah," he said. "Yes. I see. Yes." Now he stopped. He was aware of no cessation of motion since the steady dark wind still blew past him. Because I am at the wrong age for this, he thought. If I were twenty-five I could say, Thank God I am not him because I would know it was only my luck today and that maybe tomorrow or next year it will be me and so I will not need to envy him. And if I were sixty-five I could say, Thank God, I am not him because

then I would know I was too old for it to be possible and so it would not do me any good to envy him because he has proof on the body of love and of passion and of life that he is not dead. But now I am forty-eight and I did not think that I deserved this. "Wait," he said; "wait." The other paused; they stood facing one another, leaning a little into the dark wind filled with the wild dry sound of the palms.

"I offered to pay you," the other said. "Isn't five enough? And if it isn't, will you give me the name of someone who will come for that and let me use your telephone?"

"Wait," the doctor said. So Cofer was right, he thought. You are not married. Only why did you have to tell me so? He didn't say that, of course, he said, "You haven't . . . You are not . . . What are you?"

The other, taller, leaned in the hard wind, looking down at the doctor with that impatience, that seething restraint. In the black wind the house, the shack, stood, itself invisible, the dim light shaped not by any door or window but rather like a strip of dim and forlorn bunting dingy and rigidly immobile in the wind. "What am I what?" he said. "I'm trying to be a painter. Is that what you mean?"

"A painter? But there is no building, no boom, no development here any more. That died nine years ago. You mean, you came here without any offer of work, any sort of contract at all?"

"I paint pictures," the other said. "At least, I think I do—Well? Am I to use your phone or not?"

"You paint pictures," the doctor said; he spoke in that tone of quiet amazement which thirty minutes later and then tomorrow and tomorrow would vacillate among outrage and anger and despair: "Well. She's probably still bleeding. Come along." They went on. He entered the house first; even at the moment he realised that he had preceded the other not as a guest, not even as owner, but because he believed now that he alone of the two of them had any right to enter it at all so long as the woman was in it. They were out of the wind now. It merely

leaned, black, imponderable and firm, against the door which the man called Harry had closed behind them: and now and at once the doctor smelled again the odor of stale and cooling gumbo. He even knew where it would be; he could almost see it sitting uneaten (They have not even tasted it, he thought.

But why should they? Why in God's name should they?) on the cold stove since he knew the kitchen well—the broken stove, the spare cooking vessels, the meager collection of broken knives and forks and spoons, the drinking receptacles which had once contained gaudily labelled and machine-made pickle and jam. He knew the entire house well, he owned it, he had built it—the flimsy walls (they were not even tongue-and-groove like the one in which he lived but were of ship-lap, the synthetic joints of which, weathered and warped by the damp salt air, leaked all privacy just as broken socks and trousers do) murmurous with the ghosts of a thousand rented days and nights to which he (though not his wife) had closed his eyes, insisting only that there be always an odd number in any mixed party which stayed there overnight unless the couple were strangers formally professing to be man and wife, as now, even though he knew better and knew that his wife knew better. Because this was it, this the anger and outrage which would alternate with the despair tomorrow and tomorrow: Why did you have to tell me? he thought. The others didn't tell me, upset me, didn't bring here what you brought, though I dont know what they might have taken away.

At once he could see the dim lamplight beyond the open door. But he would have known which door without the light to guide him, the one beyond which the bed would be, the bed in which his wife said she would not ask a nigger servant to sleep; he could hear the other behind him and he realised for the first time that the man called Harry was still barefoot and that he was about to pass and enter the room first, thinking (the doctor) how he who actually had the only small portion of right to enter of either of them must hold back, feeling a dreadful desire to laugh, thinking, You see, I dont know the etiquette in these cases because when I was young and lived in the cities where apparently such as this occurs, I suppose I was afraid, too afraid,

pausing because the other paused: so that it seemed to the doctor, in a steady silent glare of what he was never to know was actual clairvoyance, that they had both paused as if to allow the shade, the shadow, of the absent outraged rightful husband to precede them. It was a sound from within the room itself which moved them—the sound of a bottle against a glass.

“Just a minute,” the man named Harry said. He entered the room quickly; the doctor saw, flung across the beach chair, the faded jeans that were too small for her in exactly the right places. But he did not move. He just heard the swift passage of the man’s bare feet on the floor and then his voice, tense, not loud, quiet, quite gentle: so that suddenly the doctor believed he knew why there had been neither pain nor terror in the woman’s face: that the man was carrying that too just as he carried the firewood and (doubtless) cooked with it the food she ate. “No, Charlotte,” he said. “You mustn’t. You cant. Come back to bed now.”

“Why cant I?” the woman’s voice said. “Why bloody cant I?” and now the doctor could hear them struggling. “Let me go, you bloody bungling bastard” (it was “rat,” the noun, which the doctor believed he heard). “You promised, rat. That was all I asked and you promised. Because listen, rat—” the doctor could hear it, the voice cunning, secret now: “It wasn’t him, you see. Not that bastard Wilbourne. I ratted off on him like I did you. It was the other one. You cant, anyway. I’ll plead my ass like they used to plead their bellies and nobody ever knows just where the truth is about a whore to convict anybody—” The doctor could hear them, the two pairs of bare feet; it sounded as if they were dancing, furiously and infinitesimally and without shoes. Then this stopped and the voice was not cunning, not secret. But where’s the despair? the doctor thought. Where’s the terror? “Jesus, there I went again. Harry! Harry! You promised.”

“I’ve got you. It’s all right. Come back to bed.”

“Give me a drink.”

“No. I told you no more. I told you why not. Do you hurt bad now?”

“Jesus, I dont know. I cant tell. Give me the drink, Harry. Maybe that will start it again.”

“No. It cant now. It’s too late for that to. Besides, the doctor’s here now. He’ll start it again. I’m going to put your gown on you so he can come in.”

“And risk bloodying up the only nightgown I ever owned?”

“That’s why. That’s why we got the gown. Maybe that’s all it will take to start it again. Come on now.”

“Then why the doctor? Why the five dollars? Oh, you damned bloody bungling—No no no no. Quick. There I go again. Stop me quick. I am hurting. I cant help it. Oh, damn bloody bloody—” she began to laugh; it was hard laughing and not loud, like retching or coughing. “There. That’s it. It’s like dice. Come seven come eleven. Maybe if I can just keep on saying it—” He (the doctor) could hear them, the two pair of bare feet on the floor, then the rusty plaint of the bed springs, the woman still laughing, not loud, just with that abstract and furious despair which he had seen in her eyes over the bowl of gumbo at noon. He stood there, holding his little scuffed worn serviceable black bag, looking at the faded jeans among the wadded mass of other garments on the beach chair; he saw the man called Harry reappear and select from among them a nightgown and vanish again; the doctor looked at the chair. Yes he thought. Just like the firewood. Then the man called Harry was standing in the door.

“You can come in now,” he said.

Chapter II Old Man

Once (it was in Mississippi, in May, in the flood year 1927) there were two convicts. One of them was about twenty-five, tall, lean, flat-stomached, with a sunburned face and Indian-black hair and pale, china-colored outraged eyes—an outrage directed not at the men who had foiled his crime, not even at the lawyers and judges who had sent him here, but at the writers, the uncorporeal names attached to the stories, the paper novels—the Diamond Dicks and Jesse Jameses and such—whom he believed had led him into his present predicament through their own ignorance and gullibility regarding the medium in which they dealt and took money for, in accepting information on which they placed the stamp of verisimilitude and authenticity (this so much the more criminal since there was no sworn notarised statement attached and hence so much the quicker would the information be accepted by one who expected the same unspoken good faith, demanding, asking, expecting no certification, which he extended along with the dime or fifteen cents to pay for it) and retailed for money and which on actual application proved to be impractical and (to the convict) criminally false; there would be times when he would halt his mule and plow in midfurrow (there is no walled penitentiary in Mississippi; it is a cotton plantation which the convicts work under the rifles and shotguns of guards and trusties) and muse with a kind of enraged impotence, fumbling among the rubbish left him by his one and only experience with courts and law, fumbling until the meaningless and verbose shibboleth took form at last (himself seeking justice at the same blind fount where he had met justice and been hurled back and down): Using the mails to defraud: who felt that he had been defrauded by the third-class mail system not of crass and stupid money which he did not particularly want anyway, but of liberty and honor and pride.

He was in for fifteen years (he had arrived shortly after his nineteenth birthday) for attempted train robbery. He had laid his plans in advance, he had followed his printed (and false) authority to the letter; he had saved the paper-backs for two years, reading and re-reading them, memorising them, comparing and weighing story and method against story and method, taking the good from each and discarding the dross as his workable plan emerged, keeping his mind open to make the

subtle last-minute changes, without haste and without impatience, as the newer pamphlets appeared on their appointed days as a conscientious dressmaker makes the subtle alterations in a court presentation costume as the newer bulletins appear. And then when the day came, he did not even have a chance to go through the coaches and collect the watches and the rings, the brooches and the hidden money-belts, because he had been captured as soon as he entered the express car where the safe and the gold would be.

He had shot no one because the pistol which they took away from him was not that kind of a pistol although it was loaded; later he admitted to the District Attorney that he had got it, as well as the dark lantern in which a candle burned and the black handkerchief to wear over the face, by peddling among his pine-hill neighbors subscriptions to the *Detectives' Gazette*. So now from time to time (he had ample leisure for it) he mused with that raging impotence, because there was something else he could not tell them at the trial, did not know how to tell them. It was not the money he had wanted. It was not riches, not the crass loot; that would have been merely a bangle to wear upon the breast of his pride like the Olympic runner's amateur medal—a symbol, a badge to show that he too was the best at his chosen gambit in the living and fluid world of his time. So that at times as he trod the richly shearing black earth behind his plow or with a hoe thinned the sprouting cotton and corn or lay on his sullen back in his bunk after supper, he cursed in a harsh steady unrepentive stream, not at the living men who had put him where he was but at what he did not even know were pen-names, did not even know were not actual men but merely the designations of shades who had written about shades.

The second convict was short and plump. Almost hairless, he was quite white. He looked like something exposed to light by turning over rotting logs or planks and he too carried (though not in his eyes like the first convict) a sense of burning and impotent outrage. So it did not show on him and hence none knew it was there. But then nobody knew very much about him, including the people who had sent him here. His outrage was directed at no printed word but at the paradoxical fact that he had been forced to come here of his own free choice and will.

He had been forced to choose between the Mississippi State penal farm and the Federal Penitentiary at Atlanta, and the fact that he, who resembled a hairless and pallid slug, had chosen the out-of-doors and the sunlight was merely another manifestation of the close-guarded and solitary enigma of his character, as something recognisable roils momentarily into view from beneath stagnant and opaque water, then sinks again. None of his fellow prisoners knew what his crime had been, save that he was in for a hundred and ninety-nine years—this incredible and impossible period of punishment or restraint itself carrying a vicious and fabulous quality which indicated that his reason for being here was such that the very men, the paladins and pillars of justice and equity who had sent him here had during that moment become blind apostles not of mere justice but of all human decency, blind instruments not of equity but of all human outrage and vengeance, acting in a savage personal concert, judge, lawyer and jury, which certainly abrogated justice and possibly even law.

Possibly only the Federal and State's Attorneys knew what the crime actually was. There had been a woman in it and a stolen automobile transported across a State line, a filling station robbed and the attendant shot to death. There had been a second man in the car at the time and anyone could have looked once at the convict (as the two attorneys did) and known he would not even have had the synthetic courage of alcohol to pull trigger on anyone. But he and the woman and the stolen car had been captured while the second man, doubtless the actual murderer, had escaped, so that, brought to bay at last in the State's Attorney's office, harried, dishevelled and snarling, the two grimly implacable and viciously gleeful attorneys in his front and the now raging woman held by two policemen in the anteroom in his rear, he was given his choice. He could be tried in Federal Court under the Mann Act and for the automobile, that is, by electing to pass through the anteroom where the woman raged he could take his chances on the lesser crime in Federal Court, or by accepting a sentence for manslaughter in the State Court he would be permitted to quit the room by a back entrance, without having to pass the woman.

He had chosen; he stood at the bar and heard a judge (who looked down at him as if the District Attorney actually had turned over a rotten plank with his toe and exposed him) sentence him to a hundred and ninety-nine years at the State Farm. Thus (he had ample leisure too; they had tried to teach him to plow and had failed, they had put him in the blacksmith shop and the foreman trusty himself had asked to have him removed: so that now, in a long apron like a woman, he cooked and swept and dusted in the deputy wardens' barracks) he too mused at times with that sense of impotence and outrage though it did not show on him as on the first convict since he leaned on no halted broom to do it and so none knew it was there.

It was this second convict who, toward the end of April, began to read aloud to the others from the daily newspapers when, chained ankle to ankle and herded by armed guards, they had come up from the fields and had eaten supper and were gathered in the bunkhouse. It was the Memphis newspaper which the deputy wardens had read at breakfast; the convict read aloud from it to his companions who could have had but little active interest in the outside world, some of whom could not have read it for themselves at all and did not even know where the Ohio and Missouri river basins were, some of whom had never even seen the Mississippi River although for past periods ranging from a few days to ten and twenty and thirty years (and for future periods ranging from a few months to life) they had plowed and planted and eaten and slept beneath the shadow of the levee itself, knowing only that there was water beyond it from hearsay and because now and then they heard the whistles of steamboats from beyond it and, during the last week or so had seen the stacks and pilot houses moving along the sky sixty feet above their heads.

But they listened, and soon even those who like the taller convict had probably never before seen more water than a horse pond would hold knew what thirty feet on a river gauge at Cairo or Memphis meant and could (and did) talk glibly of sandboils. Perhaps what actually moved them were the accounts of the conscripted levee gangs, mixed blacks and whites working in double shifts against the steadily rising water; stories of men, even though they were negroes, being forced like

themselves to do work for which they received no other pay than coarse food and a place in a mudfloored tent to sleep on—stories, pictures, which emerged from the shorter convict's reading voice: the mudsplashed white men with the inevitable shotguns, the antlike lines of negroes carrying sandbags, slipping and crawling up the steep face of the revetment to hurl their futile ammunition into the face of a flood and return for more. Or perhaps it was more than this.

Perhaps they watched the approach of the disaster with that same amazed and incredulous hope of the slaves—the lions and bears and elephants, the grooms and bathmen and pastrycooks—who watched the mounting flames of Rome from Ahenobarbus' gardens. But listen they did and presently it was May and the wardens' newspaper began to talk in headlines two inches tall—those black staccato slashes of ink which, it would almost seem, even the illiterate should be able to read: Crest Passes Memphis at Midnight 4000 Homeless in White River Basin Governor Calls out National Guard Martial Law Declared in Following Counties Red Cross Train with President Hoover Leaves Washington Tonight; then, three evenings later (It had been raining all day—not the vivid brief thunderous downpours of April and May, but the slow steady gray rain of November and December before a cold north wind. The men had not gone to the fields at all during the day, and the very second-hand optimism of the almost twenty-four-hour-old news seemed to contain its own refutation.): Crest Now Below Memphis 22,000 Refugees Safe at Vicksburg Army Engineers Say Levees Will Hold.

“I reckon that means it will bust tonight,” one convict said.

“Well, maybe this rain will hold on until the water gets here,” a second said. They all agreed to this because what they meant, the living unspoken thought among them, was that if the weather cleared, even though the levees broke and the flood moved in upon the Farm itself, they would have to return to the fields and work, which they would have had to do. There was nothing paradoxical in this, although they could not have expressed the reason for it which they instinctively perceived: that the land they farmed and the substance they produced

from it belonged neither to them who worked it nor to those who forced them at guns' point to do so, that as far as either—convicts or guards—were concerned, it could have been pebbles they put into the ground and papier-mâché cotton- and corn-sprouts which they thinned. So it was that, what between the sudden wild hoping and the idle day and the evening's headlines, they were sleeping restlessly beneath the sound of the rain on the tin roof when at midnight the sudden glare of the electric bulbs and the guards' voices waked them and they heard the throbbing of the waiting trucks.

“Turn out of there!” the deputy shouted. He was fully dressed—rubber boots, slicker and shotgun. “The levee went out at Mound's Landing an hour ago. Get up out of it!”

Chapter III The Wild Palms

When the man called Harry met Charlotte Rittenmeyer, he was an intern in a New Orleans hospital. He was the youngest of three children, born to his father's second wife in his father's old age; there was a difference of sixteen years between him and the younger of his two half sisters. He was left an orphan at the age of two and his older half sister had raised him. His father had been a doctor before him. He (the father) had begun and completed his medical training at a time when the designation Doctor of Medicine covered everything from pharmacology through diagnostics to surgery and when an education could be paid for in kind or in labor; the elder Wilbourne had been janitor of his dormitory and had also waited on table in commons and had completed his four-year course at a cash outlay of two hundred dollars. Thus when his will was opened, the last paragraph read:

To my son, Henry Wilbourne, and realizing that conditions as well as the intrinsic value of money have changed and therefore he cannot be expected to obtain his degree in Surgery and Medicine for the same outlay of money which obtained in my day, I hereby bequeath and set aside the sum of two thousand dollars, to be used for the furthering

and completing of his college course and the acquiring of his degree and license to practise in Surgery and Medicine, believing that the aforesaid sum will be amply sufficient for that purpose.

The will was dated two days after Harry's birth in 1910, and his father died two years later of toxemia gotten from sucking a snake bite on the hand of a child in a country cabin and his half sister took him. She had children of her own and was married to a man who died still a clerk in a grocery store in a small Oklahoma town, so by the time Harry was ready to enter medical school that two thousand dollars to be stretched over four years, even in the modest though well-rated school which he chose, was not much more than his father's two hundred had been. It was less, because there was steam heat in the dormitories now and the college was served by a cafeteria requiring no waiters and the only way a young man could earn money in school now was by carrying a football or stopping the man who did carry it.

His sister helped him—an occasional money order for one or two dollars or even a few stamps folded carefully into a letter. This bought his cigarettes and by stopping tobacco for a year he saved enough to pay his fee into his medical fraternity. There was nothing left over for squiring girls (the school was coeducational) but then he had no time for that; beneath the apparent serenity of his monastic life he waged a constant battle as ruthless as any in a Wall Street skyscraper as he balanced his dwindling bank account against the turned pages of his text books.

But he did it, he came in under the wire with enough of the two thousand dollars left either to return to the Oklahoma town and present his sheepskin to his sister, or to go straight to New Orleans and assume his internship, but not enough to do both. He chose New Orleans. Or rather, there was no choice; he wrote his sister and her husband a letter of gratitude and thanks, inclosing a signed note for the full amount of the postage stamps and the money orders, with interest (he also sent the diploma with its Latin and its spidery embossed salutation and its cramped faculty signatures, of which his sister and brother-in-law could decipher only his name) and mailed it to them and

bought his ticket and rode fourteen hours in a day coach. He reached New Orleans with one bag and a dollar and thirty-six cents.

He had been in the hospital almost two years now. He lived in the intern's quarters with the others who, like him, had no private means; he smoked once a week now: a package of cigarettes over the weekend and he was paying the note which he had executed to his half sister, the one- and two-dollar money orders in reverse now, returning to source; the one bag would still hold all he owned, including his hospital whites—the twenty-six years, the two thousand dollars, the railroad ticket to New Orleans, the one dollar and thirty-six cents, the one bag in a corner of a barracks-like room furnished with steel army cots; on the morning of his twenty-seventh birthday he waked and looked down his body toward his foreshortened feet and it seemed to him that he saw the twenty-seven irrevocable years diminished and foreshortened beyond them in turn, as if his life were to lie passively on his back as though he floated effortless and without volition upon an unreturning stream.

He seemed to see them: the empty years in which his youth had vanished—the years for wild oats and for daring, for the passionate tragic ephemeral loves of adolescence, the girl- and boy-white, the wild importunate fumbling flesh, which had not been for him; lying, so he thought, not exactly with pride and certainly not with the resignation which he believed, but rather with that peace with which a middle-aged eunuch might look back upon the dead time before his alteration, at the fading and (at last) edgeless shapes which now inhabited only the memory and not the flesh: I have repudiated money and hence love. Not abjured it, repudiated. I do not need it; by next year or two years or five years I will know to be true what I now believe to be true: I will not even need to want it.

That evening he was a little late in going off duty; when he passed the dining room he heard already the clash of cutlery and the voices, and the interns' quarters were empty save for a man named Flint who in evening trousers and shirt was tying a black tie before the mirror and who turned as Wilbourne entered and pointed to a telegram on

Wilbourne's pillow. It had been opened. "It was lying on my cot," Flint said. "I was in a hurry to dress so I didn't take time to look at the name good. I just picked it up and opened it. I'm sorry."

"That's all right," Wilbourne said. "Too many people have already seen a telegram for it to be very private." He removed the folded yellow sheet from the envelope. It was decorated with symbols—garlands and scrolls; it was from his sister: one of those stereotyped birthday greetings which the telegraph company sends to any distance within the boundaries of the United States for twenty-five cents. He found that Flint was still watching him.

"So this is your birthday," Flint said. "Celebrating?"

"No," Wilbourne said. "I guess not."

"What? Listen. I'm going to a party down in French Town. Why not come along?"

"No," Wilbourne said. "Thanks, though." He did not yet begin to think, Why not? "I'm not invited."

"That dont matter. It's not that kind of a party. It's at a studio. Painting guy. Just a mob sitting around on the floor in each other's laps, drinking. Come on. You dont want to stick here on your birthday." Now he did begin to think, Why not? Why really not? and now he could almost see the guardian of the old trained peace and resignation rise to arms, the grim Moses, not alarmed, impervious to alarm, just gauntly and fanatically interdicting: No. You will not go. Let well enough alone. You have peace now; you want no more.

"Besides, I haven't any dress clothes."

"You wont need them. Your host will probably be wearing a bathrobe. You've got a dark suit, haven't you?"

"But I dont—"

“All right,” Flint said. “De Montigny has a tux. He’s about your size. I’ll get it.” He went to the closet which they used in common.

“But I dont—” Wilbourne said.

“All right,” Flint said. He laid the second dinner suit on the cot and slipped his braces and began to remove his own trousers. “I’ll wear de Montigny’s and you can wear mine. We’re all three about standard.”

An hour later, in a borrowed costume such as he had never worn before, he and Flint halted in one of the narrow, dim, balcony-hung one-way streets between Jackson Square and Royal Street in the Vieux Carre—a wall of soft muted brick above which the crest of a cabbage palm exploded raggedly and from beyond which came a heavy smell of jasmine which seemed to lie visible upon the rich stagnant air already impregnated with the smell of sugar and bananas and hemp from the docks, like inert wisps of fog or even paint.

A wooden gate hung slightly awry, beside it a wire bell pull which under Flint’s hand produced a remote mellow jangling. They could hear a piano, it was something of Gershwin’s. “There,” Flint said. “You dont need to worry about this party. You can already hear the home-made gin. Gershwin might have painted his pictures for him too. Only I bet Gershwin could paint what Crowe calls his pictures better than Crowe plays what Gershwin calls his music.”

Flint jerked the bell again, again nothing came of it. “It’s not locked, anyway,” Wilbourne said. It was not, they entered: a court paved with the same soft, quietly rotting brick. There was a stagnant pool with a terra-cotta figure, a mass of lantana, the single palm, the thick rich leaves and the heavy white stars of the jasmine bush where light fell upon it through open French doors, the court balcony—overhung too on three sides, the walls of that same annealing brick lifting a rampart broken and nowhere level against the glare of the city on the low eternally overcast sky, and over all, brittle, dissonant and ephemeral,

the spurious sophistication of the piano like symbols scrawled by adolescent boys upon an ancient decayed rodent-scavengered tomb.

They crossed the court and entered the French windows and the noise—the piano, the voices—a longish room, uneven of floor, the walls completely covered with unframed paintings which at the moment impacted upon Wilbourne with that inextricable and detailless effect of an enormous circus poster seen suddenly at close range, from which vision the very eyeballs seem to start violently back in consternation. It contained no furniture except a piano at which a man sat in a Basque cap and a bathrobe. Perhaps a dozen other people sat or stood about on the floor with glasses; a woman in a sleeveless linen frock shrieked, “My God, where was the funeral?” and came and kissed Flint, still carrying her glass.

“This is Doctor Wilbourne, boys and girls,” Flint said. “Watch him. He’s got a pad of blank checks in his pocket and a scalpel in his sleeve.” His host did not even turn his head, though a woman brought him a drink presently. It was his hostess, though no one had told him that; she stood and talked to him for a moment, or at him because he was not listening, he was looking at the pictures on the wall; presently he stood alone, still holding his glass, before the wall itself. He had seen photographs and reproductions of such in magazines before, at which he had looked completely without curiosity because it was completely without belief, as a yokel might look at a drawing of a dinosaur.

But now the yokel was looking at the monster itself and Wilbourne stood before the paintings in complete absorption. It was not at what they portrayed, the method or the coloring; they meant nothing to him. It was in a bemusement without heat or envy at a condition which could supply a man with the obvious leisure and means to spend his days painting such as this and his evenings playing the piano and feeding liquor to people whom he ignored and (in one case, at least) whose names he did not even bother to catch. He was still standing there when someone behind said, “Here’s Rat and Charley”; he was still standing there when Charlotte spoke at his shoulder:

“What do you think about it, mister?” He turned and saw a young woman a good deal shorter than he and for a moment he thought she was fat until he saw it was not fat at all but merely that broad, simple, profoundly delicate and feminine articulation of Arabian mares—a woman of under twenty-five, in a print cotton dress, a face which laid no claim even to prettiness and wore no makeup save the painted broad mouth, with a faint inch-long scar on one cheek which he recognised as an old burn, doubtless from childhood. “You haven’t decided yet, have you?”

“No,” he said. “I dont know.”

“Dont know what you think, or whether you are trying to decide or not?”

“Yes. Probably that. What do you think about it?”

“Marshmallows with horseradish,” she said, too promptly. “I paint too,” she added. “I can afford to say. I can afford to say I can beat that, too. What’s your name, and what have you got all this on for, just to come slumming? So we can all know you are slumming?”

He told her and now she looked at him and he saw that her eyes were not hazel but yellow, like a cat’s, staring at him with a speculative sobriety like a man might, intent beyond mere boldness, speculative beyond any staring. “I borrowed this suit. It’s the first time in my life I ever had one on.” Then he said, he did not intend to, he didn’t even know he was going to say it, he seemed to be drowning, volition and will, in the yellow stare: “This is my birthday. I’m twenty-seven years old.”

“Oh,” she said. She turned, she took him by the wrist, a grasp simple, ruthless and firm, drawing him after her. “Come on.” He followed, awkwardly, not to tread on her heels, then she released him and went on before him, across the room to where three men and two women stood about the table on which the bottles and glasses sat. She stopped, she grasped his wrist again and drew him toward a man of his

own age about, in a dark double-breasted suit, with blond wavy hair going a little thin, a face not quite handsome and reasonably insensitive and shrewder than intelligent yet on the whole gentler than not, assured, courteous and successful. “This is Rat,” she said. “He is the senior living ex-freshman of the University of Alabama. That’s why we still call him Rat. You can call him Rat too. Sometimes he is.”

Later—it was after midnight and Flint and the woman who had kissed him were gone—they stood in the court beside the jasmine bush. “I’ve got two children, both girls,” she said. “That’s funny, because all my family were brothers except me. I liked my oldest brother the best but you cant sleep with your brother and he and Rat roomed together in school so I married Rat and now I’ve got two girls, and when I was seven years old I fell in the fireplace, my brother and I were fighting, and that’s the scar. It’s on my shoulder and side and hip too and I got in the habit of telling people about it before they would have time not to ask and I still do it even when it doesn’t matter anymore.”

“Do you tell everybody like this? At first?”

“About the brothers or about the scar?”

“Both. Maybe the scar.”

“No. That’s funny too. I had forgotten. I haven’t told anybody in years. Five years.”

“But you told me.”

“Yes. And that’s funny twice. No, three times now. Listen. I lied to you. I dont paint. I work with clay, and some in brass, and once with a piece of stone, with a chisel and maul. Feel.” She took his hand and drew his finger-tips along the base of her other palm—the broad, blunt, strong, supple-fingered hand with nails as closely trimmed as if she had bitten them down, the skin at the base and lower joints of the fingers not calloused exactly but smoothly hardened and toughened like the heel of a foot. “That’s what I make: something you can touch, pick up,

something with weight in your hand that you can look at the behind side of, that displaces air and displaces water and when you drop it, it's your foot that breaks and not the shape.

Not poking at a piece of cloth with a knife or a brush like you were trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle with a rotten switch through the bars of a cage. That's why I said I could beat that," she said. She didn't move, she didn't even indicate by a motion of her head the room behind them. "Not just something to tickle your taste buds for a second and then swallowed and maybe not even sticking to your entrails but just evacuated whole and flushed away into the damned old sewer, the Might-just-as-well-not-have-been. Will you come to supper tomorrow night?"

"I cant. I'm on duty tomorrow night."

"The next night then? Or when?"

"Dont you have engagements yourself?"

"There are some people coming the night after tomorrow. But they wont bother you." She looked at him. "All right, if you dont want a lot of people, I'll put them off. The night after tomorrow? At seven? Do you want me to come to the hospital for you in the car?"

"No. Dont do that."

"I can, you know."

"I know it," he said. "I know it. Listen—"

"Let's go in," she said. "I'm going home. And dont wear that. Wear your own clothes. I want to see."

Two evenings later he went to dinner. He found a modest though comfortable apartment in an irreproachable neighborhood near Audubon Park, a negro maid, two not particularly remarkable children

of two and four, with her hair but otherwise looking like the father (who in another dark obviously expensive double-breasted suit made a cocktail not particularly remarkable either and insisted that Wilbourne call him Rat) and she in something he knew had been purchased as a semi-formal garment and which she wore with the same ruthless indifference as she had the garment in which he had first seen her, as if both of them were overalls.

After the meal, which was considerably better than the cocktails, she went out with the older child, who had dined with them, but she returned presently to lie on the sofa smoking while Rittenmeyer continued to ask Wilbourne questions about his profession such as the president of a college fraternity might ask of a pledge from the medical school. At ten o'clock Wilbourne said he must go. "No," she said, "not yet." So he remained; at half past ten Rittenmeyer said he must work tomorrow and was going to bed and left them. Then she crushed out the cigarette and rose and came to where he stood before the cold hearth and stopped, facing him. "What to—Do they call you Harry? What to do about it, Harry?"

"I dont know. I never was in love before."

"I have been. But I dont know either.—Do you want me to call a cab for you?"

"No." He turned; she moved beside him across the room. "I'll walk."

"Are you that poor? Let me pay for the cab. You cant walk to the hospital. It's three miles."

"That's not far."

"It wont be his money, if that's what you mean. I have some of my own. I have been saving it for something, I dont know what." She handed him his hat and stood with her hand on the door knob.

"Three miles is not far. I would walk—"

“Yes,” she said. She opened the door, they looked at one another. Then the door closed between them. It was painted white. They did not shake hands.

During the next six weeks they met five times more. This would be downtown for lunch, because he would not again enter her husband’s house and his destiny or luck (or ill-luck, since otherwise he might have discovered that love no more exists just at one spot and in one moment and in one body out of all the earth and all time and all the teeming breathed, than sunlight does) brought him no more second-hand invitations to parties. It would be in Vieux Carre places where they could lunch on the weekly two dollars which he had been sending to his sister to apply on the note. At the third of these she said abruptly, out of nothing: “I have told Rat.”

“Told him?”

“About lunches. That I have been meeting you.” After that she never mentioned her husband again. The fifth time they did not lunch. They went to a hotel, they planned it the day before. He discovered that he knew next to nothing about the proper procedure other than supposition and imagination; because of his ignorance he believed that there was a secret to the successful performance of the business, not a secret formula to be followed but rather a kind of white magic: a word or some infinitesimal and trivial movement of the hand such as that which opens a hidden drawer or panel.

He thought once of asking her how to go about it because he was certain that she would know, just as he was certain that she would never be at a loss about anything she wished to do, not only because of her absolute coordination but because even in this short time he had come to realise that intuitive and infallible skill of all women in the practical affairs of love. But he did not ask her because he told himself that, when she told him how to do, which she would, and it would be correct, he might at some later time believe that she had done this

before and that even if she had, he did not want to know it. So he asked Flint.

“Jesus,” Flint said. “You have come out, haven’t you? I didn’t even know you knew a girl.” Wilbourne could almost watch Flint thinking swiftly, casting backward. “Was it that brawl at Crowe’s that night? But hell, that’s your business, aint it? It’s easy. Just take a bag with a couple of bricks wrapped up in a towel so they wont rattle, and walk in. I wouldn’t pick the Saint Charles or the Roosevelt, of course. Take one of the smaller ones, not too small of course. Maybe that one down toward the station. Wrap the bricks separately, see, then roll them up together. And be sure to carry a coat with you. Raincoat.”

“Yes. Do you reckon I’d better tell her to bring a coat too?”

Flint laughed, one short syllable, not loud. “I guess not. I dont guess she’ll need any coaching from you or me either.—Here,” he said quickly, “hold your horses. I dont know her. I aint talking about her. I’m talking about women. She could turn up with a bag of her own and a coat and a veil and the stub of a Pullman ticket sticking out of her handbag and that wouldn’t mean she had done this before. That’s just women. There aint any advice that Don Juan or Solomon either could give the youngest fourteen-year-old gal ever foaled about this kind of phenagling.”

“It doesn’t matter,” he said. “She probably wont come anyway.” He found that he really believed that. He still believed it even when the cab drew up to the curb where he waited with the bag. She had a coat, but no bag nor veil. She came swiftly out of the cab when he opened the door, her face was hard, sober, her eyes extraordinarily yellow, her voice harsh:

“Well? Where?”

He told her. “It’s not far. We can—” She turned, already getting back into the cab. “We can walk—”

"You damned pauper," she said. "Get in. Hurry." He got in. The cab moved on. The hotel was not far. A negro porter took the bag. Then it seemed to Wilbourne that he had never been in his life, and would never be again, so aware of her as he was while she stood in the center of the dingy lobby raddled with the Saturday nights of drummers and of minor race-track hangers-on while he signed the two fictitious names on the pad and gave to the clerk the sixth two dollars which were to have gone to his sister but did not, waiting for him, making no effort for effacement, quiet, contained, and with a quality profoundly tragic which he knew (he was learning fast) was not peculiar to her but was an attribute of all women at this instant in their lives, which would invest them with a dignity, almost a modesty, to be carried over and clothe even the last prone and slightly comic attitude of ultimate surrender.

He followed her down the corridor and into the door which the porter opened; he dismissed the porter and closed the rented door behind him and watched her cross the room to the single dingy window and, still in the hat and coat, turn without pausing and exactly like a child playing prisoner's base return to him, the yellow eyes, the whole face which he had already come to call beautiful, hard and fixed. "Oh, God, Harry," she said. She beat her clenched fists on his chest. "Not like this. Jesus, not like this."

"All right," he said. "Steady, now." He caught her wrists and held them, still doubled into fists against his chest while she still wrenched at them to free them to strike his chest again. Yes, he thought. Not like this and never. "Steady now."

"Not like this, Harry. Not back alleys. I've always said that: that no matter what happened to me, whatever I did, anything, anything but not back alleys. If it had just been hot pants, somebody with a physique I just leched for all of a sudden so that I never looked nor thought higher than his collar. But not us, Harry. Not you. Not you."

"Steady now," he said. "It's all right." He led her to the edge of the bed and stood over her, still holding her wrists.

"I told you how I wanted to make things, take the fine hard clean brass or stone and cut it, no matter how hard, how long it took, cut it into something fine, that you could be proud to show, that you could touch, hold, see the behind side of it and feel the fine solid weight so when you dropped it it wouldn't be the thing that broke it would be the foot it dropped on except it's the heart that breaks and not the foot, if I have a heart. But Jesus, Harry, how I have bitched it for you." She extended her hand, then he realised what she was about and twisted his hips away before she touched him.

"I'm all right," he said. "You mustn't worry about me. Do you want a cigarette?"

"Please." He gave her a cigarette and a light, looking down at the foreshortened slant of her nose and jaw as she drew at it. He threw the match away. "Well," she said. "So that's that. And no divorce."

"No divorce?"

"Rat's a Catholic. He wont give me one."

"You mean that he—"

"I told him. Not that I was to meet you at a hotel. I just said, suppose I did. And he still said no soap."

"Cant you get the divorce?"

"On what grounds? He would fight it. And it would have to be here—a Catholic judge. So there's just one other thing. And it seems I cant do that."

"Yes," he said. "Your children."

For a moment she looked at him, smoking. "I wasn't thinking of them. I mean, I have already thought of them. So now I dont need to think of

them any more because I know the answer to that and I know I can't change that answer and I don't think I can change me because the second time I ever saw you I learned what I had read in books but I never had actually believed: that love and suffering are the same thing and that the value of love is the sum of what you have to pay for it and any time you get it cheap you have cheated yourself. So I don't need to think about the children. I settled that a long time ago. I was thinking about money.

My brother sends me twenty-five dollars every Christmas and for the last five years I have saved it. I told you the other night I don't know why I have saved it. Maybe it was for this and maybe this is the best joke of all: that I have saved for five years and it's only a hundred and twenty-five dollars, hardly enough to get two people to Chicago. And you have nothing." She leaned toward the table at the head of the bed and crushed the cigarette out with slow and infinite care, and rose. "So that's that. That's all of it."

"No," he said. "No! I'll be damned if it is."

"Do you want to go on like this, hanging around and staying green for me like an apple on a limb?" She took his raincoat from the chair and slung it across her arm and stood waiting.

"Don't you want to go first?" he said. "I'll wait about thirty minutes, then I—"

"And let you walk alone through that lobby carrying the bag for that clerk and that nigger to snigger at because they saw me leave before I would have even had time to take my clothes off, let alone put them back on?" She went to the door and put her hand on the key. He picked up the bag and followed. But she did not unlock the door at once. "Listen. Tell me again you haven't got any money. Say it. So I can have something my ears can listen to as making sense even if I can't understand it. Some reason why I—that I can accept as the strong reason we can't beat even if I can't believe or understand that it could be just that, just money, not anything but just money. Come on. Say it."

“I have no money.”

“All right. It makes sense. It must make sense. It will have to make sense.” She began to shake, not tremble, shake, like one with a violent ague, the bones themselves seeming to chatter rigid and silent inside the flesh. “It will have—”

“Charlotte,” he said. He set the bag down and moved toward her.
“Charlotte—”

“Dont you touch me!” she whispered in a kind of tense fury. “Dont you touch me!” Yet for an instant he believed she was coming to him; she seemed to sway forward, she turned her head and looked toward the bed with an expression of distraction and despair. Then the key clicked, the door opened, and she was out of the room.

They parted as soon as he found a cab for her. He was about to follow her into it, to ride down town to the parking lot where she had left her car. Then for the first of the two times in their lives he saw her cry. She sat there, her face harsh and wrung and savage beneath the springing tears like sweat. “Oh, you pauper, you damned pauper, you transparent fool. It’s money again.

After you paid the hotel two dollars you should have sent your sister and got nothing for it, now you want to pay this cab with what you intended to take your other shirt out of the laundry with and get nothing for that either but the privilege of transporting my damned ass that at the last refused, will always refuse—” She leaned toward the driver. “Go on!” she said savagely. “Drive on! Downtown!”

The cab went on fast; it disappeared almost at once, though he was not looking after it. After a while he said quietly, aloud, to nobody: “At least, there’s no use in carrying the bricks too.” So he walked on to where a trash bin sat at the curb-edge and, while the people passing glanced at him with curiosity or briefly or not at all, he opened the bag and removed the bricks from the towel and dropped them into the bin.

It contained a mass of discarded newspapers and fruit skins, the casual anonymous droppings of the anonymous who passed it during the twelve hours like the refuse of birds in flight.

The bricks struck the mass without a sound; there was no premonitory buzz or whirr at all, the edges of the papers merely tilted and produced from among them, with the magical abruptness with which the little metal torpedo containing change from a sale emerges from its tube in a store, a leather wallet. It contained the stubs of five pari-mutuel tickets from Washington Park, a customer's identification from a national gasoline trust and another from a B.P.O.E. lodge at Longview, Texas, and twelve hundred and seventy-eight dollars in bills.

He discovered the exact amount only after he reached the hospital however, his first thought was merely, I ought to keep out a dollar for the reward as he walked on toward the branch post office, then (the post office was not only six blocks away, it was in the opposite direction from the hospital) I could even keep out taxi-fare and he should not mind. Not that I want to ride but that I've got to make it last, make everything last so there wont be any gaps between now and six oclock when I can hide behind my white jacket again, draw the old routine up over my head and face like niggers do the quilt when they go to bed.

Then he stood before the locked Saturday afternoon doors of the branch station and he had forgotten that too, thinking, as he buttoned the wallet into his hip pocket, how when he waked the name of today had been in fire letters and no word out of a nursery jingle or off a calendar, walking on, carrying the light bag, walking the now twelve useless blocks out of his way, thinking, Only I have beat that too; I have saved myself at least forty-five minutes of time that otherwise would have been filled with leisure.

The dormitory was empty. He put the bag away and hunted for and found a flat cardboard box stippled with holly-sprigs in which his sister had sent him one hand-embroidered handkerchief last Christmas; he found scissors and a bottle of paste and made a neat surgeon's packet of the wallet, copying the address neatly and clearly from one of the

identification cards and putting it carefully away beneath the garments in his drawer; and now that was done too.

Maybe I can read, he thought. Then he cursed, thinking, That's it. It's all exactly backward. It should be the books, the people in the books inventing and reading about us—the Does and Roes and Wilbournes and Smiths—males and females but without the pricks or cunts.

He went on duty at six. At seven he was relieved long enough to go to supper. While he was eating one of the probationer nurses looked in and told him he was wanted on the telephone. It would be long distance, he thought. It would be his sister, he had not written her since he had sent the last two-dollar money order five weeks ago, and now she had called him, would spend two dollars herself, not to reproach him (She's right, he thought, not meaning his sister.

It's comic. It's more than comic. It rolls you in the aisles. I fail to make the one I love and I make myself a failure toward the one who loves me.) but to see that he was well. So when the voice on the wire said "Wilbourne?" he thought it was his brother-in-law until Rittenmeyer spoke again: "Charlotte wants to speak to you."

"Harry?" she said. Her voice was rapid but calm: "I told Rat about today, and that it was a bust. So he's right. It's his turn now. He gave me a free shot, and I didn't make it. So now it's no more than fair to give him a free shot. And it's no more than decent to tell you what the score is, only decent is such a bastard word to have to use between you and me—"

"Charlotte," he said. "Listen, Charlotte—"

"So it's good-bye, Harry. And good luck. And good God damn—"

"Listen, Charlotte. Can you hear me?"

"Yes? What? What is it?"

“Listen. This is funny. I have been waiting all afternoon for you to call me, only I didn’t know it until just now. I even know now that I knew then it was Saturday all the time I was walking toward that post office—Can you hear me? Charlotte?”

“Yes? Yes?”

“I’ve got twelve hundred and seventy-eight dollars, Charlotte.”

At four o'clock the next morning, in the empty laboratory, he cut up the wallet and the identification cards with a razor blade and burned the shreds of paper and leather and flushed the ashes away in a bathroom. The next day at noon, the two tickets to Chicago and the remainder of the twelve hundred and seventy-eight dollars buttoned into his pocket and the single bag on the seat facing him, he peered out the window as the train slowed into the Carrollton Avenue station.

They were both there, the husband and the wife, he in the conservative, spuriously unassertive dark suit, the face of a college senior revealing nothing, lending an air of impeccable and formal rightness to the paradoxical act of handing the wife to the lover almost identical with the conventional mumbo-jumbo of father and bride at a wedding in church, she beside him in a dark dress beneath the open coat, watching the slowing car windows intently yet without doubt or nervousness, so that Wilbourne mused again upon that instinctive proficiency in and rapport for the mechanics of cohabitation even of innocent and unpractised women—that serene confidence in their amorous destinies like that of birds in their wings—that tranquil ruthless belief in an imminent deserved personal happiness which fledges them instantaneous and full-winged from the haven of respectability, into untried and unsupportive space where no shore is visible (not sin, he thought. I dont believe in sin.

It’s getting out of timing. You are born submerged in anonymous lockstep with the teeming anonymous myriads of your time and generation; you get out of step once, falter once, and you are trampled to death.) and this without terror or alarm and hence inferring neither

of courage nor hardihood: just an utter and complete faith in airy and fragile and untried wings—wings, the airy and fragile symbols of love which have failed them once, since by universal consent and acceptance they brooded over the very ceremony which, in taking flight, they repudiate.

They slid past and vanished, Wilbourne saw the husband stoop and raise the bag as they vanished; the air hissed into the brakes and he sat thinking, He will come in with her, he will have to do that, he will not want to any more than I (she?) will want him to but he will have to do it just as he has to wear those dark suits which I dont believe he wants to wear either, just as he had to stay at that party that first night and drink as much as any other man there yet not once sit on the floor with a wife (his own or someone else's) sprawled across his knees.

So he looked up presently and they were both standing beside his seat; he rose too and now the three of them stood, blocking the aisle while other passengers crowded past them or waited for them to move, Rittenmeyer carrying the bag—this man who ordinarily would no more have carried a bag into a train in the presence of a redcap or Pullman porter than he would have got up and fetched himself a glass of water in a restaurant; looking at the frozen impeccable face above the impeccable shirt and tie Wilbourne thought with a kind of amazement, Why, he's suffering, he's actually suffering, thinking how perhaps it is not the heart at all, not even the sensibilities, with which we suffer, but our capacity for grief or vanity or self-delusion or perhaps even merely masochism. "Go on," Rittenmeyer said. "Get out of the aisle." His voice was harsh, his hand almost rough as he pushed her into the seat and set the bag beside the other one. "Remember now.

If I dont hear by the tenth of each month, I'm going to give the detective the word. And no lies, see? No lies." He turned, he did not even look at Wilbourne, he merely jerked his head toward the end of the car. "I want to talk to you," he said in that seething repressed voice. "Come on." When they were half way down the car the train began to move, Wilbourne expected the other to run for the exit, he thought again, He is suffering; even circumstance, a trivial railroad time table, is

making comedy of that tragedy which he must play to the bitter end or cease to breathe. But the other did not even hurry. He went steadily on and swung aside the curtain to the smoking room and waited for Wilbourne to enter.

He seemed to read the temporary surprise in Wilbourne's face. "I've got a ticket as far as Hammond," he said harshly. "Don't you worry about me." The unspoken question seemed to set him off; Wilbourne could almost see him struggling physically to keep his voice down. "Worry about yourself, see? Yourself. Or by God—" Now he did check the voice again, holding it on some sort of curb like a horse, yet forcing it on; he took a wallet from his pocket. "If you ever—" he said. "If you dare—"

He can't say it, Wilbourne thought. He can't even bear to say it. "If I'm not good to her, gentle with her. Is that what you mean?"

"I'll know it," Rittenmeyer said. "If I don't hear from her by the tenth of every month, I am going to give the detective the word to go ahead. And I'll know lies too, see? See?" He was trembling, the impeccable face suffused beneath the impeccable hair which resembled a wig. "She's got a hundred and twenty-five dollars of her own, she wouldn't take more. But damn that, she wouldn't use that, anyway. She won't have it by the time she came to need it enough to use it. So here." He removed from the wallet a check and gave it to Wilbourne. It was a cashier's check for three hundred dollars, payable to the Pullman Company of America and indorsed in the corner in red ink: For one railroad ticket to New Orleans, Louisiana.

"I was going to do that with some of my money," Wilbourne said.

"Damn that too," the other said. "And it's for the ticket. If it is ever cashed and returned to the bank and no ticket bought with it, I'll have you arrested for fraud. See? I'll know."

“You mean, you want her to come back? You will take her back?” But he did not need to look at the other’s face; he said quickly, “I’m sorry. I retract that. That’s more than any man can bear to answer.”

“God,” the other said; “God. I ought to sock you.” He added, in a tone of incredulous amazement, “Why dont I? Can you tell me? Aint a doctor, any doctor, supposed to be an authority on human glands?”

Then suddenly Wilbourne heard his own voice speaking out of an amazed and quiet incredulity; it seemed to him that they both stood now, aligned, embattled and doomed and lost, before the entire female principle: “I dont know. Maybe it would make you feel better.” But the moment passed. Rittenmeyer turned and produced a cigarette from his coat and fumbled a match from the box attached to the wall. Wilbourne watched him—the trim back; he caught himself on the point of asking if the other wished him to stay and keep him company until the train reached Hammond. But again Rittenmeyer seemed to read his mind.

“Go on,” he said. “Get to hell out of here and let me alone.” Wilbourne left him standing facing the window and returned to his seat. Charlotte did not look up, she sat motionless, looking out the window, an unlighted cigarette in her fingers. Now they were running beside the larger lake, soon they would begin to cross the trestle between Maurepas and Pontchartrain. Now the whistle of the engine drifted back, the train slowed as beneath the sound of it came the hollow reverberation of the trestle. Water spread on either hand now, swamp-bound and horizonless, lined with rotting wooden jetties to which small dingy boats were tied.

“I love water,” she said. “That’s where to die. Not in the hot air, above the hot ground, to wait hours for your blood to get cool enough to let you sleep and even weeks for your hair to stop growing. The water, the cool, to cool you quick so you can sleep, to wash out of your brain and out of your eyes and out of your blood all you ever saw and thought and felt and wanted and denied. He’s in the smoking room, isn’t he? Can I go back and speak to him a minute?”

“Can you go?—”

“Hammond is the next station.”

Why, he is your husband, he was about to say but caught himself. “It’s the men’s room,” he said. “Maybe I had better—” But she had already risen and passed him; he thought, If she stops and looks back at me it will mean she is thinking, ‘Later I can always know that at least I told him good-bye’ and she did stop and they looked at each other, then she went on. Now the water slid away, the sound of the trestle ceased, the engine whistled again and the train regained speed, and almost at once they were running through an outskirts of shabby houses which would be Hammond, and he ceased to look out the window while the train stopped and stood and then moved again; he did not even have time to rise as she slipped past him and into the seat. “So you came back,” he said.

“You didn’t think I was. Neither did I.”

“But you did.”

“Only it’s not finished. If he were to get back on the train, with a ticket to Slidell—” She turned, staring at him though she did not touch him. “It’s not finished. It will have to be cut.”

“Cut?”

“ ‘If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, lad, and be whole.’ That’s it. Whole. Wholly lost—something. I’ve got to cut it. That drawing room back there was empty. Find the conductor and engage it to Jackson.”

“Drawing room? But that will cost—”

“You fool!” she said. She doesn’t love me now, he thought. She doesn’t love anything now. She spoke in a tense whisper, beating on his knee with her fist. “You fool!” She rose.

“Wait,” he said, catching her wrist. “I’ll do it.” He found the conductor in the vestibule at the end of the car; he was not gone long. “All right,” he said. She rose at once, taking up her bag and coat. “The porter will be here—” he said. She didn’t pause. “Let me have it,” he said, taking the bag from her and then his own and followed her down the aisle. Later he was to recall that interminable walk between the filled seats where people sat with nothing else to do but watch them pass, and it seemed to him that everyone in the car must have known their history, that they must have disseminated an aura of unsanctity and disaster like a smell. They entered the drawing room.

“Lock the door,” she said. He set the bags down and locked the door. He had never been in a drawing room before and he fumbled at the lock for an appreciable time. When he turned she had removed her dress: it lay in a wadded circle about her feet and she stood in the scant feminine underwear of 1937, her hands over her face. Then she removed her hands and he knew it was neither shame nor modesty, he had not expected that, and he saw it was not tears. Then she stepped out of the dress and came and began to unknot his tie, pushing aside his own suddenly clumsy fingers.

Chapter IV Old Man

When the belated and streaming dawn broke the two convicts, along with twenty others, were in a truck. A trusty drove, two armed guards sat in the cab with him. Inside the high, stall-like topless body the convicts stood, packed like matches in an upright box or like the pencil-shaped ranks of cordite in a shell, shackled by the ankles to a single chain which wove among the motionless feet and swaying legs and a clutter of picks and shovels among which they stood, and was riveted by both ends to the steel body of the truck.

Then and without warning they saw the flood about which the plump convict had been reading and they listening for two weeks or more. The

road ran south. It was built on a raised levee, known locally as a dump, about eight feet above the flat surrounding land, bordered on both sides by the barrow pits from which the earth of the levee had been excavated. These barrow pits had held water all winter from the fall rains, not to speak of the rain of yesterday, but now they saw that the pit on either side of the road had vanished and instead there lay a flat still sheet of brown water which extended into the fields beyond the pits, ravelled out into long motionless shreds in the bottom of the plow furrows and gleaming faintly in the gray light like the bars of a prone and enormous grating.

And then (the truck was moving at good speed) as they watched quietly (they had not been talking much anyway but now they were all silent and quite grave, shifting and craning as one to look soberly off to the west side of the road) the crests of the furrows vanished too and they now looked at a single perfectly flat and motionless steel-colored sheet in which the telephone poles and the straight hedgerows which marked section lines seemed to be fixed and rigid as though set in concrete.

It was perfectly motionless, perfectly flat. It looked, not innocent, but bland. It looked almost demure. It looked as if you could walk on it. It looked so still that they did not realise it possessed motion until they came to the first bridge. There was a ditch under the bridge, a small stream, but ditch and stream were both invisible now, indicated only by the rows of cypress and bramble which marked its course.

Here they both saw and heard movement—the slow profound eastward and upstream (“It’s running backward,” one convict said quietly.) set of the still rigid surface, from beneath which came a deep faint subaquean rumble which (though none in the truck could have made the comparison) sounded like a subway train passing far beneath the street and which inferred a terrific and secret speed. It was as if the water itself were in three strata, separate and distinct, the bland and unhurried surface bearing a frothy scum and a miniature flotsam of twigs and screening as though by vicious calculation the rush and fury of the flood itself, and beneath this in turn the original stream, trickle, murmuring along in the opposite direction, following undisturbed and

unaware its appointed course and serving its Lilliputian end, like a thread of ants between the rails on which an express train passes, they (the ants) as unaware of the power and fury as if it were a cyclone crossing Saturn.

Now there was water on both sides of the road and now, as if once they had become aware of movement in the water the water seemed to have given over deception and concealment, they seemed to be able to watch it rising up the flanks of the dump; trees which a few miles back had stood on tall trunks above the water now seemed to burst from the surface at the level of the lower branches like decorative shrubs on barbered lawns. The truck passed a negro cabin.

The water was up to the window ledges. A woman clutching two children squatted on the ridgepole, a man and a halfgrown youth, standing waist-deep, were hoisting a squealing pig onto the slanting roof of a barn, on the ridgepole of which sat a row of chickens and a turkey. Near the barn was a haystack on which a cow stood tied by a rope to the center pole and bawling steadily; a yelling negro boy on a saddleless mule which he flogged steadily, his legs clutching the mule's barrel and his body leaned to the drag of a rope attached to a second mule, approached the haystack, splashing and floundering.

The woman on the housetop began to shriek at the passing truck, her voice carrying faint and melodious across the brown water, becoming fainter and fainter as the truck passed and went on, ceasing at last, whether because of distance or because she had stopped screaming those in the truck did not know.

Then the road vanished. There was no perceptible slant to it yet it had slipped abruptly beneath the brown surface with no ripple, no ridgy demarcation, like a flat thin blade slipped obliquely into flesh by a delicate hand, annealed into the water without disturbance, as if it had existed so for years, had been built that way. The truck stopped. The trusty descended from the cab and came back and dragged two shovels from among their feet, the blades clashing against the serpentine of the chain about their ankles.

“What is it?” one said. “What are you fixing to do?” The trusty didn’t answer. He returned to the cab, from which one of the guards had descended, without his shotgun. He and the trusty, both in hip boots and each carrying a shovel, advanced into the water, gingerly, probing and feeling ahead with the shovel handles. The same convict spoke again. He was a middle-aged man with a wild thatch of iron-gray hair and a slightly mad face. “What the hell are they doing?” he said. Again nobody answered him. The truck moved, on into the water, behind the guard and the trusty, beginning to push ahead of itself a thick slow viscid ridge of chocolate water. Then the gray-haired convict began to scream.

“God damn it, unlock the chain!” He began to struggle, thrashing violently about him, striking at the men nearest him until he reached the cab, the roof of which he now hammered on with his fists, screaming. “God damn it, unlock us! Unlock us! Son of a bitch!” he screamed, addressing no one. “They’re going to drown us! Unlock the chain!” But for all the answer he got the men within radius of his voice might have been dead. The truck crawled on, the guard and the trusty feeling out the road ahead with the reversed shovels, the second guard at the wheel, the twenty-two convicts packed like sardines into the truck bed and padlocked by the ankles to the body of the truck itself.

They crossed another bridge—two delicate and paradoxical iron railings slanting out of the water, travelling parallel to it for a distance, then slanting down into it again with an outrageous quality almost significant yet apparently meaningless like something in a dream not quite nightmare. The truck crawled on.

Along toward noon they came to a town, their destination. The streets were paved; now the wheels of the truck made a sound like tearing silk. Moving faster now, the guard and the trusty in the cab again, the truck even had a slight bone in its teeth, its bow-wave spreading beyond the submerged sidewalks and across the adjacent lawns, lapping against the stoops and porches of houses where people stood among piles of furniture. They passed through the business district; a man in hip boots

emerged knee-deep in water from a store, dragging a flat-bottomed skiff containing a steel safe.

At last they reached the railroad. It crossed the street at right angles, cutting the town in two. It was on a dump, a levee, also, eight or ten feet above the town itself; the street ran blankly into it and turned at right angles beside a cotton compress and a loading platform on stilts at the level of a freight car door. On this platform was a khaki army tent and a uniformed National Guard sentry with a rifle and bandolier.

The truck turned and crawled out of the water and up the ramp which cotton wagons used and where trucks and private cars filled with household goods came and unloaded onto the platform.

They were unlocked from the chain in the truck and shackled ankle to ankle in pairs they mounted the platform and into an apparently inextricable jumble of beds and trunks, gas and electric stoves, radios and tables and chairs and framed pictures which a chain of negroes under the eye of an unshaven white man in muddy corduroy and hip boots carried piece by piece into the compress, at the door of which another guardsman stood with his rifle, they (the convicts) not stopping here but herded on by the two guards with their shotguns, into the dim and cavernous building where among the piled heterogeneous furniture the ends of cotton bales and the mirrors on dressers and sideboards gleamed with an identical mute and unreflecting concentration of pallid light.

They passed on through, onto the loading platform where the army tent and the first sentry were. They waited here. Nobody told them for what nor why. While the two guards talked with the sentry before the tent the convicts sat in a line along the edge of the platform like buzzards on a fence, their shackled feet dangling above the brown motionless flood out of which the railroad embankment rose, pristine and intact, in a kind of paradoxical denial and repudiation of change and portent, not talking, just looking quietly across the track to where the other half of the amputated town seemed to float, house shrub and

tree, ordered and pageant-like and without motion, upon the limitless liquid plain beneath the thick gray sky.

After a while the other four trucks from the Farm arrived. They came up, bunched closely, radiator to tail light, with their four separate sounds of tearing silk and vanished beyond the compress. Presently the ones on the platform heard the feet, the mute clashing of the shackles, the first truckload emerged from the compress, the second, the third; there were more than a hundred of them now in their bedticking overalls and jumpers and fifteen or twenty guards with rifles and shotguns.

The first lot rose and they mingled, paired, twinned by their clanking and clashing umbilicals; then it began to rain, a slow steady gray drizzle like November instead of May. Yet not one of them made any move toward the open door of the compress. They did not even look toward it, with longing or hope or without it.

If they thought at all, they doubtless knew that the available space in it would be needed for furniture, even if it were not already filled. Or perhaps they knew that, even if there were room in it, it would not be for them, not that the guards would wish them to get wet but that the guards would not think about getting them out of the rain. So they just stopped talking and with their jumper collars turned up and shackled in braces like dogs at a field trial they stood, immobile, patient, almost ruminant, their backs turned to the rain as sheep and cattle do.

After another while they became aware that the number of soldiers had increased to a dozen or more, warm and dry beneath rubberised ponchos, there was an officer with a pistol at his belt, then and without making any move toward it, they began to smell food and, turning to look, saw an army field kitchen set up just inside the compress door. But they made no move, they waited until they were herded into line, they inched forward, their heads lowered and patient in the rain, and received each a bowl of stew, a mug of coffee, two slices of bread.

They ate this in the rain. They did not sit down because the platform was wet, they squatted on their heels as country men do, hunching forward, trying to shield the bowls and mugs into which nevertheless the rain splashed steadily as into miniature ponds and soaked, invisible and soundless, into the bread.

After they had stood on the platform for three hours, a train came for them. Those nearest the edge saw it, watched it—a passenger coach apparently running under its own power and trailing a cloud of smoke from no visible stack, a cloud which did not rise but instead shifted slowly and heavily aside and lay upon the surface of the aqueous earth with a quality at once weightless and completely spent.

It came up and stopped, a single old-fashioned open-ended wooden car coupled to the nose of a pushing switch engine considerably smaller. They were herded into it, crowding forward to the other end where there was a small cast iron stove. There was no fire in it, nevertheless they crowded about it—the cold and voiceless lump of iron stained with fading tobacco and hovered about by the ghosts of a thousand Sunday excursions to Memphis or Moorhead and return—the peanuts, the bananas, the soiled garments of infants—huddling, shoving for places near it.

“Come on, come on,” one of the guards shouted. “Sit down, now.” At last three of the guards, laying aside their guns, came among them and broke up the huddle, driving them back and into seats.

There were not enough seats for all. The others stood in the aisle, they stood braced, they heard the air hiss out of the released brakes, the engine whistled four blasts, the car came into motion with a snapping jerk; the platform, the compress fled violently as the train seemed to transpose from immobility to full speed with that same quality of unreality with which it had appeared, running backward now though with the engine in front where before it had moved forward but with the engine behind.

When the railroad in its turn ran beneath the surface of the water, the convicts did not even know it. They felt the train stop, they heard the engine blow a long blast which wailed away unechoed across the waste, wild and forlorn, and they were not even curious; they sat or stood behind the rain-streaming windows as the train crawled on again, feeling its way as the truck had while the brown water swirled between the trucks and among the spokes of the driving wheels and lapped in cloudy steam against the dragging fire-filled belly of the engine; again it blew four short harsh blasts filled with the wild triumph and defiance yet also with repudiation and even farewell, as if the articulated steel itself knew it did not dare stop and would not be able to return. Two hours later in the twilight they saw through the streaming windows a burning plantation house. Juxtaposed to nowhere and neighbored by nothing it stood, a clear steady pyre-like flame rigidly fleeing its own reflection, burning in the dusk above the watery desolation with a quality paradoxical, outrageous and bizarre.

Sometime after dark the train stopped. The convicts did not know where they were. They did not ask. They would no more have thought of asking where they were than they would have asked why and what for. They couldn't even see, since the car was unlighted and the windows fogged on the outside by rain and on the inside by the engendered heat of the packed bodies. All they could see was a milky and sourceless flick and glare of flashlights.

They could hear shouts and commands, then the guards inside the car began to shout; they were herded to their feet and toward the exit, the ankle chains clashing and clanking. They descended into a fierce hissing of steam, through ragged wisps of it blowing past the car. Laid-to alongside the train and resembling a train itself was a thick blunt motor launch to which was attached a string of skiffs and flat boats. There were more soldiers; the flashlights played on the rifle barrels and bandolier buckles and flicked and glinted on the ankle chains of the convicts as they stepped gingerly down into knee-deep water and entered the boats; now car and engine both vanished completely in steam as the crew began dumping the fire from the firebox.

After another hour they began to see lights ahead—a faint wavering row of red pin-pricks extending along the horizon and apparently hanging low in the sky. But it took almost another hour to reach them while the convicts squatted in the skiffs, huddled into the soaked garments (they no longer felt the rain any more at all as separate drops) and watched the lights draw nearer and nearer until at last the crest of the levee defined itself; now they could discern a row of army tents stretching along it and people squatting about the fires, the wavering reflections from which, stretching across the water, revealed an involved mass of other skiffs tied against the flank of the levee which now stood high and dark overhead. Flashlights glared and winked along the base, among the tethered skiffs; the launch, silent now, drifted in.

When they reached the top of the levee they could see the long line of khaki tents, interspersed with fires about which people—men, women and children, negro and white—crouched or stood among shapeless bales of clothing, their heads turning, their eyeballs glinting in the firelight as they looked quietly at the striped garments and the chains; further down the levee, huddled together too though untethered, was a drove of mules and two or three cows.

Then the taller convict became conscious of another sound. He did not begin to hear it all at once, he suddenly became aware that he had been hearing it all the time, a sound so much beyond all his experience and his powers of assimilation that up to this point he had been as oblivious of it as an ant or a flea might be of the sound of the avalanche on which it rides; he had been travelling upon water since early afternoon and for seven years now he had run his plow and harrow and planter within the very shadow of the levee on which he now stood, but this profound deep whisper which came from the further side of it he did not at once recognise. He stopped. The line of convicts behind jolted into him like a line of freight cars stopping, with an iron clashing like cars. “Get on!” a guard shouted.

“What’s that?” the convict said. A negro man squatting before the nearest fire answered him:

“Dat’s him. Dat’s de Ole Man.”

“The old man?” the convict said.

“Get on! Get on up there!” the guard shouted. They went on; they passed another huddle of mules, the eyeballs rolling too, the long morose faces turning into and out of the firelight; they passed them and reached a section of empty tents, the light pup tents of a military campaign, made to hold two men. The guards herded the convicts into them, three brace of shackled men to each tent.

They crawled in on all fours, like dogs into cramped kennels, and settled down. Presently the tent became warm from their bodies. Then they became quiet and then all of them could hear it, they lay listening to the bass whisper deep, strong and powerful. “The old man?” the train-robber convict said.

“Yah,” another said. “He dont have to brag.”

At dawn the guards waked them by kicking the soles of the projecting feet. Opposite the muddy landing and the huddle of skiffs an army field kitchen was set up, already they could smell the coffee. But the taller convict at least, even though he had had but one meal yesterday and that at noon in the rain, did not move at once toward the food. Instead and for the first time he looked at the River within whose shadow he had spent the last seven years of his life but had never seen before; he stood in quiet and amazed surmise and looked at the rigid steel-colored surface not broken into waves but merely slightly undulant.

It stretched from the levee on which he stood, further than he could see—a slowly and heavily roiling chocolate-frothy expanse broken only by a thin line a mile away as fragile in appearance as a single hair, which after a moment he recognised. It’s another levee, he thought quietly. That’s what we look like from there. That’s what I am standing on looks like from there. He was prodded from the rear; a guard’s voice carried forward: “Go on! Go on! You’ll have plenty of time to look at that!”

They received the same stew and coffee and bread as the day before; they squatted again with their bowls and mugs as yesterday, though it was not raining yet. During the night an intact wooden barn had floated up. It now lay jammed by the current against the levee while a crowd of negroes swarmed over it, ripping off the shingles and planks and carrying them up the bank; eating steadily and without haste, the taller convict watched the barn dissolve rapidly down to the very water-line exactly as a dead fly vanished beneath the moiling industry of a swarm of ants.

They finished eating. Then it began to rain again, as upon a signal, while they stood or squatted in their harsh garments which had not dried out during the night but had merely become slightly warmer than the air. Presently they were haled to their feet and told off into two groups, one of which was armed from a stack of mud-clogged picks and shovels nearby, and marched away up the levee. A little later the motor launch with its train of skiffs came up across what was, fifteen feet beneath its keel, probably a cottonfield, the skiffs loaded to the gunwales with negroes and a scattering of white people nursing bundles on their laps.

When the engine shut off the faint plinking of a guitar came across the water. The skiffs warped in and unloaded; the convicts watched the men and women and children struggle up the muddy slope, carrying heavy towsacks and bundles wrapped in quilts. The sound of the guitar had not ceased and now the convicts saw him—a young, black, lean-hipped man, the guitar slung by a piece of cotton plow line about his neck. He mounted the levee, still picking it. He carried nothing else, no food, no change of clothes, not even a coat.

The taller convict was so busy watching this that he did not hear the guard until the guard stood directly beside him shouting his name. “Wake up!” the guard shouted. “Can you fellows paddle a boat?”

“Paddle a boat where?” the taller convict said.

“In the water,” the guard said. “Where in hell do you think?”

“I aint going to paddle no boat nowhere out yonder,” the tall convict said, jerking his head toward the invisible river beyond the levee behind him.

“No, it’s on this side,” the guard said. He stooped swiftly and unlocked the chain which joined the tall convict and the plump hairless one. “It’s just down the road a piece.” He rose. The two convicts followed him down to the boats. “Follow them telephone poles until you come to a filling station. You can tell it, the roof is still above water. It’s on a bayou and you can tell the bayou because the tops of the trees are sticking up. Follow the bayou until you come to a cypress snag with a woman in it. Pick her up and then cut straight back west until you come to a cottonhouse with a fellow sitting on the ridgepole—” He turned, looking at the two convicts, who stood perfectly still, looking first at the skiff and then at the water with intense sobriety. “Well? What are you waiting for?”

“I cant row a boat,” the plump convict said.

“Then it’s high time you learned,” the guard said. “Get in.”

The tall convict shoved the other forward. “Get in,” he said. “That water aint going to hurt you. Aint nobody going to make you take a bath.”

As, the plump one in the bow and the other in the stern, they shoved away from the levee, they saw other pairs being unshackled and manning the other skiffs. “I wonder how many more of them fellows are seeing this much water for the first time in their lives too,” the tall convict said. The other did not answer. He knelt in the bottom of the skiff, pecking gingerly at the water now and then with his paddle. The very shape of his thick soft back seemed to wear that expression of wary and tense concern.

Some time after midnight a rescue boat filled to the guard rail with homeless men and women and children docked at Vicksburg. It was a steamer, shallow of draft; all day long it had poked up and down

cypress- and gum-choked bayous and across cotton fields (where at times instead of swimming it waded) gathering its sorry cargo from the tops of houses and barns and even out of trees, and now it warped into that mushroom city of the forlorn and despairing where kerosene flares smoked in the drizzle and hurriedly strung electrics glared upon the bayonets of martial policemen and the red cross brassards of doctors and nurses and canteen-workers. The bluff overhead was almost solid with tents, yet still there were more people than shelter for them; they sat or lay, single and by whole families, under what shelter they could find or sometimes under the rain itself, in the little death of profound exhaustion while the doctors and the nurses and the soldiers stepped over and around and among them.

Among the first to disembark was one of the penitentiary deputy wardens, followed closely by the plump convict and another white man—a small man with a gaunt unshaven wan face still wearing an expression of incredulous outrage. The deputy warden seemed to know exactly where he wished to go. Followed closely by his two companions he threaded his way swiftly among the piled furniture and the sleeping bodies and stood presently in a fiercely lighted and hastily established temporary office, almost a military post of command in fact, where the Warden of the Penitentiary sat with two army officers wearing majors' leaves. The deputy warden spoke without preamble. "We lost a man," he said. He called the tall convict's name.

"Lost him?" the Warden said.

"Yah. Drowned." Without turning his head he spoke to the plump convict. "Tell him," he said.

"He was the one that said he could row a boat," the plump convict said. "I never. I told him myself—" he indicated the deputy warden with a jerk of his head "—I couldn't. So when we got to the bayou—"

"What's this?" the Warden said.

“The launch brought word in,” the deputy warden said. “Woman in a cypress snag on the bayou, then this fellow—” he indicated the third man; the Warden and the two officers looked at the third man “—on a cotton house. Never had room in the launch to pick them up. Go on.”

“So we come to where the bayou was,” the plump convict continued in a voice perfectly flat, without any inflection whatever. “Then the boat got away from him. I dont know what happened. I was just sitting there because he was so positive he could row a boat. I never saw any current. Just all of a sudden the boat whirled clean around and begun to run fast backward like it was hitched to a train and it whirled around again and I happened to look up and there was a limb right over my head and I grabbed it just in time and that boat was snatched out from under me like you’d snatch off a sock and I saw it one time more upside down and that fellow that said he knew all about rowing holding to it with one hand and still holding the paddle in the other—” He ceased. There was no dying fall to his voice, it just ceased and the convict stood looking quietly at a half-full quart of whiskey sitting on the table.

“How do you know he’s drowned?” the Warden said to the deputy. “How do you know he didn’t just see his chance to escape, and took it?”

“Escape where?” the other said. “The whole Delta’s flooded. There’s fifteen foot of water for fifty miles, clean back to the hills. And that boat was upside down.”

“That fellow’s drowned,” the plump convict said. “You dont need to worry about him. He’s got his pardon; it wont cramp nobody’s hand signing it, neither.”

“And nobody else saw him?” the Warden said. “What about the woman in the tree?”

“I dont know,” the deputy said. “I aint found her yet. I reckon some other boat picked her up. But this is the fellow on the cottonhouse.”

Again the Warden and the two officers looked at the third man, at the gaunt, unshaven wild face in which an old terror, an old blending of fear and impotence and rage still lingered. "He never came for you?" the Warden said. "You never saw him?"

"Never nobody came for me," the refugee said. He began to tremble though at first he spoke quietly enough. "I set there on that sonabitching cotton house, expecting hit to go any minute. I saw that launch and them boats come up and they never had no room for me. Full of bastard niggers and one of them setting there playing a guitar but there wasn't no room for me. A guitar!" he cried; now he began to scream, trembling, slaving, his face twitching and jerking. "Room for a bastard nigger guitar but not for me—"

"Steady now," the Warden said. "Steady now."

"Give him a drink," one of the officers said. The Warden poured the drink. The deputy handed it to the refugee, who took the glass in both jerking hands and tried to raise it to his mouth. They watched him for perhaps twenty seconds, then the deputy took the glass from him and held it to his lips while he gulped, though even then a thin trickle ran from each corner of his mouth, into the stubble on his chin.

"So we picked him and—" the deputy called the plump convict's name now "—both up just before dark and come on in. But that other fellow is gone."

"Yes," the Warden said. "Well. Here I haven't lost a prisoner in ten years, and now, like this—I'm sending you back to the Farm tomorrow. Have his family notified, and his discharge papers filled out at once."

"All right," the deputy said. "And listen, chief. He wasn't a bad fellow and maybe he never had no business in that boat. Only he did say he could paddle one. Listen. Suppose I write on his discharge, Drowned while trying to save lives in the great flood of nineteen twenty-seven, and send it down for the Governor to sign it. It will be something nice for his folks to have, to hang on the wall when neighbors come in or

something. Maybe they will even give his folks a cash bonus because after all they sent him to the Farm to raise cotton, not to fool around in a boat in a flood.”

“All right,” the Warden said. “I’ll see about it. The main thing is to get his name off the books as dead before some politician tries to collect his food allowance.”

“All right,” the deputy said. He turned and herded his companions out. In the drizzling darkness again he said to the plump convict: “Well, your partner beat you. He’s free. He’s done served his time out but you’ve got a right far piece to go yet.”

“Yah,” the plump convict said. “Free. He can have it.”

Chapter V The Wild Palms

On the second morning in the Chicago hotel Wilbourne waked and found that Charlotte was dressed and gone, hat coat and handbag, leaving a note for him in a big sprawling untrained hand such as you associate at first glance with a man until you realise an instant later it is profoundly feminine: Back at noon. C., then, beneath the initial: Or maybe later. She returned before noon, he was asleep again; she sat on the side of the bed, her hand in his hair, rolling his head on the pillow to shake him awake, still in the open coat and the hat shoved back from her forehead, looking down at him with that sober yellow profundity, and now he mused indeed on that efficiency of women in the mechanics, the domiciling, of cohabitation.

Not thrift, not husbandry, something far beyond that, who (the entire race of them) employed with infallible instinct, a completely uncerebrated rapport for the type and nature of male partner and situation, either the cold penuriousness of the fabled Vermont farmwife or the fantastic extravagance of the Broadway revue mistress as required, absolutely without regard for the intrinsic value of the

medium which they saved or squandered and with little more regard or grief for the bauble which they bought or lacked, using both the presence and absence of jewel or checking account as pawns in a chess game whose prize was not security at all but respectability within the milieu in which they lived, even the love-nest under the rose to follow a rule and a pattern; he thought, It's not the romance of illicit love which draws them, not the passionate idea of two damned and doomed and isolated forever against the world and God and the irrevocable which draws men; it's because the idea of illicit love is a challenge to them, because they have an irresistible desire to (and an unshakable belief that they can, as they all believe they can successfully conduct a boarding house) take the illicit love and make it respectable, take Lothario himself and trim the very incorrigible bachelor's ringlets which snared them into the seemly decorum of Monday's hash and suburban trains. "I've found it," she said.

"Found what?"

"An apartment. A studio. Where I can work too."

"Too?" She shook his head again with that savage obliviousness, she actually hurt him a little; he thought again, There's a part of her that doesn't love anybody, anything; and then, a profound and silent lightning-clap—a white glare—ratiocination, instinct, he did not know which: Why, she's alone. Not lonely, alone. She had a father and then four brothers exactly like him and then she married a man exactly like the four brothers and so she probably never even had a room of her own in all her life and so she has lived all her life in complete solitude and she doesn't even know it as a child who has never tasted cake doesn't know what cake is.

"Yes, too. Do you think that twelve hundred dollars will last forever? You live in sin; you cant live on it."

"I know it. I thought of that before I told you over the phone that night I had twelve hundred dollars. But this is honeymoon; later will be—"

“I know that too.” She grasped his hair again, hurting him again though now he knew she knew she was hurting him. “Listen: it’s got to be all honeymoon, always. Forever and ever, until one of us dies. It can’t be anything else. Either heaven, or hell: no comfortable safe peaceful purgatory between for you and me to wait in until good behavior or forbearance or shame or repentance overtakes us.”

“So it’s not me you believe in, put trust in; it’s love.” She looked at him. “Not just me; any man.”

“Yes. It’s love. They say love dies between two people. That’s wrong. It doesn’t die. It just leaves you, goes away, if you are not good enough, worthy enough. It doesn’t die; you’re the one that dies. It’s like the ocean: if you’re no good, if you begin to make a bad smell in it, it just spews you up somewhere to die. You die anyway, but I had rather drown in the ocean than be urped up onto a strip of dead beach and be dried away by the sun into a little foul smear with no name to it, just This Was for an epitaph. Get up. I told the man we would move in today.”

They left the hotel with their bags within the hour, by cab; they mounted three flights of stairs. She even had the key; she opened the door for him to enter; he knew she was looking not at the room but at him. “Well?” she said. “Do you like it?”

It was a big oblong room with a skylight in the north wall, possibly the handiwork of a dead or bankrupt photographer or maybe a former sculptor or painter tenant, with two cubbyholes for kitchen and bath. She rented that skylight, he told himself quietly, thinking how as a rule women rent bathrooms primarily. It’s only incidental that there is a place to sleep and cook food. She chose a place not to hold us but to hold love; she did not just run from one man to another; she did not merely mean to swap one piece of clay she made a bust with for another— He moved now, and then he thought, Maybe I’m not embracing her but clinging to her because there is something in me that won’t admit it can’t swim or can’t believe it can. “It’s all right,” he said. “It’s fine. Nothing can beat us now.”

During the next six days he made the rounds of the hospitals, interviewing (or being interviewed by) Residents and Staff Heads. They were brief interviews. He was not particular what he did and he had something to offer—his degree from a good medical school, his twenty months' internship in a hospital which was known, yet always after the first three or four minutes, something began to happen. He knew what it was, though he told himself differently (this sitting after the fifth interview, on a sunny bench in a park among the bums and W.P.A. gardeners and nursemaids and children): It's because I really don't try hard enough, don't really realise the need for trying because I have accepted completely her ideas about love; I look upon love with the same boundless faith that it will clothe and feed me as the Mississippi or Louisiana countryman, converted last week at a camp-meeting revival, looks upon religion, knowing that that was not the reason, that it was the twenty months of internship instead of twenty-four, thinking I have been confounded by numbers, thinking how it is apparently more seemly to die in the dulcet smell than to be saved by an apostate from convention.

At last he found a job. It was not much; it was laboratory work in a charity hospital in the negro tenement district, where victims of alcohol or pistol- and knife-wounds were brought, usually by police, and his job was making routine tests for syphilis. "You don't need a microscope or Wassermann paper," he told her that night. "All you need is enough light to tell what race they belong to." She had set two planks on trestles beneath the skylight which she called her work bench and at which for some time now she had been pattering with a package of plaster of paris from the ten-cent store, though he had paid little attention to what she was doing. She now bent over this table with a scrap of paper and a pencil while he watched the blunt supple hand make the big sprawling rapid figures.

"You will make this much a month," she said. "And it costs this much for us to live a month. And we have this much to draw from to make up the difference." The figures were cold, incontrovertible, the very pencil marks had a scornful and impregnable look; incidentally she now saw to

it that he made not only the current weekly remittances to his sister but that he had also sent to her the equivalent sum of the lunches and the abortive hotel during the six weeks in New Orleans. Then she wrote down a date beside the last figure; it would be in early September. "On that day we wont have any money left."

Then he repeated something he had thought while sitting on the park bench that day: "It will be all right. I've just got to get used to love. I never tried it before; you see, I'm at least ten years behind myself. I'm still free-wheeling. But I'll get back into gear soon."

"Yes," she said. Then she crumpled the paper and flipped it aside, turning. "But that's not important. That's just whether it's steak or hamburger. And hunger's not here—" She struck his belly with the flat of her hand. "That's just your old guts growling. Hunger's here." She touched his breast. "Dont you ever forget that."

"I wont. Not now."

"But you may. You've been hungry down here in your guts, so you are afraid of it. Because you are always a little afraid of what you have stood. If you had ever been in love before, you wouldn't have been on that train that afternoon. Would you?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes. Yes."

"So it's more than just training your brain to remember hunger's not in the belly. Your belly, your guts themselves, have got to believe it. Can yours believe it?"

"Yes," he said. Only she's not so sure of that he told himself, because three days later when he returned from the hospital he found the work bench littered with twisted bits of wire and bottles of shellac and glue and wood fiber, a few tubes of paint and a pan in which a mass of tissue paper soaked in water, which two afternoons later had become a collection of little figures—deer and wolfhounds and horses and men and women, lean epicene sophisticated and bizarre, with a quality

fantastic and perverse; the afternoon after that when he returned she and the figures were gone. She came in an hour later, her yellow eyes like a cat's in the dark, not triumph or exultation but rather fierce affirmation, and with a new ten-dollar bill.

"He took them all," she said, she named a leading department store. "Then he let me dress one of the windows. I have an order for a hundred dollars more—historical figures about Chicago, this part of the West. You know—Mrs. O'Leary with Nero's face and the cow with a ukelele, Kit Carson with legs like Nijinsky and no face, just two eyes and a shelf of forehead to shade them with, buffalo cows with the heads and flanks of Arabian mares. And all the other stores on Michigan Avenue. Here. Take it."

He refused. "It's yours. You earned it." She looked at him—the unwinking yellow stare in which he seemed to blunder and fumble like a moth, a rabbit caught in the glare of a torch; an envelopment almost like a liquid, a chemical precipitant, in which all the dross of small lying and sentimentality dissolved away. "I don't—"

"You dont like the idea of your woman helping to support you, is that it? Listen. Dont you like what we've got?"

"You know I do."

"Then what does it matter what it cost us, what we pay for it? or how? You stole the money we've got now; wouldn't you do it again? Isn't it worth it, even if it all busts tomorrow and we have to spend the rest of our lives paying interest?"

"Yes. Only it's not going to bust tomorrow. Nor next month. Nor next year—"

"No. Not as long as we are worthy of keeping of it. Good enough. Strong enough. Worthy to be allowed to keep it. To get what you want as decently as you can, then keep it. Keep it." She came and put her arms around him, hard, striking her body against him hard, not in

caress but exactly as she would grasp him by the hair to wake him up from sleep. "That's what I'm going to do. Try to do. I like bitching, and making things with my hands. I don't think that's too much to be permitted to like, to want to have and keep."

She earned that hundred dollars, working at night now, after he was in bed and sometimes asleep; during the next five weeks she earned twenty-eight dollars more, then she filled an order amounting to fifty. Then the orders stopped; she could get no more. Nevertheless she continued to work, at night altogether now, since she was out with her samples, her completed figures all day, and she worked usually with an audience now, for now their apartment had become a sort of evening club.

It began with a newspaper man named McCord who had worked on a New Orleans paper during the brief time when Charlotte's youngest brother (in a dilettante and undergraduate heeler manner, Wilbourne gathered) had cubbed there. She met him on the street; he came to dinner one evening and took them out to dinner one evening; three nights later he appeared with three men and two women and four bottles of whiskey at their apartment, and after that Wilbourne never knew just whom he would find when he reached home, except that it would not be Charlotte alone and, regardless of who was there, idle, who even after the dearth season of sales had extended into weeks and then a month and summer was almost upon them, still worked in a cheap coverall already filthy as that of any house painter and a glass of whiskey-and-water among the twists of wire and pots of glue and paint and plaster which transformed steadily and endlessly beneath the deft untiring hands into the effigies elegant, bizarre, fantastic and perverse.

Then she made a final sale, a small one, and it was done, finished. It stopped as abruptly and inexplicably as it had begun. The summer season was on now, they told her at the stores, and the tourists and natives too were leaving town to escape the heat. "Except that that's a lie," she said. "It's the saturation point," she told him, told them all: it was at night, she had returned late with the cardboard box containing

the figures which had been refused, so the evening's collection of callers had already arrived. "But I expected it.

Because these are just fun." She had taken the effigies from the box and set them up on the work bench again. "Like something created to live only in the pitch airless dark, like in a bank vault or maybe a poison swamp, not in the rich normal nourishing air breathed off of guts full of vegetables from Oak Park and Evanston. And so that's it and that's all. And now I'm not an artist any more and I'm tired and I'm hungry and I'm going to curl up with one of our good books and one of our crusts. So let each and all of you step up to the bench and choose himself or herself one souvenir and memento of this occasion, and beat it."

"We can still eat a crust," he told her. And besides, she's not done yet, he thought. She hasn't quit yet. She never will, thinking as he had thought before that there was a part of her which neither he nor Rittenmeyer had ever touched, which did not even love love. In less than a month he believed that he had proof of this; he returned and found her at the bench again, in a profound excitement which he had never seen before—an excitement without exultation but with a grim and deadly quality of irresistible driving as she told him about it. It was one of the men whom McCord had brought, a photographer. She was to make puppets, marionettes, and he to photograph them for magazine covers and advertisements; perhaps later they would use the actual puppets in charades, tableaux—a hired hall, a rented stable, something, anything. "It's my money," she told him. "The hundred and twenty-five dollars I never could get you to take."

She worked with tense and concentrated fury. She would be at the bench when he went to sleep, he would wake at two and three o'clock and find the fierce working light above it still burning. Now he would return (from the hospital at first, then from the park bench where he spent his days after he lost his job, leaving and returning home at the usual hours so she would not suspect) and see the actual figures almost as large as small children—a Quixote with a gaunt mad dreamy uncoordinated face, a Falstaff with the worn face of a syphilitic barber and gross with meat (a single figure, yet when he looked at it he

seemed to see two: the man and the gross flesh like a huge bear and its fragile consumptive keeper; it seemed to him that he could actually watch the man struggling with the mountain of entrails as the keeper might wrestle with the bear, not to overcome it but to pass it, escape it, as you do with the atavistic beasts in nightmare), Roxane with spit curls and a wad of gum like the sheet music demonstrator in a ten-cent store, Cyrano with the face of a low-comedy Jew in vaudeville, the monstrous flare of whose nostrils ceased exactly on the instant of becoming molluscs, a piece of cheese in one hand and a check book in the other—accumulating about the apartment, filling all available spaces of floor and walls, fragile perverse and disturbing, with incredible rapidity; begun continued and completed in one sustained rush of furious industry—a space of time broken not into successive days and nights but a single interval interrupted only by eating and sleeping.

Then she finished the last one and now she would be gone all day and half the night; he would return in the afternoon and find a scrawled note on a scrap of paper or a margin torn from a newspaper or even the telephone book: Don't wait for me. Go out and eat, which he would do and return and go to bed and sometimes to sleep until she slid naked (she never wore a sleeping garment, she told him she had never owned one) into bed to wake him, rouse him to listen with a hard wrestling movement, holding him in her hard arms while she talked in a grim quiet rapid voice not about money or its lack, not about the details of the day's progress with the photographing, but of their present life and situation as though it were a complete whole without past or future in which themselves as individuals, the need for money, the figures she had made, were component parts like the parts of a tableau or a puzzle, none more important than another; lying still and relaxed in the darkness while she held him, not even bothering to be aware whether his eyes were open or not, he seemed to see their joint life as a fragile globe, a bubble, which she kept balanced and intact above disaster like a trained seal does its ball. She's worse off than I am, he thought. She doesn't even know what it is to hope.

Then the puppet business ended, as abruptly and completely as the window dressing had. He returned one evening and she was at home, reading. The filthy overall in which she had lived for weeks (it was August now) was gone and then he saw that the work bench was not only clean of its former litter of wire and paint, it had been drawn into the center of the room and had become a table covered with a strip of chintz and stacked with the magazines and books which formerly had rested upon the floor and in the unused chairs and such, and, most surprising of all, a bowl of flowers. "I've got some things here," she said. "We'll eat at home for a change."

She had chops and such, she prepared the meal in a curiously frivolous apron new too like the chintz on the table; he thought how failure, reacting upon her like on a man by investing her with a sort of dignified humility, had yet brought out in her a quality which he had never seen before, a quality not only female but profoundly feminine. They ate, then she cleared the table. He offered to help but she refused. So he sat with a book beside the lamp, he heard her in the kitchen for a time, then she emerged and entered the bedroom. He did not hear her when she came out of the bedroom at all since her bare feet made no sound on the floor; he just looked up to see her standing beside him—the compactly simple rightness of the body lines, the sober intent yellow stare. She took the book from him and put it on the converted table. "Get your clothes off," she said. "The hell with it. I can still bitch."

But he did not tell her about the job for another two weeks. His reason was no longer concern that the news might destroy her accord with what she was concentrating on, since that was no longer valid now, if it had ever been, and it was no longer the possibility that he might find something else before she would need to know, for that was not valid either now, since he had tried that and failed, nor was it the Micawber-like faith of the inert in tomorrow; it was partly perhaps the knowledge that late enough would be soon enough, but mostly (he did not try to fool himself) it was a profound faith in her. Not in them, in her. God wont let her starve, he thought.

She's too valuable. He did too well with her. Even the one who made everything must fancy some of it enough to want to keep it. So each day he would leave the apartment at the usual hour and sit on his bench in the park until time to go home. And once each day he would take out the wallet and produce the slip of paper on which he kept a record of the dwindling money, as if he expected each time to find that the amount had changed or that he had misread it the day before, finding each time that it had not and he had not—the neat figures, the \$182.00 less \$5.00 or \$10.00, with the date of each subtraction; by the day it would be due there would not be enough to pay the quarter's rent on the first day of September.

And then sometimes he would take out the other paper, the pink cashier's check with its perforated legend Only Three Hundred Dollars. There would be something almost ceremonial about it, like the formal preparation by the addict of his opium pipe, and then for the time he would as completely renounce reality as the opium smoker himself while he invented a hundred ways to spend it, shifting the various components of the sum and their bought equivalents here and there like a jigsaw puzzle, knowing that this was a form of masturbation (thinking, because I am still, and probably will always be, in the puberty of money), that if it were really possible to cash the check and use the money, he would not even dare to toy with the idea.

Then he returned home one afternoon and found her at the work bench again. It was still the table, still in the center of the room; she had merely turned back the chintz and shoved the books and magazines to one end, and she wore the apron and not the coverall and she was working now with a kind of idle bemusement like someone passing time with a deck of cards. The figure was not three inches tall—a little ancient shapeless man with a foolish disorganised face, the face of a harmless imbecile clown. "It's a Bad Smell," she said.

Then he understood. "That's all it is, just a bad smell. Not a wolf at the door. Wolves are Things. Keen and ruthless. Strong, even if they are cowards. But this is just a bad smell because hunger is not here—" Again she struck his belly with the back of her hand. "Hunger's up

there. It doesn't look like this. It looks like a skyrocket or a roman candle or at least one of those sparkler sticks for little children that sparkle away into a live red coal that's not afraid to die. But this." She looked up at him. Then he knew it was coming. "How much money have we got?"

"A hundred and forty-eight dollars. But it's all right. I—"

"Oh, then you have paid next quarter's rent already." Then it came, it was too late now. My trouble is, everytime I tell either the truth or a lie I seem to have to sell myself on the idea first. "Look at me. You mean you haven't been to the hospital in two months?"

"It was the detective. You were busy then, that was the month you forgot to write to New Orleans. He wasn't trying to hur—get me fired. He just hadn't heard from you and he was worried. He was trying to find out if you were all right. It wasn't him, it was the detective who spilled the works. So they let me go. It was funny. I was fired from a job which existed because of moral turpitude, on the grounds of moral turpitude. Only it wasn't actually that, of course. The job just played out, as I knew in time it would—"

"Well," she said. "And we haven't got a drink in the house. You go down to the store and get a bottle while I—No, wait. We'll go out and eat and drink both. Besides, we'll have to find a dog."

"A dog?" From where he stood he could see her in the kitchen take from the ice box the two chops for supper and wrap them again.

"But certainly, friend," she said. "Get your hat."

It was evening, the hot August, the neon flashed and glared, alternately corpse- and hell-glowing the faces in the street and their own too as they walked, she still carrying the two chops in the thick slick clammy butcher's paper. Within the block they met McCord. "We've lost our job," she told him. "So we're looking for a dog."

Presently it began to seem to Wilbourne that the invisible dog was actually among them. They were in a bar now, one which they frequented, meeting perhaps twice a week by chance or prearrangement the group which McCord had brought into their lives. There were four of these ("We've lost our job," McCord told them. "And now we're waiting for a dog.") present now, the seven of them sitting about a table set for eight, an empty chair, an empty gap, the two chops unwrapped now and on a plate beside a glass of neat whiskey among the highballs. They had not eaten yet; twice Wilbourne leaned to her: "Hadn't we better eat something? It's all right; I can—"

"Yes, it's all right. It's fine." She was not speaking to him. "We've got forty-eight dollars too much; just think of that. Even the Armours haven't got forty-eight dollars too much. Drink up, ye armourous sons. Keep up with the dog."

"Yah," McCord said. "Set, ye armourous sons, in a sea of hemingwaves."

The neon flashed and glared, the traffic lights blinked from green to red and back to green again above the squawking cabs and hearse-like limousines. They had not eaten yet though they had lost two members of the party, they were six in the cab, sitting on each other's knees while Charlotte carried the chops (they had lost the paper now) and McCord held the invisible dog; it was named Moreover now, from the Bible, the poor man's table. "But listen," McCord said. "Just listen a minute. Doc and Gillespie and I own it. Gillespie's up there now, but he will have to be back in town by the first and it will be empty. You could take your hundred bucks—"

"You're impractical," Charlotte said. "You're talking about security. Have you no soul?—How much money have we got now, Harry?"

He looked at the meter. "A hundred and twenty-two dollars."

"But listen," McCord said.

“All right,” she said. “But now is no time to talk. You’ve made your bed; lie in it. And pull the covers over your head.” They were in Evanston now; they had stopped at a drugstore and they had a flashlight now, the cab crawling along a suburban and opulent curb while Charlotte, leaning across McCord, played the flashlight upon the passing midnight lawns. “There’s one,” she said.

“I don’t see it,” McCord said.

“Look at that fence. Did you ever hear of an iron fence with a wreath of pansies in each panel that didn’t have an iron dog inside of it? The house has got a mansard roof too.”

“I dont see any house,” McCord said.

“I dont either. But look at that fence.”

The cab stopped, they got out. The torch beam played on the iron fence with scrolled spear-tipped panels set in concrete; there was even a hitching-post in the effigy of a negro boy beside the small scrolled gate. “You’re right,” McCord said. “There’ll be one here.” They did not use the light now, but even in the faint starlight they could see it plainly—the cast iron Saint Bernard with its composite face of the emperor Franz Josef and a Maine banker in the year 1859.

Charlotte placed the chops upon the iron pediment, between the iron feet; they returned to the cab. “Listen,” McCord said. “It’s completely equipped—three rooms and kitchen, bedding, cooking things, plenty of wood for the chopping; you can even bathe if you want to. And all the other cottages will be empty after the first of September and nobody to bother you and right on the lake, you can have fish for a while yet, and with your hundred dollars in grub and the cold wont come until in October, maybe not until November; you could stay up there until Christmas or even longer than that if you dont mind the cold—”

McCord drove them up to the lake on the Saturday night before Labor Day, the hundred dollars worth of food—the tins, the beans and rice

and coffee and salt and sugar and flour—in the rumble. Wilbourne contemplated the equivalent of their last dollar with a certain sobriety. “You dont realise how flexible money is until you exchange it for something,” he said. “Maybe this is what the economists mean by a normal diminishing return.”

“You dont mean flexible,” McCord said. “You mean volatile. That’s what Congress means by a fluid currency. If it rains on us before we get this stuff under a roof, you’ll see. Those beans and rice and truck will boil us clean out of the car like three matches in a pail of home brew.” They had a bottle of whiskey and McCord and Wilbourne took turns driving while Charlotte slept. They reached the cottage just after dawn—a hundred odd acres of water surrounded by second growth spruce, four clearings with a cabin in each (from the chimney of one of them smoke stood. “That’s Bradley,” McCord said. “I thought he’d be out by now.”) and a short pier into the water.

There was a narrow finger of beach with a buck standing on it, pink in the Sunday dawn, its head up, watching them for an instant before it whirled, its white scut arcing in long bounds while Charlotte, springing from the car, her face swollen with sleep, ran to the water’s edge, squealing. “That’s what I was trying to make!” she cried. “Not the animals, the dogs and deer and horses: the motion, the speed.”

“Sure,” McCord said. “Let’s eat.” They unloaded the car and carried the things in and started a fire in the stove, then while Charlotte cooked breakfast Wilbourne and McCord carried the bottle down to the water and squatted. They drank from the bottle, saluting one another. Then there was one drink left. “Charlotte’s,” McCord said. “She can drink to the Wagon, the long drouth.”

“I’m happy now,” Wilbourne said. “I know exactly where I am going. It’s perfectly straight, between two rows of cans and sacks, fifty dollars’ worth to a side. Not street, that’s houses and people. This is a solitude. Then the water, the solitude wavering slow while you lie and look up at it.” Squatting and still holding the almost empty bottle he put his other hand into the water, the still, dawn-breathing liquid with the

temperature of the synthetic ice water in hotel rooms, the ripples fanning slowly from his wrist. McCord stared at him. "And then fall will come, the first cold, the first red and yellow leaves drifting down, the double leaves, the reflection rising to meet the falling one until they touch and rock a little, not quite closing. And then you could open your eyes for a minute if you wanted to, remembered to, and watch the shadow of the rocking leaves on the breast beside you."

"For sweet Jesus Schopenhauer," McCord said. "What the bloody hell kind of ninth-rate Teasdale is this? You haven't near done your share of starving yet. You haven't near served your apprenticeship to destitution. If you're not careful, you'll talk that stuff to some guy who will believe it and'll hand you the pistol and see you use it. Stop thinking about yourself and think about Charlotte for a while."

"That's who I'm talking about. But I wouldn't use the pistol, anyway. Because I started this too late. I still believe in love." Then he told McCord about the cashier's check. "If I didn't believe in it, I'd give you the check and send her back with you tonight."

"And if you believed in it as much as you say you do, you would have torn that check up a long time ago.

"If I tore it up, nobody would ever get the money. He couldn't even get it back from the bank."

"Damn him. You don't owe him anything. Didn't you take his wife off his hands for him? Yah, you're a hell of a guy. You haven't even got the courage of your fornications, have you?" McCord rose. "Come on. I smell coffee."

Wilbourne didn't move, his hand still in the water. "I haven't hurt her." Then he said, "Yes I have. If I hadn't marked her by now, I would—"

"What?"

"Refuse to believe it."

For a full minute McCord stood looking down at the other as he squatted, the bottle in one hand and the other wrist-deep in the water. "Shit!" he said. Then Charlotte called them from the door. Wilbourne rose.

"I wouldn't use the pistol," he said. "I'll still take this."

Charlotte did not take the drink. Instead she set the bottle on the mantel. "To remind us of our lost civilization when our hair begins to spread," she said. They ate. There were two iron cots in each of the two bedrooms, two more on the screened porch. While Wilbourne washed the dishes Charlotte and McCord made up the cots on the porch with bedding from the locker; when Wilbourne came out McCord already lay on one cot, his shoes off, smoking. "Go on," he said. "Take it. Charlotte says she dont want to sleep any more." She came out at that moment, carrying a pad of paper, a tin cup, a new japanned color box.

"We had a dollar and a half left over, even after we bought the whiskey," she said. "Maybe that deer will come back."

"Take some salt to put on his tail," McCord said. "Maybe he will stand still and pose for you."

"I dont want him to pose. That's just what I dont want. I dont want to copy a deer. Anybody can do that." She went on, the screen door slapped behind her. Wilbourne did not look after her. He lay smoking too, his hands beneath his head.

"Listen," McCord said. "You've got a lot of food, there's plenty of wood here and cover when it turns cold, and when things begin to open up in town maybe I can sell some of that junk she made, get orders—"

"I'm not worrying. I told you I am happy. Nothing can take what I have already had away from me."

“Now, aint that just sweet. Listen. Why dont you give me that damn check and send her back with me and you can eat through your hundred bucks and then move into the woods and eat ants and play Saint Anthony in a tree and on Christmas you can take a mussel shell and make yourself a present of your own oysters. I’m going to sleep.” He turned over and seemed to go to sleep at once, and soon Wilbourne slept too.

He waked once and knew by the sun that it was past noon and that she was not in the house. But he was not concerned; lying awake for a moment it was not the twenty-seven barren years he looked at, and she would not be far, the path straight and empty and quiet between the two fifty-dollar rows of cans and sacks, she would wait for him. If that is to be, she will wait, he thought. If we are to lie so, it will be together in the wavering solitude in spite of Mac and his ninth-rate Teasdale who seems to remember a hell of a lot of what people read, beneath the red and yellow drift of the waning year, the myriad kissing of the repeated leaves.

The sun was just above the trees when she returned. The top sheet of the pad was still blank, though the paints had been used. “Were they that bad?” McCord said. He was busy at the stove with beans and rice and dried apricots—one of those secret cooking or eating specialties such as every bachelor seems to have and which some can actually produce though, you would have said at first glance, not McCord.

“Maybe a little bird told her what you were doing with fifty cents’ worth of our grub, so she had to run,” Wilbourne said. The concoction was ready at last. It was not so bad, Wilbourne admitted. “Only I dont know whether it actually is not foul, or if it’s something protective—that what I taste is not this at all but the forty or fifty cents it represents, if maybe I dont have a gland for cowardice in my palate or stomach too.” He and Charlotte washed the dishes, McCord went out and returned with an armful of wood and laid a fire. “We wont need that tonight,” Wilbourne said.

“It wont cost you anything but the wood,” McCord said. “And you’ve got from here to the Canadian line to get more from. You can run all Northern Wisconsin up this chimney if you want to.” Then they sat before the fire, smoking and not talking a great deal, until time for McCord to leave. He would not stay, holiday tomorrow or not. Wilbourne went out to the car with him and he got into it, looking back at Charlotte in silhouette against the fire, in the door. “Yah,” he said. “You dont need to worry, no more than an old lady being led across the street by a policeman or an eagle scout. Because when the damned bloody wild drunken car comes along it wont be the old lady, it will be the cop or the scout it busts the hell out of. Watch yourself.”

“Watch myself?”

“Yah. You cant be even afraid all the time without taking some pains.”

Wilbourne returned to the house. It was late, yet she had not begun to undress; again he mused, not on the adaptability of women to circumstance but on the ability of women to adapt the illicit, even the criminal, to a bourgeois standard of respectability as he watched her, barefoot, moving about the room, making those subtle alterations in the fixtures of this temporary abode as they even do in hotel rooms rented for but one night, producing from one of the boxes which he had believed to contain only food objects from their apartment in Chicago which he not only did not know she still had but had forgotten they ever owned—the books they had acquired, a copper bowl, even the chintz cover from the ex-work bench; then from a cigarette carton which she had converted into a small receptacle resembling a coffin, the tiny figure of the old man, the Bad Smell; he watched her set it on the mantel and stand looking at it for a time, musing too, then take up the bottle with the drink they had saved her and, with the ritualistic sobriety of a child playing, pour the whiskey onto the hearth. “The lares and penates,” she said. “I dont know Latin, but They will know what I mean.”

They slept in the two cots on the porch, then, it turning cold just before dawn, in one cot, her bare feet fast on the boards, the hard plunge of

elbow and hip waking him as she came into the blankets smelling of bacon and balsam. There was a gray light on the lake and when he heard the loon he knew exactly what it was, he even knew what it would look like, listening to the raucous idiot voice, thinking how man alone of all creatures deliberately atrophies his natural senses and that only at the expense of others; how the four-legged animal gains all its information through smelling and seeing and hearing and distrusts all else while the two-legged one believes only what it reads.

The fire felt good the next morning. While she washed the breakfast dishes he cut more wood for it behind the cabin, removing his sweater now, the sun definitely impacting now though he was not fooled, thinking how in these latitudes Labor Day and not equinox marked the suspiration of summer, the long sigh toward autumn and the cold, when she called him from the house. He entered; in the middle of the room stood a stranger carrying balanced on his shoulder a large cardboard box, a man no older than himself, barefoot, in faded khaki slacks and a sleeveless singlet, sunbrowned, with blue eyes and pale sunburned lashes and symmetrical ridges of straw-colored hair—the perfect reflexive coiffure—who was looking quietly at the effigy on the mantel. Through the open door behind him Wilbourne saw a beached canoe. “This is—” Charlotte said. “What did you say your name was?”

“Bradley,” the stranger said. He looked at Wilbourne, his eyes almost white against his skin like a kodak negative, balancing the box on his shoulder while he extended the other hand.

“Wilbourne,” Charlotte said. “Bradley’s the neighbor. He’s leaving today. He brought us what grub they had left.”

“No use lugging it out again,” Bradley said. “Your wife tells me you folks are going to stay on a while, so I thought—” he gave Wilbourne a brief hard violent bone-crushing meaningless grip—the broker’s front man two years out of an Eastern college.

“That’s decent of you. We’ll be glad to have it. Here, let me—” But the other had already swung the box to the floor; it was well filled.

Charlotte and Wilbourne carefully did not look at it. “Thanks a lot. The more we have in the house, the harder it will be for the wolf to get in.”

“Or to crowd us out when he does,” Charlotte said. Bradley looked at her. He laughed, that is with his teeth. His eyes did not laugh, the assured, predatory eyes of the still successful prom leader.

“Not bad,” he said, “Do you—”

“Thanks,” Charlotte said. “Will you have some coffee?”

“Thanks, I’ve had breakfast. We were up at dawn. Must be back in town tonight.” Now he looked at the effigy on the mantel again. “May I?” he said. He approached the mantel. “Do I know him? I seem—”

“I hope not,” Charlotte said. Bradley looked at her.

“We hope not yet, she means,” Wilbourne said. But Bradley continued to watch Charlotte, the pale brows courteously interrogatory above the predatory eyes which did not smile when the mouth did.

“It’s the Bad Smell,” Charlotte said.

“Oh. I see.” He looked at the effigy. “You made it. I saw you sketching yesterday. Across the lake.”

“I know you did.”

“Touch,” he said. “Can I apologise? I wasn’t spying.”

“I wasn’t hiding.” Bradley looked at her and now Wilbourne for the first time saw the eyebrows and mouth in accord, quizzical, sardonic, ruthless, the whole man emanating a sort of crass and insolent confidence.

“Sure?” he said.

“Sufficiently,” Charlotte said. She moved to the mantel and took the effigy from it. “It’s too bad you are leaving before we can return your call upon your wife. But perhaps you will accept this as a memento of your perspicuity.”

“No; really, I—”

“Take it,” Charlotte said pleasantly. “You must need it much worse than we do.”

“Well, thanks.” He took the effigy. “Thanks. We’ve got to get back to town tonight. But maybe we could look in on the way out. Mrs. Bradley would—”

“Do,” Charlotte said.

“Thanks,” he said. He turned toward the door. “Thanks again.”

“Thanks again too,” Charlotte said. He went out; Wilbourne watched him shove the canoe off and step into it. Then Wilbourne went and stooped over the box.

“What are you going to do?” Charlotte said.

“I’m going to carry it back and throw it in his front door.”

“Oh, you bloody ass,” she said. She came to him. “Stand up. We’re going to eat it. Stand up like a man.” He rose, she put her hard arms around him, wrestling him against her with restrained savage impatience. “Why dont you grow up, you damned home-wrecking boy scout? Dont you know yet that we just dont look married, thank God, even to brutes?” She held him hard against her, leaning back, her hips against him and moving faintly while she stared at him, the yellow stare inscrutable and derisive and with that quality which he had come to recognise—that ruthless and almost unbearable honesty. “Like a man, I said,” holding him hard and derisive against her moving hips though that was not necessary. She dont need to touch me, he thought. Nor

the sound of her voice even nor the smell, a slipper will do it, one of those fragile instigations to venery discarded in the floor. "Come on. That's right. That's better. That's fine now." She freed one hand and began to unfasten his shirt. "Only this is supposed to be bad luck or something in the forenoon, isn't it? Or isn't it?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes." She began to unfasten his belt.

"Or is this just the way you assuage insults to me? Or are you going to bed with me just because somebody happened to remind you I divide at the belly?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes."

Later in the forenoon they heard Bradley's car depart. Face down and half lying across him (She had been asleep, her weight heavy and relaxed, her head beneath his chin, her breath slow and full) she raised up, one elbow in his stomach and the blanket slipping away from her shoulders, while the sound of the car died away. "Well, Adam," she said. But they had always been alone, he told her.

"Ever since that first night. That picture. We couldn't be any more alone, no matter who went away."

"I know it. I mean, I can go swimming now." She slid out from beneath the blanket. He watched her, the grave simple body a little broader, a little solider than the Hollywood-cod-liver-oil advertisements, the bare feet padding across the rough boards, toward the screen door.

"There are bathing suits in the locker," he said. She didn't answer. The screen door slapped. Then he could not see her any more, or he would have had to raise his head.

She swam each morning, the three bathing suits still undisturbed in the locker. He would rise from breakfast and return to the porch and lie on the cot and hear presently her bare feet cross the room and then the porch; perhaps he would watch the steadily and smoothly browning

body cross the porch. Then he would sleep again (this scarcely an hour after he had waked from slumber, a habit which he formed within the first six days) to wake later and look out and see her lying on the pier on stomach or back, her arms folded across or beneath her face; sometimes he would still be there, not sleeping now and not even thinking but merely existing in a drowsy and foetuslike state, passive and almost un sentient in the womb of solitude and peace, when she returned, moving then only enough to touch his lips to the sun-impacted flank as she stopped beside the cot, tasting the impacted sun. Then one day something happened to him.

September had gone, the nights and mornings were definitely chilly; she had changed her swim from after breakfast to after lunch and they were talking about when they would have to move the bedding in from the porch to the room with the fireplace. But the days themselves were unchanged—the same stationary recapitulation of golden interval between dawn and sunset, the long quiet identical days, the immaculate monotonous hierarchy of noons filled with the sun's hot honey, through which the waning year drifted in red-and-yellow retrograde of hardwood leaves sourceless and going nowhere.

Each day she departed directly after her swim and sunbath, with the pad and color box, leaving him to move about the house empty yet at the same time thunderous with the hard impact of her presence—the few garments she owned, the whisper of her bare feet on the boards—while he believed that he was worrying, not about the inevitable day on which their food would run out, but at the fact that he did not seem to worry about it: a curious state which he had experienced once before when his sister's husband had taken him to task one summer because he refused to exercise his vote.

He remembered the exasperation just about to become rage in which he had tried to present his reasons to his brother-in-law, realising at last that he was talking faster and faster not to convince the brother-in-law but to justify his own rage as in a mild nightmare he might be grasping for his falling trousers; that it was not even to the brother-in-law he was talking but to himself.

It became an obsession with him; he realised quite calmly that he had become secretly quietly and decently a little mad; he now thought constantly of the diminishing row of cans and sacks against which he was matching in inverse ratio the accumulating days, yet he would not go to the closet and look at them, count them. He would tell himself how it used to be he would have to steal away to a park bench and take out the wallet and produce the scrap of paper and subtract numbers from one another, while now all he would have to do would be to glance at the row of cans on a shelf; he could count the cans and know exactly how many days more they would have left, he could take a pencil and mark the shelf itself off into days and he would not even have to count cans, he could glance at the shelf and read the position at once, like on a thermometer. But he would not even look into the closet.

He knew that during these hours he was mad and he fought against it sometimes, believing that he had conquered the madness, for in the next succeeding instant the cans, save for a tragic conviction that they did not even matter, were as completely out of his mind as if they had never existed, and he would look about at his familiar surroundings with a sense of profound despair, not even knowing that he was worrying now, worrying so terribly that he did not even know it; he looked about with a kind of aghast amazement at the sunfilled solitude out of which she had walked temporarily yet still remained in and to which she would presently return and re-enter her aura which had remained behind exactly as she might re-enter a garment and find him stretched on the cot, not sleeping now and not even reading, who had lost that habit along with the habit of sleep, and said quietly to himself, I am bored. I am bored to extinction. There is nothing here that I am needed for. Not even by her. I have already cut enough wood to last until Christmas and there is nothing else for me to do.

One day he asked her to divide the colors and pad with him. She did so and found that he was color blind and didn't even know it. Then each day he would lie on his back in a small sunny clearing he had found, surrounded by the fierce astringent smell of balsam, smoking the cheap

pipe (the one provision he had made before leaving Chicago against the day they would exhaust food and money both), his half of the sketch pad and his converted sardine can color box intact and pristine beside him.

Then one day he decided to make a calendar, a notion innocently conceived not by mind, out of a desire for a calendar, but from the sheer boredom of muscles, and put into effect with the pure quiet sensory pleasure of a man carving a basket from a peach stone or the Lord's Prayer on a pin head; he drew it neatly off on the sketch pad, numbering in the days, planning to use various appropriate colors for Sundays and the holidays.

He discovered at once that he had lost count of the days, but this only added to the anticipation, prolonging the work, making more involved the pleasure, the peach basket to be a double one, the prayer to be in code. So he went back to that first morning when he and McCord squatted beside the water, whose name and number he knew, then he counted forward by reconstructing from memory the drowsing demarcations between one dawn and the next, unravelling one by one out of the wine-sharp and honey-still warp of tideless solitude the lost Tuesdays and Fridays and Sundays; when it suddenly occurred to him that he could prove his figures, establish mathematical truth out of the sunny and timeless void into which the individual days had vanished by the dates of and intervals between Charlotte's menstrual periods, he felt as some old crook-propped contemplator on the ancient sheep-drifted Syrian hills must have felt after stumbling by accident on some Alexandrian formula which proved the starry truths which he had watched nightly all his life and knew to be true but not how nor why.

That was when the thing happened to him. He sat looking at what he had made in a gleeful and amazed amusement at his own cunning in contriving for God, for Nature the unmathematical, the overfecund, the prime disorderly and illogical and patternless spendthrift, to prove his mathematical problem for him, when he discovered that he had given six weeks to the month of October and that the day in which he now stood was November twelfth.

It seemed to him that he could see the actual numeral, incontrovertible and solitary, in the anonymous identical hierarchy of the lost days; he seemed to see the row of cans on the shelf a half mile away, the dynamic torpedolike solid shapes which up to now had merely dropped one by one, silently and without weight, into that stagnant time which did not advance and which would somehow find for its two victims food as it found them breath, now in reverse to time, time now the mover, advancing slow and irresistible, blotting the cans one by one in steady progression as a moving cloud shadow blots. Yes, he thought. It's the Indian summer that did it. I have been seduced to an imbecile's paradise by an old whore; I have been throttled and sapped of strength and volition by the old weary Lilith of the year.

He burned the calendar and went back to the cabin. She had not returned yet. He went to the closet and counted the cans. It was two hours to sunset yet; when he looked out toward the lake he saw that there was no sun and that a mass of cloud like dirty cotton had crossed from east to north and west and that the feel and taste of the air too had changed. Yes, he thought.

The old bitch. She betrayed me and now she doesn't need to pretend. At last he saw her approaching, circling the lake, in a pair of his trousers and an old sweater they had found in the locker with the blankets. He went to meet her. "Good Lord," she said. "I never saw you look so happy. Have you painted a picture or have you discovered at last that the human race really doesn't have to even try to produce art—" He was moving faster than he knew; when he put his arms around her he jolted her to a stop by physical contact; thrust back, she looked at him with actual and not simulated astonishment now.

"Yes," he said. "How's for a spot of necking?"

"Why, certainly, friend," she said immediately. Then she thrust herself back again to look at him. "What's this? What's going on here?"

“Will you be afraid to stay here alone tonight?” Now she began to free herself.

“Let me go. I cant see you good.” He released her, though he did manage to meet the unwinking yellow stare which he had never yet been able to lie to. “Tonight?”

“This is the twelfth of November.”

“All right. Then what?” She looked at him. “Come on. Let’s go to the house and get to the bottom of this.” They returned to the house; again she paused and faced him. “Now let’s have it.”

“I just counted the cans. Measured the—” She stared at him with that hard, almost grim impersonality. “We can eat for about six days more.”

“All right. Then what?”

“It was the mild weather. Like time had stopped and us with it, like two chips on a pond. So I didn’t think to worry, to watch. So I’m going to walk to the village. It’s only twelve miles. I could be back by noon tomorrow.” She stared at him. “A letter. From Mac. It will be there.”

“Did you dream it would be there, or did you find it out in the coffee pot when you were measuring the grub?”

“It will be there.”

“All right. But wait till tomorrow to go. You cant walk twelve miles before dark.” They ate and went to bed. This time she came straight and got into the cot with him, as heedless of the hard and painful elbow which jabbed him as she would have been on her own account if the positions had been reversed, as she was of the painful hand which grasped his hair and shook his head with savage impatience. “My God, I never in my life saw anybody try as hard to be a husband as you do. Listen to me, you lug. If it was just a successful husband and food and a

bed I wanted, why the hell do you think I am here instead of back there where I had them?"

"You've got to sleep and eat."

"Certainly we have. So why worry about it? That's like worrying about having to bathe just because the water in the bathroom is about to be cut off." Then she rose, got out of the cot with the same abrupt violence; he watched her cross to the door and open it and look out. He could smell the snow before she spoke. "It's snowing."

"I know it. I knew this afternoon she realised the game was up."

"She?" She closed the door. This time she went to the other cot and got into it. "Try to get to sleep. It'll be a hard walk tomorrow, if it snows much."

"It will be there though."

"Yes," she said. She yawned, her back to him. "It's probably been there a week or two."

He left the cabin shortly after daylight. The snow had ceased and it was quite cold. He reached the village in four hours and found the letter from McCord. It contained a check for twenty-five dollars; he had sold one of the puppets, and he had the promise of a job for Charlotte in a department store during the holiday season. It was well after dark when he reached home. "You can put it all in the pot," he said. "We've got twenty-five dollars. And Mac's got a job for you. He's driving up Saturday night."

"Saturday night?"

"I wired him. I waited for an answer. That's why I'm late." They ate and this time she got quietly into the narrow cot with him and this time she even crept close to him who had never before known her to do such at any time, to anything.

“I’ll be sorry to leave here.”

“Will you?” he said quietly, peacefully, lying on his back, his arms crossed on his chest like a stone effigy on a tenth-century sepulchre. “You’ll probably be glad to get back, once you are there though. People to see again, McCord and the others you liked, Christmas and all that. You can get your hair clean again and your nails manicured—” This time she did not move, whose habit it was to assault him with that cold and disregarding savageness, shaking and jerking at him not only for conversation but even for mere emphasis. This time she lay perfectly still, not even breathing, her voice filled not with a suspiration but sheer amazed incredulity:

“You’ll probably. You are. You can. Harry, what do you mean?”

“That I wired Mac to come and get you. You’ll have your job; that will keep you until after Christmas all right. I thought I’d just keep half the twenty-five dollars and stay on here. Maybe Mac can find something for me too; if nothing else, maybe a W.P.A. job of some sort. Then I’d come on back to town and then we could—”

“No!” she cried. “No! No! Jesus God, no! Hold me! Hold me hard, Harry! This is what it’s for, what it all was for, what we were paying for: so we could be together, sleep together every night: not just to eat and evacuate and sleep warm so we can get up and eat and evacuate in order to sleep warm again! Hold me! Hold me hard! Hard!” He held her, his arms rigid, his face still turned upward, his lips lifted away from his rigid teeth.

God, he thought. God help her. God help her.

They left snow at the lake, though before they reached Chicago they had overtaken the end of the south-moving Indian summer for a little while. But it did not last and now it was winter in Chicago too; the Canadian wind made ice in the Lake and blew in the stone canyons holly-burgeoned with the imminent Christmas, crisping and frosting the

faces of policemen and clerks and panhandlers and Red Cross and Salvation Army people costumed as Santa Claus, the defunctive days dying in neon upon the fur-framed petal faces of the wives and daughters of cattle and timber millionaires and the paramours of politicians returned from Europe and the dude ranches to spend the holidays in the air-carved and opulent tenements above the iron lake and the rich sprawling city before departing for Florida, and of the sons of London brokers and Midland shoe-peg knights and South African senators come to look at Chicago because they had read Whitman and Masters and Sandburg in Oxford or Cambridge—members of that race which without tact for exploration and armed with note-books and cameras and sponge bags elects to pass the season of Christian holiday in the dark and bitten jungles of savages.

Charlotte's job was in a store which had been one of her first customers for the first figurines she had made. It included window- and showcase-dressing, so that her day sometimes began when the store closed in the afternoon and that of the other employees ceased. So Wilbourne and sometimes McCord would wait for her in a bar just around the corner, where they would eat an early dinner. Then McCord would depart to begin his upside-down day at the newspaper and Charlotte and Wilbourne would return to the store, which would now take on a sort of bizarre and infernal inverted life—the chromium glass and synthetic marble cavern which for eight hours had been filled with the ruthless voracious murmur of furred shoppers and the fixed regimented grimaces of satin-clad robot-like saleswomen now empty of uproar, glittering and quiet and echoed with cavernous silence, dwarfing, filled now with a grim tense fury like an empty midnight clinic in which a handful of pygmy-like surgeons and nurses battle in low-toned decorum for some obscure and anonymous life, into which Charlotte would vanish too (not disappear: he would see her from time to time, consulting in pantomime with someone over some object which one of them held, or entering or leaving a window) as soon as they entered.

He would have an evening paper and now for the next two or three hours he would sit on fragile chairs surrounded by jointless figures with suave organless bodies and serene almost incredible faces, by draped

brocade and sequins or the glitter of rhinestones, while charwomen appeared on their knees and pushing pails before them as though they were another species just crawled molelike from some tunnel or orifice leading from the foundations of the earth itself and serving some obscure principle of sanitation, not to the hushed glitter which they did not even look at but to the subterranean region which they would crawl back to before light.

Then at eleven and midnight and, as Christmas approached, even later they would go home, to the apartment which had no work bench and no skylight now but which was new and neat and in a new neat district near a park (toward which, around ten o'clock in the morning while lying in bed between his first and second sleep of the day, he could hear the voices of nursemaid-harried children moving) where Charlotte would go to bed and he would sit again at the typewriter at which he had already spent most of the day, the machine borrowed first from McCord then rented from an agency then purchased outright from among the firing-pinless pistols and guitars and gold-filled teeth in a pawnshop, on which he wrote and sold to the confession magazines the stories beginning "I had the body and desires of a woman yet in knowledge and experience of the world I was but a child" or "If I had only had a mother's love to guard me on that fatal day" —stories which he wrote complete from the first capital to the last period in one sustained frenzied agonising rush like the halfback working his way through school who grasps the ball (his Albatross, his Old Man of the Sea, which, not the opposing team, not the blank incontrovertible chalk marks profoundly terrifying and meaningless as an idiot's nightmare, is his sworn and mortal enemy) and runs until the play is completed—downed or across the goal line, it doesn't matter which—then to go to bed himself, with dawn sometimes beyond the open window of the chill sleeping cubicle, to get into bed beside Charlotte who without waking would sometimes turn to him, murmuring something damp and indistinguishable out of sleep, and to lie again holding her as on that last night at the lake, himself wide awake, carefully rigid and still, knowing no desire to sleep, waiting for the smell and echo of his last batch of moron's pap to breathe out of him.

Thus he was awake mostly while she slept, and vice versa. She would get up and close the window and dress and make coffee (the breakfast which while they were poor, when they did not know for certain where the next measure of coffee to put into the pot was coming from, they would prepare and eat together, the dishes of which they would wash and dry together side by side at the sink) and be gone and he would not know it. Then he in his turn would wake and listen to the passing children while the stale coffee heated, and drink it and sit down to the typewriter, entering without effort and without especial regret the anesthesia of his monotonous inventing. At first he made a kind of ritual of his solitary lunch, fetching in the cans and slices of meat and such the night before, like a little boy with a new Daniel Boone suit hoarding crackers in the improvised forest of a broom closet.

But lately, since he had actually bought the typewriter (he had voluntarily relinquished his amateur standing, he told himself then; he no longer had even to pretend to himself it was a lark) he began to dispense with lunch altogether, with the bother of eating, instead writing steadily on, pausing only to sit while his fingers rested, a cigarette scarring slowly into the edge of the rented table, staring at but not seeing the two or three current visible lines of his latest primer-bald moronic fable, his sexual gumdrop, then remembering the cigarette and raising it to rub uselessly at the new scorch before writing again. Then the hour would arrive and with the ink sometimes scarcely dry on the stamped sealed and self-addressed envelope containing the latest story beginning "At sixteen I was an unwed mother" he would leave the apartment and walk through the crowded streets, the steadily shortening afternoons of the dying year, to the bar where he and Charlotte and McCord met.

There was Christmas in the bar too, holly sprigs and mistletoe among the gleaming pyramids of glasses, mirror-repeated, the mirror aping the antic jackets of the barmen, the steaming seasonal bowls of hot rum and whiskey for the patrons to look at and recommend to one another while holding in their hands the same iced cocktails and highballs they had been drinking all summer.

Then McCord at their usual table, with what he called breakfast—a quart stein of beer and about another quart of pretzels or salted peanuts or whatever was available, and Wilbourne would have the one drink which he allowed himself before Charlotte came (“I can afford abstemiousness now, sobriety,” he told McCord.

“I can pay shot for shot and no holds barred with any and all for the privilege of refusing.”) and they would wait for the hour when the stores would empty, the glass doors flashing outward to erupt into the tender icy glare of neon the holly-pinned fur-framed faces, the wind-carved canyons merry and crisp with the bright voices speaking the good wishes and good will into intransigent vapor, the employees’ chute too discharging presently the regimented black satin, the feet swollen with the long standing, the faces aching with the sustained long rigid grimacing.

Then Charlotte would enter; they would stop talking and watch her approach, shifting and sidling past the throng at the bar and among the waiters and the crowded tables, her coat open above the neat uniform, her hat of the current off-the-face mode thrust further back still as if she had pushed it there herself with a sweep of the forearm in the immemorial female gesture out of the immemorial female weariness, approaching the table, her face pale and tired-looking too though she moved as strongly and surely as ever, the eyes as humorlessly and incorrigibly honest as ever above the blunt strong nose, the broad pale unsubtle mouth. “Rum, men,” she would say, then, sinking into the chair which one of them drew for her: “Well, papa.” Then they would eat, at the wrong hour, the hour when the rest of the world was just beginning to prime itself for food (“I feel like three bears in a cage on Sunday afternoon,” she said.), eating the meal which none of them wanted and then disperse, McCord to the paper, Charlotte and Wilbourne back to the store.

Two days before Christmas when she entered the bar she carried a parcel. It contained Christmas gifts for her children, the two girls. They had no work bench now and no skylight. She unwrapped and rewrapped them on the bed, the immemorial—the work bench of the

child's unwitting begetting become the altar for the Child's service, she sitting on the edge of it surrounded by holly-stippled paper and the fatuous fragile red-and-green cord and gummed labels, the two gifts she had chosen reasonably costly but unremarkable, she looking at them with a sort of grim bemusement above the hands otherwise and at nearly every other human action unhesitating and swift.

"They haven't even taught me how to wrap up packages," she said. "Children," she said. "It's not a child's function, really. It's for adults: a week's dispensation to return to childishness, to give something you don't want yourself to someone who doesn't want it either, and demand thanks for it. And the children swap with you. They vacate puerility and accept the role you abandoned not because they ever had any particular desire to be grown but just out of that ruthless piracy of children that will use anything—deception or secrecy or acting—to get anything. Anything, any bauble will do. Presents don't mean anything to them until they get big enough to calculate what it probably cost. That's why little girls are more interested in presents than little boys. So they take what you give them not because they will accept even that in preference to nothing but because that's about all they expected anyway from the stupid oxen among whom for some reason they have to live.—They have offered to keep me on at the store."

"What?" he said. He had not been listening to her. He had been hearing but not listening, looking down at the blunt hands among the tinsel litter, thinking, Now is the time for me to say, Go home. Be with them tomorrow night. "What?"

"They are going to keep me on until summer at the store."

He heard this time; he went through the same experience as when he had recognised the number on the calendar he had made, now he knew what the trouble had been all the time, why he would lie rigidly and carefully beside her in the dawn, believing the reason he could not sleep was that he was waiting for the smell of his moron pandering to fade, why he would sit before an unfinished page in the typewriter, believing he was thinking of nothing, believing he was thinking only of

the money, how each time they always had the wrong amount of it and that they were about money like some unlucky people were about alcohol: either none or too much. It was the city I was thinking of, he thought. The city and winter together, a combination too strong for us yet, for a time yet—the winter that herds people inside walls wherever they are, but winter and city together, a dungeon; the routine even of sinning, an absolution even for adultery. “No,” he said. “Because we are going to leave Chicago.”

“Leave Chicago?”

“Yes. For good. You’re not going to work any more just for money. Wait,” he said quickly. “I know we have come to live like we had been married five years, but I am not coming the heavy husband on you. I know I catch myself thinking, ‘I want my wife to have the best’ but I’m not yet saying ‘I dont approve of my women working.’ It’s not that. It’s what we have come to work for, got into the habit of working for before we knew it, almost waited too late before we found it out. Do you remember how you said up at the lake when I suggested that you clear out while the clearing was good and you said, ‘That’s what we bought, what we are paying for: to be together and eat together and sleep together’? And now look at us.

When we are together, it’s in a saloon or a street car or walking along a crowded street and when we eat together its in a crowded restaurant inside a vacant hour they allow you from the store so you can eat and stay strong so they can get the value of the money they pay you every Saturday and we dont sleep together at all any more, we take turns watching each other sleep; when I touch you I know you are too tired to wake up and you are probably too tired to touch me at all.”

Three weeks later, with a scribbled address on a torn newspaper margin folded in his vest pocket, he entered a downtown office building and ascended twenty floors to an opaque glass door lettered Callaghan Mines and entered and passed with some difficulty a chromium-finished office girl and faced at last across a desk flat and perfectly bare save for a telephone and a deck of cards laid out for Canfield, a red-

faced cold-eyed man of about fifty, with a highwayman's head and the body of a two-hundred-and-twenty-pound college fullback gone to fat, in a suit of expensive tweed which nevertheless looked on him as if he had taken it from a fire sale at the point of a pistol, to whom Wilbourne essayed to give a summary of his medical qualifications and experience.

"Never mind that," the other interrupted. "Can you take care of the ordinary injuries that men working in a mine shaft might meet?"

"I was just trying to tell you—"

"I heard you. I asked you something else. I said, Take care of them." Wilbourne looked at him.

"I dont think I—" he began.

"Take care of the mine. Of the people who own it. Have put money into it. Who will be paying your salary as long as you earn it. I dont care two damns in hell how much or how little surgery and pharmacology you know or dont know or how many degrees you might have from where to show it. Nobody else out there will; there'll be no State inspectors out there to ask to see your license. I want to know if you can be depended on to protect the mine, the company. Against backfires. Suits from wop pick-and-shovel men and bohunk powder-monkeys and chink ore-trammers to whom the notion might occur to swap the company a hand or a foot for a pension or a trip back to Canton or Hong Kong."

"Oh," Wilbourne said. "I see. Yes. I can do that."

"All right. You will be given transportation out to the mine at once. Your pay will be—" he named a sum.

"That's not much," Wilbourne said. The other looked at him with the cold flesh-bedded eyes. Wilbourne stared back at him. "I have a degree from a good university, a recognised medical school. I lacked only a few weeks of finishing my internship at a hospital which has a—"

“Then you dont want this job. This job is nowhere near up to your qualifications and, I daresay, your deserts. Good day.” The cold eyes stared at him; he did not move. “I said, Good morning.”

“I will have to have transportation for my wife,” Wilbourne said.

Their train left at three oclock two mornings later. They waited for McCord at the apartment where they had lived for two months and left no mark other than the cigarette scars on the table. “Not even of loving,” he said. “Not the wild sweet attunement, bare feet hurrying bedward in the half light, covers that wont turn back fast enough. Just the seminal groaning of box springs, the preprandial prostate relieving of the ten years’ married. We were too busy; we had to rent and support a room for two robots to live in.” McCord came and they carried down the luggage, the two bags with which they had left New Orleans, and the typewriter. The manager shook hands with all three of them and expressed regret at the dissolution of mutually pleasant domestic bonds. “Just two of us,” Wilbourne said. “None of us are androgynous.” The manager blinked, though just once.

“Ah,” he said. “A pleasant journey. You have a cab?” They had McCord’s car; they went out to it in a mild glitter of minor silver, the final neon and clash and clang of changing lights; the redcap turned the two bags and the typewriter over to the porter at the pullman vestibule.

“We’ve got time for a drink,” McCord said.

“You and Harry have one,” Charlotte said. “I’m going to bed.” She came and put her arms around McCord, her face raised. “Good night, Mac.” Then McCord moved and kissed her. She stepped back, turning; they watched her enter the vestibule and vanish. Then Wilbourne also knew that McCord knew he would never see her again.

“How about that drink?” McCord said. They went to the station bar and found a table and then they were sitting again as they had on so many of the afternoons while they waited for Charlotte—the same drinking

faces, the same white jackets of waiters and barmen, the same racked gleaming glasses, only the steaming bowls and the holly (Christmas, McCord had said, the apotheosis of the bourgeoisie, the season when with shining fable Heaven and Nature, in accord for once, edict and postulate us all husbands and fathers under our skins, when before an altar in the shape of a gold-plated cattle-trough man may with impunity prostrate himself in an orgy of unbridled sentimental obeisance to the fairy tale which conquered the Western world, when for seven days the rich get richer and the poor get poorer in amnesty: the whitewashing of a stipulated week leaving the page blank and pristine again for the chronicling of the fresh—and for the moment, horselike (“There’s the horse,” McCord said), breathed—revenge and hatred.) missing now, the waiter coming up as he had used to come—the same white sleeve, the anonymous featureless waiter-face you never actually see. “Beer,” McCord said. “What’s yours?”

“Ginger ale,” Wilbourne said.

“What?”

“I’m on the wagon.”

“Since when?”

“Since last night. I cant afford to drink any more.” McCord looked at him.

“Hell,” McCord said. “Bring me a double rye then.” The waiter departed. McCord still stared at Wilbourne. “It seems to agree with you,” he said savagely. “Listen,” he said. “I know this is none of my business. But I wish I knew what it’s all about. Here you were making fair money, and Charlotte with a good job, you had a nice place to live in. And then all of a sudden you quit it, make Charlotte throw up her job to start out in February to live in a mine shaft in Utah, without a railroad or a telephone or even a decent can, on a salary of—”

“That was just it. That was why. I had become—” He ceased. The waiter set the drinks on the table and went away. Wilbourne raised his ginger ale. “To freedom.”

“I would,” McCord snarled. “You’ll probably be able to drink to a lot of it before you see any of it again. And in water too, not even in soda pop. And maybe in a tighter place than this too. Because that guy is poison. I know about him. He’s wildcat. If the truth was written about him on a tombstone it wouldn’t be an epitaph, it would be a police record.”

“All right,” Wilbourne said. “To love, then.” There was a clock above the entrance—the ubiquitous and synchronised face, oracular admonitory and unsentient: he had twenty-two minutes yet. While it will only take two minutes to tell Mac what it took me two months to discover, he thought. “I had turned into a husband,” he said. “That was all. I didn’t even know it until she told me the store had offered to keep her on.

At first I used to have to watch myself, rehearse myself each time so I would be sure to say ‘my wife’ or ‘Mrs. Wilbourne’, then I discovered I had been watching myself for months to keep from saying it; I have even caught myself twice since we came back from the lake thinking ‘I want my wife to have the best’ exactly like any husband with his Saturday pay envelope and his suburban bungalow full of electric wife-saving gadgets and his table cloth of lawn to sprinkle on Sunday morning that will become his actual own provided he is not fired or run down by a car in the next ten years—the doomed worm blind to all passion and dead to all hope and not even knowing it, oblivious and unaware in the face of all darkness, all unknown, the underlying All-Derisive bidding to blast him.

I had even stopped being ashamed of the way I earned the money, apologising even to myself for the stories I wrote; I was no more ashamed of them than the city employee buying his own bungalow on the installment plan in which his wife can have the best is ashamed of his badge of office, the rubber plunger for unstopping toilets, which he carries about with him. In fact, I had come to really like to write them,

even apart from the money, like the boy who never saw ice before goes bugs about skating right after he learns how. Besides, after I started writing them I learned that I had no idea of the depths of depravity of which the human invention is capable, which is always interesting—”

“You mean, enjoys,” McCord said.

“Yes. All right—Respectability. That was what did it. I found out some time back that it’s idleness breeds all our virtues, our most bearable qualities—contemplation, equableness, laziness, letting other people alone; good digestion mental and physical: the wisdom to concentrate on fleshly pleasures—eating and evacuating and fornication and sitting in the sun—than which there is nothing better, nothing to match, nothing else in all this world but to live for the short time you are loaned breath, to be alive and know it—oh, yes, she taught me that; she has marked me too forever—nothing, nothing.

But it was only recently I have clearly seen, followed out the logical conclusion, that it is one of what we call the prime virtues—thrift, industry, independence—that breeds all the vices—fanaticism, smugness, meddling, fear, and worst of all, respectability. Us, for instance. Because of the fact that for the first time we were solvent, knew for certain where tomorrow’s food was coming from (the damned money, too much of it; at night we would lie awake and plan how to get it spent; by spring we would have been carrying steamer folders in our pockets) I had become as completely thrall and slave to respectability as any—”

“But not her,” McCord said.

“No. But she’s a better man than I am. You said that yourself.—as any man by drink or opium. I had become the Complete Householder. All I lacked was official sanction in the form of a registered Social Security number as head of a family. We lived in an apartment that wasn’t bohemian, it wasn’t even a tabloid love-nest, it wasn’t even in that part of town but in a neighborhood dedicated by both city ordinance and architecture to the second year of wedlock among the five-thousand-a-

year bracket. I would be waked in the mornings by the noise of children passing in the street; by the time spring came and the windows would have to stay open I would have been hearing the fretful cries of Swede nursemaids from the park all day long and, when the wind was right, smell the smell of infant urine and animal crackers. I referred to it as home, there was a corner in it we both called my study; I had even bought the damn typewriter at last—something I had got along without for twenty-eight years and so well I didn't even know it, which is too heavy and unwieldy to carry, yet which I would no more have dared desert than—”

“You've still got it, I noticed,” McCord said.

“—than—Yes. A good portion of any courage is a sincere disbelief in good luck. It's not courage otherwise—than I would my eyelashes. I had tied myself hand and foot in a little strip of inked ribbon, daily I watched myself getting more and more tangled in it like a roach in a spider web; each morning, so that my wife could leave on time for her job, I would wash the coffee pot and the sink and twice a week (for the same reason) I would buy from the same butcher the groceries we needed and the chops we would cook ourselves on Sunday; give us a little more time and we would have been dressing and undressing inside our kimonas in one another's presence and turning off the light before we made love. That's it. It's not avocation that elects our vocations, it's respectability that makes chiropractors and clerks and bill posters and motormen and pulp writers of us.”

There was a loudspeaker in the bar too, synchronised too; at this moment a voice cavernous and sourceless roared deliberately, a sentence in which could be distinguished a word now and then—“train,” then others which the mind two or three seconds afterward recognised to be the names of cities far flung about the continent, cities seen rather than names heard, as if the listener (so enormous was the voice) were suspended in space watching the globy earth spin slowly out of its cradling cloud-wisps in fragmentary glimpses the evocative strange divisions of the sphere, spinning them on into fog and cloud again before vision and comprehension could quite grasp them.

He looked at the clock again; he still had fourteen minutes. Fourteen minutes to try to tell what I have already said in five words, he thought.

“And mind, I liked it. I never denied that. I liked it. I liked the money I made. I even liked the way I made it, the thing I did, as I told you. It wasn’t because of that that one day I caught myself back from thinking ‘My wife must have the best.’ It was because I found out one day that I was afraid. And I found out at the same time that I will still be afraid, no matter what I do, that I will still be afraid as long as she lives or I live.”

“You are still afraid now?”

“Yes. And not about money. Damn money. I can make all the money we will need; certainly there seems to be no limit to what I can invent on the theme of female sex troubles. I dont mean that, nor Utah either. I mean us. Love, if you will. Because it cant last. There is no place for it in the world today, not even in Utah. We have eliminated it. It took us a long time, but man is resourceful and limitless in inventing too, and so we have got rid of love at last just as we have got rid of Christ. We have radio in the place of God’s voice and instead of having to save emotional currency for months and years to deserve one chance spend it all for love we can now spread it thin into coppers and titillate ourselves at any newsstand, two to the block like sticks of chewing gum or chocolate from the automatic machines.

If Jesus returned today we would have to crucify him quick in our own defense, to justify and preserve the civilization we have worked and suffered and died shrieking and cursing in rage and impotence and terror for two thousand years to create and perfect in man’s own image; if Venus returned she would be a soiled man in a subway lavatory with a palm full of French post-cards—” McCord turned in his chair and beckoned, a single repressed violent gesture. The waiter appeared, McCord pointed to his glass. Presently the waiter’s hand set the refilled glass on the table and withdrew.

“All right,” McCord said. “So what?”

“I was in eclipse. It began that night in New Orleans when I told her I had twelve hundred dollars and it lasted until that night she told me the store would keep her on. I was outside of time. I was still attached to it, supported by it in space as you have been ever since there was a not-you to become you, and will be until there is an end to the not-you by means of which alone you could once have been—that’s the immortality—supported by it but that’s all, just on it, non-conductive, like the sparrow insulated by its own hard non-conductive dead feet from the high-tension line, the current of time that runs through remembering, that exists only in relation to what little of reality (I have learned that too) we know, else there is no such thing as time. You know: I was not.

Then I am, and time begins, retroactive, is was and will be. Then I was and so I am not and so time never existed. It was like the instant of virginity, it was the instant of virginity: that condition, fact, that does not actually exist except during the instant you know you are losing it; it lasted as long as it did because I was too old, I waited too long; twenty-seven is too long to wait to get out of your system what you should have rid yourself of at fourteen or fifteen or maybe even younger—the messy wild hurried fumbling of two panting amateurs beneath the front steps or in an afternoon hayloft.

You remember: the precipice, the dark precipice; all mankind before you went over it and lived and all after you will but that means nothing to you because they cant tell you, forewarn you, what to do in order to survive. It’s the solitude, you see. You must do it in solitude and you can bear just so much solitude and still live, like electricity. And for this one or two seconds you will be absolutely alone: not before you were and not after you are not, because you are never alone then; in either case you are secure and companioned in a myriad and inextricable anonymity: in the one, dust from dust; in the other, seething worms to seething worms. But now you are going to be alone, you must, you know it, it must be, so be it; you herd the beast you have ridden all your life, the old familiar well-broken nag, up to the precipice—”

“There’s the damned horse,” McCord said. “I’ve been waiting for it. After ten minutes we sound like Bit and Spur. We don’t talk, we moralise at each other like two circuit-riding parsons travelling the same country lane.”

“—Maybe you thought all the time that when the moment came you could rein back, save something, maybe not, the instant comes and you know you cannot, know you knew all the time you could not, and you cannot; you are one single abnegant affirmation, one single fluxive Yes out of the terror in which you surrender volition, hope, all—the darkness, the falling, the thunder of solitude, the shock, the death, the moment when, stopped physically by the ponderable clay, you yet feel all your life rush out of you into the pervading immemorial blind receptive matrix, the hot fluid blind foundation—grave-womb or womb-grave, it’s all one.

But you return; maybe you knew that all the time, but you return, maybe you even live out your three score and ten or whatever it is but forever afterward you will know that forever more you have lost some of it, that for that one second or two seconds you were present in space but not in time, that you are not the three score and ten they have credited you with and that you will have to discharge someday to make the books balance, but three score and nine and three hundred and sixty-four and twenty-three and fifty-eight—”

“Sweet Jesus,” McCord said. “Holy choriated cherubim. If I am ever unlucky enough to have a son, I’m going to take him to a nice clean whore-house myself on his tenth birthday.”

“So that’s what happened to me,” Wilbourne said. “I waited too long. What would have been two seconds at fourteen or fifteen was eight months at twenty-seven. I was in eclipse, and we almost scraped bottom on that snow-bound Wisconsin lake with nine dollars and twenty cents’ worth of food between us and starving. I beat that, I thought I did.

I believed I waked up in time and beat that; we came back here and I thought we were going great guns, until that night before Christmas when she told me about the store and I realised what we had got into, that the starving was nothing, it could have done nothing but kill us, while this was worse than death or division even: it was the mausoleum of love, it was the stinking catafalque of the dead corpse borne between the olfactoryless walking shapes of the immortal un sentient demanding ancient meat.” The loudspeaker spoke again; they made to rise at the same time; at the same moment the waiter materialised and McCord paid him. “So I am afraid,” Wilbourne said. “I wasn’t afraid then because I was in eclipse but I am awake now and I can be afraid now, thank God.

Because this Anno Domini 1938 has no place in it for love. They used money against me while I was asleep because I was vulnerable in money. Then I waked up and rectified the money and I thought I had beat Them until that night when I found out They had used respectability on me and that it was harder to beat than money. So I am vulnerable in neither money nor respectability now and so They will have to find something else to force us to conform to the pattern of human life which has now evolved to do without love—to conform, or die.”

They entered the train shed—the cavernous gloom in which the constant electricity which knew no day from night burned wanly on toward the iron winter dawn among wisps of steam, in which the long motionless line of darkened Pullmans seemed to stand knee-deep, bedded and fixed forever in concrete. They passed the soot-dulled steel walls, the serried cubicles filled with snoring, to the open vestibule. “So I am afraid. Because They are smart, shrewd, They will have to be; if They were to let us beat Them, it would be like unchecked murder and robbery. Of course we cant beat Them; we are doomed of course; that’s why I am afraid. And not for me: do you remember that night at the lake when you said I was an old woman being led across the street by a policeman or a boy scout, and that when the drunken car came it would not be the old lady, it would—”

“But why go to Utah in February to beat it? And if you cant beat it, why in hell go to Utah?”

“Because I—” Steam, air, hissed behind them in a long sigh; the porter appeared suddenly from nowhere as the waiter had done.

“All right, gentlemen,” he said. “We’re going.”

Wilbourne and McCord shook hands. “Maybe I’ll write you,” Wilbourne said. “Charlotte probably will, anyway. She’s a better gentleman than I am, too.” He stepped into the vestibule and turned, the porter behind him, his hand on the door knob, waiting; he and McCord looked at each other, the two speeches unspoken between them, each knowing they would not be spoken: I wont see you again and No. You wont see us again. “Because crows and sparrows get shot out of trees or drowned by floods or killed by hurricanes and fires, but not hawks.

And maybe I can be the consort of a falcon, even if I am a sparrow.” The train gathered itself, the first, the beginning of motion, departure came back car by car and passed under his feet. “And something I told myself up there at the lake,” he said. “That there is something in me she is not mistress to but mother. Well, I have gone a step farther.” The train moved, he leaned out, McCord moving too to keep pace with him. “That there is something in me you and she parented between you, that you are father of. Give me your blessing.”

“Take my curse,” McCord said.

Chapter VI Old Man

As the short convict had testified, the tall one, when he returned to the surface, still retained what the short one called the paddle. He clung to it, not instinctively against the time when he would be back inside the boat and would need it, because for a time he did not believe he would

ever regain the skiff or anything else that would support him, but because he did not have time to think about turning it loose.

Things had moved too fast for him. He had not been warned, he had felt the first snatching tug of the current, he had seen the skiff begin to spin and his companion vanish violently upward like in a translation out of Isaiah, then he himself was in the water, struggling against the drag of the paddle which he did not know he still held each time he fought back to the surface and grasped at the spinning skiff which at one instant was ten feet away and the next poised above his head as though about to brain him, until at last he grasped the stern, the drag of his body becoming a rudder to the skiff, the two of them, man and boat and with the paddle perpendicular above them like a jackstaff, vanishing from the view of the short convict (who had vanished from that of the tall one with the same celerity though in a vertical direction) like a tableau snatched offstage intact with violent and incredible speed.

He was now in the channel of a slough, a bayou, in which until today no current had run probably since the old subterranean outrage which had created the country. There was plenty of current in it now though; from his trough behind the stern he seemed to see the trees and sky rushing past with vertiginous speed, looking down at him between the gouts of cold yellow in lugubrious and mournful amazement.

But they were fixed and secure in something; he thought of that, he remembered in an instant of despairing rage the firm earth fixed and founded strong and cemented fast and stable forever by the generations of laborious sweat, somewhere beneath him, beyond the reach of his feet, when, and again without warning, the stern of the skiff struck him a stunning blow across the bridge of his nose. The instinct which had caused him to cling to it now caused him to fling the paddle into the boat in order to grasp the gunwale with both hands just as the skiff pivoted and spun away again. With both hands free he now dragged himself over the stern and lay prone on his face, streaming with blood and water and panting, not with exhaustion but with that furious rage which is terror's aftermath.

But he had to get up at once because he believed he had come much faster (and so farther) than he had. So he rose, out of the watery scarlet puddle in which he had lain, streaming, the soaked denim heavy as iron on his limbs, the black hair plastered to his skull, the blood-infused water streaking his jumper, and dragged his forearm gingerly and hurriedly across his lower face and glanced at it then grasped the paddle and began to try to swing the skiff back upstream.

It did not even occur to him that he did not know where his companion was, in which tree among all which he had passed or might pass. He did not even speculate on that for the reason that he knew so incontestably that the other was upstream from him, and after his recent experience the mere connotation of the term upstream carried a sense of such violence and force and speed that the conception of it as other than a straight line was something which the intelligence, reason, simply refused to harbor, like the notion of a rifle bullet the width of a cotton field.

The bow began to swing back upstream. It turned readily, it outpaced the aghast and outraged instant in which he realised it was swinging far too easily, it had swung on over the arc and lay broadside to the current and began again that vicious spinning while he sat, his teeth bared in his bloody streaming face while his spent arms flailed the impotent paddle at the water, that innocent-appearing medium which at one time had held him in iron-like and shifting convolutions like an anaconda yet which now seemed to offer no more resistance to the thrust of his urge and need than so much air, like air; the boat which had threatened him and at last actually struck him in the face with the shocking violence of a mule's hoof now seemed to poise weightless upon it like a thistle bloom, spinning like a wind vane while he flailed at the water and thought of, envisioned, his companion safe, inactive and at ease in the tree with nothing to do but wait, musing with impotent and terrified fury upon that arbitrariness of human affairs which had abrogated to the one the secure tree and to the other the hysterical and unmanageable boat for the very reason that it knew that he alone

of the two of them would make any attempt to return and rescue his companion.

The skiff had paid off and now ran with the current again. It seemed again to spring from immobility into incredible speed, and he thought he must already be miles away from where his companion had quitted him, though actually he had merely described a big circle since getting back into the skiff, and the object (a clump of cypress trees choked by floating logs and debris) which the skiff was now about to strike was the same one it had careened into before when the stern had struck him.

He didn't know this because he had not yet ever looked higher than the bow of the boat. He didn't look higher now, he just saw that he was going to strike; he seemed to feel run through the very insentient fabric of the skiff a current of eager gleeful vicious incorrigible wilfulness; and he who had never ceased to flail at the bland treacherous water with what he had believed to be the limit of his strength now from somewhere, some ultimate absolute reserve, produced a final measure of endurance, will to endure which adumbrated mere muscle and nerves, continuing to flail the paddle right up to the instant of striking, completing one last reach thrust and recover out of pure desperate reflex, as a man slipping on ice reaches for his hat and money-pocket, as the skiff struck and hurled him once more flat on his face in the bottom of it.

This time he did not get up at once. He lay flat on his face, slightly spread-eagled and in an attitude almost peaceful, a kind of abject meditation. He would have to get up sometime, he knew that, just as all life consists of having to get up sooner or later and then having to lie down again sooner or later after a while. And he was not exactly exhausted and he was not particularly without hope and he did not especially dread getting up. It merely seemed to him that he had accidentally been caught in a situation in which time and environment, not himself, was mesmerised; he was being toyed with by a current of water going nowhere, beneath a day which would wane toward no evening; when it was done with him it would spew him back into the

comparatively safe world he had been snatched violently out of and in the meantime it did not much matter just what he did or did not do.

So he lay on his face, now not only feeling but hearing the strong quiet rustling of the current on the underside of the planks, for a while longer. Then he raised his head and this time touched his palm gingerly to his face and looked at the blood again, then he sat up onto his heels and leaning over the gunwale he pinched his nostrils between thumb and finger and expelled a gout of blood and was in the act of wiping his fingers on his thigh when a voice slightly above his line of sight said quietly, "It's taken you a while," and he who up to this moment had had neither reason nor time to raise his eyes higher than the bows looked up and saw, sitting in a tree and looking at him, a woman. She was not ten feet away.

She sat on the lowest limb of one of the trees holding the jam he had grounded on, in a calico wrapper and an army private's tunic and a sunbonnet, a woman whom he did not even bother to examine since that first startled glance had been ample to reveal to him all the generations of her life and background, who could have been his sister if he had a sister, his wife if he had not entered the penitentiary at an age scarcely out of adolescence and some years younger than that at which even his prolific and monogamous kind married—a woman who sat clutching the trunk of the tree, her stockingless feet in a pair of man's unlaced brogans less than a yard from the water, who was very probably somebody's sister and quite certainly (or certainly should have been) somebody's wife, though this too he had entered the penitentiary too young to have had more than mere theoretical female experience to discover yet. "I thought for a minute you wasn't aiming to come back."

"Come back?"

"After the first time. After you run into this brush pile the first time and got into the boat and went on." He looked about, touching his face tenderly again; it could very well be the same place where the boat had hit him in the face.

“Yah,” he said. “I’m here now though.”

“Could you maybe get the boat a little closer? I taken a right sharp strain getting up here; maybe I better . . .” He was not listening; he had just discovered that the paddle was gone; this time when the skiff hurled him forward he had flung the paddle not into it but beyond it. “It’s right there in them brush tops,” the woman said. “You can get it. Here. Catch a holt of this.” It was a grapevine. It had grown up into the tree and the flood had torn the roots loose. She had taken a turn with it about her upper body; she now loosed it and swung it out until he could grasp it.

Holding to the end of the vine he warped the skiff around the end of the jam, picking up the paddle, and warped the skiff on beneath the limb and held it and now he watched her move, gather herself heavily and carefully to descend—that heaviness which was not painful but just excruciatingly careful, that profound and almost lethargic awkwardness which added nothing to the sum of that first aghast amazement which had served already for the catafalque of invincible dream since even in durance he had continued (and even with the old avidity, even though they had caused his downfall) to consume the impossible pulp-printed fables carefully censored and as carefully smuggled into the penitentiary; and who to say what Helen, what living Garbo, he had not dreamed of rescuing from what craggy pinnacle or dragoned keep when he and his companion embarked in the skiff.

He watched her, he made no further effort to help her beyond holding the skiff savagely steady while she lowered herself from the limb—the entire body, the deformed swell of belly bulging the calico, suspended by its arms, thinking, And this is what I get. This, out of all the female meat that walks, is what I have to be caught in a runaway boat with.

“Where’s that cottonhouse?” he said.

“Cottonhouse?”

“With that fellow on it. The other one.”

“I dont know. It’s a right smart of cottonhouses around here. With folks on them too, I reckon.” She was examining him. “You’re bloody as a hog,” she said. “You look like a convict.”

“Yah,” he said, snarled. “I feel like I done already been hung. Well, I got to pick up my pardner and then find that cottonhouse.” He cast off. That is, he released his hold on the vine. That was all he had to do, for even while the bow of the skiff hung high on the log jam and even while he held it by the vine in the comparatively dead water behind the jam, he felt steadily and constantly the whisper, the strong purring power of the water just one inch beyond the frail planks on which he squatted and which, as soon as he released the vine, took charge of the skiff not with one powerful clutch but in a series of touches light, tentative, and catlike; he realised now that he had entertained a sort of foundationless hope that the added weight might make the skiff more controllable.

During the first moment or two he had a wild (and still foundationless) belief that it had; he had got the head upstream and managed to hold it so by terrific exertion continued even after he discovered that they were travelling straight enough but stern-first and continued somehow even after the bow began to wear away and swing: the old irresistible movement which he knew well by now, too well to fight against it, so that he let the bow swing on downstream with the hope of utilising the skiff’s own momentum to bring it through the full circle and so upstream again, the skiff travelling broadside then bow-first then broadside again, diagonally across the channel, toward the other wall of submerged trees; it began to flee beneath him with terrific speed, they were in an eddy but did not know it; he had no time to draw conclusions or even wonder; he crouched, his teeth bared in his blood-caked and swollen face, his lungs bursting, flailing at the water while the trees stooped hugely down at him.

The skiff struck, spun, struck again; the woman half lay in the bow, clutching the gunwales, as if she were trying to crouch behind her own

pregnancy; he banged now not at the water but at the living sapblooded wood with the paddle, his desire now not to go anywhere, reach any destination, but just to keep the skiff from beating itself to fragments against the tree trunks. Then something exploded, this time against the back of his head, and stooping trees and dizzy water, the woman's face and all, fled together and vanished in bright soundless flash and glare.

An hour later the skiff came slowly up an old logging road and so out of the bottom, the forest, and into (or onto) a cottonfield—a gray and limitless desolation now free of turmoil, broken only by a thin line of telephone poles like a wading millipede. The woman was now paddling, steadily and deliberately, with that curious lethargic care, while the convict squatted, his head between his knees, trying to stanch the fresh and apparently inexhaustible flow of blood from his nose with handfuls of water. The woman ceased paddling, the skiff drifted on, slowing, while she looked about. “We’re done out,” she said.

The convict raised his head and also looked about. “Out where?”

“I thought maybe you might know.”

“I dont even know where I used to be. Even if I knowed which way was north, I wouldn’t know if that was where I wanted to go.” He cupped another handful of water to his face and lowered his hand and regarded the resulting crimson marbling on his palm, not with dejection, not with concern, but with a kind of sardonic and vicious bemusement. The woman watched the back of his head.

“We got to get somewhere.”

“Dont I know it? A fellow on a cottonhouse. Another in a tree. And now that thing in your lap.”

“It wasn’t due yet. Maybe it was having to climb that tree quick yesterday, and having to set in it all night. I’m doing the best I can. But we better get somewhere soon.”

“Yah,” the convict said. “I thought I wanted to get somewhere too and I aint had no luck at it. You pick out a place to get to now and we’ll try yours. Gimme that oar.” The woman passed him the paddle. The boat was a double-ender; he had only to turn around.

“Which way you fixing to go?” the woman said.

“Never you mind that. You just keep on holding on.” He began to paddle, on across the cottonfield. It began to rain again, though not hard at first. “Yah,” he said. “Ask the boat. I been in it since breakfast and I aint never knowed, where I aimed to go or where I was going either.”

That was about one oclock. Toward the end of the afternoon the skiff (they were in a channel of some sort again, they had been in it for some time; they had got into it before they knew it and too late to get out again, granted there had been any reason to get out, as, to the convict anyway, there was certainly none and the fact that their speed had increased again was reason enough to stay in it) shot out upon a broad expanse of debris-filled water which the convict recognised as a river and, from its size, the Yazoo River though it was little enough he had seen of this country which he had not quitted for so much as one single day in the last seven years of his life. What he did not know was that it was now running backward.

So as soon as the drift of the skiff indicated the set of the current, he began to paddle in that direction which he believed to be downstream, where he knew there were towns—Yazoo City, and as a last resort, Vicksburg, if his luck was that bad, if not, smaller towns whose names he did not know but where there would be people, houses, something, anything he might reach and surrender his charge to and turn his back on her forever, on all pregnant and female life forever and return to that monastic existence of shotguns and shackles where he would be secure from it.

Now, with the imminence of habitations, release from her, he did not even hate her. When he looked upon the swelling and unmanageable body before him it seemed to him that it was not the woman at all but rather a separate demanding threatening inert yet living mass of which both he and she were equally victims; thinking, as he had been for the last three or four hours, of that minute's—nay, second's—aberration of eye or hand which would suffice to precipitate her into the water to be dragged down to death by that senseless millstone which in its turn would not even have to feel agony, he no longer felt any glow of revenge toward her as its custodian, he felt sorry for her as he would for the living timber in a barn which had to be burned to rid itself of vermin.

He paddled on, helping the current, steadily and strongly, with a calculated husbandry of effort, toward what he believed was downstream, towns, people, something to stand upon, while from time to time the woman raised herself to bail the accumulated rain from the skiff. It was raining steadily now though still not hard, still without passion, the sky, the day itself dissolving without grief; the skiff moved in a nimbus, an aura of gray gauze which merged almost without demarcation with the roiling spittle-frothed debris-choked water. Now the day, the light, definitely began to end and the convict permitted himself an extra notch or two of effort because it suddenly seemed to him that the speed of the skiff had lessened. This was actually the case though the convict did not know it.

He merely took it as a phenomenon of the increasing obfuscation, or at most as a result of the long day's continuous effort with no food, complicated by the ebbing and fluxing phases of anxiety and impotent rage at his absolutely gratuitous predicament. So he stepped up his stroke a beat or so, not from alarm but on the contrary, since he too had received that lift from the mere presence of a known stream, a river known by its ineradicable name to generations of men who had been drawn to live beside it as man always has been drawn to dwell beside water, even before he had a name for water and fire, drawn to the living water, the course of his destiny and his actual physical appearance rigidly coerced and postulated by it. So he was not

alarmed. He paddled on, upstream without knowing it, unaware that all the water which for forty hours now had been pouring through the levee break to the north was somewhere ahead of him, on its way back to the River.

It was full dark now. That is, night had completely come, the gray dissolving sky had vanished, yet as though in perverse ratio surface visibility had sharpened, as though the light which the rain of the afternoon had washed out of the air had gathered upon the water as the rain itself had done, so that the yellow flood spread on before him now with a quality almost phosphorescent, right up to the instant where vision ceased. The darkness in fact had its advantages; he could now stop seeing the rain. He and his garments had been wet for more than twenty-four hours now so he had long since stopped feeling it, and now that he could no longer see it either it had in a certain sense ceased for him. Also, he now had to make no effort even not to see the swell of his passenger's belly. So he was paddling on, strongly and steadily, not alarmed and not concerned but just exasperated because he had not yet begun to see any reflection on the clouds which would indicate the city or cities which he believed he was approaching but which were actually now miles behind him, when he heard a sound.

He did not know what it was because he had never heard it before and he would never be expected to hear such again since it is not given to every man to hear such at all and to none to hear it more than once in his life. And he was not alarmed now either because there was not time, for although the visibility ahead, for all its clarity, did not extend very far, yet in the next instant to the hearing he was also seeing something such as he had never seen before. This was that the sharp line where the phosphorescent water met the darkness was now about ten feet higher than it had been an instant before and that it was curled forward upon itself like a sheet of dough being rolled out for a pudding. It reared, stooping; the crest of it swirled like the mane of a galloping horse and, phosphorescent too, fretted and flickered like fire.

And while the woman huddled in the bows, aware or not aware the convict did not know which, he (the convict), his swollen and blood-

streaked face gaped in an expression of aghast and incredulous amazement, continued to paddle directly into it. Again he simply had not had time to order his rhythm-hypnotised muscles to cease. He continued to paddle though the skiff had ceased to move forward at all but seemed to be hanging in space while the paddle still reached thrust recovered and reached again; now instead of space the skiff became abruptly surrounded by a welter of fleeing debris—planks, small buildings, the bodies of drowned yet antic animals, entire trees leaping and diving like porpoises above which the skiff seemed to hover in weightless and airy indecision like a bird above a fleeing countryside, undecided where to light or whether to light at all, while the convict squatted in it still going through the motions of paddling, waiting for an opportunity to scream.

He never found it. For an instant the skiff seemed to stand erect on its stern and then shoot scrabbling and scrambling up the curling wall of water like a cat, and soared on above the licking crest itself and hung cradled into the high actual air in the limbs of a tree, from which bower of new-leafed boughs and branches the convict, like a bird in its nest and still waiting his chance to scream and still going through the motions of paddling though he no longer even had the paddle now, looked down upon a world turned to furious motion and in incredible retrograde.

Some time about midnight, accompanied by a rolling cannonade of thunder and lightning like a battery going into action, as though some forty hours' constipation of the elements, the firmament itself, were discharging in clapping and glaring salute to the ultimate acquiescence to desperate and furious motion, and still leading its charging welter of dead cows and mules and outhouses and cabins and hencoops, the skiff passed Vicksburg.

The convict didn't know it. He wasn't looking high enough above the water; he still squatted, clutching the gunwales and glaring at the yellow turmoil about him out of which entire trees, the sharp gables of houses, the long mournful heads of mules which he fended off with a splintered length of plank snatched from he knew not where in passing

(and which seemed to glare reproachfully back at him with sightless eyes, in limber-lipped and incredulous amazement) rolled up and then down again, the skiff now travelling forward now sideways now sternward, sometimes in the water, sometimes riding for yards upon the roofs of houses and trees and even upon the backs of the mules as though even in death they were not to escape that burden-bearing doom with which their eunuch race was cursed.

But he didn't see Vicksburg; the skiff, travelling at express speed, was in a seething gut between soaring and dizzy banks with a glare of light above them but he did not see it; he saw the flotsam ahead of him divide violently and begin to climb upon itself, mounting, and he was sucked through the resulting gap too fast to recognise it as the trestling of a railroad bridge; for a horrible moment the skiff seemed to hang in static indecision before the looming flank of a steamboat as though undecided whether to climb over it or dive under it, then a hard icy wind filled with the smell and taste and sense of wet and boundless desolation blew upon him; the skiff made one long bounding lunge as the convict's native state, in a final paroxysm, regurgitated him onto the wild bosom of the Father of Waters.

This is how he told about it seven weeks later, sitting in new bedticking garments, shaved and with his hair cut again, on his bunk in the barracks:

During the next three or four hours after the thunder and lightning had spent itself the skiff ran in pitch streaming darkness upon a roiling expanse which, even if he could have seen, apparently had no boundaries. Wild and invisible, it tossed and heaved about and beneath the boat, ridged with dirty phosphorescent foam and filled with a debris of destruction—objects nameless and enormous and invisible which struck and slashed at the skiff and whirled on. He did not know he was now upon the River. At that time he would have refused to believe it, even if he had known. Yesterday he had known he was in a channel by the regularity of the spacing between the bordering trees.

Now, since even by daylight he could have seen no boundaries, the last place under the sun (or the streaming sky rather) he would have suspected himself to be would have been a river; if he had pondered at all about his present whereabouts, about the geography beneath him, he would merely have taken himself to be travelling at dizzy and inexplicable speed above the largest cottonfield in the world; if he who yesterday had known he was in a river, had accepted that fact in good faith and earnest, then had seen that river turn without warning and rush back upon him with furious and deadly intent like a frenzied stallion in a lane—if he had suspected for one second that the wild and limitless expanse on which he now found himself was a river, consciousness would simply have refused; he would have fainted.

When daylight—a gray and ragged dawn filled with driving scud between icy rain-squalls—came and he could see again, he knew he was in no cottonfield. He knew that the wild water on which the skiff tossed and fled flowed above no soil tamely trod by man, behind the straining and surging buttocks of a mule. That was when it occurred to him that its present condition was no phenomenon of a decade, but that the intervening years during which it consented to bear upon its placid and sleepy bosom the frail mechanicals of man's clumsy contriving was the phenomenon and this the norm and the river was now doing what it liked to do, had waited patiently the ten years in order to do, as a mule will work for you ten years for the privilege of kicking you once.

And he also learned something else about fear too, something he had even failed to discover on that other occasion when he was really afraid—that three or four seconds of that night in his youth while he looked down the twice-flashing pistol barrel of the terrified mail clerk before the clerk could be persuaded that his (the convict's) pistol would not shoot: that if you just held on long enough a time would come in fear after which it would no longer be agony at all but merely a kind of horrible outrageous itching, as after you have been burned bad.

He did not have to paddle now, he just steered (who had been without food for twenty-four hours now and without any sleep to speak of for

fifty) while the skiff sped on across that boiling desolation where he had long since begun to not dare believe he could possibly be where he could not doubt he was, trying with his fragment of splintered plank merely to keep the skiff intact and afloat among the houses and trees and dead animals (the entire towns, stores, residences, parks and farmyards, which leaped and played about him like fish), not trying to reach any destination, just trying to keep the skiff afloat until he did. He wanted so little. He wanted nothing for himself. He just wanted to get rid of the woman, the belly, and he was trying to do that in the right way, not for himself, but for her. He could have put her back into another tree at any time—

“Or you could have jumped out of the boat and let her and it drown,” the plump convict said. “Then they could have given you the ten years for escaping and then hung you for the murder and charged the boat to your folks.”

“Yah,” the tall convict said.—But he had not done that. He wanted to do it the right way, find somebody, anybody he could surrender her to, something solid he could set her down on and then jump back into the river, if that would please anyone. That was all he wanted—just to come to something, anything. That didn’t seem like a great deal to ask. And he couldn’t do it. He told how the skiff fled on—

“Didn’t you pass nobody?” the plump convict said. “No steamboat, nothing?”

“I dont know,” the tall one said.—while he tried merely to keep it afloat, until the darkness thinned and lifted and revealed—

“Darkness?” the plump convict said. “I thought you said it was already daylight.”

“Yah,” the tall one said. He was rolling a cigarette, pouring the tobacco carefully from a new sack, into the creased paper. “This was another one. They had several while I was gone.”—the skiff to be moving still rapidly up a winding corridor bordered by drowned trees which the

convict recognised again to be a river running again in the direction that, until two days ago, had been upstream. He was not exactly warned through instinct that this one, like that of two days ago, was in reverse. He would not say that he now believed himself to be in the same river, though he would not have been surprised to find that he did believe this, existing now, as he did and had and apparently was to continue for an unnamed period, in a state in which he was toy and pawn on a vicious and inflammable geography.

He merely realised that he was in a river again, with all the subsequent inferences of a comprehensible, even if not familiar, portion of the earth's surface. Now he believed that all he had to do would be to paddle far enough and he would come to something horizontal and above water even if not dry and perhaps even populated; and, if fast enough, in time, and that his only other crying urgency was to refrain from looking at the woman who, as vision, the incontrovertible and apparently inescapable presence of his passenger, returned with dawn, had ceased to be a human being and (you could add twenty-four more hours to the first twenty-four and the first fifty now, even counting the hen.

It was dead, drowned, caught by one wing under a shingle on a roof which had rolled momentarily up beside the skiff yesterday and he had eaten some of it raw though the woman would not) had become instead one single inert monstrous sentient womb from which, he now believed, if he could only turn his gaze away and keep it away, would disappear, and if he could only keep his gaze from pausing again at the spot it had occupied, would not return. That's what he was doing this time when he discovered the wave was coming.

He didn't know how he discovered it was coming back. He heard no sound, it was nothing felt nor seen. He did not even believe that finding the skiff to be now in slack water—that is, that the motion of the current which, whether right or wrong, had at least been horizontal, had now stopped that and assumed a vertical direction—was sufficient to warn him. Perhaps it was just an invincible and almost fanatic faith in the inventiveness and innate viciousness of that medium on which his

destiny was now cast, apparently forever; a sudden conviction far beyond either horror or surprise that now was none too soon for it to prepare to do whatever it was it intended doing. So he whirled the skiff, spun it on its heel like a running horse, whereupon, reversed, he could not even distinguish the very channel he had come up.

He did not know whether he simply could not see it or if it had vanished some time ago and he not aware at the time; whether the river had become lost in a drowned world or if the world had become drowned in one limitless river. So now he could not tell if he were running directly before the wave or quartering across its line of charge; all he could do was keep that sense of swiftly accumulating ferocity behind him and paddle as fast as his spent and now numb muscles could be driven, and try not to look at the woman, to wrench his gaze from her and keep it away until he reached something flat and above water.

So, gaunt, hollow-eyed, striving and wrenching almost physically at his eyes as if they were two of those suction-tipped rubber arrows shot from the toy gun of a child, his spent muscles obeying not will now but that attenuation beyond mere exhaustion which, mesmeric, can continue easier than cease, he once more drove the skiff full-tilt into something it could not pass and, once more hurled violently forward onto his hands and knees, crouching, he glared with his wild swollen face up at the man with the shotgun and said in a harsh, croaking voice: "Vicksburg? Where's Vicksburg?"

Even when he tried to tell it, even after the seven weeks and he safe, secure, riveted warranted and doubly guaranteed by the ten years they had added to his sentence for attempted escape, something of the old hysteric incredulous outrage came back into his face, his voice, his speech.

He never did even get on the other boat. He told how he clung to a strake (it was a dirty unpainted shanty boat with a drunken rake of tin stove pipe, it had been moving when he struck it and apparently it had not even changed course even though the three people on it must have been watching him all the while—a second man, barefoot and with

matted hair and beard also at the steering sweep, and then—he did not know how long—a woman leaning in the door, in a filthy assortment of men’s garments, watching him too with the same cold speculation) being dragged violently along, trying to state and explain his simple (and to him at least) reasonable desire and need; telling it, trying to tell it, he could feel again the old unforgettable affronting like an ague fit as he watched the abortive tobacco rain steadily and faintly from between his shaking hands and then the paper itself part with a thin dry snapping report:

“Burn my clothes?” the convict cried. “Burn them?”

“How in hell do you expect to escape in them billboards?” the man with the shotgun said. He (the convict) tried to tell it, tried to explain as he had tried to explain not to the three people on the boat alone but to the entire circumambience—desolate water and forlorn trees and sky—not for justification because he needed none and knew that his hearers, the other convicts, required none from him, but rather as, on the point of exhaustion, he might have picked dreamily and incredulously at a suffocation. He told the man with the gun how he and his partner had been given the boat and told to pick up a man and a woman, how he had lost his partner and failed to find the man, and now all in the world he wanted was something flat to leave the woman on until he could find an officer, a sheriff.

He thought of home, the place where he had lived almost since childhood, his friends of years whose ways he knew and who knew his ways, the familiar fields where he did work he had learned to do well and to like, the mules with characters he knew and respected as he knew and respected the characters of certain men; he thought of the barracks at night, with screens against the bugs in summer and good stoves in winter and someone to supply the fuel and the food too; the Sunday ball games and the picture shows—things which, with the exception of the ball games, he had never known before. But most of all, his own character (Two years ago they had offered to make a trusty of him. He would no longer need to plow or feed stock, he would only

follow those who did with a loaded gun, but he declined. "I reckon I'll stick to plowing," he said, absolutely without humor.

"I done already tried to use a gun one time too many.") his good name, his responsibility not only toward those who were responsible toward him but to himself, his own honor in the doing of what was asked of him, his pride in being able to do it, no matter what it was. He thought of this and listened to the man with the gun talking about escape and it seemed to him that, hanging there, being dragged violently along (it was here he said that he first noticed the goats' beards of moss in the trees, though it could have been there for several days so far as he knew. It just happened that he first noticed it here.) that he would simply burst.

"Cant you get it into your head that the last thing I want to do is run away?" he cried. "You can set there with that gun and watch me; I give you fair lief. All I want is to put this woman—"

"And I told you she could come aboard," the man with the gun said in his level voice. "But there aint no room on no boat of mine for nobody hunting a sheriff in no kind of clothes, let alone a penitentiary suit."

"When he steps aboard, knock him in the head with the gun barrel," the man at the sweep said. "He's drunk."

"He aint coming aboard," the man with the gun said. "He's crazy."

Then the woman spoke. She didn't move, leaning in the door, in a pair of faded and patched and filthy overalls like the two men: "Give them some grub and tell them to get out of here." She moved, she crossed the deck and looked down at the convict's companion with her cold sullen face. "How much more time have you got?"

"It wasn't due till next month," the woman in the boat said. "But I—" The woman in overalls turned to the man with the gun.

“Give them some grub,” she said. But the man with the gun was still looking down at the woman in the boat.

“Come on,” he said to the convict. “Put her aboard, and beat it.”

“And what’ll happen to you,” the woman in overalls said, “when you try to turn her over to an officer. When you lay alongside a sheriff and the sheriff asks you who you are?” Still the man with the gun didn’t even look at her. He hardly even shifted the gun across his arm as he struck the woman across the face with the back of his other hand, hard. “You son of a bitch,” she said. Still the man with the gun did not even look at her.

“Well?” he said to the convict.

“Dont you see I cant?” the convict cried. “Cant you see that?”

Now, he said, he gave up. He was doomed. That is, he knew now that he had been doomed from the very start never to get rid of her, just as the ones who sent him out with the skiff knew that he never would actually give up; when he recognised one of the objects which the woman in overalls was hurling into the skiff to be a can of condensed milk, he believed it to be a presage, gratuitous and irrevocable as a death-notice over the telegraph, that he was not even to find a flat stationary surface in time for the child to be born on it.

So he told how he held the skiff alongside the shanty boat while the first tentative toying of the second wave made up beneath him, while the woman in overalls passed back and forth between house and rail, flinging the food—the hunk of salt meat, the ragged and filthy quilt, the scorched lumps of cold bread which she poured into the skiff from a heaped dishpan like so much garbage—while he clung to the strake against the mounting pull of the current, the new wave which for the moment he had forgotten because he was still trying to state the incredible simplicity of his desire and need until the man with the gun (the only one of the three who wore shoes) began to stamp at his hands, he snatching his hands away one at a time to avoid the heavy

shoes, then grasping the rail again until the man with the gun kicked at his face, he flinging himself sideways to avoid the shoe and so breaking his hold on the rail, his weight canting the skiff off at a tangent on the increasing current so that it began to leave the shanty boat behind and he paddling again now, violently, as a man hurries toward the precipice for which he knows at last he is doomed, looking back at the other boat, the three faces sullen derisive and grim and rapidly diminishing across the widening water and at last, apoplectic, suffocating with the intolerable fact not that he had been refused but that he had been refused so little, had wanted so little, asked for so little, yet there had been demanded of him in return the one price out of all breath which (they must have known) if he could have paid it, he would not have been where he was, asking what he asked, raising the paddle and shaking it and screaming curses back at them even after the shotgun flashed and the charge went scuttering past along the water to one side.

So he hung there, he said, shaking the paddle and howling, when suddenly he remembered that other wave, the second wall of water full of houses and dead mules building up behind him back in the swamp. So he quit yelling then and went back to paddling. He was not trying to outrun it. He just knew from experience that when it overtook him, he would have to travel in the same direction it was moving in anyway, whether he wanted to or not, and when it did overtake him, he would begin to move too fast to stop, no matter what places he might come to where he could leave the woman, land her in time. Time: that was his itch now, so his only chance was to stay ahead of it as long as he could and hope to reach something before it struck.

So he went on, driving the skiff with muscles which had been too tired so long they had quit feeling it, as when a man has had bad luck for so long that he ceases to believe it is even bad, let alone luck. Even when he ate—the scorched lumps the size of baseballs and the weight and durability of cannel coal even after having lain in the skiff's bilge where the shanty boat woman had thrown them—the iron-like lead-heavy objects which no man would have called bread outside of the crusted

and scorched pan in which they had cooked—it was with one hand, begrudging even that from the paddle.

He tried to tell that too—that day while the skiff fled on among the bearded trees while every now and then small quiet tentative exploratory feelers would come up from the wave behind and toy for a moment at the skiff, light and curious, then go on with a faint hissing sighing, almost a chuckling, sound, the skiff going on, driving on with nothing to see but trees and water and solitude: until after a while it no longer seemed to him that he was trying to put space and distance behind him or shorten space and distance ahead but that both he and the wave were now hanging suspended simultaneous and unprogressing in pure time, upon a dreamy desolation in which he paddled on not from any hope even to reach anything at all but merely to keep intact what little of distance the length of the skiff provided between himself and the inert and inescapable mass of female meat before him; then night and the skiff rushing on, fast since any speed over anything unknown and invisible is too fast, with nothing before him and behind him the outrageous idea of a volume of moving water toppling forward, its crest frothed and shredded like fangs, and then dawn again (another of those dreamlike alterations day to dark then back to day again with that quality truncated, anachronic and unreal as the waxing and waning of lights in a theatre scene) and the skiff emerging now with the woman no longer supine beneath the shrunken soaked private's coat but sitting bolt upright, gripping the gunwales with both hands, her eyes closed and her lower lip caught between her teeth and he driving the splintered board furiously now, glaring at her out of his wild swollen sleepless face and crying, croaking, "Hold on! For God's sake hold on!"

"I'm trying to," she said. "But hurry! Hurry!" He told it, the unbelievable: hurry, hasten: the man falling from a cliff being told to catch onto something and save himself; the very telling of it emerging shadowy and burlesque, ludicrous, comic and mad, from the age of unbearable forgetting with a quality more dreamily furious than any fable behind proscenium lights:

He was in a basin now—"A basin?" the plump convict said. "That's what you wash in."

"All right," the tall one said, harshly, above his hands. "I did." With a supreme effort he stilled them long enough to release the two bits of cigarette paper and watched them waft in light fluttering indecision to the floor between his feet, holding his hands motionless even for a moment longer—a basin, a broad peaceful yellow sea which had an abruptly and curiously ordered air, giving him, even at that moment, the impression that it was accustomed to water even if not total submersion; he even remembered the name of it, told to him two or three weeks later by someone: Atchafalaya—

"Louisiana?" the plump convict said. "You mean you were clean out of Mississippi? Hell fire." He stared at the tall one. "Shucks," he said. "That aint but just across from Vicksburg."

"They never named any Vicksburg across from where I was," the tall one said. "It was Baton Rouge they named." And now he began to talk about a town, a little neat white portrait town nestling among enormous very green trees, appearing suddenly in the telling as it probably appeared in actuality, abrupt and airy and miragelike and incredibly serene before him behind a scattering of boats moored to a line of freight cars standing flush to the doors in water. And now he tried to tell that too: how he stood waist-deep in water for a moment looking back and down at the skiff in which the woman half lay, her eyes still closed, her knuckles white on the gunwales and a tiny thread of blood creeping down her chin from her chewed lip, and he looking down at her in a kind of furious desperation.

"How far will I have to walk?" she said.

"I dont know, I tell you!" he cried. "But it's land somewhere yonder! It's land, houses."

"If I try to move, it wont even be born inside a boat," she said. "You'll have to get closer."

“Yes,” he cried, wild, desperate, incredulous. “Wait. I’ll go and surrender, then they will have—” He didn’t finish, wait to finish; he told that too: himself splashing, stumbling, trying to run, sobbing and gasping; now he saw it—another loading platform standing above the yellow flood, the khaki figures on it as before, identical, the same; he said how the intervening days since that first innocent morning telescoped, vanished as if they had never been, the two contiguous succeeding instants (succeeding? simultaneous) and he transported across no intervening space but merely turned in his own footsteps, plunging, splashing, his arms raised, croaking harshly. He heard the startled shout, “There’s one of them!”, the command, the clash of equipment, the alarmed cry: “There he goes! There he goes!”

“Yes!” he cried, running, plunging, “here I am! Here! Here!” running on, into the first scattered volley, stopping among the bullets, waving his arms, shrieking, “I want to surrender! I want to surrender!” watching not in terror but in amazed and absolutely unbearable outrage as a squatting clump of the khaki figures parted and he saw the machine gun, the blunt thick muzzle slant and drop and probe toward him and he still screaming in his hoarse crow’s voice, “I want to surrender! Cant you hear me?” continuing to scream even as he whirled and plunged splashing, ducking, went completely under and heard the bullets going thuck-thuck-thuck on the water above him and he scrabbling still on the bottom, still trying to scream even before he regained his feet and still all submerged save his plunging unmistakable buttocks, the outraged screaming bubbling from his mouth and about his face since he merely wanted to surrender.

Then he was comparatively screened, out of range, though not for long. That is (he didn’t tell how nor where) there was a moment in which he paused, breathed for a second before running again, the course back to the skiff open for the time being though he could still hear the shouts behind him and now and then a shot, and he panting, sobbing, a long savage tear in the flesh of one hand, got when and how he did not know, and he wasting precious breath, speaking to no one now any more than the scream of the dying rabbit is addressed to any mortal

ear but rather an indictment of all breath and its folly and suffering, its infinite capacity for folly and pain, which seems to be its only immortality: "All in the world I want is just to surrender."

He returned to the skiff and got in and took up his splintered plank. And now when he told this, despite the fury of element which climaxed it, it (the telling) became quite simple; he now even creased another cigarette paper between fingers which did not tremble at all and filled the paper from the tobacco-sack without spilling a flake, as though he had passed from the machine gun's barrage into a bourne beyond any more amazement: so that the subsequent part of his narrative seemed to reach his listeners as though from beyond a sheet of slightly milky though still transparent glass, as something not heard but seen—a series of shadows, edgeless yet distinct, and smoothly flowing, logical and unfrantic and making no sound: They were in the skiff, in the center of the broad placid trough which had no boundaries and down which the tiny forlorn skiff flew to the irresistible coercion of a current going once more he knew not where, the neat small liveoak-bowered towns unattainable and miragelike and apparently attached to nothing upon the airy and unchanging horizon. He did not believe them, they did not matter, he was doomed; they were less than the figments of smoke or of delirium, and he driving his unceasing paddle without destination or even hope now, looking now and then at the woman sitting with her knees drawn up and locked and her entire body one terrific clench while the threads of bloody saliva crept from her teeth-clenched lower lip. He was going nowhere and fleeing from nothing, he merely continued to paddle because he had paddled so long now that he believed if he stopped his muscles would scream in agony.

So when it happened he was not surprised. He heard the sound which he knew well (he had heard it but once before, true enough, but no man needed hear it but once) and he had been expecting it; he looked back, still driving the paddle, and saw it, curled, crested with its strawlike flotsam of trees and debris and dead beasts and he glared over his shoulder at it for a full minute out of that attenuation far beyond the point of outrage where even suffering, the capability of being further affronted, had ceased, from which he now

contemplated with savage and invulnerable curiosity the further extent to which his now anesthetised nerves could bear, what next could be invented for them to bear, until the wave actually began to rear above his head into its thunderous climax. Then only did he turn his head. His stroke did not falter, it neither slowed nor increased; still paddling with that spent hypnotic steadiness, he saw the swimming deer.

He did not know what it was nor that he had altered the skiff's course to follow it, he just watched the swimming head before him as the wave boiled down and the skiff rose bodily in the old familiar fashion on a welter of tossing trees and houses and bridges and fences, he still paddling even while the paddle found no purchase save air and still paddled even as he and the deer shot forward side by side at arm's length, he watching the deer now, watching the deer begin to rise out of the water bodily until it was actually running along upon the surface, rising still, soaring clear of the water altogether, vanishing upward in a dying crescendo of splashings and snapping branches, its damp scut flashing upward, the entire animal vanishing upward as smoke vanishes.

And now the skiff struck and canted and he was out of it too, standing knee-deep, springing out and falling to his knees, scrambling up, glaring after the vanished deer. "Land!" he croaked. "Land! Hold on! Just hold on!" He caught the woman beneath the arms, dragging her out of the boat, plunging and panting after the vanished deer. Now earth actually appeared—an acclivity smooth and swift and steep, bizarre, solid and unbelievable; an Indian mound, and he plunging at the muddy slope, slipping back, the woman struggling in his muddy hands.

"Let me down!" she cried. "Let me down!" But he held her, panting, sobbing, and rushed again at the muddy slope; he had almost reached the flat crest with his now violently unmanageable burden when a stick under his foot gathered itself with thick convulsive speed. It was a snake, he thought as his feet fled beneath him and with the indubitable last of his strength he half pushed and half flung the woman up the bank as he shot feet first and face down back into that medium upon which he had lived for more days and nights than he could remember

and from which he himself had never, completely emerged, as if his own failed and spent flesh were attempting to carry out his furious unflagging will for severance at any price, even that of drowning, from the burden with which, unwitting and without choice, he had been doomed. Later it seemed to him that he had carried back beneath the surface with him the sound of the infant's first mewling cry.

Chapter VII The Wild Palms

Neither the manager of the mine nor his wife met them—a couple even less old though considerably harder, in the face at least, than Charlotte and Wilbourne. Their name was Buckner, they called each other Buck and Bill. “Only the name is Billie, i.e.,” Mrs. Buckner said in a harsh Western voice. “I’m from Colorado” (she pronounced the a like in radish). “Buck’s from Wyoming.”

“It’s a perfect whore’s name, isn’t it?” Charlotte said pleasantly.

“Just what do you mean by that?”

“That’s all. I didn’t mean to offend. It would be a good whore. That’s what I would try to be.”

Mrs. Buckner looked at her. (This was while Buckner and Wilbourne were up at the commissary, getting the blankets and the sheep coats and woollen underwear and socks.) “You and him aint married, are you?”

“What made you think that?”

“I dont know. You can just tell somehow.”

“No, we’re not. I hope you dont mind, since we’re going to live in the same house together.”

“Why should I? Me and Buck wasn’t married for a while either. But we are now all right.” Her voice was not triumphant, it was smug. “And I’ve

got it put away good too. Even Buck dont know where. Not that that would make any difference. Buck's all right. But it dont do a girl any harm to be safe."

"What put away?"

"The paper. The license." Later (she was cooking the evening meal now and Wilbourne and Buckner were still across the canyon at the mine) she said, "Make him marry you."

"Maybe I will," Charlotte said.

"You make him. It's better that way. Especially when you get jammed."

"Are you jammed?"

"Yes. About a month."

In fact, when the ore train—a dummy engine with neither head nor rear and three cars and a cubicle of caboose containing mostly stove—reached the snow-choked railhead there was no one in sight at all save a grimed giant upon whom they had apparently come by complete surprise, in a grimed sheep-lined coat, with pale eyes which looked as if he had not slept much lately in a grimed face which obviously had not been shaved and doubtless not been washed in some time—a Pole, with an air fierce proud and wild and a little hysterical, who spoke no English, jabbering, gesturing violently toward the opposite wall of the canyon where a half dozen houses made mostly of sheet iron and window-deep in drifts, clung. The canyon was not wide, it was a ditch, a gutter, it soared, swooping, the pristine snow scarred and blemished by and dwarfing the shaft entrance, the refuse dump, the few buildings; beyond the canyon rims the actual unassailable peaks rose, cloud-ravelled in some incredible wind, on the dirty sky. "It will be beautiful in the spring," Charlotte said.

"It had better be," Wilbourne said.

“It will be. It is now. But let’s go somewhere. I’m going to freeze in a minute.”

Again Wilbourne tried the Pole. “Manager,” he said. “Which house?”

“Yah; boss,” the Pole said. He flung his hand again toward the opposite canyon wall, he moved with incredible speed for all his size and, Charlotte starting momentarily back before she caught herself, he pointed at her thin slippers in the trodden ankle-deep snow then took both lapels of her coat in his grimed hands and drew them about her throat and face with almost a woman’s gentleness, the pale eyes stooping at her with an expression at once fierce, wild and tender; he shoved her forward, patting her back, he actually gave her a definite hard slap on the bottom. “Ron,” he said. “Ron.”

Then they saw and entered the path crossing the narrow valley. That is, it was not exactly a path free of snow or snow-packed by feet, it was merely that here the snow level was lower, the width of a single man between the two snow banks and so protected somewhat from the wind. “Maybe he lives in the mine and only comes home over the week-end,” Charlotte said.

“But he’s got a wife, they told me. What would she do?”

“Maybe the ore train just comes once a week too.”

“You must not have seen the engineer.”

“We haven’t seen his wife, either,” she said. She made a sound of disgust. “That wasn’t even funny. Excuse me, Wilbourne.”

“I do.”

“Excuse me, mountains. Excuse me, snow. I think I’m going to freeze.”

“She wasn’t there this morning, anyway,” Wilbourne said. Nor was the manager at the mine. They chose a house, not at random and not

because it was the largest, which it was not, and not even because there was a thermometer (it registered fourteen degrees above zero) beside the door, but simply because it was the first house they came to and now they had both become profoundly and ineradicably intimate with cold for the first time in their lives, a cold which left an ineffaceable and unforgettable mark somewhere on the spirit and memory like first sex experience or the experience of taking human life. Wilbourne knocked once at this door with a hand which could not even feel the wood and did not wait for an answer, opening it and thrusting Charlotte ahead of him into a single room where a man and a woman, sitting identical in woolen shirts and jeans pants and shoeless woollen socks on either side of a dog-eared pack of cards laid out for a game of some sort on a plank across a nail keg, looked up at them in amazement.

“You mean he sent you out here? Callaghan himself?” Buckner said.

“Yes,” Wilbourne said. He could hear Charlotte and Mrs. Buckner where Charlotte stood over the heater about ten feet away (it burned gasoline; when a match was struck to it, which happened only when they had to turn it off to refill the tank, since it burned otherwise all the time, night and day, it took fire with a bang and glare which after a while even Wilbourne got used to and no longer clapped his mouth shut just before his heart jumped out) talking: “Is them all the clothes you brought out here? You’ll freeze. Buck’ll have to go to the commissary.” — “Yes,” Wilbourne said. “Why? Who else would send me?”

“You—ah—you didn’t bring anything? Letter or nothing?”

“No. He said I wouldn’t—”

“Oh, I see. You paid your own way. Railroad fare.”

“No. He paid it.”

“Well, I’ll be damned,” Buckner said. He turned his head toward his wife. “You hear that, Bill?”

“What?” Wilbourne said. “What’s wrong?”

“Never mind now,” Buckner said. “We’ll go up to the commissary and get you fixed up for sleeping, and some warmer clothes than them you’ve got. He didn’t even tell you to buy yourself a couple of Roebuck sheep coats, did he?”

“No,” Wilbourne said. “But let me get warm first.”

“You wont never get warm out here,” Buckner said. “If you sit over a stove trying to, waiting to, you wont ever move. You’ll starve, you wont even get up to fill the stove tank when it burns out. The thing is, to make up your mind you will always be a little cold even in bed and just go on about your business and after a while you will get used to it and forget it and then you wont even notice you are cold because you will have forgotten what being warm was ever like. So come on now. You can take my coat.”

“What will you do?”

“It aint far. I have a sweater. Carrying the stuff will warm us up some.”

The commissary was another iron single room filled with the iron cold and lighted by the hushed iron glare of the snow beyond a single window. The cold in it was a dead cold. It was like aspic, almost solid to move through, the body reluctant as though, and with justice, more than to breathe, live, was too much to ask of it. On either side rose wooden shelves, gloomy and barren save for the lower ones, as if this room too were a thermometer not to measure cold but moribundity, an incontrovertible centigrade (We should have brought the Bad Smell, Wilbourne was already thinking), a contracting mercury of sham which was not even grandiose. They hauled down the blankets, the sheep coats and woollens and galoshes; they felt like ice, like iron, stiff;

carrying them back to the cabin Wilbourne's lungs (he had forgot the altitude) labored at the rigid air which felt like fire in them.

"So you're a doctor," Buckner said.

"I'm the doctor," Wilbourne said. They were outside now. Buckner locked the door again. Wilbourne looked out across the canyon, toward the opposite wall with its tiny lifeless scar of mine entrance and refuse dump. "Just what's wrong here?"

"I'll show you after a while. Are you a doctor?"

Now Wilbourne looked at him. "I just told you I was. What do you mean?"

"Then I guess you've got something to show it. Degree: what do they call them?"

Wilbourne looked at him. "Just what are you getting at? Am I to be responsible to you for my capabilities, or to the man who is paying my salary?"

"Salary?" Buckner laughed harshly. Then he stopped. "I guess I am going about this wrong. I never aimed to rub your fur crossways. When a man comes into my country and you offer him a job and he claims he can ride, we want proof that he can and he wouldn't get mad when we asked him for it. We would even furnish him a horse to prove it on, only it wouldn't be the best horse we had and if we never had but one horse and it would be a good horse, it wouldn't be that one. So we wouldn't have a horse for him to prove it on and we would have to ask him. That's what I'm doing now." He looked at Wilbourne, sober and intent, out of hazel eyes in a gaunt face like raw beef muscle.

"Oh," Wilbourne said. "I see. I have a degree from a pretty fair medical school. I had almost finished my course in a well-known hospital. Then I would have been—known, anyway; that is, they would have admitted

publicly that I knew—about what any doctor knows, and more than some probably. Or at least I hope so. Does that satisfy you?”

“Yes,” Buckner said. “That’s all right.” He turned and went on. “You wanted to know what’s wrong here. We’ll leave these things at the cabin and go over to the shaft and I’ll show you.” They left the blankets and woollens at the cabin and crossed the canyon, the path which was no path just as the commissary had not been a commissary but a sort of inscrutable signpost like a code word set beside a road.

“That ore train we came up on,” Wilbourne said. “What was in it when it went down to the valley?”

“Oh, it was loaded,” Buckner said. “It has to get there loaded. Leave here loaded, anyway. I see to that. I don’t want my throat cut until I know it.”

“Loaded with what?”

“Ah,” Buckner said. The mine was not a shaft, it was a gallery pitching at once straight back into the bowels of the rock—a round tube like the muzzle of a howitzer, shored with timbers and filled with the dying snow-glare as they advanced, and the same dead aspic-like cold that was in the commissary and lined by two light-gauge rails along which as they entered (they stepped quickly aside for it or they would have been run down) came a filled ore tram pushed by a running man whom Wilbourne recognised also to be a Pole though shorter, thicker, squatter (he was to realise later that none of them were the giants they seemed, that the illusion of size was an aura, an emanation of that wild childlike innocence and credulity which they possessed in common)—the same pale eyes, the same grimed unshaven face above the same filthy sheep-lined coat.

“I thought—” Wilbourne began. But he did not say it. They went on; the last glare of the snow faded and now they entered a scene like something out of an Eisenstein Dante. The gallery became a small amphitheatre, branching off in smaller galleries like the spread fingers

from a palm, lighted by an incredible extravagance of electricity as though for a festival—an extravagance of dirty bulbs which had, though in inverse ratio, that same air of sham and moribundity which the big, almost barren building labeled Commissary in tremendous new letters had—in the light from which still more of the grimed, giant-seeming men in sheep coats and with eyes which had not slept much lately worked with picks and shovels with that same frenzy of the man running behind the loaded tram, with shouts and ejaculations in that tongue which Wilbourne could not understand almost exactly like a college baseball team cheering one another on, while from the smaller galleries which they had not penetrated yet and where still more electric bulbs glared in the dust-laden and icy air came either echoes or the cries of still other men, meaningless and weird, filling the heavy air like blind erratic birds. “He told me you had Chinese and Italians too,” Wilbourne said.

“Yah,” Buckner said. “They left. The chinks left in October. I waked up one morning and they were gone. All of them. They walked down, I guess. With their shirt tails hanging out and in them straw slippers. But then there wasn’t much snow in October. Not all the way down, anyhow. They smelled it. The wops—”

“Smelled it?”

“There hasn’t been a payroll in here since September.”

“Oh,” Wilbourne said. “I see now. Yes. So they smelled it. Like niggers do.”

“I dont know. I never had any smokes here. The wops made a little more noise. They struck, all proper. Threw down their picks and shovels and walked out. There was a—what do you call it? deputation?—waited on me. Considerable talk, all pretty loud, and a lot of hands, the women standing outside in the snow, holding up the babies for me to look at. So I opened the commissary and gave them all a woollen shirt apiece, men, women and children (you should have seen them, the kids in a man’s shirt, the ones that were just big enough to walk I mean.

They wore them outside like overcoats.) and a can of beans apiece and sent them out on the ore train. There was still a considerable hands, fists now, and I could hear them for a good while after the train was out of sight. Going down Hogben (he runs the ore train; the railroad pays him) just uses the engine to brake with, so it dont make much fuss. Not as much as they did, anyway. But the hunkies stayed.”

“Why? Didn’t they—”

“Find out that everything had blew? They dont understand good. Oh, they could hear all right; the wops could talk to them: one of the wops was the interpreter for them. But they are queer people; they dont understand dishonesty. I guess when the wops tried to tell them, it just didn’t make sense, that a man could let folks keep on working without intending to pay them. So now they think they are making overtime. Doing all the work. They are not trammers or miners either, they are blasters. There’s something about a hunky that likes dynamite. Maybe it’s the noise. But now they are doing it all. They wanted to put their women in here too. I understood that after a while and stopped it. That’s why they dont sleep much.

They think that when the money comes tomorrow, they’ll get all of it. They probably think now you brought it and that Saturday night they’ll all get thousands of dollars apiece. They’re like kids. They will believe anything. That’s why when they find out you have kidded them, they kill you. Oh, not with a knife in the back and not even with a knife, they walk right up to you and stick the stick of dynamite into your pocket and hold you with one hand while they strike the match to the fuse with the other.”

“And you haven’t told them?”

“Told them how? I cant talk to them; the interpreter was one of the wops. Besides, he’s got to keep his mine looking like it’s running and that’s what I am supposed to do. So he can keep on selling the stock. That’s why you are here—a doctor. When he told you there wouldn’t be any medical inspectors out here to worry you about a license, he

told you the truth. But there are mining inspectors out here, laws and regulations for running mines that say there must be a doctor. That's why he paid you and your wife's fare out here. Besides, the money might come in. When I saw you this morning I thought you had brought it too. Well? Seen enough?"

"Yes," Wilbourne said. They returned toward the entrance; once more they stepped quickly aside to let a filled ore tram pass, pushed at a run by another grimed and frantic Pole. They emerged into the living cold of the immaculate snow, the fading day. "I don't believe it," Wilbourne said.

"You saw, didn't you?"

"I mean the reason you are still here. You were not expecting any money."

"Maybe I'm waiting for a chance to slip away. And these bastards won't even go to sleep at night and give me one.—Hell," he said. "That's a lie too. I waited here because it's winter and I might as well be here as any where else, long as there is enough grub in the commissary and I can keep warm. And because I knew he would have to send another doctor soon or come here himself and tell me and them wild bastards in there the mine is closed."

"Well, here I am," Wilbourne said. "He sent another doctor. What is it you want of a doctor?"

For a long moment Buckner looked at him—the hard little eyes which would have had to be good at measuring and commanding men of a sort, a class, a type, or he would not be where he now was; the hard eyes which perhaps never before, Wilbourne told himself, had been faced with the need of measuring a man who merely claimed to be a doctor. "Listen," he said. "I've got a good job, only I haven't had any pay since September. We've saved about three hundred bucks, to get out of here with when this does blow, and to live on until I can find something else. And now Bill turns up a month gone with a kid and we

cant afford a kid. And you claim to be a doctor and I believe you are. How about it?"

"No," Wilbourne said.

"It's my risk. I'll see you are clear."

"No," Wilbourne said.

"You mean you dont know how?"

"I know how. It's simple enough. One of the men in the hospital did it once—emergency patient—maybe to show us what never to do. He didn't need to show me."

"I'll give you a hundred bucks."

"I've got a hundred bucks," Wilbourne said.

"A hundred and fifty bucks. That's half of it. You see I cant do more."

"I've got a hundred and fifty bucks too. I've got a hundred and eighty-five bucks. And even if I didn't have but ten bucks—"

Buckner turned away. "You're lucky. Let's go eat."

He told Charlotte about it. Not in bed, as they had used to talk, because they all slept in the same room—the cabin had but one, with a lean-to for what privacy was absolutely required—but outside the cabin where, knee-deep in snow, in the galoshes now, they could see the opposite canyon wall and the serrated cloud-ravelled peaks beyond, where Charlotte said again, indomitable: "It will be beautiful in the spring."

"And you said no," she said. "Why? Was it the hundred dollars?"

"You know better than that. It was a hundred and fifty, incidentally."

“Low I may be, but not that low?”

“No. It was because I—”

“You are afraid?”

“No. It’s nothing. Simple enough. A touch with the blade to let the air in. It’s because I—”

“Women do die of it though.”

“Because the operator was no good. Maybe one in ten thousand. Of course there are no records. It’s because I—”

“It’s all right. It’s not because the price was too low, nor because you are afraid. That’s all I wanted to know. You dont have to. Nobody can make you. Kiss me. We cant even kiss inside, let alone—”

The four of them (Charlotte now slept in the woollen underwear like the others) slept in the one room, not in beds but on mattresses on the floor (“It’s warmer that way,” Buckner explained. “Cold comes from underneath.”) and the gasoline stove burned constantly. They had opposite corners but even at that the two mattresses were not fifteen feet apart, so Wilbourne and Charlotte could not even talk, whisper. It meant less to the Buckners though, even though they seemed to have little enough of preliminary talking and whispering to do; at times and with the lamp not five minutes dark Wilbourne and Charlotte would hear the abrupt stallion-like surge from the other bed, the violent blanket-muffled motion ceasing into the woman’s panting moans and at times a series of pure screams tumbling over one another, though such was not for them.

Then one day the thermometer reversed itself from fourteen below to forty-one below and they moved the two mattresses together and slept as a unit, the two women in the middle, and still sometimes before the light was scarcely out (or perhaps they would be wakened by it) there would come the ruthless stallion crash with no word spoken, as if they

had been drawn violently and savagely to one another out of pure slumber like steel and magnet, the fierce breathing, the panting and shuddering woman-moans, and Charlotte saying, "Cant you all do that without pulling the covers loose?" and still it was not for them.

They had been there a month, it was almost March now and the spring for which Charlotte waited that much nearer, when one afternoon Wilbourne returned from the mine where the dirty and unsleeping Poles still labored in that fierce deluded frenzy and the blind birdlike incomprehensible voices still flew back and forth among the dusty extravagant electric bulbs, and found Charlotte and Mrs. Buckner watching the cabin door as he entered. And he knew what was coming and perhaps even that he was already done for. "Listen, Harry," she said. "They are going to leave. They've got to. It's all up here and they have only three hundred dollars, to get where they are going and to live on until he can find work. So they've got to do something before it's too late."

"So have we," he said. "And we haven't got three hundred dollars."

"We haven't got a baby either. We haven't had bad luck. You said it's simple, that only one in ten thousand die, that you know how to do it, that you are not afraid. And they want to take the risk."

"Do you want a hundred dollars that bad?"

"Have I ever? Ever talked about money, except the hundred and twenty-five of mine you wouldn't take? You know that. Just as I know you wouldn't take their money."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. It's because I—"

"It's because they are in trouble. Suppose it was us. I know you will have to throw away something. But we have thrown away a lot, threw it away for love and we're not sorry."

"No," he said. "Not sorry. Never."

“This is for love too. Not ours maybe. But love.” She went to the shelf on which they kept their personal effects and took down the meager case of instruments with which he had been equipped before he left Chicago, along with the two railroad tickets. “This would be good for him to know, if he could know it: that the only time you ever used them was to amputate his manager from the mine. What else do you need?”

Buckner came up beside Wilbourne. “All right?” he said. “I’m not afraid and she aint. Because you’re all right. I aint watched you for a month for nothing. Maybe if you had agreed quick, right off, that first day, I wouldn’t let you, I’d be afraid. But not now. I’ll take all the risk and I’ll remember my promise: I’ll see you are clear. And it aint a hundred, it’s still a hundred and fifty.”

He tried to say No, he tried hard. Yes, he thought quietly, I have thrown away lots, but apparently not this. Honesty about money, security, degree, and then for a terrible moment he thought, Maybe I would have thrown away love first too but he stopped this in time; he said, “You haven’t got enough money, even if your name were Callaghan. I’ll just take all the risk instead.”

Three days later they who had not been met walked with the Buckners across the canyon to the waiting ore train. Wilbourne had steadily refused even the hundred dollars, accepting at last and instead of it a hundred dollar assignment on Buckner’s back pay which they both knew would never be paid, this to be expended against its equivalent in food from the commissary, whose key Buckner had surrendered to him. “It sounds damn foolish to me,” Buckner said. “The commissary is yours anyway.”

“It will keep the books balanced,” Wilbourne said. They followed the path which was no path, to the train, the engine with neither head nor tail, the three ore cars, the toy cabooses. Buckner looked up at the mine, the gaping orifice, the refuse dump scarring the pristine snow. It was clear now, the sun low and thin above the serrated rosy peaks in a sky of incredible blue. “What will they think when they find you are gone?”

“Maybe they will think I have gone after the money myself. I hope they do, for your sake.” Then he said, “They are better off here. No worries about rent and such and getting drunk and then getting sober again, enough food to keep you all until spring. And they have something to do, keep the days filled, and nights to lie in bed and count up that overtime. A man can go a long way on what he thinks he’s going to get. And he may send some money yet.”

“Do you believe that?”

“No,” Buckner said. “Dont you believe it either.”

“I dont think I ever have,” Wilbourne said. “Not even that day in his office. Maybe even less then than at any time.” They were standing a little aside from the two women. “Look, when you get out and find a chance, have her see a doctor. A good one. Tell him the truth.”

“What for?” Buckner said.

“I’d rather you would. I’d feel easier.”

“Nah,” the other said. “She’s all right. Because you’re all right. If I hadn’t known that, do you think I’d a let you do it?” Now it was time; the locomotive blew a shrill peanut-whistle blast, the Buckners got into the caboose and it began to move. Charlotte and Wilbourne looked after it for only a moment, then Charlotte turned, already running. The sun was almost down, the peaks ineffable and tender, the sky amber and azure; for an instant Wilbourne heard the voices from the mine, wild faint and incomprehensible.

“Oh, God,” Charlotte said. “Let’s dont even eat tonight. Hurry. Run.” She ran on, then she stopped and turned, the broad blunt face rosy in the reflected pink, the eyes now green with it above the shapeless sheep collar of the shapeless coat. “No,” she said. “You run in front, so I can be undressing us both in the snow. But run.” But he did not go ahead, he did not even run, he walked so he could watch her

diminishing ahead of him along the path which was no path, then mounting the other wall toward the cabin, who, save for the fact that she wore them with the same abrupt obliviousness with which she wore dresses, should never have worn pants at all, and entered the cabin and found her now stripping off even the woollen underwear. "Hurry," she said. "Hurry. Six weeks. I have almost forgotten how. No," she said, "I'll never forget that. You never forget that, thank you sweet God." Then she said, holding him, the hard arms and thighs: "I guess I am a sissy about love. I never could, even with just one other person in the bed with us."

They didn't get up to prepare or eat supper. After a time they slept; Wilbourne waked somewhere in the rigid night to find the stove had gone out and the room freezing cold. He thought of Charlotte's undergarment where she had flung it away onto the floor; she would need it, she should have it on now. But it too would be like iron ice and he thought for a while about getting up and fetching it into the bed and thawing it, warming it beneath his body until she could put it on and at last he found will power to begin to move but at once she clutched him. "Where you going?" He told her. She clutched him, hard. "When I get cold, you can always cover me."

Each day he would visit the mine, where the frenzied and unabated work continued. On the first visit the men looked at him not with curiosity or surprise but merely with interrogation, obviously looking for Buckner too. But nothing else happened and he realised that they did not even know probably that he was merely the mine's official doctor, that they recognised in him only another American (he almost said white man), another representative of that remote golden unchallengeable Power in which they held blind faith and trust. He and Charlotte began to discuss the question of telling them, trying to. "Only what good would it do?" he said. "Buckner was right. Where would they go, and what would they do when they got there?"

There's plenty of food for them here to last out the winter, and they probably haven't saved any money (granted they ever got square with the commissary even when they were being paid enough wages to

save) and as Buckner said, you can live pretty happy a long time on illusion. Maybe you aren't happy any other time. I mean, if you are a hunk who never learned anything else but how to time a dynamite fuse five hundred feet underground. And another thing. We've still got three-quarters of the hundred dollars in grub ourselves, and if everybody left here, somebody would hear about it and he might even send a man in here to pick up the other three cans of beans."

"And something else too," Charlotte said. "They can't go now. They can't walk out in this snow. Hadn't you noticed?"

"Noticed what?"

"That little toy train hasn't been back since it took the Buckners out. That's two weeks ago."

He hadn't noticed this, he did not know if it would come back again, so they agreed that the next time it appeared they would wait no longer, they would tell (or try to tell) the men in the mine. Then two weeks later the train did return. They crossed the canyon to where the wild filthy jabbering men were already beginning to load the cars. "Now what?" Wilbourne said. "I can't talk to them."

"Yes, you can. Some way. They believe you are the boss now and nobody yet ever failed to understand the man he believes is his boss. Try to get them over to the commissary."

Wilbourne moved forward, over to the loading chute in which the first tram of ore was already rattling, and raised his hand. "Wait," he said loudly. The men paused, looking at him out of the gaunt pale-eyed faces. "Commissary," he shouted. "Store!" jerking his arm toward the opposite canyon wall; now he recalled the word which the first one, the one who drew up Charlotte's coat for her that first day, had used. "Ron," he said. "Ron." They looked at him a moment longer, silently, the eyes round beneath the brute-like and terrific arching of pale brows, the expressions eager, puzzled, and wild.

Then they looked at one another, they huddled, jabbering in that harsh incomprehensible tongue. Then they moved toward him in a body. “No, no,” he said. “All.” He gestured toward the mine shaft. “All of you.” Someone comprehended quickly this time, almost at once the short one whom Wilbourne had seen behind the galloping ore tram on his first visit to the mine dashed out of the group and up the snowy slope on his short strong thick piston-like legs and vanished into the orifice and reappeared, followed by the rest of the endless shift. These mingled with the first group, jabbering and gesticulating. Then they all ceased and looked at Wilbourne, obedient and subdued. “Look at their faces,” he said. “God, I hate to be the one to have to do this. Damn Buckner anyway.”

“Come on,” Charlotte said. “Let’s get it over.” They crossed the valley, the miners following, incredibly dirty against the snow—the faces of a poorly made-up and starving black-face minstrel troupe—to the commissary. Wilbourne unlocked the door. Then he saw at the rear of the group five women. He and Charlotte had never seen them before; they seemed to have sprung from the snow itself, shawled; two of them carried infants, one of which could not have been a month old.

“My God,” Wilbourne said. “They dont even know I’m a doctor. They dont even know they are supposed to have a doctor, that the law requires that they have one.” He and Charlotte entered. In the gloom after the snow-glare the faces vanished and only the eyes watched him out of nothing, subdued, patient, obedient, trusting and wild. “Now what?” he said again. Then he began to watch Charlotte and now they all watched her, the five women pushing forward also to see, as she fastened with four tacks produced from somewhere a sheet of wrapping paper to the end of a section of shelves where the light from the single window fell on it and began to draw swiftly with one of the scraps of charcoal she had brought from Chicago—the elevation of a wall in cross section with a grilled window in it unmistakably a pay window and as unmistakably shut, on one side of the window a number of people unmistakably miners (she had even included the woman with the baby); on the other side of the window an enormous man (she had never seen Callaghan, he had merely described him to her, yet the man

was Callaghan) sitting behind a table heaped with glittering coins which the man was shovelling into a sack with a huge hand on which glittered a diamond the size of a ping-pong ball.

Then she stepped aside. For a moment longer there was no sound. Then an indescribable cry rose, fierce but not loud, only the shrill voices of the women much more than a whisper, wailing, and they turned as one upon Wilbourne, the wild pale frenzied eyes glaring at him with at once incredulous ferocity and profound reproach.

“Wait!” Charlotte cried. “Wait!” They paused; they watched her once more as the crayon moved, and now, at the rear of the throng waiting outside the closed window Wilbourne saw his own face emerge from beneath the flying chalk; anyone would have recognised him: they did at once. The sound ceased, they looked at Wilbourne then at one another in bewilderment. Then they looked at Charlotte again as she ripped the paper from the wall and began to attach a fresh sheet; this time one of them stepped forward and helped her, Wilbourne too watching the flying crayon again.

This time it was himself, indubitably himself and indubitably a doctor, anyone would have known it—the horn glasses, the hospital tunic every charity patient, every hunky gutted by flying rock or steel or premature dynamite and coming to in company emergency stations, has seen, a bottle which was indubitably medicine in one hand, a spoonful of which he was offering to a man who was compositely all of them, every man who ever labored in the bowels of earth—the same wild unshaven look, even the sheepskin collar, and behind the doctor the same huge hand with its huge diamond in the act of extracting from the doctor’s pocket a wallet thin as paper. Again the eyes turned toward Wilbourne, the reproach gone now and only the ferocity remaining and that not at him. He gestured toward the remaining laden shelves. Presently he was able to reach Charlotte in the pandemonium and take her arm.

“Come on,” he said. “Let’s get out of here.” Later (he had returned to the ore train, where Hogben, its entire crew, sat over the red hot stove

in the caboose not much larger than a broom closet. "You'll be back in thirty days then," Wilbourne said. "I have to make a trip every thirty days for us to hold the franchise," Hogben said.

"You better bring your wife on out now."—"We'll wait," Wilbourne said. Then he returned to the cabin and he and Charlotte stood in the door and watched the crowd emerge from the commissary with its pitiful loot and later cross the canyon and board the ore train, filling the three open cars. The temperature was not forty-one now, neither was it back up to fourteen. The train moved; they could see the tiny faces looking back at the mine entrance, the refuse dump, with incredulous bewilderment, a kind of shocked and unbelieving sorrow; as the train moved a burst of voices reached across the canyon to them, faint with distance, forlorn, grieving, and wild) he said to Charlotte, "Thank God we got our grub out first."

"Maybe it wasn't ours," she said soberly.

"Buckner's then. They hadn't paid him either."

"But he ran away. They didn't."

It was still nearer spring then; by the time the ore train made its next ritualistic and empty visitation perhaps they would see the beginning of the mountain spring which neither of them had seen and did not know would not appear until that time which in their experience was the beginning of summer. They talked of this at night now, with the thermometer again sometimes at forty-one. But they could at least talk in bed now, in the dark where beneath the blankets Charlotte would, after an amount of savage heaving and twisting (this too ritualistic) emerge from the woollen undergarment to sleep in the old fashion. She would not fling it out from beneath the blankets but would keep it inside, a massy wad upon and beneath and around which they slept, so it would be warm for the morning. One night she said, "You haven't heard from Buckner yet. But of course you haven't; how could you have."

“No,” he said, suddenly sober. “And I wish I would. I told him to take her to a doctor soon as they got out. But he probably— He promised to write me.”

“I wish you would too.”

“We may have a letter when the ore train comes back for us.”

“If it comes back.” But he suspected nothing, though later it seemed incredible to him that he had not, even though at the time he could not have said why he should have suspected, on what evidence. But he did not. Then one day about a week before the ore train was due there was a knock and he opened the door upon a man with a mountain face and a pack and a pair of slung snow shoes on his back.

“You Wilbourne?” he said. “Got a letter for you.” He produced it—a pencilled envelope smudged with handling and three weeks old.

“Thanks,” Wilbourne said. “Come in and eat.”

But the other declined. “One of them big airplanes fell somewhere back in yonder just before Christmas. You hear or see anything about that time?”

“I wasn’t here then,” Wilbourne said. “You better eat first.”

“There’s a reward for it. I guess I wont stop.”

The letter was from Buckner. It said Everything O K Buck. Charlotte took it from him and stood looking at it. “That’s what you said. You said it was simple, didn’t you. Now you feel all right about it.”

“Yes,” Wilbourne said. “I am relieved.”

Charlotte looked at the letter, the four words, counting O and K as two. “Just one in ten thousand. All you have to do is be reasonably careful, isn’t it? Boil the tools and so forth. Does it matter who you do it on?”

“They have to be fe—” Then he stopped. He looked at her, he thought swiftly, Something is about to happen to me. Wait. Wait. “Do it on?”

She looked at the letter. “That was foolish, wasn’t it. Maybe I was mixed up with incest.” Now it did happen to him. He began to tremble, he was trembling even before he grasped her shoulder and jerked her about to face him.

“Do it on?”

She looked at him, still holding the cheap ruled sheet with its heavy pencilling—the sober intent gaze with that greenish cast which the snow gave her eyes. She spoke in short brutal sentences like out of a primer. “That night. That first night alone. When we couldn’t wait to cook supper. When the stove went out my douche bag was hanging behind it. It froze and when we lit the stove again I forgot it and it burst.”

“And every time since then you didn’t—”

“I should have known better. I always did take it easy. Too easy. I remember somebody telling me once, I was young then, that when people loved, hard, really loved each other, they didn’t have children, the seed got burned up in the love, the passion. Maybe I believed it. Wanted to believe it because I didn’t have a douche bag any more. Or maybe I just hoped. Anyway it’s done.”

“When?” he said, shaking her, trembling. “How long since you missed? Are you sure?”

“Sure that I missed? Yes. Sixteen days.”

“But you’re not sure,” he said, rapidly, knowing he was talking only to himself: “You cant be sure yet. Sometimes they miss, any woman. You can never be sure until two—”

“Do you believe that?” she said quietly. “That’s just when you want a child. And I don’t and you don’t because we can’t. I can starve and you can starve but not it. So we must, Harry.”

“No!” he cried. “No!”

“You said it was simple. We have proof it is, that it’s nothing, no more than clipping an ingrowing toenail. I’m strong and healthy as she is. Don’t you believe that?”

“Ah,” he cried, “So you tried it on her first. That was it. You wanted to see if she would die or not. That’s why you were so bent on selling me the idea when I had already said no—”

“The stove went out the night after they left, Harry. But yes, I did wait to hear from her first. She would have done the same if it had been me first. I would have wanted her to. I would have wanted her to live whether I did or not just as she would want me to live whether she did or not, just as I want to live.”

“Yes,” he said. “I know. I didn’t mean that. But you—you—”

“So it’s all right. It’s simple. You know that now by your own hand.”

“No! No!”

“All right,” she said quietly. “Maybe we can find a doctor to do it when we go out next week.”

“No!” he cried, shouted, gripping her shoulder, shaking her. “Do you hear me?”

“You mean no one else shall do it, and you won’t?”

“Yes! That’s what I mean! That’s exactly what I mean!”

“Are you that afraid?”

“Yes!” he said. “Yes!”

The next week passed. He took to walking, slogging and plunging in the waist-deep drifts, not to not see her; it's because I can't breathe in there, he told himself; once he went up to the mine even, the deserted gallery dark now of the extravagant and unneeded bulbs though it still seemed to him that he could hear the voices, the blind birds, the echoes of that frenzied and incomprehensible human speech which still remained, hanging batlike and perhaps head-down about the dead corridors until his presence startled them into flight. But sooner or later the cold—something—would drive him back to the cabin and they did not quarrel simply because she refused to be drawn into one and again he would think, She is not only a better man and a better gentleman than I am, she is a better everything than I will ever be.

They ate together, went through the day's routine, they slept together to keep from freezing; now and then he took her (and she accepted him) in a kind of frenzy of immolation, saying, crying, “At least it doesn't matter now; at least you won't have to get up in the cold.” Then it would be day again; he would refill the tank when the stove burned out; he would carry out and throw into the snow the cans which they had opened for the last meal, and there would be nothing else for him to do, nothing else under the sun for him to do. So he would walk (there was a pair of snow shoes in the cabin but he never tried to use them) among but mostly into the drifts which he had not yet learned to distinguish in time to avoid, wallowing and plunging, thinking, talking to himself aloud, weighing a thousand expedients: A kind of pill, he thought—this, a trained doctor: whores use them, they are supposed to work, they must work, something must; it can't be this difficult, this much of a price, and not believing it, knowing that he would never be able to make himself believe it, thinking, And this is the price of the twenty-six years, the two thousand dollars I stretched over four of them by not smoking, by keeping my virginity until it damn near spoiled on me, the dollar and two dollars a week or a month my sister could not afford to send: that I should have deprived myself of all hope

forever of anesthesia from either pills or pamphlets. And now anything else is completely out.

“So there’s just one thing left,” he said, aloud, in a kind of calm like that which follows the deliberate ridding of the stomach of a source of nausea. “Just one thing left. We’ll go where it is warm, where it wont cost so much to live, where I can find work and we can afford a baby and if no work, charity wards, orphanages, doorsteps anyway. No, no, not orphanage; not doorstep. We can do it, we must do it; I will find something, anything.—Yes!” he thought, cried aloud into the immaculate desolation, with harsh and terrible sardonicism, “I will set up as a professional abortionist.” Then he would return to the cabin and still they did not quarrel simply because she would not, this not through any forbearance feigned or real nor because she herself was subdued and afraid but simply because (and he knew this too and he cursed himself for this too in the snow) she knew that one of them must keep some sort of head and she knew beforehand it would not be he.

Then the ore train came. He had packed the remaining provisions out of Buckner’s theoretical hundred dollars into a box. They loaded this and the two bags with which they had left New Orleans almost exactly a year ago and themselves into the toy caboose. At the mainline junction he sold the cans of beans and salmon and lard, the sacks of sugar and coffee and flour, to a small storekeeper for twenty-one dollars. They rode two nights and a day in day coaches and left the snow behind and found buses now, cheaper now, her head tilted back against the machine-made doily, her face in profile against the dark fleeing snow-free countryside and the little lost towns, the neon, the lunch rooms with broad strong Western girls got up out of Hollywood magazines (Hollywood which is no longer in Hollywood but is stippled by a billion feet of burning colored gas across the face of the American earth) to resemble Joan Crawford, asleep or not he could not tell.

They reached San Antonio, Texas, with a hundred and fifty-two dollars and a few cents. It was warm here, it was almost like New Orleans; the pepper trees had been green all winter and the oleander and mimosa

and lantana were already in bloom and cabbage palms exploded shabbily in the mild air as in Louisiana. They had a single room with a decrepit gas plate, reached by an outside gallery in a shabby wooden house. And now they did quarrel. "Cant you see?" she said. "My period would come now, tomorrow. Now is the time, the simple time to do it. Like you did with her—what's her name? the whore's name? Bill. Billie, i.e. You shouldn't have let me learn so much about it. I wouldn't know how to pick my time to worry you then."

"Apparently you learned about it without any help from me," he said, trying to restrain himself, cursing himself: You bastard, she's the one that's in trouble; it's not you. "I had settled it. I had said no. You were the one who—" Now he did stop himself, rein himself in. "Listen. There's a pill of some sort. You take it when your time is due. I'll try to get some of them."

"Try where?"

"Where would I try? Who would ever need such? At a brothel. Oh, God, Charlotte! Charlotte!"

"I know," she said. "We cant help it. It's not us now. That's why: dont you see? I want it to be us again, quick, quick. We have so little time. In twenty years I cant any more and in fifty years we'll both be dead. So hurry. Hurry."

He had never been in a brothel in his life and had never even sought one before. So now he discovered what a lot of people have: how difficult it is to find one; how you lived in the duplex for ten years before you discovered that the late-sleeping ladies next door were not night-shift telephone girls. At last that occurred to him which the veriest yokel seems to inherit with breath: he asked a taxi-driver and was presently set down before a house a good deal like the one he lived in and pressed a button which made no audible response though presently a curtain over the narrow window beside the door fell a second before he could have sworn someone had looked out at him.

Then the door opened, a negro maid conducted him down a dim hallway and into a room containing a bare veneered dining-table bearing an imitation cut-glass punch bowl and scarred by the white rings from damp glass-bottoms, a pianola slotted for coins, and twelve chairs ranged along the four walls in orderly sequence like tombstones in a military graveyard, where the maid left him to sit and look at a lithograph of the Saint Bernard dog saving the child from the snow and another of President Roosevelt, until there entered a double-chinned woman of no especial age more than forty, with blondined hair and a lilac satin gown not quite clean. "Good evening," she said. "Stranger in town?"

"Yes," he told her. "I asked a taxi-driver. He—"

"Dont apologise," she said. "The drivers is all my friends here."

He remembered the driver's parting advice: "The first white person you see, buy them some beer. You'll be jake then."—"Wont you have some beer?" he said.

"Why, I dont mind if I do," the woman said. "It might refresh us." Immediately (she had rung no bell that Wilbourne could see) the maid entered. "Two beers, Louisa," the woman said. The maid went out. The woman sat down too. "So you're a stranger in San Tone. Well, some of the sweetest friendships I ever seen was made in one night or even after one session between two folks that never even seen one another an hour ago. I got American girls here or Spanish (strangers like Spanish girls, once, anyway. It's the influence of the moving pictures, I always say) and one little Eytalian that just—" The maid entered with two tankards of beer. It could not have been much farther away than wherever it was she had been standing when the woman in purple had rung no bell that Wilbourne could see. The maid went out.

"No," he said. "I dont want—I came here—I—" The woman was watching him; she had started to raise her mug. Instead she set it back on the table, watching him. "I'm in trouble," he said quietly. "I hoped you could help me."

Now the woman even withdrew her hand from the tankard and he saw now that her eyes, even if they were no less muddy, were also no less cold than the big diamond at her breast. "And just what made you think I could or would help you out of whatever your trouble is? The driver tell you that too? What'd he look like? You take his number?"

"No," Wilbourne said. "I—"

"Never mind that now. What kind of trouble are you in?" He told her, simply and quietly, while she watched him. "H'm," she said. "And so you, a stranger here, found right off a taxi-driver that brought you straight to me to find a doctor to do your business. Well, well." Now she did ring the bell, not violently, just hard.

"No, no, I dont—" She even keeps a doctor in the house, he thought. "I dont—"

"Undoubtless," the woman said. "It's all a mistake. You'll get back to the hotel or wherever it is and find you just drempt your wife was knocked up or even that you had a wife."

"I wish I would," Wilbourne said. "But I—" The door opened and a man entered, a biggish man, fairly young, bulging his clothes a little, who gave Wilbourne a hot, embracing, almost loverlike glare out of hot brown flesh-bedded eyes beneath the straight innocently parted hair of a little boy and continued to look at him from then on. His neck was shaved.

"Thatim?" he said over his shoulder to the woman in purple, in a voice husky with prolonged whiskey begun at too early an age yet withal the voice of a disposition cheerful, happy, even joyous. He did not even wait for an answer, he came straight to Wilbourne and before the other could move plucked him from the chair with one hamlike hand.

"Whadya mean, you sonafabitch, coming into a respectable house and acting like a sonafabitch? hah?" He glared at Wilbourne happily. "Out?" he said.

“Yah,” the woman in purple said. “Then I want to find that taxi-driver.” Wilbourne began to struggle. At once the young man turned upon him with loverlike joy, beaming. “Not in here,” the woman said sharply. “Out, like I told you, you ape.”

“I’ll go,” Wilbourne said. “You can turn me loose.”

“Yah; sure, you sonafabitch,” the young man said. “I’ll just help you. You got helped in, see. This way.” They were in the hall again, now there was a small slight black-haired dark-faced man also, in dingy trousers and a tieless blue shirt: a Mexican servant of some sort. They went on to the door, the back of Wilbourne’s coat bunched in the young man’s huge hand. The young man opened it. The brute will have to hit me once, Wilbourne thought. Or he will burst, suffocate. But all right. All right.

“Maybe you could tell me,” he said. “All I want is—”

“Yah; sure,” the young man said. “Maybe I awda sockm, Pete. Whadya think?”

“Sockm,” the Mexican said.

He did not even feel the fist. He felt the low stoop strike him across the back, then the grass already damp with dew, before he began to feel his face at all. “Maybe you could tell me—” he said.

“Yah; sure,” the young man said in his hoarse happy voice, “ask me another.” The door slammed. After a while Wilbourne got up. Now he could feel his eye, the whole side of his face, his whole head, the slow painful pounding of the blood, though in the drugstore mirror presently (it was on the first corner he came to, he entered it; he was indeed learning fast the things he should have known before he was nineteen years old) he could see no discoloration yet. But the mark was apparent, something was, because the clerk said.

“What happened to your face, mister?”

“Fight,” he said. “I knocked up my girl. I want something for it.”

For a moment the clerk looked at him, hard. Then he said, “Cost you five bucks.”

“Do you guarantee it?”

“Nah.”

“All right. I’ll take it.”

It was a small tin box, unlettered. It contained five objects which might have been coffee beans. “He said whiskey would help, and moving around. He said to take two of them tonight and go somewhere and dance.” She took all five of them, they went out and got two pints of whiskey and found at last a dance hall full of cheap colored bulbs and khaki uniforms and rentable partners or hostesses.

“Drink some of it too,” she said. “Does your face hurt very bad now?”

“No,” he said. “Drink it. Drink all you can.”

“God,” she said. “You cant dance, can you?”

“No,” he said. “Yes. Yes, I can dance.” They moved about the floor, bumped and shoved and bumping and shoving, somnambulistic and sometimes in step, during each short phase of hysterical music. By eleven oclock she had drunk almost half of one of the bottles but it only made her sick. He waited until she emerged from the washroom, her face the color of putty, the eyes indomitable and yellow. “You lost the pills too,” he said.

“Two of them. I was afraid of that so I used the basin and washed them off and took them again. Where’s the bottle?”

They had to go out for her to drink, then they returned. At twelve she had almost finished the first bottle and the lights were turned off save for a spotlight which played on a revolving globe of colored glass, so that the dancers moved with the faces of corpses in a wheeling of colored mote-beams resembling a marine nightmare. There was a man with a megaphone; it was a dancing contest and they did not even know it; the music crashed and ceased, the lights flared on, the air was filled by the bellowing megaphone and the winning couple moved forward. "I'm sick again," she said. Once more he waited for her—the putty face, the indomitable eyes. "I washed them off again," she said. "But I can't drink any more. Come on. They close at one o'clock."

Perhaps they were coffee beans because after three days nothing had happened and after five days even he admitted that the time had passed. Now they did quarrel, he cursing himself for it as he sat on his park benches reading the help wanted columns in newspapers grubbed out of trash bins while he waited for his black eye, his shiner, to disappear so he could apply decently for work, cursing himself because she had borne up for so long and would and could continue to bear up save that he had worn her out at last, knowing he had done this, swearing he would change, stop it.

But when he returned to the room (she was thinner now and there was something in her eyes; all the pills and whiskey had done was to put something in her eyes that had not been there before) it would be as if his promises had never been made, she cursing him now and striking at him with her hard fists then catching herself, clinging to him, crying, "Oh, God, Harry, make me stop! Make me hush! Bust the hell out of me!" Then they would lie holding one another, fully dressed now, in a sort of peace for a time.

"It'll be all right," he said. "A lot of people have to do it these days. Charity wards are not bad. Then we can find someone to take the baby until I can—"

"No. It won't do, Harry. It won't do."

“I know it sounds bad at first. Charity. But charity isn’t—”

“Damn charity. Have I ever cared where money comes from, where or how we lived, had to live? It’s not that. They hurt too much.”

“I know that too. But women have been bearing children—You have borne two yourself—”

“Damn pain too. I take easy and breed hard but damn that, I’m used to that, I don’t mind that. I said they hurt too much. Too damned much.” Then he understood, knew what she meant; he thought quietly, as he had thought before, that she had already and scarcely knowing him given up more than he would ever possess to relinquish, remembering the old tried true incontrovertible words: Bone of my bone, blood and flesh and even memory of my blood and flesh and memory. You dont beat it, he told himself. You dont beat it that easy. He was about to say, “But this will be ours,” when he realised that this was it, this was exactly it.

But still he could not say yes, could not say “All right.” He could say it to himself on the park benches, he could hold his hand out and it would not shake. But he could not say the word to her; he would lie beside her, holding her while she slept, and he would watch the ultimate last of his courage and manhood leave him. “That’s right,” he would whisper to himself, “stall. Stall. She will be in the fourth month soon, then I can tell myself I know it is too late to risk it; even she will believe then.” Then she would wake and it would start all over—the reasoning which got nowhere becoming the quarreling and then the cursing until she would catch herself and cling to him, crying in frantic despair: “Harry! Harry! What are we doing? We, we, us! Make me hush! Bust me! Knock me cold!” This last time he held her until she was quiet. “Harry, will you make a compact with me?”

“Yes,” he said wearily. “Anything.”

“A compact. And then until it’s up, we will never mention pregnancy again.” She named the date when her next period would have come; it

was thirteen days away. “That’s the best time, and after that it will be four months and it will be too late to risk it. So from now until then we wont even talk about it; I will try to make things as easy as possible while you look for a job, a good job that will support three of us—”

“No,” he said. “No! No!”

“Wait,” she said. “You promised.—Then if you haven’t found a job by that time, you will do it, take it away from me.”

“No!” he cried. “I wont! Never!”

“But you promised,” she said, quietly, gently, slowly, as if he were a child just learning English. “Dont you see there is nothing else?”

“I promised; yes. But I didn’t mean—”

“I told you once how I believe it isn’t love that dies, it’s the man and the woman, something in the man and the woman that dies, doesn’t deserve the chance any more to love. And look at us now. We have the child, only we both know we cant have it, cant afford to have it. And they hurt too bad, Harry. Too damned bad. I’m going to hold you to the promise, Harry. And so from now until that day comes, we wont even have to mention it, think about it again. Kiss me.” After a moment he leaned to her. Not touching otherwise, they kissed, as brother and sister might.

Now it was like Chicago again, the first weeks there while he went from hospital to hospital, the interviews which seemed to die, to begin to wilt and fade tranquilly at a given identical instant, he already foreknowing this and expecting it and so meeting the obsequy decently. But not now, not this time. In Chicago he would think, I imagine I am going to fail and he would fail; now he knew he was going to fail and he refused to believe it, refused to accept no for an answer until threatened almost with physical violence. He was not trying hospitals alone, he was trying anyone, anything.

He told lies, any lie; he approached appointments with a frantic cold maniacal determination which was inherent with its own negation; he promised anyone that he could and would do anything; walking along the street one afternoon he glanced up by sheer chance and saw a doctor's sign and entered and actually offered to perform any abortions thrown his way for half the fee, stated his experience and (he realised later when comparatively sane again) only his ejection by force forestalled his showing Buckner's letter as a testimonial to his ability.

Then one day he returned home in the middle of the afternoon. He stood outside his own door for a long time before he opened it. And even then he did not enter but stood instead in the opening with on his head a cheap white bellows-topped peaked cap with a yellow band—the solitary insignia of a rankless W.P.A. school-crossing guard—and his heart cold and still with a grief and despair that was almost peaceful. "I get ten dollars a week," he said.

"Oh, you monkey!" she said, then for the last time in his life he saw her cry. "You bastard! You damned bastard! So you can rape little girls in parks on Saturday afternoons!" She came and snatched the cap from his head and hurled it into the fireplace (a broken grate hanging by one side and stuffed with faded frilled paper which had once been either red or purple) and then clung to him, crying hard, the hard tears springing and streaming. "You bastard, you damned bastard, you damned damned damned—"

She boiled the water herself and fetched out the meager instruments they had supplied him with in Chicago and which he had used but once, then lying on the bed she looked up at him. "It's all right. It's simple. You know that; you did it before."

"Yes," he said. "Simple. You just have to let the air in. All you have to do is let the air—" Then he began to tremble again. "Charlotte. Charlotte."

"That's all. Just a touch. Then the air gets in and tomorrow it will be all over and I will be all right and it will be us again forever and ever."

“Yes. Ever and ever. But I’ll have to wait a minute, until my hand—Look. It wont stop. I cant make it stop.”

“All right. We’ll wait a minute. It’s simple. It’s funny. New, I mean. We’ve done this lots of ways but not with knives, have we? There. Now your hand has stopped.”

“Charlotte,” he said. “Charlotte.”

“It’s all right. We know how. What was it you told me nigger women say? Ride me down, Harry.”

And now, sitting on his bench in Audubon Park lush green and bright with the Louisiana summer already fully accomplished although it was not yet June, and filled with the cries of children and the sound of pram wheels like the Chicago apartment had been, he watched against his eyelids the cab (it had been told to wait) stopping before the neat and unremarkable though absolutely unimpugnable door and she getting out of the cab in the dark dress carried a full year and better, for three thousand miles and better, in the bag from last spring and mounting the steps. Now the bell, perhaps the same negro maid: “Why, Miss—” then nothing, remembering who paid the wages, though probably not since by ordinary negroes quit an employment following death or division. And now the room, as he had first seen it, the room in which she said, “Harry—do they call you Harry?—what are we going to do?” (Well, I did it, he thought.

She will have to admit that.) He could see them, the two of them, Rittenmeyer in the double-breasted suit (it might be flannel now but it would be dark flannel, obtruding smoothly its unobtrusive cut and cost); the four of them, Charlotte here and the three others yonder, the two children who were unremarkable, the daughters, the one with the mother’s hair but nothing else, the other, the younger one, with nothing, the younger sitting perhaps on the father’s knee, the other, the older, leaning against him; the three faces, the one impeccable, the two of them invincible and irrevocable, the second cold and unwinking, the third merely unwinking; he could see them, he could hear them:

'Go speak to your mother, Charlotte. Take Ann with you.'

'I dont want to.'

'Go. Take Ann's hand.' He could hear, see them: Rittenmeyer setting the little one onto the floor, the older one takes her hand and they approach. And now she will take the little one onto her lap, it staring at her still with that intent absolutely blank detachment of infants, the older one leans to her, obedient, cold, suffering the caress, already withdrawing before the kiss is completed, and returns to her father; an instant later Charlotte sees her beckoning, gesturing in violent surreptitious pantomime to the little one. So Charlotte sets the little one onto the floor again and it returns to the father, turning against his knee and already hunching one buttock toward its father's lap as children do, still staring at Charlotte with that detachment empty even of curiosity.

'Let them go,' Charlotte says.

'You want them sent away?'

'Yes. They want to go.' The children depart. And now he hears her; it is not Charlotte; he knows that as Rittenmeyer never will: 'So that's what you have taught them.'

'I? I taught them? I taught them nothing!' he cries. 'Nothing! It wasn't me who—'

'I know. I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. I have not—Have they been well?'

'Yes. As I wrote you. If you will recall, for several months I had no address. The letters were returned. You may have them when and if you like. You dont look well yourself. Is that why you came back home? Or have you come back home?'

'To see the children. And to give you this.' She produces the check, double-signed and perforated against any tampering, the slip of paper more than a year old, creased and intact and only a little worn.

'You came home on his money then. Then it belongs to him.'

'No. It's yours.'

'I refuse to accept it.'

'So would he.'

'Then burn it. Destroy it.'

'Why? Why do you wish to hurt yourself? Why do you like suffering, when there is so much of it that has to be done, so damned much? Give it to the children. A bequest. If not from me, from Ralph then. He is still their uncle. He has not harmed you.'

'A bequest?' he says. Then she tells him. Oh, yes, Wilbourne told himself, she will tell him; he could see it, hear it—the two people between whom something like love must have existed once, or who at least had known together the physical striving with which alone the flesh can try to capture what little it is ever to know of love. Oh, she will tell him; he could see and hear her as she lays the check upon the table at her hand and tells him:

'It was a month ago. It was all right, only I kept on losing blood and it got to be pretty bad. Then all of a sudden two days ago the blood stopped and so there is something wrong, which might be something badder still—what do they call it? toxemia, septicemia? It doesn't matter—that we are watching for. Waiting for.'

The men who passed the bench he sat on walked in linen suits, and now he began to notice a general exodus from the park—the negro nursemaids who managed to lend a quality bizarre and dazzling even to their starched white-crossed blue, the children moving with thin cries in

bright random like blown petals, across the green. It was near noon; Charlotte would have been in the house more than half an hour. Because it will take that long, he thought seeing and hearing them: He is trying to persuade her to go to a hospital at once, the best, the best doctors; he will assume all blame, tell all the lies; he insists, calm, not at all importunate and not to be denied.

‘No. H— he knows a place. On the Mississippi coast. We are going there. We will get a doctor there if necessary.’

‘The Mississippi coast? Why in God’s name the Mississippi coast? A country doctor in a little lost Mississippi shrimping village when in New Orleans there are the best, the very best—’

‘We may not need a doctor after all. And we can live cheaper there until we find out.’

‘You have money for coast vacations then.’

‘We have money.’ It was dead noon now; the air fell still, the stippled shadows unmoving upon his lap, upon the six bills in his hand, the two twenties, the five, the three ones, hearing them, seeing them:

‘Take up the check again. It is not mine.’

‘Nor mine. Let me go my way, Francis. A year ago you let me choose and I chose. I will stick to it. I won’t have you retract, break your oath to yourself. But I want to ask one thing of you.’

‘Of me? A favor?’

‘If you like. I don’t ask a promise. Maybe what I am trying to express is just a wish. Not hope; wish. If anything happens to me.’

‘If anything happens to you. What am I to do?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Nothing?’

‘Yes. Against him. I don’t ask it for his sake nor even for mine. I ask it for the sake of—of—I don’t even know what I am trying to say. For the sake of all the men and women who ever lived and blundered but meant the best and all that ever will live and blunder but mean the best. For your sake maybe, since yours is suffering too—if there is any such thing as suffering, if any of us ever did, if any of us were ever born strong enough and good enough to be worthy to love or suffer either. Maybe what I am trying to say is justice.’

‘Justice?’ And now he could hear Rittenmeyer laughing, who had never laughed since laughter is the yesterday’s slight beard, the negligee among emotions. ‘Justice? This, to me? Justice?’ Now she rises; he too: they face one another.

‘I didn’t ask a promise,’ she says. ‘That would have been too much to ask.’

‘Of me.’

‘Of anyone. Any man or woman. Not only you.’

‘But it is I who give none. Remember. Remember. I said you could come back home when you wished, and I would take you back, into my house at least. But can you expect that again? from any man? Tell me; you spoke once of justice; tell me that.’

‘I don’t expect it. I told you before that maybe what I was trying to say was hope.’ She will turn now, he told himself, approaching the door, and they will stand looking at one another and maybe it will be like McCord and me in the Chicago station that night last—He stopped. He was about to say ‘last year’ and he ceased and sat perfectly still and said aloud in quiet amazement, “That night was not five months ago.”—And they will both know they will never see one another again and neither of them will say it. ‘Good-bye, Rat,’ she says.

And he will not answer, he thought. No. He will not answer, this man of ultimatums, upon whom for the rest of his life will yearly devolve the necessity for decrees which he knows beforehand he cannot support, who would have denied the promise she did not ask yet would perform the act and she to know this well, too well, too well—this face impeccable and invincible upon which all existing light in the room will have seemed to gather as though in benediction, affirmation not of righteousness but rightness, having been consistently and incontrovertibly right; and withal tragic too since in the being right there was nothing of consolation nor of peace.

Now it would be time. He rose from the bench and followed the curve of blanched oyster shells between the massy bloom of oleander and wygelia, jasmine japonica and orange, toward the exit and the street, beneath the noon. The cab came up, slowing into the curb; the driver opened the door. “Station,” Wilbourne said.

“Union Station?”

“No. The one for Mobile. The coast.” He got in. The door closed, the cab went on; the scaling palm trunks began to flee past. “They were both well?” he said.

“Listen,” she said. “If we’re going to get it.”

“Get it?”

“You’ll know in time, won’t you?”

“We’re not going to get anything. I’m going to hold you. Haven’t I held you so far?”

“Dont be a fool now. There’s no time now. You’ll know in time. Get to hell out, do you hear?”

“Out?”

“Promise me. Don't you know what they'll do to you? You can't lie to anybody, even if you would. And you couldn't help me. But you'll know in time. Just telephone an ambulance or the police or something and wire Rat and get to hell out fast. Promise me.”

“I'm going to hold you,” he said. “That's what I'll promise you. They were both well?”

“Yes,” she said; the scaling palm trunks fled constantly past. “They were all right.”

Chapter VIII Old Man

When the woman asked him if he had a knife, standing there in the streaming bedticking garments which had got him shot at, the second time by a machine gun, on the two occasions when he had seen any human life after leaving the levee four days ago, the convict felt exactly as he had in the fleeing skiff when the woman suggested that they had better hurry. He felt the same outrageous affronting of a condition purely moral, the same raging impotence to find any answer to it; so that, standing above her, spent suffocating and inarticulate, it was a full minute before he comprehended that she was now crying, “The can! The can in the boat!” He did not anticipate what she could want with it; he did not even wonder nor stop to ask.

He turned running; this time he thought, It's another moccasin as the thick body truncated in that awkward reflex which had nothing of alarm in it but only alertness, he not even shifting his stride though he knew his running foot would fall within a yard of the flat head. The bow of the skiff was well up the slope now where the wave had set it and there was another snake just crawling over the stern into it and as he stooped for the bailing can he saw something else swimming toward the mound, he didn't know what—a head, a face at the apex of a vee of ripples.

He snatched up the can; by pure juxtaposition of it and water he scooped it full, already turning. He saw the deer again, or another one. That is, he saw a deer—a side glance, the light smoke-colored phantom in a cypress vista then gone, vanished, he not pausing to look after it, galloping back to the woman and kneeling with the can to her lips until she told him better.

It had contained a pint of beans or tomatoes, something, hermetically sealed and opened by four blows of an axe heel, the metal flap turned back, the jagged edges razor-sharp. She told him how, and he used this in lieu of a knife, he removed one of his shoelaces and cut it in two with the sharp tin. Then she wanted warm water—"If I just had a little hot water," she said in a weak serene voice without particular hope; only when he thought of matches it was again a good deal like when she had asked him if he had a knife, until she fumbled in the pocket of the shrunken tunic (it had a darker double vee on one cuff and a darker blotch on the shoulder where service stripes and a divisional emblem had been ripped off but this meant nothing to him) and produced a match-box contrived by telescoping two shotgun shells.

So he drew her back a little from the water and went to hunt wood dry enough to burn, thinking this time, It's just another snake, only, he said, he should have thought ten thousand other snakes: and now he knew it was not the same deer because he saw three at one time, does or bucks he did not know which since they were all antlerless in May and besides he had never seen one of any kind anywhere before except on a Christmas card; and then the rabbit, drowned, dead anyway, already torn open, the bird, the hawk, standing upon it—the erected crest, the hard vicious patrician nose, the intolerant omnivorous yellow eye—and he kicking at it, kicking it lurching and broadwinged into the actual air.

When he returned with the wood and the dead rabbit, the baby, wrapped in the tunic, lay wedged between two cypress-knees and the woman was not in sight, though while the convict knelt in the mud, blowing and nursing his meagre flame, she came slowly and weakly from the direction of the water. Then, the water heated at last and there produced from some where he was never to know, she herself

perhaps never to know until the need comes, no woman perhaps ever to know, only no woman will even wonder, that square of something somewhere between sackcloth and silk—squatting, his own wet garments steaming in the fire's heat, he watched her bathe the child with a savage curiosity and interest that became amazed unbelief, so that at last he stood above them both, looking down at the tiny terra-cotta colored creature resembling nothing, and thought, And this is all. This is what severed me violently from all I ever knew and did not wish to leave and cast me upon a medium I was born to fear, to fetch up at last in a place I never saw before and where I do not even know where I am.

Then he returned to the water and refilled the bailing can. It was drawing toward sunset now (or what would have been sunset save for the high prevailing overcast) of this day whose beginning he could not even remember; when he returned to where the fire burned in the interlaced gloom of the cypresses, even after this short absence, evening had definitely come, as though darkness too had taken refuge upon that quarter-acre mound, that earthen Ark out of Genesis, that dim wet cypress-choked life-teeming constricted desolation in what direction and how far from what and where he had no more idea than of the day of the month, and had now with the setting of the sun crept forth again to spread upon the waters. He stewed the rabbit in sections while the fire burned redder and redder in the darkness where the shy wild eyes of small animals—once the tall mild almost plate-sized stare of one of the deer—glowed and vanished and glowed again, the broth hot and rank after the four days; he seemed to hear the roar of his own saliva as he watched the woman sip the first canful. Then he drank too; they ate the other fragments which had been charring and scorching on willow twigs; it was full night now.

“You and him better sleep in the boat,” the convict said. “We want to get an early start tomorrow.” He shoved the bow of the skiff off the land so it would lie level, he lengthened the painter with a piece of grapevine and returned to the fire and tied the grapevine about his wrist and lay down. It was mud he lay upon, but it was solid underneath, it was earth, it did not move; if you fell upon it you broke

your bones against its incontrovertible passivity sometimes but it did not accept you substanceless and enveloping and suffocating, down and down and down; it was hard at times to drive a plow through, it sent you spent, weary, and cursing its light-long insatiable demands back to your bunk at sunset at times but it did not snatch you violently out of all familiar knowing and sweep you thrall and impotent for days against any returning. I dont know where I am and I dont reckon I know the way back to where I want to go, he thought. But at least the boat has stopped long enough to give me a chance to turn it around.

He waked at dawn, the light faint, the sky jonquil-colored; the day would be fine. The fire had burned out; on the opposite side of the cold ashes lay three snakes motionless and parallel as underscoring, and in the swiftly making light others seemed to materialise: earth which an instant before had been mere earth broke up into motionless coils and loops, branches which a moment before had been mere branches now become immobile ophidian festoons even as the convict stood thinking about food, about something hot before they started. But he decided against this, against wasting this much time, since there still remained in the skiff quite a few of the rocklike objects which the shanty woman had flung into it, besides (thinking this) no matter how fast nor successfully he hunted, he would never be able to lay up enough food to get them back to where they wanted to go. So he returned to the skiff, paying himself back to it by his vine-spliced painter, back to the water on which a low mist thick as cotton batting (though apparently not very tall, deep) lay, into which the stern of the skiff was already beginning to disappear although it lay with its prow almost touching the mound. The woman waked, stirred. "We fixing to start now?" she said.

"Yah," the convict said. "You aint aiming to have another one this morning, are you?" He got in and shoved the skiff clear of the land, which immediately began to dissolve into the mist. "Hand me the oar," he said over his shoulder, not turning yet.

"The oar?"

He turned his head. "The oar. You're laying on it." But she was not, and for an instant during which the mound, the island continued to fade slowly into the mist which seemed to enclose the skiff in weightless and impalpable wool like a precious or fragile bauble or jewel, the convict squatted not in dismay but in that frantic and astonished outrage of a man who, having just escaped a falling safe, is struck by the following two-ounce paper weight which was sitting on it: this the more unbearable because he knew that never in his life had he less time to give way to it. He did not hesitate. Grasping the grapevine end he sprang into the water, vanishing in the violent action of climbing and reappeared still climbing and (who had never learned to swim) plunged and threshed on toward the almost-vanished mound, moving through the water then upon it as the deer had done yesterday and scrabbled up the muddy slope and lay gasping and panting, still clutching the grapevine end.

Now the first thing he did was to choose what he believed to be the most suitable tree (for an instant in which he knew he was insane he thought of trying to saw it down with the flange of the bailing can) and build a fire against the butt of it. Then he went to seek food. He spent the next six days seeking it while the tree burned through and fell and burned through again at the proper length and he nursing little constant cunning flames along the flanks of the log to make it paddle-shaped, nursing them at night too while the woman and baby (it was eating, nursing now, he turning his back or even returning into the woods each time she prepared to open the faded tunic) slept in the skiff.

He learned to watch for stooping hawks and so found more rabbits and twice possums; they ate some drowned fish which gave them both a rash and then a violent flux and one snake which the woman thought was turtle and which did them no harm, and one night it rained and he got up and dragged brush, shaking the snakes (he no longer thought, it aint nothing but another moccasin, he just stepped aside for them as they, when there was time, telescoped sullenly aside for him) out of it with the old former feeling of personal invulnerability and built a

shelter and the rain stopped at once and did not recommence and the woman went back to the skiff.

Then one night—the slow tedious charring log was almost a paddle now—one night and he was in bed, in his bed in the bunkhouse and it was cold, he was trying to pull the covers up only his mule wouldn't let him, prodding and bumping heavily at him, trying to get into the narrow bed with him and now the bed was cold too and wet and he was trying to get out of it only the mule would not let him, holding him by his belt in its teeth, jerking and bumping him back into the cold wet bed and, leaning, gave him a long swipe across the face with its cold limber muscled tongue and he waked to no fire, no coal even beneath where the almost-finished paddle had been charring and something else prolonged and coldly limber passed swiftly across his body where he lay in four inches of water while the nose of the skiff alternately tugged at the grapevine tied about his waist and bumped and shoved him back into the water again. Then something else came up and began to nudge at his ankle (the log, the oar, it was) even as he groped frantically for the skiff, hearing the swift rustling going to and fro inside the hull as the woman began to thrash about and scream. "Rats!" she cried. "It's full of rats!"

"Lay still!" he cried. "It's just snakes. Can't you hold still long enough for me to find the boat?" Then he found it, he got into it with the unfinished paddle; again the thick muscular body convulsed under his foot; it did not strike; he would not have cared, glaring astern where he could see a little—the faint outer luminosity of the open water. He poled toward it, thrusting aside the snake-looped branches, the bottom of the skiff resounding faintly to thick solid plops, the woman shrieking steadily. Then the skiff was clear of the trees, the mound, and now he could feel the bodies whipping about his ankles and hear the rasp of them as they went over the gunwale. He drew the log in and scooped it forward along the bottom of the boat and up and out; against the pallid water he could see three more of them in lashing convolutions before they vanished. "Shut up!" he cried. "Hush! I wish I was a snake so I could get out too!"

When once more the pale and heatless wafer disc of the early sun stared down at the skiff (whether they were moving or not the convict did not know) in its nimbus of fine cotton batting, the convict was hearing again that sound which he had heard twice before and would never forget—that sound of deliberate and irresistible and monstrously disturbed water. But this time he could not tell from what direction it came.

It seemed to be everywhere, waxing and fading; it was like a phantom behind the mist, at one instant miles away, the next on the point of overwhelming the skiff within the next second; suddenly, in the instant he would believe (his whole weary body would spring and scream) that he was about to drive the skiff point-blank into it and with the unfinished paddle of the color and texture of sooty bricks, like something gnawed out of an old chimney by beavers and weighing twenty-five pounds, he would whirl the skiff frantically and find the sound dead ahead of him again. Then something bellowed tremendously above his head, he heard human voices, a bell jangled and the sound ceased and the mist vanished as when you draw your hand across a frosted pane, and the skiff now lay upon a sunny glitter of brown water flank to flank with, and about thirty yards away from, a steamboat.

The decks were crowded and packed with men, women and children sitting or standing beside and among a homely conglomeration of hurried furniture, who looked mournfully and silently down into the skiff while the convict and the man with a megaphone in the pilot house talked to each other in alternate puny shouts and roars above the chuffing of the reversed engines:

“What in hell are you trying to do? Commit suicide?”

“Which is the way to Vicksburg?”

“Vicksburg? Vicksburg? Lay alongside and come aboard.”

“Will you take the boat too?”

“Boat? Boat?” Now the megaphone cursed, the roaring waves of blasphemy and biological supposition empty cavernous and bodiless in turn, as if the water, the air, the mist had spoken it, roaring the words then taking them back to itself and no harm done, no scar, no insult left anywhere. “If I took aboard every floating sardine can you sonabitchin mushrats want me to I wouldn’t even have room forrard for a leadsman. Come aboard! Do you expect me to hang here on stern engines till hell freezes?”

“I aint coming without the boat,” the convict said. Now another voice spoke, so calm and mild and sensible that for a moment it sounded more foreign and out of place than even the megaphone’s bellowing and bodiless profanity:

“Where is it you are trying to go?”

“I aint trying,” the convict said. “I’m going. Parchman.” The man who had spoken last turned and appeared to converse with a third man in the pilot house. Then he looked down at the skiff again.

“Carnarvon?”

“What?” the convict said. “Parchman?”

“All right. We’re going that way. We’ll put you off where you can get home. Come aboard.”

“The boat too?”

“Yes, yes. Come along. We’re burning coal just to talk to you.” So the convict came alongside then and watched them help the woman and baby over the rail and he came aboard himself, though he still held to the end of the vine-spliced painter until the skiff was hoisted onto the boiler deck. “My God,” the man, the gentle one, said, “is that what you have been using for a paddle?”

“Yah,” the convict said. “I lost the plank.”

“The plank,” the mild man (the convict told how he seemed to whisper it), “the plank. Well. Come along and get something to eat. Your boat is all right now.”

“I reckon I’ll wait here,” the convict said. Because now, he told them, he began to notice for the first time that the other people, the other refugees who crowded the deck, who had gathered in a quiet circle about the upturned skiff on which he and the woman sat, the grapevine painter wrapped several times about his wrist and clutched in his hand, staring at him and the woman with queer hot mournful intensity, were not white people—

“You mean niggers?” the plump convict said.

“No. Not Americans.”

“Not Americans? You was clean out of America even?”

“I dont know,” the tall one said. “They called it Atchafalaya.” —Because after a while he said, “What?” to the man and the man did it again, gobble-gobble—

“Gobble-gobble?” the plump convict said.

“That’s the way they talked,” the tall one said. “Gobble-gobble, whang, caw-caw-to-to.” —And he sat there and watched them gobbling at one another and then looking at him again, then they fell back and the mild man (he wore a Red Cross brassard) entered, followed by a waiter with a tray of food. The mild man carried two glasses of whiskey.

“Drink this,” the mild man said. “This will warm you.” The woman took hers and drank it but the convict told how he looked at his and thought, I aint tasted whiskey in seven years. He had not tasted it but once before that; it was at the still itself back in a pine hollow; he was seventeen, he had gone there with four companions, two of whom

were grown men, one of twenty-two or -three, the other about forty; he remembered it.

That is, he remembered perhaps a third of that evening—a fierce turmoil in the hell-colored firelight, the shock and shock of blows about his head (and likewise of his own fists on other hard bone), then the waking to a splitting and blinding sun in a place, a cowshed, he had never seen before and which later turned out to be twenty miles from his home. He said he thought of this and he looked about at the faces watching him and he said,

“I reckon not.”

“Come, come,” the mild man said. “Drink it.”

“I dont want it.”

“Nonsense,” the mild man said. “I’m a doctor. Here. Then you can eat.” So he took the glass and even then he hesitated but again the mild man said, “Come along, down with it; you’re still holding us up,” in that voice still calm and sensible but a little sharp too—the voice of a man who could keep calm and affable because he wasn’t used to being crossed—and he drank the whiskey and even in the second between the sweet full fire in his belly and when it began to happen he was trying to say, “I tried to tell you! I tried to!”

But it was too late now in the pallid sun-glare of the tenth day of terror and hopelessness and despair and impotence and rage and outrage and it was himself and the mule, his mule (they had let him name it—John Henry) which no man save he had plowed for five years now and whose ways and habits he knew and respected and who knew his ways and habits so well that each of them could anticipate the other’s very movements and intentions; it was himself and the mule, the little gobbling faces flying before them, the familiar hard skull-bones shocking against his fists, his voice shouting, “Come on, John Henry! Plow them down! Gobble them down, boy!” even as the bright hot red wave turned back, meeting it joyously, happily, lifted, poised, then

hurling through space, triumphant and yelling, then again the old shocking blow at the back of his head: he lay on the deck, flat on his back and pinned arm and leg and cold sober again, his nostrils gushing again, the mild man stooping over him with behind the thin rimless glasses the coldest eyes the convict had ever seen—eyes which the convict said were not looking at him but at the gushing blood with nothing in the world in them but complete impersonal interest.

“Good man,” the mild man said. “Plenty of life in the old carcass yet, eh? Plenty of good red blood too. Anyone ever suggest to you that you were hemophilic?” (“What?” the plump convict said. “Hemophilic? You know what that means?” The tall convict had his cigarette going now, his body jackknifed backward into the coffinlike space between the upper and lower bunks, lean, clean, motionless, the blue smoke wreathing across his lean dark aquiline shaven face. “That’s a calf that’s a bull and a cow at the same time.”

“No, it aint,” a third convict said. “It’s a calf or a colt that aint neither one.”

“Hell fire,” the plump one said. “He’s got to be one or the other to keep from drounding.” He had never ceased to look at the tall one in the bunk; now he spoke to him again: “You let him call you that?”) The tall one had done so. He did not answer the doctor (this was where he stopped thinking of him as the mild man) at all. He could not move either, though he felt fine, he felt better than he had in ten days. So they helped him to his feet and steadied him over and lowered him onto the upturned skiff beside the woman, where he sat bent forward, elbows on knees in the immemorial attitude, watching his own bright crimson staining the mud-trodden deck, until the doctor’s clean clipped hand appeared under his nose with a phial.

“Smell,” the doctor said. “Deep.” The convict inhaled, the sharp ammoniac sensation burned up his nostrils and into his throat. “Again,” the doctor said. The convict inhaled obediently. This time he choked and spat a gout of blood, his nose now had no more feeling than a

toenail, other than it felt about the size of a ten-inch shovel, and as cold.

“I ask you to excuse me,” he said. “I never meant—”

“Why?” the doctor said. “You put up as pretty a scrap against forty or fifty men as I ever saw. You lasted a good two seconds. Now you can eat something. Or do you think that will send you haywire again?”

They both ate, sitting on the skiff, the gobbling faces no longer watching them now, the convict gnawing slowly and painfully at the thick sandwich, hunched, his face laid sideways to the food and parallel to the earth as a dog chews; the steamboat went on. At noon there were bowls of hot soup and bread and more coffee; they ate this too, sitting side by side on the skiff, the grapevine still wrapped about the convict’s wrist. The baby waked and nursed and slept again and they talked quietly:

“Was it Parchman he said he was going to take us?”

“That’s where I told him I wanted to go.”

“It never sounded exactly like Parchman to me. It sounded like he said something else.” The convict had thought that too. He had been thinking about that fairly soberly ever since they boarded the steamboat and soberly indeed ever since he had remarked the nature of the other passengers, those men and women definitely a little shorter than he and with skin a little different in pigmentation from any sunburn, even though the eyes were sometimes blue or gray, who talked to one another in a tongue he had never heard before and who apparently did not understand his own, people the like of whom he had never seen about Parchman nor anywhere else and whom he did not believe were going there or beyond there either.

But after his hill-billy country fashion and kind he would not ask, because to his raising asking information was asking a favor and you did not ask favors of strangers; if they offered them perhaps you accepted

and you expressed gratitude almost tediously recapitulant, but you did not ask. So he would watch and wait, as he had done before, and do or try to do to the best of his ability what the best of his judgment dictated.

So he waited, and in midafternoon the steamboat chuffed and thrust through a willow-choked gorge and emerged from it, and now the convict knew it was the River. He could believe it now—the tremendous reach, yellow and sleepy in the afternoon—(“Because it’s too big,” he told them soberly. “Aint no flood in the world big enough to make it do more than stand a little higher so it can look back and see just where the flea is, just exactly where to scratch. It’s the little ones, the little piddling creeks that run backward one day and forward the next and come busting down on a man full of dead mules and hen houses.”)—and the steamboat moving up this now (like a ant crossing a plate, the convict thought, sitting beside the woman on the upturned skiff, the baby nursing again, apparently looking too out across the water where, a mile away on either hand, the twin lines of levee resembled parallel unbroken floating thread) and then it was nearing sunset and he began to hear, to notice, the voices of the doctor and of the man who had first bawled at him through the megaphone now bawling again from the pilot house overhead:

“Stop? Stop? Am I running a street car?”

“Stop for the novelty then,” the doctor’s pleasant voice said. “I dont know how many trips back and forth you have made in yonder nor how many of what you call mushrats you have fetched out. But this is the first time you ever had two people—no, three—who not only knew the name of some place they wished to go to but were actually trying to go there.” So the convict waited while the sun slanted more and more and the steamboat-ant crawled steadily on across its vacant and gigantic plate turning more and more to copper. But he did not ask, he just waited.

Maybe it was Carrollton he said, he thought. It begun with a C. But he did not believe that either. He did not know where he was, but he did

know that this was not anywhere near the Carrollton he remembered from that day seven years ago when, shackled wrist to wrist with the deputy sheriff, he had passed through it on the train—the slow spaced repeated shattering banging of trucks where two railroads crossed, a random scattering of white houses tranquil among trees on green hills lush with summer, a pointing spire, the finger of the hand of God. But there was no river there. And you aint never close to this river without knowing it, he thought.

I dont care who you are nor where you have been all your life. Then the head of the steamboat began to swing across the stream, its shadow swinging too, travelling long before it across the water, toward the vacant ridge of willow-massed earth empty of all life. There was nothing there at all, the convict could not even see either earth or water beyond it; it was as though the steamboat were about to crash slowly through the thin low frail willow barrier and embark into space, or lacking this, slow and back and fill and disembark him into space, granted it was about to disembark him, granted this was that place which was not near Parchman and was not Carrollton either, even though it did begin with C. Then he turned his head and saw the doctor stooping over the woman, pushing the baby's eyelid up with his forefinger, peering at it.

“Who else was there when he came?” the doctor said.

“Nobody,” the convict said.

“Did it all yourselves, eh?”

“Yes,” the convict said. Now the doctor stood up and looked at the convict.

“This is Carnarvon,” he said.

“Carnarvon?” the convict said. “That aint—” Then he stopped, ceased. And now he told about that—the intent eyes as dispassionate as ice behind the rimless glasses, the clipped quick-tempered face that was

not accustomed to being crossed or lied to either. (“Yes,” the plump convict said. “That’s what I was aiming to ask. Them clothes. Anybody would know them. How if this doctor was as smart as you claim he was—”

“I had slept in them for ten nights, mostly in the mud,” the tall one said. “I had been rowing since midnight with that sapling oar I had tried to burn out that I never had time to scrape the soot off. But it’s being scared and worried and then scared and then worried again in clothes for days and days and days that changes the way they look. I dont mean just your pants.” He did not laugh. “Your face too. That doctor knowed.”

“All right,” the plump one said. “Go on.”)

“I know it,” the doctor said. “I discovered that while you were lying on the deck yonder sobering up again. Now dont lie to me. I dont like lying. This boat is going to New Orleans.”

“No,” the convict said immediately, quietly, with absolute finality. He could hear them again—the thuck-thuck-thuck on the water where an instant before he had been. But he was not thinking of the bullets. He had forgotten them, forgiven them. He was thinking of himself crouching, sobbing, panting before running again—the voice, the indictment, the cry of final and irrevocable repudiation of the old primal faithless Manipulator of all the lust and folly and injustice: All in the world I wanted was just to surrender; thinking of it, remembering it but without heat now, without passion now and briefer than an epitaph: No. I tried that once. They shot at me.

“So you dont want to go to New Orleans. And you didn’t exactly plan to go to Carnarvon. But you will take Carnarvon in preference to New Orleans.” The convict said nothing. The doctor looked at him, the magnified pupils like the heads of two bridge nails. “What were you in for? Hit him harder than you thought, eh?”

“No. I tried to rob a train.”

“Say that again.” The convict said it again. “Well? Go on. You dont say that in the year 1927 and just stop, man.” So the convict told it, dispassionately too—about the magazines, the pistol which would not shoot, the mask and the dark lantern in which no draft had been arranged to keep the candle burning so that it died almost with the match but even then left the metal too hot to carry, won with subscriptions. Only it aint my eyes or my mouth either he’s watching, he thought. It’s like he is watching the way my hair grows on my head. “I see,” the doctor said. “But something went wrong. But you’ve had plenty of time to think about it since. To decide what was wrong, what you failed to do.”

“Yes,” the convict said. “I’ve thought about it a right smart since.”

“So next time you are not going to make that mistake.”

“I don’t know,” the convict said. “There aint going to be a next time.”

“Why? If you know what you did wrong, they wont catch you next time.”

The convict looked at the doctor steadily. They looked at each other steadily; the two sets of eyes were not so different after all. “I reckon I see what you mean,” the convict said presently. “I was eighteen then. I’m twenty-five now.”

“Oh,” the doctor said. Now (the convict tried to tell it) the doctor did not move, he just simply quit looking at the convict. He produced a pack of cheap cigarettes from his coat. “Smoke?” he said.

“I wouldn’t care for none,” the convict said.

“Quite,” the doctor said in that affable clipped voice. He put the cigarettes away. “There has been conferred upon my race (the Medical race) also the power to bind and to loose, if not by Jehovah perhaps, certainly by the American Medical Association—on which incidentally,

in this day of Our Lord, I would put my money, at any odds, at any amount, at any time. I dont know just how far out of bounds I am on this specific occasion but I think we'll put it to the touch." He cupped his hands to his mouth, toward the pilot house overhead. "Captain!" he shouted. "We'll put these three passengers ashore here." He turned to the convict again. "Yes," he said, "I think I shall let your native State lick its own vomit. Here." Again his hand emerged from his pocket, this time with a bill in it.

"No," the convict said.

"Come, come; I dont like to be disputed either."

"No," the convict said. "I aint got any way to pay it back."

"Did I ask you to pay it back?"

"No," the convict said. "I never asked to borrow it either."

So once more he stood on dry land, who had already been toyed with twice by that risible and concentrated power of water, once more than should have fallen to the lot of any one man, any one lifetime, yet for whom there was reserved still another unbelievable recapitulation, he and the woman standing on the empty levee, the sleeping child wrapped in the faded tunic and the grapevine painter still wrapped about the convict's wrist, watching the steamboat back away and turn and once more crawl onward up the platter-like reach of vacant water burnished more and more to copper, its trailing smoke roiling in slow copper-edged gout, thinning out along the water, fading, stinking away across the vast serene desolation, the boat growing smaller and smaller until it did not seem to crawl at all but to hang stationary in the airy substanceless sunset, dissolving into nothing like a pellet of floating mud.

Then he turned and for the first time looked about him, behind him, recoiling, not through fear but through pure reflex and not physically but the soul, the spirit, that profound sober alert attentiveness of the

hill-man who will not ask anything of strangers, not even information, thinking quietly, No. This aint Carrollton neither.

Because he now looked down the almost perpendicular landward slope of the levee through sixty feet of absolute space, upon a surface, a terrain flat as a waffle and of the color of a waffle or perhaps of the summer coat of a claybank horse and possessing that same piled density of a rug or peltry, spreading away without undulation yet with that curious appearance of imponderable solidity like fluid, broken here and there by thick humps of arsenical green which nevertheless still seemed to possess no height and by written veins of the color of ink which he began to suspect to be actual water but with judgment reserved, with judgment still reserved even when presently he was walking in it. That's what he said, told: So they went on.

He didn't tell how he got the skiff singlehanded up the revetment and across the crown and down the opposite sixty foot drop, he just said he went on, in a swirling cloud of mosquitoes like hot cinders, thrusting and plunging through the saw-edged grass which grew taller than his head and which whipped back at his arms and face like limber knives, dragging by the vine-spliced painter the skiff in which the woman sat, slogging and stumbling knee-deep in something less of earth than water, along one of those black winding channels less of water than earth: and then (he was in the skiff too now, paddling with the charred log, what footing there had been having given away beneath him without warning thirty minutes ago, leaving only the air-filled bubble of his jumper-back ballooning lightly on the twilit water until he rose to the surface and scrambled into the skiff) the house, the cabin a little larger than a horse-box, of cypress boards and an iron roof, rising on ten-foot stilts slender as spiders' legs, like a shabby and death-stricken (and probably poisonous) wading creature which had got that far into that flat waste and died with nothing nowhere in reach or sight to lie down upon, a pirogue tied to the foot of a crude ladder, a man standing in the open door holding a lantern (it was that dark now) above his head, gobbling down at them.

He told it—of the next eight or nine or ten days, he did not remember which, while the four of them—himself and the woman and baby and the little wiry man with rotting teeth and soft wild bright eyes like a rat or a chipmunk, whose language neither of them could understand—lived in the room and a half. He did not tell it that way, just as he apparently did not consider it worth the breath to tell how he had got the hundred-and-sixty-pound skiff singlehanded up and across and down the sixty-foot levee. He just said, “After a while we come to a house and we stayed there eight or nine days then they blew up the levee with dynamite so we had to leave.”

That was all. But he remembered it, but quietly now, with the cigar now, the good one the Warden had given him (though not lighted yet) in his peaceful and steadfast hand, remembering that first morning when he waked on the thin pallet beside his host (the woman and baby had the one bed) with the fierce sun already latticed through the warped rough planking of the wall, and stood on the rickety porch looking out upon that flat fecund waste neither earth nor water, where even the senses doubted which was which, which rich and massy air and which mazy and impalpable vegetation, and thought quietly, He must do something here to eat and live.

But I dont know what. And until I can go on again, until I can find where I am and how to pass that town without them seeing me I will have to help him do it so we can eat and live too, and I dont know what. And he had a change of clothing too, almost at once on that first morning, not telling any more than he had about the skiff and the levee how he had begged borrowed or bought from the man whom he had not laid eyes on twelve hours ago and with whom on the day he saw him for the last time he still could exchange no word, the pair of dungaree pants which even the Cajan had discarded as no longer wearable, filthy, buttonless, the legs slashed and frayed into fringe like that on an 1890 hammock, in which he stood naked from the waist up and holding out to her the mud-caked and soot-stained jumper and overall when the woman waked on that first morning in the crude bunk nailed into one corner and filled with dried grass, saying, “Wash them. Good. I want all them stains out. All of them.”

“But the jumper,” she said. “Aint he got ere old shirt too? That sun and them mosquitoes—” But he did not even answer, and she said no more either, though when he and the Cajan returned at dark the garments were clean, stained a little still with the old mud and soot, but clean, resembling again what they were supposed to resemble as (his arms and back already a fiery red which would be blisters by tomorrow) he spread the garments out and examined them and then rolled them up carefully in a six-months-old New Orleans paper and thrust the bundle behind a rafter, where it remained while day followed day and the blisters on his back broke and suppurated and he would sit with his face expressionless as a wooden mask beneath the sweat while the Cajan doped his back with something on a filthy rag from a filthy saucer, she still saying nothing since she too doubtless knew what his reason was, not from that rapport of the wedded conferred upon her by the two weeks during which they had jointly suffered all the crises emotional social economic and even moral which do not always occur even in the ordinary fifty married years (the old married: you have seen them, the electroplate reproductions, the thousand identical coupled faces with only a collarless stud or a fichu out of Louisa Alcott to denote the sex, looking in pairs like the winning braces of dogs after a field trial, out from among the packed columns of disaster and alarm and baseless assurance and hope and incredible insensitivity and insulation from tomorrow propped by a thousand morning sugar bowls or coffee urns; or singly, rocking on porches or sitting in the sun beneath the tobacco-stained porticoes of a thousand county courthouses, as though with the death of the other having inherited a sort of rejuvenescence, immortality; relict, they take a new lease on breath and seem to live forever, as though that flesh which the old ceremony or ritual had morally purified and made legally one had actually become so with long tedious habit and he or she who entered the ground first took all of it with him or her, leaving only the old permanent enduring bone, free and tramelless)—not because of this but because she too had stemmed at some point from the same dim hill-bred Abraham.

So the bundle remained behind the rafter and day followed day while he and his partner (he was in partnership now with his host, hunting

alligators on shares, on the halvers he called it—“Halvers?” the plump convict said. “How could you make a business agreement with a man you claim you couldn’t even talk to?”

“I never had to talk to him,” the tall one said. “Money aint got but one language.”) departed at dawn each day, at first together in the pirogue but later singly, the one in the pirogue and the other in the skiff, the one with the battered and pitted rifle, the other with the knife and a piece of knotted rope and a lightwood club the size and weight and shape of a Thuringian mace, stalking their pleistocene nightmares up and down the secret inky channels which writhed the flat brass-colored land. He remembered that too: that first morning when turning in the sunrise from the rickety platform he saw the hide nailed drying to the wall and stopped dead, looking at it quietly, thinking quietly and soberly, So that’s it.

That’s what he does in order to eat and live, knowing it was a hide, a skin, but from what animal, by association, ratiocination or even memory of any picture out of his dead youth, he did not know but knowing that it was the reason, the explanation, for the little lost spider-legged house (which had already begun to die, to rot from the legs upward almost before the roof was nailed on) set in that teeming and myriad desolation, enclosed and lost within the furious embrace of flowing mare earth and stallion sun, divining through pure rapport of kind for kind, hill-billy and bayou-rat, the two one and identical because of the same grudged dispensation and niggard fate of hard and unceasing travail not to gain future security, a balance in the bank or even in a buried soda can for slothful and easy old age, but just permission to endure and endure to buy air to feel and sun to drink for each’s little while, thinking (the convict), Well, anyway I am going to find out what it is sooner than I expected to, and did so, re-entered the house where the woman was just waking in the one sorry built-in straw-filled bunk which the Cajan had surrendered to her, and ate the breakfast (the rice, a semi-liquid mess violent with pepper and mostly fish considerably high, the chicory-thickened coffee) and, shirtless, followed the little scuttling bobbing bright-eyed rotten-toothed man down the crude ladder and into the pirogue.

He had never seen a pirogue either and he believed that it would not remain upright—not that it was light and precariously balanced with its open side upward but that there was inherent in the wood, the very log, some dynamic and unsleeping natural law, almost will, which its present position outraged and violated—yet accepting this too as he had the fact that that hide had belonged to something larger than any calf or hog and that anything which looked like that on the outside would be more than likely to have teeth and claws too, accepting this, squatting in the pirogue, clutching both gunwales, rigidly immobile as though he had an egg filled with nitroglycerin in his mouth and scarcely breathing, thinking, If that's it, then I can do it too and even if he cant tell me how I reckon I can watch him and find out.

And he did this too, he remembered it, quietly even yet, thinking, I thought that was how to do it and I reckon I would still think that even if I had it to do again now for the first time—the brazen day already fierce upon his naked back, the crooked channel like a voluted thread of ink, the pirogue moving steadily to the paddle which both entered and left the water without a sound; then the sudden cessation of the paddle behind him and the fierce hissing gobble of the Cajan at his back and he squatting bate-breathed and with that intense immobility of complete sobriety of a blind man listening while the frail wooden shell stole on at the dying apex of its own parted water.

Afterward he remembered the rifle too—the rust-pitted single-shot weapon with a clumsily wired stock and a muzzle you could have driven a whiskey cork into, which the Cajan had brought into the boat—but not now; now he just squatted, crouched, immobile, breathing with infinitesimal care, his sober unceasing gaze going here and there constantly as he thought, What? What? I not only dont know what I am looking for, I dont even know where to look for it.

Then he felt the motion of the pirogue as the Cajan moved and then the tense gobbling hissing actually, hot rapid and repressed, against his neck and ear, and glancing downward saw projecting between his own arm and body from behind the Cajan's hand holding the knife, and

glaring up again saw the flat thick spit of mud which as he looked at it divided and became a thick mud-colored log which in turn seemed, still immobile, to leap suddenly against his retinae in three—no, four—dimensions: volume, solidity, shape, and another: not fear but pure and intense speculation and he looking at the scaled motionless shape, thinking not, It looks dangerous but It looks big, thinking, Well, maybe a mule standing in a lot looks big to a man that never walked up to one with a halter before, thinking, Only if he could just tell me what to do it would save time, the pirogue drawing nearer now, creeping now, with no ripple now even and it seemed to him that he could even hear his companion's held breath and he taking the knife from the other's hand now and not even thinking this since it was too fast, a flash; it was not a surrender, not a resignation, it was too calm, it was a part of him, he had drunk it with his mother's milk and lived with it all his life: After all a man cant only do what he has to do, with what he has to do it with, with what he has learned, to the best of his judgment.

And I reckon a hog is still a hog, no matter what it looks like. So here goes, sitting still for an instant longer until the bow of the pirogue grounded lighter than the falling of a leaf and stepped out of it and paused just for one instant while the words It does look big stood for just a second, unemphatic and trivial, somewhere where some fragment of his attention could see them and vanished, and stooped straddling, the knife driving even as he grasped the near foreleg, this all in the same instant when the lashing tail struck him a terrific blow upon the back. But the knife was home, he knew that even on his back in the mud, the weight of the thrashing beast longwise upon him, its ridged back clutched to his stomach, his arm about its throat, the hissing head clamped against his jaw, the furious tail lashing and flailing, the knife in his other hand probing for the life and finding it, the hot fierce gush: and now sitting beside the profound up-bellied carcass, his head again between his knees in the old attitude while his own blood freshened the other which drenched him, thinking, It's my durn nose again.

So he sat there, his head, his streaming face, bowed between his knees in an attitude not of dejection but profoundly bemused, contemplative, while the shrill voice of the Cajan seemed to buzz at him from an

enormous distance; after a time he even looked up at the antic wiry figure bouncing hysterically about him, the face wild and grimacing, the voice gobbling and high; while the convict, holding his face carefully slanted so the blood would run free, looked at him with the cold intentness of a curator or custodian paused before one of his own glass cases, the Cajan threw up the rifle, cried “Boom-boom-boom!” flung it down and in pantomime re-enacted the recent scene then whirled his hands again, crying “Magnifique! Magnifique! Cent d’argent! Mille d’argent! Tout l’argent sous le ciel de Dieu!”

But the convict was already looking down again, cupping the coffee-colored water to his face, watching the constant bright carmine marble it, thinking, It’s a little late to be telling me that now, and not even thinking this long because presently they were in the pirogue again, the convict squatting again with that unbreathing rigidity as though he were trying by holding his breath to decrease his very weight, the bloody skin in the bows before him and he looking at it, thinking, And I cant even ask him how much my half will be.

But this not for long either, because as he was to tell the plump convict later, money has but one language. He remembered that too (they were at home now, the skin spread on the platform, where for the woman’s benefit now the Cajan once more went through the pantomime—the gun which was not used, the hand-to-hand battle; for the second time the invisible alligator was slain amid cries, the victor rose and found this time that not even the woman was watching him. She was looking at the once more swollen and inflamed face of the convict. “You mean it kicked you right in the face?” she said.

“Nah,” the convict said harshly, savagely. “It never had to. I done seem to got to where if that boy was to shoot me in the tail with a bean blower my nose would bleed.”)—remembered that too but he did not try to tell it. Perhaps he could not have—how two people who could not even talk to one another made an agreement which both not only understood but which each knew the other would hold true and protect (perhaps for this reason) better than any written and witnessed contract.

They even discussed and agreed somehow that they should hunt separately, each in his own vessel, to double the chances of finding prey. But this was easy: the convict could almost understand the words in which the Cajan said, "You do not need me and the rifle; we will only hinder you, be in your way." And more than this, they even agreed about the second rifle: that there was someone, it did not matter who—friend, neighbor, perhaps one in business in that line—from whom they could rent a second rifle; in their two patois, the one bastard English, the other bastard French—the one volatile, with his wild bright eyes and his voluble mouth full of stumps of teeth, the other sober, almost grim, swollen-faced and with his naked back blistered and scoriated like so much beef—they discussed this, squatting on either side of the pegged-out hide like two members of a corporation facing each other across a mahogany board table, and decided against it, the convict deciding: "I reckon not," he said.

"I reckon if I had knowed enough to wait to start out with a gun, I still would. But since I done already started out without one, I dont reckon I'll change." Because it was a question of the money in terms of time, days. (Strange to say, that was the one thing which the Cajan could not tell him: how much the half would be. But the convict knew it was half.) He had so little of them. He would have to move on soon, thinking (the convict), All this durn foolishness will stop soon and I can get on back, and then suddenly he found that he was thinking, Will have to get on back, and he became quite still and looked about at the rich strange desert which surrounded him, in which he was temporarily lost in peace and hope and into which the last seven years had sunk like so many trivial pebbles into a pool, leaving no ripple, and he thought quietly, with a kind of bemused amazement, Yes. I reckon I had done forgot how good making money was. Being let to make it.

So he used no gun, his the knotted rope and the Thuringian mace, and each morning he and the Cajan took their separate ways in the two boats to comb and creep the secret channels about the lost land from (or out of) which now and then still other pint-sized dark men appeared gobbling, abruptly and as though by magic from nowhere, in other

hollowed logs, to follow quietly and watch him at his single combats—men named Tine and Toto and Theule, who were not much larger than and looked a good deal like the muskrats which the Cajan (the host did this too, supplied the kitchen too, he expressed this too like the rifle business, in his own tongue, the convict comprehending this too as though it had been English: “Do not concern yourself about food, O Hercules.

Catch alligators; I will supply the pot.”) took now and then from traps as you take a shoat pig at need from a pen, and varied the eternal rice and fish (the convict did tell this: how at night, in the cabin, the door and one sashless window battened against mosquitoes—a form, a ritual, as empty as crossing the fingers or knocking on wood—sitting beside the bug-swirled lantern on the plank table in a temperature close to blood heat he would look down at the swimming segment of meat on his sweating plate and think, It must be Theule.

He was the fat one.)—day following day, unemphatic and identical, each like the one before and the one which would follow while his theoretical half of a sum to be reckoned in pennies, dollars, or tens of dollars he did not know, mounted—the mornings when he set forth to find waiting for him like the matador his aficionados the small clump of constant and deferential pirogues, the hard noons when ringed half about by little motionless shells he fought his solitary combats, the evenings, the return, the pirogues departing one by one into inlets and passages which during the first few days he could not even distinguish, then the platform in the twilight where before the static woman and the usually nursing infant and the one or two bloody hides of the day’s take the Cajan would perform his ritualistic victorious pantomime before the two growing rows of knifemarks in one of the boards of the wall; then the nights when, the woman and child in the single bunk and the Cajan already snoring on the pallet and the reeking lantern set close, he (the convict) would sit on his naked heels, sweating steadily, his face worn and calm, immersed and indomitable, his bowed back raw and savage as beef beneath the suppurant old blisters and the fierce welts of tails, and scrape and chip at the charred sapling which was almost a paddle now, pausing now and then to raise his head while

the cloud of mosquitoes about it whined and whirled, to stare at the wall before him until after a while the crude boards themselves must have dissolved away and let his blank unseeing gaze go on and on unhampered, through the rich oblivious darkness, beyond it even perhaps, even perhaps beyond the seven wasted years during which, so he had just realised, he had been permitted to toil but not to work.

Then he would retire himself, he would take a last look at the rolled bundle behind the rafter and blow out the lantern and lie down as he was beside his snoring partner, to lie sweating (on his stomach, he could not bear the touch of anything to his back) in the whining ovenlike darkness filled with the forlorn bellowing of alligators, thinking not, They never gave me time to learn but I had forgot how good it is to work.

Then on the tenth day it happened. It happened for the third time. At first he refused to believe it, not that he felt that now he had served out and discharged his apprenticeship to mischance, had with the birth of the child reached and crossed the crest of his Golgotha and would now be, possibly not permitted so much as ignored, to descend the opposite slope free-wheeling.

That was not his feeling at all. What he declined to accept was the fact that a power, a force such as that which had been consistent enough to concentrate upon him with deadly undeviation for weeks, should with all the wealth of cosmic violence and disaster to draw from, have been so barren of invention and imagination, so lacking in pride of artistry and craftsmanship, as to repeat itself twice. Once he had accepted, twice he even forgave, but three times he simply declined to believe, particularly when he was at last persuaded to realise that this third time was to be instigated not by the blind potency of volume and motion but by human direction and hands: that now the cosmic joker, foiled twice, had stooped in its vindictive concentration to the employing of dynamite.

He did not tell that. Doubtless he did not know himself how it happened, what was happening. But he doubtless remembered it (but

quietly above the thick rich-colored pristine cigar in his clean steady hand), what he knew, divined of it.

It would be evening, the ninth evening, he and the woman on either side of their host's empty place at the evening meal, he hearing the voices from without but not ceasing to eat, still chewing steadily, because it would be the same as though he were seeing them anyway—the two or three or four pirogues floating on the dark water beneath the platform on which the host stood, the voices gobbling and jabbering, incomprehensible and filled not with alarm and not exactly with rage or ever perhaps absolute surprise but rather just cacophony like those of disturbed marsh fowl, he (the convict) not ceasing to chew but just looking up quietly and maybe without a great deal of interrogation or surprise too as the Cajan burst in and stood before them, wild-faced, glaring, his blackened teeth gaped against the inky orifice of his distended mouth, watching (the convict) while the Cajan went through his violent pantomime of violent evacuation, ejection, scooping something invisible into his arms and hurling it out and downward and in the instant of completing the gesture changing from instigator to victim of that which he had set into pantomimic motion, clasp his head and, bowed over and not otherwise moving, seeming to be swept on and away before it, crying “Boom! Boom! Boom!”, the convict watching him, his jaw not chewing now, though for just that moment, thinking, What? What is it he is trying to tell me? thinking (this a flash too, since he could not have expressed this, and hence did not even know that he had ever thought it) that though his life had been cast here, circumscribed by this environment, accepted by this environment and accepting it in turn (and he had done well here—this quietly, soberly indeed, if he had been able to phrase it, think it instead of merely knowing it—better than he had ever done, who had not even known until now how good work, making money, could be) yet it was not his life, he still and would ever be no more than the water bug upon the surface of the pond, the plumbless and lurking depths of which he would never know, his only actual contact with it being the instants when on lonely and glaring mudspits under the pitiless sun and amphitheatred by his motionless and riveted semicircle of watching pirogues, he accepted the gambit which he had not elected, entered

the lashing radius of the armed tail and beat at the thrashing and hissing head with his lightwood club, or this failing, embraced without hesitation the armored body itself with the frail web of flesh and bone in which he walked and lived and sought the raging life with an eight-inch knife-blade.

So he and the woman merely watched the Cajan as he acted out the whole charade of eviction—the little wiry man gesticulant and wild, his hysterical shadow leaping and falling upon the rough wall as he went through the pantomime of abandoning the cabin, gathering in pantomime his meagre belongings from the walls and corners—objects which no other man would want and only some power or force like blind water or earthquake or fire would ever dispossess him of, the woman watching too, her mouth slightly open upon a mass of chewed food, on her face an expression of placid astonishment, saying, “What? What’s he saying?”

“I dont know,” the convict said. “But I reckon if it’s something we ought to know we will find it out when it’s ready for us to.” Because he was not alarmed, though by now he had read the other’s meaning plainly enough. He’s fixing to leave, he thought. He’s telling me to leave too—this later, after they had quitted the table and the Cajan and the woman had gone to bed and the Cajan had risen from the pallet and approached the convict and once more went through the pantomime of abandoning the cabin, this time as one repeats a speech which may have been misunderstood, tediously, carefully repetitional as to a child, seeming to hold the convict with one hand while he gestured, talked, with the other, gesturing as though in single syllables, the convict (squatting, the knife open and the almost-finished paddle across his lap) watching, nodding his head, even speaking in English: “Yah; sure.

You bet. I got you.”—trimming again at the paddle but no faster, with no more haste than on any other night, serene in his belief that when the time came for him to know whatever it was, that would take care of itself, having already and without even knowing it, even before the possibility, the question, ever arose, declined, refused to accept even the thought of moving also, thinking about the hides, thinking, If there

was just some way he could tell me where to carry my share to get the money but thinking this only for an instant between two delicate strokes of the blade because almost at once he thought, I reckon as long as I can catch them I wont have no big trouble finding whoever it is that will buy them.

So the next morning he helped the Cajan load his few belongings—the pitted rifle, a small bundle of clothing (again they traded, who could not even converse with one another, this time the few cooking vessels, a few rusty traps by definite allocation, and something embracing and abstractional which included the stove, the crude bunk, the house or its occupancy—something—in exchange for one alligator hide)—into the pirogue, then, squatting and as two children divide sticks they divided the hides, separating them into two piles, one-for-me-and-one-for-you, two-for-me-and-two-for-you, and the Cajan loaded his share and shoved away from the platform and paused again, though this time he only put the paddle down, gathered something invisibly into his two hands and flung it violently upward, crying “Boom? Boom?” on a rising inflection, nodding violently to the half-naked and savagely scoriated man on the platform who stared with a sort of grim equability back at him and said, “Sure. Boom. Boom.” Then the Cajan went on. He did not look back. They watched him, already paddling rapidly, or the woman did; the convict had already turned.

“Maybe he was trying to tell us to leave too,” she said.

“Yah,” the convict said. “I thought of that last night. Hand me the paddle.” She fetched it to him—the sapling, the one he had been trimming at nightly, not quite finished yet though one more evening would do it (he had been using a spare one of the Cajan’s.

The other had offered to let him keep it, to include it perhaps with the stove and the bunk and the cabin’s freehold, but the convict had declined. Perhaps he had computed it by volume against so much alligator hide, this weighed against one more evening with the tedious and careful blade.) and he departed too with his knotted rope and mace, in the opposite direction, as though not only not content with

refusing to quit the place he had been warned against, he must establish and affirm the irrevocable finality of his refusal by penetrating even further and deeper into it. And then and without warning the high fierce drowsing of his solitude gathered itself and struck at him.

He could not have told this if he had tried—this not yet midmorning and he going on, alone for the first time, no pirogue emerging anywhere to fall in behind him, but he had not expected this anyway, he knew that the others would have departed too; it was not this, it was his very solitude, his desolation which was now his alone and in full since he had elected to remain; the sudden cessation of the paddle, the skiff shooting on for a moment yet while he thought, What? What?

Then, No. No. No, as the silence and solitude and emptiness roared down upon him in a jeering bellow: and now reversed, the skiff spun violently on its heel, he the betrayed driving furiously back toward the platform where he knew it was already too late, that citadel where the very crux and dear breath of his life—the being allowed to work and earn money, that right and privilege which he believed he had earned to himself unaided, asking no favor of anyone or anything save the right to be let alone to pit his will and strength against the sauric protagonist of a land, a region, which he had not asked to be projected into—was being threatened, driving the home-made paddle in grim fury, coming in sight of the platform at last and seeing the motor launch lying alongside it with no surprise at all but actually with a kind of pleasure as though at a visible justification of his outrage and fear, the privilege of saying I told you so to his own affronting, driving on toward it in a dreamlike state in which there seemed to be no progress at all, in which, unimpeded and suffocating, he strove dreamily with a weightless oar, with muscles without strength or resiliency, at a medium without resistance, seeming to watch the skiff creep infinitesimally across the sunny water and up to the platform while a man in the launch (there were five of them in all) gobbled at him in that same tongue he had been hearing constantly now for ten days and still knew no word of, just as a second man, followed by the woman carrying the baby and dressed again for departure in the faded tunic and the sunbonnet, emerged from the house, carrying (the man carried

several other things but the convict saw nothing else) the paper-wrapped bundle which the convict had put behind the rafter ten days ago and no other hand had touched since, he (the convict) on the platform too now, holding the skiff's painter in one hand and the bludgeon-like paddle in the other, contriving to speak to the woman at last in a voice dreamy and suffocating and incredibly calm: "Take it away from him and carry it back into the house."

"So you can talk English, can you?" the man in the launch said. "Why didn't you come out like they told you to last night?"

"Out?" the convict said. Again he even looked, glared, at the man in the launch, contriving even again to control his voice: "I aint got time to take trips. I'm busy," already turning to the woman again, his mouth already open to repeat as the dreamy buzzing voice of the man came to him and he turning once more, in a terrific and absolutely unbearable exasperation, crying, "Flood? What flood? Hell a mile, it's done passed me twice months ago! It's gone! What flood?" and then (he did not think this in actual words either but he knew it, suffered that flashing insight into his own character or destiny: how there was a peculiar quality of repetitiveness about his present fate, how not only the almost seminal crises recurred with a certain monotony, but the very physical circumstances followed a stupidly unimaginative pattern) the man in the launch said, "Take him" and he was on his feet for a few minutes yet, lashing and striking in panting fury, then once more on his back on hard unyielding planks while the four men swarmed over him in a fierce wave of hard bones and panting curses and at last the thin dry vicious snapping of handcuffs.

"Damn it, are you mad?" the man in the launch said. "Cant you understand they are going to dynamite that levee at noon today?—Come on," he said to the others. "Get him aboard. Let's get out of here."

"I want my hides and boat," the convict said.

“Damn your hides,” the man in the launch said. “If they dont get that levee blowed pretty soon you can hunt plenty more of them on the capitol steps at Baton Rouge. And this is all the boat you will need and you can say your prayers about it.”

“I aint going without my boat,” the convict said. He said it calmly and with complete finality, so calm, so final that for almost a minute nobody answered him, they just stood looking quietly down at him as he lay, half-naked, blistered and scarred, helpless and manacled hand and foot, on his back, delivering his ultimatum in a voice peaceful and quiet as that in which you talk to your bedfellow before going to sleep. Then the man in the launch moved; he spat quietly over the side and said in a voice as calm and quiet as the convict’s:

“All right. Bring his boat.” They helped the woman, carrying the baby and the paper-wrapped parcel, into the launch. Then they helped the convict to his feet and into the launch too, the shackles on his wrists and ankles clashing. “I’d unlock you if you’d promise to behave yourself,” the man said. The convict did not answer this at all.

“I want to hold the rope,” he said.

“The rope?”

“Yes,” the convict said. “The rope.” So they lowered him into the stern and gave him the end of the painter after it had passed the towing cleat, and they went on. The convict did not look back. But then, he did not look forward either, he lay half sprawled, his shackled legs before him, the end of the skiff’s painter in one shackled hand. The launch made two other stops; when the hazy wafer of the intolerable sun began to stand once more directly overhead there were fifteen people in the launch; and then the convict, sprawled and motionless, saw the flat brazen land begin to rise and become a greenish-black mass of swamp, bearded and convoluted, this in turn stopping short off and there spread before him an expanse of water embraced by a blue dissolution of shoreline and glittering thinly under the noon, larger than he had ever seen before, the sound of the launch’s engine ceasing, the

hull sliding on behind its fading bow-wave. "What are you doing?" the leader said.

"It's noon," the helmsman said. "I thought we might hear the dynamite." So they all listened, the launch lost of all forward motion, rocking slightly, the glitter-broken small waves slapping and whispering at the hull, but no sound, no tremble even, came anywhere under the fierce hazy sky; the long moment gathered itself and turned on and noon was past. "All right," the leader said. "Let's go." The engine started again, the hull began to gather speed. The leader came aft and stooped over the convict, key in hand. "I guess you'll have to behave now, whether you want to or not," he said, unlocking the manacles. "Wont you?"

"Yes," the convict said. They went on; after a time the shore vanished completely and a little sea got up. The convict was free now but he lay as before, the end of the skiff's painter in his hand, bent now with three or four turns about his wrist; he turned his head now and then to look back at the towing skiff as it slewed and bounced in the launch's wake; now and then he even looked out over the lake, the eyes alone moving, the face grave and expressionless, thinking, This is a greater immensity of water, of waste and desolation, than I have ever seen before; perhaps not; thinking three or four hours later, the shoreline raised again and broken into a clutter of sailing sloops and power cruisers, These are more boats than I believed existed, a maritime race of which I also had no cognizance or perhaps not thinking it but just watching as the launch opened the shored gut of the ship canal, the low smoke of the city beyond it, then a wharf, the launch slowing in; a quiet crowd of people watching with that same forlorn passivity he had seen before and whose race he did recognise even though he had not seen Vicksburg when he passed it—the brand, the unmistakable hallmark of the violently homeless, he more so than any, who would have permitted no man to call him one of them.

"All right," the leader said to him. "Here you are."

"The boat," the convict said.

“You’ve got it. What do you want me to do—give you a receipt for it?”

“No,” the convict said. “I just want the boat.”

“Take it. Only you ought to have a bookstrap or something to carry it in.” (“Carry it in?” the plump convict said. “Carry it where? Where would you have to carry it?”)

He (the tall one) told that: how he and the woman disembarked and how one of the men helped him haul the skiff up out of the water and how he stood there with the end of the painter wrapped around his wrist and the man bustled up, saying, “All right. Next load! Next load!” and how he told this man too about the boat and the man cried, “Boat? Boat?” and how he (the convict) went with them when they carried the skiff over and racked, berthed, it with the others and how he lined himself up by a coca-cola sign and the arch of a draw bridge so he could find the skiff again quick when he returned, and how he and the woman (he carrying the paper-wrapped parcel) were herded into a truck and after a while the truck began to run in traffic, between close houses, then there was a big building, an armory—

“Armory?” the plump one said. “You mean a jail.”

“No. It was a kind of warehouse, with people with bundles laying on the floor.” And how he thought maybe his partner might be there and how he even looked about for the Cajan while waiting for a chance to get back to the door again, where the soldier was and how he got back to the door at last, the woman behind him and his chest actually against the dropped rifle.

“Gwan, gwan,” the soldier said. “Get back. They’ll give you some clothes in a minute. You cant walk around the streets that way. And something to eat too. Maybe your kinfolks will come for you by that time.” And he told that too: how the woman said,

“Maybe if you told him you had some kinfolks here he would let us out.” And how he did not; he could not have expressed this either, it too deep, too ingrained; he had never yet had to think it into words through all the long generations of himself—his hill-man’s sober and jealous respect not for truth but for the power, the strength, of lying—not to be niggard with lying but rather to use it with respect and even care, delicate quick and strong, like a fine and fatal blade. And how they fetched him clothes—a blue jumper and overalls, and then food too (a brisk starched young woman saying, “But the baby must be bathed, cleaned.

It will die if you dont” and the woman saying, “Yessum. He might holler some, he aint never been bathed before. But he’s a good baby.”) and now it was night, the unshaded bulbs harsh and savage and forlorn above the snorers and he rising, gripping the woman awake, and then the window. He told that: how there were doors in plenty, leading he did not know where, but he had a hard time finding a window they could use but he found one at last, he carrying the parcel and the baby too while he climbed through first—“You ought to tore up a sheet and slid down it,” the plump convict said.

But he needed no sheet, there were cobbles under his feet now, in the rich darkness. The city was there too but he had not seen it yet and would not—the low constant glare; Bienville had stood there too, it had been the figment of an emasculate also calling himself Napoleon but no more, Andrew Jackson had found it one step from Pennsylvania Avenue. But the convict found it considerably further than one step back to the ship canal and the skiff, the coca-cola sign dim now, the draw bridge arching spidery against the jonquil sky at dawn: nor did he tell, any more than about the sixty-foot levee, how he got the skiff back into the water.

The lake was behind him now; there was but one direction he could go. When he saw the River again he knew it at once. He should have; it was now ineradicably a part of his past, his life; it would be a part of what he would bequeath, if that were in store for him.

But four weeks later it would look different from what it did now, and did: he (the old man) had recovered from his debauch, back in banks again, the Old Man, rippling placidly toward the sea, brown and rich as chocolate between levees whose inner faces were wrinkled as though in a frozen and aghast amazement, crowned with the rich green of summer in the willows; beyond them, sixty feet below, slick mules squatted against the broad pull of middle-busters in the richened soil which would not need to be planted, which would need only to be shown a cotton seed to sprout and make; there would be the symmetric miles of strong stalks by July, purple bloom in August, in September the black fields snowed over, spilled, the middles dragged smooth by the long sacks, the long black limber hands plucking, the hot air filled with the whine of gins, the September air then but now June air heavy with locust and (the towns) the smell of new paint and the sour smell of the paste which holds wall paper—the towns, the villages, the little lost wood landings on stilts on the inner face of the levee, the lower storeys bright and rank under the new paint and paper and even the marks on spile and post and tree of May's raging water-height fading beneath each bright silver gust of summer's loud and inconstant rain; there was a store at the levee's lip, a few saddled and rope-bridled mules in the sleepy dust, a few dogs, a handful of negroes sitting on the steps beneath the chewing tobacco and malaria medicine signs, and three white men, one of them a deputy sheriff canvassing for votes to beat his superior (who had given him his job) in the August primary, all pausing to watch the skiff emerge from the glitter-glare of the afternoon water and approach and land, a woman carrying a child stepping out, then a man, a tall man who, approaching, proved to be dressed in a faded but recently washed and quite clean suit of penitentiary clothing, stopping in the dust where the mules dozed and watching with pale cold humorless eyes while the deputy sheriff was still making toward his armpit that gesture which everyone present realised was to have produced a pistol in one flashing motion for a considerable time while still nothing came of it. It was apparently enough for the newcomer, however.

“You a officer?” he said.

“You damn right I am,” the deputy said. “Just let me get this damn gun—”

“All right,” the other said. “Yonder’s your boat, and here’s the woman. But I never did find that bastard on the cottonhouse.”

Chapter IX The Wild Palms

This time the doctor and the man called Harry walked out of the door together, onto the dark porch, into the dark wind still filled with the clashing of invisible palms. The doctor carried the whiskey—the pint bottle half full; perhaps he did not even know it was in his hand, perhaps it was only the hand and not the bottle which he shook in the invisible face of the man standing above him. His voice was cold, precise, and convinced—the puritan who some would have said was about to do what he had to do because he was a puritan, who perhaps believed himself he was about to do it to protect the ethics and sanctity of his chosen profession, but who was actually about to do it because though not old yet he believed he was too old for this, too old to be wakened at midnight and dragged, haled, unwarned and still dull with sleep, into this, this bright wild passion which had somehow passed him up when he had been young enough, worthy enough, and to whose loss he believed he had not only become reconciled but had been both fortunate and right in having been elected to lose.

“You have murdered her,” he said.

“Yes,” the other said, almost impatiently; this the doctor noticed now, this alone. “The hospital. Will you telephone, or—”

“Yes, murdered her! Who did this?”

“I did. Dont stand here talking. Will you tel—”

“Who did this, I say? Who performed it? I demand to know.”

“I did, I tell you. Myself. In God’s name, man!” He took the doctor’s arm, he gripped it, the doctor felt it, felt the hand, he (the doctor) heard his own voice too:

“What?” he said. “You? You did it? Yourself? But I thought you were the—” I thought you were the lover was what he meant. I thought you were the one who because what he was thinking was This is too much! There are rules! Limits! To fornication, adultery, to abortion, crime and what he meant was To that of love and passion and tragedy which is allowed to anyone lest he become as God Who has suffered likewise all that Satan can have known. He even said some of it at last, flinging the other’s hand violently off, not exactly as if it has been a spider or a reptile or even a piece of filth, but rather as if he had found clinging to his sleeve a piece of atheistic or Communist propaganda—something not violating so much as affronting that profound and now deathless desiccated spirit which had contrived to retire into pure morality. “This is too much!” he cried. “Stay here! Dont try to escape! You cannot hide where you will not be found!”

“Escape?” the other said. “Escape? Will you telephone for the ambulance, in God’s dear name?”

“I’ll telephone, never you fear!” the doctor cried. He was on the earth below the porch now, in the hard black wind, already moving away, beginning to run suddenly and heavily on his thick sedentary legs. “Dont you dare to try!” he cried back. “Dont you dare to try!” He still had the flashlight; Wilbourne watched the beam of it jouncing on toward the oleander hedge as though it too, the little futile moth-light beam, struggled too against the constant weight of the black pitiless wind. He didn’t forget that, Wilbourne thought, watching it.

But then he probably never forgot anything in his life except that he was alive once, must have been born alive at least. Then at that word he became aware of his heart, as though all profound terror had merely waited until he should prompt himself. He could feel the hard black wind too as he blinked after the floundering light until it passed through the hedge and vanished; he blinked steadily in the black wind,

he could not stop it. My lachrymae are not functioning, he thought, hearing his roaring and laboring heart. As though it were pumping sand not blood, not liquid, he thought. Trying to pump it. It's just this wind I think I cant breathe in, it's not that I really cant breathe, find something somewhere to breathe because apparently the heart can stand anything anything anything.

He turned and crossed the porch. This time as before he and the black steady wind were like two creatures trying to use the same single entrance. Only it dont really want to come in, he thought. Dont need to. Dont have to. It's just interfering for the fun, the hell of it. He could feel it on the door when he touched the knob, then, close, he could hear it too, a sibilance, a whisper. It was risible, it was almost a chuckling, leaning its weight on the door along with his weight, making the door easy, too easy, surreptitious, making its weight really felt only when he came to close the door and this time just too easy because so steady, just risible and chuckling; it did not really want to come in. He closed the door, watching the faint light which fell into the hall from the lamp inside the bedroom suck, shift and recover steadily as what of the wind might have remained in the house if it had wanted to, might have been trapped inside the house by the closing door, licked quietly out through the ultimate closing crack, risible and constant, not at all departing, and turned listening, his head slanted a little toward the bedroom door with listening. But no sound came from beyond it, no sound in the hall but the wind murmuring against the door of the barren rented hall where he stood, quiet with listening, thinking quietly, I guessed wrong.

It's incredible, not that I should have had to guess but that I should have guessed so wrong not meaning the doctor, not thinking about the doctor now (With a part of his mind he was not using now he could see it: the other neat, tight, brown-stained wind-proof tongue-and-groove hall, the flashlight still burning on the table beside the hurried bag, the thick bulging varicose planted calves as he had first seen them beneath the nightshirt, planted outraged and convinced and unassuageable by anything else but this; he could even hear the voice not raised but

risen, a little shrill, unappeasable too, into the telephone: "And a policeman. A policeman. Two if necessary.

Do you hear?" He'll wake her too, he thought, seeing this too: the upper room, the gorgon-headed woman in the gray high-necked gown risen onto her elbow in the stale gray bed, her head cocked to listen and without surprise, who would be hearing only what she had been expecting for four days to hear. She will come back with him—if he himself comes back, he thought. If he don't just sit outside with the pistol to guard the exits. And maybe she will even be there too.) Because this didn't matter, it was just like putting a letter into the mail; it didn't matter what box, only that he should have waited so late to mail the letter, he, after the four years and then the twenty months, the almost two years more and then done, complete.

I have made a bust even of that part of my life which I threw away, he thought, motionless in the risible murmur of the waiting and unhurried wind, his head turned slightly toward the bedroom door with listening, thinking with that trivial layer of his mind which he did not need to use, So it's not just the wind I can't breathe in so maybe forever after I have gained, earned, some little of suffocation, beginning to breathe not faster but deeper, he could not stop it, each breath shallower and shallower and harder and harder and nearer and nearer the top of his lungs until in a moment it would escape the lungs altogether and there would indeed be no breath left anywhere forever, blinking steadily and painfully at the sudden granulation of his lids as though the black sand dammed forever of any moisture at which his strong heart scooped and surged were about to burst out of him through all his ducts and pores as they say the sweat of agony does, thinking. Steady now. Careful now. When she comes back this time she will have to begin to hold on.

He crossed the hall to the bedroom door. There was still no sound save the wind (there was a window, the sash did not fit; the black wind whispered and murmured at it but did not enter, it did not want to, did not need to). She lay on her back, her eyes closed, the nightgown (that garment which she had never owned, never worn before) twisted

about her just under the arms, the body not sprawled, not abandoned, but on the contrary even a little tense.

The whisper of the black wind filled the room but coming from nothing, so that presently it began to seem to him that the sound was rather the murmur of the lamp itself sitting on an upended packing case beside the bed, the rustle and murmur of faint dingy light itself on her flesh—the waist ever narrower than he had believed, anticipated, the thighs merely broad since they were flat too, the swell and neat nip of belly between the navel's flattened crease and the neat close cupping of female hair, and nothing else, no croaching shadow of ineradicable blackness, no shape of death cuckolding him; nothing to see, yet it was there, he not permitted to watch his own cuckolding but only to look down upon the invisible pregnancy of his horning. And then he could not breathe and he began to back away from the door but it was too late because she was lying on the bed looking at him.

He didn't move. He couldn't help his breathing but he didn't move, one hand on the door frame and his foot already lifted for the first step back, the eyes open full upon him though still profoundly empty of sentience. Then he saw it begin: the I. It was like watching a fish rise in water—a dot, a minnow, and still increasing; in a second there would be no more pool but all sentience. He crossed to the bed in three strides, fast but quiet; he put his hand flat on her chest, his voice quiet, steady, insistent: “No, Charlotte. Not yet. You can hear me. Go back. Go back, now.

It's all right now,” quiet and urgent and contained out of his need, as though departure only followed farewell, and good-bye was not something to precede the going away—provided there was time for it. “That's right,” he said. “Go back. It's not time yet. I will tell you when the time comes.” And she heard him from somewhere because at once the fish became the minnow again and then the dot; in another second the eyes would be empty again and blank. Only he lost her. He watched it: the dot growing too fast this time, no serene minnow but a vortex of cognizant pupil in the yellow stare spinning to blackness while he watched, the black shadow not on the belly but in the eyes. Her teeth

caught her lower lip, she rolled her head and tried to rise, struggling against the flat of his hand on her breast.

“I’m hurting. Jesus, where is he? Where’s he gone? Tell him to give me something. Quick.”

“No,” he said. “He cant. You’ve got to hurt. That’s what you’ve got to hold on to.” Now it must have been laughing; it couldn’t have been anything else. She lay back and began to thresh from hip to hip, still threshing as he untwisted the gown and drew it down and covered her.

“I thought you said you would do the holding.”

“I am. But you’ve got to hold on too. You’ve got to do most of it for a while. Just a little while. The ambulance will be here soon, but you must stay here and hurt now. Do you hear? You cant go back now.”

“Then take the knife and cut it out of me. All of it. Deep. So there wont be anything left but just a shell to hold the cold air, the cold—” Her teeth, glinting in the lamplight, caught her lower lip again; a thread of blood appeared at the corner of her mouth. He took a soiled handkerchief from his hip and leaned to her but she rolled her head away from his hand. “All right,” she said. “I’m holding on. You say the ambulance is coming?”

“Yes. In a minute we will hear it. Let me—” She rolled her head again away from the handkerchief.

“All right. Now get to hell out. You promised.”

“No. If I leave, you wont hold on. And you’ve got to hold on.”

“I am holding on. I’m holding on so you can go, get out of here before they come. You promised me you would. I want to see you go. I want to watch you.”

“All right. But dont you want to say good-bye first?”

“All right. But Jesus God, dont touch me. It’s like fire, Harry. It doesn’t hurt. It’s just like fire. Just dont touch me.” So he knelt beside the bed; she stopped her head now; her lips lay still under his for a moment, hot and dry to the taste, with the thin sweetish taste of the blood. Then she pushed his face away with her hand, it hot and dry too, he hearing her heart still, even now, a little too fast, a little too strong. “Jesus, we had fun, didn’t we, bitching, and making things? In the cold, the snow. That’s what I’m thinking about. That’s what I’m holding on to now: the snow, the cold, the cold. But it doesn’t hurt; it’s just like fire; it’s just— Now go. Get to hell out. Quick.” She began to roll her head again. He rose from his knees.

“All right. I’m going. But you must hold on. You will have to hold on a long time. Can you do it?”

“Yes. But go. Go quick. We’ve got enough money for you to get to Mobile. You can lose yourself quick there; they cant find you there. But go. Get to hell away from here quick for God’s sake.” This time when the teeth caught the bright thin blood spurted all the way to her chin. He didn’t move at once. He was trying to remember something out of a book, years ago, of Owen Wister’s, the whore in the pink ball dress who drank the laudanum and the cowboys taking turns walking her up and down the floor, keeping her on her feet, keeping her alive, remembering and forgetting it in the same instant since it would not help him. He began to move toward the door.

“All right,” he said. “I’m going now. But remember, you will have to hold on by yourself then. Do you hear? Charlotte?” The yellow eyes were full on him, she released the bitten lip and as he sprang back toward the bed he heard over the chuckling murmur of the wind the two voices at the front door, the porch—the plump-calved doctor’s high, almost shrill, almost breaking, that of the gray gorgon wife cold and level, at a baritone pitch a good deal more masculine than the man’s voice, the two of them unorientable because of the wind like the voices of two ghosts quarrelling about nothing, he (Wilbourne) hearing them and losing them too in the same instant as he bent over the wide

yellow stare in the head which had ceased to roll, above the relaxed bleeding lip. "Charlotte!" he said. "You can't go back now. You're hurting. You're hurting. It won't let you go back. You can hear me." He slapped her, fast, with two motions of the same hand. "You're hurting, Charlotte."

"Yes," she said. "You and your best doctors in New Orleans. When anybody with one mail-order stethoscope could give me something. Come on, Rat. Where are they?"

"They're coming. But you've got to hurt now. You're hurting now."

"All right. I'm holding on. But you mustn't hold him. That was all I asked. It wasn't him. Listen, Francis—See, I called you Francis. If I were lying to you do you think I would call you Francis instead of Rat?—Listen, Francis. It was the other one. Not that Wilbourne bastard. Do you think I would let that bloody bungling bastard that never even finished hospital poke around in me with a knife—" The voice stopped; there was nothing in the eyes at all now though they were still open—no minnow, no dot even—nothing. But the heart, he thought. The heart.

He laid his ear to her chest, hunting the wrist pulse with one hand; he could hear it before his ear touched her, slow, strong enough still but each beat making a curious hollow reverberation as though the heart itself had retreated, seeing at the same moment (his face was toward the door) the doctor enter, still carrying the scuffed bag in one hand and in the other a cheap-looking nickel-plated revolver such as you could find in almost any pawnshop and which, as far as serviceability was concerned, should still have been there, and followed by the gray-faced Medusa-headed woman in a shawl.

Wilbourne rose, already moving toward the doctor, his hand already extended for the bag. "It will last this time," he said, "but the heart's—Here. Give me the bag. What do you carry? Strychnine?" He watched the bag as it fled, snatched, behind the thick leg, the other hand he did not even look at as it came up but only in the next instant, at the cheap

pistol pointed at nothing and being shaken in his face as the whiskey bottle had been.

“Dont move!” the doctor cried.

“Put that thing down,” the wife said, in that same cold baritone. “I told you not to bring it. Give him the bag if he wants it and can do anything with it.”

“No!” the doctor cried. “I’m a doctor. He is not. He’s not even a successful criminal!” Now the gray wife spoke to Wilbourne so abruptly that for a moment he did not even know he was being addressed:

“Is there anything in that bag that would cure her?”

“Cure her?”

“Yes. Get her on her feet and get both of you out of this house.” The doctor turned on her now, speaking in that shrill voice on the point of breaking:

“Can’t you understand that this woman is dying?”

“Let her die. Let them both die. But not in this house. Not in this town. Get them out of here and let them cut on one another and die as much as they please.” Now Wilbourne watched the doctor shaking the pistol in the wife’s face as the other had shaken it in his.

“I will not be interfered with!” he cried. “This woman is dying and this man must suffer for it.”

“Suffer fiddlesticks,” the wife said. “You’re mad because he used a scalpel without having a diploma. Or did something with it the Medical Association said he mustn’t. Put that thing down and give her whatever it is so she can get out of that bed. Then give them some money and call a taxi-cab, not an ambulance. Give him some of my money if you wont your own.”

“Are you mad?” the doctor cried. “Are you insane?” The wife looked at him coldly with her gray face beneath the screws of gray hair.

“So you will aid and abet him to the last, wont you? I’m not surprised. I never yet saw one man fail to back up another, provided what they wanted to do was just foolish enough.” Again she turned on (not to) Wilbourne with that cold abruptness which for an instant left him unaware that he was being addressed: “You haven’t eaten anything, I imagine. I’m going to heat some coffee. You’ll probably need it by the time he and those others get through with you.”

“Thank you,” Wilbourne said. “I couldn’t—” But she was already gone. He caught himself about to say, “Wait I’ll show you” then forgot this without even having to think that she would know the kitchen better than he since she owned it, moving aside as the doctor passed him and went to the bed, following the doctor, watching him set the bag down then seem to discover the pistol in his hand and look about for something to lay it upon before remembering, then remembering and turning over his shoulder his dishevelled face.

“Dont you move!” he cried. “Dont you dare to move!”

“Get your stethoscope,” Wilbourne said. “I had thought about something now, but maybe we had better wait. Because she will come out of it once more, wont she? She’ll rally another time. Of course she will. Go on. Get it out.”

“You should have thought of that before!” The doctor still watched Wilbourne, glaring, still holding the pistol while he fumbled the bag open and extracted the stethoscope; then, still holding the pistol he ducked into the pronged tubes and leaned, seeming to forget the pistol again because he actually laid it on the bed, his hand still resting upon it but unconscious of the pistol, merely supporting his leaning weight, because there was peace in the room now, the fury gone; Wilbourne could now hear the gray wife at the stove in the kitchen and he could hear the black wind again, risible, jeering, constant, inattentive, and it

even seemed to him that he could hear the wild dry clashing of the palms in it. Then he heard the ambulance, the first faint mounting wail, far away yet, on the highway from the village, and almost immediately the wife came in, carrying a cup.

“Here comes your joyride,” she said. “It never had time to get hot. But it will be something in your stomach.”

“I thank you,” Wilbourne said. “I do thank you. It wouldn’t stay down, you see.”

“Nonsense. Drink it.”

“I do thank you.” The ambulance was wailing louder, it was coming fast, it was close now, the wail sinking into a grumble as it slowed, then rising into the wail again. It seemed to be just outside the house, loud and peremptory and with an illusion of speed and haste even though Wilbourne knew it was now merely crawling up the rutted weed-choked lane which led from the highway to the house; this time when it sank to the groan it was just outside the house, the sound now possessing a baffled grunting tone almost like the voice of an animal, a large one, bewildered, maybe even injured. “I do thank you. I realise there is always a certain amount of inevitable cleaning up in vacating a house. It would be foolish to add to it this late.”

Now he heard the feet on the porch, hearing them above his heart, the profound strong ceaseless shallow dredging at air, breath on the point of escaping his lungs altogether; now (there was no knock) they were in the hall, the trampling; three men entered, in civilian clothes—a youth with a close cap of curly hair, in a polo shirt and no socks, a neat wiry man of no age and fully dressed even to a pair of horn glasses, pushing a wheeled stretcher, and behind them a third man with the indelible mark of ten thousand Southern deputy sheriffs, urban and suburban—the snapped hat-brim, the sadist’s eyes, the slightly and unmistakably bulged coat, the air not swaggering exactly but of a formally pre-absolved brutality. The two men with the stretcher wheeled it up to the bed in a businesslike manner; it was the officer whom the doctor

addressed, indicating Wilbourne with his hand, and now Wilbourne knew the other had really forgot that the hand still held the pistol.

“This is your prisoner,” the doctor said. “I will prefer formal charges against him as soon as we get to town. As soon as I can.”

“Look out, Doc— Evening, Miss Martha,” the officer said. “Put that thing down. It might go off at any time. That fellow you got it from might of pulled the trigger before he turned it over to you.” The doctor looked at the pistol, then Wilbourne seemed to remember him stowing it methodically into the scuffed bag along with the stethoscope; he just seemed to remember this because he had followed the stretcher to the bed.

“Easy now,” he said. “Dont rouse her up. She wont—”

“I’ll take charge of this,” the doctor said, in that weary voice which had become peaceful at last after a fashion, as if it had worn itself out yet which would have, could have risen again at need quick and easy, as if it had renewed itself, renewed the outrage. “This case has been turned over to me, remember that. I didn’t ask for it.” He approached the bed (it was now that Wilbourne seemed to remember him putting the pistol into the bag) and lifted Charlotte’s wrist. “Go as easy with her as you can. But hurry. Doctor Richardson will be there and I will follow in my car.” The two men lifted Charlotte onto the stretcher.

It was on rubber-tired wheels; with the hatless youth pushing it seemed to cross the room and vanish into the hall with incredible rapidity, as though sucked there and not pushed (the very wheels making a sucking sound on the floor), by no human agency but by time perhaps, by some vent-pipe through which the irrevocable seconds were fleeing, crowding; even the night itself.

“All right,” the officer said. “What’s your name? Wilson?”

“Yes,” Wilbourne said. It went through the hall too that way, sucked through, where the wiry man now had a flashlight; the risible dark wind

chuckled and murmured into the open door, leaning its weight against him like a black palpy hand, he leaning into it, onto it. There would be the porch, the steps beyond. "She's light," Wilbourne said in a thin anxious voice. "She's lost a lot of weight lately. I could carry her if they would—"

"They can too," the officer said. "Besides, they are being paid for it. Take it easy."

"I know. But that short one, that small one with the light—"

"He saves his strength for this. He likes it. You dont want to hurt his feelings. Take it easy."

"Look," Wilbourne said thinly, murmuring, "why dont you put the handcuffs on me? Why dont you?"

"Do you want them?" the officer said. And now the stretcher without stopping sucked off the porch too, into space, still on the same parallel plane as though it possessed displacement perhaps but no weight; it didn't even pause, the white shirt and trousers of the youth seemed merely to walk behind it as it moved on behind the flashlight, toward the corner of the house, toward what the man from whom he had rented the house called the drive. Now he could hear the threshing of the invisible palms, the wild dry sound of them.

The hospital was a low building, vaguely Spanish (or Los Angeles), of stucco, almost hidden by a massy lushness of oleander. There were more of the shabby palms too, the ambulance turning in at speed, the siren's wail dying into the grunting animal-like fall, the tires dry and sibilant in oyster shells; when he emerged from the ambulance he could hear the palms rustling and hissing again as if they were being played upon by a sand-blower and he could smell the sea still, the same black wind, but not so strong since the sea was four miles away, the stretcher coming out fast and smooth again as though sucked out, the feet of the four of them crisp in the dry fragile shells; and now in the corridor he began to blink again at his sanded lids, painfully in the

electric light, the stretcher sucking on, the wheels whispering on the linoleum, so that it was between two blinks that he saw that the stretcher was now propelled by two nurses in uniform, a big one and a little one, he thinking how apparently there was no such thing as a matched stretcher team, how apparently all the stretchers in the world must be propelled not by two physical bodies in accord but rather by two matched desires to be present and see what was going on.

Then he saw an open door fierce with light, a surgeon already in operating tunic beside it, the stretcher turning in, sucked through the door, the surgeon looking at him once, not with curiosity but as you memorise a face, then turning and following the stretcher as Wilbourne was about to speak to him, the door (it sounded rubber-tired too) clapping to soundlessly in his face, almost slapping his face, the officer at his elbow saying, "Take it easy." Then there was another nurse; he had not heard her, she did not look at him at all, speaking briefly to the officer. "Okay," the officer said. He touched Wilbourne's elbow. "Straight ahead. Just take it easy."

"But let me—"

"Sure. Just take it easy." It was another door, the nurse turning and stepping aside, her skirts crisp and sibilant too like the oyster shells; she did not look at him at all. They entered, an office, a desk, another man in sterilised cap and tunic seated at the desk with a blank form and a fountain pen. He was older than the first one. He did not look at Wilbourne either.

"Name?" he said.

"Charlotte Rittenmeyer."

"Miss?"

"Mistress." The man at the desk wrote on the pad.

"Husband?"

“Yes.”

“Name?”

“Francis Rittenmeyer.” Then he told the address too. The pen flowed, smooth and crisp. Now it’s the fountain pen I cant breathe in, Wilbourne thought. “Can I—”

“He will be notified.” Now the man at the desk looked up at him. He wore glasses, the pupils behind them distorted slightly and perfectly impersonal. “How do you account for it? Instruments not clean?”

“They were clean.”

“You think so.”

“I know it.”

“Your first attempt?”

“No. Second.”

“Other one come off? But you wouldn’t know.”

“Yes. I know. It did.”

“Then how do you account for this failure?” He could have answered that: I loved her. He could have said it: A miser would probably bungle the blowing of his own safe too. Should have called in a professional, a cracksman who didn’t care, didn’t love the very iron flanks that held the money. So he said nothing at all, and after a moment the man at the desk looked down and wrote again, the pen travelling smoothly across the card. He said, still writing, without looking up: “Wait outside.”

“I aint to take him in now?” the officer said.

“No.” The man at the desk still did not look up.

“Couldn’t I—” Wilbourne said. “Will you let—” The pen stopped, but for a time longer the man at the desk looked at the card, perhaps reading what he had written. Then he looked up.

“Why? She wouldn’t know you.”

“But she might come back. Rouse one more time. So I could—we could—” The other looked at him. The eyes were cold. They were not impatient, not quite palpably patient. They merely waited until Wilbourne’s voice ceased. Then the man at the desk spoke:

“Do you think she will—Doctor?” For a moment Wilbourne blinked painfully at the neat scrawled card beneath the day-colored desk lamp, the clean surgeon’s hand holding the uncapped pen beside it.

“No,” he said quietly. The man at the desk looked down again, at the card too since the hand holding the pen moved to it and wrote again.

“You will be notified.” Now he spoke to the officer, not looking up, writing steadily: “That’s all.”

“I better get him out of here before that husband blows in with a gun or something, hadn’t I, Doc?” the officer said.

“You will be notified,” the man at the desk repeated without looking up.

“All right, Jack,” the officer said. There was a bench, slotted and hard, like in old-time open trolley cars. From it he could see the rubber-tired door. It was blank, it looked final and impregnable as an iron portcullis; he saw with a kind of amazement that even from this angle it hung in its frame by only one side, lightly, so that for three-quarters of its circumference there was an unbroken line of Klieg light. But she might, he thought. She might. “Jesus,” the officer said. He held an unlighted cigarette in his hand now (Wilbourne had felt the movement against his

elbow). “—Jesus, you played—What did you say your name was? Webster?”

“Yes,” Wilbourne said. I could get there. I could trip him if necessary and get there. Because I would know. I would. Surely they would not.

“You played hell, didn’t you. Using a knife. I’m old-fashioned; the old way still suits me. I dont want variety.”

“Yes,” Wilbourne said. There was no wind in here, no sound of it, though it seemed to him that he could smell, if not the sea, at least the dry and stubborn lingering of it in the oyster shells in the drive: and then suddenly the corridor became full of sound, the myriad minor voices of human fear and travail which he knew, remembered—the carbolised vacuums of linoleum and rubber soles like wombs into which human beings fled before something of suffering but mostly of terror, to surrender in little monastic cells all the burden of lust and desire and pride, even that of functional independence, to become as embryos for a time yet retaining still a little of the old incorrigible earthy corruption—the light sleeping at all hours, the boredom, the wakeful and fretful ringing of little bells between the hours of midnight and the dead slowing of dawn (finding perhaps at least this good use for the cheap money with which the world was now glutted and cluttered); this for a while, then to be born again, to emerge renewed, to bear the world’s weight for another while as long as courage lasted.

He could hear them up and down the corridor—the tinkle of the bells, the immediate sibilance of rubber heels and starched skirts, the querulous murmur of voices about nothing. He knew it well: and now still another nurse came down the hall, already looking full at him, slowing as she passed, looking at him, her head turning as she went on like an owl’s head, her eyes quite wide and filled with something beyond just curiosity and not at all shrinking or horror, going on. The officer was running his tongue around inside his teeth as though seeking the remnants of food; possibly he had been eating somewhere when the call came. He still held the unlighted cigarette.

“These doctors and nurses,” he said. “What a fellow hears about hospitals. I wonder if there’s as much laying goes on in them as you hear about.”

“No,” Wilbourne said. “There never is any place.”

“That’s so. But you think of a place like a hospital. All full of beds every which way you turn. And all the other folks flat on their backs where they cant bother you. And after all doctors and nurses are men and women. And smart enough to take care of themselves or they wouldn’t be doctors and nurses. You know how it is. How you think.”

“Yes,” Wilbourne said. “You’ve just told me.” Because after all, he thought, they are gentlemen. They must be. They are stronger than we are. Above all this. Above clowning. They dont need to be anything else but gentlemen. And now the second doctor or surgeon—the one of the fountain pen—came out of the office and down the corridor, the skirts of his tunic sucking and snicking behind him too. He did not look at Wilbourne at all, even when Wilbourne, watching his face, rose as he passed and stepped toward him, about to speak, the officer rising hurriedly too, surging up. Then the doctor merely paused long enough to look back at the officer with one cold brief irascible glance through the glasses.

“Aren’t you in charge of this man?” he said.

“Sure, Doc,” the officer said.

“Then what’s the trouble?”

“Come on now, Watson,” the officer said. “Take it easy, I tell you.” The doctor turned; he had scarcely paused even. “How about smoking, Doc?” The doctor didn’t answer at all. He went on, his smock flicking. “Come on here,” the officer said. “Sit down before you get yourself in a jam or something.” Again the door went inward on its rubber tires and returned, clapped silently to with that iron finality and that illusion of iron impregnability which was so false since even from here he could

see how it swung in its frame by one side only, so that a child, a breath, could move it. "Listen," the officer said. "Just take it easy. They'll fix her up. That was Doc Richardson himself. They brought a sawmill nigger in here couple three years ago where somebody hit him across the guts with a razor in a crap game.

Well, what does Doc Richardson do, opens him up, cuts out the bad guts, sticks the two ends together like you'd vulcanise an inner tube, and the nigger's back at work right now. Of course he aint got but one gut and it aint but two feet long so he has to run for the bushes almost before he quits chewing. But he's all right. Doc'll fix her up the same way. Aint that better than nothing? Huh?"

"Yes," Wilbourne said. "Yes. Do you suppose we could go outside a while?" The officer rose with alacrity, the cigarette still unlighted in his hand.

"That's an idea. We could smoke then." But then he could not.

"You go on. I'll stay right here. I'm not going to leave. You know that."

"Well, I dont know. Maybe I could stand at the door yonder and smoke."

"Yes. You can watch me from there." He looked up and down the corridor, at the doors. "Do you know where I could go if I get sick?"

"Sick?"

"Should have to vomit."

"I'll call a nurse and ask her."

"No. Never mind. I wont need it. I dont suppose I've got anything more to lose. Worth the trouble. I'll stay right here until they call me." So the officer went on down the corridor, on past the door hung in its three fierce slashes of light, and on toward the entrance through which they

had come. Wilbourne watched the match snap under his thumb-nail and flare against his face, beneath the hat-brim, face and hat slanted to the match (not a bad face either exactly, just that of a fourteen-year-old boy who had to use a razor, who had begun too young to carry the authorised pistol too long), the entrance door apparently still open because the smoke, the first puff of it, streamed back up the corridor, fading: so that Wilbourne discovered that he really could smell the sea, the black shallow slumbering sound without surf which the black wind blew over.

Up the corridor, beyond an elbow, he could hear the voices of two nurses, two nurses not two patients, two females but not necessarily two women even, then beyond the same elbow one of the little bells tinkled, fretful, peremptory, the two voices murmuring on, then they both laughed, two nurses laughing not two women, the little querulous bell becoming irascible and frenzied, the laughter continuing for half a minute longer above the bell, then the rubber soles on the linoleum, hissing faint and fast; the bell ceased.

It was the sea he smelled; there was the taste of the black beach the wind blew over in it, in his lungs, up near the top of his lungs, going through that again but then he had expected to have to, each fast strong breath growing shallower and shallower as if his heart had at last found a receptacle, a dumping-place, for the black sand it dredged and pumped at: and now he got up too, not going anywhere; he just got up without intending to, the officer at the entrance turning at once, snapping the cigarette backward.

But Wilbourne made no further move and the officer slowed; he even paused at the light-slashed door and flattened his hat-brim against it, against the crack for a moment. Then he came on. He came on, because Wilbourne saw him; he saw the officer as you see a lamp post which happens to be between you and the street because the rubber-tired door had opened again, outward this time (The Kliegs are off, he thought).

They are off. They are off now.) and the two doctors emerged, the door clashing soundlessly to behind them and oscillating sharply once but opening again before it could have resumed, re-entered immobility, to produce two nurses though he saw them only with that part of vision which still saw the officer because he was watching the faces of the two doctors coming up the corridor and talking to one another in clipped voices through their mouth-pads, their smocks flicking neatly like the skirts of two women, passing him without a glance and he was sitting down again because the officer at his elbow said, "That's right.

Take it easy," and he found that he was sitting, the two doctors going on, pinch-waisted like two ladies, the skirts of the smocks snicking behind them, and then one of the nurses passed too, in a face-pad also, not looking at him either, her starched skirts rustling on, he (Wilbourne) sitting on the hard bench, listening: so that for a moment his heart evacuated him, beating strong and slow and steady but remote, leaving him globed in silence, in a round vacuum where only the remembered wind murmured, to listen in, for the rubber soles to sibilate in, the nurse stopping at last beside the bench and now he looked up after a space.

"You can go in now," she said.

"All right," he said. But he didn't move at once. It's the same one who didn't look at me, he thought. She's not looking at me now. Only she is looking at me now. Then he got up; it was all right, the officer rising too, the nurse looking at him now.

"Do you want me to go in with you?"

"All right." It was all right. Probably a breath would do it yet when he put his hand on the door he found that his whole weight would not do it, that is, he could not seem to get any of his weight into it, the door actually like a fixed iron plate in the wall except at that moment it fled suddenly before him on its rubber tires and he saw the nurse's hand and arm and the operating table, the shape of Charlotte's body just indicated and curiously flattened beneath the sheet. The Kliegs were

off, the standards shoved away into a corner and only a single dome light burned, and there was another nurse—he had not remembered four of them—drying her hands at a sink.

But she dropped the towel into a bin at that moment and passed him, that is, walked into then out of his vision, and was gone. There was a blower, a ventilator, going somewhere near the ceiling too, invisible or at least concealed, camouflaged, then he reached the table, the nurse's hand came and folded back the sheet and after a moment he looked back past her, blinking his dry painful eyelids, to where the officer stood in the door. "It's all right now," he said. "He can smoke now, cant he?"

"No," the nurse said.

"Never mind," he said. "You'll be through soon. Then you—"

"Come," the nurse said. "You only have a minute." Only this was not a cool wind blowing into the room but a hot one being forced out, so there was no smell in it of black sand it had blown over. But it was a wind, steady, he could feel it and see it, a lock of the dark savagely short hair stirring in it, heavily because the hair was still wet, still damp, between the closed eyes and the neat surgeon's knot in the tape which supported her lower jaw. Only it was more than this.

It was more than just a slackening of joints and muscles, it was a collapsing of the entire body as undammed water collapses, arrested for the moment for him to look at but still seeking that profound and primal level much lower than that of the walking and upright, lower than the prone one of the little death called sleep, lower even than the paper-thin spurning sole; the flat earth itself and even this not low enough, spreading, disappearing, slow at first then increasing and at last with incredible speed: gone, vanished, no trace left above the insatiable dust. The nurse touched his arm. "Come," she said.

"Wait," he said; "wait." But he had to step back; it came fast as before, the same stretcher on its rubber tires, the wiry man hatless now too,

his hair parted neatly with water, brushed forward then curved back at the brow like an old-time barkeeper's, the flashlight in his hip pocket, the rim of his coat caught up behind it, the stretcher wheeling rapidly up broadside to the table as the nurse drew the sheet up again. "I won't need to help those two," he said. "Will I?"

"No," the nurse said. There was no especial shape beneath the sheet now at all and it came onto the stretcher as if it had no weight either. The stretcher whispered into motion again, wheeling sibilantly, sucking through the door again when the officer now stood with his hat in his hand. Then it was gone. He could hear it for a moment longer.

Then he could not. The nurse reached her hand to the wall, a button clicked and the hum of the blower stopped. It cut short off as if it had run full-tilt into a wall, blotted out by a tremendous silence which roared down upon him like a wave, a sea, and there was nothing for him to hold to, picking him up, tossing and spinning him and roaring on, leaving him blinking steadily and painfully at his dry granulated lids. "Come," the nurse said. "Doctor Richardson says you can have a drink."

"Sure, Morrison." The officer put his hat back on. "Just take it easy."

The jail was somewhat like the hospital save that it was of two storeys, square, and there were no oleanders. But the palm was there. It was just outside his window, bigger, more shabby; when he and the officer passed beneath it to enter, with no wind to cause it to set up a sudden frenzied clashing as though they had startled it, and twice more during the night while he stood, shifting his hands from time to time as that portion of the bars which they clasped grew warm and began to sweat on his palms, it clashed again in that brief sudden inexplicable flurry.

Then the tide began to fall in the river and he could smell that too—the sour smell of salt flats where oyster shells and the heads of shrimp rotted, and hemp and old piling. Then dawn began (he had been hearing the shrimp boats putting out for some time) and he could see the draw bridge on which the railroad to New Orleans crossed standing

suddenly against the paling sky and he heard the train from New Orleans and watched the approaching smoke then the train itself crawling across the bridge, high and toylike and pink like something bizarre to decorate a cake with, in the flat sun that was already hot.

Then the train was gone, the pink smoke. The palm beyond the window began to murmur, dry and steady, and he felt the cool morning breeze from the sea, steady and filled with salt, clean and iodinic in the cell above the smell of creosote and tobacco-spit and old vomit; the sour smell of the flats went away and now there would be a glitter on the tide-chopped water, the gars roiling sluggishly up and then down again among the floating garbage. Then he heard feet on the stairs and the jailer entered with a tin mug of coffee and a piece of factory-made coffee cake. "You want anything else?" he said. "Any meat?"

"Thanks," Wilbourne said. "Just the coffee. Or if you could get me some cigarettes. I haven't had any since yesterday."

"I'll leave you this until I go out." The jailer produced a cloth tobacco-sack and papers from his shirt. "Can you roll them?"

"I dont know," Wilbourne said. "Yes. Thanks. This will be fine." But he didn't make much of a job of it. The coffee was weak, oversweet and hot, too hot to drink or even hold in the hand, possessing seemingly a dynamic inherent inexhaustible quality of renewable heat impervious even to its own fierce radiation. So he set the cup on his stool and sat on the cot's edge above it; without realising it he had assumed the immemorial attitude of all misery, crouching, hovering not in grief but in complete guttish concentration above a scrap, a bone which would require protection not from anything which walked upright but from creatures which moved on the same parallel plane with the protector and the protected, pariah too, which would snap and snarl with the protector for it in the dust.

He poured from the cloth sack into the creased paper as he knew, without being able to remember at all when and where he had seen the process, it should be done, watching in mild alarm as the tobacco

sprayed off the paper in the light wind which blew in the window, turning his body to shelter the paper, realising that his hand was beginning to tremble though not concerned about it yet, laying the sack carefully and blindly aside, watching the tobacco as if he were holding the grains in the paper by the weight of his eyes, putting the other hand to the paper and finding they were both trembling now, the paper parting suddenly between his hands with an almost audible report.

His hands were shaking badly now; he filled the second paper with a terrific concentration of will, not of desire for tobacco but just to make the cigarette; he deliberately raised his elbows from his knees and held the filled paper before his calm unshaven faintly haggard face until the trembling stopped.

But as soon as he relaxed them to roll the tobacco into the paper they began to tremble again but this time he did not even pause, turning the tobacco carefully into the paper, the tobacco raining faintly and steadily from either end of the paper but the paper turning on.

He had to hold it in both hands to lick it and then as soon as his tongue touched the paper his head seemed to catch from the contact the same faint uncontrollable jerking and he sat for an instant, looking at what he had accomplished—the splayed raddled tube already half empty of tobacco and almost too damp to take fire.

It took both hands to hold the match to it too, it not smoke but a single thin lance of heat, of actual fire, which shot into his throat.

Nevertheless, the cigarette in his right hand and his left hand gripping his right wrist, he took two more draws before the coal ran too far up the dry side of the paper to draw again and dropped it, about to set his foot on it before he remembered, noticed, that he was still barefoot, and so letting it burn while he sat looking at the coffee mug with a kind of despair, who had shown none before this and perhaps had not even begun to feel it yet, then taking up the mug, holding it as he had held the cigarette, wrist in hand, and brought it to his mouth, concentrated not on the coffee but on the drinking of it so that he perhaps forgot to remember that the coffee was too hot to drink, making contact

between the cup-rim and his steadily and faintly jerking head, gulping at the still wellnigh scalding liquid, driven back each time by the heat, blinking, gulping again, blinking, a spoonful of the coffee sloshing out of the cup and onto the floor, splashing over his feet and ankles like a handful of dropped needles or maybe ice particles, realising that he had begun to blink again too and setting the mug carefully—it took both hands to make contact with the stool too—on the stool again and sitting over it again, hunched a little and blinking steadily at that granulation behind his lids, hearing the two pair of feet on the stairs this time though he did not even look toward the door until he heard it open then clash again then looking around and up, at the double-breasted coat (it was of gray palm beach now), the face above it freshly shaved but which had not slept either, thinking (Wilbourne), He had so much more to do.

I just had to wait. He had to get out at a minute's notice and find someone to stay with the children. Rittenmeyer carried the suitcase—that one which had come out from under the cot in the intern's quarters a year ago and had traveled to Chicago and Wisconsin and Chicago and Utah and San Antonio and New Orleans again and now to jail—and he came and set it beside the cot. But even then the hand at the end of the smooth gray sleeve was not done, the hand going now inside the coat.

“There are your clothes,” he said. “I have made your bond. They will let you out this morning.” The hand emerged and dropped onto the cot a sheaf of banknotes folded neatly twice. “It's the same three hundred dollars. You carried it long enough to have gained adverse possession. It should get you a long way. Far enough, anyhow. I'd say Mexico, but then you can probably stay hidden anywhere if you're careful. But there wont be any more. Understand that. This is all.”

“Jump it?” Wilbourne said. “Jump the bail?”

“Yes!” Rittenmeyer said violently. “Get to hell away from here. I'll buy you a railroad ticket and send it to you—”

"I'm sorry," Wilbourne said.

"—New Orleans; you could even ship out on a boat—"

"I'm sorry," Wilbourne said. Rittenmeyer ceased. He was not looking at Wilbourne; he was not looking at anything. After a moment he said quietly:

"Think of her."

"I wish I could stop. I wish I could. No I dont. Maybe that's it. Maybe that's the reason—" Maybe that was; that was the first time when he almost touched it. But not yet: and that was all right too; it would return; he would find it, hold it, when the time was ready.

"Then think about me," Rittenmeyer said.

"I wish I could stop that too. I feel—"

"Not me!" the other said, with that sudden violence again; "dont you feel sorry for me. See? See?" And there was something else but he didn't say it, couldn't or wouldn't. He began to shake too, in the neat dark sober beautiful suit, murmuring, "Jesus. Jesus. Jesus."

"Maybe I'm sorry because you cant do anything. And I know why you cant. Anybody else would know why you cant. But that doesn't help any. And I could do it and that would help some, not much maybe but some. Only I cant either. And I know why I cant too. I think I do. Only I just havent—." He ceased too. He said quietly: "I'm sorry." The other ceased to tremble; he spoke as quietly as Wilbourne:

"So you wont go."

"Maybe if you could tell me why," Wilbourne said. But the other didn't answer. He took an immaculate handkerchief from his breast pocket and wiped his face carefully with it and Wilbourne noticed too that the morning breeze from the sea had dropped, gone on, as if the bright still

cumulus-stippled bowl of sky and earth were an empty globe, a vacuum, and what wind there was was not enough to fill it but merely ran back and forth inside it with no schedule, obeying no laws, unpredictable and coming from and going nowhere, like a drove of bridleless horses in an empty plain. Rittenmeyer went to the door and rattled it, not looking back. The jailer appeared and unlocked the door. He was not going to look back. “You’ve forgotten the money,” Wilbourne said. The other turned and came back and took up the neat fold of notes. After a moment he looked at Wilbourne.

“So you wont do it,” he said. “You wont.”

“I’m sorry,” Wilbourne said. Only if he had just told me why, Wilbourne thought. Maybe I would have. Only he knew he would not have. Yet he continued to think it from time to time while the last days of that June accomplished and became July—the dawns while he listened to the heavy beat of the shrimper engines standing down the river toward the Sound, the brief cool hour of morning while the sun was still at his back, the long glare of brazen afternoons while the salt-impinged sun slanted full and fierce into his window, printing his face and upper body with the bars to which he held—and he had even learned to sleep again, finding sometimes that he had slept between two shiftings of his hands upon the sweating bars. Then he stopped thinking it. He didn’t know when; he did not even remember that Rittenmeyer’s visit had gone completely out of his mind.

One day—it was toward sunset, how he had failed to see it before he did not know, it had been there twenty years—he saw, beyond the flat one-storey border of the river, across the river and toward the sea, the concrete hull of one of the emergency ships built in 1918 and never finished, the hull, the hulk; it had never moved, the ways rotted out from under it years ago, leaving it sitting on a mudflat beside the bright glitter of the river’s mouth with a thin line of drying garments across the after well deck.

The sun was setting behind it now and he could not distinguish much, but the next morning he discovered the projecting slant of stove pipe

with smoke coming out of it and he could distinguish the color of the garments flapping in the morning seawind and watched later a tiny figure which he knew to be a woman taking the garments from the line, believing he could distinguish the gesture with which she put the clothes pins one by one into her mouth, and he thought, If we had known it we could probably have lived there for the four days and saved ten dollars, thinking, Four days.

It could not possibly have been just four days. It could not; and watching, one evening saw the dory come alongside and the man mount the ladder with a long skein of net cascading downward from his climbing shoulder, fragile and fairy-like, and watched the man mend the net under a morning's sun, sitting on the poop, the net across his knees, the sun on the mazy blond webbing tawnily silver.

And a moon began and waxed nightly while he stood there, and he stood there in the dying light while night by night it waned; and one afternoon he saw the flags, set one above another, rigid and streaming from the slender mast above the Government station at the river mouth, against a flat steel-colored scudding sky and all that night a buoy outside the river moaned and bellowed and the palm beyond the window threshed and clashed and just before dawn, in a driving squall, the tail of the hurricane struck.

Not the hurricane; it was galloping off somewhere in the Gulf, just the tail of it, a flick of the mane in passing, driving up the shore ten feet of roiled and yellow tide which did not fall for twenty hours and driving fiercely through the wild frenzied palm which still sounded dry and across the roof of the cell, so that all that second night he could hear the boom of seas against the breakwater in the crashing darkness and the buoy too, gurgling now between bellows; he could even seem to hear the roar of water streaming from it as it surged up again with each choking cry, the rain driving on, into the next dawn but with less fury now, on across the flat land before the east wind.

It would be even quieter inland, it would become only a bright silver summer murmur among the heavy decorous trees, upon the clipped

sword; it would be clipped; he could imagine it, it would be a good deal like the park where he had waited, maybe even with children and nurses at times, the best, the very best; there would even be a headstone soon, at just exactly the right time, when restored earth and decorum stipulated, telling nothing; it would be clipped and green and quiet, the body, the shape of it under the drawn sheet, flat and small and moving in the hands of two men as if without weight though it did, nevertheless bearing and quiet beneath the iron weight of earth.

Only that cant be all of it, he thought. It cant be. The waste. Not of meat, there is always plenty of meat. They found that out twenty years ago preserving nations and justifying mottoes—granted the nations the meat preserved are worth the preserving with the meat it took gone. But memory. Surely memory exists independent of the flesh. But this was wrong too. Because it wouldn't know it was memory, he thought. It wouldn't know what it was it remembered. So there's got to be the old meat, the old frail eradicable meat for memory to titillate.

That was the second time he almost got it. But it escaped him again. But he was not trying yet; it was still all right, he was not worried; it would return when the time was ready and even stand still to his hand.

Then one night he was allowed a bath, and a barber (they had taken his razor blades away from him) came early the next morning and shaved him, and in a new shirt and manacled to an officer on one side and his court-designated lawyer on the other he walked through the still early sun, up the street where people—malaria-ridden men from the sawmill swamps and the wind- and sun-bitten professional shrimpers—turned to look after him, toward the courthouse from the balcony of which a bailiff was already crying.

It was like the jail in its turn, of two storeys, of the same stucco, the same smell of creosote and tobacco spittle but not the vomit, set in a grassless plot with a half dozen palms and oleanders again too, blooming pink and white above a low thick mass of lantana. Then an entry filled yet, for a while yet, with shadow and a cellar-like coolness, the tobacco stronger, the air filled with a steady human sound, not

exactly speech but that droning murmur which might have been the very authentic constant unsleeping murmur of functioning pores.

They mounted stairs, a door; he walked up an aisle between filled benches while heads turned and the bailiff's voice still chanted from the balcony, and sat at a table between his lawyer and the officer then a moment later rose and stood again while the gownless judge in a linen suit and the high black shoes of an old man came with a short quick purposeful stride and took the Bench.

It did not take long, it was businesslike, brief, twenty-two minutes to get a jury, his appointed lawyer (a young man with a round moon face and myopic eyes behind glasses, in a crumpled linen suit) challenging monotonously but it just took twenty-two minutes, the judge sitting high behind a pine counter grained and stained to resemble mahogany with his face which was not a lawyer's face at all but that of a Methodist Sunday School superintendent who on week days was a banker and probably a good banker, a shrewd banker, thin, with neat hair and a neat moustache and old-fashioned gold-rimmed spectacles. "How does the indictment read?" he said. The clerk read it, his voice droning, almost drowsy among the redundant verbiage:

". . . against the peace and dignity of the State of Mississippi . . . manslaughter . . ." A man rose at the far end of the table. He wore a suit of crumpled, almost disreputable, seersucker. He was quite fat and his was the lawyer's face, a handsome face, almost noble, cast for footlights, forensic shrewd and agile: the District Attorney.

"We believe we can prove murder, Your Honor."

"This man is not indicted for murder, Mr. Gower. You should know that. Arraign the accused." Now the plump young lawyer rose. He had neither the older one's stomach nor the lawyer's face, not yet anyway.

"Guilty, Your Honor," he said. And now Wilbourne heard it from behind him—the long expulsion, the sigh.

“Is the accused trying to throw himself upon the mercy of this Court?” the judge said.

“I just plead guilty, Your Honor,” Wilbourne said. He heard it again behind him, louder, but already the judge was hammering sharply with his child’s croquet mallet.

“Dont speak from there!” he said. “Does the accused wish to throw himself on the mercy of the Court?”

“Yes, Your Honor,” the young lawyer said.

“Then you dont need to make a case, Mr. Gower. I will instruct the jury—” This time it was no sigh. Wilbourne heard the caught breath, then it was almost a roar, not that loud of course, not yet, the little hard wooden mallet furious against the wood and the bailiff shouting something too, and there was movement, a surging sound of feet in it too; a voice cried, “That’s it! Go ahead! Kill him!” and Wilbourne saw it—the gray buttoned coat (the same one) moving steadily toward the Bench, the face, the outrageous face: the man who without any warning had had to stand the wrong sort of suffering, the one suffering for which he was not fitted, who even now must be saying to himself, But why me? Why? What have I done? What in the world can I have done in my life? coming steadily on then stopping and beginning to speak, the roar cutting short off as he opened his mouth:

“Your Honor—If the Court please—”

“Who is this?” the judge said.

“I am Francis Rittenmeyer,” Rittenmeyer said. Now it was a roar again, the gavel going again, the judge himself shouting now, shouting the roar into silence:

“Order! Order! One more outbreak like this and I will clear the room! Disarm that man!”

"I'm not armed," Rittenmeyer said. "I just want—" But already the bailiff and two other men were upon him, the smooth gray sleeves pinioned while they slapped at his pockets and sides.

"He's not armed, Your Honor," the bailiff said. The judge turned upon the District Attorney, trembling too, a neat orderly man too old for this too.

"What is the meaning of this clowning, Mr. Gower?"

"I don't know, Your Honor. I didn't—"

"You didn't summons him?"

"I didn't consider it necessary. Out of consideration for his—"

"If the Court please," Rittenmeyer said. "I just want to make a—" The judge lifted his hand; Rittenmeyer ceased. He stood motionless, his face calm as a carving, with something about it of the carved faces on Gothic cathedrals, the pale eyes possessing something of the same unpupilled marble blankness. The judge stared at the District Attorney. It (the District Attorney's) was the lawyer's face now, completely, completely watchful, completely alert, the thinking going fast and secret behind it. The judge looked at the young lawyer, the plump one, hard.

Then he looked at Rittenmeyer. "This case is closed," he said. "But if you still wish to make a statement, you may do so." Now there was no sound at all, not even that of breathing that Wilbourne could hear save his own and that of the young lawyer beside him, as Rittenmeyer moved toward the witness box. "This case is closed," the judge said. "The accused is waiting sentence. Make your statement from there." Rittenmeyer stopped. He was not looking at the judge, he was not looking at anything, his face calm, impeccable, outrageous.

"I wish to make a plea," he said. For a moment the judge did not move, staring at Rittenmeyer, the gavel still clutched in his fist like a sabre, then he leaned slowly forward, staring at Rittenmeyer: and Wilbourne

heard it begin, the long in-sucking, the gathering of amazement and incredulity.

“You what?” the judge said. “A what? A plea? For this man? This man who wilfully and deliberately performed an operation on your wife which he knew might cause her death and which did?” And now it did roar, in waves, renewed; he could hear the feet in it and the separate screaming voices, the officers of the Court charging into the wave like a football team: a vortex of fury and turmoil about the calm immobile outrageous face above the smooth beautifully cut coat: “Hang them! Hang them both!” “Lock them up together! Let the son of a bitch work on him this time with the knife!” roaring on above the trampling and screaming, dying away at last but still not ceasing, just muffled beyond the closed doors for a time, then rising again from outside the building, the judge standing now, his arms propped on the bench, still clutching the gavel, his head jerking and trembling, the head of an old man indeed now.

Then he sank slowly back, his head jerking as the heads of old men do. But his voice was quite calm, cold: “Give that man protection out of town. See that he leaves at once.”

“I dont think he better try to leave the building right now, Judge,” the bailiff said. “Listen at them.” But nobody had to listen to hear it, not hysterical now, just outraged and angry. “They aint hanging mad, just tar-and-feathering mad. But anyway—”

“All right,” the judge said. “Take him to my chambers. Keep him there until after dark. Then get him out of town.—Gentlemen of the jury, you will find the prisoner guilty as charged and so bring in your verdict, which carries with it a sentence at hard labor in the State Penitentiary at Parchman for a period of not less than fifty years. You may retire.”

“I reckon there’s no need of that, Judge,” the foreman said. “I reckon we are all—” The judge turned upon him, the old man’s thin and trembling fury:

“You will retire! Do you wish to be held in contempt?” They were gone less than two minutes, hardly long enough for the bailiff to close and then open the door. From outside the sound beat on, rising and falling.

That afternoon it rained again, a bright silver curtain roaring out of nowhere before the sun could be hidden, galloping on vagrom and coltlike, going nowhere, then thirty minutes later roaring back, bright and harmless in its own steaming footsteps.

But when, shortly after dark, he was returned to his cell the sky was ineffable and stainless above the last green of twilight, arching the evening star, the palm merely murmuring beyond the bars, the bars still cool to his hands though the water, the rain, had long evaporated. So he had learned what Rittenmeyer meant.

And now he learned why. He heard the two pairs of feet again but he did not turn from the window until the door had opened then clanged and clashed to and Rittenmeyer entered and stood for a moment, looking at him. Then Rittenmeyer took something from his pocket and crossed the cell, the hand extended. “Here,” he said. It was a small box for medicine, unlabelled. It contained one white tablet. For a moment Wilbourne looked down at it stupidly, though only for a moment. Then he said quietly:

“Cyanide.”

“Yes,” Rittenmeyer said. He turned, he was already going: the face calm outrageous and consistent, the man who had been right always and found no peace in it.

“But I dont—” Wilbourne said. “How will my just being dead help—” Then he believed he understood. He said, “Wait.” Rittenmeyer reached the door and put his hand on it. Nevertheless he paused, looking back. “It’s because I have got stale. I dont think good. Quick.” The other looked at him, waiting. “I thank you. I do thank you. I wish I knew I would do the same for you in my turn.” Then Rittenmeyer shook the

door once and looked again at Wilbourne—the face consistent and right and damned forever. The jailer appeared and opened the door.

“I’m not doing it for you,” Rittenmeyer said. “Get that out of your damned head.” Then he was gone, the door clashed; and it was no flash of comprehension, it was too quiet for that, it was just a simple falling of a jumbled pattern. Of course, Wilbourne thought. That last day in New Orleans. He promised her. She said, Not that bungling bastard Wilbourne, and he promised her. And that was it. That was all. It fell into the quiet pattern and remained just long enough for him to see it then flowed, vanished, gone out of all remembering forever and so there was just memory, forever and inescapable, so long as there was flesh to titillate.

And now he was about to get it, think it into words, so it was all right now and he turned to the window and, holding the open box carefully beneath and pinching the tablet in a folded cigarette paper between thumb and finger he rubbed the tablet carefully into powder on one of the lower bars, catching the last dust in the box and wiping the bar with the cigarette paper, and emptied the box onto the floor and with his shoe-sole ground it into the dust and old spittle and caked creosote until it had completely vanished and burned the cigarette paper and returned to the window.

It was there, waiting, it was all right; it would stand to his hand when the moment came. Now he could see the light on the concrete hulk, in the poop porthole which he had called the kitchen for weeks now, as if he lived there, and now with a preliminary murmur in the palm the light offshore breeze began, bringing with it the smell of swamps and wild jasmine, blowing on under the dying west and the bright star; it was the night. So it wasn’t just memory. Memory was just half of it, it wasn’t enough. But it must be somewhere, he thought. There’s the waste. Not just me.

At least I think I dont mean just me. Hope I dont mean just me. Let it be anyone, thinking of, remembering, the body, the broad thighs and the hands that liked bitching and making things. It seemed so little, so little

to want, to ask. With all the old graveward-creeping, the old wrinkled withered defeated clinging not even to the defeat but just to an old habit; accepting the defeat even to be allowed to cling to the habit—the wheezing lungs, the troublesome guts incapable of pleasure.

But after all memory could live in the old wheezing entrails: and now it did stand to his hand, incontrovertible and plain, serene, the palm clashing and murmuring dry and wild and faint and in the night but he could face it, thinking, Not could. Will. I want to. So it is the old meat after all, no matter how old. Because if memory exists outside of the flesh it wont be memory because it wont know what it remembers so when she became not then half of memory became not and if I become not then all of remembering will cease to be.—Yes, he thought, between grief and nothing I will take grief.

Chapter X Old Man

One of the Governor's young men arrived at the Penitentiary the next morning. That is, he was fairly young (he would not see thirty again though without doubt he did not want to, there being that about him which indicated a character which never had and never would want anything it did not, or was not about to, possess), a Phi Beta Kappa out of an Eastern university, a colonel on the Governor's staff who did not buy it with a campaign contribution, who had stood in his negligent Eastern-cut clothes and his arched nose and lazy contemptuous eyes on the galleries of any number of little lost backwoods stores and told his stories and received the guffaws of his overalled and spitting hearers and with the same look in his eyes fondled infants named in memory of the last administration and in honor (or hope) of the next, and (it was said of him and doubtless not true) by lazy accident the behinds of some who were not infants any longer though still not old enough to vote. He was in the Warden's office with a briefcase, and presently the deputy warden of the levee was there too.

He would have been sent for presently though not yet, but he came anyhow, without knocking, with his hat on, calling the Governor's young man loudly by a nickname and striking him with a flat hand on the back and lifted one thigh to the Warden's desk, almost between the Warden and the caller, the emissary. Or the vizier with the command, the knotted cord, as began to appear immediately.

"Well," the Governor's young man said, "you've played the devil, haven't you?" The Warden had a cigar. He had offered the caller one. It had been refused, though presently, while the Warden looked at the back of his neck with hard immobility even a little grim, the deputy leaned and reached back and opened the desk drawer and took one.

"Seems straight enough to me," the Warden said. "He got swept away against his will. He came back as soon as he could and surrendered."

"He even brought that damn boat back," the deputy said. "If he'd a throwed the boat away he could a walked back in three days. But no sir. He's got to bring the boat back. 'Here's your boat and here's the woman but I never found no bastard on no cottonhouse.'" He slapped his knee, guffawing. "Them convicts. A mule's got twice as much sense."

"A mule's got twice as much sense as anything except a rat," the emissary said in his pleasant voice. "But that's not the trouble."

"What is the trouble?" the Warden said.

"This man is dead."

"Hell fire, he aint dead," the deputy said. "He's up yonder in that bunkhouse right now, lying his head off probly. I'll take you up there and you can see him." The Warden was looking at the deputy.

"Look," he said. "Bledsoe was trying to tell me something about that Kate mule's leg. You better go up to the stable and—"

"I done tended to it," the deputy said. He didn't even look at the Warden. He was watching, talking to, the emissary. "No sir. He aint—"

"But he has received an official discharge as being dead. Not a pardon nor a parole either: a discharge. He's either dead, or free. In either case he doesn't belong here." Now both the Warden and the deputy looked at the emissary, the deputy's mouth open a little, the cigar poised in his hand to have its tip bitten off. The emissary spoke pleasantly, extremely distinctly: "On a report of death forwarded to the Governor by the Warden of the Penitentiary." The deputy closed his mouth, though otherwise he didn't move. "On the official evidence of the officer delegated at the time to the charge and returning of the body of the prisoner to the Penitentiary." Now the deputy put the cigar into his mouth and got slowly off the desk, the cigar rolling across his lip as he spoke:

"So that's it. I'm to be it, am I?" He laughed shortly, a stage laugh, two notes. "When I done been right three times running through three separate administrations? That's on a book somewhere too. Somebody in Jackson can find that too. And if they cant, I can show—"

"Three administrations?" the emissary said. "Well, well. That's pretty good."

"You damn right it's good," the deputy said. "The woods are full of folks that didn't." The Warden was again watching the back of the deputy's neck.

"Look," he said. "Why dont you step up to my house and get that bottle of whiskey out of the sideboard and bring it down here?"

"All right," the deputy said. "But I think we better settle this first. I'll tell you what we'll do—"

"We can settle it quicker with a drink or two," the Warden said. "You better step on up to your place and get a coat so the bottle—"

“That’ll take too long,” the deputy said. “I wont need no coat.” He moved to the door, where he stopped and turned. “I’ll tell you what to do. Just call twelve men in here and tell him it’s a jury—he never seen but one before and he wont know no better—and try him over for robbing that train. Hamp can be the judge.”

“You cant try a man twice for the same crime,” the emissary said. “He might know that even if he doesn’t know a jury when he sees one.”

“Look,” the Warden said.

“All right. Just call it a new train robbery. Tell him it happened yesterday, tell him he robbed another train while he was gone and just forgot it. He couldn’t help himself. Besides, he wont care. He’d just as lief be here as out. He wouldn’t have nowhere to go if he was out. None of them do. Turn one loose and be damned if he aint right back here by Christmas like it was a reunion or something, for doing the very same thing they caught him at before.” He guffawed again. “Them convicts.”

“Look,” the Warden said. “While you’re there, why dont you open the bottle and see if the liquor’s any good. Take a drink or two. Give yourself time to feel it. If it’s not good, no use in bringing it.”

“O. K.,” the deputy said. He went out this time.

“Couldn’t you lock the door?” the emissary said. The Warden squirmed faintly. That is, he shifted his position in his chair.

“After all, he’s right,” he said. “He’s guessed right three times now. And he’s kin to all the folks in Pittman County except the niggers.”

“Maybe we can work fast then.” The emissary opened the briefcase and took out a sheaf of papers. “So there you are,” he said.

“There what are?”

“He escaped.”

“But he came back voluntarily and surrendered.”

“But he escaped.”

“All right,” the Warden said. “He escaped. Then what?” Now the emissary said look. That is, he said,

“Listen. I’m on per diem. That’s tax-payers, votes. And if there’s any possible chance for it to occur to anyone to hold an investigation about this, there’ll be ten senators and twenty-five representatives here on a special train maybe. On per diem. And it will be mighty hard to keep some of them from going back to Jackson by way of Memphis or New Orleans—on per diem.”

“All right,” the Warden said. “What does he say to do?”

“This. The man left here in charge of one specific officer. But he was delivered back here by a different one.”

“But he surren—” This time the Warden stopped of his own accord. He looked, stared almost, at the emissary. “All right. Go on.”

“In specific charge of an appointed and delegated officer, who returned here and reported that the body of the prisoner was no longer in his possession; that, in fact, he did not know where the prisoner was. That’s correct, isn’t it?” The Warden said nothing. “Isn’t that correct?” the emissary said, pleasantly, insistently.

“But you cant do that to him. I tell you he’s kin to half the—”

“That’s taken care of. The Chief has made a place for him on the highway patrol.”

“Hell,” the Warden said. “He cant ride a motorcycle. I dont even let him try to drive a truck.”

“He wont have to. Surely an amazed and grateful State can supply the man who guessed right three times in succession in Mississippi general elections with a car to ride in and somebody to run it if necessary. He wont even have to stay in it all the time. Just so he’s near enough so when an inspector sees the car and stops and blows the horn of it he can hear it and come out.”

“I still dont like it,” the Warden said.

“Neither do I. Your man could have saved all of this if he had just gone on and drowned himself, as he seems to have led everybody to believe he had. But he didn’t. And the Chief says do. Can you think of anything better?” The Warden sighed.

“No,” he said.

“All right.” The emissary opened the papers and uncapped a pen and began to write. “Attempted escape from the Penitentiary, ten years’ additional sentence,” he said. “Deputy Warden Buckworth transferred to Highway Patrol. Call it for meritorious service even if you want to. It wont matter now. Done?”

“Done,” the Warden said.

“Then suppose you send for him. Get it over with.” So the Warden sent for the tall convict and he arrived presently, saturnine and grave, in his new bedticking, his jowls blue and close under the sunburn, his hair recently cut and neatly parted and smelling faintly of the prison barber’s (the barber was in for life, for murdering his wife, still a barber) pomade. The Warden called him by name.

“You had bad luck, didn’t you?” The convict said nothing. “They are going to have to add ten years to your time.”

“All right,” the convict said.

“It’s hard luck. I’m sorry.”

“All right,” the convict said. “If that’s the rule.” So they gave him the ten years more and the Warden gave him the cigar and now he sat, jackknifed backward into the space between the upper and lower bunks, the unlighted cigar in his hand while the plump convict and four others listened to him. Or questioned him, that is, since it was all done, finished, now and he was safe again, so maybe it wasn’t even worth talking about any more.

“All right,” the plump one said. “So you come back into the River. Then what?”

“Nothing. I rowed.”

“Wasn’t it pretty hard rowing coming back?”

“The water was still high. It was running pretty hard still. I never made much speed for the first week or two. After that it got better.” Then, suddenly and quietly, something—the inarticulateness, the innate and inherited reluctance for speech, dissolved and he found himself, listened to himself, telling it quietly, the words coming not fast but easily to the tongue as he required them: How he paddled on (he found out by trying it that he could make better speed, if you could call it speed, next the bank—this after he had been carried suddenly and violently out to midstream before he could prevent it and found himself, the skiff, travelling back toward the region from which he had just escaped and he spent the better part of the morning getting back inshore and up to the canal again from which he had emerged at dawn) until night came and they tied up to the bank and ate some of the food he had secreted in his jumper before leaving the armory in New Orleans and the woman and the infant slept in the boat as usual and when daylight came they went on and tied up again that night too and the next day the food gave out and he came to a landing, a town, he didn’t notice the name of it, and he got a job. It was a cane farm—

“Cane?” one of the other convicts said. “What does anybody want to raise cane for? You cut cane. You have to fight it where I come from. You burn it just to get shut of it.”

“It was sorghum,” the tall convict said.

“Sorghum?” another said. “A whole farm just raising sorghum? Sorghum? What did they do with it?” The tall one didn’t know. He didn’t ask, he just came up the levee and there was a truck waiting full of niggers and a white man said, “You there. Can you run a shovel plow?” and the convict said, “Yes,” and the man said, “Jump in then,” and the convict said, “Only I’ve got a—”

“Yes,” the plump one said. “That’s what I been aiming to ask. What did—” The tall convict’s face was grave, his voice was calm, just a little short:

“They had tents for the folks to live in. They were behind.” The plump one blinked at him.

“Did they think she was your wife?”

“I dont know. I reckon so.” The plump one blinked at him.

“Wasn’t she your wife? Just from time to time kind of, you might say?” The tall one didn’t answer this at all. After a moment he raised the cigar and appeared to examine a loosening of the wrapper because after another moment he licked the cigar carefully near the end. “All right,” the plump one said. “Then what?” So he worked there four days. He didn’t like it. Maybe that was why: that he too could not quite put credence in that much of what he believed to be sorghum.

So when they told him it was Saturday and paid him and the white man told him about somebody who was going to Baton Rouge the next day in a motor boat, he went to see the man and took the six dollars he had earned and bought food with it and tied the skiff behind the motor boat and went to Baton Rouge. It didn’t take long and even after they

left the motor boat at Baton Rouge and he was paddling again it seemed to the convict that the River was lower and the current not so fast, so hard, so they made fair speed, tying up to the bank at night among the willows, the woman and baby sleeping in the skiff as of old.

Then the food gave out again. This time it was a wood landing, the wood stacked and waiting, a wagon and team being unladen of another load. The men with the wagon told him about the sawmill and helped him drag the skiff up the levee; they wanted to leave it there but he would not so they loaded it onto the wagon too and he and the woman got on the wagon too and they went to the sawmill. They gave them one room in a house to live in here. They paid two dollars a day and furnish. The work was hard. He liked it. He stayed there eight days.

“If you liked it so well, why did you quit?” the plump one said. The tall convict examined the cigar again, holding it up where the light fell upon the rich chocolate-colored flank.

“I got in trouble,” he said.

“What trouble?”

“Woman. It was a fellow’s wife.”

“You mean you had been toting one piece up and down the country day and night for over a month, and now the first time you have a chance to stop and catch your breath almost you got to get in trouble over another one?” The tall convict had thought of that. He remembered it: how there were times, seconds, at first when if it had not been for the baby he might have, might have tried.

But they were just seconds because in the next instant his whole being would seem to flee the very idea in a kind of savage and horrified revulsion; he would find himself looking from a distance at this millstone which the force and power of blind and risible Motion had fastened upon him, thinking, saying aloud actually, with harsh and savage outrage even though it had been two years since he had had a

woman and that a nameless and not young negress, a casual, a straggler whom he had caught more or less by chance on one of the fifth-Sunday visiting days, the man—husband or sweetheart—whom she had come to see having been shot by a trusty a week or so previous and she had not heard about it: “She aint even no good to me for that.”

“But you got this one, didn’t you?” the plump convict said.

“Yah,” the tall one said. The plump one blinked at him.

“Was it good?”

“It’s all good,” one of the others said. “Well? Go on. How many more did you have on the way back? Sometimes when a fellow starts getting it it looks like he just cant miss even if—” That was all, the convict told them. They left the sawmill fast, he had no time to buy food until they reached the next landing. There he spent the whole sixteen dollars he had earned and they went on. The River was lower now, there was no doubt of it, and sixteen dollars’ worth looked like a lot of food and he thought maybe it would do, would be enough. But maybe there was more current in the River still than it looked like.

But this time it was Mississippi, it was cotton; the plow handles felt right to his palms again, the strain and squat of the slick buttocks against the middle buster’s blade was what he knew, even though they paid but a dollar a day here. But that did it. He told it: they told him it was Saturday again and paid him and he told about it—night, a smoked lantern in a disc of worn and barren earth as smooth as silver, a circle of crouching figures, the importunate murmurs and ejaculations, the meagre piles of worn bills beneath the crouching knees, the dotted cubes clicking and scuttering in the dust; that did it. “How much did you win?” the second convict said.

“Enough,” the tall one said.

“But how much?”

“Enough,” the tall one said. It was enough exactly; he gave it all to the man who owned the second motor boat (he would not need food now), he and the woman in the launch now and the skiff towing behind, the woman with the baby and the paper-wrapped parcel beneath his peaceful hand, on his lap; almost at once he recognised, not Vicksburg because he had never seen Vicksburg, but the trestle beneath which on his roaring wave of trees and houses and dead animals he had shot, accompanied by thunder and lightning, a month and three weeks ago; he looked at it once without heat, even without interest as the launch went on. But now he began to watch the bank, the levee. He didn’t know how he would know but he knew he would, and then it was early afternoon and sure enough the moment came and he said to the launch owner: “I reckon this will do.”

“Here?” the launch owner said. “This dont look like anywhere to me.”

“I reckon this is it,” the convict said. So the launch put inshore, the engine ceased, it drifted up and lay against the levee and the owner cast the skiff loose.

“You better let me take you on until we come to something,” he said. “That was what I promised.”

“I reckon this will do,” the convict said. So they got out and he stood with the grapevine painter in his hand while the launch purred again and drew away, already curving; he did not watch it. He laid the bundle down and made the painter fast to a willow root and picked up the bundle and turned. He said no word, he mounted the levee, passing the mark, the tide-line of the old raging, dry now and lined, traversed by shallow and empty cracks like foolish and deprecatory senile grins, and entered a willow clump and removed the overalls and shirt they had given him in New Orleans and dropped them without even looking to see where they fell and opened the parcel and took out the other, the known, the desired, faded a little, stained and worn, but clean, recognisable, and put them on and returned to the skiff and took up the paddle. The woman was already in it.

The plump convict stood blinking at him. "So you come back," he said. "Well well." Now they all watched the tall convict as he bit the end from the cigar neatly and with complete deliberation and spat it out and licked the bite smooth and damp and took a match from his pocket and examined the match for a moment as though to be sure it was a good one, worthy of the cigar perhaps, and raked it up his thigh with the same deliberation—a motion almost too slow to set fire to it, it would seem—and held it until the flame burned clear and free of sulphur, then put it to the cigar.

The plump one watched him, blinking rapidly and steadily. "And they give you ten years more for running. That's bad. A fellow can get used to what they give him at first, to start off with, I don't care how much it is, even a hundred and ninety-nine years. But ten more years. Ten years more, on top of that. When you never expected it. Ten more years to have to do without no society, no female companionship—" He blinked steadily at the tall convict. But he (the tall convict) had thought of that too.

He had had a sweetheart. That is, he had gone to church singings and picnics with her—a girl a year or so younger than he, short-legged, with ripe breasts and a heavy mouth and dull eyes like ripe muscadines, who owned a baking-powder can almost full of ear-rings and brooches and rings bought (or presented at suggestion) from ten-cent stores. Presently he had divulged his plan to her, and there were times later when, musing, the thought occurred to him that possibly if it had not been for her he would not actually have attempted it—this a mere feeling, unworded, since he could not have phrased this either: that who to know what Capone's uncandled bridehood she might not have dreamed to be her destiny and fate, what fast car filled with authentic colored glass and machine guns, running traffic lights.

But that was all past and done when the notion first occurred to him, and in the third month of his incarceration she came to see him. She wore ear-rings and a bracelet or so which he had never seen before and it never became quite clear how she had got that far from home, and she cried violently for the first three minutes though presently (and

without his ever knowing either exactly how they had got separated or how she had made the acquaintance) he saw her in animated conversation with one of the guards. But she kissed him before she left that evening and said she would return the first chance she got, clinging to him, sweating a little, smelling of scent and soft young female flesh, slightly pneumatic. But she didn't come back though he continued to write to her, and seven months later he got an answer. It was a postcard, a colored lithograph of a Birmingham hotel, a childish X inked heavily across one window, the heavy writing on the reverse slanted and primer-like too: This is where were honnymonning at. Your friend (Mrs) Vernon Waldrip

The plump convict stood blinking at the tall one, rapidly and steadily. "Yes, sir," he said. "It's them ten more years that hurt. Ten more years to do without a woman, no woman a tall a fellow wants—" He blinked steadily and rapidly, watching the tall one. The other did not move, jackknifed backward between the two bunks, grave and clean, the cigar burning smoothly and richly in his clean steady hand, the smoke wreathing upward across his face saturnine, humorless, and calm. "Ten more years—"

"Women— —!" the tall convict said.

The End

Go Down, Moses, William Faulkner

Go Down, Moses

This novel is in essence a collection of seven related short stories. The most prominent character is Isaac McCaslin, "Uncle Ike", who will live to be an old man; "uncle to half a county and father to no one." Though originally published as a short story collection, Faulkner considered Go Down, Moses to be a novel in the same way The Unvanquished is

considered a novel. Therefore, most editions today no longer print “and other stories” in the title.

Go Down, Moses tells the composite history of the McCaslin family, of the descendants of Carothers McCaslin and the residents of the plantation he founded. The histories emerge gradually over the course of the novel, with parts of information appearing in successive stories, sometimes contradicting the information given in previous stories.

Each story features its own plot and is independent of the other stories. The first story, Was, involves young McCaslin Edmonds, who helps his Uncle Buck chase the slave Turl to Hubert Beauchamp’s plantation, where Buck narrowly avoids having to marry Beauchamp’s sister Sophonsiba.

Contents

Was

The Fire And The Hearth

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Pantaloon In Black

The Old People

The Bear

Delta Autumn

Go Down, Moses

To Mammy

CAROLINE BARR

MISSISSIPPI

(1840-1940)

Who was born in slavery and who gave to my family a fidelity without stint or calculation of recompense and to my childhood an immeasurable devotion and love.

Was

I

ISAAC MCCASLIN, 'UNCLE IKE,' past seventy and nearer eighty than he ever corroborated any more, a widower now and uncle to half a county and father to no one.

This was not something participated in or even seen by himself, but by his elder cousin, McCaslin Edmonds, grandson of Isaac's father's sister and so descended by the distaff, yet notwithstanding the inheritor, and in his time the bequestor, of that which some had thought then and some still thought should have been Isaac's, since his was the name in which the title to the land had first been granted from the Indian patent and which some of the descendants of his father's slaves still bore in the land.

But Isaac was not one of these: — a widower these twenty years, who in all his life had owned but one object more than he could wear and carry in his pockets and his hands at one time, and this was the narrow iron cot and the stained lean mattress which he used camping in the woods for deer and bear or for fishing or simply because he loved the woods; who owned no property and never desired to since the earth was no man's but all men's, as light and air and weather were; who lived still in the cheap frame bungalow in Jefferson which his wife's father gave them on their marriage and which his wife had willed to him at her death and which he had pretended to accept, acquiesce to, to humour her, ease her going but which was not his, will or not, chancery dying wishes mortmain possession or whatever, himself merely hold it for his wife's sister and her children who had lived in it with him since his wife's death, holding himself welcome to live in one room of it as he had during his wife's time or she during her time or the sister-in-law and her children during the rest of his and after.

Not something he had participated in or even remembered except from the hearing, the listening, come to him through and from his cousin McCaslin born in 1850 and sixteen years his senior and hence, his own father being near seventy when Isaac, an only child, was born, rather his brother than cousin and rather his father than either, out of the old time, the old days.

II

When he and Uncle Buck ran back to the house from discovering that Tomey's Turl had run again, they heard Uncle Buddy cursing and bellowing in the kitchen, then the fox and the dogs came out of the kitchen and crossed the hall into the dogs' room and they heard them run through the dogs' room into his and Uncle Buck's room then they saw them cross the hall again into Uncle Buddy's room and heard them run through Uncle Buddy's room into the kitchen again and this time it sounded like the whole kitchen chimney had come down and Uncle Buddy bellowing like a steamboat blowing and this time the fox and the dogs and five or six sticks of firewood all came out of the kitchen together with Uncle Buddy in the middle of them hitting at everything in sight with another stick. It was a good race.

When he and Uncle Buck ran into their room to get Uncle Buck's necktie, the fox had treed behind the clock on the mantel. Uncle Buck got the necktie from the drawer and kicked the dogs off and lifted the fox down by the scruff of the neck and shoved it back into the crate under the bed and they went to the kitchen, where Uncle Buddy was picking the breakfast up out of the ashes and wiping it off with his apron. "What in damn's hell do you mean," he said, "turning that damn fox out with the dogs all loose in the house?"

"Damn the fox," Uncle Buck said. "Tomey's Turl has broke out again. Give me and Cass some breakfast quick. We might just barely catch him before he gets there."

Because they knew exactly where Tomey's Turl had gone, he went there every time he could slip off, which was about twice a year. He was heading for Mr Hubert Beauchamp's place just over the edge of the next county, that Mr Hubert's sister, Miss Sophonsiba (Mr Hubert was a bachelor too, like Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy) was still trying to make people call Warwick after the place in England that she said Mr Hubert was probably the true earl of only he never even had enough pride, not to mention energy, to take the trouble to establish his just rights. Tomey's Turl would go there to hang around Mr Hubert's girl, Tennie, until somebody came and got him.

They couldn't keep him at home by buying Tennie from Mr Hubert because Uncle Buck said he and Uncle Buddy had so many niggers already that they could hardly walk around on their own land for them, and they couldn't sell Tomey's Turl to Mr Hubert because Mr Hubert said he not only wouldn't buy Tomey's Turl, he wouldn't have that damn white half-McCaslin on his place even as a free gift, not even if Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy were to pay board and keep for him.

And if somebody didn't go and get Tomey's Turl right away, Mr. Hubert would fetch him back himself, bringing Miss Sophonsiba, and they would stay for a week or longer, Miss Sophonsiba living in Uncle Buddy's room and Uncle Buddy moved clean out of the house, sleeping in one of the cabins in the quarters where the niggers used to live in his great-grandfather's time until his great-grandfather died and Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy moved all the niggers into the big house which his great-grandfather had not had time to finish, and not even doing the cooking while they were there and not even coming to the house any more except to sit on the front gallery after supper, sitting in the darkness between Mr Hubert and Uncle Buck until after a while even Mr Hubert would give up telling how many more head of niggers and acres of land he would add to what he would give Miss Sophonsiba when she married, and go to bed.

And one midnight last summer Uncle Buddy just happened by accident to be awake and hear Mr Hubert drive out of the lot and by the time he

waked them and they got Miss Sophonsiba up and dressed and the team put to the wagon and caught Mr Hubert, it was almost daylight.

So it was always he and Uncle Buck who went to fetch Tomey's Turl because Uncle Buddy never went anywhere, not even to town and not even to fetch Tomey's Turl from Mr Hubert's, even though they all knew that Uncle Buddy could have risked it ten times as much as Uncle Buck could have dared.

They ate breakfast fast. Uncle Buck put on his necktie while they were running toward the lot to catch the horses. The only time he wore the necktie was on Tomey's Turl's account and he hadn't even had it out of the drawer since that night last summer when Uncle Buddy had waked them in the dark and said, "Get up out of that bed and damn quick." Uncle Buddy didn't own a necktie at all; Uncle Buck said Uncle Buddy wouldn't take that chance even in a section like theirs, where ladies were so damn seldom thank God that a man could ride for days in a straight line without having to dodge a single one.

His grandmother (she was Uncle Buck's and Uncle Buddy's sister; she had raised him following his mother's death. That was where he had got his christian name: McCaslin, Carothers McCaslin Edmonds) said that Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy both used the necktie just as another way of daring people to say they looked like twins, because even at sixty they would still fight anyone who claimed he could not tell them apart; whereupon his father had answered that any man who ever played poker once with Uncle Buddy would never mistake him again for Uncle Buck or anybody else.

Jonas had the two horses saddled and waiting. Uncle Buck didn't mount a horse like he was any sixty years old either, lean and active as a cat, with his round, close-cropped white head and his hard little grey eyes and his white-stubbed jaw, his foot in the iron and the horse already moving, already running at the open gate when Uncle Buck came into the seat.

He scrambled up too, on to the shorter pony, before Jonas could boost him up, clapping the pony with his heels into its own stiff, short-coupled canter, out the gate after Uncle Buck, when Uncle Buddy (he hadn't even noticed him) stepped out from the gate and caught the bit. "Watch him," Uncle Buddy said. "Watch Theophilus.

The minute anything begins to look wrong, you ride to hell back here and get me. You hear?"

"Yes, sir," he said. "Lemme go now. I wont even ketch Uncle Buck, let alone Tomey's Turl — —"

Uncle Buck was riding Black John, because if they could just catch sight of Tomey's Turl at least one mile from Mr Hubert's gate, Black John would ride him down in two minutes. So when they came out on the long flat about three miles from Mr Hubert's, sure enough, there was Tomey's Turl on the Jake mule about a mile ahead.

Uncle Buck flung his arm out and back, reining in, crouched on the big horse, his little round head and his gnarled neck thrust forward like a cooter's. "Stole away!" he whispered. "You stay back where he wont see you and flush. I'll circle him through the woods and we will bay him at the creek ford."

He waited until Uncle Buck had vanished into the woods. Then he went on. But Tomey's Turl saw him. He closed in too fast; maybe he was afraid he wouldn't be there in time to see him when he treed. It was the best race he had ever seen. He had never seen old Jake go that fast, and nobody had ever known Tomey's Turl to go faster than his natural walk, even riding a mule.

Uncle Buck whooped once from the woods, running on sight, then Black John came out of the trees, driving, soupled out flat and level as a hawk, with Uncle Buck right up behind his ears now and yelling so that they looked exactly like a big black hawk with a sparrow riding it, across the field and over the ditch and across the next field, and he was

running too; the mare went out before he even knew she was ready, and he was yelling too.

Because, being a nigger, Tomey's Turl should have jumped down and run for it afoot as soon as he saw them. But he didn't; maybe Tomey's Turl had been running off from Uncle Buck for so long that he had even got used to running away like a white man would do it. And it was like he and old Jake had added Tomey's Turl's natural walking speed to the best that old Jake had ever done in his life, and it was just exactly enough to beat Uncle Buck to the ford.

Because when he and the pony arrived, Black John was blown and lathered and Uncle Buck was down, leading him around in a circle to slow him down, and they could already hear Mr Hubert's dinner horn a mile away.

Only, for a while Tomey's Turl didn't seem to be at Mr Hubert's either. The boy was still sitting on the gate-post, blowing the horn — there was no gate there; just two posts and a nigger boy about his size sitting on one of them, blowing a fox-horn; this was what Miss Sophonsiba was still reminding people was named Warwick even when they had already known for a long time that's what she aimed to have it called, until when they wouldn't call it Warwick she wouldn't even seem to know what they were talking about and it would sound as if she and Mr Hubert owned two separate plantations covering the same area of ground, one on top of the other. Mr Hubert was sitting in the spring-house with his boots off and his feet in the water, drinking a toddy.

But nobody there had seen Tomey's Turl; for a time it looked like Mr Hubert couldn't even place who Uncle Buck was talking about. "Oh, that nigger," he said at last. "We'll find him after dinner."

Only it didn't seem as if they were going to eat either. Mr Hubert and Uncle Buck had a toddy, then Mr Hubert finally sent to tell the boy on the gate-post he could quit blowing, and he and Uncle Buck had another toddy and Uncle Buck still saying, "I just want my nigger. Then we got to get on back toward home."

“After dinner,” Mr Hubert said. “If we dont start him somewhere around the kitchen, we’ll put the dogs on him. They’ll find him if it’s in the power of mortal Walker dogs to do it.”

But at last a hand began waving a handkerchief or something white through the broken place in an upstairs shutter.

They went to the house, crossing the back gallery, Mr Hubert warning them again, as he always did, to watch out for the rotted floor-board he hadn’t got around to having fixed yet. Then they stood in the hall, until presently there was a jangling and swishing noise and they began to smell the perfume, and Miss Sophonsiba came down the stairs.

Her hair was roached under a lace cap; she had on her Sunday dress and beads and a red ribbon around her throat and a little nigger girl carrying her fan and he stood quietly a little behind Uncle Buck, watching her lips until they opened and he could see the roan tooth.

He had never known anyone before with a roan tooth and he remembered how one time his grandmother and his father were talking about Uncle Buddy and Uncle Buck and his grandmother said that Miss Sophonsiba had matured into a fine-looking woman once. Maybe she had. He didn’t know. He wasn’t but nine.

“Why, Mister Theophilus,” she said. “And McCaslin,” she said. She had never looked at him and she wasn’t talking to him and he knew it, although he was prepared and balanced to drag his foot when Uncle Buck did. “Welcome to Warwick.”

He and Uncle Buck dragged their foot. “I just come to get my nigger,” Uncle Buck said. “Then we got to get on back home.”

Then Miss Sophonsiba said something about a bumble-bee, but he couldn’t remember that. It was too fast and there was too much of it, the earrings and beads clashing and jingling like little trace chains on a toy mule trotting and the perfume stronger too, like the earrings and beads sprayed it out each time they moved and he watched the roan-

coloured tooth flick and glint between her lips; something about Uncle Buck was a bee sipping from flower to flower and not staying long anywhere and all that stored sweetness to be wasted on Uncle Buddy's desert air, calling Uncle Buddy Mister Amodeus like she called Uncle Buck Mister Theophilus, or maybe the honey was being stored up against the advent of a queen and who was the lucky queen and when? "Ma'am?" Uncle Buck said.

Then Mr Hubert said:

"Hah. A buck bee. I reckon that nigger's going to think he's a buck hornet, once he lays hands on him. But I reckon what Buck's thinking about sipping right now is some meat gravy and biscuit and a cup of coffee. And so am I."

They went into the dining-room and ate and Miss Sophonsiba said how seriously now neighbours just a half day's ride apart ought not to go so long as Uncle Buck did, and Uncle Buck said Yessum, and Miss Sophonsiba said Uncle Buck was just a confirmed roving bachelor from the cradle born and this time Uncle Buck even quit chewing and looked and said, Yes, ma'am, he sure was, and born too late at it to ever change now but at least he could thank God no lady would ever have to suffer the misery of living with him and Uncle Buddy, and Miss Sophonsiba said ah, that maybe Uncle Buck just aint met the woman yet who would not only accept what Uncle Buck was pleased to call misery, but who would make Uncle Buck consider even his freedom a small price to pay, and Uncle Buck said, "Nome. Not yet."

Then he and Mr Hubert and Uncle Buck went out to the front gallery and sat down. Mr Hubert hadn't even got done taking his shoes off again and inviting Uncle Buck to take his off, when Miss Sophonsiba came out the door carrying a tray with another toddy on it. "Damn it, Sibbey," Mr Hubert said. "He's just et. He dont want to drink that now." But Miss Sophonsiba didn't seem to hear him at all.

She stood there, the roan tooth not flicking now but fixed because she wasn't talking now, handing the toddy to Uncle Buck until after a while she said how her papa always said nothing sweetened a Mississippi toddy

like the hand of a Mississippi lady and would Uncle Buck like to see how she use to sweeten her papa's toddy for him?

She lifted the toddy and took a sip of it and handed it again to Uncle Buck and this time Uncle Buck took it. He dragged his foot again and drank the toddy and said if Mr Hubert was going to lay down, he would lay down a while too, since from the way things looked Tomey's Turl was fixing to give them a long hard race unless Mr Hubert's dogs were a considerable better than they used to be.

Mr Hubert and Uncle Buck went into the house. After a while he got up too and went around to the back yard to wait for them. The first thing he saw was Tomey's Turl's head slipping along above the lane fence. But when he cut across the yard to turn him, Tomey's Turl wasn't even running. He was squatting behind a bush, watching the house, peering around the bush at the back door and the upstairs windows, not whispering exactly but not talking loud either: "Whut they doing now?"

"They're taking a nap now," he said. "But never mind that; they're going to put the dogs on you when they get up."

"Hah," Tomey's Turl said. "And nem you mind that neither. I got protection now. All I needs to do is to keep Old Buck from ketching me unto I gets the word."

"What word?" he said. "Word from who? Is Mr Hubert going to buy you from Uncle Buck?"

"Huh," Tomey's Turl said again. "I got more protection than whut Mr Hubert got even." He rose to his feet. "I gonter tell you something to remember: anytime you wants to git something done, from hoeing out a crop to getting married, just get the womenfolks to working at it. Then all you needs to do is set down and wait. You member that."

Then Tomey's Turl was gone. And after a while he went back to the house. But there wasn't anything but the snoring coming out of the room where Uncle Buck and Mr Hubert were, and some more light-sounding snoring coming from upstairs. He went to the spring-house

and sat with his feet in the water as Mr Hubert had been doing, because soon now it would be cool enough for a race.

And sure enough, after a while Mr Hubert and Uncle Buck came out on to the back gallery, with Miss Sophonsiba right behind them with the toddy tray only this time Uncle Buck drank his before Miss Sophonsiba had time to sweeten it, and Miss Sophonsiba told them to get back early, that all Uncle Buck knew of Warwick was just dogs and niggers and now that she had him, she wanted to show him her garden that Mr Hubert and nobody else had any sayso in. "Yessum," Uncle Buck said. "I just want to catch my nigger. Then we got to get on back home."

Four or five niggers brought up the three horses. They could already hear the dogs waiting still coupled in the lane, and they mounted and went on down the lane, toward the quarters, with Uncle Buck already out in front of even the dogs.

So he never did know just when and where they jumped Tomey's Turl, whether he flushed out of one of the cabins or not. Uncle Buck was away out in front on Black John and they hadn't even cast the dogs yet when Uncle Buck roared, "Gone away!

I godfrey, he broke cover then!" and Black John's feet clapped four times like pistol shots while he was gathering to go out, then he and Uncle Buck vanished over the hill like they had run at the blank edge of the world itself. Mr Hubert was roaring too: "Gone away! Cast them!" and they all piled over the crest of the hill just in time to see Tomey's Turl away out across the flat, almost to the woods, and the dogs streaking down the hill and out on to the flat.

They just tongued once and when they came boiling up around Tomey's Turl it looked like they were trying to jump up and lick him in the face until even Tomey's Turl slowed down and he and the dogs all went into the woods together, walking, like they were going home from a rabbit hunt.

And when they caught up with Uncle Buck in the woods, there was no Tomey's Turl and no dogs either, nothing but old Jake about a half an hour later, hitched in a clump of bushes with Tomey's Turl's coat tied on him for a saddle and near a half bushel of Mr Hubert's oats scattered around on the ground that old Jake never even had enough appetite left to nuzzle up and spit back out again. It wasn't any race at all.

"We'll get him tonight though," Mr Hubert said. "We'll bait for him. We'll throw a picquet of niggers and dogs around Tennie's house about midnight, and we'll get him."

"Tonight, hell," Uncle Buck said. "Me and Cass and that nigger all three are going to be halfway home by dark. Aint one of your niggers got a fyce or something that will trail them hounds?"

"And fool around here in the woods for half the night too?" Mr Hubert said. "When I'll bet you five hundred dollars that all you got to do to catch that nigger is to walk up to Tennie's cabin after dark and call him?"

"Five hundred dollars?" Uncle Buck said. "Done! Because me and him neither one are going to be anywhere near Tennie's house by dark. Five hundred dollars!" He and Mr Hubert glared at one another. "Done!" Mr Hubert said.

So they waited while Mr Hubert sent one of the niggers back to the house on old Jake and in about a half an hour the nigger came back with a little bob-tailed black fyce and a new bottle of whisky. Then he rode up to Uncle Buck and held something out to him wrapped in a piece of paper. "What?" Uncle Buck said

"It's for you," the nigger said. Then Uncle Buck took it and unwrapped it. It was the piece of red ribbon that had been on Miss Sophonsiba's neck and Uncle Buck sat there on Black John, holding the ribbon like it was a little water moccasin only he wasn't going to let anybody see he

was afraid of it, batting his eyes fast at the nigger. Then he stopped batting his eyes.

“What for?” he said.

“She just sont hit to you,” the nigger said. “She say to tell you ‘success.’”

“She said what?” Uncle Buck said.

“I dont know, sir,” the nigger said. “She just say ‘success.’”

“Oh,” Uncle Buck said. And the fyce found the hounds. They heard them first, from a considerable distance. It was just before sundown and they were not trailing, they were making the noise dogs make when they want to get out of something. They found what that was too.

It was a ten-foot-square cotton-house in a field about two miles from Mr Hubert’s house and all eleven of the dogs were inside it and the door wedged with a chunk of wood. They watched the dogs come boiling out when the nigger opened the door, Mr Hubert sitting his horse and looking at the back of Uncle Buck’s neck.

“Well, well,” Mr Hubert said. “That’s something, anyway. You can use them again now. They dont seem to have no more trouble with your nigger than he seems to have with them.”

“Not enough,” Uncle Buck said. “That means both of them. I’ll stick to the fyce.”

“All right,” Mr Hubert said. Then he said, “Hell, ‘Filus, come on. Let’s go eat supper. I tell you, all you got to do to catch that nigger is — —”

“Five hundred dollars,” Uncle Buck said.

“What?” Mr Hubert said. He and Uncle Buck looked at each other. They were not glaring now. They were not joking each other either. They sat there in the beginning of twilight, looking at each other, just blinking a little. “What five hundred dollars?” Mr Hubert said. “That you wont catch that nigger in Tennie’s cabin at midnight tonight?”

“That me or that nigger neither aint going to be near nobody’s house but mine at midnight tonight.” Now they did glare at each other.

“Five hundred dollars,” Mr Hubert said. “Done.”

“Done,” Uncle Buck said.

“Done,” Mr. Hubert said.

“Done,” Uncle Buck said.

So Mr Hubert took the dogs and some of the niggers and went back to the house. Then he and Uncle Buck and the nigger with the fyce went on, the nigger leading old Jake with one hand and holding the fyce’s leash (it was a piece of gnawed ploughline) with the other.

Now Uncle Buck let the fyce smell Tomey’s Turl’s coat; it was like for the first time now the fyce found out what they were after and they would have let him off the leash and kept up with him on the horses, only about that time the nigger boy began blowing the fox-horn for supper at the house and they didn’t dare risk it.

Then it was full dark. And then — he didn’t know how much later nor where they were, how far from the house, except that it was a good piece and it had been dark for a good while and they were still going on, with Uncle Buck leaning down from time to time to let the fyce have another smell of Tomey’s Turl’s coat while Uncle Buck took another drink from the whisky bottle — they found that Tomey’s Turl had doubled and was making a long swing back toward the house.

“I godfrey, we’ve got him,” Uncle Buck said. “He’s going to earth. We’ll cut back to the house and head him before he can den.” So they left the nigger to cast the fyce and follow him on old Jake, and he and Uncle Buck rode for Mr Hubert’s, stopping on the hills to blow the horses and listen to the fyce down in the creek bottom where Tomey’s Turl was still making his swing.

But they never caught him. They reached the dark quarters; they could see lights still burning in Mr Hubert’s house and somebody was blowing the fox-horn again and it wasn’t any boy and he had never heard a fox-

horn sound mad before either, and he and Uncle Buck scattered out on the slope below Tennie's cabin.

Then they heard the fyce, not trailing now but yapping, about a mile away, then the nigger whooped and they knew the fyce had faulted. It was at the creek. They hunted the banks both ways for more than an hour, but they couldn't straighten Tomey's Turl out.

At last Uncle Buck gave up and they started back toward the house, the fyce riding too now, in front of the nigger on the mule. They were just coming up the lane to the quarters; they could see on along the ridge to where Mr Hubert's house was all dark now, when all of a sudden the fyce gave a yelp and jumped down from old Jake and hit the ground running and yelling every jump, and Uncle Buck was down too and had snatched him off the pony almost before he could clear his feet from the irons, and they ran too, on past the dark cabins toward the one where the fyce had treed. "We got him!" Uncle Buck said. "Run around to the back. Dont holler; just grab up a stick and knock on the back door, loud."

Afterward, Uncle Buck admitted that it was his own mistake, that he had forgotten when even a little child should have known: not ever to stand right in front of or right behind a nigger when you scare him; but always to stand to one side of him. Uncle Buck forgot that.

He was standing facing the front door and right in front of it, with the fyce right in front of him yelling fire and murder every time it could draw a new breath; he said the first he knew was when the fyce gave a shriek and whirled and Tomey's Turl was right behind it. Uncle Buck said he never even saw the door open; that the fyce just screamed once and ran between his legs and then Tomey's Turl ran right clean over him.

He never even bobbed; he knocked Uncle Buck down and then caught him before he fell without even stopping, snatched him up under one arm, still running, and carried him along for about ten feet, saying, "Look out of here, old Buck. Look out of here, old Buck," before he

threw him away and went on. By that time they couldn't even hear the fyce any more at all.

Uncle Buck wasn't hurt; it was only the wind knocked out of him where Tomey's Turl had thrown him down on his back. But he had been carrying the whisky bottle in his back pocket, saving the last drink until Tomey's Turl was captured, and he refused to move until he knew for certain if it was just whisky and not blood.

So Uncle Buck laid over on his side easy, and he knelt behind him and raked the broken glass out of his pocket. Then they went on to the house. They walked. The nigger came up with the horses, but nobody said anything to Uncle Buck about riding again. They couldn't hear the fyce at all now. "He was going fast, all right," Uncle Buck said. "But I dont believe that even he will catch that fyce, I godfrey, what a night." "We'll catch him tomorrow," he said.

"Tomorrow, hell," Uncle Buck said. "We'll be at home tomorrow. And the first time Hubert Beauchamp or that nigger either one set foot on my land, I'm going to have them arrested for trespass and vagrancy."

The house was dark. They could hear Mr Hubert snoring good now, as if he had settled down to road-gaiting at it. But they couldn't hear anything from upstairs, even when they were inside the dark hall, at the foot of the stairs. "Likely hers will be at the back," Uncle Buck said. "Where she can holler down to the kitchen without having to get up. Besides, an unmarried lady will sholy have her door locked with strangers in the house." So Uncle Buck eased himself down on to the bottom step, and he knelt and drew Uncle Buck's boots off.

Then he removed his own and set them against the wall, and he and Uncle Buck mounted the stairs, feeling their way up and into the upper hall. It was dark too, and still there was no sound anywhere except Mr Hubert snoring below, so they felt their way along the hall toward the front of the house, until they felt a door.

They could hear nothing beyond the door, and when Uncle Buck tried the knob, it opened. "All right," Uncle Buck whispered. "Be quiet." They could see a little now, enough to see the shape of the bed and the mosquito-bar.

Uncle Buck threw down his suspenders and unbuttoned his trousers and went to the bed and eased himself carefully down on to the edge of it, and he knelt again and drew Uncle Buck's trousers off and he was just removing his own when Uncle Buck lifted the mosquito-bar and raised his feet and rolled into the bed. That was when Miss Sophonsiba sat up on the other side of Uncle Buck and gave the first scream.

III

When he reached home just before dinner-time the next day, he was just about worn out. He was too tired to eat, even if Uncle Buddy had waited to eat dinner first; he couldn't have stayed on the pony another mile without going to sleep. In fact, he must have gone to sleep while he was telling Uncle Buddy, because the next thing he knew it was late afternoon and he was lying on some hay in the jolting wagon-bed, with Uncle Buddy sitting on the seat above him exactly the same way he sat a horse or sat in his rocking-chair before the kitchen hearth while he was cooking, holding the whip exactly as he held the spoon or fork he stirred and tasted with.

Uncle Buddy had some cold bread and meat and a jug of buttermilk wrapped in damp towels waiting when he waked up. He ate, sitting in the wagon in almost the last of the afternoon. They must have come fast, because they were not more than two miles from Mr Hubert's. Uncle Buddy waited for him to eat.

Then he said, "Tell me again," and he told it again: how he and Uncle Buck finally found a room without anybody in it, and Uncle Buck sitting on the side of the bed saying, "O godfrey, Cass. O godfrey, Cass," and then they heard Mr Hubert's feet on the stairs and watched the light come down the hall and Mr Hubert came in, in his nightshirt, and

walked over and set the candle on the table and stood looking at Uncle Buck.

“Well, ‘Filus,” he said. “She’s got you at last.”

“It was an accident,” Uncle Buck said. “I swear to godfrey — —”

“Hah,” Mr Hubert said. “Dont tell me. Tell her that.”

“I did,” Uncle Buck said. “I did tell her. I swear to god — —”

“Sholy,” Mr Hubert said. “And just listen.” They listened a minute. He had been hearing her all the time. She was nowhere near as loud as at first; she was just steady. “Dont you want to go back in there and tell her again it was an accident, that you never meant nothing and to just excuse you and forget about it? All right.”

“All right what?” Uncle Buck said.

“Go back in there and tell her again,” Mr Hubert said. Uncle Buck looked at Mr Hubert for a minute. He batted his eyes fast.

“Then what will I come back and tell you?” he said.

“To me?” Mr Hubert said. “I would call that a horse of another colour. Wouldn’t you?”

Uncle Buck looked at Mr Hubert. He batted his eyes fast again. Then he stopped again. “Wait,” he said. “Be reasonable. Say I did walk into a lady’s bedroom, even Miss Sophonsiba’s; say, just for the sake of the argument, there wasn’t no other lady in the world but her and so I walked into hers and tried to get in bed with her, would I have took a nine-year-old boy with me?”

“Reasonable is just what I’m being,” Mr Hubert said. “You come into bear-country of your own free will and accord. All right; you were a grown man and you knew it was bear-country and you knew the way back out like you knew the way in and you had your chance to take it. But no. You had to crawl into the den and lay down by the bear.

And whether you did or didn't know the bear was in it don't make any difference. So if you got back out of that den without even a claw-mark on you, I would not only be unreasonable, I'd be a damned fool. After all, I'd like a little peace and quiet and freedom myself, now I got a chance for it. Yes, sir. She's got you, 'Filus, and you know it. You run a hard race and you run a good one, but you skun the hen-house one time too many."

"Yes," Uncle Buck said. He drew his breath in and let it out again, slow and not loud. But you could hear it. "Well," he said. "So I reckon I'll have to take the chance then."

"You already took it," Mr Hubert said. "You did that when you came back here." Then he stopped too. Then he batted his eyes, but only about six times. Then he stopped and looked at Uncle Buck for more than a minute. "What chance?" he said.

"That five hundred dollars," Uncle Buck said.

"What five hundred dollars?" Mr Hubert said. He and Uncle Buck looked at one another. Now it was Mr Hubert that batted his eyes again and then stopped again. "I thought you said you found him in Tennie's cabin."

"I did," Uncle Buck said. "What you bet me was I would catch him there. If there had been ten of me standing in front of that door, we wouldn't have caught him." Mr Hubert blinked at Uncle Buck, slow and steady.

"So you aim to hold me to that fool bet," he said.

"You took your chance too," Uncle Buck said. Mr Hubert blinked at Uncle Buck. Then he stopped. Then he went and took the candle from the table and went out. They sat on the edge of the bed and watched the light go down the hall and heard Mr Hubert's feet on the stairs. After a while they began to see the light again and they heard Mr

Hubert's feet coming back up the stairs. Then Mr Hubert entered and went to the table and set the candle down and laid a deck of cards by it.

"One hand," he said. "Draw. You shuffle, I cut, this boy deals. Five hundred dollars against Sibbey. And we'll settle this nigger business once and for all too. If you win, you buy Tennie; if I win, I buy that boy of yours. The price will be the same for each one; three hundred dollars."

"Win?" Uncle Buck said. "The one that wins buys the niggers?"

"Wins Sibbey, damn it!" Mr Hubert said. "Wins Sibbey! What the hell else are we setting up till midnight arguing about? The lowest hand wins Sibbey and buys the niggers."

"All right," Uncle Buck said. "I'll buy the damn girl then and we'll call the rest of this foolishness off."

"Hah," Mr Hubert said again. "This is the most serious foolishness you ever took part in in your life. No. You said you wanted your chance, and now you've got it. Here it is, right here on this table, waiting on you."

So Uncle Buck shuffled the cards and Mr Hubert cut them. Then he took up the deck and dealt in turn until Uncle Buck and Mr Hubert had five. And Uncle Buck looked at his hand a long time and then said two cards and he gave them to him, and Mr Hubert looked at his hand quick and said one card and he gave it to him and Mr Hubert flipped his discard on to the two which Uncle Buck had discarded and slid the new card into his hand and opened it out and looked at it quick again and closed it and looked at Uncle Buck and said, "Well? Did you help them threes?"

"No," Uncle Buck said.

"Well I did," Mr Hubert said. He shot his hand across the table so that the cards fell face-up in front of Uncle Buck and they were three kings and two fives, and said, "By God, Buck McCaslin, you have met your match at last."

“And that was all?” Uncle Buddy said. It was late then, near sunset; they would be at Mr Hubert’s in another fifteen minutes.

“Yes, sir,” he said, telling that too: how Uncle Buck waked him at daylight and he climbed out a window and got the pony and left, and how Uncle Buck said that if they pushed him too close in the meantime, he would climb down the gutter too and hide in the woods until Uncle Buddy arrived.

“Hah,” Uncle Buddy said. “Was Tomey’s Turl there?”

“Yes, sir,” he said. “He was waiting in the stable when I got the pony. He said, ‘Aint they settled it yet?’”

“And what did you say?” Uncle Buddy said.

“I said, ‘Uncle Buck looks like he’s settled. But Uncle Buddy aint got here yet.’”

“Hah,” Uncle Buddy said.

And that was about all. They reached the house. Maybe Uncle Buck was watching them, but if he was, he never showed himself, never came out of the woods. Miss Sophonsiba was nowhere in sight either, so at least Uncle Buck hadn’t quite given up; at least he hadn’t asked her yet.

And he and Uncle Buddy and Mr Hubert ate supper and they came in from the kitchen and cleared the table, leaving only the lamp on it and the deck of cards. Then it was just like last night, except that Uncle Buddy had no necktie and Mr Hubert wore clothes now instead of a nightshirt and it was a shaded lamp on the table instead of a candle, and Mr Hubert sitting at his end of the table with the deck in his hands, riffling the edges with his thumb and looking at Uncle Buddy.

Then he tapped the edges even and set the deck out in the middle of the table, under the lamp, and folded his arms on the edge of the table and leaned forward a little on the table, looking at Uncle Buddy, who was sitting at his end of the table with his hands in his lap, all one grey

colour, like an old grey rock or a stump with grey moss on it, that still, with his round white head like Uncle Buck's but he didn't blink like Uncle Buck and he was a little thicker than Uncle Buck, as if from sitting down so much watching food cook, as if the things he cooked had made him a little thicker than he would have been and the things he cooked with, the flour and such, had made him all one same quiet colour.

"Little toddy before we start?" Mr Hubert said.

"I dont drink," Uncle Buddy said.

"That's right," Mr Hubert said. "I knew there was something else besides just being woman-weak that makes 'Filus seem human. But no matter." He batted his eyes twice at Uncle Buddy. "Buck McCaslin against the land and niggers you have heard me promise as Sophonsiba's dowry on the day she marries. If I beat you, 'Filus marries Sibbey without any dowry. If you beat me, you get 'Filus. But I still get the three hundred dollars 'Filus owes me for Tennie. Is that correct?"

"That's correct," Uncle Buddy said.

"Stud," Mr Hubert said. "One hand. You to shuffle, me to cut, this boy to deal."

"No," Uncle Buddy said. "Not Cass. He's too young. I dont want him mixed up in any gambling."

"Hah," Mr Hubert said. "It's said that a man playing cards with Amodeus McCaslin aint gambling. But no matter." But he was still looking at Uncle Buddy; he never even turned his head when he spoke: "Go to the back door and holler. Bring the first creature that answers, animal mule or human, that can deal ten cards."

So he went to the back door. But he didn't have to call because Tomey's Turl was squatting against the wall just outside the door, and they returned to the dining-room where Mr Hubert still sat with his arms folded on his side of the table and Uncle Buddy sat with his hands in his lap on his side and the deck of cards face-down under the lamp between them.

Neither of them even looked up when he and Tomey's Turl entered. "Shuffle," Mr Hubert said. Uncle Buddy shuffled and set the cards back under the lamp and put his hands back into his lap and Mr Hubert cut the deck and folded his arms back on to the table-edge. "Deal," he said. Still neither he nor Uncle Buddy looked up.

They just sat there while Tomey's Turl's saddle-coloured hands came into the light and took up the deck and dealt, one card face-down to Mr Hubert and one face-down to Uncle Buddy, and one face-up to Mr Hubert and it was a king, and one face-up to Uncle Buddy and it was a six.

"Buck McCaslin against Sibbey's dowry," Mr Hubert said. "Deal." And the hand dealt Mr Hubert a card and it was a three, and Uncle Buddy a card and it was a two. Mr Hubert looked at Uncle Buddy. Uncle Buddy rapped once with his knuckles on the table.

"Deal," Mr Hubert said. And the hand dealt Mr Hubert a card and it was another three, and Uncle Buddy a card and it was a four. Mr Hubert looked at Uncle Buddy's cards. Then he looked at Uncle Buddy and Uncle Buddy rapped on the table again with his knuckles.

"Deal," Mr Hubert said, and the hand dealt him an ace and Uncle Buddy a five and now Mr Hubert just sat still. He didn't look at anything or move for a whole minute; he just sat there and watched Uncle Buddy put one hand on to the table for the first time since he shuffled and pinch up one corner of his face-down card and look at it and then put his hand back into his lap. "Check," Mr Hubert said.

"I'll bet you them two niggers," Uncle Buddy said. He didn't move either. He sat there just like he sat in the wagon or on a horse or in the rocking-chair he cooked from.

"Against what?" Mr Hubert said.

“Against the three hundred dollars Theophilus owes you for Tennie, and the three hundred you and Theophilus agreed on for Tomey’s Turl,” Uncle Buddy said.

“Hah,” Mr Hubert said, only it wasn’t loud at all this time, nor even short. Then he said “Hah. Hah. Hah” and not loud either. Then he said, “Well.” Then he said, “Well, well.” Then he said: “We’ll check up for a minute. If I win, you take Sibbey without dowry and the two niggers, and I don’t owe ‘Filus anything. If you win — —”

“ — Theophilus is free. And you owe him the three hundred dollars for Tomey’s Turl,” Uncle Buddy said.

“That’s just if I call you,” Mr Hubert said. “If I dont call you, ‘Filus wont owe me nothing and I wont owe ‘Filus nothing, unless I take that nigger which I have been trying to explain to you and him both for years that I wont have on my place. We will be right back where all this foolishness started from, except for that.

So what it comes down to is, I either got to give a nigger away, or risk buying one that you done already admitted you cant keep at home.” Then he stopped talking. For about a minute it was like he and Uncle Buddy had both gone to sleep.

Then Mr Hubert picked up his face-down card and turned it over. It was another three, and Mr Hubert sat there without looking at anything at all, his fingers beating a tattoo, slow and steady and not very loud, on the table. “H’m,” he said.

“And you need a trey and there aint but four of them and I already got three. And you just shuffled. And I cut afterward. And if I call you, I will have to buy that nigger. Who dealt these cards, Amodeus?” Only he didn’t wait to be answered.

He reached out and tilted the lamp-shade, the light moving up Tomey’s Turl’s arms that were supposed to be black but were not quite white, up his Sunday shirt that was supposed to be white but wasn’t quite

either, that he put on every time he ran away just as Uncle Buck put on the necktie each time he went to bring him back, and on to his face; and Mr Hubert sat there, holding the lamp-shade and looking at Tomey's Turl. Then he tilted the shade back down and took up his cards and turned them face-down and pushed them toward the middle of the table. "I pass, Amodeus," he said.

IV

He was still too worn out for sleep to sit on a horse, so this time he and Uncle Buddy and Tennie all three rode in the wagon, while Tomey's Turl led the pony from old Jake. And when they got home just after daylight, this time Uncle Buddy never even had time to get breakfast started and the fox never even got out of the crate, because the dogs were right there in the room. Old Moses went right into the crate with the fox, so that both of them went right on through the back end of it.

That is, the fox went through, because when Uncle Buddy opened the door to come in, old Moses was still wearing most of the crate around his neck until Uncle Buddy kicked it off of him. So they just made one run, across the front gallery and around the house and they could hear the fox's claws when he went scabbling up the lean-pole, on to the roof — a fine race while it lasted, but the tree was too quick.

"What in damn's hell do you mean," Uncle Buddy said, "casting that damn thing with all the dogs right in the same room?"

"Damn the fox," Uncle Buck said. "Go on and start breakfast. It seems to me I've been away from home a whole damn month."

THE FIRE AND THE HEARTH

Chapter One

I

FIRST, IN ORDER to take care of George Wilkins once and for all, he had to hide his own still. And not only that, he had to do it single-handed —

dismantle it in the dark and transport it without help to some place far enough away and secret enough to escape the subsequent uproar and excitement and there conceal it. It was the prospect of this which had enraged him, compounding in advance the physical weariness and exhaustion which would be the night's aftermath.

It was not the temporary interruption of business; the business had been interfered with once before about five years ago and he had dealt with that crisis as promptly and efficiently as he was dealing with this present one — and since which time that other competitor, whose example George Wilkins might quite possibly follow provided Carothers Edmonds were as correctly informed about his intentions as he professed to be about his bank account, had been ploughing and chopping and picking cotton which was not his on the State penal farm at Parchman.

And it was not the loss of revenue which the interruption entailed. He was sixty-seven years old; he already had more money in the bank now than he would ever spend, more than Carothers Edmonds himself, provided a man believed Carothers Edmonds when he tried to draw anything extra in the way of cash or supplies from the commissary.

It was the fact that he must do it all himself, single-handed; had to come up from the field after a long day in the dead middle of planting time and stable and feed Edmonds' mules and eat his own supper and then put his own mare to the single wagon and drive three miles to the still and dismantle it by touch in the dark and carry it another mile to the best place he could think of where it would be reasonably safe after the excitement started, probably getting back home with hardly enough of the night left to make it worth while going to bed before time to return to the field until the time would be ripe to speak the one word to Edmonds; — all this alone and unassisted because the two people from whom he might reasonably and logically have not only expected but demanded help were completely interdict: his wife who was too old and frail for such, even if he could have trusted not her fidelity but her discretion; and as for his daughter, to let her get any

inkling of what he was about, he might just as well have asked George Wilkins himself to help him hide the still.

It was not that he had anything against George personally, despite the mental exasperation and the physical travail he was having to undergo when he should have been at home in bed asleep. If George had just stuck to farming the land which Edmonds had allotted him he would just as soon Nat married George as anyone else, sooner than most of the nigger bucks he knew.

But he was not going to let George Wilkins or anyone else move not only into the section where he had lived for going on seventy years but on to the very place he had been born on and set up competition in a business which he had established and nursed carefully and discreetly for twenty of them, ever since he had fired up for his first run not a mile from Zack Edmonds's kitchen door; — secretly indeed, for no man needed to tell him what Zack Edmonds or his son, Carothers (or Old Cass Edmonds either, for that matter), would do about it if they ever found it out.

He wasn't afraid that George would cut into his established trade, his old regular clientele, with the hog swill which George had begun to turn out two months ago and call whisky. But George Wilkins was a fool innocent of discretion, who sooner or later would be caught, whereupon for the next ten years every bush on the Edmonds place would have a deputy sheriff squatting behind it from sundown to sunup every night.

And he not only didn't want a fool for a son-in-law, he didn't intend to have a fool living on the same place he lived on. If George had to go to jail to alleviate that condition, that was between George and Roth Edmonds.

But it was about over now. Another hour or so and he would be back home, getting whatever little of sleep there might be left of the night before time to return to the field to pass the day until the right

moment to speak to Edmonds. Probably the outrage would be gone by then, and he would have only the weariness to contend with.

But it was his own field, though he neither owned it nor wanted to nor even needed to. He had been cultivating it for forty-five years, since before Carothers Edmonds was born even, ploughing and planting and working it when and how he saw fit (or maybe not even doing that, maybe sitting through a whole morning on his front gallery, looking at it and thinking if that's what he felt like doing), with Edmonds riding up on his mare maybe three times a week to look at the field, and maybe once during the season stopping long enough to give him advice about it which he completely ignored, ignoring not only the advice but the very voice which gave it, as though the other had not spoken even, whereupon Edmonds would ride on and he would continue with whatever he had been doing, the incident already forgotten condoned and forgiven, the necessity and the time having been served.

So the day would pass at last. Then he would approach Edmonds and speak his word and it would be like dropping the nickel into the slot machine and pulling the lever: all he would have to do then would be just to watch it.

He knew exactly where he intended to go, even in the darkness. He had been born on this land, twenty-five years before the Edmonds who now owned it.

He had worked on it ever since he got big enough to hole a plough straight; he had hunted over every foot of it during his childhood and youth and his manhood too, up to the time when he stopped hunting, not because he could no longer walk a day's or a night's hunt, but because he felt that the pursuit of rabbits and 'possums for meat was no longer commensurate with his status as not only the oldest man but the oldest living person on the Edmonds plantation, the oldest McCaslin descendant even though in the world's eye he descended not from McCaslins but from McCaslin slaves, almost as old as old Isaac McCaslin who lived in town, supported by what Roth Edmonds chose to give him, who would own the land and all on it if his just rights were

only known, if people just knew how old Cass Edmonds, this one's grandfather, had beat him out of his patrimony; almost as old as old Isaac, almost, as old Isaac was, coeval with old Buck and Buddy McCaslin who had been alive when their father, Carothers McCaslin, got the land from the Indians back in the old time when men black and white were men.

He was in the creek bottom now. Curiously enough, visibility seemed to have increased, as if the rank sunless jungle of cypress and willow and brier, instead of increasing obscurity, had solidified it into the concrete components of trunk and branch, leaving the air, space, free of it and in comparison lighter, penetrable to vision, to the mare's sight anyway, enabling her to see-saw back and forth among the trunks and the impassable thickets. Then he saw the place he sought — a squat, flat-topped, almost symmetrical mound rising without reason from the floor-like flatness of the valley. The white people called it an Indian mound.

One day five or six years ago a group of white men, including two women, most of them wearing spectacles and all wearing khaki clothes which had patently lain folded on a store shelf twenty-four hours ago, came with pick and shovels and jars and phials of insect repellent and spent a day digging about it while most of the people, men women and children, came at some time during the day and looked quietly on; later — within the next two or three days, in fact — he was to remember with almost horrified amazement the cold and contemptuous curiosity with which he himself had watched them.

But that would come later. Now he was merely busy. He could not see his watch-face, but he knew it was almost midnight. He stopped the wagon beside the mound and unloaded the still — the copper-lined kettle which had cost him more than he still liked to think about despite his ingrained lifelong scorn of inferior tools — and the worm and his pick and shovel.

The spot he sought was a slight overhang on one face of the mound; in a sense one side of his excavation was already dug for him, needing

only to be enlarged a little, the earth working easily under the invisible pick, whispering easily and steadily to the invisible shovel until the orifice was deep enough for the worm and kettle to fit into it, when — and it was probably only a sigh but it sounded to him louder than an avalanche, as though the whole mound had stooped roaring down at him — the entire overhang sloughed.

It drummed on the hollow kettle, covering it and the worm, and boiled about his feet and, as he leaped backward and tripped and fell, about his body too, hurling clods and dirt at him, striking him a final blow squarely in the face with something larger than a clod — a blow not vicious so much as merely heavy-handed, a sort of final admonitory pat from the spirit of darkness and solitude, the old earth, perhaps the old ancestors themselves.

Because, sitting up, getting his breath again at last, gasping and blinking at the apparently unchanged shape of the mound which seemed to loom poised above him in a long roaring wave of silence like a burst of jeering and prolonged laughter, his hand found the object which had struck him and learned it in the blind dark — a fragment of an earthenware vessel which, intact, must have been as big as a churn and which even as he lifted it crumbled again and deposited in his palm, as though it had been handed to him, a single coin.

He could not have said how he knew it was gold. But he didn't even need to strike a match. He dared risk no light at all as, his brain boiling with all the images of buried money he had ever listened to or heard of, for the next five hours he crawled on hands and knees among the loose earth, hunting through the collapsed and now quiet dirt almost grain by grain, pausing from time to time to gauge by the stars how much remained of the rapid and shortening spring night, then probing again in the dry insensate dust which had yawned for an instant and vouchsafed him one blinding glimpse of the absolute and then closed.

When the east began to pale he stopped and straightened up, kneeling, stretching his cramped and painful muscles into something approximating erectness for the first time since midnight.

He had found nothing more. He had not even found any other fragments of the churn or crock. That meant that the rest of it might be scattered anywhere beneath the cave-in. He would have to dig for it, coin by coin, with pick and shovel. That meant time, but more than that, solitude. Obviously there must no longer be even the remotest possibility of sheriffs and law men prying about the place hunting whisky stills.

So George Wilkins was reprieved without knowing his luck just as he had been in jeopardy without knowing his danger. For an instant, remembering the tremendous power which three hours ago had hurled him on to his back without even actually touching him, he even thought of taking George into partnership on a minor share basis to do the actual digging; indeed, not only to do the actual work but as a sort of justice, balance, libation to Chance and Fortune, since if it had not been for George, he would not have found the single coin. But he dismissed that before it even had time to become an idea.

He, Lucas Beauchamp, the oldest living McCaslin descendant still living on the hereditary land, who actually remembered old Buck and Buddy in the living flesh, older than Zack Edmonds even if Zack were still alive, almost as old as old Isaac who in a sense, say what a man would, had turned apostate to his name and lineage by weakly relinquishing the land which was rightfully his to live in town on the charity of his great-nephew; — he, to share one jot, one penny of the money which old Buck and Buddy had buried almost a hundred years ago, with an interloper without forbears and sprung from nowhere and whose very name was unknown in the country twenty-five years ago — a jimber-jawed clown who could not even learn how to make whisky, who had not only attempted to interfere with and jeopardise his business and disrupt his family, but had given him a week of alternating raging anxiety and exasperated outrage culminating in tonight — or last night now — and not even finished yet, since he still had the worm and kettle to conceal. Never. Let George take for his recompense the fact that he would not have to go to the penitentiary to which Roth Edmonds would probably have sent him even if the Law did not.

The light had increased; he could see now. The slide had covered the still. All necessary would be a few branches piled against it so that the recent earth would not be too apparent to a chance passer. He rose to his feet. But he still could not straighten up completely.

With one hand pressed to his back and still bent over a little he began to walk stiffly and painfully toward a clump of sapling cottonwoods about fifty feet away, when something crashed into flight within or beyond it and rushed on, the sound fading and already beginning to curve away toward the edge of the jungle while he stood for perhaps ten seconds, slackjawed with amazed and incredulous comprehension, his head turning to pace the invisible running.

Then he whirled and leaped, not toward the sound but running parallel with it, leaping with incredible agility and speed among the trees and undergrowth, breaking out of the jungle in time to see, in the wan light of the accelerating dawn, the quarry fleeing like a deer across a field and into the still night-bound woods beyond.

He knew who it was, even before he returned to the thicket where it had flushed, to stand looking down at the print of his daughter's naked feet where she had squatted in the mud, knowing that print as he would have known those of his mare or his dog, standing over it for a while and looking down at it but no longer seeing it at all. So that was that.

In a way, it even simplified things. Even if there had been time (another hour and every field along the creek would have a negro and a mule in it), even if he could hope to obliterate all trace and sign of disturbed earth about the mound, it would do no good to move his still to another hiding-place.

Because when they came to the mound to dig they must not only find something, they must find it quick and at once and something the discovery and exhumation of which would cause them to desist and go away — say, only partly buried, and with just enough brush in front of it

that they couldn't help but find it even before they got the brush dragged off. Because it was a matter open to, admitting, no controversy, not even discussion. George Wilkins must go. He must be on his way before another night had passed.

II

He shoved his chair back from the supper table and stood up. He gave his daughter's lowered, secret face a single look, not grim but cold. But he addressed neither her nor his wife directly. He might have been speaking to either of them or both or to neither: "Going down the road."

"Where you going this time of night?" his wife said. "Messing around up yonder in the bottom all last night! Getting back home just in time to hitch up and get to the field a good hour after sunup! You needs to be in bed if you going to get that creek piece broke like Mister Roth —"

Then he was out of the house and didn't need to hear her any longer. It was night again. The dirt lane ran pale and dim beneath the moonless sky of corn-planting time. Presently it ran along beside the very field which he was getting ready to plant his cotton in when the whippoorwills began. If it had not been for George Wilkins, he would have had it all broken and bedded and ready now. But that was about over now.

Another ten minutes and it would be like dropping the nickel into the slot machine, not ringing down a golden shower about him, he didn't ask that, need that; he would attend to the jackpot himself, but giving him peace and solitude in which to do so. That, the labour even at night and without help, even if he had to move half the mound, did not bother him. He was only sixty-seven, a better man still than some men half his age; ten years younger and he could still have done both, the night-work and the day. But now he wouldn't try it.

In a way, he was a little sorry to give up farming. He had liked it; he approved of his fields and liked to work them, taking a solid pride in having good tools to use and using them well, scorning both inferior equipment and shoddy work just as he had bought the best kettle he could find when he set up his still — that copper-lined kettle the cost of which he liked less than ever to remember now that he was not only about to lose it but was himself deliberately giving it away.

He had even planned the very phrases, dialogue, in which, after the first matter was attended to, he would inform Edmonds that he had decided to quit farming, was old enough to retire, and for Edmonds to allot his land to someone else to finish the crop. “All right,” Edmonds would say.

“But you cant expect me to furnish a house and wood and water to a family that aint working any land.” And he would say, if it really came to that — and it probably would, since he, Lucas, would affirm to his death that Zack Edmonds had been as much better a man than his son as old Cass Edmonds had been than both of them together: “All right. I’ll rent the house from you. Name your price and I will pay you every Saturday night as long as I decide to stay here.”

But that would take care of itself. The other matter was first and prime. At first, on his return home this morning, his plan had been to notify the sheriff himself, so that there would be absolutely no slip-up, lest Edmonds should be content with merely destroying George’s still and cache and just running George off the place.

In that case, George would continue to hang around the place, merely keeping out of Edmonds’s sight; whereupon, without even any farm work, let alone the still, to keep him occupied, he would be idle all day and therefore up and out all night long and would constitute more of a menace than ever.

The report would have to come from Edmonds, the white man, because to the sheriff Lucas was just another nigger and both the sheriff and Lucas knew it, although only one of them knew that to Lucas the sheriff

was a redneck without any reason for pride in his forbears nor hope for it in his descendants.

And if Edmonds should decide to handle the matter privately, without recourse to the law, there would be someone in Jefferson whom Lucas could inform that not only he and George Wilkins knew of a still on Carothers Edmonds's place, but Carothers Edmonds knew it too.

He entered the wide carriage gate from which the drive curved mounting to the oak and cedar knoll where he could already see, brighter than any kerosene, the gleam of electricity in the house where the better men than this one had been content with lamps or even candles.

There was a tractor under the mule-shed which Zack Edmonds would not have allowed on the place too, and an automobile in a house built especially for it which old Cass would not even have put his foot in.

But they were the old days, the old time, and better men than these; Lucas himself made one, himself and old Cass coevals in more than spirit even, the analogy only the closer for its paradox: — old Cass a McCaslin only on his mother's side and so bearing his father's name though he possessed the land and its benefits and responsibilities; Lucas a McCaslin on his father's side though bearing his mother's name and possessing the use and benefit of the land with none of the responsibilities.

Better men: — old Cass, a McCaslin only by the distaff yet having enough of old Carothers McCaslin in his veins to take the land from the true heir simply because he wanted it and knew he could use it better and was strong enough, ruthless enough, old Carothers McCaslin enough; even Zack, who was not the man his father had been but whom Lucas, the man McCaslin, had accepted as his peer to the extent of intending to kill him, right up to the point when, his affairs all set in order like those of a man preparing for death, he stood over the sleeping white man that morning forty-three years ago with the naked razor in his hand.

He approached the house — the two log wings which Carothers McCaslin had built and which had sufficed old Buck and Buddy, connected by the open hallway which, as his pride's monument and epitaph, old Cass Edmonds had enclosed and superposed with a second storey of white clapboards and faced with a portico. He didn't go around to the back, the kitchen door.

He had done that only one time since the present Edmonds was born; he would never do it again as long as he lived. Neither did he mount the steps. Instead he stopped in the darkness beside the gallery and rapped with his knuckles on the edge of it until the white man came up the hall and peered out the front door. "Well?" Edmonds said. "What is it?"

"It's me," Lucas said.

"Well, come in," the other said. "What are you standing out there for?" "You come out here," Lucas said. "For all you or me either know, George may be laying out yonder right now, listening."

"George?" Edmonds said. "George Wilkins?" He came out on to the gallery — a young man still, a bachelor, forty-three years old last March. Lucas did not need to remember that. He would never forget it — that night of early spring following ten days of such rain that even the old people remembered nothing to compare it with, and the white man's wife's time upon her and the creek out of banks until the whole valley rose, bled a river choked with down timber and drowned livestock until not even a horse could have crossed it in the darkness to reach a telephone and fetch the doctor back.

And Molly, a young woman then and nursing their own first child, wakened at midnight by the white man himself and they followed then the white man through the streaming darkness to his house and Lucas waited in the kitchen, keeping the fire going in the stove, and Molly delivered the white child with none to help but Edmonds and then they knew that the doctor had to be fetched.

So even before daylight he was in the water and crossed it, how he never knew, and was back by dark with the doctor, emerging from that death (At one time he had believed himself gone, done for, both himself and the mule soon to be two more white-eyed and slack-jawed pieces of flotsam, to be located by the circling of buzzards, swollen and no longer identifiable, a month hence when the water went down.) which he had entered not for his own sake but for that of old Carothers McCaslin who had sired him and Zack Edmonds both, to find the white man's wife dead and his own wife already established in the white man's house.

It was as though on that luring and driving day he had crossed and then recrossed a kind of Lethe, emerging, being permitted to escape, buying as the price of life a world outwardly the same yet subtly and irrevocably altered.

It was as though the white woman had not only never quitted the house, she had never existed — the object which they buried in the orchard two days later (they still could not cross the valley to reach the churchyard) a thing of no moment, unsanctified, nothing; his own wife, the black woman, now living alone in the house which old Cass had built for them when they married, keeping alive on the hearth the fire he had lit there on their wedding day and which had burned ever since though there was little enough cooking done on it now; — thus, until almost half a year had passed and one day he went to Zack Edmonds and said, "I wants my wife.

I needs her at home." Then — and he hadn't intended to say this. But there had been that half-year almost and himself alone keeping alive the fire which was to burn on the hearth until neither he nor Molly were left to feed it, himself sitting before it night after night through that spring and summer until one night he caught himself standing over it, furious, bursting, blind, the cedar water bucket already poised until he caught himself and set the bucket back on the shelf, still shaking, unable to remember taking the bucket up even — then he said: "I reckon you thought I wouldn't take her back, didn't you?"

The white man was sitting down. In age he and Lucas could have been brothers, almost twins too. He leaned slowly back in the chair, looking at Lucas. "Well, by God," he said quietly. "So that's what you think. What kind of a man do you think I am? What kind of a man do you call yourself?"

"I'm a nigger," Lucas said. "But I'm a man too. I'm more than just a man. The same thing made my pappy that made your grandmaw. I'm going to take her back."

"By God," Edmonds said, "I never thought to ever pass my oath to a nigger. But I will swear — —" Lucas had turned, already walking away. He whirled. The other was standing now. They faced one another, though for the instant Lucas couldn't even see him.

"Not to me!" Lucas said. "I wants her in my house to-night. You understand?" He went back to the field, to the plough standing in midfurrow where he had left it when he discovered suddenly that he was going now, this moment, to the commissary or the house or wherever the white man would be, into his bedroom if necessary, and confront him. He had tied the mule under a tree, the gear still on it.

He put the mule back to the plough and ploughed again. When he turned at the end of each furrow he could have seen his house. But he never looked toward it, not even when he knew that she was in it again, home again, not even when fresh woodsmoke began to rise from the chimney as it had not risen in the middle of the morning in almost half a year; not even when at noon she came along the fence, carrying a pail and a covered pan and stood looking at him for a moment before she set the pail and pan down and went back.

Then the plantation bell rang for noon, the flat, musical, deliberate clangs. He took the mule out and watered and fed it and only then went to the fence-corner and there it was — the pan of still-warm biscuit, the lard pail half full of milk, the tin worn and polished with scouring and long use until it had a patina like old silver — just as it had used to be.

Then the afternoon was done too. He stabled and fed Edmonds's mule and hung the gear on its appointed peg against tomorrow. Then in the lane, in the green middle-dusk of summer while the fireflies winked and drifted and the whippoorwills choired back and forth and the frogs thumped and grunted along the creek, he looked at his house for the first time, at the thin plume of supper smoke windless above the chimney, his breathing harder and harder and deeper and deeper until his faded shirt strained at the buttons on his chest.

Maybe when he got old he would become resigned to it. But he knew he would never, not even if he got to be a hundred and forgot her face and name and the white man's and his too. I will have to kill him, he thought, or I will have to take her and go away. For an instant he thought of going to the white man and telling him they were leaving, now, tonight, at once.

Only if I were to see him again right now, I might kill him, he thought. I think I have decided which I am going to do, but if I was to see him, meet him now, my mind might change. — And that's a man! he thought. He keeps her in the house with him six months and I don't do nothing: he sends her back to me and I kills him.

It would be like I had done said aloud to the whole world that he never sent her back because I told him to but he give her back to me because he was tired of her.

He entered the gate in the paling fence which he had built himself when old Cass gave them the house, as he had hauled and laid the field stone path across the grassless yard which his wife used to sweep every morning with a broom of bound willow twigs, sweeping the clean dust into curving intricate patterns among the flower-beds outlined with broken brick and bottles and shards of china and coloured glass.

She had returned from time to time during the spring to work the flower-beds so that they bloomed as usual — the hardy, blatant blooms loved of her and his race: prince's feather and sunflower, canna and

hollyhock — but until today the paths among them had not been swept since last year. Yes, he thought. I got to kill him or I got to leave here.

He entered the hall, then the room where he had lit the fire two years ago which was to have outlasted both of them. He could not always remember afterward what he had said but he never forgot the amazed and incredulous rage with which he thought, Why she aint even knowed unto right now that I ever even suspected.

She was sitting before the hearth where the supper was cooking, holding the child, shielding its face from the light and heat with her hand — a small woman even then, years before her flesh, her very bones apparently, had begun to wither and shrink inward upon themselves, and he standing over her, looking down not at his own child but at the face of the white one nuzzling into the dark swell of her breast — not Edmonds's wife but his own who had been lost; not his son but the white man's who had been restored to him, his voice loud, his clawed hand darting toward the child as her hand sprang and caught his wrist.

"Whar's ourn?" he cried. "Whar's mine?"

"Right yonder on the bed, sleeping!" she said. "Go and look at him!" He didn't move, standing over her, locked hand and wrist with her. "I couldn't leave him! You know I couldn't! I had to bring him!"

"Dont lie to me!" he said. "Dont tell me Zack Edmonds know where he is."

"He does know! I told him!" He broke his wrist free, flinging her hand and arm back; he heard the faint click of her teeth when the back of her hand struck her chin and he watched her start to raise her hand to her mouth, then let it fall again.

"That's right," he said. "It aint none of your blood that's trying to break out and run!"

"You fool!" she cried. "Oh God," she said. "Oh God. All right. I'll take him back. I aimed to anyway. Aunt Thisbe can fix him a sugar-tit — —"

“Not you,” he said. “And not me even. Do you think Zack Edmonds is going to stay in that house yonder when he gets back and finds out he is gone? No!” he said. “I went to Zack Edmonds’s house and asked him for my wife. Let him come to my house and ask me for his son!”

He waited on the gallery. He could see, across the valley, the gleam of light in the other house. He just aint got home yet, he thought. He breathed slow and steady. It aint no hurry. He will do something and then I will do something and it will be all over. It will be all right. Then the light disappeared. He began to say quietly, aloud: “Now. Now. He will have to have time to walk over here.”

He continued to say it long after he knew the other had had time to walk back and forth between the two houses ten times over. It seemed to him then that he had known all the time the other was not coming, as if he were in the house where the white man waited, watching his, Lucas’s, house in his turn. Then he knew that the other was not even waiting, and it was as if he stood already in the bedroom itself, above the slow respirations of sleep, the undefended and oblivious throat, the naked razor already in his hand.

He re-entered the house, the room where his wife and the two children were asleep on the bed. The supper which had been cooking on the hearth when he entered at dusk had not even been taken up, what was left of it long since charred and simmered away and probably almost cool now among the fading embers. He set the skillet and coffee pot aside and with a stick of wood he raked the ashes from one corner of the fireplace, exposing the bricks, and touched one of them with his wet finger.

It was hot, not scorching, searing, but possessing a slow, deep solidity of heat, a condensation of the two years during which the fire had burned constantly above it, a condensation not of fire but of time, as though not the fire’s dying and not even water would cool it but only time would.

He prised the brick up with his knife blade and scraped away the warm dirt under it and lifted out a small metal dispatch box which his white grandfather, Carothers McCaslin himself, had owned almost a hundred years ago, and took from it the knotted rag tight and solid with the coins, some of which dated back almost to Carothers McCaslin's time, which he had begun to save before he was ten years old. His wife had removed only her shoes (He recognised them too.

They had belonged to the white woman who had not died, who had not even ever existed.) before lying down. He put the knotted rag into one of them and went to the walnut bureau which Isaac McCaslin had given him for a wedding present and took his razor from the drawer.

He was waiting for daylight. He could not have said why. He squatted against a tree halfway between the carriage gate and the white man's house, motionless as the windless obscurity itself while the constellations wheeled and the whippoorwills choired faster and faster and ceased and the first cocks crowed and the false dawn came and faded and the birds began and the night was over.

In the first of light he mounted the white man's front steps and entered the unlocked front door and traversed the silent hall and entered the bedroom which it seemed to him he had already entered and that only an instant before, standing with the open razor above the breathing, the undefended and defenceless throat, facing again the act which it seemed to him he had already performed. Then he found the eyes of the face on the pillow looking quietly up at him and he knew then why he had had to wait until daylight.

"Because you are a McCaslin too," he said. "Even if you was woman-made to it. Maybe that's the reason. Maybe that's why you done it: because what you and your pa got from old Carothers had to come to you through a woman — a critter not responsible like men are responsible, not to be held like men are held. So maybe I have even already forgive you, except I cant forgive you because you can forgive only them that injure you; even the Book itself dont ask a man to

forgive them he is fixing to harm because even Jesus found out at last that was too much to ask a man.”

“Put the razor down and I will talk to you,” Edmonds said.

“You knowed I wasn’t afraid, because you knowed I was a McCaslin too and a man-made one. And you never thought that, because I am a McCaslin too, I wouldn’t. You never even thought that, because I am a nigger too, I wouldn’t dare. No. You thought that because I am a nigger I wouldn’t even mind. I never figured on the razor neither.

But I gave you your chance. Maybe I didn’t know what I might have done when you walked in my door, but I knowed what I wanted to do, what I believed I was going to do, what Carothers McCaslin would have wanted me to do. But you didn’t come. You never even gave me the chance to do what old Carothers would have told me to do.

You tried to beat me. And you wont never, not even when I am hanging dead from the limb this time tomorrow with the coal oil still burning, you wont never.”

“Put down the razor, Lucas,” Edmonds said.

“What razor?” Lucas said. He raised his hand and looked at the razor as if he did not know he had it, had never seen it before, and in the same motion flung it toward the open window, the naked blade whirling almost blood-coloured into the first copper ray of the sun before it vanished.

“I dont need no razor. My nekkid hands will do. Now get the pistol under your pillow.”

Still the other didn’t move, not even to draw his hands from under the sheet. “It’s not under the pillow. It’s in that drawer yonder where it always is and you know it. Go and look. I’m not going to run. I couldn’t.”

“I know you aint,” Lucas said. “And you know you aint. Because you know that’s all I needs, all I wants, is for you to try to run, to turn your

back on me and run. I know you aint going to. Because all you got to beat is me. I got to beat old Carothers. Get your pistol.”

“No,” the other said. “Go home. Get out of here. Tonight I will come to your house — —”

“After this?” Lucas said. “Me and you, in the same country, breathing the same air even? No matter what you could say, what you could even prove so I would have to believe it, after this? Get the pistol.”

The other drew his hands out from under the sheet and placed them on top of it. “All right,” he said. “Stand over there against the wall until I get it.”

“Hah,” Lucas said. “Hah.”

The other put his hands back under the sheet. “Then go and get your razor,” he said.

Lucas began to pant, to indraw short breaths without expiration between. The white man could see his foreshortened chest, the worn faded shirt straining across it. “When you just watched me throw it away?” Lucas said. “When you know that if I left this room now, I wouldn’t come back?”

He went to the wall and stood with his back against it, still facing the bed. “Because I done already beat you,” he said. “It’s old Carothers. Get your pistol, white man.” He stood panting in the rapid inhalations until it seemed that his lungs could not possibly hold more of it.

He watched the other rise from the bed and grasp the foot of it and swing it out from the wall until it could be approached from either side; he watched the white man cross to the bureau and take the pistol from the drawer. Still Lucas didn’t move.

He stood pressed against the wall and watched the white man cross to the door and close it and turn the key and return to the bed and toss the pistol on to it and only then look toward him. Lucas began to tremble. “No,” he said.

“You on one side, me on the other,” the white man said. “We’ll kneel down and grip hands. We wont need to count.”

“No!” Lucas said in a strangling voice. “For the last time. Take your pistol. I’m coming.”

“Come on then. Do you think I’m any less a McCaslin just because I was what you call woman-made to it? Or maybe you aint even a woman-made McCaslin but just a nigger that’s got out of hand?”

Then Lucas was beside the bed. He didn’t remember moving at all. He was kneeling, their hands gripped, facing across the bed and the pistol the man whom he had known from infancy, with whom he had lived until they were both grown almost as brothers lived. They had fished and hunted together, they had learned to swim in the same water, they had eaten at the same table in the white boy’s kitchen and in the cabin of the negro’s mother; they had slept under the same blanket before a fire in the woods.

“For the last time,” Lucas said. “I tell you — —” Then he cried, and not to the white man and the white man knew it; he saw the whites of the negro’s eyes rush suddenly with red like the eyes of a bayed animal — a bear, a fox: “I tell you! Dont ask too much of me!” I was wrong, the white man thought. I have gone too far.

But it was too late. Even as he tried to snatch his hand free Lucas’s hand closed on it. He darted his left hand toward the pistol but Lucas caught that wrist too. Then they did not move save their forearms, their gripped hands turning gradually until the white man’s hand was pressed back-downward on the pistol. Motionless, locked, incapable of moving, the white man stared at the spent and frantic face opposite his.

“I give you your chance,” Lucas said. “Then you laid here asleep with your door unlocked and give me mine. Then I throwed the razor away and give it back. And then your throwed it back at me. That’s right, aint it?”

“Yes,” the white man said.

“Hah!” Lucas said. He flung the white man’s left hand and arm away, striking the other backward from the bed as his own right hand wrenched free; he had the pistol in the same motion, springing up and back as the white man rose too, the bed between them. He broke the pistol’s breech and glanced quickly at the cylinder and turned it until the empty chamber under the hammer was at the bottom, so that a live cartridge would come beneath the hammer regardless of which direction the cylinder rotated. “Because I’ll need two of them,” he said.

He snapped the breech shut and faced the white man. Again the white man saw his eyes rush until there was neither cornea nor iris. This is it, the white man thought, with that rapid and even unamazed clarity, gathering himself as much as he dared. Lucas didn’t seem to notice. He cant even see me right now, the white man thought. But that was too late too.

Lucas was looking at him now. “You thought I wouldn’t, didn’t you?” Lucas said. “You knowed I could beat you, so you thought to beat me with old Carothers, like Cass Edmonds done Isaac: used old Carothers to make Isaac give up the land that was his because Cass Edmonds was the woman-made McCaslin, the woman-branch, the sister, and old Carothers would have told Isaac to give in to the woman-kin that couldn’t fend for herself. And you thought I’d do that too, didn’t you?”

You thought I’d do it quick, quicker than Isaac since it aint any land I would give up. I aint got any fine big McCaslin farm to give up. All I got to give up is McCaslin blood that rightfully aint even mine or at least aint worth much since old Carothers never seemed to miss much what he give to Tomey that night that made my father. And if this is what that McCaslin blood has brought me, I don’t want it neither. And if the running of it into my black blood never hurt him any more than the running of it out is going to hurt me, it wont even be old Carothers that had the most pleasure. — Or no,” he cried. He cant see me again, the white man thought.

Now. “No!” Lucas cried; “say I don’t even use this first bullet at all, say I just uses the last one and beat you and old Carothers both, leave you something to think about now and then when you aint too busy to try to think up what to tell old Carothers when you get where he’s done already gone, tomorrow and the one after that and the one after that as long as tomorrow—”

The white man sprang, hurling himself across the bed, grasping at the pistol and the hand which held it. Lucas sprang too; they met over the centre of the bed where Lucas clasped the other with his left arm almost like an embrace and jammed the pistol against the white man’s side and pulled the trigger and flung the white man from him all in one motion, hearing as he did so the light, dry; incredibly loud click of the miss-fire.

That had been a good year, though late in beginning after the rains and flood: the year of the long summer. He would make more this year than he had made in a long time, even though and in August some of his corn had not had its last ploughing.

He was doing that now, following the single mule between the rows of strong, waist-high stalks and the rich, dark, flashing blades, pausing at the end of each row to back the plough out and swing it and the yawing mule around into the next one, until at last the dinner smoke stood weightless in the bright air above his chimney and then at the old time she came along the fence with the covered pan and the pail. He did not look at her. He ploughed on until the plantation bell rang for noon.

He watered and fed the mule and himself ate — the milk, the still-warm biscuit — and rested in the shade until the bell rang again. Then, not rising yet, he took the cartridge from his pocket and looked at it again, musing — the live cartridge, not even stained, not corroded, the mark of the firing-pin dented sharp and deep into the unexploded cap — the dull little brass cylinder less long than a match, not much larger than a pencil, not much heavier, yet large enough to contain two lives.

Have contained, that is. Because I wouldn't have used the second one, he thought. I would have paid. I would have waited for the rope, even the coal oil. I would have paid. So I reckon I aint got old Carothers's blood for nothing, after all. Old Carothers, he thought. I needed him and he come and spoke for me. He ploughed again. Presently she came back along the fence and got the pan and pail herself instead of letting him bring them home when he came.

But she would be busy today; and it seemed to him still early in the afternoon when he saw the supper smoke — the supper which she would leave on the hearth for him when she went back to the big house with the children. When he reached home in the dusk, she was just departing. But she didn't wear the white woman's shoes now and her dress was the same shapeless faded calico she had worn in the morning. "Your supper's ready," she said. "I aint had time to milk yet. You'll have to."

"If I can wait on that milk, I reckon the cow can too," he said. "Can you tote them both all right?"

"I reckon I can. I been taking care of both of them a good while now without no man-help." She didn't look back. "I'll come back out when I gets them to sleep."

"I reckon you better put your time on them," he said gruffly. "Since that's what you started out to do." She went on, neither answering nor looking back, impervious, tranquil, somehow serene. Nor was he any longer watching her. He breathed slow and quiet. Women, he thought. Women. I wont never know. I dont want to.

I ruther never to know than to find out later I have been fooled. He turned toward the room where the fire was, where his supper waited. This time he spoke aloud: "How to God," he said, "can a black man ask a white man to please not lay down with his black wife? And even if he could ask it, how to God can the white man promise he wont?"

“George Wilkins?” Edmonds said. He came to the edge of the gallery — a young man still, yet possessing already something of that almost choleric shortness of temper which Lucas remembered in old Cass Edmonds but which had skipped Zack.

In age he could have been Lucas’ son, but actually was the lesser man for more reason than that, since it was not Lucas who paid taxes insurance and interest or owned anything which had to be kept ditched drained fenced and fertilised or gambled anything save his sweat, and that only as he saw fit, against God for his yearly sustenance. “What in hell has George Wilkins — —”

Without changing the inflexion of his voice and apparently without effort or even design Lucas became not Negro but nigger, not secret so much as impenetrable, not servile and not effacing, but enveloping himself in an aura of timeless and stupid impassivity almost like a smell. “He’s running a kettle in that gully behind the Old West field. If you want the whisky too, look under his kitchen floor.”

“A still?” Edmonds said. “On my land?” He began to roar. “Haven’t I told and told every man woman and child on this place what I would do the first drop of white mule whisky I found on my land?”

“You didn’t need to tell me,” Lucas said. “I’ve lived on this place since I was born, since before your pa was. And you or him or old Cass either aint never heard of me having truck with any kind of whisky except that bottle of town whisky you and him give Molly Christmas.”

“I know it,” Edmonds said. “And I would have thought George Wilkins—” He ceased. He said, “Hah. Have I or haven’t I heard something about George wanting to marry that girl of yours?”

For just an instant Lucas didn’t answer. Then he said, “That’s right.”

“Hah,” Edmonds said again. “And so you thought that by telling me on George before he got caught himself, I would be satisfied to make him chop up his kettle and pour out his whisky and then forget about it.”

“I didn’t know,” Lucas said.

“Well, you know now,” Edmonds said. “And George will too when the sheriff—” he went back into the house. Lucas listened to the hard, rapid, angry clapping of his heels on the floor, then to the prolonged violent grinding of the telephone crank. Then he stopped listening, standing motionless in the half-darkness, blinking a little. He thought, All that worrying. I never even thought of that. Edmonds returned.

“All right,” he said. “You can go on home now. Go to bed. I know it wont do a damn bit of good to mention it, but I would like to see your south creek piece planted by tomorrow night. You doped around in it today like you hadn’t been to bed for a week. I dont know what you do at night, but you are too old to be tomcatting around the country whether you think so or not.”

He went back home. Now that it was all over, done, he realised how tired he actually was. It was as if the alternating waves of alarm and outrage and anger and fear of the past ten days, culminating in last night’s frantic activity and the past thirty-six hours during which he had not even taken off his clothes, had narcotised him, deadened the very weariness itself. But it was all right now.

If a little physical exhaustion, even another ten days or two weeks of it, was all required of him in return for that moment last night, he would not complain. Then he remembered that he had not told Edmonds of his decision to quit farming, for Edmonds to arrange to rent the land he had been working to someone else to finish his crop.

But perhaps that was just as well too; perhaps even a single night would suffice to find the rest of the money which a churn that size must have contained, and he would keep the land, the crop, from old habit, for something to occupy him. — Provided I dont need to keep it for a better reason still, he thought grimly.

Since I probably aint even made a scratch yet on the kind of luck that can wait unto I am sixty-seven years old, almost too old to even want it, to make me rich.

The house was dark except for a faint glow from the hearth in his and his wife's room. The room across the hallway where his daughter slept was dark too. It would be empty too. He had expected that. I reckon George Wilkins is entitled to one more night of female company, he thought. From what I have heard, he wont find none of it where he's going tomorrow.

When he got into bed his wife said without waking, "Whar you been? Walking the roads all last night. Walking the roads all tonight, with the ground crying to get planted. You just wait unto Mister Roth—" and then stopped talking without waking either. Sometime later, he waked. It was after midnight.

He lay beneath the quilt on the shuck mattress. It would be happening about now. He knew how they did it — the white sheriff and revenue officers and deputies creeping and crawling among the bushes with drawn pistols, surrounding the kettle, sniffing and whiffing like hunting dogs at every stump and disfiguration of earth until every jug and keg was found and carried back to where the car waited; maybe they would even take a sup or two to ward off the night's chill before returning to the still to squat until George walked innocently in. He was neither triumphant nor vindictive. He even felt something personal toward George now.

He is young yet, he thought. They wont keep him down there for ever. In fact, as far as he, Lucas, was concerned, two weeks would be enough. He can afford to give a year or two at it. And maybe when they lets him out it will be a lesson to him about whose daughter to fool with next time.

Then his wife was leaning over the bed, shaking him and screaming. It was just after dawn. In his shirt and drawers he ran behind her, out on to the back gallery.

Sitting on the ground before it was George Wilkins's patched and battered still; on the gallery itself was an assortment of fruit jars and stoneware jugs and a keg or so and one rusted five-gallon oilcan which, to Lucas's horrified and sleep-dulled eyes, appeared capable of holding enough liquid to fill a ten-foot horse trough.

He could even see it in the glass jars — a pale, colourless fluid in which still floated the shreds of corn-husks which George's tenth-hand still had not removed. "Whar was Nat last night?" he cried. He grasped his wife by the shoulder, shaking her. "Whar was Nat, old woman?"

"She left right behind you!" his wife cried. "She followed you again, like night before last! Didn't you know it?"

"I knows it now," Lucas said. "Get the axe!" he said. "Bust it! We ain't got time to get it away." But there was not time for that either. Neither of them had yet moved when the sheriff of the county, followed by a deputy, came around the corner of the house — a tremendous man, fat, who obviously had been up all night and obviously still did not like it.

"Damn it, Lucas," he said. "I thought you had better sense than this." "This aint none of mine," Lucas said. "You know it aint. Even if it was, would I have had it here? George Wilkins — —"

"Never you mind about George Wilkins," the sheriff said. "I've got him too. He's out there in the car, with that girl of yours. Go get your pants on. We're going to town."

Two hours later he was in the commissioner's office in the federal courthouse in Jefferson. He was still inscrutable of face, blinking a little, listening to George Wilkins breathing hard beside him and to the voices of the white men.

"Confound it, Carothers," the commissioner said, "what the hell kind of Senegambian Montague and Capulet is this anyhow?"

“Ask them!” Edmonds said violently. “Ask them! Wilkins and that girl of Lucas’s want to get married. Lucas wouldn’t hear of it for some reason — I just seem to be finding out now why. So last night Lucas came to my house and told me George was running a still on my land because—” without even a pause to draw a fresh breath Edmonds began to roar again “ — he knew damn well what I would do because I have been telling every nigger on my place for years just what I would do if I ever found one drop of that damn wildcat — —”

“Yes, yes,” the commissioner said; “all right, all right. So you telephoned the sheriff — —”

“And we got the message—” it was one of the deputies, a plump man though nowhere as big as the sheriff, voluble, muddy about the lower legs and a little strained and weary in the face too “ — and we went out there and Mr Roth told us where to look.

But there aint no kettle in the gully where he said, so we set down and thought about just where would we hide a still if we was one of Mr Roth’s niggers and we went and looked there and sho enough there it was, neat and careful as you please, all took to pieces and about half buried and covered with brush against a kind of mound in the creek bottom.

Only it was getting toward daybreak then, so we decided to come on back to George’s house and look under the kitchen floor like Mr Roth said, and then have a little talk with George. So we come on back to George’s house, only there aint any George or nobody else in it and nothing under the kitchen floor neither and so we are coming on back toward Mr Roth’s house to ask him if maybe he aint got the wrong house in mind maybe; it’s just about full daylight now and we are about a hundred yards from Lucas’s house when what do we see but George and the gal legging it up the hill toward Lucas’s cabin with a gallon jug in each hand, only George busted the jugs on a root before we could get to them.

And about that time Lucas's wife starts to yelling in the house and we run around to the back and there is another still setting in Lucas's back yard and about forty gallons of whisky setting on his back gallery like he was fixing to hold a auction sale and Lucas standing there in his drawers and shirt-tail, hollering, 'Git the axe and bust it! Git the axe and bust it!'"

"Yes," the commissioner said. "But who do you charge? You went out there to catch George, but all your evidence is against Lucas."

"There was two stills," the deputy said. "And George and that gal both swear Lucas has been making and selling whisky right there in Edmonds's back yard for twenty years." For an instant Lucas looked up and met Edmonds's glare, not of reproach and no longer even of surprise, but of grim and furious outrage. Then he looked away, blinking, listening to George Wilkins breathing hard beside him like a man in the profoundest depths of sleep, and to the voices.

"But you cant make his own daughter testify against him," the commissioner said.

"George can, though," the deputy said. "George aint any kin to him. Not to mention being in a fix where George has got to think up something good to say and think of it quick."

"Let the court settle all that, Tom," the sheriff said. "I was up all last night and I haven't even had my breakfast yet. I've brought you a prisoner and thirty or forty gallons of evidence and two witnesses. Let's get done with this."

"I think you've brought two prisoners," the commissioner said. He began to write on the paper before him. Lucas watched the moving hand, blinking. "I'm going to commit them both. George can testify against Lucas, and that girl can testify against George. She aint any kin to George either."

He could have posted his and George's appearance bonds without altering the first figure of his bank balance. When Edmonds had drawn

his own cheque to cover them, they returned to Edmonds's car. This time George drove it, with Nat in front with him.

It was seventeen miles back home. For those seventeen miles he sat beside the grim and seething white man in the back seat, with nothing to look at but those two heads — that of his daughter where she shrank as far as possible from George, into her corner, never once looking back; that of George, the ruined panama hat raked above his right ear, who still seemed to swagger even sitting down. Leastways his face aint all full of teeth now like it used to be whenever it found anybody looking at it, he thought viciously.

But never mind that either, right now. So he sat in the car when it stopped at the carriage gate and watched Nat spring out and run like a frightened deer up the lane toward his house, still without looking back, never once looking at him. Then they drove on to the mule lot, the stable, and he and George got out and again he could hear George breathing behind him while Edmonds, behind the wheel now, leaned his elbow in the window and glanced at them both.

“Get your mules!” Edmonds said. “What in hell are you waiting for?”
“I thought you were fixing to say something,” Lucas said. “So a man's kinfolks cant tell on him in court.”

“Never you mind about that!” Edmonds said. “George can tell plenty, and he aint any kin to you. And if he should begin to forget, Nat aint any kin to George and she can tell plenty. I know what you are thinking about.

But you have waited too late. If George and Nat tried to buy a wedding licence now, they would probably hang you and George both. Besides, damn that. I'm going to take you both to the penitentiary myself as soon as you are laid by.

Now you get on down to your south creek piece. By God, this is one time you will take advice from me. And here it is: don't come out until

you have finished it. If dark catches you, dont let it worry you. I'll send somebody down there with a lantern."

He was done with the south creek piece before dark; he had intended to finish it today anyhow. He was back at the stable, his mules watered and rubbed down and stalled and fed while George was still unharnessing.

Then he entered the lane and in the beginning of twilight walked toward his house above whose chimney the windless supper smoke stood. He didn't walk fast, neither did he look back when he spoke. "George Wilkins," he said.

"Sir," George said behind him. They walked on in single file and almost step for step, about five feet apart.

"Just what was your idea?"

"I don't rightly know, sir," George said. "It uz mostly Nat's. We never aimed to get you into no trouble. She say maybe ifn we took and fotch that kettle from whar you and Mister Roth told them shurfs it was and you would find it settin on yo back porch, maybe when we offered to help you git shet of it fo they got here, yo mind might change about loandin us the money to — I mean to leffen us get married."

"Hah," Lucas said. They walked on. Now he could smell the cooking meat. He reached the gate and turned. George stopped too, lean, wasp-waisted, foppish even in faded overalls below the swaggering rake of the hat. "There's more folks than just me in that trouble."

"Yes sir," George said. "Hit look like it is. I hope it gonter be a lesson to me."

"I hope so too," Lucas said. "When they get done sending you to Parchman you'll have plenty of time between working cotton and corn you aint going to get no third and fourth of even, to study it." They looked at one another.

“Yes sir,” George said. “Especially wid you there to help me worry hit out.”

“Hah,” Lucas said. He didn’t move; he hardly raised his voice even: “Nat.” He didn’t even look toward the house then as the girl came down the path, barefoot, in a clean, faded calico dress and a bright headrag. Her face was swollen from crying, but her voice was defiant, not hysterical.

“It wasn’t me that told Mister Roth to telefoam them shurfs!” she cried. He looked at her for the first time. He looked at her until even the defiance began to fade, to be replaced by something alert and speculative. He saw her glance flick past his shoulder to where George stood and return.

“My mind done changed,” he said. “I’m going to let you and George get married.” She stared at him. Again he watched her glance flick to George and return.

“It changed quick,” she said. She stared at him. Her hand, the long, limber, narrow, light-palmed hand of her race, rose and touched for an instant the bright cotton which bound her head. Her inflexion, the very tone and pitch of her voice had changed. “Me, marry George Wilkins and go to live in a house whar the whole back porch is done already fell off and whar I got to walk a half a mile and back from the spring to fetch water? He aint even got no stove!”

“My chimbley cooks good,” George said. “And I can prop up the porch.”

“And I can get used to walking a mile for two lard buckets full of water,” she said. “I dont wants no propped-up porch. I wants a new porch on George’s house and a cook-stove and a well.

And how you gonter get um? What you gonter pay for no stove with, and a new porch, and somebody to help you dig a well?” Yet it was still Lucas she stared at, ceasing with no dying fall of her high, clear soprano voice, watching her father’s face as if they were engaged with foils.

His face was not grim and neither cold nor angry. It was absolutely expressionless, impenetrable. He might have been asleep standing, as a horse sleeps. When he spoke, he might have been speaking to himself.

“A cook-stove,” he said. “The back porch fixed. A well.”

“A new back porch,” she said. He might not have even heard her. She might not have spoken even.

“The back porch fixed,” he said. Then she was not looking at him. Again the hand rose, slender and delicate and markless of any labour, and touched the back of her headkerchief. Lucas moved. “George Wilkins,” he said.

“Sir,” George said.

“Come into the house,” Lucas said.

And so, in its own good time, the other day came at last. In their Sunday clothes he and Nat and George stood beside the carriage gate while the car came up and stopped. “Morning, Nat,” Edmonds said. “When did you get home?”

“I got home yistiddy, Mister Roth.”

“You stayed in Vicksburg a good while. I didn’t know you were going until Aunt Molly told me you were already gone.”

“Yassuh,” she said. “I lef the next day after them shurfs was here. — I didn’t know it neither,” she said. “I never much wanted to go. It was pappy’s idea for me to go and see my aunt — —”

“Hush, and get in the car,” Lucas said. “If I’m going to finish my crop in this county or finish somebody else’s crop in Parchman county, I would like to know it soon as I can.”

“Yes,” Edmonds said. He spoke to Nat again. “You and George go on a minute. I want to talk to Lucas.” Nat and George went on. Lucas stood

beside the car while Edmonds looked at him. It was the first time Edmonds had spoken to him since that morning three weeks ago, as though it had required those three weeks for his rage to consume itself, or die down at least.

Now the white man leaned in the window, looking at the impenetrable face with its definite strain of white blood, the same blood which ran in his own veins, which had not only come to the negro through male descent while it had come to him from a woman, but had reached the negro a generation sooner — a face composed, inscrutable, even a little haughty, shaped even in expression in the pattern of his great-grandfather McCaslin's face. "I reckon you know what's going to happen to you," he said.

"When that federal lawyer gets through with Nat, and Nat gets through with George, and George gets through with you and Judge Gowan gets through with all of you. You have been on this place all your life, almost twice as long as I have. You knew all the McCaslins and Edmonds both that ever lived here, except old Carothers. Was that still and that whisky in your back yard yours?"

"You know it wasn't," Lucas said.

"All right," Edmonds said. "Was that still they found in the creek bottom yours?"

They looked at each other. "I aint being tried for that one," Lucas said.

"Was that still yours, Lucas?" Edmonds said. They looked at one another. Yet still the face which Edmonds saw was absolutely blank, impenetrable. Even the eyes appeared to have nothing behind them. He thought, and not for the first time: I am not only looking at a face older than mine and which has seen and winnowed more, but at a man most of whose blood was pure ten thousand years when my own anonymous beginnings became mixed enough to produce me.

"Do you want me to answer that?" Lucas said.

"No!" Edmonds said violently. "Get in the car!"

When they reached town, the streets leading into it and the Square itself were crowded with cars and wagons; the flag rippled and flew in the bright May weather above the federal courthouse. Following Edmonds, he and Nat and George crossed the thronged pavement, walking in a narrow lane of faces they knew — other people from their place, people from other places along the creek and in the neighbourhood, come the seventeen miles also with no hope of getting into the courtroom itself but just to wait on the street and see them pass — and faces they only knew by hearsay: the rich white lawyers and judges and marshals talking to one another around their proud cigars, the haughty and powerful of the earth.

They entered the marble foyer, crowded too and sonorous with voices, where George began to walk gingerly on the hard heels of his Sunday shoes. Then Lucas took from his coat the thick, soiled, folded document which had laid hidden under the loose brick in his fireplace for three weeks now and touched Edmonds's arm with it — the paper thick enough and soiled enough yet which of its own accord apparently fell open at a touch, stiffly but easily too along the old hand-smudged folds, exposing, presenting among the meaningless and unread lettering between salutation and seal the three phrases in the cramped script of whatever nameless clerk which alone of the whole mass of it Lucas at least had bothered to read: George Wilkins and Nathalie Beauchamp and a date in October of last year.

“Do you mean,” Edmonds said, “that you have had this all the time? All these three weeks?” But still the face he glared at was impenetrable, almost sleepy-looking.

“You hand it to Judge Gowan,” Lucas said.

He and Nat and George sat quietly on a hard wooden bench in a small office, where an oldish white man — Lucas knew him though not particularly that he was a deputy marshal — chewed a toothpick and read a Memphis newspaper.

Then a young, brisk, slightly harried white man in glasses opened the door and glinted his glasses an instant and vanished; then, following the old white man they crossed the foyer again, the marble cavern murmuringly resonant with the constant slow feet and the voices, the faces watching them again as they mounted the stairs. They crossed the empty courtroom without pausing and entered another office but larger, finer, quieter.

There was an angry-looking man whom Lucas did not know — the United States Attorney, who had moved to Jefferson only after the administration changed eight years ago, after Lucas had stopped coming to town very often anymore.

But Edmonds was there, and behind the table sat a man whom Lucas did know, who had used to come out in old Cass's time forty and fifty years ago and stay for weeks during the quail season, shooting with Zack, with Lucas to hold the horses while they got down to shoot when the dogs pointed. It took hardly any time at all.

"Lucas Beauchamp?" the judge said. "With thirty gallons of whisky and a still sitting on his back porch in broad daylight? Nonsense."

"Then there you are," the angry man said, flinging out his hands. "I didn't know anything about this either until Edmonds—" But the judge was not even listening to him. He was looking at Nat.

"Come here, girl," he said. Nat moved forward and stopped. Lucas could see her trembling. She looked small, thin as a lath, young; she was their youngest and last — seventeen, born into his wife's old age and, it sometimes seemed to him, into his too. She was too young to be married and face all the troubles which married people had to get through in order to become old and find out for themselves the taste and savour of peace. Just a stove and a new back porch and a well were not enough. "You're Lucas's girl?" the judge said.

"Yassuh," Nat said in her high, sweet, chanting soprano. "I'm name Nat. Nat Wilkins, Gawge Wilkins's wife. There the paper fer hit in yo hand." "I see it is," the judge said. "It's dated last October."

“Yes sir, Judge,” George said. “We been had it since I sold my cotton last fall. We uz married then, only she wont come to live in my house unto Mister Lu — I mean I gots a stove and the porch fixed and a well dug.”

“Have you got that now?”

“Yes sir, Judge,” George said. “I got the money for hit now and I’m just fo gittin the rest of it, soon as I gits around to the hammerin and the diggin.”

“I see,” the judge said. “Henry,” he said to the other old man, the one with the toothpick, “have you got that whisky where you can pour it out?”

“Yes, Judge,” the other said.

“And both those stills where you can chop them to pieces, destroy them good?”

“Yes, Judge.”

“Then clear my office. Get them out of here. Get that jimber-jawed clown out of here at least.”

“He’s talking about you, George Wilkins,” Lucas murmured.

“Yes sir,” George said. “Sound like he is.”

IV

At first he thought that two or three days at the outside would suffice — or nights, that is, since George would have to be in his crop during the day, let alone getting himself and Nat settled for marriage in their house.

But a week passed, and though Nat would come back home at least once during the day, usually to borrow something, he had not seen George at all.

He comprehended the root of his impatience — the mound and its secret which someone, anyone else, might stumble upon by chance as he had, the rapid and daily shortening of the allotted span in which he had not only to find the treasure but to get any benefit and pleasure from it, all in abeyance until he could complete the petty business which had intervened, and nothing with which to pass the period of waiting — the good year, the good early season, and cotton and corn springing up almost in the planter's wheel-print, so that there was now nothing to do but lean on the fence and watch it grow; — on the one hand, that which he wanted to do and could not; on the other, that which he could have done and no need for.

But at last, in the second week, when he knew that in one more day his patience would be completely gone, he stood just inside his kitchen door and watched George enter and cross the lot in the dusk and enter the stable and emerge with his mare and put her to the wagon and drive away. So the next morning he went no further than his first patch and leaned on the fence in the bright dew looking at his cotton until his wife began to shout at him from the house.

When he entered, Nat was sitting in his chair beside the hearth, bent forward, her long narrow hands dangling limp between her knees, her face swollen and puffed again with crying. "Yawl and your George Wilkins!" Molly said. "Go on and tell him."

"He aint started on the well or nothing," Nat said. "He aint even propped up the back porch. With all that money you give him, he aint even started. And I axed him and he just say he aint got around to it yet, and I waited and I axed him again and he still just say he aint got around to it yet.

Unto I told him at last that ifn he didn't get started like he promised, my mind gonter change about whatall I seed that night them shurfs come out here and so last night he say he gwine up the road a piece and do I wants to come back home and stay because he mought not get back unto late and I say I can bar the door because I thought he was going to fix to start on the well.

And when I seed him catch up pappy's mare and wagon, I knowed that was it. And it aint unto almost daylight when he got back, and he aint got nothing. Not nothing to dig with and no boards to fix the porch, and he had done spent the money pappy give him.

And I told him what I was gonter do and I was waiting at the house soon as Mister Roth got up and I told Mister Roth my mind done changed about what I seed that night and Mister Roth started in to cussing and say I done waited too late because I'm Gawge's wife now and the Law wont listen to me and for me to come and tell you and Gawge both to be offen his place by sundown."

"There now!" Molly cried. "There's your George Wilkins!" Lucas was already moving toward the door. "Whar you gwine?" she said. "Whar we gonter move to?"

"You wait to start worrying about where we will move to when Roth Edmonds starts to worrying about why we aint gone," Lucas said.

The sun was well up now. It was going to be hot today; it was going to make cotton and corn both before the sun went down. When he reached George's house, George stood quietly out from behind the corner of it. Lucas crossed the grassless and sun-glared yard, the light dust swept into the intricate and curving patterns which Molly had taught Nat. "Where is it?" Lucas said.

"I hid hit in that gully where mine use to be," George said. "Since them shurfs never found nothing there the yuther time, they'll think hit aint no use to look there no more."

"You fool," Lucas said. "Dont you know a week aint going to pass from now to the next election without one of them looking in that gully just because Roth Edmonds told them there was a still in it once? And when they catch you this time, you aint going to have any witness you have already been married to since last fall."

“They aint going to catch me this time,” George said. “I done had my lesson. I’m gonter run this one the way you tells me to.”

“You better had,” Lucas said. “As soon as dark falls you take that wagon and get that thing out of that gully. I’ll show you where to put it. Hah,” he said. “And I reckon this one looks enough like the one that was in that gully before not to even been moved at all.”

“No sir,” George said. “This is a good one. The worm in hit is almost brand-new. That’s how come I couldn’t git him down on the price he axed. That porch and well money liked two dollars of being enough, but I just made that up myself, without needing to bother you. But it aint worrying about gittin caught that troubles my mind. What I cant keep from studying about is what we gonter tell Nat about that back porch and that well.”

“What we is?” Lucas said.

“What I is, then,” George said. Lucas looked at him for a moment.

“George Wilkins,” he said.

“Sir,” George said.

“I don’t give no man advice about his wife,” Lucas said.

Chapter Two

I

ABOUT A HUNDRED yards before they reached the commissary, Lucas spoke over his shoulder without stopping. “You wait here,” he said.

“No, no,” the salesman said. “I’ll talk to him myself. If I cant sell it to him, there aint a—” He stopped. He recoiled actually; another step and he would have walked full tilt into Lucas. He was young, not yet thirty, with the assurance, the slightly soiled snap and dash, of his calling, and a white man.

Yet he even stopped talking and looked at the negro in battered overalls who stood looking down at him not only with dignity but with command.

“You wait here,” Lucas said. So the salesman leaned against the fence in the bright August morning, while Lucas went on to the commissary. He mounted the steps, beside which a bright-coated young mare with a blaze and three stockings stood under a wide plantation saddle, and entered the long room with its ranked shelves of tinned food and tobacco and patent medicines, its hooks pendant with trace chains and collars and hames. Edmonds sat at a roll-top desk beside the front window, writing in a ledger.

Lucas stood quietly looking at the back of Edmonds’s neck until the other turned. “He’s come,” Lucas said.

Edmonds swivelled the chair around, back-tilted. He was already glaring before the chair stopped moving; he said with astonishing violence: “No!”

“Yes,” Lucas said.

“No!”

“He brought it with him,” Lucas said. “I saw with my own eyes — —”

“Do you mean to tell me you wrote him to come down here after I told you I wouldn’t advance you three hundred dollars nor three hundred cents nor even three cents — —”

“I saw it, I tell you,” Lucas said. “I saw it work with my own eyes. I buried a dollar in my back yard this morning and that machine went right straight to where it was and found it. We are going to find that money tonight and I will pay you back in the morning.”

“Good!” Edmonds said. “Fine! You’ve got over three thousand dollars in the bank. Advance yourself the money. Then you won’t even have to pay it back.” Lucas looked at him. He didn’t even blink. “Hah,” Edmonds said. “And because why? Because you know damn well just like I know

damn well that there aint any money buried around here. You've been here sixty-seven years.

Did you ever hear of anybody in this country with enough money to bury? Can you imagine anybody in this country burying anything worth as much as two bits that some of his kinfolks or his friends or his neighbours aint dug up and spent before he could even get back home and put his shovel away?"

"You're wrong," Lucas said. "Folks find it. Didn't I tell you about them two strange white men that come in here after dark that night three or four years ago and dug up twenty-two thousand dollars in a old churn and got out again before anybody even laid eyes on them? I saw the hole where they filled it up again. And the churn."

"Yes," Edmonds said. "You told me. And you didn't believe it then either. But now you've changed your mind. Is that it?"

"They found it," Lucas said. "Got clean away before anybody even knowed it, knowed they was here even."

"Then how do you know it was twenty-two thousand dollars?" But Lucas merely looked at him. It was not stubbornness but an infinite, almost Jehovah-like patience, as if he were contemplating the antics of a lunatic child.

"Your father would have lent me three hundred dollars if he was here," he said.

"But I aint," Edmonds said. "And if I could keep you from spending any of your money on a damn machine to hunt buried gold with, I would do that too. But then, you aint going to use your money, are you? That's why you came to me. You've got better sense. You just hoped I didn't have. Didn't you?"

"It looks like I'm going to have to use mine," Lucas said. "I'm going to ask you one more time — —"

“No!” Edmonds said. Lucas looked at him for a good minute this time. He did not sigh.

“All right,” he said.

When he emerged from the commissary, he saw George too, the soiled gleam of the ruined panama hat where George and the salesman now squatted in the shade of a tree, squatting on their heels without any other support. Hah, he thought, He mought talk like a city man and he mought even think he is one.

But I know now where he was born at. The salesman looked up as Lucas approached. He gave Lucas one rapid, hard look and rose, already moving toward the commissary. “Hell,” he said, “I told you all the time to let me talk to him.”

“No,” Lucas said. “You stay out of there.”

“Then what are you going to do?” the salesman said. “Here I’ve come all the way from Memphis — And how you ever persuaded them up there in Saint Louis to send this machine out without any downpayment in the first place, I still dont see. And I’ll tell you right now, if I’ve got to take it back, turn in an expense account for this trip and not one damn thing to show for it, something is — —”

“We aint doing any good standing here, at least,” Lucas said. He went on, the others following him, back to the gate, the road where the salesman’s car waited. The divining machine sat on the back seat and Lucas stood in the open door, looking at it — an oblong metal box with a handle for carrying at each end, compact and solid, efficient and business-like and complex with knobs and dials. He didn’t touch it. He just leaned in the door and stood over it, blinking, bemused. He spoke to no one.

“And I watched it work,” he said. “I watched it with my own eyes.”

“What did you expect?” the salesman said. “That’s what it’s supposed to do. That’s why we want three hundred dollars for it. Well?” he said. “What are you going to do? I’ve got to know, so I can know what to do myself. Aint you got three hundred dollars? What about some of your kinfolks? Hasn’t your wife got three hundred dollars hid under the mattress somewhere?” Lucas mused on the machine. He did not look up yet.

“We will find that money tonight,” he said. “You put in the machine and I’ll show you where to look, and we’ll go halves in it.”

“Ha, ha, ha,” the salesman said harshly, with no muscle of his face moving save the ones which parted his lips. “Now I’ll tell one.” Lucas mused above the box.

“We bound to find it, captain,” George said suddenly. “Two white men slipped in here three years ago and dug up twenty-two thousand dollars in a old churn one night and got clean away fo daylight.”

“You bet,” the salesman said. “And you knew it was exactly twenty-two grand because you found where they had throwed away the odd cents they never wanted to bother with.”

“Naw sir,” George said. “Hit mought a been more than twenty-two thousand dollars. Hit wuz a big churn.”

“George Wilkins,” Lucas said. He was still halfway inside the car. He didn’t even turn his head.

“Sir,” George said.

“Hush,” Lucas said. He withdrew his head and upper body and turned and looked at the salesman. Again the young white man saw a face absolutely impenetrable, even a little cold. “I’ll swap you a mule for it,” Lucas said.

“A mule?”

“When we find that money tonight, I’ll buy the mule back from you for the three hundred dollars.” George drew in his breath with a faint hissing sound. The salesman glanced quickly at him, at the raked hat, the rapid batting of his eyes. Then the salesman looked back at Lucas. They looked at one another — the shrewd, suddenly sober, suddenly attentive face of the young white man, the absolutely expressionless one of the negro.

“Do you own the mule?”

“How could I swap it to you if I didn’t?” Lucas said.

“Let’s go see it,” the salesman said.

“George Wilkins,” Lucas said.

“Sir,” George said.

“Go to my stable and get my halter.”

II

Edmonds found the mule was missing as soon as the lotmen, Dan and Oscar, brought the drove in from pasture that evening. She was a three-year-old, eleven-hundred-pound mare mule named Alice Bent Bolt, and he had refused three hundred dollars for her in the spring. He didn’t even curse.

He merely surrendered the mare to Dan and waited beside the lot fence while the rapid beat of the mare’s feet died away in the dusk and then returned and Dan sprang down and handed him his flashlight and pistol. Then, himself on the mare and the two negroes on saddleless mules, they went back across the pasture, fording the creek, to the gap in the fence through which the mule had been led.

From there they followed the tracks of the mule and the man in the soft earth along the edge of a cotton field, to the road. And here too they could follow them, Dan walking now and carrying the flashlight, where the man had led the unshod mule in the soft dirt which bordered the gravel. “That’s Alice’s foot,” Dan said. “I’d know it anywhere.”

Later Edmonds would realise that both the negroes had recognised the man's footprints too. But at the time his very fury and concern had short-circuited his normal sensitivity to negro behaviour.

They would not have told him who made the tracks even if he had demanded to know, but the realisation that they knew would have enabled him to make the correct divination and so save himself the four or five hours of mental turmoil and physical effort which he was about to enter.

They lost the tracks. He expected to find the marks where the mule had been loaded into a waiting truck; whereupon he would return home and telephone to the sheriff in Jefferson and to the Memphis police to watch the horse-and-mule markets tomorrow.

There were no such marks. It took them almost an hour to find where the tracks had disappeared on to the gravel, crossing it, descending through the opposite roadside weeds, to reappear in another field three hundred yards away. Supperless, raging, the mare which had been under saddle all day unfed too, he followed the two shadowy mules, cursing Alice and the darkness and the single puny light on which they were forced to depend.

Two hours later they were in the creek bottom four miles from the house. He was walking too now, lest he dash his brains out against a limb, stumbling and thrashing among briers and undergrowth and rotting logs and tree-tops, leading the mare with one hand and fending his face with the other arm and trying to watch his feet, so that he walked into one of the mules, instinctively leaping in the right direction as it lashed viciously back at him with one hoof, before he discovered that the negroes had stopped.

Then, cursing aloud now and leaping quickly again to avoid the invisible second mule which would be somewhere on that side, he realised that the flashlight was off now and he too saw the faint, smoky glare of a

lightwood torch among the trees ahead. It was moving. "That's right," he said quickly.

"Keep the light off." He called Oscar's name. "Give the mules to Dan and come back here and take the mare." He waited, watching the light, until the negro's hand fumbled at his. He relinquished the reins and moved around the mules, drawing the pistol and still watching the moving light. "Hand me the flashlight," he said. "You and Oscar wait here."

"I better come with you," Dan said.

"All right," Edmonds said, watching the light. "Let Oscar hold the mules." He went on without waiting, though he presently heard the negro close behind him, both of them moving as rapidly as they dared. The rage was not cold now. It was hot, and there was an eagerness upon him, a kind of vindictive exultation as he plunged on, heedless of underbrush or log, the flashlight in his left hand and the pistol in his right, gaining rapidly on the torch.

"It's the Old Injun's mound," Dan murmured behind him. "That's how come that light looked so high up. Him and George Wilkins ought to be pretty nigh through it by now."

"Him and George Wilkins?" Edmonds said. He stopped dead in his tracks. He whirled. He was not only about to perceive the whole situation in its complete and instantaneous entirety, as when the photographer's bulb explodes, but he knew now that he had seen it all the while and had refused to believe it purely and simply because he knew that when he did accept it, his brain would burst. "Lucas and George?"

"Digging down that mound," Dan said. "They been at it every night since Uncle Lucas found that thousand-dollar gold piece in it last spring."

"And you knew about it?"

“We all knowed about it. We been watching them. A thousand-dollar gold piece Uncle Lucas found that night when he was trying to hide his—” The voice died away. Edmonds couldn’t hear it any more, drowned by a rushing in his skull which, had he been a few years older, would have been apoplexy. He could neither breathe nor see for a moment. Then he whirled again.

He said something in a hoarse strangled voice and sprang on, crashing at last from the undergrowth into the glade where the squat mound lifted the gaping yawn of its gutted flank like a photographer’s backdrop before which the two arrested figures gaped at him — the one carrying before him what Edmonds might have taken for a receptacle containing feed except that he now knew neither of these had taken time to feed Alice or any other mule since darkness fell, the other holding the smoking pine-knot high above the ruined rake of the panama hat.

“You, Lucas!” he shouted. George flung the torch away, but Edmonds’s flashlight already held them spitted. Then he saw the white man, the salesman, for the first time, snap-brim hat, necktie and all, just rising from beside a tree, his trousers rolled to his knees and his feet invisible in caked mud.

“That’s right,” Edmonds said. “Go on, George. Run. I believe I can hit that hat without even touching you.” He approached, the flashlight’s beam contracting on to the metal box which Lucas held, gleaming and glinting among the knobs and dials. “So that’s it,” he said. “Three hundred dollars.

I wish somebody would come into this country with a seed that had to be worked every day from New Year’s right on through Christmas. As soon as you niggers are laid by, trouble starts. But never mind that. Because I aint going to worry about Alice tonight.

And if you and George want to spend the rest of it walking around with that damn machine, that’s your business. But that mule is going to be in her stall in my stable at sunup. Do you hear?” Now the salesman

appeared suddenly at Lucas's elbow. Edmonds had forgotten about him.

"What mule is that?" he said. Edmonds turned the light on him for a moment.

"My mule, sir," he said.

"Is that so?" the other said. "I've got a bill of sale for that mule. Signed by Lucas here."

"Have you now?" Edmonds said. "You can make pipe lighters out of it when you get home."

"Is that so? Look here, Mister What's-your-name—" But Edmonds had already turned the light back to Lucas, who still held the divining machine before him as if it were some object symbolical and sanctified for a ceremony, a ritual.

"On second thought," Edmonds said, "I aint going to worry about that mule at all. I told you this morning what I thought about this business. But you are a grown man; if you want to fool with it, I cant stop you. By God, I dont even want to. But if that mule aint in her stall by sunup tomorrow, I'm going to telephone the sheriff. Do you hear me?"

"I hear you," Lucas said sullenly. Now the salesman spoke again.

"All right, big boy," he said. "If that mule is moved from where she's at until I'm ready to load her up and move out of here, I'm going to telephone the sheriff. Do you hear that too?" This time Edmonds jumped, flung, the light beam at the salesman's face.

"Were you talking to me, sir?" he said.

"No," the salesman said. "I'm talking to him. And he heard me." For a moment longer Edmonds held the beam on the other. Then he dropped it, so that only their legs and feet showed, planted in the pool and its refraction as if they stood in water. He put the pistol back into his pocket.

“Well, you and Lucas have got till daylight to settle that. Because that mule is going to be back in my stable at sunup.” He turned. Lucas watched him go back to where Dan waited at the edge of the glade. Then the two of them went on, the light swinging and flicking on among the trees, the brush. Presently it vanished.

“George Wilkins,” Lucas said.

“Sir,” George said.

“Find the pine-knot and light it again.” George did so; once more the red glare streamed and stank away in thick smoke, upward against the August stars of more than midnight. Lucas put the divining machine down and took the torch. “Grab holt of that thing,” he said. “I got to find it now.”

But when day broke they had not found it. The torch paled in the wan, dew-heavy light. The salesman was asleep on the wet ground now, drawn into a ball against the dawn’s wet chill, unshaven, the dashing city hat crumpled beneath his cheek, his necktie wrenched sideways in the collar of his soiled white shirt, his muddy trousers rolled to his knees, the brightly-polished shoes of yesterday now two shapeless lumps of caked mud. When they waked him at last he sat up cursing. But he knew at once where he was and why. “All right now,” he said. “If that mule moves one foot from that cottonhouse where we left her, I’m going to get the sheriff.”

“I just want one more night,” Lucas said. “That money is here.”

“Take one more,” the salesman said. “Take a hundred. Spend the rest of your life here if you want to. Just tell me first what about that fellow that claims he owns that mule?”

“I’ll tend to him,” Lucas said. “I’ll tend to him this morning. You dont need to worry about that. Besides, if you try to move the mule yourself today, that sheriff will take her away from you. You just leave her where she is and stop worrying yourself and me too. Let me have just one more night with this thing and I’ll fix everything.”

"All right," the salesman said. "But do you know what one more night is going to cost you? It's going to cost you exactly twenty-five dollars more. Now I'm going to town and go to bed."

They returned to the salesman's car. He put the divining machine back into the trunk of the car and locked it. He let Lucas and George out at Lucas's gate. The car went on down the road, already going fast. George batted his eyes rapidly after it.

'Now whut we gonter do?' he said.

'Eat your breakfast quick as you can and get back here,' Lucas said.

"You are going to town and back by noon."

"I needs to go to bed too," George said. "I'm bad off to sleep too."

"You can sleep tomorrow," Lucas said. "Maybe most of tonight."

"I could have rid in and come back with him, if you had just said so sooner," George said.

"Hah," Lucas said. "But I didn't. You eat your breakfast quick as you can. Or if you think maybe you cant catch a ride to town, maybe you better start now without waiting for breakfast. Because it will be thirty-four miles to walk, and you are going to be back here by noon." When George reached Lucas's gate ten minutes later, Lucas met him, the cheque already filled out in his laborious, cramped, though quite legible hand. It was for fifty dollars. "Get it in silver dollars," Lucas said. "And be back here by noon."

It was just dusk when the salesman's car stopped again at Lucas's gate, where Lucas and George waited. George carried a pick and a long-handled shovel. The salesman was freshly shaven and his face looked rested; the snap-brim hat had been brushed and his shirt was clean. But he wore now a pair of cotton khaki pants still bearing the manufacturer's stitched label and still showing the creases where they had lain folded on the store's shelf when it opened for business that morning. He gave Lucas a hard, jeering stare as Lucas and George approached. "I aint going to ask if my mule's all right," he said. "Because I dont need to. Do I?"

"It's all right," Lucas said. He and George got into the back seat. The divining machine now sat on the front seat beside the salesman.

George stopped halfway in and blinked rapidly at it.

"I just happened to think how rich I'd be if I just knowed what hit knows," he said. "All of us would be. We wouldn't need to be wasting no night after night hunting buried money then, would we?" He addressed the salesman now, affable, deferential, chatty: "Then you and Mister Lucas neither wouldn't care who owned no mule, nor even if there was ere mule to own, would you?"

"Hush, and get in the car," Lucas said. The salesman put the car into gear, but it did not move yet. He sat half-turned, looking back at Lucas. "Well?" he said. "Where do you want to take you walk tonight? Same place?"

"Not there," Lucas said. "I'll show you where. We were looking in the wrong place. I misread the paper."

"You bet," the salesman said. "It's worth that extra twenty-five bucks to have found that out—" He had started the car. Now he stopped it so suddenly that Lucas and George, sitting gingerly on the edge of the seat, were flung forward against the back of the front one. "What did you say?" the salesman said. "You did what to the paper?"

"I misread it," Lucas said.

"Misread what?"

"The paper."

"You mean you've got a letter or something that tells where it was buried?"

"That's right," Lucas said. "I misread it yesterday."

"Where is it?"

"It's put away in my house."

"Go get it."

“Never mind,” Lucas said. “We wont need it. I read it right this time.” For a moment longer the salesman looked at Lucas over his shoulder. Then he turned his head and put his hand to the gear lever, but the car was already in gear.

“All right,” he said. “Where’s the place?”

“Drive on,” Lucas said. “I’ll show you.”

It took them almost two hours to reach it, the road not even a road but a gullied overgrown path winding through hills, the place they sought not in the bottom but on a hill overlooking the creek — a clump of ragged cedars, the ruins of old cementless chimneys, a depression which was once a well or a cistern, the old wornout brier- and sedge-choked fields spreading away and a few snagged trees of what had been an orchard, shadowy and dim beneath the moonless sky where the fierce stars of late summer swam. “It’s in the orchard,” Lucas said. “It’s divided, buried in two separate places. One of them’s in the orchard.”

“Provided the fellow that wrote you the letter aint come back and joined them together again,” the salesman said. “What are we waiting on? Here, Jack,” he said to George, “grab that thing out of there.” George lifted the divining machine from the car.

The salesman had a flashlight now, quite new, thrust into his hip pocket, though he didn’t put it on at once. He looked around at the dark horizon of other hills, visible even in the darkness for miles. “By God, you better find it first pop this time. There probably aint a man in ten miles that can walk that wont be up here inside of an hour, watching us.”

“Dont tell me that,” Lucas said. “Tell it to this three-hundred-and-twenty-five-dollar talking box I done bought that dont seem to know how to say nothing but No.”

“You aint bought this box yet, big boy,” the salesman said. “You say one of the places is in them trees there. All right. Where?”

Lucas, carrying the shovel, entered the orchard. The others followed. The salesman watched Lucas pause, squinting at the trees and sky to orient himself, moving on again. At last he stopped. "We can start here," he said. The salesman snapped on the flashlight, cupping the beam with his hand on to the box in George's hands.

"All right, Jack," he said. "Get going."

"I better tote it," Lucas said.

"No," the salesman said. "You're too old. I dont know yet that you can even keep up with us."

"I did last night," Lucas said.

"This aint last night," the salesman said. "Get on, Jack!" he said sharply. They moved on, George in the middle, carrying the machine, while all three of them watched the small cryptic dials in the flashlight's contracted beam as they worked back and forth across the orchard in parallel traverses, all three watching when the needles jerked into life and gyrated and spun for a moment, then stopped, quivering.

Then Lucas held the box and watched George spading into the light's concentrated pool and saw the rusted can come up at last and the bright cascade of silver dollars glint and rush about the salesman's hands and heard the salesman's voice: "Well, by God. Well, by God." Lucas squatted also. He and the salesman squatted opposite one another across the pit.

"Well, I done found this much of it, anyhow," Lucas said. The salesman, one hand spread upon the scattered coins, made abashing blow with the other as if Lucas had reached for the money. Squatting, he laughed harshly and steadily at Lucas.

"You found? This machine dont belong to you, old man."

"I bought it from you," Lucas said.

"With what?"

“A mule,” Lucas said. The other laughed at him across the pit, harsh and steady. “I give you a billy sale for it,” Lucas said.

“Which never was worth a damn,” the salesman said. “It’s in my car yonder. Go and get it whenever you want to. It was so worthless I never even bothered to tear it up.” He scrabbled the coins back into the can. The flashlight lay on the ground where he had dropped it, flung it, still burning. He rose quickly out of the light until only his lower legs showed, in the new creased cotton trousers, the low black shoes which had not been polished again but merely washed. “All right,” he said. “This aint hardly any of it. You said it was divided, buried in two separate places. Where’s the other one?”

“Ask your finding machine,” Lucas said. “Aint it supposed to know? Aint that why you want three hundred dollars for it?” They faced one another in the darkness, two shadows, faceless. Lucas moved. “Then I reckon we can go home,” he said. “George Wilkins.”

“Sir,” George said.

“Wait,” the salesman said. Lucas paused. They faced one another again, invisible. “There wasn’t over a hundred here,” the salesman said. “Most of it is in the other place. I’ll give you ten per cent.”

“It was my letter,” Lucas said. “That aint enough.”

“Twenty,” the salesman said. “And that’s all.”

“I want half,” Lucas said.

“Half?”

“And that mule paper back, and another paper saying that that machine is mine.”

“Ha, ha,” the salesman said. “And ha, ha, ha. You say that letter said in the orchard. The orchard aint very big. And most of the night left, not to mention tomor — —”

“I said it said some of it was in the orchard,” Lucas said. They faced one another in the darkness.

“Tomorrow,” the salesman said.

“Now,” Lucas said.

“Tomorrow.”

“Now,” Lucas said. The invisible face stared at his own invisible face. Both he and George seemed to feel the windless summer air moving to the white man’s trembling.

“Jack,” the salesman said, “how much did you say them other fellows found?” But Lucas answered before George could speak.

“Twenty-two thousand dollars.”

“Hit mought er been more than twenty-two thousand,” George said.

“Hit was a big — —”

“All right,” the salesman said. “I’ll give you a bill of sale for it as soon as we finish.”

“I want it now,” Lucas said. They returned to the car. Lucas held the flashlight. They watched the salesman rip open his patent brief case and jerk out of it and fling toward Lucas the bill of sale for the mule. Then they watched his jerking hand fill in the long printed form with its carbon duplicates and sign it and rip out one of the duplicates.

“You get possession tomorrow morning,” he said. “It belongs to me until then.” He sprang out of the car. “Come on.”

“And half it finds is mine,” Lucas said.

“How in hell is it going to be any half or any nothing, with you standing there running your mouth?” the salesman said. “Come on.” But Lucas didn’t move.

“What about them fifty dollars we done already found then?” he said.

“Dont I get half of them?” This time the salesman merely stood laughing at him, harsh and steady and without mirth. Then he was gone. He hadn’t even closed the brief case. He snatched the machine from George and the flashlight from Lucas and ran back toward the

orchard, the light jerking and leaping as he ran. "George Wilkins," Lucas said.

"Sir," George said.

"Take that mule back where you got it. Then go tell Roth Edmonds he can quit worrying folks about it,"

III

He mounted the gnawed steps beside which the bright mare stood under the wide saddle, and entered the long room with its ranked shelves of tinned food, the hooks from which hung collars and traces and hames and ploughlines, its smell of molasses and cheese and leather and kerosene. Edmonds swivelled the chair around from the desk. "Where've you been?" he said. "I sent word to you two days ago I wanted to see you. Why didn't you come?"

"I was in bed, I reckon," Lucas said. "I been up all night long for the last three nights. I cant stand it any more like when I was a young man. You wont neither when you are my age."

"And I've got better sense at half your age than to try it. And maybe when you get twice mine, you'll have too. But that's not what I wanted. I want to know about that damn Saint Louis drummer. Dan says he's still here. What's he doing?"

"Hunting buried money," Lucas said.

For a moment Edmonds didn't speak. Then he said, "What? Hunting what? What did you say?"

"Hunting buried money," Lucas said. He let himself go easily back against the edge of the counter. He took from his vest pocket a small tin of snuff and uncapped it and filled the cap carefully and exactly with snuff and drew his lower lip outward between thumb and finger and tilted the snuff into it and capped the tin and put it back in his vest pocket. "Using my finding box. He rents it from me by the night. That's why I've been having to stay up all night, to see I got the box back. But

last night he never turned up, so I got a good night's sleep for a change. So I reckon he's done gone back wherever it was he come from."

Edmonds sat in the swivel chair and stared at Lucas. "Rents it from you? The same machine you stole my — that you — the same machine — —"

"For twenty-five dollars a night," Lucas said. "That's what he charged me to use it one night. So I reckon that's the regular rent on them. He sells them; he ought to know. Leastways, that's what I charges." Edmonds put his hands on the chair arms, but he didn't move yet.

He sat perfectly still, leaning forward a little, staring at the negro leaning against the counter, in whom only the slight shrinkage of the jaws revealed the old man, in threadbare mohair trousers such as Grover Cleveland or President Taft might have worn in the summertime, a white stiff-bosomed collarless shirt beneath a pique vest yellow with age and looped across by a heavy gold watchchain, and the sixty-dollar hand-made beaver hat which Edmonds's grandfather had given him fifty years ago above the face which was not sober and not grave but wore no expression at all.

"Because he was looking in the wrong place," he said. "He was hunting up there on that hill. That money is buried down yonder by the creek somewhere. Them two white men that slipped in here that night four years ago and got clean away with twenty-two thousand dollars—" Now Edmonds got himself out of the chair and on to his feet.

He drew a long deep breath and began to walk steadily toward Lucas. "And now we done got shut of him, me and George Wilkins—" Walking steadily toward him, Edmonds expelled his breath. He had believed it would be a shout but it was not much more than a whisper.

"Get out of here," he said. "Go home. And dont come back. Dont ever come back. When you need supplies, send Aunt Molly after them."

Chapter Three

I

WHEN EDMONDS GLANCED up from the ledger and saw the old woman coming up the road, he did not recognise her. He returned to the ledger and it was not until he heard her toiling up the steps and saw her enter the commissary itself, that he knew who it was. Because for something like four or five years now he had never seen her outside her own gate.

He would pass the house on his mare while riding his crops and see her sitting on the gallery, her shrunken face collapsed about the reed stem of a clay pipe, or moving about the washing-pot and clothes-line in the back yard, moving slowly and painfully, as the very old move, appearing to be much older even to Edmonds, when he thought about it at all, than Edmonds certainly knew her to be.

And regularly once a month he would get down and tie the mare to the fence and enter the house with a tin of tobacco and a small sack of the soft cheap candy which she loved, and visit with her for a half hour.

He called it a libation to his luck, as the centurion spilled first a little of the wine he drank, though actually it was to his ancestors and to the conscience which he would have probably affirmed he did not possess, in the form, the person, of the negro woman who had been the only mother he ever knew, who had not only delivered him on that night of rain and flood when her husband had very nearly lost his life fetching the doctor who arrived too late, but moved into the very house, bringing her own child, the white child and the black one sleeping in the same room with her so she could suckle them both until he was weaned, and never out of the house very long at a time until he went off to school at twelve — a small woman, almost tiny, who in the succeeding forty years seemed to have grown even smaller, in the same clean white headcloth and aprons which he first remembered, whom he knew to be actually younger than Lucas but who looked much older, incredibly old, who during the last few years had begun to call him by his father's name, or even by the title which the older negroes referred to his grandfather.

“Good Lord,” he said. “What are you doing away over here? Why didn’t you send Lucas? He ought to know better than to let you — —”

“He’s in bed asleep now,” she said. She was panting a little from the walk. “That’s how I had a chance to come. I don’t want nothing. I come to talk to you.” She turned a little toward the window. Then he saw the myriad-wrinkled face.

“Why, what is it?” he said. He rose from the swivel chair and drew the other one, a straight chair with wire-braced legs, out from behind the desk. “Here,” he said. But she only looked from him to the chair with the same blind look until he took her by the arm which, beneath the two or three layers of clothing beneath the faded, perfectly clean dress, felt no larger than the reed stem of the pipe she smoked. He led her to the chair and lowered her into it, the voluminous layer on layer of her skirts and underskirts spreading. Immediately she bowed her head and turned it aside and raised one gnarled hand, like a tiny clump of dried and blackened roots, before her eyes.

“The light hurts them,” she said. He helped her up and turned the chair until its back was towards the window. This time she found it herself and sat down. Edmonds returned to the swivel chair.

“All right,” he said. “What is it?”

“I want to leave Lucas,” she said. “I want one of them ... one of them ...” Edmonds sat perfectly motionless, staring at the face which now he could not distinctly see.

“You what?” he said. “A divorce? After forty-five years, at your age? What will you do? How will you get along without somebody — —”

“I can work. I will — —”

“Damn that,” Edmonds said. “You know I didn’t mean that. Even if father hadn’t fixed it in his will to take care of you for the rest of your life. I mean what will you do? Leave the house that belongs to you and Lucas and go live with Nat and George?”

“That will be just as bad,” she said. “I got to go clean away. Because he’s crazy. Ever since he got that machine, he’s done went crazy. Him and — and ...” Even though he had just spoken it, he realised that she couldn’t even think of George’s name.

She spoke again, immobile, looking at nothing as far as he could tell, her hands like two cramped ink-splashes on the lap of the immaculate apron: “ — stays out all night long every night with it, hunting that buried money. He done even take care of his own stock right no more.

I feeds the mare and the hogs and milks, tries to. But that’s all right. I can do that. I’m glad to do that when he is sick in the body. But he’s sick in the mind now. Bad sick. He dont even get up to go to church on Sunday no more. He’s bad sick, marster. He’s doing a thing the Lord aint meant for folks to do. And I’m afraid.”

“Afraid of what?” Edmonds said. “Lucas is strong as a horse. He’s a better man than I am, right now. He’s all laid by now, with nothing to do until his crop makes. It wont hurt him to stay up all night walking up and down that creek with George for a while. He’ll have to quit next month to pick his cotton.”

“It aint that I’m afraid of.”

“Then what?” he said. “What is it?”

“I’m afraid he’s going to find it.”

Again Edmonds sat in his chair, looking at her. “Afraid he’s going to find it?” Still she looked at nothing that he could see, motionless, tiny, like a doll, an ornament.

“Because God say, ‘What’s rendered to My earth, it belong to Me unto I resurrect it. And let him or her touch it, and beware.’ And I’m afraid. I got to go. I got to be free of him.”

“There aint any buried money in this country,” Edmonds said. “Hasn’t he been poking around in the bottom ever since last spring, hunting for it?”

And that machine aint going to find it either. I tried my best to keep him from buying it. I did everything I knew except have that damn agent arrested for trespass. I wish now I had done that. If I had just foreseen — But that wouldn't have done any good. Lucas would just have met him down the road somewhere and bought it. But he aint going to find any more buried money with it than he found walking up and down the creek, making George Wilkins dig where he thought it ought to be. Even he'll believe that soon. He'll quit. Then he'll be all right."

"No," she said. "Lucas is an old man. He dont look it, but he's sixty-seven years old. And when a man that old takes up money-hunting, it's like when he takes up gambling or whisky or women. He aint going to have time to quit. And then he's gonter be lost, lost..." She ceased. She did not move on the hard chair, not even the depthless splotches of her knotted hands against the apron's blanched spread. Damn, damn, damn, Edmonds thought.

"I could tell you how to cure him in two days," he said. "If you were twenty years younger. But you couldn't do it now."

"Tell me. I can do it."

"No," he said. "You are too old now."

"Tell me. I can do it."

"Wait till he comes in with that thing to-morrow morning, then take it yourself and go down to the creek and hunt buried money. Do it the next morning, and the one after that. Let him find out that's what you are doing — using his machine while he is asleep, all the time he is asleep and cant watch it, cant hunt himself. Let him come in and find there's no breakfast ready for him, wake up and find there's no supper ready because you're still down in the creek bottom, hunting buried money with his machine. That'll cure him. But you're too old. You couldn't stand it. You go back home and when Lucas wakes up, you and he — No, that's too far for you to walk twice in one day. Tell him I said to wait there for me. I'll come after supper and talk to him."

“Talking wont change him. I couldn’t. And you cant. All I can do is to go clean away from him.”

“Maybe it cant,” Edmonds said. “But I can damn sure try it. And he will damn sure listen. I’ll be there after supper. You tell him to wait.”

She rose then. He watched her toil back down the road toward home, tiny, almost like a doll. It was not just concern, and, if he had told himself the truth, not concern for her at all. He was raging — an abrupt boiling-over of an accumulation of floutings and outrages covering not only his span but his father’s lifetime too, back into the time of his grandfather McCaslin Edmonds.

Lucas was not only the oldest person living on the place, older even than Edmonds’s father would have been, there was that quarter strain not only of white blood and not even Edmonds blood, but of old Carothers McCaslin himself, from whom Lucas was descended not only by a male line but in only two generations, while Edmonds was descended by a female line and five generations back; even as a child the boy remarked how Lucas always referred to his father as Mr Edmonds, never as Mister Zack, as the other negroes did, and how with a cold and deliberate calculation he evaded having to address the white man by any name whatever when speaking to him.

Yet it was not that Lucas made capital of his white or even his McCaslin blood, but the contrary. It was as if he were not only impervious to that blood, he was indifferent to it. He didn’t even need to strive with it. He didn’t even have to bother to defy it.

He resisted it simply by being the composite of the two races which made him, simply by possessing it. Instead of being at once the battleground and victim of the two strains, he was a vessel, durable, ancestryless, non-conductive, in which the toxin and its anti stalemated one another, seetheless, unrumoured in the outside air.

There had been three of them once: James, then a sister named Fonsiba, then Lucas, children of Aunt Tomey’s Turl, old Carothers

McCaslin's son, and Tennie Beauchamp, whom Edmonds's great-uncle Amodeus McCaslin won from a neighbour in a poker game in 1859. Fonsiba married and went to Arkansas to live and never returned, though Lucas continued to hear from her until her death.

But James, the eldest, ran away before he became of age and didn't stop until he had crossed the Ohio River and they never heard from or of him again at all — that is, that his white kindred ever knew.

It was as though he had not only (as his sister was later to do) put running water between himself and the land of his grandmother's betrayal and his father's nameless birth, but he had interposed latitude and geography too, shaking from his feet for ever the very dust of the land where his white ancestor could acknowledge or repudiate him from one day to another, according to his whim, but where he dared not even repudiate the white ancestor save when it met the white man's humour of the moment.

But Lucas remained. He didn't have to stay. Of the three children, he not only had no material shackles (nor, as Carothers Edmonds began to comprehend later, moral ones either) holding him to the place, he alone was equipped beforehand with financial independence to have departed for ever at any time after his twenty-first birthday.

It was known father to son to son among the Edmonds until it came to Carothers in his turn, how when in the early fifties old Carothers McCaslin's twin sons, Amodeus and Theophilus, first put into operation their scheme for the manumission of their father's slaves, there was made an especial provision (hence a formal acknowledgment, even though only by inference and only from his white half-brothers) for their father's negro son.

It was a sum of money, with the accumulated interest, to become the negro son's on his verbal demand but which Tomey's Turl, who elected to remain even after his constitutional liberation, never availed himself of.

And he died, and old Carothers McCaslin was dead more than fifty years then, and Amodeus and Theophilus were dead too, at seventy and better, in the same year as they had been born in the same year, and McCaslin Edmonds now had the land, the plantation, in fee and title both, relinquished to him by Isaac McCaslin, Theophilus's son, for what reason, what consideration other than the pension which McCaslin and his son Zachary and his son Carothers still paid to Isaac in his little jerry-built bungalow in Jefferson, no man certainly knew.

But relinquished it certainly was, somehow and somewhere back in that dark time in Mississippi when a man had to be hard and ruthless to get a patrimony to leave behind himself and strong and hard to keep it until he could bequeath it; — relinquished, repudiated even, by its true heir (Isaac, 'Uncle Ike,' childless, a widower now, living in his dead wife's house the title to which he likewise declined to assume, born into his father's old age and himself born old and became steadily younger and younger until, past seventy himself and at least that many years nearer eighty than he ever admitted any more, he had acquired something of a young boy's high and selfless innocence) who had retained of the patrimony, and by his own request, only the trusteeship of the legacy which his negro uncle still could not quite seem to comprehend was his for the asking.

He never asked for it. He died. Then his first son, James, fled, quitted the cabin he had been born in, the plantation, Mississippi itself, by night and with nothing save the clothes he walked in. When Isaac McCaslin heard about it in town he drew a third of the money, the legacy, with its accumulated interest, in cash and departed also and was gone a week and returned and put the money back into the bank. Then the daughter, Fonsiba, married and moved to Arkansas.

This time Isaac went with them and transferred a third of the legacy to a local Arkansas bank and arranged for Fonsiba to draw three dollars of it each week, no more and no less, and returned home. Then one morning Isaac was at home, looking at a newspaper, not reading it, looking at it, when he realised what it was and why. It was the date. It's

somebody's birthday, he thought. He said aloud, "It's Lucas's. He's twenty-one today," as his wife entered.

She was a young woman then; they had been married only a few years but he had already come to know the expression which her face wore, looking at it always as he did now: peacefully and with pity for her and regret too, for her, for both of them, knowing the tense bitter indomitable voice as well as he did the expression:

"Lucas Beauchamp is in the kitchen. He wants to see you. Maybe your cousin has sent you word he has decided to stop even that fifty dollars a month he swapped you for your father's farm." But it was all right. It didn't matter. He could ask her forgiveness as loudly thus as if he had shouted, express his pity and grief; husband and wife did not need to speak words to one another, not just from the old habit of living together but because in that one long-ago instant at least out of the long and shabby stretch of their human lives, even though they knew at the time it wouldn't and couldn't last, they had touched and become as God when they voluntarily and in advance forgave one another for all that each knew the other could never be.

Then Lucas was in the room, standing just inside the door, his hat in one hand against his leg — the face the colour of a used saddle, the features Syriac, not in a racial sense but as the heir to ten centuries of desert horsemen. It was not at all the face of their grandfather, Carothers McCaslin. It was the face of the generation which had just preceded them: the composite tintype face of ten thousand undefeated Confederate soldiers almost indistinguishably caricatured, composed, cold, colder than his, more ruthless than his, with more bottom than he had.

"Many happy returns!" Isaac said. "I godfrey, I was just about — —"

"Yes," Lucas said. "The rest of that money. I wants it."

"Money?" Isaac said. "Money?"

"That Old Marster left for pappy. If it's still ourn. If you're going to give it to us."

“It’s not mine to give or withhold either. It was your father’s. All any of you had to do was to ask for it. I tried to find Jim after he — —”

“I’m asking now,” Lucas said.

“All of it? Half of it is Jim’s.”

“I can keep it for him same as you been doing.”

“Yes,” Isaac said. “You’re going too,” he said. “You’re leaving too.”

“I aint decided yet,” Lucas said. “I might. I’m a man now. I can do what I want. I want to know I can go when I decide to.”

“You could have done that at any time. Even if grandpa hadn’t left money for Tomey’s Turl. All you, any of you, would have had to do would be to come to me....” His voice died. He thought, Fifty dollars a month. He knows that’s all. That I reneged, cried calf-ropes, sold my birthright, betrayed my blood, for what he too calls not peace but obliteration, and a little food. “It’s in the bank,” he said. “We’ll go and get it.”

Only Zachary Edmonds and, in his time, his son Carothers knew that part of it. But what followed most of the town of Jefferson knew, so that the anecdote not only took its place in the Edmonds family annals, but in the minor annals of the town too: — how the white and the negro cousins went side by side to the bank that morning and Lucas said, “Wait. It’s a heap of money.”

“It’s too much,” the white man said. “Too much to keep hidden under a break in a hearth. Let me keep it for you. Let me keep it.”

“Wait,” Lucas said. “Will the bank keep it for a black man same as for a white?”

“Yes,” the white man said. “I will ask them to.”

“How can I get it back?” Lucas said. The white man explained about the cheque. “All right,” Lucas said. They stood side by side at the window while the white man had the account transferred and the new pass-book filled out; again Lucas said “Wait” and then they stood side by side at the ink-splashed wooden shelf while Lucas wrote out the

cheque, writing it steadily under the white man's direction in the cramped though quite legible hand which the white man's mother had taught him and his brother and sister too.

Then they stood again at the grille while the teller cashed the cheque and Lucas, still blocking the single window, counted the money tediously and deliberately through twice and pushed it back to the teller beyond the grille. "Now you can put it back," he said. "And gimme my paper."

But he didn't leave. Within the year he married, not a country woman, a farm woman, but a town woman, and McCaslin Edmonds built a house for them and allotted Lucas a specific acreage to be farmed as he saw fit as long as he lived or remained on the place.

Then McCaslin Edmonds died and his son married and on that spring night of flood and isolation the boy Carothers was born. Still in infancy, he had already accepted the black man as an adjunct to the woman who was the only mother he would remember, as simply as he accepted his black foster-brother, as simply as he accepted his father as an adjunct to his existence.

Even before he was out of infancy, the two houses had become interchangeable: himself and his foster-brother sleeping on the same pallet in the white man's house or in the same bed in the negro's and eating of the same food at the same table in either, actually preferring the negro house, the hearth on which even in summer a little fire always burned, centring the life in it, to his own.

It did not even need to come to him as a part of his family's chronicle that his white father and his foster-brother's black one had done the same; it never even occurred to him that they in their turn and simultaneously had not had the first of remembering projected upon a single woman whose skin was likewise dark.

One day he knew, without wondering or remembering when or how he had learned that either, that the black woman was not his mother, and

did not regret it; he knew that his own mother was dead and did not grieve.

There was still the black woman, constant, steadfast, and the black man of whom he saw as much and even more than of his own father, and the negro's house, the strong warm negro smell, the night-time hearth and the fire even in summer on it, which he still preferred to his own. And besides, he was no longer an infant.

He and his foster-brother rode the plantation horses and mules, they had a pack of small hounds to hunt with and promise of a gun in another year or so; they were sufficient, complete, wanting, as all children do, not to be understood, leaping in mutual embattlement before any threat to privacy, but only to love, to question and examine unchallenged, and to be let alone.

Then one day the old curse of his fathers, the old haughty ancestral pride based not on any value but on an accident of geography, stemmed not from courage and honour but from wrong and shame, descended to him. He did not recognise it then.

He and his foster-brother, Henry, were seven years old. They had finished supper at Henry's house and Molly was just sending them to bed in the room across the hall where they slept when there, when suddenly he said, "I'm going home."

"Les stay here," Henry said. "I thought we was going to get up when pappy did and go hunting."

"You can," he said. He was already moving toward the door. "I'm going home."

"All right," Henry said, following him. And he remembered how they walked that half mile to his house in the first summer dark, himself walking just fast enough that the negro boy never quite came up beside him, entering the house in single file and up the stairs and into the room with the bed and the pallet on the floor which they slept on when

they passed the night here, and how he undressed just slow enough for Henry to beat him to the pallet and lie down.

Then he went to the bed and lay down on it, rigid, staring up at the dark ceiling even after he heard Henry raise on to one elbow, looking toward the bed with slow and equable astonishment. "Are you going to sleep up there?" Henry said.

"Well, all right. This here pallet sleeps all right to me, but I reckon I just as lief to if you wants to," and rose and approached the bed and stood over the white boy, waiting for him to move over and make room until the boy said, harsh and violent though not loud:

"No!"

Henry didn't move. "You mean you dont want me to sleep in the bed?" Nor did the boy move. He didn't answer, rigid on his back, staring upward. "All right," Henry said quietly and went back to the pallet and lay down again. The boy heard him, listened to him; he couldn't help it, lying clenched and rigid and open-eyed, hearing the slow equable voice: "I reckon on a hot night like tonight we will sleep cooler if we — —"

"Shut up!" the boy said. "How'm I or you neither going to sleep if you keep on talking?" Henry hushed then. But the boy didn't sleep, long after Henry's quiet and untroubled breathing had begun, lying in a rigid fury of the grief he could not explain, the shame he would not admit. Then he slept and it seemed to him he was still awake, waked and did not know he had slept until he saw in the grey of dawn the empty pallet on the floor.

They did not hunt that morning. They never slept in the same room again and never again ate at the same table because he admitted to himself it was shame now and he did not go to Henry's house and for a month he only saw Henry at a distance, with Lucas in the field, walking beside his father and holding the reins of the team while Lucas ploughed. Then one day he knew it was grief and was ready to admit it

was shame also, wanted to admit it only it was too late then, for ever and for ever too late. He went to Molly's house.

It was already late afternoon; Henry and Lucas would be coming up from the field at any time now. Molly was there, looking at him from the kitchen door as he crossed the yard. There was nothing in her face; he said it the best he could for that moment, because later he would be able to say it all right, say it once and for ever so that it would be gone for ever, facing her before he entered her house yet, stopping, his feet slightly apart, trembling a little, lordly, peremptory: "I'm going to eat supper with you all to-night."

It was all right. There was nothing in her face. He could say it almost any time now, when the time came. "Course you is," she said. "I'll cook you a chicken."

Then it was as if it had never happened at all. Henry came almost at once; he must have seen him from the field, and he and Henry killed and dressed the chicken.

Then Lucas came and he went to the barn with Henry and Lucas while Henry milked. Then they were busy in the yard in the dusk, smelling the cooking chicken, until Molly called Henry and then a little later himself, the voice as it had always been, peaceful and steadfast: "Come and eat your supper."

But it was too late. The table was set in the kitchen where it always was and Molly stood at the stove drawing the biscuit out as she always stood, but Lucas was not there and there was just one chair, one plate, his glass of milk beside it, the platter heaped with untouched chicken, and even as he sprang back, gasping, for an instant blind as the room rushed and swam, Henry was turning toward the door to go out of it.

"Are you ashamed to eat when I eat?" he cried.

Henry paused, turning his head a little to speak in the voice slow and without heat: "I aint shamed of nobody," he said peacefully. "Not even me."

So he entered his heritage. He ate its bitter fruit. He listened as Lucas referred to his father as Mr Edmonds, never as Mister Zack; he watched him avoid having to address the white man directly by any name at all with a calculation so coldly and constantly alert, a finesse so deliberate and unflagging, that for a time he could not tell if even his father knew that the negro was refusing to call him mister.

At last he spoke to his father about it. The other listened gravely, with something in his face which the boy could not read and which at the moment he paid little attention to since he was still young then, still a child; he had not yet divined that there was something between his father and Lucas, something more than difference in race could account for since it did not exist between Lucas and any other white man, something more than the white blood, even the McCaslin blood, could account for since it was not there between his uncle Isaac McCaslin and Lucas.

“You think that because Lucas is older than I am, old enough even to remember Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy a little, and is a descendant of the people who lived on this place where we Edmonds are usurpers, yesterday’s mushrooms, is not reason enough for him not to want to say mister to me?” his father said. “We grew up together, we ate and slept together and hunted and fished together, like you and Henry. We did it until we were grown men. Except that I always beat him shooting except one time. As it turned out, I even beat him then. You think that’s not reason enough?”

“We’re not usurpers,” the boy said, cried almost. “Our grandmother McCaslin was as much kin to old Carothers as Uncle Buck and Buddy. Uncle Isaac himself gave — Uncle Isaac himself says ...” He ceased. His father watched him. “No, sir,” he said harshly. “That’s not enough.”

“Ah,” his father said. Then the boy could read what was in his face. He had seen it before, as all children had — that moment when, enveloped and surrounded still by the warmth and confidence, he discovers that the reserve which he had thought to have passed had merely retreated

and set up a new barrier, still impregnable; — that instant when the child realises with both grief and outrage that the parent antedates it, has experienced things, shames and triumphs both, in which it can have no part. “I’ll make a trade with you. You let me and Lucas settle how he is to treat me, and I’ll let you and him settle how he is to treat you.”

Then, in adolescence, he knew what he had seen in his father’s face that morning, what shadow, what stain, what mark — something which had happened between Lucas and his father, which nobody but they knew and would ever know if the telling depended on them — something which had happened because they were themselves, men, not stemming from any difference of race nor because one blood strain ran in them both. Then, in his late teens, almost a man, he even knew what it had been.

It was a woman, he thought. My father and a nigger, over a woman. My father and a nigger man over a nigger woman, because he simply declined even to realise that he had even refused to think a white woman. He didn’t even think Molly’s name. That didn’t matter. And by God Lucas beat him, he thought.

Edmonds, he thought, harshly and viciously. Edmonds. Even a nigger McCaslin is a better man, better than all of us. Old Carothers got his nigger bastards right in his back yard and I would like to have seen the husband or anybody else that said him nay. — Yes, Lucas beat him, else Lucas wouldn’t be here. If father had beat Lucas, he couldn’t have let Lucas stay here even to forgive him. It will only be Lucas who could have stayed because Lucas is impervious to anybody, even to forgiving them, even to having to harm them.

Impervious to time too. Zachary Edmonds died, and in his turn he inherited the plantation the true heir to which, by male descent and certainly morally and, if the truth were known, probably legally too, was still alive, living on the doled pittance which his great-nephew now in his turn sent him each month. For twenty years now he had run it, tried to even with the changed times, as his father and grandfather and great-grandfather had done before him.

Yet when he looked back over those twenty years, they seemed to him one long and unbroken course of outrageous trouble and conflict, not with the land or weather (or even lately, with the federal government) but with the old negro who in his case did not even bother to remember not to call him mister, who called him Mr Edmonds and Mister Carothers or Carothers or Roth or son or spoke to him in a group of younger negroes, lumping them all together, as “you boys.”

There were the years during which Lucas had continued to farm his acreage in the same clumsy old fashion which Carothers McCaslin himself had probably followed, declining advice, refusing to use improved implements, refusing to let a tractor so much as cross the land which his McCaslin forebears had given him without recourse for life, refusing even to allow the pilot who dusted the rest of the cotton with weevil poison, even fly his laden aeroplane through the air above it, yet drawing supplies from the commissary as if he farmed, and at an outrageous and incredible profit, a thousand acres, having on the commissary books an account dating thirty years back which Edmonds knew he would never pay for the good and simple reason that Lucas would not only outlive the present Edmonds as he had outlived the two preceding him, but would probably outlast the very ledgers which held the account.

Then the still which Lucas had run almost in his, Edmonds's, back yard for at least twenty years, according to his daughter, until his own avarice exposed him, and the three-hundred-dollar mule which he had stolen from not only his business partner and guarantor but actually from his own blood relation and swapped for a machine for divining the hiding-place of buried money; and now this: breaking up after forty-five years the home of the woman who had been the only mother he, Edmonds, ever knew, who had raised him, fed him from her own breast as she was actually doing her own child, who had surrounded him always with care for his physical body and for his spirit too, teaching him his manners, behaviour — to be gentle with his inferiors, honourable with his equals, generous to the weak and considerate of the aged, courteous, truthful and brave to all — who had given him, the

motherless, without stint or expectation of reward that constant and abiding devotion and love which existed nowhere else in this world for him; — breaking up her home who had no other kin save an old brother in Jefferson whom she had not seen in ten years, and the eighteen-year-old married daughter with whom she would doubtless refuse to live since the daughter's husband likewise had lain himself liable to the curse which she believed her own husband had incurred.

Impervious to time too. It seemed to Edmonds, sitting at his solitary supper which he couldn't eat, that he could actually see Lucas standing there in the room before him — the face which at sixty-seven looked actually younger than his own at forty-three, showed less of the ravages of passions and thought and satieties and frustrations than his own — the face which was not at all a replica even in caricature of his grandfather McCaslin's but which had heired and now reproduced with absolute and shocking fidelity the old ancestor's entire generation and thought — the face which, as old Isaac McCaslin had seen it that morning forty-five years ago, was a composite of a whole generation of fierce and undefeated young Confederate soldiers, embalmed and slightly mummified — and he thought with amazement and something very like horror: He's more like old Carothers than all the rest of us put together, including old Carothers. He is both heir and prototype simultaneously of all the geography and climate and biology which sired old Carothers and all the rest of us and our kind, myriad, countless, faceless, even nameless now except himself who fathered himself, intact and complete, contemptuous, as old Carothers must have been, of all blood black white yellow or red, including his own.

II

It was full dark when he tied the mare to Lucas's fence and walked up the rock path neatly bordered with broken brick and upended bottles and such set into the earth, and mounted the steps and entered. Lucas was waiting, standing in the door with his hat on, in silhouette against the firelight on the hearth. The old woman did not rise.

She sat as in the commissary that afternoon, motionless, only bent a little forward, her tiny gnarled hands immobile again on the white apron, the shrunken and tragic mask touched here and there into highlight by the fire, and for the first time in his memory he was seeing her in or about the house without the clay pipe in her mouth. Lucas drew up a chair for him. But Lucas did not sit down.

He went and stood at the other side of the hearth, the firelight touching him too — the broad sweep of the hand-made beaver hat which Edmonds's grandfather had given him fifty years ago, the faintly Syriac features, the heavy gold watch-chain looped across the unbuttoned vest. "Now what's all this?" Edmonds said.

"She wants a voce," Lucas said. "All right."

"All right?" Edmonds said. "All right?"

"Yes. What's it going to cost me?"

"I see," Edmonds said. "If you got to pay out money for it, she cant have one. Well, this is one thing you aint going to swangdangle anybody out of. You aint buying or selling a gold-finding machine either now, old man. She dont want any mule."

"She can have it," Lucas said. "I just want to know how much it will cost me. Why cant you declare us voced like you done Oscar and that yellow slut he fotched out here from Memphis last summer? You not only declared them voced, you took her back to town yourself and bought her a railroad ticket back to Memphis."

"Because they were not married very hard," Edmonds said. "And sooner or later she was going to take a lick at him with that razor she carried. And if she had ever missed or fumbled, Oscar would have torn her head off.

He was just waiting for a chance to. That's why I did it. But you aint Oscar. This is different. Listen to me, Lucas. You are an older man than me; I admit that. You may have more money than I've got, which I think

you have, and you may have more sense than I've got, as you think you have. But you cant do this."

"Dont tell me," Lucas said. "Tell her. This aint my doing. I'm satisfied like this."

"Yes. Sure. As long as you can do like you want to — spend all the time you aint sleeping and eating making George Wilkins walk up and down that creek bottom, toting that damn — that damn—" Then he stopped and started over, holding his voice not down only but back too, for a while yet at least: "I've told you and told you there aint any money buried around here. That you are just wasting your time. But that's all right. You and George Wilkins both could walk around down there until you drop, for all of me. But Aunt Molly — —"

"I'm a man," Lucas said. "I'm the man here. I'm the one to say in my house, like you and your paw and his paw were the ones to say in his. You aint got any complaints about the way I farm my land and make my crop, have you?"

"No complaints?" Edmonds said. "No complaints?" The other didn't even pause.

"Long as I do that, I'm the one to say about my private business, and your father would be the first to tell you so if he was here. Besides, I will have to quit hunting every night soon now, to get my cotton picked. Then I'll just hunt Saturday and Sunday night." Up to now he had been speaking to the ceiling apparently. Now he looked at Edmonds. "But them two nights is mine. On them two nights I dont farm nobody's land, I dont care who he is that claims to own it."

"Well," Edmonds said. "Two nights a week. You'll have to start that next week, because some of your cotton is ready." He turned to the old woman. "There, Aunt Molly," he said. "Two nights a week, and he's bound, even Lucas, to come to his senses soon — —"

"I dont axes him to stop hunting but two nights a week," she said. She hadn't moved, speaking in a monotonous sing-song, looking at neither of them. "I dont axes him to stop hunting for it at all. Because it's too late now. He cant help himself now. And I gots to be free."

Edmonds looked up again at the impassive, the impenetrable face under the broad, old-fashioned hat. "Do you want her to go?" he said. "Is that it?"

"I'm going to be the man in this house," Lucas said. It was not stubborn. It was quiet: final. His stare was as steady as Edmonds's was, and immeasurably colder.

"Listen," Edmonds said. "You're getting along. You aint got a lot more time here. You said something about father a minute ago. All right. But when his time came and he laid down to die, he laid down in peace." Because he never had anything — Jesus, he had almost said it aloud. Damn damn damn he thought — had anything about his wife in her old age to have to say God forgive me for doing that. Almost aloud; he just caught it. "And you time's coming to want to lay down in peace, and you dont know when."

"Nor does you."

"That's correct. But I'm forty-three. You are sixty-seven." They stared at one another. Still the face beneath the hat was impassive, impenetrable. Then Lucas moved. He turned and spat neatly into the fire.

"All right," he said quietly. "I want to lay down in peace too. I'll get shut of the machine. I'll give it to George Wilkins—" That was when the old woman moved. When Edmonds looked around she was trying to rise from the chair, trying to thrust herself up with one hand, the other arm outstretched, not to ward Lucas off but toward him, Edmonds.

"No!" she cried. "Mister Zack! Cant you see? Not that he would keep on using it just the same as if he had kept it, but he would fotch on to Nat,

my last one and least one, the curse of God that's gonter destroy him or her that touches what's done been rendered back to Him? I wants him to keep it! That's why I got to go, so he can keep it and not have to even think about giving it to George! Dont you see?"

Edmonds had risen too, his chair crashing over backward. He was trembling, glaring at Lucas. "So you'll try your tricks on me too. On me," he said in a shaking voice. "All right. You're not going to get any divorce. And you're going to get rid of that machine. You bring that thing up to my house the first thing in the morning. You hear me?"

He returned home, or to the stable. There was a moon now, blanched upon the open cotton almost ready for picking. The curse of God. He knew what she meant, what she had been fumbling toward.

Granted the almost unbelievable circumstance that there should be as much as a thousand dollars buried and forgotten somewhere within Lucas's radius, and granted the even more impossible circumstance that Lucas should find it: what it might do to him, even to a man sixty-seven years old, who had, as Edmonds knew, three times that sum in a Jefferson bank; even a thousand dollars on which there was no sweat, at least none of his own.

And to George, the daughter's husband, who had not a dollar anywhere, who was not yet twenty-five and with an eighteen-year-old wife expecting a child next spring.

There was no one to take the mare; he had told Dan not to wait. He unsaddled himself and rubbed her down and opened the gate to the pasture lane and slipped the bridle and slapped her moon-bright rump as she rushed suddenly away, cantering, curvetting, her three stockings and the blaze glinting moonward for an instant as she turned. "God damn it," he said, "I wish to hell either me or Lucas Beauchamp was a horse. Or a mule."

Lucas did not appear the next morning with the divining machine. When Edmonds himself departed at nine o'clock (it was Sunday) he still

had not appeared. Edmonds was driving his car now; for a moment he thought of going to Lucas's house, stopping there on his way.

But it was Sunday; it seemed to him that he had been worrying and stewing over Lucas's affairs for six days a week since last May and very likely he would resume stewing and fretting over them at sunup tomorrow, and since Lucas himself had stated that beginning next week he would devote only Saturdays and Sundays to the machine, possibly until that time he would consider himself under his own dispensation to refrain from it on those two days.

So he went on. He was gone all that day — to church five miles away, then to Sunday dinner with some friends three miles further on, where he spent the afternoon looking at other men's cotton and adding his voice to the curses at governmental interference with the raising and marketing of it.

So it was after dark when he reached his own gate again and remembered Lucas and Molly and the divining machine once more. Lucas would not have left it at the empty house in his absence, so he turned and drove on to Lucas's cabin. It was dark; when he shouted there was no answer.

So he drove on the quarter-mile to George's and Nat's, but it was dark too, no answer there to his voice. Maybe it's all right now, he thought. Maybe they've all gone to church. Anyway, it'll be tomorrow in another twelve hours I'll have to start in worrying about Lucas and something and so it might as well be this, something at least I am familiar with, accustomed to.

Then the next morning, Monday, he had been in the stable for almost an hour and neither Dan nor Oscar had appeared. He had opened the stalls himself and turned the mule drove into the lane to the pasture and was just coming out of the mare's stall with the feed basket as Oscar came into the hallway, not running but trotting wearily and steadily.

Then Edmonds saw that he still wore his Sunday clothes — a bright shirt and a tie, serge trousers with a long tear in one leg and splashed to the knees with mud. “It’s Aunt Molly Beauchamp,” Oscar said. “She been missing since yestiddy sometime. We been hunting her all night.

We found where she went down to the creek and we been tracking her. Only she so little and light she dont hardly make a foot on the ground. Uncle Luke and George and Nat and Dan and some others are still hunting.”

“I’ll saddle the mare,” Edmonds said. “I’ve turned the mules out; you’ll have to go to the pasture and catch one. Hurry.”

The mules, free in the big pasture, were hard to catch; it was almost an hour before Oscar returned bareback on one of them. And it was two hours more before they overtook Lucas and George and Nat and Dan and another man where they followed and lost and hunted and found and followed again the faint, light prints of the old woman’s feet as they seemed to wander without purpose among the jungle of brier and rotted logs along the creek.

It was almost noon when they found her, lying on her face in the mud, the once immaculate apron and the clean faded skirts stained and torn, one hand still grasping the handle of the divining-machine as she had fallen with it. She was not dead.

When Oscar picked her up she opened her eyes, looking at no one, at nothing, and closed them again. “Run,” Edmonds told Dan. “Take the mare. Go back for the car and go get Doctor Rideout. Hurry. — Can you carry her?”

“I can tote her,” Oscar said. “She dont weigh hardly nothing. Not nigh as much as that finding-box.”

“I’ll tote her,” George said. “Bein as she’s Nat’s—” Edmonds turned on him, on Lucas too.

“You tote that box,” he said. “Both of you tote it. Hope it finds something between here and the house. Because if those needles ever move on my place afterward, neither of you all will be looking at them. — I’m going to see about that divorce,” he said to Lucas. “Before she kills herself.

Before you and that machine kill her between you. By God, I’m glad I aint walking in your shoes right now. I’m glad I aint going to lie in your bed tonight, thinking about what you’re going to think about.”

The day came. The cotton was all in and ginned and baled and frost had fallen, completing the firing of the corn which was being gathered and measured into the cribs. With Lucas and Molly in the back seat, he drove in to Jefferson and stopped before the county courthouse where the Chancellor was sitting. “You dont need to come in,” he told Lucas.

“They probably wouldn’t let you in. But you be around close. I’m not going to wait for you. And remember. Aunt Molly gets the house, and half your crop this year and half of it every year as long as you stay on my place.”

“You mean every year I keep on farming my land.”

“I mean every damned year you stay on my place. Just what I said.”

“Cass Edmonds give me that land to be mine long as I — —”

“You heard me,” Edmonds said. Lucas looked at him. He blinked.

“Do you want me to move off of it?” he said.

“Why?” Edmonds said. “What for? When you are going to be on it all night long every night, hunting buried money? You might as well sleep on it all day too. Besides, you’ll have to stay on it to make Aunt Molly’s half-crop. And I dont mean just this year. I mean every — —”

“She can have all of it,” Lucas said. “I’ll raise it all right. And she can have all of it. I got them three thousand dollars old Carothers left me, right there in that bank yonder. They’ll last me out my time — unless

you done decided to give half of them to somebody. And when me and George Wilkins find that money — —”

“Get out of the car,” Edmonds said. “Go on. Get out of it.”

The Chancellor was sitting in his office — a small detached building beside the courthouse proper. As they walked toward it Edmonds suddenly had to take the old woman’s arm, catching her just in time; feeling again the thin, almost fleshless arm beneath the layers of sleeve, dry and light and brittle and frail as a rotted stick. He stopped, holding her up. “Aunt Molly,” he said, “do you still want to do this? You dont have to. I’ll take that thing away from him. By God, I — —”

She tried to go on, tugging at his hand. “I got to,” she said. “He’ll get another one. Then he’ll give that one to George the first thing to keep you from taking it. And they’ll find it some day and maybe I’ll be gone then and cant help. And Nat was my least and my last one. I wont never see the others before I die.”

“Come on,” Edmonds said. “Come on then.”

There were a few people going in and out of the office; a few inside, not many. They waited quietly at the back of the room until their turn came. Then he found that he actually was holding her up. He led her forward, still supporting her, believing that if he released her for an instant even she would collapse into a bundle of dried and lifeless sticks, covered by the old, faded, perfectly clean garments, at his feet. “Ah, Mr Edmonds,” the Chancellor said. “This is the plaintiff?”

“Yes, sir,” Edmonds said. The Chancellor (he was quite old) slanted his head to look at Molly above his spectacles. Then he shifted them up his nose and looked at her through them. He made a clucking sound. “After forty-five years. You cant do anything about it?”

“No, sir,” Edmonds said. “I tried. I ...” The Chancellor made the clucking sound again. He looked down at the bill which the clerk laid before him.

“She will be provided for, of course.”

“Yes, sir. I’ll see to that.”

The Chancellor mused upon the bill. “There’s no contest, I suppose.”

“No, sir,” Edmonds said. And then — and he did not even know Lucas had followed them until he saw the Chancellor slant his head again and look past them this time across the spectacles, and saw the clerk glance up and heard him say, “You, nigger! Take off your hat!” — then Lucas thrust Molly aside and came to the table, removing his hat as he did so. “We aint gonter have no contest or no voce neither,” he said.

“You what?” the Chancellor said. “What’s this?” Lucas had not once looked at Edmonds. As far as Edmonds could tell, he was not looking at the Chancellor either. Edmonds thought idiotically how it must have been years since he had seen Lucas uncovered; in fact, he could not remember at all being aware previously that Lucas’s hair was grey.

“We dont want no voce,” Lucas said. “I done changed my mind.”

“Are you the husband?” the Chancellor said.

“That’s right,” Lucas said.

“Say sir to the court!” the clerk said. Lucas glanced at the clerk.

“What?” he said. “I dont want no court. I done changed my — —”

“Why, you uppity—” the clerk began.

“Wait,” the Chancellor said. He looked at Lucas. “You have waited too late. This bill has been presented in due form and order. I am about to pronounce on it.”

“Not now,” Lucas said. “We dont want no voce. Roth Edmonds knows what I mean.”

“What? Who does?”

“Why, the uppity—” the clerk said. “Your Honour—” Again the Chancellor raised his hand slightly toward the clerk. He still looked at Lucas.

“Mister Roth Edmonds,” Lucas said. Edmonds moved forward quickly, still holding the old woman’s arm. The Chancellor looked at him.

“Yes, Mr Edmonds?”

“Yes, sir,” Edmonds said. “That’s right. We dont want it now.”

“You wish to withdraw the bill?”

“Yes, sir. If you please, sir.”

“Ah,” the Chancellor said. He folded the bill and handed it to the clerk. “Strike this off the docket, Mr Hulett,” he said.

When they were out of the office, he was almost carrying her, though she was trying to walk. “Here,” he said, almost roughly, “it’s all right now. Didn’t you hear the judge? Didn’t you hear Lucas tell the judge that Roth Edmonds knows what he means?”

He lifted her into the car almost bodily, Lucas just behind them. But instead of getting in, Lucas said, “Wait a minute.”

“Wait a minute?” Edmonds said. “Hah!” he said. “You’ve bankrupted your waiting. You’ve already spent—” But Lucas had gone on. And Edmonds waited. He stood beside the car and watched Lucas cross the Square, towards the stores, erect beneath the old, fine, well-cared-for hat, walking with that unswerving and dignified deliberation which every now and then, and with something sharp at the heart, Edmonds recognised as having come from his own ancestry too as the hat had come.

He was not gone long. He returned, unhurried, and got into the car. He was carrying a small sack — obviously candy, a nickel’s worth. He put it into Molly’s hand.

“Here,” he said. “You aint got no teeth left but you can still gum it.”

It was cool that night. He had a little fire, and for supper the first ham from the smokehouse, and he was sitting at his solitary meal, eating with more appetite than it seemed to him he had had in months, when he heard the knocking from the front of the house — the rapping of knuckles on the edge of the veranda, not loud, not hurried, merely peremptory. He spoke to the cook through the kitchen door: “Tell him to come in here,” he said. He went on eating.

He was eating when Lucas entered and passed him and set the divining machine on the other end of the table. It was clean of mud now; it looked as though it had been polished, at once compact and complex and efficient-looking with its bright cryptic dials and gleaming knobs. Lucas stood looking down at it for a moment. Then he turned away. Until he left the room he did not once look toward it again. “There it is,” he said. “Get rid of it.”

“All right. I’ll put it away in the attic. Maybe by next spring Aunt Molly will forget about it and you can — —”

“No. Get rid of it.”

“For good?”

“Yes. Clean off this place, where I wont never see it again. Just dont tell me where. Sell it if you can and keep the money. But sell it a far piece away, where I wont never see it nor hear tell of it again.”

“Well,” Edmonds said. “Well.” He thrust his chair back from the table and sat looking up at the other, at the old man who had emerged out of the tragic complexity of his motherless childhood as the husband of the woman who had been the only mother he ever knew, who had never once said “sir” to his white skin and whom he knew even called him Roth behind his back, let alone to his face. “Look here,” he said. “You dont have to do that.

Aunt Molly’s old, and she’s got some curious notions. But what she dont know — Because you aint going to find any money, buried or not, around here or anywhere else. And if you want to take that damn thing

out now and then, say once or twice a month, and spend the night walking up and down that damn creek — —”

“No,” Lucas said. “Get rid of it. I dont want to never see it again. Man has got three score and ten years on this earth, the Book says. He can want a heap in that time and a heap of what he can want is due to come to him, if he just starts in soon enough. I done waited too late to start. That money’s there.

Them two white men that slipped in here that night three years ago and dug up twenty-two thousand dollars and got clean away with it before anybody saw them. I know. I saw the hole where they filled it up again, and the churn it was buried in. But I am near to the end of my three score and ten, and I reckon to find that money aint for me.”

PANTALOOON IN BLACK

I

HE STOOD IN the worn, faded clean overalls which Mannie herself had washed only a week ago, and heard the first clod strike the pine box. Soon he had one of the shovels himself, which in his hands (he was better than six feet and weighed better than two hundred pounds) resembled the toy shovel a child plays with at the shore, in half cubic foot of flung dirt no more than the light gout of sand the child’s shovel would have flung.

Another member of his sawmill gang touched his arm and said, “Lemme have hit, Rider.” He didn’t even falter. He released one hand in midstroke and flung it backward, striking the other across the chest, jolting him back a step, and restored the hand to the moving shovel, flinging the dirt with that effortless fury so that the mound seemed to be rising of its own volition, not built up from above but thrusting visibly upward out of the earth itself, until at last the grave, save for its rawness, resembled any other marked off without order about the barren plot by shards of pottery and broken bottles and old brick and

other objects insignificant to sight but actually of a profound meaning and fatal to touch, which no white man could have read.

Then he straightened up and with one hand flung the shovel quivering upright in the mound like a javelin and turned and began to walk away, walking on even when an old woman came out of the meagre clump of his kin and friends and a few old people who had known him and his dead wife both since they were born, and grasped his forearm. She was his aunt. She had raised him. He could not remember his parents at all.

“Whar you gwine?” she said.

“Ah’m goan home,” he said.

“You dont wants ter go back dar by yoself,” she said. “You needs to eat. You come on home and eat.”

“Ah’m goan home,” he repeated, walking out from under her hand, his forearm like iron, as if the weight on it were no more than that of a fly, the other members of the mill gang whose head he was giving way quietly to let him pass. But before he reached the fence one of them overtook him; he did not need to be told it was his aunt’s messenger.

“Wait, Rider,” the other said. “We gots a jug in de bushes—” Then the other said what he had not intended to say, what he had never conceived of himself saying in circumstances like these, even though everybody knew it — the dead who either will not or cannot quit the earth yet although the flesh they once lived in has been returned to it, let the preachers tell and reiterate and affirm how they left it not only without regret but with joy, mounting toward glory: “You dont wants ter go back dar. She be wawkin yit.”

He didn’t pause, glancing down at the other, his eyes red at the inner corners in his high, slightly backtilted head. “Lemme lone, Acey,” he said. “Doan mess wid me now,” and went on, stepping over the three-strand wire fence without even breaking his stride, and crossed the road and entered the woods. It was middle dusk when he emerged

from them and crossed the last field, stepping over that fence too in one stride, into the lane.

It was empty at this hour of Sunday evening — no family in wagon, no rider, no walkers churchward to speak to him and carefully refrain from looking after him when he had passed — the pale, powder-light, powder-dry dust of August from which the long week's marks of hoof and wheel had been blotted by the strolling and unhurried Sunday shoes, with somewhere beneath them, vanished but not gone, fixed and held in the annealing dust, the narrow, splay-toed prints of his wife's bare feet where on Saturday afternoons she would walk to the commissary to buy their next week's supplies while he took his bath; himself, his own prints, setting the period now as he strode on, moving almost as fast as a smaller man could have trotted, his body breasting the air her body had vacated, his eyes touching the objects — post and tree and field and house and hill — her eyes had lost.

The house was the last one in the lane, not his but rented from Carothers Edmonds, the local white landowner. But the rent was paid promptly in advance, and even in just six months he had refloored the porch and rebuilt and roofed the kitchen, doing the work himself on Saturday afternoon and Sunday with his wife helping him, and bought the stove.

Because he made good money: saw-milling ever since he began to get his growth at fifteen and sixteen and now, at twenty-four, head of the timber gang itself because the gang he headed moved a third again as much timber between sunup and sundown as any other moved, handling himself at times out of the vanity of his own strength logs which ordinarily two men would have handled with canthooks; never without work even in the old days when he had not actually needed the money, when a lot of what he wanted, needed perhaps, didn't cost money — the women bright and dark and for all purposes nameless he didn't need to buy and it didn't matter to him what he wore and there was always food for him at any hour of day or night in the house of his aunt who didn't even want to take the two dollars he gave her each Saturday — so there had been only the Saturday and Sunday dice and

whisky that had to be paid for until that day six months ago when he saw Mannie, whom he had known all his life, for the first time and said to himself: "Ah'm thu wid all dat," and they married and he rented the cabin from Carothers Edmonds and built a fire on the hearth on their wedding night as the tale told how Uncle Lucas Beauchamp, Edmonds's oldest tenant, had done on his forty-five years ago and which had burned ever since; and he would rise and dress and eat his breakfast by lamplight to walk the four miles to the mill by sunup, and exactly one hour after sundown he would enter the house again, five days a week, until Saturday.

Then the first hour would not have passed noon when he would mount the steps and knock, not on post or doorframe but on the underside of the gallery roof itself, and enter and ring the bright cascade of silver dollars on to the scrubbed table in the kitchen where his dinner simmered on the stove and the galvanised tub of hot water and the baking powder can of soft soap and the towel made of scalded flour sacks sewn together and his clean overalls and shirt waited, and Mannie would gather up the money and walk the half-mile to the commissary and buy their next week's supplies and bank the rest of the money in Edmonds's safe and return and they would eat once again without haste or hurry after five days — the sidemeat, the greens, the cornbread, the buttermilk from the well-house, the cake which she baked every Saturday now that she had a stove to bake in.

But when he put his hand on the gate it seemed to him suddenly that there was nothing beyond it. The house had never been his anyway, but now even the new planks and sills and shingles, the hearth and stove and bed, were all a part of the memory of somebody else, so that he stopped in the half-open gate and said aloud, as though he had gone to sleep in one place and then waked suddenly to find himself in another: "Whut's Ah doin hyar?" before he went on. Then he saw the dog.

He had forgotten it. He remembered neither seeing nor hearing it since it began to howl just before dawn yesterday — a big dog, a hound with

a strain of mastiff from somewhere (he had told Mannie a month after they married: "Ah needs a big dawg.

You's de onliest least thing whut ever kep up wid me one day, leff alone fo weeks.") coming out from beneath the gallery and approaching, not running but seeming rather to drift across the dusk until it stood lightly against his leg, its head raised until the tips of his fingers just touched it, facing the house and making no sound; whereupon, as if the animal controlled it, had lain guardian before it during his absence and only this instant relinquished, the shell of planks and shingles facing him solidified, filled, and for the moment he believed that he could not possibly enter it. "But Ah needs to eat," he said.

"Us bofe needs to eat," he said, moving on though the dog did not follow until he turned and cursed it. "Come on hyar!" he said.

"Whut you skeered of? She lacked you too, same as me," and they mounted the steps and crossed the porch and entered the house — the dusk-filled single room where all those six months were now crammed and crowded into one instant of time until there was no space left for air to breathe, crammed and crowded about the hearth where the fire which was to have lasted to the end of them, before which in the days before he was able to buy the stove he would enter after his four-mile walk from the mill and find her, the shape of her narrow back and haunches squatting, one narrow spread hand shielding her face from the blaze over which the other hand held the skillet, had already fallen to a dry, light soilure of dead ashes when the sun rose yesterday — and himself standing there while the last of light died about the strong and indomitable beating of his heart and the deep steady arch and collapse of his chest which walking fast over the rough going of woods and fields had not increased and standing still in the quiet and fading room had not slowed down.

Then the dog left him. The light pressure went off his flank; he heard the click and hiss of its claws on the wooden floor as it surged away and he thought at first that it was fleeing. But it stopped just outside the

front door, where he could see it now, and the upfling of its head as the howl began, and then he saw her too.

She was standing in the kitchen door, looking at him. He didn't move. He didn't breathe nor speak until he knew his voice would be all right, his face fixed too not to alarm her. "Mannie," he said. "Hit's awright. Ah aint afraid." Then he took a step toward her, slow, not even raising his hand yet, and stopped. Then he took another step. But this time as soon as he moved she began to fade. He stopped at once, not breathing again, motionless, willing his eyes to see that she had stopped too.

But she had not stopped. She was fading, going. "Wait," he said, talking as sweet as he had ever heard his voice speak to a woman: "Den lemme go wid you, honey." But she was going. She was going fast now, he could actually feel between them the insuperable barrier of that very strength which could handle alone a log which would have taken any two other men to handle, of the blood and bones and flesh too strong, invincible for life, having learned at least once with his own eyes how tough, even in sudden and violent death, not a young man's bones and flesh perhaps but the will of that bone and flesh to remain alive, actually was.

Then she was gone. He walked through the door where she had been standing, and went to the stove. He did not light the lamp. He needed no light. He had set the stove up himself and built the shelves for the dishes, from among which he took two plates by feel and from the pot sitting cold on the cold stove he ladled on to the plates the food which his aunt had brought yesterday and of which he had eaten yesterday though now he did not remember when he had eaten it nor what it was, and carried the plates to the scrubbed bare table beneath the single small fading window and drew two chairs up and sat down, waiting again until he knew his voice would be what he wanted it to be.

"Come on hyar, now," he said roughly. "Come on hyar and eat yo supper. Ah aint gonter have no—" and ceased, looking down at his plate, breathing the strong, deep pants, his chest arching and collapsing

until he stopped it presently and held himself motionless for perhaps a half minute, and raised a spoonful of the cold and glutinous peas to his mouth.

The congealed and lifeless mass seemed to bounce on contact with his lips. Not even warmed from mouth-heat, peas and spoon spattered and rang upon the plate; his chair crashed backward and he was standing, feeling the muscles of his jaw beginning to drag his mouth open, tugging upward the top half of his head. But he stopped that too before it became sound, holding himself again while he rapidly scraped the food from his plate on to the other and took it up and left the kitchen, crossed the other room and the gallery and set the plate on the bottom step and went on toward the gate.

The dog was not there, but it overtook him within the first half mile. There was a moon then, their two shadows flitting broken and intermittent among the trees or slanted long and intact across the slope of pasture or old abandoned fields upon the hills, the man moving almost as fast as a horse could have moved over that ground, altering his course each time a lighted window came in sight, the dog trotting at heel while their shadows shortened to the moon's curve until at last they trod them and the last far lamp had vanished and the shadows began to lengthen on the other hand, keeping to heel even when a rabbit burst from almost beneath the man's foot, then lying in the grey of dawn beside the man's prone body, beside the laboured heave and collapse of the chest, the loud harsh snoring which sounded not like groans of pain but like someone engaged without arms in prolonged single combat.

When he reached the mill there was nobody there but the fireman — an older man just turning from the woodpile, watching quietly as he crossed the clearing, striding as if he were going to walk not only through the boiler shed but through (or over) the boiler too, the overalls which had been clean yesterday now draggled and soiled and drenched to the knees with dew, the cloth cap flung on to the side of his head, hanging peak downward over his ear as he always wore it, the whites of his eyes rimmed with red and with something urgent and

strained about them. “Whar yo bucket?” he said. But before the fireman could answer he had stepped past him and lifted the polished lard pail down from a nail in a post. “Ah just wants a biscuit,” he said.

“Eat hit all,” the fireman said. “Ah’ll eat ouden de yuthers’ buckets at dinner. Den you gawn home and go to bed. You dont looks good.”

“Ah aint come hyar to look,” he said, sitting on the ground, his back against the post, the open pail between his knees, cramming the food into his mouth with his hands, wolfing it — peas again, also gelid and cold, a fragment of yesterday’s Sunday fried chicken, a few rough chunks of this morning’s fried sidemeat, a biscuit the size of a child’s cap — indiscriminate, tasteless.

The rest of the crew was gathering now, with voices and sounds of movement outside the boiler shed; presently the white foreman rode into the clearing on a horse. He did not look up, setting the empty pail aside, rising, looking at no one, and went to the branch and lay on his stomach and lowered his face to the water, drawing the water into himself with the same deep, strong, troubled inhalations that he had snored with, or as when he had stood in the empty house at dusk yesterday, trying to get air.

Then the trucks were rolling. The air pulsed with the rapid beating of the exhaust and the whine and clang of the saw, the trucks rolling one by one up to the skidway, he mounting the trucks in turn, to stand balanced on the load he freed, knocking the chocks out and casting loose the shackle chains and with his cant-hook squaring the sticks of cypress and gum and oak one by one to the incline and holding them until the next two men of his gang were ready to receive and guide them, until the discharge of each truck became one long rumbling roar punctuated by grunting shouts and, as the morning grew and the sweat came, chanted phrases of song tossed back and forth.

He did not sing with them. He rarely ever did, and this morning might have been no different from any other — himself man-height again above the heads which carefully refrained from looking at him, stripped

to the waist now, the shirt removed and the overalls knotted about his hips by the suspender straps, his upper body bare except for the handkerchief about his neck and the cap clapped and clinging somehow over his right ear, the mounting sun sweat-glinted steel-blue on the midnight-coloured bunch and slip of muscles until the whistle blew for noon and he said to the two men at the head of the skidway: "Look out. Git out de way," and rode the log down the incline, balanced erect upon it in short rapid backward-running steps above the headlong thunder.

His aunt's husband was waiting for him — an old man, as tall as he was, but lean, almost frail, carrying a tin pail in one hand and a covered plate in the other; they too sat in the shade beside the branch a short distance from where the others were opening their dinner pails. The bucket contained a fruit jar of buttermilk packed in a clean damp towsack.

The covered dish was a peach pie, still warm. "She baked hit fer you dis mawin," the uncle said. "She say fer you to come home." He didn't answer, bent forward a little, his elbows on his knees, holding the pie in both hands, wolfing at it, the syrupy filling smearing and trickling down his chin, blinking rapidly as he chewed, the whites of his eyes covered a little more by the creeping red. "Ah went to yo house last night, but you want dar. She sont me. She wants you to come on home. She kept de lamp burnin all last night fer you."

"Ah'm awright," he said.

"You aint awright. De Lawd guv, and He tuck away. Put yo faith and trust in Him. And she kin help you."

"Whut faith and trust?" he said. "Whut Mannie ever done ter Him? Whut He wanter come messin wid me and — —"

"Hush!" the old man said. "Hush!"

Then the trucks were rolling again. Then he could stop needing to invent to himself reasons for his breathing, until after a while he began to believe he had forgot about breathing since now he could not hear it

himself above the steady thunder of the rolling logs; whereupon as soon as he found himself believing he had forgotten it, he knew that he had not, so that instead of tipping the final log on to the skidway he stood up and cast his cant-hook away as if it were a burnt match and in the dying reverberation of the last log's rumbling descent he vaulted down between the two slanted tracks of the skid, facing the log which still lay on the truck.

He had done it before — taken a log from the truck on to his hands, balanced, and turned with it and tossed it on to the skidway, but never with a stick of this size, so that in a complete cessation of all sound save the pulse of the exhaust and the light free-running whine of the disengaged saw since every eye there, even that of the white foreman, was upon him, he nudged the log to the edge of the truckframe and squatted and set his palms against the underside of it. For a time there was no movement at all. It was as if the unrational and inanimate wood had invested, mesmerised the man with some of its own primal inertia. Then a voice said quietly: "He got hit.

Hit's off de truck," and they saw the crack and gap of air, watching the infinitesimal straightening of the braced legs until the knees locked, the movement mounting infinitesimally through the belly's insuck, the arch of the chest, the neck cords, lifting the lip from the white clench of teeth in passing, drawing the whole head backward and only the bloodshot fixity of the eyes impervious to it, moving on up the arms and the straightening elbows until the balanced log was higher than his head.

"Only he aint gonter turn wid dat un," the same voice said. "And when he try to put hit back on de truck hit gonter kill him." But none of them moved. Then — there was no gathering of supreme effort — the log seemed to leap suddenly backward over his head of his own volition, spinning, crashing and thundering down the incline; he turned and stepped over the slanting track in one stride and walked through them as they gave way and went on across the clearing toward the woods even though the foreman called after him: "Rider!" and again: "You, Rider!"

At sundown he and the dog were in the river swamp four miles away — another clearing, itself not much larger than a room, a hut, a hovel partly of planks and partly of canvas, an unshaven white man standing in the door beside which a shotgun leaned, watching him as he approached, his hand extended with four silver dollars on the palm. “Ah wants a jug,” he said. “A jug?” the white man said. “You mean a pint. This is Monday. Aint you all running this week?”

“Ah laid off,” he said. “Whar’s my jug?” waiting, looking at nothing apparently, blinking his bloodshot eyes rapidly in his high, slightly back-tilted head, then turning, the jug hanging from his crooked middle finger against his leg, at which moment the white man looked suddenly and sharply at his eyes as though seeing them for the first time — the eyes which had been strained and urgent this morning and which now seemed to be without vision too and in which no white showed at all — and said, “Here. Gimme that jug.

You dont need no gallon. I’m going to give you that pint, give it to you. Then you get out of here and stay out. Dont come back until—” Then the white man reached and grasped the jug, whereupon the other swung it behind him, sweeping his other arm up and out so that it struck the white man across the chest.

“Look out, white folks,” he said. “Hit’s mine. Ah done paid you.” The white man cursed him. “No you aint. Here’s your money. Put that jug down, nigger.”

“Hit’s mine,” he said, his voice quiet, gentle even, his face quiet save for the rapid blinking of the red eyes. “Ah done paid for hit,” turning on, turning his back on the man and the gun both, and recrossed the clearing to where the dog waited beside the path to come to heel again. They moved rapidly on between the close walls of impenetrable cane-stalks which gave a sort of blondness to the twilight and

possessed something of that oppression, that lack of room to breathe in, which the walls of his house had had.

But this time, instead of fleeing it, he stopped and raised the jug and drew the cork stopper from the fierce duskreek of uncured alcohol and drank, gulping the liquid solid and cold as ice water, without either taste or heat until he lowered the jug and the air got in. "Hah," he said. "Dat's right. Try me. Try me, big boy. Ah gots something hyar now dat kin whup you."

And, once free of the bottom's unbreathing blackness, there was the moon again, his long shadow and that of the lifted jug slanting away as he drank and then held the jug poised, gulping the silver air into his throat until he could breathe again, speaking to the jug: "Come on now. You always claim you's a better man den me. Come on now. Prove it." He drank again, swallowing the chill liquid tamed of taste or heat either while the swallowing lasted, feeling it flow solid and cold with fire, past then enveloping the strong steady panting of his lungs until they too ran suddenly free as his moving body ran in the silver solid wall of air he breathed.

And he was all right, his striding shadow and the trotting one of the dog travelling swift as those of two clouds along the hill; the long cast of his motionless shadow and that of the lifted jug slanting across the slope as he watched the frail figure of his aunt's husband toiling up the hill.

"Dey tole me at de mill you was gone," the old man said. "Ah knowed whar to look. Come home, son. Dat ar cant help you."

"Hit done awready hope me," he said. "Ah'm awready home. Ah'm snakebit now and pizen cant hawm me."

"Den stop and see her. Leff her look at you. Dat's all she axes: just leff her look at you—" But he was already moving. "Wait!" the old man cried. "Wait!"

"You cant keep up," he said, speaking into the silver air, breasting aside the silver solid air which began to flow past him almost as fast as it

would have flowed past a moving horse. The faint frail voice was already lost in the night's infinitude, his shadow and that of the dog scudding the free miles, the deep strong panting of his chest running free as air now because he was all right.

Then, drinking, he discovered suddenly that no more of the liquid was entering his mouth. Swallowing, it was no longer passing down his throat, his throat and mouth filled now with a solid and unmoving column which without reflex or revulsion sprang, columnar and intact and still retaining the mould of his gullet, outward glinting in the moonlight, splintering, vanishing into the myriad murmur of the dewed grass. He drank again.

Again his throat merely filled solidly until two icy rills ran from his mouth-corners; again the intact column sprang silvering, glinting, shivering, while he panted the chill of air into his throat, the jug poised before his mouth while he spoke to it: "Awright. Ah'm ghy try you again. Soon as you makes up yo mind to stay whar I puts you, Ah'll leff you alone." He drank, filling his gullet for the third time and lowered the jug one instant ahead of the bright intact repetition, panting, indrawing the cool of air until he could breathe.

He stoppered the cob carefully back into the jug and stood, panting, blinking, the long cast of his solitary shadow slanting away across the hill and beyond, across the mazy infinitude of all the night-bound earth. "Awright," he said. "Ah just misread de sign wrong. Hit's done done me all de help Ah needs. Ah'm awright now. Ah doan needs no mo of hit."

He could see the lamp in the window as he crossed the pasture, passing the black-and-silver yawn of the sandy ditch where he had played as a boy with empty snuff-tins and rusted harness-buckles and fragments of trace-chains and now and then an actual wheel, passing the garden patch where he had hoed in the spring days while his aunt stood sentry over him from the kitchen window, crossing the grassless yard in whose dust he had sprawled and crept before he learned to walk.

He entered the house, the room, the light itself, and stopped in the door, his head back-tilted a little as if he could not see, the jug hanging from his crooked finger, against his leg. "Unc Alec say you want see me," he said.

"Not just to see you," his aunt said. "To come home, whar we kin help you."

"Ah'm awright," he said. "Ah doan needs no help."

"No," she said. She rose from the chair and came and grasped his arm as she had grasped it yesterday at the grave. Again, as on yesterday, the forearm was like iron under her hand. "No! When Alec come back and tole me how you had wawked off de mill and de sun not half down, Ah knowed why and whar. And dat cant help you."

"Hit done awready hope me. Ah'm awright now."

"Don't lie to me," she said. "You aint never lied to me. Dont lie to me now."

Then he said it. It was his own voice, without either grief or amazement, speaking quietly out of the tremendous panting of his chest which in a moment now would begin to strain at the walls of this room too. But he would be gone in a moment.

"Nome," he said, "Hit aint done me no good."

"And hit cant! Cant nothing help you but Him! Ax Him! Tole Him about hit! He wants to hyar you and help you!"

"Efn He God, Ah dont needs to tole Him. Efn He God, He awready know hit. Awright. Hyar Ah is. Leff Him come down hyar and do me some good."

"On yo knees!" she cried. "On yo knees and ax Him!" But it was not his knees on the floor, it was his feet. And for a space he could hear her feet too on the planks of the hall behind him and her voice crying after him from the door: "Spoot! Spoot!" — crying after him across the moon-dappled yard the name he had gone by in his childhood and adolescence, before the men he worked with and the bright dark

nameless women he had taken in course and forgotten until he saw Mannie that day and said, "Ah'm thu wid all dat," began to call him Rider.

It was just after midnight when he reached the mill. The dog was gone now. This time he could not remember when nor where. At first he seemed to remember hurling the empty jug at it. But later the jug was still in his hand and it was not empty, although each time he drank now the two icy runnels streamed from his mouth-corners, sopping his shirt and overalls until he walked constantly in the fierce chill of the liquid tamed now of flavour and heat and odour too even when the swallowing ceased. "Sides that," he said, "Ah wouldn't thow nothin at him. Ah mout kick him efn he needed hit and was close enough. But Ah wouldn't ruint no dog chunkin hit."

The jug was still in his hand when he entered the clearing and paused among the mute soaring of the moon-blond lumber-stacks. He stood in the middle now of the unimpeded shadow which he was treading again as he had trod it last night, swaying a little, blinking about at the stacked lumber, the skidway, the piled logs waiting for tomorrow, the boiler-shed all quiet and blanched in the moon. And then it was all right. He was moving again. But he was not moving, he was drinking, the liquid cold and swift and tasteless and requiring no swallowing, so that he could not tell if it were going down inside or outside.

But it was all right. And now he was moving, the jug gone now and he didn't know the when or where of that either. He crossed the clearing and entered the boiler shed and went on through it, crossing the junctureless backloop of time's trepan, to the door of the tool-room, the faint glow of the lantern beyond the plank-joints, the surge and fall of living shadow, the mutter of voices, the mute click and scutter of the dice, his hand loud on the barred door, his voice loud too: "Open hit. Hit's me. Ah'm snakebit and bound to die."

Then he was through the door and inside the tool-room. They were the same faces — three members of his timber gang, three or four others of the mill crew, the white night-watchman with the heavy pistol in his

hip pocket and the small heap of coins and worn bills on the floor before him, one who was called Rider and was Rider standing above the squatting circle, swaying a little, blinking, the dead muscles of his face shaped into smiling while the white man stared up at him. "Make room, gamblers," he said. "Make room. Ah'm snakebit and de pizen cant hawm me."

"You're drunk," the white man said. "Get out of here. One of you niggers open the door and get him out of here."

"Dass awright, boss-man," he said, his voice equable, his face still fixed in the faint rigid smiling beneath the blinking of the red eyes; "Ah aint drunk. Ah just cant wawk straight fer dis yar money weighin me down."

Now he was kneeling too, the other six dollars of his last week's pay on the floor before him, blinking, still smiling at the face of the white man opposite, then, still smiling, he watched the dice pass from hand to hand around the circle as the white man covered the bets, watching the soiled and palm-worn money in front of the white man gradually and steadily increase, watching the white man cast and win two doubled bets in succession then lose on for twenty-five cents, the dice coming to him at last, the cupped snug clicking of them in his fist. He spun a coin into the centre.

"Shoots a dollar," he said, and cast, and watched the white man pick up the dice and flip them back to him. "Ah lets hit lay," he said. "Ah'm snakebit. Ah kin pass wid anything," and cast, and this time one of the negroes flipped the dice back. "Ah lets hit lay," he said, and cast, and moved as the white man moved, catching the white man's wrist before his hand reached the dice, the two of them squatting, facing each other above the dice and the money, his left hand grasping the white man's wrist, his face still fixed in the rigid and deadened smiling, his voice equable, almost deferential: "Ah kin pass even wid missouts.

But dese hyar yuther boys—" until the white man's hand sprang open and the second pair of dice clattered on to the floor beside the first two and the white man wrenched free and sprang up and back and reached the hand backward toward the pocket where the pistol was.

The razor hung between his shoulder-blades from a loop of cotton string round his neck inside his shirt. The same motion of the hand which brought the razor forward over his shoulder flipped the blade open and freed it from the cord, the blade opening on until the back edge of it lay across the knuckles of his fist, his thumb pressing the handle into his closing fingers, so that in the second before the half-drawn pistol exploded he actually struck at the white man's throat not with the blade but with a sweeping blow of his fist, following through in the same motion so that not even the first jet of blood touched his hand or arm.

II

After it was over — it didn't take long; they found the prisoner on the following day, hanging from the bell-rope in a negro schoolhouse about two miles from the sawmill, and the coroner had pronounced his verdict of death at the hands of a person or persons unknown and surrendered the body to its next of kin all within five minutes — the sheriff's deputy who had been officially in charge of the business was telling his wife about it.

They were in the kitchen. His wife was cooking supper. The deputy had been out of bed and in motion ever since the jail delivery shortly before midnight of yesterday and had covered considerable ground since, and he was spent now from lack of sleep and hurried food at hurried and curious hours and, sitting in a chair beside the stove, a little hysterical too.

“Them damn niggers,” he said. “I swear to godfrey, it's a wonder we have as little trouble with them as we do. Because why? Because they aint human. They look like a man and they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they can talk and you can understand them and you think they are understanding you, at least now and then. But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might just as well be a damn herd of wild buffaloes. Now you take this one today — —”

“I wish you would,” his wife said harshly. She was a stout woman, handsome once, greying now and with a neck definitely too short, who looked not harried at all but composed in fact, only choleric.

Also, she had attended a club rook-party that afternoon and had won the first, the fifty-cent, prize until another member had insisted on a recount of the scores and the ultimate throwing out of one entire game. “Take him out of my kitchen, anyway. You sheriffs! Sitting around that courthouse all day long, talking. It’s no wonder two or three men can walk in and take prisoners out from under your very noses. They would take your chairs and desks and window sills too if you ever got your feet and backsides off of them that long.”

“It’s more of them Birdsongs than just two or three,” the deputy said. “There’s forty-two active votes in that connection. Me and Maydew taken the poll-list and counted them one day. But listen—” The wife turned from the stove, carrying a dish. The deputy snatched his feet rapidly out of the way as she passed him, passed almost over him, and went into the dining-room. The deputy raised his voice a little to carry the increased distance: “His wife dies on him. All right. But does he grieve?”

He’s the biggest and busiest man at the funeral. Grabs a shovel before they even got the box into the grave they tell me, and starts throwing dirt on to her faster than a slip scraper could have done it. But that’s all right—” His wife came back. He moved his feet again and altered his voice again to the altered range: “ — maybe that’s how he felt about her. There aint any law against a man rushing his wife into the ground, provided he never had nothing to do with rushing her to the cemetery too.

But here the next day he’s the first man back at work except the fireman, getting back to the mill before the fireman had his fire going, let alone steam up; five minutes earlier and he could even have helped the fireman wake Birdsong up so Birdsong could go home and go back

to bed again, or he could even have cut Birdsong's throat then and saved everybody trouble.

"So he comes to work, the first man on the job, when McAndrews and everybody else expected him to take the day off since even a nigger couldn't want no better excuse for a holiday than he had just buried his wife, when a white man would have took the day off out of pure respect no matter how he felt about his wife, when even a little child would have had sense enough to take a day off when he would still get paid for it too. But not him.

The first man there, jumping from one log truck to another before the starting whistle quit blowing even, snatching up ten-foot cypress logs by himself and throwing them around like matches.

And then, when everybody had finally decided that that's the way to take him, the way he wants to be took, he walks off the job in the middle of the afternoon without by-your-leave or much obliged or goodbye to McAndrews or nobody else, gets himself a whole gallon of bust-skull white-mule whisky, comes straight back to the mill and to the same crap game where Birdsong has been running crooked dice on them mill niggers for fifteen years, goes straight to the same game where he has been peacefully losing a probably steady average ninety-nine per cent. of his pay ever since he got big enough to read the spots on them miss-out dice, and cuts Birdsong's throat clean to the neckbone five minutes later." The wife passed him again and went to the dining-room.

Again he drew his feet back and raised his voice:

"So me and Maydew go out there. Not that we expected to do any good, as he had probably passed Jackson, Tennessee, about daylight; and besides, the simplest way to find him would be just to stay close behind them Birdsong boys.

Of course there wouldn't be nothing hardly worth bringing back to town after they did find him, but it would close the case. So it's just by the merest chance that we go by his house; I dont even remember why

we went now, but we did; and there he is. Sitting behind the barred front door with a open razor on one knee and a loaded shotgun on the other? No. He was asleep.

A big pot of field peas et clean empty on the stove, and him laying in the back yard asleep in the broad sun with just his head under the edge of the porch in the shade and a dog that looked like a cross between a bear and a Polled Angus steer yelling fire and murder from the back door.

And we wake him and he sets up and says, 'Awright, white folks. Ah done it. Jest dont lock me up,' and Maydew says, 'Mr. Birdsong's kinfolks aint going to lock you up neither. You'll have plenty of fresh air when they get hold of you,' and he says, 'Ah done it. Jest dont lock me up' — advising, instructing the sheriff not to lock him up; he done it all right and it's too bad but it aint convenient for him to be cut off from the fresh air at the moment.

So we loaded him into the car, when here come the old woman — his ma or aunt or something — panting up the road at a dog-trot, wanting to come with us too, and Maydew trying to explain to her what would maybe happen to her too if them Birdsong kin catches us before we can get him locked up, only she is coming anyway, and like Maydew says, her being in the car too might be a good thing if the Birdsongs did happen to run into us, because after all interference with the law cant be condoned even if the Birdsong connection did carry that beat for Maydew last summer.

"So we brought her along too and got him to town and into the jail all right and turned him over to Ketcham and Ketcham taken him on up stairs and the old woman coming too, right on up to the cell, telling Ketcham, 'Ah tried to raise him right. He was a good boy. He aint never been in no trouble till now.

He will suffer for what he done. But dont let the white folks get him,' until Ketcham says, 'You and him ought to thought of that before he started barbering white men without using no lather first.'

So he locked them both up in the cell because he felt like Maydew did, that her being in there with him might be a good influence on the Birdsong boys if anything started if he should happen to be running for sheriff or something when Maydew's term was up.

So Ketcham come on back down stairs and pretty soon the chain gang come in and went on up to the bull pen and he thought things had settled down for a while when all of a sudden he begun to hear the yelling, not howling: yelling, though there wasn't no words in it, and he grabbed his pistol and run back up stairs to the bull pen where the chain gang was and Ketcham could see into the cell where the old woman was kind of squinched down in one corner and where that nigger had done tore that iron cot clean out of the floor it was bolted to and was standing in the middle of the cell, holding the cot over his head like it was a baby's cradle, yelling, and says to the old woman, 'Ah aint goan hurt you,' and throws the cot against the wall and comes and grabs holt of that steel-barred door and rips it out of the wall, bricks hinges and all, and walks out of the cell toting the door over his head like it was a gauze window-screen, hollering, "It's awright. It's awright. Ah aint trying to git away.'

"Of course Ketcham could have shot him right there, but like he said, if it wasn't going to be the law, then them Birdsong boys ought to have the first lick at him. So Ketcham dont shoot. Instead, he jumps in behind where them chain gang niggers was kind of backed off from that steel door, hollering, 'Grab him!

Throw him down!' except the niggers hung back at first too until Ketcham gets in where he can kick the ones he can reach, batting at the others with the flat of the pistol until they rush him. And Ketcham says that for a full minute that nigger would grab them as they come in and fling them clean across the room like they was rag dolls, saying, 'Ah aint tryin to git out.

Ah aint tryin to git out,' until at last they pulled him down — a big mass of nigger heads and arms and legs boiling around on the floor and even

then Ketcham says every now and then a nigger would come flying out and go sailing through the air across the room, spraddled out like a flying squirrel and with his eyes sticking out like car headlights, until at last they had him down and Ketcham went in and begun peeling away niggers until he could see him laying there under the pile of them, laughing, with tears big as glass marbles running across his face and down past his ears and making a kind of popping sound on the floor like somebody dropping bird eggs, laughing and laughing and saying, 'Hit look lack Ah just cant quit thinking.

Look lack Ah just cant quit.' And what do you think of that?"

"I think if you eat any supper in this house you'll do it in the next five minutes," his wife said from the dining-room. "I'm going to clear this table then and I'm going to the picture show."

THE OLD PEOPLE

I

AT FIRST THERE was nothing. There was the faint, cold, steady rain, the grey and constant light of the late November dawn, with the voices of the hounds converging somewhere in it and toward them. Then Sam Fathers, standing just behind the boy as he had been standing when the boy shot his first running rabbit with his first gun and almost with the first load it ever carried, touched his shoulder and he began to shake, not with any cold.

Then the buck was there. He did not come into sight; he was just there, looking not like a ghost but as if all of light were condensed in him and he were the source of it, not only moving in it but disseminating it, already running, seen first as you always see the deer, in that split second after he has already seen you, already slanting away in that first soaring bound, the antlers even in that dim light looking like a small rocking-chair balanced on his head.

"Now," Sam Fathers said, "shoot quick, and slow."

The boy did not remember that shot at all. He would live to be eighty, as his father and his father's twin brother and their father in his turn had lived to be, but he would never hear that shot nor remember even the shock of the gun-butt. He didn't even remember what he did with the gun afterward. He was running.

Then he was standing over the buck where it lay on the wet earth still in the attitude of speed and not looking at all dead, standing over it shaking and jerking, with Sam Fathers beside him again, extending the knife. "Dont walk up to him in front," Sam said. "If he aint dead, he will cut you all to pieces with his feet.

Walk up to him from behind and take him by the horn first, so you can hold his head down until you can jump away. Then slip your other hand down and hook your fingers in his nostrils."

The boy did that — drew the head back and the throat taut and drew Sam Fathers's knife across the throat and Sam stooped and dipped his hands in the hot smoking blood and wiped them back and forth across the boy's face.

Then Sam's horn rang in the wet grey woods and again and again; there was a boiling wave of dogs about them, with Tennie's Jim and Boon Hogganbeck whipping them back after each had had a taste of the blood, then the men, the true hunters — Walter Ewell whose rifle never missed, and Major de Spain and old General Compson and the boy's cousin, McCaslin Edmonds, grandson of his father's sister, sixteen years his senior and, since both he and McCaslin were only children and the boy's father had been nearing seventy when he was born, more his brother than his cousin and more his father than either — sitting their horses and looking down at them: at the old man of seventy who had been a negro for two generations now but whose face and bearing were still those of the Chickasaw chief who had been his father; and the white boy of twelve with the prints of the bloody hands on his face, who had nothing to do now but stand straight and not let the trembling show.

“Did he do all right, Sam?” his cousin McCaslin said.

“He done all right,” Sam Fathers said.

They were the white boy, marked for ever, and the old dark man sired on both sides by savage kings, who had marked him, whose bloody hands had merely formally consecrated him to that which, under the man’s tutelage, he had already accepted, humbly and joyfully, with abnegation and with pride too; the hands, the touch, the first worthy blood which he had been found at last worthy to draw, joining him and the man for ever, so that the man would continue to live past the boy’s seventy years and then eighty years, long after the man himself had entered the earth as chiefs and kings entered it; — the child, not yet a man, whose grandfather had lived in the same country and in almost the same manner as the boy himself would grow up to live, leaving his descendants in the land in his turn as his grandfather had done, and the old man past seventy whose grandfathers had owned the land long before the white men ever saw it and who had vanished from it now with all their kind, what of blood they left behind them running now in another race and for a while even in bondage and now drawing toward the end of its alien and irrevocable course, barren, since Sam Fathers had no children.

His father was Ikkemotubbe himself, who had named himself Doom. Sam told the boy about that — how Ikkemotubbe, old Issetibbeha’s sister’s son, had run away to New Orleans in his youth and returned seven years later with a French companion calling himself the Chevalier Soeur-Blonde de Vitry, who must have been the Ikkemotubbe of his family too and who was already addressing Ikkemotubbe as Du Homme; — returned, came home again, with his foreign Aramis and the quadroon slave woman who was to be Sam’s mother, and a gold-laced hat and coat and a wicker wine-hamper containing a litter of month-old puppies and a gold snuffbox filled with a white powder resembling fine sugar.

And how he was met at the River landing by three or four companions of his bachelor youth, and while the light of a smoking torch gleamed

on the glittering braid of the hat and coat Doom squatted in the mud of the land and took one of the puppies from the hamper and put a pinch of the white powder on its tongue and the puppy died before the one who was holding it could cast it away.

And how they returned to the Plantation where Issetibbeha, dead now, had been succeeded by his son, Doom's fat cousin Mocketubbe, and the next day Mocketubbe's eight-year-old son died suddenly and that afternoon, in the presence of Mocketubbe and most of the others (the People, Sam Fathers called them) Doom produced another puppy from the wine-hamper and put a pinch of the white powder on its tongue and Mocketubbe abdicated and Doom became in fact The Man which his French friend already called him.

And how on the day after that, during the ceremony of accession, Doom pronounced a marriage between the pregnant quadroon and one of the slave men which he had just inherited (that was how Sam Fathers got his name, which in Chickasaw had been Had-Two-Fathers) and two years later sold the man and woman and the child who was his own son to his white neighbour, Carothers McCaslin.

That was seventy years ago. The Sam Fathers whom the boy knew was already sixty — a man not tall, squat rather, almost sedentary, flabby-looking though he actually was not, with hair like a horse's mane which even at seventy showed no trace of white and a face which showed no age until he smiled, whose only visible trace of negro blood was a slight dullness of the hair and the fingernails, and something else which you did notice about the eyes, which you noticed because it was not always there, only in repose and not always then — something not in their shape nor pigment but in their expression, and the boy's cousin McCaslin told him what that was: not the heritage of Ham, not the mark of servitude but of bondage; the knowledge that for a while that part of his blood had been the blood of slaves.

“Like an old lion or a bear in a cage,” McCaslin said. “He was born in the cage and has been in it all his life; he knows nothing else. Then he smells something. It might be anything, any breeze blowing past

anything and then into his nostrils. But there for a second was the hot sand or the cane-brake that he never even saw himself, might not even know if he did see it and probably does know he couldn't hold his own with it if he got back to it. But that's not what he smells then. It was the cage he smelled. He hadn't smelled the cage until that minute. Then the hot sand or the brake blew into his nostrils and blew away, and all he could smell was the cage. That's what makes his eyes look like that."

"Then let him go!" the boy cried. "Let him go!"

His cousin laughed shortly. Then he stopped laughing, making the sound that is. It had never been laughing. "His cage aint McCaslins," he said. "He was a wild man. When he was born, all his blood on both sides, except the little white part, knew things that had been tamed out of our blood so long ago that we have not only forgotten them, we have to live together in herds to protect ourselves from our own sources.

He was the direct son not only of a warrior but of a chief. Then he grew up and began to learn things, and all of a sudden one day he found out that he had been betrayed, the blood of the warriors and chiefs had been betrayed. Not by his father," he added quickly. "He probably never held it against old Doom for selling him and his mother into slavery, because he probably believed the damage was already done before then and it was the same warriors' and chiefs' blood in him and Doom both that was betrayed through the black blood which his mother gave him.

Not betrayed by the black blood and not wilfully betrayed by his mother, but betrayed by her all the same, who had bequeathed him not only the blood of slaves but even a little of the very blood which had enslaved it; himself his own battleground, the scene of his own vanquishment and the mausoleum of his defeat. His cage aint us," McCaslin said. "Did you ever know anybody yet, even your father and Uncle Buddy, that ever told him to do or not do anything that he ever paid any attention to?"

That was true. The boy first remembered him as sitting in the door of the plantation blacksmith's shop, where he sharpened plough-points and mended tools and even did rough carpenter-work when he was not in the woods.

And sometimes, even when the woods had not drawn him, even with the shop cluttered with work which the farm waited on, Sam would sit there, doing nothing at all for half a day or a whole one, and no man, neither the boy's father and twin uncle in their day nor his cousin McCaslin after he became practical though not yet titular master, ever to say to him, "I want this finished by sundown" or "why wasn't this done yesterday?" And once each year, in the late fall, in November, the boy would watch the wagon, the hooped canvas top erected now, being loaded — the food, hams and sausage from the smokehouse, coffee and flour and molasses from the commissary, a whole beef killed just last night for the dogs until there would be meat in camp, the crate containing the dogs themselves, then the bedding, the guns, the horns and lanterns and axes, and his cousin McCaslin and Sam Fathers in their hunting clothes would mount to the seat and with Tennie's Jim sitting on the dog-crate they would drive away to Jefferson, to join Major de Spain and General Compson and Boon Hogganbeck and Walter Ewell and go on into the big bottom of the Tallahatchie where the deer and bear were, to be gone two weeks.

But before the wagon was even loaded the boy would find that he could watch no longer. He would go away, running almost, to stand behind the corner where he could not see the wagon and nobody could see him, not crying, holding himself rigid except for the trembling, whispering to himself: "Soon now. Soon now. Just three more years" (or two more or one more) "and I will be ten. Then Cass said I can go."

White man's work, when Sam did work. Because he did nothing else: farmed no allotted acres of his own, as the other ex-slaves of old Carothers McCaslin did, performed no field-work for daily wages as the younger and newer negroes did — and the boy never knew just how that had been settled between Sam and old Carothers, or perhaps with old Carothers's twin sons after him.

For, although Sam lived among the negroes, in a cabin among the other cabins in the quarters, and consorted with negroes (what of consorting with anyone Sam did after the boy got big enough to walk alone from the house to the blacksmith's shop and then to carry a gun) and dressed like them and talked like them and even went with them to the negro church now and then, he was still the son of that Chickasaw chief and the negroes knew it.

And, it seemed to the boy, not only negroes. Boon Hogganbeck's grandmother had been a Chickasaw woman too, and although the blood had run white since and Boon was a white man, it was not chief's blood. To the boy at least, the difference was apparent immediately you saw Boon and Sam together, and even Boon seemed to know it was there — even Boon, to whom in his tradition it had never occurred that anyone might be better born than himself.

A man might be smarter, he admitted that, or richer (luckier, he called it) but not better born. Boon was a mastiff, absolutely faithful, dividing his fidelity equally between Major de Spain and the boy's cousin McCaslin, absolutely dependent for his very bread and dividing that impartially too between Major de Spain and McCaslin, hardy, generous, courageous enough, a slave to all the appetites and almost unratiocinative.

In the boy's eyes at least it was Sam Fathers, the negro, who bore himself not only toward his cousin McCaslin and Major de Spain but toward all white men, with gravity and dignity and without servility or recourse to that impenetrable wall of ready and easy mirth which negroes sustain between themselves and white men, bearing himself toward his cousin McCaslin not only as one man to another but as an older man to a younger.

He taught the boy the woods, to hunt, when to shoot and when not to shoot, when to kill and when not to kill, and better, what to do with it afterward. Then he would talk to the boy, the two of them sitting beneath the close fierce stars on a summer hilltop while they waited for

the hounds to bring the fox back within hearing, or beside a fire in the November or December woods while the dogs worked out a coon's trail along the creek, or fireless in the pitch dark and heavy dew of April mornings while they squatted beneath a turkey-roost.

The boy would never question him; Sam did not react to questions. The boy would just wait and then listen and Sam would begin, talking about the old days and the People whom he had not had time ever to know and so could not remember (he did not remember ever having seen his father's face), and in place of whom the other race into which his blood had run supplied him with no substitute.

And as he talked about those old times and those dead and vanished men of another race from either that the boy knew, gradually to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy's present, not only as if they had happened yesterday but as if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had not quitted.

And more: as if some of them had not happened yet but would occur tomorrow, until at last it would seem to the boy that he himself had not come into existence yet, that none of his race nor the other subject race which his people had brought with them into the land had come here yet; that although it had been his grandfather's and then his father's and uncle's and was now his cousin's and someday would be his own land which he and Sam hunted over, their hold upon it actually was as trivial and without reality as the now faded and archaic script in the chancery book in Jefferson which allocated it to them and that it was he, the boy, who was the guest here and Sam Fathers's voice the mouthpiece of the host.

Until three years ago there had been two of them, the other a full-blood Chickasaw, in a sense even more incredibly lost than Sam Fathers. He called himself Jobaker, as if it were one word. Nobody knew his history at all.

He was a hermit, living in a foul little shack at the forks of the creek five miles from the plantation and about that far from any other habitation. He was a market hunter and fisherman and he consorted with nobody, black or white; no negro would even cross his path and no man dared approach his hut except Sam. And perhaps once a month the boy would find them in Sam's shop — two old men squatting on their heels on the dirt floor, talking in a mixture of negroid English and flat hill dialect and now and then a phrase of that old tongue which as time went on and the boy squatted there too listening, he began to learn.

Then Jobaker died. That is, nobody had seen him for some time. Then one morning Sam was missing, nobody, not even the boy, knew when nor where, until that night when some negroes hunting in the creek bottom saw the sudden burst of flame and approached. It was Jobaker's hut, but before they got anywhere near it, someone shot at them from the shadows beyond it. It was Sam who fired, but nobody ever found Jobaker's grave.

The next morning, sitting at breakfast with his cousin, the boy saw Sam pass the dining-room window and he remembered then that never in his life before had he seen Sam nearer the house than the blacksmith's shop.

He stopped eating even; he sat there and he and his cousin both heard the voices from beyond the pantry door, then the door opened and Sam entered, carrying his hat in his hand but without knocking as anyone else on the place except a house servant would have done, entered just far enough for the door to close behind him and stood looking at neither of them — the Indian face above the nigger clothes, looking at something over their heads or at something not even in the room.

"I want to go," he said. "I want to go to the Big Bottom to live."
"To live?" the boy's cousin said.

“At Major de Spain’s and your camp, where you go to hunt,” Sam said. “I could take care of it for you all while you aint there. I will build me a little house in the woods, if you rather I didn’t stay in the big one.”

“What about Isaac here?” his cousin said. “How will you get away from him? Are you going to take him with you?” But still Sam looked at neither of them, standing just inside the room with that face which showed nothing, which showed that he was an old man only when it smiled.

“I want to go,” he said. “Let me go.”

“Yes,” the cousin said quietly. “Of course. I’ll fix it with Major de Spain. You want to go soon?”

“I’m going now,” Sam said. He went out. And that was all. The boy was nine then; it seemed perfectly natural that nobody, not even his cousin McCaslin, should argue with Sam. Also, since he was nine now, he could understand that Sam could leave him and their days and nights in the woods together without any wrench.

He believed that he and Sam both knew that this was not only temporary but that the exigencies of his maturing, of that for which Sam had been training him all his life some day to dedicate himself, required it. They had settled that one night last summer while they listened to the hounds bringing a fox back up the creek valley; now the boy discerned in that very talk under the high, fierce August stars a presage, a warning, of this moment today.

“I done taught you all there is of this settled country,” Sam said. “You can hunt it good as I can now. You are ready for the Big Bottom now, for bear and deer. Hunter’s meat,” he said. “Next year you will be ten. You will write your age in two numbers and you will be ready to become a man.

Your pa” (Sam always referred to the boy’s cousin as his father, establishing even before the boy’s orphanhood did that relation between them not of the ward to his guardian and kinsman and chief

and head of his blood, but of the child to the man who sired his flesh and his thinking too.) “promised you can go with us then.” So the boy could understand Sam’s going.

But he couldn’t understand why now, in March, six months before the moon for hunting.

“If Jobaker’s dead like they say,” he said, “and Sam hasn’t got anybody but us at all kin to him, why does he want to go to the Big Bottom now, when it will be six months before we get there?”

“Maybe that’s what he wants,” McCaslin said. “Maybe he wants to get away from you a little while.”

But that was all right. McCaslin and other grown people often said things like that and he paid no attention to them, just as he paid no attention to Sam saying he wanted to go to the Big Bottom to live. After all, he would have to live there for six months, because there would be no use in going at all if he was going to turn right around and come back.

And, as Sam himself had told him, he already knew all about hunting in this settled country that Sam or anybody else could teach him. So it would be all right. Summer, then the bright days after the first frost, then the cold and himself on the wagon with McCaslin this time and the moment would come and he would draw the blood, the big blood which would make him a man, a hunter, and Sam would come back home with them and he too would have outgrown the child’s pursuit of rabbits and ‘possums. Then he too would make one before the winter fire, talking of the old hunts and the hunts to come as hunters talked.

So Sam departed. He owned so little that he could carry it. He walked. He would neither let McCaslin send him in the wagon, nor take a mule to ride. No one saw him go even. He was just gone one morning, the cabin which had never had very much in it, vacant and empty, the shop in which there never had been very much done, standing idle.

Then November came at last, and now the boy made one — himself and his cousin McCaslin and Tennie's Jim, and Major de Spain and General Compson and Walter Ewell and Boon and old Uncle Ash to do the cooking, waiting for them in Jefferson with the other wagon, and the surrey in which he and McCaslin and General Compson and Major de Spain would ride.

Sam was waiting at the camp to meet them. If he was glad to see them, he did not show it. And if, when they broke camp two weeks later to return home, he was sorry to see them go, he did not show that either. Because he did not come back with them.

It was only the boy who returned, returning solitary and alone to the settled familiar land, to follow for eleven months the childish business of rabbits and such while he waited to go back, having brought with him, even from his brief first sojourn, an unforgettable sense of the big woods — not a quality dangerous or particularly inimical, but profound, sentient, gigantic and brooding, amid which he had been permitted to go to and fro at will, unscathed, why he knew not, but dwarfed and, until he had drawn honourably blood worthy of being drawn, alien.

Then November, and they would come back. Each morning Sam would take the boy out to the stand allotted him. It would be one of the poorer stands of course, since he was only ten and eleven and twelve and he had never even seen a deer running yet. But they would stand there, Sam a little behind him and without a gun himself, as he had been standing when the boy shot the running rabbit when he was eight years old. They would stand there in the November dawns, and after a while they would hear the dogs.

Sometimes the chase would sweep up and past quite close, belling and invisible; once they heard the two heavy reports of Boon Hogganbeck's old gun with which he had never killed anything larger than a squirrel and that sitting, and twice they heard the flat unreverberant clap of Walter Ewell's rifle, following which you did not even wait to hear his horn.

“I’ll never get a shot,” the boy said. “I’ll never kill one.”

“Yes you will,” Sam said. “You wait. You’ll be a hunter. You’ll be a man.”

But Sam wouldn’t come out. They would leave him there. He would come as far as the road where the surrey waited, to take the riding horses back, and that was all. The men would ride the horses and Uncle Ash and Tennie’s Jim and the boy would follow in the wagon with Sam, with the camp equipment and the trophies, the meat, the heads, the antlers, the good ones, the wagon winding on among the tremendous gums and cypresses and oaks where no axe save that of the hunter had ever sounded, between the impenetrable walls of cane and brier — the two changing yet constant walls just beyond which the wilderness whose mark he had brought away for ever on his spirit even from that first two weeks seemed to lean, stooping a little, watching them and listening, not quite inimical because they were too small, even those such as Walter and Major de Spain and old General Compson who had killed many deer and bear, their sojourn too brief and too harmless to excite to that, but just brooding, secret, tremendous, almost inattentive.

Then they would emerge, they would be out of it, the line as sharp as the demarcation of a doored wall. Suddenly skeleton cotton-and corn-fields would flow away on either hand, gaunt and motionless beneath the grey rain; there would be a house, barns, fences, where the hand of man had clawed for an instant, holding, the wall of the wilderness behind them now, tremendous and still and seemingly impenetrable in the grey and fading light, the very tiny orifice through which they had emerged apparently swallowed up.

The surrey would be waiting, his cousin McCaslin and Major de Spain and General Compson and Walter and Boon dismounted beside it. Then Sam would get down from the wagon and mount one of the horses and, with the others on a rope behind him, he would turn back. The boy would watch him for a while against that tall and secret wall, growing smaller and smaller against it, never looking back. Then he would enter it, returning to what the boy believed, and thought that his cousin McCaslin believed, was his loneliness and solitude.

So the instant came. He pulled trigger and Sam Fathers marked his face with the hot blood which he had spilled and he ceased to be a child and became a hunter and a man. It was the last day. They broke camp that afternoon and went out, his cousin and Major de Spain and General Compson and Boon on the horses, Walter Ewell and the negroes in the wagon with him and Sam and his hide and antlers.

There could have been (and were) other trophies in the wagon. But for him they did not exist, just as for all practical purposes he and Sam Fathers were still alone together as they had been that morning.

The wagon wound and jolted between the slow and shifting yet constant walls from beyond and above which the wilderness watched them pass, less than inimical now and never to be inimical again since the buck still and for ever leaped, the shaking gun-barrels coming constantly and forever steady at last, crashing, and still out of his instant of immortality the buck sprang, forever immortal; — the wagon jolting and bouncing on, the moment of the buck, the shot, Sam Fathers and himself and the blood with which Sam had marked him for ever one with the wilderness which had accepted him since Sam said that he had done all right, when suddenly Sam reined back and stopped the wagon and they all heard the unmistakable and unforgettable sound of a deer breaking cover.

Then Boon shouted from beyond the bend of the trail and while they sat motionless in the halted wagon, Walter and the boy already reaching for their guns, Boon came galloping back, flogging his mule with his hat, his face wild and amazed as he shouted down at them. Then the other riders came around the bend, also spurring.

“Get the dogs!” Boon cried. “Get the dogs! If he had a nub on his head, he had fourteen points! Laying right there by the road in that pawpaw thicket! If I’d a knowed he was there, I could have cut his throat with my pocket knife!”

“Maybe that’s why he run,” Walter said. “He saw you never had your gun.” He was already out of the wagon with his rifle. Then the boy was out too with his gun, and the other riders came up and Boon got off his mule somehow and was scrabbling and clawing among the duffel in the wagon, still shouting, “Get the dogs! Get the dogs!” And it seemed to the boy too that it would take them for ever to decide what to do — the old men in whom the blood ran cold and slow, in whom during the intervening years between them and himself the blood had become a different and colder substance from that which ran in him and even in Boon and Walter.

“What about it, Sam?” Major de Spain said. “Could the dogs bring him back?”

“We wont need the dogs,” Sam said. “If he dont hear the dogs behind him, he will circle back in here about sundown to bed.”

“All right,” Major de Spain said. “You boys take the horses. We’ll go on out to the road in the wagon and wait there.” He and General Compson and McCaslin got into the wagon and Boon and Walter and Sam and the boy mounted the horses and turned back and out of the trail.

Sam led them for an hour through the grey and unmarked afternoon whose light was little different from what it had been at dawn and which would become darkness without any graduation between. Then Sam stopped them.

“This is far enough,” he said. “He’ll be coming upwind, and he dont want to smell the mules.” They tied the mounts in a thicket. Sam led them on foot now, unpathed through the markless afternoon, the boy pressing close behind him, the two others, or so it seemed to the boy, on his heels. But they were not.

Twice Sam turned his head slightly and spoke back to him across his shoulder, still walking: “You got time. We’ll get there fore he does.”

So he tried to go slower. He tried deliberately to decelerate the dizzy rushing of time in which the buck which he had not even seen was moving, which it seemed to him must be carrying the buck farther and farther and more and more irretrievably away from them even though there were no dogs behind him now to make him run, even though, according to Sam, he must have completed his circle now and was heading back toward them.

They went on; it could have been another hour or twice that or less than half, the boy could not have said. Then they were on a ridge. He had never been in here before and he could not see that it was a ridge. He just knew that the earth had risen slightly because the underbrush had thinned a little, the ground sloping invisibly away toward a dense wall of cane. Sam stopped. "This is it," he said. He spoke to Walter and Boon: "Follow this ridge and you will come to two crossings. You will see the tracks. If he crosses, it will be at one of these three."

Walter looked about for a moment. "I know it," he said. "I've even seen your deer. I was in here last Monday. He aint nothing but a yearling." "A yearling?" Boon said. He was panting from the walking. His face still looked a little wild. "If the one I saw was any yearling, I'm still in kindergarden."

"Then I must have seen a rabbit," Walter said. "I always heard you quit school altogether two years before the first grade."

Boon glared at Walter. "If you dont want to shoot him, get out of the way," he said. "Set down somewhere. By God, I — —"

"Aint nobody going to shoot him standing here," Sam said quietly.

"Sam's right," Walter said. He moved, slanting the worn, silver-coloured barrel of his rifle downward to walk with it again. "A little more moving and a little more quiet too. Five miles is still Hogganbeck range, even if we wasn't downwind." They went on.

The boy could still hear Boon talking, though presently that ceased too. Then once more he and Sam stood motionless together against a tremendous pin oak in a little thicket, and again there was nothing.

There was only the soaring and sombre solitude in the dim light, there was the thin murmur of the faint cold rain which had not ceased all day.

Then, as if it had waited for them to find their positions and become still, the wilderness breathed again. It seemed to lean inward above them, above himself and Sam and Walter and Boon in their separate lurking-places, tremendous, attentive, impartial and omniscient, the buck moving in it somewhere, not running yet since he had not been pursued, not frightened yet and never fearsome but just alert also as they were alert, perhaps already circling back, perhaps quite near, perhaps conscious also of the eye of the ancient immortal Umpire.

Because he was just twelve then, and that morning something had happened to him: in less than a second he had ceased for ever to be the child he was yesterday. Or perhaps that made no difference, perhaps even a city-bred man, let alone a child, could not have understood it; perhaps only a country-bred one could comprehend loving the life he spills. He began to shake again.

“I’m glad it’s started now,” he whispered. He did not move to speak; only his lips shaped the expiring words: “Then it will be gone when I raise the gun — —”

Nor did Sam. “Hush,” he said.

Is he that near?” the boy whispered. “Do you think — —”

“Hush,” Sam said. So he hushed. But he could not stop the shaking. He did not try, because he knew it would go away when he needed the steadiness — had not Sam Fathers already consecrated and absolved him from weakness and regret too? — not from love and pity for all which lived and ran and then ceased to live in a second in the very midst of splendour and speed, but from weakness and regret.

So they stood motionless, breathing deep and quiet and steady. If there had been any sun, it would be near to setting now; there was a condensing, a densifying, of what he had thought was the grey and unchanging light until he realised suddenly that it was his own breathing, his heart, his blood — something, all things, and that Sam

Fathers had marked him indeed, not as a mere hunter, but with something Sam had had in his turn of his vanished and forgotten people.

He stopped breathing then; there was only his heart, his blood, and in the following silence the wilderness ceased to breathe also, leaning, stooping overhead with its breath held, tremendous and impartial and waiting. Then the shaking stopped too, as he had known it would, and he drew back the two heavy hammers of the gun.

Then it had passed. It was over. The solitude did not breathe again yet; it had merely stopped watching him and was looking somewhere else, even turning its back on him, looking on away up the ridge at another point, and the boy knew as well as if he had seen him that the buck had come to the edge of the cane and had either seen or scented them and faded back into it. But the solitude did not breathe again. It should have suspired again then but it did not. It was still facing, watching, what it had been watching and it was not here, not where he and Sam stood; rigid, not breathing himself, he thought, cried No! No!, knowing already that it was too late, thinking with the old despair of two and three years ago: I'll never get a shot. Then he heard it — the flat single clap of Walter Ewell's rifle which never missed. Then the mellow sound of the horn came down the ridge and something went out of him and he knew then he had never expected to get the shot at all.

"I reckon that's it," he said. "Walter got him." He had raised the gun slightly without knowing it. He lowered it again and had lowered one of the hammers and was already moving out of the thicket when Sam spoke.

"Wait."

"Wait?" the boy cried. And he would remember that — how he turned upon Sam in the truculence of a boy's grief over the missed opportunity, the missed luck. "What for? Dont you hear that horn?"

And he would remember how Sam was standing. Sam had not moved. He was not tall, squat rather and broad, and the boy had been growing

fast for the past year or so and there was not much difference between them in height, yet Sam was looking over the boy's head and up the ridge toward the sound of the horn and the boy knew that Sam did not even see him; that Sam knew he was still there beside him but he did not see the boy. Then the boy saw the buck.

It was coming down the ridge, as if it were walking out of the very sound of the horn which related its death. It was not running, it was walking, tremendous, unhurried, slanting and tilting its head to pass the antlers through the undergrowth, and the boy standing with Sam beside him now instead of behind him as Sam always stood, and the gun still partly aimed and one of the hammers still cocked.

Then it saw them. And still it did not begin to run. It just stopped for an instant, taller than any man, looking at them; then its muscles suppled, gathered. It did not even alter its course, not fleeing, not even running, just moving with that winged and effortless ease with which deer move, passing within twenty feet of them, its head high and the eye not proud and not haughty but just full and wild and unafraid, and Sam standing beside the boy now, his right arm raised at full length, palm outward, speaking in that tongue which the boy had learned from listening to him and Joe Baker in the blacksmith's shop, while up the ridge Walter Ewell's horn was still blowing them in to a dead buck.

"Oleh, Chief," Sam said. "Grandfather."

When they reached Walter, he was standing with his back toward them, quite still, bemused almost, looking down at his feet. He didn't look up at all.

"Come here, Sam," he said quietly. When they reached him he still did not look up, standing above a little spike buck which had still been a fawn last spring. "He was so little I pretty near let him go," Walter said. "But just look at the track he was making. It's pretty near big as a cow's. If there were any more tracks here besides the ones he is laying in, I would swear there was another buck here that I never even saw."

It was dark when they reached the road where the surrey waited. It was turning cold, the rain had stopped, and the sky was beginning to blow clear. His cousin and Major de Spain and General Compson had a fire going. "Did you get him?" Major de Spain said.

"Got a good-sized swamp-rabbit with spike horns," Walter said. He slid the little buck down from his mule. The boy's cousin McCaslin looked at it.

"Nobody saw the big one?" he said.

"I dont even believe Boon saw it," Walter said. "He probably jumped somebody's straw cow in that thicket." Boon started cursing, swearing at Walter and at Sam for not getting the dogs in the first place and at the buck and all.

"Never mind," Major de Spain said. "He'll be here for us next fall. Let's get started home."

It was after midnight when they let Walter out at his gate two miles from Jefferson and later still when they took General Compson to his house and then returned to Major de Spain's, where he and McCaslin would spend the rest of the night, since it was still seventeen miles home.

It was cold, the sky was clear now; there would be a heavy frost by sunup and the ground was already frozen beneath the horses' feet and the wheels and beneath their own feet as they crossed Major de Spain's yard and entered the house, the warm dark house, feeling their way up the dark stairs until Major de Spain found a candle and lit it, and into the strange room and the big deep bed, the still cold sheets until they began to warm to their bodies and at last the shaking stopped and suddenly he was telling McCaslin about it while McCaslin listened, quietly until he had finished. "You dont believe it," the boy said. "I know you dont — —"

“Why not?” McCaslin said. “Think of all that has happened here, on this earth. All the blood hot and strong for living, pleasuring, that has soaked back into it. For grieving and suffering too, of course, but still getting something out of it for all that, getting a lot out of it, because after all you dont have to continue to bear what you believe is suffering; you can always choose to stop that, put an end to that. And even suffering and grieving is better than nothing; there is only one thing worse than not being alive, and that’s shame.

But you cant be alive for ever, and you always wear out life long before you have exhausted the possibilities of living. And all that must be somewhere; all that could not have been invented and created just to be thrown away.

And the earth is shallow; there is not a great deal of it before you come to the rock. And the earth dont want to just keep things, hoard them; it want to use them again. Look at the seed, the acorns, at what happens even to carrion when you try to bury it: it refuses too, seethes and struggles too until it reaches light and air again, hunting the sun still.

And they—” the boy saw his hand in silhouette for a moment against the window beyond which, accustomed to the darkness now, he could see sky where the scoured and icy stars glittered “ — they dont want it, need it.

Besides, what would it want, itself, knocking around out there, when it never had enough time about the earth as it was, when there is plenty of room about the earth, plenty of places still unchanged from what they were when the blood used and pleased in them while it was still blood?”

“But we want them,” the boy said. “We want them too. There is plenty of room for us and them too.”

“That’s right,” McCaslin said. “Suppose they dont have substance, cant cast a shadow — —”

“But I saw it!” the boy cried. “I saw him!”

“Steady,” McCaslin said. For an instant his hand touched the boy’s flank beneath the covers. “Steady. I know you did. So did I. Sam took me in there once after I killed my first deer.”

THE BEAR

I

THERE WAS A man and a dog too this time. Two beasts, counting Old Ben, the bear, and two men, counting Boon Hogganbeck, in whom some of the same blood ran which ran in Sam Fathers, even though Boon’s was a plebeian strain of it and only Sam and Old Ben and the mongrel Lion were taintless and incorruptible.

He was sixteen. For six years now he had been a man’s hunter. For six years now he had heard the best of all talking. It was of the wilderness, the big woods, bigger and older than any recorded document: — of white man fatuous enough to believe he had bought any fragment of it, of Indian ruthless enough to pretend that any fragment of it had been his to convey; bigger than Major de Spain and the scrap he pretended to, knowing better; older than old Thomas Sutpen of whom Major de Spain had had it and who knew better; older even than old Ikkemotubbe, the Chickasaw chief, of whom old Sutpen had had it and who knew better in his turn.

It was of the men, not white nor black nor red but men, hunters, with the will and hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive, and the dogs and the bear and deer juxtaposed and relieved against it, ordered and compelled by and within the wilderness in the ancient and unremitting contest according to the ancient and immitigable rules which voided all regrets and brooked no quarter; — the best game of all, the best of all breathing and for ever the best of all listening, the voices quiet and weighty and deliberate for retrospection and recollection and exactitude among the concrete trophies — the racked guns and the heads and skins — in the libraries of town houses or the offices of plantation houses or (and best of all) in the camps themselves

where the intact and still-warm meat yet hung, the men who had slain it sitting before the burning logs on hearths when there were houses and hearths or about the smoky blazing of piled wood in front of stretched tarpaulins when there were not.

There was always a bottle present, so that it would seem to him that those fine fierce instants of heart and brain and courage and wiliness and speed were concentrated and distilled into that brown liquor which not women, not boys and children, but only hunters drank, drinking not of the blood they spilled but some condensation of the wild immortal spirit, drinking it moderately, humbly even, not with the pagan's base and baseless hope of acquiring thereby the virtues of cunning and strength and speed but in salute to them. Thus it seemed to him on this December morning not only natural but actually fitting that this should have begun with whisky.

He realised later that it had begun long before that. It had already begun on that day when he first wrote his age in two ciphers and his cousin McCaslin brought him for the first time to the camp, the big woods, to earn for himself from the wilderness the name and state of hunter provided he in his turn were humble and enduring enough.

He had already inherited then, without ever having seen it, the big old bear with one trap-ruined foot that in an area almost a hundred miles square had earned for himself a name, a definite designation like a living man: — the long legend of corn-cribs broken down and rifled, of shoats and grown pigs and even calves carried bodily into the woods and devoured and traps and deadfalls overthrown and dogs mangled and slain and shotgun and even rifle shots delivered at point-blank range yet with no more effect than so many peas blown through a tube by a child — a corridor of wreckage and destruction beginning back before the boy was born, through which sped, not fast but rather with the ruthless and irresistible deliberation of a locomotive, the shaggy tremendous shape.

It ran in his knowledge before he ever saw it. It loomed and towered in his dreams before he even saw the unaxed woods where it left its

crooked print, shaggy, tremendous, red-eyed, not malevolent but just big, too big for the dogs which tried to bay it, for the horses which tried to ride it down, for the men and the bullets they fired into it; too big for the very country which was its constricting scope.

It was as if the boy had already divined what his senses and intellect had not encompassed yet: that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with ploughs and axes who feared it because it was wilderness, men myriad and nameless even to one another in the land where the old bear had earned a name, and through which ran not even a mortal beast but an anachronism indomitable and invincible out of an old dead time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life which the little puny humans swarmed and hacked at in a fury of abhorrence and fear like pygmies about the ankles of a drowsing elephant; — the old bear, solitary, indomitable, and alone; widowed childless and absolved of mortality — old Priam reft of his old wife and outlived all his sons.

Still a child, with three years then two years then one year yet before he too could make one of them, each November he would watch the wagon containing the dogs and the bedding and food and guns and his cousin McCaslin and Tennie's Jim and Sam Fathers too until Sam moved to the camp to live, depart for the Big Bottom, the big woods. To him, they were going not to hunt bear and deer but to keep yearly rendezvous with the bear which they did not even intend to kill.

Two weeks later they would return, with no trophy, no skin. He had not expected it. He had not even feared that it might be in the wagon this time with the other skins and heads. He did not even tell himself that in three years or two years or one year more he would be present and that it might even be his gun.

He believed that only after he had served his apprenticeship in the woods which would prove him worthy to be a hunter, would he even be permitted to distinguish the crooked print, and that even then for two November weeks he would merely make another minor one, along with his cousin and Major de Spain and General Compson and Walter

Ewell and Boon and the dogs which feared to bay it and the shotguns and rifles which failed even to bleed it, in the yearly pageant-rite of the old bear's furious immortality.

His day came at last. In the surrey with his cousin and Major de Spain and General Compson he saw the wilderness through a slow drizzle of November rain just above the ice point as it seemed to him later he always saw it or at least always remembered it — the tall and endless wall of dense November woods under the dissolving afternoon and the year's death, sombre, impenetrable (he could not even discern yet how, at what point they could possibly hope to enter it even though he knew that Sam Fathers was waiting there with the wagon), the surrey moving through the skeleton stalks of cotton and corn in the last of open country, the last trace of man's puny gnawing at the immemorial flank, until, dwarfed by that perspective into an almost ridiculous diminishment, the surrey itself seemed to have ceased to move (this too to be completed later, years later, after he had grown to a man and had seen the sea) as a solitary small boat hangs in lonely immobility, merely tossing up and down, in the infinite waste of the ocean while the water and then the apparently impenetrable land which it nears without appreciable progress, swings slowly and opens the widening inlet which is the anchorage.

He entered it. Sam was waiting, wrapped in a quilt on the wagon seat behind the patient and steaming mules.

He entered his novitiate to the true wilderness with Sam beside him as he had begun his apprenticeship in miniature to manhood after the rabbits and such with Sam beside him, the two of them wrapped in the damp, warm, negro-rank quilt while the wilderness closed behind his entrance as it had opened momentarily to accept him, opening before his advancement as it closed behind his progress; no fixed path the wagon followed but a channel nonexistent ten yards ahead of it and ceasing to exist ten yards after it had passed, the wagon progressing not by its own volition but by attrition of their intact yet fluid circumambience, drowsing, earless, almost lightless.

It seemed to him that at the age of ten he was witnessing his own birth. It was not even strange to him. He had experienced it all before, and not merely in dreams. He saw the camp — a paintless six-room bungalow set on piles above the spring high-water — and he knew already how it was going to look. He helped in the rapid orderly disorder of their establishment in it and even his motions were familiar to him, foreknown.

Then for two weeks he ate the coarse, rapid food — the shapeless sour bread, the wild strange meat, venison and bear and turkey and coon which he had never tasted before — which men ate, cooked by men who were hunters first and cooks afterward; he slept in harsh sheetless blankets as hunters slept. Each morning the grey of dawn found him and Sam Fathers on the stand, the crossing, which had been allotted him.

It was the poorest one, the most barren. He had expected that; he had not dared yet to hope even to himself that he would even hear the running dogs this first time. But he did hear them. It was on the third morning — a murmur, sourceless, almost indistinguishable, yet he knew what it was although he had never before heard that many dogs running at once, the murmur swelling into separate and distinct voices until he could call the five dogs which his cousin owned from among the others. “Now,” Sam said, “slant your gun up a little and draw back the hammers and then stand still.”

But it was not for him, not yet. The humility was there; he had learned that. And he could learn the patience. He was only ten, only one week. The instant had passed. It seemed to him that he could actually see the deer, the buck, smoke-coloured, elongated with speed, vanished, the woods, the grey solitude still ringing even when the voices of the dogs had died away; from far away across the sombre woods and the grey half-liquid morning there came two shots. “Now let your hammers down,” Sam said.

He did so. “You knew it too,” he said.

“Yes,” Sam said. “I want you to learn how to do when you didn’t shoot. It’s after the chance for the bear or the deer has done already come and gone that men and dogs get killed.”

“Anyway, it wasn’t him,” the boy said. “It wasn’t even a bear. It was just a deer.”

“Yes,” Sam said, “it was just a deer.”

Then one morning, it was in the second week, he heard the dogs again. This time before Sam even spoke he readied the too-long, too-heavy, man-size gun as Sam had taught him, even though this time he knew the dogs and the deer were coming less close than ever, hardly within hearing even. They didn’t sound like any running dogs he had ever heard before even.

Then he found that Sam, who had taught him first of all to cock the gun and take position where he could see best in all directions and then never to move again, had himself moved up beside him.

“There,” he said. “Listen.” The boy listened, to no ringing chorus strong and fast on a free scent but a moiling yapping an octave too high and with something more than indecision and even abjectness in it which he could not yet recognise, reluctant, not even moving very fast, taking a long time to pass out of hearing, leaving even then in the air that echo of thin and almost human hysteria, abject, almost humanly grieving, with this time nothing ahead of it, no sense of a fleeing unseen smoke-coloured shape. He could hear Sam breathing at his shoulder.

He saw the arched curve of the old man’s inhaling nostrils.

“It’s Old Ben!” he cried, whispering.

Sam didn’t move save for the slow gradual turning of his head as the voices faded on and the faint steady rapid arch and collapse of his nostrils. “Hah,” he said. “Not even running. Walking.”

“But up here!” the boy cried. “Way up here!”

“He do it every year,” Sam said. “Once. Ash and Boon say he comes up here to run the other little bears away. Tell them to get to hell out of here and stay out until the hunters are gone. Maybe.” The boy no longer heard anything at all, yet still Sam’s head continued to turn gradually and steadily until the back of it was toward him.

Then it turned back and looked down at him — the same face, grave, familiar, expressionless until it smiled, the same old man’s eyes from which as he watched there faded slowly a quality darkly and fiercely lambent, passionate and proud. “He dont care no more for bears than he does for gods or men neither. He come to see who’s here, who’s new in camp this year, whether he can shoot or not, can stay or not.

Whether we got the dog yet that can bay and hold him until a man gets there with a gun. Because he’s the head bear. He’s the man.” It faded, was gone; again they were the eyes as he had known them all his life. “He’ll let them follow him to the river. Then he’ll send them home. We might as well go too; see how they look when they get back to camp.”

The dogs were there first, ten of them huddled back under the kitchen, himself and Sam squatting to peer back into the obscurity where they crouched, quiet, the eyes rolling and luminous, vanishing, and no sound, only that effluvium which the boy could not quite place yet, of something more than dog, stronger than dog and not just animal, just beast even.

Because there had been nothing in front of the abject and painful yapping except the solitude, the wilderness, so that when the eleventh hound got back about mid-afternoon and he and Tennie’s Jim held the passive and still trembling bitch while Sam daubed her tattered ear and raked shoulder with turpentine and axle-grease, it was still no living creature but only the wilderness which, leaning for a moment, had patted lightly once her temerity.

“Just like a man,” Sam said. “Just like folks. Put off as long as she could having to be brave, knowing all the time that sooner or later she would

have to be brave once so she could keep on calling herself a dog, and knowing beforehand what was going to happen when she done it.”

He did not know just when Sam left. He only knew that he was gone. For the next three mornings he rose and ate breakfast and Sam was not waiting for him. He went to his stand alone; he found it without help now and stood on it as Sam had taught him.

On the third morning he heard the dogs again, running strong and free on a true scent again, and he readied the gun as he had learned to do and heard the hunt sweep past on since he was not ready yet, had not deserved other yet in just one short period of two weeks as compared to all the long life which he had already dedicated to the wilderness with patience and humility; he heard the shot again, one shot, the single clapping report of Walter Ewell’s rifle.

By now he could not only find his stand and then return to camp without guidance, by using the compass his cousin had given him he reached Walter waiting beside the buck and the moiling of dogs over the cast entrails before any of the others except Major de Spain and Tennie’s Jim on the horses, even before Uncle Ash arrived with the one-eyed wagon-mule which did not mind the smell of blood or even, so they said, of bear.

It was not Uncle Ash on the mule. It was Sam, returned. And Sam was waiting when he finished his dinner and, himself on the one-eyed mule and Sam on the other one of the wagon team, they rode for more than three hours through the rapid shortening sunless afternoon, following no path, no trail even that he could discern, into a section of country he had never seen before.

Then he understood why Sam had made him ride the one-eyed mule which would not spook at the smell of blood, of wild animals.

The other one, the sound one, stopped short and tried to whirl and bolt even as Sam got down, jerking and wrenching at the rein while Sam held it, coaxing it forward with his voice since he did not dare risk

hitching it, drawing it forward while the boy dismounted from the marred one which would stand.

Then, standing beside Sam in the thick great gloom of ancient woods and the winter's dying afternoon, he looked quietly down at the rotted log scored and gutted with claw-marks and, in the wet earth beside it, the print of the enormous warped two-toed foot. Now he knew what he had heard in the hounds' voices in the woods that morning and what he had smelled when he peered under the kitchen where they huddled.

It was in him too, a little different because they were brute beasts and he was not, but only a little different — an eagerness, passive; an abjectness, a sense of his own fragility and impotence against the timeless woods, yet without doubt or dread; a flavour like brass in the sudden run of saliva in his mouth, a hard sharp constriction either in his brain or his stomach, he could not tell which and it did not matter; he knew only that for the first time he realised that the bear which had run in his listening and loomed in his dreams since before he could remember and which therefore must have existed in the listening and the dreams of his cousin and Major de Spain and even old General Compson before they began to remember in their turn, was a mortal animal and that they had departed for the camp each November with no actual intention of slaying it, not because it could not be slain but because so far they had no actual hope of being able to. "It will be tomorrow," he said.

"You mean we will try tomorrow," Sam said. "We aint got the dog yet." "We've got eleven," he said. "They ran him Monday."

"And you heard them," Sam said. "Saw them too. We aint got the dog yet. It wont take but one. But he aint there. Maybe he aint nowhere. The only other way will be for him to run by accident over somebody that had a gun and knowed how to shoot it."

"That wouldn't be me," the boy said. "It would be Walter or Major or —"

"It might," Sam said. "You watch close tomorrow. Because he's smart. That's how come he has lived this long. If he gets hemmed up and has got to pick out somebody to run over, he will pick out you."

"How?" he said. "How will he know..." He ceased. "You mean he already knows me, that I aint never been to the Big Bottom before, aint had time to find out yet whether I ..." He ceased again, staring at Sam; he said humbly, not even amazed: "It was me he was watching. I dont reckon he did need to come but once."

"You watch tomorrow," Sam said. "I reckon we better start back. It'll be long after dark now before we get to camp."

The next morning they started three hours earlier than they had ever done. Even Uncle Ash went, the cook, who called himself by profession a camp cook and who did little else save cook for Major de Spain's hunting and camping parties, yet who had been marked by the wilderness from simple juxtaposition to it until he responded as they all did, even the boy who until two weeks ago had never even seen the wilderness, to a hound's ripped ear and shoulder and the print of a crooked foot in a patch of wet earth. They rode.

It was too far to walk: the boy and Sam and Uncle Ash in the wagon with the dogs, his cousin and Major de Spain and General Compson and Boon and Walter and Tennie's Jim riding double on the horses; again the first grey light found him, as on that first morning two weeks ago, on the stand where Sam had placed and left him.

With the gun which was too big for him, the breech-loader which did not even belong to him but to Major de Spain and which he had fired only once, at a stump on the first day to learn the recoil and how to reload it with the paper shells, he stood against a big gum tree beside a little bayou whose black still water crept without motion out of a cane-brake, across a small clearing and into the cane again, where, invisible, a bird, the big woodpecker called Lord-to-God by negroes, clattered at a dead trunk.

It was a stand like any other stand, dissimilar only in incidentals to the one where he had stood each morning for two weeks; a territory new to him yet no less familiar than that other one which after two weeks he had come to believe he knew a little — the same solitude, the same loneliness through which frail and timorous man had merely passed without altering it, leaving no mark nor scar, which looked exactly as it must have looked when the first ancestor of Sam Fathers's Chickasaw predecessors crept into it and looked about him, club or stone axe or bone arrow drawn and ready, different only because, squatting at the edge of the kitchen, he had smelled the dogs huddled and cringing beneath it and saw the raked ear and side of the bitch that, as Sam had said, had to be brave once in order to keep on calling herself a dog, and saw yesterday in the earth beside the gutted log, the print of the living foot. He heard no dogs at all. He never did certainly hear them. He only heard the drumming of the woodpecker stop short off, and knew that the bear was looking at him.

He never saw it. He did not know whether it was facing him from the cane or behind him. He did not move, holding the useless gun which he knew now he would never fire at it, now or ever, tasting in his saliva that taint of brass which he had smelled in the huddled dogs when he peered under the kitchen.

Then it was gone. As abruptly as it had topped, the woodpecker's dry hammering set up again, and after a while he believed he even heard the dogs — a murmur, scarce a sound even, which he had probably been hearing for a time, perhaps a minute or two, before he remarked it, drifting into hearing and then out again, dying away. They came nowhere near him. If it was dogs he heard, he could not have sworn to it; if it was a bear they ran, it was another bear. It was Sam himself who emerged from the cane and crossed the bayou, the injured bitch following at heel as a bird dog is taught to walk. She came and crouched against his leg, trembling. "I didn't see him," he said. "I didn't, Sam."

"I know it," Sam said. "He done the looking. You didn't hear him neither, did you?"

“No,” the boy said. “I — —”

“He’s smart,” Sam said. “Too smart.” Again the boy saw in his eyes that quality of dark and brooding lambence as Sam looked down at the bitch trembling faintly and steadily against the boy’s leg. From her raked shoulder a few drops of fresh blood clung like bright berries. “Too big. We aint got the dog yet. But maybe some day.”

Because there would be a next time, after and after. He was only ten. It seemed to him that he could see them, the two of them, shadowy in the limbo from which time emerged and became time: the old bear absolved of mortality and himself who shared a little of it. Because he recognised now what he had smelled in the huddled dogs and tasted in his own saliva, recognised fear as a boy, a youth, recognises the existence of love and passion and experience which is his heritage but not yet his patrimony, from entering by chance the presence or perhaps even merely the bedroom of a woman who has loved and been loved by many men.

So I will have to see him, he thought, without dread or even hope. I will have to look at him. So it was in June of the next summer. They were at the camp again, celebrating Major de Spain’s and General Compson’s birthdays.

Although the one had been born in September and the other in the depth of winter and almost thirty years earlier, each June the two of them and McCaslin and Boon and Walter Ewell (and the boy too from now on) spent two weeks at the camp, fishing and shooting squirrels and turkey and running coons and wildcats with the dogs at night.

That is, Boon and the negroes (and the boy too now) fished and shot squirrels and ran the coons and cats, because the proven hunters, not only Major de Spain and old General Compson (who spent those two weeks sitting in a rocking-chair before a tremendous iron pot of Brunswick stew, stirring and tasting, with Uncle Ash to quarrel about how he was making it and Tennie’s Jim to pour whisky into the tin dipper from which he drank it) but even McCaslin and Walter Ewell,

who were still young enough, scorned such other than shooting the wild gobblers with pistols for wagers or to test their marksmanship.

That is, his cousin McCaslin and the others thought he was hunting squirrels. Until the third evening he believed that Sam Fathers thought so too. Each morning he would leave the camp right after breakfast. He had his own gun now, a new breech-loader, a Christmas gift; he would own and shoot it for almost seventy years, through two new pairs of barrels and locks and one new stock, until all that remained of the original gun was the silver-inlaid trigger-guard with his and McCaslin's engraved names and the date in 1878.

He found the tree beside the little bayou where he had stood that morning. Using the compass he ranged from that point; he was teaching himself to be better than a fair woodsman without even knowing he was doing it. On the third day he even found the gutted log where he had first seen the print.

It was almost completely crumbled now, healing with unbelievable speed, a passionate and almost visible relinquishment, back into the earth from which the tree had grown.

He ranged the summer woods now, green with gloom, if anything actually dimmer than they had been in November's grey dissolution, where even at noon the sun fell only in windless dappling upon the earth which never completely dried and which crawled with snakes — moccasins and watersnakes and rattlers, themselves the colour of the dappled gloom so that he would not always see them until they moved; returning to camp later and later and later, first day, second day, passing in the twilight of the third evening the little log pen enclosing the log barn where Sam was putting up the stock for the night. "You aint looked right yet," Sam said.

He stopped. For a moment he didn't answer. Then he said peacefully, in a peaceful rushing burst, as when a boy's miniature dam in a little brook gives way: "All right. Yes. But how? I went to the bayou. I even found that log again. I — —"

“I reckon that was all right. Likely he’s been watching you. You never saw his foot?”

“I ...” the boy said. “I didn’t ... I never thought ...”

“It’s the gun,” Sam said. He stood beside the fence, motionless, the old man, son of a negro slave and a Chickasaw chief, in the battered and faded overalls and the frayed five-cent straw hat which had been the badge of the negro’s slavery and was not the regalia of his freedom. The camp — the clearing, the house, the barn and its tiny lot with which Major de Spain in his turn had scratched punily and evanescently at the wilderness — faded in the dusk, back into the immemorial darkness of the woods. The gun, the boy thought. The gun. “You will have to choose,” Sam said.

He left the next morning before light, without breakfast, long before Uncle Ash would wake in his quilts on the kitchen floor and start the fire. He had only the compass and a stick for the snakes. He could go almost a mile before he would need to see the compass.

He sat on a log, the invisible compass in his hand, while the secret night-sounds which had ceased at his movements, scurried again and then fell still for good and the owls ceased and gave over to the waking day birds and there was light in the grey wet woods and he could see the compass.

He went fast yet still quietly, becoming steadily better and better as a woodsman without yet having time to realise it; he jumped a doe and a fawn, walked them out of the bed, close enough to see them — the crash of undergrowth, the white scut, the fawn scudding along behind her, faster than he had known it could have run. He was hunting right, upwind, as Sam had taught him, but that didn’t matter now.

He had left the gun; by his own will and relinquishment he had accepted not a gambit, not a choice, but a condition in which not only the bear’s heretofore inviolable anonymity but all the ancient rules and balances of hunter and hunted had been abrogated.

He would not even be afraid, not even in the moment when the fear would take him completely: blood, skin, bowels, bones, memory from the long time before it even became his memory — all save that thin clear quenchless lucidity which alone differed him from this bear and from all the other bears and bucks he would follow during almost seventy years, to which Sam had said: “Be scared.

You cant help that. But dont be afraid. Aint nothing in the woods going to hurt you if you dont corner it or it dont smell that you are afraid. A bear or a deer has got to be scared of a coward the same as a brave man has got to be.”

By noon he was far beyond the crossing on the little bayou, farther into the new and alien country than he had ever been, travelling now not only by the compass but by the old, heavy, biscuit-thick silver watch which had been his father’s. He had left the camp nine hours ago; nine hours from now, dark would already have been an hour old.

He stopped, for the first time since he had risen from the log when he could see the compass face at last, and looked about, mopping his sweating face on his sleeve. He had already relinquished, of his will, because of his need, in humility and peace and without regret, yet apparently that had not been enough, the leaving of the gun was not enough. He stood for a moment — a child, alien and lost in the green and soaring gloom of the markless wilderness.

Then he relinquished completely to it. It was the watch and the compass. He was still tainted. He removed the linked chain of the one and the looped thong of the other from his overalls and hung them on a bush and leaned the stick beside them and entered it.

When he realised he was lost, he did as Sam had coached and drilled him: made a cast to cross his back-track. He had not been going very fast for the last two or three hours, and he had gone even less fast since he left the compass and watch on the bush. So he went slower

still now, since the tree could not be very far; in fact, he found it before he really expected to and turned and went to it.

But there was no bush beneath it, no compass nor watch, so he did next as Sam had coached and drilled him: made this next circle in the opposite direction and much larger, so that the pattern of the two of them would bisect his track somewhere, but crossing no trace nor mark anywhere of his feet or any feet, and now he was going faster though still not panicked, his heart beating a little more rapidly but strong and steady enough, and this time it was not even the tree because there was a down log beside it which he had never seen before and beyond the log a little swamp, a seepage of moisture somewhere between earth and water, and he did what Sam had coached and drilled him as the next and the last, seeing as he sat down on the log the crooked print, the warped indentation in the wet ground which while he looked at it continued to fill with water until it was level full and the water began to overflow and the sides of the print began to dissolve away.

Even as he looked up he saw the next one, and, moving, the one beyond it; moving, not hurrying, running, but merely keeping pace with them as they appeared before him as though they were being shaped out of thin air just one constant pace short of where he would lose them for ever and be lost for ever himself, tireless, eager, without doubt or dread, panting a little above the strong rapid little hammer of his heart, emerging suddenly into a little glade and the wilderness coalesced. It rushed, soundless, and solidified — the trees, the bush, the compass and the watch glinting where a ray of sunlight touched them. Then he saw the bear.

It did not emerge, appear: it was just there, immobile, fixed in the green and windless noon's hot dappling, not as big as he had dreamed it but as big as he had expected, bigger, dimensionless against the dappled obscurity, looking at him.

Then it moved. It crossed the glade without haste, walking for an instant into the sun's full glare and out of it, and stopped again and looked back at him across one shoulder. Then it was gone. It didn't walk

into the woods. It faded, sank back into the wilderness without motion as he had watched a fish, a huge old bass, sink back into the dark depths of its pool and vanish without even any movement of its fins.

II

So he should have hated and feared Lion. He was thirteen then. He had killed his buck and Sam Fathers had marked his face with the hot blood, and in the next November he killed a bear. But before that accolade he had become as competent in the woods as many grown men with the same experience. By now he was a better woodsman than most grown men with more.

There was no territory within twenty-five miles of the camp that he did not know — bayou, ridge, landmark trees and path; he could have led anyone direct to any spot in it and brought him back.

He knew game trails that even Sam Fathers had never seen; in the third fall he found a buck's bedding-place by himself and unbeknown to his cousin he borrowed Walter Ewell's rifle and lay in wait for the buck at dawn and killed it when it walked back to the bed as Sam had told him how the old Chickasaw fathers did.

By now he knew the old bear's footprint better than he did his own, and not only the crooked one. He could see any one of the three sound prints and distinguish it at once from any other, and not only because of its size.

There were other bears within that fifty miles which left tracks almost as large, or at least so near that the one would have appeared larger only by juxtaposition. It was more than that. If Sam Fathers had been his mentor and the backyard rabbits and squirrels his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bear ran was his college and the old male bear itself, so long unwifed and childless as to have become its own ungendered progenitor, was his alma mater.

He could find the crooked print now whenever he wished, ten miles or five miles or sometimes closer than that, to the camp. Twice while on stand during the next three years he heard the dogs strike its trail and once even jump it by chance, the voices high, abject, almost human in their hysteria. Once, still-hunting with Walter Ewell's rifle, he saw it cross a long corridor of down timber where a tornado had passed.

It rushed through rather than across the tangle of trunks and branches as a locomotive would, faster than he had ever believed it could have moved, almost as fast as a deer even because the deer would have spent most of that distance in the air; he realised then why it would take a dog not only of abnormal courage but size and speed too ever to bring it to bay. He had a little dog at home, a mongrel, of the sort called fyce by negroes, a ratter, itself not much bigger than a rat and possessing that sort of courage which had long since stopped being bravery and had become foolhardiness.

He brought it with him one June and, timing them as if they were meeting an appointment with another human being, himself carrying the fyce with a sack over its head and Sam Fathers with a brace of the hounds on a rope leash, they lay downwind of the trail and actually ambushed the bear.

They were so close that it turned at bay although he realised later this might have been from surprise and amazement at the shrill and frantic uproar of the fyce. It turned at bay against the trunk of a big cypress, on its hind feet; it seemed to the boy that it would never stop rising, taller and taller, and even the two hounds seemed to have taken a kind of desperate and despairing courage from the fyce. Then he realised that the fyce was actually not going to stop.

He flung the gun down and ran. When he overtook and grasped the shrill, frantically pinwheeling little dog, it seemed to him that he was directly under the bear. He could smell it, strong and hot and rank. Sprawling, he looked up where it loomed and towered over him like a thunderclap. It was quite familiar, until he remembered: this was the way he had used to dream about it.

Then it was gone. He didn't see it go. He knelt, holding the frantic fyce with both hands, hearing the abased wailing of the two hounds drawing farther and farther away, until Sam came up, carrying the gun. He laid it quietly down beside the boy and stood looking down at him. "You've done seed him twice now, with a gun in your hands," he said. "This time you couldn't have missed him."

The boy rose. He still held the fyce. Even in his arms it continued to yap frantically, surging and straining toward the fading sound of the hounds like a collection of live-wire springs. The boy was panting a little. "Neither could you," he said. "You had the gun. Why didn't you shoot him?"

Sam didn't seem to have heard. He put out his hand and touched the little dog in the boy's arms which still yapped and strained even though the two hounds were out of hearing now. "He's done gone," Sam said. "You can slack off and rest now, until next time." He stroked the little dog until it began to grow quiet under his hand.

"You's almost the one we wants," he said. "You just aint big enough. We aint got that one yet. He will need to be just a little bigger than smart, and a little braver than either." He withdrew his hand from the fyce's head and stood looking into the woods where the bear and the hounds had vanished. "Somebody is going to, some day."

"I know it," the boy said. "That's why it must be one of us. So it wont be until the last day. When even he dont want it to last any longer."

So he should have hated and feared Lion. It was in the fourth summer, the fourth time he had made one in the celebration of Major de Spain's and General Compson's birthday. In the early spring Major de Spain's mare had foaled a horse colt.

One evening when Sam brought the horses and mules up to stable them for the night, the colt was missing and it was all he could do to get the frantic mare into the lot. He had thought at first to let the mare

lead him back to where she had become separated from the foal. But she would not do it. She would not even feint toward any particular part of the woods or even in any particular direction.

She merely ran, as if she couldn't see, still frantic with terror. She whirled and ran at Sam once, as if to attack him in some ultimate desperation, as if she could not for the moment realise that he was a man and a long-familiar one. He got her into the lot at last. It was too dark by that time to back-track her, to unravel the erratic course she had doubtless pursued.

He came to the house and told Major de Spain. It was an animal, of course, a big one, and the colt was dead now, wherever it was. They all knew that. "It's a panther," General Compson said at once. "The same one. That doe and fawn last March." Sam had sent Major de Spain word of it when Boon Hogganbeck came to the camp on a routine visit to see how the stock had wintered — the doe's throat torn out, and the beast had run down the helpless fawn and killed it too.

"Sam never did say that was a panther," Major de Spain said. Sam said nothing now, standing behind Major de Spain where they sat at supper, inscrutable, as if he were just waiting for them to stop talking so he could go home. He didn't even seem to be looking at anything. "A panther might jump a doe, and he wouldn't have much trouble catching the fawn afterward. But no panther would have jumped that colt with the dam right there with it.

It was Old Ben," Major de Spain said. "I'm disappointed in him. He has broken the rules. I didn't think he would have done that. He has killed mine and McCaslin's dogs, but that was all right. We gambled the dogs against him; we gave each other warning. But now he has come into my house and destroyed my property, out of season too. He broke the rules. It was Old Ben, Sam." Still Sam said nothing, standing there until Major de Spain should stop talking. "We'll back-track her tomorrow and see," Major de Spain said.

Sam departed. He would not live in the camp; he had built himself a little hut something like Joe Baker's, only stouter, tighter, on the bayou a quarter-mile away, and a stout log crib where he stored a little corn for the shoat he raised each year.

The next morning he was waiting when they waked. He had already found the colt. They did not even wait for breakfast. It was not far, not five hundred yards from the stable — the three-months colt lying on its side, its throat torn out and the entrails and one ham partly eaten. It lay not as if it had been dropped but as if it had been struck and hurled, and no cat-mark, no claw-mark where a panther would have gripped it while finding its throat.

They read the tracks where the frantic mare had circled and at last rushed in with that same ultimate desperation with which she had whirled on Sam Fathers yesterday evening, and the long tracks of dead and terrified running and those of the beast which had not even rushed at her when she advanced but had merely walked three or four paces toward her until she broke, and General Compson said, "Good God, what a wolf!"

Still Sam said nothing. The boy watched him while the men knelt, measuring the tracks. There was something in Sam's face now. It was neither exultation nor joy nor hope. Later, a man, the boy realised what it had been, and that Sam had known all the time what had made the tracks and what had torn the throat out of the doe in the spring and killed the fawn. It had been foreknowledge in Sam's face that morning. And he was glad, he told himself. He was old.

He had no children, no people, none of his blood anywhere above earth that he would ever meet again. And even if he were to, he could not have touched it, spoken to it, because for seventy years now he had had to be a negro. It was almost over now and he was glad.

They returned to camp and had breakfast and came back with guns and the hounds. Afterward the boy realised that they also should have known then what killed the colt as well as Sam Fathers did. But that

was neither the first nor the last time he had seen men rationalise from and even act upon their misconceptions.

After Boon, standing astride the colt, had whipped the dogs away from it with his belt, they snuffed at the tracks. One of them, a young dog hound without judgment yet, bayed once, and then ran for a few feet on what seemed to be a trail. Then they stopped, looking back at the men, eager enough, not baffled, merely questioning, as if they were asking. "Now what?" Then they rushed back to the colt, where Boon, still astride it, slashed at them with the belt.

"I never knew a trail to get cold that quick," General Compson said.

"Maybe a single wolf big enough to kill a colt with the dam right there beside it dont leave scent," Major de Spain said.

"Maybe it was a hant," Walter Ewell said. He looked at Tennie's Jim.

"Hah, Jim?"

Because the hounds would not run it, Major de Spain had Sam hunt out and find the tracks a hundred yards farther on and they put the dogs on it again and again the young one bayed and not one of them realised then that the hound was not baying like a dog striking game but was merely bellowing like a country dog whose yard has been invaded.

General Compson spoke to the boy and Boon and Tennie's Jim: to the squirrel hunters. "You boys keep the dogs with you this morning. He's probably hanging around somewhere, waiting to get his breakfast off the colt. You might strike him."

But they did not. The boy remembered how Sam stood watching them as they went into the woods with the leashed hounds — the Indian face in which he had never seen anything until it smiled, except that faint arching of the nostrils on that first morning when the hounds had found Old Ben. They took the hounds with them on the next day, though when they reached the place where they hoped to strike a fresh trail, the carcass of the colt was gone.

Then on the third morning Sam was waiting again, this time until they had finished breakfast. He said, "Come." He led them to his house, his little hut, to the corn-crib beyond it. He had removed the corn and had made a dead-fall of the door, baiting it with the colt's carcass; peering between the logs, they saw an animal almost the colour of a gun or pistol barrel, what little time they had to examine its colour or shape. It was not crouched nor even standing.

It was in motion, in the air, coming toward them — a heavy body crashing with tremendous force against the door so that the thick door jumped and clattered in its frame, the animal, whatever it was, hurling itself against the door again seemingly before it could have touched the floor and got a new purchase to spring from.

"Come away," Sam said, "fore he break his neck." Even when they retreated the heavy and measured crashes continued, the stout door jumping and clattering each time, and still no sound from the beast itself — no snarl, no cry.

"What in hell's name is it?" Major de Spain said.

"It's a dog," Sam said, his nostrils arching and collapsing faintly and steadily and that faint, fierce milkiness in his eyes again as on that first morning when the hounds had struck the old bear. "It's the dog."

"The dog?" Major de Spain said.

"That's gonter hold Old Ben."

"Dog the devil," Major de Spain said. "I'd rather have Old Ben himself in my pack than that brute. Shoot him."

"No," Sam said.

"You'll never tame him. How do you ever expect to make an animal like that afraid of you?"

"I dont want him tame," Sam said; again the boy watched his nostrils and the fierce milky light in his eyes. "But I almost rather he be tame than scared, of me or any man or any thing. But he wont be neither, of nothing."

“Then what are you going to do with it?”

“You can watch,” Sam said.

Each morning through the second week they would go to Sam’s crib. He had removed a few shingles from the roof and had put a rope on the colt’s carcass and had drawn it out when the trap fell. Each morning they would watch him lower a pail of water into the crib while the dog hurled itself tirelessly against the door and dropped back and leaped again.

It never made any sound and there was nothing frenzied in the act but only a cold and grim indomitable determination. Toward the end of the week it stopped jumping at the door.

Yet it had not weakened appreciably and it was not as if it had rationalised the fact that the door was not going to give. It was as if for that time it simply disdained to jump any longer. It was not down. None of them had ever seen it down.

It stood, and they could see it now — part mastiff, something of Airedale and something of a dozen other strains probably, better than thirty inches at the shoulders and weighing as they guessed almost ninety pounds, with cold yellow eyes and a tremendous chest and over all that strange colour like a blued gun-barrel.

Then the two weeks were up. They prepared to break camp. The boy begged to remain and his cousin let him. He moved into the little hut with Sam Fathers. Each morning he watched Sam lower the pail of water into the crib. By the end of that week the dog was down. It would rise and half stagger, half crawl to the water and drink and collapse again.

One morning it could not even reach the water, could not raise its forequarters even from the floor. Sam took a short stick and prepared to enter the crib. “Wait,” the boy said. “Let me get the gun — —”

“No,” Sam said. “He cant move now.” Nor could it. It lay on its side while Sam touched it, its head and the gaunted body, the dog lying motionless, the yellow eyes open. They were not fierce and there was nothing of petty malevolence in them, but a cold and almost impersonal malignance like some natural force. It was not even looking at Sam nor at the boy peering at it between the logs.

Sam began to feed it again. The first time he had to raise its head so it could lap the broth. That night he left a bowl of broth containing lumps of meat where the dog could reach it.

The next morning the bowl was empty and the dog was lying on its belly, its head up, the cold yellow eyes watching the door as Sam entered, no change whatever in the cold yellow eyes and still no sound from it even when it sprang, its aim and co-ordination still bad from weakness so that Sam had time to strike it down with the stick and leap from the crib and slam the door as the dog, still without having had time to get its feet under it to jump again seemingly, hurled itself against the door as if the two weeks of starving had never been.

At noon that day someone came whooping through the woods from the direction of the camp. It was Boon. He came and looked for a while between the logs, at the tremendous dog lying again on its belly, its head up, the yellow eyes blinking sleepily at nothing: the indomitable and unbroken spirit.

“What we better do,” Boon said, “is to let that son of a bitch go and catch Old Ben and run him on the dog.” He turned to the boy his weather-reddened and beetling face. “Get your traps together. Cass says for you to come on home. You been in here fooling with that horse-eating varmint long enough.”

Boon had a borrowed mule at the camp; the buggy was waiting at the edge of the bottom. He was at home that night. He told McCaslin about it. “Sam’s going to starve him again until he go in and touch him. Then he will feed him again. Then he will starve him again, if he has to.”

“But why?” McCaslin said. “What for? Even Sam will never tame that brute.”

“We dont want him tame. We want him like he is. We just want him to find out at last that the only way he can get out of that crib and stay out of it is to do what Sam or somebody tells him to do. He’s the dog that’s going to stop Old Ben and hold him. We’ve already named him. His name is Lion.”

Then November came at last. They returned to the camp. With General Compson and Major de Spain and his cousin and Walter and Boon he stood in the yard among the guns and bedding and boxes of food and watched Sam Fathers and Lion come up the lane from the lot — the Indian, the old man in battered overalls and rubber boots and a worn sheepskin coat and a hat which had belonged to the boy’s father; the tremendous dog pacing gravely beside him.

The hounds rushed out to meet them and stopped, except the young one which still had but little of judgment. It ran up to Lion, fawning. Lion didn’t snap at it. He didn’t even pause. He struck it rolling and yelping for five or six feet with a blow of one paw as a bear would have done and came on into the yard and stood, blinking sleepily at nothing, looking at no one, while Boon said, “Jesus. Jesus. — Will he let me touch him?”

“You can touch him,” Sam said. “He dont care. He dont care about nothing or nobody.”

The boy watched that too. He watched it for the next two years from that moment when Boon touched Lion’s head and then knelt beside him, feeling the bones and muscles, the power. It was as if Lion were a woman — or perhaps Boon was the woman.

That was more like it — the big, grave, sleepy-seeming dog which, as Sam Fathers said, cared about no man and no thing; and the violent, insensitive, hard-faced man with his touch of remote Indian blood and the mind almost of a child. He watched Boon take over Lion’s feeding

from Sam and Uncle Ash both. He would see Boon squatting in the cold rain beside the kitchen while Lion ate.

Because Lion neither slept nor ate with the other dogs though none of them knew where he did sleep until in the second November, thinking until then that Lion slept in his kennel beside Sam Fathers's hut, when the boy's cousin McCaslin said something about it to Sam by sheer chance and Sam told him.

And that night the boy and Major de Spain and McCaslin with a lamp entered the back room where Boon slept — the little, tight, airless room rank with the smell of Boon's unwashed body and his wet hunting-clothes — where Boon, snoring on his back, choked and waked and Lion raised his head beside him and looked back at them from his cold, slumbrous yellow eyes.

"Damn it, Boon," McCaslin said. "Get that dog out of here. He's got to run Old Ben tomorrow morning. How in hell do you expect him to smell anything fainter than a skunk after breathing you all night?"

"The way I smell aint hurt my nose none that I ever noticed," Boon said.

"It wouldn't matter if it had," Major de Spain said. "We're not depending on you to trail a bear. Put him outside. Put him under the house with the other dogs."

Boon began to get up. "He'll kill the first one that happens to yawn or sneeze in his face or touches him."

"I reckon not," Major de Spain said. "None of them are going to risk yawning in his face or touching him either, even asleep. Put him outside. I want his nose right tomorrow. Old Ben fooled him last year. I dont think he will do it again."

Boon put on his shoes without lacing them; in his long soiled underwear, his hair still tousled from sleep, he and Lion went out. The others returned to the front room and the poker game where McCaslin's and Major de Spain's hands waited for them on the table.

After a while McCaslin said, "Do you want me to go back and look again?"

"No," Major de Spain said. "I call," he said to Walter Ewell. He spoke to McCaslin again. "If you do, dont tell me. I am beginning to see the first sign of my increasing age: I dont like to know that my orders have been disobeyed, even when I knew when I gave them that they would be. — A small pair," he said to Walter Ewell.

"How small?" Walter said.

"Very small," Major de Spain said.

And the boy, lying beneath his piled quilts and blankets waiting for sleep, knew likewise that Lion was already back in Boon's bed, for the rest of that night and the next one and during all the nights of the next November and the next one. He thought then: I wonder what Sam thinks.

He could have Lion with him, even if Boon is a white man. He could ask Major or McCaslin either. And more than that. It was Sam's hand that touched Lion first and Lion knows it. Then he became a man and he knew that too. It had been all right. That was the way it should have been. Sam was the chief, the prince; Boon, the plebeian, was his huntsman. Boon should have nursed the dogs.

On the first morning that Lion led the pack after Old Ben, seven strangers appeared in the camp. They were swampers: gaunt, malaria-ridden men appearing from nowhere, who ran trap-lines for coons or perhaps farmed little patches of cotton and corn along the edge of the bottom, in clothes but little better than Sam Fathers's and nowhere near as good as Tennie's Jim's, with worn shotguns and rifles, already squatting patiently in the cold drizzle in the side yard when day broke.

They had a spokesman; afterward Sam Fathers told Major de Spain how all during the past summer and fall they had drifted into the camp singly or in pairs and threes, to look quietly at Lion for a while and then go away: "Mawnin, Major.

We heerd you was aimin to put that ere blue dawg on that old two-toed bear this mawnin. We figgered we'd come up and watch, if you dont mind. We wont do no shooting, lessen he runs over us."

"You are welcome," Major de Spain said. "You are welcome to shoot. He's more your bear than ours."

"I reckon that aint no lie. I done fed him enough cawn to have a sheer in him. Not to mention a shoat three years ago."

"I reckon I got a sheer too," another said. "Only it aint in the bear." Major de Spain looked at him. He was chewing tobacco. He spat. "Hit was a heifer calf. Nice un too. Last year. When I finally found her, I reckon she looked about like that colt of yourn looked last June."

"Oh," Major de Spain said. "Be welcome. If you see game in front of my dogs, shoot it."

Nobody shot Old Ben that day. No man saw him. The dogs jumped him within a hundred yards of the glade where the boy had seen him that day in the summer of his eleventh year. The boy was less than a quarter-mile away.

He heard the jump but he could distinguish no voice among the dogs that he did not know and therefore would be Lion's, and he thought, believed, that Lion was not among them. Even the fact that they were going much faster than he had ever heard them run behind Old Ben before and that the high thin note of hysteria was missing now from their voices was not enough to disabuse him.

He didn't comprehend until that night, when Sam told him that Lion would never cry on a trail. "He gonter growl when he catches Old Ben's throat," Sam said. "But he aint gonter never holler, no more than he ever done when he was jumping at that two-inch door. It's that blue dog in him. What you call it?"

"Airedale," the boy said.

Lion was there; the jump was just too close to the river. When Boon returned with Lion about eleven that night, he swore that Lion had stopped Old Ben once but that the hounds would not go in and Old Ben broke away and took to the river and swam for miles down it and he and Lion went down one bank for about ten miles and crossed and came up the other but it had begun to get dark before they struck any trail where Old Ben had come up out of the water, unless he was still in the water when he passed the ford where they crossed.

Then he fell to cursing the hounds and ate the supper Uncle Ash had saved for him and went off to bed and after a while the boy opened the door of the little stale room thunderous with snoring and the great grave dog raised its head from Boon's pillow and blinked at him for a moment and lowered its head again.

When the next November came and the last day, the day on which it was now becoming traditional to save for Old Ben, there were more than a dozen strangers waiting. They were not all swampers this time.

Some of them were townsmen, from other county seats like Jefferson, who had heard about Lion and Old Ben and had come to watch the great blue dog keep his yearly rendezvous with the old two-toed bear. Some of them didn't even have guns and the hunting-clothes and boots they wore had been on a store shelf yesterday.

This time Lion jumped Old Ben more than five miles from the river and bayed and held him and this time the hounds went in, in a sort of desperate emulation. The boy heard them; he was that near.

He heard Boon whooping; he heard the two shots when General Compson delivered both barrels, one containing five buckshot, the other a single ball, into the bear from as close as he could force his almost unmanageable horse. He heard the dogs when the bear broke free again.

He was running now; panting, stumbling, his lungs bursting, he reached the place where General Compson had fired and where Old Ben had

killed two of the hounds. He saw the blood from General Compson's shots, but he could go no farther. He stopped, leaning against a tree for his breathing to ease and his heart to slow, hearing the sound of the dogs as it faded on and died away.

In camp that night — they had as guests five of the still terrified strangers in new hunting coats and boots who had been lost all day until Sam Fathers went out and got them — he heard the rest of it: how Lion had stopped and held the bear again but only the one-eyed mule which did not mind the smell of wild blood would approach and Boon was riding the mule and Boon had never been known to hit anything.

He shot at the bear five times with his pump gun, touching nothing, and Old Ben killed another hound and broke free once more and reached the river and was gone. Again Boon and Lion hunted as far down one bank as they dared.

Too far; they crossed in the first of dusk and dark overtook them within a mile. And this time Lion found the broken trail, the blood perhaps, in the darkness where Old Ben had come up out of the water, but Boon had him on a rope, luckily, and he got down from the mule and fought Lion hand-to-hand until he got him back to camp.

This time Boon didn't even curse. He stood in the door, muddy, spent, his huge gargoyle's face tragic and still amazed. "I missed him," he said. "I was in twenty-five feet of him and I missed him five times."

"But we have drawn blood," Major de Spain said. "General Compson drew blood. We have never done that before."

"But I missed him," Boon said. "I missed him five times. With Lion looking right at me."

"Never mind," Major de Spain said. "It was a damned fine race. And we drew blood. Next year we'll let General Compson or Walter ride Katie, and we'll get him."

Then McCaslin said, "Where is Lion, Boon?"

“I left him at Sam’s,” Boon said. He was already turning away. “I aint fit to sleep with him.”

So he should have hated and feared Lion. Yet he did not. It seemed to him that there was a fatality in it. It seemed to him that something, he didn’t know what, was beginning; had already begun. It was like the last act on a set stage. It was the beginning of the end of something, he didn’t know what except that he would not grieve. He would be humble and proud that he had been found worthy to be a part of it too or even just to see it too.

iii

It was December. It was the coldest December he had ever remembered. They had been in camp four days over two weeks, waiting for the weather to soften so that Lion and Old Ben could run their yearly race.

Then they would break camp and go home. Because of these unforeseen additional days which they had had to pass waiting on the weather, with nothing to do but play poker, the whisky had given out and he and Boon were being sent to Memphis with a suitcase and a note from Major de Spain to Mr Semmes, the distiller, to get more. That is, Major de Spain and McCaslin were sending Boon to get the whisky and sending him to see that Boon got back with it or most of it or at least some of it.

Tennie’s Jim waked him at three. He dressed rapidly, shivering, not so much from the cold because a fresh fire already boomed and roared on the hearth, but in that dead winter hour when the blood and the heart are slow and sleep is incomplete.

He crossed the gap between house and kitchen, the gap of iron earth beneath the brilliant and rigid night where dawn would not begin for three hours yet, tasting, tongue palate and to the very bottom of his lungs the searing dark, and entered the kitchen, the lamp-lit warmth where the stove glowed, fogging the windows, and where Boon already sat at the table at breakfast, hunched over his plate, almost in his plate, his working jaws blue with stubble and his face innocent of water and his coarse, horse-mane hair innocent of comb — the quarter Indian,

grandson of a Chickasaw squaw, who on occasion resented with his hard and furious fists the intimation of one single drop of alien blood and on others, usually after whisky, affirmed with the same fists and the same fury that his father had been the full-blood Chickasaw and even a chief and that even his mother had been only half white.

He was four inches over six feet; he had the mind of a child, the heart of a horse, and little hard shoe-button eyes without depth or meanness or generosity or viciousness or gentleness or anything else, in the ugliest face the boy had ever seen.

It looked like somebody had found a walnut a little larger than a football and with a machinist's hammer had shaped features into it and then painted it, mostly red; not Indian red but a fine bright ruddy colour which whisky might have had something to do with but which was mostly just happy and violent out-of-doors, the wrinkles in it not the residue of the forty years it had survived but from squinting into the sun or into the gloom of cane-brakes where game had run, baked into it by the camp fires before which he had lain trying to sleep on the cold November or December ground while waiting for daylight so he could rise and hunt again, as though time were merely something he walked through as he did through air, ageing him no more than air did.

He was brave, faithful, improvident and unreliable; he had neither profession job nor trade and owned one vice and one virtue: whisky, and that absolute and unquestioning fidelity to Major de Spain and the boy's cousin McCaslin. "Sometimes I'd call them both virtues," Major de Spain said once. "Or both vices," McCaslin said.

He ate his breakfast, hearing the dogs under the kitchen, wakened by the smell of frying meat or perhaps by the feet overhead. He heard Lion once, short and peremptory, as the best hunter in any camp has only to speak once to all save the fools, and none other of Major de Spain's and McCaslin's dogs were Lion's equal in size and strength and perhaps even in courage, but they were not fools; Old Ben had killed the last fool among them last year.

Tennie's Jim came in as they finished. The wagon was outside. Ash decided he would drive them over to the log-line where they would flag the outbound log-train and let Tennie's Jim wash the dishes. The boy knew why. It would not be the first time he had listened to old Ash badgering Boon.

It was cold. The wagon wheels banged and clattered on the frozen ground; the sky was fixed and brilliant. He was not shivering, he was shaking, slow and steady and hard, the food he had just eaten still warm and solid inside him while his outside shook slow and steady around it as though his stomach floated loose. "They wont run this morning," he said. "No dog will have any nose today."

"Cep Lion," Ash said. "Lion dont need no nose. All he need is a bear." He had wrapped his feet in towsacks and he had a quilt from his pallet bed on the kitchen floor drawn over his head and wrapped around him until in the thin brilliant starlight he looked like nothing at all that the boy had ever seen before.

"He run a bear through a thousand-acre ice-house. Catch him too. Them other dogs dont matter because they aint going to keep up with Lion nohow, long as he got a bear in front of him."

"What's wrong with the other dogs?" Boon said. "What the hell do you know about it anyway? This is the first time you've had your tail out of that kitchen since we got here except to chop a little wood."

"Aint nothing wrong with them," Ash said. "And long as it's left up to them, aint nothing going to be. I just wish I had knowed all my life how to take care of my health good as them hounds knows."

"Well, they aint going to run this morning," Boon said. His voice was harsh and positive. "Major promised they wouldn't until me and Ike get back."

"Weather gonter break today. Gonter soft up. Rain by night." Then Ash laughed, chuckled, somewhere inside the quilt which concealed even

his face. "Hum up here, mules!" he said, jerking the reins so that the mules leaped forward and snatched the lurching and banging wagon for several feet before they slowed again into their quick, short-paced, rapid plodding. "Sides, I like to know why Major need to wait on you. It's Lion he aiming to use. I aint never heard tell of you bringing no bear nor no other kind of meat into this camp."

Now Boon's going to curse Ash or maybe even hit him, the boy thought. But Boon never did, never had; the boy knew he never would even though four years ago Boon had shot five times with a borrowed pistol at a negro on the street in Jefferson, with the same result as when he had shot five times at Old Ben last fall.

"By God," Boon said, "he aint going to put Lion or no other dog on nothing until I get back tonight. Because he promised me. Whip up them mules and keep them whipped up. Do you want me to freeze to death?"

They reached the log-line and built a fire. After a while the log-train came up out of the woods under the paling east and Boon flagged it. Then in the warm caboose the boy slept again while Boon and the conductor and brakeman talked about Lion and Old Ben as people later would talk about Sullivan and Kilrain and, later still, about Dempsey and Tunney.

Dozing, swaying as the springless caboose lurched and clattered, he would hear them still talking, about the shoats and calves Old Ben had killed and the cribs he had rifled and the traps and deadfalls he had wrecked and the lead he probably carried under his hide — Old Ben, the two-toed bear in a land where bears with trap-ruined feet had been called Two-Toe or Three-Toe or Cripple-Foot for fifty years, only Old Ben was an extra bear (the head bear, General Compson called him) and so had earned a name such as a human man could have worn and not been sorry.

They reached Hoke's at sunup. They emerged from the warm caboose in their hunting clothes, the muddy boots and stained khaki and Boon's

blue unshaven jowls. But that was all right. Hoke's was a sawmill and commissary and two stores and a loading-chute on a sidetrack from the main line, and all the men in it wore boots and khaki too.

Presently the Memphis train came. Boon bought three packages of popcorn-and-molasses and a bottle of beer from the news butch and the boy went to sleep again to the sound of his chewing.

But in Memphis it was not all right. It was as if the high buildings and the hard pavements, the fine carriages and the horse cars and the men in starched collars and neckties made their boots and khaki look a little rougher and a little muddier and made Boon's beard look worse and more unshaven and his face look more and more like he should never have brought it out of the woods at all or at least out of reach of Major de Spain or McCaslin or someone who knew it and could have said, "Dont be afraid.

He wont hurt you." He walked through the station, on the slick floor, his face moving as he worked the popcorn out of his teeth with his tongue, his legs spraddled and stiff in the hips as if he were walking on buttered glass, and that blue stubble on his face like the filings from a new gun-barrel.

They passed the first saloon. Even through the closed doors the boy could seem to smell the sawdust and the reek of old drink. Boon began to cough. He coughed for something less than a minute. "Damn this cold," he said. "I'd sure like to know where I got it."

"Back there in the station," the boy said.

Boon had started to cough again. He stopped. He looked at the boy. "What?" he said.

"You never had it when we left camp nor on the train either." Boon looked at him, blinking. Then he stopped blinking. He didn't cough again. He said quietly:

"Lend me a dollar. Come on. You've got it. If you ever had one, you've still got it. I dont mean you are tight with your money because you aint.

You just dont never seem to ever think of nothing you want. When I was sixteen a dollar bill melted off of me before I even had time to read the name of the bank that issued it.” He said quietly: “Let me have a dollar, Ike.”

“You promised Major. You promised McCaslin. Not till we get back to camp.”

“All right,” Boon said in that quiet and patient voice. “What can I do on just one dollar? You aint going to lend me another.”

“You’re damn right I aint,” the boy said, his voice quiet too, cold with rage which was not at Boon, remembering: Boon snoring in a hard chair in the kitchen so he could watch the clock and wake him and McCaslin and drive them the seventeen miles in to Jefferson to catch the train to Memphis; the wild, never-bridled Texas paint pony which he had persuaded McCaslin to let him buy and which he and Boon had bought at auction for four dollars and seventy-five cents and fetched home wired between two gentle old mares with pieces of barbed wire and which had never even seen shelled corn before and didn’t even know what it was unless the grains were bugs maybe and at last (he was ten and Boon had been ten all his life) Boon said the pony was gentled and with a towsack over its head and four negroes to hold it they backed it into an old two-wheeled cart and hooked up the gear and he and Boon got up and Boon said, “All right, boys.

Let him go” and one of the negroes — it was Tennie’s Jim — snatched the tow-sack off and leaped for his life and they lost the first wheel against a post of the open gate only at that moment Boon caught him by the scruff of the neck and flung him into the roadside ditch so he only saw the rest of it in fragments: the other wheel as it slammed through the side gate and crossed the back yard and leaped up on to the gallery and scraps of the cart here and there along the road and Boon vanishing rapidly on his stomach in the leaping and spurting dust and still holding the reins until they broke too and two days later they finally caught the pony seven miles away still wearing the hames and

the headstall of the bridle around its neck like a duchess with two necklaces at one time. He gave Boon the dollar.

“All right,” Boon said. “Come on in out of the cold.”

“I aint cold,” he said.

“You can have some lemonade.”

“I dont want any lemonade.”

The door closed behind him. The sun was well up now. It was a brilliant day, though Ash had said it would rain before night. Already it was warmer; they could run tomorrow. He felt the old lift of the heart, as pristine as ever, as on the first day; he would never lose it, no matter how old in hunting and pursuit: the best, the best of all breathing, the humility and the pride. He must stop thinking about it.

Already it seemed to him that he was running, back to the station, to the tracks themselves: the first train going south; he must stop thinking about it. The street was busy. He watched the big Norman draught horses, the Percherons; the trim carriages from which the men in the fine overcoats and the ladies rosy in furs descended and entered the station. (They were still next door to it but one.)

Twenty years ago his father had ridden into Memphis as a member of Colonel Sartoris’s horse in Forrest’s command, up Main street and (the tale told) into the lobby of the Gayoso Hotel where the Yankee officers sat in the leather chairs spitting into the tall bright cuspidors and then out again, scot-free — —

The door opened behind him. Boon was wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. “All right,” he said. “Let’s go tend to it and get the hell out of here.”

They went and had the suitcase packed. He never knew where or when Boon got the other bottle. Doubtless Mr Semmes gave it to him. When they reached Hoke’s again at sundown, it was empty. They could get a return train to Hoke’s in two hours; they went straight back to the station as Major de Spain and then McCaslin had told Boon to do and

then ordered him to do and had sent the boy along to see that he did. Boon took the first drink from his bottle in the wash-room.

A man in a uniform cap came to tell him he couldn't drink there and looked at Boon's face once and said nothing. The next time he was pouring into his water glass beneath the edge of a table in the restaurant when the manager (she was a woman) did tell him he couldn't drink there and he went back to the wash-room. He had been telling the negro waiter and all the other people in the restaurant who couldn't help but hear him and who had never heard of Lion and didn't want to, about Lion and Old Ben. Then he happened to think of the zoo.

He had found out that there was another train to Hoke's at three o'clock and so they would spend the time at the zoo and take the three o'clock train until he came back from the wash-room for the third time. Then they would take the first train back to camp, get Lion and come back to the zoo where, he said, the bears were fed on ice cream and lady fingers and he would match Lion against them all.

So they missed the first train, the one they were supposed to take, but he got Boon on to the three o'clock train and they were all right again, with Boon not even going to the wash-room now but drinking in the aisle and talking about Lion and the men he buttonholed no more daring to tell Boon he couldn't drink there than the man in the station had dared.

When they reached Hoke's at sundown, Boon was asleep. The boy waked him at last and got him and the suitcase off the train and he even persuaded him to eat some supper at the sawmill commissary.

So he was all right when they got in the caboose of the log-train to go back into the woods, with the sun going down red and the sky already overcast and the ground would not freeze tonight.

It was the boy who slept now, sitting behind the ruby stove while the springless caboose jumped and clattered and Boon and the brakeman and the conductor talked about Lion and Old Ben because they knew

what Boon was talking about because this was home. "Overcast and already thawing," Boon said. "Lion will get him tomorrow."

It would have to be Lion, or somebody. It would not be Boon. He had never hit anything bigger than a squirrel that anybody ever knew, except the negro woman that day when he was shooting at the negro man.

He was a big negro and not ten feet away but Boon shot five times with the pistol he had borrowed from Major de Spain's negro coachman and the negro he was shooting at outed with a dollar-and-a-half mail-order pistol and would have burned Boon down with it only it never went off, it just went snicksnicksnicksnicksnick five times and Boon still blasting away and he broke a plate-glass window that cost McCaslin forty-five dollars and hit a negro woman who happened to be passing in the leg only Major de Spain paid for that; he and McCaslin cut cards, the plate-glass window against the negro woman's leg.

And the first day on stand this year, the first morning in camp, the buck ran right over Boon; he heard Boon's old pump gun go whow. whow. whow. whow. whow. and then his voice: "God damn, here he comes! Head him! Head him!" and when he got there the buck's tracks and the five exploded shells were not twenty paces apart.

There were five guests in camp that night, from Jefferson: Mr Bayard Sartoris and his son and General Compson's son and two others. And the next morning he looked out the window, into the grey thin drizzle of daybreak which Ash had predicted, and there they were, standing and squatting beneath the thin rain, almost two dozen of them who had fed Old Ben corn and shoats and even calves for ten years, in their worn hats and hunting coats and overalls which any town negro would have thrown away or burned and only the rubber boots strong and sound, and the worn and blueless guns and some even without guns.

While they ate breakfast a dozen more arrived, mounted and on foot: loggers from the camp thirteen miles below and sawmill men from Hoke's and the only gun among them that one which the log-train

conductor carried: so that when they went into the woods this morning Major de Spain led a party almost as strong, excepting that some of them were not armed, as some he had led in the last darkening days of '64 and '65. The little yard would not hold them.

They overflowed it, into the lane where Major de Spain sat his mare while Ash in his dirty apron thrust the greasy cartridges into his carbine and passed it up to him and the great grave blue dog stood at his stirrup not as a dog stands but as a horse stands, blinking his sleepy topaz eyes at nothing, deaf even to the yelling of the hounds which Boon and Tennie's Jim held on leash.

"We'll put General Compson on Katie this morning," Major de Spain said. "He drew blood last year; if he'd had a mule then that would have stood, he would have — —"

"No," General Compson said. "I'm too old to go helling through the woods on a mule or a horse or anything else any more. Besides, I had my chance last year and missed it. I'm going on a stand this morning. I'm going to let that boy ride Katie."

"No, wait," McCaslin said. "Ike's got the rest of his life to hunt bears in. Let somebody else — —"

"No," General Compson said. "I want Ike to ride Katie. He's already a better woodsman than you or me either and in another ten years he'll be as good as Walter."

At first he couldn't believe it, not until Major de Spain spoke to him. Then he was up, on the one-eyed mule which would not spook at wild blood, looking down at the dog motionless at Major de Spain's stirrup, looking in the grey streaming light bigger than a calf, bigger than he knew it actually was — the big head, the chest almost as big as his own, the blue hide beneath which the muscles flinched or quivered to no touch since the heart which drove blood to them loved no man and no thing, standing as a horse stands yet different from a horse which infers only weight and speed while Lion inferred not only courage and all else that went to make up the will and desire to pursue and kill, but

endurance, the will and desire to endure beyond all imaginable limits of flesh in order to overtake and slay.

Then the dog looked at him. It moved its head and looked at him across the trivial uproar of the hounds, out of the yellow eyes as depthless as Boon's, as free as Boon's of meanness or generosity or gentleness or viciousness. They were just cold and sleepy. Then it blinked, and he knew it was not looking at him and never had been, without even bothering to turn its head away.

That morning he heard the first cry. Lion had already vanished while Sam and Tennie's Jim were putting saddles on the mule and horse which had drawn the wagon and he watched the hounds as they crossed and cast, snuffing and whimpering, until they too disappeared.

Then he and Major de Spain and Sam and Tennie's Jim rode after them and heard the first cry out of the wet and thawing woods not two hundred yards ahead, high, with that abject, almost human quality he had come to know, and the other hounds joining in until the gloomed woods rang and clamoured. They rode then.

It seemed to him that he could actually see the big blue dog boring on, silent, and the bear too: the thick, locomotive-like shape which he had seen that day four years ago crossing the blow-down, crashing on ahead of the dogs faster than he had believed it could have moved, drawing away even from the running mules.

He heard a shotgun, once. The woods had opened, they were going fast, the clamour faint and fading on ahead; they passed the man who had fired — a swamper, a pointing arm, a gaunt face, the small black orifice of his yelling studded with rotten teeth.

He heard the changed note in the hounds' uproar and two hundred yards ahead he saw them. The bear had turned. He saw Lion drive in without pausing and saw the bear strike him aside and lunge into the yelling hounds and kill one of them almost in its tracks and whirl and run again. Then they were in a streaming tide of dogs. He heard Major

de Spain and Tennie's Jim shouting and the pistol sound of Tennie's Jim's leather thong as he tried to turn them.

Then he and Sam Fathers were riding alone. One of the hounds had kept on with Lion though. He recognised its voice. It was the young hound which even a year ago had had no judgment and which, by the lights of the other hounds anyway, still had none. Maybe that's what courage is, he thought. "Right," Sam said behind him. "Right. We got to turn him from the river if we can."

Now they were in cane: a brake. He knew the path through it as well as Sam did. They came out of the undergrowth and struck the entrance almost exactly. It would traverse the brake and come out on to a high open ridge above the river. He heard the flat clap of Walter Ewell's rifle, then two more. "No," Sam said. "I can hear the hound. Go on."

They emerged from the narrow roofless tunnel of snapping and hissing cane, still galloping, on to the open ridge below which the thick yellow river, reflectionless in the grey and streaming light, seemed not to move. Now he could hear the hound too.

It was not running. The cry was a high frantic yapping and Boon was running along the edge of the bluff, his old gun leaping and jouncing against his back on its sling made of a piece of cotton plough-line. He whirled and ran up to them, wild-faced, and flung himself on to the mule behind the boy. "That damn boat!" he cried. "It's on the other side! He went straight across! Lion was too close to him! That little hound too! Lion was so close I couldn't shoot! Go on!" he cried, beating his heels into the mule's flanks. "Go on!"

They plunged down the bank, slipping and sliding in the thawed earth, crashing through the willows and into the water. He felt no shock, no cold, he on one side of the swimming mule, grasping the pommel with one hand and holding his gun above the water with the other, Boon opposite him. Sam was behind them somewhere, and then the river, the water about them, was full of dogs.

They swam faster than the mules; they were scrabbling up the bank before the mules touched bottom. Major de Spain was whooping from the bank they had just left and, looking back, he saw Tennie's Jim and the horse as they went into the water.

Now the woods ahead of them and the rain-heavy air were one uproar. It rang and clamoured; it echoed and broke against the bank behind them and reformed and clamoured and rang until it seemed to the boy that all the hounds which had ever bayed game in this land were yelling down at him.

He got his leg over the mule as it came up out of the water. Boon didn't try to mount again. He grasped one stirrup as they went up the bank and crashed through the undergrowth which fringed the bluff and saw the bear, on its hind feet, its back against a tree while the bellowing hounds swirled around it and once more Lion drove in, leaping clear of the ground.

This time the bear didn't strike him down. It caught the dog in both arms, almost loverlike, and they both went down. He was off the mule now. He drew back both hammers of the gun but he could see nothing but moiling spotted houndbodies until the bear surged up again.

Boon was yelling something, he could not tell what; he could see Lion still clinging to the bear's throat and he saw the bear, half erect, strike one of the hounds with one paw and hurl it five or six feet and then, rising and rising as though it would never stop, stand erect again and begin to rake at Lion's belly with its forepaws.

Then Boon was running. The boy saw the gleam of the blade in his hand and watched him leap among the hounds, hurdling them, kicking them aside as he ran, and fling himself astride the bear as he had hurled himself on to the mule, his legs locked around the bear's belly, his left arm under the bear's throat where Lion clung, and the glint of the knife as it rose and fell.

It fell just once. For an instant they almost resembled a piece of statuary: the clinging dog, the bear, the man astride its back, working and probing the buried blade. Then they went down, pulled over backward by Boon's weight, Boon underneath.

It was the bear's back which reappeared first but at once Boon was astride it again. He had never released the knife and again the boy saw the almost infinitesimal movement of his arm and shoulder as he probed and sought; then the bear surged erect, raising with it the man and the dog too, and turned and still carrying the man and the dog it took two or three steps toward the woods on his hind feet as a man would have walked and crashed down.

It didn't collapse, crumple. It fell all of a piece, as a tree falls, so that all three of them, man dog and bear, seemed to bounce once.

He and Tennie's Jim ran forward. Boon was kneeling at the bear's head. His left ear was shredded, his left coat sleeve was completely gone, his right boot had been ripped from knee to instep; the bright blood thinned in the thin rain down his leg and hand and arm and down the side of his face which was no longer wild but was quite calm.

Together they prised Lion's jaws from the bear's throat. "Easy, goddamn it," Boon said. "Cant you see his guts are all out of him?" He began to remove his coat. He spoke to Tennie's Jim in that calm voice: "Bring the boat up. It's about a hundred yards down the bank there.

I saw it." Tennie's Jim rose and went away. Then, and he could not remember if it had been a call or an exclamation from Tennie's Jim or if he had glanced up by chance, he saw Tennie's Jim stooping and saw Sam Fathers lying motionless on his face in the trampled mud.

The mule had not thrown him. He remembered that Sam was down too even before Boon began to run. There was no mark on him whatever and when he and Boon turned him over, his eyes were open and he said something in that tongue which he and Joe Baker had used to speak together.

But he couldn't move. Tennie's Jim brought the skiff up; they could hear him shouting to Major de Spain across the river. Boon wrapped Lion in his hunting coat and carried him down to the skiff and they carried Sam down and returned and hitched the bear to the one-eyed mule's saddlebow with Tennie's Jim's leash-thong and dragged him down to the skiff and got him into it and left Tennie's Jim to swim the horse and the two mules back across.

Major de Spain caught the bow of the skiff as Boon jumped out and past him before it touched the bank. He looked at Old Ben and said quietly: "Well." Then he walked into the water and leaned down and touched Sam and Sam looked up at him and said something in that old tongue he and Joe Baker spoke. "You dont know what happened?" Major de Spain said.

"No, sir," the boy said. "It wasn't the mule. It wasn't anything. He was off the mule when Boon ran in on the bear. Then we looked up and he was lying on the ground." Boon was shouting at Tennie's Jim, still in the middle of the river.

"Come on, goddamn it!" he said. "Bring me that mule!"
"What do you want with a mule?" Major de Spain said.

Boon didn't even look at him. "I'm going to Hoke's to get the doctor," he said in that calm voice, his face quite calm beneath the steady thinning of the bright blood.

"You need a doctor yourself," Major de Spain said. "Tennie's Jim — —"

"Damn that," Boon said. He turned on Major de Spain. His face was still calm, only his voice was a pitch higher. "Can't you see his goddamn guts are all out of him?"

"Boon!" Major de Spain said. They looked at one another. Boon was a good head taller than Major de Spain; even the boy was taller now than Major de Spain.

"I've got to get the doctor," Boon said. "His goddamn guts — —"

“All right,” Major de Spain said. Tennie’s Jim came up out of the water. The horse and the sound mule had already scented Old Ben; they surged and plunged all the way up to the top of the bluff, dragging Tennie’s Jim with them, before he could stop them and tie them and come back.

Major de Spain unlooped the leather thong of his compass from his buttonhole and gave it to Tennie’s Jim. “Go straight to Hoke’s,” he said. “Bring Doctor Crawford back with you. Tell him there are two men to be looked at. Take my mare. Can you find the road from here?”

“Yes, sir,” Tennie’s Jim said.

“All right,” Major de Spain said. “Go on.” He turned to the boy. “Take the mules and the horse and go back and get the wagon. We’ll go on down the river in the boat to Coon bridge. Meet us there. Can you find it again?”

“Yes, sir,” the boy said.
“All right. Get started.”

He went back to the wagon. He realised then how far they had run. It was already afternoon when he put the mules into the traces and tied the horse’s lead-rope to the tail-gate. He reached Coon bridge at dusk. The skiff was already there.

Before he could see it and almost before he could see the water he had to leap from the tilting wagon, still holding the reins, and work around to where he could grasp the bit and then the ear of the plunging sound mule and dig his heels and hold it until Boon came up the bank.

The rope of the led horse had already snapped and it had already disappeared up the road toward camp. They turned the wagon around and took the mules out and he led the sound mule a hundred yards up the road and tied it.

Boon had already brought Lion up to the wagon and Sam was sitting up in the skiff now and when they raised him he tried to walk, up the bank and to the wagon and he tried to climb into the wagon but Boon did not wait; he picked Sam up bodily and set him on the seat.

Then they hitched Old Ben to the one-eyed mule's saddle again and dragged him up the bank and set two skid-poles into the open tail-gate and got him into the wagon and he went and got the sound mule and Boon fought it into the traces, striking it across its hard hollow-sounding face until it came into position and stood trembling. Then the rain came down, as though it had held off all day waiting on them.

They returned to camp through it, through the streaming and sightless dark, hearing long before they saw any light the horn and the spaced shots to guide them. When they came to Sam's dark little hut he tried to stand up. He spoke again in the tongue of the old fathers; then he said clearly: "Let me out. Let me out."

"He hasn't got any fire," Major said. "Go on!" he said sharply. But Sam was struggling now, trying to stand up. "Let me out, master," he said. "Let me go home."

So he stopped the wagon and Boon got down and lifted Sam out. He did not wait to let Sam try to walk this time. He carried him into the hut and Major de Spain got light on a paper spill from the buried embers on the hearth and lit the lamp and Boon put Sam on his bunk and drew off his boots and Major de Spain covered him and the boy was not there, he was holding the mules, the sound one which was trying again to bolt since when the wagon stopped Old Ben's scent drifted forward again along the streaming blackness of air, but Sam's eyes were probably open again on that profound look which saw farther than them or the hut, farther than the death of a bear and the dying of a dog.

Then they went on, toward the long wailing of the horn and the shots which seemed each to linger intact somewhere in the thick streaming air until the next spaced report joined and blended with it, to the lighted house, the bright streaming windows, the quiet faces as Boon

entered, bloody and quite calm, carrying the bundled coat. He laid Lion, bloody coat and all, on his stale sheetless pallet bed which not even Ash, as deft in the house as a woman, could ever make smooth.

The sawmill doctor from Hoke's was already there. Boon would not let the doctor touch him until he had seen to Lion. He wouldn't risk giving Lion chloroform. He put the entrails back and sewed him up without it while Major de Spain held his head and Boon his feet. But he never tried to move.

He lay there, the yellow eyes open upon nothing while the quiet men in the new hunting clothes and in the old ones crowded into the little airless room rank with the smell of Boon's body and garments, and watched. Then the doctor cleaned and disinfected Boon's face and arm and leg and bandaged them and, the boy in front with a lantern and the doctor and McCaslin and Major de Spain and General Compson following, they went to Sam Fathers's hut.

Tennie's Jim had built up the fire; he squatted before it, dozing. Sam had not moved since Boon had put him in the bunk and Major de Spain had covered him with the blankets, yet he opened his eyes and looked from one to another of the faces and when McCaslin touched his shoulder and said, "Sam.

The doctor wants to look at you," he even drew his hands out of the blanket and began to fumble at his shirt buttons until McCaslin said, "Wait. We'll do it."

They undressed him. He lay there — the copper-brown, almost hairless body, the old man's body, the old man, the wild man not even one generation from the woods, childless, kinless, peopleless — motionless, his eyes open but no longer looking at any of them, while the doctor examined him and drew the blankets up and put the stethoscope back into his bag and snapped the bag and only the boy knew that Sam too was going to die.

“Exhaustion,” the doctor said. “Shock maybe. A man his age swimming rivers in December. He’ll be all right. Just make him stay in bed for a day or two. Will there be somebody here with him?”

“There will be somebody here,” Major de Spain said.

They went back to the house, to the rank little room where Boon still sat on the pallet bed with Lion’s head under his hand while the men, the ones who had hunted behind Lion and the ones who had never seen him before today, came quietly in to look at him and went away.

Then it was dawn and they all went out into the yard to look at Old Ben, with his eyes open too and his lips snarled back from his worn teeth and his mutilated foot and the little hard lumps under his skin which were the old bullets (there were fifty-two of them, buckshot rifle and ball) and the single almost invisible slit under his left shoulder where Boon’s blade had finally found his life.

Then Ash began to beat on the bottom of the dish-pan with a heavy spoon to call them to breakfast and it was the first time he could remember hearing no sound from the dogs under the kitchen while they were eating. It was as if the old bear, even dead there in the yard, was a more potent terror still than they could face without Lion between them.

The rain had stopped during the night. By mid-morning the thin sun appeared, rapidly burning away mist and cloud, warming the air and the earth; it would be one of those windless Mississippi December days which are a sort of Indian summer’s Indian summer.

They moved Lion out in the front gallery, into the sun. It was Boon’s idea. “Goddamn it,” he said, “he never did want to stay in the house until I made him. You know that.” He took a crowbar and loosened the floor boards under his pallet bed so it could be raised, mattress and all, without disturbing Lion’s position, and they carried him out to the gallery and put him down facing the woods.

Then he and the doctor and McCaslin and Major de Spain went to Sam's hut. This time Sam didn't open his eyes and his breathing was so quiet, so peaceful that they could hardly see that he breathed. The doctor didn't even take out his stethoscope nor even touch him. "He's all right," the doctor said. "He didn't even catch cold. He just quit."

"Quit?" McCaslin said.

"Yes. Old people do that sometimes. Then they get a good night's sleep or maybe it's just a drink of whisky, and they change their minds."

They returned to the house. And then they began to arrive — the swamp-dwellers, the gaunt men who ran trap-lines and lived on quinine and coons and river water, the farmers of little corn- and cotton-patches along the bottom's edge whose fields and cribs and pig-pens the old bear had rifled, the loggers from the camp and the sawmill men from Hoke's and the town men from farther away than that, whose hounds the old bear had slain and traps and deadfalls he had wrecked and whose lead he carried.

They came up mounted and on foot and in wagons, to enter the yard and look at him and then go on to the front where Lion lay, filling the little yard and overflowing it until there were almost a hundred of them squatting and standing in the warm and drowsing sunlight, talking quietly of hunting, of the game and the dogs which ran it, of hounds and bear and deer and men of yesterday vanished from the earth, while from time to time the great blue dog would open his eyes, not as if he were listening to them but as though to look at the woods for a moment before closing his eyes again, to remember the woods or to see that they were still there. He died at sundown.

Major de Spain broke camp that night. They carried Lion into the woods, or Boon carried him that is, wrapped in a quilt from his bed, just as he had refused to let anyone else touch Lion yesterday until the doctor got there; Boon carrying Lion, and the boy and General Compson and Walter and still almost fifty of them following with lanterns and lighted pine-knots — men from Hoke's and even farther, who would have to ride out of the bottom in the dark, and swampers

and trappers who would have to walk even, scattering toward the little hidden huts where they lived.

And Boon would let nobody else dig the grave either and lay Lion in it and cover him and then General Compson stood at the head of it while the blaze and smoke of the pine-knots streamed away among the winter branches and spoke as he would have spoken over a man. Then they returned to camp.

Major de Spain and McCaslin and Ash had rolled and tied all the bedding. The mules were hitched to the wagon and pointed out of the bottom and the wagon was already loaded and the stove in the kitchen was cold and the table was set with scraps of cold food and bread and only the coffee was hot when the boy ran into the kitchen where Major de Spain and McCaslin had already eaten. "What?" he cried. "What? I'm not going."

"Yes," McCaslin said, "we're going out tonight. Major wants to get on back home."

"No!" he said. "I'm going to stay."

"You've got to be back in school Monday. You've already missed a week more than I intended. It will take you from now until Monday to catch up. Sam's all right. You heard Doctor Crawford. I'm going to leave Boon and Tennie's Jim both to stay with him until he feels like getting up."

He was panting. The others had come in. He looked rapidly and almost frantically around at the other faces. Boon had a fresh bottle. He upended it and started the cork by striking the bottom of the bottle with the heel of his hand and drew the cork with his teeth and spat it out and drank. "You're damn right you're going back to school," Boon said.

"Or I'll burn the tail off of you myself if Cass dont, whether you are sixteen or sixty. Where in hell do you expect to get without education? Where would Cass be? Where in hell would I be if I hadn't never went to school?"

He looked at McCaslin again. He could feel his breath coming shorter and shorter and shallower and shallower, as if there were not enough air in the kitchen for that many to breathe. "This is just Thursday. I'll come home Sunday night on one of the horses. I'll come home Sunday, then. I'll make up the time I lost studying Sunday night, McCaslin," he said, without even despair.

"No, I tell you," McCaslin said. "Sit down here and eat your supper. We're going out to — —"

"Hold up, Cass," General Compson said. The boy did not know General Compson had moved until he put his hand on his shoulder. "What is it, bud?" he said.

"I've got to stay," he said. "I've got to."

"All right," General Compson said. "You can stay. If missing an extra week of school is going to throw you so far behind you'll have to sweat to find out what some hired pedagogue put between the covers of a book, you better quit altogether. — And you shut up, Cass," he said, though McCaslin had not spoken.

"You've got one foot straddled into a farm and the other foot straddled into a bank; you aint even got a good hand-hold where this boy was already an old man long before you damned Sartorises and Edmondses invented farms and banks to keep yourselves from having to find out what this boy was born knowing and fearing too maybe but without being afraid, that could go ten miles on a compass because he wanted to look at a bear none of us had ever got near enough to put a bullet in and looked at the bear and came the ten miles back on the compass in the dark; maybe by God that's the why and the wherefore of farms and banks. — I reckon you still aint going to tell what it is?"

But still he could not. "I've got to stay," he said.

"All right," General Compson said. "There's plenty of grub left. And you'll come home Sunday, like you promised McCaslin? Not Sunday night: Sunday."

"Yes, sir," he said.

“All right,” General Compson said. “Sit down and eat, boys,” he said. “Let’s get started. It’s going to be cold before we get home.”

They ate. The wagon was already loaded and ready to depart; all they had to do was to get into it. Boon would drive them out to the road, to the farmer’s stable where the surrey had been left. He stood beside the wagon, in silhouette on the sky, turbaned like a Paythan and taller than any there, the bottle tilted. Then he flung the bottle from his lips without even lowering it, spinning and glinting in the faint starlight, empty.

“Them that’s going,” he said, “get in the goddamn wagon. Them that aint, get out of the goddamn way.” The others got in. Boon mounted to the seat beside General Compson and the wagon moved, on into the obscurity until the boy could no longer see it, even the moving density of it amid the greater night.

But he could still hear it, for a long while: the slow, deliberate banging of the wooden frame as it lurched from rut to rut. And he could hear Boon even when he could no longer hear the wagon. He was singing, harsh, tuneless, loud.

That was Thursday. On Saturday morning Tennie’s Jim left on McCaslin’s woods-horse which had not been out of the bottom one time now in six years, and late that afternoon rode through the gate on the spent horse and on to the commissary where McCaslin was rationing the tenants and the wage-hands for the coming week, and this time McCaslin forestalled any necessity or risk of having to wait while Major de Spain’s surrey was being horsed and harnessed.

He took their own, and with Tennie’s Jim already asleep in the back seat he drove in to Jefferson and waited while Major de Spain changed to boots and put on his overcoat, and they drove the thirty miles in the dark of that night and at daybreak on Sunday morning they swapped to the waiting mare and mule and as the sun rose they rode out of the jungle and on to the low ridge where they had buried Lion: the low

mound of unannealed earth where Boon's spade-marks still showed and beyond the grave the platform of freshly cut saplings bound between four posts and the blanket-wrapped bundle upon the platform and Boon and the boy squatting between the platform and the grave until Boon, the bandage removed, ripped, from his head so that the long scoriations of Old Ben's claws resembled crusted tar in the sunlight, sprang up and threw down upon them with the old gun with which he had never been known to hit anything although McCaslin was already off the mule, kicked both feet free of the irons and vaulted down before the mule had stopped, walking toward Boon.

"Stand back," Boon said. "By God, you wont touch him. Stand back, McCaslin." Still McCaslin came on, fast yet without haste.

"Cass!" Major de Spain said. Then he said "Boon! You, Boon!" and he was down too and the boy rose too, quickly, and still McCaslin came on not fast but steady and walked up to the grave and reached his hand steadily out, quickly yet still not fast, and took hold the gun by the middle so that he and Boon faced one another across Lion's grave, both holding the gun, Boon's spent indomitable amazed and frantic face almost a head higher than McCaslin's beneath the black scoriations of beast's claws and then Boon's chest began to heave as though there were not enough air in all the woods, in all the wilderness, for all of them, for him and anyone else, even for him alone.

"Turn it loose, Boon," McCaslin said.

"You damn little spindling—" Boon said. "Dont you know I can take it away from you? Dont you know I can tie it around your neck like a damn cravat?"

"Yes," McCaslin said. "Turn it loose, Boon."

"This is the way he wanted it. He told us. He told us exactly how to do it. And by God you aint going to move him. So we did it like he said, and I been sitting here ever since to keep the damn wildcats and varmints away from him and by God—" Then McCaslin had the gun, down-slanted while he pumped the slide, the five shells snicking out of it so fast that the last one was almost out before the first one touched the

ground and McCaslin dropped the gun behind him without once having taken his eyes from Boon's.

"Did you kill him, Boon?" he said. Then Boon moved. He turned, he moved like he was still drunk and then for a moment blind too, one hand out as he blundered toward the big tree and seemed to stop walking before he reached the tree so that he plunged, fell toward it, flinging up both hands and catching himself against the tree and turning until his back was against it, backing with the tree's trunk his wild spent scoriated face and the tremendous heave and collapse of his chest, McCaslin following, facing him again, never once having moved his eyes from Boon's eyes. "Did you kill him, Boon?"

"No!" Boon said. "No!"

"Tell the truth," McCaslin said. "I would have done it if he had asked me to." Then the boy moved. He was between them, facing McCaslin; the water felt as if it had burst and sprung not from his eyes alone but from his whole face, like sweat.

"Leave him alone!" he cried. "Goddamn it! Leave him alone!"

IV

then he was twenty-one. He could say it, himself and his cousin juxtaposed not against the wilderness but against the tamed land which was to have been his heritage, the land which old Carothers McCaslin his grandfather had bought with white man's money from the wild men whose grandfathers without guns hunted it, and tamed and ordered or believed he had tamed and ordered it for the reason that the human beings he held in bondage and in the power of life and death had removed the forest from it and in their sweat scratched the surface of it to a depth of perhaps fourteen inches in order to grow something out of it which had not been there before and which could be translated back into the money he who believed he had bought it had had to pay to get it and hold it and a reasonable profit too: and for which reason old Carothers McCaslin, knowing better, could raise his children, his

descendants and heirs, to believe the land was his to hold and bequeath since the strong and ruthless man has a cynical foreknowledge of his own vanity and pride and strength and a contempt for all his get: just as, knowing better, Major de Spain and his fragment of that wilderness which was bigger and older than any recorded deed: just as, knowing better, old Thomas Sutpen, from whom Major de Spain had had his fragment for money: just as Ikkemotubbe, the Chickasaw chief, from whom Thomas Sutpen had had the fragment for money or rum or whatever it was, knew in his turn that not even a fragment of it had been his to relinquish or sell

not against the wilderness but against the land, not in pursuit and lust but in relinquishment, and in the commissary as it should have been, not the heart perhaps but certainly the solar-plexus of the repudiated and relinquished: the square, galleried, wooden building squatting like a portent above the fields whose labourers it still held in thrall '65 or no and placarded over with advertisements for snuff and cures for chills and salves and potions manufactured and sold by white men to bleach the pigment and straighten the hair of negroes that they might resemble the very race which for two hundred years had held them in bondage and from which for another hundred years not even a bloody civil war would have set them completely free himself and his cousin amid the old smells of cheese and salt meat and kerosene and harness, the ranked shelves of tobacco and overalls and bottled medicine and thread and plough-bolts, the barrels and kegs of flour and meal and molasses and nails, the wall pegs dependent with ploughlines and plough-collars and hames and trace-chains, and the desk and the shelf above it on which rested the ledgers in which McCaslin recorded the slow outward trickle of food and supplies and equipment which returned each fall as cotton made and ginned and sold (two threads frail as truth and impalpable as equators yet cable-strong to bind for life them who made the cotton to the land their sweat fell on), and the older ledgers clumsy and archaic in size and shape, on the yellowed pages of which were recorded in the faded hand of his father Theophilus and his uncle Amodeus during the two decades before the Civil War, the manumission in title at least of Carothers McCaslin's slaves:

‘Relinquish,’ McCaslin said. ‘Relinquish. You, the direct male descendant of him who saw the opportunity and took it, bought the land, took the land, got the land no matter how, held it to bequeath, no matter how, out of the old grant, the first patent, when it was a wilderness of wild beasts and wilder men, and cleared it, translated it into something to bequeath to his children, worthy of bequeathment for his descendants’ ease and security and pride and to perpetuate his name and accomplishments.

Not only the male descendant but the only and last descendant in the male line and in the third generation, while I am not only four generations from old Carothers, I derived through a woman and the very McCaslin in my name is mine only by sufferance and courtesy and my grandmother’s pride in what that man accomplished whose legacy and monument you think you can repudiate.’ and he

‘I cant repudiate it. It was never mine to repudiate. It was never Father’s and Uncle Buddy’s to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never Grandfather’s to bequeath them to bequeath me to repudiate because it was never old Ikkemotubbe’s to sell to Grandfather for bequeathment and repudiation. Because it was never Ikkemotubbe’s fathers’ fathers’ to bequeath Ikkemotubbe to sell to Grandfather or any man because on the instant when Ikkemotubbe discovered, realised, that he could sell it for money, on that instant it ceased ever to have been his for ever, father to father to father, and the man who bought it bought nothing.’

‘Bought nothing?’ and he

‘Bought nothing. Because He told in the Book how He created the earth, made it and looked at it and said it was all right, and then He made man. He made the earth first and peopled it with dumb creatures, and then He created man to be His overseer on the earth and to hold suzerainty over the earth and the animals on it in His name, not to hold for himself and his descendants inviolable title for ever, generation after generation, to the oblongs and squares of the earth,

but to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood, and all the fee He asked was pity and humility and sufferance and endurance and the sweat of his face for bread. And I know what you are going to say,' he said: 'That nevertheless Grandfather—' and McCaslin

' — did own it. And not the first. Not alone and not the first since, as your Authority states, man was dispossessed of Eden. Nor yet the second and still not alone, on down through the tedious and shabby chronicle of His chosen sprung from Abraham, and of the sons of them who dispossessed Abraham, and of the five hundred years during which half the known world and all it contained was chattel to one city as this plantation and all the life it contained was chattel and revokeless thrall to this commissary store and those ledgers yonder during your grandfather's life, and the next thousand years while men fought over the fragments of that collapse until at last even the fragments were exhausted and men snarled over the gnawed bones of the old world's worthless evening until an accidental egg discovered to them a new hemisphere. So let me say it: That nevertheless and notwithstanding old Carothers did own it.

Bought it, got it, no matter; kept it, held it, no matter; bequeathed it: else why do you stand here relinquishing and repudiating? Held it, kept it for fifty years until you could repudiate it, while He — this Arbiter, this Architect, this Umpire — condoned — or did He? looked down and saw — or did He? Or at least did nothing: saw, and could not, or did not see; saw, and would not, or perhaps He would not see — perverse, impotent, or blind: which?' and he

'Dispossessed.' and McCaslin

'What?' and he

'Dispossessed. Not impotent: He didn't condone; not blind, because He watched it. And let me say it. Dispossessed of Eden. Dispossessed of Canaan, and those who dispossessed him dispossessed him dispossessed, and the five hundred years of absentee landlords in the Roman bagnios, and the thousand years of wild men from the northern

woods who dispossessed them and devoured their ravished substance ravished in turn again and then snarled in what you call the old world's worthless twilight over the old world's gnawed bones, blasphemous in His name until He used a simple egg to discover to them a new world where a nation of people could be founded in humility and pity and sufferance and pride of one to another.

And Grandfather did own the land nevertheless and notwithstanding because He permitted it, not impotent and not condoning and not blind because He ordered and watched it. He saw the land already accursed even as Ikkemotubbe and Ikkemotubbe's father old Issetibbeha and old Issetibbeha's fathers too held it, already tainted even before any white man owned it by what Grandfather and his kind, his fathers, had brought into the new land which He had vouchsafed them out of pity and sufferance, on condition of pity and humility and sufferance and endurance, from that old world's corrupt and worthless twilight as though in the sailfuls of the old world's tainted wind which drove the ships—' and McCaslin
'Ah.'

' — and no hope for the land anywhere so long as Ikkemotubbe and Ikkemotubbe's descendants held it in unbroken succession. Maybe He saw that only by voiding the land for a time of Ikkemotubbe's blood and substituting for it another blood, could He accomplish His purpose. Maybe He knew already what that other blood would be, maybe it was more than justice that only the white man's blood was available and capable to raise the white man's curse, more than vengeance when—' and McCaslin
'Ah.'

' — when He used the blood which had brought in the evil to destroy the evil as doctors use fever to burn up fever, poison to slay poison. Maybe He chose Grandfather out of all of them He might have picked. Maybe He knew that Grandfather himself would not serve His purpose because Grandfather was born too soon too, but that Grandfather would have descendants, the right descendants; maybe He had foreseen already the descendants Grandfather would have, maybe He

saw already in Grandfather the seed progenitive of the three generations He saw it would take to set at least some of His lowly people free—’ and McCaslin

‘The sons of Ham. You who quote the Book: the sons of Ham.’ and he ‘There are some things He said in the Book, and some things reported of Him that He did not say. And I know what you will say now: That if truth is one thing to me and another thing to you, how will we choose which is truth? You dont need to choose. The heart already knows. He didn’t have His Book written to be read by what must elect and choose, but by the heart, not by the wise of the earth because maybe they dont need it or maybe the wise no longer have any heart, but by the doomed and lowly of the earth who have nothing else to read with but the heart. Because the men who wrote his Book for Him were writing about truth and there is only one truth and it covers all things that touch the heart.’ and McCaslin

‘So these men who transcribed His Book for Him were sometime liars.’ and he

‘Yes. Because they were human men. They were trying to write down the heart’s truth out of the heart’s driving complexity, for all the complex and troubled hearts which would beat after them. What they were trying to tell, what He wanted said, was too simple. Those for whom they transcribed His words could not have believed them. It had to be expounded in the everyday terms which they were familiar with and could comprehend, not only those who listened but those who told it too, because if they who were that near to Him as to have been elected from among all who breathed and spoke language to transcribe and relay His words, could comprehend truth only through the complexity of passion and lust and hate and fear which drives the heart, what distance back to truth must they traverse whom truth could only reach by word of mouth?’ and McCaslin

‘I might answer that, since you have taken to proving your points and disproving mine by the same text, I dont know. But I dont say that, because you have answered yourself: No time at all if, as you say, the heart knows truth, the infallible and unerring heart. And perhaps you

are right, since although you admitted three generations from old Carothers to you, there were not three. There were not even completely two. Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy. And they not the first and not alone. A thousand other Bucks and Buddies in less than two generations and sometimes less than one in this land which so you claim God created and man himself cursed and tainted. Not to mention 1865.' and he

'Yes. More men than Father and Uncle Buddy,' not even glancing toward the shelf above the desk, nor did McCaslin. They did not need to. To him it was as though the ledgers in their scarred cracked leather bindings were being lifted down one by one in their fading sequence and spread open on the desk or perhaps upon some apocryphal Bench or even Altar or perhaps before the Throne Itself for a last perusal and contemplation and refreshment of the All-knowledgable before the yellowed pages and the brown thin ink in which was recorded the injustice and a little at least of its amelioration and restitution faded back for ever into the anonymous communal original dust

the yellowed pages scrawled in fading ink by the hand first of his grandfather and then of his father and uncle, bachelors up to and past fifty and then sixty, the one who ran the plantation and the farming of it and the other who did the housework and the cooking and continued to do it even after his twin married and the boy himself was born

the two brothers who as soon as their father was buried moved out of the tremendously-conceived, the almost barnlike edifice which he had not even completed, into a one-room log cabin which the two of them built themselves and added other rooms to while they lived in it, refusing to allow any slave to touch any timber of it other than the actual raising into place the logs which two men alone could not handle, and domiciled all the slaves in the big house some of the windows of which were still merely boarded up with odds and ends of plank or with the skins of bear and deer nailed over the empty frames: each sundown the brother who superintended the farming would parade the negroes as a first sergeant dismisses a company, and herd them willynilly, man woman and child, without question protest or

recourse, into the tremendous abortive edifice scarcely yet out of embryo, as if even old Carothers McCaslin had paused aghast at the concrete indication of his own vanity's boundless conceiving: he would call his mental roll and herd them in and with a hand-wrought nail as long as a flenching-knife and suspended from a short deer-hide thong attached to the door-jamb for that purpose, he would nail to the door of that house which lacked half its windows and had no hinged back door at all, so that presently and for fifty years afterward, when the boy himself was big to hear and remember it, there was in the land a sort of folk-tale: of the countryside all night long full of skulking McCaslin slaves dodging the moonlit roads and the Patrol-riders to visit other plantations, and of the unspoken gentlemen's agreement between the two white men and the two dozen black ones that, after the white man had counted them and driven the home-made nail into the front door at sundown, neither of the white men would go around behind the house and look at the back door, provided that all the negroes were behind the front one when the brother who drove it drew out the nail again at daybreak.

the twins who were identical even in their handwriting, unless you had specimens side by side to compare, and even when both hands appeared on the same page (as often happened, as if, long since past any oral intercourse, they had used the diurnally advancing pages to conduct the unavoidable business of the compulsion which had traversed all the waste wilderness of North Mississippi in 1830 and '40 and singled them out to drive) they both looked as though they had been written by the same perfectly normal ten-year-old boy, even to the spelling, except that the spelling did not improve as one by one the slaves which Carothers McCaslin had inherited and purchased — Roscius and Phoebe and Thucydides and Eunice and their descendants, and Sam Fathers and his mother for both of whom he had swapped an underbred trotting gelding to old Ikkemotubbe, the Chickasaw chief from whom he had likewise bought the land, and Tennie Beauchamp whom the twin Amodeus had won from a neighbour in a poker-game, and the anomaly calling itself Percival Brownlee which the twin Theophilus had purchased, neither he nor his brother ever knew why apparently, from Bedford Forrest while he was still only a slave-dealer

and not yet a general (It was a single page, not long and covering less than a year, not seven months in fact, begun in the hand which the boy had learned to distinguish as that of his father:

Percavil Brownly 26yr Old. cleark @ Bookepper. bought from N.B.Forest at Cold Water 3 Mar 1856 \$265. dolars

and beneath that, in the same hand:

5 mar 1856 No bookepper any way Cant read. Can write his Name but I already put that down My self Says he can Plough but dont look like it to Me. sent to Feild to day Mar 5 1856

and the same hand:

6 Mar 1856 Cant plough either Says he aims to be a Precher so may be he can lead live stock to Crick to Drink

and this time it was the other, the hand which he now recognised as his uncle's when he could see them both on the same page:

Mar 23th 1856 Cant do that either Except one at a Time Get shut of him

then the first again:

24 Mar 1856 Who in hell would buy him

then the second:

19th of Apr 1856 Nobody You put yourself out of Market at Cold Water two months ago I never said sell him Free him

the first:

22 Apr 1856 Ill get it out of him

the second:

Jun 13th 1856 How \$1 per yr 265\$ 265 yrs Wholl sign his Free paper

then the first again:

1 Oct 1856 Mule Josephine Broke Leg @ shot Wrong stall wrong niger
wrong everything \$100. dollars

and the same:

2 Oct 1856 Freed Debit McCaslin @ McCaslin \$265. dollars

then the second again:

Oct 3th Debit Theophilus McCaslin Niger 265\$ Mule 100\$ 365\$ He
hasnt gone yet Father should be here

then the first:

3 Oct 1876 Son of a bitch wont leave What would father done

the second:

29th of Oct 1856 Renamed him

the first:

31 Oct 1856 Renamed him what

the second:

Chrstm 1856 Spintrius

) took substance and even a sort of shadowy life with their passions and complexities too as page followed page and year year; all there, not only the general and condoned injustice and its slow amortisation but the specific tragedy which had not been condoned and could never be

amortised, the new page and the new ledger, the hand which he could now recognise at first glance as his father's:

Father dide Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, Callina 1772 Missippy 1837. Dide and burid 27 June 1837

Roskus. rased by Granfather in Callina Dont know how old. Freed 27 June 1837 Dont want to leave. Dide and Burid 12 Jan 1841

Fibby Roskus Wife. bought by granfather in Callina says Fifty Freed 27 June 1837 Dont want to leave. Dide and burd 1 Aug 1849

Thucydus Roskus @ Fibby Son born in Callina 1779. Refused 10acre peace fathers Will 28 Jun 1837 Refused Cash offer \$200. dolars from A. @ T. McCaslin 28 Jun 1837 Wants to stay and work it out

and beneath this and covering the next five pages and almost that many years, the slow, day-by-day accrument of the wages allowed him and the food and clothing — the molasses and meat and meal, the cheap durable shirts and jeans and shoes and now and then a coat against rain and cold — charged against the slowly yet steadily mounting sum of balance (and it would seem to the boy that he could actually see the black man, the slave whom his white owner had for ever manumitted by the very act from which the black man could never be free so long as memory lasted, entering the commissary, asking permission perhaps of the white man's son to see the ledger-page which he could not even read, not even asking for the white man's word, which he would have had to accept for the reason that there was absolutely no way under the sun for him to test it, as to how the account stood, how much longer before he could go and never return, even if only as far as Jefferson seventeen miles away) on to the double pen-stroke closing the final entry:

3 Nov 1841 By Cash to Thucydus McCaslin \$200. dolars Set Up blaksmith in J. Dec. 1841 Dide and burid in J. 17 feb 1854.

Eunice Bought by Father in New Orleans 1807 \$650. dolars. Marrid to Thucydus 1809 Drownd in Crick Cristmas Day 1832

and then the other hand appeared, the first time he had seen it in the ledger to distinguish it as his uncle's, the cook and housekeeper whom

even McCaslin, who had known him and the boy's father for sixteen years before the boy was born, remembered as sitting all day long in the rocking-chair from which he cooked the food, before the kitchen fire on which he cooked it:

June 21th 1833 Drownd herself

and the first:

23 Jun 1833 Who in hell ever heard of a niger drownding him self

and the second, unhurried, with a complete finality; the two identical entries might have been made with a rubber stamp save for the date:

Aug 13th 1833 Drownd herself

and he thought But why? But why? He was sixteen then. It was neither the first time he had been alone in the commissary nor the first time he had taken down the old ledgers familiar on their shelf above the desk ever since he could remember. As a child and even after nine and ten and eleven, when he had learned to read, he would look up at the scarred and cracked backs and ends but with no particular desire to open them, and though he intended to examine them some day because he realised that they probably contained a chronological and much more comprehensive though doubtless tedious record than he would ever get from any other source, not alone of his own flesh and blood but of all his people, not only the whites but the black ones too, who were as much a part of his ancestry as his white progenitors, and of the land which they had all held and used in common and fed from and on and would continue to use in common without regard to colour or titular ownership, it would only be on some idle day when he was old and perhaps even bored a little since what the old books contained would be after all these years fixed immutably, finished, unalterable, harmless.

Then he was sixteen. He knew what he was going to find before he found it. He got the commissary key from McCaslin's room after

midnight while McCaslin was asleep and with the commissary door shut and locked behind him and the forgotten lantern stinking anew the rank dead icy air, he leaned above the yellowed page and thought not Why drowned herself, but thinking what he believed his father had thought when he found his brother's first comment: Why did Uncle Buddy think she had drowned herself? finding, beginning to find on the next succeeding page what he knew he would find, only this was still not it because he already knew this:

Tomasina called Tomy Daughter of Thucydus @ Eunice Born 1810 died in Child bed June 1833 and Burd. Yr stars fell

nor the next:

Turl Son of Thucydus @ Eunice Tomy born Jun 1833 yr stars fell Fathers will

and nothing more, no tedious recording filling this page of wages day by day and food and clothing charged against them, no entry of his death and burial because he had outlived his white half-brothers and the books which McCaslin kept did not include obituaries: just Fathers will and he had seen that too: old Carothers's bold cramped hand far less legible than his sons' even and not much better in spelling, who while capitalising almost every noun and verb, made no effort to punctuate or construct whatever, just as he made no effort either to explain or obfuscate the thousand-dollar legacy to the son of an unmarried slave-girl, to be paid only at the child's coming-of-age, bearing the consequence of the act of which there was still no definite incontrovertible proof that he acknowledged, not out of his own substance but penalising his sons with it, charging them a cash forfeit on the accident of their own paternity; not even a bribe for silence toward his own fame since his fame would suffer only after he was no longer present to defend it, flinging almost contemptuously, as he might a cast-off hat or pair of shoes, the thousand dollars which could have had no more reality to him under those conditions than it would have to the negro, the slave who would not even see it until he came of age, twenty-one years too late to begin to learn what money was.

So I reckon that was cheaper than saying My son to a nigger he thought. Even if My son wasn't but just two words. But there must have been love he thought. Some sort of love. Even what he would have called love: not just an afternoon's or a night's spittoon. There was the old man, old, within five years of his life's end, long a widower and, since his sons were not only bachelors but were approaching middle age, lonely in the house and doubtless even bored since his plantation was established now and functioning and there was enough money now, too much of it probably for a man whose vices even apparently remained below his means; there was the girl, husbandless and young, only twenty-three when the child was born: perhaps he had sent for her at first out of loneliness, to have a young voice and movement in the house, summoned her, bade her mother send her each morning to sweep the floors and make the beds and the mother acquiescing since that was probably already understood, already planned: the only child of a couple who were not field hands and who held themselves something above the other slaves not alone for that reason but because the husband and his father and mother too had been inherited by the white man from his father, and the white man himself had travelled three hundred miles and better to New Orleans in a day when men travelled by horseback or steamboat, and bought the girl's mother as a wife for

and that was all. The old frail pages seemed to turn of their own accord even while he thought His own daughter His own daughter. No No Not even him back to that one where the white man (not even a widower then) who never went anywhere any more than his sons in their time ever did and who did not need another slave, had gone all the way to New Orleans and bought one. And Tomey's Terrel was still alive when the boy was ten years old and he knew from his own observation and memory that there had already been some white in Tomey's Terrel's blood before his father gave him the rest of it; and looking down at the yellowed page spread beneath the yellow glow of the lantern smoking and stinking in that rank chill midnight room fifty years later, he seemed to see her actually walking into the icy creek on that Christmas

day six months before her daughter's and her lover's (Her first lover's he thought.

Her first) child was born, solitary, inflexible, griefless, ceremonial, in formal and succinct repudiation of grief and despair who had already had to repudiate belief and hope that was all. He would never need look at the ledgers again nor did he; the yellowed pages in their fading and implacable succession were as much a part of his consciousness, and would remain so for ever, as the fact of his own nativity:

Tennie Beauchamp 21 yrs Won by Amodeus McCaslin from Hubert Beauchamp Esqre Possible Strait against three Treys in sigt Not called 1859 Marrid to Tomys Turl 1859

and no date of freedom because her freedom, as well as that of her first surviving child, derived not from Buck and Buddy McCaslin in the commissary but from a stranger in Washington and no date of death and burial, not only because McCaslin kept no obituaries in his books, but because in this year 1883 she was still alive and would remain so to see a grandson by her last surviving child:

Amodeus McCaslin Beauchamp Son of tomys Turl @ Tennie Beauchamp 1859 dide 1859

then his uncle's hand entire, because his father was now a member of the cavalry command of that man whose name as a slave-dealer he could not even spell: and not even a page and not even a full line:

Dauter Tomes Turl and tenny 1862

and not even a line and not even a sex and no cause given though the boy could guess it because McCaslin was thirteen then and he remembered how there was not always enough to eat in more places than Vicksburg:

Child of tomes Turl and Tenny 1863

and the same hand again and this one lived, as though Tennie's perseverance and the fading and diluted ghost of old Carothers's ruthlessness had at last conquered even starvation: and clearer, fuller, more carefully written and spelled than the boy had yet seen it, as if the old man, who should have been a woman to begin with, trying to run what was left of the plantation in his brother's absence in the intervals of cooking and caring for himself and the fourteen-year-old orphan, had taken as an omen for renewed hope the fact that this nameless inheritor of slaves was at least remaining alive long enough to receive a name:

James Thucydus Beauchamp Son of Tomes Turl and Tenny Beauchamp
Born 29th december 1864 and both Well Wanted to call him Theophilus
but Tride Amodeus McCaslin and Callina McCaslin and both dide so
Disswaded Them Born at Two clock A,m, both Well

but no more, nothing; it would be another two years yet before the boy, almost a man now, would return from the abortive trip into Tennessee with the still-intact third of old Carothers's legacy to his Negro son and his descendants, which as the three surviving children established at last one by one their apparent intention of surviving, their white half-uncles had increased to a thousand dollars each, conditions permitting, as they came of age, and completed the page himself as far as it would even be completed when that day was long passed beyond which a man born in 1864 (or 1867 either, when he himself saw light) could have expected or himself hoped or even wanted to be still alive; his own hand now, queerly enough resembling neither his father's nor his uncle's nor even McCaslin's, but like that of his grandfather's save for the spelling:

Vanished sometime on night of his twenty-first birthday Dec 29 1885.
Traced by Isaac McCaslin to Jackson Tenn. and there lost. His third of
legacy \$1000.00 returned to McCaslin Edmonds Trustee this day Jan 12
1886

but not yet: that would be two years yet, and now his father's again, whose old commander was now quit of soldiering and slave-trading both; once more in the ledger and then not again and more illegible than ever, almost indecipherable at all from the rheumatism which now crippled him and almost completely innocent now even of any sort of spelling as well as punctuation, as if the four years during which he had followed the sword of the only man ever breathing who ever sold him a negro, let alone beat him in a trade, had convinced him not only of the vanity of faith and hope but of orthography too:

Miss sophonsiba b dtr t t @ t 1869

but not of belief and will because it was there, written, as McCaslin had told him, with the left hand, but there in the ledger one time more and then not again, for the boy himself was a year old, and when Lucas was born six years later, his father and uncle had been dead inside the same twelve-months almost five years; his own hand again, who was there and saw it, 1886, she was just seventeen, two years younger than himself, and he was in the commissary when McCaslin entered out of the first of dusk and said, 'He wants to marry Fonsiba,' like that: and he looked past McCaslin and saw the man, the stranger, taller than McCaslin and wearing better clothes than McCaslin and most of the other white men the boy knew habitually wore, who entered the room like a white man and stood in it like a white man, as though he had let McCaslin precede him into it not because McCaslin's skin was white but simply because McCaslin lived there and knew the way, and who talked like a white man too, looking at him past McCaslin's shoulder rapidly and keenly once and then no more, without further interest, as a mature and contained white man not impatient but just pressed for time might have looked. 'Marry Fonsiba?' he cried. 'Marry Fonsiba?' and then no more either, just watching and listening while McCaslin and the Negro talked:

'To live in Arkansas, I believe you said.'

'Yes. I have property there. A farm.'

'Property? A farm? You own it?'

'Yes.'

'You dont say Sir, do you?'

'To my elders, yes.'

'I see. You are from the North.'

'Yes. Since a child.'

'Then your father was a slave.'

'Yes. Once.'

'Then how do you own a farm in Arkansas?'

'I have a grant. It was my father's. From the United States. For military service.'

'I see,' McCaslin said. 'The Yankee army.'

'The United States army,' the stranger said; and then himself again, crying it at McCaslin's back:

'Call aunt Tennie! I'll go get her! I'll—' But McCaslin was not even including him; the stranger did not even glance back toward his voice, the two of them speaking to one another again as if he were not even there:

'Since you seem to have it all settled,' McCaslin said, 'why have you bothered to consult my authority at all?'

'I dont,' the stranger said. 'I acknowledge your authority only so far as you admit your responsibility toward her as a female member of the family of which you are the head. I dont ask your permission. I — —'

'That will do!' McCaslin said. But the stranger did not falter. It was neither as if he were ignoring McCaslin nor as if he had failed to hear him. It was as though he were making, not at all an excuse and not exactly a justification, but simply a statement which the situation absolutely required and demanded should be made in McCaslin's hearing whether McCaslin listened to it or not. It was as if he were talking to himself, for himself to hear the words spoken aloud. They faced one another, not close yet at slightly less than foils' distance, erect, their voices not raised, not impactive, just succinct:

' — I inform you, notify you in advance as chief of her family. No man of honour could do less. Besides, you have, in your way, according to your lights and upbringing — —'

‘That’s enough, I said,’ McCaslin said. ‘Be off this place by full dark. Go.’ But for another moment the other did not move, contemplating McCaslin with that detached and heatless look, as if he were watching reflected in McCaslin’s pupils the tiny image of the figure he was sustaining.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘After all, this is your house. And in your fashion you have ... But no matter. You are right. This is enough.’ He turned back toward the door; he paused again but only for a second, already moving while he spoke: ‘Be easy. I will be good to her.’ Then he was gone.

‘But how did she ever know him?’ the boy cried. ‘I never even heard of him before! And Fonsida, that’s never been off this place except to go to church since she was born — —”

‘Ha,’ McCaslin said. ‘Even their parents dont know until too late how seventeen-year-old girls ever met the men who marry them too, if they are lucky.’

And the next morning they were both gone, Fonsiba too. McCaslin never saw her again, nor did he, because the woman he found at last five months later was no one he had ever known. He carried a third of the three-thousand-dollar fund in gold in a money-belt, as when he had vainly traced Tennie’s Jim into Tennessee a year ago.

They — the man — had left an address of some sort with Tennie, and three months later a letter came, written by the man although McCaslin’s wife Alice had taught Fonsiba to read and write too a little.

But it bore a different postmark from the address the man had left with Tennie, and he travelled by rail as far as he could and then by contracted stage and then by a hired livery rig and then by rail again for a distance: an experienced traveller by now and an experienced bloodhound too and a successful one this time because he would have to be; as the slow interminable empty muddy December miles crawled and crawled and night followed night in hotels, in roadside taverns of rough logs and containing little else but a bar, and in the cabins of strangers and the hay of lonely barns, in none of which he dared

undress because of his secret golden girdle like that of a disguised one of the Magi travelling incognito and not even hope to draw him but only determination and desperation, he would tell himself: I will have to find her.

I will have to. We have already lost one of them. I will have to find her this time. He did. Hunched in the slow and icy rain, on a spent hired horse splashed to the chest and higher, he saw it — a single log edifice with a clay chimney which seemed in process of being flattened by the rain to a nameless and valueless rubble of dissolution in that roadless and even pathless waste of unfenced fallow and wilderness jungle — no barn, no stable, not so much as a hen-coop: just a log cabin built by hand and no clever hand either, a meagre pile of clumsily-cut firewood sufficient for about one day and not even a gaunt hound to come bellowing out from under the house when he rode up — a farm only in embryo, perhaps a good farm, maybe even a plantation some day, but not now, not for years yet and only then with labour, hard and enduring and unflinching work and sacrifice; he shoved open the crazy kitchen door in its awry frame and entered an icy gloom where not even a fire for cooking burned and after another moment saw, crouched into the wall's angle behind a crude table, the coffee-coloured face which he had known all his life but knew no more, the body which had been born within a hundred yards of the room that he was born in and in which some of his own blood ran but which was now completely inheritor of generation after generation to whom an unannounced white man on a horse was a white man's hired Patroller wearing a pistol sometimes and a blacksnake whip always; he entered the next room, the only other room the cabin owned, and found, sitting in a rocking-chair before the hearth, the man himself, reading — sitting there in the only chair in the house, before that miserable fire for which there was not wood sufficient to last twenty-four hours, in the same ministerial clothing in which he had entered the commissary five months ago and a pair of gold-framed spectacles which, when he looked up and then rose to his feet, the boy saw did not even contain lenses, reading a book in the midst of that desolation, that muddy waste fenceless and even pathless and without even a walled shed for stock to stand beneath: and over all, permeant, clinging to the man's

very clothing and exuding from his skin itself, that rank stink of baseless and imbecile delusion, that boundless rapacity and folly, of the carpet-bagger followers of victorious armies.

‘Dont you see?’ he cried. ‘Dont you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse? Granted that my people brought the curse on to the land: maybe for that reason their descendants alone can — not resist it, not combat it — maybe just endure and outlast it until the curse is lifted. Then your people’s turn will come because we have forfeited ours. But not now. Not yet. Dont you see?’

The other stood now, the unfrayed garments still ministerial even if not quite so fine, the book closed upon one finger to keep the place, the lensless spectacles held like a music master’s wand in the other workless hand while the owner of it spoke his measured and sonorous imbecility of the boundless folly and the baseless hope: ‘You’re wrong. The curse you whites brought into this land has been lifted. It has been voided and discharged. We are seeing a new era, an era dedicated, as our founders intended it, to freedom, liberty and equality for all, to which this country will be the new Canaan — —’

‘Freedom from what? From work? Canaan?’ He jerked his arm, comprehensive, almost violent: whereupon it all seemed to stand there about them, intact and complete and visible in the drafty, damp, heatless, negro-stale negro-rank sorry room — the empty fields without plough or seed to work them, fenceless against the stock which did not exist within or without the walled stable which likewise was not there. ‘What corner of Canaan is this?’

‘You are seeing it at a bad time. This is winter. No man farms this time of year.’

‘I see. And of course her need for food and clothing will stand still while the land lies fallow.’

'I have a pension,' the other said. He said it as a man might say I have grace or I own a gold mine. 'I have my father's pension too. It will arrive on the first of the month. What day is this?'

'The eleventh,' he said. 'Twenty days more. And until then?'

'I have a few groceries in the house from my credit account with the merchant in Midnight who banks my pension cheque for me. I have executed to him a power of attorney to handle it for me as a matter of mutual — —'

'I see. And if the groceries dont last the twenty days?'

'I still have one more hog.'

'Where?'

'Outside,' the other said. 'It is customary in this country to allow stock to range free during the winter for food. It comes up from time to time. But no matter if it doesn't; I can probably trace its footprints when the need — —'

'Yes!' he cried. 'Because no matter: you still have the pension cheque. And the man in Midnight will cash it and pay himself out of it for what you have already eaten and if there is any left over, it is yours. And the hog will be eaten by then or you still cant catch it, and then what will you do?'

'It will be almost spring then,' the other said. 'I am planning in the spring — —'

'It will be January,' he said. 'And then February. And then more than half of March—' and when he stopped again in the kitchen she had not moved, she did not even seem to breathe or to be alive except her eyes watching him; when he took a step toward her it was still not movement because she could have retreated no farther: only the tremendous fathomless ink-coloured eyes in the narrow, thin, too thin coffee-coloured face watching him without alarm, without recognition, without hope. 'Fonsiba,' he said. 'Fonsiba. Are you all right?'

'I'm free,' she said. Midnight was a tavern, a livery stable, a big store (that would be where the pension cheque banked itself as a matter of mutual elimination of bother and fret, he thought) and a little one, a saloon and a blacksmith shop. But there was a bank there too. The president (the owner, for all practical purposes) of it was a translated Mississippian who had been one of Forrest's men too: and his body lightened of the golden belt for the first time since he left home eight days ago, with pencil and paper he multiplied three dollars by twelve months and divided it into one thousand dollars; it would stretch that way over almost twenty-eight years and for twenty-eight years at least she would not starve, the banker promising to send the three dollars himself by a trusty messenger on the fifteenth of each month and put it into her actual hand, and he returned home and that was all because in 1874 his father and his uncle were both dead and the old ledgers never again came down from the shelf above the desk to which his father had returned them for the last time that day in 1869. But he could have completed it:

Lucas Quintus Carothers McCaslin Beauchamp. Last surviving son and child of Tomey's Terrel and Tennie Beauchamp. March 17, 1874

except that there was no need: not Lucius Quintus @c @c @c, but Lucas Quintus, not refusing to be called Lucius, because he simply eliminated that word from the name; not denying, declining the name itself, because he used three-quarters of it; but simply taking the name and changing, altering it, making it no longer the white man's but his own, by himself composed, himself self-progenitive and nominate, by himself ancestored, as, for all the old ledgers recorded to the contrary, old Carothers himself was

and that was all: 1874 the boy; 1888 the man, repudiated denied and free; 1895 and husband but no father, unwidowed but without a wife, and found long since that no man is ever free and probably could not bear it if he were; married then and living in Jefferson in the little new jerrybuilt bungalow which his wife's father had given them: and one morning Lucas stood suddenly in the doorway of the room where he was reading the Memphis paper and he looked at the paper's

dateline and thought It's his birthday. He's twenty-one today and Lucas said: 'Whar's the rest of that money old Carothers left? I wants it. All of it.'

that was all: and McCaslin

'More men than that one Buck and Buddy to fumble-heed that truth so mazed for them that spoke it and so confused for them that heard yet still there was 1865:' and he

'But not enough. Not enough for even Father and Uncle Buddy to fumble-heed in even three generations not even three generations fathered by Grandfather not even if there had been nowhere beneath His sight any but Grandfather and so He would not even have needed to elect and choose. But He tried and I know what you will say. That having Himself created them He could have known no more of hope than He could have pride and grief but He didn't hope He just waited because He had made them: not just because He had set them alive and in motion but because He had already worried with them so long: worried with them so long because He had seen how in individual cases they were capable of anything any height or depth remembered in mazed

incomprehension out of heaven where hell was created too and so He must admit them or else admit His equal somewhere and so be no longer God and therefore must accept responsibility for what He Himself had done in order to live with Himself in His lonely and paramount heaven. And He probably knew it was vain but He had created them and knew them capable of all things because He had shaped them out of the primal Absolute which contained all and had watched them since in their individual exaltation and baseness and they themselves not knowing why nor how nor even when: until at last He saw that they were all Grandfather all of them and that even from them the elected and chosen the best the very best He could expect (not hope mind: not hope) would be Bucks and Buddies and not even enough of them and in the third generation not even Bucks and Buddies but—' and McCaslin
'Ah:' and he

'Yes. If He could see Father and Uncle Buddy in Grandfather He must have seen me too, — an Isaac born into a later life than Abraham's and repudiating immolation: fatherless and therefore safe declining the altar because maybe this time the exasperated Hand might not supply the kid—' and McCaslin

'Escape:' and he

'All right. Escape. — Until one day He said what you told Fonsiba's husband that afternoon here in this room: This will do. This is enough: not in exasperation or rage or even just sick to death as you were sick that day: just This is enough and looked about for one last time, for one time more since He had created them, upon this land this South for which He had done so much with woods for game and streams for fish and deep rich soil for seed and lush springs to sprout it and long summers to mature it and serene falls to harvest it and short mild winters for men and animals and saw no hope anywhere and looked beyond it where hope should have been, where to East North and West lay illimitable that whole hopeful continent dedicated as a refuge and sanctuary of liberty and freedom from what you called the old world's worthless evening and saw the rich descendants of slavers, females of both sexes, to whom the black they shrieked of was another specimen another example like the Brazilian macaw brought home in a cage by a traveller, passing resolutions about horror and outrage in warm and air-proof halls: and the thundering cannonade of politicians earning votes and the medicine-shows of pulpiteers earning Chatauqua fees, to whom the outrage and the injustice were as much abstractions as Tariff or Silver or Immortality and who employed the very shackles of its servitude and the sorry rags of its regalia as they did the other beer and banners and mottoes redfire and brimstone and sleight-of-hand and musical handsaws: and the whirling wheels which manufactured for a profit the pristine replacements of the shackles and shoddy garments as they wore out and spun the cotton and made the gins which ginned it and the cars and ships which hauled it, and the men who ran the wheels for that profit and established and collected the taxes it was taxed with and the rates for hauling it and the commissions for selling it: and He could have repudiated them since they were his creation now and for evermore throughout all their generations until not only

that old world from which He had rescued them but this new one too which He had revealed and led them to as a sanctuary and refuge were become the same worthless tideless rock cooling in the last crimson evening except that out of all that empty sound and bootless fury one silence, among that loud and moiling all of them just one simple enough to believe that horror and outrage were first and last simply horror and outrage and was crude enough to act upon that, illiterate and had no words for talking or perhaps was just busy and had no time to, one out of them all who did not bother Him with cajolery and adjuration then pleading then threat and had not even bothered to inform Him in advance what he was about so that a lesser than He might have even missed the simple act of lifting the long ancestral musket down from the deer-horns above the door, whereupon He said My name is Brown too and the other So is mine and He Then mine or yours cant be because I am against it and the other So am I and He triumphantly Then where are you going with that gun? and the other told him in one sentence one word and He: amazed: Who knew neither hope nor pride nor grief But your Association, your Committee, your Officers.

Where are your Minutes, your Motions, your Parliamentary Procedures? and the other I aint against them. They are all right I reckon for them that have the time. I am just against the weak because they are niggers being held in bondage by the strong just because they are white. So He turned once more to this land which He still intended to save because He had done so much for it—' and McCaslin

'What?' and he

' — to these people He was still committed to because they were His creations—' and McCaslin

'Turned back to us? His face to us?' and he

' — whose wives and daughters at least made soups and jellies for them when they were sick and carried the trays through the mud and the winter too into the stinking cabins and sat in the stinking cabins and kept fires going until crises came and passed but that was not enough: and when they were very sick had them carried into the big house itself

into the company room itself maybe and nursed them there which the white man would have done too for any other of his cattle that was sick but at least the man who hired one from a livery wouldn't have and still that was not enough: so that He said and not in grief either Who had made them and so could know no more of grief than He could of pride or hope: Apparently they can learn nothing save through sufferings, remember nothing save when underlined in blood—' and McCaslin

'Ashby on an afternoon's ride, to call on some remote maiden cousins of his mother or maybe just acquaintances of hers, comes by chance upon a minor engagement of outposts and dismounts and with his crimson-lined cloak for target leads a handful of troops he never saw before against an entrenched position of backwoods-trained riflemen. Lee's battle-order, wrapped maybe about a handful of cigars and doubtless thrown away when the last cigar was smoked, found by a Yankee Intelligence officer on the floor of a saloon behind the Yankee lines after Lee had already divided his forces before Sharpsburg. Jackson on the Plank Road, already rolled up the flank which Hooker believed could not be turned and, waiting only for night to pass to continue the brutal and incessant slogging which would fling that whole wing back into Hooker's lap where he sat on a front gallery in Chancellorsville drinking rum toddies and telegraphing Lincoln that he had defeated Lee, is shot from among a whole covey of minor officers and in the blind night by one of his own patrols, leaving as next by seniority Stuart that gallant man born apparently already horsed and sabred and already knowing all there was to know about war except the slogging and brutal stupidity of it: and that same Stuart off raiding Pennsylvania hen-roosts when Lee should have known of all of Meade just where Hancock was on Cemetery Ridge: and Longstreet too at Gettysburg and that same Longstreet shot out of saddle by his own men in the dark by mistake just as Jackson was. His face to us? His face to us?' and he

'How else have made them fight? Who else but Jacksons and Stuarts and Ashbys and Morgans and Forrests? — the farmers of the central and middle-west, holding land by the acre instead of the tens or maybe even the hundreds, farming it themselves and to no single crop of

cotton or tobacco or cane, owning no slaves and needing and wanting none and already looking toward the Pacific coast, not always as long as two generations there and having stopped where they did stop only through the fortuitous mischance that an ox died or a wagon-axle broke.

And the New England mechanics who didn't even own land and measured all things by the weight of water and the cost of turning wheels and the narrow fringe of traders and ship-owners still looking backward across the Atlantic and attached to the continent only by their counting-houses. And those who should have had the alertness to see: the wildcat manipulators of mythical wilderness town sites; and the astuteness to rationalise: the bankers who held the mortgages on the land which the first were only waiting to abandon and on the railroads and steamboats to carry them still farther west, and on the factories and the wheels and the rented tenements those who ran them lived in; and the leisure and scope to comprehend and fear in time and even anticipate: the Boston-bred (even when not born in Boston) spinster descendants of long lines of similarly-bred and likewise spinster aunts and uncles whose hands knew no callus except that of the indicting pen, to whom the wilderness itself began at the top of tide and who looked, if at anything other than Beacon Hill, only toward heaven — not to mention all the loud rabble of the camp-followers of pioneers: the bellowing of politicians, the mellifluous choring of self-styled men of God, the—' and McCaslin 'Here, here. Wait a minute:' and he

'Let me talk now. I'm trying to explain to the head of my family something which I have got to do which I don't quite understand myself, not in justification of it but to explain it if I can. I could say I don't know why I must do it but that I do know I have got to because I have got myself to have to live with for the rest of my life and all I want is peace to do it in. But you are the head of my family. More.

I knew a long time ago that I would never have to miss my father, even if you are just finding out that you have missed your son. — the drawers of bills and the shavers of notes and the schoolmasters and the

self-ordained to teach and lead and all that horde of the semi-literate with a white shirt but no change for it, with one eye on themselves and watching each other with the other one.

Who else could have made them fight: could have struck them so aghast with fear and dread as to turn shoulder to shoulder and face one way and even stop talking for a while and even after two years of it keep them still so wrung with terror that some among them would seriously propose moving their very capital into a foreign country lest it be ravaged and pillaged by a people whose entire white male population would have little more than filled any one of their larger cities: except Jackson in the Valley and three separate armies trying to catch him and none of them ever knowing whether they were just retreating from a battle or just running into one and Stuart riding his whole command entirely around the biggest single armed force this continent ever saw in order to see what it looked like from behind and Morgan leading a cavalry charge against a stranded man-of-war. Who else could have declared a war against a power with ten times the area and a hundred times the men and a thousand times the resources, except men who could believe that all necessary to conduct a successful war was not acumen nor shrewdness nor politics nor diplomacy nor money or even integrity and simple arithmetic but just love of land and courage — —'

'And an unblemished and gallant ancestry and the ability to ride a horse,' McCaslin said. 'Dont leave that out.' It was evening now, the tranquil sunset of October mazy with windless woodsmoke. The cotton was long since picked and ginned, and all day now the wagons loaded with gathered corn moved between field and crib, processional across the enduring land. 'Well, maybe that's what He wanted. At least, that's what He got.' This time there was no yellowed procession of fading and harmless ledger-pages.

This was chronicled in a harsher book and McCaslin, fourteen and fifteen and sixteen, had seen it and the boy himself had inherited it as Noah's grandchildren had inherited the Flood although they had not been there to see the deluge: that dark corrupt and bloody time while

three separate peoples had tried to adjust not only to one another but to the new land which they had created and inherited too and must live in for the reason that those who had lost it were no less free to quit it than those who had gained it were: — those upon whom freedom and equality had been dumped overnight and without warning or preparation or any training in how to employ it or even just endure it and who misused it not as children would nor yet because they had been so long in bondage and then so suddenly freed, but misused it as human beings always misuse freedom, so that he thought Apparently there is a wisdom beyond even that learned through suffering necessary for a man to distinguish between liberty and license; those who had fought for four years and lost to preserve a condition under which that franchisement was anomaly and paradox, not because they were opposed to freedom as freedom but for the old reasons for which man (not the generals and politicians but man) has always fought and died in wars: to preserve a status quo or to establish a better future one to endure for his children; and lastly, as if that were not enough for bitterness and hatred and fear, that third race even more alien to the people whom they resembled in pigment and in whom even the same blood ran, than to the people whom they did not, — that race threefold in one and alien even among themselves save for a single fierce will for rapine and pillage, composed of the sons of middle-aged Quartermaster lieutenants and Army sutlers and contractors in military blankets and shoes and transport mules, who followed the battles they themselves had not fought and inherited the conquest they themselves had not helped to gain, sanctioned and protected even if not blessed, and left their bones and in another generation would be engaged in a fierce economic competition of small sloven farms with the black men they were supposed to have freed and the white descendants of fathers who had owned no slaves anyway whom they were supposed to have disinherited and in the third generation would be back once more in the little lost county seats as barbers and garage mechanics and deputy sheriffs and mill- and gin-hands and power-plant firemen, leading, first in mufti then later in an actual formalised regalia of hooded sheets and passwords and fiery christian symbols, lynching mobs against the race their ancestors had come to save: and of all that other nameless horde of speculators in human misery, manipulators of

money and politics and land, who follow catastrophe and are their own protection as grasshoppers are and need no blessing and sweat no plough or axe-helve and batten and vanish and leave no bones, just as they derived apparently from no ancestry, no mortal flesh, no act even of passion or even of lust: and the Jew who came without protection too since after two thousand years he had got out of the habit of being or needing it, and solitary, without even the solidarity of the locusts and in this a sort of courage since he had come thinking not in terms of simple pillage but in terms of his great-grandchildren, seeking yet some place to establish them to endure even though for ever alien: and unblessed: a pariah about the face of the Western earth which twenty centuries later was still taking revenge on him for the fairy tale with which he had conquered it.

McCaslin had actually seen it, and the boy even at almost eighty would never be able to distinguish certainly between what he had seen and what had been told him: a lightless and gutted and empty land where women crouched with the huddled children behind locked doors and men armed in sheets and masks rode the silent roads and the bodies of white and black both, victims not so much of hate as of desperation and despair, swung from lonely limbs: and men shot dead in polling-booths with the still wet pen in one hand and the unblotted ballot in the other: and a United States marshal in Jefferson who signed his official papers with a crude cross, an ex-slave called Sickymo, not at all because his ex-owner was a doctor and apothecary but because, still a slave, he would steal his master's grain alcohol and dilute it with water and peddle it in pint bottles from a cache beneath the roots of a big sycamore tree behind the drug store, who had attained his high office because his half-white sister was the concubine of the Federal A.P.M.: and this time McCaslin did not even say Look but merely lifted one hand, not even pointing, not even specifically toward the shelf of ledgers but toward the desk, toward the corner where it sat beside the scuffed patch on the floor where two decades of heavy shoes had stood while the white man at the desk added and multiplied and subtracted.

And again he did not need to look because he had seen this himself and, twenty-three years after the Surrender and twenty-four after the

Proclamation, was still watching it: the ledgers, new ones now and filled rapidly, succeeding one another rapidly and containing more names than old Carothers or even his father and Uncle Buddy had ever dreamed of; new names and new faces to go with them, among which the old names and faces that even his father and uncle would have recognised, were lost, vanished — Tomey's Terrel dead, and even the tragic and miscast Percival Brownlee, who couldn't keep books and couldn't farm either, found his true niche at last, reappeared in 1862 during the boy's father's absence and had apparently been living on the plantation for at least a month before his uncle found out about it, conducting impromptu revival meetings among negroes, preaching and leading the singing also in his high sweet true soprano voice and disappeared again on foot and at top speed, not behind but ahead of a body of raiding Federal horse and reappeared for the third and last time in the entourage of a travelling Army paymaster, the two of them passing through Jefferson in a surrey at the exact moment when the boy's father (it was 1866) also happened to be crossing the Square, the surrey and its occupants traversing rapidly that quiet and bucolic scene and even in that fleeting moment and to others beside the boy's father giving an illusion of flight and illicit holiday like a man on an excursion during his wife's absence with his wife's personal maid, until Brownlee glanced up and saw his late co-master and gave him one defiant female glance and then broke again, leaped from the surrey and disappeared this time for good and it was only by chance that McCaslin, twenty years later, heard of him again, an old man now and quite fat, as the well-to-do proprietor of a select New Orleans brothel; and Tennie's Jim gone, nobody knew where, and Fonsiba in Arkansas with her three dollars each month and the scholar-husband with his lensless spectacles and frock coat and his plans for the spring; and only Lucas was left, the baby, the last save himself of old Carothers's doomed and fatal blood which in the male derivation seemed to destroy all it touched, and even he was repudiating and at least hoping to escape it; — Lucas, the boy of fourteen whose name would not even appear for six years yet among those rapid pages in the bindings new and dustless too since McCaslin lifted them down daily now to write into them the continuation of that record which two hundred years had not been enough to complete and another hundred would not be enough to

discharge; that chronicle which was a whole land in miniature, which multiplied and compounded was the entire South, twenty-three years after surrender and twenty-four from emancipation — that slow trickle of molasses and meal and meat, of shoes and straw hats and overalls, of ploughlines and collars and heel-bolts and buckheads and clevises, which returned each fall as cotton — the two threads frail as truth and impalpable as equators yet cable-strong to bind for life them who made the cotton to the land their sweat fell on: and he

‘Yes. Binding them for a while yet, a little while yet. Through and beyond that life and maybe through and beyond the life of that life’s sons and maybe even through and beyond that of the sons of those sons. But not always, because they will endure. They will outlast us because they are—’ it was not a pause, barely a falter even, possibly appreciable only to himself, as if he couldn’t speak even to McCaslin, even to explain his repudiation, that which to him too, even in the act of escaping (and maybe this was the reality and the truth of his need to escape) was heresy: so that even in escaping he was taking with him more of that evil and unregenerate old man who could summon, because she was his property, a human being because she was old enough and female, to his widower’s house and get a child on her and then dismiss her because she was of an inferior race, and then bequeath a thousand dollars to the infant because he would be dead then and wouldn’t have to pay it, than even he had feared. ‘Yes. He didn’t want to. He had to. Because they will endure. They are better than we are. Stronger than we are. Their vices are vices aped from white men or that white men and bondage have taught them: improvidence and intemperance and evasion — not laziness: evasion: of what white men had set them to, not for their aggrandisement or even comfort but his own—’ and McCaslin

‘All right. Go on: Promiscuity. Violence. Instability and lack of control. Inability to distinguish between mine and thine—’ and he

‘How distinguish, when for two hundred years mine did not even exist for them?’ and McCaslin

‘All right. Go on. And their virtues—’ and he

‘Yes. Their own. Endurance—’ and McCaslin

'So have mules:' and he

' — and pity and tolerance and forbearance and fidelity and love of children—' and McCaslin

'So have dogs:' and he

' — whether their own or not or black or not. And more: what they got not only not from white people but not even despite white people because they had it already from the old free fathers a longer time free than us because we have never been free—' and it was in McCaslin's eyes too, he had only to look at McCaslin's eyes and it was there, that summer twilight seven years ago, almost a week after they had returned from the camp before he discovered that Sam Fathers had told McCaslin: an old bear, fierce and ruthless not just to stay alive but ruthless with the fierce pride of liberty and freedom, jealous and proud enough of liberty and freedom to see it threatened not with fear nor even alarm but almost with joy, seeming deliberately to put it into jeopardy in order to savour it and keep his old strong bones and flesh supple and quick to defend and preserve it; an old man, son of a Negro slave and an Indian king, inheritor on the one hand of the long chronicle of a people who had learned humility through suffering and learned pride through the endurance which survived the suffering, and on the other side the chronicle of a people even longer in the land than the first, yet who now existed there only in the solitary brotherhood of an old and childless Negro's alien blood and the wild and invincible spirit of an old bear; a boy who wished to learn humility and pride in order to become skilful and worthy in the woods but found himself becoming so skilful so fast that he feared he would never become worthy because he had not learned humility and pride though he had tried, until one day an old man who could not have defined either led him as though by the hand to where an old bear and a little mongrel dog showed him that, by possessing one thing other, he would possess them both; and a little dog, nameless and mongrel and many-fathered, grown yet weighing less than six pounds, who couldn't be dangerous because there was nothing anywhere much smaller, not fierce because that would have been called just noise, not humble because it was already too near the ground to genuflect, and not proud because it would not have been close enough for anyone to discern what was

casting that shadow and which didn't even know it was not going to heaven since they had already decided it had no immortal soul, so that all it could be was brave even though they would probably call that too just noise. 'And you didn't shoot,' McCaslin said. 'How close were you?'

'I dont know,' he said. 'There was a big wood tick just inside his off hind leg. I saw that. But I didn't have the gun then.'

'But you didn't shoot when you had the gun,' McCaslin said. 'Why?' But McCaslin didn't wait, rising and crossing the room, across the pelt of the bear he had killed two years ago and the bigger one McCaslin had killed before he was born, to the bookcase beneath the mounted head of his first buck, and returned with the book and sat down again and opened it. 'Listen,' he said. He read the five stanzas aloud and closed the book on his finger and looked up. 'All right,' he said. 'Listen,' and read again, but only one stanza this time and closed the book and laid it on the table. 'She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,' McCaslin said: 'For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair.'

'He's talking about a girl,' he said.

'He had to talk about something,' McCaslin said. Then he said, 'He was talking about truth. Truth is one. It doesn't change. It covers all things which touch the heart — honour and pride and pity and justice and courage and love. Do you see now?' He didn't know. Somehow it had seemed simpler than that, simpler than somebody talking in a book about a young man and a girl he would never need to grieve over because he could never approach any nearer and would never have to get any farther away. He had heard about an old bear and finally got big enough to hunt it and he hunted it four years and at last met it with a gun in his hands and he didn't shoot. Because a little dog — But he could have shot long before the fyce covered the twenty yards to where the bear waited, and Sam Fathers could have shot at any time during the interminable minute while Old Ben stood on his hind legs over them.... He ceased. McCaslin watched him, still speaking, the voice, the words as quiet as the twilight itself was: 'Courage and honour and pride, and pity and love of justice and of liberty. They all touch the

heart, and what the heart holds to becomes truth, as far as we know truth. Do you see now?’ and he could still hear them, intact in this twilight as in that one seven years ago, no louder still because they did not need to be because they would endure: and he had only to look at McCaslin’s eyes beyond the thin and bitter smiling, the faint lip-lift which would have had to be called smiling; — his kinsman, his father almost, who had been born too late into the old time and too soon for the new, the two of them juxtaposed and alien now to each other against their ravaged patrimony, the dark and ravaged fatherland still prone and panting from its etherless operation: ‘Habet then. — So this land is, indubitably, of and by itself cursed:’ and he

‘Cursed:’ and again McCaslin merely lifted one hand, not even speaking and not even toward the ledgers: so that, as the stereopticon condenses into one instantaneous field the myriad minutiae of its scope, so did that slight and rapid gesture establish in the small cramped and cluttered twilit room not only the ledgers but the whole plantation in its mazed and intricate entirety — the land, the fields and what they represented in terms of cotton ginned and sold, the men and women whom they fed and clothed and even paid a little cash money at Christmas-time in return for the labour which planted and raised and picked and ginned the cotton, the machinery and mules and gear with which they raised it and their cost and upkeep and replacement — that whole edifice intricate and complex and founded upon injustice and erected by ruthless rapacity and carried on even yet with at times downright savagery not only to the human beings but the valuable animals too, yet solvent and efficient and, more than that: not only still intact but enlarged, increased: brought still intact by McCaslin, himself little more than a child then, through and out of the debacle and chaos of twenty years ago where hardly one in ten survived, and enlarged and increased and would continue so, solvent and efficient and intact and still increasing so long as McCaslin and his McCaslin successors lasted, even though their surnames might not even be Edmonds then: and he: ‘Habet too. Because that’s it: not the land, but us. Not only the blood, but the name too; not only its colour but its designation: Edmonds, white, but, a female line, could have no other but the name his father

bore; Beauchamp, the elder line and the male one, but, black, could have had any name he liked and no man would have cared, except the name his father bore who had no name—' and McCaslin

'And since I know too what you know I will say now, once more let me say it: And one other, and in the third generation too, and the male, the eldest, the direct and sole and white and still McCaslin even, father to son to son—' and he

'I am free:' and this time McCaslin did not even gesture, no inference of fading pages, no postulation of the stereoptic whole, but the frail and iron thread strong as truth and impervious as evil and longer than life itself and reaching beyond record and patrimony both to join him with the lusts and passions, the hopes and dreams and griefs, of bones whose names while still fleshed and capable even old Carothers's grandfather had never heard: and he: 'And of that too:' and McCaslin

'Chosen, I suppose (I will concede it) out of all your time by Him as you say Buck and Buddy were from theirs. And it took Him a bear and an old man and four years just for you. And it took you fourteen years to reach that point and about that many, maybe more, for Old Ben, and more than seventy for Sam Fathers. And you are just one. How long then? How long?' and he

'It will be long. I have never said otherwise. But it will be all right because they will endure—' and McCaslin

'And anyway, you will be free. — No, not now nor ever, we from them nor they from us. So I repudiate too. I would deny even if I knew it were true. I would have to. Even you can see that I could do no else. I am what I am; I will be always what I was born and have always been. And more than me. More than me, just as there were more than Buck and Buddy in what you called His first plan which failed:' and he

'And more than me:' and McCaslin

'No. Not even you. Because mark. You said how on that instant when Ikkemotubbe realised that he could sell the land to Grandfather, it ceased for ever to have been his. All right; go on: Then it belonged to

Sam Fathers, old Ikkemotubbe's son. And who inherited from Sam Fathers, if not you? co-heir perhaps with Boon, if not of his life maybe, at least of his quitting it?' and he

'Yes. Sam Fathers set me free.' And Isaac McCaslin, not yet Uncle Ike, a long time yet before he would be uncle to half a county and still father to none, living in one small cramped fireless rented room in a Jefferson boarding-house where petit juries were domiciled during court terms and itinerant horse- and mule-traders stayed, with his kit of brand-new carpenter's tools and the shotgun McCaslin had given him with his name engraved in silver and old General Compson's compass (and, when the General died, his silver-mounted horn too) and the iron cot and mattress and the blankets which he would take each fall into the woods for more than sixty years and the bright tin coffee-pot

there had been a legacy, from his Uncle Hubert Beauchamp, his godfather, that bluff burly roaring childlike man from whom Uncle Buddy had won Toney's Terrel's wife Tennie in the poker-game in 1859— 'possible strait against three Treys in sight Not called' — ; no pale sentence or paragraph scrawled in cringing fear of death by a weak and trembling hand as a last desperate sop flung backward at retribution, but a Legacy, a Thing, possessing weight to the hand and bulk to the eye and even audible: a silver cup filled with gold pieces and wrapped in burlap and sealed with his godfather's ring in the hot wax, which (intact still) even before his Uncle Hubert's death and long before his own majority, when it would be his, had become not only a legend but one of the family lares. After his father's and his Uncle Hubert's sister's marriage they moved back into the big house, the tremendous cavern which old Carothers had started and never finished, cleared the remaining negroes out of it and with his mother's dowry completed it, at least the rest of the windows and doors and moved into it, all of them save Uncle Buddy who declined to leave the cabin he and his twin had built, the move being the bride's notion and more than just a notion and none ever to know if she really wanted to live in the big house or if she knew beforehand that Uncle Buddy would refuse to move: and two weeks after his birth in 1867, the first time he and his mother came downstairs, one night and the silver cup sitting on the

cleared dining-room table beneath the bright lamp and while his mother and his father and McCaslin and Tennie (his nurse: carrying him) — all of them again but Uncle Buddy — watched, his Uncle Hubert rang one by one into the cup the bright and glinting mintage and wrapped it into the burlap envelope and heated the wax and sealed it and carried it back home with him where he lived alone now without even his sister either to hold him down as McCaslin said or to try to raise him up as Uncle Buddy said, and (dark times then in Mississippi) Uncle Buddy said most of the niggers gone and the ones that didn't go even Hub Beauchamp could not have wanted: but the dogs remained and Uncle Buddy said Beauchamp fiddled while Nero fox-hunted they would go and see it there; at last his mother would prevail and they would depart in the surrey, once more all save Uncle Buddy and McCaslin to keep Uncle Buddy company until one winter Uncle Buddy began to fail and from then on it was himself, beginning to remember now, and his mother and Tennie and Toney's Terrel to drive: the twenty-two miles into the next county, the twin gateposts on one of which McCaslin could remember the half-grown boy blowing a fox-horn at breakfast dinner and suppertime and jumping down to open to any passer who happened to hear it but where there were no gates at all now, the shabby and overgrown entrance to what his mother still insisted that people call Warwick because her brother was if truth but triumphed and justice but prevailed the rightful earl of it, the paintless house which outwardly did not change but which on the inside seemed each time larger because he was too little to realise then that there was less and less in it of the fine furnishings, the rosewood and mahogany and walnut which for him had never existed anywhere anyway save in his mother's tearful lamentations and the occasional piece small enough to be roped somehow on to the rear or the top of the carriage on their return (And he remembered this, he had seen it: an instant, a flash, his mother's soprano 'Even my dress! Even my dress!' loud and outraged in the barren unswept hall; a face young and female and even lighter in colour than Toney's Terrel's for an instant in a closing door; a swirl, a glimpse of the silk gown and the flick and glint of an ear-ring: an apparition rapid and tawdry and illicit yet somehow even to the child, the infant still almost, breathless and exciting and evocative: as though, like two limpid and pellucid streams meeting, the child which he still

was had made serene and absolute and perfect rapport and contact through that glimpsed nameless illicit hybrid female flesh with the boy which had existed at that stage of inviolable and immortal adolescence in his uncle for almost sixty years; the dress, the face, the ear-rings gone in that same aghast flash and his uncle's voice: 'She's my cook! She's my new cook! I had to have a cook, didn't I?' then the uncle himself, the face alarmed and aghast too yet still innocently and somehow even indomitably of a boy, they retreating in their turn now, back to the front gallery, and his uncle again, pained and still amazed, in a sort of desperate resurgence if not of courage at least of self-assertion: 'They're free now! They're folks too just like we are!' and his mother: "That's why! That's why! My mother's house! Defiled! Defiled!" and his uncle: 'Damn it, Sibbey, at least give her time to pack her grip:' then over, finished, the loud uproar and all, himself and Tennie and he remembered Tennie's inscrutable face at the broken shutterless window of the bare room which had once been the parlour while they watched, hurrying down the lane at a stumbling trot, the routed compounder of his uncle's uxory: the back, the nameless face which he had seen only for a moment, the once-hooped dress ballooning and flapping below a man's overcoat, the worn heavy carpet-bag jouncing and banging against her knee, routed and in retreat true enough and in the empty lane solitary young-looking and forlorn yet withal still exciting and evocative and wearing still the silken banner captured inside the very citadel of respectability, and unforgettable.)

the cup, the sealed inscrutable burlap, sitting on the shelf in the locked closet, Uncle Hubert unlocking the door and lifting it down and passing it from hand to hand: his mother, his father, McCaslin and even Tennie, insisting that each take it in turn and heft it for weight and shake it again to prove the sound, Uncle Hubert himself standing spraddled before the cold unswept hearth in which the very bricks themselves were crumbling into a litter of soot and dust and mortar and the droppings of chimney-sweeps, still roaring and still innocent and still indomitable: and for a long time he believed nobody but himself had noticed that his uncle now put the cup only into his hands, unlocked the door and lifted it down and put it into his hands and stood over him until he had shaken it obediently until it sounded then took it from him

and locked it back into the closet before anyone else could have offered to touch it, and even later, when competent not only to remember but to rationalise, he could not say what it was or even if it had been anything because the parcel was still heavy and still rattled, not even when, Uncle Buddy dead and his father, at last and after almost seventy-five years in bed after the sun rose, said: 'Go get that damn cup. Bring that Damn Hub Beauchamp too if you have to:' because it still rattled though his uncle no longer put it even into his hands now but carried it himself from one to the other, his mother, McCaslin, Tennie, shaking it before each in turn, saying: 'Hear it? Hear it?' his face still innocent, not quite baffled but only amazed and not very amazed and still indomitable: and, his father and Uncle Buddy both gone now, one day without reason or any warning the almost completely empty house in which his uncle and Tennie's ancient and quarrelsome great-grandfather (who claimed to have seen Lafayette and McCaslin said in another ten years would be remembering God) lived, cooked and slept in one single room, burst into peaceful conflagration, a tranquil instantaneous sourceless unanimity of combustion, walls floors and roof: at sunup it stood where his uncle's father had built it sixty years ago, at sundown the four blackened and smokeless chimneys rose from a light white powder of ashes and a few charred ends of planks which did not even appear to have been very hot: and out of the last of evening, the last one of the twenty-two miles, on the old white mare which was the last of that stable which McCaslin remembered, the two old men riding double up to the sister's door, the one wearing his fox-horn on its braided deerhide thong and the other carrying the burlap parcel wrapped in a shirt, the tawny wax-daubed shapeless lump sitting again and on an almost identical shelf and his uncle holding the half-opened door now, his hand not only on the knob but one foot against it and the key waiting in the other hand, the face urgent and still not baffled but still and even indomitably not very amazed and himself standing in the half-opened door looking quietly up at the burlap shape become almost three times its original height and a good half less than its original thickness and turning away and he would remember not his mother's look this time nor yet Tennie's inscrutable expression but McCaslin's dark and aquiline face grave insufferable and bemused: then one night they waked him and

fetches him still half-asleep into the lamplight, the smell of medicine which was familiar by now in that room and the smell of something else which he had not smelled before and knew at once and would never forget, the pillow, the worn and ravaged face from which looked out still the boy innocent and immortal and amazed and urgent, looking at him and trying to tell him until McCaslin moved and leaned over the bed and drew from the top of the nightshirt the big iron key on the greasy cord which suspended it, the eyes saying Yes Yes Yes now, and cut the cord and unlocked the closet and brought the parcel to the bed, the eyes still trying to tell him even when he took the parcel so that was still not it, the hands still clinging to the parcel even while relinquishing it, the eyes more urgent than ever trying to tell him but they never did; and he was ten and his mother was dead too and McCaslin said, 'You are almost halfway now. You might as well open it:' and he: 'No. He said twenty-one:' and he was twenty-one and McCaslin shifted the bright lamp to the centre of the cleared dining-room table and set the parcel beside it and laid his open knife beside the parcel and stood back with that expression of old grave intolerant and repudiating and he lifted it, the burlap lump which fifteen years ago had changed its shape completely overnight, which shaken gave forth a thin weightless not-quite-musical curiously muffled clatter, the bright knife-blade hunting amid the mazed intricacy of string, the knobby gouts of wax bearing his uncle's Beauchamp seal rattling on to the table's polished top and, standing amid the collapse of burlap folds, the unstained tin coffee-pot still brand-new, the handful of copper coins and now he knew what had given them the muffled sound: a collection of minutely-folded scraps of paper sufficient almost for a rat's nest, of good linen bond, of the crude ruled paper such as negroes use, of raddedly-torn ledger-pages and the margins of newspapers and once the paper label from a new pair of overalls, all dated and all signed, beginning with the first one not six months after they had watched him seal the silver cup into the burlap on this same table in this same room by the light even of this same lamp almost twenty-one years ago:

I owe my Nephew Isaac Beauchamp McCaslin five (5) pieces Gold which I.O.U constitutes My note of hand with Interest at 5 percent.
Hubert Fitz-Hubert Beauchamp

at Warwick 27 Nov 1867

and he: 'Anyway he called it Warwick:' once at least, even if no more.
But there was more:

Isaac 24 Dec 1867 I.O.U. 2 pieces Gold H.Fh.B. I.O.U. Isaac 1 piece Gold
1 Jan 1868 H.Fh.B.

then five again then three then one then one then a long time and what
dream, what dreamed splendid recoup, not of any injury or betrayal of
trust because it had been merely a loan: nay, a partnership:

I.O.U. Beauchamp McCaslin or his heirs twenty-five (25) pieces Gold
This & All preceeding constituting My notes of hand at twenty (20)
percentum compounded annually. This date of 19th January 1873
Beauchamp

no location save that in time and signed by the single not name but
word as the old proud earl himself might have scrawled Nevile: and
that made forty-three and he could not remember himself of course
but the legend had it at fifty, which balanced: one: then one: then one:
then one and then the last three and then the last chit, dated after he
came to live in the house with them and written in the shaky hand not
of a beaten old man because he had never been beaten to know it but
of a tired old man maybe and even at that tired only on the outside and
still indomitable, the simplicity of the last one the simplicity not of
resignation but merely of amazement, like a simple comment or
remark, and not very much of that:

One silver cup. Hubert Beauchamp

and McCaslin: 'So you have plenty of coppers anyway. But they are still
not old enough yet to be either rarities or heirlooms. So you will have
to take the money:' except that he didn't hear McCaslin, standing
quietly beside the table and looking peacefully at the coffee-pot and
the pot sitting one night later on the mantel above what was not even a
fireplace in the little cramped icelike room in Jefferson as McCaslin

tossed the folded banknotes on to the bed and, still standing (there was nowhere to sit save on the bed) did not even remove his hat and overcoat: and he

‘As a loan. From you. This one:’ and McCaslin

‘You cant. I have no money that I can lend to you. And you will have to go to the bank and get it next month because I wont bring it to you:’ and he could not hear McCaslin now either, looking peacefully at McCaslin, his kinsman, his father almost yet no kin now as, at the last, even fathers and sons are no kin: and he

‘It’s seventeen miles, horseback and in the cold. We could both sleep here:’ and McCaslin

‘Why should I sleep here in my house when you wont sleep yonder in yours?’ and gone, and he looking at the bright rustless unstained tin and thinking and not for the first time how much it takes to compound a man (Isaac McCaslin for instance) and of the devious intricate choosing yet unerring path that man’s (Isaac McCaslin’s for instance) spirit takes among all that mass to make him at last what he is to be, not only to the astonishment of them (the ones who sired the McCaslin who sired his father and Uncle Buddy and their sister, and the ones who sired the Beauchamp who sired his Uncle Hubert and his Uncle Hubert’s sister) who believed they had shaped him, but to Isaac McCaslin too

as a loan and used it though he would not have had to: Major de Spain offered him a room in his house as long as he wanted it and asked nor would ever ask any question, and old General Compson more than that, to take him into his own room, to sleep in half of his own bed and more than Major de Spain because he told him baldly why: ‘You sleep with me and before this winter is out, I’ll know the reason. You’ll tell me. Because I dont believe you just quit. It looks like you just quit but I have watched you in the woods too much and I dont believe you just quit even if it does look damn like it:’ using it as a loan, paid his board and rent for a month and bought the tools, not simply because he was good with his hands because he had intended to use his hands and it could have been with horses, and not in mere static and hopeful emulation of

the Nazarene as the young gambler buys a spotted shirt because the old gambler won in one yesterday, but (without the arrogance of false humility and without the false humbleness of pride, who intended to earn his bread, didn't especially want to earn it but had to earn it and for more than just bread) because if the Nazarene had found carpentering good for the life and ends He had assumed and elected to serve, it would be all right too for Isaac McCaslin even though Isaac McCaslin's ends, although simple enough in their apparent motivation, were and would be always incomprehensible to him, and his life, invincible enough in its needs, if he could have helped himself, not being the Nazarene, he would not have chosen it: and paid it back. He had forgotten the thirty dollars which McCaslin would put into the bank in his name each month, fetched it in to him and flung it on to the bed that first one time but no more; he had a partner now or rather he was the partner: a blasphemous profane clever old dipsomaniac who had built blockade-runners in Charleston in '62 and '3 and had been a ship's carpenter since and appeared in Jefferson two years ago nobody knew from where nor why and spent a good part of his time since recovering from delirium tremens in the jail; they had put a new roof on the stable of the bank's president and (the old man in jail again still celebrating that job) he went to the bank to collect for it and the president said, 'I should borrow from you instead of paying you:' and it had been seven months now and he remembered for the first time, two-hundred-and-ten dollars, and this was the first job of any size and when he left the bank the account stood at two-twenty, two-forty to balance, only twenty dollars more to go, then it did balance though by then the total had increased to three hundred and thirty and he said, 'I will transfer it now:' and the president said, 'I cant do that. McCaslin told me not to. Haven't you got another initial you could use and open another account?' but that was all right, the coins the silver and the bills as they accumulated knotted into a handkerchief and the coffee-pot wrapped in an old shirt as when Tennie's great-grandfather had fetched it from Warwick eighteen years ago, in the bottom of the iron-bound trunk which old Carothers had brought from Carolina and his landlady said, 'Not even a lock! And you dont even lock your door, not even when you leave!' and himself looking at her as peacefully as he had looked at McCaslin that first night in this same room, no kin to him at all yet more

than kin as those who serve you even for pay are your kin and those who injure you are more than brother or wife

and had the wife now, got the old man out of jail and fetched him to the rented room and sobered him by superior strength, did not even remove his own shoes for twenty-four hours, got him up and got food into him and they built the barn this time from the ground up and he married her: an only child, a small girl yet curiously bigger than she seemed at first, solider perhaps, with dark eyes and a passionate heart-shaped face, who had time even on that farm to watch most of the day while he sawed timbers to the old man's measurements: and she: 'Papa told me about you. That farm is really yours, isn't it?' and he

'And McCaslin's:' and she

'Was there a will leaving half of it to him?' and he

'There didn't need to be a will. His grandmother was my father's sister. We were the same as brothers:' and she

'You are the same as second cousins and that's all you ever will be. But I don't suppose it matters:' and they were married, they were married and it was the new country, his heritage too as it was the heritage of all, out of the earth, beyond the earth yet of the earth because his too was of the earth's long chronicle, his too because each must share with another in order to come into it and in the sharing they become one: for that while, one: for that little while at least, one: indivisible, that while at least irrevocable and unrecoverable, living in a rented room still but for just a little while and that room wall-less and topless and floorless in glory for him to leave each morning and return to at night; her father already owned the lot in town and furnished the material and he and his partner would build it, her dowry from one: her wedding-present from three, she not to know it until the bungalow was finished and ready to be moved into and he never know who told her, not her father and not his partner and not even in drink though for a while he believed that, himself coming home from work and just time to wash and rest a moment before going down to supper, entering no rented cubicle since it would still partake of glory even after they would have grown old and lost it: and he saw her face then, just before she

spoke: 'Sit down:' the two of them sitting on the bed's edge, not even touching yet, her face strained and terrible, her voice a passionate and expiring whisper of immeasurable promise: 'I love you. You know I love you. When are we going to move?' and he

'I didn't — I didn't know — Who told you—' the hot fierce palm clapped over his mouth, crushing his lips into his teeth, the fierce curve of fingers digging into his cheek and only the palm slacked off enough for him to answer:

'The farm. Our farm. Your farm:' and he

'I—' then the hand again, finger and palm, the whole enveloping weight of her although she still was not touching him save the hand, the voice: 'No! No!' and the fingers themselves seeming to follow, through the cheek the impulse to speech as it died in his mouth, then the whisper, the breath again, of love and of incredible promise, the palm slackening again to let him answer:

'When?' and he

'I—' then she was gone, the hand too, standing, her back to him and her head bent, the voice so calm now that for an instant it seemed no voice of hers that he ever remembered: 'Stand up and turn your back and shut your eyes:' and repeated before he understood and stood himself with his eyes shut and heard the bell ring for supper below stairs and the calm voice again: 'Lock the door:' and he did so and leaned his forehead against the cold wood, his eyes closed, hearing his heart and the sound he had begun to hear before he moved until it ceased and the bell rang again below stairs and he knew it was for them this time and he heard the bed and turned and he had never seen her naked before, he had asked her to once, and why: that he wanted to see her naked because he loved her and he wanted to see her looking at him naked because he loved her but after that he never mentioned it again, even turning his face when she put the nightgown on over her dress to undress at night and putting the dress on over the gown to remove it in the morning and she would not let him get into bed beside her until the lamp was out and even in the heat of summer she would draw the sheet up over them both before she would let him

turn to her: and the landlady came up the stairs up the hall and rapped on the door and then called their names but she didn't move, lying still on the bed outside the covers, her face turned away on the pillow, listening to nothing, thinking of nothing, not of him anyway he thought then the landlady went away and she said, 'Take off your clothes:' her head still turned away, looking at nothing, thinking of nothing, waiting for nothing, not even him, her hand moving as though with volition and vision of its own, catching his wrist at the exact moment when he paused beside the bed so that he never paused but merely changed the direction of moving, downward now, the hand drawing him and she moved at last, shifted, a movement one single complete inherent not practised and one time older than man, looking at him now, drawing him still downward with the one hand down and down and he neither saw nor felt it shift, palm flat against his chest now and holding him away with the same apparent lack of any effort or any need for strength, and not looking at him now, she didn't need to, the chaste woman, the wife, already looked upon all the men who ever rutted and now her whole body had changed, altered, he had never seen it but once and now it was not even the one he had seen but composite of all woman-flesh since man that ever of its own will reclined on its back and opened, and out of it somewhere, without any movement of lips even, the dying and invincible whisper: 'Promise:' and he 'Promise?'

'The farm.' He moved. He had moved, the hand shifting from his chest once more to his wrist, grasping it, the arm still lax and only the light increasing pressure of the fingers as though arm and hand were a piece of wire cable with one looped end, only the hand tightening as he pulled against it. 'No,' he said. 'No:' and she was not looking at him still but not like the other but still the hand: 'No, I tell you. I wont. I cant. Never:' and still the hand and he said, for the last time, he tried to speak clearly and he knew it was still gently and he thought, She already knows more than I with all the man-listening in camps where there was nothing to read ever even heard of. They are born already bored with what a boy approaches only at fourteen and fifteen with blundering and aghast trembling: 'I cant. Not ever. Remember:' and still the steady and invincible hand and he said Yes and he thought. She is

lost. She was born lost. We were all born lost then he stopped thinking and even saying Yes, it was like nothing he had ever dreamed, let alone heard in mere man-talking until after a no-time he returned and lay spent on the insatiate immemorial beach and again with a movement one time more older than man she turned and freed herself and on their wedding night she had cried and he thought she was crying now at first, into the tossed and wadded pillow, the voice coming from somewhere between the pillow and the cachinnation: 'And that's all. That's all from me. If this dont get you that son you talk about, it wont be mine:' lying on her side, her back to the empty rented room, laughing and laughing

V

He went back to the camp one more time before the lumber company moved in and began to cut the timber. Major de Spain himself never saw it again. But he made them welcome to use the house and hunt the land whenever they liked, and in the winter following the last hunt when Sam Fathers and Lion died, General Compson and Walter Ewell invented a plan to incorporate themselves, the old group, into a club and lease the camp and the hunting privileges of the woods — an invention doubtless of the somewhat childish old General but actually worthy of Boon Hogganbeck himself. Even the boy, listening, recognised it for the subterfuge it was: to change the leopard's spots when they could not alter the leopard, a baseless and illusory hope to which even McCaslin seemed to subscribe for a while, that once they had persuaded Major de Spain to return to the camp he might revoke himself, which even the boy knew he would not do. And he did not. The boy never knew what occurred when Major de Spain declined. He was not present when the subject was broached and McCaslin never told him. But when June came and the time for the double birthday celebration there was no mention of it and when November came no one spoke of using Major de Spain's house and he never knew whether or not Major de Spain knew they were going on the hunt though without doubt old Ash probably told him: he and McCaslin and General Compson (and that one was the General's last hunt too) and Walter and Boon and Tennie's Jim and old Ash loaded two wagons and drove two days and almost

forty miles beyond any country the boy had ever seen before and lived in tents for the two weeks. And the next spring they heard (not from Major de Spain) that he had sold the timber-rights to a Memphis lumber company and in June the boy came to town with McCaslin one Saturday and went to Major de Spain's office — the big, airy, book-lined second-storey room with windows at one end opening upon the shabby hinder purlieus of stores and at the other a door giving on to the railed balcony above the Square, with its curtained alcove where sat a cedar water-bucket and a sugar-bowl and spoon and tumbler and a wicker-covered demijohn of whisky, and the bamboo-and-paper punkah swinging back and forth above the desk while old Ash in a tilted chair beside the entrance pulled the cord.

Of course," Major de Spain said. "Ash will probably like to get off in the woods himself for a while, where he wont have to eat Daisy's cooking. Complain about it, anyway. Are you going to take anybody with you?"

"No sir," he said. "I thought that maybe Boon—" For six months now Boon had been town-marshal at Hoke's; Major de Spain had compounded with the lumber company — or perhaps compromised was closer, since it was the lumber company who had decided that Boon might be better as a town-marshal than head of a logging gang.

"Yes," Major de Spain said. "I'll wire him today. He can meet you at Hoke's. I'll send Ash on by the train and they can take some food in and all you will have to do will be to mount your horse and ride over."

"Yes sir," he said. "Thank you." And he heard his voice again. He didn't know he was going to say it yet he did know, he had known it all the time: "Maybe if you ..." His voice died. It was stopped, he never knew how because Major de Spain did not speak and it was not until his voice ceased that Major de Spain moved, turned back to the desk and the papers spread on it and even that without moving because he was sitting at the desk with a paper in his hand when the boy entered, the boy standing there looking down at the short plumpish grey-haired man in sober fine broadcloth and an immaculate glazed shirt whom he was used to seeing in boots and muddy corduroy, unshaven, sitting the

shaggy powerful long-hocked mare with the worn Winchester carbine across the saddlebow and the great blue dog standing motionless as bronze at the stirrup, the two of them in that last year and to the boy anyway coming to resemble one another somehow as two people competent for love or for business who have been in love or in business together for a long time sometimes do. Major de Spain did not look up again.

“No. I will be too busy. But good luck to you. If you have it, you might bring me a young squirrel.”

“Yes sir,” he said. “I will.”

He rode his mare, the three-year-old filly he had bred and raised and broken himself. He left home a little after midnight and six hours later, without even having sweated her, he rode into Hoke’s, the tiny log-line junction which he had always thought of as Major de Spain’s property too although Major de Spain had merely sold the company (and that many years ago) the land on which the sidetracks and loading-platforms and the commissary store stood, and looked about in shocked and grieved amazement even though he had had forewarning and had believed himself prepared: a new planing-mill already half completed which would cover two or three acres and what looked like miles and miles of stacked steel rails red with the light bright rust of newness and of piled crossties sharp with creosote, and wire corrals and feeding-troughs for two hundred mules at least and the tents for the men who drove them; so that he arranged for the care and stabling of his mare as rapidly as he could and did not look any more, mounted into the log-train caboose with his gun and climbed into the cupola and looked no more save toward the wall of wilderness ahead within which he would be able to hide himself from it once more anyway.

Then the little locomotive shrieked and began to move: a rapid churning of exhaust, a lethargic deliberate clashing of slack couplings travelling backward along the train, the exhaust changing to the deep slow clapping bites of power as the caboose too began to move and from the cupola he watched the train’s head complete the first and only curve in the entire line’s length and vanish into the wilderness,

dragging its length of train behind it so that it resembled a small dingy harmless snake vanishing into weeds, drawing him with it too until soon it ran once more at its maximum clattering speed between the twin walls of unaxed wilderness as of old. It had been harmless once.

Not five years ago Walter Ewell had shot a six-point buck from this same moving caboose, and there was the story of the half-grown bear: the train's first trip into the cutting thirty miles away, the bear between the rails, its rear end elevated like that of a playing puppy while it dug to see what sort of ants or bugs they might contain or perhaps just to examine the curious symmetrical squared barkless logs which had appeared apparently from nowhere in one endless mathematical line overnight, still digging until the driver on the braked engine not fifty feet away blew the whistle at it, whereupon it broke frantically and took the first tree it came to: an ash sapling not much bigger than a man's thigh and climbed as high as it could and clung there, its head ducked between its arms as a man (a woman perhaps) might have done while the brakeman threw chunks of ballast at it, and when the engine returned three hours later with the first load of outbound logs the bear was halfway down the tree and once more scrambled back up as high as it could and clung again while the train passed and was still there when the engine went in again in the afternoon and still there when it came back out at dusk; and Boon had been in Hoke's with the wagon after a barrel of flour that noon when the train-crew told about it and Boon and Ash, both twenty years younger then, sat under the tree all that night to keep anybody from shooting it and the next morning Major de Spain had the log-train held at Hoke's and just before sundown on the second day, with not only Boon and Ash but Major de Spain and General Compson and Walter and McCaslin, twelve then, watching, it came down the tree after almost thirty-six hours without even water and McCaslin told him how for a minute they thought it was going to stop right there at the barrow-pit where they were standing and drink, how it looked at the water and paused and looked at them and at the water again, but did not, gone, running, as bears run, the two sets of feet, front and back, tracking two separate though parallel courses.

It had been harmless then. They would hear the passing log-train sometimes from the camp; sometimes, because nobody bothered to listen for it or not. They would hear it going in, running light and fast, the light clatter of the trucks, the exhaust of the diminutive locomotive and its shrill peanut-parcher whistle flung for one petty moment and absorbed by the brooding and inattentive wilderness without even an echo. They would hear it going out, loaded, not quite so fast now yet giving its frantic and toylike illusion of crawling speed, not whistling now to conserve steam, flinging its bitten labouring miniature puffing into the immemorial woods-face with frantic and bootless vainglory, empty and noisy and puerile, carrying to no destination or purpose sticks which left nowhere any scar or stump as the child's toy loads and transports and unloads its dead sand and rushes back for more, tireless and unceasing and rapid yet never quite so fast as the Hand which plays with it moves the toy burden back to load the toy again. But it was different now. It was the same train, engine cars and caboose, even the same enginemen brakeman and conductor to whom Boon, drunk then sober then drunk again then fairly sober once more all in the space of fourteen hours, had bragged that day two years ago about what they were going to do to Old Ben tomorrow, running with its same illusion of frantic rapidity between the same twin walls of impenetrable and impervious woods, passing the old landmarks, the old game crossings over which he had trailed bucks wounded and not wounded and more than once seen them, anything but wounded, bolt out of the woods and up and across the embankment which bore the rails and ties then down and into the woods again as the earth-bound supposedly move but crossing as arrows travel, groundless, elongated, three times its actual length and even paler, different in colour, as if there were a point between immobility and absolute motion where even mass chemically altered, changing without pain or agony not only in bulk and shape but in colour too, approaching the colour of wind, yet this time it was as though the train (and not only the train but himself, not only his vision which had seen it and his memory which remembered it but his clothes too, as garments carry back into the clean edgeless blowing of air the lingering effluvium of a sick-room or of death) had brought with it into the doomed wilderness even before the actual axe the shadow and portent of the new mill not even finished yet and the rails and ties

which were not even laid; and he knew now what he had known as soon as he saw Hoke's this morning but had not yet thought into words: why Major de Spain had not come back, and that after this time he himself, who had had to see it one time other, would return no more.

Now they were near. He knew it before the engine-driver whistled to warn him. Then he saw Ash and the wagon, the reins without doubt wrapped once more about the brake-lever as within the boy's own memory Major de Spain had been forbidding him for eight years to do, the train slowing, the slackened couplings jolting and clashing again from car to car, the caboose slowing past the wagon as he swung down with his gun, the conductor leaning out above him to signal the engine, the caboose still slowing, creeping, although the engine's exhaust was already slatting in mounting tempo against the unechoing wilderness, the crashing of draw-bars once more travelling backward along the train, the caboose picking up speed at last. Then it was gone. It had not been. He could no longer hear it. The wilderness soared, musing, inattentive, myriad, eternal, green; older than any mill-shed, longer than any spur-line. "Mr Boon here yet?" he said.

"He beat me in," Ash said. "Had the wagon loaded and ready for me at Hoke's yistiddy when I got there and setting on the front steps at camp last night when I got in. He already been in the woods since fo daylight this morning. Said he gwine up to the Gum Tree and for you to hunt up that way and meet him." He knew where that was: a single big sweet-gum just outside the woods, in an old clearing; if you crept up to it very quietly this time of year and then ran suddenly into the clearing, sometimes you caught as many as a dozen squirrels in it, trapped, since there was no other tree near they could jump to. So he didn't get into the wagon at all.

"I will," he said.

"I figured you would," Ash said, "I fotch you a box of shells." He passed the shells down and began to unwrap the lines from the brake-pole.

"How many times up to now do you reckon Major has told you not to do that?" the boy said.

“Do which?” Ash said. Then he said: “And tell Boon Hogganbeck dinner gonter be on the table in a hour and if yawl want any to come on and eat it.”

“In an hour?” he said. “It aint nine oclock yet.” He drew out his watch and extended it face toward Ash. “Look.” Ash didn’t even look at the watch.

“That’s town time. You aint in town now. You in the woods.”

“Look at the sun then.”

“Nemmine the sun too,” Ash said. “If you and Boon Hogganbeck want any dinner, you better come on in and get it when I tole you. I aim to get done in that kitchen because I got my wood to chop. And watch your feet. They’re crawling.”

“I will,” he said.

Then he was in the woods, not alone but solitary; the solitude closed about him, green with summer. They did not change, and, timeless, would not, anymore than would the green of summer and the fire and rain of fall and the iron cold and sometimes even snow

the day, the morning when he killed the buck and Sam marked his face with its hot blood, they returned to camp and he remembered old Ash’s blinking and disgruntled and even outraged disbelief until at last McCaslin had had to affirm the fact that he had really killed it: and that night Ash sat snarling and unapproachable behind the stove so that Tennie’s Jim had to serve the supper and waked them with breakfast already on the table the next morning and it was only half-past one o’clock and at last out of Major de Spain’s angry cursing and Ash’s snarling and sullen rejoinders the fact emerged that Ash not only wanted to go into the woods and shoot a deer also but he intended to and Major de Spain said, ‘By God, if we dont let him we will probably have to do the cooking from now on:’ and Walter Ewell said, ‘Or get up at midnight to eat what Ash cooks:’ and since he had already killed his buck for this hunt and was not to shoot again unless they needed meat, he offered his gun to Ash until Major de Spain took command and allotted that gun to Boon for the day and gave Boon’s unpredictable

pump gun to Ash, with two buckshot shells but Ash said, 'I got shells:' and showed them, four: one buck, one of number three shot for rabbits, two of bird-shot and told one by one their history and their origin and he remembered not Ash's face alone but Major de Spain's and Walter's and General Compson's too, and Ash's voice; 'Shoot? In course they'll shoot! Genl Cawmpson guv me this un' — the buckshot— 'right outen the same gun he kilt that big buck with eight years ago.

And this un' — it was the rabbit shell: triumphantly— 'is oldern thisyer boy!' And that morning he loaded the gun himself, reversing the order: the bird-shot, the rabbit, then the buck so that the buckshot would feed first into the chamber, and himself without a gun, he and Ash walked beside Major de Spain's and Tennie's Jim's horses and the dogs (that was the snow) until they cast and struck, the sweet strong cries ringing away into the muffled falling air and gone almost immediately, as if the constant and unmurmuring flakes had already buried even the unformed echoes beneath their myriad and weightless falling, Major de Spain and Tennie's Jim gone too, whooping on into the woods; and then it was all right, he knew as plainly as if Ash had told him that Ash had now hunted his deer and that even his tender years had been forgiven for having killed one, and they turned back toward home through the falling snow — that is, Ash said, 'Now whut?' and he said, 'This way' — himself in front because, although they were less than a mile from camp, he knew that Ash, who had spent two weeks of his life in the camp each year for the last twenty, had no idea whatever where they were, until quite soon the manner in which Ash carried Boon's gun was making him a good deal more than just nervous and he made Ash walk in front, striding on, talking now, an old man's garrulous monologue beginning with where he was at the moment then of the woods and of camping in the woods and of eating in camps then of eating then of cooking it and of his wife's cooking then briefly of his old wife and almost at once and at length of a new light-coloured woman who nursed next door to Major de Spain's and if she didn't watch out who she was switching her tail at he would show her how old was an old man or not if his wife just didn't watch him all the time, the two of them in a game trail through a dense brake of cane and brier which would bring them out within a quarter-mile of camp, approaching a big

fallen tree-trunk lying athwart the path and just as Ash, still talking, was about to step over it the bear, the yearling, rose suddenly beyond the log, sitting up, its forearms against its chest and its wrists limply arrested as if it had been surprised in the act of covering its face to pray: and after a certain time Ash's gun yawed jerkily up and he said, 'You haven't got a shell in the barrel yet.

Pump it:' but the gun already snicked and he said, 'Pump it. You haven't got a shell in the barrel yet:' and Ash pumped the action and in a certain time the gun steadied again and snicked and he said, 'Pump it:' and watched the buckshot shell jerk, spinning heavily, into the cane. This is the rabbit shot: he thought and the gun snicked and he thought: The next is bird-shot: and he didn't have to say Pump it; he cried, 'Dont shoot! Dont shoot!' but that was already too late too, the light dry vicious snick! before he could speak and the bear turned and dropped to all-fours and then was gone and there was only the log, the cane, the velvet and constant snow and Ash said, 'Now whut?' and he said, 'This way. Come on:' and began to back away down the path and Ash said, 'I got to find my shells:' and he said, 'Goddamn it, goddamn it, come on:' but Ash leaned the gun against the log and returned and stooped and fumbled among the cane roots until he came back and stooped and found the shells and they rose and at that moment the gun, untouched, leaning against the log six feet away and for that while even forgotten by both of them, roared, bellowed and flamed, and ceased: and he carried it now, pumped out the last mummified shell and gave that one also to Ash and, the action still open, himself carried the gun until he stood it in the corner behind Boon's bed at the camp

— ; summer, and fall, and snow, and wet and saprife spring in their ordered immortal sequence, the deathless and immemorial phases of the mother who had shaped him if any had toward the man he almost was, mother and father both to the old man born of a Negro slave and a Chickasaw chief who had been his spirit's father if any had, whom he had revered and harkened to and loved and lost and grieved: and he would marry someday and they too would own for their brief while that brief unsubstanced glory which inherently of itself cannot last and hence why glory: and they would, might, carry even the remembrance

of it into the time when flesh no longer talks to flesh because memory at least does last: but still the woods would be his mistress and his wife.

He was not going toward the Gum Tree. Actually he was getting farther from it. Time was and not so long ago either when he would not have been allowed here without someone with him, and a little later, when he had begun to learn how much he did not know, he would not have dared be here without someone with him, and later still, beginning to ascertain, even if only dimly, the limits of what he did not know, he could have attempted and carried it through with a compass, not because of any increased belief in himself but because McCaslin and Major de Spain and Walter and General Compson too had taught him at last to believe the compass regardless of what it seemed to state. Now he did not even use the compass but merely the sun and that only subconsciously, yet he could have taken a scaled map and plotted at any time to within a hundred feet of where he actually was; and sure enough, at almost the exact moment when he expected it, the earth began to rise faintly, he passed one of the four concrete markers set down by the lumber company's surveyor to establish the four corners of the plot which Major de Spain had reserved out of the sale, then he stood on the crest of the knoll itself, the four corner-markers all visible now, blanched still even beneath the winter's weathering, lifeless and shockingly alien in that place where dissolution itself was a seething turmoil of ejaculation tumescence conception and birth, and death did not even exist. After two winters' blanketings of leaves and the flood-waters of two springs, there was no trace of the two graves any more at all. But those who would have come this far to find them would not need headstones but would have found them as Sam Fathers himself had taught him to find such: by bearings on trees: and did, almost the first thrust of the hunting knife finding (but only to see if it was still there) the round tin box manufactured for axle-grease and containing now Old Ben's dried mutilated paw, resting above Lion's bones.

He didn't disturb it. He didn't even look for the other grave where he and McCaslin and Major de Spain and Boon had laid Sam's body, along with his hunting horn and his knife and his tobacco-pipe, that Sunday morning two years ago; he didn't have to. He had stepped over it,

perhaps on it. But that was all right. He probably knew I was in the woods this morning long before I got here, he thought, going on to the tree which had supported one end of the platform where Sam lay when McCaslin and Major de Spain found them — the tree, the other axle-grease tin nailed to the trunk, but weathered, rusted, alien too yet healed already into the wilderness's concordant generality, raising no tuneless note, and empty, long since empty of the food and tobacco he had put into it that day, as empty of that as it would presently be of this which he drew from his pocket — the twist of tobacco, the new bandanna handkerchief, the small paper sack of the peppermint candy which Sam had used to love; that gone too, almost before he had turned his back, not vanished but merely translated into the myriad life which printed the dark mould of these secret and sunless places with delicate fairy tracks, which, breathing and biding and immobile, watched him from beyond every twig and leaf until he moved, moving again, walking on; he had not stopped, he had only paused, quitting the knoll which was no abode of the dead because there was no death, not Lion and not Sam: not held fast in earth but free in earth and not in earth but of earth, myriad yet undiffused of every myriad part, leaf and twig and particle, air and sun and rain and dew and night, acorn oak and leaf and acorn again, dark and dawn and dark and dawn again in their immutable progression and, being myriad, one: and Old Ben too, Old Ben too; they would give him his paw back even, certainly they would give him his paw back: then the long challenge and the long chase, no heart to be driven and outraged, no flesh to be mauled and bled — Even as he froze himself he seemed to hear Ash's parting admonition.

He could even hear the voice as he froze, immobile, one foot just taking his weight, the toe of the other just lifted behind him, not breathing, feeling again and as always the sharp shocking inrush from when Isaac McCaslin long yet was not, and so it was fear all right but not fright as he looked down at it. It had not coiled yet and the buzzer had not sounded either, only one thick rapid contraction, one loop cast sideways as though merely for purchase from which the raised head might start slightly backward, not in fright either, not in threat quite yet, more than six feet of it, the head raised higher than his knee and

less than his knee's length away, and old, the once-bright markings of its youth dulled now to a monotone concordant too with the wilderness it crawled and lurked: the old one, the ancient and accursed about the earth, fatal and solitary and he could smell it now: the thin sick smell of rotting cucumbers and something else which had no name, evocative of all knowledge and an old weariness and of pariah-hood and of death.

At last it moved. Not the head. The elevation of the head did not change as it began to glide away from him, moving erect yet off the perpendicular as if the head and that elevated third were complete and all: an entity walking on two feet and free of all laws of mass and balance and should have been because even now he could not quite believe that all that shift and flow of shadow behind that walking head could have been one snake: going and then gone; he put the other foot down at last and didn't know it, standing with one hand raised as Sam had stood that afternoon six years ago when Sam led him into the wilderness and showed him and he ceased to be a child, speaking the old tongue which Sam had spoken that day without premeditation either: "Chief," he said: "Grandfather."

He couldn't tell when he first began to hear the sound, because when he became aware of it, it seemed to him that he had been already hearing it for several seconds — a sound as though someone were hammering a gun-barrel against a piece of railroad iron, a sound loud and heavy and not rapid yet with something frenzied about it, as the hammerer were not only a strong man and an earnest one but a little hysterical too. Yet it couldn't be on the log-line because, although the track lay in that direction, it was at least two miles from him and this sound was not three hundred yards away.

But even as he thought that, he realised where the sound must be coming from: whoever the man was and whatever he was doing, he was somewhere near the edge of the clearing where the Gum Tree was and where he was to meet Boon. So far, he had been hunting as he advanced, moving slowly and quietly and watching the ground and the trees both. Now he went on, his gun unloaded and the barrel slanted

up and back to facilitate its passage through brier and undergrowth, approaching as it grew louder and louder that steady savage somehow queerly hysterical beating of metal on metal, emerging from the woods, into the old clearing, with the solitary gum tree directly before him.

At first glance the tree seemed to be alive with frantic squirrels. There appeared to be forty or fifty of them leaping and darting from branch to branch until the whole tree had become one green maelstrom of mad leaves, while from time to time, singly or in twos and threes, squirrels would dart down the trunk then whirl without stopping and rush back up again as though sucked violently back by the vacuum of their fellows' frenzied vortex. Then he saw Boon, sitting, his back against the trunk, his head bent, hammering furiously at something on his lap. What he hammered with was the barrel of his dismembered gun, what he hammered at was the breech of it.

The rest of the gun lay scattered about him in a half-dozen pieces while he bent over the piece on his lap his scarlet and streaming walnut face, hammering the disjointed barrel against the gun-breech with the frantic abandon of a madman. He didn't even look up to see who it was. Still hammering, he merely shouted back at the boy in a hoarse strangled voice:

"Get out of here! Dont touch them! Dont touch a one of them! They're mine!"

DELTA AUTUMN

SOON NOW THEY would enter the Delta. The sensation was familiar to him. It had been renewed like this each last week in November for more than fifty years — the last hill, at the foot of which the rich unbroken alluvial flatness began as the sea began at the base of its cliffs, dissolving away beneath the unhurried November rain as the sea itself would dissolve away.

At first they had come in wagons: the guns, the bedding, the dogs, the food, the whisky, the keen heart-lifting anticipation of hunting; the

young men who could drive all night and all the following day in the cold rain and pitch a camp in the rain and sleep in the wet blankets and rise at daylight the next morning and hunt. There had been bear then.

A man shot a doe or a fawn as quickly as he did a buck, and in the afternoons they shot wild turkey with pistols to test their stalking skill and marksmanship, feeding all but the breast to the dogs.

But that time was gone now. Now they went in cars, driving faster and faster each year because the roads were better and they had farther and farther to drive, the territory in which game still existed drawing yearly inward as his life was drawing inward, until now he was the last of those who had once made the journey in wagons without feeling it and now those who accompanied him were the sons and even grandsons of the men who had ridden for twenty-four hours in the rain or sleet behind the steaming mules.

They called him 'Uncle Ike' now, and he no longer told anyone how near eighty he actually was because he knew as well as they did that he no longer had any business making such expeditions, even by car.

In fact, each time now, on that first night in camp, lying aching and sleepless in the harsh blankets, his blood only faintly warmed by the single thin whisky-and-water which he allowed himself, he would tell himself that this would be his last.

But he would stand that trip — he still shot almost as well as he ever had, still killed almost as much of the game he saw as he ever killed; he no longer even knew how many deer had fallen before his gun — and the fierce long heat of the next summer would renew him.

Then November would come again, and again in the car with two of the sons of his old companions, whom he had taught not only how to distinguish between the prints left by a buck or a doe but between the sound they made in moving, he would look ahead past the jerking arc of the windshield wiper and see the land flatten suddenly and swoop,

dissolving away beneath the rain as the sea itself would dissolve, and he would say, “Well, boys, there it is again.”

This time though, he didn't have time to speak. The driver of the car stopped it, slamming it to a skidding halt on the greasy pavement without warning, actually flinging the two passengers forward until they caught themselves with their braced hands against the dash. “What the hell, Roth!” the man in the middle said. “Cant you whistle first when you do that? Hurt you, Uncle Ike?”

“No,” the old man said. “What's the matter?” The driver didn't answer. Still leaning forward, the old man looked sharply past the face of the man between them, at the face of his kinsman. It was the youngest face of them all, aquiline, saturnine, a little ruthless, the face of his ancestor too, tempered a little, altered a little, staring sombrely through the streaming windshield across which the twin wipers flicked and flicked.

“I didn't intend to come back in here this time,” he said suddenly and harshly.

“You said that back in Jefferson last week,” the old man said. “Then you changed your mind. Have you changed it again? This aint a very good time to — —”

“Oh, Roth's coming,” the man in the middle said. His name was Legate. He seemed to be speaking to no one, as he was looking at neither of them. “If it was just a buck he was coming all this distance for, now. But he's got a doe in here.

Of course a old man like Uncle Ike cant be interested in no doe, not one that walks on two legs — when she's standing up, that is. Pretty light-coloured, too. The one he was after them nights last fall when he said he was coon-hunting, Uncle Ike.

The one I figured maybe he was still running when he was gone all that month last January. But of course a old man like Uncle Ike aint got no interest in nothing like that.” He chortled, still looking at no one, not completely jeering.

“What?” the old man said. “What’s that?” But he had not even so much as glanced at Legate. He was still watching his kinsman’s face. The eyes behind the spectacles were the blurred eyes of an old man, but they were quite sharp too; eyes which could still see a gun-barrel and what ran beyond it as well as any of them could.

He was remembering himself now: how last year, during the final stage by motor-boat in to where they camped, a box of food had been lost overboard and how on the next day his kinsman had gone back to the nearest town for supplies and had been gone overnight.

And when he did return, something had happened to him. He would go into the woods with his rifle each dawn when the others went, but the old man, watching him, knew that he was not hunting. “All right,” he said. “Take me and Will on to shelter where we can wait for the truck, and you can go on back.”

“I’m going in,” the other said harshly. “Dont worry. Because this will be the last of it.”

“The last of deer hunting, or of doe hunting?” Legate said. This time the old man paid no attention to him even by speech. He still watched the young man’s savage and brooding face.

“Why?” he said.

“After Hitler gets through with it? Or Smith or Jones or Roosevelt or Willkie or whatever he will call himself in this country?”

“We’ll stop him in this country,” Legate said. “Even if he calls himself George Washington.”

“How?” Edmonds said. “By singing God bless America in bars at midnight and wearing dime-store flags in our lapels?”

“So that’s what’s worrying you,” the old man said. “I aint noticed this country being short of defenders yet, when it needed them. You did some of it yourself twenty-odd years ago, before you were a grown man even. This country is a little mite stronger than any one man or group of men, outside of it or even inside of it either. I reckon, when

the time comes and some of you have done got tired of hollering we are whipped if we dont go to war and some more are hollering we are whipped if we do, it will cope with one Austrian paper-hanger, no matter what he will be calling himself. My pappy and some other better men than any of them you named tried once to tear it in two with a war, and they failed.”

“And what have you got left?” the other said. “Half the people without jobs and half the factories closed by strikes. Half the people on public dole that wont work and half that couldn’t work even if they would. Too much cotton and corn and hogs, and not enough for people to eat and wear. The country full of people to tell a man how he cant raise his own cotton whether he will or wont, and Sally Rand with a sergeant’s stripes and not even the fan couldn’t fill the army rolls. Too much not-butter and not even the guns — —”

“We got a deer camp — if we ever get to it,” Legate said. “Not to mention does.”

“It’s a good time to mention does,” the old man said. “Does and fawns both. The only fighting anywhere that ever had anything of God’s blessing on it has been when men fought to protect does and fawns. If it’s going to come to fighting, that’s a good thing to mention and remember too.”

“Haven’t you discovered in — how many years more than seventy is it? — that women and children are one thing there’s never any scarcity of?” Edmonds said.

“Maybe that’s why all I am worrying about right now is. that ten miles of river we still have got to run before we can make camp,” the old man said. “So let’s go on.”

They went on. Soon they were going fast again, as Edmonds always drove, consulting neither of them about the speed just as he had given neither of them any warning when he slammed the car to stop. The old man relaxed again. He watched, as he did each recurrent November while more than sixty of them passed, the land which he had seen change.

At first there had been only the old towns along the River and the old towns along the hills, from each of which the planters with their gangs of slaves and then of hired labourers had wrested from the impenetrable jungle of water-standing cane and cypress, gum and holly and oak and ash, cotton patches which as the years passed became fields and then plantations.

The paths made by deer and bear became roads and then highways, with towns in turn springing up along them and along the rivers Tallahatchie and Sunflower which joined and became the Yazoo, the River of the Dead of the Choctaws — the thick, slow, black, unsunned streams almost without current, which once each year ceased to flow at all and then reversed, spreading, drowning the rich land and subsiding again, leaving it still richer.

Most of that was gone now. Now a man drove two hundred miles from Jefferson before he found wilderness to hunt in. Now the land lay open from the cradling hills on the East to the rampart of levee on the West, standing horseman-tall with cotton for the world's looms — the rich black land, imponderable and vast, fecund up to the very doorsteps of the negroes who worked it and of the white men who owned it; which exhausted the hunting life of a dog in one year, the working life of a mule in five and of a man in twenty — the land in which neon flashed past them from the little countless towns and countless shining this-year's automobiles sped past them on the broad plumb-ruled highways, yet in which the only permanent mark of man's occupation seemed to be the tremendous gins, constructed in sections of sheet iron and in a week's time though they were, since no man, millionaire though he be, would build more than a roof and walls to shelter the camping equipment he lived from when he knew that once each ten years or so his house would be flooded to the second storey and all within it ruined; — the land across which there came now no scream of panther but instead the long hooting of locomotives: trains of incredible length and drawn by a single engine, since there was no gradient anywhere and no elevation save those raised by forgotten aboriginal hands as refuges from the yearly water and used by their

Indian successors to sepulchre their fathers' bones, and all that remained of that old time were the Indian names on the little towns and usually pertaining to water — Aluschaskuna, Tillatoba, Homochitto, Yazoo.

By early afternoon, they were on water. At the last little Indian-named town at the end of pavement they waited until the other car and the two trucks — the one carrying the bedding and tents and food, the other the horses — overtook them. They left the concrete and, after another mile or so, the gravel too.

In caravan they ground on through the ceaselessly dissolving afternoon, with skid-chains on the wheels now, lurching and splashing and sliding among the ruts, until presently it seemed to him that the retrograde of his remembering had gained an inverse velocity from their own slow progress, that the land had retreated not in minutes from the last spread of gravel but in years, decades, back toward what it had been when he first knew it: the road they now followed once more the ancient pathway of bear and deer, the diminishing fields they now passed once more scooped punily and terrifically by axe and saw and mule-drawn plough from the wilderness's flank, out of the brooding and immemorial tangle, in place of ruthless mile-wide parallelograms wrought by ditching the dyking machinery.

They reached the river landing and unloaded, the horses to go overland down stream to a point opposite the camp and swim the river, themselves and the bedding and food and dogs and guns in the motor-launch.

It was himself, though no horseman, no farmer, not even a countryman save by his distant birth and boyhood, who coaxed and soothed the two horses, drawing them by his own single frail hand until, backing, filling, trembling a little, they surged, halted, then sprang scrambling down from the truck, possessing no affinity for them as creatures, beasts, but being merely insulated by his years and time from the corruption of steel and oiled moving parts which tainted the others.

Then, his old hammer double gun which was only twelve years younger than he standing between his knees, he watched even the last puny marks of man — cabin, clearing, the small and irregular fields which a year ago were jungle and in which the skeleton stalks of this year's cotton stood almost as tall and rank as the old cane had stood, as if man had had to marry his planting to the wilderness in order to conquer it — fall away and vanish.

The twin banks marched with wilderness as he remembered it — the tangle of brier and cane impenetrable even to sight twenty feet away, the tall tremendous soaring of oak and gum and ash and hickory which had rung to no axe save the hunter's, had echoed to no machinery save the beat of old-time steamboats traversing it or to the snarling of launches like their own of people going into it to dwell for a week or two weeks because it was still wilderness.

There was some of it left, although now it was two hundred miles from Jefferson when once it had been thirty. He had watched it, not being conquered, destroyed, so much as retreating since its purpose was served now and its time an outmoded time, retreating southward through this inverted-apex, this ∇ -shaped section of earth between hills and River until what was left of it seemed now to be gathered and for the time arrested in one tremendous destiny of brooding and inscrutable impenetrability at the ultimate funnelling tip.

They reached the site of their last-year's camp with still two hours left of light. "You go on over under that driest tree and set down," Legate told him. " — if you can find it. Me and these other young boys will do this." He did neither. He was not tired yet. That would come later.

Maybe it wont come at all this time, he thought, as he had thought at this point each November for the last five or six of them. Maybe I will go out on stand in the morning too; knowing that he would not, not even if he took the advice and sat down under the driest shelter and did nothing until camp was made and supper cooked. Because it would not be the fatigue.

It would be because he would not sleep to-night but would lie instead wakeful and peaceful on the cot amid the tent-filling snoring and the rain's whisper as he always did on the first night in camp; peaceful, without regret or fretting, telling himself that was all right too, who didn't have so many of them left as to waste one sleeping.

In his slicker he directed the unloading of the boat — the tents, the stove, the bedding, the food for themselves and the dogs until there should be meat in camp. He sent two of the negroes to cut firewood; he had the cook-tent raised and the stove up and a fire going and supper cooking while the big tent was still being staked down. Then in the beginning of dusk he crossed in the boat to where the horses waited, backing and snorting at the water.

He took the lead-ropes and with no more weight than that and his voice, he drew them down into the water and held them beside the boat with only their heads above the surface, as though they actually were suspended from his frail and strengthless old man's hands, while the boat recrossed and each horse in turn lay prone in the shallows, panting and trembling, its eyes rolling in the dusk, until the same weightless hand and unraised voice gathered it surging upward, splashing and thrashing up the bank.

Then the meal was ready. The last of light was gone now save the thin stain of it snared somewhere between the river's surface and the rain. He had the single glass of thin whisky-and-water, then, standing in the churned mud beneath the stretched tarpaulin, he said grace over the fried slabs of pork, the hot soft shapeless bread, the canned beans and molasses and coffee in iron plates and cups, — the town food, brought along with them — then covered himself again, the others following.

“Eat,” he said. “Eat it all up. I dont want a piece of town meat in camp after breakfast tomorrow. Then you boys will hunt. You'll have to. When I first started hunting in this bottom sixty years ago with old General Compson and Major de Spain and Roth's grandfather and Will Legate's too, Major de Spain wouldn't allow but two pieces of foreign grub in his camp.

That was one side of pork and one ham of beef. And not to eat for the first supper and breakfast neither. It was to save until along toward the end of camp when everybody was so sick of bear meat and coon and venison that we couldn't even look at it."

"I thought Uncle Ike was going to say the pork and beef was for the dogs," Legate said, chewing. "But that's right; I remember. You just shot the dogs a mess of wild turkey every evening when they got tired of deer guts."

"Times are different now," another said. "There was game here then."
"Yes," the old man said quietly. "There was game here then."
"Besides, they shot does then too," Legate said. "As it is now, we aint got but one doe-hunter in — —"

"And better men hunted it," Edmonds said. He stood at the end of the rough plank table, eating rapidly and steadily as the others ate. But again the old man looked sharply across at the sullen, handsome, brooding face which appeared now darker and more sullen still in the light of the smoky lantern. "Go on. Say it."

"I didn't say that," the old man said. "There are good men everywhere, at all times. Most men are. Some are just unlucky, because most men are a little better than their circumstances give them a chance to be. And I've known some that even the circumstances couldn't stop."

"Well, I wouldn't say—" Legate said.

"So you've lived almost eighty years," Edmonds said. "And that's what you finally learned about the other animals you lived among. I suppose the question to ask you is, where have you been all the time you were dead?"

There was a silence; for the instant even Legate's jaw stopped chewing while he gaped at Edmonds. "Well, by God, Roth—" the third speaker said. But it was the old man who spoke, his voice still peaceful and untroubled and merely grave:

“Maybe so,” he said. “But if being what you call alive would have learned me any different, I reckon I’m satisfied, wherever it was I’ve been.”

“Well, I wouldn’t say that Roth—” Legate said.

The third speaker was still leaning forward a little over the table, looking at Edmonds. “Meaning that it’s only because folks happen to be watching him that a man behaves at all,” he said. “Is that it?”

“Yes,” Edmonds said. “A man in a blue coat, with a badge on it watching him. Maybe just the badge.”

“I deny that,” the old man said. “I dont — —”

The other two paid no attention to him. Even Legate was listening to them for the moment, his mouth still full of food and still open a little, his knife with another lump of something balanced on the tip of the blade arrested halfway to his mouth. “I’m glad I dont have your opinion of folks,” the third speaker said. “I take it you include yourself.”

“I see,” Edmonds said. “You prefer Uncle Ike’s opinion of circumstances. All right. Who makes the circumstances?”

“Luck,” the third said. “Chance. Happen so. I see what you are getting at. But that’s just what Uncle Ike said: that now and then, maybe most of the time, man is a little better than the net result of his and his neighbours’ doings, when he gets the chance to be.”

This time Legate swallowed first. He was not to be stopped this time. “Well, I wouldn’t say that Roth Edmonds can hunt one doe every day and night for two weeks and was a poor hunter or a unlucky one neither. A man that still have the same doe left to hunt on again next year — —”

“Have some meat,” the man next to him said.

“ — aint no unlucky. What?” Legate said.

“Have some meat.” The other offered the dish.

“I got some,” Legate said.

“Have some more,” the third speaker said. “You and Roth Edmonds both. Have a heap of it. Clapping your jaws together that way with nothing to break the shock.” Someone chortled. Then they all laughed, with relief, the tension broken. But the old man was speaking, even into the laughter, in that peaceful and still untroubled voice: “I still believe. I see proof everywhere.

I grant that man made a heap of his circumstances, him and his living neighbours between them. He even inherited some of them already made, already almost ruined even. A while ago Henry Wyatt there said how there used to be more game here. There was. So much that we even killed does. I seem to remember Will Legate mentioning that too—” Someone laughed, a single guffaw, stillborn. It ceased and they all listened, gravely, looking down at their plates. Edmonds was drinking his coffee, sullen, brooding, inattentive.

“Some folks still kill does,” Wyatt said. “There wont be just one buck hanging in this bottom to-morrow night without any head to fit it.” “I didn’t say all men,” the old man said. “I said most men. And not just because there is a man with a badge to watch us. We probably wont even see him unless maybe he will stop here about noon tomorrow and eat dinner with us and check our licences — —”

“We dont kill does because if we did kill does in a few years there wouldn’t even be any bucks left to kill, Uncle Ike,” Wyatt said.

“According to Roth yonder, that’s one thing we wont never have to worry about,” the old man said. “He said on the way here this morning that does and fawns — I believe he said women and children — are two things this world aint ever lacked. But that aint all of it,” he said.

“That’s just the mind’s reason a man has to give himself because the heart dont always have time to bother with thinking up words that fit together. God created man and He created the world for him to live in and I reckon He created the kind of world He would have wanted to live

in if He had been a man — the ground to walk on, the big woods, the trees and the water, and the game to live in it. And maybe He didn't put the desire to hunt and kill game in man but I reckon He knew it was going to be there, that man was going to teach it to himself, since he wasn't quite God himself yet — —"

"When will he be?" Wyatt said.

"I think that every man and woman, at the instant when it dont even matter whether they marry or not, I think that whether they marry then or afterward or dont never, at that instant the two of them together were God."

"Then there are some Gods in this world I wouldn't want to touch, and with a damn long stick," Edmonds said. He set his coffee cup down and looked at Wyatt. "And that includes myself, if that's what you want to know. I'm going to bed." He was gone. There was a general movement among the others.

But it ceased and they stood again about the table, not looking at the old man, apparently held there yet by his quiet and peaceful voice as the heads of the swimming horses had been held above the water by his weightless hand. The three negroes — the cook and his helper and old Isham — were sitting quietly in the entrance of the kitchen tent, listening too, the three faces dark and motionless and musing.

"He put them both here: man, and the game he would follow and kill, foreknowing it. I believe He said, 'So be it.' I reckon He even foreknew the end. But He said, 'I will give him his chance. I will give him warning and foreknowledge too, along with the desire to follow and the power to slay.

The woods and fields he ravages and the game he devastates will be the consequence and signature of his crime and guilt, and his punishment.' — Bed time," he said. His voice and inflexion did not change at all. "Breakfast at four o'clock, Isham. We want meat on the ground by sunup time."

There was a good fire in the sheet-iron heater; the tent was warm and was beginning to dry out, except for the mud underfoot. Edmonds was already rolled into his blankets, motionless, his face to the wall.

Isham had made up his bed too — the strong, battered iron cot, the stained mattress which was not quite soft enough, the worn, often-washed blankets which as the years passed were less and less warm enough. But the tent was warm; presently, when the kitchen was cleaned up and readied for breakfast, the young negro would come in to lie down before the heater, where he could be roused to put fresh wood into it from time to time.

And then, he knew now he would not sleep tonight anyway; he no longer needed to tell himself that perhaps he would. But it was all right now. The day was ended now and night faced him, but alarmless, empty of fret. Maybe I came for this, he thought: Not to hunt, but for this.

I would come anyway, even if only to go back home tomorrow. Wearing only his bagging woollen underwear, his spectacles folded away in the worn case beneath the pillow where he could reach them readily and his lean body fitted easily into the old worn groove of mattress and blankets, he lay on his back, his hands crossed on his breast and his eyes closed while the others undressed and went to bed and the last of the sporadic talking died into snoring.

Then he opened his eyes and lay peaceful and quiet as a child, looking up at the motionless belly of rain-murmured canvas upon which the glow of the heater was dying slowly away and would fade still further until the young negro, lying on two planks before it, would sit up and stoke it and lie back down again.

He had a house once. That was sixty years ago, when the Big Bottom was only thirty miles from Jefferson and old Major de Spain, who had been his father's cavalry commander in '61 and '2 and '3 and '4, and his cousin (his older brother; his father too) had taken him into the woods for the first time.

Old Sam Fathers was alive then, born in slavery, son of a Negro slave and a Chickasaw chief, who had taught him how to shoot, not only when to shoot but when not to; such a November dawn as tomorrow would be and the old man led him straight to the great cypress and he had known the buck would pass exactly there because there was something running in Sam Fathers's veins which ran in the veins of the buck too, and they stood there against the tremendous trunk, the old man of seventy and the boy of twelve, and there was nothing save the dawn until suddenly the buck was there, smoke-coloured out of nothing, magnificent with speed: and Sam Fathers said, 'Now.

Shoot quick and shoot slow:' and the gun levelled rapidly without haste and crashed and he walked to the buck lying still intact and still in the shape of that magnificent speed and bled it with Sam's knife and Sam dipped his hands into the hot blood and marked his face for ever while he stood trying not to tremble, humbly and with pride too though the boy of twelve had been unable to phrase it then: I slew you: my bearing must not shame your quitting life.

My conduct for ever onward must become your death: marking him for that and for more than that: that day and himself and McCaslin juxtaposed not against the wilderness but against the tamed land, the old wrong and shame itself, in repudiation and denial at least of the land and the wrong and shame even if he couldn't cure the wrong and eradicate the shame, who at fourteen when he learned of it had believed he could do both when he became competent and when at twenty-one he became competent he knew that he could do neither but at least he could repudiate the wrong and shame, at least in principle, and at least the land itself in fact, for his son at least: and did, thought he had: then (married then) in a rented cubicle in a back-street stock-traders' boarding-house, the first and last time he ever saw her naked body, himself and his wife juxtaposed in their turn against that same land, that same wrong and shame from whose regret and grief he would at least save and free his son and, saving and freeing his son, lost him. They had the house then. That roof, the two weeks of each November which they spent under it, had become his home.

Although since that time they had lived during the two fall weeks in tents and not always in the same place two years in succession and now his companions were the sons and even the grandsons of them with whom he had lived in the house and for almost fifty years now the house itself had not even existed, the conviction, the sense and feeling of home, had been merely transferred into the canvas. He owned a house in Jefferson, a good house though small, where he had had a wife and lived with her and lost her, ay, lost her even though he had lost her in the rented cubicle before he and his old clever dipsomaniac partner had finished the house for them to move into it: but lost her, because she loved him. But women hope for so much.

They never live too long to still believe that anything within the scope of their passionate wanting is likewise within the range of their passionate hope: and it was still kept for him by his dead wife's widowed niece and her children and he was comfortable in it, his wants and needs and even the small trying harmless crotchets of an old man looked after by blood at least related to the blood which he had elected out of all the earth to cherish. But he spent the time within those walls waiting for November, because even this tent with its muddy floor and the bed which was not wide enough nor soft enough nor even warm enough, was his home and these men, some of whom he only saw during these two November weeks and not one of whom even bore any name he used to know — De Spain and Compson and Ewell and Hogganbeck — were more his kin than any. Because this was his land
— —

The shadow of the youngest negro loomed. It soared, blotting the heater's dying glow from the ceiling, the wood billets thumping into the iron maw until the glow, the flame, leaped high and bright across the canvas. But the negro's shadow still remained, by its length and breadth, standing, since it covered most of the ceiling, until after a moment he raised himself on one elbow to look. It was not the negro, it was his kinsman; when he spoke the other turned sharp against the red firelight the sullen and ruthless profile.
"Nothing," Edmonds said. "Go on back to sleep."

“Since Will Legate mentioned it,” McCaslin said, “I remember you had some trouble sleeping in here last fall too. Only you called it coon-hunting then. Or was it Will Legate called it that?” The other didn’t answer. Then he turned and went back to his bed. McCaslin, still propped on his elbow, watched until the other’s shadow sank down the wall and vanished, became one with the mass of sleeping shadows. “That’s right,” he said. “Try to get some sleep.

We must have meat in camp to-morrow. You can do all the setting up you want to after that.” He lay down again, his hands crossed again on his breast, watching the glow of the heater on the canvas ceiling. It was steady again now, the fresh wood accepted, being assimilated; soon it would begin to fade again, taking with it the last echo of that sudden upflare of a young man’s passion and unrest. Let him lie awake for a little while, he thought; He will lie still some day for a long time without even dissatisfaction to disturb him.

And lying awake here, in these surroundings, would soothe him if anything could, if anything could soothe a man just forty years old. Yes, he thought; Forty years old or thirty, or even the trembling and sleepless ardour of a boy; already the tent, the rain-murmured canvas globe, was once more filled with it.

He lay on his back, his eyes closed, his breathing quiet and peaceful as a child’s, listening to it — that silence which was never silence but was myriad. He could almost see it, tremendous, primeval, looming, musing downward upon this puny evanescent clutter of human sojourn which after a single brief week would vanish and in another week would be completely healed, traceless in the unmarked solitude. Because it was his land, although he had never owned a foot of it.

He had never wanted to, not even after he saw plain its ultimate doom, watching it retreat year by year before the onslaught of axe and saw the log-lines and then dynamite and tractor ploughs, because it belonged to no man.

It belonged to all; they had only to use it well, humbly and with pride. Then suddenly he knew why he had never wanted to own any of it, arrest at least that much of what people called progress, measure his longevity at least against that much of its ultimate fate. It was because there was just exactly enough of it.

He seemed to see the two of them — himself and the wilderness — as coevals, his own span as a hunter, a woodsman, not contemporary with his first breath but transmitted to him, assumed by him gladly, humbly, with joy and pride, from that old Major de Spain and that old Sam Fathers who had taught him to hunt, the two spans running out together, not toward oblivion, nothingness, but into a dimension free of both time and space where once more the untreed land warped and wrung to mathematical squares of rank cotton for the frantic old-world people to turn into shells to shoot at one another, would find ample room for both — the names, the faces of the old men he had known and loved and for a little while outlived, moving again among the shades of tall unaxed trees and sightless brakes where the wild strong immortal game ran for ever before the tireless belling immortal hounds, falling and rising phoenix-like to the soundless guns.

He had been asleep. The lantern was lighted now. Outside in the darkness the oldest negro, Isham, was beating a spoon against the bottom of a tin pan and crying, "Raise up and get yo foa clock coffy.

Raise up and get yo foa clock coffy," and the tent was full of low talk and of men dressing, and Legate's voice, repeating: "Get out of here now and let Uncle Ike sleep. If you wake him up, he'll go out with us. And he aint got any business in the woods this morning."

So he didn't move. He lay with his eyes closed, his breathing gentle and peaceful, and heard them one by one leave the tent. He listened to the breakfast sounds from the table beneath the tarpaulin and heard them depart — the horses, the dogs, the last voice until it died away and there was only the sounds of the negroes clearing breakfast away.

After a while he might possibly even hear the first faint clear cry of the first hound ring through the wet woods from where the buck had bedded, then he would go back to sleep again — The tent-flap swung in and fell.

Something jarred sharply against the end of the cot and a hand grasped his knee through the blanket before he could open his eyes. It was Edmonds, carrying a shotgun in place of his rifle. He spoke in a harsh, rapid voice:

“Sorry to wake you. There will be a — —”

“I was awake,” McCaslin said. “Are you going to shoot that shotgun today?”

“You just told me last night you want meat,” Edmonds said. “There will be a — —”

“Since when did you start having trouble getting meat with your rifle?”

“All right,” the other said, with that harsh, restrained, furious impatience. Then McCaslin saw in his hand a thick oblong: an envelope. “There will be a message here some time this morning, looking for me. Maybe it wont come. If it does, give the messenger this and tell h — say I said No.”

“A what?” McCaslin said. “Tell who?” He half rose on to his elbow as Edmonds jerked the envelope on to the blanket, already turning toward the entrance, the envelope striking solid and heavy and without noise and already sliding from the bed until McCaslin caught it, divining by feel through the paper as instantaneously and conclusively as if he had opened the envelope and looked, the thick sheaf of banknotes.

“Wait,” he said. “Wait:” — more than the blood kinsman, more even than the senior in years, so that the other paused, the canvas lifted, looking back, and McCaslin saw that outside it was already day. “Tell her No,” he said. “Tell her.”

They stared at one another — the old face, wan, sleep-raddled above the tumbled bed, the dark and sullen younger one at once furious and

cold. "Will Legate was right. This is what you called coon-hunting. And now this." He didn't raise the envelope. He made no motion, no gesture to indicate it. "What did you promise her that you haven't the courage to face her and retract?"

"Nothing!" the other said. "Nothing! This is all of it. Tell her I said No." He was gone. The tent flap lifted on an in-waft of faint light and the constant murmur of rain, and fell again, leaving the old man still half-raised on to one elbow, the envelope clutched in the other shaking hand. Afterward it seemed to him that he had begun to hear the approaching boat almost immediately, before the other could have got out of sight even.

It seemed to him that there had been no interval whatever: the tent flap falling on the same out-waft of faint and rain-filled light like the suspiration and expiration of the same breath and then in the next second lifted again — the mounting snarl of the outboard engine, increasing, nearer and nearer and louder and louder then cut short off, ceasing with the absolute instantaneity of a blown-out candle, into the lap and plop of water under the bows as the skiff slid in to the bank, the youngest negro, the youth, raising the tent flap beyond which for that instant he saw the boat — a small skiff with a negro man sitting in the stern beside the up-slanted motor — then the woman entering, in a man's hat and a man's slicker and rubber boots, carrying the blanket-swaddled bundle on one arm and holding the edge of the unbuttoned raincoat over it with the other hand: and bringing something else, something intangible, an effluvium which he knew he would recognise in a moment because Isham had already told him, warned him, by sending the young negro to the tent to announce the visitor instead of coming himself, the flap falling at last on the young negro and they were alone — the face indistinct and as yet only young and with dark eyes, queerly colourless but not ill and not that of a country woman despite the garments she wore, looking down at him where he sat upright on the cot now, clutching the envelope, the soiled undergarment bagging about him and the twisted blankets huddled about his hips.

“Is that his?” he cried. “Dont lie to me!”

“Yes,” she said. “He’s gone.”

“Yes. He’s gone. You wont jump him here. Not this time. I dont reckon even you expected that. He left you this. Here.” He fumbled at the envelope. It was not to pick it up, because it was still in his hand; he had never put it down.

It was as if he had to fumble somehow to co-ordinate physically his heretofore obedient hand with what his brain was commanding of it, as if he had never performed such an action before, extending the envelope at last, saying again, “Here. Take it. Take it:” until he became aware of her eyes, or not the eyes so much as the look, the regard fixed now on his face with that immersed contemplation, that bottomless and intent candour, of a child. If she had ever seen either the envelope or his movement to extend it, she did not show it.

“You’re Uncle Isaac,” she said.

“Yes,” he said. “But never mind that. Here. Take it. He said to tell you No.” She looked at the envelope, then she took it. It was sealed and bore no superscription. Nevertheless, even after she glanced at the front of it, he watched her hold it in the one free hand and tear the corner off with her teeth and manage to rip it open and tilt the neat sheaf of bound notes on to the blanket without even glancing at them and look into the empty envelope and take the edge between her teeth and tear it completely open before she crumpled and dropped it.

“That’s just money,” she said.

“What did you expect? What else did you expect? You have known him long enough or at least often enough to have got that child, and you dont know him any better than that?”

“Not very often. Not very long. Just that week here last fall, and in January he sent for me and we went West, to New Mexico. We were there six weeks, where I could at least sleep in the same apartment where I cooked for him and looked after his clothes — —”

“But not marriage,” he said. “Not marriage. He didn’t promise you that. Dont lie to me. He didn’t have to.”

“No. He didn’t have to. I didn’t ask him to. I knew what I was doing. I knew that to begin with, long before honour I imagine he called it told him the time had come to tell me in so many words what his code I suppose he would call it would forbid him for ever to do. And we agreed. Then we agreed again before he left New Mexico, to make sure. That that would be all of it. I believed him. No, I dont mean that; I mean I believed myself.

I wasn’t even listening to him any more by then because by that time it had been a long time since he had had anything else to tell me for me to have to hear. By then I wasn’t even listening enough to ask him to please stop talking. I was listening to myself. And I believed it. I must have believed it. I dont see how I could have helped but believe it, because he was gone then as we had agreed and he didn’t write as we had agreed, just the money came to the bank in Vicksburg in my name but coming from nobody as we had agreed.

So I must have believed it. I even wrote him last month to make sure again and the letter came back unopened and I was sure. So I left the hospital and rented myself a room to live in until the deer season opened so I could make sure myself and I was waiting beside the road yesterday when your car passed and he saw me and so I was sure.”

“Then what do you want?” he said. “What do you want? What do you expect?”

“Yes,” she said. And while he glared at her, his white hair awry from the pillow and his eyes, lacking the spectacles to focus them, blurred and irisless and apparently pupilless, he saw again that grave, intent, speculative and detached fixity like a child watching him. “His great great — Wait a minute. — great great great grandfather was your grandfather. McCaslin. Only it got to be Edmonds.

Only it got to be more than that. Your cousin McCaslin was there that day when your father and Uncle Buddy won Tennie from Mr

Beauchamp for the one that had no name but Terrel so you called him Tomey's Terrel, to marry. But after that it got to be Edmonds." She regarded him, almost peacefully, with that unwinking and heatless fixity — the dark wide bottomless eyes in the face's dead and toneless pallor which to the old man looked anything but dead, but young and incredibly and even ineradicably alive — as though she were not only not looking at anything, she was not even speaking to anyone but herself. "I would have made a man of him. He's not a man yet. You spoiled him. You, and Uncle Lucas and Aunt Mollie. But mostly you."

"Me?" he said. "Me?"

"Yes. When you gave to his grandfather that land which didn't belong to him, not even half of it by will or even law."

"And never mind that too," he said. "Never mind that too. You," he said. "You sound like you have been to college even. You sound almost like a Northerner even, not like the draggle-tailed women of these Delta peckerwoods. Yet you meet a man on the street one afternoon just because a box of groceries happened to fall out of a boat. And a month later you go off with him and live with him until he got a child on you: and then, by your own statement, you sat there while he took his hat and said good-bye and walked out. Even a Delta peckerwood would look after even a draggle-tail better than that. Haven't you got any folks at all?"

"Yes," she said. "I was living with one of them. My aunt, in Vicksburg. I came to live with her two years ago when my father died; we lived in Indianapolis then. But I got a job, teaching school here in Aluschaskuna, because my aunt was a widow, with a big family, taking in washing to sup — —"

"Took in what?" he said. "Took in washing?" He sprang, still seated even, flinging himself backward on to one arm, awry-haired, glaring. Now he understood what it was she had brought into the tent with her, what old Isham had already told him by sending the youth to bring her in to him — the pale lips, the skin pallid and dead-looking yet not ill, the dark and tragic and foreknowing eyes. Maybe in a thousand or two

thousand years in America, he thought. But not now! Not now! He cried, not loud, in a voice of amazement, pity, and outrage: "You're a nigger!"

"Yes," she said. "James Beauchamp — you called him Tennie's Jim though he had a name — was my grandfather. I said you were Uncle Isaac."

"And he knows?"

"No," she said. "What good would that have done?"

"But you did," he cried. "But you did. Then what do you expect here?"

"Nothing."

"Then why did you come here? You said you were waiting in Aluschaskuna yesterday and he saw you. Why did you come this morning?"

"I'm going back North. Back home. My cousin brought me up the day before yesterday in his boat. He's going to take me on to Leland to get the train."

"Then go," he said. Then he cried again in that thin not loud and grieving voice: "Get out of here! I can do nothing for you! Cant nobody do nothing for you!" She moved; she was not looking at him again, toward the entrance. "Wait," he said. She paused again, obediently still, turning. He took up the sheaf of banknotes and laid it on the blanket at the foot of the cot and drew his hand back beneath the blanket.

"There," he said.

Now she looked at the money, for the first time, one brief blank glance, then away again. "I dont need it. He gave me money last winter. Besides the money he sent to Vicksburg. Provided. Honour and code too. That was all arranged."

"Take it," he said. His voice began to rise again, but he stopped it. "Take it out of my tent." She came back to the cot and took up the money; whereupon once more he said, "Wait:" although she had not turned, still stooping, and he put out his hand. But, sitting, he could not complete the reach until she moved her hand, the single hand which

held the money, until he touched it. He didn't grasp it, he merely touched it — the gnarled, bloodless, bone-light bone-dry old man's fingers touching for a second the smooth young flesh where the strong old blood ran after its long-lost journey back to home. "Tennie's Jim," he said. "Tennie's Jim." He drew the hand back beneath the blanket again: he said harshly now: "It's a boy, I reckon. They usually are, except that one that was its own mother too."

"Yes," she said. "It's a boy." She stood for a moment longer, looking at him. Just for an instant her free hand moved as though she were about to lift the edge of the raincoat away from the child's face. But she did not. She turned again when once more he said Wait and moved beneath the blanket.

"Turn your back," he said. "I am going to get up. I aint got my pants on." Then he could not get up. He sat in the huddled blanket, shaking, while again she turned and looked down at him in dark interrogation. "There," he said harshly, in the thin and shaking old man's voice. "On the nail there. The tent-pole."

"What?" she said.

"The horn!" he said harshly. "The horn." She went and got it, thrust the money into the slicker's side pocket as if it were a rag, a soiled handkerchief, and lifted down the horn, the one which General Compson had left him in his will, covered with the unbroken skin from a buck's shank and bound with silver.

"What?" she said.

"It's his. Take it."

"Oh," she said. "Yes. Thank you."

"Yes," he said, harshly, rapidly, but not so harsh now and soon not harsh at all but just rapid, urgent, until he knew that his voice was running away with him and he had neither intended it nor could stop it: "That's right. Go back North. Marry: a man in your own race. That's the only salvation for you — for a while yet, maybe a long while yet. We will have to wait. Marry a black man. You are young, handsome, almost

white; you could find a black man who would see in you what it was you saw in him, who would ask nothing of you and expect less and get even still less than that, if it's revenge you want. Then you will forget all this, forget it ever happened, that he ever existed—" until he could stop it at last and did, sitting there in his huddle of blankets during the instant when, without moving at all, she blazed silently down at him. Then that was gone too. She stood in the gleaming and still dripping slicker, looking quietly down at him from under the sodden hat.

"Old man," she said, "have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you dont remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?"

Then she was gone too. The waft of light and the murmur of the constant rain flowed into the tent and then out again as the flap fell. Lying back once more, trembling, panting, the blanket huddled to his chin and his hands crossed on his breast, he listened to the pop and snarl, the mounting then fading whine of the motor until it died away and once again the tent held only silence and the sound of rain.

And cold too: he lay shaking faintly and steadily in it, rigid save for the shaking. This Delta, he thought: This Delta. This land which man has deswamped and denuded and derivered in two generations so that white men can own plantations and commute every night to Memphis and black men own plantations and ride in jim crow cars to Chicago to live in millionaires' mansions on Lakeshore Drive, where white men rent farms and live like niggers and niggers crop on shares and live like animals, where cotton is planted and grows man-tall in the very cracks of the sidewalks, and usury and mortgage and bankruptcy and measureless wealth, Chinese and African and Aryan and Jew, all breed and spawn together until no man has time to say which one is which nor cares.... No wonder the ruined woods I used to know dont cry for retribution! he thought: The people who have destroyed it will accomplish its revenge.

The tent flap jerked rapidly in and fell. He did not move save to turn his head and open his eyes. It was Legate. He went quickly to Edmonds's

bed and stopped, rummaging hurriedly among the still-tumbled blankets.

“What is it?” he said.

“Looking for Roth’s knife,” Legate said. “I come back to get a horse. We got a deer on the ground.” He rose, the knife in his hand, and hurried toward the entrance.

“Who killed it?” McCaslin said. “Was it Roth?”

“Yes,” Legate said, raising the flap.

“Wait,” McCaslin said. He moved, suddenly, on to his elbow. “What was it?” Legate paused for an instant beneath the lifted flap. He did not look back.

“Just a deer, Uncle Ike,” he said impatiently. “Nothing extra.” He was gone; again the flap fell behind him, wafting out of the tent again the faint light and the constant and grieving rain. McCaslin lay back down, the blanket once more drawn to his chin, his crossed hands once more weightless on his breast in the empty tent.

“It was a doe,” he said.

GO DOWN, MOSES

I

THE FACE WAS black, smooth, impenetrable; the eyes had seen too much. The negroid hair had been treated so that it covered the skull like a cap, in a single neat-ridged sweep, with the appearance of having been lacquered, the part trimmed out with a razor, so that the head resembled a bronze head, imperishable and enduring.

He wore one of those sports costumes called ensembles in the men’s shop advertisements, shirt and trousers matching and cut from the same fawn-coloured flannel, and they had cost too much and were draped too much, with too many pleats; and he half lay on the steel cot in the steel cubicle just outside which an armed guard had stood for twenty hours now, smoking cigarettes and answering in a voice which

was anything under the sun but a southern voice or even a negro voice, the questions of the spectacled young white man sitting with a broad census-taker's portfolio on the steel stool opposite:

"Samuel Worsham Beauchamp. Twenty-six. Born in the country near Jefferson, Mississippi. No family. No — —"

"Wait." The census-taker wrote rapidly. "That's not the name you were sen — lived under in Chicago."

The other snapped the ash from the cigarette. "No. It was another guy killed the cop."

"All right. Occupation — —"

"Getting rich too fast.

— none." The census-taker wrote rapidly. "Parents."

"Sure. Two. I dont remember them. My grandmother raised me."

"What's her name? Is she still living?"

"I dont know. Mollie Worsham Beauchamp. If she is, she's on Carothers Edmonds's farm seventeen miles from Jefferson, Mississippi. That all?"

The census-taker closed the portfolio and stood up. He was a year or two younger than the other. "If they dont know who you are here, how will they know — how do you expect to get home?"

The other snapped the ash from the cigarette, lying on the steel cot in the fine Hollywood clothes and a pair of shoes better than the census-taker would ever own. "What will that matter to me?" he said.

So the census-taker departed; the guard locked the steel door again. And the other lay on the steel cot smoking until after a while they came and slit the expensive trousers and shaved the expensive coiffure and led him out of the cell.

II

On that same hot, bright July morning the same hot bright wind which shook the mulberry leaves just outside Gavin Stevens's window blew into the office too, contriving a semblance of coolness from what was merely motion. It fluttered among the county-attorney business on the

desk and blew in the wild shock of prematurely white hair of the man who sat behind it — a thin, intelligent, unstable face, a rumpled linen suit from whose lapel a Phi Beta Kappa key dangled on a watch-chain — Gavin Stevens, Phi Beta Kappa, Harvard, Ph.D., Heidelberg, whose office was his hobby, although it made his living for him, and whose serious vocation was a twenty-two-year-old unfinished translation of the Old Testament back into classic Greek.

Only his caller seemed impervious to it, though by appearance she should have owned in that breeze no more of weight and solidity than the intact ash of a scrap of burned paper — a little old negro woman with a shrunken, incredibly old face beneath a white headcloth and a black straw hat which would have fitted a child.

“Beauchamp?” Stevens said. “You live on Mr Carothers Edmonds’s place.”

“I done left,” she said. “I come to find my boy.” Then, sitting on the hard chair opposite him and without moving, she began to chant. “Roth Edmonds sold my Benjamin. Sold him in Egypt. Pharaoh got him — —”

“Wait,” Stevens said. “Wait, Aunty.” Because memory, recollection, was about to mesh and click. “If you dont know where your grandson is, how do you know he’s in trouble? Do you mean that Mr Edmonds has refused to help you find him?”

“It was Roth Edmonds sold him,” she said. “Sold him in Egypt. I dont know whar he is. I just knows Pharaoh got him. And you the Law. I wants to find my boy.”

“All right,” Stevens said. “I’ll try to find him. If you’re not going back home, where will you stay in town? It may take some time, if you dont know where he went and you haven’t heard from him in five years.”

“I be staying with Hamp Worsham. He my brother.”

“All right,” Stevens said. He was not surprised. He had known Hamp Worsham all his life, though he had never seen the old Negress before. But even if he had, he still would not have been surprised. They were

like that. You could know two of them for years; they might even have worked for you for years, bearing different names. Then suddenly you learn by pure chance that they are brothers or sisters.

He sat in the hot motion which was not breeze and listened to her toiling slowly down the steep outside stairs, remembering the grandson. The papers of that business had passed across his desk before going to the District Attorney five or six years ago — Butch Beauchamp, as the youth had been known during the single year he had spent in and out of the city jail: the old Negress's daughter's child, orphaned of his mother at birth and deserted by his father, whom the grandmother had taken and raised, or tried to.

Because at nineteen he had quit the country and come to town and spent a year in and out of jail for gambling and fighting, to come at last under serious indictment for breaking and entering a store.

Caught red-handed, whereupon he had struck with a piece of iron pipe at the officer who surprised him and then lay on the ground where the officer had felled him with a pistol-butt, cursing through his broken mouth, his teeth fixed into something like furious laughter through the blood.

Then two nights later he broke out of jail and was seen no more — a youth not yet twenty-one, with something in him from the father who begot and deserted him and who was now in the State Penitentiary for manslaughter — some seed not only violent but dangerous and bad.

And that's who I am to find, save, Stevens thought. Because he did not for one moment doubt the old Negress's instinct. If she had also been able to divine where the boy was and what his trouble was, he would not have been surprised, and it was only later that he thought to be surprised at how quickly he did find where the boy was and what was wrong.

His first thought was to telephone Carothers Edmonds, on whose farm the old Negress's husband had been a tenant for years. But then,

according to her, Edmonds had already refused to have anything to do with it. Then he sat perfectly still while the hot wind blew in his wild white mane. Now he comprehended what the old Negress had meant.

He remembered now that it was Edmonds who had actually sent the boy to Jefferson in the first place: he had caught the boy breaking into his commissary store and had ordered him off the place and had forbidden him ever to return.

And not the sheriff, the police, he thought. Something broader, quicker in scope.... He rose and took his old fine worn panama and descended the outside stairs and crossed the empty square in the hot suspension of noon's beginning, to the office of the county newspaper. The editor was in — an older man but with hair less white than Stevens's, in a black string tie and an old-fashioned boiled shirt and tremendously fat.

"An old nigger woman named Mollie Beauchamp," Stevens said. "She and her husband live on the Edmonds place. It's her grandson. You remember him — Butch Beauchamp, about five or six years ago, who spent a year in town, mostly in jail, until they finally caught him breaking into Rouncewell's store one night?"

Well, he's in worse trouble than that now. I don't doubt her at all. I just hope, for her sake as well as that of the great public whom I represent, that his present trouble is very bad and maybe final too — —"

"Wait," the editor said. He didn't even need to leave his desk. He took the press association flimsy from its spike and handed it to Stevens. It was datelined from Joliet, Illinois, this morning:

Mississippi negro, on eve of execution for murder of Chicago policeman, exposes alias by completing census questionnaire. Samuel Worsham Beauchamp — —

Five minutes later Stevens was crossing again the empty square in which noon's hot suspension was that much nearer. He had thought that he was going home to his boarding-house for the noon meal, but

he found that he was not. 'Besides, I didn't lock my office door,' he thought.

Only, how under the sun she could have got to town from those seventeen miles. She may even have walked. "So it seems I didn't mean what I said I hoped," he said aloud, mounting the outside stairs again, out of the hazy and now windless sun glare, and entered his office. He stopped. Then he said,

"Good morning, Miss Worsham."

She was quite old too — thin, erect, with a neat, old-time piling of white hair beneath a faded hat of thirty years ago, in rusty black, with a frayed umbrella faded now until it was green instead of black. He had known her too all his life.

She lived alone in the decaying house her father had left her, where she gave lessons in china-painting and, with the help of Hamp Worsham, descendant of one of her father's slaves, and his wife, raised chickens and vegetables for market.

"I came about Mollie," she said. "Mollie Beauchamp. She said that you — —"

He told her while she watched him, erect on the hard chair where the old Negress had sat, the rusty umbrella leaning against her knee. On her lap, beneath her folded hands, lay an old-fashioned beaded reticule almost as big as a suitcase. "He is to be executed tonight."

"Can nothing be done? Mollie's and Hamp's parents belonged to my grandfather. Mollie and I were born in the same month. We grew up together as sisters would."

"I telephoned," Stevens said. "I talked to the Warden at Joliet, and to the District Attorney in Chicago. He had a fair trial, a good lawyer — of that sort. He had money. He was in a business called numbers, that people like him make money in." She watched him, erect and motionless. "He is a murderer, Miss Worsham. He shot that policeman

in the back. A bad son of a bad father. He admitted, confessed it afterward.”

“I know,” she said. Then he realised that she was not looking at him, not seeing him at least. “It’s terrible.”

“So is murder terrible,” Stevens said. “It’s better this way.” Then she was looking at him again.

“I wasn’t thinking of him. I was thinking of Mollie. She mustn’t know.”

“Yes,” Stevens said. “I have already talked with Mr Wilmoth at the paper. He has agreed not to print anything. I will telephone the Memphis paper, but it’s probably too late for that. ... If we could just persuade her to go on back home this afternoon, before the Memphis paper ... Out there, where the only white person she ever sees is Mr Edmonds, and I will telephone him; and even if the other darkies should hear about it, I’m sure they wouldn’t.

And then maybe in about two or three months I could go out there and tell her he is dead and buried somewhere in the North....” This time she was watching him with such an expression that he ceased talking; she sat there, erect on the hard chair, watching him until he had ceased.

“She will want to take him back home with her,” she said.

“Him?” Stevens said. “The body?” She watched him. The expression was neither shocked nor disapproving. It merely embodied some old, timeless, female affinity for blood and grief. Stevens thought: She has walked to town in this heat. Unless Hamp brought her in the buggy he peddles eggs and vegetables from.

“He is the only child of her oldest daughter, her own dead first child. He must come home.”

“He must come home,” Stevens said as quietly. “I’ll attend to it at once. I’ll telephone at once.”

“You are kind.” For the first time she stirred, moved. He watched her hands draw the reticule toward her, clasping it. “I will defray the expenses. Can you give me some idea — — ?”

He looked her straight in the face. He told the lie without batting an eye, quickly and easily. "Ten or twelve dollars will cover it. They will furnish a box and there will be only the transportation."

"A box?" Again she was looking at him with that expression curious and detached, as though he were a child. "He is her grandson, Mr Stevens. When she took him to raise, she gave him my father's name — Samuel Worsham. Not just a box, Mr Stevens. I understand that can be done by paying so much a month."

"Not just a box," Stevens said. He said it in exactly the same tone in which he had said He must come home. "Mr Edmonds will want to help, I know. And I understand that old Luke Beauchamp has some money in the bank. And if you will permit me — —"

"That will not be necessary," she said. He watched her open the reticule; he watched her count on to the desk twenty-five dollars in frayed bills and coins ranging down to nickels and dimes and pennies. "That will take care of the immediate expense. I will tell her — You are sure there is no hope?"

"I am sure. He will die tonight."

"I will tell her this afternoon that he is dead then."

"Would you like for me to tell her?"

"I will tell her," she said.

"Would you like for me to come out and see her, then, talk to her?"

"It would be kind of you." Then she was gone, erect, her feet crisp and light, almost brisk, on the stairs, ceasing. He telephoned again, to the Illinois warden, then to an undertaker in Joliet. Then once more he crossed the hot, empty square. He had only to wait a short while for the editor to return from dinner.

"We're bringing him home," he said. "Miss Worsham and you and me and some others. It will cost — —"

"Wait," the editor said. "What others?"

“I dont know yet. It will cost about two hundred. I’m not counting the telephones; I’ll take care of them myself. I’ll get something out of Carothers Edmonds the first time I catch him; I dont know how much, but something. And maybe fifty around the square. But the rest of it is you and me, because she insisted on leaving twenty-five with me, which is just twice what I tried to persuade her it would cost and just exactly four times what she can afford to pay — —”

“Wait,” the editor said. “Wait.”

“And he will come in on Number Four the day after tomorrow and we will meet it, Miss Worsham and his grandmother, the old nigger, in my car and you and me in yours. Miss Worsham and the old woman will take him back home, back where he was born. Or where the old woman raised him. Or where she tried to. And the hearse out there will be fifteen more, not counting the flowers — —”

“Flowers?” the editor cried.

“Flowers,” Stevens said. “Call the whole thing two hundred and twenty-five. And it will probably be mostly you and me. All right?”

“No it aint all right,” the editor said. “But it dont look like I can help myself. By Jupiter,” he said, “even if I could help myself, the novelty will be almost worth it. It will be the first time in my life I ever paid money for copy I had already promised beforehand I wont print.”

“Have already promised beforehand you will not print,” Stevens said. And during the remainder of that hot and now windless afternoon, while officials from the city hall, and justices of the peace and bailiffs come fifteen and twenty miles from the ends of the county, mounted the stairs to the empty office and called his name and cooled their heels a while and then went away and returned and sat again, fuming, Stevens passed from store to store and office to office about the square — merchant and clerk, proprietor and employee, doctor dentist lawyer and barber — with his set and rapid speech: “It’s to bring a dead nigger

home. It's for Miss Worsham. Never mind about a paper to sign: just give me a dollar. Or a half a dollar then. Or a quarter then."

And that night after supper he walked through the breathless and star-filled darkness to Miss Worsham's house on the edge of town and knocked on the paintless front door. Hamp Worsham admitted him — an old man, belly-bloated from the vegetables on which he and his wife and Miss Worsham all three mostly lived, with blurred old eyes and a fringe of white hair about the head and face of a Roman general.

"She expecting you," he said. "She say to kindly step up to the chamber."

"Is that where Aunt Mollie is?" Stevens said.

"We all dar," Worsham said.

So Stevens crossed the lamplit hall (he knew that the entire house was still lighted with oil lamps and there was no running water in it) and preceded the Negro up the clean, paintless stairs beside the faded wallpaper, and followed the old Negro along the hall and into the clean, spare bedroom with its unmistakable faint odour of old maidens.

They were all there, as Worsham had said — his wife, a tremendous light-coloured woman in a bright turban leaning in the door, Miss Worsham erect again on a hard straight chair, the old Negress sitting in the only rocking-chair beside the hearth on which even tonight a few ashes smouldered faintly.

She held a reed-stemmed clay pipe but she was not smoking it, the ash dead and white in the stained bowl; and actually looking at her for the first time, Stevens thought: Good Lord, she's not as big as a ten-year-old child. Then he sat too, so that the four of them — himself, Miss Worsham, the old Negress and her brother — made a circle about the brick hearth on which the ancient symbol of human coherence and solidarity smouldered.

"He'll be home the day after tomorrow, Aunt Mollie," he said. The old Negress didn't even look at him; she never had looked at him.

“He dead,” she said. “Pharaoh got him.”

“Oh yes, Lord,” Worsham said. “Pharaoh got him.”

“Done sold my Benjamin,” the old Negress said. “Sold him in Egypt.”
She began to sway faintly back and forth in the chair.

“Oh yes, Lord,” Worsham said.

“Hush,” Miss Worsham said. “Hush, Hamp.”

“I telephoned Mr Edmonds,” Stevens said. “He will have everything ready when you get there.”

“Roth Edmonds sold him,” the old Negress said. She swayed back and forth in the chair. “Sold my Benjamin.”

“Hush,” Miss Worsham said. “Hush, Mollie. Hush now.”

“No,” Stevens said. “No he didn’t, Aunt Mollie. It wasn’t Mr Edmonds. Mr Edmonds didn’t—” But she cant hear me, he thought. She was not even looking at him. She never had looked at him.

“Sold my Benjamin,” she said. “Sold him in Egypt.”

“Sold him in Egypt,” Worsham said.

“Roth Edmonds sold my Benjamin.”

“Sold him to Pharaoh.”

“Sold him to Pharaoh and now he dead.”

“I’d better go,” Stevens said. He rose quickly. Miss Worsham rose too, but he did not wait for her to precede him. He went down the hall fast, almost running; he did not even know whether she was following him or not. Soon I will be outside, he thought. Then there will be air, space, breath. Then he could hear her behind him — the crisp, light, brisk yet unhurried feet as he had heard them descending the stairs from his office, and beyond them the voices:

“Sold my Benjamin. Sold him in Egypt.”

“Sold him in Egypt. Oh yes, Lord.”

He descended the stairs, almost running. It was not far now; now he could smell and feel it: the breathing and simple dark, and now he

could manner himself to pause and wait, turning at the door, watching Miss Worsham as she followed him to the door — the high, white, erect, old-time head approaching through the old-time lamplight. Now he could hear the third voice, which would be that of Hamp's wife — a true constant soprano which ran without words beneath the strophe and antistrophe of the brother and sister:

"Sold him in Egypt and now he dead."

"Oh yes, Lord. Sold him in Egypt."

"Sold him in Egypt."

"And now he dead."

"Sold him to Pharaoh."

"And now he dead."

"I'm sorry," Stevens said. "I ask you to forgive me. I should have known. I shouldn't have come."

"It's all right," Miss Worsham said. "It's our grief."

And on the next bright hot day but one the hearse and the two cars were waiting when the southbound train came in. There were more than a dozen cars, but it was not until the train came in that Stevens and the editor began to notice the number of people, Negroes and whites both.

Then, with the idle white men and youths and small boys and probably half a hundred Negroes, men and women too, watching quietly, the Negro undertaker's men lifted the grey-and-silver casket from the train and carried it to the hearse and snatched the wreaths and floral symbols of man's ultimate and inevitable end briskly out and slid the casket in and flung the flowers back and clapped-to the door.

Then, with Miss Worsham and the old Negress in Stevens's car with the driver he had hired and himself and the editor in the editor's, they followed the hearse as it swung into the long hill up from the station, going fast in a whining lower gear until it reached the crest, going pretty fast still but with an unctuous, an almost bishoplike purr until it slowed into the square, crossing it, circling the Confederate monument

and the courthouse while the merchants and clerks and barbers and professional men who had given Stevens the dollars and half-dollars and quarters and the ones who had not, watched quietly from doors and upstairs windows, swinging then into the street which at the edge of town would become the country road leading to the destination seventeen miles away, already picking up speed again and followed still by the two cars containing the four people — the high-headed erect white woman, the old Negress, the designated paladin of justice and truth and right, the Heidelberg Ph.D. — in formal component complement to the Negro murderer's catafalque: the slain wolf.

When they reached the edge of town the hearse was going quite fast. Now they flashed past the metal sign which said Jefferson. Corporate Limit. and the pavement vanished, slanting away into another long hill, becoming gravel.

Stevens reached over and cut the switch, so that the editor's car coasted, slowing as he began to brake it, the hearse and the other car drawing rapidly away now as though in flight, the light and unraind summer dust spurting from beneath the fleeing wheels; soon they were gone. The editor turned his car clumsily, grinding the gears, sawing and filing until it was back in the road facing town again. Then he sat for a moment, his foot on the clutch.

"Do you know what she asked me this morning, back there at the station?" he said.

"Probably not," Stevens said.

"She said, 'Is you gonter put hit in de paper?'"

"What?"

"That's what I said," the editor said. "And she said it again: 'Is you gonter put hit in de paper? I wants hit all in de paper. All of hit.' And I wanted to say, 'If I should happen to know how he really died, do you want that in too?' And by Jupiter, if I had and if she had known what we know even, I believe she would have said yes. But I didn't say it. I just said, 'Why, you couldn't read it, Aunty.' And she said, 'Miss Belle will

show me whar to look and I can look at hit. You put hit in de paper. All of hit.’”

“Oh,” Stevens said. Yes, he thought. It doesn’t matter to her now. Since it had to be and she couldn’t stop it, and now that it’s all over and done and finished, she doesn’t care how he died. She just wanted him home, but she wanted him to come home right. She wanted that casket and those flowers and the hearse and she wanted to ride through town behind it in a car. “Come on,” he said. “Let’s get back to town. I haven’t seen my desk in two days.”

The End

The Hamlet, William Faulkner

The Hamlet

Published in 1940, this novel forms part of what is now collectively known as the Snopes Trilogy, though it was originally a standalone novel. It was followed by *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959). The novel incorporates revised versions of the previously-published short stories “Spotted Horses” (1931, Book Four’s Chapter One), “The Hound” (1931, Book Three’s Chapter Two), “Lizards in Jamshyd’s Courtyard” (1932, Book One’s Chapter Three and Book Four’s Chapter Two), and “Fool About a Horse” (1936, Book One’s Chapter Two). It also makes use of material from “Father Abraham” (abandoned 1927, pub. 1984, Book Four’s Chapter One), “Afternoon of a Cow” (1937, pub. 1943, Book Three’s Chapter Two), and “Barn Burning” (1939, Book One’s Chapter One).

The plot concerns the exploits of the Snopes family, beginning with Ab Snopes, who is introduced more fully in Faulkner’s *The Unvanquished*. Most of the novel centres on Frenchman’s Bend, into which the heirs of Ab and his family have migrated from parts unknown. In the beginning

of the book, Ab, his wife, daughter and son Flem settle down as tenant farmers beholden to the powerful Varner family. As the narrative progresses, the Snopeses move from being poor outcasts to a controversial, if not dangerous, element in the life of the town. In contrast, V.K. Ratliff stands as the moral hero of the novel. Faulkner employs the eccentricities of the Snopeses to great comic effect, most notably in his description of Ike Snopes and his carnal inclinations toward a cow.

Contents

BOOK ONE. FLEM

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER THREE

BOOK TWO. EULA

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TWO

BOOK THREE. THE LONG SUMMER

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TWO

BOOK FOUR. THE PEASANTS

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TWO

To Phil Stone

BOOK ONE. FLEM

CHAPTER ONE

FRENCHMAN'S BEND WAS a section of rich river-bottom country lying twenty miles southeast of Jefferson. Hill-cradled and remote, definite yet without boundaries, straddling into two counties and owing allegiance to neither, it had been the original grant and site of a tremendous pre-Civil War plantation, the ruins of which — the gutted shell of an enormous house with its fallen stables and slave quarters and overgrown gardens and brick terraces and promenades — were

still known as the Old Frenchman's place, although the original boundaries now existed only on old faded records in the Chancery Clerk's office in the county courthouse in Jefferson, and even some of the once-fertile fields had long since reverted to the cane-and-cypress jungle from which their first master had hewed them.

He had quite possibly been a foreigner, though not necessarily French, since to the people who had come after him and had almost obliterated all trace of his sojourn, anyone speaking the tongue with a foreign flavour or whose appearance or even occupation was strange, would have been a Frenchman regardless of what nationality he might affirm, just as to their more urban co-evals (if he had elected to settle in Jefferson itself, say) he would have been called a Dutchman.

But now nobody knew what he had actually been, not even Will Varner, who was sixty years old and now owned a good deal of his original grant, including the site of his ruined mansion. Because he was gone now, the foreigner, the Frenchman, with his family and his slaves and his magnificence. His dream, his broad acres were parcelled out now into small shiftless mortgaged farms for the directors of Jefferson banks to squabble over before selling finally to Will Varner, and all that remained of him was the river bed which his slaves had straightened for almost ten miles to keep his land from flooding, and the skeleton of the tremendous house which his heirs-at-large had been pulling down and chopping up — walnut newel-posts and stair spindles, oak floors which fifty years later would have been almost priceless, the very clapboards themselves — for thirty years now for firewood.

Even his name was forgotten, his pride but a legend about the land he had wrested from the jungle and tamed as a monument to that appellation which those who came after him in battered wagons and on mule-back and even on foot, with flintlock rifles and dogs and children and home-made whiskey stills and Protestant psalm-books, could not even read, let alone pronounce, and which now had nothing to do with any once-living man at all — his dream and his pride now dust with the lost dust of his anonymous bones, his legend but the

stubborn tale of the money he buried somewhere about the place when Grant overran the country on his way to Vicksburg.

The people who inherited from him came from the northeast, through the Tennessee mountains by stages marked by the bearing and raising of a generation of children. They came from the Atlantic seaboard and before that, from England and the Scottish and Welsh Marches, as some of the names would indicate — Turpin and Haley and Whittington, McCallum and Murray and Leonard and Littlejohn, and other names like Riddup and Armstid and Doshey which could have come from nowhere since certainly no man would deliberately select one of them for his own. They brought no slaves and no Phyfe and Chippendale highboys; indeed, what they did bring most of them could (and did) carry in their hands. They took up land and built one- and two-room cabins and never painted them, and married one another and produced children and added other rooms one by one to the original cabins and did not paint them either, but that was all.

Their descendants still planted cotton in the bottom land and corn along the edge of the hills and in the secret coves in the hills made whiskey of the corn and sold what they did not drink. Federal officers went into the country and vanished. Some garment which the missing man had worn might be seen — a felt hat, a broadcloth coat, a pair of city shoes or even his pistol — on a child or an old man or woman. County officers did not bother them at all save in the heel of election years. They supported their own churches and schools, they married and committed infrequent adulteries and more frequent homicides among themselves and were their own courts judges and executioners. They were Protestants and Democrats and prolific; there was not one negro landowner in the entire section. Strange negroes would absolutely refuse to pass through it after dark.

Will Varner, the present owner of the Old Frenchman place, was the chief man of the country. He was the largest landholder and beat supervisor in one county and Justice of the Peace in the next and election commissioner in both, and hence the fountainhead if not of law at least of advice and suggestion to a countryside which would have

repudiated the term constituency if they had ever heard it, which came to him, not in the attitude of What must I do but What do you think you would like for me to do if you was able to make me do it. He was a farmer, a usurer, a veterinarian; Judge Benbow of Jefferson once said of him that a milder-mannered man never bled a mule or stuffed a ballot box.

He owned most of the good land in the country and held mortgages on most of the rest. He owned the store and the cotton gin and the combined grist mill and blacksmith shop in the village proper and it was considered, to put it mildly, bad luck for a man of the neighbourhood to do his trading or gin his cotton or grind his meal or shoe his stock anywhere else. He was thin as a fence rail and almost as long, with reddish-grey hair and moustaches and little hard bright innocently blue eyes; he looked like a Methodist Sunday School superintendent who on weekdays conducted a railroad passenger train or vice versa and who owned the church or perhaps the railroad or perhaps both. He was shrewd, secret and merry, of a Rabelaisian turn of mind and very probably still sexually lusty (he had fathered sixteen children to his wife, though only two of them remained at home, the others scattered, married and buried, from El Paso to the Alabama line) as the spring of his hair which even at sixty was still more red than grey, would indicate.

He was at once active and lazy; he did nothing at all (his son managed all the family business) and spent all his time at it, out of the house and gone before the son had come down to breakfast even, nobody knew where save that he and the old fat white horse which he rode might be seen anywhere within the surrounding ten miles at any time, and at least once every month during the spring and summer and early fall, the old white horse tethered to an adjacent fence post, he would be seen by someone sitting in a home-made chair on the jungle-choked lawn of the Old Frenchman's homesite.

His blacksmith had made the chair for him by sawing an empty flour-barrel half through the middle and trimming out the sides and nailing a seat into it, and Varner would sit there chewing his tobacco or smoking his cob pipe, with a brusque word for passers cheerful enough but

inviting no company, against his background of fallen baronial splendour. The people (those who saw him sitting there and those who were told about it) all believed that he sat there planning his next mortgage foreclosure in private, since it was only to an itinerant sewing-machine agent named Ratliff — a man less than half his age — that he ever gave a reason: “I like to sit here.

I’m trying to find out what it must have felt like to be the fool that would need all this” — he did not move, he did not so much as indicate with his head the rise of old brick and tangled walks topped by the columned ruin behind him— “just to eat and sleep in.” Then he said — and he gave Ratliff no further clue to which might have been the truth— “For a while it looked like I was going to get shut of it, get it cleared up.

But by God folks have got so lazy they won’t even climb a ladder to pull off the rest of the boards. It looks like they will go into the woods and even chop up a tree before they will reach above eye-level for a scantling of pine kindling. But after all, I reckon I’ll just keep what there is left of it, just to remind me of my one mistake. This is the only thing I ever bought in my life I couldn’t sell to nobody.”

The son, Jody, was about thirty, a prime bulging man, slightly thyroidic, who was not only unmarried but who emanated a quality of invincible and inviolable bachelordom as some people are said to breathe out the odour of sanctity or spirituality.

He was a big man, already promising a considerable belly in ten or twelve years, though as yet he still managed to postulate something of the trig and unattached cavalier. He wore, winter and summer (save that in the warm season he dispensed with the coat) and Sundays and weekdays, a glazed collarless white shirt fastened at the neck with a heavy gold collar-button beneath a suit of good black broadcloth.

He put on the suit the day it arrived from the Jefferson tailor and wore it every day and in all weathers thereafter until he sold it to one of the family’s negro retainers, so that on almost any Sunday night one whole

one or some part of one of his old suits could be met — and promptly recognised — walking the summer roads, and replaced it with the new succeeding one.

In contrast to the unvarying overalls of the men he lived among he had an air not funereal exactly but ceremonial — this because of that quality of invincible bachelorhood which he possessed: so that, looking at him you saw, beyond the flabbiness and the obscuring bulk, the perennial and immortal Best Man, the apotheosis of the masculine Singular, just as you discern beneath the dropsical tissue of the '09 half-back the lean hard ghost which once carried a ball.

He was the ninth of his parents' sixteen children. He managed the store of which his father was still titular owner and in which they dealt mostly in foreclosed mortgages, and the gin, and oversaw the scattered farm holdings which his father at first and later the two of them together had been acquiring during the last forty years.

One afternoon he was in the store, cutting lengths of plough-line from a spool of new cotton rope and looping them in neat seamanlike bights onto a row of nails in the wall, when at a sound behind him he turned and saw, silhouetted by the open door, a man smaller than common, in a wide hat and a frock-coat too large for him, standing with a curious planted stiffness. "You Varner?" the man said, in a voice not harsh exactly, or not deliberately harsh so much as rusty from infrequent use.

"I'm one Varner," Jody said, in his bland, hard, quite pleasant voice.

"What can I do for you?"

"My name is Snopes. I heard you got a farm to rent."

"That so?" Varner said, already moving so as to bring the other's face into the light. "Just where did you hear that?" Because the farm was a new one, which he and his father had acquired through a foreclosure sale not a week ago, and the man was a complete stranger. He had never even heard the name before.

The other did not answer. Now Varner could see his face — a pair of eyes of a cold opaque grey between shaggy greying irascible brows and a short scrabble of iron-grey beard as tight and knotted as a sheep's coat. "Where you been farming?" Varner said.

"West." He did not speak shortly. He merely pronounced the one word with a complete inflectionless finality, as if he had closed a door behind himself.

"You mean Texas?"

"No."

"I see. Just west of here. How much family you got?"

"Six." Now there was no perceptible pause, nor was there any hurrying on into the next word. But there was something. Varner sensed it even before the lifeless voice seemed deliberately to compound the inconsistency: "Boy and two girls. Wife and her sister."

"That's just five."

"Myself," the dead voice said.

"A man don't usually count himself among his own field hands," Varner said. "Is it five or is it seven?"

"I can put six hands into the field."

Now Varner's voice did not change either, still pleasant, still hard: "I don't know as I will take on a tenant this year. It's already almost first of May. I figure I might work it myself, with day labour. If I work it at all this year."

"I'll work that way," the other said. Varner looked at him.

"Little anxious to get settled, ain't you?" The other said nothing. Varner could not tell whether the man was looking at him or not. "What rent were you aiming to pay?"

"What do you rent for?"

"Third and fourth," Varner said. "Furnish out of the store here. No cash."

"I see. Furnish in six-bit dollars."

"That's right," Varner said pleasantly. Now he could not tell if the man were looking at anything at all or not.

“I’ll take it,” he said.

Standing on the gallery of the store, above the half-dozen overalled men sitting or squatting about it with pocket-knives and slivers of wood, Varner watched his caller limp stiffly across the porch, looking neither right nor left, and descend and from among the tethered teams and saddled animals below the gallery choose a gaunt saddleless mule in a worn plough bridle with rope reins and lead it to the steps and mount awkwardly and stiffly and ride away, still without once looking to either side. “To hear that ere foot, you’d think he weighed two hundred pounds,” one of them said. “Who’s he, Jody?”

Varner sucked his teeth and spat into the road. “Name’s Snopes,” he said.

“Snopes?” a second man said. “Sho now. So that’s him.” Now not only Varner but all the others looked at the speaker — a gaunt man in absolutely clean though faded and patched overalls and even freshly shaven, with a gentle, almost sad face until you unravelled what were actually two separate expressions — a temporary one of static peace and quiet overlaying a constant one of definite even though faint harriedness, and a sensitive mouth which had a quality of adolescent freshness and bloom until you realised that this could just as well be the result of a lifelong abstinence from tobacco — the face of the breathing archetype and protagonist of all men who marry young and father only daughters and are themselves but the eldest daughter of their own wives. His name was Tull. “He’s the fellow that wintered his family in a old cottonhouse on Ike McCaslin’s place. The one that was mixed up in that burnt barn of a fellow named Harris over in Grenier County two years ago.”

“Huh?” Varner said. “What’s that? Burnt barn?”

“I never said he done it,” Tull said. “I just said he was kind of involved in it after a fashion you might say.”

“How much involved in it?”

“Harris had him arrested into court.”

"I see," Varner said. "Just a pure case of mistaken identity. He just hired it done."

"It wasn't proved," Tull said. "Leastways, if Harris ever found any proof afterward, it was too late then. Because he had done left the country. Then he turned up at McCaslin's last September. Him and his family worked by the day, gathering for McCaslin, and McCaslin let them winter in a old cottonhouse he wasn't using. That's all I know. I ain't repeating nothing."

"I wouldn't," Varner said. "A man don't want to get the name of a idle gossip." He stood above them with his broad bland face, in his dingy formal black-and-white — the glazed soiled white shirt and the bagging and uncared-for trousers — a costume at once ceremonial and negligée. He sucked his teeth briefly and noisily. "Well well well," he said. "A barn burner. Well well well."

That night he told his father about it at the supper table. With the exception of the rambling half-log half-sawn plank edifice known as Littlejohn's hotel, Will Varner's was the only house in the country with more than one story. They had a cook too, not only the only negro servant but the only servant of any sort in the whole district.

They had had her for years yet Mrs. Varner still said and apparently believed that she could not be trusted even to boil water unsupervised. He told it that evening while his mother, a plump cheery bustling woman who had born sixteen children and already outlived five of them and who still won prizes for preserving fruits and vegetables at the annual county fair, bustled back and forth between dining-room and kitchen, and his sister, a soft ample girl with definite breasts even at thirteen and eyes like cloudy hothouse grapes and a full damp mouth always slightly open, sat at her place in a kind of sullen bemusement of rife young female flesh, apparently not even having to make any effort not to listen.

"You already contracted with him?" Will Varner said.

"I hadn't aimed to at all till Vernon Tull told me what he did. Now I figure I'll take the paper up there tomorrow and let him sign."

“Then you can point out to him which house to burn too. Or are you going to leave that to him?”

“Sho,” Jody said. “We’ll discuss that too.” Then he said — and now all levity was gone from his voice, all poste and riposte of humour’s light whimsy, tierce quarto and prime: “All I got to do is find out for sho about that barn. But then it will be the same thing, whether he actually did it or not. All he’ll need will be to find out all of a sudden at gathering-time that I think he did it. Listen. Take a case like this.” He leaned forward now, over the table, bulging, protuberant, intense.

The mother had bustled out, to the kitchen, where her brisk voice could be heard scolding cheerfully at the negro cook. The daughter was not listening at all. “Here’s a piece of land that the folks that own it hadn’t actually figured on getting nothing out of this late in the season. And here comes a man and rents it on shares that the last place he rented on a barn got burnt up. It don’t matter whether he actually burnt that barn or not, though it will simplify matters if I can find out for sho he did. The main thing is, it burnt while he was there and the evidence was such that he felt called on to leave the country.

So here he comes and rents this land we hadn’t figured on nothing out of this year nohow and we furnish him outen the store all regular and proper. And he makes his crop and the landlord sells it all regular and has the cash waiting and the fellow comes in to get his share and the landlord says, ‘What’s this I heard about you and that barn?’ That’s all. ‘What’s this I just heard about you and that barn?’ ” They stared at one another — the slightly protuberant opaque eyes and the little hard blue ones. “What will he say? What can he say except ‘All right. What do you aim to do?’ ”

“You’ll lose his furnish bill at the store.”

“Sho. There ain’t no way of getting around that. But after all a man that’s making you a crop free gratis for nothing, at least you can afford to feed him while he’s doing it. — Wait,” he said. “Hell fire, we won’t even need to do that; I’ll just let him find a couple of rotten shingles

with a match laid across them on his doorstep the morning after he finishes laying-by and he'll know it's all up then and ain't nothing left for him but to move on. That'll cut two months off the furnish bill and all we'll be out is hiring his crop gathered." They stared at one another. To one of them it was already done, accomplished: he could actually see it; when he spoke it was out of a time still six months in the future yet: "Hell fire, he'll have to! He can't fight it! He don't dare!"

"Hmph," Will said. From the pocket of his unbuttoned vest he took a stained cob pipe and began to fill it. "You better stay clear of them folks."

"Sho now," Jody said. He took a toothpick from the china receptacle on the table and sat back. "Burning barns ain't right. And a man that's got habits that way will just have to suffer the disadvantages of them."

He did not go the next day nor the one after that either. But early in the afternoon of the third day, his roan saddle-horse hitched and waiting at one of the gallery posts, he sat at the roll-top desk in the rear of the store, hunched, the black hat on the back of his head and one broad black-haired hand motionless and heavy as a ham of meat on the paper and the pen in the other tracing the words of the contract in his heavy deliberate sprawling script. An hour after that and five miles from the village, the contract blotted and folded neatly into his hip-pocket, he was sitting the horse beside a halted buckboard in the road. It was battered with rough usage and caked with last winter's dried mud, it was drawn by a pair of shaggy ponies as wild and active-looking as mountain goats and almost as small. To the rear of it was attached a sheet-iron box the size and shape of a dog kennel and painted to resemble a house, in each painted window of which a painted woman's face simpered above a painted sewing-machine, and Varner sat his horse and glared in shocked and outraged consternation at its occupant, who had just said pleasantly, "Well, Jody, I hear you got a new tenant."

"Hell fire!" Varner cried. "Do you mean he set fire to another one? even after they caught him, he set fire to another one?"

“Well,” the man in the buckboard said, “I don’t know as I would go on record as saying he set ere a one of them a-fire. I would put it that they both taken fire while he was more or less associated with them. You might say that fire seems to follow him around, like dogs follows some folks.” He spoke in a pleasant, lazy, equable voice which you did not discern at once to be even more shrewd than humorous.

This was Ratliff, the sewing-machine agent. He lived in Jefferson and he travelled the better part of four counties with his sturdy team and the painted dog kennel into which an actual machine neatly fitted.

On successive days and two counties apart the splashed and battered buckboard and the strong mismatched team might be seen tethered in the nearest shade and Ratliff’s bland affable ready face and his neat tieless blue shirt one of the squatting group at a crossroads store, or — and still squatting and still doing the talking apparently though actually doing a good deal more listening than anybody believed until afterward — among the women surrounded by laden clotheslines and tubs and blackened wash pots beside springs and wells, or decorous in a splint chair on cabin galleries, pleasant, affable, courteous, anecdotal and impenetrable.

He sold perhaps three machines a year, the rest of the time trading in land and livestock and second-hand farming tools and musical instruments or anything else which the owner did not want badly enough, retailing from house to house the news of his four counties with the ubiquity of a newspaper and carrying personal messages from mouth to mouth about weddings and funerals and the preserving of vegetables and fruit with the reliability of a postal service.

He never forgot a name and he knew everyone, man mule and dog, within fifty miles. “Just say it was following along behind the wagon when Snopes druv up to the house De Spain had give him, with the furniture piled into the wagon bed like he had druv up to the house they had been living in at Harris’s or wherever it was and said ‘Get in

here' and the cookstove and beds and chairs come out and got in by their selves.

Careless and yet good too, tight, like they was used to moving and not having no big help at it. And Ab and that big one, Flem they call him — there was another one too, a little one; I remember seeing him once somewhere. He wasn't with them. Leastways he ain't now. Maybe they forgot to tell him when to get outen the barn — setting on the seat and them two hulking gals in the two chairs in the wagon bed and Miz Snopes and her sister, the widow, setting on the stuff in back like nobody cared much whether they come along or not either, including the furniture. And the wagon stops in front of the house and Ab looks at it and says, 'Likely it ain't fitten for hawgs.' "

Sitting the horse, Varner glared down at Ratliff in protuberant and speechless horror. "All right," Ratliff said. "Soon as the wagon stopped Miz Snopes and the widow got out and commenced to unload. Them two gals ain't moved yet, just setting there in them two chairs, in their Sunday clothes, chewing sweet gum, till Ab turned round and cussed them outen the wagon to where Miz Snopes and the widow was wrastling with the stove. He druv them out like a pair of heifers just a little too valuable to hit hard with a stick, and then him and Flem set there and watched them two strapping gals take a wore-out broom and a lantern outen the wagon and stand there again till Ab lent out and snicked the nigh one across the stern with the end of the reins. 'And then you come back and help your maw with that stove,' he hollers after them. Then him and Flem got outen the wagon and went up to call on De Spain."

"To the barn?" Varner cried. "You mean they went right straight and —"

"No no. That was later. The barn come later. Likely they never knowed just where it was yet. The barn burnt all regular and in due course; you'll have to say that for him. This here was just a call, just pure friendship, because Snopes knowed where his fields was and all he had to do was to start scratching them, and it already the middle of May.

Just like now," he added in a tone of absolutely creamlike innocence. "But then I hear tell he always makes his rent contracts later than most." But he was not laughing. The shrewd brown face was as bland and smooth as ever beneath the shrewd impenetrable eyes.

"Well?" Varner said violently. "If he sets his fires like you tell about it, I reckon I don't need to worry until Christmas. Get on with it. What does he have to do before he starts lighting matches? Maybe I can recognise at least some of the symptoms in time."

"All right," Ratliff said. "So they went up the road, leaving Miz Snopes and the widow wrastling at the cookstove and them two gals standing there now holding a wire rat-trap and a chamber-pot, and went up to Major De Spain's and walked up the private road where that pile of fresh horse manure was and the nigger said Ab stepped in it on deliberate purpose. Maybe the nigger was watching them through the front window.

Anyway Ab tracked it right across the front porch and knocked and when the nigger told him to wipe it offen his feet, Ab shoved right past the nigger and the nigger said he wiped the rest of it off right on that ere hundred-dollar rug and stood there hollering 'Hello.

Hello, De Spain' until Miz de Spain come and looked at the rug and at Ab and told him to please go away. And then De Spain come home at dinner time and I reckon maybe Miz de Spain got in behind him because about middle of the afternoon he rides up to Ab's house with a nigger holding the rolled-up rug on a mule behind him and Ab setting in a chair against the door-jamb and De Spain hollers 'Why in hell ain't you in the field?' and Ab says, he don't get up or nothing, 'I figger I'll start tomorrow.

I don't never move and start to work the same day,' only that ain't neither here nor there; I reckon Miz de Spain had done got in behind him good because he just set on the horse a while saying 'Confound you, Snopes, confound you, Snopes' and Ab setting there saying 'If I had thought that much of a rug I don't know as I would keep it where folks

coming in would have to tromp on it.' ” Still he was not laughing. He just sat there in the buckboard, easy and relaxed, with his shrewd intelligent eyes in his smooth brown face, well-shaved and clean in his perfectly clean faded shirt, his voice pleasant and drawling and anecdotal, while Varner’s suffused swollen face glared down at him.

“So after a while Ab hollers back into the house and one of them strapping gals comes out and Ab says, ‘Take that ere rug and wash it.’ And so next morning the nigger found the rolled-up rug throwed onto the front porch against the door and there was some more tracks across the porch too only it was just mud this time and it was said how when Miz de Spain unrolled the rug this time it must have been hotter for De Spain than before even — the nigger said it looked like they had used brickbats instead of soap on it — because he was at Ab’s house before breakfast even, in the lot where Ab and Flem was hitching up to go to the field sho enough, setting on the mare mad as a hornet and cussing a blue streak, not at Ab exactly but just sort of at all rugs and all horse manure in general and Ab not saying nothing, just buckling hames and choke strops until at last De Spain says how the rug cost him a hundred dollars in France and he is going to charge Ab twenty bushels of corn for it against his crop that Ab ain’t even planted yet.

And so De Spain went back home. And maybe he felt it was all neither here nor there now. Maybe he felt that long as he had done something about it Miz de Spain would ease up on him and maybe come gathering-time he would a even forgot about that twenty bushels of corn. Only that never suited Ab. So here, it’s the next evening I reckon, and Major laying with his shoes off in the barrel stave hammock in his yard and here comes the bailiff hemming and hawing and finally gets it out how Ab has done sued him — —”

“Hell fire,” Varner murmured. “Hell fire.”

“Sho,” Ratliff said. “That’s just about what De Spain his self said when he finally got it into his mind that it was so. So it come Sat-dy and the wagon druv up to the store and Ab got out in that preacher’s hat and coat and tromps up to the table on that clubfoot where Uncle Buck

McCaslin said Colonel John Sartoris his self shot Ab for trying to steal his clay-bank riding stallion during the war, and the Judge said, 'I done reviewed your suit, Mr. Snopes, but I ain't been able to find nothing nowhere in the law bearing on rugs, let alone horse manure. But I'm going to accept it because twenty bushels is too much for you to have to pay because a man as busy as you seem to stay ain't going to have time to make twenty bushels of corn. So I am going to charge you ten bushels of corn for ruining that rug.' "

"And so he burnt it," Varner said. "Well well well."

"I don't know as I would put it just that way," Ratliff said, repeated. "I would just put it that that same night Major de Spain's barn taken fire and was a total loss. Only somehow or other De Spain got there on his mare about the same time, because somebody heard him passing in the road. I don't mean he got there in time to put it out but he got there in time to find something else already there that he felt entitled to consider enough of a foreign element to justify shooting at it, setting there on the mare and blasting away at it or them three or four times until it ran into a ditch on him where he couldn't follow on the mare.

And he couldn't say neither who it was because any animal can limp if it wants to and any man is liable to have a white shirt, with the exception that when he got to Ab's house (and that couldn't a been long, according to the gait the fellow heard him passing in the road) Ab and Flem wasn't there, wasn't nobody there but the four women and De Spain never had time to look under no beds and such because there was a cypress-roofed corn crib right next to that barn.

So he rid back to where his niggers had done fetched up the water barrels and was soaking tow-sacks to lay on the crib, and the first person he see was Flem standing there in a white-coloured shirt, watching it with his hands in his pockets, chewing tobacco. 'Evening,' Flem says. 'That ere hay goes fast' and De Spain setting on the horse hollering 'Where's your paw? Where's that — —' and Flem says, 'If he ain't here somewhere he's done went back home.

Me and him left at the same time when we see the blaze.’ And De Spain knowed where they had left from too and he knowed why too. Only that wasn’t neither here nor there neither because, as it was just maintained, any two fellows anywhere might have a limp and a white shirt between them and it was likely the coal oil can he seen one of them fling into the fire when he shot the first time.

And so here the next morning he’s setting at breakfast with a right smart of his eyebrows and hair both swung off when the nigger comes in and says it’s a fellow to see him and he goes to the office and it’s Ab, already in the preacher hat and coat and the wagon done already loaded again too, only Ab ain’t brought that into the house where it could be seen. ‘It looks like me and you ain’t going to get along together,’ Ab says, ‘so I reckon we better quit trying before we have a misunderstanding over something. I’m moving this morning.’ And De Spain says, ‘What about your contract?’

And Ab says, ‘I done cancelled it,’ and De Spain setting there saying ‘Cancelled. Cancelled’ and then he says, ‘I would cancel it and a hundred more like it and throw in that barn too just to know for sho if it was you I was shooting at last night.’ And Ab says, ‘You might sue me and find out. Justices of the Peace in this country seems to be in the habit of finding for plaintiffs.’ ”

“Hell fire,” Varner said quietly again. “Hell fire.”

“So Ab turned and went stomping out on that stiff foot and went back — —”

“And burnt the tenant house,” Varner said.

“No no. I ain’t saying he might not a looked back at it with a certain regret, as the fellow says, when he druv off. But never nothing else taken all of a sudden on fire. Not right then, that is. I don’t — —”

“That’s so,” Varner said. “I recollect you did say he had to throw the balance of the coal oil into the fire when De Spain started shooting at him. Well well well,” he said, bulging, slightly apoplectic. “And now, out of all the men in this country, I got to pick him to make a rent contract

with.” He began to laugh. That is, he began to say “Ha. Ha. Ha,” rapidly, but just from the teeth, the lungs: no higher, nothing of it in the eyes. Then he stopped. “Well, I can’t be setting here, no matter how pleasant it is. Maybe I can get there in time to get him to cancel with me for just a old cottonhouse.”

“Or at least maybe for an empty barn,” Ratliff called after him.

An hour later Varner was sitting the halted horse again, this time before a gate, or a gap that is in a fence of sagging and rusted wire. The gate itself or what remained of it lay unhinged to one side, the interstices of the rotted palings choked with grass and weeds like the ribs of a forgotten skeleton. He was breathing hard but not because he had been galloping. On the contrary, since he had approached near enough to his destination to believe he could have seen smoke if there had been smoke, he had ridden slower and slower. Nevertheless he now sat the horse before the gap in the fence, breathing hard through his nose and even sweating a little, looking at the sagging broken-backed cabin set in its inevitable treeless and grassless plot and weathered to the colour of an old beehive, with that expression of tense and rapid speculation of a man approaching a dud howitzer shell. “Hell fire,” he said again quietly. “Hell fire. He’s been here three days now and he ain’t even set the gate up. And I don’t even dare to mention it to him. I don’t even dare to act like I knowed there was even a fence to hang it to.” He twitched the reins savagely. “Come up!” he said to the horse. “You hang around here very long standing still and you’ll be a-fire too.”

The path (it was neither road nor lane: just two parallel barely discernible tracks where wagon wheels had run, almost obliterated by this year’s grass and weeds) went up to the sagging and stepless porch of the perfectly blank house which he now watched with wire-taut wariness, as if he were approaching an ambush. He was watching it with such intensity as to be oblivious to detail.

He saw suddenly in one of the sashless windows and without knowing when it had come there, a face beneath a grey cloth cap, the lower jaw moving steadily and rhythmically with a curious sidewise thrust, which

even as he shouted "Hello!" vanished again. He was about to shout again when he saw beyond the house the stiff figure which he recognised even though the frock-coat was missing now, doing something at the gate to the lot. He had already begun to hear the mournful measured plaint of a rusted well-pulley, and now he began to hear two flat meaningless loud female voices.

When he passed beyond the house he saw it — the narrow high frame like an epicene gallows, two big absolutely static young women beside it, who even in that first glance postulated that immobile dreamy solidarity of statuary (this only emphasised by the fact that they both seemed to be talking at once and to some listener — or perhaps just circumambience — at a considerable distance and neither listening to the other at all) even though one of them had hold of the well-rope, her arms extended at full reach, her body bent for the down pull like a figure in a charade, a carved piece symbolising some terrific physical effort which had died with its inception, though a moment later the pulley began again its rusty plaint but stopped again almost immediately, as did the voices also when the second one saw him, the first one paused now in the obverse of the first attitude, her arms stretched downward on the rope and the two broad expressionless faces turning slowly in unison as he rode past.

He crossed the barren yard littered with the rubbish — the ashes, the shards of pottery and tin cans — of its last tenants. There were two women working beside the fence too and they were all three aware of his presence now because he had seen one of the women look around. But the man himself (Durn little clubfooted murderer, Varner thought with that furious helpless outrage) had not looked up nor even paused in whatever it was he was doing until Varner rode directly up behind him. The two women were watching him now. One wore a faded sunbonnet, the other a shapeless hat which at one time must have belonged to the man and holding in her hand a rusted can half full of bent and rusted nails. "Evening," Varner said, realising too late that he was almost shouting. "Evening, ladies." The man turned, deliberately, holding a hammer — a rusted head from which both claws had been broken, fitted onto an untrimmed stick of stove wood — and once

more Varner looked down into the cold impenetrable agate eyes beneath the writhen overhang of brows.

“Howdy,” Snopes said.

“Just thought I’d ride up and see what your plans were,” Varner said, too loud still, he could not seem to help it. I got too much to think about to have time to watch it, he thought, beginning at once to think, Hell fire. Hell fire, again, as though proving to himself what even a second’s laxity of attention might bring him to.

“I figure I’ll stay,” the other said. “The house ain’t fitten for hogs. But I reckon I can make out with it.”

“But look here!” Varner said. Now he was shouting; he didn’t care. Then he stopped shouting. He stopped shouting because he stopped speaking because there was nothing else to say, though it was going through his mind fast enough: Hell fire. Hell fire. Hell fire. I don’t dare say Leave here, and I ain’t got anywhere to say Go there.

I don’t even dare to have him arrested for barn-burning for fear he’ll set my barn a-fire. The other had begun to turn back to the fence when Varner spoke. Now he stood half-turned, looking up at Varner not courteously and not exactly patiently, but just waiting. “All right,” Varner said. “We can discuss the house. Because we’ll get along all right. We’ll get along. Anything that comes up, all you got to do is come down to the store. No, you don’t even need to do that: just send me word and I’ll ride right up here as quick as I can get here. You understand? Anything, just anything you don’t like — —”

“I can get along with anybody,” the other said. “I been getting along with fifteen or twenty different landlords since I started farming. When I can’t get along with them, I leave. That all you wanted?”

All, Varner thought. All. He rode back across the yard, the littered grassless desolation scarred with the ashes and charred stick-ends and blackened bricks where pots for washing clothes and scalding hogs had sat. I just wish I never had to have but just the little I do want now, he thought. He had been hearing the well-pulley again.

This time it did not cease when he passed, the two broad faces, the one motionless, the other pumping up and down with metronome-like regularity to the wheel's not-quite-musical complaint, turning slowly again as though riveted and synchronised to one another by a mechanical arm as he went on beyond the house and into the imperceptible lane which led to the broken gate which he knew would still be lying there in the weeds when he saw it next. He still had the contract in his pocket, which he had written out with that steady and deliberate satisfaction which, it now seemed to him, must have occurred in another time, or more likely, to another person altogether.

It was still unsigned. I could put a fire-clause in it, he thought. But he did not even check the horse. Sho, he thought. And then I could use it to start shingling the new barn. So he went on. It was late, and he eased the horse into a rack which it would be able to hold nearly all the way home, with a little breathing on the hills, and he was travelling at a fair gait when he saw suddenly, leaning against a tree beside the road, the man whose face he had seen in the window of the house.

One moment the road had been empty, the next moment the man stood there beside it, at the edge of a small copse — the same cloth cap, the same rhythmically chewing jaw materialised apparently out of nothing and almost abreast of the horse, with an air of the completely and purely accidental which Varner was to remember and speculate about only later. He had almost passed the other before he pulled the horse up. He did not shout now and now his big face was merely bland and extremely alert.

“Howdy,” he said. “You’re Flem, ain’t you? I’m Varner.”

“That so?” the other said. He spat. He had a broad flat face. His eyes were the colour of stagnant water. He was soft in appearance like Varner himself, though a head shorter, in a soiled white shirt and cheap grey trousers.

“I was hoping to see you,” Varner said. “I hear your father has had a little trouble once or twice with landlords. Trouble that might have

been serious.” The other chewed. “Maybe they never treated him right; I don’t know about that and I don’t care. What I’m talking about is a mistake, any mistake, can be straightened out so that a man can still stay friends with the fellow he ain’t satisfied with. Don’t you agree to that?” The other chewed steadily. His face was as blank as a pan of uncooked dough. “So he won’t have to feel that the only thing that can prove his rights is something that will make him have to pick up and leave the country next day,” Varner said. “So that there won’t come a time some day when he will look around and find out he has run out of new country to move to.” Varner ceased. He waited so long this time that the other finally spoke, though Varner was never certain whether this was the reason or not:

“There’s a right smart of country.”

“Sho,” Varner said pleasantly, bulging, bland. “But a man don’t want to wear it out just moving through it. Especially because of a matter that if it had just been took in hand and straightened out to begin with, wouldn’t have amounted to nothing. That could have been straightened out in five minutes if there had just been some other fellow handy to take a hold of a fellow that was maybe a little high-tempered to begin with say, and say to him, ‘Hold up here, now; that fellow don’t aim to put nothing on you. All you got to do is consult with him peaceable and it will be fixed up. I know that to be a fact because I got his promise to that effect.’ ” He paused again. “Especially if this here fellow we are speaking of, that could take a hold of him and tell him that, was going to get a benefit out of keeping him quiet and peaceable.” Varner stopped again. After a while the other spoke again: “What benefit?”

“Why, a good farm to work. Store credit. More land if he felt he could handle it.”

“Ain’t no benefit in farming. I figure on getting out of it soon as I can.”

“All right,” Varner said. “Say he wanted to take up some other line, this fellow we’re speaking of. He will need the good will of the folks he aims to make his money off of to do it. And what better way — —”

“You run a store, don’t you?” the other said.

“ — better way — —” Varner said. Then he stopped. “What?” he said. “I hear you run a store.”

Varner stared at him. Now Varner’s face was not bland. It was just completely still and completely intent. He reached to his shirt pocket and produced a cigar. He neither smoked nor drank himself, being by nature so happily metabolised that, as he might have put it himself, he could not possibly have felt better than he naturally did. But he always carried two or three. “Have a cigar,” he said.

“I don’t use them,” the other said.

“Just chew, hah?” Varner said.

“I chew up a nickel now and then until the suction is out of it. But I ain’t never lit a match to one yet.”

“Sho now,” Varner said. He looked at the cigar; he said quietly: “And I just hope to God you and nobody you know ever will.” He put the cigar back into his pocket. He expelled a loud hiss of breath. “All right,” he said. “Next fall. When he has made his crop.” He had never been certain just when the other had been looking at him and when not, but now he watched the other raise his arm and with his other hand pick something infinitesimal from the sleeve with infinitesimal care. Once more Varner expelled his breath through his nose. This time it was a sigh. “All right,” he said. “Next week then. You’ll give me that long, won’t you? But you got to guarantee it.” The other spat.

“Guarantee what?” he said.

Two miles farther on dusk overtook him, the shortening twilight of late April, in which the blanched dogwoods stood among the darker trees with spread raised palms like praying nuns; there was the evening star and already the whippoorwills. The horse, travelling supperward, was going well in the evening’s cool, when Varner pulled it to a stop and held it for a full moment. “Hell fire,” he said. “He was standing just exactly where couldn’t nobody see him from the house.”

CHAPTER TWO

1

RATLIFF, THE SEWING-MACHINE agent, again approaching the village, with a used music-box and a set of brand-new harrow teeth still fastened together by the factory shipping wire in the dog kennel box in place of the sewing-machine, saw the old white horse dozing on three legs at a fence post and, an instant later, Will Varner himself sitting in the home-made chair against the rise of shaggy lawns and overgrown gardens of the Old Frenchman place.

“Evening, Uncle Will,” he said in his pleasant, courteous, even deferent voice. “I hear you and Jody got a new clerk in the store.” Varner looked at him sharply, the reddish eyebrows beetling a little above the hard little eyes.

“So that’s done spread,” he said. “How far you been since yesterday?” “Seven-eight miles,” Ratliff said.

“Hah,” Varner said. “We been needing a clerk.” That was true. All they needed was someone to come and unlock the store in the morning and lock it again at night — this just to keep stray dogs out, since even tramps, like stray negroes, did not stay in Frenchman’s Bend after nightfall. In fact, at times Jody Varner himself (Will was never there anyhow) would be absent from the store all day. Customers would enter and serve themselves and each other, putting the price of the articles, which they knew to a penny as well as Jody himself did, into a cigar box inside the circular wire cage which protected the cheese, as though it — the cigar box, the worn bills and thumb-polished coins — were actually baited.

“At least you can get the store swept out every day,” Ratliff said. “Ain’t everybody can get that included into a fire insurance policy.”

“Hah,” Varner said again. He rose from the chair. He was chewing tobacco. He removed from his mouth the chewed-out wad which resembled a clot of damp hay, and threw it away and wiped his palm on his flank. He approached the fence, where at his direction the blacksmith had contrived a clever passage which (neither the blacksmith nor Varner had ever seen one before or even imagined one) operated exactly like a modern turnstile, by the raising of a chained pin instead of inserting a coin. “Ride my horse on back to the store,” Varner said. “I’ll drive your rig. I want to sit down and ride.”

“We can tie the horse behind the buckboard and both ride in it,” Ratliff said.

“You ride the horse,” Varner said. “That’s close as I want you right now. Sometimes you are a little too smart to suit me.”

“Why, sho, Uncle Will,” Ratliff said. So he cramped the buckboard’s wheel for Varner to get in, and himself mounted the horse. They went on, Ratliff a little behind the buckboard, so that Varner talked to him over his shoulder, not looking back:

“This here fire-fighter — —”

“It wasn’t proved,” Ratliff said mildly. “Of course, that’s the trouble. If a fellow’s got to choose between a man that is a murderer and one he just thinks maybe is, he’ll choose the murderer. At least then he will know exactly where he’s at. His attention ain’t going to wander then.”

“All right, all right,” Varner said. “This here victim of libel and mis-statement then. What do you know about him?”

“Nothing to mention,” Ratliff said. “Just what I hear about him. I ain’t seen him in eight years. There was another boy then, besides Flem. A little one. He would be about ten or twelve now if he was there. He must a been mislaid in one of them movings.”

“Has what you have heard about him since them eight years ago caused you to think he might have changed his habits any?”

“Sho now,” Ratliff said. What dust the three horses raised blew lightly aside on the faint breeze, among the dogfennel and bitterweed just beginning to bloom in the roadside ditches. “Eight years. And before that it was fifteen more pretty near I never saw him. I growed up next to where he was living. I mean, he lived for about two years on the same place where I growed up. Him and my pap was both renting from old man Anse Holland. Ab was a horse-trader then. In fact, I was there the same time the horse-trading give out on him and left him just a farmer. He ain’t naturally mean. He’s just soured.”

“Soured,” Varner said. He spat. His voice was now sardonic, almost contemptuous: “Jody came in last night, late. I knowed it soon as I saw him. It was exactly like when he was a boy and had done something he knowed I was going to find out about tomorrow and so he would figure he better tell me first himself. ‘I done hired a clerk,’ he says. ‘What for?’ I says. ‘Don’t Sam shine your shoes on Sunday no more to suit you?’ and he hollers, ‘I had to! I had to hire him! I had to, I tell you!’

And he went to bed without eating no supper. I don’t know how he slept; I never listened to see. But this morning he seemed to feel a little better about it. He seemed to feel considerable better about it. ‘He might even be useful,’ he says. ‘I don’t doubt it,’ I says. ‘But there’s a law against it. Besides, why not just tear them down instead? You could even sell the lumber then.’ And he looked at me a while longer. Only he was just waiting for me to stop; he had done figured it all out last night.

‘Take a man like that,’ he says. ‘A man that’s independent about protecting his self, his own rights and interests. Say the advantage of his own rights and interests is another fellow’s advantage and interest too. Say his benefits is the same benefits as the fellow that’s paying some of his kinfolks a salary to protect his business; say it’s a business where now and then — and you know it as well as I do,’ Jody says, ‘ — say benefits is always coming up that the fellow that’s going to get the benefits just as lief not be actively mixed up in himself, why, a fellow that independent — —’ ”

“He could have said ‘dangerous’ with the same amount of breath,” Ratliff said.

“Yes,” Varner said. “Well?”

Ratliff didn’t answer. Instead, he said: “That store ain’t in Jody’s name, is it?” Only he answered this himself, before the other could have spoken: “Sho now. Why did I need to ask that? Besides, it’s just — Flem that Jody’s mixed up with. Long as Jody keeps him, maybe old Ab will — —”

“Out with it,” Varner said. “What do you think about it?”

“You mean what I really think?”

“What in damnation do you think I am talking about?”

“I think the same as you do,” Ratliff said quietly. “That there ain’t but two men I know can risk fooling with them folks. And just one of them is named Varner and his front name ain’t Jody.”

“And who’s the other one?” Varner said.

“That ain’t been proved yet neither,” Ratliff said pleasantly.

2

Besides Varner’s store and cotton gin and the combined grist mill and blacksmith shop which they rented to the actual smith, and the schoolhouse and the church and the perhaps three dozen dwellings within sound of both bells, the village consisted of a livery barn and lot and a contiguous shady though grassless yard in which sat a sprawling rambling edifice partly of sawn boards and partly of logs, unpainted and of two storeys in places and known as Littlejohn’s hotel, where behind a weathered plank nailed to one of the trees and lettered ROOM2 AND BORD drummers and livestock-traders were fed and lodged.

It had a long veranda lined with chairs. That night after supper, the buckboard and team in the stable, Ratliff was sitting here with five or six other men who had drifted in from the adjacent homes within walking distance.

They would have been there on any other night, but this evening they were gathered even before the sun was completely gone, looking now and then toward the dark front of Varner's store as people will gather to look quietly at the cold embers of a lynching or at the propped ladder and open window of an elopement, since the presence of a hired white clerk in the store of a man still able to walk and with intellect still sound enough to make money mistakes at least in his own favour, was as unheard of as the presence of a hired white woman in one of their own kitchens. "Well," one said, "I don't know nothing about that one Varner hired. But blood's thick. And a man that's got kinfolks that stays mad enough all the time to set fire to a man's barn — —"

"Sho now," Ratliff said. "Old man Ab ain't naturally mean. He's just soured."

For a moment nobody spoke. They sat or squatted along the veranda, invisible to one another. It was almost full dark, the departed sun a pale greenish stain in the northwestern sky. The whippoorwills had begun and fireflies winked and drifted among the trees beyond the road.

"How soured?" one said after a while.

"Why, just soured," Ratliff said pleasantly, easily, readily. "There was that business during the War. When he wasn't bothering nobody, not harming or helping either side, just tending to his own business, which was profit and horses — things which never even heard of such a thing as a political conviction — when here comes somebody that never even owned the horses even and shot him in the heel.

And that soured him. And then that business of Colonel Sartoris's ma-in-law, Miss Rosa Millard, that Ab had done went and formed a horse-and mule-partnership with in good faith and honour, not aiming to harm nobody blue or grey but just keeping his mind fixed on profit and horses, until Miz Millard had to go and get herself shot by that fellow that called his self Major Grumby, and then Colonel's boy Bayard and Uncle Buck McCaslin and a nigger caught Ab in the woods and

something else happened, tied up to a tree or something and maybe even a doubled bridle rein or maybe even a heated ramrod in it too though that's just hearsay.

Anyhow, Ab had to withdraw his allegiance to the Sartorises, and I hear tell he skulked for a considerable back in the hills until Colonel Sartoris got busy enough building his railroad for it to be safe to come out. And that soured him some more. But at least he still had horse-trading left to fall back on. Then he run into Pat Stamper. And Pat eliminated him from horse-trading. And so he just went plumb curdled."

"You mean he locked horns with Pat Stamper and even had the bridle left to take back home?" one said. Because they all knew Stamper. He was a legend, even though still alive, not only in that country but in all North Mississippi and West Tennessee — a heavy man with a stomach and a broad pale expensive Stetson hat and eyes the colour of a new axe blade, who travelled about the country with a wagon carrying camping equipment and played horses against horses as a gambler plays cards against cards, for the pleasure of beating a worthy opponent as much as for gain, assisted by a negro hostler who was an artist as a sculptor is an artist, who could take any piece of horseflesh which still had life in it and retire to whatever closed building or shed was empty and handy and then, with a quality of actual legerdemain, reappear with something which the beast's own dam would not recognise, let alone its recent owner; the two of them, Stamper and the negro, working in a kind of outrageous rapport like a single intelligence possessing the terrific advantage over common mortals of being able to be in two places at once and directing two separate sets of hands and fingers at the same time.

"He done better than that," Ratliff said. "He come out exactly even. Because if it was anybody that Stamper beat, it was Miz Snopes. And even she never considered it so. All she was out was just having to make the trip to Jefferson herself to finally get the separator and maybe she knowed all the time that sooner or later she would have to do that. It wasn't Ab that bought one horse and sold two to Pat

Stamper. It was Miz Snopes. Her and Pat just used Ab to trade through.”

Once more for a moment no one spoke. Then the first speaker said: “How did you find all this out? I reckon you was there too.”

“I was,” Ratliff said. “I went with him that day to get the separator. We lived about a mile from them. My pap and Ab were both renting from Old Man Anse Holland then, and I used to hang around Ab’s barn with him. Because I was a fool about a horse too, same as he was. And he wasn’t curdled then. He was married to his first wife then, the one he got from Jefferson, that one day her pa druv up in a wagon and loaded her and the furniture into it and told Ab that if he ever crossed Whiteleaf Bridge again he would shoot him.

They never had no children and I was just turning eight and I would go down to his house almost every morning and stay all day with him, setting on the lot fence with him while the neighbours would come up and look through the fence at whatever it was he had done swapped some more of Old Man Anse’s bob-wire or busted farm tools for this time, and Ab lying to just exactly the right amount about how old it was and how much he give for it.

He was a fool about a horse; he admitted it, but he wasn’t the kind of a fool about a horse Miz Snopes claimed he was that day when we brought Beasley Kemp’s horse home and turned it into the lot and come up to the house and Ab taken his shoes off on the gallery to cool his feet for dinner and Miz Snopes standing in the door shaking the skillet at him and Ab saying, ‘Now Vynie, now Vynie. I always was a fool about a good horse and you know it and ain’t a bit of use in you jawing about it. You better thank the Lord that when He give me a eye for horseflesh He give me a little judgment and gumption with it.’

“Because it wasn’t the horse. It wasn’t the trade. It was a good trade because Ab had just give Beasley a straight stock and a old wore-out sorghum mill of Old Man Anse’s for the horse, and even Miz Snopes had to admit that that was a good swap for anything that could get up

and walk from Beasley's lot to theirs by itself, because like she said while she was shaking the skillet at him, he couldn't get stung very bad in a horse-trade because he never had nothing of his own that anybody would want to swap even a sorry horse for.

And it wasn't because Ab had left the plough down in the far field where she couldn't see it from the house and had snuck the wagon out the back way with the plough stock and the sorghum mill in it while she still thought he was in the field. It was like she knowed already what me and Ab didn't: that Pat Stamper had owned that horse before Beasley got it and that now Ab had done caught the Pat Stamper sickness just from touching it. And maybe she was right. Maybe to himself Ab did call his self the Pat Stamper of the Holland farm or maybe even of all Beat Four, even if maybe he was fairly sho that Pat Stamper wasn't going to walk up to that lot fence and challenge him for it.

Sho, I reckon while he was setting there on the gallery with his feet cooling and the sidemeat plopping and spitting in the kitchen and us waiting to eat it so we could go back down to the lot and set on the fence while the folks would come up and look at what he had brung home this time, I reckon maybe Ab not only knowed as much about horse-trading as Pat Stamper, but he owned head for head of them with Old Man Anse himself.

And I reckon while we would be setting there, just moving enough to keep outen the sun, with that empty plough standing in the furrow down in the far field and Miz Snopes watching him outen the back window and saying to herself, 'Horse-trader! Setting there bragging and lying to a passel of shiftless men with the weeds and morning glories climbing so thick in the cotton and corn I am afraid to tote his dinner down to him for fear of snakes'; I reckon Ab would look at whatever it was he had just traded the mail box or some more of Old Man Anse's bob-wire or some of the winter corn for this time, and he would say to his self, 'It's not only mine, but before God it's the prettiest drove of a horse I ever see.'

“It was fate. It was like the Lord Himself had decided to buy a horse with Miz Snopes’s separator money. Though I will admit that when He chose Ab He picked out a good quick willing hand to do His trading for Him. The morning we started, Ab hadn’t planned to use Beasley’s horse a tall because he knowed it probably couldn’t make that twenty-eight mile trip to Jefferson and back in one day. He aimed to go up to Old Man Anse’s lot and borrow a mule to work with hisn and he would a done it except for Miz Snopes.

She kept on taunting him about swapping for a yard ornament, about how if he could just git it to town somehow maybe he could swap it to the livery stable to prop up in front for a sign. So in a way it was Miz Snopes herself that put the idea in Ab’s head of taking Beasley’s horse to town. So when I got there that morning we hitched Beasley’s horse into the wagon with the mule.

We had done been feeding it for two-three days now by forced draft, getting it ready to make the trip, and it looked some better now than when we had brung it home. But even yet it didn’t look so good. So Ab decided it was the mule that showed it up, that when it was the only horse or mule in sight it looked pretty good and that it was standing by something else on four legs that done the damage. ‘If it was just some way to hitch the mule under the wagon, so it wouldn’t show but could still pull, and just leave the horse in sight,’ Ab says.

Because he wasn’t soured then. But we had done the best we could with it. Ab thought about mixing a right smart of salt in some corn so it would drink a lot of water so some of the ribs wouldn’t show so bad at least, only we knowed it wouldn’t never get to Jefferson then, let alone back home, besides having to stop at every creek and branch to blow it up again.

So we done the best we could. That is, we hoped for the best. Ab went to the house and come back in his preacher’s coat (it’s the same one he’s still got; it was Colonel Sartoris’s that Miss Rosa Millard give him, it would be thirty years ago) and that twenty-four dollars and sixty-eight

cents Miz Snopes had been saving on for four years now, tied up in a rag, and we started out.

“We wasn’t even thinking about horse-trading. We was thinking about horse all right, because we was wondering if maybe we wasn’t fixing to come back home that night with Beasley’s horse in the wagon and Ab in the traces with the mule. Yes sir, Ab eased that team outen the lot and on down the road easy and careful as ere a horse and mule ever moved in this world, with me and Ab walking up every hill that tilted enough to run water offen it, and we was aiming to do that right into Jefferson.

It was the weather, the hot day; it was the middle of July. Because here we was about a mile from Whiteleaf store, with Beasley’s horse kind of half walking and half riding on the double tree and Ab’s face looking worriered and worriered every time it failed to lift its feet high enough to step, when all of a sudden that horse popped into a sweat. It flung its head up like it had been touched with a hot poker and stepped up into the collar, touching the collar for the first time since the mule had taken the weight of it when Ab shaken out the whip in the lot, and so we come down the hill and up to Whiteleaf store with that horse of Beasley’s eyes rolling white as darning eggs and its mane and tail swirling like a grass fire.

And I be dog if it hadn’t not only sweated itself into as pretty a dark blood bay as you ever saw, but even its ribs didn’t seem to show so much. And Ab that had been talking about taking the back road so we wouldn’t have to pass the store at all, setting there on the wagon seat like he would set on the lot fence back home where he knowed he was safe from Pat Stamper, telling Hugh Mitchell and the other fellows on the gallery that that horse come from Kentucky. Hugh Mitchell never even laughed. ‘Sho now,’ he says. ‘I wondered what had become of it.

I reckon that’s what taken it so long; Kentucky’s a long walk. Herman Short swapped Pat Stamper a mule and buggy for that horse five years ago and Beasley Kemp give Herman eight dollars for it last summer. What did you give Beasley? Fifty cents?’

“That’s what did it. It wasn’t what the horse had cost Ab because you might say all it had cost Ab was the straight stock, since in the first place the sorghum mill was wore-out and in the second place it wasn’t Ab’s sorghum mill nohow. And it wasn’t the mule and buggy of Herman’s. It was them eight cash dollars of Beasley’s, and not that Ab held them eight dollars against Herman, because Herman had done already invested a mule and buggy in it.

And besides, the eight dollars was still in the country and so it didn’t actually matter whether it was Herman or Beasley that had them. It was the fact that Pat Stamper, a stranger, had come in and got actual Yoknapatawpha County cash dollars to rattling around loose that way. When a man swaps horse for horse, that’s one thing and let the devil protect him if the devil can.

But when cash money starts changing hands, that’s something else. And for a stranger to come in and start that cash money to changing and jumping from one fellow to another, it’s like when a burglar breaks into your house and flings your things ever which way even if he don’t take nothing. It makes you twice as mad. So it was not just to unload Beasley Kemp’s horse back onto Pat Stamper.

It was to get Beasley Kemp’s eight dollars back outen Pat someway. And that’s what I meant about it was pure fate that had Pat Stamper camped outside Jefferson right by the road we would have to pass on that day we went to get Miz Snopes’s milk separator; camped right there by the road with that nigger magician on the very day when Ab was coming to town with twenty-four dollars and sixty-eight cents in his pocket and the entire honour and pride of the science and pastime of horse-trading in Yoknapatawpha County depending on him to vindicate it.

“I don’t recollect just when and where we found out Pat was in Jefferson that day. It might have been at Whiteleaf store. Or it might have just been that in Ab’s state it was not only right and natural that Ab would have to pass Stamper to get to Jefferson, but it was foreordained and fated that he would have to.

So here we come, easing them eight dollars of Beasley Kemp's up them long hills with Ab and me walking and Beasley's horse laying into the collar the best it could but with the mule doing most of the pulling and Ab walking on his side of the wagon and cussing Pat Stamper and Herman Short and Beasley Kemp and Hugh Mitchell; and we went down the hills with Ab holding the wagon braked with a sapling pole so it wouldn't shove Beasley's horse through the collar and turn it wrong-side-out like a sock, and Ab still cussing Pat Stamper and Herman and Beasley and Mitchell, until we come to the Three Mile bridge and Ab turned the team outen the road and druv into the bushes and taken the mule out and knotted up one rein so I could ride and give me the quarter and told me to ride for town and get a dime's worth of saltpetre and a nickel's worth of tar and a number ten fish hook and hurry back.

"So we didn't get into town until after dinner time. We went straight to Pat's camp and druv in with that horse of Beasley's laying into the collar now sho enough, with its eyes looking nigh as wild as Ab's and foaming a little at the mouth where Ab had rubbed the saltpetre into its gums and a couple of as pretty tarred bob-wire cuts on its chest as you could want, and another one where Ab had worked that fish hook under its hide where he could touch it by drooping one rein a little, and Pat's nigger running up to catch the head-stall before the horse ran right into the tent where Pat slept and Pat his self coming out with that ere cream-coloured Stetson cocked over one eye and them eyes the colour of a new plough point and just about as warm and his thumbs hooked into his waist band. 'That's a pretty lively horse you got there,' he says.

" 'You damn right,' Ab says. 'That's why I got to get shut of it. Just consider you done already trimmed me and give me something in place of it I can get back home without killing me and this boy both.' Because that was the right system: to rush right up and say he had to trade instead of hanging back for Pat to persuade him. It had been five years since Pat had seen the horse, so Ab figured that the chance of his recognising it would be about the same as a burglar recognising a dollar

watch that happened to get caught for a minute on his vest button five years ago.

And Ab wasn't trying to beat Pat bad. He just wanted to recover that eight dollars' worth of the honour and pride of Yoknapatawpha County horse-trading, doing it not for profit but for honour. And I believe it worked. I still believe that Ab fooled Pat, and that it was because of what Pat aimed to trade Ab and not because Pat recognised Beasley's horse, that Pat refused to trade any way except team for team. Or I don't know: maybe Ab was so busy fooling Pat that Pat never had to fool Ab at all.

So the nigger led the span of mules out and Pat standing there with his thumbs in his pants-top, watching Ab and chewing tobacco slow and gentle, and Ab standing there with that look on his face that was desperate but not scared yet, because he was realising now he had got in deeper than he aimed to and that he would either have to shut his eyes and bust on through, or back out and quit, get back in the wagon and go on before Beasley's horse even give up to the fish hook. And then Pat Stamper showed how come he was Pat Stamper. If he had just started in to show Ab what a bargain he was getting, I reckon Ab would have backed out. But Pat didn't. He fooled Ab just exactly as one first-class burglar would fool another first-class burglar by purely and simply refusing to tell him where the safe was at.

“ 'I already got a good mule,' Ab says. 'It's just the horse I don't want. Trade me a mule for the horse.'

“ 'I don't want no wild horse neither,' Pat says. 'Not that I won't trade for anything that walks, provided I can trade my way. But I ain't going to trade for that horse alone because I don't want it no more than you do. What I am trading for is that mule. And this here team of mine is matched. I aim to get about three times as much for them as a span as I would selling them single.'

“ 'But you would still have a team to trade with,' Ab says.

“ ‘No,’ Pat says. ‘I aim to get more for them from you than I would if the pair was broken. If it’s a single mule you want, you better try somewhere else.’

“So Ab looked at the mules again. They looked just exactly right. They didn’t look extra good and they didn’t look extra bad. Neither one of them looked quite as good as Ab’s mule, but the two of them together looked just a little mite better than just one mule of anybody’s. And so he was doomed. He was doomed from the very minute Hugh Mitchell told him about that eight dollars.

I reckon Pat Stamper knowed he was doomed the very moment he looked up and seen that nigger holding Beasley’s horse back from running into the tent. I reckon he knowed right then he wouldn’t even have to try to trade Ab: all he would have to do would be just to say No long enough. Because that’s what he done, leaning there against our wagon bed with his thumbs hooked into his pants, chewing his tobacco and watching Ab go through the motions of examining them mules again.

And even I knowed that Ab had done traded, that he had done walked out into what he thought was a spring branch and then found out it was quicksand, and that now he knowed he couldn’t even stop long enough to turn back. ‘All right,’ he says. ‘I’ll take them.’

“So the nigger put the new team into the harness and we went on to town. And them mules still looked all right.

I be dog if I didn’t begin to think that Ab had walked into that Stamper quicksand and then got out again, and when we had got back into the road and beyond sight of Stamper’s tent, Ab’s face begun to look like it would while he would set on the lot fence at home and tell folks how he was a fool about a horse but not a durn fool. It wasn’t easy yet, it was just watchful, setting there and feeling out the new team. We was right at town now and he wouldn’t have much time to feel them out in, but we would have a good chance on the road back home. ‘By God,’ Ab says. ‘If they can walk home at all, I have got that eight dollars back, damn him.’

“But that nigger was a artist. Because I swear to God them mules looked all right. They looked exactly like two ordinary, not extra good mules you might see in a hundred wagons on the road. I had done realised how they had a kind of jerky way of starting off, first one jerking into the collar and then jerking back and then the other jerking into the collar and then jerking back, and even after we was in the road and the wagon rolling good one of them taken a spell of some sort and snatched his self crossways in the traces like he aimed to turn around and go back, maybe crawling right across the wagon to do it, but then Stamper had just told us they was a matched team; he never said they had ever worked together as a matched team, and they was a matched team in the sense that neither one of them seemed to have any idea as to just when the other one aimed to start moving.

But Ab got them straightened out and we went on, and we was just starting up that big hill onto the square when they popped into a sweat too, just like Beasley’s horse had done just beyond Whiteleaf.

But that was all right, it was hot enough; that was when I first noticed that that rain was coming up; I mind how I was watching a big hot-looking bright cloud over to the southwest and thinking how it was going to rain on us before we got home or to Whiteleaf either, when all of a sudden I realised that the wagon had done stopped going up the hill and was starting down it backwards and I looked around just in time to see both of them mules this time crossways in the traces and kind of glaring at one another across the tongue and Ab trying to straighten them out and glaring too, and then all of a sudden they straightened out and I mind how I was thinking what a good thing it was they was pointed away from the wagon when they straightened out.

Because they moved at the same time for the first time in their lives, or for the first time since Ab owned them anyway, and here we come swurging up that hill and into the square like a roach up a drainpipe with the wagon on two wheels and Ab sawing at the reins and saying, ‘Hell fire, hell fire’ and folks, ladies and children mostly, scattering and screeching and Ab just managed to swing them into the alley behind

Cain's store and stopped them by locking our nigh wheel with another wagon's and the other team (they was hitched) help to put the brakes on.

So it was a good crowd by then, helping us to get untangled, and Ab led our team over to Cain's back door and tied them snubbed up close to a post, with folks still coming up and saying, 'It's that team of Stamper's,' and Ab breathing hard now and looking a right smart less easy in the face and most all-fired watchful. 'Come on,' he says. 'Let's get that damn separator and get out of here.'

"So we went in and give Cain Miz Snopes's rag and he counted the twenty-four sixty-eight and we got the separator and started back to the wagon, to where we had left it. Because it was still there; the wagon wasn't the trouble. In fact, it was too much wagon. I mind how I could see the bed and the tops of the wheels where Ab had brought it up close against the loading platform and I could see the folks from the waist up standing in the alley, twice or three times as many of them now, and I was thinking how it was too much wagon and too much folks; it was like one of these here pictures that have printed under them, What's wrong with this picture? and then Ab begun to say 'Hell fire, hell fire' and begun to run, still toting his end of the separator, up to the edge of the platform where we could see under it.

The mules was all right too. They was laying down. Ab had snubbed them up pretty close to the same post, with the same line through both bits, and now they looked exactly like two fellows that had done hung themselves in one of these here suicide packs, with their heads snubbed up together and pointing straight up and their tongues hanging out and their eyes popping and their necks stretched about four foot and their legs doubled back under them like shot rabbits until Ab jumped down and cut them down with his pocket-knife. A artist. He had give them just exactly to the inch of whatever it was to get them to town and off the square before it played out.

"So Ab was desperate. I can see him now, backed off in a corner behind Cain's ploughs and cultivators, with his face white and his voice shaking

and his hand shaking so he couldn't hardly hand me the six bits outen his pocket. 'Go to Doc Peabody's,' he says, 'and get me a bottle of whiskey. Hurry.' He was desperate. It wasn't even quicksand now. It was a whirlpool and him with just one jump left.

He drunk that pint of whiskey in two drinks and set the empty bottle down in the corner careful as a egg and we went back to the wagon. The mules was still standing up this time and we loaded the separator in and he eased them away careful, with folks still telling each other it was that team of Stamper's. Ab's face was red instead of white now and the sun was gone but I don't think he even noticed it.

And we hadn't et too, and I don't believe he knowed that either. And I be dog if it didn't seem like Pat Stamper hadn't moved either, standing there at the gate to his rope stock pen, with that Stetson cocked and his thumbs still hooked in the top of his pants and Ab sitting in the wagon trying to keep his hands from shaking and the team Stamper had swapped him stopped now with their heads down and their legs spraddled and breathing like a sawmill. 'I come for my team,' Ab says.

" 'What's the matter?' Stamper says. 'Don't tell me these are too lively for you too. They don't look it.'

" 'All right,' Ab says. 'All right. I got to have my team. I got four dollars. Make your four-dollar profit and give me my team.'

" 'I ain't got your team,' Stamper says. 'I didn't want that horse neither. I told you that. So I got shut of it.'

"Ab set there for a while. It was cooler now. A breeze had got up and you could smell the rain in it. 'But you still got my mule,' Ab says. 'All right. I'll take it.'

" 'For what?' Stamper says. 'You want to swap that team for your mule?' Because Ab wasn't trading now. He was desperate, sitting there like he couldn't even see, with Stamper leaning easy against the gatepost and looking at him for a minute. 'No,' Stamper says. 'I don't want them mules. Yours is the best one. I wouldn't trade that way,

even swap.’ He spit, easy and careful. ‘Besides, I done included your mule into another team. With another horse. You want to look at it?’

“ ‘All right,’ Ab says. ‘How much?’

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

“ ‘All right,’ Ab says. So the nigger led out Ab’s mule and a horse, a little dark brown horse; I remember how even with it clouded up and no sun, how that horse shined — a horse a little bigger than the one we had traded Stamper, and hog fat. That’s just exactly how it was fat: not like a horse is fat but like a hog: fat right up to its ears and looking tight as a drum; it was so fat it couldn’t hardly walk, putting its feet down like they didn’t have no weight nor feeling in them at all. ‘It’s too fat to last,’ Ab says. ‘It won’t even get me home.’

“ ‘That’s what I think myself,’ Stamper says. ‘That’s why I want to get shut of it.’

“ ‘All right,’ Ab says. ‘I’ll have to try it.’ He begun to get outen the wagon.

“ ‘Try it?’ Stamper says. Ab didn’t answer. He got outen the wagon careful and went to the horse, putting his feet down careful and stiff too, like he never had no weight in his feet too, like the horse. It had a hackamore on and Ab taken the rope from the nigger and started to get on the horse. ‘Wait,’ Stamper said. ‘What are you fixing to do?’

“ ‘Going to try it,’ Ab says. ‘I done swapped a horse with you once today.’ Stamper looked at Ab a minute. Then he spit again and kind of stepped back.

“ ‘All right, Jim,’ he says to the nigger. ‘Help him up.’ So the nigger help Ab onto the horse, only the nigger never had time to jump back like Stamper because soon as Ab’s weight come onto the horse it was like Ab had a live wire in his britches. The horse made one swirl, it looked round as a ball, without no more front or back end than a Irish potato. It throwed Ab hard and Ab got up and went back to the horse and Stamper says, ‘Help him up, Jim,’ and the nigger help Ab up again and the horse slammed him off again and Ab got up with his face just the

same and went back and taken the rope again when Stamper stopped him. It was just exactly like Ab wanted that horse to throw him, hard, like the ability of his bones and meat to stand that ere hard ground was all he had left to pay for something with life enough left to get us home. 'Are you trying to kill yoursel'?' Stamper says.

" 'All right,' Ab says. 'How much?'

" 'Come into the tent,' Stamper says.

"So I waited in the wagon. It was beginning to blow a little now, and we hadn't brought no coats with us. But we had some croker sacks in the wagon Miz Snopes had made us bring along to wrap the separator in and I was wrapping it in the sacks when the nigger come outen the tent and when he lifted up the flap I seen Ab drinking outen the bottle. Then the nigger led up a horse and buggy and Ab and Stamper come outen the tent and Ab come to the wagon, he didn't look at me, he just lifted the separator outen the sacks and went and put it into the buggy and him and Stamper went and got into it and drove away, back toward town. The nigger was watching me. 'You fixing to get wet fo you get home,' he said.

" 'I reckon so,' I said.

" 'You want to eat a snack of dinner until they get back?' he said. 'I got it on the stove.'

" 'I reckon not,' I said. So he went back into the tent and I waited in the wagon. It was most sholy going to rain, and that soon. I mind how I thought that anyway we would have the croker sacks now to try to keep dry under. Then Ab and Stamper come back and Ab never looked at me that time either. He went back into the tent and I could see him drinking outen the bottle again and this time he put it into his shirt. And then the nigger led our mule and the new horse up and put them in the wagon and Ab come out and got in. Stamper and the nigger both help him now.

" 'Don't you reckon you better let that boy drive?' Stamper says.

“ ‘I’ll drive,’ Ab says. ‘Maybe I can’t swap a horse with you, but by God I can still drive it.’

“ ‘Sho now,’ Stamper says. ‘That horse will surprise you.’

“And it did,” Ratliff said. He laughed, for the first time, quietly, invisible to his hearers though they knew exactly how he would look at the moment as well as if they could see him, easy and relaxed in his chair, with his lean brown pleasant shrewd face, in his faded clean blue shirt, with that same air of perpetual bachelorhood which Jody Varner had, although there was no other resemblance between them and not much here, since in Varner it was a quality of shabby and fustian gallantry where in Ratliff it was that hearty celibacy as of a lay brother in a twelfth-century monastery — a gardener, a pruner of vines, say. “That horse surprised us.

The rain, the storm, come up before we had gone a mile and we rode in it for two hours, hunched under the croker sacks and watching that new shiny horse that was so fat it even put its feet down like it couldn’t even feel them, that every now and then, even during the rain, would give a kind of flinching jerk like when Ab’s weight had come down onto its back at Stamper’s camp, until we found a old barn to shelter under.

I did, that is, because Ab was laying out in the wagon bed by then, flat on his back with the rain popping him in the face and me on the seat driving now and watching that shiny black horse turning into a bay horse. Because I was just eight then, and me and Ab had done all our horse-trading up and down that lane that run past his lot. So I just drove under the first roof I come to and shaken Ab awake. The rain had cooled him off by then and he waked up sober. And he got a heap soberer fast. ‘What?’ he says. ‘What is it?’

“ ‘The horse!’ I hollered. ‘He’s changing colour!’

“He was sober then. We was both outen the wagon then and Ab’s eyes popping and a bay horse standing in the traces where he had went to sleep looking at a black one. He put his hand out like he couldn’t believe it was even a horse and touched it at a spot where the reins

must every now and then just barely touched it and just about where his weight had come down on it when he was trying to ride it at Stamper's, and next I knowed that horse was plunging and swurging.

I dodged just as it slammed into the wall behind me; I could even feel the wind in my hair. Then there was a sound like a nail jabbed into a big bicycle tyre. It went whishhhhhhhh and then the rest of that shiny fat black horse we had got from Pat Stamper vanished. I don't mean me and Ab was standing there with just the mule left. We had a horse too. Only it was the same horse we had left home with that morning and that we had swapped Beasley Kemp the sorghum mill and the straight stock for two weeks ago. We even got our fish hook back, with the barb still bent where Ab had bent it and the nigger had just moved it a little.

But it wasn't till next morning that Ab found the bicycle pump valve under its hide just inside the nigh foreshoulder — the one place in the world where a man might own a horse for twenty years and never think to look at it.

“Because we never got home till well after sunup the next day, and my pap was waiting at Ab's house, considerable mad. So I didn't stay long, I just had time to see Miz Snopes standing in the door where I reckon she had been setting all night too, saying, ‘Where's my separator?’ and Ab saying how he had always been a fool about a horse and he couldn't help it and then Miz Snopes begun to cry.

I had been hanging around them a heap by now, but I never had seen her cry before. She looked like the kind of somebody that never had done much crying to speak of nohow, because she cried hard, like she didn't know just how to do it, like even the tears never knowed just exactly what they was expected to do, standing there in a old wrapper, not even hiding her face, saying, ‘Fool about a horse, yes! But why the horse? why the horse?’

“So me and Pap went on. He had my arm a right smart twisted up in his hand, but when I begun to tell him about what happened yesterday, he changed his mind about licking me. But it was almost noon before I got

back down to Ab's. He was setting on the lot fence and I clumb up and set by him. Only the lot was empty.

I couldn't see his mule nor Beasley's horse neither. But he never said nothing and I never said nothing, only after a while he said, 'You done had breakfast?' and I said I had and he said, 'I ain't et yet.' So we went to the house then, and sho enough, she was gone.

And I could imagine it — Ab setting there on that fence and her coming down the hill in her sunbonnet and shawl and gloves too and going into the stable and saddling the mule and putting the halter on Beasley's horse and Ab setting there trying to decide whether to go and offer to help her or not.

"So I started the fire in the stove. Ab wasn't much of a hand at cooking, so by the time he got his breakfast started it was so late we just decided to cook enough for breakfast and dinner too and we et it and I washed the dishes and we went back to the lot.

The middle buster was still setting down yonder in the far field, but there wasn't nothing to pull it with nohow now lessen he walked up to Old Man Anse's and borrowed a span of mules, which would be just like going up to a rattlesnake and borrowing a rattle: but then, I reckon he felt he had stood all the excitement he could for the rest of that day at least. So we just set on the fence and looked at that empty lot. It never had been a big lot and it would look kind of crowded even with just one horse in it.

But now it looked like all Texas; and sho enough, I hadn't hardly begun to think about how empty it was when he clumb down offen the fence and went across and looked at a shed that was built against the side of the barn and that would be all right if it was just propped up and had a new roof on it. 'I think next time I will trade for a mare and build me up a brood herd and raise mules,' he says. 'This here will do all right for colts with a little fixing up.'

Then he come back and we set on the fence again, and about middle of the afternoon a wagon druv up. It was Cliff Odum, it had the side-boards on it and Miz Snopes was on the seat with Cliff, coming on past the house, toward the lot. 'She ain't got it,' Ab says. 'He wouldn't dicker with her.' We was behind the barn now and we watched Cliff back his wagon up against a cut bank by the gate and we watched Miz Snopes get out and take off her shawl and gloves and come across the lot and into the cowshed and lead the cow back and up onto the cut bank behind the wagon and Cliff said, 'You come hold the team.

I'll get her in the wagon.' But she never even stopped. She faced the cow into the tail gate and got behind it and laid her shoulder against its hams and hove that cow into the wagon before Cliff could have got out. And Cliff put up the tail gate and Miz Snopes put her shawl and gloves back on and they got into the wagon and they went on.

"So I built him another fire to cook his supper and then I had to go home; it was almost sundown then. When I come back the next morning I brung a pail of milk. Ab was in the kitchen, still cooking breakfast. 'I am glad you thought about that,' he says when he see the milk.

'I was aiming to tell you yesterday to see if you could borrow some.' He kept on cooking breakfast because he hadn't expected her that soon, because that would make two twenty-eight mile trips in not much more than twenty-four hours. But we heard the wagon again and this time when she got out she had the separator. When we got to the barn we could see her toting it into the house. 'You left that milk where she will see it, didn't you?' Ab says.

" 'Yes, sir,' I says.

" 'Likely she will wait to put on her old wrapper first,' Ab says. 'I wish I had started breakfast sooner.' Only I don't think she even waited that long, because it seemed like we begun to hear it right away. It made a fine high sound, good and strong, like it would separate a gallon of milk in no time. Then it stopped. 'It's too bad she ain't got but the one gallon,' Ab says.

“ ‘I can bring her another one in the morning,’ I said. But he wasn’t listening, watching the house.

“ ‘I reckon you can go now and look in the door,’ he says. So I went and did. She was taking Ab’s breakfast off the stove, onto two plates. I didn’t know she had even seen me till she turned and handed the two plates to me. Her face was all right now, quiet. It was just busy.

“ ‘I reckon you can eat something more too,’ she said. ‘But eat it out yonder. I am going to be busy in here and I don’t want you and him in my way.’ So I taken the plates back and we set against the fence and et. And then we heard the separator again. I didn’t know it would go through but one time. I reckon he didn’t neither.

“ ‘I reckon Cain showed her,’ he says, eating. ‘I reckon if she wants it to run through more than once, it will run through more than once.’ Then it stopped and she come to the door and hollered to us to bring the dishes up so she could wash them and I taken the plates back and set them on the step and me and Ab went back and set on the fence.

It looked like it would have held all Texas and Kansas too. ‘I reckon she just rode up to that damn tent and said, Here’s your team. You get my separator and get it quick because I got to catch a ride back home,’ he said. And then we heard it again, and that evening we walked up to Old Man Anse’s to borrow a mule to finish the far piece with, but he never had none to spare now.

So as soon as Old Man Anse had finished cussing, we come on back and set on the fence. And sho enough, we could hear the separator start up again. It sounded strong as ever, like it could make the milk fly, like it didn’t give a whoop whether that milk had been separated once or a hundred times. ‘There it goes again,’ Ab says. ‘Don’t forget that other gallon tomorrow.’

“ ‘No, sir,’ I says. We listened to it. Because he wasn’t curdled then.

“ ‘It looks like she is fixing to get a heap of pleasure and satisfaction outen it,’ he says.”

He halted the buckboard and sat for a moment looking down at the same broken gate which Jody Varner had sat the roan horse and looked at nine days ago — the weed-choked and grass-grown yard, the weathered and sagging house — a cluttered desolation filled already, even before he reached the gate and stopped, with the loud flat sound of two female voices.

They were young voices, talking not in shouts or screams but with an unhurried profundity of volume the very apparent absence from which of any discernible human speech or language seemed but natural, as if the sound had been emitted by two enormous birds; as if the aghast and amazed solitude of some inaccessible and empty marsh or desert were being invaded and steadily violated by the constant bickering of the two last survivors of a lost species which had established residence in it — a sound which stopped short off when Ratliff shouted. A moment later the two girls came to the door and stood, big, identical, like two young tremendous cows, looking at him.

“Morning, ladies,” he said. “Where’s your paw?”

They continued to contemplate him. They did not seem to breathe even, though he knew they did, must; bodies of that displacement and that apparently monstrous, that almost oppressive, wellness, would need air and lots of it. He had a fleeting vision of them as the two cows, heifers, standing knee-deep in air as in a stream, a pond, nuzzling into it, the level of the pond fleeing violently and silently to one inhalation, exposing in astounded momentary amaze the teeming lesser subaerial life about the planted feet. Then they spoke exactly together, like a trained chorus: “Down to the field.”

Sho now, he thought, moving on: Doing what? Because he did not believe that the Ab Snopes he had known would have more than two mules. And one of these he had already seen standing idle in the lot beyond the house; and the other he knew to be tied at this moment to

a tree behind Varner's store eight miles away, because only three hours ago he had left it there, tied where for six days now he had watched Varner's new clerk ride up each morning and tie it. For an instant he actually halted the buckboard again. By God, he thought quietly, This would be exactly the chance he must have been waiting on for twenty-three years now to get his self that new un-Stampered start.

So when he came in sight of the field and recognised the stiff, harsh, undersized figure behind a plough drawn by two mules, he was not even surprised. He did not wait until he had actually recognised the mules to be a pair which until a week ago at least had belonged to Will Varner: he merely changed the tense of the possessing verb: Not had belonged, he thought. They still do. By God, he has done even better than that. He ain't even trading horses now. He has done swapped a man for a span of them.

He halted the buckboard at the fence. The plough had reached the far end of the field. The man turned the team, their heads tossing and yawing, their stride breaking as he sawed them about with absolutely needless violence. Ratliff watched soberly. Just like always, he thought. He still handles a horse or a mule like it had done already threatened him with its fist before he even spoke to it. He knew that Snopes had seen and even recognised him too, though there was no sign of it, the team straightened out now and returning, the delicate mule-legs and narrow deer-like feet picking up swiftly and nervously, the earth shearing dark and rich from the polished blade of the plough.

Now Ratliff could even see Snopes looking directly at him — the cold glints beneath the shaggy ill-tempered brows as he remembered them even after eight years, the brows only a little greyer now — though once more the other merely swung the team about with that senseless savageness, canting the plough onto its side as he stopped it. "What you doing here?" he said.

"Just heard you were here and stopped by," Ratliff said. "It's been a while, ain't it? Eight years."

The other grunted. "It don't show on you, though. You still look like butter wouldn't melt in your mouth."

"Sho now," Ratliff said. "Speaking of mouths." He reached beneath the seat cushion and produced a pint bottle filled apparently with water. "Some of McCallum's best," he said. "Just run off last week. Here." He extended the bottle. The other came to the fence. Although they were now not five feet apart, still all that Ratliff could see were the two glints beneath the fierce overhang of brow.

"You brought it to me?"

"Sholy," Ratliff said. "Take it."

The other did not move. "What for?"

"Nothing," Ratliff said. "I just brought it. Try a sup of it. It's good."

The other took the bottle. Then Ratliff knew that something had gone out of the eyes. Or maybe they were just not looking at him now. "I'll wait till tonight," Snopes said. "I don't drink in the sun any more."

"How about in the rain?" Ratliff said. And then he knew that Snopes was not looking at him, although the other had not moved, no change in the harsh knotted violent face as he stood holding the bottle. "You ought to settle down pretty good here," Ratliff said. "You got a good farm now, and Flem seems to taken hold in the store like he was raised storekeeping." Now the other did not seem to be listening either. He shook the bottle and raised it to the light as though testing the bead. "I hope you will," Ratliff said.

Then he saw the eyes again, fierce and intractable and cold. "What's it to you if I do or don't?"

"Nothing," Ratliff said, pleasantly, quietly. Snopes stooped and hid the bottle in the weeds beside the fence and returned to the plough and raised it.

"Go on to the house and tell them to give you some dinner," he said.

"I reckon not," Ratliff said. "I got to get on to town."

“Suit yourself,” the other said. He looped the single rein about his neck and gave another savage yank on the inside line; again the team swung with yawing heads, already breaking stride even before they had come into motion. “Much obliged for the bottle,” he said.

“Sho now,” Ratliff said. The plough went on. Ratliff watched it. He never said, Come back again, he thought. He lifted his own reins. “Come up, rabbits,” he said. “Let’s hit for town.”

CHAPTER THREE

1

ON THE MONDAY morning when Flem Snopes came to clerk in Varner’s store, he wore a brand-new white shirt. It had not even been laundered yet, the creases where the cloth had lain bolted on a shelf, and the sun-browned streaks repeated zebra-like on each successive fold, were still apparent.

And not only the women who came to look at him, but Ratliff himself (he did not sell sewing-machines for nothing; he had even learned to operate one quite well from demonstrating them, and it was even told of him that he made himself the blue shirts which he wore) knew that the shirt had been cut and stitched by hand and by a stiff and unaccustomed hand too.

He wore it all that week. By Saturday night it was soiled, but on the following Monday he appeared in a second one exactly like it, even to the zebra-stripes. By the second Saturday night that one was soiled too, in exactly the same places as the other.

It was as though its wearer, entering though he had into a new life and milieu already channelled to compulsions and customs fixed long before his advent, had nevertheless established in it even on that first day his own particular soiling groove.

He rode up on a gaunt mule, on a saddle which was recognised at once as belonging to the Varners, with a tin pail tied to it. He hitched the mule to a tree behind the store and untied the pail and came and mounted to the gallery, where already a dozen men, Ratliff among them, lounged. He did not speak.

If he ever looked at them individually, that one did not discern it — a thick squat soft man of no establishable age between twenty and thirty, with a broad still face containing a tight seam of mouth stained slightly at the corners with tobacco, and eyes the colour of stagnant water, and projecting from among the other features in startling and sudden paradox, a tiny predatory nose like the beak of a small hawk.

It was as though the original nose had been left off by the original designer or craftsman and the unfinished job taken over by someone of a radically different school or perhaps by some viciously maniacal humorist or perhaps by one who had had only time to clap into the centre of the face a frantic and desperate warning.

He entered the store, carrying the pail, and Ratliff and his companions sat and squatted about the gallery all that day and watched not only the village proper but all the countryside within walking distance come up singly and in pairs and in groups, men women and children, to make trivial purchases and look at the new clerk and go away.

They came not belligerently but completely wary, almost decorous, like half-wild cattle following word of the advent of a strange beast upon their range, to buy flour and patent medicine and plough-lines and tobacco and look at the man whose name a week ago they had never heard, yet with whom in the future they would have to deal for the necessities of living, and then depart as quietly as they had come. About nine o'clock Jody Varner rode up on his roan saddle-horse and entered the store.

They could hear the bass murmur of his voice inside, though for all the answer he got he might have been talking to himself. He came out at noon and mounted and rode away, though the clerk did not follow him.

But they had known anyway what the tin pail would contain, and they began to disperse noonward too, looking into the store as they passed the door, seeing nothing.

If the clerk was eating his lunch, he had hidden to do it. Ratliff was back on the gallery before one o'clock, since he had had to walk only a hundred yards for his dinner. But the others were not long after him, and for the rest of that day they sat and squatted, talking quietly now and then about nothing at all, while the rest of the people within walking distance came and bought in nickels and dimes and went away.

By the end of that first week they had all come in and seen him, not only all those who in future would have to deal through him for food and supplies but some who had never traded with the Varners and never would — the men, the women, the children — the infants who had never before crossed the doorsteps beyond which they had been born, the sick and the aged who otherwise might never have crossed them but once more — coming on horses and mules and by wagonsful.

Ratliff was still there, the buckboard still containing the music-box and the set of virgin harrow teeth standing, a plank propping its tongue and the sturdy mismatched team growing vicious with idleness, in Mrs. Littlejohn's lot, watching each morning as the clerk would ride up on the mule, on the borrowed saddle, in the new white shirt growing gradually and steadily a little more and more soiled with each sunset, with the tin pail of lunch which no man had ever yet seen him eating, and hitch the mule and unlock the store with the key which they had not quite expected him to have in his possession for a few days yet at least. After the first day or so he would even have the store open when Ratliff and the others arrived.

Jody Varner would appear on the horse about nine o'clock and mount the steps and jerk his head bluffly at them and enter the store, though after the first morning he remained only about fifteen minutes. If Ratliff and his companions had hoped to divine any hidden undercurrent or secret spark between the younger Varner and the clerk, they were disappointed.

There would be the heavy-bass matter-of-fact murmur, still talking apparently to itself for all the audible answer it ever got, then he and the clerk would come to the door and stand in it while Varner finished his instructions and sucked his teeth and departed; when they looked toward the door, it would be empty.

Then at last, on Friday afternoon, Will Varner himself appeared. Perhaps it was for this Ratliff and his companions had been waiting. But if it was, it was doubtless not Ratliff but the others who even hoped that anything would divulge here. So it was very likely Ratliff alone who was not surprised, since what did divulge was the obverse of what they might have hoped for; it was not the clerk who now discovered at last whom he was working for, but Will Varner who discovered who was working for him.

He came up on the old fat white horse. A young man squatting on the top step rose and descended and took the reins and tied the horse and Varner got down and mounted the steps, speaking cheerily to their deferential murmur, to Ratliff by name: "Hell fire, ain't you gone back to work yet?"

Two more of them vacated the knife-gnawed wooden bench, but Varner did not approach it at once. Instead, he paused in front of the open door in almost exactly the same attitude of the people themselves, lean, his neck craned a little like a turkey as he looked into the store, though only for an instant because almost at once he shouted, "You there. What's your name? Flem.

Bring me a plug of my tobacco. Jody showed you where he keeps it." He came and approached the group, two of whom vacated the knife-gnawed wooden bench for him, and he sat down and took out his knife and had already begun his smoking-car story in his cheerful drawling bishop's voice when the clerk (Ratliff had not heard his feet at all) appeared at his elbow with the tobacco. Still talking, Varner took the plug and cut off a chew and shut the knife with his thumb and straightened his leg to put the knife back into his pocket, when he

stopped talking and looked sharply upward. The clerk was still standing at his elbow. "Hey?" Varner said. "What?"

"You ain't paid for it," the clerk said. For an instant Varner did not move at all, his leg still extended, the plug and the severed chew in one hand and the knife in the other just about to enter his pocket. None of them moved in fact, looking quietly and attentively at their hands or at wherever their eyes had been when Varner interrupted himself. "The tobacco," the clerk said.

"Oh," Varner said. He put the knife into his pocket and drew from his hip a leather purse about the size and shape and colour of an eggplant and took a nickel from it and gave it to the clerk. Ratliff had not heard the clerk come out and he did not hear him return. Now he saw why. The clerk wore also a new pair of rubber-soled tennis shoes. "Where was I?" Varner said.

"The fellow had just begun to unbutton his over-halls," Ratliff said mildly.

The next day Ratliff departed. He was put into motion not by the compulsion of food, earning it. He could have passed from table to table in that country for six months without once putting his hand into his pocket. He was moved by his itinerary, his established and nurtured round of news mongering, the pleasure of retailing it, not the least nor stalest of which present stock he had spent the last two weeks actually watching.

It was five months before he saw the village again. His route embraced four counties. It was absolutely rigid, flexible only within itself. In ten years he had not once crossed the boundaries of these four, yet one day in this summer he found himself in Tennessee. He found himself not only on foreign soil but shut away from his native state by a golden barrier, a wall of neatly accumulating minted coins.

During the spring and summer he had done a little too well. He had oversold himself, selling and delivering the machines on notes against the coming harvest, employing what money he collected or sold the

exchanged articles for which he accepted as down-payments, to make his own down-payments to the Memphis wholesaler on still other machines, which he delivered in turn on new notes, countersigning them, until one day he discovered that he had almost sold himself insolvent on his own bull market. The wholesaler made demand upon him for his (the wholesaler's) half of the outstanding twenty-dollar notes. Ratliff in his turn made a swift canvass of his own debtors.

He was affable, bland, anecdotal and apparently unhurried as ever but he combed them thoroughly, not to be denied, although the cotton had just begun to bloom and it would be months yet before there would be any money in the land. He collected a few dollars, a set of used wagon harness, eight White Leghorn hens. He owed the wholesaler \$120.00. He called on the twelfth customer, a distant kinsman, and found that he had departed a week ago with a string of mules to sell at the mule curb-market at Columbia, Tennessee.

He followed at once in the buckboard, with the wagon harness and the hens. He not only saw a chance to collect his note, provided he got there before someone sold the kinsman some mules in his own turn, but he might even borrow enough to appease the wholesaler. He reached Columbia four days later, where, after the first amazed moment or so, he looked about him with something of the happy surmise of the first white hunter blundering into the idyllic solitude of a virgin African vale teeming with ivory, his for the mere shooting and fetching out.

He sold a machine to the man whom he asked the whereabouts of his cousin, he went with the kinsman to pass the night at the home of the kinsman's wife's cousin ten miles from Columbia and sold a machine there. He sold three in the first four days; he remained a month and sold eight in all, collecting \$80.00 in down-payments, with the \$80.00 and the wagon harness and the eight hens he bought a mule, took the mule to Memphis and sold it at curb auction for \$135.00, gave the wholesaler \$120.00 and the new notes for a quit-claim on the old ones in Mississippi, and reached home at gathering-time with \$2.53 in cash

and full title to the twelve twenty-dollar notes which would be paid as the cotton was ginned and sold.

When he reached Frenchman's Bend in November, it had returned to normal. It had acquiesced to the clerk's presence even if it had not accepted him, though the Varners seemed to have done both. Jody had used to be in the store at some time during the day and not far from it at any time.

Ratliff now discovered that for months he had been in the habit of sometimes not appearing at all, customers who had traded there for years, mostly serving themselves and putting the correct change into the cigar box inside the cheese cage, now having to deal for each trivial item with a man whose name they had not even heard two months ago, who answered Yes and No to direct questions and who apparently never looked directly or long enough at any face to remember the name which went with it, yet who never made mistakes in any matter pertaining to money.

Jody Varner had made them constantly. They were usually in his own favour to be sure, letting a customer get away with a spool of thread or a tin of snuff now and then, but getting it back sooner or later.

They had come to expect mistakes of him, just as they knew he would correct them when caught with a bluff, hearty amiability, making a joke of it, which sometimes left the customer wondering just a little about the rest of the bill. But they expected this too, because he would give them credit for food and plough-gear when they needed it, long credit, though they knew they would pay interest for that which on its face looked like generosity and openhandedness, whether that interest showed in the final discharge or not. But the clerk never made mistakes.

"Nonsense," Ratliff said. "Somebody's bound to catch him sooner or later. There ain't a man woman or child in twenty-five miles that don't know what's in that store and what it cost as well as Will or Jody Varner either."

“Hah,” the other said — a sturdy short-legged black-browed ready-faced man named Odum Bookwright. “That’s it.”

“You mean ain’t nobody ever caught him once even?”

“No,” Bookwright said. “And folks don’t like it. Otherwise, how can you tell?”

“Sho,” Ratliff said. “How can you?”

“There was that credit business too,” another said — a lank man with a bulging dreamy scant-haired head and pale myopic eyes named Quick, who operated a sawmill. He told about it: how they had discovered almost at once that the clerk did not want to credit anyone with anything. He finally flatly refused further credit to a man who had been into and out of the store’s debt at least once a year for the last fifteen, and how that afternoon Will Varner himself came galloping up on the old fat grumble-gutted white horse and stormed into the store, shouting loud enough to be heard in the blacksmith shop across the road: “Who in hell’s store do you think this is, anyway?”

“Well, we know whose store it is yet, anyway,” Ratliff said.

“Or whose store some folks still thinks it is yet,” Bookwright said.

“Anyhow, he ain’t moved into Varner’s house yet.”

Because the clerk now lived in the village. One Saturday morning someone noticed that the saddled mule was not hitched behind the store. The store remained open until ten and later on Saturdays and there was always a crowd about it and several men saw him put out the lamps and lock the door and depart, on foot.

And the next morning he who had never been seen in the village between Saturday night and Monday morning appeared at the church, and those who saw him looked at him for an instant in incredulous astonishment. In addition to the grey cloth cap and the grey trousers, he wore not only a clean white shirt but a necktie — a tiny machine-made black bow which snapped together at the back with a metal fastener.

It was not two inches long and with the exception of the one which Will Varner himself wore to church it was the only tie in the whole Frenchman's Bend country, and from that Sunday morning until the day he died he wore it or one just like it (it was told of him later, after he had become president of his Jefferson bank, that he had them made for him by the gross) — a tiny viciously depthless cryptically balanced splash like an enigmatic punctuation symbol against the expanse of white shirt which gave him Jody Varner's look of ceremonial heterodoxy raised to its tenth power and which postulated to those who had been present on that day that quality of outrageous overstatement of physical displacement which the sound of his father's stiff foot made on the gallery of the store that afternoon in the spring.

He departed on foot; he came to the store the next morning still walking and still wearing the tie. By nightfall the countryside knew that since the previous Saturday he had boarded and lodged in the home of a family living about a mile from the store.

Will Varner had long since returned to his old idle busy cheerful existence — if he had ever left it. The store had not seen him since the Fourth of July. And now that Jody no longer came in, during the dead slack days of August while the cotton ripened and there was nothing for anyone to do, it had actually seemed as if not only the guiding power but the proprietorial and revenue-deriving as well was concentrated in that squat reticent figure in the steadily-soiling white shirts and the minute invulnerable bow, which in those abeyant days lurked among the ultimate shadows of the deserted and rich-odoured interior with a good deal of the quality of a spider of that bulbous blond omnivorous though non-poisonous species.

Then in September something happened. It began rather, though at first they did not recognise it for what it was. The cotton had opened and was being picked. One morning the first of the men to arrive found Jody Varner already there. The gin was unlocked and Trumbull, Varner's blacksmith, and his apprentice and the negro fireman were overhauling the machinery, getting it ready for the season's run, and presently

Snopes came out of the store and went across to the gin and entered it and passed from sight and so, for the moment, from remembering too.

It was not until the store closed that afternoon that they realised that Jody Varner had been inside it all day. But even then they attached little importance to this. They thought that without doubt Jody himself had sent the clerk to superintend the opening of the gin, which Jody himself had used to do, out of laziness, assuming himself the temporary onus of tending store so he could sit down.

It took the actual firing-up of the gin and the arrival of the first loaded wagons to disabuse them. Then they saw that it was Jody who was now tending store again, fetching and carrying for the nickels and dimes, while the clerk sat all day long on the stool behind the scale-beam as the wagons moved in turn onto it and so beneath the suction pipe. Jody had used to do both.

That is, he was mostly behind the scales, letting the store take care of itself, as it always had, though now and then, just to rest himself, he would keep a wagon standing upon the scales, blocking them for fifteen minutes or even forty-five minutes, while he was in the store; maybe there would not even be any customers during that time, just loungers, listeners for him to talk to. But that was all right. Things got along just as well.

And now that there were two of them, there was no reason why one should not remain in the store while the other did the weighing, and there was no reason why Jody should not have designated the weighing to the clerk. The cold surmise which now began to dawn upon them was that — —

“Sho,” Ratliff said. “I know. That Jody should have stayed there a tall. Just who it was that told him to stay there.” He and Bookwright looked at each other. “It wasn’t Uncle Will. That store and that gin had been running themselves at the same time for nigh forty years all right, with just one fellow between them. And a fellow Uncle Will’s age ain’t likely to change his notions. Sho now. All right. Then what?”

They could watch them both from the gallery. They would come in on their laden wagons and draw into line, mule-nose to tail gate, beside the road, waiting for their turn to move onto the scales and then under the suction pipe, and dismount and wrap the reins about a stanchion and cross to the gallery, from which they could watch the still, impenetrable, steadily-chewing face throned behind the scale-beam, the cloth cap, the minute tie, while from within the store they could hear now and then the short surly grunts with which Varner answered when his customers forced him to speak at all.

Now and then they would even go in themselves and buy sacks or plugs of tobacco or tins of snuff which they did not actually need yet, or maybe just to drink from the cedar water bucket. Because there was something in Jody's eyes that had not been there before either — a shadow, something between annoyance and speculation and purest foreknowledge, which was not quite bafflement yet but was certainly sober.

This was the time they referred to later, two and three years later, when they told one another: "That was when he passed Jody," though it was Ratliff who amended it: "You mean, that was when Jody begun to find it out."

But that was to be sometime in the future yet. Now they just watched, missing nothing. During that month the air was filled from daylight until dark with the whine of the gin; the wagons stood in line for the scales and moved up one by one beneath the suction pipe. Now and then the clerk would cross the road to the store, the cap, the trousers, even the tie wisped with cotton; the men lounging upon the gallery while they waited their turns at the suction pipe or the scales would watch him enter the store now and a moment later hear his voice this time, murmuring, matter-of-fact, succinct.

But Jody Varner would not come to the door with him to stand for a moment as before, and they would watch the clerk return to the gin — the thick squat back, shapeless, portentous, without age. After the

crops were in and ginned and sold, the time came when Will Varner made his yearly settlement with his tenants and debtors. He had used to do this alone, not even allowing Jody to help him. This year he sat at the desk with the iron cash box while Snopes sat on a nail keg at his knee with the open ledgers.

In the tunnel-like room lined with canned food and cluttered with farming implements and now crowded with patient earth-reeking men waiting to accept almost without question whatever Varner should compute he owed them for their year's work, Varner and Snopes resembled the white trader and his native parrot-taught headman in an African outpost.

That headman was acquiring the virtues of civilisation fast. It was not known what the Varners paid him, except that Will Varner had never been known to pay very much for anything. Yet this man who five months ago was riding eight miles back and forth to work on a plough mule and a cast-off saddle with a tin pail of cold turnip greens or field pease tied to it, was now not only sleeping in a rented bed and eating from a furnished table like a drummer, he had also made a considerable cash loan, security and interest not specified, to a resident of the village, and before the last of the cotton was ginned it was generally known that any sum between twenty-five cents and ten dollars could be borrowed from him at any time, if the borrower agreed to pay enough for the accommodation.

In the next spring Tull, in Jefferson with a drove of cattle for shipping on the railroad, came to see Ratliff who was sick in bed in the house which he owned and which his widowed sister kept for him, with a recurrent old gallbladder trouble. Tull told him of a considerable herd of scrub cattle which had passed the winter in pasture on the farm which Snopes's father had rented from the Varners for another year — a herd which, by the time Ratliff had been carried to a Memphis hospital and operated on and returned home and once more took an interest in what went on about him, had increased gradually and steadily and then overnight vanished, its disappearance coincident with the appearance of a herd of good Herefords in a pasture on another place which Varner

owned and kept himself as his home farm, as though transmogrified, translated complete and intact save for their altered appearance and obviously greater worth, it only later becoming known that the cattle had reached the pasture via a foreclosed lien nominally held by a Jefferson bank. Bookwright and Tull both came to see him and told him of this.

“Maybe they was in the bank vault all the time,” Ratliff said weakly.

“Who did Will say they belonged to?”

“He said they was Snopeses,” Tull said. “He said, ‘Ask that son-of-a-gun of Jody’s.’ ”

“And did you?” Ratliff said.

“Bookwright did. And Snopes said, ‘They’re in Varner’s pasture.’ And Bookwright said, ‘But Will says they are yourn.’ And Snopes turned his head and spit and says, ‘They’re in Varner’s pasture.’ ”

And Ratliff, ill, did not see this either. He only heard it second-hand, though by that time he was mending, well enough to muse upon it, speculate, curious, shrewd, and inscrutable himself, sitting up now in a chair propped with pillows in a window where he could watch the autumn begin, feel the bright winy air of October noons: How one morning in that second spring a man named Houston, heeled by a magnificent grave blue-ticked Walker hound, led a horse up to the blacksmith shop and saw, stooping over the forge and trying to start a fire in it with liquid from a rusty can, a stranger — a young, well-made, muscle-bound man who, turning, revealed an open equable face beginning less than an inch below his hairline, who said, “Howdy.

I can’t seem to get this here fire started. Everytime I put this here coal oil onto it, it just goes further out. Watch.” He prepared to pour from the can again.

“Hold on,” Houston said. “Is that coal oil you’ve got?”

“It was setting on that ere ledge yonder,” the other said. “It looks like the kind of a can coal oil would be in. It’s a little rusty, but I never heard tell of even rusty coal oil that wouldn’t burn before.” Houston came

and took the can from him and sniffed it. The other watched him. The splendid hound sat in the doorway and watched them both. "It don't smell exactly like coal oil, does it?"

"— t," Houston said. He set the can back on the sooty ledge above the forge. "Go on. Haul that mud out. You'll have to start over. Where's Trumbull?" Trumbull was the smith who had been in the shop for almost twenty years, until this morning.

"I don't know," the other said. "Wasn't nobody here when I come."
"What are you doing here? Did he send you?"

"I don't know," the other said. "It was my cousin hired me. He told me to be here this morning and get the fire started and tend to the business till he come. But everytime I put that ere coal oil — —"

"Who is your cousin?" Houston said. At that moment a gaunt aged horse came up rapidly, drawing a battered and clattering buggy one of whose wheels was wired upright by two crossed slats, which looked as if its momentum alone held it intact and that the instant it stopped it would collapse into kindling. It contained another stranger — a frail man none of whose garments seemed to belong to him, with a talkative weasel's face — who halted the buggy, shouting at the horse as if they were a good-sized field apart, and got out of the buggy and came into the shop, already (or still) talking.

"Morning, morning," he said, his little bright eyes darting. "Want that horse shod, hey? Good, good: save the hoof and save all. Good-looking animal. Seen a considerable better one in a field a-piece back. But no matter; love me, love my horse, beggars can't be choosers, if wishes was horseflesh we'd all own thoroughbreds. What's the matter?" he said to the man in the apron.

He paused, though still he seemed to be in violent motion, as though the attitude and position of his garments gave no indication whatever of what the body within them might be doing — indeed, if it were still inside them at all. "Ain't you got that fire started yet?"

Here.” He darted to the ledge; he seemed to translate himself over beneath it without increasing his appearance of violent motion at all, and had taken the can down and sniffed at it and then prepared to empty it onto the coals in the forge before anyone could move. Then Houston intercepted him at the last second and took the can from him and flung it out the door.

“I just finished taking that damn hog piss away from him,” Houston said. “What the hell’s happened here? Where’s Trumbull?”

“Oh, you mean the fellow that used to be here,” the newcomer said. “His lease has done been cancelled. I’m leasing the shop now. My name’s Snopes. I. O. Snopes. This here’s my young cousin, Eck Snopes. But it’s the old shop, the old stand; just a new broom in it.”

“I don’t give a damn what his name is,” Houston said. “Can he shoe a horse?” Again the newcomer turned upon the man in the apron, shouting at him as he had shouted at the horse:

“All right. All right. Get that fire started.” After watching a moment, Houston took charge and they got the fire going. “He’ll pick it up though,” the newcomer said. “Just give him time.

He’s handy with tools, even though he ain’t done no big sight of active blacksmithing. But give a dog a good name and you don’t need to hang him. Give him a few days to practise up and he’ll shoe a horse quick as Trumbull or any of them.”

“I’ll shoe this one,” Houston said. “Just let him keep pumping that bellows. He looks like he ought to be able to do that without having to practise.” Nevertheless, the shoe shaped and cooled in the tub, the newcomer darted in again.

It was as if he took not only Houston but himself too by complete surprise — that weasel-like quality of existing independent of his clothing so that although you could grasp and hold that you could not restrain the body itself from doing what it was doing until the damage had been done — a furious already dissipating concentration of energy

vanishing the instant after the intention took shape, the newcomer darting between Houston and the raised hoof and clapping the shoe onto it and touching the animal's quick with the second blow of the hammer on the nail and being hurled, hammer and all, into the shrinking-tub by the plunging horse which Houston and the man in the apron finally backed into a corner and held while Houston jerked nail and shoe free and flung them into the corner and backed the horse savagely out of the shop, the hound rising and resuming its position quietly at proper heeling distance behind the man. "And you can tell Will Varner — if he cares a damn, which evidently he don't," Houston said, "that I have gone to Whiteleaf to have my horse shod."

The shop and the store were just opposite, only the road between. There were several men already on the gallery, who watched Houston, followed by the big quiet regal dog, lead the horse away. They did not even need to cross the road to see one of the strangers, because presently the smaller and older one crossed to the store, in the clothes which would still appear not to belong to him on the day they finally fell off his body, with his talkative pinched face and his bright darting eyes. He mounted the steps, already greeting them.

Still talking, he entered the store, his voice voluble and rapid and meaningless like something talking to itself about nothing in a deserted cavern. He came out again, still talking: "Well, gentlemen, off with the old and on with the new.

Competition is the life of trade, and though a chain ain't no stronger than its weakest link, I don't think you'll find the boy yonder no weak reed to have to lean on once he catches onto it.

It's the old shop, the old stand; it's just a new broom in it and maybe you can't teach a old dog new tricks but you can teach a new young willing one anything. Just give him time; a penny on the waters pays interest when the flood turns. Well, well; all pleasure and no work, as the fellow says, might make Jack so sharp he might cut his self.

I bid you good morning, gentlemen.” He went on and got into the buggy, still talking, now to the man in the shop and now to the gaunt horse, all in one breath, without any break to indicate to the hearers which he addressed at any time. He drove away, the men on the gallery looking after him, completely expressionless. During the day they crossed to the shop, one by one, and looked at the second stranger — the quiet empty open face which seemed to have been a mere afterthought to the thatching of the skull, like the binding of a rug, harmless.

A man brought up a wagon with a broken hound. The new smith even repaired it, though it took him most of the forenoon, working steadily but in a dreamlike state in which what actually lived inside him apparently functioned somewhere else, paying no heed to and having no interest in, not even in the money he would earn, what his hands were doing; busy, thick-moving, getting nowhere seemingly though at last the job was finished.

That afternoon Trumbull, the old smith, appeared. But if they had waited about the store to see what would happen when he arrived who until last night anyway must have still believed himself the incumbent, they were disappointed. He drove through the village with his wife, in a wagon loaded with household goods. If he even looked toward his old shop nobody saw him do it — an old man though still hale, morose and efficient, who would have invited no curiosity even before yesterday. They never saw him again.

A few days later they learned that the new smith was living in the house where his cousin (or whatever the relationship was: nobody ever knew for certain) Flem lived, the two of them sleeping together in the same bed.

Six months later the smith had married one of the daughters of the family where the two of them boarded. Ten months after that he was pushing a perambulator (once — or still — Will Varner’s, like the cousin’s saddle) about the village on Sundays, accompanied by a five-or six-year-old boy, his son by a former wife which the village did not

know either he had ever possessed — indicating that there was considerably more force and motion to his private life, his sex life anyway, than would appear on the surface of his public one.

But that all appeared later. All they saw now was that they had a new blacksmith — a man who was not lazy, whose intentions were good and who was accommodating and unfailingly pleasant and even generous, yet in whom there was a definite limitation of physical coordination beyond which design and plan and pattern all vanished, disintegrated into dead components of pieces of wood and iron straps and vain tools.

Two months later Flem Snopes built a new blacksmith shop in the village. He hired it done, to be sure, but he was there most of the day, watching it going up. This was not only the first of his actions in the village which he was ever seen in physical juxtaposition to, but the first which he not only admitted but affirmed, stating calmly and flatly that he was doing it so that people could get decent work done again. He bought completely new equipment at cost price through the store and hired the young farmer who during the slack of planting and harvesting time had been Trumbull's apprentice.

Within a month the new shop had got all the trade which Trumbull had had and three months after that Snopes had sold the new shop — smith clientele and goodwill and new equipment — to Varner, receiving in return the old equipment in the old shop, which he sold to a junk man, moved the new equipment to the old shop and sold the new building to a farmer for a cowshed, without even having to pay himself to have it moved, leaving his kinsman now apprentice to the new smith — at which point even Ratliff had lost count of what profits Snopes might have made.

But I reckon I can guess the rest of it, he told himself, sitting, a little pale but otherwise well, in his sunny window. He could almost see it — in the store, at night, the door barred on the inside and the lamp burning above the desk where the clerk sat, chewing steadily, while Jody Varner stood over him, in no condition to sit down, with a good

deal more in his eyes than had been in them last fall, shaking, trembling, saying in a shaking voice: "I want to make one pure and simple demand of you and I want a pure and simple Yes and No for an answer: How many more is there? How much longer is this going on? Just what is it going to cost me to protect one goddamn barn full of hay?"

2

He had been sick and he showed it as, the buckboard once more with a new machine in the dog kennel box and the little sturdy team fat and slick with the year's idleness hitched in an adjacent alley, he sat at the counter of a small side-street restaurant in which he owned a sleeping-partner's half interest, with a cup of coffee at his hand and in his pocket a contract to sell fifty goats to a Northerner who had recently established a goat-ranch in the western part of the country.

It was actually a subcontract which he had purchased at the rate of twenty-five cents a goat from the original contractor who held his from the Northerner at seventy-five cents a goat and was about to fail to complete. Ratliff bought the subcontract because he happened to know of a herd of some fifty-odd goats in a little-travelled section near Frenchman's Bend village which the original contractor had failed to find and which Ratliff was confident he could acquire by offering to halve his profit with the owner of them.

He was on his way to Frenchman's Bend now, though he had not started yet and did not know just when he would start. He had not seen the village in a year now. He was looking forward to his visit not only for the pleasure of the shrewd dealing which far transcended mere gross profit, but with the sheer happiness of being out of bed and moving once more at free will, even though a little weakly, in the sun and air which men drank and moved in and talked and dealt with one another — a pleasure no small part of which lay in the fact that he had not started yet and there was absolutely nothing under heaven to make him start until he wanted to.

He did not still feel weak, he was merely luxuriating in that supremely gutful lassitude of convalescence in which time, hurry, doing, did not exist, the accumulating seconds and minutes and hours to which in its well state the body is slave both waking and sleeping, now reversed and time now the lip-server and mendicant to the body's pleasure instead of the body thrall to time's headlong course.

So he sat, thin, the fresh clean blue shirt quite loose upon him now, yet looking actually quite well, the smooth brown of his face not pallid but merely a few shades lighter, cleaner-looking; emanating in fact a sort of delicate robustness like some hardy odourless infrequent woodland plant blooming into the actual heel of winter's snow, nursing his coffee-cup in one thin hand and telling three or four listeners about his operation in that shrewd humorous voice which would require a good deal more than just illness to other than merely weaken its volume a little, when two men entered. They were Tull and Bookwright. Bookwright had a stock-whip rolled about its handle and thrust into the back pocket of his overalls.

"Howdy, boys," Ratliff said. "You're in early."

"You mean late," Bookwright said. He and Tull went to the counter.

"We just got in last night with some cattle to ship today," Tull said. "I heard you was sick. I thought I'd missed you."

"We all missed him," Bookwright said. "My wife ain't mentioned nobody's new sewing-machine in almost a year. What was it that Memphis fellow cut outen you anyway?"

"My pocketbook," Ratliff said. "I reckon that's why he put me to sleep first."

"He put you to sleep first to keep you from selling him a sewing-machine or a bushel of harrow teeth before he could get his knife open," Bookwright said. The counterman came and slid two plates of bread and butter before them.

"I'll have steak," Tull said.

"I won't," Bookwright said. "I been watching the dripping sterns of steaks for two days now. Let alone running them back out of corn fields and vegetable patches. Bring me some ham and a half a dozen fried eggs." He began to eat the bread, wolfing it. Ratliff turned slightly on his stool to face them.

"So I been missed," he said. "I would a thought you folks would a had so many new citizens in Frenchman's Bend by now you wouldn't a missed a dozen sewing-machine agents. How many kinfolks has Flem Snopes brought in to date? Is it two more, or just three?"

"Four," Bookwright said shortly, eating.

"Four?" Ratliff said. "That's that blacksmith — I mean, the one that uses the blacksmith shop for his address until it's time to go back home and eat again — what's his name? Eck. And that other one, the contractor, the business executive — —"

"He's going to be the new school professor next year," Tull said mildly. "Or so they claim."

"No no," Ratliff said. "I'm talking about them Snopeses. That other one. I. O. That Jack Houston throwed into the water tub that day in the blacksmith shop."

"That's him," Tull said. "They claim he's going to teach the school next year. The teacher we had left all of a sudden just after Christmas. I reckon you never heard about that neither."

But Ratliff wasn't listening to this. He wasn't thinking about the other teacher. He stared at Tull, for the moment surprised out of his own humorous poise. "What?" he said. "Teach the school? That fellow? That Snopes? The one that came to the shop that day that Jack Houston — — Here; Odum," he said; "I been sick, but sholy it ain't affected my ears that much."

Bookwright didn't answer. He had finished his bread; he leaned and took a piece from Tull's plate. "You ain't eating it," he said. "I'll tell him to bring some more in a minute."

“Well,” Ratliff said. “I’ll be damned. By God, I knowed there was something wrong with him soon as I saw him. That was it. He was standing in front of the wrong thing — a blacksmith shop or a ploughed field. But teaching the school.

I just hadn’t imagined that yet. But that’s it, of course. He has found the one and only place in the world or Frenchman’s Bend either where he not only can use them proverbs of hisn all day long but he will be paid for doing it. Well,” he said.

“So Will Varner has caught that bear at last. Flem has grazed up the store and he has grazed up the blacksmith shop and now he is starting in on the school. That just leaves Will’s house. Of course, after that he will have to fall back on you folks, but that house will keep him occupied for a while because Will — —”

“Hah!” Bookwright said shortly. He finished the slice of bread he had taken from Tull’s plate and called to the counterman: “Here. Bring me a piece of pie while I’m waiting.”

“What kind of pie, Mr. Bookwright?” the counterman said.

“Eating pie,” Bookwright said.

“ — because Will might be a little hard to dislodge outen the actual house,” Ratliff went on. “He might even draw the line there altogether. So maybe Flem will have to start in on you folks sooner than he had figured on — —”

“Hah,” Bookwright said again, harsh and sudden. The counterman slid the pie along to him. Ratliff looked at him.

“All right,” Ratliff said. “Hah what?”

Bookwright sat with the wedge of pie poised in his hand before his mouth. He turned his fierce dark face toward Ratliff. “I was sitting on the sawdust pile at Quick’s mill last week. His fireman and another nigger were shovelling the chips over toward the boiler, to fire with. They were talking. The fireman wanted to borrow some money, said

Quick wouldn't let him have it. 'Go to Mr. Snopes at the store,' the other nigger says.

'He will lend it to you. He lent me five dollars over two years ago and all I does, every Saturday night I goes to the store and pays him a dime. He ain't even mentioned that five dollars.' " Then he turned his head and bit into the pie, taking a little less than half of it. Ratliff watched him with a faint quizzical expression which was almost smiling.

"Well well well," he said. "So he's working the top and the bottom both at the same time. At that rate it will be a while yet before he has to fall back on you ordinary white folks in the middle." Bookwright took another huge bite of the pie. The counterman brought his and Tull's meal and Bookwright crammed the rest of the pie into his mouth. Tull began to cut his steak neatly into bites as though for a child to eat it. Ratliff watched them. "Ain't none of you folks out there done nothing about it?" he said.

"What could we do?" Tull said. "It ain't right. But it ain't none of our business."

"I believe I would think of something if I lived there," Ratliff said.

"Yes," Bookwright said. He was eating his ham as he had the pie. "And wind up with one of them bow-ties in place of your buckboard and team. You'd have room to wear it."

"Sho now," Ratliff said. "Maybe you're right." He stopped looking at them now and raised his spoon, but lowered it again. "This here cup seems to have a draft in it," he said to the counterman. "Maybe you better warm it up a little. It might freeze and bust, and I would have to pay for the cup too."

The counterman swept the cup away and refilled it and slid it back. Ratliff spooned sugar into it carefully, his face still wearing that faint expression which would have been called smiling for lack of anything better. Bookwright had mixed his six eggs into one violent mess and was now eating them audibly with a spoon. He and Tull both ate with expedition, though Tull even contrived to do that with almost niggling

primness. They did not talk, they just cleaned their plates and rose and went to the cigar case and paid their bills.

“Or maybe them tennis shoes,” Bookwright said. “He ain’t wore them in a year now. — No,” he said. “If I was you I would go out there nekid in the first place. Then you won’t notice the cold coming back.”

“Sho now,” Ratliff said mildly. After they left he drank his coffee again, sipping it without haste, talking again to the three or four listeners, finishing the story of his operation. Then he rose too and paid for his coffee, scrupulously, and put on his overcoat. It was now March but the doctor had told him to wear it, and in the alley now he stood for a while beside the buckboard and the sturdy little horses overfat with idleness and sleek with new hair after their winter coats, looking quietly at the dog kennel box where, beneath the cracked paint of their fading and incredible roses, the women’s faces smiled at him in fixed and sightless invitation.

It would need painting again this year; he must see to that. It will have to be something that will burn, he thought. And in his name. Known to be in his name. Yes, he thought, if my name was Will Varner and my partner’s name was Snopes I believe I would insist that some part of our partnership at least, that part of it that will burn anyway, would be in his name. He walked on slowly, buttoned into the overcoat. It was the only one in sight. But then the sick grow well fast in the sun; perhaps when he returned to town he would no longer need it.

And soon he would not need the sweater beneath it either — May and June, the summer, the long good days of heat. He walked on, looking exactly as he always had save for the thinness and the pallor, pausing twice to tell two different people that yes, he felt all right now, the Memphis doctor had evidently cut the right thing out whether by accident or design, crossing the Square now beneath the shaded marble gaze of the Confederate soldier, and so into the Court House and the Chancery Clerk’s office, where he found what he sought — some two hundred acres of land, with buildings, recorded to Flem Snopes.

Toward the end of the afternoon he was sitting in the halted buckboard in a narrow back road in the hills, reading the name on a mailbox. The post it sat on was new, but the box was not. It was battered and scarred; at one time it had apparently been crushed flat as though by a wagon wheel and straightened again, but the crude lettering of the name might have been painted on it yesterday.

It seemed to shout at him, all capitals, MINK SNOPEs, sprawling, without any spacing between the two words, trailing off and uphill and over the curve of the top to include the final letters. Ratliff turned in beside it — a rutted lane now, at the end of it a broken-backed cabin of the same two rooms which were scattered without number through these remote hill sections which he travelled. It was built on a hill; below it was a foul muck-trodden lot and a barn leaning away downhill as though a human breath might flatten it.

A man was emerging from it, carrying a milk pail, and then Ratliff knew that he was being watched from the house itself though he had seen no one. He pulled the team up. He did not get down. “Howdy,” he said. “This Mr. Snopes? I brought your machine.”

“Brought my what?” the man in the lot said. He came through the gate and set the pail on the end of the sagging gallery. He was slightly less than medium height also but thin, with a single line of heavy eyebrow. But it’s the same eyes, Ratliff thought.

“Your sewing-machine,” he said pleasantly. Then he saw from the corner of his eye a woman standing on the gallery — a big-boned hard-faced woman with incredible yellow hair, who had emerged with a good deal more lightness and quickness than the fact that she was barefoot would have presaged. Behind her were two towheaded children. But Ratliff did not look at her. He watched the man, his expression bland courteous and pleasant.

“What’s that?” the woman said. “A sewing-machine?”

“No,” the man said. He didn’t look at her either. He was approaching the buckboard. “Get on back in the house.” The woman paid no attention to him. She came down from the gallery, moving again with that speed and co-ordination which her size belied. She stared at Ratliff with pale hard eyes.

“Who told you to bring it here?” she said.

Now Ratliff looked at her, still bland, still pleasant. “Have I done made a mistake?” he said. “The message come to me in Jefferson, from Frenchman’s Bend. It said Snopes. I taken it to mean you, because if your . . . cousin??” Neither of them spoke, staring at him. “Flem. If Flem had wanted it, he would have waited till I got there. He knowed I was due there tomorrow. I reckon I ought to make sho.” The woman laughed harshly, without mirth.

“Then take it on to him. If Flem Snopes sent you word about anything that cost more than a nickel it wasn’t to give away. Not to his kinfolks anyhow. Take it on to the Bend.”

“I told you to go in the house,” the man said. “Go on.” The woman didn’t look at him. She laughed harshly and steadily, staring at Ratliff.

“Not to give away,” she said. “Not the man that owns a hundred head of cattle and a barn and pasture to feed them in his own name.” The man turned and walked toward her. She turned and began to scream at him, the two children watching Ratliff quietly from behind her skirts as if they were deaf or as if they lived in another world from that in which the woman screamed, like two dogs might.

“Deny it if you can!” she cried at the man. “He’d let you rot and die right here and glad of it, and you know it! Your own kin you’re so proud of because he works in a store and wears a necktie all day! Ask him to give you a sack of flour even and see what you get. Ask him! Maybe he’ll give you one of his old neckties someday so you can dress like a Snopes too!”

The man walked steadily toward her. He did not even speak again. He was the smaller of the two of them; he walked steadily toward her with

a curious sidling deadly, almost deferential, air until she broke, turned swiftly and went back toward the house, the herded children before her still watching Ratliff over their shoulders. The man approached the buckboard.

“You say the message came from Flem?” he said.

“I said it come from Frenchman’s Bend,” Ratliff said. “The name mentioned was Snopes.”

“Who was it seems to done all this mentioning about Snopes?”

“A friend,” Ratliff said pleasantly. “He seems to make a mistake. I ask you to excuse it. Can I follow this lane over to the Whiteleaf Bridge road?”

“If Flem sent you word to leave it here, suppose you leave it.”

“I just told you I thought I had made a mistake and ask you to excuse it,” Ratliff said. “Does this lane — —”

“I see,” the other said. “That means you aim to have a little cash down. How much?”

“You mean on the machine?”

“What do you think I am talking about?”

“Ten dollars,” Ratliff said. “A note for twenty more in six months. That’s gathering-time.”

“Ten dollars? With the message you got from — —”

“We ain’t talking about messages now,” Ratliff said. “We’re talking about a sewing-machine.”

“Make it five.”

“No,” Ratliff said pleasantly.

“All right,” the other said, turning. “Fix up your note.” He went back to the house. Ratliff got out and went to the rear of the buckboard and opened the dog kennel’s door and drew from beneath the new machine a tin dispatch box. It contained a pen, a carefully corked ink bottle, a pad of note forms. He was filling in the note when Snopes returned, reappeared at his side.

As soon as Ratliff's pen stopped Snopes slid the note toward himself and took the pen from Ratliff's hand and dipped it and signed the note, all in one continuous motion, without even reading it, and shoved the note back to Ratliff and took something from his pocket which Ratliff did not look at yet because he was looking at the signed note, his face perfectly expressionless. He said quietly:
"This is Flem Snopes' name you have signed."

"All right," the other said. "Then what?" Ratliff looked at him. "I see. You want my name on it too, so one of us anyway can't deny it has been signed. All right." He took the note and wrote again on it and passed it back. "And here's your ten dollars. Give me a hand with the machine." But Ratliff did not move again, because it was not money but another paper which the other had given him, folded, dog-eared and soiled.

Opened, it was another note. It was dated a little more than three years ago, for ten dollars with interest, payable on demand one year after date of execution, to Isaac Snopes or bearer, and signed Flem Snopes. It was indorsed on the back (and Ratliff recognised the same hand which had just signed the two names to the first note) to Mink Snopes by Isaac Snopes (X) his mark, and beneath that and still in the same hand and blotted (or dried at least), to V. K. Ratliff, by Mink Snopes, and Ratliff looked at it quite quietly and quite soberly for almost a minute.

"All right," the other said. "Me and Flem are his cousins. Our grandma left us all three ten dollars a-piece. We were to get it when the least of us — that was him — come twenty-one. Flem needed some cash and he borrowed his from him on this note. Then he needed some cash a while back and I bought Flem's note from him. Now if you want to know what colour his eyes are or anything else, you can see for yourself when you get to Frenchman's Bend. He's living there now with Flem."
"I see," Ratliff said. "Isaac Snopes. He's twenty-one, you say?"

"How could he have got that ten dollars to lend Flem if he hadn't been?"

“Sho,” Ratliff said. “Only this here ain’t just exactly a cash ten dollars —
—”

“Listen,” the other said. “I don’t know what you are up to and I don’t care. But you ain’t fooling me any more than I am fooling you. If you were not satisfied Flem is going to pay that first note, you wouldn’t have taken it.

And if you ain’t afraid of that one, why are you afraid of this one, for less money, on the same machine, when this one has been collectible by law for more than two years? You take these notes on to him down yonder. Just hand them to him. Then you give him a message from me.

Say ‘From one cousin that’s still scratching dirt to keep alive, to another cousin that’s risen from scratching dirt to owning a herd of cattle and a hay barn. To owning cattle and a hay barn.’ Just say that to him. Better keep on saying it over to yourself on the way down there so you will be sure not to forget it.”

“You don’t need to worry,” Ratliff said. “Does this road lead over to Whiteleaf Bridge?”

He spent that night in the home of kin people (he had been born and raised not far away) and reached Frenchman’s Bend the next afternoon and turned his team into Mrs. Littlejohn’s lot and walked down to the store, on the gallery of which apparently the same men who had been there when he saw it last a year ago were still sitting, including Bookwright. “Well, boys,” he said. “A quorum as usual, I see.”

“Bookwright says it was your pocketbook that Memphis fellow cut outen you,” one said. “No wonder it taken you a year to get over it. I’m just surprised you didn’t die when you reached back and found it gone.”

“That’s when I got up,” Ratliff said. “Otherwise I’d a been laying there yet.” He entered the store. The front of it was empty but he did not pause, not even long enough for his contracted pupils to have adjusted

themselves to the obscurity, as he might have been expected to. He went on to the counter, saying pleasantly, "Howdy, Jody. Howdy, Flem. Don't bother; I'll get it myself." Varner, standing beside the desk at which the clerk sat, looked up.

"So you got well, hah," he said.

"I got busy," Ratliff said, going behind the counter and opening the store's single glassed-in case which contained a jumble of shoestrings and combs and tobacco and patent medicines and cheap candy. "Maybe that's the same thing." He began to choose sticks of the striped gaudy candy with care, choosing and rejecting. He did not once look toward the rear of the store, where the clerk at the desk had never looked up at all. "You know if Uncle Ben Quick is at home or not?"

"Where would he be?" Varner said. "Only I thought you sold him a sewing-machine two-three years back."

"Sho," Ratliff said, rejecting a stick of candy and substituting another one for it. "That's why I want him to be at home: so his folks can look after him when he faints. I'm going to buy something from him this time."

"What in thunder has he got you had to come all the way out here to buy?"

"A goat," Ratliff said. He was counting the candy sticks into a sack now.

"A what?"

"Sho," Ratliff said. "You wouldn't think it, would you? But there ain't another goat in Yoknapatawpha and Grenier County both except them of Uncle Ben's."

"No I wouldn't," Varner said. "But what's curiouser than that is what you want with it."

"What does a fellow want with a goat?" Ratliff said. He moved to the cheese cage and put a coin into the cigar box. "To pull a wagon with. You and Uncle Will and Miss Maggie all well, I hope."

"Ah-h-h!" Varner said. He turned back to the desk. But Ratliff had not paused to see him do it. He returned to the gallery, offering his candy about.

“Doctor’s orders,” he said. “He’ll probably send me another bill now for ten cents for advising me to eat a nickel’s worth of candy. I don’t mind that though. What I mind is the order he give me to spend so much time setting down.” He looked now, pleasant and quizzical, at the men sitting on the bench. It was fastened against the wall, directly beneath one of the windows which flanked the door, a little longer than the window was wide. After a moment a man on one end of the bench rose.

“All right,” he said. “Come on and set down. Even if you wasn’t sick you will probably spend the next six months pretending like you was.”

“I reckon I got to get something outen that seventy-five dollars it cost me,” Ratliff said. “Even if it ain’t no more than imposing on folks for a while. Only you are fixing to leave me setting in a draft. You folks move down and let me set in the middle.” They moved and made room for him in the middle of the bench. He sat now directly before the open window. He took a stick of his candy himself and began to suck it, speaking in the weak thin penetrating voice of recent illness: “Yes sir.

I’d a been in that bed yet if I hadn’t a found that pocketbook gone. But it wasn’t till I got up that I got sho enough scared. I says to myself, here I been laying on my back for a year now and I bet some enterprising fellow has done come in and flooded not only Frenchman’s Bend but all Yoknapatawpha County too with new sewing-machines. But the Lord was watching out for me. I be dog if I had hardly got outen bed before Him or somebody had done sent me a sheep just like He done to save Isaac in the Book. He sent me a goat-rancher.”

“A what?” one said.

“A goat-rancher. You never heard of a goat-rancher. Because wouldn’t nobody in this country think of it. It would take a Northerner to do that. This here one thought of it away up yonder in Massachusetts or Boston or Ohio and here he come all the way down to Mississippi with his hand grip bulging with greenback money and bought him up two thousand

acres of as fine a hill-gully and rabbit-grass land as ever stood on one edge about fifteen miles west of Jefferson and built him a ten foot practically waterproof fence around it and was just getting ready to start getting rich, when he run out of goats.”

“Shucks,” another said. “Never nobody in the world ever run out of goats.”

“Besides,” Bookwright said, suddenly and harshly, “if you want to tell them folks at the blacksmith shop about it too, why don’t we all just move over there.”

“Sho now,” Ratliff said. “You fellows don’t know how good a man’s voice feels running betwixt his teeth until you have been on your back where folks that didn’t want to listen could get up and go away and you couldn’t follow them.” Nevertheless he did lower his voice a little, thin, clear, anecdotal, unhurried: “This one did. You got to keep in mind he is a Northerner.

They does things different from us. If a fellow in this country was to set up a goat-ranch, he would do it purely and simply because he had too many goats already. He would just declare his roof or his front porch or his parlour or wherever it was he couldn’t keep the goats out of a goat-ranch and let it go at that. But a Northerner don’t do it that way.

When he does something, he does it with a organised syndicate and a book of printed rules and a gold-filled diploma from the Secretary of State at Jackson saying for all men to know by these presents, greeting, that them twenty thousand goats or whatever it is, is goats. He don’t start off with goats or a piece of land either. He starts off with a piece of paper and a pencil and measures it all down setting in the library — so many goats to so many acres and so much fence to hold them.

Then he writes off to Jackson and gets his diploma for that much land and fence and goats and he buys the land first so he can have something to build the fence on, and he builds the fence around it so nothing can’t get outen it, and then he goes out to buy some things not to get outen the fence. So everything was going just fine at first.

He picked out land that even the Lord hadn't never thought about starting a goat-ranch on and bought it without hardly no trouble at all except finding the folks it belonged to and making them understand it was actual money he was trying to give them, and that fence practically taken care of itself because he could set in one place in the middle of it and pay out the money for it.

And then he found he had done run out of goats. He combed this country up and down and backwards and forwards to find the right number of goats to keep that gold diploma from telling him to his face he was lying. But he couldn't do it. In spite of all he could do, he still lacked fifty goats to take care of the rest of that fence. So now it ain't a goat-ranch; it's a insolvency. He's either got to send that diploma back, or get them fifty goats from somewhere.

So here he is, done come all the way down here from Boston, Maine, and paid for two thousand acres of land and built forty-four thousand feet of fence around it, and now the whole blame pro-jeck is hung up on that passel of goats of Uncle Ben Quick's because they ain't another goat betwixt Jackson and the Tennessee line apparently."

"How do you know?" one said.

"Do you reckon I'd a got up outen bed and come all the way out here if I hadn't?" Ratliff said.

"Then you better get in that buckboard right now and go and make yourself sure," Bookwright said. He was sitting against a gallery post, facing the window at Ratliff's back. Ratliff looked at him for a moment, pleasant and inscrutable behind his faint constant humorous mask.

"Sho," he said. "He's had them goats a good while now. I reckon he'll be still telling me I can't do this and must do that for the next six months, not to mention sending me bills for it" — changing the subject so smoothly and completely that, as they realised later, it was as if he had suddenly produced a signboard with Hush in red letters on it, glancing easily and pleasantly upward as Varner and Snopes came out.

Snopes did not speak. He went on across the gallery and descended the steps. Varner locked the door. "Ain't you closing early, Jody?" Ratliff said.

"That depends on what you call late," Varner said shortly. He went on after the clerk.

"Maybe it is getting toward supper-time," Ratliff said.

"Then if I was you I'd go eat it and then go and buy my goats," Bookwright said.

"Sho now," Ratliff said. "Uncle Ben might have a extra dozen or so by tomorrow. Howsomedever — —" He rose and buttoned the overcoat about him.

"Go buy your goats first," Bookwright said. Again Ratliff looked at him, pleasant, impenetrable. He looked at the others. None of them were looking at him.

"I figure I can wait," he said. "Any of you fellows eating at Mrs. Littlejohn's?" Then he said, "What's that?" and the others saw what he was looking at — the figure of a grown man but barefoot and in scant faded overalls which would have been about right for a fourteen-year-old boy, passing in the road below the gallery, dragging behind him on a string a wooden block with two snuff tins attached to its upper side, watching over his shoulder with complete absorption the dust it raised. As he passed the gallery he looked up and Ratliff saw the face too — the pale eyes which seemed to have no vision in them at all, the open drooling mouth encircled by a light fuzz of golden virgin beard.

"Another one of them," Bookwright said, in that harsh short voice. Ratliff watched the creature as it went on — the thick thighs about to burst from the overalls, the mowing head turned backward over its shoulder, watching the dragging block.

"And yet they tell us we was all made in His image," Ratliff said.

"From some of the things I see here and there, maybe he was," Bookwright said.

"I don't know as I would believe that, even if I knowed it was true," Ratliff said. "You mean he just showed up here one day?" "Why not?" Bookwright said. "He ain't the first."

"Sho," Ratliff said. "He would have to be somewhere." The creature, opposite Mrs. Littlejohn's now, turned in the gate. "He sleeps in her barn," another said. "She feeds him. He does some work. She can talk to him somehow."

"Maybe she's the one that was then," Ratliff said. He turned; he still held the end of the stick of candy. He put it into his mouth and wiped his fingers on the skirt of his overcoat. "Well, how about supper?"

"Go buy your goats," Bookwright said. "Wait till after that to do your eating."

"I'll go tomorrow," Ratliff said. "Maybe by then Uncle Ben will have another fifty of them even." Or maybe the day after tomorrow, he thought, walking on toward the brazen sound of Mrs. Littlejohn's supper-bell in the winy chill of the March evening.

So he will have plenty of time. Because I believe I done it right. I had to trade not only on what I think he knows about me, but on what he must figure I know about him, as conditioned and restricted by that year of sickness and abstinence from the science and pastime of skullduggery. But it worked with Bookwright. He done all he could to warn me. He went as far and even further than a man can let his self go in another man's trade.

So tomorrow he not only did not go to see the goat-owner, he drove six miles in the opposite direction and spent the day trying to sell a sewing-machine he did not even have with him. He spent the night there and did not reach the village until midmorning of the second day, halting the buckboard before the store, to one of the gallery posts of which Varner's roan horse was tied.

So he's even riding the horse now, he thought. Well well well. He did not get out of the buckboard. "One of you fellows mind handing me a nickel's worth of candy?" he said. "I might have to bribe Uncle Ben through one of his grandchillen." One of the men entered the store and fetched out the candy. "I'll be back for dinner," he said. "Then I'll be ready for another needy young doc to cut at again."

His destination was not far: a little under a mile to the river bridge, a little more than a mile beyond it. He drove up to a neat well-kept house with a big barn and pasture beyond it; he saw the goats. A hale burly old man was sitting in his stocking-feet on the veranda, who roared, "Howdy, V. K. What in thunder are you fellows up to over at Varner's?" Ratliff did not get out of the buckboard. "So he beat me," he said.

"Fifty goats," the other roared. "I've heard of a man paying a dime to get shut of two or three, but I never in my life heard of a man buying fifty."

"He's smart," Ratliff said. "If he bought fifty of anything he knowed beforehand he was going to need exactly that many."

"Yes, he's smart. But fifty goats. Hell and sulphur. I still got a passel left, bout one hen-house full, say. You want them?"

"No," Ratliff said. "It was just them first fifty."

"I'll give them to you. I'll even pay you a quarter to get the balance of them outen my pasture."

"I thank you," Ratliff said. "Well, I'll just charge this to social overhead."

"Fifty goats," the other said. "Stay and eat dinner."

"I thank you," Ratliff said. "I seem to done already wasted too much time eating now. Or sitting down doing something, anyway." So he returned to the village — that long mile then the short one, the small sturdy team trotting briskly and without synchronisation. The roan horse still stood before the store and the men still sat and squatted about the gallery, but Ratliff did not stop.

He went on to Mrs. Littlejohn's and tied his team to the fence and went and sat on the veranda, where he could see the store. He could smell

food cooking in the kitchen behind him and soon the men on the store's gallery began to rise and disperse, noonward, though the saddled roan still stood there. Yes, he thought, He has passed Jody. A man takes your wife and all you got to do to ease your feelings is to shoot him. But your horse.

Mrs. Littlejohn spoke behind him: "I didn't know you were back. You going to want some dinner, ain't you?"

"Yessum," he said. "I want to step down to the store first. But I won't be long." She went back into the house. He took the two notes from his wallet and separated them, putting one into his inside coat pocket, the other into the breast pocket of his shirt, and walked down the road in the March noon, treading the noon-impacted dust, breathing the unbreathing suspension of the meridian, and mounted the steps and crossed the now deserted gallery stained with tobacco and scarred with knives.

The store, the interior, was like a cave, dim, cool, smelling of cheese and leather; it needed a moment for his eyes to adjust themselves. Then he saw the grey cap, the white shirt, the minute bow-tie. The face looked up at him, chewing. "You beat me," Ratliff said. "How much?" The other turned his head and spat into the sand-filled box beneath the cold stove.

"Fifty cents," he said.

"I paid twenty-five for my contract," Ratliff said. "All I am to get is seventy-five. I could tear the contract up and save hauling them to town."

"All right," Snopes said. "What'll you give?"

"I'll trade you this for them," Ratliff said. He drew the first note from the pocket where he had segregated it. And he saw it — an instant, a second of a new and completer stillness and immobility touch the blank face, the squat soft figure in the chair behind the desk. For that instant even the jaw had stopped chewing, though it began again almost at

once. Snopes took the paper and looked at it. Then he laid it on the desk and turned his head and spat into the sand-box.

“You figure this note is worth fifty goats,” he said. It was not a question, it was a statement.

“Yes,” Ratliff said. “Because there is a message goes with it. Do you want to hear it?”

The other looked at him, chewing. Otherwise he didn't move, he didn't even seem to breathe. After a moment he said, “No.” He rose, without haste. “All right,” he said. He took his wallet from his hip and extracted a folded paper and gave it to Ratliff. It was Quick's bill-of-sale for the fifty goats. “Got a match?” Snopes said. “I don't smoke.” Ratliff gave him the match and watched him set fire to the note and hold it, blazing, then drop it still blazing into the sand-box and then crush the carbon to dust with his toe.

Then he looked up; Ratliff had not moved. And now just for another instant Ratliff believed he saw the jaw stop. “Well?” Snopes said. “What?” Ratliff drew the second note from his pocket.

And then he knew that the jaw had stopped chewing. It did not move at all during the full minute while the broad impenetrable face hung suspended like a balloon above the soiled dog-eared paper, front back then front again. The face looked at Ratliff again with no sign of life in it, not even breathing, as if the body which belonged to it had learned somehow to use over and over again its own suspirations. “You want to collect this too,” he said. He handed the note back to Ratliff. “Wait here,” he said. He crossed the room to the rear door and went out. What, Ratliff thought.

He followed. The squat reluctant figure was going on, in the sunlight now, toward the fence to the livery lot. There was a gate in it. Ratliff watched Snopes pass through the gate and go on across the lot, toward the barn. Then something black blew in him, a suffocation, a sickness, nausea. They should have told me! he cried to himself. Somebody

should have told me! Then, remembering: Why, he did! Bookwright did tell me. He said Another one.

It was because I have been sick, was slowed up, that I didn't — He was back beside the desk now. He believed he could hear the dragging block long before he knew it was possible, though presently he did hear it as Snopes entered and turned, moving aside, the block thumping against the wooden step and the sill, the hulking figure in the bursting overalls blotting the door, still looking back over its shoulder, entering, the block thumping and scraping across the floor until it caught and lodged behind the counter leg where a three-year-old child would have stooped and lifted it clear though the idiot himself merely stood jerking fruitlessly at the string and beginning a wet whimpering moaning at once pettish and concerned and terrified and amazed until Snopes kicked the block free with his toe.

They came on to the desk where Ratliff stood — the mowing and bobbing head, the eyes which at some instant, some second once, had opened upon, been vouchsafed a glimpse of, the Gorgon-face of that primal injustice which man was not intended to look at face to face and had been blasted empty and clean forever of any thought, the slobbering mouth in its mist of soft gold hair. "Say what your name is," Snopes said. The creature looked at Ratliff, bobbing steadily, drooling. "Say it," Snopes said, quite patiently. "Your name."

"Ike H-mope," the idiot said hoarsely.

"Say it again."

"Ike H-mope." Then he began to laugh, though almost at once it stopped being laughing and Ratliff knew that it had never been laughing, cachinnant, sobbing, already beyond the creature's power to stop it, galloping headlong and dragging breath behind it like something still alive at the galloping heels of a cossack holiday, the eyes above the round mouth fixed and sightless.

"Hush," Snopes said. "Hush." At last he took the idiot by the shoulder, shaking him until the sound began to fall, bubbling and gurgling away.

Snopes led him toward the door, pushing him on ahead, the other moving obediently, looking backward over his shoulder at the block with its two raked snuff tins dragging at the end of the filthy string, the block about to lodge again behind the same counter leg though this time Snopes kicked it free before it stopped.

The hulking shape — the backlooking face with its hanging mouth and pointed faun's ears, the bursting overalls drawn across the incredible female thighs — blotted the door again and was gone. Snopes closed the door and returned to the desk. He spat again into the sand-box. "That was Isaac Snopes," he said. "I'm his guardian. Do you want to see the papers?"

Ratliff didn't answer. He looked down at the note where he had laid it on the desk when he returned from the door, with that same faint, quizzical, quiet expression which his face had worn when he looked at his coffee-cup in the restaurant four days ago. He took up the note, though he did not look at Snopes yet.

"So if I pay him his ten dollars myself, you will take charge of it as his guardian. And if I collect the ten dollars from you, you will have the note to sell again. And that will make three times it has been collected. Well well well." He took another match from his pocket and extended it and the note to Snopes. "I hear tell you said once you never set fire to a piece of money. This here's your chance to see what it feels like." He watched the second note burn too and drift, still blazing, onto the stained sand in the box, curling into carbon which vanished in its turn beneath the shoe.

He descended the steps, again into the blaze of noon upon the pocked quiet dust of the road actually it was not ten minutes later. Only thank God men have done learned how to forget quick what they ain't brave enough to try to cure, he told himself, walking on. The empty road shimmered with mirage, the pollen-wroiled chiaroscuro of spring. Yes, he thought, I reckon I was sicker than I knowed. Because I missed it, missed it clean. Or maybe when I have et I will feel better. Yet, alone in

the dining-room where Mrs. Littlejohn had set a plate for him, he could not eat.

He could feel what he had thought was appetite ebbing with each mouthful becoming heavy and tasteless as dirt. So at last he pushed the plate aside and onto the table he counted the five dollars profit he had made — the thirty-seven-fifty he would get for the goats, less the twelve-fifty his contract had cost him, plus the twenty of the first note.

With a chewed pencil stub he calculated the three years' interest on the ten-dollar note, plus the principal (that ten dollars would have been his commission on the machine, so it was no actual loss anyway) and added to the five dollars the other bills and coins — the frayed banknotes, the worn coins, the ultimate pennies. Mrs. Littlejohn was in the kitchen, where she cooked what meals she sold and washed the dishes too, as well as caring for the rooms in which they slept who ate them. He put the money on the table beside the sink. "That what's-his-name, Ike. Isaac. They tell me you feed him some. He don't need money. But maybe — —"

"Yes," she said. She dried her hands on her apron and took the money and folded the bills carefully about the silver and stood holding it. She didn't count it. "I'll keep it for him. Don't you worry. You going on to town now?"

"Yes," he said. "I got to get busy. No telling when I will run into another starving and eager young fellow that ain't got no way to get money but to cut meat for it." He turned, then paused again, not quite looking back at her, with that faint quizzical expression on his face that was smiling now, sardonic, humorous. "I got a message I would like to get to Will Varner. But it don't matter especially."

"I'll give it to him," Mrs. Littlejohn said. "If it ain't too long I will remember it."

"It don't matter," Ratliff said. "But if you happen to think of it. Just tell him Ratliff says it ain't been proved yet neither. He'll know what it means."

“I’ll try to remember it,” she said.

He went out to the buckboard and got into it. He would not need the overcoat now, and next time he would not even have to bring it along. The road began to flow beneath the flickering hooves of the small hickory-tough horses. I just never went far enough, he thought. I quit too soon.

I went as far as one Snopes will set fire to another Snopeses barn and both Snopeses know it, and that was all right. But I stopped there. I never went on to where that first Snopes will turn around and stomp the fire out so he can sue that second Snopes for the reward and both Snopeses know that too.

3

Those who watched the clerk now saw, not the petty dispossession of a blacksmith, but the usurpation of an heirship. At the next harvest the clerk not only presided at the gin scales but when the yearly settling of accounts between Varner and his tenants and debtors occurred, Will Varner himself was not even present. It was Snopes who did what Varner had never even permitted his son to do — sat alone at the desk with the cash from the sold crops and the accountbooks before him and cast up the accounts and charged them off and apportioned to each tenant his share of the remaining money, one or two of them challenging his figures as they had when he first entered the store, on principle perhaps, the clerk not even listening, just waiting in his soiled white shirt and the minute tie, with his steady thrusting tobacco and his opaque still eyes which they never knew whether or not were looking at them, until they would finish cease; then, without speaking a word, taking pencil and paper and proving to them that they were wrong.

Now it was not Jody Varner who would come leisurely to the store and give the clerk directions and instructions and leave him to carry them out; it was the ex-clerk who would enter the store, mounting the steps and jerking his head at the men on the gallery exactly as Will Varner himself would do, and enter the store, from which presently the sound

of his voice would come, speaking with matter-of-fact succinctness to the bull-goaded bafflement of the man who once had been his employer and who still seemed not to know just exactly what had happened to him.

Then Snopes would depart, to be seen no more that day, for Will Varner's old fat white horse had a companion now. It was the roan which Jody had used to ride, the white and the roan now tied side by side to the same fence while Varner and Snopes examined fields of cotton and corn or herds of cattle or land boundaries, Varner cheerful as a cricket and shrewd and bowelless as a tax-collector, idle and busy and Rabelaisian; the other chewing his steady tobacco, his hands in the pockets of the disreputable bagging grey trousers, spitting now and then his contemplative bullet-like globules of chocolate saliva.

One morning he came to the village carrying a brand-new straw suitcase. That evening he carried it up to Varner's house. A month after that Varner bought a new runabout buggy with bright red wheels and a fringed parasol top, which, the fat white horse and the big roan in new brass-studded harness and the wheels glinting in vermilion and spokeless blurs, swept all day long along back country roads and lanes while Varner and Snopes sat side by side in outrageous paradox above a spurting cloud of light dust, in a speeding aura of constant and invincible excursion.

And one afternoon in that same summer Ratliff again drove up to the store, on the gallery of which was a face which he did not recognise for a moment because he had only seen it once before and that two years ago, though only for a moment, for almost at once he said, "Howdy. Machine still running good?" and sat looking with an expression quite pleasant and absolutely impenetrable at the fierce intractable face with its single eyebrow, thinking Fox? cat? oh yes, mink.

"Howdy," the other said. "Why not? Ain't you the one that claims not to sell no other kind?"

"Sholy," Ratliff said, still quite pleasant, impenetrable. He got out of the buckboard and tied it to a gallery post and mounted the steps and

stood among the four men who sat and squatted about the gallery.
“Only it ain’t quite that, I would put it.

I would say, folks named Snopes don’t buy no other kind.” Then he heard the horse and turned his head and saw it, coming up fast, the fine hound running easily and strongly beside it as Houston pulled up, already dismounting, and dropped the loose reins over its head as a Western rider does and mounted the steps and stopped before the post against which Mink Snopes squatted.

“I reckon you know where that yearling is,” Houston said.
“I can guess,” Snopes said.

“All right,” Houston said. He was not shaking, trembling, anymore than a stick of dynamite does. He didn’t even raise his voice. “I warned you. You know the law in this country. A man must keep his stock up after ground’s planted or take the consequences.”

“I would have expected you to have fences that would keep a yearling up,” Snopes said. Then they cursed each other, hard and brief and without emphasis, like blows or pistol-shots, both speaking at the same time and neither moving, the one still standing in the middle of the steps, the other still squatting against the gallery post.

“Try a shotgun,” Snopes said. “That might keep it up.” Then Houston went on into the store and those on the gallery stood or squatted quietly, the man with his single eyebrow no less quiet than any, until Houston came out again and passed without looking at any of them and mounted and galloped off, the hound following again, strong, high-headed, indefatigable, and after another moment or so Snopes rose too and went up the road on foot.

Then one leaned and spat carefully over the gallery-edge, into the dust, and Ratliff said,

“I don’t quite understand about that fence. I gathered it was Snopes’s yearling in Houston’s field.”

“It was,” the man who had spat said. “He lives on a piece of what used to be Houston’s land. It belongs to Will Varner now. That is, Varner foreclosed on it about a year ago.”

“That is, it was Will Varner Houston owed the money to,” a second said. “It was the fences on that he was talking about.”

“I see,” Ratliff said. “Just conversational remarks. Unnecessary.”

“It wasn’t losing the land that seems to rile Houston,” a third said. “Not that he don’t rile easy.”

“I see,” Ratliff said again. “It’s what seems to happened to it since. Or who it seems Uncle Will has rented it to. So Flem’s got some more cousins still. Only this here seems to be a different kind of Snopes like a cotton-mouth is a different kind of snake.” So that wasn’t the last time this one is going to make his cousin trouble, he thought. But he did not say it, he just said, absolutely pleasant, easy, inscrutable: “I wonder where Uncle Will and his partner would be about now. I ain’t learned the route good yet like you folks.”

“I passed them two horses and the buggy tied to the Old Frenchman fence this morning,” the fourth man said. He too leaned and spat carefully over the gallery-edge. Then he added, as if in trivial afterthought: “It was Flem Snopes that was setting in the flour barrel.”

BOOK TWO. EULA

CHAPTER ONE

1

WHEN FLEM SNOPEs came to clerk in her father’s store, Eula Varner was not quite thirteen. She was the last of the sixteen children, the baby, though she had overtaken and passed her mother in height in her tenth year. Now, though not yet thirteen years old, she was already bigger than most grown women and even her breasts were no longer the little, hard, fiercely-pointed cones of puberty or even maidenhood.

On the contrary, her entire appearance suggested some symbology out of the old Dionysiac times — honey in sunlight and bursting grapes, the written bleeding of the crushed fecundated vine beneath the hard rapacious trampling goat-hoof.

She seemed to be not a living integer of her contemporary scene, but rather to exist in a teeming vacuum in which her days followed one another as though behind sound-proof glass, where she seemed to listen in sullen bemusement, with a weary wisdom heired of all mammalian maturity, to the enlarging of her own organs.

Like her father, she was incorrigibly lazy, though what was in him a constant bustling cheerful idleness was in her an actual force impregnable and even ruthless. She simply did not move at all of her own volition, save to and from the table and to and from bed.

She was late in learning to walk. She had the first and only perambulator the countryside had ever seen, a clumsy expensive thing almost as large as a dog-cart. She remained in it long after she had grown too large to straighten her legs out. When she reached the stage where it almost took the strength of a grown man to lift her out of it, she was graduated from it by force. Then she began to sit in chairs. It was not that she insisted upon being carried when she went anywhere.

It was rather as though, even in infancy, she already knew there was nowhere she wanted to go, nothing new or novel at the end of any progression, one place like another anywhere and everywhere. Until she was five and six, when she did have to go anywhere because her mother declined to leave her at home while she herself was absent, she would be carried by their negro manservant.

The three of them would be seen passing along the road — Mrs. Varner in her Sunday dress and shawl, followed by the negro man staggering slightly beneath his long, dangling, already indisputably female burden like a bizarre and chaperoned Sabine rape.

She had the usual dolls. She would place them in chairs about the one in which she sat, and they would remain so, none with either more or less of the semblance of life than any other. Finally her father had his blacksmith make her a miniature of the perambulator in which she had spent her first three years.

It was crude and heavy also, but it was the only doll perambulator anyone in that country had ever seen or even heard of. She would place all the dolls in it and sit in a chair beside it. At first they decided it was mental backwardness, that she merely had not yet reached the material stage of female adulthood in miniature, though they soon realised that her indifference to the toy was that she would have to move herself to keep it in motion.

She grew from infancy to the age of eight in the chairs, moving from one to another about the house as the exigencies of sweeping and cleaning house and eating meals forced her to break cover.

At her mother's insistence, Varner continued to have the blacksmith make miniatures of housekeeping implements — little brooms and mops, a small actual stove — hoping to make a sport, a game of utility, all of which, singly and collectively, was apparently no more to her than the tot of cold tea to the old drunkard. She had no playmates, no inseparable girl companion.

She did not want them. She never formed one of those violent, sometimes short-lived intimacies in which two female children form embattled secret cabal against their masculine co-evals and the mature world too. She did nothing. She might as well still have been a foetus.

It was as if only half of her had been born, that mentality and body had somehow become either completely separated or hopelessly involved; that either only one of them had ever emerged, or that one had emerged, itself not accompanied by, but rather pregnant with, the other. "Maybe she's fixing to be a tomboy," her father said.

“When?” Jody said — a spark, a flash, even though born of enraged exasperation. “At the rate she’s going at it, there ain’t a acorn that will fall in the next fifty years that won’t grow up and rot down and be burnt for firewood before she’ll ever climb it.”

When she was eight, her brother decided she should start to school. Her parents had intended that she should start someday, perhaps mainly because Will Varner was, with the nominal designation of Trustee, the principal mainstay and arbiter of the school’s existence.

It was, as the other parents of the countryside considered it, actually another Varner enterprise, and sooner or later Varner would have insisted that his daughter attend it, for a while at least, just as he would have insisted upon collecting the final odd cent of an interest calculation. Mrs. Varner did not particularly care whether the daughter went to school or not. She was one of the best housewives in the county and was indefatigable at it.

She derived an actual physical pleasure which had nothing at all to do with mere satisfaction in husbandry and forehandedness, from the laying-away of ironed sheets and the sight of packed shelves and potato cellars and festooned smoke-house rafters. She did not read herself, though at the time of her marriage she had been able to read a little.

She did not practise it much then and during the last forty years she had lost even that habit, preferring now to be face to face with the living breath of event, fiction or news either, and being able to comment and moralise upon it. So she saw no need for literacy in women.

Her conviction was that the proper combining of food ingredients lay not on any printed page but in the taste of the stirring spoon, and that the housewife who had to wait until she had been to school to know how much money she had left after subtracting from it what she had spent, would never be a housewife.

It was the brother, Jody, who emerged almost violently in her eighth summer as erudition's champion, and three months later came bitterly to regret it. He did not regret that it had been himself who had insisted that she go to school. His regret was that he was still convinced, and knew that he would remain convinced, of the necessity of that for which he now paid so dear a price.

Because she refused to walk to school. She did not object to attending it, to being in school, she just declined to walk to it. It was not far. It was not a half-mile from the Varner home. Yet during the five years she attended it, which, if it had been computed in hours based upon what she accomplished while there, would have been measured not in years or even months but in days, she rode to and from it.

While other children living three and four and five times the distance walked back and forth in all weathers, she rode. She just calmly and flatly refused to walk. She did not resort to tears and she did not even fight back emotionally, let alone physically.

She just sat down, where, static, apparently not even thinking, she emanated an outrageous and immune perversity like a blooded and contrary filly too young yet to be particularly valuable, though which in another year or so would be, and for which reason its raging and harried owner does not dare whip it. Her father immediately and characteristically washed his hands of the business. "Let her stay at home then," he said.

"She ain't going to lift her hand here either, but at least maybe she will learn something about housekeeping from having to move from one chair to another to keep out of the way of it. All we want anyway is to keep her out of trouble until she gets old enough to sleep with a man without getting me and him both arrested. Then you can marry her off. Maybe you can even find a husband that will keep Jody out of the poorhouse too. Then we will give them the house and store and the whole shebang and me and you will go to that world's fair they are talking about having in Saint Louis, and if we like it by God we will buy a tent and settle down there."

But the brother insisted that she go to school. She still declined to walk there, sitting supine and female and soft and immovable and not even thinking and apparently not even listening either, while the battle between her mother and brother roared over her tranquil head.

So at last the negro man who had used to carry her when her mother went visiting would bring up the family surrey and drive her the half-mile to school and would be waiting there with the surrey at noon and at three o'clock when school dismissed. This lasted about two weeks. Mrs. Varner stopped it because it was too wasteful, like firing-up a twenty-gallon pot to make a bowl of soup would be wasteful.

She delivered an ultimatum; if Jody wanted his sister to go to school, he would have to see that she got there himself. She suggested that, since he rode his horse to and from the store every day anyhow, he might carry Eula to and from school behind him, the daughter sitting there again, neither thinking nor listening while this roared and concussed to the old stalemate, sitting on the front porch in the mornings with the cheap oilcloth book-satchel they had bought her until her brother rode the horse up to the gallery-edge and snarled at her to come and mount behind him.

He would carry her to the school and go and fetch her at noon and carry her back afterward and be waiting when school was out for the day. This lasted for almost a month. Then Jody decided that she should walk the two hundred yards from the schoolhouse to the store and meet him there.

To his surprise, she agreed without protest. This lasted for exactly two days. On the second afternoon the brother fetched her home at a fast single-foot, bursting into the house and standing over his mother in the hall and trembling with anger and outrage, shouting.

“No wonder she agreed so easy and quick to walk to the store and meet me!” he cried. “If you could arrange to have a man standing every hundred feet along the road, she would walk all the way home! She’s

just like a dog! Soon as she passes anything in long pants she begins to give off something. You can smell it! You can smell it ten feet away!”

“Fiddlesticks,” Mrs. Varner said. “Besides, don’t worry me with it. It was you insisted she had to go to school. It wasn’t me. I raised eight other daughters, I thought they turned out pretty well. But I am willing to agree that maybe a twenty-seven-year-old bachelor knows more about them than I do. Anytime you want to let her quit school, I reckon your pa and me won’t object. Did you bring me that cinnamon?”

“No,” Jody said. “I forgot it.”

“Try to remember it tonight. I’m already needing it.”

So she no longer began the homeward journey at the store. Her brother would be waiting for her at the schoolhouse. It had been almost five years now since this sight had become an integral part of the village’s life four times a day and five days a week — the roan horse bearing the seething and angry man and the girl of whom, even at nine and ten and eleven, there was too much — too much of leg, too much of breast, too much of buttock; too much of mammalian female meat which, in conjunction with the tawdry oilcloth receptacle that was obviously a grammar-grade book-satchel, was a travesty and paradox on the whole idea of education. Even while sitting behind her brother on the horse, the inhabitant of that meat seemed to lead two separate and distinct lives as infants in the act of nursing do.

There was one Eula Varner who supplied blood and nourishment to the buttocks and legs and breasts; there was the other Eula Varner who merely inhabited them, who went where they went because it was less trouble to do so, who was comfortable there but in their doings she intended to have no part, as you are in a house which you did not design but where the furniture is all settled and the rent paid up.

On the first morning Varner had put the horse into a fast trot, to get it over with quick, but almost at once he began to feel the entire body behind him, which even motionless in a chair seemed to postulate an

invincible abhorrence of straight lines, jiggling its component boneless curves against his back.

He had a vision of himself transporting not only across the village's horizon but across the embracing proscenium of the entire inhabited world like the sun itself, a kaleidoscopic convolution of mammalian ellipses.

So he would walk the horse. He would have to, his sister clutching the cross of his suspenders or the back of his coat with one hand and holding the book-satchel with the other, passing the store where the usual quota of men would be squatting and sitting, past Mrs. Littlejohn's veranda where there would usually be an itinerant drummer or horse-trader — and Varner now believing, convinced, that he knew why they were there too, the real reason why they had driven twenty miles from Jefferson — and so up to the school where the other children in overalls and coarse calico and cast-off adult shoes as often as not when they wore shoes at all, were already gathered after walking three and four and five times the distance.

She would slide off the horse and her brother would sit for a moment longer, seething, watching the back which already used its hips to walk with as women used them, and speculate with raging impotence whether to call the school-teacher (he was a man) outside at once and have it out with him, warn or threaten or even use his fists, or whether to wait until that happened which he, Varner, was convinced must occur.

They would repeat that at one o'clock and in the reverse direction at twelve and three, Varner riding on a hundred yards up the road to where, hidden by a copse, a fallen tree lay. The negro manservant had felled it one night while he sat the horse and held the lantern; he would ride up beside it, snarling fiercely to her the third time she mounted from it: "God damn it, can't you try to get it without making it look like the horse is twenty feet tall?"

He even decided one day that she should not ride astride anymore. This lasted one day, until he happened to look aside and so behind him and saw the incredible length of outrageously curved dangling leg and the bare section of thigh between dress and stocking-top looking as gigantically and profoundly naked as the dome of an observatory.

And his rage was only intensified by the knowledge that she had not deliberately exposed it. He knew that she simply did not care, doubtless did not even know it was exposed, and if she had known, would not have gone to the trouble to cover it.

He knew that she was sitting even on the moving horse exactly as she would in a chair at home, and, as he knew, inside the schoolhouse itself, so that he wondered at times in his raging helplessness how buttocks as constantly subject to the impact of that much steadily increasing weight could in the mere act of walking seem actually to shout aloud that rich mild- and will-sapping fluid softness; sitting, even on the moving horse, secret and not even sullen, bemused with that whatever it was which had nothing to do with flesh, meat, at all; emanating that outrageous quality of being, existing, actually on the outside of the garments she wore and not only being unable to help it but not even caring.

She attended the school from her eighth year until shortly after Christmas in her fourteenth. She would undoubtedly have completed that year and very probably the next one or two, learning nothing, except that in January of that year the school closed.

It closed because the teacher vanished. He disappeared overnight, with no word to anyone. He neither collected his term's salary nor removed his meagre and monklike personal effects from the fireless rented lean-to room in which he had lived for six years.

His name was Labove. He came from the adjoining county, where Will Varner himself had discovered him by sheer chance. The incumbent, the Professor at that time, was an old man bibulous by nature, who had

been driven still further into his cups by the insubordination of his pupils.

The girls had respect neither for his ideas and information nor for his ability to convey them; the boys had no respect for his capacity, not to teach them but to make them obey and behave or even be civil to him — a condition which had long since passed the stage of mere mutiny and had become a kind of bucolic Roman holiday, like the baiting of a mangy and toothless bear.

Thus everyone, including the Professor, knew that he would not be there next term. But nobody minded especially whether the school functioned next year or not. They owned it. They had built the schoolhouse themselves and paid the teacher and sent their children to it only when there was no work for them to do at home, so it only ran between harvest-time and planting — from mid-October through March.

Nothing had been done yet about replacing the Professor until one day in the summer Varner happened to make a business trip into the next county, was benighted, and was invited to pass the night in a bleak puncheon-floored cabin on a barren little hill farm. When he entered the house he saw, sitting beside the cold hearth and sucking a foul little clay pipe, an incredibly old woman wearing a pair of stout-looking man's shoes slightly unorthodox or even a little bizarre in appearance.

But Varner paid no attention to them until he heard a clattering scraping noise behind him and turned and saw a girl of about ten, in a tattered though quite clean gingham dress and a pair of shoes exactly like those of the old lady — if anything, even a little larger. Before he departed the next morning Varner had seen three more pairs of the same shoes, by which time he had discovered that they resembled no other shoes he had ever seen or even heard of. His host told him what they were.

“What?” Varner said. “Football shoes?”

“It’s a game,” Labove said. “They play it at the University.” He explained. It was the eldest son. He was not at home now, off working at a sawmill to earn money to return to the University, where he had been for one summer normal term and then half of the following academic term. It was then that the University played the game out of which the shoes had come. The son had wanted to learn to be a school-teacher, or so he said when he left for the University the first time.

That is, he wanted to go to the University. The father saw no point in it. The farm was clear and would belong to the son someday and it had always made them a living. But the son insisted. He could work at mills and such and save enough to attend the summer terms and learn to be a teacher anyway, since this was all they taught in the summer sessions. He would even be back home in the late summer in time to help finish the crop. So he earned the money— “Doing harder work than farming too,” the elder Labove said. “But he was almost twenty-one.

I couldn’t have stood in his way even if I would have” — and enrolled for the summer session, which would last eight weeks and so would have had him back in August but did not do so. When September arrived, he still had not returned. They did not know for certain where he was, though they were not worried so much as annoyed, concerned, even a little outraged that he should have deserted them with the remaining work on the crop — the picking and ginning of the cotton, the gathering and cribbing of the corn — to be done.

In mid-September the letter came. He was going to stay on longer at the University, through the fall. He had a job there; they must gather the crops without him. He did not say what kind of a job it was and the father took it for granted as being another sawmill, since he would never have associated any sort of revenue-producing occupation with going to school, and they did not hear from him again until in October, when the first package arrived.

It contained two pair of the curious cleated shoes. A third pair came early in November. The last two came just after Thanksgiving, which

made five pair, although there were seven in the family. So they all used them indiscriminately, anyone who found a pair available, like umbrellas, four pair of them that is, Labove explained. The old lady (she was the elder Labove's grandmother) had fastened upon the first pair to emerge from the box and would let no one else wear them at all.

She seemed to like the sound the cleats made on the floor when she sat in a chair and rocked. But that still left four pair. So now the children could go shod to school, removing the shoes when they reached home for whoever else needed to go out doors. In January the son came home. He told them about the game. He had been playing it all that fall. They let him stay at the University for the entire fall term for playing it. The shoes were provided them free of charge to play it in.

"How did he happen to get six pairs?" Varner asked.

Labove did not know. "Maybe they had a heap of them on hand that year," he said. They had also given the son a sweater at the University, a fine heavy warm dark blue sweater with a big red M on the front of it. The great-grandmother had taken that too, though it was much too big for her. She would wear it on Sundays, winter and summer, sitting beside him on the seat of the churchward wagon on the bright days, the crimson accolade of the colour of courage and fortitude gallant in the sun, or on the bad days, sprawled and quiet but still crimson, still brave, across her shrunken chest and stomach as she sat in her chair and rocked and sucked the dead little pipe.

"So that's where he is now," Varner said. "Playing the football."

No, Labove told him. He was at the sawmill now. He had calculated that by missing the current summer term and working instead, he could save enough money to stay on at the University even after they stopped letting him stay to play the football, thus completing a full year in the regular school instead of just the summer school in which they only taught people how to be schoolteachers.

"I thought that's what he wanted to be," Varner said.

“No,” Labove said. “That was all he could learn in the summer school. I reckon you’ll laugh when you hear this. He says he wants to be Governor.”

“Sho now,” Varner said.
“You’ll laugh, I reckon.”

“No,” Varner said. “I ain’t laughing. Governor. Well well well. Next time you see him, if he would consider putting off the governor business for a year or two and teach school, tell him to come over to the Bend and see me.”

That was in July. Perhaps Varner did not actually expect Labove to come to see him. But he made no further effort to fill the vacancy, which he certainly could not have forgotten about. Even apart from his obligation as Trustee, he would have a child of his own ready to start to school within another year or so.

One afternoon in early September he was lying with his shoes off in the barrel stave hammock slung between two trees in his yard, when he saw approaching on foot across the yard the man whom he had never seen before but knew at once — a man who was not thin so much as actually gaunt, with straight black hair coarse as a horse’s tail and high Indian cheekbones and quiet pale hard eyes and the long nose of thought but with the slightly curved nostrils of pride and the thin lips of secret and ruthless ambition. It was a forensic face, the face of invincible conviction in the power of words as a principle worth dying for if necessary.

A thousand years ago it would have been a monk’s, a militant fanatic who would have turned his uncompromising back upon the world with actual joy and gone to a desert and passed the rest of his days and nights calmly and without an instant’s self-doubt battling, not to save humanity about which he would have cared nothing, for whose sufferings he would have had nothing but contempt, but with his own fierce and unappeasable natural appetites.

“I came to tell you I can’t teach for you this year,” he said. “I haven’t got time. I’ve got things fixed now so I can stay at the University the whole year.”

Varner did not rise. “That’s just one year. What about next year?”

“I have arranged about the sawmill too. I am going back to it next summer. Or something else.”

“Sho,” Varner said. “I been thinking about it some myself. Because the school here don’t need to open until first of November. You can stay at Oxford until then and play your game. Then you can come and open the school and get it started.

You can bring your books here from the University and keep up with the class and on the day you have to play the game again you can go back to Oxford and play it and let them find out whether you have kept up in the books or not or whether you have learned anything or whatever they would need to know. Then you could come back to the school; even a day or two won’t matter.

I will furnish you a horse that can make the trip in eight hours. It ain’t but forty miles to Oxford from here. Then when the time comes for the examination in January your pa was telling me about, you can shut up the school here and go back and stay until you are through with them. Then you can close the school here in March and go back for the rest of the year, until the last of next October if you wanted. I don’t reckon a fellow that really wanted to would have much trouble keeping up with his class just forty miles away. Well?”

For some time now Varner knew that the other no longer saw him though he had not moved and his eyes were still open. Labove stood quite still, in a perfectly clean white shirt which had been washed so often that it now had about the texture of mosquito netting, in a coat and trousers absolutely clean too and which were not mates and the coat a little too small for him and which Varner knew were the only ones he owned and that he owned them only because he believed, or had been given to understand, that one could not wear overalls to a University classroom.

He stood there enveloped in no waking incredulous joy and hope but in that consuming fury, the gaunt body not shaped by the impact of its environment as though shrunken and leaned by what was within it, like a furnace. "All right," he said. "I'll be here the first of November." He was already turning away.

"Don't you want to know what your pay will be?"

"All right," Labove said, pausing. Varner told him. He (Varner) had not moved in the hammock, his home-knit socks crossed at the ankles.

"That game," he said. "Do you like to play it?"

"No," Labove said.

"I hear it ain't much different from actual fighting."

"Yes," Labove said, again shortly, paused, courteous and waiting, looking at the lean shrewd shoeless old man prone and profoundly idle in the hammock, who seemed to have laid upon him already the curse of his own invincible conviction of the absolute unimportance of this or any other given moment or succession of them, holding him there and forcing him to spend time thinking about what he had never told anyone and did not intend to talk about since it did not matter now. It began just before the end of the summer term a year ago.

He had intended to return home at the end of the term, as he had told his father he would, to help finish the crop. But just before the term ended he found a job. It was practically dropped into his lap. There would be two or three weeks yet before the cotton would be ready to pick and gin and he was already settled where he could stay on until the middle of September at little additional expense. So most of what the work would bring him would be clear profit. He took the job.

It was grading and building a football field. He didn't know then what a football field was and he did not care. To him it was merely an opportunity to earn so much additional money each day and he did not even stop his shovel when he would speculate now and then with cold sardonicism on the sort of game the preparation of ground for which

demanded a good deal more care and expense both than the preparing of that same ground to raise a paying crop on; indeed, to have warranted that much time and money for a crop, a man would have had to raise gold at least.

So it was still sardonicism and not curiosity when in September and before the field was finished, it began to be used, and he discovered that the young men engaged upon it were not even playing the game but just practising. He would watch them at it.

He was probably watching them more closely or at least more often than he was aware and with something in his face, his eyes, which he did not know was there too, because one afternoon one of them (he had already discovered that the game had a paid teacher) said to him, "You think you can do it better, do you? All right. Come here." That night he sat on the front steps of the coach's house in the dry dusty September darkness, still saying No quietly and patiently.

"I ain't going to borrow money just to play a game on," he said.

"You won't have to, I tell you!" the coach said. "Your tuition will be paid. You can sleep in my attic and you can feed my horse and cow and milk and build the fires and I will give you your meals. Don't you understand?" It could not have been his face because that was in darkness, and he did not believe it had been in his voice. Yet the coach said, "I see. You don't believe it."

"No," he said. "I don't believe anybody will give me all that just for playing a game."

"Will you try it and see? Will you stay here and do it until somebody comes to you and asks you for money?"

"Will I be free to go when they do?"

"Yes," the coach said. "You have my word." So that night he wrote his father he would not be home to help finish the harvest and if they would need an extra hand in his place he would send money. And they gave him a uniform and on that afternoon, as on the one before when

he had still worn the overalls in which he had been working, one of the other players failed to rise at once and they explained that to him — how there were rules for violence, he trying patiently to make this distinction, understand it: “But how can I carry the ball to that line if I let them catch me and pull me down?”

He didn't tell this. He just stood beside the hammock, in the clean unmatching garments, composed and grave, answering Yes or No briefly and quietly to Varner's questions while it recapitulated, ran fast and smooth and without significance now in his memory, finished and done and behind him, meaning nothing, the fall itself going fast, dreamlike and telescoped. He would rise in the icy attic at four o'clock and build fires in the houses of five different faculty members and return to feed and milk.

Then the lectures, the learning and wisdom distilled of all man had ever thought, plumbed, the ivied walls and monastic rooms impregnated with it, abundant, no limit save that of the listener's capacity and thirst; the afternoons of practice (soon he was excused from this on alternate days, which afternoons he spent raking leaves in the five yards), the preparing of coal and wood against tomorrow's fires. Then the cow again and then in the overcoat which the coach had given him he sat with his books beneath the lamp in his fireless garret until he went to sleep over the printed page.

He did this for five days, up to the Saturday's climax when he carried a trivial contemptible obloid across fleeting and meaningless white lines. Yet during these seconds, despite his contempt, his ingrained conviction, his hard and spartan heritage, he lived, fiercely free — the spurning earth, the shocks, the hard breathing and the grasping hands, the speed, the rocking roar of massed stands, his face even then still wearing the expression of sardonic not-quite-belief.

And the shoes. Varner was watching him, his hands beneath his head. “Them shoes,” Varner said. It was because I never did really believe it was going to last until the next Saturday, Labove could have answered. But he did not, he just stood, his hands quiet at his sides, looking at

Varner. "I reckon they always had a plenty of them on hand," Varner said.

"They bought them in lots. They kept all sizes on hand."

"Sho now," Varner said. "I reckon all a fellow had to do was just to say his old pair didn't fit good or had got lost."

Labove did not look away. He stood quietly facing the man in the hammock. "I knew what the shoes cost. I tried to get the coach to say what a pair was worth. To the University. What a touchdown was worth. Winning was worth."

"I see. You never taken a pair except when you beat. And you sent five pairs home. How many times did you play?"

"Seven," Labove said. "One of them nobody won."

"I see," Varner said. "Well, I reckon you want to get on back home before dark. I'll have that horse ready by November."

Labove opened the school in the last week of October. Within that week he had subdued with his fists the state of mutiny which his predecessor had bequeathed him. On Friday night he rode the horse Varner had promised him the forty-odd miles to Oxford, attended morning lectures and played a football game in the afternoon slept until noon Sunday and was on his pallet bed in the unheated lean-to room in Frenchman's Bend by midnight.

It was in the house of a widow who lived near the school. He owned a razor, the unmatching coat and trousers he stood in, two shirts, the coach's overcoat, a Coke, a Blackstone, a volume of Mississippi Reports, an original Horace and a Thucydides which the classics professor, in whose home he had built the morning fires, had given him at Christmas, and the brightest lamp the village had ever seen. It was nickel, with valves and pistons and gauges; as it sat on his plank table it obviously cost more than everything else he owned lumped together and people would come in from miles away at night to see the fierce still glare it made.

By the end of that first week they all knew him — the hungry mouth, the insufferable humourless eyes, the intense ugly blue-shaved face like a composite photograph of Voltaire and an Elizabethan pirate.

They called him Professor too even though he looked what he was — twenty-one — and even though the school was a single room in which pupils ranging in age from six to the men of nineteen whom he had had to meet with his fists to establish his professorship, and classes ranging from bald abc's to the rudiments of common fractions were jumbled together.

He taught them all and everything. He carried the key to the building in his pocket as a merchant carries the key to his store. He unlocked it each morning and swept it, he divided the boys by age and size into water-carrying and wood-cutting details and by precept, bullying, ridicule and force saw that they did it, helping them at times not as an example but with a kind of contemptuous detached physical pleasure in burning up his excess energy.

He would ruthlessly keep the older boys after school, standing before the door and barring it and beating them to the open windows when they broke for these. He forced them to climb with him to the roof and replace shingles and such which heretofore Varner, as Trustee, had seen to after the teacher had nagged and complained to him enough.

At night passers would see the fierce dead glare of the patent lamp beyond the lean-to window where he would be sitting over the books which he did not love so much as he believed that he must read, compass and absorb and wring dry with something of that same contemptuous intensity with which he chopped firewood, measuring the turned pages against the fleeing seconds of irrevocable time like the implacable inching of a leaf worm.

Each Friday afternoon he would mount the wiry strong hammer-headed horse in Varner's lot and ride to where the next day's game would be played or to the railroad which would get him there, sometimes arriving only in time to change into his uniform before the

whistle blew. But he was always back at the school on Monday morning, even though on some occasions it meant he had spent only one night — Saturday — in bed between Thursday and Monday.

After the Thanksgiving game between the two State colleges, his picture was in a Memphis paper. He was in the uniform and the picture (to the people in the village, and for that reason) would not have looked like him. But the name was his and that would have been recognised, except that he did not bring the paper back with him. They did not know what he did on those weekends, except that he was taking work at the University. They did not care.

They had accepted him, and although his designation of professor was a distinction, it was still a woman's distinction, functioning actually in a woman's world like the title of reverend. Although they would not have actually forbidden him the bottle, they would not have drunk with him, and though they were not quite as circumspect in what they said before him as they would have been with the true minister, if he had responded in kind he might have found himself out of a position when the next term began and he knew it.

This distinction he accepted in the spirit offered and even met it more than halfway, with that same grim sufficiency, not pride quite and not quite actual belligerence, grave and composed.

He was gone for a week at the time of the mid-term examinations at the University. He returned and hounded Varner into clearing a basketball court. He did a good deal of the work himself, with the older boys, and taught them the game. At the end of the next year the team had beaten every team they could find to play against and in the third year, himself one of the players, he carried the team to Saint Louis, where, in overalls and barefoot, they won a Mississippi Valley tournament against all comers.

When he brought them back to the village, he was through. In three years he had graduated, a master of arts and a bachelor of laws. He would leave the village now for the last time — the books, the fine

lamp, the razor, the cheap reproduction of an Alma Tadema picture which the classics professor had given him on the second Christmas — to return to the University to his alternating academy and law classes, one following another from breakfast-time to late afternoon.

He had to read in glasses now, leaving one class to walk blinking painfully against the light to the next, in the single unmatching costume he owned, through throngs of laughing youths and girls in clothes better than he had ever seen until he came here, who did not stare through him so much as they did not see him at all anymore than they did the poles which supported the electric lights which until he arrived two years ago he had never seen before either.

He would move among them and look with the same expression he would wear above the cleatspurned fleeing lines of the football field, at the girls who had apparently come there to find husbands, the young men who had come there for what reason he knew not.

Then one day he stood in a rented cap and gown among others and received the tightly-rolled parchment scroll no larger than a rolled calendar yet which, like the calendar, contained those three years — the spurned cleat-blurred white lines, the nights on the tireless horse, the other nights while he had sat in the overcoat and with only the lamp for heat, above spread turning pages of dead verbiage. Two days after that he stood with his class before the Bench in an actual courtroom in Oxford and was admitted to the Bar, and it was finished.

He made one that night at a noisy table in the hotel dining-room, at which the Judge presided, flanked by the law professors and the other legal sponsors. This was the anteroom to that world he had been working to reach for three years now — four, counting that first one when he could not yet see his goal.

He had only to sit with that fixed expression and wait until the final periphrase died, was blotted by the final concussion of palms, and rise and walk out of the room and on, his face steady in the direction he had chosen to set it, as it had been for three years now anyway, not

faltering, not looking back. And he could not do it. Even with that already forty miles of start toward freedom and (he knew it, said it) dignity and self-respect, he could not do it.

He must return, drawn back into the radius and impact of an eleven-year-old girl who, even while sitting with veiled eyes against the sun like a cat on the schoolhouse steps at recess and eating a cold potato, postulated that ungirdled quality of the very goddesses in his Homer and Thucydides: of being at once corrupt and immaculate, at once virgins and the mothers of warriors and of grown men.

On that first morning when her brother had brought her to the school, Labove had said to himself: No. No. Not here. Don't leave her here. He had taught the school for only one year, a single term of five months broken by the weekly night ride to Oxford and return and the two-weeks' gap of the mid-term examinations in January, yet he had not only extricated it from the chaos in which his predecessor had left it, he had even coerced the curriculum itself into something resembling order.

He had no assistant, there was not even a partition in the single room, yet he had segregated the pupils according to capacity into a routine which they not only observed but had finally come to believe in. He was not proud of it, he was not even satisfied.

But he was satisfied that it was motion, progress, if not toward increasing knowledge to any great extent, at least toward teaching order and discipline. Then one morning he turned from the crude blackboard and saw a face eight years old and a body of fourteen with the female shape of twenty, which on the instant of crossing the threshold brought into the bleak, ill-lighted, poorly-heated room dedicated to the harsh functioning of Protestant primary education a moist blast of spring's liquorish corruption, a pagan triumphal prostration before the supreme primal uterus.

He took one look at her and saw what her brother would doubtless be the last to discern. He saw that she not only was not going to study, but

there was nothing in books here or anywhere else that she would ever need to know, who had been born already completely equipped not only to face and combat but to overcome anything the future could invent to meet her with.

He saw a child whom for the next two years he was to watch with what he thought at first was only rage, already grown at eight, who apparently had reached and passed puberty in the foetus, who, tranquil bemused and not even sullen, obedient to whatever outside compulsion it had been had merely transferred from one set of walls to another that quality of static waiting through and beneath the accumulating days of burgeoning and unhurryable time until whatever man it was to be whose name and face she probably had neither seen nor heard yet, would break into and disperse it. For five years he was to watch her, fetched each morning by the brother and remain just as he had left her, in the same place and almost in the same position, her hands lying motionless for hours on her lap like two separate slumbering bodies.

She would answer "I don't know" when her attention was finally attracted at last, or, pressed, "I never got that far." It was as if her muscles and flesh too were even impervious to fatigue and boredom or as if, the drowsing maidenhead symbol's self, she possessed life but not sentience and merely waited until the brother came, the jealous seething eunuch priest, and removed her.

She would arrive each morning with the oilcloth satchel in which if she carried anything else besides the baked sweet potatoes which she ate at recess, Labove did not know it. By merely walking down the aisle between them she would transform the very wooden desks and benches themselves into a grove of Venus and fetch every male in the room, from the children just entering puberty to the grown men of nineteen and twenty, one of whom was already a husband and father, who could turn ten acres of land between sunup and sundown, springing into embattled rivalry, importunate each for precedence in immolation.

Sometimes on Friday nights there would be parties in the schoolhouse, where the pupils would play the teasing games of adolescence under his supervision. She would take no part in them, yet she would dominate them.

Sitting beside the stove exactly as she had sat during the hours of school, inattentive and serene amid the uproar of squeals and trampling feet, she would be assaulted simultaneously beneath a dozen simultaneous gingham or calico dresses in a dozen simultaneous shadowy nooks and corners. She was neither at the head nor at the foot of her class, not because she declined to study on the one hand and not because she was Varner's daughter on the other and Varner ran the school, but because the class she was in ceased to have either head or foot twenty-four hours after she entered it.

Within the year there even ceased to be any lower class for her to be promoted from, for the reason that she would never be at either end of anything in which blood ran. It would have but one point, like a swarm of bees, and she would be that point, that centre, swarmed over and importuned yet serene and intact and apparently even oblivious, tranquilly abrogating the whole long sum of human thinking and suffering which is called knowledge, education, wisdom, at once supremely unchaste and inviolable: the queen, the matrix.

He watched that for two years, still with what he thought was only rage. He would graduate at the end of the second year, take his two degrees. He would be done then, finished. His one reason for having taken the school would be cancelled and discharged.

His aim and purpose would be gained at the price it had cost him, not the least of which was riding that horse forty miles at night to and from the University, since after his dirt-farmer tradition and heritage, he did not ride a horse for fun. Then he could go on, quit the village and never lay eyes upon it again.

For the first six months he believed he was going to do that and for the next eighteen he still told himself he was. This was especially easy not

only to tell himself but to believe too while he was away from the village during the last two months of the spring term at the University and the following eight weeks of the summer term into which he was crowding by sections his fourth academic year, then the eight weeks of what the school called his vacation, which he spent at the sawmill although he did not need the money now, he could graduate without it, but it would be that much more in his pocket when he passed through the last door and faced the straight hard road with nothing between him and his goal save himself; then the six fall weeks when each Saturday afternoon the spurned white line fled beneath him and the hysteric air screamed and roared and he for those fleet seconds and despite himself did live, fierce, concentrated, even though still not quite believing it.

Then one day he discovered that he had been lying to himself for almost two years. It was after he had returned to the University in the second spring and about a month before he would graduate. He had not formally resigned from the school, though when he left the village a month ago he believed it was for the last time, considering it understood between Varner and himself that he was teaching the school only to enable himself to finish at the University.

So he believed he had quitted the village for the last time. The final examinations were only a month away, then the Bar examination and the door would be open to him. There was even the promise of a position in the profession he had chosen. Then one afternoon, he had no warning at all, he had entered the dining-room of his boarding-house for the evening meal when the landlady came and said, "I have a treat for you.

My sister's husband brought them to me," and set a dish before him. It was a single baked sweet potato, and while the landlady cried, "Why, Mr. Labove, you are sick!" he managed to rise and leave the room. In his room at last it seemed to him that he must go at once, start now, even on foot.

He could see her, even smell her, sitting there on the school steps, eating the potato, tranquil and chewing and with that terrible quality of being not only helplessly and unawares on the outside of her clothing, but of being naked and not even knowing it. He knew now that it was not the school steps but in his mind that she had constantly been for two years now, that it had not been rage at all but terror, and that the vision of that gate which he had held up to himself as a goal was not a goal but just a point to reach, as the man fleeing a holocaust runs not for a prize but to escape destruction.

But he did not really give up then, though for the first time he said the words, I will not go back. It had not been necessary to say them before because until now he had believed he was going on. But at least he could still assure himself aloud that he would not, which was something and which got him on through the graduation and the Bar initiation and banquet too.

Just before the ceremony he had been approached by one of his fellow neophytes. After the banquet they were going to Memphis, for further and informal celebrating. He knew what that meant: drinking in a hotel room and then, for some of them at least, a brothel.

He declined, not because he was a virgin and not because he did not have the money to spend that way but because up to the very last he still believed, still had his hill-man's purely emotional and foundationless faith in education, the white magic of Latin degrees, which was an actual counterpart of the old monk's faith in his wooden cross. Then the last speech died into the final clapping and scraping of chairs; the door was open and the road waited and he knew he would not take it. He went to the man who had invited him to Memphis and accepted.

He descended with the group from the train in the Memphis station and asked quietly how to find a brothel. "Hell, man," the other said. "Restrain yourself. At least let's go through the formality of registering at the hotel." But he would not. He went alone to the address given

him. He knocked firmly at the equivocal door. This would not help him either. He did not expect it to.

His was that quality lacking which no man can ever be completely brave or completely craven: the ability to see both sides of the crisis and visualise himself as already vanquished — itself inherent with its own failure and disaster. At least it won't be my virginity that she is going to scorn, he told himself. The next morning he borrowed a sheet of cheap ruled tablet paper (the envelope was pink and had been scented once) from his companion of the night, and wrote Varner that he would teach the school for another year.

He taught it for three more years. By then he was the monk indeed, the bleak schoolhouse, the little barren village, was his mountain, his Gethsemane and, he knew it, his Golgotha too. He was the virile anchorite of old time. The heatless lean-to room was his desert cell, the thin pallet bed on the puncheon floor the couch of stones on which he would lie prone and sweating in the iron winter nights, naked, rigid, his teeth clenched in his scholar's face and his legs haired-over like those of a faun. Then day would come and he could rise and dress and eat the food which he would not even taste.

He had never paid much attention to what he ate anyway, but now he would not always know that he had eaten it. Then he would go and unlock the school and sit behind his desk and wait for her to walk down the aisle. He had long since thought of marrying her, waiting until she was old enough and asking for her in marriage, attempting to, and had discarded that. In the first place, he did not want a wife at all, certainly not yet and probably not ever.

And he did not want her as a wife, he just wanted her one time as a man with a gangrened hand or foot thirsts after the axe-stroke which will leave him comparatively whole again. But he would have paid even this price to be free of his obsession, only he knew that this could never be, not only because her father would never agree to it, but because of her, that quality in her which absolutely abrogated the exchange value

of any single life's promise or capacity for devotion, the puny asking-price of any one man's reserve of so-called love.

He could almost see the husband which she would someday have. He would be a dwarf, a gnome, without glands or desire, who would be no more a physical factor in her life than the owner's name on the fly-leaf of a book. There it was again, out of the books again, the dead defacement of type which had already betrayed him: the crippled Vulcan to that Venus, who would not possess her but merely own her by the single strength which power gave, the dead power of money, wealth, gewgaws, baubles, as he might own, not a picture, statue: a field, say.

He saw it: the fine land rich and fecund and foul and eternal and impervious to him who claimed title to it, oblivious, drawing to itself tenfold the quantity of living seed its owner's whole life could have secreted and compounded, producing a thousandfold the harvest he could ever hope to gather and save.

So that was out. Yet still he stayed on. He stayed for the privilege of waiting until the final class was dismissed and the room was empty so that he could rise and walk with his calm damned face to the bench and lay his hand on the wooden plank still warm from the impact of her sitting or even kneel and lay his face to the plank, wallowing his face against it, embracing the hard un sentient wood, until the heat was gone. He was mad. He knew it.

There would be times now when he did not even want to make love to her but wanted to hurt her, see blood spring and run, watch that serene face warp to the indelible mark of terror and agony beneath his own; to leave some indelible mark of himself on it and then watch it even cease to be a face. Then he would exorcise that. He would drive it from him, whereupon their positions would reverse. It would now be himself importunate and prostrate before that face which, even though but fourteen years old, postulated a weary knowledge which he would never attain, a surfeit, a glut of all perverse experience. He would be as a child before that knowledge.

He would be like a young girl, a maiden, wild distracted and amazed, trapped not by the seducer's maturity and experience but by blind and ruthless forces inside herself which she now realised she had lived with for years without even knowing they were there. He would grovel in the dust before it, panting: "Show me what to do. Tell me. I will do anything you tell me, anything, to learn and know what you know." He was mad. He knew it.

He knew that sooner or later something was going to happen. And he knew too that, whatever it would be, he would be the vanquished, even though he did not know yet what the one crack in his armour was and that she would find it unerringly and instinctively and without ever being aware that she had been in deadly danger.

Danger? he thought, cried. Danger? Not to her: to me. I am afraid of what I might do, not because of her because there is nothing I or any man could do to her that would hurt her. It's because of what it will do to me.

Then one afternoon he found his axe. He continued to hack in almost an orgasm of joy at the dangling nerves and tendons of the gangrened member long after the first bungling blow. He had heard no sound. The last footfall had ceased and the door had closed for the last time. He did not hear it open again, yet something caused him to raise his wallowing face from the bench.

She was in the room again, looking at him. He knew that she not only recognised the place at which he knelt, but that she knew why. Possibly at that instant he believed she had known all the time, because he knew at once that she was neither frightened nor laughing at him, that she simply did not care.

Nor did she know that she was now looking at the face of a potential homicide. She merely released the door and came down the aisle toward the front of the room where the stove sat. "Jody ain't come yet," she said. "It's cold out there. What are you doing down there?"

He rose. She came steadily on, carrying the oilcloth satchel which she had carried for five years now and which he knew she had never opened outside of the schoolhouse save to put into it the cold potatoes. He moved toward her. She stopped, watching him. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Don't be afraid."

"Afraid?" she said. "Of what?" She took one step back, then no more, watching his face. She was not afraid. She ain't got that far either, he thought; and then something furious and cold, or repudiation and bereavement both, blew in him though it did not show in his face which was even smiling a little, tragic and sick and damned.

"That's it," he said: "That's the trouble. You are not afraid. That's what you have got to learn. That's one thing I am going to teach you, anyway." He had taught her something else, though he was not to find it out for a minute or so yet. She had indeed learned one thing during the five years in school and was presently to take and pass an examination on it. He moved toward her. She still stood her ground. Then he had her.

He moved as quickly and ruthlessly as if she had been a football or as if he had the ball and she stood between him and the final white line which he hated and must reach. He caught her, hard, the two bodies hurling together violently because she had not even moved to avoid him, let alone to begin resisting yet.

She seemed to be momentarily mesmerised by a complete inert soft surprise, big, immobile, almost eye to eye with him in height, the body which seemed always to be on the outside of its garments, which without even knowing it apparently had made a priapic hullabaloo of that to which, at the price of three years of sacrifice and endurance and flagellation and unceasing combat with his own implacable blood, he had bought the privilege of dedicating his life, as fluid and muscleless as a miraculous intact milk.

Then the body gathered itself into furious and silent resistance which even then he might have discerned to be neither fright nor even outrage but merely surprise and annoyance. She was strong. He had expected that. He had wanted that, he had been waiting for it. They wrestled furiously. He was still smiling, even whispering. "That's it," he said. "Fight it. Fight it. That's what it is: a man and a woman fighting each other. The hating.

To kill, only to do it in such a way that the other will have to know forever afterward he or she is dead. Not even to lie quiet dead because forever afterward there will have to be two in that grave and those two can never again lie quiet anywhere together and neither can ever lie anywhere alone and be quiet until he or she is dead." He held her loosely, the better to feel the fierce resistance of bones and muscles, holding her just enough to keep her from actually reaching his face.

She had made no sound, although her brother, who was never late in calling for her, must by now be just outside the building. Labove did not think of this. He would not have cared probably. He held her loosely, still smiling, whispering his jumble of fragmentary Greek and Latin verse and American-Mississippi obscenity, when suddenly she managed to free one of her arms, the elbow coming up hard under his chin.

It caught him off-balance; before he regained it her other hand struck him a full-armed blow in the face. He stumbled backward, struck a bench and went down with it and partly beneath it. She stood over him, breathing deep but not panting and not even dishevelled.

"Stop pawing me," she said. "You old headless horseman Ichabod Crane."

After the sound of her feet and the closing door had ceased, he could hear the cheap clock which he had brought back with him from his room at the University, loud in the silence, with a tinny sound like minute shot being dropped into a can, though before he could begin to get up the door opened again and, sitting on the floor, he looked up at her as she came back down the aisle.

“Where’s my — —” she said. Then she saw it, the book-satchel, and lifted it from the floor and turned again. He heard the door again. So she hasn’t told him yet, he thought. He knew the brother too. He would not have waited to take her home first, he would have come in at once, vindicated at last after five years of violent and unsupported conviction.

That would be something, anyway. It would not be penetration, true enough, but it would be the same flesh, the same warm living flesh in which the same blood ran, under impact at least — a paroxysm, an orgasm of sorts, a catharsis, anyway — something.

So he got up and went to his desk and sat down and squared the clock-face (it sat at an oblique angle, so he could see it from the point before the recitation bench where he usually stood) toward him. He knew the distance between the school and the Varner home and he had ridden that horse back and forth to the University enough to calculate time in horse-distance.

He will gallop back too, he thought. So he measured the distance the minute hand would have to traverse and sat watching it as it crept toward the mark. Then he looked up at the only comparatively open space in the room, which still had the stove in it, not to speak of the recitation bench. The stove could not be moved, but the bench could. But even then. . . . Maybe he had better meet the brother out doors, or someone might get hurt.

Then he thought that that was exactly what he wanted: for somebody to get hurt, and then he asked himself quietly, Who? and answered himself: I don’t know. I don’t care. So he looked back at the clock-face. Yet even when a full hour had passed he still could not admit to himself that the final disaster had befallen him. He is lying in ambush for me with the pistol, he thought.

But where? What ambush? What ambush could he want better than here? already seeing her entering the room again tomorrow morning, tranquil, untroubled, not even remembering, carrying the cold potato

which at recess she would sit on the sunny steps and eat like one of the unchaste and perhaps even anonymously pregnant immortals eating bread of Paradise on a sunwise slope of Olympus.

So he rose and gathered up the books and papers which, with the clock, he carried to his barren room each afternoon and fetched back the next morning, and put them into the desk drawer and closed it and with his handkerchief he wiped off the desk top, moving without haste yet steadily, his face calm, and wound the clock and set it back on the desk. The overcoat which the football coach had given him six years ago hung on its nail.

He looked at it for a moment, though presently he went and got it and even put it on and left the room, the now deserted room in which there were still and forever would be too many people; in which, from that first day when her brother had brought her into it, there had been too many people, who would make one too many forever after in any room she ever entered and remained in long enough to expel breath.

As soon as he emerged, he saw the roan horse tied to the post before the store. Of course, he thought quietly. Naturally he would not carry a pistol around with him, and it would not do him any good hidden under a pillow at home. Of course. That's it.

That's where the pistol will be; telling himself that perhaps the brother even wanted witnesses, as he himself wanted them, his face tragic and calm now, walking on down the road toward the store. That will be proof, he cried silently. Proof in the eyes and beliefs of living men that that happened which did not. Which will be better than nothing, even though I am not here to know men believe it. Which will be fixed in the beliefs of living men forever and ever ineradicable, since one of the two alone who know different will be dead.

It was a grey day, of the colour and texture of iron, one of those windless days of a plastic rigidity too dead to make or release snow even, in which even light did not alter but seemed to appear complete

out of nothing at dawn and would expire into darkness without gradation.

The village was lifeless — the shuttered and silent gin and blacksmith shop, the weathered store; the motionless horse alone postulating life and that not because it moved but because it resembled something known to be alive. But they would be inside the store. He could see them — the heavy shoes and boots, the overalls and jumper coats bulging over the massed indiscriminate garments beneath — planted about the box of pocked sand in which the stove, squatting, radiated the strong good heat which had an actual smell, masculine, almost monastic — a winter's concentration of unwomaned and deliberate tobacco-spittle annealing into the iron flanks.

The good heat: he would enter it, not out of the bleak barren cold but out of life, mounting steps and walking through a door and out of living. The horse raised its head and looked at him as he passed it. But not you, he said to it. You've got to stand outside, stand here and remain intact for the blood to contrive to run through. I don't. He mounted the steps, crossing the heel-gnawed planks of the gallery.

On the closed door was tacked a paper placard advertising a patent medicine, half defaced — the reproduction of a portrait, smug, bearded, successful, living far away and married, with children, in a rich house and beyond the reach of passion and blood's betrayal and not even needing to be dead to be embalmed with spaced tacks, ubiquitous and immortal in ten thousand fading and tattered effigies on ten thousand weathered and paintless doors and walls and fences in all the weathers of rain and ice and summer's harsh heat, about the land.

Then, with his hand already on the knob to turn it, he stopped. Once — it was one of the football trips of course, he had never ridden in a train otherwise save on that night visit to Memphis — he had descended onto a bleak station platform.

There was a sudden commotion about a door. He heard a man cursing, shouting, a negro ran out the door, followed by a shouting white man.

The negro turned, stooping, and as the onlookers scattered the white man shot the negro in the body with a blunt pistol.

He remembered how the negro, clutching his middle, dropped onto his face then suddenly flopped over onto his back, actually appearing to elongate himself, to add at least a yard to his stature; the cursing white man was overpowered and disarmed, the train whistled once and began to draw away, a uniformed trainman breaking out of the crowd and running to overtake it and still looking back from the moving step.

And he remembered how he shoved himself up, instinctively using his football tactics to make a place, where he looked down upon the negro lying rigid on his back, still clutching his middle, his eyes closed and his face quite peaceful. Then there was a man — a doctor or an officer, he did not know — kneeling over the negro. He was trying to draw the negro's hands away. There was no outward show of resistance; the forearms and hands at which the doctor or officer was tugging merely seemed to have become iron. The negro's eyes did not open nor his peaceful expression alter, he merely said: "Look out, white folks.

I already been shot." But they unclasped his hands at last, and he remembered the peeling away of the jumper, the overalls, a ragged civilian coat beneath which revealed itself to have been a long overcoat once, the skirts cut away at the hips as with a razor; beneath that a shirt and a pair of civilian trousers. The waist of them was unbuttoned and the bullet rolled out onto the platform, bloodless. He released the doorknob and removed the overcoat and hung it over his arm. At least I won't make a failure with one of us, he thought, opening the door, entering.

At first he believed the room was empty. He saw the stove in its box of pocked sand, surrounded by the nail kegs and upended boxes; he even smelled the rank scorch of recent spitting. But no one sat there, and when a moment later he saw the brother's thick humourless surly face staring at him over the desk, for an instant he felt rage and outrage.

He believed that Varner had cleared the room, sent them all away deliberately in order to deny him that last vindication, the ratification of success which he had come to buy with his life; and suddenly he knew a furious disinclination, even a raging refusal, to die at all. He stooped quickly aside, already dodging, scrabbling about him for some weapon as Varner's face rose still further above the desk top like a bilious moon.

"What in hell are you after?" Varner said. "I told you two days ago that window sash ain't come yet."

"Window sash?" Labove said.

"Nail some planks over it," Varner said. "Do you expect me to make a special trip to town to keep a little fresh air out of your collar?"

Then he remembered it. The panes had been broken out during the Christmas holidays. He had nailed boards over them at the time. He did not remember doing it. But then he did not remember being told about the promised sash two days ago, let alone asking about it. And now he stopped remembering the window at all. He rose quietly and stood, the overcoat over his arm; now he did not even see the surly suspicious face any more. Yes, he thought quietly; Yes. I see.

She never told him at all. She didn't even forget to. She doesn't even know anything happened that was worth mentioning. Varner was still talking; apparently someone had answered him:

"Well, what do you want, then?"

"I want a nail," he said.

"Get it, then." The face had already disappeared beyond the desk.

"Bring the hammer back."

"I won't need the hammer," he said. "I just want a nail."

The house, the heatless room in which he had lived for six years now with his books and his bright lamp, was between the store and the school. He did not even look toward it when he passed. He returned to the schoolhouse and closed and locked the door. With a fragment of brick he drove the nail into the wall beside the door and hung the key

on the nail. The schoolhouse was on the Jefferson road. He already had the overcoat with him.

CHAPTER TWO

1

THROUGH THAT SPRING and through the long succeeding summer of her fourteenth year, the youths of fifteen and sixteen and seventeen who had been in school with her and others who had not, swarmed like wasps about the ripe peach which her full damp mouth resembled. There were about a dozen of them. They formed a group, close, homogeneous, and loud, of which she was the serene and usually steadily and constantly eating axis, centre.

There were three or four girls in the group, lesser girls, though if she were deliberately using them for foils, nobody knew it for certain. They were smaller girls, even though mostly older. It was as though that abundance which had invested her cradle, not content with merely overshadowing them with the shape of features and texture of hair and skin, must also dwarf and extinguish them ultimately with sheer bulk and mass.

They were together at least once a week and usually oftener. They would meet at the church on Sunday mornings and sit together in two adjacent pews which presently became their own by common consent of the congregation and authorities, like a class or an isolation place. They met at the community parties which would be held in the now empty schoolhouse, which was to be used for nothing else for almost two years before another teacher was installed.

They arrived in a group, they chose one another monotonously in the twosing games, the boys clowning and ruthless, loud. They might have been a masonic lodge set suddenly down in Africa or China, holding a weekly meeting. They departed together, walking back down the star- or moonlit road in a tight noisy clump, to leave her at her father's gate before dispersing. If the boys had been sparring for opportunities to

walk home with her singly, nobody knew that either because she was never known to walk home singly from anywhere or to walk anywhere anyhow when she could help it.

They would meet again at the singings and baptisings and picnics about the country. It was election year and after the last of the planting and the first of the laying-by of the crops, there were not only the first-Sunday all-day singings and baptisings, but the vote-rousing picnics as well.

The Varner surrey would be seen now week after week among the other tethered vehicles at country churches or on the edge of groves within which the women spread a week's abundance of cold food on the long plank tables while the men stood beneath the raised platforms on which the candidates for the county offices and the legislature and Congress spoke, and the young people in groups or pairs moved about the grove or, in whatever of seclusion the girls could be enticed into, engaged in the clumsy horseplay of adolescent courtship or seduction.

She listened to no speeches and set no tables and did no singing. Instead, with those two or three or four lesser girls she sat, nucleus of that loud frustrated group; the nucleus, the centre, the centrice; here as at the school parties of last year, casting over them all that spell of incipient accouchement while refusing herself to be pawed at, preserving even within that aura of licence and invitation in which she seemed to breathe and walk — or sit rather — a ruthless chastity impervious even to the light precarious balance, the actual overlapping, of Protestant religious and sexual excitement.

It was as if she really knew what instant, moment, she was reserved for, even if not his name and face, and was waiting for that moment rather than merely for the time for the eating to start, as she seemed to be.

They would meet again at the homes of the girls. This would be by prearrangement without doubt, and doubtless contrived by the other girls, though if she were aware that they invited her so that the boys

would come, nobody ever divined this from her behaviour either. She would make visits of overnight or of two and three days with them.

She was not allowed to attend the dances which would be held in the village schoolhouse or in other schoolhouses or country stores at night. She had never asked permission; it had rather been violently refused her by her brother before anyone knew whether she was going to ask it or not. The brother did not object to the house visits though.

He even fetched her back and forth on the horse as he had used to do to and from the school and for the same reason he would not let her walk from the school to the store to meet him, still seething and grimly outraged and fanatically convinced of what he believed he was battling against, riding for miles, the oilcloth book-satchel containing the nightgown and the toothbrush which her mother compelled her to bring held in the same hand which clutched the cross of his suspenders, the soft mammalian rubbing against his back and the steady quiet sound of chewing and swallowing in his ear, stopping the horse at last before the house she had come to visit and snarling at her, "Can't you stop eating that damn potato long enough to get down and let me go back to work?"

In early September the annual County Fair was held in Jefferson. She and her parents went to town and lived for four days in a boarding-house. The youths and the three girls were already there waiting for her.

While her father looked at livestock and farm tools and her mother bustled cheerful and martinettish among ranked cans and jars and decorated cakes, she moved all day long in the hem-lengthened dresses she had worn last year to school and surrounded by her loud knot of loutish and belligerent adolescents, from shooting gallery to pitch game to pop stand, usually eating something, or time after time without even dismounting and still eating, rode, her long Olympian legs revealed halfway to the thigh astride the wooden horses of merry-go-rounds.

By her fifteenth year they were men. They were the size of men and doing the work of grown men at least — eighteen and nineteen and twenty, who in that time and country should have been thinking of marriage and, for her sake anyway, looking toward other girls; for their own sakes, almost any other girl.

But they were not thinking of marriage. There was about a dozen of them too, who at some moment, instant, during that second spring which her brother still could not definitely put his finger on, had erupted into her placid orbit like a stampede of wild cattle, trampling ruthlessly aside the children of last summer's yesterday.

Luckily for her brother, the picnics were not as frequent this year as during the election summer, because he went with the family now in the surrey — the humourless seething raging man in his hot bagging broadcloth and collarless glazed shirt who now, as if in a kind of unbelieving amazement, did not even snarl at her any more. He had nagged Mrs. Varner into making her wear corsets. He would grasp her each time he saw her outside the house, in public or alone, and see for himself if she had them on.

Although the brother declined to attend the singings and baptisings, he had badgered the parents into standing in his stead then. So the young men had what might be called a free field only on Sundays. They would arrive in a body at the church, riding up on horses and mules taken last night from the plough and which would return to the plough with tomorrow's sun, and wait for the Varner surrey to arrive.

That was all the adolescent companions of last year ever saw of her now — that glimpse of her between the surrey and the church door as she moved stiff and awkward in the corset and the hem-lengthened dress of last year's childhood, seen for an instant then hidden by the crowding surge of those who had dispossessed them. Within another year it would be the morning's formal squire in a glittering buggy drawn by a horse or mare bred for harness, and the youths of this year would be crowded aside in their turn.

But that would be next year; now it was a hodgepodge though restrained into something like decorum or at least discretion by the edifice and the day, a leashed turmoil of lust like so many lowering dogs after a scarce-fledged and apparently unawares bitch, filing into the church to sit on a back bench where they could watch the honey-coloured head demure among those of her parents and brother.

After church the brother would be gone, courting himself, it was believed, and through the long drowsing afternoons the trace-galled mules would doze along the Varner fence while their riders sat on the veranda, doggedly and vainly sitting each other out, crass and loud and baffled and raging not at one another but at the girl herself who apparently did not care whether they stayed or not, apparently not even aware that the sitting-out was going on.

Older people, passing, would see them — the half-dozen or so bright Sunday shirts with pink or lavender sleeve-garters, the pomaded hair above the shaved sunburned necks, the polished shoes, the hard loud faces, the eyes filled with the memory of a week of hard labour in fields behind them and knowledge of another week of it ahead; among them the girl, the centrice here too — the body of which there was simply too much dressed in the clothing of childhood, like a slumberer washed out of Paradise by a night flood and discovered by chance passers and covered hurriedly with the first garment to hand, still sleeping.

They would sit leashed and savage and loud and wild at the vain galloping seconds while the shadows lengthened and the frogs and whippoorwills began and the fireflies began to blow and drift above the creek.

Then Mrs. Varner would come bustling out, talking, and still talking herd them all in to eat the cold remains of the heavy noon meal beneath the bug-swirled lamp, and they would give up. They would depart in a body, seething and decorous, to mount the patient mules and horses and ride in furious wordless amity to the creek ford a half-mile away and dismount and hitch the horses and mules and with bare fists fight silently and savagely and wash the blood off in the water and

mount again and ride their separate ways, with their skinned knuckles and split lips and black eyes and for the time being freed even of rage and frustration and desire, beneath the cold moon, across the planted land.

By the third summer the trace-galled mules had given way to the trotting horses and the buggies. Now it was the youths, the outgrown and discarded of last year, who waited about the churchyard on Sunday mornings to watch in impotent and bitter turn their own dispossession — the glittering buggy powdered only lightly over with dust, drawn by a bright mare or horse in brass-studded harness, driven by the man who owned them both — a man grown in his own right and never again to be haled from an attic bed in an iron dawn to milk cows or break land not his own, by a father who still held over him legally and sometimes physically too the power to bind and loose.

Beside him would be the girl who last year, after a fashion at least, had been their own and who had outgrown them, escaped them like the dead summer itself, who had learned at last to walk without proclaiming the corsets beneath the dresses of silk in which she looked, not like a girl of sixteen dressed like twenty, but a woman of thirty dressed in the garments of her sixteen-year-old sister.

At one time in the spring, for an afternoon and evening, to be exact, there were four buggies. The fourth one belonged to a drummer, rented. He appeared in the village by accident one day, having lost his way and blundered upon Frenchman's Bend to ask directions without even knowing there was a store there, in a battered rig which a Jefferson livery stable rented to travelling men. He saw the store and stopped and tried to sell the clerk, Snopes, a bill of goods and got nowhere quickly.

He was a youngish city man with city ways and assurance and insistence. He had presently wormed from the usual loungers on the gallery who the actual owner of the store was and where he lived, and went on to Varner's house and doubtless knocked and was or was not admitted, since that was all they knew then. Two weeks later he was

back, in the same rig. This time he did not even try to sell the Varners anything; it was learned later that he had taken supper at the Varner house. That was Tuesday. On Friday he returned.

He was now driving the best turnout which the Jefferson stable had — a runabout and a fair horse — and he not only wore a necktie, he had on the first white flannel trousers Frenchman's Bend ever saw. They were the last ones too, and they were not there long: he ate supper with the Varners and that evening he drove the daughter to a dance in a schoolhouse about eight miles away, and vanished.

Someone else brought the daughter home and at daylight the next morning the hostler found the rented horse and buggy tied to the stable door in Jefferson and that afternoon the night station agent told of a frightened and battered man in a pair of ruined ice-cream pants who had bought a ticket on the early train. The train was going south, though it was understood that the drummer lived in Memphis, where it was later learned he had a wife and family, but about this nobody in Frenchman's Bend either knew or cared.

That left three. They were constant, almost in rotation, week and week and Sunday and Sunday about, last summer's foreclosed bankrupts waiting at the church to watch him of that morning lift her out of the buggy. They still waited there to look at her exposed leg when she got back into it, or, a lowering clot farther along the road, they would stand suddenly out of the undergrowth as the buggy swept past to shout vicious obscenity after it out of the spinning and choking dust.

At some time during the afternoon one or two or three of them would pass the Varner house, to see without looking at them the horse and buggy hitched to the fence and Will Varner napping in his wooden hammock in its small grove in the yard and the closed blinds of the parlour windows beyond, shuttered after the local fashion, against the heat. They would lurk in the darkness, usually with a jug of white hill whiskey, just beyond the light-radius of the homes or stores or school buildings within the lamplit doors and windows of which the silhouettes of dancing couples moved athwart the whine and squeal of fiddles.

Once they charged yelling from a clump of shadow beside the moonlit road, upon the moving buggy, the mare rearing and plunging, the driver standing up in the buggy and slashing at them with the whip and laughing at them as they ducked and dodged.

Because it was not the brother, it was this dead last summer's vain and raging jetsam, who divined or at least believed that there had never been but one buggy all the time. It was almost a year now since Jody had ceased to wait for her in the hall until she came out, dressed, the buggy waiting, to grasp her arm and exactly as he would have felt the back of a new horse for old saddle sores, grimly explore with his hard heavy hand to see if she had the corset on or not.

This buggy belonged to a man named McCarron who lived about twelve miles from the village. He was the only child of a widow, herself the only child of a well-to-do landowner. Motherless, she had eloped at nineteen with a handsome, ready-tongued, assured and pleasant man who had come into the country without specific antecedents and no definite past.

He had been there about a year. His occupation seemed to be mainly playing poker in the back rooms of country stores or the tack rooms of stables, and winning, though perfectly honestly; there had never been any question of that.

All the women said he would make a poor husband. The men said that only a shotgun would ever make him a husband of any sort, and most of them would have declined him as a son-in-law even on those terms, because he had that about him which loved the night — not the night's shadows, but the bright hysteric glitter-glare which made them, the perversity of unsleeping. Nevertheless, Alison Hoake climbed out a second-story window one night. There was no ladder, no drainpipe, no rope of knotted sheets.

They said she jumped and McCarron caught her in his arms and they vanished for ten days and returned, McCarron walking, his fine teeth

exposed though the rest of his face took no part in the smile, into the room where old Hoake had sat for ten days now with a loaded shotgun across his lap.

To everyone's surprise, he made not only a decent husband, but son-in-law too. He knew little about farming and did not pretend to like it, nevertheless he served as his father-in-law's overseer, carrying out the old man's verbatim instructions like a dictaphone record would have of course, but having himself the gift of getting along well with, and even dominating somewhat, all men not as ready of tongue as he, though it was actually his jolly though lightly-balanced temper and his reputation as a gambler which got him the obedience of the negro field hands even more than his position as the son-in-law or even his proved prowess with a pistol. He even stayed home at night and quit the poker-playing.

In fact, later nobody could decide for certain if the cattle-buying scheme had not been the father-in-law's instead of his. But within a year, by which time he was a father himself, he was buying up cattle and taking them in droves overland to the railroad and Memphis every two or three months. This went on for ten years, by which time the father-in-law had died and left the property to his grandson. Then McCarron made his last trip.

Two nights later one of his drovers galloped up to the house and waked his wife. McCarron was dead, and the countryside never did know much about that either, shot in a gambling house apparently. His wife left the nine-year-old boy with the negro servants and went in the farm wagon and fetched her husband's body home and buried it on the oak and cedar knoll beside her father and mother. Shortly after that a rumour, a tale of a brief day or two, went about that a woman had shot him.

But that died; they only said to one another, "So that's what he was doing all the time," and there remained only the legend of the money and jewels he was supposed to have won during the ten years and

fetches home at night and, with his wife's help, bricks up in one of the chimneys of the house.

The son, Hoake, at twenty-three looked older. This was his father's assurance in his face which was bold and handsome too. It was also a little swaggering and definitely spoiled though not vain so much as intolerant, which his father's face had not been.

It also lacked humour and equability and perhaps intelligence too, which his father's face had not lacked, but which that of the man who sat for ten days after his daughter's elopement with a loaded shotgun on his lap, probably did. He grew up with a negro lad for his sole companion.

They slept in the same room, the negro on a pallet on the floor, until he was ten years old. The negro was a year older. When they were six and seven, he conquered the negro with his fists in fair fight.

Afterward he would pay the negro out of his pocket money at a standard rate fixed between them, for the privilege of whipping the negro, not severely, with a miniature riding-crop.

At fifteen his mother sent him to a military boarding-school. Precocious, well-co-ordinated and quick to learn whatever he saw was to his benefit, he acquired enough credits in three years to enter college. His mother chose an agricultural college. He went there and spent a whole year in the town without even matriculating while his mother believed he was passing his freshman work.

The next fall he did matriculate, remained five months and was given the privilege of withdrawing from the school following a scandalous denouement involving the wife of a minor instructor. He returned home and spent the next two years ostensibly overseeing the plantation which his mother now ran.

This meant that he spent some part of the day riding about it in the dress boots of his military school days which still fitted his small feet and which were the first riding-boots the countryside had ever seen.

Five months ago he happened by chance to ride through Frenchman's Bend village and saw Eula Varner. This was he against whom, following the rout of the Memphis drummer, the youths of last summer's trace-galled mules rose in embattled concert to defend that in which apparently they and the brother both had no belief, even though they themselves had failed signally to disprove it, as knights before them have probably done.

A scout of two or three would lurk about the Varner fence to watch the buggy depart and find which road it would take. They would follow or precede it to whatever plank-trampling fiddle-impregnated destination, to wait there with the jug of raw whiskey and follow it back home or toward home — the long return through night-time roads across the mooned or unmooned sleeping land, the mare's feet like slow silk in the dust as a horse moves when the reins are wrapped about the upright whip in its dashboard socket, the fords into which the unguided mare would step gingerly down and stop unhidden and drink, nuzzling and blowing among the broken reflections of stars, raising its dripping muzzle and maybe drinking again or maybe just blowing into the water as a thirst-quenched horse will.

There would be no voice, no touch of rein to make it move on; anyway, it would be standing there too long, too long, too long. One night they charged the moving buggy from the roadside shadows and were driven off by the whip because they had no concerted plan but were moved by a spontaneous combustion of rage and grief.

A week after that, the horse and buggy tied to the Varner fence, they burst with yells and banging pans around the corner of the dark veranda, McCarron presently strolling composedly out, not from the porch but from the clump of trees where Varner's wooden hammock hung, and called upon two or three of them by name and cursed them

in a pleasant, drawling, conversational voice and dared any two of them to meet him down the road. They could see the pistol hanging in his hand against his flank.

Then they gave him formal warning. They could have told the brother but they did not, not because the brother would more than likely have turned upon the informers with physical violence. Like the teacher Labove, they would have welcomed that, they would have accepted that with actual joy. As with Labove, it would at least have been the same living flesh warm under furious impact, bruising, scoriating, springing blood, which, like Labove, was what they actually desired now whether they knew it or not.

It was because they were already insulated against acceptance of the idea of telling him by the fact that their rage would be wasted then upon the agent of their vengeance and not the betrayer; they would have met the profferer of a mortal affronting and injury with their hands bound up in boxing gloves.

So they sent McCarron a formal warning in writing with their names signed. One of them rode the twelve miles to his mother's house one night and fastened the notice to the door. The next afternoon McCarron's negro, a grown man too now, brought the five separate answers and escaped from them at last, bloody about the head but not seriously hurt.

Yet for almost another week he foiled them. They were trying to take him when he was in the buggy alone, either before he had reached the Varner house or after he had left it. But the mare was too fast for them to overtake, and their spiritless plough-animals would not stand ground and halt the mare, and they knew from the previous attempt that, if they tried to stop the mare on foot, he would ride them down, standing up in the buggy with the slashing whip and his hard bare jeering teeth.

Besides, he had the pistol, they had learned enough about him to know that he had never been without it since he turned twenty-one. And

there was still the matter to be settled between him and the two who had beaten his negro messenger.

So they were forced at last to ambush him at the ford with Eula in the buggy when the mare stopped to drink. Nobody ever knew exactly what happened. There was a house near the ford, but there were no yells and shouts this time, merely abrasions and cuts and missing teeth on four of the five faces seen by daylight tomorrow. The fifth one, the other of the two who had beaten the negro, still lay unconscious in the nearby house. Someone found the butt of the buggy whip.

It was clotted with dried blood and human hair and later, years later, one of them told that it was the girl who had wielded it, springing from the buggy and with the reversed whip beating three of them back while her companion used the reversed pistol-butt against the wagon-spoke and the brass knuckles of the other two.

That was all that was ever known, the buggy reaching the Varner house not especially belated. Will Varner, in his nightshirt and eating a piece of cold peach pie with a glass of buttermilk in the kitchen, heard them come up from the gate and onto the veranda, talking quietly, murmuring as she and her young men did about what her father believed was nothing, and on into the house, the hall, and onto the kitchen door.

Varner looked up and saw the bold handsome face, the pleasant hard revelation of teeth which would have been called smiling at least, though it was not particularly deferent, the swelling eye, the long welt down the jaw, the hanging arm flat against the side. "He bumped into something," the daughter said.

"I see he did," Varner said. "He looks like it kicked him too."

"He wants some water and a towel," she said. "It's over yonder," she said, turning; she did not come into the kitchen, the light. "I'll be back in a minute." Varner heard her mount the stairs and move about in her room overhead but he paid no further attention. He looked at

McCarron and saw that the exposed teeth were gritted rather than smiling, and he was sweating. After he saw that, Varner paid no more attention to the face either.

“So you bumped into something,” he said. “Can you get that coat off?”
“Yes,” the other said. “I did it catching my mare. A piece of scantling.”

“Serve you right for keeping a mare like that in a woodshed,” Varner said. “This here arm is broke.”

“All right,” McCarron said. “Ain’t you a veterinary? I reckon a man ain’t so different from a mule.”

“That’s correct,” Varner said. “Usually he ain’t got quite as much sense.” The daughter entered. Varner had heard her on the stairs again, though he did not notice that she now wore another dress from that in which she had left the house. “Fetch my whiskey jug,” he said. It was beneath his bed, where it stayed.

She fetched it down. McCarron sat now with his bared arm flat on the kitchen table. He fainted once, erect in the chair, but not for long. After that it was only the fixed teeth and the sweat until Varner had done. “Pour him another drink and go wake Sam to drive him home,” Varner said. But McCarron would not, either be driven home or go to bed where he was. He had a third drink from the jug and he and the girl went back to the veranda and Varner finished his pie and milk and carried the jug back upstairs and went to bed.

It was not the father and not even the brother, who for five or six years now had actually been supported upright and intact in breathing life by an idea which had not even grown through the stage of suspicion at all but had sprung full blown as a conviction only the more violent for the fact that the most unremitting effort had never been able to prove it, upon whom divination had descended. Varner took a drink himself from the jug and shoved it back under the bed where a circle of dust marked the place where it had sat for years, and went to sleep.

He entered his accustomed state of unsnoring and childlike slumber and did not hear his daughter mount the stairs, to remove this time the dress which had her own blood on it. The mare, the buggy, was gone by then, though McCarron fainted in it again before he reached home.

The next morning the doctor found that, although the break had been properly set and splinted, nevertheless it had broken free since, the two bone-ends telescoping, and so had to be set again.

But Varner did not know that — the father, the lean pleasant shrewd unillusioned man asleep in the bed above the whiskey jug twelve miles away, who, regardless of what error he might have made in the reading of the female heart in general and his daughter's in particular, had been betrayed at the last by failing to anticipate that she would not only essay to, but up to a certain point actually support, with her own braced arm from underneath, the injured side.

Three months later, when the day came for the delicate buggies and the fast bright horses and mares to be seen no more along the Varner fence, Will Varner himself was the last to discover it. They and the men who drove them were gone, vanished overnight, not only from Frenchman's Bend but from the country itself.

Although one of the three knew certainly one who was guilty, and the other two knew collectively two who were not, all three of them fled, secretly and by back roads probably, with saddle-bags or single hurried portmanteaus for travelling fast. One of them went because of what he believed the Varner men would do.

The other two fled because they knew that the Varners would not do it. Because the Varners too would know by now from the one incontrovertible source, the girl herself, that two of them were not guilty, and so those two would thus be relegated also to the flotsam of a vain dead yesterday of passionate and eternal regret and grief, along with the impotent youths who by badgering them also, along with him who had been successful, had conferred upon them likewise blindly and unearned the accolade of success. By fleeing too, they put in a final

and despairing bid for the guilt they had not compassed, the glorious shame of the ruin they did not do.

So when the word went quietly from house to house about the country that McCarron and the two others had vanished and that Eula Varner was in what everyone else but her, as it presently appeared, called trouble, the last to learn of it was the father — this man who cheerfully and robustly and undeviatingly declined to accept any such theory as female chastity other than as a myth to hoodwink young husbands with just as some men decline to believe in free tariff or the efficacy of prayer; who, as it was well known, had spent and was still spending no inconsiderable part of his time proving to himself his own contention, who at the present moment was engaged in a liaison with the middle-fortyish wife of one of his own tenants.

He was too old, he told her baldly and plainly, to be tomcatting around at night, about his own house or any other man's. So she would meet him in the afternoons, on pretence of hunting hen-nests, in a thicket beside the creek near her house, in which sylvan Pan-hallowed retreat, the fourteen-year-old boy whose habit it was to spy on them told, Varner would not even remove his hat.

He was the last to hear about it, waked where he slept in his sock feet in the wooden hammock, by the peremptory voice of his wife, hurrying, lean, loose-jointed and still not quite awake, in his stockings across the yard and into the hall where Mrs.

Varner, in a loose old wrapper and the lace boudoir cap in which she took her afternoon naps, shouted at him in an immediate irate voice above the uproar of his son's voice from the daughter's room upstairs: "Eula's got a baby. Go up there and knock that fool in the head."

"Got a what?" Varner said. But he did not pause. He hurried on, Mrs. Varner following, up the stairs and into the room in which for the last day or two the daughter had remained more or less constantly, not even coming down for meals, suffering from what, if Varner had thought about it at all, he would have judged merely a stomach

disorder from eating too much, possibly accumulated and suddenly and violently retroactive after sixteen years of visceral forbearance and outrage.

She sat in a chair beside the window in her loosened hair and a bright near-silk negligée she had ordered recently from a Chicago mail-order house. Her brother stood over her, shaking her arm and shouting: "Which one was it? Tell me which one!"

"Stop shoving me," she said. "I don't feel good." Again Varner did not pause. He came between them and thrust Jody back. "Let her alone," he said. "Get on out of here." Jody turned on Varner his suffused face.

"Let her alone?" he said. He laughed fiercely, with no mirth, his eyes pale, popping and enraged. "That's what's the matter now! She's done been let alone too damn much already! I tried. I knowed what was coming. I told both of you five years ago. But no. You both knew better. And now see what you got! See what's happened? But I'll make her talk. By God, I'll find out who it was. And then I — —"

"All right," Varner said. "What's happened?" For a moment, a minute almost, Jody appeared to be beyond speech. He glared at Varner. He looked as though only a supreme effort of will kept him from bursting where he stood.

"And he asks me what's happened," he said at last, in an amazed and incredulous whisper. "He asks me what's happened." He whirled; he jerked one hand upward in a gesture of furious repudiation and, Varner following, rushed upon Mrs. Varner, who had just reached the door, her hand upon her fleshy now heaving breast and her mouth open for speech as soon as breath returned. Jody weighed two hundred pounds and Mrs. Varner, although not much over five feet tall, weighed almost as much.

Yet he managed somehow to run past her in the door, she grasping at him as Varner, eel-like, followed. "Stop the fool!" she shouted,

following again as Varner and Jody thundered back down the stairs and into the ground-floor room which Varner still called his office though for the last two years now the clerk, Snopes, had slept on a cot in it, where Varner now overtook Jody bending over the open drawer of the clumsy (and now priceless, though Varner did not know it) walnut secretary which had belonged to Varner's grandfather, scrabbling a pistol from among the jumble of dried cotton bolls and seed pods and harness buckles and cartridges and old papers which it contained.

Through the window beside the desk the negress, the cook, could be seen running across the backyard toward her cabin, her apron over her head, as negroes do when trouble starts among the white people. Sam, the man, was following, though slower, looking back at the house, when both Varner and Jody saw him at the same time.

"Sam! Saddle my horse!" Jody roared.

"You Sam!" Varner shouted. They both grasped the pistol now, the four hands now apparently hopelessly inextricable in the open drawer.

"Don't touch that horse! Come back here this minute!" Mrs. Varner's feet were now pounding in the hall. The pistol came free of the drawer, they stepped back, their hands locked and tangled, to see her now in the door, her hand still at her heaving breast, her ordinarily cheerful opinionated face suffused and irate.

"Hold him till I get a stick of stove wood," she gasped. "I'll fix him. I'll fix both of them. Turning up pregnant and yelling and cursing here in the house when I am trying to take a nap!"

"All right," Varner said. "Go and get it." She went out; she seemed to have been sucked violently out of the door by her own irate affrontment. Varner wrenched the pistol free and hurled Jody (he was quite strong, incredibly wiry and quick for all his sixty years, though he had cold intelligence for his ally where the son had only blind rage) back into the desk and went and threw the pistol into the hall and slammed the door and turned the key and came back, panting a little but not much. "What in hell are you trying to do?" he said.

“Nothing!” Jody cried. “Maybe you don’t give a damn about your name, but I do. I got to hold my head up before folks even if you ain’t.”

“Hah,” Varner said. “I ain’t noticed you having any trouble holding it up. You have just about already got to where you can’t get it far enough down to lace your own shoes.” Jody glared at him, panting.

“By God,” he said, “maybe she won’t talk but I reckon I can find somebody that will. I’ll find all three of them. I’ll — —”

“What for? Just out of curiosity to find out for certain just which of them was and wasn’t diddling her?” Again for a long moment Jody could not speak at all. He stood against the desk, huge, bull-goaded, impotent and outraged, actually suffering, not from lese-Varner but from frustration. Mrs. Varner’s heavy stockinged feet pounded again in the hall; she began now to hammer at the door with the stick of wood.

“You, Will!” she shouted. “Open this door.’ ”

“You mean you ain’t going to do nothing?” Jody said. “Not anything?”

“Do what?” Varner said. “To who? Don’t you know them damn tomcats are halfway to Texas now? Where would you be about now, if it was you? Where would I be, even at my age, if I was footloose enough to prowl any roof I wanted to and could get in when I did?”

I know damn well where, and so would you — right where they are and still lathering horsemeat.” He went to the door and unlocked it, though the steady irate tattoo of Mrs. Varner’s stick was so loud that she apparently did not hear the key turn at all. “Now you go on out to the barn and set down until you cool off.

Make Sam dig you some worms and go fishing. If this family needs any head-holding-up done, I’ll tend to it myself.” He turned the knob. “Hell and damnation, all this hullabaloo and uproar because one confounded running bitch finally foxed herself. What did you expect — that she would spend the rest of her life just running water through it?”

That was Saturday afternoon. On the next Monday morning the seven men squatting about the gallery of the store saw the clerk, Snopes, coming on foot down the road from Varner's house, followed by a second man who was carrying a suitcase.

The clerk not only wore the grey cloth cap and the minute tie but a coat too, and then they saw that the suitcase which the second man carried was the straw one which Snopes had carried new to Varner's house one afternoon a year ago and left there.

Then they began to look at the man who was carrying it. They saw that the clerk was heeled as by a dog by a man a little smaller than himself but shaped exactly like him. It was as though the two of them were merely graded by perspective.

At first glance even the two faces were identical, until the two of them mounted the steps. Then they saw that the second face was a Snopes face right enough, differing from the other only by that unpredictable variation within the iron kinship to which they had become accustomed — in this case a face not smaller than the other exactly but closer, the features plucked together at the centre of it not by some inner impulse but rather from the outside, as though by a single swift gesture of the fingers of one hand; a face quick and bright and not derisive exactly as profoundly and incorrigibly merry behind the bright, alert, amoral eyes of a squirrel or a chipmunk.

They mounted the steps and crossed the gallery, carrying the suitcase. Snopes jerked his head at them exactly as Will Varner himself did it, chewing; they entered the store. After a while three more men came out of the blacksmith shop opposite, so there was a dozen of them about within sight of the gallery when, an hour later, the Varner surrey came up. The negro, Sam, was driving.

Beside him in front was the tremendous battered telescope bag which Mr. and Mrs. Varner had made their honeymoon to Saint Louis with and which all travelling Varners had used since, even the daughters marrying, sending it back empty, when it would seem to be both

symbol and formal notice of moonset, the mundane return, the valedictory of bright passion's generous impulsive abandon, as the printed card had been of its hopeful dawn.

Varner, in the back seat with his daughter, called a general greeting, short, perfectly inflectionless, unreadable. He did not get out, and those on the gallery looked quietly once and then away from the calm beautiful mask beside him beneath the Sunday hat, the veil, above the Sunday dress, even the winter coat, seeing without looking at him as Snopes came out of the store, carrying the straw suitcase, and mounted to the front seat beside the telescope bag.

The surrey moved on. Snopes turned his head once and spat over the wheel. He had the straw suitcase on his knees like the coffin of a baby's funeral.

The next morning Tull and Bookwright returned from Jefferson, where they had delivered another drove of cattle to the railroad. By that night the countryside knew the rest of it — how on that Monday afternoon Varner and his daughter and his clerk had visited his bank, where Varner had cashed a considerable cheque. Tull said it was for three hundred dollars.

Bookwright said that meant a hundred and fifty then, since Varner would discount even his own paper to himself fifty per cent. From there they had gone to the courthouse, to the Chancery Clerk's office, where a deed to the Old Frenchman place was recorded to Flem and Eula Varner Snopes. A Justice of the Peace had a desk in the Circuit Clerk's office, where they bought the licence.

Tull blinked rapidly, telling it. He coughed. "The bride and groom left for Texas right after the ceremony," he said.

"That makes five," a man named Armstid said. "But they say Texas is a big place."

"It's beginning to need to be," Bookwright said. "You mean six."

Tull coughed. He was still blinking rapidly. "Mr. Varner paid for it too," he said.

"Paid for what too?" Armstid said.

"The wedding licence," Tull said.

2

She knew him well. She knew him so well that she never had to look at him any more. She had known him ever since her fourteenth summer, when the people said that he had "passed" her brother. They did not say it to her. She would not have heard them. She would not have cared.

She saw him almost every day, because in her fifteenth summer he began to come to the house itself, usually after supper, to sit with her father on the veranda, not talking but listening, spitting his tobacco neatly over the railing. Sometimes on Sunday afternoons he would come and squat against a tree beside the wooden hammock where her father lay in his stockings, still not talking and still chewing; she would see him there from where she sat on the veranda surrounded by her ravening crowd of that year's Sunday beaux.

By then she had learned to recognise the mute hissing of his tennis shoes on the veranda planks; without rising or even turning her head she would call toward the interior of the house: "Papa, here's that man," or, presently, "the man" — "papa, here's the man again," though sometimes she said Mr. Snopes, saying it exactly as she would have said Mr. Dog.

In the next summer, her sixteenth, she not only did not look at him, she never saw him again because he now lived in the same house, eating at the same table, using her brother's saddle-horse to attend to his and her father's interminable business. He would pass her in the hall where her brother held her, dressed to go out to the waiting buggy, while his hard raging hand explored to see if she had the corset on, and she would not see him.

She faced him across the table to eat twice a day because she ate her own breakfast in the kitchen, at whatever midmorning hour her mother finally got her up, though once she was awake it was no further trouble to get her down to the table; harried at last from the kitchen by the negress or her mother, the last half-eaten biscuit in her hand and her face unwashed and looking, in the rich deshabelle of her loose hair and the sloven and not always clean garments she had groped into between bed and breakfast-table, as if she had just been surprised from a couch of illicit love by a police raid, she would meet and pass him returning to his noon meal, in the hall, and he had never been.

And so one day they clapped her into her Sunday clothes and put the rest of her things — the tawdry mail-order negligées and nightgowns, the big cheap flimsy shoes and what toilet things she had — into the tremendous bag and took her to town in the surrey and married her to him.

Ratliff was in Jefferson that Monday afternoon too. He saw the three of them cross the Square from the bank to the courthouse and followed them. He walked past the door to the Chancery Clerk's office and saw them inside; he could have waited and seen them go from there to the Circuit Clerk's office and he could have witnessed the marriage, but he did not. He did not need to. He knew what was happening now and he had already gone on to the station, there waiting an hour before the train was due, and he was not wrong; he saw the straw suitcase and the big telescope bag go into the vestibule, in that juxtaposition no more paradoxical and bizarre; he saw the calm beautiful mask beneath the Sunday hat once more beyond a moving window, looking at nothing, and that was all.

If he had lived in Frenchman's Bend itself during that spring and summer, he would have known no more — a little lost village, nameless, without grace, forsaken, yet which wombed once by chance and accident one blind seed of the spendthrift Olympian ejaculation and did not even know it, without tumescence conceived, and bore — one bright brief summer, concentric, during which three fairly well-

horsed buggies stood in steady rotation along a picket fence or spun along adjacent roads between the homes and the crossroads stores and the schoolhouses and churches where people gathered for pleasure or at least for escape, and then overnight and simultaneously were seen no more; then eccentric:

buggies gone, vanished — a lean, loose-jointed, cotton-socked, shrewd, ruthless old man, the splendid girl with her beautiful masklike face, the froglike creature which barely reached her shoulder, cashing a cheque, buying a licence, taking a train — a word, a single will to believe born of envy and old deathless regret, murmured from cabin to cabin above the washing pots and the sewing, from wagon to horseman in roads and lanes or from rider to halted plough in field furrows; the word, the dream and wish of all male under sun capable of harm — the young who only dreamed yet of the ruins they were still incapable of; the sick and the maimed sweating in sleepless beds, impotent for the harm they willed to do;

the old, now-glandless earth-creeping, the very buds and blossoms, the garlands of whose yellowed triumphs had long fallen into the profitless dust, embalmed now and no more dead to the living world if they were sealed in buried vaults, behind the impregnable matronly calico of others' grandchildren's grandmothers — the word, with its implications of lost triumphs and defeats of unimaginable splendour — and which beast: to have that word, that dream and hope for future, or to have had need to flee that word and dream, for past. Even one of the actual buggies remained.

Ratliff was to see it, discovered a few months afterward, standing empty and with propped shafts in a stable shed a few miles from the village, gathering dust; chickens roosted upon it, steadily streaking and marring the once-bright varnish with limelike droppings, until the next harvest, the money-time, when the father of its late driver sold it to a negro farmhand, after which it would be seen passing through the village a few times each year perhaps recognised, perhaps now, while its new owner married and began to get a family and then turn grey, spilling children, no longer glittering, its wheels wired upright in

succession by crossed barrel staves until staves and delicate wheels both vanished, translated apparently in motion at some point into stout, not new, slightly smaller wagon wheels, giving it a list, the list too interchangeable, ranging from quarter to quarter between two of its passing appearances behind a succession of spavined and bony horses and mules in wire- and rope-patched harness, as if its owner had horsed it ten minutes ago out of a secret boneyard for this particular final swan-song's apotheosis which, woefully misinformed as to its own capacities, was each time not the last.

But when he at last turned his little tough team toward Frenchman's Bend again, Bookwright and Tull had long since returned home and told it. It was now September. The cotton was open and spilling into the fields; the very air smelled of it. In field after field as he passed along the pickers, arrested in stooping attitudes, seemed fixed amid the constant surf of bursting bolls like piles in surf, the long, partly-filled sacks streaming away behind them like rigid frozen flags. The air was hot, vivid and breathless — a final fierce concentration of the doomed and dying summer.

The feet of the small horses twinkled rapidly in the dust and he sat, loose and easy to the motion, the reins loose in one hand, inscrutable of face, his eyes darkly impenetrable, quizzical and bemused, remembering, still seeing them — the bank, the courthouse, the station; the calm beautiful mask seen once more beyond a moving pane of glass, then gone. But that was all right, it was just meat, just galmeat, he thought, and God knows there was a plenty of that, yesterday and tomorrow too.

Of course there was the waste, not wasted on Snopes but on all of them, himself included — — Except was it waste? he thought suddenly, seeing the face again for an instant as though he had recalled not only the afternoon but the train too — the train itself, which had served its day and schedule and so, despite the hard cars, the locomotive, no more existed.

He looked at the face again. It had not been tragic, and now it was not even damned, since from behind it there looked out only another mortal natural enemy of the masculine race.

And beautiful: but then, so did the highwayman's daggers and pistols make a pretty shine on him; and now as he watched, the lost calm face vanished. It went fast; it was as if the moving glass were in retrograde, it too merely a part, a figment, of the concentric flotsam and jetsam of the translation, and there remained only the straw bag, the minute tie, the constant jaw:

Until at last, baffled, they come to the Prince his self. "Sire," they says. "He just won't. We can't do nothing with him."
"What?" the Prince hollers.

"He says a bargain is a bargain. That he swapped in good faith and honour, and now he has come to redeem it, like the law says. And we can't find it," they says. "We done looked everywhere. It wasn't no big one to begin with nohow, and we was specially careful in handling it. We sealed it up in a asbestos matchbox and put the box in a separate compartment to itself. But when we opened the compartment, it was gone. The matchbox was there and the seal wasn't broke. But there wasn't nothing in the matchbox but a little kind of dried-upsmear under one edge. And now he has come to redeem it. But how can we redeem him into eternal torment without his soul?"

"Damn it," the Prince hollers. "Give him one of the extra ones. Ain't there souls turning up here everyday, banging at the door and raising all kinds of hell to get in here, even bringing letters from Congressmen, that we never even heard of? Give him one of them?"

"We tried that," they says. "He won't do it. He says he don't want no more and no less than his legal interest according to what the banking and the civil laws states in black and white is hisn. He says he has come prepared to meet his bargain and signature, and he sholy expects you of all folks to meet yourn."

“Tell him he can go then. Tell him he had the wrong address. That there ain’t nothing on the books here against him. Tell him his note was lost — if there ever was one. Tell him we had a flood, even a freeze.”

“He won’t go, not without his — —”

“Turn him out. Eject him.”

“How?” they says. “He’s got the law.”

“Oho,” the Prince says. “A sawmill advocate. I see. All right,” he says.

“Fix it. Why bother me?” And he set back and raised his glass and blowed the flames offen it like he thought they was already gone. Except they wasn’t gone.

“Fix what?” they says.

“His bribe!” the Prince hollers. “His bribe! Didn’t you just tell me he come in here with his mouth full of law? Did you expect him to hand you a wrote-out bill for it?”

“We tried that,” they says. “He won’t bribe.”

Then the Prince set up there and sneered at them with his sharp litter tongue and no talkback, about how likely what they thought was a bribe would be a cash discount with maybe a trip to the Legislature throwed in, and them standing there and listening and taking it because he was the Prince. Only there was one of them that had been there in the time of the Prince’s pa.

He used to dandle the Prince on his knee when the Prince was a boy; he even made the Prince a little pitchfork and learned him how to use it practising on Chinees and Dagoes and Polynesians, until his arms would get strong enough to handle his share of white folks.

He didn’t appreciate this and he drewed his self up and he looked at the Prince and he says,

“Your father made, unreproved, a greater failure. Though maybe a greater man tempted a greater man.”

“Or you have been reprov'd by a lesser,” the Prince snaps back. But he remembered them old days too, when the old fellow was smiling fond and proud on his crude youthful inventions with BB size lava and brimstone and such, and bragging to the old Prince at night about how the boy done that day, about what he invented to do to that little Dago or Chinee that even the grown folks hadn't thought of yet. So he apologised and got the old fellow smoothed down, and says, “What did you offer him?”

“The gratifications.”

“And — — ?”

“He has them. He says that for a man that only chews, any spittoon will do.”

“And then?”

“The vanities.”

“And — — ?”

“He has them. He brought a gross with him in the suitcase, specially made up for him outen asbestos, with unmeltable snaps.”

“Then what does he want?” the Prince hollers. “What does he want? Paradise?” And the old one looks at him and at first the Prince thinks it's because he ain't forgot that sneer. But he finds out different.

“No,” the old one says. “He wants hell.”

And now for a while there ain't a sound in that magnificent kingly hall hung about with the proud battle-torn smokes of the old martyrs but the sound of frying and the faint constant screams of authentic Christians. But the Prince was the same stock and blood his pa was. In a flash the sybaritic indolence and the sneers was gone; it might have been the old Prince his self that stood there. “Bring him to me,” he says. “Then leave us.”

So they brought him in and went away and closed the door. His clothes was still smoking a little, though soon he had done brushed most of it off. He come up to the Throne, chewing, toting the straw suitcase.

“Well?” the Prince says.

He turned his head and spit, the spit frying off the floor quick in a little blue ball of smoke. “I come about that soul,” he says.

“So they tell me,” the Prince says. “But you have no soul.”

“Is that my fault?” he says.

“Is it mine?” the Prince says. “Do you think I created you?”

“Then who did?” he says. And he had the Prince there and the Prince knowed it. So the Prince set out to bribe him his self. He named over all the temptations, the gratifications, the satieties; it sounded sweeter than music the way the Prince fetched them up in detail.

But he didn’t even stop chewing, standing there holding the straw suitcase. Then the Prince said, “Look yonder,” pointing at the wall, and there they was, in order and rite for him to watch, watching his self performing them all, even the ones he hadn’t even thought about inventing to his self yet, until they was done, the last unimaginable one. And he just turned his head and spit another scorch of tobacco on to the floor and the Prince flung back on the throne in very exasperation and baffled rage.

“Then what do you want?” the Prince says. “What do you want? Paradise?”

“I hadn’t figured on it,” he says. “Is it yours to offer?”

“Then whose is it?” the Prince says. And the Prince knowed he had him there. In fact, the Prince knowed he had him all the time, ever since they had told him how he had walked in the door with his mouth already full of law; he even leaned over and rung the firebell so the old one could be there to see and hear how it was done, then he leaned back on the Throne and looked down at him standing there with his

straw suitcase, and says, “You have admitted and even argued that I created you.

Therefore your soul was mine all the time. And therefore when you offered it as security for this note, you offered that which you did not possess and so laid yourself liable to — —”

“I have never disputed that,” he says.

“ — criminal action. So take your bag and — —” the Prince says. “Eh?” the Prince says. “What did you say?”

“I have never disputed that,” he says.

“What?” the Prince says. “Disputed what?” Except that it don’t make any noise, and now the Prince is leaning forward, and now he feels that ere hot floor under his knees and he can feel his self grabbing and hauling at his throat to get the words out like he was digging potatoes outen hard ground. “Who are you?” he says, choking and gasping and his eyes a-popping up at him setting there with that straw suitcase on the Throne among the bright, crown-shaped flames.

“Take Paradise!” the Prince screams. “Take it! Take it!” And the wind roars up and the dark roars down and the Prince scrabbling across the floor, clawing and scrabbling at that locked door, screaming. . . .

BOOK THREE. THE LONG SUMMER

CHAPTER ONE

1

SITTING IN THE halted buckboard, Ratliff watched the old fat white horse emerge from Varner’s lot and come down the lane beside the picket fence, surrounded and preceded by the rich sonorous organ-tone of its entrails. So he’s back to the horse again, he thought. He’s got to straddle his legs at least once to keep on moving. So he had to pay that too.

Not only the deed to the land and the two-dollar wedding licence and them two tickets to Texas and the cash, but the riding in that new buggy with somebody to do the driving, to get that patented necktie out of his store and out of his house. The horse came up and stopped, apparently of its own accord, beside the buckboard in which Ratliff sat neat, decorous, and grave like a caller in a house of death.

“You must have been desperate,” he said quietly. He meant no insult. He was not even thinking of Varner’s daughter’s shame or of his daughter at all. He meant the land, the Old Frenchman place. He had never for one moment believed that it had no value. He might have believed this if anyone else had owned it.

But the very fact that Varner had ever come into possession of it and still kept it, apparently making no effort to sell it or do anything else with it, was proof enough for him. He declined to believe that Varner ever had been or ever would be stuck with anything; that if he acquired it, he got it cheaper than anyone else could have, and if he kept it, it was too valuable to sell.

In the case of the Old Frenchman place he could not see why this was so, but the fact that Varner had bought it and still had it was sufficient. So when Varner finally did let it go, Ratliff believed it was because Varner had at last got the price for which he had been holding it for twenty years, or at least some sufficient price, whether it was in money or not. And when he considered who Varner had relinquished possession to, he believed that the price had been necessity and not cash.

Varner knew that Ratliff was thinking it. He sat the old horse and looked down at Ratliff, the little hard eyes beneath their bushy rust-coloured brows glinting at the man who was a good deal nearer his son in spirit and intellect and physical appearance too than any of his own get. “So you think pure liver ain’t going to choke that cat,” he said.

“Maybe with that ere little piece of knotted-up string in it?” Ratliff said. “What little piece of knotted-up string?”

"I don't know," Ratliff said.

"Hah," Varner said. "You going my way?"

"I reckon not," Ratliff said. "I'm going to mosey down to the store." Unless maybe he even feels he can set around it too again now, he thought.

"So am I," Varner said. "I got that damn trial this morning. That damn Jack Houston and that What's-his-name. Mink. About that durned confounded scrub yearling."

"You mean Houston sued him?" Ratliff said. "Houston?"

"No, no. Houston just kept the yearling up. He kept it up all last summer and Snopes let him pasture and feed it all winter, and it run in Houston's pasture all this spring and summer too. Then last week for some reason he decided to go and get it. I reckon he figured to beef it. So he went to Houston's with a rope.

He was in Houston's pasture, trying to catch it, when Houston come up and stopped him. He finally had to draw his pistol, he claims. He says Snopes looked at the pistol and said, 'That's what you'll need. Because you know I ain't got one.'

And Houston said all right, they would lay the pistol on a fence post and back off one post a-piece on each side and count three and run for it."

"Why didn't they?" Ratliff said.

"Hah," Varner said shortly. "Come on. I want to get it over with. I got some business to tend to."

"You go on," Ratliff said. "I'll mosey on slow. I ain't got no yearling calf nor trial neither today."

So the old fat clean horse (it looked always as if it had just come back from the dry-cleaner's; you could almost smell the benzene) moved on again, with a rich preliminary internal chord, going on along the gapped and weathered picket fence.

Ratliff sat in the still-motionless buckboard and watched it and the lean, loose-jointed figure which, with the exception of the three-year runabout interval, had bestridden it, the same saddle between them, for twenty-five years, thinking how if, as dogs do, the white horse or his own two either had snuffed along that fence for yellow-wheeled buggies now, they would not have found them, thinking: And all the other two-legged feice in this country between thirteen and eighty can pass here now without feeling no urge to stop and raise one of them against it. And yet those buggies were still there. He could see them, sense them.

Something was; it was too much to have vanished that quickly and completely — the air polluted and rich and fine which had flowed over and shaped that abundance and munificence, which had done the hydraulic office to that almost unbroken progression of chewed food, which had held intact the constant impact of those sixteen years of sitting down: so why should not that body at the last have been the unscalable sierra, the rosy virginal mother of barricades for no man to conquer scot-free or even to conquer at all, but on the contrary to be hurled back and down, leaving no scar, no mark of himself (That ere child ain't going to look no more like nobody this country ever saw than she did, he thought) — the buggy merely a part of the whole, a minor and trivial adjunct, like the buttons on her clothing, the clothes themselves, the cheap beads which one of the three of them had given her.

That would never have been for him, not even at the prime summer peak of what he and Varner both would have called his tomcatting's heyday.

He knew that without regret or grief, he would not have wanted it to be (It would have been like giving me a pipe organ, that never had and never would know any more than how to wind up the second-hand music-box I had just swapped a mailbox for, he thought) and he even thought of the cold and froglike victor without jealousy: and this not because he knew that, regardless of whatever Snopes had expected or would have called what it was he now had, it would not be victory.

What he felt was outrage at the waste, the useless squandering; at a situation intrinsically and inherently wrong by any economy, like building a log dead-fall and baiting it with a freshened heifer to catch a rat; or no, worse: as though the gods themselves had funnelled all the concentrated bright wet-slanted unparadised June onto a dung-heap, breeding pismires.

Beyond the white horse, beyond the corner of the picket fence, the faint, almost overgrown lane turned off which led to the Old Frenchman place. The horse attempted to turn into it until Varner hauled it roughly back. Not to mention the poorhouse, Ratliff thought. But then, he wouldn't have been infested. He shook his own reins slightly. "Boys," he said, "advance."

The team, the buckboard, went on in the thick dust of the spent summer. Now he could see the village proper — the store, the blacksmith shop, the metal roof of the gin with a thin rapid shimmer of exhaust above the stack. It was now the third week in September; the dry, dust-laden air vibrated steadily to the rapid beat of the engine, though so close were the steam and the air in temperature that no exhaust was visible but merely a thin feverish shimmer of mirage. The very hot, vivid air, which seemed to be filled with the slow laborious plaint of laden wagons, smelled of lint; wisps of it clung among the dust-stiffened roadside weeds and small gouts of cotton lay imprinted by hoof- and wheel-marks into the trodden dust.

He could see the wagons too, the long motionless line of them behind the patient, droop-headed mules, waiting to advance a wagon-length at a time, onto the scales and then beneath the suction pipe where Jody Varner would now be again, what with a second new clerk in the store — the new clerk exactly like the old one but a little smaller, a little compacter, as if they had both been cut with the same die but in inverse order to appearance, the last first and after the edges of the die were dulled and spread a little — with his little, full, bright-pink mouth like a kitten's button and his bright, quick, amoral eyes like a chipmunk

and his air of merry and incorrigible and unflagging conviction of the inherent constant active dishonesty of all men, including himself.

Jody Varner was at the scales; Ratliff craned his turkey's neck in passing and saw the heavy bagging broadcloth, the white collarless shirt with a yellow halfmoon of sweat at each armpit, the dusty, lint-wisped black hat. So I reckon maybe everybody is satisfied now, he thought.

Or everybody except one, he added to himself because before he reached the store Will Varner came out of it and got onto the white horse which someone had just untied and held for him, and on the gallery beyond Ratliff now saw the eruption of men whose laden wagons stood along the road opposite, waiting for the scales, and as he drove up to the gallery in his turn, Mink Snopes and the other Snopes, the proverbist, the school-teacher (he now wore a new frock-coat which, for all its newness, looked no less like it belonged to him than the old one in which Ratliff had first seen him did) came down the steps.

Ratliff saw the intractable face now cold and still with fury behind the single eyebrow; beside it the rodent's face of the teacher, the two of them seeming to pass him in a whirling of flung unco-ordinated hands and arms out of the new, black, swirling frock-coat, the voice that, also like the gestures, seemed to be not servant but master of the body which supplied blood and wind to them:

“Be patient; Cæsar never built Rome in one day; patience is the horse that runs steadiest; justice is the right man's bread but poison for the evil man if you give it time. I done looked the law up; Will Varner has misread it pure and simple. We'll take a appeal.

We will — —” until the other turned his furious face with its single violent emphasis of eyebrow upon him and said fiercely: “ — — t!” They went on. Ratliff moved up to the gallery. While he was tying his team, Houston came out, followed by the big hound, and mounted and rode away. Ratliff mounted to the gallery where now at least twenty men were gathered, Bookwright among them.

“The plaintiff seems to had legal talent,” he said. “What was the verdict?”

“When Snopes pays Houston three dollars pasturage, he can get his bull,” Quick said.

“Sho now,” Ratliff said. “Wasn’t his lawyer even allowed nothing by the court?”

“The lawyer was fined what looked like the considerable balance of one uncompleted speech,” Bookwright said. “If that’s what you want to know.”

“Well well,” Ratliff said. “Well well well. So Will couldn’t do nothing to the next succeeding Snopes but stop him from talking. Not that anymore would have done any good. Snopes can come and Snopes can go, but Will Varner looks like he is fixing to Snopes forever. Or Varner will Snopes forever — take your pick. What is it the fellow says? off with the old and on with the new; the old job at the old stand, maybe a new fellow doing the jobbing but it’s the same old stern getting reamed out?” Bookwright was looking at him.

“If you would stand closer to the door, he could hear you a heap better,” he said.

“Sholy,” Ratliff said. “Big ears have little pitchers, the world beats a track to the rich man’s hog-pen but it ain’t every family has a new lawyer, not to mention a prophet. Waste not want not, except that a full waist don’t need no prophet to prophesy a profit and just whose.” Now they were all watching him — the smooth, impenetrable face with something about the eyes and the lines beside the mouth which they could not read.

“Look here,” Bookwright said. “What’s the matter with you?”

“Why, nothing,” Ratliff said. “What could be wrong with nothing nowhere nohow in this here best of all possible worlds? Likely the same folks that sells him the neckties will have a pair of long black stockings

too. And any sign-painter can paint him a screen to set up alongside the bed to look like looking up at a wall full of store shelves of canned goods — —”

“Here,” Bookwright said.

“ — so he can know to do what every man and woman that ever seen her between thirteen and Old Man Hundred-and-One McCallum has been thinking about for twenty-nine days now. Of course, he could fix it with a shed roof to climb up on and a window to crawl through too. But that ain’t necessary; that ain’t his way. No, sir.

This here man ain’t no trifling eavecat. This here man — —” A little boy of eight or ten came up, trotting, in overalls, and mounted the steps and gave them a quick glance out of eyes as blue and innocent as periwinkles and trotted intently into the store. “ — this here man that all he needs is just to set back there in the store until after a while one comes in to get a nickel’s worth of lard, not buy it: come and ax Mr. Snopes for it, and he gives it to her and writes in a book about it and her not knowing no more about what he wrote in that book and why then she does how that ere lard got into that tin bucket with the picture of a hog on it that even she can tell is a hog, and he puts the bucket back and puts the book away and goes and shuts the door and puts the bar up and she has done already went around behind the counter and laid down on the floor because maybe she thinks by now that’s what you have to do, not to pay for the lard because that’s done already been wrote down in the book, but to get out of that door again — —”

Ratliff moved toward the steps. He began to descend. He was still talking. He continued to talk as he went down the steps, not looking back; nobody could have told whether he was actually talking to the men behind him or not, if he was talking to anyone or not: “ — goes and puts the bar up on the inside and comes back and this here black brute from the field with the field sweat still drying on her that she don’t know it’s sweat she smells because she ain’t never smelled nothing else, just like a mule don’t know it’s mule he smells for the

same reason, and the one garment to her name and that's the one she's laying there on the floor behind the counter in and looking up past him at them rows of little tight cans with fishes and devils on them that she don't know what's on the inside either because she ain't never had the dime or the fifteen cents that even if he was to give her the nickel, not to mention the lard she come after, she would have after the next two or three times she come after lard, but just heard somewhere one day the name of what folks said was inside them, laying there and looking up at them every time his head would get out of the way long enough, and says, 'Mr. Snopes, whut you ax fer dem sardines?' "

2

As winter became spring and the spring itself advanced, he had less and less of darkness to flee through and from. Soon it was dark only when he left the barn, backed carefully, with one down-groping foot, from the harness-room where his quilt-and-straw bed was, and turned his back on the long rambling loom of the house where last night's new drummer-faces snored on the pillows of the beds which he had now learned to make as well as Mrs. Littlejohn could; by April it was the actual thin depthless suspension of false dawn itself, in which he could already see and know himself to be an entity solid and cohered in visibility instead of the uncohered all-sentience of fluid and nerve-springing terror alone and terribly free in the primal sightless inimicality. That was gone now.

Now the terror existed only during that moment after the false dawn, that interval's second between it and the moment which birds and animals know: when the night at last succumbs to day; and then he would begin to hurry, trot, not to get there quicker but because he must get back soon, without fear and calmly now in the growing visibility, the gradation from grey through primrose to the morning's ultimate gold, to the brow of the final hill, to let himself downward into the creekside mist and lie in the drenched myriad waking life of grasses and listen for her approach.

Then he would hear her, coming down the creekside in the mist. It would not be after one hour, two hours, three; the dawn would be empty, the moment and she would not be, then he would hear her and he would lie drenched in the wet grass, serene and one and indivisible in joy, listening to her approach. He would smell her; the whole mist reeked with her; the same malleate hands of mist which drew along his prone drenched flanks played her pearled barrel too and shaped them both somewhere in immediate time, already married. He would not move.

He would lie amid the waking instant of earth's teeming minute life, the motionless fronds of water-heavy grasses stooping into the mist before his face in black, fixed curves, along each parabola of which the marching drops held in minute magnification the dawn's rosy miniatures, smelling and even tasting the rich, slow, warm barn-reek milk-reek, the flowing immemorial female, hearing the slow planting and the plopping suck of each deliberate cloven mud-spreading hoof, invisible still in the mist loud with its hymeneal choristers.

Then he would see her; the bright thin horns of morning, of sun, would blow the mist away and reveal her, planted, blonde, dew-pearled, standing in the parted water of the ford, blowing into the water the thick, warm, heavy, milk-laden breath; and lying in the drenched grasses, his eyes now blind with sun, he would wallow faintly from thigh to thigh, making a faint, thick, hoarse moaning sound.

Because he cannot make one with her through the day's morning and noon and evening. It is not that he must return to work. There is no work, no travail, no muscular and spiritual reluctance to overcome, constantly war against; yesterday was not, tomorrow is not, today is merely a placid and virginal astonishment at the creeping ridge of dust and trash in front of the broom, at sheets coming smooth and taut at certain remembered motions of the hands — a routine grooved, irkless; a firm gentle compelling hand, a voice to hold and control him through joy out of kindness as a dog is taught and held.

It is because he can go no farther. He tried it. It was the third time he lay and waited for her; the mist blew away and he saw her and this time there was no today even — no beds to return to, no hand, no voice: he repudiated fidelity and even habit. He rose and approached her, speaking to her, his hand extended.

She raised her head and looked at him and scrambled up the farther bank, out of the water. He followed, stepping gingerly down into the water, and began to cross, lifting his feet high at each step, moaning a little, urgent and concerned yet not to alarm her more. He fell once, at full length into the water, making no effort to catch himself, vanishing completely with one loud cry and rising again, streaming, his breath already indrawn to cry again.

But he stopped the cry, speaking to her instead, and climbed out onto the bank and approached her again, his hand extended. This time she ran, rushed on a short distance and turned, her head lowered; she whirled and rushed away again before his hand touched her, he following, speaking to her, urgent and cajoling. Finally she broke back past him and went back to the ford.

She ran faster than he could; trotting, moaning, he watched the vain stippling of leaf-shadows as they fled across the intact and escaping shape of love as she recrossed the creek and galloped on up the path for a short way, where once more she stopped to graze.

He ceased to moan. He hurried back to the creek and began to cross it, lifting his feet high out of the water at each step as if he expected each time to find solidity there, or perhaps at each step did not know whether he would or not. This time he did not fall.

But as soon as he climbed the bank, she moved again, on up the path, not galloping now but purposefully, so that he once more had to run, once more steadily losing ground, moaning again now with that urgent and now alarmed and bewildered amazement. She was now retracing the path by which she had appeared that morning and all the other mornings.

Probably he did not even know it, was paying no attention at all to where he was going, seeing nothing but the cow; perhaps he did not even realise they were in the lot, even when she went on across it and entered the milking shed which she had left less than an hour ago, though he probably knew generally where she would come from each morning, since he knew most of the adjacent countryside and was never disoriented: objects became fluid in darkness but they did not alter in place and juxtaposition.

Perhaps he did not even comprehend that she was in her stable, but only that she had stopped at last, ceased to flee at last, because at once he stopped the alarmed and urgent moaning and followed her into the shed, speaking to her again, murmurous, drooling, and touched her with his hand. She whirled; possibly he saw, not that she could not, but only that she did not flee.

He touched her again, his hand, his voice, thin and hungry with promise. Then he was lying on his back, her heels were still thudding against the plank wall beside his head and then the dog was standing over him and an instant later the man was hauling him savagely to his feet by the slack of his shirt. Then he was outside the shed while Houston still clutched him by the shirt and cursed in what he could not know was not rage but angry exasperation. The dog stood a few feet away, watching.

“Ike H-mope,” he said. “Ike H-mope.”

“Ike hell,” Houston said, cursing, shaking him. “Go on!” he said. “Git!” He spoke to the dog. “Take him out of here. Easy, now.” Now the dog shouted at him. It did not move yet, it merely shouted once; it was as if it said “Boo!” and, still moaning, trying now to talk to the man with his blasted eyes, he moved on toward the still-open gate which he had just entered.

Now the dog moved too, just behind him. He looked back at the shed, the cow; he tried again to speak to the man with his eyes, moaning,

drooling, when the dog shouted at him again, once, taking one pace toward him but no more, whereupon he gave the dog one terrified glance and broke, trotting toward the gate.

The dog shouted again, three times in rapid succession, and he cried now, hoarse and abject, running now, the thick reluctant hips working with a sort of abject and hopeless unco-ordination. "Easy, now!" Houston shouted. He did not hear. He heard only the feet of the dog just behind him. He ran heavily, bellowing.

So now he can go no farther. He can lie in the grass and wait for her and hear her and then see her when the mist parts, and that is all. So he would rise from the grass and stand, still swaying faintly from side to side and making the faint, hoarse sound. Then he would turn and mount the hill, stumbling a little because his eyes were still full of sun yet.

But his bare feet would know the dust of the road, and in it again, he would begin to trot again, hurrying, still moaning, his shadow shortening on the dust ahead and the mounting sun warm on his back and already drying the dust on his damp overalls; and so back to the house, the littered rooms and the unmade beds.

Soon he would be sweeping again, stopping only occasionally to make the hoarse sound of bafflement and incredulous grieving, then watching again with peaceful and absorbed astonishment the creeping ridge of dust and trash before the moving broom. Because even while sweeping he would still see her, blonde among the purpling shadows of the pasture, not fixed amid the suppurant tender green but integer of spring's concentrated climax, by it crowned, garlanded.

He was upstairs sweeping when he saw the smoke. He knew exactly where it was — the hill, the sedge-and-brier overgrown hill beyond the creek. Although it was three miles away, he can even see her backing away before the flames and hear her bellowing. He began to run where he stood, carrying the broom. He ran blundering at the wall, the high small window through which he had seen the smoke, which he could

not have passed through even if he could have taken the eighteen-foot drop to the earth, as a moth or a trapped bird might.

Then the corridor door was facing him and without pausing he ran to it and through it, still carrying the broom, and on down the corridor toward the stairs, when Mrs. Littlejohn emerged from a second bedroom and stopped him. "You, Isaac," she said. "You, Isaac." She did not raise her voice and she did not touch him, yet he stopped, moaning, the empty eyes striving at her, picking his feet up in turn like a cat standing on something hot.

Then she put her hand out and took him by the shoulder and turned him and he went obediently back up the corridor and into the room again, moaning; he even made a stroke or two with the broom before he saw the smoke again through the window. This time he found the corridor door almost at once, though he did not approach it.

Instead he stood for a moment, looking at the broom in his hands, whimpering, then at the bed, smooth and neat where he had just made it up, and he stopped whimpering and went to the bed and turned the covers back and put the broom into it, the straw end on the pillow like a face, and drew the covers up smooth again, tucking them about the broom with that paradoxical unco-ordinated skill and haste, and left the room.

He made no sound now. He did not move on tiptoe, yet he went down the corridor with astonishing silence and celerity; he had reached the stairs and begun to descend before Mrs. Littlejohn could have emerged from the other room.

At first, three years ago, he would not try to descend them. He had ascended them alone; nobody ever knew if he had walked or crawled up, or if perhaps he had mounted them without realising he was doing so, altering his position in altitude, depth perception not functioning in reverse. Mrs. Littlejohn had gone to the store.

Someone passing the house heard him and when she returned there were five or six people in the hall, looking up at where he clung to the rail at the top step, his eyes shut, bellowing. He still clung to the rail, bellowing and tugging back, when she tried to break his grip and draw him downward. He stayed upstairs three days while she carried food to him and people would come in from miles away and say, "Ain't you got him down yet?" before she finally coaxed him to attempt to descend.

And even then it took several minutes, while faces gathered in the lower hall to watch as the firm, gentle, unremitting hand, the cold, grim, patient voice, drew him, clinging to the rail and bellowing, step by step downward. For a while after that he would fall down them each time he tried to descend. He would know he was going to fall; he would step blindly and already moaning onto nothing and plunge, topple, sprawling and bumping, terrified not by pain but by amazement, to lie at last on the floor of the lower hall, bellowing, his blasted eyes staring aghast and incredulous at nothing.

But at last he learned to negotiate them. Now he merely slowed a little before stepping, not confidently quite but not with alarm, off onto that which at each successive step, was not quite space; was almost nothing but at each advancing instant, not quite was, and hurried on through the lower hall and into the backyard, where he paused again and began to sway from side to side and moan, his empty face now filled with baffled bewilderment.

Because he could not see the smoke from here and now all he remembers is the empty dawn-hill from which he will let himself downward into the creekside mist to wait for her, and it is wrong now. Because he stands in sun, visible — himself, earth, trees, house — already cohered and fixed in visibility; no darkness to flee through and from, and this is wrong.

So he stood, baffled, moaning and swaying for a time, then he moved again, across the yard to the lot gate. He had learned to open it too. He turned the catch and the gate vanished from between its two posts; he passed through and after a moment he found the gate where it had

swung to against the fence and closed it and turned the latch and went on across the sun-glared lot, moaning, and entered the hallway of the stable.

Because of his sun-contracted pupils, he could not see at once. But then, it always was dark when he entered the stable on his way to bed, so at once he ceased to moan and went straight to the door to the harness-room, moving now with actual assurance, and grasped the door-jamb with both hands and raised his foot to the step, and, his down-groping foot already on the ground, he backed out of darkness and into visibility, turning, visibility roaring soundless down about him, establishing him intact and cohered in it and already trotting, running, toward the crest where he will let himself downward into the creekside mist to lie and wait for her, on across the lot and through the spread place in the wire fence.

His overalls snagged on the wire but he ripped free, making no sound now, and into the road, running, his thick female thighs working, his face, his eyes, urgent and alarmed.

When he reached the hill three miles away, he was still trotting; when he turned from the road and mounted to the crest of the hill and saw the smoke beyond the creek, he made the hoarse, aghast sound again and ran on down the hill and through the now-dry grass in which at dawn he had lain, and to the creek, the ford. He did not hesitate.

He ran full-tilt off the bank and onto the rimpled water, continuing to run even after he began to fall, plunging face down into the water, completely submerged, and rose, streaming, knee-deep, bellowing. He lifted one foot above the surface and stepped forward as though onto a raised floor and took another step running before he fell.

This time his outflung hands touched the farther bank and this time when he rose he actually heard the cow's voice, faint and terrified, from beyond the smokepall on the other hill. He raised one foot above the surface and ran again. When he fell this time he lay on dry land. He scrambled up and ran in his sodden overalls, across the pasture and on

up the other hill, on whose crest the smokepall lay without wind, grading from blue to delicate mauve and lilac and then copper beneath the meridional sun.

A mile back he had left the rich, broad, flat river-bottom country and entered the hills — a region which topographically was the final blue and dying echo of the Appalachian mountains. Chickasaw Indians had owned it, but after the Indians it had been cleared where possible for cultivation, and after the Civil War, forgotten save by small peripatetic sawmills which had vanished too now, their sites marked only by the mounds of rotting sawdust which were not only their gravestones but the monuments of a people's heedless greed.

Now it was a region of scrubby second-growth pine and oak among which dogwood bloomed until it too was cut to make cotton spindles, and old fields where not even a trace of furrow showed any more, gutted and gullied by forty years of rain and frost and heat into plateaus choked with rank sedge and briers loved of rabbits and quail coveys, and crumbling ravines striated red and white with alternate sand and clay.

It was toward one of these plateaus that he now ran, running in ashes without knowing it since the earth here had had time to cool, running among the blackened stubble of last year's sedge dotted with small islands of this year's incombustible green and the blasted heads of tiny blue-and-white daisies, and so onto the crest of the hill, the plateau.

The smoke lay like a wall before him; beyond it he could hear the steady terrified bellowing of the cow. He ran into the smoke and toward the voice. The earth was now hot to his feet.

He began to snatch them quickly up; he cried once himself, hoarse and amazed, whereupon, as though in answer, the smoke, the circumambience itself, screamed back at him. The sound was everywhere, above and beneath, funnelling downward at him; he heard the hooves and as he paused, his breath indrawn, the horse appeared,

materialised furiously out of the smoke, monstrous and distorted, wild-eyed and with tossing mane, bearing down upon him. He screamed too.

For an instant they yelled face to face, the wild eyes, the yellow teeth, the long gullet red with ravening gleeful triumph, stooping at him and then on as the horse swerved without breaking, the wind, the fierce dragon-reek of its passage, blasting at his hair and garments; it was gone. He ran again toward the cow's voice.

When he heard the horse behind him again he did not even look back. He did not even scream again. He just ran, running, as again the earth, the smoke, filled and became thunderous with the hard, rapid hoofbeats and again the intolerable voice screamed down at him and he flung both arms about his head and fell sprawling as the wind, the dragon-reek, blasted at him again as the maddened horse soared over his prone body and vanished once more.

He scrambled up and ran. The cow was quite near now and he saw the fire — a tender, rosy, creeping thread low in the smoke between him and the location of the cow's voice. Each time his feet touched the earth now he gave a short shriek like an ejaculation, trying to snatch his foot back before it could have taken his weight, then turning immediately in aghast amazement to the other foot which he had for the moment forgotten, so that presently he was not progressing at all but merely moving in one spot, like a dance, when he heard the horse coming at him again. He screamed.

His voice and that of the horse became one voice, wild, furious and without hope, and he ran into and through the fire and burst into air, sun, visibility again, shedding flames which sucked away behind him like a tattered garment. The cow stood at the edge of a ravine about ten feet away, facing the fire, her head lowered, bellowing. He had just time to reach her and turn, his body intervened and his arms about his head, as the frantic horse burst out of the smoke and bore down upon them.

It did not even swerve. It took off almost without gathering, at full stride. The teeth, the wild eyes, the long red gullet, stooped at him, framed out of a swirled rigidity of forelock and mane, the entire animal floating overhead in monstrous deliberation. The air was filled with furious wings and the four crescent-glints of shod hooves as, still screaming, the horse vanished beyond the ravine's lip, sucking first the cow and then himself after it as though by the violent vacuum of its passing.

Earth became perpendicular and fled upward — the yawn of void without even the meretricious reassurance of graduated steps. He made no sound as the three of them plunged down the crumbling sheer, at the bottom of which the horse rolled to its feet without stopping and galloped on down the ditch and where he, lying beneath the struggling and bellowing cow, received the violent relaxing of her fear-constricted bowels. Overhead, in the down draft of the ravine, the last ragged flame tongued over the lip, tip-curved, and vanished, swirled off into the windless stain of pale smoke on the sunny sky.

At first he couldn't do anything with her at all. She scrambled to her feet, facing him, her head lowered, bellowing. When he moved toward her, she whirled and ran at the crumbling sheer of the slope, scrambling furiously at the vain and shifting sand as though in a blind paroxysm of shame, to escape not him alone but the very scene of the outrage of privacy where she had been sprung suddenly upon and without warning from the dark and betrayed and outraged by her own treacherous biological inheritance, he following again, speaking to her, trying to tell her how this violent violation of her maiden's delicacy is no shame, since such is the very iron imperishable warp of the fabric of love.

But she would not hear. She continued to scabble at the shifting rise, until at last he set his shoulder to her hams and heaved forward.

Striving together, they mounted for a yard or so up the slope, the sand shifting and fleeing beneath their feet, before momentum and strength were spent and, locked together and motionless, they descended once

more to the floor of the ditch, planted and fixed ankle-deep in a moving block of sand like two effigies on a float.

Again, his shoulder to her hams, they rushed at the precipice and up it for a yard or more before the treacherous footing completely failed. He spoke to her, exhortative; they made a supreme effort.

But again the earth fled upward; footing, sand and all plucked violently from beneath them and rushed upward into the pale sky still faintly stained with smoke, and once more they lay inextricable and struggling on the floor of the ravine, he once more underneath, until, bellowing and never ceasing her mad threshing, the cow scrambled up and galloped on down the ditch as the horse had done, vanishing before he could get to his feet to follow.

The ravine debouched onto the creek. Almost at once he was in the pasture again, though possibly he did not realise it, seeing only the cow as she galloped on ahead. Possibly at the moment he did not even recognise the ford at once, even when the cow, slowing, walked down into the water and stopped and drank and he ran up, slowing too, moaning, urgent but not loud, not to send her once more into flight. So he approaches the bank, stilling his voice now, picking his feet up and putting them down again in one spot, his singed and scorched face urgent and tense.

But she does not move, and at last he steps down into the water, onto the water, forgetting again that it will give under his weight, crying once again not so much in surprise as in alarm lest he alarm her, and steps again forward onto the receptive solid, and touches her. She does not even stop drinking; his hand has lain on her flank for a second or two before she lifts her dripping muzzle and looks back at him, once more maiden meditant, shame-free.

Houston found them there. He came across the pasture on the horse, bareback, galloping, the hound following, and saw the thick squatting shape in the water behind the cow, clumsily washing her legs with a broken willow branch. "Is she all right?" he shouted, speaking to the

horse to slow it since he did not even have a hackamore: "Whoa. Whoa. Ho now. Ho now, damn you. — Why in hell didn't you try to catch the horse?" he shouted. "He might have broke — —" Then the other, squatting in the water, turned his scorched face and Houston recognised him.

He began to curse, checking the horse with his hand in its mane, already flinging his leg over and sliding down before the horse stopped, cursing with that fretted exasperation which was not anger, rage. He came to the creek, the hound following, and stooped and caught up a dried limb left from last winter's flood water and slashed the cow savagely with it and flung the broken end after her as she sprang forward and scrambled up the farther bank. "Git!" Houston shouted.

"Git on home, you damn whore!" The cow galloped on a few steps, then stopped and began to graze. "Take her home," Houston said to the dog. Without moving, only raising its head, the hound bayed once. The cow jerked her head up and trotted again, and he in the creek made again his faint hoarse sound, rising too as the hound rose.

But the dog did not even cross the creek, it did not even hurry; it merely followed the bank until it came opposite the cow and bayed again, once, contemptuous and peremptory. This time the cow went off at a gallop, back up the creek toward the lot, the hound following on its side of the creek. They went out of sight so. Twice more at intervals the hound bayed, one time, as though it merely shouted "Boo!" each time the cow prepared to stop.

He stood in the water, moaning. Now he actually bellowed himself, not loud, just amazed. When Houston and the dog came up he had looked around, at first at the dog. His mouth had opened to cry then, but instead there had come into his face an expression almost intelligent in its foolish fatuity, which, when Houston began to curse, faded and became one of incredulity, amazement, and which was still incredulous and bereft as he stood in the water, moaning, while Houston on the bank looked at the stained foul front of his overalls, cursing with that baffled exasperation, saying, "Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ. — Come here,” he said. “Get out of there”; gesturing his arm savagely. But the other did not move, moaning, looking away up the creek where the cow had gone, until Houston came to the edge and leaned and caught him by the strap of his overalls and drew him roughly out of the water and, his nose wrinkled fiercely and still cursing, unfastened the straps and snatched the overalls down about his hips.

“Step out!” Houston said. But he did not move until Houston jerked him, stumbling, out of the overalls, to stand in his shirt and nothing else, moaning faintly, though when Houston picked up the overalls gingerly by the strap and flung them into the creek, he cried again, once, hoarse, abject, not loud. “Go on,” Houston said. “Wash them.”

He made violent washing motions in pantomime. But the other only looked at Houston, moaning, until Houston found another stick and twisted it into the overalls and soused and walloped them violently in the water, cursing steadily, and drew them out, still using the stick, scrubbed them front-down on the grass. “There,” he said. “Now git! Home! Home!” he shouted. “Stay there! Let her alone!” He had stopped moaning to watch Houston. Now he began to moan again, drooling, while Houston glared at him in baffled and raging exasperation.

Then Houston took a handful of coins from his pocket and chose a fifty-cent piece and came and put it into his shirt pocket and buttoned the flap and went back to the horse, speaking to it until he touched it, grasped it by the mane, and vaulted onto its back. He had stopped moaning now, he just watched as, again without seeming to gather itself, just as when it had soared above him and the cow on the edge of the ravine an hour ago, the horse made two short circles under Houston’s hand and then took the creek cleanly, already galloping, and was gone.

Then he began to moan again. He stood for a while, moaning, looking down at the shirt pocket which Houston had buttoned, fumbling at it. Then he looked at his soaked and wadded overalls on the ground

beside him. After a while he stooped and picked them up. One leg was turned wrong-side-outward. He tried patiently for a while to put them on so, moaning. Then presently they came straight again and he got into them and fastened the straps and went to the creek and crossed, moving gingerly, raising his foot at each step as if he were mounting onto a raised floor, and climbed out and went back to the place where he had lain at each dawn for three months now, waiting for her.

It was the same spot; he would return as exactly to it each time as a piston to its cylinder-head and he stood there for a time, fumbling at the buttoned pocket, moaning. Then he went on up the hill; his feet knew the dust of the road again though perhaps he himself was unaware of it, possibly it was pure instinct functioning in the desolation of bereavement which carried him back toward the house which he had left that morning, because twice more in the first mile he stopped and fumbled at the buttoned pocket.

Apparently he was not trying to unbutton the pocket without being able to do it, because presently he had the coin in his hand, looking at it, moaning. He was standing then on a plank bridge over a narrow, shallow, weed-choked ditch. He made no false motion with the hand which held the coin, he had made no motion of any kind, he was standing perfectly still at the moment, yet suddenly his palm was empty.

The coin rang dully once on the dusty planks and perhaps glinted once, then vanished, though who to know what motion, infinitesimal and convulsive, of supreme repudiation there might have been, its impulse gone, vanished with the movement, because he even ceased to moan as he stood looking at his empty palm with quiet amazement, turning the hand over to look at the back, even raising and opening the other hand to look into it.

Then — it was an effort almost physical, like childbirth — he connected two ideas, he progressed backward into time and recaptured an image by logical retrogression and fumbled into the shirt pocket again, peering into it, though only for a moment, as if he actually did not

expect to find the coin there, though it was doubtless pure instinct which caused him to look down at the dusty planks on which he stood. And he was not moaning. He made no sound at all.

He just stood there, looking at the planks, lifting his feet in turn; when he stepped off the bridge and into the ditch he fell. You could not have told if he did step off intentionally or if he fell off, though it was doubtless a continuation of the instinct, the inherited constant awareness of gravity, which caused him to look under the bridge for the coin — if he were looking for it as he squatted in the weeds, bobbing his head faintly yet still making no sound. From then on he made no sound at all.

He squatted for a time, pulling at the weeds, and now even the paradoxical dexterity was missing from his movements, even the dexterity which caused his hands to function at other times as though in spite of him; watching him you would have said he did not want to find the coin.

And then you would have said, known, that he did not intend to find it; when after a time a wagon came up the road and crossed the bridge and the driver spoke to him, when he raised his face it was not even empty, it was unfathomable and profoundly quiet; when the man spoke his name, he did not even reply with the one sound which he knew, or at least was ever known to make, and that infallibly when anyone spoke to him.

He did not move until the wagon was out of sight, though he was not watching it. Then he rose and climbed back into the road. He was already trotting, back in the direction from which he had just come, treading his own tracks into the hot dust of the road beneath the May noon, back to where he would leave the road to mount the hill, and crossed the hill again and trotted down the slope to the creek. He passed the place where he would lie in the wet grass each dawn without even looking at it and turned on up the creek, trotting.

It was then about two o'clock Saturday afternoon. He could not have known that at that hour and day Houston, a childless widower who lived alone with the hound and a negro man to cook for them both, would already be sitting on the gallery of Varner's store three miles away; he could not have thought that maybe Houston would not be at home.

Certainly he did not pause to find out. He entered the lot, trotting, he went straight to the closed door of the shed. There was a halter hanging from a nail beside it. Perhaps he merely put his hand on the halter by chance in fumbling at the latch. But he put it on the cow properly, as he had seen it done.

At six o'clock that afternoon they were five miles away. He did not know it was that distance. It did not matter; there is no distance in either space or geography, no prolongation of time for distance to exist in, no muscular fatigue to establish its accomplishment. They are moving not toward a destination in space but a destination in time, toward the pinnacle-keep of evening where morning and afternoon become one; the sleight hand of May shapes them both, not in the immediate, the soon, but in the now as, facing her, braced against the pull of the rope, he speaks to her implacable and compelling while she tugged back, shaking her head against the rope and bellowing.

She had been doing this for the last half-hour, drawn backward and barnward by the discomfort of her bag. But he held her, slacking the rope gradually until his other hand touched her, first her head then her neck, speaking to her until the resistance went out of her and she moved on again. They were in the hills now, among pines.

Although the afternoon wind had fallen, the shaggy crests still made a constant murmuring sound in the high serene air. The trunks and the massy foliage were the harps and strings of afternoon; the barred inconstant shadow of the day's retrograde flowed steadily over them as they crossed the ridge and descended into shadow, into the azure bowl of evening, the windless well of night; the portcullis of sunset fell behind them. At first she would not let him touch her bag at all.

Even then she kicked him once, but only because the hands were strange and clumsy. Then the milk came down, warm among his fingers and on his hands and wrists, making a thin sharp hissing on the earth.

There was a moon at that time. It waned nightly westward; juxtaposed to it, each dawn the morning star burned in fierce white period to the night, and he would smell the waking's instant as she would rise, hindquarters first, backing upward out of invisibility, attenuating then disseminating out of the nest-form of sleep, the smell of milk.

Then he would rise too and tie the rope-end to a swinging branch and seek and find the basket by the smell of the feed which it contained last night, and depart. From the edge of the woods he would look back.

She would be still invisible, but he could hear her; it is as though he can see her — the warm breath visible among the tearing roots of grass, the warm reek of the urgent milk a cohered shape amid the fluid and abstract earth.

The barn is less than a half-mile away. Soon it looms, forthright and square upon the scroll and cryptogram of heaven. The dog meets him at the fence, not barking, furrowing invisibility somewhere between sight and sound, moving completely in neither. On the first morning it rushed at him, yapping furiously. He stopped then.

Perhaps he remembered that other dog five miles away, but only for a moment, since such is succeeding's success, such is that about victory which out-odours the betraying stink of all past defeats: so that now it comes up to him already fawning, invisible and fluid about his walking legs, its warm wet limber tongue shaping for him out of invisibility his own swinging hand.

In the ammoniac density of the barn, filled with the waking dawn-sounds of horses and cattle, he cannot even sense space. But he does not hesitate. He finds the crib door and enters; his sightless hand which knows and remembers finds the feed-box.

He sets the basket down and begins to fill it, working steadily and fast, spilling half of what his cupped hands raise, as on the two preceding mornings establishing between feed-box and basket the agent of his own betrayal.

When he rises and faces the door, he can see it now, grey, lighter in tone yet paradoxically no more luminous, as if a rectangle of opaque glass had been set into nothing's self while his back was turned, to further confound obscurity. And now he becomes aware of the birds.

The cattle-sounds are louder now, constant; he can actually see the dog waiting in the stable door and he knows that he should hurry, since he knows that soon someone will come to feed and milk. So he leaves the crib, pausing for a moment in the door before descending as though he were listening, breathing in the reek, the odour of cows and mares as the successful lover does that of a room full of women, his the victor's drowsing rapport with all anonymous faceless female flesh capable of love walking the female earth.

He and the dog recross the lot together in the negative dawn-wash cacophonous and loud with birds. He can see the fence now, where the dog leaves him. He climbs through the fence, hurrying now, carrying the basket awkwardly before him in both arms, leaving in the wet grass a dark fixed wake. Now he watches the recurrence of that which he discovered for the first time three days ago: that dawn, light, is not decanted onto earth from the sky, but instead is from the earth itself suspired.

Roofed by the woven canopy of blind annealing grass-roots and the roots of trees, dark in the blind dark of time's silt and rich refuse — the constant and unslumbering anonymous worm-glut and the inextricable known bones — Troy's Helen and the nymphs and the snoring mitred bishops, the saviours and the victims and the kings — it wakes, up-seeping, attritive in uncountable creeping channels: first, root; then frond by frond, from whose escaping tips like gas it rises and disseminates and stains the sleep-fast earth with drowsy insect-

murmur; then, still upward-seeking, creeps the knitted bark of trunk and limb where, suddenly louder leaf by leaf and dispersive in diffusive sudden speed, melodious with the winged and jewelled throats, it upward bursts and fills night's globed negation with jonquil thunder.

Far below, the gauzy hemisphere treads with herald-cock, and sty and pen and byre salute the day. Vanes on steeples groove the southwest wind, and fields for ploughing, since sunset married to the bedded and unhorsed plough, spring into half-furrowed sight like the slumbering half-satiate sea. Then the sun itself: within the half-mile it overtakes him.

The silent copper roar fires the drenched grass and flings long before him his shadow prone for the vain eluded treading; the earth mirrors his antic and constant frustration which soars up the last hill and, motionless in the void, hovers until he himself crests over, whereupon it drops an invisible bridge across the ultimate ebb of night and, still preceding him, leaps visible once more across the swale and touches the copse itself, shortening into the nearing leafy wall, head: shoulders: hips: and then the trotting legs, until at last it stands upright upon the mazy whimple of the windy leaves for one intact inconstant instant before he runs into and through it.

She stands as he left her, tethered, chewing. Within the mild enormous moist and pupilless globes he sees himself in twin miniature mirrored by the inscrutable abstraction; one with that which Juno might have looked out with, he watches himself contemplating what those who looked at Juno saw. He sets the basket before her. She begins to eat.

The shifting shimmer of incessant leaves gives to her a quality of illusion as insubstantial as the prone negative of his late hurrying, but this too is not so: one blonde touch stipulates and affirms both weight and mass out of the flowing shadow-maze; a hand's breadth of contact shapes her solid and whole out of the infinity of hope. He squats beside her and begins to draw the teats.

They eat from the basket together. He has eaten feed before — hulls and meal, and oats and raw corn and silage and pig-swill, never much at one time but more or less constantly while he is awake as birds do, eating not even very much of the filled plate which Mrs. Littlejohn would set for him, leaving it less than half-emptied, then an hour later eating something else, anything else, things which the weary long record of shibboleth and superstition had taught his upright kind to call filth, neither liking nor disliking the taste of anything save that of certain kinds of soil and the lime in old plaster and the dissolved ink in chewed newspapers and the formic acid of stinging ants, making but one discrimination: he is herbivorous, even the life he eats is the life of plants. Then he removed the basket. It was not empty.

It contained yet almost to the measured ounce exactly half of the original feed, but he takes it away from her, drags it from beneath the swinging muzzle which continues to chew out of the centre of surprise, and hangs it over a limb, who is learning fast now, who has learned success and then precaution and secrecy and how to steal and even providence; who has only lust and greed and bloodthirst and a moral conscience to keep him awake at night, yet to acquire.

They go first to the spring. He found it on the first day — a brown creep of moisture in a clump of alder and beech, sunless, which wandered away without motion among the unsunned roots of other alders and willows.

He cleaned it out and scooped a basin for it, which now at each return of light stood full and clear and leaf by leaf repeating until they lean and interrupt the green reflections and with their own drinking faces break each's mirroring, each face to its own shattered image wedded and annealed. Then he rises and takes up the rope, and they go on across the swale, toward the woods, and enter them.

Dawn is now over. It is now bald and forthright day. The sun is well up the sky. The air is still loud with birds, but the cries are no longer the mystery's choral strophe and antistrophe rising vertical among the leafed altars, but are earth-parallel, streaking the lateral air in prosaic

busy accompaniment to the prosaic business of feeding. They dart in ceaseless arrowings, tinted and electric, among the pines whose shaggy crests murmur dry and incessant in the high day wind.

Now he slacks the rope; from now until evening they will advance only as the day itself advances, no faster. They have the same destination: sunset. They pursue it as the sun itself does and within the compass of one single immutable horizon.

They pace the ardent and unheeding sun, themselves unheeding and without ardour among the shadows of the soaring trunks which are the sun-gear'd ratchet-spokes which wheel the axled earth, powerful and without haste, up out of the caverns of darkness, through dawn and morning and midmorning, and on toward and at last into the slowing neap of noon, the flood, the slack of peak and crown of light garlanding all within one single coronet the fallen and unregenerate seraphim.

The sun is a yellow column, perpendicular. He bears it on his back as, stooping with that thick, reluctant unco-ordination of thigh and knee, he gathers first the armful of lush grass, then the flowers.

They are the bright blatant wild daisies of flamboyant summer's spendthrift beginning. At times his awkward and disobedient hand, instead of breaking the stem, merely shuts about the escaping stalk and strips the flower-head into a scatter of ravished petals. But before he reaches the windless noon-bound shade in which she stands, he has enough of them.

He has more than enough; if he had only gathered two of them, there would have been too many: he lays the plucked grass before her, then out of the clumsy fumbling of the hands there emerges, already in dissolution, the abortive diadem. In the act of garlanding, it disintegrates, rains down the slant of brow and chewing head; fodder and flowers become one inexhaustible rumination. From the sidling rhythm of the jaws depends one final blossom.

That afternoon it rained. It came without warning and it did not last long. He watched it for some time and without alarm, wanton and random and indecisive before it finally developed, concentrated, drooping in narrow unperpendicular bands in two or three different places at one time, about the horizon, like gauzy umbilical loops from the bellied cumulæ, the sun-belled ewes of summer grazing up the wind from the southwest.

It was as if the rain were actually seeking the two of them, hunting them out where they stood amid the shade, finding them finally in a bright intransigent fury.

The pine-snoring wind dropped, then gathered; in an anticlimax of complete vacuum the shaggy pelt of earth became overblown like that of a receptive mare for the rampant crash, the furious brief fecundation which, still rampant, seeded itself in flash and glare of noise and fury and then was gone, vanished; then the actual rain, from a sky already breaking as if of its own rich over-fertile weight, running in a wild lateral turmoil among the unrecovered leaves, not in drops but in needles of fiery ice which seemed to be not trying to fall but, immune to gravity, earthless, were merely trying to keep pace with the windy uproad which had begotten and foaled them, striking in thin brittle strokes through his hair and shirt and against his lifted face, each brief lance already filled with the glittering promise of its imminent cessation like the brief bright saltless tears of a young girl over a lost flower; then gone too, fled north and eastward beyond the chromatic arch of its own insubstantial armistice, leaving behind it the spent confetti of its carnival to gather and drip leaf by leaf and twig by twig then blade by blade of grass, to gather in murmuring runnels, releasing in mirrored repetition the sky which, glint by glint of fallen gold and blue, the falling drops had prisoned.

It was over at last. He takes up the rope again and they move out from beneath the tree and go on, moving no faster than before but for the first time since they entered the woods, with purpose. Because it is nearing sunset.

Although the rain had not seemed to last long, yet now it is as if there had been something in that illogical and harmless sound and fury which abrogated even the iron schedule of grooved and immutable day as the abrupt unplumbable tantrum of a child, the very violence of which is its own invincible argument against protraction, can somehow seem to set the clock up. He is soaking wet.

His overalls are heavy and dank and cold upon him — the sorry refuse, the scornful lees of glory — a lifeless chill which is no kin to the vivid wet of the living water which has carried into and still retains within the very mud, the boundless freedom of the golden air as that same air glitters in the leaves and branches which globe in countless minute repetition the intact and iridescent cosmos. They walk in splendour.

Joined by the golden skein of the wet grass rope, they move in single file toward the ineffable effulgence, directly into the sun. They are still pacing it. They mount the final ridge. They will arrive together. At the same moment all three of them cross the crest and descend into the bowl of evening and are extinguished.

The rapid twilight effaces them from the day's tedious recording. Original, in the womb-dimension, the unavoidable first and the inescapable last, eyeless, they descend the hill. He finds the basket by smell and lifts it down from the limb and sets it before her.

She nuzzles into it, blowing the sweet breath-reek into the sweetish reek of feed until they become indistinguishable with that of the urgent and unimpatient milk as it flows among and about his fingers, hands, wrists, warm and indivisible as the strong inexhaustible life ichor itself, inherently, of itself, renewing.

Then he leaves the invisible basket where he can find it again at dawn, and goes to the spring. Now he can see again. Again his head interrupts, then replaces as once more he breaks with drinking the reversed drinking of his drowned and fading image.

It is the well of days, the still and insatiable aperture of earth. It holds in tranquil paradox of suspended precipitation dawn, noon, and sunset; yesterday, today, and tomorrow — star-spawn and hieroglyph, the fierce white dying rose, then gradual and invincible speeding up to and into slack-flood's coronal of nympholept noon.

Then ebb's afternoon, until at last the morning, noon, and afternoon flow back, drain the sky and creep leaf by voiceless leaf and twig and branch and trunk, descending, gathering frond by frond among the grass, still creeping downward in drowsy insect murmurs, until at last the complete all of light gathers about that still and tender mouth in one last expiring inhalation.

He rises. The swale is constant with random and erratic fireflies. There is the one fierce evening star, though almost at once the marching constellations mesh and gear and wheel strongly on. Blonde too in that gathering last of light, she owns no dimension against the lambent and undimensional grass. But she is there, solid amid the abstract earth.

He walks lightly upon it, returning, treading lightly that frail inextricable canopy of the subterrene slumber — Helen and the bishops, the kings and the graceless seraphim. When he reaches her, she has already begun to lie down — first the forequarters, then the hinder ones, lowering herself in two distinct stages into the spent ebb of evening, nestling back into the nest-form of sleep, the mammalian attar. They lie down together.

3

It was after sunset when Houston returned home and missed the cow. He was a widower, without family. Since the death of his wife three or four years ago, the cow was the only female creature on the place, obviously. He even had a man cook, a negro, who did the milking too, but on this Saturday the negro had asked permission to attend a picnic of his race, promising to be back in plenty of time to milk and get supper too — a statement in which Houston naturally put no credence at all.

Indeed, except for a certain monotonous recapitulation about the promise which finally began to impinge on him, he might not have returned home at all that night and so would not have missed the cow until the next day.

As it was, he returned home just after sunset, not for food, the presence or lack of which meant nothing to him, but to milk the cow, the prospect and necessity of which had been facing him and drawing nearer and nearer all afternoon.

Because of this, he had drunk a little more than his customary Saturday afternoon quantity, which (a man naturally of a moody, though robustly and healthily so, habit) in conjunction with the savage fixation about females which the tragic circumstances of his bereavement had created in him, and the fact that not only must he return and establish once more physical contact with the female world which three years ago he had adjured but the time this would require would be that (the hour between sunset and dark) one of the entire day's hierarchy which he could least bear — when the presence of his dead wife and sometimes even that of the son which they had never had, would be everywhere about the house and the place — left him in no very predictable frame of mind when he went to the cowshed and found the cow gone.

He thought at first that she had merely continued to bump and butt at the door until the latch turned and allowed it to open. But even then he was surprised that the discomfort of her bag had not fetched her, waiting and even lowing, at the lot gate before he arrived.

But she was not there, and cursing her (and himself for having neglected to close the gate which led to the creek pasture) he called the hound and took the path back to the creek. It was not yet full dark. He could (and did) see tracks, though when he did notice the prints of the man's bare feet, the cow's prints superposed, so he merely took the two sets of tracks to be six hours apart and not six feet.

But primarily he did not bother with the tracks because he was convinced he knew where the cow was, even when the hound turned from the creek at the ford and bore away up the hill. He shouted it angrily back.

Even when it paused and looked back at him in grave and intelligent surprise, he still acted out of that seething conviction born of drink and exasperation and the old strong uncompromising grief, shouting at the dog until it returned and then actually kicking it toward the ford and then following it across, where it now heeled him, puzzled and gravely alert, until he kicked at it again and drove it out ahead.

She was not in the pasture. Now he knew that she was not, and therefore had been led away; it was as though his very savageness toward the dog had recalled him to something like sanity. He recrossed the creek. He had in his hip-pocket the weekly county paper which he had taken from his mailbox on his way to the village early in the afternoon. He rolled it into a torch.

By its light he saw the prints of the idiot's feet and those of the cow where they had turned away at the ford and mounted the hill to the road, where the torch burned out, leaving him standing there in the early starlight (the moon had not risen yet) cursing again in that furious exasperation which was not rage but savage contempt and pity for all blind flesh capable of hope and grief.

He was almost a mile from his horse. What with the vain quartering of the pasture, he had already walked twice that distance, and he was boiling with that helpless rage at abstract circumstance which feeds on its own impotence, has no object to retaliate upon; it seemed to him that once more he had been victim of a useless and elaborate practical joke at the hands of the prime maniacal Risibility, the sole purpose of which had been to leave him with a mile's walk in darkness.

But even if he could not actually punish, hurt, the idiot, at least he could put the fear, if not of God, at least of cow-stealing and certainly of Jack Houston, into him, so that in any event he, Houston, would not

leave home each time from now on wondering whether or not the cow would be there when he returned.

Yet, mounted at last and in motion again and the cool wind of motion drawing about him, he found that the grim icy rage had given way to an even more familiar sardonic humour, a little clumsy and heavy-footed perhaps, but indomitable and unconquerable above even the ruthless grief: so that long before he reached the village he knew exactly what he would do.

He would cure the idiot forever more of coveting cows by the immemorial and unfailing method: he would make him feed and milk her; he would return home and ride back tomorrow morning and make him feed and milk again and then lead the cow back on foot to where he had found her. So he did not stop at Mrs. Littlejohn's house at all. He turned into the lane and went on toward the lot; it was Mrs. Littlejohn who spoke to him from the dense moonshade beside the fence: "Who's that?"

He stopped the horse. She ain't even saw the dog, he thought. That was when he knew he was not going to say anything else to her either. He could see her now, tall, tall like a chimney and with little more shape, standing at the fence. "Jack Houston," he said.

"What you want?" she said.

"Thought I'd water my horse at your trough."

"Ain't there water at the store anymore?"

"I come from home."

"Oh," she said. "Then you ain't — —" She spoke in a harsh rush, stopping. Then he knew he was going to say more. He was saying it:

"He's all right. I saw him."

"When?"

"Before I left home. He was there this morning and again this evening. In my pasture. He's all right. I reckon he's taking a Saturday holiday too."

She grunted. "That nigger of yours go to the picnic?"
"Yessum."

"Then come on in and eat. There's some cold supper left."

"I done et." He began to turn the horse. "I wouldn't worry. If he's still there, I'll tell him to get to hell on home."

She grunted again. "I thought you was going to water your horse."

"That's a fact," he said. So he rode into the lot. He had to dismount and open the gate and close it and then open it and close it again in order to do so, and then mount again. She was still standing beside the fence but when he called goodnight in passing she did not answer.

He returned home. The moon was now high and full above the trees. He stabled the horse and crossed the blanched lot, passing the moony yawn of the empty cowshed, and went on to the dark and empty and silver-roofed house and undressed and lay on the monklike iron cot where he now slept, the hound on the floor beside it, the moony square of the window falling across him as it had used to fall across both of them when his wife was alive and there was a bed there in place of the cot. He was not cursing now, and it was still not rage when at sunup he sat the horse in the road where he had lost the tracks last night.

He looked down at the dust blandly inscrutable with the wheel- and hoof- and human-prints of a whole Saturday afternoon, where the very virginity of the idiot at hiding had seemed to tap at need an inexhaustible reservoir of cleverness as one who has never before needed courage can seem at need to find it, cursing, not with rage but with that savage contempt and pity for the weak, nerve-raddled, yet curiously indestructible flesh already doomed and damned before it saw light and breathed.

By that time the owner of the barn had already found in the crib the telltale ridge of spilled feed beginning at the feed-box and ending in a

shelving crescent about the shape of the absent basket; presently he even discovered it was his own basket which was gone. He tracked the feet across the lot and lost them. But there was nothing else missing, not a great quantity of feed and the basket was an old one.

He gathered up the spilled feed and put it back into the box and soon even his first burst of impotent wrath at the moral outrage, the crass violation of private property, evaporated, recurring only once or twice during the day as angry and exasperated puzzlement: so that on the second morning when he entered the crib and saw the mute ridge of spilled feed ending in that empty embracing crescent, he experienced a shocking bewilderment followed by a furious and blazing wrath like that of a man who, leaping to safety from in front of a runaway, slips on a banana skin. For that moment his state of mind was homicidal.

He saw in this second flagrant abrogation of the ancient biblical edict (on which he had established existence, integrity, all) that man must sweat or have not, the same embattled moral point which he had fought singly and collectively with his five children for more than twenty years and in which battle, by being victorious, he had lost.

He was a man past middle age, who with nothing to start with but sound health and a certain grim and puritanical affinity for abstinence and endurance, had made a fair farm out of the barren scrap of hill land which he had bought at less than a dollar an acre and married and raised a family on it and fed and clothed them all and even educated them after a fashion, taught them at least hard work, so that as soon as they became big enough to resist him, boys and girls too, they left home (one was a professional nurse, one a ward-heeler to a minor county politician, one a city barber, one a prostitute; the oldest had simply vanished completely) so that there now remained the small neat farm which likewise had been worked to the point of mute and unflagging mutual hatred and resistance but which could not leave him and so far had not been able to eject him but which possibly knew that it could and would outlast him, and his wife who possibly had the same, perhaps not hope for resisting, but maybe staff and prop for bearing and enduring.

He ran out of the barn, shouting her name. When she appeared in the kitchen door, he shouted at her to come and milk and ran on into the house and reappeared with a shotgun, and ran past her again in the barn, cursing her for her slowness, and bridled one of the mules and took up the gun and followed the tracks once more across the lot, to where they disappeared at the fence. But this time he did not quit, and presently he found them again — the dark, dragging wake still visible in the dew-heavy grass of his hayfield, crossing the field and entering the woods. Then he did lose them. But still he did not quit. He was too old for this, too old certainly for such prolonged and panting rage and thirst for blood.

He had eaten no breakfast yet, and at home there was that work waiting, the constant and unflagging round of repetitive nerve-and-flesh wearing labour by which alone that piece of earth which was his mortal enemy could fight him with, which he had performed yesterday and must perform again today and again tomorrow and tomorrow, alone and unassisted or else knock under to that very defeat which had been his barren victory over his children; — this until the day came when (he knew this too) he would stumble and plunge, his eyes still open and his empty hands stiffening into the shape of the plough-handles, into the furrow behind the plough, or topple into the weedy ditch, still clutching the brush-hook or the axe, this final victory marked by a cenotaph of coiling buzzards on the sky until some curious stranger happened there and found and buried what was left of him.

Yet he went on. After a while he even found the tracks again, three of them in a sandy ditch where a branch ran, coming upon them more or less by chance since the last one he had seen was a mile away; he could have had no reason to believe they were even the right ones, though as it happened they were. But he did not for one moment doubt that they were the right ones.

About the middle of the morning he even discovered whom the cow belonged to. He met Houston's negro, also on a mule, in the woods. He told the negro violently, even swinging the gun toward him, that he had

seen no stray cow, there was no stray cow about there, and that this was his land although he owned nothing within three miles of where he stood unless it might have been the temporarily hidden feed-basket, and ordered the negro to get off it and stay off.

He returned home. He had not given up; he now knew not only what he intended to do, but how to do it. He saw before him not mere revenge and reprisal, but redress.

He did not want to surprise the thief; he wanted now to capture the cow and either collect a reward from its owner for returning it, or if the owner refused, resort to his legal rights and demand a pound fee on the cow as a stray — this, this legal dollar which would be little enough compensation, not for the time he had spent recovering the cow, but for the time he had lost from the endless round of that labour which he could not have hired done in his place, not because he could not pay for it but because no man in that country, white or black, would work for him at any price, and which he durst not permit to get the ascendancy of him or he would be lost.

He did not even go to the house. He went straight to the field and put the mule into the plough which he had left in the furrow last night and ploughed until his wife rang the bell at noon; he returned to the field after dinner and ploughed on until dark.

He was in the barn, the mule already saddled and waiting in its stall, before moonset the next morning. He saw against the pallid lift of dawn the thick, bearlike figure enter with the basket and followed by his own dog, and enter the crib and then emerge, carrying the basket in both arms as a bear does, and hurry back across the lot, the dog still following. When he saw the dog he was suffused again by that almost unbearable rage. He had heard it on the first morning, but its uproar had ceased by the time he came good awake; now he understood why he had not heard it on the second and third mornings, and he knew now that even if the man did not look back and see him, if he now appeared from the barn the dog in all likelihood would bark at him. So when he did feel it safe to come out of the barn, there was nothing in

sight but the dog, which stood peering through the fence after the thief, remaining unaware of his presence until he had actually kicked it, savage and raging, toward the house.

But the thief's dark wake lay again upon the dew-pearled grass of the pasture, though when he reached the woods he discovered that he had made the same error of underestimation which Houston had made: that there is perhaps something in passion too, as well as in poverty and innocence, which cares for its own. So he spent another half morning, breakfastless, seething with incredulous outrage, riding the green and jocund solitudes of the May woods, while behind him the dark reminder of his embattled and unremitting fields stood higher and higher in despotic portent. This time he even found the trail again — the stain of wasted milk on the earth (so close he was), the bent grass where the basket had sat while the cow fed from it. He should have found the basket itself hanging on the limb, since nobody had tried to conceal it.

But he did not look that high, since he now had the cow's trail. He followed it, calm and contained and rigidly boiling, losing it and finding it and losing it again, on through the morning and into the access of noon — that concentration of light and heat which he could seem to feel raising not only the temperature of his blood but that of the very abstract conduits and tubes through which the current of his wrath had to flow. That afternoon though he discovered that the sun had nothing to do with it.

He also stood beneath a tree while the thunderstorm crashed and glared and the furious cold rain drove at that flesh which cringed and shivered only on the outside, then galloped on in tearful and golden laughter across the glittering and pristine earth. He was then seven miles from home. There was an hour more of daylight. He had done perhaps four of the miles and the evening star had risen, when it occurred to him that the fugitives might just possibly return to the place where he had found the milk-stain on the earth. He went back there without hope. He was not even raging anymore.

He reached home about midnight, on foot, leading the mule and the cow. At first he had been afraid that the thief himself would escape. Then he had expected him to. Then for that half-mile between the barn and the place where he had found them, he tried to drive away the creature which had started up from beside the cow with a hoarse, alarmed cry which he recognised, which still followed, moaning and blundering along in the darkness behind even when he would turn — a man too old for this, spent not so much by the long foodless day as by constant and unflagging rage — and shout at it, cursing.

His wife was waiting at the lot gate with a lighted lantern. He entered, he handed the two halter-reins carefully to her and went and closed the gate carefully and stooped as an old man stoops and found a stick and then sprang, ran at the idiot, striking at it, cursing in a harsh spent panting voice, the wife following, calling him by name. “You stop!” she cried. “Stop it! Do you want to kill yourself?”

“Hah!” he said, panting, shaking. “I ain’t going to die for a few more miles yet. Go get the lock.” It was a padlock. It was the only lock of any sort on the place. It was on the front gate, where he had put it the day after his last child left home. She went and got it while he still tried to drive the idiot from the lot. But he could not overtake the creature. It moved awkwardly and thickly, moaning and bubbling, but he could neither overtake it nor frighten it.

It was somewhere behind him, just outside the radius of the lantern which his wife held, even while he locked the piece of chain through the door of the stall into which he had put the cow. The next morning when he unlocked the chain, the creature was inside the stall with the cow.

It had even fed the cow, climbing back out and then back into the stall to do it, and for that five miles to Houston’s place it still followed, moaning and slobbering, though just before they reached the house he looked back, and it was gone. He did not know just when it disappeared. Later, returning, with Houston’s dollar in his pocket, he

examined the road to see just where it had vanished. But he found no trace.

The cow was in Houston's lot less than ten minutes. Houston was at the house at the time; his immediate intention was to send the cow on by his negro. But he countermanded this in the next breath and sent the man instead to saddle his horse, during which time he stood waiting, cursing again with that savage and bleak contempt which was not disgust nor rage. Mrs. Littlejohn was putting her horse into the buggy when he led the cow into the lot, so he did not need to tell her himself, after all.

They just looked at one another, not man and woman but two integers which had both reached the same ungendered peace even if by different roads. She drew the clean, knotted rag from her pocket. "I don't want money," he said roughly. "I just don't want to see her again."

"It's his," she said, extending the rag. "Take it."

"Where'd he get money?"

"I don't know. V. K. Ratliff gave it to me. It's his."

"I reckon it is, if Ratliff gave it up. But I still don't want it."

"What else could he do with it?" she said. "What else did he ever want?"

"All right," Houston said. He took the rag. He did not open it. If he had asked how much was in it, she could not have told him since she had never counted it either. Then he said, furious and still out of his calm rigid face: "God damn it, keep them both away from my place. Do you hear?"

CHAPTER TWO

THE WOMAN HOUSTON married was not beautiful. She had neither wit nor money. An orphan, a plain girl, almost homely and not even very young (she was twenty-four) she came to him out of the home of the remote kinswoman who had raised her, with the domestic skill of her country heritage and blood and training and a small trunk of neat, plain, dove-coloured clothes and the hand-stitched sheets and towels and table-linen which she had made herself and an infinite capacity for constancy and devotion, and no more.

And they were married and six months later she died and he grieved for her for four years in black, savage, indomitable fidelity, and that was all.

They had known one another all their lives. They were both only children, born of the same kind of people, on farms not three miles apart.

They belonged to the same country congregation and attended the same one-room country school, where, although five years his junior, she was already one class ahead of him when he entered and, although he failed twice during the two years he attended it, she was still one class ahead of him when he quit, vanished, not only from his father's house but from the country too, fleeing even at sixteen the immemorial trap, and was gone for thirteen years and then as suddenly returned, knowing (and perhaps even cursing himself) on the instant he knew he was going to return, that she would still be there and unmarried; and she was.

He was fourteen when he entered the school. He was not wild, he was merely unbitted yet; not high-spirited so much as possessed of that strong lust, not for life, not even for movement, but for that fetterless immobility called freedom. He had nothing against learning; it was merely the confinement, the regimentation, which it entailed.

He could competently run his father's farm, and his mother had taught him to write his name before she died at last and so gave up trying to compel his father to send him to the school which for four years at least he had contrived to avoid by playing his mother's spoiling fondness

against the severity of his father's pride; he really enjoyed the increasing stint of responsibility and even work which his father set him as a training for manhood. But at last he outgeneralled himself with his own strategy: finally even his father admitted that there was nothing else about the farm for him to learn.

So he entered school, not a paragon but a paradox. He was competent for citizenship before he could vote and capable of fatherhood before he learned to spell. At fourteen he was already acquainted with whiskey and was the possessor of a mistress — a negro girl two or three years his senior, daughter of his father's renter — and so found himself submitting to be taught his abc's four and five and six years after his co-evals and hence already too big physically for where he was; bulging in Lilliput, inevitably sophisticated, logically contemptuous, invincibly incorrigible, not deliberately intending to learn nothing but merely convinced that he would not, did not want and did not believe he needed to.

Afterward, it seemed to him that the first thing he saw when he entered the room was that bent, demure, simply-brown and straight-haired head. Still later, after he believed he had escaped, it seemed to him that it had been in his life always, even during those five years between his birth and hers; and not that she had contrived somehow to exist during those five years, but that he himself had not begun to exist until she was born, the two of them chained irrevocably from that hour and onward forever, not by love but by implacable constancy and invincible repudiation — on the one hand, that steadfast and undismayable will to alter and improve and remake; on the other, that furious resistance.

It was not love — worship, prostration — as he knew it, as passion had manifested heretofore in an experience limited to be sure, yet not completely innocent.

He would have accepted that, taken it as his due, calling himself submitting to it as he called himself submitting when he was really using that same quality which he called proffered slavery in all the

other women — his mother and his mistress — so far in his life. What he did not comprehend was that until now he had not known what true slavery was — that single constant despotic undeviating will of the enslaved not only for possession, complete assimilation, but to coerce and reshape the enslaver into the seemliness of his victimisation.

She did not even want him yet, not because she was too young yet but because apparently she had not found even in him the one suitable. It was as though she had merely elected him out of all the teeming earth, not as one competent to her requirements, but as one possessing the possibilities on which she would be content to establish the structure of her life.

She was trying to get him through school. Not out of it and apparently not even educated, any wiser; apparently just through it, grade by grade in orderly progression and at the appointed times for advancing from one to the next as people commonly do.

At one time the thought occurred to him that what she perhaps wanted was to get him on and into the class of his age, where he should have been; that if she could do that, perhaps she would let him alone, to fail or not fail as his nature and character dictated.

Perhaps she would have. Or perhaps she, who was fond enough to attempt it at all, was also wise enough to know that he not only would never reach the grade where he should have been but he would not even keep up with the one where he was, and more: that where he was did not even matter, that even failing did not matter so long as she had a hand too in the failing.

It was a feud, a gage, wordless, uncapitulating, between that unflagging will not for love or passion but for the married state, and that furious and as unbending one for solitariness and freedom. He was going to fail that first year. He expected to. Not only himself but the whole school knew it.

She never even spoke directly to him, she would pass him on the playground without even looking at him, apparently ever seeing him, yet there would be, mute and inevitable on his desk, the apple or the piece of cake from her lunch-box, and secret in one of his books the folded sheet of problems solved or spelling corrected or sentences written out in the round, steadfast child's hand — the reward and promise which he spurned, the assistance which he repudiated, raging not because his integrity and gullibility had been attempted but because he could neither publicly express the scorn of the repudiation nor be sure that the private exposition — the wanton destruction of the food or the paper — had even registered upon that head bent, decorous, intent, in profile or three-quarters and sometimes in full rear, which he had never yet heard even pronounce his name.

Then one day a boy not a third his size chanted a playground doggerel at him — not that Lucy Pate and Jack Houston were sweethearts, but that Lucy Pate was forcing Jack Houston to make the rise to the second grade.

He struck the child as he would one of his own size, was immediately swarmed over by four older boys and was holding his furious own when his assailants gave back and she was beside him, flailing at his enemies with her school-satchel. He struck her as blindly and furiously as he had the little boy and flung her away. For the next two minutes he was completely berserk. Even after he was down, the four of them had to bind him up with a piece of fence wire in order to turn him loose and run.

So he won that first point. He failed. When he entered school the next fall, in the same grade and surrounded (a giant knee-deep in midgets) by a swarm of still smaller children, he believed that he had even escaped. The face was still there to be sure, and it looked no smaller, no more distant.

But he now believed he saw it from beyond the additional abyss of yet another intervening grade. So he believed that he had taken the last

point too, and the game; it was almost two months before he discovered that she too had failed in her last year's examinations.

Now something very like panic took possession of him. Because he also discovered that the scale and tone of the contest between them had altered. It was no more deadly; that was impossible. It had matured. Up to now, for all its deadly seriousness, it had retained something of childhood, something both illogical and consistent, both reasonable and bizarre. But now it had become a contest between adults; at some instant during that summer in which they had not even seen one another except among the congregation at church, the ancient worn glove of biological differentiation had been flung and raised.

It was as if, mutually unaware yet at the same moment, they had looked upon the olden Snake, had eaten of the Tree with the will and capacity for assimilation but without the equipment, even if the lack of equipment were not true in his case.

There were no more apples and cake now, there was only the paper, correct, inescapable and implacable, in the book or in his overcoat pocket or in the mailbox before his gate; he would submit his own blank paper at the written monthly tests and receive back that one bearing a perfect grade and written in that hand, even to the signature, which was coming more and more to look like his own.

And always there was the face which still never addressed him nor even looked at him, bent, in profile or three-quarters, sober and undismayable. He not only looked at it all day, he carried it home with him at night, waking from sleep to meet it, still serene, still steadfast.

He would even try to efface and exorcise it beyond that of the negress paramour but it still remained, constant, serene, not reproachful nor even sad nor even angry, but already forgiving him before forgiveness had been dared or earned; waiting, tranquil, terrifying. Once during that year the frantic thought occurred to him of escaping her forever by getting beyond the reach of her assistance, of applying himself and

making up the lost years, overhauling the class where he should have been.

For a short time he even attempted it. But there was the face. He knew he could never pass it, not that it would hold him back, but he would have to carry it on with him in his turn, just as it had held him somehow in abeyance during those five years before she was even born; not only would he never pass it, he would not even ever overtake it by that one year, so that regardless of what stage he might reach it would still be there, one year ahead of him, inescapable and impervious to passing.

So there was but one alternative. That was the old one: the movement not in retrograde since he could retrograde no further than the grade in which he already was, but of braking, slapping the invincible spike-heels of immobility into the fleeing and dizzy scope.

He did that. His mistake was in assuming a limitation to female ruthlessness. He watched his blank monthly test papers vanish into the teacher's hands and then return to him, perfectly executed even to his own name at the top, while the months passed and the final examination for promotion or not arrived.

He submitted the blank sheets bearing nothing but his name and the finger-smudges where he had folded them and closed for the last time the books which he had not even managed to soil and walked out of the room, free save for the minor formality of being told by the teacher that he had failed. His conviction of freedom lasted through the afternoon and through supper and into the evening itself.

He was undressing for bed, one leg already out of his trousers; without pause or falter he put the leg back into the trousers, already running, barefoot and shirtless, out of the house where his father was already asleep. The schoolhouse was not locked, though he had to break a lock to get into the teacher's desk.

Yet all three of his papers were there, even to the same type of foolscap which he had submitted in blank — arithmetic, geography, the

paragraph of English composition which, if he had not known he had submitted a blank one and if it had not been that he could neither pronounce nor recognise some of the words and could not understand all of what the ones he did know were talking about, he could not have sworn himself he had not written.

He returned home and got a few clothes and the pistol which he had owned for three years now, and waked his father, the two of them meeting for the last time in life in the summer lamplit midnight room — the determined and frightened youth and the fierce thin wiry man almost a head shorter, unshaven, with a wild flurry of grey hair, in a calf-length nightshirt, who gave him the contents of the worn wallet from the trousers flung across a nearby chair and, in iron spectacles now, wrote out the note for the amount, with interest and made the son sign it.

“All right,” he said. “Go then, and be damned to you. You certainly ought to be enough kin to me to take care of yourself at sixteen. I was. But I’ll bet you the same amount, by God, that you’ll be hollering for help before six months.”

He went back past the schoolhouse and restored the papers, including the new set of blank ones; he would have repaired the broken lock if he could. And he even paid the bet, although he did not lose it. He sent the money back out of three times that sum won at dice one Saturday night a year later in the railroad construction camp in Oklahoma where he was a timekeeper.

He fled, not from his past, but to escape his future. It took him twelve years to learn you cannot escape either of them. He was in El Paso then, which was one end of his run as a locomotive fireman well up the service list toward an engine of his own, where he lived in the neat, small, urban house which he had rented for four years now, with the woman known to the neighbourhood and the adjacent grocers and such as his wife, whom he had taken seven years ago out of a Galveston brothel.

He had been a Kansas wheat-hand, he had herded sheep in New Mexico, he was again with a construction gang in Arizona and west Texas and then longshoreman on the Galveston docks; if he were still fleeing, he did not know it because it had been years now since he had even remembered that he had forgotten the face.

And when he proved that at least you cannot escape either past or future with nothing better than geography, he did not know that. (Geography: that paucity of invention, that fatuous faith in distance of man, who can invent no better means than geography for escaping; himself of all, to whom, so he believed he believed, geography had never been merely something to walk upon but was the very medium which the fetterless to- and fro-going required to breathe in.)

And if he were merely being consistent in escaping from one woman by violating the skirts of another, as with his mother and the negro girl of his adolescence, he did not know that, taking almost by force out of the house at daybreak the woman whom he had never seen until the previous midnight; there was a scene by gaslight between him and the curl-papered landlady as violent as if he were ravishing from the house an only daughter with an entailed estate.

They lived together for seven years. He went back to railroading and stuck with it and even came at last into the hierarchical current of seniority; he was mentally and spiritually, and with only an occasional aberration, physically faithful to her who in her turn was loyal, discreet, undemanding, and thrifty with his money. She bore his name in the boarding-houses where they lived at first, then in the rented house in El Paso which they called home and were furnishing as they were able to buy furniture.

Although she had never suggested it, he even thought of marrying her, so had the impact of the West which was still young enough then to put a premium on individuality, softened and at last abolished his inherited southern-provincial-protestant fanaticism regarding marriage and female purity, the biblical Magdalen. There was his father, to be sure.

He had not seen him since the night he left home and he did not expect to see him again.

He did not think of his father as being dead, being any further removed than the old house in Mississippi where he had seen him last; he simply could not visualise them meeting anywhere else except in Mississippi, to which he could only imagine himself returning as an old man. But he knew what his father's reaction to his marriage with a once-public woman would be, and up to this time, with all that he had done and failed to do, he had never once done anything which he could not imagine his father also doing, or at least condoning.

Then he received the message that his father was dead (He received at the same an offer from a neighbour for the farm. He did not sell it. At the time he did not comprehend why) and so that was removed.

But it had never actually existed anyway. He had already settled that as a matter purely between him and himself, long ago one night while the dim engine rocked through the darkness over the clucking rail-joints: "Maybe she was not much once, but neither was I. And for a right smart while now she has been better than I know myself to have been." Perhaps they would have a child after a while. He thought of waiting for that, letting that be the sign.

At first that eventuality had never occurred to him — here again was the old mystical fanatic protestant; the hand of God lying upon the sinner even after the regeneration: the Babylonian interdict by heaven forever against reproduction.

He did not know just how much time, just what span of chastity, would constitute purgatorium and absolution, but he would imagine it — some instant, mystical still, when the blight of those nameless and faceless men, the scorched scars of merchandised lust, would be effaced and healed from the organs which she had prostituted.

But that time was past now, not the mystic moment when the absolvment would be discharged, but the hour, the day before the

elapse of which he had thought she would have told him she was pregnant and they would have married. It was long past now.

It would never be. And one night in that twelfth year, in the boarding-house at the other end of his run where he spent the alternate nights, he took out the three-year-old offer and he knew why he had not accepted it.

I'm going home, he told himself — no more than that, not why; not even seeing the face which up to the day he entered school he could not even have described and which now he could not even remember. He made his run back to El Paso the next day and drew the seven years' accumulation out of the bank and divided it into two equal parts.

The woman who had been his wife for seven years glanced once at the money and then stood cursing him. "You are going to get married," she said. There were no tears; she just cursed him. "What do I want with money? Look at me. Do you think I will lack money? Let me go with you. There will be some town, some place close where I can live. You can come when you want to. Have I ever bothered you?"

"No," he said. She cursed him, cursing them both. If she would just touch me, hit me, make me mad enough to hit her, he thought. But that did not happen either. It was not him she cursed, anymore than she could curse the woman she had never seen and whose face even he could not quite recall.

So he divided his half of the money again — that money which he had been lucky with: not lucky in the winning or earning or finding, but lucky in having the vices and desiring the pleasures which left a fair balance of it after they had been fed and satisfied — and returned to Mississippi. But even then, it apparently took him still another year to admit that he did not want to escape that past and future. The countryside believed he had come back to sell the farm. Yet the weeks passed, and he did not.

Spring came and he had made no preparations either to rent it or work it himself. He merely continued to live in the old pre-Civil War house which, although no mansion, owning no columns, had been too big for three, while month after month passed, still apparently on that vacation from the Texas railroad his father had already told them he worked for, alone, without companionship, meeting (when he met them at all) the contemporaries who remembered him from youth over casual drinks or cards and that not often.

Occasionally he would be seen at the picnics during the summer, and each Saturday afternoon he would make one of the group on the gallery of Varner's store, talking a little, answering questions rather, about the West, not secret and reserved so much as apparently thinking in another tongue from that in which he listened and would presently have to answer. He was bitted now, even if it did not show so much yet.

There was still the mark of space and solitude in his face, but fading a little, rationalised and corrupted even into something consciously alert even if it was not fearful; the beast, prime solitary and sufficient out of the wild fields, drawn to the trap and knowing it to be a trap, not comprehending why it was doomed but knowing it was, and not afraid now — and not quite wild.

They were married in January. His part of the Texas money was gone then, though the countryside still believed he was rich, else he could not have lived for a year without working and would not have married a penniless orphan.

Since he had arrived home solvent, the neighbourhood would be unalterably convinced forever that he was wealthy, just as it had been unalterably convinced at first that only beggary had brought him home. He borrowed money from Will Varner, on a portion of the land, to build the new house on a new site nearer the road. He bought the stallion too then, as if for a wedding present to her, though he never said so.

Or if that blood and bone and muscles represented that polygamous and bitless masculinity which he had relinquished, he never said that. And if there were any among his neighbours and acquaintances — Will Varner or Ratliff perhaps — who discerned that this was the actual transference, the deliberate filling of the vacancy of his abdication, they did not say it either.

Three months after the marriage the house was finished and they moved into it, with a negro woman to cook although the only other hired cook, white or black, in the country was Varner's. Then the countryside would call, the men to the lot to look at the stallion, the women to the house, the new bright rooms, the new furniture and equipment and devices for saving steps and labour whose pictures they would dream over in the mail-order catalogues.

They would watch her moving among the new possessions, busy, indefatigable, in the plain, neat garments, the plain and simple hair, the plain face blooming now with something almost like beauty — not amazement at luck, not particularly vindication of will and faith, but just serene, steadfast and boldly rosy when they would remark how the house had been completed exactly in time to catch the moon's full of April through the window where the bed was placed.

Then the stallion killed her. She was hunting a missing hen-nest in the stable. The negro man had warned her: "He's a horse, missy. But he's a man horse. You keep out of there." But she was not afraid. It was as if she had recognised that transubstantiation, that duality, and thought even if she did not say it: Nonsense. I've married him now.

He shot the stallion, running first into the stall with the now frenzied animal with nothing but an open pocket-knife, until the negro grappled with him and persuaded him to wait for the pistol to be fetched from the house, and for four years and two months he had lived in the new house with the hound and the negro man to cook for them.

He sold the mare which he had bought for her, and the cow he owned then, and discharged the woman cook and gave away the chickens. The

new furniture had been bought on instalment. He moved it all into the barn at the old place where he was born and notified the merchant to come and get it.

Then he had only the stove, the kitchen table he ate from, and the cot he had substituted for the bed beneath the window. The moon was full on that first night he slept on the cot too, so he moved the cot into another room and then against a north wall where the moon could not possibly reach him, and two nights later he even went and spent one night in the old house. But there he lost everything, not only peace but even fibred and durable grief for despair to set its teeth into.

So he returned to the new house. The moon was waning then and would return only at monthly intervals, so that left only that single hour between sunset and full dark between its fulls, and weariness was an antidote for that.

And weariness was cheap: he not only had the note he had given Will Varner for the loan, but there had been some trouble with the instalment people who did not want to take the furniture back.

So he farmed again, finding gradually how much he had forgotten about it. Thus, at times he would have actually forgotten that hour he dreaded until he would find himself entering it, walking into it, finding it suddenly upon him, drowning him with suffocation.

Then that stubborn part of her and sometimes even of the son which perhaps next year they would have would be everywhere about the house he had built to please her even though it was empty now of all the objects she had touched and used and looked at except the stove and the kitchen table and the one garment — not a nightgown or an undergarment, but the gingham dress which resembled the one in which he had first seen her that day at the school — and the window itself, so that even on the hottest evenings of summer he would sit in the sweltering kitchen while the negro man cooked supper, drinking whiskey from a stone jug and tepid water from the cedar bucket and talking louder and louder, profane, intolerant, argumentative, with no

challenge to be rebutted and no challenger to be vanquished and overcome.

But sooner or later the moon would wax again. There would be nights which were almost blank ones. Yet sooner or later that silver and blanched rectangle of window would fall once more, while night waxed into night then waned from night, as it had used to fall across the two of them while they observed the old country belief that the full moon of April guaranteed the fertilising act.

But now there was no body beside his own for the moon to fall upon, and nothing for another body to have lain beside his own upon. Because the cot was too narrow for that and there was only the abrupt downward sheer of inky shadow in which only the invisible hound slept, and he would lie rigid, indomitable, and panting. "I don't understand it," he would say. "I don't know why. I won't ever know why. But You can't beat me. I am strong as You are. You can't beat me."

He was still alive when he left the saddle. He had heard the shot, then an instant later he knew he must have felt the blow before he heard it. Then the orderly sequence of time as he had known it for thirty-three years became inverted.

He seemed to feel the shock of the ground while he knew he was still falling and had not yet reached it, then he was on the ground, he had stopped falling, and remembering what he had seen of stomach-wounds he thought: If I don't get the hurting started quick, I am going to die.

He willed to start it, and for an instant he could not understand why it did not start. Then he saw the blank gap, the chasm somewhere between vision and where his feet should have been, and he lay on his back watching the ravelled and shattered ends of sentience and will projecting into the gap, hair-light and worm-blind and groping to meet and fuse again, and he lay there trying to will the sentience to meet and fuse. Then he saw the pain blast like lightning across the gap.

But it came from the other direction: not from himself outward, but inward toward himself out of all the identifiable lost earth. Wait, wait, he said. Just go slow at first, and I can take it. But it would not wait. It roared down and raised him, tossed and spun. But it would not wait for him.

It would not wait to hurl him into the void, so he cried, "Quick! Hurry!" looking up out of the red roar, into the face which with his own was wedded and twinned forever now by the explosion of that ten-gauge shell — the dead who would carry the living into the ground with him; the living who must bear about the repudiating earth with him forever, the deathless slain — then, as the slanted barrels did not move: "God damn it, couldn't you even borrow two shells, you fumbling ragged —" and put the world away.

His eyes, still open to the lost sun, glazed over with a sudden well and run of moisture which flowed down the alien and unremembering cheeks too, already drying, with a newness as of actual tears.

2

That shot was too loud. It was not only too loud for any shot, it was too loud for any sound, louder than any sound needed to be. It was as though the very capacity of space and echo for reproducing noise were leagued against him too in the vindication of his rights and the liquidation of his injuries, building up and building up about the thicket where he crouched and the dim faint road which ran beside it long after the gun-butt had shocked into his shoulder and the black powder smoke had reeked away and the horse had whirled, galloping, the empty stirrups clashing against the empty saddle. He had not fired the gun in four years; he had not even been certain that either two of the five shells he owned would explode.

The first one had not; it was the second one — the vain click louder than thunderbolt, the furious need to realign and find the second trigger, then the crash which after the other deafening click he did not hear at all, the reek and stink of powder pressing him backward and

downward into the thicket until for an instant he was physically off-balance, so that even if he could have made a second shot it would have been too late and the hound too was gone, leaving him betrayed here too, crouching behind the log, panting and trembling.

Then he would have to finish it, not in the way he wanted to but in the way he must. It was no blind, instinctive, and furious desire for flight which he had to combat and curb. On the contrary. What he would have liked to do would be to leave a printed placard on the breast itself: This is what happens to the men who impound Mink Snopes's cattle, with his name signed to it.

But he could not, and here again, for the third time since he had pulled the trigger, was that conspiracy to frustrate and outrage his rights as a man and his feelings as a sentient creature.

He must rise and quit the thicket and do what he had next to do, not to finish it but merely to complete the first step of what he had started, put into motion, who realised now that he had known already, before he heard the horse and raised the gun, that that would happen which had happened: that he had pulled trigger on an enemy but had only slain a corpse to be hidden.

So he sat up behind the log and shut his eyes and counted slowly until the shaking stopped and the sound of the galloping horse and even the outrageous and incredible shot had died out of his ears and he could rise, carrying the slanted gun still loaded with the shell which had failed to explode, and emerge from the thicket, already hurrying. But even then it would be dusk before he reached home.

It was dusk. He emerged from the bottom and looked up the slope of his meagre and sorry corn and saw it — the paintless two-room cabin with an open hallway between and a lean-to kitchen, which was not his, on which he paid rent but not taxes, paying almost as much in rent in one year as the house had cost to build; not old, yet the roof of which already leaked and the weather-stripping had already begun to rot away from the wall planks and which was just like the one he had

been born in which had not belonged to his father either, and just like the one he would die in if he died indoors — which he probably would even if in his clothes, repudiated without warning at some instant between bed and table or perhaps the door itself, by his unflagging furious heart-muscles — and it was just like the more than six others he had lived in since his marriage and like the twice that many more he knew he would live in before he did die and although he paid rent on this one he was unalterably convinced that his cousin owned it and he knew that this was as near as he would ever come to owning the roof over his head.

Then he saw the two children in the yard before it, who even as he saw them, stood quickly up, watching him, then turned and scuttled toward the house. Then it seemed to him that he could see her also, standing in the open hallway almost exactly where she had stood eight hours before and watched his back where he sat over the cold hearth, oiling the gun with the bacon-drippings which was the only thing he owned that could be used for oil, which would not lubricate but in contact with the metal would congeal into a substance like soap, inherent with its own salty corrosion; standing there as if in all that time she had not moved, once more framed by an opening, though without the lamp, as she was standing in the savage lamplight, above the loud harsh voices of invisible men, in the open door of the mess-hall in that south Mississippi convict camp where he first saw her nine years ago.

He stopped looking at the house; he had only glanced at it as it was, and mounted through the yellow and stunted stand of his corn, yellow and stunted because he had had no money to buy fertiliser to put beneath it and owned neither the stock nor the tools to work it properly with and had had no one to help him with what he did own in order to gamble his physical strength and endurance against his body's livelihood not only with ordinary climate but with the incredible spring of which the dry summer was the monstrous abortion, which had rained every day from the middle of May into July, as if the zodiac too had stacked cards against him.

He mounted on among the bitten and fruitless stalks, carrying the gun which looked too big for him to carry or aim or dare to fire, which he had acquired seven years ago at the sacrifice of actual food and had acquired at all only because no other man would want it since it carried a shell too big to shoot at anything but a wild goose or a deer and too costly to shoot at anything but a man.

He did not look toward the house again. He went on past it and entered the rotting lattice which enclosed the well and leaned the gun against the wall and removed his shoes and drew a bucket of water and began to wash the shoes. Then he knew that she was behind him.

He didn't look back, sitting on the rotted bench, small, in a faded clean shirt and patched overalls, tipping the bucket over the shoe and scrubbing at it with a corn cob. She began to laugh, harshly and steadily. "I told you this morning," she said. "I said, if you do, if you left here with that gun, I was going." He didn't look up, crouched over the wet shoe into which he had slipped his hand like a shoe-last, scrubbing at it with the cob. "Never you mind where.

Don't you worry about where when they come for you." He didn't answer. He finished the first shoe and set it down and slipped his hand into the second one and tipped water from the bucket over it and began to scrub it. "Because it won't be far!" she cried suddenly, yet without raising her voice at all. "Because when they come to hang you, I'm going to be where I can see it!" Now he rose.

He set the unfinished second shoe carefully down and laid the cob beside it and rose, small, almost a half-head shorter than she, barefoot, moving toward her, not fast, sidling a little, his head bent and apparently not even looking at her as she stood in the gaping and broken entrance — the bleached hair darkening again at the roots since it had been a year now since there had been any money to buy more dye, the harshly and steadily laughing face watching him with a curious and expectant glitter in the eyes.

He struck her across the mouth. He watched his hand, almost laboured, strike across the face which did not flinch, beneath the eyes which did not even blink. "You damned little murdering bastard," she said past the bright sudden blood. He struck her again, the blood smearing between mouth and palm and then renewed, striking again with that slow gathering which was not deliberation but extreme and patiently indomitable and implacable weariness, and again. "Go," he said. "Go. Go."

He followed her, across the yard and into the hallway, though he did not enter the room. From the door he could see her, although the room itself was almost completely dark, against the small high square of the dusk-faint window.

Then the match sputtered and glared and steadied above the wick, and now she was framed in an opening by shadeless light and surrounded by the loud soundless invisible shades of the nameless and numberless men — that body which, even when he was actually looking at them, at times to him had never borne children, was anterior even to the two-dollar marriage which had not sanctified but sanctioned them, which each time he approached it, it was not garments intervening but the cuckolding shades which had become a part of his past too, as if he and not she had been their prone recipient; which despite the soiled and shapeless garments concealing it he would contemplate even from the cold starless night-periphery beyond both hatred and desire and tell himself: It's like drink. It's like dope to me.

Then he saw the faces of the two children also, in the same flare of match and wick as if she had touched that single match to all three of them at the same time. They were sitting on the floor in the corner, not crouched, not hiding, just sitting there in the dark as they had been sitting doubtless ever since he had watched them scuttle toward the house when he came out of the bottom, looking at him with that same quality which he himself possessed: not abject but just still, with an old tired wisdom, acceptance of the immitigable discrepancy between will and capability due to that handicap of physical size in which none of the three of them had had any choice, turning from him to look without

curiosity at the blood on their mother's face and watching quietly as she took a garment from a nail in the wall and spread it on the pallet bed and wrapped the other objects — the other garments, the single pair of half-size shoes which either child wore indiscriminately in cold weather, the cracked hand-glass, the wooden comb, the handleless brush — into it.

“Come,” she said. He moved aside and they passed him, the children huddled against her skirt and for a moment hidden from him as they emerged from the room, then visible again, moving on up the hallway before her, he following, keeping that same distance, stopping again at the entrance while they crossed the porch and descended the warped and rotting steps.

When she paused on the ground beyond the steps he moved again, again with that invincible, that weary implacability, until he saw and stopped also and watched the larger child hurry across the yard, soundless and incorporeal in the dusk which was almost night now, and snatch something from the ground and return, clasping the object — a wooden block with the tops of four snuff tins nailed to it like wheels — to its breast. They went on. He did not follow farther. He did not even appear to be looking at them as they passed through the broken gate.

He returned to the house and blew out the lamp, whereupon the dark became complete, as if the puny vanishing flame had carried along with it all that remained of day, so that when he returned to the wall, it was by touch alone that he found the cob and the unfinished shoe and finished cleaning it.

Then he washed the gun. When he first got it, when the gun was new, or new at least to him, he had had a cleaning rod for it. He had made it himself, of cane, chosen carefully and trimmed and scraped carefully and eyed neatly at the tip to take the greasy rag, and during the first year or so, when he had had money to buy powder and shot and caps to load the shells with and could hunt a little now and then, he had been no less particular in the care of the cleaning rod than of the gun because he had only bought the gun but the rod he had made.

But the rod was gone now, he did not remember when nor know where, vanished along with the other accumulations of his maturity which had been dear to him too once, which he had shed somehow and somewhere along the road between the attaining of manhood and this hour when he found himself with nothing but an empty and foodless house which did not actually belong to him, and the gun, and that irremediable instant when the barrels had come level and true and his will had told his finger to contract, which nothing but his own death would ever efface from his memory.

So he tipped water from the bucket over the gun and removed his shirt and wiped it dry and picked up the shoes and returned to the house and, without lighting the lamp again, stood in the dark at the cold stove and ate with his fingers from the pot of cold peas which sat on it and went and lay down, still in his overalls, on the pallet bed in the room which was empty at last even of the loud shades, lying flat on his back in the darkness with his eyes open and his arms straight beside him, thinking of nothing. Then he heard the hound.

At first he did not move; except for his regular and unhurried breathing, he might have been the corpse his attitude resembled, lying perfectly still while the first cry died away and the myriad night-silence came down and then indrew and the second cry came, ringing, deep, resonant and filled with grief. He did not move.

It was as though he had been expecting it, waiting for it; had lain down and composed and emptied himself, not for sleep but to gather strength and will as distance runners and swimmers do, before assuming the phase of harried and furious endeavour which his life was about to enter, lying there for perhaps ten minutes while the long cries rang up from the dark bottom, as if he knew that those ten minutes were to be the last of peace.

Then he rose. Still in the dark, he put on the still-damp shirt and the shoes he had just washed and from a nail behind the door he took

down the new plough-line still looped in the coils in which his cousin, Varner's clerk, had knotted it two weeks ago, and left the house.

The night was moonless. He descended through the dry and invisible corn, keeping his bearing on a star until he reached the trees, against the black solidity of which fireflies winked and drifted and from beyond which came the booming and grunting of frogs and the howling of the dog. But once among them, he could not even see the sky anymore, though he realised then what he should have before: that the hound's voice would guide him.

So he followed it, slipping and plunging in the mud and tripping and thrashing among the briars and tangled undergrowth and blundering against invisible tree-trunks, his arm crooked to shield his face, sweating, while the steady cries of the dog drew nearer and nearer and broke abruptly off in mid-howl. He believed for an instant that he actually saw the phosphorescent glints of eyes although he had no light to reflect them, and suddenly and without knowing that he was going to do it, he ran toward where he had seen the eyes.

He struck the next tree a shocking blow with his shoulder; he was hurled sideways but caught balance again, still plunging forward, his hands extended. He was falling now. If there's a tree in front of me now, he thought, it will be all. He actually touched the dog. He felt its breath and heard the click of its teeth as it slashed at him, springing away, leaving him on his hands and knees in the mud while the noise of its invisible flight crashed and ceased.

He was kneeling at the brink of the depression. He had only to rise and, half stooping, his arm still crooked to fend his face, step down into the ankle-deep ooze of sunless mud and rotting vegetation and follow it for another step or so to reach the brush-pile.

He thrust the coiled plough-line into the bib of his overalls and stooped and began to drag away the slimed and rotten branches. Something gave a choked, infant-like cry, scrabbling among the sticks; it sprawled

frantically across his foot as he kicked at it, telling himself: It's just a possum.

It ain't nothing but a possum, stooping again to the tangle of foul and sweating wood, lifting it away until he reached the body. He wiped his hands free of mud and slime on his shirt and overalls and took hold of the shoulders and began to walk backward, dragging it along the depression.

It was not a ditch, it was an old logging road, choked with undergrowth and almost indistinguishable now, about two feet below the flat level of the bottom. He followed it for better than a mile, dragging the body which outweighed him by fifty pounds, pausing only to wipe his sweating hands from time to time on his shirt and to establish his whereabouts anew whenever he could find enough visible sky to distinguish the shapes of individual trees against.

Then he turned and dragged the body up out of the depression and went on for a hundred yards, still walking backward. He seemed to know exactly where he was, he did not even look over his shoulder until he released the body at last and stood erect and laid his hand upon what he sought — the shell of a once-tremendous pin oak, topless and about ten feet tall, standing in the clearing which the lightning bolt or age or decay or whatever it had been, had created.

Two years ago he had lined a wild bee into it; the sapling which he had cut and propped against the shell to reach the honey was still in place.

He took the plough-line from his breast and knotted one end about the body and removed his shoes and with the other end of the rope between his teeth, he climbed the sapling and straddled the rim of the shell and hand over hand hauled up the body which was half again as large as he, dragging it bumping and scraping up the trunk, until it lay like a half-filled sack across the lip. The knot in the rope had slipped tight.

At last he took his knife and cut the rope and tumbled the body over into the shell. But it stopped almost at once, and only when it was too late did he realise that he should have reversed it.

He shoved at it, probing about the shoulders, but it was not hung, it was wedged by one twisted arm. So he tied one end of the rope about the stub of a limb just below his foot and took a turn of the rope about his wrist and stood up on the wedged shoulders and began to jump up and down, whereupon without warning the body fled suddenly beneath him, leaving him dangling on the rope.

He began to climb it, hand over hand, rasping off with his knuckles the rotten fibre of the wall so that a faint, constant, dry powder of decay filled his nostrils like snuff. Then he heard the stub crack, he felt the rope slip free and he leaped upward from nothing and got the fingertips of one hand over the lip.

But when his weight came down on it, a whole shard of the rotten shell carried away and he flung the other hand up but the shell crumbled beneath that one also and he climbed interminably, furiously perpetual and without gain, his mouth open for his panting breath and his eyes glaring at the remote September sky which had long since turned past midnight, until at last the wood stopped crumbling, leaving him dangling by his hands, panting, until he could pull himself up once more and straddle the rim.

After a while he climbed down and lifted the propped sapling onto his shoulder and carried it fifteen or twenty yards beyond the edge of the clearing and returned and got his shoes. When he reached home dawn had already begun. He took off the muddy shoes and lay down on the pallet bed.

Then, as if it had waited for him to lie down, the hound began to howl again. It seemed to him that he had even heard the intake of breath before the first cry came up from the bottom where it was still night, measured, timbrous, and prolonged.

His days and nights were now reversed. He would emerge from the bottom with the morning star or perhaps the actual sun and mount through the untended and abortive corn. He did not wash the shoes now. He would not always remove them, and he would make no fire but would eat standing from the pot of cold peas on the stove while they lasted and drank down to its dregs the pot of cold, stale coffee while it lasted, and when they were gone he would eat handfuls of raw meal from the almost empty barrel.

For during the first day or so he would be hungry, since what he was doing now was harder than any work he had ever done, besides the excitement, the novelty. But after that it was not new anymore, and by then he realised it could have but one ending and so it would last forever, and he stopped being hungry.

He would merely rouse, wake, to tell himself, You got to eat, and eating the raw meal (presently there was nothing in the barrel but the dried cake on the sides which he would scrape off with a knife-blade) which he did not want and apparently did not even need, as if his body were living on the incorrigible singleness of his will like so much fatty tissue.

Then he would lie down on the pallet bed in his overalls and shoes on which the freshest and most recent caking of mud had not even begun to dry, still chewing and with the lengthening stubble about his mouth still full of meal grains and, as though in a continuation of the lying down, plunge not into oblivion but into an eyeless and tongueless interval of resting and recuperation like a man stepping deliberately into a bath, to wake as though to an alarm-clock at the same afternoon hour, the continuity unbroken between the lying down and the opening of eyes again, since it was only the body which bore and would bear the burden which needed the rest. He would build a fire in the stove then, although there was nothing to cook save the scrapings from the meal barrel.

But it was the hot drink he wanted, though there was no more coffee either. So he would fill the pot with water and heat it and drink the hot water sweetened with sugar, then in the splint chair on the porch he

would watch the night, the darkness, emerge from the bottom and herd, drive, the sun gradually up the slope of the corn-patch which even in dusk stood no less barren and yellow than in sunlight, and at last take the house itself.

Then the hound would begin and he would sit there for perhaps ten or fifteen minutes longer, as the holder of the annual commuters' ticket sits on his accustomed bench and continues to read his paper after the train has already whistled for the stop.

On the second afternoon when he waked a little boy was sitting on the front steps — the round-headed periwinkle-eyed son of his kinsman who operated Varner's blacksmith shop — though at the first sound of his feet on the floor the boy moved, so that when he reached the porch the boy was already on the ground beyond it and several feet away, looking back at him. "Uncle Lump says for you to come to the store," the boy said. "He says it's important."

He didn't answer. He stood there with last night's mud now dried on the shoes and overalls and (so still had been his sleep) this morning's meal grains still clinging in the stubble around his mouth, until the boy turned and began to walk away and then began to run, looking back for an instant from the edge of the woods, then running on, vanishing. Still he didn't move and still there was nothing in his face. If it had been money, he could have brought it, he thought.

Because it ain't money. Not from them. And on the third morning he knew suddenly that someone was standing in the door watching him. He knew, even in the midst of the unreality which was not dream but a barren place where his mind, his will, stood like an unresting invincible ungrazing horse while the puny body which rode it renewed its strength, that it was not the boy now and that it was still morning, that he had not been asleep that long.

They were hid here, watching me when I come up out of the bottom, he thought, trying to speak aloud to wake himself as he might have knelt to shake his own shoulder: Wake up. Wake up: until he waked,

knowing at once that it was too late, not even needing the position of the window's shadow on the floor to tell him it was that same automatic hour of afternoon. He did not hurry.

He started the fire and set the pot on to heat and scooped a handful of meal scrapings from the barrel and ate it, chewing the splinters out of it, spitting them, rubbing them from his lips with his hand. In doing so, he discovered the meal already clinging in his beard and he ate that too, wiping the grains from either side with his fingers across his chewing mouth.

Then he drank the cup of sweetened water and went out into the yard. The tracks were there. He knew the sheriff's — the heavy, deep, deliberate prints, even in the rainless summer's parched earth, of those two hundred and forty pounds of flesh which wore the metal shield smaller than a playing card, on which he had gambled not only his freedom but perhaps his obliteration too, followed by those of its satellites.

He saw the prints of the hands and the crawling knees where one of them had searched back and forth beneath the floor while he was sleeping on top of it; he found leaning against the wall inside the stable his own shovel with which they had cleared away the year's accumulation of mule-droppings to examine the earth beneath, and he found among the trees above the cabin the place where the surrey had stood.

And still there was nothing in his face — no alarm, no terror, no dread; not even contempt or amusement — only the cold and incorrigible, the almost peaceful, intractability.

He returned to the house and took the shotgun from its corner. It was covered now almost completely over with a thin, snuff-coloured frost of rust, as though the very tedious care of that first night's wiping had overreached itself, had transferred the water from the gun to the shirt then back from the shirt to the gun again.

And it did not breach, break, but opened slowly to steady force, exposing the thick, chocolate-coloured soap-like mass of congealed animal fat, so that at last he dismantled it and boiled water in the coffee-pot and scalded the grease away and laid the dismembered sections along the edge of the back porch where the sun fell on them as long as there was sun.

Then he reassembled it and loaded it with two of the three remaining shells and leaned it against the wall beside the chair, and again he watched the night emerge from the bottom and mount through the bitten corn, taking corn, taking the house itself at last and, still rising, become as two up-opening palms releasing the westward-flying ultimate bird of evening.

Below him, beyond the corn, the fireflies winked and drifted against the breast of darkness; beyond, within it, the steady booming of the frogs was the steady pulse and beat of the dark heart of night, so that at last when the unvarying moment came — that moment as unvarying from one dusk to the next as the afternoon's instant when he would awake — the beat of that heart seemed to fall still too, emptying silence for the first deep cry of strong and invincible grief. He reached his hand backward and took up the gun.

This time he used the hound's voice for a bearing from the start. When he entered the bottom he thought about wind and paused to test it. But there was no wind, so he went straight on toward the howling, not fast now since he was trying for silence, yet not slow either since this would not take long and then he could return home and lie down before midnight, long before midnight, telling himself as he moved cautiously and steadily toward the howling: Now I can go back to sleeping at night again.

The howling was quite near now. He slanted the gun forward, his thumb on the two hammers. Then the dog's voice stopped, again in mid-howl; again for an instant he saw the two yellow points of eyes before the gun-muzzle blotted them. In the glare of the explosion he

saw the whole animal sharp in relief, leaping. He saw the charge strike and hurl it backward into the loud welter of following darkness.

By an actual physical effort he restrained his finger before it contracted on the second trigger and with the gun still at his shoulder he crouched, holding his breath and glaring into the sightless dark while the tremendous silence which had been broken three nights ago when the first cry of the hound reached him and which had never once been restored, annealed, even while he slept, roared down about him and, still roaring, began to stiffen and set like cement, not only in his hearing but in his lungs, his breathing, inside and without him too, solidifying from tree-trunk to tree-trunk, among which the shattered echoes of the shot died away in strangling murmurs, caught in that cooling solidity before they had had time to cease.

With the gun still cocked and presented, he advanced toward the place where he had seen the dog fall, panting through his bared clenched teeth, feeling about with his feet in the undergrowth. Then he realised suddenly that he had already passed the spot and that he was still advancing.

He knew that he was about to start running and then he was running, blindly in the pitch darkness, speaking, hissing to himself: Stop. Stop. You'll bust your damn brains out. He stopped, panting. He got his bearings anew on a patch of sky, yet he forced himself to remain motionless until even the panting stopped. Then he let the hammer of the gun down and went on, walking now.

Now he had the booming of the frogs to guide him, blending and fading then rising again in choral climax, each separate voice not a single note but an octave, almost a chord, in bass, growing louder and louder and nearer and nearer, then ceasing abruptly too into a second of frozen immobility followed by a swift random patter of small splashes like hands striking the water, so that when he saw the water it was already shattered into fluid ceaseless gleams across which reflected stars slid and vanished and recovered.

He flung the gun. For an instant he saw it, spinning slowly. Then it splashed, not sinking but disintegrating among that shattered scurrying of broken stars.

When he reached home, it was not even midnight yet. Now he removed not only the shoes but the overalls too which had not passed his knees in seventy-two hours, and lay down on the pallet. But at once he knew he was not going to sleep, not because of the seventy-two hours' habit of reversed days and nights, not because of any twitching and jerking of spent and ungovernable nerves and muscles, but because of that silence which the first gunshot had broken and the second one had made whole again.

So he lay again, rigid and composed on his back, his arms at his sides and his eyes open in the darkness and his head and lungs filled with that roaring silence across which the random and velvet-shod fireflies drifted and winked and beyond which the constant frogs pulsed and beat, until the rectangle of sky beyond the oblique door of the room and the open end of the hallway began to turn grey and then primrose, and already he could see three buzzards soaring in it. Now I must get up, he told himself; I will have to start staying up all day if I aim to begin sleeping again at night. Then he began to say, Wake up.

Wake up, until he waked at last, with the yellow square of window-shaped sun lying once more on the floor where each unvarying afternoon it would lie. Resting upon the quilt not an inch from his face was a folded scrap of brown paper; when he rose, he found in the dust at the doorsill the print of the little boy's naked foot.

The note was in pencil, on a scrap torn from a paper sack, unsigned: Come on in here your wives got some money for you. He stood, unshaven, in his shirt, blinking at it. Now I can go, he thought, and something began to happen in his heart.

He raised his head, blinking almost painfully, looking for the first time in three days beyond the desolate and foodless cabin which symbolised the impasse his life had reached, into the limitless freedom of the

sunny sky. He spoke aloud. "Now I can — —" he said. Then he saw the buzzards. At dawn he had seen three.

Now he might possibly have counted them, though he did not. He just watched the black concentric spiralling as if they followed an invisible funnel, disappearing one by one below the trees. He spoke aloud again. "It's the dog," he said, knowing it was not the dog. And it didn't matter.

Because I'll be gone then, he thought. It was not that something lifted from his heart; it was as though he had become aware for the first time of the weight which lay on it.

It was almost sunset when, shaved and with the shoes and overalls washed again, he mounted to the empty gallery and entered the store. His kinsman was behind the open candy-case, in the act of putting something into his mouth.

"Where — —" he said.

The cousin closed the case, chewing. "You durned fool, I sent word to you two days ago to get away from there before that pussel-gutted Hampton come prowling around here with that surrey full of deputies. A nigger grabbling in that slough found that durn gun before the water even quit shaking."

"It's not mine," he said. "I have no gun. Where — —"

"Hell fire, everybody knows it's yours. There ain't another one of them old hammer-lock ten-gauge Hadleys in this country but that one. That's why I never told no lie about it, let alone that durn Hampton sitting right out there on that bench when the nigger come up the steps with it.

I says, 'Sure it's Mink's gun. He's been hunting for it ever since last fall.' Then I turns to the nigger. 'What the hell you mean, you black son of a bitch,' I says, 'borrowing Mr. Snopes's gun last fall to go squirl hunting and letting it fall in that ere slough and claiming you couldn't find it?'

Here.” The cousin stooped beneath the counter and rose and laid the gun on the counter. It had been wiped off save for a patch of now-dried mud on the stock.

He did not even look at it. “It’s not mine,” he said. “Where is — —”

“But that’s all right now. I fixed that in time. What Hampton expected was for me to deny it was yours. Then he would a had you. But I fixed that. I throwed the suspicion right onto the nigger fore Hampton could open his mouth.

I figger about tonight or maybe tomorrow night I’ll take a few of the boys and go to the nigger’s house with a couple of trace chains or maybe a little fire under his feet. And even if he don’t confess nothing, folks will hear that he has done been visited at night and there’s too many votes out here for Hampton to do nothing else but take him on in and send him to the penitentiary, even if he can’t quite risk hanging him, and Hampton knows it.

So that’s all right. Besides, what I sent you that first message for was about your wife.”

“Yes,” he said. “Where — —”

“She’s going to get you in trouble. She’s done already got you in trouble. That’s how come that durn vote-sucking sheriff noseying around out here. His nigger found the horse, with him and the dog both missing, but that was all right until folks begun to remember how she turned up here that same night, with them two kids and that bundle of clothes and blood still running out of her busted mouth until folks couldn’t help but know you had run her out of the house.

And even that might have been all right if she hadn’t started in telling everybody that would listen that you never done it. Just a horse with a empty saddle; no body and no blood neither found yet, and here she is

trying to help you by telling everybody she meets that you never done something that nobody knows for sure has even been done yet.

Why in hell ain't you got out of here? Didn't you have sense enough to do that the first day?"

"On what?" he said.

The cousin had been blinking rapidly at him. Now the little eyes stopped blinking. "On what?" he said. The other did not answer. He had not moved since he entered, small, immobile, in the middle of the floor opposite the entrance, through which the dying sunlight stained him from head to foot with a thin wash like diluted blood. "You mean you ain't got any money? You mean to stand there and tell me he never had nothing in his pocket? Because I don't believe it.

By God, I know better. I saw inside his purse that same morning. He never carried a cent less than fifty. . . ." The voice ceased, died. Then it spoke in a dawning incredulous amazement and no louder than a whisper: "Do you mean to tell me you never even looked? never even looked?"

The other did not answer. He might not have even heard, motionless, looking at nothing while the last of the copper light, mounting like rising water up his body, gathered for an instant in concentrated and dying crimson upon the calm and unwavering and intractable mask of his face, and faded, and the dusk, the twilight, gathered along the ranked shelves and in the shadowy corners and the old strong smells of cheese and leather and kerosene, condensed and thickened among the rafters above his head like the pall of oblivion itself.

The cousin's voice seemed to emerge from it, sourceless, unlocatable, without even the weight of breath to give it volume: "Where did you put him?" and again, the cousin outside the counter now, facing him, almost breast to breast with him, the fierce repressed breathing murmuring on his face now: "By God, he had at least fifty dollars.

I know. I seen it. Right here in this store. Where did you — —”

“No,” he said.

“Yes.”

“No.” Their faces were not a foot apart, their breathing steady and audible. Then the other face moved back, larger than his, higher than his, beginning to become featureless in the fading light.

“All right,” the cousin said. “I’m glad you don’t need money. Because if you come to me expecting any you’d just have to keep on expecting. You know what Will Varner pays his clerks. You know about how much any man working for Will Varner’s wages could get ahead in ten years, let alone two months. So you won’t even need that ten dollars your wife’s got. So that’ll be just fine, won’t it?”

“Yes,” he said. “Where — —”

“Staying at Will Varner’s.” He turned at once and went toward the door. As he passed out of it the cousin spoke again out of the shadows behind him: “Tell her to ask Will or Jody to lend her another ten to go with that one she’s already got.”

Although it was not quite dark yet, there was already a light in the Varner house. He could see it even at this distance, and it was as if he were standing outside of himself, watching the distance steadily shorten between himself and the light. And then that’s all, he thought. All them days and nights that looked like they wasn’t going to have no end, come down to the space of a little piece of dusty road between me and a lighted door.

And when he put his hand on Varner’s gate, it was as if she had been waiting, watching the road for him. She came out of the front door, running, framed again for an instant by the lighted doorway as when he had first seen her that night at the lumber camp to which, even nine years afterward, he did not like to remember how, by what mischance, he had come. The feeling was no less strong now than it had ever been.

He did not dread to remember it nor did he try not to, and not in remorse for the deed he had done, because he neither required nor desired absolution for that. He merely wished he did not have to remember the fiasco which had followed the act, contemptuous of the body or the intellect which had failed the will to do, not writhing with impotent regret on remembering it and not snarling, because he never snarled; but just cold, indomitable, and intractable.

He had lived in a dozen different sorry and ill-made rented cabins as his father had moved from farm to farm, without himself ever having been more than fifteen or twenty miles away from any one of them.

Then suddenly and at night he had had to leave the roof he called home and the only land and people and customs he knew, without even time to gather up anything to take with him, if there had been anything to take, nor to say farewell to anyone if there had been anyone to say farewell to, to find himself weeks later and still on foot, more than two hundred miles away. He was seeking the sea; he was twenty-three then, that young.

He had never seen it; he did not know certainly just where it was, except that it was to the south. He had never thought of it before and he could not have said why he wanted to go to it — what of repudiation of the land, the earth, where his body or intellect had faulted somehow to the cold undeviation of his will to do — seeking what of that iodinic proffer of space and oblivion of which he had no intention of availing himself, would never avail himself, as if, by deliberately refusing to cut the wires of remembering, to punish that body and intellect which had failed him.

Perhaps he was seeking only the proffer of this illimitable space and irremediable forgetting along the edge of which the contemptible teeming of his own earth-kind timidly seethed and recoiled, not to accept the proffer but merely to bury himself in this myriad anonymity beside the impregnable haven of all the drowned intact golden galleons and the unattainable deathless seamaiads.

Then, almost there and more than twenty-four hours without food, he saw a light and approached it and heard the loud voices and saw her framed in the open door, immobile, upright and unlistening, while those harsh loud manshouts and cries seemed to rise toward her like a roaring incense.

He went no further. The next morning he was at work there, an axeman, without even knowing whom he was working for, asking only incidentally of the foreman who hired him and who told him bluntly that he was too small, too light, to swing his end of a cross-cut saw, what his wage would be.

He had never seen convicts' stripes before either, so it was not with that first light but only after several succeeding ones that he learned where he was — a tract of wild-catted virgin timber in process of being logged by a roaring man of about fifty who was no taller than he was, with strong, short iron-grey hair and a hard prominent belly, who through political influence or bribery or whatever got his convict labour from the State for the price of their board and keep; a widower who had lost his wife years ago at the birth of their first child and now lived openly with a magnificent quadroon woman most of whose teeth were gold and who superintended the kitchen where other convicts did the actual work, in a separate house set among the plank-and-canvas barracks in which the convicts lived.

The woman in the lighted door was that child. She lived in the same house with her father and the quadroon, in a separate wing with an entrance of its own, and her hair was black then — a splendid heavy mane of it which whatever present one out of foremen and armed guards and convict labourers, and himself in his turn, after his summons came and he had long since discovered the reason for the separate entrance, contributed to keep cut almost man-short with razors.

It was strong and short and not fine, either in the glare of that first evening's lamp or in the next day's sunlight when, the axe lifted for the stroke, he turned and she was sitting a big, rangy, well-kept horse

behind and above him, in overalls, looking at him not brazenly and not speculatively, but intently and boldly, as a bold and successful man would.

That was what he saw: the habit of success — that perfect marriage of will and ability with a single undiffused object — which set her not as a feminine garment but as one as masculine as the overalls and her height and size and the short hair; he saw not a nympholept but the confident lord of a harem.

She did not speak that time. She rode on, and now he discovered that that separate entrance was not used only at night. Sometimes she would ride past on the horse and stop and speak briefly to the foreman and ride on; sometimes the quadroon would appear on the horse and speak a name to the foreman and return, and the foreman would call that name and the man would drop his axe or saw and follow the horse.

Then he, still swinging his axe and not even looking up, would seem to follow and watch that man enter the private door and then watch him emerge later and return to work — the nameless, the identical, highwayman, murderer, thief, among whom there appeared to be no favourites and no jealousy. That was to be his, alone, apparently.

But even before his summons came, he was resigned to the jealousy and cognisant of his fate. He had been bred by generations to believe invincibly that to every man, whatever his past actions, whatever depths he might have reached, there was reserved one virgin, at least for him to marry; one maidenhead, if only for him to deflower and destroy.

Yet he not only saw that he must compete for mere notice with men among whom he saw himself not only as a child but as a child of another race and species, but that when he did approach her at last he would have to tear aside not garments alone but the ghostly embraces of thirty or forty men; and this not only once but each time and hence (he foresaw even then his fate) forever: no room, no darkness, no

desert even ever large enough to contain the two of them and the constant stallion-ramp of those inexpugnable shades.

Then his turn, his summons came at last, as he had known it would. He obeyed it with foreknowledge but without regret. He entered not the hot and quenchless bed of a barren and lecherous woman, but the fierce simple cave of a lioness — a tumescence which surrendered nothing and asked no quarter, and which made a monogamist of him forever, as opium and homicide do of those whom they once accept. That was early one afternoon.

The hot sun of July falling through the shadeless and even curtainless windows open to all outdoors, upon a bed made by hand of six-inch unplanned timbers cross-braced with light steel cables, yet which nevertheless would advance in short steady skidding jerks across the floor like a light and ill-balanced rocking-chair. Five months later they were married. They did not plan it. Never at any time afterward did he fail to affirm, even to himself, that the marriage had been no scheme or even intention of hers.

What did it was the collapse of her father's enterprise, which even he had been able to see was inherent with its own inevitable bankruptcy which the crash of each falling tree brought one stick nearer.

Afterward it seemed to him that that afternoon's bedding had been the signal for that entire furious edifice of ravished acres and shotgun houses and toiling men and mules which had been erected overnight and founded on nothing, to collapse overnight into nothing, back into the refuse — the sawdust heaps, the lopped dead limbs and tree-butts and all the grief of wood — of its own murdering. He had most of his five months' pay.

They walked to the nearest county-seat and bought a licence; the Justice of the Peace who sold it to them removed his chew of tobacco and, holding it damp in his hand, called in two passing men and pronounced them man and wife. They returned to his native country, where he rented a small farm on shares. They had a second-hand stove,

a shuck mattress on the floor, the razor with which he still kept her hair cut short, and little else.

At that time they needed little else. She said: "I've had a hundred men, but I never had a wasp before. That stuff comes out of you is rank poison. It's too hot. It burns itself and my seed both up. It'll never make a kid." But three years afterward it did.

Five years later it had made two; and he would watch them as they approached across whatever sorry field or patch, fetching his cold meagre dinner of the jug of fresh water, or as they played with blocks of wood or rusted harness buckles or threadless and headless ploughbolts which even he could no longer use, in the dust before whatever rented porch he sat on while the sweat cooled out of him, and in a resurgence of the old hot quick invincible fury still as strong and fierce and brief as on the first time, he would think, By God, they better be mine.

Then, quieter, on the pallet bed where she would already be asleep although his own spent body had not yet ceased to jerk and twitch, he would think how, even if they were not, it was the same thing. They served to shackle her too, more irrevocably than he himself was shackled, since on her fate she had even put the seal of a formal acquiescence by letting her hair grow out again and dyeing it.

She came down the walk, running heavily but fast. She reached it before he had finished opening it, flinging both him and the gate back as she ran through it and caught him by the front of his overalls. "No!" she cried, though her voice still whispered: "No! Oh God, what do you mean? You can't come in here!"

"I can go anywhere I want to," he said. "Lump said — —" Then he tried to wrench free, but she had already released him and caught his arm and was hurrying, almost dragging him along the fence, away from the light. He wrenched at her grip again, setting his feet. "Wait," he said.

“You fool!” she said, in that harsh panting whisper: “You fool! Oh, God damn you! God damn you!” He began to struggle, with a cold condensed fury which did not seem quite able or perhaps ready to emerge yet from his body. Then he lashed suddenly out, still not at her but to break her grip.

But she held him, with both hands now, as they faced each other. “Why didn’t you go that night? God, I thought of course you were going to get out as soon as I left!” She shook him savagely, with no more effort than if he were a child. “Why didn’t you? Why in hell didn’t you?”

“On what?” he said. “Where? Lump said — —”

“I know you didn’t have any money, like I know you haven’t had anything to eat except the dust in that barrel. You could have hidden! In the woods — anywhere, until I would have time to — God damn you! God damn you! If they would just let me do the hanging!”

She shook him, her face bent to his, her hard, hot, panting breath on his face. “Not for killing him, but for doing it when you have no money to get away on if you ran, and nothing to eat if you stayed.

If they’d just let me do it: hang you just enough to take you down and bring you to and hang you again just enough to cut you down and bring you to — —” He slashed out again, viciously. But she had already released him, standing on one foot now, the other foot angled upward from the knee to meet her reaching hand. She took something from her shoe and put it into his hand.

He knew at once what it was — a banknote, folded and refolded small and square and still warm with body-heat.

And it was just one note. It’s one dollar, he thought, knowing it was not. It was I. O. and Eck, he told himself, knowing it was not, just as he knew there was but one man in the country who would have ten dollars in one bill — or at the most, two men; now he even heard what

his cousin had said as he walked out of the store fifteen minutes ago. He didn't even look toward his hand.

"Did you sell Will something for it, or did you just take it out of his pants while he was asleep? Or was it Jody?"

"What if I did? What if I can sell enough more of it tonight to get ten more. Only for God's sake don't go back to the house. Stay in the woods. Then tomorrow morning — —" He did not move; she saw only the slight jerk of his hand and wrist — no coin to ring against his thumbnail or to make any sound among the dust-stiffened roadside weeds where gouts of dusty cotton clung.

When he went on, she began to run after him. "Mink!" she said. He walked steadily on. She was at his shoulder, running, though he continued to walk. "For God's sake," she said. "For God's sake." Then she caught his shoulder and swung him to face her. This time he slashed free and sprang into the weeds, stooping, and rose with a stick lifted in his hand and walked toward her again with that patient and implacable weariness, until she turned.

He lowered the stick, but he continued to stand there until he could no longer distinguish her, even against the pale dust of the road. Then he tossed the stick into the weeds and turned. The cousin was standing behind him. If the other had been smaller or he larger he would have stepped on him, walked him down. The other stepped aside and turned with him, the faint rasp of the repressed breathing at his shoulder.

"So you throwed that away too," the cousin said. He didn't answer. They went on side by side in the thick, ankle-deep dust. Their feet made no sound in it. "He had at least fifty dollars. I tell you I saw it. And you expect me to believe you ain't got it." He didn't answer.

They walked steadily on, not fast, like two people walking without destination or haste, for pleasure or exercise. "All right. I'm going to do what wouldn't no other man living do: I'm going to give you the benefit

of the doubt that you ain't got it, actually never looked. Now where did you put him?"

He didn't answer nor pause. The cousin caught him by the shoulder, stopping him; now there was in the fierce baffled breathing, the whispering voice, not only the old amazement but a sort of cold and desperate outrage, like one trying to reach through a fleeing crisis to the comprehension of an idiot: "Are you going to let that fifty dollars lay there for Hampton and them deputies to split up between them?"

He struck the hand off. "Let me alone," he said.

"All right. I'll do this. I'll give you twenty-five dollars now. I'll go with you, all you got to do is hand me the wallet, sight unseen. Or hand me his pants, if you don't want to take it out of them. You won't even touch or even see the money." He turned to go on again. "All right.

If you are too puke-stomached to do it yourself, tell me where it is. When I come back, I'll give you ten dollars, though a fellow that just throwed away a ten-dollar bill don't — —" He walked on. Again the hand caught his shoulder and swung him about; the tense fierce voice murmured from nowhere and everywhere out of the breathless dark: "Wait. Listen. Listen good. Suppose I look up Hampton; he's been around here all day; he's probably still somewhere here tonight.

Suppose I tell him I done recollected a mistake, that that gun wasn't lost last fall because you come in the store and bought a nickel's worth of powder just last week. Then you can explain how you was aiming to swap Houston the powder for the pound-free on that yearling — —"

This time he did not fling the hand off. He merely began to walk toward the other with that patient and invincible weariness which the other did not recognise, walking steadily toward the cousin as the other gave ground.

His voice was not loud either; it was flat, absolutely toneless: "I ask you to let me alone," he said. "I don't tell you; I ask you to let me alone. Not

for my sake. Because I'm tired. I ask you to let me alone." The other backed away before him, moving slightly faster, so that the distance between them increased.

When he stopped, it continued to increase until he could no longer see the other and only the whisper, furious and outraged, came back: "All right, you durn little tight-fisted murderer. See if you get away with it."

Approaching the village again, his feet made no sound in the dust and, in the darkness, seemingly no progress either, though the light in Mrs. Littlejohn's kitchen window just beyond the store's dark bulk — the only light anywhere — drew steadily nearer. Just beyond it the lane turned off which led to his cabin four miles away.

That's where I would have kept straight on, to Jefferson and the railroad, he thought; and suddenly, now that it was too late, now that he had lost all hope of alternative between planned and intelligent escape and mere blind desperate harried fleeing and doubling through the swamp and jungle of the bottom like a spent and starving beast cut off from its den, he knew that for three days now he had not only hoped but had actually believed that opportunity to choose would be given him.

And he had not only lost that privilege of choice, but due to the blind mischance which had permitted his cousin either to see or guess what was in the wallet, even the bitter alternative was deferred for another night.

It began to seem to him now that that puny and lonely beacon not only marked no ultimate point for even desperate election but was the period to hope itself, and that all which remained to him of freedom lay in the shortening space between it and his advancing foot. I thought that when you killed a man, that finished it, he told himself. But it don't. It just starts then.

When he reached home, he did not enter it. Instead, he went around to the woodpile and got his axe and stood for a moment to examine the stars. It was not much past nine; he could allow himself until midnight. Then he circled the house and entered the corn-patch. Halfway down the slope he paused, listening, then he went on.

He did not enter the bottom either; he stepped behind the first tree large enough to conceal him and leaned the axe carefully against it where he could find it again and stood there, motionless, breathing quietly, and listened to the heavy body running with hurried and cautious concern among the clashing cornstalks, the tense and hurried panting drawing rapidly nearer, then the quick indraw of breath when the other ran past the tree, checking, as he stepped out from behind it and turned back up the slope.

They went back through the corn, in single file and five feet apart. He could hear the clumsy body behind him stumbling and thrashing among the sibilant rows, and the breathing fierce, outraged, and repressed. His own passage made no noise, even in the trigger-set dryness of the corn, as if his body had no substance. "Listen," the cousin said. "Let's look at this thing like two reasonable . . ."

They emerged from the corn and crossed the yard and entered the house, still five feet apart. He went onto the kitchen and lit the lamp and squatted before the stove, preparing to start the fire. The cousin stood in the door, breathing heavily and watching while the other coaxed the chips into a blaze and took the coffee-pot from the stove and filled it from the water pail and set it back. "Ain't you even got nothing to eat?" the cousin said.

The other did not answer. "You got some feed corn, ain't you? We could parch some of that." The fire was burning well now. The other laid his hand on the pot, though of course it had not even begun to be warm yet. The cousin watched the back of his head. "All right," he said. "Let's go get some of it."

The other removed his hand from the pot. He did not look back. "Get it," he said. "I'm not hungry." The cousin breathed in the door, watching the still, slanted face. His breath made a faint, steady, rasping sound.

"All right," he said. "I'll go to the barn and get some." He left the door and walked heavily down the hallway and onto the back porch and stepped down to the earth, already running. He ran frantically in the blind darkness and on tiptoe, around toward the front of the house and stopped, peering around the corner toward the front door, holding his breath, then ran again, onto the steps, where he could see into the hallway lighted faintly by the lamp in the kitchen, and paused again for an instant, crouched, glaring.

The son of a bitch tricked me, he thought. He went out the back: and ran up the steps, stumbling heavily and recovering, and thundered down the hall to the kitchen door and saw, in the instant of passing it, the other standing beside the stove as he had left him, his hand again on the coffee-pot.

The murdering little son of a bitch, he thought. I wouldn't have believed it. I wouldn't have believed a man would have to go through all this even for five hundred dollars.

But when he stood in the door again, save for the slightly increased rasp and tempo of his breathing, he might never have left it. He watched the other fetch to the stove a cracked china cup, a thick glass tumbler, a tin can containing a little sugar, and a spoon; when he spoke, he might have been talking to his employer's wife over a tea-table: "It's done made up its mind at last to get hot, has it?" The other did not answer. He filled the cup from the pot and spooned sugar into it and stirred it and stood beside the stove, turned three-quarters from the cousin, his head bent, sipping from the cup.

After a moment the cousin approached and filled the tumbler and put sugar into it and sipped, wry-faced, his features all seeming to flee from the tumbler's rim, upward, gathering, eyes, nose, even mouth, toward

his forehead, as if the skin in which they were embedded was attached to his skull only at one point somewhere in the back. "Listen," the cousin said. "Just try to look at this thing like two reasonable people. There's that fifty dollars laying out there, not belonging to nobody. And you can't go and get it without taking me, because I ain't going to let you.

And I can't go get it without taking you, because I don't know where it's at. Yet here we are, setting around this house while every minute we waste is bringing that durn sheriff and them deputies just that much closer to finding it.

It's just a matter of pure and simple principle. Ain't no likes and dislikes about it. If I had my way, I'd keep all of it myself, the same as you would. But you can't and I can't. Yet here we are, setting here — —" The other tilted the cup and drained it.

"What time is it?" he said. From the creased bulge of his waistband the cousin wrenched a dollar watch on a thong of greasy leather and looked at it and prized it back into the fob-pocket.

"Twenty-eight past nine. And it ain't going to stay that forever.

And I got to open the store at six o'clock in the morning. And I got to walk five miles tonight before I can go to bed. But never mind that. Don't pay no attention to that, because there ain't nothing personal in this because it is a pure and simple business matter. Think about your — —" The other set the empty cup on the stove.

"Checkers?" he said.

" — self. You got — what?" The cousin stopped talking. He watched the other cross the room and lift from among the shadows in the corner a short, broad piece of plank. From the shelf above it he took another tin can and brought them to the table. The board was marked off with charcoal into alternate staggered squares; the can contained a handful of small china- and glass-fragments in two colours, apparently from a broken plate and a blue glass bottle.

He laid the board beside the lamp and began to oppose the men. The cousin watched him, the tumbler arrested halfway to his mouth. For an instant he ceased to breathe. Then he breathed again. "Why, sholy," he said. He set the glass on the stove and drew up a chair opposite.

Sitting, he seemed to be on the point of enveloping not only the chair but the table too in a collapsing mass of flabby and badly-filled flesh, like a collapsing balloon. "We'll play a nickel a game against that fifty dollars," he said. "All right?"

"Move," the other said. They began to play — the one with a cold and deadly deliberation and economy of moves, the other with a sort of clumsy speed and dash.

It was that amateurish, that almost childlike, lack of premeditation and plan or even foresight of one who, depending on manipulation and not intellect in games of chance, finds himself involved in one where dexterity cannot avail, yet nevertheless attempting to cheat even at bald and simple draughts with an incredible optimism, an incorrigible dishonesty long since become pure reflex and probably now beyond his control, making his dashing and clumsy moves then withdrawing his closed fist to sit watching with his little intent unwinking eyes the still, wasted, down-looking face opposite, talking steadily about almost everything except money and death, the fist resting on the table-edge still closed about the pawn or the king's crown which it had palmed.

The trouble with checkers is, he thought, It ain't nothing but checkers. At the end of an hour he was thirteen games ahead.

"Make it a quarter," he said.

"What time is it?" the other said. The cousin wrung the watch from his waistband again and returned it.

"Four minutes to eleven."

"Move," the other said. They played on. The cousin was not talking now. He was keeping score now with a chewed pencil stub on the edge

of the board. Thus when, thirty minutes later, he totted up the score, the pencil presented to his vision not a symbol but a sum complete with decimal and dollar mark, which seemed in the next instant to leap upward and strike comprehension, with an impact almost audible; he became dead still, for an instant he did not breathe indeed, thinking rapidly: Hell fire. Hell fire. Of course he never caught me.

He didn't want to. Because when I have won all of his share, he'll figure he won't need to risk going where it's at. So now he had to completely reverse his entire tactics. And now for the first time the crawling hands on the face of the watch which he now produced without being asked and laid face-up beside the board, assumed a definite significance. Because this here just can't go on forever, he thought in a resurgence of the impotent rage.

It just can't. A man just can't be expected to go through much more of this even for all of fifty dollars. So he reversed himself. Whereupon it was as if even dishonesty had foresworn him. He would make the dashing, clumsy, calculated moves; he would sit back with his own pawn or king's crown in his fist now.

Only now the other's thin hard hand would be gripping that wrist while the cold, flat, dead voice demonstrated how a certain pawn could not possibly have arrived at the square on which it suddenly appeared to be, and lived, or even rapping the knuckles of that gripped hand on the table until it disgorged.

Yet he would attempt it again, with that baffled and desperate optimism and hope, and be caught again and then try it again, until at the end of the next hour his movements on the board were not even childlike, they were those of an imbecile or a blind person. And he was talking again now: "Listen. There's that fifty dollars that don't belong to nobody because he never had no kin, nobody to claim it. Just laying out there for the first man that comes along to — —"

"Move," the other said. He moved a pawn. "No," the other said. "Jump." He made the jump. The other moved a second pawn.

“ — and here you are needing money to keep from being hung maybe and you can't go and get it because I won't leave. And me that can't get up and go on home and get to bed so I can get up, and go to work tomorrow because you won't show me where that money's at — —”

“Move,” the other said. The cousin moved a pawn. “No,” the other said. “Jump.” The cousin took the jump. Then he watched the gaunt black-haired fingers holding the scrap of blue glass clear the board in five jumps.

“And now it's after midnight. It will be light in six hours. And Hampton and them durn deputies — —” The cousin ceased. The other was now standing, looking down at him; the cousin rose quickly. They stared at one another across the table. “Well?” the cousin said. His breath began to make the harsh, tense, rasping sound again, not triumphant yet. “Well?” he said. “Well?” But the other was not looking at him, he was looking down, the face still, wasted, seemingly without life.

“I ask you to go,” the other said. “I ask you to leave me alone.”

“Sholy,” the cousin said, his voice no louder than the other's. “Quit now? after I done gone through all this?” The other turned toward the door. “Wait,” the cousin said. The other did not pause. The cousin blew out the lamp and overtook the other in the hallway. He was talking again, whispering now. “If you'd just listened to me six hours ago. We'd a done had it and been back, in bed, instead of setting up here half the night.

Don't you see how it was tit for tat all the time? You had me and I had you, and couldn't neither — — Where we going?” The other didn't answer. He went steadily on across the yard, toward the barn, the cousin following; again he heard just behind him the tense, fierce adenoidal breathing, the whispering voice: “Hell fire, maybe you don't want me to have half of it and maybe I don't want nobody to have half of it neither.

But hell fire, ain't just half of it better than to think of that durn Hampton and them deputies — —" He entered the barn and opened the door to the crib and stepped up into it, the cousin stopping just outside the door behind him, and reached down from its nail in the wall a short, smooth white-oak stick eyed at the end with a loop of hemp rope — a twister which Houston had used with his stallion, which Snopes had found when he rented the foreclosed portion of Houston's farm from the Varners — and turned and struck all in one motion and dropped the cudgel and caught the heavy body as it fell so that its own weight helped to carry it into the crib and all he needed to do was to drag it on in until the feet cleared the door.

He unbuckled a hame string and the check rein from his plough-gear and bound the other's hands and feet and tore a strip from the tail of his shirt and made a gag with it.

When he reached the bottom, he could not find the tree behind which he had left the axe. He knew what was wrong. It was as though with the cessation of that interminable voice he had become aware not of silence but of elapsed time, that on the instant it had ceased he had retraced and resumed at the moment it began in the store at six o'clock in the afternoon, and now he was six hours late. You're trying too hard, he told himself. You got to slow up.

So he held himself still for the space of a hundred, trying to orient himself by looking back up the slope, to establish whether he was above or below the tree, to the right or left of it. Then he went back halfway through the corn and looked back at the bottom from there, trying to recognise by its shape and position the tree where he had left the axe, standing in the roar not of silence now but of time's friction.

He thought of starting from some point which he knew was below the tree he sought and searching each tree as he came to it. But the sound of time was too loud, so when he began to move, to run, it was toward neither the bottom nor the cabin but across the slope, quartering, out of the corn and on into the road a half-mile beyond his house.

He ran for another mile and came to another cabin, smaller and shabbier than his. It belonged to the negro who had found the gun. There was a dog here, a mongrel terrier, a feice, not much larger than a cat and noisy as a calliope; at once it came boiling out from beneath the house and rushed toward him in shrill hysteria.

He knew it and it should know him; he spoke to it to quiet it but it continued to yap, the sound seeming to come from a dozen different points out of the darkness before him until he ran suddenly at it, whereupon the shrill uproar faded rapidly back toward the house. He continued to run, on toward the woodpile which he knew too; the axe was there. As he caught it up a voice said from the dark cabin: "Who there?" He didn't answer.

He ran on, the terrier still yapping behind him though from beneath the house now. Now he was in corn again, better than his. He ran on through it, descending, toward the bottom. Before entering the bottom, he stopped and took his bearings on a star.

He did not expect to find the tree from this point, it was the old sunken road he aimed for; once in that, he could orient himself again. His surest course, even though it would be longer, would be to skirt the bottom until he reached country he knew in the dark and strike in for the tree from there, but when he examined the sky to fix his bearing, he thought, It's after one o'clock.

Yet, thirty minutes later, he had not found the road. He had been able to see the sky only intermittently, and not always the star he guided by then. But he believed he had not deviated much. Also, he had cautioned himself: You will expect to come onto it before you do; you will have to watch for that.

But in this time he had travelled twice the distance in which he should have found it. When he realised, admitted at last that he was lost, it was with neither alarm nor despair, but rage.

It was as though, like the cousin and his dishonesty two or three hours ago, ruthlessness likewise had repudiated the disciple who had flagged for a moment in ruthlessness; that it was that humanity which had caused him to waste three hours in hope that the cousin would tire and go away instead of striking the other over the head when he ran past the tree where he had lost the axe, which had brought him to this.

His first impulse was to run, not in panic but to keep ahead of that avalanche of accumulating seconds which was now his enemy. But he quelled it, holding himself motionless, his spent body shaking faintly and steadily with exhaustion, until he was satisfied his muscles would not be able to take him by surprise and run with him.

Then he turned deliberately and carefully until he believed he was facing his back trail and the direction from which he had come, and walked forward. After a while he came to an opening in which he could see the sky. The star on which he had fixed his course when he entered the bottom was directly in front of him. And now it's after two o'clock, he thought.

Now he began to run, or as fast as he dared, that is. He could not help himself. I got to find the road now, he thought. If I try to go back and start over, it will be daylight before I get out of the bottom.

So he hurried on, stumbling and thrashing among the briars and undergrowth, one arm extended to fend himself from the trees, voiceless, panting, blind, the muscles about his eyelids strained and aching against the flat impenetrable face of the darkness, until suddenly there was no earth under his feet; he made another stride, running upon nothing, then he was falling and then he was on his back, panting. He was in the road. But he did not know where. But I ain't crossed it, he thought. I am still on the west side of it. And now it's past two o'clock.

Now he was oriented again. By turning his back on the road and holding a straight course, he would reach the edge of the bottom. Then he would be able to ascertain where he was. When he found himself

falling, he had flung the axe away. He hunted for it on his hands and knees and found it and climbed out of the road and went on. He did not run now. Now he knew that he dared not lose himself again.

When, an hour later, he emerged from the bottom, it was at the corner of a corn-patch. It was his own; the bizarre erst-fluid earth became fixed and stable in the old solid dimensions and juxtapositions. He saw the squat roof-line of his own house, and running again, stumbling a little among the rows of whispering stalks, panting through his dry lips and his dry clenched teeth, he saw and recognised the tree behind which he had left the axe, and again it was as if he had retraced and resumed at some dead point in time and only time was lost.

He turned and approached it, he was about to pass it when a thicker shadow detached itself from the other shadow, rising without haste, and the cousin's voice said, weakly and harshly: "Forgot your durned axe, hah? Here it is. Take it."

He had stopped with no sound, no ejaculation, no catch of breath. Except I better not use the axe, he thought, still, immobile, while the other breathed harshly above him and the harsh, weak, outraged voice went on: "You durn little fratricidal murderer, if I hadn't just about stood all one man can stand, for twenty-five dollars or twenty-five thousand either, I'd be a good mind to knock you in the head with it and tote you out and throw you into Hampton's surrey myself.

And by God it ain't your fault it wasn't Hampton instead of me sitting here waiting for you. Hell fire, you hadn't hardly got started good chuckling over them other twenty-five dollars you thought you had just got before Hampton and the whole durn mess of them was in that crib, untying me and throwing water in my face. And I lied for you again. I told them you had knocked me in the head and tied me up and robbed me and lit out for the railroad. Now just how much longer do you figure I am to keep telling lies just to save your neck? Hah? Well? What are we waiting for? For Hampton?"

“Yes,” he said. “All right.” But not the axe, he thought. He turned and went on, into the trees. The other followed him, right at his heels now, the fierce adenoidal breath, the weak, outraged voice almost over his head, so that when he stooped and groped with his hand about the ground at his feet, the other walked into him.

“What the hell you doing now? Have you lost the durn axe again? Find it and give it to me and then get on and show me where it’s at before not only sunup but ever durn vote-sucking — —” His hand touched and found a stick large enough. I can’t see this time, so I got to be ready to hit twice, he thought, rising. He struck toward the harsh, enraged voice, recovering and striking again though one blow had been enough.

He knew where he was now. He needed no guide, though presently he knew that he had one and he went quite fast now, nosing into the thin taint of air, needing to go fast now. Because it’s more than three o’clock now, he thought, thinking: I had forgot that.

It’s like just about everything was in cahoots against one man killing another. Then he knew that he smelled it, because now there was no focal point, no guiding point, it was everywhere; he saw the opening, the topless shell of the blasted oak rising against the leaf-frayed patch of rainless sky.

He squared himself away for proper distance by touching his hand against the shell and swung the axe. The entire head sank helve-deep into the rotten pith. He wrenched at it, twisting it free, and raised it again. Then — there was no sound, the darkness itself merely sighed and flowed behind him, and he tried to turn but it was too late — something struck him between the shoulders. He knew at once what it was.

He was not surprised even, feeling the breath and hearing the teeth as he fell, turning, trying to raise the axe, hearing the teeth again at his throat and feeling the hot breath-reek as he hurled the hound temporarily back with his forearm and got onto his knees and got both hands on the axe. He could see its eyes now as it leaped the second

time. They seemed to float toward him interminably. He struck at them, striking nothing: the axehead went into the ground, almost snatching him after it onto his face. This time when he saw the eyes, he was on his feet.

He rushed at them, the axe lifted. He went charging on even after the eyes vanished, crashing and plunging in the undergrowth, stopping at last, the axe raised and poised, panting, listening, seeing and hearing nothing. He returned to the tree.

At the first stroke of the axe, the dog sprang again. He was expecting it. He did not bury the head this time and he had the axe raised and ready as he whirled. He struck at the eyes and felt the axe strike and leap grinning from his hands, and he sprang toward where the animal thrashed and groaned in the underbrush, leaping toward the sound, stamping furiously about him, pausing crouched, to listen, leaping toward another sound and stamping again, but again in vain.

Then he got down on his hands and knees and crawled in widening circles about the tree, hunting the axe. When he found it at last he could see, above the jagged top of the shell, the morning star.

He chopped again at the base of the shell, stopping after each blow to listen, the axe already poised, his feet and knees braced to whirl. But he heard nothing. Then he began to chop steadily, the axe sinking helve-deep at each stroke as though into sand or sawdust.

Then the axe sank, helve and all, into the rotten wood, he knew now it was not imagination he had smelled and he dropped the axe and began to tear at the shell with his hands, his head averted, his teeth bared and clenched, his breath hissing through them, freeing one arm momentarily to fling the hound back though it surged against him again, whimpering and then thrust its head into the growing orifice out of which the foul air seemed to burst with an audible sound.

“Get back, God damn you!” he panted as though he were speaking to a man, trying again to hurl the hound away; “give me room!” He dragged

at the body, feeling it slough upon its bones as though it were too large for itself. Now the hound had its entire head and shoulders in the opening, howling.

When the body came suddenly free, he went over backward, lying on his back in the mud, the body across his legs, while the hound stood over it, howling. He got up and kicked at it. It moved back, but when he stooped and took hold of the legs and began to walk backward, the hound was beside him again.

But it was intent on the body and as long as they were in motion, it did not howl. But when he stopped to get his breath, it began to howl again and again he braced himself and kicked at it and this time as he did so he discovered that he was actually seeing the animal and that dawn had come, the animal visible now, gaunt, thin, with a fresh bloody gash across its face, howling. Watching it, he stooped and groped until his hand found a stick. It was foul with slime but still fairly sound. When the hound raised its head to howl again, he struck.

The dog whirled; he saw the long scar of the gunshot running from its shoulder to its flank as it sprang at him. This time the stick took it fairly between the eyes. He picked up the ankles, facing forward now, and tried to run.

When he came out of the undergrowth and onto the river bank, the east was turning red. The stream itself was still invisible — a long bank of mist like cotton batting, beneath which the water ran. He stooped; once more he raised the body which was half again his size, and hurled it outward into the mist and, even as he released it, springing after it, catching himself back just before he followed it, seeing at the instant of its vanishing the sluggish sprawl of three limbs where there should have been four, and recovering balance to turn, already running as the pattering rush of the hound whispered behind him and the animal struck him in the back.

It did not pause. On his hands and knees he saw it in midair like a tremendous wingless bird soar out and vanish into the mist. He got to

his feet and ran. He stumbled and fell once and got up, running. Then he heard the swift soft feet behind him and he fell again and on his hands and knees again he watched it soar over him and turn in midair so that it landed facing him, its eyes like two cigar-coals as it sprang at him before he could rise.

He struck at its face with his hands and got up and ran. They reached the stump together. The hound leaped at him again, slashing at his shoulder as he ducked into the opening he had made and groped furiously for the missing arm, the hound still slashing at his back and legs. Then the dog was gone. A voice said: "All right, Mink. We've got him. You can come out now."

The surrey was waiting among the trees behind his house, where he had found the marks of it two days ago. He sat with a deputy in the back seat, their inside wrists manacled together. The sheriff rode beside the other deputy, who drove. The driver swung the team around to return to Varner's store and the Jefferson highroad, but the sheriff stopped him.

"Wait," the sheriff said and turned in the front seat — a tremendous man, neckless, in an unbuttoned waistcoat and a collarless starched shirt. In his broad heavy face his small, cold, shrewd eyes resembled two bits of black glass pressed into uncooked dough. He addressed both of them. "Where does this road come out at the other end?"

"Into the old Whiteleaf Bridge road," the deputy said. "That's fourteen miles. And you are still nine miles from Whiteleaf store then. And when you reach Whiteleaf store, you are still eight miles from Jefferson. It's just twenty-five miles by Varner's."

"I reckon we'll skip Varner's this time," the sheriff said. "Drive on, Jim."

"Sure," the deputy said. "Drive on, Jim. It wouldn't be our money we saved, it would just be the county's." The sheriff, turning to face forward again, paused and looked at the deputy. They looked at one another. "I said all right, didn't I?" the deputy said. "Drive on."

Through the rest of that morning and into noon they wound among the pine hills. The sheriff had a shoe box of cold food and even a stone jug of buttermilk wrapped in wet gunnysacks. They ate without stopping save to let the team drink at a branch which crossed the road.

Then the road came down out of the hills and in the early afternoon they passed Whiteleaf store in the long broad rich flatlands lush with the fine harvest, the fired and heavy corn and the cotton-pickers still moving through the spilling rows, and he saw the men squatting and sitting on the gallery beneath the patent medicine and tobacco posters stand suddenly up. "Well, well," the deputy said. "There are folks here too that act willing to believe their name is Houston for maybe ten or fifteen minutes anyway."

"Drive on," the sheriff said. They went on, pacing in the thick, soft dust the long, parched summer afternoon, though actually they could not keep pace with it and presently the fierce sun slanted into the side of the surrey where he sat. The sheriff spoke now without turning his head or removing his cob pipe: "George, swap sides with him. Let him ride in the shade."

"I'm all right," he said. "It don't bother me." After a while it did not bother him, or it was no worse for him than for the others, because the road approached the hills again, rising and winding again as the long shadows of the pines wheeled slowly over the slow surrey in the now slanting sun; soon Jefferson itself would appear beyond the final valley, with the poised fierce ball of the sun dropping down beyond it, shining from directly ahead and almost level into the surrey, upon all their faces.

There was a board on a tree, bearing a merchant's name above the legend Jefferson 4 mi, drawing up and then past, yet with no semblance of motion, and he moved his feet slightly and braced his inside elbow for the coming jerk and gathered and hurled himself feet foremost out of the moving surrey, snapping his arm and shoulder forward against the expected jerk but too late, so that even as his body swung out and free of the wheel his head slipped down into the V of the stanchion

which supported the top and the weight and momentum of his whole body came down on his viced neck.

In a moment now he would hear the bone, the vertebrae, and he wrenched his body again, kicking backward now toward where he believed the moving wheel would be, thinking, If I can just hook my foot in them spokes, something will have to give; lashing with his foot toward the wheel, feeling each movement of his body travel back to his neck as though he were attempting, in a cold fury of complete detachment, to see which would go first: the living bone or the dead metal. Then something struck him a terrific blow at the base of his neck and ceased to be a blow and became instead a pressure, rational and furious with deadly intent.

He believed he heard the bone and he knew he heard the deputy's voice: "Break! God damn it, break! Break!" and he felt the surge of the surrey and he even seemed to see the sheriff leaning over the seat-back and grappling with the raging deputy; choking, gasping, trying to close his mouth and he could not, trying to roll his head from beneath the cold hard blow of the water and there was a bough over his head against the sunny sky, with a faint wind in the leaves, and the three faces.

But after a while he could breathe again all right, and the faint wind of motion had dried the water from his face and only his shirt was a little damp, not a cool wind yet but just a wind free at last of the unendurable sun, blowing out of the beginning of dusk, the surrey moving now beneath an ordered overarch of sunshot trees, between the clipped and tended lawns where children shrieked and played in bright small garments in the sunset and the ladies sat rocking in the fresh dresses of afternoon and the men coming home from work turned into the neat painted gates, toward plates of food and cups of coffee in the long beginning of twilight.

They approached the jail from the rear and drove into the enclosed yard. "Jump," the sheriff said. "Lift him out."

“I’m all right,” he said. But he had to speak twice before he made any sound, and even then it was not his voice. “I can walk.”

After the doctor had gone, he lay on his cot. There was a small, high, barred window in the wall, but there was nothing beyond the window save twilight. Then he smelled supper cooking somewhere — ham and hot bread and coffee — and suddenly a hot, thin, salty liquid began to run in his mouth, though when he tried to swallow, it was so painful that he sat up, swallowing the hot salt, moving his neck and head rigidly and gingerly to ease the swallowing.

Then a loud trampling of feet began beyond the barred door, coming rapidly nearer, and he rose and went to it and looked through the bars into the common room where the negro victims of a thousand petty white man’s misdemeanours ate and slept together.

He could see the head of the stairs; the trampling came from it and he watched a disorderly clump of heads in battered hats and caps and bodies in battered overalls and broken shoes erupt and fill the foul barren room with a subdued uproar of scuffling feet and mellow witless singsong voices — the chain gang which worked on the streets, seven or eight of them, in jail for vagrancy or razor fights or shooting dice for ten or fifteen cents, freed of their shovels and rock hammers for ten hours at least. He held to the bars and looked at them. “It — —” he said. His voice made no sound at all.

He put his hand to his throat and spoke again, making a dry, croaking sound. The negroes fell completely still, looking at him, their eyeballs white and still in the already fading faces. “I was all right,” he said, “until it started coming to pieces. I could have handled that dog.” He held his throat, his voice harsh and dry and croaking. “But the son of a bitch started coming to pieces on me.”

“Who him?” one of the negroes said. They whispered among themselves, murmuring. The white eyeballs rolled at him.

“I was all right,” he said. “But the son of a bitch — —”

“Hush, white man,” the negro said. “Hush. Don’t be telling us no truck like that.”

“I would have been all right,” he said, harsh, whispering. Then his voice failed altogether again and he held to the bars with one hand, holding his throat with the other, while the negroes watched him, huddled, their eyeballs white and still in the failing light. Then with one accord they turned and rushed toward the stairs and he heard the slow steps too and then he smelled the food, and he clung to the bars, trying to see the stairhead. Are they going to feed them niggers before they do a white man? he thought, smelling the coffee and the ham.

3

That was the fall before the winter from which the people as they became older were to establish time and date events. The summer’s rainless heat — the blazing days beneath which even the oak leaves turned brown and died, the nights during which the ordered stars seemed to glare down in cold and lidless amazement at an earth being drowned in dust — broke at last, and for the three weeks of Indian summer the ardour-wearied earth, ancient Lilith, reigned, throned and crowned amid the old invincible courtesan’s formal defunction. Through these blue and drowsy and empty days filled with silence and the smell of burning leaves and woodsmoke.

Ratliff passing to and fro between his home and the Square, would see the two small grimed hands, immobile and clasping loosely the bars of the jail window at a height not a great deal above that at which a child would have held them. And in the afternoons he would watch his three guests, the wife and the two children, entering or leaving the jail on their daily visit.

On the first day, the day he had brought her home with him, she had insisted on doing some of the housework, all of it which his sister would permit, sweeping and washing dishes and chopping wood for fires which his nieces and nephews had heretofore done (and incidentally, in doing so, gaining their juvenile contempt too), apparently oblivious of

the sister's mute and outraged righteousness, big yet not fat, actually slender as Ratliff realised at last in a sort of shocked and sober . . . not pity: rather, concern; usually barefoot, with the untidy mass of bleached hair long since turning back to dark at the roots, and the cold face in which there was something of a hard not-quite-lost beauty, though it may have been only an ingrained and ineradicable self-confidence or perhaps just toughness.

Because the prisoner had refused not only bond (if he could have made one) but counsel. He had stood between two officers — small, his face like a mask of intractability carved in wood, wasted and almost skeleton-thin — before the committing magistrate, and he might not even have been present, hearing or perhaps not hearing himself being arraigned, then at a touch from one of the officers turning back toward the jail, the cell.

So the case was pretermitted from sheer desuetude of physical material for formal suttee, like a half-cast play, through the October term of court, to the spring term next May; and perhaps three afternoons a week Ratliff would watch his guests as, the children dressed in cast-off garments of his nephews and nieces, the three of them entered the jail, thinking of the four of them sitting in the close cell rank with creosote and old wraiths of human excreta — the sweat, the urine, the vomit discharged of all the old agonies: terror, impotence, hope. Waiting for Flem Snopes, he thought. For Flem Snopes.

Then the winter, the cold, came. By that time she had a job. He had known as well as she that the other arrangement could not last, since in a way it was his sister's house, even if only by a majority of voting strength. So he was not only not surprised, he was relieved when she came and told him she was going to move.

Then, as soon as she told him she was going to leave, something happened to him. He told himself that it was the two children. "That's all right about the job," he said. "That's fine. But you don't need to

move. You'll have to pay board and lodging if you move. And you will need to save. You will need money."

"Yes," she said harshly. "I'll need money."

"Does he still think — —" He stopped himself. He said, "You ain't heard yet when Flem will be back, have you?" She didn't answer. He didn't expect her to. "You will need to save all you can," he said. "So you stay here. Pay her a dollar a week board for the children if that would make you feel better about it. I don't reckon a kid would eat more than four bits' worth in seven days. But you stay here."

So she stayed. He had given up his room to them and he slept with his oldest nephew. Her job was in a rambling shabby side-street boarding-house with an equivocal reputation, named the Savoy Hotel. Her work began at daybreak and ended sometime after dark, sometimes well after dark.

She swept and made the beds and did some of the cooking, since there was a negro porter who washed the dishes and kept up the fires. She had her meals there and received three dollars a week. "Only she's going to keep her heels blistered running barefooted in and out of them horse-traders' and petty jurys' and agents for nigger insurances' rooms all night long," a town wit said.

But that was her affair. Ratliff knew nothing about that and cared less and, to his credit, believed even still less than that. So now he would not see her at all save on Sunday afternoons as, the children in the new overcoats which he had bought for them and the woman in his old one which she had insisted on paying him fifty cents for, they would enter the gate to the jail or perhaps emerge from it.

That was when it occurred to him how not once had any of his kin — old Ab or the schoolmaster or the blacksmith or the new clerk — come in to see him. And if all the facts about that business was knowed, he thought, There's one of them that ought to be there in that cell too. Or in another one just like it, since you can't hang a man twice — granted

of course that a Snopes carries the death penalty even for another Snopes.

There was snow on Thanksgiving and though it did not remain two days, it was followed early in December by an iron cold which locked the earth in a frozen rigidity, so that after a week or so actual dust blew from it.

Smoke turned white before it left the chimney, unable to rise, becoming the same colour as the misty sky itself in which all day long the sun stood pale as an uncooked biscuit and as heatless. Now they don't even need to have to not come in to see him, Ratliff told himself.

For a man to drive them twenty miles in from Frenchman's Bend just on an errand of mercy, even a Snopes don't have to excuse himself from it. There was a window-pane now between the bars and the hands; they were not visible now, even if anyone had paused along before the jail to look for them.

Instead he would be walking fast when he passed, hunched in his overcoat, holding his ears in turn with his yarn-mitted hands, his breath wisping about the crimson tip of his nose and his watering eyes and into the empty Square across which perhaps one country wagon moved, its occupants wrapped in quilts with a lighted lantern on the seat between them while the frosted windows of the stores seemed to stare at it without comprehension or regret like the faces of cataracted old men.

Christmas passed beneath that same salt-coloured sky, without even any surface softening of the iron ground, but in January a wind set up out of the northwest and blew the sky clear. The sun drew shadows on the frozen ground and for three days patches of it thawed a little at noon, for an inch or so, like a spreading of butter or axle-grease; and toward noon people would emerge, like rats or roaches, Ratliff told himself, amazed and tentative at the sun or at the patches of earth soft again out of an old, almost forgotten time, capable again of taking a footprint.

“It won’t freeze again tonight,” they told one another. “It’s clouding up from the southwest. It will rain and wash the frost out of the ground and we will be all right again.” It did rain. The wind moved counter-clockwise into the east. “It will go through to the northwest again and freeze again.

Even that would be better than snow,” they told one another, even though the rain had already begun to solidify and by nightfall had become snow, falling for two days and dissolving into the mud as it fell until the mud itself froze at last and still the snow fell and stopped too finally and the windless iron cold came down upon it without even a heatless wafer of sun to preside above a dead earth cased in ice; January and then February, no movement anywhere save the low constant smoke and the infrequent people unable to stand up on the sidewalks creeping townward or homeward in the middle of the streets where no horse could have kept its feet, and no sound save the chopping of axes and the lonely whistles of the daily trains and Ratliff would seem to see them, black, without dimension and unpeopled and plumed with fading vapour, rushing without purpose through the white and rigid solitude.

At home now, sitting over his own fire on those Sunday afternoons, he would hear the woman arrive for the children after dinner and put the new overcoats on them above the outgrown garments in which regardless of temperature they had gone to Sunday school (his sister saw to that) with the nephew and nieces who had discarded them, and he would think of the four of them sitting, huddled still in the coats, about the small ineffective sheet-iron stove which did not warm the cell but merely drew from the walls like tears the old sweat of the old agonies and despairs which had harboured there.

Later they would return. She would never stay for supper, but once a month she would bring to him the eight dollars she had saved out of her twelve-dollar salary, and the other coins and bills (once she had nine dollars more) which he never asked how she had come by. He was her banker. His sister may or may not have known this, though she

probably did. The sum mounted up. "But it will take a lot of weeks," he said. She didn't answer. "Maybe he might answer a letter," he said. "After all, blood is blood."

The freeze could not last forever. On the ninth of March it even snowed again and this snow even went away without turning to ice. So people could move about again, and one Saturday he entered the restaurant of which he was half owner and saw Bookwright sitting again before a plate containing a mass of jumbled food a good deal of which was eggs. They had not seen one another in almost six months. No greeting passed between them. "She's back home again," Bookwright said. "Got in last week."

"She gets around fast," Ratliff said. "I just saw her toting a scuttle of ashes out the back door of the Savoy Hotel five minutes ago."

"I mean the other one," Bookwright said, eating. "Flem's wife. Will drove over to Mottstown and picked them up last week."

"Them?"

"Not Flem. Her and the baby."

So he has already heard, Ratliff thought. Somebody has done already wrote him. He said: "The baby. Well, well. February, January, December, November, October, September, August. And some of March. It ain't hardly big enough to be chewing tobacco yet, I reckon."

"It wouldn't chew," Bookwright said. "It's a girl."

So for a while he didn't know what to do, though it did not take him long to decide. Better now, he told himself. Even if she was ever hoping without knowing she was. He waited at home the next afternoon until she came for the children. "His wife's back," he said.

For just an instant she did not move at all. "You never really expected nothing else, did you?" he said.

"No," she said.

Then even that winter was over at last. It ended as it had begun, in rain, not cold rain but loud fierce gusts of warm water washing out of the earth the iron-enduring frost, the belated spring hard on its bright heels and all coming at once, pell-mell and disordered, fruit and bloom and leaf, pied meadow and blossoming wood and the long fields shearing dark out of winter's slumber, to the shearing plough.

The school was already closed for the planting year when he passed it and drove up to the store and hitched his team to the old familiar post and mounted among the seven or eight men squatting and lounging about the gallery as if they had not moved since he had looked back last at them almost six months ago. "Well, men," he said. "School's already closed, I see. Chillen can go to the field now and give you folks a chance to rest."

"It's been closed since last October," Quick said. "Teacher's quit."
"I. O.? Quit?"

"His wife come in one day. He looked up and saw her and lit out."
"His what?" Ratliff said.

"His wife," Tull said. "Or so she claimed. A kind of big grey-coloured women with a — —"

"Ah shucks," Ratliff said. "He ain't married. Ain't he been here three years? You mean his mother."

"No, no," Tull said. "She was young all right. She just had a kind of grey colour all over. In a buggy. With a baby about six months old."

"A baby?" Ratliff said. He looked from face to face among them, blinking. "Look here," he said. "What's all this anyway? How'd he get a wife, let alone a baby six months old? Ain't he been right here three years? Hell a mile, he ain't been out of hearing long enough to done that."

"Wallstreet says they are his," Tull said.

"Wallstreet?" Ratliff said. "Who's Wallstreet?"

"That boy of Eck's."

“That boy about ten years old?” Ratliff blinked at Tull now. “They never had that panic until a year or two back. How’d a boy ten years old get to be named Wallstreet?”

“I don’t know,” Tull said.

“I reckon it’s his all right,” Quick said. “Leastways he taken one look at that buggy and he ain’t been seen since.”

“So now,” Ratliff said. “A baby is one thing in pants that will make any man run, provided he’s still got room enough to start in. Which it seems I. O. had.”

“He needed room,” Bookwright said in his harsh, abrupt voice. “This one could have held him, provided somebody just throwed I. O. down first and give it time to get a hold. It was bigger than he was already.”

“It might hold him yet,” Quick said.

“Yes,” Tull said. “She just stopped long enough to buy a can of sardines and crackers. Then she druv on down the road in the same direction somebody told her I. O. had been going. He was walking. Her and the baby both et the sardines.”

“Well, well,” Ratliff said. “Them Snopes. Well, well — —” He ceased. They watched quietly as the Varner surrey came up the road, going home. The negro was driving; in the back seat with her mother, Mrs. Flem Snopes sat. The beautiful face did not even turn as the surrey drew abreast of the store. It passed in profile, calm, oblivious, incurious. It was not a tragic face: it was just damned. The surrey went on.

“Is he really waiting in that jail yonder for Flem Snopes to come back and get him out?” the fourth man said.

“He’s still in jail,” Ratliff said.

“But is he waiting for Flem?” Quick said.

“No,” Ratliff said. “Because Flem ain’t coming back here until that trial is over and finished.” Then Mrs. Littlejohn stood on her veranda, ringing

the dinner-bell, and they rose and began to disperse. Ratliff and Bookwright descended the steps together.

“Shucks,” Bookwright said. “Even Flem Snopes ain’t going to let his own blood cousin be hung just to save money.”

“I reckon Flem knows it ain’t going to go that far. Jack Houston was shot from in front, and everybody knows he never went anywhere without that pistol, and they found it laying there in the road where they found the marks where the horse had whirled and run, whether it had dropped out of his hand or fell out of his pocket when he fell or not.

I reckon Flem had done inquired into all that. And so he ain’t coming back until it’s all finished. He ain’t coming back here where Mink’s wife can worry him or folks can talk about him for leaving his cousin in jail. There’s some things even a Snopes won’t do. I don’t know just exactly what they are, but they’s some somewhere.”

Then Bookwright went on, and he untied the team and drove the buckboard on into Mrs. Littlejohn’s lot and unharnessed and carried the harness into the barn.

He had not seen it since that afternoon in September either, and something, he did not know what, impelled and moved him; he hung the gear up and went on through the dim high ammoniac tunnel, between the empty stalls, to the last one and looked into it and saw the thick, female, sitting buttocks, the shapeless figure quiet in the gloom, the blasted face turning and looking up at him, and for a fading instant there was something almost like recognition even if there could have been no remembering, in the devastated eyes, and the drooling mouth slacking and emitting a sound, hoarse, abject, not loud.

Upon the overalled knees Ratliff saw the battered wooden effigy of a cow such as children receive on Christmas.

He heard the hammer before he reached the shop. The hammer stopped, poised; the dull, open, healthy face looked up at him without

either surprise or interrogation, almost without recognition. “Howdy, Eck,” Ratliff said. “Can you pull the old shoes off my team right after dinner and shoe them again? I got a trip to make tonight.”

“All right,” the other said. “Anytime you bring them in.”

“All right,” Ratliff said. “That boy of yours. You changed his name lately, ain’t you?” The other looked at him, the hammer poised. On the anvil the ruby tip of the iron he was shaping faded slowly. “Wallstreet.”

“Oh,” the other said. “No, sir. It wasn’t changed. He never had no name to speak of until last year. I left him with his grandma after my first wife died, while I was getting settled down; I was just sixteen then. She called him after his grandpa, but he never had no actual name. Then last year after I got settled down and sent for him, I thought maybe he better have a name. I. O. read about that one in the paper. He figured if we named him Wallstreet Panic it might make him get rich like the folks that run that Wallstreet panic.”

“Oh,” Ratliff said. “Sixteen. And one kid wasn’t enough to settle you down. How many did it take?”

“I got three.”

“Two more beside Wallstreet. What — —”

“Three more besides Wall,” the other said.

“Oh,” Ratliff said. The other waited a moment. Then he raised the hammer again. But he stopped it and stood looking at the cold iron on the anvil and laid the hammer down and turned back to the forge. “So you had to pay all that twenty dollars,” Ratliff said. The other looked back at him. “For that cow last summer.”

“Yes. And another two bits for that ere toy one.”

“You bought him that too?”

“Yes. I felt sorry for him. I thought maybe anytime he would happen to start thinking, that ere toy one would give him something to think about.”

BOOK FOUR. THE PEASANTS

CHAPTER ONE

1

A LITTLE WHILE before sundown the men lounging about the gallery of the store saw, coming up the road from the south, a covered wagon drawn by mules and followed by a considerable string of obviously alive objects which in the levelling sun resembled vari-sized and -coloured tatters torn at random from large billboards — circus posters, say — attached to the rear of the wagon and inherent with its own separate and collective motion, like the tail of a kite.

“What in the hell is that?” one said.

“It’s a circus,” Quick said. They began to rise, watching the wagon. Now they could see that the animals behind the wagon were horses. Two men rode in the wagon.

“Hell fire,” the first man — his name was Freeman — said. “It’s Flem Snopes.” They were all standing when the wagon came up and stopped and Snopes got down and approached the steps. He might have departed only this morning. He wore the same cloth cap, the minute bow-tie against the white shirt, the same grey trousers. He mounted the steps.

“Howdy, Flem,” Quick said. The other looked briefly at all of them and none of them, mounting the steps. “Starting you a circus?”

“Gentlemen,” he said. He crossed the gallery; they made way for him. Then they descended the steps and approached the wagon, at the tail of which the horses stood in a restive clump, larger than rabbits and

gaudy as parrots and shackled to one another and to the wagon itself with sections of barbed wire.

Calico-coated, small-bodied, with delicate legs and pink faces in which their mismatched eyes rolled wild and subdued, they huddled, gaudy motionless and alert, wild as deer, deadly as rattlesnakes, quiet as doves. The men stood at a respectful distance, looking at them. At that moment Jody Varner came through the group, shouldering himself to the front of it.

“Watch yourself, doc,” a voice said from the rear. But it was already too late. The nearest animal rose on its hind legs with lightning rapidity and struck twice with its forefeet at Varner’s face, faster than a boxer, the movement of its surge against the wire which held it travelling backward among the rest of the band in a wave of thuds and lunges. “Hup, you broom-tailed hay-burning sidewinders,” the same voice said.

This was the second man who had arrived in the wagon. He was a stranger. He wore a heavy densely black moustache, a wide pale hat. When he thrust himself through and turned to herd them back from the horses they saw, thrust into the hip-pockets of his tight jeans pants, the butt of a heavy pearl-handled pistol and a florid carton such as small cakes come in. “Keep away from them, boys,” he said. “They’ve got kind of skittish, they ain’t been rode in so long.”

“Since when have they been rode?” Quick said. The stranger looked at Quick. He had a broad, quite cold, wind-gnawed face and bleak cold eyes. His belly fitted neat and smooth as a peg into the tight trousers.

“I reckon that was when they were rode on the ferry to get across the Mississippi River,” Varner said. The stranger looked at him. “My name’s Varner,” Jody said.

“Hipps,” the other said. “Call me Buck.” Across the left side of his head, obliterating the tip of that ear, was a savage and recent gash gummed over with a blackish substance like axle-grease. They looked at the scar.

Then they watched him remove the carton from his pocket and tilt a gingersnap into his hand and put the gingersnap into his mouth, beneath the moustache.

“You and Flem have some trouble back yonder?” Quick said. The stranger ceased chewing. When he looked directly at anyone, his eyes became like two pieces of flint turned suddenly up in dug earth.

“Back where?” he said.

“Your nigh ear,” Quick said.

“Oh,” the other said. “That.” He touched his ear. “That was my mistake. I was absent-minded one night when I was staking them out. Studying about something else and forgot how long the wire was.” He chewed. They looked at his ear. “Happen to any man careless around a horse. Put a little axle-dope on it and you won’t notice it tomorrow though. They’re pretty lively now, lazing along all day doing nothing.

It’ll work out of them in a couple of days.” He put another gingersnap into his mouth, chewing, “Don’t you believe they’ll gentle?” No one answered. They looked at the ponies, grave and noncommittal. Jody turned and went back into the store. “Them’s good, gentle ponies,” the stranger said. “Watch now.” He put the carton back into his pocket and approached the horses, his hand extended. The nearest one was standing on three legs now.

It appeared to be asleep. Its eyelid drooped over the cerulean eye; its head was shaped like an ironing-board. Without even raising the eyelid it flicked its head, the yellow teeth cropped. For an instant it and the man appeared to be inextricable in one violence.

Then they became motionless, the stranger’s high heels dug into the earth, one hand gripping the animal’s nostrils, holding the horse’s head wrenched half around while it breathed in hoarse, smothered groans. “See?” the stranger said in a panting voice, the veins standing white and rigid in his neck and along his jaw. “See?”

All you got to do is handle them a little and work hell out of them for a couple of days. Now look out. Give me room back there.” They gave back a little. The stranger gathered himself, then sprang away. As he did so, a second horse slashed at his back, severing his vest from collar to hem down the back exactly as the trick swordsman severs a floating veil with one stroke.

“Sho now,” Quick said. “But suppose a man don’t happen to own a vest.”

At that moment Jody Varner, followed by the blacksmith, thrust through them again. “All right, Buck,” he said. “Better get them on into the lot. Eck here will help you.” The stranger, the several halves of the vest swinging from either shoulder, mounted to the wagon seat, the blacksmith following.

“Get up, you transmogrified hallucinations of Job and Jezebel,” the stranger said. The wagon moved on, the tethered ponies coming gaudily into motion behind it, behind which in turn the men followed at a respectful distance, on up the road and into the lane and so to the lot gate behind Mrs. Littlejohn’s.

Eck got down and opened the gate. The wagon passed through but when the ponies saw the fence the herd surged backward against the wire which attached it to the wagon, standing on its collective hind legs and then trying to turn within itself, so that the wagon moved backward for a few feet until the Texan, cursing, managed to saw the mules about and so lock the wheels.

The men following had already fallen rapidly back. “Here, Eck,” the Texan said. “Get up here and take the reins.” The blacksmith got back in the wagon and took the reins. Then they watched the Texan descend, carrying a looped-up blacksnake whip, and go around to the rear of the herd and drive it through the gate, the whip snaking about the harlequin rumps in methodical and pistol-like reports. Then the watchers hurried across Mrs. Littlejohn’s yard and mounted to the veranda, one end of which overlooked the lot.

“How you reckon he ever got them tied together?” Freeman said.

“I’d a heap rather watch how he aims to turn them loose,” Quick said. The Texan had climbed back into the halted wagon. Presently he and Eck both appeared at the rear end of the open hood. The Texan grasped the wire and began to draw the first horse up to the wagon, the animal plunging and surging back against the wire as though trying to hang itself, the contagion passing back through the herd from animal to animal until they were rearing and plunging again against the wire.

“Come on, grab a holt,” the Texan said. Eck grasped the wire also. The horses laid back against it, the pink faces tossing above the back-surfing mass. “Pull him up, pull him up,” the Texan said sharply.

“They couldn’t get up here in the wagon even if they wanted to.” The wagon moved gradually backward until the head of the first horse was snubbed up to the tail gate. The Texan took a turn of the wire quickly about one of the wagon stakes. “Keep the slack out of it,” he said. He vanished and reappeared, almost in the same second, with a pair of heavy wire-cutters.

“Hold them like that,” he said, and leaped. He vanished, broad hat, flapping vest, wire-cutters and all, into a kaleidoscopic maelstrom of long teeth and wild eyes and slashing feet, from which presently the horses began to burst one by one like partridges flushing, each wearing a necklace of barbed wire. The first one crossed the lot at top speed, on a straight line. It galloped into the fence without any diminution whatever.

The wire gave, recovered, and slammed the horse to earth where it lay for a moment, glaring, its legs still galloping in air. It scrambled up without having ceased to gallop and crossed the lot and galloped into the opposite fence and was slammed again to earth. The others were now freed. They whipped and whirled about the lot like dizzy fish in a bowl.

It had seemed like a big lot until now, but now the very idea that all that fury and motion should be transpiring inside any one fence was something to be repudiated with contempt, like a mirror trick. From the ultimate dust the stranger, carrying the wire-cutters and his vest completely gone now, emerged.

He was not running, he merely moved with a light-poised and watchful celerity, weaving among the calico rushes of the animals, feinting and dodging like a boxer until he reached the gate and crossed the yard and mounted to the veranda. One sleeve of his shirt hung only at one point from his shoulder.

He ripped it off and wiped his face with it and threw it away and took out the paper carton and shook a gingersnap into his hand. He was breathing only a little heavily. "Pretty lively now," he said. "But it'll work out of them in a couple of days." The ponies still streaked back and forth through the growing dusk like hysterical fish, but not so violently now.

"What'll you give a man to reduce them odds a little for you?" Quick said. The Texan looked at him, the eyes bleak, pleasant and hard above the chewing jaw, the heavy moustache. "To take one of them off your hands?" Quick said.

At that moment the little periwinkle-eyed boy came along the veranda, saying, "Papa, papa; where's papa?"

"Who you looking for, sonny?" one said.

"It's Eck's boy," Quick said. "He's still out yonder in the wagon. Helping Mr. Buck here." The boy went on to the end of the veranda, in diminutive overalls — a miniature replica of the men themselves.

"Papa," he said. "Papa." The blacksmith was still leaning from the rear of the wagon, still holding the end of the severed wire. The ponies, bunched for the moment, now slid past the wagon, flowing, stringing out again so that they appeared to have doubled in number, rushing

on; the hard rapid light patter of unshod hooves came out of the dust. "Mamma says to come on to supper," the boy said.

The moon was almost full then. When supper was over and they had gathered again along the veranda, the alteration was hardly one of visibility even. It was merely a translation from the lapidary-dimensional of day to the treacherous and silver receptivity in which the horses huddled in mazy camouflage, or singly or in pairs rushed, fluid, phantom, and unceasing, to huddle again in mirage-like clumps from which came high abrupt squeals and the vicious thudding of hooves.

Ratliff was among them now. He had returned just before supper. He had not dared to take his team into the lot at all. They were now in Bookwright's stable a half-mile from the store. "So Flem has come home again," he said. "Well, well, well. Will Varner paid to get him to Texas, so I reckon it ain't no more than fair for you fellows to pay the freight on him back." From the lot there came a high thin squeal. One of the animals emerged. It seemed not to gallop but to flow, bodiless, without dimension. Yet there was the rapid light beat of hard hooves on the packed earth.

"He ain't said they was his yet," Quick said.

"He ain't said they ain't neither," Freeman said.

"I see," Ratliff said. "That's what you are holding back on. Until he tells you whether they are his or not. Or maybe you can wait until the auction's over and split up and some can follow Flem and some can follow that Texas fellow and watch to see which one spends the money. But then, when a man's done got trimmed, I don't reckon he cares who's got the money."

"Maybe if Ratliff would leave here tonight, they wouldn't make him buy one of them ponies tomorrow," a third said.

"That's a fact," Ratliff said. "A fellow can dodge a Snopes if he just starts lively enough. In fact, I don't believe he would have to pass more

than two folks before he would have another victim intervened betwixt them. You folks ain't going to buy them things sho enough, are you?" Nobody answered.

They sat on the steps, their backs against the veranda posts, or on the railing itself. Only Ratliff and Quick sat in chairs, so that to them the others were black silhouettes against the dreaming lambence of the moonlight beyond the veranda.

The pear tree across the road opposite was now in full and frosty bloom, the twigs and branches springing not outward from the limbs but standing motionless and perpendicular above the horizontal boughs like the separate and upstreaming hair of a drowned woman sleeping upon the uttermost floor of the windless and tideless sea.

"Anse McCallum brought two of them horses back from Texas once," one of the men on the steps said. He did not move to speak. He was not speaking to anyone. "It was a good team. A little light. He worked it for ten years. Light work, it was."

"I mind it," another said. "Anse claimed he traded fourteen rifle cartridges for both of them, didn't he?"

"It was the rifle too, I heard," a third said.

"No, it was just the shells," the first said. "The fellow wanted to swap him four more for the rifle too, but Anse said he never needed them. Cost too much to get six of them back to Mississippi."

"Sho," the second said. "When a man don't have to invest so much into a horse or a team, he don't need to expect so much from it." The three of them were not talking any louder, they were merely talking among themselves, to one another, as if they sat there alone. Ratliff, invisible in the shadow against the wall, made a sound, harsh, sardonic, not loud.

"Ratliff's laughing," a fourth said.

“Don’t mind me,” Ratliff said. The three speakers had not moved. They did not move now, yet there seemed to gather about the three silhouettes something stubborn, convinced, and passive, like children who have been chidden. A bird, a shadow, fleet and dark and swift, curved across the moonlight, upward into the pear tree and began to sing; a mockingbird.

“First one I’ve noticed this year,” Freeman said.

“You can hear them along Whiteleaf every night,” the first man said. “I heard one in February. In that snow. Singing in a gum.”

“Gum is the first tree to put out,” the third said. “That was why. It made it feel like singing, fixing to put out that way. That was why it taken a gum.”

“Gum first to put out?” Quick said. “What about willow?”

“Willow ain’t a tree,” Freeman said. “It’s a weed.”

“Well, I don’t know what it is,” the fourth said. “But it ain’t no weed. Because you can grub up a weed and you are done with it. I been grubbing up a clump of willows outen my spring pasture for fifteen years. They are the same size every year. Only difference is, it’s just two or three more trees every time.”

“And if I was you,” Ratliff said, “that’s just exactly where I would be come sunup tomorrow. Which of course you ain’t going to do. I reckon there ain’t nothing under the sun or in Frenchman’s Bend neither that can keep you folks from giving Flem Snopes and that Texas man your money. But I’d sholy like to know just exactly who I was giving my money to. Seems like Eck here would tell you.

Seems like he’d do that for his neighbours, don’t it? Besides being Flem’s cousin, him and that boy of his, Wallstreet, helped that Texas man tote water for them tonight and Eck’s going to help him feed them in the morning too. Why, maybe Eck will be the one that will catch

them and lead them up one at a time for you folks to bid on them. Ain't that right, Eck?"

The other man sitting on the steps with his back against the post was the blacksmith. "I don't know," he said.

"Boys," Ratliff said, "Eck knows all about them horses. Flem's told him, how much they cost and how much him and that Texas man aim to get for them, make off of them. Come on, Eck. Tell us." The other did not move, sitting on the top step, not quite facing them, sitting there beneath the successive layers of their quiet and intent concentrated listening and waiting.

"I don't know," he said. Ratliff began to laugh. He sat in the chair, laughing while the others sat or lounged upon the steps and the railing, sitting beneath his laughing as Eck had sat beneath their listening and waiting. Ratliff ceased laughing. He rose. He yawned, quite loud.

"All right. You folks can buy them critters if you want to. But me, I'd just as soon buy a tiger or a rattlesnake. And if Flem Snopes offered me either one of them, I would be afraid to touch it for fear it would turn out to be a painted dog or a piece of garden hose when I went up to take possession of it.

I bid you one and all goodnight." He entered the house. They did not look after him, though after a while they all shifted a little and looked down into the lot, upon the splotchy, sporadic surge and flow of the horses, from among which from time to time came an abrupt squeal, a thudding blow. In the pear tree the mockingbird's idiot reiteration pulsed and purled.

"Anse McCallum made a good team outen them two of hisn," the first man said. "They was a little light. That was all."

When the sun rose the next morning a wagon and three saddled mules stood in Mrs. Littlejohn's lane and six men and Eck Snopes's son were already leaning on the fence, looking at the horses which huddled in a

quiet clump before the barn door, watching the men in their turn. A second wagon came up the road and into the lane and stopped, and then there were eight men beside the boy standing at the fence, beyond which the horses stood, their blue-and-brown eyeballs rolling alertly in their gaudy faces.

“So this here is the Snopes’s circus, is it?” one of the newcomers said. He glanced at the faces, then he went to the end of the row and stood beside the blacksmith and the little boy. “Are them Flem’s horses?” he said to the blacksmith.

“Eck don’t know who them horses belong to anymore than we do,” one of the others said. “He knows that Flem come here on the same wagon with them, because he saw him. But that’s all.”

“And all he will know,” a second said. “His own kin will be the last man in the world to find out anything about Flem Snopes’s business.”

“No,” the first said. “He wouldn’t even be that. The first man Flem would tell his business to would be the man that was left after the last man died. Flem Snopes don’t even tell himself what he is up to. Not if he was laying in bed with himself in a empty house in the dark of the moon.”

“That’s a fact,” a third said. “Flem would trim Eck or any other of his kin quick as he would us. Ain’t that right, Eck?”

“I don’t know,” Eck said. They were watching the horses, which at that moment broke into a high-eared, stiff-kneed swirl and flowed in a patchwork wave across the lot and brought up again, facing the men along the fence, so they did not hear the Texan until he was among them. He wore a new shirt and another vest a little too small for him and he was just putting the paper carton back into his hip-pocket.

“Morning, morning,” he said. “Come to get an early pick, have you? Want to make me an offer for one or two before the bidding starts and runs the prices up?” They had not looked at the stranger long. They

were not looking at him now, but at the horses in the lot, which had lowered their heads, snuffing into the dust.

“I reckon we’ll look a while first,” one said.

“You are in time to look at them eating breakfast, anyhow,” the Texan said. “Which is more than they done without they staid up all night.” He opened the gate and entered it. At once the horses jerked their heads up, watching him.

“Here, Eck,” the Texan said over his shoulder, “two or three of you boys help me drive them into the barn.” After a moment Eck and two others approached the gate, the little boy at his father’s heels, though the other did not see him until he turned to shut the gate.

“You stay out of here,” Eck said. “One of them things will snap your head off same as a acorn before you even know it.” He shut the gate and went on after the others, whom the Texan had now waved fanwise outward as he approached the horses which now drew into a restive huddle, beginning to mill slightly, watching the men. Mrs. Littlejohn came out of the kitchen and crossed the yard to the woodpile, watching the lot.

She picked up two or three sticks of wood and paused, watching the lot again. Now there were two more men standing at the fence.

“Come on, come on,” the Texan said. “They won’t hurt you. They just ain’t never been in under a roof before.”

“I just as lief let them stay out here, if that’s what they want to do,” Eck said.

“Get yourself a stick — there’s a bunch of wagon stakes against the fence yonder — and when one of them tries to rush you, bust him over the head so he will understand what you mean.” One of the men went to the fence and got three of the stakes and returned and distributed them. Mrs. Littlejohn, her armful of wood complete now, paused again halfway back to the house, looking into the lot. The little boy was

directly behind his father again, though this time the father had not discovered him yet.

The men advanced toward the horses, the huddle of which began to break into gaudy units turning inward upon themselves. The Texan was cursing them in a loud steady cheerful voice. "Get in there, you banjo-faced jack-rabbits. Don't hurry them, now. Let them take their time. Hi! Get in there. What do you think that barn is — a law court maybe? Or maybe a church and somebody is going to take up a collection on you?" The animals fell slowly back.

Now and then one feinted to break from the huddle, the Texan driving it back each time with skilfully thrown bits of dirt. Then one at the rear saw the barn door just behind it but before the herd could break the Texan snatched the wagon stake from Eck and, followed by one of the other men, rushed at the horses and began to lay about the heads and shoulders, choosing by unerring instinct the point animal and striking it first square in the face then on the withers as it turned and then on the rump as it turned further, so that when the break came it was reversed and the entire herd rushed into the long open hallway and brought up against the farther wall with a hollow, thunderous sound like that of a collapsing mine-shaft. "Seems to have held all right," the Texan said.

He and the other man slammed the half-length doors and looked over them into the tunnel of the barn, at the far end of which the ponies were now a splotchy phantom moiling punctuated by crackings of wooden partitions and the dry reports of hooves which gradually died away. "Yep, it held all right," the Texan said.

The other two came to the doors and looked over them. The little boy came up beside his father now, trying to see through a crack — and Eck saw him.

"Didn't I tell you to stay out of here?" Eck said. "Don't you know them things will kill you quicker than you can say scat? You go and get outside of that fence and stay there."

“Why don’t you get your paw to buy you one of them, Wall?” one of the men said.

“Me buy one of them things?” Eck said. “When I can go to the river anytime and catch me a snapping turtle or a moccasin for nothing? You go on, now. Get out of here and stay out.” The Texan had entered the barn. One of the men closed the doors after him and put the bar up again and over the top of the doors they watched the Texan go on down the hallway, toward the ponies which now huddled like gaudy phantoms in the gloom, quiet now and already beginning to snuff experimentally into the long lipworn trough fastened against the rear wall.

The little boy had merely gone around behind his father, to the other side, where he stood peering now through a knot-hole in a plank. The Texan opened a smaller door in the wall and entered it, though almost immediately he reappeared.

“I don’t see nothing but shelled corn in here,” he said. “Snopes said he would send some hay up here last night.”

“Won’t they eat corn either?” one of the men said.

“I don’t know,” the Texan said. “They ain’t never seen any that I know of. We’ll find out in a minute though.” He disappeared, though they could still hear him in the crib. Then he emerged once more, carrying a big double-ended feed-basket, and retreated into the gloom where the parti-coloured rumps of the horses were now ranged quietly along the feeding-trough. Mrs. Littlejohn appeared once more, on the veranda this time, carrying a big brass dinner-bell. She raised it to make the first stroke.

A small commotion set up among the ponies as the Texan approached, but he began to speak to them at once, in a brisk loud unemphatic mixture of cursing and cajolery, disappearing among them. The men at the door heard the dry rattling of the corn-pellets into the trough, a sound broken by a single snort of amazed horror.

A plank cracked with a loud report; before their eyes the depths of the hallway dissolved in loud fury, and while they stared over the doors, unable yet to begin to move, the entire interior exploded into mad tossing shapes like a downrush of flames.

“Hell fire,” one of them said. “Jump!” he shouted. The three turned and ran frantically for the wagon, Eck last. Several voices from the fence were now shouting something but Eck did not even hear them until, in the act of scrambling madly at the tail gate, he looked behind him and saw the little boy still leaning to the knot-hole in the door which in the next instant vanished into matchwood, the knot-hole itself exploding from his eye and leaving him, motionless in the diminutive overalls and still leaning forward a little until he vanished utterly beneath the towering parti-coloured wave full of feet and glaring eyes and wild teeth which, overtopping, burst into scattering units, revealing at last the gaping orifice and the little boy still standing in it, unscratched, his eye still leaned to the vanished knot-hole.

“Wall!” Eck roared. The little boy turned and ran for the wagon. The horses were whipping back and forth across the lot, as if while in the barn they had once more doubled their number; two of them rushed up quartering and galloped all over the boy again without touching him as he ran, earnest and diminutive and seemingly without progress, though he reached the wagon at last, from which Eck, his sunburned skin now a sickly white, reached down and snatched the boy into the wagon by the straps of his overalls and slammed him face down across his knees and caught up a coiled hitching-rope from the bed of the wagon.

“Didn’t I tell you to get out of here?” Eck said in a shaking voice. “Didn’t I tell you?”

“If you’re going to whip him, you better whip the rest of us too and then one of us can frail hell out of you,” one of the others said.

“Or better still, take the rope and hang that durn fellow yonder,” the second said. The Texan was now standing in the wrecked door of the

barn, taking the gingersnap carton from his hip-pocket. "Before he kills the rest of Frenchman's Bend too."

"You mean Flem Snopes," the first said. The Texan tilted the carton above his other open palm. The horses still rushed and swirled back and forth, but they were beginning to slow now, trotting on high, stiff legs, although their eyes were still rolling whitely and various.

"I misdoubted that damn shell corn all along," the Texan said. "But at least they have seen what it looks like. They can't claim they ain't got nothing out of this trip." He shook the carton over his open hand. Nothing came out of it. Mrs. Littlejohn on the veranda made the first stroke with the dinner-bell; at the sound the horses rushed again, the earth of the lot becoming vibrant with the light dry clatter of hooves.

The Texan crumpled the carton and threw it aside. "Chuck wagon," he said. There were three more wagons in the lane now and there were twenty or more men at the fence when the Texan, followed by his three assistants and the little boy, passed through the gate. The bright cloudless early sun gleamed upon the pearl butt of the pistol in his hip-pocket and upon the bell which Mrs. Littlejohn still rang, peremptory, strong, and loud.

When the Texan, picking his teeth with a splintered kitchen match, emerged from the house twenty minutes later, the tethered wagons and riding horses and mules extended from the lot gate to Varner's store, and there were more than fifty men now standing along the fence beside the gate, watching him quietly, a little covertly, as he approached, rolling a little, slightly bowlegged, the high heels of his carved boots printing neatly into the dust.

"Morning, gents," he said. "Here, Bud," he said to the little boy, who stood slightly behind him, looking at the protruding butt of the pistol. He took a coin from his pocket and gave it to the boy. "Run to the store and get me a box of gingersnaps."

He looked about at the quiet faces, protuberant, sucking his teeth. He rolled the match from one side of his mouth to the other without touching it. "You boys done made your picks, have you? Ready to start her off, hah?" They did not answer. They were not looking at him now. That is, he began to have the feeling that each face had stopped looking at him the second before his gaze reached it. After a moment Freeman said:

"Ain't you going to wait for Flem?"

"Why?" the Texan said. Then Freeman stopped looking at him too. There was nothing in Freeman's face either. There was nothing, no alteration, in the Texan's voice. "Eck, you done already picked out yours. So we can start her off when you are ready."

"I reckon not," Eck said. "I wouldn't buy nothing I was afraid to walk up and touch."

"Them little ponies?" the Texan said. "You helped water and feed them. I bet that boy of yours could walk up to any one of them."

"He better not let me catch him," Eck said. The Texan looked about at the quiet faces, his gaze at once abstract and alert, with an impenetrable surface quality like flint, as though the surface were impervious or perhaps there was nothing behind it.

"Them ponies is gentle as a dove, boys. The man that buys them will get the best piece of horseflesh he ever forked or druv for the money. Naturally they got spirit; I ain't selling crowbait.

Besides, who'd want Texas crowbait anyway, with Mississippi full of it?" His stare was still absent and unwinking; there was no mirth or humour in his voice and there was neither mirth nor humour in the single guffaw which came from the rear of the group.

Two wagons were now drawing out of the road at the same time, up to the fence. The men got down from them and tied them to the fence

and approached. "Come up, boys," the Texan said. "You're just in time to buy a good gentle horse cheap."

"How about that one that cut your vest off last night?" a voice said. This time three or four guffawed. The Texan looked toward the sound, bleak and unwinking.

"What about it?" he said. The laughter, if it had been laughter, ceased. The Texan turned to the nearest gatepost and climbed to the top of it, his alternate thighs deliberate and bulging in the tight trousers, the butt of the pistol catching and losing the sun in pearly gleams. Sitting on the post, he looked down at the faces along the fence which were attentive, grave, reserved and not looking at him.

"All right," he said. "Who's going to start her off with a bid? Step right up; take your pick and make your bid, and when the last one is sold, walk in that lot and put your rope on the best piece of horseflesh you ever forked or druv for the money. There ain't a pony there that ain't worth fifteen dollars.

Young, sound, good for saddle or work stock, guaranteed to outlast four ordinary horses; you couldn't kill one of them with a axle-tree — —" There was a small violent commotion at the rear of the group. The little boy appeared, burrowing among the motionless overalls.

He approached the post, the new and unbroken paper carton lifted. The Texan leaned down and took it and tore the end from it and shook three or four of the cakes into the boy's hand, a hand as small and almost as black as that of a coon. He held the carton in his hand while he talked, pointing out the horses with it as he indicated them.

"Look at that one with the three stocking-feet and the frost-bit ear; watch him now when they pass again. Look at that shoulder-action; that horse is worth twenty dollars of any man's money. Who'll make me a bid on him to start her off?"

His voice was harsh, ready, forensic. Along the fence below him the men stood with, buttoned close in their overalls, the tobacco-sacks and worn purses the sparse silver and frayed bills hoarded a coin at a time in the cracks of chimneys or chinked into the logs of walls.

From time to time the horses broke and rushed with purposeless violence and huddled again, watching the faces along the fence with wild mismatched eyes. The lane was full of wagons now. As the others arrived they would have to stop in the road beyond it and the occupants came up the lane on foot. Mrs. Littlejohn came out of her kitchen.

She crossed the yard, looking toward the lot gate. There was a blackened wash-pot set on four bricks in the corner of the yard. She built a fire beneath the pot and came to the fence and stood there for a time, her hands on her hips and the smoke from the fire drifting blue and slow behind her. Then she turned and went back into the house. "Come on, boys," the Texan said.

"Who'll make me a bid?"

"Four bits," a voice said. The Texan did not even glance toward it.

"Or, if he don't suit you, how about that fiddle-head horse without no mane to speak of? For a saddle pony, I'd rather have him than that stocking-foot. I heard somebody say fifty cents just now. I reckon he meant five dollars, didn't he? Do I hear five dollars?"

"Four bits for the lot," the same voice said. This time there were no guffaws. It was the Texan who laughed, harshly, with only his lower face, as if he were reciting a multiplication table.

"Fifty cents for the dried mud offen them, he means," he said. "Who'll give a dollar more for the genuine Texas cockle-burrs?" Mrs. Littlejohn came out of the kitchen, carrying the sawn half of a wooden hogshead which she set on a stump beside the smoking pot, and stood with her

hands on her hips, looking into the lot for a while without coming to the fence this time.

Then she went back into the house. "What's the matter with you boys?" the Texan said. "Here, Eck, you been helping me and you know them horses. How about making me a bid on that wall-eyed one you picked out last night? Here. Wait a minute." He thrust the paper carton into his other hip-pocket and swung his feet inward and dropped, cat-light, into the lot. The ponies, huddled, watched him.

Then they broke before him and slid stiffly along the fence. He turned them and they whirled and rushed back across the lot; whereupon, as though he had been waiting his chance when they should have turned their backs on him, the Texan began to run too, so that when they reached the opposite side of the lot and turned, slowing to huddle again, he was almost upon them. The earth became thunderous; dust arose, out of which the animals began to burst like flushed quail and into which, with that apparently unflagging faith in his own invulnerability, the Texan rushed.

For an instant the watchers could see them in the dust — the pony backed into the angle of the fence and the stable, the man facing it, reaching toward his hip. Then the beast rushed at him in a sort of fatal and hopeless desperation and he struck it between the eyes with the pistol-butt and felled it and leaped onto its prone head.

The pony recovered almost at once and pawed itself to its knees and heaved at its prisoned head and fought itself up, dragging the man with it; for an instant in the dust the watchers saw the man free of the earth and in violent lateral motion like a rag attached to the horse's head.

Then the Texan's feet came back to earth and the dust blew aside and revealed them, motionless, the Texan's sharp heels braced into the ground, one hand gripping the pony's forelock and the other its nostrils, the long evil muzzle wrung backward over its scarred shoulder while it breathed in laboured and hollow groans. Mrs. Littlejohn was in the yard again. No one had seen her emerge this time.

She carried an armful of clothing and a metal-ridged washboard and she was standing motionless at the kitchen steps, looking into the lot. Then she moved across the yard, still looking into the lot, and dumped the garments into the tub, still looking into the lot. "Look him over, boys," the Texan panted, turning his own suffused face and the protuberant glare of his eyes toward the fence. "Look him over quick. Them shoulders and — —" He had relaxed for an instant apparently.

The animal exploded again; again for an instant the Texan was free of the earth, though he was still talking: " — and legs you whoa I'll tear your face right look him over quick boys worth fifteen dollars of let me get a holt of who'll make me a bid whoa you blare-eyed jack-rabbit, whoa!"

They were moving now — a kaleidoscope of inextricable and incredible violence on the periphery of which the metal clasps of the Texan's suspenders sun-glinted in ceaseless orbit, with terrific slowness across the lot. Then the broad clay-coloured hat soared deliberately outward; an instant later the Texan followed it, though still on his feet, and the pony shot free in mad, staglike bounds. The Texan picked up the hat and struck the dust from it against his leg, and returned to the fence and mounted the post again. He was breathing heavily.

Still the faces did not look at him as he took the carton from his hip and shook a cake from it and put the cake into his mouth, chewing, breathing harshly. Mrs. Littlejohn turned away and began to bail water from the pot into the tub, though after each bucketful she turned her head and looked into the lot again. "Now, boys," the Texan said. "Who says that pony ain't worth fifteen dollars?"

You couldn't buy that much dynamite for just fifteen dollars. There ain't one of them can't do a mile in three minutes; turn them into pasture and they will board themselves; work them like hell all day and every time you think about it, lay them over the head with a single-tree and after a couple of days every jack-rabbit one of them will be so tame you will have to put them out of the house at night like a cat." He shook

another cake from the carton and ate it. "Come on, Eck," he said. "Start her off. How about ten dollars for that horse, Eck?"

"What need I got for a horse I would need a bear-trap to catch?" Eck said.

"Didn't you just see me catch him?"

"I seen you," Eck said. "And I don't want nothing as big as a horse if I got to wrastle with it every time it finds me on the same side of a fence it's on."

"All right," the Texan said. He was still breathing harshly, but now there was nothing of fatigue or breathlessness in it. He shook another cake into his palm and inserted it beneath his moustache. "All right. I want to get this auction started. I ain't come here to live, no matter how good a country you folks claim you got. I'm going to give you that horse." For a moment there was no sound, not even that of breathing except the Texan's.

"You going to give it to me?" Eck said.

"Yes. Provided you will start the bidding on the next one." Again there was no sound save the Texan's breathing, and then the clash of Mrs. Littlejohn's pail against the rim of the pot.

"I just start the bidding," Eck said. "I don't have to buy it lessen I ain't over-topped." Another wagon had come up the lane. It was battered and paintless.

One wheel had been repaired by crossed planks bound to the spokes with baling wire and the two underfed mules wore a battered harness patched with bits of cotton rope; the reins were ordinary cotton plough-lines, not new.

It contained a woman in a shapeless grey garment and a faded sunbonnet, and a man in faded and patched though clean overalls. There was not room for the wagon to draw out of the lane so the man left it standing where it was and got down and came forward — a thin

man, not large, with something about his eyes, something strained and washed-out, at once vague and intense, who shoved into the crowd at the rear, saying,

“What? What’s that? Did he give him that horse?”

“All right,” the Texan said. “That wall-eyed horse with the scarred neck belongs to you. Now. That one that looks like he’s had his head in a flour-barrel. What do you say? Ten dollars?”

“Did he give him that horse?” the newcomer said.

“A dollar,” Eck said. The Texan’s mouth was still open for speech; for an instant his face died so behind the hard eyes.

“A dollar?” he said. “One dollar? Did I actually hear that?”

“Durn it,” Eck said. “Two dollars then. But I ain’t — —”

“Wait,” the newcomer said. “You, up there on the post.” The Texan looked at him. When the others turned, they saw that the woman had left the wagon too, though they had not known she was there since they had not seen the wagon drive up.

She came among them behind the man, gaunt in the grey shapeless garment and the sunbonnet, wearing stained canvas gymnasium shoes. She overtook the man but she did not touch him, standing just behind him, her hands rolled before her into the grey dress.

“Henry,” she said in a flat voice. The man looked over his shoulder.

“Get back to that wagon,” he said.

“Here, missus,” the Texan said. “Henry’s going to get the bargain of his life in about a minute. Here, boys, let the missus come up close where she can see. Henry’s going to pick out that saddle-horse the missus has been wanting. Who says ten — —”

“Henry,” the woman said. She did not raise her voice. She had not once looked at the Texan. She touched the man’s arm. He turned and struck her hand down.

“Get back to that wagon like I told you.” The woman stood behind him, her hands rolled again into her dress. She was not looking at anything, speaking to anyone.

“He ain’t no more despair than to buy one of them things,” she said. “And us not but five dollars away from the poorhouse, he ain’t no more despair.” The man turned upon her with that curious air of leashed, of dreamlike fury.

The others lounged along the fence in attitudes gravely inattentive, almost oblivious. Mrs. Littlejohn had been washing for some time now, pumping rhythmically up and down above the washboard in the sud-foamed tub. She now stood erect again, her soap-raw hands on her hips, looking into the lot.

“Shut your mouth and get back in that wagon,” the man said. “Do you want me to take a wagon stake to you?” He turned and looked up at the Texan. “Did you give him that horse?” he said. The Texan was looking at the woman. Then he looked at the man; still watching him, he tilted the paper carton over his open palm. A single cake came out of it.

“Yes,” he said.

“Is the fellow that bids in this next horse going to get that first one too?”

“No,” the Texan said.

“All right,” the other said. “Are you going to give a horse to the man that makes the first bid on the next one?”

“No,” the Texan said.

“Then if you were just starting the auction off by giving away a horse, why didn’t you wait till we were all here?” The Texan stopped looking

at the other. He raised the empty carton and squinted carefully into it, as if it might contain a precious jewel or perhaps a deadly insect. Then he crumpled it and dropped it carefully beside the post on which he sat.

“Eck bids two dollars,” he said. “I believe he still thinks he’s bidding on them scraps of bob-wire they come here in instead of on one of the horses. But I got to accept it. But are you boys — —”

“So Eck’s going to get two horses at a dollar a head,” the newcomer said. “Three dollars.” The woman touched him again. He flung her hand off without turning and she stood again, her hands rolled into her dress across her flat stomach, not looking at anything.

“Misters,” she said, “we got chaps in the house that never had shoes last winter. We ain’t got corn to feed the stock. We got five dollars I earned weaving by firelight after dark. And he ain’t no more despair.”

“Henry bids three dollars,” the Texan said. “Raise him a dollar, Eck, and the horse is yours.” Beyond the fence the horses rushed suddenly and for no reason and as suddenly stopped, staring at the faces along the fence.

“Henry,” the woman said. The man was watching Eck. His stained and broken teeth showed a little beneath his lip. His wrists dangled into fists below the faded sleeves of his shirt too short from many washings.

“Four dollars,” Eck said.

“Five dollars!” the husband said, raising one clenched hand. He shouldered himself forward toward the gatepost. The woman did not follow him. She now looked at the Texan for the first time. Her eyes were a washed grey also, as though they had faded too like the dress and the sunbonnet.

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

“Five dollars!” the husband shouted. He thrust himself up to the post, his clenched hand on a level with the Texan’s knees. He opened it upon a wad of frayed banknotes and silver. “Five dollars! And the man that raises it will have to beat my head off or I’ll beat hisn.”

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

At five o’clock that afternoon the Texan crumpled the third paper carton and dropped it to the earth beneath him. In the copper slant of the levelling sun which fell also upon the line of limp garments in Mrs. Littlejohn’s backyard and which cast his shadow and that of the post on which he sat long across the lot where now and then the ponies still rushed in purposeless and tireless surges, the Texan straightened his leg and thrust his hand into his pocket and took out a coin and leaned down to the little boy.

His voice was now hoarse, spent. “Here, bud,” he said. “Run to the store and get me a box of gingersnaps.” The men still stood along the fence, tireless, in their overalls and faded shirts.

Flem Snopes was there now, appeared suddenly from nowhere, standing beside the fence with a space the width of three or four men on either side of him, standing there in his small yet definite isolation, chewing tobacco, in the same grey trousers and minute bow-tie in which he had departed last summer but in a new cap, grey too like the other, but new, and overlaid with a bright golfer’s plaid, looking also at the horses in the lot. All of them save two had been sold for sums ranging from three dollars and a half to eleven and twelve dollars.

The purchasers, as they had bid them in, had gathered as though by instinct into a separate group on the other side of the gate, where they stood with their hands lying upon the top strand of the fence, watching with a still more sober intensify the animals which some of them had owned for seven and eight hours now but had not yet laid hands upon.

The husband, Henry, stood beside the post on which the Texan sat. The wife had gone back to the wagon, where she sat grey in the grey garment, motionless, looking at nothing still she might have been something inanimate which he had loaded into the wagon to move it somewhere, waiting now in the wagon until he should be ready to go on again, patient, insensate, timeless.

“I bought a horse and I paid cash for it,” he said. His voice was harsh and spent too, the mad look in his eyes had a quality glazed now and even sightless. “And yet you expect me to stand around here till they are all sold before I can get my horse. Well, you can do all the expecting you want. I’m going to take my horse out of there and go home.” The Texan looked down at him. The Texan’s shirt was blotched with sweat. His big face was cold and still, his voice level.

“Take your horse then.” After a moment Henry looked away. He stood with his head bent a little, swallowing from time to time.

“Ain’t you going to catch him for me?”

“It ain’t my horse,” the Texan said in that flat still voice. After a while Henry raised his head. He did not look at the Texan.

“Who’ll help me catch my horse?” he said. Nobody answered. They stood along the fence, looking quietly into the lot where the ponies huddled, already beginning to fade a little where the long shadow of the house lay upon them, deepening. From Mrs. Littlejohn’s kitchen the smell of frying ham came.

A noisy cloud of sparrows swept across the lot and into a chinaberry tree beside the house, and in the high soft vague blue swallows stooped and whirled in erratic indecision, their cries like strings plucked at random. Without looking back, Henry raised his voice: “Bring that ere plough-line.” After a time the wife moved. She got down from the wagon and took a coil of new cotton rope from it and approached. The husband took the rope from her and moved toward the gate.

The Texan began to descend from the post, stiffly, as Henry put his hand on the latch. "Come on here," he said. The wife had stopped when he took the rope from her. She moved again, obediently, her hands rolled into the dress across her stomach, passing the Texan without looking at him.

"Don't go in there, missus," he said. She stopped, not looking at him, not looking at anything. The husband opened the gate and entered the lot and turned, holding the gate open but without raising his eyes.

"Come on here," he said.

"Don't you go in there, missus," the Texan said. The wife stood motionless between them, her face almost concealed by the sunbonnet, her hands folded across her stomach.

"I reckon I better," she said. The other men did not look at her at all, at her or Henry either. They stood along the fence, grave and quiet and inattentive, almost bemused. Then the wife passed through the gate; the husband shut it behind them and turned and began to move toward the huddled ponies, the wife following in the grey and shapeless garment within which she moved without inference of locomotion, like something on a moving platform, a float.

The horses were watching them. They clotted and blended and shifted among themselves, on the point of breaking though not breaking yet. The husband shouted at them. He began to curse them, advancing, the wife following.

Then the huddle broke, the animals moving with high, stiff knees, circling the two people who turned and followed again as the herd flowed and huddled again at the opposite side of the lot.

"There he is," the husband said. "Get him into that corner." The herd divided; the horse which the husband had bought jolted on stiff legs. The wife shouted at it; it spun and poised, plunging, then the husband struck it across the face with the coiled rope and it whirled and

slammed into the corner of the fence. "Keep him there now," the husband said.

He shook out the rope, advancing. The horse watched him with wild, glaring eyes; it rushed again, straight toward the wife. She shouted at it and waved her arms but it soared past her in a long bound and rushed again into the huddle of its fellows.

They followed and hemmed it again into another corner; again the wife failed to stop its rush for freedom and the husband turned and struck her with the coiled rope. "Why didn't you head him?" he said. "Why didn't you?" He struck her again; she did not move, not even to fend the rope with a raised arm.

The men along the fence stood quietly, their faces lowered as though brooding upon the earth at their feet. Only Flem Snopes was still watching — if he ever had been looking into the lot at all, standing in his little island of isolation, chewing with his characteristic faint sidewise thrust beneath the new plain cap.

The Texan said something, not loud, harsh and short. He entered the lot and went to the husband and jerked the uplifted rope from his hand. The husband whirled as though he were about to spring at the Texan, crouched slightly, his knees bent and his arms held slightly away from his sides, though his gaze never mounted higher than the Texan's carved and dusty boots.

Then the Texan took the husband by the arm and led him back toward the gate, the wife following, and through the gate which he held open for the woman and then closed. He took a wad of banknotes from his trousers and removed a bill from it and put it into the woman's hand. "Get him into the wagon and get him on home," he said.

"What's that for?" Flem Snopes said. He had approached. He now stood beside the post on which the Texan had been sitting. The Texan did not look at him.

“Thinks he bought one of them ponies,” the Texan said. He spoke in a flat still voice, like that of a man after a sharp run. “Get him on away, missus.”

“Give him back that money,” the husband said, in his lifeless, spent tone. “I bought that horse and I aim to have him if I got to shoot him before I can put a rope on him.” The Texan did not even look at him.

“Get him on away from here, missus,” he said.

“You take your money and I take my horse,” the husband said. He was shaking slowly and steadily now, as though he were cold. His hands open and shut below the frayed cuffs of his shirt. “Give it back to him,” he said.

“You don’t own no horse of mine,” the Texan said. “Get him on home, missus.” The husband raised his spent face, his mad glazed eyes. He reached out his hand. The woman held the banknote in her folded hands across her stomach. For a while the husband’s shaking hand merely fumbled at it. Then he drew the banknote free.

“It’s my horse,” he said. “I bought it. These fellows saw me. I paid for it. It’s my horse. Here.” He turned and extended the banknote towards Snopes. “You got something to do with these horses. I bought one. Here’s the money for it. I bought one.

Ask him.” Snopes took the banknote. The others stood, gravely inattentive, in relaxed attitudes along the fence. The sun had gone now; there was nothing save violet shadow upon them and upon the lot where once more and for no reason the ponies rushed and flowed. At that moment the little boy came up, tireless and indefatigable still, with the new paper carton. The Texan took it, though he did not open it at once.

He had dropped the rope and now the husband stooped for it, fumbling at it for some time before he lifted it from the ground. Then he stood with his head bent, his knuckles whitening on the rope. The woman had

not moved. Twilight was coming fast now; there was a last mazy swirl of swallows against the high and changing azure.

Then the Texan tore the end from the carton and tilted one of the cakes into his hand; he seemed to be watching the hand as it shut slowly upon the cake until a fine powder of snuff-coloured dust began to rain from his fingers. He rubbed the hand carefully on his thigh and raised his head and glanced about until he saw the little boy and handed the carton back to him.

“Here, bud,” he said. Then he looked at the woman, his voice flat, quiet again. “Mr. Snopes will have your money for you tomorrow. Better get him in the wagon and get him on home. He don’t own no horse.

You can get your money tomorrow from Mr. Snopes.” The wife turned and went back to the wagon and got into it. No one watched her, nor the husband who still stood, his head bent, passing the rope from one hand to the other. They leaned along the fence, grave and quiet, as though the fence were in another land, another time.

“How many you got left?” Snopes said. The Texan roused; they all seemed to rouse then, returning, listening again.

“Got three now,” the Texan said. “Swap all three of them for a buggy or a — —”

“It’s out in the road,” Snopes said, a little shortly, a little quickly, turning away. “Get your mules.” He went on up the lane. They watched the Texan enter the lot and cross it, the horses flowing before him but without the old irrational violence, as if they too were spent, vitiated with the long day, and enter the barn and then emerge, leading the two harnessed mules. The wagon had been backed under the shed beside the barn.

The Texan entered this and came out a moment later, carrying a bedding-roll and his coat, and led the mules back toward the gate, the ponies huddled again and watching him with their various unmatching eyes, quietly now, as if they too realised there was not only an

armistice between them at last but that they would never look upon each other again in both their lives.

Someone opened the gate. The Texan led the mules through it and they followed in a body, leaving the husband standing beside the closed gate, his head still bent and the coiled rope in his hand.

They passed the wagon in which the wife sat, her grey garment fading into the dusk, almost the same colour and as still, looking at nothing; they passed the clothes-line with its limp and unwinded drying garments, walking through the hot vivid smell of ham from Mrs. Littlejohn's kitchen.

When they reached the end of the lane they could see the moon, almost full, tremendous and pale and still lightless in the sky from which day had not quite gone. Snopes was standing at the end of the lane beside an empty buggy. It was the one with the glittering wheels and the fringed parasol top in which he and Will Varner had used to drive. The Texan was motionless too, looking at it.

"Well well well," he said. "So this is it."

"If it don't suit you, you can ride one of the mules back to Texas," Snopes said.

"You bet," the Texan said. "Only I ought to have a powder-puff or at least a mandolin to ride it with." He backed the mules onto the tongue and lifted the breast-yoke. Two of them came forward and fastened the traces for him. Then they watched him get into the buggy and raise the reins.

"Where you heading for?" one said. "Back to Texas?"

"In this?" the Texan said. "I wouldn't get past the first Texas saloon without starting the vigilance committee. Besides, I ain't going to waste all this here lace-trimmed top and these spindle wheels just on Texas. Long as I am this far, I reckon I'll go on a day or two and look-see them Northern towns. Washington and New York and Baltimore. What's the

short way to New York from here?" They didn't know. But they told him how to reach Jefferson.

"You're already headed right," Freeman said. "Just keep right on up the road past the schoolhouse."

"All right," the Texan said. "Well, remember about busting them ponies over the head now and then until they get used to you. You won't have any trouble with them then." He lifted the reins again. As he did so Snopes stepped forward and got into the buggy.

"I'll ride as far as Varner's with you," he said.

"I didn't know I was going past Varner's," the Texan said.

"You can go to town that way," Snopes said. "Drive on." The Texan shook the reins. Then he said,

"Whoa." He straightened his leg and put his hand into his pocket.

"Here, bud," he said to the little boy, "run to the store and — — Never mind. I'll stop and get it myself, long as I am going back that way. Well, boys," he said. "Take care of yourselves." He swung the team around. The buggy went on. They looked after it.

"I reckon he aims to kind of come up on Jefferson from behind," Quick said.

"He'll be lighter when he gets there," Freeman said. "He can come up to it easy from any side he wants."

"Yes," Bookwright said. "His pockets won't rattle." They went back to the lot; they passed on through the narrow way between the two lines of patient and motionless wagons, which at the end was completely closed by the one in which the woman sat.

The husband was still standing beside the gate with his coiled rope, and now night had completely come. The light itself had not changed so much; if anything, it was brighter but with that other-worldly quality of moonlight, so that when they stood once more looking into the lot, the

splotchy bodies of the ponies had a distinctness, almost a brilliance, but without individual shape and without depth — no longer horses, no longer flesh and bone directed by a principle capable of calculated violence, no longer inherent with the capacity to hurt and harm.

“Well, what are we waiting for?” Freeman said. “For them to go to roost?”

“We better all get our ropes first,” Quick said. “Get your ropes everybody.” Some of them did not have ropes. When they left home that morning, they had not heard about the horses, the auction. They had merely happened through the village by chance and learned of it and stopped.

“Go to the store and get some then,” Freeman said.

“The store will be closed now,” Quick said.

“No it won’t,” Freeman said. “If it was closed, Lump Snopes would a been up here.” So while the ones who had come prepared got their ropes from the wagons, the others went down to the store. The clerk was just closing it.

“You all ain’t started catching them yet, have you?” he said. “Good; I was afraid I wouldn’t get there in time.” He opened the door again and amid the old strong sunless smells of cheese and leather and molasses he measured and cut off sections of plough-line for them and in a body and the clerk in the centre and still talking, voluble and unlistened to, they returned up the road.

The pear tree before Mrs. Littlejohn’s was like drowned silver now in the moon. The mockingbird of last night, or another one, was already singing in it, and they now saw, tied to the fence, Ratliff’s buckboard and team.

“I thought something was wrong all day,” one said. “Ratliff wasn’t there to give nobody advice.” When they passed down the lane, Mrs. Littlejohn was in her backyard, gathering the garments from the

clothes-line; they could still smell the ham. The others were waiting at the gate, beyond which the ponies, huddled again, were like phantom fish, suspended apparently without legs now in the brilliant treachery of the moon.

"I reckon the best way will be for us all to take and catch them one at a time," Freeman said.

"One at a time," the husband, Henry, said. Apparently he had not moved since the Texan had led his mules through the gate, save to lift his hands to the top of the gate, one of them still clutching the coiled rope.

"One at a time," he said. He began to curse in a harsh, spent monotone. "After I've stood around here all day, waiting for that — —" He cursed. He began to jerk at the gate, shaking it with spent violence until one of the others slid the latch back and it swung open and Henry entered it, the others following, the little boy pressing close behind his father until Eck became aware of him and turned.

"Here," he said. "Give me that rope. You stay out of here."

"Aw, paw," the boy said.

"No sir. Them things will kill you. They almost done it this morning. You stay out of here."

"But we got two to catch." For a moment Eck stood looking down at the boy.

"That's right," he said. "We got two. But you stay close to me now. And when I holler run, you run. You hear me?"

"Spread out, boys," Freeman said. "Keep them in front of us." They began to advance across the lot in a ragged crescent-shaped line, each one with his rope. The ponies were now at the far side of the lot. One of them snorted; the mass shifted within itself but without breaking. Freeman, glancing back, saw the little boy. "Get that boy out of here," he said.

“I reckon you better,” Eck said to the boy. “You go and get in the wagon yonder. You can see us catch them from there.” The little boy turned and trotted toward the shed beneath which the wagon stood. The line of men advanced, Henry a little in front.

“Watch them close now,” Freeman said. “Maybe we better try to get them into the barn first — —” At that moment the huddle broke. It parted and flowed in both directions along the fence.

The men at the ends of the line began to run, waving their arms and shouting. “Head them,” Freeman said tensely. “Turn them back.” They turned them, driving them back upon themselves again; the animals merged and spun in short, huddling rushes, phantom and inextricable. “Hold them now,” Freeman said. “Don’t let them get by us.” The line advanced again. Eck turned; he did not know why — whether a sound, what. The little boy was just behind him again.

“Didn’t I tell you to get in that wagon and stay there?” Eck said. “Watch out, paw!” the boy said. “There he is! There’s ourn!” It was the one the Texan had given Eck. “Catch him, paw!”

“Get out of my way,” Eck said. “Get back to that wagon.” The line was still advancing. The ponies milled, clotting, forced gradually backward toward the open door of the barn. Henry was still slightly in front, crouched slightly, his thin figure, even in the mazy moonlight, emanating something of that spent fury. The splotchy huddle of animals seemed to be moving before the advancing line of men like a snowball which they might have been pushing before them by some invisible means, gradually nearer and nearer to the black yawn of the barn door. Later it was obvious that the ponies were so intent upon the men that they did not realise the barn was even behind them until they backed into the shadow of it.

Then an indescribable sound, a movement desperate and despairing, arose among them; for an instant of static horror men and animals faced one another, then the men whirled and ran before a gaudy vomit

of long wild faces and splotched chests which overtook and scattered them and flung them sprawling aside and completely obliterated from sight Henry and the little boy, neither of whom had moved though Henry had flung up both arms, still holding his coiled rope, the herd sweeping on across the lot, to crash through the gate which the last man through it had neglected to close, leaving it slightly ajar, carrying all of the gate save upright to which the hinges were nailed with them, and so among the teams and wagons which choked the lane, the teams springing and lunging too, snapping hitch-reins and tongues.

Then the whole inextricable mass crashed among the wagons and eddied and divided about the one in which the woman sat, and rushed on down the lane and into the road, dividing, one-half going one way and one-half the other.

The men in the lot, except Henry, got to their feet and ran toward the gate. The little boy once more had not been touched, not even thrown off his feet; for a while his father held him clear of the ground in one hand, shaking him like a rag doll. "Didn't I tell you to stay in that wagon?" Eck cried. "Didn't I tell you?"

"Look out, paw!" the boy chattered out of the violent shaking, "there's ourn! There he goes!" It was the horse the Texan had given them again. It was as if they owned no other, the other one did not exist; as if by some absolute and instantaneous rapport of blood they had relegated to oblivion the one for which they had paid money.

They ran to the gate and down the lane where the other men had disappeared. They saw the horse the Texan had given them whirl and dash back and rush through the gate into Mrs. Littlejohn's yard and run up the front steps and crash once on the wooden veranda and vanish through the front door.

Eck and the boy ran up onto the veranda. A lamp sat on a table just inside the door. In its mellow light they saw the horse fill the long hallway like a pinwheel, gaudy, furious and thunderous.

A little farther down the hall there was a varnished yellow melodeon. The horse crashed into it; it produced a single note, almost a chord, in bass, resonant and grave, of deep and sober astonishment; the horse with its monstrous and antic shadow whirled again and vanished through another door. It was a bedroom; Ratliff, in his underclothes and one sock and with the other sock in his hand and his back to the door, was leaning out the open window facing the lane, the lot. He looked back over his shoulder. For an instant he and the horse glared at one another.

Then he sprang through the window as the horse backed out of the room and into the hall again and whirled and saw Eck and the little boy just entering the front door, Eck still carrying his rope. It whirled again and rushed on down the hall and onto the back porch just as Mrs. Littlejohn, carrying an armful of clothes from the line and the washboard, mounted the steps.

“Get out of here, you son of a bitch,” she said. She struck with the washboard; it divided neatly on the long mad face and the horse whirled and rushed back up the hall, where Eck and the boy now stood.

“Get to hell out of here, Wall!” Eck roared. He dropped to the floor, covering his head with his arms. The boy did not move, and for the third time the horse soared above the unwinking eyes and the unbowed and untouched head and onto the front veranda again just as Ratliff, still carrying the sock, ran around the corner of the house and up the steps. The horse whirled without breaking or pausing. It galloped to the end of the veranda and took the railing and soared outward, hobgoblin and floating, in the moon.

It landed in the lot still running and crossed the lot and galloped through the wrecked gate and among the overturned wagons and the still intact one in which Henry’s wife still sat, and on down the lane and into the road.

A quarter of a mile farther on, the road gashed pallid and moony between the moony shadows of the bordering trees, the horse still

galloping, galloping its shadow into the dust, the road descending now toward the creek and the bridge. It was of wood, just wide enough for a single vehicle. When the horse reached it, it was occupied by a wagon coming from the opposite direction and drawn by two mules already asleep in the harness and the soporific motion.

On the seat was Tull and his wife, in splint chairs in the wagon behind them sat their four daughters, all returning belated from an all-day visit with some of Mrs. Tull's kin. The horse neither checked nor swerved.

It crashed once on the wooden bridge and rushed between the two mules which waked lunging in opposite directions in the traces, the horse now apparently scrambling along the wagon-tongue itself like a mad squirrel and scrabbling at the end-gate of the wagon with its forefeet as if it intended to climb into the wagon while Tull shouted at it and struck at its face with his whip.

The mules were now trying to turn the wagon around in the middle of the bridge. It slewed and tilted, the bridge-rail cracked with a sharp report above the shrieks of the women; the horse scrambled at last across the back of one of the mules and Tull stood up in the wagon and kicked at its face. Then the front end of the wagon rose, flinging Tull, the reins now wrapped several times about his wrist, backward into the wagon bed among the overturned chairs and the exposed stockings and undergarments of his women. The pony scrambled free and crashed again on the wooden planking, galloping again. The wagon lurched again; the mules had finally turned it on the bridge where there was not room for it to turn and were now kicking themselves free of the traces. When they came free, they snatched Tull bodily out of the wagon. He struck the bridge on his face and was dragged for several feet before the wrist-wrapped reins broke. Far up the road now, distancing the frantic mules, the pony faded on. While the five women still shrieked above Tull's unconscious body, Eck and the little boy came up, trotting, Eck still carrying his rope. He was panting. "Which way'd he go?" he said.

In the now empty and moon-drenched lot, his wife and Mrs. Littlejohn and Ratliff and Lump Snopes, the clerk, and three other men raised Henry out of the trampled dust and carried him into Mrs. Littlejohn's backyard.

His face was blanched and stony, his eyes were closed, the weight of his head tautened his throat across the protruding larynx; his teeth glinted dully beneath his lifted lip. They carried him on toward the house, through the dappled shade of the chinaberry trees. Across the dreaming and silver night a faint sound like remote thunder came and ceased. "There's one of them on the creek bridge," one of the men said.

"It's that one of Eck Snopes's," another said. "The one that was in the house." Mrs. Littlejohn had preceded them into the hall. When they entered with Henry, she had already taken the lamp from the table and she stood beside an open door, holding the lamp high.

"Bring him in here," she said. She entered the room first and set the lamp on the dresser. They followed with clumsy scufflings and pantings and laid Henry on the bed and Mrs. Littlejohn came to the bed and stood looking down at Henry's peaceful and bloodless face. "I'll declare," she said.

"You men." They had drawn back a little, clumped, shifting from one foot to another, not looking at her nor at his wife either, who stood at the foot of the bed, motionless, her hands folded into her dress. "You all get out of here, V. K.," she said to Ratliff. "Go outside. See if you can't find something else to play with that will kill some more of you."

"All right," Ratliff said. "Come on boys. Ain't no more horses to catch in here." They followed him toward the door, on tiptoe, their shoes scuffling, their shadows monstrous on the wall.

"Go get Will Varner," Mrs. Littlejohn said. "I reckon you can tell him it's still a mule." They went out; they didn't look back. They tiptoed up the hall and crossed the veranda and descended into the moonlight.

Now that they could pay attention to it, the silver air seemed to be filled with faint and sourceless sounds — shouts, thin and distant, again a brief thunder of hooves on a wooden bridge, more shouts faint and thin and earnest and clear as bells; once they even distinguished the words: “Whooley. Head him.”

“He went through that house quick,” Ratliff said. “He must have found another woman at home.” Then Henry screamed in the house behind them. They looked back into the dark hall where a square of light fell through the bedroom door, listening while the scream sank into a harsh respiration: “Ah. Ah. Ah” on a rising note about to become screaming again. “Come on,” Ratliff said. “We better get Varner.”

They went up the road in a body, treading the moon-blanching dust in the tremulous April night murmurous with the moving of sap and the wet bursting of burgeoning leaf and bud and constant with the thin and urgent cries and the brief and fading bursts of galloping hooves.

Varner’s house was dark, blank and without depth in the moonlight. They stood, clumped darkly in the silver yard and called up at the blank windows until suddenly someone was standing in one of them.

It was Flem Snopes’s wife. She was in a white garment; the heavy braided club of her hair looked almost black against it. She did not lean out, she merely stood there, full in the moon, apparently blank-eyed or certainly not looking downward at them — the heavy gold hair, the mask not tragic and perhaps not even doomed: just damned, the strong faint lift of breasts beneath marblelike fall of the garment; to those below what Brunhilde, what Rhinemaiden on what spurious river-rock of papier mâché, what Helen returned to what topless and shoddy Argos, waiting for no one. “Evening, Mrs. Snopes,” Ratliff said. “We want Uncle Will.”

Henry Armstid is hurt at Mrs. Littlejohn’s.” She vanished from the window. They waited in the moonlight, listening to the faint remote shouts and cries, until Varner emerged, sooner than they had actually expected, hunching into his coat and buttoning his trousers over the

tail of his nightshirt, his suspenders still dangling in twin loops below the coat.

He was carrying the battered bag which contained the plumber-like tools with which he drenched and wormed and blistered and floated or drew the teeth of horses and mules; he came down the steps, lean and loose-jointed, his shrewd ruthless head cocked a little as he listened also to the faint bell-like cries and shouts with which the silver air was full.

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

“All of them except Henry Armstid,” Ratliff said. “He caught his.”

“Hah,” Varner said. “That you, V. K.? How many did you buy?”

“I was too late,” Ratliff said. “I never got back in time.”

“Hah,” Varner said. They moved on to the gate and into the road again.

“Well, it’s a good bright cool night for running them.” The moon was now high overhead, a pearled and mazy yawn in the soft sky, the ultimate ends of which rolled onward, whorl on whorl, beyond the pale stars and by pale stars surrounded.

They walked in a close clump, tramping their shadows into the road’s mild dust, blotting the shadows of the burgeoning trees which soared, trunk branch and twig against the pale sky, delicate and finely thinned. They passed the dark store. Then the pear tree came in sight. It rose in mazed and silver immobility like exploding snow; the mockingbird still sang in it.

“Look at that tree,” Varner said. “It ought to make this year, sho.”

“Corn’ll make this year too,” one said.

“A moon like this is good for every growing thing outen earth,” Varner said. “I mind when me and Mrs. Varner was expecting Eula. Already had a mess of children and maybe we ought to quit then. But I wanted some more gals. Others had done married and moved away, and a

passel of boys, soon as they get big enough to be worth anything, they ain't got time to work. Got to set around store and talk.

But a gal will stay home and work until she does get married. So there was a old woman told my mammy once that if a woman showed her belly to the full moon after she had done caught, it would be a gal. So Mrs. Varner taken and laid every night with the moon on her nekid belly, until it fulled and after. I could lay my ear to her belly and hear Eula kicking and scrounging like all get-out, feeling the moon."

"You mean it actually worked sho enough, Uncle Will?" the other said.

"Hah," Varner said. "You might try it. You get enough women showing their nekid bellies to the moon or the sun either or even just to your hand fumbling around often enough and more than likely after a while there will be something in it you can lay your ear and listen to, provided something come up and you ain't got away by that time. Hah, V. K.?" Someone guffawed.

"Don't ask me," Ratliff said. "I can't even get nowhere in time to buy a cheap horse." Two or three guffawed this time. Then they began to hear Henry's respirations from the house: "Ah. Ah. Ah," and they ceased abruptly, as if they had not been aware of their closeness to it. Varner walked on in front, lean, shambling, yet moving quite rapidly, though his head was still slanted with listening as the faint, urgent, indomitable cries murmured in the silver lambence, sourceless, at times almost musical, like fading bell-notes; again there was a brief rapid thunder of hooves on wooden planking.

"There's another one on the creek bridge," one said.

"They are going to come out even on them things, after all," Varner said. "They'll get the money back in exercise and relaxation. You take a man that ain't got no other relaxation all year long except dodging mule-dung up and down a field furrow.

And a night like this one, when a man ain't old enough yet to lay still and sleep, and yet he ain't young enough anymore to be tomcatting in and out of other folks' back windows, something like this is good for him. It'll make him sleep tomorrow night anyhow, provided he gets back home by then. If we had just knowed about this in time, we could have trained up a pack of horse-dogs. Then we could have held one of these field trials."

"That's one way to look at it, I reckon," Ratliff said. "In fact, it might be a considerable comfort to Bookwright and Quick and Freeman and Eck Snopes and them other new horse-owners if that side of it could be brought to their attention, because the chances are ain't none of them thought to look at it in that light yet. Probably there ain't a one of them that believes now there's any cure a tall for that Texas disease Flem Snopes and that Dead-eye Dick brought here."

"Hah," Varner said. He opened Mrs. Littlejohn's gate. The dim light still fell outward across the hall from the bedroom door; beyond it, Armstid was saying "Ah. Ah. Ah" steadily. "There's a pill for every ill but the last one."

"Even if there was always time to take it," Ratliff said.

"Hah," Varner said again. He glanced back at Ratliff for an instant, pausing. But the little hard bright eyes were invisible now; it was only the bushy overhang of the brows which seemed to concentrate downward toward him in writhen immobility, not frowning but with a sort of fierce risibility. "Even if there was time to take it. Breathing is a sight-draft dated yesterday."

At nine o'clock on the second morning after that, five men were sitting or squatting along the gallery of the store. The sixth was Ratliff. He was standing up, and talking: "Maybe there wasn't but one of them things in Mrs. Littlejohn's house that night, like Eck says. But it was the biggest drove of just one horse I ever seen.

It was in my rooms and it was on the front porch and I could hear Mrs. Littlejohn hitting it over the head with that washboard in the backyard all at the same time. And still it was missing everybody everytime.

I reckon that's what that Texas man meant by calling them bargains: that a man would need to be powerful unlucky to ever get close enough to one of them to get hurt." They laughed, all except Eck himself. He and the little boy were eating.

When they mounted the steps, Eck had gone on into the store and emerged with a paper sack, from which he took a segment of cheese and with his pocket-knife divided it carefully into two exact halves and gave one to the boy and took a handful of crackers from the sack and gave them to the boy, and now they squatted against the wall, side by side and, save for the difference in size, identical, eating.

"I wonder what that horse thought Ratliff was," one said. He held a spray of peach bloom between his teeth. It bore four blossoms like miniature ballet skirts of pink tulle. "Jumping out windows and running indoors in his shirt-tail? I wonder how many Ratliffs that horse thought he saw."

"I don't know," Ratliff said. "But if he saw just half as many of me as I saw of him, he was sholy surrounded. Everytime I turned my head, that thing was just running over me or just swirling to run back over that boy again. And that boy there, he stayed right under it one time to my certain knowledge for a full one and one-half minutes without ducking his head or even batting his eyes.

Yes sir, when I looked around and seen that varmint in the door behind me blaring its eyes at me, I'd a made sho Flem Snopes had brought a tiger back from Texas except I knowed that couldn't no just one tiger completely fill a entire room." They laughed again, quietly. Lump Snopes, the clerk, sitting in the only chair tilted back against the door-facing and partly blocking the entrance, cackled suddenly.

"If Flem had knowed how quick you fellows was going to snap them horses up, he'd a probably brought some tigers," he said. "Monkeys too."

"So they was Flem's horses," Ratliff said. The laughter stopped. The other three had open knives in their hands, with which they had been trimming idly at chips and slivers of wood. Now they sat apparently absorbed in the delicate and almost tedious movements of the knife-blades.

The clerk had looked quickly up and found Ratliff watching him. His constant expression of incorrigible and mirthful disbelief had left him now; only the empty wrinkles of it remained about his mouth and eyes.

"Has Flem ever said they was?" he said. "But you town fellows are smarter than us country folks. Likely you done already read Flem's mind." But Ratliff was not looking at him now.

"And I reckon we'd a bought them," he said.

He stood above them again, easy, intelligent, perhaps a little sombre but still perfectly impenetrable. "Eck here, for instance. With a wife and family to support. He owns two of them, though to be sho he never had to pay money for but one. I heard folks chasing them things up until midnight last night, but Eck and that boy ain't been home a tall in two days." They laughed again, except Eck. He pared off a bit of cheese and speared it on the knife-point and put it into his mouth.

"Eck caught one of hisn," the second man said.

"That so?" Ratliff said. "Which one was it, Eck? The one he give you or the one you bought?"

"The one he give me," Eck said, chewing.

"Well, well," Ratliff said. "I hadn't heard about that. But Eck's still one horse short. And the one he had to pay money for. Which is pure proof enough that them horses wasn't Flem's because wouldn't no man even give his own blood kin something he couldn't even catch."

They laughed again, but they stopped when the clerk spoke. There was no mirth in his voice at all.

“Listen,” he said. “All right. We done all admitted you are too smart for anybody to get ahead of. You never bought no horse from Flem or nobody else, so maybe it ain’t none of your business and maybe you better just leave it at that.”

“Sholy,” Ratliff said. “It’s done already been left at that two nights ago. The fellow that forgot to shut that lot gate done that. With the exception of Eck’s horse. And we know that wasn’t Flem’s, because that horse was give to Eck for nothing.”

“There’s others besides Eck that ain’t got back home yet,” the man with the peach spray said. “Bookwright and Quick are still chasing theirs. They was reported three miles west of Burtsboro Old Town at eight o’clock last night. They ain’t got close enough to it yet to tell which one it belongs to.”

“Sholy,” Ratliff said. “The only new horse-owner in this country that could a been found without bloodhounds since whoever it was left that gate open two nights ago, is Henry Armstid.

He’s laying right there in Mrs. Littlejohn’s bedroom where he can watch the lot so that any time the one he bought happens to run back into it, all he’s got to do is to holler at his wife to run out with the rope and catch it — —” He ceased, though he said, “Morning, Flem,” so immediately afterward and with no change whatever in tone, that the pause was not even discernible.

With the exception of the clerk, who sprang up, vacated the chair with a sort of servile alacrity, and Eck and the little boy who continued to eat, they watch above their stilled hands as Snopes in the grey trousers and the minute tie and the new cap with its bright overplaid mounted the steps.

He was chewing; he already carried a piece of white pine board; he jerked his head at them, looking at nobody, and took the vacated chair and opened his knife and began to whittle. The clerk now leaned in the opposite side of the door, rubbing his back against the facing.

The expression of merry and invincible disbelief had returned to his face, with a quality watchful and secret.

“You’re just in time,” he said. “Ratliff here seems to be in a considerable sweat about who actually owned them horses.” Snopes drew his knife-blade neatly along the board, the neat, surgeon-like sliver curling before it.

The others were whittling again, looking carefully at nothing, except Eck and the boy, who were still eating, and the clerk rubbing his back against the door-facing and watching Snopes with that secret and alert intensity. “Maybe you could put his mind at rest.” Snopes turned his head slightly and spat, across the gallery and the steps and into the dust beyond them. He drew the knife back and began another curling sliver.

“He was there too,” Snopes said. “He knows as much as anybody else.” This time the clerk guffawed, chortling, his features gathering toward the centre of his face as though plucked there by a hand. He slapped his leg, cackling.

“You might as well to quit,” he said. “You can’t beat him.”

“I reckon not,” Ratliff said. He stood above them, not looking at any of them, his gaze fixed apparently on the empty road beyond Mrs. Littlejohn’s house, impenetrable, brooding even. A hulking, half-grown boy in overalls too small for him, appeared suddenly from nowhere in particular.

He stood for a while in the road, just beyond spitting-range of the gallery, with the air of having come from nowhere in particular and of

not knowing where he would go next when he should move again and of not being troubled by that fact.

He was looking at nothing, certainly not toward the gallery, and no one on the gallery so much as looked at him except the little boy, who now watched the boy in the road, his periwinkle eyes grave and steady above the bitten cracker in his halted hand.

The boy in the road moved on, thickly undulant in the tight overalls, and vanished beyond the corner of the store, the round head and the unwinking eyes of the little boy on the gallery turning steadily to watch him out of sight. Then the little boy bit the cracker again, chewing. "Of course there's Mrs. Tull," Ratliff said. "But that's Eck she's going to sue for damaging Tull against that bridge. And as for Henry Armstid — —"

"If a man ain't got gumption enough to protect himself, it's his own look-out," the clerk said.

"Sholy," Ratliff said, still in that dreamy, abstracted tone, actually speaking over his shoulder even. "And Henry Armstid, that's all right because from what I hear of the conversation that taken place, Henry had already stopped owning that horse he thought was his before that Texas man left.

And as for that broke leg, that won't put him out none because his wife can make his crop." The clerk had ceased to rub his back against the door. He watched the back of Ratliff's head, unwinking too, sober and intent; he glanced at Snopes who, chewing, was watching another sliver curl away from the advancing knife-blade, then he watched the back of Ratliff's head again.

"It won't be the first time she has made their crop," the man with the peach spray said. Ratliff glanced at him.

"You ought to know. This won't be the first time I ever saw you in their field, doing ploughing Henry never got around to. How many days have

you already given them this year?" The man with the peach spray removed it and spat carefully and put the spray back between his teeth.

"She can run a furrow straight as I can," the second said.

"They're unlucky," the third said. "When you are unlucky, it don't matter much what you do."

"Sholy," Ratliff said. "I've heard laziness called bad luck so much that maybe it is."

"He ain't lazy," the third said. "When their mule died three or four years ago, him and her broke their land working time about in the traces with the other mule. They ain't lazy."

"So that's all right," Ratliff said, gazing up the empty road again.

"Likely she will begin right away to finish the ploughing; that oldest gal is pretty near big enough to work with a mule, ain't she? or at least to hold the plough steady while Mrs. Armstid helps the mule?" He glanced again toward the man with the peach spray as though for an answer, but he was not looking at the other and he went on talking without any pause.

The clerk stood with his rump and back pressed against the door-facing as if he had paused in the act of scratching, watching Ratliff quite hard now, unwinking. If Ratliff had looked at Flem Snopes, he would have seen nothing below the downslanted peak of the cap save the steady motion of his jaws.

Another sliver was curling with neat deliberation before the moving knife. "Plenty of time now because all she's got to do after she finishes washing Mrs. Littlejohn's dishes and sweeping out the house to pay hers and Henry's board, is to go out home and milk and cook up enough vittles to last the children until tomorrow and feed them and get the littlest ones to sleep and wait outside the door until that biggest gal gets the bar up and gets into bed herself with the axe — —"

“The axe?” the man with the peach spray said.

“She takes it to bed with her. She’s just twelve, and what with this country still more or less full of them uncaught horses that never belonged to Flem Snopes, likely she feels maybe she can’t swing a mere washboard like Mrs. Littlejohn can — and then come back and wash up the supper dishes.

And after that, not nothing to do until morning except to stay close enough where Henry can call her until it’s light enough to chop the wood to cook breakfast and then help Mrs. Littlejohn wash the dishes and make the beds and sweep while watching the road.

Because likely any time now Flem Snopes will get back from wherever he has been since the auction, which of course is to town naturally to see about his cousin that’s got into a little legal trouble, and so get that five dollars. ‘Only maybe he won’t give it back to me,’ she says, and maybe that’s what Mrs. Littlejohn thought too, because she never said nothing. I could hear her — —”

“And where did you happen to be during all this?” the clerk said.

“Listening,” Ratliff said. He glanced back at the clerk, then he was looking away again, almost standing with his back to them. “ — could hear her dumping the dishes into the pan like she was throwing them at it. ‘Do you reckon he will give it back to me?’ Mrs. Armstid says. ‘That Texas man give it to him and said he would.

All the folks there saw him give Mr. Snopes the money and heard him say I could get it from Mr. Snopes tomorrow.’ Mrs. Littlejohn was washing the dishes now, washing them like a man would, like they was made out of iron. ‘No,’ she says. ‘But asking him won’t do no hurt.’ — ‘If he wouldn’t give it back, it ain’t no use to ask,’ Mrs. Armstid says. — ‘Suit yourself,’ Mrs. Littlejohn says. ‘It’s your money.’ Then I couldn’t hear nothing but the dishes for a while. ‘Do you reckon he might give it back to me?’ Mrs. Armstid says. ‘That Texas man said he would.

They all heard him say it.' — 'Then go and ask him for it,' Mrs. Littlejohn says. Then I couldn't hear nothing but the dishes again. 'He won't give it back to me,' Mrs. Armstid says. — 'All right,' Mrs. Littlejohn says. 'Don't ask him, then.' Then I just heard the dishes.

They would have two pans, both washing. 'You don't reckon he would, do you?' Mrs. Armstid says. Mrs. Littlejohn never said nothing. It sounded like she was throwing the dishes at one another. 'Maybe I better go and talk to Henry,' Mrs. Armstid says. — 'I would,' Mrs. Littlejohn says. And I be dog if it didn't sound exactly like she had two plates in her hands, beating them together like these here brass bucket-lids in a band. 'Then Henry can buy another five-dollar horse with it. Maybe he'll buy one next time that will out and out kill him.

If I just thought he would, I'd give him back that money, myself.' — 'I reckon I better talk to him first,' Mrs. Armstid says. And then it sounded just like Mrs. Littlejohn taken up the dishes and pans and all and threw the whole business at the cookstove — —" Ratliff ceased. Behind him the clerk was hissing "Psst! Psst! Flem. Flem!" Then he stopped, and all of them watched Mrs. Armstid approach and mount the steps, gaunt in the shapeless grey garment, the stained tennis shoes hissing faintly on the boards. She came among them and stood, facing Snopes but not looking at anyone, her hands rolled into her apron.

"He said that day he wouldn't sell Henry that horse," she said in a flat toneless voice. "He said you had the money and I could get it from you." Snopes raised his head and turned it slightly again and spat neatly past the woman, across the gallery and into the road.

"He took all the money with him when he left," he said. Motionless, the grey garment hanging in rigid, almost formal folds like drapery in bronze, Mrs. Armstid appeared to be watching something near Snopes's feet, as though she had not heard him, or as if she had quitted her body as soon as she finished speaking and although her body, hearing, had received the words, they would have no life nor meaning until she returned.

The clerk was rubbing his back steadily against the door-facing again, watching her. The little boy was watching her too with his unwinking ineffable gaze, but nobody else was. The man with the peach spray removed it and spat and put the twig back into his mouth.

“He said Henry hadn’t bought no horse,” she said. “He said I could get the money from you.”

“I reckon he forgot it,” Snopes said. “He took all the money away with him when he left.” He watched her a moment longer, then he trimmed again at the stick. The clerk rubbed his back gently against the door, watching her.

After a time Mrs. Armstid raised her head and looked up the road where it went on, mild with spring dust, past Mrs. Littlejohn’s, beginning to rise, on past the not-yet-bloomed (that would be in June) locust grove across the way, on past the schoolhouse, the weathered roof of which, rising beyond an orchard of peach and pear trees, resembled a hive swarmed about by a cloud of pink-and-white bees, ascending, mounting toward the crest of the hill where the church stood among its sparse gleam of marble headstones in the sombre cedar grove where during the long afternoons of summer the constant mourning doves called back and forth. She moved; once more the rubber soles hissed on the gnawed boards.

“I reckon it’s about time to get dinner started,” she said.

“How’s Henry this morning, Mrs. Armstid?” Ratliff said. She looked at him, pausing, the blank eyes waking for an instant.

“He’s resting, I thank you kindly,” she said. Then the eyes died again and she moved again. Snopes rose from the chair, closing his knife with his thumb and brushing a litter of minute shavings from his lap.

“Wait a minute,” he said. Mrs. Armstid paused again, half-turning, though still not looking at Snopes nor at any of them. Because she can’t possibly actually believe it, Ratliff told himself, anymore than I do.

Snopes entered the store, the clerk, motionless again, his back and rump pressed against the door-facing as though waiting to start rubbing again, watched him enter, his head turning as the other passed him like the head of an owl, the little eyes blinking rapidly now. Jody Varner came up the road on his horse.

He did not pass but instead turned in beside the store, toward the mulberry tree behind it where he was in the habit of hitching his horse. A wagon came up the road, creaking past. The man driving it lifted his hand; one or two of the men on the gallery lifted theirs in response. The wagon went on. Mrs. Armstid looked after it.

Snopes came out of the door, carrying a small striped paper bag and approached Mrs. Armstid. “Here,” he said. Her hand turned just enough to receive it. “A little sweetening for the chaps,” he said. His other hand was already in his pocket, and as he turned back to the chair, he drew something from his pocket and handed it to the clerk, who took it. It was a five-cent piece. He sat down in the chair and tilted it back against the door again.

He now had the knife in his hand again, already open. He turned his head slightly and spat again, neatly past the grey garment, into the road. The little boy was watching the sack in Mrs. Armstid’s hand. Then she seemed to discover it also, rousing.

“You’re right kind,” she said. She rolled the sack into the apron, the little boy’s unwinking gaze fixed upon the lump her hands made beneath the cloth. She moved again. “I reckon I better get on and help with dinner,” she said.

She descended the steps, though as soon as she reached the level earth and began to retreat, the grey folds of the garment once more lost all inference and intimation of locomotion, so that she seemed to progress

without motion like a figure on a retreating and diminishing float; a grey and blasted tree-trunk moving, somehow intact and upright, upon an unhurried flood. The clerk in the doorway cackled, suddenly, explosively, chortling. He slapped his thigh.

“By God,” he said, “you can’t beat him.”

Jody Varner, entering the store from the rear, paused in mid-stride like a pointing bird-dog. Then, on tiptoe, in complete silence and with astonishing speed, he darted behind the counter and sped up the gloomy tunnel, at the end of which a hulking, bear-shaped figure stooped, its entire head and shoulders wedged into the glass case which contained the needles and thread and snuff and tobacco and the stale gaudy candy.

He snatched the boy savagely and viciously out; the boy gave a choked cry and struggled flabbily, cramming a final handful of something into his mouth, chewing. But he ceased to struggle almost at once and become slack and inert save for his jaws. Varner dragged him around the counter as the clerk entered, seemed to bounce suddenly into the store with a sort of alert concern. “You, Saint Elmo!” he said.

“Ain’t I told you and told you to keep him out of here?” Varner demanded, shaking the boy. “He’s damn near eaten that candy-case clean. Stand up!” The boy hung like a half-filled sack from Varner’s hand, chewing with a kind of fatalistic desperation, the eyes shut tight in the vast flaccid colourless face, the ears moving steadily and faintly to the chewing. Save for the jaw and the ears, he appeared to have gone to sleep chewing.

“You, Saint Elmo!” the clerk said. “Stand up!” The boy assumed his own weight, though he did not open his eyes yet nor cease to chew. Varner released him. “Git on home,” the clerk said. The boy turned obediently to re-enter the store. Varner jerked him about again.

“Not that way,” he said. The boy crossed the gallery and descended the steps, the tight overalls undulant and reluctant across his flabby thighs.

Before he reached the ground, his hand rose from his pocket to his mouth; again his ears moved faintly to the motion of chewing.

“He’s worse than a rat, ain’t he?” the clerk said.

“Rat, hell,” Varner said, breathing harshly. “He’s worse than a goat. First thing I know, he’ll graze on back and work through that lace leather and them hame-strings and lap-links and ring-bolts and eat me and you and him all three clean out the back door.

And then be damned if I wouldn’t be afraid to turn my back for fear he would cross the road and start in on the gin and the blacksmith shop. Now you mind what I say. If I catch him hanging around here one more time, I’m going to set a bear-trap for him.” He went out onto the gallery, the clerk following. “Morning, gentlemen,” he said.

“Who’s that one, Jody?” Ratliff said. Save for the clerk in the background, they were the only two standing, and now, in juxtaposition, you could see the resemblance between them — a resemblance intangible, indefinite, not in figure, speech, dress, intelligence; certainly not in morals.

Yet it was there, but with this bridgeless difference, this hallmark of his fate upon him: he would become an old man; Ratliff, too: but an old man who at about sixty-five would be caught and married by a creature not yet seventeen probably, who would for the rest of his life continue to take revenge upon him for her whole sex; Ratliff, never. The boy was moving without haste up the road. His hand rose again from his pocket to his mouth.

“That boy of I. O.’s,” Varner said. “By God, I’ve done everything but put out poison for him.”

“What?” Ratliff said. He glanced quickly about at the faces; for an instant there was in his own not only bewilderment but something almost like terror. “I thought — the other day you fellows told me — —

You said it was a woman, a young woman with a baby — Here now,” he said. “Wait.”

“This here’s another one,” Varner said. “I wish to hell he couldn’t walk. Well, Eck, I hear you caught one of your horses.”

“That’s right,” Eck said. He and the little boy had finished the crackers and cheese and he had sat for some time now, holding the empty bag.

“It was the one he give you, wasn’t it?” Varner said.

“That’s right,” Eck said.

“Give the other one to me, paw,” the little boy said.

“What happened?” Varner said.

“He broke his neck,” Eck said.

“I know,” Varner said. “But how?” Eck did not move. Watching him they could almost see him visibly gathering and arranging words, speech. Varner, looking down at him, began to laugh steadily and harshly, sucking his teeth. “I’ll tell you what happened. Eck and that boy finally run it into that blind lane of Freeman’s, after a chase of about twenty-four hours.

They figured it couldn’t possibly climb them eight-foot fences of Freeman’s so him and the boy tied their rope across the end of the lane, about three feet off the ground.

And sho enough, soon as the horse come to the end of the lane and seen Freeman’s barn, it whirled just like Eck figured it would and come helling back up that lane like a scared hen-hawk. It probably never even seen the rope at all. Mrs. Freeman was watching from where she had run up onto the porch.

She said that when it hit that rope, it looked just like one of these here great big Christmas pinwheels. But the one you bought got clean away, didn’t it?”

“That’s right,” Eck said. “I never had time to see which way the other one went.”

“Give him to me, paw,” the little boy said.

“You wait till we catch him,” Eck said. “We’ll see about it then.”

That afternoon Ratliff sat in the halted buckboard in front of Bookwright’s gate. Bookwright stood in the road beside it. “You were wrong,” Bookwright said. “He come back.”

“He come back,” Ratliff said. “I misjudged his . . . nerve ain’t the word I want, and sholy lack of it ain’t. But I wasn’t wrong.”

“Nonsense,” Bookwright said. “He was gone all day yesterday. Nobody saw him going to town or coming back, but that’s bound to be where he was at. Ain’t no man, I don’t care if his name is Snopes, going to let his own blood kin rot in jail.”

“He won’t be in jail long. Court is next month, and after they send him to Parchman, he can stay outdoors again. He will even go back to farming, ploughing. Of course it won’t be his cotton, but then he never did make enough out of his own cotton to quite pay him for staying alive.”

“Nonsense,” Bookwright said. “I don’t believe it. Flem ain’t going to let him go to the penitentiary.”

“Yes,” Ratliff said. “Because Flem Snopes has got to cancel all them loose-flying notes that turns up here and there every now and then. He’s going to discharge at least some of the notes for good and all.” They looked at one another — Ratliff grave and easy in the blue shirt, Bookwright sober too, black-browed, intent.

“I thought you said you and him burned them notes.”

“I said we burned two notes that Mink Snopes gave me. Do you think that any Snopes is going to put all of anything on one piece of paper

that can be destroyed by one match? Do you think there is any Snopes that don't know that?"

"Oh," Bookwright said. "Hah," he said, with no mirth. "I reckon you gave Henry Armstid back his five dollars too." Then Ratliff looked away. His face changed — something fleeting, quizzical, but not smiling, his eyes did not smile; it was gone.

"I could have," he said. "But I didn't. I might have if I could just been sho he would buy something this time that would sho enough kill him, like Mrs. Littlejohn said. Besides, I wasn't protecting a Snopes from Snopeses; I wasn't even protecting a people from a Snopes.

I was protecting something that wasn't even a people, that wasn't nothing but something that don't want nothing but to walk and feel the sun and wouldn't know how to hurt no man even if it would and wouldn't want to even if it could, just like I wouldn't stand by and see you steal a meat-bone from a dog.

I never made them Snopeses and I never made the folks that can't wait to bare their backsides to them. I could do more, but I won't. I won't, I tell you!"

"All right," Bookwright said. "Hook your drag up; it ain't nothing but a hill. I said it's all right."

2

The two actions of Armstid pl. vs. Snopes, and Tull pl. vs. Eckrum Snopes (and anyone else named Snopes or Varner either which Tull's irate wife could contrive to involve, as the village well knew) were accorded a change of venue by mutual agreement and arrangement among the litigants.

Three of the parties did, that is, because Flem Snopes flatly refused to recognise the existence of the suit against himself, stating once and without heat and first turning his head slightly aside to spit, "They

wasn't none of my horses," then fell to whittling again while the baffled and helpless bailiff stood before the tilted chair with the papers he was trying to serve.

"What a opportunity for that Snopes family lawyer this would a been," Ratliff said when told about it. "What's his name? that quick-fatherer, the Moses with his mouth full of mottoes and his coat-tail full of them already half-grown retroactive sons? I don't understand yet how a man that has to spend as much time as I do being constantly reminded of them folks, still can't keep the names straight. I. O. That he never had time to wait.

This here would be probably the one tried case in his whole legal existence where he wouldn't be bothered with no narrow-ideaed client trying to make him stop talking, and the squire presiding himself would be the only man in company with authority to tell him to shut up."

So neither did the Varner surrey nor Ratliff's buckboard make one among the wagons, the buggies, and the saddled horses and mules which moved out of the village on that May Saturday morning, to converge upon Whiteleaf store eight miles away, coming not only from Frenchman's Bend but from other directions too since by that time, what Ratliff had called "that Texas sickness," that spotted corruption of frantic and uncatchable horses, had spread as far as twenty and thirty miles.

So by the time the Frenchman's Bend people began to arrive, there were two dozen wagons, the teams reversed and eased of harness and tied to the rear wheels in order to pass the day, and twice that many saddled animals already standing about the locust grove beside the store and the site of the hearing had already been transferred from the store to an adjacent shed where in the fall cotton would be stored.

But by nine o'clock it was seen that even the shed would not hold them all, so the palladium was moved again, from the shed to the grove itself. The horses and mules and wagons were cleared from it; the single chair, the gnawed table bearing a thick bible which had the

appearance of loving and constant use of a piece of old and perfectly-kept machinery and an almanac and a copy of Mississippi Reports dated 1881 and bearing along its opening edge a single thread-thin line of soilure as if during all the time of his possession its owner (or user) had opened it at only one page though that quite often, were fetched from the shed to the grove; a wagon and four men were dispatched and returned presently from the church a mile away with four wooden pews for the litigants and their clansmen and witnesses; behind these in turn the spectators stood — the men, the women, the children, sober, attentive, and neat, not in their Sunday clothes to be sure, but in the clean working garments donned that morning for the Saturday's diversion of sitting about the country stores or trips into the country seat, and in which they would return to the field on Monday morning and would wear all that week until Friday night came round again.

The Justice of the Peace was a neat, small, plump old man resembling a tender caricature of all grandfathers who ever breathed, in a beautifully laundered though collarless white shirt with immaculate starch-gleaming cuffs and bosom, and steel-framed spectacles and neat, faintly curling white hair.

He sat behind the table and looked at them — at the grey woman in the grey sunbonnet and dress, her clasped and motionless hands on her lap resembling a gnarl of pallid and drowned roots from a drained swamp; at Tull in his faded but absolutely clean shirt and the overalls which his womenfolks not only kept immaculately washed but starched and ironed also, and not creased through the legs but flat across them from seam to seam, so that on each Saturday morning they resembled the short pants of a small boy, and the sedate and innocent blue of his eyes above the month-old corn-silk beard which concealed most of his abraded face and which gave him an air of incredible and paradoxical dissoluteness, not as though at last and without warning he had appeared in the sight of his fellowmen in his true character, but as if an old Italian portrait of a child saint had been defaced by a vicious and idle boy; at Mrs. Tull, a strong, full-bosomed though slightly dumpy woman with an expression of grim and seething outrage which the elapsed four weeks had apparently neither increased nor diminished

but had merely set, an outrage which curiously and almost at once began to give the impression of being directed not at any Snopes or at any other man in particular but at all men, all males, and of which Tull himself was not at all the victim but the subject, who sat on one side of her husband while the biggest of the four daughters sat on the other as if they (or Mrs. Tull at least) were not so much convinced that Tull might leap up and flee, as determined that he would not; and at Eck and the little boy, identical save for size, and Lump the clerk in a grey cap which someone actually recognised as being the one which Flem Snopes had worn when he went to Texas last year, who between spells of rapid blinking would sit staring at the Justice with the lidless intensity of a rat — and into the lens-distorted and irisless old-man's eyes of the Justice there grew an expression not only of amazement and bewilderment but, as in Ratliff's eyes while he stood on the store gallery four weeks ago, something very like terror.

"This — —" he said. "I didn't expect — I didn't look to see — — . I'm going to pray," he said. "I ain't going to pray aloud. But I hope — —" He looked at them. "I wish. . . . Maybe some of you all anyway had better do the same." He bowed his head. They watched him, quiet and grave, while he sat motionless behind the table, the light morning wind moving faintly in his thin hair and the shadow-stipple of windy leaves gliding and flowing across the starched bulge of bosom and the gleaming bone-buttoned cuffs, as rigid and almost as large as section of six-inch stovepipe, at his joined hands. He raised his head.

"Armstid against Snopes," he said. Mrs. Armstid spoke. She did not move, she looked at nothing, her hands clasped in her lap, speaking in that flat, toneless and hopeless voice:

"That Texas man said — —"

"Wait," the Justice said. He looked about at the faces, the blurred eyes fleeing behind the thick lenses. "Where is the defendant? I don't see him."

"He wouldn't come," the bailiff said.

“Wouldn’t come?” the Justice said. “Didn’t you serve the papers on him?”

“He wouldn’t take them,” the bailiff said. “He said — —”

“Then he is in contempt!” the Justice cried.

“What for?” Lump Snopes said. “Ain’t nobody proved yet they was his horses.” The Justice looked at him.

“Are you representing the defendant?” he said. Snopes blinked at him for a moment.

“What’s that mean?” he said. “That you aim for me to pay whatever fine you think you can clap onto him?”

“So he refuses to defend himself,” the Justice said. “Don’t he know that I can find against him for that reason, even if pure justice and decency ain’t enough?”

“It’ll be pure something,” Snopes said. “It don’t take no mind-reader to see how your mind is — —”

“Shut up, Snopes,” the bailiff said. “If you ain’t in this case, you keep out of it.” He turned back to the Justice. “What you want me to do: go over to the Bend and fetch Snopes here anyway? I reckon I can do it.”

“No,” the Justice said. “Wait.” He looked about at the sober faces again with that bafflement, that dread. “Does anybody here know for sho who them horses belonged to? Anybody?” They looked back at him, sober, attentive — at the neat immaculate old man sitting with his hands locked together on the table before him to still the trembling. “All right, Mrs. Armstid,” he said. “Tell the court what happened.”

She told it, unmoving, in the flat, inflectionless voice, looking at nothing, while they listened quietly, coming to the end and ceasing without even any fall of voice, as though the tale mattered nothing and came to nothing.

The Justice was looking down at his hands. When she ceased, he looked up at her. “But you haven’t showed yet that Snopes owned the horses.

The one you want to sue is that Texas man. And he's gone. If you got a judgment against him, you couldn't collect the money. Don't you see?"

"Mr. Snopes brought him here," Mrs. Armstid said. "Likely that Texas man wouldn't have knowed where Frenchman's Bend was if Mr. Snopes hadn't showed him."

"But it was the Texas man that sold the horses and collected the money for them." The Justice looked about again at the faces. "Is that right? You, Bookwright, is that what happened?"

"Yes," Bookwright said. The Justice looked at Mrs. Armstid again, with that pity and grief.

As the morning increased the wind had risen, so that from time to time gusts of it ran through the branches overhead, bringing a faint snow of petals, prematurely bloomed as the spring itself had condensed with spendthrift speed after the hard winter, and the heavy and drowsing scent of them, about the motionless heads.

"He give Mr. Snopes Henry's money. He said Henry hadn't bought no horse. He said I could get the money from Mr. Snopes tomorrow."

"And you have witnesses that saw and heard him?"

"Yes, sir. The other men that was there saw him give Mr. Snopes the money and say that I could get it — —"

"And you asked Snopes for the money?"

"Yes, sir. He said that Texas man taken it away with him when he left. But I would . . ." She ceased again, perhaps looking down at her hands also. Certainly she was not looking at anyone.

"Yes?" the Justice said. "You would what?"

"I would know them five dollars. I earned them myself, weaving at night after Henry and the chaps was asleep. Some of the ladies in Jefferson would save up string and such and give it to me and I would weave things and sell them. I earned that money a little at a time and I would know it when I saw it because I would take the can outen the chimney

and count it now and then while it was making up to enough to buy my chaps some shoes for next winter. I would know it if I was to see it again. If Mr. Snopes would just let — —”

“Suppose there was somebody seen Flem give that money back to that Texas fellow,” Lump Snopes said suddenly.

“Did anybody here see that?” the Justice said.

“Yes,” Snopes said, harshly and violently. “Eck here did.” He looked at Eck. “Go on. Tell him.” The Justice looked at Eck; the four Tull girls turned their heads as one head and looked at him, and Mrs. Tull leaned forward to look past her husband, her face cold, furious, and contemptuous, and those standing shifted to look past one another’s heads at Eck sitting motionless on the bench.

“Did you see Snopes give Armstid’s money back to the Texas man, Eck?” the Justice said. Still Eck did not answer nor move, Lump Snopes made a gross violent sound through the side of his mouth.

“By God, I ain’t afraid to say it if Eck is. I seen him do it.”

“Will you swear that as testimony?” Snopes looked at the Justice. He did not blink now.

“So you won’t take my word,” he said.

“I want the truth,” the Justice said. “If I can’t find that, I got to have sworn evidence of what I will have to accept as truth.” He lifted the bible from the two other books.

“All right,” the bailiff said. “Step up here.”

Snopes rose from the bench and approached. They watched him, though now there was no shifting nor craning, no movement at all among the faces, the still eyes. Snopes at the table looked back at them once, his gaze traversing swiftly the crescent-shaped rank; he looked at the Justice again. The bailiff grasped the bible; though the Justice did not release it yet.

“You are ready to swear you saw Snopes give that Texas man back the money he took from Henry Armstid for that horse?” he said.

“I said I was, didn’t I?” Snopes said. The Justice released the bible. “Swear him,” he said.

“Put your left hand on the Book raise your right hand you solemnly swear and affirm — —” the bailiff said rapidly. But Snopes had already done so, his left hand clapped onto the extended bible and the other hand raised and his head turned away as once more his gaze went rapidly along the circle of expressionless and intent faces, saying in that harsh and snarling voice:

“Yes.

I saw Flem Snopes give back to that Texas man whatever money Henry Armstid or anybody else thinks Henry Armstid or anybody else paid Flem for any of them horses. Does that suit you?”

“Yes,” the Justice said. Then there was no movement, no sound anywhere among them.

The bailiff placed the bible quietly on the table beside the Justice’s locked hands, and there was no movement save the flow and recover of the windy shadows and the drift of the locust petals. Then Mrs. Armstid rose; she stood once more (or still) looking at nothing, her hands clasped across her middle.

“I reckon I can go now, can’t I?” she said.

“Yes,” the Justice said, rousing. “Unless you would like — —”

“I better get started,” she said. “It’s a right far piece.” She had not come in the wagon, but on one of the gaunt and underfed mules. One of the men followed her across the grove and untied the mule for her and led it up to a wagon, from one hub of which she mounted.

Then they looked at the Justice again. He sat behind the table, his hands still joined before him, though his head was not bowed now. Yet

he did not move until the bailiff leaned and spoke to him, when he roused, came suddenly awake without starting, as an old man wakes from an old man's light sleep. He removed his hands from the table and, looking down, he spoke exactly as if he were reading from a paper: "Tull against Snopes. Assault and — —"

"Yes!" Mrs. Tull said. "I'm going to say a word before you start." She leaned, looking past Tull at Lump Snopes again. "If you think you are going to lie and perjure Flem and Eck Snopes out of — —"

"Now, mamma," Tull said. Now she spoke to Tull, without changing her position or her tone or even any break or pause in her speech: "Don't you say hush to me! You'll let Eck Snopes or Flem Snopes or that whole Varner tribe snatch you out of the wagon and beat you half to death against a wooden bridge. But when it comes to suing them for your just rights and a punishment, oh no. Because that wouldn't be neighbourly.

What's neighbourly got to do with you lying flat on your back in the middle of planting-time while we pick splinters out of your face?" By this time the bailiff was shouting,

"Order! Order! This here's a law court!" Mrs. Tull ceased. She sat back, breathing hard, staring at the Justice, who sat and spoke again as if he were reading aloud:

" — assault and battery on the person of Vernon Tull, through the agency and instrument of one horse, unnamed, belonging to Eckrum Snopes. Evidence of physical detriment and suffering, defendant himself. Witnesses, Mrs. Tull and daughters — —"

"Eck Snopes saw it too," Mrs. Tull said, though with less violence now. "He was there. He got there in plenty of time to see it. Let him deny it. Let him look me in the face and deny it if he — —"

"If you please, ma'am," the Justice said. He said it so quietly that Mrs. Tull hushed and became quite calm, almost a rational and composed being. "The injury to your husband ain't disputed.

And the agency of the horse ain't disputed. The law says that when a man owns a creature which he knows to be dangerous and if that creature is restrained and restricted from the public commons by a pen or enclosure capable of restraining and restricting it, if a man enter that pen or enclosure, whether he knows the creature in it is dangerous or not dangerous, then that man has committed trespass and the owner of that creature is not liable.

But if that creature known to him to be dangerous ceases to be restrained by that suitable pen or enclosure, either by accident or design and either with or without the owner's knowledge, then that owner is liable. That's the law. All necessary now is to establish first, the ownership of the horse, and second, that the horse was a dangerous creature within the definition of the law as provided."

"Hah," Mrs. Tull said. She said it exactly as Bookwright would have. "Dangerous. Ask Vernon Tull. Ask Henry Armstid if them things was pets."

"If you please, ma'am," the Justice said. He was looking at Eck.

"What is the defendant's position? Denial of ownership?"

"What?" Eck said.

"Was that your horse that ran over Mr. Tull?"

"Yes," Eck said. "It was mine. How much do I have to p — —"

"Hah," Mrs. Tull said again. "Denial of ownership. When there were at least forty men — fools too, or they wouldn't have been there. But even a fool's word is good about what he saw and heard — at least forty men heard that Texas murderer give that horse to Eck Snopes. Not sell it to him, mind; give it to him."

"What?" the Justice said. "Gave it to him?"

"Yes," Eck said. "He give it to me. I'm sorry Tull happened to be using that bridge too at the same time. How much do I — —"

“Wait,” the Justice said. “What did you give him? a note? a swap of some kind?”

“No,” Eck said. “He just pointed to it in the lot and told me it belonged to me.”

“And he didn’t give you a bill-of-sale or a deed or anything in writing?”

“I reckon he never had time,” Eck said. “And after Lon Quick forgot and left that gate open, never nobody had time to do no writing even if we had a thought of it.”

“What’s all this?” Mrs. Tull said. “Eck Snopes has just told you he owned that horse. And if you won’t take his word, there were forty men standing at that gate all day long doing nothing, that heard that murdering card-playing whiskey-drinking anti-christ — —” This time the Justice raised one hand, in its enormous pristine cuff, toward her. He did not look at her.

“Wait,” he said. “Then what did he do?” he said to Eck. “Just lead the horse up and put the rope in your hand?”

“No,” Eck said. “Him nor nobody else never got no ropes on none of them. He just pointed to the horse in the lot and said it was mine and auctioned off the rest of them and got into the buggy and said goodbye and druv off.

And we got our ropes and went into the lot, only Lon Quick forgot to shut the gate. I’m sorry it made Tull’s mules snatch him outen the wagon. How much do I owe him?” Then he stopped, because the Justice was no longer looking at him and, as he realised a moment later, no longer listening either. Instead, he was sitting back in the chair, actually leaning back in it for the first time, his head bent slightly and his hands resting on the table before him, the fingers lightly overlapped. They watched him quietly for almost a half-minute before anyone realised that he was looking quietly and steadily at Mrs. Tull.

“Well, Mrs. Tull,” he said, “by your own testimony, Eck never owned that horse.”

“What?” Mrs. Tull said. It was not loud at all. “What did you say?”

“In the law, ownership can’t be conferred or invested by word-of-mouth. It must be established either by recorded or authentic document, or by possession or occupation. By your testimony and his both, he never gave that Texan anything in exchange for that horse, and by his testimony the Texas man never gave him any paper to prove he owned it, and by his testimony and by what I know myself from these last four weeks, nobody yet has ever laid hand or rope either on any one of them.

So that horse never came into Eck’s possession at all. That Texas man could have given that same horse to a dozen other men standing around that gate that day, without even needing to tell Eck he had done it; and Eck himself could have transferred all his title and equity in it to Mr. Tull right there while Mr. Tull was lying unconscious on that bridge just by thinking it to himself, and Mr. Tull’s title would be just as legal as Eck’s.”

“So I get nothing,” Mrs. Tull said. Her voice was still calm, quiet, though probably no one but Tull realised that it was too calm and quiet. “My team is made to run away by a wild spotted mad dog, my wagon is wrecked; my husband is jerked out of it and knocked unconscious and unable to work for a whole week with less than half of our seed in the ground, and I get nothing.”

“Wait,” the Justice said. “The law — —”

“The law,” Mrs. Tull said. She stood suddenly up — a short, broad, strong woman, balanced on the balls of her planted feet.

“Now, mamma,” Tull said.

“Yes, ma’am,” the Justice said. “Your damages are fixed by statute. The law says that when a suit for damages is brought against the owner of an animal which has committed damage or injury, if the owner of the animal either can’t or won’t assume liability, the injured or damaged

party shall find recompense in the body of the animal. And since Eck Snopes never owned that horse at all, and since you just heard a case here this morning that failed to prove that Flem Snopes had any equity in any of them, that horse still belongs to that Texas man. Or did belong. Because now that horse that made your team run away and snatch your husband out of the wagon, belongs to you and Mr. Tull.”

“Now, mamma!” Tull said. He rose quickly. But Mrs. Tull was still quiet, only quite rigid and breathing hard, until Tull spoke. Then she turned on him, not screaming: shouting; presently the bailiff was banging the table-top with his hand-polished hickory cane and roaring “Order! Order!” while the neat old man, thrust backward in his chair as though about to dodge and trembling with an old man’s palsy, looked on with amazed unbelief.

“The horse!” Mrs. Tull shouted. “We see it for five seconds, while it is climbing into the wagon with us and then out again. Then it’s gone, God don’t know where and thank the Lord He don’t! And the mules gone with it and the wagon wrecked and you laying there on the bridge with your face full of kindling-wood and bleeding like a hog and dead for all we knew. And he gives us the horse! Don’t hush me! Get on to that wagon, fool that would sit there behind a pair of young mules with the reins tied around his wrist! Get on to that wagon, all of you!”
“I can’t stand no more!” the old Justice cried. “I won’t! This court’s adjourned! Adjourned!”

There was another trial then. It began on the following Monday and most of those same faces watched it too, in the county courthouse in Jefferson when the prisoner entered between two officers and looking hardly larger than a child, in a suit of brand-new overalls, thin, almost frail-looking, the sombre violent face thin in repose and pallid from the eight months in jail, and was arraigned and then plead by the counsel appointed him by the Court — a young man graduated only last June from the State University’s law school and admitted to the Bar, who did what he could and overdid what he could not, zealous and, for all practical purposes and results, ignored, having exhausted all his challenges before the State had made one and in despite of which

seeing himself faced by an authenticated jury in almost record time as if the State, the public, all rational mankind, possessed an inexhaustible pool of interchangeable faces and names all cradling one identical conviction and intention, so that his very challenges could have been discharged for him by the janitor who opened the courtroom, by merely counting off the first members of the panel corresponding to that number.

And, if the defendant's counsel had had any detachment and objectivity left at all by then, he probably realised soon that it was not his client but himself who was embattled with that jury.

Because his client was paying no attention whatever to what was going on. He did not seem to be interested in watching and listening to it as someone else's trial. He sat where they had placed him, manacled to one of the officers, small, in the new iron-hard board-stiff overalls, the back of his head toward the Bar and what was going on there and his upper body shifting constantly until they realised that he was trying to watch the rear of the room, the doors and who entered them.

He had to be spoken to twice before he stood up and plead and continued to stand, his back completely turned to the Court now, his face sombre, thin, curiously urgent and quite calm and with something else in it which was not even just hope but was actual faith, looking not at his wife who sat on the bench just behind him but out into the crowded room, among the ranked and intent faces some of which, most of which, he knew, until the officer he was handcuffed to pulled him down again.

And he sat that way through the rest of the brief and record day and a quarter of his trial, the small, neatly-combed, vicious and ironlike incorrigible head turning and craning constantly to see backward past the bulk of the two officers, watching the entrance while his attorney did what he could, talked himself frantic and at last voiceless before the grave impassivity of the jury which resembled a conclave of grown men self-delegated with the necessity (though for a definitely specified and limited time) of listening to prattle of a licensed child.

And still the client listened to none of it, watching constantly the rear of the room while toward the end of the first day the faith went out of his face, leaving only the hope, and at the beginning of the second day the hope was gone too and there was only the urgency, the grim and intractable sombreness, while still he watched the door. The State finished in midmorning of the second day.

The jury was out twenty minutes and returned with a ballot of murder in the second degree; the prisoner stood again and was sentenced by the Court to be transported to the State Penal Farm and there remain until he died.

But he was not listening to that either; he had not only turned his back to the Court to look out into the crowded room, he was speaking himself even before the Judge had ceased, continuing to speak even while the Judge hammered the desk with his gavel and the two officers and three bailiffs converged upon the prisoner as he struggled, flinging them back and for a short time actually successful, staring out into the room. "Flem Snopes!" he said. "Flem Snopes! Is Flem Snopes in this room? Tell that son of a bitch — —"

CHAPTER TWO

1

RATLIFF STOPPED THE buckboard at Bookwright's gate. The house was dark, but at once three or four of Bookwright's dogs came yelling out from beneath it or behind it. Armstid swung his leg stiffly out and prepared to get down. "Wait," Ratliff said. "I'll go get him."

"I can walk," Armstid said harshly.

"Sholy," Ratliff said. "Besides, them dogs knows me."

"They'll know me, after the first one runs at me once," Armstid said.

"Sholy," Ratliff said. He was already out of the buckboard. "You wait here and hold the team." Armstid swung his leg back into the

buckboard, not invisible even in the moonless August darkness, but on the contrary, because of his faded overalls, quite distinct against the buckboard's dark upholstery; it was only his features beneath his hatbrim which could not be distinguished. Ratliff handed him the reins and turned past the metal mailbox on its post in the starlight, toward the gate beyond it and the mellow uproar of the dogs.

When he was through the gate he could see them — a yelling clump of blackness against the slightly paler earth which broke and spread fanwise before him, braced, yelling, holding him bayed — three black-and-tan hounds whose tan the starlight had transposed to black too so that, not quite invisible but almost and without detail, they might have been the three intact carbons of burned newspaper-sheets standing upright from the earth, yelling at him. He shouted at them. They should have recognised him already by smell.

When he shouted, he knew that they already had, because for perhaps a second they hushed, then as he moved forward they retreated before him, keeping the same distance, baying. Then he saw Bookwright, pale too in overalls against the black house. When Bookwright shouted at the hounds, they did hush.

"Git," he said. "Shut up and git." He approached, becoming black in his turn against the paler earth, to where Ratliff waited. "Where's Henry?" he said.

"In the buggy," Ratliff said. He turned back toward the gate.

"Wait," Bookwright said. Ratliff stopped. The other came up beside him. They looked at one another, each face invisible to the other. "You ain't let him persuade you into this, have you?" Bookwright said.

"Between having to remember them five dollars every time he looks at his wife maybe, and that broke leg, and that horse he bought from Flem Snopes with it he ain't even seen again, he's plumb crazy now. Not that he had far to go. You ain't just let him persuade you?"

"I don't think so," Ratliff said. "I know I ain't," he said. "There's something there. I've always knowed it. Just like Will Varner knows there is something there. If there wasn't, he wouldn't never bought it.

And he wouldn't a kept it, selling the balance of it off and still keeping that old house, paying taxes on it when he could a got something for it, setting there in that flour-barrel chair to watch it and claiming he did it because it rested him to set there where somebody had gone to all that work and expense just to build something to sleep and eat and lay with his wife in. And I knowed it for sho when Flem Snopes took it.

When he had Will Varner just where he wanted him, and then he sold out to Will by taking that old house and them ten acres that wouldn't hardly raise goats. And I went with Henry last night. I saw it too. You don't have to come in, if you feel uncertain. I'd rather you wouldn't."

"All right," Bookwright said. He moved on. "That's all I wanted to know." They returned to the buckboard. Henry moved to the middle of the seat and they got in. "Don't let me crowd your leg," Bookwright said.

"There ain't anything wrong with my leg," Armstid said in that harsh voice. "I can walk as far as you or any man any day."

"Sholy," Ratliff said quickly, taking the reins. "Henry's leg is all right now. You can't even notice it."

"Let's get on," Bookwright said. "Won't nobody have to walk for a while, if that team can."

"It's shorter through the Bend," Ratliff said. "But we better not go that way."

"Let them see," Armstid said. "If anybody here is afraid, I don't need no help. I can — —"

"Sholy," Ratliff said. "If folks sees us, we might have too much help. That's what we want to dodge." Armstid hushed. He said no more from then on, sitting between them in an immobility which was almost like a temperature, thinner, as though it had not been the sickness (after

being in bed about a month, he had got up one day and broken the leg again; nobody ever knew how, what he had been doing, trying to do, because he never talked about it) but impotence and fury which had wasted him.

Ratliff asked neither advice nor directions; there was little anybody could have told him about the back roads and lanes of that or any of the other country he travelled. They passed nobody; the dark and sleeping land was empty, the scattered and remote homesteads indicated only by the occasional baying of dogs.

The lanes he followed ran pale between the broad spread of fields felt rather than seen, where the corn was beginning to fire and the cotton to bloom, then into tunnels of trees rising and feathered lushly with summer's full leaf against the sky of August heavy and thick with stars.

Then they were in the old lane which for years now had been marked by nothing save the prints of Varner's old white horse and, for a brief time, by the wheels of the parasol-topped runabout — the old scar almost healed now, where thirty years ago a courier (perhaps a neighbour's slave flogging a mule taken out of the plough) had galloped with the news of Sumter, where perhaps the barouche had moved, the women swaying and pliant in hooped crinoline beneath parasols, the men in broadcloth riding the good horses at the wheels, talking about it, where the son, and perhaps the master himself had ridden into Jefferson with his pistols and his portmanteau and a body-servant on the spare horse behind, talking of regiments and victory; where the Federal patrols had ridden the land peopled by women and negro slaves about the time of the battle of Jefferson.

There was nothing to show of that now. There was hardly a road; where the sand darkened into the branch and then rose again, there was no trace left of the bridge. Now the scar ran straight as a plumb-line along a shaggy hedgerow of spaced cedars decreed there by the same nameless architect who had planned and built the house for its nameless master, now two and three feet thick, the boughs interlocked and massed now. Ratliff turned in among them. He seemed to know

exactly where he was going. But then Bookwright remembered that he had been here last night.

Armstid didn't wait for them. Ratliff tied the team hurriedly and they overtook him — a shadow, still faintly visible because of his overalls faded pale with washing, hurrying stiffly on through the undergrowth. The earth yawned black before them, a long gash: a ravine, a ditch. Bookwright remembered that Armstid had been here for more than one night, nevertheless the limping shadow seemed about to hurl itself into the black abyss. "You better help him," Bookwright said. "He's going to break — —"

"Hush!" Ratliff hissed. "The garden is just up the hill yonder."
" — break that leg again," Bookwright said, quieter now. "Then we'll be into it."

"He'll be all right," Ratliff whispered. "It's been this way every night. Just don't push him too close. But don't let him get too far ahead. Once last night while we were laying there I had to hold him." They went on, just behind the figure which moved now in absolute silence and with surprising speed. They were in a ravine massed with honeysuckle and floored with dry sand in which they could hear the terrific labouring of the lame leg.

Yet still they could hardly keep up with him. After about two hundred yards Armstid turned to climb up out of the ravine. Ratliff followed him. "Careful now," he whispered back to Bookwright. "We're right at it." But Bookwright was watching Armstid. He won't never make it, he thought.

He won't never climb that bank. But the other did it, dragging the stiffened and once-fragile and hence maybe twice-fragile leg at the almost sheer slope, silent and unaided and emanating that trigger-like readiness to repudiate assistance and to deny that he might possibly need it.

Then on hands and knees Bookwright was crawling after the others in a path through a mass of man-tall briars and weeds and persimmon shoots, overtaking them where they lay flat at the edge of a vague slope which rose to the shaggy crest on which, among oaks, the shell of the tremendous house stood where it had been decreed too by the imported and nameless architect and its master whose anonymous dust lay with that of his blood and of the progenitors of saxophone players in Harlem honkytonks beneath the weathered and illegible headstones on another knoll four hundred yards away, with its broken roof and topless chimneys and one high rectangle of window through which he could see the stars in the opposite sky.

The slope had probably been a rose-garden. None of them knew or cared, just as they, who had seen it, walked past and looked at it perhaps a hundred times, did not know that the fallen pediment in the middle of the slope had once been a sundial. Ratliff reached across Armstid's body and gripped his arm, then, above the sound of their panting breath, Bookwright heard the steady and unhurried sigh of a shovel and the measured thud of spaded earth somewhere on the slope above them. "There!" Ratliff whispered.

"I hear somebody digging," Bookwright whispered. "How do I know it's Flem Snopes?"

"Hasn't Henry been laying here every night since ten days ago, listening to him? Wasn't I right here last night with Henry myself, listening to him? Didn't we lay right here until he quit and left and then we crawled up there and found every place where he had dug and then filled the hole back up and smoothed the dirt to hide it?"

"All right," Bookwright whispered. "You and Armstid have been watching somebody digging. But how do I know it is Flem Snopes?"

"All right," Armstid said, with a cold restrained violence, almost aloud; both of them could feel him trembling where he lay between them, jerking and shaking through his gaunt and wasted body like a leashed dog. "It ain't Flem Snopes then. Go on back home."

“Hush!” Ratliff hissed. Armstid had turned, looking toward Bookwright. His face was not a foot from Bookwright’s, the features more indistinguishable than ever now.

“Go on,” he said. “Go on back home.”

“Hush, Henry!” Ratliff whispered. “He’s going to hear you!” But Armstid had already turned his head, glaring up the dark slope again, shaking and trembling between them, cursing in a dry whisper. “If you knowed it was Flem, would you believe then?” Ratliff whispered across Armstid’s body. Bookwright didn’t answer. He lay there too, with the others, while Armstid’s thin body shook and jerked beside him, listening to the steady and unhurried whisper of the shovel and to Armstid’s dry and furious cursing. Then the sound of the shovel ceased. For a moment nobody moved. Then Armstid said,

“He’s done found it!” He surged suddenly and violently between them. Bookwright heard or felt Ratliff grasp him.

“Stop!” Ratliff whispered. “Stop! Help hold him, Odum!” Bookwright grasped Armstid’s other arm. Between them they held the furious body until Armstid ceased and lay again between them, rigid, glaring, cursing in that dry whisper. His arms felt no larger than sticks; the strength in them was unbelievable.

“He ain’t found it yet!” Ratliff whispered at him. “He just knows it’s there somewhere; maybe he found a paper somewhere in the house telling where it is. But he’s got to hunt to find it same as we will. He knows it’s somewhere in that garden, but he’s got to hunt to find it same as us. Ain’t we been watching him hunting for it?”

Bookwright could hear both the voices now speaking in hissing whispers, the one cursing, the other cajoling and reasoning while the owners of them glared as one up the starlit slope. Now Ratliff was speaking to him. “You don’t believe it’s Flem,” he said. “All right. Just watch.” They lay in the weeds; they were all holding their breaths now,

Bookwright too. Then he saw the digger — a shadow, a thicker darkness, moving against the slope, mounting it.

“Watch,” Ratliff whispered. Bookwright could hear him and Armstid where they lay glaring up the slope, breathing in hissing exhalations, in passionate and dying sighs. Then Bookwright saw the white shirt; an instant later the figure came into complete relief against the sky as if it had paused for a moment on the crest of the slope. Then it was gone.

“There!” Ratliff whispered. “Wasn’t that Flem Snopes? Do you believe now?” Bookwright drew a long breath and let it out again. He was still holding Armstid’s arm. He had forgotten about it. Now he felt it again under his hand like a taut steel cable vibrating.

“It’s Flem,” he said.

“Certainly it’s Flem,” Ratliff said. “Now all we got to do is find out tomorrow night where it’s at and — —”

“Tomorrow night, hell!” Armstid said. He surged forward again, attempting to rise. “Let’s get up there now and find it. That’s what we got to do. Before he — —” They both held him again while Ratliff argued with him, sibilant and expostulant. They held him flat on the ground again at last, cursing.

“We got to find where it is first,” Ratliff panted. “We got to find exactly where it is the first time. We ain’t got time just to hunt. We got to find it the first night because we can’t afford to leave no marks for him to find when he comes back. Can’t you see that? that we ain’t going to have but one chance to find it because we don’t dare be caught looking?”

“What we going to do?” Bookwright said.

“Ha,” Armstid said. “Ha.” It was harsh, furious, restrained. There was no mirth in it. “What we going to do. I thought you had gone back home.” “Shut up, Henry,” Ratliff said. He rose to his knees, though he still held Armstid’s arm. “We agreed to take Odum in with us. At least let’s wait till we find that money before we start squabbling over it.”

“Suppose it ain’t nothing but Confederate money,” Bookwright said.

“All right,” Ratliff said. “What do you reckon that old Frenchman did with all the money he had before there was any such thing as Confederate money? Besides, a good deal of it was probably silver spoons and jewellery.”

“You all can have the silver spoons and jewellery,” Bookwright said. “I’ll take my share in money.”

“So you believe now, do you?” Ratliff said. Bookwright didn’t answer. “What we going to do now?” he said.

“I’m going up the bottom tomorrow and get Uncle Dick Bolivar,” Ratliff said. “I ought to get back here a little after dark. But then we can’t do anything here until after midnight, after Flem has done got through hunting it.”

“And finding it tomorrow night,” Armstid said. “By God, I ain’t — —” They were all standing now. Armstid began to struggle, sudden and furious, to free his arm. But Ratliff held him. He flung both arms around Armstid and held him until he stopped struggling.

“Listen,” Ratliff said. “Flem Snopes ain’t going to find it. If he knowed where to look, do you think he’d a been here digging for it every night for two weeks? Don’t you know folks have been looking for that money for thirty years?

That every foot of this whole place has been turned over at least ten times? That there ain’t a piece of land in this whole country that’s been worked as much and as often as this here little shirt-tail of garden? Will Varner could have raised cotton or corn either in it so tall he would have to gather it on horse back just by putting the seed in the ground.

The reason ain’t nobody found it yet is it’s buried so deep ain’t nobody had time to dig that far in just one night and then get the hole filled back up where Will Varner wouldn’t find it when he got out here at

daylight to sit in that flour-barrel chair and watch. No sir. There ain't but one thing in this world can keep us from finding it."

Armstid had ceased. He and Bookwright both looked toward Ratliff's indistinguishable face. After a while Armstid said harshly:

"And what's that?"

"That's for Flem Snopes to find out somebody else is hunting for it," Ratliff said.

It was about midnight the next night when Ratliff turned his buckboard into the cedars again. Bookwright now rode his horse, because there were already three people in the buckboard, and again Armstid did not wait for Ratliff to tie the team. He was out as soon as the buckboard stopped he dragged a shovel clashing and clanging out of the dog kennel box, making no effort whatever to be quiet, and was gone limping terrifically into the darkness before Ratliff and Bookwright were on the ground. "We might as well go back home," Bookwright said.

"No, no," Ratliff said. "He ain't never there this late. But we better catch up with Henry anyway." The third man in the buckboard had not moved yet. Even in the obscurity his long white beard had a faintly luminous quality, as if it had absorbed something of the starlight through which Ratliff had fetched him and were now giving it back to the dark.

Ratliff and Bookwright helped him, groping and fumbling, out of the buckboard, and carrying the other shovel and the pick and half-carrying the old man, they hurried down into the ravine and then ran, trying to overtake the sound of Armstid's limping progress.

They never overtook him. They climbed up out of the ditch, carrying the old man bodily now, and even before they reached the foot of the garden they could hear the sound of Armstid's rapid shovel up the slope. They released the old man, who sank to the ground between them, breathing in reedy gasps, and as one Ratliff and Bookwright glared up the dark slope toward the hushed furious sound of the

shovel. "We got to make him stop until Uncle Dick can find it," Ratliff said. They ran toward the sound, shoulder to shoulder in the stumbling dark, among the rank weeds.

"Here, Henry!" Ratliff whispered. "Wait for Uncle Dick." Armstid didn't pause, digging furiously, flinging the dirt and thrusting the shovel again all in one motion. Ratliff grasped at the shovel. Armstid jerked it free and whirled, the shovel raised like an axe, their faces invisible to one another, strained, spent. Ratliff had not had his clothes off in three nights, but Armstid had probably been in his for the whole two weeks.

"Touch it!" Armstid whispered. "Touch it!"

"Wait now," Ratliff said. "Give Uncle Dick a chance to find where it's at."

"Get away," Armstid said. "I warn you. Get outen my hole." He resumed his furious digging. Ratliff watched him for a second.

"Come on," he said. He turned, running, Bookwright behind him. The old man was sitting up when they reached him. Ratliff plunged down beside him and began to scabble among the weeds for the other shovel. It was the pick he found first. He flung it away and plunged down again; he and Bookwright found the shovel at the same time. Then they were standing, struggling for the shovel, snatching and jerking at it, their breathing harsh and repressed, hearing even above their own breathing the rapid sound of Armstid's shovel up the slope. "Leave go!" Ratliff whispered. "Leave go!" The old man, unaided now, was struggling to get up.

"Wait," he said. "Wait." Then Ratliff seemed to realise what he was doing. He released the shovel; he almost hurled it at Bookwright.

"Take it," he said. He drew a long shuddering breath. "God," he whispered. "Just look at what even the money a man ain't got yet will do to him." He stooped and jerked the old man to his feet, not with intentional roughness but merely out of his urgency. He had to hold him up for a moment.

“Wait,” the old man said in a reedy, quavering voice. He was known through all that country. He had no kin, no ties, and he antedated everyone; nobody knew how old he was — a tall thin man in a filthy frock-coat and no shirt beneath it and a long, perfectly white beard reaching below his waist, who lived in a mud-daubed hut in the river-bottom five or six miles from any road.

He made and sold nostrums and charms, and it was said of him that he ate not only frogs and snakes but bugs as well — anything that he could catch. There was nothing in his hut but his pallet bed, a few cooking vessels, a tremendous Bible and a faded daguerreotype of a young man in a Confederate uniform which was believed by those who had seen it to be his son. “Wait,” he said. “There air anger in the yearth. Ye must make that ere un quit a-bruisin hit.”

“That’s so,” Ratliff said. “It won’t work unless the ground is quiet. We got to make him stop.” Again when they stood over him, Henry continued to dig; again when Ratliff touched him he whirled, the shovel raised, and stood cursing them in a spent whisper until the old man himself walked up and touched his shoulder.

“Ye kin dig and ye kin dig, young man,” the reedy voice said. “For what’s rendered to the yearth, the yearth will keep until hit’s ready to reveal hit.”

“That’s right, Henry,” Ratliff said. “We got to give Uncle Dick room to find where it is. Come on, now.” Armstid lowered the shovel and came out of his pit (it was already nearly a foot deep).

But he would not relinquish the shovel; he still held to it until the old man drove them back to the edge of the garden and produced from the tail-pocket of his frock-coat a forked peach branch, from the butt-end of which something dangled on a length of string; Ratliff, who had seen it before at least, knew what it was — an empty cloth tobacco-sack containing a gold-filled human tooth.

He held them there for ten minutes, stooping now and then to lay his hand flat on the earth. Then, with the three of them clumped and silent at his heels, he went to the weed-choked corner of the old garden and grasped the two prongs of the branch in his hands, the string and the tobacco-sack hanging plumblike and motionless before him, and stood for a time, muttering to himself.

“How do I — —” Bookwright said.

“Hush,” Ratliff said. The old man began to walk, the three of them following. They moved like a procession, with something at once outrageously pagan and orthodoxly funereal about them, slowly back and forth across the garden, mounting the slope gradually in overlapping traverses. Suddenly the old man stopped; Armstid, limping just behind him, bumped into him.

“There’s somebody agin it,” he said. He didn’t look back. “It ain’t you,” he said, and they all knew he was talking to Ratliff. “And it ain’t that cripple. It’s that other one. That black one. Let him get offen this ground and quieten hit, or you can take me on back home.”

“Go back to the edge,” Ratliff said quietly over his shoulder to Bookwright. “It’ll be all right then.”

“But I — —” Bookwright said.

“Get off the garden,” Ratliff said. “It’s after midnight. It’ll be daylight in four hours.” Bookwright returned to the foot of the slope. That is, he faded into the darkness, because they did not watch him; they were moving again now, Armstid and Ratliff close at the old man’s heels.

Again they began to mount the slope in traverses, passing the place where Henry had begun to dig, passing the place where Ratliff had found signs of the other man’s excavation on the first night Armstid had brought him here; now Ratliff could feel Armstid beginning to tremble again. The old man stopped.

They did not bump into him this time, and Ratliff did not know that Bookwright was behind him again until the old man spoke:

“Tech my elbers,” he said. “Not you,” he said. “You that didn’t believe.” When Bookwright touched them, inside the sleeves the arms — arms thin and frail and dead as rotten sticks — were jerking faintly and steadily; when the old man stopped suddenly again and Bookwright blundered into him, he felt the whole thin body straining backward.

Armstid was cursing steadily in his dry whisper. “Tech the peach fork,” the old man panted. “You that didn’t believe.” When Bookwright touched it, it was arched into a rigid down-pointing curve, the string taut as wire. Armstid made a choked sound; Bookwright felt his hand on the branch too. The branch sprang free; the old man staggered, the fork lying dead on the ground at his feet until Armstid, digging furiously with his bare hand, flung it away.

They turned as one and plunged back down the slope to where they had left the tools. They could hardly keep up with Armstid. “Don’t let him get the pick,” Bookwright panted. “He will kill somebody with it.” But Armstid was not after the pick.

He went straight to where he had left his shovel when the old man produced the forked branch and refused to start until he put the shovel down, and snatched it up and ran back up the slope. He was already digging when Ratliff and Bookwright reached him.

They all dug then, frantically, hurling the dirt aside, in each other’s way, the tools clashing and ringing together, while the old man stood above them behind the faint gleam of his beard in the starlight and his white brows above the two caverns from which, even if they had paused to look, they could not have told whether his eyes even watched them or not, musing, detached, without interest in their panting frenzy.

Suddenly the three of them became frozen in the attitudes of digging for perhaps a second. Then they leaped into the hole together; the six hands at the same instant touched the object — a heavy solid sack of

heavy cloth through which they all felt the round milled edges of coins. They struggled for it, jerking it back and forth among them, clutching it, gripping it, panting.

“Stop it!” Ratliff panted. “Stop it! Ain’t we all three partners alike?” But Armstid clung to it, trying to jerk it away from the others, cursing. “Let go, Odum,” Ratliff said. “Let him have it.” They turned it loose. Armstid clutched it to himself, stooping, glaring at them as they climbed out of the hole. “Let him keep it,” Ratliff said. “Don’t you know that ain’t all?” He turned quickly away. “Come on, Uncle Dick,” he said. “Get your — —” He ceased.

The old man was standing motionless behind them, his head turned as if he were listening toward the ditch from which they had come.

“What?” Ratliff whispered. They were all three motionless now, rigid, still stooped a little as when they had stepped away from Armstid. “Do you hear something?” Ratliff whispered. “Is somebody down there?”

“I feel four bloods lust-running,” the old man said. “Hit’s four sets of blood here lusting for trash.” They crouched, rigid. But there was no sound.

“Well, ain’t it four of us here?” Bookwright whispered.

“Uncle Dick don’t care nothing about money,” Ratliff whispered. “If somebody’s hiding there — —” They were running. Armstid was the first to start, still carrying his shovel. Again they could hardly keep up with him as they went plunging down the slope.

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

“No,” Ratliff said. “Catch him first.” When he and Bookwright reached the ditch, they could hear Armstid beating along the edge of it, making no effort whatever to be quiet, slashing at the dark undergrowth with the axe-like shovel-edge with the same fury he had dug with. But they found nothing, nobody.

“Maybe Uncle Dick never heard nothing,” Bookwright said.

“Well, whatever it was is gone, anyway,” Ratliff said. “Maybe it — —” He ceased. He and Bookwright stared at one another; above their breaths they heard the horse. It was in the old road beyond the cedars; it was as if it had been dropped there from the sky in full gallop. They heard it until it ceased into the sand at the branch. After a moment they heard it again on the hard ground beyond, fainter now. Then it ceased altogether. They stared at one another in the darkness, across their held breaths. Then Ratliff exhaled. “That means we got till daylight,” he said. “Come on.”

Twice more the old man’s peach branch sprang and bent; twice more they found small bulging canvas bags solid and unmistakable even in the dark. “Now,” Ratliff said, “we got a hole a-piece and till daylight to do it in. Dig, boys.”

When the east began to turn grey, they had found nothing else. But digging three holes at once, as they had been doing, none of them had been able to go very deep. And the bulk of the treasure would be deep; as Ratliff had said, if it were not it would have been found ten times over during the last thirty years since there probably were not many square feet of the ten acres which comprised the old mansion-site which had not been dug into between some sunset and dawn by someone without a light, trying to dig fast and dig quiet at the same time.

So at last he and Bookwright prevailed on Armstid to see a little of reason, and they desisted and filled up the holes and removed the traces of digging. Then they opened the bags in the grey light. Ratliff’s and Bookwright’s contained twenty-five silver dollars each. Armstid refused to tell what his contained or to let anyone see it.

He crouched over it, his back toward them, cursing them when they tried to look. “All right,” Ratliff said. Then a thought struck him. He looked down at Armstid. “Of course ain’t nobody fool enough to try to spend any of it now.”

“Mine’s mine,” Armstid said. “I found it. I worked for it. I’m going to do any God damn thing I want to with it.”

“All right,” Ratliff said. “How are you going to explain it?”

“How am I — —” Armstid said. Squatting, he looked up at Ratliff. They could see one another’s faces now. All three of them were strained, spent with sleeplessness and fatigue.

“Yes,” Ratliff said. “How are you going to explain to folks where you got it? Got twenty-five dollars all coined before 1861?” He quit looking at Armstid. He and Bookwright looked at one another quietly in the growing light. “There was somebody in the ditch, watching us,” he said. “We got to buy it.”

“We got to buy it quick,” Bookwright said. “Tomorrow.”

“You mean today,” Ratliff said. Bookwright looked about him. It was as though he were waking from an anaesthetic, as if he saw the dawn, the earth, for the first time.

“That’s right,” he said. “It’s already tomorrow now.”

The old man lay under a tree beside the ditch, asleep, flat on his back, his mouth open, his beard dingy and stained in the increasing dawn; they hadn’t even missed him since they really began to dig. They waked him and helped him back to the buckboard.

The dog kennel box in which Ratliff carried the sewing-machines had a padlocked door. He took a few ears of corn from the box, then he stowed his and Bookwright’s bags of coins beneath the odds and ends of small and still-frozen traded objects at the back of it and locked it again.

“You put yours in here too, Henry,” he said. “What we want to do now is to forget we even got them until we find the rest of it and get it out of the ground.” But Armstid would not. He climbed stiffly onto the

horse behind Bookwright, unaided, repudiating the aid which had not even been offered yet, clutching his bag inside the bib of his patched and faded overalls, and they departed.

Ratliff fed his team and watered them at the branch; he too was on the road before the sun rose. Just before nine o'clock he paid the old man his dollar fee and put him down where the five-mile path to his hut entered the river-bottom, and turned the wiry and indefatigable little horses back toward Frenchman's Bend. There was somebody hid in that ditch, he thought. We got to buy it damn quick.

Later it seemed to him that, until he reached the store, he had not actually realised himself how quick they would have to buy it. Almost as soon as he came in sight of the store, he saw the new face among the familiar ones along the gallery and recognised it — Eustace Grimm, a young tenant-farmer living ten or twelve miles away in the next county with his wife of a year, to whom Ratliff intended to sell a sewing-machine as soon as they had finished paying for the baby born two months ago; as he tied his team to one of the gallery posts and mounted the heel-gnawed steps, he thought, Maybe sleeping rests a man, but it takes staying up all night for two or three nights and being worried and scared half to death during them, to sharpen him.

Because as soon as he recognised Grimm, something in him had clicked, though it would be three days before he would know what it was. He had not had his clothes off in more than sixty hours; he had had no breakfast today and what eating he had done in the last two days had been more than spotty — all of which showed in his face. But it didn't show in his voice or anywhere else, and nothing else but that showed anywhere at all. "Morning, gentlemen," he said.

"Be durn if you don't look like you ain't been to bed in a week, V. K.," Freeman said. "What you up to now? Lon Quick said his boy seen your team and buckboard hid out in the bottom below Armstid's two mornings ago, but I told him I didn't reckon them horses had done nothing to have to hide from. So it must be you."

"I reckon not," Ratliff said. "Or I'd a been caught too, same as the team. I used to think I was too smart to be caught by anybody around here. But I don't know now." He looked at Grimm, his face, except for the sleeplessness and fatigue, as bland and quizzical and impenetrable as ever. "Eustace," he said, "you're strayed."

"It looks like it," Grimm said. "I come to see — —"

"He's paid his road-tax," Lump Snopes, the clerk, sitting as usual in the single chair tilted in the doorway, said. "Do you object to him using Yoknapatawpha roads too?"

"Sholy not," Ratliff said. "And if he'd a just paid his poll-tax in the right place, he could drive his wagon through the store and through Will Varner's house too." They guffawed, all except Lump.

"Maybe I will yet," Grimm said. "I come up here to see — —" He ceased, looking up at Ratliff. He was perfectly motionless, squatting, a sliver of wood in one hand and his open and arrested knife in the other. Ratliff watched him.

"Couldn't you see him last night either?" he said.

"Couldn't I see who last night?" Grimm said.

"How could he have seen anybody in Frenchman's Bend last night when he wasn't in Frenchman's Bend last night?" Lump Snopes said. "Go on to the house, Eustace," he said. "Dinner's about ready. I'll be along in a few minutes."

"I got — —" Grimm said.

"You got twelve miles to drive to get home tonight," Snopes said. "Go on, now." Grimm looked at him a moment longer. Then he rose and descended the steps and went on up the road. Ratliff was no longer watching him. He was looking at Snopes.

"Eustace eating with you during his visit?" he said.

“He happens to be eating at Winterbottom’s where I happen to be boarding,” Snopes said harshly. “Where a few other folks happens to be eating and paying board too.”

“Sho now,” Ratliff said. “You hadn’t ought to druv him away like that. Likely Eustace don’t get to town very often to spend a day or two examining the country and setting around store.”

“He’ll have his feet under his own table tonight,” Snopes said. “You can go down there and look at him. Then you can be in his backyard even before he opens his mouth.”

“Sho now,” Ratliff said, pleasant, bland, inscrutable, with his spent and sleepless face. “When you expecting Flem back?”

“Back from where?” Snopes said, in that harsh voice. “From laying up yonder in that barrel-slat hammock, taking time about with Will Varner, sleeping? Likely never.”

“Him and Will and the womenfolks was in Jefferson yesterday,” Freeman said. “Will said they was coming home this morning.”

“Sho now,” Ratliff said. “Sometimes it takes a man even longer than a year to get his new wife out of the idea that money was just made to shop with.” He stood above them, leaning against a gallery post, indolent and easy, as if he had not ever even heard of haste.

So Flem Snopes has been in Jefferson since yesterday, he thought. And Lump Snopes didn’t want it mentioned. And Eustace Grimm — again his mind clicked still it would be three days before he would know what had clicked, because now he believed he did know, that he saw the pattern complete — and Eustace Grimm has been here since last night, since we heard that galloping horse anyway. Maybe they was both on the horse.

Maybe that’s why it sounded so loud. He could see that too — Lump Snopes and Grimm on the single horse, fleeing, galloping in the dark back to Frenchman’s Bend where Flem Snopes would still be absent until sometime in the early afternoon.

And Lump Snopes didn't want that mentioned either, he thought, and Eustace Grimm had to be sent home to keep folks from talking to him. And Lump Snopes ain't just worried and mad: he's scared. They might even have found the hidden buckboard.

They probably had, and so knew at least one of those who were digging in the garden; now Snopes would not only have to get hold of his cousin first through his agent, Grimm, he might even then become involved in the bidding contest for the place against someone who (Ratliff added this without vanity) had more to outbid him with; he thought, musing, amazed as always though still impenetrable, how even a Snopes was not safe from another Snopes. Damn quick, he thought.

He stood away from the post and turned back toward the steps. "I reckon I'll get along," he said. "See you boys tomorrow."

"Come home with me and take dinner," Freeman said.

"Much obliged," Ratliff said. "I ate breakfast late at Bookwright's. I want to collect a machine note from Ike McCaslin this afternoon and be back here by dark." He got into the buckboard and turned the team back down the road. Presently they had fallen into their road-gait, trotting rapidly on their short legs in the traces though their forward motion was not actually fast, on until they had passed Varner's house, beyond which the road turned off to McCaslin's farm and so out of sight from the store.

They entered this road galloping, the dust bursting from their shaggy backs in long spurts where the whip slashed them. He had three miles to go. After the first half-mile it would be all winding and little-used lane, but he could do it in twenty minutes. And it was only a little after noon, and it had probably been at least nine o'clock before Will Varner got his wife away from the Jefferson church-ladies' auxiliary with which she was affiliated.

He made it in nineteen minutes, hurtling and bouncing among the ruts ahead of his spinning dust, and slowed the now-lathered team and swung them into the Jefferson highroad a mile from the village, letting them trot for another half-mile, slowing, to cool them out gradually.

But there was no sign of the surrey yet, so he went on at a walk until he reached a crest from which he could see the road for some distance ahead, and pulled out of the road into the shade of a tree and stopped. Now he had had no dinner either. But he was not quite hungry, and although after he had put the old man out and turned back toward the village this morning he had had an almost irresistible desire to sleep, that was gone too now.

So he sat in the buckboard, lax now, blinking painfully against the glare of noon, while the team (he never used check-reins) nudged the lines slack and grazed over the breast-yoke. People would probably pass and see him there; some might even be going toward the village, where they might tell of seeing him. But he would take care of that when it arose. It was as though he said to himself, Now I got a little while at least when I can let down.

Then he saw the surrey. He was already in the road, going at that road-gait which the whole countryside knew, full of rapid little hooves which still did not advance a great deal faster than two big horses could have walked, before anyone in the surrey could have seen him. And he knew that they had already seen and recognised him when, still two hundred yards from it, he pulled up and sat in the buckboard, affable, bland and serene except for his worn face, until Varner stopped the surrey beside him. "Howdy, V. K.," Varner said.

"Morning," Ratliff said. He raised his hat to the two women in the back seat. "Mrs. Varner. Mrs. Snopes."

"Where you headed?" Varner said. "Town?" Ratliff told no lie; he attempted none, smiling a little, courteous, perhaps even a little deferential.

"I come out to meet you. I want to speak to Flem a minute." He looked at Snopes for the first time. "I'll drive you on home," he said.

"Hah," Varner said. "You had to come two miles to meet him and then turn around and go two miles back, to talk to him."

"That's right," Ratliff said. He was still looking at Snopes.

"You got better sense than to try to sell Flem Snopes anything," Varner said. "And you sholy ain't fool enough by God to buy anything from him, are you?"

"I don't know," Ratliff said in that same pleasant and unchanged and impenetrable voice out of his spent and sleepless face, still looking at Snopes. "I used to think I was smart, but now I don't know. I'll bring you on home," he said. "You won't be late for dinner."

"Go on and get out," Varner said to his son-in-law. "He ain't going to tell you till you do." But Snopes was already moving. He spat outward over the wheel and turned and climbed down over it, backward, broad and deliberate in the soiled light-grey trousers, the white shirt, the plaid cap; the surrey went on.

Ratliff cramped the wheel and Snopes got into the buckboard beside him and he turned the buckboard and again the team fell into their tireless and familiar road-gait. But this time Ratliff reined them back until they were walking and held them so while Snopes chewed steadily beside him. They didn't look at one another again.

"That Old Frenchman place," Ratliff said. The surrey went on a hundred yards ahead, pacing its own dust, as they themselves were now doing. "What are you going to ask Eustace Grimm for it?" Snopes spat tobacco juice over the moving wheel. He did not chew fast nor did he seem to find it necessary to stop chewing in order to spit or speak either.

"He's at the store, is he?" he said.

“Ain’t this the day you told him to come?” Ratliff said. “How much are you going to ask him for it?” Snopes told him. Ratliff made a short sound, something like Varner’s habitual ejaculation. “Do you reckon Eustace Grimm can get his hands on that much money?”

“I don’t know,” Snopes said. He spat over the moving wheel again. Ratliff might have said, Then you don’t want to sell it; Snopes would have answered, I’ll sell anything. But they did not. They didn’t need to.

“All right,” Ratliff said. “What are you going to ask me for it?” Snopes told him. It was the same amount. This time Ratliff used Varner’s ejaculation. “I’m just talking about them ten acres where that old house is.

I ain’t trying to buy all Yoknapatawpha County from you.” They crossed the last hill; the surrey began to move faster, drawing away from them. The village was not far now. “We’ll let this one count,” Ratliff said.

“How much do you want for that Old Frenchman place?” His team was trying to trot too, ahead of the buckboard’s light weight. Ratliff held them in, the road beginning to curve to pass the schoolhouse and enter the village. The surrey had already vanished beyond the curve.

“What do you want with it?” Snopes said.

“To start a goat-ranch,” Ratliff said. “How much?” Snopes spat over the moving wheel. He named the sum for the third time. Ratliff slacked off the reins and the little strong tireless team began to trot, sweeping around the last curve and past the empty schoolhouse, the village now in sight, the surrey in sight too, already beyond the store, going on. “That fellow, that teacher you had three-four years ago. Labove. Did anybody ever hear what become of him?”

A little after six that evening, in the empty and locked store, Ratliff and Bookwright and Armstid bought the Old Frenchman place from Snopes. Ratliff gave a quit-claim deed to his half of the side-street lunch-room in Jefferson. Armstid gave a mortgage on his farm, including the buildings

and tools and livestock and about two miles of three-strand wire fence; Bookwright paid his third in cash.

Then Snopes let them out the front door and locked it again and they stood on the empty gallery in the fading August afterglow and watched him depart up the road toward Varner's house — two of them did, that is, because Armstid had already gone ahead and got into the buckboard, where he sat motionless and waiting and emanating that patient and seething fury. "It's ours now," Ratliff said. "And now we better get on out there and watch it before somebody fetches in Uncle Dick Bolivar some night and starts hunting buried money."

They went first to Bookwright's house (he was a bachelor) and got the mattress from his bed and two quilts and his coffee-pot and skillet and another pick and shovel, then they went to Armstid's home. He had but one mattress too, but then he had a wife and five small children; besides, Ratliff, who had seen the mattress, knew that it would not even bear being lifted from the bed.

So Armstid got a quilt and they helped him fill an empty feed sack with shucks for a pillow and returned to the buckboard, passing the house in the door of which his wife still stood, with four of the children huddled about her now. But she still said nothing, and when Ratliff looked back from the moving buckboard, the door was empty.

When they turned from the old road and drove up through the shaggy park to the shell of the ruined house, there was still light enough for them to see the wagon and mules standing before it, and at that moment a man came out of the house itself and stopped, looking at them.

It was Eustace Grimm, but Ratliff never knew if Armstid recognised him or even bothered to try to, because once more before the buckboard had even stopped Armstid was out of it and snatched the other shovel from beneath Bookwright's and Ratliff's feet and rushed with his limping and painful fury toward Grimm, who moved swiftly too and put the wagon between Armstid and himself, standing there and watching

Armstid across the wagon as Armstid slashed across the wagon at him with the shovel. "Catch him!" Ratliff said. "He'll kill him!"

"Or break that damn leg again," Bookwright said. When they overtook him, he was trying to double the wagon, the shovel raised and poised like an axe. But Grimm had already darted around to the other side, where he now saw Ratliff and Bookwright running up, and he sprang away from them too, watching them, poised and alert. Bookwright caught Armstid from behind in both arms and held him.

"Get away quick, if you don't want anything," Ratliff told Grimm. "No, I don't want anything," Grimm said.

"Then go on while Bookwright's got him." Grimm moved toward the wagon, watching Armstid with something curious and veiled in his look. "He's going to get in trouble with that sort of foolishness," he said.

"He'll be all right," Ratliff said. "You just get on away from here." Grimm got into the wagon and went on. "You can let him go now," Ratliff said. Armstid flung free of Bookwright and turned toward the garden. "Wait, Henry," Ratliff said. "Let's eat supper first. Let's get our beds into the house." But Armstid hurried on, limping in the fading light toward the garden. "We ought to eat first," Ratliff said.

Then he let out a long breath like a sigh; he and Bookwright ran side by side to the rear of the sewing-machine box, which Ratliff unlocked, and they snatched out the other shovels and picks and ran down the slope and into the old garden where Armstid was already digging. Just before they reached him he stood up and began to run toward the road, the shovel raised, whereupon they too saw that Grimm had not departed but was sitting in the wagon in the road, watching them across the ruined fence of iron pickets until Armstid had almost reached it. Then he drove on.

They dug all that night, Armstid in one hole, Ratliff and Bookwright working together in another. From time to time they would stop to rest while the summer constellations marched overhead. Ratliff and

Bookwright would move about to flex their cramped muscles, then they would squat (They did not smoke; they could not risk showing any light.

Armstid had probably never had the extra nickel or dime to buy tobacco with) and talk quietly while they listened to the steady sound of Armstid's shovel below them. He would be digging when they stopped; he would still be digging, unflagging and tireless, when they started again, though now and then one of them would remember him and pause to see him sitting on the side of his pit, immobile as the lumps of earth he had thrown out of it.

Then he would be digging again before he had actually had time to rest; this until dawn began and Ratliff and Bookwright stood over him in the wan light, arguing with him. "We got to quit," Ratliff said. "It's already light enough for folks to see us." Armstid didn't pause.

"Let them," he said. "It's mine now. I can dig all day if I want."

"All right," Ratliff said. "You'll have plenty of help then." Now Armstid paused, looking up at him out of his pit. "How can we dig all night and then set up all day to keep other folks out of it?" Ratliff said.

"Come on now," he said. "We got to eat and then sleep some." They got the mattress and the quilts from the buckboard and carried them into the house, the hall in whose gaping door-frames no doors any longer hung and from whose ceiling depended the skeleton of what had been once a crystal chandelier, with its sweep of stairs whose treads had long since been prised off and carried away to patch barns and chicken-houses and privies, whose spindles and walnut railings and newel-posts had long ago been chopped up and burned as firewood.

The room they chose had a fourteen-foot ceiling. There were the remains of a once-gilt filigree of cornice above the gutted windows and the ribbed and serrated grin of lathing from which the plaster had fallen, and the skeleton of another prised chandelier.

They spread the mattress and the quilts upon the dust of plaster, and Ratliff and Bookwright returned to the buckboard and got the food they had brought, and the two sacks of coins. They hid the two sacks in the chimney, foul with bird-droppings, behind the mantel in which there were still wedged a few shards of the original marble. Armstid didn't produce his bag. They didn't know what he had done with it. They didn't ask.

They built no fire. Ratliff would probably have objected, but nobody suggested it; they ate cold the tasteless food, too tired to taste it; removing only their shoes stained with the dampening earth from the deepening pits, they lay among the quilts and slept fitfully, too tired to sleep completely also, dreaming of gold.

Toward noon jagged scraps and flecks of sun came through the broken roof and the two rotted floors overhead and crept eastward across the floor and the tumbled quilts and then the prone bodies and the slack-mouthed upflung faces, whereupon they turned and shifted or covered their heads and faces with their arms, as though, still sleeping, they fled the weightless shadow of that for which, awake, they had betrayed themselves. They were awake at sunset without having rested.

They moved stiffly about, not talking, while the coffee-pot boiled on the broken hearth; they ate again, wolfing the cold and tasteless food while the crimson glow from the dying west faded in the high ruined room.

Armstid was the first one to finish. He put his cup down and rose, turning first onto his hands and knees as an infant gets up, dragging his stiff twice broken leg painfully beneath him, and limped toward the door. "We ought to wait till full dark," Ratliff said, to no one; certainly no one answered him. It was as if he spoke to himself and had answered himself. He rose too. Bookwright was already standing. When they reached the garden, Armstid was already in his pit, digging.

They dug through that brief summer night as through the previous one while the familiar stars wheeled overhead, stopping now and then to

rest and ease their muscles and listen to the steady sigh and recover of Armstid's shovel below them; they prevailed upon him to stop at dawn and returned to the house and ate — the canned salmon, the sidemeat cold in its own congealed grease, the cold cooked bread — and slept again among the tumbled quilts while noon came and the creeping and probing golden sun at whose touch they turned and shifted as though in impotent nightmare flight from that impalpable and weightless burden.

They had finished the bread that morning. When the others waked at the second sunset, Ratliff had the coffee-pot on the fire and was cooking another batch of cornbread in the skillet.

Armstid would not wait for it. He ate his portion of meat alone and drank his coffee and got to his feet again as small children do, and went out. Bookwright was standing also. Ratliff, squatting beside the skillet, looked up at him. "Go on then," he said. "You don't need to wait either."

"We're down six foot," Bookwright said. "Four foot wide and near ten foot long. I'll start where we found the third sack."

"All right," Ratliff said. "Go on and start." Because something had clicked in his mind again. It might have been while he was asleep, he didn't know. But he knew that this time it was right. Only I don't want to look at it, hear it, he thought, squatting, holding the skillet steady over the fire, squinting his watering eyes against the smoke which the broken chimney no longer drew out of the house, I don't dare to.

Anyway, I don't have to yet. I can dig again tonight. We even got a new place to dig. So he waited until the bread was done. Then he took it out of the skillet and set it near the ashes and sliced some of the bacon into the skillet and cooked it; he had his first hot meal in three days, and he ate it without haste, squatting, sipping his coffee while the last of the sunset's crimson gathered along the ruined ceiling and died from there too, and the room had only the glow of the dying fire.

Bookwright and Armstid were already digging. When he came close enough to see, Armstid unaided was three feet down and his pit was very nearly as long as the one Ratliff and Bookwright had dug together. He went on to where Bookwright had started the new pit and took up his shovel (Bookwright had fetched it for him) and began to dig.

They dug on through that night too, beneath the marching and familiar stars, stopping now and then to rest although Armstid did not stop when they did, squatting on the lip of the new excavation while Ratliff talked, murmurous, not about gold, money, but anecdotal, humorous, his invisible face quizzical, bemused, impenetrable. They dug again. Daylight will be time enough to look at it, he thought.

Because I done already looked at it, he thought. I looked at it three days ago. Then it began to be dawn. In the wan beginning of that light he put his shovel down and straightened up.

Bookwright's pick rose and fell steadily in front of him; twenty feet beyond, he could now see Armstid waist-deep in the ground as if he had been cut in two at the hips, the dead torso, not even knowing it was dead, labouring on in measured stoop and recover like a metronome as Armstid dug himself back into that earth which had produced him to be its born and fated thrall forever until he died.

Ratliff climbed out of the pit and stood in the dark fresh loam which they had thrown out of it, his muscles flinching and jerking with fatigue, and stood looking quietly at Bookwright until Bookwright became aware of him and paused, the pick raised for the next stroke, and looked up at him. They looked at each other — the two gaunt, unshaven, weary faces. "Odum," Ratliff said, "who was Eustace Grimm's wife?"

"I don't know," Bookwright said.

"I do," Ratliff said. "She was one of them Calhoun County Dosheys. And that ain't right. And his ma was a Fite. And that ain't right either." Bookwright quit looking at him. He laid the pick down carefully, almost

gently, as if it were a spoon level-full of soup or of that much nitroglycerine, and climbed out of the pit, wiping his hands on his trousers.

"I thought you knew," he said. "I thought you knew everything about folks in this country."

"I reckon I know now," Ratliff said. "But I reckon you'll still have to tell me."

"Fite was his second wife's name. She wasn't Eustace's ma. Pa told me about it when Ab Snopes first rented that place from the Varners five years ago."

"All right," Ratliff said. "Tell me."

"Eustace's ma was Ab Snopes's youngest sister." They looked at one another, blinking a little. Soon the light would begin to increase fast.

"Sholy now," Ratliff said. "You finished?"

"Yes," Bookwright said. "I'm finished."

"Bet you one of them I beat you," Ratliff said. They mounted the slope and entered the house, the room where they slept. It was still dark in the room, so while Ratliff fumbled the two bags out of the chimney, Bookwright lit the lantern and set it on the floor and they squatted facing each other across the lantern, opening the bags.

"I reckon we ought to knowed wouldn't no cloth sack . . ." Bookwright said. "After thirty years . . ." They emptied the bags onto the floor. Each of them took up a coin, examined it briefly, then set them one upon the other like a crowned king in checkers, close to the lantern. Then one by one they examined the other coins by the light of the dingy lantern.

"But how did he know it would be us?" Bookwright said.

"He didn't," Ratliff said. "He didn't care. He just come out here every night and dug for a while. He knowed he couldn't possibly dig over two weeks before somebody saw him." He laid his last coin down and sat back on his heels until Bookwright had finished. "1871," he said.

“1879,” Bookwright said. “I even got one that was made last year. You beat me.”

“I beat you,” Ratliff said. He took up the two coins and they put the money back into the bags. They didn’t hide them. They left each bag on its owner’s quilt and blew out the lantern. It was lighter now and they could see Armstid quite well where he stooped and rose and stooped in his thigh-deep pit. The sun would rise soon; already there were three buzzards soaring against the high yellow-blue. Armstid did not even look up when they approached; he continued to dig even while they stood beside the pit, looking down at him. “Henry,” Ratliff said.

Then Ratliff leaned down and touched his shoulder. He whirled, the shovel raised and turned edgewise and glinting a thin line of steel-coloured dawn as the edge of an axe would.

“Get out of my hole,” he said. “Get outen it.”

2

The wagons containing the men, the women and the children approaching the village from that direction, stopped, and the men who had walked up from the store to stand along Varner’s fence, watched, while Lump and Eck Snopes and Varner’s negro, Sam, loaded the furniture and the trunks and the boxes into the wagon backed up to the edge of the veranda.

It was the same wagon drawn by the same mules which had brought Flem Snopes back from Texas in April, and the three men came and went between it and the house, Eck or the negro backing clumsily through the door with the burden between them and Lump Snopes scuttling along beside it in a constant patter of his own exhortations and commands, holding to it, to be sure, but carrying no weight, to load that into the wagon and return, pausing at the door and stepping aside as Mrs. Varner bustled out with another armful of small crocks and hermetic jars of fruit and vegetables.

The watchers along the fence checked the objects off — the dismantled bed, the dresser, the washstand with its flowered matching bowl and ewer and slop-jar and chamber-pot, the trunk which doubtless contained the wife's and the child's clothing, the wooden box which the women at least knew doubtless contained dishes and cutlery and cooking vessels, and lastly a tightly roped mass of brown canvas. "What's that?" Freeman said. "It looks like a tent."

"It is a tent," Tull said. "Eck brought it out from the express office in town last week."

"They ain't going to move to Jefferson and live in a tent, are they?" Freeman said.

"I don't know," Tull said. At last the wagon was loaded; Eck and the negro bumped through the door for the last time, Mrs. Varner bustled out with the final hermetic jar; Lump Snopes re-entered the house and emerged with the straw suitcase which they all knew, then Flem Snopes and then his wife came out.

She was carrying the baby which was too large to have been born at only seven months but which had certainly not waited until May, and stood there for a moment, Olympus-tall, a head taller than her mother or husband either, in a tailored suit despite the rich heat of summer's full maturing, whose complexion alone showed that she was not yet eighteen since the unseeing and expressionless mask-face had no age, while the women in the wagons looked at her and thought how that was the first tailored suit ever seen in Frenchman's Bend and how she had got some clothes out of Flem Snopes anyway because it would not be Will Varner that bought them now, and the men along the fence looked at her and thought of Hoake McCarron and how any one of them would have bought the suit or anything else for her if she had wanted it.

Mrs. Varner took the child from her and they watched her sweep the skirts inward into one hand with the gesture immemorial and female

and troubling, and climb the wheel to the seat where Snopes already sat with the reins, and lean down and take the child from Mrs. Varner.

The wagon moved, lurched into motion, the team swinging to cross the yard toward the open gate into the lane, and that was all. If farewell was said, that was it, the halted wagons along the road creaking into motion again though Freeman and Tull and the other four men merely turned, relaxed again, their backs against the picket fence now, their faces identically grave, a little veiled and perhaps even sober, not quite watching the laden wagon as it turned out of the lane and approached and then was passing them — the plaid cap, the steady and deliberate jaw, the minute bow and the white shirt; the other face calm and beautiful and by its expression carven or even corpse-like, looking not at them certainly and maybe not at anything they knew.

“So long, Flem,” Freeman said. “Save me a steak when you get your hand in at cooking.” He didn’t answer. He might not have heard even. The wagon went on. Watching it, not moving yet, they saw it turn into the old road which until two weeks ago had been marked only by the hooves of Varner’s fat white horse for more than twenty years.

“He’ll have to drive three extra miles to get back into the road to town that way,” Tull said in an anxious voice.

“Maybe he aims to take them three miles on into town with him and swap them to Aaron Rideout for the other half of that restaurant,” Freeman said.

“Maybe he’ll swap them to Ratliff and Bookwright and Henry Armstid for something else,” a third man — his name was Rideout also, a brother of the other one, both of whom were Ratliff’s cousins — said. “He’ll find Ratliff in town too.”

“He’ll find Henry Armstid without having to go that far,” Freeman said.

That road was no longer a fading and almost healed scar. It was rutted now, because there had been rain a week ago, and now the untroubled

grass and weeds of almost thirty years bore four distinct paths: the two outer ones where iron wheel-rims had run, the two inner ones where the harnessed teams had walked daily since that first afternoon when the first ones had turned into it — the weathered and creaking wagons, the plough-galled horses and mules, the men and women and children entering another world, traversing another land, moving in another time, another afternoon without time or name.

When the sand darkened into the shallow water of the branch and then lightened and rose again, the countless overlapping prints of rims and iron shoes were like shouts in a deserted church.

Then the wagons would begin to come into sight, drawn up in line at the roadside, the smaller children squatting in the wagons, the women still sitting in the splint chairs in the wagon beds, holding the infants and nursing them when need arose, the men and the larger children standing quietly along the ruined and honeysuckle-choked iron fence, watching Armstid as he spaded the earth steadily down the slope of the old garden. They had been watching him for two weeks.

After the first day, after the first ones had seen him and gone home with the news of it, they began to come in by wagon and on horse- and mule-back from as far away as ten and fifteen miles, men, women and children, octogenarian and suckling, four generations in one battered and weathered wagon bed still littered with dried manure or hay and grain chaff, to sit in the wagons and stand along the fence with the decorum of a formal reception, the rapt interest of a crowd watching a magician at a fair.

On the first day, when the first one descended and approached the fence, Armstid climbed out of his pit and ran at him, dragging the stiffened leg, the shovel raised, cursing in a harsh, light, gasping whisper, and drove the man away. But soon he quit that; he appeared to be not even aware of them where they stood along the fence, watching him spading himself steadily back and forth across the slope with that spent and unflagging fury. But none of them attempted to

enter the garden again, and now it was only the half-grown boys who ever bothered him.

Toward the middle of the afternoon the ones who had come the long distances would begin to depart. But there were always some who would remain, even though it meant unharnessing and feeding and perhaps even milking in the dark. Then, just before sunset, the last wagon would arrive — the two gaunt, rabbit-like mules, the braced and dishing and ungreased wheels — and they would turn along the fence and watch quietly while the woman in the grey and shapeless garment and the faded sunbonnet got down and lifted from beneath the seat a tin pail and approached the fence beyond which the man still had not looked up nor faltered in his metronome-like labour.

She would set the pail in the corner of the fence and stand for a time, motionless, the grey garment falling in rigid carven folds to her stained tennis shoes, her hands clasped and rolled into her apron, against her stomach. If she were looking at the man, they could not tell it; if she were looking at anything, they did not know it.

Then she would turn and go back to the wagon (she had feeding and milking to do too, as well as the children's supper to get) and mount to the seat and take up the rope reins and turn the wagon and drive away. Then the last of the watchers would depart, leaving Armstid in the middle of his fading slope, spading himself into the waxing twilight with the regularity of a mechanical toy and with something monstrous in his unflagging effort, as if the toy were too light for what it had been set to do, or too tightly wound.

In the hot summer mornings, squatting with slow tobacco or snuff-sticks on the gallery of Varner's store, or at quiet crossroads about the land in the long slant of afternoon, they talked about it, wagon to wagon, wagon to rider, rider to rider or from wagon or rider to one waiting beside a mailbox or a gate: "Is he still at it?"

"He's still at it."

"He's going to kill himself. Well, I don't know as it will be any loss."

“Not to his wife, anyway.”

“That’s a fact. It will save her that trip every day toting food to him. That Flem Snopes.”

“That’s a fact. Wouldn’t no other man have done it.”

“Couldn’t no other man have done it. Anybody might have fooled Henry Armstid. But couldn’t nobody but Flem Snopes have fooled Ratliff.”

Now though it was only a little after ten, so not only had the day’s quota all arrived, they were still there, including even the ones who, like Snopes, were going all the way in to Jefferson, when he drove up. He did not pull out of the road into line.

Instead, he drove on past the halted wagons while the heads of the women holding the nursing children turned to look at him and the heads of the men along the fence turned to watch him pass, the faces grave, veiled too, still looking at him when he stopped the wagon and sat, chewing with that steady and measured thrust and looking over their heads into the garden. Then the heads along the ruined fence turned as though to follow his look, and they watched two half-grown boys emerge from the undergrowth on the far side of the garden and steal across it, approaching Armstid from behind.

He had not looked up nor even ceased to dig, yet the boys were not within twenty feet of him when he whirled and dragged himself out of the trench and ran at them, the shovel lifted. He said nothing; he did not even curse now. He just ran at them, dragging his leg, stumbling among the clods he had dug while the boys fled before him, outdistancing him.

Even after they had vanished in the undergrowth from which they had come, Armstid continued to run until he stumbled and fell headlong and lay there for a time, while beyond the fence the people watched him in a silence so complete that they could hear the dry whisper of his panting breath.

Then he got up, onto his hands and knees first as small children do, and picked up the shovel and returned to the trench. He did not glance up at the sun, as a man pausing in work does to gauge the time. He came straight back to the trench, hurrying back to it with that painful and labouring slowness, the gaunt unshaven face which was now completely that of a madman. He got back into the trench and began to dig.

Snopes turned his head and spat over the wagon wheel. He jerked the reins slightly. "Come up," he said.

1940

The End

Intruder in the Dust, William Faulkner

Intruder in the Dust

Contents

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter One

It was just noon that Sunday morning when the sheriff reached the jail with Lucas Beauchamp though the whole town (the whole county too for that matter) had known since the night before that Lucas had killed a white man.

He was there, waiting. He was the first one, standing lounging trying to look occupied or at least innocent, under the shed in front of the closed blacksmith's shop across the street from the jail where his uncle would be less likely to see him if or rather when he crossed the Square toward the postoffice for the eleven o'clock mail.

Because he knew Lucas Beauchamp too—as well that is as any white person knew him. Better than any maybe unless it was Carothers Edmonds on whose place Lucas lived seventeen miles from town, because he had eaten a meal in Lucas' house. It was in the early winter four years ago; he had been only twelve then and it had happened this way: Edmonds was a friend of his uncle; they had been in school at the same time at the State University, where his uncle had gone after he came back from Harvard and Heidelberg to learn enough law to get himself chosen County Attorney, and the day before Edmonds had come in to town to see his uncle on some county business and had stayed the night with them and at supper that evening Edmonds had said to him:

'Come out home with me tomorrow and go rabbit hunting:' and then to his mother: 'I'll send him back in tomorrow afternoon. I'll send a boy along with him while he's out with his gun:' and then to him again: 'He's got a good dog.'

'He's got a boy,' his uncle said and Edmonds said:

'Does his boy run rabbits too?' and his uncle said:

'We'll promise he wont interfere with yours.'

So the next morning he and Aleck Sander went home with Edmonds. It was cold that morning, the first winter cold-snap; the hedgerows were rimed and stiff with frost and the standing water in the roadside drainage ditches was skimmed with ice and even the edges of the running water in the Nine-Mile branch glinted fragile and scintillant like fairy glass and from the first farmyard they passed and then again and again and again came the windless tang of woodsmoke and they could see in the back yards the black iron pots already steaming while women in the sunbonnets still of summer or men's old felt hats and long men's overcoats stoked wood under them and the men with crokersack aprons tied with wire over their overalls whetted knives or already moved about the pens where hogs grunted and squealed, not quite startled, not alarmed but just alerted as though sensing already even though only dimly their rich and immanent destiny; by nightfall the whole land would be hung with their spectral intact tallowcolored empty carcasses immobilised by the heels in attitudes of frantic running as though full tilt at the center of the earth.

And he didn't know how it happened. The boy, one of Edmonds' tenant's sons, older and larger than Aleck Sander who in his turn was larger than he although they were the same age, was waiting at the house with the dog—a true rabbit dog, some hound, a good deal of hound, maybe mostly hound, redbone and black-and-tan with maybe a little pointer somewhere once, a potlicker, a nigger dog which it took but one glance to see had an affinity a rapport with rabbits such as people said Negroes had with mules—and Aleck Sander already had his tapstick—one of the heavy nuts which bolt railroad rails together, driven onto a short length of broom-handle—which Aleck Sander could throw whirling end over end at a running rabbit pretty near as accurately as he could shoot the shotgun—and Aleck Sander and Edmonds' boy with tapsticks and he with the gun they went down through the park and across a pasture to the creek where Edmonds' boy knew the footlog was and he didn't know how it happened, something a girl might have been expected and even excused for doing but nobody else, halfway over the footlog and not even thinking about it who had walked the top rail of a fence many a time twice that far

when all of a sudden the known familiar sunny winter earth was upside down and flat on his face and still holding the gun he was rushing not away from the earth but away from the bright sky and he could remember still the thin bright tinkle of the breaking ice and how he didn't even feel the shock of the water but only of the air when he came up again.

He had dropped the gun too so he had to dive, submerge again to find it, back out of the icy air into the water which as yet felt neither, neither cold or not and where even his sodden garments—boots and thick pants and sweater and hunting coat—didn't even feel heavy but just slow, and found the gun and tried again for bottom then thrashed one-handed to the bank and treading water and clinging to a willow-branch he reached the gun up until someone took it; Edmonds' boy obviously since at that moment Aleck Sander rammed down at him the end of a long pole, almost a log whose first pass struck his feet out from under him and sent his head under again and almost broke his hold on the willow until a voice said:

'Get the pole out of his way so he can get out'—just a voice, not because it couldn't be anybody else but either Aleck Sander or Edmonds' boy but because it didn't matter whose: climbing out now with both hands among the willows, the skim ice crinkling and tinkling against his chest, his clothes like soft cold lead which he didn't move in but seemed rather to mount into like a poncho or a tarpaulin: up the bank until he saw two feet in gum boots which were neither Edmonds' boy's nor Aleck Sander's and then the legs, the overalls rising out of them and he climbed on and stood up and saw a Negro man with an axe on his shoulder, in a heavy sheep-lined coat and a broad pale felt hat such as his grandfather had used to wear, looking at him and that was when he saw Lucas Beauchamp for the first time that he remembered or rather for the first time because you didn't forget Lucas Beauchamp; gasping, shaking and only now feeling the shock of the cold water, he looked up at the face which was just watching him without pity commiseration or anything else, not even surprise: just watching him, whose owner had made no effort whatever to help him up out of the creek, had in fact ordered Aleck Sander to desist with the

pole which had been the one token toward help that anybody had made—a face which in his estimation might have been under fifty or even forty except for the hat and the eyes, and inside a Negro's skin but that was all even to a boy of twelve shaking with cold and still panting from shock and exertion because what looked out of it had no pigment at all, not even the white man's lack of it, not arrogant, not even scornful: just intractable and composed.

Then Edmonds' boy said something to the man, speaking a name: something Mister Lucas: and then he knew who the man was, remembering the rest of the story which was a piece, a fragment of the country's chronicle which few if any knew better than his uncle: how the man was son of one of old Carothers McCaslin's, Edmonds' great grandfather's, slaves who had been not just old Carothers' slave but his son too: standing and shaking steadily now for what seemed to him another whole minute while the man stood looking at him with nothing whatever in his face. Then the man turned, speaking not even back over his shoulder, already walking, not even waiting to see if they heard, let alone were going to obey:

'Come on to my house.'

'I'll go back to Mr Edmonds,' he said. The man didn't look back. He didn't even answer.

'Tote his gun, Joe,' he said.

So he followed, with Edmonds' boy and Aleck Sander following him, in single file along the creek toward the bridge and the road. Soon he had stopped shaking; he was just cold and wet now and most of that would go if he just kept moving. They crossed the bridge. Ahead now was the gate where the drive went up through the park to Edmonds' house.

It was almost a mile; he would probably be dry and warm both by the time he got there and he still believed he was going to turn in at the gate and even after he knew that he wasn't or anyway hadn't, already beyond it now, he was still telling himself the reason was that, although

Edmonds was a bachelor and there were no women in the house, Edmonds himself might refuse to let him out of the house again until he could be returned to his mother, still telling himself this even after he knew that the true reason was that he could no more imagine himself contradicting the man striding on ahead of him than he could his grandfather, not from any fear of nor even the threat of reprisal but because like his grandfather the man striding ahead of him was simply incapable of conceiving himself by a child contradicted and defied.

So he didn't even check when they passed the gate, he didn't even look at it and now they were in no well-used tended lane leading to tenant or servant quarters and marked by walking feet but a savage gash half gully and half road mounting a hill with an air solitary independent and intractable too and then he saw the house, the cabin and remembered the rest of the story, the legend: how Edmonds' father had deeded to his Negro first cousin and his heirs in perpetuity the house and the ten acres of land it sat in—an oblong of earth set forever in the middle of the two-thousand-acre plantation like a postage stamp in the center of an envelope—the paintless wooden house, the paintless picket fence whose paintless latchless gate the man kneed open still without stopping or once looking back and, he following and Aleck Sander and Edmonds' boy following him, strode on into the yard.

It would have been grassless even in summer; he could imagine it, completely bare, no weed no sprig of anything, the dust each morning swept by some of Lucas' womenfolks with a broom made of willow switches bound together, into an intricate series of whorls and overlapping loops which as the day advanced would be gradually and slowly defaced by the droppings and the cryptic three-toed prints of chickens like (remembering it now at sixteen) a terrain in miniature out of the age of the great lizards, the four of them walking in what was less than walk because its surface was dirt too yet more than path, the footpacked strip running plumbline straight between two borders of tin cans and empty bottles and shards of china and earthenware set into the ground, up to the paintless steps and the paintless gallery along whose edge sat more cans but larger—empty gallon buckets which had once contained molasses or perhaps paint and wornout water or milk

pails and one five-gallon can for kerosene with its top cut off and half of what had once been somebody's (Edmonds' without doubt) kitchen hot water tank sliced longways like a banana—out of which flowers had grown last summer and from which the dead stalks and the dried and brittle tendrils still leaned and drooped, and beyond this the house itself, gray and weathered and not so much paintless as independent of and intractable to paint so that the house was not only the one possible continuation of the stern untended road but was its crown too as the carven ailanthus leaves are the Greek column's capital.

Nor did the man pause yet, up the steps and across the gallery and opened the door and entered and he and then Edmonds' boy and Aleck Sander followed: a hall dim even almost dark after the bright outdoors and already he could smell that smell which he had accepted without question all his life as being the smell always of the places where people with any trace of Negro blood live as he had that all people named Mallison are Methodists, then a bedroom: a bare worn quite clean paintless rugless floor, in one corner and spread with a bright patchwork quilt a vast shadowy tester bed which had probably come out of old Carothers McCaslin's house, and a battered cheap Grand Rapids dresser and then for the moment no more or at least little more; only later would he notice—or remember that he had seen—the cluttered mantel on which sat a kerosene lamp hand-painted with flowers and a vase filled with spills of twisted newspaper and above the mantel the colored lithograph of a three-year-old calendar in which Pocahontas in the quilled fringed buckskins of a Sioux or Chippewa chief stood against a balustrade of Italian marble above a garden of formal cypresses and shadowy in the corner opposite the bed a chromo portrait of two people framed heavily in gold-painted wood on a gold-painted easel.

But he hadn't seen that at all yet because that was behind him and all he now saw was the fire—the clay-daubed fieldstone chimney in which a halfburned backlog glowed and smoldered in the gray ashes and beside it in a rocking chair something which he thought was a child until he saw the face, and then he did pause long enough to look at her because he was about to remember something else his uncle had told

him about or at least in regard to Lucas Beauchamp, and looking at her he realised for the first time how old the man actually was, must be—a tiny old almost doll-sized woman much darker than the man, in a shawl and an apron, her head bound in an immaculate white cloth on top of which sat a painted straw hat bearing some kind of ornament. But he couldn't think what it was his uncle had said or told him and then he forgot that he had remembered even the having been told, sitting in the chair himself now squarely before the hearth where Edmonds' boy was building up the fire with split logs and pine slivers and Aleck Sander squatting tugged off the wet boots and then his trousers and standing he got out of the coat and sweater and his shirt, both of them having to dodge around and past and under the man who stood straddled on the hearth, his back to the fire in the gum boots and the hat and only the sheepskin coat removed and then the old woman was beside him again less tall than he and Aleck Sander even at twelve, with another of the bright patchwork quilts on her arm.

'Strip off,' the man said.

'No I—' he said.

'Strip off,' the man said. So he stripped off the wet unionsuit too and then he was in the chair again in front of the now bright and swirling fire, enveloped in the quilt like a cocoon, enclosed completely now in that unmistakable odor of Negroes—that smell which if it were not for something that was going to happen to him within a space of time measurable now in minutes he would have gone to his grave never once pondering speculating if perhaps that smell were really not the odor of a race nor even actually of poverty but perhaps of a condition: an idea: a belief: an acceptance, a passive acceptance by them themselves of the idea that being Negroes they were not supposed to have facilities to wash properly or often or even to wash bathe often even without the facilities to do it with; that in fact it was a little to be preferred that they did not.

But the smell meant nothing now or yet; it was still an hour yet before the thing would happen and it would be four years more before he

would realise the extent of its ramifications and what it had done to him and he would be a man grown before he would realise, admit that he had accepted it. So he just smelled it and then dismissed it because he was used to it, he had smelled it off and on all his life and would continue to: who had spent a good part of that life in Paralee's, Aleck Sander's mother's cabin in their back yard where he and Aleck Sander played in the bad weather when they were little and Paralee would cook whole meals for them halfway between two meals at the house and he and Aleck Sander would eat them together, the food tasting the same to each; he could not even imagine an existence from which the odor would be missing to return no more.

He had smelled it forever, he would smell it always; it was a part of his inescapable past, it was a rich part of his heritage as a Southerner; he didn't even have to dismiss it, he just no longer smelled it at all as the pipe smoker long since never did smell at all the cold pipereek which is as much a part of his clothing as their buttons and buttonholes, sitting drowsing a little even in the warm huddled rankness of the quilt, rousing a little when he heard Edmonds' boy and Aleck Sander get up from where they had been squatting against the wall and leave the room, but not much, sinking again into the quilt's warm reek while there stood over him still, back to the fire and hands clasped behind him and except for the clasped hands and the missing axe and the sheep-lined coat exactly as when he had looked up out of the creek and seen him first, the man in the gum boots and the faded overalls of a Negro but with a heavy gold watch-chain looping across the bib of the overalls and shortly after they entered the room he had been conscious of the man turning and taking something from the cluttered mantel and putting it into his mouth and later he had seen what it was: a gold toothpick such as his own grandfather had used: and the hat was a worn handmade beaver such as his grandfather had paid thirty and forty dollars apiece for, not set but raked slightly above the face pigmented like a Negro's but with a nose high in the bridge and even hooked a little and what looked out through it or from behind it not black nor white either, not arrogant at all and not even scornful: just intolerant inflexible and composed.

Then Aleck Sander came back with his clothes, dried now and still almost hot from the stove and he dressed, stamping into his stiffened boots; Edmonds' boy squatting again against the wall was still eating something from his hand and he said: 'I'll have my dinner at Mr Edmonds'.'

The man neither protested nor acquiesced. He didn't stir; he was not even looking at him. He just said, inflexible and calm: 'She done already dished it up now:' and he went on past the old woman who stood aside from the door to let him pass, into the kitchen: an oilcloth-covered table set in the bright sunny square of a southern window where—he didn't know how he knew it since there were no signs, traces, soiled plates to show it—Edmonds' boy and Aleck Sander had already eaten, and sat down and ate in his turn of what obviously was to be Lucas' dinner—collard greens, a slice of sidemeat fried in flour, big flat pale heavy half-cooked biscuits, a glass of buttermilk: nigger food too, accepted and then dismissed also because it was exactly what he had expected, it was what Negroes ate, obviously because it was what they liked, what they chose; not (at twelve: he would be a man grown before he experienced his first amazed dubiety at this) that out of their long chronicle this was all they had had a chance to learn to like except the ones who ate out of white folks' kitchens but that they had elected this out of all eating because this was their palates and their metabolism; afterward, ten minutes later and then for the next four years he would be trying to tell himself that it was the food which had thrown him off.

But he would know better; his initial error, misjudgment had been there all the time, not even needing to be abetted by the smell of the house and the quilt in order to survive what had looked out (and not even at him: just looked out) from the man's face; rising at last and with the coin, the half dollar already in his hand going back into the other room: when he saw for the first time because he happened to be facing it now the gold-framed portrait-group on its gold easel and he went to it, stooping to peer at it in its shadowy corner where only the gold leaf gleamed, before he knew he was going to do it. It had been retouched obviously; from behind the round faintly prismatic glass

dome as out of a seer's crystal ball there looked back at him again the calm intolerant face beneath the swaggering rake of the hat, a tieless starched collar clipped to a white starched shirt with a collarbutton shaped like a snake's head and almost as large, the watch-chain looped now across a broadcloth vest inside a broadcloth coat and only the toothpick missing, and beside him the tiny doll-like woman in another painted straw hat and a shawl; that is it must have been the woman though it looked like nobody he had ever seen before and then he realised it was more than that: there was something ghastly, almost intolerably wrong about it or her: when she spoke and he looked up, the man still standing straddled before the fire and the woman sitting again in the rocking chair in its old place almost in the corner and she was not looking at him now and he knew she had never looked at him since he re-entered yet she said:

'That's some more of Lucas' doings:' and he said,

'What?' and the man said,

'Molly dont like it because the man that made it took her headrag off:' and that was it, she had hair; it was like looking at an embalmed corpse through the hermetic glass lid of a coffin and he thought Molly. Of course because he remembered now what it was his uncle had told him about Lucas or about them. He said:

'Why did he take it off?'

'I told him to,' the man said. 'I didn't want no field nigger picture in the house:' and he walked toward them now, putting the fist holding the half dollar back into his pocket and scooping the dime and the two nickels—all he had—into the palm with it, saying,

'You came from town. My uncle knows you—Lawyer Gavin Stevens.'

'I remember your mama too,' she said. 'She use to be Miss Maggie Dandridge.'

'That was my grandmother,' he said. 'My mother's name was Stevens too:' and extended the coins: and in the same second in which he knew she would have taken them he knew that only by that one irrevocable second was he forever now too late, forever beyond recall, standing with the slow hot blood as slow as minutes themselves up his neck and face, forever with his dumb hand open and on it the four shameful fragments of milled and minted dross, until at last the man had something that at least did the office of pity.

'What's that for?' the man said, not even moving, not even tilting his face downward to look at what was on his palm: for another eternity and only the hot dead moveless blood until at last it ran to rage so that at least he could bear the shame: and watched his palm turn over not flinging the coins but spurning them downward ringing onto the bare floor, bouncing and one of the nickels even rolling away in a long swooping curve with a dry minute sound like the scurry of a small mouse: and then his voice:

'Pick it up!'

And still nothing, the man didn't move, hands clasped behind him, looking at nothing; only the rush of the hot dead heavy blood out of which the voice spoke, addressing nobody: 'Pick up his money:' and he heard and saw Aleck Sander and Edmonds' boy reach and scurry among the shadows near the floor. 'Give it to him,' the voice said: and saw Edmonds' boy drop his two coins into Aleck Sander's palm and felt Aleck Sander's hand fumble the four of them at his own dropped hand and then into it. 'Now go on and shoot your rabbit,' the voice said. 'And stay out of that creek.'

Chapter Two

And they walked again in the bright cold (even though it was noon now and about as warm as it would ever get today probably), back across the creek bridge and (suddenly: looking around, they had gone almost a

half-mile along the creek and he didn't even remember it) the dog put a rabbit into a brier patch beside a cottonfield and yapping hysterically hoicked it out again, the small frantic tawny-colored blob looking one instant spherical and close-coupled as a croquet ball and the next one long as a snake, bursting out of the thicket ahead of the dog, the small white flare of its scut zigzagging across the skeletoned cottonrows like the sail of a toy boat on a windy pond while across the thicket Aleck Sander yelled:

'Shoot him! Shoot him!' then 'Whyn't you shoot him?' and then he turned without haste and walked steadily to the creek and drew the four coins from his pocket and threw them out into the water: and sleepless in bed that night he knew that the food had been not just the best Lucas had to offer but all he had to offer; he had gone out there this morning as the guest not of Edmonds but of old Carothers McCaslin's plantation and Lucas knew it when he didn't and so Lucas had beat him, stood straddled in front of the hearth and without even moving his clasped hands from behind his back had taken his own seventy cents and beat him with them, and writhing with impotent fury he was already thinking of the man whom he had never seen but once and that only twelve hours ago, as within the next year he was to learn every white man in that whole section of the country had been thinking about him for years: We got to make him be a nigger first. He's got to admit he's a nigger.

Then maybe we will accept him as he seems to intend to be accepted. Because he began at once to learn a good deal more about Lucas. He didn't hear it: he learned it, all that anyone who knew that part of the country could tell him about the Negro who said 'ma'am' to women just as any white man did and who said 'sir' and 'mister' to you if you were white but who you knew was thinking neither and he knew you knew it but who was not even waiting, daring you to make the next move, because he didn't even care. For instance, this.

It was a Saturday afternoon three years ago at the crossroads store four miles from Edmonds' place where at some time during Saturday afternoon every tenant and renter and freeholder white or black in the

neighborhood would at least pass and usually stop, quite often even to buy something, the saddled trace-galled mules and horses tied among the willows and birches and sycamores in the trampled mud below the spring and their riders overflowing the store itself out onto the dusty banquette in front, standing or squatting on their heels drinking bottled sodapop and spitting tobacco and rolling without hurry cigarettes and striking deliberate matches to smoked-out pipes; this day there were three youngish white men from the crew of a nearby sawmill, all a little drunk, one of whom had a reputation for brawling and violence, and Lucas came in in the worn black broadcloth suit which he wore to town and on Sundays and the worn fine hat and the heavy watch-chain and the toothpick, and something happened, the story didn't say or perhaps didn't even know what, perhaps the way Lucas walked, entered speaking to no one and went to the counter and made his purchase (it was a five-cent carton of gingersnaps) and turned and tore the end from the carton and removed the toothpick and put it into his breast pocket and shook one of the gingersnaps into his palm and put it into his mouth, or perhaps just nothing was enough, the white man on his feet suddenly saying something to Lucas, saying 'You goddamn biggity stiff-necked stinking burrheaded Edmonds sonofabitch:' and Lucas chewed the gingersnap and swallowed and the carton already tilted again over his other hand, turned his head quite slowly and looked at the white man a moment and then said:

'I aint a Edmonds. I dont belong to these new folks. I belongs to the old lot. I'm a McCaslin.'

'Keep on walking around here with that look on your face and what you'll be is crowbait,' the white man said. For another moment or at least a half one Lucas looked at the white man with a calm speculative detachment; slowly the carton in one of his hands tilted further until another gingersnap dropped into his other palm, then lifting the corner of his lip he sucked an upper tooth, quite loud in the abrupt silence but with no implication whatever of either derision or rebuttal or even disagreement, with no implication of anything at all but almost abstractedly, as a man eating gingersnaps in the middle of a hundred-mile solitude would—if he did—suck a tooth, and said:

'Yes, I heard that idea before, And I notices that the folks that brings it up aint even Edmondses:' whereupon the white man even as he sprang up reached blindly back where on the counter behind him lay a half-dozen plow singletrees and snatched one of them up and had already started the downswing when the son of the store's proprietor, himself a youngish active man, came either around or over the counter and grasped the other so that the singletree merely flew harmlessly across the aisle and crashed against the cold stove; then another man was holding the man too.

'Get out of here, Lucas!' the proprietor's son said over his shoulder. But still Lucas didn't move, quite calm, not even scornful, not even contemptuous, not even very alert, the gaudy carton still poised in his left hand and the small cake in the right, just watching while the proprietor's son and his companion held the foaming and cursing white man. 'Get to hell out of here, you damn fool!' the proprietor's son shouted: and only then did Lucas move, without haste, turning without haste and going on toward the door, raising his right hand to his mouth so that as he went out the door they could see the steady thrust of his chewing.

Because there was the half dollar. The actual sum was seventy cents of course and in four coins but he had long since during that first few fractions of a second transposed translated them into the one coin one integer in mass and weight out of all proportion to its mere convertible value; there were times in fact when, the capacity of his spirit for regret or perhaps just simple writhing or whatever it was at last spent for a moment and even quiescent, he would tell himself At least I have the half dollar, at least I have something because now not only his mistake and its shame but its protagonist too—the man, the Negro, the room, the moment, the day itself—had annealed vanished into the round hard symbol of the coin and he would seem to see himself lying watching regretless and even peaceful as day by day the coin swelled to its gigantic maximum, to hang fixed at last forever in the black vault of his anguish like the last dead and waneless moon and himself, his own puny shadow gesticulant and tiny against it in frantic and vain eclipse:

frantic and vain yet indefatigable too because he would never stop, he could never give up now who had debased not merely his manhood but his whole race too; each afternoon after school and all day Saturday, unless there was a ballgame or he went hunting or there was something else he wanted or needed to do, he would go to his uncle's office where he would answer the telephone or run errands, all with some similitude of responsibility even if not actually of necessity; at least it was an intimation of his willingness to carry some of his own weight.

He had begun it when he was a child, when he could scarcely remember, out of that blind and absolute attachment to his mother's only brother which he had never tried to reason about, and he had done it ever since; later, at fifteen and sixteen and seventeen he would think of the story of the boy and his pet calf which he lifted over the pasture fence each day; years passed and they were a grown man and a bull still being lifted over the pasture fence each day.

He deserted his calf. It was less than three weeks to Christmas; every afternoon after school and all day Saturday he was either in the Square or where he could see it, watch it. It was cold for another day or two, then it got warm, the wind softened then the bright sun hazed over and it rained yet he still walked or stood about the street where the store windows were already filling with toys and Christmas goods and fireworks and colored lights and evergreen and tinsel or behind the steamy window of the drugstore or barbershop watched the country faces, the two packages—the four two-for-a-quarter cigars for Lucas and the tumbler of snuff for his wife—in their bright Christmas paper in his pocket, until at last he saw Edmonds and gave them to him to deliver Christmas morning.

But that merely discharged (with doubled interest) the seventy cents; there still remained the dead monstrous heatless disc which hung nightly in the black abyss of the rage and impotence: If he would just be a nigger first, just for one second, one little infinitesimal second: so in February he began to save his money—the twenty-five cents his father gave him each week as allowance and the twenty-five cents his uncle

paid him as office salary—until in May he had enough and with his mother helping him chose the flowered imitation silk dress and sent it by mail to Molly Beauchamp, care of Carothers Edmonds R.F.D. and at last he had something like ease because the rage was gone and all he could not forget was the grief and the shame; the disc still hung in the black vault but it was almost a year old now and so the vault itself was not so black with the disc paling and he could even sleep under it as even the insomniac dozes at last under his waning and glareless moon. Then it was September; school would begin in another week. He came home one afternoon and his mother was waiting for him.

‘Here’s something for you,’ she said. It was a gallon bucket of fresh homemade sorghum molasses and he knew the answer at once long before she finished speaking: ‘Somebody from Mr Edmonds’ place sent it to you.’

‘Lucas Beauchamp,’ he said, cried almost. ‘How long has he been gone? Why didn’t he wait for me?’

‘No,’ his mother said. ‘He didn’t bring it himself. He sent it in. A white boy brought it on a mule.’

And that was all. They were right back where they had started; it was all to do over again; it was even worse this time because this time Lucas had commanded a white hand to pick up his money and give it back to him. Then he realised that he couldn’t even start over again because to take the can of molasses back and fling it into Lucas’ front door would only be the coins again for Lucas again to command somebody to pick up and return, not to mention the fact that he would have to ride a Shetland pony which he had outgrown and was ashamed of except that his mother wouldn’t agree yet to let him have a full-sized horse or at least the kind of full-sized horse he wanted and that his uncle had promised him, seventeen miles in order to reach the door to fling it through. This would have to be all; whatever would or could set him free was beyond not merely his reach but even his ken; he could only wait for it if it came and do without it if it didn’t.

And four years later he had been free almost eighteen months and he thought it was all: old Molly dead and her and Lucas' married daughter moved with her husband to Detroit and he heard now at last by chance remote and belated hearsay that Lucas was living alone in the house, solitary kinless and intractable, apparently not only without friends even in his own race but proud of it.

He had seen him three times more, on the Square in town and not always on Saturday—in fact it would be a year from the last time before he would realise that he had never seen him in town on Saturday when all the other Negroes and most of the whites too from the country came in, nor even that the occasions when he did see him were almost exactly a year apart and that the reason he saw him then was not that Lucas' presence had happened to coincide with his own chance passage through the Square but that he had coincided with Lucas' annual and necessary visits—but on weekdays like the white men who were not farmers but planters, who wore neckties and vests like the merchants and doctors and lawyers themselves, as if he refused, declined to accept even that little of the pattern not only of Negro but of country Negro behavior, and always in the worn brushed obviously once-expensive black broadcloth suit of the portrait-photograph on the gold easel and the raked fine hat and the boiled white shirt of his own grandfather's time and the tieless collar and the heavy watch-chain and the gold toothpick like the one his own grandfather had carried in his upper vest pocket: the first time in the second winter; he had spoken first though Lucas had remembered him at once; he thanked him for the molasses and Lucas had answered exactly as his grandfather himself might, only the words, the grammar any different:

'They turned out good this year. When I was making um I remembered how a boy's always got a sweet tooth for good molasses:' and went on, saying over his shoulder: 'Dont fall in no more creeks this winter:' and saw him twice more after that—the black suit, the hat, the watch-chain but the next time he didn't have the toothpick and this time Lucas looked straight at him, straight into his eyes from five feet away and passed him and he thought He has forgotten me. He doesn't even

remember me anymore until almost the next year when his uncle told him that Molly, the old wife, had died a year ago. Nor did he bother, take time to wonder then how his uncle (obviously Edmonds had told him) happened to know about it because he was already counting rapidly backward; he said thought with a sense of vindication, easement, triumph almost: She had just died then. That was why he didn't see me.

That was why he didn't have the toothpick: thinking with a kind of amazement: He was grieving. You don't have to not be a nigger in order to grieve and then he found that he was waiting, haunting the Square almost as he had done two years ago when he was watching for Edmonds to give him the two Christmas presents to deliver, through the next two then three then four months before it occurred to him that when he had seen Lucas in town it had always been only once each year in January or February and then for the first time he realised why: he had come in to pay the yearly taxes on his land. So it was late January, a bright cold afternoon.

He stood on the bank corner in the thin sun and saw Lucas come out of the courthouse and cross the Square directly toward him, in the black suit and the tieless shirt and the fine old hat at its swaggering rake, walking so erect that the coat touched him only across the shoulders from which it hung and he could already see the cocked slanted glint of the gold toothpick and he could feel the muscles of his face, waiting and then Lucas looked up and once more looked straight into his eyes for perhaps a quarter of a minute and then away and came straight on and then even side-stepped a little in order to pass him and passed him and went on; nor did he look back either, standing at the curb-edge in the thin cold sun thinking He didn't even fail to remember me this time. He didn't even know me. He hasn't even bothered to forget me: thinking in a sort of peace even: It's over.

That was all because he was free, the man who for three years had obsessed his life waking and sleeping too had walked out of it. He would see him again of course; without doubt they would pass on the street in town like this once each year for the rest of Lucas' life but that

would be all: the one no longer the man but only the ghost of him who had ordered the two Negro boys to pick up his money and give it back to him; the other only the memory of the child who had offered it and then flung it down, carrying into manhood only the fading tagend of that old once-frantic shame and anguish and need not for revenge, vengeance but simply for re-equalization, reaffirmation of his masculinity and his white blood.

And someday the one would not even be any longer the ghost of the man who had ordered the coins picked up and to the other the shame and anguish would no longer be a thing remembered and recallable but merely a breath a whisper like the bitter-sweet-sour taste of the sheep sorrel eaten by the boy in his dead childhood, remembered only in the instant of tasting and forgotten before it could be placed and remembered; he could imagine them as old men meeting, quite old, at some point in that agony of naked inanesthetisable nerve-ends which for lack of a better word men call being alive at which not only their elapsed years but the half-century of discrepancy between them would be as indistinguishable and uncountable as that many sand grains in a coal pile and he saying to Lucas: I was the boy who when you gave me half of your dinner tried to pay you with some things which people in those days called seventy cents' worth of money and so all I could think of to save my face was to fling it on the floor? Dont you remember? and Lucas: Was that me? or vice versa, turned around and it was Lucas saying I was the man when you throwed your money on the floor and wouldn't pick it up I had to have two niggers pick it up and hand it back to you? Dont you remember? and he this time: Was that me? Because it was over now. He had turned the other cheek and it had been accepted. He was free.

Then he came back through the Square late that Saturday afternoon (there had been a ballgame on the High School field) and he heard that Lucas had killed Vinson Gowrie out at Fraser's store; word had come for the sheriff about three oclock and had been relayed on by another party-line telephone down into the opposite corner of the county where the sheriff had gone this morning on business and where a messenger might quite possibly find him some time between now and

tomorrow's sunup: which would make little difference since even if the sheriff had been in his office he would probably be too late since Fraser's store was in Beat Four and if Yoknapatawpha County was the wrong place for a nigger to shoot a white man in the back then Beat Four was the last place even in Yoknapatawpha County a nigger with any judgment—or any other stranger of any color—would have chosen to shoot anybody least of all one named Gowrie before or behind either; already the last car full of the young men and some not so young whose business addresses not only on Saturday afternoons but all week too were the poolhall and the barbershop and some of whom even had some vague connection with cotton or automobiles or land-and stock-sales, who bet on prizefights and punchboards and national ballgames, had long since left the Square to hurry the fifteen miles to park along the highway in front of the constable's house where the constable had taken Lucas and the story said had handcuffed him to a bedpost and was now sitting over him with a shotgun (and Edmonds too of course by now;

even a fool country constable would have had sense enough to send for Edmonds only four miles away even before hollering for the sheriff) in case the Gowries and their connections decided not to wait until they had buried Vinson first; of course Edmonds would be there; if Edmonds had been in town today he would certainly have seen him at some time during the morning and before he went to the ballpark and since he had not obviously Edmonds had been at home, only four miles away; a messenger could have reached him and Edmonds himself could have been at the constable's house almost before the other messenger had memorised the sheriff's telephone and the message to give him and then rode to the nearest telephone where he could use either: which—Edmonds (again something nagged for a second's flash at his attention) and the constable—would be two while the Lord Himself would have to stop to count the Gowries and Ingrums and Workitts and if Edmonds was busy eating supper or reading the paper or counting his money or something the constable would be just one even with the shotgun: but then he was free, hardly even pausing really, walking on to the corner where he would turn for home and not until he saw how much of sun, how much was left of afternoon still in the street then turned back

retracing his steps for several yards before he remembered why in the world he didn't cut straight across the now almost empty Square to the outside stairs leading up to the office.

Though of course there was really no reason to expect his uncle to be in the office this late on Saturday afternoon but once on the stairs he could at least throw that away, happening to be wearing rubber soles today though even then the wooden stairs creaked and rumbled unless you trod the inside edge close to the wall: thinking how he had never really appreciated rubber soles before, how nothing could match them for giving you time to make up your mind what you really wanted to do and then he could see the office door closed now although it was still too early for his uncle to have had the lights on but besides the door itself had that look which only locked doors have so even hard soles wouldn't have mattered, unlocking the door with his key then locking it with the thumb-latch behind him and crossed to the heavy swivel roller chair which had been his grandfather's before his uncle's and sat down behind the littered table which his uncle used in place of the rolltop desk of his grandfather's old time and across which the county's legal business had passed longer than he could remember, since in fact his memory was memory or anyway his, and so battered table and dogeared faded papers and the needs and passions they represented and the measured and bounded county too were all coeval and one, the last of the sun coming through the mulberry tree then the window behind him onto the table the stacked untidy papers the inkwell the tray of paperclips and fouled rusted penpoints and pipecleaners and the overturned corncob pipe in its spill of ash beside the stained unwashed coffeecup and saucer and the colored mug from the Heidelberg stübe filled with twisted spills of newspaper to light the pipes with like the vase sitting on Lucas' mantel that day and before he even knew he had thought of it he rose taking up the cup and saucer and crossed the room picking up the coffeepot and the kettle too in passing and in the lavatory emptied the grounds and rinsed the pot and cup and filled the kettle and set it and the pot the cup and saucer back on the shelf and returned to the chair and sat down again after really no absence at all, still in plenty of time to watch the table and all its familiar untidy clutter all fading toward one anonymity of night as the

sunlight died: thinking remembering how his uncle had said that all man had was time, all that stood between him and the death he feared and abhorred was time yet he spent half of it inventing ways of getting the other half past: and suddenly he remembered from nowhere what it was that had been nagging at his attention: Edmonds was not at home nor even in Mississippi; he was in a hospital in New Orleans being operated on for gallstones, the heavy chair making a rumbling clatter on the wooden floor almost as loud as a wagon on a wooden bridge as he rose and then stood beside the table until the echo died away and there was only the sound of his breathing: because he was free: and then he moved: because his mother would know what time baseball games finished even if she couldn't have heard the yelling from across the edge of town and she would know that even he could use up only so much of twilight getting home, locking the door behind him then down the stairs again, the Square filled with dusk now and the first lights coming on in the drugstore (they had never been off in the barbershop and the poolhall since the bootblack and the porter unlocked the doors and swept out the hair and cigarette stubs at six o'clock this morning) and the mercantile ones too so that the rest of the county except Beat Four would have somewhere to wait until word could come in from Fraser's store that all was okeydoke again and they could unpark the trucks and cars and wagons and mules from the back streets and alleys and go home and go to bed: turning the corner this time and now the jail, looming, lightless except for the one crossbarred rectangle in the upper front wall where on ordinary nights the nigger crapshooters and whiskey-peddlers and razor-throwers would be yelling down to their girls and women on the street below and where Lucas would have been these three hours now (very likely banging on the steel door for somebody to bring him his supper or perhaps having already had it and now merely to complain about its quality since without doubt he would consider that his right too along with the rest of his lodging and keep) except that people seemed to hold that the one sole end of the entire establishment of public office was to elect one man like Sheriff Hampton big enough or at least with sense and character enough to run the county and then fill the rest of the jobs with cousins and inlaws who had failed to make a living at everything else they ever tried.

But then he was free and besides it was probably all over by now and even if it wasn't he knew what he was going to do and there was plenty of time yet for that, tomorrow would be time enough for that; all he would need to do tonight was to give Highboy about two extra cups of oats against tomorrow and at first he believed he was or at least in a moment was going to be ravenously hungry himself, sitting down at the familiar table in the familiar room among the bright linen and silver and the water glasses and the bowl of narcissus and gladioli and a few roses in it too and his uncle said,

'Your friend Beauchamp seems to have done it this time.'

'Yes,' he said. 'They're going to make a nigger out of him once in his life anyway.'

'Charles!' his mother said.—eating rapidly, eating quite a lot and talking rapidly and quite a lot too about the ballgame and waiting to get hungry any minute any second now until suddenly he knew that even the last bite had been too much, still chewing at it to get it down to where it would swallow, already getting up.

'I'm going to the picture show,' he said.

'You haven't finished,' his mother said: then she said, 'The show doesn't begin for almost an hour yet:' and then not even just to his father and uncle but to all time all A.D. of Our Lord one thousand and nine hundred and thirty and forty and fifty: 'I dont want him to go to town tonight. I dont want—' and then at last one wail one cry to the supreme: his father himself: out of that nightraddled dragonregion of fears and terrors in which women—mothers anyway—seemed from choice almost to dwell: 'Charlie—' until his uncle put his napkin down and rose too and said:

'Then here's your chance to wean him. I want him to do an errand for me anyway:' and out: on the front gallery in the dark cool and after a while his uncle said: 'Well? Go on.'

‘Aint you coming?’ he said. Then he said, ‘But why? Why?’

‘Does that matter?’ his uncle said, and then said what he had already heard when he passed the barbershop going on two hours ago now: ‘Not now. Not to Lucas nor anybody else of his color out there.’ But he had already thought of that himself not just before his uncle said it but even before whoever it had been in front of the barbershop two hours ago did, and for that matter the rest of it too: ‘In fact the true why is not what crisis he faced beyond which life would be no longer bearable until he shot a white man in the back but why of all white men he must pick a Gowrie to shoot and out of all possible places Beat Four to do it in.—Go on. But don’t be late. After all a man ought to be kind even to his parents now and then.’

And sure enough one of the cars and for all he knew maybe all of them had got back to the barbershop and the poolhall so apparently Lucas was still chained and peaceful to the bedpost and the constable sitting over him (it was probably a rocking chair) with the cold shotgun and probably the constable’s wife had served their supper there and Lucas with a good appetite, sharp set for his since he not only wouldn’t have to pay for it but you dont shoot somebody every day in the week: and at last it seemed to be more or less authentic that the sheriff had finally got the word and sent word back that he would return to town late tonight and would fetch Lucas in early tomorrow morning and he would have to do something, pass the time somehow until the picture show was out so he might as well go to it and he crossed the Square to the courthouse yard and sat down on a bench in the dark cool empty solitude among the bitten shadows the restless unwindy vernal leaves against the starry smore of heaven where he could watch the lighted marquee in front of the picture show and perhaps the sheriff was right; he seemed able to establish enough contact with Gowries and Ingrums and Workitts and McCallums to persuade them to vote for him every eight years so maybe he knew approximately what they would do under given situations or perhaps the people in the barbershop were right and the Ingrums and Gowries and Workitts were waiting not until they had buried Vinson tomorrow but simply because it would be

Sunday in three hours now and they didn't want to have to hurry, bolt through the business in order to finish it by midnight and not violate the Sabbath: then the first of the crowd dribbled then flowed beneath the marquee blinking into the light and even fumbling a little for a second or even a minute or two yet, bringing back into the shabby earth a fading remnant of the heart's celluloid and derring dream so he could go home now, in fact he would have to: who knew by simple instinct when picture shows were over just as she did when ballgames were and though she would never really forgive him for being able to button his own buttons and wash behind his ears at least she accepted it and would not come after him herself but merely send his father and by starting now ahead of the picture show's dispersal he would have the empty street until he got home, until he reached the corner of the yard in fact and his uncle stepped out from beside the hedge, hatless, smoking one of the cob pipes.

'Listen,' his uncle said. 'I talked to Hampton down at Peddlers Field Old Town and he had already telephoned Squire Fraser and Fraser himself went to Skipworth's house and saw Lucas handcuffed to the bedpost and it's all right, everything's quiet out there tonight and tomorrow morning Hampton will have Lucas locked up in the jail—'

'I know,' he said. 'They wont lynch him until after midnight tomorrow night, after they have buried Vinson and got rid of Sunday:' walking on: 'It's all right with me. Lucas didn't have to work this hard not to be a nigger just on my account.' Because he was free: in bed: in the cool familiar room in the cool familiar dark because he knew what he was going to do and he had forgotten after all to tell Aleck Sander to give Highboy the extra feed against tomorrow but in the morning would do just as well because he was going to sleep tonight because he had something about ten thousand times quicker than just sheep to count; in fact he was going to go to sleep so fast he probably wouldn't have time to count more than about ten of them: with rage, an almost unbearable excruciation of outrage and fury: any white man to shoot in the back but this one of all white men at all: youngest of a family of six brothers one of whom had already served a year in federal penitentiary for armed resistance as an army deserter and another term at the state

penal farm for making whiskey, and a ramification of cousins and inlaws covering a whole corner of the county and whose total number probably even the old grandmothers and maiden aunts couldn't have stated offhand—a connection of brawlers and farmers and foxhunters and stock- and timber-traders who would not even be the last anywhere to let one of its number be killed by anyone but only among the last since it in its turn was integrated and interlocked and intermarried with other brawlers and foxhunters and whiskeymakers not even into a simple clan or tribe but a race a species which before now had made their hill stronghold good against the county and the federal government too, which did not even simply inhabit nor had merely corrupted but had translated and transmogrified that whole region of lonely pine hills dotted meagrely with small tilted farms and peripatetic sawmills and contraband whiskey-kettles where peace officers from town didn't even go unless they were sent for and strange white men didn't wander far from the highway after dark and no Negro at any time—where as a local wit said once the only stranger ever to enter with impunity was God and He only by daylight and on Sunday—into a synonym for independence and violence: an idea with physical boundaries like a quarantine for plague so that solitary unique and alone out of all the county it was known to the rest of the county by the number of its survey co-ordinate—Beat Four—as in the middle twenties people knew where Cicero Illinois was and who lived there and what they did who neither knew nor cared what state Chicago was in: and since this was not enough choosing the one moment when the one man white or black—Edmonds—out of all Yoknapatawpha County or Mississippi or America or the world too for that matter who would have had any inclination let alone power and ability (and here he had to laugh even though he was just about to go to sleep, remembering how he had even thought at first that if Edmonds had been at home it would have made any difference anywhere, remembering the face the angle of the hat the figure straddled baronial as a duke or a squire or a congressman before the fire hands clasped behind it and not even looking down at them but just commanding two nigger boys to pick up the coins and give them back to him, not even needing to remember his uncle reminding him ever since he had got big enough to understand the words that no man could come between another man and his

destiny because even his uncle for all Harvard and Heidelberg couldn't have pointed out the man with enough temerity and delusion just to come between Lucas and merely what he wanted to do) to try to stand between Lucas and the violent fate he had courted was lying flat on his back in a New Orleans operating room: yet that was what Lucas had had to pick, that time that victim and that place: another Saturday afternoon and the same store where he had already had trouble with a white man at least once before: chose the first suitable convenient Saturday afternoon and with an old single action Colt pistol of a calibre and type not even made anymore which was exactly the sort of pistol Lucas would own exactly as no other still alive man in the county owned a gold toothpick lay in wait at the store—the one sure place where sooner or later on Saturday afternoon that whole end of the county would pass—until the victim appeared and shot him and nobody knew why yet and as far as he had discovered that afternoon or even when he finally left the Square that night nobody had even wondered yet since why didn't matter least of all to Lucas since he had apparently he had been working for twenty or twenty-five years with indefatigable and unflagging concentration toward this one crowning moment; followed him into the woods about one good spit from the store and shot him in the back within hearing distance of the crowd around it and was still standing over the body the fired pistol put neatly away into his hip pocket again when the first ones reached the scene where he would without doubt have been lynched immediately out of hand except for the same Doyle Fraser who had saved him from the singletree seven years ago and old Skipworth, the constable—a little driedup wizened stonedead old man not much larger than a half-grown boy with a big nickel-plated pistol loose in one coat pocket and in the other a guttapercha eartrumpet on a rawhide thong around his neck like a foxhorn, who on this occasion anyway revealed an almost gratuitous hardihood and courage, getting Lucas (who made no resistance whatever, merely watching this too with that same calm detached not even scornful interest) out of the crowd and took him to his home and chained him to the bedpost until the sheriff could come and get him and bring him in to town and keep him while the Gowries and Workitts and Ingrums and the rest of their guests and connections could get Vinson buried and Sunday passed and so be fresh and

untrammelled for the new week and its duties and believe it or not even the night passed, the tentative roosters at false dawn then the interval then the loud fairy clangor of the birds and through the east window he could see the trees against gray light and then the sun itself high and furious above the trees glaring at him and it was already late, this of course must happen to him too: but then he was free and he would feel better after breakfast and he could always say he was going to Sunday school but then he wouldn't have to say anything by going out the back, strolling: across the back yard and into the lot and across it and through the woods to the railroad to the depot and then back to the Square then he thought of a simpler way than that and then quit thinking about it at all, through the front hall and across the front gallery and down the walk to the street and it was here he would remember later having first noticed that he had seen no Negro except Paralee when she brought his breakfast; by ordinary at this hour on Sunday morning he would have seen on almost every gallery housemaids or cooks in their fresh Sunday aprons with brooms or perhaps talking from gallery to gallery across the contiguous yardspaces and the children too fresh and scrubbed for Sunday school with clutched palmsweaty nickels though perhaps it was a little too early for that or perhaps by mutual consent or even interdiction there would be no Sunday school today, only church and so at some mutual concorded moment say about half-past eleven all the air over Yoknapatawpha County would reverberate soundlessly like heatshimmer with one concerted adjuration calm the hearts of these bereaved and angry men vengeance is mine saith the lord thou shalt not kill except that this was a little late too, they should have mentioned this to Lucas yesterday, past the jail the barred second storey window whose interstices on an ordinary Sunday would have been thick with dark hands and beyond them even a glint now and then of eyewhites in the shadows and the mellow voices calling and laughing down to the Negro girls and women passing or stopping along the street and this was when he realised that except for Paralee he had seen no Negro since yesterday afternoon though it would be tomorrow before he would learn that the ones who lived in the Hollow and Freedmantown hadn't come to work at all since Saturday night: nor on the Square either, not even in the barbershop where Sunday morning was the bootblack's best day shining shoes and

brushing clothes and running errands and drawing baths for the bachelor truckdrivers and garagehands who lived in rented rooms and the young men and the ones not so young who worked hard all week in the poolhall and the sheriff really had finally got back to town and had even torn himself away from his Sunday to go for Lucas: listening: hearing the talk: a dozen of them who had hurried out to Fraser's store yesterday afternoon and returned empty-handed (and he gathered one car full had even gone back last night, yawning and lounging now and complaining of lack of sleep: and that to be added to Lucas' account too) and he had heard all this before too and had even thought of it himself before that:

'I wonder if Hampton took a shovel with him. That's all he's going to need.'

'They'll lend him a shovel out there.'

'Yes—if there's anything to bury. They have gasoline even in Beat Four.'

'I thought old Skipworth was going to take care of that.'

'Sure. But that's Beat Four. They'll do what Skipworth tells them as long as he's got the nigger. But he's going to turn him over to Hampton. That's when it'll happen. Hope Hampton might be sheriff in Yoknapatawpha County but he's just another man in Beat Four.'

'No. They wont do nothing today. They're burying Vinson this afternoon and to burn a nigger right while the funeral's going on wouldn't be respectful to Vinson.'

'That's so. It'll probably be tonight.'

'On Sunday night?'

'Is that the Gowries' fault? Lucas ought to thought of that before he picked out Saturday to kill Vinson on.'

'I don't know about that. Hope Hampton's going to be a hard man to take a prisoner away from too.'

'A nigger murderer? Who in this county or state either is going to help him protect a nigger that shoots white men in the back?'

'Or the South either.'

'Yes. Or the South either.' He had heard it all before: outside again now: only his uncle might decide to come to town before time to go for the noon mail at the postoffice and if his uncle didn't see him then he really could tell his mother he didn't know where he was and of course he thought first of the empty office but if he went there that's exactly where his uncle would come too: because—and he remembered again that he had forgot to give Highboy the extra feed this morning too but it was too late now and besides he was going to carry feed with him anyway—he knew exactly what he was going to do: the sheriff had left town about nine o'clock; the constable's house was fifteen miles away on a gravel road not too good but the sheriff should certainly go there and be back with Lucas by noon even if he stopped to make a few votes while there; long before that time he would go home and saddle Highboy and tie a sack of feed behind the saddle and turn him in a straight line in the opposite direction from Fraser's store and ride in that one undeviable direction for twelve hours which would be about midnight tonight and feed Highboy and rest him until daylight or even longer if he decided to and then ride the twelve hours back which would be eighteen actually or maybe even twenty-four or even thirty-six but at least all over finished done, no more fury and outrage to have to lie in bed with like trying to put yourself to sleep counting sheep and he turned the corner and went along the opposite side of the street and under the shed in front of the closed blacksmith shop, the heavy double wooden doors not locked with a hasp or latch but with a padlocked chain passed through an augerhole in each one so that the slack of the chain created an insag almost like an alcove; standing in it nobody could have seen him from either up the street or down it nor even passing along it (which would not be his mother anyway today) unless they stopped to look and now the bells began ringing in mellow

unhurried discordant strophe and antistrophe from steeple to pigeonswirled steeple across the town, streets and Square one sudden decorous flow of men in their dark suits and women in silks and parasols and girls and young men two and two, flowing and decorous beneath that mellow uproar into that musical clamor: gone, Square and street empty again though still the bells rang on for a while yet, sky-dwellers, groundless denizens of the toplevel air too high too far insentient to the crawling earth then ceasing stroke by hasteless stroke from the subterrene shudder of organs and the cool frantic monotone of the settled pigeons. Two years ago his uncle had told him that there was nothing wrong with cursing; on the contrary it was not only useful but substituteless but like everything else valuable it was precious only because the supply was limited and if you wasted it on nothing on its urgent need you might find yourself bankrupt so he said What the hell am I doing here then answered himself the obvious answer: not to see Lucas, he had seen Lucas but so that Lucas could see him again if he so wished, to look back at him not just from the edge of mere uniqueness death but from the gasoline-roar of apotheosis. Because he was free. Lucas was no longer his responsibility, he was no longer Lucas' keeper; Lucas himself had discharged him.

Then suddenly the empty street was full of men. Yet there were not many of them, not two dozen, some suddenly and quietly from nowhere. Yet they seemed to fill it, block it, render it suddenly interdicted as though not that nobody could pass them, pass through it, use it as a street but that nobody would dare, would even approach near enough to essay the gambit as people stay well away from a sign saying High Voltage or Explosive. He knew, recognized them all; some of them he had even seen and listened to in the barbershop two hours ago—the young men or men under forty, bachelors, the homeless who had the Saturday and Sunday baths in the barbershop—truckdrivers and garagehands, the oiler from the cotton gin, a sodajerker from the drugstore and the ones who could be seen all week long in or around the poolhall who did nothing at all that anyone knew, who owned automobiles and spent money nobody really knew exactly how they earned on weekends in Memphis or New Orleans brothels—the men who his uncle said were in every little Southern town, who never really

led mobs nor even instigated them but were always the nucleus of them because of their mass availability. Then he saw the car; he recognised it too even in the distance without knowing or for that matter stopping to wonder how, himself moving out of his concealing doorway into the street and then across it to the edge of the crowd which made no sound but just stood there blocking the sidewalk beside the jail fence and overflowing into the street while the car came up not fast but quite deliberately, almost decorously as a car should move on Sunday morning, and drew in to the curb in front of the jail and stopped. A deputy was driving it. He made no move to get out. Then the rear door opened and the sheriff emerged—a big, a tremendous man with no fat and little hard pale eyes in a cold almost bland pleasant face who without even glancing at them turned and held the door open. Then Lucas got out, slowly and stiffly, exactly like a man who has spent the night chained to a bedpost, fumbling a little and bumping or at least raking his head against the top of the door so that as he emerged his crushed hat tumbled from his head onto the pavement almost under his feet. And that was the first time he had ever seen Lucas without the hat on and in the same second he realised that with the possible exception of Edmonds they there in the street watching him were probably the only white people in the county who had ever seen him uncovered: watching as, still bent over as he had emerged from the car, Lucas began to reach stiffly for the hat. But already in one vast yet astonishingly supple stoop the sheriff had picked it up and handed it back to Lucas who still bent over seemed to fumble at the hat too. Yet almost at once the hat was creased back into its old shape and now Lucas was standing up, erect except for his head, his face as he brushed the hat back and forth against the sleeve of his forearm rapid and light and deft as you stroke a razor. Then his head, his face went back and up too and in a motion not quite sweeping he set the hat back on his head at the old angle which the hat itself seemed to assume as if he had flung it up, and erect now in the black suit crumpled too from whatever night he had spent (there was a long grimed smear down one entire side from shoulder to ankle as if he had been lying on an unswept floor a long time in one position without being able to change it) Lucas looked at them for the first time and he thought Now. He will see me now and then he thought He saw me. And that's all and then he

thought He hasn't seen anybody because the face was not even looking at them but just toward them, arrogant and calm and with no more defiance in it than fear: detached, impersonal, almost musing, intractable and composed, the eyes blinking a little in the sunlight even after the sound, an indraw of breath went up from somewhere in the crowd and a single voice said:

'Knock it off again, Hope. Take his head too this time.'

'You boys get out of here,' the sheriff said. 'Go back to the barbershop:' turning, saying to Lucas: 'All right. Come on.' And that was all, the face for another moment looking not at them but just toward them, the sheriff already walking toward the jail door when Lucas turned at last to follow him and by hurrying a little he could even get Highboy saddled and be out of the lot before his mother began to send Aleck Sander to look for him to come and eat dinner. Then he saw Lucas stop and turn and he was wrong because Lucas even knew where he was in the crowd before he turned, looking straight at him before he got turned around even, speaking to him:

'You, young man,' Lucas said. 'Tell your uncle I wants to see him:' then turned again and walked on after the sheriff, still a little stiffly in the smeared black suit, the hat arrogant and pale in the sunlight, the voice in the crowd saying:

'Lawyer hell. He wont even need an undertaker when them Gowries get through with him tonight:' walking on past the sheriff who himself had stopped now and was looking back at them, saying in his mild cold bland heatless voice:

'I told you folks once to get out of here. I aint going to tell you again.'

Chapter Three

So if he had gone straight home from the barbershop this morning and saddled Highboy when he first thought of it he would be ten hours away by now, probably fifty miles.

There were no bells now. What people on the street now would have been going to the less formal more intimate evening prayer-meeting, walking decorously across the shadow-bitten darkness from streetlamp to streetlamp; so in keeping with the Sabbath's still suspension that he and his uncle would have been passing them steadily, recognising them yards ahead without knowing or even pausing to speculate on when or how or why they had done so—not by silhouette nor even the voice needed: the presence, the aura perhaps; perhaps merely the juxtaposition: this living entity at this point at this moment on this day, as is all you need to recognise the people with, among whom you have lived all your life—stepping off the concrete onto the bordering grass to pass them, speaking (his uncle) to them by name, perhaps exchanging a phrase, a sentence then on, onto the concrete again.

But tonight the street was empty. The very houses themselves looked close and watchful and tense as though the people who lived in them, who on this soft May night (those who had not gone to church) would have been sitting on the dark galleries for a little while after supper in rocking chairs or porchswings, talking quietly among themselves or perhaps talking from gallery to gallery when the houses were close enough. But tonight they passed only one man and he was not walking but standing just inside the front gate to a small neat shoebox of a house built last year between two other houses already close enough together to hear one another's toilets flush (his uncle had explained that: 'When you were born and raised and lived all your life where you cant hear anything but owls at night and roosters at dawn and on damp days when sound carries your nearest neighbor chopping wood two miles away, you like to live where you can hear and smell people on either side of you every time they flush a drain or open a can of salmon or of soup.'), himself darker than shadow and certainly stiller—a countryman who had moved to town a year ago and now owned a small shabby side street grocery whose customers were mostly Negroes, whom they had not even seen until they were almost on him though he had already recognised them or at least his uncle some distance away and was waiting for them, already speaking to his uncle before they came abreast of him:

‘Little early, aint you, Lawyer? Them Beat Four folks have got to milk and then chop wood to cook breakfast tomorrow with before they can eat supper and get in to town.’

‘Maybe they’ll decide to stay at home on a Sunday night,’ his uncle said pleasantly, passing on: whereupon the man said almost exactly what the man in the barbershop had said this morning (and he remembered his uncle saying once how little of vocabulary man really needed to get comfortably and even efficiently through his life, how not only in the individual but within his whole type and race and kind a few simple clichés served his few simple passions and needs and lusts):

‘Sho now. It aint their fault it’s Sunday. That sonofabitch ought to thought of that before he taken to killing white men on a Saturday afternoon.’ Then he called after them as they went on, raising his voice: ‘My wife aint feeling good tonight, and besides I dont want to stand around up there just looking at the front of that jail. But tell um to holler if they need help.’

‘I expect they know already they can depend on you, Mr Lilley,’ his uncle said. They went on. ‘You see?’ his uncle said. ‘He has nothing against what he calls niggers. If you ask him, he will probably tell you he likes them even better than some white folks he knows and he will believe it. They are probably constantly beating him out of a few cents here and there in his store and probably even picking up things—packages of chewing gum or bluing or a banana or a can of sardines or a pair of shoelaces or a bottle of hair-straightener—under their coats and aprons and he knows it; he probably even gives them things free of charge—the bones and spoiled meat out of his butcher’s icebox and spoiled candy and lard. All he requires is that they act like niggers. Which is exactly what Lucas is doing: blew his top and murdered a white man—which Mr Lilley is probably convinced all Negroes want to do—and now the white people will take him out and burn him, all regular and in order and themselves acting exactly as he is convinced Lucas would wish them to act: like white folks; both of them observing implicitly the rules: the nigger acting like a nigger and the white folks

acting like white folks and no real hard feelings on either side (since Mr Lilley is not a Gowrie) once the fury is over; in fact Mr Lilley would probably be one of the first to contribute cash money toward Lucas' funeral and the support of his widow and children if he had them. Which proves again how no man can cause more grief than that one clinging blindly to the vices of his ancestors.'

Now they could see the Square, empty too—the amphitheatric lightless stores, the slender white pencil of the Confederate monument against the mass of the courthouse looming in columned upsoar to the dim quadruple face of the clock lighted each by a single faint bulb with a quality as intransigent against those four fixed mechanical shouts of adjuration and warning as the glow of a firefly. Then the jail and at that moment, with a flash and glare and wheel of lights and a roar of engine at once puny against the vast night and the empty town yet insolent too, a car rushed from nowhere and circled the Square; a voice, a young man's voice squalled from it—no words, not even a shout: a squall significant and meaningless—and the car rushed on around the Square, completing the circle back to nowhere and died away. They turned in at the jail.

It was of brick, square, proportioned, with four brick columns in shallow bas-relief across the front and even a brick cornice under the eaves because it was old, built in a time when people took time to build even jails with grace and care and he remembered how his uncle had said once that not courthouses nor even churches but jails were the true records of a county's, a community's history, since not only the cryptic forgotten initials and words and even phrases cries of defiance and indictment scratched into the walls but the very bricks and stones themselves held, not in solution but in suspension, intact and biding and potent and indestructible, the agonies and shames and griefs with which hearts long since unmarked and unremembered dust had strained and perhaps burst. Which was certainly true of this one because it and one of the churches were the oldest buildings in the town, the courthouse and everything else on or in the Square having been burned to rubble by Federal occupation forces after a battle in 1864. Because scratched into one of the panes of the fanlight beside

the door was a young girl's single name, written by her own hand into the glass with a diamond in that same year and sometimes two or three times a year he would go up onto the gallery to look at it, it cryptic now in reverse, not for a sense of the past but to realise again the eternity, the deathlessness and changelessness of youth—the name of one of the daughters of the jailer of that time (and his uncle who had for everything an explanation not in facts but long since beyond dry statistics into something far more moving because it was truth: which moved the heart and had nothing whatever to do with what mere provable information said, had told him this too: how this part of Mississippi was new then, as a town a settlement a community less than fifty years old, and all the men who had come into it less long ago almost than even the oldest's lifetime were working together to secure it, doing the base jobs along with the splendid ones not for pay or politics but to shape a land for their posterity, so that a man could be the jailer then or the innkeeper or farrier or vegetable peddler yet still be what the lawyer and planter and doctor and parson called a gentleman) who stood at that window that afternoon and watched the battered remnant of a Confederate brigade retreat through the town, meeting suddenly across that space the eyes of the ragged unshaven lieutenant who led one of the broken companies, scratching into the glass not his name also, not only because a young girl of that time would never have done that but because she didn't know his name then, let alone that six months later he would be her husband.

In fact it still looked like a residence with its balustraded wooden gallery stretching across the front of the lower floor. But above that the brick wall was windowless except for the single tall crossbarred rectangle and he thought again of the Sunday nights which seemed now to belong to a time as dead as Nineveh when from supertime until the jailer turned the lights out and yelled up the stairs for them to shut up, the dark limber hands would lie in the grimed interstices while the mellow untroubled repentless voices would shout down to the women in the aprons of cooks or nurses and the girls in their flash cheap clothes from the mailorder houses or the other young men who had not been caught yet or had been caught and freed yesterday, gathered along the street. But not tonight and even the room behind it

was dark though it was not yet eight o'clock and he could see, imagine them not huddled perhaps but certainly all together, within elbow's touch whether they were actually touching or not and certainly quiet, not laughing tonight nor talking either, sitting in the dark and watching the top of the stairs because this would not be the first time when to mobs of white men not only all black cats were gray but they didn't always bother to count them either.

And the front door was open, standing wide to the street which he had never seen before even in summer although the ground floor was the jailer's living quarters, and tilted in a chair against the back wall so that he faced the door in full sight of the street, was a man who was not the jailer nor even one of the sheriff's deputies either. Because he had recognised him too: Will Legate, who lived on a small farm two miles from town and was one of the best woodsmen, the finest shot and the best deer-hunter in the county, sitting in the tilted chair holding the colored comic section of today's Memphis paper, with leaning against the wall beside him not the hand-worn rifle with which he had killed more deer (and even running rabbits with it) than even he remembered but a double-barrelled shotgun, who apparently without even lowering or moving the paper had already seen and recognised them even before they turned in at the gate and was now watching them steadily as they came up the walk and mounted the steps and crossed the gallery and entered: at which moment the jailer himself emerged from a door to the right—a snuffy untidy potbellied man with a harried concerned outraged face, wearing a heavy pistol holstered onto a cartridge belt around his waist which looked as uncomfortable and out of place as a silk hat or a fifth-century iron slavecollar, who shut the door behind him, already crying at his uncle:

'He wont even shut and lock the front door! Just setting there with that durn funny paper waiting for anybody that wants to to walk right in!'

'I'm doing what Mr Hampton told me to,' Legate said in his pleasant equable voice.

‘Does Hampton think that funny paper’s going to stop them folks from Beat Four?’ the jailer cried.

‘I don’t think he’s worrying about Beat Four yet,’ Legate said still pleasantly and equably. ‘This here’s just for local consumption now.’

His uncle glanced at Legate. ‘It seems to have worked. We saw the car—or one of them—make one trip around the Square as we came up. I suppose it’s been by here too.’

‘Oh, once or twice,’ Legate said. ‘Maybe three times. I really aint paid much mind.’

‘And I hope to hell it keeps on working,’ the jailer said. ‘Because you sure aint going to stop anybody with just that one britch-loader.’

‘Sure,’ Legate said. ‘I don’t expect to stop them. If enough folks get their minds made up and keep them made up, aint anything likely to stop them from what they think they want to do. But then, I got you and that pistol to help me.’

‘Me?’ the jailer cried. ‘Me get in the way of them Gowries and Ingrums for seventy-five dollars a month? Just for one nigger? And if you aint a fool, you wont neither.’

‘Oh I got to,’ Legate said in his easy pleasant voice. ‘I got to resist. Mr Hampton’s paying me five dollars for it.’ Then to his uncle: ‘I reckon you want to see him.’

‘Yes,’ his uncle said. ‘If it’s all right with Mr Tubbs.’

The jailer stared at his uncle, irate and harried. ‘So you got to get mixed up in it too. You can’t let well enough alone neither.’ He turned abruptly. ‘Come on:’ and led the way through the door beside which Legate’s chair was tilted, into the back hall where the stairway rose to the upper floor, snapping on the light switch at the foot of the stairs and began to mount them, his uncle then he following while he

watched the hunch and sag of the holster at the jailer's hip. Suddenly the jailer seemed about to stop; even his uncle thought so, stopping too but the jailer went on, speaking over his shoulder: 'Dont mind me. I'm going to do the best I can; I taken an oath of office too.' His voice rose a little, still calm, just louder: 'But dont think nobody's going to make me admit I like it. I got a wife and two children; what good am I going to be to them if I get myself killed protecting a goddamn stinking nigger?' His voice rose again; it was not calm now: 'And how am I going to live with myself if I let a passel of nogood sonabitches take a prisoner away from me?' Now he stopped and turned on the step above them, higher than both, his face once more harried and frantic, his voice frantic and outraged: 'Better for everybody if them folks had took him as soon as they laid hands on him yesterday——

'But they didn't,' his uncle said. 'I dont think they will. And if they do, it wont really matter. They either will or they wont and if they dont it will be all right and if they do we will do the best we can, you and Mr Hampton and Legate and the rest of us, what we have to do, what we can do. So we dont need to worry about it. You see?'

'Yes,' the jailer said. Then he turned and went on, unsnapping his keyring from his belt under the pistol belt, to the heavy oak door which closed off the top of the stairs (It was one solid handhewn piece over two inches thick, locked with a heavy modern padlock in a handwrought iron bar through two iron slots which like the heavy risette-shaped hinges were handwrought too, hammered out over a hundred years ago in the blacksmith shop across the street where he had stood yesterday; one day last summer a stranger, a city man, an architect who reminded him somehow of his uncle, hatless and tieless, in tennis shoes and a pair of worn flannel trousers and what was left of a case of champagne in a convertible-top car which must have cost three thousand dollars, driving not through town but into it, not hurting anyone but just driving the car up onto the pavement and across it through a plate glass window, quite drunk, quite cheerful, with less than fifty cents in cash in his pocket but all sorts of identification cards and a check folder whose stubs showed a balance in a New York bank of over six thousand dollars, who insisted on being put in jail even

though the marshal and the owner of the window both were just trying to persuade him to go to the hotel and sleep it off so he could write a check for the window and the wall: until the marshal finally put him in jail where he went to sleep at once like a baby and the garage sent for the car and the next morning the jailer telephoned the marshal at five o'clock to come and get the man out because he had waked the whole household up talking from his cell across to the niggers in the bullpen. So the marshal came and made him leave and then he wanted to go out with the street gang to work and they wouldn't let him do that and his car was ready too but he still wouldn't leave, at the hotel that night and two nights later his uncle even brought him to supper, where he and his uncle talked for three hours about Europe and Paris and Vienna and he and his mother listening too though his father had excused himself: and still there two days after that, still trying from his uncle and the mayor and the board of aldermen and at last the board of supervisors themselves to buy the whole door or if they wouldn't sell that, at least the bar and slots and the hinges.) and unlocked it and swung it back.

But already they had passed out of the world of man, men: people who worked and had homes and raised families and tried to make a little more money than they perhaps deserved by fair means of course or at least by legal, to spend a little on fun and still save something against old age. Because even as the oak door swung back there seemed to rush out and down at him the stale breath of all human degradation and shame—a smell of creosote and excrement and stale vomit and incorrigibility and defiance and repudiation like something palpable against the thrust and lift of their bodies as they mounted the last steps and into a passage which was actually a part of the main room, the bullpen, cut off from the rest of the room by a wall of wire mesh like a chicken run or a dog-kennel, inside which in tiered bunks against the farther wall lay five Negroes, motionless, their eyes closed but no sound of snoring, no sound of any sort, lying there immobile orderly and composed under the dusty glare of the single shadeless bulb as if they had been embalmed, the jailer stopping again, his own hands gripped into the mesh while he glared at the motionless shapes. 'Look at them,' the jailer said in that voice too loud, too thin, just under

hysteria: 'Peaceful as lambs but aint a damned one of them asleep. And I dont blame them; with a mob of white men boiling in here at midnight with pistols and cans of gasoline.—Come on,' he said and turned and went on. Just beyond there was a door in the mesh, not padlocked but just hooked with a hasp and staple such as you might see on a dog-kennel or a corn crib but the jailer passed it.

'You put him in the cell, did you?' his uncle said.

'Hampton's orders,' the jailer said over his shoulder. 'I dont know what the next white man that figgers he cant rest good until he kills somebody is going to think about it. I taken all the blankets off the cot though.'

'Maybe because he wont be here long enough to have to go to sleep?' his uncle said.

'Ha ha,' the jailer said in that strained high harsh voice without mirth: 'Ha ha ha ha:' and following behind his uncle he thought how of all human pursuits murder has the most deadly need of privacy; how man will go to almost any lengths to preserve the solitude in which he evacuates or makes love but he will go to any length for that in which he takes life, even to homicide, yet by no act can he more completely and irrevocably destroy it: a modern steel barred door this time with a built-in lock as large as a woman's handbag which the jailer unlocked with another key on the ring and then turned, the sound of his feet almost as rapid as running back down the corridor until the sound of the oak door at the head of the stairs cut them off, and beyond it the cell lighted by another single dim dusty flyspecked bulb behind a wire screen cupped to the ceiling, not much larger than a broom closet and in fact just wide enough for the double bunk against the wall, from both beds of which not just the blankets but the mattresses too had been stripped, he and his uncle entering and still all he saw yet was the first thing he had seen: the hat and the black coat hanging neatly from a nail in the wall: and he would remember afterward how he thought in a gasp, a surge of relief: They've already got him. He's gone. It's too late. It's already over now. Because he didn't know what he had expected,

except that it was not this: a careful spread of newspaper covering neatly the naked springs of the lower cot and another section as carefully placed on the upper one so it would shield his eyes from the light and Lucas himself lying on the spread papers, asleep, on his back, his head pillowed on one of his shoes and his hands folded on his breast, quite peacefully or as peacefully as old people sleep, his mouth open and breathing in faint shallow jerky gasps; and he stood in an almost unbearable surge not merely of outrage but of rage, looking down at the face which for the first time, defenceless at last for a moment, revealed its age, and the lax gnarled old man's hands which only yesterday had sent a bullet into the back of another human being, lying still and peaceful on the bosom of the old-fashioned collarless boiled white shirt closed at the neck with the oxidising brass button shaped like an arrow and almost as large as the head of a small snake, thinking: He's just a nigger after all for all his high nose and his stiff neck and his gold watch-chain and refusing to mean mister to anybody even when he says it. Only a nigger could kill a man, let alone shoot him in the back, and then sleep like a baby as soon as he found something flat enough to lie down on; still looking at him when without moving otherwise Lucas closed his mouth and his eyelids opened, the eyes staring up for another second, then still without the head moving at all the eyeballs turned until Lucas was looking straight at his uncle but still not moving: just lying there looking at him.

'Well, old man,' his uncle said. 'You played hell at last.' Then Lucas moved. He sat up stiffly and swung his legs stiffly over the edge of the cot, picking one of them up by the knee between his hands and swinging it around as you open or close a sagging gate, groaning, grunting not just frankly and unabashed and aloud but comfortably, as the old grunt and groan with some long familiar minor stiffness so used and accustomed as to be no longer even an ache and which if they were ever actually cured of it, they would be bereft and lost; he listening and watching still in that rage and now amazement too at the murderer not merely in the shadow of the gallows but of a lynch-mob, not only taking time to groan over a stiffness in his back but doing it as if he had all the long rest of a natural life in which to be checked each time he moved by the old familiar catch.

‘Looks like it,’ Lucas said. ‘That’s why I sent for you. What you going to do with me?’

‘Me?’ his uncle said. ‘Nothing. My name aint Gowrie. It aint even Beat Four.’

Moving stiffly again Lucas bent and peered about his feet, then he reached under the cot and drew out the other shoe and sat up again and began to turn creakily and stiffly to look behind him when his uncle reached and took the first shoe from the cot and dropped it beside the other. But Lucas didn’t put them on. Instead he sat again, immobile, his hands on his knees, blinking. Then with one hand he made a gesture which completely dismissed Gowries, mob, vengeance, holocaust and all. ‘I’ll worry about that when they walks in here,’ he said. ‘I mean the law. Aint you the county lawyer?’

‘Oh,’ his uncle said. ‘It’s the District Attorney that’ll hang you or send you to Parchman—not me.’

Lucas was still blinking, not rapidly: just steadily. He watched him. And suddenly he realised that Lucas was not looking at his uncle at all and apparently had not been for three or four seconds.

‘I see,’ Lucas said. ‘Then you can take my case.’

‘Take your case? Defend you before the judge?’

‘I’m gonter pay you,’ Lucas said. ‘You dont need to worry.’

‘I dont defend murderers who shoot people in the back,’ his uncle said.

Again Lucas made the gesture with one of the dark gnarled hands. ‘Let’s forgit the trial. We aint come to it yet.’ And now he saw that Lucas was watching his uncle, his head lowered so that he was watching his uncle upward from beneath through the grizzled tufts of his eyebrows—a look shrewd secret and intent. Then Lucas said: ‘I wants to hire

somebody—’ and stopped. And watching him, he thought remembered an old lady, dead now, a spinster, a neighbor who wore a dyed transformation and had always on a pantry shelf a big bowl of homemade teacakes for all the children on the street, who one summer (he couldn’t have been over seven or eight then) taught all of them to play Five Hundred: sitting at the card table on her screened side gallery on hot summer mornings and she would wet her fingers and take a card from her hand and lay it on the table, her hand not still poised over it of course but just lying nearby until the next player revealed exposed by some movement or gesture of triumph or exultation or maybe by just simple increased hard breathing his intention to trump or overplay it, whereupon she would say quickly: ‘Wait. I picked up the wrong one’ and take up the card and put it back into her hand and play another one. That was exactly what Lucas had done. He had sat still before but now he was absolutely immobile. He didn’t even seem to be breathing.

‘Hire somebody?’ his uncle said. ‘You’ve got a lawyer. I had already taken your case before I came in here. I’m going to tell you what to do as soon as you have told me what happened.’

‘No,’ Lucas said. ‘I wants to hire somebody. It dont have to be a lawyer.’

Now it was his uncle who stared at Lucas. ‘To do what?’

He watched them. Now it was no childhood’s game of stakeless Five Hundred. It was more like the poker games he had overlooked. ‘Are you or aint you going to take the job?’ Lucas said.

‘So you aint going to tell me what you want me to do until after I have agreed to do it,’ his uncle said. ‘All right,’ his uncle said. ‘Now I’m going to tell you what to do. Just exactly what happened out there yesterday?’

‘So you dont want the job,’ Lucas said. ‘You aint said yes or no yet.’

'No!' his uncle said, harsh, too loud, catching himself but already speaking again before he had brought his voice back down to a sort of furious explicit calm: 'Because you aint got any job to offer anybody. You're in jail, depending on the grace of God to keep those damned Gowries from dragging you out of here and hanging you to the first lamp post they come to. Why they ever let you get to town in the first place I still dont understand——'

'Nemmine that now,' Lucas said. 'What I needs is——'

'Nemmine that!' his uncle said. 'Tell the Gowries to never mind it when they bust in here tonight. Tell Beat Four to just forget it——' He stopped; again with an effort you could almost see he brought his voice back to that furious patience. He drew a deep breath and expelled it. 'Now. Tell me exactly what happened yesterday.'

For another moment Lucas didn't answer, sitting on the bunk, his hands on his knees, intractable and composed, no longer looking at his uncle, working his mouth faintly as if he were tasting something. He said: 'They was two folks, partners in a sawmill. Leastways they was buying the lumber as the sawmill cut it——'

'Who were they?' his uncle said.

'Vinson Gowrie was one of um.'

His uncle stared at Lucas for a long moment. But his voice was quite calm now. 'Lucas,' he said, 'has it ever occurred to you that if you just said mister to white people and said it like you meant it, you might not be sitting here now?'

'So I'm to commence now,' Lucas said. 'I can start off by saying mister to the folks that drags me out of here and builds a fire under me.'

'Nothing's going to happen to you—until you go before the judge,' his uncle said. 'Dont you know that even Beat Four dont take liberties with Mr Hampton—at least not here in town?'

‘Shurf Hampton’s home in bed now.’

‘But Mr Will Legate’s sitting downstairs with a shotgun.’

‘I aint ’quainted with no Will Legate.’

‘The deer-hunter? The man that can hit a running rabbit with a thirty-thirty rifle?’

‘Hah,’ Lucas said. ‘Them Gowries aint deer. They might be cattymounts and panthers but they aint deer.’

‘All right,’ his uncle said. ‘Then I’ll stay here if you’ll feel better. Now. Go on. Vinson Gowrie and another man were buying lumber together. What other man?’

‘Vinson Gowrie’s the only one that’s public yet.’

‘And he got public by being shot in broad daylight in the back,’ his uncle said. ‘Well, that’s one way to do it.—All right,’ his uncle said. ‘Who was the other man?’

Lucas didn’t answer. He didn’t move; he might not even have heard, sitting peaceful and inattentive, not even really waiting: just sitting there while his uncle watched him. Then his uncle said:

‘All right. What were they doing with it?’

‘They was yarding it up as the mill cut it, gonter sell it all at once when the sawing was finished. Only the other man was hauling it away at night, coming in late after dark with a truck and picking up a load and hauling it over to Glasgow or Hollymount and selling it and putting the money in his pocket.’

‘How do you know?’

'I seen um. Watched um,' Nor did he doubt this for a moment because he remembered Ephraim, Paralee's father before he died, an old man, a widower who would pass most of the day dozing and waking in a rocking chair on Paralee's gallery in summer and in front of the fire in winter and at night would walk the roads, not going anywhere, just moving, at times five and six miles from town before he would return at dawn to doze and wake all day in the chair again.

'All right,' his uncle said. 'Then what?'

'That's all,' Lucas said. 'He was just stealing a load of lumber every night or so.'

His uncle stared at Lucas for perhaps ten seconds. He said in a voice of calm, almost hushed amazement: 'So you took your pistol and went to straighten it out. You, a nigger, took a pistol and went to rectify a wrong between two white men. What did you expect? What else did you expect?'

'Nemmine expecting,' Lucas said. 'I wants——'

'You went to the store,' his uncle said, 'only you happened to find Vinson Gowrie first and followed him into the woods and told him his partner was robbing him and naturally he cursed you and called you a liar whether it was true or not, naturally he would have to do that; maybe he even knocked you down and walked on and you shot him in the back——'

'Never nobody knocked me down,' Lucas said.

'So much the worse,' his uncle said. 'So much the worse for you. It's not even self-defense. You just shot him in the back. And then you stood there over him with the fired pistol in your pocket and let the white folks come up and grab you. And if it hadn't been for that little shrunk-up rheumatic constable who had no business being there in the first place and in the second place had no business whatever, at the rate of a dollar a prisoner every time he delivered a subpoena or served a

warrant, having guts enough to hold off that whole damn Beat Four for eighteen hours until Hope Hampton saw fit or remembered or got around to bringing you in to jail——holding off that whole countryside that you nor all the friends you could drum up in a hundred years——’

‘I aint got friends,’ Lucas said with stern and inflexible pride, and then something else though his uncle was already talking:

‘You’re damned right you haven’t. And if you ever had that pistol shot would have blown them to kingdom come too—— What?’ his uncle said. ‘What did you say?’

‘I said I pays my own way,’ Lucas said.

‘I see,’ his uncle said. ‘You dont use friends; you pay cash. Yes. I see. Now you listen to me. You’ll go before the grand jury tomorrow. They’ll indict you. Then if you like I’ll have Mr Hampton move you to Mottstown or even further away than that, until court convenes next month. Then you’ll plead guilty; I’ll persuade the District Attorney to let you do that because you’re an old man and you never were in trouble before; I mean as far as the judge and the District Attorney will know since they dont live within fifty miles of Yoknapatawpha County. Then they wont hang you; they’ll send you to the penitentiary; you probably wont live long enough to be paroled but at least the Gowries cant get to you there. Do you want me to stay in here with you tonight?’

‘I reckon not,’ Lucas said. ‘They kept me up all last night and I’m gonter try to get some sleep. If you stay here you’ll talk till morning.’

‘Right,’ his uncle said harshly, then to him: ‘Come on:’ already moving toward the door. Then his uncle stopped. ‘Is there anything you want?’

‘You might send me some tobacco,’ Lucas said. ‘If them Gowries leaves me time to smoke it.’

‘Tomorrow,’ his uncle said. ‘I dont want to keep you awake tonight:’ and went on, he following, his uncle letting him pass first through the

door so that he stepped aside in his turn and stood looking back into the cell while his uncle came through the door and drew it after him, the heavy steel plunger crashing into its steel groove with a thick oily sound of irrefutable finality like that ultimate cosmological doom itself when as his uncle said man's machines had at last effaced and obliterated him from the earth and, purposeless now to themselves with nothing left to destroy, closed the last carborundum-grooved door upon their own progenitorless apotheosis behind one clockless lock responsive only to the last stroke of eternity, his uncle going on, his feet ringing and echoing down the corridor and then the sharp rattle of his knuckles on the oak door while he and Lucas still looked at one another through the steel bars, Lucas standing too now in the middle of the floor beneath the light and looking at him with whatever it was in his face so that he thought for a second that Lucas had spoken aloud. But he hadn't, he was making no sound: just looking at him with that mute patient urgency until the jailer's feet thumped nearer and nearer on the stairs and the slotted bar on the door rasped back.

And the jailer locked the bar again and they passed Legate still with his funny paper in the tilted chair beside the shotgun facing the open door, then outside, down the walk to the gate and the street, following through the gate where his uncle had already turned toward home: stopping, thinking a nigger a murderer who shoots white people in the back and aint even sorry.

He said: 'I imagine I'll find Skeets McGowan loafing somewhere on the Square. He's got a key to the drugstore. I'll take Lucas some tobacco tonight.' His uncle stopped.

'It can wait till morning,' his uncle said.

'Yes,' he said, feeling his uncle watching him, not even wondering what he would do if his uncle said no, not even waiting really, just standing there.

'All right,' his uncle said. 'Dont be too long.' So he could have moved then. But still he didn't.

'I thought you said nothing would happen tonight.'

'I still dont think it will,' his uncle said. 'But you cant tell. People like the Gowries dont attach a great deal of importance to death or dying. But they do put a lot of stock in the dead and how they died—particularly their own. If you get the tobacco, let Tubbs carry it up to him and you come on home.'

So he didn't have to say even yes this time, his uncle turning first then he turned and walked toward the Square, walking on until the sound of his uncle's feet had ceased, then standing until his uncle's black silhouette had changed to the white gleam of his linen suit and then that faded beyond the last arclight and if he had gone on home and got Highboy as soon as he recognised the sheriff's car this morning that would be eight hours and almost forty miles, turning then and walking back toward the gate with Legate's eyes watching him, already recognising him across the top of the funny paper even before he reached the gate and if he just went straight on now he could follow the lane behind the hedge and across into the lot and saddle Highboy and go out by the pasture gate and turn his back on Jefferson and nigger murderers and all and let Highboy go as fast as he wanted to go and as far as he wanted to go even when he had blown himself at last and agreed to walk, just so his tail was still turned to Jefferson and nigger murderers: through the gate and up the walk and across the gallery and again the jailer came quickly through the door at the right, his expression already giving way to the one of harried outrage.

'Again,' the jailer said. 'Dont you never get enough?'

'I forgot something,' he said.

'Let it wait till morning,' the jailer said.

'Let him get it now,' Legate said in his equable drawl. 'If he leaves it there till morning it might get trompled on.' So the jailer turned; again

they mounted the stairs, again the jailer unlocked the bar across the oak door.

‘Never mind the other one,’ he said. ‘I can attend to it through the bars:’ and didn’t wait, the door closed behind him, he heard the bar slide back into the slot but still all he had to do was just to rap on it, hearing the jailer’s feet going away back down the stairs but even then all he had to do was just to yell loud and bang on the floor and Legate anyway would hear him, thinking Maybe he will remind me of that goddamn plate of collards and sidemeat or maybe he’ll even tell me I’m all he’s got, all that’s left and that will be enough—walking fast, then the steel door and Lucas had not moved, still standing in the middle of the cell beneath the light, watching the door when he came up to it and stopped and said in a voice as harsh as his uncle’s had ever been:

‘All right. What do you want me to do?’

‘Go out there and look at him,’ Lucas said.

‘Go out where and look at who?’ he said. But he understood all right. It seemed to him that he had known all the time what it would be; he thought with a kind of relief So that’s all it is even while his automatic voice was screeching with outraged disbelief: ‘Me? Me?’ It was like something you have dreaded and feared and dodged for years until it seemed like all your life, then despite everything it happened to you and all it was was just pain, all it did was hurt and so it was all over, all finished, all right.

‘I’ll pay you,’ Lucas said.

So he wasn’t listening, not even to his own voice in amazed incredulous outrage: ‘Me go out there and dig up that grave?’ He wasn’t even thinking anymore So this is what that plate of meat and greens is going to cost me. Because he had already passed that long ago when that something—whatever it was—had held him here five minutes ago looking back across the vast, the almost insuperable chasm between him and the old Negro murderer and saw, heard Lucas saying

something to him not because he was himself, Charles Mallison junior, nor because he had eaten the plate of greens and warmed himself at the fire, but because he alone of all the white people Lucas would have a chance to speak to between now and the moment when he might be dragged out of the cell and down the steps at the end of a rope, would hear the mute unhoping urgency of the eyes. He said:

‘Come here.’ Lucas did so, approaching, taking hold of two of the bars as a child stands inside a fence. Nor did he remember doing so but looking down he saw his own hands holding to two of the bars, the two pairs of hands, the black ones and the white ones, grasping the bars while they faced one another above them. ‘All right,’ he said. ‘Why?’

‘Go and look at him,’ Lucas said. ‘If it’s too late when you get back, I’ll sign you a paper now saying I owes you whatever you think it’s worth.’

But still he wasn’t listening; he knew it: only to himself: ‘I’m to go seventeen miles out there in the dark——’

‘Nine,’ Lucas said. ‘The Gowries buries at Caledonia Chapel. You takes the first right hand up into the hills just beyond the Nine-Mile branch bridge. You can be there in a half-hour in your uncle’s automobile.’

‘——I’m to risk having the Gowries catch me digging up that grave. I aim to know why. I dont even know what I’ll be looking for. Why?’

‘My pistol is a fawty-one Colt,’ Lucas said. Which it would be; the only thing he hadn’t actually known was the calibre—that weapon workable and efficient and well cared for yet as archaic peculiar and unique as the gold toothpick, which had probably (without doubt) been old Carothers McCaslin’s pride a half-century ago.

‘All right,’ he said. ‘Then what?’

‘He wasn’t shot with no fawty-one Colt.’

‘What was he shot with?’

But Lucas didn't answer that, standing there on his side of the steel door, his hands light-clasped and motionless around the two bars, immobile save for the faint movement of his breathing. Nor had he expected Lucas to and he knew that Lucas would never answer that, say any more, any further to any white man, and he knew why, as he knew why Lucas had waited to tell him, a child, about the pistol when he would have told neither his uncle nor the sheriff who would have been the one to open the grave and look at the body; he was surprised that Lucas had come as near as he had to telling his uncle about it and he realised, appreciated again that quality in his uncle which brought people to tell him things they would tell nobody else, even tempting Negroes to tell him what their nature forbade them telling white men: remembering old Ephraim and his mother's ring that summer five years ago—a cheap thing with an imitation stone; two of them in fact, identical, which his mother and her room-mate at Sweetbriar Virginia had saved their allowances and bought and exchanged to wear until death as young girls will, and the room-mate grown and living in California with a daughter of her own at Sweetbriar now and she and his mother had not seen one another in years and possibly never would again yet his mother still kept the ring: then one day it disappeared; he remembered how he would wake late at night and see lights burning downstairs and he would know she was still searching for it: and all this time old Ephraim was sitting in his homemade rocking chair on Paralee's front gallery until one day Ephraim told him that for half a dollar he would find the ring and he gave Ephraim the half dollar and that afternoon he left for a week at a Scout camp and returned and found his mother in the kitchen where she had spread newspapers on the table and emptied the stone crock she and Paralee kept the cornmeal in onto it and she and Paralee were combing through the meal with forks and for the first time in a week he remembered the ring and went back to Paralee's house and there was Ephraim sitting in the chair on the gallery and Ephraim said, 'Hit's under the hawg-trough at your pa's farm:' nor did Ephraim need to tell him how then because he had already remembered by then: Mrs Downs: an old white woman who lived alone in a small filthy shoebox of a house that smelled like a foxden on the edge of town in a settlement of Negro houses, in and out

of which Negroes came and went steadily all day long and without doubt most of the night: who (this not from Paralee who seemed always to not know or at least to have no time at the moment to talk about it, but from Aleck Sander) didn't merely tell fortunes and cure hexes but found things: which was where the half dollar had gone and he believed at once and so implicitly that the ring was now found that he dismissed that phase at once and forever and it was only the thing's secondary and corollary which moved his interest, saying to Ephraim: 'You've known all this week where it was and you didn't even tell them?' and Ephraim looked at him a while, rocking steadily and placidly and sucking at his cold ashfilled pipe with each rock like the sound of a small asthmatic cylinder: 'I mought have told your maw. But she would need help. So I waited for you. Young folks and womens, they aint cluttered. They can listen. But a middle-year man like your paw and your uncle, they cant listen. They aint got time. They're too busy with facks. In fact, you mought bear this in yo mind; someday you mought need it. If you ever needs to get anything done outside the common run, dont waste yo time on the menfolks; get the womens and children to working at it.' And he remembered his father's not rage so much as outrage, his almost furious repudiation, his transference of the whole thing into a realm of assailed embattled moral principle, and even his uncle who until now had had no more trouble than he believing things that all other grown people doubted for the sole reason that they were unreasonable, while his mother went serenely and stubbornly about her preparations to go out to the farm which she hadn't visited in over a year and even his father hadn't seen it since months before the ring was missing and even his uncle refused to drive the car so his father hired a man from the garage and he and his mother went out to the farm and with the help of the overseer found under the trough where the hogs were fed, the ring. Only this was no obscure valueless little ring exchanged twenty years ago between two young girls but the death by shameful violence of a man who would die not because he was a murderer but because his skin was black. Yet this was all Lucas was going to tell him and he knew it was all; he thought in a kind of raging fury: Believe? Believe what? because Lucas was not even asking him to believe anything; he was not even asking a favor, making no last desperate plea to his humanity and pity but was even going to pay him

provided the price was not too high, to go alone seventeen miles (no, nine: he remembered at least that he had heard that now) in the dark and risk being caught violating the grave of a member of a clan of men already at the pitch to commit the absolute of furious and bloody outrage, without even telling him why. Yet he tried it again, as he knew Lucas not only knew he was going to but knew that he knew what answer he would get:

‘What gun was he shot with, Lucas?’ and got exactly what even Lucas knew he had expected:

‘I’m gonter pay you,’ Lucas said. ‘Name yo price at anything in reason and I will pay it.’

He drew a long breath and expelled it while they faced each other through the bars, the bleared old man’s eyes watching him, inscrutable and secret. They were not even urgent now and he thought peacefully He’s not only beat me, he never for one second had any doubt of it. He said: ‘All right. Just for me to look at him wouldn’t do any good, even if I could tell about the bullet. So you see what that means. I’ve got to dig him up, get him out of that hole before the Gowries catch me, and in to town where Mr Hampton can send to Memphis for an expert that can tell about bullets.’ He looked at Lucas, at the old man holding gently to the bars inside the cell and not even looking at him anymore. He drew a long breath again. ‘But the main thing is to get him up out of the ground where somebody can look at him before the’ He looked at Lucas. ‘I’ll have to get out there and dig him up and get back to town before midnight or one oclock and maybe even midnight will be too late. I dont see how I can do it. I cant do it.’

‘I’ll try to wait,’ Lucas said.

Chapter Four

There was a weathered battered second-hand-looking pickup truck parked at the curb in front of the house when he reached home. It was now well past eight oclock; it was a good deal more than a possibility

that there remained less than four hours for his uncle to go to the sheriff's house and convince him and then find a J.P. or whoever they would have to find and wake and then convince too to open the grave (in lieu of permission from the Gowries, which for any reason whatever, worst of all to save a nigger from being burned over a bonfire, the President of the United States himself let alone a country sheriff would never get) and then go out to Caledonia church and dig up the body and get back to town with it in time. Yet this of all nights would be one when a farmer whose stray cow or mule or hog had been impounded by a neighbor who insisted on collecting a dollar pound fee before he would release it, must come in to see his uncle, to sit for an hour in his uncle's study saying yes or no or I reckon not while his uncle talked about crops or politics, one of which his uncle knew nothing about and the other the farmer didn't, until the man would get around to telling what he came for.

But he couldn't stand on ceremony now. He had been walking pretty fast since he left the jail but he was trotting now, catcorner across the lawn, onto the gallery and across it into the hall past the library where his father would still be sitting under one reading lamp with the Memphis paper's Sunday crossword puzzle page and his mother under the other one with the new Book-of-the-Month book, and on back to what his mother used to try to call Gavin's study but which Paralee and Aleck Sander had long since renamed the office so that everyone now called it that. The door was closed; he could hear the murmur of the man's voice beyond it during the second in which without even stopping he rapped twice and at the same time opened the door and entered, already saying:

'Good evening, sir. Excuse me. Uncle Gavin——'

Because the voice was his uncle's; seated opposite his uncle beyond the desk, instead of a man with a shaved sunburned neck in neat tieless Sunday shirt and pants, was a woman in a plain cotton print dress and one of the round faintly dusty-looking black hats set squarely on the top of her head such as his grandmother had used to wear and then he recognised her even before he saw the watch—small gold in a hunting

case suspended by a gold brooch on her flat bosom almost like and in almost exactly the same position as the heart sewn on the breast of the canvas fencing vest—because since his grandmother’s death no other woman in his acquaintance wore or even owned one and in fact he should have recognised the pickup truck: Miss Habersham, whose name was now the oldest which remained in the county. There had been three once: Doctor Habersham and a tavern keeper named Holston and a Huguenot younger son named Grenier who had ridden horseback into the county before its boundaries had ever been surveyed and located and named, when Jefferson was a Chickasaw trading post with a Chickasaw word to designate it out of the trackless wilderness of canebrake and forest of that time but all gone now, vanished except the one even from the county’s spoken recollection: Holston merely the name of the hotel on the Square and few in the county to know or care where the word came from, and the last of the blood of Louis Grenier the elegante, the dilettante, the Paris-educated architect who had practised a little of law but had spent most of his time as a planter and painter (and more amateur as a raiser of food and cotton than with canvas and brush) now warmed the bones of an equable cheerful middleaged man with the mind and face of a child who lived in a half-shed half-den he built himself of discarded boards and pieces of flattened stovepipe and tin cans on the bank of the river twenty miles away, who didn’t know his age and couldn’t write even the Lonnie Grinnup which he now called himself and didn’t even know that the land he squatted on was the last lost scrap of the thousands of acres which his ancestor had been master of and only Miss Habersham remained: a kinless spinster of seventy living in the columned colonial house on the edge of town which had not been painted since her father died and had neither water nor electricity in it, with two Negro servants (and here again something nagged for an instant at his mind his attention but already in the same second gone, not even dismissed: just gone) in a cabin in the back yard, who (the wife) did the cooking while Miss Habersham and the man raised chickens and vegetables and peddled them about town from the pickup truck. Until two years ago they had used a plump aged white horse (it was said to be twenty years old when he first remembered it, with a skin beneath the burnished white hairs as clean and pink as a baby’s) and a buggy. Then they had a

good season or something and Miss Habersham bought the pickup truck second-hand and every morning winter and summer they would be seen about the streets from house to house, Miss Habersham at the wheel in cotton stockings and the round black hat which she had been wearing for at least forty years and the clean print dresses which you could see in the Sears Roebuck catalogues for two dollars and ninety-eight cents with the neat small gold watch pinned to the flat unmammary front and the shoes and the gloves which his mother said were made to her measure in a New York shop and cost thirty and forty dollars a pair for the one and fifteen and twenty for the other, while the Negro man trotted his vast belly in and out of the houses with a basket of bright greens or eggs in one hand and the plucked naked carcass of a chicken in the other;—recognised, remembered, even (his attention) nagged at and already dismissed because there wasn't time, saying rapidly:

'Good evening, Miss Habersham. Excuse me. I've got to speak to Uncle Gavin:' then again to his uncle: 'Uncle Gavin—'

'So is Miss Habersham,' his uncle said quick and immediate, in a tone a voice which in ordinary times he would have recognised at once; at an ordinary time he might even have comprehended the implication of what his uncle had said. But not now. He didn't actually hear it. He wasn't listening. In fact he really didn't have time to talk himself, saying rapid yet calm too, merely urgent and even that only to his uncle because he had already forgotten Miss Habersham, even her presence:

'I've got to speak to you:' and only then stopped not because he had finished, he hadn't even begun yet, but because for the first time he was hearing his uncle who hadn't even paused, sitting half sideways in the chair, one arm thrown over the back and the other hand holding the burning cob pipe on the table in front of him, still speaking in that voice like the idle flicking of a small limber switch:

'So you took it up to him yourself. Or maybe you didn't even bother with tobacco. And he told you a tale. I hope it was a good one.'

And that was all. He could go now, in fact should. For that matter he should never have stopped on his way through the hall or even come into the house at all but on around it where he could have called Aleck Sander on his way to the stable; Lucas had told him that thirty minutes ago in the jail when even he had come almost to the point and even under the very shadow of the Gowries had in the end known better than to try to tell his uncle or any other white man. Yet still he didn't move. He had forgotten Miss Habersham. He had dismissed her; he had said 'Excuse me' and so vanished her not only from the room but the moment too as the magician with one word or gesture disappears the palm tree or the rabbit or the bowl of roses and only they remained, the three of them: he at the door and still holding it, half in the room which he had never actually entered and shouldn't have come even that far and half already back out of it in the hall where he should never have wasted time passing to begin with, and his uncle half sprawled behind the table littered with papers too and another of the German beer mugs filled with paper spills and probably a dozen of the corncob pipes in various stages of char, and half a mile away the old kinless friendless opinionated arrogant hardheaded intractable independent (insolent too) Negro man alone in the cell where the first familiar voice he would hear would probably be old one-armed Nub Gowrie's in the hall below saying, 'Git out of the way, Will Legate. We've come for that nigger,' while outside the quiet lamplit room the vast millrace of time roared not toward midnight but dragging midnight with it, not to hurl midnight into wreckage but to hurl the wreckage of midnight down upon them in one poised skyblotting yawn: and he knew now that the irrevocable moment was not when he said 'All right' to Lucas through the steel door of the cell but when he would step back into the hall and close this one behind him. So he tried again, still calm, not even rapid now, not even urgent: just specious explicit and reasonable:

'Suppose it wasn't his pistol that killed him.'

'Of course,' his uncle said. 'That's exactly what I would claim myself if I were Lucas—or any other Negro murderer for that matter or any ignorant white murderer either for the matter of that. He probably even told you what he fired his pistol at. What was it? a rabbit, or

maybe a tin can or a mark on a tree just to see if it really was loaded, really would go off. But let that pass. Grant it for the moment: then what? What do you suggest? No; what did Lucas tell you to do?’

And he even answered that: ‘Couldn’t Mr Hampton dig him up and see?’

‘On what grounds? Lucas was caught within two minutes after the shot, standing over the body with a recently-fired pistol in his pocket. He never denied having fired it; in fact he refused to make any statement at all, even to me, his lawyer—the lawyer he himself sent for. And how risk it? I’d just as soon go out there and shoot another one of his sons as to tell Nub Gowrie I wanted to dig his boy’s body up out of the ground it had been consecrated and prayed into. And if I went that far, I’d heap rather tell him I just wanted to exhume it to dig the gold out of its teeth than to tell him the reason was to save a nigger from being lynched.’

‘But suppose——’ he said.

‘Listen to me,’ his uncle said with a sort of weary yet indomitable patience: ‘Try to listen. Lucas is locked behind a proof steel door. He’s got the best protection Hampton or anybody else in this county can possibly give him. As Will Legate said, there are enough people in this county to pass him and Tubbs and even that door if they really want to. But I don’t believe there are that many people in this county who really want to hang Lucas to a telephone pole and set fire to him with gasoline.’

And now too. But he still tried. ‘But just suppose——’ he said again and now he heard for the third time almost exactly what he had heard twice in twelve hours, and he marvelled again at the paucity, the really almost standardised meagreness not of individual vocabularies but of Vocabulary itself, by means of which even man can live in vast droves and herds even in concrete warrens in comparative amity: even his uncle too:

'Suppose it then. Lucas should have thought of that before he shot a white man in the back.' And it was only later that he would realise his uncle was speaking to Miss Habersham too now; at the moment he was neither rediscovering her presence in the room nor even discovering it; he did not even remember that she had already long since ceased to exist, turning, closing the door upon the significantless speciosity of his uncle's voice: 'I've told him what to do. If anything was going to happen, they would have done it out there, at home, in their own back yard; they would never have let Mr Hampton get to town with him. In fact, I still dont understand why they did. But whether it was luck or mismanagement or old Mr Gowrie is failing with age, the result is good; he's all right now and I'm going to persuade him to plead guilty to manslaughter; he's old and I think the District Attorney will accept it. He'll go to the penitentiary and perhaps in a few years if he lives——' and closed the door, who had heard it all before and would no more, out of the room which he had never completely entered anyway and shouldn't have stopped at all, releasing the knob for the first time since he had put his hand on it and thinking with the frantic niggling patience of a man in a burning house trying to gather up a broken string of beads: Now I'll have to walk all the way back to the jail to ask Lucas where it is: realising how Lucas probability doubts and everything else to the contrary he actually had expected his uncle and the sheriff would take charge and make the expedition, not because he thought they would believe him but simply because he simply could not conceive of himself and Aleck Sander being left with it: until he remembered that Lucas had already taken care of that too, foreseen that too; remembering not with relief but rather with a new burst of rage and fury beyond even his own concept of his capacity how Lucas had not only told him what he wanted but exactly where it was and even how to get there and only then as afterthought asked him if he would:— hearing the crackle of the paper on his father's lap beyond the library door and smelling the cigar burning in the ashtray at his hand and then he saw the blue wisp of its smoke float slowly out the open door as his father must have picked it up in some synonymous hiatus or throe and puffed it once: and (remembering) even by what means to get out there and back and he thought of himself opening the door again and saying to his uncle: Forget Lucas. Just lend me your car and then

walking into the library and saying to his father who would have their car keys in his pocket until he would remember when he undressed to leave them where his mother could find them tomorrow: Let me have the keys, Pop. I want to run out to the country and dig up a grave; he even remembered Miss Habersham's pickup truck in front of the house (not Miss Habersham; he never thought of her again. He just remembered a motor vehicle sitting empty and apparently unwatched on the street not fifty yards away); the key might be, probably was, still in the switch and the Gowrie who caught him robbing his son's or brother's or cousin's grave might as well catch a car-thief too.

Because (quitting abandoning emerging from scattering with one sweep that confetti-swirl of raging facetiae) he realised that he had never doubted getting out there and even getting the body up. He could see himself reaching the church, the graveyard without effort nor even any great elapse of time; he could see himself singlehanded even having the body up and out still with no effort, no pant and strain of muscles and lungs nor laceration of the shrinking sensibilities. It was only then that the whole wrecked and tumbling midnight which peer and pant though he would he couldn't see past and beyond, would come crashing down on him. So (moving: he had not stopped since the first second's fraction while he closed the office door) he flung himself bodily with one heave into a kind of deadly reasonableness of enraged calculation, a calm sagacious and desperate rationality not of pros and cons because there were no pros: the reason he was going out there was that somebody had to and nobody else would and the reason somebody had to was that not even Sheriff Hampton (vide Will Legate and the shotgun stationed in the lower hall of the jail like on a lighted stage where anybody approaching would have to see him or them before they even reached the gate) were completely convinced that the Gowries and their kin and friends would not try to take Lucas out of the jail tonight and so if they were all in town tonight trying to lynch Lucas there wouldn't be anybody hanging around out there to catch him digging up the grave and if that was a concrete fact then its obverse would be concrete too: if they were not in town after Lucas tonight then any one of the fifty or a hundred men and boys in the immediate connection by blood or just foxhunting and whiskeymaking and pine

lumbertrading might stumble on him and Aleck Sander: and that too, that again: he must go on a horse for the same reason: that nobody else would except a sixteen-year-old boy who owned nothing to go on but a horse and he must even choose here: either to go alone on the horse in half the time and spend three times the time getting the body up alone because alone he would not only have to do all the digging but the watching and listening too, or take Aleck Sander with him (he and Aleck Sander had travelled that way before on Highboy for even more than ten miles—a big rawboned gelding who had taken five bars even under a hundred and seventy-five pounds and a good slow canter even with two up and a long jolting driving trot as fast as the canter except that not even Aleck Sander could stand it very long behind the saddle and then a shuffling nameless halfrun halfwalk which he could hold for miles under both of them, Aleck Sander behind him for the first mile at the canter then trotting beside the horse holding to the off stirrup for the next one) and so get the body up in a third of the time at the risk of having Aleck Sander keeping Lucas company when the Gowries came with the gasoline: and suddenly he found himself escaped back into the confetti exactly as you put off having to step finally into the cold water, thinking seeing hearing himself trying to explain that to Lucas too:

We have to use the horse. We cant help it: and Lucas:

You could have axed him for the car: and he:

He would have refused. Dont you understand? He wouldn't only have refused, he would have locked me up where I couldn't even have walked out there, let alone had a horse: and Lucas:

All right, all right. I aint criticising you. After all, it aint you them Gowries is fixing to set afire:—moving down the hall to the back door: and he was wrong; not when he had said All right to Lucas through the steel bars nor when he had stepped back into the hall and closed the office door behind him, but here was the irrevocable moment after which there would be no return; he could stop here and never pass it, let the wreckage of midnight crash harmless and impotent against these walls because they were strong, they would endure; they were

home, taller than wreckage, stronger than fear;—not even stopping, not even curious to ask himself if perhaps he dared not stop, letting the screen door quietly to behind him and down the steps into the vast furious vortex of the soft May night and walking fast now across the yard toward the dark cabin where Paralee and Aleck Sander were no more asleep than all the other Negroes within a mile of town would sleep tonight, not even in bed but sitting quietly in the dark behind the closed doors and shuttered windows waiting for what sound what murmur of fury and death to breathe the spring dark: and stopped and whistled the signal he and Aleck Sander had been using to one another ever since they learned to whistle, counting off the seconds until the moment should come to repeat it, thinking how if he were Aleck Sander he wouldn't come out of the house to anybody's whistle tonight either when suddenly with no sound and certainly no light behind to reveal him by Aleck Sander stood out from the shadows, walking, already quite near in the moonless dark, a little taller than he though there was only a few months' difference between them: and came up, not even looking at him but past, over his head, toward the Square as if looking could make a lofting trajectory like a baseball, over the trees and the streets and the houses, to drop seeing into the Square—not the homes in the shady yards and the peaceful meals and the resting and the sleep which were the end and the reward, but the Square: the edifices created and ordained for trade and government and judgment and incarceration where strove and battled the passions of men for which the rest and the little death of sleep were the end and the escape and the reward.

'So they aint come for old Lucas yet,' Aleck Sander said.

'Is that what your people think about it too?' he said.

'And so would you,' Aleck Sander said. 'It's the ones like Lucas makes trouble for everybody.'

'Then maybe you better go to the office and sit with Uncle Gavin instead of coming with me.'

'Going where with you?' Aleck Sander said. And he told him, harsh and bald, in four words:

'Dig up Vinson Gowrie.' Aleck Sander didn't move, still looking past and over his head toward the Square. 'Lucas said it wasn't his gun that killed him.'

Still not moving Aleck Sander began to laugh, not loud and with no mirth: just laughing; he said exactly what his uncle had said hardly a minute ago: 'So would I,' Aleck Sander said. He said: 'Me? Go out there and dig that dead white man up? Is Mr Gavin already in the office or do I just sit there until he comes?'

'Lucas is going to pay you,' he said. 'He told me that even before he told me what it was.'

Aleck Sander laughed, without mirth or scorn or anything else: with no more in the sound of it than there is anything in the sound of breathing but just breathing. 'I aint rich,' he said. 'I dont need money.'

'At least you'll saddle Highboy while I hunt for a flashlight, wont you?' he said. 'You're not too proud about Lucas to do that, are you?'

'Certainly,' Aleck Sander said, turning.

'And get the pick and shovel. And the long tie-rope. I'll need that too.'

'Certainly,' Aleck Sander said. He paused, half turned. 'How you going to tote a pick and shovel both on Highboy when he dont even like to see a riding switch in your hand?'

'I dont know,' he said and Aleck Sander went on and he turned back toward the house and at first he thought it was his uncle coming rapidly around the house from the front, not because he believed that his uncle might have suspected and anticipated what he was about because he did not, his uncle had dismissed that too immediately and thoroughly not only from conception but from possibility too, but

because he no longer remembered anyone else available for it to have been and even after he saw it was a woman he assumed it was his mother, even after he should have recognised the hat, right up to the instant when Miss Habersham called his name and his first impulse was to step quickly and quietly around the corner of the garage, from where he could reach the lot fence still unseen and climb it and go on to the stable and so go out the pasture gate without passing the house again at all, flashlight or not but it was already too late: calling his name: 'Charles:' in that tense urgent whisper then came rapidly up and stopped facing him, speaking in that tense rapid murmur:

'What did he tell you?' and now he knew what it was that had nudged at his attention back in his uncle's office when he had recognised her and then in the next second flashed away: old Molly, Lucas' wife, who had been the daughter of one of old Doctor Habersham's, Miss Habersham's grandfather's, slaves, she and Miss Habersham the same age, born in the same week and both suckled at Molly's mother's breast and grown up together almost inextricably like sisters, like twins, sleeping in the same room, the white girl in the bed, the Negro girl on a cot at the foot of it almost until Molly and Lucas married, and Miss Habersham had stood up in the Negro church as godmother to Molly's first child.

'He said it wasn't his pistol,' he said.

'So he didn't do it,' she said, rapid still and with something even more than urgency in her voice now.

'I dont know,' he said.

'Nonsense,' she said. 'If it wasn't his pistol—'

'I dont know,' he said.

'You must know. You saw him—talked to him—'

'I dont know,' he said. He said it calmly, quietly, with a kind of incredulous astonishment as though he had only now realised what he had promised, intended: 'I just dont know. I still dont know. I'm just going out there. . . . ' He stopped, his voice died. There was an instant a second in which he even remembered he should have been wishing he could recall it, the last unfinished sentence. Though it was probably already too late and she had already done herself what little finishing the sentence needed and at any moment now she would cry, protest, ejaculate and bring the whole house down on him. Then in the same second he stopped remembering it. She said:

'Of course:' immediate murmurous and calm; he thought for another half of a second that she hadn't understood at all and then in the other half forgot that too, the two of them facing each other indistinguishable in the darkness across the tense and rapid murmur: and then he heard his own voice speaking in the same tone and pitch, the two of them not conspiratorial exactly but rather like two people who have irrevocably accepted a gambit they are not at all certain they can cope with: only that they will resist it: 'We dont even know it wasn't his pistol. He just said it wasn't.'

'Yes.'

'He didn't say whose it was nor whether or not he fired it. He didn't even tell you he didn't fire it. He just said it wasn't his pistol.'

'Yes.'

'And your uncle told you there in his study that that's just exactly what he would say, all he could say.' He didn't answer that. It wasn't a question. Nor did she give him time. 'All right,' she said. 'Now what? To find out if it wasn't his pistol—find out whatever it was he meant? Go out there and what?'

He told her, as badly as he had told Aleck Sander, explicit and succinct: 'Look at him:' not even pausing to think how here he should certainly have anticipated at least a gasp. 'Go out there and dig him up and bring

him to town where somebody that knows bullet holes can look at the bullet hole in him——’

‘Yes,’ Miss Habersham said. ‘Of course. Naturally he wouldn’t tell your uncle. He’s a Negro and your uncle’s a man:’ and now Miss Habersham in her turn repeating and paraphrasing and he thought how it was not really a paucity a meagreness of vocabulary, it was in the first place because the deliberate violent blotting out obliteration of a human life was itself so simple and so final that the verbiage which surrounded it enclosed it insulated it intact into the chronicle of man had of necessity to be simple and uncomplex too, repetitive, almost monotonous even; and in the second place, vaster than that, adumbrating that, because what Miss Habersham paraphrased was simple truth, not even fact and so there was not needed a great deal of diversification and originality to express it because truth was universal, it had to be universal to be truth and so there didn’t need to be a great deal of it just to keep running something no bigger than one earth and so anybody could know truth; all they had to do was just to pause, just to stop, just to wait: ‘Lucas knew it would take a child—or an old woman like me: someone not concerned with probability, with evidence. Men like your uncle and Mr Hampton have had to be men too long, busy too long. ——Yes?’ she said. ‘Bring him in to town where someone who knows can look at the bullet hole. And suppose they look at it and find out it was Lucas’ pistol?’ And he didn’t answer that at all, nor had she waited again, saying, already turning: ‘We’ll need a pick and shovel. I’ve got a flashlight in the truck——’

‘We?’ he said.

She stopped; she said almost patiently: ‘It’s fifteen miles out there——’

‘Ten,’ he said.

‘——a grave is six feet deep. It’s after eight now and you may have only until midnight to get back to town in time——’ and something else but he didn’t even hear it. He wasn’t even listening. He had said this himself to Lucas only fifteen minutes ago but it was only now that he

understood what he himself had said. It was only after hearing someone else say it that he comprehended not the enormity of his intention but the simple inert unwieldy impossible physical vastness of what he faced; he said quietly, with hopeless indomitable amazement:

‘We cant possibly do it.’

‘No,’ Miss Habersham said. ‘Well?’

‘Ma’am?’ he said. ‘What did you say?’

‘I said you haven’t even got a car.’

‘We were going on the horse.’

Now she said, ‘We?’

‘Me and Aleck Sander.’

‘Then we’ll have three,’ she said. ‘Get your pick and shovel. They’ll begin to wonder in the house why they haven’t heard my truck start.’ She moved again.

‘Yessum,’ he said. ‘Drive on down the lane to the pasture gate. We’ll meet you there.’

He didn’t wait either. He heard the truck start as he climbed the lot fence; presently he could see Highboy’s blaze in the black yawn of the stable hallway; Aleck Sander jerked the buckled girth-strap home through the keeper as he came up. He unsnapped the tie-rope from the bit-ring before he remembered and snapped it back and untied the other end from the wall-ring and looped it and the reins up over Highboy’s head and led him out of the hallway and got up.

‘Here,’ Aleck Sander said reaching up the pick and shovel but Highboy had already begun to dance even before he could have seen them as he always did even at a hedge switch and he set him back hard and

steadied him as Aleck Sander said 'Stand still!' and gave Highboy a loud slap on the rump, passing up the pick and shovel and he steadied them across the saddle-bow and managed to hold Highboy back on his heels for another second, long enough to free his foot from the near stirrup for Aleck Sander to get his foot into it, Highboy moving then in a long almost buck-jump as Aleck Sander swung up behind and still trying to run until he steadied him again with one hand, the pick and shovel jouncing on the saddle, and turned him across the pasture toward the gate. 'Hand me them damn shovels and picks,' Aleck Sander said. 'Did you get the flashlight?'

'What do you care?' he said. Aleck Sander reached his spare hand around him and took the pick and shovel; again for a second Highboy could actually see them but this time he had both hands free for the snaffle and the curb too. 'You aint going anywhere to need a flashlight. You just said so.'

They had almost reached the gate. He could see the dark blob of the halted truck against the pale road beyond it; that is, he could believe he saw it because he knew it was there. But Aleck Sander actually saw it: who seemed able to see in the dark almost like an animal. Carrying the pick and shovel, Aleck Sander had no free hand, nevertheless he had one with which he reached suddenly again and caught the reins outside his own hands and jerked Highboy almost back to a squat and said in a hissing whisper: 'What's that?'

'It's Miss Eunice Habersham's truck,' he said. 'She's going with us. Turn him loose, confound it!' wrenching the reins from Aleck Sander, who released them quickly enough now, saying,

'She's gonter take the truck:' and not even dropping the pick and shovel but flinging them clattering and clanging against the gate and slipping down himself and just in time because now Highboy stood erect on his hind feet until he struck him hard between the ears with the looped tie-rope.

'Open the gate,' he said.

'We wont need the horse,' Aleck Sander said. 'Unsaddle and bridle him here. We'll put um up when we get back.'

Which was what Miss Habersham said; through the gate now and Highboy still sidling and beating his hooves while Aleck Sander put the pick and shovel into the back of the truck as though he expected Aleck Sander to throw them at him this time, and Miss Habersham's voice from the dark cab of the truck:

'He sounds like a good horse. Has he got a four-footed gait too?'

'Yessum,' he said. 'Nome,' he said. 'I'll take the horse too. The nearest house is a mile from the church but somebody might still hear a car. We'll leave the truck at the bottom of the hill when we cross the branch.' Then he answered that too before she had time to say it: 'We'll need the horse to bring him back down to the truck.'

'Heh,' Aleck Sander said. It wasn't laughing. But then nobody thought it was. 'How do you reckon that horse is going to tote what you dug up when he dont even want to tote what you going to do the digging with?' But he had already thought of that too, remembering his grandfather telling of the old days when deer and bear and wild turkey could be hunted in Yoknapatawpha County within twelve miles of Jefferson, of the hunters: Major de Spain who had been his grandfather's cousin and old General Compson and Uncle Ike McCaslin, Carothers Edmonds' great-uncle, still alive at ninety, and Boon Hogganbeck whose mother's mother had been a Chickasaw woman and the Negro Sam Fathers whose father had been a Chickasaw chief, and Major de Spain's one-eyed hunting mule Alice who wasn't afraid even of the smell of bear and he thought how if you really were the sum of your ancestry it was too bad the ancestors who had evoluted him into a secret resurrector of country graveyards hadn't thought to equip him with a descendant of that unspookable one-eyed mule to transport his subjects on.

'I dont know,' he said.

‘Maybe he’ll learn by the time we get back to the truck,’ Miss Habersham said. ‘Can Aleck Sander drive?’

‘Yessum,’ Aleck Sander said.

Highboy was still edgy; held down he would merely have lathered himself to no end so since it was cool tonight for the first mile he actually kept in sight of the truck’s tail-light. Then he slowed, the light fled diminishing on and vanished beyond a curve and he settled Highboy into the shambling halfrun halfwalk which no show judge would ever pass but which covered ground; nine miles of it to be covered and he thought with a kind of ghastly amusement that at last he would have time to think, thinking how it was too late to think now, not one of the three of them dared think now, if they had done but one thing tonight it was at least to put all thought ratiocination contemplation forever behind them; five miles from town and he would cross (probably Miss Habersham and Aleck Sander in the truck already had) the invisible surveyor’s line which was the boundary of Beat Four: the notorious, the fabulous almost and certainly least of all did any of them dare think now, thinking how it was never difficult for an outlander to do two things at once which Beat Four wouldn’t like since Beat Four already in advance didn’t like most of the things which people from town (and from most of the rest of the county too for that matter) did: but that it remained for them, a white youth of sixteen and a Negro one of the same and an old white spinster of seventy to elect and do at the same time the two things out of all man’s vast reservoir of invention and capability that Beat Four would repudiate and retaliate on most violently: to violate the grave of one of its progeny in order to save a nigger murderer from its vengeance.

But at least they would have some warning (not speculating on who the warning could help since they who would be warned were already six and seven miles from the jail and still moving away from it as fast as he dared push the horse) because if Beat Four were coming in tonight he should begin to pass them soon (or they pass him)—the battered mud-stained cars, the empty trucks for hauling cattle and lumber, and the

saddled horses and mules. Yet so far he had passed nothing whatever since he left town; the road lay pale and empty before and behind him too; the lightless houses and cabins squatted or loomed beside it, the dark land stretched away into the darkness strong with the smell of plowed earth and now and then the heavy scent of flowering orchards lying across the road for him to ride through like stagnant skeins of smoke so maybe they were making better time than even he had hoped and before he could stop it he had thought Maybe we can, maybe we will after all;—before he could leap and spring and smother and blot it from thinking not because he couldn't really believe they possibly could and not because you dont dare think whole even to yourself the entirety of a dear hope or wish let alone a desperate one else you yourself have doomed it but because thinking it into words even only to himself was like the struck match which doesn't dispel the dark but only exposes its terror—one weak flash and glare revealing for a second the empty road's the dark and empty land's irrevocable immitigable negation.

Because—almost there now; Aleck Sander and Miss Habersham had already arrived probably a good thirty minutes ago and he took a second to hope Aleck Sander had had forethought enough to drive the truck off the road where anybody passing would not see it, then in the same second he knew that of course Aleck Sander had done that and it was not Aleck Sander he had ever doubted but himself for even for one second doubting Aleck Sander—he had not seen one Negro since leaving town, with whom at this hour on Sunday night in May the road should have been constant as beads almost—the men and young women and girls and even a few old men and women and even children before it got too late, but mostly the men the young bachelors who since last Monday at daylight had braced into the shearing earth the lurch and heave of plows behind straining and surging mules then at noon Saturday had washed and shaved and put on the clean Sunday shirts and pants and all Saturday night had walked the dusty roads and all day Sunday and all Sunday night would still walk them until barely time to reach home and change back into the overalls and the brogans and catch and gear up the mules and forty-eight hours even bedless save for the brief time there was a woman in it be back in the field

again the plow's point set into the new furrow when Monday's sun rose: but not now, not tonight: where in town except for Paralee and Aleck Sander he had seen none either for twenty-four hours but he had expected that, they were acting exactly as Negroes and whites both would have expected Negroes to act at such a time; they were still there, they had not fled, you just didn't see them—a sense a feeling of their constant presence and nearness: black men and women and children breathing and waiting inside their barred and shuttered houses, not crouching cringing shrinking, not in anger and not quite in fear: just waiting, biding since theirs was an armament which the white man could not match nor—if he but knew it—even cope with: patience; just keeping out of sight and out of the way,—but not here, no sense feeling here of a massed adjacence, a dark human presence biding and unseen; this land was a desert and a witness, this empty road its postulate (it would be some time yet before he would realise how far he had come: a provincial Mississippian, a child who when the sun set this same day had appeared to be—and even himself believed, provided he had thought about it at all—still a swaddled unwitting infant in the long tradition of his native land—or for that matter a witless foetus itself struggling—if he was aware that there had been any throes—blind and insentient and not even yet awaked in the simple painless convulsion of emergence) of the deliberate turning as with one back of the whole dark people on which the very economy of the land itself was founded, not in heat or anger nor even regret but in one irremediable invincible inflexible repudiation, upon not a racial outrage but a human shame.

Now he was there; Highboy tightened and even began to drive a little, even after nine miles, smelling water and now he could see distinguish the bridge or at least the gap of lighter darkness where the road spanned the impenetrable blackness of the willows banding the branch and then Aleck Sander stood out from the bridge rail; Highboy snorted at him then he recognised him too, without surprise, not even remembering how he had wondered once if Aleck Sander would have forethought to hide the truck, not even remembering that he had expected no less, not stopping, checking Highboy back to a walk across the bridge then giving him his head to turn from the road beyond the

bridge and drop in stiff fore-legged jolts down toward the water invisible for a moment longer then he too could see the reflected wimpling where it caught the sky: until Highboy stopped and snorted again then heaved suddenly up and back, almost unseating him.

‘He smell quicksand,’ Aleck Sander said. ‘Let him wait till he gets home, anyway. I’d rather be doing something else than what I am too.’

But he took Highboy a little further down the bank where he might get down to the water but again he only feinted at it so he pulled away and back onto the road and freed the stirrup for Aleck Sander, Highboy again already in motion when Aleck Sander swung up. ‘Here,’ Aleck Sander said but he had already swung Highboy off the gravel and into the narrow dirt road turning sharp toward the black loom of the ridge and beginning almost at once its long slant up into the hills though even before it began to rise the strong constant smell of pines was coming down on them with no wind behind it yet firm and hard as a hand almost, palpable against the moving body as water would have been. The slant steepened under the horse and even carrying double he essayed to run at it as was his habit at any slope, gathering and surging out until he checked him sharply back and even then he had to hold him hard-wristed in a strong lurching uneven walk until the first level of the plateau flattened and even as Aleck Sander said ‘Here’ again Miss Habersham stood out of the obscurity at the roadside carrying the pick and shovel. Aleck Sander slid down as Highboy stopped. He followed.

‘Stay on,’ Miss Habersham said. ‘I’ve got the tools and the flashlight.’

‘It’s a half-mile yet,’ he said. ‘Up hill. This aint a sidesaddle but maybe you could sit sideways. Where’s the truck?’ he said to Aleck Sander.

‘Behind them bushes,’ Aleck Sander said. ‘We aint holding a parade. Leastways I aint.’

‘No no,’ Miss Habersham said. ‘I can walk.’

‘We’ll save time,’ he said. ‘It must be after ten now. He’s gentle. That was just when Aleck Sander threw the pick and shovel——’

‘Of course,’ Miss Habersham said. She handed the tools to Aleck Sander and approached the horse.

‘I’m sorry it aint——’ he said.

‘Pah,’ she said and took the reins from him and before he could even brace his hand for her foot she put it in the stirrup and went up as light and fast as either he or Aleck Sander could have done, onto the horse astride so that he had just time to avert his face, feeling her looking down in the darkness at his turned head. ‘Pah,’ she said again. ‘I’m seventy years old. Besides, we’ll worry about my skirt after we are done with this:’—moving Highboy herself before he had hardly time to take hold of the bit, back into the road when Aleck Sander said:

‘Hush.’ They stopped, immobile in the long constant invisible flow of pine. ‘Mule coming down the hill,’ Aleck Sander said.

He began to turn the horse at once. ‘I dont hear anything,’ Miss Habersham said. ‘Are you sure?’

‘Yessum,’ he said, turning Highboy back off the road: ‘Aleck Sander’s sure.’ And standing at Highboy’s head among the trees and undergrowth, his other hand lying on the horse’s nostrils in case he decided to nicker at the other animal, he heard it too—the horse or mule coming steadily down the road from the crest. It was unshod probably; actually the only sound he really heard was the creak of leather and he wondered (without doubting for one second that he had) how Aleck Sander had heard it at all the two minutes and more it had taken the animal to reach them. Then he could see it or that is where it was passing them—a blob, a movement, a darker shadow than shadow against the pale dirt of the road, going on down the hill, the soft steady shuffle and scream of leather dying away, then gone. But they waited a moment more.

'What was that he was toting on the saddle in front of him?' Aleck Sander said.

'I couldn't even see whether it was a man on it or not,' he said.

'I couldn't see anything,' Miss Habersham said. He led the horse back into the road. 'Suppose——' she said.

'Aleck Sander will hear it in time,' he said. So once more Highboy surged strong and steady at the steepening pitch, he carrying the shovel and clutching the leather under Miss Habersham's thin hard calf on one side and Aleck Sander with the pick on the other, mounting, really moving quite fast through the strong heady vivid living smell of the pines which did something to the lungs, the breathing as (he imagined: he had never tasted it. He could have—the sip from the communion cup didn't count because it was not only a sip but sour consecrated and sharp: the deathless blood of our Lord not to be tasted, moving not downward toward the stomach but upward and outward into the Allknowledge between good and evil and the choice and the repudiation and the acceptance forever—at the table at Thanksgiving and Christmas but he had never wanted to.) wine did to the stomach. They were quite high now, the ridged land opening and tumbling away invisible in the dark yet with the sense, the sensation of height and space; by day he could have seen them, ridge on pine-dense ridge rolling away to the east and the north in similitude of the actual mountains in Carolina and before that in Scotland where his ancestors had come from but he hadn't seen yet, his breath coming a little short now and he could not only hear but feel too the hard short blasts from Highboy's lungs as he was actually trying to run at this slope too even carrying a rider and dragging two, Miss Habersham steadying him, holding him down until they came out onto the true crest and Aleck Sander said once more 'Here' and Miss Habersham turned the horse out of the road because he could still see nothing until they were off the road and only then he distinguished the clearing not because it was a clearing but because in a thin distillation of starlight there stood, canted a little where the earth had sunk, the narrow slab of a marble headstone. And he could hardly see the church (weathered, unpainted,

of wood and not much larger than a single room) at all even when he led Highboy around behind it and tied the reins to a sapling and unsnapped the tie-rope from the bit and went back to where Miss Habersham and Aleck Sander were waiting.

‘It’ll be the only fresh one,’ he said. ‘Lucas said there hasn’t been a burying here since last winter.’

‘Yes,’ Miss Habersham said. ‘The flowers too. Aleck Sander’s already found it.’ But to make sure (he thought quietly, he didn’t know to whom: I’m going to make a heap more mistakes but dont let this be one of them.) he hooded the flashlight in his wadded handkerchief so that one thin rapid pencil touched for a second the raw mound with its meagre scattering of wreaths and bouquets and even single blooms and then for another second the headstone adjacent to it, long enough to read the engraved name: Amanda Workitt wife of N. B. Forrest Gowrie 1878 1926 then snapped it off and again the darkness came in and the strong scent of the pines and they stood for a moment beside the raw mound, doing nothing at all. ‘I hate this,’ Miss Habersham said.

‘You aint the one,’ Aleck Sander said. ‘It’s just a half a mile back to the truck. Down hill too.’

She moved; she was first. ‘Move the flowers,’ she said. ‘Carefully. Can you see?’

‘Yessum,’ Aleck Sander said. ‘Aint many. Looks like they throwed them at it too.’

‘But we wont,’ Miss Habersham said. ‘Move them carefully.’ And it must be nearing eleven now; they would not possibly have time; Aleck Sander was right: the thing to do was to go back to the truck and drive away, back to town and through town and on, not to stop, not even to have time to think for having to keep on driving, steering, keeping the truck going in order to keep on moving, never to come back; but then they had never had time, they had known that before they ever left Jefferson and he thought for an instant how if Aleck Sander really had

meant it when he said he would not come and if he would have come alone in that case and then (quickly) he wouldn't think about that at all, Aleck Sander using the shovel for the first shift while he used the pick though the dirt was still so loose they didn't really need the pick (and if it hadn't been still loose they couldn't have done it at all even by daylight); two shovels would have done and faster too but it was too late for that now until suddenly Aleck Sander handed him the shovel and climbed out of the hole and vanished and (not even using the flashlight) with that same sense beyond sight and hearing both which had realised that what Highboy smelled at the branch was quicksand and which had discovered the horse or the mule coming down the hill a good minute before either he or Miss Habersham could begin to hear it, returned with a short light board so that both of them had shovels now and he could hear the chuck! and then the faint swish as Aleck Sander thrust the board into the dirt and then flung the load up and outward, expelling his breath, saying 'Hah!' each time—a sound furious raging and restrained, going faster and faster until the ejaculation was almost as rapid as the beat of someone running: 'Hah! . . . Hah! . . . Hah!' so that he said over his shoulder:

'Take it easy. We're doing all right:' straightened his own back for a moment to mop his sweating face and seeing as always Miss Habersham in motionless silhouette on the sky above him in the straight cotton dress and the round hat on the exact top of her head such as few people had seen in fifty years and probably no one at any time looking up out of a halfway rifled grave: more than halfway because spading again he heard the sudden thud of wood on wood, then Aleck Sander said sharply:

'Go on. Get out of here and gimme room:' and flung the board up and out and took, jerked the shovel from his hands and he climbed out of the pit and even as he stooped groping Miss Habersham handed him the coiled tie-rope.

'The flashlight too,' he said and she handed him that and he stood too while the strong hard immobile flow of the pines bleached the sweat from his body until his wet shirt felt cold on his flesh and invisible

below him in the pit the shovel rasped and scraped on wood, and stooping and hooding the light again he flashed it downward upon the unpainted lid of the pine box and switched it off.

‘All right,’ he said. ‘That’s enough. Get out:’ and Aleck Sander with the last shovel of dirt released the shovel too, flinging the whole thing arcing out of the pit like a javelin and followed it in one motion, and carrying the rope and the light he dropped into the pit and only then remembered he would need a hammer, crowbar—something to open the lid with and the only thing of that nature would be what Miss Habersham might happen to have in the truck a half-mile away and the walk back uphill, stooping to feel, examine the catch or whatever it was to be forced when he discovered that the lid was not fastened at all: so that straddling it, balancing himself on one foot he managed to open the lid up and back and prop it with one elbow while he shook the rope out and found the end and snapped on the flashlight and pointed it down and then said, ‘Wait.’ He said, ‘Wait.’ He was still saying ‘Wait’ when he finally heard Miss Habersham speaking in a hissing whisper:

‘Charles Charles.’

‘This aint Vinson Gowrie,’ he said. ‘This man’s name is Montgomery. He’s some kind of a shoestring timber-buyer from over in Crossman County.’

Chapter Five

They had to fill the hole back up of course and besides he had the horse. But even then it was a good while until daylight when he left Highboy with Aleck Sander at the pasture gate and tried remembered to tiptoe into the house but at once his mother her hair loose and in her nightdress wailed from right beside the front door: ‘Where have you been?’ then followed him to his uncle’s door and then while his uncle was putting some clothes on: ‘You? Digging up a grave?’ and he with a sort of weary indefatigable patience, just about worn out himself now from riding and digging then turning around and undigging and

then riding again, somehow managing to stay that one jump ahead of what he had really never hoped to beat anyway:

‘Aleck Sander and Miss Habersham helped:’ which if anything seemed to be worse though she was still not loud: just amazed and inexpugnable until his uncle came out fully dressed even to his necktie but not shaved and said,

‘Now Maggie, do you want to wake Charley?’ then following them back to the front door and this time she said—and he thought again how you could never really beat them because of their fluidity which was not just a capacity for mobility but a willingness to abandon with the substanceless promptitude of wind or air itself not only position but principle too; you didn’t have to marshal your forces because you already had them: superior artillery, weight, right justice and precedent and usage and everything else and made your attack and cleared the field, swept all before you—or so you thought until you discovered that the enemy had not retreated at all but had already abandoned the field and had not merely abandoned the field but had usurped your very battlecry in the process; you believed you had captured a citadel and instead found you had merely entered an untenable position and then found the unimpaired and even unmarked battle set up again in your unprotected and unsuspecting rear—she said:

‘But he’s got to sleep! He hasn’t even been to bed!’ so that he actually stopped until his uncle said, hissed at him:

‘Come on. What’s the matter with you? Don’t you know she’s tougher than you and me both just as old Habersham was tougher than you and Aleck Sander put together; you might have gone out there without her to drag you by the hand but Aleck Sander wouldn’t and I’m still not so sure you would when you came right down to it.’ So he moved on too beside his uncle toward where Miss Habersham sat in the truck behind his uncle’s parked car (it had been in the garage at nine o’clock last night; later when he had time he would remember to ask his uncle just where his mother had sent him to look for him). ‘I take that back,’ his uncle said. ‘Forget it. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings and old

ladies——’ he paraphrased. ‘Quite true, as a lot of truth often is, only a man just dont like to have it flung in his teeth at three oclock in the morning. And dont even forget your mother, which of course you cant; she has already long since seen to that. Just remember that they can stand anything, accept any fact (it’s only men who burk at facts) provided they dont have to face it; can assimilate it with their heads turned away and one hand extended behind them as the politician accepts the bribe. Look at her: who will spend a long contented happy life never abating one jot of her refusal to forgive you for being able to button your own pants.’

And still a good while until daylight when his uncle stopped the car at the sheriff’s gate and led the way up the short walk and onto the rented gallery. (Since he couldn’t succeed himself, although now in his third term the elapsed time covering Sheriff Hampton’s tenure was actually almost twice as long as the twelve years of his service. He was a countryman, a farmer and son of farmers when he was first elected and now owned himself the farm and house where he had been born, living in the rented one in town during his term of office then returning to the farm which was his actual home at each expiration, to live there until he could run for—and be elected—sheriff again.)

‘I hope he’s not a heavy sleeper,’ Miss Habersham said.

‘He aint asleep,’ his uncle said. ‘He’s cooking breakfast.’

‘Cooking breakfast?’ Miss Habersham said: and then he knew that, for all her flat back and the hat which had never shifted from the exact top of her head as though she kept it balanced there not by any pins but simply by the rigid unflagging poise of her neck as Negro women carry a whole family wash, she was about worn out with strain and lack of sleep too.

‘He’s a country man,’ his uncle said. ‘Any food he eats after daylight in the morning is dinner. Mrs Hampton’s in Memphis with their daughter waiting for the baby and the only woman who’ll cook a man’s breakfast at half-past three a. m. is his wife. No hired town cook’s going to do it.

She comes at a decent hour about eight o'clock and washes the dishes.' His uncle didn't knock. He started to open the door then stopped and looked back past both of them to where Aleck Sander stood at the bottom of the front steps. 'And don't you think you're going to get out of it just because your mama don't vote,' he told Aleck Sander. 'You come on too.'

Then his uncle opened the door and at once they smelled the coffee and the frying hogmeat, walking on linoleum toward a faint light at the rear of the hall then across a linoleum-floored diningroom in rented Grand Rapids mission into the kitchen, into the hard cheerful blast of a woodstove where the sheriff stood over a sputtering skillet in his undershirt and pants and socks, his braces dangling and his hair mussed and tousled with sleep like that of a ten-year-old boy, a battercake turner in one hand and a cup towel in the other. The sheriff had already turned his vast face toward the door before they entered it and he watched the little hard pale eyes flick from his uncle to Miss Habersham to himself and then to Aleck Sander and even then it was not the eyes which widened so much for that second but rather the little hard black pupils which had tightened in that one flick to pinpoints. But the sheriff said nothing yet, just looking at his uncle now and now even the little hard pupils seemed to expand again as when an expulsion of breath untightens the chest and while the three of them stood quietly and steadily watching the sheriff his uncle told it, rapid and condensed and succinct, from the moment in the jail last night when his uncle had realised that Lucas had started to tell—or rather ask—him something, to the one when he had entered his uncle's room ten minutes ago and waked him up, and stopped and again they watched the little hard eyes go flick, flick, slick, across their three faces then back to his uncle again, staring at his uncle for almost a quarter of a minute without even blinking. Then the sheriff said:

'You wouldn't come here at four o'clock in the morning with a tale like that if it wasn't so.'

'You ain't listening just to two sixteen-year-old children,' his uncle said. 'I remind you that Miss Habersham was there.'

‘You dont have to,’ the sheriff said. ‘I haven’t forgot it. I dont think I ever will.’ Then the sheriff turned. A gigantic man and in the fifties too, you wouldn’t think he could move fast and he didn’t really seem to yet he had taken another skillet from a nail in the wall behind the stove and was already turning toward the table (where for the first time he noticed, saw the side of smoked meat) before he seemed to have moved at all, picking up a butcher knife from beside the meat before his uncle could even begin to speak:

‘Have we got time for that? You’ve got to drive sixty miles to Harrisburg to the District Attorney; you’ll have to take Miss Habersham and these boys with you for witnesses to try and persuade him to originate a petition for the exhumation of Vinson Gowrie’s body— —’

The sheriff wiped the handle of the knife rapidly with the cuptowel. ‘I thought you told me Vinson Gowrie aint in that grave.’

‘Officially he is,’ his uncle said. ‘By the county records he is. And if you, living right here and knowing Miss Habersham and me all your political life, had to ask me twice, what do you think Jim Halladay is going to do?—Then you’ve got to drive sixty miles back here with your witnesses and the petition and get Judge Maycox to issue an order— —’

The sheriff dropped the cuptowel onto the table. ‘Have I?’ he said mildly, almost inattentively: so that his uncle stopped perfectly still watching him as the sheriff turned from the table, the knife in his hand.

‘Oh,’ his uncle said.

‘I’ve thought of something else too,’ the sheriff said. ‘I’m surprised you aint. Or maybe you have.’

His uncle stared at the sheriff. Then Aleck Sander—he was behind them all, not yet quite through the diningroom door into the kitchen—said in a voice as mild and impersonal as though he were reading off a slogan

catchphrase advertising some object he didn't own and never expected to want:

'It mought not a been a mule. It mought have been a horse.'

'Maybe you've thought of it now,' the sheriff said.

'Oh,' his uncle said. He said: 'Yes.' But Miss Habersham was already talking. She had given Aleck Sander one quick hard look but now she was looking at the sheriff again as quick and as hard.

'So do I,' she said. 'And I think we deserve better than secrecy.'

'I do too, Miss Eunice,' the sheriff said. 'Except that the one that needs considering right now aint in this room.'

'Oh,' Miss Habersham said. She said 'Yes' too. She said, 'Of course:' already moving, meeting the sheriff halfway between the table and the door and taking the knife from him and going on to the table when he passed her and came on toward the door, his uncle then he then Aleck Sander moving out of the way as the sheriff went on into the diningroom and across it into the dark hall, shutting the door behind him: and then he was wondering why the sheriff hadn't finished dressing when he got up; a man who didn't mind or had to or anyway did get up at half-past three in the morning to cook himself some breakfast would hardly mind getting up five minutes earlier and have time to put his shirt and shoes on too then Miss Habersham spoke and he remembered her; a lady's presence of course was why he had gone to put on the shirt and shoes without even waiting to eat the breakfast and Miss Habersham spoke and he jerked, without moving heaved up out of sleep, having been asleep for seconds maybe even minutes on his feet as a horse sleeps but Miss Habersham was still only turning the side of meat onto its edge to cut the first slice. She said: 'Cant he telephone to Harrisburg and have the District Attorney telephone back to Judge Maycox?'

'That's what he doing now,' Aleck Sander said. 'Telephoning.'

‘Maybe you’d better go to the hall where you can overhear good what he’s saying,’ his uncle told Aleck Sander. Then his uncle looked at Miss Habersham again; he too watched her slicing rapid slice after slice of the bacon as fast and even almost as a machine could have done it. ‘Mr Hampton says we wont need any papers. We can attend to it ourselves without bothering Judge Maycox— —’

Miss Habersham released the knife. She didn’t lay it down, she just opened her hand and in the same motion picked up the cuptowel and was wiping her hands as she turned from the table, crossing the kitchen toward them faster, a good deal faster than even the sheriff had moved. ‘Then what are we wasting time here for?’ she said. ‘For him to put on his necktie and coat?’

His uncle stepped quickly in front of her. ‘We cant do anything in the dark,’ he said. ‘We must wait for daylight.’

‘We didn’t,’ Miss Habersham said. Then she stopped; it was either that or walk over his uncle though his uncle didn’t touch her, just standing between her and the door until she had to stop at least for the second for his uncle to get out of the way: and he looked at her too, straight, thin, almost shapeless in the straight cotton dress beneath the round exactitude of the hat and he thought She’s too old for this and then corrected it: No a woman a lady shouldn’t have to do this and then remembered last night when he had left the office and walked across the back yard and whistled for Aleck Sander and he knew he had believed—and he still believed it—that he would have gone alone even if Aleck Sander had stuck to his refusal but it was only after Miss Habersham came around the house and spoke to him that he knew he was going to go through with it and he remembered again what old Ephraim had told him after they found the ring under the hog trough: If you got something outside the common run that’s got to be done and cant wait, dont waste your time on the menfolks; they works on what your uncle calls the rules and the cases. Get the womens and the children at it; they works on the circumstances. Then the hall door opened. He heard the sheriff cross the diningroom to the kitchen door.

But the sheriff didn't enter the kitchen, stopping in the door, standing in it even after Miss Habersham said in a harsh, almost savage voice:

'Well?' and he hadn't put on his shoes nor even picked up the dangling galluses and he didn't seem to have heard Miss Habersham at all: just standing looming bulging in the door looking at Miss Habersham—not at the hat, not at her eyes nor even her face: just at her—as you might look at a string of letters in Russian or Chinese which someone you believed had just told you spelled your name, saying at last in a musing baffled voice:

'No:' then turning his head to look at him and saying, 'It aint you neither:' then turning his head further until he was looking at Aleck Sander while Aleck Sander slid his eyes up at the sheriff then slid them away again then slid them up again. 'You,' the sheriff said. 'You're the one. You went out there in the dark and helped dig up a dead man. Not only that, a dead white man that the rest of the white folks claimed another nigger had murdered. Why? Was it because Miss Habersham made you?'

'Never nobody made me,' Aleck Sander said. 'I didn't even know I was going. I had done already told Chick I didn't aim to. Only when we got to the truck everybody seemed to just take it for granted I wasn't going to do nothing else but go and before I knowed it I wasn't.'

'Mr Hampton,' Miss Habersham said. Now the sheriff looked at her. He even heard her now.

'Haven't you finished slicing that meat yet?' he said. 'Give me the knife then.' He took her by the arm, turning her back to the table. 'Aint you done enough rushing and stewing around tonight to last you a while? It'll be daylight in fifteen minutes and folks dont start lynchings in daylight. They might finish one by daylight if they had a little trouble or bad luck and got behind with it. But they dont start them by daylight because then they would have to see one another's faces. How many can eat more than two eggs?'

They left Aleck Sander with his breakfast at the kitchen table and carried theirs into the diningroom, he and his uncle and Miss Habersham carrying the platter of fried eggs and meat and the pan of biscuits baked last night and warmed again in the oven until they were almost like toast and the coffeepot in which the unstrained grounds and the water had been boiling together until the sheriff had thought to remove the pot from the hot part of the stove; four of them although the sheriff had set five places and they had barely sat down when the sheriff raised his head listening though he himself heard nothing, then rose and went into the dark hall and toward the rear of the house and then he heard the sound of the back door and presently the sheriff came back with Will Legate though minus the shotgun, and he turned his head enough to look out the window behind him and sure enough it was daylight.

The sheriff served the plates while his uncle and Legate passed theirs and the sheriff's cup to Miss Habersham at the coffeepot. Then at once he seemed to have been hearing for a long time the sheriff from a great distance saying ' . . . boy . . . boy . . . ' then 'Wake him up, Gavin. Let him eat his breakfast before he goes to sleep:' and he jerked, it was still only daylight, Miss Habersham was still pouring coffee into the same cup and he began to eat, chewing and even swallowing, rising and falling as though to the motion of the chewing along the deep soft bottomless mire of sleep, into then out of the voices buzzing of old finished things no longer concern of his: the sheriff's:

'Do you know Jake Montgomery, from over in Crossman County? Been in and out of town here for the last six months or so?' then Legate's:

'Sure. A kind of jackleg timber-buyer now. Used to run a place he called a restaurant just across the Tennessee line out of Memphis, though I never heard of nobody trying to buy nothing that had to be chewed in it, until a man went and got killed in it one night two-three years ago. They never did know just how much Jake did or didn't have to do with it but the Tennessee police run him back across the Mississippi line just on principle. Since then I reckon he's been laying around his pa's farm over beyond Glasgow. Maybe he's waiting until he figgers folks have

forgot about that other business and he can set up again in another place on a highway with a hole under the floor big enough to hide a case of whiskey in.'

'What was he doing around here?' the sheriff said: then Legate:

'Buying timber, aint he? Aint him and Vinson Gowrie ' Then Legate said with the barest inflection, 'Was?' and then with no inflection at all: 'What is he doing?' and he this time, his own voice indifferent along the soft deep edge of sleep, too indifferent to bother if it were aloud or not:

'He aint doing anything now.'

But it was better afterward, out of the stale warm house again into the air, the morning, the sun in one soft high level golden wash in the highest tips of the trees, gilding the motionless obese uprush of the town water tank in spiderlegged elongate against the blue, the four of them in his uncle's car once more while the sheriff stood leaned above the driver's window, dressed now even to a bright orange-and-yellow necktie, saying to his uncle:

'You run Miss Eunice home so she can get some sleep. I'll pick you up at your house in say an hour—'

Miss Habersham in the front seat with his uncle said 'Pah.' That was all. She didn't curse. She didn't need to. It was far more definite and final than just cursing. She leaned forward to look past his uncle at the sheriff. 'Get in your car and go to the jail or wherever you'll go to get somebody to do the digging this time. We had to fill it up again because we knew you wouldn't believe it even yet unless you saw it there yourself. Go on,' she said. 'We'll meet you out there. Go on,' she said.

But the sheriff didn't move. He could hear him breathing, vast subterrene and deliberate, like sighing almost. 'Of course I dont know about you,' the sheriff said. 'A lady without nothing but a couple thousand chickens to feed and nurse and water and a vegetable farm

hardly five acres big to run, might not have nothing to do all day. But these boys anyway have got to go to school. Leastways I never heard about any rule in the School Board to give holidays for digging up corpses.'

And that even stopped her. But she didn't sit back yet. She still leaned forward where she could look past his uncle at the sheriff and he thought again She's too old for this, to have to do this: only if she hadn't then he and Aleck Sander, what she and his uncle and the sheriff all three and his mother and father and Paralee too would have called children, would have had to do it—not would have done it but would have had to do it to preserve not even justice and decency but innocence: and he thought of man who apparently had to kill man not for motive or reason but simply for the sake the need the compulsion of having to kill man, inventing creating his motive and reason afterward so that he could still stand up among man as a rational creature: whoever had had to kill Vinson Gowrie had then to dig him up dead and slay another to put in his vacated grave so that whoever had to kill him could rest; and Vinson Gowrie's kin and neighbors who would have to kill Lucas or someone or anyone, it would not really matter who, so that they could lie down and breathe quiet and even grieve quiet and so rest. The sheriff's voice was mild, almost gentle even: 'You go home. You and these boys have done fine. Likely you saved a life. Now you go home and let us attend to the rest of it. That wont be any place for a lady out there.'

But Miss Habersham was just stopped, nor even that for long: 'It wasn't for a man either last night.'

'Wait, Hope,' his uncle said. Then his uncle turned to Miss Habersham. 'Your job's in town here,' he said. 'Dont you know that?' Now Miss Habersham watched his uncle. But she still hadn't sat back in the seat, giving no ground to anyone yet; watching, it was as though she had not at all exchanged one opponent for another but without pause or falter had accepted them both, asking no quarter, crying no odds. 'Will Legate's a farmer,' his uncle said. 'Besides being up all night. He's got to go home and see to his own business for a little while.'

‘Hasn’t Mr Hampton got other deputies?’ Miss Habersham said. ‘What are they for?’

‘They’re just men with guns,’ his uncle said. ‘Legate himself told Chick and me last night that if enough men made up their minds and kept them made up, they would pass him and Mr Tubbs both in time. But if a woman, a lady, a white lady’ His uncle stopped, ceased; they stared at each other; watching them he thought again of his uncle and Lucas in the cell last night (it was last night, of course; it seemed like years now); again except for the fact that his uncle and Miss Habersham were actually looking into each other’s physical eyes instead of bending each upon the other that absolute concentration of all the senses in the sum of which mere clumsy fallible perception weighed little more than the ability to read Sanskrit would, he might have been watching the last two stayers in a poker-pot. ‘. . . just to sit there, in sight, where the first one that passes can have the word spread long before Beat Four can even get the truck cranked up to start to town . . . while we go out there and finish it for good, for ever—’

Miss Habersham leaned slowly back until her back came against the seat. She said: ‘So I’m to sit there on that staircase with my skirts spread or maybe better with my back against the balustrade and one foot propped against the wall of Mrs Tubbs’ kitchen while you men who never had time yesterday to ask that old nigger a few questions and so all he had last night was a boy, a child—’ His uncle said nothing. The sheriff leaned above the window breathing vast subterranean sighs, not breathing hard but just as a big man seems to have to breathe. Miss Habersham said: ‘Drive me home first. I’ve got some mending to do. I aint going to sit there all morning doing nothing so that Mrs Tubbs will think she has to talk to me. Drive me home first. I realised an hour ago what a rush and hurry you and Mr Hampton are in but you can spare the time for that. Aleck Sander can bring my truck to the jail on his way to school and leave it in front of the gate.’

‘Yessum,’ his uncle said.

Chapter Six

So they drove Miss Habersham home, out to the edge of town and through the shaggy untended cedar grove to the paintless columned portico where she got out and went into the house and apparently on through it without even stopping because at once they could hear her somewhere in the back yelling at someone—the old Negro man probably who was Molly's brother and Lucas' brother-in-law—in her strong voice strained and a little high from sleeplessness and fatigue, then she came out again carrying a big cardboard box full of what looked like unironed laundry and long limp webs and ropes of stockings and got back into the car and they drove back to the Square through the fresh quiet morning streets: the old big decaying wooden houses of Jefferson's long-ago foundation set like Miss Habersham's deep in shaggy untended lawns of old trees and rootbound scented and flowering shrubs whose very names most people under fifty no longer knew and which even when children lived in them seemed still to be spellbound by the shades of women, old women still spinsters and widows waiting even seventy-five years later for the slow telegraph to bring them news of Tennessee and Virginia and Pennsylvania battles, which no longer even faced the street but peered at it over the day-after-tomorrow shoulders of the neat small new one-story houses designed in Florida and California set with matching garages in their neat plots of clipped grass and tedious flowerbeds, three and four of them now, a subdivision now in what twenty-five years ago had been considered a little small for one decent front lawn, where the prosperous young married couples lived with two children each and (as soon as they could afford it) an automobile each and the memberships in the country club and the bridge clubs and the junior rotary and chamber of commerce and the patented electric gadgets for cooking and freezing and cleaning and the neat trim colored maids in frilled caps to run them and talk to one another over the telephone from house to house while the wives in sandals and pants and painted toenails puffed lipstick-stained cigarettes over shopping bags in the chain groceries and drugstores.

Or would have been and should have been; Sunday and they might have passed, accepted a day with no one to plug and unplug the humming sweepers and turn the buttons on the stoves as a day off a vacation or maybe an occasion like a baptising or a picnic or a big funeral but this was Monday, a new day and a new week, rest and the need to fill time and conquer boredom was over, children fresh for school and husband and father for store or office or to stand around the Western Union desk where the hourly cotton reports came in; breakfast must be forward and the pandemoniac bustle of exodus yet still no Negro had they seen—the young ones with straightened hair and makeup in the bright trig tomorrow’s clothes from the mailorder houses who would not even put on the Harper’s Bazaar caps and aprons until they were inside the white kitchens and the older ones in the ankle-length homemade calico and gingham who wore the long plain homemade aprons all the time so that they were no longer a symbol but a garment, not even the men who should have been mowing the lawns and clipping the hedges; not even (crossing the Square now) the street department crews who should have been flushing the pavement with hoses and sweeping up the discarded Sunday papers and empty cigarette packs; across the Square and on to the jail where his uncle got out too and went up the walk with Miss Habersham and up the steps and through the still-open door where he could still see Legate’s empty chair still propped against the wall and he heaved himself bodily again out of the long soft timeless rushing black of sleep to find as usual that no time had passed, his uncle still putting his hat back on and turning to come back down the walk to the car. Then they stopped at home, Aleck Sander already out of the car and gone around the side of the house and vanished and he said,

‘No.’

‘Yes,’ his uncle said. ‘You’ve got to go to school. Or better still, to bed and to sleep. —Yes,’ his uncle said suddenly: ‘and Aleck Sander too. He must stay at home today too. Because this mustn’t be talked about, not one word about it until we have finished it. You understand that.’

But he wasn't listening, he and his uncle were not even talking about the same thing, not even when he said 'No' again and his uncle out of the car and already turning toward the house stopped and looked back at him and then stood looking at him for a good long moment and then said,

'We are going at this a little hindpart-before, aint we? I'm the one who should be asking you if I can go.' Because he was thinking about his mother, not just remembered about her because he had done that as soon as they crossed the Square five minutes ago and the simplest thing would have been to get out of his uncle's car there and go and get in the sheriff's car and simply stay in it until they were ready to go back out to the church and he had probably thought about it at the time and would even have done it probably if he hadn't been so worn out and anticlimaxed and dull for sleep and he knew he couldn't cope with her this time even if he had been completely fresh; the very fact that he had already done it twice in eleven hours, once by secrecy and once by sheer surprise and rapidity of movement and of mass, but doomed him completer now to defeat and rout: musing on his uncle's naïve and childlike rationalising about school and bed when faced with that fluid and implacable attack, when once more his uncle read his mind, standing beside the car and looking down at him for another moment with compassion and no hope even though he was a bachelor of fifty thirty-five years free of woman's dominion, his uncle too knowing remembering how she would use the excuses of his education and his physical exhaustion only less quicker than she would have discarded them; who would listen no more to rational reasons for his staying at home than for—civic duty or simple justice or humanity or to save a life or even the peace of his own immortal soul—his going. His uncle said:

'All right. Come on. I'll talk to her.'

He moved, getting out; he said suddenly and quietly, in amazement not at despair of hope but at how much hopelessness you could really stand: 'You're just my uncle.'

'I'm worse than that,' his uncle said. 'I'm just a man.' Then his uncle read his mind again: 'All right. I'll try to talk to Paralee too. The same condition obtains there; motherhood doesn't seem to have any pigment in its skin.'

And his uncle too was probably thinking how you not only couldn't beat them, you couldn't even find the battlefield in time to admit defeat before they had moved it again; he remembered, it was two years ago now, he had finally made the high school football team or that is he had won or been chosen for one of the positions to make an out-of-town trip because the regular player had been injured in practice or fallen behind in his grades or maybe his mother either wouldn't let him go, something, he had forgotten exactly what because he had been too busy all that Thursday and Friday racking his brains in vain to think how to tell his mother he was going to Mottstown to play on the regular team, right up to the last minute when he had to tell her something and so did: badly: and weathered it since his father happened to be present (though he really hadn't calculated it that way—not that he wouldn't have if he hadn't been too worried and perplexed with a blending of anger and shame and shame at being angry and ashamed ((crying at her at one point: 'Is it the team's fault that I'm the only child you've got?')) to think of it) and left that Friday afternoon with the team feeling as he imagined a soldier might feel wrenching out of his mother's restraining arms to go fight a battle for some shameful cause; she would grieve for him of course if he fell and she would even look on his face again if he didn't but there would be always ineradicable between them the ancient green and perennial adumbration: so that all that Friday night trying to go to sleep in a strange bed and all the next forenoon too waiting for the game to start he thought better for the team if he had not come since he probably had too much on his mind to be worth anything to it: until the first whistle blew and on and afterward until bottom-most beneath the piled mass of both teams, the ball clutched to his chest and his mouth and nostrils both full of the splashed dried whitewash marking the goal line he heard and recognised above all the others that one voice shrill triumphant and bloodthirsty and picked up at last and the wind thumped back into him he saw her foremost in the crowd not sitting in the grandstand but

among the ones trotting and even running up and down the sideline following each play, then in the car that evening on the way back to Jefferson, himself in the front seat beside the hired driver and his mother and three of the other players in the back and her voice as proud and serene and pitiless as his own could have been: 'Does your arm still hurt?'—entering the hall and only then discovering that he had expected to find her still just inside the front door still in the loose hair and the nightdress and himself walking back even after three hours into the unbroken uninterrupted wail. But instead it was his father already roaring who came out of the diningroom and still at it even with his uncle yelling back almost into his face:

'Charley. Charley. Dammit, will you wait?' and only then his mother fully dressed, brisk busy and composed, coming up the hall from the back, the kitchen, saying to his father without even raising her voice:

'Charley. Go back and finish your breakfast. Paralee isn't feeling well this morning and she doesn't want to be all day getting dinner ready:' then to him—the fond constant familiar face which he had known all his life and therefore could neither have described it so that a stranger could recognise it nor recognise it himself from anyone's description but only brisk calm and even a little inattentive now, the wail a wail only because of the ancient used habit of its verbiage: 'You haven't washed your face:' nor even pausing to see if he followed, on up the stairs and into the bathroom, even turning on the tap and putting the soap into his hands and standing with the towel open and waiting, the familiar face wearing the familiar expression of amazement and protest and anxiety and invincible repudiation which it had worn all his life each time he had done anything removing him one more step from infancy, from childhood: when his uncle had given him the Shetland pony someone had taught to take eighteen- and twenty-four-inch jumps and when his father had given him the first actual powder-shooting gun and the afternoon when the groom delivered Highboy in the truck and he got up for the first time and Highboy stood on his hind legs and her scream and the groom's calm voice saying, 'Hit him hard over the head when he does that. You dont want him falling over backward on you' but the muscles merely falling into the old expression

through inattention and long usage as her voice had merely chosen by inattention and usage the long-worn verbiage of wailing because there was something else in it now—the same thing which had been there in the car that afternoon when she said, ‘Your arm doesn’t hurt at all now does it?’ and on the other afternoon when his father came home and found him jumping Highboy over the concrete watertrough in the lot, his mother leaning on the fence watching and his father’s fury of relief and anger and his mother’s calm voice this time: ‘Why not? The trough isn’t near as tall as that flimsy fence-thing you bought him that isn’t even nailed together:’ so that even dull for sleep he recognised it and turned his face and hands dripping and cried at her in amazed and incredulous outrage: ‘You aint going too! You cant go!’ then even dull for sleep realising the fatuous naïveté of anyone using cant to her on any subject and so playing his last desperate card: ‘If you go, then I wont! You hear me? I wont go!’

‘Dry your face and comb your hair,’ she said. ‘Then come on down and drink your coffee.’

That too. Paralee was all right too apparently because his uncle was at the telephone in the hall when he entered the diningroom, his father already roaring again before he had even sat down:

‘Dammit, why didn’t you tell me last night? Dont you ever again——’

‘Because you wouldn’t have believed him either,’ his uncle said coming in from the hall. ‘You wouldn’t have listened either. It took an old woman and two children for that, to believe truth for no other reason than that it was truth, told by an old man in a fix deserving pity and belief, to someone capable of the pity even when none of them really believed him. Which you didn’t at first,’ his uncle said to him. ‘When did you really begin to believe him? When you opened the coffin, wasn’t it? I want to know, you see. Maybe I’m not too old to learn either. When was it?’

‘I dont know,’ he said. Because he didn’t know. It seemed to him that he had known all the time. Then it seemed to him that he had never

really believed Lucas. Then it seemed to him that it had never happened at all, heaving himself once more with no movement up out of the long deep slough of sleep but at least to some elapse of time now, he had gained that much anyway, maybe enough to be safe on for a while like the tablets night truckdrivers took not as big hardly as a shirt button yet in which were concentrated enough wakefulness to reach the next town because his mother was in the room now brisk and calm, setting the cup of coffee down in front of him in a way that if Paralee had done it she would have said that Paralee had slopped it at him: which, the coffee, was why neither his father nor his uncle had even looked at her, his father on the contrary exclaiming,

‘Coffee? What the devil is this? I thought the agreement was when you finally consented for Gavin to buy that horse that he would neither ask for nor even accept a spoonful of coffee until he was eighteen years old:’ and his mother not even listening, with the same hand and in the same manner half shoving and half popping the cream pitcher then the sugar bowl into his reach and already turning back toward the kitchen, her voice not really hurried and impatient: just brisk:

‘Drink it now. We’re already late:’ and now they looked at her for the first time: dressed, even to her hat, with in the crook of her other arm the straw basket out of which she had darned his and his father’s and his uncle’s socks and stockings ever since he could remember, though his uncle at first saw only the hat and for a moment seemed to join him in the same horrified surprise he had felt in the bathroom.

‘Maggie!’ his uncle said. ‘You cant! Charley——’

‘I dont intend to,’ his mother said, not even stopping. ‘This time you men will have to do the digging. I’m going to the jail:’ already in the kitchen now and only her voice coming back: ‘I’m not going to let Miss Habersham sit there by herself with the whole county gawking at her. As soon as I help Paralee plan dinner we’ll——’ but not dying fading: ceasing, quitting: since she had dismissed them though his father still tried once more:

‘He’s got to go to school.’

But even his uncle didn’t listen. ‘You can drive Miss Eunice’s truck, cant you?’ his uncle said. ‘There wont be a Negro school today for Aleck Sander to be going to so he can leave it at the jail. And even if there was I doubt if Paralee’s going to let him cross the front yard inside the next week.’ Then his uncle seemed even to have heard his father or at least decided to answer him: ‘Nor any white school either for that matter if this boy hadn’t listened to Lucas, which I wouldn’t, and to Miss Habersham, which I didn’t. Well?’ his uncle said. ‘Can you stay awake that long? You can get a nap once we are on the road.’

‘Yes sir,’ he said. So he drank the coffee which the soap and water and hard toweling had unfogged him enough to know he didn’t like and didn’t want but not enough for him to choose what simple thing to do about it: that is not drink it: tasting sipping then adding more sugar to it until each—coffee and sugar—ceased to be either and became a sickish quinine sweet amalgam of the worst of both until his uncle said,

‘Dammit, stop that,’ and got up and went to the kitchen and returned with a saucepan of heated milk and a soup bowl and dumped the coffee into the bowl and poured the hot milk into it and said, ‘Go on. Forget about it. Just drink it.’ So he did, from the bowl in both hands like water from a gourd, hardly tasting it and still his father flung a little back in his chair looking at him and talking, asking him just how scared Aleck Sander was and if he wasn’t even scarer than Aleck Sander only his vanity wouldn’t allow him to show it before a darky and to tell the truth now, neither of them would have touched the grave in the dark even enough to lift the flowers off of it if Miss Habersham hadn’t driven them at it: his uncle interrupting:

‘Aleck Sander even told you then that the grave had already been disturbed by someone in a hurry, didn’t he?’

‘Yes sir,’ he said and his uncle said:

‘Do you know what I’m thinking now?’

‘No sir,’ he said.

‘I’m being glad Aleck Sander couldn’t completely penetrate darkness and call out the name of the man who came down the hill carrying something in front of him on the mule.’ And he remembered that: the three of them all thinking it but not one of them saying it: just standing invisible to one another above the pit’s invisible inky yawn.

‘Fill it up,’ Miss Habersham said. They did, the (five times now) loosened dirt going down much faster than it came up though it seemed forever in the thin starlight filled with the constant sound of the windless pines like one vast abateless hum not of amazement but of attention, watching, curiosity; amoral, detached, not involved and missing nothing. ‘Put the flowers back,’ Miss Habersham said.

‘It’ll take time,’ he said.

‘Put them back,’ Miss Habersham said. So they did.

‘I’ll get the horse,’ he said. ‘You and Aleck Sander——’

‘We’ll all go,’ Miss Habersham said. So they gathered up the tools and the rope (nor did they use the flashlight again) and Aleck Sander said ‘Wait’ and found by touch the board he had used for a shovel and carried that until he could push it back under the church and he untied Highboy and held the stirrup but Miss Habersham said, ‘No. We’ll lead him. Aleck Sander can walk exactly behind me and you walk exactly behind Aleck Sander and lead the horse.’

‘We could go faster——’ he said again and they couldn’t see her face: only the thin straight shape, the shadow, the hat which on anyone else wouldn’t even have looked like a hat but on her as on his grandmother looked exactly right, like exactly nothing else, her voice not loud, not much louder than breathing, as if she were not even moving her lips, not to anyone, just murmuring:

'It's the best I know to do. I don't know anything else to do.'

'Maybe we all ought to walk in the middle,' he said, loud, too loud, twice louder than he had intended or even thought; it should carry for miles especially over a whole countryside already hopelessly waked and alerted by the sleepless sibilant what Paralee probably and old Ephraim certainly and Lucas too would call 'miration' of the pines. She was looking at him now. He could feel it.

'I'll never be able to explain to your mother but Aleck Sander hasn't got any business here at all,' she said. 'You all walk exactly behind me and let the horse come last:' and turned and went on though what good that would do he didn't know because in his understanding the very word 'ambush' meant 'from the flank, the side': back in single file that way down the hill to where Aleck Sander had driven the truck into the bushes: and he thought if I were him this is where it would be and so did she; she said, 'Wait.'

'How can you keep on standing in front of us if we don't stay together?' he said. And this time she didn't even say This is all I can think of to do but just stood there so that Aleck Sander walked past her and on into the bushes and started the truck and backed it out and swung it to point down the hill, the engine running but no lights yet and she said, 'Tie the reins up and let him go. Won't he come home?'

'I hope so,' he said. He got up.

'Then tie him to a tree,' she said. 'We will come back and get him as soon as we have seen your uncle and Mr Hampton——'

'Then we can all watch him ride down the road with maybe a horse or the mule in front of him too,' Aleck Sander said. He raced the engine then let it idle again. 'Come on, get in. He's either here watching us or he ain't and if he ain't we're all right and if he is he's done waited too late now when he let us get back to the truck.'

'Then you ride right behind the truck,' she said. 'We'll go slow——'

‘Nome,’ Aleck Sander said; he leaned out. ‘Get started; we’re going to have to wait for you anyway when we get to town.’

So—he needed no urging—he let Highboy down the hill, only holding his head up; the truck’s lights came on and it moved and once on the flat even in the short space to the highroad Highboy was already trying to run but he checked him back and up onto the highroad, the lights of the truck fanning up and out as it came down onto the flat then he slacked the curb, Highboy beginning to run, clashing the snaffle as always, thinking as always that one more champing regurg would get it forward enough to get his teeth on it, running now when the truck lights swung up onto the highroad too, his feet in eight hollow beats on the bridge and he leaned into the dark hard wind and let him go, the truck lights not even in sight during the full half-mile until he slowed him into the long reaching hard road-gait and almost a mile then before the truck overtook and then passed and the ruby tail-lamp drew on and away and then was gone but at least he was out of the pines, free of that looming down-watching sibilance uncaring and missing nothing saying to the whole circumambience: Look. Look: but then they were still saying it somewhere and they had certainly been saying it long enough for all Beat Four, Gowries and Ingrums and Workitts and Frasers and all to have heard it by this time so he wouldn’t think about that and so he stopped thinking about it now, all in the same flash in which he had remembered it, swallowing the last swallow from the bowl and setting it down as his father more or less plunged up from the table, clattering his chairlegs back across the floor, saying:

‘Maybe I better go to work. Somebody’ll have to earn a little bread around here while the rest of you are playing cops and robbers:’ and went out and apparently the coffee had done something to what he called his thinking processes or anyway the processes of what people called thinking because now he knew the why for his father too—the rage which was relief after the event which had to express itself some way and chose anger not because he would have forbidden him to go but because he had had no chance to, the pseudo-scornful humorous impugment of his and Aleck Sander’s courage which blinked not even

as much at a rifled grave in the dark as it did at Miss Habersham's will,—in fact the whole heavyhanded aspersion of the whole thing by reducing it to the terms of a kind of kindergarten witchhunt: which was probably merely the masculine form of refusing also to believe that he was what his uncle called big enough to button his pants and so he dismissed his father, hearing his mother about to emerge from the kitchen and pushing his chair back and getting up himself when suddenly he was thinking how coffee was already a good deal more than he had known but nobody had warned him that it produced illusions like cocaine or opium: seeing watching his father's noise and uproar flick and vanish away like blown smoke or mist, not merely revealing but exposing the man who had begot him looking back at him from beyond the bridgeless abyss of that begetting not with just pride but with envy too; it was his uncle's abnegant and rhetorical self-lacerating which was the phony one and his father was gnawing the true bitter irremediable bone of all which was mismatchment with time, being born too soon or late to have been himself sixteen and gallop a horse ten miles in the dark to save an old nigger's insolent and friendless neck.

But at least he was awake. The coffee had accomplished that anyway. He still needed to doze only now he couldn't; the desire to sleep was there but it was wakefulness now he would have to combat and abate. It was after eight now; one of the county schoolbusses passed as he prepared to drive Miss Habersham's truck away from the curb and the street would be full of children too fresh for Monday morning with books and paper bags of recess-time lunches and behind the schoolbus was a string of cars and trucks stained with country mud and dust so constant and unbroken that his uncle and his mother would already have reached the jail before he ever managed to cut into it because Monday was stock-auction day at the sales barns behind the Square and he could see them, the empty cars and trucks rank on dense rank along the courthouse curb like shoats at a feed-trough and the men with their stock-trader walking-sticks not even stopping but gone straight across the Square and along the alley to the sales barns to chew tobacco and unlighted cigars from pen to pen amid the ammonia-reek of manure and liniment and the bawling of calves and the stamp

and sneeze of horses and mules and the second-hand wagons and plow-gear and guns and harness and watches and only the women (what few of them that is since stock-sale day unlike Saturday was a man's time) remained about the Square and the stores so that the Square itself would be empty except for the parked cars and trucks until the men would come back for an hour at noon to meet them at the cafes and restaurants.

Whereupon this time he jerked himself, no reflex now, not even out of sleep but illusion, who had carried hypnosis right out of the house with him even into the bright strong sun of day, even driving the pickup truck which before last night he would not even have recognised yet which since last night had become as inexpugnable a part of his memory and experience and breathing as hiss of shovelled dirt or the scrape of a metal blade on a pine box would ever be, through a mirage-vacuum in which not simply last night had not happened but there had been no Saturday either, remembering now as if he had only this moment seen it that there had been no children in the schoolbus but only grown people and in the stream of cars and trucks following it and now following him where he had finally cut in, a few of which even on stock-auction Monday (on Saturday half of the flat open beds would have been jammed and packed with them, men women and children in the cheap meagre finery in which they came to town) should have carried Negroes, there had not been one dark face.

Nor one school-bound child on the street although he had heard without listening enough of his uncle at the telephone to know that the superintendent had called whether to have school today or not and his uncle had told him yes, and in sight of the Square now he could see already three more of the yellow busses supposed and intended to bring the county children in to school but which their owner-contractor-operators translated on Saturdays and holidays into pay-passenger transport and then the Square itself, the parked cars and trucks as always as should be but the Square itself anything but empty: no exodus of men toward the stock pens nor women into the stores so that as he drove the pickup into the curb behind his uncle's car he could see already where visible and sense where not a moil and mass of

movement, one dense pulse and hum filling the Square as when the crowd overflows the carnival midway or the football field, flowing into the street and already massed along the side opposite to the jail until the head of it had already passed the blacksmith's where he had stood yesterday trying to be invisible as if they were waiting for a parade to pass (and almost in the middle of the street so that the still unbroken stream of cars and trucks had to detour around them a clump of a dozen or so more like the group in a reviewing stand in whose center in its turn he recognized the badged official cap of the town marshal who at this hour on this day would have been in front of the schoolhouse holding up traffic for children to cross the street and he did not have to remember that the marshal's name was Ingrum, a Beat Four Ingrum come to town as the apostate sons of Beat Four occasionally did to marry a town girl and become barbers and bailiffs and nightwatchmen as petty Germanic princelings would come down out of their Brandenburg hills to marry the heiresses to European thrones)—the men and the women and not one child, the weathered country faces and sunburned necks and backs of hands, the clean faded tieless earthcolored shirts and pants and print cotton dresses thronging the Square and the street as though the stores themselves were closed and locked, not even staring yet at the blank front of the jail and the single barred window which had been empty and silent too for going on forty-eight hours now but just gathering, condensing, not expectant nor in anticipation nor even attentive yet but merely in that preliminary settling down like the before-curtain in a theatre: and he thought that was it: holiday: which meant a day for children yet here turned upside down: and suddenly he realised that he had been completely wrong; it was not Saturday which had never happened but only last night which to them had not happened yet, that not only they didn't know about last night but there was nobody, not even Hampton, who could have told them because they would have refused to believe him; whereupon something like a skim or a veil like that which crosses a chicken's eye and which he had not even known was there went flick! from his own and he saw them for the first time—the same weathered still almost inattentive faces and the same faded clean cotton shirts and pants and dresses but no crowd now waiting for the curtain to rise on a stage's illusion but rather the one in the courtroom waiting for the sheriffs

officer to cry Oyez Oyez Oyez This honorable court; not even impatient because the moment had not even come yet to sit in judgment not on Lucas Beauchamp, they had already condemned him but on Beat Four, come not to see what they called justice done nor even retribution exacted but to see that Beat Four should not fail its white man's high estate.

So that he had stopped the truck was out and had already started to run when he stopped himself: something of dignity something of pride remembering last night when he had instigated and in a way led and anyway accompanied the stroke which not one of the responsible elders but had failed even to recognise its value, let alone its need, and something of caution too remembering how his uncle had said almost nothing was enough to put a mob in motion so perhaps even a child running toward the jail would have been enough: then he remembered again the faces myriad yet curiously identical in their lack of individual identity, their complete relinquishment of individual identity into one We not even impatient, not even hurryable, almost gala in its complete obliviousness of its own menace, not to be stampeded by a hundred running children: and then in the same flash the obverse: not to be halted or deflected by a hundred times a hundred of them, and having realised its sheer hopelessness when it was still only an intention and then its physical imponderability when it entered accomplishment he now recognised the enormity of what he had blindly meddled with and that his first instinctive impulse—to run home and fling saddle and bridle on the horse and ride as the crow flies into the last stagger of exhaustion and then sleep and then return after it was all over—had been the right one (who now simply because he happened not to be an orphan had not even that escape) because it seemed to him now that he was responsible for having brought into the light and glare of day something shocking and shameful out of the whole white foundation of the county which he himself must partake of too since he too was bred of it, which otherwise might have flared and blazed merely out of Beat Four and then vanished back into its darkness or at least invisibility with the fading embers of Lucas' crucifixion.

But it was too late now, he couldn't even repudiate, relinquish, run: the jail door still open and opposite it now he could see Miss Habersham sitting in the chair Legate had sat in, the cardboard box on the floor at her feet and a garment of some sort across her lap; she was still wearing the hat and he could see the steady motion of her hand and elbow and it seemed to him he could even see the flash and flick of the needle in her hand though he knew he could not at this distance; but his uncle was in the way so he had to move further along the walk but at that moment his uncle turned and came out the door and recrossed the veranda and then he could see her too in the second chair beside Miss Habersham; a car drew up to the curb behind him and stopped and now without haste she chose a sock from the basket and slipped the darningegg into it; she even had the needle already threaded stuck in the front of her dress and now he could distinguish the flash and glint of it and maybe that was because he knew so well the motion, the narrow familiar suppleness of the hand which he had watched all his life but at least no man could have disputed him that it was his sock.

'Who's that?' the sheriff said behind him. He turned. The sheriff sat behind the wheel of his car, his neck and shoulders bowed and hunched so he could peer out below the top of the window-frame. The engine was still running and he saw in the back of the car the handles of two shovels and the pick too which they would not need and on the back seat quiet and motionless save for the steady glint and blink of their eyewhites, two Negroes in blue jumpers and the soiled black-ringed convict pants which the street gangs wore.

'Who would it be?' his uncle said behind him too but he didn't turn this time nor did he even listen further because three men came suddenly out of the street and stopped beside the car and as he watched five or six more came up and in another moment the whole crowd would begin to flow across the street; already a passing car had braked suddenly (and then the following one behind it) at first to keep from running over them and then for its occupants to lean out looking at the sheriff's car where the first man to reach it had already stooped to peer into it, his brown farmer's hands grasping the edge of the open window, his brown weathered face thrust into the car curious divinant

and abashless while behind him his massed duplicates in their felt hats and sweat-stained panamas listened.

'What you up to, Hope?' the man said. 'Dont you know the Grand Jury'll get you, wasting county money this way? Aint you heard about that new lynch law the Yankees passed? the folks that lynches the nigger is supposed to dig the grave?'

'Maybe he's taking them shovels out there for Nub Gowrie and them boys of his to practice with,' the second said.

'Then it's a good thing Hope's taking shovel hands too,' the third said. 'If he's depending on anybody named Gowrie to dig a hole or do anything else that might bring up a sweat, he'll sure need them.'

'Or maybe they aint shovel hands,' the fourth said. 'Maybe it's them the Gowries are going to practice on.' Yet even though one guffawed they were not laughing, more than a dozen now crowded around the car to take one quick allcomprehensive glance into the back of it where the two Negroes sat immobile as carved wood staring straight ahead at nothing and no movement even of breathing other than an infinitesimal widening and closing of the whites around their eyeballs, then looking at the sheriff again with almost exactly the expression he had seen on the faces waiting for the spinning tapes behind a slotmachine's glass to stop.

'I reckon that'll do,' the sheriff said. He thrust his head and one vast arm out the window and with the arm pushed the nearest ones back and away from the car as effortlessly as he would have opened a curtain, raising his voice but not much: 'Willy.' The marshal came up; he could already hear him:

'Gangway, boys. Lemme see what the high sheriff's got on his mind this morning.'

'Why dont you get these folks out of the street so them cars can get to town?' the sheriff said. 'Maybe they want to stand around and look at the jail too.'

'You bet,' the marshal said. He turned, shoving his hands at the nearest ones, not touching them, as if he were putting into motion a herd of cattle. 'Now boys,' he said.

They didn't move, looking past the marshal still at the sheriff, not at all defiant, not really daring anyone: just tolerant, goodhumored, debonair almost.

'Why, Sheriff,' a voice said, then another:

'It's a free street, aint it, Sheriff? You town folks wont mind us just standing on it long as we spend our money with you, will you?'

'But not to block off the other folks trying to get to town to spend a little,' the sheriff said. 'Move on now. Get them out of the street, Willy.'

'Come on, boys,' the marshal said. 'There's other folks besides you wants to get up where they can watch them bricks.' They moved then but still without haste, the marshal herding them back across the street like a woman driving a flock of hens across a pen, she to control merely the direction not the speed and not too much of that, the fowls moving ahead of her flapping apron not recalcitrant, just unpredictable, fearless of her and not yet even alarmed; the halted car and the ones behind it moved too, slowly, dragging at creeping pace their loads of craned faces; he could hear the marshal shouting at the drivers: 'Get on. Get on. There's cars behind you—'

The sheriff was looking at his uncle again. 'Where's the other one?'

'The other what?' his uncle said.

'The other detective. The one that can see in the dark.'

‘Aleck Sander,’ his uncle said. ‘You want him too?’

‘No,’ the sheriff said. ‘I just missed him. I was just surprised to find one human in this county with taste and judgment enough to stay at home today. You ready? Let’s get started.’

‘Right,’ his uncle said. The sheriff was notorious as a driver who used up a car a year as a heavyhanded sweeper wears out brooms: not by speed but by simple friction; now the car actually shot away from the curb and almost before he could watch it, was gone. His uncle went to theirs and opened the door. ‘Jump in,’ his uncle said.

Then he said it; at least this much was simple: ‘I’m not going.’

His uncle paused and now he saw watching him the quizzical saturnine face, the quizzical eyes which given a little time didn’t miss much; had in fact as long as he had known them never missed anything until last night.

‘Ah,’ his uncle said. ‘Miss Habersham is of course a lady but this other female is yours.’

‘Look at them,’ he said, not moving, barely moving his lips even. ‘Across the street. On the Square too and nobody but Willy Ingrum and that damn cap—’

‘Didn’t you hear them talking to Hampton?’ his uncle said.

‘I heard them,’ he said. ‘They were not even laughing at their own jokes. They were laughing at him.’

‘They were not even taunting him,’ his uncle said. ‘They were not even jeering at him. They were just watching him. Watching him and Beat Four, to see what would happen. These people just came to town to see what either or both of them are going to do.’

‘No,’ he said. ‘More than that.’

'All right,' his uncle said, quite soberly too now. 'Granted. Then what?'

'Suppose——' But his uncle interrupted:

'Suppose Beat Four comes in and picks up your mother's and Miss Habersham's chairs and carries them out into the yard where they'll be out of the way? Lucas aint in that cell. He's in Mr Hampton's house, probably sitting in the kitchen right now eating his breakfast. What did you think Will Legate was doing coming in by the back door within fifteen minutes of when we got there and told Mr Hampton? Aleck Sander even heard him telephoning.'

'Then what's Mr Hampton in such a hurry for?' he said: and his uncle's voice was quite sober now: but just sober, that was all:

'Because the best way to stop having to suppose or deny either is for us to get out there and do what we have to do and get back here. Jump in the car.'

Chapter Seven

They never saw the sheriff's car again until they reached the church. Nor for him was the reason sleep who in spite of the coffee might have expected that and in fact had. Up to the moment when at the wheel of the pickup he had got near enough to see the Square and then the mass of people lining the opposite side of the street in front of the jail he had expected that as soon as he and his uncle were on the road back to the church, coffee or no coffee he would not even be once more fighting sleep but on the contrary would relinquish and accept it and so in the nine miles of gravel and the one of climbing dirt regain at least a half-hour of the eight he had lost last night and—it seemed to him now—the three or four times that many he had spent trying to quit thinking about Lucas Beauchamp the night before.

And when they reached town a little before three this morning nobody could have persuaded him that by this time, almost nine o'clock, he

would not have made back at least five and a half hours of sleep even if not the full six, remembering how he—and without doubt Miss Habersham and Aleck Sander too—had believed that as soon as they and his uncle entered the sheriff's house that would be all of it; they would enter the front door and lay into the sheriff's broad competent ordained palm as you drop your hat on the hall table in passing, the whole night's nightmare of doubt and indecision and sleeplessness and strain and fatigue and shock and amazement and (he admitted it) some of fear too. But it hadn't happened and he knew now that he had never really expected it to; the idea had ever entered their heads only because they had been worn out, spent not so much from sleeplessness and fatigue and strain as exhausted by shock and amazement and anticlimax; he had not even needed the massed faces watching the blank brick front of the jail nor the ones which had crossed the street and even blocked it while they crowded around the sheriff's car, to read and then dismiss its interior with that one mutual concordant glance comprehensive abashless trustless and undeniable as the busy parent pauses for an instant to check over and anticipate the intentions of a loved though not too reliable child. If he needed anything he certainly had that—the faces the voices not even taunting and not even jeering: just perspicuous jocular and without pity—poised under the first relaxation of succumbence like a pin in the mattress so he was as wide awake as his uncle even who had slept all night or at least most of it, free of town now and going fast now, passing within the first mile the last of the cars and trucks and then no more of them because all who would come to town today would by this time be inside that last rapidly contracting mile—the whole white part of the county taking advantage of the good weather and the good allweather roads which were their roads because their taxes and votes and the votes of their kin and connections who could bring pressure on the congressmen who had the giving away of the funds had built them, to get quickly into the town which was theirs too since it existed only by their sufferance and support to contain their jail and their courthouse, to crowd and jam and block its streets too if they saw fit: patient biding and un pitying, neither to be hurried nor checked nor dispersed nor denied since theirs was the murdered and the murderer too; theirs the affronter and the principle affronted: the white man and the

bereavement of his vacancy, theirs the right not just to mere justice but vengeance too to allot or withhold.

They were going quite fast now, faster than he could ever remember his uncle driving, out the long road where he had ridden last night on the horse but in daylight now, morning's bland ineffable May; now he could see the white bursts of dogwood in the hedgerows marking the old section-line surveys or standing like nuns in the cloistral patches and bands of greening woods and the pink and white of peach and pear and the pinkwhite of the first apple trees in the orchards which last night he had only smelled: and always beyond and around them the enduring land—the fields geometric with furrows where corn had been planted when the first doves began to call in late March and April, and cotton when the first whippoorwills cried at night around the beginning of May a week ago: but empty, vacant of any movement and any life—the farmhouses from which no smoke rose because breakfast was long over by now and no dinner to be cooked where none would be home to eat it, the paintless Negro cabins where on Monday morning in the dust of the grassless treeless yards halfnaked children should have been crawling and scabbling after broken cultivator wheels and wornout automobile tires and empty snuff-bottles and tin cans and in the back yards smoke-blackened iron pots should have been bubbling over wood fires beside the sagging fences of vegetable patches and chickenruns which by nightfall would be gaudy with drying overalls and aprons and towels and unionsuits: but not this morning, not now; the wheels and the giant-doughnuts of chewed rubber and the bottles and cans lying scattered and deserted in the dust since that moment Saturday afternoon when the first voice shouted from inside the house, and in the back yards the pots sitting empty and cold among last Monday's ashes among the empty clotheslines and as the car flashed past the blank and vacant doors he would catch one faint gleam of fire on hearth and no more see but only sense among the shadows the still white roll of eyes; but most of all, the empty fields themselves in each of which on this day at this hour on the second Monday in May there should have been fixed in monotonous repetition the land's living symbol—a formal group of ritual almost mystic significance identical and monotonous as milestones tying the county-seat to the county's

ultimate rim as milestones would: the beast the plow and the man integrated in one foundationed into the frozen wave of their furrow tremendous with effort yet at the same time vacant of progress, ponderable immovable and immobile like groups of wrestling statuary set against the land's immensity—until suddenly (they were eight miles from town; already the blue-green lift of the hills was in sight) he said with an incredulous an almost shocked amazement who except for Paralee and Aleck Sander and Lucas had not seen one in going on forty-eight hours:

'There's a nigger.'

'Yes,' his uncle said. 'Today is the ninth of May. This county's got half of a hundred and forty-two thousand acres to plant yet. Somebody's got to stay home and work:'—the car rushing boring up so that across the field's edge and the perhaps fifty yards separating them he and the Negro behind the plow looked eye to eye into each other's face before the Negro looked away—the face black and gleamed with sweat and passionate with effort, tense concentrated and composed, the car flashing past and on while he leaned first out the open window to look back then turned in the seat to see back through the rear window, watching them still in their rapid unblurred diminishment—the man and the mule and the wooden plow which coupled them furious and solitary, fixed and without progress in the earth, leaning terrifically against nothing.

They could see the hills now; they were almost there—the long lift of the first pine ridge standing across half the horizon and beyond it a sense a feel of others, the mass of them seeming not so much to stand rush abruptly up out of the plateau as to hang suspended over it as his uncle had told him the Scottish highlands did except for this sharpness and color; that was two years ago, maybe three and his uncle had said, 'Which is why the people who chose by preference to live on them on little patches which wouldn't make eight bushels of corn or fifty pounds of lint cotton an acre even if they were not too steep for a mule to pull a plow across (but then they dont want to make the cotton anyway, only the corn and not too much of that because it really doesn't take a

great deal of corn to run a still as big as one man and his sons want to fool with) are people named Gowrie and McCallum and Fraser and Ingrum that used to be Ingraham and Workitt that used to be Urquhart only the one that brought it to America and then Mississippi couldn't spell it either, who love brawling and fear God and believe in Hell——' and it was as though his uncle had read his mind, holding the speedometer needle at fifty-five into the last mile of gravel (already the road was beginning to slant down toward the willow-and-cypress bottom of the Nine-Mile branch) speaking, that is volunteering to speak for the first time since they left town:

'Gowrie and Fraser and Workitt and Ingrum. And in the valleys along the rivers, the broad rich easy land where a man can raise something he can sell openly in daylight, the people named Littlejohn and Greenleaf and Armstead and Millingham and Bookwright——' and stopped, the car dropping on down the slope, increasing speed by its own weight; now he could see the bridge where Aleck Sander had waited for him in the dark and below which Highboy had smelled quicksand.

'We turn off just beyond it,' he said.

'I know,' his uncle said. '—And the ones named Sambo, they live in both, they elect both because they can stand either because they can stand anything.' The bridge was quite near now, the white railing of the entrance yawned rushing at them. 'Not all white people can endure slavery and apparently no man can stand freedom (Which incidentally—the premise that man really wants peace and freedom—is the trouble with our relations with Europe right now, whose people not only don't know what peace is but—except for Anglo Saxons—actively fear and distrust personal liberty; we are hoping without really any hope that our atom bomb will be enough to defend an idea as obsolete as Noah's Ark.); with one mutual instantaneous accord he forces his liberty into the hands of the first demagogue who rises into view: lacking that he himself destroys and obliterates it from his sight and ken and even remembrance with the frantic unanimity of a neighborhood stamping out a grass-fire. But the people named Sambo

survived the one and who knows? they may even endure the other. —
And who knows— —’

Then a gleam of sand, a flash and glint of water; the white rail streamed past in one roar and rush and rattle of planking and they were across. He’ll have to slow down now he thought but his uncle didn’t, merely declutching, the car rolling on its own momentum which carried it still too fast through a slewing skidding turn into the dirt road and on for fifty yards bouncing among the ruts until the last of flat land died headlong into the first gentle slant, its momentum still carrying the car in high speed gear yet up the incline until then after he saw the tracks where Aleck Sander had driven the pickup off the road into the bushes and where he had stood ready with his hand poised over Highboy’s nostrils while the horse or the mule, whichever it was, had come down the hill with the burden in front of the rider which even Aleck Sander with his eyes like an owl or mink or whatever else hunts at night, had failed to descry (and he remembered again not just his uncle at the table this morning but himself standing in the yard last night during that moment after Aleck Sander walked away and before he recognised Miss Habersham when he actually believed he was coming out alone to do what must be done and he told himself now as he had at the table: I won’t think about that.); almost there now, practically were there in fact: what remained of space intervened not even to be measured in miles.

Though that little at a crawl, the car whining in second gear now against the motionless uprush of the main ridge and the strong constant resinous downflow of the pines where the dogwood looked indeed like nuns now in the long green corridors, up and onto the last crest, the plateau and now he seemed to see his whole native land, his home—the dirt, the earth which had bred his bones and those of his fathers for six generations and was still shaping him into not just a man but a specific man, not with just a man’s passions and aspirations and beliefs but the specific passions and hopes and convictions and ways of thinking and acting of a specific kind and even race: and even more: even among a kind and race specific and unique (according to the lights of most, certainly of all of them who had thronged into town this

morning to stand across the street from the jail and crowd up around the sheriff's car, damned unique) since it had also integrated into him whatever it was that had compelled him to stop and listen to a damned highnosed impudent Negro who even if he wasn't a murderer had been about to get if not about what he deserved at least exactly what he had spent the sixty-odd years of his life asking for—unfolding beneath him like a map in one slow soundless explosion: to the east ridge on green ridge tumbling away toward Alabama and to the west and south the checkered fields and the woods flowing on into the blue and gauzed horizon beyond which lay at last like a cloud the long wall of the levee and the great River itself flowing not merely from the north but out of the North circumscribing and outland—the umbilicus of America joining the soil which was his home to the parent which three generations ago it had failed in blood to repudiate; by turning his head he could see the faint stain of smoke which was town ten miles away and merely by looking ahead he could see the long reach of rich bottom land marked off into the big holdings, the plantations (one of which was Edmonds' where the present Edmonds and Lucas both had been born, stemming from the same grandfather) along their own little river (though even in his grandfather's memory steamboats had navigated it) and then the dense line of river jungle itself: and beyond that stretching away east and north and west not merely to where the ultimate headlands frowned back to back upon the waste of the two oceans and the long barrier of Canada but to the uttermost rim of earth itself, the North: not north but North, outland and circumscribing and not even a geographical place but an emotional idea, a condition of which he had fed from his mother's milk to be ever and constant on the alert not at all to fear and not actually anymore to hate but just—a little wearily sometimes and sometimes even with tongue in cheek—to defy: who had brought from infancy with him a childhood's picture which on the threshold of manhood had found no reason or means to alter and which he had no reason to believe in his old age would alter either: a curving semicircular wall not high (anyone who really wanted to could have climbed it; he believed that any boy already would) from the top of which with the whole vast scope of their own rich teeming never-ravaged land of glittering undefiled cities and unburned towns and unwasted farms so long-secured and opulent you would think there

was no room left for curiosity, there looked down upon him and his countless row on row of faces which resembled his face and spoke the same language he spoke and at times even answered to the same names he bore yet between whom and him and his there was no longer any real kinship and soon there would not even be any contact since the very mutual words they used would no longer have the same significance and soon after that even this would be gone because they would be too far asunder even to hear one another: only the massed uncountable faces looking down at him and his in fading amazement and outrage and frustration and most curious of all, gullibility: a volitionless, almost helpless capacity and eagerness to believe anything about the South not even provided it be derogatory but merely bizarre enough and strange enough: whereupon once more his uncle spoke at complete one with him and again without surprise he saw his thinking not be interrupted but merely swap one saddle for another:

'It's because we alone in the United States (I'm not speaking of Sambo right now; I'll get to him in a minute) are a homogeneous people. I mean the only one of any size. The New Englander is too of course back inland from the coastal spew of Europe which this country quarantined unrootable into the rootless ephemeral cities with factory and foundry and municipal paychecks as tight and close as any police could have done it, but there are no longer enough of him just as there are not of the Swiss who are not a people so much as a neat clean small quite solvent business. So we are not really resisting what the outland calls (and we too) progress and enlightenment. We are defending not actually our politics or beliefs or even our way of life, but simply our homogeneity from a federal government to which in simple desperation the rest of this country has had to surrender voluntarily more and more of its personal and private liberty in order to continue to afford the United States. And of course we will continue to defend it. We (I mean all of us: Beat Four will be unable to sleep at night until it has cancelled Lucas Beauchamp ((or someone else)) against Vinson Gowrie in the same color of ink, and Beat One and Two and Three and Five who on heatless principle intend to see that Beat Four makes that cancellation) dont know why it is valuable. We dont need to know. Only a few of us know that only from homogeneity comes anything of a

people or for a people of durable and lasting value—the literature, the art, the science, that minimum of government and police which is the meaning of freedom and liberty, and perhaps most valuable of all a national character worth anything in a crisis—that crisis we shall face someday when we meet an enemy with as many men as we have and as much material as we have and—who knows?—who can even brag and boast as we brag and boast.

‘That’s why we must resist the North: not just to preserve ourselves nor even the two of us as one to remain one nation because that will be the inescapable by-product of what we will preserve: which is the very thing that three generations ago we lost a bloody war in our own back yards so that it remain intact: the postulate that Sambo is a human being living in a free country and hence must be free. That’s what we are really defending: the privilege of setting him free ourselves: which we will have to do for the reason that nobody else can since going on a century ago now the North tried it and have been admitting for seventy-five years now that they failed. So it will have to be us. Soon now this sort of thing wont even threaten anymore. It shouldn’t now. It should never have. Yet it did last Saturday and it probably will again, perhaps once more, perhaps twice more. But then no more, it will be finished; the shame will still be there of course but then the whole chronicle of man’s immortality is in the suffering he has endured, his struggle toward the stars in the stepping-stones of his expiations. Someday Lucas Beauchamp can shoot a white man in the back with the same impunity to lynch-rope or gasoline as a white man; in time he will vote anywhen and anywhere a white man can and send his children to the same school anywhere the white man’s children go and travel anywhere the white man travels as the white man does it. But it wont be next Tuesday. Yet people in the North believe it can be compelled even into next Monday by the simple ratification by votes of a printed paragraph: who have forgotten that although a long quarter-century ago Lucas Beauchamp’s freedom was made an article in our constitution and Lucas Beauchamp’s master was not merely beaten to his knees but trampled for ten years on his face in the dust to make him swallow it, yet only three short generations later they are faced once

more with the necessity of passing legislation to set Lucas Beauchamp free.

‘And as for Lucas Beauchamp, Sambo, he’s a homogeneous man too, except that part of him which is trying to escape not even into the best of the white race but into the second best—the cheap shoddy dishonest music, the cheap flash baseless overvalued money, the glittering edifice of publicity foundationed on nothing like a card-house over an abyss and all the noisy muddle of political activity which used to be our minor national industry and is now our national amateur pastime—all the spurious uproar produced by men deliberately fostering and then getting rich on our national passion for the mediocre: who will even accept the best provided it is debased and befouled before being fed to us: who are the only people on earth who brag publicly of being second-rate, i.e., lowbrows. I dont mean that Sambo. I mean the rest of him who has a better homogeneity than we have and proved it by finding himself roots into the land where he had actually to displace white men to put them down: because he had patience even when he didn’t have hope, the long view even when there was nothing to see at the end of it, not even just the will but the desire to endure because he loved the old few simple things which no one wanted to take from him: not an automobile nor flash clothes nor his picture in the paper but a little of music (his own), a hearth, not his child but any child, a God a heaven which a man may avail himself a little of at any time without having to wait to die, a little earth for his own sweat to fall on among his own green shoots and plants. We—he and us—should confederate: swap him the rest of the economic and political and cultural privileges which are his right, for the reversion of his capacity to wait and endure and survive. Then we would prevail; together we would dominate the United States; we would present a front not only impregnable but not even to be threatened by a mass of people who no longer have anything in common save a frantic greed for money and a basic fear of a failure of national character which they hide from one another behind a loud lipservice to a flag.’

Now they were there and not too long behind the sheriff. For though the car was already drawn off the road into the grove in front of the

church, the sheriff was still standing beside it and one of the Negroes was just passing the pick backward out of the car to the other prisoner who stood holding both the shovels. His uncle drew in beside it and stopped and now in daylight he could see the church, for the first time actually who had lived within ten miles of it all his life and must have passed it, seen it at least half that many times. Yet he could not remember ever having actually looked at it before—a plank steepleless box no longer than some of the one-room cabins hill people lived in, paintless too yet (curiously) not shabby and not even in neglect or disrepair because he could see where sections of raw new lumber and scraps and fragments of synthetic roofing had been patched and carpentered into the old walls and shingles with a savage almost insolent promptitude, not squatting nor crouching nor even sitting but standing among the trunks of the high strong constant shaggy pines, solitary but not forlorn, intractable and independent, asking nothing of any, making compromise with none and he remembered the tall slender spires which said Peace and the squatter utilitarian belfries which said Repent and he remembered one which even said Beware but this one said simply: Burn: and he and his uncle got out; the sheriff and the two Negroes carrying the tools were already inside the fence and he and his uncle followed, through the sagging gate in the low wire enclosure massed with honeysuckle and small odorless pink and white climbing roses and he saw the graveyard too for the first time, who had not only violated a grave in it but exploded one crime by exposing another—a fenced square of earth less large than garden plots he had seen and which by September would probably be choked and almost impenetrable and wellnigh invisible with sagegrass and ragweed and beggarlice, out of which stood without symmetry or order like bookmarks thrust at random into a ledger or toothpicks in a loaf and canted always slightly as if they had taken their own frozen perpendicular from the limber unresting never-quite-vertical pines, shingle-thin slabs of cheap gray granite of the same weathered color as the paintless church as if they had been hacked out of its flank with axes (and carved mottoless with simple names and dates as though there had been nothing even their mourners remembered of them than that they had lived and they had died) and it had been neither decay nor time which had compelled back into the violated walls the

raw new patching of unplanned paintless lumber but the simple exigencies of mortality and the doom of flesh.

He and his uncle threaded on among them to where the sheriff and the two Negroes already stood above the fresh raw mound which likewise he who had violated it now actually saw for the first time. But they hadn't begun to dig yet. Instead the sheriff had even turned, looking back at him until he and his uncle came up and stopped too.

'Now what?' his uncle said.

But the sheriff was speaking to him in the mild heavy voice: 'I reckon you and Miss Eunice and your secretary were mighty careful not to let anybody catch you at this business last night, weren't you?'

His uncle answered: 'This is hardly the thing you'd want an audience at, is it?'

But the sheriff was still looking at him. 'Then why didn't they put the flowers back?'

Then he saw them too—the artificial wreath, the tedious intricate contrivance of wire and thread and varnished leaves and embalmed blooms which someone had brought or sent out from the florist in town, and the three bunches of wilted garden and field flowers tied with cotton string, all of which Aleck Sander had said last night looked as if they had been thrown at or onto the grave and which he remembered Aleck Sander and himself moving aside out of the way and which he knew they had put back after they filled the hole back up; he could remember Miss Habersham telling them twice to put them back even after he himself had protested about the un-need or at least the waste of time; perhaps he could even remember Miss Habersham herself helping to put them back: or then perhaps he didn't remember them being put back at all but merely thought he did because they obviously hadn't been, lying now tossed and inextricable to one side and apparently either he or Aleck Sander had trodden on the wreath

though it didn't really matter now, which was what his uncle was just saying:

'Never mind now. Let's get started. Even when we finish here and are on the way back to town we will still be only started.'

'All right, boys,' the sheriff said to the Negroes. 'Jump to it. Let's get out of here——' and there was no sound, he heard nothing to warn him, he just looked up and around as his uncle and the sheriff did and saw, coming not down the road but around from behind the church as though from among the high windy pines themselves, a man in a wide pale hat and a clean faded blue shirt whose empty left sleeve was folded neatly back and pinned cuff to shoulder with a safety pin, on a small trim claybank mare showing too much eye-white and followed by two younger men riding double on a big saddleless black mule with a rope-burn on its neck and followed in their turn (and keeping carefully clear of the mule's heels) by two gaunt Trigg foxhounds, coming at a rapid trot across the grove to the gate where the man stopped the mare and swung himself lightly and rapidly down with his one hand and dropped the reins across the mare's neck and came with that light wiry almost springy rapidity through the gate and up to them—a short lean old man with eyes as pale as the sheriff's and a red weathered face out of which jutted a nose like the hooked beak of an eagle, already speaking in a high thin strong uncracked voice:

'What's going on around here, Shurf?'

'I'm going to open this grave, Mr Gowrie,' the sheriff said.

'No, Shurf,' the other said, immediate, with no change whatever in the voice: not disputative, nothing: just a statement: 'Not that grave.'

'Yes, Mr Gowrie,' the sheriff said. 'I'm going to open it.'

Without haste or fumbling, almost deliberate in fact, the old man with his one hand unbuttoned two buttons on the front of his shirt and thrust the hand inside, hunching his hip slightly around to meet the

hand and drew from inside the shirt a heavy nickel-plated pistol and still with no haste but no pause either thrust the pistol into his left armpit, clamping it butt-forward against his body by the stub of the arm while his one hand buttoned the shirt, then took the pistol once more into the single hand not pointing it at anything, just holding it.

But long before this he had seen the sheriff already moving, moving with really incredible speed not toward the old man but around the end of the grave, already in motion even before the two Negroes turned to run, so that when they whirled they seemed to run full tilt into the sheriff as into a cliff, even seeming to bounce back a little before the sheriff grasped them one in each hand as if they were children and then in the next instant seemed to be holding them both in one hand like two rag dolls, turning his body so that he was between them and the little wiry old man with the pistol, saying in that mild even lethargic voice:

‘Stop it. Dont you know the worst thing that could happen to a nigger would be dodging loose in a pair of convict pants around out here today?’

‘That’s right, boys,’ the old man said in his high inflectionless voice. ‘I aint going to hurt you. I’m talking to the Shurf here. Not my boy’s grave, Shurf.’

‘Send them back to the car,’ his uncle murmured rapidly. But the sheriff didn’t answer, still looking at the old man.

‘Your boy aint in that grave, Mr Gowrie,’ the sheriff said. And watching he thought of all the things the old man might have said—the surprise, the disbelief, the outrage perhaps, even the thinking aloud: How do you come to know my boy aint there?—the rationalising by reflective in which he might have paraphrased the sheriff speaking to his uncle six hours ago: You wouldn’t be telling me this if you didn’t know it was so; watching, even following the old man as he cut straight across all this and he thought suddenly with amazement: Why, he’s grieving: thinking how he had seen grief twice now in two years where he had not

expected it or anyway anticipated it, where in a sense a heart capable of breaking had no business being: once in an old nigger who had just happened to outlive his old nigger wife and now in a violent foulmouthed godless old man who had happened to lose one of the six lazy idle violent more or less lawless a good deal more than just more or less worthless sons, only one of whom had ever benefitted his community and kind and that only by the last desperate resort of getting murdered out of it: hearing the high flat voice again immediate and strong and without interval, inflectionless, almost conversational:

‘Why, I just hope you dont tell me the name of the fellow that proved my boy aint there, Shurf. I just hope you wont mention that:’—little hard pale eyes staring at little hard pale eyes, the sheriff’s voice mild still, inscrutable now:

‘No, Mr Gowrie. It aint empty:’ and later, afterward, he realised that this was when he believed he knew not perhaps why Lucas had ever reached town alive because the reason for that was obvious: there happened to be no Gowrie present at the moment but the dead one: but at least how the old man and two of his sons happened to ride out of the woods behind the church almost as soon as he and the sheriff and his uncle reached the grave, and certainly why almost forty-eight hours afterward Lucas was still breathing. ‘It’s Jake Montgomery down there,’ the sheriff said.

The old man turned, immediate, not hurriedly and even quickly but just easily as if his spare small fleshless frame offered neither resistance to the air nor weight to the motive muscles, and shouted toward the fence where the two younger men still sat the mule identical as two clothing store dummies and as immobile, not even having begun yet to descend until the old man shouted: ‘Here, boys.’

‘Never mind,’ the sheriff said. ‘We’ll do it.’ He turned to the two Negroes. ‘All right. Get your shovels——’

‘I told you,’ his uncle murmured rapidly again. ‘Send them back to the car.’

'That's right, Lawyer—Lawyer Stevens, aint it?' the old man said. 'Get 'em away from here. This here's our business. We'll attend to it.'

'It's my business now, Mr Gowrie,' the sheriff said.

The old man raised the pistol, steadily and without haste, bending his elbow until it came level, his thumb curling up and over the hammer cocking it so that it came already cocked level or not quite, not quite pointing at anything somewhere about the height of the empty belt-loops on the sheriff's trousers. 'Get them out of here, Shurf,' the old man said.

'All right,' the sheriff said without moving. 'You boys go back to the car.'

'Further than that,' the old man said. 'Send 'em back to town.'

'They're prisoners, Mr Gowrie,' the sheriff said. 'I cant do that.' He didn't move. 'Go back and get in the car,' he told them. They moved then, walking not back toward the gate but directly away across the enclosure, walking quite fast, lifting their feet and knees in the filthy barred trousers quite high, walking quite fast by the time they reached the opposite fence and half stepping half hopping over it and only then changing direction back toward the two cars so that until they reached the sheriff's car they would never be any nearer the two white men on the mule than when they had left the grave: and he looked at them now sitting the mule identical as two clothes pins on a line, the identical faces even weathered exactly alike, surly quick-tempered and calm, until the old man shouted again:

'All right, boys:' and they got down as one, at the same time even like a trained vaudeville team and again as one stepped with the same left leg over the fence, completely ignoring the gate: the Gowrie twins, identical even to the clothing and shoes except that one wore a khaki shirt and the other a sleeveless jersey; about thirty, a head taller than their father and with their father's pale eyes and the nose too except that it was not the beak of an eagle but rather that of a hawk, coming

up with no word, no glance even for any of them from the bleak composed humorless faces until the old man pointed with the pistol (he saw that the hammer was down now anyway) at the two shovels and said in his high voice which sounded almost cheerful even:

‘Grab ’em, boys. They belong to the county; if we bust one it aint anybody’s business but the Grand Jury’s:’—the twins, facing each other now at opposite ends of the mound and working again in that complete almost choreographic unison: the next two youngest before the dead one, Vinson; fourth and fifth of the six sons:—Forrest, the oldest who had not only wrenched himself free of his fiery tyrant of a father but had even got married and for twenty years now had been manager of a delta cotton plantation above Vicksburg; then Crawford, the second one who had been drafted on the second day of November 1918 and on the night of the tenth (with a bad luck in guessing which, his uncle said, should not happen to any man—a point of view in which in fact his federal captors themselves seemed to concur since his term in the Leavenworth prison had been only one year) had deserted and lived for almost eighteen months in a series of caves and tunnels in the hills within fifteen miles of the federal courthouse in Jefferson until he was captured at last after something very like a pitched battle (though luckily for him nobody was seriously hurt) during which he made good his cave for thirty-odd hours armed with (and, his uncle said, a certain consistency and fitness here: a deserter from the United States army defending his freedom from the United States government with a piece of armament captured from the enemy whom he had refused to fight) an automatic pistol which one of the McCallum boys had taken from a captured German officer and traded shortly after he got home for a brace of Gowrie foxhounds, and served his year and came home and the town next heard of him in Memphis where it was said he was (1) running liquor up from New Orleans, (2) acting as a special employer-bonded company officer during a strike, but anyway coming back to his father’s home suddenly where nobody saw much of him until a few years back when the town began to hear of him as having more or less settled down, dealing in a little timber and cattle and even working a little land; and Bryan, the third one who was the actual force, power, cohering element, whatever you might call it, in or behind the family

farm which fed them all; then the twins, Vardaman and Bilbo who spent their nights squatting in front of smoldering logs and stumps while the hounds ran foxes and their days sleeping flat on the naked planks of the front gallery until dark came and time to cast the hounds again; and the last one, Vinson, who even as a child had shown an aptitude for trading and for money so that now, though dead at only twenty-eight, he was not only said to own several small parcels of farmland about the county but was the first Gowrie who could sign his name to a check and have any bank honor it;—the twins, kneedeep then waistdeep, working with a grim and sullen speed, robotlike and in absolute unison so that the two shovels even seemed to ring at the same instant on the plank box and even then seeming to communicate by no physical means as birds or animals do: no sound no gesture: simply one of them released his shovel in a continuation of the same stroke which flung the dirt and then himself flowed effortless up out of the pit and stood among the rest of them while his brother cleaned off what remained of dirt from the top of the coffin, then tossed his shovel up and out without even looking and—as he himself had done last night—kicked the last of the earth away from the edge of the lid and stood on one leg and grasped the lid and heaved it up and over and away until all of them standing along the rim of the grave could look down past him into the box.

It was empty. There was nothing in it at all until a thin trickle of dirt flowed down into it with a whispering pattering sound.

Chapter Eight

And he would remember it: the five of them standing at the edge of the pit above the empty coffin, then with another limber flowing motion like his twin's the second Gowrie came up out of the grave and stooped and with an air of rapt displeased even faintly outraged concern began to brush and thump the clay particles from the lower legs of his trousers, the first twin moving as the second stooped, going straight to him with a blind unhurried undeviable homing quality about him like the other of a piece of machinery, the other spindle say of a lathe, travelling on the same ineluctable shaft to its socket, and stooped too

and began to brush and strike the dirt from the back of his brother's trousers; and this time almost a spadeful of dirt slid down across the out-slanted lid and rattled down into the empty box, almost loud enough or with mass and weight enough to produce a small hollow echo.

'Now he's got two of them,' his uncle said.

'Yes,' the sheriff said. 'Where?'

'Durn two of them,' old Gowrie said. 'Where's my boy, Shurf?'

'We're going to find him now, Mr Gowrie,' the sheriff said. 'And you were smart to bring them hounds. Put your pistol up and let your boys catch them dogs and hold them till we get straightened out here.'

'Never you mind the pistol nor the dogs neither,' old Gowrie said. 'They'll trail and they'll ketch anything that ever run or walked either. But my boy and that Jake Montgomery—if it was Jake Montgomery whoever it was found laying in my son's coffin—never walked away from here to leave no trail.'

The sheriff said, 'Hush now, Mr Gowrie.' The old man glared back up at the sheriff. He was not trembling, not eager, baffled, amazed, not anything. Watching him he thought of one of the cold lightblue tearshaped apparently heatless flames which balance themselves on even less than tiptoe over gasjets.

'All right,' the old man said. 'I'm hushed. And now you get started. You're the one that seems to know all about this, that sent me word out to my breakfast table at six oclock this morning to meet you here. Now you get started.'

'That's what we're going to do,' the sheriff said. 'We're going to find out right now where to start.' He turned to his uncle, saying in the mild rational almost diffident voice: 'It's say around eleven oclock at night. You got a mule or maybe it's a horse, anyway something that can walk

and tote a double load, and a dead man across your saddle. And you aint got much time; that is, you aint got all of time. Of course it's around eleven oclock, when most folks is in bed, and a Sunday night too when folks have got to get up early tomorrow to start a new week in the middle of cotton-planting time, and there aint any moon and even if folks might still be moving around you're in a lonely part of the country where the chances all are you wont meet nobody. But you still got a dead man with a bullet hole in his back and even at eleven oclock day's going to come sooner or later. All right. What would you do?'

They looked, stared at one another, or that is his uncle stared—the too-thin bony eager face, the bright intent rapid eyes, and opposite the sheriff's vast sleepy face, the eyes not staring, apparently not even looking, blinking almost drowsily, the two of them cutting without speech across all that too: 'Of course,' his uncle said. 'Into the earth again. And not far, since as you said daylight comes sooner or later even when it's still just eleven oclock. Especially when he still had time to come back and do it all over again, alone, by himself, no hand but his on the shovel.—And think of that too: the need, the terrible need, not just to have it all to do again but to have to do it again for the reason he had; to think that he had done all he possibly could, all anyone could have asked or expected him to do or even dreamed that he would have to do; was as safe as he could hope to be—and then to be drawn back by a sound, a noise or perhaps he blundered by sheer chance on the parked truck or perhaps it was just his luck, his good fortune, whatever god or djinn or genie looks after murderers for a little while, keeps him secure and safe until the other fates have had time to spin and knot the rope,—anyway to have to crawl, tie the mule or horse or whatever it was to a tree and crawl on his belly back up here to lie (who knows? perhaps just behind the fence yonder) and watch a meddling old woman and two children who should have been two hours ago in bed ten miles away, wreck the whole careful edifice of his furious labor, undo the work not merely of his life but of his death too . . .' His uncle stopped, and now he saw the bright almost luminous eyes glaring down at him: 'And you. You couldn't have had any idea Miss Habersham was coming with you until you got home. And without her, you could have had no hope whatever that Aleck Sander would come with you alone at

all. So if you ever really had any idea of coming out here alone to dig this grave up, dont even tell me——’

‘Let that be now,’ the sheriff said. ‘All right. Somewhere in the ground. And what sort of ground? What dirt digs easiest and fastest for a man in a hurry and by himself even if he has a shovel? What sort of dirt could you hope to hide a body in quick even if you never had nothing but a pocket knife?’

‘In sand,’ his uncle said immediately, rapidly, almost indifferently, almost inattentively. ‘In the bed of the branch. Didn’t they tell you at three oclock this morning that they saw him going there with it? What are we waiting for?’

‘All right,’ the sheriff said. ‘Let’s go then.’ Then to him: ‘Show us exactly where——’

‘Except that Aleck Sander said it might not have been a mule,’ he said.

‘All right,’ the sheriff said. ‘Horse then. Show us exactly where’

He would remember it: watching the old man clap the pistol again butt-forward into his armpit and clamp it there with the stump of the arm while the one hand unbuttoned the shirt then took the pistol from the armpit and thrust it back inside the shirt then buttoned the shirt again then turned even faster quicker than the two sons half his age, already in front of everybody when he hopped back over the fence and went to the mare and caught reins and pommel all in one hand, already swinging up: then the two cars dropping in second speed against gravity back down the steep pitch until he said ‘Here’ where the pickup’s tracks slewed off the road into the bushes then back into the road again and his uncle stopped: and he watched the fierce old stump-armed man jump the buckskin mare up out of the road into the woods on the opposite side already falling away down toward the branch, then the two hounds flowing up the bank behind him and then the mule with the two identical wooden-faced sons on it: then he and his uncle were out of the car the sheriff’s car bumper to bumper behind

them, hearing the mare crashing on down toward the branch and then the old man's high flat voice shouting at the hounds:

'Hi! Hi! Hum on boy! At him, Ring!' and then his uncle:

'Handcuff them through the steering wheel:' and then the sheriff:

'No. We'll need the shovels:' and he had climbed the bank too, listening off and downward toward the crashing and the shouts, then his uncle and the sheriff and the two Negroes carrying the shovels were beside him. Although the branch crossed almost at right angles the highway just beyond where the dirt road forked away, it was almost a quarter-mile from where they now stood or walked rather and although they could all hear old Gowrie still whooping at the dogs and the crashing of the mare and the mule too in the dense thicket below, the sheriff didn't go that way, bearing instead off along the hill almost parallel with the road for several minutes and only beginning to slant away from it when they came out into the sawgrass and laurel and willow-choked flat between the hill and the branch: and on across that, the sheriff in front until he stopped still looking down then turned his head and looked back at him, watching him as he and his uncle came up.

'Your secretary was right the first time,' the sheriff said. 'It was a mule.'

'Not a black one with a rope-burn,' his uncle said. 'Surely not that. Not even a murderer is that crassly and arrogantly extrovert.'

'Yes,' the sheriff said. 'That's why they're dangerous, why we must destroy them or lock them up:' and looking down he saw them too: the narrow delicate almost finicking mule-prints out of all proportion to the animal's actual size, mashed pressed deep, too deep for any one mule no matter how heavy carrying just one man, into the damp muck, the tracks filled with water and even as he watched a minute aquatic beast of some sort shot across one of them leaving a tiny threadlike spurt of dissolving mud; and standing in the trail, now that they had found it they could see the actual path itself through the crushed shoulder-high growth in suspension held like a furrow across a field or the frozen

wake of a boat, crossing the marsh arrow-straight until it vanished into the jungle which bordered the branch. They followed it, walking in it, treading the two sets of prints not going and returning but both going in the same direction, now and then the print of the same hoof superposed on its previous one, the sheriff still in the lead talking again, speaking aloud but without looking back as though—he thought at first—to no one:

‘He wouldn’t come back this way. The first time he didn’t have time. He went back straight up the hill that time, woods or not and dark or not. That was when he heard whatever it was he heard.’ Then he knew who the sheriff was talking to: ‘Maybe your secretary was whistling up there or something. Being in a graveyard that time of night.’

Then they stood on the bank of the branch itself—a broad ditch a channel through which during the winter and spring rains a torrent rushed but where now there flowed a thin current scarcely an inch deep and never much over a yard wide from pool to pool along the blanched sand—and even as his uncle said, ‘Surely the fool—’ the sheriff ten yards or so further along the bank said:

‘Here it is:’ and they went to him and then he saw where the mule had stood tied to a sapling and then the prints where the man himself had thrashed on along the bank, his prints also deeper than any man no matter how heavy should have made and he thought of that too: the anguish, the desperation, the urgency in the black dark and the briers and the dizzy irrevocable fleeing on seconds, carrying a burden man was not intended to carry: then he was hearing a snapping and thrashing of underbrush still further along the bank and then the mare and then old Gowrie shouted and then another crash which would be the mule coming up and then simple pandemonium: the old man shouting and cursing and the yelping of the hounds and the thudding sound a man’s shoe makes against a dog’s ribs: but they couldn’t hurry anymore, thrashing and crashing their own way through the tearing clinging briers and vines until they could look down into the ditch and the low mound of fresh shaled earth into which the two hounds had

been digging and old Gowrie still kicking at them and cursing, and then they were all down in the ditch except the two Negroes.

‘Hold up, Mr Gowrie,’ the sheriff said. ‘That aint Vinson.’ But the old man didn’t seem to hear him. He didn’t even seem aware that anyone else was there; he seemed even to have forgot why he was kicking the dogs: that he had merely set out to drive them back from the mound, still hobbling and hopping after them on one leg and the other poised and cocked to kick even after they had retreated from the mound and were merely trying to dodge past him and get out of the ditch into safety, still kicking at them and cursing after the sheriff caught him by his one arm and held him.

‘Look at the dirt,’ the sheriff said. ‘Cant you see? He hardly took time to bury it. This was the second one, when he was in the hurry, when it was almost daylight and he had to get it hidden?’ and they could all see now—the low hummock of fresh dirt lying close under the bank and in the bank above it the savage ragged marks of the shovel as if he had hacked at the bank with the edge of the blade like swinging an axe (and again: thinking: the desperation the urgency the frantic hand-to-hand combat with the massy intolerable inertia of the earth itself) until enough of it shaled off and down to hide what he had to hide.

This time they didn’t need even the shovels. The body was barely covered; the dogs had already exposed it and he realised now the true magnitude of the urgency and desperation: the frantic and desperate bankrupt in time who had not even enough of it left to hide the evidence of his desperation and the reason for his urgency; it had been after two oclock when he and Aleck Sander, even two of them working with furious speed, had got the grave filled back up again: so that by the time the murderer, not only alone but who had already moved six feet of dirt and then put it back once since the sun set yesterday, had the second body out and the grave filled for the second time it must have been daylight, later than daylight perhaps, the sun itself watching him while he rode for the second time down the hill and across to the branch; morning itself watching him while he tumbled the body beneath the bank’s overhang then hacked furiously from it just enough

dirt to hide the body temporarily from sight with something of that frantic desperation of the wife flinging her peignoir over the lover's forgotten glove:—lying (the body) face down and only the back of the crushed skull visible until the old man stooped and with his one hand jerked it stiffly over onto its back.

'Yep,' old Gowrie said in the high brisk carrying voice: 'It's that Montgomery, damned if it aint:' and rose lean and fast as a tripped watch-spring yelling shouting at the hounds again: 'Hi boys! Find Vinson!' and then his uncle shouting too to make himself heard:

'Wait, Mr Gowrie. Wait:' then to the sheriff: 'He was a fool then just because he didn't have time, not because he is a fool. I just dont believe it twice—' looking around, his eyes darting. Then he stopped them on the twins. He said sharply: 'Where's the quicksand?'

'What?' one of the twins said.

'The quicksand,' his uncle said. 'The quicksand bed in the branch here. Where is it?'

'Quicksand?' old Gowrie said. 'Sonabitch, Lawyer. Put a man in quicksand? my boy in quicksand?'

'Shut up, Mr Gowrie,' the sheriff said. Then to the twin: 'Well? Where?'

But he answered first. He had been intending to for a second or so. Now he did: 'It's by the bridge:' then—he didn't know why: and then that didn't matter either—'It wasn't Aleck Sander that time. It was Highboy.'

'Under the highway bridge,' the twin corrected. 'Where it's been all the time.'

'Oh,' the sheriff said. 'Which one was Highboy?' And he was about to answer that: then suddenly the old man seemed to have forgot about his mare too, whirling, already running before any of them moved and

even before he himself moved, running for several strides against the purchaseless sand while they watched him, before he turned and with that same catlike agility he mounted the mare with, clawed himself one-handed up the steep bank and was thrashing and crashing on out of sight before anybody else except the two Negroes who had never quitted it were even up the bank.

‘Jump,’ the sheriff said to the twins: ‘Catch him.’ But they didn’t. They thrashed and crashed on after him, one of the twins in front then the rest of them and the two Negroes pell mell through the briers and brush, on back along the branch and out of the jungle into the cleared right-of-way below the road at the bridge; he saw the sliding hoof-marks where Highboy had come almost down to the water and then refused, the stream the water crowded over against the opposite concrete revetment flowing in a narrow band whose nearer edge faded without demarcation into an expanse of wet sand as smooth and innocent and markless of surface as so much milk; he stepped sprang over a long willow pole lying above the bank-edge and coated for three or four feet up its length with a thin patina of dried sand like when you thrust a stick into a bucket or vat of paint and even as the sheriff shouted to the twin in front ‘Grab him, you!’ he saw the old man jump feet first off the bank and with no splash no disturbance of any sort continue right on not through the bland surface but past it as if he had jumped not into anything but past the edge of a cliff or a window-sill and then stopping half-disappeared as suddenly with no shock, or jolt: just fixed and immobile as if his legs had been cut off at the loins by one swing of a scythe, leaving his trunk sitting upright on the bland depthless milklike sand.

‘All right, boys!’ old Gowrie cried, brisk and carrying: ‘Here he is. I’m standing on him.’

And one twin got the rope bridle from the mule and the leather one and the saddle girth from the mare and using the shovels like axes the Negroes hacked willow branches while the rest of them dragged up other brush and poles and whatever else they could reach or find or free and now both twins and the two Negroes, their empty shoes

sitting on the bank, were down in the sand too and steadily there came down from the hills the ceaseless strong murmur of the pines but no other sound yet although he strained his ears listening in both directions along the road, not for the dignity of death because death has no dignity but at least for the decorum of it: some little at least of that decorum which should be every man's helpless right until the carrion he leaves can be hidden from the ridicule and the shame, the body coming out now feet first, gallowised up and out of the inscrutable suck to the heave of the crude tackle then free of the sand with a faint smacking plop like the sound of lips perhaps in sleep and in the bland surface nothing: a faint wimple wrinkle already fading then gone like the end of a faint secret fading smile, and then on the bank now while they stood about and over it and he was listening harder than ever now with something of the murderer's own frantic urgency both ways along the road though there was still nothing: only hearing recognising his own voice apparently long after everyone else had, watching the old man coated to the waist with the same thin patina of sand like the pole, looking down at the body, his face wrenched and his upper lip wrenched upward from the lifeless porcelain glare and the pink bloodless gums of his false teeth:

'Oh gee, Uncle Gavin, oh gee, Uncle Gavin, let's get him away from the road, at least let's get him back into the woods——'

'Steady,' his uncle said. 'They've all passed now. They're all in town now:' and still watching as the old man stooped and began to brush clumsily with his one hand at the sand clogged into the eyes and nostrils and mouth, the hand looking curious and stiff at this which had been shaped so supple and quick to violence: to the buttons on the shirt and the butt and hammer of the pistol: then the hand went back and began to fumble at the hip pocket but already his uncle had produced a handkerchief and extended it but that was too late too as kneeling now the old man jerked out the tail of his shirt and bending to bring it close, wiped the or at the dead face with it then bending tried to blow the wet sand from it as though he had forgotten the sand was still damp. Then the old man stood up again and said in the high flat carrying voice in which there was still no real inflection at all:

'Well, Shurf?'

'It wasn't Lucas Beauchamp, Mr Gowrie,' the sheriff said. 'Jake Montgomery was at Vinson's funeral yesterday. And while Vinson was being buried Lucas Beauchamp was locked up in my jail in town.'

'I aint talking about Jake Montgomery, Shurf,' old Gowrie said.

'Neither am I, Mr Gowrie,' the sheriff said. 'Because it wasn't Lucas Beauchamp's old forty-one Colt that killed Vinson either.'

And watching he thought No! No! Dont say it! Dont ask! and for a while he believed the old man would not as he stood facing the sheriff but not looking at him now because his wrinkled eyelids had come down hiding his eyes but only in the way they do when somebody looks down at something at his feet so you couldn't really say whether the old man had closed them or was just looking down at what lay on the ground between him and the sheriff. But he was wrong; the eyelids went up again and again the old man's hard pale eyes were looking at the sheriff; again his voice to nine hundred men out of nine hundred and one would have sounded just cheerful:

'What was it killed Vinson, Shurf?'

'A German Luger automatic, Mr Gowrie,' the sheriff said. 'Like the one Buddy McCallum brought home from France in 1919 and traded that summer for a pair of fox hounds.'

And he thought how this was where the eyelids might even should have closed again but again he was wrong: only until the old man himself turned, quick and wiry, already in motion, already speaking peremptory and loud, not brookless of opposition or argument, simply incapable of conceiving either:

'All right, sons. Let's load our boy on the mule and take him home.'

Chapter Nine

And two o'clock that afternoon in his uncle's car just behind the truck (it was another pickup; they—the sheriff—had commandeered it, with a slatted cattle frame on the bed which one of the Gowrie twins had known would be standing in the deserted yard of the house two miles away which had the telephone too—and he remembered how he wondered what the truck was doing there, how they had got to town themselves who had left it—and the Gowrie had turned the switch on with a table fork which by the Gowrie's direction he had found in the unlocked kitchen when his uncle went in to telephone the coroner and the Gowrie was driving it) blinking rapidly and steadily not against glare so much as something hot and gritty inside his eyelids like a dust of ground glass (which certainly could and even should have been dust after twenty-odd miles of sand and gravel roads in one morning except that no simple dust refused as this did to moisten at all with blinking) it seemed to him that he saw crowding the opposite side of the street facing the jail not just the county, not just Beat One and Two and Three and Five in their faded tieless khaki and denim and print cotton but the town too—not only the faces he had seen getting out of the Beat Four dusty cars in front of the barbershop and the poolhall Saturday afternoon and then in the barbershop Sunday morning and again here in the street Sunday noon when the sheriff drove up with Lucas, but the others who except for the doctors and lawyers and ministers were not just the town but the Town: merchants and cotton-buyers and automobile dealers and the younger men who were the clerks in the stores and cotton offices and salesrooms and mechanics in the garages and filling stations on the way back to work from lunch—who without even waiting for the sheriff's car to get close enough to be recognised had already turned and begun to flow back toward the Square like the turn of a tide, already in motion when the sheriff's car reached the jail, already pouring back into the Square and converging in that one direction across it when first the sheriff then the truck then his uncle turned into the alley beyond the jail leading to the loading ramp at the undertaker's back door where the coroner was waiting for them: so that moving not only parallel with them beyond the intervening block but already in advance, it would even reach the undertaker's first; and

then suddenly and before he could even turn in the seat to look back he knew that it had even boiled into the alley behind them and in a moment a second now it would roar down on them, overtake and snatch them up in order: his uncle's car then the truck then the sheriff's like three hencoops and sweep them on and fling them at last in one inextricable aborted now-worthless jumble onto the ramp at the coroner's feet; still not moving yet it seemed to him that he was already leaning out the window or maybe actually clinging to the fleeing runningboard yelling back at them in a kind of unbearable unbelieving outrage:

'You fools, dont you see you are too late, that you'll have to start all over again now to find a new reason?' then turning in the seat and looking back through the rear window for a second or maybe two he actually saw it—not faces but a face, not a mass nor even a mosaic of them but a Face: not even ravening nor uninsatiate but just in motion, insensate, vacant of thought or even passion: an Expression significantless and without past like the one which materialises suddenly after seconds or even minutes of painful even frantic staring from the innocent juxtaposition of trees and clouds and landscape in the soap-advertisement puzzle-picture or on the severed head in the news photo of the Balkan or Chinese atrocity: without dignity and not even evocative of horror: just neckless slack-musclcd and asleep, hanging suspended face to face with him just beyond the glass of the back window yet in the same instant rushing and monstrous down at him so that he actually started back and had even begun to think In a second more it will when flick! it was gone, not only the Face but the faces, the alley itself empty behind them: nobody and nothing in it at all and in the street beyond the vacant mouth less than a dozen people now standing looking up the alley after them who even as he looked turned also and began to move back toward the Square.

He hesitated only an instant. They've all gone around to the front he thought rapid and quite calm, having a little trouble (he noticed that the car was stopped now) getting his hand onto the door handle, remarking the sheriff's car and the truck both stopped too at the

loading ramp where four or five men were lifting a stretcher up to the truck's open endgate and he even heard his uncle's voice behind him:

'Now we're going home and put you to bed before your mother has a doctor in to give us both a squirt with a needle:' then finding the handle and out of the car, stumbling a little but only once, then his heels although he was not running at all pounding too hard on the concrete, his leg-muscles cramped from the car or perhaps even charley-horsed from thrashing up and down branch bottoms not to mention a night spent digging and undigging graves but at least the jarring was clearing his head somewhat or maybe it was the wind of motion doing it; anyway if he was going to have delusions at least he would have a clear brain to look at them with: up the walkway between the undertaker's and the building next to it though already too late of course, the Face in one last rush and surge long since by now already across the Square and the pavement, in one last crash against then right on through the plate glass window trampling to flinders the little bronze-and-ebony membership plaque in the national funerals association and the single shabby stunted palm in its maroon earthenware pot and exploding to tatters the sunfaded purple curtain which was the last frail barrier shielding what was left of Jake Montgomery had of what was left of his share of human dignity.

Then out of the walkway onto the sidewalk, the Square, and stopped dead still for what seemed to him the first time since he and his uncle left the supper-table and walked out of the house a week or a month or a year ago or whenever it had been that last Sunday night was. Because this time he didn't even need the flick. They were there of course nose-pressed to the glass but there were not even enough of them to block the pavement let alone compound a Face; less than a dozen here too and some most of them were even boys who should have been in school at this hour—not one country face nor even one true man because even the other four or five were the man-sized neither men nor boys who were always there when old epileptic Uncle Hogeye Mosby from the poorhouse fell foaming into the gutter or when Willy Ingrum finally managed to shoot through the leg or loins what some woman had telephoned him was a mad-dog: and standing at the

entrance to the walkway while his uncle came pounding up it behind him, blinking painfully his painful moistureless eyelids he watched why: the Square not empty yet because there were too many of them but getting empty, the khaki and denim and the printed cotton streaming into it and across it toward the parked cars and trucks, clotting and crowding at the doors while one by one they crawled and climbed into the seats and beds and cabs; already starters were whining and engines catching and racing and idling and gears scraping and grinding while the passengers still hurried toward them, and now not one but five or six at once backed away from the curb and turned and straightened out with people still running toward them and scrambling aboard and then he could no longer have kept count of them even if he had ever tried, standing beside his uncle watching them condense into four streams into the four main streets leading out of town in the four directions, already going fast even before they were out of the Square, the faces for one last moment more looking not back but out, not at anything, just out just once and that not for long and then no more, vanishing rapidly in profile and seeming already to be travelling much faster than the vehicle which bore them, already by their faces out of town long before they had passed from view: and twice more even from the car; his mother standing suddenly not touching him, come obviously through the walkway too from the jail right past where they were probably still hoicking Montgomery out of the truck but then his uncle had told him they could stand anything provided they still retained always the right to refuse to admit it was visible, saying to his uncle:

‘Where’s the car?’ then not even waiting to be answered, turning back into the walkway ahead of them, walking slender and erect and rigid with her back looking and her heels clicking and popping on the concrete as they did at home when he and Aleck Sander and his father and uncle all four had better walk pretty light for a while, back past the ramp where only the sheriff’s empty car and the empty truck stood now and on to the alley where she was already holding open the door of the car when he and his uncle got there and saw them again crossing the mouth of the alley like across a stage—the cars and trucks, the faces in invincible profile not amazed not aghast but in a sort of irrevocable repudiation, shooting across the alley-mouth so constant

and unbroken and so many of them it was like the high school senior class or maybe an itinerant one-night travelling troupe giving the Battle of San Juan Hill and you not only didn't hear you didn't even need to not listen to the muted confused backstage undersounds to the same as see the marching or charging troops as soon as they reached the wings break into a frantic stumbling run swapping coats and caps and fake bandages as they doubled back behind the rippling cheesecloth painted with battle and courage and death to fall in on their own rear and at heroic attention cross the footlights again.

'We'll take Miss Habersham home first,' he said.

'Get in,' his mother said and one turn to the left into the street behind the jail and he could still hear them and another turn to the left into the next cross street and there they were again fleeing across that proscenium too unbroken and breakless, the faces rigid in profile above the long tearing sound of cement and rubber and it had taken him two or three minutes in the pickup this morning to find a chance just to get into it and go the same way it was going; it would take his uncle five or ten to find a hole to get through it and go back to the jail.

'Go on,' his mother said. 'Make them let you in:' and he knew they were not going by the jail at all; he said:

'Miss Habersham——'

'How do I do it?' his uncle said. 'Just shut both eyes and mash hard with my right foot?' and perhaps did; they were in the stream too now turning with it toward home which was all right, he had never worried about getting into it but getting out of it again before that frantic pell mell not of flight then if any liked that better so just call it evacuation swept them on into nightfall to spew them at last hours and miles away high and dry and battered and with the wind knocked out of them somewhere along the county's ultimate scarce-mapped perimeter to walk back in the dark: saying again:

'Miss Habersham——'

‘She has her truck,’ his uncle said. ‘Dont you remember?’—who had been doing nothing else steadily for five minutes now, even trying three times to say it: Miss Habersham in the truck and her house not half a mile away and all holding her back was she couldn’t possibly get to it, the house on one side and the truck on the other of that unpierceable barrier of rushing bumper-locked cars and trucks and so almost as interdict to an old maiden lady in a second-hand vegetable-peddler’s pickup as if it were in Mongolia or the moon: sitting in the truck with the engine running and the gears meshed and her foot on the accelerator independent solitary and forlorn erect and slight beneath the exact archaic even moribund hat waiting and watching and wanting only but nothing but to get through it so she could put the darned clothes away and feed the chickens and eat supper and get some rest too after going on thirty-six hours which to seventy must have been worse than a hundred to sixteen, watching and waiting that dizzying profiled blur for a while even a good while but not forever not too long because she was a practical woman who hadn’t taken long last night to decide that the way to get a dead body up out of a grave was to go out to the grave and dig it up and not long now to decide that the way to get around an obstruction especially with the sun already tumbling down the west was to go around it, the truck in motion now running along parallel with the obstruction and in its direction, forlorn and solitary still yet independent still too and only a little nervous, perhaps just realising that she was already driving a little faster than she was used and liked to, faster in fact than she had ever driven before and even then not keeping abreast of it but only beside it because it was going quite fast now: one endless profiled whizz: and now she would know that when the gap came perhaps she would not have the skill or strength or speed or quickness of eye or maybe even the simple nerve: herself going faster and faster and so intent trying to not miss the gap with one eye and watch where she was going with the other that she wouldn’t realise until afterward that she had made the turn going not south but east now and not just her house diminishing rapidly and squarely behind her but Jefferson too because they or it was not moving in just one direction out of town but in all of them on all the main roads leading away from the jail and the undertaker’s and Lucas

Beauchamp and what was left of Vinson Gowrie and Montgomery like the frantic scattering of waterbugs on a stagnant pond when you drop a rock into it: so she would be more desperate than ever now with all distance fleeing between her and home and another night coming on, nerving herself for any gap or crevice now, the battered pickup barely skimming the ground beside that impenetrable profiled blur drawing creeping closer and closer beside it when the inevitable happened: some failure of eye or tremor of hand or an involuntary flick of the eyelid on alertness's straining glare or maybe simple topography: a stone or clod in the path as inaccessible to indictment as God but anyway too close and then too late, the truck snatched up and into the torrent of ballbearing rubber and refinanced pressed steel and hurled pell mell on still gripping the useless steering wheel and pressing the gelded accelerator solitary and forlorn across the long peaceful creep of late afternoon, into the mauve windless dome of dusk, faster and faster now toward one last crescendo just this side of the county line where they would burst scattering into every crossroad and lane like rabbits or rats nearing at last their individual burrows, the truck slowing and then stopping a little crossways in the road perhaps where momentum had spewed it because she was safe now, in Crossman County and she could turn south again now along the edge of Yoknapatawpha turning on the lights now going as fast as she dared along the fringing unmarked country roads; full night now and in Mott County now she could even turn west at last watching her chance to turn north and make her dash, nine and ten o'clock along the markless roads fringing the imaginary line beyond which the distant frantic headlights flashed and darted plunging into their burrows and dens; Okatoba County soon and midnight and surely she could turn north then back into Yoknapatawpha, wan and spent solitary and indomitable among the crickets and treefrogs and lightningbugs and owls and whippoorwills and the hounds rushing bellowing out from under the sleeping houses and even at last a man in his nightshirt and unlaced shoes, carrying a lantern:

Where you trying to go, lady?

I'm trying to get to Jefferson.

Jefferson's behind you, lady.

I know. I had to detour around an arrogant insufferable old nigger who got the whole county upset trying to pretend he murdered a white man: when suddenly he discovered that he was going to laugh, discovering it almost in time, not quite in time to prevent it but in time to begin to stop it pretty quick, really more surprised than anything else, until his mother said harshly:

'Blow the horn. Blow them out of the way' and he discovered that it was not laughing at all or anyway not just laughing, that is the sound it was making was about the same as laughing but there was more of it and it felt harder, seemed to be having more trouble getting out and the harder it felt and sounded the less and less he could seem to remember what he must have been laughing at and his face was suddenly wet not with a flow but a kind of burst and spring of water; anyway there he was, a hulking lump the second largest of the three of them, more bigger than his mother than his uncle was than he, going on seventeen years old and almost a man yet because three in the car were so crowded he couldn't help but feel a woman's shoulder against his and her narrow hand on his knee sitting there like a spanked child before he had even had warning enough to begin to stop it.

'They ran,' he said.

'Pull out, damn you,' his mother said. 'Go around them:' which his uncle did, on the wrong side of the street and going almost as fast as he had driven this morning on the way to the church trying to keep in sight of the sheriff and it wasn't because his mother had rationalised that since all of them were already in town trying their best to get out of it there wouldn't be anybody to be coming toward the Square on that side of the street so it was simply just having one in the car with you even if she wasn't driving it, that's all you needed to do: remembering them once before in a car and his uncle driving and his uncle said then,

‘All right, how do I do it, just shut both eyes and mash the accelerator?’ and his mother said,

‘How many collisions did you ever see with women driving both of them?’ and his uncle said,

‘All right, touché, maybe it’s because one of them’s car is still in the shop where a man ran into it yesterday:’ then he could no longer see them but only hear the long tearing without beginning or end and leaving no scar of tires and pavement in friction like the sound of raw silk and luckily the house was on the same wrong side of the street too and carrying the sound into the yard with him too and now he could do something about the laughing by taking a moment to put his hand on whatever it was that seemed to have got him started and bringing it out into the light where even he could see it wasn’t that funny; about ten thousand miles of being funny enough to set his mother swearing; he said:

‘They ran’ and at once knew that was wrong, almost too late even while he was standing right there looking at himself, walking fast across the yard until he stopped and not jerked just pulled his arm away and said, ‘Look, I’m not crippled. I’m just tired. I’m going up to my room and lie down a while:’ and then to his uncle: ‘I’ll be all right then. Come up and call me in about fifteen minutes:’ then stopped and turned again again to his uncle: ‘I’ll be ready in fifteen minutes:’ and went on this time carrying it into the house with him and even in his room too he could still hear it even through the drawn shades and the red jumping behind his eyelids until he started up onto one elbow under his mother’s hand too again to his uncle just beyond the footboard:

‘Fifteen minutes. You wont go without me? You promise?’

‘Sure,’ his uncle said. ‘I wont go without you. I’ll just——’

‘Will you please get to hell out of here, Gavin?’ his mother said and then to him, ‘Lie down’ and he did and there it still was even through even against the hand, the narrow slim cool palm but too dry too rough

and maybe even too cool, the dry hot gritty feel of his skull better than the feel of the hand on it because at least he was used to it by now, he had had it long enough, even rolling his head but about as much chance to escape that one frail narrow inevitable palm as to roll your forehead out from under a birthmark and it was not even a face now because their backs were toward him but the back of a head, the composite one back of one Head one fragile mushfilled bulb indefensible as an egg yet terrible in its concorded unanimity rushing not at him but away.

‘They ran,’ he said. ‘They saved their consciences a good ten cents by not having to buy him a package of tobacco to show they had forgiven him.’

‘Yes,’ his mother said. ‘Just let go:’ which was like telling a man dangling with one hand over a cliff to just hold on: who wanted nothing right now but a chance to let go and relinquish into the nothing of sleep what little of nothing he still had who last night had wanted to go to sleep and could have but didn’t have time and now wanted more than ever to go to sleep and had all the time in the world for the next fifteen minutes (or the next fifteen days or fifteen years as far as anybody knew because there was nothing anybody could do but hope Crawford Gowrie would decide to come in and hunt up the sheriff and say All right I did it because all they had was Lucas who said that Vinson Gowrie wasn’t shot with a forty-one Colt or anyway his, Lucas’ forty-one Colt and Buddy McCallum to say or not say Yes I swapped Crawford Gowrie a German pistol twenty-five years ago; not even Vinson Gowrie for somebody from the Memphis police to come and look at and say what bullet killed him because the sheriff had already let old Gowrie take him back home and wash the quicksand off and bury him again tomorrow: where this time Hampton and his uncle could go out there tomorrow night and dig him up) only he had forgotten how: or maybe that was it and he didn’t dare relinquish into nothing what little he had left: which was nothing: no grief to be remembered nor pity nor even awareness of shame, no vindication of the deathless aspiration of man by man to man through the catharsis of pity and shame but instead only an old man for whom grief was not even a component of his own but merely a temporary phenomenon of his slain son jerking a strange

corpse over onto its back not in appeasement to its one mute indicting cry not for pity not for vengeance but for justice but just to be sure he had the wrong one, crying cheery abashless and loud: 'Yep it's that damned Montgomery damned if it aint,' and a Face; who had no more expected Lucas to be swept out of his cell shoulder high on a tide of expiation and set for his moment of vindication and triumph on the base say of the Confederate monument (or maybe better on the balcony of the postoffice building beneath the pole where the national flag flew) than he had expected such for himself and Aleck Sander and Miss Habersham: who (himself) not only had not wanted that but could not have accepted it since it would have abrogated and made void the whole sum of what part he had done which had to be anonymous else it was valueless: who had wanted of course to leave his mark too on his time in man but only that, no more than that, some mark on his part in earth but humbly, waiting wanting humbly even, not really hoping even, nothing (which of course was everything) except his own one anonymous chance too to perform something passionate and brave and austere not just in but into man's enduring chronicle worthy of a place in it (who knew? perhaps adding even one anonymous jot to the austerity of the chronicle's brave passion) in gratitude for the gift of his time in it, wanting only that and not even with hope really, willing to accept the fact that he had missed it because he wasn't worthy, but certainly he hadn't expected this:—not a life saved from death nor even a death saved from shame and indignity nor even the suspension of a sentence but merely the grudging pretermission of a date; not indignity shamed with its own shameful cancellation, not sublimation and humility with humility and pride remembered nor the pride of courage and passion nor of pity nor the pride and austerity and grief, but austerity itself debased by what it had gained, courage and passion befouled by what they had had to cope with;—a Face, the composite Face of his native kind his native land, his people his blood his own with whom it had been his joy and pride and hope to be found worthy to present one united unbreakable front to the dark abyss the night—a Face monstrous unravering omniverous and not even uninsatiate, not frustrated nor even thwarted, not biding nor waiting and not even needing to be patient since yesterday today and tomorrow are Is: Indivisible: One (his uncle for this too, anticipating this too two or three

or four years ago as his uncle had everything else which as he himself became more and more a man he had found to be true: 'It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago. For every Southern boy fourteen years old, not once but whenever he wants it, there is the instant when it's still not yet two o'clock on that July afternoon in 1863, the brigades are in position behind the rail fence, the guns are laid and ready in the woods and the furled flags are already loosened to break out and Pickett himself with his long oiled ringlets and his hat in one hand probably and his sword in the other looking up the hill waiting for Longstreet to give the word and it's all in the balance, it hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet but there is still time for it not to begin against that position and those circumstances which made more men than Garnett and Kemper and Armstead and Wilcox look grave yet it's going to begin, we all know that, we have come too far with too much at stake and that moment doesn't need even a fourteen-year-old boy to think This time. Maybe this time with all this much to lose and all this much to gain: Pennsylvania, Maryland, the world, the golden dome of Washington itself to crown with desperate and unbelievable victory the desperate gamble, the cast made two years ago; or to anyone who ever sailed even a skiff under a quilt sail, the moment in 1492 when somebody thought This is it: the absolute edge of no return, to turn back now and make home or sail irrevocably on and either find land or plunge over the world's roaring rim. A small voice, a sound sensitive lady poet of the time of my youth said the scattered tea goes with the leaves and every day a sunset dies: a poet's extravagance which as quite often mirrors truth but upside down and backward since the mirror's unwitting manipulator busy in his preoccupation has forgotten that the back of it is glass too: because if they only did, instead of which yesterday's sunset and yesterday's tea both are inextricable from the scattered indestructible uninfusable grounds blown through the endless corridors of tomorrow, into the shoes we will have to walk in and even the sheets we will have (or try) to sleep between: because you escape nothing, you flee nothing; the pursuer is what is doing the running and tomorrow night is nothing but one long sleepless wrestle with yesterday's omissions and regrets.'): who had pretermitted not even a death nor even a death to Lucas but

merely Lucas, Lucas in ten thousand Sambo-avatars to scurry unheeding and not even aware through that orifice like mice through the slot of a guillotine until at the One unheeding moment the unheeding unwitting uncaring chopper falls; tomorrow or at least tomorrow or at most tomorrow and perhaps this time to intervene where angels fear no white and black children sixteen and an old white spinster long on the way to eighty; who ran, fled not even to deny Lucas but just to keep from having to send up to him by the drugstore porter a can of tobacco not at all to say they were sorry but so they wouldn't have to say out loud that they were wrong: and spurned the cliff away in one long plunge up and up slowing into it already hearing it, only the most faintly oscillant now hearing it listening to it, not moving yet nor even opening his eyes as he lay for a moment longer listening to it, then opened them and then his uncle stood silhouetted against the light beyond the footboard in that utter that complete that absolute silence now with nothing in it now but the breathing of darkness and the treefrogs and bugs: no fleeing nor repudiation nor for this moment more even urgency anywhere in the room or outside it either above or below or before or behind the tiny myriad beast-sounds and the vast systole and diastole of summer night.

'It's gone,' he said.

'Yes,' his uncle said. 'They're probably all in bed asleep by now. They got home to milk and even have time before dark to chop wood for tomorrow's breakfast too.'

Which made once though still he didn't move. 'They ran,' he said.

'No,' his uncle said. 'It was more than that.'

'They ran,' he said. 'They reached the point where there was nothing left for them to do but admit that they were wrong. So they ran home.'

'At least they were moving,' his uncle said: which made twice: who hadn't even needed the first cue since not only the urgency the need the necessity to move again or rather not really to have stopped

moving at all at that moment four or five or six hours or whatever it had been ago when he really believed he was going to lie down for only fifteen minutes (and which incidentally knew fifteen minutes whether he apparently did or not) hadn't come back, it had never been anywhere to come back from because it was still there, had been there all the time, never for one second even vacated even from behind the bizarre phantasmagoriae whose ragtag and bobends still befogged him, with or among which he had wasted nearer fifteen hours than fifteen minutes; it was still there or at least his unfinished part in it which was not even a minuscule but rather a minuscule of his uncle's and the sheriff's in the unfinishability of Lucas Beauchamp and Crawford Gowrie since as far as they knew before he lost track this morning neither of them knew what they were going to do next even before Hampton had disposed of what little of evidence they had by giving it back to old one-armed pistol Gowrie where even two children and an old woman couldn't get it back this time; the need not to finish anything but just to keep moving not even to remain where they were but just desperately to keep up with it like having to run on a treadmill not because you wanted to be where the treadmill was but simply not to be flung pell mell still running frantically backward off the whole stage out of sight, and not waiting static for the moment to flow back into him again and explode him up into motion but rather already in endless motion like the treadmill's endless band less than an inch's fraction above the ultimate point of his nose and chest where the first full breath would bring him into its snatching orbit, himself lying beneath it like a hobo trapped between the rails under a speeding train, safe only so long as he did not move.

So he moved; he said 'Time:' swinging his legs over: 'What time is it? I said fifteen minutes. You promised——'

'It's only nine-thirty,' his uncle said. 'Plenty of time for a shower and your supper too. They won't leave before we get there.'

'They?' he said: up onto his bare feet (he had not undressed except his shoes and sox) already reaching for his slippers. 'You've been back to town. Before we get there? We're not going with them?'

‘No,’ his uncle said. ‘It’ll take both of us to hold Miss Habersham back. She’s going to meet us at the office. So move along now; she’s probably already waiting for us.’

‘Yes,’ he said. But he was already unfastening his shirt and his belt and trousers too with the other hand, all ready to step in one motion out of both. And this time it was laughing. It was all right. You couldn’t even hear it. ‘So that was why,’ he said. ‘So their women wouldn’t have to chop wood in the dark with half-awake children holding lanterns.’

‘No,’ his uncle said. ‘They were not running from Lucas. They had forgotten about him——’

‘That’s exactly what I’m saying,’ he said. ‘They didn’t even wait to send him a can of tobacco and say It’s all right, old man, everybody makes mistakes and we wont hold this one against you.’

‘Was that what you wanted?’ his uncle said. ‘The can of tobacco? That would have been enough?—Of course it wouldn’t. Which is one reason why Lucas will ultimately get his can of tobacco; they will insist on it, they will have to. He will receive installments on it for the rest of his life in this country whether he wants them or not and not just Lucas but Lucas: Sambo since what sets a man writhing sleepless in bed at night is not having injured his fellow so much as having been wrong; the mere injury (if he cannot justify it with what he calls logic) he can efface by destroying the victim and the witnesses but the mistake is his and that is one of his cats which he always prefers to choke to death with butter. So Lucas will get his tobacco. He wont want it of course and he’ll try to resist it. But he’ll get it and so we shall watch right here in Yoknapatawpha County the ancient oriental relationship between the savior and the life he saved turned upside down: Lucas Beauchamp once the slave of any white man within range of whose notice he happened to come, now tyrant over the whole county’s white conscience. And they—Beat One and Two and Three and Five—knew that too so why take time now to send him a ten-cent can of tobacco when they have got to spend the balance of their lives doing it? So they

had dismissed him for the time. They were not running from him, they were running from Crawford Gowrie; they simply repudiated not even in horror but in absolute unanimity a shall-not and should-not which without any warning whatever turned into a must-not. Thou shalt not kill you see—no accusative, heatless: a simple moral precept; we have accepted it in the distant anonymity of our forefathers, had it so long, cherished it, fed it, kept the sound of it alive and the very words themselves unchanged, handled it so long that all the corners are now worn smoothly off; we can sleep right in the bed with it; we have even distilled our own antidotes for it as the foresighted housewife keeps a solution of mustard or handy eggwhites on the same shelf with the ratpoison; as familiar as grandpa's face, as unrecognisable as grandpa's face beneath the turban of an Indian prince, as abstract as grandpa's flatulence at the family supper-table; even when it breaks down and the spilled blood stands sharp and glaring in our faces we still have the precept, still intact, still true: we shall not kill and maybe next time we even wont. But thou shalt not kill thy mother's child. It came right down into the street that time to walk in broad daylight at your elbow, didn't it?'

'So for a lot of Gowries and Workitts to burn Lucas Beauchamp to death with gasoline for something he didn't even do is one thing but for a Gowrie to murder his brother is another.'

'Yes,' his uncle said.

'You cant say that,' he said.

'Yes,' his uncle said. 'Thou shalt not kill in precept and even when you do, precept still remains unblemished and scarless: Thou shalt not kill and who knows, perhaps next time maybe you wont. But Gowrie must not kill Gowrie's brother: no maybe about it, no next time to maybe not Gowrie kill Gowrie because there must be no first time. And not just for Gowrie but for all: Stevens and Mallison and Edmonds and McCaslin too; if we are not to hold to the belief that that point not just shall not but must not and cannot come at which Gowrie or Ingrum or Stevens or Mallison may shed Gowrie or Ingrum or Stevens or Mallison blood,

how hope ever to reach that one where Thou shalt not kill at all, where Lucas Beauchamp's life will be secure not despite the fact that he is Lucas Beauchamp but because he is?

'So they ran to keep from having to lynch Crawford Gowrie,' he said.

'They wouldn't have lynched Crawford Gowrie,' his uncle said. 'There were too many of them. Don't you remember, they packed the street in front of the jail and the Square too all morning while they still believed Lucas had shot Vinson Gowrie in the back without bothering him at all?'

'They were waiting for Beat Four to come in and do it.'

'Which is exactly what I am saying—granted for the moment that that's true. That part of Beat Four composed of Gowries and Workitts and the four or five others who wouldn't have given a Gowrie or Workitt either a chew of tobacco and who would have come along just to see the blood, is small enough to produce a mob. But not all of them together because there is a simple numerical point at which a mob cancels and abolishes itself, maybe because it has finally got too big for darkness, the cave it was spawned in is no longer big enough to conceal it from light and so at last whether it will or no it has to look at itself, or maybe because the amount of blood in one human body is no longer enough, as one peanut might titillate one elephant but not two or ten. Or maybe it's because man having passed into mob passes then into mass which abolishes mob by absorption, metabolism, then having got too large even for mass becomes man again conceivable of pity and justice and conscience even if only in the recollection of his long painful aspiration toward them, toward that something anyway of one serene universal light.'

'So man is always right,' he said.

'No,' his uncle said. 'He tries to be if they who use him for their own power and aggrandisement let him alone. Pity and justice and conscience too—that belief in more than the divinity of individual man (which we in America have debased into a national religion of the

entrails in which man owes no duty to his soul because he has been absolved of soul to owe duty to and instead is static heir at birth to an inevitable quit-claim on a wife a car a radio and an old-age pension) but in the divinity of his continuity as Man; think how easy it would have been for them to attend to Crawford Gowrie: no mob moving fast in darkness watching constantly over its shoulder but one indivisible public opinion: that peanut vanishing beneath a whole concerted trampling herd with hardly one elephant to really know the peanut had even actually been there since the main reason for a mob is that the individual red hand which actually snapped the thread may vanish forever into one inviolable confraternity of namelessness: where in this case that one would have had no more reason to lie awake at night afterward than a paid hangman. They didn't want to destroy Crawford Gowrie. They repudiated him. If they had lynched him they would have taken only his life. What they really did was worse: they deprived him to the full extent of their capacity of his citizenship in man.'

He didn't move yet. 'You're a lawyer.' Then he said, 'They were not running from Crawford Gowrie or Lucas Beauchamp either. They were running from themselves. They ran home to hide their heads under the bedclothes from their own shame.'

'Exactly correct,' his uncle said. 'Haven't I been saying that all the time? There were too many of them. This time there were enough of them to be able to run from shame, to have found unbearable the only alternative which would have been the mob's: which (the mob) because of its smallness and what it believed was its secretness and tightness and what it knew to be its absolute lack of trust in one another, would have chosen the quick and simple alternative of abolishing knowledge of the shame by destroying the witness to it. So as you like to put it they ran.'

'Leaving you and Mr Hampton to clean up the vomit, which even dogs don't do. Though of course Mr Hampton is a paid dog and I reckon you might be called one too.—Because don't forget Jefferson either,' he said. 'They were clearing off out of sight pretty fast too. Of course some of them couldn't because it was still only the middle of the afternoon

so they couldn't shut up the stores and run home too yet; there still might be a chance to sell each other a nickel's worth of something.'

'I said Stevens and Mallison too,' his uncle said.

'Not Stevens,' he said. 'And not Hampton either. Because somebody had to finish it, somebody with a strong enough stomach to mop a floor. The sheriff to catch (or try to or hope to or whatever it is you are going to do) the murderer and a lawyer to defend the lynchers.'

'Nobody lynched anybody to be defended from it,' his uncle said.

'All right,' he said. 'Excuse them then.'

'Nor that either,' his uncle said. 'I'm defending Lucas Beauchamp. I'm defending Sambo from the North and East and West—the outlanders who will fling him decades back not merely into injustice but into grief and agony and violence too by forcing on us laws based on the idea that man's injustice to man can be abolished overnight by police. Sambo will suffer it of course; there are not enough of him yet to do anything else. And he will endure it, absorb it and survive because he is Sambo and has that capacity; he will even beat us there because he has the capacity to endure and survive but he will be thrown back decades and what he survives to may not be worth having because by that time divided we may have lost America.'

'But you're still excusing it.'

'No,' his uncle said. 'I only say that the injustice is ours, the South's. We must expiate and abolish it ourselves, alone and without help nor even (with thanks) advice. We owe that to Lucas whether he wants it or not (and this Lucas anyway wont) not because of his past since a man or a race either if he's any good can survive his past without even needing to escape from it and not because of the high quite often only too rhetorical rhetoric of humanity but for the simple indubitable practical reason of his future: that capacity to survive and absorb and endure and still be steadfast.'

‘All right,’ he said again. ‘You’re still a lawyer and they still ran. Maybe they intended for Lucas to clean it up since he came from a race of floor-moppers. Lucas and Hampton and you since Hampton ought to do something now and then for his money and they even elected you to a salary too. Did they think to tell you how to do it? what to use for bait to get Crawford Gowrie to come in and say All right, boys, I pass. Deal them again. Or were they too busy being—being’

His uncle said quietly: ‘Righteous?’

Now he completely stopped. But only for a second. He said, ‘They ran,’ calm and completely final, not even contemptuous, flicking the shirt floating away behind him and at the same moment dropping the trousers and stepping barefoot out of them in nothing now but shorts. ‘Besides, it’s all right. I dreamed through all that; I dreamed through them too, dreamed them away too; let them stay in bed or milking their cows before dark or chopping wood before dark or after or by lanterns or not lanterns either. Because they were not the dream; I just passed them to get to the dream——’ talking quite fast now, a good deal faster than he realised until it would be too late: ‘It was something . . . somebody . . . something about how maybe this was too much to expect of us, too much for people just sixteen or going on eighty or ninety or whatever she is to have to bear, and then right off I was answering what you told me, you remember, about the English boys not much older than me leading troops and flying scout aeroplanes in France in 1918? how you said that by 1918 all British officers seemed to be either subalterns of seventeen or one-eyed or one-armed or one-legged colonels of twenty-three?’—checking then or trying to because he had got the warning at last quite sharp not as if he had heard suddenly in advance the words he was going to say but as if he had discovered suddenly not what he had already said but where it was going, what the ones he had already spoken were going to compel him to say in order bring them to a stop: but too late of course like mashing suddenly on the brake pedal going downhill then discovering to your horror that the brake rod had snapped: ‘——only there was something else too—— I was trying’ and he stopped them at last feeling the

hot hard blood burn all the way up his neck into his face and nowhere even to look not because he was standing there almost naked to begin with but because no clothes nor expression nor talking either smoke-screened anything from his uncle's bright grave eyes.

'Yes?' his uncle said. Then his uncle said, 'Yes. Some things you must always be unable to bear. Some things you must never stop refusing to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame. No matter how young you are or how old you have got. Not for kudos and not for cash: your picture in the paper nor money in the bank either. Just refuse to bear them. That it?'

'Who, me,' he said, moving now already crossing the room, not even waiting for the slippers. 'I haven't been a Tenderfoot scout since I was twelve years old.'

'Of course not,' his uncle said. 'But just regret it; dont be ashamed.'

Chapter Ten

Perhaps eating had something to do with it, not even pausing while he tried with no particular interest nor curiosity to compute how many days since he had sat down to a table to eat and then in the same chew as it were remembering that it had not been one yet since even though already half asleep he had eaten a good breakfast at the sheriff's at four this morning: remembering how his uncle (sitting across the table drinking coffee) had said that man didn't necessarily eat his way through the world but by the act of eating and maybe only by that did he actually enter the world, get himself into the world: not through it but into it, burrowing into the world's teeming solidarity like a moth into wool by the physical act of chewing and swallowing the substance of its warp and woof and so making, translating into a part of himself and his memory, the whole history of man or maybe even relinquishing by mastication, abandoning, eating it into to be annealed, the proud vainglorious minuscule which he called his memory and his self and his I-Am into that vast teeming anonymous solidarity of the world from beneath which the ephemeral rock would cool and spin away to dust

not even remarked and remembered since there was no yesterday and tomorrow didn't even exist so maybe only an ascetic living in a cave on acorns and spring water was really capable of vainglory and pride; maybe you had to live in a cave on acorns and spring water in rapt impregnable contemplation of your vainglory and righteousness and pride in order to keep up to that high intolerant pitch of its worship which brooked no compromise: eating steadily and quite a lot too and at what even he knew by this time was too fast since he had been hearing it for sixteen years and put his napkin down and rose and one last wail from his mother (and he thought how women couldn't really stand anything except tragedy and poverty and physical pain; how this morning when he was where at sixteen he had no business being and doing what even at twice sixteen he had no business doing: chasing over the country with the sheriff digging up murdered corpses out of a ditch: she had been a hundred times less noisy than his father and a thousand times more valuable, yet now when all he intended was to walk to town with his uncle and sit for an hour or so in the same office in which he had already spent a probably elapsed quarter of his life, she had completely abolished Lucas Beauchamp and Crawford Cowrie both and had gone back indefatigable to the day fifteen years ago when she had first set out to persuade him he couldn't button his pants):

'But why cant Miss Habersham come here to wait?'

'She can,' his uncle said. 'I'm sure she can find the house again.'

'You know what I mean,' she said. 'Why dont you make her? Sitting around a lawyer's office until twelve oclock at night is no place for a lady.'

'Neither was digging up Jake Montgomery last night,' his uncle said. 'But maybe this time we will break Lucas Beauchamp of making this constant drain on her gentility. Come along, Chick:' and so out of the house at last, not walking out of the house into it because he had brought it out of the house with him, having at some point between his room and the front door not acquired it nor even simply entered it nor even actually regained it but rather expiated his aberration from it,

become once more worthy to be received into it since it was his own or rather he was its and so it must have been the eating, he and his uncle once more walking the same street almost exactly as they had walked it not twenty-two hours ago which had been empty then with a sort of aghast recoiled consternation: because it was not empty at all now, deserted and empty of movement certainly running as vacant of life from streetlamp to streetlamp as a dead street through an abandoned city but not really abandoned not really withdrawn but only making way for them who could do it better, only making way for them who could do it right, not to interfere or get in the way or even offer suggestion or even permit (with thanks) advice to them who would do it right and in their own homely way since it was their own grief and their own shame and their own expiation, laughing again now but it was all right, thinking: Because they always have me and Aleck Sander and Miss Habersham, not to mention Uncle Gavin and a sworn badge-wearing sheriff: when suddenly he realised that that was a part of it too—that fierce desire that they should be perfect because they were his and he was theirs, that furious intolerance of any one single jot or tittle less than absolute perfection—that furious almost instinctive leap and spring to defend them from anyone anywhere so that he might excoriate them himself without mercy since they were his own and he wanted no more save to stand with them unalterable and impregnable: one shame if shame must be, one expiation since expiation must surely be but above all one unalterable durable impregnable one: one people one heart one land: so that suddenly he said,

‘Look—’ and stopped but as always no more was needed:

‘Yes?’ his uncle said, then when he said no more: ‘Ah, I see. It’s not that they were right but that you were wrong.’

‘I was worse,’ he said. ‘I was righteous.’

‘It’s all right to be righteous,’ his uncle said. ‘Maybe you were right and they were wrong. Just dont stop.’

‘Dont stop what?’ he said.

‘Even bragging and boasting is all right too,’ his uncle said. ‘Just dont stop.’

‘Dont stop what?’ he said again. But he knew what now; he said,

‘Aint it about time you stopped being a Tenderfoot scout too?’

‘This is not Tenderfoot,’ his uncle said. ‘This is the third degree. What do you call it?—’

‘Eagle scout,’ he said.

‘Eagle scout,’ his uncle said. ‘Tenderfoot is, Dont accept. Eagle scout is, Dont stop. You see? No, that’s wrong. Dont bother to see. Dont even bother to not forget it. Just dont stop.’

‘No,’ he said. ‘We dont need to worry about stopping now. It seems to me what we have to worry about now is where we’re going and how.’

‘Yes you do,’ his uncle said. ‘You told me yourself about fifteen minutes ago, dont you remember? About what Mr Hampton and Lucas were going to use for bait to fetch Crawford Gowrie in to where they could put Mr Hampton’s hand on him? They’re going to use Lucas—’

And he would remember: himself and his uncle standing beside the sheriff’s car in the alley beside the jail watching Lucas and the sheriff emerge from the jail’s side door and cross the dark yard toward them.

It was quite dark in fact since the street light at the corner didn’t reach this far nor any sound either; only a little after ten oclock and on Monday night too yet the sky’s dark bowl cupped as though in a vacuum like the old bride’s bouquet under its glass bell the town, the Square which was more than dead: abandoned: because he had gone on to look at it, without stopping leaving his uncle standing at the corner of the alley who said after him:

'Where are you going?' but not even answering, walking the last silent and empty block, ringing his footfalls deliberate and unsecret into the hollow silence, unhurried and solitary but nothing at all of forlorn, instead with a sense a feeling not possessive but proprietary, viceregal, with humility still, himself not potent but at least the vessel of a potency like the actor looking from wings or perhaps empty balcony down upon the waiting stage vacant yet garnished and empty yet, nevertheless where in a moment now he will walk and posture in the last act's absolute cynosure, himself in himself nothing and maybe no world-beater of a play either but at least his to finish it, round it and put it away intact and unassailable, complete: and so onto into the dark and empty Square stopping as soon as he could perceive at effortless once that whole dark lifeless rectangle with but one light anywhere and that in the cafe which stayed open all night on account of the long-haul trucks whose (the cafe's) real purpose some said, the real reason for the grant of its license by the town was to keep Willy Ingrum's nocturnal counterpart awake who although the town had walled him off a little cubbyhole of an office in an alley with a stove and a telephone he wouldn't stay there but used instead the cafe where there was somebody to talk to and he could be telephoned there of course but some people old ladies especially didn't like to page the policeman in an allnight jukejoint coffee stall so the office telephone had been connected to a big burglar alarm bell on the outside wall loud enough for the counterman or a truck driver in the cafe to hear it and tell him it was ringing, and the two lighted second-story windows (and he thought that Miss Habersham really had persuaded his uncle to give her the key to the office and then he thought that that was wrong, his uncle had persuaded her to take the key since she would just as soon have sat in the parked truck until they came—and then added If she had waited because that was certainly wrong and what had really happened was that his uncle had locked her up in the office to give the sheriff and Lucas time to get out of town) but since the lights in a lawyer's office were liable to burn any time the lawyer or the janitor forgot to turn them off when they left and the cafe like the power plant was a public institution they didn't count and even the cafe was just lighted (he couldn't see into it from here but he could have heard and he thought how that, formally shutting off the jukebox for twelve hours

had probably been the night marshal's first official act besides punching every hour the time clock on the wall at the bank's back door since the mad-dog scare last August) and he remembered the other the normal Monday nights when no loud fury of blood and revenge and racial and family solidarity had come roaring in from Beat Four (or Beat One or Two or Three or Five for that matter or for the matter of that from the purlieus of the urban Georgian porticoes themselves) to rattle and clash among the old bricks and the old trees and the Doric capitals and leave them for one night anyway stricken: ten o'clock on Monday night and although the first run of the film at the picture show would be forty or fifty minutes over now a few of the patrons who had come in late would still be passing homeward and all the young men sitting since that time drinking coca cola and playing nickels into the drugstore jukebox would certainly be, strolling timeless and in no haste since they were going nowhere since the May night itself was their destination and they carried that with them walking in it and (stock-auction day) even a few belated cars and trucks whose occupants had stayed in for the picture show too or to visit and take supper with kin or friends and now at last dispersing nightward sleepward tomorrow-ward about the dark mile-compassing land, remembering no longer ago than last night when he had thought it was empty too until he had had time to listen to it a moment and realised that it was not empty at all: a Sunday night but with more than Sunday night's quiet, the sort of quiet in fact that no night had any business with and of all nights Sunday night never, which had been Sunday night only because they had already named the calendar when the sheriff brought Lucas in to jail: an emptiness you could call emptiness provided you called vacant and empty the silent and lifeless terrain in front of a mobilised army or peaceful the vestibule to a powder magazine or quiet the spillway under the locks of a dam—a sense not of waiting but of incrementation, not of people—women and old folks and children—but of men not so much grim as grave and not so much tense as quiet, sitting quietly and not even talking much in back rooms and not just the bath-cabinets and johns behind the barbershop and the shed behind the poolhall stacked with soft drink cases and littered with empty whiskey bottles but the stock-rooms of stores and garages and behind the drawn shades of the offices themselves whose owners even the proprietors of the stores

and garages conceded to belong not to a trade but a profession, not waiting for an event a moment in time to come to them but for a moment in time when in almost volitionless concord they themselves would create the event, preside at and even serve an instant which was not even six or twelve or fifteen hours belated but was instead simply the continuation of the one when the bullet struck Vinson Gowrie and there had been no time between and so for all purposes Lucas was already dead since he had died then on the same instant when he had forfeited his life and theirs was merely to preside at his suttee, and now tonight to remember because tomorrow it would be over, tomorrow of course the Square would wake and stir, another day and it would fling off hangover, another and it would even fling off shame so that on Saturday the whole county with one pierceless unanimity of click and pulse and hum would even deny that the moment had ever existed when they could have been mistaken: so that he didn't even need to remind himself in the absolute the utter the complete silence that the town was not dead nor even abandoned but only withdrawn giving room to do what homely thing must be done in its own homely way without help or interference or even (thank you) advice: three amateurs, an old white spinster and a white child and a black one to expose Lucas' wouldbe murderer, Lucas himself and the county sheriff to catch him and so one last time: remembering: his uncle while he still stood barefoot on the rug with both edges of the unbuttoned shirt arrested in his hands thirty minutes ago and when they were mounting the last pitch of hill toward the church eleven hours ago and on what must have been a thousand other times since he had got big enough to listen and to understand and to remember:—to defend not Lucas nor even the union of the United States but the United States from the outlanders North East and West who with the highest of motives and intentions (let us say) are essaying to divide it at a time when no people dare risk division by using federal laws and federal police to abolish Lucas' shameful condition, there may not be in any random one thousand Southerners one who really grieves or even is really concerned over that condition nevertheless neither is there always one who would himself lynch Lucas no matter what the occasion yet not one of that nine hundred ninety-nine plus that other first one making the thousand whole again would hesitate to repulse with force (and

one would still be that lyncher) the outlander who came down here with force to intervene or punish him, you say (with sneer) You must know Sambo well to arrogate to yourself such calm assumption of his passivity and I reply I dont know him at all and in my opinion no white man does but I do know the Southern white man not only the nine hundred and ninety-nine but that one other too because he is our own too and more than that, that one other does not exist only in the South, you will see allied not North and East and West and Sambo against a handful of white men in the South but a paper alliance of theorists and fanatics and private and personal avengers plus a number of others under the assumption of enough physical miles to afford a principle against and possibly even outnumbered a concorded South which has drawn recruits whether it would or no from your own back-areas, not just your hinterland but the fine cities of your cultural pride your Chicagos and Detroits and Los Angeleses and wherever else live ignorant people who fear the color of any skin or shape of nose save their own and who will grasp this opportunity to vent on Sambo the whole sum of their ancestral horror and scorn and fear of Indian and Chinese and Mexican and Carib and Jew, you will force us the one out of that first random thousand and the nine hundred and ninety-nine out of the second who do begrieve Lucas' shameful condition and would improve it and have and are and will until (not tomorrow perhaps) that condition will be abolished to be not forgotten maybe but at least remembered with less of pain and bitterness since justice was relinquished to him by us rather than torn from us and forced on him both with bayonets, willynilly into alliance with them with whom we have no kinship whatever in defence of a principle which we ourselves begrieve and abhor, we are in the position of the German after 1933 who had no other alternative between being either a Nazi or a Jew or the present Russian (European too for that matter) who hasn't even that but must be either a Communist or dead, only we must do it and we alone without help or interference or even (thank you) advice since only we can if Lucas' equality is to be anything more than its own prisoner inside an impregnable barricade of the direct heirs of the victory of 1861-1865 which probably did more than even John Brown to stalemate Lucas' freedom which still seems to be in check going on a hundred years after Lee surrendered and when you say Lucas must not

wait for that tomorrow because that tomorrow will never come because you not only cant you wont then we can only repeat Then you shall not and say to you Come down here and look at us before you make up your mind and you reply No thanks the smell is bad enough from here and we say Surely you will at least look at the dog you plan to housebreak, a people divided at a time when history is still showing us that the anteroom to dissolution is division and you say At least we perish in the name of humanity and we reply When all is stricken but that nominative pronoun and that verb what price Lucas' humanity then and turned and ran the short dead empty block back to the corner where his uncle had gone on without waiting and then up the alley too to where the sheriff's car stood, the two of them watching the sheriff and Lucas cross the dark yard toward them the sheriff in front and Lucas about five feet behind walking not fast but just intently, neither furtive nor covert but exactly like two men simply busy not exactly late but with no time to dawdle, through the gate and across to the car where the sheriff opened the back door and said,

'Jump in,' and Lucas got in and the sheriff closed the door and opened the front one and crawled grunting into it, the whole car squatting onto its springs and rims when he let himself down into the seat and turned the switch and started the engine, his uncle standing at the window now holding the rim of it in both hands as though he thought or hoped suddenly on some second thought to hold the car motionless before it could begin to move, saying what he himself had been thinking off and on for thirty or forty minutes:

'Take somebody with you.'

'I am,' the sheriff said. 'Besides I thought we settled all this three times this afternoon.'

'That's still just one no matter how many times you count Lucas,' his uncle said.

'You let me have my pistol,' Lucas said, 'and wont nobody have to do no counting. I'll do it:' and he thought how many times the sheriff had

probably told Lucas by now to shut up, which may have been why the sheriff didn't say it now: except that (suddenly) he did, turning slowly and heavily and grunting in the seat to look back at Lucas, saying in the plaintive heavily-sighing voice:

'After all the trouble you got into Saturday standing with that pistol in your pocket in the same ten feet of air a Gowrie was standing in, you want to take it in your hand and walk around another one. Now I want you to hush and stay hushed. And when we begin to get close to Whiteleaf bridge I want you to be laying on the floor close up against the seat behind me and still hushed. You hear me?'

'I hear you,' Lucas said. 'But if I just had my pistol——' but the sheriff had already turned to his uncle:

'No matter how many times you count Crawford Gowrie he's still just one too:' and then went on in the mild sighing reluctant voice which nevertheless was already answering his uncle's thoughts before even his uncle could speak it: 'Who would he get?' and he thought of that too remembering the long tearing rubber-from-cement sound of the frantic cars and trucks scattering pell mell hurling themselves in aghast irrevocable repudiation in all directions toward the county's outmost unmapped fastnesses except that little island in Beat Four known as Caledonia Church, into sanctuary: the old the used the familiar, home where the women and older girls and children could milk and chop wood for tomorrow's breakfast while the little ones held lanterns and the men and older sons after they had fed the mules against tomorrow's plowing would sit on the front gallery waiting for supper into the twilight: the whippoorwills: night: sleep: and this he could even see (provided that even a murderer's infatuation could bring Crawford Gowrie ever again into the range and radius of that nub arm which—since Crawford was a Gowrie too—in agreement here with the sheriff he didn't believe—and he knew now why Lucas had ever left Fraser's store alive Saturday afternoon, let alone ever got out of the sheriff's car at the jail: that the Gowries themselves had known he hadn't done it so they were just marking time waiting for somebody else, maybe Jefferson to drag him out into the street until he remembered—a flash,

something like shame—the blue shirt squatting and the stiff awkward single hand trying to brush the wet sand from the dead face and he knew that whatever the furious old man might begin to think tomorrow he held nothing against Lucas then because there was no room for anything but his son)—night, the diningroom perhaps and again seven Gowrie men in the twenty-year womanless house because Forrest had come up from Vicksburg for the funeral yesterday and was probably still there this morning when the sheriff sent word out for old Gowrie to meet him at the church, a lamp burning in the center of the table among the crusted sugarbowls and molasses jugs and ketchup and salt and pepper in the same labeled containers they had come off the store shelf in and the old man sitting at the head of it his one arm lying on the table in front of him and the big pistol under his hand pronouncing judgment sentence doom and execution too on the Gowrie who had cancelled his own Gowriehood with his brother's blood, then the dark road the truck (not commandeered this time because Vinson had owned one new and big and powerful convertible for either logs or cattle) the same twin driving it probably and the body boomed down onto the runninggear like a log itself with the heavy logchains, fast out of Caledonia out of Beat Four into the dark silent waiting town fast still up the quiet street across the Square to the sheriff's house and the body tumbled and flung onto the sheriff's front gallery and perhaps the truck even waiting while the other Gowrie twin rang the doorbell. 'Stop worrying about Crawford,' the sheriff said. 'He aint got anything against me. He votes for me. His trouble right now is having to kill extra folks like Jake Montgomery when all he ever wanted was just to keep Vinson from finding out he had been stealing lumber from him and Uncle Sudley Workitt. Even if he jumps onto the runningboard before I have time to keep up with what's going on he'll still have to waste a minute or two trying to get the door open so he can see exactly where Lucas is—provided by that time Lucas is doing good and hard what I told him to do, which I sure hope for his sake he is.'

'I'm going to,' Lucas said. 'But if I just had my——'

'Yes,' his uncle said in the harsh voice: 'Provided he's there.'

The sheriff sighed. 'You sent the message.'

'What message I could,' his uncle said. 'However I could. A message making an assignation between a murderer and a policeman, that whoever finally delivers it to the murderer wont even know was intended for the murderer, that the murderer himself will not only believe he wasn't intended to get it but that it's true.'

'Well,' the sheriff said, 'he'll either get it or he wont get it and he'll either believe it or he wont believe it and he'll either be waiting for us in Whiteleaf bottom or he wont and if he aint me and Lucas will go on to the high way and come back to town.' He raced the engine let it idle again; now he turned on the lights. 'But he may be there. I sent a message too.'

'All right,' his uncle said. 'Why is that, Mr Bones?'

'I got the mayor to excuse Willy Ingrum so he could go out and set up with Vinson again tonight and before Willy left I told him in confidence I was going to run Lucas over to Hollymount tonight through the old Whiteleaf cutoff so Lucas can testify tomorrow at Jake Montgomery's inquest and reminded Willy that they aint finished the Whiteleaf fill yet and cars have to cross it in low gear and told him to be sure not to mention it to anybody.'

'Oh,' his uncle said, not quite turning the door loose yet. 'No matter who might have claimed Jake Montgomery alive he belongs to Yoknapatawpha County now.—But then,' he said briskly, turning the door loose now, 'we're after just a murderer, not a lawyer.—All right,' he said. 'Why dont you get started?'

'Yes,' the sheriff said. 'You go on to your office and watch out for Miss Eunice. Willy may have passed her on the street too and if he did she might still beat us to Whiteleaf bridge in that pickup.'

Then into the Square this time to cross it catacornered to where the pickup stood nosedin empty to the otherwise empty curb and up the

long muted groan and rumble of the stairway to the open office door and passing through it he thought without surprise how she was probably the only woman he knew who would have withdrawn the borrowed key from the lock as soon as she opened the strange door not to leave the key on the first flat surface she passed but to put it back into the reticule or pocket or whatever she had put it in when it was lent to her and she wouldn't be sitting in the chair behind the table either and wasn't, sitting instead bolt upright in the hat but another dress which looked exactly like the one she had worn last night and the same handbag on her lap with the eighteen-dollar gloves clasped on top of it and the flat-heeled thirty-dollar shoes planted side by side on the floor in front of the hardest straightest chair in the room, the one beside the door which nobody ever really sat in no matter how crowded the office and only moving to the easy chair behind the table after his uncle had spent a good two minutes insisting and finally explained it might be two or three hours yet because she had the gold brooch watch on her bosom open when they came in and seemed to think that by this time the sheriff should not only have been back with Crawford Gowrie but probably on the way to the penitentiary with him: then he in his usual chair beside the water cooler and finally his uncle even struck the match to the cob pipe still talking not just through the smoke but into it with it:

'—what happened because some of it we even know let alone what Lucas finally told us by watching himself like a hawk or an international spy to keep from telling us anything that would even explain him let alone save him, Vinson and Crawford were partners buying the timber from old man Sudley Workitt who was Mrs Gowrie's second or fourth cousin or uncle or something, that is they had agreed with old Sudley on a price by the board foot but to be paid him when the lumber was sold which was not to be until the last tree was cut and Crawford and Vinson had delivered it and got their money and then they would pay old Sudley his, hiring a mill and crew to fell and saw and stack it right there within a mile of old Sudley's house and not one stick to be moved until it was all cut. Only—except this part we don't really know yet until Hampton gets his hands on Crawford except it's got to be this way or what in the world were you all doing digging Jake Montgomery out of

Vinson's grave?—and every time I think about this part of it and remember you three coming back down that hill to the exact spot where two of you heard him and one of you even saw riding past the man who already with one murdered corpse on the mule in front of him experienced such a sudden and urgent alteration of plan that when Hampton and I got there hardly six hours later there was nobody in the grave at all—'

'But he didn't,' Miss Habersham said.

'—What?' his uncle said. '. . . Where was I? Oh yes.—only Lucas Beauchamp taking his walk, one night heard something and went and looked or maybe he was actually passing and saw or maybe he already had the idea which was why he took the walk or that walk that night and saw a truck whether he recognised it or not being loaded in the dark with that lumber which the whole neighborhood knew was not to be moved until the mill itself closed up and moved away which would be some time yet and Lucas watched and listened and maybe he even went over into Crossman County to Glasgow and Hollymount until he knew for sure not only who was moving some of that lumber every night or so, not much at a time, just exactly not quite enough for anyone who was not there every day to notice its absence (and the only people there every day or even interested even to that extent were Crawford who represented himself and his brother and uncle who owned the trees and the resulting lumber and so could do what they liked with it, the one of which was running about the country all day long attending to his other hot irons and the other an old rheumatic man to begin with and half blind on top of that who couldn't have seen anything even if he could have got that far from his house—and the mill crew who were hired by the day and so wouldn't have cared even if they had known what was going on at night as long as they got their pay every Saturday) but what he was doing with it, maybe learning even as far as Jake Montgomery though Lucas' knowing about Jake made no difference except that by getting himself murdered and into Vinson's grave Jake probably saved Lucas' life. But even when Hope told me how he had finally got that much out of Lucas in his kitchen this morning when Will Legate brought him from the jail and we were

driving you home it explained only part of it because I was still saying what I had been saying ever since you all woke me this morning and Chick told me what Lucas had told him about the pistol: But why Vinson? Why did Crawford have to kill Vinson in order to obliterate the witness to his thieving? not that it shouldn't have worked of course since Lucas really should have died as soon as the first white man came in sight of him standing over Vinson's body with the handle of that pistol hunching the back of his coat, but why do it this way, by the bizarre detour of fratricide? so now that we had something really heavy enough to talk to Lucas with I went straight to Hampton's house this afternoon into the kitchen and there was Hampton's cook sitting on one side of the table and Lucas on the other eating greens and cornbread not from a plate but out of the two-gallon pot itself and I said,

' "And you let him catch you—and I dont mean Crawford——" and he said,

' "No. I means Vinson too. Only it was too late then, the truck was done already loaded and pulling out fast without no lights burning or nothing and he said Whose truck is that? and I never said nothing."

' "All right," I said. "Then what?"

' "That's all," Lucas said. "Nothing."

' "Didn't he have a gun?"

' "I dont know," Lucas said. "He had a stick:" and I said,

' "All right. Go on:" and he said,

' "Nothing. He just stood there a minute with the stick drawed back and said Tell me whose truck that was and I never said nothing and he lowered the stick back down and turned and then I never saw him no more."

‘ “So you took your pistol.” I said and he said, “and went——” and he said,

‘ “I never had to. He come to me, I mean Crawford this time, at my house the next night and was going to pay me to tell him whose truck that was, a heap of money, fifty dollars, he showed it to me and I said I hadn’t decided yet whose truck it was and he said he would leave me the money anyhow while I decided and I said I had already decided what I was going to do, I would wait until tomorrow—that was Friday night—for some kind of a evidence that Mr Workitt and Vinson had got their share of that missing timber money.”

‘ “Yes?” I said. “Then what?”

‘ “Then I would go and tell Mr Workitt he better——”

‘ “Say that again,” I said. “Slow.”

‘ “Tell Mr Workitt he better count his boards.”

‘ “And you, a Negro, were going up to a white man and tell him his niece’s sons were stealing from him—and a Beat Four white man on top of that. Dont you know what would have happened to you?”

‘ “It never had no chance,” he said. “Because it was the next day—Sat-dy—I got the message——” and I should have known then about the pistol because obviously Gowrie knew about it; his message couldn’t have been have replaced stolen money, would like your personal approval, bring your pistol and be sociable—something like that so I said,

‘ “But why the pistol?” and he said,

‘ “It was Sat-dy,” and I said,

‘ “Yes, the ninth. But why the pistol?” and then I understood; I said: “I see. You wear the pistol when you dress up on Saturday just like old Carothers did before he gave it to you:” and he said,

‘ “Sold it to me,” and I said,

‘ “All right, go on,” and he said,

‘ “—got the message to meet him at the store only——” ’ and now his uncle struck the match again and puffed the pipe still talking, talking through the pipe stem with the smoke as though you were watching the words themselves: ‘Only he never got to the store, Crawford met him in the woods sitting on a stump beside the path waiting for him almost before Lucas had left home good and now it was Crawford about the pistol, right off before Lucas could say good afternoon or were Vinson and Mr Workitt glad to get the money or anything, saying “Even if it will still shoot you probably couldn’t hit anything with it” and so you can probably finish it yourself; Lucas said how Crawford finally put up a half dollar that Lucas couldn’t hit the stump from fifteen feet away and Lucas hit it and Crawford gave him the half dollar and they walked on the other two miles toward the store until Crawford told Lucas to wait there, that Mr Workitt was sending a signed receipt for his share of the missing lumber to the store and Crawford would go and fetch it back so Lucas could see it with his own eyes and I said,

‘ “And you didn’t suspicion anything even then?” and he said,

‘ “No. He cussed me so natural.” And at least you can finish that, no need to prove any quarrel between Vinson and Crawford nor rack your brains very deep to imagine what Crawford said and did to have Vinson waiting at the store and then send him in front along the path since no more than this will do it: “All right. I’ve got him. If he still wont tell whose truck that was we’ll beat it out of him:” because that doesn’t really matter either, enough that the next Lucas saw was Vinson coming down the path from the store in a good deal of a hurry Lucas said but probably what he meant was impatient, puzzled and annoyed both but probably mostly annoyed, probably doing exactly what Lucas

was doing: waiting for the other to speak and explain except that Vinson quit waiting first according to Lucas, still walking saying getting as far as “So you changed your mind—” when Lucas said he tripped over something and kind of bucked down onto his face and presently Lucas remembered that he had heard the shot and realised that what Vinson had tripped over was his brother Crawford, then the rest of them were there Lucas said before he even had time to hear them running through the woods and I said,

‘ “I reckon it looked to you right then that you were getting ready to trip pretty bad over Vinson, old Skipworth and Adam Fraser or not” but at least I didn’t say But why didn’t you explain then and so at least Lucas didn’t have to say Explain what to who: and so he was all right— I dont mean Lucas of course, I mean Crawford, no mere child of misfortune he— — and there it was again and this time he knew what it was, Miss Habersham had done something he didn’t know what, no sound and she hadn’t moved and it wasn’t even that she had got any stiller but something had occurred, not something happened to her from the outside in but something from the inside outward as though she not only hadn’t been surprised by it but had decreed authorised it but she hadn’t moved at all not even to take an extra breath and his uncle hadn’t even noticed that much —but rather chosen and elected peculiar and unique out of man by the gods themselves to prove not to themselves because they had never doubted it but to man by this his lowest common denominator that he has a soul, driven at last to murder his brother— —’

‘He put him in quicksand,’ Miss Habersham said.

‘Yes,’ his uncle said. ‘Ghastly wasn’t it.—by the simple mischance of an old Negro man’s insomnambulism and then having got away with that by means of a plan a scheme so simple and water-tight in its biological and geographical psychology as to be what Chick here would call a natural, then to be foiled here by the fact that four years ago a child whose presence in the world he was not even aware of fell into a creek in the presence of that same Negro insomnambulist because this part we dont really know either and with Jake Montgomery in his present

condition we probably never will though that doesn't really matter either since the fact still remains, why else was he in Vinson's grave except that in buying the lumber from Crawford (we found that out by a telephone call to the lumber's ultimate consignee in Memphis this afternoon) Jake Montgomery knew where it came from too since knowing that would have been Jake's nature and character too and indeed a factor in his middleman's profit and so when Vinson Crawford's partner tripped suddenly on death in the woods behind Fraser's store Jake didn't need a crystal ball to read that either and so if this be surmise then make the most of it or give Mr Hampton and me a better and we'll swap, Jake knew about Buddy McCallum's old war trophy too and I like to think for Crawford's sake——' and there it was again and still no outward sign but this time his uncle saw or felt or sensed (or however it was) it too and stopped and even for a second seemed about to speak then in the next one forgot it apparently, talking again: '—that maybe Jake named the price of his silence and even collected it or an installment on it perhaps intending all the time to convict Crawford of the murder, perhaps with his contacts all established to get still more money or perhaps he didn't like Crawford and wanted revenge or perhaps a purist he drew the line at murder and simply dug Vinson up to load him on the mule and take him in to the sheriff but anyway on the night after the funeral somebody with a conceivable reason for digging Vinson up dug him up, which must have been Jake, and somebody who not only didn't want Vinson dug up but had a conceivable reason to be watching the someone who would have had a conceivable reason for digging him up, knew that he had been dug up within in—you said it was about ten when you and Aleck Sander parked the truck and it got dark enough for digging up graves about seven that night so that leaves three hours—and that's what I mean about Crawford,' his uncle said and this time he noticed that his uncle had even stopped, expecting it and it came but still no sound no movement, the hat immobile and exact the neat precision of the clasped gloves and the handbag on her lap the shoes planted and motionless side by side as if she had placed them into a chalked diagram on the floor: '——watching there in the weeds behind the fence seeing himself not merely betrayed out of the blackmail but all the agony and suspense to go through again not to mention the

physical labor who since one man already knew that the body couldn't bear examination by trained policemen, could never know how many others might know or suspect so the body would have to come out of the grave now though at least he had help here whether the help knew it or not so he probably waited until Jake had the body out and was all ready to load it onto the mule (and we found that out too, it was the Gowrie's plow mule, the same one the twins were riding this morning; Jake borrowed it himself late that Sunday afternoon and when you guess which Gowrie he borrowed it from you'll be right: it was Crawford) and he wouldn't have risked the pistol now anyway anymore than he would have used it if he could, who would rather have paid Jake over again the amount of the blackmail for the privilege of using whatever it was he crushed Jake's skull with and put him into the coffin and filled the grave back up—and here it is again, the desperate the dreadful urgency, the loneliness the pariah-hood having not only the horror and repudiation of all man against him but having to struggle with the sheer inertia of earth and the terrible heedless rush of time but even beating all that coalition at last, the grave decent again even to the displaced flowers and the evidence of his original crime at last disposed and secure—' and it would have been again but this time his uncle didn't pause '——then to straighten up at last and for the first time draw a full breath since the moment when Jake had approached him rubbing his thumb against the tips of the same fingers—and then to hear whatever it was that sent him plunging back up the hill then crawling creeping to lie once more panting but this time not merely in rage and terror but in almost incredulous disbelief that one single man could be subject to this much bad luck, watching you three not only undo his work for the second time but double it now since you not only exposed Jake Montgomery but you refilled the grave and even put the flowers back: who couldn't afford to let his brother Vinson be found in that grave but durst not let Jake Montgomery be found in it when (as he must have known) Hope Hampton got there tomorrow:' and stopped this time waiting for her to say it and she did:

'He put his brother in quicksand.'

'Ah,' his uncle said. 'That moment may come to anyone when simply nothing remains to be done with your brother or husband or uncle or cousin or mother-in-law except destroy them. But you dont put them in quicksand. Is that it?'

'He put him in quicksand,' she said with calm and implacable finality, not moving nor stirring except her lips to speak until then she raised her hand and opened the watch pinned to her bosom and looked at it.

'They haven't reached Whiteleaf bottom yet,' his uncle said. 'But dont worry, he'll be there, my message might have reached him but no man in this county can possibly escape hearing anything ever told Willy Ingrum under the pledge of secrecy, because there's nothing else he can do you see because murderers are gamblers and like the amateur gambler the amateur murderer believes first not in his luck but in long shots, that the long shot will win simply because it's a long shot but besides that, say he already knew he was lost and nothing Lucas could testify about Jake Montgomery or anyone else could harm him further and that his one last slim chance was to get out of the country, or say he knew even that was vain, knew for sure that he was running through the last few pence and pennies of what he could still call freedom, suppose he even knew for certain that tomorrow's sun would not even rise for him,—what would you want to do first, one last act and statement of your deathless principles before you left your native land for good and maybe even the world for good if your name was Gowrie and your blood and thinking and acting had been Gowrie all your life and you knew or even only believed or even only hoped that at a certain moment in an automobile creeping in low gear through a lonely midnight creek bottom would be the cause and reason for all your agony and frustration and outrage and grief and shame and irreparable loss and that not even a white man but a nigger and you still had the pistol with at least one of the old original ten German bullets in it.

But dont worry,' he said quickly: 'Dont worry about Mr Hampton. He probably wont even draw his pistol, I aint certain in fact that he has one because he has a way of carrying right along with him into all situations maybe not peace, maybe not abatement of the base emotions but at

least a temporary stalemate of crude and violent behavior just by moving slow and breathing hard, this happened two or three terms ago back in the twenties, a Frenchman's Bend lady naming no names at feud with another lady over something which began (we understood) over the matter of a prize cake at a church supper bazaar, whose—the second lady's—husband owned the still which had been supplying Frenchman's Bend with whiskey for years bothering nobody until the first lady made official demand on Mr Hampton to go out there and destroy the still and arrest the operator and then in about a week or ten days came in to town herself and told him that if he didn't she was going to report him to the governor of the state and the president in Washington so Hope went that time, she had not only given him explicit directions but he said there was a path to it kneedeep in places where it had been trodden for years beneath the weight of stopper-full gallon jugs so that you could have followed it even without the flashlight which he had and sure enough there was the still in as nice a location as you could want, cozy and sheltered yet accessible too with a fire burning under the kettle and a Negro tending it who of course didn't know who owned it nor ran it nor anything about it even before he recognised Hampton's size and finally even saw his badge: who Hope said offered him a drink first and then did fetch him a gourd of branch water and then made him comfortable sitting against a tree, even chunking the fire up to dry his wet feet while he waited for the owner to come back, quite comfortable Hope said, the two of them there by the fire in the darkness talking about one thing and another and the Negro asking him from time to time if he wouldn't like another gourd of water until Hampton said the mockingbird was making so confounded much racket that finally he opened his eyes blinking for a while in the sunlight until he got them focussed and there the mockingbird was on a limb not three feet above his head and before they loaded up the still to move it away somebody had gone to the nearest house and fetched back a quilt to spread over him and a pillow to put under his head and Hope said he noticed the pillow even had a fresh slip on it when he took it and the quilt to Varner's store to be returned with thanks to whoever owned them and came on back to town. And another time——'

'I'm not worrying,' Miss Habersham said.

'Of course not,' his uncle said. 'Because I know Hope Hampton——'

'Yes,' Miss Habersham said. 'I know Lucas Beauchamp.'

'Oh,' his uncle said. Then he said, 'Yes.' Then he said, 'Of course.' Then he said, 'Let's ask Chick to plug in the kettle and we'll have coffee while we wait, what do you think?'

'That will be nice,' Miss Habersham said.

Chapter Eleven

Finally he even got up and went to one of the front windows looking down into the Square because if Monday was stock-auction and trade day then Saturday was certainly radio and automobile day; on Monday they were mostly men and they drove in and parked the cars and trucks around the Square and went straight to the sales barns and stayed there until time to come back to the Square and eat dinner and then went back to the sales barns and stayed there until time to come and get in the cars and trucks and drive home before full dark.

But not Saturday; they were men and women and children too then and the old people and the babies and the young couples to buy the licenses for the weddings in the country churches tomorrow, come in to do a week's shopping for staples and delicacies like bananas and twenty-five-cent sardines and machine-made cakes and pies and clothes and stockings and feed and fertilizer and plow-gear: which didn't take long for any of them and no time at all for some of them so that some of the cars never really became permanently stationary at all and within an hour or so many of the others had joined them moving steadily processional and quite often in second gear because of their own density round and round the Square then out to the end of the tree-dense residential streets to turn and come back and circle round and round the Square again as if they had come all the way in from the distant circumambient settlements and crossroads stores and isolate

farms for that one purpose of enjoying the populous coming and going and motion and recognising one another and the zephyr-like smoothness of the paved streets and alleys themselves as well as looking at the neat new painted small houses among their minute neat yards and flowerbeds and garden ornaments which in the last few years had come to line them as dense as sardines or bananas; as a result of which the radios had to play louder than ever through their supercharged amplifiers to be heard above the mutter of exhausts and swish of tires and the grind of gears and the constant horns, so that long before you even reached the Square you not only couldn't tell where one began and another left off but you didn't even have to try to distinguish what any of them were playing or trying to sell you.

But this one seemed to be even a Saturday among Saturdays so that presently his uncle had got up from behind the table and come to the other window too, which was why they happened to see Lucas before he reached the office though that was not yet; he was still standing (so he thought) alone at the window looking down into the Square thronged and jammed as he couldn't remember it before—the bright sunny almost hot air heavy with the smell of blooming locust from the courthouse yard, the sidewalks dense and massed and slow with people black and white come in to town today as if by concert to collect at compound and so discharge not merely from balance but from remembering too that other Saturday only seven days ago of which they had been despoiled by an old Negro man who had got himself into the position where they had had to believe he had murdered a white man—that Saturday and Sunday and Monday only a week past yet which might never have been since nothing of them remained: Vinson and his brother Crawford (in his suicide's grave and strangers would be asking for weeks yet what sort of jail and sheriff Yoknapatawpha County had where a man locked in it for murder could still get hold of a Luger pistol even if it didn't have but one bullet in it and for that many weeks nobody in Yoknapatawpha County would still be able to tell him) side by side near their mother's headstone in Caledonia churchyard and Jake Montgomery over in Crossman County where somebody probably claimed him too for the same reason somebody did Crawford and Miss Habersham sitting in her own hall now mending the stockings until time

to feed the chickens and Aleck Sander down there on the Square in a flash Saturday shirt and a pair of zoot pants and a handful of peanuts or bananas too and he standing at the window watching the dense unhurried unhurryable throng and the busy almost ubiquitous flash and gleam on Willy Ingrum's cap-badge but mostly and above all the motion and the noise, the radios and the automobiles—the jukeboxes in the drugstore and the poolhall and the cafe and the bellowing amplifiers on the outside walls not only of the record-and-sheetmusic store but the army-and-navy supply store and both feed stores and (that they might falter) somebody standing on a bench in the courthouse yard making a speech into another one with a muzzle like a siege gun bolted to the top of an automobile, not to mention the ones which would be running in the apartments and the homes where the housewives and the maids made up the beds and swept and prepared to cook dinner so that nowhere inside the town's uttermost ultimate corporate rim should man woman or child citizen or guest or stranger be threatened with one second of silence; and the automobiles because explicitly speaking he couldn't see the Square at all: only the dense impenetrable mass of tops and hoods moving in double line at a snail's crawl around the Square in a sharp invisible aura of carbon monoxide and blating horns and a light intermittent clashing of bumpers, creeping slowly one by one into the streets leading away from the Square while the other opposite line crept as slowly one by one into it; so dense and slow dowelled into one interlocked mosaic so infinitesimal of movement as to be scarcely worthy of the word that you could have crossed the Square walking on them—or even out to the edge of town for that matter or even on a horse for that matter, Highboy for instance to whom the five- or six-foot jump from one top across the intervening hood to the next top would have been nothing or say the more or less motionless tops were laid with one smooth continuous surface of planks like a bridge and not Highboy but a gaited horse or a horse with one gait: a hard-driving rack seven feet in the air like a bird and travelling fast as a hawk or an eagle: with a feeling in the pit of his stomach as if a whole bottle of hot sodapop had exploded in it thinking of the gallant the splendid the really magnificent noise a horse would make racking in any direction on a loose plank bridge two miles long when suddenly his uncle at the other window said,

'The American really loves nothing but his automobile: not his wife his child nor his country nor even his bank-account first (in fact he doesn't really love that bank-account nearly as much as foreigners like to think because he will spend almost any or all of it for almost anything provided it is valueless enough) but his motor-car.

Because the automobile has become our national sex symbol. We cannot really enjoy anything unless we can go up an alley for it. Yet our whole background and raising and training forbids the subrosa and surreptitious. So we have to divorce our wife today in order to remove from our mistress the odium of mistress in order to divorce our wife tomorrow in order to remove from our mistress and so on.

As a result of which the American woman has become cold and undersexed; she has projected her libido onto the automobile not only because its glitter and gadgets and mobility pander to her vanity and incapacity (because of the dress decreed upon her by the national retailers association) to walk but because it will not maul her and tousele her, get her all sweaty and disarranged. So in order to capture and master anything at all of her anymore the American man has got to make that car his own.

Which is why let him live in a rented rathole though he must he will not only own one but renew it each year in pristine virginity, lending it to no one, letting no other hand ever know the last secret forever chaste forever wanton intimacy of its pedals and levers, having nowhere to go in it himself and even if he did he would not go where scratch or blemish might deface it, spending all Sunday morning washing and polishing and waxing it because in doing that he is caressing the body of the woman who has long since now denied him her bed.'

'That's not true,' he said.

'I am fifty-plus years old,' his uncle said. 'I spent the middle fifteen of them fumbling beneath skirts. My experience was that few of them were interested in love or sex either. They wanted to be married.'

'I still don't believe it,' he said.

'That's right,' his uncle said. 'Don't. And even when you are fifty and plus, still refuse to believe it.' And that was when they saw Lucas crossing the Square, probably at the same time—the cocked hat and the thin fierce glint of the tilted gold toothpick and he said,

'Where do you suppose it was all the time? I never did see it. Surely he had it with him that afternoon, a Saturday when he was not only wearing that black suit but he even had the pistol? Surely he never left home without the toothpick too.'

'Didn't I tell you?' his uncle said. 'That was the first thing he did when Mr Hampton walked into Skipworth's house where Skipworth had Lucas handcuffed to the bedpost—gave Hampton the toothpick and told him to keep it until he called for it.'

'Oh,' he said. 'He's coming up here.'

'Yes,' his uncle said. 'To gloat. Oh,' he said quickly, 'he's a gentleman; he won't remind me to my face that I was wrong; he's just going to ask me how much he owes me as his lawyer.'

Then in his chair beside the water cooler and his uncle once more behind the table they heard the long airy rumble and creak of the stairs then Lucas' feet steadily though with no haste and Lucas came tieless and even collarless this time except for the button but with an old-time white waistcoat not soiled so much as stained under the black coat and the worn gold loop of the watch-chain—the same face which he had seen for the first time when he climbed dripping up out of the icy creek that morning four years ago, unchanged, to which nothing had happened since not even age—in the act of putting the toothpick into one of the upper waistcoat pockets as he came through the door, saying generally,

'Gentle-men,' and then to him: 'Young man—' courteous and intractable, more than bland: downright cheerful almost, removing the raked swagger of the hat: 'You aint fell in no more creeks lately, have you?'

'That's right,' he said. 'I'm saving that until you get some more ice on yours.'

'You'll be welcome without waiting for a freeze,' Lucas said.

'Have a seat, Lucas,' his uncle said but he had already begun to, taking the same hard chair beside the door which nobody else but Miss Habersham had ever chosen, a little akimbo as though he were posing for a camera, the hat laid crownup back across his forearm, looking at both of them still and saying again,

'Gentle-men.'

'You didn't come here for me to tell you what to do so I'm going to tell you anyway,' his uncle said.

Lucas blinked rapidly once. He looked at his uncle. 'I cant say I did.' Then he said cheerily: 'But I'm always ready to listen to good advice.'

'Go and see Miss Habersham,' his uncle said.

Lucas looked at his uncle. He blinked twice this time. 'I aint much of a visiting man,' he said.

'You were not much of a hanging man either,' his uncle said. 'But you dont need me to tell you how close you came.'

'No,' Lucas said. 'I dont reckon I do. What do you want me to tell her?'

'You cant,' his uncle said. 'You dont know how to say thank you. I've got that fixed too. Take her some flowers.'

'Flowers?' Lucas said. 'I aint had no flowers to speak of since Molly died.'

'And that too,' his uncle said. 'I'll telephone home. My sister'll have a bunch ready. Chick'll drive you up in my car to get them and then take you out to Miss Habersham's gate.'

'Nemmine that,' Lucas said. 'Once I got the flowers I can walk.'

'And you can throw the flowers away too,' his uncle said. 'But I know you wont do one and I dont think you'll do the other in the car with Chick.'

'Well,' Lucas said. 'If wont nothing else satisfy you——' (And when he got back to town and finally found a place three blocks away to park the car and mounted the stairs again his uncle was striking the match, holding it to the pipe and speaking through with into the smoke: 'You and Booker T. Washington, no that's wrong, you and Miss Habersham and Aleck Sander and Sheriff Hampton, and Booker T. Washington because he did only what everybody expected of him so there was no real reason why he should have while you all did not only what nobody expected you to but all Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County would have risen in active concord for once to prevent you if they had known in time and even a year from now some (when and if they do at all) will remember with disapproval and distaste not that you were ghouls nor that you defied your color because they would have passed either singly but that you violated a white grave to save a nigger so you had every reason why you should have. Just dont stop:' and he:

'You dont think that just because it's Saturday afternoon again somebody is hiding behind Miss Habersham's jasmine bush with a pistol aimed at her waiting for Lucas to walk up to the front steps. Besides Lucas didn't have his pistol today and besides that Crawford Gowrie ——' and his uncle:

'Why not, what's out yonder in the ground at Caledonia Church was Crawford Gowrie for only a second or two last Saturday and Lucas

Beauchamp will be carrying his pigment into ten thousand situations a wiser man would have avoided and a lighter escaped ten thousand times after what was Lucas Beauchamp for a second or so last Saturday is in the ground at his Caledonia Church too, because that Yoknapatawpha County which would have stopped you and Aleck Sander and Miss Habersham last Sunday night are right actually, Lucas' life the breathing and eating and sleeping is of no importance just as yours and mine are not but his unchallengeable right to it in peace and security and in fact this earth would be much more comfortable with a good deal fewer Beauchamps and Stevenses and Mallisons of all colors in it if there were only some painless way to efface not the clumsy room-devouring carcasses which can be done but the memory which cannot—that inevitable immortal memory awareness of having once been alive which exists forever still ten thousand years afterward in ten thousand recollections of injustice and suffering, too many of us not because of the room we take up but because we are willing to sell liberty short at any tawdry price for the sake of what we call our own which is a constitutional statutory license to pursue each his private postulate of happiness and contentment regardless of grief and cost even to the crucifixion of someone whose nose or pigment we don't like and even these can be coped with provided that few of others who believe that a human life is valuable simply because it has a right to keep on breathing no matter what pigment its lungs distend or nose inhales the air and are willing to defend that right at any price, it doesn't take many three were enough last Sunday night even one can be enough and with enough ones willing to be more than grieved and shamed Lucas will no longer run the risk of needing without warning to be saved:' and he:

'Maybe not three the other night. One and two halves would be nearer right:' and his uncle:

'I said it's all right to be proud. It's all right even to boast. Just don't stop.')

— and came to the table and laid the hat on it and took from the inside coat pocket a leather snap-purse patina-ed like old silver and almost as big as Miss Habersham's handbag and said,

'I believe you got a little bill against me.'

'What for?' his uncle said.

'For representing my case,' Lucas said. 'Name whatever your fee is within reason. I want to pay it.'

'Not me,' his uncle said. 'I didn't do anything.'

'I sent for you,' Lucas said. 'I authorised you. How much do I owe you?'

'Nothing,' his uncle said. 'Because I don't believe you. That boy there is the reason you're walking around today.'

Now Lucas looked at him, holding the purse in one hand and the other hand poised to unsnap it—the same face to which it was not that nothing had happened but which had simply refused to accept it; now he opened the purse. 'All right. I'll pay him.'

'And I'll have you both arrested,' his uncle said, 'you for corrupting a minor and him for practising law without a license.'

Lucas looked back to his uncle; he watched them staring at one another. Then once more Lucas blinked twice. 'All right,' he said. 'I'll pay the expenses then. Name your expenses at anything within reason and let's get this thing settled.'

'Expenses?' his uncle said. 'Yes, I had an expense sitting here last Tuesday trying to write down all the different things you finally told me in such a way that Mr Hampton could get enough sense out of it to discharge you from the jail and so the more I tried it the worse it got and the worse it got the worse I got until when I came to again my fountain pen was sticking up on its point in the floor down here like an arrow. Of course the paper belongs to the county but the fountain pen was mine and it cost me two dollars to have a new point put in it. You owe me two dollars.'

'Two dollars?' Lucas said. He blinked twice again. Then he blinked twice again. 'Just two dollars?' Now he just blinked once, then he did something with his breath: not a sigh, simply a discharge of it, putting his first two fingers into the purse: 'That dont sound like much to me but then I'm a farming man and you're a lawing man and whether you know your business or not I reckon it aint none of my red wagon as the music box says to try to learn you different:' and drew from the purse a worn bill crumpled into a ball not much larger than a shriveled olive and opened it enough to read it then opened it out and laid it on the desk and from the purse took a half dollar and laid it on the desk then counted onto the desk from the purse one by one four dimes and two nickels and then counted them again with his forefinger, moving them one by one about half an inch, his lips moving under the moustache, the purse still open in the other hand, then he picked up two of the dimes and a nickel and put them into the hand holding the open purse and took from the purse a quarter and put it on the desk and looked down at the coins for a rapid second then put the two dimes and the nickel back on the desk and took up the half dollar and put it back into the purse.

'That aint but six bits,' his uncle said.

'Nemmine that,' Lucas said and took up the quarter and dropped it back into the purse and closed it and watching Lucas he realised that the purse had at least two different compartments and maybe more, a second almost elbow-deep section opening beneath Lucas' fingers and for a time Lucas stood looking down into it exactly as you would look down at your reflection in a well then took from that compartment a knotted soiled cloth tobacco sack bulging and solid looking which struck on the desk top with a dull thick chink.

'That makes it out,' he said. 'Four bits in pennies. I was aiming to take them to the bank but you can save me the trip. You want to count um?'

'Yes,' his uncle said. 'But you're the one paying the money. You're the one to count them.'

'It's fifty of them,' Lucas said.

'This is business,' his uncle said. So Lucas unknotted the sack and dumped the pennies out on the desk and counted them one by one moving each one with his forefinger into the first small mass of dimes and nickels, counting aloud, then snapped the purse shut and put it back inside his coat and with the other hand shoved the whole mass of coins and the crumpled bill across the table until the desk blotter stopped them and took a bandana handkerchief from the side pocket of the coat and wiped his hands and put the handkerchief back and stood again intractable and calm and not looking at either of them now while the fixed blaring of the radios and the blating creep of the automobile horns and all the rest of the whole County's Saturday uproar came up on the bright afternoon.

'Now what?' his uncle said. 'What are you waiting for now?'

'My receipt,' Lucas said.

THE END

Knight's Gambit

Knight's Gambit is a collection of mystery short stories, regarded by some as a novel with a continuous plot. The first five stories were published in various magazines and the six stories were later published together in 1949. The stories deal with the adventures of the Jefferson county attorney Gavin Stevens, who also takes a leading part in the novel *Intruder in the Dust*. Stevens is shrewd, observant and tolerant of the quirks and foibles of his fellow Southerners. He takes part in the detection and prevention of crime in the local community, witnessing at first hand the many varying forms of human passions released by violence. The stories are narrated by Stevens' nephew, who constantly refers to him as Uncle Gavin.

The first edition

The first edition's title page

CONTENTS

Smoke

Monk

Hand Upon the Waters

To-Morrow

An Error in Chemistry

Knight's Gambit

Faulkner, close to the time of publication

Smoke

ANSELM HOLLAND CAME to Jefferson many years ago. Where from, no one knew. But he was young then and a man of parts, or of presence at least, because within three years he had married the only daughter of a man who owned two thousand acres of some of the best land in the county, and he went to live in his father-in-law's house, where two years later his wife bore him twin sons and where a few years later still the father-in-law died and left Holland in full possession of the property, which was now in his wife's name. But even before that event, we in Jefferson had already listened to him talking a trifle more than loudly of "my land, my crops"; and those of us whose fathers and grandfathers had been bred here looked upon him a little coldly and a little askance for a ruthless man and (from tales told about him by both white and negro tenants and by others with whom he had dealings) for a violent one. But out of consideration for his wife and respect for his father-in-law, we treated him with courtesy if not with regard. So when his wife, too, died while the twin sons were still children, we believed that he was responsible, that her life had been worn out by the crass violence of an underbred outlander. And when his sons reached maturity and first one and then the other left home for good and all, we were not surprised. And when one day six months ago he was found dead, his foot fast in the stirrup of the saddled horse which he rode,

and his body pretty badly broken where the horse had apparently dragged him through a rail fence (there still showed at the time on the horse's back and flanks the marks of the blows which he had dealt it in one of his fits of rage), there was none of us who was sorry, because a short time before that he had committed what to men of our town and time and thinking was the unpardonable outrage. On the day he died it was learned that he had been digging up the graves in the family cemetery where his wife's people rested, among them the grave in which his wife had lain for thirty years. So the crazed, hate-ridden old man was buried among the graves which he had attempted to violate, and in the proper time his will was offered for probate. And we learned the substance of the will without surprise. We were not surprised to learn that even from beyond the grave he had struck one final blow at those alone whom he could now injure or outrage: his remaining flesh and blood.

At the time of their father's death the twin sons were forty. The younger one, Anselm, Junior, was said to have been the mother's favorite — perhaps because he was the one who was most like his father. Anyway, from the time of her death, while the boys were still children almost, we would hear of trouble between Old Anse and Young Anse, with Virginius, the other twin, acting as mediator and being cursed for his pains by both father and brother; he was that sort, Virginius was. And Young Anse was his sort too; in his late teens he ran away from home and was gone ten years. When he returned he and his brother were of age, and Anselm made formal demand upon his father that the land which we now learned was held by Old Anse only in trust, be divided and he — Young Anse — be given his share. Old Anse refused violently. Doubtless the request had been as violently made, because the two of them, Old Anse and Young Anse, were so much alike. And we heard that, strange to say, Virginius had taken his father's side. We heard that, that is. Because the land remained intact, and we heard how, in the midst of a scene of unparalleled violence even for them — a scene of such violence that the Negro servants all fled the house and scattered for the night — Young Anse departed, taking with him the team of mules which he did own; and from that day until his father's death, even after Virginius also had been forced to leave home, Anselm never spoke to his father and brother again. He did not leave

the county this time, however. He just moved back into the hills ('where he can watch what the old man and Virginius are doing,' some of us said and all of us thought); and for the next fifteen years he lived alone in a dirt-floored, two-room cabin, like a hermit, doing his own cooking, coming into town behind his two mules not four times a year. Some time earlier he had been arrested and tried for making whiskey. He made no defense, refusing to plead either way, was fined both on the charge and for contempt of court, and flew into a rage exactly like his father when his brother Virginius offered to pay the fine. He tried to assault Virginius in the courtroom and went to the penitentiary at his own demand and was pardoned eight months later for good behavior and returned to his cabin — a dark, silent, aquiline-faced man whom both neighbors and strangers let severely alone.

The other twin, Virginius, stayed on, farming the land which his father had never done justice to even while he was alive. (They said of Old Anse, 'wherever he came from and whatever he was bred to be, it was not a farmer.'

And so we said among ourselves, taking it to be true, 'That's the trouble between him and Young Anse: watching his father mistreat the land which his mother aimed for him and Virginius to have.') But Virginius stayed on. It could not have been much fun for him, and we said later that Virginius should have known that such an arrangement could not last. And then later than that we said, 'Maybe he did know.' Because that was Virginius. You didn't know what he was thinking at the time, any time. Old Anse and Young Anse were like water. Dark water, maybe; but men could see what they were about. But no man ever knew what Virginius was thinking or doing until afterward. We didn't even know what happened that time when Virginius, who had stuck it out alone for ten years while Young Anse was away, was driven away at last; he didn't tell it, not even to Granby Dodge, probably. But we knew Old Anse and we knew Virginius, and we could imagine it, about like this:

We watched Old Anse smoldering for about a year after Young Anse took his mules and went back into the hills. Then one day he broke out; maybe like this, 'You think that, now your brother is gone, you can just hang around and get it all, don't you?'

'I don't want it all,' Virginius said. 'I just want my share.'

'Ah,' Old Anse said. 'You'd like to have it parceled out right now too, would you? Claim like him it should have been divided up when you and him came of age.'

'I'd rather take a little of it and farm it right than to see it all in the shape it's in now,' Virginius said, still just, still mild — no man in the county ever saw Virginius lose his temper or even get ruffled, not even when Anselm tried to fight him in the courtroom about that fine.

'You would, would you?' Old Anse said. 'And me that's kept it working at all, paying the taxes on it, while you and your brother have been putting money by every year, tax-free.'

'You know Anse never saved a nickel in his life,' Virginius said. 'Say what you want to about him, but don't accuse him of being forehanded.'

'Yes, by heaven! He was man enough to come out and claim what he thought was his and get out when he never got it. But you. You'll just hang around, waiting for me to go, with that damned meal mouth of yours. Pay me the taxes on your half back to the day your mother died, and take it.'

'No,' Virginius said. 'I won't do it.'

'No,' Old Anse said. 'No. Oh, no. Why spend your money for half of it when you can set down and get all of it some day without putting out a cent.' Then we imagined Old Anse (we thought of them as sitting down until now, talking like two civilized men) rising, with his shaggy head and his heavy eyebrows. 'Get out of my house!' he said. But Virginius didn't move, didn't get up, watching his father. Old Anse came toward him, his hand raised. 'Get. Get out of my house. By heaven, I'll....'

Virginius went, then. He didn't hurry, didn't run. He packed up his belongings (he would have more than Anse; quite a few little things) and went four or five miles to live with a cousin, the son of a remote kinsman of his mother. The cousin lived alone, on a good farm too, though now eaten up with mortgages, since the cousin was no farmer either, being half a stock-trader and half a lay preacher — a small, sandy, nondescript man whom you would not remember a minute after you looked at his face and then away — and probably no better at either of these than at fanning. Without haste Virginius left, with none of his brother's foolish and violent finality; for which, strange to say, we thought none the less of Young Anse for showing, possessing. In fact, we always looked at Virginius a little askance too; he was a little too

much master of himself. For it is human nature to trust quickest those who cannot depend on themselves. We called Virginius a deep one; we were not surprised when we learned how he had used his savings to disencumber the cousin's farm. And neither were we surprised when a year later we learned how Old Anse had refused to pay the taxes on his land and how, two days before the place would have gone delinquent, the sheriff received anonymously in the mail cash to the exact penny of the Holland assessment. 'Trust Virginius,' we said, since we believed we knew that the money needed no name to it. The sheriff had notified Old Anse.

'Put it up for sale and be damned,' Old Anse said. 'If they think that all they have to do is set there waiting, the whole brood and biling of them...'

The sheriff sent Young Anse word. 'It's not my land,' Young Anse sent back.

The sheriff notified Virginius. Virginius came to town and looked at the tax books himself. 'I got all I can carry myself, now,' he said. 'Of course, if he lets it go, I hope I can get it. But I don't know. A good farm like that won't last long or go cheap.' And that was all. No anger, no astonishment, no regret. But he was a deep one; we were not surprised when we learned how the sheriff had received that package of money, with the unsigned note: Tax money for Anselm Holland farm. Send receipt to Anselm Holland, Senior. 'Trust Virginius,' we said. We thought about Virginius quite a lot during the next year, out there in a strange house, farming strange land, watching the farm and the house where he was born and that was rightfully his going to ruin. For the old man was letting it go completely now: year by year the good broad fields were going back to jungle and gully, though still each January the sheriff received that anonymous money in the mail and sent the receipt to Old Anse, because the old man had stopped coming to town altogether now, and the very house was falling down about his head, and nobody save Virginius ever stopped there. Five or six times a year he would ride up to the front porch, and the old man would come out and bellow at him in savage and violent vituperation, Virginius taking it quietly, talking to the few remaining negroes once he had seen with his own eyes that his father was all right, then riding away again. But nobody else ever stopped there, though now and then from a distance

someone would see the old man going about the mournful and shaggy fields on the old white horse which was to kill him.

Then last summer we learned that he was digging up the graves in the cedar grove where five generations of his wife's people rested. A negro reported it, and the county health officer went out there and found the white horse tied in the grove, and the old man himself came out of the grove with a shotgun. The health officer returned, and two days later a deputy went out there and found the old man lying beside the horse, his foot fast in the stirrup, and on the horse's rump the savage marks of the stick — not a switch: a stick — where it had been struck again and again and again.

So they buried him, among the graves which he had violated. Virginius and the cousin came to the funeral. They were the funeral, in fact. For Anse, Junior, didn't come. Nor did he come near the place later, though Virginius stayed long enough to lock the house and pay the negroes off. But he too went back to the cousin's, and in due time Old Anse's will was offered for probate to Judge Dukinfield. The substance of the will was no secret; we all learned of it. Regular it was, and we were surprised neither at its regularity nor at its substance nor its wording:... with the exception of these two bequests, I give and bequeath... my property to my elder son Virginius, provided it be proved to the satisfaction of the... Chancellor that it was the said Virginius who has been paying the taxes on my land, the... Chancellor to be the sole and unchallenged judge of the proof.

The other two bequests were:

To my younger son Anselm, I give... two full sets of mule harness, with the condition that this... harness be used by... Anselm to make one visit to my grave. Otherwise this... harness to become and remain part... of my property as described above.

To my cousin-in-law Granby Dodge I give... one dollar in cash, to be used by him for the purchase of a hymn book or hymn books, as a token of my gratitude for his having fed and lodged my son Virginius since... Virginius quitted my roof.

That was the will. And we watched and listened to hear or see what Young Anse would say or do. And we heard and saw nothing. And we watched to see what Virginius would do. And he did nothing. Or we didn't know what he was doing, what he was thinking. But that was

Virginus. Because it was all finished then, anyway. All he had to do was to wait until Judge Dukinfield validated the will, then Virginus could give Anse his half — if he intended to do this. We were divided there. ‘He and Anse never had any trouble,’ some said. ‘Virginus never had any trouble with anybody,’ others said. ‘If you go by that token, he will have to divide that farm with the whole county.’

‘But it was Virginus that tried to pay Anse’s fine that,’ the first ones said. ‘And it was Virginus that sided with his father when Young Anse wanted to divide the land, too,’ the second ones said.

So we waited and we watched. We were watching Judge Dukinfield now; it was suddenly as if the whole thing had sifted into his hands; as though he sat godlike above the vindictive and jeering laughter of that old man who even underground would not die, and above these two irreconcilable brothers who for fifteen years had been the same as dead to each other. But we thought that in his last coup, Old Anse had overreached himself; that in choosing Judge Dukinfield the old man’s own fury had checkmated him; because in Judge Dukinfield we believed that Old Anse had chosen the one man among us with sufficient probity and honor and good sense — that sort of probity and honor which has never had time to become confused and self-doubting with too much learning in the law. The very fact that the validating of what was a simple enough document appeared to be taking him an overlong time, was to us hut fresh proof that Judge Dukinfield was the one man among us who believed that justice is fifty per cent legal knowledge and fifty per cent unhaste and confidence in himself and in God.

So as the expiration of the legal period drew near, we watched Judge Dukinfield as he went daily between his home and his office in the courthouse yard. Deliberate and unhurried he moved — a widower of sixty and more, portly, white-headed, with an erect and dignified carriage which the Negroes called ‘rear-backed.’ He had been appointed Chancellor seventeen years ago; he possessed little knowledge of the law and a great deal of hard common SENSE; AND FOR thirteen years now no man had opposed him for reelection and even those who would be most enraged by his air of bland and affable condescension voted for him on occasion with a kind of childlike confidence and trust. So we watched him without impatience, knowing that what he finally did would be right, not because he did it, but

because he would not permit himself or anyone else to do anything until it was right. So each morning we would see him cross the square at exactly ten minutes past eight o'clock and go on to the courthouse, where the negro janitor had preceded him by exactly ten minutes, with the clocklike precision with which the block signal presages the arrival of the train, to open the office for the day. The Judge would enter the office, and the Negro would take his position in a wire-mended splint chair in the flagged passage which separated the office from the courthouse proper where he would sit all day long and doze, as he had done for seventeen years. Then at five in the afternoon the negro would wake and enter the office and perhaps wake the Judge too, who had lived long enough to have learned that the onus of any business is usually in the hasty minds of those theoreticians who have no business of their own; and then we would watch them cross the square again in single file and go on up the street toward home, the two of them, eyes front and about fifteen feet apart, walking so erect that the two frock coats made by the same tailor and to the Judge's measure fell from the two pairs of shoulders in single hoardlike planes, without intimation of waist or of hips.

Then one afternoon, a little after five o'clock, men began to run suddenly across the square, toward the courthouse. Other men saw them and ran too, their feet heavy on the paving, among the wagons and the cars, their voices tense, urgent, 'What? What is it?'

'Judge Dukinfield,' the word went; and they ran on and entered the flagged passage between the courthouse and the office, where the old negro in his castoff frock coat stood beating his hands on the air. They passed him and ran into the office. Behind the table the Judge sat, leaning a little back in his chair, quite comfortable. His eyes were open, and he had been shot neatly once through the bridge of the nose, so that he appeared to have three eyes in a row. It was a bullet, yet no man about the square that day, or the old negro who had sat all day long in the chair in the passage, had heard any sound.

It took Gavin Stevens a long time, that day — he and the little brass box. Because the Grand Jury could not tell at first what he was getting at — if any man in that room that day, the jury, the two brothers, the cousin, the old negro, could tell. So at last the Foreman asked him point blank:

‘Is it your contention, Gavin, that there is a connection between Mr. Holland’s will and Judge Dukinfield’s murder?’

‘Yes,’ the county attorney said. ‘And I’m going to contend more than that.’

They watched him: the jury, the two brothers. The old negro and the cousin alone were not looking at him. In the last week the negro had apparently aged fifty years. He had assumed public office concurrently with the Judge; indeed, because of that fact, since he had served the Judge’s family for longer than some of us could remember. He was older than the Judge, though until that afternoon a week ago he had looked forty years younger — a wizened figure, shapeless in the voluminous frock coat, who reached the office ten minutes ahead of the Judge and opened it and swept it and dusted the table without disturbing an object upon it, all with a skillful slovenliness that was fruit of seventeen years of practice, and then repaired to the wire-bound chair in the passage to sleep. He seemed to sleep, that is. (The only other way to reach the office was by means of the narrow private stair which led down from the courtroom, used only by the presiding judge during court term, who even then had to cross the passage and pass within eight feet of the negro’s chair unless he followed the passage to where it made an L beneath the single window in the office, and climbed through that window.) For no man or woman had ever passed that chair without seeing the wrinkled eyelids of its occupant open instantaneously upon the brown, irisless eyes of extreme age. Now and then we would stop and talk to him, to hear his voice roll in rich mispronunciation of the orotund and meaningless legal phraseology which he had picked up unawares, as he might have disease germs, and which he reproduced with an ex-cathedra profundity that caused more than one of us to listen to the Judge himself with affectionate amusement. But for all that he was old; he forgot our names at times and confused us with one another; and, confusing our faces and our generations too, he waked sometimes from his light slumber to challenge callers who were not there, who had been dead for many years. But no one had ever been known to pass him unawares. But the others in the room watched Stevens — the jury about the table, the two brothers sitting at opposite ends of the bench, with their dark, identical, aquiline faces, their arms folded in identical attitudes. ‘Are

you contending that Judge Dukinfield's slayer is in this room?' the Foreman asked.

The county attorney looked at them, at the faces watching him. 'I'm going to contend more than that,' he said.

'Contend?' Anselm, the younger twin, said. He sat alone at his end of the bench, with the whole span of bench between him and the brother to whom he had not spoken in fifteen years, watching Stevens with a hard, furious, unwinking glare.

'Yes,' Stevens said. He stood at the end of the table. He began to speak, looking at no one in particular, speaking in an easy, anecdotal tone, telling what we already knew, referring now and then to the other twin, Virginius, for corroboration. He told about Young Anse and his father. His tone was fair, pleasant. He seemed to be making a case for the living, telling about how Young Anse left home in anger, in natural anger at the manner in which his father was treating that land which had been his mother's and half of which was at the time rightfully his. His tone was quite just, specious, frank; if anything, a little partial to Anselm, Junior. That was it. Because of that seeming partiality, that seeming glozing, there began to emerge a picture of Young Anse that was damning him to something which we did not then know, damned him because of that very desire for justice and affection for his dead mother, warped by the violence which he had inherited from the very man who had wronged him. And the two brothers sitting there, with that space of friction-smooth plank between them, the younger watching Stevens with that leashed, violent glare, the elder as intently, but with a face unfathomable. Stevens now told how Young Anse left in anger, and how a year later Virginius, the quieter one, the calmer one, who had tried more than once to keep peace between them, was driven away in turn. And again he drew a specious, frank picture: of the brothers separated, not by the living father, but by what each had inherited from him; and drawn together, bred together, by that land which was not only rightfully theirs, but in which their mother's bones lay.

'So there they were, watching from a distance that good land going to ruin, the house in which they were born and their mother was born falling to pieces because of a crazed old man who attempted at the last, when he had driven them away and couldn't do anything else to them,

to deprive them of it for good and all by letting it be sold for nonpayment of taxes. But somebody foiled him there, someone with foresight enough and self-control enough to keep his own counsel about what wasn't anybody else's business anyway so long as the taxes were paid. So then all they had to do was to wait until the old man died. He was old anyway and, even if he had been young, the waiting would not have been very hard for a self-controlled man, even if he did not know the contents of the old man's will. Though that waiting wouldn't have been so easy for a quick, violent man, especially if the violent man happened to know or suspect the substance of the will and was satisfied and, further, knew himself to have been irrevocably wronged; to have had citizenship and good name robbed through the agency of a man who had already despoiled him and had driven him out of the best years of his life among men, to live like a hermit in a hill cabin. A man like that would have neither the time nor the inclination to bother much with either waiting for something or not waiting for it.' They stared at him, the two brothers. They might have been carved in stone, save for Anselm's eyes. Stevens talked quietly, not looking at anyone in particular. He had been county attorney for almost as long as Judge Dukinfield had been chancellor. He was a Harvard graduate: a loose-jointed man with a mop of untidy iron-gray hair, who could discuss Einstein with college professors and who spent whole afternoons among the squatting men against the walls of country stores, talking to them in their idiom. He called these his Then in time the father died, as any man who possessed self-control and foresight would have known. And his will was submitted for probate; and even folks way back in the hills heard what was in it, heard how at last that mistreated land would belong to its rightful owner. Or owners, since Anse Holland knows as well as we do that Virge would no more take more than his rightful half, will or no will, now than he would have when his father gave him the chance. Anse knows that because he knows that he would do the same thing — give Virge his half — if he were Virge. Because they were both born to Anselm Holland, but they were born to Cornelia Mardis too. But even if Anse didn't know, believe, that, he would know that the land which had been his mother's and in which her bones now lie would now be treated right. So maybe that night when he heard that his father was dead, maybe for the first

time since Anse was a child, since before his mother died maybe and she would come upstairs at night and look into the room where he was asleep and go away; maybe for the first time since then, Anse slept. Because it was all vindicated then, you see: the outrage, the injustice, the lost good name, and the penitentiary stain — all gone now like a dream. To be forgotten now, because it was all right. By that time, you see, he had got used to being a hermit, to being alone; he could not have changed after that long. He was happier where he was, alone back there. And now to know that it was all past like a bad dream, and that the land, his mother's land, her heritage and her mausoleum, was now in the hands of the one man whom he could and would trust, even though they did not speak to each other. Don't you see?'

We watched him as we sat about the table which had not been disturbed since the day Judge Dukinfield died, upon which lay still the objects which had been, next to the pistol muzzle, his last sight on earth, and with which we were all familiar for years — the papers, the foul inkwell, the stubby pen to which the Judge clung, the small brass box which had been his superfluous paper weight. At their opposite ends of the wooden bench, the twin brothers watched Stevens, motionless, intent.

'No, we don't see,' the Foreman said. 'What are you getting at? What is the connection between all this and Judge Dukinfield's murder?'

'Here it is,' Stevens said. 'Judge Dukinfield was validating that will when he was killed. It was a queer will; but we all expected that of Mr.

Holland. But it was all regular, the beneficiaries are all satisfied; we all know that half of that land is Anse's the minute he wants it. So the will is all right. Its probate should have been just a formality. Yet Judge Dukinfield had had it in abeyance for over two weeks when he died.

And so that man who thought that all he had to do was to wait—'

'What man?' the Foreman said.

'Wait,' Stevens said. 'All that man had to do was to wait. But it wasn't the waiting that worried him, who had already waited fifteen years. That wasn't it. It was something else, which he learned (or remembered) when it was too late, which he should not have forgotten; because he is a shrewd man, a man of self-control and foresight; self-control enough to wait fifteen years for his chance, and foresight enough to have prepared for all the incalculables except one:

his own memory. And when it was too late, he remembered that there was another man who would also know what he had forgotten about. And that other man who would know it was Judge Dukinfield. And that thing which he would also know was that that horse could not have killed Mr. Holland.'

When his voice ceased there was no sound in the room. The jury sat quietly about the table, looking at Stevens. Anselm turned his leashed, furious face and looked once at his brother, then he looked at Stevens again, leaning a little forward now. Virginius had not moved; there was no change in his grave, intent expression. Between him and the wall the cousin sat. His hands lay on his lap and his head was bowed a little, as though he were in church. We knew of him only that he was some kind of an itinerant preacher, and that now and then he gathered up strings of scrubby horses and mules and took them somewhere and swapped or sold them. Because he was a man of infrequent speech who in his dealings with men betrayed such an excruciating shyness and lack of confidence that we pitied him, with that kind of pitying disgust you feel for a crippled worm, dreading even to put him to the agony of saying 'yes' or 'no' to a question. But we heard how on Sundays, in the pulpits of country churches, he became a different man, changed; his voice then timbrous and moving and assured out of all proportion to his nature and his size.

'Now, imagine the waiting,' Stevens said, 'with that man knowing what was going to happen before it had happened, knowing at last that the reason why nothing was happening, why that will had apparently gone into Judge Dukinfield's office and then dropped out of the world, out of the knowledge of man, was because he had forgotten something which he should not have forgotten. And that was that Judge Dukinfield also knew that Mr. Holland was not the man who beat that horse. He knew that Judge Dukinfield knew that the man who struck that horse with that stick so as to leave marks on its back was the man who killed Mr. Holland first and then hooked his foot in that stirrup and struck that horse with a stick to make it bolt. But the horse didn't bolt. The man knew beforehand that it would not; he had known for years that it would not, but he had forgotten that. Because while it was still a colt it had been beaten so severely once that ever since, even at the sight of a switch in the rider's hand, it would lie down on the ground, as Mr.

Holland knew, and as all who were close to Mr. Holland's family knew. So it just lay down on top of Mr. Holland's body. But that was all right too, at first; that was just as well. That's what that man thought for the next week or so, lying in his bed at night and waiting, who had already waited fifteen years. Because even then, when it was too late and he realized that he had made a mistake, he had not even then remembered all that he should never have forgotten. Then he remembered that too, when it was too late, after the body had been found and the marks of the stick on the horse seen and remarked and it was too late to remove them. They were probably gone from the horse by then, anyway. But there was only one tool he could use to remove them from men's minds. Imagine him then, his terror, his outrage, his feeling of having been tricked by something beyond retaliation: that furious desire to turn time back for just one minute, to undo or to complete when it is too late. Because the last thing which he remembered when it was too late was that Mr. Holland had bought that horse from Judge Dukinfield, the man who was sitting here at this table, passing on the validity of a will giving away two thousand acres of some of the best land in the county. And he waited, since he had but one tool that would remove those stick marks, and nothing happened. And nothing happened, and he knew why. And he waited as long as he dared, until he believed that there was more at stake than a few roods and squares of earth. So what else could he do but what he did?' L His voice had hardly ceased before Anselm was speaking. His voice was harsh, abrupt. 'You're wrong,' he said.

As one, we looked at him where he sat forward on the bench, in his muddy boots and his worn overalls, glaring at Stevens; even Virginius turned and looked at him for an instant. The cousin and the old negro alone had not moved. They did not seem to be listening. 'Where am I wrong?' Stevens said.

But Anselm did not answer. He glared at Stevens. Will Virginius get the place in spite of... of....'

'In spite of what?' Stevens said.

Whether he... that....'

'You mean your father? Whether he died or was murdered?'

'Yes,' Anselm said.

'Yes. You and Virge get the land whether the will stands up or not, provided, of course, that Virge divides with you if it does. But the man that killed your father wasn't certain of that and he didn't dare to ask. Because he didn't want that. He wanted Virge to have it all. That's why he wants that will to stand.'

'You're wrong,' Anselm said, in that harsh, sudden tone. I killed him. But it wasn't because of that damned farm. Now bring on your sheriff.' And now it was Stevens who, gazing steadily at Anselm's furious face, said quietly: 'And I say that you are wrong, Anse.'

For some time after that we who watched and listened dwelt in anticlimax, in a dreamlike state in which we seemed to know beforehand what was going to happen, aware at the same time that it didn't matter because we should soon wake. It was as though we were outside of time, watching events from outside; still outside of and beyond time since that first instant when we looked again at Anselm as though we had never seen him before. There was a sound, a slow, sighing sound, not loud; maybe of relief — something. Perhaps we were all thinking how Anse's nightmare must be really over at last; it was as though we too had rushed suddenly back to where he lay as a child in his bed and the mother who they said was partial to him, whose heritage had been lost to him, and even the very resting place of her tragic and long quiet dust outraged, coming in to look at him for a moment before going away again. Far back down time that was, straight though it be. And straight though that corridor was, the boy who had lain unawares in that bed had got lost in it, as we all do, must, ever shall; that boy was as dead as any other of his blood in that violated cedar grove, and the man at whom we looked, we looked at across the irrevocable chasm, with pity perhaps, but not with mercy. So it took the sense of Stevens' words about as long to penetrate to us at it did to Anse; he had to repeat himself, 'Now I say that you are wrong, Anse.'

'What?' Anse said. Then he moved. He did not get up, yet somehow he seemed to lunge suddenly, violently. 'You're a liar. You—'

'You're wrong, Anse. You didn't kill your father. The man who killed your father was the man who could plan and conceive to kill that old man who sat here behind this table every day, day after day, until an old negro would come in and wake him and tell him it was time to go

home — a man who never did man, woman, or child aught but good as he believed that he and God saw it. It wasn't you that killed your father. You demanded of him what you believed was yours, and when he refused to give it, you left, went away, never spoke to him again. You heard how he was mistreating the place but you held your peace, because the land was just 'that damned farm.' You held your peace until you heard how a crazy man was digging up the graves where your mother's flesh and blood and your own was buried. Then, and then only, you came to him, to remonstrate. But you were never a man to remonstrate, and he was never a man to listen to it. So you found him there, in the grove, with the shotgun. I didn't even expect you paid much attention to the shotgun. I reckon you just took it away from him and whipped him with your bare hands and left him there beside the horse; maybe you thought that he was dead. Then somebody happened to pass there after you were gone and found him; maybe that someone had been there all the time, watching. Somebody that wanted him dead too; not in anger and outrage, but by calculation. For profit, by a will, maybe. So he came there and he found what you had left and he finished it: hooked your father's foot in that stirrup and tried to beat that horse into bolting to make it look well, forgetting in his haste what he should not have forgot. But it wasn't you. Because you went back home, and when you heard what had been found, you said nothing. Because you thought something at the time which you did not even say to yourself. And when you heard what was in the will you believed that you knew. And you were glad then. Because you had lived alone until youth and wanting things were gone out of you; you just wanted to be quiet as you wanted your mother's dust to be quiet. And besides, what could land and position among men be to a man without citizenship, with a blemished name?'

We listened quietly while Stevens' voice died in that little room in which no air ever stirred, no draft ever blew because of its position, its natural lee beneath the courthouse wall.

'It wasn't you that killed your father or Judge Dukinfield either, Anse. Because if that man who killed your father had remembered in time that Judge Dukinfield once owned that horse, Judge Dukinfield would be alive to-day.'

We breathed quietly, sitting about the table behind which Judge Dukinfield had been sitting when he looked up into the pistol. The table had not been disturbed. Upon it still lay the papers, the pens, the inkwell, the small, curiously chased brass box which his daughter had fetched him from Europe twelve years ago — for what purpose neither she nor the Judge knew, since it would have been suitable only for bath salts or tobacco, neither of which the Judge used — and which he had kept for a paper weight, that, too, superfluous where no draft ever blew. But he kept it there on the table, and all of us knew it, had watched him toy with it while he talked, opening the spring lid and watching it snap viciously shut at the slightest touch.

When I look back on it now, I can see that the rest of it should not have taken as long as it did. It seems to me now that we must have known all the time; I still seem to feel that kind of disgust without mercy which after all does the office of pity, as when you watch a soft worm impaled on a pin, when you feel that retching revulsion — would even use your naked palm in place of nothing at all, thinking, 'Go on. Mash it. Smear it. Get it over with.' But that was not Stevens' plan. Because he had a plan, and we realized afterward that, since he could not convict the man, the man himself would have to. And it was unfair, the way he did it; later we told him so. ('Ah,' he said. 'But isn't justice always unfair? Isn't it always composed of injustice and luck and platitude in unequal parts?')

But anyway we could not see yet what he was getting at as he began to speak again in that tone — easy, anecdotal, his hand resting now on the brass box. But men are moved so much by preconceptions. It is not realities, circumstances, that astonish us; it is the concussion of what we should have known, if we had only not been so busy believing what we discover later we had taken for the truth for no other reason than that we happened to be believing it at the moment. He was talking about smoking again, about how a man never really enjoys tobacco until he begins to believe that it is harmful to him, and how non-smokers miss one of the greatest pleasures in life for a man of sensibility: the knowledge that he is succumbing to a vice which can injure himself alone. 'Do you smoke, Anse?' he said.

'No,' Anse said.

'You don't either, do you, Virge?'

'No,' Virginius said. 'None of us ever did — father or Anse or me. We heired it, I reckon.'

'A family trait,' Stevens said. 'Is it in your mother's family too? Is it in your branch, Granby?'

The cousin looked at Stevens, for less than a moment. Without moving he appeared to writhe slowly within his neat, shoddy suit. 'No sir. I never used it.'

'Maybe because you are a preacher,' Stevens said. The cousin didn't answer. He looked at Stevens again with his mild, still, hopelessly abashed face. 'I've always smoked,' Stevens said. 'Ever since I finally recovered from being sick at it at the age of fourteen. That's a long time, long enough to have become finicky about tobacco. But most smokers are, despite the psychologists and the standardized tobacco. Or maybe it's just cigarettes that are standardized. Or maybe they are just standardized to laymen, non-smokers. Because I have noticed how non-smokers are apt to go off half cocked about tobacco, the same as the rest of us go off half cocked about what we do not ourselves use, are not familiar with, since man is led by his pre-(or mis-) conceptions. Because you take a man who sells tobacco even though he does not use it himself, who watches customer after customer tear open the pack and light the cigarette just across the counter from him. You ask him if all tobacco smells alike, if he cannot distinguish one kind from another by the smell. Or maybe it's the shape and color of the package it comes in; because even the psychologists have not yet told us just where seeing stops and smelling begins, or hearing stops and seeing begins. Any lawyer can tell you that.'

Again the Foreman checked him. We had listened quietly enough, but I think we all felt that to keep the murderer confused was one thing, but that we, the jury, were another. 'You should have done all this investigating before you called us together,' the Foreman said. 'Even if this be evidence, what good will it do without the body of the murderer be apprehended? Conjecture is all well enough—'

'All right,' Stevens said. 'Let me conjecture a little more, and if I don't seem to progress any, you tell me so, and I'll stop my way and do yours. And I expect that at first you are going to call this taking a right smart of liberty even with conjecture. But we found Judge Dukinfield dead, shot between the eyes, in this chair behind this table. That's not conjecture.'

And Uncle Job was sitting all day long in that chair in the passage, where anyone who entered this room (unless he came down the private stair from the courtroom and climbed through the window) would have to pass within three feet of him. And no man that we know of has passed Uncle Job in that chair in seventeen years. That's not conjecture.'

'Then what is your conjecture?'

But Stevens was talking about tobacco again, about smoking. 'I stopped in West's drug store last week for some tobacco, and he told me about a man who was particular about his smoking also. While he was getting my tobacco from the case, he reached out a box of cigarettes and handed it to me. It was dusty, faded, like he had had it a long time, and he told me how a drummer had left two of them with him years ago.

"Ever smoke them?" he said. "No," I said. "They must be city cigarettes." Then he told me how he had sold the other package just that day. He said he was behind the counter, with the newspaper spread on it, sort of half reading the paper and half keeping the store while the clerk was gone to dinner. And he said he never heard or saw the man at all until he looked up and the man was just across the counter, so close that it made him jump. A smallish man in city clothes, West said, wanting a kind of cigarette that West had never heard of. "I haven't got that kind," West said. "I don't carry them." "Why don't you carry them?" the man said. "I have no sale for them," West said. And he told about the man in his city clothes, with a face like a shaved wax doll, and eyes with a still way of looking and a voice with a still way of talking. Then West said he saw the man's eyes and he looked at his nostrils, and then he knew what was wrong. Because the man was full of dope right then. "I don't have any calls for them," West said. "What am I trying to do now?" the man said. "Trying to sell you flypaper?" Then the man bought the other package of cigarettes and went out. And West said that he was mad and he was sweating too, like he wanted to vomit, he said. He said to me, "If I had some devilment I was scared to do myself, you know what I'd do? I'd give that fellow about ten dollars and I'd tell him where the devilment was and tell him not to never speak to me again. When he went out, I felt just exactly like that. Like I was going to be sick.'"

Stevens looked about at us; he paused for a moment. We watched him: 'He came here from somewhere in a car, a big roadster, that city man did. That city man that ran out of his own kind of tobacco.' He paused again, and then he turned his head slowly and he looked at Virginius Holland. It seemed like a full minute that we watched them looking steadily at one another. 'And a nigger told me that that big car was parked in Virginius Holland's bam the night before Judge Dukinfield was killed.' And for another time we watched the two of them looking steadily at each other, with no change of expression on either face. Stevens spoke in a tone quiet, speculative, almost musing. 'Someone tried to keep him from coming out here in that car, that big car that anyone who saw it once would remember and recognize. Maybe that someone wanted to forbid him to come in it, threaten him. Only the man that Doctor West sold those cigarettes to wouldn't have stood for very much threatening.'

'Meaning me, by "someone,"' Virginius said. He did not move or turn away his steady stare from Stevens' face. But Anselm moved. He turned his head and he looked at his brother, once. It was quite quiet, yet when the cousin spoke we could not hear or understand him at once; he had spoken but one time since we entered the room and Stevens locked the door. His voice was faint; again and without moving he appeared to writhe faintly beneath his clothes. He spoke with that abashed faintness, that excruciating desire for effacement with which we were all familiar.

'That fellow you're speaking of, he come to see me,' Dodge said.

'Stopped to see me. He stopped at the house about dark that night and said he was hunting to buy up little-built horses to use for this — this game—'

'Polo?' Stevens said. The cousin had not looked at anyone while he spoke; it was as though he were speaking to his slowly moving hands upon his lap.

'Yes, sir. Virginius was there. We talked about horses. Then the next morning he took his car and went on. I never had anything that suited him. I don't know where he come from nor where he went.'

'Or who else he came to see,' Stevens said. 'Or what else he came to do. You can't say that.'

Dodge didn't answer. It was not necessary, and again he had fled behind the shape of his effacement like a small and weak wild creature into a hole.

'That's my conjecture,' Stevens said.

And then we should have known. It was there to be seen, bald as a naked hand. We should have felt it — the someone in that room who felt that Stevens had called that horror, that outrage, that furious desire to turn time back for a second, to unsay, to undo. But maybe the someone had not felt it yet, had not yet felt the blow, the impact, as for a second or two a man may be unaware that he has been shot. Because now it was Virge that spoke, abruptly, harshly, 'How are you going to prove that?'

'Prove what, Virge?' Stevens said. Again they looked at each other, quiet, hard, like two boxers. Not swordsmen, but boxers; or at least with pistols. Who it was who hired that gorilla, that thug, down here from Memphis? I don't have to prove that. He told that. On the way back to Memphis he ran down a child at Battenburg (he was still full of dope; likely he had taken another shot of it when he finished his job here), and they caught him and locked him up and when the dope began to wear off he told where he had been, whom he had been to see, sitting in the cell in the jail there, jerking and snarling, after they had taken the pistol with the silencer on it away from him.'

'Ah,' Virginius said. That's nice. So all you've got to do is to prove that he was in this room that day. And how will you do that? Give that old nigger another dollar and let him remember again?'

But Stevens did not appear to be listening. He stood at the end of the table, between the two groups, and while he talked now he held the brass box in his hand, turning it, looking at it, talking in that easy, musing tone. 'You all know the peculiar attribute which this room has. How no draft ever blows in it. How when there has been smoking here on a Saturday, say, the smoke will still be here on Monday morning when Uncle Job opens the door, lying against the baseboard there like a dog asleep, kind of. You've all seen that.'

We were sitting a little forward now, like Anse, watching Stevens.

'Yes,' the Foreman said. 'We've seen that.'

'Yes,' Stevens said, still as though he were not listening, turning the closed box this way and that in his hand. 'You asked me for my

conjecture. Here it is. But it will take a conjecturing man to do it — a man who could walk up to a merchant standing behind his counter, reading a newspaper with one eye and the other eye on the door for customers, before the merchant knew he was there. A city man, who insisted on city cigarettes. So this man left that store and crossed to the courthouse and entered and went on upstairs, as anyone might have done. Perhaps a dozen men saw him; perhaps twice that many did not look at him at all, since there are two places where a man does not look at faces: in the sanctuaries of civil law, and in public lavatories. So he entered courtroom and came down the private stairs and into the passage, and saw Uncle Job asleep in his chair. So maybe he followed the passage, and climbed through the window behind Judge Dukinfield's back. Or maybe he walked right past Uncle Job, coming up from behind, you see. And to pass within eight feet of a man asleep in a chair would not be very hard for a man who could walk up to a merchant leaning on the counter of his own store. Perhaps he even lighted the cigarette from the pack that West had sold him before even Judge Dukinfield knew that he was in the room. Or perhaps the Judge was asleep in his chair, as he sometimes was. So perhaps the man stood there and finished the cigarette and watched the smoke pour slowly across the table and bank up against the wall, thinking about the easy money, the easy hicks, before he even drew the pistol. And it made less noise than the striking of the match which lighted the cigarette, since he had guarded so against noise that he forgot about silence. And then he went back as he came, and the dozen men and the two dozen saw him and did not see him, and at five that afternoon Uncle Job came in to wake the Judge and tell him it was time to go home. Isn't that right, Uncle Job?'

The old Negro looked up. 'I looked after him, like I promised Mistis,' he said. 'And I worried with him, like I promised Mistis I would. And I come in here and I thought at first he was asleep, like he sometimes—'

'Wait,' Stevens said. 'You came in and you saw him in the chair, as always, and you noticed the smoke against the wall behind the table as you crossed the floor. Wasn't that what you told me?'

Sitting in his mended chair, the old negro began to cry. He looked like an old monkey, weakly crying black tears, finishing at his face with the back of a gnarled hand that shook with age, with something. 'I come in

here many's the time in the morning, to clean up. It would be laying there, that smoke, and him that never smoked a lick in his life coming in and sniffing with that high nose of hisn and saying, "Well, Job, we sholy smoked out that corpus juris coon last night."

'No,' Stevens said. Tell about how the smoke was there behind that table that afternoon when you came to wake him to go home, when there hadn't anybody passed you all that day except Mr. Virge Holland yonder. And Mr. Virge don't smoke, and the Judge didn't smoke. But that smoke was there. Tell what you told me.'

'It was there. And I thought that he was asleep like always, and I went to wake him up—'

'And this little box was sitting on the edge of the table where he had been handling it while he talked to Mr. Virge, and when you reached your hand to wake him—'

'Yes, sir. It jumped off the table and I thought he was asleep—'

The box jumped off the table. And it made a noise and you wondered why that didn't wake the Judge, and you looked down at where the box was lying on the floor in the smoke, with the lid open, and you thought that it was broken. And so you reached your hand down to see, because the Judge liked it because Miss Emma had brought it back to him from across the water, even if he didn't need it for a paper weight in his office. So you closed the lid and set it on the table again. And then you found that the Judge was more than asleep.'

He ceased. We breathed quietly, hearing ourselves breathe. Stevens seemed to watch his hand as it turned the box slowly this way and that. He had turned a little from the table in talking with the old negro, so that now he faced the bench rather than the jury, the table. 'Uncle Job calls this a gold: box. Which is as good a name as any. Better than most. Because all metal is about the same; it just happens that some I folks want one kind more than another. But it all has certain general attributes, likenesses. One of them is, that whatever is shut up in a metal box will stay in it unchanged for a longer time than in a wooden or paper box. You can shut up smoke, for instance, in a metal box with a tight lid like this one, and even a week later it will still be there. And not only that, a chemist or a smoker or tobacco seller like Doctor West can tell what made the smoke, what kind of tobacco, particularly if it happens to be a strange brand, a kind not sold in Jefferson, and of

which he just happened to have two packs and remembered who he sold one of them to.'

We did not move. We just sat there and heard the man's urgent stumbling feet on the floor, then we saw him strike the box from Stevens' hand. But we were not particularly watching him, even then. Like him, we watched the box bounce into two pieces as the lid snapped off, and emit a fading vapor which dissolved sluggishly away. As one we leaned across the table and looked down upon the sandy and hopeless mediocrity of Granby Dodge's head as he knelt on the floor and flapped at the fading smoke with his hands.

'But I still don't..' Virginus said. We were outside now, in the courthouse yard, the five of us, blinking a little at one another as though we had just come out of a cave.

You've got a will, haven't you?' Stevens said. Then Virginus stopped perfectly still, looking at Stevens.

Oh,' he said at last.

'One of those natural mutual deed-of-trust wills that any two business partners might execute,' Stevens said. You and Granby each the other's beneficiary and executor, for mutual protection of mutual holdings. That's natural. Likely Granby was the one who suggested it first, by telling you how he had made you his heir. So you'd better tear it up, yours, your copy. Make Anse your heir, if you have to have a will.'

'He won't need to wait for that,' Virginus said. 'Half of that land is his.'

'You just treat it right, as he knows you will,' Stevens said. 'Anse don't need any land.'

'Yes,' Virginus said. He looked away. 'But I wish...'

'You just treat it right. He knows you'll do that.'

'Yes,' Virginus said. He looked at Stevens again. 'Well, I reckon I... we both owe you....'

'More than you think,' Stevens said. He spoke quite soberly. 'Or to that horse. A week after your father died, Granby bought enough rat poison to kill three elephants, West told me. But after he remembered what he had forgotten about that horse, he was afraid to kill his rats before that will was settled. Because he is a man both shrewd and ignorant at the same time: a dangerous combination. Ignorant enough to believe that the law is something like dynamite: the slave of whoever puts his

hand to it first, and even then a dangerous slave; and just shrewd enough to believe that people avail themselves of it, resort to it, only for personal ends. I found that out when he sent a negro to see me one day last summer, to find out if the way in which a man died could affect the probate of his will. And I knew who had sent the negro to me, and I knew that whatever information the negro took back to the man who sent him, that man had already made up his mind to disbelieve it, since I was a servant of the slave, the dynamite. So if that had been a normal horse, or Granby had remembered in time, you would be underground now.

Granby might not be any better off than he is, but you would be dead.' Oh,' Virginius said, quietly, soberly. 'I reckon I'm obliged.'

'Yes,' Stevens said. 'You've incurred a right smart of obligation. You owe Granby something.' Virginius looked at him. 'You owe him for those taxes he has been paying every year now for fifteen years.'

'Oh,' Virginius said. 'Yes. I thought that father.... Every November, about, Granby would borrow money from me, not much, and not ever the same amount. To buy stock with, he said. He paid some of it back. But he still owes me... no. I owe him now.' He was quite grave, quite sober. When a man starts doing wrong, it's not what he does; it's what he leaves.'

'But it's what he does that people will have to hurt him for, the outsiders. Because the folks that'll be hurt by what he leaves won't hurt him. So it's a good thing for the rest of us that what he does takes him out of their hands. I have taken him out of your hands now, Virge, blood or no blood. Do you understand?'

'I understand,' Virginius said. 'I wouldn't anyway...' Then suddenly he looked at Stevens. 'Gavin,' he said.

What?' Stevens said.

Virginius watched him. 'You talked a right smart in yonder about chemistry and such, about that smoke. I reckon I believed some of it and I reckon I didn't believe some of it. And I reckon if I told you which I believed and didn't believe, you'd laugh at me.' His face was quite sober. Stevens' face was quite grave too. Yet there was something in Stevens' eyes, glance; something quick and eager; not ridiculing, either. 'That was a week ago. If you had opened that box to see if that smoke was still in there, it would have got out. And if there hadn't been any

smoke in that box, Granby wouldn't have given himself away. And that was a week ago. How did you know there was going to be any smoke in that box?'

'I didn't,' Stevens said. He said it quickly, brightly, cheerfully, almost happily, almost beaming. 'I didn't. I waited as long as I could before I put the smoke in there. Just before you all came into the room, I filled that box full of pipe smoke and shut it up. But I didn't know. I was a lot scarer than Granby Dodge. But it was all right. That smoke stayed in that box almost an hour.'

Monk

I WILL HAVE to try to tell about Monk. I mean, actually try — a deliberate attempt to bridge the inconsistencies in his brief and sordid and unoriginal history, to make something out of it, not only with the nebulous tools of supposition and inference and invention, but to employ these nebulous tools upon the nebulous and inexplicable material which he left behind him. Because it is only in literature that the paradoxical and even mutually negating anecdotes in the history of a human heart can be juxtaposed and annealed by art into verisimilitude and credibility.

He was a moron, perhaps even a cretin; he should never have gone to the penitentiary at all. But at the time of his trial we had a young District Attorney who had his eye on Congress, and Monk had no people and no money and not even a lawyer, because I don't believe he ever understood why he should need a lawyer or even what a lawyer was, and so the Court appointed a lawyer for him, a young man just admitted to the bar, who probably knew hut little more about the practical functioning of criminal law than Monk did, who perhaps pleaded Monk guilty at the direction of the Court or maybe forgot that he could have entered a plea of mental incompetence, since Monk did not for one moment deny that he had killed the deceased. They could not keep him from affirming or even reiterating it, in fact. He was neither confessing nor boasting. It was almost as though he were trying to make a speech, to the people who held him beside the body until the deputy got there, to the deputy and to the jailor and to the other prisoners — the casual niggers picked up for gambling or vagrancy or for selling whiskey in alleys — and to the J. P. who arraigned him and

the lawyer appointed by the Court, and to the Court and the jury. Even an hour after the killing he could not seem to remember where it had happened; he could not even remember the man whom he affirmed that he had killed; he named as his victim (this on suggestion, prompting) several men who were alive, and even one who was present in the J. P.'s office at the time. But he never denied that he had killed somebody. It was not insistence; it was just a serene reiteration of the fact in that voice bright, eager, and sympathetic while he tried to make his speech, trying to tell them something of which they could make neither head nor tail and to which they refused to listen. He was not confessing, not trying to establish grounds for lenience in order to escape what he had done. It was as though he were trying to postulate something, using this opportunity to bridge the hitherto abyss between himself and the living world, the world of living men, the ponderable and travailing earth — as witness the curious speech which he made on the gallows five years later.

But then, he never should have lived, either. He came — emerged: whether he was born there or not, no one knew — from the pine hill country in the eastern part of our county: a country which twenty-five years ago (Monk was about twenty-five) was without roads almost and where even the sheriff of the county did not go — a country impenetrable and almost uncultivated and populated by a clannish people who owned allegiance to no one and no thing and whom outsiders never saw until a few years back when good roads and automobiles penetrated the green fastnesses where the denizens with their corrupt Scotch-Irish names intermarried and made whiskey and shot at all strangers from behind log barns and snake fences. It was the good roads and the fords which not only brought Monk to Jefferson but brought the half-rumored information about his origin. Because the very people among whom he had grown up seemed to know almost as little about him as we did — a tale of an old woman who lived like a hermit, even among those fiercely solitary people, in a log house with a loaded shotgun standing just inside the front door, and a son who had been too much even for that country and people, who had murdered and fled, possibly driven out, where gone none knew for ten years, when one day he returned, with a woman — a woman with hard, bright, metallic, city hair and a hard, blonde, city face seen about the

place from a distance, crossing the yard or just standing in the door and looking out upon the green solitude with an expression of cold and sullen and unseeing inscrutability: and deadly, too, but as a snake is deadly, in a different way from their almost conventional ritual of warning and then powder. Then they were gone. The others did not know when they departed nor why, any more than they knew when they had arrived nor why. Some said that one night the old lady, Mrs. Odlethrop, had got the drop on both of them with the shotgun and drove them out of the house and out of the country.

But they were gone; and it was months later before the neighbors discovered that there was a child, an infant, in the house; whether brought there or born there — again they did not know. This was Monk; and the further tale how six or seven years later they began to smell the body and some of them went into the house where old Mrs. Odlethrop had been dead for a week and found a small creature in a single shift made from bedticking trying to raise the shotgun from its corner beside the door. They could not catch Monk at all. That is, they failed to hold him that first time, and they never had another chance. But he did not go away. They knew that he was somewhere watching them while they prepared the body for burial, and that he was watching from the undergrowth while they buried it. They never saw him again for some time, though they knew that he was about the place, and on the following Sunday they found where he had been digging into the grave, with sticks and with his bare hands. He had a pretty big hole by then, and they filled it up and that night some of them lay in ambush for him, to catch him and give him food. But again they could not hold him, the small furious body (it was naked now) which writhed out of their hands as if it had been greased, and fled with no human sound. After that, certain of the neighbors would carry food to the deserted house and leave it for him. But they never saw him. They just heard, a few months later, that he was living with a childless widower, an old man named Fraser who was a whiskey maker of wide repute. He seems to have lived there for the next ten years, until Fraser himself died. It was probably Fraser who gave him the name which he brought to town with him, since nobody ever knew what old Mrs. Odlethrop had called him, and now the country got to know him or become familiar with him, at least — a youth not tall and

already a little pudgy, as though he were thirty-eight instead of eighteen, with the ugly, shrewdly foolish, innocent face whose features rather than expression must have gained him his nickname, who gave to the man who had taken him up and fed him the absolute and unquestioning devotion of a dog and who at eighteen was said to be able to make Fraser's whiskey as well as Fraser could.

That was all that he had ever learned to do — to make and sell whiskey where it was against the law and so had to be done in secret, which further increases the paradox of his public statement when they drew the black cap over his head for killing the warden of the penitentiary five years later. That was all he knew: that, and fidelity to the man who fed him and taught him what to do and how and when; so that after Fraser died and the man, whoever it was, came along in the truck or the car and said, 'All right, Monk. Jump in,' he got into it exactly as the homeless dog would have, and came to Jefferson. This time it was a filling station two or three miles from town, where he slept on a pallet in the back room, what time the pallet was not already occupied by a customer who had got too drunk to drive his car or walk away, where he even learned to work the gasoline pump and to make correct change, though his job was mainly that of remembering just where the half-pint bottles were buried in the sand ditch five hundred yards away. He was known about town now, in the cheap, bright town clothes for which he had discarded his overalls — the colored shirts which faded with the first washing, the banded straw hats which dissolved at the first shower, the striped shoes which came to pieces on his very feet — pleasant, impervious to affront, talkative when anyone would listen, with that shrewd, foolish face, that face at once cunning and dreamy, pasty even beneath the sunburn, with that curious quality of imperfect connection between sense and ratiocination. The town knew him for seven years until that Saturday midnight and the dead man (he was no loss to anyone, but then as I said, Monk had neither friends, money, nor lawyer) lying on the ground behind the filling station and Monk standing there with the pistol in his hand — there were two others present, who had been with the dead man all evening — trying to tell the ones who held him and then the deputy himself whatever it was that he was trying to say in his eager, sympathetic voice, as though the sound of the shot had broken the barrier behind which he had lived for

twenty-five years and that he had now crossed the chasm into the world of living men by means of the dead body at his feet. Because he had no more conception of death than an animal has — of that of the man at his feet nor of the warden's later nor of his own. The thing at his feet was just something that would never walk or talk or eat again and so was a source neither of good nor harm to anyone; certainly not of good nor use. He had no comprehension of bereavement, irreparable finality. He was sorry for it, but that was all. I don't think he realized that in lying there it had started a train, a current of retribution that someone would have to pay. Because he never denied that he had done it, though denial would have done him no good, since the two companions of the dead man were there to testify against him. But he did not deny it, even though he was never able to tell what happened, what the quarrel was about, nor (as I said), later, even where it had occurred and who it was that he had killed, stating once (as I also said) that his victim was a man standing at the moment in the crowd which had followed him into the J. P.'s office. He just kept on trying to say whatever it was that had been inside him for twenty-five years and that he had only now found the chance (or perhaps the words) to free himself of, just as five years later on the scaffold he was to get it (or something else) said at last, establishing at last that contact with the old, fecund, ponderable, travailing earth which he wanted but had not been able to tell about because only then had they told him how to say what it was that he desired. He tried to tell it to the deputy who arrested him and to the J. P. who arraigned him; he stood in the courtroom with that expression on his face which people have when they are waiting for a chance to speak, and heard the indictment read:... against the peace and dignity of the Sovereign State of Mississippi, that the aforesaid Monk Odlethrop did willfully and maliciously and with premeditated — and interrupted, in a voice reedy and high, the sound of which in dying away left upon his face the same expression of amazement and surprise which all our faces wore: 'My name ain't Monk; it's Stonewall Jackson Odlethrop.'

You see? If it were true, he could not have heard it in almost twenty years since his grandmother (if grandmother she was) had died: and yet he could not even recall the circumstances of one month ago when he had committed a murder. And he could not have invented it. He could

not have known who Stonewall Jackson was, to have named himself. He had been to school in the country, for one year. Doubtless old Fraser sent him, but he did not stay. Perhaps even the first-grade work in a country school was too much for him. He told my uncle about it when the matter of his pardon came up. He did not remember just when, nor where the school was, nor why he had quit. But he did remember being there, because he had liked it. All he could remember was how they would all read together out of the books. He did not know what they were reading, because he did not know what the book said; he could not even write his name now. But he said it was fine to hold the book and hear all the voices together and then to feel (he said he could not hear his own voice) his voice too, along with the others, by the way his throat would buzz, he called it. So he could never have heard of Stonewall Jackson. Yet there it was, inherited from the earth, the soil, transmitted to him through a self-pariahed people — something of bitter pride and indomitable undefeat of a soil and the men and women who trod upon it and slept within it.

They gave him life. It was one of the shortest trials ever held in our county, because, as I said, nobody regretted the deceased and nobody except my Uncle Gavin seemed to be concerned about Monk. He had never been on a train before. He got on, handcuffed to the deputy, in a pair of new overalls which someone, perhaps the sovereign state whose peace and dignity he had outraged, had given him, and the still new, still pristine, gaudy-banded, imitation Panama hat (it was still only the first of June, and he had been in jail six weeks) which he had just bought during the week of the fatal Saturday night. He had the window side in the car and he sat there looking at us with his warped, pudgy, foolish face, waving the fingers of the hand, the free arm propped in the window until the train began to move, accelerating slowly, huge and dingy as the metal gangways clashed, drawing him from our sight hermetically sealed and leaving upon us a sense of finality more irrevocable than if we had watched the penitentiary gates themselves close behind him, never to open again in his life, the face looking back at us, craning to see us, wan and small behind the dingy glass, yet wearing that expression questioning yet unalarmed, eager, serene, and grave. Five years later one of the dead man's two companions on that Saturday night, dying of pneumonia and whiskey, confessed that he had

fired the shot and thrust the pistol into Monk's hand, telling Monk to look at what he had done.

My Uncle Gavin got the pardon, wrote the petition, got the signatures, went to the capitol and got it signed and executed by the Governor, and took it himself to the penitentiary and told Monk that he was free. And Monk looked at him for a minute until he understood, and cried. He did not want to leave. He was a trusty now; he had transferred to the warden the same doglike devotion which he had given to old Fraser. He had learned to do nothing well, save manufacture and sell whiskey, though after he came to town he had learned to sweep out the filling station. So that's what he did here; his life now must have been something like that time when he had gone to school. He swept and kept the warden's house as a woman would have, and the warden's wife had taught him to knit; crying, he showed my uncle the sweater which he was knitting for the warden's birthday and which would not be finished for weeks yet.

So Uncle Gavin came home. He brought the pardon with him, though he did not destroy it, because he said it had been recorded and that the main thing now was to look up the law and see if a man could be expelled from the penitentiary as he could from a college. But I think he still hoped that maybe some day Monk would change his mind; I think that's why he kept it. Then Monk did set himself free, without any help. It was not a week after Uncle Gavin had talked to him; I don't think Uncle Gavin had even decided where to put the pardon for safekeeping, when the news came. It was a headline in the Memphis papers next day, but we got the news that night over the telephone: how Monk Oglethrop, apparently leading an abortive jailbreak, had killed the warden with the warden's own pistol, in cold blood. There was no doubt this time; fifty men had seen him do it, and some of the other convicts overpowered him and took the pistol away from him. Yes. Monk, the man who a week ago cried when Uncle Gavin told him that he was free, leading a jailbreak and committing a murder (on the body of the man for whom he was knitting the sweater which he cried for permission to finish) so cold-blooded that his own confederates had turned upon him.

Uncle Gavin went to see him again. He was in solitary confinement now, in the death house. He was still knitting on the sweater. He

knitted well, Uncle Gavin said, and the sweater was almost finished. 'I ain't got but three days more,' Monk said. 'So I ain't got no time to waste.'

'But why, Monk?' Uncle Gavin said. 'Why? Why did you do it?' He said that the needles would not cease nor falter, even while Monk would look at him with that expression serene, sympathetic, and almost exalted. Because he had no conception of death. I don't believe he had ever connected the carrion at his feet behind the filling station that night with the man who had just been walking and talking, or that on the ground in the compound with the man for whom he was knitting the sweater.

'I knowed that making and selling that whiskey wasn't right,' he said. 'I knowed that wasn't it. Only I...' He looked at Uncle Gavin. The serenity was still there, but for the moment something groped behind it: not bafflement nor indecision, just seeking, groping.

'Only what?' Uncle Gavin said. 'The whiskey wasn't it? Wasn't what? It what?'

'No. Not it.' Monk looked at Uncle Gavin. 'I mind that day on the train, and that fellow in the cap would put his head in the door and holler, and I would say "Is this it? Is this where we get off?" and the deppity would say No. Only if I had been there without that deppity to tell me, and that fellow had come in and hollered, I would have...'

'Got off wrong? Is that it? And now you know what is right, where to get off right? Is that it?'

'Yes,' Monk said. 'Yes. I know right, now.'

'What? What is right? What do you know now that they never told you before?'

He told them. He walked up onto the scaffold three days later and stood where they told him to stand and held his head docilely (and without being asked) to one side so they could knot the rope comfortably, his face still serene, still exalted, and wearing that expression of someone waiting his chance to speak, until they stood back. He evidently took that to be his signal, because he said, 'I have sinned against God and man and now I have done paid it out with my suffering. And now—' they say he said this part loud, his voice clear and serene. The words must have sounded quite loud to him and

irrefutable, and his heart uplifted, because he was talking inside the black cap now: 'And now I am going out into the free world, and farm.' You see? It just does not add up. Granted that he did not know that he was about to die, his words still do not make sense. He could have known but little more about farming than about Stonewall Jackson; certainly he had never done any of it. He had seen it, of course, the cotton and the com in the fields, and men working it. But he could not have wanted to do it himself before, or he would have, since he could have found chances enough. Yet he turns and murders the man who had befriended him and, whether he realized it or not, saved him from comparative hell and upon whom he had transferred his capacity for doglike fidelity and devotion and on whose account a week ago he had refused a pardon: his reason being that he wanted to return into the world and farm land — this, the change, to occur in one week's time and after he had been for five years more completely removed and insulated from the world than any nun. Yes, granted that this could be the logical sequence in that mind which he hardly possessed and granted that it could have been powerful enough to cause him to murder his one friend (Yes, it was the warden's pistol; we heard about that: how the warden kept it in the house and one day it disappeared and to keep word of it getting out the warden had his Negro cook, another trusty and who would have been the logical one to have taken it, severely beaten to force the truth from him. Then Monk himself found the pistol, where the warden now recalled having hidden it himself, and returned it.) — granted all this, how in the world could the impulse have reached him, the desire to farm land have got into him where he now was? That's what I told Uncle Gavin.

'It adds up, all right,' Uncle Gavin said. 'We just haven't got the right ciphers yet. Neither did they.'

'They?'

'Yes. They didn't hang the man who murdered Gambrell. They just crucified the pistol.'

'What do you mean?' I said.

'I don't know. Maybe I never shall. Probably never shall. But it adds up, as you put it, somewhere, somehow. It has to. After all, that's too much buffooning even for circumstances, let alone a mere flesh-and-blood

imbecile. But probably the ultimate clowning of circumstances will be that we won't know it.'

But we did know. Uncle Gavin discovered it by accident, and he never told anyone but me, and I will tell you why.

At that time we had for Governor a man without ancestry and with hut little more divulged background than Monk had; a politician, a shrewd man who (some of us feared, Uncle Gavin and others about the state) would go far if he lived. About three years after Monk died he declared, without warning, a kind of jubilee. He set a date for the convening of the Pardon Board at the penitentiary, where he inferred that he would hand out pardons to various convicts in the same way that the English king gives out knighthoods and garters on his birthday. Of course, all the Opposition said that he was frankly auctioning off the pardons, but Uncle Gavin didn't think so. He said that the Governor was shrewder than that, that next year was election year, and that the Governor was not only gaining votes from the kin of the men he would pardon but was laying a trap for the purists and moralists to try to impeach him for corruption and then fail for lack of evidence. But it was known that he had the Pardon Board completely under his thumb, so the only protest the Opposition could make was to form committees to be present at the time, which step the Governor — oh, he was shrewd — courteously applauded, even to the extent of furnishing transportation for them. Uncle Gavin was one of the delegates from our county.

He said that all these unofficial delegates were given copies of the list of those slated for pardon (the ones with enough voting kin to warrant it, I suppose) — the crime, the sentence, the time already served, prison record, etc. It was in the mess hall; he said he and the other delegates were seated on the hard, backless benches against one wall, while the Governor and his Board sat about the table on the raised platform where the guards would sit while the men ate, when the convicts were marched in and halted. Then the Governor called the first name on the list and told the man to come forward to the table. But nobody moved. They just huddled there in their striped overalls, murmuring to one another while the guards began to holler at the man to come out and the Governor looked up from the paper and looked at them with his eyebrows raised. Then somebody said from back in the

crowd: 'Let Terrel speak for us, Governor. We done 'lected him to do our talking.'

Uncle Gavin didn't look up at once. He looked at his list until he found the name: Terrel, Bill. Manslaughter. Twenty years. Served since May 9, 19 — . Applied for pardon January, 19 — . Vetoed by Warden C. L. Gambrell. Applied for pardon September, 19 — . Vetoed by Warden C. L. Gambrell. Record, Troublemaker. Then he looked up and watched Terrel walk out of the crowd and approach the table — a tall man, a huge man, with a dark aquiline face like an Indian's, except for the pale yellow eyes and a shock of wild, black hair — who strode up to the table with a curious blend of arrogance and servility and stopped and, without waiting to be told to speak, said in a queer, high singsong filled with that same abject arrogance: 'Your Honor, and honorable gentlemen, we have done sinned against God and man but now we have done paid it out with our suffering. And now we want to go out into the free world, and farm.'

Uncle Gavin was on the platform almost before Terrel quit speaking, leaning over the Governor's chair, and the Governor turned with his little, shrewd, plump face and his inscrutable, speculative eyes toward Uncle Gavin's urgency and excitement. 'Send that man back for a minute,' Uncle Gavin said. 'I must speak to you in private.' For a moment longer the Governor looked at Uncle Gavin, the puppet Board looking at him too, with nothing in their faces at all, Uncle Gavin said. 'Why, certainly, Mr. Stevens,' the Governor said. He rose and followed Uncle Gavin back to the wall, beneath the barred window, and the man Terrel still standing before the table with his head jerked suddenly up and utterly motionless and the light from the window in his yellow eyes like two match flames as he stared at Uncle Gavin.

'Governor, that man's a murderer,' Uncle Gavin said. The Governor's face did not change at all.

'Manslaughter, Mr. Stevens,' he said. 'Manslaughter. As private and honorable citizens of the state, and as humble servants of it, surely you and I can accept the word of a Mississippi jury.'

'I'm not talking about that,' Uncle Gavin said. He said he said it like that, out of his haste, as if Terrel would vanish if he did not hurry; he said that he had a terrible feeling that in a second the little inscrutable, courteous man before him would magic Terrel out of reach of all

retribution by means of his cold will and his ambition and his amoral ruthlessness. 'I'm talking about Gambrell and that half-wit they hanged. That man there killed them both as surely as if he had fired the pistol and sprung that trap.'

Still the Governor's face did not change at all. 'That's a curious charge, not to say serious,' he said. Of course you have proof of it.'

'No. But I will get it. Let me have ten minutes with him, alone. I will get proof from him. I will make him give it to me.'

'Ah,' the Governor said. Now he did not look at Uncle Gavin for a whole minute. When he did look up again, his face still had not altered as to expression, yet he had wiped something from it as he might have done physically, with a handkerchief. ('You see, he was paying me a compliment,' Uncle Gavin told me. 'A compliment to my intelligence. He was telling the absolute truth now. He was paying me the highest compliment in his power.') 'What good do you think that would do?' he said.

'You mean., Uncle Gavin said. They looked at one another. 'So you would still turn him loose on the citizens of this state, this country, just for a few votes?'

Why not? If he murders again, there is always this place for him to come back to.' Now it was Uncle Gavin who thought for a minute, though he did not look down.

'Suppose I should repeat what you have just said. I have no proof of that, either, but I would be believed. And that would—'

'Lose me votes? Yes. But you see, I have already lost those votes because I have never had them. You see? You force me to do what, for all you know, may be against my own principles too — or do you grant me principles?' Now Uncle Gavin said the Governor looked at him with an expression almost warm, almost pitying — and quite curious. 'Mr. Stevens, you are what my grandpap would have called a gentleman. He would have snarled it at you, hating you and your kind; he might very probably have shot your horse from under you someday from behind a fence — for a principle. And you are trying to bring the notions of 1860 into the politics of the nineteen hundreds. And politics in the twentieth century is a sorry thing. In fact, I sometimes think that the whole twentieth century is a sorry thing, smelling to high heaven in somebody's nose. But, no matter.' He turned now, back toward the

table and the room full of faces watching them. 'Take the advice of a well-wisher even if he cannot call you friend, and let this business alone. As I said before, if we let him out and he murders again, as he probably will, he can always come back here.'

'And be pardoned again,' Uncle Gavin said.

'Probably. Customs do not change that fast, remember.'

'But you will let me talk to him in private, won't you?' The Governor paused, looking back, courteous and pleasant.

'Why, certainly, Mr. Stevens. It will be a pleasure to oblige you.'

They took them to a cell, so that a guard could stand opposite the barred door with a rifle. Watch yourself,' the guard told Uncle Gavin.

'He's a bad egg. Don't fool with him.'

'I'm not afraid,' Uncle Gavin said; he said he wasn't even careful now, though the guard didn't know what he meant. 'I have less reason to fear him than Mr. Gambrell even, because Monk Odlethrop is dead now.' So they stood looking at one another in the bare cell — Uncle Gavin and the Indian-looking giant with the fierce, yellow eyes.

'So you're the one that crossed me up this time,' Terrel said, in that queer, almost whining singsong. We knew about that case, too; it was in the Mississippi reports, besides it had not happened very far away, and Terrel not a farmer, either. Uncle Gavin said that that was it, even before he realized that Terrel had spoken the exact words which Monk had spoken on the gallows and which Terrel could not have heard or even known that Monk had spoken; not the similarity of the words, but the fact that neither Terrel nor Monk had ever farmed anything, anywhere. It was another filling station, near a railroad this time, and a brakeman on a night freight testified to seeing two men rush out of the bushes as the train passed, carrying something which proved later to be a man, and whether dead or alive at the time the brakeman could not tell, and fling it under the train. The filling station belonged to Terrel, and the fight was proved, and Terrel was arrested. He denied the fight at first, then he denied that the deceased had been present, then he said that the deceased had seduced his (Terrel's) daughter and that his (Terrel's) son had killed the man, and he was merely trying to avert suspicion from his son. The daughter and the son both denied this, and the son proved an alibi, and they dragged Terrel, cursing both his children, from the courtroom.

'Wait,' Uncle Gavin said. 'I'm going to ask you a question first. What did you tell Monk Odlethrop?'

'Nothing!' Terrel said. 'I told him nothing!'

'All right,' Uncle Gavin said. That's all I wanted to know.' He turned and spoke to the guard beyond the door. 'We're through. You can let us out.'

'Wait,' Terrel said. Uncle Gavin turned. Terrel stood as before, tall and hard and lean in his striped overalls, with his fierce, depthless, yellow eyes, speaking in that half-whining singsong. What do you want to keep me locked up in here for? What have I ever done to you? You, rich and free, that can go wherever you want, while I have to—' Then he shouted. Uncle Gavin said he shouted without raising his voice at all, that the guard in the corridor could not have heard him: 'Nothing, I tell you! I told him nothing!' But this time Uncle Gavin didn't even have time to begin to turn away. He said that Terrel passed him in two steps that made absolutely no sound at all, and looked out into the corridor. Then he turned and looked at Uncle Gavin. 'Listen,' he said. 'If I tell you, will you give me your word not to vote agin me?'

'Yes,' Uncle Gavin said. 'I won't vote agin you, as you say.'

'But how will I know you ain't lying?'

'Ah,' Uncle Gavin said. 'How will you know, except by trying it?' They looked at one another. Now Terrel looked down; Uncle Gavin said Terrel held one hand in front of him and that he (Uncle Gavin) watched the knuckles whiten slowly as Terrel closed it.

'It looks like I got to,' he said. 'It just looks like I got to.' Then he looked up; he cried now, with no louder sound than when he had shouted before: 'But if you do, and if I ever get out of here, then look out! See? Look out.'

'Are you threatening me?' Uncle Gavin said. 'You, standing there, in those striped overalls, with that wall behind you and this locked door and a man with a rifle in front of you? Do you want me to laugh?'

'I don't want nothing,' Terrel said. He whimpered almost now. 'I just want justice. That's all.' Now he began to shout again, in that repressed voice, watching his clenched, white knuckles too apparently. 'I tried twice for it; I tried for justice and freedom twice. But it was him. He was the one; he knowed I knowed it too. I told him I was going to—' He

stopped, as sudden as he began; Uncle Gavin said he could hear him breathing, panting.

That was Gambrell,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Go on.'

'Yes. I told him I was. I told him. Because he laughed at me. He didn't have to do that. He could have voted agin me and let it go at that. He never had to laugh. He said I would stay here as long as he did or could keep me, and that he was here for life. And he was. He stayed here all his life. That's just exactly how long he stayed.' But he wasn't laughing, Uncle Gavin said. It wasn't laughing.

'Yes. And so you told Monk—'

'Yes. I told him. I said here we all were, pore ignorant country folks that hadn't had no chance. That God had made to live outdoors in the free world and farm His land for Him; only we were pore and ignorant and didn't know it, and the rich folks wouldn't tell us until it was too late. That we were pore ignorant country folks that never saw a train before, getting on the train and nobody caring to tell us where to get off and farm in the free world like God wanted us to do, and that he was the one that held us back, kept us locked up outen the free world to laugh at us agin the wishes of God. But I never told him to do it. I just said "And now we can't never get out because we ain't got no pistol. But if somebody had a pistol we would walk out into the free world and farm it, because that's what God aimed for us to do and that's what we want to do. Ain't that what we want to do?" and he said, 'Yes. That's it. That's what it is.'" And I said, "Only we ain't got nara pistol." And he said, "I can get a pistol." And I said, "Then we will walk in the free world because we have sinned against God but it wasn't our fault because they hadn't told us what it was He aimed for us to do. But now we know what it is because we want to walk in the free world and farm for God!" That's all I told him. I never told him to do nothing. And now go tell them. Let them hang me too. Gambrell is rotted, and that batbrain is rotted, and I just as soon rot under ground as to rot in here. Go on and tell them.'

'Yes,' Uncle Gavin said. 'All right. You will go free.'

For a minute he said Terrel did not move at all. Then he said, 'Free?'

'Yes,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Free. But remember this. A while ago you threatened me. Now I am going to threaten you. And the curious thing is, I can back mine up. I am going to keep track of you. And the next

time anything happens, the next time anybody tries to frame you with a killing and you can't get anybody to say you were not there nor any of your kinsfolks to take the blame for it — You understand?' Terrel had looked up at him when he said Free, but now he looked down again.

'Do you?' Uncle Gavin said.

'Yes,' Terrel said. 'I understand.'

'All right,' Uncle Gavin said. He turned; he called to the guard. 'You can let us out this time,' he said. He returned to the mess hall, where the Governor was calling the men up one by one and giving them their papers and where again the Governor paused, the smooth, inscrutable face looking up at Uncle Gavin. He did not wait for Uncle Gavin to speak.

'You were successful, I see,' he said.

'Yes. Do you want to hear—'

'My dear sir, no. I must decline. I will put it stronger than that: I must refuse.' Again Uncle Gavin said he looked at him with that expression warm, quizzical, almost pitying, yet profoundly watchful and curious. 'I really believe that you never have quite given up hope that you can change this business. Have you?'

Now Uncle Gavin said he did not answer for a moment. Then he said, 'No. I haven't. So you are going to turn him loose? You really are?' Now he said that the pity, the warmth vanished, that now the face was as he first saw it: smooth, completely inscrutable, completely false.

'My dear Mr. Stevens,' the Governor said. 'You have already convinced me. But I am merely the moderator of this meeting; here are the votes. But do you think that you can convince these gentlemen?' And Uncle Gavin said he looked around at them, the identical puppet faces of the seven or eight of the Governor's battalions and battalions of factory-made colonels.

'No,' Uncle Gavin said. 'I can't.' So he left then. It was in the middle of the morning, and hot, but he started back to Jefferson at once, riding across the broad, heat-miraged land, between the cotton and the corn of God's long-fecund, remorseless acres, which would outlast any corruption and injustice. He was glad of the heat, he said; glad to be sweating, sweating out of himself the smell and the taste of where he had been.

Hand Upon the Waters

THE TWO MEN followed the path where it ran between the river and the dense wall of cypress and cane and gum and brier. One of them carried a gunny sack which had been washed and looked as if it had been ironed too. The other was a youth, less than twenty, by his face. The river was low, at mid-July level.

‘He ought to been catching fish in this water,’ the youth said.

‘If he happened to feel like fishing,’ the one with the sack said. ‘Him and Joe run that line when Lonnie feels like it, not when the fish are biting.’

‘They’ll be on the line, anyway,’ the youth said. ‘I don’t reckon Lonnie cares who takes them off for him.’

Presently the ground rose to a cleared point almost like a headland. Upon it sat a conical hut with a pointed roof, built partly of mildewed canvas and odd-shaped boards and partly of oil tins hammered out flat. A rusted stovepipe projected crazily above it, there was a meager woodpile and an ax, and a bunch of cane poles leaned against it. Then they saw, on the earth before the open door, a dozen or so short lengths of cord just cut from a spool near by, and a rusted can half full of heavy fishhooks, some of which had already been bent onto the cords. But there was nobody there.

‘The boat’s gone,’ the man with the sack said. ‘So he ain’t gone to the store.’ Then he discovered that the youth had gone on, and he drew in his breath and was just about to shout when suddenly a man rushed out of the undergrowth and stopped, facing him and making an urgent whimpering sound — a man not large, but with tremendous arms and shoulders; an adult, yet with something childlike about him, about the way he moved, barefoot, in battered overalls and with the urgent eyes of the deaf and dumb.

‘Hi, Joe,’ the man with the sack said, raising his voice as people will with those who they know cannot understand them. ‘Where’s Lonnie?’ He held up the sack. ‘Got some fish?’

But the other only stared at him, making that rapid whimpering. Then he turned and scuttled on up the path where the youth had disappeared, who, at that moment, shouted: ‘Just look at this line!’ The older one followed. The youth was leaning eagerly out over the water beside a tree from which a light cotton rope slanted tautly downward into the water. The deaf-and-dumb man stood just behind

him, still whimpering and lifting his feet rapidly in turn, though before the older man reached him he turned and scuttled back past him, toward the hut. At this stage of the river the line should have been clear of the water, stretching from bank to bank, between the two trees, with only the hooks on the dependent cords submerged. But now it slanted into the water from either end, with a heavy downstream sag, and even the older man could feel movement on it. 'It's big as a man!' the youth cried.

'Yonder's his boat,' the older man said. The youth saw it, too — across the stream and below them, floated into a willow clump inside a point. 'Cross and get it, and we'll see how big this fish is.'

The youth stepped out of his shoes and overalls and removed his shirt and waded out and began to swim, holding straight across to let the current carry him down to the skiff, and got the skiff and paddled back, standing erect in it and staring eagerly upstream toward the heavy sag of the line, near the center of which the water, from time to time, roiled heavily with submerged movement. He brought the skiff in below the older man, who, at that moment, discovered the deaf-and-dumb man just behind him again, still making the rapid and urgent sound and trying to enter the skiff.

'Get back!' the older man said, pushing the other back with his arm.

'Get back, Joe!'

'Hurry up!' the youth said, staring eagerly toward the submerged line, where, as he watched, something rolled sluggishly to the surface, then sank again. 'There's something on there, or there ain't a hog in Georgia. It's big as a man too!'

The older one stepped into the skiff. He still held the rope, and he drew the skiff, hand over hand, along the line itself.

Suddenly, from the bank of the river behind them, the deaf-and-dumb man began to make an actual sound. It was quite loud.

II

'Inquest?' Stevens said.

'Lonnie Grinnup.' The coroner was an old country doctor. 'Two fellows found him drowned on his own trotline this morning.'

'No!' Stevens said. 'Poor damned feeb. I'll come out.' As county attorney he had no business there, even if it had not been an accident. He knew it. He was going to look at the dead man's face for a

sentimental reason. What was now Yoknapatawpha County had been founded not by one pioneer but by three simultaneous ones. They came together on horseback, through the Cumberland Gap from the Carolinas, when Jefferson was still a Chickasaw Agency post, and bought land in the Indian patent and established families and flourished and vanished, so that now, a hundred years afterward, there was in all the county they helped to found but one representative of the three names.

This was Stevens, because the last of the Holston family had died before the end of the last century, and the Louis Grenier, whose dead face Stevens was driving eight miles in the heat of a July afternoon to look at, had never even known he was Louis Grenier. He could not even spell the Lonnie Grinnup he called himself — an orphan, too, like Stevens, a man a little under medium size and somewhere in his middle thirties, whom the whole county knew — the face which was almost delicate when you looked at it again, equable, constant, always cheerful, with an invariable fuzz of soft golden beard which had never known a razor, and light-colored peaceful eyes — ‘touched,’ they said, but whatever it was, had touched him lightly, taking not very much away that need be missed — living, year in and year out, in the hovel he had built himself of an old tent and a few mismatched boards and flattened oil tins, with the deaf-and-dumb orphan he had taken into his hut ten years ago and clothed and fed and raised, and who had not even grown mentally as far as he himself had.

Actually his hut and trotline and fish trap were in almost the exact center of the thousand and more acres his ancestors had once owned. But he never knew it.

Stevens believed he would not have cared, would have declined to accept the idea that any one man could or should own that much of the earth which belongs to all, to every man for his use and pleasure — in his own case, that thirty or forty square feet where his hut sat and the span of river across which his trotline stretched, where anyone was welcome at any time, whether he was there or not, to use his gear and eat his food as long as there was food.

And at times he would wedge his door shut against prowling animals and with his deaf-and-dumb companion he would appear without warning or invitation at houses or cabins ten and fifteen miles away,

where he would remain for weeks, pleasant, equable, demanding nothing and without servility, sleeping wherever it was convenient for his hosts to have him sleep — in the hay of lofts, or in beds in family or company rooms, while the deaf-and-dumb youth lay on the porch or the ground just outside, where he could hear him who was brother and father both, breathing. It was his one sound out of all the voiceless earth. He was infallibly aware of it.

It was early afternoon. The distances were blue with heat. Then, across the long flat where the highway began to parallel the river bottom, Stevens saw the store. By ordinary it would have been deserted, but now he could already see clotted about it the topless and battered cars, the saddled horses and mules and the wagons, the riders and drivers of which he knew by name. Better still, they knew him, voting for him year after year and calling him by his given name even though they did not quite understand him, just as they did not understand the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa key on his watch chain. He drew in beside the coroner's car. Apparently it was not to be in the store, but in the grist mill beside it, before the open door of which the clean Saturday overalls and shirts and the bared heads and the sunburned necks striped with the white razor lines of Saturday neck shaves were densest and quietest. They made way for him to enter. There was a table and three chairs where the coroner and two witnesses sat.

Stevens noticed a man of about forty holding a clean gunny sack, folded and refolded until it resembled a book, and a youth whose face wore an expression of weary yet indomitable amazement. The body lay under a quilt on the low platform to which the silent mill was bolted. He crossed to it and raised the corner of the quilt and looked at the face and lowered the quilt and turned, already on his way back to town, and then he did not go back to town. He moved over among the men who stood along the wall, their hats in their hands, and listened to the two witnesses — it was the youth telling it in his amazed, spent, incredulous voice — finish describing the finding of the body. He watched the coroner sign the certificate and return the pen to his pocket, and he knew he was not going back to town.

'I reckon that's all,' the coroner said. He glanced toward the door. 'All right, Ike,' he said. 'You can take him now.' Stevens moved aside with

the others and watched the four men cross toward the quilt. 'You going to take him, Ike?' he said.

The eldest of the four glanced back at him for a moment. 'Yes. He had his burying money with Mitchell at the store.'

'You, and Pose, and Matthew, and Jim Blake,' Stevens said.

This time the other glanced back at him almost with surprise, almost impatiently.

'We can make up the difference,' he said.

'I'll help,' Stevens said.

'I thank you,' the other said. 'We got enough.'

Then the coroner was among them, speaking testily: 'All right, boys. Give them room.'

With the others, Stevens moved out into the air, the afternoon again.

There was a wagon backed up to the door now which had not been there before. Its tail gate was open, the bed was filled with straw, and with the others Stevens stood bareheaded and watched the four men emerge from the shed, carrying the quilt-wrapped bundle, and approach the wagon. Three or four others moved forward to help, and Stevens moved, too, and touched the youth's shoulder, seeing again that expression of spent and incredulous wild amazement.

'You went and got the boat before you knew anything was wrong,' he said.

'That's right,' the youth said. He spoke quietly enough at first. 'I swum over and got the boat and rowed back. I knowed something was on the line. I could see it swagged—'

'You mean you swam the boat back,' Stevens said.

'— down into the — Sir?'

'You swam the boat back. You swam over and got it and swam it back.'

'No, sir! I rowed the boat back. I rowed it straight back across! I never suspected nothing! I could see them fish—'

'What with?' Stevens said. The youth glared at him. 'What did you row it back with?'

'With the oar! I picked up the oar and rowed it right back, and all the time I could see them flopping around in the water. They didn't want to let go! They held on to him even after we hauled him up, still eating him! Fish were! I knowed turtles would, but these were fish! Eating

him! Of course it was fish we thought was there! It was! I won't never eat another one! Never!

It had not seemed long, yet the afternoon had gone somewhere, taking some of the heat with it. Again in his car, his hand on the switch, Stevens sat looking at the wagon, now about to depart. And it's not right, he thought. It don't add. Something more that I missed, didn't see. Or something that hasn't happened yet.

The wagon was now moving, crossing the dusty banquette toward the highroad, with two men on the seat and the other two on saddled mules beside it. Stevens' hand turned the switch; the car was already in gear. It passed the wagon, already going fast.

A mile down the road he turned into a dirt lane, back toward the hills. It began to rise, the sun intermittent now, for in places among the ridges sunset had already come. Presently the road forked. In the V of the fork stood a church, white-painted and steepleless, beside an unfenced straggle of cheap marble headstones and other graves outlined only by rows of inverted glass jars and crockery and broken brick.

He did not hesitate. He drove up beside the church and turned and stopped the car facing the fork and the road over which he had just come where it curved away and vanished. Because of the curve, he could hear the wagon for some time before he saw it, then he heard the truck. It was coming down out of the hills behind him, fast, sweeping into sight, already slowing — a cab, a shallow bed with a tarpaulin spread over it.

It drew out of the road at the fork and stopped; then he could hear the wagon again, and then he saw it and the two riders come around the curve in the dusk, and there was a man standing in the road beside the truck now, and Stevens recognized him: Tyler Ballenbaugh — a farmer, married and with a family and a reputation for self-sufficiency and violence, who had been born in the county and went out West and returned, bringing with him, like an effluvium, rumors of sums he had won gambling, who had married and bought land and no longer gambled at cards, but on certain years would mortgage his own crop and buy or sell cotton futures with the money — standing in the road beside the wagon, tall in the dusk, talking to the men in the wagon without raising his voice or making any gesture. Then there was

another man beside him, in a white shirt, whom Stevens did not recognize or look at again.

His hand dropped to the switch; again the car was in motion with the sound of the engine. He turned the headlights on and dropped rapidly down out of the churchyard and into the road and up behind the wagon as the man in the white shirt leaped onto the running board, shouting at him, and Stevens recognized him too: A younger brother of Ballenbaugh's, who had gone to Memphis years ago, where it was understood he had been a hired armed guard during a textile strike, but who, for the last two or three years, had been at his brother's, hiding, it was said, not from the police hut from some of his Memphis friends or later business associates. From time to time his name made one in reported brawls and fights at country dances and picnics. He was subdued and thrown into jail once by two officers in Jefferson, where, on Saturdays, drunk, he would brag about his past exploits or curse his present luck and the older brother who made him work about the farm. 'Who in hell you spying on?' he shouted.

'Boyd,' the other Ballenbaugh said. He did not even raise his voice. 'Get back in the truck.' He had not moved — a big somber-faced man who stared at Stevens out of pale, cold, absolutely expressionless eyes.

'Howdy, Gavin,' he said.

'Howdy, Tyler,' Stevens said. 'You going to take Lonnie?'

'Does anybody here object?'

'I don't,' Stevens said, getting out of the car. 'I'll help you swap him.'

Then he got back into the car. The wagon moved on. The truck hacked and turned, already gaining speed; the two faces fled past — the one which Stevens saw now was not truculent, but frightened; the other, in which there was nothing at all save the still, cold, pale eyes. The cracked tail lamp vanished over the hill. That was an Okatoba County license number, he thought.

Lonnie Grinnup was buried the next afternoon, from Tyler Ballenbaugh's house.

Stevens was not there. 'Joe wasn't there, either, I suppose,' he said.

'Lonnie's dummy.'

'No. He wasn't there, either. The folks that went in to Lonnie's camp on Sunday morning to look at that trotline said that he was still there,

hunting for Lonnie. But he wasn't at the burying. When he finds Lonnie this time, he can lie down by him, but he won't hear him breathing.' Ill 'No,' Stevens said.

He was in Mottstown, the seat of Okatoba County, on that afternoon. And although it was Sunday, and although he would not know until he found it just what he was looking for, he found it before dark — the agent for the company which, eleven years ago, had issued to Lonnie Grinnup a five-thousand-dollar policy, with double indemnity for accidental death, on his life, with Tyler Ballenbaugh as beneficiary. It was quite correct. The examining doctor had never seen Lonnie Grinnup before, but he had known Tyler Ballenbaugh for years, and Lonnie had made his mark on the application and Ballenbaugh had paid the first premium and kept them up ever since.

There had been no particular secrecy about it other than transacting the business in another town, and Stevens realized that even that was not unduly strange.

Okatoba County was just across the river, three miles from where Ballenbaugh lived, and Stevens knew of more men than Ballenbaugh who owned land in one county and bought their cars and trucks and banked their money in another, obeying the country-bred man's inherent, possibly atavistic, faint distrust, perhaps, not of men in white collars but of paving and electricity.

'Then I'm not to notify the company yeti' the agent asked.

'No. I want you to accept the claim when he comes in to file it, explain to him it will take a week or so to settle it, wait three days and send him word to come in to your office to see you at nine o'clock or ten o'clock the next morning; don't tell him why, what for. Then telephone me at Jefferson when you know he has got the message.'

Early the next morning, about daybreak, the heat wave broke. He lay in bed watching and listening to the crash and glare of lightning and the rain's loud fury, thinking of the drumming of it and the fierce channeling of clay-colored water across Lonnie Grinnup's raw and kinless grave in the barren hill beside the steepleless church, and of the sound it would make, above the turmoil of the rising river, on the tin-and-canvas hut where the deaf-and-dumb youth probably still waited for him to come home, knowing that something had happened, but not

how, not why. Not how, Stevens thought. They fooled him somehow. They didn't even bother to tie him up. They just fooled him.

On Wednesday night he received a telephone message from the Mottstown agent that Tyler Ballenbaugh had filed his claim.

'All right,' Stevens said. 'Send him the message Monday, to come in Tuesday. And let me know when you know he has gotten it.' He put the phone down. I am playing stud poker with a man who has proved himself a gambler, which I have not, he thought. But at least I have forced him to draw a card. And he knows who is in the pot with him. So when the second message came, on the following Monday afternoon, he knew only what he himself was going to do. He had thought once of asking the sheriff for a deputy, or of taking some friend with him. But even a friend would not believe that what I have is a hole card, he told himself, even though I do: That one man, even an amateur at murder, might be satisfied that he had cleaned up after himself. But when there are two of them, neither one is going to be satisfied that the other has left no ravelings.

So he went alone. He owned a pistol. He looked at it and put it back into its drawer. At least nobody is going to shoot me with that, he told himself. He left town just after dusk.

This time he passed the store, dark at the roadside. When he reached the lane into which he had turned nine days ago, this time he turned to the right and drove on for a quarter of a mile and turned into a littered yard, his headlights full upon a dark cabin. He did not turn them off. He walked full in the yellow beam, toward the cabin, shouting: 'Nate! Nate!'

After a moment a Negro voice answered, though no light showed.

'I'm going in to Mr. Lonnie Grinnup's camp. If I'm not back by daylight, you better go up to the store and tell them.'

There was no answer. Then a woman's voice said: 'Toil come on away from that door!' The man's voice murmured something.

'I can't help it!' the woman cried. 'You come away and let them white folks alone!'

So there are others besides me, Stevens thought, thinking how quite often, almost always, there is in Negroes an instinct not for evil but to recognize evil at once when it exists. He went back to the car and snapped off the lights and took his flashlight from the seat.

He found the truck. In the close-held beam of the light he read again the license number which he had watched nine days ago flee over the hill. He snapped off the light and put it into his pocket.

Twenty minutes later he realized he need not have worried about the light. He was in the path, between the black wall of jungle and the river, he saw the faint glow inside the canvas wall of the hut and he could already hear the two voices — the one cold, level and steady, the other harsh and high. He stumbled over the woodpile and then over something else and found the door and flung it back and entered the devastation of the dead man's house — the shuck mattresses dragged out of the wooden hunks, the overturned stove and scattered cooking vessels — where Tyler Ballenbaugh stood facing him with a pistol and the younger one stood half-crouched above an overturned box.

'Stand back, Gavin,' Ballenbaugh said.

'Stand back yourself, Tyler,' Stevens said. 'You're too late.'

The younger one stood up. Stevens saw recognition come into his face.

'Well, by—' he said.

'Is it all up, Gavin?' Ballenbaugh said. 'Don't lie to me.'

'I reckon it is,' Stevens said. 'Put your pistol down.'

'Who else is with you?'

'Enough,' Stevens said. 'Put your pistol down, Tyler.'

'Hell,' the younger one said. He began to move; Stevens saw his eyes go swiftly from him to the door behind him. 'He's lying. There ain't anybody with him. He's just spying around like he was the other day, putting his nose into business he's going to wish he had kept it out of. Because this time it's going to get bit off.'

He was moving toward Stevens, stooping a little, his arms held slightly away from his sides.

'Boyd!' Tyler said. The other continued to approach Stevens, not smiling, but with a queer light, a glitter, in his face. 'Boyd!' Tyler said.

Then he moved, too, with astonishing speed, and overtook the younger and with one sweep of his arm hurled him back into the bunk. They faced each other — the one cold, still, expressionless, the pistol held before him aimed at nothing, the other half-crouched, snarling.

What the hell you going to do? Let him take us back to town like two damn sheep?'

That's for me to decide,' Tyler said. He looked at Stevens. 'I never intended this, Gavin. I insured his life, kept the premiums paid — yes. But it was good business: If he had outlived me, I wouldn't have had any use for the money, and if I had outlived him, I would have collected on my judgment. There was no secret about it. It was done in open daylight. Anybody could have found out about it. Maybe he told about it. I never told him not to. And who's to say against it anyway? I always fed him when he came to my house, he always stayed as long as he wanted to, come when he wanted to. But I never intended this.'

Suddenly the younger one began to laugh, half-crouched against the bunk where the other had flung him. 'So that's the tune,' he said. That's the way it's going.' Then it was not laughter any more, though the transition was so slight or perhaps so swift as to be imperceptible. He was standing now, leaning forward a little, facing his brother. 'I never insured him for five thousand dollars! I wasn't going to get—'

'Hush,' Tyler said.

' — five thousand dollars when they found him dead on that—'

Tyler walked steadily to the other and slapped him in two motions, palm and back, of the same hand, the pistol still held before him in the other.

'I said, hush, Boyd,' he said. He looked at Stevens again. 'I never intended this. I don't want that money now, even if they were going to pay it, because this is not the way I aimed for it to be. Not the way I bet. What are you going to do?'

'Do you need to ask that? I want an indictment for murder.'

'And then prove it!' the younger one snarled. Try and prove it! I never insured his life for—'

'Hush,' Tyler said. He spoke almost gently, looking at Stevens with the pale eyes in which there was absolutely nothing. 'You can't do that. It's a good name. Has been. Maybe nobody's done much for it yet, but nobody's hurt it bad yet, up to now. I have owed no man, I have taken nothing that was not mine. You mustn't do that, Gavin.'

'I mustn't do anything else, Tyler.'

The other looked at him. Stevens heard him draw a long breath and expel it. But his face did not change at all. 'You want your eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.'

'Justice wants it. Maybe Lonnie Grinnup wants it. Wouldn't you?'

For a moment longer the other looked at him. Then Ballenbaugh turned and made a quiet gesture at his brother and another toward Stevens, quiet and peremptory.

Then they were out of the hut, standing in the light from the door; a breeze came up from somewhere and rustled in the leaves overhead and died away, ceased.

At first Stevens did not know what Ballenbaugh was about. He watched in mounting surprise as Ballenbaugh turned to face his brother, his hand extended, speaking in a voice which was actually harsh now: 'This is the end of the row. I was afraid from that night when you came home and told me. I should have raised you better, but I didn't. Here. Stand up and finish it.'

'Look out, Tyler!' Stevens said. 'Don't do that!'

'Keep out of this, Gavin. If it's meat for meat you want, you will get it.' He still faced his brother, he did not even glance at Stevens. 'Here,' he said. 'Take it and stand up.'

Then it was too late. Stevens saw the younger one spring back. He saw Tyler take a step forward and he seemed to hear in the other's voice the surprise, the disbelief, then the realization of the mistake. 'Drop the pistol, Boyd,' he said. 'Drop it.'

'So you want it back, do you?' the younger said. 'I come to you that night and told you you were worth five thousand dollars as soon as somebody happened to look on that trotline, and asked you to give me ten dollars, and you turned me down. Ten dollars, and you wouldn't. Sure you can have it. Take it.' It flashed, low against his side; the orange fire lanced downward again as the other fell.

Now it's my turn, Stevens thought. They faced each other; he heard again that brief wind come from somewhere and shake the leaves overhead and fall still.

'Run while you can, Boyd,' he said. 'You've done enough. Run, now.'

'Sure I'll run. You do all your worrying about me now, because in a minute you won't have any worries. I'll run all right, after I've said a word to smart guys that come sticking their noses where they'll wish to hell they hadn't—'

Now he's going to shoot, Stevens thought, and he sprang. For an instant he had the illusion of watching himself springing, reflected somehow by the faint light from the river, that luminousness which

water gives back to the dark, in the air above Boyd Ballenbaugh's head. Then he knew it was not himself he saw, it had not been wind he heard, as the creature, the shape which had no tongue and needed none, which had been waiting nine days now for Lonnie Grinnup to come home, dropped toward the murderer's back with its hands already extended and its body curved and rigid with silent and deadly purpose. He was in the tree, Stevens thought. The pistol glared. He saw the flash, but he heard no sound.

IV

He was sitting on the veranda with his neat surgeon's bandage after supper when the sheriff of the county came up the walk — a big man, too, pleasant, affable, with eyes even paler and colder and more expressionless than Tyler Ballenbaugh's. 'It won't take but a minute,' he said, 'or I wouldn't have bothered you.'

'How bothered me?' Stevens said.

The sheriff lowered one thigh to the veranda rail. 'Head feel all right?'

'Feels all right,' Stevens said.

'That's good, I reckon you heard where we found Boyd.' Stevens looked back at him just as blankly. 'I may have,' he said pleasantly. 'Haven't remembered much today but a headache.'

'You told us where to look. You were conscious when I got there. You were trying to give Tyler water. You told us to look on that trotline.'

'Did I? Well, well, what won't a man say, drunk or out of his head? Sometimes he's right too.'

'You were. We looked on the line, and there was Boyd hung on one of the hooks, dead, just like Lonnie Grinnup was. And Tyler Ballenbaugh with a broken leg and another bullet in his shoulder, and you with a crease in your skull you could hide a cigar in. How did he get on that trotline, Gavin?'

'I don't know,' Stevens said.

'All right. I'm not sheriff now. How did Boyd get on that trotline?'

'I don't know.'

The sheriff looked at him; they looked at each other. 'Is that what you answer any friend that asks?'

'Yes. Because I was shot, you see. I don't know.'

The sheriff took a cigar from his pocket and looked at it for a time. 'Joe — that deaf-and-dumb boy Lonnie raised — seems to have gone away

at last. He was still around there last Sunday, but nobody has seen him since. He could have stayed. Nobody would have bothered him.’
‘Maybe he missed Lonnie too much to stay,’ Stevens said. ‘Maybe he missed Lonnie.’ The sheriff rose. He bit the end from the cigar and lit it. ‘Did that bullet cause you to forget this too? Just what made you suspect something was wrong? What was it the rest of us seem to have missed?’

‘It was that paddle,’ Stevens said.

‘Paddle?’

‘Didn’t you ever run a trotline, a trotline right at your camp? You don’t paddle, you pull the boat hand over hand along the line itself from one hook to the next. Lonnie never did use his paddle; he even kept the skiff tied to the same tree his trotline was fastened to, and the paddle stayed in his house. If you had ever been there, you would have seen it. But the paddle was in the skiff when that boy found it.’

To-Morrow

UNCLE GAVIN HAD not always been county attorney. But the time when he had not been was more than twenty years ago and it had lasted for such a short period that only the old men remembered it, and even some of them did not. Because in that time he had had but one case.

He was a young man then, twenty-eight, only a year out of the state-university law school where, at grandfather’s instigation, he had gone after his return from Harvard and Heidelberg; and he had taken the case voluntarily, persuaded grandfather to let him handle it alone, which grandfather did, because everyone believed the trial would be a mere formality.

So he tried the case. Years afterward he still said it was the only case, either as a private defender or a public prosecutor, in which he was convinced that right and justice were on his side, that he ever lost. Actually he did not lose it — a mistrial in the fall court term, an acquittal in the following spring term — the defendant a solid, well-to-do farmer, husband and father, too, named Bookwright, from a section called Frenchman’s Bend in the remote southeastern corner of the county; the victim a swaggering bravo calling himself Buck Thorpe and called Bucksnot by the other young men whom he had subjugated

with his fists during the three years he had been in Frenchman's Bend; kinless, who had appeared overnight from nowhere, a brawler, a gambler, known to be a distiller of illicit whiskey and caught once on the road to Memphis with a small drove of stolen cattle, which the owner promptly identified. He had a bill of sale for them, but none in the country knew the name signed to it.

And the story itself was old and unoriginal enough: The country girl of seventeen, her imagination fired by the swagger and the prowess and the daring and the glib tongue; the father who tried to reason with her and got exactly as far as parents usually do in such cases; then the interdiction, the forbidden door, the inevitable elopement at midnight; and at four o'clock the next morning Bookwright waked Will Varner, the justice of the peace and the chief officer of the district, and handed Varner his pistol and said, 'I have come to surrender. I killed Thorpe two hours ago.' And a neighbor named Quick, who was first on the scene, found the half-drawn pistol in Thorpe's hand; and a week after the brief account was printed in the Memphis papers, a woman appeared in Frenchman's Bend who claimed to be Thorpe's wife, and with a wedding license to prove it, trying to claim what money or property he might have left.

I can remember the surprise that the grand jury even found a true bill; when the clerk read the indictment, the betting was twenty to one that the jury would not be out ten minutes. The district attorney even conducted the case through an assistant, and it did not take an hour to submit all the evidence. Then Uncle Gavin rose, and I remember how he looked at the jury — the eleven farmers and storekeepers and the twelfth man, who was to ruin his case — a farmer, too, a thin man, small, with thin gray hair and that appearance of hill farmers — at once frail and work-worn, yet curiously imperishable — who seem to become old men at fifty and then become invincible to time. Uncle Gavin's voice was quiet, almost monotonous, not ranting as criminal-court trials had taught us to expect; only the words were a little different from the ones he would use in later years. But even then, although he had been talking to them for only a year, he could already talk so that all the people in our country — the Negroes, the hill people, the rich flatland plantation owners — understood what he said.

'All of us in this country, the South, have been taught from birth a few things which we hold to above all else. One of the first of these — not the best; just one of the first — is that only a life can pay for the life it takes; that the one death is only half complete. If that is so, then we could have saved both these lives by stopping this defendant before he left his house that night; we could have saved at least one of them, even if we had had to take this defendant's life from him in order to stop him. Only we didn't know in time. And that's what I am talking about — not about the dead man and his character and the morality of the act he was engaged in; not about self-defense, whether or not this defendant was justified in forcing the issue to the point of taking life, but about us who are not dead and what we don't know — about all of us, human beings who at bottom want to do right, want not to harm others; human beings with all the complexity of human passions and feelings and beliefs, in the accepting or rejecting of which we had no choice, trying to do the best we can with them or despite them — this defendant, another human being with that same complexity of passions and instincts and beliefs, faced by a problem — the inevitable misery of his child who, with the headstrong folly of youth — again that same old complexity which she, too, did not ask to inherit — was incapable of her own preservation — and solved that problem to the best of his ability and beliefs, asking help of no one, and then abode by his decision and his act.'

He sat down. The district attorney's assistant merely rose and bowed to the court and sat down again. The jury went out and we didn't even leave the room. Even the judge didn't retire. And I remember the long breath, something, which went through the room when the clock hand above the bench passed the ten-minute mark and then passed the half-hour mark, and the judge beckoned a bailiff and whispered to him, and the bailiff went out and returned and whispered to the judge, and the judge rose and banged his gavel and recessed the court.

I hurried home and ate my dinner and hurried back to town. The office was empty. Even grandfather, who took his nap after dinner, regardless of who hung and who didn't, returned first; after three o'clock then, and the whole town knew now that Uncle Gavin's jury was hung by one man, eleven to one for acquittal; then Uncle Gavin came in fast, and

grandfather said, 'Well, Gavin, at least you stopped talking in time to hang just your jury and not your client.'

'That's right, sir,' Uncle Gavin said. Because he was looking at me with his bright eyes, his thin, quick face, his wild hair already beginning to turn white. 'Come here, Chick,' he said. 'I need you for a Infinite.'

'Ask Judge Frazier to allow you to retract your oration, then let Charley sum up for you,' grandfather said. But we were outside then, on the stairs, Uncle Gavin stopping halfway down, so that we stood exactly halfway from anywhere, his hand on my shoulder, his eyes brighter and intenter than ever. This is not cricket,' he said. 'But justice is accomplished lots of times by methods that won't bear looking at. They have moved the jury to the back room in Mrs. Rouncewell's boardinghouse. The room right opposite that mulberry tree. If you could get into the back yard without anybody seeing you, and be careful when you climb the tree—'

Nobody saw me. But I could look through the windy mulberry leaves into the room, and see and hear, both — the nine angry and disgusted men sprawled in chairs at the far end of the room; Mr. Holland, the foreman, and another man standing in front of the chair in which the little, worn, dried-out hill man sat. His name was Fentry. I remembered all their names, because Uncle Gavin said that to be a successful lawyer and politician in our country you did not need a silver tongue nor even an intelligence; you needed only an infallible memory for names. But I would have remembered his name anyway, because it was Stonewall Jackson — Stonewall Jackson Fentry.

'Don't you admit that he was running off with Bookwright's seventeen-year-old daughter?' Mr. Holland said. 'Don't you admit that he had a pistol in his hand when they found him? Don't you admit that he wasn't hardly buried before that woman turned up and proved she was already his wife? Don't you admit that he was not only no-good but dangerous, and that if it hadn't been Bookwright, sooner or later somebody else would have had to, and mat Bookwright was just unlucky?'

'Yes,' Fentry said.

Then what do you want?' Mr. Holland said. 'What do you want?'

'I can't help it,' Fentry said. 'I ain't going to vote Mr. Bookwright free.'

And he didn't. And that afternoon Judge Frazier discharged the jury and set the case for retrial in the next term of court; and the next morning Uncle Gavin came for me before I had finished breakfast.

'Tell your mother we might be gone overnight,' he said. 'Tell her I promise not to let you get either shot, snake-bit or surfeited with soda pop.... Because I've got to know,' he said. We were driving fast now, out the northeast road, and his eyes were bright, not baffled, just intent and eager. 'He was born and raised and lived all his life out here at the very other end of the county, thirty miles from Frenchman's Bend. He said under oath that he had never even seen Bookwright before, and you can look at him and see that he never had enough time off from hard work to learn how to lie in. I doubt if he ever even heard Bookwright's name before.'

We drove until almost noon. We were in the hills now, out of the rich flat land, among the pine and bracken, the poor soil, the little tilted and barren patches of gaunt com and cotton which somehow endured, as the people they clothed and fed somehow endured; the roads we followed less than lanes, winding and narrow, rutted and dust choked, the car in second gear half the time. Then we saw the mailbox, the crude lettering: G. A. FENTRY; beyond it, the two-room log house with an open hall, and even I, a boy of twelve, could see that no woman's hand had touched it in a lot of years. We entered the gate.

Then a voice said, 'Stop! Stop where you are!' And we hadn't even seen him — an old man, barefoot, with a fierce white bristle of mustache, in patched denim faded almost to the color of skim milk, smaller, thinner even than the son, standing at the edge of the worn gallery, holding a shotgun across his middle and shaking with fury or perhaps with the palsy of age.

'Mr. Fentry—' Uncle Gavin said.

'You've badgered and harried him enough!' the old man said. It was fury; the voice seemed to rise suddenly with a fiercer, an uncontrollable blaze of it: 'Get out of here! Get off my land! Go!'

'Come,' Uncle Gavin said quietly. And still his eyes were only bright, eager, intent and grave. We did not drive fast now. The next mailbox was within the mile, and this time the house was even painted, with beds of petunias beside the steps, and the land about it was better, and this time the man rose from the gallery and came down to the gate.

'Howdy, Mr. Stevens,' he said. 'So Jackson Fentry hung your jury for you.'

'Howdy, Mr. Pruitt,' Uncle Gavin said. 'It looks like he did. Tell me.' And Pruitt told him, even though at that time Uncle Gavin would forget now and then and his language would slip back to Harvard and even to Heidelberg. It was as if people looked at his face and knew that what he asked was not just for his own curiosity or his own selfish using.

'Only ma knows more about it than I do,' Pruitt said. 'Come up to the gallery.'

We followed him to the gallery, where a plump, white-haired old lady in a clean gingham sunbonnet and dress and a clean white apron sat in a low rocking chair, shelling field peas into a wooden bowl. 'This is Lawyer Stevens,' Pruitt said. 'Captain Stevens' son, from town. He wants to know about Jackson Fentry.'

So we sat, too, while they told it, the son and the mother talking in rotation.

That place of theirs,' Pruitt said. 'You seen some of it from the road. And what you didn't see don't look no better. But his pa and his grandpa worked it, made a living for themselves and raised families and paid their taxes and owed no man. I don't know how they done it, but they did. And Jackson was helping from the time he got big enough to reach up to the plow handles. He never got much bigger than that neither. None of them ever did. I reckon that was why. And Jackson worked it, too, in his time, until he was about twenty-five and already looking forty, asking no odds of nobody, not married and not nothing, him and his pa living alone and doing their own washing and cooking, because how can a man afford to marry when him and his pa have just one pair of shoes between them. If it had been worth while getting a wife a-tall, since that place had already killed his ma and his grandma both before they were forty years old. Until one night—'

'Nonsense,' Mrs. Pruitt said. 'When your pa and me married, we didn't even own a roof over our heads. We moved into a rented house, on rented land—'

'All right,' Pruitt said. 'Until one night he come to me and said how he had got him a sawmilling job down at Frenchman's Bend.'

'Frenchman's Bend?' Uncle Gavin said, and now his eyes were much brighter and quicker than just intent. 'Yes,' he said.

'A day-wage job,' Pruitt said. 'Not to get rich; just to earn a little extra money maybe, risking a year or two to earn a little extra money, against the life his grandpa led until he died between the plow handles one day, and that his pa would lead until he died in a com furrow, and then it would be his turn, and not even no son to come and pick him up out of the dirt. And that he had traded with a nigger to help his pa work their place while he was gone, and would I kind of go up there now and then and see that his pa was all right.'

'Which you did,' Mrs. Pruitt said.

'I went close enough,' Pruitt said. 'I would get close enough to the field to hear him cussing at the nigger for not moving fast enough and to watch the nigger trying to keep up with him, and to think what a good thing it was Jackson hadn't got two niggers to work the place while he was gone, because if that old man — and he was close to sixty then — had had to spend one full day sitting in a chair in the shade with nothing in his hands to chop or hoe with, he would have died before sundown. So Jackson left. He walked. They didn't have but one mule. They ain't never had but one mule. But it ain't but about thirty miles. He was gone about two and a half years. Then one day—'

'He come home that first Christmas,' Mrs. Pruitt said.

'That's right,' Pruitt said. 'He walked them thirty miles home and spent Christmas Day, and walked them other thirty miles back to the sawmill.'

'Whose sawmill?' Uncle Gavin said.

'Quick's,' Pruitt said. 'Old Man Ben Quick's. It was the second Christmas he never come home. Then, about the beginning of March, about when the river bottom at Frenchman's Bend would be starting to dry out to where you could skid logs through it and you would have thought he would be settled down good to his third year of sawmilling, he come home to stay. He didn't walk this time. He come in a hired buggy. Because he had the goat and the baby.'

'Wait,' Uncle Gavin said.

'We never knew how he got home,' Mrs. Pruitt said. 'Because he had been home over a week before we even found out he had the baby.'

'Wait,' Uncle Gavin said.

They waited, looking at him, Pruitt sitting on the gallery railing and Mrs. Pruitt's fingers still shelling the peas out of the long brittle hulls, looking at Uncle Gavin. His eyes were not exultant now any more than they had

been baffled or even very speculative before; they had just got brighter, as if whatever it was behind them had flared up, steady and fiercer, yet still quiet, as if it were going faster than the telling was going.

'Yes,' he said. 'Tell me.'

'And when I finally heard about it and went up there,' Mrs. Pruitt said, 'that baby wasn't two weeks old. And how he had kept it alive, and just on goat's milk—'

'I don't know if you know it,' Pruitt said. 'A goat ain't like a cow. You milk a goat every two hours or so. That means all night too.'

'Yes,' Mrs. Pruitt said. 'He didn't even have diaper cloths. He had some split floursacks the midwife had showed him how to put on. So I made some cloths and I would go up there; he had kept the nigger on to help his pa in the field and he was doing the cooking and washing and nursing that baby, milking the goat to feed it; and I would say, "Let me take it. At least until he can be weaned. You come stay at my house, too, if you want," and him just looking at me — little, thin, already wore-out something that never in his whole life had ever set down to a table and et all he could hold — saying, "I thank you, ma'am. I can make out."' "

'Which was correct,' Pruitt said. 'I don't know how he was at sawmilling, and he never had no farm to find out what kind of a farmer he was. But he raised that boy.'

'Yes,' Mrs. Pruitt said. 'And I kept on after him: "We hadn't even heard you was married," I said. "Yessum," he said. "We was married last year. When the baby come, she died."' "

"Who was she?" I said. "Was she a Frenchman Bend girl?"

"No'm," he said. "She come from downstate."

"What was her name?" I said. "Miss Smith," he said.'

'He hadn't even had enough time off from hard work to learn how to lie either,' Pruitt said. 'But he raised that boy. After their crops were in in the fall, he let the nigger go, and next spring him and the old man done the work like they use to. He had made a kind of satchel, like they say Indians does, to carry the boy in. I would go up there now and then while the ground was still cold and see Jackson and his pa plowing and chopping brush, and that satchel hanging on a fence post and that boy asleep bolt upright in it like it was a feather bed. He learned to walk

that spring, and I would stand there at the fence and watch that dum little critter out there in the middle of the furrow, trying his best to keep up with Jackson, until Jackson would stop the plow at the turn row and go back and get him and set him straddle of his neck and take up the plow and go on. In the late summer he could walk pretty good. Jackson made him a little hoe out of a stick and a scrap of shingle, and you could see Jackson chopping in the middle-thigh cotton, but you couldn't see the boy at all; you could just see the cotton shaking where he was.'

'Jackson made his clothes,' Mrs. Pruitt said. 'Stitched them himself, by hand. I made a few garments and took them up there. I never done it but once though. He took them and he thanked me. But you could see it. It was like he even begrudged the earth itself for what that child had to eat to keep alive. And I tried to persuade Jackson to take him to church, have him baptized. "He's already named," he said. "His name is Jackson and Longstreet Fentry. Pa fit under both of them."'

'He never went nowhere,' Pruitt said. 'Because where you saw Jackson, you saw that boy. If he had had to steal that boy down there at Frenchman's Bend, he couldn't 'a' hid no closer. It was even the old man that would ride over to Haven Hill store to buy their supplies, and the only time Jackson and that boy was separated as much as one full breath was once a year when Jackson would ride in to Jefferson to pay their taxes, and when I first seen the boy I thought of a setter puppy, until one day I knowed Jackson had gone to pay their taxes and I went up there and the boy was under the bed, not making any fuss, just backed up into the corner, looking out at me. He didn't blink once. He was exactly like a fox or a wolf cub somebody had caught just last night.'

We watched him take from his pocket a tin of snuff and tilt a measure of it into the lid and then into his lower lip, tapping the final grain from the lid with delicate deliberation. 'All right,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Then what?'

'That's all,' Pruitt said. 'In the next summer him and the boy disappeared.'

'Disappeared?' Uncle Gavin said.

'That's right. They were just gone one morning. I didn't know when. And one day I couldn't stand it no longer, I went up there and the

house was empty, and I went on to the field where the old man was plowing, and at first I thought the spreader between his plow handles had broke and he had tied a sapling across the handles, until he seen me and snatched the sapling off, and it was that shotgun, and I reckon what he said to me was about what he said to you this morning when you stopped there. Next year he had the nigger helping him again. Then, about five years later, Jackson come back. I don't know when. He was just there one morning. And the nigger was gone again, and him and his pa worked the place like they use to. And one day I couldn't stand it no longer, I went up there and I stood at the fence where he was plowing, until after a while the land he was breaking brought him up to the fence, and still he hadn't never looked at me; he plowed right by me, not ten feet away, still without looking at me, and he turned and come back, and I said, "Did he die, Jackson?" and then he looked at me. "The boy," I said. And he said, "What boy?"

They invited us to stay for dinner.

Uncle Gavin thanked them. We brought a snack with us,' he said. 'And it's thirty miles to Varner's store, and twenty-two from there to Jefferson. And our roads ain't quite used to automobiles yet.'

So it was just sundown when we drove up to Varner's store in Frenchman's Bend Village; again a man rose from the deserted gallery and came down the steps to the car.

It was Isham Quick, the witness who had first reached Thorpe's body — a tall, gangling man in the middle forties, with a dreamy kind of face and near-sighted eyes, until you saw there was something shrewd behind them, even a little quizzical.

'I been waiting for you,' he said. 'Looks like you made a water haul.' He blinked at Uncle Gavin. 'That Fentry.'

'Yes,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Why didn't you tell me?'

'I didn't recognize it myself,' Quick said. 'It wasn't until I heard your jury was hung, and by one man, that I associated them names.'

'Names?' Uncle Gavin said. What na — Never mind.

Just tell it.'

So we sat on the gallery of the locked and deserted store while the cicadas shrilled and rattled in the trees and the lightning bugs blinked and drifted above the dusty road, and Quick told it, sprawled on the bench beyond Uncle Gavin, loose-jointed, like he would come all to

pieces the first time he moved, talking in a lazy sardonic voice, like he had all night to tell it in and it would take all night to tell it. But it wasn't that long. It wasn't long enough for what was in it. But Uncle Gavin says it don't take many words to tell the sum of any human experience; that somebody has already done it in eight: He was born, he suffered and he died.

'It was pap that hired him. But when I found out where he had come from, I knowed he would work, because folks in that country hadn't never had time to learn nothing but hard work. And I knowed he would be honest for the same reason: that there wasn't nothing in his country a man could want bad enough to learn how to steal it. What I seem to have underestimated was his capacity for love. I reckon I figured that, coming from where he come from, he never had none a-tall, and for that same previous reason — that even the comprehension of love had done been lost out of him back down the generations where the first one of them had had to take his final choice between the pursuit of love and the pursuit of keeping on breathing.

'So he come to work, doing the same work and drawing the same pay as the niggers done. Until in the late fall, when the bottom got wet and we got ready to shut down for the winter, I found out he had made a trade with pap to stay on until spring as watchman and caretaker, with three days out to go home Christmas. And he did, and the next year when we started up, he had done learned so much about it and he stuck to it so, that by the middle of summer he was running the whole mill hisself, and by the end of summer pap never went out there no more a-tall and I just went when I felt like it, maybe once a week or so; and by fall pap was even talking about building him a shack to live in in place of that shuck mattress and a old broke-down cookstove in the boiler shed. And he stayed through that winter too. When he went home that Christmas we never even knowed it, when he went or when he come back, because even I hadn't been out there since fall.

'Then one afternoon in February — there had been a mild spell and I reckon I was restless — I rode out there. The first thing I seen was her, and it was the first time I had ever done that — a woman, young, and maybe when she was in her normal health she might have been pretty, too; I don't know. Because she wasn't just thin, she was gaunted. She was sick, more than just starved-looking, even if she was still on her

feet, and it wasn't just because she was going to have that baby in a considerable less than another month. And I says, "Who is that?" and he looked at me and says, "That's my wife," and I says, "Since when? You never had no wife last fall. And that child ain't a month off." And he says, "Do you want us to leave?" and I says, "What do I want you to leave for?" I'm going to tell this from what I know now, what I found out after them two brothers showed up here three years later with their court paper, not from what he ever told me, because he never told nobody nothing.'

'All right,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Tell.'

'I don't know where he found her. I don't know if he found her somewhere, or if she just walked into the mill one day or one night and he looked up and seen her, and it was like the fellow says — nobody knows where or when love or lightning either is going to strike, except that it ain't going to strike there twice, because it don't have to. And I don't believe she was hunting for the husband that had deserted her — likely he cut and run soon as she told him about the baby — and I don't believe she was scared or ashamed to go back home just because her brothers and father had tried to keep her from marrying the husband, in the first place. I believe it was just some more of that same kind of black-complected and not extra-intelligent and pretty durn ruthless blood pride that them brothers themselves was waving around here for about a hour that day.

'Anyway, there she was, and I reckon she knowed her time was going to be short, and him saying to her, "Let's get married," and her saying, "I can't marry you. I've already got a husband." And her time come and she was down then, on that shuck mattress, and him feeding her with a spoon, likely, and I reckon she knowed she wouldn't get up from it, and he got the midwife, and the baby was horn, and likely her and the midwife both knowed by then she would never get up from that mattress and maybe they even convinced him at last, or maybe she knowed it wouldn't make no difference nohow and said yes, and he taken the mule pap let him keep at the mill and rid seven miles to Preacher Whitfield's and brung Whitfield back about daylight, and Whitfield married them and she died, and him and Whitfield buried her. And that night he come to the house and told pap he was quitting, and left the mule, and I went out to the mill a few days later and he was

gone — just the shuck mattress and the stove, and the dishes and skillet mammy let him have, all washed and clean and set on the shelf. And in the third summer from then, them two brothers, them Thorpes—’

‘Thorpes,’ Uncle Gavin said. It wasn’t loud. It was getting dark fast now, as it does in our country, and I couldn’t see his face at all any more.

‘Tell,’ he said.

‘Black-complected like she was — the youngest one looked a heap like her — coming up in the surrey, with the deputy or bailiff or whatever he was, and the paper all wrote out and stamped and sealed all regular, and I says, “You can’t do this. She come here of her own accord, sick and with nothing, and he taken her in and fed her and nursed her and got help to born that child and a preacher to bury her; they was even married before she died. The preacher and the midwife both will prove it.” And the oldest brother says, “He couldn’t marry her. She already had a husband. We done already attended to him.” And I says, “All right. He taken that boy when nobody come to claim him. He has raised that boy and clothed and fed him for two years and better.” And the oldest one drew a money purse half outen his pocket and let it drop back again. ‘We aim to do right about that, too — when we have seen the boy,” he says. “He is our kin. We want him and we aim to have him.” And that wasn’t the first time it ever occurred to me that this world ain’t run like it ought to be run a heap of more times than what it is, and I says, “It’s thirty miles up there. I reckon you all will want to lay over here tonight and rest your horses.” And the oldest one looked at me and says, “The team ain’t tired. We won’t stop.”

“Then I’m going with you,” I says. “You are welcome to come,” he says. ‘We drove until midnight. So I thought I would have a chance then, even if I never had nothing to ride. But when we unhitched and laid down on the ground, the oldest brother never laid down. “I ain’t sleepy,” he says. “I’ll set up a while.” So it wasn’t no use, and I went to sleep and then the sun was up and it was too late then, and about middle morning we come to that mailbox with the name on it you couldn’t miss, and the empty house with nobody in sight or hearing neither, until we heard the ax and went around to the back, and he looked up from the woodpile and seen what I reckon he had been expecting to see every time the sun rose for going on three years now.

Because he never even stopped. He said to the little boy, "Run. Run to the field to grandpap. Run," and come straight at the oldest brother with the ax already raised and the down-stroke already started, until I managed to catch it by the haft just as the oldest brother grabbed him and we lifted him clean off the ground, holding him, or trying to. "Stop it, Jackson!" I says. "Stop it! They got the law!"

'Then a puny something was kicking and clawing me about the legs; it was the little boy, not making a sound, just swarming around me and the brother both, hitting at us as high as he could reach with a piece of wood Fentry had been chopping. "Catch him and take him on to the surrey," the oldest one says. So the youngest one caught him; he was almost as hard to hold as Fentry, kicking and plunging even after the youngest one had picked him up, and still not making a sound, and Fentry jerking and lunging like two men until the youngest one and the boy was out of sight. Then he collapsed. It was like all his bones had turned to water, so that me and the oldest brother lowered him down to the chopping block like he never had no bones a-tall, laying back against the wood he had cut, panting, with a little froth of spit at each corner of his mouth. "It's the law, Jackson," I says. "Her husband is still alive."

"I know it," he says. It wasn't much more than whispering. "I been expecting it. I reckon that's why it taken me so by surprise. I'm all right now."

"I'm sorry for it," the brother says. "We never found out about none of it until last week. But he is our kin. We want him home. You done well by him. We thank you. His mother thanks you. Here," he says. He taken the money purse outen his pocket and puts it into Fentry's hand. Then he turned and went away. After a while I heard the carriage turn and go back down the hill. Then I couldn't hear it any more. I don't know whether Fentry ever heard it or not.

"It's the law, Jackson," I says. "But there's two sides to the law. We'll go to town and talk to Captain Stevens. I'll go with you."

'Then he set up on the chopping block, setting up slow and stiff. He wasn't panting so hard now and he looked better now, except for his eyes, and they was mostly just dazed looking. Then he raised the hand that had the money purse in it and started to mop his face with the money purse, like it was a handkerchief; I don't believe he even

knowed there was anything in his hand until then, because he taken his hand down and looked at the money purse for maybe five seconds, and then he tossed it — he didn't fling it; he just tossed it like you would a handful of dirt you had been examining to see what it would make — over behind the chopping block and got up and walked across the yard toward the woods, walking straight and not fast, and not looking much bigger than that little boy, and into the woods. "Jackson," I says. But he never looked back.

'And I stayed that night at Rufus Pruitt's and borrowed a mule from him; I said I was just looking around, because I didn't feel much like talking to nobody, and the next morning I hitched the mule at that gate and started up the path, and I didn't see old man Fentry on the gallery a-tall at first.

'When I did see him he was moving so fast I didn't even know what he had in his hands until it went "boom!" and I heard the shot rattling in the leaves overhead and Rufus Pruitt's mule trying his durn best either to break the hitch rein or hang hissself from the gatepost.

'And one day about six months after he had located here to do the balance of his drinking and fighting and sleight-of-hand with other folks' cattle, Bucksnot was on the gallery here, drunk still and running his mouth, and about a half dozen of the ones he had beat unconscious from time to time by foul means and even by fair on occasion, as such emergencies arose, laughing every time he stopped to draw a fresh breath. And I happened to look up, and Fentry was setting on his mule out there in the road.

'He was just setting there, with the dust of them thirty miles caking into the mule's sweat, looking at Thorpe. I don't know how long he had been there, not saying nothing, just setting there and looking at Thorpe; then he turned the mule and rid back up the road toward them hills he hadn't ought to never have left. Except maybe it's like the fellow says, and there ain't nowhere you can hide from either lightning or love. And I didn't know why then. I hadn't associated them names. I knowed that Thorpe was familiar to me, but that other business had been twenty years ago and I had forgotten it until I heard about that hung jury of yourn. Of course he wasn't going to vote Bookwright free.... It's dark. Let's go to supper.'

But it was only twenty-two miles to town now, and we were on the highway now, the gravel; we would be home in an hour and a half, because sometimes we could make thirty and thirty-five miles an hour, and Uncle Gavin said that someday all the main roads in Mississippi would be paved like the streets in Memphis and every family in America would own a car. We were going fast now.

'Of course he wasn't,' Uncle Gavin said. The lowly and invincible of the earth — to endure and endure and then endure, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. Of course he wasn't going to vote Bookwright free.'

'I would have,' I said. 'I would have freed him. Because Buck Thorpe was bad. He—'

'No, you wouldn't,' Uncle Gavin said. He gripped my knee with one hand even though we were going fast, the yellow light beam level on the yellow road, the bugs swirling down into the light beam and ballooning away. 'It wasn't Buck Thorpe, the adult, the man. He would have shot that man as quick as Bookwright did, if he had been in Bookwright's place. It was because somewhere in that debased and brutalized flesh which Bookwright slew there still remained, not the spirit maybe, but at least the memory, of that little boy, that Jackson and Longstreet Fentry, even though the man the boy had become didn't know it, and only Fentry did. And you wouldn't have freed him either. Don't ever forget that. Never.'

An Error in Chemistry

IT WAS JOEL Flint himself who telephoned the sheriff that he had killed his wife. And when the sheriff and his deputy reached the scene, drove the twenty-odd miles into the remote back-country region where old Wesley Pritchel lived, Joel Flint himself met them at the door and asked them in. He was the foreigner, the outlander, the Yankee who had come into our county two years ago as the operator of a pitch — a lighted booth where a roulette wheel spun against a bank of nickel-plated pistols and razors and watches and harmonicas, in a traveling street carnival — and who when the carnival departed had remained, and two months later was married to Pritchel's only living child: the dim-witted spinster of almost forty who until then had shared her

irascible and violent-tempered father's almost hermit-existence on the good though small farm which he owned.

But even after the marriage, old Pritchel still seemed to draw the line against his son-in-law. He built a new small house for them two miles from his own, where the daughter was presently raising chickens for the market. According to rumor old Pritchel, who hardly ever went anywhere anyway, had never once entered the new house, so that he saw even this last remaining child only once a week. This would he when she and her husband would drive each Sunday in the second-hand truck in which the son-in-law marketed the chickens, to take Sunday dinner with old Pritchel in the old house where Pritchel now did his own cooking and housework. In fact, the neighbors said the only reason he allowed the son-in-law to enter his house even then was so that his daughter could prepare him a decent hot meal once a week. So for the next two years, occasionally in Jefferson, the county seat, but more frequently in the little cross-roads hamlet near his home, the son-in-law would be seen and heard too. He was a man in the middle forties, neither short nor tall nor thin nor stout (in fact, he and his father-in-law could easily have cast that same shadow which later for a short time they did), with a cold, contemptuous intelligent face and a voice lazy with anecdotes of the teeming outland which his listeners had never seen — a dweller among the cities, though never from his own accounting long resident in any one of them, who within the first three months of his residence among them had impressed upon the people whose way of life he had assumed, one definite personal habit by which he presently became known throughout the whole county, even by men who had never seen him. This was a harsh and contemptuous derogation, sometimes without even provocation or reason or opportunity, of our local southern custom of drinking whiskey by mixing sugar and water with it. He called it effeminacy, a pap for children, himself drinking even our harsh, violent, illicit and unaged homemade com whiskey without even a sip of water to follow it. Then on this last Sunday morning he telephoned the sheriff that he had killed his wife and met the officers at his father-in-law's door and said: 'I have already carried her into the house. So you won't need to waste breath telling me I shouldn't have touched her until you got here.'

'I reckon it was all right to take her up out of the dirt,' the sheriff said.

'It was an accident, I believe you said.'

'Then you believe wrong,' Flint said. 'I said I killed her.' And that was all.

The sheriff brought him to Jefferson and locked him in a cell in the jail.

And that evening after supper the sheriff came through the side door into the study where Uncle Gavin was supervising me in the drawing of a brief. Uncle Gavin was only county, not District, attorney. But he and the sheriff, who had been sheriff off and on even longer than Uncle Gavin had been county attorney, had been friends all that while. I mean friends in the sense that two men who play chess together are friends, even though sometimes their aims are diametrically opposed. I heard them discuss it once.

'I'm interested in truth,' the sheriff said.

'So am I,' Uncle Gavin said. 'It's so rare. But I am more interested in justice and human beings.'

'Ain't truth and justice the same thing?' the sheriff said. 'Since when?'

Uncle Gavin said. 'In my time I have seen truth that was anything under the sun but just, and I have seen justice using tools and instruments I wouldn't want to touch with a ten-foot fence rail.'

The sheriff told us about the killing, standing, looming above the table-lamp — a big man with little hard eyes, talking down at Uncle Gavin's wild shock of prematurely white hair and his quick thin face, while Uncle Gavin sat on the back of his neck practically, his legs crossed on the desk, chewing the bit of his corncob pipe and spinning and unspinning around his finger his watch chain weighted with the Phi Beta Kappa key he got at Harvard.

Why?' Uncle Gavin said.

'I asked him that, myself,' the sheriff said. 'He said, "Why do men ever kill their wives? Call it for the insurance."'

'That's wrong,' Uncle Gavin said. 'It's women who murder their spouses for immediate personal gain — insurance policies, or at what they believe is the instigation or promise of another man. Men murder their wives from hatred or rage or despair, or to keep them from talking since not even bribery not even simple absence can bridle a woman's tongue.'

'Correct,' the sheriff said. He blinked his little eyes at Uncle Gavin. 'It's like he wanted to be locked up in jail. Not like he was submitting to

arrest because he had killed his wife, but like he had killed her so that he would be locked up, arrested. Guarded.'

Why?' Uncle Gavin said.

'Correct too,' the sheriff said. When a man deliberately locks doors behind himself, it's because he is afraid. And a man who would voluntarily have himself locked up on suspicion of murder...' He batted his hard little eyes at Uncle Gavin for a good ten seconds while Uncle Gavin looked just as hard back at him. 'Because he wasn't afraid. Not then nor at any time. Now and then you meet a man that aint ever been afraid, not even of himself. He's one.'

'If that's what he wanted you to do,' Uncle Gavin said, 'why did you do it?'

'You think I should have waited a while?'

They looked at one another a while. Uncle Gavin wasn't spinning the watch chain now. 'All right,' he said. 'Old Man Pritchel—'

'I was coming to that,' the sheriff said. 'Nothing.'

'Nothing?' Uncle Gavin said. You didn't even see him?' And the sheriff told that too — how as he and the deputy and Flint stood on the gallery, they suddenly saw the old man looking out at them through a window — a face rigid, furious, glaring at them through the glass for a second and then withdrawn, vanished, leaving an impression of furious exultation and raging triumph, and something else....

'Fear?' the sheriff said. 'No. I tell you, he wasn't afraid — Oh,' he said.

'You mean Pritchel.' This time he looked at Uncle Gavin so long that at last Uncle Gavin said, 'All right. Go on.' And the sheriff told that too: how they entered the house, the hall, and he stopped and knocked at the locked door of the room where they had seen the face and he even called old Pritchel's name and still got no answer. And how they went on and found Mrs. Flint on a bed in the back room with the shotgun wound in her neck, and Flint's battered truck drawn up beside the back steps as if they had just got out of it.

'There were three dead squirrels in the truck,' the sheriff said. 'Td say they had been shot since daylight' — and the blood on the steps, and on the ground between the steps and the truck, as if she had been shot from inside the truck, and the gun itself, still containing the spent shell, standing just inside the hall door as a man would put it down when he

entered the house. And how the sheriff went back up the hall and knocked again at the locked door —

‘Locked where?’ Uncle Gavin said.

On the inside, the sheriff said — and shouted against the door’s blank surface that he would break the door in if Mr. Pritchel didn’t answer and open it, and how this time the harsh furious old voice answered, shouting:

‘Get out of my house! Take that murderer and get out of my house.’

‘You will have to make a statement,’ the sheriff answered.

‘I’ll make my statement when the time comes for it!’ the old man shouted. ‘Get out of my house, all of you!’ And how he (the sheriff) sent the deputy in the car to fetch the nearest neighbor, and he and Flint waited until the deputy came back with a man and his wife. Then they brought Flint on to town and locked him up and the sheriff telephoned back to old Pritchel’s house and the neighbor answered and told him how the old man was still locked in the room, refusing to come out or even to answer save to order them all (several other neighbors had arrived by now, word of the tragedy having spread) to leave. But some of them would stay in the house, no matter what the seemingly crazed old man said or did, and the funeral would be tomorrow.

‘And that’s all?’ Uncle Gavin said.

That’s all,’ the sheriff said. ‘Because it’s too late now.’

‘For instance?’ Uncle Gavin said.

‘The wrong one is dead.’

‘That happens,’ Uncle Gavin said.

‘For instance?’

‘That clay-pit business.’

‘What clay-pit business?’ Because the whole county knew about old Pritchel’s clay-pit. It was a formation of malleable clay right in the middle of his farm, of which people in the adjacent countryside made quite serviceable though crude pottery — those times they could manage to dig that much of it before Mr. Pritchel saw them and drove them off. For generations, Indian and even aboriginal relics — flint arrow-heads, axes and dishes and skulls and thigh-bones and pipes — had been excavated from it by random hoys, and a few years ago a party of archaeologists from the State University had dug into it until Old Man Pritchel got there, this time with a shotgun. But everybody

knew this; this was not what the sheriff was telling, and now Uncle Gavin was sitting erect in the chair and his feet were on the floor now. 'I hadn't heard about this,' Uncle Gavin said.

'It's common knowledge out there,' the sheriff said. 'In fact, you might call it the local outdoor sport. It began about six weeks ago. They are three northern men. They're trying to buy the whole farm from old Pritchel to get the pit and manufacture some kind of road material out of the clay, I understand. The folks out there are still watching them trying to buy it. Apparently the northerners are the only folks in the country that don't know yet old Pritchel aint got any notion of selling even the clay to them, let alone the farm.'

They've made him an offer, of course.'

'Probably a good one. It runs all the way from two hundred and fifty dollars to two hundred and fifty thousand, depending on who's telling it. Them northerners just don't know how to handle him. If they would just set in and convince him that everybody in the county is hoping he won't sell it to them, they could probably buy it before supper tonight.'

He stared at Uncle Gavin, batting his eyes again. 'So the wrong one is dead, you see. If it was that clay pit, he's no nearer to it than he was yesterday. He's worse off than he was yesterday. Then there wasn't anything between him and his pa-in-law's money but whatever private wishes and hopes and feelings that dim-witted girl might have had. Now there's a penitentiary wall, and likely a rope. It don't make sense. If he was afraid of a possible witness, he not only destroyed the witness before there was anything to be witnessed but also before there was any witness to be destroyed. He set up a signboard saying "Watch me and mark me," not just to this county and this state but to all folks everywhere who believe the Book where it says Thou Shalt Not Kill — and then went and got himself locked up in the very place created to punish him for this crime and restrain him from the next one. Something went wrong.'

Something went wrong.'

'I hope so,' Uncle Gavin said.

'You hope so?'

'Yes. That something went wrong in what has already happened, rather than what has already happened is not finished yet.'

'How not finished yet?' the sheriff said. 'How can he finish whatever it is he aims to finish? Aint he already locked up in jail, with the only man

in the county who might make bond to free him being the father of the woman he as good as confessed he murdered?’

‘It looks that way,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘Was there an insurance policy?’ ‘I don’t know,’ the sheriff said. ‘I’ll find that out tomorrow. But that aint what I want to know. I want to know why he wanted to be locked up in jail. Because I tell you he wasn’t afraid, then nor at any other time. You already guessed who it was out there that was afraid.’

But we were not to learn that answer yet. And there was an insurance policy. But by the time we learned about that, something else had happened which sent everything else temporarily out of mind. At daylight the next morning, when the jailer went and looked into Flint’s cell, it was empty. He had not broken out. He had walked out, out of the cell, out of the jail, out of the town and apparently out of the country — no trace, no sign, no man who had seen him or seen anyone who might have been him. It was not yet sunup when I let the sheriff in at the side study door; Uncle Gavin was already sitting up in bed when we reached his bedroom.

‘Old Man Pritchel!’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘Only we are already too late.’ ‘What’s the matter with you?’ the sheriff said. ‘I told you last night he was already too late the second he pulled that wrong trigger. Besides, just to be in position to ease your mind, I’ve already telephoned out there. Been a dozen folks in the house all night, sitting up with the — with Mrs. Flint, and old Pritchel’s still locked in his room and all right too. They heard him bumping and blundering around in there just before daylight, and so somebody knocked on the door and kept on knocking and calling him until he finally opened the door wide enough to give them all a good cussing and order them again to get out of his house and stay out. Then he locked the door again. Old fellow’s been hit pretty hard, I reckon. He must have seen it when it happened, and at his age, and having already druv the whole human race away from his house except that half-wit girl, until at last even she up and left him, even at any cost. I reckon it aint any wonder she married even a man like Flint. What is it the Book says? ‘Who lives by the sword, so shall he die.’? — the sword in old Pritchel’s case being whatever it was he decided he preferred in place of human beings, while he was still young and hale and strong and didn’t need them. But to keep your mind easy, I sent Bryan Ewell out there thirty minutes ago and told him not to let

that locked door — or old Pritchel himself, if he comes out of it — out of his sight until I told him to, and I sent Ben Berry and some others out to Flint's house and told Ben to telephone me. And I'll call you when I hear anything. Which won't be anything, because that fellow's gone. He got caught yesterday because he made a mistake, and the fellow that can walk out of that jail like he did aint going to make two mistakes within five hundred miles of Jefferson or Mississippi either.'

'Mistake?' Uncle Gavin said. 'He just told us this morning why he wanted to be put in jail.'

'And why was that?'

'So he could escape from it.'

'And why get out again, when he was already out and could have stayed out by just running instead of telephoning me he had committed a murder?'

'I don't know,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Are you sure Old Man Pritchel—'

'Didn't I just tell you folks saw and talked to him through that half-opened door this morning? And Bryan Ewell probably sitting in a chair tilted against that door right this minute — or he better be. I'll telephone you if I hear anything. But I've already told you that too — that it won't be nothing.' He telephoned an hour later. He had just talked to the deputy who had searched Flint's house, reporting only that Flint had been there sometime in the night — the back door open, an oil lamp shattered on the floor where Flint had apparently knocked it while fumbling in the dark, since the deputy found, behind a big, open, hurriedly ransacked trunk, a twisted spill of paper which Flint had obviously used to light his search of the trunk — a scrap of paper torn from a billboard —

'A what?' Uncle Gavin said.

'That's what I said,' the sheriff said. 'And Ben says, "All right, then send somebody else out here, if my reading aint good enough to suit you. It was a scrap of paper which was evidently tore from the corner of a billboard because it says on the scrap in English that even I can read—" and I says, "Tell me exactly what it is you're holding in your hand." And he did. It's a page, from a magazine or a small paper named Billboard or maybe The Billboard. There's some more printing on it but Ben can't read it because he lost his spectacles back in the woods while he was surrounding the house to catch Flint doing whatever it was he expected

to catch him doing — cooking breakfast, maybe. Do you know what it is?’

‘Yes,’ Uncle Gavin said.

‘Do you know what it means, what it was doing there?’

‘Yes,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘But why?’

‘Well, I can’t tell you. And he never will. Because he’s gone, Gavin. Oh, we’ll catch him — somebody will, I mean, someday, somewhere. But it won’t be here, and it won’t be for this. It’s like that poor, harmless, half-witted girl wasn’t important enough for even that justice you claim you prefer above truth, to avenge her.’

And that did seem to be all of it. Mrs. Flint was buried that afternoon. The old man was still locked in his room during the funeral, and even after they departed with the coffin for the churchyard, leaving in the house only the deputy in his tilted chair outside the locked door, and two neighbor women who remained to cook a hot meal for old Pritchel, finally prevailing on him to open the door long enough to take the tray from them. And he thanked them for it, clumsily and gruffly, thanking them for their kindness during all the last twenty-four hours. One of the women was moved enough to offer to return tomorrow and cook another meal for him, whereupon his old-time acerbity and choler returned and the kind-hearted woman was even regretting that she had made the offer at all when the harsh, cracked old voice from inside the half-closed door added: ‘I don’t need no help. I ain’t had no darter nohow in two years,’ and the door slammed in their faces and the bolt shot home.

Then the two women left, and there was only the deputy sitting in his tilted chair beside the door. He was back in town the next morning, telling how the old man had snatched the door suddenly open and kicked the chair out from beneath the dozing deputy before he could move and ordered him off the place with violent curses, and how as he (the deputy) peered at the house from around the corner of the bam a short time later, the shotgun blared from the kitchen window and the charge of squirrel shot slammed into the stable wall not a yard above his head. The sheriff telephoned that to Uncle Gavin too:

‘So he’s out there alone again. And since that’s what he seems to want, it’s all right with me. Sure I feel sorry for him. I feel sorry for anybody that has to live with a disposition like his. Old and alone, to have all this

happen to him. It's like being snatched up by a tornado and whirled and slung and then slammed right back down where you started from, without even the benefit and pleasure of having taken a trip. What was it I said yesterday about living by the sword?'

'I don't remember,' Uncle Gavin said. 'You said a lot yesterday.'

'And a lot of it was right. I said it was finished yesterday. And it is. That fellow will trip himself again someday, but it won't be here.'

Only it was more than that. It was as if Flint had never been here at all — no mark, no scar to show that he had ever been in the jail cell. The meagre group of people who pitied but did not mourn, departing, separating, from the raw grave of the woman who had had little enough hold on our lives at best, whom a few of us had known without ever having seen her and some of us had seen without ever knowing her.... The childless old man whom most of us had never seen at all, once more alone in the house where, as he said himself, there had been no child anyway in two years....

'As though none of it had ever happened,' Uncle Gavin said. 'As if Flint had not only never been in that cell but had never existed at all. That triumvirate of murderer, victim, and bereaved — not three flesh-and-blood people but just an illusion, a shadow-play on a sheet — not only neither men nor women nor young nor old but just three labels which cast two shadows for the simple and only reason that it requires a minimum of two in order to postulate the verities of injustice and grief. That's it. They have never cast but two shadows, even though they did bear three labels, names. It was as though only by dying did that poor woman ever gain enough substance and reality even to cast a shadow.'

'But somebody killed her,' I said.

'Yes,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Somebody killed her.'

That was at noon. About five that afternoon I answered the telephone. It was the sheriff. 'Is your uncle there?' he said. Tell him to wait. I'm coming right over.' He had a stranger with him — a city man, in neat city clothes.

This is Mr. Workman,' the sheriff said. The adjustor. There was an insurance policy. For five hundred, taken out seventeen months ago. Hardly enough to murder anybody for.'

'If it ever was a murder,' the adjustor said. His voice was cold too, cold yet at the same time at a sort of seething boil. That policy will be paid

at once, without question or any further investigation. And I'll tell you something else you people here don't seem to know yet. That old man is crazy. It was not the man Flint who should have been brought to town and locked up.'

Only it was the sheriff who told that too: how yesterday afternoon the insurance company's Memphis office had received a telegram, signed with Old Man Pritchel's name, notifying them of the insured's death, and the adjustor arrived at Old Man Pritchel's house about two o'clock this afternoon and within thirty minutes had extracted from Old Man Pritchel himself the truth about his daughter's death: the facts of it which the physical evidence — the truck and the three dead squirrels and the blood on the steps and on the ground — supported. This was that while the daughter was cooking dinner, Pritchel and Flint had driven the truck down to Pritchel's woods lot to shoot squirrels for supper— 'And that's correct,' the sheriff said. 'I asked. They did that every Sunday morning. Pritchel wouldn't let anybody but Flint shoot his squirrels, and he wouldn't even let Flint shoot them unless he was along' — and they shot the three squirrels and Flint drove the truck back to the house and up beside the back steps and the woman came out to take the squirrels and Flint opened the door and picked up the gun to get out of the truck and stumbled, caught his heel on the edge of the running-board and flinging up the hand carrying the gun to break his fall, so that the muzzle of the gun was pointing right at his wife's head when it went off. And Old Man Pritchel not only denied having sent the wire, he violently and profanely repudiated any and all implication or suggestion that he even knew the policy existed at all. He denied to the very last that the shooting had been any part of an accident. He tried to revoke his own testimony as to what had happened when the daughter came out to get the dead squirrels and the gun went off, repudiating his own story when he realized that he had cleared his son-in-law of murder, snatching the paper from the adjustor's hand, which he apparently believed was the policy itself, and attempting to tear it up and destroy it before the adjustor could stop him.

'Why?' Uncle Gavin said.

‘Why not?’ the sheriff said. We had let Flint get away; Mr. Pritchel knew he was loose somewhere in the world. Do you reckon he aimed to let the man that killed his daughter get paid for it?’

‘Maybe,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘But I don’t think so. I don’t think he is worried about that at all. I think Mr. Pritchel knows that Joel Flint is not going to collect that policy or any other prize. Maybe he knew a little country jail like ours wasn’t going to hold a wide-travelled ex-carnival man, and he expected Flint to come back out there and this time he was ready for him. And I think that as soon as people stop worrying him, he will send you word to come out there, and he will tell you so.’

‘Hah,’ the adjustor said. Then they must have stopped worrying him. Listen to this. When I got there this afternoon, there were three men in the parlor with him. They had a certified check. It was a big check. They were buying his farm from him — lock, stock and barrel — and I didn’t know land in this country was worth that much either, incidentally. He had the deed all drawn and signed, but when I told them who I was, they agreed to wait until I could get back to town here and tell somebody — the sheriff, probably. And I left, and that old lunatic was still standing in the door, shaking that deed at me and croaking: ‘Tell the sheriff, damn you! Get a lawyer, too! Get that lawyer Stevens. I hear tell he claims to be pretty slick!’”

‘We thank you,’ the sheriff said. He spoke and moved with that deliberate, slightly florid, old-fashioned courtesy which only big men can wear, except that his was constant; this was the first time I ever saw him quit anyone shortly, even when he would see them again tomorrow. He didn’t even look at the adjustor again. ‘My car’s outside,’ he told Uncle Gavin.

So just before sunset we drove up to the neat picket fence enclosing Old Man Pritchel’s neat, bare little yard and neat, tight little house, in front of which stood the big, dust-covered car with its city license plates and Flint’s battered truck with a strange Negro youth at the wheel — strange because Old Man Pritchel had never had a servant of any sort save his daughter.

‘He’s leaving too,’ Uncle Gavin said.

‘That’s his right,’ the sheriff said. We mounted the steps. But before we reached the door, Old Man Pritchel was already shouting for us to come in — the harsh, cracked old man’s voice shouting at us from

beyond the hall, beyond the door to the dining room where a tremendous old-fashioned telescope bag, strapped and bulging, sat on a chair and the three northerners in dusty khaki stood watching the door and Old Man Pritchel himself sat at the table. And I saw for the first time (Uncle Gavin told me he had seen him only twice) the uncombed thatch of white hair, a fierce tangle of eyebrows above steel-framed spectacles, a jut of untrimmed mustache and a scrabble of beard stained with chewing tobacco to the color of dirty cotton.

'Come in,' he said. That lawyer Stevens, heh?'

'Yes. Mr. Pritchel,' the sheriff said.

'Hehm,' the old man barked. 'Well, Hub,' he said. 'Can I sell my land, or can't I?'

'Of course, Mr. Pritchel,' the sheriff said. We hadn't heard you aimed to.'

'Heh,' the old man said. 'Maybe this changed my mind.' The check and the folded deed both lay on the table in front of him. He pushed the check toward the sheriff. He didn't look at Uncle Gavin again; he just said: 'You, too.' Uncle Gavin and the sheriff moved to the table and stood looking down at the check. Neither of them touched it. I could see their faces. There was nothing in them. 'Well?' Mr. Pritchel said. 'It's a good price,' the sheriff said.

This time the old man said 'Hah!' short and harsh. He unfolded the deed and spun it to face, not the sheriff but Uncle Gavin. 'Well?' he said. 'You, lawyer?'

'It's all right, Mr. Pritchel,' Uncle Gavin said. The old man sat back, both hands on the table before him, his head tilted back as he looked up at the sheriff.

'Well?' he said. 'Fish, or cut bait.'

It's your land,' the sheriff said. 'What you do with it is no man's business else.'

'Hah,' Mr. Pritchel said. He didn't move. 'All right, gentlemen.' He didn't move at all; one of the strangers came forward and took up the deed.

'I'll be out of the house in thirty minutes. You can take possession then, or you will find the key under the mat tomorrow morning.' I don't believe he even looked after them as they went out, though I couldn't be sure because of the glare on his spectacles. Then I knew that he was looking at the sheriff, had been looking at him for a minute or more,

and then I saw that he was trembling, jerking and shaking as the old tremble, although his hands on the table were as motionless as two lumps of the clay would have been.

‘So you let him get away,’ he said.

That’s right,’ the sheriff said. ‘But you wait, Mr. Pritchel. We’ll catch him.’

‘When?’ the old man said. Two years? Five years? Ten years? I am seventy-four years old; buried my wife and four children. Where will I be in ten years?’

‘Here, I hope,’ the sheriff said.

‘Here?’ the old man said. ‘Didn’t you just hear me tell that fellow he could have this house in thirty minutes? I own a automobile truck now; I got money to spend now, and something to spend it for.’

‘Spend it for what?’ the sheriff said. ‘That check? Even this boy here would have to start early and run late to get shut of that much money in ten years.’

‘Spend it running down the man that killed my Ellie!’ He rose suddenly, thrusting his chair back. He staggered, but when the sheriff stepped quickly toward him, he flung his arm out and seemed actually to strike the sheriff back a pace. ‘Let be,’ he said, panting. Then he said, harsh and loud in his cracked shaking voice: ‘Get out of here! Get out of my house all of you!’ But the sheriff didn’t move, nor did we, and after a moment the old man stopped trembling. But he was still holding to the table edge. But his voice was quiet. ‘Hand me my whiskey. On the sideboard. And three glasses.’ The sheriff fetched them — an old-fashioned cut-glass decanter and three heavy tumblers — and set them before him. And when he spoke this time, his voice was almost gentle and I knew what the woman had felt that evening when she offered to come back tomorrow and cook another meal for him: ‘You’ll have to excuse me. I’m tired. I’ve had a heap of trouble lately, and I reckon I’m wore out. Maybe a change is what I need.’

‘But not tonight, Mr. Pritchel,’ the sheriff said.

And then again, as when the woman had offered to come back and cook, he ruined it. ‘Maybe I won’t start tonight,’ he said. ‘And then maybe again I will. But you folks want to get on back to town, so we’ll just drink to goodbye and better days.’ He unstopped the decanter and poured whiskey into the three tumblers and set the decanter down

and looked about the table. 'You, boy,' he said, 'hand me the water bucket. It's on the back gallery shelf.' Then, as I turned and started toward the door, I saw him reach and take up the sugar bowl and plunge the spoon into the sugar and then I stopped too. And I remember Uncle Gavin's and the sheriff's faces and I could not believe my eyes either as he put the spoonful of sugar into the raw whiskey and started to stir it. Because I had not only watched Uncle Gavin, and the sheriff when he would come to play chess with Uncle Gavin, but Uncle Gavin's father too who was my grandfather, and my own father before he died, and all the other men who would come to Grandfather's house who drank cold toddies as we call them, and even I knew that to make a cold toddy you do not put the sugar into the whiskey because sugar will not dissolve in raw whiskey but only lies in a little intact swirl like sand at the bottom of the glass; that you first put the water into the glass and dissolve the sugar into the water, in a ritual almost; then you add the whiskey, and that anyone like Old Man Pritchel who must have been watching men make cold toddies for nearly seventy years and had been making and drinking them himself for at least fifty-three, would know this too. And I remember how the man we had thought was Old Man Pritchel realized too late what he was doing and jerked his head up just as Uncle Gavin sprang toward him, and swung his arm back and hurled the glass at Uncle Gavin's head, and the thud of the flung glass against the wall and the dark splash it made and the crash of the table as it went over and the raw stink of the spilled whiskey from the decanter and Uncle Gavin shouting at the sheriff: 'Grab him, Hub! Grab him!'

Then we were all three on him. I remember the savage strength and speed of the body which was no old man's body; I saw him duck beneath the sheriff's arm and the entire wig came off; I seemed to see his whole face wrenching itself furiously free from beneath the makeup which bore the painted wrinkles and the false eyebrows. When the sheriff snatched the beard and mustache off, the flesh seemed to come with it, springing quick and pink and then crimson, as though in that last desperate cast he had had to heard, disguise, not his face so much as the very blood which he had spilled.

It took us only thirty minutes to find old Mr. Pritchel's body. It was under the feed room in the stable, in a shallow and hurried trench,

scarcely covered from sight. His hair had not only been dyed, it had been trimmed, the eyebrows trimmed and dyed too, and the mustache and beard shaved off. He was wearing the identical garments which Flint had worn to the jail and he had been struck at least one crushing blow on the face, apparently with the flat of the same axe which had split his skull from behind, so that his features were almost unrecognizable and, after another two or three weeks underground, would perhaps have been even unidentifiable as those of the old man. And pillowed carefully beneath the head was a big ledger almost six inches thick and weighing almost twenty pounds and filled with the carefully pasted clippings which covered twenty years and more. It was the record and tale of the gift, the talent, which at the last he had misapplied and betrayed and which had then turned and destroyed him. It was all there: inception, course, peak, and then decline — the handbills, the theatre programs, the news clippings, and even one actual ten-foot poster:

SIGNOR CANOVA

Master of Illusion

He Disappears While You Watch Him

Management offers One Thousand Dollars in Cash To Any Man or

Woman or

Child Who...

Last of all was the final clipping, from our Memphis-printed daily paper, under the Jefferson date line, which was news and not press-agentry. This was the account of that last gamble in which he had cast his gift and his life against money, wealth, and lost — the clipped fragment of news-sheet which recorded the end not of one life hut of three, though even here two of them cast but one shadow: not only that of the harmless dim-witted woman but of Joel Flint and Signor Canova too, with scattered among them and marking the date of that death too, the cautiously worded advertisements in Variety and Billboard, using the new changed name and no takers probably, since Signor Canova the Great was already dead then and already serving his purgatory in this circus for six months and that circus for eight — bandsman, ringman,

Bornean wild man, down to the last stage where he touched bottom: the travelling from country town to country town with a roulette wheel wired against imitation watches and pistols which would not shoot, until one day instinct perhaps showed him one more chance to use the gift again.

‘And lost this time for good,’ the sheriff said. We were in the study again. Beyond the open side door fireflies winked and drifted across the summer night and the crickets and tree-frogs cheeped and whirred. ‘It was that insurance policy.

If that adjustor hadn’t come to town and sent us back out there in time to watch him try to dissolve sugar in raw whiskey, he would have collected that check and taken that truck and got clean away. Instead, he sends for the adjustor, then he practically dares you and me to come out there and see past that wig and paint—’

‘You said something the other day about his destroying his witness too soon,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘She wasn’t his witness. The witness he destroyed was the one we were supposed to find under that feed room.’

‘Witness to what?’ the sheriff said. To the fact that Joel Flint no longer existed?’

Tartly. But mostly to the first crime, the old one: the one in which Signor Canova died. He intended for that witness to be found. That’s why he didn’t bury it, hide it better and deeper. As soon as somebody found it, he would be at once and forever not only rich but free, free not only of Signor Canova who had betrayed him by dying eight years ago, but of Joel Flint too. Even if we had found it before he had a chance to leave, what would he have said?’

‘He ought to have battered the face a little more,’ the sheriff said.

‘I doubt it,’ Uncle Gavin said. What would he have said?’

‘All right,’ the sheriff said. ‘What?’

“‘Yes, I killed him. He murdered my daughter.’” And what would you have said, being, as you are, the Law?’

‘Nothing,’ the sheriff said after a time.

‘Nothing,’ Uncle Gavin said. A dog was barking somewhere, not a big dog, and then a screech-owl flew into the mulberry tree in the back yard and began to cry, plaintive and tremulous, and all the little furred creatures would be moving now — the field mice, the possums and

rabbits and I did the legless vertebrates — creeping or scurrying about the dark land which beneath the rainless summer stars was just dark: not desolate. 'That's one reason he did it.' Uncle Gavin said.

'One reason?' the sheriff said. 'What's the other?'

'The other is the real one. It had nothing to do with the money; he probably could not have helped obeying it if he had wanted to. That gift he had. His first regret right now is probably not that he was caught, but that he was caught too soon, before the body was found and he had the chance to identify it as his own; before Signor Canova had had time to toss his gleaming top hat vanishing behind him and bow to the amazed and stormlike staccato of adulant palms and turn and stride once or twice and then himself vanish from the pacing spotlight — gone, to be seen no more. Think what he did: he convicted himself of murder when he could very likely have escaped by flight; he acquitted himself of it after he was already free again. Then he dared you and me to come out there and actually be his witnesses and guarantors in the consummation of the very act which he knew we had been trying to prevent. What else could the possession of such a gift as his have engendered, and the successful practising of it have increased, but a supreme contempt for mankind? You told me yourself that he had never been afraid in his life.'

'Yes,' the sheriff said. 'The Book itself says somewhere, Know thyself. Ain't there another book somewhere that says, Man, fear thyself, thine arrogance and vanity and pride? You ought to know; you claim to be a book man. Didn't you tell me that's what that luck-charm on your watch chain means? What book is that in?'

'It's in all of them,' Uncle Gavin said. 'The good ones, I mean. It's said in a lot of different ways, but it's there.'

Knight's Gambit

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

Their name was Harriss. They were brother and sister. At first glance they might have been twins, not just to strangers but to most of

Jefferson too. Because there were probably not half a dozen people in Yoknapatawpha County who actually knew which one was the oldest. They lived six miles from town on what twenty years ago had been just another plantation raising cotton for the market and com and hay to feed the mules which made the cotton. But now it was a county (or for that matter, a north Mississippi) landmark: a mile square of white panel and rail paddock-and pasture-fences and electric-lit stables and a once-simple country house transmogrified now into something a little smaller than a Before-the-War Hollywood set.

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

But the boy didn't wait for that either. Then he saw that the boy held his sister, not by the arm or elbow, but by the forearm above the wrist like in the old lithographs of the policeman with his cringing captive or the victory-flushed soldier with his shrinking Sabine prey. And that was when he saw the girl's face.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Or at least what he thought it was she wanted to say. Because he should have known then that his uncle probably knew already more than the boy or the girl either intended to say yet; perhaps, even then, all of it. But it would be a little while yet before he would realise that last. And the reason he was so slow about it was his uncle himself. 'Yes,' the boy said, in exactly the same tone and voice which had declined to address the older man by any title of courtesy or deference to age; he — Charles — watched the boy staring at his uncle too — the same delicate face which the sister had, but with nothing delicate about the eyes. They — the eyes — stared at his uncle without even bothering to be hard: they just waited. 'Captain Gualdres, our so-called house-guest. We want him out of our house and out of Jefferson too.' 'I see,' his uncle said. He said, 'I'm on the draft board here. I don't remember your name in the registration.' But the boy's stare didn't change at all. It was not even contemptuous. It just waited.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now it seemed to him that his uncle really looked at the boy for the first time. 'I see,' his uncle said. Now his uncle's voice was different. It was no louder, there was just no more gentleness in it, as though for the first time his uncle could (or anyway had) stop speaking to the sister: That's your affair and your right. I ask you again: why should I do anything about it, even if I could?' And now the two of them — his uncle and the boy — spoke crisply and rapidly; it was almost as though

they stood toe to toe, slapping each other: 'He was engaged to marry my sister. When he found out that the money would still be our mother's as long as she lived, he ratted.'

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

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

'Is this true?'

'Not engaged,' she whispered.

'But you love him?'

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

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

'Say it in English if you can,' he said.

'I wont take your case,' his uncle said.

For a moment still the boy stared at his uncle, holding the girl by the wrist. Then he — Charles — thought the boy was going to jerk, fling her bodily through the door ahead of him. But he even released her, himself (not the host, the owner of the door which he had already passed through once without even waiting for permission, let alone invitation) opening the door, then standing aside for the girl to precede him through it — a gesture, a pantomime of courtesy and deference even when automatic from habit and early training, as his was: automatic: and from long habit and the best of training under the best masters and tutors and preceptors in what the ladies of Yoknapatawpha County anyway would call the best of company. But there was no difference in it now: only arrogance: swaggering, insulting not just to whom offered but to everyone watching it too, not even looking at the sister for whom he held the door but still staring at the man twice his age whose domicile he had now violated twice.

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

Then they were gone. His uncle closed the door. But for a second his uncle didn't move. It was a pause, a check, an almost infinitesimal instant of immobility so quick and infinitesimal that probably nobody but he, Charles, would have remarked it. And he noticed it only because he had never before seen his uncle, that quick and nervous man garrulous in speech and movement both, falter or check in either once he had begun them. Then his uncle turned and came back toward where he, Charles, still sat at his side of the chessboard, not even realising yet, so rapid and staccato the whole thing had been, that he not only hadn't risen himself, he would hardly have had time to even if he had thought about it. And maybe his mouth was open a little too (he was not quite eighteen yet and even at eighteen there were still a few situations which even a man of his uncle's capacity for alarms would have to admit you might not be able to assimilate at the drop of a hat or the slam of a door, or at least hadn't needed to yet), sitting at his side of the half-played game watching his uncle come back to his chair and begin to sit back down and reach for the overturned cob pipe on the smoking stand all in the same motion.

'Warned?' he said.

'So he called it,' his uncle said, finishing the sitting down and approaching the bitt of the pipe to his mouth and already taking a match from the box on the smoking stand, so that the actual relighting of the pipe would be merely a continuation of the coming back from the door: 'I'd call it a threat, myself.'

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

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

Then his uncle dropped the match into the ashtray and with the other hand made the move which without doubt he had already planned out long before the knock came on the door which he had been too late or at least too slow to answer or even say 'Come in.' He made the move without even looking, moving the pawn which exposed his, Charles's, castle to the rook which his uncle had probably been convinced even

longer back than the plan that he, Charles, had forgotten to watch, and then sat there with his thin quick face and his shock of premature white hair and his Phi Beta Kappa key and the dime corncob pipe and the suit which looked as if he had slept in it every night since the day he bought it, and said, 'Move.'

But he, Charles, wasn't that stupid even if his mouth was open a little. In fact, he wasn't really surprised, after the first shock of that entrance, that abrupt and that informal, at this hour, this late at night and this cold: the boy without doubt dragging the girl by the arm right on through the front door without bothering to ring or knock there at all, on down the strange hall which, if he had never seen before, would have been seventeen or eighteen years ago as an infant at nurse, to a strange door and knocking this time true enough but not waiting for any response, and so into a room where for all he knew (or cared) his, Charles's, mother might have been undressing for bed.

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

Yet two strangers had burst not only into his home but into his private sitting room, and delivered first a peremptory command and then a threat and then burst out again, and his uncle had sat calmly back to an interrupted chess game and an interrupted pipe and completed a planned move as though he had not only not noticed any interruption but hadn't actually been interrupted. This, in the face of what should have supplied his uncle with food and scope for garrulity for the rest of the night, since of all possible things which might have entered this room from the whole county's remotest environs, this one concerned him least: the domestic entanglements or impasses or embroilments of a family a household six miles from town whose four members or at least inhabitants not a dozen people in the county knew more than merely to speak to on the street — the wealthy widow (millionairess, the county stipulated it), the softly fading still softly pretty woman in

the late thirties, and the two spoiled children a year apart somewhere under twenty-one, and the Argentine army captain house-guest, the four of them like the stock characters in the slick magazine serial, even to the foreign fortune-hunter.

For which reason (and maybe that was why, though it would take a good deal more than even his uncle's incredible taciturnity to convince him, Charles, of this) his uncle didn't really need to talk about it.

Because for twenty years now, long before there were any children even, let alone anything to draw the foreign fortune-hunter, the county had been watching it unfold as the subscribers read and wait and watch for the serial's next installment.

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

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

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

And there was something else: an appendix or anyway appendage; a legend to or within or behind the actual or original or initial legend; apocryphal's apocrypha. He not only couldn't remember whether it was from his mother or his grandmother that he had heard it, he couldn't even remember whether his mother or grandmother had actually seen it, known it at first hand, or had themselves heard it from someone else. It was something about a previous involvement, prior to the marriage: an engagement, a betrothal in form in fact, with (so the legend said) the father's formal consent, then broken, ruptured, voided — something — before the man she did marry ever appeared on the scene; — a betrothal in form according to the legend, yet so nebulous that even twenty years after, with twenty years of front gallery gossip for what his uncle called the Yoknapatawpha County spinster aunts of both sexes to have cast that romantic mantle over the shoulders of

every male under sixty who had ever taken a drink or bought a bale of cotton from her father, the other party to it had not only no name but no face too — which at least the other man had, the stranger, for all that he appeared without warning out of nowhere and (as it were) married her all in one burst, one breath, without any space between for anything called by so leisurely a name as betrothal, let alone courtship. So it — the first, the other one, the true betrothal, worthy of the word for the simple reason that nothing came of it but apocrypha's ephemeral footnote, already fading: a scent, a shadow, a whisper; a young girl's trembling Yes in an old garden at dusk, a flower exchanged or kept; and nothing remained unless perhaps the flower, the rose pressed between the pages of a book as the successors to his grandmother's generation occasionally did — was probably, without doubt, it had to be, the aftermath of some boy-and-girl business of her schooldays. But indubitably it was to someone in Jefferson or at least in the county. Because until now she had never been anywhere else to have involved or pledged her inclinations and then lost them.

But the man (or the boy) had no face, no name. He had no substance at all, in fact. He had no past, no yesterday; protagonist of a young girl's ephemeris: a shade, a shadow; himself virgin as the untried passions of that cloistered and nunlike maiden. Not even the five or six girls (his, Charles's, mother was one of them) who had been the nearest thing she had to friends during the three or four years she attended the female half of the Academy, even knew for certain that an engagement really existed, let alone the mortal partner in it. Because she never spoke of it herself, and even the rumor, legend's baseless legend, was born rather of a chance remark of her father's one day, and now its own part of the legend, to the effect that for a girl of sixteen to be partner in a betrothal was like a blind man being a partner in the ownership of an original Horatian manuscript.

But at least his uncle had a reason for not talking about this part of it because his uncle didn't even know about the first engagement except by second hand two or three years later. Because he — his uncle — was not there then; that was 1919 and once more Europe — Germany — was open to students and tourists too with student visas, and his uncle had already gone back to Heidelberg to finish his Ph.D., and when he returned five years later, she was already married to the other man, the

one who did have a name and a face even if nobody in the town or the county had heard the one nor seen the other until they came up the church aisle almost, and had borne the two children and then herself departed with them for Europe and the old other thing which had never been more than a shadow anyway, had been forgotten even in Jefferson, unless maybe on fading occasions over cups of coffee or tea or ladies' punch (and then more fading still over their own bassinets) by the six girls who had been her only friends.

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

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

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

And he, Charles, of course hadn't been in his grandmother's sitting room yet by about two years, but in his imagination he could see his

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

The whole plot was hind-part-before, his uncle said; all the roles and parts mixed-up and confused: the child acting and reading what should have been the parent's lines and character — assuming of course that the father's cryptic remark about the Horatian manuscript meant anything at all; not the parent but the child putting aside the childhood sweetheart (no matter how thin and ephemeral had been that entanglement, his uncle said, asking, so his, Charles's, mother told, for the second time if anyone had ever learned the sweetheart's name or what had become of him) in order to lift the mortgage on the homestead; the child herself choosing the man twice her age but with the Midas touch whom it should have been the father's role to pick and, if necessary, even bring pressure to bear to the end that the old romance (and his mother told how his uncle said again, No matter how worthless and ephemeral) be voided and forgotten and the marriage done: and worse: even if it had been the father who chose the husband, the plot would still have been upside down because the money (and his mother told how his uncle asked this twice too: if the man Harriss was already rich or if he just looked like, given enough time and enough people, he would be) was already the father's even if there wasn't much of it, because, as his uncle said, the man who read Latin for pleasure wouldn't have wanted any more than he already had. But they were married. Then for the next five years what his uncle called that whole broad generation of spinster aunts who, still alive seventy-five years after the Civil War, are the backbone of the South's

social and political and economic solidarity too, watched it as you watch the unfolding story in the magazine installments.

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

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

So there were more than just what his uncle called the spinster aunts who now believed they knew what sort of business Harriss's was, and that it had taken him long since a good deal further than New Orleans,

— four or five hundred miles further probably, since although this was in the twenties when absconders still considered Mexico far and safe enough, this one could hardly have found enough money in that family and that plantation to have made Mexico a solvent necessity, let alone have got there — or in fact to have found flight at all a necessity, and that it was probably only his own fears which had sent him even the three hundred miles which New Orleans represented.

But they were wrong. He came back Christmas. And once he was actually back, where they could see him again, unchanged — the same man, a little ageless, affable, high-colored, bland, without grace and without imagination, it was all right again. In fact, it had never been wrong; even the very ones who had said soonest and most positively that he had deserted her, were now the most convinced that they had never really believed it; when he left again after New Year's like any other husband unlucky enough to have his work, business, in one place and his family in another, nobody even marked the day. They didn't even bother about his business anymore. They knew what it was now: bootlegging: and no petty furtive peddling of pint bottles in hotel barbershops either, because when she drove through the Square now alone in the victoria, it was in a fur coat: at which — the coat — as soon as they saw it, the man himself rose in the town's and the county's opinion and respect too. Because he was not only successful, but in the best tradition he spent it on his womenfolks. And more than that: his was a still older and firmer American tradition; he was successful not even despite the Law but over the Law as though the Law itself and not failure were his vanquished adversary, moving among them on his returns home now, in an aura not merely of success, not solely of romance and bravado and the odor of spent cordite, but of delicacy too since he had had the taste to conduct his business in another state three hundred miles away.

And it was big business. He came back that summer in the biggest and shiniest car that had ever stayed overnight within the county's boundaries, with a strange Negro in a uniform who did nothing but drive and wash and polish it. And the first child came and then there was a nurse too: a light-colored Negress a good deal smarter, or at least snappier-looking than any other woman white or black either in Jefferson. Then Harriss was gone again, and now every day the four of

them — the wife, the infant, the uniformed chauffeur and the nurse — would be seen in the big glittering car, in and out of the Square and the town two and three times a day and not even always stopping anywhere, until pretty soon the county and the town knew also that it was the two Negroes who decided where and perhaps when too they would drive.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

anything which wasn't particularly his business, didn't know or at least didn't say.

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

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

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

He (Harriss) rebuilt the house. (He was making flying trips up every week now, in an aeroplane; they said it was the same aeroplane which ran the whiskey up from the Gulf to New Orleans.) That is, the new house was going to occupy the same ground the old one would have covered if there had been four of them just alike nailed together. It had been just a house, of one storey, with the gallery across the front where the old master would sit in his home-made chair with his toddy and his Catullus; when Harriss got through with it, it looked like the Southern mansion in the moving picture, only about five times as big and ten times as Southern.

Then he began to bring friends up from New Orleans with him, for week-ends and longer, and not just at Christmas and in the summer now, but four and five times during the year, as though the money was coming in so fast and smooth now that he didn't even have to stay there and watch it. Sometimes he wouldn't even come himself, but would just send them. He had a caretaker who lived in the house all the time: not the old one, the first renter, but a new one from New Orleans whom he called his butler: a fat Italian or Greek collarless in white silk shirt sleeves and a pistol loose in his hip pocket until the guests arrived. Then he would shave and put on a four-in-hand tie of soft scarlet silk, and a coat too when it was very cold: who they said in Jefferson wore the pistol even when he was serving meals, though nobody from town or the county either had ever eaten there to see.

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

There was a polo field too. It was beside the road, the highway; the men from town, the merchants and lawyers and deputy sheriffs, could drive out now and watch the riding without even getting out of their cars. And the men from the countryside too — the farmers, the landholders and the tenants and renters and croppers — who wore

boots only when walking in mud was unavoidable, and who rode horses only to get from one place to another without having to walk, and that in the same clothes they had put on to eat breakfast in, would come too on horses and mules taken from the plow, to stand along the fence and look at the fine horses a little but mostly at the clothes — the women and the men too who couldn't ride a horse except in shiny boots and special pants, and the others in the pants and hoots and derby hats who didn't even ride horses.

And presently to watch something else. They had heard about polo and they even believed it before they ever saw it. But the other they still did not believe even while they were watching it and its preparation too: gangs of workmen cutting out whole panels of the costly plank-and-rail fences and the outermost and still costly wire fences too, then in the resulting gaps setting lower makeshift barriers of brush-tops and laths a little stouter than matchsticks, which wouldn't have stopped a serious dog, let alone a calf or a mule; and, at one place, a section of something molded and painted to resemble a stone wall (It was said to be paper, though naturally the county didn't believe this — not that they didn't believe that paper could be made to look like that, but simply because they did not believe any of it; they knew that the thing was not stone for the very reason that it looked like stone, and they were already prepared to be lied to about what it really was.) which a man at each end could pick up and carry to one side like two housemaids moving a canvas cot; and at another place, in the middle of a forty-acre pasture as bare and empty as a baseball diamond, a section of hedgerow not even growing in the ground but in a wooden box like a hog-trough, and behind it, an artificial pit filled with water pumped through a galvanised pipe from the house almost a mile away.

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

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

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

Whereupon the Negro would rein up the mule and sit on it, his eyes rolling a little white, while one of the watchers who had seen it before and followed by the six or ten or fifteen who had not, would climb the fence and, without even looking at the Negro, pass the mule and go and pick the bag and hold it while one by one the six or twelve or fifteen bent down and sniffed it. Then he would put the bag back down, and with still no word, no sound, they would go back and climb the fence and stand once more along it — men who would squat all night with a jug of com whiskey around a smoldering stump or log, and call correctly to one another the names of the running hounds by the tone and pitch of their voices a mile away, watching not only the horses which didn't need a quarry to run at, but the frantic clamor of dogs themselves pursuing not even a phantom but a chimaera, leaning their elbows on the white fence, immobile, sardonic and contained, chewing tobacco and spitting.

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

They even smelled like that. There were not only the fast ships, there was airmail crossing the ocean now, and he, Charles, would think of the pouches of letters from all the world's capitals, postmarked one day

and delivered and read and forgotten almost the next, with among them the old-timey cards out of the old time, giving off the faint whisper of old sentiment and old thought impervious to the foreign names and languages, as if she had carried them across the ocean with her from a bureau drawer in the old house which these five and ten years had no longer existed.

And between the cards, on his mother's and the five other birthdays, the letters that even after ten years had not changed — letters constant in sentiment and expression and uncertain spelling, written in the hand of a girl of sixteen and still talking not only of the old homely things but in the old unchanged provincial terms, as if in ten years of the world's glitter she still hadn't seen anything she had not brought with her: talking not about names or places but about the children's health and schooling, not of the ambassadors and millionaires and exiled kings, but of the families of the porters and waiters who had been kind or at least gentle with her and the children, and of the postmen who delivered the mail from home; she didn't always remember to name, let alone underline, the fine fashionable schools the children attended, as if she didn't even know they were fine and fashionable. So that the taciturnity was really not new; he would watch his uncle sitting even then, holding one of the letters his mother had received, incorrigible and bachelor, faced for the only time in his life with something on which he apparently had nothing to say, exactly as he sat here across the chessboard ten years later, still speechless, or certainly still taciturn.

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

Maybe he really did die at the desk; maybe it was even a desk in an office, as the message implied. Because you can be shot just as discreetly across a desk in an office as anywhere else. And maybe he really did just die sitting at it, because prohibition was even legally dead by then and he was already rich when it ended, and the casket wasn't opened again after the lawyer and eight or ten of the butlers in their sharp clothes and arm-pitted pistols brought him home to lie in state

for a day in his ten-year-old ancestral baron's hall, with a butler cum pistol in each downstairs room as far as the butlers went, so that now anybody in Jefferson that wanted could pass the casket with a neat white card engraved in script \$5500 propped among the flowers against it, and examine the inside of the house, before the lawyer and the butlers took him back to New Orleans or anyhow away and buried him. That was in what was going to be the first year of the new war in Europe, or rather the second phase of that old one his uncle had gone to; the family would have had to come back home anyway in another three months.

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

He never saw any of them but just a few times — nor did anybody else that he knew of. The boy rode the horses, but only out there, in the paddock or the polo field, and not for pleasure it appeared, but simply to pick out a few of the best ones to keep, because within a month they had held an auction sale in one of the smaller paddocks and sold off all but about a dozen. But he seemed to know horses, because the ones they kept were good ones.

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

how small, no matter if they grew up in Paris and London and Vienna, or just Jefferson and Mottstown and Hollyknowe, Mississippi. But he, Charles, never saw Mrs. Harriss that time. And so he would imagine her moving about that incredible house which she probably recognised only by its topographical location, not like a ghost, because — to him — there was nothing at all wraithlike about her. She was too — too — and then he found the word: tough. Toughness: that constancy, that imperviousness, that soft still malleableness which had lived ten years in the glittering capitals of Europe without even having to be aware that she had completely resisted them; — merely soft, merely malleable: a breath say of an old sachet, as if one of the old bureau drawers or such from the old house had remained stubborn and constant against all change and alteration, not only impervious but not even aware that it had resisted change, inside the parvenues monstrous mushroom, and somebody passing had jarred open the drawer — and then suddenly and without warning he saw the true juxtaposition, the true perspective: it was not she which was the ghost; the wraith was Harriss's monstrous house: one breath one faint waft of sachet from that disturbed drawer, and all the vast soar of walls, the loom and sweep of porticoes, became at once transparent and substanceless.

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

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

her father had been to his bride; and so at least the pattern was consistent.

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

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

'I beg your pardon?' she said.

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

'Happy?'

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

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

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

'Sir?' he said.

'Sir what?' his uncle said.

'You said something.'

'Did I?' his uncle said.

'You said "less oft is peace".'

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

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

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

Because by that time the whole county knew Captain Gualdres, by hearsay, and most of them even by sight. Then one day he, Charles, saw him too. Captain Gualdres was crossing the Square on one of the Harriss horses, and his, Charles's, uncle said what it was. Not who the man was nor even what, but what they were, the man and the horse together: not a centaur, but a unicorn. He looked hard, not that flabby hardness of too much living which Harriss's butlers had had, but the hardness of metal, of fine steel or bronze, desiccated, almost epicene. And as soon as his uncle had said it, he, Charles, could see it too: the horse-creature out of the old poetry, with its single horn not of bone but of some metal so curious and durable and strange that even the wise men could not name it; some metal forged out of the very beginning of man's dreams and desires and his fears too, and the formula lost or perhaps even deliberately destroyed by the Smith himself; something far older than steel or bronze and stronger than all the power for suffering and terror and death in mere gold or silver. That was how, his uncle said, the man seemed a part of the horse he rode; that was the quality of the man who was a living part of the living horse: the composite creature might die, and would, and must, but only the horse would leave bones; in time the bones would crumble to dust

and vanish into the earth, but the man would remain intact and impervious where they had lain.

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

He not only knew the county, he had made friends in it. Soon all sorts of people were going out there to see, not the Harrisses but the stranger; as guests not of the woman who owned the place and whose family name they had known all her life and her father's and grandfather's too, but of the stranger, the foreigner who six months ago they had never heard of and even a year later they would not be able to understand all he said; — out-of-doors men, usually bachelors: farmers, mechanics, a locomotive fireman, a civil engineer, two young men on the highway maintenance crew, a professional horse-and-mule trader — going out there on his invitation to ride the horses belonging to the woman who was his hostess known and whose lover (the whole county was convinced before they ever saw him that his interest, or at least intentions, was in the older woman, the mother, who already controlled the money, because he could have married the girl, the daughter, at any time, long before they left South America) he already probably was and whose husband he could be at any time he wished: — which would be when he finally had to, since, being not only a foreigner but a Latin too, he would have sprung from a long line of bachelor Don Juans and would be adulterous not even through preference but simply in the same way that a leopard is spotted. In fact, it was presently said of him that if Mrs. Harriss had been a horse instead of a human, he would have married her at once long ago. Because it was soon realised that horses were his heart's love just as drink or dope or gambling are other men's. The county heard how he would go to the stables alone at night, moon or dark, and saddle a half-dozen of them and ride them in relays into dawn and sunup; and that summer he built a steeplechase course in comparison to which that one

Harriss had built was an obstacle race for crawling infants: sections of rail or wall not set into the fences but higher than the fences by a foot or two feet, not matchwood this time but solid beams capable of supporting roofs, not papier-mâché this time but the actual living rock freighted all the way from eastern Tennessee and Virginia. And now many people from town too would go out there, because that was something to see: the man and the horse fusing, joining, becoming one beast, then passing on beyond even that point, that juncture: not daring, but testing, almost physically palpating at that point where even at mutually-compounding ultimate, concorded at absolute's uttermost, they must become violently two again, like the rocket pilot at his mach 1 then 2 then 3 and toward (himself and the machine) their own finitive apex where the iron craft explodes and vanishes, leaving his tender and naked flesh still hurtling forward on the other side of sound.

Though in this case (the man and the horse) the thing was in obverse. It was as if the man knew that he himself was invulnerable and unbreakable, and of their two, only the horse could fail, and that the man had laid out the course and built the jumps just to see where the horse must ultimately falter. Which, by all the tenets of that agrarian and equestrian land, was exactly right; that was exactly the way to ride a horse; Rafe McCallum, one of his constant watchers, who had bred and raised and trained and sold horses all his life and who knew more about horses probably than any man in the country, said so: that when it was in the stall, treat it like it cost a thousand dollars; but when you were using it for something you had, or you and it both liked, to do, treat it like you could have bought ten like it for that many cents. And one thing more happened or at least began about three months ago now, which the whole county had had to know about, or at least form an opinion about, for the very reason that this was the only phase or side of Captain Gualdres' Mississippi life which he ever tried to keep, if not secret, at least private.

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

Because this one belonged to Captain Gualdres himself. He had bought it on his own selection and with his own money — or what he used for his own money: and the fact that he bought a horse with what the county believed was his mistress's money was one of the best, perhaps the best North American stroke Captain Gualdres ever made or could have made. If he had used Mrs. Harriss's money to buy himself a girl, which, being younger than Mrs. Harriss, they had expected all the time that sooner or later he would, the county's contempt and disgust for him would have been exceeded only by their contempt and shame for Mrs. Harriss. While, having decently spent her money for a horse, the county absolved him in advance by accepting the *prima facie*; he had gained a kind of male respectability by honorableness in adultery, fidelity and continence in pimp-hood; continuing (Captain Gualdres) to enjoy it for almost six weeks in fact, going himself all the way to St Louis and buying the horse and coming back in the truck with it.

It was a mare, a filly, sired by a famous imported steeplechaser and going blind from trauma, purchased of course, the county believed, to be a brood mare (which was proof to them that Captain Gualdres anyway considered his tenure on North Mississippi worth a year's purchase at least) since there was obviously nothing else that anyone could do with a mare, no matter what the breeding, which in another year would be totally blind. Which the county continued to believe for the next six weeks, even after they discovered that he was doing something with the mare besides simply waiting on nature, discovering this — not what he was doing with the mare, but that he was doing something with it — for that same reason that this was the first one of his horse activities which he ever tried to keep private.

Because there were no watchers, spectators this time, not only because whatever it was Captain Gualdres was doing with the mare took place at night and usually late, but because Captain Gualdres himself asked them not to come out and watch, asking them with that Latin passion for decorum and courtesy become instinctive from dealing with its own hair-triggered race, which shone even through the linguistic paucity: 'You will not come out to see because, my honor, there is nothing now to see.'

So they didn't. They deferred, not to his Latin honor perhaps, but they deferred. Perhaps there really was nothing to see, since there couldn't

have been very much out there at that hour worth going that distance to see; only occasionally someone, a neighbor on his way home, passing the place in the late silence, would hear hooves in one of the paddocks beyond the stables at some distance from the road — a single horse, at trot then canter then for a few beats at dead run, the sound stopping short off into complete silence while the listener could have counted two or perhaps three, then beginning once more in the middle of the dead run, already slowing back to canter and trot as if Captain Guldres had snatched, jerked, wrenched the animal from full speed into immobility in one stride and held it so for the two or three beats, then flung it bodily into full run again, — teaching it what, nobody knew, unless as a barber-shop wit said, since it was going to be blind, how to dodge traffic on the way to town to collect its pension.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

a code which he had proved now was not his either, and they would never forgive him.

It was a woman, another woman; they were forced at last to the acceptance of that which, they realised now, they had always expected of a foreigner and a Latin, knowing now at last why the horse, that horse, a horse going blind, the sound and reason for the sound of whose feet late at night nobody would understand probably, but at least nobody would bother enough about to investigate. It was a Trojan horse; the foreigner who as yet barely spoke English, had gone all the way to St. Louis to find and buy with his own money, one meeting the requirements: blindness to establish an acceptable reason for the night absences, a horse already trained or that he himself could train to make on signal — perhaps an electrical sound every ten or fifteen minutes operated from a clock (by this time the county's imagination had soared to heights which even horse-traders didn't reach, let alone mere horse-trainers) — those spurts of galloping around an empty paddock, until he got back from the assignation and threw a switch and put the horse up and rewarded it with sugar or oats.

It would be a younger woman of course, perhaps even a young girl; probably was a young girl, since there was a hard ruthless unimaginative maleness to him which wore and even became the Latin formality like a young man's white tie and tails became him and stood him in good stead, with no real effort on his part at all. But this didn't matter. In fact, only the concupiscent wondered who the partner might be. To the others, the rest, the most of them, the new victim was no more important than Mrs. Harriss. They turned the stem face of repudiation not on a seducer, but simply on another buck of the woods running the land, as though the native domestic supply were not enough. When they remembered Mrs. Harriss, it was as the peers and even superiors of her million dollars. They thought, not 'Poor woman' but 'Poor fool.'

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

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

Yet these were the people — the puppets, the paper dolls; the situation, impasse, morality play, medicine show, whichever you liked best — dropped out of a clear sky into his uncle's lap at ten o'clock on a cold night four weeks before Christmas, and all his uncle saw fit or felt inclined or even needful to do, was to come back to the board and move the pawn and say 'Move' as though it had never happened, never been; not only dismissed but repudiated, refused.

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

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

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

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

‘Well well,’ his uncle said. ‘Well well well:’ — looking at him while he found out that he hadn’t forgot how to blush either. But he should have been used to that by now — or at least to the fact that his uncle would still remember it, whether it had slipped his mind or not. But at least he stuck to his guns, holding his head up, hot suffusion and all, staring as steadily back as his uncle stared, answering that too:

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

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

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

‘Eighteen,’ he said. Or almost.’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It seemed to be all of it indeed. He moved. He had planned it a long time back too, a longer time back than his uncle, counting as airmen do by contiguous and not elapsed time, because he had not had to make a landing long enough to repel an invading force and then get airborne again, as his uncle had. He checked his uncle's queen and her castle both with the horse. Then his uncle fed him the pawn which only he, Charles, seemed to have believed that nobody had forgotten about, and he moved and then his uncle moved and then as usual it was all over.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That was all he knew then. He didn't even suspect any more. But he learned fast — or caught on fast. This time they heard the feet first — the light sharp brittle staccato clapping that girls make, coming up the hall. He had already learned, from the time he had spent in his uncle's quarters, that you really never actually hear the sound of feet in any house or building containing at least two more or less separate establishments. So he realised in the same moment (which was before she even knocked, even before his uncle said, 'Now it's your time to be too late to open it') that not only had his uncle known all the time that she would come back, but that he must have known it too. Only he thought at first that the boy had sent her back; it wasn't until afterward that he thought to wonder how she had managed to get away from him that quick.

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

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

'I must see you alone,' she said.

'You are,' his uncle said. 'This is Charles Mallison, my nephew.' His uncle turned one of the chairs away from the chessboard. 'Sit down.' But she didn't move.

'No,' she said. 'Alone.'

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

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

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

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

'Can I smoke?' she said.

But before his uncle could reach for the box of cigarettes which his uncle himself didn't smoke, she had produced one from somewhere — no platinum-and-jewel case as you expected, but a single cigarette bent and crumpled and already shedding tobacco as if it had lain loose in her pocket for days, holding her wrist in the other hand as though to steady it while she leaned the cigarette to the match his uncle struck. Then she expelled that one puff and laid the cigarette in the ashtray and put her hands in her lap, not clenched, just lying tight and small and still against the dark fur.

'He's in danger,' she said. 'I'm afraid.'

'Ah,' his uncle said. 'Your brother is in danger.'

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

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

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

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

don't want to see him hurt. At least I don't want my brother locked up in jail for doing it.'

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

She looked at his uncle. 'Before?' she said. 'Before what?'

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

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

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

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

'Deport your brother?' his uncle said. 'Where? What for?'

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

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

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

'Keep who?' his uncle said. 'Locked up where?'

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘All right,’ she said. ‘Yes. So we came to you, and then I saw that you didn’t believe us and were not going to do anything about it and so the only thing I could think to do was to let Max see with you watching that I loved him too, so that Max would do something to make you believe that at least Max meant what he was saying. And he did it and he does mean it and he’s dangerous and you’ve got to help me. You’ve got to.’

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

‘I have. I am.’

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

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

and went at him with the bare point and Sebastian used the hearth-broom like a sabre and beat down the lunge until somebody grabbed Max—'

She was breathing, not hard so much as fast, rapid, panting almost, still trying to draw on the cigarette which would have been too short to smoke even if her hand had been steady enough to hold it steady, sitting huddled in the chair in a kind of cloud of white tulle and satin and the rich dark heavy sheen of little slain animals, looking not wan so much as delicate and fragile and not even fragile so much as cold, evanescent, like one of the stalked white early spring flowers bloomed ahead of its time into the snow and the ice and doomed before your eyes without even knowing that it was dying, feeling not even any pain. 'That was afterward,' his uncle said.

'What? After what?'

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

'Yes,' she said.

'No,' his uncle said.

'Yes.'

'No.'

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

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

'Ah,' his uncle said.

'I thought you would,' she said, and now her voice had changed again, for the third time since she entered the room not ten minutes ago yet. Out there, about two miles from our back door. A farmer's daughter. — Oh yes,' she said, 'I know that one too: Scott or Hardy or somebody else three hundred years ago: the young lord of the manor and the villeins: DROIT DU SEIGNEUR and all the rest of it. Only this time it wasn't. Because Max gave her a ring.' Now her hands were lying on the chair arms, clenched again, and she wasn't looking at his uncle now either. 'A good deal different this time. Better than Hardy or Shakespeare either thought of. Because there were two city lads this time: not only just the

rich young earl but the young earl's foreign friend or anyway house-guest: the dark romantic foreign knight that heat the young earl riding the young earl's own horses and then took the young earl's sword away from him with a hearth-broom. Until at last all he had to do was ride at night up to the young earl's girl friend's window, and whistle — . Wait,' she said.

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

But his uncle didn't answer; his uncle was still watching the door and then almost before his uncle could have answered, they heard the front door again and then the hard brittle girl-heels in the hall, two pairs of them now, and the Harriss girl came in fast and crossed the room and flipped one hand backward behind her and said, 'There she is,' and went on and swirled down into the chair again while he and his uncle looked at the other girl — a country girl, because he had seen her face before in town on Saturday, but that was the only way you could tell them now because their mouths and faces were painted too and sometimes their fingernails and the Sears, Roebuck clothes didn't look like Sears, Roebuck now and sometimes they were not even Sears, Roebuck even if they were not trimmed off in thousand-dollar mink; — a girl about the same age as the Harriss girl but not quite as tall, slender yet solid too, as country-bred girls can look, with dark hair and black eyes, looking at him for a second and then at his uncle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'I see,' his uncle said.

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

'I see,' his uncle said.

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

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

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

'Gualdres,' the Harriss girl said.

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

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

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

'What?' she said. 'What did you say?'

'Here,' his uncle said. 'Stup it.'

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

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

'Stand up,' she said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Cayley girl blew her nose into the handkerchief. 'Yes sir,' she said. 'Then you'll have to drive her home,' his uncle said to him, not looking back. 'They both cant—'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Bloodshed,' she said. She forgot her face then and the platinum-and-jewel box too and the flipness and the hardness both went and when she looked at his uncle, the terror and dread were in her eyes again; and he knew that, whatever he and his uncle might think about what her brother could or would or might do, at least she didn't have any doubts. 'You've got to do something,' she said. 'You've got to. If I had known anybody else to go to, I wouldn't have bothered you. But I'

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

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

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

Now there was terror and despair both in her face.

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

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

'Exactly why what?'

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

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

'What?' his uncle said.

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

'Oh,' his uncle said, and the Harriss girl said, 'Just talking to him won't do any good either. You tried that once, you know.'

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

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

'Good night,' his uncle said.

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

'Good night,' his uncle said again.

Then they were gone: through the sittingroom door, leaving it open of course; that is, the Harriss girl did, though when he went to close it the Cayley girl had turned back to do it until she saw he was already there. But when he started to shut it, his uncle said, 'Wait' so he stood holding it and they heard the hard brittle girlheels in the hall and then, sure enough, the front door too.

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

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

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

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

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

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

'You had a nice sleep?' his uncle said.

He was a little slow on that one too. But all he had to do was to wait, because the only time when his uncle absolutely refused to diagram his

wit was when it was really witty, really brilliant: never when it merely had an edge.

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

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

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

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

'I already have,' he said.

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

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

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

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

'Move.'

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

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

'No no, not the police; they couldn't hold him. I don't want him held anyway; I just want him watched, so he can't leave Memphis without

me knowing it. A good private man, just to keep an eye on him without him knowing it — unless he tries to leave Memphis.... What? I never really authorise actual bloodshed, at least not with witnesses.... Yes, until I come up and put my own hand on him, tomorrow or next day... At the hotel... There's only one: the Greenbury.

Did you ever hear of a Mississippian who has learned yet there is another one? (Which was true enough; there was a saying in North Mississippi that the state began in the lobby of the Greenbury hotel).... Assumed name? Him? The last thing he is running from is notoriety. He will probably call all the newspapers to be sure they have his name and location right, and that they record it.... No no, just wire me in the morning that you have him safely under surveillance and keep him so until you hear from me again': and put the telephone down and got up, but not to return to the chessboard hut instead went to the door and opened it and stood holding the knob, until finally he did catch up. He got up and picked up the book he had started upstairs with three hours ago. But this time he spoke, and this time his uncle answered him: 'But what do you want with him?'

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

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

'His alibi,' his uncle said.

And that too.

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

'Trick?' he said. What trick?'

'How do I know?' his uncle said. 'Ask yourself; you're eighteen, or so near it doesn't matter; you know what a child of nineteen will do: a Black Hand letter maybe, or even a reasonably careful shot fired through the bedroom window at him. I'm fifty; all I know is that people nineteen years old will do anything, and that the only thing which makes the adult world at all safe from them is the fact that they are so preconvinced of success that the simple desire and will are the finished

accomplishment, that they pay no attention to mere dull mechanical details.'

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

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

'Nobody ever believed there was, except his sister,' his uncle said. 'She was the one who ever convinced him in the first place that there was, started this whole thing. To get her own man. Maybe she thought that, as soon as her brother reached for that foil again, Gualdres would leave the country. Or maybe she hoped that simple discretion and good sense would be enough to move him; in either case, all she would have to do would be to follow him, to some or any other place in the United States or even back to the Argentine (where of course there are no other women) and, by surprise envelopement or perhaps simple compromise, gain the victory, render him at least monogamous. But she underestimated him; she aspersed his character with the crime of maturity too.'

His uncle held the door open, looking at him.

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

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

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

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

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

'Nothing,' he said.

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

III.

So that was that. He went upstairs to his room. He went to bed too, taking off the uniform, 'shedding the brown' as the Corps called it. Because this was Thursday, and the battalion always drilled on Thursday. And he was not only cadet lieutenant colonel this year, but nobody ever missed drill because, although the Academy was only a prep school, it had one of the highest R.O.T.C. ratings in the country; at the last review, the inspector-general himself told them that when war came, every one of them who could prove he was eighteen years old would be almost automatically eligible for officer-candidate school. Which included him too, since he was already so near eighteen that you could put the difference in your eye. Except that it wouldn't matter now whether he was eighteen or eight or eighty; he would be too late even if he were going to wake up eighteen tomorrow morning. It would be over and people would already have begun to be able to start forgetting about it before he could even reach officers' school, let alone finish the course.

It was already over even now as far as the United States was concerned: the British, the handful of boys, some no older than he and some probably not even as old, who flew the Royal Air Force's fighter command, had stopped them on the west and so now there was nothing left for that whole irresistible tide of victory and destruction to do but vanish away into the plumbless depths of Russia like the mop-thrust push of dirty water across a kitchen floor: so that each time during the fifteen months since that fall of 1940 that he took the uniform down or hung it back up in the closet — the khaki serge true enough such as real officers wore but without even the honest stripes of N.C.O.'s but instead, the light-blue tabs and facings of R.O.T.C. like the lapel badges of fraternity pledges, and the innocent pastless metal lozenges such as you might see on the shoulders of a swank hotel

doorman or the leader of a circus band, to divorce it still further from the realm of valor and risk, the heart's thirst for glory and renown; — each time he looked at it, in the eyes of that heart's thirst (if that's what it was), certainly in the irremediable regret which had been his these last months after he realised that it was too late, that he had procrastinated, deferred too long, lacking not only the courage but even the will and the desire and the thirst, the khaki altered transmogrified dissolved like the moving-picture shot, to the blue of Britain and the hooked wings of a diving falcon and the modest braid of rank: but above all the blue, the color the shade which the handful of Anglo Saxon young men had established and decreed as such visual synonym of glory that only last spring an association of American haberdashers or gents' outfitters had adopted it as a trade slogan, so that every lucky male resident of the United States who had the price could walk into church that Easter morning in the authentic aura of valor yet at the same time safe from the badges of responsibility and the candy-stripes of risk.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So he went to bed and to sleep; tomorrow was Friday so he would not have to put on the pseudo khaki in order to shed the brown and, for another week, the heart's thirst, if that's what it was. And he ate breakfast; his uncle had already eaten and gone, and he stopped at his uncle's office on the way to school to pick up the notebook he had left yesterday, and Max Harriss wasn't in Memphis; the wire came from Mr. Markey while he was still in the office:

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

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

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

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

'Maybe he has,' he said.

His uncle stopped walking.

'What?' his uncle said.

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

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

And that was all: eating his dinner: walking back with his uncle as far as the office corner: in school that afternoon, through the history class which Miss Melissa Hogganbeck now called World Affairs with capitals on both, which, coming twice a week, should have been worse for the heart's thirst than the inevitable next Thursdays when he would have to tote the brown again — the sabre and the pastless shoulder-pips — and posture through the spurious the straightfaced the make-believe of command, but which was not at all: the tireless cultured educated 'lady's' voice talking with a kind of frantic fanaticism of peace and security: of how we were safe because the old worn-out nations of Europe had learned their lesson too well in 1918; they not only did not dare outrage us, they couldn't even afford to, until the world's whole staggering and savage mass was reduced to that weightless interminable murmuring not even echoed within the isolate insulate dusty walls of a prep-school classroom and having a hundred times less connection with any reality than even the sword and the pips. Because at least the sabre and pips were a make-believe of what they parodied, while to Miss Hogganbeck the whole establishment of national R.O. T.C. was an inescapable inexplicable phenomenon of the edifice of education, like the necessity for having children in the junior courses. And it was still all even when he had seen the horse. It was in a muddy horse-van standing in an alley behind the square when he passed after school, with a half dozen men standing around looking at the van from a definitely respectful distance, and only afterward did he actually see the horse shackled into the van not with ropes but with steel chains as if it were a lion or an elephant. Because he hadn't really looked at the van yet. In fact, he hadn't even got as far as affirming, accepting that there was a horse in it, because at that moment he saw Mr. Rafe McCallum himself coming up the alley and he crossed the street to speak to him because he and his uncle would go out to the McCallum farm fifteen miles from town to shoot quail in season, and, until they enlisted last summer, he used to go out there by himself to spend the

night in the woods or the creek bottom running fox or coon with the twin McCallum nephews.

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

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

It was unrideable and unmanageable even for breeding. It was said to have killed two men who just happened to get on the same side of a fence with it. Though this was not very probable, or the horse would have been destroyed. But Mr. McCallum was supposed to have bought it because its owner wanted to destroy it. Or maybe he believed he could tame it. Anyway, he always denied that it had ever killed anyone, so at least he must have thought he could sell it, since no horse was ever quite as bad as the man who bought it claimed, or as good as the man who sold it contended.

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

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

McCallum:

'You finally sold it.'

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

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

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

Which didn't mean much, didn't mean anything in fact except that Mr. McCallum would have to hurry like billy-O just to prove he hadn't even sold it. Which would be in the dark and a good while into it: four o'clock now, and anyone who had engaged to buy that horse would have to have lived a long way off not to have heard about it.

Then he thought how anybody who bought that horse would live too far away to be reached in just one daylight even if it were the twenty-second of June, let alone the fifth of December, so maybe it didn't matter what time Mr. McCallum started, and so he went on to his uncle's office and that was all except the postscript and even that was not too long away; his uncle had the practice brief all laid out for him on the desk and the list of references beside it and he got to work and it seemed almost at once when the light began to fail and he switched on the desk lamp and then the telephone rang. The girl's voice was already talking when he lifted the receiver and it never did stop, so that it was a second or two before he could recognize it:

'Hello! Hello! Mr. Stevens! He was here! Nobody even knew it! He just left! They called me from the garage and I ran down and he was already in the car with the engine running and he said if you want to see him, to be on your corner in five minutes; he said he wouldn't be able to come up to your office, for you to be on the corner in five minutes if you want to see him, otherwise you can call and maybe get an appointment with him at the Greenbury hotel tomorrow—' and still talking when his uncle came in and took the receiver and listened for a moment, and probably still talking even after his uncle put the receiver back up.

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

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

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

But they did see him. They heard the car, the horn: the heel of the Harriss boy's palm on the button or maybe he had simply reached inside the dash or the hood and jerked the ground connection loose, and probably if the boy was thinking about anything at all then, he was being sorry he didn't have an old-time muffler cutout. And he, Charles, thought of Hampton Killegrew, the night marshal, running out of the pool room or the Allnite Inn or wherever he would be at this time and already too late too, the car howling and wailing up the street toward the Square with all the lights burning, parking driving and fog, then blatting and crashing between the brick walls and the street narrowed into the Square; and afterward he remembered a cat leaping in silhouette across the rushing lights, looking ten feet long one second then the next one high and narrow as a fleeing fence post.

But luckily there wasn't anybody else but him and his uncle at the crossing and the boy saw them then, the lights swinging down at them as if he was going to drive right up onto the curb. Then they swung away at the last second and he could have touched the boy — the face, the teeth glinting in it — as the car shot past into the Square and crossed it and slewed skidding, the tires squealing against the pavement, into the Memphis highway, the horn and the tires and the engine growing fainter and fainter, until at last he and his uncle could even hear Hampton Killegrew running toward the corner cursing and yelling.

'Did you pull the door to?' his uncle said.

'Yes sir,' he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Then I was wrong,' his uncle said. 'I maligned him too. Apparently I attributed to nineteen not only more ingenuity than it is capable of, but even malice too. Come along. You're late. You've not only got to eat supper, you've got to get back to town.'

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

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

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

And if he, Charles, hadn't gone to the picture show, he wouldn't have seen his uncle at all that evening: eating his supper without haste since there was plenty of time despite his uncle and only his uncle seemed to want to avoid the human race: walking still without haste, since there was still plenty of time, through the cold vivid dark toward the Square and the picture show, not knowing what he was going to see and not even caring; it might be another war picture he was walking toward and it didn't even matter, thinking remembering how once a war picture should, ought, to have been the worst thing of all for the heart's thirst to have to endure, except that it was not, since there lay between the war movie and Miss Hogganbeck's world events a thousand times even the insuperable distance which lay between Miss Hogganbeck's world events and the R.O.T.C. pips and the sword: thinking how if the human race could just pass all its time watching moving pictures, there would be no more wars nor any other man-made anguishes, except for the fact that man couldn't spend that much time watching moving pictures since boredom was the one human passion that movies couldn't cope with and man would have to spend at least eight hours a day watching

them since he would have to sleep for another eight and his uncle said the only other thing man could stand for eight continuous hours was work.

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

The moon was up now. Once the lighted Square was behind him, he could watch the chopping shadows of his legs chopping off the shadows of the leafless branches and then finally of the fence pickets too, though not for long because he climbed the fence at the corner of the yard and so saved the distance between there and the gate. And now he could see the shaded down-glow of the desk lamp beyond the sitting-room window and, himself not walking hurrying but rather being swept along on the still-pristine cresting of the astonishment and puzzlement and (most of all, though he didn't know why) haste, his instinct was to stop, avoid evade — anything rather than violate that interdiction, that hour, that ritual of the Translation which the whole family referred to with a capital T — the rendering of the Old Testament back into the classic Greek into which it had been translated from its lost Hebrew infancy — which his uncle had been engaged on for twenty years now, a few days over two years longer than he, Charles, had lived, retiring to the sittingroom once a week always (and sometimes two and three times provided that many things happened to displease or affront him), shutting the door behind him: nor man woman nor child, client well-wisher or friend, to touch even the knob until his uncle turned it from inside.

And he, Charles, thought how if he had been eight instead of almost eighteen, he wouldn't have paid any attention even to that student lamp and that shut door; or how if he had been twenty-four instead of

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

But then he didn't need to; his uncle would attend to that. All required of him was the hurry, the speed. And he had supplied that, holding the steady half-walk half-trot from that first step through the Inn door where he could turn the corner, to the yard and across it and up the steps into the hall and down the hall to the closed door, not pausing at all, his hand already reaching for the knob, then into the sitting-room where his uncle sat in shirtsleeves and an eyeshade at the desk beneath the lamp, not even looking up, the Bible propped open in front of him and the Greek dictionary and the cob pipe at his elbow and the better part of a ream of yellow copy paper strewn about the floor at his feet. 'He bought the horse,' he said. 'What can he do with the horse?' Nor did his uncle look up yet nor even move. 'Ride it, I hope,' his uncle said. Then his uncle looked up, reaching for the pipe. 'I thought it was understood—'

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

'All right,' his uncle said. 'What horse?'

He answered, succinct too. 'McCallum's. That stallion.'

'All right,' his uncle said again.

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

His uncle was not seeing him at all; the eyes were as empty as the Harriss girl's had been when she came through the door the first time last night. Then his uncle said something. It was in Greek, the old Greek, as his uncle was back there in the old time when the Old Testament had first been translated or even written. Sometimes his uncle would do that: say something for him in English that neither of them would have intended for his, Charles's, mother to hear, then again in the old Greek, and even to him who couldn't understand the Greek, it sounded a lot stronger, a lot more like whoever was saying it meant exactly that, even to the ones who couldn't understand it or at least hadn't understood it until now. And this was one of them and neither did this sound like anything that anybody had got out of the Bible, at least since the Anglo-Saxon puritans had got hold of it. His uncle was up now too, snatching off the eyeshade and flinging it away, and kicked the chair backward and snatched his coat and vest from the other chair.

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

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

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

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

move over and drive and flung the stick in and shoved Mr. McCallum in and got in himself and slammed the door.

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

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

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

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

'He knew the horse,' Mr. McCallum said. 'He came all the way out home and insisted he wanted to buy it. He was there at sunup, asleep in the car at the front gate, with four or five hundred dollars loose in his overcoat pocket like a handful of leaves. Why? Does he claim to be a minor?'

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

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

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

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

bridle and blankets and a curry-comb and brush and some feed. And he said that anybody that touched that saddle and bridle or the feed either, was going to already know about the horse and I told them they had certainly better, because if anybody walked into that lot and opened that stall door expecting to find just an ordinary horse behind it, it would not only be a considerable worry to the one that did the walking and the opening, but to the one that owned the horse too. And he said that at least that let me out, because I was just the one that sold it. But the stable was all right. There was even an outside window where a man could climb into the loft and throw down feed until the horse got used to him.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

It began in Spanish. Three years ago he had reached optional Spanish in high school and he didn't remember now, in fact he never had really understood, how or why he started taking it; just exactly what his uncle

had done, as a result of which he, Charles, found himself committed to taking the Spanish which he had never really intended to commit himself to. It wasn't persuasion and it wasn't a bribe, because his uncle said you didn't need to be bribed to do something you wanted to do, needed to do, whether you knew at the time you needed it, would ever need it, or not. Perhaps his mistake was in dealing with a lawyer. Anyway, he was still taking Spanish and he had read Don Quixote and he could keep up with most Mexican and South American newspapers and he had started the Cid only that was last year and last year was 1940 and his uncle said, 'But why? It should be easier than Quixote because the Cid is about heroes.' But he couldn't have explained, to anyone, least of all a man fifty years old, even his uncle, how to assuage the heart's thirst with the dusty chronicle of the past when not fifteen hundred miles away in England men not much older than he was were daily writing with their lives his own time's deathless footnote. So most of the time he could understand them; only a little of the Spanish went too fast for him. But then, some of the English was too fast for Captain Gualdres too, and at one time he was even about to believe there were two of them who were not keeping up with his uncle's Spanish too.

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

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

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

'Mr. McCallum I know well,' Captain Gualdres said in English, turning; they could see his teeth for a second too. 'He has one much horse too. A pity.' He shook hands with Mr. McCallum, sudden and brief and hard. But even doing that he still looked like bronze, for all his soft worn moon-gleamed leather and brilliantined hair, as if he had been cast from metal, hair boots jacket and all, in one jointless piece. 'The young

gentleman, not so well.' He shook hands with him, Charles, quick and brief and hard too. Then he stepped back. And this time he didn't shake hands. 'And Mr. Stevens, not so well. A pity too, perhaps.' And still even the tone of the voice didn't say, You may now present the apologies for consideration. It didn't even say, yes, gentlemen? Only the voice itself said, perfectly courteous, perfectly heatless, with no inflection whatever:

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

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

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

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

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

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

'A wager then,' his uncle said.

Captain Gualdres didn't move.

'A request then,' his uncle said.

Captain Gualdres didn't move.

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

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

'You ride tonight,' his uncle said.

'Truth,' Captain Gualdres said.

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

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

'Truth,' he said, and went on, the three of them following, around the house that was too big, across the lawn where the bushes and shrubs were too many, past the garages that would have held more cars than just four people could ever have used and the conservatories and hothouses of too many flowers and grapes for just four people ever to have eaten or smelled, crossing that moon-still moon-blached moon-silent barony with Captain Gualdres leading the way on the hard bowed pistons of boot-gleamed and glinted legs, then his uncle then himself then Mr. McCallum carrying the white-oak cudgel, the three of them in single file behind Captain Gualdres like three of his family GAUCHOS if Captain Gualdres had a family and they were not GAUCHOS instead or maybe even something else altogether ending in ONES.

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

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

McCallum was at least entitled to this much:

'Now, Mr. Stevens. You explain?'

'With permission?' his uncle said.

'Truth,' Captain Gualdres said.

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

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

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

'The jumps?' his uncle said.

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

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

'Then what?' he said. 'What did you say then?'

'Not much,' his uncle said. 'I just said, "That favor." And Gualdres said, "For which, naturally, I thank you beforehand." And I said, "But which, naturally, you do not believe. But of which, naturally, you wish to know

the price.” And we agreed on the price, and I performed the favor, and that was all.’

‘But what price?’ he said.

‘It was a bet,’ his uncle said. ‘A wager.’

‘A wager on what?’ he said.

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

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

But his uncle didn’t even answer that, just looking at him, sardonic, whimsical, fantastical and familiar still, even though he, Charles, had just discovered that he didn’t know his uncle at all. Then his uncle said: ‘A knight comes suddenly out of nowhere — out of the west, if you like — and checks the queen and the castle all in that same one move.

What do you do?’

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

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

‘He lost the queen,’ he said.

‘The queen?’ his uncle said. What queen? Oh, you mean Mrs. Harriss. Maybe he realised that queen had been moved the same instant he realised he would have to call the bet. Maybe he realised that queen and the castle both had been gone ever since the moment he disarmed the prince with that hearth-broom. If he ever wanted her.’

‘Then what was he doing here?’ he said.

‘Why was he waiting?’ his uncle said.

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

‘Or indecision, since he can,’ his uncle said. ‘And almost fatal for this one, because he must. At least, he’d certainly better. His threat and his charm are in his capacity for movement. This time, he forgot that his safety lay in it too.’ But that was tomorrow. Right now he couldn’t even

keep up with what he was watching. He and Mr. McCallum just stood there looking and hearing while his uncle and Captain Gualdres stood facing each other, rapping out the brittle splattering syllables, until at last Captain Gualdres made a motion, not quite a shrug and not quite a salute, and his uncle turned to Mr. McCallum.

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

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

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

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

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

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

It came out screaming. It looked tremendous, airborne even: a furious mass the color of doom or midnight in a moonward swirling of mane and tail like black flames, looking not merely like death because death

is stasis, but demoniac: the lost brute forever unregenerate, bursting out into the moonlight, screaming, galloping in a short rushing circle while it flung its head this way and that, searching for the man until it saw Mr. McCallum at last and quit screaming and rushed toward him, not recognising him until he stepped out from the wall and shouted at it.

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

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

'I have lost,' Captain Gualdres said.

'Not lost,' his uncle said.

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

IV.

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

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

'Memphis city police cant transport a prisoner back to Mississippi,' Mr. Markey said. 'You know that. Your sheriff will have to send someone—'
'He's not a prisoner,' his uncle said. 'Tell him that. Tell him I just want him to come back here and talk to me.'

Then for almost half a minute there was nothing on the telephone at all except the faint hum of the distant power which kept the line alive,

which was costing somebody money whether voices went over it or not. Then Mr. Markey said:

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

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

And Max Harriss came back. He arrived just ahead of the others, just far enough ahead of them to have got through the anteroom and into the office while the other two were still mounting the stairs; and he, Charles, shut the anteroom door and Max stood in front of it, watching his uncle, delicate and young and expensive-looking still and a little tired and strained-looking too as if he hadn't slept much last night, except for his eyes. They didn't look young or tired either, watching his uncle exactly as they had looked at him night before last; looking anything but all right by a good long shot. But at least there wasn't anything cringing in them, whatever else there might be.

'Sit down,' his uncle said.

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

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

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

'All right,' Max said. 'You couldn't prove an intention, design. All that you can prove, you won't even have to. I already admit it. I affirm it. I bought a horse and turned it into a private stable on my mother's property. I know a little law too, you see. I probably know just exactly the minor and incorrect amount of it to make a first-class small-town

Mississippi lawyer. Maybe even a state legislator, though probably a little too much ever to be elected governor.'

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

'You'd do more than that right now if you were me,' Max said. 'Well?' Now his uncle moved. He swung the chair around with the pressure of his knee against the desk, until he faced Max.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Enlist?' Harriss said.

'Enlist,' his uncle said.

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

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

'No,' his uncle said. 'No "else." Just enlist. Look. You are playing poker (I assume you know poker, or at least — like a lot of people — anyway play it). You draw cards. When you do that, you affirm two things: either that you have something to draw to, or you are willing to support to your last cent the fact that you have not. You don't draw and then throw the cards in because they are not what you wanted, expected, hoped for; not just for the sake of your own soul and pocket-book, but for the sake of the others in the game, who have likewise assumed that unspoken obligation.'

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

'Now?' he said.

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

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

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

'Yes,' Harriss said. He drew another of the long breaths and let it go.

'Go down those steps and get in the car by myself, and leave. What makes you think you or the army or anybody else will ever catch me again?'

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

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

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

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

She was in a dark dress too, the dark blue in which brides 'go away,' travel, with the fine rich fur coat with a corsage (Orchids, of course. He had heard of orchids all his life, so he realised that he had never seen them before. But he knew them at once; on that coat and that bride they could be nothing else.) pinned to the collar and the thin thread from the Cayley girl's fingernail still showing on her cheek.

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

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

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

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

'Not good-bye,' his uncle said.

'Yes. Now. By one—' again Captain Gualdres looked at his wrist ' — five minutes we are no more for here.' (Because, as his uncle had said, there was one thing about Captain Gualdres: he not only knew exactly what he thought he was going to do, he quite often did it.) 'Back to my country. The CAMPO. Maybe I do not ought to have left him to begin. This country. Is magnificent, but too strong for simple GAUCHO, PAYSANO. But for now, no matter. For now, is done. So I come to say one more good-bye and one hundred more GRACIAS.' Then it was Spanish again. But he kept up: 'You have Spanish. My wife, having been educated only in the best of European convents for rich young American ladies, has no language at all. In my country, the campo, there is a saying: Married; dead. But there is another saying: To learn where the rider will sleep tonight, ask the horse. So no matter about that either, that's all finished too. So I have come to say goodbye, and thanks, and to congratulate myself that you had no stepchildren also to be placed for life. But I really have no confidence even in that condition because nothing is beyond a man of your capacity and attainments, not to mention imagination. So we return to my — our — country in time, where you are not. Because I think you are a very dangerous man and I do not like you. And so, with God.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Get in and drive,' his uncle said. 'And remember this is not last night.' So he took the wheel and drove on through across the crowded Saturday Square, still having to dodge among the homeward-bound cars and trucks and wagons even after they were clear of downtown. But the road itself was still open for a little speed — a lot of it if he had been Max Harriss going home instead of just Charles Mallison driving his uncle backward.

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

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

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

'What's that?' he said.

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

So they went then, almost half as fast as Max Harriss, over the road which the baron hadn't had time to concrete but which he probably would have dropped other things to do if he had just been warned in time, not for his own comfort because he didn't travel it; he went and came from New Orleans in his own airplane so that when Jefferson saw him it went out there to do it; but for the uniqueness of spending that much money on something not only not his hut which all who knew him would not even expect him to use, just as Huey Long in Louisiana had made himself founder owner and supporter of what his uncle said was one of the best literary magazines anywhere, without ever once

looking inside it probably nor even caring what the people who wrote and edited it thought of him any more than the baron did what the farmers thought of him whose straying livestock leaped and shrieked and died under the speeding wheels of his guests; they were going fast now through the early December afternoon — the winter afternoon, the sixth day of winter the old folks called it, who counted from the first of December.

And it (the road) was older than gravel too, running back into the old time of simple dirt red and curving among the hills, then straight and black where the rich land flattened, alluvial and fertile; niggard in width since the land was too rich, too fecund in com and cotton, to allow room for men to pass one another almost, marked only by the thin iron of carriage-and wagon-rims and the open O's of horses and mules when the old owner, the baron's father-in-law, would leave the Horace and the weak toddy long enough to come in to town the two or three or four times a year, to vote or sell the cotton or pay the taxes or attend a funeral or a wedding, and then be driven back to the toddy and the Latin pages again, along the simple dirt in which even hooves, unless running, made no noise, let alone the wheels or anything other than the creak of harness; back to the acres which were hardly bounded then except in his own recollection and holding and belief and that of his neighbors, not even fenced always, let alone in carefully panelled and railed oak and hickory designed in Virginia and Long Island and handcrafted in Grand Rapids factories, the lawn which was a yard of shabby oaks then, innocent of shears and pruners and clippers and borderers in a light mist of gasoline fumes, to the house which was just a house to back a front gallery for him to sit on with the silver cup and the worn calf; a garden which was just a garden, overgrown, shabby too, of old permanent perennial things: nameless roses and lilac bushes and daisies and phlox and the hard durable dusty bloom of fall, itself in the tradition of the diluted whiskey and the Horatian odes: unassertive, enduring.

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

‘You mean ten years from now it wont be true?’ And his uncle said, ‘I mean that ten years from now I wont say it because ten years from now I will be ten years older and the one thing age teaches you is not fear and least of all more of truth, but only shame. — That spring of 1919 like a garden at the end of a four-year tunnel of blood and excrement and fear in which that whole generation of the world’s young men lived like frantic ants, each one alone against the instant when he too must enter the faceless anonymity behind the blood and the filth, each one alone’ (which at least proved one of his uncle’s points, the one about truth anyway) ‘with his constant speculation whether his fear was as plain to others as to himself. Because the groundling during his crawling minutes and the airman during his condensed seconds have no friends or comrades any more than the hog at the trough or the wolf in the pack has. And when the corridor ends at last and they come out of it — if they do — they still have none. Because’ (but at least he, Charles, hoped his uncle was right about the shame) ‘they have lost something, something of themselves dear and irreplaceable, scattered now and diffused and become communal among all the other faces and bodies which also survived: I am no more just John Doe of Jefferson, Mississippi; I am also Joe Ginotta of East Orange, New Jersey, and Charley Longfeather of Shoshone, Idaho, and Harry Wong of San Francisco; and Harry and Charley and Joe are all John Doe of Jefferson, Mississippi too. But that composite is each still us, so we cant repudiate it. And that’s why American Legions. And though we may have been able to face and lie down what we had seen Harry and Joe and Charley do in the person of John Doe of Jefferson, we cant face down and lie away what we saw John Doe do as Charley or Harry or Joe. And that’s why, while they were still young and had faith in breath, American Legions got mass-drunk.’

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

that you died but that you were no longer there to see the glory; you didn't want to obliterate the thirsting heart: you wanted to slake it. But that was twelve years ago; now his uncle only said, first: 'Stop. I'll drive.'

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

'It was the quiet,' his uncle said. 'At first I couldn't even sleep at night for it. But that was all right, because I didn't want to sleep; I didn't want to miss that much of silence: just to lie in bed in the dark and remember tomorrow and tomorrow and all the colored spring, April and May and June, morning noon and evening, empty, then dark again and silence to lie in because I didn't need to sleep. Then I saw her. She was in the old stained victoria with the two mismatched plow-horses drawing it and the plow-hand on the box who didn't even have on shoes. And your mother was wrong. She didn't look like a parading doll at all. She looked like a little girl playing grown-up in the carriage-house, but playing it in deadly seriousness; like a child of twelve say, orphaned by sudden catastrophe, upon whom has devolved the care of a whole litter of younger brothers and sisters and perhaps even an aged grandparent, supervising the diet and changing and washing out the garments of infants; too young to have a vicarious interest in, let alone the conception of and kinship with the passion and mystery which created them alive into the world, which alone could have made the drudgery of feeding them bearable or even explicable.

'Of course it wasn't that. There was only her father, and if anything, the situation was reversed: the father who not only farmed the land and supervised the household, but did it in such a way that a plow-team and its driver from the field could be spared always to draw those six miles back and forth to town, the old carriage against the tremendous expanse of whose cushions she could resemble an archaic miniature, sober and sedate and demure ten years beyond her age and fifty years beyond her time. But that was the impression I got: a child playing house in that windless and timeless garden at the red and stinking corridor's end: and so one day I knew suddenly and irrevocably that just silence was not peace. It was after I saw her the third or the tenth or the thirtieth time, I don't remember which, but one morning I stood

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

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

“I know it,” she said. But I felt thirty, even if I wasn't quite. She was sixteen. And how could you say to a child (as we said then): “Give me a date?” And what would you (at thirty) do with it? And you don't just simply invite the child: you ask the child's parents if it can come. So it was just dusk when I stopped your grandmother's car at the gate and got out. There was a garden then, not a florist's landscaping dream. It was a good deal bigger than even five or six rugs spread side by side, with old bushes of roses and callicanthus and paintless collapsing arbors and trellises and beds of perennials re-seeding themselves without outside meddling help or let, and she standing in the middle of it watching me as I entered the gate and went up the walk until she couldn't see me any more. And I knew she would not have moved from where she stood, and I mounted the steps to where the old gentleman sat in his hickory chair with the setter pup at his feet and the silver cup and the marked book at his elbow, and I said, “Let me be betrothed to her” (mark how I put it: me to her). “I know,” I said. “I know: not now. Not now. Just let us be betrothed, and we wont even have to think about it again.”

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

“I don't know how,” she said. ‘You'll have to teach me.’”

“Don’t learn then,” I said. “It’s all right. It doesn’t even matter. You don’t have to learn.” It was like sherbet: the rest of spring, and summer and the long rest of summer: the darks and silence to be in, remembering sherbet: not retasting it because you don’t need to retaste sherbet; it doesn’t take much sherbet because you don’t forget it. Then it was time for me to go back to Germany and I took the ring out to her. I had already looped it onto the ribbon myself.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘She was a Russian,’ his uncle said. ‘She had escaped from Moscow. For a price, paid by installments, over a long time, to different collectors. She was through a war too, O my Philistine. I knew her in Paris in 1918. When I left America in the fall of ‘19 to go back to Heidelberg, I thought, believed I had forgotten her. That is, one day in mid-ocean I discovered that I hadn’t thought about her since spring. And so I knew I hadn’t forgot. I changed my hooking and went to Paris first; she was to follow me to Heidelberg as soon as someone would visé what papers she had. I would write to her each month too while we waited. Maybe while I waited. You must hear in mind my age. I was a European then. I

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

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

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

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

Then inside; the Negro butler opened the door and immediately vanished and he and his uncle stood in the room in which Captain

Gualdres (assuming he was or had been cavalry) could have paraded his troop, horses too, though he noticed little else because it was the orchid again: recognised at once, immediately, without surprise not even attention. Then he even forgot the pleasant savor, titillation of simple tremendousness, because she came in: her feet in the hall and then into the room, though he had already smelled it, as if somebody had opened an old drawer by gaucherie, clumsiness, mistake and forty servants in rubber soles jumping frantically through the long corridors and rooms of glash and glitter to hurry it shut again; coming into the room and stopping and beginning to put her hands up palm-out in front of her without even having time to look at him since his uncle, who had never really stopped at all, was already walking toward her.

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

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

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

'Bless you, my children,' he said.

V.

That was Saturday. The next day was December seventh. But even before he left, the store windows were already bright with toys and tinsel and artificial snow like any other December in any other year, the air bright and merry with the taste and smell of Christmas even with gunfire in it, the gunfire and the whine of bullets and the sound they made on flesh getting ready to echo right here in Jefferson before many more weeks or months.

But when he saw Jefferson next, it was spring. The wagons and pick-ups of the hill farmers and the five-and ten-ton trucks of the bottomland planters and operators had already backed up to the loading platforms of the seed stores and the fertilizer warehouses, and tractors and

spanned and tripled mules would be moving across the dark shearing of the land's winter sleep: plow and middlehuster, harrow and drag and disc; dogwood would bloom soon and soon the whippoorwills, but this was only 1942 and there would be a little time yet before the party-line telephones would begin to carry the War and Navy Department telegrams, and on Thursday mornings the RFD carrier would leave in the lonely post-perched boxes the weekly YOKNAPATAWPHA CLARION bearing the reproduced photograph and the brief obit already too familiar yet still cryptic as Sanscrit or Chinese — the country-boy face not really old enough yet to be a man's photograph, the uniform still showing the creases of the quartermaster shelves, the place-names which those who had created that face and flesh apparently in order that it might die in agony there, had never even heard of before, let alone pronounce.

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

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

Then the shabby purlieus themselves timeless and durable, familiar as his own voracious omnivorous insatiable heart or his body and limbs or the growth of his hair and fingernails: the first Negro cabins weathered

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

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

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

'My who?' his uncle said.

'All right,' he said. 'Your son-in-law. Your daughter's husband. The one that don't like you. He came out to camp to see me. He's a cavalryman

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

'What?' his uncle said.

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

And now it was time to go; they had already pulled the express hand-truck away from the baggage car door, and the express clerk was even leaning out the door looking back, and Mr. McWilliams, the conductor,

was standing at the vestibule steps with his watch in his hand, but at least he was not hollering at him, Charles, yet, because he, Charles, wore a uniform and this was still early in 1942 and civilians hadn't got used to war yet. So he said, 'And one more thing. Those letters. Two letters. Two wrong envelopes.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Heidelberg not to deliver a message but a demand: he wanted to know. So I asked it.

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

‘Did she answer it?’ he said.

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

‘And what did you say?’

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

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

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

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

Knight's Gambit, William Faulkner

Knight's Gambit

Knight's Gambit is a collection of mystery short stories, regarded by some as a novel with a continuous plot. The first five stories were published in various magazines and the six stories were later published together in 1949. The stories deal with the adventures of the Jefferson county attorney Gavin Stevens, who also takes a leading part in the novel *Intruder in the Dust*.

Stevens is shrewd, observant and tolerant of the quirks and foibles of his fellow Southerners. He takes part in the detection and prevention of crime in the local community, witnessing at first hand the many varying forms of human passions released by violence. The stories are narrated by Stevens' nephew, who constantly refers to him as Uncle Gavin.

Contents

Smoke

Monk

Hand Upon the Waters

To-Morrow

An Error in Chemistry

Knight's Gambit

Smoke, William Faulkner

Smoke

ANSELM HOLLAND CAME to Jefferson many years ago. Where from, no one knew. But he was young then and a man of parts, or of presence at least, because within three years he had married the only daughter of a man who owned two thousand acres of some of the best land in the county, and he went to live in his father-in-law's house, where two years later his wife bore him twin sons and where a few years later still the father-in-law died and left Holland in full possession of the property, which was now in his wife's name.

But even before that event, we in Jefferson had already listened to him talking a trifle more than loudly of "my land, my crops"; and those of us whose fathers and grandfathers had been bred here looked upon him a little coldly and a little askance for a ruthless man and (from tales told about him by both white and negro tenants and by others with whom he had dealings) for a violent one.

But out of consideration for his wife and respect for his father-in-law, we treated him with courtesy if not with regard. So when his wife, too, died while the twin sons were still children, we believed that he was responsible, that her life had been worn out by the crass violence of an underbred outlander. And when his sons reached maturity and first one and then the other left home for good and all, we were not surprised.

And when one day six months ago he was found dead, his foot fast in the stirrup of the saddled horse which he rode, and his body pretty badly broken where the horse had apparently dragged him through a rail fence (there still showed at the time on the horse's back and flanks the marks of the blows which he had dealt it in one of his fits of rage), there was none of us who was sorry, because a short time before that he had committed what to men of our town and time and thinking was the unpardonable outrage. On the day he died it was learned that he had been digging up the graves in the family cemetery where his wife's

people rested, among them the grave in which his wife had lain for thirty years.

So the crazed, hate-ridden old man was buried among the graves which he had attempted to violate, and in the proper time his will was offered for probate. And we learned the substance of the will without surprise. We were not surprised to learn that even from beyond the grave he had struck one final blow at those alone whom he could now injure or outrage: his remaining flesh and blood.

At the time of their father's death the twin sons were forty. The younger one, Anselm, Junior, was said to have been the mother's favorite — perhaps because he was the one who was most like his father. Anyway, from the time of her death, while the boys were still children almost, we would hear of trouble between Old Anse and Young Anse, with Virginius, the other twin, acting as mediator and being cursed for his pains by both father and brother; he was that sort, Virginius was. And Young Anse was his sort too; in his late teens he ran away from home and was gone ten years.

When he returned he and his brother were of age, and Anselm made formal demand upon his father that the land which we now learned was held by Old Anse only in trust, be divided and he — Young Anse — be given his share. Old Anse refused violently. Doubtless the request had been as violently made, because the two of them, Old Anse and Young Anse, were so much alike. And we heard that, strange to say, Virginius had taken his father's side.

We heard that, that is. Because the land remained intact, and we heard how, in the midst of a scene of unparalleled violence even for them — a scene of such violence that the Negro servants all fled the house and scattered for the night — Young Anse departed, taking with him the team of mules which he did own; and from that day until his father's death, even after Virginius also had been forced to leave home, Anselm never spoke to his father and brother again.

He did not leave the county this time, however. He just moved back into the hills ('where he can watch what the old man and Virginius are doing,' some of us said and all of us thought); and for the next fifteen years he lived alone in a dirt-floored, two-room cabin, like a hermit, doing his own cooking, coming into town behind his two mules not four times a year. Some time earlier he had been arrested and tried for making whiskey.

He made no defense, refusing to plead either way, was fined both on the charge and for contempt of court, and flew into a rage exactly like his father when his brother Virginius offered to pay the fine. He tried to assault Virginius in the courtroom and went to the penitentiary at his own demand and was pardoned eight months later for good behavior and returned to his cabin — a dark, silent, aquiline-faced man whom both neighbors and strangers let severely alone.

The other twin, Virginius, stayed on, farming the land which his father had never done justice to even while he was alive. (They said of Old Anse, 'wherever he came from and whatever he was bred to be, it was not a farmer.'

And so we said among ourselves, taking it to be true, 'That's the trouble between him and Young Anse: watching his father mistreat the land which his mother aimed for him and Virginius to have.') But Virginius stayed on. It could not have been much fun for him, and we said later that Virginius should have known that such an arrangement could not last. And then later than that we said, 'Maybe he did know.' Because that was Virginius. You didn't know what he was thinking at the time, any time. Old Anse and Young Anse were like water. Dark water, maybe; but men could see what they were about. But no man ever knew what Virginius was thinking or doing until afterward. We didn't even know what happened that time when Virginius, who had stuck it out alone for ten years while Young Anse was away, was driven away at last; he didn't tell it, not even to Granby Dodge, probably. But we knew Old Anse and we knew Virginius, and we could imagine it, about like this:

We watched Old Anse smoldering for about a year after Young Anse took his mules and went back into the hills. Then one day he broke out; maybe like this, 'You think that, now your brother is gone, you can just hang around and get it all, don't you?'

'I don't want it all,' Virginius said. 'I just want my share.'

'Ah,' Old Anse said. 'You'd like to have it parceled out right now too, would you? Claim like him it should have been divided up when you and him came of age.'

'I'd rather take a little of it and farm it right than to see it all in the shape it's in now,' Virginius said, still just, still mild — no man in the county ever saw Virginius lose his temper or even get ruffled, not even when Anselm tried to fight him in the courtroom about that fine.

'You would, would you?' Old Anse said. 'And me that's kept it working at all, paying the taxes on it, while you and your brother have been putting money by every year, tax-free.'

'You know Anse never saved a nickel in his life,' Virginius said. 'Say what you want to about him, but don't accuse him of being forehanded.'

'Yes, by heaven! He was man enough to come out and claim what he thought was his and get out when he never got it. But you. You'll just hang around, waiting for me to go, with that damned meal mouth of yours. Pay me the taxes on your half back to the day your mother died, and take it.'

'No,' Virginius said. 'I won't do it.'

'No,' Old Anse said. 'No. Oh, no. Why spend your money for half of it when you can set down and get all of it some day without putting out a cent.' Then we imagined Old Anse (we thought of them as sitting down until now, talking like two civilized men) rising, with his shaggy head and his heavy eyebrows. 'Get out of my house!' he said. But Virginius didn't move, didn't get up, watching his father. Old Anse came toward him, his hand raised. 'Get. Get out of my house. By heaven, I'll....'

Virginus went, then. He didn't hurry, didn't run. He packed up his belongings (he would have more than Anse; quite a few little things) and went four or five miles to live with a cousin, the son of a remote kinsman of his mother. The cousin lived alone, on a good farm too, though now eaten up with mortgages, since the cousin was no farmer either, being half a stock-trader and half a lay preacher — a small, sandy, nondescript man whom you would not remember a minute after you looked at his face and then away — and probably no better at either of these than at fanning.

Without haste Virginus left, with none of his brother's foolish and violent finality; for which, strange to say, we thought none the less of Young Anse for showing, possessing. In fact, we always looked at Virginus a little askance too; he was a little too much master of himself. For it is human nature to trust quickest those who cannot depend on themselves.

We called Virginus a deep one; we were not surprised when we learned how he had used his savings to disencumber the cousin's farm. And neither were we surprised when a year later we learned how Old Anse had refused to pay the taxes on his land and how, two days before the place would have gone delinquent, the sheriff received anonymously in the mail cash to the exact penny of the Holland assessment. 'Trust Virginus,' we said, since we believed we knew that the money needed no name to it. The sheriff had notified Old Anse.

'Put it up for sale and be damned,' Old Anse said. 'If they think that all they have to do is set there waiting, the whole brood and biling of them...'

The sheriff sent Young Anse word. 'It's not my land,' Young Anse sent back.

The sheriff notified Virginus. Virginus came to town and looked at the tax books himself. 'I got all I can carry myself, now,' he said. 'Of course, if he lets it go, I hope I can get it. But I don't know. A good farm like that won't last long or go cheap.' And that was all. No anger, no

astonishment, no regret. But he was a deep one; we were not surprised when we learned how the sheriff had received that package of money, with the unsigned note: Tax money for Anselm Holland farm. Send receipt to Anselm Holland, Senior.

‘Trust Virginius,’ we said. We thought about Virginius quite a lot during the next year, out there in a strange house, farming strange land, watching the farm and the house where he was born and that was rightfully his going to ruin. For the old man was letting it go completely now: year by year the good broad fields were going back to jungle and gully, though still each January the sheriff received that anonymous money in the mail and sent the receipt to Old Anse, because the old man had stopped coming to town altogether now, and the very house was falling down about his head, and nobody save Virginius ever stopped there.

Five or six times a year he would ride up to the front porch, and the old man would come out and bellow at him in savage and violent vituperation, Virginius taking it quietly, talking to the few remaining negroes once he had seen with his own eyes that his father was all right, then riding away again. But nobody else ever stopped there, though now and then from a distance someone would see the old man going about the mournful and shaggy fields on the old white horse which was to kill him.

Then last summer we learned that he was digging up the graves in the cedar grove where five generations of his wife’s people rested. A negro reported it, and the county health officer went out there and found the white horse tied in the grove, and the old man himself came out of the grove with a shotgun. The health officer returned, and two days later a deputy went out there and found the old man lying beside the horse, his foot fast in the stirrup, and on the horse’s rump the savage marks of the stick — not a switch: a stick — where it had been struck again and again and again.

So they buried him, among the graves which he had violated. Virginius and the cousin came to the funeral. They were the funeral, in fact. For

Anse, Junior, didn't come. Nor did he come near the place later, though Virginius stayed long enough to lock the house and pay the negroes off. But he too went back to the cousin's, and in due time Old Anse's will was offered for probate to Judge Dukinfield. The substance of the will was no secret; we all learned of it.

Regular it was, and we were surprised neither at its regularity nor at its substance nor its wording:... with the exception of these two bequests, I give and bequeath... my property to my elder son Virginius, provided it be proved to the satisfaction of the... Chancellor that it was the said Virginius who has been paying the taxes on my land, the... Chancellor to be the sole and unchallenged judge of the proof.

The other two bequests were:

To my younger son Anselm, I give... two full sets of mule harness, with the condition that this... harness be used by... Anselm to make one visit to my grave. Otherwise this... harness to become and remain part... of my property as described above.

To my cousin-in-law Granby Dodge I give... one dollar in cash, to be used by him for the purchase of a hymn book or hymn books, as a token of my gratitude for his having fed and lodged my son Virginius since... Virginius quitted my roof.

That was the will. And we watched and listened to hear or see what Young Anse would say or do. And we heard and saw nothing. And we watched to see what Virginius would do. And he did nothing. Or we didn't know what he was doing, what he was thinking. But that was Virginius. Because it was all finished then, anyway. All he had to do was to wait until Judge Dukinfield validated the will, then Virginius could give Anse his half — if he intended to do this. We were divided there. 'He and Anse never had any trouble,' some said. 'Virginius never had any trouble with anybody,' others said. 'If you go by that token, he will have to divide that farm with the whole county.'

‘But it was Virginius that tried to pay Anse’s fine that,’ the first ones said. ‘And it was Virginius that sided with his father when Young Anse wanted to divide the land, too,’ the second ones said.

So we waited and we watched. We were watching Judge Dukinfield now; it was suddenly as if the whole thing had sifted into his hands; as though he sat godlike above the vindictive and jeering laughter of that old man who even underground would not die, and above these two irreconcilable brothers who for fifteen years had been the same as dead to each other.

But we thought that in his last coup, Old Anse had overreached himself; that in choosing Judge Dukinfield the old man’s own fury had checkmated him; because in Judge Dukinfield we believed that Old Anse had chosen the one man among us with sufficient probity and honor and good sense — that sort of probity and honor which has never had time to become confused and self-doubting with too much learning in the law.

The very fact that the validating of what was a simple enough document appeared to be taking him an overlong time, was to us hut fresh proof that Judge Dukinfield was the one man among us who believed that justice is fifty per cent legal knowledge and fifty per cent unhaste and confidence in himself and in God.

So as the expiration of the legal period drew near, we watched Judge Dukinfield as he went daily between his home and his office in the courthouse yard. Deliberate and unhurried he moved — a widower of sixty and more, portly, white-headed, with an erect and dignified carriage which the Negroes called ‘rear-backed.’ He had been appointed Chancellor seventeen years ago; he possessed little knowledge of the law and a great deal of hard common SENSE; AND FOR thirteen years now no man had opposed him for reelection and even those who would be most enraged by his air of bland and affable condescension voted for him on occasion with a kind of childlike confidence and trust.

So we watched him without impatience, knowing that what he finally did would be right, not because he did it, but because he would not permit himself or anyone else to do anything until it was right. So each morning we would see him cross the square at exactly ten minutes past eight o'clock and go on to the courthouse, where the negro janitor had preceded him by exactly ten minutes, with the clocklike precision with which the block signal presages the arrival of the train, to open the office for the day. The Judge would enter the office, and the Negro would take his position in a wire-mended splint chair in the flagged passage which separated the office from the courthouse proper where he would sit all day long and doze, as he had done for seventeen years.

Then at five in the afternoon the negro would wake and enter the office and perhaps wake the Judge too, who had lived long enough to have learned that the onus of any business is usually in the hasty minds of those theoreticians who have no business of their own; and then we would watch them cross the square again in single file and go on up the street toward home, the two of them, eyes front and about fifteen feet apart, walking so erect that the two frock coats made by the same tailor and to the Judge's measure fell from the two pairs of shoulders in single hoardlike planes, without intimation of waist or of hips.

Then one afternoon, a little after five o'clock, men began to run suddenly across the square, toward the courthouse. Other men saw them and ran too, their feet heavy on the paving, among the wagons and the cars, their voices tense, urgent, 'What? What is it?'

'Judge Dukinfield,' the word went; and they ran on and entered the flagged passage between the courthouse and the office, where the old negro in his castoff frock coat stood beating his hands on the air. They passed him and ran into the office. Behind the table the Judge sat, leaning a little back in his chair, quite comfortable. His eyes were open, and he had been shot neatly once through the bridge of the nose, so that he appeared to have three eyes in a row. It was a bullet, yet no man about the square that day, or the old negro who had sat all day long in the chair in the passage, had heard any sound.

It took Gavin Stevens a long time, that day — he and the little brass box. Because the Grand Jury could not tell at first what he was getting at — if any man in that room that day, the jury, the two brothers, the cousin, the old negro, could tell. So at last the Foreman asked him point blank:

‘Is it your contention, Gavin, that there is a connection between Mr. Holland’s will and Judge Dukinfield’s murder?’

‘Yes,’ the county attorney said. ‘And I’m going to contend more than that.’

They watched him: the jury, the two brothers. The old negro and the cousin alone were not looking at him. In the last week the negro had apparently aged fifty years. He had assumed public office concurrently with the Judge; indeed, because of that fact, since he had served the Judge’s family for longer than some of us could remember. He was older than the Judge, though until that afternoon a week ago he had looked forty years younger — a wizened figure, shapeless in the voluminous frock coat, who reached the office ten minutes ahead of the Judge and opened it and swept it and dusted the table without disturbing an object upon it, all with a skillful slovenliness that was fruit of seventeen years of practice, and then repaired to the wire-bound chair in the passage to sleep.

He seemed to sleep, that is. (The only other way to reach the office was by means of the narrow private stair which led down from the courtroom, used only by the presiding judge during court term, who even then had to cross the passage and pass within eight feet of the negro’s chair unless he followed the passage to where it made an L beneath the single window in the office, and climbed through that window.) For no man or woman had ever passed that chair without seeing the wrinkled eyelids of its occupant open instantaneously upon the brown, irisless eyes of extreme age.

Now and then we would stop and talk to him, to hear his voice roll in rich mispronunciation of the orotund and meaningless legal phraseology which he had picked up unawares, as he might have

disease germs, and which he reproduced with an ex-cathedra profundity that caused more than one of us to listen to the Judge himself with affectionate amusement.

But for all that he was old; he forgot our names at times and confused us with one another; and, confusing our faces and our generations too, he waked sometimes from his light slumber to challenge callers who were not there, who had been dead for many years. But no one had ever been known to pass him unawares.

But the others in the room watched Stevens — the jury about the table, the two brothers sitting at opposite ends of the bench, with their dark, identical, aquiline faces, their arms folded in identical attitudes. 'Are you contending that Judge Dukinfield's slayer is in this room?' the Foreman asked.

The county attorney looked at them, at the faces watching him. 'I'm going to contend more than that,' he said.

'Contend?' Anselm, the younger twin, said. He sat alone at his end of the bench, with the whole span of bench between him and the brother to whom he had not spoken in fifteen years, watching Stevens with a hard, furious, unwinking glare.

'Yes,' Stevens said. He stood at the end of the table. He began to speak, looking at no one in particular, speaking in an easy, anecdotal tone, telling what we already knew, referring now and then to the other twin, Virginus, for corroboration. He told about Young Anse and his father. His tone was fair, pleasant. He seemed to be making a case for the living, telling about how Young Anse left home in anger, in natural anger at the manner in which his father was treating that land which had been his mother's and half of which was at the time rightfully his. His tone was quite just, specious, frank; if anything, a little partial to Anselm, Junior. That was it.

Because of that seeming partiality, that seeming glozing, there began to emerge a picture of Young Anse that was damning him to something

which we did not then know, damned him because of that very desire for justice and affection for his dead mother, warped by the violence which he had inherited from the very man who had wronged him. And the two brothers sitting there, with that space of friction-smooth plank between them, the younger watching Stevens with that leashed, violent glare, the elder as intently, but with a face unfathomable. Stevens now told how Young Anse left in anger, and how a year later Virginius, the quieter one, the calmer one, who had tried more than once to keep peace between them, was driven away in turn. And again he drew a specious, frank picture: of the brothers separated, not by the living father, but by what each had inherited from him; and drawn together, bred together, by that land which was not only rightfully theirs, but in which their mother's bones lay.

'So there they were, watching from a distance that good land going to min, the house in which they were born and their mother was born falling to pieces because of a crazed old man who attempted at the last, when he had driven them away and couldn't do anything else to them, to deprive them of it for good and all by letting it be sold for nonpayment of taxes. But somebody foiled him there, someone with foresight enough and self-control enough to keep his own counsel about what wasn't anybody else's business anyway so long as the taxes were paid. So then all they had to do was to wait until the old man died.

He was old anyway and, even if he had been young, the waiting would not have been very hard for a self-controlled man, even if he did not know the contents of the old man's will. Though that waiting wouldn't have been so easy for a quick, violent man, especially if the violent man happened to know or suspect the substance of the will and was satisfied and, further, knew himself to have been irrevocably wronged; to have had citizenship and good name robbed through the agency of a man who had already despoiled him and had driven him out of the best years of his life among men, to live like a hermit in a hill cabin. A man like that would have neither the time nor the inclination to bother much with either waiting for something or not waiting for it.'

They stared at him, the two brothers. They might have been carved in stone, save for Anselm's eyes. Stevens talked quietly, not looking at anyone in particular. He had been county attorney for almost as long as Judge Dukinfield had been chancellor. He was a Harvard graduate: a loose-jointed man with a mop of untidy iron-gray hair, who could discuss Einstein with college professors and who spent whole afternoons among the squatting men against the walls of country stores, talking to them in their idiom. He called these his Then in time the father died, as any man who possessed self-control and foresight would have known.

And his will was submitted for probate; and even folks way back in the hills heard what was in it, heard how at last that mistreated land would belong to its rightful owner. Or owners, since Anse Holland knows as well as we do that Virge would no more take more than his rightful half, will or no will, now than he would have when his father gave him the chance. Anse knows that because he knows that he would do the same thing — give Virge his half — if he were Virge.

Because they were both born to Anselm Holland, but they were born to Cornelia Mardis too. But even if Anse didn't know, believe, that, he would know that the land which had been his mother's and in which her bones now lie would now be treated right. So maybe that night when he heard that his father was dead, maybe for the first time since Anse was a child, since before his mother died maybe and she would come upstairs at night and look into the room where he was asleep and go away; maybe for the first time since then, Anse slept.

Because it was all vindicated then, you see: the outrage, the injustice, the lost good name, and the penitentiary stain — all gone now like a dream. To be forgotten now, because it was all right.

By that time, you see, he had got used to being a hermit, to being alone; he could not have changed after that long. He was happier where he was, alone back there. And now to know that it was all past like a bad dream, and that the land, his mother's land, her heritage and her mausoleum, was now in the hands of the one man whom he could

and would trust, even though they did not speak to each other. Don't you see?'

We watched him as we sat about the table which had not been disturbed since the day Judge Dukinfield died, upon which lay still the objects which had been, next to the pistol muzzle, his last sight on earth, and with which we were all familiar for years — the papers, the foul inkwell, the stubby pen to which the Judge clung, the small brass box which had been his superfluous paper weight. At their opposite ends of the wooden bench, the twin brothers watched Stevens, motionless, intent.

'No, we don't see,' the Foreman said. 'What are you getting at? What is the connection between all this and Judge Dukinfield's murder?'

'Here it is,' Stevens said. 'Judge Dukinfield was validating that will when he was killed. It was a queer will; but we all expected that of Mr. Holland. But it was all regular, the beneficiaries are all satisfied; we all know that half of that land is Anse's the minute he wants it. So the will is all right. Its probate should have been just a formality. Yet Judge Dukinfield had had it in abeyance for over two weeks when he died. And so that man who thought that all he had to do was to wait—'

'What man?' the Foreman said.

'Wait,' Stevens said. 'All that man had to do was to wait. But it wasn't the waiting that worried him, who had already waited fifteen years. That wasn't it. It was something else, which he learned (or remembered) when it was too late, which he should not have forgotten; because he is a shrewd man, a man of self-control and foresight; self-control enough to wait fifteen years for his chance, and foresight enough to have prepared for all the incalculables except one: his own memory. And when it was too late, he remembered that there was another man who would also know what he had forgotten about. And that other man who would know it was Judge Dukinfield. And that thing which he would also know was that that horse could not have killed Mr. Holland.'

When his voice ceased there was no sound in the room. The jury sat quietly about the table, looking at Stevens. Anselm turned his leashed, furious face and looked once at his brother, then he looked at Stevens again, leaning a little forward now. Virginius had not moved; there was no change in his grave, intent expression.

Between him and the wall the cousin sat. His hands lay on his lap and his head was bowed a little, as though he were in church. We knew of him only that he was some kind of an itinerant preacher, and that now and then he gathered up strings of scrubby horses and mules and took them somewhere and swapped or sold them. Because he was a man of infrequent speech who in his dealings with men betrayed such an excruciating shyness and lack of confidence that we pitied him, with that kind of pitying disgust you feel for a crippled worm, dreading even to put him to the agony of saying 'yes' or 'no' to a question.

But we heard how on Sundays, in the pulpits of country churches, he became a different man, changed; his voice then timbrous and moving and assured out of all proportion to his nature and his size.

'Now, imagine the waiting,' Stevens said, 'with that man knowing what was going to happen before it had happened, knowing at last that the reason why nothing was happening, why that will had apparently gone into Judge Dukinfield's office and then dropped out of the world, out of the knowledge of man, was because he had forgotten something which he should not have forgotten. And that was that Judge Dukinfield also knew that Mr. Holland was not the man who beat that horse. He knew that Judge Dukinfield knew that the man who struck that horse with that stick so as to leave marks on its back was the man who killed Mr. Holland first and then hooked his foot in that stirrup and struck that horse with a stick to make it bolt. But the horse didn't bolt.

The man knew beforehand that it would not; he had known for years that it would not, but he had forgotten that. Because while it was still a colt it had been beaten so severely once that ever since, even at the sight of a switch in the rider's hand, it would lie down on the ground, as

Mr. Holland knew, and as all who were close to Mr. Holland's family knew. So it just lay down on top of Mr. Holland's body. But that was all right too, at first; that was just as well.

That's what that man thought for the next week or so, lying in his bed at night and waiting, who had already waited fifteen years. Because even then, when it was too late and he realized that he had made a mistake, he had not even then remembered all that he should never have forgotten. Then he remembered that too, when it was too late, after the body had been found and the marks of the stick on the horse seen and remarked and it was too late to remove them. They were probably gone from the horse by then, anyway.

But there was only one tool he could use to remove them from men's minds. Imagine him then, his terror, his outrage, his feeling of having been tricked by something beyond retaliation: that furious desire to turn time back for just one minute, to undo or to complete when it is too late. Because the last thing which he remembered when it was too late was that Mr. Holland had bought that horse from Judge Dukinfield, the man who was sitting here at this table, passing on the validity of a will giving away two thousand acres of some of the best land in the county.

And he waited, since he had but one tool that would remove those stick marks, and nothing happened. And nothing happened, and he knew why. And he waited as long as he dared, until he believed that there was more at stake than a few roods and squares of earth. So what else could he do but what he did?' L His voice had hardly ceased before Anselm was speaking. His voice was harsh, abrupt. 'You're wrong,' he said.

As one, we looked at him where he sat forward on the bench, in his muddy boots and his worn overalls, glaring at Stevens; even Virginius turned and looked at him for an instant. The cousin and the old negro alone had not moved. They did not seem to be listening. 'Where am I wrong?' Stevens said.

But Anselm did not answer. He glared at Stevens. Will Virginius get the place in spite of... of....'

'In spite of what?' Stevens said.

Whether he... that....'

'You mean your father? Whether he died or was murdered?'

'Yes,' Anselm said.

'Yes. You and Virge get the land whether the will stands up or not, provided, of course, that Virge divides with you if it does. But the man that killed your father wasn't certain of that and he didn't dare to ask. Because he didn't want that. He wanted Virge to have it all. That's why he wants that will to stand.'

'You're wrong,' Anselm said, in that harsh, sudden tone. I killed him. But it wasn't because of that damned farm. Now bring on your sheriff.' And now it was Stevens who, gazing steadily at Anselm's furious face, said quietly: 'And I say that you are wrong, Anse.'

For some time after that we who watched and listened dwelt in anticlimax, in a dreamlike state in which we seemed to know beforehand what was going to happen, aware at the same time that it didn't matter because we should soon wake. It was as though we were outside of time, watching events from outside; still outside of and beyond time since that first instant when we looked again at Anselm as though we had never seen him before. There was a sound, a slow, sighing sound, not loud; maybe of relief — something.

Perhaps we were all thinking how Anse's nightmare must be really over at last; it was as though we too had rushed suddenly back to where he lay as a child in his bed and the mother who they said was partial to him, whose heritage had been lost to him, and even the very resting place of her tragic and long quiet dust outraged, coming in to look at him for a moment before going away again. Far back down time that was, straight though it be.

And straight though that corridor was, the boy who had lain unawares in that bed had got lost in it, as we all do, must, ever shall; that boy was as dead as any other of his blood in that violated cedar grove, and the man at whom we looked, we looked at across the irrevocable chasm, with pity perhaps, but not with mercy. So it took the sense of Stevens' words about as long to penetrate to us as it did to Anse; he had to repeat himself, 'Now I say that you are wrong, Anse.'

'What?' Anse said. Then he moved. He did not get up, yet somehow he seemed to lunge suddenly, violently. 'You're a liar. You—'

'You're wrong, Anse. You didn't kill your father. The man who killed your father was the man who could plan and conceive to kill that old man who sat here behind this table every day, day after day, until an old negro would come in and wake him and tell him it was time to go home — a man who never did man, woman, or child aught but good as he believed that he and God saw it. It wasn't you that killed your father. You demanded of him what you believed was yours, and when he refused to give it, you left, went away, never spoke to him again. You heard how he was mistreating the place but you held your peace, because the land was just 'that damned farm.'

You held your peace until you heard how a crazy man was digging up the graves where your mother's flesh and blood and your own was buried. Then, and then only, you came to him, to remonstrate. But you were never a man to remonstrate, and he was never a man to listen to it. So you found him there, in the grove, with the shotgun. I didn't even expect you paid much attention to the shotgun.

I reckon you just took it away from him and whipped him with your bare hands and left him there beside the horse; maybe you thought that he was dead. Then somebody happened to pass there after you were gone and found him; maybe that someone had been there all the time, watching. Somebody that wanted him dead too; not in anger and outrage, but by calculation. For profit, by a will, maybe.

So he came there and he found what you had left and he finished it: hooked your father's foot in that stirrup and tried to beat that horse into bolting to make it look well, forgetting in his haste what he should not have forgot. But it wasn't you. Because you went back home, and when you heard what had been found, you said nothing.

Because you thought something at the time which you did not even say to yourself. And when you heard what was in the will you believed that you knew. And you were glad then. Because you had lived alone until youth and wanting things were gone out of you; you just wanted to be quiet as you wanted your mother's dust to be quiet. And besides, what could land and position among men be to a man without citizenship, with a blemished name?'

We listened quietly while Stevens' voice died in that little room in which no air ever stirred, no draft ever blew because of its position, its natural lee beneath the courthouse wall.

'It wasn't you that killed your father or Judge Dukinfield either, Anse. Because if that man who killed your father had remembered in time that Judge Dukinfield once owned that horse, Judge Dukinfield would be alive to-day.'

We breathed quietly, sitting about the table behind which Judge Dukinfield had been sitting when he looked up into the pistol. The table had not been disturbed. Upon it still lay the papers, the pens, the inkwell, the small, curiously chased brass box which his daughter had fetched him from Europe twelve years ago — for what purpose neither she nor the Judge knew, since it would have been suitable only for bath salts or tobacco, neither of which the Judge used — and which he had kept for a paper weight, that, too, superfluous where no draft ever blew. But he kept it there on the table, and all of us knew it, had watched him toy with it while he talked, opening the spring lid and watching it snap viciously shut at the slightest touch.

When I look back on it now, I can see that the rest of it should not have taken as long as it did. It seems to me now that we must have known all the time; I still seem to feel that kind of disgust without mercy which

after all does the office of pity, as when you watch a soft worm impaled on a pin, when you feel that retching revulsion — would even use your naked palm in place of nothing at all, thinking, 'Go on.

Mash it. Smear it. Get it over with.' But that was not Stevens' plan. Because he had a plan, and we realized afterward that, since he could not convict the man, the man himself would have to. And it was unfair, the way he did it; later we told him so. ('Ah,' he said. 'But isn't justice always unfair? Isn't it always composed of injustice and luck and platitude in unequal parts?')

But anyway we could not see yet what he was getting at as he began to speak again in that tone — easy, anecdotal, his hand resting now on the brass box. But men are moved so much by preconceptions. It is not realities, circumstances, that astonish us; it is the concussion of what we should have known, if we had only not been so busy believing what we discover later we had taken for the truth for no other reason than that we happened to be believing it at the moment.

He was talking about smoking again, about how a man never really enjoys tobacco until he begins to believe that it is harmful to him, and how non-smokers miss one of the greatest pleasures in life for a man of sensibility: the knowledge that he is succumbing to a vice which can injure himself alone. 'Do you smoke, Anse?' he said.

'No,' Anse said.

'You don't either, do you, Virge?'

'No,' Virginius said. 'None of us ever did — father or Anse or me. We heired it, I reckon.'

'A family trait,' Stevens said. 'Is it in your mother's family too? Is it in your branch, Granby?'

The cousin looked at Stevens, for less than a moment. Without moving he appeared to writhe slowly within his neat, shoddy suit. 'No sir. I never used it.'

‘Maybe because you are a preacher,’ Stevens said. The cousin didn’t answer. He looked at Stevens again with his mild, still, hopelessly abashed face. ‘I’ve always smoked,’ Stevens said. ‘Ever since I finally recovered from being sick at it at the age of fourteen. That’s a long time, long enough to have become finicky about tobacco. But most smokers are, despite the psychologists and the standardized tobacco. Or maybe it’s just cigarettes that are standardized.

Or maybe they are just standardized to laymen, non-smokers. Because I have noticed how non-smokers are apt to go off half cocked about tobacco, the same as the rest of us go off half cocked about what we do not ourselves use, are not familiar with, since man is led by his pre-(or mis-) conceptions.

Because you take a man who sells tobacco even though he does not use it himself, who watches customer after customer tear open the pack and light the cigarette just across the counter from him. You ask him if all tobacco smells alike, if he cannot distinguish one kind from another by the smell. Or maybe it’s the shape and color of the package it comes in; because even the psychologists have not yet told us just where seeing stops and smelling begins, or hearing stops and seeing begins. Any lawyer can tell you that.’

Again the Foreman checked him. We had listened quietly enough, but I think we all felt that to keep the murderer confused was one thing, but that we, the jury, were another. ‘You should have done all this investigating before you called us together,’ the Foreman said. ‘Even if this be evidence, what good will it do without the body of the murderer be apprehended? Conjecture is all well enough—’

‘All right,’ Stevens said. ‘Let me conjecture a little more, and if I don’t seem to progress any, you tell me so, and I’ll stop my way and do yours. And I expect that at first you are going to call this taking a right smart of liberty even with conjecture. But we found Judge Dukinfield dead, shot between the eyes, in this chair behind this table.

That's not conjecture. And Uncle Job was sitting all day long in that chair in the passage, where anyone who entered this room (unless he came down the private stair from the courtroom and climbed through the window) would have to pass within three feet of him. And no man that we know of has passed Uncle Job in that chair in seventeen years. That's not conjecture.'

'Then what is your conjecture?'

But Stevens was talking about tobacco again, about smoking. 'I stopped in West's drug store last week for some tobacco, and he told me about a man who was particular about his smoking also. While he was getting my tobacco from the case, he reached out a box of cigarettes and handed it to me. It was dusty, faded, like he had had it a long time, and he told me how a drummer had left two of them with him years ago. "Ever smoke them?" he said.

"No," I said. "They must be city cigarettes." Then he told me how he had sold the other package just that day. He said he was behind the counter, with the newspaper spread on it, sort of half reading the paper and half keeping the store while the clerk was gone to dinner. And he said he never heard or saw the man at all until he looked up and the man was just across the counter, so close that it made him jump. A smallish man in city clothes, West said, wanting a kind of cigarette that West had never heard of. "I haven't got that kind," West said.

"I don't carry them." "Why don't you carry them?" the man said. "I have no sale for them," West said. And he told about the man in his city clothes, with a face like a shaved wax doll, and eyes with a still way of looking and a voice with a still way of talking. Then West said he saw the man's eyes and he looked at his nostrils, and then he knew what was wrong. Because the man was full of dope right then. "I don't have any calls for them," West said.

"What am I trying to do now?" the man said. "Trying to sell you flypaper?" Then the man bought the other package of cigarettes and went out. And West said that he was mad and he was sweating too, like he wanted to vomit, he said. He said to me, "If I had some devilment I

was scared to do myself, you know what I'd do? I'd give that fellow about ten dollars and I'd tell him where the devilment was and tell him not to never speak to me again. When he went out, I felt just exactly like that. Like I was going to be sick.””

Stevens looked about at us; he paused for a moment. We watched him: ‘He came here from somewhere in a car, a big roadster, that city man did. That city man that ran out of his own kind of tobacco.’ He paused again, and then he turned his head slowly and he looked at Virginius Holland. It seemed like a full minute that we watched them looking steadily at one another. ‘And a nigger told me that that big car was parked in Virginius Holland’s bam the night before Judge Dukinfield was killed.’

And for another time we watched the two of them looking steadily at each other, with no change of expression on either face. Stevens spoke in a tone quiet, speculative, almost musing. ‘Someone tried to keep him from coming out here in that car, that big car that anyone who saw it once would remember and recognize. Maybe that someone wanted to forbid him to come in it, threaten him. Only the man that Doctor West sold those cigarettes to wouldn’t have stood for very much threatening.’

‘Meaning me, by “someone,”’ Virginius said. He did not move or turn away his steady stare from Stevens’ face. But Anselm moved. He turned his head and he looked at his brother, once. It was quite quiet, yet when the cousin spoke we could not hear or understand him at once; he had spoken but one time since we entered the room and Stevens locked the door. His voice was faint; again and without moving he appeared to writhe faintly beneath his clothes. He spoke with that abashed faintness, that excruciating desire for effacement with which we were all familiar.

‘That fellow you’re speaking of, he come to see me,’ Dodge said. ‘Stopped to see me. He stopped at the house about dark that night and said he was hunting to buy up little-built horses to use for this — this game—’

'Polo?' Stevens said. The cousin had not looked at anyone while he spoke; it was as though he were speaking to his slowly moving hands upon his lap.

'Yes, sir. Virginius was there. We talked about horses. Then the next morning he took his car and went on. I never had anything that suited him. I don't know where he come from nor where he went.'

'Or who else he came to see,' Stevens said. 'Or what else he came to do. You can't say that.'

Dodge didn't answer. It was not necessary, and again he had fled behind the shape of his effacement like a small and weak wild creature into a hole.

'That's my conjecture,' Stevens said.

And then we should have known. It was there to be seen, bald as a naked hand. We should have felt it — the someone in that room who felt that Stevens had called that horror, that outrage, that furious desire to turn time back for a second, to unsay, to undo. But maybe the someone had not felt it yet, had not yet felt the blow, the impact, as for a second or two a man may be unaware that he has been shot. Because now it was Virge that spoke, abruptly, harshly, 'How are you going to prove that?'

'Prove what, Virge?' Stevens said. Again they looked at each other, quiet, hard, like two boxers. Not swordsmen, but boxers; or at least with pistols. Who it was who hired that gorilla, that thug, down here from Memphis? I don't have to prove that. He told that.

On the way back to Memphis he ran down a child at Battenburg (he was still full of dope; likely he had taken another shot of it when he finished his job here), and they caught him and locked him up and when the dope began to wear off he told where he had been, whom he had been to see, sitting in the cell in the jail there, jerking and snarling, after they had taken the pistol with the silencer on it away from him.'

'Ah,' Virginius said. That's nice. So all you've got to do is to prove that he was in this room that day. And how will you do that? Give that old nigger another dollar and let him remember again?'

But Stevens did not appear to be listening. He stood at the end of the table, between the two groups, and while he talked now he held the brass box in his hand, turning it, looking at it, talking in that easy, musing tone. 'You all know the peculiar attribute which this room has. How no draft ever blows in it. How when there has been smoking here on a Saturday, say, the smoke will still be here on Monday morning when Uncle Job opens the door, lying against the baseboard there like a dog asleep, kind of. You've all seen that.'

We were sitting a little forward now, like Anse, watching Stevens. 'Yes,' the Foreman said. 'We've seen that.'

'Yes,' Stevens said, still as though he were not listening, turning the closed box this way and that in his hand. 'You asked me for my conjecture. Here it is. But it will take a conjecturing man to do it — a man who could walk up to a merchant standing behind his counter, reading a newspaper with one eye and the other eye on the door for customers, before the merchant knew he was there. A city man, who insisted on city cigarettes.'

So this man left that store and crossed to the courthouse and entered and went on upstairs, as anyone might have done. Perhaps a dozen men saw him; perhaps twice that many did not look at him at all, since there are two places where a man does not look at faces: in the sanctuaries of civil law, and in public lavatories. So he entered courtroom and came down the private stairs and into the passage, and saw Uncle Job asleep in his chair. So maybe he followed the passage, and climbed through the window behind Judge Dukinfield's back.

Or maybe he walked right past Uncle Job, coming up from behind, you see. And to pass within eight feet of a man asleep in a chair would not be very hard for a man who could walk up to a merchant leaning on the counter of his own store. Perhaps he even lighted the cigarette from

the pack that West had sold him before even Judge Dukinfield knew that he was in the room. Or perhaps the Judge was asleep in his chair, as he sometimes was.

So perhaps the man stood there and finished the cigarette and watched the smoke pour slowly across the table and bank up against the wall, thinking about the easy money, the easy hicks, before he even drew the pistol. And it made less noise than the striking of the match which lighted the cigarette, since he had guarded so against noise that he forgot about silence. And then he went back as he came, and the dozen men and the two dozen saw him and did not see him, and at five that afternoon Uncle Job came in to wake the Judge and tell him it was time to go home. Isn't that right, Uncle Job?'

The old Negro looked up. 'I looked after him, like I promised Mistis,' he said. 'And I worried with him, like I promised Mistis I would. And I come in here and I thought at first he was asleep, like he sometimes—'

'Wait,' Stevens said. 'You came in and you saw him in the chair, as always, and you noticed the smoke against the wall behind the table as you crossed the floor. Wasn't that what you told me?'

Sitting in his mended chair, the old negro began to cry. He looked like an old monkey, weakly crying black tears, finishing at his face with the back of a gnarled hand that shook with age, with something. 'I come in here many's the time in the morning, to clean up. It would be laying there, that smoke, and him that never smoked a lick in his life coming in and sniffing with that high nose of hisn and saying, "Well, Job, we sholy smoked out that corpus juris coon last night."'

'No,' Stevens said. Tell about how the smoke was there behind that table that afternoon when you came to wake him to go home, when there hadn't anybody passed you all that day except Mr. Virge Holland yonder. And Mr. Virge don't smoke, and the Judge didn't smoke. But that smoke was there. Tell what you told me.'

‘It was there. And I thought that he was asleep like always, and I went to wake him up—’

‘And this little box was sitting on the edge of the table where he had been handling it while he talked to Mr. Virge, and when you reached your hand to wake him—’

‘Yes, sir. It jumped off the table and I thought he was asleep—’

The box jumped off the table. And it made a noise and you wondered why that didn’t wake the Judge, and you looked down at where the box was lying on the floor in the smoke, with the lid open, and you thought that it was broken. And so you reached your hand down to see, because the Judge liked it because Miss Emma had brought it back to him from across the water, even if he didn’t need it for a paper weight in his office. So you closed the lid and set it on the table again. And then you found that the Judge was more than asleep.’

He ceased. We breathed quietly, hearing ourselves breathe. Stevens seemed to watch his hand as it turned the box slowly this way and that. He had turned a little from the table in talking with the old negro, so that now he faced the bench rather than the jury, the table. ‘Uncle Job calls this a gold: box. Which is as good a name as any. Better than most. Because all metal is about the same; it just happens that some I folks want one kind more than another. But it all has certain general attributes, likenesses.

One of them is, that whatever is shut up in a metal box will stay in it unchanged for a longer time than in a wooden or paper box. You can shut up smoke, for instance, in a metal box with a tight lid like this one, and even a week later it will still be there. And not only that, a chemist or a smoker or tobacco seller like Doctor West can tell what made the smoke, what kind of tobacco, particularly if it happens to be a strange brand, a kind not sold in Jefferson, and of which he just happened to have two packs and remembered who he sold one of them to.’

We did not move. We just sat there and heard the man’s urgent stumbling feet on the floor, then we saw him strike the box from Stevens’ hand. But we were not particularly watching him, even then.

Like him, we watched the box bounce into two pieces as the lid snapped off, and emit a fading vapor which dissolved sluggishly away. As one we leaned across the table and looked down upon the sandy and hopeless mediocrity of Granby Dodge's head as he knelt on the floor and flapped at the fading smoke with his hands.

'But I still don't..' Virginus said. We were outside now, in the courthouse yard, the five of us, blinking a little at one another as though we had just come out of a cave.

You've got a will, haven't you?' Stevens said. Then Virginus stopped perfectly still, looking at Stevens.

Oh,' he said at last.

'One of those natural mutual deed-of-trust wills that any two business partners might execute,' Stevens said. You and Granby each the other's beneficiary and executor, for mutual protection of mutual holdings. That's natural. Likely Granby was the one who suggested it first, by telling you how he had made you his heir. So you'd better tear it up, yours, your copy. Make Anse your heir, if you have to have a will.'

'He won't need to wait for that,' Virginus said. 'Half of that land is his.' 'You just treat it right, as he knows you will,' Stevens said. 'Anse don't need any land.'

'Yes,' Virginus said. He looked away. 'But I wish...'

'You just treat it right. He knows you'll do that.'

'Yes,' Virginus said. He looked at Stevens again. 'Well, I reckon I... we both owe you....'

'More than you think,' Stevens said. He spoke quite soberly. 'Or to that horse. A week after your father died, Granby bought enough rat poison to kill three elephants, West told me. But after he remembered what he had forgotten about that horse, he was afraid to kill his rats before that will was settled. Because he is a man both shrewd and ignorant at the same time: a dangerous combination.'

Ignorant enough to believe that the law is something like dynamite: the slave of whoever puts his hand to it first, and even then a dangerous slave; and just shrewd enough to believe that people avail themselves of it, resort to it, only for personal ends. I found that out when he sent a negro to see me one day last summer, to find out if the way in which a man died could affect the probate of his will. And I knew who had sent the negro to me, and I knew that whatever information the negro took back to the man who sent him, that man had already made up his mind to disbelieve it, since I was a servant of the slave, the dynamite. So if that had been a normal horse, or Granby had remembered in time, you would be underground now.

Granby might not be any better off than he is, but you would be dead.' Oh,' Virginius said, quietly, soberly. 'I reckon I'm obliged.'

'Yes,' Stevens said. 'You've incurred a right smart of obligation. You owe Granby something.' Virginius looked at him. 'You owe him for those taxes he has been paying every year now for fifteen years.'

'Oh,' Virginius said. 'Yes. I thought that father... Every November, about, Granby would borrow money from me, not much, and not ever the same amount. To buy stock with, he said. He paid some of it back. But he still owes me... no. I owe him now.' He was quite grave, quite sober. When a man starts doing wrong, it's not what he does; it's what he leaves.'

'But it's what he does that people will have to hurt him for, the outsiders. Because the folks that'll be hurt by what he leaves won't hurt him. So it's a good thing for the rest of us that what he does takes him out of their hands. I have taken him out of your hands now, Virge, blood or no blood. Do you understand?'

'I understand,' Virginius said. 'I wouldn't anyway...' Then suddenly he looked at Stevens. 'Gavin,' he said. 'What?'

Stevens said.

Virginius watched him. 'You talked a right smart in yonder about chemistry and such, about that smoke. I reckon I believed some of it and I reckon I didn't believe some of it. And I reckon if I told you which I believed and didn't believe, you'd laugh at me.' His face was quite sober. Stevens' face was quite grave too. Yet there was something in Stevens' eyes, glance; something quick and eager; not ridiculing, either.

'That was a week ago. If you had opened that box to see if that smoke was still in there, it would have got out. And if there hadn't been any smoke in that box, Granby wouldn't have given himself away. And that was a week ago. How did you know there was going to be any smoke in that box?'

'I didn't,' Stevens said. He said it quickly, brightly, cheerfully, almost happily, almost beaming. 'I didn't. I waited as long as I could before I put the smoke in there. Just before you all came into the room, I filled that box full of pipe smoke and shut it up. But I didn't know. I was a lot scarer than Granby Dodge. But it was all right. That smoke stayed in that box almost an hour.'

The End

Monk, William Faulkner

Monk

I WILL HAVE to try to tell about Monk. I mean, actually try — a deliberate attempt to bridge the inconsistencies in his brief and sordid and unoriginal history, to make something out of it, not only with the nebulous tools of supposition and inference and invention, but to employ these nebulous tools upon the nebulous and inexplicable material which he left behind him.

Because it is only in literature that the paradoxical and even mutually negating anecdotes in the history of a human heart can be juxtaposed and annealed by art into verisimilitude and credibility.

He was a moron, perhaps even a cretin; he should never have gone to the penitentiary at all. But at the time of his trial we had a young District Attorney who had his eye on Congress, and Monk had no people and no money and not even a lawyer, because I don't believe he ever understood why he should need a lawyer or even what a lawyer was, and so the Court appointed a lawyer for him, a young man just admitted to the bar, who probably knew but little more about the practical functioning of criminal law than Monk did, who perhaps pleaded Monk guilty at the direction of the Court or maybe forgot that he could have entered a plea of mental incompetence, since Monk did not for one moment deny that he had killed the deceased.

They could not keep him from affirming or even reiterating it, in fact. He was neither confessing nor boasting. It was almost as though he were trying to make a speech, to the people who held him beside the body until the deputy got there, to the deputy and to the jailor and to the other prisoners — the casual niggers picked up for gambling or vagrancy or for selling whiskey in alleys — and to the J. P. who arraigned him and the lawyer appointed by the Court, and to the Court and the jury.

Even an hour after the killing he could not seem to remember where it had happened; he could not even remember the man whom he affirmed that he had killed; he named as his victim (this on suggestion, prompting) several men who were alive, and even one who was present in the J. P.'s office at the time. But he never denied that he had killed somebody.

It was not insistence; it was just a serene reiteration of the fact in that voice bright, eager, and sympathetic while he tried to make his speech, trying to tell them something of which they could make neither head nor tail and to which they refused to listen.

He was not confessing, not trying to establish grounds for lenience in order to escape what he had done. It was as though he were trying to postulate something, using this opportunity to bridge the hitherto abyss between himself and the living world, the world of living men, the ponderable and travailing earth — as witness the curious speech which he made on the gallows five years later.

But then, he never should have lived, either. He came — emerged: whether he was born there or not, no one knew — from the pine hill country in the eastern part of our county: a country which twenty-five years ago (Monk was about twenty-five) was without roads almost and where even the sheriff of the county did not go — a country impenetrable and almost uncultivated and populated by a clannish people who owned allegiance to no one and no thing and whom outsiders never saw until a few years back when good roads and automobiles penetrated the green fastnesses where the denizens with their corrupt Scotch-Irish names intermarried and made whiskey and shot at all strangers from behind log barns and snake fences.

It was the good roads and the fords which not only brought Monk to Jefferson but brought the half-rumored information about his origin. Because the very people among whom he had grown up seemed to know almost as little about him as we did — a tale of an old woman who lived like a hermit, even among those fiercely solitary people, in a log house with a loaded shotgun standing just inside the front door, and a son who had been too much even for that country and people, who had murdered and fled, possibly driven out, where gone none knew for ten years, when one day he returned, with a woman — a woman with hard, bright, metallic, city hair and a hard, blonde, city face seen about the place from a distance, crossing the yard or just standing in the door and looking out upon the green solitude with an expression of cold and sullen and unseeing inscrutability: and deadly, too, but as a snake is deadly, in a different way from their almost conventional ritual of warning and then powder.

Then they were gone. The others did not know when they departed nor why, any more than they knew when they had arrived nor why. Some

said that one night the old lady, Mrs. Odlethrop, had got the drop on both of them with the shotgun and drove them out of the house and out of the country.

But they were gone; and it was months later before the neighbors discovered that there was a child, an infant, in the house; whether brought there or born there — again they did not know. This was Monk; and the further tale how six or seven years later they began to smell the body and some of them went into the house where old Mrs. Odlethrop had been dead for a week and found a small creature in a single shift made from bedticking trying to raise the shotgun from its corner beside the door. They could not catch Monk at all.

That is, they failed to hold him that first time, and they never had another chance. But he did not go away. They knew that he was somewhere watching them while they prepared the body for burial, and that he was watching from the undergrowth while they buried it. They never saw him again for some time, though they knew that he was about the place, and on the following Sunday they found where he had been digging into the grave, with sticks and with his bare hands.

He had a pretty big hole by then, and they filled it up and that night some of them lay in ambush for him, to catch him and give him food. But again they could not hold him, the small furious body (it was naked now) which writhed out of their hands as if it had been greased, and fled with no human sound. After that, certain of the neighbors would carry food to the deserted house and leave it for him. But they never saw him. They just heard, a few months later, that he was living with a childless widower, an old man named Fraser who was a whiskey maker of wide repute.

He seems to have lived there for the next ten years, until Fraser himself died. It was probably Fraser who gave him the name which he brought to town with him, since nobody ever knew what old Mrs. Odlethrop had called him, and now the country got to know him or become familiar with him, at least — a youth not tall and already a little pudgy, as though he were thirty-eight instead of eighteen, with the ugly,

shrewdly foolish, innocent face whose features rather than expression must have gained him his nickname, who gave to the man who had taken him up and fed him the absolute and unquestioning devotion of a dog and who at eighteen was said to be able to make Fraser's whiskey as well as Fraser could.

That was all that he had ever learned to do — to make and sell whiskey where it was against the law and so had to be done in secret, which further increases the paradox of his public statement when they drew the black cap over his head for killing the warden of the penitentiary five years later.

That was all he knew: that, and fidelity to the man who fed him and taught him what to do and how and when; so that after Fraser died and the man, whoever it was, came along in the truck or the car and said, 'All right, Monk. Jump in,' he got into it exactly as the homeless dog would have, and came to Jefferson.

This time it was a filling station two or three miles from town, where he slept on a pallet in the back room, what time the pallet was not already occupied by a customer who had got too drunk to drive his car or walk away, where he even learned to work the gasoline pump and to make correct change, though his job was mainly that of remembering just where the half-pint bottles were buried in the sand ditch five hundred yards away.

He was known about town now, in the cheap, bright town clothes for which he had discarded his overalls — the colored shirts which faded with the first washing, the banded straw hats which dissolved at the first shower, the striped shoes which came to pieces on his very feet — pleasant, impervious to affront, talkative when anyone would listen, with that shrewd, foolish face, that face at once cunning and dreamy, pasty even beneath the sunburn, with that curious quality of imperfect connection between sense and ratiocination.

The town knew him for seven years until that Saturday midnight and the dead man (he was no loss to anyone, but then as I said, Monk had

neither friends, money, nor lawyer) lying on the ground behind the filling station and Monk standing there with the pistol in his hand — there were two others present, who had been with the dead man all evening — trying to tell the ones who held him and then the deputy himself whatever it was that he was trying to say in his eager, sympathetic voice, as though the sound of the shot had broken the barrier behind which he had lived for twenty-five years and that he had now crossed the chasm into the world of living men by means of the dead body at his feet.

Because he had no more conception of death than an animal has — of that of the man at his feet nor of the warden's later nor of his own. The thing at his feet was just something that would never walk or talk or eat again and so was a source neither of good nor harm to anyone; certainly not of good nor use. He had no comprehension of bereavement, irreparable finality. He was sorry for it, but that was all. I don't think he realized that in lying there it had started a train, a current of retribution that someone would have to pay.

Because he never denied that he had done it, though denial would have done him no good, since the two companions of the dead man were there to testify against him. But he did not deny it, even though he was never able to tell what happened, what the quarrel was about, nor (as I said), later, even where it had occurred and who it was that he had killed, stating once (as I also said) that his victim was a man standing at the moment in the crowd which had followed him into the J. P.'s office.

He just kept on trying to say whatever it was that had been inside him for twenty-five years and that he had only now found the chance (or perhaps the words) to free himself of, just as five years later on the scaffold he was to get it (or something else) said at last, establishing at last that contact with the old, fecund, ponderable, travailing earth which he wanted but had not been able to tell about because only then had they told him how to say what it was that he desired.

He tried to tell it to the deputy who arrested him and to the J. P. who arraigned him; he stood in the courtroom with that expression on his

face which people have when they are waiting for a chance to speak, and heard the indictment read:... against the peace and dignity of the Sovereign State of Mississippi, that the aforesaid Monk Odlethrop did willfully and maliciously and with premeditated — and interrupted, in a voice reedy and high, the sound of which in dying away left upon his face the same expression of amazement and surprise which all our faces wore:

‘My name ain’t Monk; it’s Stonewall Jackson Odlethrop.’

You see? If it were true, he could not have heard it in almost twenty years since his grandmother (if grandmother she was) had died: and yet he could not even recall the circumstances of one month ago when he had committed a murder. And he could not have invented it. He could not have known who Stonewall Jackson was, to have named himself. He had been to school in the country, for one year. Doubtless old Fraser sent him, but he did not stay. Perhaps even the first-grade work in a country school was too much for him. He told my uncle about it when the matter of his pardon came up.

He did not remember just when, nor where the school was, nor why he had quit. But he did remember being there, because he had liked it. All he could remember was how they would all read together out of the books. He did not know what they were reading, because he did not know what the book said; he could not even write his name now.

But he said it was fine to hold the book and hear all the voices together and then to feel (he said he could not hear his own voice) his voice too, along with the others, by the way his throat would buzz, he called it. So he could never have heard of Stonewall Jackson. Yet there it was, inherited from the earth, the soil, transmitted to him through a self-pariahed people — something of bitter pride and indomitable defeat of a soil and the men and women who trod upon it and slept within it.

They gave him life. It was one of the shortest trials ever held in our county, because, as I said, nobody regretted the deceased and nobody except my Uncle Gavin seemed to be concerned about Monk. He had never been on a train before. He got on, handcuffed to the deputy, in a

pair of new overalls which someone, perhaps the sovereign state whose peace and dignity he had outraged, had given him, and the still new, still pristine, gaudy-banded, imitation Panama hat (it was still only the first of June, and he had been in jail six weeks) which he had just bought during the week of the fatal Saturday night.

He had the window side in the car and he sat there looking at us with his warped, pudgy, foolish face, waving the fingers of the hand, the free arm propped in the window until the train began to move, accelerating slowly, huge and dingy as the metal gangways clashed, drawing him from our sight hermetically sealed and leaving upon us a sense of finality more irrevocable than if we had watched the penitentiary gates themselves close behind him, never to open again in his life, the face looking back at us, craning to see us, wan and small behind the dingy glass, yet wearing that expression questioning yet unalarmed, eager, serene, and grave.

Five years later one of the dead man's two companions on that Saturday night, dying of pneumonia and whiskey, confessed that he had fired the shot and thrust the pistol into Monk's hand, telling Monk to look at what he had done.

My Uncle Gavin got the pardon, wrote the petition, got the signatures, went to the capitol and got it signed and executed by the Governor, and took it himself to the penitentiary and told Monk that he was free. And Monk looked at him for a minute until he understood, and cried. He did not want to leave. He was a trusty now; he had transferred to the warden the same doglike devotion which he had given to old Fraser.

He had learned to do nothing well, save manufacture and sell whiskey, though after he came to town he had learned to sweep out the filling station. So that's what he did here; his life now must have been something like that time when he had gone to school. He swept and kept the warden's house as a woman would have, and the warden's wife had taught him to knit; crying, he showed my uncle the sweater

which he was knitting for the warden's birthday and which would not be finished for weeks yet.

So Uncle Gavin came home. He brought the pardon with him, though he did not destroy it, because he said it had been recorded and that the main thing now was to look up the law and see if a man could be expelled from the penitentiary as he could from a college. But I think he still hoped that maybe some day Monk would change his mind; I think that's why he kept it. Then Monk did set himself free, without any help.

It was not a week after Uncle Gavin had talked to him; I don't think Uncle Gavin had even decided where to put the pardon for safekeeping, when the news came. It was a headline in the Memphis papers next day, but we got the news that night over the telephone: how Monk Oglethrop, apparently leading an abortive jailbreak, had killed the warden with the warden's own pistol, in cold blood.

There was no doubt this time; fifty men had seen him do it, and some of the other convicts overpowered him and took the pistol away from him. Yes. Monk, the man who a week ago cried when Uncle Gavin told him that he was free, leading a jailbreak and committing a murder (on the body of the man for whom he was knitting the sweater which he cried for permission to finish) so cold-blooded that his own confederates had turned upon him.

Uncle Gavin went to see him again. He was in solitary confinement now, in the death house. He was still knitting on the sweater. He knitted well, Uncle Gavin said, and the sweater was almost finished. 'I ain't got but three days more,' Monk said. 'So I ain't got no time to waste.'

'But why, Monk?' Uncle Gavin said. 'Why? Why did you do it?' He said that the needles would not cease nor falter, even while Monk would look at him with that expression serene, sympathetic, and almost exalted. Because he had no conception of death. I don't believe he had ever connected the carrion at his feet behind the filling station that night with the man who had just been walking and talking, or that on

the ground in the compound with the man for whom he was knitting the sweater.

‘I knowed that making and selling that whiskey wasn’t right,’ he said. ‘I knowed that wasn’t it. Only I...’ He looked at Uncle Gavin. The serenity was still there, but for the moment something groped behind it: not bafflement nor indecision, just seeking, groping.

‘Only what?’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘The whiskey wasn’t it? Wasn’t what? It what?’

‘No. Not it.’ Monk looked at Uncle Gavin. ‘I mind that day on the train, and that fellow in the cap would put his head in the door and holler, and I would say “Is this it? Is this where we get off?” and the deppity would say No. Only if I had been there without that deppity to tell me, and that fellow had come in and hollered, I would have...’

‘Got off wrong? Is that it? And now you know what is right, where to get off right? Is that it?’

‘Yes,’ Monk said. ‘Yes. I know right, now.’

‘What? What is right? What do you know now that they never told you before?’

He told them. He walked up onto the scaffold three days later and stood where they told him to stand and held his head docilely (and without being asked) to one side so they could knot the rope comfortably, his face still serene, still exalted, and wearing that expression of someone waiting his chance to speak, until they stood back. He evidently took that to be his signal, because he said, ‘I have sinned against God and man and now I have done paid it out with my suffering.

And now—’ they say he said this part loud, his voice clear and serene. The words must have sounded quite loud to him and irrefutable, and his heart uplifted, because he was talking inside the black cap now: ‘And now I am going out into the free world, and farm.’

You see? It just does not add up. Granted that he did not know that he was about to die, his words still do not make sense. He could have known but little more about farming than about Stonewall Jackson; certainly he had never done any of it. He had seen it, of course, the cotton and the com in the fields, and men working it. But he could not have wanted to do it himself before, or he would have, since he could have found chances enough.

Yet he turns and murders the man who had befriended him and, whether he realized it or not, saved him from comparative hell and upon whom he had transferred his capacity for doglike fidelity and devotion and on whose account a week ago he had refused a pardon: his reason being that he wanted to return into the world and farm land — this, the change, to occur in one week's time and after he had been for five years more completely removed and insulated from the world than any nun.

Yes, granted that this could be the logical sequence in that mind which he hardly possessed and granted that it could have been powerful enough to cause him to murder his one friend (Yes, it was the warden's pistol; we heard about that: how the warden kept it in the house and one day it disappeared and to keep word of it getting out the warden had his Negro cook, another trusty and who would have been the logical one to have taken it, severely beaten to force the truth from him.

Then Monk himself found the pistol, where the warden now recalled having hidden it himself, and returned it.) — granted all this, how in the world could the impulse have reached him, the desire to farm land have got into him where he now was? That's what I told Uncle Gavin.

'It adds up, all right,' Uncle Gavin said. 'We just haven't got the right ciphers yet. Neither did they.'

'They?'

'Yes. They didn't hang the man who murdered Gambrell. They just crucified the pistol.'

'What do you mean?' I said.

'I don't know. Maybe I never shall. Probably never shall. But it adds up, as you put it, somewhere, somehow. It has to. After all, that's too much buffooning even for circumstances, let alone a mere flesh-and-blood imbecile. But probably the ultimate clowning of circumstances will be that we won't know it.'

But we did know. Uncle Gavin discovered it by accident, and he never told anyone but me, and I will tell you why.

At that time we had for Governor a man without ancestry and with hut little more divulged background than Monk had; a politician, a shrewd man who (some of us feared, Uncle Gavin and others about the state) would go far if he lived. About three years after Monk died he declared, without warning, a kind of jubilee.

He set a date for the convening of the Pardon Board at the penitentiary, where he inferred that he would hand out pardons to various convicts in the same way that the English king gives out knighthoods and garters on his birthday. Of course, all the Opposition said that he was frankly auctioning off the pardons, but Uncle Gavin didn't think so.

He said that the Governor was shrewder than that, that next year was election year, and that the Governor was not only gaining votes from the kin of the men he would pardon but was laying a trap for the purists and moralists to try to impeach him for corruption and then fail for lack of evidence. But it was known that he had the Pardon Board completely under his thumb, so the only protest the Opposition could make was to form committees to be present at the time, which step the Governor — oh, he was shrewd — courteously applauded, even to the extent of furnishing transportation for them. Uncle Gavin was one of the delegates from our county.

He said that all these unofficial delegates were given copies of the list of those slated for pardon (the ones with enough voting kin to warrant it, I suppose) — the crime, the sentence, the time already served, prison record, etc. It was in the mess hall; he said he and the other

delegates were seated on the hard, backless benches against one wall, while the Governor and his Board sat about the table on the raised platform where the guards would sit while the men ate, when the convicts were marched in and halted.

Then the Governor called the first name on the list and told the man to come forward to the table. But nobody moved. They just huddled there in their striped overalls, murmuring to one another while the guards began to holler at the man to come out and the Governor looked up from the paper and looked at them with his eyebrows raised. Then somebody said from back in the crowd: 'Let Terrel speak for us, Governor. We done 'lected him to do our talking.'

Uncle Gavin didn't look up at once. He looked at his list until he found the name: Terrel, Bill. Manslaughter. Twenty years. Served since May 9, 19 — . Applied for pardon January, 19 — . Vetoed by Warden C. L. Gambrell. Applied for pardon September, 19 — . Vetoed by Warden C. L. Gambrell. Record, Troublemaker.

Then he looked up and watched Terrel walk out of the crowd and approach the table — a tall man, a huge man, with a dark aquiline face like an Indian's, except for the pale yellow eyes and a shock of wild, black hair — who strode up to the table with a curious blend of arrogance and servility and stopped and, without waiting to be told to speak, said in a queer, high singsong filled with that same abject arrogance: 'Your Honor, and honorable gentlemen, we have done sinned against God and man but now we have done paid it out with our suffering. And now we want to go out into the free world, and farm.'

Uncle Gavin was on the platform almost before Terrel quit speaking, leaning over the Governor's chair, and the Governor turned with his little, shrewd, plump face and his inscrutable, speculative eyes toward Uncle Gavin's urgency and excitement. 'Send that man back for a minute,' Uncle Gavin said. 'I must speak to you in private.' For a moment longer the Governor looked at Uncle Gavin, the puppet Board looking at him too, with nothing in their faces at all, Uncle Gavin said.

'Why, certainly, Mr. Stevens,' the Governor said. He rose and followed Uncle Gavin back to the wall, beneath the barred window, and the man Terrel still standing before the table with his head jerked suddenly up and utterly motionless and the light from the window in his yellow eyes like two match flames as he stared at Uncle Gavin.

'Governor, that man's a murderer,' Uncle Gavin said. The Governor's face did not change at all.

'Manslaughter, Mr. Stevens,' he said. 'Manslaughter. As private and honorable citizens of the state, and as humble servants of it, surely you and I can accept the word of a Mississippi jury.'

'I'm not talking about that,' Uncle Gavin said. He said he said it like that, out of his haste, as if Terrel would vanish if he did not hurry; he said that he had a terrible feeling that in a second the little inscrutable, courteous man before him would magic Terrel out of reach of all retribution by means of his cold will and his ambition and his amoral ruthlessness. 'I'm talking about Gambrell and that half-wit they hanged. That man there killed them both as surely as if he had fired the pistol and sprung that trap.'

Still the Governor's face did not change at all. 'That's a curious charge, not to say serious,' he said. Of course you have proof of it.'

'No. But I will get it. Let me have ten minutes with him, alone. I will get proof from him. I will make him give it to me.'

'Ah,' the Governor said. Now he did not look at Uncle Gavin for a whole minute. When he did look up again, his face still had not altered as to expression, yet he had wiped something from it as he might have done physically, with a handkerchief. ('You see, he was paying me a compliment,' Uncle Gavin told me. 'A compliment to my intelligence. He was telling the absolute truth now. He was paying me the highest compliment in his power.') 'What good do you think that would do?' he said.

'You mean., Uncle Gavin said. They looked at one another. 'So you would still turn him loose on the citizens of this state, this country, just for a few votes?'

Why not? If he murders again, there is always this place for him to come back to.' Now it was Uncle Gavin who thought for a minute, though he did not look down.

'Suppose I should repeat what you have just said. I have no proof of that, either, but I would be believed. And that would—'

'Lose me votes? Yes. But you see, I have already lost those votes because I have never had them. You see? You force me to do what, for all you know, may be against my own principles too — or do you grant me principles?' Now Uncle Gavin said the Governor looked at him with an expression almost warm, almost pitying — and quite curious. 'Mr. Stevens, you are what my grandpap would have called a gentleman.

He would have snarled it at you, hating you and your kind; he might very probably have shot your horse from under you someday from behind a fence — for a principle. And you are trying to bring the notions of 1860 into the politics of the nineteen hundreds.

And politics in the twentieth century is a sorry thing. In fact, I sometimes think that the whole twentieth century is a sorry thing, smelling to high heaven in somebody's nose. But, no matter.' He turned now, back toward the table and the room full of faces watching them. 'Take the advice of a well-wisher even if he cannot call you friend, and let this business alone. As I said before, if we let him out and he murders again, as he probably will, he can always come back here.'

'And be pardoned again,' Uncle Gavin said.

'Probably. Customs do not change that fast, remember.'

'But you will let me talk to him in private, won't you?' The Governor paused, looking back, courteous and pleasant.

'Why, certainly, Mr. Stevens. It will be a pleasure to oblige you.'

They took them to a cell, so that a guard could stand opposite the barred door with a rifle. Watch yourself,' the guard told Uncle Gavin. 'He's a bad egg. Don't fool with him.'

'I'm not afraid,' Uncle Gavin said; he said he wasn't even careful now, though the guard didn't know what he meant. 'I have less reason to fear him than Mr. Gambrell even, because Monk Odlethrop is dead now.' So they stood looking at one another in the bare cell — Uncle Gavin and the Indian-looking giant with the fierce, yellow eyes.

'So you're the one that crossed me up this time,' Terrel said, in that queer, almost whining singsong. We knew about that case, too; it was in the Mississippi reports, besides it had not happened very far away, and Terrel not a farmer, either.

Uncle Gavin said that that was it, even before he realized that Terrel had spoken the exact words which Monk had spoken on the gallows and which Terrel could not have heard or even known that Monk had spoken; not the similarity of the words, but the fact that neither Terrel nor Monk had ever farmed anything, anywhere.

It was another filling station, near a railroad this time, and a brakeman on a night freight testified to seeing two men rush out of the bushes as the train passed, carrying something which proved later to be a man, and whether dead or alive at the time the brakeman could not tell, and fling it under the train.

The filling station belonged to Terrel, and the fight was proved, and Terrel was arrested. He denied the fight at first, then he denied that the deceased had been present, then he said that the deceased had seduced his (Terrel's) daughter and that his (Terrel's) son had killed the man, and he was merely trying to avert suspicion from his son. The daughter and the son both denied this, and the son proved an alibi, and they dragged Terrel, cursing both his children, from the courtroom.

'Wait,' Uncle Gavin said. 'I'm going to ask you a question first. What did you tell Monk Odlethrop?'

'Nothing!' Terrel said. 'I told him nothing!'

'All right,' Uncle Gavin said. That's all I wanted to know.' He turned and spoke to the guard beyond the door. 'We're through. You can let us out.'

'Wait,' Terrel said. Uncle Gavin turned. Terrel stood as before, tall and hard and lean in his striped overalls, with his fierce, depthless, yellow eyes, speaking in that half-whining singsong. What do you want to keep me locked up in here for? What have I ever done to you? You, rich and free, that can go wherever you want, while I have to—' Then he shouted.

Uncle Gavin said he shouted without raising his voice at all, that the guard in the corridor could not have heard him: 'Nothing, I tell you! I told him nothing!' But this time Uncle Gavin didn't even have time to begin to turn away.

He said that Terrel passed him in two steps that made absolutely no sound at all, and looked out into the corridor. Then he turned and looked at Uncle Gavin. 'Listen,' he said. 'If I tell you, will you give me your word not to vote agin me?'

'Yes,' Uncle Gavin said. 'I won't vote agin you, as you say.'
'But how will I know you ain't lying?'

'Ah,' Uncle Gavin said. 'How will you know, except by trying it?' They looked at one another. Now Terrel looked down; Uncle Gavin said Terrel held one hand in front of him and that he (Uncle Gavin) watched the knuckles whiten slowly as Terrel closed it.

'It looks like I got to,' he said. 'It just looks like I got to.' Then he looked up; he cried now, with no louder sound than when he had shouted before: 'But if you do, and if I ever get out of here, then look out! See? Look out.'

‘Are you threatening me?’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘You, standing there, in those striped overalls, with that wall behind you and this locked door and a man with a rifle in front of you? Do you want me to laugh?’

‘I don’t want nothing,’ Terrel said. He whimpered almost now. ‘I just want justice. That’s all.’ Now he began to shout again, in that repressed voice, watching his clenched, white knuckles too apparently. ‘I tried twice for it; I tried for justice and freedom twice. But it was him. He was the one; he knowed I knowed it too. I told him I was going to—’ He stopped, as sudden as he began; Uncle Gavin said he could hear him breathing, panting.

That was Gambrell,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘Go on.’

‘Yes. I told him I was. I told him. Because he laughed at me. He didn’t have to do that. He could have voted agin me and let it go at that. He never had to laugh. He said I would stay here as long as he did or could keep me, and that he was here for life. And he was. He stayed here all his life. That’s just exactly how long he stayed.’ But he wasn’t laughing, Uncle Gavin said. It wasn’t laughing.

‘Yes. And so you told Monk—’

‘Yes. I told him. I said here we all were, pore ignorant country folks that hadn’t had no chance. That God had made to live outdoors in the free world and farm His land for Him; only we were pore and ignorant and didn’t know it, and the rich folks wouldn’t tell us until it was too late.

That we were pore ignorant country folks that never saw a train before, getting on the train and nobody caring to tell us where to get off and farm in the free world like God wanted us to do, and that he was the one that held us back, kept us locked up outen the free world to laugh at us agin the wishes of God. But I never told him to do it.

I just said “And now we can’t never get out because we ain’t got no pistol. But if somebody had a pistol we would walk out into the free world and farm it, because that’s what God aimed for us to do and

that's what we want to do. Ain't that what we want to do?" and he said, 'Yes. That's it.

That's what it is." And I said, "Only we ain't got nara pistol." And he said, "I can get a pistol." And I said, "Then we will walk in the free world because we have sinned against God but it wasn't our fault because they hadn't told us what it was He aimed for us to do. But now we know what it is because we want to walk in the free world and farm for God!" That's all I told him. I never told him to do nothing. And now go tell them. Let them hang me too. Gambrell is rotted, and that batbrain is rotted, and I just as soon rot under ground as to rot in here. Go on and tell them.'

'Yes,' Uncle Gavin said. 'All right. You will go free.'

For a minute he said Terrel did not move at all. Then he said, 'Free?'

'Yes,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Free. But remember this. A while ago you threatened me. Now I am going to threaten you. And the curious thing is, I can back mine up. I am going to keep track of you. And the next time anything happens, the next time anybody tries to frame you with a killing and you can't get anybody to say you were not there nor any of your kinsfolks to take the blame for it — You understand?' Terrel had looked up at him when he said Free, but now he looked down again. 'Do you?' Uncle Gavin said.

'Yes,' Terrel said. 'I understand.'

'All right,' Uncle Gavin said. He turned; he called to the guard. 'You can let us out this time,' he said. He returned to the mess hall, where the Governor was calling the men up one by one and giving them their papers and where again the Governor paused, the smooth, inscrutable face looking up at Uncle Gavin. He did not wait for Uncle Gavin to speak.

'You were successful, I see,' he said.

'Yes. Do you want to hear—'

'My dear sir, no. I must decline. I will put it stronger than that: I must refuse.' Again Uncle Gavin said he looked at him with that expression warm, quizzical, almost pitying, yet profoundly watchful and curious. 'I really believe that you never have quite given up hope that you can change this business. Have you?'

Now Uncle Gavin said he did not answer for a moment. Then he said, 'No. I haven't. So you are going to turn him loose? You really are?' Now he said that the pity, the warmth vanished, that now the face was as he first saw it: smooth, completely inscrutable, completely false.

'My dear Mr. Stevens,' the Governor said. 'You have already convinced me. But I am merely the moderator of this meeting; here are the votes. But do you think that you can convince these gentlemen?' And Uncle Gavin said he looked around at them, the identical puppet faces of the seven or eight of the Governor's battalions and battalions of factory-made colonels.

'No,' Uncle Gavin said. 'I can't.' So he left then. It was in the middle of the morning, and hot, but he started back to Jefferson at once, riding across the broad, heat-miraged land, between the cotton and the corn of God's long-fecund, remorseless acres, which would outlast any corruption and injustice. He was glad of the heat, he said; glad to be sweating, sweating out of himself the smell and the taste of where he had been.

The end

Hand Upon the Waters

I

THE TWO MEN followed the path where it ran between the river and the dense wall of cypress and cane and gum and brier. One of them carried a gunny sack which had been washed and looked as if it had been ironed too. The other was a youth, less than twenty, by his face. The river was low, at mid-July level.

‘He ought to been catching fish in this water,’ the youth said.

‘If he happened to feel like fishing,’ the one with the sack said. ‘Him and Joe run that line when Lonnie feels like it, not when the fish are biting.’ ‘They’ll be on the line, anyway,’ the youth said. ‘I don’t reckon Lonnie cares who takes them off for him.’

Presently the ground rose to a cleared point almost like a headland. Upon it sat a conical hut with a pointed roof, built partly of mildewed canvas and odd-shaped boards and partly of oil tins hammered out flat. A rusted stovepipe projected crazily above it, there was a meager woodpile and an ax, and a bunch of cane poles leaned against it. Then they saw, on the earth before the open door, a dozen or so short lengths of cord just cut from a spool near by, and a rusted can half full of heavy fishhooks, some of which had already been bent onto the cords. But there was nobody there.

‘The boat’s gone,’ the man with the sack said. ‘So he ain’t gone to the store.’ Then he discovered that the youth had gone on, and he drew in his breath and was just about to shout when suddenly a man rushed out of the undergrowth and stopped, facing him and making an urgent whimpering sound — a man not large, but with tremendous arms and shoulders; an adult, yet with something childlike about him, about the way he moved, barefoot, in battered overalls and with the urgent eyes of the deaf and dumb.

‘Hi, Joe,’ the man with the sack said, raising his voice as people will with those who they know cannot understand them. ‘Where’s Lonnie?’ He held up the sack. ‘Got some fish?’

But the other only stared at him, making that rapid whimpering. Then he turned and scuttled on up the path where the youth had disappeared, who, at that moment, shouted: ‘Just look at this line!’

The older one followed. The youth was leaning eagerly out over the water beside a tree from which a light cotton rope slanted tautly downward into the water. The deaf-and-dumb man stood just behind him, still whimpering and lifting his feet rapidly in turn, though before the older man reached him he turned and scuttled back past him, toward the hut. At this stage of the river the line should have been clear of the water, stretching from bank to bank, between the two trees, with only the hooks on the dependent cords submerged. But now it slanted into the water from either end, with a heavy downstream sag, and even the older man could feel movement on it. 'It's big as a man!' the youth cried.

'Yonder's his boat,' the older man said. The youth saw it, too — across the stream and below them, floated into a willow clump inside a point. 'Cross and get it, and we'll see how big this fish is.'

The youth stepped out of his shoes and overalls and removed his shirt and waded out and began to swim, holding straight across to let the current carry him down to the skiff, and got the skiff and paddled back, standing erect in it and staring eagerly upstream toward the heavy sag of the line, near the center of which the water, from time to time, roiled heavily with submerged movement. He brought the skiff in below the older man, who, at that moment, discovered the deaf-and-dumb man just behind him again, still making the rapid and urgent sound and trying to enter the skiff.

'Get back!' the older man said, pushing the other back with his arm.

'Get back, Joe!'

'Hurry up!' the youth said, staring eagerly toward the submerged line, where, as he watched, something rolled sluggishly to the surface, then sank again. 'There's something on there, or there ain't a hog in Georgia. It's big as a man too!'

The older one stepped into the skiff. He still held the rope, and he drew the skiff, hand over hand, along the line itself.

Suddenly, from the bank of the river behind them, the deaf-and-dumb man began to make an actual sound. It was quite loud.

II

‘Inquest?’ Stevens said.

‘Lonnie Grinnup.’ The coroner was an old country doctor. ‘Two fellows found him drowned on his own trotline this morning.’

‘No!’ Stevens said. ‘Poor damned feeb. I’ll come out.’ As county attorney he had no business there, even if it had not been an accident. He knew it. He was going to look at the dead man’s face for a sentimental reason.

What was now Yoknapatawpha County had been founded not by one pioneer but by three simultaneous ones. They came together on horseback, through the Cumberland Gap from the Carolinas, when Jefferson was still a Chickasaw Agency post, and bought land in the Indian patent and established families and flourished and vanished, so that now, a hundred years afterward, there was in all the county they helped to found but one representative of the three names.

This was Stevens, because the last of the Holston family had died before the end of the last century, and the Louis Grenier, whose dead face Stevens was driving eight miles in the heat of a July afternoon to look at, had never even known he was Louis Grenier.

He could not even spell the Lonnie Grinnup he called himself — an orphan, too, like Stevens, a man a little under medium size and somewhere in his middle thirties, whom the whole county knew — the face which was almost delicate when you looked at it again, equable, constant, always cheerful, with an invariable fuzz of soft golden beard which had never known a razor, and light-colored peaceful eyes — ‘touched,’ they said, but whatever it was, had touched him lightly, taking not very much away that need be missed — living, year in and year out, in the hovel he had built himself of an old tent and a few mismatched boards and flattened oil tins, with the deaf-and-dumb

orphan he had taken into his hut ten years ago and clothed and fed and raised, and who had not even grown mentally as far as he himself had.

Actually his hut and trotline and fish trap were in almost the exact center of the thousand and more acres his ancestors had once owned. But he never knew it.

Stevens believed he would not have cared, would have declined to accept the idea that any one man could or should own that much of the earth which belongs to all, to every man for his use and pleasure — in his own case, that thirty or forty square feet where his hut sat and the span of river across which his trotline stretched, where anyone was welcome at any time, whether he was there or not, to use his gear and eat his food as long as there was food.

And at times he would wedge his door shut against prowling animals and with his deaf-and-dumb companion he would appear without warning or invitation at houses or cabins ten and fifteen miles away, where he would remain for weeks, pleasant, equable, demanding nothing and without servility, sleeping wherever it was convenient for his hosts to have him sleep — in the hay of lofts, or in beds in family or company rooms, while the deaf-and-dumb youth lay on the porch or the ground just outside, where he could hear him who was brother and father both, breathing. It was his one sound out of all the voiceless earth. He was infallibly aware of it.

It was early afternoon. The distances were blue with heat. Then, across the long flat where the highway began to parallel the river bottom, Stevens saw the store. By ordinary it would have been deserted, but now he could already see clotted about it the topless and battered cars, the saddled horses and mules and the wagons, the riders and drivers of which he knew by name. Better still, they knew him, voting for him year after year and calling him by his given name even though they did not quite understand him, just as they did not understand the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa key on his watch chain. He drew in beside the coroner's car.

Apparently it was not to be in the store, but in the grist mill beside it, before the open door of which the clean Saturday overalls and shirts and the bared heads and the sunburned necks striped with the white razor lines of Saturday neck shaves were densest and quietest. They made way for him to enter. There was a table and three chairs where the coroner and two witnesses sat.

Stevens noticed a man of about forty holding a clean gunny sack, folded and refolded until it resembled a book, and a youth whose face wore an expression of weary yet indomitable amazement.

The body lay under a quilt on the low platform to which the silent mill was bolted. He crossed to it and raised the corner of the quilt and looked at the face and lowered the quilt and turned, already on his way back to town, and then he did not go back to town. He moved over among the men who stood along the wall, their hats in their hands, and listened to the two witnesses — it was the youth telling it in his amazed, spent, incredulous voice — finish describing the finding of the body. He watched the coroner sign the certificate and return the pen to his pocket, and he knew he was not going back to town.

‘I reckon that’s all,’ the coroner said. He glanced toward the door. ‘All right, Ike,’ he said. ‘You can take him now.’ Stevens moved aside with the others and watched the four men cross toward the quilt. ‘You going to take him, Ike?’ he said.

The eldest of the four glanced back at him for a moment. ‘Yes. He had his burying money with Mitchell at the store.’

‘You, and Pose, and Matthew, and Jim Blake,’ Stevens said.

This time the other glanced back at him almost with surprise, almost impatiently.

‘We can make up the difference,’ he said.

‘I’ll help,’ Stevens said.

‘I thank you,’ the other said. ‘We got enough.’

Then the coroner was among them, speaking testily: 'All right, boys. Give them room.'

With the others, Stevens moved out into the air, the afternoon again. There was a wagon backed up to the door now which had not been there before. Its tail gate was open, the bed was filled with straw, and with the others Stevens stood bareheaded and watched the four men emerge from the shed, carrying the quilt-wrapped bundle, and approach the wagon. Three or four others moved forward to help, and Stevens moved, too, and touched the youth's shoulder, seeing again that expression of spent and incredulous wild amazement. 'You went and got the boat before you knew anything was wrong,' he said.

'That's right,' the youth said. He spoke quietly enough at first. 'I swum over and got the boat and rowed back. I knowed something was on the line. I could see it swagged—'

'You mean you swam the boat back,' Stevens said.

'— down into the — Sir?'

'You swam the boat back. You swam over and got it and swam it back.'

'No, sir! I rowed the boat back. I rowed it straight back across! I never suspected nothing! I could see them fish—'

'What with?' Stevens said. The youth glared at him. 'What did you row it back with?'

'With the oar! I picked up the oar and rowed it right back, and all the time I could see them flopping around in the water. They didn't want to let go! They held on to him even after we hauled him up, still eating him! Fish were! I knowed turtles would, but these were fish! Eating him! Of course it was fish we thought was there! It was! I won't never eat another one! Never!'

It had not seemed long, yet the afternoon had gone somewhere, taking some of the heat with it. Again in his car, his hand on the switch, Stevens sat looking at the wagon, now about to depart. And it's not

right, he thought. It don't add. Something more that I missed, didn't see. Or something that hasn't happened yet.

The wagon was now moving, crossing the dusty banquette toward the highroad, with two men on the seat and the other two on saddled mules beside it. Stevens' hand turned the switch; the car was already in gear. It passed the wagon, already going fast.

A mile down the road he turned into a dirt lane, back toward the hills. It began to rise, the sun intermittent now, for in places among the ridges sunset had already come. Presently the road forked. In the V of the fork stood a church, white-painted and steepleless, beside an unfenced straggle of cheap marble headstones and other graves outlined only by rows of inverted glass jars and crockery and broken brick.

He did not hesitate. He drove up beside the church and turned and stopped the car facing the fork and the road over which he had just come where it curved away and vanished. Because of the curve, he could hear the wagon for some time before he saw it, then he heard the truck. It was coming down out of the hills behind him, fast, sweeping into sight, already slowing — a cab, a shallow bed with a tarpaulin spread over it.

It drew out of the road at the fork and stopped; then he could hear the wagon again, and then he saw it and the two riders come around the curve in the dusk, and there was a man standing in the road beside the truck now, and Stevens recognized him: Tyler Ballenbaugh — a farmer, married and with a family and a reputation for self-sufficiency and violence, who had been born in the county and went out West and returned, bringing with him, like an effluvium, rumors of sums he had won gambling, who had married and bought land and no longer gambled at cards, but on certain years would mortgage his own crop and buy or sell cotton futures with the money — standing in the road beside the wagon, tall in the dusk, talking to the men in the wagon without raising his voice or making any gesture. Then there was another man beside him, in a white shirt, whom Stevens did not recognize or look at again.

His hand dropped to the switch; again the car was in motion with the sound of the engine. He turned the headlights on and dropped rapidly down out of the churchyard and into the road and up behind the wagon as the man in the white shirt leaped onto the running board, shouting at him, and Stevens recognized him too: A younger brother of Ballenbaugh's, who had gone to Memphis years ago, where it was understood he had been a hired armed guard during a textile strike, but who, for the last two or three years, had been at his brother's, hiding, it was said, not from the police hut from some of his Memphis friends or later business associates.

From time to time his name made one in reported brawls and fights at country dances and picnics. He was subdued and thrown into jail once by two officers in Jefferson, where, on Saturdays, drunk, he would brag about his past exploits or curse his present luck and the older brother who made him work about the farm.

'Who in hell you spying on?' he shouted.

'Boyd,' the other Ballenbaugh said. He did not even raise his voice. 'Get back in the truck.' He had not moved — a big somber-faced man who stared at Stevens out of pale, cold, absolutely expressionless eyes.

'Howdy, Gavin,' he said.

'Howdy, Tyler,' Stevens said. 'You going to take Lonnie?'

'Does anybody here object?'

'I don't,' Stevens said, getting out of the car. 'I'll help you swap him.' Then he got back into the car. The wagon moved on. The truck hacked and turned, already gaining speed; the two faces fled past — the one which Stevens saw now was not truculent, but frightened; the other, in which there was nothing at all save the still, cold, pale eyes. The cracked tail lamp vanished over the hill. That was an Okatoba County license number, he thought.

Lonnie Grinnup was buried the next afternoon, from Tyler Ballenbaugh's house.

Stevens was not there. 'Joe wasn't there, either, I suppose,' he said. 'Lonnie's dummy.'

'No. He wasn't there, either. The folks that went in to Lonnie's camp on Sunday morning to look at that trotline said that he was still there, hunting for Lonnie. But he wasn't at the burying. When he finds Lonnie this time, he can lie down by him, but he won't hear him breathing.'

Ill 'No,' Stevens said.

He was in Mottstown, the seat of Okatoba County, on that afternoon. And although it was Sunday, and although he would not know until he found it just what he was looking for, he found it before dark — the agent for the company which, eleven years ago, had issued to Lonnie Grinnup a five-thousand-dollar policy, with double indemnity for accidental death, on his life, with Tyler Ballenbaugh as beneficiary.

It was quite correct. The examining doctor had never seen Lonnie Grinnup before, but he had known Tyler Ballenbaugh for years, and Lonnie had made his mark on the application and Ballenbaugh had paid the first premium and kept them up ever since.

There had been no particular secrecy about it other than transacting the business in another town, and Stevens realized that even that was not unduly strange.

Okatoba County was just across the river, three miles from where Ballenbaugh lived, and Stevens knew of more men than Ballenbaugh who owned land in one county and bought their cars and trucks and banked their money in another, obeying the country-bred man's inherent, possibly atavistic, faint distrust, perhaps, not of men in white collars but of paving and electricity.

'Then I'm not to notify the company yeti' the agent asked.

'No. I want you to accept the claim when he comes in to file it, explain to him it will take a week or so to settle it, wait three days and send him word to come in to your office to see you at nine o'clock or ten o'clock

the next morning; don't tell him why, what for. Then telephone me at Jefferson when you know he has got the message.'

Early the next morning, about daybreak, the heat wave broke. He lay in bed watching and listening to the crash and glare of lightning and the rain's loud fury, thinking of the drumming of it and the fierce channeling of clay-colored water across Lonnie Grinnup's raw and kinless grave in the barren hill beside the steepleless church, and of the sound it would make, above the turmoil of the rising river, on the tin-and-canvas hut where the deaf-and-dumb youth probably still waited for him to come home, knowing that something had happened, but not how, not why.

Not how, Stevens thought. They fooled him somehow. They didn't even bother to tie him up. They just fooled him.

On Wednesday night he received a telephone message from the Mottstown agent that Tyler Ballenbaugh had filed his claim.

'All right,' Stevens said. 'Send him the message Monday, to come in Tuesday. And let me know when you know he has gotten it.' He put the phone down. I am playing stud poker with a man who has proved himself a gambler, which I have not, he thought. But at least I have forced him to draw a card. And he knows who is in the pot with him.

So when the second message came, on the following Monday afternoon, he knew only what he himself was going to do. He had thought once of asking the sheriff for a deputy, or of taking some friend with him.

But even a friend would not believe that what I have is a hole card, he told himself, even though I do: That one man, even an amateur at murder, might be satisfied that he had cleaned up after himself. But when there are two of them, neither one is going to be satisfied that the other has left no ravelings.

So he went alone. He owned a pistol. He looked at it and put it back into its drawer. At least nobody is going to shoot me with that, he told himself. He left town just after dusk.

This time he passed the store, dark at the roadside.

When he reached the lane into which he had turned nine days ago, this time he turned to the right and drove on for a quarter of a mile and turned into a littered yard, his headlights full upon a dark cabin. He did not turn them off. He walked full in the yellow beam, toward the cabin, shouting: 'Nate! Nate!'

After a moment a Negro voice answered, though no light showed.

'I'm going in to Mr. Lonnie Grinnup's camp. If I'm not back by daylight, you better go up to the store and tell them.'

There was no answer. Then a woman's voice said: 'Toil come on away from that door!' The man's voice murmured something.

'I can't help it!' the woman cried. 'You come away and let them white folks alone!'

So there are others besides me, Stevens thought, thinking how quite often, almost always, there is in Negroes an instinct not for evil but to recognize evil at once when it exists. He went back to the car and snapped off the lights and took his flashlight from the seat.

He found the truck. In the close-held beam of the light he read again the license number which he had watched nine days ago flee over the hill. He snapped off the light and put it into his pocket.

Twenty minutes later he realized he need not have worried about the light. He was in the path, between the black wall of jungle and the river, he saw the faint glow inside the canvas wall of the hut and he could already hear the two voices — the one cold, level and steady, the other harsh and high.

He stumbled over the woodpile and then over something else and found the door and flung it back and entered the devastation of the dead man's house — the shuck mattresses dragged out of the wooden

hunks, the overturned stove and scattered cooking vessels — where Tyler Ballenbaugh stood facing him with a pistol and the younger one stood half-crouched above an overturned box.

‘Stand back, Gavin,’ Ballenbaugh said.

‘Stand back yourself, Tyler,’ Stevens said. ‘You’re too late.’

The younger one stood up. Stevens saw recognition come into his face.

‘Well, by—’ he said.

‘Is it all up, Gavin?’ Ballenbaugh said. ‘Don’t lie to me.’

‘I reckon it is,’ Stevens said. ‘Put your pistol down.’

‘Who else is with you?’

‘Enough,’ Stevens said. ‘Put your pistol down, Tyler.’

‘Hell,’ the younger one said. He began to move; Stevens saw his eyes go swiftly from him to the door behind him. ‘He’s lying. There ain’t anybody with him. He’s just spying around like he was the other day, putting his nose into business he’s going to wish he had kept it out of. Because this time it’s going to get bit off.’

He was moving toward Stevens, stooping a little, his arms held slightly away from his sides.

‘Boyd!’ Tyler said. The other continued to approach Stevens, not smiling, but with a queer light, a glitter, in his face. ‘Boyd!’ Tyler said. Then he moved, too, with astonishing speed, and overtook the younger and with one sweep of his arm hurled him back into the bunk. They faced each other — the one cold, still, expressionless, the pistol held before him aimed at nothing, the other half-crouched, snarling. ‘What the hell you going to do? Let him take us back to town like two damn sheep?’

‘That’s for me to decide,’ Tyler said. He looked at Stevens. ‘I never intended this, Gavin. I insured his life, kept the premiums paid — yes. But it was good business: If he had outlived me, I wouldn’t have had any use for the money, and if I had outlived him, I would have collected on my judgment. There was no secret about it. It was done in open daylight. Anybody could have found out about it. Maybe he told about

it. I never told him not to. And who's to say against it anyway? I always fed him when he came to my house, he always stayed as long as he wanted to, come when he wanted to. But I never intended this.'

Suddenly the younger one began to laugh, half-crouched against the bunk where the other had flung him. 'So that's the tune,' he said. That's the way it's going.' Then it was not laughter any more, though the transition was so slight or perhaps so swift as to be imperceptible. He was standing now, leaning forward a little, facing his brother. 'I never insured him for five thousand dollars! I wasn't going to get—'

'Hush,' Tyler said.

'— five thousand dollars when they found him dead on that—'

Tyler walked steadily to the other and slapped him in two motions, palm and back, of the same hand, the pistol still held before him in the other.

'I said, hush, Boyd,' he said. He looked at Stevens again. 'I never intended this. I don't want that money now, even if they were going to pay it, because this is not the way I aimed for it to be. Not the way I bet. What are you going to do?'

'Do you need to ask that? I want an indictment for murder.'

'And then prove it!' the younger one snarled. Try and prove it! I never insured his life for—'

'Hush,' Tyler said. He spoke almost gently, looking at Stevens with the pale eyes in which there was absolutely nothing. 'You can't do that. It's a good name. Has been. Maybe nobody's done much for it yet, but nobody's hurt it bad yet, up to now. I have owed no man, I have taken nothing that was not mine. You mustn't do that, Gavin.'

'I mustn't do anything else, Tyler.'

The other looked at him. Stevens heard him draw a long breath and expel it. But his face did not change at all. 'You want your eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.'

'Justice wants it. Maybe Lonnie Grinnup wants it. Wouldn't you?'

For a moment longer the other looked at him. Then Ballenbaugh turned and made a quiet gesture at his brother and another toward Stevens, quiet and peremptory.

Then they were out of the hut, standing in the light from the door; a breeze came up from somewhere and rustled in the leaves overhead and died away, ceased.

At first Stevens did not know what Ballenbaugh was about. He watched in mounting surprise as Ballenbaugh turned to face his brother, his hand extended, speaking in a voice which was actually harsh now: 'This is the end of the row. I was afraid from that night when you came home and told me. I should have raised you better, but I didn't. Here. Stand up and finish it.'

'Look out, Tyler!' Stevens said. 'Don't do that!'

'Keep out of this, Gavin. If it's meat for meat you want, you will get it.' He still faced his brother, he did not even glance at Stevens. 'Here,' he said. 'Take it and stand up.'

Then it was too late. Stevens saw the younger one spring back. He saw Tyler take a step forward and he seemed to hear in the other's voice the surprise, the disbelief, then the realization of the mistake. 'Drop the pistol, Boyd,' he said. 'Drop it.'

'So you want it back, do you?' the younger said. 'I come to you that night and told you you were worth five thousand dollars as soon as somebody happened to look on that trotline, and asked you to give me ten dollars, and you turned me down. Ten dollars, and you wouldn't. Sure you can have it. Take it.' It flashed, low against his side; the orange fire lanced downward again as the other fell.

Now it's my turn, Stevens thought. They faced each other; he heard again that brief wind come from somewhere and shake the leaves overhead and fall still.

'Run while you can, Boyd,' he said. 'You've done enough. Run, now.'

‘Sure I’ll run. You do all your worrying about me now, because in a minute you won’t have any worries. I’ll run all right, after I’ve said a word to smart guys that come sticking their noses where they’ll wish to hell they hadn’t—’

Now he’s going to shoot, Stevens thought, and he sprang. For an instant he had the illusion of watching himself springing, reflected somehow by the faint light from the river, that luminousness which water gives back to the dark, in the air above Boyd Ballenbaugh’s head. Then he knew it was not himself he saw, it had not been wind he heard, as the creature, the shape which had no tongue and needed none, which had been waiting nine days now for Lonnie Grinnup to come home, dropped toward the murderer’s back with its hands already extended and its body curved and rigid with silent and deadly purpose.

He was in the tree, Stevens thought. The pistol glared. He saw the flash, but he heard no sound.

IV

He was sitting on the veranda with his neat surgeon’s bandage after supper when the sheriff of the county came up the walk — a big man, too, pleasant, affable, with eyes even paler and colder and more expressionless than Tyler Ballenbaugh’s. ‘It won’t take but a minute,’ he said, ‘or I wouldn’t have bothered you.’

‘How bothered me?’ Stevens said.

The sheriff lowered one thigh to the veranda rail. ‘Head feel all right?’ ‘Feels all right,’ Stevens said.

‘That’s good, I reckon you heard where we found Boyd.’ Stevens looked back at him just as blankly. ‘I may have,’ he said pleasantly. ‘Haven’t remembered much today but a headache.’

‘You told us where to look. You were conscious when I got there. You were trying to give Tyler water. You told us to look on that trotline.’

‘Did I? Well, well, what won’t a man say, drunk or out of his head? Sometimes he’s right too.’

'You were. We looked on the line, and there was Boyd hung on one of the hooks, dead, just like Lonnie Grinnup was. And Tyler Ballenbaugh with a broken leg and another bullet in his shoulder, and you with a crease in your skull you could hide a cigar in. How did he get on that trotline, Gavin?'

'I don't know,' Stevens said.

'All right. I'm not sheriff now. How did Boyd get on that trotline?'

'I don't know.'

The sheriff looked at him; they looked at each other. 'Is that what you answer any friend that asks?'

'Yes. Because I was shot, you see. I don't know.'

The sheriff took a cigar from his pocket and looked at it for a time. 'Joe — that deaf-and-dumb boy Lonnie raised — seems to have gone away at last. He was still around there last Sunday, but nobody has seen him since. He could have stayed. Nobody would have bothered him.'

'Maybe he missed Lonnie too much to stay,' Stevens said. 'Maybe he missed Lonnie.' The sheriff rose. He bit the end from the cigar and lit it. 'Did that bullet cause you to forget this too? Just what made you suspect something was wrong? What was it the rest of us seem to have missed?'

'It was that paddle,' Stevens said.

'Paddle?'

'Didn't you ever run a trotline, a trotline right at your camp? You don't paddle, you pull the boat hand over hand along the line itself from one hook to the next. Lonnie never did use his paddle; he even kept the skiff tied to the same tree his trotline was fastened to, and the paddle stayed in his house.

If you had ever been there, you would have seen it. But the paddle was in the skiff when that boy found it.'

The End

To-Morrow

UNCLE GAVIN HAD not always been county attorney. But the time when he had not been was more than twenty years ago and it had lasted for such a short period that only the old men remembered it, and even some of them did not. Because in that time he had had but one case.

He was a young man then, twenty-eight, only a year out of the state-university law school where, at grandfather's instigation, he had gone after his return from Harvard and Heidelberg; and he had taken the case voluntarily, persuaded grandfather to let him handle it alone, which grandfather did, because everyone believed the trial would be a mere formality.

So he tried the case. Years afterward he still said it was the only case, either as a private defender or a public prosecutor, in which he was convinced that right and justice were on his side, that he ever lost.

Actually he did not lose it — a mistrial in the fall court term, an acquittal in the following spring term — the defendant a solid, well-to-do farmer, husband and father, too, named Bookwright, from a section called Frenchman's Bend in the remote southeastern corner of the county; the victim a swaggering bravo calling himself Buck Thorpe and called Bucksnot by the other young men whom he had subjugated with his fists during the three years he had been in Frenchman's Bend; kinless, who had appeared overnight from nowhere, a brawler, a gambler, known to be a distiller of illicit whiskey and caught once on the road to Memphis with a small drove of stolen cattle, which the owner promptly identified. He had a bill of sale for them, but none in the country knew the name signed to it.

And the story itself was old and unoriginal enough: The country girl of seventeen, her imagination fired by the swagger and the prowess and the daring and the glib tongue; the father who tried to reason with her and got exactly as far as parents usually do in such cases; then the interdiction, the forbidden door, the inevitable elopement at midnight; and at four o'clock the next morning Bookwright waked Will Varner, the justice of the peace and the chief officer of the district, and handed Varner his pistol and said, 'I have come to surrender.

I killed Thorpe two hours ago.' And a neighbor named Quick, who was first on the scene, found the half-drawn pistol in Thorpe's hand; and a week after the brief account was printed in the Memphis papers, a woman appeared in Frenchman's Bend who claimed to be Thorpe's wife, and with a wedding license to prove it, trying to claim what money or property he might have left.

I can remember the surprise that the grand jury even found a true bill; when the clerk read the indictment, the betting was twenty to one that the jury would not be out ten minutes.

The district attorney even conducted the case through an assistant, and it did not take an hour to submit all the evidence. Then Uncle Gavin rose, and I remember how he looked at the jury — the eleven farmers and storekeepers and the twelfth man, who was to ruin his case — a farmer, too, a thin man, small, with thin gray hair and that appearance of hill farmers — at once frail and work-worn, yet curiously imperishable — who seem to become old men at fifty and then become invincible to time.

Uncle Gavin's voice was quiet, almost monotonous, not ranting as criminal-court trials had taught us to expect; only the words were a little different from the ones he would use in later years. But even then, although he had been talking to them for only a year, he could already talk so that all the people in our country — the Negroes, the hill people, the rich flatland plantation owners — understood what he said.

'All of us in this country, the South, have been taught from birth a few things which we hold to above all else. One of the first of these — not

the best; just one of the first — is that only a life can pay for the life it takes; that the one death is only half complete. If that is so, then we could have saved both these lives by stopping this defendant before he left his house that night; we could have saved at least one of them, even if we had had to take this defendant's life from him in order to stop him. Only we didn't know in time.

And that's what I am talking about — not about the dead man and his character and the morality of the act he was engaged in; not about self-defense, whether or not this defendant was justified in forcing the issue to the point of taking life, but about us who are not dead and what we don't know — about all of us, human beings who at bottom want to do right, want not to harm others; human beings with all the complexity of human passions and feelings and beliefs, in the accepting or rejecting of which we had no choice, trying to do the best we can with them or despite them — this defendant, another human being with that same complexity of passions and instincts and beliefs, faced by a problem — the inevitable misery of his child who, with the headstrong folly of youth — again that same old complexity which she, too, did not ask to inherit — was incapable of her own preservation — and solved that problem to the best of his ability and beliefs, asking help of no one, and then abode by his decision and his act.'

He sat down. The district attorney's assistant merely rose and bowed to the court and sat down again. The jury went out and we didn't even leave the room. Even the judge didn't retire. And I remember the long breath, something, which went through the room when the clock hand above the bench passed the ten-minute mark and then passed the half-hour mark, and the judge beckoned a bailiff and whispered to him, and the bailiff went out and returned and whispered to the judge, and the judge rose and banged his gavel and recessed the court.

I hurried home and ate my dinner and hurried back to town. The office was empty. Even grandfather, who took his nap after dinner, regardless of who hung and who didn't, returned first; after three o'clock then, and the whole town knew now that Uncle Gavin's jury was hung by one man, eleven to one for acquittal; then Uncle Gavin came in fast, and

grandfather said, 'Well, Gavin, at least you stopped talking in time to hang just your jury and not your client.'

'That's right, sir,' Uncle Gavin said. Because he was looking at me with his bright eyes, his thin, quick face, his wild hair already beginning to turn white. 'Come here, Chick,' he said. 'I need you for a Infinite.'

'Ask Judge Frazier to allow you to retract your oration, then let Charley sum up for you,' grandfather said. But we were outside then, on the stairs, Uncle Gavin stopping halfway down, so that we stood exactly halfway from anywhere, his hand on my shoulder, his eyes brighter and intenter than ever. This is not cricket,' he said. 'But justice is accomplished lots of times by methods that won't bear looking at. They have moved the jury to the back room in Mrs. Rouncewell's boardinghouse. The room right opposite that mulberry tree. If you could get into the back yard without anybody seeing you, and be careful when you climb the tree—'

Nobody saw me. But I could look through the windy mulberry leaves into the room, and see and hear, both — the nine angry and disgusted men sprawled in chairs at the far end of the room; Mr. Holland, the foreman, and another man standing in front of the chair in which the little, worn, dried-out hill man sat. His name was Fentry. I remembered all their names, because Uncle Gavin said that to be a successful lawyer and politician in our country you did not need a silver tongue nor even an intelligence; you needed only an infallible memory for names. But I would have remembered his name anyway, because it was Stonewall Jackson — Stonewall Jackson Fentry.

'Don't you admit that he was running off with Bookwright's seventeen-year-old daughter?' Mr. Holland said. 'Don't you admit that he had a pistol in his hand when they found him? Don't you admit that he wasn't hardly buried before that woman turned up and proved she was already his wife? Don't you admit that he was not only no-good but dangerous, and that if it hadn't been Bookwright, sooner or later somebody else would have had to, and mat Bookwright was just unlucky?'

'Yes,' Fentry said.

Then what do you want?' Mr. Holland said. 'What do you want?'

'I can't help it,' Fentry said. 'I ain't going to vote Mr. Bookwright free.'

And he didn't. And that afternoon Judge Frazier discharged the jury and set the case for retrial in the next term of court; and the next morning Uncle Gavin came for me before I had finished breakfast.

'Tell your mother we might be gone overnight,' he said. 'Tell her I promise not to let you get either shot, snake-bit or surfeited with soda pop.... Because I've got to know,' he said. We were driving fast now, out the northeast road, and his eyes were bright, not baffled, just intent and eager. 'He was born and raised and lived all his life out here at the very other end of the county, thirty miles from Frenchman's Bend. He said under oath that he had never even seen Bookwright before, and you can look at him and see that he never had enough time off from hard work to learn how to lie in. I doubt if he ever even heard Bookwright's name before.'

We drove until almost noon. We were in the hills now, out of the rich flat land, among the pine and bracken, the poor soil, the little tilted and barren patches of gaunt com and cotton which somehow endured, as the people they clothed and fed somehow endured; the roads we followed less than lanes, winding and narrow, rutted and dust choked, the car in second gear half the time. Then we saw the mailbox, the crude lettering: G. A. FENTRY; beyond it, the two-room log house with an open hall, and even I, a boy of twelve, could see that no woman's hand had touched it in a lot of years. We entered the gate.

Then a voice said, 'Stop! Stop where you are!' And we hadn't even seen him — an old man, barefoot, with a fierce white bristle of mustache, in patched denim faded almost to the color of skim milk, smaller, thinner even than the son, standing at the edge of the worn gallery, holding a shotgun across his middle and shaking with fury or perhaps with the palsy of age.

'Mr. Fentry—' Uncle Gavin said.

'You've badgered and harried him enough!' the old man said. It was fury; the voice seemed to rise suddenly with a fiercer, an uncontrollable blaze of it: 'Get out of here! Get off my land! Go!'

'Come,' Uncle Gavin said quietly. And still his eyes were only bright, eager, intent and grave. We did not drive fast now. The next mailbox was within the mile, and this time the house was even painted, with beds of petunias beside the steps, and the land about it was better, and this time the man rose from the gallery and came down to the gate.

'Howdy, Mr. Stevens,' he said. 'So Jackson Fentry hung your jury for you.'

'Howdy, Mr. Pruitt,' Uncle Gavin said. 'It looks like he did. Tell me.'

And Pruitt told him, even though at that time Uncle Gavin would forget now and then and his language would slip back to Harvard and even to Heidelberg. It was as if people looked at his face and knew that what he asked was not just for his own curiosity or his own selfish using.

'Only ma knows more about it than I do,' Pruitt said. 'Come up to the gallery.'

We followed him to the gallery, where a plump, white-haired old lady in a clean gingham sunbonnet and dress and a clean white apron sat in a low rocking chair, shelling field peas into a wooden bowl. 'This is Lawyer Stevens,' Pruitt said. 'Captain Stevens' son, from town. He wants to know about Jackson Fentry.'

So we sat, too, while they told it, the son and the mother talking in rotation.

That place of theirs,' Pruitt said. 'You seen some of it from the road. And what you didn't see don't look no better. But his pa and his grandpa worked it, made a living for themselves and raised families and paid their taxes and owed no man. I don't know how they done it, but they did. And Jackson was helping from the time he got big enough to

reach up to the plow handles. He never got much bigger than that neither. None of them ever did. I reckon that was why. And Jackson worked it, too, in his time, until he was about twenty-five and already looking forty, asking no odds of nobody, not married and not nothing, him and his pa living alone and doing their own washing and cooking, because how can a man afford to marry when him and his pa have just one pair of shoes between them. If it had been worth while getting a wife a-tall, since that place had already killed his ma and his grandma both before they were forty years old. Until one night—'

'Nonsense,' Mrs. Pruitt said. 'When your pa and me married, we didn't even own a roof over our heads. We moved into a rented house, on rented land—'

'All right,' Pruitt said. 'Until one night he come to me and said how he had got him a sawmilling job down at Frenchman's Bend.'

'Frenchman's Bend?' Uncle Gavin said, and now his eyes were much brighter and quicker than just intent. 'Yes,' he said.

'A day-wage job,' Pruitt said. 'Not to get rich; just to earn a little extra money maybe, risking a year or two to earn a little extra money, against the life his grandpa led until he died between the plow handles one day, and that his pa would lead until he died in a com furrow, and then it would be his turn, and not even no son to come and pick him up out of the dirt. And that he had traded with a nigger to help his pa work their place while he was gone, and would I kind of go up there now and then and see that his pa was all right.'

'Which you did,' Mrs. Pruitt said.

'I went close enough,' Pruitt said. 'I would get close enough to the field to hear him cussing at the nigger for not moving fast enough and to watch the nigger trying to keep up with him, and to think what a good thing it was Jackson hadn't got two niggers to work the place while he was gone, because if that old man — and he was close to sixty then — had had to spend one full day sitting in a chair in the shade with nothing in his hands to chop or hoe with, he would have died before sundown. So Jackson left. He walked. They didn't have but one mule.'

They ain't never had but one mule. But it ain't but about thirty miles. He was gone about two and a half years. Then one day—'

'He come home that first Christmas,' Mrs. Pruitt said.

'That's right,' Pruitt said. 'He walked them thirty miles home and spent Christmas Day, and walked them other thirty miles back to the sawmill.'

'Whose sawmill?' Uncle Gavin said.

'Quick's,' Pruitt said. 'Old Man Ben Quick's. It was the second Christmas he never come home. Then, about the beginning of March, about when the river bottom at Frenchman's Bend would be starting to dry out to where you could skid logs through it and you would have thought he would be settled down good to his third year of sawmilling, he come home to stay. He didn't walk this time. He come in a hired buggy. Because he had the goat and the baby.'

'Wait,' Uncle Gavin said.

'We never knew how he got home,' Mrs. Pruitt said. 'Because he had been home over a week before we even found out he had the baby.'

'Wait,' Uncle Gavin said.

They waited, looking at him, Pruitt sitting on the gallery railing and Mrs. Pruitt's fingers still shelling the peas out of the long brittle hulls, looking at Uncle Gavin. His eyes were not exultant now any more than they had been baffled or even very speculative before; they had just got brighter, as if whatever it was behind them had flared up, steady and fiercer, yet still quiet, as if it were going faster than the telling was going.

'Yes,' he said. 'Tell me.'

'And when I finally heard about it and went up there,' Mrs. Pruitt said, 'that baby wasn't two weeks old. And how he had kept it alive, and just on goat's milk—'

'I don't know if you know it,' Pruitt said. 'A goat ain't like a cow. You milk a goat every two hours or so. That means all night too.'

'Yes,' Mrs. Pruitt said. 'He didn't even have diaper cloths. He had some split floursacks the midwife had showed him how to put on. So I made some cloths and I would go up there; he had kept the nigger on to help his pa in the field and he was doing the cooking and washing and nursing that baby, milking the goat to feed it; and I would say, "Let me take it. At least until he can be weaned. You come stay at my house, too, if you want," and him just looking at me — little, thin, already wore-out something that never in his whole life had ever set down to a table and et all he could hold — saying, "I thank you, ma'am. I can make out."' "

'Which was correct,' Pruitt said. 'I don't know how he was at sawmilling, and he never had no farm to find out what kind of a farmer he was. But he raised that boy.'

'Yes,' Mrs. Pruitt said. 'And I kept on after him: "We hadn't even heard you was married," I said. "Yessum," he said. "We was married last year. When the baby come, she died."' "

"Who was she?" I said. "Was she a Frenchman Bend girl?"

"No'm," he said. "She come from downstate."

"What was her name?" I said. "Miss Smith," he said.'

'He hadn't even had enough time off from hard work to learn how to lie either,' Pruitt said. 'But he raised that boy. After their crops were in in the fall, he let the nigger go, and next spring him and the old man done the work like they use to. He had made a kind of satchel, like they say Indians does, to carry the boy in.'

I would go up there now and then while the ground was still cold and see Jackson and his pa plowing and chopping brush, and that satchel hanging on a fence post and that boy asleep bolt upright in it like it was a feather bed.

He learned to walk that spring, and I would stand there at the fence and watch that dum little critter out there in the middle of the furrow, trying his best to keep up with Jackson, until Jackson would stop the

plow at the turn row and go back and get him and set him straddle of his neck and take up the plow and go on.

In the late summer he could walk pretty good. Jackson made him a little hoe out of a stick and a scrap of shingle, and you could see Jackson chopping in the middle-thigh cotton, but you couldn't see the boy at all; you could just see the cotton shaking where he was.'

'Jackson made his clothes,' Mrs. Pruitt said. 'Stitched them himself, by hand. I made a few garments and took them up there. I never done it but once though. He took them and he thanked me. But you could see it. It was like he even begrudged the earth itself for what that child had to eat to keep alive. And I tried to persuade Jackson to take him to church, have him baptized. "He's already named," he said. "His name is Jackson and Longstreet Fentry. Pa fit under both of them."' "

'He never went nowhere,' Pruitt said. 'Because where you saw Jackson, you saw that boy. If he had had to steal that boy down there at Frenchman's Bend, he couldn't 'a' hid no closer. It was even the old man that would ride over to Haven Hill store to buy their supplies, and the only time Jackson and that boy was separated as much as one full breath was once a year when Jackson would ride in to Jefferson to pay their taxes, and when I first seen the boy I thought of a setter puppy, until one day I knowed Jackson had gone to pay their taxes and I went up there and the boy was under the bed, not making any fuss, just backed up into the corner, looking out at me. He didn't blink once.

He was exactly like a fox or a wolf cub somebody had caught just last night.'

We watched him take from his pocket a tin of snuff and tilt a measure of it into the lid and then into his lower lip, tapping the final grain from the lid with delicate deliberation. 'All right,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Then what?'

'That's all,' Pruitt said. 'In the next summer him and the boy disappeared.'

'Disappeared?' Uncle Gavin said.

'That's right. They were just gone one morning. I didn't know when. And one day I couldn't stand it no longer, I went up there and the house was empty, and I went on to the field where the old man was plowing, and at first I thought the spreader between his plow handles had broke and he had tied a sapling across the handles, until he seen me and snatched the sapling off, and it was that shotgun, and I reckon what he said to me was about what he said to you this morning when you stopped there. Next year he had the nigger helping him again. Then, about five years later, Jackson come back. I don't know when. He was just there one morning. And the nigger was gone again, and him and his pa worked the place like they use to.

And one day I couldn't stand it no longer, I went up there and I stood at the fence where he was plowing, until after a while the land he was breaking brought him up to the fence, and still he hadn't never looked at me; he plowed right by me, not ten feet away, still without looking at me, and he turned and come back, and I said, "Did he die, Jackson?" and then he looked at me. "The boy," I said. And he said, "What boy?"

They invited us to stay for dinner.

Uncle Gavin thanked them. We brought a snack with us,' he said. 'And it's thirty miles to Varner's store, and twenty-two from there to Jefferson. And our roads ain't quite used to automobiles yet.'

So it was just sundown when we drove up to Varner's store in Frenchman's Bend Village; again a man rose from the deserted gallery and came down the steps to the car.

It was Isham Quick, the witness who had first reached Thorpe's body — a tall, gangling man in the middle forties, with a dreamy kind of face and near-sighted eyes, until you saw there was something shrewd behind them, even a little quizzical.

'I been waiting for you,' he said. 'Looks like you made a water haul.' He blinked at Uncle Gavin. 'That Fentry.'

'Yes,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Why didn't you tell me?'

'I didn't recognize it myself,' Quick said. 'It wasn't until I heard your jury was hung, and by one man, that I associated them names.'

'Names?' Uncle Gavin said. What na — Never mind. Just tell it.'

So we sat on the gallery of the locked and deserted store while the cicadas shrilled and rattled in the trees and the lightning bugs blinked and drifted above the dusty road, and Quick told it, sprawled on the bench beyond Uncle Gavin, loose-jointed, like he would come all to pieces the first time he moved, talking in a lazy sardonic voice, like he had all night to tell it in and it would take all night to tell it. But it wasn't that long.

It wasn't long enough for what was in it. But Uncle Gavin says it don't take many words to tell the sum of any human experience; that somebody has already done it in eight: He was born, he suffered and he died.

'It was pap that hired him. But when I found out where he had come from, I knowed he would work, because folks in that country hadn't never had time to learn nothing but hard work. And I knowed he would be honest for the same reason: that there wasn't nothing in his country a man could want bad enough to learn how to steal it. What I seem to have underestimated was his capacity for love.

I reckon I figured that, coming from where he come from, he never had none a-tall, and for that same previous reason — that even the comprehension of love had done been lost out of him back down the generations where the first one of them had had to take his final choice between the pursuit of love and the pursuit of keeping on breathing.

'So he come to work, doing the same work and drawing the same pay as the niggers done. Until in the late fall, when the bottom got wet and we got ready to shut down for the winter, I found out he had made a trade with pap to stay on until spring as watchman and caretaker, with three days out to go home Christmas.

And he did, and the next year when we started up, he had done learned so much about it and he stuck to it so, that by the middle of summer he was running the whole mill hisself, and by the end of summer pap never went out there no more a-tall and I just went when I felt like it, maybe once a week or so; and by fall pap was even talking about building him a shack to live in in place of that shuck mattress and a old broke-down cookstove in the boiler shed.

And he stayed through that winter too. When he went home that Christmas we never even knowed it, when he went or when he come back, because even I hadn't been out there since fall.

'Then one afternoon in February — there had been a mild spell and I reckon I was restless — I rode out there. The first thing I seen was her, and it was the first time I had ever done that — a woman, young, and maybe when she was in her normal health she might have been pretty, too; I don't know. Because she wasn't just thin, she was gaunted. She was sick, more than just starved-looking, even if she was still on her feet, and it wasn't just because she was going to have that baby in a considerable less than another month.

And I says, "Who is that?" and he looked at me and says, "That's my wife," and I says, "Since when? You never had no wife last fall. And that child ain't a month off." And he says, "Do you want us to leave?" and I says, "What do I want you to leave for?" I'm going to tell this from what I know now, what I found out after them two brothers showed up here three years later with their court paper, not from what he ever told me, because he never told nobody nothing.'

'All right,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Tell.'

'I don't know where he found her. I don't know if he found her somewhere, or if she just walked into the mill one day or one night and he looked up and seen her, and it was like the fellow says — nobody knows where or when love or lightning either is going to strike, except that it ain't going to strike there twice, because it don't have to.

And I don't believe she was hunting for the husband that had deserted her — likely he cut and run soon as she told him about the baby — and I don't believe she was scared or ashamed to go back home just because her brothers and father had tried to keep her from marrying the husband, in the first place. I believe it was just some more of that same kind of black-complected and not extra-intelligent and pretty durn ruthless blood pride that them brothers themselves was waving around here for about a hour that day.

'Anyway, there she was, and I reckon she knowed her time was going to be short, and him saying to her, "Let's get married," and her saying, "I can't marry you. I've already got a husband."

And her time come and she was down then, on that shuck mattress, and him feeding her with a spoon, likely, and I reckon she knowed she wouldn't get up from it, and he got the midwife, and the baby was horn, and likely her and the midwife both knowed by then she would never get up from that mattress and maybe they even convinced him at last, or maybe she knowed it wouldn't make no difference nohow and said yes, and he taken the mule pap let him keep at the mill and rid seven miles to Preacher Whitfield's and brung Whitfield back about daylight, and Whitfield married them and she died, and him and Whitfield buried her.

And that night he come to the house and told pap he was quitting, and left the mule, and I went out to the mill a few days later and he was gone — just the shuck mattress and the stove, and the dishes and skillet mammy let him have, all washed and clean and set on the shelf. And in the third summer from then, them two brothers, them Thorpes—'

'Thorpes,' Uncle Gavin said. It wasn't loud. It was getting dark fast now, as it does in our country, and I couldn't see his face at all any more. 'Tell,' he said.

‘Black-complected like she was — the youngest one looked a heap like her — coming up in the surrey, with the deputy or bailiff or whatever he was, and the paper all wrote out and stamped and sealed all regular, and I says, “You can’t do this. She come here of her own accord, sick and with nothing, and he taken her in and fed her and nursed her and got help to born that child and a preacher to bury her; they was even married before she died. The preacher and the midwife both will prove it.”

And the oldest brother says, “He couldn’t marry her. She already had a husband. We done already attended to him.” And I says, “All right. He taken that boy when nobody come to claim him. He has raised that boy and clothed and fed him for two years and better.”

And the oldest one drawed a money purse half outen his pocket and let it drop back again. ‘We aim to do right about that, too — when we have seen the boy,” he says. “He is our kin. We want him and we aim to have him.” And that wasn’t the first time it ever occurred to me that this world ain’t run like it ought to be run a heap of more times than what it is, and I says, “It’s thirty miles up there. I reckon you all will want to lay over here tonight and rest your horses.” And the oldest one looked at me and says, “The team ain’t tired. We won’t stop.”

“Then I’m going with you,” I says. “You are welcome to come,” he says.

‘We drove until midnight. So I thought I would have a chance then, even if I never had nothing to ride. But when we unhitched and laid down on the ground, the oldest brother never laid down. “I ain’t sleepy,” he says. “I’ll set up a while.”

So it wasn’t no use, and I went to sleep and then the sun was up and it was too late then, and about middle morning we come to that mailbox with the name on it you couldn’t miss, and the empty house with nobody in sight or hearing neither, until we heard the ax and went around to the back, and he looked up from the woodpile and seen what I reckon he had been expecting to see every time the sun rose for going on three years now.

Because he never even stopped. He said to the little boy, "Run. Run to the field to grandpap. Run," and come straight at the oldest brother with the ax already raised and the down-stroke already started, until I managed to catch it by the haft just as the oldest brother grabbed him and we lifted him clean off the ground, holding him, or trying to. "Stop it, Jackson!" I says. "Stop it! They got the law!"

'Then a puny something was kicking and clawing me about the legs; it was the little boy, not making a sound, just swarming around me and the brother both, hitting at us as high as he could reach with a piece of wood Fentry had been chopping.

"Catch him and take him on to the surrey," the oldest one says. So the youngest one caught him; he was almost as hard to hold as Fentry, kicking and plunging even after the youngest one had picked him up, and still not making a sound, and Fentry jerking and lunging like two men until the youngest one and the boy was out of sight. Then he collapsed.

It was like all his bones had turned to water, so that me and the oldest brother lowered him down to the chopping block like he never had no bones a-tall, laying back against the wood he had cut, panting, with a little froth of spit at each corner of his mouth. "It's the law, Jackson," I says. "Her husband is still alive."

"I know it," he says. It wasn't much more than whispering. "I been expecting it. I reckon that's why it taken me so by surprise. I'm all right now."

"I'm sorry for it," the brother says. "We never found out about none of it until last week. But he is our kin. We want him home. You done well by him. We thank you. His mother thanks you. Here," he says. He taken the money purse outen his pocket and puts it into Fentry's hand. Then he turned and went away. After a while I heard the carriage turn and go back down the hill. Then I couldn't hear it any more. I don't know whether Fentry ever heard it or not.

“It’s the law, Jackson,” I says. “But there’s two sides to the law. We’ll go to town and talk to Captain Stevens. I’ll go with you.”

‘Then he set up on the chopping block, setting up slow and stiff. He wasn’t panting so hard now and he looked better now, except for his eyes, and they was mostly just dazed looking. Then he raised the hand that had the money purse in it and started to mop his face with the money purse, like it was a handkerchief; I don’t believe he even knowed there was anything in his hand until then, because he taken his hand down and looked at the money purse for maybe five seconds, and then he tossed it — he didn’t fling it; he just tossed it like you would a handful of dirt you had been examining to see what it would make — over behind the chopping block and got up and walked across the yard toward the woods, walking straight and not fast, and not looking much bigger than that little boy, and into the woods. “Jackson,” I says. But he never looked back.

‘And I stayed that night at Rufus Pruitt’s and borrowed a mule from him; I said I was just looking around, because I didn’t feel much like talking to nobody, and the next morning I hitched the mule at that gate and started up the path, and I didn’t see old man Fentry on the gallery a-tall at first.

‘When I did see him he was moving so fast I didn’t even know what he had in his hands until it went “boom!” and I heard the shot rattling in the leaves overhead and Rufus Pruitt’s mule trying his durn best either to break the hitch rein or hang hisself from the gatepost.

‘And one day about six months after he had located here to do the balance of his drinking and fighting and sleight-of-hand with other folks’ cattle, Bucksnot was on the gallery here, drunk still and running his mouth, and about a half dozen of the ones he had beat unconscious from time to time by foul means and even by fair on occasion, as such emergencies arose, laughing every time he stopped to draw a fresh breath. And I happened to look up, and Fentry was setting on his mule out there in the road.

'He was just setting there, with the dust of them thirty miles caking into the mule's sweat, looking at Thorpe. I don't know how long he had been there, not saying nothing, just setting there and looking at Thorpe; then he turned the mule and rid back up the road toward them hills he hadn't ought to never have left.

Except maybe it's like the fellow says, and there ain't nowhere you can hide from either lightning or love. And I didn't know why then. I hadn't associated them names. I knowed that Thorpe was familiar to me, but that other business had been twenty years ago and I had forgotten it until I heard about that hung jury of yourn. Of course he wasn't going to vote Bookwright free.... It's dark. Let's go to supper.'

But it was only twenty-two miles to town now, and we were on the highway now, the gravel; we would be home in an hour and a half, because sometimes we could make thirty and thirty-five miles an hour, and Uncle Gavin said that someday all the main roads in Mississippi would be paved like the streets in Memphis and every family in America would own a car. We were going fast now.

'Of course he wasn't,' Uncle Gavin said. The lowly and invincible of the earth — to endure and endure and then endure, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. Of course he wasn't going to vote Bookwright free.'

'I would have,' I said. 'I would have freed him. Because Buck Thorpe was bad. He—'

'No, you wouldn't,' Uncle Gavin said. He gripped my knee with one hand even though we were going fast, the yellow light beam level on the yellow road, the bugs swirling down into the light beam and ballooning away. 'It wasn't Buck Thorpe, the adult, the man. He would have shot that man as quick as Bookwright did, if he had been in Bookwright's place.

It was because somewhere in that debased and brutalized flesh which Bookwright slew there still remained, not the spirit maybe, but at least the memory, of that little boy, that Jackson and Longstreet Fentry, even though the man the boy had become didn't know it, and only Fentry did. And you wouldn't have freed him either. Don't ever forget that. Never.'

The end

An Error in Chemistry

IT WAS JOEL Flint himself who telephoned the sheriff that he had killed his wife. And when the sheriff and his deputy reached the scene, drove the twenty-odd miles into the remote back-country region where old Wesley Pritchel lived, Joel Flint himself met them at the door and asked them in.

He was the foreigner, the outlander, the Yankee who had come into our county two years ago as the operator of a pitch — a lighted booth where a roulette wheel spun against a bank of nickel-plated pistols and razors and watches and harmonicas, in a traveling street carnival — and who when the carnival departed had remained, and two months later was married to Pritchel's only living child: the dim-witted spinster of almost forty who until then had shared her irascible and violent-tempered father's almost hermit-existence on the good though small farm which he owned.

But even after the marriage, old Pritchel still seemed to draw the line against his son-in-law. He built a new small house for them two miles from his own, where the daughter was presently raising chickens for the market. According to rumor old Pritchel, who hardly ever went anywhere anyway, had never once entered the new house, so that he saw even this last remaining child only once a week.

This would be when she and her husband would drive each Sunday in the second-hand truck in which the son-in-law marketed the chickens, to take Sunday dinner with old Pritchel in the old house where Pritchel now did his own cooking and housework. In fact, the neighbors said the only reason he allowed the son-in-law to enter his house even then was so that his daughter could prepare him a decent hot meal once a week.

So for the next two years, occasionally in Jefferson, the county seat, but more frequently in the little cross-roads hamlet near his home, the son-in-law would be seen and heard too.

He was a man in the middle forties, neither short nor tall nor thin nor stout (in fact, he and his father-in-law could easily have cast that same shadow which later for a short time they did), with a cold, contemptuous intelligent face and a voice lazy with anecdotes of the teeming outland which his listeners had never seen — a dweller among the cities, though never from his own accounting long resident in any one of them, who within the first three months of his residence among them had impressed upon the people whose way of life he had assumed, one definite personal habit by which he presently became known throughout the whole county, even by men who had never seen him.

This was a harsh and contemptuous derogation, sometimes without even provocation or reason or opportunity, of our local southern custom of drinking whiskey by mixing sugar and water with it. He called it effeminacy, a pap for children, himself drinking even our harsh, violent, illicit and unaged homemade corn whiskey without even a sip of water to follow it.

Then on this last Sunday morning he telephoned the sheriff that he had killed his wife and met the officers at his father-in-law's door and said: 'I have already carried her into the house. So you won't need to waste breath telling me I shouldn't have touched her until you got here.'

'I reckon it was all right to take her up out of the dirt,' the sheriff said. 'It was an accident, I believe you said.'
'Then you believe wrong,' Flint said. 'I said I killed her.' And that was all.

The sheriff brought him to Jefferson and locked him in a cell in the jail. And that evening after supper the sheriff came through the side door into the study where Uncle Gavin was supervising me in the drawing of a brief. Uncle Gavin was only county, not District, attorney.

But he and the sheriff, who had been sheriff off and on even longer than Uncle Gavin had been county attorney, had been friends all that while. I mean friends in the sense that two men who play chess together are friends, even though sometimes their aims are diametrically opposed. I heard them discuss it once.

'I'm interested in truth,' the sheriff said.
'So am I,' Uncle Gavin said. 'It's so rare. But I am more interested in justice and human beings.'

'Ain't truth and justice the same thing?' the sheriff said. 'Since when?' Uncle Gavin said. 'In my time I have seen truth that was anything under the sun but just, and I have seen justice using tools and instruments I wouldn't want to touch with a ten-foot fence rail.'

The sheriff told us about the killing, standing, looming above the table-lamp — a big man with little hard eyes, talking down at Uncle Gavin's wild shock of prematurely white hair and his quick thin face, while Uncle Gavin sat on the back of his neck practically, his legs crossed on the desk, chewing the bit of his corncob pipe and spinning and unspinning around his finger his watch chain weighted with the Phi Beta Kappa key he got at Harvard.

Why?' Uncle Gavin said.
'I asked him that, myself,' the sheriff said. 'He said, "Why do men ever kill their wives? Call it for the insurance."'

‘That’s wrong,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘It’s women who murder their spouses for immediate personal gain — insurance policies, or at what they believe is the instigation or promise of another man. Men murder their wives from hatred or rage or despair, or to keep them from talking since not even bribery not even simple absence can bridle a woman’s tongue.’

‘Correct,’ the sheriff said. He blinked his little eyes at Uncle Gavin. ‘It’s like he wanted to be locked up in jail. Not like he was submitting to arrest because he had killed his wife, but like he had killed her so that he would be locked up, arrested. Guarded.’

Why?’ Uncle Gavin said.

‘Correct too,’ the sheriff said. When a man deliberately locks doors behind himself, it’s because he is afraid. And a man who would voluntarily have himself locked up on suspicion of murder...’ He batted his hard little eyes at Uncle Gavin for a good ten seconds while Uncle Gavin looked just as hard back at him. ‘Because he wasn’t afraid. Not then nor at any time. Now and then you meet a man that aint ever been afraid, not even of himself. He’s one.’

‘If that’s what he wanted you to do,’ Uncle Gavin said, ‘why did you do it?’

‘You think I should have waited a while?’

They looked at one another a while. Uncle Gavin wasn’t spinning the watch chain now. ‘All right,’ he said. ‘Old Man Pritchel—’

‘I was coming to that,’ the sheriff said. ‘Nothing.’

‘Nothing?’ Uncle Gavin said. You didn’t even see him?’ And the sheriff told that too — how as he and the deputy and Flint stood on the gallery, they suddenly saw the old man looking out at them through a window — a face rigid, furious, glaring at them through the glass for a second and then withdrawn, vanished, leaving an impression of furious exultation and raging triumph, and something else....

'Fear?' the sheriff said. 'No. I tell you, he wasn't afraid — Oh,' he said. 'You mean Pritchel.' This time he looked at Uncle Gavin so long that at last Uncle Gavin said, 'All right. Go on.'

And the sheriff told that too: how they entered the house, the hall, and he stopped and knocked at the locked door of the room where they had seen the face and he even called old Pritchel's name and still got no answer.

And how they went on and found Mrs. Flint on a bed in the back room with the shotgun wound in her neck, and Flint's battered truck drawn up beside the back steps as if they had just got out of it.

'There were three dead squirrels in the truck,' the sheriff said. 'I'd say they had been shot since daylight' — and the blood on the steps, and on the ground between the steps and the truck, as if she had been shot from inside the truck, and the gun itself, still containing the spent shell, standing just inside the hall door as a man would put it down when he entered the house. And how the sheriff went back up the hall and knocked again at the locked door —

'Locked where?' Uncle Gavin said.

On the inside, the sheriff said — and shouted against the door's blank surface that he would break the door in if Mr. Pritchel didn't answer and open it, and how this time the harsh furious old voice answered, shouting:

'Get out of my house! Take that murderer and get out of my house.'

'You will have to make a statement,' the sheriff answered.

'I'll make my statement when the time comes for it!' the old man shouted. 'Get out of my house, all of you!' And how he (the sheriff) sent the deputy in the car to fetch the nearest neighbor, and he and Flint waited until the deputy came back with a man and his wife.

Then they brought Flint on to town and locked him up and the sheriff telephoned back to old Pritchel's house and the neighbor answered and

told him how the old man was still locked in the room, refusing to come out or even to answer save to order them all (several other neighbors had arrived by now, word of the tragedy having spread) to leave. But some of them would stay in the house, no matter what the seemingly crazed old man said or did, and the funeral would be tomorrow.

‘And that’s all?’ Uncle Gavin said.

That’s all,’ the sheriff said. ‘Because it’s too late now.’

‘For instance?’ Uncle Gavin said.

‘The wrong one is dead.’

‘That happens,’ Uncle Gavin said.

‘For instance?’

‘That clay-pit business.’

‘What clay-pit business?’ Because the whole county knew about old Pritchel’s clay-pit. It was a formation of malleable clay right in the middle of his farm, of which people in the adjacent countryside made quite serviceable though crude pottery — those times they could manage to dig that much of it before Mr. Pritchel saw them and drove them off.

For generations, Indian and even aboriginal relics — flint arrow-heads, axes and dishes and skulls and thigh-bones and pipes — had been excavated from it by random hoys, and a few years ago a party of archaeologists from the State University had dug into it until Old Man Pritchel got there, this time with a shotgun. But everybody knew this; this was not what the sheriff was telling, and now Uncle Gavin was sitting erect in the chair and his feet were on the floor now.

‘I hadn’t heard about this,’ Uncle Gavin said.

‘It’s common knowledge out there,’ the sheriff said. ‘In fact, you might call it the local outdoor sport. It began about six weeks ago. They are three northern men. They’re trying to buy the whole farm from old Pritchel to get the pit and manufacture some kind of road material out of the clay, I understand.

The folks out there are still watching them trying to buy it. Apparently the northerners are the only folks in the country that don't know yet old Pritchel aint got any notion of selling even the clay to them, let alone the farm.'

They've made him an offer, of course.'

'Probably a good one. It runs all the way from two hundred and fifty dollars to two hundred and fifty thousand, depending on who's telling it. Them northerners just don't know how to handle him. If they would just set in and convince him that everybody in the county is hoping he won't sell it to them, they could probably buy it before supper tonight.' He stared at Uncle Gavin, batting his eyes again. 'So the wrong one is dead, you see. If it was that clay pit, he's no nearer to it than he was yesterday.

He's worse off than he was yesterday. Then there wasn't anything between him and his pa-in-law's money but whatever private wishes and hopes and feelings that dim-witted girl might have had.

Now there's a penitentiary wall, and likely a rope. It don't make sense. If he was afraid of a possible witness, he not only destroyed the witness before there was anything to be witnessed but also before there was any witness to be destroyed.

He set up a signboard saying "Watch me and mark me," not just to this county and this state but to all folks everywhere who believe the Book where it says Thou Shalt Not Kill — and then went and got himself locked up in the very place created to punish him for this crime and restrain him from the next one. Something went wrong.'

'I hope so,' Uncle Gavin said.

'You hope so?'

'Yes. That something went wrong in what has already happened, rather than what has already happened is not finished yet.'

‘How not finished yet?’ the sheriff said. ‘How can he finish whatever it is he aims to finish? Aint he already locked up in jail, with the only man in the county who might make bond to free him being the father of the woman he as good as confessed he murdered?’

‘It looks that way,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘Was there an insurance policy?’

‘I don’t know,’ the sheriff said. ‘I’ll find that out tomorrow. But that aint what I want to know. I want to know why he wanted to be locked up in jail. Because I tell you he wasn’t afraid, then nor at any other time. You already guessed who it was out there that was afraid.’

But we were not to learn that answer yet. And there was an insurance policy. But by the time we learned about that, something else had happened which sent everything else temporarily out of mind. At daylight the next morning, when the jailer went and looked into Flint’s cell, it was empty. He had not broken out. He had walked out, out of the cell, out of the jail, out of the town and apparently out of the country — no trace, no sign, no man who had seen him or seen anyone who might have been him. It was not yet sunup when I let the sheriff in at the side study door; Uncle Gavin was already sitting up in bed when we reached his bedroom.

‘Old Man Pritchel!’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘Only we are already too late.’

‘What’s the matter with you?’ the sheriff said. ‘I told you last night he was already too late the second he pulled that wrong trigger. Besides, just to be in position to ease your mind, I’ve already telephoned out there. Been a dozen folks in the house all night, sitting up with the — with Mrs. Flint, and old Pritchel’s still locked in his room and all right too.’

They heard him bumping and blundering around in there just before daylight, and so somebody knocked on the door and kept on knocking and calling him until he finally opened the door wide enough to give them all a good cussing and order them again to get out of his house and stay out. Then he locked the door again.

Old fellow's been hit pretty hard, I reckon. He must have seen it when it happened, and at his age, and having already druv the whole human race away from his house except that half-wit girl, until at last even she up and left him, even at any cost. I reckon it aint any wonder she married even a man like Flint.

What is it the Book says? 'Who lives by the sword, so shall he die.'? — the sword in old Pritchel's case being whatever it was he decided he preferred in place of human beings, while he was still young and hale and strong and didn't need them.

But to keep your mind easy, I sent Bryan Ewell out there thirty minutes ago and told him not to let that locked door — or old Pritchel himself, if he comes out of it — out of his sight until I told him to, and I sent Ben Berry and some others out to Flint's house and told Ben to telephone me. And I'll call you when I hear anything. Which won't be anything, because that fellow's gone.

He got caught yesterday because he made a mistake, and the fellow that can walk out of that jail like he did aint going to make two mistakes within five hundred miles of Jefferson or Mississippi either.'

'Mistake?' Uncle Gavin said. 'He just told us this morning why he wanted to be put in jail.'

'And why was that?'

'So he could escape from it.'

'And why get out again, when he was already out and could have stayed out by just running instead of telephoning me he had committed a murder?'

'I don't know,' Uncle Gavin said. 'Are you sure Old Man Pritchel—'

'Didn't I just tell you folks saw and talked to him through that half-opened door this morning? And Bryan Ewell probably sitting in a chair tilted against that door right this minute — or he better be. I'll telephone you if I hear anything. But I've already told you that too — that it won't be nothing.' He telephoned an hour later. He had just

talked to the deputy who had searched Flint's house, reporting only that Flint had been there sometime in the night — the back door open, an oil lamp shattered on the floor where Flint had apparently knocked it while fumbling in the dark, since the deputy found, behind a big, open, hurriedly ransacked trunk, a twisted spill of paper which Flint had obviously used to light his search of the trunk — a scrap of paper torn from a billboard —

'A what?' Uncle Gavin said.

'That's what I said,' the sheriff said. 'And Ben says, "All right, then send somebody else out here, if my reading aint good enough to suit you. It was a scrap of paper which was evidently tore from the corner of a billboard because it says on the scrap in English that even I can read—" and I says, "Tell me exactly what it is you're holding in your hand." And he did. It's a page, from a magazine or a small paper named Billboard or maybe The Billboard. There's some more printing on it but Ben can't read it because he lost his spectacles back in the woods while he was surrounding the house to catch Flint doing whatever it was he expected to catch him doing — cooking breakfast, maybe. Do you know what it is?'

'Yes,' Uncle Gavin said.

'Do you know what it means, what it was doing there?'

'Yes,' Uncle Gavin said. 'But why?'

'Well, I can't tell you. And he never will. Because he's gone, Gavin. Oh, we'll catch him — somebody will, I mean, someday, somewhere. But it won't be here, and it won't be for this. It's like that poor, harmless, half-witted girl wasn't important enough for even that justice you claim you prefer above truth, to avenge her.'

And that did seem to be all of it. Mrs. Flint was buried that afternoon. The old man was still locked in his room during the funeral, and even after they departed with the coffin for the churchyard, leaving in the house only the deputy in his tilted chair outside the locked door, and two neighbor women who remained to cook a hot meal for old Pritchel,

finally prevailing on him to open the door long enough to take the tray from them.

And he thanked them for it, clumsily and gruffly, thanking them for their kindness during all the last twenty-four hours. One of the women was moved enough to offer to return tomorrow and cook another meal for him, whereupon his old-time acerbity and choler returned and the kind-hearted woman was even regretting that she had made the offer at all when the harsh, cracked old voice from inside the half-closed door added: 'I don't need no help. I ain't had no darter nohow in two years,' and the door slammed in their faces and the bolt shot home.

Then the two women left, and there was only the deputy sitting in his tilted chair beside the door. He was back in town the next morning, telling how the old man had snatched the door suddenly open and kicked the chair out from beneath the dozing deputy before he could move and ordered him off the place with violent curses, and how as he (the deputy) peered at the house from around the corner of the bam a short time later, the shotgun blared from the kitchen window and the charge of squirrel shot slammed into the stable wall not a yard above his head. The sheriff telephoned that to Uncle Gavin too:

'So he's out there alone again. And since that's what he seems to want, it's all right with me. Sure I feel sorry for him. I feel sorry for anybody that has to live with a disposition like his. Old and alone, to have all this happen to him. It's like being snatched up by a tornado and whirled and slung and then slammed right back down where you started from, without even the benefit and pleasure of having taken a trip. What was it I said yesterday about living by the sword?'

'I don't remember,' Uncle Gavin said. 'You said a lot yesterday.'

'And a lot of it was right. I said it was finished yesterday. And it is. That fellow will trip himself again someday, but it won't be here.'

Only it was more than that. It was as if Flint had never been here at all — no mark, no scar to show that he had ever been in the jail cell. The

meagre group of people who pitied but did not mourn, departing, separating, from the raw grave of the woman who had had little enough hold on our lives at best, whom a few of us had known without ever having seen her and some of us had seen without ever knowing her.... The childless old man whom most of us had never seen at all, once more alone in the house where, as he said himself, there had been no child anyway in two years....

‘As though none of it had ever happened,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘As if Flint had not only never been in that cell but had never existed at all. That triumvirate of murderer, victim, and bereaved — not three flesh-and-blood people but just an illusion, a shadow-play on a sheet — not only neither men nor women nor young nor old but just three labels which cast two shadows for the simple and only reason that it requires a minimum of two in order to postulate the verities of injustice and grief. That’s it. They have never cast but two shadows, even though they did bear three labels, names. It was as though only by dying did that poor woman ever gain enough substance and reality even to cast a shadow.’

‘But somebody killed her,’ I said.

‘Yes,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘Somebody killed her.’

That was at noon. About five that afternoon I answered the telephone. It was the sheriff. ‘Is your uncle there?’ he said. Tell him to wait. I’m coming right over.’ He had a stranger with him — a city man, in neat city clothes.

This is Mr. Workman,’ the sheriff said. The adjustor. There was an insurance policy. For five hundred, taken out seventeen months ago. Hardly enough to murder anybody for.’

‘If it ever was a murder,’ the adjustor said. His voice was cold too, cold yet at the same time at a sort of seething boil. That policy will be paid at once, without question or any further investigation. And I’ll tell you something else you people here don’t seem to know yet. That old man is crazy. It was not the man Flint who should have been brought to town and locked up.’

Only it was the sheriff who told that too: how yesterday afternoon the insurance company's Memphis office had received a telegram, signed with Old Man Pritchel's name, notifying them of the insured's death, and the adjustor arrived at Old Man Pritchel's house about two o'clock this afternoon and within thirty minutes had extracted from Old Man Pritchel himself the truth about his daughter's death: the facts of it which the physical evidence — the truck and the three dead squirrels and the blood on the steps and on the ground — supported.

This was that while the daughter was cooking dinner, Pritchel and Flint had driven the truck down to Pritchel's woods lot to shoot squirrels for supper— 'And that's correct,' the sheriff said. 'I asked. They did that every Sunday morning.

Pritchel wouldn't let anybody but Flint shoot his squirrels, and he wouldn't even let Flint shoot them unless he was along' — and they shot the three squirrels and Flint drove the truck back to the house and up beside the back steps and the woman came out to take the squirrels and Flint opened the door and picked up the gun to get out of the truck and stumbled, caught his heel on the edge of the running-board and flinging up the hand carrying the gun to break his fall, so that the muzzle of the gun was pointing right at his wife's head when it went off.

And Old Man Pritchel not only denied having sent the wire, he violently and profanely repudiated any and all implication or suggestion that he even knew the policy existed at all. He denied to the very last that the shooting had been any part of an accident.

He tried to revoke his own testimony as to what had happened when the daughter came out to get the dead squirrels and the gun went off, repudiating his own story when he realized that he had cleared his son-in-law of murder, snatching the paper from the adjustor's hand, which he apparently believed was the policy itself, and attempting to tear it up and destroy it before the adjustor could stop him.

'Why?' Uncle Gavin said.

‘Why not?’ the sheriff said. We had let Flint get away; Mr. Pritchel knew he was loose somewhere in the world. Do you reckon he aimed to let the man that killed his daughter get paid for it?’

‘Maybe,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘But I don’t think so. I don’t think he is worried about that at all. I think Mr. Pritchel knows that Joel Flint is not going to collect that policy or any other prize. Maybe he knew a little country jail like ours wasn’t going to hold a wide-travelled ex-carnival man, and he expected Flint to come back out there and this time he was ready for him. And I think that as soon as people stop worrying him, he will send you word to come out there, and he will tell you so.’

‘Hah,’ the adjustor said. Then they must have stopped worrying him. Listen to this. When I got there this afternoon, there were three men in the parlor with him. They had a certified check. It was a big check. They were buying his farm from him — lock, stock and barrel — and I didn’t know land in this country was worth that much either, incidentally. He had the deed all drawn and signed, but when I told them who I was, they agreed to wait until I could get back to town here and tell somebody — the sheriff, probably.

And I left, and that old lunatic was still standing in the door, shaking that deed at me and croaking: ‘Tell the sheriff, damn you! Get a lawyer, too! Get that lawyer Stevens. I hear tell he claims to be pretty slick!’”

‘We thank you,’ the sheriff said. He spoke and moved with that deliberate, slightly florid, old-fashioned courtesy which only big men can wear, except that his was constant; this was the first time I ever saw him quit anyone shortly, even when he would see them again tomorrow. He didn’t even look at the adjustor again. ‘My car’s outside,’ he told Uncle Gavin.

So just before sunset we drove up to the neat picket fence enclosing Old Man Pritchel’s neat, bare little yard and neat, tight little house, in front of which stood the big, dust-covered car with its city license plates and Flint’s battered truck with a strange Negro youth at the wheel —

strange because Old Man Pritchel had never had a servant of any sort save his daughter.

‘He’s leaving too,’ Uncle Gavin said.

‘That’s his right,’ the sheriff said. We mounted the steps. But before we reached the door, Old Man Pritchel was already shouting for us to come in — the harsh, cracked old man’s voice shouting at us from beyond the hall, beyond the door to the dining room where a tremendous old-fashioned telescope bag, strapped and bulging, sat on a chair and the three northerners in dusty khaki stood watching the door and Old Man Pritchel himself sat at the table. And I saw for the first time (Uncle Gavin told me he had seen him only twice) the uncombed thatch of white hair, a fierce tangle of eyebrows above steel-framed spectacles, a jut of untrimmed mustache and a scrabble of beard stained with chewing tobacco to the color of dirty cotton. ‘Come in,’ he said. That lawyer Stevens, heh?’

‘Yes. Mr. Pritchel,’ the sheriff said.

‘Hehm,’ the old man barked. ‘Well, Hub,’ he said. ‘Can I sell my land, or can’t I?’

‘Of course, Mr. Pritchel,’ the sheriff said. We hadn’t heard you aimed to.’

‘Heh,’ the old man said. ‘Maybe this changed my mind.’ The check and the folded deed both lay on the table in front of him. He pushed the check toward the sheriff. He didn’t look at Uncle Gavin again; he just said: ‘You, too.’ Uncle Gavin and the sheriff moved to the table and stood looking down at the check. Neither of them touched it. I could see their faces. There was nothing in them. ‘Well?’ Mr. Pritchel said.

‘It’s a good price,’ the sheriff said.

This time the old man said ‘Hah!’ short and harsh. He unfolded the deed and spun it to face, not the sheriff but Uncle Gavin. ‘Well?’ he said. ‘You, lawyer?’

'It's all right, Mr. Pritchel,' Uncle Gavin said. The old man sat back, both hands on the table before him, his head tilted back as he looked up at the sheriff.

'Well?' he said. 'Fish, or cut bait.'

It's your land,' the sheriff said. 'What you do with it is no man's business else.'

'Hah,' Mr. Pritchel said. He didn't move. 'All right, gentlemen.' He didn't move at all; one of the strangers came forward and took up the deed. 'I'll be out of the house in thirty minutes. You can take possession then, or you will find the key under the mat tomorrow morning.' I don't believe he even looked after them as they went out, though I couldn't be sure because of the glare on his spectacles. Then I knew that he was looking at the sheriff, had been looking at him for a minute or more, and then I saw that he was trembling, jerking and shaking as the old tremble, although his hands on the table were as motionless as two lumps of the clay would have been.

'So you let him get away,' he said.

That's right,' the sheriff said. 'But you wait, Mr. Pritchel. We'll catch him.'

'When?' the old man said. Two years? Five years? Ten years? I am seventy-four years old; buried my wife and four children. Where will I be in ten years?'

'Here, I hope,' the sheriff said.

'Here?' the old man said. 'Didn't you just hear me tell that fellow he could have this house in thirty minutes? I own a automobile truck now; I got money to spend now, and something to spend it for.'

'Spend it for what?' the sheriff said. 'That check? Even this boy here would have to start early and run late to get shut of that much money in ten years.'

'Spend it running down the man that killed my Ellie!' He rose suddenly, thrusting his chair back. He staggered, but when the sheriff stepped

quickly toward him, he flung his arm out and seemed actually to strike the sheriff back a pace. 'Let be,' he said, panting.

Then he said, harsh and loud in his cracked shaking voice: 'Get out of here! Get out of my house all of you!' But the sheriff didn't move, nor did we, and after a moment the old man stopped trembling. But he was still holding to the table edge. But his voice was quiet. 'Hand me my whiskey. On the sideboard. And three glasses.' The sheriff fetched them — an old-fashioned cut-glass decanter and three heavy tumblers — and set them before him.

And when he spoke this time, his voice was almost gentle and I knew what the woman had felt that evening when she offered to come back tomorrow and cook another meal for him: 'You'll have to excuse me. I'm tired. I've had a heap of trouble lately, and I reckon I'm wore out. Maybe a change is what I need.'

'But not tonight, Mr. Pritchel,' the sheriff said.

And then again, as when the woman had offered to come back and cook, he ruined it. 'Maybe I won't start tonight,' he said. 'And then maybe again I will. But you folks want to get on back to town, so we'll just drink to goodbye and better days.' He unstoppered the decanter and poured whiskey into the three tumblers and set the decanter down and looked about the table.

'You, boy,' he said, 'hand me the water bucket. It's on the back gallery shelf.' Then, as I turned and started toward the door, I saw him reach and take up the sugar bowl and plunge the spoon into the sugar and then I stopped too. And I remember Uncle Gavin's and the sheriff's faces and I could not believe my eyes either as he put the spoonful of sugar into the raw whiskey and started to stir it.

Because I had not only watched Uncle Gavin, and the sheriff when he would come to play chess with Uncle Gavin, but Uncle Gavin's father too who was my grandfather, and my own father before he died, and all the other men who would come to Grandfather's house who drank

cold toddies as we call them, and even I knew that to make a cold toddy you do not put the sugar into the whiskey because sugar will not dissolve in raw whiskey but only lies in a little intact swirl like sand at the bottom of the glass; that you first put the water into the glass and dissolve the sugar into the water, in a ritual almost; then you add the whiskey, and that anyone like Old Man Pritchel who must have been watching men make cold toddies for nearly seventy years and had been making and drinking them himself for at least fifty-three, would know this too.

And I remember how the man we had thought was Old Man Pritchel realized too late what he was doing and jerked his head up just as Uncle Gavin sprang toward him, and swung his arm back and hurled the glass at Uncle Gavin's head, and the thud of the flung glass against the wall and the dark splash it made and the crash of the table as it went over and the raw stink of the spilled whiskey from the decanter and Uncle Gavin shouting at the sheriff: 'Grab him, Hub! Grab him!'

Then we were all three on him. I remember the savage strength and speed of the body which was no old man's body; I saw him duck beneath the sheriff's arm and the entire wig came off; I seemed to see his whole face wrenching itself furiously free from beneath the makeup which bore the painted wrinkles and the false eyebrows.

When the sheriff snatched the beard and mustache off, the flesh seemed to come with it, springing quick and pink and then crimson, as though in that last desperate cast he had had to heard, disguise, not his face so much as the very blood which he had spilled.

It took us only thirty minutes to find old Mr. Pritchel's body. It was under the feed room in the stable, in a shallow and hurried trench, scarcely covered from sight. His hair had not only been dyed, it had been trimmed, the eyebrows trimmed and dyed too, and the mustache and beard shaved off.

He was wearing the identical garments which Flint had worn to the jail and he had been struck at least one crushing blow on the face,

apparently with the flat of the same axe which had split his skull from behind, so that his features were almost unrecognizable and, after another two or three weeks underground, would perhaps have been even unidentifiable as those of the old man.

And pillowed carefully beneath the head was a big ledger almost six inches thick and weighing almost twenty pounds and filled with the carefully pasted clippings which covered twenty years and more. It was the record and tale of the gift, the talent, which at the last he had misapplied and betrayed and which had then turned and destroyed him. It was all there: inception, course, peak, and then decline — the handbills, the theatre programs, the news clippings, and even one actual ten-foot poster:

SIGNOR CANOVA

Master of Illusion

He Disappears While You Watch Him

Management offers One Thousand Dollars in Cash To Any Man or

Woman or

Child Who...

Last of all was the final clipping, from our Memphis-printed daily paper, under the Jefferson date line, which was news and not press-agentry.

This was the account of that last gamble in which he had cast his gift and his life against money, wealth, and lost — the clipped fragment of news-sheet which recorded the end not of one life but of three, though even here two of them cast but one shadow: not only that of the harmless dim-witted woman but of Joel Flint and Signor Canova too, with scattered among them and marking the date of that death too, the cautiously worded advertisements in Variety and Billboard, using the new changed name and no takers probably, since Signor Canova the Great was already dead then and already serving his purgatory in this circus for six months and that circus for eight — bandsman, ringman, Bornean wild man, down to the last stage where he touched bottom: the travelling from country town to country town with a roulette wheel

wired against imitation watches and pistols which would not shoot, until one day instinct perhaps showed him one more chance to use the gift again.

‘And lost this time for good,’ the sheriff said. We were in the study again. Beyond the open side door fireflies winked and drifted across the summer night and the crickets and tree-frogs cheeped and whirred. ‘It was that insurance policy.

If that adjustor hadn’t come to town and sent us back out there in time to watch him try to dissolve sugar in raw whiskey, he would have collected that check and taken that truck and got clean away. Instead, he sends for the adjustor, then he practically dares you and me to come out there and see past that wig and paint—’

‘You said something the other day about his destroying his witness too soon,’ Uncle Gavin said. ‘She wasn’t his witness. The witness he destroyed was the one we were supposed to find under that feed room.’

‘Witness to what?’ the sheriff said. To the fact that Joel Flint no longer existed?’

Tartly. But mostly to the first crime, the old one: the one in which Signor Canova died. He intended for that witness to be found. That’s why he didn’t bury it, hide it better and deeper. As soon as somebody found it, he would be at once and forever not only rich but free, free not only of Signor Canova who had betrayed him by dying eight years ago, but of Joel Flint too. Even if we had found it before he had a chance to leave, what would he have said?’

‘He ought to have battered the face a little more,’ the sheriff said.

‘I doubt it,’ Uncle Gavin said. What would he have said?’

‘All right,’ the sheriff said. ‘What?’

“‘Yes, I killed him. He murdered my daughter.’” And what would you have said, being, as you are, the Law?’

‘Nothing,’ the sheriff said after a time.

‘Nothing,’ Uncle Gavin said. A dog was barking somewhere, not a big dog, and then a screech-owl flew into the mulberry tree in the back yard and began to cry, plaintive and tremulous, and all the little furred creatures would be moving now — the field mice, the possums and rabbits and all the legless vertebrates — creeping or scurrying about the dark land which beneath the rainless summer stars was just dark: not desolate. ‘That’s one reason he did it.’ Uncle Gavin said.

‘One reason?’ the sheriff said. What’s the other?’

‘The other is the real one. It had nothing to do with the money; he probably could not have helped obeying it if he had wanted to. That gift he had. His first regret right now is probably not that he was caught, but that he was caught too soon, before the body was found and he had the chance to identify it as his own; before Signor Canova had had time to toss his gleaming tophat vanishing behind him and bow to the amazed and stormlike staccato of adulant palms and turn and stride once or twice and then himself vanish from the pacing spotlight — gone, to be seen no more.

Think what he did: he convicted himself of murder when he could very likely have escaped by flight; he acquitted himself of it after he was already free again. Then he dared you and me to come out there and actually be his witnesses and guarantors in the consummation of the very act which he knew we had been trying to prevent.

What else could the possession of such a gift as his have engendered, and the successful practising of it have increased, but a supreme contempt for mankind? You told me yourself that he had never been afraid in his life.’

‘Yes,’ the sheriff said. The Book itself says somewhere, Know thyself. Ain’t there another book somewhere that says, Man, fear thyself, thine arrogance and vanity and pride? You ought to know; you claim to be a

book man. Didn't you tell me that's what that luck-charm on your watch chain means? What book is that in?'

'It's in all of them,' Uncle Gavin said. The good ones, I mean. It's said in a lot of different ways, but it's there.'

The End

Knight's Gambit

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

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

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

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

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

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

'You're Stevens,' the boy said. He didn't even demand it. He stated it. 'That's partly correct,' his uncle said. 'But let it pass. What can I'

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

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

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

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

But it seemed as if that one expiring rush was all of it. She just stood there, trying to tell his uncle something, whatever it was, with her eyes; trying to tell both of them for that matter, since he was there too. But they found out quickly enough what it was, or at least what it was the boy wanted her to say, had dragged her in to town by the arm to say. Or at least what he thought it was she wanted to say. Because he should have known then that his uncle probably knew already more than the boy or the girl either intended to say yet; perhaps, even then, all of it. But it would be a little while yet before he would realise that last. And the reason he was so slow about it was his uncle himself.

'Yes,' the boy said, in exactly the same tone and voice which had declined to address the older man by any title of courtesy or deference to age; he — Charles — watched the boy staring at his uncle too — the

same delicate face which the sister had, but with nothing delicate about the eyes. They — the eyes — stared at his uncle without even bothering to be hard: they just waited. ‘Captain Gualdres, our so-called house-guest. We want him out of our house and out of Jefferson too.’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I ask you again: why should I do anything about it, even if I could?’ And now the two of them — his uncle and the boy — spoke crisply and rapidly; it was almost as though they stood toe to toe, slapping each

other: 'He was engaged to marry my sister. When he found out that the money would still be our mother's as long as she lived, he ratted.'

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

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

'Not engaged,' she whispered.

'But you love him?'

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

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

'Say it in English if you can,' he said.

'I wont take your case,' his uncle said.

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

masters and tutors and preceptors in what the ladies of Yoknapatawpha County anyway would call the best of company.

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Warned?’ he said.

'So he called it,' his uncle said, finishing the sitting down and approaching the bitt of the pipe to his mouth and already taking a match from the box on the smoking stand, so that the actual relighting of the pipe would be merely a continuation of the coming back from the door: 'I'd call it a threat, myself.'

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

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

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

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

But he, Charles, wasn't that stupid even if his mouth was open a little. In fact, he wasn't really surprised, after the first shock of that entrance, that abrupt and that informal, at this hour, this late at night and this cold: the boy without doubt dragging the girl by the arm right on through the front door without bothering to ring or knock there at all, on down the strange hall which, if he had never seen before, would have been seventeen or eighteen years ago as an infant at nurse, to a strange door and knocking this time true enough but not waiting for any response, and so into a room where for all he knew (or cared) his, Charles's, mother might have been undressing for bed.

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

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

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

For which reason (and maybe that was why, though it would take a good deal more than even his uncle's incredible taciturnity to convince him, Charles, of this) his uncle didn't really need to talk about it.

Because for twenty years now, long before there were any children even, let alone anything to draw the foreign fortune-hunter, the county

had been watching it unfold as the subscribers read and wait and watch for the serial's next installment.

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

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

And until tonight it had even remained as harmless and unreal as the old yellowed volumes: the old plantation six miles from town which had been an old place even in his grandmother's time, not so big in acreage hut of good land properly cared for and worked, with the house on it which was not large either but was just a house, a domicile, more spartan even than comfortable, even in those days when people

wanted needed comfort in their homes for the reason that they spent some of their time there; and the widower-owner who stayed at home and farmed his heritage and, with a constant tumbler of thin whiskey-and-water at his elbow and an aged setter bitch dozing at his feet, sat through the long summer afternoons in a home-made chair on the front gallery, reading in Latin the Roman poets; and the child, the daughter, the motherless girl who grew up in that almost conventual seclusion without companions or playmates with nobody in fact except a few Negro servants and the middle-aged father who paid (again by the town's and the county's postulation) little or no attention to her and who therefore, without ever once saying so to anyone of course, certainly not to the child, perhaps never even to himself, still charged against the life of the daughter, the death of the wife who apparently had been his own life's one monogamous love; and who (the child) at seventeen and without warning to anyone, not to the county anyway, married a man whom nobody in that part of Mississippi had ever heard of before.

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

It was something about a previous involvement, prior to the marriage: an engagement, a betrothal in form in fact, with (so the legend said) the father's formal consent, then broken, ruptured, voided — something — before the man she did marry ever appeared on the scene; — a betrothal in form according to the legend, yet so nebulous that even twenty years after, with twenty years of front gallery gossip for what his uncle called the Yoknapatawpha County spinster aunts of both sexes to have cast that romantic mantle over the shoulders of every male under sixty who had ever taken a drink or bought a bale of cotton from her father, the other party to it had not only no name but no face too — which at least the other man had, the stranger, for all

that he appeared without warning out of nowhere and (as it were) married her all in one burst, one breath, without any space between for anything called by so leisurely a name as betrothal, let alone courtship.

So it — the first, the other one, the true betrothal, worthy of the word for the simple reason that nothing came of it but apocrypha's ephemeral footnote, already fading: a scent, a shadow, a whisper; a young girl's trembling Yes in an old garden at dusk, a flower exchanged or kept; and nothing remained unless perhaps the flower, the rose pressed between the pages of a book as the successors to his grandmother's generation occasionally did — was probably, without doubt, it had to be, the aftermath of some boy-and-girl business of her schooldays. But indubitably it was to someone in Jefferson or at least in the county. Because until now she had never been anywhere else to have involved or pledged her inclinations and then lost them.

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

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

But at least his uncle had a reason for not talking about this part of it because his uncle didn't even know about the first engagement except by second hand two or three years later. Because he — his uncle — was not there then; that was 1919 and once more Europe — Germany — was open to students and tourists too with student visas, and his uncle had already gone back to Heidelberg to finish his Ph.D., and when he

returned five years later, she was already married to the other man, the one who did have a name and a face even if nobody in the town or the county had heard the one nor seen the other until they came up the church aisle almost, and had borne the two children and then herself departed with them for Europe and the old other thing which had never been more than a shadow anyway, had been forgotten even in Jefferson, unless maybe on fading occasions over cups of coffee or tea or ladies' punch (and then more fading still over their own bassinets) by the six girls who had been her only friends.

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

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

In fact, his uncle said that the whole pattern was upside down. He — his uncle — was home again now, for good this time, and his sister and mother, Charles's mother and grandmother (and all the other women he couldn't help but listen to probably) had told him about the marriage and about the other shadowy betrothal too. Which itself should have unbraked his uncle's tongue when the violation of his home didn't, for the very reason that it was not merely no concern of

his but so little concerned with any reality at all that there would have been nothing in it anywhere to confound or restrict him.

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

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

wasn't much of it, because, as his uncle said, the man who read Latin for pleasure wouldn't have wanted any more than he already had.

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

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

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

Then a month passed and not even the victoria was seen in town. It was as if she had realised at last, it had finally occurred to her, what for two months now the whole town and the county too had been believing and saying; — only eighteen then and his mother said how she didn't look even that — a slight, dark-haired, dark-eyed girl who didn't look much bigger than a child perched alone in the cave-like opening of the victoria's hooded back seat which would have held five

or six of her, — who, his mother said, hadn't been any too bright even in school and had never tried to be anything else, and who, his uncle said, maybe didn't need to be bright, having been created for simple love and grief; that is it must have been for love and grief because it was certainly not for haughtiness and pride, since she had failed (if she had ever really tried even that) at assurance without even accomplishing bravado.

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

But they were wrong. He came back Christmas. And once he was actually back, where they could see him again, unchanged — the same man, a little ageless, affable, high-colored, bland, without grace and without imagination, it was all right again. In fact, it had never been wrong; even the very ones who had said soonest and most positively that he had deserted her, were now the most convinced that they had never really believed it; when he left again after New Year's like any other husband unlucky enough to have his work, business, in one place and his family in another, nobody even marked the day.

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

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

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

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

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

would have been like the hot horse-player quitting the tracks in midseason to run a milk-route.

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

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

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

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

mother's attic, and the man who rented the farm-land was living in the house as the caretaker.

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

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

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

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

They would come by whole families in battered dusty cars and wagons, or singly on horses and mules taken last night from the plow, to stop along the road and watch gangs of strange men with enough machinery

to have built a highway or a reservoir, disc and terrace the old fields once dedicated to simple profit-producing com and cotton, and sow them to pasture grass costing more per pound than sugar.

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

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

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

Then he began to bring friends up from New Orleans with him, for week-ends and longer, and not just at Christmas and in the summer now, but four and five times during the year, as though the money was coming in so fast and smooth now that he didn't even have to stay there and watch it. Sometimes he wouldn't even come himself, but would just send them. He had a caretaker who lived in the house all the time: not the old one, the first renter, but a new one from New Orleans

whom he called his butler: a fat Italian or Greek collarless in white silk shirt sleeves and a pistol loose in his hip pocket until the guests arrived.

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

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

There was a polo field too. It was beside the road, the highway; the men from town, the merchants and lawyers and deputy sheriffs, could drive out now and watch the riding without even getting out of their cars. And the men from the countryside too — the farmers, the landholders and the tenants and renters and croppers — who wore boots only when walking in mud was unavoidable, and who rode horses only to get from one place to another without having to walk, and that in the same clothes they had put on to eat breakfast in, would come too on horses and mules taken from the plow, to stand along the fence

and look at the fine horses a little but mostly at the clothes — the women and the men too who couldn't ride a horse except in shiny boots and special pants, and the others in the pants and hoots and derby hats who didn't even ride horses.

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

which a man at each end could pick up and carry to one side like two housemaids moving a canvas cot; and at another place, in the middle of a forty-acre pasture as bare and empty as a baseball diamond, a section of hedgerow not even growing in the ground but in a wooden box like a hog-trough, and behind it, an artificial pit filled with water pumped through a galvanised pipe from the house almost a mile away.

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

And the next year there was an actual pack of hounds, fine ones, a little too fine to be simple dogs just as the horses were a little too fine to be simple horses, a little too clean, a little too (somehow) unaccustomed,

living in weather-proof hutches with running water and special human beings to wait on them too like the horses did and had.

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

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

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

And each Christmas and New Year's, his, Charles's, mother and the other five who had been the girlhood friends, would receive the seasonal cards. They would be postmarked from Rome or London or Paris or Vienna or Cairo, but they hadn't been bought there. They hadn't been bought anywhere within the last five or ten years, because

they had been chosen and purchased and saved from a quieter time than this one, when the houses that people were born in didn't always even know they lacked electric wiring and water pipes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He never saw any of them but just a few times — nor did anybody else that he knew of. The boy rode the horses, but only out there, in the paddock or the polo field, and not for pleasure it appeared, but simply to pick out a few of the best ones to keep, because within a month they had held an auction sale in one of the smaller paddocks and sold off all but about a dozen. But he seemed to know horses, because the ones they kept were good ones.

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

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

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

one faint waft of sachet from that disturbed drawer, and all the vast soar of walls, the loom and sweep of porticoes, became at once transparent and substanceless.

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

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

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

'This is Charles,' his uncle said. 'Maggie's boy. I hope you'll be happy.'
'I beg your pardon?' she said.

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

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

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

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

'Sir?' he said.

'Sir what?' his uncle said.

'You said something.'

'Did I?' his uncle said.

'You said "less oft is peace".'

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

So maybe he had been wrong. Perhaps his uncle had not lost that year after all, like the old golfer or wing-shot who, a little slack and off and even consistently missing shot after casual shot, can still bear down at

last not even when the: pressure comes but merely when he wants to. Because almost before he had even had time to think that, his uncle said, striding on, glib, familiar, quick, incorrigibly garrulous, incorrigibly discursive, who had always something curiously truthful yet always a little bizarre to say about almost anything that didn't really concern him:

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

Because by that time the whole county knew Captain Gualdres, by hearsay, and most of them even by sight. Then one day he, Charles, saw him too. Captain Gualdres was crossing the Square on one of the Harriss horses, and his, Charles's, uncle said what it was. Not who the man was nor even what, but what they were, the man and the horse together: not a centaur, but a unicorn. He looked hard, not that flabby hardness of too much living which Harriss's butlers had had, but the hardness of metal, of fine steel or bronze, desiccated, almost epicene.

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

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

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

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

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

The county heard how he would go to the stables alone at night, moon or dark, and saddle a half-dozen of them and ride them in relays into

dawn and sunup; and that summer he built a steeplechase course in comparison to which that one Harriss had built was an obstacle race for crawling infants: sections of rail or wall not set into the fences but higher than the fences by a foot or two feet, not matchwood this time but solid beams capable of supporting roofs, not papier-mâché this time but the actual living rock freighted all the way from eastern Tennessee and Virginia.

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

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

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

And one thing more happened or at least began about three months ago now, which the whole county had had to know about, or at least form an opinion about, for the very reason that this was the only phase

or side of Captain Gualdres' Mississippi life which he ever tried to keep, if not secret, at least private.

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

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

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

It was a mare, a filly, sired by a famous imported steeplechaser and going blind from trauma, purchased of course, the county believed, to be a brood mare (which was proof to them that Captain Gualdres anyway considered his tenure on North Mississippi worth a year's purchase at least) since there was obviously nothing else that anyone could do with a mare, no matter what the breeding, which in another year would be totally blind.

Which the county continued to believe for the next six weeks, even after they discovered that he was doing something with the mare

besides simply waiting on nature, discovering this — not what he was doing with the mare, but that he was doing something with it — for that same reason that this was the first one of his horse activities which he ever tried to keep private.

Because there were no watchers, spectators this time, not only because whatever it was Captain Gualdres was doing with the mare took place at night and usually late, but because Captain Gualdres himself asked them not to come out and watch, asking them with that Latin passion for decorum and courtesy become instinctive from dealing with its own hair-triggered race, which shone even through the linguistic paucity: 'You will not come out to see because, my honor, there is nothing now to see.'

So they didn't. They deferred, not to his Latin honor perhaps, but they deferred. Perhaps there really was nothing to see, since there couldn't have been very much out there at that hour worth going that distance to see; only occasionally someone, a neighbor on his way home, passing the place in the late silence, would hear hooves in one of the paddocks beyond the stables at some distance from the road — a single horse, at trot then canter then for a few beats at dead run, the sound stopping short off into complete silence while the listener could have counted two or perhaps three, then beginning once more in the middle of the dead run, already slowing back to canter and trot as if Captain Gualdres had snatched, jerked, wrenched the animal from full speed into immobility in one stride and held it so for the two or three beats, then flung it bodily into full run again, — teaching it what, nobody knew, unless as a barber-shop wit said, since it was going to be blind, how to dodge traffic on the way to town to collect its pension.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Not his morals: his morality. They had never had any illusions about his — a foreigner and a Latin — morals, so they had accepted his lack of them already in advance before he could have demanded, requested it even. But they themselves had foisted on, invested him with a morality, a code which he had proved now was not his either, and they would never forgive him.

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

It was a Trojan horse; the foreigner who as yet barely spoke English, had gone all the way to St. Louis to find and buy with his own money, one meeting the requirements: blindness to establish an acceptable reason for the night absences, a horse already trained or that he himself could train to make on signal — perhaps an electrical sound every ten or fifteen minutes operated from a clock (by this time the county’s imagination had soared to heights which even horse-traders

didn't reach, let alone mere horse-trainers) — those spurts of galloping around an empty paddock, until he got back from the assignation and threw a switch and put the horse up and rewarded it with sugar or oats.

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

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

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

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

L WOULD RIDE WITH HIM, EVEN IF MY NAME WAS CAPTAIN GUALDRES,
II.

Yet these were the people — the puppets, the paper dolls; the situation, impasse, morality play, medicine show, whichever you liked best — dropped out of a clear sky into his uncle's lap at ten o'clock on a cold night four weeks before Christmas, and all his uncle saw fit or felt inclined or even needful to do, was to come back to the board and move the pawn and say 'Move' as though it had never happened, never been; not only dismissed but repudiated, refused.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Eighteen,’ he said. Or almost.’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It seemed to be all of it indeed. He moved. He had planned it a long time back too, a longer time back than his uncle, counting as airmen do by contiguous and not elapsed time, because he had not had to make a landing long enough to repel an invading force and then get airborne again, as his uncle had. He checked his uncle’s queen and her castle both with the horse. Then his uncle fed him the pawn which only he, Charles, seemed to have believed that nobody had forgotten about, and he moved and then his uncle moved and then as usual it was all over.

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

‘Always,’ his uncle said, starting to separate the white and the black pieces as he, Charles, reached for the box on the lower shelf of the smoking stand. ‘You couldn’t have taken them both without two moves. And a knight can move two squares at once and even in two directions at once. But he cant move twice’ — shoving the black pieces

across the board toward him. 'I'll take the white this time and you can try it.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She looked as if she had been running ever since, anyway, standing in the door for a moment after he opened it, holding the fur coat together at her throat with one hand and the long white dress flowing away from beneath it. And maybe the terror was still in her face, but there

wasn't anything dazed about her eyes. And she even looked at him this time, good, when on the other one, as near as he could tell, she never had seen that he was in the room.

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

'I must see you alone,' she said.

'You are,' his uncle said. 'This is Charles Mallison, my nephew.' His uncle turned one of the chairs away from the chessboard. 'Sit down.' But she didn't move.

'No,' she said. 'Alone.'

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

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

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

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

'Can I smoke?' she said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Oh,’ she said. She looked at his uncle. ‘Lock him up how?’ she said. ‘I know that much about law, myself: that you can’t keep anybody locked up just because of what they are planning to do. Besides, he’d just give

some Memphis lawyer two or three hundred dollars and be out again the next day. Isn't that true?'

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

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

'Deport your brother?' his uncle said. 'Where? What for?'

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

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

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

'Keep who?' his uncle said. 'Locked up where?'

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

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

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

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

'All right,' she said through the rapid smoke, holding the cigarette between two fingers with pointed painted nails. 'Because there was nothing really settled between him and Mother — if there ever had

been anything to settle. And so at least it wasn't Mother who wanted anything settled about it because... And he would have had the horses or at least the money to buy new ones, no matter which one of us.. She puffed rapidly at the cigarette, not looking at his uncle nor at anything. 'So when I found out that sooner or later Max was going to kill him if something wasn't done about it, I made a trade with Max that if he would wait twenty-four hours, I would come with him to you and persuade you to have him deported, back to the Argentine—' '— where he wouldn't have anything but his captain's pay,' his uncle said. 'And then you would follow him.'

'All right,' she said. 'Yes. So we came to you, and then I saw that you didn't believe us and were not going to do anything about it and so the only thing I could think to do was to let Max see with you watching that I loved him too, so that Max would do something to make you believe that at least Max meant what he was saying. And he did it and he does mean it and he's dangerous and you've got to help me. You've got to.'

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

'I have. I am.'

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

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

broom like a sabre and beat down the lunge until somebody grabbed Max—'

She was breathing, not hard so much as fast, rapid, panting almost, still trying to draw on the cigarette which would have been too short to smoke even if her hand had been steady enough to hold it steady, sitting huddled in the chair in a kind of cloud of white tulle and satin and the rich dark heavy sheen of little slain animals, looking not wan so much as delicate and fragile and not even fragile so much as cold, evanescent, like one of the stalked white early spring flowers bloomed ahead of its time into the snow and the ice and doomed before your eyes without even knowing that it was dying, feeling not even any pain.

'That was afterward,' his uncle said.

'What? After what?'

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

'Yes,' she said.

'No,' his uncle said.

'Yes.'

'No.'

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

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

'Ah,' his uncle said.

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

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

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

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

'What?' he said. What?'

But his uncle didn't answer; his uncle was still watching the door and then almost before his uncle could have answered, they heard the front door again and then the hard brittle girl-heels in the hall, two pairs of them now, and the Harriss girl came in fast and crossed the room and flipped one hand backward behind her and said, There she is,' and went on and swirled down into the chair again while he and his uncle looked at the other girl — a country girl, because he had seen her face before in town on Saturday, but that was the only way you could tell them now because their mouths and faces were painted too and sometimes their fingernails and the Sears, Roebuck clothes didn't look like Sears, Roebuck now and sometimes they were not even Sears, Roebuck even if they were not trimmed off in thousand-dollar mink; — a girl about the same age as the Harriss girl but not quite as tall, slender yet solid too, as country-bred girls can look, with dark hair and black eyes, looking at him for a second and then at his uncle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'I see,' his uncle said.

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

'I see,' his uncle said.

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

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

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

‘Gualdres,’ the Harriss girl said.

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

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

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

‘What?’ she said. ‘What did you say?’

‘Here,’ his uncle said. ‘Stup it.’

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

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

‘Stand up,’ she said.

Now the Harriss girl said ‘What?’ looking up, the hand still holding the unlighted cigarette in front of her mouth. The Cayley girl didn’t speak

again. She just rocked back onto her heels, slender and solid too, and swung her arm back and his uncle was moving now, hollering 'Stop it! Stop it!' but the Cayley girl had already swung, slapping the Harriss girl's face and the cigarette and the hand that held it, all together, and the Harriss girl jerked in the chair and then sat with the broken cigarette dangling between her fingers and a long thin scratch down her cheek; and then the ring itself, a big diamond, tumbled winking down the front of her coat and onto the floor.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Bloodshed,' she said. She forgot her face then and the platinum-and-jewel box too and the flipness and the hardness both went and when she looked at his uncle, the terror and dread were in her eyes again; and he knew that, whatever he and his uncle might think about what her brother could or would or might do, at least she didn't have any doubts. 'You've got to do something,' she said. 'You've got to. If I had known anybody else to go to, I wouldn't have bothered you. But I'

'You told me he made a pact with you to do nothing for twenty-four hours,' his uncle said. 'Do you think he will hold himself still bound to it,

or will he do what you did — make an effort of his own behind your back too?’

‘I don’t know,’ she said. ‘If you could just lock him up until I’
‘Which I cant do, any more than I can have the other one deported before breakfast. Why don’t you deport him yourself? You said that you—’

Now there was terror and despair both in her face.

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

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

‘Exactly why what?’

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

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

‘It’s on the mirror.’

‘What?’ his uncle said.

‘Your handkerchief,’ the Cayley girl said. ‘I washed it.’

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

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

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

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

Then they were gone: through the sittingroom door, leaving it open of course; that is, the Harriss girl did, though when he went to close it the Cayley girl had turned back to do it until she saw he was already there. But when he started to shut it, his uncle said, 'Wait' so he stood holding it and they heard the hard brittle girlheels in the hall and then, sure enough, the front door too.

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

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

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

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

‘What girl?’ his uncle said. ‘Didn’t one of them drive six miles twice tonight just to make sure we understood that she wanted her name coupled with Captain Gualdres’, no matter what the conditions; and the other one not only resorted to fisticuffs to refute the aspersion, she cant even spell his name?’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘I already have,’ he said.

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

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

‘It stops being a game then,’ he said.

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

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

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

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

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

He will probably call all the newspapers to be sure they have his name and location right, and that they record it.... No no, just wire me in the morning that you have him safely under surveillance and keep him so until you hear from me again’: and put the telephone down and got up,

but not to return to the chessboard hut instead went to the door and opened it and stood holding the knob, until finally he did catch up. He got up and picked up the book he had started upstairs with three hours ago. But this time he spoke, and this time his uncle answered him:

‘But what do you want with him?’

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

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

‘His alibi,’ his uncle said.

And that too.

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

‘Trick?’ he said. What trick?’

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

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

‘I’m not worrying,’ his uncle said. ‘I’m being worried. Worse; annoyed. I just want to keep my — or Mr. Markey’s — finger on him until I can telephone his sister tomorrow and she — or their mother, or anyone else in the family who have or hope to have any control over him or

either or both of them — can go up there and get him and do whatever they want to with him; I would suggest that they tie him up in one of the stalls and let his prospective father (this might even be enough reason to Captain Gualdres for him to give over his maiden hesitancy and consent to an immediate marriage) work on him with his riding-crop.'

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

'Nobody ever believed there was, except his sister,' his uncle said. 'She was the one who ever convinced him in the first place that there was, started this whole thing. To get her own man. Maybe she thought that, as soon as her brother reached for that foil again, Gualdres would leave the country.

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

His uncle held the door open, looking at him.

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

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

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

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

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

'Nothing,' he said.

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

III.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So he went to bed and to sleep; tomorrow was Friday so he would not have to put on the pseudo khaki in order to shed the brown and, for another week, the heart's thirst, if that's what it was. And he ate breakfast; his uncle had already eaten and gone, and he stopped at his uncle's office on the way to school to pick up the notebook he had left yesterday, and Max Harriss wasn't in Memphis; the wire came from Mr. Markey while he was still in the office:

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

No what just thanks and so that was that too; he thought that was all; when he came back at noon to where his uncle waited on the corner to walk home to dinner, he didn't even think to ask; it was his uncle who voluntarily told him how Mr. Markey had even telephoned and said

how Harriss seemed to be well known not only to all the clerks and telephone girls and the Negro doormen and bellboys and waiters in the Greenbury, but to all the liquor stores and taxi-drivers in that part of town too, and that he, Mr. Markey, had even tried the other hotels just on the impossible supposition that there was one Mississippian who had heard there were others in Memphis.

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

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

'Maybe he has,' he said.

His uncle stopped walking.

'What?' his uncle said.

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

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

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

dusty walls of a prep-school classroom and having a hundred times less connection with any reality than even the sword and the pips.

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

And it was still all even when he had seen the horse. It was in a muddy horse-van standing in an alley behind the square when he passed after school, with a half dozen men standing around looking at the van from a definitely respectful distance, and only afterward did he actually see the horse shackled into the van not with ropes but with steel chains as if it were a lion or an elephant. Because he hadn't really looked at the van yet.

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

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

It had been ruined either as a colt or a young horse, probably by some owner who had tried to break its spirit by fear or violence. Only its spirit had refused to break, so that all it had got from whatever the experience had been, was a hatred for anything walking upright on two

legs, something like that abhorrence and rage and desire to destroy it which some humans feel for even harmless snakes.

It was unrideable and unmanageable even for breeding. It was said to have killed two men who just happened to get on the same side of a fence with it. Though this was not very probable, or the horse would have been destroyed. But Mr. McCallum was supposed to have bought it because its owner wanted to destroy it. Or maybe he believed he could tame it. Anyway, he always denied that it had ever killed anyone, so at least he must have thought he could sell it, since no horse was ever quite as bad as the man who bought it claimed, or as good as the man who sold it contended.

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

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

'You finally sold it.'

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

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

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

Which didn't mean much, didn't mean anything in fact except that Mr. McCallum would have to hurry like billy-O just to prove he hadn't even sold it. Which would be in the dark and a good while into it: four o'clock now, and anyone who had engaged to buy that horse would have to have lived a long way off not to have heard about it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But luckily there wasn't anybody else but him and his uncle at the crossing and the boy saw them then, the lights swinging down at them as if he was going to drive right up onto the curb. Then they swung away at the last second and he could have touched the boy — the face, the teeth glinting in it — as the car shot past into the Square and crossed it and slewed skidding, the tires squealing against the pavement, into the Memphis highway, the horn and the tires and the engine growing fainter and fainter, until at last he and his uncle could even hear Hampton Killegrew running toward the corner cursing and yelling.

'Did you pull the door to?' his uncle said.

'Yes sir,' he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Then I was wrong,’ his uncle said. ‘I maligned him too. Apparently I attributed to nineteen not only more ingenuity than it is capable of, but even malice too. Come along. You’re late. You’ve not only got to eat supper, you’ve got to get back to town.’

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

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

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

And if he, Charles, hadn’t gone to the picture show, he wouldn’t have seen his uncle at all that evening: eating his supper without haste since there was plenty of time despite his uncle and only his uncle seemed to want to avoid the human race: walking still without haste, since there was still plenty of time, through the cold vivid dark toward the Square and the picture show, not knowing what he was going to see and not even caring; it might be another war picture he was walking toward and

it didn't even matter, thinking remembering how once a war picture should, ought, to have been the worst thing of all for the heart's thirst to have to endure, except that it was not, since there lay between the war movie and Miss Hogganbeck's world events a thousand times even the insuperable distance which lay between Miss Hogganbeck's world events and the R.O.T.C. pips and the sword: thinking how if the human race could just pass all its time watching moving pictures, there would be no more wars nor any other man-made anguishes, except for the fact that man couldn't spend that much time watching moving pictures since boredom was the one human passion that movies couldn't cope with and man would have to spend at least eight hours a day watching them since he would have to sleep for another eight and his uncle said the only other thing man could stand for eight continuous hours was work.

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

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

And now he could see the shaded down-glow of the desk lamp beyond the sitting-room window and, himself not walking hurrying but rather being swept along on the still-pristine cresting of the astonishment and puzzlement and (most of all, though he didn't know why) haste, his

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

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

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

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

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

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

'All right,' his uncle said. 'What horse?'

He answered, succinct too. 'McCallum's. That stallion.'

'All right,' his uncle said again.

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

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

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

And this was one of them and neither did this sound like anything that anybody had got out of the Bible, at least since the Anglo-Saxon puritans had got hold of it. His uncle was up now too, snatching off the

eyeshade and flinging it away, and kicked the chair backward and snatched his coat and vest from the other chair.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘He knew the horse,’ Mr. McCallum said. ‘He came all the way out home and insisted he wanted to buy it. He was there at sunup, asleep in the car at the front gate, with four or five hundred dollars loose in his overcoat pocket like a handful of leaves. Why? Does he claim to be a minor?’

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

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

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

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

And he said that anybody that touched that saddle and bridle or the feed either, was going to already know about the horse and I told them they had certainly better, because if anybody walked into that lot and opened that stall door expecting to find just an ordinary horse behind it, it would not only be a considerable worry to the one that did the walking and the opening, but to the one that owned the horse too. And he said that at least that let me out, because I was just the one that sold it. But the stable was all right. There was even an outside window where a man could climb into the loft and throw down feed until the horse got used to him.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘A wager then,’ his uncle said.

Captain Gualdres didn’t move.

‘A request then,’ his uncle said.

Captain Gualdres didn’t move.

‘A favor to me then,’ his uncle said.

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

‘You ride tonight,’ his uncle said.

‘Truth,’ Captain Gualdres said.

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

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

‘Truth,’ he said, and went on, the three of them following, around the house that was too big, across the lawn where the bushes and shrubs

were too many, past the garages that would have held more cars than just four people could ever have used and the conservatories and hothouses of too many flowers and grapes for just four people ever to have eaten or smelled, crossing that moon-still moon-blached moon-silent barony with Captain Gualdres leading the way on the hard bowed pistons of boot-gleamed and glinted legs, then his uncle then himself then Mr. McCallum carrying the white-oak cudgel, the three of them in single file behind Captain Gualdres like three of his family GAUCHOS if Captain Gualdres had a family and they were not GAUCHOS instead or maybe even something else altogether ending in ONES.

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

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

'Now, Mr. Stevens. You explain?'

'With permission?' his uncle said.

'Truth,' Captain Gualdres said.

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

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

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

‘The jumps?’ his uncle said.

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

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

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

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

‘But what price?’ he said.

‘It was a bet,’ his uncle said. ‘A wager.’

‘A wager on what?’ he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘He lost the queen,’ he said.

‘The queen?’ his uncle said. What queen? Oh, you mean Mrs. Harriss. Maybe he realised that queen had been moved the same instant he realised he would have to call the bet. Maybe he realised that queen and the castle both had been gone ever since the moment he disarmed the prince with that hearth-broom. If he ever wanted her.’

‘Then what was he doing here?’ he said.

‘Why was he waiting?’ his uncle said.

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

‘Or indecision, since he can,’ his uncle said. ‘And almost fatal for this one, because he must. At least, he’d certainly better. His threat and his charm are in his capacity for movement. This time, he forgot that his

safety lay in it too.’ But that was tomorrow. Right now he couldn’t even keep up with what he was watching. He and Mr. McCallum just stood there looking and hearing while his uncle and Captain Gualdres stood facing each other, rapping out the brittle splattering syllables, until at last Captain Gualdres made a motion, not quite a shrug and not quite a salute, and his uncle turned to Mr. McCallum.

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

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

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

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

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

Then they watched him climb, still without haste, down into the paddock: a compact light-poised deliberate man with about him something of the same aura, sense of horses which Captain Gualdres had, walking steadily on in the moonlight, toward the blank white stable and the single black square of emptiness, of utter of absolute silence, in the center of it, reaching the stable at last and lifting the heavy wrought-iron latch and opening the closed lower half of the door; only then moving with unbelievable speed, jerking the half-door quickly back and out on its hinges and already moving with it, swinging it all the way back to the wall until he stood slightly behind it, between it and the wall, the heavy cudgel clutched in his other hand; swinging the door back barely an instant before the stallion, itself the same color as the inky blackness of the inside, exploded out into the moonlight as

if it had been tied to the door itself with a rope no longer than a watch-chain.

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

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

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

'I have lost,' Captain Gualdres said.

'Not lost,' his uncle said.

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

IV.

Then Saturday, no school: the whole unchallengeable day in which to have sat around the office and attended the little rest of it, the cleaning up; the what little rest of it remained, or so he thought, who even at

that late hour of December afternoon had not yet known his own capacity to be astonished and amazed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Sit down,' his uncle said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

'You'd do more than that right now if you were me,' Max said. 'Well?' Now his uncle moved. He swung the chair around with the pressure of his knee against the desk, until he faced Max.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Enlist?' Harriss said.

'Enlist,' his uncle said.

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

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

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

You are playing poker (I assume you know poker, or at least — like a lot of people — anyway play it). You draw cards. When you do that, you affirm two things: either that you have something to draw to, or you are willing to support to your last cent the fact that you have not.

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

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

'Now?' he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She was in a dark dress too, the dark blue in which brides 'go away,' travel, with the fine rich fur coat with a corsage (Orchids, of course. He had heard of orchids all his life, so he realised that he had never seen them before. But he knew them at once; on that coat and that bride they could be nothing else.) pinned to the collar and the thin thread from the Cayley girl's fingernail still showing on her cheek.

Captain Gualdres wouldn't sit down, so he and his uncle stood too. 'I come to say good-bye,' Captain Gualdres said in English. 'And to receive your — how you say—'

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

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

'Not good-bye,' his uncle said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘For decency.

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

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

So he took the wheel and drove on through across the crowded Saturday Square, still having to dodge among the homeward-hound cars and trucks and wagons even after they were clear of downtown. But the road itself was still open for a little speed — a lot of it if he had

been Max Harriss going home instead of just Charles Mallison driving his uncle backward.

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

‘You just said it’s not last night,’ he said.

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

‘What’s that?’ he said.

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

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

And it (the road) was older than gravel too, running back into the old time of simple dirt red and curving among the hills, then straight and black where the rich land flattened, alluvial and fertile; niggard in width since the land was too rich, too fecund in com and cotton, to allow

room for men to pass one another almost, marked only by the thin iron of carriage-and wagon-rims and the open O's of horses and mules when the old owner, the baron's father-in-law, would leave the Horace and the weak toddy long enough to come in to town the two or three or four times a year, to vote or sell the cotton or pay the taxes or attend a funeral or a wedding, and then be driven back to the toddy and the Latin pages again, along the simple dirt in which even hooves, unless running, made no noise, let alone the wheels or anything other than the creak of harness; back to the acres which were hardly bounded then except in his own recollection and holding and belief and that of his neighbors, not even fenced always, let alone in carefully panelled and railed oak and hickory designed in Virginia and Long Island and handicrafted in Grand Rapids factories, the lawn which was a yard of shabby oaks then, innocent of shears and pruners and clippers and borderers in a light mist of gasoline fumes, to the house which was just a house to back a front gallery for him to sit on with the silver cup and the worn calf; a garden which was just a garden, overgrown, shabby too, of old permanent perennial things: nameless roses and lilac bushes and daisies and phlox and the hard durable dusty bloom of fall, itself in the tradition of the diluted whiskey and the Horatian odes: unassertive, enduring.

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

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

least proved one of his uncle's points, the one about truth anyway) 'with his constant speculation whether his fear was as plain to others as to himself.

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

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

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

Because only the point about the shame was right, since his uncle only said that twelve years ago and never again since. Because the rest of it was wrong, since even twelve years ago, when his uncle was only in the late thirties, he had already lost touch with what was the real truth: that you went to war, and young men would always go, for glory because there was no other way so glorious to earn it, and the risk and fear of death was not only the only price worth buying what you bought, but the cheapest you could be asked, and the tragedy was, not that you died but that you were no longer there to see the glory; you didn't want to obliterate the thirsting heart: you wanted to slake it.

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

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

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

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

She looked like a little girl playing grown-up in the carriage-house, but playing it in deadly seriousness; like a child of twelve say, orphaned by sudden catastrophe, upon whom has devolved the care of a whole litter of younger brothers and sisters and perhaps even an aged grandparent, supervising the diet and changing and washing out the garments of infants; too young to have a vicarious interest in, let alone the conception of and kinship with the passion and mystery which created them alive into the world, which alone could have made the drudgery of feeding them bearable or even explicable.

'Of course it wasn't that. There was only her father, and if anything, the situation was reversed: the father who not only farmed the land and supervised the household, but did it in such a way that a plow-team and its driver from the field could be spared always to draw those six miles back and forth to town, the old carriage against the tremendous expanse of whose cushions she could resemble an archaic miniature, sober and sedate and demure ten years beyond her age and fifty years beyond her time.

But that was the impression I got: a child playing house in that windless and timeless garden at the red and stinking corridor's end: and so one day I knew suddenly and irrevocably that just silence was not peace.

It was after I saw her the third or the tenth or the thirtieth time, I don't remember which, but one morning I stood beside the halted carriage with the barefoot nigger on the box and she like something preserved from an old valentine or a 1904 candy-box against that faded soiled expanse of back seat (when the carriage passed, all you saw was just her head, and from behind you couldn't even see that though obviously the hand and the team wouldn't have been taken from the plow just to give the plowman a ride to town and back); — one morning I stood beside the halted carriage while on all sides rushed and squawked the bright loud glittering new automobiles because the war was won and every man would be rich and at peace forever.

“I'm Gavin Stevens,” I said. “And I'm going on thirty years old.”

“I know it,” she said. But I felt thirty, even if I wasn't quite. She was sixteen. And how could you say to a child (as we said then): “Give me a date?” And what would you (at thirty) do with it? And you don't just simply invite the child: you ask the child's parents if it can come. So it was just dusk when I stopped your grandmother's car at the gate and got out. There was a garden then, not a florist's landscaping dream. It was a good deal bigger than even five or six rugs spread side by side, with old bushes of roses and callicanthus and paintless collapsing arbors and trellises and beds of perennials re-seeding themselves without outside meddling help or let, and she standing in the middle of it watching me as I entered the gate and went up the walk until she couldn't see me any more.

And I knew she would not have moved from where she stood, and I mounted the steps to where the old gentleman sat in his hickory chair with the setter pup at his feet and the silver cup and the marked book at his elbow, and I said, “Let me be betrothed to her” (mark how I put

it: me to her). "I know," I said. "I know: not now. Not now. Just let us be betrothed, and we won't even have to think about it again."

'And she hadn't moved from where she stood, not even for listening. Because it was too far for listening, and besides she didn't need to: just standing there in the dusk the twilight, not moving: not shrinking, just not anything at all; it was even I who tilted up her face though it took no more strength than to raise a strand of honeysuckle. It was like tasting sherbet.

"I don't know how," she said. 'You'll have to teach me.'

"Don't learn then," I said. "It's all right. It doesn't even matter. You don't have to learn." It was like sherbet: the rest of spring, and summer and the long rest of summer: the darks and silence to be in, remembering sherbet: not retasting it because you don't need to retaste sherbet; it doesn't take much sherbet because you don't forget it. Then it was time for me to go back to Germany and I took the ring out to her. I had already looped it onto the ribbon myself.

"You don't want me to wear it yet?" she said.

"Yes," I said. "No," I said. "All right. Loop it over the bush here if you want to. It's just a little piece of glass and colored iron; it probably won't even last a thousand years." And I went back to Heidelberg and every month the letters would come, talking about nothing. Because how could they? She was just sixteen; what can have happened to just sixteen to write about, even talk about? And each month I answered, talking about nothing too, because how could just sixteen have translated it if I had, translated it to? And that's what I never did understand, never did find out,' his uncle said.

Now they were almost there; he was already slowing the car to enter the gate.

'Not how she got the German translated,' his uncle said. 'But how whoever translated the German for her, translated the English too.' 'German?' he said. 'You wrote her in German?'

'There were two letters,' his uncle said. 'I wrote them at the same time. I sealed and mailed them in the wrong envelopes. Then his uncle cried, 'Look out!' and even reached for the wheel. But he caught the car in time.

'The other one was a woman too,' he said. 'Yes. So that—'

'She was a Russian,' his uncle said. 'She had escaped from Moscow. For a price, paid by installments, over a long time, to different collectors. She was through a war too, O my Philistine. I knew her in Paris in 1918.

When I left America in the fall of '19 to go back to Heidelberg, I thought, believed I had forgotten her. That is, one day in mid-ocean I discovered that I hadn't thought about her since spring. And so I knew I hadn't forgot. I changed my hooking and went to Paris first; she was to follow me to Heidelberg as soon as someone would visé what papers she had. I would write to her each month too while we waited. Maybe while I waited. You must hear in mind my age. I was a European then.

I was in that menopause of every sensitive American when he believes that what (if any) future Americans' claim not even to human spirit but to simple civilization has, lies in Europe. Or maybe that was wrong.

Maybe it was simply, sherbet, and I was not even allergic to sherbet nor even impervious to it but simply incapable of sherbet; writing the two letters at the same time because it didn't even demand any cerebral process to compose one of them, that one flowing from somewhere around, amid the intestines, out to the fingertips, the pen-point, the ink without detour via the brain: as a result of which I was never even able to recall what could have been in the one which went where I had not written it to go, though there couldn't have been much doubt; never occurred to me to remember to be careful with them because they did not exist in the same world although the same hand wrote them at the same desk upon successive sheets of paper with the same one unbroken pen-stroke beneath the same two pfennigs' worth of electricity while the same space on the clock's dial crept beneath the moving hand.'

Then they were there. His uncle didn't have to say stop; he had already parked the car in the empty drive too wide too suave and too neatly raked and graveled for even a station wagon and a convertible or two and a limousine and something for the servants, his uncle not even waiting for that but already out of the car and walking toward the house while he, Charles, was still saying, 'I don't have to come in too, do I?'

'Haven't you come a little far to quit now?' his uncle said. So he got out too and followed, up the flagged walk too wide and with too many flagstones in it, toward the side portico which, merely a side one, would have held a president and cabinet or a supreme court all right though a little cozy for Congress, and the house itself like something between a gargantuan bride's cake and a freshly whitewashed circus tent, his uncle still going fast and still talking:

'We are strangely apathetic toward some very sound foreign customs. Think what a blaze it would have made, with his coffin on stacked gasoline-soaked cross-ties high in the middle of it: its (the house's) amortization one with its creator's suttee.'

Then inside; the Negro butler opened the door and immediately vanished and he and his uncle stood in the room in which Captain Gualdres (assuming he was or had been cavalry) could have paraded his troop, horses too, though he noticed little else because it was the orchid again: recognised at once, immediately, without surprise not even attention.

Then he even forgot the pleasant savor, titillation of simple tremendousness, because she came in: her feet in the hall and then into the room, though he had already smelled it, as if somebody had opened an old drawer by gaucherie, clumsiness, mistake and forty servants in rubber soles jumping frantically through the long corridors and rooms of glash and glitter to hurry it shut again; coming into the room and stopping and beginning to put her hands up palm-out in front of her without even having time to look at him since his uncle, who had never really stopped at all, was already walking toward her.

'I'm Gavin Stevens and now I'm almost fifty,' his uncle said, walking on toward her even after she began to retreat, fall back, bringing the hands higher and still palm-out toward his uncle, his uncle walking right on into the hands too and still walking right on while she was still trying to hold him away long enough to at least give herself time to change her mind about wanting to turn and run: too late now, assuming that was what she wanted or anyway thought she ought to do: but too late now, so that his uncle could stop too, looking back at him.

'Now what?' his uncle said. 'You can say something, cant you? Even good afternoon Mrs. Harriss will do.'

He started to say 'Excuse me.' But already he had thought of something better than that.

'Bless you, my children,' he said.

V.

That was Saturday. The next day was December seventh. But even before he left, the store windows were already bright with toys and tinsel and artificial snow like any other December in any other year, the air bright and merry with the taste and smell of Christmas even with gunfire in it, the gunfire and the whine of bullets and the sound they made on flesh getting ready to echo right here in Jefferson before many more weeks or months.

But when he saw Jefferson next, it was spring. The wagons and pick-ups of the hill farmers and the five-and ten-ton trucks of the bottomland planters and operators had already backed up to the loading platforms of the seed stores and the fertilizer warehouses, and tractors and spanned and tripled mules would be moving across the dark shearing of the land's winter sleep: plow and middlehuster, harrow and drag and disc; dogwood would bloom soon and soon the whippoorwills, but this was only 1942 and there would be a little time yet before the party-line telephones would begin to carry the War and Navy Department telegrams, and on Thursday mornings the RFD carrier would leave in the lonely post-perched boxes the weekly YOKNAPATAWPHA CLARION

bearing the reproduced photograph and the brief obit already too familiar yet still cryptic as Sanscrit or Chinese — the country-boy face not really old enough yet to be a man's photograph, the uniform still showing the creases of the quartermaster shelves, the place-names which those who had created that face and flesh apparently in order that it might die in agony there, had never even heard of before, let alone pronounce.

Because the inspector-general had been right. In fact, Benbow Sartoris, who had been only nineteenth in the class, had his commission and was already in England on something hush hush. Which, first and cadet colonel on the battalion list, he might have been doing too before it was too late, except that as usual he had exchanged the devil for the witch: not even the Sam Browne and the sabre and the trick insigne now, but only the blue hat-band and, even though being a cadet colonel or maybe that particular cadet colonel had shortened preflight some, probably a year yet before the winged badge on the cap would move down to just above the left pocket (with the shield of a pilot in the middle he hoped or at least a navigator's globe or anyway a bomb dropper's bomb).

And not even coming home really but just passing it on the way from preflight to basic, airplanes at last, only stopping in the station long enough for his mother to get on the train and ride with him down to the mainline junction where he would get a train for Texas and she would come back on the next local; approaching, passing, beginning to pass the familiar land: the road crossings he knew, the fields and woods where he had hiked as a cub then a scout and, old enough at last for a gun, hunted rabbits first and then quail on the wing.

Then the shabby purlieus themselves timeless and durable, familiar as his own voracious omnivorous insatiable heart or his body and limbs or the growth of his hair and fingernails: the first Negro cabins weathered and paintless until you realised it was more than just that and that they were a little, just a little awry: not out of plumb so much as beyond plumb: as though created for, seen in or by a different perspective, by a different architect, for a different purpose or anyway with a different

past: survived or even impervious to, unaware of, harder air or weather, whatever it was, each in its fierce yet orderly miniature jungle of vegetable patch, each with a shoat hog in a pen too small for any hog to thrive in yet this one did and would, and usually a tethered cow and a few chickens, the whole thing — cabin outhouse washpot shed and well — having a quality flimsy and make-shift, alien yet inviolably durable like Crusoe's cave; then the houses of white people, no larger than the Negro ones but never cabins, not to their faces anyway or you'd probably have a fight on your hands, painted or at least once-painted, the main difference being that they wouldn't be quite so clean inside.

Then he was home: a paved street-crossing not very far from the house he had been born in, and now he could see above the trees the water tank and the gold cross on the spire of the Episcopal church and then no more: his face pressed to the grimy glass as if he were eight years old, the train slowing over a clash and clatter of switch-points among the box-and cattle-cars and the gondolas and the tanks, and there they were, seen as the child of eight sees them: with something of shock, set puny yet amazingly durable against the perspective of the vast encompassable earth: his mother: his uncle: his new aunt: and his mother had been married to one man for twenty years and had raised another one, and his new aunt had been married to two in about that same time and had watched two more in her own house fighting each other with hearth-brooms and horses, so he was not surprised nor did he even really know how it happened: his mother already in the train and his new aunt already gone back to the waiting car while he and his uncle had the one last word together:

'Well, Squire,' he said. 'You not only went once too many to the well, you threw the pitcher in and then jumped in after it. I've got a message from your son.'

'My who?' his uncle said.

'All right,' he said. 'Your son-in-law. Your daughter's husband. The one that don't like you. He came out to camp to see me. He's a cavalryman now. I mean a soldier, an American' — tediously, himself récapitulant:

'You understand? One night an American acquaintance tried to kill him with a horse. The next day he married the American's sister. The day after that a Jap dropped a bomb on another American on a little island two thousand miles away.

So on the third day he enlisted, not into his own army in which he already held a reserve commission, but into the foreign one, renouncing not only his commission to do so but his citizenship too, using an interpreter without doubt to explain both to his bride and to his adopted government what he was trying to do' — remembering, still *récapitulant*, not amazed or if amazed, the tireless timeless amazement of the child watching tireless and timeless the repetitive Punch and Judy booth: that afternoon and no warning whatever until the summons to the orderly room, and there Captain Gualdres was ' — in a private's uniform, looking more like a horse than ever, maybe because of the fact that he had got himself into the one situation or condition above earth — a 1942 United States Army cavalry regiment — where as long as the war lasted he would have no contact whatever with horses—' himself (Charles) repetitive too: 'He didn't look brave, he just looked indomitable, not offering a life or a limb to anyone, any government in gratitude for or protest against any thing, as if in this final and serious moment neither would he assume any sentimental pretence regarding the vain and idle pattering of bullets against him any more than he had used to about the vain and fragile hooves of horses; not hating Germans or Japs or even Harrisses, going to war against Germans not because they had ruined a continent and were rendering a whole race into fertilizer and lubricating oil, but because they had abolished horses from civilised cavalry, getting up from the chair when I came in and saying, "I come here so you can see me. Now you have seen me. Now you will return to your uncle and say to him, Perhaps you are satisfied now."'

'What?' his uncle said.

'I don't know either,' he said. That's what he said: that he had come all the way there from Kansas so I could see him in that brown suit and then come back to you and say, "Now maybe you're satisfied."'

And now it was time to go; they had already pulled the express hand-truck away from the baggage car door, and the express clerk was even leaning out the door looking back, and Mr. McWilliams, the conductor, was standing at the vestibule steps with his watch in his hand, but at least he was not hollering at him, Charles, yet, because he, Charles, wore a uniform and this was still early in 1942 and civilians hadn't got used to war yet. So he said, 'And one more thing. Those letters. Two letters. Two wrong envelopes.'

His uncle looked at him. 'You don't like coincidence?'

'I love it,' he said. 'It's one of the most important things in life. Like maidenhead. Only, like maidenhead, you only use it once. I'm going to save mine a while yet.'

His uncle looked at him, quizzical, fantastical, grave. 'All right,' his uncle said. 'Try this. A street. In Paris. Within, as we Yoknapatawphians say, a medium spit of the Bois de Boulogne, so recent in nomenclature that its name is no older than the last battles of 1918 and the Versailles peace table — less than five years then; so select and so discreet that its location was known only to garbage collectors and employment bureaus for upper servants and the under secretaries of embassys. But no matter; it doesn't exist any more now, and besides, you'd never get there to see it if it did.'

'Maybe I will,' he said. 'Maybe I'll look at where it used to be.'

'You can do that here,' his uncle said. 'In the library. Simply by opening the right page in Conrad: the same waxed red-and-black tiled floor, the ormolu, the faience, the buhl; even to the long mirror which seemed to hold as in a silver dish the whole condensation of light, of afternoon, in whose depths seemed to float, like the lily upon its own concordant repetition, that forehead innocent and smooth of thought, ravaged only by grief and fidelity—'

'How did you know she was there?' he said.

'I seen it in the paper,' his uncle said. 'The Paris HERALD. The United States government (given a little time) did very well in keeping up with its own first American Expeditionary Force in France. But theirs was nothing to how the Paris HERALD kept cases on the second one which began to land in Europe in 1919. — But this one was not ravaged at all by anything: just sitting there looking still exactly like a little girl whom all the world was helping now in the make-believe that she was a queen; and no caller this time come to do justice to a dead man because the man, creature, whose message this caller bore was anything but dead; he had sent his envoy all that distance from Heidelberg not to deliver a message but a demand: he wanted to know. So I asked it.

“‘But why didn’t you wait for me?’ I said. “‘Why didn’t you cable?’”
‘Did she answer it?’ he said.

‘Didn’t I say that brow was unravaged, even by indecision?’ his uncle said. ‘She answered it. “You didn’t want me,” she said. “I wasn’t smart enough for you.”’

‘And what did you say?’

‘I answered correctly too,’ his uncle said. ‘I said, “Good afternoon, Mrs. Harriss.” Will that one do?’

‘Yes,’ he said. And now it was time. The engineer even blew the whistle at him. Mr. McWilliams had never once shouted, ‘Come on here, boy, if you’re going with us’ as he would have five years ago (or for that matter, five months ago): only the two short deep impatient blasts of steam; simply because of the yet untried uniform he wore, a creature whose constant waking habit was talk, who would not even have missed or been aware of the breath passing over his vocal cords necessary to holler at him, had made no sound; instead, simply because he wore the uniform, a trained expert in a hundred-ton machine costing a hundred thousand dollars had expended three or four dollars’ worth of coal and pounds of hard-earned steam to tell an eighteen-year-old boy that he had spent enough time gossiping with his uncle: and he thought how perhaps that country, that nation, that way of

living really was invincible which could not only accept war but even assimilate it in stride by compromising with it; with the left hand so to speak, without really impeding or even deflecting, aberrating, even compelling the attention of the right hand still engaged in the way's old prime durable business.

'Yes,' he said. 'That's better. I might even buy that one. And that was twenty years ago. And it was true then or at least enough then or at least enough for you then. And now it's twenty years later and it's not true now or at least not enough now or at least not enough for you now. How did just years do all that?

'They made me older,' his uncle said. 'I have improved.'

The end

Requiem for a Nun, William Faulkner

Requiem for a Nun

First published in 1951, *Requiem for a Nun* is a sequel to *Sanctuary*, which introduced the characters of Temple Drake, her friend and later husband Gowan Stevens, and Gowan's uncle, Gavin Stevens.

Once more set in Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County, the novel takes place in November 1937 and March 1938, eight years after the events of *Sanctuary*. The book is part novel, part play, offering a unique narrative technique in the author's oeuvre. The main narrative, presented in dramatic form, is interspersed with prose sections recounting the history of Yoknapatawpha County.

Each prose section focuses on a specific institution (the courthouse, state house, and jailhouse respectively), serving as the setting for the following dramatic section of the story. The major theme of the novel is

spiritual redemption for past evil deeds through suffering and the recognition of one's guilt. The protagonist Temple, who is now married with a child, must learn to deal with her violent and turbulent past, as related in the earlier novel.

The word "nun" in the title refers to the character Nancy, a prostitute convicted of murder, playing upon the Elizabethan era-slang meaning of the word, as well as playing upon its contemporary meaning of a woman that sacrifices herself to save sinners.

At the time of publication, *Requiem for a Nun* received mixed reviews. The *New York Herald Tribune* described it as "a drama conceived on a level of moral consciousness" that made it "genuinely tragic", and "in that respect it is vastly superior to *Sanctuary*, where the only morality was in the dim background of the author's mind." Several critics were intrigued by the novel's experimental combination of novel and drama.

However, Faulkner's writing style was criticised by some as clumsy and tedious, particularly in the dramatic sections, where the action was largely narrated rather than shown. In later decades, *Requiem for a Nun* was not considered marketable by publishers and for a time it went out of print.

Nonetheless, more recent scholarship has recognised its innovative qualities, influencing other key modernist authors, including Albert Camus, who adapted it for the theatre in 1956 under the title *Requiem pour une nonne*. Interestingly, the novel is the source for one of Faulkner's most celebrated lines, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

The first edition

Contents

Act I

Scene I

Scene II

Scene III

Act II

Scene I
Scene II
Scene III
Act III
Scene I

Albert Camus in 1957, close to the time of his adapting 'Requiem for a Nun' for the stage.

Act I

THE COURTHOUSE (A Name for the City)

THE COURTHOUSE IS less old than the town, which began somewhere under the turn of the century as a Chickasaw Agency trading-post and so continued for almost thirty years before it discovered, not that it lacked a depository for its records and certainly not that it needed one, but that only by creating or anyway decreeing one, could it cope with a situation which otherwise was going to cost somebody money;

The settlement had the records; even the simple dispossession of Indians begot in time a minuscule of archive, let alone the normal litter of man's ramshackle confederation against environment — that time and that wilderness — in this case, a meagre, fading, dog-eared, uncorrelated, at times illiterate sheaf of land grants and patents and transfers and deeds, and tax- and militia-rolls, and bills of sale for slaves, and counting-house lists of spurious currency and exchange rates, and liens and mortgages, and listed rewards for escaped or stolen Negroes and other livestock, and diary-like annotations of births and marriages and deaths and public hangings and land-auctions, accumulating slowly for those three decades in a sort of iron pirate's chest in the back room of the post-office-trading-post-store, until that day thirty years later when, because of a jailbreak compounded by an ancient monster iron padlock transported a thousand miles by horseback from Carolina, the box was removed to a small new lean-to room like a wood- or tool-shed built two days ago against one outside wall of the morticed-log mud-chinked shake-down jail; and thus was

born the Yoknapatawpha County courthouse: by simple fortuity, not only less old than even the jail, but come into existence at all by chance and accident: the box containing the documents not moved from any place, but simply to one; removed from the trading-post back room not for any reason inherent in either the back room or the box, but on the contrary: which — the box — was not only in nobody's way in the back room, it was even missed when gone since it had served as another seat or stool among the powder- and whiskey-kegs and firkins of salt and lard about the stove on winter nights; and was moved at all for the simple reason that suddenly the settlement (overnight it would become a town without having been a village; one day in about a hundred years it would wake frantically from its communal slumber into a rash of Rotary and Lion Clubs and Chambers of Commerce and City Beautifuls: a furious beating of hollow drums toward nowhere, but merely to sound louder than the next little human clotting to its north or south or east or west, dubbing itself city as Napoleon dubbed himself emperor and defending the expedient by padding its census rolls — a fever, a delirium in which it would confound forever seething with motion and motion with progress.

But that was a hundred years away yet; now it was frontier, the men and women pioneers, tough, simple, and durable, seeking money or adventure or freedom or simple escape, and not too particular how they did it.) discovered itself faced not so much with a problem which had to be solved, as a Damocles sword of dilemma from which it had to save itself;

Even the jailbreak was fortuity: a gang — three or four — of Natchez Trace bandits (twenty-five years later legend would begin to affirm, and a hundred years later would still be at it, that two of the bandits were the Harpes themselves, Big Harpe anyway, since the circumstances, the method of the breakout left behind like a smell, an odour, a kind of gargantuan and bizarre playfulness at once humorous and terrifying, as if the settlement had fallen, blundered, into the notice or range of an idle and whimsical giant.

Which — that they were the Harpes — was impossible, since the Harpes and even the last of Mason's ruffians were dead or scattered by

this time, and the robbers would have had to belong to John Murrel's organisation — if they needed to belong to any at all other than the simple fraternity of rapine.) captured by chance by an incidental band of civilian more-or-less militia and brought in to the Jefferson jail because it was the nearest one, the militia band being part of a general muster at Jefferson two days before for a Fourth-of-July barbecue, which by the second day had been refined by hardy elimination into one drunken brawling which rendered even the hardest survivors vulnerable enough to be ejected from the settlement by the civilian residents, the band which was to make the capture having been carried, still comatose, in one of the evicting wagons to a swamp four miles from Jefferson known as Hurricane Bottoms, where they made camp to regain their strength or at least their legs, and where that night the four — or three — bandits, on the way across country to their hide-out from their last exploit on the Trace, stumbled onto the campfire.

And here report divided; some said that the sergeant in command of the militia recognised one of the bandits as a deserter from his corps, others said that one of the bandits recognised in the sergeant a former follower of his, the bandit's, trade.

Anyway, on the fourth morning all of them, captors and prisoners, returned to Jefferson in a group, some said in confederation now seeking more drink, others said that the captors brought their prizes back to the settlement in revenge for having been evicted from it. Because these were frontier, pioneer times, when personal liberty and freedom were almost a physical condition like fire or flood, and no community was going to interfere with anyone's morals as long as the amoralist practised somewhere else, and so Jefferson, being neither on the Trace nor the River but lying about midway between, naturally wanted no part of the underworld of either;

But they had some of it now, taken as it were by surprise, unawares, without warning to prepare and fend off. They put the bandits into the log-and-mud-chinking jail, which until now had had no lock at all since its clients so far had been amateurs — local brawlers and drunkards and runaway slaves — for whom a single heavy wooden beam in slots

across the outside of the door like on a corncrib, had sufficed. But they had now what might be four — three — Dillingers or Jesse Jameses of the time, with rewards on their heads.

So they locked the jail; they bored an auger hole through the door and another through the jamb and passed a length of heavy chain through the holes and sent a messenger on the run across to the post-office-store to fetch the ancient Carolina lock from the last Nashville mail-pouch — the iron monster weighing almost fifteen pounds, with a key almost as long as a bayonet, not just the only lock in that part of the country, but the oldest lock in that cranny of the United States, brought there by one of the three men who were what was to be Yoknapatawpha County's coeval pioneers and settlers, leaving in it the three oldest names — Alexander Holston, who came as half groom and half bodyguard to Doctor Samuel Habersham, and half nurse and half tutor to the doctor's eight-year-old motherless son, the three of them riding horseback across Tennessee from the Cumberland Gap along with Louis Grenier, the Huguenot younger son who brought the first slaves into the country and was granted the first big land patent and so became the first cotton planter; while Doctor Habersham, with his worn black bag of pills and knives and his brawny taciturn bodyguard and his half orphan child, became the settlement itself (for a time, before it was named, the settlement was known as Doctor Habersham's, then Habersham's, then simply Habersham; a hundred years later, during a schism between two ladies' clubs over the naming of the streets in order to get free mail delivery, a movement was started, first, to change the name back to Habersham; then, failing that, to divide the town in two and call one half of it Habersham after the old pioneer doctor and founder) — friend of old Issetibbeha, the Chickasaw chief (the motherless Habersham boy, now a man of twenty-five, married one of Issetibbeha's granddaughters and in the thirties emigrated to Oklahoma with his wife's dispossessed people), first unofficial, then official Chickasaw agent until he resigned in a letter of furious denunciation addressed to the President of the United States himself; and — his charge and pupil a man now — Alexander Holston became the settlement's first publican, establishing the tavern still known as the Holston House, the original log walls and puncheon floors and hand-morticed joints of which are still buried somewhere beneath

the modern pressed glass and brick veneer and neon tubes. The lock was his;

Fifteen pounds of useless iron lugged a thousand miles through a desert of precipice and swamp, of flood and drouth and wild beasts and wild Indians and wilder white men, displacing that fifteen pounds better given to food or seed to plant food or even powder to defend with, to become a fixture, a kind of landmark, in the bar of a wilderness ordinary, locking and securing nothing, because there was nothing behind the heavy bars and shutters needing further locking and securing; not even a paper weight because the only papers in the Holston House were the twisted spills in an old powder horn above the mantel for lighting tobacco; always a little in the way, since it had constantly to be moved: from bar to shelf to mantel then back to bar again until they finally thought about putting it on the bi-monthly mail-pouch;

familiar, known, presently the oldest unchanged thing in the settlement, older than the people since Issetibbeha and Doctor Habersham were dead, and Alexander Holston was an old man crippled with arthritis, and Louis Grenier had a settlement of his own on his vast plantation, half of which was not even in Yoknapatawpha County, and the settlement rarely saw him; older than the town, since there were new names in it now even when the old blood ran in them — Sartoris and Stevens, Compson and McCaslin and Sutpen and Coldfield — and you no longer shot a bear or deer or wild turkey simply by standing for a while in your kitchen door, not to mention the pouch of mail — letters and even newspapers — which came from Nashville every two weeks by a special rider who did nothing else and was paid a salary for it by the Federal Government; and that was the second phase of the monster Carolina lock's transubstantiation into the Yoknapatawpha County courthouse;

The pouch didn't always reach the settlement every two weeks, nor even always every month.

But sooner or later it did, and everybody knew it would, because it — the cowhide saddlebag not even large enough to hold a full change of

clothing, containing three or four letters and half that many badly-printed one- and two-sheet newspapers already three or four months out of date and usually half and sometimes wholly misinformed or incorrect to begin with — was the United States, the power and the will to liberty, owing liegence to no man, bringing even into that still almost pathless wilderness the thin peremptory voice of the nation which had wrenched its freedom from one of the most powerful peoples on earth and then again within the same lifespan successfully defended it; so peremptory and audible that the man who carried the pouch on the galloping horse didn't even carry any arms except a tin horn, traversing month after month, blatantly, flagrantly, almost contemptuously, a region where for no more than the boots on his feet, men would murder a traveller and gut him like a bear or deer or fish and fill the cavity with rocks and sink the evidence in the nearest water; not even deigning to pass quietly where other men, even though armed and in parties, tried to move secretly or at least without uproar, but instead announcing his solitary advent as far ahead of himself as the ring of the horn would carry.

So it was not long before Alexander Holston's lock had moved to the mail-pouch. Not that the pouch needed one, having come already the three hundred miles from Nashville without a lock. (It had been projected at first that the lock remain on the pouch constantly. That is, not just while the pouch was in the settlement, but while it was on the horse between Nashville and the settlement too.

The rider refused, succinctly, in three words, one of which was printable. His reason was the lock's weight. They pointed out to him that this would not hold water, since not only — the rider was a frail irascible little man weighing less than a hundred pounds — would the fifteen pounds of lock even then fail to bring his weight up to that of a normal adult male, the added weight of the lock would merely match that of the pistols which his employer, the United States Government, believed he carried and even paid him for having done so, the rider's reply to this being succinct too though not so glib: that the lock weighed fifteen pounds either at the back door of the store in the settlement, or at that of the post-office in Nashville. But since Nashville

and the settlement were three hundred miles apart, by the time the horse had carried it from one to the other, the lock weighed fifteen pounds to the mile times three hundred miles, or forty-five hundred pounds.

Which was manifest nonsense, a physical impossibility either in lock or horse. Yet indubitably fifteen pounds times three hundred miles was forty-five hundred something, either pounds or miles — especially as while they were still trying to unravel it, the rider repeated his first three succinct — two unprintable — words.) So less than ever would the pouch need a lock in the back room of the trading-post, surrounded and enclosed once more by civilisation, where its very intactness, its presence to receive a lock, proved its lack of that need during the three hundred miles of rapine-haunted Trace; needing a lock as little as it was equipped to receive one, since it had been necessary to slit the leather with a knife just under each jaw of the opening and insert the lock's iron mandible through the two slits and clash it home, so that any other hand with a similar knife could have cut the whole lock from the pouch as easily as it had been clasped onto it.

So the old lock was not even a symbol of security; it was a gesture of salutation, of free men to free men, of civilisation to civilisation across not just the three hundred miles of wilderness to Nashville, but the fifteen hundred to Washington: of respect without servility, allegiance without abasement to the government which they had helped to found and had accepted with pride but still as free men, still free to withdraw from it at any moment when the two of them found themselves no longer compatible, the old lock meeting the pouch each time on its arrival, to clasp it in iron and inviolable symbolism, while old Alec Holston, childless bachelor, grew a little older and greyer, a little more arthritic in flesh and temper too, a little stiffer and more rigid in bone and pride too, since the lock was still his, he had merely lent it, and so in a sense he was the grandfather in the settlement of the inviolability not just of government mail, but of a free government of free men too, so long as the government remembered to let men live free, not under it but beside it;

That was the lock; they put it on the jail. They did it quickly, not even waiting until a messenger could have got back from the Holston House with old Alec's permission to remove it from the mail-pouch or use it for the new purpose. Not that he would have objected on principle nor refused his permission except by simple instinct; that is, he would probably have been the first to suggest the lock if he had known in time or thought of it first, but he would have refused at once if he thought the thing was contemplated without consulting him.

Which everybody in the settlement knew, though this was not at all why they didn't wait for the messenger. In fact, no messenger had ever been sent to old Alec; they didn't have time to send one, let alone wait until he got back; they didn't want the lock to keep the bandits in, since (as was later proved) the old lock would have been no more obstacle for the bandits to pass than the customary wooden bar; they didn't need the lock to protect the settlement from the bandits, but to protect the bandits from the settlement.

Because the prisoners had barely reached the settlement when it developed that there was a faction bent on lynching them at once, out of hand, without preliminary — a small but determined gang which tried to wrest the prisoners from their captors while the militia was still trying to find someone to surrender them to, and would have succeeded except for a man named Compson, who had come to the settlement a few years ago with a race horse, which he swapped to Ikkemotubbe, Issetibbeha's successor in the chiefship, for a square mile of what was to be the most valuable land in the future town of Jefferson, who, legend said, drew a pistol and held the ravishers at bay until the bandits could be got into the jail and the auger holes bored and someone sent to fetch old Alec Holston's lock.

Because there were indeed new names and faces too in the settlement now — faces so new as to have (to the older residents) no discernible antecedents other than mammalinity, nor past other than the simple years which had scored them; and names so new as to have no discernible (nor discoverable either) antecedents or past at all, as though they had been invented yesterday, report dividing again: to the

effect that there were more people in the settlement that day than the militia sergeant whom one or all of the bandits might recognise;

So Compson locked the jail, and a courier with the two best horses in the settlement — one to ride and one to lead — cut through the woods to the Trace to ride the hundred-odd miles to Natchez with news of the capture and authority to dicker for the reward; and that evening in the Holston House kitchen was held the settlement's first municipal meeting, prototype not only of the town council after the settlement would be a town, but of the Chamber of Commerce when it would begin to proclaim itself a city, with Compson presiding, not old Alec, who was quite old now, grim, taciturn, sitting even on a hot July night before a smouldering log in his vast chimney, his back even turned to the table (he was not interested in the deliberation; the prisoners were his already since his lock held them; whatever the conference decided would have to be submitted to him for ratification anyway before anyone could touch his lock to open it) around which the progenitors of the Jefferson city fathers sat in what was almost a council of war, not only discussing the collecting of the reward, but the keeping and defending it.

Because there were two factions of opposition now: not only the lynching party, but the militia band too, who now claimed that as prizes the prisoners still belonged to their original captors; that they — the militia — had merely surrendered the prisoners' custody but had relinquished nothing of any reward: on the prospect of which, the militia band had got more whiskey from the trading-post store and had built a tremendous bonfire in front of the jail, around which they and the lynching party had now confederated in a wassail or conference of their own.

Or so they thought. Because the truth was that Compson, in the name of a crisis in the public peace and welfare, had made a formal demand on the professional bag of Doctor Peabody, old Doctor Habersham's successor, and the three of them — Compson, Peabody, and the post trader (his name was Ratcliffe; a hundred years later it would still exist in the county, but by that time it had passed through two inheritors

who had dispensed with the eye in the transmission of words, using only the ear, so that by the time the fourth one had been compelled by simple necessity to learn to write it again, it had lost the 'c' and the final 'fe' too) added the laudanum to the keg of whiskey and sent it as a gift from the settlement to the astonished militia sergeant, and returned to the Holston House kitchen to wait until the last of the uproar died; then the law-and-order party made a rapid sortie and gathered up all the comatose opposition, lynchers and captors too, and dumped them all into the jail with the prisoners and locked the door again and went home to bed — until the next morning, when the first arrivals were met by a scene resembling an outdoor stage setting: which was how the legend of the mad Harpes started: a thing not just fantastical but incomprehensible, not just whimsical but a little terrifying (though at least it was bloodless, which would have contented neither Harpe): not just the lock gone from the door nor even just the door gone from the jail, but the entire wall gone, the mud-chinked axe-morticed logs unjointed neatly and quietly in the darkness and stacked as neatly to one side, leaving the jail open to the world like a stage on which the late insurgents still lay sprawled and various in deathlike slumber, the whole settlement gathered now to watch Compson trying to kick at least one of them awake, until one of the Holston slaves — the cook's husband, the waiter-groom-hostler — ran into the crowd shouting, 'Whar de lock, whar de lock, ole Boss say whar de lock.'

It was gone (as were three horses belonging to three of the lynching faction). They couldn't even find the heavy door and the chain, and at first they were almost betrayed into believing that the bandits had had to take the door in order to steal the chain and lock, catching themselves back from the very brink of this wanton accusation of rationality. But the lock was gone; nor did it take the settlement long to realise that it was not the escaped bandits and the aborted reward, but the lock, and not a simple situation which faced them, but a problem which threatened, the slave departing back to the Holston House at a dead run and then reappearing at the dead run almost before the door, the walls, had had time to hide him, engulf and then eject him again,

darting through the crowd and up to Compson himself now, saying, 'Ole Boss say fetch de lock' — not send the lock, but bring the lock.

So Compson and his lieutenants (and this was where the mail rider began to appear, or rather, to emerge — the fragile wisp of a man ageless, hairless and toothless, who looked too frail even to approach a horse, let alone ride one six hundred miles every two weeks, yet who did to, and not only that but had wind enough left not only so announce and precede but even follow his passing with the jeering musical triumph of the horn: — a contempt for possible — probable — despoilers matched only by that for the official dross of which he might be despoiled, and which agreed to remain in civilised bounds only so long as the despoilers had the taste to refrain) — repaired to the kitchen where old Alec still sat before his smouldering log, his back still to the room, and still not turning it this time either. And that was all.

He ordered the immediate return of his lock. It was not even an ultimatum, it was a simple instruction, a decree, impersonal, the mail rider now well into the fringe of the group, saying nothing and missing nothing, like a weightless desiccated or fossil bird, not a vulture of course nor even quite a hawk, but say a pterodactyl chick arrested just out of the egg ten glaciers ago and so old in simple infancy as to be the worn and weary ancestor of all subsequent life.

They pointed out to old Alec that the only reason the lock could be missing was that the bandits had not had time or been able to cut it out of the door and that even three fleeing madmen on stolen horses would not carry a six-foot oak door very far, and that a party of Ikkemotubbe's young men were even now trailing the horses westward toward the River and that without doubt the lock would be found at any moment, probably under the first bush at the edge of the settlement: knowing better, knowing that there was no limit to the fantastic and the terrifying and the bizarre, of which the men were capable who already, just to escape from a log jail, had quietly removed one entire wall and stacked it in neat piecemeal at the roadside, and that they nor old Alec neither would ever see his lock again;

Nor did they; the rest of that afternoon and all the next day too, while old Alec still smoked his pipe in front of his smouldering log, the settlement's sheepish and raging elders hunted for it, with (by now: the next afternoon) Ikkemotubbe's Chickasaws helping too, or anyway present, watching: the wild men, the wilderness's tameless evictant children looking only the more wild and homeless for the white man's denim and butternut and felt and straw which they wore, standing or squatting or following, grave, attentive and interested, while the white men sweated and cursed among the bordering thickets of their punily-clawed foothold; and always the rider, Pettigrew, ubiquitous, everywhere, not helping search himself and never in anyone's way, but always present, inscrutable, saturnine, missing nothing: until at last toward sundown Compson crashed savagely out of the last bramble-brake and flung the sweat from his face with a full-armed sweep sufficient to repudiate a throne, and said,

'All right, god damn it, we'll pay him for it.' Because they had already considered that last gambit; they had already realised its seriousness from the very fact that Peabody had tried to make a joke about it which everyone knew that even Peabody did not think humorous: 'Yes — and quick too, before he has time to advise with Pettigrew and price it by the pound.'

'By the pound?' Compson said.

'Pettigrew just weighed it by the three hundred miles from Nashville. Old Alec might start from Carolina. That's fifteen thousand pounds.' 'Oh,' Compson said. So he blew in his men by means of a foxhorn which one of the Indians wore on a thong around his neck, though even then they paused for one last quick conference; again it was Peabody who stopped them.

'Who'll pay for it?' he said. 'It would be just like him to want a dollar a pound for it, even if by Pettigrew's scale he had found it in the ashes of his fireplace.' They — Compson anyway — had probably already thought of that; that, as much as Pettigrew's presence, was probably why he was trying to rush them into old Alec's presence with the offer so quickly that none would have the face to renege on a pro-rata

share. But Peabody had torn it now. Compson looked about at them, sweating, grimly enraged.

‘That means Peabody will probably pay one dollar,’ he said. ‘Who pays the other fourteen? Me?’ Then Ratcliffe, the trader, the store’s proprietor, solved it — a solution so simple, so limitless in retrospect, that they didn’t even wonder why nobody had thought of it before; which not only solved the problem but abolished it; and not just that one, but all problems, from now on into perpetuity, opening to their vision like the rending of a veil, like a glorious prophecy, the vast splendid limitless panorama of America: that land of boundless opportunity, that bounteous, created not by nor of the people, but for the people, as was the heavenly manna of old, with no return demand on man save the chewing and swallowing since out of its own matchless Allgood it would create produce train support and perpetuate a race of labourers dedicated to the single purpose of picking the manna up and putting it into his lax hand or even between his jaws — illimitable, vast, without beginning or end, not even a trade or a craft but a beneficence as are sunlight and rain and air, inalienable and immutable.

‘Put it on the Book,’ Ratcliffe said — the Book: not a ledger, but the ledger, since it was probably the only thing of its kind between Nashville and Natchez, unless there might happen to be a similar one a few miles south at the first Choctaw agency at Yalo Busha — a ruled, paper-backed copybook such as might have come out of a schoolroom, in which accrued, with the United States as debtor, in Mohataha’s name (the Chickasaw matriarch, Ikkemotubbe’s mother and old Issetibbeha’s sister, who — she could write her name, or anyway make something with a pen or pencil which was agreed to be, or at least accepted to be, a valid signature — signed all the conveyances as her son’s kingdom passed to the white people, regularising it in law anyway) the crawling tedious list of calico and gunpowder, whiskey and salt and snuff and denim pants and osseous candy drawn from Ratcliffe’s shelves by her descendants and subjects and Negro slaves.

That was all the settlement had to do: add the lock to the list, the account. It wouldn’t even matter at what price they entered it. They

could have priced it on Pettigrew's scale of fifteen pounds times the distance not just to Carolina but to Washington itself, and nobody would ever notice it probably; they could have charged the United States with seventeen thousand five hundred dollars' worth of the fossilised and indestructible candy, and none would ever read the entry. So it was solved, done, finished, ended. They didn't even have to discuss it.

They didn't even think about it any more, unless perhaps here and there to marvel (a little speculatively probably) at their own moderation, since they wanted nothing — least of all, to escape any just blame — but a fair and decent adjustment of the lock. They went back to where old Alec still sat with his pipe in front of his dim hearth. Only they had overestimated him; he didn't want any money at all, he wanted his lock. Whereupon what little remained of Compson's patience went too.

'Your lock's gone,' he told old Alec harshly. 'You'll take fifteen dollars for it,' he said, his voice already fading, because even that rage could recognise impasse when it saw it. Nevertheless, the rage, the impotence, the sweating, the too much — whatever it was — forced the voice on for one word more: 'Or — —' before it stopped for good and allowed Peabody to fill the gap:

'Or else?' Peabody said, and not to old Alec, but to Compson. 'Or else what?' Then Ratcliffe saved that too.

'Wait,' he said. 'Uncle Alec's going to take fifty dollars for his lock. A guarantee of fifty dollars. He'll give us the name of the blacksmith back in Cal'lina that made it for him, and we'll send back there and have a new one made. Going and coming and all'll cost about fifty dollars. We'll give Uncle Alec the fifty dollars to hold as a guarantee. Then when the new lock comes, he'll give us back the money.'

All right, Uncle Alec?' And that could have been all of it. It probably would have been, except for Pettigrew. It was not that they had forgotten him, nor even assimilated him. They had simply sealed — healed him off (so they thought) — him into their civic crisis as the

desperate and defenceless oyster immobilises its atom of inevitable grit. Nobody had seen him move yet he now stood in the centre of them where Compson and Ratcliffe and Peabody faced old Alec in the chair.

You might have said that he had oozed there, except for that adamant quality which might (in emergency) become invisible but never insubstantial and never in this world fluid; he spoke in a voice bland, reasonable and impersonal, then stood there being looked at, frail and child-sized, impermeable as diamond and manifest with portent, bringing into that backwoods room a thousand miles deep in pathless wilderness, the whole vast incalculable weight of federality, not just representing the government nor even himself just the government; for that moment at least, he was the United States. 'Uncle Alec hasn't lost any lock,' he said. 'That was Uncle Sam.'

After a moment someone said, 'What?'

'That's right,' Pettigrew said. 'Whoever put that lock of Holston's on that mail bag either made a voluntary gift to the United States, and the same law covers the United States Government that covers minor children; you can give something to them, but you can't take it back, or he or they done something else.'

They looked at him. Again after a while somebody said something; it was Ratcliffe. 'What else?' Ratcliffe said. Pettigrew answered, still bland, impersonal, heatless and glib: 'Committed a violation of act of Congress as especially made and provided for the defacement of government property, penalty of five thousand dollars or not less than one year in a Federal jail or both.'

For whoever cut them two slits in the bag to put the lock in, act of Congress as especially made and provided for the injury or destruction of government property, penalty of ten thousand dollars or not less than five years in a Federal jail or both.' He did not move even yet; he simply spoke directly to old Alec: 'I reckon you're going to have supper here same as usual sooner or later or more or less.'

'Wait,' Ratcliffe said. He turned to Compson. 'Is that true?'
'What the hell difference does it make whether it's true or not?'
Compson said. 'What do you think he's going to do as soon as he gets to Nashville?' He said violently to Pettigrew: 'You were supposed to leave for Nashville yesterday. What were you hanging around here for?'

'Nothing to go to Nashville for,' Pettigrew said. 'You don't want any mail. You ain't got anything to lock it up with.'

'So we ain't,' Ratcliffe said. 'So we'll let the United States find the United States' lock.' This time Pettigrew looked at no one. He wasn't even speaking to anyone, any more than old Alec had been when he decreed the return of his lock:

'Act of Congress as made and provided for the unauthorised removal and or use or wilful or felonious use or misuse or loss of government property, penalty the value of the article plus five hundred to ten thousand dollars or thirty days to twenty years in a Federal jail or both. They may even make a new one when they read where you have charged a post-office department lock to the Bureau of Indian Affairs.'

He moved; now he was speaking to old Alec again: 'I'm going out to my horse. When this meeting is over and you get back to cooking, you can send your nigger for me.'

Then he was gone. After a while Ratcliffe said, 'What do you reckon he aims to get out of this? A reward?' But that was wrong; they all knew better than that.

'He's already getting what he wants,' Compson said, and cursed again.

'Confusion. Just damned confusion.' But that was wrong too; they all knew that too, though it was Peabody who said it:

'No. Not confusion. A man who will ride six hundred miles through this country every two weeks, with nothing for protection but a foxhorn, ain't really interested in confusion any more than he is in money.' So they didn't know yet what was in Pettigrew's mind. But they knew what he would do. That is, they knew that they did not know at all, either what he would do, or how, or when, and that there was nothing whatever that they could do about it until they discovered why.

And they saw now that they had no possible means to discover that; they realised now that they had known him for three years now, during which, fragile and inviolable and undeviable and preceded for a mile or more by the strong sweet ringing of the horn, on his strong and tireless horse he would complete the bi-monthly trip from Nashville to the settlement and for the next three or four days would live among them, yet that they knew nothing whatever about him, and even now knew only that they dared not, simply dared not, take any chance, sitting for a while longer in the darkening room while old Alec still smoked, his back still squarely turned to them and their quandary too; then dispersing to their own cabins for the evening meal — with what appetite they could bring to it, since presently they had drifted back through the summer darkness when by ordinary they would have been already in bed, to the back room of Ratcliffe's store now, to sit again while Ratcliffe recapitulated in his mixture of bewilderment and alarm (and something else which they recognised was respect as they realised that he — Ratcliffe — was unshakably convinced that Pettigrew's aim was money; that Pettigrew had invented or evolved a scheme so richly rewarding that he — Ratcliffe — had not only been unable to forestall him and do it first, he — Radcliffe — couldn't even guess what it was after he had been given a hint) until Compson interrupted him.

'Hell,' Compson said. 'Everybody knows what's wrong with him. It's ethics. He's a damned moralist.'

'Ethics?' Peabody said. He sounded almost startled. He said quickly: 'That's bad. How can we corrupt an ethical man?'

'Who wants to corrupt him?' Compson said. 'All we want him to do is stay on that damned horse and blow whatever extra wind he's got into that damned horn.'

But Peabody was not even listening. He said, 'Ethics,' almost dreamily. He said, 'Wait.' They watched him. He said suddenly to Ratcliffe: 'I've heard it somewhere. If anybody here knows it, it'll be you. What's his name?'

‘His name?’ Ratcliffe said. ‘Pettigrew’s? Oh. His christian name.’
Ratcliffe told him. ‘Why?’

‘Nothing,’ Peabody said. ‘I’m going home. Anybody else coming?’ He spoke directly to nobody and said and would say no more, but that was enough: a straw perhaps, but at least a straw; enough anyway for the others to watch and say nothing either as Compson got up too and said to Ratcliffe:

‘You coming?’ and the three of them walked away together, beyond earshot then beyond sight too. Then Compson said, ‘All right. What?’ ‘It may not work,’ Peabody said. ‘But you two will have to back me up. When I speak for the whole settlement, you and Ratcliffe will have to make it stick. Will you?’

Compson cursed. ‘But at least tell us a little of what we’re going to guarantee.’ So Peabody told them some of it, and the next morning entered the stall in the Holston House stable where Pettigrew was grooming his ugly hammer-headed iron-muscled horse.

‘We decided not to charge that lock to old Mohataha, after all,’ Peabody said.

‘That so?’ Pettigrew said. ‘Nobody in Washington would ever catch it. Certainly not the ones that can read.’

‘We’re going to pay for it ourselves,’ Peabody said. ‘In fact, we’re going to do a little more. We’ve got to repair that jail wall anyhow; we’ve got to build one wall anyway. So by building three more, we will have another room. We got to build one anyway, so that don’t count. So by building an extra three-wall room, we will have another four-wall house. That will be the courthouse.’ Pettigrew had been hissing gently between his teeth at each stroke of the brush, like a professional Irish groom. Now he stopped, the brush and his hand arrested in midstroke, and turned his head a little.

‘Courthouse?’

‘We’re going to have a town,’ Peabody said. ‘We already got a church — that’s Whitfield’s cabin. And we’re going to build a school too soon as we get around to it. But we’re going to build the courthouse today; we’ve already got something to put in it to make it a courthouse: that iron box that’s been in Ratcliffe’s way in the store for the last ten years. Then we’ll have a town. We’ve already even named her.’

Now Pettigrew stood up, very slowly. They looked at one another. After a moment Pettigrew said, ‘So?’

‘Ratcliffe says your name’s Jefferson,’ Peabody said.

‘That’s right,’ Pettigrew said. ‘Thomas Jefferson Pettigrew. I’m from old Ferginny.’

‘Any kin?’ Peabody said.

‘No,’ Pettigrew said. ‘My ma named me for him, so I would have some of his luck.’

‘Luck?’ Peabody said.

Pettigrew didn’t smile. ‘That’s right. She didn’t mean luck. She never had any schooling. She didn’t know the word she wanted to say.’

‘Have you had it?’ Peabody said. Nor did Pettigrew smile now. ‘I’m sorry,’ Peabody said. ‘Try to forget it.’ He said: ‘We decided to name her Jefferson.’ Now Pettigrew didn’t seem to breathe even. He just stood there, small, frail, less than boy-size, childless and bachelor, incorrigibly kinless and tieless, looking at Peabody. Then he breathed, and raising the brush, he turned back to the horse and for an instant Peabody thought he was going back to the grooming. But instead of making the stroke, he laid the hand and the brush against the horse’s flank and stood for a moment, his face turned away and his head bent a little. Then he raised his head and turned his face back toward Peabody.

‘You could call that lock “axle-grease” on that Indian account,’ he said.

‘Fifty dollars’ worth of axle-grease?’ Peabody said.

‘To grease the wagons for Oklahoma,’ Pettigrew said.

‘So we could,’ Peabody said. ‘Only her name’s Jefferson now. We can’t ever forget that any more now.’ And that was the courthouse — the courthouse which it had taken them almost thirty years not only to realise they didn’t have, but to discover that they hadn’t even needed, missed, lacked; and which, before they had owned it six months, they discovered was nowhere near enough. Because somewhere between the dark of that first day and the dawn of the next, something happened to them.

They began that same day; they restored the jail wall and cut new logs and split out shakes and raised the little floorless lean-to against it and moved the iron chest from Ratcliffe’s back room; it took only the two days and cost nothing but the labour and not much of that per capita since the whole settlement was involved to a man, not to mention the settlement’s two slaves — Holston’s man and the one belonging to the German blacksmith — ; Ratcliffe too, all he had to do was put up the bar across the inside of his back door, since his entire patronage was countable in one glance sweating and cursing among the logs and shakes of the half dismantled jail across the way opposite — including Ikkemotubbe’s Chickasaw, though these were neither sweating nor cursing: the grave dark men dressed in their Sunday clothes except for the trousers, pants, which they carried rolled neatly under their arms or perhaps tied by the two legs around their necks like capes or rather hussars’ dolmans where they had forded the creek, squatting or lounging along the shade, courteous, interested, and reposed (even old Mohataha herself, the matriarch, barefoot in a purple silk gown and a plumed hat, sitting in a gilt brocade empire chair in a wagon behind two mules, under a silver-handled Paris parasol held by a female slave child) — because they (the other white men, his confreres, or — during this first day — his co-victims) had not yet remarked the thing — quality — something — esoteric, eccentric, in Ratcliffe’s manner, attitude, — not an obstruction nor even an impediment, not even when on the second day they discovered what it was, because he was among them, busy too, sweating and cursing too, but rather like a single chip, infinitesimal, on an otherwise unbroken flood or tide, a single body or substance,

alien and unreconciled, a single thin almost unheard voice crying thinly out of the roar of a mob: 'Wait, look here, listen — —'

Because they were too busy raging and sweating among the dismantled logs and felling the new ones in the adjacent woods and trimming and notching and dragging them out and mixing the tenuous clay mud to chink them together with; it was not until the second day that they learned what was troubling Ratcliffe, because now they had time, the work going no slower, no lessening of sweat but on the contrary, if anything the work going even a little faster because now there was a lightness in the speed and all that was abated was the rage and the outrage, because somewhere between the dark and the dawn of the first and the second day, something had happened to them — the men who had spent that first long hot endless July day sweating and raging about the wrecked jail, flinging indiscriminately and savagely aside the dismantled logs and the log-like laudanum-smitten inmates in order to rebuild the one, cursing old Holston and the lock and the four — three — bandits and the eleven militiamen who had arrested them, and Compson and Pettigrew and Peabody and the United States of America — the same men met at the project before sunrise on the next day which was already promising to be hot and endless too, but with the rage and the fury absent now, quiet, not grave so much as sobered, a little amazed, diffident, blinking a little perhaps, looking a little aside from one another, a little unfamiliar even to one another in the new jonquil-coloured light, looking about them at the meagre huddle of crude cabins set without order and every one a little awry to every other and all dwarfed to doll-houses by the vast loom of the woods which enclosed them — the tiny clearing clawed punily not even into the flank of pathless wilderness but into the loin, the groin, the secret parts, which was the irrevocable cast die of their lives, fates, pasts and futures — not even speaking for a while yet since each one probably believed (a little shamefaced too) that the thought was solitarily his, until at last one spoke for all and then it was all right since it had taken one conjoined breath to shape that sound, the speaker speaking not loud, diffidently, tentatively, as you insert the first light tentative push of wind into the mouthpiece of a strange untried foxhorn: 'By God. Jefferson.'

‘Jefferson, Mississippi,’ a second added.

‘Jefferson, Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi,’ a third corrected; who, which one, didn’t matter this time either since it was still one conjoined breathing, one compound dream-state, mused and static, well capable of lasting on past sunrise too, though they probably knew better too since Compson was still there: the gnat, the thorn, the catalyst.

‘It ain’t until we finish the goddamned thing,’ Compson said. ‘Come on. Let’s get at it.’ So they finished it that day, working rapidly now, with speed and lightness too, concentrated yet inattentive, to get it done and that quickly, not to finish it but to get it out of the way, behind them; not to finish it quickly in order to own, possess it sooner, but to be able to obliterate, efface, it the sooner, as if they had also known in that first yellow light that it would not be near enough, would not even be the beginning; that the little lean-to room they were building would not even be a pattern and could not even be called practice, working on until noon, the hour to stop and eat, by which time Louis Grenier had arrived from Frenchman’s Bend (his plantation: his manor, his kitchens and stables and kennels and slave quarters and gardens and promenades and fields which a hundred years later will have vanished, his name and his blood too, leaving nothing but the name of his plantation and his own fading corrupted legend like a thin layer of the native ephemeral yet inevitable dust on a section of country surrounding a little lost paintless crossroads store) twenty miles away behind a slave coachman and footman in his imported English carriage and what was said to be the finest matched team outside of Natchez or Nashville, and Compson said, ‘I reckon that’ll do’ — all knowing what he meant: not abandonment: to complete it, of course, but so little remained now that the two slaves could finish it.

The four in fact, since, although as soon as it was assumed that the two Grenier Negroes would lend the two local ones a hand, Compson demurred on the grounds that who would dare violate the rigid protocol of bondage by ordering a stable-servant, let alone a house-servant, to do manual labour, not to mention having the temerity to

approach old Louis Grenier with the suggestion, Peabody nipped that at once.

‘One of them can use my shadow,’ he said. ‘It never blenched out there with a white doctor standing in it,’ and even offered to be emissary to old Grenier, except that Grenier himself forestalled them. So they ate Holston’s noon ordinary, while the Chickasaws, squatting unmoving still where the creep of shade had left them in the full fierce glare of July noon about the wagon where old Mohataha still sat under her slave-borne Paris parasol, ate their lunches too which (Mohataha’s and her personal retinue’s came out of a woven whiteoak with the fishbasket in the wagonbed) they appeared to have carried in from what, patterning the white people, they called their plantation too, under their arms inside the rolled-up trousers.

Then they moved back to the front gallery and — not the settlement any more now: the town; it had been a town for thirty-one hours now — watched the four slaves put up the final log and pin down the final shake on the roof and hang the door, and then, Ratcliffe leading something like the court chamberlain across a castle courtyard, cross back to the store and enter and emerge carrying the iron chest, the grave Chickasaws watching too the white man’s slaves sweating the white man’s ponderable dense inscrutable medicine into its new shrine. And now they had time to find out what was bothering Ratcliffe.

‘That lock,’ Ratcliffe said.

‘What?’ somebody said.

‘That Indian axle-grease,’ Ratcliffe said.

‘What?’ they said again. But they knew, understood, now. It was neither lock nor axle-grease; it was the fifteen dollars which could have been charged to the Indian Department on Ratcliffe’s books and nobody would have ever found it, noticed it, missed it. It was not greed on Ratcliffe’s part, and least of all was he advocating corruption. The idea was not even new to him; it did not need any casual man on a horse riding in to the settlement once every two or three weeks, to reveal to him that possibility; he had thought of that the first time he

had charged the first sack of peppermint candy to the first one of old Mohataha's forty-year-old grandchildren and had refrained from adding two zeroes to the ten or fifteen cents for ten years now, wondering each time why he did refrain, amazed at his own virtue or at least his strength of will. It was a matter of principle.

It was he — they: the settlement (town now) — who had thought of charging the lock to the United States as a provable lock, a communal risk, a concrete ineradicable object, win lose or draw, let the chips fall where they may, on that dim day when some Federal inspector might, just barely might, audit the Chickasaw affairs; it was the United States itself which had voluntarily offered to show them how to transmute the inevitable lock into proofless and ephemeral axle-grease — the little scrawny child-sized man, solitary unarmed impregnable and unalarmed, not even defying them, not even advocate and representative of the United States, but the United States, as though the United States had said, 'Please accept a gift of fifteen dollars' (the town had actually paid old Alec fifteen dollars for the lock; he would accept no more), and they had not even declined it but simply abolished it since, as soon as Pettigrew breathed it into sound, the United States had already forever lost it; as though Pettigrew had put the actual ponderable fifteen gold coins into — say, Compson's or Peabody's — hands and they had dropped them down a rat-hole or a well, doing no man any good, neither restoration to the ravaged nor emolument to the ravager, leaving in fact the whole race of man, as long as it endured, forever and irrevocably fifteen dollars deficit, fifteen dollars in the red;

That was Ratcliffe's trouble. But they didn't even listen. They heard him out of course, but they didn't even listen. Or perhaps they didn't even hear him either, sitting along the shade on Holston's gallery, looking, seeing, already a year away; it was barely the tenth of July; there was the long summer, the bright soft dry fall until the November rains, but they would require not two days this time but two years and maybe more, with a winter of planning and preparation before hand.

They even had an instrument available and waiting, like providence almost: a man named Sutpen who had come into the settlement that same spring — a big gaunt friendless passion-worn untalkative man who walked in a fading aura of anonymity and violence like a man just entered a warm room or at least a shelter, out of a blizzard, bringing with him thirty-odd men slaves even wilder and more equivocal than the native wild men, the Chickasaws, to whom the settlement had become accustomed, who (the new Negroes) spoke no English but instead what Compson, who had visited New Orleans, said was the Carib-Spanish-French of the Sugar Islands, and who (Sutpen) had bought or proved on or anyway acquired a tract of land in the opposite direction and was apparently bent on establishing a place on an even more ambitious and grandiose scale than Grenier's; he had even brought with him a tame Parisian architect — or captive rather, since it was said in Ratcliffe's back room that the man slept at night in a kind of pit at the site of the chateau he was planning, tied wrist to wrist with one of his captor's Carib slaves; indeed, the settlement had only to see him once to know that he was no dociler than his captor, any more than the weasel or rattlesnake is no less untame than the wolf or bear before which it gives way until completely and hopelessly cornered: — a man no larger than Pettigrew, with humorous sardonic undefeated eyes which had seen everything and believed none of it, in the broad expensive hat and brocaded waistcoat and ruffled wrists of a half-artist half-boulevardier; and they — Compson perhaps, Peabody certainly — could imagine him in his mudstained brier-slashed brocade and lace standing in a trackless wilderness dreaming colonnades and porticoes and fountains and promenades in the style of David, with just behind each elbow an identical giant half-naked Negro not even watching him, only breathing, moving each time he took a step or shifted like his shadow repeated in two and blown to gigantic size;

So they even had an architect. He listened to them for perhaps a minute in Ratcliffe's back room. Then he made an indescribable gesture and said, 'Bah. You do not need advice. You are too poor. You have only your hands, and clay to make good brick.'

You don't have any money. You don't even have anything to copy: how can you go wrong?' But he taught them how to mould the brick; he designed and built the kiln to bake the brick in, plenty of them since they had probably known from that first yellow morning too that one edifice was not going to be enough. But although both were conceived in the same instant and planned simultaneously during the same winter and built in continuation during the next three years, the courthouse of course came first, and in March, with stakes and hanks of fishline, the architect laid out in a grove of oaks opposite the tavern and the store, the square and simple foundations, the irrevocable design not only of the courthouse but of the town too, telling them as much: 'In fifty years you will be trying to change it in the name of what you will call progress. But you will fail; but you will never be able to get away from it.'

But they had already seen that, standing thigh-deep in wilderness also but with more than a vision to look at since they had at least the fishline and the stakes, perhaps less than fifty years, perhaps — who knew? — less than twenty-five even: a Square, the courthouse in its grove the centre; quadrangular around it, the stores, two-storey, the offices of the lawyers and doctors and dentists, the lodge-rooms and auditoriums, above them; school and church and tavern and bank and jail each in its ordered place; the four broad diverging avenues straight as plumb-lines in the four directions, becoming the network of roads and by-roads until the whole county would be covered with it: the hands, the prehensile fingers clawing dragging lightward out of the disappearing wilderness year by year as up from the bottom of the receding sea, the broad rich fecund burgeoning fields, pushing thrusting each year further and further back the wilderness and its denizens — the wild bear and deer and turkey, and the wild men (or not so wild any more, familiar now, harmless now, just obsolete: anachronism out of an old dead time and a dead age; regrettable of course, even actually regretted by the old men, fiercely as old Doctor Habersham did, and with less fire but still as irreconcilable and stubborn as old Alec Holston and a few others were still doing, until in a few more years the last of them would have passed and vanished in their turn too, obsolescent too: because this was a white man's land; that was its fate, or not even

fate but destiny, its high destiny in the roster of the earth) — the veins, arteries, life- and pulse-stream along which would flow the aggrandisement of harvest: the gold: the cotton and the grain;

But above all, the courthouse: the centre, the focus, the hub; sitting looming in the centre of the county's circumference like a single cloud in its ring of horizon, laying its vast shadow to the uttermost rim of horizon; musing, brooding, symbolic and ponderable, tall as cloud, solid as rock, dominating all: protector of the weak, judicate and curb of the passions and lusts, repository and guardian of the aspirations and the hopes; rising course by brick course during that first summer, simply square, simplest Georgian colonial (this, by the Paris architect who was creating at Sutpen's Hundred something like a wing of Versailles glimpsed in a Lilliput's gothic nightmare — in revenge, Gavin Stevens would say a hundred years later, when Sutpen's own legend in the county would include the anecdote of the time the architect broke somehow out of his dungeon and tried to flee and Sutpen and his Negro head man and hunter ran him down with dogs in the swamp and brought him back) since, as the architect had told them, they had no money to buy bad taste with nor even anything from which to copy what bad taste might still have been within their compass; this one too still costing nothing but the labour and — the second year now — most of that was slave since there were still more slave owners in the settlement which had been a town and named for going on two years now, already a town and already named when the first ones waked up on that yellow morning two years back: — men other than Holston and the blacksmith (Compson was one now) who owned one or two or three Negroes, besides Grenier and Sutpen who had set up camps beside the creek in Compson's pasture for the two gangs of their Negroes to live in until the two buildings — the courthouse and the jail — should be completed.

But not altogether slave, the bound-men, the unfree, because there were still the white men too, the same ones who on that hot July morning two and now three years ago had gathered in a kind of outraged unbelief to fling, hurl up in raging sweating impotent fury the little three-walled lean-to — the same men (with affairs of their own

they might have been attending to or work of their own or for which they were being hired, paid, that they should have been doing) standing or lounging about the scaffolding and the stacks of brick and puddles of clay mortar for an hour or two hours or half a day, then putting aside one of the Negroes and taking his place with trowel or saw or adze, unbidden or unreprieved either since there was none present with the right to order or deny; a stranger might have said probably for that reason, simply because now they didn't have to, except that it was more than that, working peacefully now that there was no outrage and fury, and twice as fast because there was no urgency since this was no more to be hurried by man or men than the burgeoning of a crop, working (this paradox too to anyone except men like Grenier and Compson and Peabody who had grown from infancy among slaves, breathed the same air and even suckled the same breast with the sons of Ham: black and white, free and unfree, shoulder to shoulder in the same tireless lift and rhythm as if they had the same aim and hope, which they did have as far as the Negro was capable, as even Ratcliffe, son of a long pure line of Anglo-Saxon mountain people and — destined — father of an equally long and pure line of white trash tenant farmers who never owned a slave and never would since each had and would imbibe with his mother's milk a personal violent antipathy not at all to slavery but to black skins, could have explained: the slave's simple child's mind had fired at once with the thought that he was helping to build not only the biggest edifice in the country, but probably the biggest he had ever seen; this was all but this was enough) as one because it was theirs, bigger than any because it was the sum of all and, being the sum of all, it must raise all of their hopes and aspirations level with its own aspirant and soaring cupola, so that, sweating and tireless and unflagging, they would look about at one another a little shyly, a little amazed, with something like humility too, as if they were realising, or were for a moment at least capable of believing, that men, all men, including themselves, were a little better, purer maybe even, than they had thought, expected, or even needed to be.

Though they were still having a little trouble with Ratcliffe: the money, the Holston lock-Chickasaw axle-grease fifteen dollars; not trouble

really because it had never been an obstruction even three years ago when it was new, and now after three years even the light impedeless chip was worn by familiarity and custom to less than a toothpick: merely present, merely visible, or that is, audible: and no trouble with Ratcliffe because he made one too contraposed the toothpick; more: he was its chief victim, sufferer, since where with the others was mostly inattention, a little humour, now and then a little fading annoyance and impatience, with him was shame, bafflement, a little of anguish and despair like a man struggling with a congenital vice, hopeless, indomitable, already defeated. It was not even the money any more now, the fifteen dollars. It was the fact that they had refused it and, refusing it, had maybe committed a fatal and irremediable error.

He would try to explain it: 'It's like Old Moster and the rest of them up there that run the luck, would look down at us and say, Well well, looks like them durn peckerwoods down there don't want them fifteen dollars we was going to give them free-gratis-for-nothing. So maybe they don't want nothing from us. So maybe we better do like they seem to want, and let them sweat and swivet and scrabble through the best they can by themselves.'

Which they — the town — did, though even then the courthouse was not finished for another six years. Not but that they thought it was: complete: simple and square, floored and roofed and windowed, with a central hallway and the four offices — sheriff and tax assessor and circuit- and chancery-clerk (which — the chancery-clerk's office — would contain the ballot boxes and booths for voting) — below, and the courtroom and jury-room and the judge's chambers above — even to the pigeons and English sparrows, migrants too but not pioneers, inevitably urban in fact, come all the way from the Atlantic coast as soon as the town became a town with a name, taking possession of the gutters and eave-boxes almost before the final hammer was withdrawn, uxorious and interminable the one, garrulous and myriad the other.

Then in the sixth year old Alec Holston died and bequeathed back to the town the fifteen dollars it had paid him for the lock; two years

before, Louis Grenier had died and his heirs still held in trust on demand the fifteen hundred dollars his will had devised it, and now there was another newcomer in the county, a man named John Sartoris, with slaves and gear and money too like Grenier and Sutpen, but who was an even better stalemater to Sutpen than Grenier had been because it was apparent at once that he, Sartoris, was the sort of man who could even cope with Sutpen in the sense that a man with a sabre or even a small sword and heart enough for it could cope with one with an axe; and that summer (Sutpen's Paris architect had long since gone back to whatever place he came from and to which he had made his one abortive midnight try to return, but his trickle, flow of bricks had never even faltered: his moulds and kilns had finished the jail and were now raising the walls of two churches and by the half-century would have completed what would be known through all north Mississippi and east Tennessee as the Academy, the Female Institute) there was a committee: Compson and Sartoris and Peabody (and in absentia Sutpen: nor would the town ever know exactly how much of the additional cost Sutpen and Sartoris made up): and the next year the eight disjointed marble columns were landed from an Italian ship at New Orleans, into a steamboat up the Mississippi to Vicksburg, and into a smaller steamboat up the Yazoo and Sunflower and Tallahatchie, to Ikkemotubbe's old landing which Sutpen now owned, and thence the twelve miles by oxen into Jefferson: the two identical four-column porticoes, one on the north and one on the south, each with its balcony of wrought-iron New Orleans grillwork, on one of which — the south one — in 1861 Sartoris would stand in the first Confederate uniform the town had ever seen, while in the Square below the Richmond mustering officer enrolled and swore in the regiment which Sartoris as its colonel would take to Virginia as a part of Bee, to be Jackson's extreme left in front of the Henry house at First Manassas, and from both of which each May and November for a hundred years, bailiffs in their orderly appointive almost hereditary succession would cry without inflection or punctuation either 'oyes oyes honourable circuit court of Yoknapatawpha County come all and ye shall be heard' and beneath which for that same length of time too except for the seven years between '63 and '70 which didn't really count a century afterward except to a few irreconcilable old ladies, the white male

citizens of the county would pass to vote for county and state offices, because when in '63 a United States military force burned the Square and the business district, the courthouse survived.

It didn't escape: it simply survived: harder than axes, tougher than fire, more fixed than dynamite; encircled by the tumbled and blackened ruins of lesser walls, it still stood, even the topless smoke-stained columns, gutted of course and roofless, but immune, not one hair even out of the Paris architect's almost forgotten plumb, so that all they had to do (it took nine years to build; they needed twenty-five to restore it) was put in new floors for the two storeys and a new roof, and this time with a cupola with a four-faced clock and a bell to strike the hours and ring alarms; by this time the Square, the banks and the stores and the lawyers' and doctors' and dentists' offices, had been restored, and the English sparrows were back too which had never really deserted — the garrulous noisy independent swarms which, as though concomitant with, inextricable from regularised and roted human quarrelling, had appeared in possession of cornices and gutter-boxes almost before the last nail was driven — and now the pigeons also, interminably murmurous, nesting in, already usurping, the belfry even though they couldn't seem to get used to the bell, bursting out of the cupola at each stroke of the hour in frantic clouds, to sink and burst and whirl again at each succeeding stroke, until the last one: then vanishing back through the slatted louvres until nothing remained but the frantic and murmurous cooing like the fading echoes of the bell itself, the source of the alarm never recognised and even the alarm itself unremembered, as the actual stroke of the bell is no longer remembered by the vibration-fading air. Because they — the sparrows and the pigeons — endured, durable, a hundred years, the oldest things there except the courthouse centennial and serene above the town most of whose people now no longer even knew who Doctor Habersham and old Alec Holston and Louis Grenier were, had been; centennial and serene above the change: the electricity and gasolene, the neon and the crowded cacophonous air; even Negroes passing in beneath the balconies and into the chancery-clerk's office to cast ballots too, voting for the same white-skinned rascals and demagogues and white supremacy champions that the white ones did — durable: every few

years the county fathers, dreaming of baksheesh, would instigate a movement to tear it down and erect a new modern one, but someone would at the last moment defeat them; they will try it again of course and be defeated perhaps once again or even maybe twice again, but no more than that. Because its fate is to stand in the hinterland of America: its doom is its longevity; like a man, its simple age is its own reproach, and after the hundred years, will become unbearable. But not for a little while yet; for a little while yet the sparrows and the pigeons: garrulous myriad and independent the one, the other uxorious and interminable, at once frantic and tranquil — until the clock strikes again which even after a hundred years, they still seem unable to get used to, bursting in one swirling explosion out of the belfry as though the hour, instead of merely adding one puny infinitesimal more to the long weary increment since Genesis, had shattered the virgin pristine air with the first loud ding-dong of time and doom.

Scene I

COURTROOM. 5.30 P.M. November thirteenth.

The curtain is down. As the lights begin to go up:

MAN'S VOICE (behind the curtain)

Let the prisoner stand.

The curtain rises, symbolising the rising of the prisoner in the dock, and revealing a section of the courtroom. It does not occupy the whole stage, but only the upper left half, leaving the other half and the bottom of the stage in darkness, so that the visible scene is not only spotlighted but elevated slightly too, a further symbolism which will be clearer when Act II opens — the symbolism of the elevated tribunal of justice of which this, a county court, is only the intermediate, not the highest, stage.

This is a section of the court — the bar, the judge, officers, the opposing lawyers, the jury. The defence lawyer is Gavin Stevens, about fifty. He looks more like a poet than a lawyer and actually is: a bachelor, descendant of one of the pioneer Yoknapatawpha County families, Harvard and Heidelberg educated, and returned to his native soil to be

a sort of bucolic Cincinnatus, champion not so much of truth as of justice, or of justice as he sees it, constantly involving himself, often for no pay, in affairs of equity and passion and even crime too among his people, white and Negro both, sometimes directly contrary to his office of County Attorney which he has held for years, as is the present business.

The prisoner is standing. She is the only one standing in the room — a Negress, quite black, about thirty — that is, she could be almost anything between twenty and forty — with a calm impenetrable almost bemused face, the tallest, highest there with all eyes on her but she herself not looking at any of them, but looking out and up as though at some distant corner of the room, as though she were alone in it.

She is — or was until recently, five months ago to be exact — a domestic servant, nurse to two white children, the second of whom, an infant, she smothered in its cradle five months ago, for which act she is now on trial for her life.

But she has probably done many things else — chopped cotton, cooked for working gangs — any sort of manual labour within her capacities, or rather, limitations in time and availability, since her principal reputation in the little Mississippi town where she was born is that of a tramp — a drunkard, a casual prostitute, being beaten by some man or cutting or being cut by his wife or his other sweetheart. She has probably been married, at least once. Her name — or so she calls it and would probably spell it if she could spell — is Nancy Mannigoe.

There is a dead silence in the room while everybody watches her.

JUDGE

Have you anything to say before the sentence of the court is pronounced upon you?

Nancy neither answers nor moves; she doesn't even seem to be listening.

That you, Nancy Mannigoe, did on the ninth day of September, wilfully and with malice aforethought kill and murder the infant child of Mr. and Mrs. Gowan Stevens in the town of Jefferson and the County of Yoknapatawpha . . .

It is the sentence of this court that you be taken from hence back to the county jail of Yoknapatawpha County and there on the thirteenth day of March be hanged by the neck until you are dead. And may God have mercy on your soul.

NANCY

(quite loud in the silence, to no one, quite calm, not moving)

Yes, Lord.

There is a gasp, a sound, from the invisible spectators in the room, of shock at this unheard-of violation of procedure: the beginning of something which might be consternation and even uproar, in the midst of, or rather above which, Nancy herself does not move. The judge bangs his gavel, the bailiff springs up, the curtain starts hurriedly and jerkily down as if the judge, the officers, the court itself were jerking frantically at it to hide this disgraceful business; from somewhere among the unseen spectators there comes the sound of a woman's voice — a moan, wail, sob perhaps.

BAILIFF

(loudly)

Order! Order in the court! Order!

The curtain descends rapidly, hiding the scene, the lights fade rapidly into darkness: a moment of darkness: then the curtain rises smoothly and normally on:

Scene II

STEVENSES' LIVING-ROOM. 6.00 p.m. November thirteenth.

Living-room, a centre table with a lamp, chairs, a sofa left rear, floor-lamp, wall-bracket lamps, a door left enters from the hall, double doors rear stand open on a dining-room, a fireplace right with gas logs. The atmosphere of the room is smart, modern, up-to-date, yet the room

itself has the air of another time — the high ceiling, the cornices, some of the furniture; it has the air of being in an old house, an ante-bellum house descended at last to a spinster survivor who has modernised it (vide the gas fire and the two overstuffed chairs) into apartments rented to young couples or families who can afford to pay that much rent in order to live on the right street among other young couples who belong to the right church and the country club.

Sound of feet, then the lights come on as if someone about to enter had pressed a wall switch, then the door left opens and Temple enters, followed by Gowan, her husband, and the lawyer, Gavin Stevens. She is in the middle twenties, very smart, soignée, in an open fur coat, wearing a hat and gloves and carrying a handbag. Her air is brittle and tense, yet controlled. Her face shows nothing as she crosses to the centre table and stops. Gowan is three or four years older. He is almost a type; there were many of him in America, the South, between the two great wars: only children of financially secure parents living in city apartment hotels, alumni of the best colleges, South or East, where they belonged to the right clubs; married now and raising families yet still alumni of their schools, performing acceptably jobs they themselves did not ask for, usually concerned with money: cotton futures, or stocks, or bonds. But this face is a little different, a little more than that. Something has happened to it — tragedy — something, against which it had had no warning, and to cope with which (as it discovered) no equipment, yet which it has accepted and is trying, really and sincerely and selflessly (perhaps for the first time in its life) to do its best with according to its code. He and Stevens wear their overcoats, carrying their hats. Stevens stops just inside the room. Gowan drops his hat onto the sofa in passing and goes on to where Temple stands at the table, stripping off one of her gloves.

TEMPLE

(takes cigarette from box on the table: mimics the prisoner; her voice, harsh, reveals for the first time repressed, controlled, hysteria)

Yes, God. Guilty, God. Thank you, God. If that's your attitude toward being hung, what else can you expect from a judge and jury except to accommodate you?

GOWAN

Stop it, Boots. Hush now. Soon as I light the fire, I'll buy a drink.

(to Stevens)

Or maybe Gavin will do the fire while I do the butler.

TEMPLE

(takes up lighter)

I'll do the fire. You get the drinks. Then Uncle Gavin won't have to stay. After all, all he wants to do is say good-bye and send me a postcard. He can almost do that in two words, if he tries hard. Then he can go home. She crosses to the hearth and kneels and turns the gas valve, the lighter ready in her other hand.

GOWAN

(anxiously)

Now, Boots.

TEMPLE

(snaps lighter, holds flame to the jet)

Will you for God's sake please get me a drink?

GOWAN

Sure, honey.

(he turns: to Stevens)

Drop your coat anywhere.

He exits into the dining-room. Stevens does not move, watching Temple as the log takes fire.

TEMPLE

(still kneeling, her back to Stevens)

If you're going to stay, why don't you sit down? Or vice versa.

Backward. Only, it's the first one that's backward: if you're not sitting down, why don't you go? Let me be bereaved and vindicated, but at least let me do it in privacy, since God knows if any one of the excretions should take place in privacy, triumph should be the one — Stevens watches her. Then he crosses to her, taking the handkerchief from his breast pocket, stops behind her and extends the handkerchief down where she can see it. She looks at it, then up at him. Her face is quite calm.

TEMPLE

What's that for?

STEVENS

It's all right. It's dry too.

(still extending the handkerchief)

For tomorrow, then.

TEMPLE

(rises quickly)

Oh, for cinders. On the train. We're going by air; hadn't Gowan told you? We leave from the Memphis airport at midnight; we're driving up after supper. Then California tomorrow morning; maybe we'll even go on to Hawaii in the spring. No; wrong season: Canada, maybe. Lake Louise in May and June — —

(she stops, listens a moment toward the dining-room doors)

So why the handkerchief? Not a threat, because you don't have anything to threaten me with, do you? And if you don't have anything to threaten me with, I must not have anything you want, so it can't be a bribe either, can it?

(they both hear the sound from beyond the dining-room doors which indicates that Gowan is approaching. Temple lowers her voice again, rapidly)

Put it this way then. I don't know what you want, because I don't care. Because whatever it is, you won't get it from me.

(the sound is near now — footsteps, clink of glass)

Now he'll offer you a drink, and then he'll ask you too what you want, why you followed us home. I've already answered you. No. If what you came for is to see me weep, I doubt if you'll even get that. But you certainly won't get anything else. Not from me. Do you understand that?

STEVENS

I hear you.

TEMPLE

Meaning, you don't believe it. All right, touché then.

(quicker, tenser)

I refused to answer your question; now I'll ask you one: How much do you —

(as Gowan enters, she changes what she was saying so smoothly in mid-sentence that anyone entering would not even realise that the pitch of her voice had altered)

— are her lawyer, she must have talked to you; even a dope-fiend that murders a little baby must have what she calls some excuse for it, even a nigger dope-fiend and a white baby — or maybe even more, a nigger dope-fiend and a white baby — —

GOWAN

I said, stop it, Boots.

He carries a tray containing a pitcher of water, a bowl of ice, three empty tumblers and three whiskey glasses already filled. The bottle itself protrudes from his topcoat pocket. He approaches Temple and offers the tray.

That's right. I'm going to have one myself. For a change. After eight years. Why not?

TEMPLE

Why not?

(looks at the tray)

Not highballs?

GOWAN

Not this one.

She takes one of the filled glasses. He offers the tray to Stevens, who takes the second one. Then he sets the tray on the table and takes up the third glass.

Nary a drink in eight years; count 'em. So maybe this will be a good time to start again. At least, it won't be too soon.

(to Stevens)

Drink up. A little water behind it?

As though not aware that he had done so, he sets his untasted glass back on the tray, splashes water from the pitcher into a tumbler and

hands the tumbler to Stevens as Stevens empties his glass and lowers it, taking the tumbler. Temple has not touched hers either. Now maybe Defence Attorney Stevens will tell us what he wants here.

STEVENS

Your wife has already told you. To say good-bye.

GOWAN

Then say it. One more for the road, and where's your hat, huh? He takes the tumbler from Stevens and turns back to the table.

TEMPLE

(sets her untasted glass back on the tray)

And put ice in it this time, and maybe even a little water. But first, take Uncle Gavin's coat.

GOWAN

(takes bottle from his pocket and makes a highball for Stevens in the tumbler)

That won't be necessary. If he could raise his arm in a white courtroom to defend a murdering nigger, he can certainly bend it in nothing but a wool overcoat — at least to take a drink with the victim's mother.

(quickly: to Temple)

Sorry. Maybe you were right all the time, and I was wrong. Maybe we've both got to keep on saying things like that until we can get rid of them, some of them, a little of them — —

TEMPLE

All right, why not? Here goes then.

(she is watching, not Gowan but Stevens, who watches her in return, grave and soberly)

Don't forget the father too, dear.

GOWAN

(mixing the drink)

Why should I, dear? How could I, dear? Except that the child's father is unfortunately just a man. In the eyes of the law, men are not supposed to suffer: they are merely appellants or appellees. The law is tender only of women and children — particularly of women, particularly particular of nigger dope-fiend whores who murder white children.

(hands the highball to Stevens, who takes it)

So why should we expect Defence Attorney Stevens to be tender of a man or a woman who just happen to be the parents of the child that got murdered?

TEMPLE

(harshly)

Will you for God's sake please get through? Then will you for God's sake please hush?

GOWAN

(quickly: turns)

Sorry.

(he turns toward her, sees her hand empty, then sees her full glass beside his own on the tray)

No drink?

TEMPLE

I don't want it. I want some milk.

GOWAN

Right. Hot, of course.

TEMPLE

Please.

GOWAN

(turning)

Right. I thought of that too. I put a pan on to heat while I was getting the drinks.

(crossing toward dining-room exit)

Don't let Uncle Gavin get away until I get back. Lock the door, if you have to. Or maybe just telephone that nigger freedom agent — what's his name? — —

He exits. They don't move until the slap of the pantry door sounds.

TEMPLE

(rapid and hard)

How much do you know?

(rapidly)

Don't lie to me; don't you see there's not time?

STEVENS

Not time for what? Before your plane leaves tonight? She has a little time yet — four months, until March, the thirteenth of March —

TEMPLE

You know what I mean — her lawyer — seeing her every day — just a nigger, and you a white man — even if you needed anything to frighten her with — you could just buy it from her with a dose of cocaine or a pint of . . .

(she stops, stares at him, in a sort of amazement, despair; her voice is almost quiet)

Oh, God, oh, God, she hasn't told you anything. It's me; I'm the one that's — Don't you see? It's that I cannot believe — will not believe — impossible —

STEVENS

Impossible to believe that all human beings really don't — as you would put it — stink? Even — as you put it — dope-fiend nigger whores? No, she told me nothing more.

TEMPLE

(prompts)

Even if there was anything more.

STEVENS

Even if there was.

TEMPLE

Then what is it you think you know? Never mind where you got it; just tell me what you think it is.

STEVENS

There was a man there that night.

TEMPLE

(quick, glib, almost before he has finished)

Gowan.

STEVENS

That night? When Gowan had left with Bucky at six that morning to drive to New Orleans in a car?

TEMPLE

(quick, harsh)

So I was right. Did you frighten her, or just buy it?

(interrupts herself)

I'm trying. I'm really trying. Maybe it wouldn't be so hard if I could just understand why they don't stink — what reason they would have for not stinking. . . .

(she stops; it is as if she had heard a sound presaging Gowan's return, or perhaps simply knew by instinct or from knowledge of her own house that he had had time to heat a cup of milk. Then continues, rapid and quiet)

There was no man there. You see? I told you, warned you, that you would get nothing from me. Oh, I know; you could have put me on the stand at any time, under oath; of course, your jury wouldn't have liked it — that wanton crucifixion of a bereaved mamma, but what's that in the balance with justice? I don't know why you didn't. Or maybe you still intend to — provided you can catch us before we cross the Tennessee line tonight.

(quick, tense, hard)

All right. I'm sorry. I know better. So maybe it's just my own stinking after all that I find impossible to doubt.

(the pantry door slaps again; they both hear it)

Because I'm not even going to take Gowan with me when I say good-bye and go up stairs. — And who knows ——

She stops. Gowan enters, carrying a small tray bearing a glass of milk, a salt-shaker and a napkin, and comes to the table.

GOWAN

What are you talking about now?

TEMPLE

Nothing. I was telling Uncle Gavin that he had something of Virginia or some sort of gentleman in him too that he must have inherited from you through your grandfather, and that I'm going up to give Bucky his bath and supper.

(she touches the glass for heat, then takes it up: to Gowan)

Thank you, dear.

GOWAN

Right, dear.

(to Stevens)

You see? Not just a napkin: the right napkin. That's how I'm trained.

(he stops suddenly, noticing Temple, who has done nothing apparently: just standing there holding the milk. But he seems to know what is going on: to her)

What's this for?

TEMPLE

I don't know.

He moves; they kiss, not long but not a peck either; definitely a kiss between a man and a woman. Then, carrying the milk, Temple crosses toward the hall door.

(to Stevens)

Good-bye then until next June. Bucky will send you and Maggie a postcard.

(she goes on to the door, pauses and looks back at Stevens)

I may even be wrong about Temple Drake's odour too; if you should happen to hear something you haven't heard yet and it's true, I may even ratify it. Maybe you can even believe that — if you can believe you are going to hear anything that you haven't heard yet.

STEVENS

Do you?

TEMPLE

(after a moment)

Not from me, Uncle Gavin. If someone wants to go to heaven, who am I to stop them? Good night. Good-bye.

She exits, closes the door. Stevens, very grave, turns back and sets his highball down on the tray.

GOWAN

Drink up. After all, I've got to eat supper and do some packing too. How about it?

STEVENS

About what? The packing, or the drink? What about you? I thought you were going to have one.

GOWAN

Oh, sure, sure.

(takes up the small filled glass)

Maybe you had better go on and leave us to our revenge.

STEVENS

I wish it could comfort you.

GOWAN

I wish to God it could. I wish to God that what I wanted was only revenge. An eye for an eye — were ever words emptier? Only, you have got to have lost the eye to know it.

STEVENS

Yet she still has to die.

GOWAN

Why not? Even if she would be any loss — a nigger whore, a drunkard, a dope-fiend — —

STEVENS

— a vagabond, a tramp, hopeless until one day Mr. and Mrs. Gowan Stevens out of simple pity and humanity picked her up out of the gutter to give her one more chance —

(Gowan stands motionless, his hand tightening slowly about the glass. Stevens watches him)

And then in return for it —

GOWAN

Look, Uncle Gavin. Why don't you go for God's sake home? Or to hell, or anywhere out of here?

STEVENS

I am, in a minute. Is that why you think — why you would still say she has to die?

GOWAN

I don't. I had nothing to do with it. I wasn't even the plaintiff. I didn't even instigate — that's the word, isn't it? — the suit. My only connection with it was, I happened by chance to be the father of the child she — — Who in hell ever called that a drink?

He dashes the whiskey, glass and all, into the ice bowl, quickly catches up one of the empty tumblers in one hand and, at the same time, tilts

the whiskey bottle over it, pouring. At first he makes no sound, but at once it is obvious that he is laughing: laughter which begins normally enough, but almost immediately it is out of hand, just on hysteria, while he still pours whiskey into the glass, which in a moment now will overflow, except that Stevens reaches his hand and grasps the bottle and stops it.

STEVENS

Stop it. Stop it, now. Here.

He takes the bottle from Gowan, sets it down, takes the tumbler and tilts part of its contents into the other empty one, leaving at least a reasonable, a believable, drink, and hands it to Gowan. Gowan takes it, stopping the crazy laughter, gets hold of himself again.

GOWAN

(holding the glass untasted)

Eight years. Eight years on the wagon — and this is what I got for it: my child murdered by a dope-fiend nigger whore that wouldn't even run so that a cop or somebody could have shot her down like the mad-dog — You see? Eight years without the drink, and so I got whatever it was I was buying by not drinking, and now I've got whatever it was I was paying for and it's paid for and so I can drink again. And now I don't want the drink. You see? Like whatever it was I was buying I not only didn't want, but what I was paying for it wasn't worth anything, wasn't even any loss. So I have a laugh coming. That's triumph. Because I got a bargain even in what I didn't want. I got a cut rate. I had two children. I had to pay only one of them to find out it wasn't really costing me anything — Half price: a child, and a dope-fiend nigger whore on a public gallows: that's all I had to pay for immunity.

STEVENS

There's no such thing.

GOWAN

From the past. From my folly. My drunkenness. My cowardice, if you like — —

STEVENS

There's no such thing as past either.

GOWAN

That is a laugh, that one. Only, not so loud, huh? to disturb the ladies — disturb Miss Drake — Miss Temple Drake. — Sure, why not cowardice. Only, for euphony, call it simple over-training. You know? Gowan Stevens, trained at Virginia to drink like a gentleman, gets drunk as ten gentlemen, takes a country college girl, a maiden: who knows? maybe even a virgin, cross country by car to another country college ball game, gets drunker than twenty gentlemen, gets lost, gets still drunker than forty gentlemen, wrecks the car, passes eighty gentlemen now, passes completely out while the maiden the virgin is being kidnapped into a Memphis whorehouse — —

(he mumbles an indistinguishable word)

STEVENS

What?

GOWAN

Sure; cowardice. Call it cowardice; what's a little euphony between old married people?

STEVENS

Not the marrying her afterward, at least. What — —

GOWAN

Sure. Marrying her was purest Old Virginia. That was indeed the hundred and sixty gentlemen.

STEVENS

The intent was, by any other standards too. The prisoner in the whorehouse; I didn't quite hear — —

GOWAN

(quickly: reaching for it)

Where's your glass? Dump that slop — here — —

STEVENS

(holds glass)

This will do. What was that you said about held prisoner in the whorehouse?

GOWAN

(harshly)

That's all. You heard it.

STEVENS

You said 'and loved it.'

(they stare at each other)

Is that what you can never forgive her for? — not for having been the instrument creating that moment in your life which you can never recall nor forget nor explain nor condone nor even stop thinking about, but because she herself didn't even suffer, but on the contrary, even liked it — that month or whatever it was like the episode in the old movie of the white girl held prisoner in the cave by the Bedouin prince? — That you had to lose not only your bachelor freedom, but your man's self-respect in the chastity of his wife and your child too, to pay for something your wife hadn't even lost, didn't even regret, didn't even miss? Is that why this poor lost doomed crazy Negro woman must die?

GOWAN

(tensely)

Get out of here. Go on.

STEVENS

In a minute. — Or else, blow your own brains out: stop having to remember, stop having to be forever unable to forget: nothing; to plunge into nothing and sink and drown forever and forever, never again to have to remember, never again to wake in the night writhing and sweating because you cannot, can never, stop remembering? What else happened during that month, that time while that madman held her prisoner there in that Memphis house, that nobody but you and she know about, maybe not even you know about?

Still staring at Stevens, slowly and deliberately Gowan sets the glass of whiskey back on the tray and takes up the bottle and swings it bottom up back over his head. The stopper is out, and at once the whiskey begins to pour out of it, down his arm and sleeve and onto the floor. He does not seem to be aware of it even. His voice is tense, barely articulate.

GOWAN

So help me, Christ . . . So help me, Christ.

A moment, then Stevens moves, without haste, sets his own glass back on the tray and turns, taking his hat as he passes the sofa, and goes on to the door and exits. Gowan stands a moment longer with the poised bottle, now empty. Then he draws a long shuddering breath, seems to

rouse, wake, sets the empty bottle back on the tray, notices his untasted whiskey glass, takes it up, a moment: then turns and throws the glass crashing into the fireplace, against the burning gas logs, and stands, his back to the audience, and draws another long shuddering breath and then draws both hands hard down his face, then turns, looking at his wet sleeve, takes out his handkerchief and dabs at his sleeve as he comes back to the table, puts the handkerchief back in his pocket and takes the folded napkin from the small tray beside the salt-cellar and wipes his sleeve with it, sees he is doing no good, tosses the crumpled napkin back onto the whiskey tray; and now, outwardly quite calm again, as though nothing had happened, he gathers the glasses back onto the big tray, puts the small tray and the napkin onto it too and takes up the tray and walks quietly toward the dining-room door as the lights begin to go down.

The lights go completely down. The stage is dark.

The lights go up.

Scene III

STEVENSES' LIVING-ROOM. 10.00 p.m. March eleventh.

The room is exactly as it was four months ago, except that the only light burning is the lamp on the table, and the sofa has been moved so that it partly faces the audience, with a small motionless blanket-wrapped object lying on it, and one of the chairs placed between the lamp and the sofa so that the shadow of its back falls across the object on the sofa, making it more or less indistinguishable, and the dining-room doors are now closed. The telephone sits on the small stand in the corner right as in Scene II.

The hall door opens. Temple enters, followed by Stevens. She now wears a long housecoat; her hair is tied back with a ribbon as though prepared for bed. This time Stevens carries the topcoat and the hat too; his suit is different. Apparently she has already warned Stevens to be quiet; his air anyway shows it. She enters, stops, lets him pass her. He pauses, looks about the room, sees the sofa, stands looking at it.

STEVENS

This is what they call a plant.

He crosses to the sofa, Temple watching him, and stops, looking down at the shadowed object. He quietly draws aside the shadowing chair and reveals a little boy, about four, wrapped in the blanket, asleep.

TEMPLE

Why not? Don't the philosophers and other gynæcologists tell us that women will strike back with any weapon, even their children?

STEVENS

(watching the child)

Including the sleeping pill you told me you gave Gowan?

TEMPLE

All right.

(approaches table)

If I would just stop struggling: how much time we could save. I came all the way back from California, but I still can't seem to quit. Do you believe in coincidence?

STEVENS

(turns)

Not unless I have to.

TEMPLE

(at table, takes up a folded yellow telegraph form, opens it, reads)

Dated Jefferson, March sixth. 'You have a week yet until the thirteenth. But where will you go then?' signed Gavin.

She folds the paper back into its old creases, folds it still again. Stevens watches her.

STEVENS

Well? This is the eleventh. Is that the coincidence?

TEMPLE

No. This is.

(she drops, tosses the folded paper onto the table, turns)

It was that afternoon — the sixth. We were on the beach, Bucky and I. I was reading, and he was — oh, talking mostly, you know — 'Is California far from Jefferson, mamma?' and I say 'Yes, darling' — you know: still reading or trying to, and he says, 'How long will we stay in California, mamma?' and I say, 'Until we get tired of it' and he says, 'Will we stay here until they hang Nancy, mamma?' and it's already too late then; I should have seen it coming but it's too late now; I say, 'Yes, darling' and then he drops it right in my lap, right out of the mouths of — how is it?

— babes and sucklings. ‘Where will we go then, mamma?’ And then we come back to the hotel, and there you are too. Well?

STEVENS

Well what?

TEMPLE

All right. Let’s for God’s sake stop.

(goes to a chair)

Now that I’m here, no matter whose fault it was, what do you want? A drink? Will you drink? At least, put your coat and hat down.

STEVENS

I don’t even know yet. That’s why you came back —

TEMPLE

(interrupts)

I came back? It wasn’t I who — —

STEVENS

(interrupts)

— who said, let’s for God’s sake stop.

They stare at each other: a moment.

TEMPLE

All right. Put down your coat and hat.

Stevens lays his hat and coat on a chair. Temple sits down. Stevens takes a chair opposite, so that the sleeping child on the sofa is between them in background.

So Nancy must be saved. So you send for me, or you and Bucky between you, or anyway here you are and here I am. Because apparently I know something I haven’t told yet, or maybe you know something I haven’t told yet. What do you think you know?

(quickly; he says nothing)

All right. What do you know?

STEVENS

Nothing. I don’t want to know it. All I — —

TEMPLE

Say that again.

STEVENS

Say what again?

TEMPLE

What is it you think you know?

STEVENS

Nothing. I — —

TEMPLE

All right. Why do you think there is something I haven't told yet?

STEVENS

You came back. All the way from California — —

TEMPLE

Not enough. Try again.

STEVENS

You were there.

(with her face averted, Temple reaches her hand to the table, fumbles until she finds the cigarette box, takes a cigarette and with the same hand fumbles until she finds the lighter, draws them back to her lap)

At the trial. Every day. All day, from the time court opened — —

TEMPLE

(still not looking at him, supremely casual, puts the cigarette into her mouth, talking around it, the cigarette bobbing)

The bereaved mother — —

STEVENS

Yes, the bereaved mother — —

TEMPLE

(the cigarette bobbing: still not looking at him)

— herself watching the accomplishment of her revenge; the tigress over the body of her slain cub — —

STEVENS

— who should have been too immersed in grief to have thought of revenge — to have borne the very sight of her child's murderer . . .

TEMPLE

(not looking at him)

Methinks she doth protest too much?

Stevens doesn't answer. She snaps the lighter on, lights the cigarette, puts the lighter back on the table. Leaning, Stevens pushes the ashtray along the table until she can reach it. Now she looks at him.

TEMPLE

Thanks. Now let grandmamma teach you how to suck an egg. It doesn't matter what I know, what you think I know, what might have

happened. Because we won't even need it. All we need is an affidavit. That she is crazy. Has been for years.

STEVENS

I thought of that too. Only it's too late. That should have been done about five months ago. The trial is over now. She has been convicted and sentenced. In the eyes of the law, she is already dead. In the eyes of the law, Nancy Mannigoe doesn't even exist. Even if there wasn't a better reason than that. The best reason of all.

TEMPLE

(smoking)

Yes?

STEVENS

We haven't got one.

TEMPLE

(smoking)

Yes?

(she sits back in the chair, smoking rapidly, looking at Stevens. Her voice is gentle, patient, only a little too rapid, like the smoking)

That's right. Try to listen. Really try. I am the affidavit; what else are we doing here at ten o'clock at night barely a day from her execution? What else did I — as you put it — come all the way back from California for, not to mention a — as you have probably put that too — faked coincidence to save — as I would put it I suppose — my face? All we need now is to decide just how much of what to put in the affidavit. Do try; maybe you had better have a drink after all.

STEVENS

Later, maybe. I'm dizzy enough right now with just perjury and contempt of court.

TEMPLE

What perjury?

STEVENS

Not venal then, worse: inept. After my client is not only convicted but sentenced, I turn up with the prosecution's chief witness offering evidence to set the whole trial aside —

TEMPLE

Tell them I forgot this. Or tell them I changed my mind. Tell them the district attorney bribed me to keep my mouth shut — —

STEVENS

(peremptory yet quiet)

Temple.

She puffs rapidly at the cigarette, removes it from her mouth.

TEMPLE

Or better still; won't it be obvious? a woman whose child was smothered in its crib, wanting vengeance, capable of anything to get the vengeance; then when she has it, realising she can't go through with it, can't sacrifice a human life for it, even a nigger whore's?

STEVENS

Stop it. One at a time. At least, let's talk about the same thing.

TEMPLE

What else are we talking about except saving a condemned client whose trained lawyer has already admitted that he has failed?

STEVENS

Then you really don't want her to die. You did invent the coincidence.

TEMPLE

Didn't I just say so? At least, let's for God's sake stop that, can't we?

STEVENS

Done. So Temple Drake will have to save her.

TEMPLE

Mrs. Gowan Stevens will.

STEVENS

Temple Drake.

She stares at him, smoking, deliberately now. Deliberately she removes the cigarette and, still watching him, reaches and snubs it out in the ashtray.

All right. Tell me again. Maybe I'll even understand this time, let alone listen. We produce — turn up with — a sworn affidavit that this murderess was crazy when she committed the crime.

TEMPLE

You did listen, didn't you? Who knows — —

STEVENS

Based on what?

TEMPLE

— What?

STEVENS

The affidavit. Based on what?

(she stares at him)

On what proof?

TEMPLE

Proof?

STEVENS

Proof. What will be in the affidavit? What are we going to affirm now that for some reason, any reason, we — you — we didn't see fit to bring up or anyway didn't bring up until after she —

TEMPLE

How do I know? You're the lawyer. What do you want in it? What do such affidavits have in them, need to have in them, to make them work, make them sure to work? Don't you have samples in your law books — reports, whatever you call them — that you can copy and have me swear to? Good ones, certain ones? At least, while we're committing whatever this is, pick out a good one, such a good one that nobody, not even an untrained lawyer, can punch holes in it. . . .

Her voice ceases. She stares at him, while he continues to look steadily back at her, saying nothing, just looking at her, until at last she draws a loud harsh breath; her voice is harsh too.

What do you want then? What more do you want?

STEVENS

Temple Drake.

TEMPLE

(quick, harsh, immediate)

No. Mrs. Gowan Stevens.

STEVENS

(implacable and calm)

Temple Drake. The truth.

TEMPLE

Truth? We're trying to save a condemned murderess whose lawyer has already admitted that he has failed. What has truth got to do with that?

(rapid, harsh)

We? I, I, the mother of the baby she murdered; not you, Gavin Stevens, the lawyer, but I, Mrs. Gowan Stevens, the mother. Can't you get it through your head that I will do anything, anything?

STEVENS

Except one. Which is all. We're not concerned with death. That's nothing: any handful of petty facts and sworn documents can cope with that. That's all finished now; we can forget it. What we are trying to deal with now is injustice. Only truth can cope with that. Or love.

TEMPLE

(harshly)

Love. Oh, God. Love.

STEVENS

Call it pity then. Or courage. Or simple honour, honesty, or a simple desire for the right to sleep at night.

TEMPLE

You prate of sleep, to me, who learned six years ago how not even to realise any more that I didn't mind not sleeping at night?

STEVENS

Yet you invented the coincidence.

TEMPLE

Will you for Christ's sake stop? Will you . . . All right. Then if her dying is nothing, what do you want? What in God's name do you want?

STEVENS

I told you. Truth.

TEMPLE

And I told you that what you keep on harping at as truth has nothing to do with this. When you go before the — — What do you call this next collection of trained lawyers? supreme court? — what you will need will be facts, papers, documents, sworn to, incontrovertible, that no other lawyer trained or untrained either can punch holes in, find any flaw in.

STEVENS

We're not going to the supreme court.

(she stares at him)

That's all finished. If that could have been done, would have sufficed, I would have thought of that, attended to that, four months ago. We're going to the Governor. Tonight.

TEMPLE

The Governor?

STEVENS

Perhaps he won't save her either. He probably won't.

TEMPLE

Then why ask him? Why?

STEVENS

I've told you. Truth.

TEMPLE

(in quiet amazement)

For no more than that. For no better reason than that. Just to get it told, breathed aloud, into words, sound. Just to be heard by, told to, someone, anyone, any stranger none of whose business it is, can possibly be, simply because he is capable of hearing, comprehending it. Why blink your own rhetoric? Why don't you go on and tell me it's for the good of my soul — if I have one?

STEVENS

I did. I said, so you can sleep at night.

TEMPLE

And I told you I forgot six years ago even what it was to miss the sleep. She stares at him. He doesn't answer, looking at her. Still watching him, she reaches her hand to the table, toward the cigarette box, then stops, is motionless, her hand suspended, staring at him.

There is something else, then. We're even going to get the true one this time. All right. Shoot.

He doesn't answer, makes no sign, watching her. A moment, then she turns her head and looks toward the sofa and the sleeping child. Still looking at the child, she rises and crosses to the sofa and stands looking down at the child; her voice is quiet.

So it was a plant, after all; I just didn't seem to know for who.

(she looks down at the child)

I threw my remaining child at you. Now you threw him back.

STEVENS

But I didn't wake him.

TEMPLE

Then I've got you, lawyer. What would be better for his peace and sleep than to hang his sister's murderer?

STEVENS

No matter by what means, in what lie?

TEMPLE

Nor whose.

STEVENS

Yet you invented the coincidence.

TEMPLE

Mrs. Gowan Stevens did.

STEVENS

Temple Drake did. Mrs. Gowan Stevens is not even fighting in this class. This is Temple Drake's.

TEMPLE

Temple Drake is dead.

STEVENS

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

She comes back to the table, takes a cigarette from the box, puts it in her mouth and reaches for the lighter. He leans as though to hand it to her, but she has already found it, snaps it on and lights the cigarette, talking through the smoke.

TEMPLE

Listen. How much do you know?

STEVENS

Nothing.

TEMPLE

Swear.

STEVENS

Would you believe me?

TEMPLE

No. But swear anyway.

STEVENS

All right. I swear.

TEMPLE

(crushes cigarette into tray)

Then listen. Listen carefully.

(she stands, tense, rigid, facing him, staring at him)

Temple Drake is dead. Temple Drake will have been dead six years longer than Nancy Mannigoe will ever be. If all Nancy Mannigoe has to save her is Temple Drake, then God help Nancy Mannigoe. Now get out of here.

She stares at him; another moment. Then he rises, still watching her; she stares steadily and implacably back. Then he moves.

Good night.

STEVENS

Good night.

He goes back to the chair, takes up his coat and hat, then goes on to the hall door, has put his hand on the knob.

TEMPLE

Gavin.

(he pauses, his hand on the knob, and looks back at her)

Maybe I'll have the handkerchief, after all.

(he looks at her a moment longer, then releases the knob, takes the handkerchief from his breast pocket as he crosses back toward her, extends it. She doesn't take it)

All right. What will I have to do? What do you suggest, then?

STEVENS

Everything.

TEMPLE

Which of course I won't. I will not. You can understand that, can't you?

At least you can hear it. So let's start over, shall we? How much will I have to tell?

STEVENS

Everything.

TEMPLE

Then I won't need the handkerchief, after all. Good night. Close the front door when you go out, please. It's getting cold again.

He turns, crosses again to the door without stopping nor looking back, exits, closes the door behind him. She is not watching him either now. For a moment after the door has closed, she doesn't move. Then she makes a gesture something like Gowan's in Scene Two, except that she merely presses her palms for a moment hard against her face, her face calm, expressionless, cold, drops her hands, turns, picks up the crushed cigarette from beside the tray and puts it into the tray and takes up the tray and crosses to the fireplace, glancing down at the sleeping child as she passes the sofa, empties the tray into the fireplace and returns to the table and puts the tray on it and this time pauses at the sofa and stoops and tucks the blanket closer about the sleeping child and then goes on to the telephone and lifts the receiver.

(into the phone)

Three-two-nine, please.

(while she stands waiting for the answer, there is a slight movement in the darkness beyond the open door at rear, just enough silent movement to show that something or someone is there or has moved there. Temple is unaware of it since her back is turned. Then she speaks into the phone)

Maggie? Temple. . . . Yes, suddenly . . . Oh, I don't know; perhaps we got bored with sunshine. . . . Of course, I may drop in tomorrow. I wanted to leave a message for Gavin . . . I know; he's just left here. Something I forgot . . . If you'll ask him to call me when he comes in. . . . Yes. . . . Wasn't it. . . . Yes. . . . If you will . . . Thank you.

(she puts the receiver down and starts to turn back into the room when the telephone rings. She turns back, takes up the receiver, speaks into it)

Hello . . . Yes. Coincidence again; I had my hand on it; I had just called Maggie. . . . Oh, the filling station. I didn't think you had had time. I can be ready in thirty minutes. Your car, or ours? . . . All right. Listen. . . . Yes, I'm here. Gavin . . . How much will I have to tell?

(hurriedly)

Oh, I know: you've already told me eight or ten times. But maybe I didn't hear it right. How much will I have to tell?

(she listens a moment, quiet, frozen-faced, then slowly begins to lower the receiver toward the stand; she speaks quietly, without inflection)
Oh, God. Oh, God.

She puts the receiver down, crosses to the sofa, snaps off the table lamp and takes up the child and crosses to the door to the hall, snaps off the remaining room lights as she goes out, so that the only light in the room now enters from the hall. As soon as she has disappeared from sight, Gowan enters from the door at rear, dressed except for his coat, waistcoat and tie. He has obviously taken no sleeping pill. He goes to the phone and stands quietly beside it, facing the hall door and obviously listening until Temple is safely away. Now the hall light snaps off, and the stage is in complete darkness.

GOWAN'S VOICE

(quietly)

Three-two-nine, please . . . Good evening, Aunt Maggie. Gowan . . . All right, thank you . . . Sure, some time tomorrow. As soon as Uncle Gavin comes in, will you have him call me? I'll be right here. Thank you.
Sound of the receiver as he puts it back.

(CURTAIN)

Act II

THE GOLDEN DOME (Beginning Was the Word)

JACKSON. ALT. 294 ft. Pop. (a.d. 1950) 201,092.

Located by an expedition of three Commissioners selected appointed and dispatched for that single purpose, on a high bluff above Pearl River at the approximate geographical centre of the State, to be not a market nor industrial town, nor even as a place for men to live, but to be a capital, the Capital of a Commonwealth;

In the beginning was already decreed this rounded knob, this gilded pustule, already before and beyond the steamy chiaroscuro, untimed unseasoned winterless miasma not any one of water or earth or life yet

all of each, inextricable and indivisible; that one seethe one spawn one mother-womb, one furious tumescence, father-mother-one, one vast incubant ejaculation already fissionating in one boiling moil of litter from the celestial experimental Work Bench; that one spawning crawl and creep printing with three-toed mastodonic tracks the steamy-green swaddling clothes of the coal and the oil, above which the pea-brained reptilian heads curved the heavy leather-flapped air;

Then the ice, but still this knob, this pimple-dome, this buried half-ball hemisphere; the earth lurched, heaving darkward the long continental flank, dragging upward beneath the polar cap that furious equatorial womb, the shutter-lid of cold severing off into blank and heedless void one last sound, one cry, one puny myriad indictment already fading and then no more, the blind and tongueless earth spinning on, looping the long recordless astral orbit, frozen, tideless, yet still was there this tiny gleam, this spark, this gilded crumb of man's eternal aspiration, this golden dome preordained and impregnable, this minuscule foetus-glint tougher than ice and harder than freeze; the earth lurched again, sloughing; the ice with infinitesimal speed, scouring out the valleys, scoring the hills, and vanished; the earth tilted further to recede the sea rim by necklace-rim of crustacean husks in recessional contour lines like the concentric whorls within the sawn stump telling the tree's age, bearing south by recessional south toward that mute and beckoning gleam the confluent continental swale, baring to light and air the broad blank mid-continental page for the first scratch of orderly recording — a laboratory-factory covering what would be twenty states, established and ordained for the purpose of manufacturing one: the ordered unhurried whirl of seasons, of rain and snow and freeze and thaw and sun and drouth to aerate and slack the soil, the conflux of a hundred rivers into one vast father of rivers carrying the rich dirt, the rich garnering, south and south, carving the bluffs to bear the long march of the river towns, flooding the Mississippi lowlands, spawning the rich alluvial dirt layer by vernal layer, raising inch by foot by year by century the surface of the earth which in time (not distant now, measured against that long signatureless chronicle) would tremble to the passing of trains like when the cat crosses the suspension bridge;

The rich deep black alluvial soil which would grow cotton taller than the head of a man on a horse, already one jungle one brake one impassable density of brier and cane and vine interlocking the soar of gum and cypress and hickory and pinoak and ash, printed now by the tracks of unalien shapes — bear and deer and panthers and bison and wolves and alligators and the myriad smaller beasts, and unalien men to name them too perhaps — the (themselves) nameless though recorded predecessors who built the mounds to escape the spring floods and left their meagre artifacts: the obsolete and the dispossessed, dispossessed by those who were dispossessed in turn because they too were obsolete: the wild Algonquian, Chickasaw and Choctaw and Natchez and Pascagoula, peering in virgin astonishment down from the tall bluffs at a Chippeway canoe bearing three Frenchmen — and had barely time to whirl and look behind him at ten and then a hundred and then a thousand Spaniards come overland from the Atlantic Ocean:

a tide, a wash, a thrice flux-and-ebb of motion so rapid and quick across the land's slow alluvial chronicle as to resemble the limber flicking of the magician's one hand before the other holding the deck of inconstant cards: the Frenchman for a moment, then the Spaniard for perhaps two, then the Frenchman for another two and then the Spaniard again for another and then the Frenchman for that one last second, half-breath; because then came the Anglo-Saxon, the pioneer, the tall man, roaring with Protestant scripture and boiled whiskey, Bible and jug in one hand and (like as not) a native tomahawk in the other, brawling, turbulent not through viciousness but simply because of his over-revved glands; uxorious and polygamous: a married invincible bachelor, dragging his gravid wife and most of the rest of his mother-in-law's family behind him into the trackless infested forest, spawning that child as like as not behind the barricade of a rifle-crotched log mapleless leagues from nowhere and then getting her with another one before reaching his final itch-footed destination, and at the same time scattering his ebullient seed in a hundred dusky bellies through a thousand miles of wilderness; innocent and gullible, without bowels for avarice or compassion or forethought either, changing the face of the earth: felling a tree which took two hundred years to grow, in order to extract from it a bear or a capful of wild honey;

Obsolete too: still felling the two-hundred-year-old tree when the bear and the wild honey were gone and there was nothing in it any more but a raccoon or a possum whose hide was worth at the most two dollars, turning the earth into a howling waste from which he would be the first to vanish, not even on the heels but synchronous with the slightly darker wild men whom he had dispossessed, because, like them, only the wilderness could feed and nourish him; and so disappeared, strutted his roaring eupeptic hour, and was no more, leaving his ghost, pariah and proscribed, scriptureless now and armed only with the highwayman's, the murderer's, pistol, haunting the fringes of the wilderness which he himself had helped to destroy, because the river towns marched now recessional south by south along the processional bluffs:

St. Louis, Paducah, Memphis, Helena, Vicksburg, Natchez, Baton Rouge, peopled by men with mouths full of law, in broadcloth and flowered waistcoats, who owned Negro slaves and Empire beds and buhl cabinets and ormolu clocks, who strolled and smoked their cigars along the bluffs beneath which in the shanty and flatboat purlieus he rioted out the last of his doomed evening, losing his worthless life again and again to the fierce knives of his drunken and worthless kind — this in the intervals of being pursued and harried in his vanishing avatars of Harpe and Hare and Mason and Murrel, either shot on sight or hoicked, dragged out of what remained of his secret wilderness haunts along the overland Natchez trace (one day someone brought a curious seed into the land and inserted it into the earth, and now vast fields of white not only covered the waste places which with his wanton and heedless axe he had made, but were effacing, thrusting back the wilderness even faster than he had been able to, so that he barely had a screen for his back when, crouched in his thicket, he glared at his dispossessor in impotent and incredulous and uncomprehending rage) into the towns to his formal apotheosis in a courtroom and then a gallows or the limb of a tree;

Because those days were gone, the old brave innocent tumultuous eupeptic tomorrowless days; the last broadhorn and keelboat (Mike

Fink was a legend; soon even the grandfathers would no longer claim to remember him, and the river hero was now the steamboat gambler wading ashore in his draggled finery from the towhead where the captain had marooned him) had been sold piecemeal for firewood in Chartres and Toulouse and Dauphine Street, and Choctaw and Chickasaw braves, in short hair and overalls and armed with mule-whips in place of war-clubs and already packed up to move west to Oklahoma, watched steamboats furrowing even the shallowest and remotest wilderness streams where tumbled gently to the motion of the paddle-wheels, the gutted rock-weighted bones of Hare's and Mason's murderees; a new time, a new age, millennium's beginning; one vast single net of commerce webbed and veined the mid-continent's fluvial embracement; New Orleans, Pittsburgh, and Fort Bridger, Wyoming, were suburbs one to the other, inextricable in destiny; men's mouths were full of law and order, all men's mouths were round with the sound of money; one unanimous golden affirmation ululated the nation's boundless immeasurable forenoon: profit plus regimen equals security: a nation of commonwealths; that crumb, that dome, that gilded pustule, that Idea risen now, suspended like a balloon or a portent or a thundercloud above what used to be wilderness, drawing, holding the eyes of all: Mississippi: a state, a commonwealth; triumvirate in legislative, judiciary, executive, but without a capital, functioning as though from a field headquarters, operating as though still en route toward that high inevitable place in the galaxy of commonwealths, so in 1820 from its field p.c. at Columbia the legislature selected appointed and dispatched the three Commissioners Hinds, Lattimore and Patton, not three politicians and less than any three political time-servers but soldiers engineers and patriots — soldier to cope with the reality, engineer to cope with the aspiration, patriot to hold fast to the dream — three white men in a Choctaw pirogue moving slowly up the empty reaches of a wilderness river as two centuries ago the three Frenchmen had drifted in their Northern birchbark down that vaster and emptier one;

But not drifting, these: paddling: because this was upstream, bearing not volitionless into the unknown mystery and authority, but establishing in the wilderness a point for men to rally to in conscience

and free will, scanning, watching the dense inscrutable banks in their turn too, conscious of the alien incorrigible eyes too perhaps but already rejectant of them, not that the wilderness's dark denizens, already dispossessed at Doak's Stand, were less inveterate now, but because this canoe bore not the meek and bloody cross of Christ and Saint Louis, but the scales the blindfold and the sword — up the river to Le Fleur's Bluff, the trading-post store on the high mild promontory established by the Canadian voyageur, whose name, called and spelled 'Leflore' now, would be borne by the half-French half-Choctaw hereditary first chief of the Choctaw nation who, siding with the white men at the Council of Dancing Rabbit, would remain in Mississippi after his people departed for the west, to become in time among the first of the great slave-holding cotton planters and leave behind him a county and its seat named for himself and a plantation named in honour of a French king's mistress — stopping at last though still paddling slowly to hold the pirogue against the current, looking not up at the dark dispossessed faces watching them from the top of the bluff, but looking staring rather from one to another among themselves in the transfixed boat, saying, 'This is the city. This is the State';

1821, General Hinds and his co-commissioners, with Abraham DeFrance, superintendent of public buildings at Washington, to advise them, laid out the city according to Thomas Jefferson's plan to Territorial Governor Claiborne seventeen years ago, and built the statehouse, thirty by forty feet of brick and clay and native limestone yet large enough to contain the dream; the first legislature convened in it in the new year 1822;

And named the city after the other old hero, hero Hinds' brother-in-arms on beaten British and Seminole fields and presently to be President — the old duellist, the brawling lean fierce mangy durable old lion who set the well-being of the Nation above the White House, and the health of his new political party above either, and above them all set, not his wife's honour, but the principle that honour must be defended whether it was or not since, defended, it was, whether or not; — Jackson, that the new city created not for a city but a central point for the governance of men, might partake of the successful

soldier's courage and endurance and luck, and named the area surrounding it 'Hinds County' after the lesser hero, as the hero's quarters, even empty, not only partake of his dignity but even guard and increase its stature;

And needed them, the luck at least: in 1829 the Senate passed a bill authorising the removal of the capital to Clinton, the House defeated it; in 1830 the House itself voted to move to Port Gibson on the Mississippi, but with the next breath reconsidered, reneged, the following day they voted to move to Vicksburg but nothing came of that either, no records (Sherman burned them in 1863 and notified his superior, General Grant, by note of hand with comfortable and encouraging brevity) to show just what happened this time: a trial, a dry run perhaps or perhaps still enchannelled by a week's or a month's rut of habit or perhaps innocent in juvenility, absent or anyway missing the unanimous voice or presence of the three patriot-dreamers who forced the current and bore the dream, like a child with dynamite: innocent of its own power for alteration: until in 1832, perhaps in simple self-defence or perhaps in simple weariness, a constitution was written designating Jackson as the capital if not in perpetuity at least in escrow until 1850, when (hoped perhaps) a maturer legislature would be composed of maturer men outgrown or anyway become used to the novelty of manipulation;

Which by that time was enough; Jackson was secure, impregnable to simple toyment; fixed and founded strong, it would endure always; men had come there to live and the railroads had followed them, crossing off with steel cancellations the age of the steamboat: in '36 to Vicksburg, in '37 to Natchez, then last of all the junction of two giving a route from New Orleans to Tennessee and the Southern railroad to New York and the Atlantic Ocean; secure and fixed: in 1836 Old Hickory himself addressed the legislature in its own halls, five years later Henry Clay was entertained under that roof; it knew the convention called to consider Clay's last compromise, it saw that Convention in 1861 which declared Mississippi to be the third star in that new galaxy of commonwealth dedicated to the principle that voluntary communities of men shall be not just safe but even secured from Federal meddling,

and knew General Pemberton while defending that principle and right, and Joseph Johnston: and Sherman: and fire: and nothing remained, a City of Chimneys (once pigs rooted in the streets; now rats did) ruled over by a general of the United States Army while the new blood poured in: men who had followed, pressed close the Federal field armies with spoiled grain and tainted meat and spavined mules, now pressing close the Federal provost-marshals with carpet bags stuffed with blank ballot-forms on which freed slaves could mark their formal X's;

But endured; the government, which fled before Sherman in 1863, returned in '65, and even grew too despite the fact that a city government of carpetbaggers held on long after the state as a whole had dispossessed them; in 1869 Tougaloo College for Negroes was founded, in 1884 Jackson College for Negroes was brought from Natchez, in 1898 Campbell College for Negroes removed from Vicksburg: Negro leaders developed by these schools intervened when in 1868 one 'Buzzard' Egglestone instigated the use of troops to drive Governor Humphries from the executive offices and mansion; in 1887 Jackson women sponsored the Kermis Ball lasting three days to raise money for a monument to the Confederate dead; in 1844 Jefferson Davis spoke for his last time in public at the old Capitol; in 1890 the state's greatest convention drew up the present constitution;

And still the people and the railroads: the New Orleans and Great Northern down the Pearl River valley, the Gulf Mobile and Northern north-east; Alabama and the eastern black prairies were almost a commuter's leap and a line to Yazoo City and the upper river towns made of the Great Lakes five suburban ponds; the Gulf and Ship Island opened the south Mississippi lumber boom and Chicago voices spoke among the magnolias and the odour of jasmine and oleander; population doubled and trebled in a decade, in 1892 Millsaps College opened its doors to assume its place among the first establishments for higher learning; then the natural gas and the oil, Texas and Oklahoma licence plates flitted like a migration of birds about the land and the tall flames from the vent-pipes stood like incandescent plumes above the century-cold ashes of Choctaw camp-fires and the vanished imprints of

deer; and in 1903 the new Capitol was completed — the golden dome, the knob, the gleamy crumb, the gilded pustule longer than the miasma and the gigantic ephemeral saurians, more durable than the ice and the pre-night cold, soaring, hanging as one blinding spheroid above the centre of the Commonwealth, incapable of being either looked full or evaded, peremptory, irrefragable, and reassuring;

In the roster of Mississippi names:

Claiborne. Humphries. Dickson. McLaurin. Barksdale. Lamar. Prentiss. Davis. Sartoris. Compson;

In the roster of cities:

JACKSON. Alt. 294 ft. Pop. (a.d. 1950) 201,092.

Railroads: Illinois Central, Yazoo & Mississippi Valley, Alabama & Vicksburg, Gulf & Ship Island.

Bus: Tri-State Transit, Vanardo, Thomas, Greyhound, Dixie-Greyhound, Teche-Greyhound, Oliver.

Air: Delta, Chicago & Southern.

Transport: Street buses, Taxis.

Accommodations: Hotels, Tourist camps, Rooming houses.

Radio: WJDX, WTJS.

Diversions: chronic: S.I.A.A., Basketball Tournament, Music Festival, Junior Auxiliary Follies, May Day Festival, State Tennis Tournament, Red Cross Water Pageant, State Fair, Junior Auxiliary Style Show, Girl Scouts Horse Show, Feast of Carols.

Diversions: acute: Religion, Politics.

Scene I

OFFICE OF THE Governor of the State. 2.00 a.m. March twelfth.

The whole bottom of the stage is in darkness, as in Scene I, Act I, so that the visible scene has the effect of being held in the beam of a spotlight. Suspended too, since it is upper left and even higher above the shadow of the stage proper than the same in Scene I, Act I, carrying still further the symbolism of the still higher, the last, the ultimate seat of judgment.

It is a corner or section of the office of the Governor of the Commonwealth, late at night, about 2 a.m. — a clock on the wall says two minutes past two — a massive flat-topped desk bare except for an ashtray and a telephone, behind it a high-backed heavy chair like a throne; on the wall behind and above the chair, is the emblem, official badge, of the state, sovereignty (a mythical one, since this is rather the state of which Yoknapatawpha County is a unit) — an eagle, the blind scales of justice, a device in Latin perhaps, against a flag. There are two other chairs in front of the desk, turned slightly to face each other, the length of the desk between them.

The Governor stands in front of the high chair, between it and the desk, beneath the emblem on the wall. He is symbolic too: no known person, neither old nor young; he might be someone's idea not of God but of Gabriel perhaps, the Gabriel not before the Crucifixion but after it. He has obviously just been routed out of bed or at least out of his study or dressing-room; he wears a dressing-gown, though there is a collar and tie beneath it, and his hair is neatly combed.

Temple and Stevens have just entered. Temple wears the same fur coat, hat, bag, gloves, etc., as in Scene II, Act I, Stevens is dressed exactly as he was in Scene III, Act I, is carrying his hat. They are moving toward the two chairs at either end of the desk.

STEVENS

Good morning, Henry. Here we are.

GOVERNOR

Yes. Sit down.

(as Temple sits down)

Does Mrs. Stevens smoke?

STEVENS

Yes. Thank you.

He takes a pack of cigarettes from his topcoat pocket, as though he had come prepared for the need, emergency. He works one of them free and extends the pack to Temple. The Governor puts one hand into his

dressing-gown pocket and withdraws it, holding something in his closed fist.

TEMPLE

(takes the cigarette)

What, no blindfold?

(the Governor extends his hand across the desk. It contains a lighter. Temple puts the cigarette into her mouth. The Governor snaps on the lighter)

But of course, the only one waiting execution is back there in Jefferson. So all we need to do here is fire away, and hope that at least the volley rids us of the metaphor.

GOVERNOR

Metaphor?

TEMPLE

The blindfold. The firing squad. Or is metaphor wrong? Or maybe it's the joke. But don't apologise; a joke that has to be diagrammed is like trying to excuse an egg, isn't it? The only thing you can do is, bury them both, quick.

(the Governor approaches the flame to Temple's cigarette. She leans and accepts the light, then sits back)

Thanks.

The Governor closes the lighter, sits down in the tall chair behind the desk, still holding the lighter in his hand, his hands resting on the desk before him. Stevens sits down in the other chair across from Temple, laying the pack of cigarettes on the desk beside him.

GOVERNOR

What has Mrs. Gowan Stevens to tell me?

TEMPLE

Not tell you: ask you. No, that's wrong. I could have asked you to revoke or commute or whatever you do to a sentence to hang when we — Uncle Gavin telephoned you last night.

(to Stevens)

Go on. Tell him. Aren't you the mouthpiece? — isn't that how you say it? Don't lawyers always tell their patients — I mean clients — never to say anything at all: to let them do all the talking?

GOVERNOR

That's only before the client enters the witness stand.

TEMPLE

So this is the witness stand.

GOVERNOR

You have come all the way here from Jefferson at two o'clock in the morning. What would you call it?

TEMPLE

All right. Touché then. But not Mrs. Gowan Stevens: Temple Drake. You remember Temple: the all-Mississippi debutante whose finishing school was the Memphis sporting house? About eight years ago, remember? Not that anyone, certainly not the sovereign state of Mississippi's first paid servant, need be reminded of that, provided they could read newspapers eight years ago or were kin to somebody who could read eight years ago or even had a friend who could or even just hear or even just remember or just believe the worst or even just hope for it.

GOVERNOR

I think I remember. What has Temple Drake to tell me then?

TEMPLE

That's not first. The first thing is, how much will I have to tell? I mean, how much of it that you don't already know, so that I won't be wasting all of our times telling it over? It's two o'clock in the morning; you want to — maybe even need to — sleep some, even if you are our first paid servant; maybe even because of that — — You see? I'm already lying. What does it matter to me how much sleep the state's first paid servant loses, any more than it matters to the first paid servant, a part of whose job is being paid to lose sleep over the Nancy Mannigoes and Temple Drakes?

STEVENS

Not lying.

TEMPLE

All right. Stalling, then. So maybe if his excellency or his honour or whatever they call him, will answer the question, we can get on.

STEVENS

Why not let the question go, and just get on?

GOVERNOR

(to Temple)

Ask me your question. How much of what do I already know?

TEMPLE

(after a moment: she doesn't answer at first, staring at the Governor: then:)

Uncle Gavin's right. Maybe you are the one to ask the questions. Only, make it as painless as possible. Because it's going to be a little . . . painful, to put it euphoniously — at least 'euphonious' is right, isn't it? — no matter who bragged about blindfolds.

GOVERNOR

Tell me about Nancy — Mannihoe, Mannikoe — how does she spell it?

TEMPLE

She doesn't. She can't. She can't read or write either. You are hanging her under Mannigoe, which may be wrong too, though after tomorrow morning it won't matter.

GOVERNOR

Oh yes, Manigault. The old Charleston name.

STEVENS

Older than that. Maingault. Nancy's heritage — or anyway her patronym — runs Norman blood.

GOVERNOR

Why not start by telling me about her?

TEMPLE

You are so wise. She was a dope-fiend whore that my husband and I took out of the gutter to nurse our children. She murdered one of them and is to be hung tomorrow morning. We — her lawyer and I — have come to ask you to save her.

GOVERNOR

Yes. I know all that. Why?

TEMPLE

Why am I, the mother whose child she murdered, asking you to save her? Because I have forgiven her.

(the Governor watches her, he and Stevens both do, waiting. She stares back at the Governor steadily, not defiant: just alert)

Because she was crazy.

(the Governor watches her: she stares back, puffing rapidly at the cigarette)

All right. You don't mean why I am asking you to save her, but why I — we hired a whore and a tramp and a dope-fiend to nurse our children.

(she puffs rapidly, talking through the smoke)

To give her another chance — a human being too, even a nigger dope-fiend whore — —

STEVENS

Nor that, either.

TEMPLE

(rapidly, with a sort of despair)

Oh yes, not even stalling now. Why can't you stop lying? You know: just stop for a while or a time like you can stop playing tennis or running or dancing or drinking or eating sweets during Lent. You know: not to reform: just to quit for a while, clear your system, rest up for a new tune or set or lie? All right. It was to have someone to talk to. And now you see? I'll have to tell the rest of it in order to tell you why I had to have a dope-fiend whore to talk to, why Temple Drake, the white woman, the all-Mississippi debutante, descendant of long lines of statesmen and soldiers high and proud in the high proud annals of our sovereign state, couldn't find anybody except a nigger dope-fiend whore that could speak her language — —

GOVERNOR

Yes. This far, this late at night. Tell it.

TEMPLE

(she puffs rapidly at the cigarette, leans and crushes it out in the ashtray and sits erect again. She speaks in a hard rapid brittle emotionless voice)

Whore, dope-fiend; hopeless, already damned before she was ever born, whose only reason for living was to get the chance to die a murderess on the gallows. — Who not only entered the home of the socialite Gowan Stevenses out of the gutter, but made her debut into

the public life of her native city while lying in the gutter with a white man trying to kick her teeth or at least her voice back down her throat. — You remember, Gavin: what was his name? it was before my time in Jefferson, but you remember: the cashier in the bank, the pillar of the church or anyway in the name of his childless wife; and this Monday morning and still drunk, Nancy comes up while he is unlocking the front door of the bank and fifty people standing at his back to get in, and Nancy comes into the crowd and right up to him and says, ‘Where’s my two dollars, white man?’ and he turned and struck her, knocked her across the pavement into the gutter and then ran after her, stomping and kicking at her face or anyway her voice which was still saying ‘Where’s my two dollars, white man?’ until the crowd caught and held him still kicking at the face lying in the gutter, spitting blood and teeth and still saying, ‘It was two dollars more than two weeks ago and you done been back twice since’ — —

She stops speaking, presses both hands to her face for an instant, then removes them.

No, no handkerchief; Lawyer Stevens and I made a dry run on handkerchiefs before we left home tonight. Where was I?

GOVERNOR

(quotes her)

‘It was already two dollars’ — —

TEMPLE

So now I’ve got to tell all of it. Because that was just Nancy Mannigoe. Temple Drake was in more than just a two-dollar Saturday-night house. But then, I said touché, didn’t I?

She leans forward and starts to take up the crushed cigarette from the ashtray. Stevens picks up the pack from the desk and prepares to offer it to her. She withdraws her hand from the crushed cigarette and sits back.

(to the proffered cigarette in Stevens’ hand)

No, thanks; I won’t need it, after all. From here out, it’s merely anticlimax. Coup de grâce. The victim never feels that, does he? —
Where was I?

(quickly)

Never mind. I said that before too, didn't I?

(she sits for a moment, her hands gripped in her lap, motionless)

There seems to be some of this, quite a lot of this, which even our first paid servant is not up on; maybe because he has been our first paid servant for less than two years yet. Though that's wrong too; he could read eight years ago, couldn't he? In fact, he couldn't have been elected Governor of even Mississippi if he hadn't been able to read at least three years in advance, could he?

STEVENS

Temple.

TEMPLE

(to Stevens)

Why not? It's just stalling, isn't it?

GOVERNOR

(watching Temple)

Hush, Gavin.

(to Temple)

Coup de grâce not only means mercy, but is. Deliver it. Give her the cigarette, Gavin.

TEMPLE

(sits forward again)

No, thanks. Really.

(after a second)

Sorry.

(quickly)

You'll notice, I always remember to say that, always remember my manners,— 'raising' as we put it. Showing that I really sprang from gentlefolks, not Norman knights like Nancy did, but at least people who don't insult the host in his own house, especially at two o'clock in the morning. Only, I just sprang too far, where Nancy merely stumbled modestly: a lady again, you see.

(after a moment)

There again. I'm not even stalling now: I'm faulting — what do they call it? burking. You know: here we are at the fence again; we've got to jump it this time, or crash. You know: slack the snaffle, let her mouth it a little, take hold, a light hold, just enough to have something to jump against; then touch her. So here we are, right back where we started, and so we can start over. So how much will I have to tell, say, speak out loud so that anybody with ears can hear it, about Temple Drake that I never thought that anything on earth, least of all the murder of my child and the execution of a nigger dope-fiend whore, would ever make me tell? That I came here at two o'clock in the morning to wake you up to listen to, after eight years of being safe, or at least quiet? You know: how much will I have to tell, to make it good and painful of course, but quick too, so that you can revoke or commute the sentence or whatever you do to it, and we can all go back home to sleep or at least to bed? Painful of course, but just painful enough — I think you said 'euphoniously' was right, didn't you?

GOVERNOR

Death is painful. A shameful one, even more so — which is not too euphonious, even at best.

TEMPLE

Oh, death. We're not talking about death now. We're talking about shame. Nancy Mannigoe has no shame; all she has is, to die. But touché for me too; haven't I brought Temple Drake all the way here at two o'clock in the morning for the reason that all Nancy Mannigoe has, is to die?

STEVENS

Tell him, then.

TEMPLE

He hasn't answered my question yet.

(to Governor)

Try to answer it. How much will I have to tell? Don't just say 'everything'. I've already heard that.

GOVERNOR

I know who Temple Drake was: the young woman student at the University eight years ago who left the school one morning on a special

train of students to attend a baseball game at another college, and disappeared from the train somewhere during its run, and vanished, nobody knew where, until she reappeared six weeks later as a witness in a murder trial in Jefferson, produced by the lawyer of the man who, it was then learned, had abducted her and held her prisoner — —

TEMPLE

— in the Memphis sporting house: don't forget that.

GOVERNOR

— in order to produce her to prove his alibi in the murder — —

TEMPLE

— that Temple Drake knew had done the murder for the very good reason that — —

STEVENS

Wait. Let me play too. She got off the train at the instigation of a young man who met the train at an intermediate stop with an automobile, the plan being to drive on to the ball game in the car, except that the young man was drunk at the time and got drunker, and wrecked the car and stranded both of them at the moonshiner's house where the murder happened, and from which the murderer kidnapped her and carried her to Memphis, to hold her until he would need his alibi. Afterward he — the young man with the automobile, her escort and protector at the moment of the abduction — married her. He is her husband now. He is my nephew.

TEMPLE

(to Stevens, bitterly)

You too. So wise too. Why can't you believe in truth? At least that I'm trying to tell it. At least trying now to tell it.

(to Governor)

Where was I?

GOVERNOR

(quotes)

That Temple Drake knew had done the murder for the very good reason that — —

TEMPLE

Oh yes — for the very good reason that she saw him do it, or at least his shadow: and so produced by his lawyer in the Jefferson courtroom so that she could swear away the life of the man who was accused of it. Oh yes, that's the one. And now I've already told you something you nor nobody else but the Memphis lawyer knew, and I haven't even started. You see? I can't even bargain with you. You haven't even said yes or no yet, whether you can save her or not, whether you want to save her or not, will consider saving her or not; which, if either of us, Temple Drake or Mrs. Gowan Stevens either, had any sense, would have demanded first of you.

GOVERNOR

Do you want to ask me that first?

TEMPLE

I can't. I don't dare. You might say no.

GOVERNOR

Then you wouldn't have to tell me about Temple Drake.

TEMPLE

I've got to do that. I've got to say it all, or I wouldn't be here. But unless I can still believe that you might say yes, I don't see how I can. Which is another touché for somebody: God, maybe — if there is one. You see? That's what's so terrible. We don't even need Him. Simple evil is enough. Even after eight years, it's still enough. It was eight years ago that Uncle Gavin said — oh yes, he was there too; didn't you just hear him? He could have told you all of this or anyway most of it over the telephone and you could be in bed asleep right this minute — said how there is a corruption even in just looking at evil, even by accident; that you can't haggle, traffic, with putrefaction — you can't, you don't dare —

(she stops, tense, motionless)

GOVERNOR

Take the cigarette now.

(to Stevens)

Gavin —

(Stevens takes up the pack and prepares to offer the cigarette)

TEMPLE

No, thanks. It's too late now. Because here we go. If we can't jump the fence, we can at least break through it — —

STEVENS

(interrupts)

Which means that anyway one of us will get over standing up.

(as Temple reacts)

Oh yes, I'm still playing; I'm going to ride this one too. Go ahead.

(prompting)

Temple Drake — —

TEMPLE

— Temple Drake, the foolish virgin; that is, a virgin as far as anybody went on record to disprove, but a fool certainly by anybody's standards and computation; seventeen, and more of a fool than simply being a virgin or even being seventeen could excuse or account for; indeed, showing herself capable of a height of folly which even seven or three, let alone mere virginity, could scarcely have matched — —

STEVENS

Give the brute a chance. Try at least to ride him at the fence and not just through it.

TEMPLE

You mean the Virginia gentlemen.

(to Governor)

That's my husband. He went to the University of Virginia, trained, Uncle Gavin would say, at Virginia not only in drinking but in gentility too — —

STEVENS

— and ran out of both at the same instant that day eight years ago when he took her off the train and wrecked the car at the moonshiner's house.

TEMPLE

But relapsed into one of them at least because at least he married me as soon as he could.

(to Stevens)

You don't mind my telling his excellency that, do you?

STEVENS

A relapse into both of them. He hasn't had a drink since that day either. His excellency might bear that in mind too.

GOVERNOR

I will. I have.

(he makes just enough of a pause to cause them both to stop and look at him)

I almost wish — —

(they are both watching him; this is the first intimation we have that something is going on here, an undercurrent: that the Governor and Stevens know something which Temple doesn't: to Temple)

He didn't come with you.

STEVENS

(mildly yet quickly)

Won't there be time for that later, Henry?

TEMPLE

(quick, defiant, suspicious, hard)

Who didn't?

GOVERNOR

Your husband.

TEMPLE

(quick and hard)

Why?

GOVERNOR

You have come here to plead for the life of the murderess of your child. Your husband was its parent too.

TEMPLE

You're wrong. We didn't come here at two o'clock in the morning to save Nancy Mannigoe. Nancy Mannigoe is not even concerned in this because Nancy Mannigoe's lawyer told me before we ever left Jefferson that you were not going to save Nancy Mannigoe. What we came here and waked you up at two o'clock in the morning for is just to give Temple Drake a good fair honest chance to suffer — you know: just anguish for the sake of anguish, like that Russian or somebody who wrote a whole book about suffering, not suffering for or about anything, just suffering, like somebody unconscious not really breathing for anything but just breathing. Or maybe that's wrong too and nobody

really cares, suffers, any more about suffering than they do about truth or justice or Temple Drake's shame or Nancy Mannigoe's worthless nigger life — —

She stops speaking, sitting quite still, erect in the chair, her face raised slightly, not looking at either of them while they watch her.

GOVERNOR

Give her the handkerchief now.

Stevens takes a fresh handkerchief from his pocket, shakes it out and extends it toward Temple. She does not move, her hands still clasped in her lap. Stevens rises, crosses, drops the handkerchief into her lap, returns to his chair.

TEMPLE

Thanks really. But it doesn't matter now; we're too near the end; you could almost go on down to the car and start it and have the engine warming up while I finish.

(to Governor)

You see? All you'll have to do now is just be still and listen. Or not even listen if you don't want to: but just be still, just wait. And not long either now, and then we can all go to bed and turn off the light. And then, night: dark, sleep even maybe, when with the same arm you turn off the light and pull the covers up with, you can put away forever Temple Drake and whatever it is you have done about her, and Nancy Mannigoe and whatever it is you have done about her, if you're going to do anything, if it even matters anyhow whether you do anything or not, and none of it will ever have to bother us any more. Because Uncle Gavin was only partly right. It's not that you must never even look on evil and corruption; sometimes you can't help that, you are not always warned. It's not even that you must resist it always. Because you've got to start much sooner than that. You've got to be already prepared to resist it, say no to it, long before you see it; you must have already said no to it long before you even know what it is. I'll have the cigarette now, please.

Stevens takes up the pack, rising and working the end of a cigarette free, and extends the pack. She takes the cigarette, already speaking

again while Stevens puts the pack on the desk and takes up the lighter which the Governor, watching Temple, shoves across the desk where Stevens can reach it. Stevens snaps the lighter on and holds it out. Temple makes no effort to light the cigarette, holding the cigarette in her hand and talking. Then she lays the cigarette unlighted on the ashtray and Stevens closes the lighter and sits down again, putting the lighter down beside the pack of cigarettes.

Because Temple Drake liked evil. She only went to the ball game because she would have to get on a train to do it, so that she could slip off the train the first time it stopped, and get into the car to drive a hundred miles with a man — —

STEVENS

— who couldn't hold his drink.

TEMPLE

(to Stevens)

All right. Aren't I just saying that?

(to Governor)

An optimist. Not the young man; he was just doing the best he knew, could. It wasn't him that suggested the trip: it was Temple — —

STEVENS

It was his car though. Or his mother's.

TEMPLE

(to Stevens)

All right. All right.

(to Governor)

No, Temple was the optimist: not that she had foreseen, planned ahead either: she just had unbounded faith that her father and brothers would know evil when they saw it, so all she had to do was, do the one thing which she knew they would forbid her to do if they had the chance. And they were right about the evil, and so of course she was right too, though even then it was not easy: she even had to drive the car for a while after we began to realise that the young man was wrong, had graduated too soon in the drinking part of his Virginia training — —

STEVENS

It was Gowan who knew the moonshiner and insisted on going there.

TEMPLE

— and even then ——

STEVENS

He was driving when you wrecked.

TEMPLE

(to Stevens: quick and harsh)

And married me for it. Does he have to pay for it twice? It wasn't really worth paying for once, was it?

(to Governor)

And even then ——

GOVERNOR

How much was it worth?

TEMPLE

Was what worth?

GOVERNOR

His marrying you.

TEMPLE

You mean to him, of course. Less than he paid for it.

GOVERNOR

Is that what he thinks too?

(they stare at one another, Temple alert, quite watchful, though rather impatient than anything else)

You're going to tell me something that he doesn't know, else you would have brought him with you. Is that right?

TEMPLE

Yes.

GOVERNOR

Would you tell it if he were here?

(Temple is staring at the Governor. Unnoticed by her, Stevens makes a faint movement. The Governor stops him with a slight motion of one hand which also Temple does not notice)

Now that you have come this far, now that, as you said, you have got to tell it, say it aloud, not to save Nan — this woman, but because you

decided before you left home tonight that there is nothing else to do but tell it.

TEMPLE

How do I know whether I would or not?

GOVERNOR

Suppose he was here — sitting in that chair where Gav — your uncle is — —

TEMPLE

— or behind the door or in one of your desk drawers, maybe? He's not. He's at home. I gave him a sleeping pill.

GOVERNOR

But suppose he was, now that you have got to say it. Would you still say it?

TEMPLE

All right. Yes. Now will you please shut up too and let me tell it? How can I, if you and Gavin won't hush and let me? I can't even remember where I was. — Oh yes. So I saw the murder, or anyway the shadow of it, and the man took me to Memphis, and I know that too, I had two legs and I could see, and I could have simply screamed up the main street of any of the little towns we passed, just as I could have walked away from the car after Gow — we ran it into the tree, and stopped a wagon or a car which would have carried me to the nearest town or railroad station or even back to school or, for that matter, right on back home into my father's or brothers' hands. But not me, not Temple. I chose the murderer — —

STEVENS

(to Governor)

He was a psychopath, though that didn't come out in the trial, and when it did come out, or could have come out, it was too late. I was there; I saw that too: a little black thing with an Italian name, like a neat and only slightly deformed cockroach: a hybrid, sexually incapable. But then, she will tell you that too.

TEMPLE

(with bitter sarcasm)

Dear Uncle Gavin.

(to Governor)

Oh yes, that too, her bad luck too: to plump for a thing which didn't even have sex for his weakness, but just murder —
(she stops, sitting motionless, erect, her hands clenched on her lap, her eyes closed)

If you both would just hush, just let me, I seem to be like trying to drive a hen into a barrel. Maybe if you would just try to act like you wanted to keep her out of it, from going into it —

GOVERNOR

Don't call it a barrel. Call it a tunnel. That's a thoroughfare, because the other end is open too. Go through it. There was no — sex.

TEMPLE

Not from him. He was worse than a father or uncle. It was worse than being the wealthy ward of the most indulgent trust or insurance company: carried to Memphis and shut up in that Manuel Street sporting house like a ten-year-old bride in a Spanish convent, with the madam herself more eagle-eyed than any mama — and the Negro maid to guard the door while the madam would be out, to wherever she would go, wherever the madams of cat houses go on their afternoons out, to pay police-court fines or protection or to the bank or maybe just visiting, which would not be so bad because the maid would unlock the door and come inside and we could —

(she falters, pauses for less than a second; then quickly)

Yes, that's why — talk. A prisoner of course, and maybe not in a very gilded cage, but at least the prisoner was. I had perfume by the quart; some salesgirl chose it of course, and it was the wrong kind, but at least I had it, and he bought me a fur coat — with nowhere to wear it of course because he wouldn't let me out, but I had the coat — and snazzy underwear and negligees, selected also by salesgirls but at least the best or anyway the most expensive — the taste at least of the big end of an underworld big shot's wallet. Because he wanted me to be contented, you see; and not only contented, he didn't even mind if I was happy too: just so I was there when or in case the police finally connected him with that Mississippi murder; not only didn't mind if I was happy; he even made the effort himself to see that I was. And so at last we have come to it, because now I have got to tell you this too to

give you a valid reason why I waked you up at two in the morning to ask you to save a murderess.

She stops speaking, reaches and takes the unlighted cigarette from the tray, then realises it is unlit. Stevens takes up the lighter from the desk and starts to get up. Still watching Temple, the Governor makes to Stevens a slight arresting signal with his hand. Stevens pauses, then pushes the lighter along the desk to where Temple can reach it, and sits back down. Temple takes the lighter, snaps it on, lights the cigarette, closes the lighter and puts it back on the desk. But after only one puff at the cigarette, she lays it back on the tray and sits again as before, speaking again.

Because I still had the two arms and legs and eyes; I could have climbed down the rainspout at any time, the only difference being that I didn't. I would never leave the room except late at night, when he would come in a closed car the size of an undertaker's wagon, and he and the chauffeur on the front seat, and me and the madam in the back, rushing at forty and fifty and sixty miles an hour up and down the back alleys of the redlight district. Which — the back alleys — was all I ever saw of them too. I was not even permitted to meet or visit with or even see the other girls in my own house, not even to sit with them after work and listen to the shop talk while they counted their chips or blisters or whatever they would do sitting on one another's beds in the elected dormitory. . . .

(she pauses again, continues in a sort of surprise, amazement)
Yes, it was like the dormitory at school: the smell: of women, young women all busy thinking not about men but just man: only a little stronger, a little calmer, less excited — sitting on the temporarily idle beds discussing the exigencies — that's surely the right one, isn't it? — of their trade. But not me, not Temple: shut up in that room twenty-four hours a day, with nothing to do but hold fashion shows in the fur coat and the flashy pants and negligees, with nothing to see it but a two-foot mirror and a Negro maid; hanging bone dry and safe in the middle of sin and pleasure like being suspended twenty fathoms deep in an ocean diving bell. Because he wanted her to be contented, you

see. He even made the last effort himself. But Temple didn't want to be just contented. So she had to do what us sporting girls call fall in love.

GOVERNOR

Ah.

STEVENS

That's right.

TEMPLE

(quickly: to Stevens)

Hush.

STEVENS

(to Temple)

Hush yourself.

(to Governor)

He — Vitelli — they called him Popeye — brought the man there himself. He — the young man —

TEMPLE

Gavin! No, I tell you!

STEVENS

(to Temple)

You are drowning in an orgasm of abjectness and moderation when all you need is truth.

(to Governor)

— was known in his own circles as Red, Alabama Red; not to the police, or not officially, since he was not a criminal, or anyway not yet, but just a thug, probably cursed more by simple eupepsia than by anything else. He was a houseman — the bouncer — at the nightclub, joint, on the outskirts of town, which Popeye owned and which was Popeye's headquarters. He died shortly afterward in the alley behind Temple's prison, of a bullet from the same pistol which had done the Mississippi murder, though Popeye too was dead, hanged in Alabama for a murder he did not commit, before the pistol was ever found and connected with him.

GOVERNOR

I see. This — Popeye —

STEVENS

— discovered himself betrayed by one of his own servants, and took a princely vengeance on his honour's smircher? You will be wrong. You underrate this précieux, this flower, this jewel. Vitelli. What a name for him. A hybrid, impotent. He was hanged the next year, to be sure. But even that was wrong: his very effacement debasing, flouting, even what dignity man has been able to lend to necessary human abolishment. He should have been crushed somehow under a vast and mindless boot, like a spider. He didn't sell her; you violate and outrage his very memory with that crass and material impugment. He was a purist, an amateur always: he did not even murder for base profit. It was not even for simple lust. He was a gourmet, a sybarite, centuries, perhaps hemispheres before his time; in spirit and glands he was of that age of princely despots to whom the ability even to read was vulgar and plebeian and, reclining on silk amid silken airs and scents, had eunuch slaves for that office, commanding death to the slave at the end of each reading, each evening, that none else alive, even a eunuch slave, shall have shared in, partaken of, remembered, the poem's evocation.

GOVERNOR

I don't think I understand.

STEVENS

Try to. Uncheck your capacity for rage and revulsion — the sort of rage and revulsion it takes to step on a worm. If Vitelli cannot evoke that in you, his life will have been indeed a desert.

TEMPLE

Or don't try to. Just let it go. Just for God's sake let it go. I met the man, how doesn't matter, and I fell what I called in love with him and what it was or what I called it doesn't matter either because all that matters is that I wrote the letters — —

GOVERNOR

I see. This is the part that her husband didn't know.

TEMPLE

(to Governor)

And what does that matter either? Whether he knows or not? What can another face or two or name or two matter, since he knows that I

lived for six weeks in a Manuel Street brothel? Or another body or two in the bed? Or three or four? I'm trying to tell it, enough of it. Can't you see that? But can't you make him let me alone so I can. Make him, for God's sake, let me alone.

GOVERNOR

(to Stevens: watching Temple)

No more, Gavin.

(to Temple)

So you fell in love.

TEMPLE

Thank you for that. I mean, the 'love.' Except that I didn't even fall, I was already there: the bad, the lost: who could have climbed down the gutter or lightning rod any time and got away, or even simpler than that: disguised myself as the nigger maid with a stack of towels and a bottle opener and change for ten dollars, and walked right out the front door. So I wrote the letters. I would write one each time . . . afterward, after they — he left, and sometimes I would write two or three when it would be two or three days between, when they — he wouldn't —

GOVERNOR

What? What's that?

TEMPLE

— you know: something to do, be doing, filling the time, better than the fashion parades in front of the two-foot glass with nobody to be disturbed even by the . . . pants, or even no pants. Good letters —

GOVERNOR

Wait. What did you say?

TEMPLE

I said they were good letters, even for —

GOVERNOR

You said, after they left.

(they look at one another. Temple doesn't answer: to Stevens, though still watching Temple)

Am I being told that this . . . Vitelli would be there in the room too?

STEVENS

Yes. That was why he brought him. You can see now what I meant by connoisseur and gourmet.

GOVERNOR

And what you meant by the boot too. But he's dead. You know that.

STEVENS

Oh yes. He's dead. And I said 'purist' too. To the last: hanged the next summer in Alabama for a murder he didn't even commit and which nobody involved in the matter really believed he had committed, only not even his lawyer could persuade him to admit that he couldn't have done it if he had wanted to, or wouldn't have done it if the notion had struck him. Oh yes, he's dead too; we haven't come here for vengeance.

GOVERNOR

(to Temple)

Yes. Go on. The letters.

TEMPLE

The letters. They were good letters. I mean — good ones.

(staring steadily at the Governor)

What I'm trying to say is, they were the kind of letters that if you had written them to a man, even eight years ago, you wouldn't — would — rather your husband didn't see them, no matter what he thought about your — past.

(still staring at the Governor as she makes her painful confession)

Better than you would expect from a seventeen-year-old amateur. I mean, you would have wondered how anybody just seventeen and not even through freshman in college, could have learned the — right words. Though all you would have needed probably would be an old dictionary from back in Shakespeare's time when, so they say, people hadn't learned how to blush at words. That is, anybody except Temple Drake, who didn't need a dictionary, who was a fast learner and so even just one lesson would have been enough for her, let alone three or four or a dozen or two or three dozen.

(staring at the Governor)

No, not even one lesson because the bad was already there waiting, who hadn't even heard yet that you must be already resisting the corruption not only before you look at it but before you even know what it is, what you are resisting. So I wrote the letters, I don't know how many, enough, more than enough because just one would have been enough. And that's all.

GOVERNOR

All?

TEMPLE

Yes. You've certainly heard of blackmail. The letters turned up again of course. And of course, being Temple Drake, the first way to buy them back that Temple Drake thought of, was to produce the material for another set of them.

STEVENS

(to Temple)

Yes, that's all. But you've got to tell him why it's all.

TEMPLE

I thought I had. I wrote some letters that you would have thought that even Temple Drake might have been ashamed to put on paper, and then the man I wrote them to died, and I married another man and reformed, or thought I had, and bore two children and hired another reformed whore so that I would have somebody to talk to, and I even thought I had forgotten about the letters until they turned up again and then I found out that I not only hadn't forgot about the letters, I hadn't even reformed — —

STEVENS

All right. Do you want me to tell it, then?

TEMPLE

And you were the one preaching moderation.

STEVENS

I was preaching against orgasms of it.

TEMPLE

(bitterly)

Oh, I know. Just suffering. Not for anything: just suffering. Just because it's good for you, like calomel or ipecac.

(to Governor)

All right. What?

GOVERNOR

The young man died — —

TEMPLE

Oh yes. — Died, shot from a car while he was slipping up the alley behind the house, to climb up the same drainpipe I could have climbed down at any time and got away, to see me — the one time, the first time, the only time when we thought we had dodged, fooled him, could be alone together, just the two of us, after all the . . . other ones. — If love can be, mean anything, except the newness, the learning, the peace, the privacy: no shame: not even conscious that you are naked because you are just using the nakedness because that's a part of it; then he was dead, killed, shot down right in the middle of thinking about me, when in just one more minute maybe he would have been in the room with me, when all of him except just his body was already in the room with me and the door locked at last for just the two of us alone; and then it was all over and as though it had never been, happened: it had to be as though it had never happened, except that that was even worse — —

(rapidly)

Then the courtroom in Jefferson and I didn't care, not about anything any more, and my father and brothers waiting and then the year in Europe, Paris, and I still didn't care, and then after a while it really did get easier. You know. People are lucky. They are wonderful. At first you think that you can bear only so much and then you will be free. Then you find out that you can bear anything, you really can and then it won't even matter. Because suddenly it could be as if it had never been, never happened. You know: somebody — Hemingway, wasn't it? —

wrote a book about how it had never actually happened to a girl — woman, if she just refused to accept it, no matter who remembered, bragged. And besides, the ones who could — remember — were both dead. Then Gowan came to Paris that winter and we were married — at the Embassy, with a reception afterward at the Crillon, and if that

couldn't fumigate an American past, what else this side of heaven could you hope for to remove stink? Not to mention a new automobile and a honeymoon in a rented hideaway built for his European mistress by a Mohammedan prince at Cap Ferrat. Only — —

(she pauses, falters, for just an instant, then goes on)

— we — I thought we — I didn't want to efface the stink really — —

(rapidly now, tense, erect, her hands gripped again into fists on her lap)

You know: just the marriage would be enough: not the Embassy and the Crillon and Cap Ferrat but just to kneel down, the two of us, and say 'We have sinned, forgive us.' And then maybe there would be the love this time — the peace, the quiet, the no shame that I . . . didn't — missed that other time — —

(falters again, then rapidly again, glib and succinct)

Love, but more than love too: not depending on just love to hold two people together, make them better than either one would have been alone, but tragedy, suffering, having suffered and caused grief; having something to have to live with even when, because you knew both of you could never forget it. And then I began to believe something even more than that: that there was something even better, stronger, than tragedy to hold two people together: forgiveness. Only that seemed to be wrong. Only maybe it wasn't the forgiveness that was wrong, but the gratitude; and maybe the only thing worse than having to give gratitude constantly all the time, is having to accept it — —

STEVENS

Which is exactly backward. What was wrong wasn't — —

GOVERNOR

Gavin.

STEVENS

Shut up yourself, Henry. What was wrong wasn't Temple's good name. It wasn't even her husband's conscience. It was his vanity: the Virginia-trained aristocrat caught with his gentility around his knees like the guest in the trick Hollywood bathroom. So the forgiving wasn't enough for him, or perhaps he hadn't read Hemingway's book. Because after

about a year, his restiveness under the onus of accepting the gratitude began to take the form of doubting the paternity of their child.

TEMPLE

Oh God. Oh God.

GOVERNOR

Gavin.

(Stevens stops.)

No more, I said. Call that an order.

(to Temple)

Yes. Tell me.

TEMPLE

I'm trying to. I expected our main obstacle in this would be the bereaved plaintiff. Apparently though it's the defendant's lawyer. I mean, I'm trying to tell you about one Temple Drake, and our Uncle Gavin is showing you another one. So already you've got two different people begging for the same clemency; if everybody concerned keeps on splitting up into two people, you won't even know who to pardon, will you? And now that I mention it, here we are, already back to Nancy Mannigoe, and now surely it shouldn't take long. Let's see, we'd got back to Jefferson too, hadn't we? Anyway, we are now. I mean, back in Jefferson, back home. You know: face it: the disgrace: the shame, face it down, good and down forever, never to haunt us more; together, a common front to stink because we love each other and have forgiven all, strong in our love and mutual forgiveness. Besides having everything else: the Gowan Stevenses, young, popular: a new bungalow on the right street to start the Saturday night hangovers in, a country club with a country-club younger set of rallying friends to make it a Saturday-night hangover worthy the name of Saturday-night country-club hangover, a pew in the right church to recover from it in, provided of course they were not too hungover even to get to church. Then the son and heir came; and now we have Nancy: nurse: guide: mentor, catalyst, glue, whatever you want to call it, holding the whole lot of them together — not just a magnetic centre for the heir apparent and the other little princes or princesses in their orderly succession, to circle around, but for the two bigger hunks too of mass or matter or dirt or

whatever it is shaped in the image of God, in a semblance at least of order and respectability and peace; not ole cradle-rocking black mammy at all, because the Gowan Stevenses are young and modern, so young and modern that all the other young country-club set applauded when they took an ex-dope-fiend nigger whore out of the gutter to nurse their children, because the rest of the young country-club set didn't know that it wasn't the Gowan Stevenses but Temple Drake who had chosen the ex-dope-fiend nigger whore for the reason that an ex-dope-fiend nigger whore was the only animal in Jefferson that spoke Temple Drake's language — —

(quickly takes up the burning cigarette from the tray and puffs at it, talking through the puffs)

Oh yes, I'm going to tell this too. A confidante. You know: the big-time ball player, the idol on the pedestal, the worshipped; and the worshipper, the acolyte, the one that never had and never would, no matter how willing or how hard she tried, get out of the sandlots, the bush league. You know: the long afternoons, with the last electric button pressed on the last cooking or washing or sweeping gadget and the baby safely asleep for a while, and the two sisters in sin swapping trade or anyway avocational secrets over Coca-Colas in the quiet kitchen. Somebody to talk to, as we all seem to need, want, have to have, not to converse with you nor even agree with you, but just keep quiet and listen.

Which is all that people really want, really need; I mean, to behave themselves, keep out of one another's hair; the maladjustments which they tell us breed the arsonists and rapists and murderers and thieves and the rest of the antisocial enemies, are not really maladjustments but simply because the embryonic murderers and thieves didn't have anybody to listen to them: which is an idea the Catholic Church discovered two thousand years ago only it just didn't carry it far enough or maybe it was too busy being the Church to have time to bother with man, or maybe it wasn't the Church's fault at all but simply because it had to deal with human beings and maybe if the world was just populated with a kind of creature half of which were dumb, couldn't do

anything but listen, couldn't even escape from having to listen to the other half, there wouldn't even be any war. Which was what Temple had: somebody paid by the week, just to listen, which you would have thought would have been enough; and then the other baby came, the infant, the doomed sacrifice (though of course we don't know that yet) and you would have thought that this was surely enough, that now even Temple Drake would consider herself safe, could be depended on, having two — what do sailors call them? oh yes, sheet-anchors — now. Only it wasn't enough. Because Hemingway was right. I mean, the girl — woman in his book. All you have got to do is, refuse to accept. Only, you have got to . . . refuse — —

STEVENS

Now, the letters — —

GOVERNOR

(watching Temple)

Be quiet, Gavin.

STEVENS

No, I'm going to talk a while now. We'll even stick to the sports metaphor and call it a relay race, with the senior member of the team carrying the . . . baton, twig, switch, sapling, tree — whatever you want to call the symbolical wood, up what remains of the symbolical hill.

(the lights flicker, grow slightly dimmer, then flare back up and steady again, as though in a signal, a warning)

The letters. The blackmail. The blackmailer was Red's younger brother — a criminal of course, but at least a man — —

TEMPLE

No! No!

STEVENS

(to Temple)

Be quiet too. It only goes up a hill, not over a precipice. Besides, it's only a stick. The letters were not first. The first thing was the gratitude. And now we have even come to the husband, my nephew. And when I say 'past,' I mean that part of it which the husband knows so far, which

apparently was enough in his estimation. Because it was not long before she discovered, realised, that she was going to spend a good part of the rest of her days (nights too) being forgiven for it; in being not only constantly reminded — well, maybe not specifically reminded, but say made — kept — aware of it in order to be forgiven for it so that she might be grateful to the forgiver, but in having to employ more and more of what tact she had — and the patience which she probably didn't know she had, since until now she had never occasion to need patience — to make the gratitude — in which she had probably had as little experience as she had had with patience — acceptable to meet with, match, the high standards of the forgiver. But she was not too concerned. Her husband — my nephew — had made what he probably considered the supreme sacrifice to expiate his part in her past; she had no doubts of her capacity to continue to supply whatever increasing degree of gratitude the increasing appetite — or capacity — of its addict would demand, in return for the sacrifice which, so she believed, she had accepted for the same reason of gratitude. Besides, she still had the legs and the eyes; she could walk away, escape, from it at any moment she wished, even though her past might have shown her that she probably would not use the ability to locomote to escape from threat and danger. Do you accept that?

GOVERNOR

All right. Go on.

STEVENS

Then she discovered that the child — the first one — was on the way. For that first instant, she must have known something almost like frenzy. Now she couldn't escape; she had waited too long. But it was worse than that. It was as though she realised for the first time that you — everyone — must, or anyway may have to, pay for your past; that past is something like a promissory note with a trick clause in it which, as long as nothing goes wrong, can be manumitted in an orderly manner, but which fate or luck or chance can foreclose on you without warning. That is, she had known, accepted, this all the time and dismissed it because she knew that she could cope, was invulnerable through simple integration, own-womanness. But now there would be

a child, tender and defenceless. But you never really give up hope, you know, not even after you finally realise that people not only can bear anything, but probably will have to, so probably even before the frenzy had had time to fade, she found a hope: which was the child's own tender and defenceless innocence: that God — if there was one — would protect the child — not her: she asked no quarter and wanted none; she could cope, either cope or bear it, but the child from the sight draft of her past — because it was innocent, even though she knew better, all her observation having shown her that God either would not or could not — anyway, did not — save innocence just because it was innocent; that when He said 'Suffer little children to come unto Me' He meant exactly that: He meant suffer; that the adults, the fathers, the old in and capable of sin, must be ready and willing — nay, eager — to suffer at any time, that the little children shall come unto Him unanguished, unterrified, undefiled. Do you accept that?

GOVERNOR

Go on.

STEVENS

So at least she had ease. Not hope: ease. It was precarious of course, a balance, but she could walk a tight-rope too. It was as though she had struck, not a bargain, but an armistice with God — if there was one. She had not tried to cheat; she had not tried to evade the promissory note of her past by intervening the blank cheque of a child's innocence — it was born now, a little boy, a son, her husband's son and heir — between. She had not tried to prevent the child; she had simply never thought about pregnancy in this connection, since it took the physical fact of the pregnancy to reveal to her the existence of that promissory note bearing her post-dated signature. And since God — if there was one — must be aware of that, then she too would bear her side of the bargain by not demanding on Him a second time since He — if there was one — would at least play fair, would be at least a gentleman. And that?

GOVERNOR

Go on.

STEVENS

So you can take your choice about the second child. Perhaps she was too busy between the three of them to be careful enough: between the three of them: the doom, the fate, the past; the bargain with God; the forgiveness and the gratitude. Like the juggler says, not with three insentient replaceable Indian clubs or balls, but three glass bulbs filled with nitroglycerine and not enough hands for one even: one hand to offer the atonement with and another to receive the forgiveness with and a third needed to offer the gratitude, and still a fourth hand more and more imperative as time passed to sprinkle in steadily and constantly increasing doses a little more and a little more of the sugar and seasoning on the gratitude to keep it palatable to its swallower — that perhaps: she just didn't have time to be careful enough, or perhaps it was desperation, or perhaps this was when her husband first refuted or implied or anyway impugned — whichever it was — his son's paternity. Anyway, she was pregnant again; she had broken her word, destroyed her talisman, and she probably knew fifteen months before the letters that this was the end, and when the man appeared with the old letters she probably was not even surprised: she had merely been wondering for fifteen months what form the doom would take. And accept this too — —

The lights flicker and dim further, then steady at that point.

And relief too. Because at last it was over; the roof had fallen, avalanche had roared; even the helplessness and the impotence were finished now, because now even the old fragility of bone and meat was no longer a factor — and, who knows? because of that fragility, a kind of pride, triumph: you have waited for destruction: you endured; it was inevitable, inescapable, you had no hope. Nevertheless, you did not merely cringe, crouching, your head, vision, buried in your arms; you were not watching that poised arrestment all the time, true enough, but that was not because you feared it but because you were too busy putting one foot before the other, never for one instant really flagging, faltering, even though you knew it was in vain — triumph in the very fragility which no longer need concern you now, for the reason that the all, the very worst, which catastrophe can do to you, is crush and obliterate the fragility; you were the better man, you outfaced even

catastrophe, outlasted it, compelled it to move first; you did not even defy it, not even contemptuous: with no other tool or implement but that worthless fragility, you held disaster off as with one hand you might support the weightless silken canopy of a bed, for six long years while it, with all its weight and power, could not possibly prolong the obliteration of your fragility over five or six seconds; and even during that five or six seconds you would still be the better man, since all that it — the catastrophe — could deprive you of, you yourself had already written off six years ago as being, inherently of and because of its own fragile self, worthless.

GOVERNOR

And now, the man.

STEVENS

I thought you would see it too. Even the first one stuck out like a sore thumb. Yes, he — —

GOVERNOR

The first what?

STEVENS

(pauses, looks at the Governor)

The first man: Red. Don't you know anything at all about women? I never saw Red or this next one, his brother, either, but all three of them, the other two and her husband, probably all look enough alike or act enough alike — maybe by simply making enough impossible unfulfillable demands on her or by being drawn to her enough to accept, risk, almost incredible conditions — to be at least first cousins. Where have you been all your life?

GOVERNOR

All right. The man.

STEVENS

At first, all he thought of, planned on, was interested in, intended, was the money — to collect for the letters, and beat it, get the hell out. Of course, even at the end, all he was really after was still the money, not only after he found out that he would have to take her and the child

too to get it, but even when it looked like all he was going to get, at least for a while, was just a runaway wife and a six-months-old infant. In fact, Nancy's error, her really fatal action on that fatal and tragic night, was in not giving the money and the jewels both to him when she found where Temple had hidden them, and getting the letters and getting rid of him forever, instead of hiding the money and jewels from Temple in her turn — which was what Temple herself thought too apparently, since she — Temple — told him a lie about how much the money was, telling him it was only two hundred dollars when it was actually almost two thousand. So you would have said that he wanted the money indeed, and just how much, how badly, to have been willing to pay that price for it.

Or maybe he was being wise — 'smart,' he would have called it — beyond his years and time, and without having actually planned it that way, was really inventing a new and safe method of kidnapping: that is, pick an adult victim capable of signing her own cheques — also with an infant in arms for added persuasion — and not forcing but actually persuading her to come along under her own power and then — still peaceably — extracting the money later at your leisure, using the tender welfare of the infant as a fulcrum for your lever. Or maybe we're both wrong and both should give credit — what little of it — where credit — what little of it — is due, since it was just the money with her too at first, though he was probably still thinking it was just the money at the very time when, having got her own jewellery together and found where her husband kept the key to the strongbox (and I imagine, even opened it one night after her husband was in bed asleep and counted the money in it or at least made sure there was money in it or anyway that the key would actually open it), she found herself still trying to rationalise why she had not paid over the money and got the letters and destroyed them and so rid herself forever of her Damocles' roof. Which was what she did not do.

Because Hemingway — his girl — was quite right: all you have got to do is, refuse to accept it. Only, you have got to be told truthfully beforehand what you must refuse; the gods owe you that — at least a clear picture and a clear choice. Not to be fooled by . . . who knows?

probably even gentleness, after a fashion, back there on those afternoons or whenever they were in the Memphis . . . all right: honeymoon, even with a witness; in this case certainly anything much better lacked, and indeed, who knows? (I am Red now) even a little of awe, incredulous hope, incredulous amazement, even a little of trembling at this much fortune, this much luck dropping out of the very sky itself, into his embrace; at least (Temple now) no gang; even rape become tender: only one, an individual, still refusable, giving her at least (this time) the similitude of being wooed, of an opportunity to say Yes first, letting her even believe she could say either one of yes or no. I imagine that he (the new one, the blackmailer) even looked like his brother — a younger Red, the Red of a few years even before she knew him, and — if you will permit it — less stained, so that in a way it may have seemed to her that here at last even she might slough away the six years' soilure of struggle and repentance and terror to no avail.

And if this is what you meant, then you are right too: a man, at least a man, after six years of that sort of forgiving which debased not only the forgiven but the forgiven's gratitude too — a bad man of course, a criminal by intent regardless of how cramped his opportunities may have been up to this moment; and, capable of blackmail, vicious and not merely competent to, but destined to, bring nothing but evil and disaster and ruin to anyone foolish enough to enter his orbit, cast her lot with his.

But — by comparison, that six years of comparison — at least a man — a man so single, so hard and ruthless, so impeccable in amorality, as to have a kind of integrity, purity, who would not only never need nor intend to forgive anyone anything, he would never even realise that anyone expected him to forgive anyone anything; who wouldn't even bother to forgive her if it ever dawned on him that he had the opportunity, but instead would simply black her eyes and knock a few teeth out and fling her into the gutter: so that she could rest secure forever in the knowledge that, until she found herself with a black eye and or spitting teeth in the gutter, he would never even know he had anything to forgive her for.

This time, the lights do not flicker. They begin to dim steadily toward and then into complete darkness as Stevens continues.

Nancy was the confidante, at first, while she — Nancy — still believed probably that the only problem, factor, was how to raise the money the blackmailer demanded, without letting the boss, the master, the husband find out about it; finding, discovering — this is still Nancy — realising probably that she had not really been a confidante for a good while, a long while before she discovered that what she actually was, was a spy: on her employer: not realising until after she had discovered that, although Temple had taken the money and the jewels too from her husband's strongbox, she — Temple — still hadn't paid them over to the blackmailer and got the letters, that the payment of the money and jewels was less than half of Temple's plan.

The lights go completely out. The stage is in complete darkness. Stevens' voice continues.

That was when Nancy in her turn found where Temple had hidden the money and jewels, and — Nancy — took them in her turn and hid them from Temple; this was the night of the day Gowan left for a week's fishing at Aransas Pass, taking the older child, the boy, with him, to leave the child for a week's visit with its grandparents in New Orleans until Gowan would pick him up on his way home from Texas.

(to Temple: in the darkness)

Now tell him.

The stage is in complete darkness.

Scene II

INTERIOR, TEMPLE'S PRIVATE sitting- or dressing-room. 9.30 p.m.
September thirteenth ante.

The lights go up, lower right, as in Act I in the transition from the Courtroom to the Stevenses' living-room, though instead of the living-room, the scene is now Temple's private apartment. A door, left, enters from the house proper. A door, right, leads into the nursery where the child is asleep in its crib. At rear, french-windows open on to a terrace; this is a private entrance to the house itself from outside. At left, a

cupboard door stands open. Garments are scattered over the floor about it, indicating that the cupboard has been searched, not hurriedly so much as savagely and ruthlessly and thoroughly. At right, is a fireplace of gas logs. A desk against the rear wall is open and shows traces of the same savage and ruthless search. A table, centre, bears Temple's hat, gloves and bag, also a bag such as is associated with infants; two cases, obviously Temple's, are packed and closed and sit on the floor beside the table. The whole room indicates Temple's imminent departure, and that something has been vainly yet savagely and completely, perhaps even frantically, searched for.

When the lights go up, Pete is standing in the open cupboard door, holding a final garment, a negligee, in his hands. He is about twenty-five. He does not look like a criminal. That is, he is not a standardised recognisable criminal or gangster type, quite. He looks almost like the general conception of a college man, or a successful young automobile or appliance salesman. His clothes are ordinary, neither flashy nor sharp, simply what everybody wears. But there is a definite 'untamed' air to him. He is handsome, attractive to women, not at all unpredictable because you — or they — know exactly what he will do, you just hope he won't do it this time. He has a hard, ruthless quality, not immoral but unmoral.

He wears a light-weight summer suit, his hat is shoved on to the back of his head so that, engaged as he is at present, he looks exactly like a youthful city detective in a tough moving-picture. He is searching the flimsy negligee, quickly and without gentleness, drops it and turns, finds his feet entangled in the other garments on the floor and without pausing, kicks himself free and crosses to the desk and stands looking down at the litter on it which he has already searched thoroughly and savagely once, with a sort of bleak and contemptuous disgust. Temple enters, left. She wears a dark suit for travelling beneath a light-weight open coat, is hatless, carries the fur coat which we have seen, and a child's robe or blanket over the same arm, and a filled milk bottle in the other hand. She pauses long enough to glance at the littered room. Then she comes on in and approaches the table. Pete turns his head; except for that, he doesn't move.

PETE

Well?

TEMPLE

No. The people where she lives say they haven't seen her since she left to come to work this morning.

PETE

I could have told you that.

(he glances at his wrist watch)

We've still got time. Where does she live?

TEMPLE

(at the table)

And then what? hold a lighted cigarette against the sole of her foot?

PETE

It's fifty dollars, even if you are accustomed yourself to thinking in hundreds. Besides the jewellery. What do you suggest then? call the cops?

TEMPLE

No. You won't have to run. I'm giving you an out.

PETE

An out?

TEMPLE

No, dough, no snatch. Isn't that how you would say it?

PETE

Maybe I don't get you.

TEMPLE

You can quit now. Clear out. Leave. Get out from under. Save yourself. Then all you'll have to do is, wait till my husband gets back, and start over.

PETE

Maybe I still don't get you.

TEMPLE

You've still got the letters, haven't you?

PETE

Oh, the letters.

He reaches inside his coat, takes out the packet of letters and tosses it onto the table.

There you are.

TEMPLE

I told you two days ago I didn't want them.

PETE

Sure. That was two days ago.

They watch each other a moment. Then Temple dumps the fur coat and the robe from her arm, onto the table, sets the bottle carefully on the table, takes up the packet of letters and extends her other hand to Pete.

TEMPLE

Give me your lighter.

Pete produces the lighter from his pocket and hands it to her. That is, he extends it, not moving otherwise, so that she has to take a step or two toward him to reach and take it. Then she turns and crosses to the hearth, snaps the lighter on. It misses fire two or three times, then lights. Pete has not moved, watching her. She stands motionless a moment, the packet of letters in one hand, the burning lighter in the other. Then she turns her head and looks back at him. For another moment they watch each other.

PETE

Go ahead. Burn them. The other time I gave them to you, you turned them down so you could always change your mind and back out. Burn them.

They watch each other for another moment. Then she turns her head and stands now, her face averted, the lighter still burning. Pete watches her for another moment.

Then put that junk down and come here.

She snaps out the lighter, turns, crosses to the table, putting the packet of letters and the lighter on the table as she passes it, and goes on to

where Pete has not moved. At this moment, Nancy appears in the door, left. Neither of them sees her. Pete puts his arms around Temple.

I offered you an out too.

(he draws her closer)

Baby.

TEMPLE

Don't call me that.

PETE

(tightens his arms, caressing and savage too)

Red did. I'm as good a man as he was. Ain't I?

They kiss. Nancy moves quietly through the door and stops just inside the room, watching them. She now wears the standardised department-store maidservant's uniform, but without cap and apron, beneath a light-weight open topcoat; on her head is a battered almost shapeless felt hat which must have once belonged to a man. Pete breaks the kiss.

Come on. Let's get out of here. I've even got moral or something. I don't even want to put my hands on you in his house — —

He sees Nancy across Temple's shoulder, and reacts. Temple reacts to him, turns quickly, and sees Nancy too. Nancy comes on into the room.

TEMPLE

(to Nancy)

What are you doing here?

NANCY

I brought my foot. So he can hold that cigarette against it.

TEMPLE

So you're not just a thief: you're a spy too.

PETE

Maybe she's not a thief either. Maybe she brought it back.

(they watch Nancy, who doesn't answer)

Or maybe she didn't. Maybe we had better use that cigarette.

(to Nancy)

How about it? Is that what you came back for, sure enough?

TEMPLE

(to Pete)

Hush. Take the bags and go on to the car.

PETE

(to Temple but watching Nancy)

I'll wait for you. There may be a little something I can do here, after all.

TEMPLE

Go on, I tell you! Let's for God's sake get away from here. Go on.

Pete watches Nancy for a moment longer, who stands facing them but not looking at anything, motionless, almost bemused, her face sad, brooding and inscrutable. Then Pete turns, goes to the table, picks up the lighter, seems about to pass on, then pauses again and with almost infinitesimal hesitation takes up the packet of letters, puts it back inside his coat, takes up the two packed bags and crosses to the french-window, passing Nancy, who is still looking at nothing and no one.

PETE

(to Nancy)

Not that I wouldn't like to, you know. For less than fifty bucks even. For old lang syne.

He transfers the bags to one hand, opens the french-window, starts to exit, pauses halfway out and looks back at Temple.

I'll be listening, in case you change your mind about the cigarette.

He goes on out, draws the door to after him. Just before it closes, Nancy speaks.

NANCY

Wait.

Pete stops, begins to open the door again.

TEMPLE

(quickly: to Pete)

Go on! Go on! For God's sake go on!

Pete exits, shuts the door after him. Nancy and Temple face each other.

NANCY

Maybe I was wrong to think that just hiding that money and diamonds was going to stop you. Maybe I ought to have give it to him yesterday as soon as I found where you had hid it. Then wouldn't nobody between here and Chicago or Texas seen anything of him but his dust.

TEMPLE

So you did steal it. And you saw what good that did, didn't you?

NANCY

If you can call it stealing, then so can I. Because wasn't but part of it yours to begin with. Just the diamonds was yours. Not to mention that money is almost two thousand dollars, that you told me was just two hundred and that you told him was even less than that, just fifty. No wonder he wasn't worried — about just fifty dollars. He wouldn't even be worried if he knowed it was even the almost two thousand it is, let alone the two hundred you told me it was. He ain't even worried about whether or not you'll have any money at all when you get out to the car. He knows that all he's got to do is, just wait and keep his hand on you and maybe just mash hard enough with it, and you'll get another passel of money and diamonds too out of your husband or your pa. Only, this time he'll have his hand on you and you'll have a little trouble telling him it's just fifty dollars instead of almost two thousand —

Temple steps quickly forward and slaps Nancy across the face. Nancy steps back. As she does so, the packet of money and the jewel box fall to the floor from inside her topcoat. Temple stops, looking down at the money and jewels. Nancy recovers.

Yes, there it is, that caused all the grief and ruin. If you hadn't been somebody that would have a box of diamonds and a husband that you could find almost two thousand dollars in his britches pocket while he was asleep, that man wouldn't have tried to sell you them letters. Maybe if I hadn't taken and hid it, you would have give it to him before you come to this. Or maybe if I had just give it to him yesterday and got the letters, or maybe if I was to take it out to where he's waiting in that car right now, and say, Here, man, take your money —

TEMPLE

Try it. Pick it up and take it out to him, and see. If you'll wait until I finish packing, you can even carry the bag.

NANCY

I know. It ain't even the letters any more. Maybe it never was. It was already there in whoever could write the kind of letters that even eight years afterward could still make grief and ruin. The letters never did matter. You could have got them back at any time; he even tried to give them to you twice — —

TEMPLE

How much spying have you been doing?

NANCY

All of it. — You wouldn't even needed money and diamonds to get them back. A woman don't need it. All she needs is womanishness to get anything she wants from men. You could have done that right here in the house, without even tricking your husband into going off fishing.

TEMPLE

A perfect example of whore morality. But then, if I can say whore, so can you, can't you? Maybe the difference is, I decline to be one in my husband's house.

NANCY

I ain't talking about your husband. I ain't even talking about you. I'm talking about two little children.

TEMPLE

So am I. Why else do you think I sent Bucky on to his grandmother, except to get him out of a house where the man he has been taught to call his father, may at any moment decide to tell him he has none? As clever a spy as you must surely have heard my husband — —

NANCY

(interrupts)

I've heard him. And I heard you too. You fought back — that time. Not for yourself, but for that little child. But now you have quit.

TEMPLE

Quit?

NANCY

Yes. You gave up. You gave up the child too. Willing to risk never seeing him again maybe.

(Temple doesn't answer)

That's right. You don't need to make no excuses to me. Just tell me what you must have already strengthened your mind up to telling all the rest of the folks that are going to ask you that. You are willing to risk it. Is that right?

(Temple doesn't answer)

All right. We'll say you have answered it. So that settles Bucky. Now answer me this one. Who are you going to leave the other one with?

TEMPLE

Leave her with? A six-months-old baby?

NANCY

That's right. Of course you can't leave her. Not with nobody. You can't no more leave a six-months-old baby with nobody while you run away from your husband with another man, than you can take a six-months-old baby with you on that trip. That's what I'm talking about. So maybe you'll just leave it in there in that cradle; it'll cry for a while, but it's too little to cry very loud and so maybe won't nobody hear it and come meddling, especially with the house shut up and locked until Mr. Gowan gets back next week, and probably by that time it will have hushed — —

TEMPLE

Are you really trying to make me hit you again?

NANCY

Or maybe taking her with you will be just as easy, at least until the first time you write Mr. Gowan or your pa for money and they don't send it as quick as your new man thinks they ought to, and he throws you and the baby both out. Then you can drop it into a garbage can and no more trouble to you or anybody, because then you will be rid of both of them — —

(Temple makes a convulsive movement, then catches herself)

Hit me. Light you a cigarette too, I told you and him both I brought my foot. Here it is.

(she raises her foot slightly)

I've tried everything else; I reckon I can try that too.

TEMPLE

(repressed, furious)

Hush. I tell you for the last time. Hush.

NANCY

I've hushed.

She doesn't move. She is not looking at Temple. There is a slight change in her voice or manner, though we only realise later that she is not addressing Temple.

I've tried. I've tried everything I know. You can see that.

TEMPLE

Which nobody will dispute. You threatened me with my children, and even with my husband — if you can call my husband a threat. You even stole my elopement money. Oh yes, nobody will dispute that you tried. Though at least you brought the money back. Pick it up.

NANCY

You said you don't need it.

TEMPLE

I don't. Pick it up.

NANCY

No more do I need it.

TEMPLE

Pick it up, anyway. You can keep your next week's pay out of it when you give it back to Mr. Gowan.

Nancy stoops and gathers up the money, and gathers the jewellery back into its box, and puts them on the table.

(quieter)

Nancy.

(Nancy looks at her)

I'm sorry. Why do you force me to this — hitting and screaming at you, when you have always been so good to my children and me — my husband too — all of us — trying to hold us together in a household, a

family, that anybody should have known all the time couldn't possibly hold together? even in decency, let alone happiness?

NANCY

I reckon I'm ignorant. I don't know that yet. Besides, I ain't talking about any household or happiness neither —

TEMPLE

(with sharp command)

Nancy!

NANCY

— I'm talking about two little children —

TEMPLE

I said, hush.

NANCY

I can't hush. I'm going to ask you one more time. Are you going to do it?

TEMPLE

Yes!

NANCY

Maybe I am ignorant. You got to say it out in words yourself, so I can hear them. Say, I'm going to do it.

TEMPLE

You heard me. I'm going to do it.

NANCY

Money or no money.

TEMPLE

Money or no money.

NANCY

Children or no children.

(Temple doesn't answer)

To leave one with a man that's willing to believe the child ain't got no father, willing to take the other one to a man that don't even want no children —

(They stare at one another)

If you can do it, you can say it.

TEMPLE

Yes! Children or no children! Now get out of here. Take your part of that money, and get out. Here — —

Temple goes quickly to the table, removes two or three bills from the mass of banknotes, and hands them to Nancy, who takes them. Temple takes up the rest of the money, takes up her bag from the table and opens it. Nancy crosses quietly toward the nursery, picking up the milk bottle from the table as she passes, and goes on. With the open bag in one hand and the money in the other, Temple notices Nancy's movement.

What are you doing?

NANCY

(still moving)

This bottle has got cold. I'm going to warm it in the bathroom.

Then Nancy stops and looks back at Temple, with something so strange in her look that Temple, about to resume putting the money into the bag, pauses too, watching Nancy. When Nancy speaks, it is like the former speech: we don't realise until afterward what it signifies.

I tried everything I knowed. You can see that.

TEMPLE

(peremptory, commanding)

Nancy.

NANCY

(quietly, turning on)

I've hushed.

She exits through the door into the nursery. Temple finishes putting the money into the bag, and closes it and puts it back on the table. Then she turns to the baby's bag. She tidies it, checks rapidly over its contents, takes up the jewel box and stows it in the bag and closes the bag. All this takes about two minutes; she has just closed the bag when Nancy emerges quietly from the nursery, without the milk bottle, and crosses, pausing at the table only long enough to put back on it the money Temple gave her, then starts toward the opposite door through which she first entered the room.

TEMPLE

Now what?

Nancy goes on toward the other door. Temple watches her.

Nancy.

(Nancy pauses, still not looking back)

Don't think too hard of me.

(Nancy waits, immobile, looking at nothing. When Temple doesn't continue, she moves again toward the door)

If I — it ever comes up, I'll tell everybody you did your best. You tried. But you were right. It wasn't even the letters. It was me.

(Nancy moves on)

Good-bye, Nancy.

(Nancy reaches the door)

You've got your key. I'll leave your money here on the table. You can get it —

(Nancy exits)

Nancy!

There is no answer. Temple looks a moment longer at the empty door, shrugs, moves, takes up the money Nancy left, glances about, crosses to the littered desk and takes up a paperweight and returns to the table and puts the money beneath the weight; now moving rapidly and with determination, she takes up the blanket from the table and crosses to the nursery door and exits through it. A second or two, then she screams. The lights flicker and begin to dim, fade swiftly into complete darkness, over the scream.

The stage is in complete darkness.

Scene III

SAME AS SCENE I. Governor's Office. 3.09 a.m. March twelfth.

The lights go on upper left. The scene is the same as before, Scene I, except that Gowan Stevens now sits in the chair behind the desk where the Governor had been sitting and the Governor is no longer in the room. Temple now kneels before the desk, facing it, her arms on the

desk and her face buried in her arms. Stevens now stands beside and over her. The hands of the clock show nine minutes past three.

Temple does not know that the Governor has gone and that her husband is now in the room.

TEMPLE

(her face still hidden)

And that's all. The police came, and the murderess still sitting in a chair in the kitchen in the dark, saying 'Yes, Lord, I done it,' and then in the cell at the jail still saying it — —

(Stevens leans and touches her arm, as if to help her up. She resists, though still not raising her head)

Not yet. It's my cue to stay down here until his honour or excellency grants our plea, isn't it? Or have I already missed my cue forever even if the sovereign state should offer me a handkerchief right out of its own elected public suffrage dressing-gown pocket? Because see?

(she raises her face, quite blindly, tearless, still not looking toward the chair where she could see Gowan instead of the Governor, into the full glare of the light)

Still no tears.

STEVENS

Get up, Temple.

(he starts to lift her again, but before he can do so, she rises herself, standing, her face still turned away from the desk, still blind; she puts her arm up almost in the gesture of a little girl about to cry, but instead she merely shields her eyes from the light while her pupils re-adjust)

TEMPLE

Nor cigarette either; this time it certainly won't take long, since all he has to say is, No.

(still not turning her face to look, even though she is now speaking directly to the Governor who she still thinks is sitting behind the desk) Because you aren't going to save her, are you? Because all this was not for the sake of her soul because her soul doesn't need it, but for mine.

STEVENS

(gently)

Why not finish first? Tell the rest of it. You had started to say something about the jail.

TEMPLE

The jail. They had the funeral the next day — Gowan had barely reached New Orleans, so he chartered an aeroplane back that morning — and in Jefferson, everything going to the graveyard passes the jail, or going anywhere else for that matter, passing right under the upstairs barred windows — the bullpen and the cells where the Negro prisoners — the crapshooters and whiskey-pedlars and vagrants and the murderers and murderesses too — can look down and enjoy it, enjoy the funerals too. Like this. Some white person you know is in a jail or a hospital, and right off you say, How ghastly: not at the shame or the pain, but the walls, the locks, and before you even know it, you have sent them books to read, cards, puzzles to play with. But not Negroes. You don't even think about the cards and puzzles and books.

And so all of a sudden you find out with a kind of terror, that they have not only escaped having to read, they have escaped having to escape. So whenever you pass the jail, you can see them — no, not them, you don't see them at all, you just see the hands among the bars of the windows, not tapping or fidgeting or even holding, gripping the bars like white hands would be, but just lying there among the interstices, not just at rest, but even restful, already shaped and easy and unanguished to the handles of the ploughs and axes and hoes, and the mops and brooms and the rockers of white folks' cradles, until even the steel bars fitted them too without alarm or anguish. You see? not gnarled and twisted with work at all, but even limbered and supplied by it, smoothed and even softened, as though with only the penny-change of simple sweat they had already got the same thing the white ones have to pay dollars by the ounce jar for.

Not immune to work, and in compromise with work is not the right word either, but in confederacy with work and so free from it; in

armistice, peace; — the same long supple hands serene and immune to anguish, so that all the owners of them need to look out with, to see with — to look out at the outdoors — the funerals, the passing, the people, the freedom, the sunlight, the free air — are just the hands: not the eyes: just the hands lying there among the bars and looking out, that can see the shape of the plough or hoe or axe before daylight comes; and even in the dark, without even having to turn on the light, can not only find the child, the baby — not her child but yours, the white one — but the trouble and discomfort too — the hunger, the wet nappie, the unfastened safety-pin — and see to remedy it. You see. If I could just cry. There was another one, a man this time, before my time in Jefferson but Uncle Gavin will remember this too.

His wife had just died — they had been married only two weeks — and he buried her and so at first he tried just walking the country roads at night for exhaustion and sleep, only that failed and then he tried getting drunk so he could sleep, and that failed and then he tried fighting and then he cut a white man's throat with a razor in a dice game and so at last he could sleep for a little while; which was where the sheriff found him, asleep on the wooden floor of the gallery of the house he had rented for his wife, his marriage, his life, his old age. Only that waked him up, and so in the jail that afternoon, all of a sudden it took the jailor and a deputy and five other Negro prisoners just to throw him down and hold him while they locked the chains on him — lying there on the floor with more than a half-dozen men panting to hold him down, and what do you think he said? 'Look like I just can't quit thinking. Look like I just can't quit.'

(she ceases, blinking, rubs her eyes and then extends one hand blindly toward Stevens, who has already shaken out his handkerchief and hands it to her. There are still no tears on her face; she merely takes the handkerchief and dabs, pats at her eyes with it as if it were a powder-puff, talking again)

But we have passed the jail, haven't we? We're in the Courtroom now. It was the same there; Uncle Gavin had rehearsed her, of course, which was easy, since all you can say when they ask you to answer to a

murder charge is, Not Guilty. Otherwise, they can't even have a trial; they would have to hurry out and find another murderer before they could take the next official step.

So they asked her, all correct and formal among the judges and lawyers and bailiffs and jury and the Scales and the Sword and the flag and the ghosts of Coke upon Littleton upon Bonaparte and Julius Cæsar and all the rest of it, not to mention the eyes and the faces which were getting a moving-picture show for free since they had already paid for it in the taxes, and nobody really listening since there was only one thing she could say.

Except that she didn't say it: just raising her head enough to be heard plain — not loud: just plain — and said, 'Guilty, Lord' — like that, disrupting and confounding and dispersing and flinging back two thousand years, the whole edifice of corpus juris and rules of evidence we have been working to make stand up by itself ever since Cæsar, like when without even watching yourself or even knowing you were doing it, you would reach out your hand and turn over a chip and expose to air and light and vision the frantic and aghast turmoil of an ant-hill.

And moved the chip again, when even the ants must have thought there couldn't be another one within her reach: when they finally explained to her that to say she was not guilty, had nothing to do with truth but only with law, and this time she said it right, Not Guilty, and so then the jury could tell her she lied and everything was all correct again and, as everybody thought, even safe, since now she wouldn't be asked to say anything at all any more. Only, they were wrong; the jury said Guilty and the judge said Hang and now everybody was already picking up his hat to go home, when she picked up that chip too: the judge said, 'And may God have mercy on your soul,' and Nancy answered: 'Yes, Lord.'

(she turns suddenly, almost briskly, speaking so briskly that her momentum carries her on past the instant when she sees and recognises Gowan sitting where she had thought all the time that the Governor was sitting and listening to her)

And that is all, this time. And so now you can tell us. I know you're not going to save her, but now you can say so. It won't be difficult. Just one word — —

(she stops, arrested, utterly motionless, but even then she is first to recover)

Oh God.

(Gowan rises quickly, Temple whirls to Stevens)

Why is it you must always believe in plants? Do you have to? Is it because you have to? Because you are a lawyer? No, I'm wrong. I'm sorry; I was the one that started us hiding gimmicks on each other, wasn't it?

(quickly: turning to Gowan)

Of course; you didn't take the sleeping pill at all. Which means you didn't even need to come here for the Governor to hide you behind the door or under the desk or wherever it was he was trying to tell me you were hiding and listening, because after all the Governor of a Southern state has got to try to act like he regrets having to aberrate from being a gentleman — —

STEVENS

(to Temple)

Stop it.

GOWAN

Maybe we both didn't start hiding soon enough — by about eight years — not in desk drawers either, but in two abandoned mine shafts, one in Siberia and the other at the South Pole, maybe.

TEMPLE

All right. I didn't mean hiding. I'm sorry.

GOWAN

Don't be. Just draw on your eight years' interest for that.

(to Stevens)

All right, all right; tell me to shut up too.

(to no one directly)

In fact, this may be the time for me to start saying sorry for the next eight-year term. Just give me a little time. Eight years of gratitude might be a habit a little hard to break. So here goes.

(to Temple)

I'm sorry. Forget it.

TEMPLE

I would have told you.

GOWAN

You did. Forget it. You see how easy it is? You could have been doing that yourself for eight years: every time I would say 'Say sorry, please,' all you would need would be to answer: 'I did. Forget it.'

(to Stevens)

I guess that's all, isn't it? We can go home now.

(he starts to come around the desk)

TEMPLE

Wait.

(Gowan stops; they look at each other)

Where are you going?

GOWAN

I said home, didn't I? To pick up Bucky and carry him back to his own bed again.

(they look at one another)

You're not even going to ask me where he is now?

(answers himself)

Where we always leave our children when the clutch — —

STEVENS

(to Gowan)

Maybe I will say shut up this time.

GOWAN

Only let me finish first. I was going to say, 'with our handiest kinfolks.'

(to Temple)

I carried him to Maggie's.

STEVENS

(moving)

I think we can all go now. Come on.

GOWAN

So do I.

(he comes on around the desk, and stops again; to Temple)

Make up your mind. Do you want to ride with me, or Gavin?

STEVENS

(to Gowan)

Go on. You can pick up Bucky.

GOWAN

Right.

(he turns, starts toward the steps front, where Temple and Stevens entered, then stops)

That's right. I'm probably still supposed to use the spy's entrance.

(he turns back, starts around the desk again, toward the door at rear, sees Temple's gloves and bag on the desk, and takes them up and holds them out to her: roughly almost)

Here. This is what they call evidence; don't forget these.

(Temple takes the bag and gloves)

Gowan goes on toward the door at rear.

TEMPLE

(after him)

Did you have a hat and coat?

(he doesn't answer. He goes on, exits)

Oh, God. Again.

STEVENS

(touches her arm)

Come on.

TEMPLE

(not moving yet)

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow — —

STEVENS

(speaking her thought, finishing the sentence)

— he will wreck the car again against the wrong tree, in the wrong place, and you will have to forgive him again, for the next eight years until he can wreck the car again in the wrong place, against the wrong tree — —

TEMPLE

I was driving it too. I was driving some of the time too.

STEVENS

(gently)

Then let that comfort you.

(he takes her arm again, turns her toward the stairs)

Come on. It's late.

TEMPLE

(holds back)

Wait. He said, No.

STEVENS

Yes.

TEMPLE

Did he say why?

STEVENS

Yes. He can't.

TEMPLE

Can't? The Governor of a state, with all the legal power to pardon or at least reprieve, can't?

STEVENS

That's just law. If it was only law, I could have pleaded insanity for her at any time, without bringing you here at two o'clock in the morning —
—

TEMPLE

And the other parent too; don't forget that. I don't know yet how you did it. . . . Yes, Gowan was here first; he was just pretending to be asleep when I carried Bucky in and put him in his bed; yes, that was what you called that leaking valve, when we stopped at the filling station to change the wheel: to let him get ahead of us — —

STEVENS

All right. He wasn't even talking about justice. He was talking about a child, a little boy — —

TEMPLE

That's right. Make it good: the same little boy to hold whose normal and natural home together, the murderess, the nigger, the dope-fiend whore, didn't hesitate to cast the last gambit — and maybe that's the wrong word too, isn't it? — she knew and had: her own debased and worthless life. Oh yes, I know that answer too; that was brought out here tonight too: that a little child shall not suffer in order to come unto Me. So good can come out of evil.

STEVENS

It not only can, it must.

TEMPLE

So touché, then. Because what kind of natural and normal home can that little boy have where his father may at any time tell him he has no father?

STEVENS

Haven't you been answering that question every day for six years? Didn't Nancy answer it for you when she told you how you had fought back, not for yourself, but for that little boy? Not to show the father that he was wrong, nor even to prove to the little boy that the father was wrong, but to let the little boy learn with his own eyes that nothing, not even that, which could possibly enter that house, could ever harm him?

TEMPLE

But I quit. Nancy told you that too.

STEVENS

She doesn't think so now. Isn't that what she's going to prove Friday morning?

TEMPLE

Friday. The black day. The day you never start on a journey. Except that Nancy's journey didn't start at daylight or sun-up or whenever it is polite and tactful to hang people, day after tomorrow. Her journey started that morning eight years ago when I got on the train at the University — —

(she stops: a moment; then quietly)

Oh God, that was Friday too; that baseball game was Friday — —

(rapidly)

You see? Don't you see? It's nowhere near enough yet. Of course he wouldn't save her. If he did that, it would be over: Gowan could just throw me out, which he may do yet, or I could throw Gowan out, which I could have done until it got too late now, too late forever now, or the judge could have thrown us both out and given Bucky to an orphanage, and it would be all over. But now it can go on, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow — —

STEVENS

(gently tries to start her)

Come on.

TEMPLE

(holding back)

Tell me exactly what he did say. Not tonight: it couldn't have been tonight — or did he say it over the telephone, and we didn't even need

— —

STEVENS

He said it a week ago — —

TEMPLE

Yes, about the same time when you sent the wire. What did he say?

STEVENS

(quotes)

'Who am I, to have the brazen temerity and hardihood to set the puny appanage of my office in the balance against that simple undeviable aim? Who am I, to render null and abrogate the purchase she made with that poor crazed lost and worthless life?'

TEMPLE

(wildly)

And good too — good and mellow too. So it was not even in hopes of saving her life, that I came here at two o'clock in the morning. It wasn't even to be told that he had already decided not to save her. It was not even to confess to my husband, but to do it in the hearing of two strangers, something which I had spent eight years trying to expiate so that my husband wouldn't have to know about it. Don't you see? That's just suffering. Not for anything: just suffering.

STEVENS

You came here to affirm the very thing which Nancy is going to die tomorrow morning to postulate: that little children, as long as they are little children, shall be intact, unanguished, untorn, unterrified.

TEMPLE

(quietly)

All right. I have done that. Can we go home now?

STEVENS

Yes.

(she turns, moves toward the steps, Stevens beside her. As she reaches the first step, she falters, seems to stumble slightly, like a sleepwalker. Stevens steadies her, but at once she frees her arm, and begins to descend)

TEMPLE

(on the first step: to no one, still with that sleepwalker air)

To save my soul — if I have a soul. If there is a God to save it — a God who wants it — —

(CURTAIN)

Act III

THE JAIL (Nor Even Yet Quite Relinquish — —)

SO, ALTHOUGH IN a sense the jail was both older and less old than the courthouse, in actuality, in time, in observation and memory, it was older even than the town itself. Because there was no town until there was a courthouse, and no courthouse until (like some insentient unweaned creature torn violently from the dug of its dam) the floorless lean-to rabbit-hutch housing the iron chest was reft from the log flank of the jail and transmogrified into a by-neo-Greek-out-of-Georgian-England edifice set in the centre of what in time would be the town Square (as a result of which, the town itself had moved one block south — or rather, no town then and yet, the courthouse itself the catalyst:

a mere dusty widening of the trace, trail, pathway in a forest of oak and ash and hickory and sycamore and flowering catalpa and dogwood and judas tree and persimmon and wild plum, with on one side old Alec Holston's tavern and coaching-yard, and a little farther along, Ratcliffe's trading-post-store and the blacksmith's, and diagonal to all of them, en face and solitary beyond the dust, the log jail;

moved — the town — complete and intact, one block southward, so that now, a century and a quarter later, the coaching-yard and

Ratcliffe's store were gone and old Alec's tavern and the blacksmith's were a hotel and a garage, on a main thoroughfare true enough but still a business side-street, and the jail across from them, though transformed also now into two storeys of Georgian brick by the hand [or anyway pocket-books] of Sartoris and Sutpen and Louis Grenier, faced not even on a side-street but on an alley);

And so, being older than all, it had seen all: the mutation and the change: and, in that sense, had recorded them (indeed, as Gavin Stevens, the town lawyer and the county amateur Cincinnatus, was wont to say, if you would peruse in unbroken — aye, overlapping — continuity the history of a community, look not in the church registers and the courthouse records, but beneath the successive layers of calsomine and creosote and whitewash on the walls of the jail, since only in that forcible carceration does man find the idleness in which to compose, in the gross and simple terms of his gross and simple lusts and yearnings, the gross and simple recapitulations of his gross and simple heart);

invisible and impacted, not only beneath the annual inside creosote-and-whitewash of bullpen and cell, but on the blind outside walls too, first the simple mud-chinked log ones and then the symmetric brick, not only the scrawled illiterate repetitive unimaginative doggerel and the perspectiveless almost prehistoric sexual picture-writing, but the images, the panorama not only of the town but of its days and years until a century and better had been accomplished, filled not only with its mutation and change from a halting-place: to a community: to a settlement: to a village: to a town, but with the shapes and motions, the gestures of passion and hope and travail and endurance, of the men and women and children in their successive overlapping generations long after the subjects which had reflected the images were vanished and replaced and again replaced, as when you stand say alone in a dim and empty room and believe, hypnotised beneath the vast weight of man's incredible and enduring Was, that perhaps by turning your head aside you will see from the corner of your eye the turn of a moving limb — a gleam of crinoline, a laced wrist, perhaps even a Cavalier plume — who knows? provided there is will enough,

perhaps even the face itself three hundred years after it was dust — the eyes, two jellied tears filled with arrogance and pride and satiety and knowledge of anguish and foreknowledge of death, saying no to death across twelve generations, asking still the old same unanswerable question three centuries after that which reflected them had learned that the answer didn't matter, or — better still — had forgotten the asking of it — in the shadowy fathomless dreamlike depths of an old mirror which has looked at too much too long;

But not in shadow, not this one, this mirror, these logs: squatting in the full glare of the stump-pocked clearing during those first summers, solitary on its side of the dusty widening marked with an occasional wheel but mostly by the prints of horses and men: Pettigrew's private pony express until he and it were replaced by a monthly stagecoach from Memphis, the race horse which Jason Compson traded to Ikkemotubbe, old Mohataha's son and the last ruling Chickasaw chief in that section, for a square of land so large that, as the first formal survey revealed, the new courthouse would have been only another of Compson's outbuildings had not the town Corporation bought enough of it (at Compson's price) to forefend themselves being trespassers, and the saddle-mare which bore Doctor Habersham's worn black bag (and which drew the buggy after Doctor Habersham got too old and stiff to mount the saddle), and the mules which drew the wagon in which, seated in a rocking chair beneath a French parasol held by a Negro slave girl, old Mohataha would come to town on Saturdays (and came that last time to set her capital X on the paper which ratified the dispossession of her people forever, coming in the wagon that time too, barefoot as always but in the purple silk dress which her son, Ikkemotubbe, had brought her back from France, and a hat crowned with the royal-coloured plume of a queen, beneath the slave-held parasol still and with another female slave child squatting on her other side holding the crusted slippers which she had never been able to get her feet into, and in the back of the wagon the petty rest of the unmarked Empire flotsam her son had brought to her which was small enough to be moved;

driving for the last time out of the woods into the dusty widening before Ratcliffe's store where the Federal land agent and his marshal waited for her with the paper, and stopped the mules and sat for a little time, the young men of her bodyguard squatting quietly about the halted wagon after the eight-mile walk, while from the gallery of the store and of Holston's tavern the settlement — the Ratcliffes and Compsons and Peabodys and Pettigrews [not Grenier and Holston and Habersham, because Louis Grenier declined to come in to see it, and for the same reason old Alec Holston sat alone on that hot afternoon before the smouldering log in the fireplace of his taproom, and Doctor Habersham was dead and his son had already departed for the West with his bride, who was Mohataha's granddaughter, and his father-in-law, Mohataha's son, Ikkemotubbe] — looked on, watched: the inscrutable ageless wrinkled face, the fat shapeless body dressed in the cast-off garments of a French queen, which on her looked like the Sunday costume of the madam of a rich Natchez or New Orleans brothel, sitting in a battered wagon inside a squatting ring of her household troops, her young men dressed in their Sunday clothes for travelling too: then she said, 'Where is this Indian territory?' And they told her: West.

'Turn the mules west,' she said, and someone did so, and she took the pen from the agent and made her X on the paper and handed the pen back and the wagon moved, the young men rising too, and she vanished so across that summer afternoon to that terrific and infinitesimal creak and creep of ungreased wheels, herself immobile beneath the rigid parasol, grotesque and regal, bizarre and moribund, like obsolescence's self riding off the stage its own obsolete catafalque, looking not once back, not once back toward home);

But most of all, the prints of men — the fitted shoes which Doctor Habersham and Louis Grenier had brought from the Atlantic seaboard, the cavalry boots in which Alec Holston had ridden behind Francis Marion, and — more myriad almost than leaves, outnumbering all the others lumped together — the moccasins, the deer-hide sandals of the forest, worn not by the Indians but by white men, the pioneers, the long hunters, as though they had not only vanquished the wilderness

but had even stepped into the very footgear of them they dispossessed (and mete and fitting so, since it was by means of his feet and legs that the white man conquered America;

the closed and split U's of his horses and cattle overlay his own prints always, merely consolidating his victory); — (the jail) watched them all, red men and white and black — the pioneers, the hunters, the forest men with rifles, who made the same light rapid soundless toed-in almost heel-less prints as the red men they dispossessed and who in fact dispossessed the red men for that reason: not because of the grooved barrel but because they could enter the red man's milieu and make the same footprints that he made;

the husbandman printing deep the hard heels of his brogans because of the weight he bore on his shoulders: axe and saw and plough-stock, who dispossessed the forest man for the obverse reason: because with his saw and axe he simply removed, obliterated, the milieu in which alone the forest man could exist; then the land speculators and the traders in slaves and whiskey who followed the husbandmen, and the politicians who followed the land speculators, printing deeper and deeper the dust of that dusty widening, until at last there was no mark of Chickasaw left in it any more;

watching (the jail) them all, from the first innocent days when Doctor Habersham and his son and Alex Holston and Louis Grenier were first guests and then friends of Ikkemotubbe's Chickasaw clan; then an Indian agent and a land-office and a trading-post, and suddenly Ikkemotubbe and his Chickasaws were themselves the guests without being friends of the Federal Government;

then Ratcliffe, and the trading-post was no longer simply an Indian trading-post, though Indians were still welcome, of course (since, after all, they owned the land or anyway were on it first and claimed it), then Compson with his race horse and presently Compson began to own the Indian accounts for tobacco and calico and jeans pants and cooking-pots on Ratcliffe's books (in time he would own Ratcliffe's books too) and one day Ikkemotubbe owned the race horse and Compson owned

the land itself, some of which the city fathers would have to buy from him at his price in order to establish a town;

and Pettigrew with his tri-weekly mail, and then a monthly stage and the new faces coming in faster than old Alex Holston, arthritic and irascible, hunkered like an old surly bear over his smouldering hearth even in the heat of summer (he alone now of that original three, since old Grenier no longer came in to the settlement, and old Doctor Habersham was dead, and the old doctor's son, in the opinion of the settlement, had already turned Indian and renegade even at the age of twelve or fourteen) any longer made any effort, wanted, to associate names with;

and now indeed the last moccasin print vanished from that dusty widening, the last toed-in heel-less light soft quick long-striding print pointing west for an instant, then trodden from the sight and memory of man by a heavy leather heel engaged not in the traffic of endurance and hardihood and survival, but in money — taking with it (the print) not only the moccasins but the deer-hide leggings and jerkin too, because Ikkemotubbe's Chickasaws now wore Eastern factory-made jeans and shoes sold them on credit out of Ratcliffe's and Compson's general store, walking in to the settlement on the white man's Saturday, carrying the alien shoes rolled neatly in the alien pants under their arms, to stop at the bridge over Compson's creek long enough to bathe their legs and feet before donning the pants and shoes, then coming on to squat all day on the store gallery eating cheese and crackers and peppermint candy (bought on credit too out of Compson's and Ratcliffe's showcase) and now not only they but Habersham and Holston and Grenier too were there on sufferance, anachronistic and alien, not really an annoyance yet but simply a discomfort;

Then they were gone; the jail watched that: the halted ungreased unpainted wagon, the span of underfed mules attached to it by fragments of Eastern harness supplemented by raw deer-hide thongs, the nine young men — the wild men, tameless and proud, who even in their own generation's memory had been free and, in that of their

fathers, the heirs of kings — squatting about it, waiting, quiet and composed, not even dressed in the ancient forest-softened deerskins of their freedom but in the formal regalia of the white man's inexplicable ritualistic sabbaticals: broadcloth trousers and white shirts with boiled-starch bosoms (because they were travelling now;

they would be visible to outworld, to strangers: — and carrying the New England-made shoes under their arms too since the distance would be long and walking was better barefoot), the shirts collarless and cravatless true enough and with the tails worn outside, but still board-rigid, gleaming, pristine, and in the rocking chair in the wagon, beneath the slave-borne parasol, the fat shapeless old matriarch in the regal sweat-stained purple silk and the plumed hat, barefoot too of course but, being a queen, with another slave to carry her slippers, putting her cross to the paper and then driving on, vanishing slowly and terrifically to the slow and terrific creak and squeak of the ungreased wagon — apparently and apparently only, since in reality it was as though, instead of putting an inked cross at the foot of a sheet of paper, she had lighted the train of a mine set beneath a dam, a dyke, a barrier already straining, bulging, bellying, not only towering over the land but leaning, looming, imminent with collapse, so that it only required the single light touch of the pen in that brown illiterate hand, and the wagon did not vanish slowly and terrifically from the scene to the terrific sound of its ungreased wheels, but was swept, hurled, flung not only out of Yoknapatawpha County and Mississippi but the United States too, immobile and intact — the wagon, the mules, the rigid shapeless old Indian woman and the nine heads which surrounded her — like a float or a piece of stage property dragged rapidly into the wings across the very backdrop and amid the very hustle of the property-men setting up for the next scene and act before the curtain had even had time to fall;

There was no time; the next act and scene itself clearing its own stage without waiting for property-men; or rather, not even bothering to clear the stage but commencing the new act and scene right in the midst of the phantoms, the fading wraiths of that old time which had been exhausted, used up, to be no more and never return: as though

the mere and simple orderly ordinary succession of days was not big enough, comprised not scope enough, and so weeks and months and years had to be condensed and compounded into one burst, one surge, one soundless roar filled with one word: town: city: with a name: Jefferson; men's mouths and their incredulous faces (faces to which old Alex Holston had long since ceased trying to give names or, for that matter, even to recognise) were filled with it; that was only yesterday, and by tomorrow the vast bright rush and roar had swept the very town one block south, leaving in the tideless backwater of an alley on a side-street the old jail which, like the old mirror, had already looked at too much too long, or like the patriarch who, whether or not he decreed the conversion of the mud-chinked cabin into a mansion, had at least foreseen it, is now not only content but even prefers the old chair on the back gallery, free of the rustle of blueprints and the uproar of bickering architects in the already dismantled living-room;

It (the old jail) didn't care, tideless in that backwash, insulated by that city block of space from the turmoil of the town's birthing, the mud-chinked log walls even carcerant of the flotsam of an older time already on its rapid way out too: an occasional runaway slave or drunken Indian or shoddy would-be heir of the old tradition of Mason or Hare or Harpe (biding its time until, the courthouse finished, the jail too would be translated into brick, but, unlike the courthouse, merely a veneer of brick, the old mud-chinked logs of the ground floor still intact behind the patterned and symmetric sheath);

no longer even watching now, merely cognisant, remembering: only yesterday was a wilderness ordinary, a store, a smithy, and already today was not a town, a city, but the town and city: named; not a courthouse but the courthouse, rising surging like the fixed blast of a rocket, not even finished yet but already looming, beacon focus and lodestar, already taller than anything else, out of the rapid and fading wilderness — not the wilderness receding from the rich and arable fields as tide recedes, but rather the fields themselves, rich and inexhaustible to the plough, rising sunward and airward out of swamp and morass, themselves thrusting back and down brake and thicket, bayou and bottom and forest, along with the copeless denizens — the

wild men and animals — which once haunted them, wanting, dreaming, imagining, no other — lodestar and pole, drawing the people — the men and women and children, the maidens, the marriageable girls and the young men, flowing, pouring in with their tools and goods and cattle and slaves and gold money, behind ox- or mule-teams, by steamboat up Ikkemotubbe's old river from the Mississippi; only yesterday Pettigrew's pony express had been displaced by a stagecoach, yet already there was talk of a railroad less than a hundred miles to the north, to run all the way from Memphis to the Atlantic Ocean;

Going fast now: only seven years, and not only was the courthouse finished, but the jail too: not a new jail of course but the old one veneered over with brick, into two storeys, with white trim and iron-barred windows: only its face lifted, because behind the veneer were still the old ineradicable bones, the old ineradicable remembering: the old logs immured intact and lightless between the tiered symmetric bricks and the whitewashed plaster, immune now even to having to look, see, watch that new time which in a few years more would not even remember that the old logs were there behind the brick or had ever been, an age from which the drunken Indian had vanished, leaving only the highwayman, who had wagered his liberty on his luck, and the runaway nigger who, having no freedom to stake, had wagered merely his milieu; that rapid, that fast:

Sutpen's untamable Paris architect long since departed, vanished (one hoped) back to wherever it was he had made that aborted midnight try to regain and had been overtaken and caught in the swamp, not (as the town knew now) by Sutpen and Sutpen's wild West Indian headman and Sutpen's bear hounds, nor even by Sutpen's destiny nor even by his (the architect's) own, but by that of the town: the long invincible arm of Progress itself reaching into that midnight swamp to pluck him out of that bayed circle of dogs and naked Negroes and pine torches, and stamped the town with him like a rubber signature and then released him, not flung him away like a squeezed-out tube of paint, but rather (inattentive too) merely opening its fingers, its hand; stamping his (the architect's) imprint not on just the courthouse and the jail, but on the

whole town, the flow and trickle of his bricks never even faltering, his moulds and kilns building the two churches and then that Female Academy a certificate from which, to a young woman of North Mississippi or West Tennessee, would presently have the same mystic significance as an invitation dated from Windsor Castle and signed by Queen Victoria would for a young female from Long Island or Philadelphia;

That fast now: tomorrow, and the railroad did run unbroken from Memphis to Carolina, the light-wheeled bulb-stacked wood-burning engines shrieking among the swamps and cane-brakes where bear and panther still lurked, and through the open woods where browsing deer still drifted in pale bands like unwinded smoke: because they — the wild animals, the beasts — remained, they coped, they would endure; a day, and they would flee, lumber, scuttle across the clearings already overtaken and relinquished by the hawk-shaped shadows of mail planes;

they would endure, only the wild men were gone; indeed, tomorrow, and there would be grown men in Jefferson who could not even remember a drunken Indian in the jail; another tomorrow — so quick, so rapid, so fast — and not even a highwayman any more of the old true sanguinary girt and tradition of Hare and Mason and the mad Harpes; even Murrell, their thrice-compounded heir and apotheosis, who had taken his heritage of simple rapacity and bloodlust and converted it into a bloody dream of outlaw-empire, was gone, finished, as obsolete as Alexander, checkmated and stripped not even by man but by Progress, by a pierceless front of middle-class morality, which refused him even the dignity of execution as a felon, but instead merely branded him on the hand like an Elizabethan pickpocket — until all that remained of the old days for the jail to incarcerate was the runaway slave, for his little hour more, his little minute yet while the time, the land, the nation, the American earth, whirled faster and faster toward the plunging precipice of its destiny;

That fast, that rapid: a commodity in the land now which until now had dealt first in Indians: then in acres and sections and boundaries: — an

economy: Cotton: a king: omnipotent and omnipresent: a destiny of which (obvious now) the plough and the axe had been merely the tools; not plough and axe which had effaced the wilderness, but Cotton: petty globules of Motion weightless and myriad even in the hand of a child, incapable even of wadding a rifle, let alone of charging it, yet potent enough to sever the very taproots of oak and hickory and gum, leaving the acre-shading tops to wither and vanish in one single season beneath that fierce minted glare; not the rifle nor the plough which drove at last the bear and deer and panther into the last jungle fastnesses of the river bottoms, but Cotton; not the soaring cupola of the courthouse drawing people into the country, but that same white tide sweeping them in: that tender skim covering the winter's brown earth, burgeoning through spring and summer into September's white surf crashing against the flanks of gin and warehouse and ringing like bells on the marble counters of the banks: altering not just the face of the land, but the complexion of the town too, creating its own parasitic aristocracy not only behind the columned porticoes of the plantation houses, but in the counting-rooms of merchants and bankers and the sanctums of lawyers, and not only these last, but finally nadir complete: the county offices too: of sheriff and tax-collector and bailiff and turnkey and clerk;

doing overnight to the old jail what Sutpen's architect with all his brick and iron smithwork, had not been able to accomplish — the old jail which had been unavoidable, a necessity, like a public convenience, and which, like the public convenience, was not ignored but simply by mutual concord, not seen, not looked at, not named by its purpose and aim, yet which to the older people of the town, in spite of Sutpen's architect's face-lifting, was still the old jail — now translated into an integer, a movable pawn on the county's political board like the sheriff's star or the clerk's bond or the bailiff's wand of office;

converted indeed now, elevated (an apotheosis) ten feet above the level of the town, so that the old buried log walls now contained the living-quarters for the turnkey's family and the kitchen from which his wife catered, at so much a meal, to the city's and the county's prisoners — perquisite not for work or capability for work, but for political fidelity

and the numerality of votable kin by blood or marriage — a jailor or turnkey, himself someone's cousin and with enough other cousins and in-laws of his own to have assured the election of sheriff or chancery- or circuit-clerk — a failed farmer who was not at all the victim of his time but, on the contrary, was its master, since his inherited and inescapable incapacity to support his family by his own efforts had matched him with an era and a land where government was founded on the working premise of being primarily an asylum for ineptitude and indigence, for the private business failures among your or your wife's kin whom otherwise you yourself would have to support — so much his destiny's master that, in a land and time where a man's survival depended not only on his ability to drive a straight furrow and to fell a tree without maiming or destroying himself, that fate had supplied to him one child:

a frail anæmic girl with narrow workless hands lacking even the strength to milk a cow, and then capped its own vanquishment and eternal subjugation by the paradox of giving him for his patronymic the designation of the vocation at which he was to fail: Farmer; this was the incumbent, the turnkey, the jailor;

the old tough logs which had known Ikkemotubbe's drunken Chickasaws and brawling teamsters and trappers and flatboatmen (and — for that one short summer night — the four highwaymen, one of whom might have been the murderer, Wiley Harpe), were now the bower framing a window in which mused hour after hour and day and month and year, the frail blonde girl not only incapable of (or at least excused from) helping her mother cook, but even of drying the dishes after her mother (or father perhaps) washed them — musing, not even waiting for anyone or anything, as far as the town knew, not even pensive, as far as the town knew: just musing amid her blonde hair in the window facing the country town street, day after day, and month after month and — as the town remembered it — year after year for what must have been three or four of them, inscribing at some moment the fragile and indelible signature of her meditation in one of the panes of it (the window): her frail and workless name, scratched by

a diamond ring in her frail and workless hand, and the date: Cecilia Farmer April 16th 1861;

At which moment the destiny of the land, the nation, the South, the state, the county, was already whirling into the plunge of its precipice, not that the state and the South knew it, because the first seconds of fall always seem like soar: a weightless deliberation preliminary to a rush not downward but upward, the falling body reversed during that second by transubstantiation into the upward rush of earth;

a soar, an apex, the South's own apotheosis of its destiny and its pride, Mississippi and Yoknapatawpha County not last in this, Mississippi among the first of the eleven to ratify secession, the regiment of infantry which John Sartoris raised and organised with Jefferson for its headquarters, going to Virginia numbered Two in the roster of Mississippi regiments, the jail watching that too but just by cognisance from a block away: that noon, the regiment not even a regiment yet but merely a voluntary association of untried men who knew they were ignorant and hoped they were brave, the four sides of the Square lined with their fathers or grandfathers and their mothers and wives and sisters and sweethearts, the only uniform present yet that one in which Sartoris stood with his virgin sabre and his pristine colonel's braid on the courthouse balcony, bareheaded too while the Baptist minister prayed and the Richmond mustering officer swore the regiment in; and then (the regiment) gone;

and now not only the jail but the town too hung without motion in a tideless backwash: the plunging body advanced far enough now into space as to have lost all sense of motion, weightless and immobile upon the light pressure of invisible air, gone now all diminishment of the precipice's lip, all increment of the vast increaseless earth: a town of old men and women and children and an occasional wounded soldier (John Sartoris himself, deposed from his colonelcy by a regimental election after Second Manassas, came home and oversaw the making and harvesting of a crop on his plantation before he got bored and gathered up a small gang of irregular cavalry and carried it up into Tennessee to join Forrest), static in quo, rumoured, murmured of war

only as from a great and incredible dreamy distance, like far summer thunder: until the spring of '64, the once-vast fixed impalpable increaseless and threatless earth now one omnivorous roar of rock (a roar so vast and so spewing, flinging ahead of itself, like the spray above the maelstrom, the preliminary anæsthetic of shock so that the agony of bone and flesh will not even be felt, as to contain and sweep along with it the beginning, the first ephemeral phase, of this story, permitting it to boil for an instant to the surface like a chip or a twig — a match-stick or a bubble, say, too weightless to give resistance for destruction to function against: in this case, a bubble, a minute globule which was its own impunity, since what it — the bubble — contained, having no part in rationality and being contemptuous of fact, was immune even to the rationality of rock) — a sudden battle centring around Colonel Sartoris's plantation house four miles to the north, the line of a creek held long enough for the main Confederate body to pass through Jefferson to a stronger line on the river heights south of the town, a rear-guard action of cavalry in the streets of the town itself (and this was the story, the beginning of it;

all of it too, the town might have been justified in thinking, presuming they had had time to see, notice, remark and then remember, even that little) — the rattle and burst of pistols, the hooves, the dust, the rush and scurry of a handful of horsemen led by a lieutenant, up the street past the jail, and the two of them — the frail and useless girl musing in the blonde mist of her hair beside the window-pane where three or four (or whatever it was) years ago she had inscribed with her grandmother's diamond ring her paradoxical and significantless name (and where, so it seemed to the town, she had been standing ever since), and the soldier, gaunt and tattered, battle-grimed and fleeing and undefeated, looking at one another for that moment across the fury and pell-mell of battle;

Then gone; that night the town was occupied by Federal troops; two nights later, it was on fire (the Square, the stores and shops and the professional offices), gutted (the courthouse too), the blackened jagged topless jumbles of brick wall enclosing like a ruined jaw the blackened shell of the courthouse between its two rows of topless columns, which

(the columns) were only blackened and stained, being tougher than fire: but not the jail, it escaped, untouched, insulated by its windless backwater from fire;

and now the town was as though insulated by fire or perhaps cauterised by fire from fury and turmoil, the long roar of the rushing omnivorous rock fading on to the east with the fading uproar of the battle: and so in effect it was a whole year in advance of Appomattox (only the undefeated undefeatable women, vulnerable only to death, resisted, endured, irreconcilable);

already, before there was a name for them (already their prototype before they even existed as a species), there were carpetbaggers in Jefferson — a Missourian named Redmond, a cotton- and quartermaster-supplies speculator, who had followed the Northern army to Memphis in '61 and (nobody knew exactly how or why) had been with (or at least on the fringe of) the military household of the brigadier commanding the force which occupied Jefferson, himself — Redmond — going no farther, stopping, staying, none knew the why for that either, why he elected Jefferson, chose that alien fire-gutted site (himself one, or at least the associate, of them who had set the match) to be his future home;

and a German private, a blacksmith, a deserter from a Pennsylvania regiment, who appeared in the summer of '64, riding a mule, with (so the tale told later, when his family of daughters had become matriarchs and grandmothers of the town's new aristocracy) for saddle-blanket sheaf on sheaf of virgin and uncut United States banknotes, so Jefferson and Yorknapatawpha County had mounted Golgotha and passed beyond Appomattox a full year in advance, with returned soldiers in the town, not only the wounded from the battle of Jefferson, but whole men: not only the furloughed from Forrest in Alabama and Johnston in Georgia and Lee in Virginia, but the stragglers, the unmaimed flotsam and refuse of that single battle now drawing its final constricting loop from the Atlantic Ocean at Old Point Comfort, to Richmond: to Chattanooga: to Atlanta: to the Atlantic Ocean again at Charleston, who were not deserters but who could not rejoin any still-

intact Confederate unit for the reason that there were enemy armies between, so that in the almost faded twilight of that land, the knell of Appomattox made no sound; when in the spring and early summer of '65 the formally and officially paroled and disbanded soldiers began to trickle back into the county, there was anticlimax;

they returned to a land which not only had passed through Appomattox over a year ago, it had had that year in which to assimilate it, that whole year in which not only to ingest surrender but (begging the metaphor, the figure) to convert, metabolise it, and then defæcate it as fertiliser for the four-years' fallow land they were already in train to rehabilitate a year before the Virginia knell rang the formal change, the men of '65 returning to find themselves alien in the very land they had been bred and born in and had fought for four years to defend, to find a working and already solvent economy based on the premise that it could get along without them; (and now the rest of this story, since it occurs, happens, here: not yet June in '65; this one had indeed wasted no time getting back: a stranger, alone;

the town did not even know it had ever seen him before, because the other time was a year ago and had lasted only while he galloped through it firing a pistol backward at a Yankee army, and he had been riding a horse — a fine though a little too small and too delicate blooded mare — where now he rode a big mule, which for that reason — its size — was a better mule than the horse was a horse, but it was still a mule, and of course the town could not know that he had swapped the mare for the mule on the same day that he traded his lieutenant's sabre — he still had the pistol — for the stocking full of seed corn he had seen growing in a Pennsylvania field and had not let even the mule have one mouthful of it during the long journey across the ruined land between the Atlantic seaboard and the Jefferson jail, riding up to the jail at last, still gaunt and tattered and dirty and still undefeated and not fleeing now but instead making or at least planning a single-handed assault against what any rational man would have considered insurmountable odds [but then, that bubble had ever been immune to the ephemeræ of facts];

perhaps, probably — without doubt: apparently she had been standing leaning musing in it for three or four years in 1864; nothing had happened since, not in a land which had even anticipated Appomattox, capable of shaking a meditation that rooted, that durable, that veteran — the girl watched him get down and tie the mule to the fence, and perhaps while he walked from the fence to the door he even looked for a moment at her, though possibly, perhaps even probably, not, since she was not his immediate object now, he was not really concerned with her at the moment, because he had so little time, he had none, really: still to reach Alabama and the small hill farm which had been his father's and would not be his, if — no, when — he could get there, and it had not been ruined by four years of war and neglect, and even if the land was still plantable, even if he could start planting the stocking of corn tomorrow, he would be weeks and even months late;

during that walk to the door and as he lifted his hand to knock on it, he must have thought with a kind of weary and indomitable outrage of how, already months late, he must still waste a day or maybe even two or three of them before he could load the girl onto the mule behind him and head at last for Alabama — this, at a time when of all things he would require patience and a clear head, trying for them [courtesy too, which would be demanded now], patient and urgent and polite, undefeated, trying to explain, in terms which they could understand or at least accept, his simple need and the urgency of it, to the mother and father whom he had never seen before and whom he never intended, or anyway anticipated, to see again, not that he had anything for or against them either: he simply intended to be too busy for the rest of his life, once they could get on the mule and start for home; not seeing the girl then, during the interview, not even asking to see her for a moment when the interview was over, because he had to get the licence now and then find the preacher: so that the first word he ever spoke to her was a promise delivered through a stranger; it was probably not until they were on the mule — the frail useless hands whose only strength seemed to be that sufficient to fold the wedding licence into the bosom of her dress and then cling to the belt around his waist — that he looked at her again or [both of them] had time to learn one another's middle name);

That was the story, the incident, ephemeral of an afternoon in late May, unrecorded by the town and the county because they had little time too: which (the county and the town) had anticipated Appomattox and kept that lead, so that in effect Appomattox itself never overhauled them; it was the long pull of course, but they had — as they would realise later — that priceless, that unmatchable year; on New Year's Day, 1865, while the rest of the South sat staring at the north-east horizon beyond which Richmond lay, like a family staring at the closed door to a sick-room, Yorknapatawpha County was already nine months gone in reconstruction;

by New Year's of '66, the gutted walls (the rain of two winters had washed them clean of the smoke and soot) of the Square had been temporarily roofed and were stores and shops and offices again, and they had begun to restore the courthouse: not temporary, this, but restored, exactly as it had been, between the too columned porticoes, one north and one south, which had been tougher than dynamite and fire, because it was the symbol: the County and the City: and they knew how, who had done it before; Colonel Sartoris was home now, and General Compson, the first Jason son, and though a tragedy had happened to Sutpen and his pride — a failure not of his pride nor even of his own bones and flesh, but of the lesser bones and flesh which he had believed capable of supporting the edifice of his dream — they still had the old plans of his architect and even the architect's moulds, and even more: money, (strangely, curiously) Redmond, the town's domesticated carpetbagger, symbol of a blind rapacity almost like a biological instinct, destined to cover the South like a migration of locusts;

in the case of this man, arriving a full year before its time and now devoting no small portion of the fruit of his rapacity to restoring the very building the destruction of which had rung up the curtain for his appearance on the stage, had been the formal visa on his passport to pillage; and by New Year's of '76, this same Redmond with his money and Colonel Sartoris and General Compson had built a railroad from

Jefferson north into Tennessee to connect with the one from Memphis to the Atlantic Ocean;

nor content there either, north or south: another ten years (Sartoris and Redmond and Compson quarrelled, and Sartoris and Redmond bought — probably with Redmond's money — Compson's interest in the railroad, and the next year Sartoris and Redmond had quarrelled and the year after that, because of simple physical fear, Redmond killed Sartoris from ambush on the Jefferson Square and fled, and at last even Sartoris's supporters — he had no friends: only enemies and frantic admirers — began to understand the result of that regimental election in the fall of '62) and the railroad was a part of that system covering the whole South and East like the veins in an oak leaf and itself mutually adjunctive to the other intricate systems covering the rest of the United States, so that you could get on a train in Jefferson now and, by changing and waiting a few times, go anywhere in North America;

No more into the United States, but into the rest of the United States, because the long pull was over now; only the ageing unvanquished women were unreconciled, irreconcilable, reversed and irrevocably reverted against the whole moving unanimity of panorama until, old unordered vacant pilings above a tide's flood, they themselves had an illusion of motion, facing irreconcilably backward toward the old lost battles, the old aborted cause, the old four ruined years whose very physical scars ten and twenty and twenty-five changes of season had annealed back into the earth; twenty-five and then thirty-five years; not only a century and an age, but a way of thinking died; the town itself wrote the epilogue and epitaph: 1900, on Confederate Decoration Day, Mrs.

Virginia Depre, Colonel Sartoris's sister, twitched a lanyard and the spring-restive bunting collapsed and flowed, leaving the marble effigy — the stone infantryman on his stone pedestal on the exact spot where forty years ago the Richmond officer and the local Baptist minister had mustered in the Colonel's regiment, and the old men in the grey and braided coats (all officers now, none less in rank than captain) tottered into the sunlight and fired shotguns at the bland sky and raised their

cracked quavering voices in the shrill hackle-lifting yelling which Lee and Jackson and Longstreet and the two Johnstons (and Grant and Sherman and Hooker and Pope and McClellan and Burnside too for the matter of that) had listened to amid the smoke and the din;

epilogue and epitaph, because apparently neither the U.D.C. ladies who instigated and bought the monument, nor the architect who designed it nor the masons who erected it, had noticed that the marble eyes under the shading marble palm stared not toward the north and the enemy, but toward the south, toward (if anything) his own rear — looking perhaps, the wits said (could say now, with the old war thirty-five years past and you could even joke about it — except the women, the ladies, the unsundered, the irreconcilable, who even after another thirty-five years would still get up and stalk out of picture houses showing *Gone With the Wind*), for reinforcements; or perhaps not a combat soldier at all, but a provost-marshal's man looking for deserters, or perhaps himself for a safe place to run to: because that old war was dead; the sons of those tottering old men in grey had already died in blue coats in Cuba, the macabre mementoes and testimonials and shrines of the new war already usurping the earth before the blasts of blank shotgun shells and the weightless collapsing of bunting had unveiled the final ones to the old;

Not only a new century and a new way of thinking, but of acting and behaving too: now you could go to bed in a train in Jefferson and wake up tomorrow morning in New Orleans or Chicago; there were electric lights and running water in almost every house in town except the cabins of Negroes; and now the town bought and brought from a great distance a kind of grey crushed ballast-stone called macadam, and paved the entire street between the depot and the hotel, so that no more would the train-meeting hacks filled with drummers and lawyers and court-witnesses need to lurch and heave and strain through the winter mud-holes;

every morning a wagon came to your very door with artificial ice and put it in your icebox on the back gallery for you, the children in rotational neighbourhood gangs following it (the wagon), eating the

fragments of ice which the Negro driver chipped off for them; and that summer a specially-built sprinkling-cart began to make the round of the streets each day; a new time, a new age: there were screens in windows now; people (white people) could actually sleep in summer night air, finding it harmless, uninimical: as though there had waked suddenly in man (or anyway in his womenfolks) a belief in his inalienable civil right to be free of dust and bugs;

Moving faster and faster: from the speed of two horses on either side of a polished tongue, to that of thirty then fifty then a hundred under a tin bonnet no bigger than a wash-tub: which from almost the first explosion, would have to be controlled by police; already in a back yard on the edge of town, an ex-blacksmith's-apprentice, a grease-covered man with the eyes of a visionary monk, was building a gasolene buggy, casting and boring his own cylinders and rods and cams, inventing his own coils and plugs and valves as he found he needed them, which would run, and did: crept popping and stinking out of the alley at the exact moment when the banker Bayard Sartoris, the Colonel's son, passed in his carriage: as a result of which, there is on the books of Jefferson today a law prohibiting the operation of any mechanically-propelled vehicle on the streets of the corporate town: who (the same banker Sartoris) died in one (such was progress, that fast, that rapid) lost from control on an icy road by his (the banker's) grandson, who had just returned from (such was progress) two years of service as a combat airman on the Western Front and now the camouflage paint is weathering slowly from a French .75 field piece squatting on one flank of the base of the Confederate monument, but even before it faded there was neon in the town and A.A.A. and C.C.C. in the county, and W.P.A. ('and XYZ and etc.,' as 'Uncle Pete' Gombault, a lean clean tobacco-chewing old man, incumbent of a political sinecure under the designation of United States marshal — an office held back in reconstruction times, when the State of Mississippi was a United States military district, by a Negro man who was still living in 1925 — fire-maker, sweeper, janitor and furnace-attendant to five or six lawyers and doctors and one of the banks — and still known as 'Mulberry' from the avocation which he had followed before and during and after his incumbency as marshal: peddling illicit whiskey in pint and half-pint

bottles from a cache beneath the roots of a big mulberry tree behind the drugstore of his pre-1865 owner — put it) in both;

W.P.A. and XYZ marking the town and the county as war itself had not: gone now were the last of the forest trees which had followed the shape of the Square, shading the unbroken second-storey balcony onto which the lawyers' and doctors' offices had opened, which shaded in its turn the fronts of the stores and the walkway beneath; and now was gone even the balcony itself with its wrought-iron balustrade on which in the long summer afternoons the lawyers would prop their feet to talk; and the continuous iron chain looping from wooden post to post along the circumference of the courthouse yard, for the farmers to hitch their teams to;

and the public watering trough where they could water them, because gone was the last wagon to stand on the Square during the spring and summer and fall Saturdays and trading-days, and not only the Square but the streets leading into it were paved now, with fixed signs of interdiction and admonition applicable only to something capable of moving faster than thirty miles an hour; and now the last forest tree was gone from the courthouse yard too, replaced by formal synthetic shrubs contrived and schooled in Wisconsin greenhouses, and in the courthouse (the city hall too) a courthouse and city hall gang, in miniature of course (but that was not its fault but the fault of the city's and the county's size and population and wealth) but based on the pattern of Chicago and Kansas City and Boston and Philadelphia (and which, except for its minuscularity, neither Philadelphia nor Boston nor Kansas City nor Chicago need have blushed at) which every three or four years would try again to raze the old courthouse in order to build a new one, not that they did not like the old one nor wanted the new, but because the new one would bring into the town and county that much more increment of unearned federal money;

And now the paint is preparing to weather from an anti-tank howitzer squatting on rubber tyres on the opposite flank of the Confederate monument; and gone now from the fronts of the stores are the old bricks made of native clay in Sutpen's architect's old moulds, replaced

now by sheets of glass taller than a man and longer than a wagon and team, pressed intact in Pittsburgh factories and framing interiors bathed now in one shadowless corpse-glare of fluorescent light; and, now and at last, the last of silence too: the county's hollow inverted air one resonant boom and ululance of radio: and thus no more Yoknapatawpha's air nor even Mason and Dixon's air, but America's: the patter of comedians, the baritone screams of female vocalists, the babbling pressure to buy and buy and still buy arriving more instantaneous than light, two thousand miles from New York and Los Angeles;

one air, one nation: the shadowless fluorescent corpse-glare bathing the sons and daughters of men and women, Negro and white both, who were born to and who passed all their lives in denim overalls and calico, haggling by cash or the instalment-plan for garments copied last week out of Harper's Bazaar or Esquire in East Side sweat-shops: because an entire generation of farmers has vanished, not just from Yoknapatawpha's but from Mason and Dixon's earth: the self-consumer: the machine which displaced the man because the exodus of the man left no one to drive the mule, now that the machine was threatening to extinguish the mule; time was when the mules stood in droves at daylight in the plantation mule-lots across the plantation road from the serried identical ranks of two-room shotgun shacks in which lived in droves with his family the Negro tenant- or share- or furnish-hand who bridled him (the mule) in the lot at sun-up and followed him through the plumb-straight monotony of identical furrows and back to the lot at sundown, with (the man) one eye on where the mule was going and the other eye on his (the mule's) heels;

both gone now: the one, to the last of the forty- and fifty- and sixty-acre hill farms inaccessible from unmarked dirt roads, the other to New York and Detroit and Chicago and Los Angeles ghettos, or nine out of ten of him that is, the tenth one mounting from the handles of a plough to the springless bucket seat of a tractor, dispossessing and displacing the other nine just as the tractor had dispossessed and displaced the other eighteen mules to whom that nine would have been complement; then Warsaw and Dunkerque displaced that tenth in his

turn, and now the planter's not-yet-drafted son drove the tractor: and then Pearl Harbour and Tobruk and Utah Beach displaced that son, leaving the planter himself on the seat of the tractor, for a little while that is — or so he thought, forgetting that victory or defeat both are bought at the same exorbitant price of change and alteration;

one nation, one world: young men who had never been farther from Yoknapatawpha County than Memphis or New Orleans (and that not often), now talked glibly of street intersections in Asiatic and European capitals, returning no more to inherit the long monotonous endless unendable furrows of Mississippi cotton fields, living now (with now a wife and next year a wife and child and the year after that a wife and children) in automobile trailers or G.I. barracks on the outskirts of liberal arts colleges, and the father and now grandfather himself still driving the tractor across the gradually diminishing fields between the long looping skeins of electric lines bringing electric power from the Appalachian mountains, and the subterranean steel veins bringing the natural gas from the Western plains, to the little lost lonely farmhouses glittering and gleaming with automatic stoves and washing machines and television antennæ;

One nation: no longer anywhere, not even in Yoknapatawpha County, one last irreconcilable fastness of stronghold from which to enter the United States, because at last even the last old sapless indomitable unvanquished widow or maiden aunt had died and the old deathless Lost Cause had become a faded (though still select) social club or caste, or form of behaviour when you remembered to observe it on the occasions when young men from Brooklyn, exchange students at Mississippi or Arkansas or Texas Universities, vended tiny Confederate battle flags among the thronged Saturday afternoon ramps of football stadia; one world: the tank gun: captured from a regiment of Germans in an African desert by a regiment of Japanese in American uniforms, whose mothers and fathers at the time were in a California detention camp for enemy aliens, and carried (the gun) seven thousand miles back to be set halfway between, as a sort of secondary flying buttress to a memento of Shiloh and The Wilderness;

one universe, one cosmos: contained in one America: one towering frantic edifice poised like a card-house over the abyss of the mortgaged generations; one boom, one peace: one swirling rocket-roar filling the glittering zenith as with golden feathers, until the vast hollow sphere of his air, the vast and terrible burden beneath which he tries to stand erect and lift his battered and indomitable head — the very substance in which he lives and, lacking which, he would vanish in a matter of seconds — is murmurous with his fears and terrors and disclaimers and repudiations and his aspirations and dreams and his baseless hopes, bouncing back at him in radar waves from the constellations;

And still — the old jail — endured, sitting in its rumourless cul-de-sac, its almost seasonless backwater in the middle of that rush and roar of civic progress and social alteration and change like a collarless (and reasonably clean: merely dingy: with a day's stubble and no garters to his socks) old man sitting in his suspenders and stocking feet, on the back kitchen steps inside a walled courtyard; actually not isolated by location so much as insulated by obsolescence: on the way out of course (to disappear from the surface of the earth along with the rest of the town on the day when all America, after cutting down all the trees and levelling the hills and mountains with bulldozers, would have to move underground to make room for, get out of the way of, the motor-cars) but like the track-walker in the tunnel, the thunder of the express mounting behind him, who finds himself opposite a niche or crack exactly his size in the wall's living and impregnable rock, and steps into it, inviolable and secure while destruction roars past and on and away, grooved ineluctably to the spidery rails of its destiny and destination;

not even — the jail — worth selling to the United States for some matching allocation out of the federal treasury; not even (so fast, so far, was Progress) any more a real pawn, let alone knight or rook, on the County's political board, not even plum in true worth of the word: simply a modest sinecure for the husband of someone's cousin, who had failed not as a father but merely as a fourth-rate farmer or day-labourer;

It survived, endured; it had its inevitable place in the town and the county; it was even still adding modestly not just to its but to the town's and the county's history too: somewhere behind that dingy brick façade, between the old durable hand-moulded brick and the cracked creosote-impregnated plaster of the inside walls (though few in the town or county any longer knew that they were there) were the old notched and morticed logs which (this, the town and county did remember; it was part of its legend) had held someone who might have been Wiley Harpe;

during that summer of 1864, the federal brigadier who had fired the Square and the courthouse had used the jail as his provost-marshal's guard-house; and even children in high school remembered how the jail had been host to the Governor of the State while he discharged a thirty-day sentence for contempt of court for refusing to testify in a paternity suit brought against one of his lieutenants: but isolate, even its legend and record and history, indisputable in authenticity yet a little oblique, elliptic or perhaps just ellipsoid, washed thinly over with a faint quiet cast of apocrypha: because there were new people in the town now, strangers, outlanders, living in new minute glass-walled houses set as neat and orderly and antiseptic as cribs in a nursery ward, in new subdivisions named Fairfield or Longwood or Halcyon Acres which had once been the lawn or back yard or kitchen garden of the old residences (the old obsolete columned houses still standing among them like old horses surged suddenly out of slumber in the middle of a flock of sheep), who had never seen the jail;

that is, they had looked at it in passing, they knew where it was, when their kin or friends or acquaintances from the East or North or California visited them or passed through Jefferson on the way to New Orleans or Florida, they could even repeat some of its legend or history to them: but they had had no contact with it; it was not a part of their lives; they had the automatic stoves and furnaces and milk deliveries and lawns the size of instalment-plan rugs; they had never had to go to the jail on the morning after June Tenth or July Fourth or Thanksgiving or Christmas or New Year's (or for that matter, on almost any Monday morning) to pay the fine of houseman or gardener or handyman so that

he could hurry on home (still wearing his hangover or his barely-staunched razor-slashes) and milk the cow or clean the furnace or mow the lawn;

So only the old citizens knew the jail any more, not old people but old citizens: men and women old not in years but in the constancy of the town, or against that constancy, concordant (not coeval of course, the town's date was a century and a quarter ago now, but in accord against that continuation) with that thin durable continuity born a hundred and twenty-five years ago out of a handful of bandits captured by a drunken militia squad, and a bitter ironical incorruptible wilderness mail rider, and a monster wrought-iron padlock — that steadfast and durable and unhurriable continuity against or across which the vain and glittering ephemerae of progress and alteration washed in substanceless repetitive evanescent scarless waves, like the wash and glare of the neon sign on what was still known as the Holston House diagonally opposite, which would fade with each dawn from the old brick walls of the jail and leave no trace;

only the old citizens still knew it: the intractable and obsolescent of the town who still insisted on wood-burning ranges and cows and vegetable gardens and handymen who had to be taken out of hock on the mornings after Saturday-nights and holidays; or the ones who actually spent the Saturday- and holiday-nights inside the barred doors and windows of the cells or bullpen for drunkenness or fighting or gambling — the servants, housemen and gardeners and handymen, who would be extracted the next morning by their white folks, and the others (what the town knew as the New Negro, independent of that commodity) who would sleep there every night beneath the thin ruby chequer-barred wash and fade of the hotel sign, while they worked their fines out on the street;

and the County, since its cattle-thieves and moonshiners went to trial from there, and its murderers — by electricity now (so fast, that fast, was Progress) — to eternity from there; in fact it was still, not a factor perhaps, but at least an integer, a cipher, in the county's political establishment; at least still used by the Board of Supervisors, if not as a

lever, at least as something like Punch's stuffed club, not intended to break bones, not aimed to leave any permanent scars;

So only the old knew it, the irreconcilable Jeffersonians and Yoknapatawphians who had (and without doubt firmly intended to continue to have) actual personal dealings with it on the blue Monday mornings after holidays, or during the semi-yearly terms of Circuit or Federal Court: — until suddenly you, a stranger, an outlander say from the East or the North or the Far West, passing through the little town by simple accident, or perhaps relation or acquaintance or friend of one of the outland families which had moved into one of the pristine and recent subdivisions, yourself turning out of your way to fumble among road signs and filling stations out of frank curiosity, to try to learn, comprehend, understand what had brought your cousin or friend or acquaintance to elect to live here — not specifically here, of course, not specifically Jefferson, but such as here, such as Jefferson — suddenly you would realise that something curious was happening or had happened here: that instead of dying off as they should as time passed it was as though these old irreconcilables were actually increasing in number;

as though with each interment of one, two more shared that vacancy: where in 1900, only thirty-five years afterward, there could not have been more than two or three capable of it, either by knowledge or memory of leisure, or even simple willingness and inclination, now, in 1951, eighty-six years afterward, they could be counted in dozens (and in 1965, a hundred years afterward, in hundreds because — by now you had already begun to understand why your kin or friends or acquaintance had elected to come to such as this with his family and call it his life — by then the children of that second outland invasion following a war, would also have become not just Mississippians but Jeffersonians and Yoknapatawphians: by which time — who knows? — not merely the pane, but the whole window, perhaps the entire wall, may have been removed and embalmed intact into a museum by an historical, or anyway a cultural, club of ladies — why, by that time they may not even know, or even need to know: only that the window-pane bearing the girl's name and the date is that old, which is enough;

has lasted that long: one small rectangle of wavy, crudely-pressed, almost opaque glass, bearing a few faint scratches apparently no more durable than the thin dried slime left by the passage of a snail, yet which has endured a hundred years) who are capable and willing too to quit whatever they happen to be doing — sitting on the last of the wooden benches beneath the last of the locust and chinaberry trees among the potted conifers of the new age dotting the courthouse yard, or in the chairs along the shady sidewalk before the Holston House, where a breeze always blows — to lead you across the street and into the jail and (with courteous neighbourly apologies to the jailor's wife stirring or turning on the stove the peas and grits and side-meat — purchased in bargain-lot quantities by shrewd and indefatigable peditation from store to store — which she will serve to the prisoners for dinner or supper at so much a head — plate — payable by the County, which is no mean factor in the sinecure of her husband's incumbency) into the kitchen and so to the cloudy pane bearing the faint scratches which, after a moment, you will descry to be a name and a date;

Not at first, of course, but after a moment, a second, because at first you would be a little puzzled, a little impatient because of your illness-at-ease from having been dragged without warning or preparation into the private kitchen of a strange woman cooking a meal; you would think merely What? So what? annoyed and even a little outraged, until suddenly, even while you were thinking it, something has already happened: the faint frail illegible meaningless even inference-less scratching on the ancient poor-quality glass you stare at, has moved, under your eyes, even while you stared at it, coalesced, seeming actually to have entered into another sense than vision: a scent, a whisper, filling that hot cramped strange room already fierce with the sound and reek of frying pork-fat: the two of them in conjunction — the old milky obsolete glass, and the scratches on it: that tender ownerless obsolete girl's name and the old dead date in April almost a century ago — speaking, murmuring, back from, out of, across from, a time as old as lavender, older than album or stereopticon, as old as daguerreotype itself;

And being a stranger and a guest would have been enough, since, a stranger and a guest, you would have shown the simple courtesy and politeness of asking the questions naturally expected of you by the host or anyway volunteer guide, who had dropped whatever he was doing (even if that had been no more than sitting with others of his like on a bench in a courthouse yard or on the sidewalk before a hotel) in order to bring you here; not to mention your own perfectly natural desire for, not revenge perhaps, but at least compensation, restitution, vindication, for the shock and annoyance of having been brought here without warning or preparation, into the private quarters of a strange woman engaged in something as intimate as cooking a meal; but by now you had not only already begun to understand why your kin or friend or acquaintance had elected, not Jefferson but such as Jefferson, for his life, but you had heard that voice, that whisper, murmur, frailer than the scent of lavender, yet (for that second anyway) louder than all the seethe and fury of frying fat;

so you ask the questions, not only which are expected of you, but whose answers you yourself must have if you are to get back into your car and fumble with any attention and concentration among the road signs and filling stations, to get on to wherever it is you had started when you stopped by chance or accident in Jefferson for an hour or a day or a night, and the host — guide — answers them, to the best of his ability out of the town's composite heritage of remembering that long back, told, repeated, bequeathed to him by his father; or rather, his mother: from her mother: or better still, to him when he himself was a child, direct from his great-aunt: the spinsters, maiden and childless out of a time when there were too many women because too many of the young men were maimed or dead: the indomitable and undefeated, maiden progenitresses of spinster and childless descendants still capable of rising up and stalking out in the middle of *Gone With the Wind*;

And again one sense assumes the office of two or three: not only hearing, listening, and seeing too, but you are even standing on the same spot, the same boards she did that day she wrote her name into

the window and on the other one three years later watching and hearing through and beyond that faint fragile defacement the sudden rush and thunder: the dust: the crackle and splatter of pistols: then the face, gaunt, battle-dirty, stubbled-over; urgent of course, but merely harried, harassed; not defeated, turned for a fleeing instant across the turmoil and the fury, then gone: and still the girl in the window (the guide — host — has never said one or the other;

without doubt in the town's remembering after a hundred years it has changed that many times from blonde to dark and back to blonde again: which doesn't matter, since in your own remembering that tender mist and veil will be forever blonde) not even waiting: musing; a year, and still not even waiting: meditant, not even unimpatient: just patienceless, in the sense that blindness and zenith are colourless;

until at last the mule, not out of the long north-eastern panorama of defeat and dust and fading smoke, but drawn out of it by that impregnable, that invincible, that incredible, that terrifying passivity, coming at that one fatigueless unflagging job all the way from Virginia — the mule which was a better mule in 1865 than the blood mare had been a horse in '2 and '3 and '4, for the reason that this was now 1865, and the man, still gaunt and undefeated: merely harried and urgent and short of time to get on to Alabama and see the condition of his farm — or (for that matter) if he still had a farm, and now the girl, the fragile and workless girl not only incapable of milking a cow but of whom it was never even demanded required, suggested, that she substitute for her father in drying the dishes, mounting pillion on a mule behind a paroled cavalry subaltern out of a surrendered army who had swapped his charger for a mule and the sabre of his rank and his defeatless pride for a stocking full of seed corn, whom she had not known or even spoken to long enough to have learned his middle name or his preference in food, or told him hers, and no time for that even now: riding, hurrying toward a country she had never seen, to begin a life which was not even simple frontier, engaged only with wilderness and shoeless savages and the tender hand of God but one which had been rendered into a desert (assuming that it was still there at all to be returned to) by the iron and fire of civilisation;

Which was all your host (guide) could tell you, since that was all he knew, inherited, inheritable from the town: which was enough, more than enough in fact, since all you needed was the face framed in its blonde and delicate veil behind the scratched glass; yourself, the stranger, the outlander from New England or the prairies or the Pacific Coast, no longer come by the chance or accident of kin or friend or acquaintance or road map, but drawn too from ninety years away by that incredible and terrifying passivity, watching in your turn through and beyond that old milk-dim disfigured glass that shape, that delicate frail and useless bone and flesh departing pillion on a mule without one backward look, to the reclaiming of an abandoned and doubtless even ravaged (perhaps even usurped) Alabama hill farm — being lifted on to the mule (the first time he touched her probably, except to put the ring on: not to prove nor even to feel, touch, if there actually was a girl under the calico and the shawls;

there was no time for that yet; but simply to get her up so they could start), to ride a hundred miles to become the farmless mother of farmers (she would bear a dozen, all boys, herself no older, still fragile, still workless among the churns and stove and brooms and stacks of wood which even a woman could split into kindlings; unchanged), bequeathing to them in their matronymic the heritage of that invincible inviolable ineptitude;

Then suddenly, you realise that that was nowhere near enough, not for that face — bridehood, motherhood, grandmotherhood, then widowhood and at last the grave — the long peaceful connubial progress toward matriarchy in a rocking chair nobody else was allowed to sit in, then a headstone in a country churchyard — not for that passivity, that stasis, that invincible captaincy of soul which didn't even need to wait but simply to be, breathe tranquilly, and take food — infinite not only in capacity but in scope too: that face, one maiden muse which had drawn a man out of the running pell-mell of a cavalry battle, a whole year around the long iron perimeter of duty and oath, from Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, across Tennessee into Virginia and up to the fringe of Pennsylvania before it curved back into

its closing fade along the headwaters of the Appomattox river and at last removed from him its iron hand: where, a safe distance at last into the rainy woods from the picket lines and the furled flags and the stacked muskets, a handful of men leading spent horses, the still-warm pistols still loose and quick for the hand in the unstrapped scabbards, gathered in the failing twilight — privates and captains, sergeants and corporals and subalterns — talking a little of one last desperate cast southward where (by last report) Johnston was still intact, knowing that they would not, that they were done not only with vain resistance but with indomitability too;

already departed this morning in fact for Texas, the West, New Mexico: a new land even if not yet (spent too — like the horses — from the long harassment and anguish of remaining indomitable and undefeated) a new hope, putting behind them for good and all the lost of both: the young dead bride — drawing him (that face) even back from this too, from no longer having to remain undefeated too: who swapped the charger for the mule and the sabre for the stocking of seed corn: back across the whole ruined land and the whole disastrous year by that virgin inevitable passivity more inescapable than Iodestar;

Not that face; that was nowhere near enough: no symbol there of connubial matriarchy, but fatal instead with all insatiate and deathless sterility; spouseless, barren, and undescended; not even demanding more than that: simply requiring it, requiring all — Lilith's lost and insatiable face drawing the substance — the will and hope and dream and imagination — of all men (you too: yourself and the host too) into that one bright fragile net and snare;

not even to be caught, over-flung, by one single unerring cast of it, but drawn to watch in patient and thronging turn the very weaving of the strangling golden strands — drawing the two of you from almost a hundred years away in your turn — yourself the stranger, the outlander with a B.A. or (perhaps even) M.A. from Harvard or Northwestern or Stanford, passing through Jefferson by chance or accident on the way to somewhere else, and the host who in three generations has never been out of Yoknapatawpha farther than a few prolonged Saturday-

nights in Memphis or New Orleans, who has heard of Jenny Lind, not because he has heard of Mark Twain and Mark Twain spoke well of her, but for the same reason that Mark Twain spoke well of her: not that she sang songs, but that she sang them in the old West in the old days, and the man sanctioned by public affirmation to wear a pistol openly in his belt is an inevitable part of the Missouri and the Yoknapatawpha dream too, but never of Duse or Bernhardt or Maximilian of Mexico, let alone whether the Emperor of Mexico even ever had a wife or not (saying — the host — : ‘You mean, she was one of them? maybe even that emperor’s wife?’ and you:

‘Why not? Wasn’t she a Jefferson girl?’) — to stand, in this hot strange little room furious with frying fat, among the roster and chronicle, the deathless murmur of the sublime and deathless names and the deathless faces, the faces omnivorous and insatiable and forever incontent: demon-nun and angel-witch; empress, siren, Erinys: Mistinguette, too, invincibly possessed of a half-century more of years than the mere threescore or so she bragged and boasted, for you to choose among, which one she was — not might have been, nor even could have been, but was: so vast, so limitless in capacity is man’s imagination to disperse and burn away the rubble-dross of fact and probability, leaving only truth and dream — then gone, you are outside again, in the hot noon sun: late;

you have already wasted too much time: to unfumble among the road signs and filling stations to get back on to a highway you know, back into the United States; not that it matters, since you know again now that there is no time: no space: no distance: a fragile and workless scratching almost depthless in a sheet of old barely transparent glass, and (all you had to do was look at it a while; all you have to do now is remember it) there is the clear undistanced voice as though out of the delicate antenna-skeins of radio, further than empress’s throne, than splendid insatiation, even than matriarch’s peaceful rocking chair, across the vast instantaneous intervention, from the long long time ago: ‘Listen, stranger; this was myself: this was I.’

Scene I

INTERIOR, THE JAIL. 10.30 a.m. March twelfth.

The common room, or 'bullpen.' It is on the second floor. A heavy barred door at left is the entrance to it, to the entire cell-block, which — the cells — are indicated by a row of steel doors, each with its own individual small barred window, lining the right wall. A narrow passage at the far end of the right wall leads to more cells. A single big heavily barred window in the rear wall looks down into the street. It is mid-morning of a sunny day.

The door, left, opens with a heavy clashing of the steel lock, and swings back and outward. Temple enters, followed by Stevens and the Jailor. Temple has changed her dress, but wears the fur coat and the same hat. Stevens is dressed exactly as he was in Act II. The Jailor is a typical small-town turnkey, in shirt-sleeves and no necktie, carrying the heavy keys on a big iron ring against his leg as a farmer carries a lantern, say. He is drawing the door to behind him as he enters.

Temple stops just inside the room. Stevens perforce stops also. The Jailor closes the door and locks it on the inside with another clash and clang of steel, and turns.

JAILOR

Well, Lawyer, singing school will be over after tonight, huh?

(to Temple)

You been away, you see. You don't know about this, you ain't up with what's — —

(he stops himself quickly; he is about to commit what he would call a very bad impoliteness, what in the tenets of his class and kind would be the most grave of gaucherie and bad taste: referring directly to a recent bereavement in the presence of the bereaved, particularly one of this nature, even though by this time tomorrow the state itself will have made restitution with the perpetrator's life. He tries to rectify it)
Not that I wouldn't too, if I'd a been the ma of the very — —

(stopping himself again; this is getting worse than ever; now he not only is looking at Stevens, but actually addressing him)

Every Sunday night, and every night since last Sunday except last night — come to think of it, Lawyer, where was you last night? We missed you — Lawyer here and Na — the prisoner have been singing hymns in her cell. The first time, he just stood out there on the sidewalk while she stood in that window yonder. Which was all right, not doing no harm, just singing church hymns. Because all of us home folks here in Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County both know Lawyer Stevens, even if some of us might have thought he got a little out of line — —

(again it is getting out of hand; he realises it, but there is nothing he can do now; he is like someone walking a foot-log: all he can do is move as fast as he dares until he can reach solid ground or at least pass another log to leap to)

defending a nigger murderer let alone when it was his own niece was mur — —

(and reaches another log and leaps to it without stopping: at least one running at right angles for a little distance into simple generality)

— maybe suppose some stranger say, some durn Yankee tourist, happened to be passing through in a car, when we get enough durn criticism from Yankees like it is — besides, a white man standing out there in the cold, while a durned nigger murderer is up here all warm and comfortable; so it happened that me and Mrs. Tubbs hadn't went to prayer meeting that night, so we invited him to come in; and to tell the truth, we come to enjoy it too.

Because as soon as they found out there wasn't going to be no objection to it, the other nigger prisoners (I got five more right now, but I taken them out back and locked them up in the coal house so you could have some privacy) joined in too, and by the second or third Sunday night, folks was stopping along the street to listen to them instead of going to regular church. Of course, the other niggers would just be in and out over Saturday and Sunday night for fighting or gambling or vagrance or drunk, so just about the time they would begin to get in tune, the whole choir would be a complete turnover. In fact, I had a idea at one time to have the Marshal comb the nigger dives and joints not for drunks and gamblers, but basses and baritones.

(he starts to laugh, guffaws once, then catches himself; he looks at Temple with something almost gentle, almost articulate, in his face, taking (as though) by the horns, facing frankly and openly the dilemma of his own inescapable vice)

Excuse me, Mrs. Stevens. I talk too much. All I want to say is, this whole county, not a man or woman, wife or mother either in the whole state of Mississippi, that don't — don't feel — —

(stopping again, looking at Temple)

There I am, still at it, still talking too much. Wouldn't you like for Mrs. Tubbs to bring you up a cup of coffee or maybe a Coca-Cola? She's usually got a bottle or two of sody pop in the icebox.

TEMPLE

No, thank you, Mr. Tubbs. If we could just see Nancy — —

JAILOR

(turning)

Sure, sure.

He crosses toward the rear, right, and disappears into the passage.

TEMPLE

The blindfold again. Out of a Coca-Cola bottle this time or a cup of county-owned coffee.

Stevens takes the same pack of cigarettes from his overcoat pocket, though Temple has declined before he can even offer them.

No, thanks. My hide's toughened now. I hardly feel it. People. They're really innately, inherently gentle and compassionate and kind. That's what wrings, wrenches . . . something. Your entrails, maybe. The member of the mob who holds up the whole ceremony for seconds or even minutes while he dislodges a family of bugs or lizards from the log he is about to put on the fire — —

(there is the clash of another steel door off-stage as the Jailor unlocks Nancy's cell. Temple pauses, turns and listens, then continues rapidly)
And now I've got to say 'I forgive you, sister' to the nigger who murdered my baby. No: it's worse: I've even got to transpose it, turn it around. I've got to start off my new life being forgiven again. How can I say that? Tell me. How can I?

She stops again and turns farther as Nancy enters from the rear alcove, followed by the Jailor, who passes Nancy and comes on, carrying the ring of keys once more like a farmer's lantern.

JAILOR

(to Stevens)

Okay, Lawyer. How much time you want? Thirty minutes? an hour?

STEVENS

Ten minutes should be enough.

JAILOR

(still moving toward the exit, left)

Okay.

(to Temple)

You sure you don't want that coffee or a Coca-Cola? I could bring you up a rocking chair — —

TEMPLE

Thank you just the same, Mr. Tubbs.

JAILOR

Okay.

(at the exit door, unlocking it)

Ten minutes, then.

He unlocks the door, opens it, exits, closes and locks it behind him; the lock clashes, his footsteps die away. Nancy has slowed and stopped where the Jailor passed her; she now stands about six feet to the rear of Temple and Stevens. Her face is calm, unchanged. She is dressed exactly as before, except for the apron; she still wears the hat.

NANCY

(to Temple)

You been to California, they tell me. I used to think maybe I would get there too, some day. But I waited too late to get around to it.

TEMPLE

So did I. Too late and too long. Too late when I went to California, and too late when I came back. That's it: too late and too long, not only for you, but for me too; already too late when both of us should have got

around to running, like from death itself, from the very air anybody breathed named Drake or Mannigoe.

NANCY

Only, we didn't. And you come back, yesterday evening. I heard that too. And I know where you were last night, you and him both.

(indicating Stevens)

You went to see the Mayor.

TEMPLE

Oh, God, the mayor. No: the Governor, the Big Man himself, in Jackson. Of course; you knew that as soon as you realised that Mr. Gavin wouldn't be here last night to help you sing, didn't you? In fact, the only thing you can't know about it is what the Governor told us. You can't know that yet, no matter how clairvoyant you are, because we — the Governor and Mr. Gavin and I — were not even talking about you; the reason I — we had to go and see him was not to beg or plead or bind or loose, but because it would be my right, my duty, my privilege — Don't look at me, Nancy.

NANCY

I'm not looking at you. Besides, it's all right. I know what the Governor told you. Maybe I could have told you last night what he would say, and saved you the trip. Maybe I ought to have — sent you the word as soon as I heard you were back home, and knowed what you and him — (again she indicates Stevens with that barely discernible movement of her head, her hands still folded across her middle as though she still wore the absent apron)

— both would probably be up to. Only, I didn't. But it's all right —

TEMPLE

Why didn't you? Yes, look at me. This is worse, but the other is terrible.

NANCY

What?

TEMPLE

Why didn't you send me the word?

NANCY

Because that would have been hoping: the hardest thing of all to break, get rid of, let go of, the last thing of all poor sinning man will turn

aloose. Maybe it's because that's all he's got. Leastways, he holds onto it, hangs onto it. Even with salvation laying right in his hand, and all he's got to do is, choose between it; even with salvation already in his hand and all he needs is just to shut his fingers, old sin is still too strong for him, and sometimes before he even knows it, he has throwed salvation away just grabbling back at hoping. But it's all right — —

STEVENS

You mean, when you have salvation, you don't have hope?

NANCY

You don't even need it. All you need, all you have to do, is just believe. So maybe — —

STEVENS

Believe what?

NANCY

Just believe. — So maybe it's just as well that all I did last night, was just to guess where you all went. But I know now, and I know what the Big Man told you. And it's all right. I finished all that a long time back, that same day in the judge's court. No: before that even: in the nursery that night, before I even lifted my hand — —

TEMPLE

(convulsively)

Hush. Hush.

NANCY

All right. I've hushed. Because it's all right. I can get low for Jesus too. I can get low for Him too.

TEMPLE

Hush! Hush! At least, don't blaspheme. But who am I to challenge the language you talk about Him in, when He Himself certainly can't challenge it, since that's the only language He arranged for you to learn?

NANCY

What's wrong with what I said? Jesus is a man too. He's got to be. Menfolks listens to somebody because of what he says. Women don't. They don't care what he said. They listens because of what he is.

TEMPLE

Then let Him talk to me. I can get low for Him too, if that's all He wants, demands, asks. I'll do anything He wants if He'll just tell me what to do. No: how to do it. I know what to do, what I must do, what I've got to do. But how? We — I thought that all I would have to do would be to come back and go to the Big Man and tell him that it wasn't you who killed my baby, but I did it five years ago that day when I slipped out the back door of that train, and that would be all. But we were wrong.

Then I — we thought that all it would be was, for me just to come back here and tell you you had to die; to come all the way two thousand miles from California, to sit up all night driving to Jackson and talking for an hour or two and then driving back, to tell you you had to die; not just to bring you the news that you had to die, because any messenger could do that, but just so it could be me that would have to sit up all night and talk for the hour or two hours and then bring you the news back.

You know: not to save you, that wasn't really concerned in it: but just for me, just for the suffering and the paying: a little more suffering simply because there was a little more time left for a little more of it, and we might as well use it since we were already paying for it; and that would be all; it would be finished then. But we were wrong again. That was all, only for you. You wouldn't be any worse off if I had never come back from California. You wouldn't even be any worse off.

And this time tomorrow, you won't be anything at all. But not me. Because there's tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow. All you've got to do is, just to die. But let Him tell me what to do. No: that's wrong; I know what to do, what I'm going to do; I found that out that same night in the nursery too. But let Him tell me how. How? Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and still tomorrow. How?

NANCY

Trust in Him.

TEMPLE

Trust in Him. Look what He has already done to me. Which is all right; maybe I deserved it; at least I'm not the one to criticise or dictate to

Him. But look what He did to you. Yet you can still say that. Why? Why? Is it because there isn't anything else?

NANCY

I don't know. But you got to trust Him. Maybe that's your pay for the suffering.

STEVENS

Whose suffering, and whose pay? Just each one's for his own?

NANCY

Everybody's. All suffering. All poor sinning man's.

STEVENS

The salvation of the world is in man's suffering. Is that it?

NANCY

Yes, sir.

STEVENS

How?

NANCY

I don't know. Maybe when folks are suffering, they will be too busy to get into devilment, won't have time to worry and meddle one another.

TEMPLE

But why must it be suffering? He's omnipotent, or so they tell us. Why couldn't He have invented something else? Or, if it's got to be suffering, why can't it be just your own? why can't you buy back your own sins with your own agony? Why do you and my little baby both have to suffer just because I decided to go to a baseball game five years ago? Do you have to suffer everybody else's anguish just to believe in God? What kind of God is it that has to blackmail His customers with the whole world's grief and ruin?

NANCY

He don't want you to suffer. He don't like suffering neither. But He can't help Himself. He's like a man that's got too many mules. All of a sudden one morning, he looks around and sees more mules than he can count at one time even, let alone find work for, and all he knows is that they are his, because at least don't nobody else want to claim them, and that the pasture fence was still holding them last night where they can't harm themselves nor nobody else the least possible.

And that when Monday morning comes, he can walk in there and hem some of them up and even catch them if he's careful about not never turning his back on the ones he ain't hemmed up. And that, once the gear is on them, they will do his work and do it good, only he's still got to be careful about getting too close to them, or forgetting that another one of them is behind him, even when he is feeding them. Even when it's Saturday noon again, and he is turning them back into the pasture, where even a mule can know it's got until Monday morning anyway to run free in mule sin and mule pleasure.

STEVENS

You have got to sin, too?

NANCY

You ain't got to. You can't help it. And He knows that. But you can suffer. And He knows that too. He don't tell you not to sin, he just asks you not to. And He don't tell you to suffer. But He gives you the chance. He gives you the best He can think of, that you are capable of doing. And He will save you.

STEVENS

You too? A murderess? In heaven?

NANCY

I can work.

STEVENS

The harp, the raiment, the singing, may not be for Nancy Mannigoe — not now. But there's still the work to be done — the washing and sweeping, maybe even the children to be tended and fed and kept from hurt and harm and out from under the grown folks' feet?

(he pauses a moment. Nancy says nothing, immobile, looking at no one)

Maybe even that baby?

(Nancy doesn't move, stir, not looking at anything apparently, her face still, bemused, expressionless)

That one too, Nancy? Because you loved that baby, even at the very moment when you raised your hand against it, knew that there was nothing left but to raise your hand?

(Nancy doesn't answer nor stir)

A heaven where that little child will remember nothing of your hands but gentleness because now this earth will have been nothing but a dream that didn't matter? Is that it?

TEMPLE

Or maybe not that baby, not mine, because, since I destroyed mine myself when I slipped out the back end of that train that day five years ago, I will need about all the forgiving and forgetting that one six-months-old baby is capable of. But the other one: yours: that you told me about, that you were carrying six months gone, and you went to the picnic or dance or frolic or fight or whatever it was, and the man kicked you in the stomach and you lost it? That one too?

STEVENS

(to Nancy)

What? Its father kicked you in the stomach while you were pregnant?

NANCY

I don't know.

STEVENS

You don't know who kicked you?

NANCY

I know that. I thought you meant its pa.

STEVENS

You mean, the man, who kicked you wasn't even its father?

NANCY

I don't know. Any of them might have been.

STEVENS

Any of them? You don't have any idea who its father was?

NANCY

(looks at Stevens impatiently)

If you backed your behind into a buzz-saw, could you tell which tooth hit you first?

(to Temple)

What about that one?

TEMPLE

Will that one be there too, that never had a father and never was even born, to forgive you? Is there a heaven for it to go to so it can forgive you? Is there a heaven, Nancy?

NANCY

I don't know. I believes.

TEMPLE

Believe what?

NANCY

I don't know. But I believes.

They all pause at the sound of feet approaching beyond the exit door, all are looking at the door as the key clashes again in the lock and the door swings out and the Jailor enters, drawing the door to behind him.

JAILOR

(locking the door)

Thirty minutes, Lawyer. You named it, you know: not me.

STEVENS

I'll come back later.

JAILOR

(turns and crosses toward them)

Provided you don't put it off too late. What I mean, if you wait until tonight to come back, you might have some company; and if you put it off until tomorrow, you won't have no client.

(to Nancy)

I found that preacher you want. He'll be here about sundown, he said. He sounds like he might even be another good baritone. And you can't have too many, especially as after tonight you won't need none, huh? No hard feelings, Nancy. You committed about as horrible a crime as this county ever seen, but you're fixing to pay the law for it, and if the child's own mother — —

(he falters, almost pauses, catches himself and continues briskly, moving again)

There, talking too much again. Come on, if Lawyer's through with you. You can start taking your time at daylight tomorrow morning, because you might have a long hard trip.

He passes her and goes briskly on toward the alcove at rear. Nancy turns to follow.

TEMPLE

(quickly)

Nancy.

(Nancy doesn't pause. Temple continues, rapidly)

What about me? Even if there is one and somebody waiting in it to forgive me, there's still tomorrow and tomorrow. And suppose tomorrow and tomorrow, and then nobody there, nobody waiting to forgive me — —

NANCY

(moving on after the Jailor)

Believe.

TEMPLE

Believe what, Nancy? Tell me.

NANCY

Believe.

She exits into the alcove behind the Jailor. The steel door off-stage clangs, the key clashes. Then the Jailor reappears, approaches, and crosses toward the exit. He unlocks the door and opens it out again, pauses.

JAILOR

Yes, sir. A long hard way. If I was ever fool enough to commit a killing that would get my neck into a noose, the last thing I would want to see would be a preacher. I'd a heap rather believe there wasn't nothing after death than to risk the station where I was probably going to get off.

(he waits, holding the door, looking back at them. Temple stands motionless until Stevens touches her arm slightly. Then she moves, stumbles slightly and infinitesimally, so infinitesimally and so quickly recovered that the Jailor has barely time to react to it, though he does

so: with quick concern, with that quality about him almost gentle, almost articulate, turning from the door, even leaving it open as he starts quickly toward her)

Here; you set down on the bench; I'll get you a glass of water.

(to Stevens)

Durn it, Lawyer, why did you have to bring her — —

TEMPLE

(recovered)

I'm all right.

She walks steadily toward the door. The Jailor watches her.

JAILOR

You sure?

TEMPLE

(walking steadily and rapidly toward him and the door now)

Yes. Sure.

JAILOR

(turning back toward the door)

Okay. I sure don't blame you. Durned if I see how even a murdering nigger can stand this smell.

He passes on out the door and exits, invisible though still holding the door and waiting to lock it.

Temple, followed by Stevens, approaches the door.

JAILOR'S VOICE

(off-stage: surprised)

Howdy, Gowan, here's your wife now.

TEMPLE

(walking)

Anyone to save it. Anyone who wants it. If there is none, I'm sunk. We all are. Doomed. Damned.

STEVENS

(walking)

Of course we are. Hasn't He been telling us that for going on two thousand years?

GOWAN'S VOICE

(off-stage)

Temple.

TEMPLE

Coming.

They exit. The door closes in, clashes, the clash and clang of the key as the Jailor locks it again; the three pairs of footsteps sound and begin to fade in the outer corridor.

(CURTAIN)

The End

A Fable, William Faulkner

A Fable

Faulkner spent more than a decade in writing this 1954 novel, which he intended to be "the best work of my life and maybe of my time". A Fable won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, though critical reviews were mixed and it is now generally considered to be one of Faulkner's lesser works. The plot takes place in France during World War I and stretches through the course of a single week in 1918.

Corporal Stephan, who represents the reincarnation of Jesus Christ, orders 3,000 troops to disobey their orders of attacking in trench warfare. In return, the Germans do not attack and the war stops when soldiers realise that it takes two sides to wage a war. The Generalissimo, who represents leaders that use war to gain power, invites his German counterpart to discuss how to restart the war. He then arrests and executes Stefan. Before Stefan's execution, the Generalissimo tries to convince the corporal that war can never be stopped as it is the essence of human nature.

In his contemporary review of the novel, the critic Philip Blair Rice noted that Faulkner had returned in subject matter to the one general

subject that engaged him besides Mississippi, the First World War. Richard H. King interpreted *A Fable* as the one major attempt by Faulkner to depict political action in his novels and has characterised the novel as “Faulkner’s failed political novel”.

The first edition

Contents

Wednesday

Monday: Monday Night

Tuesday Night

Monday: Tuesday: Wednesday

Tuesday: Wednesday

Tuesday: Wednesday: Wednesday Night

Wednesday Night

Thursday: Thursday Night

Friday: Saturday: Sunday

Tomorrow

To my daughter,

Jill

To William Bacher and Henry Hathaway of Beverly Hills, California, who had the basic idea from which this book grew into its present form; to James Street in whose volume, *Look Away*, I read the story of the hanged man and the bird; and to Hodding Carter and Ben Wasson of the Levee Press, who published in a limited edition the original version of the story of the stolen racehorse, I wish to make grateful acknowledgment.

W. F.

Wednesday

LONG BEFORE THE first bugles sounded from the barracks within the city and the cantonments surrounding it, most of the city was already awake. These did not need to rise from the straw mattresses and thin

pallet beds of their hive-dense tenements, because few of them save the children had ever lain down. Instead, they had huddled all night in one vast tongueless brotherhood of dread and anxiety, about the thin fires of braziers and meagre hearths, until the night wore at last away and a new day of anxiety and dread had begun.

Because the original regiment had been raised in this district, raised in person, in fact, by one of the glorious blackguards who later became Napoleon's marshals, who delivered the regiment into the Emperor's own hand, and along with it became one of the fiercest stars in that constellation which filled half the sky with its portent and blasted half the earth with its lightning. And most of its subsequent replacements had been drawn from this same district, so that most of these old men were not only veterans of it in their time, and these male children already dedicated to it when their time should come, but all these people were parents and kin, not only the actual old parents and kin of the doomed men, but fathers and mothers and sisters and wives and sweethearts whose sons and brothers and husbands and fathers and lovers might have been among the doomed men except for sheer blind chance and luck.

Even before the bugles' echoes died away, the warren'd purlieus were already disgorging them. A French or British or American aviator (or a German either for that matter, if he had had the temerity and the luck) could have watched it best: hovel and tenement voiding into lane and alley and nameless cul-de-sac, and lane and alley and cul-de-sac compounding into streets as the trickles became streams and the streams became rivers, until the whole city seemed to be pouring down the broad boulevards converging like wheelspokes into the Place de Ville, filling the Place and then, pressed on by the weight of its own converging mass, flowing like an unrecoiling wave up to the blank gates of the Hôtel where the three sentries of the three co-embattled nations flanked the three empty flagstaffs awaiting the three concordant flags.

They met the first troops here. It was a body of garrison cavalry, drawn up across the mouth of the wide main boulevard leading from the Place to the old gate in what had once been the city's ancient eastern wall,

already in position and waiting as though the murmur of the flood's beginning had preceded it, right into the bedroom of the town-major himself. But the crowd paid no attention to the cavalry. It just continued to press on into the Place, slowing and stopping now because of its own massy congested weight, merely stirring and shifting constantly and faintly within its own mass while it stared, mazed and patient in the rising light, at the Hôtel door.

Then the sunrise gun crashed from the old citadel above the city; the three flags broke simultaneously from nowhere and climbed the three staffs. What they broke and climbed and peaked in was still dawn, hanging motionless for a moment. But when they streamed on the first morning breeze, they streamed into sunlight, flinging into sunlight the three mutual colors — the red for courage and pride, the white for purity and constancy, the blue for honor and truth. Then the empty boulevard behind the cavalry filled suddenly with sunlight which flung suddenly the tall shadows of the men and the horses outward upon the crowd as though the cavalry were charging it.

Only it was the people advancing on the cavalry. The mass made no sound. It was almost orderly, merely irresistible in the concord of its frail components like a wave in its drops. For an instant the cavalry — there was an officer present, though a sergeant-major seemed to be in charge — did nothing. Then the sergeant-major shouted. It was not a command, because the troop did not stir. It sounded like nothing whatever, in fact: unintelligible: a thin forlorn cry hanging for a fading instant in the air like one of the faint, sourceless, musical cries of the high invisible larks now filling the sky above the city. His next shout though was a command. But it was already too late; the crowd had already underswept the military, irresistible in that passive and invincible humility, carrying its fragile bones and flesh into the iron orbit of the hooves and sabres with an almost inattentive, a humbly and passively contemptuous disregard, like martyrs entering an arena of lions.

For another instant, the cavalry held. And even then, it did not break. It just began to move in retrograde while still facing forward, as though it

had been picked up bodily — the white-rolled eyes of the short-held horses, the high, small faces of the riders gaped with puny shouting beneath the raised sabres, all moving backward like the martial effigies out of a gutted palace or mansion or museum being swept along on the flood which had obliterated to instantaneous rubble the stone crypts of their glorious privacy. Then the mounted officer freed himself. For a moment, he alone seemed to be moving, because he alone was stationary above the crowd which was now parting and flowing on either side of him. Then he actually was moving, forward, breasting the still short-bitted horse, iron-held, into and through the moving crowd; a voice cried once somewhere beneath the horse — a child, a woman, possibly a man's voice eunuch-keened by fear or pain — as he forced the horse on, feinting and dodging the animal through the human river which made no effort to avoid him, which accepted the horse as water accepts a thrusting prow. Then he was gone. Accelerating now, the crowd poured into the boulevard. It flung the cavalry aside and poured on, blotting the intersecting streets as it passed them as a river in flood blots up its tributary creeks, until at last that boulevard too was one dense seething voiceless lake.

But before that, the infantry had already arrived, debouching from the Place de Ville on the crowd's rear long before the cavalry officer could have reported to the officer of the day, who would have dispatched the orderly, who would have summonsed the batman, who would have interrupted at his ablutions and shaving the adjutant, who would have waked the town-major in his nightcap, who would have telephoned or sent a runner to the infantry commander in the citadel. It was a whole battalion, armed except for packs, emerging from the Place de Ville in close route column, led by a light tank with its visor closed for action, which as it advanced, parted the crowd like a snow-plow, thrusting the divided parting back from either curb like the snow-plow's jumbled masses, the infantry deploying into two parallel files behind the advancing tank, until at last the whole boulevard from the Place to the old gate was clear and empty again between the two thin lines of interlocked bayoneted rifles. A slight commotion rose at one point behind the dyke of bayonets, but its area was not ten feet and it did not spread, and only those near it knew that anything was happening or

had happened. And when a platoon sergeant stooped under the interlocked rifles and shouldered his way in, there was not much to see either: only a young woman, a girl, thin and poorly dressed, who had fainted. She lay as she had fallen: a thin huddle of shabby, travel-stained garments, as if she had come a long distance and mostly on foot or in farm carts, lying in the narrow grave-shaped space they had made for her to fall in, and, if such had been her intention, die in, while those who apparently had made no room for her to stand erect and breathe in, stood looking quietly down at her as people will, until someone makes the first move. The sergeant made it.

‘At least pick her up,’ he said savagely. ‘Get her up out of the street where she wont be trampled.’ A man moved then, but as he and the sergeant stooped, the woman opened her eyes; she even tried to help as the sergeant hauled her to her feet, not roughly, just impatient at the stupidly complicating ineptitude of civilians at all times, particularly at this one now which kept him from his abandoned post. ‘Who does she belong to?’ he said. There was no answer: only the quiet attentive faces. Apparently he had expected none. He was already glancing about, though he had probably already seen that it would be impossible to get her out of the crowd, even if anyone had offered to take charge of her. He looked at her again; he started to speak again, to her this time, but stopped himself, furious and contained — a thick man of forty, moustached like a Sicilian brigand and wearing the service and campaign ribbons of three continents and two hemispheres on his tunic, whose racial stature Napoleon had shortened two or three inches a hundred years ago as Caesar had shortened that of the Italians and Hannibal that of the nameless pediment-pieces of his glory, — a husband and father who should (perhaps even could and would) have been a custodian of wine-casks in the Paris Halles if he and the Paris Halles had been cast on some other stage than this. He glanced again at the patient faces. ‘Doesn’t anybody — —’

‘She’s hungry,’ a voice said.

‘All right,’ the sergeant said. ‘Has anybody — —’ But the hand had already extended the bread. It was the heel of a loaf, soiled and even a

little warm from the pocket it had been carried in. The sergeant took it. But when he offered it to her, she refused it, quickly, glancing quickly about with something like fright in her face, her eyes, as if she were looking for an avenue of escape. The sergeant thrust the bread into her hands. 'Here,' he said harshly, with that roughness which was not unkindness but just impatience, 'eat it. You'll have to stay and look at him too, whether you want to or not.'

But she refused again, repudiating the bread, not the gift of it but the bread itself, and not to whoever had offered it, but to herself. It was as if she were trying to keep her eyes from looking at the bread, and knew that she could not. Even while they watched her, she surrendered.

Her eyes, her whole body, denied her mouth's refusal, her eyes already devouring the bread before her hand reached to take it, snatching it from the sergeant and holding it to her face between both hands as though to hide either the bread from a ravisher, or her voracity from those who watched her, gnawing at the bread like a species of rodent, her eyes darting constantly above the concealing hands, not quite furtive, not quite secret: just anxious, watchful, and terrified, — a quality which glowed and faded and then glowed again like a coal she breathed on.

But she was all right now, and the sergeant had begun to turn away, when the same voice spoke again. Without doubt, it belonged to the hand which had tendered the bread, though if the sergeant remarked it now, he gave no sign.

But without doubt he did remark now that the face did not belong here at all, not now, at this time, this place — not just in France, but in forty kilometres of the Western Front, on this or any Wednesday in late May in 1918 — ; a man not so young actually, but rather simply youthful-looking, and this not merely in contrast to the other men among (or above rather; he was that tall, that unblemished) whom he stood, sound and erect and standing easily in a faded smock and rough trousers and stained shoes like a road-mender or perhaps a plasterer, who, to be here on this day on this place on the earth, must have been

a soldier invalidated safely and securely and forever out since the fifth day of August almost four years ago now, yet who, if this was so, didn't show it, and if the sergeant remarked it or thought it, there was only the flicker of his glance to reveal that he had.

The first time the man spoke, he had addressed the sergeant; this time, the sergeant had no doubt of it.

'But now she has eaten bread,' the man said. 'With that morsel, she should have bought immunity from her anguish, not?'

In fact, the sergeant had turned away, already in motion, when the voice, the murmur, stopped him — the murmur not so much gentle as just quiet, not so much tentative as bland, and possessing, for last of all the qualities, innocence: so that in the second, the instant of pause before he even began to turn back, he could see, feel all the quiet attentive faces watching, not him nor the speaker either, but as though looking at something intangible which the man's voice had created in the very air between them. Then the sergeant saw it too. It was the cloth he wore.

Turning and looking back, not only at the man who had spoken but at all the faces surrounding him, it seemed to him that he was looking, out of a sort of weary, prolonged, omniscient grief and sorrow so long borne and accustomed that, now when he happened to remember it, it was no longer even regret, at the whole human race across the insuperable barrier of the vocation and livelihood to which twenty years ago he had not merely dedicated but relinquished too, not just his life but his bones and flesh; it seemed to him that the whole ring of quiet attentive faces was stained with a faint, ineradicable, reflected horizon-blue.

It had always been so; only the tint had changed — the drab and white of the desert and the tropics, the sharp full red-and-blue of the old uniform, and now the chameleon-azure of this present one since three years ago. He had expected that, not only expected, but accepted, relinquishing volition and the fear of hunger and decision to the extent of even being paid a few sure sous a day for the privilege and right, at

no other cost than obedience and the exposure and risk of his tender and brittle bones and flesh, of immunity forever for his natural appetites.

So for twenty years now he had looked at the anonymous denizens of the civilian world from the isolation, insulation, of that unchallengeable immunity, with a sort of contempt as alien intruders, rightless, on simple sufferance, himself and his interknit and interlocked kind in the impregnable fraternity of valor and endurance breasting through it behind the sharp and cleaving prow of their stripe and bars and stars and ribbons, like an armored ship (or, since a year ago now, a tank) through a shoal of fish. But now something had happened.

Looking about at the waiting faces (all except the young woman's; she alone was not watching him, the end of the heel of bread still cupped against her chewing face between her slender dirt-stained hands, so that it was not he alone, but the two of them, himself and the kinless and nameless girl, who seemed to stand in a narrow well of unbreathing), it seemed to him with a kind of terror that it was himself who was the alien, and not just alien but obsolete; that on that day twenty years ago, in return for the right and the chance to wear on the battle-soiled breast of his coat the battle-grimed symbolical candy-stripes of valor and endurance and fidelity and physical anguish and sacrifice, he had sold his birthright in the race of man. But he did not show it. The candy-stripes themselves were the reason that he could not, and his wearing of them the proof that he would not.

'And so?' he said.

'It was the whole regiment,' the tall man said dreamily, in his murmurous, masculine, gentle, almost musing baritone. 'All of it. At zero, nobody left the trench except the officers and a few N.C.O.'s. That's right, not?'

'And so?' the sergeant said again.

'Why didn't the boche attack?' the tall man said. 'When they saw that we were not coming over? that something had happened to the attack? The drum-fire was all right, and the rolling barrage too, only when it

lifted and the moment came, only the section leaders had climbed out of the trench, but that the men themselves were not coming? They must have seen that, not? When you have been facing another front only a thousand metres away for four years, you can see an attack fail to start, and probably why. And you can't say it was because of the barrage; that's why you get out of the trench in the first place and charge: to get out from under somebody's shelling — sometimes your own, not?'

The sergeant looked only at the tall man; he needed to do no more since he could feel the others — the quiet, attentive, quietly-breathing faces, listening, missing nothing. 'A field marshal,' the sergeant said in a bitter contemptuous voice. 'Maybe it's time somebody looked into that uniform you are wearing.' He held out his hand. 'Let's have a look at them.'

The tall man looked calmly and peacefully down at him a moment longer. Then his hand went somewhere under the smock and reappeared and extended the papers, folded once, stained and soiled and dog-eared at the crease. The sergeant took and opened them.

Yet even then, he did not seem to be looking at the papers, his glance instead now flicking rapidly again about the other motionless intent faces, while the tall man still looked down at him, serene and waiting, and then speaking again, remote, calm, almost absently, conversational:

'And at noon yesterday, our whole front stopped except for token artillery, one gun to a battery each ten thousand metres, and at fifteen hours the British and the Americans stopped too, and when it got quiet you could hear the boche doing the same thing, so that by sundown yesterday there was no more gunfire in France except the token ones since they had to leave them for a little longer yet since all that silence, falling suddenly out of the sky on the human race after going on four years, might have destroyed it — —'

Rapidly and in one motion, the sergeant refolded the papers and extended them back toward the man, or apparently so, since before the man could raise his hand to take them, the sergeant's hand had

grasped the front of his smock, gripping as one the crumple of the papers and the wadded mass of the rough cloth, jerking, though actually it was not the tall man but the sergeant who moved, the sergeant's brigand's face nose to nose with the other's, his rotting discolored teeth gaped for speech, though still empty of it because the other man was still talking in that calm unhurried murmur: 'And now General of Division Gragnon is bringing the whole lot of them back here to ask the Generalissimo to let him shoot them, since that much peace and silence, falling without warning on the human race — —'

'Not even a field marshal,' the sergeant said in his furious, seething voice: 'an advocate.' He said, in that harsh furious murmur no louder than the other man's had been, to which the static attentive faces ringing them about seemed not to listen or even hear anymore than they had listened to or heard the other man while he spoke, anymore than the young woman herself did or was, still gnawing and tearing steadily at the bread behind her huddled hands, but only watching them, intent and incurious as deaf people. 'Ask the bastards you have come here to look at if they think anybody has quit.'

'I know that too,' the other said. 'I just said so. You saw my papers.'

'So will the provost-marshal's adjutant,' the sergeant said, and flung, not the other man, but himself away and turned again, still clutching the crumpled papers and using his elbows and hands both this time to open his path back to the boulevard; then he stopped again suddenly and jerked his head up, and as they watched, he seemed to raise his whole body in order to look past and above the crowded heads and faces, in the direction of the old city gate.

Then they all heard it, not only the sergeant already ducking back under the interlocked rifles, but even the young woman, who even stopped chewing behind her cupped hands to listen too, when as one the heads and the packed bodies turned away from her and toward the boulevard, not because so light on them had been the impact of her trouble and the spectacle of its alleviation, but because of the sound

now coming up the boulevard from the old city gate like a wind beginning.

Except for the shouts of the section leaders of the deployed infantry aligning each curb, the sound was not voices yet so much as a sigh, an exhalation, travelling from breast to breast up the boulevard. It was as if the night's anxiety, quiescent for a time beneath the simple weight of waiting, now that the new day was about to reveal the actuality which in darkness had only been a dread, was gathering itself to flow over them like the new day itself in one great blinding wave, as the first car entered the city.

It contained the three generals. It came fast, so fast that the shouts of the section leaders and the clash of rifles as each section presented arms and then clashed back to 'at ease', were not only continuous but overlapping, so that the car seemed to progress on one prolonged crash of iron as on invisible wings with steel feathers, — a long, dusty open car painted like a destroyer and flying the pennon of the supreme commander of all the allied armies, the three generals sitting side by side in the tonneau amid a rigid glitter of aides, — the three old men who held individual command over each of the three individual armies, and the one of that three who, by mutual consent and accord, held supreme command over all (and, by that token and right, over everything beneath and on and above the distracted half-continent) — the Briton, the American, and between them the Generalissimo: the slight gray man with a face wise, intelligent, and unbelieving, who no longer believed in anything but his disillusion and his intelligence and his limitless power — flashing across that terrified and aghast amazement and then gone, as the section leaders shouted again and the boots and the rifles crashed back to simple alert.

The lorries were right behind it. They were coming fast too, in close order and seemingly without end, since this was the whole regiment. But still there was no concerted, no definite, human sound yet, not even the crashing ejaculation of salute this time, but only the stir, the shift of movement in the crowd itself, pacing the first lorry in that silence which was still aghast and not quite believing, in which the

anguish and terror seemed to rise to each lorry as it approached, and enclose it as it passed, and follow it as it sped on, broken only now and then when someone — a woman — cried out at one of the passing faces — a face which, because of the lorry's speed, had already passed and vanished before recognition became a fact, and the roar of the next lorry had already drowned it before the recognition became a cry, so that the lorries seemed to be travelling even faster than the car, as though the car, with half a continent supine before its bonnet, possessed the gift of leisure, where the lorries, whose destination could be computed in seconds now, had only the spur of shame.

They were open, with high, slatted sides as though for the transportation of cattle, packed like cattle with standing men, bareheaded, disarmed, stained from the front lines, with something desperate and defiant in the unshaven and sleepless faces which glared down at the crowd as if they had never seen human beings before, or could not see these now, or at least could not recognise them as human beings.

They were like the faces of sleepwalkers looking backward across nightmares, recognising no one and no familiar things, glaring down across the fleeing irrevocable instant as if they were being hurried to execution itself, flashing on, rapid and successive and curiously identical, not despite the fact that each had an individuality and a name, but because of it; identical not because of an identical doom, but because each carried into that mutual doom a name and an individuality, and that most complete privacy of all: the capacity for that solitude in which every man has to die, — flashing on as if they had no part nor interest in, and were not even aware of, the violence and speed with which or in which they rigidly moved, like phantoms or apparitions or perhaps figures cut without depth from tin or cardboard and snatched in violent repetition across a stage set for a pantomime of anguish and fatality.

And now there was a concerted sound: a faint yelling beginning somewhere in the Place de Ville, which the first lorry would be reaching about now. It was high, thin with distance, prolonged, not vindictive

but defiant, with at the same time a curiously impersonal quality, as if the men it came from were not making, producing it, but merely passing through it as through a sudden noisy though harmless burst of spring rain.

It came in fact from the Hôtel de Ville, which the first lorries were now passing, where the three sentries now stood at attention beneath the three flags hanging windless now in the following stillness of the dawn breeze, and where on the stone steps before the door the old generalissimo, the other two generals having followed him out of the halted car, had now stopped and turned, the two lesser generals stopping and turning with him, both on a step higher than his and so taller than he, both as gray as he, both slightly behind him though not behind each other, while the first lorry passed, and the hatless, dishevelled, somnambulistic men in it, waked perhaps at sight of the three flags or perhaps by the simple isolation of the three old men after the crowded boulevard, but waking anyway, and in that same instant divining, identifying the three gaudy panoplied old men, not merely by their juxtaposition to the three flags but by their isolation, like that of three plague carriers in the empty center of an aghast and fleeing city, or perhaps the three survivors of a city swept by plague, immune and impervious, gaudy and panoplied and seemingly as harmless in time as a photograph posed and fading since these fifty or sixty years, — but — the men in the lorries — anyway waking, as one man, and as one man yelling, shaking their clenched hands down at the three impassive figures, the yelling passing from lorry to lorry as each entered the yelling and sped on, until the last one seemed to trail behind it a cloud of doomed and forlorn repudiation filled with gaped faces and threatening fists like the fading cloud of its own dust.

It was like dust, still hanging in the air long after the object — the motion, the friction, the body, the momentum, speed — which had produced it was gone and vanished. Because the whole boulevard was filled with yelling now, not defiant now but just amazed and incredulous, the two back-flung parallel banks of massed bodies and wan faces now gaped and frantic with adjuration. Because there was still one more lorry.

It came fast too; although there were two hundred yards between it and the last one preceding it, this one seemed to be travelling twice as fast as the others, just as the others had seemed to be travelling twice as fast as the pennoned car containing the three generals. Yet it seemed to move in complete silence. There was something almost furtive about it. Where the others had seemed to pass noisily, violently almost, in a kind of defiant valedictory of shame and despair, this one came and was gone with a sort of noiseless, celeritous effacement, as if the men who drove it abhorred, not its destination at all, but rather its contents.

It was open, like the others, indistinguishable from the others, except by its cargo. Because, where the others had been packed with standing men, this one carried only thirteen. They were hatless and dirty and battle-stained too, but they were manacled, chained to one another and to the lorry itself like wild beasts, so that at first glance they looked not merely like foreigners but like creatures of another race, another species; alien, bizarre, and strange, even though they wore on their collar-tabs the same regimental numerals, to the rest of the regiment which had not only preceded them by that reduceless gap but which had even seemed to be fleeing from them, not only by their chains and isolation, but by their very expressions and attitudes too: where the faces in the other fleeing lorries had been dazed and spent, like those of men too long under ether, the faces of these thirteen were merely grave, attentive, watchful.

Then you saw that four of the thirteen were really foreigners, alien not only by their gyves and isolation to the rest of the regiment but against the whole panorama of city and soil across which the lorry was rushing them, — the faces of four mountain men in a country which had no mountains, of peasants in a land which no longer had a peasantry; alien even among the other nine among whom they were chained and shackled, since where the other nine were grave and watchful and a little — not too much — concerned, three of the four who were not Frenchmen were merely a little puzzled, alert too, almost decorous, curious and interested: the mountain peasants whom they resembled,

entering for the first time a strange valley market-town, say; men overtaken suddenly by an uproar in a tongue which they had no hope of comprehending and, indeed, not much interest in, and therefore no concern in its significance; — three of the four who were not Frenchmen, that is, because now the crowd itself had discerned that the fourth one was alien still somehow even to the other three, if only in being the sole object of its vituperation and terror and fury.

Because it was to — against — this one man that the crowd was raising its voices and its clenched hands, having barely glanced at the other twelve. He stood near the front, his hands resting quietly on the top rail, so that the loop of chain between his wrists and the corporal's stripes on his sleeve were both visible, with an alien face like all the other twelve, a mountain peasant's face like the last three, a little younger than several of them, looking down at the fleeing sea of eyes and gaped mouths and fists with the same watchfulness as the other twelve, but with neither the bafflement nor the concern: — a face merely interested, attentive, and calm, with something else in it which none of the others had: a comprehension, understanding, utterly free of compassion, as if he had already anticipated without censure or pity the uproar which rose and paced and followed the lorry as it sped on.

It crossed in its turn the Place de Ville, where the three generals still stood like a posed camera group on the steps of the Hôtel. Perhaps this time it was the simple juxtaposition of the three flags which were just beginning to stir in the reversed day wind, since certainly none of the other three who were not Frenchmen, and possibly none of the whole twelve, seemed to remark the significance of the three dissimilar banners, nor even to see the three starred and braided old men standing beneath them.

It was only the thirteenth man who seemed to notice, see, remark; only the gaze of the corporal in passing as he and the old supreme general, whom no man in any of the other lorries could say had ever looked definitely at any one of them, stared full at one another across the moment which could not last because of the vehicle's speed, — the peasant's face above the corporal's chevrons and the shackled wrists in

the speeding lorry, and the gray inscrutable face above the stars of supreme rank and the bright ribbons of honor and glory on the Hôtel steps, looking at one another across the fleeing instant. Then the lorry was gone.

The old generalissimo turned, his two confreres turning with him, flanking him in rigid protocol; the three sentries clashed and stamped to present arms as the limber and glittering young aide sprang and opened the door.

This time, the commotion went almost unnoticed, not only because of the yelling and uproar, but because the crowd itself was moving now. It was the young woman again, the one who had fainted. She was still gnawing at the bread when the last lorry came up. Then she ceased, and those nearest remembered later that she moved, cried out, and tried to run, to break through the crowd and into the street as if to intercept or overtake the lorry.

But by that time, they were all moving toward the street, even those at whose backs she was clawing and scrabbling and at whose faces she was trying to cry, say something through the mass of chewed bread in her mouth. So they stopped remembering her at all, and there remained only the man who had given her the bread, upon whose chest she was still hammering with the hand which still clutched the fragment of the morsel, while she tried to cry something at him through the wet mass in her mouth.

Then she began to spit the chewed bread at him, not deliberately, intentionally, but because there was not time to turn her head aside and void her mouth for speech, already screaming something at him through the spew and spray of mastication. But the man was already running too, wiping his face on his sleeve, vanishing into the crowd as it burst at last through the interlocked rifles and poured into the street. Still clutching what remained of the bread, she ran too. For a while, she even kept up with them, running and darting between and among them with an urgency apparently even greater than theirs, as the whole mass of them poured up the boulevard after the fleeing lorries.

But presently the ones she had passed began to overtake her in turn and pass her; soon she was running in a fading remnant of dispersal, panting and stumbling, seeming to run now in spent and frantic retrograde to the whole city's motion, the whole world's, so that when she reached the Place de Ville at last, and stopped, all mankind seemed to have drained away and vanished, bequeathing, relicting to her the broad, once-more empty boulevard and the Place and even, for that moment, the city and the earth itself; — a slight woman, not much more than a girl, who had been pretty once, and could be again, with sleep and something to eat and a little warm water and soap and a comb, and whatever it was out of her eyes, standing in the empty Place, wringing her hands.

Monday: Monday Night

WHEN THE ATTACK was first offered him, the general commanding the division which contained the regiment said immediately: 'Of course. Thanks. What is it?' Because it seemed to him that here at last was the chance which he had needed and wanted for more years than he cared to remember, so many years in fact that he had, as he realised now, given up hope of ever getting. Because at some moment in his past which even he could not specifically postulate, something had happened to him, or at least to his career.

It seemed to him that he had been intended by fate itself to be the perfect soldier: pastless, unhampered, and complete. His first recollection had been a Pyrenean orphanage run by a Catholic sisterhood, where there was no record of his parentage whatever, even to be concealed. At seventeen, he was an enlisted private; at twenty-four, he had been three years a sergeant and of such destined promise that his regimental commander (himself a self-made man who had risen from the ranks) gave no one any rest until the protégé also had his chance for officers' school; by 1914 he had established a splendid record as a desert colonel of Spahis, and, immediately in France itself, the beginning of an unimpeachable one as a brigadier, so that to those who believed in him and watched his career (he had no influence

either, and no friends too save those, like the obscure colonel of his sergeantcy, whom he had made, earned himself by his own efforts and record) there seemed no limit to his destiny save the premature end of the war itself.

Then something happened. Not to him: he had not changed, he was still competent, still unhampered and complete. He seemed merely to have lost or mislaid somewhere, at some point, the old habit or mantle or aura (or affinity for) of almost monotonous success in which he had seemed to move as in his garments, as if not he but his destiny had slowed down, not changed: just slowed down for the time being: which idea his superiors themselves seemed to hold, since he got in due time (in fact, a little sooner than some) the next star for his hat and not only the division which went with it but the opportunities too, indicating that his superiors still believed that at any moment now he might recover, or rediscover, the secret of the old successfulness.

But that was two years ago now, and for a year now even the opportunities had ceased, as though at last even the superiors had come around to his own belief that the high tide of his hopes and aspirations had fluxed three years ago, three years before the last backwash of his destiny finally ebbed from beneath him, leaving him stranded a mere general of division still in a war already three years defunctive. It — the war — would hang on a while yet, of course; it would take the Americans, the innocent newcomers, another year probably to discover that you cannot really whip Germans: you can only exhaust them.

It might even last another ten years or even another twenty, by which time France and Britain would have vanished as military and even political integers and the war would have become a matter of a handful of Americans who didn't even have ships to go back home in, battling with limbs from shattered trees and the rafters from ruined houses and the stones from fences of weed-choked fields and the broken bayonets and stocks of rotted guns and rusted fragments wrenched from crashed aeroplanes and burned tanks, against the skeletons of German companies stiffened by a few Frenchmen and Britons tough enough like

himself to endure still, to endure as he would always, immune to nationality, to exhaustion, even to victory — by which time he hoped he himself would be dead.

Because by ordinary he believed himself incapable of hoping: only of daring, without fear or qualm or regret within the iron and simple framework of the destiny which he believed would never betray him so long as he continued to dare without question or qualm or regret, but which apparently had abandoned him, leaving him only the capacity to dare, until two days ago when his corps commander sent for him. The corps commander was his only friend in France, or anywhere else above earth, for that matter.

They had been subalterns together in the same regiment into which he had been commissioned. But Lallemont, though a poor man too, had along with ability just enough of the sort of connections which not only made the difference between division and corps command at the same length of service, but placed Lallemont quite favorably for the next vacant army command. Though when Lallemont said, 'I've something for you, if you want it,' he realised that what he had thought was the capacity to dare was still soiled just a little with the baseless hoping which is the diet of weaklings. But that was all right too: who, even though apparently abandoned by destiny, still had not been wrong in dedicating his life as he had: even though abandoned, he had never let his chosen vocation down; and sure enough in his need, the vocation had remembered him.

So he said, 'Thanks. What?' Lallemont told him. Whereupon for a moment he believed that he had not understood.

But this passed, because in the next one he saw the whole picture. The attack was already doomed in its embryo, and whoever commanded it, delivered it, along with it. It was not that his trained professional judgment told him that the affair, as the corps commander presented it, would be touch-and-go and hence more than doubtful. That would not have stopped him. On the contrary, that would have been a challenge, as if the old destiny had not abandoned him at all.

It was because that same trained judgment saw at once that this particular attack was intended to fail: a sacrifice already planned and doomed in some vaster scheme, in which it would not matter either way, whether the attack failed or not: only that the attack must be made: and more than that, since here the whole long twenty-odd years of training and dedication paid him off in clairvoyance; he saw the thing not only from its front and public view, but from behind it too: the cheapest attack would be one which must fail, harmlessly to all if delivered by a man who had neither friends nor influence to make people with five stars on the General Staff, or civilians with red rosettes in the Quai d'Orsay, squirm.

He didn't for even one second think of the old gray man in the Hôtel de Ville at Chaulnesmont. He thought for even less time than that: Lallemond is saving his own neck. He thought — and now he knew that he was indeed lost — It's Mama Bidet. But he only said: 'I cant afford a failure.'

'There will be a ribbon,' the corps commander said.
'I dont have enough rank to get the one they give for failures.'
'Yes,' the corps commander said. 'This time.'

'So it's that bad,' the division commander said. 'That serious. That urgent. All between Bidet and his baton, is one infantry division. And that one, mine.' They stared at one another. Then the corps commander started to speak. The division commander didn't permit him to. 'Stow it,' the division commander said. That is, that's what he conveyed. What he spoke was a phrase pithy succinct and obscene out of his life as an N.C.O. in the African regiment recruited from the prison- and gutter-sweepings of Europe before he and the corps commander had ever seen one another. He said: 'So I have no choice.'

'You have no choice,' the corps commander said.

The division commander always watched his attacks from the nearest forward observer's post; it had been his habit always; that was a part of

his record too. This time, he had one especially prepared, on an elevation, revetted and sandbagged behind a steel plate, with one telephone line direct to corps headquarters and another to the artillery commander; here, synchronised watch in hand while the preliminary barrage wailed and screeched overhead onto the German wire, he looked down upon his own front line and on the opposite one which even those who had assigned him the attack didn't intend to breach, as from a balcony seat at the opera.

Or box seat, and not just any box, but the royal one: the victim by regal dispensation watching in solitary splendor the preparations for his execution, watching not the opera's final scene, but his own before he moved, irrevocable and forever, into some back-area job in that region whose function was to arm and equip the combat divisions who reaped the glorious death and the immortal renown; from now on, his to reap every hope save glory, and every right save the chance to die for it.

He could desert, of course, but where? to whom? The only people who would accept a failed French general would be people so far free of the war: the Dutch, who were off the normal course of German invasions, and the Spanish, who were too poor even to make a two-day excursion to it, like the Portuguese did, for excitement and change of scene — in which case — the Spanish one — he would not even be paid for risking his life and what remained of his reputation, until he corrected that: thinking how war and drink are the two things man is never too poor to buy. His wife and children may be shoeless; someone will always buy him drink or weapons, thinking More than that. The last person a man planning to set up in the wine trade would approach for a loan, would be a rival wine-dealer. A nation preparing for war can borrow from the very nation it aims to destroy.

Then he didn't even have a failure. He had a mutiny. When the barrage lifted, he was not even watching the scene beneath him, but was already looking at his watch-face. He didn't need to watch.

After watching them from beneath his stars for three years now, he had become an expert, not merely in forecasting failure, but in predicting

almost exactly when, where, at what point in time and terrain, they would become void and harmless; — this, even when he was not familiar with the troops making the attack, which in the present case he was, having selected this particular regiment the day before because he knew, on the one hand, not only the condition of the regiment but its colonel's belief in it and the record of his success with it; and on the other, its value as measured against each of the other three in the division; he knew it would deliver the attack near enough to the maximum demanded of him, yet if the foreordained failure meant its temporary wreckage or even permanent ruin, this would weigh less in the strength and morale of the division than that of any of the other three; he could never, breathing, have been convinced or even told that he had chosen the regiment out of his division exactly as the group commander had chosen the division out of his armies.

So he simply followed the jerking watch-hand, waiting for it to establish the point when all the men who were to get through the wire, would be beyond it. Then he looked up and saw nothing, nothing at all in the space beyond the wire which by now should have been filled with running and falling men; he saw only a few figures crouching along his own parapet, not advancing at all but apparently yelling, screaming and gesticulating, downward into the trench — the officers and N.C.O.'s, the company and section leaders who obviously had been betrayed as he had been.

Because he knew at once what had happened. He was quite calm; he thought without passion or even astonishment: So this was reserved for me too as he dropped the binocular back into its case on his chest and snapped the cover down and spoke to the aide beside him, indicating the line to Corps Headquarters: 'Say that the attack failed to leave the trench. Tell them to ratify me to Artillery. Say I'm on my way out now,' and took the other telephone himself and spoke down it: 'Gragnon. I want two barrages. Re-range one on the enemy wire.

Range the other on the communication trenches behind the — th Regiment and continue until you have a remand from Corps,' and put the telephone down and turned toward the exit.

'Sir!' the aide at the other telephone cried. 'Here's General Lallemond himself!' But the division commander didn't even pause, not until the tunnel breached at last into light, and then only long enough to listen for a moment to the screeching crescendo of shells overhead, listening with a sort of impersonal detached attentiveness, as if he were a messenger, a runner, sent there to ascertain whether or not the guns were still firing, and to return and report. It had been twenty years now, the first scrap of braid not even tarnished on his sleeve, since he had accepted, established as the first stone in the edifice of his career: A commander must be so hated, or at least feared by his troops that, immunised by that fury, they will attempt any odds, any time, anywhere.

He stood, not stopped, just paused, his face lifted too, like the runner taking that simple precaution against the possibility that those to whom he would report might demand the authority of his eyes too, or order him to walk the whole distance back again to rectify the oversight, thinking: Except that I didn't intend that they should hate me so much they would refuse to attack at all because I didn't think then that a commander could be hated that much, apparently didn't know even this morning that soldiers could hate that much, being soldiers; thinking quietly: Of course.

Countermand the barrage, stop it, let them come over; the whole thing will be obliterated then, effaced, and I need only say that they were ready for me before my attack ever started, with none to refute me since those who could will no longer be alive; thinking with what he considered not even sardonicism nor even wittiness, but just humor: With a regiment which has already mutinied holding the line, they will overrun and destroy the whole division in ten or fifteen minutes.

Then even those who are giving him the baton will appreciate the value of their gift; — already walking again, on for another thousand metres, almost to the end of the communication trench where his car would be waiting; and this time he did stop, utterly; he didn't know how long it had been going on nor even how long he had been hearing it: no puny

concentration now of guns behind one single regimental front; it seemed to him that he could hear the fury spreading battery to battery in both directions along the whole front until every piece in the entire sector must be in frantic action. They did come over, he thought.

They did. The whole line has collapsed; not just one mutinied regiment, but the whole line of us; already turned to run back up the trench before he could catch himself, telling himself, It's too late; you can't get back in time now, — catching himself back into sanity, or at least into trained military logic and reason, even if he did have to use what he thought was humor (and this time called wittiness too, the wit perhaps of despair) in order to do it: Nonsense. What reason could they have had for an assault at this moment? How could the boche have known even before I did, that one of my regiments was going to mutiny? And even if they did know it, how could they afford to give Bidet his German marshalcy at the rate of just one regiment at a time? — walking on again, saying quietly aloud this time: 'That's the clatter a falling general makes.'

Two field howitzers were firing almost over his waiting car. They had not been there at dawn when he left it, and his driver could not have heard him if he had spoken, which he did not: one peremptory gesture as he got in, sitting rigid and calm and parallel now for a while to the pandemonium of guns stretching further than hearing did; still quite calm when he got out of the car at Corps Headquarters, not even seeing at first that the corps commander was already waiting for him at the door, then reversing in midstride and returning to the car, still striding rigidly on when the corps commander overtook him and put one hand on his arm and began to draw him aside toward where the corps car waited. The corps commander spoke the army commander's name. 'He's waiting for us,' he said.

'And then, Bidet,' the division commander said. 'I want authority from Bidet's own lips to shoot them.'

'In with you,' the corps commander said, touching him again, almost shoving him into the car, then following, closing the door himself, the

car already in motion, so that the orderly had to leap for the running board; soon they were running fast too beside, beneath the horizon's loud parallel, the division commander rigid, erect, immobile, staring ahead, while the corps commander, leaning back, watched him, or what was visible of the calm and invincible face. 'And suppose he refuses,' the corps commander said.

'I hope he does,' the division commander said. 'All I ask is to be sent under arrest to Chaulnesmont.'

'Listen to me,' the corps commander said. 'Cant you see that it will not matter to Bidet whether it failed or not or how it failed or even whether it was made or not? that he will get his baton just the same, anyway?'

'Even if the boche destroys us?'

'Destroys us?' the corps commander said. 'Listen.' He jerked his hand toward the east where, fast though they were moving, the division commander might have realised now that the uproar still reached further and faster than hearing moved. 'The boche doesn't want to destroy us, any more than we would want, could afford, to destroy him. Cant you understand? either of us, without the other, couldn't exist? that even if nobody was left in France to confer Bidet's baton, some boche would be selected, even if there remained only one private, and elevated high enough in French rank to do it? That Bidet didn't choose you for this because you were Charles Gragnon, but because you were General of Division Gragnon at this time, this day, this hour?'

'Us?' the division commander repeated.

'Us!' the corps commander said.

'So I failed, not in a front line at six this morning, but the day before yesterday in your headquarters — or maybe ten years ago, or maybe forty-seven years ago.'

'You did not fail at all,' the corps commander said.

'I lost a whole regiment. And not even by an attack: by a provost marshal's machinegun squad.'

'Does it matter how they will die?'

'It does to me. How it dies is the reason it died. That's my record.'
'Bah,' the corps commander said.

'Since what I lost was merely Charles Gragnon. While what I saved was France — —'

'You saved us,' the corps commander said.

'Us?' the division commander repeated again.

'Us,' the corps commander said in that voice harsh and strong with pride: 'the lieutenants, the captains, the majors and colonels and sergeants all with the same privilege: the opportunity to lie someday in the casket of a general or a marshal among the flags of our nation's glory in the palace of the Invalides — —'

'Except that the Americans and British and Germans don't call theirs "Invalides".'

'All right, all right,' the corps commander said. ' — merely in return for fidelity and devotion and accepting a little risk, gambling a petty stake which, lacking glory, was no better than any vegetable's to begin with, and deserved no less of obscurity for its fate. Failed,' he said. 'Failed. Charles Gragnon, from sergeant to general of division before he was forty-five years old — that is, forty-seven — —'

'And then lost.'

'So did the British lieutenant general who commanded that army in Picardy two months ago.'

'And whatever boche it was who lost contact or mislaid his maps and compass in Belgium three years ago,' the division commander said.

'And the one who thought they could come through at Verdun. And the one who thought the Chemin des Dames would be vulnerable, having a female name.' He said: 'So it's not we who conquer each other, because we are not even fighting each other. It's simple nameless war which decimates our ranks. All of us: captains and colonels, British and American and German and us, shoulder to shoulder, our backs to the

long invincible wall of our glorious tradition, giving and asking...
Asking? not even accepting quarter — —'

'Bah,' the corps commander said again. 'It is man who is our enemy: the vast seething moiling spiritless mass of him. Once to each period of his inglorious history, one of us appears with the stature of a giant, suddenly and without warning in the middle of a nation as a dairymaid enters a buttery, and with his sword for paddle he heaps and pounds and stiffens the malleable mass and even holds it cohered and purposeful for a time. But never for always, nor even for very long: sometimes before he can even turn his back, it has relinquished, dis-cohered, faster and faster flowing and seeking back to its own base anonymity. Like that out there this morning — —' again the corps commander made the brief indicative gesture.

'Like what out there?' the division commander said; whereupon the corps commander said almost exactly what the group commander would say within the next hour:

'It cannot be that you dont even know what happened.'

'I lost Charles Gragon.'

'Bah,' the corps commander said. 'We have lost nothing. We were merely faced without warning by an occupational hazard. We hauled them up out of their ignominious mud by their bootstraps; in one more little instant they might have changed the world's face. But they never do. They collapse, as yours did this morning. They always will. But not us. We will even drag them willy-nilly up again, in time, and they will collapse again. But not us. It wont be us.'

The army commander was waiting too; the car had barely to stop for him. As soon as it was in motion again, the division commander made for the second time his request in the flat, calm, almost dispassionate voice: 'I shall shoot them, of course.' The army commander didn't answer. The division commander had not expected him to. He would not have heard any answer because he was not even listening to the other two voices murmuring to one another in brief, rapid, half-finished phrases as the corps commander briefed, reviewed to the army

commander by number and designation, the regiments in the other divisions on either flank of his own, until the two voices had locked block into regimental block the long mosaic of the whole army front.

And — not only no sound of guns here, but never at any time — they were challenged at the chateau gates and entered the park, a guide on the running board now so that they didn't even pause at the carved rococo entrance but went on around to the side, across a courtyard bustling with orderlies and couriers and popping motorcycles, passing — and the division commander neither noticed nor cared here either — two cars flying the pennons of two other army commanders, and a third car which was British, and a fourth one which had not even been manufactured on this side of the Atlantic, and on to a porte cochere at the back of the chateau and so directly into the shabby cluttered cubicle not much larger than a clothes press, notched into the chateau's Italianate bijou like a rusted spur in a bride's cake, from which the group commander conducted the affairs of his armies.

They were all there: the commanders of the two other armies which composed the group of armies, their heavy moustaches, already shaped to noon's spoon, richly luxuriant from the daily ritual of soup; the English chief of staff who could have looked no more indomitably and rigidly youthful if the corset had been laced in full view on the outside of his tunic, with his bright ribbons and wisps of brass and scarlet tabs and his white hair and moustache and his blue eyes the color of icy war; and the American colonel with the face of a Boston shipping magnate (which indeed he was, or at least the entailed scion of one) — or rather, an eighteenth century face: the face of that predecessor or forefather who at twenty-five had retired rich from the quarter deck of a Middle Passage slaver, and at thirty had his name illuminated in colored glass above his Beacon Hill pew.

He was the guest, the privileged, since for three years it had not even been his nation's war, who had brought already into the conclave the privileged guest's air of prim, faintly spinsterish disapproval — an air, quality, appearance too, almost Victorian in fact, from his comfortable old man's shoes and the simple leather putties of a Northumberland

drover (both — shoes and putties — beautifully polished but obviously purchased at different times and places and so never to match in color, and neither matching the ordnance belt which obviously had been acquired in two places also, making four different tones of leather) and the simple flareless breeches cut from the same bolt as the shorttailed jacket rising unblemished by any brass to the highboned throat with its prim piping of linen collar backside foremost like the dog-collar of a priest.

(There was an anecdote about that uniform, or rather about its wearer, the colonel, going the rounds of messes six months ago, about how, shortly after the American headquarters had been set up, a junior officer — no Bostonian, this: a New Yorker — had appeared before the colonel one morning in the Bedford cords of a British officer and a long skirted tunic cut by a London tailor, though it did have the high closed throat; the colonel would meet many duplicates of it later, but not then because that was 1917; the youth appearing a little sheepishly, probably a little fearfully, wishing perhaps, as many another pioneer has done, that he had let someone else be first, before the cold banker's eyes of his superior, saying presently: 'You think I shouldn't have done it? It's bad form, taste, aping — —'; then the colonel, pleasant, immediate: 'Why not? They taught us the art of war in 1783 by losing one to us; they should not object to lending us the clothes in 1917 to win one for them.')

And, cynosure of all, the Mama Bidet, the General Cabinet, the Marshal d'Aisance of the division commander's calm and icelike implacability not for justice for himself but for vindication of his military record, who — the group commander — had brought twenty-five years ago into the African sun glare not a bent for war (that would reveal later) and not even a simple normal thirst for glory and rank, but a cold, pitiless preoccupation with the mucous membrane buttoned inside his army breeches, which accompanied (even preceded) him from troop to squadron to regiment to brigade, division and corps and army and army group as he advanced and rose, more immune to harm as his stars increased in number and his gift for war found field and scope, but no more pitiless — the short, healthy, pot-bellied little man who looked

like a green grocer retired happy and cheerful at fifty, and then ten years later dressed not too willingly for a masquerade in the ill-fitting private's tunic without a single ribbon on it nor even any insigne of rank, whose real name had been an authority for fifteen years among textbook soldiers on how to keep troops fit, and a byword for four years among field commanders on how to fight them.

He didn't ask the division commander to sit down when the army- and corps-commanders did; as far as the division commander could have affirmed, the group commander had not even remarked his presence, leaving him to stand while that unbidden and uncaring part of his attention recorded the tedious recapitulation of regiments and divisions, not merely by their positions in the front but by their past records and the districts of their derivation and their officers' names and records, the army commander talking, rapid and succinct, nothing still of alarm in the voice and not very much of concern: just alertness, precision, care.

Nor did it seem to the division commander watching — or not specifically watching the group commander because he was not really watching anything: just looking steadily at or toward the group commander as he had been doing ever since he entered, aware suddenly that he not only could not remember when he had blinked his eyes last, but that he felt no need to blink them — that the group commander was listening either, though he must have been, quietly and courteously and inattentively; until suddenly the division commander realised that the group commander had been looking at him for several seconds.

Then the others seemed to become aware of it too; the army commander stopped talking, then said:
'This is Gragnon. It was his division.'

'Ah yes,' the group commander said. He spoke directly to the division commander in the same tone, pleasant and inflectionless: 'Many thanks. You may return to your troops,' and turned again to the army commander. 'Yes?' Then for another half minute, the army

commander's voice; and now the division commander, rigid and unblinking, was looking at nothing at all, rigid and unblinking still until the army commander's voice stopped again, the division commander not even bothering to bring vision back behind his eyes even after the group commander spoke to him again: 'Yes?'

Standing not quite at attention, looking not at anything but merely staring at rigid eyelevel above the group commander's head, the division commander made his formal request for permission to have the whole regiment executed. The group commander heard him through. There was nothing whatever in the group commander's face.

'Endorsed as received,' he said. 'Return to your troops.' The division commander did not move. He might not have heard even. The group commander sat back in his chair and spoke to the army commander without even turning his head: 'Henri. Will you conduct these gentlemen to the little drawing room and have them bring wine, whisky, tea, whatever they fancy?' He said to the American colonel in quite passable English: 'I have heard of your United States coca cola. My regrets and apologies that I do not have that for you yet. But soon we hope, eh?'

'Thank you, General,' the colonel said in better than passable French: 'The only European terms we decline to accept are German ones.'

Then they were gone; the door closed behind them. The division commander had not moved. The group commander looked at him. His voice was still merely pleasant, not even quizzical: 'A general of division. You have come a long way from Africa, Sergeant Gagnon.'

'So have you,' the division commander said, ' — Mama Bidet.' — speaking in his cold, flat voice, with no inflection nor emphasis either, the name given not secretly so much as merely when he was out of earshot, or perhaps not even that but simply from the inviolable security of their rankless state, by the men in ranks to the group commander soon after he came out as a subaltern into the African regiment in which the division commander was already a sergeant: 'A

long way, Monsieur the General Cabinet, Monsieur soon-to-be the Marshal d'Aisance.'

And still nothing in the group commander's face; his voice was still calm, yet there now crept into it a shadow of something else, something speculative and even a little astonished, though the division commander would prove that he at least had not remarked it. Then the group commander said:

'I seem to have been more right than even I knew or hoped. When you came in, I felt that perhaps I owed you an apology. Now I am sure of it.'

'You demean yourself,' the division commander said. 'How could a man doubting his own infallibility get that many stars? And how could a man with that many stars retain any doubts about anything?'

The group commander looked at the division commander for another moment. Then he said: 'It cant be possible that you dont even see that it has already ceased to matter whether these three thousand men or these four men die or not. That there is already more to this than the execution of twice three thousand men could remedy or even change.'

'Speak for yourself,' the division commander said. 'I have seen ten times three thousand dead Frenchmen.' He said, 'You will say, Slain by other Frenchmen?' He said, repeated, rote-like, cold, unemphasised, almost telegraphic: 'Comité des Forges. De Ferrovie. S.P.A.D. The people at Billancourt. Not to mention the English and Americans, since they are not French, at least not until they have conquered us. What will it matter to the three thousand or the ten times three thousand, when they are dead? Nor matter to us who killed them, if we are successful?'

'By "successful" you mean "victorious",' the group commander said. 'And by "we" of course, you mean France.'

In his flat, cold voice the division commander repeated the simple, explicit, soldierly expletive of the Cambronne legend.

'A fact, but not a rejoinder,' the group commander said.

The division commander said the word again. 'For me, a ribbon tomorrow; for you, a baton before you die. Since mine is worth only a regiment, yours will certainly be cheap at that.'

Presently the group commander said: 'What you are really asking me for, is to endorse you for a court-martial. You're offering me the choice between sending you to the commander-in-chief, and compelling you to go yourself.' The division commander did not move. He was not going to. They both knew it. 'Return to your headquarters,' the group commander said. 'You will be notified there when the Marshal will see you at Chaulnesmont.'

He returned to Corps Headquarters with the corps commander, and got his own car; he would probably not even remember that the corps commander did not ask him to lunch. He would not have cared. He would have declined anyway. The group commander had told him to return to his own headquarters: an order. He was probably not even aware that he was disobeying it, getting into his car and saying briefly to the driver: 'The line.' Though it would be too late.

It was nearing two o'clock; the regiment would long since have been evacuated and disarmed and replaced; it would be too late to watch it pass now and so see for himself that it was done, just as he had paused in the communication trench to make sure that the artillery was still firing.

He was going back as a chef might return two or three hours afterward to the kitchen where a dish he had been preparing had burned or perhaps exploded, not to help nor even advise in tidying up, but merely to see what might remain with some of the litter removed; not to regret it, because that would be a waste of regret, but just to see, to check; not even thinking about it, not thinking about anything, immobile and calm in the moving car, carrying inside him like a liquid sealed in a vacuum bottle that cold, inflexible undeviable determination for justice to his rank at any cost, vindication of his record at all.

So at first he did not realise what had startled, shocked him. He said sharply: 'Stop.' and sat in the halted car in the ringing silence which he

hadn't even heard yet because he had never heard anything here before but guns: no longer a starred, solitary man in a staff car behind a French battle-front, but a solitary boy lying on his stomach on a stone wall outside the Pyrenean village where, for all any records stated or knowledge remembered, he had been born an orphan; listening now to the same cicada chirring and buzzing in a tangle of cordite-blasted weeds beyond the escarpment landmarked since last winter by the skeleton tail of a crashed German aeroplane.

Then he heard the lark too, high and invisible, almost liquid but not quite, like four small gold coins dropped without haste into a cup of soft silver, he and the driver staring at one another until he said, loud and harsh: 'Drive on!' — moving on again; and sure enough, there was the lark again, incredible and serene, and then again the unbearable golden silence, so that he wanted to clap his hands to his ears, bury his head, until at last the lark once more relieved it.

Though the two batteries at the camouflaged corner were not firing now, they were not only still there, but a section of heavy howitzers was flanked on them, the gunners watching him quietly as he approached, chop-striding, bull-chested, virile, in appearance impervious and indestructible, starred and exalted and, within this particular eye-range of earth, supreme and omnipotent still, yet who, because of those very stars, didn't dare ask whoever was senior here when he had ceased to fire, let alone where his orders to do so had come from, thinking how he had heard all his military life about the ineradicable mark which war left on a man's face, without ever having seen it himself, but at least he had seen now what peace did to men's faces.

Because he knew now that the silence extended much further than one divisional front or even than the two flanking ones; knowing now what the corps commander and the group commander both had meant when they had said in almost the same words: 'It cannot be that you don't even know what is happening', thinking I am not even to have a court-martial for incompetence.

Now that the war is over, they won't have to allow me a court because nobody will care any longer, nobody compelled by simple military regulations to see that my record receives justice.

'Who commands here?' he said. But before the captain could answer, a major appeared from beyond the guns. 'Gragnon here,' the division commander said. 'You're standing to, of course.'

'Yes, General,' the major said. 'That was the order which came up with the remand. What is it, General? What's happening?' — saying the last of it to the division commander's back, because he had already turned, striding on, rigidly erect and only a little blind; then a battery did fire, two kilometres and perhaps more to the south: a salvo, a ragged thud; and, chop-striding, unhurried, burly and virile and indestructible, there occurred inside him a burst, a giving-away, a flow of something which if he had still been the unfathered unmothered boy secure in the privacy of his abandoned Pyrenean wall, would have been tears, no more visible then than now, no more then than now of grief, but of inflexibility.

Then another battery fired, one salvo, less than a kilometre away this time, the division commander not faltering, merely altering direction in midstride and instead of entering the communication trench he rapidly climbed the escarpment, into the pocked field beyond it, not running still but walking so fast that he was a considerable distance away when the next battery fired, this time one of those he had just left, firing its salvo in its turn as if whoever had created the silence were underlining it, calling men's attention to it with the measured meaningless slams, saying with each burst of puny uproar, 'Hear it? Hear it?'

His first brigade's headquarters was the cellar of a ruined farm. There were several people there, but he was not inside long enough to have recognised any of them, even if he had wanted to or tried. Almost immediately, he was outside again, wrenching his arm from the hand of the aide who had been with him in the observation post when the attack failed. But he did take the flask, the brandy insentient as stale water in his throat, slightly warm from the aide's body-heat, tasteless. Because here at last was one of the rare moments in the solitude and

pride of command when he could be General Gragnon without being General of Division Gragnon too. 'What — —' he said.

'Come,' the aide said rapidly. But the division commander jerked his arm from the aide's hand again, not following but preceding the aide for a short distance into the farmyard, then stopping and turning. 'Now,' he said.

'They didn't even tell you?' the aide said. He didn't answer, immobile, bull-like and indestructible; and, bull-like and indestructible, quite calm. The aide told him. 'They are stopping it. Our whole front — I don't mean just our division and corps, but the whole French front — remanded at noon except for air patrols and artillery like that yonder at the corner. And the air people are not crossing: just patrolling up and down our front, and the orders to the artillery were to range, not on the boche, but between us and them, on what the Americans call no-man's land.

And the boche is doing the same thing with his artillery and air; and the order is out for the British and Americans to remand at fifteen hours, to see if the boche will do the same thing in front of them.' The division commander stared at him. 'It's not just our division: it's all of them: us and the boche too.' Then the aide saw that even now the division commander did not understand. 'It's the men,' the aide said. 'The ranks.

Not just that regiment, nor even our division, but all the private soldiers in our whole front, the boche too, since he remanded too as soon as our barrage lifted, which would have been his chance to attack since he must have seen that our regiment had refused, mutinied; he went further than we have, because he is not even using artillery: only his air people, not crossing either, just patrolling up and down his front.

Though of course they won't know for sure about the British and the Americans and the boche in front of them until fifteen hours. It's the men; not even the sergeants knew, suspected anything, had any warning. And nobody knows if they just happened to set a date in advance which coincided with our attack, or if they had a pre-arranged

signal which our regiment put up when it knew for certain that it was going over this morning — —'

'You lie,' the division commander said. 'The men?'

'Yes. Everybody in the line below sergeant — —'

'You lie,' the division commander said. He said with a vast, a spent, an indomitable patience: 'Cant you understand? Cant you see the difference between a single regiment getting the wind up — a thing which can and might happen to any regiment, at any time; to the same regiment which took a trench yesterday and which tomorrow, simply because it turned tail today, will take a village or even a walled town? And you try to tell me this (using again the succinct soldierly noun).

The men,' he said. 'Officers — marshals and generals — decreed that business this morning and decreed it as a preordained failure; staff officers and experts made the plans for it within the specifications of failure; I supplied the failure with a mutinying regiment, and still more officers and generals and marshals will collect the cost of it out of my reputation. But the men. I have led them in battle all my life.

I was always under the same fire they were under. I got them killed: yes; but I was there too, leading them, right up to the day when they gave me so many stars that they could forbid me to anymore. But not the men. They understand even if you cannot. Even that regiment would have understood; they knew the risk they took when they refused to leave the trench.

Risk? Certainty. Because I could have done nothing else. Not for my reputation, not even for my own record or the record of the division I command, but for the future safety of the men, the rank and file of all the other regiments and divisions whose lives might be thrown away tomorrow or next year by another regiment shirking, revolting, refusing, that I was going to have them executed — —' thinking, Was. I'm already saying was; not is: was, while the aide stared at him in incredulous amazement.

'Is it possible?' the aide said. 'Do you really contend that they are stopping the war just to deprive you of your right, as commander of the division, to execute that regiment?'

'Not my reputation,' the division commander said quickly, 'not even my own record. But the division's record and good name. What else could it be? What other reason could they have — —' blinking rapidly and painfully while the aide took the flask from his pocket and uncapped it and nudged it against the division commander's hand. 'The men,' the division commander said.

'Here,' the aide said. The division commander took the flask.

'Thanks,' he said; he even started to raise the flask to his lips. 'The men,' he said. 'The troops. All of them. Defying, revolting, not against the enemy, but against us, the officers, who not only went where they went, but led them, went first, in front, who desired for them nothing but glory, demanded of them nothing but courage....'

'Drink, General,' the aide said. 'Come now.'

'Ah yes,' the division commander said. He drank and returned the flask; he said, 'Thanks,' and made a motion, but before he could complete it the aide, who had been in his military family since he got his first brigadier's star, had already produced a handkerchief, immaculate and laundered, still folded as the iron pressed it. 'Thanks,' the division commander said again, taking the handkerchief and wiping his moustache, and then stood again, the handkerchief open now in his hand, blinking rapidly and painfully. Then he said, simply and distinctly: 'Enough of this.'

'General?' the aide said.

'Eh? What?' the division commander said. Then he was blinking again, steadily though not painfully now, not really fast. 'Well — —' he said. He turned.

'Shall I come too?' the aide said.

'No no,' the division commander said, already walking on. 'You stay here. They may need you. There might be something else....' his voice not fading but simply ceasing, already chop-striding again, virile and

impregnable, the gunners now standing along the crest of the opposite escarpment as he approached, carrying the loose handkerchief in his hand as though bearing under orders a flag of truce of which he himself was inflexibly ashamed and grieved.

The major saluted him. He returned it and got into the car. It moved at once; the driver had already turned it around. The boche crash was not far; soon they reached it. 'Stop here,' he said. He got out. 'Drive on. I'll overtake you in a moment;' not even waiting for the car to move but already climbing the bank into the cordite-blasted weeds, still carrying the handkerchief. This was the place; he had marked it, though naturally his sudden advent would have alarmed the tiny beast.

But it would still be here; by squatting and hunting patiently enough, parting the weed-stems gently enough, he could probably see it in the Pyrenean grass, crouching and unterrified, merely waiting for him to become still, resume the solitude which was his origin and his ancestry and his birthright, the Sisters — the Father himself when he would arrive with his inconsolable dedicated eyes and his hands gentle enough but sonless, which had never caressed nor struck in anger and love and fear and hope and pride, boy's flesh sprung from his flesh and bearing his immortality in the same intolerant love and hope and pride, wiser perhaps than the Sisters were, less tender than they were tender, but no less compassionate, knowing nothing as the Sisters knew nothing too — saying: 'The Mother of Christ, the Mother of all, is your mother;' not enough, because he didn't want the mother of all nor the mother of Christ either: he wanted the mother of One; only necessary to become still and wait until the tiny creature was accustomed to his sudden advent, then the first sound would come, tentative, brief: a rising, almost an interrogative inflection, almost a test as if to learn if he were really there and ready; then he would whisper the one word against the noon-fierce stone under his face: and he had been right: not the Pyrenean cicada of course, but certainly its northern sister, the miniature sound insistent and impersonal and constant and unobtrusive, steadfast somewhere among the jumble of rusted engine and guns and blackened wires and charred sticks — a purring sound

such as he imagined might be made by the sleeping untoothed mouth itself around the sleeping nipple.

His divisional headquarters was what its owner called his country house, built by a man who had made several millions on the Paris Bourse and returned to the district of his birth to install an Argentine mistress, establishing not only the symbol and monument, but bringing the proof of his success back to the scene of his childhood and youth, his I-told-you-so to the elders, mayor and doctor and advocate and judge, who had said he would never amount to anything; and who was well served not only in his patriotism but in his devotion too when the military demanded the use of it, since the Argentine had quitted Paris only under pressure in the first place.

The message from Corps Headquarters was waiting for him: Chaulnesmont. Tomorrow 15 hours. You are expected. You will confine yourself to quarters until the motor car calls for you, crumpling the message and the aide's handkerchief into his tunic pocket; and, home again (what home he had ever had since when, at eighteen, he had first donned the uniform which from then on would be his home as the turtle's shell is its domicile), there opened before him an attenuation, an emptiness, of the next five or six or seven hours until it would be dark. He thought of drink. He was not a drinking man; he not only never thought of it until he saw it, it was as though he had forgot it existed until someone actually put it into his hand, as the aide had done the flask. But he dismissed the idea as immediately and completely and for exactly the same reason as if he had been a drinking man: although he had officially ceased to be General of Division Gragnon the moment he received the corps commander's order for him to put himself under arrest, General of Division Gragnon would have to continue to exist for another five or six or seven hours, perhaps even for another day or two yet.

Then suddenly he knew what he would do, quitting the official quarters for his private ones, passing his own bedroom — a small, panelled closet called by the millionaire the gunroom and containing a shotgun which had never been fired and a mounted stag's head (not a very good

one) and a stuffed trout, both bought in the same shop with the gun — and went on to the room in which three of his aides slept — the lovenest itself, which seemed to retain even yet something of the Argentine, though none could have said what it was, since nothing remained of her, unless it was some inconsolable ghost perhaps of what northerners conceived, believed, to be antipodal libidinous frenzy — and found the volume in the battered chest in which it was the duty of one of the aides to transport about with them the unofficial effects of the headquarters entourage.

And now the book's dead owner was present again too: a former member of his staff, a thin, overtall, delicately- and even languidly-made man regarding whose sexual proclivities the division commander had had his doubts (very likely wrong) without really caring one way or the other, who had entered the (then) brigadier's military family shortly before he received his division, who, the general discovered, was the nameless product of an orphanage too — which fact, not the book, the reading itself, the division commander would admit to himself with a sort of savage self-contempt in his secret moments, was what caused him to be so constantly aware of the other not quite sipping and not quite snatching and certainly not buried in the book because he was a satisfactory aide, until at last it seemed to the division commander that the battered and dogeared volume was the aide and the man himself merely that aide's orderly: until one evening while they were waiting for a runner from the front lines with a return concerning some prisoners which a brigadier had neglected to sign (the aide was his divisional JAG), he asked and then listened in cold, inattentive amazement to the answer he got:

'I was a couturier.

In Paris — —'

'A what?' the division commander said.

'I made women's clothes. I was good at it. I was going to be better some day. But that wasn't what I wanted. I wanted to be brave.'

'Be what?' the division commander said.

'You know: a hero. Instead, I made women's clothes. So I thought of becoming an actor — Henry V — Tartuffe better than nothing — even Cyrano. But that would be just acting, pretence — somebody else, not me. Then I knew what to do. Write it.'

'Write it?'

'Yes. The plays. Myself write the plays, rather than just act out somebody else's idea of what is brave. Invent myself the glorious deeds and situations, create myself the people brave enough to perform and face and endure them.'

'And that wouldn't have been make-believe too?' the general said.

'It would have been me that wrote them, invented them, created them.' Nor did the general discern humility either: a quality humble yet dogged too, even if it was sheep-like. 'I would at least have done that.'

'Oh,' the general said. 'And this is the book.'

'No no,' the aide said. 'Another man wrote this one. I haven't written mine yet.'

'Haven't written it yet? You have had time here'; not even knowing that he had expressed the contempt nor even that he had tried to conceal it, or that perhaps he might have tried. And now the aide was not humble, not even dogged; certainly the general would not have recognised despair, though he might indomitability:

'I don't know enough yet. I had to wait to stop the books to find out — —'

'In books? What in books?'

'About being brave. About glory, and how men got it, and how they bore it after they got it, and how other people managed to live with them after they got it; and honor and sacrifice, and the pity and compassion you have to have to be worthy of honor and sacrifice, and the courage it takes to pity, and the pride it takes to deserve the courage — —'

'Courage, to pity?' the general said.

'Yes. Courage. When you stop to pity, the world runs over you. It takes pride to be that brave.'

'Pride in what?' the general said.

'I dont know yet. That's what I'm trying to find out.' Nor did the general recognise serenity then, since he probably called it something else.

'And I will find it. It's in the books.'

'In this book?' the general said.

'Yes,' the aide said, and he died, or that is, the general found him missing one morning, or rather failed to find him at all one morning. It was two hours before he found where the aide was, and another three or four hours before he learned exactly what the aide had done, and he never did learn why and how the aide had come to be there, inside the lines, where a general of division's Assistant Judge Advocate General had no right nor business whatever, sitting — this was how the runner told it — beside a regimental runner behind a wall near a corner much used by staff cars, on which, so the runner claimed he had told the aide, the enemy had registered a gun only that morning.

And everybody had been warned of it, yet the car came on anyway, still coming on even after the aide sprang to his feet and began to wave his arms to stop the car. But it refused to stop, still coming on even after the aide ran out into the open road, still trying to wave the car off even after the runner said that he could hear the shell coming, and that the aide himself must have heard it also; and how the aide could not possibly have known that the car contained not only a wealthy American expatriate, a widow whose only son was in a French air squadron a few kilometres away and who was supporting near Paris an asylum for war-orphaned children, but a well-connected Paris staff-major too.

And there had been nothing to pin the medal on when it came through, and nothing to identify to bury it with either, so that the medal also was still in the battered chest which the aide's successors in their succession superintended from post to post; and the division commander took the book out and read the title and then read it again

in mounting exasperation, reading it aloud, saying aloud almost, All right. Blas wrote it.

But what's the name of the book? until he realised that the word he was looking at was the name of the book and therefore the book would have to be about a man, thinking Yes, remembering scraps, fragments, echoes from that night two years ago, saying the name aloud this time: 'Gil Blas,' listening, concentrated, if perhaps there might come out of the closed pages, through the cover itself and into the simple name, something, some echo of the thunder, the clanging crash, the ringing bugles and the horns, the — — What was it? he thought. The glory, the honor and the courage and the pride — —

He returned to his bedroom, carrying the book. Save for his field cot and chest and desk, the furniture still belonged to the owner of the house and of the Argentine. It had the look of having been bought all in one shop too, probably over the telephone. He drew the single chair into the light from the window beside the stuffed fish and sat down and began to read, slowly, rigidly, not moving his lips even, inflexible in fortitude and suffering as if he were sitting fifty years ago for his portrait.

After a while it was dusk. The door opened, hesitated, opened more and quietly and a batman entered and came to the table and prepared to light the lamp on it, the division commander not even looking up to say 'Yes', even when the soft gout of light plopped and burst soundless and brilliant on the open page in his hands, still reading when the batman went out, still reading until the tray was on the table beside the lamp and the batman had gone again.

Then he put the book carefully down and turned to the tray, immobile again for a second, facing, somewhat as he had faced the book before opening it, the tray bearing the covered dish and the loaf and plate and cutlery and glass, and the bottle of wine and one of rum and one of cassis which he had been looking at on this tray for three years now — the same bottles which he had never touched, the same corks started each day and then driven home again and even dusted freshly over, the

same liquid level in each as when vintner and distiller had bottled them.

Nor did he use the knife and fork when he ate alone from the tray like this, eating not with voracity, nothing at all really gross about the feeding: simply putting the food rapidly and efficiently into himself with his fingers and sops of the bread.

Then with only the slightest pause, not of indecision but simply to remember which pocket, he drew out the aide's handkerchief and carefully wiped his moustache and fingers and tossed the handkerchief onto the tray and thrust the chair away from the table and took up the book and paused again, immobile, the book half raised, though none could have said whether he was looking at the open page or out the open window which he now faced, looking at or listening to the spring-filled darkness, the myriad peaceful silence, which it framed.

Then he raised the book further and entered, strode into it as a patient enters a dentist's office for the last petty adjustment before paying the bill, and read again, rigid and inflexible above the pages' slow increment in which he missed, skipped, elided, no single word, with a cold, incredulous, respectful amazement, not at the shadows of men and women, because they were inventions and naturally he didn't believe them — besides being in another country and long ago and therefore even if they had been real, they could never impinge, affect, the course of his life and its destruction — but at the capacity and industry and (he admitted it) the competence of the man who could remember all this and write it down.

He waked immediately, completely prescient. He even picked up the fallen book before looking at his watch; no start of concern nor dismay, as though he knew beforehand that he would be able to reach the chateau in plenty of time before dawn. Not that it would make any difference; he had simply planned to see the group commander tonight, and slept without intending to sleep and waked without needing to be waked, in plenty of time to see the group commander while technically at least it was still tonight.

So it was not dawn yet when the sentry at the lodge passed him (he was alone in the car, driving himself) through the gates and into the drive running straight and over-arched now through the spring darkness loud with predawn nightingales, up to the chateau.

A successful highwayman had established its site and the park it sat in, a distant connection of a French queen had restored it in the Italian style of his native land; his marquis descendants had owned it: then the Republic: then a marshal of Napoleon: then a Levantine millionaire; for the last four years now, for all practical purposes, it had been the property of the general commanding the circumambient group of French armies. And the division commander had not noticed the nightingales until he was inside the park and it may have been at this moment that he realised that he himself would never own either: army command or chateau, or nightingales for doomed division commanders, coming to resign their pasts and their futures both, to listen to.

And still not dawn when he slammed the car to a stop before the dark pile less of Louis than Florentine and more of baroque than either, jerking it up exactly as he would the over-ridden horse and getting out and flinging the door backward behind him against the night's silence as he would have flung the reins to a groom without even pausing to see if the animal's head were secure or not, then mounting the broad shallow steps to the stone terrace with its carved balustrade and urns garlanded in carven stone.

Nor was even all the old gothic quite absent either: a pile of horse-droppings two or three days old on the terrace beside the door, as if the old princely highwayman himself had returned, or perhaps had only left day before yesterday, which the division commander glanced at in passing, thinking how forage grown from this northern chalkloam soil merely gave a horse windy size, distending the animal simply by its worthless passing bulk: nothing of speed and bottom like the hard, lean, light desert-bred ones bone- and flesh-bred to endure on almost nothing, contemptuous even of that.

And not just horses: man too, thinking Able was I ere I saw France again, thinking how always a man's simple longevity outlives his life and we are all our own paupers, derelict; thinking, as men had thought and said before him, that no soldier should be permitted to survive his first engagement under fire and then not thinking at all, chop-striding to the door and rapping on it, deliberate, peremptory, and loud.

He saw the candle, heard the feet. The door opened: no dishevelled Faubourg Saint Germain aide, this, but a private soldier: a middle-aged man in unlaced infantry boots and dangling braces, holding his trousers up with the other candleless hand over a soiled lavender civilian shirt whose collarless neckband was clasped by a tarnished brass button the size and shape of a wolf's fang.

Even the man appeared no different; certainly the shirt was not: he (the division commander) might have been looking at both that day fifteen years ago when Bidet got his captaincy at last and an instructorship at the École Militaire, and he and the wife, who had followed him a subaltern to Africa even though she herself got no further than a loft in the Oran native town, could sleep every night under the same roof again at last, the same soldier but with a baize apron over the soiled violet shirt, scrubbing the stoop or the staircase while the wife stood over him like a sergeant herself, with a vast bunch of keys at her waist to jangle at each of his convulsive starts when she would murmur at him, and in the same baize apron waiting on table at meals; and apparently the same soldier (or at least one as large) but certainly the same shirt eight years later when Bidet was a colonel with enough pay to keep a horse too, waiting on table with a white apron now over the collarless shirt and the vast bunch of keys jangling against authentic satin now or even the true funereal silk at each of his convulsive starts, the same heavy boots under the apron bringing amid the viands the smell of stable manure now, the same giant thumb in the bowls of soup.

He followed the candle into the same bedroom at which the knightly highwayman, along with the shade of the imperial marshal, would have

looked in contemptuous unbelief, in which the marquis descendants of the Florentine might or might not have slept, but in which the Levantine without doubt did, and saw something else which, he realised now, he had not expected to find changed either, though the man who wore them had.

Standing at the foot of the bed, he faced across the fretted garlanded painted footboard the group commander sitting against the piled pillows in the same flannel nightcap and nightshirt which he too had brought to Africa that day twenty-five years ago when he had had to leave his wife under the broiling eaves of the Oran native house because they had no money then (he the only child of the widow living — or trying to — on the pension of her husband, a Savoyard schoolmaster, she one of the six daughters of a retired sergeant-major of marines) while the husband was absent for almost two years on his first subaltern's tour of outpost duty; — facing the man who even now did not look like even a French soldier and who on that first day twenty-five years ago seemed to have been completely and even criminally miscast, looking then himself like a consumptive school teacher, condemned not just to simple failure but to destitution and suicide too, who weighed then less than a hundred pounds (he was stouter now, almost plump in fact, and somewhere in his career like that of a delayed rocket, the glasses had vanished too) and wearing spectacles of such fierce magnification that he was almost blind without them, and even with them too since for a third of the time the lenses were sweated to opaqueness and he spent another third wiping them dry with the end of his burnous in order to see at all before sweating them blind again, and who had brought into the field life of that regiment of desert cavalry something of the monastery, something of the cold fierce blinkless intolerant glare which burns at midnight in the dedicated asepsis of clinical or research laboratories: that pitiless preoccupation with man, not as an imperial implement, least of all as that gallant and puny creature bearing undismayed on his frail bones and flesh the vast burden of his long inexplicable incomprehensible tradition and journey, not even in fact as a functioning animal but as a functioning machine in the same sense that the earthworm is: alive purely and simply for the purpose of transporting, without itself

actually moving, for the distance of its corporeal length, the medium in which it lives, which, given time, would shift the whole earth that infinitesimal inch, leaving at last its own blind insatiate jaws chewing nothing above the spinning abyss: that cold, scathing, contemptuous preoccupation with body vents and orifices and mucous membrane as though he himself owned neither, who declared that no army was better than its anus, since even without feet it could still crawl forward and fight, and so earned his nickname because of his inflexible belief in his doctrine — a nickname spoken at first in contempt and derision, then in alarm and anger and then rage and then concerned and impotent fury since his inflexible efforts to prove his doctrine soon extended beyond his own platoon, into troops and squadrons where, still a simple junior lieutenant of cavalry and not even a medical officer, he had no right nor business at all; and then spoken no longer in ridicule nor even contumely and anger anywhere, because presently the whole African establishment knew how, sitting in a tent, he had told his regimental commander how to recover two scouts captured one night by a band of mounted tribesmen who vanished afterward like antelope; and it worked, and later, still sitting in a tent, told the general himself how to avail to a hitherto dry outpost a constant supply of drinking water, and that worked too; and moved from the classroom colonelcy to the command of a field division in 1914 and three years later was the competent and successful commander of an army group and already unofficially next but one to a marshal's baton while still less than fifty-five years old, sitting in his flannel nightshirt and cap in the gaudy bed in the rococo room lighted by the cheap candle in its tin candlestick which the batman had set on the bedside table, like an ex-grocer alderman surprised, but neither alarmed nor even concerned, in a sumptuous bordello.

'You were right,' the division commander said. 'I went to Chaulnesmont.'

'You have wrestled all night,' the group commander said. 'With what angel?'

'What?' the division commander said. He blinked for only a second. Then he said, firmly and calmly, like a man stepping firmly forward into

complete darkness, drawing a folded paper from his tunic as he did so and dropping it onto the group commander's covered knees: 'It didn't take that long.'

The group commander didn't touch the paper. He merely looked at it. He said pleasantly: 'Yes?'
'It's my resignation,' the division commander said.
'You think it's over, then?'

'What?' the division commander said. 'Oh. The war. No, it's not over. They'll have something I can do as a civilian. I was even a fair veterinary in the old days, Farrier, too. Or maybe I could even run a production line (that's what they call it, isn't it?) in a munitions plant.'

'And then?' the group commander said.
The division commander looked at him, though only for a second. 'Oh. When it is over, you mean. I'm leaving France then. Maybe to the south Pacific. An island...'
'Like Gauguin,' the group commander said gently.
'Who?'

'Another man who one day discovered that he had had enough of France too and went to the south Pacific and became a painter.'
'This is another place,' the division commander said immediately.
'There wont be enough people on this one to need their houses painted.'

The group commander reached his hand and took up the folded paper and turned and, the paper still folded, held the corner of it to the candle-flame until it took fire and then burst blazing, the group commander holding it for a second longer before he dropped it hissing into the chamberpot beside the bed and in the same motion slid himself down the pillows until he was reclining again, already drawing the covers up.

‘Chaulnesmont,’ he said. ‘At three tomorrow — — Bah, it’s already tomorrow.’ And then the division commander was aware of it too: the alteration, day, the invincible oblivious tomorrow which follows always, undeviable by man and to man immune; no longer ago than yesterday saw him and his fury, the first tomorrow will have forgotten both. It was even a second or so before he realised that the group commander was still talking to him: ‘ — if the world thinks it wishes to stop fighting for twenty-five or thirty years, let it. But not this way. Not like a group of peasants in a half-mown field suddenly shouldering their scythes and lunch-pails and walking off. Chaulnesmont this afternoon.’

‘Because there are rules,’ the division commander said harshly. ‘Our rules. We shall enforce them, or we shall die — the captains and the colonels — no matter what the cost — —’

‘It wasn’t we who invented war,’ the group commander said. ‘It was war which created us. From the loins of man’s furious ineradicable greed sprang the captains and the colonels to his necessity. We are his responsibility; he shall not shirk it.’

‘But not me,’ the division commander said.

‘You,’ the group commander said. ‘We can permit even our own rank and file to let us down on occasion; that’s one of the prerequisites of their doom and fate as rank and file forever. They may even stop the wars, as they have done before and will again; ours merely to guard them from the knowledge that it was actually they who accomplished that act. Let the whole vast moil and seethe of man confederate in stopping wars if they wish, so long as we can prevent them learning that they have done so. A moment ago you said that we must enforce our rules, or die.

It’s no abrogation of a rule that will destroy us. It’s less. The simple effacement from man’s memory of a single word will be enough. But we are safe. Do you know what that word is?’

The division commander looked at him for a moment. He said: ‘Yes?’

'Fatherland,' the group commander said. Now he raised the top of the covers, preparatory to drawing them back over his head and face. 'Yes, let them believe they can stop it, so long as they don't suspect that they have.' The covers were already moving; now only the group commander's nose and eyes and the nightcap remained in sight. 'Let them believe that tomorrow they will end it; then they won't begin to ponder if perhaps today they can. Tomorrow. And still tomorrow. And again tomorrow. That's the hope you will vest them in. The three stars that Sergeant Gagnon won by his own strength, with help from man nor God neither, have damned you, General. Call yours martyrdom for the world; you will have saved it. Chaulnesmont this afternoon.'

And now the division commander was no longer a general, still less the sergeant of twenty-five years ago whose inflexible pride it had been to accept odds from no man. 'But to me,' he said. 'What will happen to me?'

And now even the nightcap had vanished and only the muffled voice came from beneath the covers. 'I don't know,' it said. 'It will be glorious.'

Tuesday Night

SOME TIME AFTER midnight that Tuesday (it was Wednesday now) two British privates were resting on the firestep of a front-line trench below the Bethune slag-heap. Two months ago they were looking at it not only from another angle but from another direction; until then, the line's relation to it seemed fixed to a longer life than memory's. But since the breakthrough there had been no fixed line at all. The old corridor had still remained of course, roofed over with the shriek and stink of cordite, but attached to the earth only at the two ends: the one somewhere on the Channel and the other somewhere up the roof of France, so that it seemed to belly before the Teutonic gale like a clothesline about to carry away in a wind.

And since three o'clock yesterday afternoon (yesterday morning rather, noon when the French quit) it had merely hung in its spent bulge

against the arrested weight of the Germanic air, even roofless now since with dark the last patrolling aircraft had gone to roost and there remained only the flares arching up from behind the flickerless wire with a faint hiss, a prolonged whispered sniff, to bloom and parachute and hang against the dark with the cold thick texture and color of the working lights in a police morgue, then sliding silently down the black air like drops of grease on a window-pane, and far away to the North the spaced blink and thump of a single gun, a big one, with no following burst at all, as though it were firing at the Channel, the North Sea itself fifty miles away, or perhaps at some target even vaster and more immune than that: at Cosmos, space, infinity, lifting its voice against the Absolute, the ultimate I-Am, harmless: the iron maw of Dis, toothless, unweariable, incapable, bellowing.

One of the privates was a sentry. He stood on the firestep, leaning slightly against the wall beside the sand-bagged aperture in which his rifle lay loaded and cocked and with the safety off. In civil life he had indubitably been a horse-groom, because even in khaki and even after four years of infantryman's war he still moved, stood in an aura, effluvium of stalls and tack-rooms — a hard-faced jockey-sized man who seemed to have brought on his warped legs even into the French and Flemish mud something of hard, light, razor-edge horses and betting-rings, who even wore the steel helmet at the same vicious rake of the filthy heavy-checked cap which would have been the badge of his old dead calling and dedication.

But this was only inference, from his appearance and general air, not from anything he ever told anyone; even his mates in the battalion who had stayed alive long enough to have known him four years knew nothing about his past, as if he did not have one, had not even been born until the fourth of August 1914 — a paradox who had no business in an infantry battalion at all, and an enigma to the extent that six months after he entered the battalion (this was about Christmas, 1914) the colonel commanding it had been summoned to Whitehall to make a specific report on him.

Because the authorities had discovered that eleven privates in the battalion had made the man beneficiary of their soldiers' life assurance policies; by the time the colonel reached the war ministry, the number had increased to twenty, and although the colonel had made an intensive two-days' investigation of his own before leaving the battalion, he knew little more than they in London did.

Because the company officers knew nothing about it, and from the N.C.O.'s he got only rumor and hearsay, and from the men themselves, only a blank and respectful surprised innocence as to the man's very existence, the sum of which was, that the (eleven when the war office got its first report, and twenty by the time the colonel reached London, and — the colonel had been absent from the battalion twelve hours now — nobody knew how many more by this time) men had approached the battalion sergeant-major all decorously and regularly and apparently of their own free will and desire, and made the request which, since none of them had legal heirs, was their right to make, and the Empire's duty to acquiesce to. As for the man himself —

'Yes,' the staff-major who was doing the informal questioning, said. 'What did he say about it?' and then, after a moment: 'You didn't even question him?'

This time, the colonel did shrug. 'Why?' he said.

'Quite,' the major said. 'Though I should have been tempted — if only to learn what he can be selling them.'

'I should rather know what the ones who have legal heirs and cant make over the insurance, are paying him instead,' the colonel said.

'Their souls, obviously,' the major said. 'Since their deaths are already pledged.' And that was all. In the whole King's Regulations, through which had been winnowed and tested and proved every conceivable khaki or blue activity and posture and intention, with a rule provided for it and a penalty provided for the rule, there was nothing to cover it: who (the man) had infringed no discipline, trafficked with no enemy, failed to shine no brass nor wrap properly any puttie nor salute any

officer. Yet still the colonel sat there, until the major, a little more than curious now, said, 'What? Say it.'

'I cant,' the colonel said. 'Because the only word I can think of is love,' — explaining that: the stupid, surly, dirty, unsocial, really unpleasant man, who apparently neither gambled nor drank (during the last two months, the battalion sergeant-major and the colonel's orderly sergeant had sacrificed — unofficially, of course — no little of their own free time and slumber too, walking suddenly into dugouts and rest billets and estaminets, ascertaining that), who, in the light of day, seemed to have no friends at all, yet each time the sergeant-major or the orderly sergeant entered one of the dugouts or billets, they would find it jammed with men.

And not the same men either, but each time there would be a new set of faces, so that in each period between two pay-days, the entire battalion roll could have been called by anyone detailed to sit beside the man's bunk; indeed, on pay-day itself, or for a day or two days after it, the line, queue, had been known to extend into the street, as when people wait to enter a cinema, while the dugout, the room, itself would be jammed to the door with men standing or sitting or squatting about the bunk or corner in which the man himself lay quite often asleep, morose and resigned and not even talking, like people waiting in a dentist's anteroom; —

waiting, that was it, as both the sergeant-major and the sergeant realised, if for nothing else except for them — the sergeant-major and the sergeant — to leave.

'Why dont you give him a stripe?' the major said. 'If it's devotion, why not employ it for the greater glory of English arms?'

'How?' the colonel said. 'Try to buy with one file, the man who already owns the battalion?'

'Perhaps you should assign your own insurance and pay-book over to him.'

'Yes,' the colonel said. 'If he gives me time to.' And that was all. The colonel spent fourteen hours with his wife. At noon the next day, he

was in Boulogne again; at six that afternoon, his car entered the village where the battalion was in rest billets. 'Stop here,' the colonel said, and sat for a moment in the car, looking at the queue of men which was moving infinitesimally toward and through the gate into one of those sweating stone courtyards which for a thousand years the French have been dotting about the Picard and Artois and Flanders countryside, apparently for the purpose of housing between battles the troops of the allied nations come to assist in preserving them. No, the colonel thought, not a cinema; the anticipation is not great enough, although the urgency is twice as strong. They are like the parade outside a latrine. 'Drive on,' he said.

The other private was a battalion runner. He was sitting on the firestep, his unslung rifle propped beside him, himself half-propped, half-reclining against the trench-wall, his boots and putties not caked with the drying mud of trenches but dusted with the recent powdery dust of roads; even his attitude showed not so much indolence, but fatigue, physical exhaustion.

Except that it was not spent exhaustion, but the contrary: with something tense behind it, so that the exhaustion did not seem to possess him, but rather he seemed to wear it as he did the dust, sitting there for five or six minutes now, all of which he had spent talking, and with nothing of exhaustion in his voice either.

Back in the old spanking time called peace, he had been not only a successful architect, but a good one, even if (in private life) an aesthete and even a little precious; at this hour of those old dead days, he would have been sitting in a Soho restaurant or studio (or, his luck good, even in a Mayfair drawing room or even — at least once or twice or perhaps three times — boudoir), doing a little more than his share of the talking about art or politics or life or both or all three.

He had been among the first London volunteers, a private at Loos; without even a lance corporal's stripe on his sleeve, he had extricated his platoon and got it back alive across the Canal; he commanded the platoon for five days at Passchendaele and was confirmed in it, posted

from the battlefield to officers' school and had carried his single pip for five months into 1916 on the night when he came off duty and entered the dugout where his company commander was shaving out of a Maconochie tin.

'I want to resign,' he said.

Without stopping the razor nor even moving enough to see the other's reflection in the mirror, the company commander said, 'Dont we all.' Then he stopped the razor. 'You must be serious. All right. Go up the trench and shoot yourself through the foot. Of course, they never really get away with it. But — —'

'I see,' the other said. 'No, I dont want to get out.' He touched the pip on his left shoulder rapidly with his right finger tips and dropped the hand. 'I just dont want this anymore.'

'You want to go back to ranks,' the company commander said. 'You love man so well you must sleep in the same mud he sleeps in.'

'That's it,' the other said. 'It's just backward. I hate man so. Hear him?' Again the hand moved, an outward motion, gesture, and dropped again. 'Smell him, too.' That was already in the dugout also, sixty steps down though it was: not just the rumble and mutter, but the stench too, the smell, the soilure, the stink of simple usage: not the dead bones and flesh rotting in the mud, but because the live bones and flesh had used the same mud so long to sleep and eat in.

'When I, knowing what I have been, and am now, and will continue to be — assuming of course that I shall continue among the chosen beneath the boon of breathing, which I probably shall, some of us apparently will have to, dont ask me why of that either — , can, by the simple coincidence of wearing this little badge on my coat, have not only the power, with a whole militarised government to back me up, to tell vast herds of man what to do, but the impunitive right to shoot him with my own hand when he doesn't do it, then I realise how worthy of any fear and abhorrence and hatred he is.'

'Not just your hatred and fear and abhorrence,' the company commander said.

'Right,' he said. 'I'm merely the one who can't face it.'

'Won't face it,' the company commander said.

'Can't face it,' he said.

'Won't face it,' the company commander said.

'All right,' he said. 'So I must get back into the muck with him. Then maybe I'll be free.'

'Free of what?' the company commander said.

'All right,' he said. 'I don't know either. Maybe of having to perform forever at inescapable intervals that sort of masturbation about the human race people call hoping. That would be enough. I had thought of going straight to Brigade. That would save time. But then, the colonel might get his back up for being overslaughed. I'm looking for what K.R. and O. would call channels, I suppose. Only I don't seem to know anybody who ever read that book.'

It was not that easy. The battalion commander refused to endorse him; he found himself in the presence of a brigadier twenty-seven years old, less than four years out of Sandhurst today, in a Mons Star, M.C. and bar, D.S.O. and a French Croix de Guerre and a thing from the Belgian monarch and three wound stripes, who could not — not would not, could not — even believe what he was hearing, let alone understand what his importuner was talking about, who said, 'I daresay you've already thought of shooting yourself in the foot. Raise the pistol about sixty inches first. You might as well get out front of the parapet too, what? Better still, get past the wire while you're about it.'

But it was quite simple, when he finally thought of the method. He waited until his leave came up. He would have to do that; desertion was exactly what he did not want. In London he found a girl, a young woman, not a professional, not really a good-standing amateur yet, two or three months pregnant from any one of three men, two of whom had been killed inside the same fortnight and mile by Nieppe Forest, and the other now in Mesopotamia, who didn't understand either and therefore (so he thought at the time) was willing to help him for a price

— a price twice what she suggested and which represented his whole balance at Cox's — in a plot whose meretricity and shabbiness only American moving pictures were to match: the two of them taken in delicto so outrageously flagrante and public, so completely unequivocal and incapable of other than one interpretation, that anyone, even the field-rank moralists in charge of the conduct of Anglo-Saxon-derived junior officers, should have refused point blank to accept or even believe it.

It worked though. The next morning, in a Knightsbridge barracks anteroom, a staff officer spokesman offered, as an alternative to preserve the regiment's honor, the privilege which he had requested of his company commander and then the battalion commander, and finally of the brigadier himself in France three months ago; and three nights later, passing through Victoria station to file into a coach full of private soldiers in the same returning train which had brought him by officers' first class up from Dover ten days ago, he found he had been wrong about the girl, whom at first he didn't even remember after she spoke to him. 'It didn't work,' she said.

'Yes,' he said. 'It worked.'

'But you're going back. I thought you wanted to lose the commission so you wouldn't have to go back.' Then she was clinging to him, cursing him and crying too. 'You were lying all the time, then. You wanted to go back. You just wanted to be a poor bloody private again.' She was pulling at his arm. 'Come on. The gates are still open.'

'No,' he said, holding back. 'It's all right.'

'Come on,' she said, jerking at him. 'I know these things. There's a train you can take in the morning; you won't be reported absent until tomorrow night in Boulogne.' The line began to move. He tried to move with it. But she clung only the harder. 'Can't you see?' she cried. 'I can't get the money to give back to you until tomorrow morning.'

'Let go,' he said. 'I must get aboard and find a corner to sleep in.'

'The train wont go for two hours yet. How many of them do you think I've seen leave? Come on. My room isn't ten minutes from here.'
'Let go now,' he said, moving on. 'Goodbye.'

'Just two hours.' A sergeant shouted at him. It had been so long since an N.C.O. had spoken to him this way, that he did not realise at once himself was meant. But he had already freed himself with a sudden sharp hard movement; a carriage door was open behind him, then he was in the compartment, dropping his pack and rifle onto a jumble of others, stumbling among a jumble of legs, pulling the door behind him as she cried through the closing gap: 'You haven't told me where to send the money.'

'Goodbye,' he said, closing the door, leaving her on the step, clinging on somehow even after the train was moving, her gaped urgent face moving parallel beyond the voiceless glass until an M.P. on the platform jerked her off, her face, not the train, seeming to flee suddenly with motion, in another instant gone.

He had gone out in 1914 with the Londoners. His commission was in them. This time, he was going out to a battalion of Northumberland Borderers. His record had preceded him; a corporal was waiting on the Boulogne quai to take him to the R.T.O. anteroom. The lieutenant had been with him at officers' school.

'So you put up a job on them,' the lieutenant said. 'Dont tell me: I dont want to know why. You're going out to the — th. I know James (the lieutenant colonel commanding it). Cut my teeth with him in the Salient last year. You dont want to go in a platoon. What about a telephonist — a sergeant-major's man?'

'Let me be a runner,' he said. So a runner he was. The word from the R.T.O. lieutenant had been too good; not just his record but his past had preceded him to the battalion also, up to the lieutenant colonel himself before he had been a week in the battalion, possibly because he, the runner, was entitled to wear (he did not wear it since it was the officer's branch of the decoration and, among the men he would now

mess and sleep with, that ribbon up on his private's tunic would have required too much breath) one of the same candy-stripes which the colonel (he was not a professional soldier either) did; that, and one other matter, though he would never believe that the two were more than incidentally connected.

'Look here,' the colonel said. 'You haven't come here to stir up anything. You ought to know that the only possible thing is to get on with it, finish it and bloody well have done. We already have one man who could be a trouble-maker — unless he oversteps in time for us to learn what he is up to.' He named the man. 'He's in your company.'

'I couldn't,' the runner said. 'They wont talk to me yet. I probably couldn't persuade them to anything even if they would talk to me and I wanted to.'

'Not even (the colonel named the private again)? You dont know what he's up to either?'

'I dont think I'm an agitator,' the runner said. 'I know I'm not a spy. This is gone now, remember,' he said, touching his shoulder lightly with the opposite hand.

'Though I doubt if you can stop remembering that you once had it,' the colonel said. 'It's your own leg you're pulling, you know. If you really hate man, all you need do is take your pistol back to the latrines and rid yourself of him.'

'Yes sir,' the runner said, completely wooden.

'Hate Germans, if you must hate someone.'

'Yes sir,' the runner said.

'Well? Cant you answer?'

'All the Germans with all their kith and kin are not enough to make up man.'

'They are for me — now,' the colonel said. 'And they had better be for you too now. Dont force me to compel you to remember that pip. Oh, I know it too: the men who, in hopes of being recorded as victorious

prime- or cabinet-ministers, furnish men for this. The men who, in order to become millionaires, supply the guns and shells. The men who, hoping to be addressed someday as Field Marshal or Viscount Plugstreet or Earl of Loos, invent the gambles they call plans. The men who, to win a war, will go out and dig up if possible, invent if necessary, an enemy to fight against. Is that a promise?

‘Yes,’ the runner said.

‘Right,’ the colonel said. ‘Carry on. Just remember.’ Which he did, sometimes when on duty but mostly during the periods when the battalion was in rest billets, carrying the unloaded rifle slung across his back which was his cognizance, his badge of office, with somewhere in his pocket some — any — scrap of paper bearing the colonel’s or the adjutant’s signature in case of emergency.

At times he managed lifts from passing transport — lorries, empty ambulances, an unoccupied sidecar. At times while in rest areas he even wangled the use of a motorbike himself, as if he actually were a dispatch rider; he could be seen sitting on empty petrol tins in scout- or fighter- or bomber-squadron hangars, in the material sheds of artillery or transport parks, at the back doors of field stations and hospitals and divisional chateaux, in kitchens and canteens and at the toy-sized zinc bars of village estaminets, as he had told the colonel, not talking but listening.

So he learned about the thirteen French soldiers almost at once — or rather, the thirteen men in French uniforms — who had been known for a year now among all combat troops below the grade of sergeant in the British forces and obviously in the French too, realising at the same moment that not only had he been the last man below sergeant in the whole Allied front to hear about them, but why: who five months ago had been an officer too, by the badges on his tunic also forever barred and interdict from the right and freedom to the simple passions and hopes and fears — sickness for home, worry about wives and allotment pay, the weak beer and the shilling a day which wont even buy enough of that; even the right to be afraid of death, — all that confederation of

fellowship which enables man to support the weight of war; in fact, the surprise was that, having been an officer once, he had been permitted to learn about the thirteen men at all.

His informant was an A.S.C. private more than sixty years old, member of and lay preacher to a small nonconformist congregation in Southwark; he had been half porter and half confidential servant with an unblemished record to an Inns of Court law firm, as his father had been before him and his son was to be after, except that at the Old Bailey assizes in the spring of 1914 the son would have been sent up for breaking and burglary, except that the presiding judge was not only a humanitarian but a member of the same philatelist society to which the head of the law firm belonged; whereupon the son was permitted to enlist instead the next day and in August went to Belgium and was reported missing at Mons all in the same three weeks and was accepted so by all save his father, who received leave of absence to enlist from the law firm for the single reason that his employers did not believe he could pass the doctors; eight months later the father was in France too; a year after that he was still trying to get, first, leave of absence; then, failing that, transfer to some unit near enough to Mons to look for his son although it had been a long time now since he had mentioned the son, as if he had forgot the reason and remembered only the destination, still a lay preacher, still half night-watchman and half nurse, unimpeachable of record, to the succession of (to him) children who ran a vast ammunition dump behind St Omer, where one afternoon he told the runner about the thirteen French soldiers.

‘Go and listen to them,’ the old porter said. ‘You can speak foreign; you can understand them.’

‘I thought you said that the nine who should have spoken French, didn’t, and that the other four couldn’t speak anything at all.’

‘They dont need to talk,’ the old porter said. ‘You dont need to understand. Just go and look at him.’

‘Him?’ the runner said. ‘So it’s just one now?’

‘Wasn’t it just one before?’ the old porter said. ‘Wasn’t one enough then to tell us the same thing all them two thousand years ago: that all

we ever needed to do was just to say, Enough of this; — us, not even the sergeants and corporals, but just us, all of us, Germans and Colonials and Frenchmen and all the other foreigners in the mud here, saying together: Enough. Let them that's already dead and maimed and missing be enough of this; — a thing so easy and simple that even human man, as full of evil and sin and folly as he is, can understand and believe it this time. Go and look at him.'

But he didn't see them, not yet. Not that he couldn't have found them; at any time they would be in the British zone, against that khaki monotone that clump of thirteen men in horizon blue, even battle-stained, would have stood out like a cluster of hyacinths in a Scottish moat. He didn't even try yet.

He didn't dare; he had been an officer himself, even though for only eight months, and even though he had repudiated it something ineradicable of it still remained, as the unfrocked priest or repentant murderer, even though unfrocked at heart and reformed at heart, carries forever about him like a catalyst the indelible effluvium of the old condition; it seemed to him that he durst not be present even on the fringe of whatever surrounding crowd, even to walk, pass through, let alone stop, within the same air of that small blue clump of hope; this, even while telling himself that he did not believe it, that it couldn't be true, possible, since if it were possible, it would not need to be hidden from Authority; that it would not matter whether Authority knew about it or not, since even ruthless and all-powerful and unchallengeable Authority would be impotent before that massed unresisting undemanding passivity.

He thought: They could execute only so many of us before they will have worn out the last rifle and pistol and expended the last live shell, visualising it: first, the anonymous fringe of subalterns and junior clerks to which he had once belonged, relegated to the lathes and wheels to keep them in motion rifling barrels and filling shell-cases; then, the frenzy and the terror mounting, the next layer: the captains and majors and secretaries and attachés with their martial harness and ribbons and striped trousers and brief-cases among the oilcans and the flying shafts;

then the field officers: colonels and senators and Members; then, last and ultimate, the ambassadors and ministers and lesser generals themselves frantic and inept among the slowing wheels and melting bearings, while the old men, the last handful of kings and presidents and field marshals and spoiled-beef and shoe-peg barons, their backs to the last crumbling rampart of their real, their credible, their believable world, wearied, spent, not with blood-glut at all but with the eye-strain of aiming and the muscle-tension of pointing and the finger-cramp of squeezing, fired the last puny scattered and markless fusillade as into the face of the sea itself. It's not that I don't believe it, he said. It's because it can't be true. We can't be saved now; even He doesn't want us anymore now.

So he believed that he was not even waiting: just watching. It was winter again now, the long unbroken line from Alps to sea lying almost quiescent in mud's foul menopause; this would be the time for them, with even front-line troops free for a little while to remember when they were warm and dry and clean; for him and the other twelve — (thinking, almost impatiently, All right, all right, they are thirteen too), — a soil not only unfallow now but already tumescent even, having a little space to think now, to remember and to dread, thinking (the runner) how it was not the dying but the indignity of the method: even the condemned murderer is better off, with an hour set and fixed far enough in the future to allow time to summon fortitude to face it well, and privacy to hide the lack in case the fortitude failed; not to receive both the sentence and its execution all in one unprepared flash, not even at rest but running, stumbling, laden with jangling iron like a pack-mule in the midst of death which can take him from any angle, front rear or above, panting, vermin-covered, stinking with his own reek, without even privacy in which to drop the dung and water he carried.

He even knew what he was watching for: for the moment in the stagnancy when Authority would finally become aware of the clump of alien incongruous blue in its moat. Which would be at any time now; what he was watching was a race. Winter was almost over; they — the thirteen — had had time, but it was running out. It would be spring soon: the jocund bright time beginning to be mobile and dry underfoot;

and even before that they in the Whitehalls and Quai d'Orsais and Unter den Somethings and Gargleplatzes would have thought of something anew, even if it had to be something which had already failed before. And suddenly he knew why it would not matter to Authority whether they knew about the thirteen men or not. They didn't need to, having not only authority but time too on their side; no need for them to hunt down and hoick out and execute a mere thirteen men: their very avocation was its own defender and emollient.

And it had run out. It was already spring; the Americans (1918 now) were in it now, rushing frantically across the Atlantic ocean before it was too late and the scraps were all gone, and the break-through had come: the old stale Germanic tide washing again over the Somme and Picard towns which you might have thought had served their apprenticeship, washing along the Aisne a month later so that clerks in Paris bureaus were once more snapping the locks on the worn and homeless attaché-cases; May and even the Marne again, American troops counter-attacking this time among the ruined towns which you would think might have had absolution too.

Except that he was not thinking now, he was too busy; for two weeks now he and his heretofore unfired rifle had been in an actual platoon, part of a rearguard, too busy remembering how to walk backward to think, using in place of the harassing ordeal of thought, a fragment out of the old time before he had become incapable of believing, out of Oxford probably (he could even see the page) though now it seemed much younger than that, too young to have endured this far at all: lo, I have committed fornication. But that was in another country; and besides, the wench is dead

So when it finally happened, he had no warning. The wave had stopped, and he was a runner again; he had got back from Division Headquarters at dawn and two hours later he was asleep in the bunk of a man on a fatigue party, when an orderly summoned him to the office. 'You can drive a motorbike,' the colonel said.

He thought You should know. He said: 'Yes sir.'

'You're going to Corps Headquarters. They want couriers. A lorry will pick you up and the others at Division.'

He didn't even think Other what? He just thought They have killed the serpent, and now they have got to get rid of the fragments, and returned to Division Headquarters, where eight more runners from the other battalions and a lorry waited, the nine of them by that special transport to serve as special couriers out of Corps Headquarters which by ordinary bristled with couriers, not warned still, knowing no more yet, not even wondering, not even caring; fixed behind a faint wry grimace which was almost smiling in the midst of what was not ruin at all because he had known it of old too long, too long of old: Yes he thought a bigger snake than even they had anticipated having to destroy and efface.

Nor did he learn anymore at Corps Headquarters, nor during the next two hours while at top speed now he delivered and exchanged and received dispatches from and to people whom even his travels had never touched before — not to orderly room N.C.O.'s but in person to majors and colonels and sometimes even generals, at transport and artillery parks, with columns of transport and artillery camouflaged beside roads and waiting for darkness to move, at batteries in position and Flying Corps wing offices and forward aerodromes — no longer even wondering now behind that fixed thin grimace which might have been smiling: who had not for nothing been a soldier in France for twenty-one months and an officer for five of them, and so knew what he was looking at when he saw it: the vast cumbrous machinery of war grinding to its clumsy halt in order to reverse itself to grind and rumble in a new direction, — the proprietorless wave of victory exhausted by its own ebb and returned by its own concomitant flux, spent not by its own faded momentum but as though bogged down in the refuse of its own success; afterward, it seemed to him that he had been speeding along those back-area roads for days before he realised what he had been travelling through; he would not even recall afterward at what moment, where, what anonymous voice from a passing lorry or another motorbike or perhaps in some orderly room where he lay one

dispatch down in the act of taking up another, which said: 'The French quit this morning — —' merely riding on, speeding on into the full burst of sun before he realised what he had heard.

It was an hour after noon before he finally found a face: that of a corporal standing before a cafe in a village street — a face which had been in the anteroom of the old battalion when he was an officer in it: and slowed the machine in and stopped, still straddling it; it was the first time.

'Nah,' the corporal said. 'It was just one regiment. Fact is, they're putting one of the biggest shoots yet in jerry's support and communications along the whole front right this minute. Been at it ever since dawn — —'

'But one regiment quit,' the runner said. 'One did.' Now the corporal was not looking at him at all.

'Have a wet,' the corporal said.

'Besides,' the runner said gently, 'you're wrong. The whole French front quit at noon.'

'But not ours,' the corporal said.

'Not yet,' the runner said. 'That may take a little time.' The corporal was not looking at him. Now the corporal said nothing whatever. With a light, rapid gesture the runner touched one shoulder with the opposite hand. 'There's nothing up here now,' he said.

'Have a wet,' the corporal said, not looking at him.

And an hour later he was close enough to the lines to see the smoke-and-dust pall as well as hear the frantic uproar of the concentrated guns along the horizon; at three o'clock, though twelve miles away at another point, he heard the barrage ravel away into the spaced orderly harmless-seeming poppings as of salutes or signals, and it seemed to him that he could see the whole long line from the sea-beaches up the long slant of France to old tired Europe's rooftree, squatted and crouched with filthy and noisome men who had forgot four years ago

how to stand erect anymore, amazed and bewildered and unable to believe it either, forewarned and filled with hope though (he knew it now) they must have been; he thought, said aloud almost: Yes, that's it. It's not that we didn't believe: it's that we couldn't, didn't know how anymore. That's the most terrible thing they have done to us. That's the most terrible.

That was all, then. For almost twenty-four hours in fact, though he didn't know it then. A sergeant-major was waiting for them as they returned, gathered again at Corps Headquarters that night — the nine from his Division and perhaps two dozen others from other units in the Corps. 'Who's senior here?' the sergeant-major said.

But he didn't even wait on himself: he glanced rapidly about at them again and with the unerring instinct of his vocation chose a man in the middle thirties who looked exactly like what he probably was — a demoted lance corporal out of a 1912 Northwest Frontier garrison. 'You're acting sergeant,' the sergeant-major said. 'You will indent for suppers and bedding here.' He looked at them again. 'I suppose it's no use to tell you not to talk.'

'Talk about what?' one said. 'What do we know to talk about.'

'Talk about that then,' the sergeant-major said. 'You are relieved until reveille. Carry on.' And that was all then. They slept on a stone floor in a corridor; they were given breakfast (a good one; this was a Corps Headquarters) before reveille went even; what bugles they — he, the runner — heard were at other Division and Corps Headquarters and parks and depots where the motorcycle took him during another day like yesterday in his minuscule walking-on (riding-on) part in bringing war to a pause, a halt, a stop; morning noon and afternoon up and down back areas not beneath a pall of peace but a thrall of dreamlike bustling for a holiday.

The night again, the same sergeant-major was waiting for them — the nine from his Division and the two dozen others. 'That's all,' the

sergeant-major said. 'Lorries are waiting to take you back in.' That's all, he thought.

All you have to do, all you need to do, all He ever asked and died for eighteen hundred and eighty-five years ago, in the lorry now with his group of the thirty-odd others, the afterglow of sunset fading out of the sky like the tideless shoreless sea of despair itself ebbing away, leaving only the peaceful grief and the hope; when the lorry stopped and presently he leaned out to see what was wrong — a road which it was unable to cross because of transport on it, a road which he remembered as running southeast from up near Boulogne somewhere, now so dense with hooded and lightless lorries moving nose to tail like a line of elephants that their own lorry had to put them down here, to find their ways home as best they might, his companions dispersing, leaving him standing there in the last of afterglow while the vans crawled endless past him, until a head, a voice called his name from one of them, saying, 'Hurry, get up quick.... something to show you,' so that he had to run to overtake it and had already begun to swing himself up before he recognised it: the old watchman from the St Omer ammunition dump, who had come to France four years ago to search for his son and who had been the first to tell him about the thirteen French soldiers.

Three hours after midnight he was sitting on the firestep where the sentry leaned at the aperture while the spaced starshells sniffed and plopped and whispered down the greasy dark and the remote gun winked and thudded and after a while winked and thudded again.

He was talking in a voice which, whatever else it contained, it was not exhaustion — a voice dreamy and glib, apparently not only inattentive to itself but seemingly incapable of compelling attention anywhere. Yet each time he spoke, the sentry without even removing his face from the aperture would give a start, a motion convulsive and intolerable, like someone goaded almost beyond endurance.

'One regiment,' the runner said. 'One French regiment. Only a fool would look on war as a condition; it's too expensive. War is an episode,

a crisis, a fever the purpose of which is to rid the body of fever. So the purpose of a war is to end the war. We've known that for six thousand years.

The trouble was, it took us six thousand years to learn how to do it. For six thousand years we labored under the delusion that the only way to stop a war was to get together more regiments and battalions than the enemy could, or vice versa, and hurl them upon each other until one lot was destroyed and, the one having nothing left to fight with, the other could stop fighting. We were wrong, because yesterday morning, by simply declining to make an attack, one single French regiment stopped us all.'

This time the sentry didn't move, leaning — braced rather — against the trench-wall beneath the vicious rake of his motionless helmet, peering apparently almost idly through the aperture save for that rigidity about his back and shoulders — a kind of immobility on top of immobility — as though he were braced not against the dirt wall but rather against the quiet and empty air behind him. Nor had the runner moved either, though from his speech it was almost as if he had turned his face to look directly at the back of the sentry's head.

'What do you see?' he said. 'No novelty, you think? — the same stinking strip of ownerless valueless frantic dirt between our wire and theirs, which you have been peering at through a hole in a sandbag for four years now? the same war which we had come to believe did not know how to end itself, like the amateur orator searching desperately for a definitive preposition? You're wrong. You can go out there now, at least during the next fifteen minutes say, and not die probably.

Yes, that may be the novelty: you can go out there now and stand erect and look about you — granted of course that any of us really ever can stand erect again. But we will learn how. Who knows? in four or five years we may even have got our neck-muscles supple enough simply to duck our heads again in place of merely bowing them to await the stroke, as we have been doing for four years now; in ten years, certainly.'

The sentry didn't move, like a blind man suddenly within range of a threat, the first warning of which he must translate through some remaining secondary sense, already too late to fend with. 'Come,' the runner said. 'You're a man of the world. Indeed, you have been a man of this world since noon yesterday, even if they didn't bother to tell you so until fifteen o'clock. In fact, we are all men of this world now, all of us who died on the fourth day of August four years ago — —'

The sentry moved again with that convulsive start; he said in a harsh thick furious murmur: 'For the last time. I warned you.'

'— all the fear and the doubt, the agony and the grief and the lice — Because it's over. Isn't it over?'

'Yes!' the sentry said.

'Of course it's over. You came out in ... fifteen, wasn't it? You've seen a lot of war too. Of course you know when one is over.'

'It is over!' the sentry said. 'Didn't you hear the.... ing guns stop right out there in front of you?'

'Then why don't we go home?'

'Can they draw the whole.... ing line out at once? Leave the whole.... ing front empty at one time?'

'Why not?' the runner said. 'Isn't it over?' It was as if he had fixed the sentry as the matador does the bull, leaving the animal capable only of watching him. 'Over. Finished. Done. No more parades. Tomorrow we shall go home; by this time tomorrow night we shall have hoicked from the beds of our wives and sweethearts the manufacturers of walking-out shoepegs and Enfield primers — —' He thought rapidly He's going to kick me. He said, 'All right. Sorry. I didn't know you had a wife.'

'No more I have,' the sentry said in his shaking whisper. 'So will you stow it now? Will you for bleeding Christ?'

'Of course you haven't. How wise you are. A girl in a High Street pub, of course. Or perhaps a city girl — a Greater City girl, Houndsditch or Bermondsey, towarding forty but not looking within five years of it,

and's had her troubles too — who hasn't? — but suppose she does, who wouldn't choose her and lucky, who can appreciate a man, to one of these young tarts swapping cove for cove with each leave train — —'

The sentry began to curse, in the same harsh spent furious monotone, cursing the runner with obscene and dull unimagination out of the stalls and tack-rooms and all the other hinder purlieus of what must have been his old vocation, until at the same moment the runner sat quickly and lightly up and the sentry began to turn back to the aperture in a series of jerks like a mechanical toy running down, murmuring again in his shaking furious voice: 'Remember. I told you' as two men came around the traverse and up the trench in single file, indistinguishable in their privates' uniforms save for the officer's stick and the sergeant's chevrons.

'Post?' the officer said.

'Two-nine,' the sentry said. The officer had lifted his foot to the firestep when he saw, seemed to see, the runner.

'Who's that?' he said. The runner began to stand up, promptly enough but without haste. The sergeant pronounced his name.

'He was in that special draft of runners Corps drew out yesterday morning. They were dismissed to dugouts as soon as they reported back tonight, and told to stop there. This man was, anyway.'

'Oh,' the officer said. That was when the sergeant pronounced the name. 'Why aren't you there?'

'Yes sir,' the runner said, picking up the rifle and turning quite smartly, moving back down the trench until he had vanished beyond the traverse. The officer completed his stride onto the firestep; now both the helmets slanted motionless and twinlike between the sandbags while the two of them peered through the aperture.

Then the sentry said, murmured so quietly that it seemed impossible that the sergeant six feet away could have heard him:

'Nothing more's come up I suppose, sir?' For another half minute the officer peered through the aperture.

Then he turned and stepped down to the duckboards, the sentry turning with him, the sergeant moving again into file behind him, the officer himself already beginning to move when he spoke:

'When you are relieved, go down your dugout and stay there.' Then they were gone.

The sentry began to turn back toward the aperture. Then he stopped. The runner was now standing on the duckboards below him; while they looked at one another the star-shell sniffed and traced its sneering arc and plopped into parachute, the faint glare washing over the runner's lifted face and then, even after the light itself had died, seeming to linger still on it as if the glow had not been refraction at all but water or perhaps grease; he spoke in a tense furious murmur not much louder than a whisper:

'Do you see now? Not for us to ask what nor why but just go down a hole in the ground and stay there until they decide what to do.

No: just how to do it because they already know what. Of course they wont tell us. They wouldn't have told us anything at all if they hadn't had to, hadn't had to tell us something, tell the rest of you something before the ones of us who were drawn out yesterday for special couriers out of Corps would get back in tonight and tell you what we had heard. And even then, they told you just enough to keep you in the proper frame of mind so that, when they said Go down the dugouts and stay there you would do it. And even I wouldn't have known any more in time if on the way back in tonight I hadn't blundered onto that lorry train.

'No: that's wrong too; just known in time that they are already up to something. Because all of us know by now that something is wrong. Dont you see? something happened down there yesterday morning in the French front, a regiment failed — burked — mutinied, we dont know what and are not going to know what because they aren't going to tell us. Besides, it doesn't matter what happened. What matters is,

what happened afterward. At dawn yesterday a French regiment did something — did or failed to do something which a regiment in a front line is not supposed to do or fail to do, and as a result of it, the entire war in western Europe took a recess at three o'clock yesterday afternoon.

Dont you see? When you are in battle and one of your units fails, the last thing you do, dare do, is quit. Instead, you snatch up everything else you've got and fling it in as quick and hard as you can, because you know that that's exactly what the enemy is going to do as soon as he discovers or even suspects you have trouble on your side. Of course you're going to be one unit short of him when you meet; your hope, your only hope, is that if you can only start first and be going the fastest, momentum and surprise might make up a little of it.

'But they didn't. Instead, they took a recess, remanded, the French at noon, us and the Americans three hours later. And not only us, but Jerry too. Dont you see? How can you remand in war, unless your enemy agrees too? And why should Jerry have agreed, after squatting under the sort of barrage which four years had trained him to know meant that an attack was coming, then no attack came or failed or whatever it was it did, and four years had certainly trained him to the right assumption for that; when the message, signal, request — whatever it was — came over suggesting a remand, why should he have agreed to it, unless he had a reason as good as the one we had, maybe the same reason we had? The same reason; those thirteen French soldiers apparently had no difficulty whatever going anywhere they liked in our back-areas for three years, why weren't they across yonder in Jerry's too, since we all know that, unless you've got the right properly signed paper in your hand, it's a good deal more difficult to go to Paris from here than to Berlin; any time you want to go east from here, all you need is a British or French or American uniform.

Or perhaps they didn't even need to go themselves, perhaps just wind, moving air, carried it. Or perhaps not even moving air but just air, spreading by attrition from invisible and weightless molecule to molecule as disease, smallpox spreads, or fear, or hope — just enough

of us, all of us in the mud here saying together, Enough of this, let's have done with this.

'Because dont you see? they cant have this. They cant permit this, to stop it at all yet, let alone allow it to stop itself this way — the two shells in the river and the race already underway and both crews without warning simply unshipping the oars from the locks and saying in unison: We're not going to pull anymore. They cant yet.

It's not finished yet, like an unfinished cricket or rugger match which started according to a set of mutually accepted rules formally and peaceably agreed on, and must finish by them, else the whole theory of arbitration, the whole tried and proven step-by-step edifice of politics and economy on which the civilised concord of nations is based, becomes so much wind.

More than that: that thin and tensioned girder of steel and human blood which carries its national edifice soaring glorious and threatful among the stars, in dedication to which young men are transported free of charge and even with pay, to die violently in places that even the map-makers and -dividers never saw, that a pilgrim stumbling on it a hundred or a thousand years afterward may still be able to say Here is a spot that is (anyway was once) forever England or France or America.

And not only cant, dare not: they wont. They have already started not to. Because listen. On the way back up tonight, I got a lift in a lorry. It was carrying AA shells. It was in a column almost three miles long, all chock full of AA shells. Think of it: three miles of AA shells; think of having enough shells to measure it in miles, which apparently they did not have in front of Amiens two months ago.

But then, naturally it takes more ammunition to recess a war for ten minutes than to stop a mere offensive. The lorry was in charge of an old man I knew who had been waiting for three years at an ammo dump at St Omer for his application to go through for leave and permission to go to Mons and search for his son who hadn't or didn't or couldn't or

didn't want to — anyway, failed to — come back that afternoon four years ago. He showed me one of the shells. It was blank.

Not dud: blank, complete and intact except that there was no shrapnel in it; it would fire and even burst, harmless. It looked all right on the outside; I doubt if its father in his West End club (or Birmingham or Leeds or Manchester or wherever people live who make shells) would have known the difference, and only a dyed-in-the-wool archie bloke could.

It was amazing, really; they must have worked like beaver all last night and today too there at the dump, altering, gelding three miles of shells — or maybe they had them all ready beforehand, in advance; maybe after four years, even Anglo-Saxons can learn to calculate ahead in war — —' talking, the voice not dreamy now: just glib and rapid, he (the runner) in the moving lorry now, the three of them, himself, the old man and the driver, crowded into the close and lightless cab so that he could feel the whole frail length of the old man's body tense and exultant against him, remembering how at first his voice had sounded as cracked and amazed as the old man's, but soon no more: the two voices running along side by side as logical in unreason, rational and inconsequent as those of two children:

'Perhaps you'd better tell me again. Maybe I have forgot.'

'For the signal!' the old man cried. 'The announcement! To let the whole world know that He has risen!'

'A signal of AA shells? Three miles of AA shells? Wouldn't one gun be enough to herald Him? And if one gun, why hold His resurrection up long enough to run three miles of shells through it? Or if one shell to each gun, why only three miles of guns? Why not enough for every gun between Switzerland and the Channel? Aren't the rest of us to be notified too? To welcome Him too? Why not just bugles, horns? He would recognise horns; they wouldn't frighten Him.'

'Dont the Book itself say he will return in thunder and lightning?'

'But not gunpowder,' the runner said.

‘Then let man make the noise!’ the cracked voice cried. ‘Let man shout hallelujah and jubilee with the very things he has been killing with!’ — rational and fantastic, like children, and as cruel too:

‘And fetch your son along with Him?’ the runner said.

‘My son?’ the old man said. ‘My son is dead.’

‘Yes,’ the runner said. ‘That’s what I meant. Isn’t that what you mean too?’

‘Pah,’ the old man said; it sounded almost like spitting. ‘What does it matter, whether or not He brings my son back with Him? my son, or yours, or any other man’s? My son? Even the whole million of them we have lost since that day four years ago, the billion since that day eighteen hundred and eighty-five years ago. The ones He will restore to life are the ones that would have died since eight o'clock this morning My son? My son?’ — then (the runner) out of the lorry again (The column had stopped).

It was near the lines, just under them in fact, or what had been the front line until three o'clock this afternoon; the runner knew that at once, although he had never been here before. But he had not only been an infantryman going in and out of them for twenty-odd months, for seven months he had been a runner going in and out of them every night, so he had no more doubt of where he was than would the old wolf or lynx when he was near a trap-line.), walking up the column toward the halted head of it, and stopped in shadow and watched M.P.’s and armed sentries splitting the column into sections with a guide for each leading lorry, each section as it was detached turning from the road into the fields and woods beyond which lay the front; and not long to watch this either, because almost at once a corporal with his bayonet fixed came quickly around the lorry in whose shadow he stood.

‘Get back to your lorry,’ the corporal ordered.

He identified himself, naming his battalion and its vector.

‘What the bleeding ... are you doing down here?’ the corporal said.

‘Trying to get a lift.’

‘Not here,’ the corporal said. ‘Hop it. Sharp, now’ — and (the corporal) still watching him until darkness hid him again; then he too left the road, into a wood, walking toward the lines now; and (telling it, sprawled on the firestep beneath the rigid and furious sentry almost as though he drowsed, his eyes half-closed, talking in the glib, dreamy, inconsequent voice) how from the shadows again he watched the crew of an anti-aircraft battery, with hooded torches, unload the blank shells from one of the lorries, and tumble their own live ammunition back into it, and went on until he saw the hooded lights again and watched the next lorry make its exchange; and at midnight was in another wood — or what had been a wood, since all that remained now was a nightingale somewhere behind him — , not walking now but standing with his back against the blasted corpse of a tree, hearing still above the bird’s idiot reiteration the lorries creeping secretly and steadily through the darkness, not listening to them, just hearing them, because he was searching for something which he had lost, mislaid, for the moment, though when he thought that he had put the digit of his recollection on it at last, it was wrong, flowing rapid and smooth through his mind, but wrong: In Christ is death at end in Adam that began: — true, but the wrong one: not the wrong truth but the wrong moment for it, the wrong one needed and desired; clearing his mind again and making the attempt again, yet there it was again: In Christ is death at end in Adam that —— still true, still wrong, still comfortless; and then, before he had thought his mind was clear again, the right one was there, smooth and intact and instantaneous, seeming to have been there for a whole minute while he was still fretting its loss: — but that was in another country; — and besides the wench is dead

And this time the flare went up from their own trench, not twenty yards away beyond the up traverse, so near this time that after the green corpse-glare died the sentry could have discerned that what washed over the runner’s face was neither the refraction assumed nor the grease it resembled, but the water it was: ‘A solid corridor of harmlessarchie batteries, beginning at our parapet and exactly the width of the range at which a battery in either wall would decide there

wasn't any use in even firing at an aeroplane flying straight down the middle of it, running back to the aerodrome at Villeneuve Blanche, so that to anyone not a general it would look all right — and if there was just enough hurry and surprise about it, maybe even to the men themselves carrying the shells running to the guns ramming them home and slamming the blocks and pulling the lanyards and blistering their hands snatching the hot cases out fast enough to get out of the way of the next one, let alone the ones in front lines trying to cringe back out of man's sight in case the aeroplane flying down the corridor to Villeneuve wasn't carrying ammunition loaded last night at whatever the Hun calls his Saint Omer, it would still look and sound all right, even if the Hun continued not falling all the way back to Villeneuve because Flying Corps people say archie never hits anything anyway — —

'So you see what we must do, before that German emissary or whatever he will be, can reach Paris or Chaulnesmont or wherever he is to go, and he and whoever he is to agree with, have agreed, not on what to do because that is no problem: only on how, and goes back home to report it.

We dont even need to start it; the French, that one French regiment, has already taken up the load. All we need is, not to let it drop, falter, pause for even a second. We must do it now, tomorrow — tomorrow? it's already tomorrow; it's already today now — do as that French regiment did, the whole battalion of us: climb over this parapet tomorrow morning and get through the wire, with no rifles, nothing, and walk toward jerry's wire until he can see us, enough of him can see us — a regiment of him or a battalion or maybe just a company or maybe even just one because even just one will be enough.

You can do it. You own the whole battalion, every man in it under corporal, beneficiary of every man's insurance in it who hasn't got a wife and I.O.U.'s for their next month's pay of all the rest of them in that belt around your waist. All you'll need is just to tell them to when you say Follow me; I'll go along to the first ones as soon as you are relieved, so they can see you vouch for me. Then others will see you vouch for me when I vouch for them, so that by daylight or by sunup

anyway, when Jerry can see us, all the rest of Europe can see us, will have to see us, can't help but see us — —' He thought: He's really going to kick me this time, and in the face.

Then the sentry's boot struck the side of his jaw, snapping his head back even before his body toppled, the thin flow of water which sheathed his face flying at the blow like a thin spray of spittle or perhaps of dew or rain from a snapped leaf, the sentry kicking at him again as he went over backward onto the firestep, and was still stamping his boot at the unconscious face when the officer and the sergeant ran back around the traverse, still stamping at the prone face and panting at it:

'Will you for Christ's sake now? Will you? Will you?' when the sergeant jerked him bodily down to the duck-boards.

The sentry didn't even pause, whirling while the sergeant held him, and slashing his reversed rifle blindly across the nearest face. It was the officer's, but the sentry didn't even wait to see, whirling again back toward the firestep though the sergeant still gripped him in one arm around his middle, still — the sentry — striking with the rifle-butt at the runner's bleeding head when the sergeant fumbled his pistol out with his free hand and thumbed the safety off.

'As you were,' the officer said, jerking the blood from his mouth, onto his wrist and flinging it away. 'Hold him.' He spoke without turning his head, toward the corner of the down traverse, raising his voice a little: 'Two-eight. Pass the word for corporal.'

The sentry was actually foaming now, apparently not even conscious that the sergeant was holding him, still jabbing the rifle-butt at or at least toward the runner's peaceful and bloody head, until the sergeant spoke almost against his ear.

'Two-seven for corporal,' a voice beyond the down traverse said; then fainter, beyond that, another:

'Two-six corporal.'

'Use yer boot,' the sergeant muttered. 'Kick his ing teeth in.'

Monday: Tuesday: Wednesday

HE HAD ALREADY turned back toward the aerodrome when he saw the Harry Tate. At first he just watched it, merely alerting himself to overshoot it safely; they looked so big and were travelling so slowly that you always made the mistake of overestimating them if you were not careful. Then he saw that the thing obviously not only hoped but actually believed that it could cut him off — a Harry Tate, which usually had two Australians in it or one general-and-pilot, this one indubitably a general since only by some esoteric factor like extreme and even overwhelming rank could an R.E.8 even hope to catch an S.E. and send it to earth.

Which was obviously what this one intended to do, he throttling back now until the S.E. was hanging on its airscrew just above stalling. And it was a general: the two aeroplanes broadside on for a second or so, a hand in a neat walking-out glove from the observer's seat gesturing him peremptorily downward until he wagged his wings in acknowledgment and put his nose down for home, thinking, Why me? What've I done now? Besides, how did they know where I was? — having suddenly a sort of vision of the whole sky full of lumbering R.E.8's, each containing a general with a list compiled by frantic telephone of every absent unaccounted-for scout on the whole front, hunting them down one by one out of back-areas and harrying them to earth.

Then he reached the aerodrome and saw the ground signal-strip laid out on it; he hadn't seen one since ground school and for a goodish while he didn't even know what it was; not until he saw the other aeroplanes on the ground or landing or coming in to land, did he recognise it to be the peremptory emergency signal to all aircraft to come down, landing in his turn faster and harder than people liked to land S.E.'s because of their unhappy ground habits, taxi-ing in to the tarmac where, even before he could switch off, the mechanic was shouting at him: 'The mess, sir! Right away! The major wants you at the mess right away!'

‘What?’ he said. ‘Me?’

‘Everyone, sir,’ the mechanic said. ‘The whole squadron, sir. Best hurry.’

He jumped down to the tarmac, already running, so young in breathing that he wouldn't be nineteen for another year yet and so young in war that, although the Royal Air Force was only six weeks old, his was not the universal tunic with RFC badges superposed on the remnants of old regimental insigne which veteran transfers wore, and he didn't even own the old official Flying Corps tunic at all: his was the new RAF thing not only unmartial but even a little epicene, with its cloth belt and no shoulder-straps like the coat of the adult leader of a neo-Christian boys' club and the narrow pale blue ring around each cuff and the hat-badge like a field marshal's until you saw, remarked, noticed the little modest dull gold pin on either side of it like lingerie-clips or say the christening's gift-choice by godfathers whose good taste had had to match their pocket-books.

A year ago he was still in school, waiting not for his eighteenth birthday and legal age for joining up, but for his seventeenth one and the expiration, discharge, of a promise to his widowed mother (he was the only child) to stick it out until then. Which he did, even making good marks, even while his mind, his whole being, was sleepless and athirst with the ringing heroic catalogue: Ball: McCudden: Mannock: Bishop: Barker: Rhys Davies: and above all, simply: England.

Three weeks ago he was still in England, waiting in Pilot's Pool for posting to the front — a certificated stationary engine scout pilot to whom the King had inscribed We Reposing Trust and Confidence in Our Trusty and Well-Beloved Gerald David ... but already too late, gazetted not into the RFC but into the RAF. Because the RFC had ceased to exist on April Fool's day, two days before his commission came through: whereupon that March midnight had seemed to him a knell.

A door had closed on glory; immortality itself had died in unprimed anti-climax: not his to be the old commission in the old glorious corps, the brotherhood of heroes to which he had dedicated himself even at the cost of that wrench to his mother's heart; not his the old

commission which Albert Ball had carried with him into immortality and which Bishop and Mannock and McCudden still bore in their matchless records; his only the new thing not flesh nor fowl nor good red herring: who had waited one whole year acquiescent to his mother's unrational frantic heart fiercely and irrevocably immune to glory, and then another year in training, working like a beaver, like the very proverbial Trojan, to compensate for his own inability to say no to a woman's tears.

It was too late; those who had invented for him the lingerie pins and the official slacks in place of pink Bedfords and long boots and ordnance belt, had closed the door even to the anteroom of heroes. In Valhalla's un-national halls the un-national shades, Frenchman and German and Briton, conqueror and conquered alike — Immelman and Guynemer, Boelcke and Ball — identical not in the vast freemasonry of death but in the closed select one of flying, would clash their bottomless mugs, but not for him.

Their inheritors — Bishop and Mannock and Voss and McCudden and Fonck and Barker and Richthofen and Nungesser — would still cleave the earth-founded air, pacing their fleeing shadows on the scudding canyon-walls of cumulae, furloughed and immune, secure in immortality even while they still breathed, but it would not be his. Glory and valor would still exist of course as long as men lived to reap them. It would even be the same valor in fact, but the glory would be another glory. And that would be his: some second form of Elysium, a cut above dead infantry perhaps, but little more: who was not the first to think What had I done for motherland's glory had motherland but matched me with her need.

And now apparently even what remained was to be denied him: three weeks spent in practice, mostly gunnery (he was quite good at it, astonishing even himself), at the aerodrome; one carefully chaperoned trip — the major, Bridesman, his flight commander, himself and one other new and unblooded tyro — up to the lines to show them what they looked like and how to find the way back; and yesterday he was in his hut after lunch trying to compose a letter to his mother when

Bridesman thrust his head in and gave him the official notice which he had been waiting for now ever since his seventeenth birthday: 'Levine. Jobs tomorrow. Eleven o'clock. Before we take off, I'll try again to remind you to try to remember what we have been trying to tell you to remember.'

Then this morning he had gone up for what would be the last of his unchallenged airy privacy, the farewell to his apprenticeship, what might be called the valedictory of his maidenhood, when the general in the Harry Tate sent him back to earth, to spring down almost before the aeroplane stopped rolling and, spurred again by the mechanic, run to the mess, already the last one since everyone else was there except the flight which was still out, finding the major already talking, one knee crooked easily across the corner of the table; he (the major) had just got back from Wing Headquarters, where he had met the general commanding, who had come straight from Poperinghe: the French had asked for an armistice; it would go into effect at noon — twelve hours.

But it meant nothing: they (the squadron) were to remember that; the British hadn't asked for any armistice, nor the Americans either; and having known the French, fought beside them for almost four years now, he (the major) didn't yet believe it meant anything with them. However, there would be a truce, a remand, for an hour or two hours or perhaps a whole day.

But it was a French truce; it wasn't ours — looking about at them, nonchalant and calm and even negligent, speaking in that same casual negligent voice and manner with which he could carry the whole squadron through a binge night, through exuberance and pandemonium and then, with none realising it until afterward, back into sufficient sobriety to cope with the morrow's work, which was not the least of the reasons why, even though no hun-getter, he was one of the most popular and capable squadron commanders in France, though he (the child) had not been there long enough to know that.

But he did know that here was the true authentic voice of that invincible island which, with not merely the eighteen years he had but

the rest of his promised span which he might very likely lose doing it, he would in joy and pride defend and in gratitude preserve: 'Because we aren't quitting. Not us nor the Americans either. It's not over. Nobody declared it for us; nobody but us shall make our peace. Flights will stand by as usual. Carry on.'

He didn't think Why yet. He just thought What. He had never heard of a recess in war. But then, he knew so little about war; he realised now that he knew nothing about war.

He would ask Bridesman, glancing about the room where they were already beginning to disperse, and in the first moment realising that Bridesman was not there, and in the next one that none of the flight commanders were there: not only Bridesman, but Witt and Sibleigh too, which in Witt's case obviously meant that he still had C Flight out on the mid-morning job, and which — the fact that C Flight was still carrying on with the war — ratified the major's words; C Flight hadn't quit, and if he knew Bridesman (and after three weeks he certainly should) B hadn't either, glancing at his watch now: half after ten, thirty minutes yet before B would go up; he would have time to finish the letter to his mother which Bridesman had interrupted yesterday; he could even — since the war would officially begin for him in thirty minutes — write the other one, the succinct and restrained and modestly heroic one to be found among his gear afterward by whoever went through it and decided what should be sent back to his mother: thinking how the patrol went up at eleven and the remand would begin at twelve, which would leave him an hour — no, it would take them ten minutes to get to the lines, which would leave fifty minutes; if fifty minutes was long enough for him to at least make a start after Bishop's and McCudden's and Mannock's records, it would be long enough for him to get shot down in too: already moving toward the door when he heard engines: a flight: taking off: then running up to the hangars, where he learned that it was not even B Flight, shouting at the sergeant, incredulous and amazed: 'Do you mean that all three flight commanders and all the deputies have gone out in one patrol?' and then heard the guns begin, not like any heavy firing he had ever heard before, but furious and

simultaneous and vast in extent — a sound already in existence to the south-east before audibility began and still in existence to the north-west when audibility ceased. 'They're coming over!' he shouted. 'The French have betrayed us! They just got out of the way and let them through!'

'Yes sir,' the flight sergeant said. 'Hadn't you better get along to the office? They may be wanting you.'

'Right,' he said, already running, back up the vacant aerodrome beneath the sky furious with the distant guns, into the office which was worse than empty: the corporal not only sitting as always behind the telephone, but looking at him across the dogeared copy of Punch which he had been looking at when he first saw him three weeks ago.

'Where's the major?' he cried.

'Down at Wing, sir,' the corporal said.

'Down at Wing?' he cried, incredulous, already running again: through the opposite door, into the mess, and saw everyone of the squadron's new replacements like himself except himself, all sitting quietly about as though the adjutant had not merely arrested them but was sitting guard over them, and the adjutant himself sitting at the end of the mess table with his pipe and wound stripe and observer's O and single wing above the Mons Star ribbon, and the squadron chessboard and the folded sheet of last Sunday's Times chess problem laid out before him; and he (the child) shouting, 'Cant you hear them? Cant you?' so that he couldn't hear the adjutant at all for his own noise, until the adjutant began to shout too:

'Where have you been?'

'Hangars,' he said. 'I was to go on the patrol.'

'Didn't anyone tell you to report to me here?'

'Report?' he said. 'Flight Sergeant Conventicle — — No,' he said.

'You're — —'

'Levine.'

'Levine. You've been here three weeks. Not long enough to have learned that this squadron is run by people especially appointed and even qualified for it. In fact, when they gave you those badges, they gave you a book of rules to go with them, to prevent you needing ever to rack your brains like this. Perhaps you haven't yet had time to glance through it.'

'Yes,' he said. 'What do you want with me?'

'To sit down somewhere and be quiet. As far as this squadron is concerned, the war stopped at noon. There'll be no more flying here until further notice. As for those guns, they began at twelve hours. The major knew that beforehand. They will stop at fifteen hours. Now you know that in advance too — —'

'Stop?' he said. 'Dont you see — —'

'Sit down!' the adjutant said.

' — if we stop now, we are beat, have lost — —'

'Sit down!'

He stopped then. Then he said: 'Am I under arrest?'

'Do you want to be?'

'Right,' he said. He sat down. It was twenty-two minutes past twelve hours; now it was not the Nissen walls which trembled, but the air they contained. Presently, or in time that is, it was thirteen hours, then fourteen, all that distant outside fury reduced now to a moiling diastole of motes where the sun slanted into the western windows; getting on for fifteen hours now and the squadron itself reduced to a handful of tyros who barely knew in which direction the front lay, under command of a man who had never been anything but a poor bloody observer to begin with and had even given that up now for a chessboard: they still sat there: he, and the other new men who had — must have — brought out from England with them the same gratitude and pride and thirst and hope — — Then he was on his feet, hearing the silence still falling like a millstone into a well; then they were all moving as one, through the door and outside into that topless gape from which the walls and roof of distant gunfire had been ripped, snatched, as a cyclone rips the

walls and roof from the rectangle of vacancy which a moment ago had been a hangar, leaving audibility with nothing now to lean against, outbursting into vacuum as the eardrums crack with altitude, until at last even that shocking crash died away.

‘That seems to be it,’ a voice said behind him.

‘Seems to be what?’ he said. ‘It’s not over! Didn’t you hear what the major said? The Americans aren’t quitting either! Do you think Monaghan’ (Monaghan was an American, in B Flight too; although he had been out only ten weeks, he already had a score of three and a fraction) ‘is quitting? And even if they do — —’ and stopped, finding them all watching him, soberly and quietly, as if he were a flight commander himself; one said:

‘What do you think, Levine?’

‘Me?’ he said. ‘About what?’ Ask Collyer, he thought. He’s running the nursery now; bitterly too now: Ask Collyer — — the pipe, the balding head, the plump bland face which at this moment was England’s sole regent over this whole square half-mile of French dirt, custodian of her honor and pride, who three years ago had probably brought out to France (he, Collyer, according to squadron folklore, had been ridden down by a Uhlan with a lance inside the war’s first weeks and turned flying observer and came out again and within a week of that managed somehow to live through a F.E. crash after his pilot was dead and since then, carrying the same single pip and — the legend said — the same cold pipe, had been a squadron adjutant) the same feeling, belief, hunger — whatever you want to call it — as intolerant and unappeasable as his own, and then lost it or put it aside as he had put the war itself forever away, secure and immune in his ground job where no thirst for victory nor tumescence of valor could trouble him more; thinking, Oh yes, ask Collyer, finishing the thought which the cessation of the guns had interrupted inside the mess: He has quit too.

He gave up so long ago that he doesn’t even remember now that he hasn’t even lost anything. — I heard the death of England he said

quietly to himself, then aloud: 'Think about what? That noise? Nothing. That's what it sounds like, doesn't it?'

At five o'clock the major was delivered almost onto the office stoop by the general commanding the brigade's Harry Tate. Just before sunset two lorries drove onto the aerodrome; watching from his hut he saw infantry with rifles and tin hats get down and parade for a moment on the dusty grass behind the office and then disperse in squads and at sunset the patrol of flight commanders and deputies which had gone out at noon in the similitude of B Flight had not returned, three times longer than any patrol ever stayed out or than any S.E. could stay up on its petrol.

And he dined with a mess (the major was not present though a few of the older men — including the infantry officer — were; he didn't know where they had been nor when returned) half of whom he knew knew nothing either and the other half he didn't know how much they knew or cared; — a meal which was not long before the adjutant got up and stopped just long enough to say, not speaking to the older people at all: 'You aren't confined to quarters. Just put it that almost any place you can think of is out of bounds.'

'Even the village?' someone said.

'Even Villeneuve Blanche, sink of iniquity though it be not. You might all go home with Levine and curl up with his book. That's where he should be.' Then he stopped again. 'That means the hangars too.'

'Why should we go to the hangars this time of night?' one said.

'I don't know,' the adjutant said. 'Dont.' Then the others dispersed but not he, he was still sitting there after the orderlies had cleared the mess for the night and still there when the motor car came up, not stopping at the mess but going on around to the office and through the thin partition he heard people enter the office and then the voices: the major and Bridesman and the other two flight commanders and no S.E. had landed on this aerodrome after dark even if he hadn't heard the car but then that was all right, aeroplanes were not even new

replacements, they were not only insentient and so couldn't ask questions and talk back, you could even jettison them where they wouldn't even need to be watched by infantry and he couldn't have heard what the voices were saying even if he had tried, just sitting there when the voices stopped short and a second later the door opened and the adjutant paused an instant then came on, pulling the door after him, saying: 'Get along to your hut.'

'Right,' he said, rising. But the adjutant came on into the mess, shutting the door behind him; his voice was really kind now:

'Why dont you let it alone?'

'I am,' he said. 'I dont know how to do anything else because I dont know how it can be over if it's not over nor how it can be not over if it's over — —'

'Go to your hut,' the adjutant said. He went out into the darkness, the silence, walking on in the direction of the huts as long as anyone from the mess might still see him, then giving himself another twenty steps for good measure before he turned away toward the hangars, thinking how his trouble was probably very simple, really: he simply had never heard silence before; he had been thirteen, almost fourteen, when the guns began, but perhaps even at fourteen you still could not bear silence: you denied it at once and immediately began to try to do something about it as children of six or ten do: as a last resort, when even noise failed, fleeing into closets, cupboards, corners under beds or pianos, lacking any other closeness and darkness in which to escape it; walking around the corner of the hangar as the challenge came, and saw the crack of light under the hangar doors which were not only closed but pad-locked — a thing never before seen by him or anyone else in this or any squadron, himself standing quite still now with the point of the bayonet about six inches from his stomach.

'All right,' he said. 'What do I do now?'

But the man didn't even answer. 'Corporal of the guard!' he shouted.

'Post Number Four!' Then the corporal appeared.

'Second Lieutenant Levine,' he said. 'My aeroplane's in this hangar — —'

'Not if you're General Haig and your sword's in there,' the corporal said.

'Right,' he said, and turned. And for a moment he even thought of Conventicle, the Flight Sergeant; he had been a soldier long enough by now to have learned that there were few, if any, military situations which the simple cry of 'Sergeant!' would not resolve.

It was mainly this of course, yet there was a little of something else too: the rapport, not between himself and Conventicle perhaps, but between their two races — the middle-aged bog-complected man out of that race, all of whom he had ever known were named Evans or Morgan except the two or three named Deuteronomy or Tabernacle or Conventicle out of the Old Testament — that morose and musical people who knew dark things by simply breathing, who seemed to be born without dread or concern into knowledge of and rapport with man's sunless and subterrene origins which had better never have seen light at all, whose own misty and music-ed names no other men could pronounce even, so that when they emerged from their fens and fastnesses into the rational world where men still tried to forget their sombre beginnings, they permitted themselves to be designated by the jealous and awesome nouns out of the old fierce Hebraic annals in which they as no other people seemed at home, as Napoleon in Austria had had his (the child's) people with their unpronounceable names fetched before him and said 'Your name is Wolf' or 'Hoff' or 'Fox' or 'Berg' or 'Schneider', according to what they looked like or where they lived or what they did.

But he considered this only a moment. There was only one sure source, knowing now that even this one would not be too certain. But nothing else remained: Bridesman's and Cowrie's hut (That was one of the dangled prerequisites for being brave enough to get to be a captain: half a hut to yourself. The major had a whole one.), Cowrie looking at him from the pillow as Bridesman sat up in the other cot and lit the candle and told him.

‘Certainly it’s not over. It’s so far from over that you’re going on jobs tomorrow. Does that satisfy you?’

‘All right,’ he said. ‘But what happened? What is it? An armed sentry stopped me at the hangars thirty minutes ago and turned out the guard and the hangar doors were locked and a light inside and I could hear people doing something, only I couldn’t pass the bayonet and when they drove me away I heard a lorry and saw a torch moving about down at that archie battery this side the village and of course that’s fresh ammo being hurried up since archie quit at noon today too and naturally they’ll need a lot of ammo to quit with too — —’

‘If I tell you, will you let be and go to your hut and go to bed?’

‘Right,’ he said. ‘That’s all I ever wanted: just to know. If they’ve beat us, I want to stand my share too — —’

‘Beat us be blowed. There’s nobody in this war any longer capable of beating anyone, unless the Americans might in time — —’

‘And welcome,’ Cowrie said. But Bridesman was still talking:

‘A French regiment mutinied this morning — refused to go over. When they — the French — began to poke about to learn why, it seems that — — But it’s all right.’

‘How all right?’

‘It was only their infantry disaffected. Only troops holding the line. But the other regiments didn’t do anything. The others all seemed to know in advance that the one was going to refuse, but all the others did seem to be just waiting about to see what was going to happen to it. But they — the French — took no chances. They pulled the regiment out and replaced it and moved up guns and put down a heavy barrage all along their front, just like we did this afternoon. To give ourselves time to see what was what. That’s all.’

‘How that’s all?’ he said. Cowrie had put a cigarette into his mouth and, raised onto one elbow, was reaching for the candle when the hand stopped, less than a fraction of a second before it moved on. ‘What was the hun doing all this time?’ He said quietly: ‘So it’s over.’

'It's not over,' Bridesman said harshly. 'Didn't you just hear what the major said at noon today?'

'Oh yes,' he said serenely. 'It's over. All the poor bloody stinking infantry everywhere, Frenchmen, Americans, Germans, us ... So that's what they're hiding.'

'Hiding?' Bridesman said. 'Hiding what? There's nothing to hide. It's not over, I tell you. Didn't you just hear me say we have a job tomorrow?'

'All right,' he said. 'It's not over. How can it be not over then?'

'Because it isn't. What do you think we put down that barrage for today — we and the French and the Americans too — the whole front from the Channel in — blasting away a half year's supply of ammo for except to keep the hun off until we can know what to do?'

'Know to do what? What are they doing in our hangar tonight?'

'Nothing!' Bridesman said.

'What are they doing in B Flight's hangar, Bridesman?' he said. The cigarette pack lay on the packing case which served for a table between the two cots. Bridesman half turned and reached his hand but before he had touched the pack Cowrie, lying back on one arm beneath his head, without looking around extended the cigarette already burning in his own hand. Bridesman took it.

'Thanks,' he said. He said: 'I dont know.' He said harsh and strong: 'I dont want to know. All I know is, we have a job tomorrow and you're on it. If you've a good reason for not going, say it and I'll take someone else.'

'No,' he said. 'Goodnight.'

'Goodnight,' someone said.

But it wasn't tomorrow. There was nothing tomorrow: only dawn and then daylight and then morning. No dawn patrol went out because he would have heard it, being already and long since awake. Nor were there any aeroplanes on the tarmac when he crossed to the mess for breakfast, and nothing on the blackboard where Collyer occasionally

saw fit to scrawl things in chalk which no one really ever read, himself sitting long at the cleared table where Bridesman would more or less have to see him sooner or later, provided he wanted to. From here he could see across the aerodrome to the blank and lifeless hangars and watch the two-hourly relief of the pacing guards through the long coma-ed forenoon, the morning reft of all progress beneath the bland sky and the silence.

Then it was noon; he watched the Harry Tate land and taxi up to the office and switch off, and the trench coat get down from the observer's seat and remove the helmet and goggles and toss them into the cockpit and draw out the stick and the red and brazen hat. Then all of them at lunch: the general and his pilot and the infantry officer and the whole squadron, the first lunch he could remember from which at least one flight and sometimes two were not absent, the general saying it not quite as well as the major because it took him longer, but saying the same thing:

'It's not over.

Not that we needed the French. We should simply have drawn back to the Channel ports and let the hun have Paris. It wouldn't be the first time. 'Change would have got windy, but it wouldn't have been their first time either. But that's all past now. We have not only kept the hun fooled, the French have got their backs into it again. Call this a holiday, since like all holidays it will be over soon.

And there are some of you I think wont be sorry either' — naming them off because he did keep up with records, knew them all ' — Thorpe, Osgood, De Marchi, Monaghan — who are doing damned well and will do better because the French have had their lesson now and so next time it will be the long vac. proper because when the guns stop next, it will be on the other side of the Rhine. Plenty of revs, and carry on.' And no sound, though maybe no one expected any, everyone following outside to where the Harry Tate's engine was already ticking over and the major helped put the stick and the red hat back into the cockpit and get the helmet out and get it on the general and the general back into

the Harry Tate and the major said 'Shun!' saluting and the general jerked his thumbed fist upward and the Harry Tate trundled away.

Then afternoon, and nothing either. He still sat in the mess where Bridesman could see or find him if he liked, not waiting now any less than he had been waiting during the forenoon, because he knew now that he had not been waiting then, had not believed it then, not to mention that Bridesman had had to look at him at lunch because he had sat right across the table from him.

The whole squadron did in fact: sat or idled about the mess — that is, the new ones, the tyros, the huns like himself — Villeneuve Blanche, even Villeneuve which Collyer called that sink, still out of bounds (which fact — the out of bounds — was probably the first time in all its history that anyone not born there had specifically wanted to go there).

He could have gone to his hut too; there was a letter to his mother in it that he had not finished yet, except that now he could not finish it because the cessation of the guns yesterday had not only deleted all meaning from the words but effaced the very foundation of their purpose and aim.

But he went to the hut and got a book out and lay down on his cot with it. Perhaps it was simply to show, prove to, the old flesh, the bones and the meat, that he was not waiting for anything.

Or perhaps to teach them to relinquish, abnegate. Or perhaps it was not the bones and meat so much as the nerves, muscles, which had been trained by a government in a serious even though temporary crisis to follow one highly specialised trade, then the government passed the crisis, solved the dilemma needing it, before he had had the chance to repay the cost of the training.

Not glory: just to repay the cost. The laurel of glory, provided it was even moderately leafed, had human blood on; that was permissible only when motherland itself was at stake. Peace abolished it, and that

man who would choose between glory and peace had best let his voice be small indeed — —

But this was not reading; Gaston de la Tour at least deserved to be read by whoever held it open looking at it, even lying down. So he read, peaceful, resigned, no longer thirsting now. Now he even had a future, it would last forever now; all he needed was to find something to do with it, now that the only trade he had been taught — flying armed aircraft in order to shoot down (or try to) other armed aircraft — was now obsolete.

It would be dinner time soon, and eating would exhaust, get rid of, a little of it, four, perhaps, counting tea, even five hours out of each twenty-four, if one only remembered to eat slowly enough, then eight off for sleeping or even nine if you remembered to go slowly enough about that too, would leave less than half to have to cope with.

Except that he would not go to tea or dinner either today; he had yet almost a quarter-pound of the chocolate his mother had sent last week and whether he preferred chocolate to tea and dinner would not matter. Because they — the new ones, the tyros, the huns — would probably be sent back home tomorrow, and he would return to London if he must without ribbons on his coat, but at least he would not go back with a quarter-pound of chocolate melting in his hand like a boy returning half asleep from a market fair.

And anyone capable of spreading eating and sleeping over fourteen hours out of twenty-four, should be able to stretch Gaston de la Tour over what remained of this coma-ed and widowed day, until it met the night: the dark: and the sleep.

Then tomorrow, it had just gone three Pip Emma, he was not only not waiting for anything, it had been twenty-four hours now since he had had to remind himself that he was not waiting for anything, when the orderly room corporal stood suddenly in the door of the hut.

‘What?’ he said. ‘What?’

'Yes sir,' the corporal said. 'A patrol sir. Going up in thirty minutes.'
'The whole squadron?'
'Captain Bridesman just said you, sir.'

'In only thirty minutes?' he said. 'Damn it, why couldn't — Right,' he said. 'Thirty minutes. Thanks.' Because he would have to finish the letter now, and it was not that thirty minutes was not long enough to finish it in, but that they were not long enough to get back into the mood, belief in which the letter had been necessary. Except for signing it and folding it into the envelope, he would not even have needed to get the letter out. Because he remembered it:
... not dangerous at all, really.

I knew I could fly before I came out, and I have got to be pretty good on the range and even Captain Bridesman admits now that I'm not a complete menace to life in formation, so maybe when I settle down I might be of some value in the squadron after all

and what else could one add? what else say to a woman who was not only a mother, but an only and half-orphan mother too? which was backward, of course, but anybody would know what he meant; who knew? perhaps one of the anybody could even suggest a postscript: like this say:

P.S. A delightful joke on you: they declared a recess at noon two days ago and if you had only known it, you would not have needed to worry at all from then until three o'clock this afternoon; you could have gone out to tea two afternoons with a clear conscience, which I hope you did, and even stayed for dinner too though I do hope you remembered what sherry always does to your complexion

Except that there was not even time for that. He heard engines; looking out, he saw three busses outside now in front of the hangar, the engines running and mechanics about them and the sentry standing again in front of the closed hangar doors. Then he saw a strange staff-car on the grass plot beside the office and he wrote 'love, David' at the foot of the letter and folded and licked it into the envelope and in the mess again now he saw the major's batman cross toward the office

carrying an armful of flying kit; apparently Bridesman hadn't left the office at all, except that a moment later he saw Bridesman coming up from the hangars already dressed for the patrol, so the gear was not his.

Then the office door opened and Bridesman came out, saying, 'All right, get your — —' and stopped, because he already had it: maps, gloves, helmet, scarf, his pistol inside the knee pocket of the sidcott. Then they were outside, walking toward the three aeroplanes in front of B hangar.

'Just three,' he said. 'Who else is going?'

'The major,' Bridesman said.

'Oh,' he said. 'Why did he pick me?'

'I dont know. Out of a hat, I think. I can wash you out if you dont like it. It wont matter. I think he really picked you out of a hat.'

'Why should I not like it?' he said. Then he said, 'I just thought — —' and then stopped.

'Thought what?' Bridesman said.

'Nothing,' he said. Then he was telling it, he didn't know why: 'I thought that maybe the major found out about it somehow, and when he wanted one of the new blokes on this job, he remembered about me—' telling it: that morning when he had been supposed simply to be out practicing, contour chasing probably, and instead had spent that forty or fifty seconds right down on the carpet with the unarmed aeroplane over the hun trenches or at least what he thought was the hun front line: 'You dont get frightened then; it's not until later, afterward.'

And then — — It's like the dentist's drill, already buzzing before you have even opened your mouth. You've got to open your mouth and you know you're going to all right, only you know at the same time that neither knowing you are going to nor opening it either, is going to help because even after you have closed it again, the thing will buzz at you again and you'll have to open it again the next moment or tomorrow or maybe it wont be until six months from now, but it will buzz again and you will have to open again because there's nowhere else you can go ...'

He said: 'Maybe that's all of it. Maybe when it's too late and you can't help yourself anymore, you don't really mind getting killed — —'

'I don't know,' Bridesman said. 'You didn't get even one bullet hole?'

'No,' he said. 'Maybe I shall this time.' And this time Bridesman did stop.

'Listen,' Bridesman said. 'This is a job. You know what jobs in this squadron are for.'

'Yes. To find huns.'

'And then bust them.'

'You sound like Monaghan: "Oh, I just ran up behind and busted the ass off the son of a bitch."'

'You do that too,' Bridesman said. 'Come on.' They went on. But he had needed only one glance at the three aeroplanes.

'Your bus is not back yet,' he said.

'No,' Bridesman said. 'I'm taking Monaghan's.' Then the major came and they took off. As he passed the office, he saw a smallish closed van turn in from the road but he didn't have time to look then, not until he was off and up and from the turn could really look down. It was the sort of van provost marshals' people used; and climbing for formation, he saw not one car but two behind the mess — not ordinary muddy staff cars but the sort which detached Life and Horse Guards officers on the staffs of corps- and army-commanders were chauffeured about in.

Now he drew in opposite Bridesman across the major's tail-plane, still climbing but to the southward, so that they would approach the lines squarely, and did so, still climbing; Bridesman wagged his wings and turned away and he did likewise long enough to clear the Vickers, into Germany or anyway toward Germans, and traversed the Lewis on its quadrant and fired it off too and closed in again.

Now the major turned back north-west parallel above the front, still climbing and nothing below now to reveal, expose it as front lines although he hadn't seen it but twice to have learned to know it again — only two kite balloons about a mile apart above the British trenches

and two others almost exactly opposite them above the German ones, no dust no murk no gout and drift of smoke purposeless and unorigined and convoluted with no sound out of nothing and already fading and already replaced, no wink of guns as he had seen them once though perhaps at this height you didn't see flashes anyway: nothing now but the correlative to a map, looking now as it would look on that day when as the general said the last gun would cease beyond the Rhine — for that little space before the earth with one convulsive surge would rush to cover and hide it from the light of day and the sight of man — —

He broke off to turn when the major did. They were crossing now, still climbing, right over the upper British balloon, heading straight for the German one. Then he saw it too — a white salvo bursting well below them and in front and then four single bursts pointing away eastward like four asterisks. But he never had time to look where it was pointing because at the same instant German archie burst all around them — or would have, because the major was diving slightly now, going east. But still he could see nothing yet except the black hun archie.

It seemed to be everywhere; he flew right through a burst of it, cringing, shrinking convulsively into himself while he waited for the clang and whine which he had heard before. But maybe they were going too fast now, he and the major really diving now, and he noticed for the first time that Bridesman was gone, he didn't know what had become of him nor when, and then he saw it: a two-seater: he didn't know what kind because he had never seen a German two-seater in the air before nor any other German for that matter. Then Bridesman came vertically down in front of him and putting his nose down after Bridesman, he discovered that the major had vanished and forgot that too, he and Bridesman going almost straight down, the German right under them now, going west; he could see Bridesman's tracer going right into it until Bridesman pulled out and away, then his own tracer though he never could seem to get right on the two-seater before he had to pull out and away too, the archie already waiting for him before he was clear even, as though the hun batteries were simply shooting it up here without caring whom it hit or even watching to see.

One actually seemed to burst between his upper and lower right-hand planes; he thought, Maybe the reason I don't hear any clang is because this one is going to shoot me down before I have time to. Then he found the two-seater again. That is, not the aeroplane but the white bursts of British archie telling him or them where it was, and an S.E. (it would have to be the major; Bridesman couldn't possibly have got that far by now) diving toward the bursts. Then Bridesman was just off his wing-tip again, the two of them going full out now in the pocking cloud of black archie like two sparrows through a swirl of dead leaves; and then he saw the balloons and noticed or remembered or perhaps simply saw the sun.

He saw them all — the two-seater apparently emerged neatly and exactly from between the two German balloons and, in its aureole of white archie, flying perfectly straight and perfectly level on a line which would carry it across No-man's Land and exactly between the two British ones, the major behind and above the two-seater and Bridesman and himself perhaps a mile back in their cloud of black archie, the four of them like four beads sliding on a string and two of them not even going very fast because he and Bridesman were up with the major almost at once. And perhaps it was the look on his face, the major glancing quickly at him then motioning him and Bridesman back into formation.

But he didn't even throttle back and then Bridesman was following him, the two of them passing the major and he thought, Maybe I was wrong, maybe hun archie doesn't clang and it was ours I heard that day, still thinking that when, slightly ahead of Bridesman, they closed that gap too and flew into the white archie enclosing the two-seater before someone could tell the gunners they could stop now too, the last white wisp of it vanishing in the last fading drift about him and Bridesman now and there was the two-seater flying straight and level and sedate toward the afternoon sun and he pressed the button and nudged and ruddered the tracer right onto it, walking the tracer the whole length of it and return — the engine, the back of the pilot's head then the observer sitting as motionless as though in a saloon car on the way to the opera, the unfired machine gun slanting back and down from its

quadrant behind the observer like a rolled umbrella hanging from a rail, then the observer turned without haste and looked right into the tracer, right at him, and with one hand deliberately raised the goggles — a Prussian face, a Prussian general's face; he had seen too many caricatures of the Hohenzollern Crown Prince in the last three years not to know a Prussian general when he saw one — and with the other hand put up a monocle at him and looked at him through it, then removed the monocle and faced front again.

Then he pulled away and went past; there was the aerodrome right under them now, until he remembered the archie battery just outside the village where he had seen the torch last night and heard the lorry; from the tight vertical turn he could look straight down at the gunners, shaking his hand at them and yelling: 'Come on! Come on! This is your last chance!' and slanted away and came back diving, walking the tracer right through the gun and the pale still up-turned discs of the faces watching him about it; as he pulled up he saw another man whom he had not seen before standing just on the edge of the wood behind the battery; the gentlest nudge on stick and rudder brought this one squarely into the Aldis itself this time and, pulling up at last to get over the trees, he knew that he should have got something very close to a possible ten somewhere about that one's navel.

Then the aerodrome again; he saw the two-seater squaring away to land, the two S.E.'s above and behind it, herding it down; he himself was too high even if he had not been much too fast; even after the vicious sideslip he might still wipe off the S.E.'s frail undercarriage, which was easy enough to do even with sedate landings.

But it held, stood up; he was down first, rolling now and for a moment he couldn't remember where he had seen it then he did remember, beginning to turn as soon as he dared (Someday they would put brakes on them; those who flew them now and lived would probably see it.) and turning: a glimpse of brass and scarlet somewhere near the office, and the infantry in column coming around the corner of the office; he was taxi-ing fast now back along the tarmac past the hangars where three mechanics began to run toward him until he waved them off,

taxi-ing on toward the corner of the field and there it was where he had seen it last week and he switched off and got down, the two-seater on the ground too now and Bridesman and the major landing while he watched, the three of them taxi-ing on in a clump like three waddling geese toward the office where the scarlet and brass gleamed beautiful and refulgent in the sun in front of the halted infantry.

But he was running a little heavily now in his flying boots and so the ritual had already begun when he arrived — the major and Bridesman on foot now with the adjutant and Thorpe and Monaghan and the rest of B Flight, in the center of them the three Poperinghe a.d.c.'s splendid in scarlet and brass and glittering Guards badges, behind them the infantry officer with his halted platoon deployed into two open files, all facing the German aeroplane.

'Bridesman,' he said but at that moment the major said "Shun!" and the infantry officer shouted 'Present — — harms!' and at salute now he watched the German pilot jump down and jerk to attention beside the wing while the man in the observer's seat removed the helmet and goggles and dropped them somewhere and from somewhere inside the cockpit drew out a cap and put it on and did something rapidly with his empty hand like a magician producing a card and set the monocle into his eye and got down from the aeroplane and faced the pilot and said something rapid in German and the pilot stood himself back at ease and then snapped something else at the pilot and the pilot jerked back to attention and then with no more haste than when he had removed the helmet but still a little quicker than anyone could have stopped it drew a pistol from somewhere and even aimed it for a second while the rigid pilot (he looked about eighteen himself) stared not even at the pistol's muzzle but at the monocle and shot the pilot through the center of the face and turned almost before the body jerked and began to fall and swapped the pistol to the other gloved hand and had started to return the salute when Monaghan jumped across the pilot's body and flung the other German back into the aeroplane before Bridesman and Thorpe caught and held him.

'Fool,' Bridesman said. 'Dont you know hun generals dont fight strangers?'

'Strangers?' Monaghan said. 'I'm no stranger. I'm trying to kill the son of a bitch. That's why I came two thousand miles over here: to kill them all so I can get to hell back home!'

'Bridesman,' he said again but again the major said "Shun there! Shun!" and at salute again he watched the German straighten up (he hadn't even lost the monocle) and flip the pistol over until he held it by the barrel and extend it butt first to the major who took it, and then draw a handkerchief from his cuff and brush off the breast and sleeve of his tunic where Monaghan had touched him and look at Monaghan for just a second with nothing behind the monocle at all as he put the handkerchief back into the cuff and clicked and jerked as he returned the salute and walked forward straight at the group as though it were not there and he didn't even need to see it part and even scramble a little to get out of the way for him to stride through, the three Guards officers falling in behind, between the two open infantry files, toward the mess; the major said to Collyer:

'Move this.

I dont know whether they want it or not, but neither do we, here.'

'Bridesman,' he said again.

'Pah,' Bridesman said, spitting, hard. 'We shant need to go to the mess. I've a bottle in the hut.' Then Bridesman overtook him. 'Where are you going?'

'It will only take a moment,' he said. Then apparently Bridesman saw, noticed the aeroplane too.

'What's wrong with your bus? You got down all right.'

'Nothing,' he said. 'I left it there because there's an empty petrol tin in the weeds we can set the tail up on.' The tin was there: a faint and rusting gleam in the dying end of day. 'Because it's over, isn't it?'

That's what they want with that hun general of course. Though why they had to do it this way, when all somebody needed was just to hold out a white sheet or tablecloth; they must have a tablecloth at Pop and

surely jerry's got one at his headquarters that he took away from a Frenchwoman; and somebody owes something for that poor bloodstained taxi-driver he — — Which was not like the book either: he did it backward; first he should have unpinned the iron cross from his own coat and hung it on the other one and then shot him — —'
'You fool,' Bridesman said. 'You bloody fool.'

'All right. This will only take a moment.'

'Let it be,' Bridesman said. 'Just let it be.'

'I just want to see,' he said. 'Then I shall. It wont take but a moment.'

'Will you let it be then? Will you promise?'

'Of course. What else can I do? I just want to see' — and set the empty petrol tin in position and lifted the S.E.'s tail and swung it around onto the tin and it was just right: in a little better than flying angle: almost in a flat shallow glide, the nose coming down just right; and Bridesman really saying No now.

'I'll be damned if I will.'

'Then I'll have to get ...' he hesitated: a second: then rapidly, cunningly: '... Monaghan. He'll do it. Especially if I can overtake the van or the staff-car or whichever it is, and borrow the jerry general's hat. Or maybe just the monocle will be enough — — no: just the pistol to hold in my hand.'

'Take your own word for it,' Bridesman said. 'You were there. You saw what they shot at us, and what we were shooting at that two-seater. You were right on him for five or six seconds once. I watched your tracer rake him from the engine right on back through the monocle.'

'So were you,' he said. 'Get in.'

'Why dont you just let it be?'

'I have. Long ago. Get in.'

'Do you call this letting be?'

'It's like a cracked record on the gramophone, isn't it?'

'Chock the wheels,' Bridesman said. He found two chocks for the wheels and steadied the fuselage while Bridesman got into the cockpit. Then he went around to face the nose and it was all right; he could see the slant of the cowl and the Aldis slanting a little since he was taller than most, a little high still.

But then he could raise himself on his toes and he intended to put his arms over his face anyway in case there was something left of whatever it was they had loaded the cartridges with last night by the time it had travelled twenty feet, though he never had actually seen any of them strike, bounce off the two-seater, and he had been right on top of it for the five or six seconds Bridesman had talked about.

And the airscrew was already in open position so the constantinesco would be working or not working or whatever it was doing when it let bullets pass. So all he had to do was line up the tube of the Aldis on Bridesman's head behind the wind screen, except that Bridesman was leaning out around the screen, talking again: 'You promised.'

'That's right,' he said. 'It will be all right then.'

'You're too close,' Bridesman said. 'It's still tracer. It can still burn you.'

'Yes,' he said, backing away, still facing the little black port out of which the gun shot, 'I wondered how they did that. I thought tracer was the bullet itself burning up. However did they make tracer without a bullet in it? do you know? I mean, what are they? bread pellets maybe? No, bread would have burned up in the breech. Maybe they are wood pellets dipped in phosphorus.

Which is a little amusing, isn't it? our hangar last night locked tight as ... with an armed guard walking back and forth in the dark and the cold outside and inside somebody, maybe Collyer; a chess player ought to be good with a knife, whittling sounds philosophical too and they say chess is a philosopher's game, or maybe it was a mechanic who will be a corporal tomorrow or a corporal who will be a sergeant tomorrow even if it is over because they can give a corporal another stripe even on the way home or at least before he is demobbed.

Or maybe they'll even still keep the Air Force since a lot of people came into it out of the cradle before they had time to learn to do anything else but fly, and even in peace these ones will still have to eat at least now and then — —' still backing away because Bridesman was still waving him back, still keeping the Aldis aligned; ' — out here three years, and nothing, then one night he sits in a locked hangar with a pen knife and a lap-full of wooden blocks and does what Ball nor McCudden nor Mannock nor Bishop nor none of them ever did: brought down a whole German general: and get the barnacle at Buckingham palace his next leave — except that there wont be any, there's nothing now to be on leave from, and even if there was, what decoration will they give for that, Bridesman? — All right,' he said, 'all right, I'll cover my face too — —'

Except that he wouldn't really need to now; the line of fire was already slanting into the ground, and this much further away it would cross well down his chest. And so he took one last sight on the Aldis for alignment and bowed his head a little and crossed both arms before his face and said, 'All right.'

Then the chattering rattle, the dusky rose winking in miniature in the watch-crystal on his lifted wrist and the hard light stinging (They were pellets of some sort; if he had been three feet from the muzzle instead of about thirty, they would have killed him as quickly as actual bullets would have.

And even as it was, he had leaned into the burst, not to keep from being beaten back but to keep from being knocked down: during which — the falling backward — the angle, pattern, would have walked up his chest and he would probably have taken the last of the burst in his face before Bridesman could have stopped it.) bitter thock-thock-thock-thock on his chest and the slow virulent smell of burning cloth before he felt the heat.

'Get it off!' Bridesman was shouting. 'You cant put it out! Get the sidcott off, damn it!' Then Bridesman was wrenching at the overall too,

ripping it down as he kicked out of the flying boots and then out of the overall and the slow invisible smoldering stink. 'Are you satisfied now?' Bridesman said. 'Are you?'

'Yes, thanks,' he said. 'It's all right now. — Why did he have to shoot his pilot?'

'Here,' Bridesman said, 'get it away from the bus — —' catching up the overall by one leg as though to fling it away until he caught hold of it.

'Wait,' he said. 'I've got to get my pistol out. If I don't, they'll charge me with it!' He took the pistol from the sidcott's knee pocket and dropped it into his tunic pocket.

'Now then,' Bridesman said. But he held on.

'Incinerator,' he said. 'We can't leave it lying about here.'

'All right,' Bridesman said. 'Come along.'

'I'll put it in the incinerator and meet you at the hut.'

'Bring it on to the hut and let the batman put it in the incinerator.'

'It's like the cracked record again isn't it?' he said. Then Bridesman released his leg of the sidcott though he didn't move yet.

'Then you'll come along to the hut.'

'Of course,' he said. 'Besides, I'll have to stop at the hangars and tell them to roll me in. — But why did he have to shoot his pilot, Bridesman?'

'Because he is a German,' Bridesman said with a sort of calm and raging patience. 'Germans fight wars by the rule-books. By the book, a German pilot who lands an undamaged German aeroplane containing a German lieutenant general on an enemy aerodrome, is either a traitor or a coward, and he must die for it. That poor bloody bugger probably knew while he was eating his breakfast sausage and beer this morning what was going to happen to him. If the general hadn't done it here, they would probably shoot the general himself as soon as they got their hands on him again. Now get rid of that thing and come on to the hut.'

'Right,' he said. Then Bridesman went on and at first he didn't dare roll up the overall to carry it. Then he thought what difference could it possibly make now. So he rolled up the overall and picked up his flying boots and went back to the hangars.

B's was open now and they were just rolling in the major's and Bridesman's busses; the rule-book wouldn't let them put the German two-seater under a British shed probably, but on the contrary it would doubtless compel at least six Britons (who, since the infantry were probably all gone now, would be air mechanics unaccustomed both to rifles and having to stop up all night) to pass the night in relays walking with guns around it. 'I had a stoppage,' he told the first mechanic. 'There was a live shell in. Captain Bridesman helped me clear it. You can roll me in now.'

'Yes sir,' the mechanic said. He went on, carrying the rolled overall gingerly, around the hangars and on in the dusk toward the incinerator behind the men's mess, then suddenly he turned sharply again and went to the latrines; it would be pitch dark inside, unless someone was already there with a torch (Collyer had a tin candle-stick; passed going or coming from the latrines, cloistral indeed he would look, tonsured and with his braces knotted about his waist under his open warm). It was dark and the smell of the sidcott was stronger than ever inside.

He put the flying boots down and unrolled it but even in the pitch dark there was nothing to see: only the slow thick invisible burning; and he had heard that too: a man in B Flight last year who had got a tracer between the bones of his lower leg and they were still whittling the bone away as the phosphorus rotted it; Thorpe told him that next time they were going to take off the whole leg at the knee to see if that would stop it. Of course the bloke's mistake was in not putting off until day after tomorrow say, going on that patrol (Or tomorrow, for that matter.

Or today, except that Collyer wouldn't have let him.) only how could he have known that a year ago, when he himself knew one in the squadron who hadn't discovered it until people shot blank archie at him

and couldn't seem to believe it even then? rolling up the sidcott again and fumbling for a moment in the pitch dark (It wasn't quite dark after you got used to it.

The canvas walls had gathered a little luminousness, as if delayed day would even begin inside them after it was done outdoors.) until he found the boots. Outside, it was not at all night yet; night wouldn't even begin for two or three hours yet and this time he went straight to Bridesman's hut, pausing only long enough to lay the rolled sidcott against the wall beside the door.

Bridesman was in his shirt sleeves, washing; on the box between his and Cowrie's beds a bottle of whisky sat between his and Cowrie's toothmugs. Bridesman dried his hands and without stopping to roll down his sleeves, dumped the two toothbrushes from the mugs and poured whisky into them and passed Cowrie's mug to him.

'Down with it,' Bridesman said. 'If the whisky's any good at all, it will burn up whatever germs Cowrie put in it or that you'll leave.' They drank. 'More?' Bridesman said.

'No thanks. What will they do with the aeroplanes?'

'What will what?' Bridesman said.

'The aeroplanes. Our busses. I didn't have time to do anything with mine. But I might have, if I had had time. You know: wash it out. Taxi it into something — another aeroplane standing on the tarmac, yours maybe. Finish it, do for two of them at once, before they can sell them to South America or the Levantine. So nobody in a comic opera general's suit can lead the squadron's aeroplanes in some air force that wasn't even in this at all. Maybe Collyer'll let me fly mine once more. Then I shall crash it — —'

Bridesman was walking steadily toward him with the bottle. 'Up the mug,' Bridesman said.

'No thanks. I suppose you dont know just when we'll go home.'

'Will you drink, or wont you?' Bridesman said. 'No thanks.'

'All right,' Bridesman said. 'I'll give you a choice: drink, or shut up — let be — napoo. Which will you have?'

'Why do you keep on saying let be? Let be what? Of course I know the infantry must go home first — the p.b.i. in the mud for four years, out after two weeks and no reason to be glad or even amazed that you are still alive, because all you came out for is to get your rifle clean and count your iron rations so you can go back in for two weeks, and so no reason to be amazed until it's over.

Of course they must go home first, throw the bloody rifle away forever and maybe after two weeks even get rid of the lice. Then nothing to do forever more but work all day and sit in pubs in the evenings and then go home and sleep in a clean bed with your wife — —'

Bridesman held the bottle almost like he was going to strike him with it. 'Your word's worth damn all. Up the mug.'

'Thanks,' he said. He put the mug back on the box. — 'All right,' he said. 'I've let be.'

'Then cut along and wash and come to the mess. We'll get one or two others and go to Madame Milhaud's to eat.'

'Collyer told us again this morning none of us were to leave the aerodrome. He probably knows. It's probably as hard to stop a war as it is to start one. Thanks for the whisky.' He went out. He could already smell it even before he was outside the hut and he stooped and took up the overall and went to his hut.

It was empty of course; there would probably be a celebration, perhaps even a binge in the mess tonight. Nor did he light the lamp: dropping the flying boots and shoving them under his bed with his foot, then he put the rolled sidcott carefully on the floor beside the bed and lay down on it, lying quietly on his back in that spurious semblance of darkness and the time for sleeping which walls held, smelling the slow burning, and still there when he heard Burk cursing something or someone and the door banged back and Burk said, 'Holy Christ, what's that stink?'

‘It’s my sidcott,’ he said from the bed while someone lit the lamp. ‘It’s on fire.’

‘What the bloody hell did you bring it in here for?’ Burk said. ‘Do you want to burn down the hut?’

‘All right,’ he said, swinging his legs over and getting up and then taking up the overall while the others watched him curiously for a moment more, De Marchi at the lamp still holding the burning match in one hand. ‘What’s the matter? No binge tonight?’ Then Burk was cursing Collyer again even before De Marchi said, ‘Collyer closed the bar.’

He went outside; it was not even night yet, he could still read his watch: twenty-two hours (no, simple ten o'clock p.m. now because now time was back in mufti too) and he went around the corner of the hut and put the overall on the ground beside the wall, not too close to it, the whole northwest one vast fading church window while he listened to the silence crowded and myriad with tiny sounds which he had never heard before in France and didn't know even existed there because they were England.

Then he couldn't remember whether he had actually heard them in English nights either or whether someone had told him about them, because four years ago when such peaceful night sounds were legal or at least de rigueur, he had been a child looking forward to no other uniform save that of the Boy Scouts.

Then he turned; he could still smell it right up to the door and even inside too though inside of course he couldn't really have sworn whether he actually smelled it or not. They were all in bed now and he got into pyjamas and put out the lamp and got into bed properly, rigid and quiet on his back.

The snoring had already begun — Burk always snored and always cursed anyone who told him he did — so he could hear nothing but night passing, time passing, the grains of it whispering in a faint rustling

whisper from or into whatever it was it ran from or into, and he swung his legs quietly over again and reached under the bed and found the flying boots and put them on and stood up and found his warm quietly and put it on and went out, already smelling it before he reached the door and on around the corner and sat down with his back against the wall beside the overall, not any darker now than it had been at twenty-two (no, ten p.m. now), the vast church window merely wheeling slowly eastward until almost before you knew it now it would fill, renew with light and then the sun, and then tomorrow.

But they would not wait for that. Already the long lines of infantry would be creeping in the darkness up out of the savage bitter fatal stinking ditches and scars and caves where they had lived for four years now, blinking with amazement and unbelief, looking about them with dawning incredulous surmise, and he tried listening, quite hard, because surely he should be able to hear it since it would be much louder, noisier than any mere dawning surmise and unbelief: the single voice of all the women in the western world, from what used to be the Russian front to the Atlantic ocean and beyond it too, Germans and French and English and Italians and Canadians and Americans and Australians — not just the ones who had already lost sons and husbands and brothers and sweethearts, because that sound had been in the air from the moment the first one fell, troops had been living with that sound for four years now; but the one which had begun only yesterday or this morning or whenever the actual instant had been, from the women who would have lost a son or brother or husband or sweetheart today or tomorrow if it hadn't stopped and now wouldn't have to since it had (not his women, his mother of course because she had lost nothing and had really risked nothing; there hadn't been that much time) — a sound much noisier than mere surmise, so much noisier that men couldn't believe it quite yet even, where women could and did believe anything they wanted to, making (didn't want to nor even need to make) no distinction between the sound of relief and the sound of anguish.

Not his mother in the house on the River beyond Lambeth where he had been born and lived ever since and from which, until he died ten

years ago, his father would go in to the City each day to manage the London office of a vast American cotton establishment; they — his father and mother — had begun too late if he were the man on whom she was to bestow her woman's capacity for fond anguish, she the woman for whom (as history insisted — and from the talk he had had to listen to in messes he was inclined to admit that at least history believed it knew what it was talking about — men always had) he was to seek garlands or anyway sprigs of laurel at the cannon's mouth.

He remembered, it was the only time, he and two others were celebrating their commissions, pooled their resources and went to the Savoy and McCudden came in, either just finished getting some more ribbons or some more huns, very likely both, in fact indubitably both, and it was an ovation, not of men but of women, the three of them watching while women who seemed to them more beautiful and almost as myriad as angels, flung themselves upward like living bouquets about that hero's feet; and how, watching, they thought it whether they said it aloud or not: 'Wait.'

But there hadn't been time; there was only his mother still, and he thought with despair how women were not moved one jot by glory and when they were mothers too, they were even irascible about uniforms. And suddenly he knew that his mother would be the noisiest of any anywhere, the noisiest of all, who had never for one instant had any intention of losing anything in the war and now had been proved in the sight of the whole world to have been right.

Because women didn't care who won or lost wars, they didn't even care whether anybody did. And then he knew that it really didn't matter, not to England: Ludendorff could come on over Amiens and turn for the coast and get into his boats and cross the Channel and storm whatever he thought fit between Goodwin Sands and Land's End and Bishop's Rock and take London too and it wouldn't matter.

Because London signified England like the foam signifies the beer, but the foam is not the beer and nobody would waste much time or breath grieving, nor would Ludendorff have time to breathe either or spend

gloating, because he would still have to envelop and reduce every tree in every wood and every stone in every wall in all England, not to mention three men in every pub that he would have to tear down brick by brick to get to them.

And it would not matter when he did, because there would be another pub at the next crossroads with three more men in it and there were simply just not that many Germans nor anybody else in Europe or anywhere else, and he unrolled the sidcott; at first there had been a series of little smoldering overlapping rings across the front of it, but now it had become one single sprawling ragged loop spreading, creeping up toward the collar and down toward the belt and across toward each armpit, until by morning the whole front would be gone probably.

Because it was constant, steadfast, invincible and undeviable; you could depend on it as Ball had, and McCudden and Bishop and Rhys Davies and Barker, and Boelcke and Richthofen and Immelman and Guynemer and Nungesser and the Americans like Monaghan who had been willing to die even before their country was even in it to give them a roster of names to brag about; and the troops on the ground, in the mud, the poor bloody infantry — all of them who hadn't asked to be safe nor even to not be let down again tomorrow always by the brass hats who had done the best they could too probably, but asked only that the need for the unsafeness and the fact that all of them had dared it and a lot of them had accepted it and in consequence were now no more, be held by the nations at Paris and Berlin and Washington and London and Rome immune and unchallengeable above all save brave victory itself and as brave defeat, to the one of which it would give glory and from the other efface the shame.

Tuesday: Wednesday

THE NEXT TIME anyone might have seen or noticed her to remember, would have been at the old eastern city gate. And they would have noticed her then only because she had been there so long, standing

beside the arch and staring at each face as it entered, then looking quickly on to the next one even before the first one had passed her.

But nobody noticed her to remember. Nobody except her lingered about the gate to notice anything. Even the ones who were still crowding steadily up to pass through the gate, had already entered the city in mind and spirit long before their bodies reached it, their anxiety and dread already one with the city's vast and growing reservoir of it, while their bodies still choked the slow converging roads.

They had begun to arrive yesterday, Tuesday, when news of the regiment's mutiny and arrest first reached the district and before the regiment itself had even been brought back to Chaulnesmont for the old supreme generalissimo himself to decide its fate.

They continued to pour into the city all that night, and this morning they still came, on the heels of the regiment, in the very dust of the lorries which had rushed it back to the city and into it and through it without stopping, coming on foot and in clumsy farm carts, to crowd through the gate where the young woman stood scanning each face with strained and indefatigable rapidity, — villagers and farmers, laborers and artisans and publicans and clerks and smiths: other men who in turn had served in the regiment, other men and women who were parents and kin of the men who belonged to it now and, because of that fact, were now under close guard beneath the threat of execution in the prisoners' compound on the other side of the town; — other men and women who, but for sheer blind chance and luck, might have been the parents and kin this time, and — some of them — would certainly be the next.

It was little they knew on that first day when they left their homes, and they would learn but little more from the others on the same mutual errand of desperation and terror whom they met or overtook or were overtaken by, before they reached the city: only that at dawn yesterday morning, the regiment had mutinied, refused to make an attack.

It had not failed in an attack: it had simply refused to make one, to leave the trench, not before nor even as the attack started, but afterward; — had, with no prewarning, no intimation even to the most minor lance-corporal among the officers designated to lead it, declined to perform that ritual act which, after four years, had become as much and as inescapable a part of the formal ritual of war as the Grand March which opens the formal ball each evening during a season of festival or carnival; — the regiment had been moved up into the lines the night before, after two weeks of rest and refitting which could have disabused even the rawest replacement of what was in store for it, let alone the sudden moil and seethe of activity through which it fumbled in the darkness on the way up: the dense loom and squat of guns, the lightless lurch and crawl of caissons and lorries which could only be ammunition; then the gunfire itself, concentrated on the enemy-held hill sufficient to have notified both lines for kilometres in either direction that something was about to happen at this point, the wire-cutting parties out and back, and at dawn the whole regiment standing under arms, quiet and docile while the barrage lifted from the enemy's wire to hurdle his front and isolate him from reinforcement; and still no warning, no intimation; the company- and section-leaders, officers and N.C.O.'s, had already climbed out of the trench when they looked back and saw that not one man had moved to follow: no sign nor signal from man to man, but the entire three thousand spread one-man deep across a whole regimental front, acting without intercommunication as one man, as — reversed, of course — a line of birds on a telephone wire all leave the wire at the same instant like one bird, and that the general commanding the division of which the regiment was a unit, had drawn it out and put it under arrest, and at noon on that same day, Monday, all activity on the whole French front and the German one opposite it from the Alps to the Aisne, except air patrols and spaced token artillery salvos almost like signal guns, had ceased, and by three o'clock that afternoon, the American and British fronts and the enemy one facing them from the Aisne to the sea, had done likewise, and now the general commanding the division of which the regiment was a unit, was sending the regiment back to Grand Headquarters at Chaulnesmont, where he himself would appear at three o'clock on Wednesday afternoon (nor did they pause to wonder, let alone doubt,

how an entire civilian countryside managed to know two days in advance, not only the purpose and intent but the hour too, of a high military staff conference) and, with the support or at least acquiescence of his own immediate superiors — the commander of the corps to which the division belonged, and of the army to which the corps belonged — demand in person of the old generalissimo permission to execute every man in it.

That was all they knew now as they hurried toward the city — old people and women and children, parents and wives and children and kin and mistresses of the three thousand men whom the old generalissimo at Chaulnesmont could destroy tomorrow by merely lifting his finger, — a whole converging countryside flowing toward the city, panting and stumbling, aghast and frantic, torn not even between terror and hope, but only by anguish and terror; destinationless even, since they had no hope: not quitting their homes and fields and shops to hurry to the city, but hoicked by anguish and terror, out of their huts and hovels and ditches, and drawn to the city whether they would or not: out of the villages and farms and into the city by simple grief to grief, since grief and anxiety, like poverty, take care of their own; to crowd into the already crowded city with no other will and desire except to relinquish their grief and anxiety into the city's vast conglomerate of all the passions and forces — fear, and grief, and despair, and impotence, and unchallengeable power and terror and invincible will; to partake of and share in all by breathing the same air breathed by all, and therefore both: by the grieving and the begrieved on one hand, and on the other the lone gray man supreme, omnipotent and inaccessible behind the carved stone door and the sentries and the three symbolical flags of the Hôtel de Ville, who dealt wholesale in death and who could condemn the whole regiment and miss its three thousand men no more from the myriads he dealt in, than he would miss the nod of his head or the reverse of the lifted hand which would save them.

Because they did not believe that the war was over. It had gone on too long to cease, finish, overnight, at a moment's notice, like this. It had merely arrested itself; not the men engaged in it, but the war itself,

War, impervious and even inattentive to the anguish, the torn flesh, the whole petty surge and resurge of victories and defeats like the ephemeral repetitive swarm and swirl of insects on a dung-heap, saying, 'Hush. Be quiet a moment' to the guns and the cries of the wounded too, — that whole ruined band of irredeemable earth from the Alps to the sea, studded with faces watching in lipless and lidless detachment, for a moment, a day or two days, for the old gray man at Chaulnesmont to lift that hand.

Besides, it did not matter. They had got used to the war now, after four years. In four years, they had even learned how to live with it, beside it; or rather, beneath it as beneath a fact or condition of nature, of physical laws — the privations and deprivations, the terror and the threat like the loom of an arrested tornado or a tidal wave beyond a single frail dyke; the maiming and dying too of husbands and fathers and sweethearts and sons, as though bereavement by war were a simple occupational hazard of marriage and parenthood and childbearing and love.

And not only just while the war lasted, but after it was officially over too, as if the only broom War knew or had to redd up its vacated room with, was Death; as though every man touched by even one second's flick of its mud and filth and physical fear, had been discharged only under condition of a capital sentence like a fatal disease; — so does War ignore its own recessment until it has ground also to dust the last cold and worthless cinder of its satiety and the tag-ends of its unfinished business; whether the war had ceased or not, the men of the regiment would still have had to die individually before their time, but since the regiment as a unit had been responsible for its cessation, the regiment would surely have to die, as a unit, by the old obsolete methods of war, if for no other reason than to enable its executioners to check their rifles back into the quartermasters' stores in order to be disbanded and demobilised.

In fact, the only thing that could save the regiment would be the resumption of the war: which was their paradox, their bereavement: that, by mutinying, the regiment had stopped the war; it had saved

France (France? England too; the whole West, since nothing else apparently had been able to stop the Germans since the March breakthrough in front of Amiens) and this was to be its reward; the three thousand men who had saved France and the world, would lose their lives, not in the act of it, but only after the fact, so that, to the men who had saved the world, the world they saved would not be worth the price they paid for it, — not to them, of course, the three thousand men in the regiment; they would be dead: the world, the West, France, all, would not matter to them; but to the wives and parents and children and brothers and sisters and sweethearts who would have lost all in order to save France and the world; they saw themselves no longer as one unit integrated into one resistance, one nation, mutual in suffering and dread and deprivation, against the German threat, but solitary, one small district, one clan, one family almost, embattled against all that Western Europe whom their sons and fathers and husbands and lovers were having to save.

Because, no matter how much longer the threat of the war might have continued, some at least of the lovers and sons and fathers and husbands might have escaped with no more than an injury, while, now that the terror and the threat were past, all of their fathers and lovers and husbands and sons would have to die.

But when they reached the city, they found no placid lake of grieving resignation. Rather, it was a cauldron of rage and consternation, because now they learned that the regiment had not mutinied by mutual concord and design, either planned or spontaneous, but instead had been led, cajoled, betrayed into revolt by a single squad of twelve soldiers and their corporal; that the entire three thousand men had been corrupted into capital crime and through it, right up into the shadow of the rifles which would be its punishment, by thirteen men, four of whom, including the corporal-leader, were not only not Frenchmen by birth, but not even naturalised Frenchmen.

In fact, only one of them — the corporal — could even speak French. Even the army records did not seem to know what their nationality was; their very presence in a French regiment or the French army in

France was contradictory and obfuscated, though indubitably they had, must have, got there through or by means of some carelessly reported or recorded Foreign Legion draft, since armies never really lost anything for good, once it was described and numbered and dated and countersigned onto a scrap of paper; the boot, bayonet, camel or even regiment, might vanish and leave no physical trace, but not the record of it and the name and rank and designation of whoever had it last, or anyway signed for it last.

The other nine of the squad were Frenchmen, but only three of them were less than thirty years old, and two of them were over fifty. But all nine of them had unimpeachable service records extending back not only to August 1914, but on to the day when the oldest of them turned eighteen and was drafted thirty-five years ago.

And by the next morning, Wednesday, they knew the rest of it. By then, this part of it was not even waiting for them to reach the city. It was running out to meet them on the thronged converging roads like wind or fire through dry grass: how, not only warned and alerted by the barrage that an attack was coming, the German observation posts must have actually seen the men refuse to leave the trench after their officers, yet no counter-attack came; and how, even during their best, their priceless opportunity, which was during the confusion and turmoil while the revolted and no longer to-be-trusted regiment was having to be relieved in broad daylight, still the enemy made no counter-move, not even a barrage on the communication lines where the relieved and the relieving regiments would have to pass each other, so that, an hour after the regiment had been relieved and put under arrest, all infantry activity in the sector had stopped, and two hours after that, the general commanding the regiment's division and his corps commander and their army commander, and an American staff-colonel and the British commander-in-chief's chief of staff, were behind locked doors with the general commanding the entire Group of Armies, where, as report and rumor thickened, it emerged that not only the private soldiers in the division's other three regiments, but those in both the divisions flanking it, knew in advance that the attack was to be made and that the selected regiment was going to refuse.

And that (staff- and provost-officers with their sergeants and corporals were moving fast now, spurred by amazement and alarm and incredulity too, while the telephones shrilled and the telegraphs chattered and the dispatch-riders' motorcycles roared in and out of the courtyard) not only were the foreign corporal and his strange conglomerate squad known personally to every private in those three divisions, but for over two years now the thirteen men — the obscure corporal whose name few knew and even they could not pronounce it, whose very presence in the regiment, along with that of the other three apparently of the same middle-European nationality, was an enigma, since none of them seemed to have any history at all beyond the day when they had appeared, materialised seemingly out of nowhere and nothingness in the quartermaster's store-room where they had been issued uniforms and equipment, and the nine others who were authentic and, until this morning, unimpeachable French men and French soldiers, had been spending their leaves and furloughs for two years now among the combat-troop rest-billets not only throughout the entire French Army zone, but the American and the British ones too, sometimes individually, but usually as the intact squad, — the entire thirteen, three of whom couldn't even speak French, and their corporal-leader only enough of it to hold his rating, visiting for days and sometimes weeks at a time, not only among French troops, but American and British too; — which was the moment when the inspectors and inquisitors in their belts and tabs and pips and bars and eagles and wreaths and stars, realised the ... not enormity, but monstrosity, incredibility; the monstrous incredibility, the incredible monstrosity, with which they were confronted: the moment when they learned that during three of these two-week leave-periods, two last year and the third last month, less than three weeks ago, the entire squad had vanished from France itself, vanished one night with their passes and transport and ration warrants from their rest-billets, and reappeared one morning two weeks later in ranks again, with the passes and warrants still unstamped and intact; — monstrous and incredible, since there was but one place on earth since almost four years now where thirteen men in uniform could have gone without having their papers stamped, needing no papers at all in fact, only

darkness and a pair of wire-cutters; they — the inquisitors and examiners, the inspectors-general and the provost-marshals flanked now by platoons of N.C.O.'s and M.P.'s with pistols riding light to the hand in the unstrapped holsters — were moving rapidly indeed now, with a sort of furious calm, along, among that unbroken line of soiled, stained, unchevroned and braidless men designated only by serial numbers, stretching from Alsace to the Channel, who for almost four years now had been standing in sleepless rotation behind their cocked and loaded rifles in the apertures of that one continuous firestep, but who now were not watching the opposite German line at all but, as though they had turned their backs on war, were watching them, the inquisitors, the inspectors, the alarmed and outraged and amazed; until a heliograph in a French observation post began to blink, and one behind the German line facing it answered; and at noon that Monday, the whole French front and the German one opposite it fell silent, and at three o'clock the American and the British fronts and the German one facing them followed suit, so that when night fell, both the dense subterrene warrens lay as dead as Pompeii or Carthage beneath the constant watchful arch and plop of rockets and the slow wink and thud of back-area guns.

So now they had a protagonist for anguishment, an object for execration, stumbling and panting on that Wednesday morning through the kilometres' final converging, above which the city soared into the sunlight the spires and crenellations of its golden diadem, pouring, crowding through the old city gates, becoming one with that vast subterrene of warrened shadow out of which, until yesterday, the city's iron and martial splendor had serenely stood, but which now had become one seethe and turmoil which had overflowed the boulevard at dawn and was still pouring across the city after the fleeing lorries.

As the lorries sped across the city, they soon outdistanced the crowd, though when its vanguard emerged also onto the sunny plain beyond, the lorries were in sight again, fleeing in a sucking swirl of primrose-colored dust toward the camouflage-painted huddle of the prison-compound a kilometre and a half away.

But for a moment, the crowd seemed unable to discern or distinguish the lorries. It stopped, bunching onto itself like a blind worm thrust suddenly into sunlight, recoiling into arrestment, so that motion itself seemed to repudiate it in one fleeing ripple like a line of invisible wind running down a windrow of wheat. Then they distinguished or located the speeding dust, and broke, surged, not running now, because — old men and women and children — they had run themselves out crossing the city, and no longer shouting now either because they had spent themselves voiceless too, but hurrying, panting, stumbling, beginning — now that they were clear of the city — to spread out fanwise across the plain, so that already they no longer resembled a worm, but rather again that wave of water which had swept at dawn across the Place de Ville.

They had no plan: only motion, like a wave; fanned out now across the plain, they — or it — seemed to have more breadth than depth, like a wave, seeming, as they approached the compound, to increase in speed as a wave does nearing the sand, on, until it suddenly crashed against the wire barrier, and hung for an instant and then burst, split into two lesser waves which flowed in each direction along the fence until each spent itself. And that was all.

Instinct, anguish, had started them; motion had carried all of them for an hour, and some of them for twenty-four, and brought them here and flung them like a cast of refuse along the fence (It — the compound — had been a factory once, back in the dead vanished days of what the nations called peace: a rectangle of brick walls covered with peaceful ivy then, converted last year into a training- and replacement-depot by the addition of half a hundred geometric plank-and-paper barracks composed of material bought with American money and sawn into numbered sections by American machines in America, and shipped overseas and clapped up by American engineers and artisans, into an eyesore, monument, and portent of a nation's shocking efficiency and speed, and converted again yesterday into a man-proof pen for the mutinied regiment, by the addition of barricades of electrified wire and searchlight towers and machine-gun platforms and pits and an elevated catwalk for guards; French sappers and service troops were still

weaving more barricades and stringing more of the lethal wire to crown them.) and then abandoned them, leaving them lying along the barrier in an inextricable mass like victims being resurrected after a holocaust, staring through the taut, vicious, unclimbable strands beyond which the regiment had vanished as completely as though it had never existed, while all circumstance — the sunny spring, the jocund morning, the lark-loud sky, the glinting pristine wire (which, even when close enough to be touched, still had an appearance gossamer and ephemeral like Christmas tinsel, giving to the working parties immersed in its coils the inconsequential air of villagers decorating for a parish festival), the empty parade and the blank lifeless barracks and the Senegalese guarding them, lounging haughtily overhead along the catwalks and lending a gaudy, theatrical insouciance to the raffish shabbiness of their uniforms like that of an American blackface minstrel troupe dressed hurriedly out of pawnshops — seemed to muse down at them, contemplative, inattentive, inscrutable, and not even interested.

And that was all. Here they had wanted to come for twenty-four hours now, and here at last they were, lying like the cast of spent flotsam along the fence, not even seeing the wire against which they lay, let alone anything beyond it, for the half-minute perhaps which it took them to realise, not that they had had no plan when they came here, nor even that the motion which had served in lieu of plan, had been motion only so long as it had had room to move in, but that motion itself had betrayed them by bringing them here at all, not only in the measure of the time it had taken them to cover the kilometre and a half between the city and the compound, but in that of the time it would take them to retrace back to the city and the Place de Ville, which they comprehended now they should never have quitted in the first place, so that, no matter what speed they might make getting back to it, they would be too late.

Nevertheless, for still another half minute they lay immobile against the fence beyond which the fatigue parties, wrestling slowly among their interminable tinsel coils, paused to look quietly and incuriously back at them, and the gaudy Senegalese, lounging in lethargic disdain among their machine guns above both the white people engaged in labor

inside the fence and the ones engaged in anguish outside, it, smoked cigarettes and stroked idly the edges of bayonets with broad dark spatulate thumbs and didn't bother to look at them at all.

Nor could even the aviator stationed and motionless in the hard blue wind, have said exactly where among them the facing-about began as, like the blind headless earth-brute which, apparently without any organ either to perceive alarm or select a course to evade it, can move at instantaneous notice and instantaneous speed in either direction, the crowd began to flow back to the city, turning and beginning to move all at one instant as birds do, hurrying again, weary and indefatigable, indomitable in their capacity not alone for endurance but for frenzy as well, streaming immediately once more between two files of troops stretching the whole distance back to the city — (apparently a whole brigade of cavalry this time, drawn up and facing, across the cleared path, a like number of infantry, without packs again but with bayonets still fixed and with grenades too now, with at one point, the nozzle and looped hose of a flame thrower, and at the far, the city, end of the cleared path, the tank again, half-seen beyond the arch of the gate like a surly, not-too-courageous dog peering from its kennel) without seeming to have remarked either the arrival of the troops nor to notice, let alone have any curiosity about, their presence now.

Nor did the troops pay any attention to the people, alerted of course, but actually almost lounging on the horses and the grounded rifles while the crowd poured between them, as though to the troops themselves and to those who had ordered them here, the crowd was like the herd of western cattle which, once got into motion about its own vortex, is its own warrant both of its own security and of the public's peace.

They recrossed the city, back into the Place de Ville, filling it again, right up to the spear-tipped iron fence beyond which the three sentries flanked the blank door beneath the three morning-windy flags. They still crowded into the Place long after there was no more room, still convinced that, no matter how fast they had come back from the compound, they would be too late, knowing that no courier carrying

the order for the execution could possibly have passed them on the road, yet convinced that one must indubitably have done so.

Yet they still crowded in, as if the last belated ones could not accept the back-passed word, but must see, or try to see, for themselves that they had missed the courier and were too late; until even if they had wished to stream, stumble, pant back to the compound and at least be where they could hear the volley which would bereave them, there would have been no room to turn around in and begin to run; immobilised and fixed by their own density in that stone sink whose walls were older than Clovis and Charlemagne — until suddenly it occurred to them that they could not be late, it was impossible for them to be late; that, no matter what errors and mistakes of time or direction or geography they might make, they could no more be late for the execution than they could prevent it, since the only reason for the whole vast frantic and anguished influx to the city was, to be there when the regiment's division commander arrived to ask the old gray general behind the closed stone door facing them, to allow him to have the regiment shot, and the division general was not even due there until three o'clock this afternoon.

So all they needed to do now, was just to wait. It was a little after nine o'clock now. At ten, three corporals, an American, a Briton, and a Frenchman, flanked each by an armed soldier of his nation, came out of the archway from the rear of the Hôtel, and exchanged each the sentry of his nation and marched the relieved man back through the archway. Then it was noon. Their shadows crept in from the west and centered; the same three corporals came with three fresh sentries and relieved the three posts and went away; it was the hour when, in the old dead time called peace, men went home to eat and rest a little perhaps, but none stirred; their shadows crept eastward, lengthening again; at two o'clock, the three corporals came for the third time; the three sets of three paced and stamped for the third time through the two-hourly ritual, and departed.

This time, the car came so fast up the boulevard that it outstripped its own heralding. The crowd had only time to press frantically back and

let it enter the Place and then anneal behind it as it shot across the Place and stopped before the Hôtel in a bursting puff of dust from its clapped- to brakes. It was a staff car also, but stained with dust and caked with dried mud too, since it had come not only from the army zone, but out of the lines themselves, even if its pennon did bear the five stars of an army commander.

Though, after these four years, even the children read that much, and if it had flown no pennon at all, even the children would have recognised two of the men in it — the squat, bull-chested man who commanded the regiment's division, who was already beginning to stand up before the car stopped, and the tall, scholarly-looking man who would be the division commander's army-group commander's chief-of-staff, the division commander springing out of the car before the orderly beside the driver in the front seat had time to get down and open the tonneau door, and already chop-striding his short stiff cavalry legs toward the blank, sentry-flanked entrance to the Hôtel before the staff officer had even begun to move.

Then the staff officer rose too, taking up a longish object from the seat beside him, and in the next second they — the crowd — had recognised it, swaying forward out of their immobilised recoil and making a sound now, not of execration, because it was not even directed at the division commander; even before they learned about the foreign corporal, they had never really blamed him, and even with the corporal, although they could still dread the division commander as the postulate of their fear and the instrument of their anguish, they had not blamed him: not only a French soldier, but a brave and faithful one, he could have done nothing else but what he was doing, believed nothing else except what he believed, since it was because of such as he that France had endured this long, surrounded and embattled by jealousy and envy — a soldier: that not only his own honor and that of his division, but the honor of the entire profession of command, from files and squads to armies and groups of them, had been compromised; a Frenchman: that the security of the motherland itself had been jeopardised or at least threatened.

Later, afterward, it would seem to them, some of them, that, during the four or five seconds before they recognised the significance of what the staff officer had taken up from the seat of the car, there had been a moment when they had felt for him something almost like pity: not only a Frenchman and a soldier, but a Frenchman and a soldier who had to be a man first, to have been a Frenchman and become a soldier, yet who, to gain the high privilege of being a brave and faithful Frenchman and soldier, had had to forfeit and abdicate his right in the estate of man, — where theirs would be only to suffer and grieve, his would be to decree it; he could share only in the bereaving, never in the grief; victim, like they, of his own rank and high estate.

Then they saw what the staff officer had in his hand. It was a sabre. He — the staff officer — had two: wearing one buckled to his ordnance belt, and carrying one, its harness furled about the hilt and sheath, which he was tucking under his arm as he too descended from the car.

And even the children knew what that meant: that the division commander too was under arrest, and now they made the sound; it was as though only now, for the first time, had they actually realised that the regiment was going to die, — a sound not even of simple agony, but of relinquishment, acceptance almost, so that the division commander himself paused and turned and they seemed to look at, see him too for the first time — victim not even of his rank and high estate, but like them, of that same instant in geography and in time which had destroyed the regiment, but with no rights in its fate; solitary, kinless, alone, pariah and orphan both from them whose decree of orphanage he would carry out, and from them whom he would orphan; repudiated in advance by them from whom he had bought the high privilege of endurance and fidelity and abnegation with the forfeiture of his birthright in humanity, in compassion and pity and even in the right to die; — standing for a moment yet, looking back at them, then turned, already chop-striding again toward the stone steps and the blank door, the staff officer with the furled sabre under his arm following, the three sentries clashing to present arms as the division commander strode up the steps and past them and himself jerked open the door's black yawn before anyone else could have moved to do it, and entered — the

squat, short figure kinless, indomitable, and doomed, vanishing rigidly and without a backward look, across that black threshold as though (to the massed faces and eyes watching) into Abyss or into Hell.

And now it was too late. If they could have moved, they might at least have reached the compound wire in time to hear the knell; now, because of their own immobilisation, they would have only the privilege of watching the executioner prepare the empty rope.

In a moment now, the armed couriers and outriders would appear and kick into life the motorcycles waiting in the areaway; the cars would draw up to the door, and the officers themselves would emerge — not the old supreme general, not the two lesser ones, not even the division commander, compelled to that last full measure of expiation by watching the doom whose mouthpiece he had been, — not any of these, but the provost-marshals, the specialists: they who by avocation and affinity had been called and as by bishops selected and trained and dedicated into the immutable hierarchy of War to be major-domos to such as this, to preside with all the impunity and authority of civilised usage over the formal orderly shooting of one set of men by another wearing the same uniform, lest there be flaw or violation in the right; trained for this moment and this end as race-horses are brought delicately, with all man's skill and knowledge and care, up to the instant of the springing barrier and the grandstands' roar, of St Leger or Derby; the pennoned staff cars would roar away, rapid and distancing, feeding them fading dust once more back to the compound which they knew now they should never have left; even if they could have moved, only by the most frantic speed could they more than reach the compound fence in time merely to hear and see the clapping away of echoes and the wisping away of smoke which made them orphaned and childless and relict, but now they could not even move enough to face about: the whole Place one aspic of gaped faces from which rose that sound not yelling but half murmuring and half wailing, while they stared at the gray, tomblike pile into which the two generals in their panoply and regalia and tools of glory, had vanished as into a tomb for heroes, and from which, when something did emerge, it would now be Death, — glaring at it, anguished and aghast, unable to move anywhere, unless

the ones in front might perhaps fling themselves upon and beneath the cavalcade before it could start, and so destroy it, and, dying themselves with it, bequeath to the doomed regiment at least that further span of breathing comprised in the time necessary to form a new one.

But nothing happened. A courier did appear after a while from the archway, but he was only an ordinary dispatch-rider, and alone; his whole manner declared that he had no concern whatever in anything regarding them or their trouble.

He didn't even look at them, so that the sound, never too loud, ceased while he straddled one of the waiting motorcycles and kicked it to life and moved away, not even in the direction of the compound but toward the boulevard, pushing the popping mechanism along between his straddled legs since, in the crowd, there was no chance whatever of running it fast enough to establish its balance, the crowd parting just enough to let him through and then closing behind him again, his urgent, constant adjurations for passage marking his progress, lonely, urgent and irritable, like the crying of a lost wildfowl; after a while two more came out, identical, even to the air of private and leisurely independence, and departed on two more of the machines, their cries too marking their infinitesimal and invisible progress: 'Give way, you bastards.... offspring of sheep and camels ...'
And that was all. Then it was sunset.

As they stood in the turning flood of night, the ebb of day rang abruptly with an orderly discordant diapason of bugles, orderly because they all sounded at once, discordant because they sounded not one call, but three: the Battre aux Champs of the French, the Last Post of the English, the Retreat of the Americans, beginning inside the city and spreading from cantonment and depot to cantonment and depot, rising and falling within its own measured bruit as the bronze throat of orderly and regulated War proclaimed and affirmed the end of day, clarion and sombre above the parade rite of Mount and Stand Down as the old guards, custodians of today, relinquished to tomorrow's, the six sergeants themselves appearing this time, each with his old guard or his new, the six files in ordered tramp and wheel facing each its rigid

counterpart juxtaposed, the barked commands in the three different tongues ringing in the same discordant unison as the bugles, in staccato poste and riposte as the guards exchanged and the three sentries of the new ones assumed the posts.

Then the sunset gun went from the old citadel, deliberate and profound, as if a single muffled drumstick had been dropped once against the inverted bowl of hollow and resonant air, the sound fading slowly and deliberately, until at last, with no suture to mark its annealment, it was lost in the murmur of bunting with which the flags, bright blooms of glory myriad across the embattled continent, sank, windless again, down.

They were able to move now. The fading whisper of the gun and the descending flags might have been the draining away of what had been holding them gelid; there would even be time to hasten home and eat, and then return. So they were almost running, walking only when they had to and running again when they could, wan, indomitable and indefatigable, as the morning's ebb flowed back through the twilight, the darkling, the night-annealing city, toward the warrens and tenements where it had risen. They were like the recessed shift out of a factory furiously abridging the ordered retinue of day and dark producing shells say, for a retreating yet unconquered army, their eyes bloodshot from the fumes, their hair and garments stinking with the reek, hurrying to eat and then return, already eating the waiting food while they still ran toward it, and already back at the clanking flashing unstopping machines while still chewing and swallowing the food they would not taste.

Tuesday: Wednesday: Wednesday Night

IT WAS LATE spring of 1916 when the runner joined the battalion. The whole brigade had been moved from Flanders down into Picardy, in billets near Amiens, resting and refitting and receiving replacements to be an integer in what would be known afterward as the First Battle of the Somme — an affair which would give even those who had survived

to remember Loos and the Canal, not only something to blench for but the discovery that something even remained to blench with.

He had debarked that same dawn from the Dover leave packet. A lorry had given him a lift from Boulogne; he got directions from the first man he met and in time entered the brigade office with his posting order already in his hand, expecting to find a corporal or a sergeant or at most the brigade adjutant, but found instead the brigadier himself sitting at the desk with an open letter, who said:
'Afternoon.

As you were a moment, will you?' The runner did so and watched enter a captain whom he was to know as commander of one of the companies in the battalion to which he would be assigned, followed by a thin wiry surly-looking private who, even to the runner's first glance, seemed to have between his bowed legs and his hands the shape of a horse, the brigadier saying pettishly, 'Stand at ease; stand at ease,' then opened the folded letter and glanced at it, then looked at the private and said: 'This came by special courier this morning. From Paris.

Someone from America is trying to find you. Someone important enough for the French government to have located you through channels and then send a special courier up from Paris. Someone named—' and glanced at the letter again: '— Reverend Tobe Sutterfield.'

And now the runner was watching the private too, already looking at him in time not only to hear but to see him say, quick and harsh and immediately final: 'No.'
'Sir,' the captain prompted.

'No what?' the brigadier said. 'An American. A blackamoor minister. You dont know who it is?'
'No,' the private said.

'He seemed to think you might say that. He said to remind you of Missouri.'

'No,' the private said, rigid and harsh and final. 'I was never in Missouri. I don't know anything about him.'

'Say sir,' the captain said.

'That's your last word?' the brigadier said.

'Yes sir,' the private said.

'All right,' the brigadier said. 'Carry on.' Then they were gone and, rigid at attention, he (the runner) felt rather than saw the brigadier open the brigade order and begin to read it and then look up at him — no movement of the head at all: merely an upward flick of the eyes, steady for a moment, then down to the order again: thinking (the runner) quietly: Not this time. There's too much rank: thinking: It won't even be the colonel, but the adjutant.

Which by ordinary could have been as much as two weeks later since, a runner formally assigned to a combat battalion, his status was the same as any other member of it and he too would be officially 'resting' until they went back up the lines; and, except for coincidence, probably would have been: reporting (the runner) not to the battalion sergeant-major but to Coincidence, entering his assigned billet two hours later, and in the act of stowing his kit into a vacant corner, saw again the man he had seen two hours ago in the brigadier's office — the surly, almost insubordinate stable-aura-ed private who by his appearance would have pined and died one day after he was removed further from Whitechapel than a Newmarket paddock perhaps, yet who was not only important enough to be approached through official channels by some American individual or agent or agency himself or itself important enough to use the French government for messenger, but important enough to repudiate the approach — seated this time on a bunk with a thick leather money-belt open on one knee and a small dirty dogeared notebook on the other, and three or four other privates facing him in turn, to each of which he counted out a few French notes from the money-belt and then made a notation with the stub of a pencil in the notebook.

And the next day, the same scene; and the day after that, and the one after that, directly after the morning parade for roll-call and inspection;

the faces different faces and varying in number: two, or three, sometimes only one: but always one, the worn money-belt getting a little thinner but apparently inexhaustible, anyway bottomless, the pencil stub making the tedious entries in the grimed notebook; then the fifth day, after noon mess; it was payday and, approaching the billet, for a moment the runner thought wildly that part of the pay parade was taking place there: a line, a queue of men extending out into the street, waiting to creep one by one inside, so that the runner had trouble entering his own domicile, to stand now and watch the whole affair in reverse: the customers, clients, patients — whatever they were — now paying the grimed frayed wads of French notes back into the money-belt, the tedious pencil stub still making the tedious entries; and still standing there watching when the orderly whom he had seen that first morning in the brigade anteroom, entered and broke through the line, saying to the man on the bunk: 'Come on.

You're for it this time. It's a bleeding f ... ing motorcar from Paris with a bleeding f ... ing prime minister in it,' — watching (the runner) the man on the bunk without haste stow the notebook and the pencil-stub into the money-belt and strap it up and turn and roll the belt into the blanket behind him and rise and follow the orderly, the runner speaking to the nearest of the now broken and dispersing line: 'What is it? What's the money for?

He's gone now; why dont you just help yourselves while he's not here to put it down against you?' and still getting only the watchful, secretive, already dispersing stares, and not waiting even for that: himself outside too now, in the cobbled street, and saw that too: one of the long black funereal French motorcars such as high government officials use, with a uniformed driver and a French staff-captain in the front seat and a British one and a thin Negro youth on the two small jump seats and behind them in the rear seat, a middle-aged woman in rich furs who could be nothing but a rich American (the runner did not recognise her though almost any Frenchman would since her money partially supported a French air squadron in which her only son was a pilot) and a Frenchman who was not the prime minister but (the runner did recognise this) was at least a high Cabinet secretary for something,

and sitting between them, an old Negro in a worn brushed tophat, with the serene and noble face of an idealised Roman consul; the owner of the money-belt rigid and wooden, staring but at nothing, saluting but saluting no one, just saluting, then rigid and wooden again and ten feet away while the old Negro man leaned, speaking to him, then the old Negro himself descended from the car, the runner watching that too, and not only the runner but the entire circumambience: the six people still in the car, the orderly who had fetched the man from the bunk, the thirty-odd men who had been in the creeping line when the orderly broke through it, having followed into the street to stand before the billet door, watching too, perhaps waiting: the two of them drawn aside now, the owner of the money-belt still rigid, wooden, invincibly repudiant while the serene and noble head, the calm imperial chocolate-colored face, still talked to him, murmured: barely a minute, then the Negro turned and went back to the car and got into it, the runner not waiting to watch that either, already following the white man back toward the billet, the waiting group before the door parting to let him through, then crowding in after him until the runner stopped the last one by touching, grasping his sleeve.

‘The money,’ the runner said. ‘What is it?’

‘It’s the Association,’ the man said.

‘All right, all right,’ the runner said, almost testily. ‘How do you get it? Can anybody ...’

‘Right,’ the man said. ‘You take ten bob. Then on the next payday you begin paying him sixpence a day for thirty days.’

‘If you’re still alive,’ the runner said.

‘Right,’ the other said. ‘When you have paid up you can start over again.’

‘But suppose you’re not,’ the runner said. But this time the man merely looked at him, so that he said, almost pettishly again:

‘All right, all right, I’m not really that stupid; to still be alive a year from now is worth six hundred percent. of anything.’ But still the man looked at him, with something so curious in his face, behind his eyes, that the runner said quickly, ‘Yes. What?’

‘You’re new,’ the other said.

'Yes,' the runner said. 'I was in London last week. Why?'

'The rate aint so high, if you're a

the voice stopping, ceasing, the eyes still watching him so curiously, so intently, that it seemed to the runner that his own gaze was drawn, as though by some physical force, down the man's side to where his hand hung against his flank: at which instant the hand flicked out in a gesture, a signal, so brief, so rapid before it became again immobile against its owner's khaki leg, that the runner could hardly believe he had seen it.

'What?' the runner said. 'What?' But now the face was closed, inscrutable; the man was already turning away.

'Why dont you ask him what you want to know?' he said. 'He wont bite yer. He wont even make you take the ten bob, if you dont want.'

The runner watched the long car back and fill in the narrow street, to return wherever it came from: nor had he even seen the battalion adjutant yet, who at worst could be no more than captain and very likely not even as old as he: so the preliminaries would not take long, probably no more than this: what Hollywood in a few more years would coin a word for: double-take: then the adjutant: Oh, you're that one. Why haven't you got up your M.C.? Or did they take that back too, along with the pip?

Then he: I dont know. Could I wear an M.C. on this?

Then the adjutant: I dont know either. What else did you want? You're not due here until Orderly Room Monday.

Then he would ask: who by now had divined who the rich American woman would be, since for two years now Europe — France anyway — had been full of them — the wealthy Philadelphia and Wall Street and Long Island names whose money supported ambulance units and air squadrons in the French front — the committees, organizations, of officially nonbelligerent amateurs by means of which America fended off not Germans but war itself; he could ask then, saying, But why here? Granted that they have one with at the head of it an old

blackamoor who looks like a nonconformist preacher, why did the French government send him up here in a State motorcar for a two-minute visit with a private soldier in a British infantry battalion? — oh yes, he could ask, getting nothing probably except the old Negro's name, which he already knew and hence was not what he lacked, needed, must have if there were peace: which took another three days from that Monday when, reporting at Orderly Room, he became officially a member of the battalion family and could cultivate the orderly corporal in charge of the battalion correspondence and so hold at last in his own hands the official document signed by the chief-of-staff at Poperinghe, containing not only the blackamoor's name but the rich and organ-rolling one of the organization, committee, which he headed: Les Amis Myriades et Anonymes à la France de Tout le Monde — a title, a designation, so embracing, so richly sonorous with grandeur and faith, as to have freed itself completely from man and his agonies, majestic in empyrean, as weightless and palpless upon the anguished earth as the adumbration of a cloud.

And if he had hoped to get anything at all, even that much, let alone anything more, from the owner of the money-belt, he would have been wrong indeed there: which (the failure) cost him five shillings in francs: hunting the man down and stopping him by simply getting in front of him and standing there, saying baldly and bluntly: 'Who is Reverend Tobe Sutterfield?' then still standing there for better than another minute beneath the harsh spent vituperation, until he could say at last: 'Are you finished now? Then I apologise.

All I really want is ten bob:' and watched his name go down into the little dogeared book and took the francs which he would not even spend, so that the thirty six-pences would go back to their source in the original notes. But at least he had established a working, a speaking relationship; because of his orderly-room contact, he was able to use it, not needing to block the way this time to speak: 'Best keep this a staff matter, though I think you should know. We're going back in tonight.' The man looked at him. 'Something is going to happen. They have brought too many troops down here.

It's a battle. The ones who thought up Loos cant rest on their laurels forever, you know.' Still the man only looked at him. 'It's your money. So you can protect yourself. Who knows? you may be one of the ones to stay alive. Instead of letting us bring you only sixpence a day, demand it all at once and bury it somewhere.'

Still the man just looked at him, not even with contempt; suddenly the runner thought, with humility, abasement almost: He has ethics, like a banker, not to his clients because they are people, but because they are clients. Not pity: he would bankrupt any — all — of them without turning a hair, once they had accepted the gambit; it's ethics toward his vocation, his trade, his profession. It's purity.

No: it's even more than that: it's chastity, like Caesar's wife, — watching it; the battalion went in that night, and he was right: when it came out again — the sixty-odd percent. which was left of it — it bore forever across its memory like the sear of a heated poker, the name of the little stream not much wider in places than a good downwind spit, and the other Somme names — Arras and Albert, Bapaume and St Quentin and Beaumont Hamel — ineradicable, to last as long as the capacity for breathing would, the capacity for tears, — saying (the runner) this time:

'You mean that all that out there is just a perfectly healthy and normal panic, like a market-crash: necessary to keep the body itself strong and hale? that the ones who died and will still die in it, were allotted to do so, like the little brokers and traders without wit or intelligence or perhaps just enough money backing, whose high destiny it is to commit suicide in order to keep the edifice of finance solvent?' And still the other only looked at him, not even contemptuous, not even with pity: just waiting until the runner had finished this time. Then he said: 'Well? Do you want the tanner, or dont you?'

The runner took the money, the francs. He spent them, this time, seeing for the first time, thinking, how finance was like poetry, demanding, requiring a giver and a taker too in order to endure; singer and listener, banker and borrower, buyer and seller, both ethical, unimpugnable, immaculate in devotion and faith; thinking I was the

one who failed; I was the debaser, the betrayer, spending the money this time, usually at one blow, in modest orgies of food and drink for whoever would share it with him, fulfilling his sixpence-by-sixpence contract, then borrowing the ten shillings again, with the single-mindedness of a Roman Catholic at his devotions or expiating a penance: through that fall, that winter; it would be spring soon and now his leave would be coming up again and he thought, quietly, without grief, without regret: Of course I could go back home, back to London.

Because what else can you do to a cashiered subaltern in this year of Our Lord One Nine One Seven but give him a rifle and a bayonet and I already have those; when, suddenly and peacefully, he knew what he would do with that freedom, that liberty which he no longer had any use for because there was no more any place for it on the earth; and this time he would ask not for shillings but pounds, setting its valuation not in shillings but in pounds, not only on his pilgrimage back to when and where the lost free spirit of man once existed, but on that which made the pilgrimage possible, asking for ten of them and himself setting the rate and interest at ten shillings a day for thirty days.

‘Going to Paris to celebrate your f ... ing D.C.M. are you?’ the other said.

‘Why not?’ he said: and took the ten pounds in francs and with the ghost of his lost youth dead fifteen years now, he retraced the perimeter of his dead life when he had not only hoped but believed, concentric about the once-sylvan vale where squatted the gray and simple stone of Saint Sulpice, saving for the last the narrow crooked passageway in which he had lived for three years, passing the Sorbonne but only slowing, not turning in, and the other familiar Left Bank places — quai and bridge, gallery and garden cafe — where he had spent his rich leisure and his frugal money; it was not until the second solitary and sentimental morning, after coffee (and Figaro: today was April eighth, an English liner, this time practically full of Americans, had been torpedoed yesterday off Ireland; he thought peacefully, tearless: They’ll have to come in now; we can destroy both hemispheres now) at the Deux Magots, taking the long way, through the Luxembourg Gardens

again among the nursemaids and maimed soldiers (another spring, perhaps by this autumn even, there would be American uniforms too) and the stained effigies of gods and queens, into the rue Vaugirard, already looking ahead to discern the narrow crevice which would be the rue Servandoni and the garret which he had called home (perhaps Monsieur and Madame Gargne, patron and patronne, would still be there to greet him), when he saw it — the banner, the lettered cloth strip fastened above the archway where the ducal and princely carriages had used to pass, affirming its grandiose and humble declaration out of the old faubourg of aristocrats: *Les Amis Myriades et Anonymes à la France de Tout le Monde*, and, already one in a thin steady trickle of people — soldiers and civilians, men and women, old and young — entered something which seemed to him afterward like a dream: a vestibule, an anteroom, where a strong hale plain woman of no age, in a white coif like a nun, sat knitting, who said: 'Monsieur?'

'Monsieur le président, Madame, s'il vous plaît. Monsieur le Révérend Sutterfield:' and who (the woman) said again, with no pause in the click and flick of the needles:

'Monsieur?'

'Le chef de bureau, Madame. Le directeur. Monsieur Le Révérend Sutterfield.'

'Ah,' the woman said. 'Monsieur Tooleyman:' and, still knitting, rose to precede, guide, conduct him: a vast marble-floored hall with gilded cornices and hung with chandeliers and furnished, crowded, heterogeneous and without order, with wooden benches and the sort of battered chairs you rent for a few sous at band concerts in parks, murmurous not with the voices but as though with the simple breathing, the inspiration and suspiration of the people — the soldiers maimed and unmaimed, the old men and women in black veils and armbands and the young women here and there carrying a child against or even beneath the complete weeds of bereavement and grieving — singly or in small groups like family groups about the vast room murmurous also still of dukes and princes and millionaires, facing the end of the room across which was suspended another of the cloth

banners, the lettered strip like that one above the gateway and lettered like it: Les Amis Myriades et Anonymes à la France de Tout le Monde: not looking at the banner, not watching it; not like people in church: it was not subdued enough for that, but perhaps like people in a railway station where a train has been indefinitely delayed; then the rich curve of a stairway, the woman stopping and standing aside, still knitting and not even

looking up to speak:

‘Prière de monter, monsieur:’ and he did so: who had traversed a cloud, now mounting to the uttermost airy nepenthelene pinnacle: a small chamber like a duchess’s boudoir in heaven converted temporarily to represent a business office in a charade: a new innocent and barren desk and three hard and innocent chairs and behind the desk the serene and noble face in its narrow clasp of white wool rising now from the horizon-blue of an infantry corporal’s uniform which by its look had lain only yesterday still on a supply sergeant’s shelves, and slightly behind him the pole-thin Negro youth in the uniform and badges of a French sub-lieutenant which looked almost as new, himself facing them across it, the voices also serenely congruous and inconsequential, like dream:

‘Yes, it used to be Sutterfield. But I changed it. To make it easier for the folks. From the Association.’

‘Oh. Tout le Monde.’

‘Yes. Tooleyman.’

‘So you came up that day to see.... I was about to say friend — —’

‘Yes, he aint quite ready yet. It was to see if he needed money.’

‘Money? He?’

‘The horse,’ the old Negro said. ‘That they claimed we stole. Except that we couldn’t have stole it, even if we had wanted to. Because it never belonged to no man to be stole from. It was the world’s horse. The champion. No, that’s wrong too. Things belonged to it, not it to things. Things and people both. He did. I did. All three of us did before it was over.’

‘He?’ the runner said.

'Mistairy.'

'Mist what?' the runner said.

'Harry,' the youth said. 'That's how he pronounced it.'

'Oh,' the runner said, with a sort of shame. 'Of course. Mistairy — —'

'That's right,' the old Negro said. 'He kept on trying to get me to say just Airy, but I reckon I was too old.' So he told it: what he had seen, watched at first hand, and what he had divined from what he had seen, watched: which was not all; the runner knew that, thinking, A protagonist. If I'm to run with the hare and be the hounds too, I must have a protagonist, even while the youth, speaking for the first time, answered that:

'It was the deputy marshal that sent the New Orleans lawyer.'

'The who?' the runner said.

'The Federal deputy marshal,' the youth said. 'The head man of the folks chasing us.'

'All right,' the runner said. 'Tell me.'

It was 1912, two years before the war; the horse was a three-year-old running horse, but such a horse that even the price which the Argentine hide-and-wheat prince paid for it at the Newmarket sale, although an exceptional one, was not an outrageous one.

Its groom was the sentry, the man with the ledger and the money-belt. He went out to America with it, whereupon within the next twenty-four months three things happened to him which changed completely not only his life but his character too, so that when late in 1914 he returned to England to enlist, it was as though somewhere behind the Mississippi Valley hinterland where within the first three months he had vanished, a new man had been born, without past, without griefs, without recollections.

He was not merely included in the sale of the horse, he was compelled into it. And not by the buyer nor even the seller, but by the sold: the chattel: the horse itself, with an imperiousness not even to be

temporised with, let alone denied. It was not because he was the exceptional groom, which he might have been, nor even the first rate one which he actually was.

It was because there had developed apparently on sight between the man and the animal something which was no mere rapport but an affinity, not from understanding to understanding but from heart to heart and glands to glands, so that unless the man was present or at least nearby, the horse was not even less than a horse: it was no longer a horse at all: not at all intractable and anything but unpredictable, because it was quite predictable in fact; not only dangerous, but in effect, for all its dedicated and consecrated end and purpose — the long careful breeding and selecting which finally produced it to be sold for the price it brought to perform the one rite for which it had been shaped — worthless, letting none save the one man enter the same walls or fence with it to groom or feed it, no jockey or exercise boy to approach and mount it until the man bade it; and even then, with the rider actually up, not even running until — whatever the communication was: voice, touch, whatever — the man had set it free.

So the Argentine bought the groom too, for a sum left in escrow in a London bank, to become the groom's on his return to England after being formally discharged. By the horse of course, since nothing else could, which (the horse) in the end discharged and absolved them all, the old Negro telling this part of it since this was where he — they — himself and his grandson — came into it: — the horse which before the groom came into its life, merely won races, but which after his advent, began to break records; three weeks after it first felt his hand and heard his voice, it set a mark ('The race was named the Sillinger,' the old Negro said. 'It was like our Derby at home.') which seven years later was still standing; and in its first South American race, although only two weeks out of the ship after a month and a half at sea, it set one not likely to be touched at any time.

('Not nowhere. At no time. By no horse,' the old Negro said.) And the next day it was bought by a United States oil baron for a price which even the Argentine millionaire could not refuse, and two weeks later

landed in New Orleans, where the old Negro, a preacher on Sunday and the rest of the week a groom and hostler in the new owner's Kentucky breeding and training stables, met it; and two nights later the train drawing the van containing the horse and the two grooms, the white one and the black one, plunged through a flood-weakened trestle: out of which confusion and mischance were born the twenty-two months from which the English groom emerged at last a practicing Baptist: a Mason: and one of his time's most skillful manipulators of or players at dice.

Sixteen of the twenty-two were the months during which the five separately organised though now grimly unified groups — the Federal government, the successive state police forces and the railway's and the insurance company's and the oil baron's private detectives — pursued the four of them — the crippled horse and the English groom and the old Negro and the twelve-year-old child who rode it — up and down and back and forth through the section of the Mississippi watershed between Illinois and the Gulf of Mexico and Kansas and Alabama, where on three legs the horse had been running in remote back-country quarter-races and winning most of them, the old Negro telling it, grave and tranquil, serenely and peacefully inconsequential, like listening to a dream, until presently the runner five years afterward was seeing what the Federal deputy marshal had five years ago while in the middle of it: not a theft, but a passion, an immolation, an apotheosis — no gang of opportunists fleeing with a crippled horse whose value, even whole, had ceased weeks back to equal the sum spent on its pursuit, but the immortal pageant-piece of the tender legend which was the crowning glory of man's own legend beginning when his first paired children lost well the world and from which paired prototypes they still challenged paradise, still paired and still immortal against the chronicle's grimed and bloodstained pages: Adam and Lilith and Paris and Helen and Pyramus and Thisbe and all the other recordless Romeos and their Juliets, the world's oldest and most shining tale limning in his brief turn the warp-legged foul-mouthed English horse-groom as ever Paris or Lochinvar or any else of earth's splendid rapers: the doomed glorious frenzy of a love-story, pursued not by an unclosed office file nor even the raging frustration of the

millionaire owner, but by its own inherent doom since, being immortal, the story, the legend, was not to be owned by any one of the pairs who added to its shining and tragic increment, but only to be used, passed through, by each in their doomed and homeless turn.

He didn't tell how they did it: only that they did it: as if, once it was done, how no longer mattered; that if something must be done, it is done, and then hardship or anguish or even impossibility no longer signify: — got the frantic and injured horse out of the demolished car and into the bayou where it could swim while they held its head above water — ('He found a boat,' the old Negro said.

'If you could call it a boat. Whittled out of a log and done already turned over before you even put your foot in it. They called them pirogues. They talked gobble talk there, like they do here.')

— then out of the bayou too, into such complete invisibility that when the railroad detectives reached the scene the next morning, it was as if the flood itself had washed the three of them away. It was a hummock, a small island in the swamp not a mile from the collapsed trestle, where a work-train and crew had arrived the next morning to rebuild the bridge and the track, and from which (They got the horse as far up out of the water as they could the first night, and the old Negro was left to attend it.

'I just give it water, and kept a mud pack on the hip and tried to keep the gnats and flies and mosquitoes away,' the old Negro said.) the groom returned at dawn on the third day, with a block-and-tackle bearing the railroad company's stencil in the pirogue, and food for themselves and the horse and canvas for the sling and cradle and plaster of Paris for the case — ('I know what you're going to ask now,' the old Negro said. 'Where we got the money for all that.

He got it like he done the boat,' telling that too: the cockney horse-groom who had never been further from London than Epsom or Doncaster yet who in two years of America had become a Mason and a Baptist, who in only two weeks in the forecastle of the American freighter up from Buenos Aires had discovered or anyway revealed to

himself that rapport with and affinity for dice, who on the first return to the scene of the wreck had picked up the block-and-tackle simply because he happened to pass it, since his true destination had been the bunk-car where the Negro work-gang slept, waking them, the white man in his swamp-fouled alien jodhpurs and the black ones in undershirts or dungaree pants or in nothing at all, squatting around a spread blanket beneath the smoking lantern and the bank notes and the coins and the clicking and scuttering dice.) — and in the pitch dark — he had brought back no lantern, no light; it would not only have been dangerous to show one, he didn't even need one: scornfully, even contemptuously, who from his tenth year had known the bodies of horses as the blind man knows the room he durst not leave: any more than he would have brought back a veterinary, not only not needing one but he would not have let any hand save his or the old Negro's touch the horse, even if the horse had permitted it — they suspended the horse and set the hip and built the immobilising cast.

Then the weeks while the ruined hip knitted and the search-parties, with every exit to the swamp watched and guarded, continued to drag the bayou beneath the trestle, and to splash and curse among the moccasins and rattlesnakes and alligators of the swamp itself, long after they (the pursuers) had come to believe that the horse was dead for the simple reason that it must be dead, since that particular horse could not be anything else but dead and still be invisible, and that the owner would in the end gain only the privilege of venting his vengeance on the thieves.

And once each week, as soon as it was dark enough and the search-parties had withdrawn for the night, the groom would depart in the pirogue, to return before dawn two or three days later with another supply of food and forage; two and three days now because the trestle was repaired now; once more trains roared hollowly across it in the night and the work-gang and that source of revenue or income was gone, back to New Orleans where it had come from and now the white man was going to New Orleans himself, bucking the professional games on baize-covered tables beneath electric lights and now not even the old Negro — (a horseman, a groom, merely by accident, but by

avocation and dedication a minister of God, sworn dedicated enemy of sin yet who apparently without qualm or hesitation had long since drawn and then forgot it the line of his rectitude to include the magnificent ruined horse and all who were willing to serve it) — would know how far he sometimes had to go before he found another spread blanket beneath a smoked lantern or, as a last resort, the electric-lit baize table, where, although in their leathern cup the dice were as beyond impugment as Caesar's wife, the counters — chips, money — still accrued, whether or not to the benison of his gift or to the simple compulsion of his need.

Then months, not only within daily earshot of the trains once more thundering across the repaired trestle but of the search parties themselves (to whom at times either of them could have spoken without even raising his voice), the search continuing long after the ones who did the cursing and splashing and the frantic recoiling from the sluggish thrash or vicious buzz of startled moccasins and rattlesnakes all believed that the horse was long since dead and vanished forever into the sleepless insatiable appetites of eels and gars and turtles and the thief himself fled, out of the country and out of the nation and perhaps even out of the continent and the hemisphere, but continuing nevertheless because the railroad company had for stake an expensive set of triple blocks and over two hundred feet of two-inch cable, and the insurance company owned banks and barge lines and chain stores from Portland, Maine to Oregon and so could afford not to lose even a one-dollar horse, let alone a fifty thousand dollar one, and the horse's owner that bottomless purse which would not miss the value of the sixty race horses he still owned, in order to revenge himself on the thief of the sixty-first, and the Federal police had more at stake than even the state ones who could only share in the glory and the reward: they had a file to be closed out — until one day a United Press flash came, relayed last night from Washington to the Federal deputy, of how a horse, a valuable Thoroughbred and running on three legs, in charge of or at least accompanied by a small bandy-legged foreigner who could barely speak English, and a middle-aged Negro preacher, and ridden by a twelve-year-old Negro boy, had run away from the

whole field in a three-furlong race at Weatherford, Texas — ('We walked it,' the old Negro said, before the runner could ask him.

'At night. It needed that much to get used to itself again. To stop remembering that trustle and get limbered up again and start being a horse. When daylight come, we would hide in the woods again.' And afterwards too, telling that too: how they didn't dare else: run one race and then leave directly afterward without even stopping almost, because as soon as that three-legged horse won a race the whole world would hear about it and they had to stay at least one day ahead of them.) — and got there one day too late, to learn that the Negro preacher and the snarling contemptuous foreigner had appeared suddenly from nowhere exactly in time to enter the three-legged Thoroughbred in a race on which the foreigner had betted sums ranging (by this time) all the way from ten to a thousand dollars, at odds ranging all the way from one to ten to one to a hundred, the three-legged horse breaking so fast from the post that the barrier seemed actually to have sprung behind it, and running so fast that the trailing field appeared, if anything, to be running in another and later race, and so far ahead at the finish that the jockey seemed to have no control over it at all — if anyone, let alone a child of twelve or at most thirteen who rode the race without saddle at all but simply a bellyband and a surcingle to hold on to (this informant had seen the race), could have held it after the barrier dropped, the horse crossing the finish line at full speed and apparently bent on making another circuit of the track had not the white foreigner, leaning on the rail beyond the finish line, spoken a single word to it in a voice you could not have heard fifteen feet away.

And the next place where they were within even three days of the horse was at Willow Springs, Iowa, and next to that, Bucyrus, Ohio, and the next time they were almost two weeks behind — an inaccessible valley in the east Tennessee mountains three months later, so remote not only from railroads but even telegraphs and telephones too, that the horse had been running and winning races for ten days before the pursuit ever heard of it; this was indubitably where he joined, was received into, the order of Masons: since this was the first time they

had stopped for longer than one afternoon, the horse able now to run for ten undisturbed days before the pursuers even heard about it, so that, when the pursuers left the valley, they were twice ten days behind the horse, since after two weeks of patient asking and listening up and down that thirty-mile-long mountain-cradled saucer, again, as at the scene of the original disappearance, they had not found one human being who had ever heard of the three-legged horse and the two men and the child, let alone seen them.

So when they heard of the horse next in central Alabama, it was already gone from there, moving west again, the pursuers still a month behind across Mississippi: across the Mississippi River into Arkansas, pausing only as a bird pauses: not alighting, though the last thing the pause could have been called was hovering since the horse would be running, once more at that incredible, that unbelievable, speed (and at the incredible and unbelievable odds too; by report and rumor the two men — the aged Negro man of God, and the foul-mouthed white one to whom to grant the status of man was merely to accept Darkness' emissary in the stead of its actual prince and master — had won tens of thousands of dollars) as if their mundane progress across America were too slow to register on the eye, and only during those incredible moments against a white rail did the horse and the three adjunctive human beings become visible.

Whereupon the Federal deputy, the titular-by-protocol leader of the pursuit, found that, suddenly and with no warning, something had happened to him which was to happen five years later in Paris to a British soldier even whose name he would never hear.

He — the deputy — was a poet, not the writing kind, or anyway not yet, but rather still one of Homer's mere mute orphan godchildren sired by blind chance into a wealthy and political New Orleans family and who, by that family's standards, had failed at Harvard and then wasted two years at Oxford before the family found out about it and fetched him home where, after some months under the threat of the full marshalate, he compromised with his father on the simple deputyship.

And so that night — it was in Arkansas, in a new paint-rank hotel room in a little booming logging town, itself less old than last year — he realised what it was about the whole business that he refused to accept ever since Weatherford, Texas, and then in the next second dismissed it forever because what remained had not only to be the answer but the truth too; or not even the truth, but truth, because truth was truth: it didn't have to be anything; it didn't even care whether it was so or not even, looking (the deputy) at it not even in triumph but in humility, because an old Negro minister had already seen it with one glance going on two years ago now — a minister, a man of God, sworn and dedicated enemy of man's lusts and follies, yet who from that first moment had not only abetted theft and gambling, but had given to the same cause the tender virgin years of his own child as ever of old had Samuel's father or Abraham his Isaac; and not even with pride because at last he had finally seen the truth even if it did take him a year, but at least pride in the fact that from the very first, as he knew now, he had performed his part in the pursuit with passion and regret. So ten minutes later he waked his second-in-command, and two days later in the New York office he said, 'Give it up. You'll never catch him.'

'Meaning you wont,' the owner of the horse said.

'If you like it that way,' the deputy said. 'I've resigned.'

'You should have done that eight months ago when you quit.'

'Touché then,' the deputy said. 'If that makes you feel better too.'

Maybe what I'm trying to do now is apologise because I didn't know it eight months ago too.' He said: 'I know about what you have spent so far. You know what the horse is now. I'll give you my check for that amount. I'll buy your ruined horse from you.'

Call it off.' The owner told him what he had actually paid for the horse. It was almost as much as the public believed. 'All right,' the deputy said. 'I cant give you a check for that much, but I'll sign a note for it. Even my father wont live forever.' The owner pressed a button. A secretary entered.

The owner spoke briefly to the secretary, who went out and returned and laid a check on the desk before the owner, who signed the check and pushed it across to the deputy. It was for a sum still larger than the difference between the horse's cost and that of the pursuit to date. It was made out to the deputy.

'That's your fee for catching my horse and deporting that Englishman and bringing my nigger back in handcuffs,' the owner said. The deputy folded the check twice and tore it across twice, the owner's thumb already on the buzzer as the deputy dropped the fragments carefully into an ashtray and was already standing to leave when the secretary opened the door again. 'Another check,' the owner said without even turning his head. 'Add to it the reward for the capture of the men who stole my horse.'

But he didn't even wait for that one, and it was Oklahoma before he (ex now) overtook the pursuit, joining it now as the private young man with money in his pocket — or who had had it once and lost or spent it — had used to join Marlborough's Continental Tours (and indeed meeting among them who a week ago had been his companions in endeavor the same cold-fronted unanimity of half-contempt which the private young men would meet among Marlborough's professionals).

Then the little bleak railway stations between a cattle-chute and a water-tank, the men in broad hats and heeled boots already clumped about the placard offering for a stolen horse a reward such as even Americans had never seen before — the reproduction of a newspaper photograph made in Buenos Aires of the man and the horse together, with a printed description of both — a face as familiar and recognisable now to the central part of the United States (Canada and Mexico too) as that of a president or a female murderer, but above all, the sum, the amount of the reward — the black, succinct evocation of that golden dream, that shining and incredible heap of dollars to be had by any man for the simple turn of a tongue, always ahead of them (of the pursuit certainly, and, the deputy now believed, of the pursued too), disseminating the poison faster than they advanced, faster even than the meteor-course of love and sacrifice, until already the whole

Mississippi-Missouri-Ohio watershed must be corrupt and befouled and at last the deputy knew that the end was in sight: thinking how it was no wonder that man had never been able to solve the problems of his span upon earth, since he has taken no steps whatever to educate himself, not in how to manage his lusts and follies; they harm him only in sporadic, almost individual instances; but in how to cope with his own blind mass and weight: seeing them — the man and the horse and the two Negroes whom they had snatched as it were willy nilly into that fierce and radiant orbit — doomed not at all because passion is ephemeral (which was why they had never found any better name for it, which was why Eve and the Snake and Mary and the Lamb and Ahab and the Whale and Androcles and Balzac's African deserter, and all the celestial zoology of horse and goat and swan and bull, were the firmament of man's history instead of the mere rubble of his past), nor even because the rape was theft and theft is wrong and wrong shall not prevail, but simply because, due to the sheer repetition of zeros behind a dollarmark on a printed placard, everyone within eyerange or tonguespread (which was every human capable of seeing and hearing between Canada and Mexico and the Rockies and the Appalachians) would be almost frantically attuned to the merest whisper regarding the horse's whereabouts.

No, it would not be much longer now, and for an instant he thought, toyed with the idea, of confounding corruption with corruption: using the equivalent of the check which in New York he had offered to write, to combat the reward, and put that away because that would fail too: not that corrupting corruption would merely spread corruption that much further, but because the idea merely created an image which even a poet must regard as only a poet's fantastic whimsy: Mammon's David ringing for a moment anyway Mammon's Goliath's brazen invincible unregenerate skull.

It was not long now, the end was actually in sight when the course, the run (as if it too knew that this was near the end) turned sharply back south and east across Missouri and into the closing V where the St Francis river entered the Mississippi, haunted still by the ghosts of the old bank-and-railroad bandits who had refuged there; then over,

finished, done: an afternoon, a little lost branch-line county seat with a fairgrounds and a rail-less half-mile track, the pursuers crossing the infield in the van of a growing crowd of local people, town and swamp and farm, all men, silent, watching, not crowding them at all yet: just watching; and now for the first time they laid eyes on the thief whom they had pursued now for almost fifteen months: the foreigner, the Englishman leaning in the doorless frame of the fallen stable, the butt of the still-warm pistol protruding from the waistband of his filthy jodhpurs, and behind him the body of the horse shot neatly once through the star on its forehead and beyond the horse the Roman senator's head and the brushed worn frock coat of the old Negro preacher, and beyond him in turn, in deeper shadow still, the still white eyeballs of the child; and that night in the jail cell the ex-deputy (still a lawyer even though the prisoner violently and obscenely repudiated him) said:

'I would have done it too of course. But tell me why —— No, I know why.

I know the reason. I know it's true: I just want to hear you say it, hear both of us say it so I'll know it's real' —— already — or still — speaking even through the other's single vicious obscene contemptuous epithet: 'You could have surrendered the horse at any time and it could have stayed alive, but that was not it: not just to keep it alive, anymore than for the few thousands or the few hundred thousands that people will always be convinced you won on it' —— stopping then and even waiting, or anyway watching, exultant and calm while the prisoner cursed, not toward him nor even just at him, but him, the ex-deputy, steadily and for perhaps a full minute, with harsh and obscene unimagination, then the ex-deputy speaking again, rapid and peaceful and soothing: 'All right, all right.

The reason was so that it could run, keep on running, keep on losing races at least, finish races at least even if it did have to run them on three legs, did run them on three legs because it was a giant and didn't need even three legs to run them on but only one with a hoof at the end to qualify as a horse.

While they would have taken it back to the Kentucky farm and shut it up in a warehouse where it wouldn't need any legs at all, not even a sling suspended from a travelling crane geared by machinery to the rhythm of ejaculation, since a skillful pander with a tin cup and a rubber glove' —— exultant and quite calm, murmuring: 'Fathering colts forever more; they would have used its ballocks to geld its heart with for the rest of its life, except that you saved it because any man can be a father, but only the best, the brave — —' and left in the middle of the spent dull repetitive cursing and from New Orleans the next morning sent back the best lawyer which even he, with all the vast scope of his family's political affiliations and his own semi-professional and social ones, could find — a lawyer whose like the little lost Missouri town had probably never seen before, nor anyone else for that matter, as having come four hundred miles to defend a nameless foreign horsethief — telling the lawyer what he had seen there: the curious, watching attitude of the town ——

'A mob,' the lawyer said, with a sort of unctious almost. 'It's a long time since I have coped with a mob.'

'No no,' the client said quickly. 'They are just watching, waiting for something, I didn't have time to find out what.'

And the lawyer saw that too. He found more than that: arriving on the second morning after an all-night drive in his private chauffeured limousine, and within thirty minutes was on the telephone back to his client in New Orleans, because the man he had come to defend was gone, vanished, not escaped from the jail but freed from it, the lawyer sitting at the telephone where he could look out into the quiet square almost empty of movement, from which nobody watched him now nor for that matter had ever actually looked at him, but where he was conscious of them — not so much the dour, slow-speaking, half-western half-southern faces, but of the waiting, the attention.

And not only the white man, the two Negroes were gone too, the lawyer on the New Orleans telephone again that evening, not because it had taken him this long to learn these meagre details, but simply because he realised now that this was all he was going to find out here,

by inquiry or purchase or just by simple listening, no matter how much longer he stayed: how the two Negroes had never reached the jail at all but had vanished apparently into thin air somewhere between it and the courthouse, where the ex-deputy's Federal successor had formally relinquished the three prisoners to the local sheriff; only the white man ever to reach the jail, because the ex-deputy had seen him there, and he gone too now, not even freed so much as just vanished, the lawyer discovering five minutes after his arrival that there was no prisoner, and at the end of thirty no felon, and by mid-afternoon no crime even, the body of the horse having vanished too sometime during that first night, and nobody had moved it nor seen anyone moving it nor heard of anyone who might have moved it or in fact even knew that it was missing.

But the pursuit had long ago learned about all there was to know about those two weeks in the eastern Tennessee valley last fall, and the ex-deputy had briefed the lawyer, and so to the lawyer there was no mystery about it; he had already divined the solution: there would be Masons in Missouri too — an opinion which the client in New Orleans didn't even bother to ignore, let alone acknowledge, not the ex-deputy's but the poet's voice actually babbling at his end of the wire while the lawyer was still talking:

'About the money,' the lawyer said. 'They searched him, of course — —
,

'All right, all right,' the ex-deputy said. — right perhaps, justice certainly, might not have prevailed, but something more important had — —

'He had only ninety-four dollars and a few cents,' the lawyer said.

'The old Negro has got the rest of it in the tail of that frock-coat,' the ex-deputy said. — — truth, love, sacrifice, and something else even more important than they: some bond between or from man to his brother man stronger than even the golden shackles which coopered precariously his ramshackle earth — —

'I'll be damned,' the lawyer said. 'Of course that's where the money is. Why the hell I didn't — Hush, and listen to me a minute. There's nothing more I can do here, so I'm coming back to town as soon as they unlock the garage in the morning and I can get my car. But you are already on the scene, you can do it quicker than I can by telephone from here. Get in touch with your people and get notices spread up and down the valley as quick as you can — placards, descriptions of all three of them — —'

'No,' the ex-deputy said. 'You must stay there. If anything further comes out of the charge, it will have to originate there. You must be there to protect him.'

'The only one who will need protection here is the first man who tries to lay a hand on the man who earned as much money as they believe he did, with nothing but his bare hands and a three-legged horse,' the lawyer said. 'He's a fool. If he had stayed here, he could have had the sheriff's badge without even running for it. But I can do everything necessary by telephone from my office until we catch them.'

'I said from the first that you didn't understand,' the ex-deputy said. 'No: that you still did not believe me, even after I tried to tell you. I don't want to find him — them. I had my turn at bat, and struck out. You stay there. That's what you are for,' the ex-deputy said, and hung up.

Though still the lawyer didn't move, his end of the connection still open, the smoke from his cigar standing like a balanced pencil on a carven hand until the other New Orleans number answered and he spoke to his confidential clerk, describing the two Negroes, rapid and explicit and succinct:

'Cover all the river towns from St Louis to Basin Street. Watch the cabin or stable or whatever it is in Lexington, of course; if he doesn't go back home himself, he might try to send the child back.'

'You're in the middle of a pretty good place to look for him now,' the clerk said. 'If the sheriff there won't — —'

'Listen to me,' the lawyer said. 'Listen carefully. He must not reappear here under any condition. He must not be found at all until he can be picked up for something like vagrancy in some city big enough for nobody to know who he is, or care. Under no condition must he come into the clutches of any local officers in any town or hamlet small enough even to have heard of that three-legged horse, let alone seen it. Do you understand?'

A moment: then the clerk: 'So they really did win that much money.'
'Do as I tell you,' the lawyer said.

'Of course,' the clerk said. 'Only you're too late. The owner of the horse has already beat you. The police here have had that notice ever since yesterday, and I imagine the police everywhere have it by now — description, reward and all. They even know where the money is: in the tail-pocket of that preacher's coat the nigger wears. It's too bad every house he passes don't have a wireless, like ships do. Then he would know how valuable he is, and he would have something to trade with you on.'

'Do as I tell you,' the lawyer said; that was the second day; then the third day and the lawyer had established his headquarters or post of command in the judge's chambers next the courtroom in the courthouse, not by the consent or even acquiescence of the judge who was a circuit judge and merely followed the itinerary of his court and did not live in the town and was not even consulted, nor by the acquiescence of the town either but by its will, so that it did not even matter whether the judge was a Mason too or not; and in the barbershop that day the lawyer saw last night's St Louis paper bearing something which even purported to be a photograph of the old Negro, with the usual description and even a guess at the amount of money in the tail of the frock-coat, the barber, busy with another client, having apparently glanced at least once at the lawyer where he stood looking at the paper, because the barber said, 'That many folks hunting for him ought to find him,' then silence and then a voice from the other end of the shop, speaking to nothing and no one and with no inflection: 'Several thousand dollars.'

Then the fourth day, when the Department of Justice investigator and the one from the sheriff's bonding company arrived (the first St Louis reporter had reached the scene one train ahead of the U.P. man from Little Rock) and from his high small quiet borrowed window the lawyer watched the two strangers and the sheriff and the two men who would be the sheriff's local bondsmen, cross the square not to the front door of the bank but around to the discreet side one which led directly to the president's office; five minutes there, then out again, the two strangers stopping while the sheriff and the two local men scattered briskly and vanished, the two strangers looking after them until the Federal man removed his hat and seemed to be studying the inside of it for a moment, a second.

Then he turned briskly, leaving the bonding company's man still looking out across the square, and crossed to the hotel and entered it, moving briskly now, and reappeared with his strapped bag and sat down on the bench opposite the bus stop; and then the bonding company's man moved too and crossed to the hotel and reappeared with his bag.

Then the fifth day and the sixth and even the two reporters had returned to where they came from and there remained in the town no stranger save the lawyer; nor was he a stranger anymore now, though he was never to know by what means the town had learned or divined that he was there not to prosecute but to shield; and at times during that idleness and waiting, he would imagine, envision himself actually in court with the man whom he had not only no expectation but even intention, of ever seeing at all — a picture of himself not engaged in just one more monotonous legal victory, but as a — perhaps the — figure in a pageant which in reality would be an historical commemoration, in fact, even more than that: the affirmation of a creed, a belief, the declaration of an undying faith, the postulation of an invincible way of life: the loud strong voice of America itself out of the westward roar of the tremendous and battered yet indomitably virgin continent, where nothing save the vast unmoral sky limited what a man could try to do, nor even the sky limit his success and the adulation of his fellow man; even the defence he would employ would

be in the old fine strong American tradition of rapine, its working precedent having been already established in this very — or anyway approximate — land by an older and more successful thief than any English groom or Negro preacher: John Murrell himself, himself his own attorney: the rape was not a theft but merely a misdemeanor, since the placard offering the reward before the horse's demise had constituted a legal power of attorney authorising any man's hand to the body of the horse, and its violation had been a simple breach of trust, the burden of the proof of which lay with the pursuers since they would have to prove that the man had not been trying simply to find the owner and restore him his property all the time.

This, out of daydream's idle unexpectedness, because the lawyer did not really expect ever to see either of them since the owner or the Federal Government would indubitably catch them first, right up to the morning of the seventh day when there was a knock at the jail's kitchen door — a knock not much louder than audibility, yet quite firm; and, firm, yet not at all peremptory: just polite, courteous and firm: a knock not often heard at the back door of a small Missouri jail, nor even quite at the back door of an Arkansas or Louisiana or Mississippi plantation house, where it might sooner have been at home, the turnkey's wife wiping her hands on her apron as she turned from the sink and opened the door on a middle-aged Negro man in a worn brushed frock-coat and carrying a napless tophat, whom she did not recognise because she had not expected to see him there, possibly because he was alone, the boy, the child still standing five minutes later just inside the mouth of the alley beside the jail, where neither he nor the old one gave any sign of recognition whatever, although his grandfather — handcuffed now to the turnkey — actually brushed him in passing.

But her husband recognised him at once, not by the face, he scarcely glanced at that, but by the coat: the worn dusty broadcloth garment which — not the man but the coat, and not even the whole coat but the elbow-deep, suitcase-roomy tails of it — the county and state police of five contiguous commonwealths had been blocking roads and searching farm wagons and automobiles and freight trains and the Jim Crow cars of passenger ones, and depot lavatories, charging in pairs

and threes with shotguns and drawn pistols through the pool halls and burial associations and the kitchens and bedrooms of Negro tenements for sixty-five hours now, trying to find.

As did the town too: the turnkey and his shackled prize had scarcely left the jail before they began to gather behind them a growing tail of men and youths and small boys like that of a rising kite, which in the street leading to the square the turnkey could still tell himself that he was leading, and which while crossing the square toward the courthouse he even still looked like he was, walking faster and faster, almost dragging the prisoner at the other end of the chain joining them, until at last he broke and even took one step actually running before he stopped and turned to face the pressing crowd, drawing the pistol from its holster all in one blind motion like the hopeless and furious repudiation of the boy turning, once more whole, stainless and absolved, to hurl his toy pistol into the very face of the charging elephant, victim no more of terror but of pride, and cried in a thin forlorn voice which itself was like the manless voice of a boy:

‘Stop, men!

This hyer’s the Law!’ — who, without doubt if they had run at him, would have stood his ground, still holding the pistol which he had not and would not even cock, dying without a struggle beneath the trampling feet in that one last high second of his badge and warrant: — a small, mild, ordinary man whom you have seen in his ten thousands walking the streets of little American towns, and some not so little either, not just in the vast central Valley but on the eastern and western watersheds and the high mountain plateaus too, who had received his job and office out of that inexhaustible reservoir of nepotism from which, during the hundred-odd years since the republic’s founding, almost that many millions of its children had received not just their daily bread but a little something over for Saturday and Christmas too, since, coeval with the republic, it was one of the prime foundations, — in this case, from the current sheriff, whose remote kinswoman, to his unending surprise and unbelief even ten years afterward, the turnkey had somehow managed to marry; — a man so quiet so mild and so ordinary that none remarked the manner

in which he accepted and affirmed the oath when sworn into his office: merely somebody else's nameless and unknown cousin by blood or maybe just marriage, promising to be as brave and honest and loyal as anyone could or should expect for the pay he would receive during the next four years in a position he would lose the day the sheriff went out of office, turning to meet his one high moment as the male mayfly concentrates his whole one day of life in the one evening act of procreation and then relinquishes it.

But the crowd was not running at him: only walking, and that only because he was between them and the courthouse, checking for an instant at sight of the drawn pistol, until a voice said: 'Take that thing away from him before he hurts somebody:' and they did: a hand, not ungently nor even unkindly, wrenching the pistol firmly from him, the crowd moving again, converging on him, the same voice, not impatient so much as irascible, speaking to him by name this time: 'Gwan, Irey.

Get out of the sun': so that, turning again, the turnkey faced merely another gambit, he must choose all over again: either to acquiesce forever more to man or sever himself forever more from the human race by the act — getting either himself or the prisoner free from one end or the other of the steel chain joining them — which would enable him to flee. Or not flee, not flight; who to dispute the moment's heroic image even in that last second: no puny fumbling with a blind mechanical insentient key, but instead one single lightning-stroke of sword or scimitar across the betraying wrist, and then running, the scarlet-spurting stump inevitably aloft like an unbowed pennon's staff or the undefeated lance's headless shank, not even in adjuration but in abdication of all man and his corruption.

But there was not even time for that; his only choice was against being trampled as, shoulder to shoulder now with his captive and, if anything, slightly behind him, they moved on in the center of the crowd, across the square and into the courthouse, a firm hand now grasping him above the elbow and thrusting him firmly on exactly as he had nightlily dreamed ever since he assumed his office of himself in the act of doing,

as soon as he found a felon either small enough or mild enough to permit him, through the corridor and up the stairs to the judge's chambers, where the New Orleans lawyer gave one start of outrage then of astonishment and then the infinitesimal flicker which never reached his face at all nor even his eyes, until the same calm merely irascible voice said, 'This aint big enough.

We'll use the courtroom' and he (the lawyer) was moving too, the three of them now — himself, the turnkey and the prisoner like three hencoops on a flood — filling the little room with a sibilant sound as though all the ghosts of Coke upon Littleton upon Blackstone upon Napoleon upon Julius Caesar had started up and back in one inextricable rustle, one aghast and dusty cry, and through the opposite door into the courtroom itself, where suddenly the lawyer was not only himself free of the crowd, he had managed (quite skilfully for all his bulk: a man not only tall but big, in rich dark broadcloth and an immaculate pique waistcoat and a black cravat bearing a single pearl like the egg of a celestial humming bird) to extricate the turnkey and the prisoner too, in the same motion kneeing the swing gate in the low railing enclosing Bench and witness stand and jury box and counsels' tables, and thrust the other two through it and followed and let the gate swing back while the crowd itself poured on into the auditorium.

People were entering now not only through the judge's chambers but through the main doors at the back too, not just men and boys now but women also — young girls who already at eight and nine in the morning had been drinking coca cola in the drugstores, and housewives testing meat and cabbages in the groceries and markets, or matching scraps of lace and buttons over drygoods counters — until not just the town but the county itself, all of which had probably seen the three-legged horse run, and most of which had contributed at least one or two each of the dollars (by now the total had reached the thirty thousands) which the two men had won and which the old Negro preacher had escaped with and indubitably concealed — seemed to be converging steadily into the courthouse, ringing with unhurried thunder the corridor and stairs and the cavernous courtroom itself, filling row by row the hard pew-like wooden benches until the last reverberation faded behind the cool

frantic pulsing of pigeons in the clock tower on the roof and the brittle chitter and rattle of sparrows in the sycamores and locusts in the yard, and the calm merely irascible voice said — and not from behind any face but as though no one man spoke but rather the room itself: ‘All right, Mister. Commence.’

And, standing with his prize behind the railing’s flimsy sanctuary, bayed, trapped in fact, between the little wooden barrier which a child could step over in one stride like a degree of latitude or of honesty, and the sacred dais to which, even before he saw it, he had already lost his appeal, not alone except for his two companions nor even despite them, but in fact because of them, for a moment yet the lawyer watched Man pouring steadily into the tabernacle, the shrine itself, of his last tribal mysteries, entering it without temerity or challenge, because why not? it was his, he had decreed it, built it, sweated it up: not out of any particular need nor any long agony of hope, because he was not aware of any lack or long history of agony or that he participated in any long chronicle of frustrated yearning, but because he wanted it, could afford it, or anyway was going to have it whether he could afford it or not: to be no symbol nor cradle nor any mammalian apex, harbor where the incredible cockleshell of his invincible dream made soundings at last from the chartless latitudes of his lost beginnings and where, like that of the enduring sea, the voice of his affirmation roared murmuring home to the atoll-dais of his unanimity where no mere petty right, but blind justice itself, reigned ruthless and inattentive amid the deathless invincible smells of his victories: his stale tobacco spit and his sweat.

Because to begin with, he was not he but they, and they only by electing to be, because what he actually was, was I and in the first place he was not a mammal and as for his chartless latitudes, he not only knew exactly where he came from six thousand years ago, but that in three score and ten or thereabouts he was going back there; and as for affirmation, the mark of a free man was his right to say no for no other reason except no, which answered for the unanimity too; and the floor was his because he had built it, paid for it, and who could spit on it if not he.

And perhaps the lawyer had even read Dickens and Hugo once long ago when he was a young man, looking now across the flimsy barrier into no brick-and-plaster barn built yesterday by the God-fearing grandfathers of other orderly and decorous and God-fearing Missouri farmers, but back a hundred years into the stone hall older than Orleans or Capet or Charlemagne, filled with the wooden sabots until yesterday reeking with plowed land and manure, which had stained and fouled the trampled silks and lilies which had lasted a thousand years and were to have endured ten thousand more; and the caps of Mediterranean fishermen, and the smocks of cobblers and porters and road-menders stiffening with the crimson smears of the hands which had rent and cast down the silks and the lilies, looking out at them not even with mere awe and respect, not alone alarm, but with triumph and pride: pride in the triumph of man, and that out of all his kind, time and geography had matched him with this hour: — America, the United States in this April of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and fourteen, where man had had a hundred and forty years in which to become so used to liberty that the simple unchallenged right to attend its ordered and regimented charades sufficed to keep him quiet and content; looking out at them a moment longer, then he turned and struck the handcuffs a sharp and almost musical blow and thundered down at the turnkey:

‘What does this mean? Dont you know that no man shall be put twice in the same jeopardy?’ then turned again and spoke into the room in that same voice like the rich snore of an organ: ‘This man has been illegally arrested.

The law compels his right to consult a lawyer. We will recess for ten minutes,’ and turned again and opened the gate in the railing this time by thrusting the other two through it and on ahead of him toward the door to the judge’s chambers, not even looking back as five men rose at the back of the room and went out through the main doors, and thrust the Negro and the turnkey into the judge’s chambers and followed and shut the door and — the turnkey told this afterward — without even stopping, went on to the opposite door and opened it and was already

standing in it when the five men from the courtroom came around the corner.

‘Five minutes, gentlemen,’ the lawyer said. ‘Then we will resume in the courtroom,’ and closed the door and came back to where the turnkey and the Negro stood. But he didn’t even look at the Negro; and the turnkey, spent, exhausted, almost comatose from courage and excitement, discovered, realised with a kind of outraged unbelief that the lawyer, who had voluntarily given himself only ten minutes to do whatever he intended to do, was apparently going to use up some of them smoking, watching the lawyer produce the cigar from an upper pocket of the white vest which looked as if it had come right out from under the washerwoman’s smoothing-iron five minutes ago — a pocket which contained three more just like it.

Then the turnkey recognised its brand and therefore its cost — one dollar — because he had owned one once (and on the following Sunday morning smoked it) through the mistake of a stranger under the impression that it was the sheriff who had married his, the turnkey’s, sister instead of he who had married the sheriff’s brother’s wife’s niece, recognised it with grief and outrage too, the same thing happening again but this time a thousand times worse: the man who gave him the other cigar had asked nothing of him, whereas he knew now and at last what the lawyer wanted, was after, had been after all the while, setting the price of his, the turnkey’s, corruption at that of one one-dollar cigar: this was the forty thousand dollars which the nigger had escaped with and hidden so good that even the Federal Government couldn’t find it.

Then the grief and outrage was not even outrage, let alone grief; it was triumph and pride and even joy too, since not only had the lawyer already lost even before he laid eyes on the nigger, he (the lawyer) wasn’t even going to find it out until he (the turnkey) got good and ready to tell him, waiting for the lawyer to speak first, with no organ in the voice either now, which instead was as hard and calm and cold and vacant of trash as that of his wife’s uncle-by-marriage: ‘You’ve got to get him out of town. It’s your only chance.’

And maybe his (the turnkey's) voice wasn't too calm and maybe to a big city lawyer it didn't sound too hard either. But even one as big as this one could have heard the finality in it and, if he listened, the scorn and the contempt and the pleasure too:

'I can think of another. In fact, I'm fixing right now to take it.' Then to the nigger: 'Come on:' already moving toward the corridor door, drawing the nigger after him, and already reaching from the snap on his belt the ring containing the handcuff key. 'You're thinking of that money. I aint.

Because it aint mine to think about. It's his, half of it is that is; whether or not a nigger aint got any business with half of forty thousand dollars aint none of my business nor yours neither. And soon as I unlock these handcuffs, he can go and get it,' and turned the knob and had opened the door when the voice stopped him — the hard calm not even loud voice behind him sounding like somebody dropping pebbles into a churn:

'Neither am I. Because there's not any money. I'm not even thinking about you. I'm thinking about your bondsmen:' and (the turnkey) heard the match and turned in time to watch the flame's hunchy squat at the drawing cigar's tip and the first pale gout of smoke hiding for an instant the lawyer's face.

'That's all right too,' the turnkey said. 'I been living in the jail two years already. So I wont even have to move. I expect I can even stand chain-gang work too.'

'Pah,' the lawyer said, not through smoke but in smoke, by means of smoke, the puff, the gout, the pale rich costly balloon bursting, vanishing, leaving the hard calm not loud word as durable and single as a piece of gravel or a buckshot: 'When you arrested this man the second time, you broke the law.

As soon as you turn him loose, he wont have to hunt for a lawyer because there are probably a dozen of them from Memphis and Saint Louis and Little Rock waiting down there in the yard now, just hoping you will have no more sense than to turn him loose. They're not going

to put you in jail. They're not even going to sue you. Because you haven't got any money or know where any is, anymore than this nigger does. They're going to sue your bondsmen — whoever they were and whatever it was they thought you could do for them — and your — what is it? brother-in-law? — the sheriff.'

'They were my — —' he started to say kinsmen, but they were not, they were his wife's kinsmen; he had plenty of his own, but none of them — or all of them together, for that matter — had enough money in a bank anywhere to guarantee a bond. Then he started to say friends, but they were his wife's family's friends too.

But then it didn't matter what he said, because the voice had already read his mind:

' — which makes it harder; you might leave your own kin-folks holding the sack, but these are the sheriff's friends and you've got to sleep in the same bed with his niece every night.'

Which was wrong too, since three years and two months and thirteen nights ago now, but that didn't matter either, the cigar smoking in the judge's ashtray now, and the voice: 'Come back here': and he returned, drawing the Negro with him, until they stood facing the white vest with its loop of watch-chain like a section of gold plow-trace, and the voice: 'You've got to get him into a jail somewhere where they can hold him long enough for you to put a charge on him that the law will accept.

They can turn him loose the next day or the next minute if they want to; all you want is to have him on record as having been charged with a legal crime or misdemeanor by a legally qualified officer of a legally constituted court, then when his lawyers sue your bondsmen for false arrest, they can tell them to go chase themselves.'

'What charge?' the turnkey said.

'What's the next big jail from here? Not a county seat: a town with at least five thousand people in it?' The turnkey told him. 'All right. Take

him there. Take my car; it's in the hotel garage; I'll telephone my driver from here.

Only, you'll — but surely I don't need to tell you how to spirit a prisoner out of the clutches of a mob.' Which was true too, that was a part of the turnkey's dream too; he had planned it all, run it through his mind, out to the last splendid and victorious gesture, time and again since that moment two years ago when he had laid his hand on the Book and sworn the oath, not that he really expected it to happen but to be prepared against that moment when he should be called upon to prove not merely his fitness for his office but his honor and courage as a man, by preserving and defending the integrity of his oath in the very face of them by whose sufferance he held his office.

'Yes,' he said. 'Only — —'

'All right,' the lawyer said. 'Unlock that damn thing. Here, give me the key:' and took it from his hand and unlocked the handcuffs and flung them onto the table, where they made again that faint musical note.

'Only — —' the turnkey said again.

'Now go around by the corridor and shut the big door to the courtroom and lock it on the outside.'

'That won't stop them — hold them — —'

'Don't worry about them. I'll attend to that. Go on.'

'Yes,' he said, and turned, then stopped again. 'Wait. What about them fellows outside the door there?' For perhaps two or three seconds the lawyer didn't say anything at all, and when he did speak, it was as though there was nobody else in the room, or in fact as though he was not even speaking aloud:

'Five men. And you a sworn officer of the law, armed. You might even draw your pistol. They're not dangerous, if you're careful.'

'Yes,' he said, and turned again and stopped again, not looking back: just stopping as he had turned. 'That charge.'

'Vagrancy,' the lawyer said.

'Vagrancy?' he said. 'A man owning half of forty-five thousand dollars?'

'Pah,' the lawyer said. 'He doesn't own half of anything, even one dollar. Go on.' But now it was he who didn't move; maybe he didn't look back, but he didn't move either, talking himself this time, and calm enough too:

'Because this thing is all wrong. It's backwards. The law spirits a nigger prisoner out of jail and out of town, to protect him from a mob that wants to take him out and burn him. All these folks want to do is to set this one free.'

'Dont you think the law should cut both ways?' the lawyer said. 'Dont you think it should protect people who didn't steal forty-five thousand dollars too?'

'Yes,' the turnkey said; and now he looked at the lawyer, his hand on the doorknob again but not turning it yet.

'Only that aint the question I want to ask anyway. And I reckon you got an answer to this one too and I hope it's a good one—' speaking calm and slow and clear himself too: 'This is all to it. I just take him to Blankton long enough to get a legal charge on the books. Then he can go.'

'Look at his face,' the lawyer said. 'He hasn't got any money. He doesn't even know where any is. Neither of them do, because there never was any and what little there might have been, that cockney swipe threw away long ago on whores and whisky.'

'You still aint answered,' the turnkey said. 'As soon as the charge is on the books, he can go.'

'Yes,' the lawyer said. 'Lock the courtroom doors first. Then come back for the nigger.' Then the turnkey opened the door; the five men stood there but he didn't even falter: on through and past them; then suddenly, instead of following the corridor to the courtroom's rear door as the lawyer had ordered him, he turned toward the stairs, moving fast now, not running: just moving fast, down the stairs and along the

hall to the office of his wife's uncle-in-law, deserted now, and into the office, around the partition and straight to the drawer and opened it and without even faltering, took from beneath the mass of old discharged warrants and incomplete subpoenas and paper clips and rubber stamps and corroded pen points, the spare office pistol and slipped it into the empty holster and returned to the hall and mounted the opposite stairway which brought him to the main courtroom doors and drew them quietly to even as a face, then three, then a dozen, turned to look at him, and turned the key in the lock and withdrew it and put it into his pocket, already hurrying again, even running now, back to the judge's chambers where the lawyer had put the receiver back on its hook and pushed the telephone away and reached for the cigar in the ashtray and actually looked for the first time at the Negro, drawing the cigar to life in one slow inhale-exhale and through the smoke for the first time examined the calm no-aged Roman senator's face framed in a narrow unclosed circlet of grizzled hair clasping the skull like a caesar's laurels above the aged worn carefully brushed carefully mended frock coat, and then spoke, the two of them in succinct flat poste-riposte that was almost monotone:

'You haven't got any money, have you?'

'No.'

'You dont even know where any is, do you?'

'No.'

'Because there's not any. There never was. And even that little, your white bully boy threw away before you even saw it — —'

'You're wrong. And you believe you're wrong too. Because I know — —'

'All right. Maybe it was even a whole hundred dollars.'

'More than that.'

'More than thirty thousand dollars?' and only the faintest hesitation here; no faulting: only an interval: the voice still strong, still invincibly unshaken and unshakable:

'Yes.'

'How much more than thirty thousand dollars?... All right. How much more than a hundred dollars? ... Did you ever have a hundred dollars? Ever see a hundred dollars? ... All right. You know it's more than a hundred dollars, but you dont know how much more. Is that it?'

'Yes. But you dont need to worry — —'

'And you came back to get your half of the hundred dollars anyway.'

'I came back to tell him goodbye before he goes back home.'

'Back home?' the lawyer said quickly. 'You mean, England? Did he tell you that?' and the other, insuperably calm, insuperably intractable: 'How could he told me? Because he wouldn't need to. When a man comes to the place where he aint got anything left worth spending or losing, he always goes back home. But you dont need to worry, because I know what you're fixing to do: lock me up in the jail until he hears about it in the newspapers and comes back. And you're right, because that's what he'll do, because he needs me too. And you dont need to worry about how much money it is; it'll be enough for all the lawyers too.'

'Like the loaves and the fishes?' the lawyer said. But this time it was not an interval; there was no answer at all, serenely nothing, and the interval was the lawyer's to put an end to: 'So he's the one who needs you. Yet he's the one who has the forty thousand dollars.'

How can anyone with forty thousand dollars need you?' and again the interval, intractable and serene, again the lawyer's to break: 'Are you an ordained minister?'

'I dont know. I bears witness.'

'To what? God?'

'To man. God dont need me. I bears witness to Him of course, but my main witness is to man.'

'The most damning thing man could suffer would be a valid witness before God.'

'You're wrong there,' the Negro said. 'Man is full of sin and nature, and all he does dont bear looking at, and a heap of what he says is a shame and a mawkery. But cant no witness hurt him.

Someday something might beat him, but it wont be Satan,' and turned, both of them, at the sound of the door and saw the turnkey inside the room, trying to hold the corridor door, braced against its slow remorseless movement until the yawn's full inswing dismissed him completely into the wall and the five men from the corridor entered, the lawyer already moving before they had got inside the room, crossing to the opposite courtroom door, saying over his shoulder: 'This way, gentlemen,' and opened the door and stood aside holding it: no gesture or motion commanding nor even peremptory as, docile and simultaneous as five sheep, they filed across the room after him like five of the identical targets — ducks or clay pipes or stars — traversing on their endless chain the lilliputian range of a shooting-gallery, and on through the door, the lawyer following on the last one's heels and saying over his shoulder to the turnkey or the Negro or perhaps both or perhaps neither: 'Five minutes,' and followed, on and then through the five men who had stopped, huddled, blocking the narrow passage as if they had walked full tilt, as into an invisible wall, into the room's massed and waiting cynosure; and on through the swing gate into the enclosure, to stop facing the massed room in almost the same prints he had stood in ten minutes ago, solitary this time but anything but alone amid, against, as a frieze or tapestry, that titanic congeries, invincible and judgmatical, of the long heroic roster who were the milestones of the rise of man — the giants who coerced compelled directed and, on occasion, actually led his myriad moil: Caesar and Christ, Bonaparte and Peter and Mazarin, Marlborough and Alexander, Genghis and Talleyrand and Warwick, Marlborough and Bryan, Bill Sunday, General Booth and Prester John, prince and bishop, Norman, dervish, plotter and khan, not for the power and glory nor even the aggrandisement; these were merely secondarily concomitant and even accidental; but for man: by putting some of him in one motion in one direction, by him of him and for him, to disjam the earth, get him for a little while at least out of his own way; — standing there a moment, then two, then three, not accepting but compelling the entire blast of the cynosure as in the

twilit room the mirror concentrates to itself all of light and all else owns visibility only at second hand; four then five then six, while breathed no sound no sigh no sound of breathing even save the watch-chain's golden sough and the thin insistent music of the pearl, still holding as in his palm like putty, the massed anonymity and the waiting as the sculptor holds for another moment yet the malleable obedient unimpatient clay, or the conductor across his balanced utensile hands the wand containing within its weightless pencil-gleam all the loud fury and love and anguish.

Then he moved his hand, feeling as he did so the whole vast weight of the watching and the attention concentrate in one beam upon it as the magician's hand compels, and took out the watch and snapped it open, seeing even as he calculated the elapsed creep of the hands, within the lid's mellow concavity as in the seer's crystal ball, the shadowy miniatures of the turnkey and the prisoner who should be well into the square by now and even perhaps already in the alley leading to the hotel garage; even at the moment there came into the room the rising roar of an automobile engine, then the sound of the car itself rushing fast into the square and across and out of it, rushing on at that contemptuous and reckless gait at which his insolent Negro driver always drove when, under his master's orders, the car contained passengers whom the driver considered beneath him or beneath the car's splendor — a swaggering demi-d'Artagnan of a mulatto murderer whom the lawyer had let remain in the penitentiary at hard labor for exactly one year and one day, as the handler wires the dead game bird to the neck of the intractable hunting dog, then getting him out on parole, not that he (the lawyer) held any brief even for the murder of this particular woman, but because of the way it had been done; apparently with the razor already naked in his hand, the man had not driven the woman out of the cabin, but had simply harried and chivvied her through a scene which, as the lawyer imagined it, must have had the quality of ballet, until the woman broke and ran out of the house screaming into the moonlit lane, running without doubt toward the sanctuary of the white kitchen where she worked, until the man without haste overtook her, not to catch, grasp at her, but simply ran past her with one single neat surgeon-like back-handed slash of the

razor, running into then out of the instant's immobility into which all motion flowed in one gesture of formulated epicene, almost finicking, even niggardly fatal violence like the bullfighter's, the two of them running on side by side for two or three paces in the moonlight until the woman fell, the man not even spotted and the blade itself barely befouled, as if he had severed not a jugular but a scream and restored merely to the midnight, silence.

So the lawyer could have stopped now, with one word leaving them once more fixed, as with one twitch of his cape the espada does the bull, and walk again through the door to the judge's chambers and on to the hotel and pack and strap his bag. But he did not: who owed this little more, as the old pagan, before he quaffed it empty, tilted always from the goblet's brimming rim one splash at least upon the hearth, not to placate but simply in recognition of them who had matched him with his hour upon the earth; in one of the houses on one of the best streets in one of the most unassailable sections of New Orleans, he owned a picture, a painting, no copy but proved genuine and coveted, for which he had paid more than he liked to remember even though it had been validated by experts before he bought it and revalidated twice since and for which he had been twice offered half again what he had paid for it, and which he had not liked then and still didn't and was not even certain he knew what it meant, but which was his own now and so he didn't even have to pretend that he liked it, which — so he believed then, with more truth than any save himself knew — he affirmed to have bought for the sole purpose of not having to pretend that he liked it; one evening, alone in his study (wifeless and childless, in the house too save for the white-jacketed soft-footed not tamed but merely tractable mulatto murderer) suddenly he found himself looking at no static rectangle of disturbing Mediterranean blues and saffrons and ochres, nor even at the signboard affirming like a trumpet-blast the inevitable establishment in coeval space of the sum of his past — the house in its unimpeachable street, the membership in clubs some of whose doors were older than the state and behind which his father's name would, could, never have disturbed the air, and the cryptic numbers which opened his lock boxes and monotonous incrementation of his securities-lists — but instead was looking at the cognizance of his

destiny like the wind-hard banner of the old Norman earl beneath whose vast shadow not just bankers and politicians clicked and sprang nor governors and lieutenants blanched and trembled but at the groaning tables in whose kitchens and sculleries or even open courtyards and kennels daily sixty thousand who wore no swords and spurs and owned no surnames made the one last supreme sacrifice: the free gift of their pauperism, and (the lawyer) thought: I didn't really earn this.

I didn't have time. I didn't even need to earn to earn it; man out of his boundless and incalculable folly foisted it on me before I even had time to resist him; and closed the watch and put it back into the waistcoat pocket and then the voice, not even raised, murmurous, ventriloquial, sourceless, as though it were not even he but circumambience, the room, the high unsubstantiated air itself somewhere about or among the soaring and shadowy cornices, not speaking to the faces but rather descending, not as sound but as benison, as light itself upon the docile, the enduring, the triumphing heads:

'Ladies, gentlemen—' then not louder: merely sharp peremptory and succinct, like the report of a small whip or a toy pistol: 'Democrats: On the fourth of November two years ago there rose from the ballot boxes of America the sun of a thousand years of peace and prosperity such as the world has never seen; on the fourth day of November two years from now, we will see it set again, if the octopus of Wall Street and the millionaire owners of New England factories have their way, waiting and watching their chance to erect once more the barricade of a Yankee tariff between the Southern farmer and the hungry factories and cheap labor of the old world in Europe already entered into its own millennium of peace and reason, freed at last after two thousand years of war and the fear of war, panting only to exchange at a price you can afford to accept, your wheat and corn and cotton for the manufactured goods necessary to your life and happiness and that of your children at a price you can afford to pay, affirming again that inalienable right decreed by our forefathers a hundred and twenty-six years ago of liberty and free trade: the right of man to sell the produce of his own sweat and labor wherever and whenever he wants to, without fear or favor of New York capitalists or New England factory owners already

spending like water the money ground out of the child labor of their sweatshops, to divert to the farthest corners of the earth the just profits of your sweat and labor, so that not your wives and children, but those of African savages and heathen Chinese will have the good roads and the schools and the cream separators and the automobiles — —' then already in motion before he stopped speaking, crossing rapidly to the gate in the railing as with one concerted unhaste the entire room stood up, not flowing so much as swaying toward the main doors at the back, since almost at once a voice said from the doors: 'Hit's locked,' the sway not even pausing, only reversing and becoming a flow: one murmurous hollow roaring of feet, not running: merely shuffling yet as the crowd flowed back toward and into the narrow passage leading to the judge's chambers, where the lawyer, passing rapidly through the swing gate, now stood between them and the door; and even as he thought, My first mistake was moving he made another.

'Stand back, men,' he said and even raised his hand, palm out, seeing, marking for the first time, faces, individual faces and eyes which least of all were those of individuals now, but rather one single face bearing steadily down on him and overwhelming him until suddenly he was moving backward: no shock, no concussion, but simply enclosed, accepted into one moving envelopement; he stumbled once but immediately what felt like a dozen quick firm impersonal hands steadied and even turned him and then checked him while others reached past him and opened the door to the judge's chambers, not flinging nor even sweeping him aside, but evacuating, voiding him back into the wall as the crowd flowed on across the little room to the opposite corridor door, already emptying the room before they had had time to fill it, so that he knew that the first ones out had gone around to the main courtroom doors and unlocked them, so that not only the corridor but the whole building was murmuring again with the hollow unhurried thunder of feet while he stood for a moment more against the wall with in the center of the once immaculate waistcoat the print, not smeared: just blurred, not hurried, just firm and plain and light, of a hand.

And suddenly, in outrage and prescience, he started, actually sprang almost, already knowing what he would see before he reached the window, looking through it down into the square where they had already halted, the turnkey already facing back toward the courthouse as he fumbled inside his coat; except there were three of them now and the lawyer thought, rapid, inattentive and with no surprise: Oh yes, the child who rode the horse and looked no more at the turnkey scabbling clumsily beneath his coat-tail but watched instead the deliberate pour of the crowd from the courthouse portal, already spreading as it converged toward the three waiting figures like the remorseless unhurried flow of spilled ink across a table cloth, thinking (the lawyer) how only when he is mounted on something — anything, from a footstool through a horse or rostrum to a flagpole or a flying machine — is man vulnerable and familiar; that on his own feet and in motion, he is terrible; thinking with amazement and humility and pride too, how no mere immobile mass of him, no matter how large nor apparently doing or about to do no matter what, nor even the mass of him in motion mounted on something which, not he but it, was locomotive, but the mass of him moving of itself in one direction, toward one objective by means of his own frail clumsily-jointed legs and feet; — not Ghengis' bone horns nor Murat's bugles, let alone the golden voice of Demosthenes or Cicero, or the trumpet-blast of Paul or John Brown or Pitt or Calhoun or Daniel Webster, but the children dying of thirst amid Mesopotamian mirages and the wild men out of the northern woods who walked into Rome carrying even their houses on their backs and Moses' forty-year scavengers and the tall men carrying a rifle or an axe and a bag of beads who changed the color of the American race (and in the lawyer's own memory the last individual: cowboy who marked the whole of western America with the ranging dung of his horse and the oxidising hulls of his sardine and tomato cans, exterminated from the earth by a tide of men with wire-stretchers and pockets full of staples); thinking with pride and awe too, how threatful only in locomotion and dangerous only in silence; neither in lust nor appetite nor greed lay wombed the potency of his threat, but in silence and meditation: his ability to move en masse at his own impulse, and silence in which to fall into thought and then action as into an open manhole; with exultation too, since none knew this better than the

lords proprietors of his massed breathing, the hero-giant preceptors of his seething moil, who used his spendthrift potency in the very act of curbing and directing it, and ever had and ever would: in Detroit today an old-time bicycle-racer destined to be one of the world's giants, his very surname an adjectival noun in the world's mouth, who had already put half a continent on wheels by families, and in twenty-five more would have half a hemisphere on wheels individually, and in a thousand would have already effaced the legs from a species just as that long-ago and doubtless at the time not-even-noticed twitch of Cosmos drained the seas into continents and effaced the gills from their fish.

But that was not yet; that would be peace, and to attain that, the silence must be conquered too: the silence in which man had space to think and in consequence act on what he believed he thought or thought he believed: the silence in which the crowd walked, flowed steadily across the square toward the three waiting figures and out of which the turnkey cried in his thin high manless voice, dragging the new pistol in its turn from beneath his coat skirts:

'Stop, men!

I'm going to count three!' and began to count: 'One — Two — —' staring, even glaring at the faces which were not rushing at him nor did they even seem to walk at him, but rather towered down and over him, feeling again the pistol neither wrenched nor snatched but just wrung firmly from him and then other hands had him too. 'You durn fools!' he cried, struggling. But how say it? how tell them? You had to be honorable about money, no matter who had it; if you were not honorable about money, pitying the weak did them no good because about all they got from you then was just pity.

Besides, it was already too late to try to tell them, even if there had been no other reason, the firm, quite kind, almost gentle hands not only holding him up but even lifting, raising him, and then they were even carrying him as two kinless bachelors might carry a child between them, his feet remembering earth but no longer touching it; then raising him still further until he could see, between and past the heads and shoulders, the ringed circumference of faces not grim and never

angry: just unanimous and attentive, and in the center of it the old Negro in the worn frock coat and the thin chocolate-colored adolescent boy with eyeballs of that pure incredible white which Flemish painters knew how to grind; then the owner of the calm irascible voice spoke again and now for the first time the turnkey could see and recognise him: no lawyer or merchant or banker or any other civic leader, but himself a gambler who bucked from choice the toughest game of all: ownership of a small peripatetic sawmill where he had gone to work at the age of fifteen as the sole support of a widowed mother and three unmarried sisters, and now at forty owned the mill and a wife and two daughters and one grand-daughter of his own, speaking at last into a silence in which there was not even the sound of breathing:

‘How much did you and that fellow really win on that horse? A hundred dollars?’

‘More,’ the old Negro said.

‘A thousand?’

‘More than that’: and now indeed there was no stir, no breath: only one vast suspension as if the whole bright April morning leaned:

‘Was it forty thousand?... All right. Was it half of forty thousand? How much did you see? How much did you count? Can you count to a thousand dollars?’

‘It was a heap,’ the old Negro said: and now they breathed: one stir, one exhalation, one movement; the day, the morning once more relinquished, the voice its valedictory:

‘There’ll be a train at the depot in twenty-five minutes. You be on it when it leaves and dont come back. We dont like rich niggers here.’

‘So we got on the train,’ the old Negro said, ‘and rode to the next station. Then we got out and walked. It was a far piece, but we knowed where he would be now, if they would just let him alone—’ the blue haze-cradled valley where the corners of Georgia and Tennessee and Carolina meet, where he had appeared suddenly from nowhere that day last summer with a three-legged racehorse and an old Negro preacher and the Negro child who rode the horse, and stayed two weeks during which the horse outran every other one within fifty miles,

and finally one brought all the way from Knoxville to try to cope with it, then (the four of them) vanished again overnight six hours ahead of a horde of Federal agents and sheriffs and special officers like the converging packs of a state- or nationwide foxhunt.

‘And we was right; he must a come straight back there from the Missouri jail because it was still June. They told us about it: a Sunday morning in the church and likely it was the preacher that seen him first because he was already facing that way, before the rest of them turned their heads and recognised him too standing against the back wall just inside the door like he hadn’t never left—’ the runner seeing it too, seeing almost as much as the Federal ex-deputy would have seen if he had been there: — the morose, savage, foul-mouthed, almost inarticulate (only the more so for the fact that occasionally a fragment of what he spoke sounded a little like what the valley knew as English) foreigner who moved, breathed, not merely in an aura of bastardy and bachelordom but of homelessness too, like a halfwild pedigreeless pariah dog: fatherless, wifeless, sterile and perhaps even impotent too, mis-shapen, savage and foul: the world’s portionless and intractable and inconsolable orphan, who brought without warning into that drowsing vacuum an aggregation bizarre, mobile and amazing as a hippodrome built around a comet: two Negroes and the ruined remnant of the magnificent and incredible horse whose like even on four legs the valley or the section either had never seen before, into a country where a horse was any milkless animal capable of pulling a plow or a cart on weekdays and carrying sacks of corn to the mill on Saturdays and bearing as many of the family as could cling to its gaunt ridgepole to the church on Sundays, and where there not only were none, but there never had been any Negroes; whose people, man and boy from sixty-odd down to fourteen and thirteen, had fifty years ago quitted their misty unmapped eyries to go for miles and even weeks on foot to engage in a war in which they had no stake and, if they had only stayed at home, no contact, in order to defend their land from Negroes; not content merely to oppose and repudiate their own geopolitical kind and their common economic derivation, they must confederate with its embattled enemies, stealing, creeping (once at a crossroads tavern a party of them fought something resembling a pitched battle with a

Confederate recruiting party) by night through the Confederate lines to find and join a Federal army, to fight not against slavery but against Negroes, to abolish the Negro by freeing him from them who might bring Negroes among them exactly as they would have taken their rifles down from the pegs or deer antlers above hearth and doorway to repel, say, a commercial company talking about bringing the Indians back.

Hearing it too: 'Except it wasn't two weeks we was there that first time. It was fifteen days. The first two they spent just looking at us. They would come from all up and down the valley, walking or on horses and mules or the whole family in the wagon, to set in the road in front of the store where we would be squatting on the gallery eating cheese and crackers and sardines, looking at us. Then the men and boys would go around behind the store where we had built a pen out of rails and scraps of boards and pieces of rope, to stand and look at the horse. Then we begun to run and by the fifth day we had outrun every horse in the whole valley and had done won even one mortgage on a ten-acre corn-patch up on the mountain, and by the seventh day we was running against horses brought all the way in from the next counties across what they called the Gap. Then six days more, with the folks in the valley betting on our horse now, until the fifteenth day when they brought that horse from Knoxville that had run at Churchill Downs back home once, and this time it was not just the valley folks but folks from all that part of Tennessee watching that three-legged horse without even no saddle (we never used no bridle neither: just a one-rein hackamore and a belly-band for this boy to hold on to) outrun that Knoxville horse the first time at five furlongs and the next time at a full mile for double stakes, with not just the folks in the valley but the folks from the other counties too betting on it now, so that everybody or anyway every family in that part of Tennessee had a share in what it won—'

'That's when he was taken into the Masons,' the runner said. 'During that two weeks.'

‘Fifteen days,’ the old Negro said. ‘Yes, there was a lodge there. — then just before daylight the next morning a man on a mule rid down from the Gap, just about a hour ahead of them—’ the runner hearing this too as the old Negro himself had heard it a year afterward: when the sun rose the automobile itself stood in front of the store — the first automobile which the soil of the valley had ever emprinted and which some of the old people and children had ever seen, driven part of the way over the gap trail but indubitably hauled and pushed and probably even carried here and there for the rest of the distance, and inside the store the sheriff of the county and the city strangers in their city hats and neckties and shoes smelling, stinking of excise officers, revenueurs, while already the horses and mules and wagons of yesterday flowed back down from the coves and hills, the riders and occupants dismounting at once now, to pause for a moment to look quietly and curiously at the automobile as though at a medium-sized rattlesnake, then crowding into the store until it would hold no more of them, facing not the city strangers standing in a tight wary clump in front of the cold spit-marked stove in its spit-marked sandbox, they had looked at them once and then no more, but rather the sheriff, so that, since the sheriff was one of them, bore one of the names which half the valley bore and the valley had all voted for him and in fact, except for his dime-store cravat and their overalls, even looked like them, it was as though the valley merely faced itself.

‘They stole the horse,’ the sheriff said. ‘All the man wants is just to get it back.’ But no reply: only the quiet, grave, courteous, not really listening but just waiting faces, until one of the city strangers said in a bitter city voice:

‘Wait — —’ already stepping quickly past the sheriff, his hand already inside the buttoned front of his city coat when the sheriff said in his flat hill voice:

‘You wait,’ his hand inside the other’s buttoned coat too, already covering the other smaller one, plucking it out of the coat and holding easily in the one grasp both the small city hand and the flat city pistol so that they looked like toys in it, not wrenching but merely squeezing the pistol out of the hand and dropping it into his own coat pocket, and said, ‘Well boys, let’s get on,’ moving, walking, his companions in their

white shirts and coat sleeves and pants legs and shoes creased and polished two days ago in Chattanooga hotels, heeling him, compact and close, while the faces, the lane opened: through the store, the lane, the faces closing behind: across the gallery and down the steps, the silent lane still opening and closing behind them until they reached the automobile; 1914 then, and young mountain men had not yet learned how to decommission an automobile simply by removing the distributor or jamming the carburetor.

So they had used what they did know: a ten-pound hammer from the blacksmith's shop, not knowing even then the secret of the thing's life beneath the hood and so over-finding it: the fine porcelain dust of shattered plugs and wrenched and battered wires and dented pipes and even the mute half-horse-shoe prints of the hammer punctuating the spew of oil and gasoline and even the hammer itself immobile against an overalled leg in plain view; and now the city man, cursing in his furious bitter voice, was scrabbling with both hands at the sheriff's coat until the sheriff grasped both of them in his one and held the man so; and, facing them now across the ruined engine, again it was merely the valley facing itself. 'The automobile dont belong to the government,' the sheriff said. 'It belongs to him. He will have to pay to have it fixed.'

Nor anything yet for a moment. Then a voice: 'How much?'

'How much?' the sheriff said over his shoulder.

'How much?' the city man said. 'A thousand dollars, for all I know. Maybe two thousand — —'

'We'll call it fifty,' the sheriff said, releasing the hands and removing the trim pearl-colored city hat from the city head and with his other hand took from his trousers pocket a small crumple of banknotes and separated one and dropped it into the hat, holding the hat upside down and as though baited with the single bill, toward the nearest of the crowd: 'Next,' he said.

'Except that they had to look quick, because before the preacher could say the benediction so they could get up and even tell him howdy, he was done gone from there too.

But quick as he left, it wasn't before the word could begin to spread: telling that too: thirty-seven in the church that morning so in effect the whole valley was and by midafternoon or sundown anyway every cove and hill and run knew he was back: alone: without the horse: and broke, and hungry; not gone again: just disappeared, out of sight: for the time: so that they knew they had only to wait, to bide until the moment, which was that night in the loft above the postoffice-store— 'It was the lodge-room.

They used it for they politic too, and for the court, but mostly for the poker- and crap-games that they claimed had been running there ever since the valley was first settled and the store was built. There was a regular outside staircase going up to it that the lawyers and judges and politicians and Masons and Eastern Stars used, but mainly it was a ladder nailed flat to the back wall outside, leading up to a back window, that everybody in the valley knowed about but not one of them would ever claim he even seen, let alone climbed.

And inside there was a jug always full of white mountain whisky setting on the shelf with the water-bucket and the gourd, that everybody in the valley knowed was there just like they done the ladder but that nobody could see while the court or the lodge or a meeting was going on: telling it:

An hour after dark when the six or seven men (including the store's clerk) squatting around the spread blanket on the floor beneath the lantern ('It was Sunday night.

They just shot craps on Sunday night. They wouldn't allow no poker.') heard his feet on the ladder and watched him crawl through the window and then didn't look at him anymore while he went to the jug and poured himself a drink into the gourd dipper, not watching him exactly as not one of them would have offered him as a gift the actual food or as a loan the money to buy it with, not even when he turned and saw the coin, the half-dollar, on the floor beside his foot where ten seconds ago no coin had been, nor when he picked it up and interrupted the game for two or three minutes while he compelled

them one by one to disclaim the coin's ownership, then knelt into the circle and bet the coin and cast the dice and drew down the original half-dollar and pyramided for two more casts, then passed the dice and, rising, left the original coin on the floor where he had found it and went to the trap door and the ladder which led down into the store's dark interior and with no light descended and returned with a wedge of cheese and a handful of crackers and interrupted the game again to hand the clerk one of the coins he had won and took his change and, squatting against the wall and with no sound save the steady one of his chewing, ate what the valley knew was his first food since he returned to it, reappeared in the church ten hours ago; and — suddenly — the first since he had vanished with the horse and the two Negroes ten months ago.

'They just took him back, like he hadn't never even been away. It was more than that. It was like there never had been no more than what they seen now: no horse to win races on three legs and never had been because they probably never even asked him what had become of it, never no two niggers like me and this boy, never no money to ask him how much of it he won like all them folks back there in Missouri done, not even no time between that one a year ago last summer and this one—' no interval of fall and winter and spring, no flame of oak and hickory nor drive of sleet nor foam and rush of laurel and rhododendron down the mountainsides into summer again; the man himself (the runner seeing this too out of the listening, the hearing) unchanged and not even any dirtier: just alone this time (though not as well as the Federal ex-deputy could have seen it) — the same savage and bandy misanthrope in the foul raked checked cap and the cheap imitation tweed jacket and the bagging Bedford cords ('He called them jodhpurs.

They would have held three of him. He said they was made in a place called Savile Row for what he called the second largest duke in the Irish peerage.') squatting on the store's front gallery beneath the patent medicine and tobacco and baking powder placards and the announcements and adjurations of candidates for sheriff and representative and district attorney (this was 1914, an even year; they

had already been defeated and forgotten and there remained only their fading photographs jobblotted from the lowest bidder and not looking like them anyway, which no one had expected, but merely like any candidate, which was all that any hoped, dotting the countryside on telephone poles and fences and the wooden rails of bridges and the flanks of barns and already fading beneath the incrementation of time and weather, like ejaculations: a warning: a plea: a cry):

‘Just squatting there at first, not doing nothing and not nobody bothering him, even to try to talk to him, until Sunday when he would be in the church again, setting in the last pew at the back where he could get out first after the benediction.

He was sleeping on a straw tick in the lodge room over the store and eating out of the store too because he had won that much that first night. He could have had a job; they told me about that too: him squatting on the gallery one morning when some fellow brought a horse in to the blacksmith that he had tried to shoe himself and quicked it in the nigh hind, the horse plunging and kicking and squealing every time they tried to touch it until at last they was trying to cross-tie it up and maybe even have to throw it to pull the quick shoe, until he got up and went in and laid his hand on its neck a minute and talked to it and then just tied the halter rein in the ring and picked up the foot and pulled the shoe and reset it. The blacksmith offered him a steady job right there but he never even answered, just back on the gallery squatting again, then Sunday in the back pew in the church again where he could get out first, before anybody could try to talk to him. Because they couldn’t see his heart.’

‘His heart?’ the runner said.

‘Yes,’ the old Negro said. ‘Then he did vanish, because the next time they seed him they wouldn’t have knowed him except for the cap, the coat and them Irish britches gone now and wearing over-halls and a hickory shirt. Except that they would have had to gone out there to seen that, because he was a farmer now, a wage-hand, likely not getting much more than his board and lodging and washing because the place he was working on hadn’t hardly supported the two folks that

was already trying to live on it—' the runner seeing that now almost as well as the Federal ex-deputy could have seen it: — a childless couple of arthritic middleage: two heirs of misfortune drawn as though by some mutual last resort into the confederation of matrimony as inversely two heirs of great wealth or of royalty might have been, — a one-room-and-leanto cabin, a hovel almost, clinging paintless to a sheer pitch of mountainside in a straggling patch of corn standing in niggard monument to the incredible, the not just back- but heart-breaking labor which each meagre stalk represented: moloch-effigy of self-sustenance which did not reward man's sweat but merely consumed his flesh; — the man who ten months ago had walked in the company of giants and heroes and who even yesterday, even without the horse and solitary and alone, had still walked in its magnificent gigantic shadow, now in faded overalls milking a gaunt hill cow and splitting firewood and (the three of them, distinguishable at any distance from one another only because one wore the checked cap and another a skirt) hoeing the lean and tilted corn, coming down the mountain to squat, not talking yet not actually mute either, among them on the gallery of the store on Saturday afternoon; and on the next morning, Sunday, again in his back pew in the church, always in that clean fresh rotation of faded blue which was not the regalia of his metamorphosis and the badge of all plodding enduring husbandry, but which hid and concealed even the horse-warped curvature of his legs, obliterating, effacing at last the last breath or recollection of the old swaggering aura bachelor, footfree and cavalier, so that (it was July now) there remained (not the heart) only the foul raked heavily-checked cap talking (not the heart talking of passion and bereavement) among the empty Tennessee hills of the teeming metropolitan outland: 'Then he was gone.

It was August; the mail rider had brought the Chattanooga and Knoxville papers back over the Gap that week and the next Sunday the preacher made the prayer for all the folks across the water swamped again in battle and murder and sudden death, and the next Saturday night they told me how he taken his last degree in Masonry and how that time they tried to talk to him because the Chattanooga and

Knoxville papers was coming over the Gap every day now and they was reading them too: about that battle — —'
'Mons,' the runner said.

'Mons,' the old Negro said. — 'saying to him, "Them was your folks too, wasn't they?" and getting the sort of answer there wasn't no reply to except just to hit him. And when the next Sunday came, he was gone. Though at least this time they knowed where, so that when we finally got there that day — —'

'What?' the runner said. 'It took you from June until August to travel from Missouri to Tennessee?'

'It wasn't August,' the old Negro said. 'It was October. We walked. We would have to stop now and then to find work to earn money to eat on. That taken a while, because this boy never had no size then, and I never knowed nothing but horses and preaching, and any time I stopped to do either one, somebody might have asked me who I was.'

'You mean you had to bring the money to him first before you could even draw travel expenses from it?'

'There wasn't no money,' the old Negro said. 'There never was none, except just what we needed, had to have. Never nobody but that New Orleans lawyer ever believed there was. We never had time to bother with winning a heap of money to have to take care of. We had the horse. To save that horse that never wanted nothing and never knowed nothing but just to run out in front of all the other horses in a race, from being sent back to Kentucky to be just another stud-horse for the rest of its life. We had to save it until it could die still not knowing nothing and not wanting nothing but just to run out in front of everything else. At first he thought different, aimed different. But not long. It was during that time when we was walking to Texas. We was hiding in the woods one day by a creek and I talked to him and that evening I baptised him in the creek into my church. And after that he knowed too that betting was a sin. We had to do a little of it, win a little money to live on, buy feed for it and grub for us. But that was all. God knowed that too. That was all right with Him.'

'Are you an ordained minister?' the runner said.

'I bears witness,' the old Negro said.

'But you're not an ordained priest. Then how could you confirm him into your church?'

'Hush, Pappy,' the youth said.

'Wait,' the runner said. 'I know. He made you a Mason too.'

'Suppose he did,' the old Negro said. 'You and this boy are alike. You think maybe I never had no right to make him a christian, but you know he never had no business making me a Mason. But which do you think is the lightest to undertake: to tell a man to act like the head Mason thinks he ought to act, that's just another man trying to know what's right to do, or to tell him how the head of Heaven knows he ought to act, that's God and knows what's right to ease his suffering and save him?'

'All right,' the runner said. 'It was October — —'

'Only this time they knowed where he was. "France?" I says, with this boy already jerking at my sleeve and saying, "Come on, Grampaw. Come on, Grampaw." "Which way is that?" I says. "Is that in Tennessee too?"'

' "Come on, Grampaw," this boy says. "I knows where it is."'

'Yes,' the runner said to the youth. 'I'll get to you in a moment too.' He said to the old Negro: 'So you came to France. I wont even ask how you did that with no money. Because that was God. Wasn't it?'

'It was the Society,' the youth said. Only he didn't say 'society': he said 'société'.

'Yes,' the runner said to the youth. He said in French, his best French: the glib smart febrile argot immolated into the international salons via the nightclubs from the Paris gutter: 'I wondered who did the talking for him. It was you, was it?'

'Someone had to,' the youth said, in still better French, the French of the Sorbonne, the Institute, the old Negro listening, peaceful and serene, until he said:

'His mamma was a New Orleans girl. She knowed gobble talk. That's where he learned it.'

'But not the accent,' the runner said. 'Where did you get that?'

'I dont know,' the youth said. 'I just got it.'

'Could you "just get" Greek or Latin or Spanish the same way?'

'I aint tried,' the youth said. 'I reckon I could, if they aint no harder than this one.'

'All right,' the runner said, to the old Negro now. 'Did you have the Society before you left America?' and heard that, insequent and without order or emphasis, like dream too: they were in New York, who a year ago had not known that the earth extended further than the distance between Lexington, Kentucky, and Louisville until they walked on it, trod with their actual feet the hard enduring ground bearing the names Louisiana and Missouri and Texas and Arkansas and Ohio and Tennessee and Alabama and Mississippi — words which until then had been as foundationless and homeless as the ones meaning Avalon or Astalot or Ultima Thule. Then immediately there was a woman in it, a 'lady', not young, richly in furs —

'I know,' the runner said. 'She was in the car with you that day last spring when you came up to Amiens. The one whose son is in the French air squadron that she is supporting.'

'Was,' the youth said. 'Her boy is dead. He was a volunteer, one of the first airmen killed in the French service. That's when she began to give money to support the squadron.'

'Because she was wrong,' the old Negro said.

'Wrong?' the runner said. 'Oh. Her dead son's monument is a machine to kill as many Germans as possible because one German killed him? Is that it? And when you told her so, it was just like that morning in the woods when you talked to the horse-thief and then baptised him in the creek and saved him? All right, tell me.'

‘Yes,’ the old Negro said, and told it: the three of them traversing a succession almost like avatars: from what must have been a Park Avenue apartment, to what must have been a Wall Street office, to another office, room: a youngish man with a black patch over one eye and a cork leg and a row of miniature medals on his coat, and an older man with a minute red thing like a toy rosebud in his buttonhole, talking gobble talk to the lady and then to the youth too —

‘A French consulate?’ the runner said. ‘Looking for a British soldier?’
‘It was Verdun,’ the youth said.

‘Verdun?’ the runner said. ‘That was just last year — 1916. It took you until 1916 — —’

‘We was walking and working. Then Pappy begun to hear them — —’

‘There was too many of them,’ the old Negro said. ‘Men and boys, marching for months down into one muddy ditch to kill one another. There was too many of them. There wasn’t room to lay quiet and rest. All you can kill is man’s meat. You cant kill his voice. And if there is enough of the meat, without even room to lay quiet and rest, you can hear it too.’

‘Even if it’s not saying anything but Why?’ the runner said.

‘What can trouble you more than having a human man saying to you, Tell me why. Tell me how. Show me the way?’

‘And you can show him the way?’

‘I can believe,’ the old Negro said.

‘So because you believed, the French government sent you to France.’

‘It was the lady,’ the youth said. ‘She paid for it.’

‘She believed too,’ the old Negro said. ‘All of them did. The money didn’t count no more now because they all knowed by now that just money had done already failed.’

‘All right,’ the runner said. ‘Anyway, you came to France—’ hearing it: a ship; there was a committee of at least one or two at Brest, even if they were just military, staff officers to expedite, not a special train maybe but at least one with precedence over everything not military; the house, palace, sonorous and empty, was already waiting for them in Paris. Even if the banner to go above the ducal gates was not ready yet, thought of yet into the words.

But that was not long and the house, the palace, was not empty long either: first the women in black, the old ones and the young ones carrying babies, then the maimed men in trench-stained horizon blue, coming in to sit for a while on the hard temporary benches, not always even to see him since he was still occupied in trying to trace down his companion, his Mistairy, telling that too: from the Paris war office to the Department of State, to Downing Street to Whitehall and then out to Poperinghe, until the man’s whereabouts were ascertained at last: who (that Newmarket horse and its legend were known and remembered in Whitehall too) could have gone out as groom to the commander-in-chief himself’s horse if he had chosen, but enlisted instead into the Londoners until, having barely learned how to wrap his spiral putties, he found himself in a posting which would have left him marooned for the duration as groom-farrier-hostler in a troop of Guards cavalry had he not taught the sergeant in charge of the draft to shoot dice in the American fashion and so won his escape from him, and for two years now had been a private in a combat battalion of Northumberland Borderers.

‘Only when you finally found him, he barely spoke to you,’ the runner said.

‘He aint ready yet,’ the old Negro said. ‘We can wait. There’s plenty of time yet.’

‘We?’ the runner said. ‘You and God too?’

‘Yes. Even if it will be over next year.’

‘The war? This war? Did God tell you that?’

‘It’s all right. Laugh at Him. He can stand that too.’

‘What else can I do but laugh?’ the runner said. ‘Hadn’t He rather have that than the tears?’

‘He’s got room for both of them. They’re all the same to Him; He can grieve for both of them.’

‘Yes,’ the runner said. ‘Too much of it. Too many of them. Too often. There was another one last year, called the Somme; they give ribbons now not for being brave because all men are brave if you just frighten them enough. You must have heard of that one; you must have heard them too.’

‘I heard them too,’ the old Negro said.

‘Les Amis à la France de Tout le Monde,’ the runner said. ‘Just to believe, to hope. That little. So little. Just to sit together in the anguished room and believe and hope. And that’s enough? like the doctor when you’re ill: you know he can’t cure you just by laying his hands on you and you don’t expect him to: all you need is someone to say “Believe and hope. Be of good cheer”. But suppose it’s already too late for a doctor now; all that will serve now is a surgeon, someone already used to blood, up there where the blood already is.’

‘Then He would have thought of that too.’

‘Then why hasn’t He sent you up there, instead of here to live on hot food in clean bugless clothes in a palace?’

‘Maybe because He knows I ain’t brave enough,’ the old Negro said.

‘Would you go if He sent you?’

‘I would try,’ the old Negro said. ‘If I could do the work, it wouldn’t matter to Him or me neither whether I was brave.’

‘To believe and to hope,’ the runner said. ‘Oh yes, I walked through that room downstairs; I saw them; I was walking along the street and happened by simple chance to see that placard over the gate. I was going somewhere else, yet here I am too. But not to believe and hope.

Because man can bear anything, provided he has something left, a little something left: his integrity as a creature tough and enduring enough

not only not to hope but not even to believe in it and not even to miss its lack; to be tough and to endure until the flash, crash, whatever it will be, when he will no longer be anything and none of it will matter anymore, even the fact that he was tough and, until then, did endure.'

'That's right,' the old Negro said, peaceful and serene, 'maybe it is tomorrow you got to go back. So go on now and have your Paris while you got a little time.'

'Aha,' the runner said. 'Ave Bacchus and Venus, morituri te salutant, eh? Wouldn't you have to call that sin?'

'Evil is a part of man, evil and sin and cowardice, the same as repentance and being brave. You got to believe in all of them, or believe in none of them. Believe that man is capable of all of them, or he aint capable of none. You can go out this way if you want to, without having to meet nobody.'

'Thanks,' the runner said. 'Maybe what I need is to have to meet somebody. To believe. Not in anything: just to believe. To enter that room down there, not to escape from anything but to escape into something, to flee mankind for a little while. Not even to look at that banner because some of them probably cant even read it, but just to sit in the same room for a while with that affirmation, that promise, that hope. If I only could. You only could. Anybody only could. Do you know what the loneliest experience of all is? But of course you do: you just said so. It's breathing.'

'Send for me,' the old Negro said.

'Oh yes — if I only could.'

'I know,' the old Negro said. 'You aint ready yet neither. But when you are, send for me.'

'Are what?' the runner said.

'When you needs me.'

'What can I need you for, when it will be over next year? All I've got to do is just stay alive.'

'Send for me,' the old Negro said.

'Goodbye,' the runner said.

Descending, retracing his steps, they were still there in the vast cathedral-like room, not only the original ones but the steady trickle of new arrivals, entering, not even to look at the lettered banner but just to sit for awhile inside the same walls with that innocent and invincible affirmation. And he had been right: it was August now and there were American uniforms in France, not as combat units yet but singly, still learning: they had a captain and two subalterns posted to the battalion, to blood themselves on the old Somme names, preparatory to, qualifying themselves to, lead their own kind into the ancient familiar abbatoir; he thought: Oh yes, three more years and we will have exhausted Europe.

Then we — hun and allies together — will transfer the whole business intact to the fresh trans-Atlantic pastures, the virgin American stage, like a travelling minstrel troupe.

Then it was winter; later, remembering it, it would seem to him that it might actually have been the anniversary of the Son of Man, a gray day and cold, the gray cobbles of that village Place de Ville gleaming and wimpled like the pebbles beneath the surface of a brook when he saw the small augmenting crowd and joined it too, from curiosity then, seeing across the damp khaki shoulders the small clump of battle-stained horizon blue whose obvious or at least apparent leader bore a French corporal's insigne, the faces alien and strange and bearing an identical lostness, like — some of them at least — those of men who have reached a certain point or place or situation by simple temerity and who no longer have any confidence even in the temerity, and three or four of which were actually foreign faces reminding him of the ones the French Foreign Legion was generally believed to have recruited out of European jails.

And if they had been talking once, they stopped as soon as he came up and was recognised, the faces, the heads above the damp khaki shoulders turning to recognise him and assume at once that expression

tentative, reserved and alert with which he had become familiar ever since the word seeped down (probably through a corporal-clerk) from the orderly room that he had been an officer once.

So he came away. He learned in the orderly room that they were correctly within military protocol: they had passes, to visit the homes of one or two or three of them in villages inside the British zone. Then from the battalion padre he even began to divine why. Not learn why: divine it. 'It's a staff problem,' the padre said. 'It's been going on for a year or two. Even the Americans are probably familiar with them by now. They just appear, with their passes all regularly issued and visa-ed, in troop rest-billets. They are known, and of course watched. The trouble is, they have done no — —' and stopped, the runner watching him.

'You were about to say, "done no harm yet",' the runner said. 'Harm?' he said gently. 'Problem? Is it a problem and harmful for men in front-line trenches to think of peace, that after all, we can stop fighting if enough of us want to?'

'To think it; not to talk it. That's mutiny. There are ways to do things, and ways not to do them.'

'Render under Caesar?' the runner said.

'I cannot discuss this subject while I bear this,' the padre said, his hand flicking for an instant toward the crown on his cuff.

'But you wear this too,' the runner said, his hand in its turn indicating the collar and the black V inside the tunic's lapels.

'God help us,' the padre said.

'Or we, God,' the runner said. 'Maybe the time has now come for that': and went away from there too, the winter following its course too toward the spring and the next final battle which would end the war, during which he would hear of them again, rumored from the back areas of the (now three) army zones, watched still by the (now) three intelligence sections but still at stalemate because still they had caused no real harm, at least not yet; in fact, the runner had now begun to

think of them as a formally accepted and even dispatched compromise with the soldier's natural and inevitable belief that he at least would not be killed, as orderly batches of whores were sent up back areas to compromise with man's natural and normal sex, thinking (the runner) bitterly and quietly, as he had thought before: His prototype had only man's natural propensity for evil to contend with; this one faces all the scarlet-and-brazen impregnability of general staffs.

And this time (it was May again, the fourth one he had seen from beneath the brim of a steel helmet, the battalion had gone in again two days ago and he had just emerged from Corps Headquarters at Villeneuve Blanche) when he saw the vast black motor car again there was such a shrilling of N.C.O.s' whistles and a clashing of presented arms that he thought at first it was full of French and British and American generals until he saw that only one was a general: the French one: then recognised them all: in the rear seat beside the general the pristine blue helmet as unstained and innocent of exposure and travail as an uncut sapphire above the Roman face and the unstained horizon-blue coat with its corporal's markings, and the youth in the uniform now of an American captain, on the second jump seat beside the British staff-major, the runner half-wheeling without even breaking stride, to the car and halted one pace short then took that pace and clapped his heels and saluted and said to the staff-major in a ringing voice: 'Sir!' then in French to the French general — an old man with enough stars on his hat to have been at least an army commander: 'Monsieur the general.'

'Good morning, my child,' the general said.

'With permission to address monsieur the director your companion?'

'Certainly, my child,' the general said.

'Thank you, my general,' the runner said, then to the old Negro: 'You missed him again.'

'Yes,' the old Negro said. 'He aint quite ready yet. And dont forget what I told you last year. Send for me.'

‘And dont you forget what I told you last year too,’ the runner said, and took that pace backward then halted again. ‘But good luck to you, anyway; he doesn’t need it,’ he said and clapped his heels again and saluted and said again to the staff-major or perhaps to no one at all in the ringing and empty voice: ‘Sir!’

And that was all, he thought; he would never see either of them again — that grave and noble face, the grave and fantastic child. But he was wrong. It was not three days until he stood in the ditch beside the dark road and watched the lorries moving up toward the lines laden with what the old St Omer watchman told him were blank anti-aircraft shells, and not four when he waked, groaning and choking on his own blood until he could turn his head and spit (his lip was cut and he was going to lose two teeth — spitting again, he had already lost them — and now he even remembered the rifle-butt in his face), hearing already (that was what had waked, roused him) the terror of that silence.

He knew at once where he was: where he always was asleep or on duty either: lying (someone had even spread his blanket over him) on the dirt ledge hacked out of the wall of the tiny cave which was the ante-room to the battalion dugout.

And he was alone: no armed guard sitting across from him as he realised now he had expected, nor was he even manacled: nothing save himself lying apparently free on his familiar ledge in that silence which was not only above ground but down here too: no telephonist at the switchboard opposite, none of the sounds — voices, movement, the coming and going of orderlies and company commanders and N.C.O.’s — all the orderly disorder of a battalion p.c. functioning normally in a cramped space dug forty feet down into the earth — which should have been coming from the dugout itself; — only the soundless roar of the massed weight of shored and poised dirt with which all subterrene animals — badgers and miners and moles — are deafened until they no longer hear it. His watch (curiously it was not broken) said 10:19, whether Ack Emma or Pip Emma he could not tell down here, except that it could not be, it must not be Pip Emma; he could not, he must not

have been here going on twenty hours; the seven which Ack Emma would signify would already be too many.

So he knew at least where they would be, the whole p.c. of them — colonel, adjutant, sergeant-major and the telephonist with his temporarily spliced and extended line — topside too, crouching behind the parapet, staring through periscopes across that ruined and silent emptiness at the opposite line, where their opposite German numbers would be crouching also behind a parapet, gazing too through periscopes across that vernal desolation, that silence, expectant too, alerted and amazed.

But he did not move yet. It was not that it might already be too late; he had already refused to believe that and so dismissed it. It was because the armed man might be in the dugout itself, guarding the only exit there. He even thought of making a sound, a groan, something to draw the man in; he even thought of what he would say to him: Don't you see? We don't know what they are up to, and only I seem to have any fears or alarms. If I am wrong, we will all die sooner or later anyway. If I am right and you shoot me here, we will all surely die. Or better still: Shoot me. I shall be the one man out of this whole four years who died calmly and peacefully and reposed in dry clothing instead of panting, gasping, befouled with mud to the waist or drenched completely in the sweat of exertion and anguish. But he didn't do it. He didn't need to. The dugout was empty also. The armed man might be at the top of the stairs instead of the foot of them but then there or thereabouts would be where the colonel and his orderly room and periscope were too; besides, he would have to face, risk the rifle somewhere and it wouldn't matter where since it contained only (for him) one bullet while what he was armed with was capable of containing all of time, all of man.

He found his helmet at once. He would have no rifle, of course, but even as he dismissed this he had one: leaning against the wall behind the sergeant-major's desk (oh yes, what he was armed with even equipped him at need with that which his own armament was even superior to) and yes, there it still was in the sergeant-major's desk: the

pass issued to him Monday to pass him out to Corps Headquarters and then back, so that he didn't even expect to find a guard at the top of the fifty-two steps leading up and debouching into the trench: only the transubstantiated orderly room as he had foreknown — colonel, adjutant, sergeant-major, telephone periscopes and all, his speech all ready on his tongue when the sergeant-major turned and looked back at him.

'Latrine,' he said.

'Right,' the sergeant-major said. 'Be smart about it. Then report back here.'

'Yessir,' he said and two hours later he was again among the trees from which he had watched the torches moving about the archie battery two nights ago; three hours after that he saw the three aeroplanes — they were S.E.5's — in the sky which had been empty of aircraft for forty-eight hours now, and saw and heard the frantic uproar of shells above where the enemy front would be.

Then he saw the German aeroplane too, watched it fly arrow-straight and apparently not very fast, enclosed by the pocking of white British archie which paced it, back across No-man's Land, the three S.E.'s in their pocking of black hun archie zooming and climbing and diving at the German; he watched one of them hang on the German's tail for what must have been a minute or two, the two aircraft apparently fastened rigidly together by the thin threads of tracer.

And still the German flew steadily and sedately on, descending, descending now even as it passed over him and the battery behind — near — which he lurked opened on it in that frenzy of frantic hysterical frustration common to archie batteries; descending, vanishing just above the trees, and suddenly he knew where: the aerodrome just outside Villeneuve Blanche, vanishing sedately and without haste downward, enclosed to the last in that empty similitude of fury, the three S.E.5's pulling up and away in one final zoom; and, as if that were not enough to tell him what he had to do, he saw one of them roll over at the top of its loop and, frozen and immobile, watched it in its plan as

it dove, rushed straight down at the battery itself, its nose flicking and winking with the tracer which was now going straight into the battery and the group of gunners standing quietly about it, down and down past what he would have thought was the instant already too late to save itself from crashing in one last inextricable jumble into the battery, then levelling, himself watching the rapid pattering walk of the tracer across the intervening ground toward him until now he was looking directly into the flicking wink and the airman's helmeted and goggled face behind and above it, so near that they would probably recognise one another if they ever saw each other again — the two of them locked in their turn for a moment, an instant by the thin fiery thread of a similitude of death (afterward he would even remember the light rapid blow against his leg as if he had been tapped rapidly and lightly once by a finger), the aeroplane pulling level and with a single hard snarling downward blast of air, zooming, climbing on until the roaring whine died away, he not moving yet, immobile and still frozen in the ravelling fading snarl and the faint thin sulphur-stink of burning wool from the skirt of his tunic.

It was enough. He didn't even expect to get nearer the Villeneuve aerodrome than the first road-block, himself speaking to the corporal not even across a rifle but across a machine gun: 'I'm a runner from the — th Battalion.'

'I cant help that,' the corporal said. 'You dont pass here.' Nor did he really want to. He knew enough now. Ten hours later in the Villeneuve Blanche gendarme's uniform, he was in Paris, traversing again the dark and silent streets of the aghast and suspended city dense not only with French civil police but the military ones of the three nations patrolling the streets in armed motorcars, until he passed again beneath the lettered banner above the arched gateway.

Wednesday Night

TO THE YOUNG woman waiting just inside the old eastern city gate, that dispersal in the Place de Ville made a long faint hollow faraway rushing sound as remote and impersonal as a pouring of water or the

wings of a tremendous migratory flock. With her head turned and arrested and one thin hand clutching the crossing of the shabby shawl on her breast, she seemed to listen to it almost inattentively while it filled the saffron sunset between the violet city and the cobalt-green firmament, and died away.

Then she turned back to where the road entered the city beneath the old arch. It was almost empty now, only a trickle approached and entered, the last of them, the dregs; when she turned back to it her face, though still wan and strained, was almost peaceful now, as if even the morning's anguish had been exhausted and even at last obliterated by the day of watching and waiting.

Then she was not even watching the road as her hand, releasing the shawl, brushed past the front of her dress and stopped, her whole body motionless while her hand fumbled at something through the cloth, fumbling at whatever it was as if even the hand didn't know yet what it was about to find. Then she thrust her hand inside the dress and brought the object out — the crust of the bread which the man had given her in the boulevard almost twelve hours ago, warm from her body and which by her expression she had completely forgotten, even the putting it there.

Then she even forgot the bread again, clutching it to her mouth in one thin voracious fist, tearing at it with quick darting birdlike snatches as she once more watched the gate which those entering now approached with creeping and painful slowness. Because these were the dregs, the residue — the very old and the very young, belated not because they had had further to come but because some of them had been so long in life as long ago to have outlived the kin and friends who would have owned carts to lend or share with them, and the others had been too brief in it yet to have friends capable of owning carts and who had already been orphaned of kin by the regiment at Bethune and Souchez and the Chemin des Dames three years ago — all creeping cityward now at the pace of the smallest and weakest.

When she began suddenly to run, she was still chewing the bread, still chewing when she darted under the old twilight arch, running around an old woman and a child who were entering it without breaking stride but merely changing feet like a running horse at a jump, flinging the crust behind her, spurning it with her palm against the hollow purchaseless air as she ran toward a group of people coming up the now almost empty road — an old man and three women, one of them carrying a child. The woman carrying the child saw her and stopped.

The second woman stopped too, though the others — an old man on a single crutch and carrying a small cloth-knotted bundle and leaning on the arm of an old woman who appeared to be blind — were still walking on when the young woman ran past them and up to the woman carrying the child and stopped facing her, her wan face urgent and frantic again.

‘Marthe!’ she said. ‘Marthe!’

The woman answered, something rapid and immediate, not in French but in a staccato tongue full of harsh rapid consonants, which went with her face — a dark high calm ugly direct competent peasant’s face out of the ancient mountainous central-European cradle, which, though a moment later she spoke in French and with no accent, was no kin whatever to the face of the child she carried, with its blue eyes and florid coloring filtered westward from Flanders. She spoke French at once, as if, having looked at the girl, she realised that, whether or not the girl had ever once understood the other tongue, she was past comprehending or remembering it now.

Now the blind woman leading the crippled old man had stopped and turned and was coming back; and now you would have noticed for the first time the face of the second woman, the one who had stopped when the one carrying the child did. It was almost identical with the other’s; they were indubitably sisters. At first glance, the second face was the older of the two. Then you saw that it was much younger. Then you realised that it had no age at all, it had all ages or none; it was the peaceful face of the witless.

'Hush now,' the woman carrying the child said. 'They wont shoot him without the others.' Then the blind woman dragged the old man up. She faced them all, but none in particular, motionless while she listened for the sound of the girl's breathing until she located it and turned quickly toward the girl her fierce cataracted stare.

'Have they got him?' she said.

'As we all know,' the woman with the child said quickly. She started to move again. 'Let's get on.'

But the blind woman didn't move, square and sightless in the road, blocking it, still facing the girl. 'You,' she said. 'I dont mean the fools who listened to him and who deserve to die for it. I mean that foreigner, that anarchist who murdered them. Have they got him? Answer me.'

'He's there too,' the woman carrying the child said, moving again. 'Come on.'

But still the blind woman didn't move, except to turn her face toward the woman with the child when she spoke. 'That's not what I asked,' she said.

'You heard me say they will shoot him too,' the woman carrying the child said. She moved again, as though to touch the blind woman with her hand and turn her. But before the hand touched her, the woman who could not even see had jerked her own up and struck it down.

'Let her answer me,' she said. She faced the girl again. 'They haven't shot him yet? Where's your tongue? You were full enough of something to say when you came up.' But the girl just stared at her.

'Answer her,' the woman carrying the child said.

'No,' the girl whispered.

'So,' the blind woman said. She had nothing to blink for or from, yet there was nothing else to call it but blinking. Then her face began to turn rapidly between the girl's and the woman's carrying the child. Even before she spoke, the girl seemed to shrink, staring at the blind

woman in terrified anticipation. Now the blind woman's voice was silken, smooth. 'You too have kin in the regiment, eh? Husband — brother — a sweetheart?'

'Yes,' the woman carrying the child said.

'Which one of you?' the blind woman said.

'All three of us,' the woman carrying the child said. 'A brother.'

'A sweetheart too, maybe?' the blind woman said. 'Come, now.'

'Yes,' the woman carrying the child said.

'So, then,' the blind woman said. She jerked her face back to the girl. 'You,' she said. 'You may pretend you're from this district, but you don't fool me. You talk wrong. And you—' she jerked back to face the woman carrying the child again '— you're not even French. I knew that the minute the two of you came up from nowhere back yonder, talking about having given your cart to a pregnant woman. Maybe you can fool them that don't have anything but eyes, and nothing to do but believe everything they look at. But not me.'

'Angélique,' the old man said in a thin quavering disused voice. The blind woman paid no attention to him. She faced the two women. Or the three women, the third one too: the older sister who had not spoken yet, whom anyone looking at her would never know whether she was going to speak or not, and even when she did speak it would be in no language of the used and familiar passions: suspicion or scorn or fear or rage; who had not even greeted the girl who had called the sister by a christian name, who had stopped simply because the sister had stopped and apparently was simply waiting with peaceful and infinite patience for the sister to move again, watching each speaker in turn with serene inattention.

'So the anarchist who is murdering Frenchmen is your brother,' the blind woman said. Still facing the woman carrying the child, she jerked her head sideways toward the girl. 'What does she claim him as? a brother too, or maybe an uncle?'

'She is his wife,' the woman carrying the child said.

‘His whore, maybe you mean,’ the blind woman said. ‘Maybe I’m looking at two more of them, even if both of you are old enough to be his grandmothers. Give me the child.’ Again she moved as unerring as light toward the faint sound of the child’s breathing and before the other could move snatched the child down from her shoulder and swung it onto her own. ‘Murderers,’ she said.

‘Angélique,’ the old man said.

‘Pick it up,’ the blind woman snapped at him. It was the cloth-knotted bundle; only the blind woman, who was still facing the three other women, not even the old man himself, knew that he had dropped it. He stooped for it, letting himself carefully and with excruciating slowness hand under hand down the crutch and picked it up and climbed the crutch hand over hand again.

As soon as he was up her hand went out with that sightless unerring aim and grasped his arm, jerking him after her as she moved, the child riding high on her other shoulder and staring silently back at the woman who had been carrying it; she was not only holding the old man up, she was actually leading the way. They went on to the old arch and passed beneath it. The last of sunset was gone even from the plain now.

‘Marthe,’ the girl said to the woman who had carried the child. Now the other sister spoke, for the first time. She was carrying a bundle too — a small basket neatly covered with an immaculate cloth tucked neatly down.

‘That’s because he’s different,’ she said with peaceful triumph. ‘Even people in the towns can see it.’

‘Marthe!’ the girl said again. This time she grasped the other’s arm and began to jerk at it. ‘That’s what they’re all saying! They’re going to kill him!’

'That's why,' the second sister said with that serene and happy triumph.

'Come on,' Marthe said, moving. But the girl still clung to her arm. 'I'm afraid,' she said. 'I'm afraid.'

'We cant do anything just standing here and being afraid,' Marthe said. 'We're all one now. It is the same death, no matter who calls the tune or plays it or pays the fiddler. Come, now. We're still in time, if we just go on.' They went on toward the old dusk-filling archway, and entered it. The sound of the crowd had ceased now. It would begin again presently though, when, having eaten, the city would hurry once more back to the Place de Ville.

But now what sound it was making was earthy, homely, intuned and appeased, no longer the sound of thinking and hope and dread, but of the peaceful diurnal sublimation of viscera; the very air was colored not so much by twilight as by the smoke of cooking drifting from windows and doorways and chimneys and from braziers and naked fires burning on the cobbles themselves where even the warrens had overflowed, gleaming rosily on the spitted hunks of horses and the pots and on the faces of the men and children squatting about them and the women bending over them with spoons or forks.

That is, until a moment ago. Because when the two women and the girl entered the gate, the street as far as they could see it lay arrested and immobilised under a deathlike silence, rumor having moved almost as fast as anguish did, though they never saw the blind woman and the old man again. They saw only the back-turned squatting faces about the nearest fire and the face of the woman turned too in the act of stooping or rising, one hand holding the fork or spoon suspended over the pot, and beyond them faces at the next fire turning to look, and beyond them people around the third fire beginning to stand up to see, so that even Marthe had already stopped for a second when the girl grasped her arm again.

'No, Marthe!' she said. 'No!'

'Nonsense,' Marthe said. 'Haven't I told you we are all one now?' She freed her arm, not roughly, and went on. She walked steadily into the firelight, into the thin hot reek of the meat, the squatting expressionless faces turning like the heads of owls to follow her, and stopped facing across the closed circle the woman with the spoon. 'God be with all here this night and tomorrow,' she said.

'So here you are,' the woman said. 'The murderer's whores.'
'His sisters,' Marthe said. 'This girl is his wife.'

'We heard that too,' the woman said. The group at the next fire had left it now, and the one beyond it. But of the three strangers only the girl seemed aware that the whole street was crowding quietly up, growing denser and denser, not staring at them yet, the faces even lowered or turned a little aside and only the gaunt children staring, not at the three strangers but at the covered basket which the sister carried. Marthe had not once even glanced at any of them.

'We have food,' she said. 'We'll share with you for a share in your fire.'
Without turning her head she said something in the mountain tongue, reaching her hand back as the sister put the handle of the basket into it. She extended the basket toward the woman with the spoon. 'Here,' she said.

'Hand me the basket,' the woman said. A man in the squatting circle took the basket from Marthe and passed it to her. Without haste the woman put the spoon back into the pot, pausing to give the contents a single circular stir, turning her head to sniff at the rising steam, then in one motion she released the spoon and turned and took the basket from the man and swung her arm back and flung the basket at Marthe's head.

It spun once, the cloth still neatly tucked. It struck Marthe high on the shoulder and caromed on, revolving again and emptying itself (it was food) just before it struck the other sister in the chest. She caught it. That is, although none had seen her move, she now held the empty

basket easily against her breast with one hand while she watched the woman who threw it, interested and serene.

'You're not hungry,' she said.

'Did that look like we want your food?' the woman said.

'That's what I said,' the sister said. 'Now you don't have to grieve.' Then the woman snatched the spoon from the pot and threw it at the sister. But it missed. That is, as the woman stooped and scrabbled for the next missile (it was a wine bottle half full of vinegar) she realised that the spoon had struck nothing, that none of the three strangers had even ducked, as though the spoon had vanished into thin air as it left her hand. And when she threw the bottle she couldn't see the three women at all.

It struck a man in the back and caromed vanishing as the whole crowd surged, baying the three strangers in a little ring of space like hounds holding fixed but still immune some animal not feared but which had completely confounded them by violating all the rules of chase and flight, so that, as hounds fall still and for a moment even cease to whimper, the crowd even stopped yelling and merely held the three women in a ring of gaped suspended uproar until the woman who threw the spoon broke through, carrying a tin mug and two briquettes and flung them without aim, the crowd baying and surging again as Marthe turned, half carrying the girl in one arm and pushing the sister on ahead with the other hand, walking steadily, the crowd falling away in front and closing behind so that the flexing intact ring itself seemed to advance as they did like a miniature whirlpool in a current, then the woman, screaming now, darted and stooped to a scatter of horse droppings among the cobbles and began to hurl the dried globules which might have been briquettes too but for hue and durability.

Marthe stopped and turned, the girl half hanging from the crook of her arm, the sister's ageless interested face watching from behind her shoulder, while refuse of all sorts — scraps of food, rubbish, sticks, cobbles from the street itself — rained about them.

A thread of blood appeared suddenly at the corner of her mouth but she didn't move, until after a time her immobility seemed to stay the missiles too and the gaped crowding faces merely bayed at them again, the sound filling the alley and roaring from wall to wall until the reverberations had a quality not only frantic but cachinnant, recoiling and compounding as it gathered strength, rolling on alley by alley and street to street until it must have been beating along the boulevards' respectable fringes too.

Because the patrol — it was a mounted provost marshal's party — met them at the first corner. The crowd broke, burst, because this was a charge. The yelling rose a whole octave without transition like flipping over a playing card, as motionless again the three women watched the crowd stream back upon them; they stood in a rushing vacuum while the mass divided and swept past on either hand, in front of and beneath and behind the running horses, the cobble-clashing fire-ringing hooves and the screams dying away into the single vast murmur of the whole city's tumult, leaving the alley empty save for the three women when the N.C.O. leader of the patrol reined his horse and held it, short-bitted, ammoniac and reek-spreading and bouncing a little against the snaffle, while he glared down at them. 'Where do you live?' he said. They didn't answer, staring up at him — the wan girl, the tall calm woman, the quicking and serene approval of the sister. The N.C.O. listened for an instant to the distant tumult. Then he looked at them again. 'All right,' he said harshly. 'Get out of town while you can. Come on now. Get started.'

'We belong here too,' Marthe said. For a second he glared down at them, he and the horse in high sharp fading silhouette against the sky itself filled with anguish and fury.

'Is the whole damned world crowding here to crucify a bastard the army's going to fix anyway?' he said in thin furious exasperation.

'Yes,' Marthe said. Then he was gone. He slacked the horse; its iron feet clashed and sparked on the cobbles; the hot reek sucked after it, pungent for a fading instant, then even the galloping had faded into the sound of the city. 'Come,' Marthe said. They went on. At first she

seemed to be leading them away from the sound. But presently she seemed to be leading them straight back to it. She turned into an alley, then into another not smaller but emptier, deserted, with an air about it of back premises.

But she seemed to know where she was going or at least what she was looking for. She was almost carrying the girl now until the sister moved up unbidden and exchanged the empty basket to the other arm and took half the girl's weight and then they went quite rapidly, on to the end of the alley and turned the wall and there was what Marthe had gone as directly to as if she had not only known it was there but had been to it before — an empty stone stall, a byre or stable niched into the city's night-fading flank. There was even a thin litter of dry straw on the stone floor and once inside although the sound was still audible it was as though they had established armistice with the tumult and the fury, not that it should evacuate the city in their favor but at least it should approach no nearer.

Marthe didn't speak, she just stood supporting the girl while the sister set down the empty basket and knelt and with quick deft darting motions like a little girl readying a doll's house she spread the straw evenly and then removed her shawl and spread it over the straw and still kneeling helped Marthe lower the girl onto the shawl and took the other shawl which Marthe removed from her shoulders and spread it over the girl.

Then they lowered themselves onto the straw on either side of the girl and as Marthe drew the girl to her for warmth the sister reached and got the basket and not even triumphant, with another of those clumsy darting childlike motions which at the same time were deft or least efficient or anyway successful, she took from the basket which everyone had seen empty itself when the woman at the fire threw it at her, a piece of broken bread a little larger than two fists. Again Marthe said nothing. She just took the bread from the sister and started to break it.

‘In three,’ the sister said and took the third fragment when Marthe broke it and put it back into the basket and they reclined again, the girl between them, eating. It was almost dark now.

What little light remained seemed to have gathered about the door’s worn lintel with a tender nebulous quality like a worn lost halo, the world outside but little lighter than the stone interior — the chill sweating stone which seemed not to conduct nor even contain but to exude like its own moisture the murmur of the unwearying city — a sound no longer auricularly but merely intellectually disturbing, like the breathing of a sick puppy or a sick child. But when the other sound began they stopped chewing. They stopped at the same instant; when they sat up it was together as though a spreader bar connected them, sitting each with a fragment of bread in one poised hand, listening.

It was beneath the first sound, beyond it, human too but not the same sound at all because the old one had women in it — the mass voice of the ancient limitless mammalian capacity not for suffering but for grieving, wailing, to endure incredible anguish because it could become vocal without shame or self-consciousness, passing from gland to tongue without transition through thought — while the new one was made by men and though they didn’t know where the prisoners’ compound was nor even (nobody had taken time to tell them yet) that the regiment was in a compound anywhere, they knew at once what it was.

‘Hear them?’ the sister said, serene, in astonished and happy approval, so rapt that Marthe’s movement caused her to look up only after the other had risen and was already stooping to rouse the girl; whereupon the sister reached again with that deft unthinking immediate clumsiness and took the fragment of bread from Marthe and put it and her own fragment back into the basket with the third one and rose to her knees and began to help raise the girl, speaking in a tone of happy anticipation. ‘Where are we going now?’ she said.

‘To the Mayor,’ Marthe said. ‘Get the basket.’ She did so; she had to gather up both the shawls too which delayed her a little, so that when

she was on her feet Marthe, supporting the girl, had already reached the door.

But even for a moment yet the sister didn't follow, standing clutching the shawls and the basket, her face lifted slightly in rapt and pleased astonishment in the murmurous last of light which seemed to have brought into the damp stone cubicle not merely the city's simple anguish and fury but the city itself in all its invincible and impervious splendor. Even inside the stone single-stalled stable it seemed to rise in glittering miniature, tower and spire tall enough and high enough to soar in sunlight still though dark had fallen, high enough and tall enough above earth's old miasmic mists for the glittering and splendid pinnacles never to be in darkness at all perhaps, invincible, everlasting, and vast.

'He will wear a fine sword here,' she said.

Shortly before sunset the last strand of wire enclosing the new compound had been run and joined and the electric current turned into it. Then the whole regiment, with the exception of the thirteen special prisoners who were in a separate cell to themselves, were turned out of the barracks. They were not released, they were evicted, not by simultaneous squads of guards nor even by one single roving detachment moving rapidly, alert compact and heavily armed, from barracks to barracks, but by individual Senegalese.

Armed sometimes with a bayoneted rifle and sometimes merely with the naked bayonet carried like a brush knife or a swagger stick and sometimes with nothing at all, they appeared abruptly and without warning in each room and drove its occupants out, hustling them with scornful and contemptuous expedition toward the door, not even waiting to follow but going along with them, each one already well up into the middle of the group before it even reached the door and still pressing on toward the head of it, prodding each his own moving path with the reversed rifle or the bayonet's handle and, even within the ruck, moving faster than it moved, riding head and shoulders not merely above the moving mass but as though on it, gaudy ethiope and

contemptuous, resembling harlequined trees uprooted say from the wild lands, the tameless antipodal fields, moving rigid and upright above the dull sluggish current of a city-soiled commercial canal.

So the Senegalese would actually be leading each group when it emerged into its company street. Nor would they even stop then, not even waiting to pair off in couples, let alone in squads, but seeming to stride once or twice, still carrying the bayoneted rifles or the bayonets like the spears and knives of a lion or antelope hunt, and vanish as individual and abrupt as they had appeared.

So when the regiment, unarmed unshaven hatless and half-dressed, began to coalesce without command into the old sheeplike molds of platoons and companies, it found that nobody was paying any attention to it at all, that it had been deserted even by the bayonets which had evicted it out of doors. But for a while yet it continued to shuffle and grope for the old familiar alignments, blinking a little after the dark barracks, in the glare of sunset. Then it began to move.

There were no commands from anywhere; the squads and sections simply fell in between the old file-markers and -closers and began to flow, drift as though by some gentle and even unheeded gravitation, into companies in the barracks streets, into battalions onto the parade ground, and stopped.

It was not a regiment yet but rather a shapeless mass in which only the squads and platoons had any unity, as the coherence of an evicted city obtains only in the household groups which stick together not because the members are kin in blood but because they have eaten together and slept together and grieved and hoped and fought among themselves so long, huddling immobile and blinking beneath the high unclimbable wire and the searchlights and machine-gun platforms and the lounging scornful guards, all in silhouette on the sunset as if the lethal shock which charged the wire ten minutes ago had at the same instant electrocuted them all into inflexible arrestment against the end of time.

They were still huddled there when the new tumult began in the city. The sun had set, the bugles had rung and ceased, the gun had crashed from the old citadel and clapped and reverberated away, and the huddled regiment was already fading into one neutral mass in the middle of the parade ground when the first faint yelling came across the plain. But they did nothing at first, except to become more still, as dogs do at the rising note of a siren about to reach some unbearable pitch which the human ear will not hear at all.

In fact, when they did begin to make the sound, it was not human at all but animal, not yelling but howling, huddling still in the dusk that fading and shapeless mass which might have been Protoplasm itself, eyeless and tongueless on the floor of the first dividing of the sea, palpant and vociferant with no motion nor sound of its own but instead to some gigantic uproar of the primal air-crashing tides' mighty copulation, while overhead on the catwalks and platforms the Senegalese lounged on their rifles or held to cigarettes the small windless flames of lighters contrived of spent cartridge cases, as if the glare of day had hidden until now that which the dusk exposed: that the electric shock which had fixed them in carbon immobility had left here and there one random not-yet-faded coal.

The dusk seemed to have revealed to them the lighted window too. It was in the old once-ivied wall of what had been the factory's main building; they might even have seen the man standing in it, though probably the window alone was enough. Not yelling but howling, they began to flow across the compound.

But the night moved still faster; the mass of them had already faded completely into it before they had crossed the parade ground, so that it was the sound, the howling, which seemed to roll on and crash and recoil and roar again against the wall beneath the lighted window and the motionless silhouette of the man standing in it, and recoiled and roared again while a hurried bugle began to blat and whistles to shrill and a close body of white infantry came rapidly around the corner and began to push them away from the wall with short jabbing blows of rifle butts.

When the guard came for them, the corporal was still standing at the window, looking down at the uproar. The thirteen of them were in a small perfectly bare perfectly impregnable single-windowed cell which obviously had been a strong room of some sort back in the old dead time when the factory had been merely a factory. A single dingy electric bulb burned in the center of the ceiling behind a wire cage like the end of a rat-trap.

It had been burning when they were herded into the room shortly after dawn this morning, and, since it was American electricity, or that is, was already being charged daily one day in advance to the Service of Supply of the American Expeditionary Force, it had been burning ever since. So as the day succumbed to evening, the faces of the thirteen men sitting quietly on the floor against one wall did not fade wanly back into the shadows but rather instead emerged, not even wan but, unshaven and therefore even more virile, gathering to themselves an even further ghastly and jaundiced strength.

When the first stir of movement went through the compound as the Senegalese began to evict the regiment from the barracks, the thirteen men sitting against the wall of the cell did not appear to respond to it, unless there might have been a further completer stillness and arrestment travelling as though from one to another among twelve of them — the half-turn of a face, the quick almost infinitesimal side-glancing of an eye toward the thirteenth one, the corporal, sitting in the center of them, who — the corporal — did not move at all until the first roar of yelling rolled across the parade ground and crashed like a wave against the wall beneath the window.

Then the corporal rose to his feet, not quietly nor deliberately so much as easily, as mountain men move, and went to the window and, his hands lying as lightly and easily among the bars as they had lain on the lorry's top rail, stood looking down at the yelling.

He didn't seem to be listening to it: just looking at it, watching it pour across the compound to break in one inaudible crash beneath the

window, in the wan glow from which the men themselves were now visible — the clenched fists, the pale individual faces which, even gaped with yelling he may have recognised, having spent four years crouched with them behind bullet-snicked parapets or trying bitten-tongued to anneal into the stinking muck of shell craters beneath drum fire or rolling barrages or flattened immobile and unbreathing beneath the hiss and whisper of flares on night patrols.

He seemed not to listen to it but to watch it, immobile and detached, while the frantic bugle yelped and the whistles shrilled and the infantry section burst on its collapsing flank and whirled it slowly away. He didn't move. He looked exactly like a stone-deaf man watching with interest but neither surprise nor alarm the pantomime of some cataclysm or even universal uproar which neither threatens nor even concerns him since to him it makes no sound at all.

Then heavy boots tramped and clashed in the corridor. The corporal turned from the window and this time the other twelve faces moved too, lifting as one and pacing along the wall the tramp of the invisible feet beyond it until the feet halted, so that they were all looking at the door when it opened and flung back and a sergeant (they were not Senegalese nor even white infantry this time, but provost marshal's people) stood in it and made a sweeping peremptory gesture with his arm. 'On your feet,' he said.

Still preceding the chief-of-staff, and pausing only long enough for the aide to open the door and get out of the way, the division commander entered the room. It was less large than a modern concert hall. In fact, it had been merely a boudoir back in the time of its dead duchess or marquise, and it still bore the imprint of that princely insensate (and, perhaps one of the duchesses or marquises had thought, impregnable) opulence in its valanced alcoves and pilastered medallioned ceiling and crystal chandeliers and sconces and mirrors and girandoles and buhl etageres and glazed cabinets of faience bibelots, and a white rug into which war-bleached boots sank ankle-deep as into the muck of trenches say in the cold face of the moon, flooring bland and soft as cloud that majestic vista at the end of which the three old generals sat.

Backed by a hovering frieze of aides and staff, they sat behind a tremendous oblong table as bare and flat and richly austere as the top of a knight's or a bishop's sarcophagus, all three in the spectacles of old men and each with a thick identical sheaf of clipped papers before him, so that the whole group in their dust- or horizon-colored clothing and brass-and-scarlet-and-leather harness had a look paradoxical and bizarre, both scholarly and outlandish, like a pack of tameless forest beasts dressed in the regalia and set in the environment of civilised office and waiting in decorous and almost somnolent unhaste while the three old leaders sat for a specified time over the meaningless papers which were a part of the regalia too, until the moment came not to judge nor even condemn but just to fling away the impeding papers and garments and execute.

The windows were open, curtain and casement, so that there came into the room not only the afternoon light and air, but something of the city's tumult too — not sound, because the voices, even the sudden uproar of them which the division commander and the chief-of-staff had just left outside in the Place de Ville, didn't reach here.

It was rather a sense, a quality as of the light itself, a reflection as of light itself from the massed faces below, refracted upward into the room through the open windows like light from disturbed water, pulsing and quivering faintly and constantly on the ceiling where nobody, not even the clerks and secretaries coming and going steadily on their endless minuscule errands, would notice it without they chanced to look up, unless like now, when something had caused the pulse to beat a little faster, so that when the division commander and the chief-of-staff entered, everyone in the room was looking at the door. Though almost as soon as they entered, that too died away and the refraction merely quivered again.

The division commander had never seen the room before. He did not look at it now. He just entered and paused for a rigid infinitesimal instant until the chief-of-staff came abreast on his right, the sabre between them now under the chief-of-staff's left arm. Then almost in

step they trod the rug's blanched vista to the table and halted rigidly together while the chief-of-staff saluted and took from under his arm the dead sabre furled loosely in the dangling buckle-ends of its harness like a badly-rolled umbrella, and laid it on the table. And staring rigidly at nothing while the chief-of-staff verbally performed the formal rite of his relinquishment, the division commander thought: It's true.

He knew me at once, thinking, No: worse: that the old man had already known him long before anyone announced the two of them from an anteroom; that apparently he had come all the long way from that instant in the observation post two mornings back where his career died, merely to prove what all who knew the old marshal's name believed: that the old man remembered the name and face of every man in uniform whom he had ever seen — not only those out of the old regiment into which he had been commissioned from St Cyr, and the ranking commanders of his armies and corps whom he saw daily, but their staffs and secretaries and clerks, and the commanders of divisions and brigades and their staffs, and regimental and battalion and company officers and their orderlies and batmen and runners, and the privates whom he had decorated or reprimanded or condemned, and the N.C.O. leaders and degreeless fileclosers of sections and platoons and squads whose inspection-opened ranks he had merely walked rapidly through once thirty and forty years ago, calling them all 'my child' just as he did his own handsome young personal aide and his ancient batman and his chauffeur: a six-and-a-half foot Basque with the face of a murderer of female children.

He (the division commander) had seen no movement; his recollection on entering was that the old marshal had been holding the sheaf of papers open in his hand. Yet it was not only closed now, it was pushed slightly aside and the old marshal had removed the spectacles, holding them lightly in a mottled old man's hand almost completely hidden inside the round tremendous orifice of an immaculately laundered cuff detachable from an old-fashioned starched white civilian shirt, and looking for just a second into the spectacle-less eyes, the division commander remembered something Lallemond had said once: If I were

evil, I would hate and fear him. If I were a saint, I would weep. If I were wise, and both or either, I would despair.

‘Yes, General Gragnon?’ the old general said.

Staring again not at anything but at simple eye-level above the old general’s head, the division commander repeated orally the report which he had already recognised as soon as he entered the room — the verbatim typescripts signed by himself and endorsed by the corps commander, lying now in mimeographed triplicate before the three generals, and finished and stopped for a moment as the lecturer pauses to turn a page or sip from the glass of water, then repeated for the fourth time his official request for the regiment’s execution; inflexible and composed before the table on which lay the triumvirate markers of his career’s sepulture, the triplicate monument of what the group commander had called his glory, he discharged for the fourth time the regiment from the rolls of his division as though it had vanished two mornings ago in the face of a machine-gun battery or a single mine explosion.

He hadn’t changed it. It had been right thirty-six hours ago when his honor and integrity as its (or any regiment’s) division commander compelled him to anticipate having to make it; it was still right the second after that when he discovered that that which had given him the chance to become commander of a division in exchange for the dedication of his honor and life, was compelling him to deliver it. So it was still right now for the very reason that it was the same honor and integrity which the beneficence had found worthy to be conferred with the three stars of his major general’s rank, rather than the beneficence itself, which was making the demand, the compulsion.

Because the beneficence itself didn’t need the gesture. As the group commander himself had practically told him this morning, what he was saying now had no connection at all beyond mere coincidence, with what lay on the table. The speech was much older than that moment two days ago in the observation post when he discovered that he was going to have to make it.

Its conception was the moment he found he was to be posted to officers' school, its birth the day he received the commission, so that it had become, along with the pistol and sabre and the sublieutenant's badges, a part of the equipment with which he would follow and serve his destiny with his life as long as life lasted; its analogous coeval was that one of the live cartridges constant through the pistol's revolving cylinder, against the moment when he would discharge the voluntary lien he had given on his honor by expiating what a civilian would call bad luck and only a soldier disgrace, the — any — bad luck in it being merely this moment now, when the need compelled the speech yet at the same time denied the bullet.

In fact, it seemed to him now that the two of them, speech and bullet, were analogous and coeval even in more than birth: analogous in the very incongruity of the origins from which they moved, not even shaped yet, toward their mutual end: — a lump of dross exhumed from the earth and become, under heat, brass, and under fierce and cunning pressure, a cartridge case; from a laboratory, a pinch, a spoonful, a dust, precipitate of earth's and air's primordial motion, the two condensed and combined behind a tiny locked grooved slug and all micrometered to a servant breech and bore not even within its cognizance yet, like a footman engaged from an employment agency over the telephone; — half Europe went to war with the other half and finally succeeded in dragging half the western hemisphere along: a plan, a design vast in scope, exalted in conception, in implication (and hope) terrifying, not even conceived here at Grand Headquarters by the three old generals and their trained experts and advisers in orderly conference, but conceived out of the mutual rage and fear of the three ocean-dividing nations themselves, simultaneously at Washington and London and Paris by some immaculate pollenization like earth's simultaneous leafage, and come to birth at a council not even held at Grand Headquarters but behind locked and guarded doors in the Quai d'Orsay — a council where trained military experts, dedicated as irrevocably to war as nuns are married to God, were outnumbered by those who were not only not trained for war, they were not even braided and panoplied for it — the Prime Ministers and Premiers and

Secretaries, the cabinet members and senators and chancellors; and those who outnumbered even them: the board chairmen of the vast establishments which produced the munitions and shoes and tinned foods, and the modest unsung omnipotent ones who were the priests of simple money; and the others still who outnumbered even these: the politicians, the lobbyists, the owners and publishers of newspapers and the ordained ministers of churches, and all the other accredited travelling representatives of the vast solvent organizations and fraternities and movements which control by coercion or cajolery man's morals and actions and all his mass-value for affirmation or negation; — all that vast powerful terror-inspiring representation which, running all democracy's affairs in peace, come indeed into their own in war, finding their true apotheosis then, in iron conclave now decreeing for half the earth a design vast in its intention to demolish a frontier, and vaster still in its furious intent to obliterate a people; all in conclave so single that the old gray inscrutable supreme general with the face of one who long ago had won the right to believe in nothing whatever save man's deathless folly, didn't need to vote at all but simply to preside, and so presiding, contemplated the plan's birth and then watched it, not even needing to control it as it took its ordained undeviable course, descending from nations confederated to nations selected, to forces to army groups to armies to corps; all that gigantic long complex chronicle, at the end reduced to a simple regimental attack against a simple elevation of earth too small to show on a map, known only to its own neighborhood and even that by a number and a nickname dating back less than four years to the moment when someone had realised that you could see perhaps a quarter-mile further from its summit than its foot; an attack not allotted to a division but self-compelled to it by its own geography and logistics because the alternatives were either here or nowhere, this or nothing, and compelled to his particular division for the reason that the attack was doomed and intended as failure and his was the division among all with which failure could be bought cheapest, as another might be the division with which a river could be crossed or a village taken cheapest; he realised now that it had not been necessary for anyone to have foreseen the mutiny, because the mutiny itself didn't matter: the failure alone would have been enough, and how and why it failed,

nobody cared, the mutiny flung in as lagniappe to that end whose sole aim had been to bring him to attention here before the table on which lay in its furled scabbard the corpse of his career, to repeat for the fourth time the speech, who had been denied the bullet, and finish it and stop.

‘The whole regiment,’ the old marshal said, repeating in his turn, in a voice inscrutable and pleasant and so void of anything as to seem almost warm, inattentive, almost impersonal. ‘Not just this ring-leader and his twelve disciples. By all means, the nine of them who are Frenchmen yet still permitted themselves to be corrupted.’

‘There was no ring-leader,’ the division commander said, harsh and rigid. ‘The regiment mutinied.’

‘The regiment mutinied,’ the old marshal repeated again. ‘And suppose we do. What of the other regiments in your division, when they learn of it?’

‘Shoot them,’ the division commander said.

‘And the other divisions in your corps, and the other corps on either side of you.’

‘Shoot them,’ the division commander said, and stood again inflexible and composed while the old marshal turned and translated quietly and rapidly to the British general and the American on either side of him, then turned back and said to the chief-of-staff:

‘Thank you, General.’

The chief-of-staff saluted. But the division commander did not wait for him, already about-facing, leaving the chief-of-staff once more the split of a second late since he had to perform his own manoeuvre which even a crack drill-sergeant could not have done smoothly with no more warning than this, having in fact to take two long extra steps to get himself again on the division commander’s right hand and failing — or almost — here too, so that it was the old marshal’s personal aide who flanked the division commander, the chief-of-staff himself still half a pace behind, as they trod the white rug once more back to the now

open door just outside which a provost marshal's officer correct with sidearms waited, though before they reached him, the division commander was even in front of the aide.

So the aide was flanking, not the division commander but the chief-of-staff, pacing him correctly on the left, back to the open door beyond which the provost officer waited while the division commander passed through it.

Whereupon the aide not only effaced from the room the entire significance of the surrendered sabre, he obliterated from it the whole gauche inference of war.

As he stepped quickly and lightly and even a little swaggeringly toward the open door beyond which the division commander and the provost officer had vanished, it was as though, in declining in advance to hold the door for the division commander (even though the division commander had already declined the courtesy in advance by not waiting for it), he had not merely retaliated upon the junior general for the junior's affrontment to the senior general's precedence, he had used the junior as the instrument to postulate both himself and the chief-of-staff as being irrevocably alien and invincibly unconcerned with everything the room and those it contained represented — the very tall elegantly thin captain of twenty-eight or thirty with the face and body of a durable matinee idol, who might have been a creature from another planet, anachronistic and immune, inviolable, so invincibly homeless as to be completely and impregnably at home on this or any other planet where he might find himself: not even of tomorrow but of the day before it, projected by reverse avatar back into a world where what remained of lost and finished man struggled feebly for a moment yet among the jumbled ruins of his yesterdays — a creature who had survived intact the fact that he had no place, no business whatever, in war, who for all gain or loss to war's inexorable gambit or that of the frantic crumbling nations either, might as well have been floating gowned and capped (and with the golden tassel of a lordship too since he looked more like a scion than any duke's son) across an Oxford or Cambridge quadrangle, compelling those watching him and the chief-

of-staff to condone the deodorization of war's effluvium even from the uniforms they wore, leaving them simply costumes, stepping rapidly and lightly and elegantly past the chief-of-staff to grasp the knob and shut the door until the latch caught, then turned the knob and opened the door and clicked not to attention but into a rigid brief inclination from the waist as the chief-of-staff passed through it.

Then he closed the door and turned and started back down the room, then in the same instant stopped again and now apparently essayed to efface from it even the rumor of war which had entered at second hand; motionless for that moment at the top of the splendid diminishing vista, there was about him like an aura a quality insouciant solitary and debonair like Harlequin solus on a second- or third-act stage as the curtain goes down or rises, while he stood with his head turned slightly aside, listening. Then he moved, rapid and boneless on his long boneless legs, toward the nearest window. But the old marshal spoke before he had taken the second step, saying quietly in English: 'Leave them open.'

The aide paid no attention whatever. He strode to the window and thrust his whole upper body out as he reached for the outswung casement and began to swing it in. Then he stopped. He said in French, not loud, in a sort of rapt amazement, dispassionate and momentary: 'It looks like a crowd at a race track waiting for the two-sou window to open — if they have such. No, they look like they are watching a burning pawnshop.'

'Leave it open,' the old general said in English. The aide paused again, the casement half closed. He turned his head and said in English too, perfectly, with no accent whatever, not even of Oxford, not even of Beacon Hill:

'Why not have them inside and be done with it? They cant hear what's going on out there.'

This time the old general spoke French. 'They dont want to know,' he said. 'They want only to suffer. Leave it open.'

'Yes sir,' the aide said in French. He flung the casement out again and turned. As he did so one leaf of the double doors in the opposite wall opened. It opened exactly six inches, by no visible means, and stopped. The aide didn't even glance toward it. He came on into the room, saying in that perfect accentless English, 'Dinner, gentlemen,' as both leaves of the door slid back.

The old general rose when the two other generals did but that was all. When the doors closed behind the last aide, he was already seated again. Then he pushed the closed folder further aside and folded the spectacles into their worn case and buttoned the case into one of his upper tunic pockets, and alone now in the vast splendid room from which even the city's tumult and anguish was fading as the afternoon light died from the ceiling, motionless in the chair whose high carved back topped him like the back of a throne, his hands hidden below the rich tremendous table which concealed most of the rest of him too and apparently not only immobile but immobilised beneath the mass and glitter of his braid and stars and buttons, he resembled a boy, a child, crouching amid the golden debris of the tomb not of a knight or bishop ravished in darkness but (perhaps the mummy itself) of a sultan or pharaoh violated by Christians in broad afternoon.

Then the same leaf of the double door opened again, exactly as before, for exactly six inches and no hand to show for it and making only the slightest of sounds, and even then giving the impression that if it had wanted to, it could have made none and that what it did make was only the absolute minimum to be audible at all, opening for that six inches and then moving no more until the old general said: 'Yes, my child.'

Then it began to close, making no sound at all now that sound was no longer necessary, moving on half the distance back to closure with its fellow leaf when it stopped again and with no pause began to open again, still noiseless but quite fast now, so fast that it had opened a good eighteen inches and in another instant who or whatever moved it would of necessity reveal, expose him or itself, before the old general could or did speak. 'No,' he said. The door stopped. It didn't close, it just quit moving at all and seemed to hang like a wheel at balance with

neither top nor bottom, hanging so until the old general spoke again: 'Leave them open.'

Then the door closed. It went all the way to this time, and the old general rose and came around the table and went to the nearest window, walking through the official end of day as across a threshold into night, because as he turned the end of the table the scattered bugles began to sound the three assemblies, and as he crossed the room the clash of boots and rifles came up from the courtyard, and when he reached the window the two guards were already facing one another for the first note of the three retreats and the formal exchange to begin. But the old general didn't seem to be watching it.

He just stood in the window above the thronged motionless Place where the patient mass of people lay against the iron fence; nor did he turn his head when the door opened rapidly this time and the young aide entered, carrying a telephone whose extension flowed behind him across the white rug like the endless tail of a trophy, and went behind the table and with his foot drew up one of the chairs and sat down and set the telephone on the table and lifted the receiver and shot into view the watch on his other wrist and became motionless, the receiver to his ear and his eyes on the watch.

Instead, he just stood there, a little back from the window and a little to one side, holding the curtain slightly aside, visible if anyone in the Place had thought to look up, while the scattered brazen adjurations died into the clash and stamp as the two guards came to at ease and the whole borderline, no longer afternoon yet not quite evening either, lay in unbreathing suspension until the bugles began again, the three this time in measured discordant unison, the three voices in the courtyard barking in unison too yet invincibly alien, the two groups of heavily armed men posturing rigidly at each other like a tribal ritual for religious immolation.

He could not have heard the telephone, since the aide already had the receiver to his ear and merely spoke an acknowledging word into it, then listened a moment and spoke another word and lowered the

receiver and sat waiting too while the bugles chanted and wailed like cocks in the raddled sunset, and died away.

‘He has landed,’ the aide said. ‘He got down from the aeroplane and drew a pistol and called his pilot to attention and shot him through the face. They dont know why.’

‘They are Englishmen,’ the old general said. ‘That will do.’

‘Of course,’ the aide said. ‘I’m surprised they have as little trouble as they do in Continental wars. In any of their wars.’ He said: ‘Yes sir.’ He rose to his feet. ‘I had arranged to have this line open at five points between here and Villeneuve Blanche, so you could keep informed of his progress — —’

‘It is indistinguishable from his destination,’ the old general said without moving. ‘That will do.’ The aide put the receiver back on its hook and took up the telephone and went back around the table, the limber endless line recoiling onto itself across the rug until he flicked the diminishing loop after him through the door, and closed it. At that moment the sunset gun thudded: no sound, but rather a postulation of vacuum, as though back into its blast-vacated womb the regurgitated martial day had poured in one reverberant clap; from just beyond the window came the scream and whisper of the three blocks and the three down-reeling lanyards and the same leaf of the door opened again for that exact six inches, paused, then without any sound opened steadily and unmotived on and still the old general stood while the thrice-alien voices barked, and beneath the three tenderly-borne mystical rags the feet of the three color guards rang the cobbled courtyard and, in measured iron diminution, the cobbled evening itself.

And now the mass beyond the fence itself began to move, flowing back across the Place toward the diverging boulevards, emptying the Place, already fading before it was out of the Place, as though with one long quiet inhalation evening was effacing the whole meek mist of man; now the old general stood above the city which, already immune to man’s enduring, was now even free of his tumult. Or rather, the evening effaced not man from the Place de Ville so much as it effaced the Place

de Ville back into man's enduring anguish and his invincible dust, the city itself not really free of either but simply taller than both.

Because they endured, as only endurance can, firmer than rock, more invincible than folly, longer than grief, the darkling and silent city rising out of the darkling and empty twilight to lower like a tumescent thunderclap, since it was the effigy and the power, rising tier on inviolate tier out of that mazed chiaroscuro like a tremendous beehive whose crown challenged by day the sun and stemmed aside by night the celestial smore.

First and topmost were the three flags and the three supreme generals who served them: a triumvirate consecrated and anointed, a constellation remote as planets in their immutability, powerful as archbishops in their trinity, splendid as cardinals in their retinues and myriad as Brahmins in their blind followers; next were the three thousand lesser generals who were their deacons and priests and the hierarchate of their households, their acolytes and bearers of monstrance and host and censer:

the colonels and majors who were in charge of the portfolios and maps and memoranda, the captains and subalterns who were in charge of the communications and errands which kept the portfolios and maps up to date, and the sergeants and corporals who actually carried the portfolios and mapcases and protected them with their lives and answered the telephone and ran the errands, and the privates who sat at the flickering switchboards at two and three and four o'clock in the morning and rode the motorcycles in the rain and snow and drove the starred and pennoned cars and cooked the food for the generals and colonels and majors and captains and subalterns and made their beds and shaved them and cut their hair and polished their boots and brass; and inferior and nethermost even in that braided inviolate hierarchate:

so crowded was the city with generals of high rank and their splendid and shining staffs that not only were subalterns and captains and even majors and colonels nothing, distinguishable from civilians only because they wore uniforms, there was even a nadir among these:

men who had actually been in, come out of, the battle zone, as high in rank as majors and even colonels sometime, strayed into the glittering and gunless city through nobody knew what bizarre convulsion of that military metabolism which does everything to a man but lose him, which learns nothing and forgets nothing and loses nothing at all whatever and forever — no scrap of paper, no unfinished record or uncompleted memorandum no matter how inconsequential or trivial; a few of them were always there, not many but enough:

platoon or section leaders and company commanders and battalion seconds stained with the filth of front lines who amid that thronged pomp and glitter of stars and crossed batons and braid and brass and scarlet tabs moved diffident and bewildered and ignored with the lost air of oafish peasants smelling of field and stable summoned to the castle, the Great House, for an accounting or a punishment:

a wounded man armless legless or eyeless was stared at with the same aghast distasteful refusive pity and shock and outrage as a man in an epileptic seizure at high noon on a busy downtown corner; then the civilians:

Antipas his friends and their friends, merchant and prince and bishop, administrator clacquer and absolver to ministrare the attempt and applaud the intention and absolve the failed result, and all the nephews and godsons of Tiberius in far Rome and their friends and the friends of the wives and the husbands of their friends come to dine with the generals and sell to the generals' governments the shells and guns and aircraft and beef and shoes for the generals to expend against the enemy, and their secretaries and couriers and chauffeurs who had got military deferment because the brief-cases had to be carried and the motorcars driven, and those who actually dwelled as paterfamiliae among the city's boulevards and avenues and even less base streets already before the city entered its four-year apotheosis and while apotheosis obtained and would still (so they hoped) after apotheosis had ceased and been forgotten — mayor and burgher, doctor attorney director inspector and judge who held no particular letter from Tiberius

in Rome yet whose contacts were still among generals and colonels and not captains and subalterns even if they were restricted to drawing rooms and dining tables, publican and smith and baker and grocer and wright whose contacts were not with captains nor subalterns nor with sergeants and corporals and privates neither since it was their wives who knitted behind the zinc bars and weighed and exchanged sous for the bread and greens and beat the underwear on the river's margin stones; and the women who were not the wives of directors or bakers, who traded not in war but because of war and who as in a sense two thousand nine hundred and ninety-seven of the generals were just one general were all one woman too whether staff colonels stood when they entered rooms or whether they lived on the same floor in modest pensions with Service Corps captains or boiled the soup of communications corporals or, troops themselves, received their partners in what is called love and perhaps even is from a sergeant's roll-call as a soldier receives his iron ration or boots and no need for that partner to put back on his tunic or greatcoat before going on into the lines because the sergeant who checked him into and out of that love which perhaps had never let him take either off, so that as often as not she carried into sleep with her that night a dead man's still warm and living seed; and then and last even anonymity's absolute whose nameless faceless mass cluttered old Jerusalem and old Rome too while from time to time governor and caesar flung them bread or a circus as in the old snowy pantomime the fleeing shepherd casts back to the pursuing wolves fragments of his lunch, a garment, and as a last resort the lamb itself — the laborers who owned today only the spending of what they earned yesterday, the beggars and thieves who did not always understand that what they did was beggary and theft, the lepers beneath city gate and temple door who did not even know they were not whole, who belonged neither to the military nor to the merchants and princes and bishops, who neither derived nor hoped for any benefit from army contracts nor battered by simply existing, breathing coeval with the prodigality and waste concomitant with a nation's mortal agony, that strange and constant few who each time are denied any opportunity whatever to share in the rich carnival of their country's wasting lifeblood, whose luck is out always with no kin nor friends who have kin or friends who have powerful kin or friends or patrons, who

owned nothing in fact save a reversion in endurance without hope of betterment nor any spur of pride — a capacity for endurance which even after four years of existence as tolerated and rightless aliens on their own land and in their own city still enabled them without hope or pride even in the endurance to endure, asking or expecting no more than permission to exercise it, like a sort of immortality.

Out of that enduring and anguished dust it rose, out of the dark Gothic dream, carrying the Gothic dream, arch- and buttress-winged, by knight and bishop, angels and saints and cherubim groined and pilastered upward into soaring spire and pinnacle where goblin and demon, gryphon and gargoyle and hermaphrodite yelped in icy soundless stone against the fading zenith.

The old general dropped the curtain and began to turn from the window.

‘You may close — —’ he said. Then he stopped.

It was as though he didn’t anticipate the sound so much as he simply foreknew it, already motionless when the sound came into the window — an uproar thin and distant across the city, not diffuse now but localised and still curiously localised by source even when it began to move as if it were directed at some small specific object no larger than a man and it was not the yelling which moved but the object of it retreating slowly before the yelling — not turning back to the window but simply arrested beside it. Hooves clattered suddenly in the Place and a body of cavalry crossed it at trot and entered the boulevard leading toward the old eastern gate, already at canter and went on.

Then for a time the sound of the hooves seemed to have dissolved into, been smothered by the yelling, until suddenly the cavalry had ridden as though into the yelling as into a weightless mass of dead leaves, exploding them, flinging and hurling them, to reappear the next second like centaurs in furious soundless motion intact in an intact visible cloud of swirling frantic screams which continued to swirl and burst in that faint frenetic tossing even after the horses must indubitably have been

gone, still swirling and tossing in scattered diminuendo when the other sound began.

It came up beneath them, beginning not as sound at all but rather as light, diffused yet steady from across the plain beyond the city: the voices of men alone, choral almost, growing not in volume but in density as dawn itself increases, filling the low horizon beyond the city's black and soaring bulk with a band not of sound but light while above and into it the thin hysteric nearer screams and cries skittered and spun and were extinguished like sparks into water, still filling the horizon even after the voices themselves had ceased with a resonant humming like a fading sunset and heatless as aurora against which the black tremendous city seemed to rush skyward in one fixed iron roar out of the furious career of earth toward its furious dust, upreared and insensate as an iron ship's prow among the fixed insensate stars.

This time the old general turned from it. The single leaf of the door was now open about three feet and there stood beside it an old old man, not at all at attention but just standing there. He was hardly larger than a child, not stooped or humped and shrunken was not the word either. He was condensed, intact and unshriveled, the long ellipsoid of his life almost home again now, where rosy and blemishless, without memory or grieving flesh, mewling bald and toothless, he would once more possess but three things and would want no more: a stomach, a few surface nerves to seek warmth, a few cells capable of sleep.

He was not a soldier. The very fact that he wore not only a heavy regulation infantryman's buttoned-back greatcoat but a steel helmet and a rifle slung across his back merely made him look less like one. He stood there in spectacles, in the faded coat which had been removed perhaps from its first (or last) owner's corpse — it still bore the darker vacancies where an N.C.O.'s chevrons and a regimental number had been removed, and neatly stitched together on the front of it, just above where the skirts folded back, was the suture where something (a bayonet obviously) had entered it, and within the last twenty-four hours it had been brushed carefully and ironed by hand by someone who could not see very well — and processed through a cleansing and

delousing plant and then issued to him from a quartermaster's salvage depot, and the polished steel helmet and the clean polished rifle which looked as lovingly-tended and unused as a twelfth-century pike from a private museum, which he had never fired and did not know how to fire and would not have fired nor accepted a live cartridge for even if there was a single man in all the French armies who would have given him one.

He had been the old general's batman for more than fifty years (except for the thirteen years beginning on the day more than forty years ago now when the old general, a captain with a brilliant and almost incredible future, had vanished not only from the army lists but from the ken of all the people who up to that time had thought they knew him also, to reappear thirteen years later in the army lists and the world too with the rank of brigadier and none to know whence nor why either although as regards the rank they did know how; his first official act had been to find his old batman, then a clerk in a commissary's office in Saigon, and have him assigned back to his old position and rating); he stood there healthily pink as an infant, ageless and serene in his aura of indomitable fidelity, invincibly hardheaded, incorrigibly opinionated and convinced, undeflectable in advice suggestion and comment and invincibly contemptuous of war and all its ramifications, constant durable faithful and insubordinate and almost invisible within the clutter and jumble of his martial parody so that he resembled an aged servant of some ancient ducal house dressed in ceremonial regalia for the annual commemoration of some old old event, some ancient defeat or glory of the House so long before his time that he had long ago forgotten the meaning and significance if he ever knew it, while the old general crossed the room and went back around the table and sat down again.

Then the old batman turned and went back through the door and reappeared immediately with a tray bearing a single plain soup bowl such as might have come from an N.C.O.'s mess or perhaps from that of troops themselves, and a small stone jug and the end of a loaf and a battered pewter spoon and an immaculate folded damask napkin, and set the tray on the table before the old marshal and, the beautifully

polished rifle gleaming and glinting as he bent and recovered and stood back, watched, fond and domineering and implacable, the old marshal's every move as the old marshal took up the bread and began to crumble it into the bowl.

When he entered St Cyr at seventeen, except for that fragment of his splendid fate which even here he could not escape, he seemed to have brought nothing of the glittering outside world he had left behind him but a locket — a small object of chased worn gold, obviously valuable or anyway venerable, resembling a hunting-case watch and obviously capable of containing two portraits; only capable of containing such since none of his classmates ever saw it open and in fact they only learned he possessed it through the circumstance that one or two of them happened to see it on a chain about his neck like a crucifix in the barracks bathroom one day.

And even that scant knowledge was quickly adumbrated by the significance of that destiny which even these gates were incapable of severing him from — that of being not only the nephew of a Cabinet Minister, but the godson of the board chairman of that gigantic international federation producing munitions which, with a few alterations in the lettering stamped into the head of each cartridge- and shell-case, fitted almost every military rifle and pistol and light field-piece in all the western hemisphere and half the eastern too.

Yet despite this, because of his secluded and guarded childhood, until he entered the Academy the world outside the Faubourg St Germain had scarcely ever seen him, and the world which began at the Paris banlieu had never even heard of him except as a male christian name. He was an orphan, an only child, the last male of his line, who had grown from infancy in the sombre insulate house of his mother's eldest sister in the rue Vaugirard — wife of a Cabinet Minister who was himself a nobody but a man of ruthless and boundless ambition, who had needed only opportunity and got it through his wife's money and connections, and — they were childless — had legally adopted her family by hyphenating its name onto his own, the child growing to the threshold of manhood not only that heir and heir to the power and

wealth of his bachelor godfather, the Comité de Ferrovie chairman who had been his father's closest friend, but before any save his aunt's Faubourg St Germain salons and their servants and his tutors, could connect his face with his splendid background and his fabulous future.

So when he entered the Academy, none of the classmates with whom he was to spend the next four years (and probably the staff and the professors too) had ever seen him before. And he had been there probably twenty-four hours before any of them except one even connected his face with his great name. This one was not a youth too but instead already a man, twenty-two years old, who had entered the Academy two days before and was to stand Number Two to the other's One on the day of graduation, who on that first afternoon began to believe, and for the next fifteen years would continue, that he had seen at once in that seventeen-year-old face the promise of a destiny which would be the restored (this was 1873, two years after the capitulation and formal occupation of Paris) glory and destiny of France too.

As for the rest of them, their first reaction was that of the world outside: surprise and amazement and for the moment downright unbelief, that he, this youth, was here at all. It was not because of his appearance of fragility and indurability; they simply read the face also into that fragility and indurability which, during that first instant when he seemed to be not entering the gates but rather framed immobilely by them, had fixed him as absolutely and irrevocably discrepant to that stone-bastioned iron maw of war's apprenticeship as a figure out of a stained glass cathedral window set by incomprehensible chance into the breached wall of a fort. It was because to them, his was the golden destiny of an hereditary crown prince of paradise.

To them, he was not even a golden youth: he was the golden youth; to them inside the Academy and to all that world stretching from the Paris banlieu to the outermost rim where the word Paris faded, he was not even a Parisian but the Parisian: a millionaire and an aristocrat from birth, an orphan and an only child, not merely heir in his own right to more francs than anyone knew save the lawyers and bankers who guarded and nursed and incremented them, but to the incalculable

weight and influence of the uncle who was the nation's first Cabinet member even though another did bear the title and the precedence, and of that godfather whose name opened doors which (a Comité de Ferrovie chairman's), because of their implications and commitments, or (a bachelor's) of their sex, gender, even that of a Cabinet Minister could not; who had only to reach majority in order to inherit that matchless of all catastrophes: the privilege of exhausting his life — or if necessary, shortening it — by that matchless means of all: being young, male, unmarried, an aristocrat, wealthy, secure by right of birth in Paris: that city which was the world too, since of all cities it was supreme, dreamed after and adored by all men, and not just when she was supreme in her pride but when — as now — she was abased from it. Indeed, never more dreamed after and adored than now, while in abasement; never more so than now because of what, in any other city, would have been abasement.

Never more than now was she, not France's Paris but the world's, the defilement being not only a part of the adored immortality and the immaculateness and therefore necessary to them, but since it was the sort of splendid abasement of which only Paris was capable, being capable of it made her the world's Paris: conquered — or rather, not conquered, since, France's Paris, she was inviolate and immune to the very iron heel beneath which the rest of France (and, since she was the world's Paris too, the rest of the world also) lay supine and abased, — impregnable and immune: the desired, the civilised world's inviolate and forever unchaste, virgin barren and insatiable: the mistress who renewed her barren virginity in the very act of each barren recordless promiscuity, Eve and Lilith both to every man in his youth so fortunate and blessed as to be permitted within her omnivorous insatiable orbit; the victorious invading hun himself, bemazed not so much by his success as his sudden and incredible whereabouts, shuffling his hobbled boots in the perfumed anteroom, dreaming no less than one born to that priceless fate, on whom, herself immortal, she conferred brief immortality's godhead in exchange for no more than his young man's youth.

Yet here he was, just another anonymous one in a class of candidates for professional careers, not merely in the rigid hierarchy of an army but in an army which for the next fifty years would be struggling simply to survive, to emerge from the debacle and debasement of defeat in order not to be feared as a threat but merely respected as a monument. An Anglo-Saxon mind could, and almost any American would, have read into his presence here a young man's dream in which he would see himself, not by some irremediable sacrifice rescuing that adored city Andromeda-like from her brutal rock perhaps, but at least as one of Niobe's or Rachel's children clapping up sword and buckler. But not the Latin, the French mind; to it, that city had nothing to be saved from, who had strangled all man's heart in any one strand of her vagrant Lilith hair; who, barren, had no sons: they were her lovers, and when they went to war, it was for glory to lay before the altar of that unchaste unstale bed.

So only that single classmate ever believed other than that it was not the youth who repudiated paradise but paradise which repudiated its scion and heir; not he but his family which had put him where he was, not disinherited at all but disfranchised, segregated: the family which had compelled him into the army as — for them, their name and position — at best the isolation, quarantine, of whatever was the threat he had become or represented, and at worst the mausoleum of the shame which would be its result, and — for him — a refuge from the consequences. Because he was still who he was, male and solitary and heir; the family would still use the power and the influence, even though they had had to isolate and quarantine his failure to be what he might — should — have been.

In fact, his family had not even merely bought absolution for him. On the contrary, they would gain a sort of blinding redundancy on the great name's original splendor from the golden braid which his hat and sleeves would someday bear. Because even the single classmate believed that all that class (and presently the three ahead of it too) were eating and sleeping with one who would be a general at forty and — given any sort of opportunity for any kind of a military debacle

worthy of the name inside the next thirty years — a marshal of France when the nation buried him.

Only he didn't use the influence, not in the next four years at least. He didn't even need it. He graduated not only at the top of the class but with the highest marks ever made at the Academy; such was his record that not even his classmates, who would not have been offered it no matter what grades they graduated with, were not even jealous of the Quartermaster captaincy which rumor said was waiting for him at the Academy's exit like a hat or a cloak on the arm of a footman at the exit from a theatre or a restaurant.

Yet when he next came into their cognizance — which was immediately on the succeeding day, when the rest of the class had barely begun the regulation two weeks' leave before assuming duty — he didn't have the captaincy.

He simply appeared at Toulon without it, still looking little different from what he had four years ago: not fragile so much as invincibly indurable, with his unblemished pay-book for which he would have no more use than would the beggar for the king's farrier's nail or the king for the beggar's almsbox, and his untried spartan subaltern's kit and his virgin copy of the Manual of War (and the locket of course; his classmates had not forgot that; in fact they even knew now what the two portraits in it would be: the uncle and the godfather: his crucifix indeed, his talisman, his reliquary) but with no more captaincy than the guest or patron leaving the theatre or restaurant by a fire exit or rear alley would have hat or cloak when he reached the boulevard.

But — save that one — they believed they knew the answer to this. It was a gesture, not the youth's but the family's — one of those gestures of modesty and discretion of the potent and powerful who are powerful and potent enough to afford even discretion and modesty; they and he too were all waiting for the same thing: for the arrival of the great suave hearselike midnight-colored limousine bringing not the civilian secretary bearing the captaincy like a ducal coronet on a velvet cushion, but rather the uncle-Minister himself, who would walk the

nephew back to the Quai d'Orsay and in that privacy fling away the meagre African subaltern's kit with the cold outrage of a cardinal plucking a copy of Martin Luther from the robe of a kneeling candidate for consecration.

But that didn't happen either. The car would have come too late. Because, although the draft to which he would have been posted was not to leave for two weeks yet and its personnel had not even begun to arrive at the depot, he was gone after only one night, to Africa, to immediate field service, quietly, almost surreptitiously, with the same simple sublieutenant's rank and the same meagre equipment which the rest of them would have in their turn.

So now those who might have been jealous of him (not only his St Cyr coevals, junior and senior, who had no Minister-uncles and chairman-godfathers, but the career men who did have parents and guardians but not Cabinet members and Comité de Ferrovie chairmen, who hated him not because he had been offered the captaincy but because he had not accepted it) no longer had to be. Because they knew that they would never overtake him now: who would be removed forever more from envy and hence from hatred and fear both, the three of them, nephew godfather and uncle, going fast now, who had been ruthless even to the long tradition of nepotism, the youth hurried to whatever remote frontier where rampant indeed would be the uncle's and the godfather's power and will, with none save an occasional inspector-general to challenge it; no bounds to the family's ambition nor check to that which furthered it.

They would be free, who had bought immunity from envy by simply outlasting it; when he reappeared, say two years from now as a colonel of twenty-three, he would be far beyond the range of any envy and jealousy, let alone theirs.

Or perhaps it wouldn't even take two years, one might be enough, so great was their faith in, not just the uncle's and the godfather's power and will, but in rapacity itself: the compassionate, the omnipotent, the all-seeing and all-pervading; one day the Quai d'Orsay would gently

out-breathe, and against that fierce African foreshore would officially beat a national unanimity loud and long enough not only to obfuscate the mere circumstances of fact, but to distract the mind from all curiosity regarding them; there would remain only the accomplishment and its protagonist juxtaposed without past on a stage without yesterday, like two masques for a pantomime furbished out of the bloodless lumber-room of literature, because by that time he would have escaped not merely from fear and hatred but from the long rigid mosaic of seniority itself, as irrevocably as does a girl from maidenhood; they would — could — even watch him now, heatless peaceful and immune to any remembered anguish — even see him again passing among the windy bunting and the paraded troops in the cheering Oran street in the Governor General's car, sitting on the right hand of the Governor General himself: the hero of twenty-two or -three who had not at all merely saved some whatever scrap or fragment of an empire, but had set again against the zenith the fierce similitude of a bird, be though as it was but one more lost feather of the eagles which seventy years ago had stooped at all Europe and Africa and Asia too, they watching without jealousy now nor even rancor, but rather with amazed admiration not merely for France but for invincible Man; — the hero still girlish-looking even after two years of African sun and solitude, still frail and fragile in the same way that adolescent girls appear incredibly delicate yet at the same time invincibly durable, like wisps of mist or vapor drifting checkless and insensate among the thunderous concrete-bedded mastodons inside a foundry; appearing now only the more durable because of the proven — no: reproven — fragility, at once frail yet at the same time intact and inviolable because of what in another had been not merely ruin but destruction too: like the saint in the old tale, the maiden who without hesitation or argument fee-ed in advance with her maidenhood the ferryman who set her across the stream and into heaven (an Anglo-Saxon fable too, since only an Anglo-Saxon could seriously believe that anything buyable at no more cost than that could really be worth a sainthood); — the hero, the sheeplike acclaiming mass with not one among them all to ask or even wonder what he had done or when or where, nor even against what or whom the victory, as he passed immune even to the uproar, across the cheering city to the quai and

the destroyer (a cruiser maybe, a destroyer certainly) which would carry him to his Paris triumph and then return him, chief of a corps and commander of a department, or perhaps even Governor General himself.

But that didn't happen either. He crossed the Mediterranean and disappeared; when they followed in the order of their postings, they learned that he had gone on from the port base too, after even less than one night, to assigned duty somewhere in the interior, exactly where and on exactly what service, nobody at the port base knew either. But they had expected that.

They believed they even knew where he would be: no place remote merely because it was far away and impossible to reach, like Brazzaville say, where the three pale faces — Commandant-governor, new subaltern, and halfbreed interpreter — would slumber hierarchate and superposed, benignant and inscrutable, irascible and hieroglyph like an American Indian totem pole in ebon Eden innocence; but a place really remote, not even passively isolate but actively and even aggressively private, like an oasis in the desert's heart itself, more blind than cave and circumferenced than safari — a silken tent odorous with burning pastille and murmurous with the dreamy chock of the woodcutter's axe and the pad of watercarriers' feet, where on a lion-robed divan he would await untimed destiny's hasteless accouchement. But they were wrong.

He had left the port base the same day he arrived, for a station as famous in its circles as the Black Hole of Calcutta — a small outpost not only five hundred kilometres from anything resembling a civilised stronghold or even handhold, but sixty and more from its nearest support — a tiny lost compound manned by a sergeant's platoon out of a foreign legion battalion recruited from the gutter-sweepings of all Europe and South America and the Levant: — a well, a flagstaff, a single building of loop-holed clay set in a seared irreconcilable waste of sun and sand which few living men had ever seen, to which troops were sent as punishment or, incorrigibles, for segregation until heat and

monotony on top of their natural and acquired vices divorced them permanently from mankind.

He had gone straight there from the port base three years ago and (the only officer present and, for all practical purposes, the only white man too) had not only served out his own one-year tour of command, but that of his successor too, and was now ten months forward in that of what would have been his successor's successor; in the shock of that first second of knowledge it seemed to them — except that one — that earth itself had faltered, rapacity itself had failed, when regardless of whatever had been the nephew's old defalcation from his family's hope or dream seven or eight or ten years ago, even that uncle and that godfather had been incapable of saving him; this, until that single classmate picked up the whole picture and reversed it.

He was a Norman, son of a Caen doctor whose grandfather, while an art student in Paris, had become the friend and then the fanatic disciple of Camille Desmoulins until Robespierre executed them both, the great-grandson come to Paris to be a painter too but relinquished his dream to the Military Academy for the sake of France as the great-grandfather had done his to the guillotine for the sake of Man: who for all his vast peasant bones had looked at twenty-two even more indurable and brittly-keyed than ever had his obsession at seventeen, — a man with a vast sick flaccid moon of a face and hungry and passionate eyes, who had looked once at that one which to all the world else had been that of any seventeen-year-old youth and relinquished completely to it like a sixty-year-old longtime widower to that of a pubic unconscious girl, who picked up the three figures — uncle nephew and godfather — like so many paper dolls and turned them around and set them down again in the same positions and attitudes but obversed.

Though this would be several years yet, almost ten in fact after that day when they had watched that sunstricken offing behind Oran accept that fragile stride and then close markless behind it like a painted backdrop, not only markless but impenetrable too; and not just a backdrop but Alice's looking-glass rather, through which he had stepped not into unreality but instead carrying unreality with him to

establish it where before there had been none: four years from that day and he was still there at his little lost barren sunglared unfutured outpost: who, whether or not he had ever been an actual threat once, was now an enigma burying its ostrich-head from the staff commission which would drag him back to Paris and at least into vulnerable range of his old sybaritic renunciation; five years from that day and beginning the sixth voluntary tour of that duty which should have fallen to every officer in the Army List (every man everywhere) before it came to him, and (so grave the defalcation from which his family had had to bury him that not only was mere seniority confounded, but the immutable rotation of military leave too) not even the cafes of Casa Blanca or Oran or Algiers, let alone Paris, had ever seen him.

Then six years from that day and he had vanished from Africa too, none knew where except the Norman classmate's passionate and hungry hope, vanished not only from the knowledge of man but from the golden warp and woof of the legend too, leaving behind him only a name in the Army List, still with the old unchanged rank of sublieutenant but with nothing after it: not even dead, not even whereabouts unknown; and even this was another two years, by which time all of them who had feared him once, not only the old St Cyr class but its successors too, were scattered and diffused about the perimeter where the thrice-barred flag flew, until the afternoon when five of them, including the Norman classmate and a staff captain, met by chance in a Quai d'Orsay anteroom, were now sitting about a sidewalk table in front of the most adjacent cafe, the staff officer already four years a captain even though only five years out of St Cyr, descendant of a Napoleonic duchy whose founder or recipient had been a butcher then a republican then an imperialist then a duke, and his son a royalist then a republican again and — still alive and still a duke — then a royalist again: so that three of the four watching and listening to him thought how here was the true golden youth which that other one of eleven years ago whom he was talking about, had refused to be, realising, aware for the first time, not just what the other would have been by now, but — with that family and background and power — what matchless pinnacle he might have reached, since this one had behind him only simple proprietors of banks and manipulators of

shares; the staff captain using the anteroom to serve his captaincy in, and three of the other four having reported to it that morning by mutual coincidence after three years on the Asiatic Station, and the fourth one, the junior, having been assigned to it right out of the gates themselves, the five of them coincidental about the cramped table on the crowded terrace while three of them — including the Norman giant who sat not among them so much as above them, immense and sick and apparently insensate as a boulder save for his flaccid and hungry face and the passionate and hungry eyes — listening while the staff captain, burly blunt brutal heavy-witted and assured and so loud that people at the other tables had begun to turn, talked about the almost-forgotten sublieutenant at his tiny lost post in the depths of Never-Never: who should have been the idol pattern and hope not merely for all career officers but for all golden youth everywhere, as was Bonaparte not merely for all soldiers but for every ancestorless Frenchman qualified first in poverty, who was willing to hold life and conscience cheap enough: wondering (the staff captain) what could have been out there in that desert to hold for six years above a quartermaster captaincy, the sublieutenant-command of a stinking well enclosed by eight palm trees and inhabited by sixteen un-nationed cutthroats; what out there that Oran or Casa Blanca or even Paris couldn't match — what paradise within some camel-odored tent — what limbs old and weary and cunning with ancient pleasures that Montmartre bagnios (and even St Germain boudoirs) knew nothing of, yet so ephemeral, so incipient with satiation and at last actual revulsion, that after only six years the sultan-master must vacate it — —

'Vacate it?' one of the three said. 'You mean he's gone? He actually left that place at last?'

'Not quite gone,' the staff captain said. 'Not until his relief arrives. After all, he accepted an oath to France, even he, even if he does hold from the Comité de Ferrovie. He failed. He lost a camel.'

There was a man too, even if he had spent most of his five enlistments in clink—' telling it: the soldier spawned by a Marseilles cesspool to be the ultimate and fatal nemesis of a woman a girl whom eighteen years

ago he had corrupted and diseased and then betrayed into prostitution and at last murdered and had spent the eighteen years since as member of lost frontier garrisons such as this because this — the rim of oblivion — was the one place on earth where he could continue to walk and breathe and be fed and clothed: whose one fear now was that he might do something which would prompt someone to make him a corporal or a sergeant and so compel him back to some post within a day's walk of any community large enough to possess one civilian policeman, where not he would see a strange face but where some strange face would see him; he — the soldier, the trooper, had vanished along with the camel, obviously into the hands of an adjacent band or tribe of the Riffs who were the excuse for the garrison being where it was and the reason for its being armed.

And though the man was a piece of government property too, even if not a very valuable one, that camel was a camel. Yet the commander of the post had apparently made no effort whatever to recover them; whereupon they — his listeners — might say that the commander's only failure in the matter had been that he had prevented a local war.

Which was wrong. He had not stopped a war: he had simply failed to start one. Which was not his purpose there, not why he had been tested and found competent for that command: not to fail to start wars, but to preserve government property. So he had failed, and yesterday his official request to be relieved had forwarded to the Adjutant-General's desk — —

The Norman was already on his feet while the staff captain was still talking; at least four of them knew how he heard of the command's vacancy but not even these knew how he managed to get the succession to it — a man without family or influence or money at all, with nothing in fact to front or fend for him in his profession save the dubious capacity of his vast ill body to endure, and the rating of Two in his St Cyr class; already, because of the rating, a sublieutenant of engineers and, because of the rating and his sick body both, in addition to the fact that he had just completed a tour of field service in Indo

China, from now on secure for a Home Establishment post probably in Paris itself, until retirement age overtook him.

Yet within an hour he was in the office of the Quartermaster General himself, using, having deliberately used the Number Two rating for the first (and probably the last) time in his life for the chance to stand facing the desk which he could not know or dream that someday he himself would sit behind, himself in his turn sole unchallengeable arbiter over the whereabouts and maintenance of every man wearing a French uniform.

'You? an Engineer?' the man facing him said.

'So was he:' — the voice eager, serene, not importunate so much as simply not to be denied: 'That's why, you see. Remember, I was Number Two to him in our class. When he leaves it, it belongs to me.'

'Then you remember this,' the other said, tapping the medical survey on the desk before him. 'This is why you are not going back to Saigon after your leave, why you are going on Home Establishment from now on. As for that, you wouldn't live a year out there in that — —'

'You were about to say "hole",' he said. 'Isn't that its purpose: for the honorable disposal of that self-proven to have no place in the Establishment of Man?'

'Man?'

'France, then,' he said; and thirteen days later looked from the back of the camel across the glaring markless intervening miles, as a thousand years afterward the first pilgrim must have looked at the barely distinguishable midden which the native guide assured him had been, not Golgotha of course but Gethsemane, at the flagstaff and the sun-blached walls in a nest of ragged and meagre palms; at sunset he stood inside them, rigid and immolant while the horn chanted and there descended on him in his turn that fringy raveling of empire's carapace; at first dark, the two camels rumbling and gurgling just beyond earshot above the waiting orderly, he stood at the gate beside the man who had been One to his Two in the old class six years ago, the two of them barely visible to one another, leaving only the voice serene and tender, passionate for suffering, sick with hope:

'I know.'

They thought you were hiding. They were afraid of you at first. Then they decided you were just a fool who insisted on becoming a marshal of France at fifty instead of forty-five, using the power and influence at twenty-one and -two and -three and -four and -five to evade at forty-five the baton you would have nothing left to fend off at fifty; the power and the influence to escape the power and influence, the world to escape the world; to free yourself of flesh without having to die, without having to lose the awareness that you were free of flesh: not to escape from it and you could not be immune to it nor did you want to be: only to be free of it, to be conscious always that you were merely at armistice with it at the price of constant and unflagging vigilance, because without that consciousness, flesh would not exist for you to be free of it and so there would be nothing anywhere for you to be free of.

Oh yes, I knew: the English poet Byron's dream or wish or cry that all living women had but one single mouth for his kiss: the supreme golden youth who encompassed all flesh by putting, still virgin to it, all flesh away. But I knew better: who sought a desert not as Simeon did but as Anthony, using Mithridates and Heliogabalus not merely to acquire a roosting-place for contempt and scorn, but for fee to the cave where the lion itself lay down: who — the ones who feared you once — believed that they had seen ambition and greed themselves default before one seventeen-year-old child — had seen the whole vast hitherto invulnerable hegemony of ruthlessness and rapacity reveal itself unfearsome and hollow when even that uncle and that godfather could not cope with your crime or defalcation, as though so poor and thin was the ambition and greed to which even that uncle and that godfather were dedicant, that voracity itself had repudiated them who had been its primest pillars and its supremest crown and glory.

'Which could not be. That was not merely incredible, it was unbearable. Rapacity does not fail, else man must deny he breathes. Not rapacity: its whole vast glorious history repudiates that. It does not, cannot, must not fail. Not just one family in one nation privileged to soar cometlike into splendid zenith through and because of it, not just one nation among all the nations selected as heir to that vast splendid heritage;

not just France, but all governments and nations which ever rose and endured long enough to leave their mark as such, had sprung from it and in and upon and by means of it became forever fixed in the amazement of man's present and the glory of his past; civilization itself is its password and Christianity its masterpiece, Chartres and the Sistine Chapel, the pyramids and the rock-wombed powder-magazines under the Gates of Hercules its altars and monuments, Michelangelo and Phidias and Newton and Ericsson and Archimedes and Krupp its priests and popes and bishops; the long deathless roster of its glory — Caesar and the Barcas and the two Macedonians, our own Bonaparte and the great Russian and the giants who strode nimbused in red hair like fire across the Aurora Borealis, and all the lesser nameless who were not heroes but, glorious in anonymity, at least served the destiny of heroes — the generals and admirals, the corporals and ratings of glory, the batmen and orderlies of renown, and the chairmen of boards and the presidents of federations, the doctors and lawyers and educators and churchmen who after nineteen centuries have rescued the son of heaven from oblivion and translated him from mere meek heir to earth to chairman of its board of trade; and those who did not even have names and designations to be anonymous from — the hands and the backs which carved and sweated aloft the stone blocks and painted the ceilings and invented the printing presses and grooved the barrels, down to the last indestructible voice which asked nothing but the right to speak of hope in Roman lion-pits and murmur the name of God from the Indian-anticked pyres in Canadian forests — stretching immutable and enduring further back than man's simple remembering recorded it.

Not rapacity: it does not fail; suppose Mithridates' and Heliogabalus' heir had used his heritage in order to escape his inheritees: Mithridates and Heliogabalus were Heliogabalus and Mithridates still and that scurry from Oran was still only a mouse's, since one of Grimalkin's parents was patience too and that whole St Cyr-Toulon-Africa business merely flight, as when the maiden flees the ravisher not toward sanctuary but privacy, and just enough of it to make the victory memorable and its trophy a prize. Not rapacity, which like poverty, takes care of its own. Because it endures, not even because it is rapacity but because man is man, enduring and immortal; enduring not

because he is immortal but immortal because he endures: and so with rapacity, which immortal man never fails since it is in and from rapacity that he gets, holds, his immortality — the vast, the all-being, the compassionate, which says to him only, Believe in Me; though ye doubt seventy times seven, ye need only believe again.

‘But I know. I was there. I saw: that day eleven years ago: paused in that iron maw of war, not fragile actually: just fixed and immune in fragility like the figure in the stained window; not through any Alice’s mirror into unreality, but just immune, moral opposed and invincibly apostate; if there still existed for you even in dream the splendid and glittering boulevards and faubourgs of your old cradle and your lost estate, it was merely as dream forever inextricable from your past and forever interdict from your destiny; inextricable the dream, yourself and the dream annealed, yourself interdict and free from that pain and that longing forever more; inextricable from that youth who is this man now, as is this little lost barren spot here inextricable forever from that destiny, — never that uncle’s and that godfather’s private donjon but rather the figment of that consecration’s necessary tarryment for this time, this space, somewhere in time and space, — not the youth: the fragility; not to test the youth but to test the fragility: to measure and gauge and test; never an intractable and perverse child who fled, never an uncle and godfather coercing and compelling by attrition, starvation, but all of them, the trinity still intact because it had never been otherwise, testing as one the fragility’s capacity for the destiny and the consecration, using the desert for yardstick as when in the old days the cadet would spend that last night of his maiden squiredom on his knees on the lonely chapel’s stone floor before the cushion bearing the virgin spurs of his tomorrow’s knighthood.

‘That’s what they think: not that man failed rapacity, but that man failed man; his own frail flesh and blood lets him down: the blood still runs but cooling now, into the second phase of his brief and furious span when the filling of his belly is better than glory or a throne, then on into the third and last one where anticipation of the latrine is more moving than even the spread of a girl’s hair on the pillow. That’s what

they believe is to be your destiny and end. And ten years from now they will still know no better.

Because your time, your moment, will not have come even in ten years. It will take longer than that. It will need a new time, a new age, a new century which doesn't even remember our old passions and failures; a new century from that one when man discovered God for a second and then lost Him, postulated by a new digit in the record of his hope and need; it will be more than twenty years even before the day, the moment when you will appear again, without past, as if you had never been.

Because by that time you will no longer exist for them except in mutual remembering: a lay figure not only without life but integrated as myth only in mutual confederation: the property of no one of them because you will be the property of all, possessing unity and integration only when your custodians happen to meet from the ends of the earth (which is the French empire) and match fragments and make you whole for a moment; you will lie weightless across the face of France from Mozambique to Miquelon, and Devil's Island to the Treaty Ports like a barely remembered odor, a fading word, a habit, a legend — an effigy cut by a jigsaw for souvenirs, becoming whole only over a cafe or mess table in Brazzaville or Saigon or Cayenne or Tananarive, dovetailed for a moment or an hour as when boys match and exchange the pictures of the actresses and generals and presidents from the packs of cigarettes; not even the shadow of a breathing man but instead something synthetic and contrived like the composite one of the homely domestic objects contrived by the nurse's hand between the nursery lamp and the wall for the child to take into slumber with it: a balloon: a duck: Punchinello: la gloire: the head of a cat — a shadow cast backward on that arid curtain behind Oran beyond which you disappeared, not by the sun but by that quartermaster captain's commission the refusal of which first struck them with terror and rage, until after twenty years not you nor even your two powerful kinsmen will be real, but only that old fading parchment, and it real only because your refusal of it incorporated it onto your legend — the shopworn and now harmless vellum vainly dangling its fading seals and ribbons beside the rent

beyond which you vanished in the oldest of comedies: the youth fleeing, the forsaken aging yet indomitable betrothed pursuing, abject, constant, undis-mayable, undeflectable, terrifying not in threat but in fidelity, until at last those who feared you once will have watched you pass out of enmity to amazement: to contempt: to unreality, and at last out of your race and kind altogether, into the dusty lumber room of literature.

‘But not I,’ he said, looming, visible only as a gaunt gigantic shape, sick, furious, murmuring: ‘Because I know better. I knew that first moment eleven years ago when I looked and saw you standing there in that gate. I knew. I wont be here to see it of course (my last medical survey, you know: that marvelous and amazing thing, a human life, spanned and then — what’s the Boer word? — outspanned by one dry and dusty page of doctor’s jargon.

They are wrong of course. I mean in the Quai d’Orsay. They didn’t want to post me here at all, since in doing it they would in their opinion simply double the work of whatever clerk would not only have to relieve me but discharge me from the army list also and then post my successor before my tour here was even completed) and at first I grieved a little because once I thought that you might need me. I mean, need me other than for my simple seniority of hope in the condition of man. — That’s right,’ he said, though the other had made no sound: ‘Laugh, at that dream, that vain hope too.

Because you will not need anybody wherever it is you are going now in order to return from it. Mind you, I dont ask where. I was about to say “to find whom or what you will need to be your instrument” but I refrained from that in time too. So at least you dont need to laugh at that, since I know that you are going wherever it is you are going, in order to return from it when the time, the moment comes, in the shape of man’s living hope. May I embrace you?’

‘Must you?’ the other said. Then: ‘Should you?’ Then quickly: ‘Of course,’ but before he moved the taller one had stooped, loomed downward from his vast and depthless height and took the smaller

man's hand and kissed it and released it and, erect again, took the other's face between his two hands almost like a parent, a mother, and held it for a moment, then released it.

'With Christ in God,' he said. 'Go now.'

'So I'm to save France,' the other said.

'France,' he said, not even brusquely, not even contemptuously. 'You will save man. Farewell.'

And he was right for almost two years. That is, he was almost wrong. He did not remember the camel or litter — whatever it had been — at all; only a moment — probably, without doubt, in the base hospital in Oran — a face, a voice, probably a doctor's, marvelling not that he had failed to keep consciousness over that fierce and empty distance, but that he had kept life at all; then not much again, only motion: the Mediterranean: then he knew peacefully, not with joy or exultation: just peacefully, almost unattentively, unable yet (nor did that matter either) to raise his own head to look, that this was France, Europe, home.

Then he could move his head and lift his hands too even if the vast peasant Norman frame did seem still to lie outside its transparent envelope; he said, weakly but aloud, with a sort of peaceful amazement, weakly, but at least aloud: 'I had forgot what winter looks like,' lying half-propped all day now on the glassed veranda above Zermatt watching the Matterhorn, watching not the ordered and nameless progression of days fade but rather the lesser earth, since always the great peak carried into the next one as in a gigantic hand, one clutch of light.

But that was only the body and it was mending too; soon it would be as strong, not perhaps as it ever was nor even as it ever would but rather as it would ever need to be, since they were the same, — only the body: not the memory because it had forgotten nothing, not even for one second the face which had been the junior that afternoon two years ago around the table on the Quai d'Orsay terrace, come all the way from Paris just to see him — —

‘Not Paris,’ the other said. ‘Verdun. We’re building fortifications there now which they will never pass again.’

‘They?’ he said peacefully. ‘It’s too late now.’

‘Too late? Nonsense. The fever and the fury are still there, I grant you. It seems to be born in them; they probably can’t help it. But it will be decades, perhaps a whole generation, before it reaches convulsion again.’

‘Not for us,’ he said. ‘Too late for them.’

‘Oh,’ the other said, who did not see at all; he knew that. Then the other said: ‘I brought this. It came out just after you left for Africa. You probably haven’t seen it yet.’ It was a page from the Gazette, yellowed, faded, almost three years old now, the other holding it spread while he looked at the rigid epitaph:

To Lieutenant-Colonel:

Sous-Lieutenant (and the name)

March 29, 1885

Relieved and Retired:

Lieutenant-Colonel (and the name)

March 29, 1885

‘He never came back to Paris,’ the other said. ‘Not even to France — —’

‘No,’ he said peacefully.

‘So you were probably the last to see him. — You did see him, didn’t you?’

‘Yes,’ he said.

‘Then maybe you even know where he went. Where he is.’

‘Yes,’ he said peacefully.

‘You mean he told you himself? I don’t believe it.’

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘it is nonsense, isn’t it? Not for me to claim that he told me, but that he should have to have told anyone. He’s in a Tibetan lamasery.’

‘A what?’

‘Yes. The east, the morning, which even the dead, even the pagan dead, lie facing, so that the first faint fall of shadow of the risen son of it can break their sleep.’ Now he could feel the other watching him and there was something in the face but he would not bother about it yet, and when the other spoke there was something in the voice too but he would not bother about that yet either.

‘They gave him a ribbon too,’ the other said. ‘It was the red one. He not only saved your post and garrison for you, he probably saved Africa. He prevented a war. Of course, they had to get rid of him afterward — ask for his resignation.’

‘All right,’ he said peacefully. Then he said, ‘What?’

‘The camel and the soldier he lost: the murderer — dont you remember? Surely, if he told you where he was going, he told you about that too.’ Now the other was looking at him, watching him. ‘There was a woman in it — not his, of course. You mean he didn’t tell you?’

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘He told me.’

‘Then of course I wont have to.’

‘Yes,’ he said again. ‘He told me.’

‘She was a Riff, a native, belonging to the village, tribe, settlement, whatever it was, which was the reason for the post and the garrison being there; you must have seen that anyway while you were there, — a slave, valuable: nobody’s wife or daughter or favorite it appeared, or anyway was reported: just simply merchantable. She died too, like the other one back in Marseilles eighteen years ago; the man’s power over women was indeed a fatal one.

Whereupon the next morning the camel — it was his — the commandant's — private mount: possibly a pet if you can — want to — pet a camel — and its groom, driver, mahout, whatever they are, had vanished and two dawns later the groom returned, on foot and thoroughly terrified, with the ultimatum from the chief, headman to the commandant, giving the commandant until the next dawn to send him the man (there were three involved but the chief would be content with the principal one) responsible for the woman's death and her spoliation as merchandise; else the chief and his men would invest the post and obliterate it and its garrison, which they could probably have done, if not immediately, certainly in the almost twelve months before the next inspector-general would turn up to look at it.

So the commandant asked for a volunteer to slip away that night, before the ultimatum went into effect at dawn and the place was surrounded, and go to the next post and bring back a relieving force. — 'I beg your pardon?' But he had not spoken, rigid, himself the fragile one now, who was yet only barely erect from death.

'I thought you said "chose one",' the other said. 'He didn't need to choose. Because this was the man's one chance. He could have escaped at any time — hoarded food and water and stolen away on almost any night during the whole eighteen years, possibly reached the coast and perhaps even France. But where would he go then? who could have escaped only from Africa: never from himself, from the old sentence, from which all that saved him was his uniform, and that only while he wore it in the light of day. But now he could go. He was not even escaping, he was not even entering mere amnesty but absolution; from now on, the whole edifice of France would be his sponsor and his purification, even though he got back with the relief too late, because he not only had the commandant's word, but a signed paper also to avouch his deed and command all men by these presents to make good its reward.

'So the commandant didn't need to choose him: only accept him; and at sunset the garrison paraded and the man stepped out of ranks; and now the commandant should have taken the decoration from his own

breast and pinned it on that of the sacrifice, except that the commandant had not got the ribbon yet (oh yes, I've thought of the locket too: to remove the chain from his own neck and cast it about the condemned's, but that is reserved for some finer, more durable instant in that rocket's course than the abolishment of a blackguard or the preservation of a flyspeck). So without doubt that would be the moment when he gave him the signed paper setting him free of his past, the man not knowing that that first step out of ranks had already set him free of whatever else breathing could do to him more; and the man saluted and about faced and marched out the gate into darkness. Into death. And I thought for a moment you had spoken again, were about to ask how, if the ultimatum would not take effect until dawn tomorrow, did the Riff chief discover that a scout would attempt to get out that night, and so have an ambush ready at the mouth of the wadi through which the scout would pass. Yes, how: the man himself probably asking that in the one last choked cry or scream remaining to him of indictment and repudiation, because he didn't know about the ribbon then either.

'Into darkness: night: the wadi. Into hell; even Hugo didn't think of that. Because from the looks of what remained of him, it took him most of that night to die; the sentry above the gate challenged at dawn the next morning, then the camel (not the plump missing one of course but an old mangy one, because the dead woman was valuable; and besides, one camel looks just like another in a Transport Office return) cantered in with the body tied on it, stripped of clothing and most of the flesh too. So the siege, the investment, was lifted; the enemy retired and that sunset the commandant buried its lone casualty (except for the better camel: and after all, the woman had been valuable) with a bugle and a firing-squad, and you relieved him and he departed, a lieutenant-colonel with the rosette in a Himalayan lamasery, leaving nothing behind him but that little corner of France which he saved, to be mausoleum and cenotaph of the man whom he tricked into saving it. A man,' the other said, watching him. 'A human being.'

'A murderer,' he said. 'A murderer twice — —'
'Spawned into murder by a French cesspool.'

‘But repudiated by all the world’s cesspools: nationless twice, without fatherland twice since he had forfeited life, worldless twice since he was already forfeit to death, belonging to no man since he was not even his own — —’

‘But a man,’ the other said.

‘ — speaking, thinking in French only because, nationless, he must of necessity use that tongue which of all is international; wearing that French uniform because inside a French uniform was the only place on earth where a murderer could be safe from his murder — —’

‘But bearing it, bearing at least without complaint his rewardless share of the vast glorious burden of empire where few other men dared or could; even behaving himself in his fashion: nothing in his record but a little drunkenness, a little thievery — —’

‘Until now,’ he cried. ‘ — only thievery, buggery, sodomy — until now.’

‘ — which were his sole defense against the corporal’s or sergeant’s warrant which would have been his death sentence. Asking nothing of none until his blind and valueless fate tangled with that of him who had already exhausted the Comité de Ferrovie and the French Army, and was now reduced to rooting about among the hogwallows and cesspools of the human race itself; who, already forfeit of life, owed nothing to France save the uniform he wore and the rifle he oiled and tended, who in return for filling on demand a man’s width of space in a platoon front, asked and expected nothing save the right to hope to die in a barracks-bed still unregenerate, yet who had been tricked into giving his life, without even the chance to prepare himself, for that country which would guillotine him within fifteen minutes of putting its civilian hand on him.’

‘He was a man,’ the other said. ‘Even dead, angels — justice itself — still fought for him. You were away at the time, so you have not heard this either. It was at the signing of the citation for that rosette. While bearing the parchment across to the desk for the Grand Commander’s signature, the clerk (in private life an amateur Alpinist) stumbled and

overturned a litre bottle of ink onto it, blotting out not merely the recipient's name but the entire record of the achievement. So they produced a new parchment.

It reached the desk, but even as the Grand Commander reached his hand for the pen, a draft of air came from nowhere (if you know General Martel, you know that any room he stops in long enough to remove his hat, must be hermetically sealed) — came from nowhere and wafted the parchment twenty metres across the room and into the fire, where it vanished pouf! like celluloid. But to what avail, between them armed only with the flaming swords of clumsy mythology, and the Comité de Ferrovie snoring with revolving pistols and the rattling belch of Maxim guns? So now he has gone to a Tibetan lamasery. To repent.'

'To wait!' he cried. 'To prepare!'

'Yes,' the other said. 'That's what they call it too: Der Tag. So maybe I'd better hurry on back to Verdun and get on with our preparing and waiting too, since we are warned now that we shall need them both.'

Oh, I know. I was not there that day to see his face in that gate as you saw it. But at least I inherited it. We all did: not just that class, but all the others which came after yours and his. And at least we know now what we inherited: only fear, not anguish. A prophet discharged us of that by giving us a warning of it. So only the respect for the other need remain.'

'A murderer,' he said.

'But a man,' the other said, and was gone, leaving him not quite erect from death perhaps but at least with his back once more toward it; erect enough to be aware of the steadily diminishing numbers of his seniority: that diminishing reservoir on which the bark of his career floated, to be aground soon at this rate.

In fact, that day would come when he would know that it was aground, revokable never more by any tide or wave or flood: who had believed all his life, if not in his durability, at least in the vast frame which the indurability clothed; whereupon in the next moment he would know that, aground or not, it — he — would never be abandoned; that that edifice which had accepted the gaunt frame's dedication would see always that there was at least one number between him and zero, even if it were only his own; so that the day came, Der Tag, the enemy poured, not through Verdun because his caller of that morning twenty-five years back had been right and they would not pass there, but through Flanders so fast and so far that a desperate rag-tag met them in Paris taxi-cabs and held them for the necessary desperate moment, and still behind his glassed veranda he heard how that Number One to his Two in the old St Cyr class was now Number One among all the desperate and allied peoples in Western Europe, and he said, Even from here I will have seen the beginning of it, then two months later he stood across a desk from the face which he had not seen in thirty years, which he had seen the first time in the St Cyr gate forty years ago and had been marked forever with it, looking not much older, still calm, composed, the body, the shoulders beneath it still frail and delicate yet doomed — no: not doomed: potent — to bear the fearful burden of man's anguish and terror and at last his hope, looking at him for a moment, then saying: 'The appointment of Quartermaster General is within my gift.

Will you accept the office?' and he said to himself, with a sort of peaceful vindication not even of great and desperate hope now but of simple reason, logic: I will even see the end, accomplishment of it too. I will even be present there.

But that was a quarter of a century away yet, as the caller of ten minutes ago had prophesied; now he lay beneath his own peaceful tears while the nurse bent over him with a folded cloth, saying, weak but indomitable still, invincibly obdurate, incurable and doomed with hope, using the two 'he's' indiscriminately, as though the nurse too knew:

‘Yes, he was a man. But he was young then, not much more than a child. These tears are not anguish: only grief.’

The room was now lighted candelabrum, sconce and girandole. The windows were closed now, curtain and casement; the room seemed now to hang insulate as a diving bell above the city’s murmur where the people had already begun to gather again in the Place below.

The jug and bowl were gone and the old general sat once more flanked by his two confreres behind the bare table, though among them now was a fourth figure as incongruous and paradoxical as a magpie in a bowl of goldfish — a bearded civilian sitting between the old generalissimo and the American in that black-and-white costume which to the Anglo-Saxon is the formal regalia for eating or seduction or other diversions of the dark, and to the Continental European and South American the rigid uniform for partitioning other governments or overthrowing his own.

The young aide stood facing them. He said rapid and glib in French: ‘The prisoners are here. The motorcar from Villeneuve Blanche will arrive at twenty-two hours. The woman about the spoon.’

‘Spoon?’ the old general said. ‘Did we take her spoon? Return it.’

‘No sir,’ the aide said. ‘Not this time. The three strange women. The foreigners. His Honor the Mayor’s business.’ For a moment the old general sat perfectly still. But there was nothing in his voice.

‘They stole the spoon?’

Nor was there anything in the aide’s either: rigid, inflectionless: ‘She threw the spoon at them. It disappeared. She has witnesses.’

‘Who saw one of them pick up the spoon and hide it,’ the old general said.

The aide stood rigid, looking at nothing. ‘She threw a basket too. It was full of food. The same one caught it in the air without spilling it.’

‘I see,’ the old general said. ‘Does she come here to protest a miracle, or merely affirm one?’

‘Yes sir,’ the aide said. ‘Do you want the witnesses too?’

‘Let the strangers wait,’ the old general said. ‘Just the plaintiff.’

‘Yes sir,’ the aide said. He went out again by the smaller door at the end of the room. Though when in the next second almost he reappeared, he had not had time to get out of anyone’s way. He returned not swept but tumbled, not in but rather on because he rose, loomed not half a head nor even a whole head but half a human being above a tight clump of shawled or kerchiefed women led by one of a short broad strong fifty-ish who stopped just at the edge of the white rug as if it were water and gave the room one rapid comprehensive look, then another rapid one at the three old men behind the table, then moved again unerringly toward the old generalissimo, leading her group, save the aide who had at last extricated himself beside the door, firmly out onto the blanched surface of the rug, saying in a strong immediate voice:

‘That’s right.

Dont hope to conceal yourself — not behind a mayor anyway; there are too many of you for that. Once I would have said that the curse of this country is its forest of mayoral sashes and swords; I know better now. And after four years of this harassment, even the children can tell a general on sight — provided you can ever see one when you need him.’

‘A third miracle then,’ the old general said. ‘Since your first postulate is proved by the confounding of your second.’

‘Miracle?’ the woman said. ‘Bah. The miracle is that we have anything left after four years of being over-run by foreigners. And now, even Americans. Has France come to that sorry pass where you must not only rob us of our kitchen utensils but even import Americans in order to fight your battles? War, war, war. Dont you ever get tired of it?’

‘Indubitably, Madame,’ the old general said. ‘Your spoon — —’

‘It vanished. Dont ask me where. Ask them. Or better: have some of your corporals and sergeants search them. It’s true there are two of

them beneath whose garments even a sergeant would not want to fumble. But none of them would object.'

'No,' the old general said. 'More should not be demanded of corporals and sergeants beyond the simple hazard of military life.' He spoke the aide's name.

'Sir,' the aide said.

'Go to the scene. Find the gentlewoman's spoon and return it to her.'

'I, sir?' the aide cried.

'Take a full company. On your way out, let the prisoners come in. — No: first, the three officers. They are here?'

'Yes sir,' the aide said.

'Good,' the old general said. He turned toward his two confreres, started to speak, paused, then spoke to the civilian; when he did so, the civilian began to rise from his seat with a sort of startled and diffuse alacrity. 'That should take care of the spoon,' the old general said. 'I believe the rest of your problem was the complaint of the three strange women that they have no place to sleep tonight.'

'That; and — —' the mayor said.

'Yes,' the old general said. 'I will see them presently. Meanwhile, will you take care of finding quarters for them, or shall — —'

'But certainly, General,' the mayor said.

'Thank you. Then, goodnight.' He turned to the woman. 'And to you also. And in peace; your spoon will be restored.' Now it was the mayor who was swept, carried — the magpie this time in a flock of pigeons or perhaps hens or maybe geese — back toward the door which the aide held open, and through it, the aide still looking back at the old general with his expression of shocked disbelief.

'A spoon,' the aide said. 'A company. I've never commanded one man, let alone a company of them. And even if I could, knew how, how can I find that spoon?'

‘Of course you will find it,’ the old general said. ‘That will be the fourth miracle. Now, the three officers. But first take the three strange ladies to your office and ask them to wait there for me.’

‘Yes sir,’ the aide said. He went out and closed the door. It opened again; three men entered: a British colonel, a French major, an American captain, the two juniors flanking the colonel rigidly down the rug and to rigid attention facing the table while the colonel saluted.

‘Gentlemen,’ the old general said. ‘This is not a parade. It is not even an inquiry: merely an identification. — Chairs, please,’ he said without turning his head to the galaxy of staff behind him. ‘Then the prisoners.’ Three of the aides brought chairs around; now that end of the room resembled one end of an amphitheatre or a section of an American bleachers, the three generals and the three newcomers sitting in the beginning of a semi-circle against the bank of aides and staff as one of the aides who had fetched the chairs went on to the smaller door and opened it and stood aside.

And now they could smell the men before they even entered — that thin strong ineradicable stink of front lines: of foul mud and burnt cordite and tobacco and ammonia and human filth. Then the thirteen men entered, led by the sergeant with his slung rifle and closed by another armed private, bare-headed, unshaven, alien, stained still with battle, bringing with them still another compounding of the smell — wariness, alertness, just a little of fear too but mostly just watchfulness, deploying a little clumsily as the sergeant spoke two rapid commands in French and halted them into line. The old general turned to the British colonel. ‘Colonel?’ he said.

‘Yes sir,’ the colonel said immediately. ‘The corporal.’ The old general turned to the American.

‘Captain?’ he said.

‘Yes sir,’ the American said. ‘That’s him. Colonel Beale’s right — I mean, he cant be right — —’ But the old general was already speaking to the sergeant.

'Let the corporal remain,' he said. 'Take the others back to the ante-room and wait there.' The sergeant wheeled and barked, but the corporal had already paced once out of ranks, to stand not quite at attention but almost, while the other twelve wheeled into file, the armed private now leading and the sergeant last, up the room to the door, not through it yet but to it, because the head of the file faltered and fell back on itself for a moment and then gave way as the old general's personal aide entered and passed them and then himself gave way aside until the file had passed him, the sergeant following last and drawing the door after him, leaving the aide once more solus before it, boneless, tall, baffled still and incredulous still but not outraged now: merely disorganised.

The British colonel said:

'Sir.' But the old general was looking at the aide at the door. He said in French:

'My child?'

'The three women,' the aide said. 'In my office now. While we have our hands on them, why dont — —'

'Oh yes,' the old general said. 'Your authority for detached duty. Tell the Chief-of-Staff to let it be a reconnaissance, of — say — four hours. That should be enough.' He turned to the British colonel. 'Certainly, Colonel,' he said.

The colonel rose quickly, staring at the corporal — the high calm composed, not wary but merely watchful, mountain face looking, courteous and merely watchful, back at him. 'Boggan,' the colonel said. 'Dont you remember me? Lieutenant Beale?' But still the face only looked at him, courteous, interrogatory, not baffled: just blank, just waiting. 'We thought you were dead,' the colonel said. 'I — — saw you — —'

'I did more than that,' the American captain said. 'I buried him.' The old general raised one hand slightly at the captain. He said to the Briton: 'Yes, Colonel?'

'It was at Mons, four years ago. I was a subaltern. This man was in my platoon that afternoon when they ... caught us. He went down before a lance. I... saw the point come through his back before the shaft broke. The next two horses galloped over him. On him. I saw that too, afterward. I mean, just for a second or two, how his face looked after the last horse, before I — I mean, what had used to be his face — —' He said, still staring at the corporal, his voice if anything even more urgent because of what its owner had now to cope with: 'Boggan!' But still the corporal only looked at him, courteous, attentive, quite blank. Then he turned and said to the old general in French: 'I'm sorry. I understand only French.'

'I know that,' the old general said also in French. He said in English to the Briton: 'Then this is not the man.'

'It cant be, sir,' the colonel said. 'I saw the head of that lance. I saw his face after the horses — — Besides, I — I saw — —' He stopped and sat there, martial and glittering in his red tabs and badges of rank and the chain-wisps symbolising the mail in which the regiment had fought at Crecy and Agincourt seven and eight hundred years ago, with his face above them like death itself.

'Tell me,' the old general said gently. 'You saw what? You saw him again later, afterward? Perhaps I know already — the ghosts of your ancient English bowmen there at Mons? — in leather jerkins and hose and crossbows, and he among them in khaki and a steel helmet and an Enfield rifle? Was that what you saw?'

'Yes sir,' the colonel said. Then he sat erect; he said quite loudly: 'Yes sir.'

'But if this could be the same man,' the old general said.

'I'm sorry, sir,' the colonel said.

'You wont say either way: that he is or is not that man?'

'I'm sorry, sir,' the colonel said. 'I've got to believe in something.'

'Even if only death?'

'I'm sorry, sir,' the colonel said. The old general turned to the American. 'Captain?' he said.

'That puts us all in a fix, doesn't it?' the American captain said. 'All three of us; I don't know who's worst off. Because I didn't just see him dead: I buried him, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. His name is — was — no, it can't be because I'm looking at him — wasn't Brzonymi. At least it wasn't last year. It was — damn it — I'm sorry sir — is Brzewski. He's from one of the coal towns back of Pittsburgh. I was the one that buried him. I mean, I commanded the burial party, read the service: you know. We were National Guard; you probably don't know what that means — —'

'I know,' the old general said.

'Sir?' the captain said.

'I know what you mean,' the old general said. 'Continue.'

'Yes sir. — Civilians, organised our own company ourselves, to go out and die for dear old Rutgers — that sort of thing; elected our officers, notified the government who was to get what commission and then got hold of the Articles of War and tried to memorise as much of it as we could before the commission came back.

So when the flu hit us, we were in the transport coming over last October, and when the first one died — it was Brzewski — we found out that none of us had got far enough in the manual to find out how to bury a dead soldier except me — I was a sha — second lieutenant then — and I just happened to have found out by accident the last night before we left because a girl had stood me up and I thought I knew why.

I mean, who it was, who the guy was. And you know how it is: you think of all the things to do to get even, make her sorry; you lying dead right there where she's got to step over you to pass, and it's too late now and boy, won't that fix her — —'

'Yes,' the old general said. 'I know.'

'Sir?' the captain said.

'I know that too,' the old general said.

'Of course you do — remember, anyway,' the captain said. 'Nobody's really that old, I don't care how — —' going that far before he managed to stop himself. 'I'm sorry, sir,' he said.

'Don't be,' the old general said. 'Continue. So you buried him.'

'So that night just by chance or curiosity or maybe it was personal interest, I was reading up on what somebody would have to do to get rid of me afterward and make Uncle Sam's books balance, and so when Br — —' he paused and glanced rapidly at the corporal, but only for a second, even less than that: barely a falter even: ' — the first one died, I was elected, to certify personally with the M.O. that the body was a dead body and sign the certificate and drill the firing squad and then give the command to dump him overboard.

Though by the time we got to Brest two weeks later, all the rest of them had had plenty of practice at it. So you see where that leaves us. I mean, him; he's the one in the fix: if I buried him in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean in October last year, then Colonel Beale couldn't have seen him killed at Mons in 1914. And if Colonel Beale saw him killed in 1914, he can't be standing here now waiting for you to shoot him tomorrow — —' He stopped completely. He said quickly: 'I'm sorry, sir. I didn't — —'

'Yes,' the old general said in his courteous and bland and inflectionless voice. 'Then Colonel Beale was wrong.'

'No sir,' the captain said.

'Then you wish to retract your statement that this is the man whose death you personally certified and whose body you saw sink into the Atlantic Ocean?'

'No sir,' the captain said.

'So you believe Colonel Beale.'

'If he says so, sir.'

'That's not quite an answer. Do you believe him?' He watched the captain. The captain looked as steadily back at him. Then the captain said:

'And that I certified him dead and buried him.' He said to the corporal, even in a sort of French: 'So you came back. I'm glad to see you and I hope you had a nice trip,' and looked back at the old general again, as steadily as he, as courteously and as firm, a good moment this time until the old general said in French:

'You speak my tongue also.'

'Thank you, sir,' the captain answered him. 'No other Frenchman ever called it that.'

'Do not demean yourself. You speak it well. What is your name?'

'Middleton, sir.'

'You have ... twenty-five years, perhaps?'

'Twenty-four, sir.'

'Twenty-four. Some day you are going to be a very dangerous man, if you are not already so:' and said to the corporal: 'Thank you, my child. You may return to your squad,' and spoke a name over his shoulder without turning his head, though the aide had already come around the table as the corporal about-faced, the aide flanking him back to the door and through it and out, the American captain turning his head back in time to meet for another second yet the quiet and inscrutable eyes, the courteous, bland, almost gentle voice: 'Because his name is Brzonyi here too.'

He sat back in the chair; again he looked like a masquerading child beneath the illusion of crushing and glittering weight of his blue-and-scarlet and gold and brass and leather, until even the five who were still sitting had the appearance of standing too, surrounding and enclosing him. He said in English: 'I must leave you presently, for a short time. But Major Blum speaks English.'

It is not as good as yours of course, nor as good as Captain Middleton's French, but it should do; one of our allies — Colonel Beale — saw him

slain, and the other — Captain Middleton — buried him, so all that remains for us is to witness to his resurrection, and none more competent for that than Major Blum, who was graduated from the Academy into the regiment in 1913 and so was in it before and has been in it ever since the day when this ubiquitous corporal reached it.

So the only question is—' he paused a second; it was as though he had even glanced about at them without even moving: the delicate and fragile body, the delicate face beautiful, serene, and terrifying ' — who knew him first: Colonel Beale at Mons in August 1914, or Major Blum at Chalons in that same month — before of course Captain Middleton buried him at sea in 1917.

But that is merely academic: identity — if there is such — has been established (indeed, it was never disputed): there remains only recapitulation, and Major Blum will do that.' He stood up; except for the two generals, the others rose quickly too and although he said rapidly: 'No no, sit down, sit down,' the three newcomers continued to stand. He turned to the French major. 'Colonel Beale has his ghostly bowmen in Belgium; at least we can match that with our archangels on the Aisne.

Surely you can match that for us — the tremendous aerial shapes patrolling our front, and each time they are thickest, heaviest, densest, most archangelic, our corporal is there too perhaps, pacing with them — the usual night firing going on, just enough to make a sane man keep his head below the trench and be glad he has a trench to keep his head below, yet this corporal is outside the trench, between the parapet and the wire, pacing along as peacefully as a monk in his cloister while the great bright formless shapes pace the dark air beside and above him? or perhaps not even pacing but simply leaning on the wire contemplating that desolation like a farmer his turnip-field? Come, Major.'

'My imagination wears only a majority, sir,' the major said. 'It cannot compete with yours.'

‘Nonsense,’ the old general said. ‘The crime — if any — is already established. If any? established? we did not even need to establish it; he did not even merely accept it in advance: he abrogated it. All that remains now is to find extenuation — pity, if we can persuade him to accept pity. Come, tell them.’

‘There was the girl,’ the major said.

‘Yes,’ the old general said. ‘The wedding and the wine.’

‘No sir,’ the major said. ‘Not quite now. You see, I can — how do you say? — *démentir* — *contredire* — say against — —’

‘Contradict,’ the American captain said.

‘Thank you,’ the major said. ‘ — contradict you here; my majority can cope with simple regimental gossip.’

‘Tell them,’ the old general said. So the major did, though that was after the old general had left the room — a little girl, a child going blind in one of the Aisne towns for lack of an operation which a certain famous Paris surgeon could perform, the corporal levying upon the troops of two nearby divisions, a franc here and two francs there until the surgeon’s fee was raised and the child sent to him.

And an old man; he had a wife, daughter and grandson and a little farm in 1914 but waited too long to evacuate it, unable until too late to tear himself away from what he possessed; his daughter and grandson vanished in the confusion which ended at the First Marne battle, his old wife died of exposure on the roadside, the old man returning alone to the village when it was freed again and he could, where, an idiot, name forgotten, grief and all forgotten, only moaning a little, drooling, grubbing for food in the refuse of army kitchens, sleeping in ditches and hedgerows on the spot of earth which he had owned once, until the corporal used one of his leaves to hunt out a remote kinsman of the old man’s in a distant Midi village and levied again on the regiment for enough to send him there.

‘And now,’ the major said. He turned to the American captain. ‘How to say, *touché*?’

‘You’re out,’ the captain said. ‘And I wish he was still present so I could hear you say it to him.’

‘Bah,’ the major said. ‘He is a Frenchman. It is only a boche marshal that no man can speak to. And now, you’re out, from him to me. Because now the wedding and the wine—’ and told that — a village behind Montfaucon and only this past winter because they were American troops; they had just been paid, a dice game was going on, the floor littered with franc notes and half the American company crowded around them when the French corporal entered and without a word began to gather up the scattered money; for a time a true international incident was in the making until the corporal finally managed to communicate, explain, what it was about: a wedding: one of the young American soldiers, and a girl, an orphan refugee from somewhere beyond Rheims, who was now a sort of slavey in the local estaminet; she and the young American had — had —

‘The rest of his company would say he had knocked her up,’ the American captain said. ‘But we know what you mean. Go on.’ So the major did: the matter ending with the entire company not only attending the wedding but adopting it, taking charge of it, buying up all the wine in the village for the supper and inviting the whole countryside; adopting the marriage too: endowing the bride with a wedding gift sufficient to set up as a lady in her own right, to wait in her own single rented room until — if — her husband returned from his next tour in the lines.

But that would be after the old general had left the room; now the three newcomers made way for him as he came around the table and paused and said:

‘Tell them. Tell them how he got the medal too. What we seek now is not even extenuation, not even pity, but mercy — if there is such — if he will accept that either,’ and turned and went on toward the small door: at which moment it opened and the aide who had taken the prisoner out stood at attention beside it for the old general to pass, then followed and closed the door behind them. ‘Yes?’ the old general said.

‘They are in De Montigny’s office,’ the aide said. ‘The youngest one, the girl, is a Frenchwoman. One of the older ones is the wife of a Frenchman, a farmer — —’

‘I know,’ the old general said. ‘Where is the farm?’

‘Was, sir,’ the aide said. ‘It was near a village called Vienne-la-pucelle, north of St Mihiel. That country was all evacuated in 1914. On Monday morning Vienne-la-pucelle was under the enemy’s front line.’

‘Then she and her husband dont know whether they have a farm or not,’ the old general said.

‘No sir,’ the aide said.

‘Ah,’ the old general said. Then he said again: ‘Yes?’

‘The motorcar from Villeneuve Blanche has just entered the courtyard.’

‘Good,’ the old general said. ‘My compliments to our guest, and conduct him to my study. Serve his dinner there, and request his permission to receive us in one hour.’

The aide’s office had been contrived three years ago by carpenters out of — or into — a corner of what had been a ballroom and then a courtroom. The aide saw it each twenty-four hours and obviously even entered it at least once during those periods because on a rack in the corner hung his hat and topcoat and a very fine beautifully-furled London umbrella, in juxtaposition to that hat and that coat as bizarre and paradox as a domino or a fan, until you realised that it could quite well have owed its presence there to the same thing which the only other two objects of any note in the room did: two bronzes which sat at either end of the otherwise completely bare desk — a delicate and furious horse poised weightless and epicene on one leg, and a savage and slumbrous head not cast, molded but cut by hand out of the amalgam by Gaudier-Brzeska.

Otherwise the cubicle was empty save for a wooden bench against the wall facing the desk. When the old general entered, the three women were sitting on it, the two older ones on the outside and the younger

one between them; as he crossed to the desk without yet looking at them, the younger one gave a quick, almost convulsive start, as though to get up, until one of the others stopped her with one hand. Then they sat again, immobile, watching him while he went around the desk and sat down behind the two bronzes and looked at them — the harsh high mountain face which might have been a twin of the corporal's except for the difference in age, the serene and peaceful one which showed no age at all or perhaps all ages, and between them the strained and anguished one of the girl.

Then, as though on a signal, as if she had waited for him to complete the social amenity of sitting too, the peaceful one — she held on her lap a wicker basket neatly covered by an immaculate tucked-in cloth — spoke.

'I'm glad to see you, anyway,' she said. 'You look so exactly like what you are.'

'Marya,' the other older one said.

'Dont be ashamed,' the first one said. 'You cant help it. You should be pleased, because so many dont.' She was already rising. The other said again:

'Marya,' and even raised her hand again, but the first one came on to the desk, carrying the basket, beginning to raise her other hand as though to approach the basket with it as she reached the desk, then extending the hand until it lay on the desk. It now held a long-handled iron spoon.

'That nice young man,' she said. 'At least you should be ashamed of that. Sending him out to tramp about the city at night with all those soldiers.'

'The fresh air will be good for him,' the old general said. 'He doesn't get much of it in here.'

'You could have told him.'

'I never said you had it. I only said I believed you could produce it when it was needed.'

'Here it is.' She released the spoon and laid that hand lightly on the one which held the tucked-in and undisturbed basket. Then immediately and peacefully but without haste she smiled at him, serene and uncritical. 'You really cant help it, can you? You really cant.'

'Marya,' the woman on the bench said. Again immediately but without haste, the smile went away. It was not replaced by anything: it just went away, leaving the face unchanged, uncritical, serene.

'Yes, Sister,' she said. She turned and went back to the bench where the other woman had risen now; again the girl had made that convulsive start to rise too; this time the tall woman's hard thin peasant hand was gripping her shoulder, holding her down.

'This is — —' the old general said.

'His wife,' the tall woman said harshly. 'Who did you expect it to be?' 'Ah yes,' the old general said, looking at the girl; he said, in that gentle inflectionless voice: 'Marseilles? Toulon perhaps?' then named the street, the district, pronouncing the street name which was its by-word. The woman started to answer but the old general raised his hand at her. 'Let her answer,' he said, then to the girl: 'My child? A little louder.'

'Yes sir,' the girl said.

'Oh yes,' the woman said. 'A whore. How else do you think she got here — got the papers to come this far, to this place, except to serve France also?'

'But his wife too,' the old general said.

'His wife now,' the woman corrected. 'Accept that, whether you believe it or not.'

'I do both,' the old general said. 'Accept that from me too.' Then she moved, released the girl's shoulder and came toward the desk, almost to it in fact, then stopping as though at the exact spot from which her voice would be only a murmur to the two still on the bench when she spoke:

'Do you want to send them out first?'

'Why?' the old general said. 'So you are Magda.'

'Yes,' she said. 'Not Marthe: Magda. I wasn't Marthe until after I had a brother and had to cross half of Europe to face thirty years later the French general who would hold the refusal of his life. Not gift: refusal; and even that's wrong: the taking back of it.' She stood, tall, still, looking down at him. 'So you even knew us. I was about to say "Not remembered us, because you never saw us".'

But maybe that's wrong too and you did see us then. If you did, you would remember us even if I wasn't but nine then and Marya eleven, because as soon as I saw your face tonight I knew that it would never need to flee, hide from, fear or dread or grieve at having to remember anything it ever looked at. Marya might fail to see that maybe — Marya now too, since she also had to come all the way to France to watch the refusal of her half-brother's life, even if she doesn't need to fear or dread or grieve at having to remember either — but not I. Maybe Marya is why you remember us if you saw us then: because she was eleven then and in our country girls at eleven are not girls anymore, but women.

But I wont say that, not because of the insult that would be even to our mother, let alone to you — our mother who had something in her — I dont mean her face — which did not belong in that village — that village? in all our mountains, all that country — while what you must have had — had? have — in you is something which all the earth had better beware and dread and be afraid of. The insult would have been to evil itself. I dont mean just that evil.

I mean Evil, as if there was a purity in it, a severity, a jealousy like in God — a strictness of untruth incapable of compromise or second-best or substitute. A purpose, an aim in it, as though not just our mother but you neither could help yourselves; and not just you but our — mine and Marya's — father too: not two of you but three of you doing not what you would but what you must.

That people, men and women, don't choose evil and accept it and enter it, but evil chooses the men and women by test and trial, proves and tests them and then accepts them forever until the time comes when they are consumed and empty and at last fail evil because they no longer have anything that evil can want or use; then it destroys them. So it wasn't just you, a stranger happened by accident into a country so far away and hard to get to that whole generations of us are born and live and die in it without even knowing or wondering or caring what might be on the other side of our mountains or even if the earth extends there.

Not just a man come there by chance, having already whatever he would need to charm, trance, bewitch a weak and vulnerable woman, then finding a woman who was not only weak and vulnerable but beautiful too — oh yes, beautiful; if that was what you had had to plead, her beauty and your love, my face would have been the first to forgive you, since the jealousy would be not yours but hers — just to destroy her home, her husband's faith, her children's peace, and at last her life, — to drive her husband to repudiate her just to leave her children fatherless, then her to die in childbirth in a cow-byre behind a roadside inn just to leave them orphans, then at last have the right — privilege — duty, whatever you want to call it — to condemn that last and only male child to death just that the name which she betrayed shall be no more. Because that's not enough. It's nowhere near enough.

It must be something much bigger than that, much more splendid, much more terrible: not our father gone all that long distance from our valley to seek a beautiful face to be the mother of his name's succession, then finding instead the fatal and calamitous one which would end it; not you blundered there by chance, but sent there to meet that beautiful and fatal face; not her so weak in pride and virtue, but rather doomed by that face from them; — not the three of you compelled there just to efface a name from man's history, because who on earth outside our valley ever heard that name, or cares? but instead to create a son for one of you to condemn to death as though to save the earth, save the world, save man's history, save mankind.'

She brought both hands up in front of her and let them rest there, the fist of one lying in the other palm. 'Of course you knew us. My folly was in even thinking I would need to bring you proof. So now I don't know just what to do with it, when to use it, like a knife capable of only one stroke or a pistol with just one bullet, which I can't afford to risk too soon and dare not wait too late. Maybe you even know the rest of it already too; I remember how wrong I was that you would not know who we are. Maybe your face is telling me now that you already know the rest of it, end of it, even if you weren't there, had served your destiny — or anyway hers — and gone away.'

'Tell me then,' the old general said.

' — if I must? Is that it? the ribbons and stars and braid that turned forty years of spears and bullets, yet not one of them to stop a woman's tongue? — Or try to tell you, that is, because I don't know; I was only nine then, I only saw and remembered; Marya too, even if she was eleven, because even then she already didn't need to dread or grieve for anything just because her face had looked at it. Not that we needed to look at this because it had been there all our lives, most of the valley's too.

It was already ours, our — the valley's — pride (with a little awe in it) as another one might have a peak or glacier or waterfall — that speck, that blank white wall or dome or tower — whatever it was — which was first in all our valley that the sun touched and the last that lost it, still holding light long after the gulch we crouched in had lost what little it had ever snared. Yet it wasn't high either; high wasn't the right word either; you couldn't — we didn't — measure where it was that way. It was just higher than any of our men, even herdsman and hunters, ever went. Not higher than they could but than they did, dared; no shrine or holy place because we knew them too and even the kind of men that lived in, haunted, served them; mountain men too before they were priests because we knew their fathers and our fathers had known their grandfathers, so they would be priests only afterward with what was left.

Instead, it was an eyrie like where eagles nested, where people — men — came as if through the air itself (you), leaving no more trace of coming or arriving (yes, you) or departing (oh yes, you) than eagles would (oh yes, you too; if Marya and I ever saw you then, we did not remember it, nor when you saw us if you ever did except for our mother's telling; I almost said If our father himself ever saw you in the flesh because of course he did, you would have seen to that yourself: a gentleman honorable in gentleman fashion and brave too since it would have taken courage, our father having already lost too much for that little else to be dear spending), come there not to tremble on their knees on stone floors, but to think. To think: not that dreamy hoping and wishing and believing (but mainly just waiting) that we would think is thinking, but some fierce and rigid concentration that at any time — tomorrow, today, next moment, this one — will change the shape of the earth.

'Not high, just high enough to stand between us and the sky like a way-station to heaven, so no wonder when we died the rest of us believed the soul hadn't stopped there maybe but at least had paused to surrender half the coupon; no wonder when our mother was gone for that week in the spring, Marya and I knew where she had gone to; not dead: we had buried nothing, so she wouldn't have to pass it.

But certainly there, since where else could she be — that face which had never belonged to, had no place in, our valley from the beginning, not to mention what we, even her children, had felt, sensed, behind that face which had no place in our mountains, among our kind of people anywhere; where else but there? not to think, to be accepted into that awesome and tremendous condition, because even her face and what was behind it could not match that, but at least to breathe, bathe in the lambence of that furious meditation.

The wonder was that she came back. Not the valley's wonder but mine and Marya's too. Because we were children, we didn't know: we only watched and saw and knitted, knotted, tried to, what simple threads we had of implication; to us it was simply that the face, that something

— whatever it was — in her that had never been ours and our father's anyway even if it had been wife to one and mother to the others, had at last simply done what from the beginning it had been doomed to do.

Yet she came back. She didn't change forever that house, home, life and all, she had already done that by leaving as she did and coming back to it only compounded what she had already left there; she had been alien and a passing guest always anyhow, she couldn't possibly come back any more so. So Marya and I, even children, knew even more than the valley did that it couldn't last. The child, another child, a new brother or sister or whichever it would be next winter, meant nothing to us.

Even if we were children, we knew about babies; who so young in our country as not to know, since in our country, our hard and unpiteous mountains, people used, had to use, needed, required, had nothing else to use, children as people in lands savage with dangerous animals used guns and bullets: to defend, preserve themselves, endure; we didn't see, as our father did, that child not the brand of sin but incontrovertible proof of something which otherwise he might have schooled himself to bear.

He didn't turn her out of his house. Don't think that. It was us — she. He was just going to leave himself, put home, past, all the dreams and hopes that people call home; the rage, the impotence, the outraged masculinity — oh yes, heartbreak too: why not? — all behind him. It was she who cut that cord and left, swollen belly and all because it could not be long now, it was already winter and maybe we couldn't compute gestation but we had seen enough swelled female bellies to guess approximations.

'So we left. It was at night, after dark. He had left right after supper, we didn't know where, and now I would say, maybe just hunting dark and solitude and space and silence for what wasn't there or anywhere else for him either. And I know now why the direction we — she — took was west too, and where the money came from that we had for a while too until we couldn't pay for riding anymore and had to walk, because

she — we — took nothing from that house except the clothes we wore and our shawls and a little food which Marya carried in that same basket yonder.

And I could say here also: “But you were safe; it was not enough” except that I dont, not to you who have in you what all heaven too might do well to blench at. So we walked then, and still westward: who might not have learned to think in that place during that week but at least she had memorised something of geography. Then there was no more food except what we could beg, but it would not be long now even if we had had money left to ride with too.

Then that night, it was already winter when we left home and now it was Christmas, the eve before; and now I dont remember if we were driven from the inn itself or just turned away or maybe perhaps it was our mother still who would cut even that cord too with man. I remember only the straw, the dark stable and the cold, nor whether it was Marya or I who ran back through the snow to beat on the closed kitchen door until someone came — only the light at last, the lantern, the strange and alien faces crowding downward above us, then the blood and lymph and wet: I, a child of nine and an eleven-year-old idiot sister trying to hide into what privacy we could that outraged betrayed abandon and forsaken nakedness while her closed hand fumbled at mine and she tried to speak, the hand still gripping, holding onto it even after I had given my word, my promise, my oath — —’

She stood looking down at him, the closed fist of the one hand lying in the palm of the other. ‘Not for you: for him. No, that’s wrong; it was already for you, for this moment, that night thirty-five years ago when she first gripped it into my hand and tried to speak; I must have known even at nine that I would cross half of Europe to bring it to you some day, just as I must have known even at nine how vain the bringing it would be.

A fate, a doom communicated, imposed on me by the mere touch of it against my flesh, before I even opened it to look inside and divine, surmise who the face belonged to, even before I — we — found the

purse, the money which was to bring us here. Oh you were generous; nobody denied that. Because how could you have known that the money which was to have bought you immunity from the consequence of your youthful folly — a dowry if the child should be a girl, a tilted scrap of pasture and a flock to graze it if a boy, and a wife for him in time and so even the same grandchildren to immobilise your folly's partner forever beyond the geographic range of your vulnerability — would instead accomplish the exact opposite by paying our passage to Beirut and — with what was left over — becoming what was its original intent: a dowry?

'Because we could have stayed there, in our mountains, our country, among people whose kind we knew and whose kind knew us. We could have stayed right there at the inn, the village where we were because people are really kind, they really are capable of pity and compassion for the weak and orphaned and helpless because it is pity and compassion and they are weak and helpless and orphaned and people though of course you cannot, dare not believe that: who dare believe only that people are to be bought and used empty and then thrown away. In fact we did stay there for almost ten years.

We worked of course, at the inn — in the kitchen, with the milk cows; in — for — the village too; being witless Marya had a way with simple unarmoured creatures like cows and geese which were content to be simple cows and geese instead of lions and stags: but then so would we have worked back home, which was where for all their kindness, perhaps because of their kindness, they tried at first to persuade us to return.

'But not I. The doom might have been his, but the curse to hurry it, consummate it, at least was mine; I was the one now wearing the secret talisman, token, not to remember, cherish: no tender memento of devoted troth nor plighted desertion either: but lying instead against my flesh beneath my dress like a brand a fever a coal a goad driving me (I was his mother now; the doom that moved him would have to move me first; already at nine and ten and eleven I was the mother of two — the infant brother and the idiot sister two years my senior too — until

at Beirut I found a father for them both) toward the day the hour the moment the instant when with his same blood he would discharge the one and expiate the other.

Yes, the doom was his but at least I was its handmaiden: to bring you this, I must bring you the reason for its need too; to bring you this I must bring with me into your orbit the very object which would constitute and make imperative that need. Worse: by bringing it into your orbit I myself created the need which the token, the last desperate cast remaining to me, would be incapable of discharging.

'A curse and doom which in time was to corrupt the very kindly circumambience which harbored us because already you are trying to ask how in the world we managed to have to pass through Asia Minor in order to reach Western Europe, and I will tell you. It was not us. It was the village.

No: it was all of us together: a confederation. France: a word a name a designation significant yet foundationless like the ones for grace or Tuesday or quarantine, esoteric and infrequent not just to us but to the ignorant and kindly people among whom we had found orphaned and homeless haven: who had barely heard of France either and did not care until our advent among them: whereupon it was as though they had established a living rapport with it through, by means of us who did not even know where it was except West and that we — I, dragging the other two with me — must go there: until presently we were known to the whole village — valley, district — as the little Franchini: the three who were going to — bound for — dedicated for — France as others might be for some distant and irrevocable state or condition like a nunnery or the top of Mount Everest — not heaven; everybody believes he will be on his way there just as soon as he finds time to really concentrate on it — but some peculiar and individual esoteric place to which no one really wants to go save in idle speculation yet which reflects a certain communal glory on the place which was host to the departure and witnessed the preparations.

‘Because we had never heard of Beirut at all; it required older and more worldly than us to have known that Beirut even was, let alone that there was a French colony there, a garrison, official — in effect France, the nearest France to where we were. That is, the real France might have been nearer but that was overland and therefore expensive and we were poor; what we had to travel on was time and leisure. There was the purse of course which probably wouldn’t have taken all three of us to France the quickest route anyway, even if there had not been a better reason than that to save the purse.

So we spent what we had the most of, travelling as only the very poor or the very rich can; only they travel rapidly who are too rich to have time and too poor to have leisure: by sea, spending only enough of the purse to set the three of us in the nearest available official authentic fringe of France and still leave as much as possible over. Because I was nineteen now and in me we had now something even more mutually compoundable than the purse, of which we needed only enough to set me, not empty-handed, into the quickest marriage-range of the French husband who would be the passport of all three of us into the country where our brother’s destiny waited for him.

‘That was why Beirut. I had never heard of it but why should I have doubted when the village didn’t? any more that in its or God’s good time Beirut would appear at the end of the ship, the voyage than that the French husband would be waiting for me there. Which he was. I had never even heard his name before and I don’t even recall all the circumstances of our meeting: only that it was not long and he was — is — a good man and has been a good husband to me and brother to Marya and father to him of whom I am apparently to have all the anguishes save the initial one of having borne him, and I have tried — will still try — to be a good wife to him.

He was a soldier in the garrison. That is, doing his military service because he was bred a farmer and his time was just up; oh yes, it was that close; one more day and I would have missed him, which should have told me, warned me that what faced us was doom, not destiny, since only destiny is clumsy, inefficient, procrastinative, while doom

never is. But I didn't know that then. I knew only that we must reach France, which we did: the farm — I won't even bother to tell you where it is — —'

'I know where it is,' the old general said. She had been immobile all the while so she couldn't become stiller — a tall figure breathing so quietly that she didn't seem to be doing that either, clasp the closed fist into the other motionless palm, looking down at him.

'So we have already come to that,' she said. 'Of course you have learned where the farm is; how else could you know what spot to hesitate to give me permission to bury the flesh and bone of the flesh and bone you loved once — lusted after once at least — in? You even know already in advance the request I'll finally demand of you, since we both know now that this—' without uncrossing her hands she moved the closed one slightly then returned it to the other palm ' — will be in vain.'

'Yes,' the old general said. 'I know that too.'

'And granted in advance too, since by that time he'll be no more a threat? No no, don't answer yet; let me believe a little longer that I could never have believed that anyone, not even you, could any more control the flux of the bowels of natural compassion than he could his physical ones. Where was I? oh yes, the farm. In that ship to Beirut I had heard them talk of landfall and harbor; by Beirut I even knew what haven meant and now at last in France I believed that we — he — had found them. Home: who had never known one before: four walls and a hearth to come back to at the end of day because they were mutually his walls and hearth; work to be done not for pay or the privilege of sleeping in a hay-loft or left-over food at a kitchen door but because the finished task was mutually his too to choose between its neglect and its completion.

Because already he was not just a natural farmer: he was a good one, as though that half of his blood and background and heritage which was peasant had slept in untimed suspension until his destiny found

and matched him with land, earth good and broad and rich and deep enough, so that by the end of the second year he was my husband's heir and would still be co-heir even if we had children of our own. And not just home but fatherland too; he was already a French subject; in ten more years he would be a French citizen too, a citizen of France, a Frenchman to all effect and purpose, and his very nameless origin would be as though it had never been.

'So now at last we — I, he — could forget you. No, not that: we couldn't forget you because you were why we were where we were, had at last found the harbor, haven where as they said in the ship, we could drop anchor and make fast and secure. Besides, he couldn't very well forget you because he had never heard of you yet. It was rather that I forgave you. Now at last I could stop seeking you, harrying, dragging two other people over the earth in order to find and face and reproach, compel, whatever it would be; remember, I was a child still even if I had been the mother of two since I was nine years old.

It was as though it had been I in my ignorance who had misread you and owed you the apology and the shame where you in your wisdom had known all the time the one restitution for which he was fitted; that, because of that ineradicable peasant other half of his origin, any other relationship, juxtaposition, with you would have brought him only disaster, perhaps even to the point of destroying him.

Oh yes, I believed now that you already knew this history, not only where we were but how and what we were doing there, hoped — yes, believed — there, that you had deliberately arranged and planned it to be even if you may not quite have anticipated that I should establish it intact on your own doorstep — haven and harbor and home not just for him but us too, Marya and me too: all four of us, not just yourself and the one you had begot but the other two whose origin you had had no part in, all branded forever more into one irremediable kinship by that one same passion which had created three of our lives and altered forever the course or anyway the pattern of your own; the four of us together even obliterating that passion's irremediable past in which you had not participated: in your own get you dispossessed your

predecessor; in Marya and me you effaced even his seniority; and in Marya, her first child, you even affirmed to yourself the trophy of its virginity.

More: in the two of us — not Marya this time because, unrational and witless, she was incapable of threatening you and, herself innocent of harm, was herself invulnerable even to you since the witless know only loss and absence: never bereavement — but he and I were not only your absolution but even your expiation too, as though in your design's first completion you had even foreseen this moment here now and had decreed already to me in proxy the last right and privilege of your dead abandoned paramour: to vaunt her virtue for constancy at the same time she heaped on you the reproach of her fall.

'So I didn't even need to forgive you either: we were all four one now in that workable mutual neither compassionate nor uncompassionate armistice and none of us neither needed or had the time to waste forgiving or reproaching one another because we would all be busy enough in supporting, balancing that condition of your expiation and our — his — reparations whose instrument you had been. Nor had I ever seen your face to remember either and now I began to believe that I never would, never would have to: that even when — if — the moment ever came when you would have, could no longer evade having, to face one another he alone would be enough and he would not require my ratification or support.

No, it was the past itself which I had forgiven, could at last forgive now: swapped all that bitter and outraged impotence for the home — harbor — haven which was within the range of his capacities, which he was fitted and equipped for — more: would have chosen himself if he had had the choice — whose instrument you in your anonymity had been whether you actually intended for it to be in France or not, where, since he was free of you, the two others of us could be also. Then his military class was called. He went almost eagerly — not that he could have done else as I know, but then so do you know that there are ways and still ways of accepting what you have no choice of refusing.

But he went almost eagerly and served his tour — I almost said time but didn't I just say he went almost eagerly? — and came back home and then I believed that he was free of you — that you and he also had struck a balance, an armistice in liability and threat; he was a French citizen and a Frenchman now not only legally but morally too since the date of his birth proved his right to the one and he had just doffed the uniform in which he himself had proved his right and worthiness to the other; not only was he free of you but each of you were free now of the other: you absolved of the liability since, having given him life, you had now created for him security and dignity in which to end it and so you owed him nothing; he absolved of threat since you no longer harmed him now and so you didn't need to fear him anymore.

'Yes, free of you at last, or so I thought. Or you were free of him that is, since he was the one who had better be afraid. If any minuscule of danger still remained for you in him, he himself would eradicate it now by the surest means of all: marriage, a wife and family; so many economic responsibilities to bear and discharge that he would have no time over to dream of his moral rights; a family, children: that strongest and most indissoluble bond of all to anneal him harmless forever more into his present and commit him irrevocable to his future and insulate him for good and always from the griefs and anguishes (he had none of course in the sense I mean because he still had never heard of you) of his past.

But it seems that I was wrong. Wrong always in regard to you, wrong every time in what I thought you thought or felt or feared from him. Never more wrong than now, when apparently you had come to believe that bribing him with independence of you had merely scotched the snake, not killed it, and marriage would compound his threat in children any one of which might prove impervious to the bribe of a farm. Any marriage, even this one.

And at first it looked like your own blood was trying to fend and shield you from this threat as though in a sort of instinctive filial loyalty. We had long ago designed marriage for him and, now that he was free, grown, a man, a citizen, heir to the farm because we — my husband

and I — knew now that we would have no children, his military service forever (so we thought then) behind him, we began to plan one.

Except that he refused twice, declined twice the candidates virtuous and solvent and suitable which we picked for him, and still in such a way that we could never tell if it was the girl he said no to or the institution. Perhaps both, being your son though as far as I know he still didn't know you even existed; perhaps both, having inherited both from you: the repudiation of the institution since his own origin had done without it; the choicy choosing of a partner since with him once passion had had to be enough because it was all and he in his turn felt, desired, believed that he deserved, no less to match his own inheritance with.

'Or was it even worse than that to you: your own son truly, demanding not even revenge on you but vengeance: refusing the two we picked who were not only solvent but virtuous too, for that one who had not even sold the one for the other but in bartering one had trafficked them both away? I didn't know, we didn't know: only that he had refused, declined, and still in that way I told you of less of refusal than negation, so that we just thought he wasn't ready yet, that he still wanted a little more of that young man's bachelor and tieless freedom which he had only regained — regained? found — yesterday when he doffed the uniform.

So we could wait too and we did; more time passed but we still thought there was enough of it since marriage is long enough to have plenty of room for time behind it. Then — suddenly, with no warning to us who knew only work and bread, not politics and glory — it was 1914 and whether there had been time enough or not or he had been right to wait or not didn't matter.

Because he didn't wait now either; he was gone that first week in the old uniform still stinking of the mothballs from the garret trunk but even that was no quicker nor faster than we were; you know where the farm is — was (no: still is since it will have to still be there in order to be a basis for what you will finally grant us) so I dont need to tell you how

we left it either since a part of your trade is coping with the confused and anguished mass of the civilian homeless in order to make room for your victories.

‘He didn’t even wait to be called by his class. A stranger might have guessed it to be a young bachelor accepting even war as a last desperate cast to escape matrimony, but that stranger would be wrong of course, as he himself proved two years later. But we knew better. He was a Frenchman now. All France asked of him in return for that dignity and right and that security and independence was his willingness to defend it and them, and he had gone to do that.

Then suddenly all France (all western Europe too for that matter) was loud with your name; every child even in France knew your face because you would save us — you, to be supreme of all, not to command our armies and the armies of our allies because they did not need to be commanded since the terror and the threat was their terror and threat too and all they needed was to be led, comforted, reassured and you were the one to do that because they had faith in you, believed in you. But I knew more.

Not better: just more; I had only to match almost any newspaper with this—’ again she moved slightly the closed hand lying in the other palm ‘ — and now I knew not only who you were but what you were and where you were. No no, you didn’t start this war just to further prove him as your son and a Frenchman, but rather since this war had to be, his own destiny, fate would use it to prove him to his father. You see? you and he together to be one in the saving of France, he in his humble place and you in your high and matchless one and victory itself would be that day when at last you would see one another face to face, he rankless still save for the proven bravery and constancy and devotion which the medal you would fasten to his breast would symbolise and affirm.

‘It was the girl of course; his revenge and vengeance on you which you feared: a whore, a Marseilles whore to mother the grandchildren of your high and exalted blood. He told us of her on his leave in the

second year. We — I — said no of course too, but then he had that of you also: the capacity to follow his will always. Oh yes, he told us of her: a good girl he said, leading through her own fate, necessity, compulsions (there is an old grandmother) a life which was not her life.

And he was right. We saw that as soon as he brought her to us. She is a good girl, now anyway, since then anyway, maybe always a good girl as he believed or maybe only since she loved him. Anyway, who are we to challenge him and her, if what this proves is what love can do: save a woman as well as doom her. But no matter now. You will never believe, perhaps you dare not risk it, chance it, that he would never have made any claim on you: that this whore's children would bear not his father's name but my father's.

You would never believe that they would never any more know whose blood they carried than he would have known except for this. But it's too late now. That's all over now; I had imagined you facing him for the first time on that last victorious field while you fastened a medal to his coat; instead you will see him for the first time — no, you wont even see him; you wont even be there — tied to a post, you to see him — if you were to see him, which you will not — over the shoulders and the aimed rifles of a firing-squad.'

The hand, the closed one, flicked, jerked, so fast that the eye almost failed to register it and the object seemed to gleam once in the air before it even appeared, already tumbling across the vacant top of the desk until it sprang open as though of its own accord and came to rest — a small locket of chased worn gold, opening like a hunting-case watch upon twin medallions, miniatures painted on ivory.

'So you actually had a mother. You really did. When I first saw the second face inside it that night, I thought it was your wife or sweetheart or mistress, and I hated you. But I know better now and I apologise for imputing to your character a capacity so weak as to have earned the human warmth of hatred.' She looked down at him. 'So I did wait too late to produce it, after all. No, that's wrong too. Any moment would have been too late; any moment I might have chosen to use it as

a weapon the pistol would have misfired, the knife-blade shattered at the stroke. So of course you know what my next request will be.'

'I know it,' the old general said.

'And granted in advance of course, since then he can no longer threaten you. But at least it's not too late for him to receive the locket, even though it cannot save him. At least you can tell me that. Come. Say it: At least it's not too late for him to receive it.'

'It's not too late,' the old general said.

'So he must die.' They looked at one another. 'Your own son.'

'Then will he not merely inherit from me at thirty what I had already bequeathed to him at birth?'

By its size and location, the room which the old general called his study had probably been the chamber, cell of the old marquise's favorite lady-in-waiting or perhaps tiring-woman, though by its appearance now it might have been a library lifted bodily from an English country home and then reft of the books and furnishings. The shelves were empty now except for one wall, and those empty too save for a brief row of the text-books and manuals of the old general's trade, stacked neatly at one end of one shelf.

Beneath this, against the wall, was a single narrow army cot pillowless beneath a neatly and immaculately drawn gray army blanket; at the foot of it sat the old general's battered field desk. Otherwise the room contained a heavyish, Victorian-looking, almost American-looking table surrounded by four chairs in which the four generals were sitting. The table had been cleared of the remains of the German general's meal; an orderly was just going out with the final tray of soiled dishes. Before the old general sat a coffee service and its cups and a tray of decanters and glasses. The old general filled the cups and passed them. Then he took up one of the decanters.

'Schnaps, General, of course,' he said to the German general.

'Thanks,' the German general said. The old general filled and passed the glass. The old general didn't speak to the British general at all, he

simply passed the port decanter and an empty glass to him, then a second empty glass.

‘Since General (he called the American general’s name) is already on your left.’ He said to no one directly, calling the American general’s name again: ‘ — doesn’t drink after dinner, as a rule. Though without doubt he will void it tonight.’ Then to the American: ‘Unless you will have brandy too?’

‘Port, thank you, General,’ the American said. ‘Since we are only recessing an alliance: not abrogating it.’

‘Bah,’ the German general said. He sat rigid, bright with medals, the ground glass monocle (it had neither cord nor ribbon; it was not on his face, his head like an ear, but set as though inevitable into the socket of his right eye like an eyeball itself) fixed in a rigid opaque glare at the American general. ‘Alliances. That is what is wrong each time. The mistake we — us, and you — and you — and you—’ his hard and rigid stare jerking from face to face as he spoke ‘ — have made always each time as though we will never learn. And this time, we are going to pay for it. Oh yes, we.

Dont you realise that we know as well as you do what is happening, what is going to be the end of this by another twelve months? twelve months? bah. It wont last twelve months; another winter will see it. We know better than you do—’ to the British general ‘ — because you are on the run now and do not have time to do anything else. Even if you were not running, you probably would not realise it, because you are not a martial people. But we are. Our national destiny is for glory and war; they are not mysteries to us and so we know what we are looking at.

So we will pay for that mistake. And since we will, you — and you — and you—’ the cold and lifeless glare stopping again at the American ‘ — who only think you came in late enough to gain at little risk — must pay also.’ Then he was looking at none of them; it was almost as though he had drawn one rapid quiet and calming inhalation, still rigid though

and still composed. 'But you will excuse me, please. It is too late for that now — this time. Our problem now is the immediate one.

Also, first — —' He rose, tossing his crumpled napkin onto the table and picking up the filled brandy glass, so rapidly that his chair scraped back across the floor and would have crashed over had not the American general put out a quick hand and saved it, the German general standing rigid, the brandy glass raised, his close uniform as unwrinkleable as mail against the easy coat of the Briton like the comfortable jacket of a game-keeper, and the American's like a tailor-made costume for a masquerade in which he would represent the soldier of fifty years ago, and the old general's which looked like a wife had got it out of a moth-balled attic trunk and cut some of it off and stitched some braid and ribbons and buttons on what remained. 'Hoch!' the German general said and tossed the brandy down and with the same motion flung the empty glass over his shoulder to crash against the wall.

'Hoch,' the old general said courteously. He drank too but he set his empty glass back on the table. 'You must excuse us,' he said. 'We are not situated as you are; we cannot afford to break French glasses.' He took another brandy glass from the tray and began to fill it. 'Be seated, General,' he said. The German general didn't move.

'And whose fault is that?' he said, 'that we have been — ja, twice — compelled to destroy French property? Not yours and mine, not ours here, not the fault of any of us, all of us who have to spend the four years straining at each other from behind two wire fences. It's the politicians, the civilian imbeciles who compel us every generation to have to rectify the blunders of their damned international horse-trading — —'

'Be seated, General,' the old general said.

'As you were!' the German general said. Then he caught himself. He made a rigid quarter-turn and clapped his heels to face the old general. 'I forgot myself for a moment. You will please to pardon it.' He reversed the quarter-turn, but without the heel-clap this time. His voice was

milder now, quieter anyway. 'The same blunder because it is always the same alliance: only the pieces moved and swapped about. Perhaps they have to keep on doing, making the same mistake; being civilians and politicians, perhaps they can't help themselves.

Or, being civilians and politicians, perhaps they dare not. Because they would be the first to vanish under that one which we would establish. Think of it, if you have not already: the alliance which would dominate all Europe. Europe? Bah. The world — Us, with you, France, and you, England—' he seemed to catch himself again for a second, turning to the American general. ' — with you for — with your good wishes — —'

'A minority stockholder,' the American said.

'Thank you,' the German general said. ' — An alliance, the alliance which will conquer the whole earth — Europe, Asia, Africa, the islands; — to accomplish where Bonaparte failed, what Caesar dreamed of, what Hannibal didn't live long enough to do — —'

'Who will be emperor?' the old general said. It was so courteous and mild that for a moment it didn't seem to register. The German general looked at him.

'Yes,' the British general said as mildly: 'Who?' The German general looked at him. There was no movement of the face at all: the monocle simply descended from the eye, down the face and then the tunic, glinting once or twice as it turned in the air, into the palm lifted to receive it, the hand shutting on it then opening again, the monocle already in position between the thumb and the first finger, to be inserted again; and in fact there had been no eyeball behind it: no scar nor healed suture even: only the lidless and empty socket glaring down at the British general.

'Perhaps now, General?' the old general said.

'Thanks,' the German general said. But still he didn't move. The old general set the filled brandy glass in front of his still-vacant place.

'Thanks,' the German general said. Still staring at the British general, he

drew a handkerchief from his cuff and wiped the monocle and set it back into the socket; now the opaque oval stared down at the British general. 'You see why we have to hate you English,' he said. 'You are not soldiers. Perhaps you cant be.

Which is all right; if true, you cant help it; we dont hate you for that. We dont even hate you because you dont try to be. What we hate you for is because you wont even bother to try. You are in a war, you blunder through it somehow and even survive. Because of your little island you cant possibly get any bigger, and you know it.

And because of that, you know that sooner or later you will be in another war, yet this time too you will not even prepare for it. Oh, you send a few of your young men to your military college, where they will be taught perfectly how to sit a horse and change a palace guard; they will even get some practical experience by transferring this ritual intact to little outposts beside rice-paddies or tea-plantations or Himalayan goatpaths. But that is all.

You will wait until an enemy is actually beating at your front gate. Then you will turn out to repel him exactly like a village being turned out cursing and swearing on a winter night to salvage a burning hayrick — gather up your gutter-sweepings, the scum of your slums and stables and paddocks; they will not even be dressed to look like soldiers, but in the garments of ploughmen and ditchers and carters; your officers look like a country-house party going out to the butts for a pheasant drive.

Do you see? getting out in front armed with nothing but walking sticks, saying, "Come along, lads. That seems to be enemy yonder and there appear to be a goodish number of them but I dare say not too many" — and then walking, strolling on, not even looking back to see if they are followed or not because they dont need to because they are followed, do follow, cursing and grumbling still and unprepared still, but they follow and die, still cursing and grumbling, still civilians. We have to hate you.

There is an immorality, an outrageous immorality; you are not even contemptuous of glory: you are simply not interested in it: only in solvency.' He stood, rigid and composed, staring down at the British general; he said calmly, in a voice of composed and boundless despair: 'You are swine, you know.' Then he said, 'No,' and now in his voice there was a kind of invincibly incredulous outrage too. 'You are worse. You are unbelievable. When we are on the same side, we win — always; and the whole world gives you the credit for the victory: Waterloo. When we are against you, you lose — always: Passchendaele, Mons, Cambrai and tomorrow Amiens — and you dont even know it — —'

'If you please, General,' the old general said in his mild voice. The German general didn't even pause. He turned to the American.

'You also.'

'Swine?' the American said.

'Soldiers,' the German said. 'You are no better.'

'You mean, no worse, dont you?' the American said. 'I just got back from St Mihiel last night.'

'Then perhaps you can visit Amiens tomorrow,' the German said. 'I will conduct you.'

'General,' the old general said. This time the German general stopped and even looked at the old general. He said:

'Not yet. I am — how you say? — supplicant.' He said again:

'Supplicant.' Then he began to laugh, that is, up to the dead indomitable unregenerate eye, speaking not even to anyone, not even to himself: only to outraged and unregenerate incredulity: 'I, a German lieutenant general, come eighty-seven kilometres to request of — ja, insist on — an Englishman and a Frenchman the defeat of my nation. We — I — could have saved it by simply refusing to meet you here. I could save it now simply by walking out.

I could have done it at your aerodrome this afternoon by using on myself the pistol which I employed to preserve even in defeat the

integrity of what this—' he made a brief rapid gesture with one hand; with barely a motion of it he indicated his entire uniform — belts brass braid insigne and all ' — represents, has won the right to stand for, preserves still that for which those of us who have died in it died for. Then this one, this blunder of the priests and politicians and civilian time-servers, would stop now, since in fact it already has, three days ago now.

But I did not. I do not, as a result of which inside another year we — not us—' again without moving he indicated his uniform ' — but they whose blunder we tried to rectify, will be done, finished; and with them, us too since now we are no longer extricable from them — oh yes, us too, let the Americans annoy our flank as much as they like: they will not pass Verdun either; by tomorrow we will have run you—' to the Briton ' — out of Amiens and possibly even into what you call your ditch, and by next month your people—' to the old general now ' — in Paris will be cramming your official sacred talismans into brief-cases on the way to Spain or Portugal. But it will be too late, it will be over, finished; twelve months from now and we — not they for this but we, us — will have to plead with you on your terms for their survival since already it is impossible to extricate theirs from ours.

Because I am a soldier first, then a German, then — or hope to be — a victorious German. But that is not even second, but only third. Because this—' again he indicated the uniform ' — is more important than any German or even any victory.' Now he was looking at all of them; his voice was quite calm, almost conversational now: 'That is our sacrifice: the whole German army against your one French regiment.

But you are right. We waste time.' He looked at them, rapidly, erect still but not quite rigid. 'You are here. I am ...' He looked at them again; he said again, 'Bah. For a little time anyway we dont need secrets. I am eighty-seven kilometres from here. I must return. As you say—' he faced the American general; his heels clapped again, a sound very loud in the quiet and insulate room ' — this is only a recess: not an abrogation.' Still without moving, he looked rapidly from the American

to the Briton then back again. 'You are admirable. But you are not soldiers—'

'All young men are brave,' the American said.

'Continue,' the German general said. 'Say it. Even Germans.'

'Even Frenchmen,' the old general said in his mild voice. 'Wouldn't we all be more comfortable if you would sit down?'

'A moment,' the German general said. He did not even look at the old general. 'We—' again without moving he looked rapidly from one to the other '— you two and I discussed this business thoroughly while your — what do I say? formal or mutual? — Commander-in-Chief was detained from us. We are agreed on what must be done; that was never any question.

Now we need only to agree to do it in this little time we have out of the four years of holding one another off — we, Germans on one side, and you, English and French—' he turned to the American; again the heels clapped '— you Americans too; I have not forgot you. — on the other, engaging each the other with half a hand because the other hand and a half was required to defend our back areas from our own politicians and priests. During that discussion before your Commander-in-Chief joined us, something was said about decision.' He said again, 'Decision.' He didn't even say bah now. He looked rapidly again from the American to the Briton, to the American again. 'You,' he said.

'Yes,' the American general said. 'Decision implies choice.'

The German general looked at the Briton. 'You,' he said.

'Yes,' the British general said. 'God help us.'

The German general paused. 'Pardon?'

'Sorry,' the British general said. 'Let it be just yes then.'

'He said, God help us,' the American general said. 'Why?'

'Why?' the German general said. 'The why is to me?'

'We're both right this time,' the American general said. 'At least we dont have to cope with that.'

‘So,’ the German general said. ‘That is both of you. Three of us.’ He sat down, picked up the crumpled napkin and drew his chair up, and took up the filled brandy glass and sat back and erect again, into that same rigidity of formal attention as when he had been standing to toast his master, so that even sitting the rigidity had a sort of visible inaudibility like a soundless clap of heels, the filled glass at level with the fixed rigid glare of the opaque monocle; again without moving he seemed to glance rapidly at the other glasses.

‘Be pleased to fill, gentlemen,’ he said. But neither the Briton nor the American moved. They just sat there while across the table from them the German general sat with his lifted and rigid glass; he said, indomitable and composed, not even contemptuous: ‘So then. All that remains is to acquaint your Commander-in-Chief with what part of our earlier discussion he might be inclined to hear. Then the formal ratification of our agreement.’

‘Formal ratification of what agreement?’ the old general said.

‘Mutual ratification then,’ the German general said.

‘Of what?’ the old general said.

‘The agreement,’ the German general said.

‘What agreement?’ the old general said. ‘Do we need an agreement? Has anyone missed one? — The port is with you, General,’ he said to the Briton. ‘Fill, and pass.’

Thursday: Thursday Night

THIS TIME IT was a bedroom. The grave and noble face was framed by a pillow, looking at him from beneath a flannel nightcap tied under the chin. The nightshirt was flannel too, open at the throat to reveal a small cloth bag, not new and not very clean and apparently containing something which smelled like asafoetida, on a soiled string like a necklace. The youth stood beside the bed in a brocade dressing gown.

'They were blank shells,' the runner said in his light dry voice. 'The aeroplane — all four of them — flew right through the bursts. The German one never even deviated, not even going fast, even when one of ours hung right on its tail from about fifty feet for more than a minute while I could actually see the tracer going into it. The same one — aeroplane — ours — dove at us, at me; I even felt one of whatever it was coming out of the gun hit me on the leg here.

It was like when a child blows a garden pea at you through a tube except for the smell, the stink, the burning phosphorus. There was a German general in it, you see. I mean, in the German one. There had to be; either we had to send someone there or they had to send someone here.

And since we — or the French — were the ones who started it, thought of it first, obviously it would be our right — privilege — duty to be host. Only it would have to look all right from beneath; they couldn't — couldn't dare anyway — issue a synchronised simultaneous order for every man on both sides to shut their eyes and count a hundred so they had to do the next best thing to make it look all regular, all orthodox to anyone they couldn't hide it from — —'

'What?' the old Negro said.

'Dont you see yet? It's because they cant afford to let it stop like this. I mean, let us stop it. They dont dare. If they ever let us find out that we can stop a war as simply as men tired of digging a ditch decide calmly and quietly to stop digging the ditch — —'

'I mean that suit,' the old Negro said. 'That policeman's suit. You just took it, didn't you?'

'I had to,' the runner said with that peaceful and terrible patience. 'I had to get out. To get back in too. At least back to where I hid my uniform. It used to be difficult enough to pass either way, in or out. But now it will be almost impossible to get back in. But dont worry about that; all I need — —'

'Is he dead?' the old Negro said.

‘What?’ the runner said. ‘Oh, the policeman. I dont know. Probably not.’ He said with a sort of amazement: ‘I hope not.’ He said: ‘I knew night before last — two nights ago, Tuesday night — what they were planning to do, though of course I had no proof then. I tried to tell him. But you know him, you’ve probably tried yourself to tell him something you couldn’t prove or that he didn’t want to believe.

So I’ll need something else. Not to prove it to him, make him believe it: there’s not time enough left to waste that way. That’s why I came here. I want you to make me a Mason too. Or maybe there’s not even time for that either. So just show me the sign — like this — —’ he jerked, flicked his hand low against his flank, as near as he had been able to divine at the time or anyway remember now from the man two years ago on the day he joined the battalion.

‘That will be enough. It will have to be; I’ll bluff the rest of it through — —’

‘Wait,’ the old Negro said. ‘Tell me slow.’

‘I’m trying to,’ the runner said with that terrible patience. ‘Every man in the battalion owes him his pay for weeks ahead, provided they live long enough to earn it and he lives long enough to collect it from them. He did it by making them all Masons or anyway making them believe they are Masons. He owns them, you see. They cant refuse him. All he will need to do is — —’

‘Wait,’ the old Negro said. ‘Wait.’

‘Dont you see?’ the runner said. ‘If all of us, the whole battalion, at least one battalion, one unit out of the whole line to start it, to lead the way — leave the rifles and grenades and all behind us in the trench: simply climb barehanded out over the parapet and through the wire and then just walk on barehanded, not with our hands up for surrender but just open to show that we had nothing to hurt, harm anyone; not running, stumbling: just walking forward like free men, — just one of us, one man; suppose just one man, then multiply him by a battalion; suppose a whole battalion of us, who want nothing except just to go

home and get themselves clean into clean clothes and work and drink a little beer in the evening and talk and then lie down and sleep and not be afraid.

And maybe, just maybe that many Germans who dont want anything more too, or maybe just one German who doesn't want more than that, to put his or their rifles and grenades down and climb out too with their hands empty too not for surrender but just so every man could see there is nothing in them to hurt or harm either — —'

'Suppose they dont,' the old Negro said. 'Suppose they shoot at us.' But the runner didn't even hear the us. He was still talking.

'Wont they shoot at us tomorrow anyway, as soon as they have recovered from the fright? as soon as the people at Chaulnesmont and Paris and Poperinghe and whoever it was in that German aeroplane this afternoon have had time to meet and compare notes and decide exactly where the threat, danger is, and eradicate it and then start the war again: tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow until the last formal rule of the game has been fulfilled and discharged and the last ruined player removed from sight and the victory immolated like a football trophy in a club-house show-case. That's all I want. That's all I'm trying to do. But you may be right. So you tell me.'

The old Negro groaned. He groaned peacefully. One hand came out from beneath the covers and turned them back and he swung his legs toward the edge of the bed and said to the youth in the dressing gown: 'Hand me my shoes and britches.'

'Listen to me,' the runner said. 'There's not time. It will be daylight in two hours and I've got to get back. Just show me how to make the sign, the signal.'

'You cant learn it right in that time,' the old Negro said. 'And even if you could, I'm going too. Maybe this is what I been hunting for too.'

'Didn't you just say the Germans might shoot at us?' the runner said. 'Dont you see? That's it, that's the risk: if some of the Germans do

come out. Then they will shoot at us, both of them, their side and ours too — put a barrage down on all of us. They'll have to. There wont be anything else for them to do.'

'So your mind done changed about it,' the old Negro said.

'Just show me the sign, the signal,' the runner said. Again the old Negro groaned, peaceful, almost inattentive, swinging his legs on out of the bed. The innocent and unblemished corporal's uniform was hanging neatly on a chair, the shoes and the socks were placed neatly beneath it. The youth had picked them up and he now knelt beside the bed, holding one of the socks open for the old Negro's foot. 'Aren't you afraid?' the runner said.

'Aint we already got enough ahead of us without bringing that up?' the old Negro said pettishly. 'And I know what you're fixing to say next: How am I going to get up there? And I can answer that: I never had no trouble getting here to France; I reckon I can make them other just sixty miles. And I know what you are fixing to say after that one too: I cant wear this French suit up there neither, without no general with me. Only I dont need to answer that one because you done already answered it.'

'Kill a British soldier this time?' the runner said.

'You said he wasn't dead.'

'I said maybe he wasn't.'

'You said you hoped he wasn't. Dont never forget that.'

The runner was the last thing which the sentry would ever see. In fact, he was the first thing the sentry saw that morning except for the relief guard who had brought his breakfast and who now sat, his rifle leaning beside him against the dugout's opposite earthen shelf.

He had been under arrest for almost thirty hours now. That was all: just under arrest, as though the furious blows of the rifle-butt two nights ago had not simply hushed a voice which he could bear no longer but had somehow separated him from mankind; as if that aghast reversal, that cessation of four years of mud and blood and its accompanying

convulsion of silence had cast him up on this buried dirt ledge with no other sign of man at all save the rotation of guards who brought him food and then sat opposite him until the time came for their relief.

Yesterday and this morning too in ordained rote the orderly officer's sergeant satellite had appeared suddenly in the orifice, crying "Shun!" and he had stood bareheaded while the guard saluted and the orderly officer himself entered and said, rapid and glib out of the glib and routine book: 'Any complaints?' and was gone again before he could have made any answer he did not intend to make.

But that was all. Yesterday he had tried for a little while to talk to one of the rotated guards and since then some of them had tried to talk to him, but that was all of that too, so that in effect for over thirty hours now he had sat or sprawled and lay asleep on his dirt shelf, morose, sullen, incorrigible, foul-mouthed and snarling, not even waiting but just biding pending whatever it was they would finally decide to do with him or with the silence, both or either, if and when they did make up their minds.

Then he saw the runner. At the same moment he saw the pistol already in motion as the runner struck the guard between the ear and the rim of the helmet and caught him as he toppled and tumbled him onto the ledge and turned and the sentry saw the burlesque of a soldier entering behind him — the travesty of the wrapped putties, the tunic whose lower buttons would not even meet across the paunch not of sedentation but of age and above it, beneath the helmet, the chocolate face which four years ago he had tried to relegate and repudiate into the closed book of his past.

'That makes five,' the old Negro said.

'All right, all right,' the runner answered, rapidly and harshly. 'He's not dead either. Dont you think that by this time I have learned how to do it?' He said rapidly to the sentry: 'You dont need to worry either now. All we need from you now is inertia.' But the sentry was not even looking at him. He was looking at the old Negro.

'I told you to leave me alone,' he said. And it was the runner who answered him, in that same rapid and brittle voice:

'It's too late for that now. Because I am wrong; we don't want inertia from you: what we want is silence. Come along. Notice, I have the pistol. If I must, I shall use it. I've already used it six times, but only the flat of it. This time I'll use the trigger.' He said to the old Negro, in the rapid brittle and almost despairing voice: 'All right, this one will be dead. Then you suggest something.'

'You can't get away with this,' the sentry said.

'Who expects to?' the runner said. 'That's why we have no time to waste. Come along. You've got your investments to protect, you know; after a breathing spell like this and the fresh start it will give them, let alone the discovery of what can happen simply by letting the same men hang around in uniforms too long, the whole battalion will probably be wiped out as soon as they can get us up in gun-range again. Which may be this afternoon.'

They flew a German general over yesterday; without doubt he was at Chaulnesmont by late dinner last night, with our pooh-bahs and the American ones too already waiting for him and the whole affair settled and over with by the time the port passed (if German generals drink port, though why not, since we have had four years to prove to us even if all history had not already done it, that the biped successful enough to become a general had ceased to be a German or British or American or Italian or French one almost as soon as it never was a human one) and without doubt he is already on his way back and both sides are merely waiting until he is out of the way as you hold up a polo game while one of the visiting rajahs rides off the field — —'

The sentry — in what time he had left — would remember it. He knew at once that the runner meant exactly what he said about the pistol; he had proof of that at once — of the flat side of it anyway — when he almost stumbled over the sprawled bodies of the orderly officer and his sergeant in the tunnel before he saw them. But it would seem to him that it was not the hard muzzle of the pistol in the small of his back, but

the voice itself — the glib calm rapid desperate and despairing voice carrying, sweeping them into the next dugout where an entire platoon lay or sat along the earthen shelf, the faces turning as one to look at them as the runner thrust him in with the muzzle of the pistol and then thrust the old Negro forward too, saying:

‘Make the sign. Go on. Make it.’ — the tense calm desperate voice not even stopping then, as it seemed to the sentry that it never had: ‘That’s right, of course he doesn’t need to make the sign. He has enough without. He has come from outside. So have I, for that matter but you wont even need to doubt me now, you need only look at him; some of you may even recognise Horn’s D.C.M. on that tunic.

But dont worry; Horn isn’t dead any more than Mr Smith and Sergeant Bledsoe; I have learned to use the flat of this—’ he raised the pistol for an instant into sight ‘ — quite neatly now. Because here is our chance to have done with it, be finished with it, quit of it, not just the killing, the getting dead, because that’s only a part of the nightmare, of the rot and the stinking and the waste — —’

The sentry would remember it, incorrigible still, merely acquiescent, believing still that he was waiting, biding the moment when he or perhaps two or three of them at once would take the runner off guard and smother him, listening to the glib staccato voice, watching the turned faces listening to it too, believing still that he saw in them only astonishment, surprise, presently to fade into one incorrigible concert which he would match: ‘And neither of us would have got back in if it had not been for his pass from the Ministry of War in Paris.

So you dont even know yet what they have done to you. They’ve sealed you up in here — the whole front from the Channel to Switzerland. Though from what I saw in Paris last night — not only military police, the French and American and ours too, but the civilian police too — I wouldn’t have thought they’d have enough left to seal anything with.

But they have; the colonel himself could not have got back in this morning unless the pass bore the signature of that old man in the castle

at Chaulnesmont. It's like another front, manned by all the troops in the three forces who can't speak the language belonging to the coat they came up from under the equator and half around the world to die in, in the cold and the wet — Senegalese and Moroccans and Kurds and Chinese and Malays and Indians — Polynesian Melanesian Mongol and Negro who couldn't understand the password nor read the pass either: only to recognise perhaps by memorised rote that one cryptic hieroglyph. But not you. You can't even get out now, to try to come back in.

No-man's Land is no longer in front of us. It's behind us now. Before, the faces behind the machine guns and the rifles at least thought Caucasian thoughts even if they didn't speak English or French or American; now they don't even think Caucasian thoughts. They're alien. They don't even have to care. They have tried for four years to get out of the white man's cold and mud and rain just by killing Germans, and failed. Who knows? by killing off the Frenchmen and Englishmen and Americans which they have bottled up here, they might all be on the way home tomorrow. So there is nowhere for us to go now but east — —'

Now the sentry moved. That is, he did not move yet, he dared not yet: he simply made a single infinitesimal transition into a more convulsive rigidity, speaking now, harsh and obscene, cursing the rapt immobilised faces: 'Are you going to let them get away with this? Don't you know we're all going to be for it? They have already killed Lieutenant Smith and Sergeant Bledsoe — —'

'Nonsense,' the runner said. 'They aren't dead. Didn't I just tell you I have learned how to use the flat of a pistol? It's his money. That's all. Everyone in the battalion owes him. He wants us to sit here and do nothing until he has earned his month's profit. Then he wants them to start it up again so we will be willing to bet him twenty shillings a month that we will be dead in thirty days. Which is what they are going to do — start it up again. You all saw those four aeroplanes yesterday, and all that archie. The archie were blank shells. There was a German general in the hun aeroplane. Last night he was at Chaulnesmont.'

He would have to have been; else, why did he come at all? why else wafted across on a cloud of blank archie shell, with three S.E.5's going through the motion of shooting him down with blank ammunition? Oh yes, I was there; I saw the lorries fetching up the shells night before last, and yesterday I stood behind one of the batteries firing them when one of the S.E.'s — that pilot would have been a child of course, too young for them to have dared inform him in advance, too young to be risked with the knowledge that fact and truth are not the same — dived and put a burst right into the battery and shot me in the skirt of my tunic with something — whatever it was — which actually stung a little for a moment.

What else, except to allow a German general to visit the French and the British and the American ones in the Allied Commandery-in-Chief without alarming the rest of us bipeds who were not born generals but simply human beings? And since they — all four of them — would speak the same language, no matter what clumsy isolated national tongues they were compelled by circumstance to do it in, the matter probably took them no time at all and very likely the German one is already on his way back home at this moment, not even needing the blank shells now because the guns will be already loaded with live ones, merely waiting for him to get out of the way in order to resume, efface, obliterate forever this ghastly and incredible contretemps. So we have no time, you see.

We may not even have an hour. But an hour will be enough, if only it is all of us, the whole battalion. Not to kill the officers; they themselves have abolished killing for a recess of three days. Besides, we wont need to, with all of us. If we had time, we could even draw lots: one man to each officer, to simply hold his hands while the rest of us go over. But the flat of a pistol is quicker and no more harmful really, as Mr Smith and Sergeant Bledsoe and Horn will tell you when they awake.

Then never to touch pistol or rifle or grenade or machine gun again, to climb out of ditches forever and pass through the wire and then advance with nothing but our bare hands, to dare, defy the Germans

not to come out too and meet us.' He said quickly, in the desperate and calmly despairing voice: 'All right: meet us with machine-gun fire, you will say. But the hun archie yesterday was blank too.' He said to the old Negro: 'Now, make them the sign. Have not you already proved that, if anything, it means brotherhood and peace?'

'You fools!' the sentry cried, except that he did not say fools: virulent and obscene out of his almost inarticulate paucity, struggling now, having defied the pistol in one outraged revulsion of repudiation before he realized that the hard little iron ring was gone from his spine and that the runner was merely holding him, he (the sentry) watching, glaring at the faces which he had thought were merely fixed in a surprise precursive to outrage too, looming, bearing down on him, identical and alien and concerted, until so many hard hands held him that he could not even struggle, the runner facing him now, the pistol poised flat on one raised palm, shouting at him: 'Stop it! Stop it! Make your choice, but hurry. You can come with us, or you can have the pistol. But decide.'

He would remember; they were topside now, in the trench, he could see a silent and moiling group within which or beneath which the major and two company commanders and three or four sergeants had vanished (they had taken the adjutant and the sergeant-major and the corporal signalman in the orderly dugout and the colonel still in bed) and in both directions along the trench he could see men coming up out of their holes and warrens, blinking in the light, dazed still yet already wearing on their faces that look of amazed incredulity fading with one amazed concert into dawning and incredulous hope.

The hard hands still grasped him; as they lifted, flung him up onto the firestep and then over the lip of the parapet, he already saw the runner spring up and turn and reach down and pull the old Negro up beside him while other hands boosted from beneath, the two of them now standing on the parapet facing the trench, the runner's voice thin and high now with that desperate and indomitable despair: 'The sign! The sign! Give it us! Come on, men! If this is what they call staying alive, do you want that on these terms forever either?'

Then he was struggling again. He didn't even know he was about to, when he found himself jerking and thrashing, cursing, flinging, beating away the hands, not even realising then why, for what, until he found himself in the wire, striking, hitting backward at the crowding bodies at the entrance to the labyrinthine passageway which the night patrols used, hearing his own voice in one last invincible repudiation: 'F ... them all! Bugger all of you!' crawling now, not the first one through because when he rose to his feet, running, the old Negro was panting beside him, while he shouted at the old Negro: 'Serve you f ... ing well right! Didn't I warn you two years ago to stay away from me? Didn't I?'

Then the runner was beside him, grasping his arm and stopping him and turning him about, shouting: 'Look at them!' He did so and saw them, watched them, crawling on their hands and knees through the gaps in the wire as though up out of hell itself, faces clothes hands and all stained as though forever one single nameless and identical color from the mud in which they had lived like animals for four years, then rising to their feet as though in that four years they had not stood on earth, but had this moment returned to light and air from purgatory as ghosts stained forever to the nameless single color of purgatory.

'Over there too!' the runner cried, turning him again until he saw that also: the distant German wire one faint moil and pulse of motion, indistinguishable until it too broke into men rising erect; whereupon a dreadful haste came over him, along with something else which he had not yet time to assimilate, recognise, knowing, aware of only the haste; and not his haste but one haste, not only the battalion but the German one or regiment or whatever it was, the two of them running toward each other now, empty-handed, approaching until he could see, distinguish the individual faces but still all one face, one expression, and then he knew suddenly that his too looked like that, all of them did: tentative, amazed, defenseless, and then he heard the voices too and knew that his was one also — a thin murmuring sound rising into the incredible silence like a chirping of lost birds, forlorn and defenseless too; and then he knew what the other thing was even before the frantic

uprush of the rockets from behind the two wires, German and British too.

'No!' he cried, 'no! Not to us!' not even realising that he had said 'we' and not 'I' for the first time in his life probably, certainly for the first time in four years, not even realising that in the next moment he had said 'I' again, shouting to the old Negro as he whirled about: 'What did I tell you? Didn't I tell you to let me alone?' Only it was not the old Negro, it was the runner, standing facing him as the first ranging burst of shells bracketed in.

He never heard them, nor the wailing rumble of the two barrages either, nor saw nor heard little more of anything in that last second except the runner's voice crying out of the soundless rush of flame which enveloped half his body neatly from heel through navel through chin:

'They cant kill us! They cant! Not dare not: they cant!'

Except of course that he couldn't sit here save for a definitely physically limited length of time because after a while it would be daylight. Unless of course the sun really failed to rise tomorrow, which as they taught you in that subsection of philosophy they called dialectics which you were trying to swot through in order to try to swot through that section of being educated they called philosophy, was for the sake of argument possible. Only why shouldn't he be sitting here after daylight or for the rest of the day itself for that matter, since the only physical limitation to that would be when someone with the authority and compulsion to resist the condition of a young man in a second lieutenant's uniform sitting on the ground against the wall of a Nissen hut, had his attention called to it by a horn or whistle; and that greater condition which yesterday had sent three fairly expensive aeroplanes jinking up and down the sky with their Vickerses full of blank ammunition, might well abrogate that one too.

Then the first limitation had been discharged, because now it was day and none to know where the night had gone: not a dialectic this time, but he who didn't know where night had gone this soon, this quick.

Or maybe it was a dialectic since as far as he knew only he had watched it out and since only he in waking had watched it out, to all the others still in slumber it still obtained, like the tree in darkness being no longer green, and since he who had watched it out still didn't know where it had gone, for him it was still night too.

Then almost before he had had time to begin to bother to think that out and so have done with it, a bugle blowing reveille confounded him, the sound (that sound: who had never heard it before or even heard of it: a horn blowing at daybreak on a forward aerodrome where people did not even have guns but were armed only with maps and what Monaghan called monkeywrenches) even getting him up onto his feet: that greater condition's abrogation which had now reabrogated.

In fact, if he had been a cadet still, he would even know what crime whoever found him sitting there would charge him with: not shaving: and, standing now, he realised that he had even forgot his problem too, who had sat there all night thinking that he had none evermore, as though sitting so long within that peaceful stink had robbed olfactory of its single sense or perhaps the sidcott of its smell and only getting up restored them both. In fact, for a moment he toyed with the idea of unrolling the sidcott to see how far the burning had spread, except that if he did that and let the air in, the burning might spread faster, thinking, with a sort of peaceful amazement hearing himself: Because it's got to last; no more: not last until, just last.

At least he wouldn't take it inside with him so he left it against the wall and went around the hut and inside it — Burk and Hanley and De Marchi had not stirred so the tree was not green for some yet anyway — and got his shaving tackle and then picked up the sidcott again and went to the washroom; nor would the tree be quite green yet here either, and if not here, certainly not in the latrines.

Though now it would because the sun was well up now and, once more smooth of face, the sidcott stinking peacefully under his arm, he could see movement about the mess, remembering suddenly that he had not

eaten since lunch yesterday. But then there was the sidcott, when suddenly he realised that the sidcott would serve that too, turning and already walking.

They — someone — had brought his bus back and rolled it in so he trod his long shadow toward only the petrol tin and put the sidcott into it and stood peaceful and empty while the day incremented, the infinitesimal ineluctable shortening of the shadows. It was going to rain probably, but then it always was anyway; that is, it always did on days-off from patrols, he didn't know why yet, he was too new. 'You will though,' Monaghan told him. 'Just wait till after the first time you've been good and scared' — pronouncing it 'skeered'.

So it would be all right now, the ones who were going to get up would have already had breakfast and the others would sleep on through till lunch; he could even take his shaving kit on to the mess without going to the hut at all: and stopped, he could not even remember when he had heard it last, that alien and divorced — that thick dense mute furious murmur to the north and east; he knew exactly where it would be because he had flown over the spot yesterday afternoon, thinking peacefully I came home too soon.

If I had only sat up there all night instead I could have seen it start again — listening, motionless in midstride, hearing it murmur toward and into its crescendo and sustain a time, a while and then cut short off, murmuring in his ears for a little time still until he discovered that what he was actually listening to was a lark: and he had been right, the sidcott had served even better than it knew even or even perhaps intended, carrying him still intact across lunch too since it was after ten now. Provided he could eat enough of course, the food — the eggs and bacon and the marmalade — having no taste to speak of, so that only in that had he been wrong; then presently he was wrong there too, eating steadily on in the empty mess until at last the orderly told him there was simply no more toast.

Much better than the sidcott could have known to plan or even dream because during lunch the hut itself would be empty and for that while

he could use his cot to do some of the reading he had imagined himself doing between patrols — the hero living by proxy the lives of heroes between the monotonous peaks of his own heroic derring: which he was doing for another moment or two while Bridesman stood in the door, until he looked up. 'Lunch?' Bridesman said.

'Late breakfast, thanks,' he said.

'Drink?' Bridesman said.

'Later, thanks,' he said: and moved in time, taking the book with him; there was a tree, he had discovered it in the first week — an old tree with two big roots like the arms of a chair on the bank above the cut through which the road ran past the aerodrome to Villeneuve Blanche so that you could sit like in a chair with the roots to prop the elbows which propped in turn the book, secure from war yet still of it, not that remote, in those days when they had called it war: who apparently were not decided yet what to call this now. And so now there would have been time enough, Bridesman would know by now what that had been this morning: thinking peacefully, the open book still propped before he began to move: Yes, he will know by now. He will have to make the decision to tell me or not, but he will make it.

Nor was there any reason to take the book to the hut because he might even read some more, entering and then leaving Bridesman's hut with the book still closed on one finger to mark his place, still strolling; he had never been walking fast anyway and finally stopping, empty and peaceful, only blinking a little, looking out across the empty field, the line of closed hangars, the mess and the office where a few people came and went.

Not too many though; apparently Collyer had lifted the ban on Villeneuve Blanche; soon he would be looking at evening too and suddenly he thought of Conventicle but for an instant only and then no more because what could he say to Conventicle or they to each other? 'Well, Flight, Captain Bridesman tells me one of our battalions put their guns down this morning and climbed out of the trench and through the wire and met a similar unarmed German one until both sides could get

a barrage down on them. So all we need now is just to stand by until time to take that jerry general home.’ And then Conventicle: ‘Yes sir. So I heard.’

And now he was looking at evening, the aftermath of sun, treading no shadow at all now to the petrol tin. Though almost at once he began to hurry a little, remembering not the sidcott but the burning; it had been more than twelve hours now since he left it in the tin and there might not be anything left of it. But he was in time: just the tin itself too hot to touch so that he kicked it over and tumbled the sidcott out, which would have to cool a little too.

Which it did: not evening incrementing now but actual night itself, almost summer night this time at home in May; and in the latrine the tree once more was no longer green: only the stink of the sidcott which had lasted, he had wasted that concern, dropping it into the sink where it unfolded as of its own accord into visibility, into one last repudiation — the slow thick invincible smell of the burning itself visible now in creeping overlaps, almost gone now — only a beggar’s crumb but perhaps there had been an instant in the beginning when only a crumb of fire lay on the face of darkness and the falling waters and he moved again, one of the cubicles had a wooden latch inside the door if you were there first and he was and latched the invisible door and drew the invisible pistol from his tunic pocket and thumbed the safety off.

Again the room was lighted, candelabrum sconce and girandole, curtain and casement once more closed against the swarm-dense city’s unsleeping and anguished murmur; again the old general looked like a gaudy toy in his blanched and glittering solitude, just beginning to crumble the heel of bread into the waiting bowl as the smaller door opened and the youthful aide stood in it. ‘He is here?’ the old general said.

‘Yes sir,’ the aide said.

‘Let him come in,’ the old general said. ‘Then let nobody else.’

'Yes sir,' the aide said and went out and closed the door and in a time opened it again; the old general had not moved except to put quietly down beside the bowl the uncrumbled bread, the aide entering and turning stiffly to attention beside the door as the Quartermaster General entered and came on a pace or two and then stopped, paused, the aide going back out the door and drawing it to behind him, the Quartermaster General standing for a moment longer — the gaunt gigantic peasant with his sick face and his hungry and stricken eyes, the two old men looking at one another for another moment, then the Quartermaster General partly raised one hand and dropped it and came on until he faced the table.

'Have you dined?' the old general said. The other didn't even answer. 'I know what happened,' he said. 'I authorised it, permitted it, otherwise it couldn't have. But I want you to tell me. Not admit, confess: affirm it, tell me to my face that we did this. Yesterday afternoon a German general was brought across the lines and here, to this house, into this house.'

'Yes,' the old general said. But the other still waited, inexorable. 'We did it then,' the old general said.

'Then this morning an unarmed British battalion met an unarmed German force between the lines until artillery from both sides was able to destroy them both.'

'We did it then,' the old general said.

'We did it,' the Quartermaster General said. 'We. Not British and American and French we against German them nor German they against American and British and French us, but We against all because we no longer belong to us. A subterfuge not of ours to confuse and mislead the enemy nor of the enemy to mislead and confuse us, but of We to betray all since all has had to repudiate us in simple defensive horror; no barrage by us or vice versa to prevent an enemy running over us with bayonets and hand grenades or vice versa, but a barrage by both of We to prevent naked and weaponless hand touching opposite naked and weaponless hand.'

We, you and I and our whole unregenerate and unregenerable kind; not only you and I and our tight close jealous unchallengeable hierarchy behind this wire and our opposite German one behind that one, but more, worse: our whole small repudiated and homeless species about the earth who not only no longer belong to man but even to earth itself since we have had to make this last base desperate cast in order to hold our last desperate and precarious place on it.'

'Sit down,' the old general said.

'No,' the other said. 'I was standing when I accepted this appointment. I can stand to divest myself of it.' He thrust one big fleshless hand rapidly inside his tunic then out again, though once more he stood just holding the folded paper in it, looking down at the old general. 'Because I didn't just believe in you. I loved you. I believed from that first moment when I saw you in that gate that day forty-seven years ago that you had been destined to save us.

That you were chosen by destiny out of the paradox of your background, to be a paradox to your past in order to be free of human past to be the one out of all earth to be free of the compulsions of fear and weakness and doubt which render the rest of us incapable of what you were competent for; that you in your strength would even absolve us of our failure due to our weakness and fears. I dont mean the men out there tonight—' this time the vast hand holding the folded paper made a single rapid clumsy gesture which indicated, seemed to shape somehow in the brilliant insulate room the whole scope of the murmurous and anguished darkness outside and even as far away as the lines themselves — the wire, the ditches dense and, for this time anyway, silent with dormant guns and amazed and incredulous men, waiting, alerted, confused and incredulous with hope ' — they dont need you, they are capable of saving themselves, as three thousand of them proved four days ago.

They only needed to be defended, protected from you. Not expected to be nor even hope to be: just should have been except that we failed them. Not you this time, who did not even what you would but what you must, since you are you. But I and my few kind, who had rank

enough and authority and position enough, as if God Himself had put this warrant in my hand that day against this one three years later, until I failed them and Him and brought it back.’ His hand also jerked, flicked, and tossed the folded paper onto the desk in front of the bowl and jug and the still intact morsel, on either side of which the old general’s veined and mottled hands lay faintly curled at rest.

‘Back to you by hand, as I received it from you. I will have no more of it. I know: by my own token I am too late in returning what I should never have accepted to begin with because even at first I would have known myself incapable of coping with what it was going to entail, if I had only known then what that entailment was going to be. I am responsible. I am responsible, mine is the blame and solely mine; without me and this warrant which you gave me that day three years ago, you could not have done this.

By this authority I could have prevented you then, and even afterward I could have stopped it, remanded it. As you — the Commander-in-Chief of all the Allied Armies in France — as Quartermaster General over all embattled Europe west of our and the British and the American wire, I could have decreed that whole zone containing Villeneuve Blanche (or arbitrarily any other point which you might have threatened) at one hundred point one of saturation and forbidden whatever number of men it took to drive those lorries of blank anti-aircraft shells to enter it and even at one hundred absolute of saturation and so forbidden that single supernumerary German one to come out of it. But I didn’t.

So I was responsible even more than you because you had no choice. You didn’t even do what you would but only what you could since you were incapable of else, born and doomed incapable of else. While I did have a choice between could and would, between shall and must and cannot, between must and dare not, between will do and I am afraid to do: had that choice, and found myself afraid. Oh yes, afraid. But then why shouldn’t I be afraid of you, since you are afraid of man?’

'I am not afraid of man,' the old general said. 'Fear implies ignorance. Where ignorance is not, you do not need to fear: only respect. I don't fear man's capacities, I merely respect them.'

'And use them,' the Quartermaster General said.

'Beware of them,' the old general said.

'Which, fear them or not, you should. You someday will. Not I, of course. I'm an old man, finished; I had my chance and failed; who — what — wants or needs me further now? what midden or rubbish heap, least of all that one beside the Seine yonder with its gold hemisphere ravaged from across all of Europe by a lesser one than you since he embroiled himself with all the armies of Europe in order to lose a petty political empire where you have allied all the armies of both hemispheres and finally even the German one too, to lose the world to man.'

'Will you let me speak a moment?' the old general said.

'Of course,' the other said. 'Didn't I tell you I loved you once? Who can control that? All you dare assume mandate over is oath, contract.'

'You say they do not need me to save themselves from me and us since they themselves will save themselves if they are only let alone, only defended and preserved that long from me and us. How do you think we coped with this in time at time and place — at this particular moment in four whole years of moments, at this particular point in that thousand kilometres of regimental fronts? just by being alert? not only alert at this specific spot and moment but prepared to cope and concentrate and nullify at this specific spot and moment with that which every trained soldier had been trained and taught to accept as a factor in war and battle as he must logistics and climate and failure of ammunition; this, in four long years of fateful and vulnerable moments and ten hundred kilometres of fateful and vulnerable spots — spots and moments fateful and vulnerable because as yet we have found nothing better to man them with than man? How do you think we knew in time? Don't you know how? who, since you believe in man's capacities, must certainly know them?'

Now the other had stopped, immobile, looming, vast, his sick and hungry face as though sick anew with foreknowledge and despair. Though his voice was quiet, almost gentle. 'How?' he said.

'One of them told us. One of his own squad. One of his close and familiar own — as always. As that or them or at least one among them for whom man sets in jeopardy what he believes to be his life and assumes to be his liberty or his honor, always does. His name was Polchek.

He went on sick parade that Sunday midnight and we should have known about it inside an hour except that apparently a traitor too (by all means call him that if you like) had to outface regimental tape. So we might not have learned in time at all until too late, the division commander being himself already an hour before dawn in a forward observation post where he likewise had no business being, except for a lieutenant (a blatant and unregenerate eccentric whose career very probably ended there also since he held the sanctity of his native soil above that of his divisional channels; he will get a decoration of course but no more, the utmost venerability of his beard can only expose that same lieutenant's insigne) who rang directly through to, and insisted on speaking to someone in authority at, his Army Headquarters. That was how we knew, had even that little time to nullify, get in touch with the enemy and offer him too an alternate to chaos.'

'So I was right,' the other said. 'You were afraid.'

'I respect him as an articulated creature capable of locomotion and vulnerable to self-interest.'

'You were afraid,' the Quartermaster General said. 'Who with two armies which had already been beaten once and a third one not yet blooded to where it was a calculable quantity, had nevertheless managed to stalemate the most powerful and skillful and dedicated force in Europe, yet had had to call upon that enemy for help against the simple unified hope and dream of simple man. No, you are afraid. And so I am well to be. That's why I brought it back. There it lies. Touch it, put your hand on it. Or take my word for it that it's real, the same one, not defiled since the defilement was mine who shirked it in the

middle of a battle, and a concomitant of your rank is the right and privilege to obliterate the human instrument of a failure.'

'But can you bring it back here? to me?' the old general said mildly.

'Why not? Weren't you the one who gave it to me?'

'But can you?' the old general said. 'Dare you? ask me to grant you a favor, let alone accept it from me. This favor,' the old general said in that gentle and almost inflectionless voice. 'A man is to die what the world will call the basest and most ignominious of deaths: execution for cowardice while defending his native — anyway adopted — land. That's what the ignorant world will call it, who will not know that he was murdered for that principle which, by your own bitter self-scouring, you were incapable of risking death and honor for. Yet you don't demand that life. You demand instead merely to be relieved of a commission. A gesture. A martyrdom. Does it match his?'

'He won't accept that life!' the other cried. 'If he does — —' and stopped, amazed, aghast, foreknowing and despaired while the gentle voice went on:

'If he does, if he accepts his life, keeps his life, he will have abrogated his own gesture and martyrdom.'

If I gave him his life tonight, I myself could render null and void what you call the hope and the dream of his sacrifice. By destroying his life tomorrow morning, I will establish forever that he didn't even live in vain, let alone die so. Now tell me who's afraid?'

Now the other began to turn, slowly, a little jerkily, as though he were blind, turning on until he faced the small door again and stopping not as though he saw it but as if he had located its position and direction by some other and lesser and less exact sense, like smell, the old general watching him until he had completely turned before he spoke:

'You've forgotten your paper.'

'Of course,' the other said. 'So I have.' He turned back, jerkily, blinking rapidly; his hand fumbled on the table top for a moment, then it found

the folded paper and put it back inside the tunic, and he stood again, blinking rapidly. 'Yes,' he said. 'So I did.' Then he turned again, a little stiffly still but moving almost quickly now, directly anyhow, and went on across the blanched rug, toward the door; at once it opened and the aide entered, carrying the door with him and already turning into rigid attention, holding it while the Quartermaster General walked toward it, a little stiffly and awkwardly, too big too gaunt too alien, then stopped and half-turned his head and said: 'Goodbye.'

'Goodbye,' the old general said. The other went on, to the door now, almost into it, beginning to bow his head a little as though from long habit already too tall for most doors, stopping almost in the door now, his head still bowed a little even after he turned it not quite toward where the old general sat immobile and gaudy as a child's toy behind the untouched bowl and jug and the still uncrumbled bread.

'And something else,' the Quartermaster General said. 'To say. Something else — —'

'With God,' the old general said.

'Of course,' the Quartermaster General said. 'That was it. I almost said it.'

The door clashed open, the sergeant with his slung rifle entered first, followed by a private carrying his unslung one, unbelievably long now with the fixed bayonet, like a hunter dodging through a gap in a fence. They took position one on either side of the door, the thirteen prisoners turning their thirteen heads as one to watch quietly while two more men carried in a long wooden bench-attached mess table and set it in the center of the cell and went back out.

'Going to fatten us up first, huh?' one of the prisoners said. The sergeant didn't answer; he was now working at his front teeth with a gold toothpick.

'If the next thing they bring is a tablecloth, the third will be a priest,' another prisoner said. But he was wrong, although the number of casseroles and pots and dishes (including a small caldron obviously

soup) which did come next, followed by a third man carrying a whole basket of bottles and a jumble of utensils and cutlery, was almost as unnerving, the sergeant speaking now though still around, past the toothpick:

‘Hold it now. At least let them get their hands and arms out of the way.’

Though the prisoners had really not moved yet to rush upon the table, the food: it was merely a shift, semicircular, poised while the third orderly set the wine (there were seven bottles) on the table and then began to place the cups, vessels, whatever anyone wanted to call them — tin cups, pannikins from mess kits, two or three cracked tumblers, two flagons contrived by bisecting laterally one canteen.

‘Dont apologise, garçon,’ the wit said. ‘Just so it’s got a bottom at one end and a hole at the other.’ Then the one who had brought the wine scuttled back to the door after the two others, and out of it; the private with the bayonet dodged his seven-foot-long implement through it again and turned, holding the door half closed for the sergeant.

‘All right, you bastards,’ the sergeant said. ‘Be pigs.’

‘Speak for yourself, maître,’ the wit said. ‘If we must dine in stink, we prefer it to be our own.’ Then suddenly, in unpremeditated concert as though they had not even planned it or instigated it, they had not even been warned of it but instead had been overtaken from behind by it like wind, they had all turned on the sergeant, or perhaps not even the sergeant, the human guards, but just the rifles and the bayonets and the steel lockable door, not moving, rushing toward them but just yelling at them — a sound hoarse, loud, without language, not of threat or indictment either: just a hoarse concerted affirmation of invincible repudiation which continued for another moment or so even after the sergeant had passed through the door and it had clashed shut again.

Then they stopped. Yet they still didn’t rush at the table, still hovering, semicircular, almost diffidently, merely enclosing it, their noses trembling questing like those of rabbits at the odors from it, grimed, filthy, reeking still of the front lines and uncertainty and perhaps despair; unshaven, faces not alarming nor even embittered but

harassed — faces of men who had already borne not only more than they expected but than they believed they could and who knew that it was still not over and — with a sort of amazement, even terror — that no matter how much more there would be, they would still bear that too.

‘Come on, Corp,’ a voice said. ‘Let’s go.’

‘O.K.,’ the corporal said. ‘Watch it now.’ But still there was no stampede, rush. It was just a crowding, a concentration, a jostling itself almost inattentive, not of famishment, hunger but rather of the watchful noncommittance of people still — so far at least — keeping pace with, holding their own still within the fringe of a fading fairy-tale, the cursing itself inattentive and impersonal, not eager: just pressed as they crowded in onto both the fixed benches, five on one side and six on the other facing them until the twelfth man dragged up the cell’s one stool to the head of the table for the corporal and then himself took the remaining place at the foot end of the unfilled bench like the Vice to the Chair in a Dickensian tavern’s back room — a squat powerful weathered man with the blue eyes and reddish hair and beard of a Breton fisherman, captain say of his own small tough and dauntless boat — laden doubtless with contraband.

The corporal filled the bowls while they passed them hand to hand. But still there was no voracity. A leashed quality, but even, almost unimpatient as they sat holding each his upended unsoiled spoon like a boat-crew or a parade.

‘This looks bad,’ one said.

‘It’s worse,’ another said. ‘It’s serious.’

‘It’s a reprieve,’ a third said. ‘Somebody besides a garage mechanic cooked this. So if they went to all that trouble — —’ a third began.

‘Hold it,’ the Breton said. The man opposite him was short and very dark, his jaw wrenched by an old healed wound. He was saying something rapidly in an almost unintelligible Mediterranean dialect —

Midi or perhaps Basque. They looked at one another. Suddenly still another spoke. He looked like a scholar, almost like a professor. 'He wants someone to say grace,' he said.

The corporal looked at the Midian. 'Say it then.' Again the other said something rapid and incomprehensible. Again the one who resembled a scholar translated.

'He says he doesn't know one.'

'Does anybody know one?' the corporal said. Again they looked at one another. Then one said to the fourth one:

'You've been to school. Say one.'

'Maybe he went too fast and passed it,' another said.

'Say it then,' the corporal said to the fourth one. The other said rapidly: 'Benedictus. Benedicte. Benedictissimus. Will that do?'

'Will that do, Luluque?' the corporal said to the Midian.

'Yes yes,' the Midian said. They began to eat now. The Breton lifted one of the bottles slightly toward the corporal.

'Okay?' he said.

'Okay,' the corporal said. Six other hands took up the other bottles; they ate and poured and passed the bottles too.

'A reprieve,' the third said. 'They wouldn't dare execute us until we have finished eating this cooking. Our whole nation would rise at that insult to what we consider the first of the arts. How's this for an idea? We stagger this, eat one at a time, one man to each hour, thirteen hours; we'll still be alive at ... almost noon tomorrow — —'

' — when they'll serve us another meal,' another said, 'and we'll stagger that one into dinner and then stagger dinner on through tomorrow night — —'

' — and in the end eat ourselves into old age when we cant eat anymore — —'

'Let them shoot us then. Who cares?' the third said. 'No. That bastard sergeant will be in here with his firing squad right after the coffee. You watch.'

'Not that quick,' the first said. 'You have forgot what we consider the first of the virtues too. Thrift. They will wait until we have digested this and defecated it.'

'What will they want with that?' the fourth said.

'Fertiliser,' the first said. 'Imagine that corner, that garden-plot manured with the concentrate of this meal — —'

'The manure of traitors,' the fourth said. He had the dreamy and furious face of a martyr.

'In that case, wouldn't the maize, the bean, the potato grow upside down, or anyway hide its head even if it couldn't bury it?' the second said.

'Stop it,' the corporal said.

'Or more than just the corner of a plot,' the third said. 'The carrion we'll bequeath France tomorrow — —'

'Stop it!' the corporal said.

'Christ assoil us,' the fourth said.

'Aiyiyi,' the third said. 'We can call on him then. He need not fear cadavers.'

'Do you want me to make them shut up, Corp?' the Breton said.

'Come on now,' the corporal said. 'Eat. You'll spend the rest of the night wishing you did have something to clap your jaws on. Save the philosophy for then.'

'The wit too,' the third said.

'Then we will starve,' the first said.

'Or indigest,' the third said. 'If much of what we've heard tonight is wit.'

'Come on now,' the corporal said. 'I've told you twice. Do you want your bellies to say you've had enough, or that sergeant to come back in and say you've finished?' So they ate again, except the man on the

corporal's left, who once more stopped his laden knife blade halfway to his mouth.

'Polchek's not eating,' he said suddenly. 'He's not even drinking. What's the matter, Polchek? Afraid yours wont produce anything but nettles and you wont make it to the latrine in time and we'll have to sleep in them?' The man addressed was on the corporal's immediate right. He had a knowing, almost handsome metropolitan or possibly banlieu face, bold but not at all arrogant, masked, composed, and only when you caught his eyes unawares did you realise how alert.

'A day of rest at Chaulnesmont wasn't the right pill for that belly of his maybe,' the first said.

'The sergeant-major's coup de grâce tomorrow morning will be though,' the fourth said.

'Maybe it'll cure all of you of having to run a fever over what I dont eat and drink,' Polchek said.

'What's the matter?' the corporal said to him. 'You went on sick parade Sunday night before we came out. Haven't you got over it yet?'

'So what?' Polchek said. 'Is it an issue? I had a bad belly Sunday night. I've still got it but it's still mine. I was just sitting here with it, not worrying half as much about what I dont put in it, as some innocent bystanders do because I dont.'

'Do you want to make an issue of it?' the fourth said.

'Bang on the door,' the corporal said to the Breton. 'Tell the sergeant we want to report a sick man.'

'Who's making an issue of it now?' Polchek said to the corporal before the Breton could move. He picked up his filled glass. 'Come on,' he said to the corporal. 'No heel taps. If my belly dont like wine tonight, as Jean says that sergeant-major's pistol will pump it all out tomorrow morning.' He said to all of them: 'Come on. To peace. Haven't we finally got what we've all been working for for four years now? Come on, up with them!' he said, louder and sharply, with something momentary and almost fierce in his voice, face, look.

At once the same excitement, restrained fierceness, seemed to pass through all of them; they raised their glasses too except one — the fourth one of the mountain faces, not quite as tall as the others and with something momentary and anguished in it almost like despair, who suddenly half raised his glass and stopped it and did not drink when the others did and banged the bizarre and incongruous vessels down and reached for the bottles again as, preceded by the sound of the heavy boots, the door clashed open again and the sergeant and his private entered; he now held an unfolded paper in his hand.

‘Polchek,’ he said. For a second Polchek didn’t stir. Then the man who had not drunk gave a convulsive start and although he arrested it at once, when Polchek stood quietly up they both for a moment were in motion, so that the sergeant, about to address Polchek again, paused and looked from one to the other. ‘Well?’ the sergeant said. ‘Which? Dont you even know who you are?’ Nobody answered. As one the others except Polchek were looking at the man who had not drunk. ‘You,’ the sergeant said to the corporal. ‘Dont you know your own men?’

‘This is Polchek,’ the corporal said, indicating Polchek.

‘Then what’s wrong with him?’ the sergeant said. He said to the other man: ‘What’s your name?’

‘I — —’ the man said; again he glanced rapidly about, at nothing, no one, anguished and despairing.

‘His name is — —’ the corporal said. ‘I’ve got his papers — —’ He reached inside his tunic and produced a soiled dog-eared paper, obviously a regimental posting order. ‘Pierre Bouc.’ He rattled off a number.

‘There’s no Bouc on this list,’ the sergeant said. ‘What’s he doing here?’

‘You tell me,’ the corporal said. ‘He got mixed in with us somehow Monday morning. None of us know any Pierre Bouc either.’

‘Why didn’t he say something before this?’

‘Who would have listened?’ the corporal said.

'Is that right?' the sergeant said to the man. 'You dont belong in this squad?' The man didn't answer.

'Tell him,' the corporal said.

'No,' the man whispered. Then he said loudly: 'No!' He blundered up. 'I dont know them!' he said, blundering, stumbling, half-falling backward over the bench almost as though in flight until the sergeant checked him.

'The major will have to settle this,' the sergeant said. 'Give me that order.' The corporal passed it to him. 'Out with you,' the sergeant said. 'Both of you.' Now those inside the room could see beyond the door another file of armed men, apparently a new one, waiting. The two prisoners passed on through the door and into it, the sergeant then the orderly following; the iron door clashed behind them, against that room and all it contained, signified, portended; beyond it Polchek didn't even lower his voice:

'They promised me brandy. Where is it?'

'Shut up,' the sergeant's voice said. 'You'll get what's coming to you, no bloody fear.'

'I'd better,' Polchek said. 'If I dont, I might know what to do about it.'

'I've told him once,' the sergeant's voice said. 'If he dont shut up this time, shut him up.'

'With pleasure, sergeant,' another voice said. 'Can do.'

'Take them on,' the sergeant's voice said. Though before the iron clash of the door had ceased the corporal was already speaking, not loud: just prompt, still mild, not peremptory: just firm:

'Eat.' The same man essayed to speak again but again the corporal forestalled him. 'Eat,' he said. 'Next time he will take it out.' But they were spared that. The door opened almost immediately, but this time it was only the sergeant, alone, the eleven heads which remained turning as one to look at him where he faced the corporal down the length of the littered table.

'You,' the sergeant said.

'Me?' the corporal said.

'Yes,' the sergeant said. Still the corporal didn't move. He said again: 'You mean me?'

'Yes,' the sergeant said. 'Come on.' The corporal rose then. He gave one rapid look about at the ten faces now turning from the sergeant to look at him — faces dirty, unshaven, strained, which had slept too little in too long, harassed, but absolute, one in whatever it was — not trust exactly, not dependence: perhaps just one-ness, singleness.

'You're in charge, Paul,' he said to the Breton.

'Right,' the Breton said. 'Till you get back.' But this time the corridor was empty; it was the sergeant himself who closed the door behind them and turned the heavy key and pocketed it. There was no one in sight at all where he — the corporal — had expected to find armed men bristling until they in the white glittering room in the Hôtel de Ville sent for them for the last time.

Then the sergeant turned from the door and now he — the corporal — realised that they were even hurrying a little: not at all furtive nor even surreptitious: just expedite, walking rapidly back up the corridor which he had already traversed three times — once yesterday morning when the guards had brought them from the lorry to the cell, and twice last night when the guards had taken them to the Hôtel de Ville and brought them back, their — his and the sergeant's — heavy boots not ringing because (so recent the factory — when it had been a factory — was) these were not stone but brick, but making instead a dull and heavy sound seeming only the louder because there were only four now instead of twenty-six plus the guards.

So to him it was as though there was no other way out of it save that one exit, no destination to go to in it except on, so that he had already begun to pass the small arch with its locked iron gate when the sergeant checked and turned him, nor any other life in or near it so that he didn't even recognise the silhouette of the helmet and the rifle until the man was in the act of unlocking the gate from the outside and swinging it back for them to pass through.

Nor did he see the car at once, the sergeant not quite touching him, just keeping him at that same pace, rapidity, as though by simple juxtaposition, on through the gate into an alley, a blank wall opposite and at the curb-edge the big dark motionless car which he had not noticed yet because of the silence — not the subterrene and cavernous emptiness in which their boots had echoed a moment back but a cul-de-sac of it, himself and the sergeant and the two sentries — the one who had unlocked the gate for them and then locked it after them, and his opposite flanking the other side of the gate — not even at parade rest but at ease, their rifles grounded, immobile and remote, as though oblivious to that to which they in their turn were invisible, the four of them set down in a vacuum of silence within the city's distant and indefatigable murmur. Then he saw the car.

He didn't stop, it was barely a falter, the sergeant's shoulder barely nudged him before he went on. The driver didn't even move to descend; it was the sergeant who opened the door, the shoulder, a hand too now, firm and urgent against his back because he had stopped now, erect, immobile and immovable even after the voice inside the car said, 'Get in, my child;' then immovable for another second yet before he stooped and entered it, seeing as he did so the pallid glint of braid, a single plane of face above the dark enveloping cloak.

Then the sergeant shut the door, the car already in motion and that was all; only the three of them: the old man who bore far too much rank to carry a lethal weapon even if he were not already too old to use it, and the driver whose hands were full with managing the car even if he had not had his back to him who could not remember in four days anyhow when there had not been one arm or two but from twenty to a thousand already cocked and triggered for his life; out of the alley and still no word — direction or command — from the old man in the braided invincible hat and the night-colored cloak in the corner opposite him, not back to the city but skirting through the fringe of it, faster and faster, pacing its cavernous echoes through the narrow ways of the deserted purlieu, taking the rapid turnings as if the mechanism

itself knew their destination, making a long concentric through the city's edge, the ground rising now so that even he began to know where they were probably going, the city itself beginning to tilt toward them as it sank away beneath; nor any word from the old man this time either: the car just stopped, and looking past the fine and delicate profile beneath what should have been the insuperable weight of the barred and braided hat, he could see not the Place de Ville itself, they were not that high above the city yet, but rather as though the concentration of its unwearyable and sleepless anxiety had taken on the glow and glare of light.

'Now, my child,' the old general said: not to him this time but to the driver. The car went on and now he did know where they were going because there was nothing else up here but the old Roman citadel. But if he felt any first shock of instinctive and purely physical terror, he didn't show it. And if at the same instant reason was also telling him, Nonsense.

To execute you secretly in a dungeon would undo the very thing which they stopped the war and brought all thirteen of you here to accomplish, nobody heard that either: he just sat there, erect, a little stiffly who never had sat completely back in the seat, alert but quite calm, rapid watchful and composed, the car in second gear now but still going fast around the final convoluted hairpin turns until at last the stone weight of the citadel itself seemed to lean down and rest upon them like a ponderable shadow, the car making the last renversement because now it could go no further, stopping at last and not he nor the driver but the old general himself who opened the door and got out and held the door until he was out and erect again and had begun to turn his head to look until the old general said, 'No, not yet,' and turned on himself, he following, up the final steep and rocky pitch where they would have to walk, the old citadel not looming above them but squatting, not Gothic but Roman: not soaring to the stars out of the aspiration of man's past but a gesture against them of his mortality like a clenched fist or a shield.

'Now turn and look at it,' the old general said. But he already had, was — down the declivity's black pitch to where the city lay trembling and myriad with lights in its bowl of night like a scatter of smoldering autumn leaves in the windy darkness, thicker and denser than the stars in its concentration of anguish and unreprieve, as if all of darkness and terror had poured down in one wash, one wave, to lie palpitant and unassuageable in the Place de Ville. 'Look at it.

Listen to it. Remember it. A moment: then close the window on it. Disregard that anguish. You caused them to fear and suffer but tomorrow you will have discharged them of both and they will only hate you: once for the rage they owe you for giving them the terror, once for the gratitude they will owe you for taking it away, and once for the fact that you are beyond the range of either. So close the window on that, and be yourself discharged. Now look beyond it.

The earth, or half of it, full half the earth as far as horizon bounds it. It is dark of course, but only dark from here; its darkness is only that anonymity which a man can close behind him like a curtain on his past, not even when he must in his desperation but when he will for his comfort and simple privacy. Of course he can go only in one direction in it now: west; only one hemisphere of it — the Western — is available to him now. But that is large enough for his privacy for a year because this condition will only last another year, then all earth will be free to him. They will ask for a formal meeting, for terms, sometime this winter; by next year we will even have what we will call peace — for a little while.

Not we will request it: they will — the Germans, the best soldiers on earth today or in two thousand years for that matter since even the Romans could not conquer them — the one people out of all the earth who have a passion and dedication not even for glory but for war, who make war not even for conquest and aggrandisement but as an occupation, an avocation, and who will lose this one for that very reason: that they are the best soldiers on earth; not we French and British, who accept war only as a last gambit when everything else has failed, and even enter that final one with no confidence in it either; but they, the Germans, who have not receded one foot since they crossed

the Belgian frontier almost four years ago and every decision since has been either nil or theirs and who will not stop now even though they themselves know that one more victory will destroy them; who will win perhaps two or even three more (the number will not matter) and then will have to surrender because the phenomenon of war is its hermaphroditism: the principles of victory and of defeat inhabit the same body and the necessary opponent, enemy, is merely the bed they self-exhaust each other on: a vice only the more terrible and fatal because there is no intervening breast or division between to frustrate them into health by simple normal distance and lack of opportunity for the copulation from which even orgasm cannot free them; the most expensive and fatal vice which man has invented yet, to which the normal ones of lechery and drink and gambling which man fatuously believes are capable of destroying him, stand as does the child's lollypop to the bottle the courtesan and the playing-card.

A vice so long ingrained in man as to have become an honorable tenet of his behavior and the national altar for his love of bloodshed and glorious sacrifice. More than that even: a pillar not of his nation's supremacy but of his national survival; you and I have seen war as the last resort of politics; I shant of course but you will — can — see it become the last refuge from bankruptcy; you will — can, provided you will — see the day when a nation insolvent from overpopulation will declare war on whatever richest and most sentimental opponent it can persuade to defeat it quickest, in order to feed its people out of the conqueror's quartermaster stores.

But that is not our problem today; and even if it were, by simply being in alliance with the ultimate victor, we — France and Britain — would find ourselves in the happy situation of gaining almost as much from our victory as the German will through his defeat. Our — call it mine if you like — problem is more immediate. There is the earth. You will have half of it now; by New Year's you will very probably have all of it, all the vast scope of it except this minuscule suppuration which men call Europe — and who knows? in time and with a little discretion and care, even that again if you like. Take my car — you can drive one, cant you?'

‘Yes,’ the corporal said. ‘Go?’

‘Now,’ the old general said. ‘Take my car. If you can drive at all, the pennon on its bonnet will carry you anywhere in Europe west of the German wire; if you can drive well, the engine beneath it will take you to the coast — Brest or Marseilles either — in two days; I have papers ready to pass you aboard any ship you choose there and command its captain. Then South America — Asia — the Pacific islands; close that window fast; lock it forever on that aberrant and futile dream.

No no,’ he said quickly, ‘dont for one second suspect me of that base misreading of your character — you who in five minutes Monday voided that war which the German himself, the best soldier in Europe, in almost four years has never quite nudged from stalemate. Of course you will have money, but only that balance exactly matched to freedom as the eagle or the bandit carry theirs. I dont bribe you with money. I give you liberty.’

‘To desert them,’ the corporal said.

‘Desert whom? Look again.’ His hand appeared in a brief rapid gesture toward the wan city unsleeping below them — a gesture not even contemptuous, not anything: just a flick, then gone, already vanished again within the midnight-colored cloak. ‘Not them.

Where have they been since Monday? Why with their bare hands, since they have enough of them, have they not torn down brick by brick the walls which far fewer hands than theirs sufficed to raise, or torn from its hinges that one door which only one hand sufficed to lock, and set all of you free who had essayed to die for them? Where are the two thousand nine hundred and eighty-seven others you had — or thought you had — at dawn Monday? Why, as soon as you were through the wire, didn’t all of them cast down their arms too and simply follow you, if they too believed you were all weaponed and bucklered out of the arsenal of invulnerable human aspiration and hope and belief? why didn’t even that mere three thousand then — they would have been enough — erase the bricks and wrench away that door, who believed in

you for five minutes anyway enough to risk what you anyway knew you risked — the three thousand that is lacking the twelve who have been locked inside the same incommunicant bricks with you ever since.

Where are they even? one of them, your own countryman, blood brother, kinsman probably since you were all blood kin at some time there — one Zsettlani who has denied you, and the other, whether Zsettlani or not or blood kin or not, at least was — or anyway had been accepted into — the brotherhood of your faith and hope — Polchek, who had already betrayed you by midnight Sunday.

Do you see? You even have a substitute to your need as on that afternoon God produced the lamb which saved Isaac — if you could call Polchek a lamb. I will take Polchek tomorrow, execute him with rote and fanfare; you will not only have your revenge and discharge the vengeance of the rest of those three thousand whom he betrayed, you will repossess the opprobrium from all that voice down there which cannot even go to bed because of the frantic need to anathemise you. Give me Polchek, and take freedom.'

'There are still ten,' the corporal said.

'Let's try it. We will remain here; I will send the car back with orders to unlock and open that door and then for every man in that building to vanish from it, oblivious of all to which they themselves will be invisible — quietly unlock that door, unlock that gate, and vanish. How long before that ten will have denied you too — betrayed you too, if you can call that choice betrayal?'

'And you see too,' the corporal said. 'In ten minutes there would not be ten but a hundred. In ten hours there would not be ten hundred but ten thousand. And in ten days — —'

'Yes,' the old general said. 'I have seen that. Have I not said I dont so basely misread your character? oh yes, let us say it: your threat. Why else have I offered to buy my — our — security with things which most men not only do not want but on the contrary do well to fear and flee

from, like liberty and freedom? Oh yes, I can destroy you tomorrow morning and save us — for the time. For the length of my life, in fact. But only for the time. And if I must, I will. Because I believe in man within his capacities and limitations.

I not only believe he is capable of enduring and will endure, but that he must endure, at least until he himself invents evolves produces a better tool than he to substitute for himself. Take my car and freedom, and I will give you Polchek. Take the highest of all the ecstasies: compassion, pity: the orgasm of forgiving him who barely escaped doing you a mortal hurt — that glue, that catalyst which your philosophers have trained you to believe holds the earth together. Take the earth.'

'There are still ten,' the corporal said.

'Have I forgotten them?' the old general said. 'Have I not said twice that I have never misread you? You dont need to threaten me; I know that they, not you, are the problem; not you but they are what we are bargaining for. Because for your profit, I must destroy all eleven of you and so compound tenfold the value of your threat and sacrifice.

For my profit, I must let them go too, to be witnesses to all the earth that you forsook them; for, talk as much and as loudly and as long as they will, who to believe in the value — value? validity — of the faith they preach when you, its prophet and instigator, elected your liberty to its martyrdom? No no, we are not two Greek or Armenian or Jewish — or for that matter, Norman — peasants swapping a horse: we are two articulations self-elected possibly, anyway elected, anyway postulated, not so much to defend as to test two inimical conditions which, through no fault of ours but through the simple paucity and restrictions of the arena where they meet, must contend and — one of them — perish: I champion of this mundane earth which, whether I like it or not, is, and to which I did not ask to come, yet since I am here, not only must stop but intend to stop during my allotted while; you champion of an esoteric realm of man's baseless hopes and his infinite capacity — no: passion — for unfact.

No, they are not inimical really, there is no contest actually; they can even exist side by side together in this one restricted arena, and could and would, had yours not interfered with mine. So once more: take the earth. Now, answer as I know you will: There are still ten.'

'There are still that ten,' the corporal said.

'Then take the world,' the old general said. 'I will acknowledge you as my son; together we will close the window on this aberration and lock it forever. Then I will open another for you on a world such as caesar nor sultan nor khalif ever saw, Tiberius nor Kubla nor all the emperors of the East ever dreamed of — no Rome and Baiae: mere depot for the rapine of ravagers and bagnio for one last exhaustion of the nerve-ends before returning to their gloomy deserts to wrest more of the one or face at home the hired knives of their immediate underlings thirsting to cure them of the need for both; no Cathay: chimaera of poets bearing the same relation to the reality of attainment as the Mahometan's paradise — a symbol of his escape and a justification of its need, from the stinking alleys or fierce sand of his inescapable cradle; nor Kubla's Xanadu which was not even a poet's rounded and completed dream but a drug-sodden English one's lightning-bolt which electrocuted him with the splendor he could not even face long enough to describe it down; — none of these which were but random and momentary constellations in the empyrean of the world's history; but Paris, which is the world as empyrean is the sum of its constellations, — not that Paris in which any man can have all of these — Rome Cathay and Xanadu — provided he is connected a little and does not need to count his money, because you do not want these: have I not said twice now that I have not misread you? but that Paris which only my son can inherit from me — that Paris which I did not at all reject at seventeen but simply held in abeyance for compounding against the day when I should be a father to bequeath it to an heir worthy of that vast and that terrible heritage. A fate, a destiny in it: mine and yours, one and inextricable.

Power, matchless and immeasurable; oh no, I have not misread you: — I, already born heir to that power as it stood then, holding that

inheritance in escrow to become unchallenged and unchallengeable chief of that confederation which would defeat and subjugate and so destroy the only factor on earth which threatened it; you with the power and gift to persuade three thousand men to accept a sure and immediate death in preference to a problematical one based on tried mathematical percentage, when you had at most only a division of fifteen thousand to work on and your empty hands to work with.

What can you not — will you not — do with all the world to work on and the heritage I can give you to work with. A king, an emperor, retaining his light and untensile hold on mankind only until another appears capable of giving them more and bloodier circuses and more and sweeter bread? Bah. You will be God, holding him forever through a far, far stronger ingredient than his simple lusts and appetites: by his triumphant and ineradicable folly, his deathless passion for being led, mystified, and deceived.'

'So we ally — confederate,' the corporal said. 'Are you that afraid of me?'

'I already respect you; I dont need to fear you. I can do without you. I shall; I intend to. Of course, in that case you will not see it — and how sad that commentary: that one last bitterest pill of martyrdom, without which the martyrdom itself could not be since then it would not be martyrdom: even if by some incredible if you shall have been right, you will not even know it — and paradox: only the act of voluntarily relinquishing the privilege of ever knowing you were right, can possibly make you right. — I know, dont say it: if I can do without you, then so can you yourself; to me, your death is but an ace to be finessed, while to you it is the actual ace of trumps.

Nor this either: I mentioned the word bribe once; now I have offered it: I am an old man, you a young one; I will be dead in a few years and you can use your inheritance to win the trick tomorrow which today my deuce finessed you of. Because I will take that risk too. Dont even say — —' and stopped and raised the hand quickly this time from inside the

cloak and said: 'Wait. Dont say it yet. — Then take life. And think well before you answer that.

Because the purse is empty now; only one thing else remains in it. Take life. You are young; even after four years of war, the young can still believe in their own invulnerability: that all else may die, but not they. So they dont need to treasure life too highly since they cannot conceive, accept, the possible end of it. But in time you become old, you see death then. Then you realise that nothing — nothing — nothing — not power nor glory nor wealth nor pleasure nor even freedom from pain, is as valuable as simple breathing, simply being alive even with all the regret of having to remember and the anguish of an irreparable wornout body; merely knowing that you are alive — Listen to this.

It happened in America, at a remote place called by an Indian name I think: Mississippi: a man who had committed a brutal murder for some base reason — gain or revenge perhaps or perhaps simply to free himself of one woman in order to espouse another; it doesn't matter — who went to his trial still crying his innocence and was convicted and sentenced still crying it and even in the death cell beneath the gallows still crying it, until a priest came to him; not the first time of course nor the second nor perhaps even the third, but presently and in time: the murderer at last confessing his crime against man and so making his peace with God, until presently it was almost as though the murderer and the priest had exchanged places and offices: not the priest now but the murderer the strong one, the calm one, the strong calm steadfast rock not even of tremulous hope but of conviction and unshakable faith, on which the priest himself could now lean for strength and courage; this right up to the very morning of the execution, toward which the murderer now looked with a sort of impatience almost, as though actually fretting a little for the moment when he could doff the sorry ephemeral world which had brought him to this and demanded this expiation and accepted his forgiveness; right up to the gallows itself: which at Mississippi I understand is out-of-doors in the yard of the jail, enclosed temporarily in a high stockade of planks to shield the principal's departure from earth from the merely morbid and curious anyway; though they would come: in their carts and carriages for miles,

bringing box lunches: men women children and grandparents, to stand along the tall fence until the bell, clock, whatever it was to mark the passing of the soul, struck and released them to go back home; indeed, able to see even less than the man who stood beneath the noose, already free this whole week now of that sorry and mortal body which was the sorry all which penance could rob him of, standing calm composed and at peace, the trivial noose already fitted to his neck and in his vision one last segment of the sky beyond which his theology had taught him he would presently be translated, and one single branch of an adjacent tree extending over the stockade as though in benison, one last gesture of earth's absolution, with which he had long since severed any frail remaining thread; when suddenly a bird flew onto that bough and stopped and opened its tiny throat and sang — whereupon he who less than a second before had his very foot lifted to step from earth's grief and anguish into eternal peace, cast away heaven, salvation, immortal soul and all, struggling to free his bound hands in order to snatch away the noose, crying, 'Innocent! Innocent! I didn't do it!' even as the trap earth, world and all, fell from under him — all because of one bird, one weightless and ephemeral creature which hawk might stoop at or snare or lime or random pellet of some idle boy destroy before the sun set — except that tomorrow, next year, there would be another bird, another spring, the same bough leafed again and another bird to sing on it, if he is only here to hear it, can only remain — Do you follow me?'

'Yes,' the corporal said.

'Then take that bird. Recant, confess, say you were wrong; that what you led was — led? you led nothing: you simply participated — an attack which failed to advance. Take life from me; ask mercy and accept it. I can give it, even for a military failure. The general commanding your division will — he already has — demand a sacrifice, not in the name of France or of victory, but in that of his blemished record. But it's not he, it's I who wear this hat.'

'There are still ten,' the corporal said.

‘Who will hate you — until they forget you. Who will even curse you until they have forgot whom they cursed, and why. No no: close the window upon that baseless dream. Open this other one; perhaps you will — can — see nothing but gray beyond it — except for that bough, always; that one single bough which will be there always waiting and ready for that weightless and ephemeral burden. Take that bird.’

‘Dont be afraid,’ the corporal said. ‘There’s nothing to be afraid of. Nothing worth it.’

For a moment the old general didn’t seem to have heard the corporal at all, standing a head below the other’s high mountain one, beneath the seemingly insuperable weight of the blue-and-scarlet hat cross-barred and dappled with gold braid and heavy golden leaves. Then he said, ‘Afraid? No no, it’s not I but you who are afraid of man; not I but you who believe that nothing but a death can save him. I know better.

I know that he has that in him which will enable him to outlast even his wars; that in him more durable than all his vices, even that last and most fearsome one; to outlast even this next avatar of his servitude which he now faces: his enslavement to the demonic progeny of his own mechanical curiosity, from which he will emancipate himself by that one ancient tried and true method by which slaves have always freed themselves: by inculcating their masters with the slaves’ own vices — in this case the vice of war and that other one which is no vice at all but instead is the quality-mark and warrant of man’s immortality: his invincible and deathless folly.

He has already begun to put wheels under his patio his terrace and his front veranda; even at my age I may see the day when what was once his house has become a storage-place for his bed and stove and razor and spare clothing; you with your youth could (remember that bird) see the day when he will have invented his own private climate and moved it stove bathroom bed clothing kitchen and all into his automobile and what he once called home will have vanished from human lexicon: so that he wont dismount from his automobile at all because he wont need to: the entire earth one unbroken machined de-mounted dis-

rivered expanse of concrete paving protuberanceless by tree or bush or house or anything which might constitute a corner or a threat to visibility, and man in his terrapin myriads enclosed clothesless from birth in his individual wheeled and glovelike envelope, with pipes and hoses leading upward from underground reservoirs to charge him with one composite squirt which at one mutual instant will fuel his mobility, pander his lusts, sate his appetites and fire his dreams; peripatetic, unceasing and long since no longer countable, to die at last at the click of an automatic circuit-breaker on a speedometer dial, and, long since freed of bone and organ and gut, leaving nothing for communal scavenging but a rusting and odorless shell — the shell which he does not get out of because he does not need to but which presently for a time he will not emerge from because he does not dare because the shell will be his only protection from the hail-like iron refuse from his wars.

Because by that time his wars will have dispossessed him by simple out-distance; his simple frail physique will be no longer able to keep up, bear them, attend them, be present. He will try of course and for a little while he will even hold his own; he will build tanks bigger and faster and more impervious and with more firepower than any before, he will build aircraft bigger and faster and capable of more load and more destruction than any yet; for a little while he will accompany, direct, as he thinks control them, even after he has finally realised that it is not another frail and mortal dissident to his politics or his notions of national boundaries that he is contending with, but the very monster itself which he inhabits.

It will not be someone firing bullets at him who for the moment doesn't like him. It will be his own frankenstein which roasts him alive with heat, asphyxiates him with speed, wrenches loose his still living-entrails in the ferocity of its prey-seeking stoop. So he will not be able to go along with it at all, though for a little while longer it will permit him the harmless delusion that he controls it from the ground with buttons.

Then that will be gone too; years, decades then centuries will have elapsed since it last answered his voice; he will have even forgotten the

very location of its breeding-grounds and his last contact with it will be a day when he will crawl shivering out of his cooling burrow to crouch among the delicate stalks of his dead antennae like a fairy geometry, beneath a clangorous rain of dials and meters and switches and bloodless fragments of metal epidermis, to watch the final two of them engaged in the last gigantic wrestling against the final and dying sky robbed even of darkness and filled with the inflectionless uproar of the two mechanical voices bellowing at each other polysyllabic and verbless patriotic nonsense.

Oh yes, he will survive it because he has that in him which will endure even beyond the ultimate worthless tideless rock freezing slowly in the last red and heatless sunset, because already the next star in the blue immensity of space will be already clamorous with the uproar of his debarkation, his puny and inexhaustible and immortal voice still talking, still planning; and there too after the last ding dong of doom has rung and died there will still be one sound more: his voice, planning still to build something higher and faster and louder; more efficient and louder and faster than ever before, yet it too inherent with the same old primordial fault since it too in the end will fail to eradicate him from the earth. I dont fear man. I do better: I respect and admire him. And pride: I am ten times prouder of that immortality which he does possess than ever he of that heavenly one of his delusion. Because man and his folly—'

'Will endure,' the corporal said.

'They will do more,' the old general said proudly. 'They will prevail. — Shall we return?' They went back to the waiting car and descended; they traversed once more the echoing and empty warrens concentric about the distant crowded Place de Ville. Then the alley again, the car slowing and stopping once more opposite the small locked gate in front of which, above a struggling group of five men the bayoneted rifles of four of them waved and jerked like furious exclamations. The corporal looked once at the struggling group and said quietly: 'There are eleven now.'

'There are eleven now,' the old general said as quietly; again one arresting gesture of the fine and delicate hand from beneath the cloak. 'Wait. Let us watch this a moment: a man freed of it, now apparently trying to fight his way back into what for all he knows will be his death cell.'

So they sat for a moment yet, watching the fifth man (the same one who two hours ago had been taken from the cell by the same guards who came for Polchek) straining stocky and furious in the hands of his four captors apparently not away from the small gate but toward it, until the old general got out of the car, the corporal following, and said, not raising his voice yet either:

'What's wrong here, Sergeant?' The group paused in their straining attitudes. The prisoner looked back then he wrenched free and turned and ran across the pavement toward the old general and the corporal, the four captors following, grasping him again.

'Stand still, you!' the sergeant hissed. 'Attention! His name is Pierre Bouc. He didn't belong in that squad at all, though we didn't discover the mistake until one of them—' he glanced at the corporal '—you—condescended to produce his regimental order. We found him trying to get back in. He denied his name; he wouldn't even produce the order until we took it away from him.' Holding the short and furious man with one hand, he produced the dog-eared paper from his pocket. Immediately the prisoner snatched it from him.

'You lie!' he said to the sergeant. Before they could prevent him he ripped the order to shreds and whirled and flung the shreds in the old general's face. 'You lie!' he shouted at the old general while the bursting gout drifted like a confetti of windless and weightless snow or feathers about the golden and invincible hat, the calm incurious inscrutable face which had looked at everything and believed none of it. 'You lie!' the man shouted again. 'My name is not Pierre Bouc.

I am Piotr—' adding something in a harsh almost musical middle-eastern tongue so full of consonants as to be almost unintelligible. Then he turned to the corporal, going rapidly onto his knees, grasping the

corporal's hand and saying something else in the incomprehensible tongue, to which the corporal answered in it though the man still crouched, clinging to the corporal's hand, the corporal speaking again in the tongue, as if he had repeated himself but with a different object, noun perhaps, and then a third time, a third slight alteration in its construction or context or direction, at which the man moved, rose and stood now rigid at attention facing the corporal, who spoke again, and the man turned, a smart military quarter-turn, the four captors moving quickly in again until the corporal said in French:

'You dont need to hold him. Just unlock the gate.' But still the old general didn't move, motionless within the cloak's dark volume, composed, calm, not even bemused: just inscrutable, saying presently in that voice not even recapitulant: not anything:

' "Forgive me, I didn't know what I was doing" . And you said, "Be a man", but no move. Then you said "Be a Zsettlani" and no move. Then you said "Be a soldier" and he became one.' Then he turned and got back into the car, the soft voluminous smother of the coat becoming motionless again about him in the corner of the seat; the sergeant came rapidly back across the pavement and stood again just behind the corporal's shoulder; now the old general himself spoke in the rapid unvoeled tongue:

'And became one. No: returned to one. Good night, my child.'
'Goodbye, Father,' the corporal answered him.

'Not goodbye,' the old general said. 'I am durable too; I dont give up easily either. Remember whose blood it is that you defy me with.' Then in French to the driver: 'Let us go home now.' The car went on. Then he and the sergeant turned together, the sergeant once more at and just behind his shoulder, not touching him, back to the iron gate which one of the sentries held open for them to pass through and then closed and locked.

Again, so grooved and locked in old assumption, he had begun to turn down the corridor toward the cell when the sergeant once more

checked and turned him, this time into a passage only wide enough for one and barely tall enough for any — a one-way secret duct leading as though into the very bowels of incarceration; the sergeant unlocked a solid door this time and closed it between himself and the corporal upon a cell indeed this time, little larger than a big closet containing one endless man-width wooden bench for sleeping and an iron bucket for latrine and two men, all bathed in one fierce glare of light.

One of them did have the swaggering face this time, reckless and sardonic, incorrigible and debonair, even to the thin moustache; he even wore the filthy beret and the knotted handkerchief about his throat, even the limp dead cigarette in the corner of his mouth, his hands in his pockets and one foot crossed negligently over the other as he had leaned against the wall of his narrow Montmartre alley, the other shorter man standing beside him with the peaceful and patient fidelity of a blind dog — a squat simian-like man whose tremendous empty and peaceful hands hung almost to his knees as if they were attached to strings inside his sleeves, with a small quite round simian head and a doughy face itself like one single feature, drooling a little at the mouth.

‘Pray to enter,’ the first said. ‘So they tapped you for it, did they? Call me Lapin; anybody in the Prêfecture will validate it.’ Without removing his hand from the pocket, he indicated the man beside him with a nudge of his elbow. ‘This is Cassetête — Horse for short. We’re on our way to town, hey, Horse?’ The second man made a single hoarse indistinguishable sound.

‘Hear that?’ the first said. ‘He can say “Paris” as good as anybody. Tell him again, Uncle — where we’re going tomorrow.’ Again the other made the thick wet sound. It was quite true; the corporal could recognise it now.

‘What’s he doing in that uniform?’ the corporal said.

‘Ah, the sons of bitches scared him,’ the first said. ‘I dont mean Germans either. You dont mean they are going to be satisfied to shoot just one of you out of that whole regiment.’

'I dont know,' the corporal said. 'He hasn't always been like this?'

'Got a fag?' the other said. 'I'm out.' The corporal produced a pack of cigarettes. The other spat the stub from his mouth without even moving his head, and took one from the pack. 'Thanks.'

The corporal produced a lighter. 'Thanks,' the other said. He took the lighter and snapped it on and lit the cigarette, already — or still — talking, the cigarette bobbing, his arms now crossed in front of him, each hand grasping lightly the opposite elbow. 'What was that you said? Has he always been like this? Naah. A few flies upstairs, but he was all right until — What?' The corporal stood facing him, his hand extended.

'The lighter,' the corporal said.

'I beg pardon?'

'My lighter,' the corporal said. They looked at one another. Lapin made a slight motion with his wrists and up-turned his empty palms. The corporal faced him, his hand extended.

'Jesus,' the other said. 'Dont break my heart. Dont tell me you even saw what I did with it. If you did, then they are right; they just waited one day too late.' He made another rapid movement with one hand; when it opened again, the lighter was in it. The corporal took it.

'Beats hell, dont it?' the other said. 'A man aint even the sum of his vices: just his habits. Here we are, after tomorrow morning neither one of us will have any use for it and until then it wont matter which one of us has it.

Yet you've got to have it back just because you are in the habit of owning it, and I have to try to cop it just because that's one of my natural habits too. Maybe that's what all the bother and trouble they're getting ready to go to tomorrow morning is for — parading a whole garrison just to cure three lousy bastards of the bad habit of breathing. Hey, Horse?' he said to the second man.

'Paris,' the second man said hoarsely.

'You bet,' the other said. 'That's the one they're going to cure us of tomorrow: the bad habit of not getting to Paris after working for four years at it. We'll make it this time though; the corporal here is going with us to see that we do.'

'What did he do?' the corporal said.

'That's all right,' the other said. 'Say we. Murder. It was the old dame's fault; all she had to do was just tell us where the money was hidden and then behave herself, keep her mouth shut. Instead she had to lay there in the bed yelling her head off until we had to choke her or we never would have got to Paris — —'

'Paris,' the second said in his wet hoarse voice.

'Because that's all we wanted,' the other said. 'All he was trying to do: we were trying to do: just to get to Paris. Only folks kept on steering him wrong, sending him off in the wrong direction, sicking the dogs on him, cops always saying Move on, move on — you know how it is.

So when we threw in together that day — that was at Clermont Ferrand in '14 — we didn't know how long he had been on the road because we didn't know how old he was. Except that it had been a good while, he hadn't been nothing but a kid then — You found out you were going to have to go to Paris before you even found out you were going to have to have a woman, hey, Horse?'

'Paris,' the second said hoarsely.

' — working a little whenever he could find it, sleeping in stables and hedgerows until they would set the dogs or the police on him again, telling him to move on without even bothering to tell him which way he wanted to go until you would have thought nobody else in France ever heard of Paris, let alone wanted — had — to go there. Hey, Horse?'

'Paris,' the second said hoarsely.

'Then we run into one another that day in Clermont and decided to throw in together and then it was all right, there was a war on then and all you had to do was get yourself inside a government blue suit and you were free of cops and civilians and the whole human race; all you needed was just to know who to salute and do it quick enough. So we took a bottle of brandy to a sergeant I knew — —'

'The human race?' the corporal said.

'Sure,' the other said. 'You might not think it to look at him, but he can move in the dark as quiet as a ghost and even see in it like a cat; turn this light off for a second and he will have that lighter out of your pocket and you wont even know it — — So he was in too now — —'

'He learned that fast?' the corporal said.

'Of course we had to be a little careful about his hands. He never meant nothing, see: he just didn't know himself how strong they were, like that night last month.'

'So you got along fine then,' the corporal said.

'It was duck soup. — So he was in too now and now he could even ride sometimes, with the government paying for it, getting closer and closer to Paris now; not much over a year and we were all the way up to Verdun, that any boche will tell you is right next door to Paris — —'

'And still doing all right,' the corporal said.

'Why not? If you cant trust your money to a bank in peacetime, where else can you put it in a war except up the chimney or under the mattress or inside the clock? Or anywhere else you thought it was hidden for that matter because it didn't matter to us; Horse here has a nose for a ten-franc note like a pig for a truffle.

Until that night last month and that was the old dame's fault; all she needed to do was tell us where it was and then lay quiet and keep her mouth shut but that didn't suit her, she had to lay there in the bed hollering her head off until Horse here had to shut her up — you know:

no harm intended: just to squeeze her throat a little until we could have a little peace and quiet to hunt for it in. Only we forgot about the hands, and when I got back — —'

'Got back?' the corporal said.

'I was downstairs hunting for the money. — got back, it was too late. So they caught us. And you'd have thought that would have satisfied them, especially as they even got the money back — —'

'You found the money?' the corporal said.

'Sure. While he was keeping her quiet. — But no, that wasn't enough — —'

'You found the money and had got away with it, and then turned around and came back?'

'What?' the other said.

'Why did you change your mind?' the corporal said. After a second the other said:

'Fag me again.' The corporal gave him another cigarette. 'Thanks,' he said. The corporal extended the lighter. 'Thanks,' the other said. He snapped it and lit the cigarette and snuffed the lighter; again his two hands began the rapid and involuted gesture then stopped and in the same motion one of the hands tossed the lighter back to the corporal, the arms crossed again, palms to opposite elbows, the cigarette bobbing while he talked. 'Where was I? oh yes. — But that didn't suit them; just to take us out in a decent and peaceful way and shoot us wasn't enough; they had to take Horse here off in a cellar somewhere and scare the daylights out of him. Justice, see?'

Protecting our rights. Just catching us wasn't enough; we got to insist we did it. Just me saying so wasn't enough; Horse too has got to holler it to high heaven — whatever that means. But it's all right now. They cant stop us now.' He turned and clapped the second man a hard quick blow on the back: 'Paris tomorrow morning, kid. Fasten on to that.'

The door opened. It was the same sergeant again. He did not enter, saying to the corporal: 'Once more' and then stood and held the door until the corporal had passed him. Then he closed and locked it. This time it was the office of the prison commandant himself and what he — the corporal — assumed to be just another N.C.O. until he saw, arranged on the cleared desk, the utensils for the Last Sacrament — urn ewer stole candles and crucifix — and only then remarked the small embroidered cross on the coat of the man standing beside them, the other sergeant closing that door too between them so that he and the priest were alone, the priest lifting his hand to inscribe into the invisible air the invisible Passion while the corporal paused for a moment just inside the door, not surprised yet either: just once more alert, looking at him: at which moment a third person in the room would have remarked that they were almost of an age.

'Come in, my son,' the priest said.

'Good evening, Sergeant,' the corporal said.

'Cant you say Father?' the priest said.

'Of course,' the corporal said.

'Then say it,' the priest said.

'Of course, Father,' the corporal said. He came on into the room, looking quietly and rapidly again at the sacred implements on the desk while the priest watched him.

'Not that,' the priest said. 'Not yet. I came to offer you life.'

'So he sent you,' the corporal said.

'He?' the priest said. 'What he can you mean, except the Giver of all life? Why should He send me here to offer you what He has already entrusted you with? Because the man you imply, for all his rank and power, can only take it from you. Your life was never his to give you because for all his stars and braid he too before God is just one more pinch of rotten and ephemeral dust.'

It was neither of them which sent me here: not the One who has already given you life, nor the other who never had yours nor any other life within his gift. It was duty which sent me here. Not this—' for an

instant his hand touched the small embroidered cross on his collar ' — not my cloth, but my belief in Him; not even as His mouthpiece but as a man — —'

'A French man?' the corporal said.

'All right,' the priest said. 'Yes, a Frenchman if you like. — commanded me here to command — not ask, offer: command — you to keep the life which you never had and never will have the refusal of, to save another one.'

'To save another one?' the corporal said.

'The commander of your regiment's division,' the priest said. 'He will die too, for what all the world he knows — the only world he does know because it was the one he dedicated his life to — will call his failure, where you will die for what you anyway will call a victory.'

'So he did send you,' the corporal said. 'For blackmail.'

'Beware,' the priest said.

'Then dont tell me this,' the corporal said. 'Tell him. If I can save Gragnon's life only by not doing something you tell me I already cant and never could do anyway. Tell him then. I dont want to die either.'

'Beware,' the priest said.

'That wasn't who I meant,' the corporal said. 'I meant — —'

'I know whom you meant,' the priest said. 'That's why I said Beware. Beware Whom you mock by reading your own mortal's pride into Him Who died two thousand years ago in the postulate that man shall never never never, need never never never, hold suzerainty over another's life and death — absolved you and the man you mean both of that terrible burden: you of the right to and he of the need for, suzerainty over your life; absolved poor mortal man forever of the fear of the oppression, and the anguish of the responsibility, which suzerainty over human fate and destiny would have entailed on him and cursed him with, when He refused in man's name the temptation of that mastery, refused the terrible temptation of that limitless and curbless power when He answered the Temptor: Render unto caesar the things which

are caesar's. — I know,' he said quickly, before the corporal could have spoken: 'To Chaulnesmont the things which are Chaulnesmont's. Oh yes, you're right; I'm a Frenchman first. And so now you can even cite the record at me, cant you? All right. Do it.'

'The record?' the corporal said.

'The Book,' the priest said. The corporal looked at him. 'You mean you dont even know it?'

'I cant read,' the corporal said.

'Then I'll cite for you, plead for you,' the priest said. 'It wasn't He with His humility and pity and sacrifice that converted the world, it was pagan and bloody Rome which did it with His martyrdom; furious and intractable dreamers had been bringing that same dream out of Asia Minor for three hundred years until at last one found a caesar foolish enough to crucify him. And you are right. But then so is he (I dont mean Him now, I mean the old man in that white room yonder onto whose shoulders you are trying to slough and shirk your right and duty for free will and decision).

Because only Rome could have done it, accomplished it, and even He (I do mean Him now) knew it, felt and sensed this, furious and intractable dreamer though He was. Because He even said it Himself: On this rock I found My church, even while He didn't — and never would — realise the true significance of what He was saying, believing still that He was speaking poetic metaphor, synonym, parable — that rock meant unstable inconstant heart, and church meant airy faith. It wasn't even His first and favorite sycophant who read that significance, who was also ignorant and intractable like Him and even in the end got himself also electrocuted by the dream's intractable fire, like Him.

It was Paul, who was a Roman first and then a man and only then a dreamer and so of all of them was able to read the dream correctly and to realise that, to endure, it could not be a nebulous and airy faith but instead it must be a church, an establishment, a morality of behavior inside which man could exercise his right and duty for free will and decision, not for a reward resembling the bed-time tale which soothes

the child into darkness, but the reward of being able to cope peacefully, hold his own, with the hard durable world in which (whether he would ever know why or not wouldn't matter either because now he could cope with that too) he found himself.

Not snared in that frail web of hopes and fears and aspirations which man calls his heart, but fixed, established, to endure, on that rock whose synonym was the seeded capital of that hard durable enduring earth which man must cope with somehow, by some means, or perish. So you see, he is right. It wasn't He nor Peter, but Paul who, being only one-third dreamer, was two-thirds man and half of that a Roman, could cope with Rome. Who did more; who, rendering unto caesar, conquered Rome. More: destroyed it, because where is that Rome now? until what remains but that rock, that citadel. Render unto Chaulnesmont. Why should you die?'

'Tell him that,' the corporal said.

'To save another life, which your dream will electrocute,' the priest said.

'Tell him that,' the corporal said.

'Remember—' the priest said. 'No, you cant remember, you dont know it, you cant read. So I'll have to be both again: defender and advocate. Change these stones to bread, and all men will follow Thee. And He answered, Man cannot live by bread alone.

Because He knew that too, intractable and furious dreamer though He was: that He was tempted to tempt and lead man not with the bread, but with the miracle of that bread, the deception, the illusion, the delusion of that bread; tempted to believe that man was not only capable and willing but even eager for that deception, that even when the illusion of that miracle had led him to the point where the bread would revert once more to stone in his very belly and destroy him, his own children would be panting for the opportunity to grasp into their hands in their turn the delusion of that miracle which would destroy them. No no, listen to Paul, who needed no miracle, required no martyrdom. Save that life. Thou shalt not kill.'

‘Tell him that,’ the corporal said.

‘Take your own tomorrow, if you must,’ the priest said. ‘But save his now.’

‘Tell him that,’ the corporal said.

‘Power,’ the priest said. ‘Not just power over the mere earth offered by that temptation of simple miracle, but that more terrible one over the universe itself — that terrible power over the whole universe which that mastery over man’s mortal fate and destiny would have given Him had He not cast back into the Temptor’s very teeth that third and most terrible temptation of immortality: which if He had faltered or succumbed would have destroyed His Father’s kingdom not only on the earth but in heaven too because that would have destroyed heaven since what value in the scale of man’s hope and aspiration or what tensile hold or claim on man himself could that heaven own which could be gained by that base means — blackmail: man in his turn by no more warrant than one single precedent casting himself from the nearest precipice the moment he wearied of the burden of his free will and decision, the right to the one and the duty of the other, saying to, challenging his Creator: Let me fall — if You dare?’

‘Tell him that,’ the corporal said.

‘Save that other life. Grant that the right of free will is in your own death. But your duty to choose is not yours. It’s his. It’s General Gragnon’s death.’

‘Tell him that,’ the corporal said. They looked at one another. Then the priest seemed to make a terrible faint and convulsive effort, whether to speak or not to speak was still not clear even when he said, like a sort of gesture, a valedictory not to defeat nor despair nor even desperation, but as though to abnegation itself:

‘Remember that bird.’

‘So he did send you here,’ the corporal said.

‘Yes,’ the priest said. ‘He sent for me. To render unto caesar—’ He said: ‘But he came back.’

'Came back?' the corporal said. 'He?'

'The one who denied you,' the priest said. 'That turned his back on you. Freed himself of you. But he came back. And now there are eleven of them again.' He moved until he was facing the corporal. 'Save me too,' he said. Then he was on his knees before the corporal, his hands clasped fist into fist at his breast. 'Save me,' he said.

'Get up, Father,' the corporal said.

'No,' the priest said. He fumbled a moment inside the breast of his coat and produced his prayer-book, dog-eared and stained too from the front lines; it seemed to open automatically on the narrow purple ribbon of its marker as the priest reversed it and extended it upward.

'Read it to me then,' he said. The corporal took the book.

'What?' he said.

'The office for the dying,' the priest said. 'But you cant read, can you?' he said. He took the book back and now clasped it closed between his hands at his breast, his head bowed still. 'Save me then,' he said.

'Get up,' the corporal said, reaching down to grasp the priest's arm, though the priest had already begun to rise, standing now, fumbling a little clumsily as he put the book back inside his coat; as he turned, stiffly and clumsily still, he seemed to stumble slightly and was apparently about to fall even, though again he had recovered himself before the corporal touched him, going toward the door now, one hand already lifted toward it or toward the wall or perhaps just lifted, as though he were blind too, the corporal watching him, until the corporal said: 'You've forgotten your gear.'

The priest stopped, though he didn't turn yet. 'Yes,' he said. 'So I did.' Then he said, 'So I have.' Then he turned and went back to the desk and gathered the articles up — basin ewer stole and crucifix — and huddled them clumsily into or onto one arm and extended his hand toward the candles and then stopped again, the corporal watching him.

'You can send back for them,' the corporal said.

'Yes,' the priest said. 'I can send back for them,' and turned and went again to the door and stopped again and after a moment began to raise his hand toward it, though the corporal now had already passed him, to strike two or three rapping blows with his knuckles on the wood, which a moment later swung open and back, revealing the sergeant, the priest standing again for a second or two clasping to his breast the huddled symbols of his mystery. Then he roused. 'Yes,' he said, 'I can send back for them,' and passed through the door; and this time he didn't pause even when the sergeant overtook him and said: 'Shall I take them to the chapel, Father?'

'Thank you,' the priest said, relinquishing them: and now he was free, walking on; and now he was even safe: outside, out of doors with only the spring darkness, the spring night soft and myriad above the blank and lightless walls and between them too, filling the empty topless passage, alley, at the end of which he could see a section of the distant wire fence and the catwalk spaced by the rigid down-glare of the lights, these spaced in their turn by the red eyes of the Senegalese sentries' cigarettes; and beyond that the dark plain, and beyond the plain in turn the faint unsleeping glow of the sleepless city; and now he could remember when he had seen them first, finally seen them, overtook them at last, two winters ago up near the Chemin des Dames — behind Combles, Souchez, he couldn't remember — the cobbled Place in the mild evening (no: mild evening, it was only autumn yet, a little while still before there would begin at Verdun that final winter of the doomed and accursed race of man) already empty again because again he had just missed them by minutes, the arms the hands pointing to show him, the helpful and contradictory voices giving him directions, too many of them in fact, too many helpful voices and too many directions, until at last one man walked with him to the edge of the village to show him the exact route and even point out to him the distant huddle of the farm itself — a walled yard enclosing house byre and all, twilight now and he saw them, eight of them at first standing quietly about the kitchen stoop until he saw two more of them, the corporal and another, sitting on the stoop in baize or oilcloth aprons, the corporal cleaning a fowl, a chicken, the other peeling potatoes into a bowl while beside, above them stood the farmwife with a pitcher and

a child, a girl of ten or so, with both hands full of mugs and tumblers; then while he watched, the other three came out of the byre with the farmer himself and crossed the yard carrying the pails of milk.

Nor did he approach nor even make his presence known: just watching while the woman and the child exchanged the pitcher and the drinking vessels for the fowl and bowl and the pails of milk and carried the food on into the house and the farmer filled from the pitcher the mugs and tumblers which the corporal held and passed in turn and then they drank in ritual salutation — to peaceful work, to the peaceful end of day, to anticipation of the peaceful lamplit meal, whatever it was — and then it was dark, night, night indeed because the second time was at Verdun which was the freezing night of France and of man too since France was the cradle of the liberty of the human spirit, in the actual ruins of Verdun itself, within actual hearing range of the anguish of Gaud and Valaumont; not approaching this time either but only to stand from a distance watching, walled by the filth- and anguish-stained backs from where the thirteen would be standing in the circle's center, talking or not, haranguing or not, he would never know, dared not know; thinking Yes, even then I durst not; even if they did not need to talk or harangue since simply to believe was enough; thinking, Yes, there were thirteen then and even now there are still twelve; thinking, Even if there were only one, only he, would be enough, more than enough, thinking Just that one to stand between me and safety, me and security, between me and peace; and although he knew the compound and its environs well, for a moment he was dis-oriented as sometimes happens when you enter a strange building in darkness or by one door and then emerge from it in light or by another even though this was not the case here, thinking in a sort of quiet unamazement Yes, I probably knew from the moment he sent for me what door I should have to emerge from, the only exit left for me.

So it only lasted for a moment or two or possibly even less than that: one infinitesimal vertiginous lurch and wall stone and brick resumed once more its ordered and forever repudiated place; one corner, one turn, and the sentry was where he had remembered he would be, not

even pacing his beat but just standing at ease with his grounded rifle beside the small iron gate.

'Good evening, my son,' the priest said.

'Good evening, Father,' the man said.

'I wonder if I might borrow your bayonet?' the priest said.

'My what?' the man said.

'Your bayonet,' the priest said, extending his hand.

'I cant do that,' the man said. 'I'm on parade — on post. The corporal will — — The Officer of the Day himself might come along — —'

'Tell them I took it,' the priest said.

'Took it?' the man said.

'Demanded it,' the priest said, his hand still steadily out. 'Come.' Then the hand moved, not fast, and drew the bayonet from the man's belt.

'Tell them I took it,' the priest said, already turning. 'Good night.'

Or perhaps the man even answered; perhaps even in the silent and empty alley again one last fading echo of one last warm and human voice speaking in warm and human protest or amazement or simple unquestioning defence of an is simply because it is; and then no more, thinking It was a spear, so I should have taken the rifle too, and then no more: thinking The left side, and I'm right handed, thinking But at least He wasn't wearing an infantryman's overcoat and a Magasin du Louvre shirt and so at least I can do that, opening the coat and throwing it back and then opening the shirt until he could feel the blade's cold minuscule point against his flesh and then the cold sharp whisper of the blade itself entering, beginning to make a sort of thin audible cry as though of astonishment at its own swiftness yet when he looked down at it barely the point itself had disappeared and he said aloud, quietly: 'Now what?' But He was not standing either, he thought He was nailed there and He will forgive me and cast himself sideways and downward, steadying the bayonet so that the end of the hilt should strike the bricks first, and turned a little until his cheek lay against the still-warm bricks and now he began to make a thin sweet crying of frustration and despair until the pinch of his hand between the bayonet's cross guard

and his own flesh told him better and so he could stop the crying now — the sweet thick warm murmur of it pouring suddenly from his mouth.

Beeping its horn steadily — not pettishly nor fretfully nor even irritatedly but in fact with a sort of unwearyable blasé Gallic detachment — the French staff-car crept through the Place de Ville as though patting the massed crowd gently and firmly to either side with the horn itself to make room for its passage. It was not a big car.

It flew no general's pennon nor in fact any insignia of any kind; it was just a small indubitable French army motor car driven by a French soldier and containing three more soldiers, three American privates who until they met in the Blois orderly room where the French car had picked them up four hours ago had never laid eyes on one another before, who sat two in the back and one in front with the driver while the car bleated its snaillike passage through the massed spent wan and sleepless faces.

One of the two Americans in the back seat was leaning out of the car, looking eagerly about, not at the faces but at the adjacent buildings which enclosed the Place. He held a big much-folded and -unfolded and -refolded map open between his hands.

He was quite young, with brown eyes as trustful and unalarmed as those of a cow, in an open reliant invincibly and incorrigibly bucolic face — a farmer's face fated to love his peaceful agrarian heritage (his father, as he would after him, raised hogs in Iowa and rich corn to feed and fatten them for market on) for the simple reason that to the end of his eupeptic days (what was going to happen to him inside the next thirty minutes would haunt him of course from time to time but only in dreams, as nightmares haunt) it would never occur to him that he could possibly have found anything more worthy to be loved — leaning eagerly out of the car and completely ignoring the massed faces through which he crept, saying eagerly:
'Which one is it? Which one is it?'

‘Which one is what?’ the American beside the driver said.

‘The Headquarters,’ he said. ‘The Ho-tel de Villy.’

‘Wait till you get inside,’ the other said. ‘That’s what you volunteered to look at.’

‘I want to see it from the outside too,’ the first said. ‘That’s why I volunteered for this what-ever-it-is. Ask him,’ he said, indicating the driver. ‘You can speak Frog.’

‘Not this time,’ the other said. ‘My French dont use this kind of a house.’ But it wasn’t necessary anyway because at the same moment they both saw the three sentries — American French and British — flanking the door, and in the next one the car turned through the gates and now they saw the whole courtyard cluttered and massed with motorcycles and staff-cars bearing the three different devices. The car didn’t stop there though.

Darting its way among the other vehicles at a really headlong speed, now that its gambits were its own durable peers instead of frail untriumphable human flesh, it dashed on around to the extreme rear of the baroque and awesome pile (‘Now what?’ the one in the front seat said to the lowan who was still leaning out toward the building’s dizzy crenellated wheel. ‘Did you expect them to invite us in by the front?’

‘It’s all right,’ the lowan said. ‘That’s how I thought it would look.’) to where an American military policeman standing beside a sort of basement areaway was signalling them with a flashlight. The car shot up beside him and stopped. He opened the door, though since the lowan was now engaged in trying to refold his map, the American private in the front seat was the first to get out.

His name was Buchwald. His grandfather had been rabbi of a Minsk synagogue until a Cossack sergeant beat his brains out with the shod hooves of a horse. His father was a tailor; he himself was born on the fourth floor of a walk-up, cold-water Brooklyn tenement. Within two years after the passage of the American prohibition law, with nothing in

his bare hands but a converted army-surplus Lewis machine gun, he himself was to become czar of a million-dollar empire covering the entire Atlantic coast from Canada to whatever Florida cove or sandspit they were using that night.

He had pale, almost colorless eyes; he was hard and slender too now though one day a few months less than ten years from now, lying in his ten-thousand-dollar casket banked with half that much more in cut flowers, he would look plump, almost fat. The military policeman leaned into the back of the car.

'Come on, come on,' he said. The lowan emerged, carrying the clumsily-folded map in one hand and slapping at his pocket with the other. He feinted past Buchwald like a football half-back and darted to the front of the car and held the map into the light of one of the headlamps, still slapping at his pocket.

'Durn!' he said. 'I've lost my pencil.' The third American private was now out of the car. He was a Negro, of a complete and unrelieved black. He emerged with a sort of ballet dancer elegance, not mincing, not foppish, not maidenly but rather at once masculine and girlish or perhaps better, epicene, and stood not quite studied while the lowan spun and feinted this time through all three of them — Buchwald, the policeman, and the Negro — and carrying his now rapidly disintegrating map plunged his upper body back into the car, saying to the policeman: 'Lend me your flashlight. I must have dropped it on the floor.'

'Sweet crap,' Buchwald said. 'Come on.'

'It's my pencil,' the lowan said. 'I had it at that last big town we passed — what was the name of it?'

'I can call a sergeant,' the policeman said. 'Am I going to have to?'

'Nah,' Buchwald said. He said to the lowan: 'Come on. They've probably got a pencil inside. They can read and write here too.' The lowan backed out of the car and stood up. He began to refold his map.

Following the policeman, they crossed to the areaway and descended

into it, the lowan following with his eyes the building's soaring upward swoop.

'Yes,' he said. 'It sure does.' They descended steps, through a door; they were in a narrow stone passage; the policeman opened a door and they entered an anteroom; the policeman closed the door behind them. The room contained a cot, a desk, a telephone, a chair. The lowan went to the desk and began to shift the papers on it.

'You can remember you were here without having to check it off, cant you?' Buchwald said.

'It aint for me,' the lowan said, tumbling the papers through. 'It's for the girl I'm engaged to. I promised her — —'

'Does she like pigs too?' Buchwald said.

' — what?' the lowan said. He stopped and turned his head; still half stooped over the desk, he gave Buchwald his mild open reliant and alarmless look. 'Why not?' he said. 'What's wrong with pigs?'

'Okay,' Buchwald said. 'So you promised her.'

'That's right,' the lowan said. 'When we found out I was coming to France I promised to take a map and mark off on it all the places I went to, especially the ones you always hear about, like Paris. I got Blois, and Brest, and I'll get Paris for volunteering for this, and now I'm even going to have Chaulnesmont, the Grand Headquarters of the whole shebang as soon as I can find a pencil.' He began to search the desk again.

'What you going to do with it?' Buchwald said. 'The map. When you get it back home?'

'Frame it and hang it on the wall,' the lowan said. 'What did you think I was going to do with it?'

'Are you sure you're going to want this one marked on it?' Buchwald said.

'What?' the lowan said. Then he said, 'Why?'

'Dont you know what you volunteered for?' Buchwald said.

'Sure,' the lowan said. 'For a chance to visit Chaulnesmont.'

'I mean, didn't anybody tell you what you were going to do here?'
Buchwald said.

'You haven't been in the army very long, have you?' the lowan said. 'In the army, you dont ask what you are going to do: you just do it. In fact, the way to get along in any army is never even to wonder why they want something done or what they are going to do with it after it's finished, but just do it and then get out of sight so that they cant just happen to see you by accident and then think up something for you to do, but instead they will have to have thought up something to be done, and then hunt for somebody to do it. Durn it, I dont believe they have a pencil here either.'

'Maybe Sambo's got one,' Buchwald said. He looked at the Negro.
'What did you volunteer for this for besides a three-day Paris pass? To see Chaulnesmont too?'
'What did you call me?' the Negro said.
'Sambo,' Buchwald said. 'You no like?'

'My name's Philip Manigault Beauchamp,' the Negro said.
'Go on,' Buchwald said.
'It's spelled Manigault but you pronounce it Mannygo,' the Negro said.

'Oh hush,' Buchwald said.
'You got a pencil, buddy?' the lowan said to the Negro.

'No,' the Negro said. He didn't even look at the lowan. He was still looking at Buchwald. 'You want to make something of it?'
'Me?' Buchwald said. 'What part of Texas you from?'

'Texas,' the Negro said with a sort of bemused contempt. He glanced at the nails of his right hand, then rubbed them briskly against his flank.
'Mississippi. Going to live in Chicago soon as this crap's over. Be an undertaker, if you're interested.'

'An undertaker?' Buchwald said. 'You like dead people, huh?'
'Hasn't anybody in this whole durn war got a pencil?' the lowan said.

'Yes,' the Negro said. He stood, tall, slender, not studied: just poised; suddenly he gave Buchwald a look feminine and defiant. 'I like the work. So what?'

'So you know what you volunteered for, do you?'

'Maybe I do and maybe I dont,' the Negro said. 'Why did you volunteer for it? Besides a three-day pass in Paris?'

'Because I love Wilson,' Buchwald said.

'Wilson?' the lowan said. 'Do you know Sergeant Wilson? He's the best sergeant in the army.'

'Then I dont know him,' Buchwald said without looking at the lowan.

'All the N.C.O.'s I know are sons of bitches.' He said to the Negro, 'Did they tell you, or didn't they?' Now the lowan had begun to look from one to the other of them.

'What is going on here?' he said. The door opened. It was an American sergeant-major. He entered rapidly and looked rapidly at them. He was carrying an attaché case.

'Who's in charge?' he said. He looked at Buchwald. 'You.' He opened the attaché case and took something from it which he extended to Buchwald. It was a pistol.

'That's a German pistol,' the lowan said. Buchwald took it. The sergeant-major reached into the attaché case again; this time it was a key, a door key; he extended it to Buchwald.

'Why?' Buchwald said.

'Take it,' the sergeant-major said. 'You dont want privacy to last forever, do you?' Buchwald took the key and put it and the pistol into his pocket.

'Why in hell didn't you bastards do it yourselves?' he said.

'So we had to send all the way to Blois to find somebody for a midnight argument,' the sergeant-major said. 'Come on,' he said. 'Get it over with.' He started to turn. This time the lowan spoke quite loudly:

‘Look here,’ he said. ‘What is this?’ The sergeant-major paused and looked at the lowan, then the Negro. He said to Buchwald: ‘So they’re already going coy on you.’

‘Oh, coy,’ Buchwald said. ‘Dont let that worry you. The smoke cant help it, coy is a part of what you might say one of his habits or customs or pastimes. The other one dont even know what coy means yet.’

‘Okay,’ the sergeant-major said. ‘It’s your monkey. You ready?’ ‘Wait,’ Buchwald said. He didn’t look back to where the other two stood near the desk, watching him and the sergeant-major. ‘What is it?’

‘I thought they told you,’ the sergeant-major said. ‘Let’s hear yours,’ Buchwald said.

‘They had a little trouble with him,’ the sergeant-major said. ‘It’s got to be done from in front, for his own sake, let alone everybody else’s. But they cant seem to make him see it. He’s got to be killed from in front, by a Kraut bullet — see? You get it now? he was killed in that attack Monday morning; they’re giving him all the benefit: out there that morning where he had no business being — a major general, safe for the rest of his life to stay behind and say Give ’em hell, men. But no. He was out there himself, leading the whole business to victory for France and fatherland. They’re even going to give him a new medal, but he still wont see it.’

‘What’s his gripe?’ Buchwald said. ‘He knows he’s for it, dont he?’

‘Oh sure,’ the sergeant-major said. ‘He knows he’s gone. That aint the question. He aint kicking about that. He just refuses to let them do it that way — swears he’s going to make them shoot him not in the front but in the back, like any top-sergeant or shave-tail that thinks he’s too tough to be scared and too hard to be hurt. You know: make the whole world see that not the enemy but his own men did it.’

‘Why didn’t they just hold him and do it?’ Buchwald said.

'Now now,' the sergeant-major said. 'You dont just hold a French major-general and shoot him in the face.'

'Then how are we supposed to do it?' Buchwald said. The sergeant-major looked at him. 'Oh,' Buchwald said. 'Maybe I get it now. French soldiers dont. Maybe next time it will be an American general and three Frogs will get a trip to New York.'

'Yeah,' the sergeant-major said. 'If they just let me pick the general. You ready now?'

'Yes,' Buchwald said. But he didn't move. He said: 'Yeah. Why us, anyway? If he's a Frog general, why didn't the Frogs do it? Why did it have to be us?'

'Maybe because an American doughfoot is the only bastard they could bribe with a trip to Paris,' the sergeant-major said. 'Come on.'

But still Buchwald didn't move, his pale hard eyes thoughtful and steady. 'Come on,' he said. 'Give.'

'If you're going to back out, why didn't you do it before you left Blois?' the sergeant-major said.

Buchwald said something unprintable. 'Give,' he said. 'Let's get it over with.'

'Right,' the sergeant-major said. 'They rationed it. The Frogs will have to shoot that Frog regiment, because it's Frog. They had to bring a Kraut general over here Wednesday to explain why they were going to shoot the Frog regiment, and the Limeys won that. Now they got to shoot this Frog general to explain why they brought the Kraut general over here, and we won that. Maybe they drew straws. All right now?'

'Yes,' Buchwald said, suddenly and harshly. He cursed. 'Yes. Let's get it over with.'

'Wait!' the Iowan said. 'No! I — —'

'Dont forget your map,' Buchwald said. 'We wont be back here.'

'I haven't,' the Iowan said. 'What you think I been holding onto it this long for?'

‘Good,’ Buchwald said. ‘Then when they send you back home to prison for mutiny, you can mark Leavenworth on it too.’ They returned to the corridor and followed it. It was empty, lighted by spaced weak electric bulbs.

They had seen no other sign of life and suddenly it was as though they apparently were not going to until they were out of it again. The narrow corridor had not descended, there were no more steps.

It was as if the earth it tunnelled through had sunk as an elevator sinks, holding the corridor itself intact, immune, empty of any life or sound save that of their boots, the white-washed stone sweating in furious immobility beneath the whole concentrated weight of history, stratum upon stratum of dead tradition impounded by the Hôtel above them — monarchy revolution empire and republic, duke farmer-general and sans culotte, levee tribunal and guillotine, liberty fraternity equality and death and the people the People always to endure and prevail, the group, the clump, huddled now, going quite fast until the lowan cried again:

‘No, I tell you! I aint — —’ until Buchwald stopped, stopping them all, and turned and said to the lowan in a calm and furious murmur: ‘Beat it.’

‘What?’ the lowan cried. ‘I cant! Where would I go?’

‘How the hell do I know?’ Buchwald said. ‘I aint the one that’s dissatisfied here.’

‘Come on,’ the sergeant-major said. They went on. They reached a door; it was locked. The sergeant-major unlocked and opened it.

‘Do we report?’ Buchwald said.

‘Not to me,’ the sergeant-major said. ‘You can even keep the pistol for a souvenir. The car’ll be waiting where you got out of it,’ and was about to close the door until Buchwald after one rapid glance into the room turned and put his foot against the door and said again in that harsh calm furious controlled voice:

‘Christ, cant the sons of bitches even get a priest for him?’

'They're still trying,' the sergeant-major said. 'Somebody sent for the priest out at the compound two hours ago and he aint got back yet. They cant seem to find him.'

'So we're supposed to wait for him,' Buchwald said in that tone of harsh calm unbearable outrage.

'Supposed by who?' the sergeant-major said. 'Move your foot.' Buchwald did, the door closed, the lock clashed behind them and the three of them were in a cell, a cubicle fierce with whitewash and containing the single unshaded electric light and a three-legged stool like a farmer's milking stool, and the French general.

That is, it was a French face and by its expression and cast it had been used to enough rank long enough to be a general's, besides the insignia and the dense splash of ribbons and the Sam Browne belt and the leather putties, though the uniform which bore them were the plain G.I. tunic and trousers which a cavalry sergeant would have worn, standing now, erect and rigid now and rather as though enclosed by the fading aura of the convulsive movement which had brought him to his feet, who said sharply in French:

'Attention there!'

'What?' Buchwald said to the Negro beside him. 'What did he say?' 'How in hell do I know?' the Negro said. 'Quick!' he said in a panting voice. 'That loway bastard. Do something about him quick.'

'Right,' Buchwald said, turning. 'Grab him then,' and turned on to meet the lowan.

'No, I tell you!' the lowan cried. 'I aint going to—' Buchwald struck him skilfully, the blow seeming not to travel at all before the lowan catapulted backward into the wall then slid down it to the floor, Buchwald turning again in time to see the Negro grasp at the French general and the French general turn sharply face- to and against the wall, his head turned cheek against it, saying over his shoulder in French as Buchwald snapped the safety off the pistol:

'Shoot now, you whorehouse scum. I will not turn.'

'Jerk him around,' Buchwald said.

'Put that damn safety back on!' the Negro panted, glaring back at him. 'You want to shoot me too? Come on. It will take both of us.' Buchwald closed the safety though he still held the pistol in his hand while they struggled, all three of them or two of them to drag the French general far enough from the wall to turn him. 'Hit him a little,' the Negro panted. 'We got to knock him out.'

'How in hell can you knock out a man that's already dead?' Buchwald panted.

'Come on,' the Negro panted. 'Just a little. Hurry.' Buchwald struck, trying to gauge the blow, and he was right: the body collapsed until the Negro was supporting it but not out, the eyes open, looking up at Buchwald then watching the pistol as Buchwald raised it and snapped the safety off again, the eyes not afraid, not even despaired: just incorrigibly alert and rational, so alert in fact as apparently to have seen the squeeze of Buchwald's hand as it started, so that the sudden and furious movement turned not only the face but the whole body away with the explosion so that the round hole was actually behind the ear when the corpse reached the floor. Buchwald and the Negro stood over it, panting, the barrel of the pistol warm against Buchwald's leg.

'Son of a bitch,' Buchwald said to the Negro. 'Why didn't you hold him?'

'He slipped!' the Negro panted.

'Slipped my crap,' Buchwald said. 'You didn't hold him.'

'Son of a bitch yourself!' the Negro panted. 'Me stand there holding him for that bullet to come on through hunting me next?'

'All right, all right,' Buchwald said. 'Now we got to plug that one up and shoot him again.'

'Plug it up?' the Negro said.

'Yes,' Buchwald said. 'What the hell sort of undertaker will you make if you dont know how to plug up a hole in a bastard that got shot in the wrong place? Wax will do it. Get a candle.'

'Where'm I going to get a candle?' the Negro said.

'Go out in the hall and yell,' Buchwald said, swapping hands with the pistol and taking the door key from his pocket and handing it to the Negro. 'Keep on yelling until you find a Frog. They must have candles. They must have at least one thing in this ing country we never had to bring two thousand miles over here and give to them.'

Friday: Saturday: Sunday

IT BADE FAIR to be another bright and perennial lark-filled vernal morning; the gaudy uniforms and arms and jangling accoutrements and even the ebon faces too of the Senegalese regiment seemed to gleam in it as, to the cryptic tribal equatorial cries of its noncoms, it filed onto the parade ground and formed three sides of a hollow square facing the three freshly-planted posts set in a symmetric row on the edge of a long pit or ditch, almost filled and obliterated now by four years of war's refuse — tin cans, bottles, old messkits, worn-out cooking utensils, boots, inextricable coils of rusting and useless wire — from which the dirt had been excavated to form the railroad embankment running across the end of the parade, which would serve as a backstop for what bullets neither flesh nor wood absorbed.

They came into position then at rest and grounded arms and stood at ease and then easy, whereupon there rose a steady unemphatic gabble, not festive: just gregarious, like people waiting for the opening of a marketplace; the pallid perennial almost invisible lighters winked and flared from perennial cigarette to cigarette among the babble of voices, the ebon and gleaming faces not even watching the working party of white soldiers while they tamped the last earth about the posts and took up their tools and departed in a disorderly straggle like a company of reapers leaving a field of hay.

Then a distant bugle cried once or twice, the Senegalese N.C.O.'s shouted, the gaudy ranks doused the cigarettes without haste and with a sort of negligent, almost inattentive deliberation came to alert and at ease as the sergeant-major of the city garrison, a holstered pistol

strapped outside his long buttoned-back coat, came into the vacant side of the square before the three posts and stopped and stood as, to the harsh abrupt ejaculations of the new N.C.O.'s, the mutinied regiment filed into the empty rectangle and huddled, pariahs still, hatless and unarmed, still unshaven, alien, stained still with Aisne and Oise and Marne mud so that against the gaudy arras of the Senegalese they looked like harassed and harried and homeless refugees from another planet, moiling a little though quiet and even orderly or at least decorous until suddenly a handful of them, eleven it was, broke suddenly out and ran in a ragged clump toward the three posts and had knelt facing the posts in the same ragged clump by the time the sergeant-major had shouted something and an N.C.O.'s voice took it up and a file of Senegalese came rapidly out and around and across the empty parade and surrounded the kneeling men and pulled them, not at all roughly, back onto their feet and turned them and herded them back among their companions like drovers behind a small band of temporarily strayed sheep.

Now a small party of horsemen rode rapidly up from the rear and stopped just outside the square, behind it; they were the town major, his adjutant, the provost marshal adjutant and three orderlies.

The sergeant-major shouted, the parade (save for the pariah regiment) came to attention in one long metallic clash, the sergeant-major wheeled and saluted the town major across the rigid palisade of Senegalese heads, the town major accepted the parade and stood it at ease then back to attention again and returned it to the sergeant-major who in his turn stood it at ease again and turned to face the three posts as, abruptly and apparently from nowhere, a sergeant and file came up with the three hatless prisoners interspersed among them, whom they bound quickly to the three posts — the man who had called himself Lapin, then the corporal, then the simian-like creature whom Lapin had called Cassetête or Horse — leaving them facing in to the hollow of the square though they couldn't see it now because at the moment there filed between them and it another squad of some twenty men with a sergeant, who halted and quarter-turned and stood them at ease with their backs to the three doomed ones, whom the sergeant-major now

approached in turn, to examine rapidly the cord which bound Lapin to his post, then on to the corporal, already extending his (the sergeant-major's) hand to the Médaille Militaire on the corporal's coat, saying in a rapid murmur:

'You dont want to keep this.'

'No,' the corporal said. 'No use to spoil it.' The sergeant-major wrenched it off the coat, not savagely: just rapidly, already moving on. 'I know who to give it to,' he said, moving on to the third man, who said, drooling a little, not alarmed, not even urgent: just diffident and promptive, as you address someone, a stranger, on whom your urgent need depends but who may have temporarily forgotten your need or forgotten you:

'Paris.'

'Right,' the sergeant-major said. Then he was gone too; now the three bound men could have seen nothing save the backs of the twenty men in front of them though they could still have heard the sergeant-major's voice as he brought the parade to attention again and drew from somewhere inside his coat a folded paper and a worn leather spectacle case and unfolded the paper and put the spectacles on and read aloud from the paper, holding it now in both hands against the light flutter of the morning breeze, his voice sounding clear and thin and curiously forlorn in the sunny lark-filled emptiness among the dead redundant forensic verbiage talking in pompous and airy delusion of an end of man. 'By order of the president of the court,' the sergeant-major chanted wanly and refolded the paper and removed the spectacles and folded them back into the case and stowed them both away; command, the twenty men about-turned to face the three posts; Lapin was now straining outward against his cord, trying to see past the corporal to the third man.

'Look,' Lapin said anxiously to the corporal.

Load!

'Paris,' the third man said, hoarse and wet and urgent.

'Say something to him,' Lapin said. 'Quick.'

Aim!

'Paris,' the third man said again.

'It's all right,' the corporal said. 'We're going to wait. We won't go without you.'

The corporal's post may have been flawed or even rotten because, although the volley merely cut cleanly the cords binding Lapin and the third man to theirs, so that their bodies slumped at the foot of each post, the corporal's body, post bonds and all, went over backward as one intact unit, onto the edge of the rubbish-filled trench behind it; when the sergeant-major, the pistol still smoking faintly in his hand, moved from Lapin to the corporal, he found that the plunge of the post had jammed it and its burden too into a tangled mass of old barbed wire, a strand of which had looped up and around the top of the post and the man's head as though to assail them both on in one unbroken continuation of the fall, into the anonymity of the earth.

The wire was rusted and pitted and would not have deflected the bullet anyway, nevertheless the sergeant-major flicked it carefully away with his toe before setting the pistol's muzzle against the ear.

As soon as the parade ground was empty (before in fact; the end of the Senegalese column had not yet vanished into the company street) the fatigue party came up with a hand-drawn barrow containing their tools and a folded tarpaulin.

The corporal in charge took a wire-cutter from the barrow and approached the sergeant-major, who had already cut the corporal's body free from the broken post. 'Here,' he said, handing the sergeant-major the wire-cutter. 'You're not going to waste a ground-sheet on one of them, are you?'

'Get those posts out,' the sergeant-major said. 'Let me have two men and the ground sheet.'

'Right,' the corporal said. The corporal went away. The sergeant-major cut off a section about six feet long of the rusted wire. When he rose,

the two men with the folded tarpaulin were standing behind him, watching him.

‘Spread it out,’ he said, pointing. They did so. ‘Put him in it,’ he said. They took up the dead corporal’s body, the one at the head a little finicking because of the blood, and laid it on the tarpaulin. ‘Go on,’ the sergeant-major said. ‘Roll it up. Then put it in the barrow,’ and followed them, the fatigue-party corporal suddenly not watching him too, the other men suddenly immersed again in freeing the planted posts from the earth.

Nor did the sergeant-major speak again. He simply gestured the two men to take up the handles and, himself at the rear, established the direction by holding one corner as a pivot and pushing against the other and then pushing ahead on both, the laden barrow now crossing the parade ground at a long slant toward the point where the wire fence died in a sharp right angle against the old factory wall.

Nor did he (the sergeant-major) look back either, the two men carrying the handles almost trotting now to keep the barrow from running over them, on toward the corner where at some point they too must have seen beyond the fence the high two-wheeled farm cart with a heavy farm horse in the shafts and the two women and the three men beside it, the sergeant-major stopping the barrow just as he had started it: by stopping himself and pivoting the barrow by its two rear corners into the angle of the fence, then himself went and stood at the fence — a man of more than fifty and now looking all of it — until the taller of the two women — the one with the high dark strong and handsome face as a man’s face is handsome — approached the other side of the wire.

The second woman had not moved, the shorter, dumpier, softer one. But she was watching the two at the fence and listening, her face quite empty for the moment but with something incipient and tranquilly promising about it like a clean though not-yet-lighted lamp on a kitchen bureau.

‘Where did you say your husband’s farm is?’ the sergeant-major said.

'I told you,' the woman said.

'Tell me again,' the sergeant-major said.

'Beyond Chalons,' the woman said.

'How far beyond Chalons?' the sergeant-major said. 'All right,' he said.

'How far from Verdun?'

'It's near Vienne-la-pucelle,' the woman said. 'Beyond St Mihiel,' she said.

'St Mihiel,' the sergeant-major said. 'In the army zone. Worse. In the battle zone. With Germans on one side of it and Americans on the other. Americans.'

'Should American soldiers be more terrible than other soldiers?' the woman said. 'Because they are fresher at it? Is that it?'

'No, Sister,' the other woman said. 'That's wrong. It's because the Americans have been here so young. It will be easy for them.' The two at the fence paid no attention to her. They looked at one another through the wire. Then the woman said:

'The war is over.'

'Ah,' the sergeant-major said.

The woman made no movement, no gesture. 'What else can this mean? What else explain it? justify it? No, not even justify it: plead compassion, plead pity, plead despair for it?' She looked at the sergeant-major, cold, griefless, impersonal. 'Plead exculpation for it?'

'Bah,' the sergeant-major said. 'Did I ask you? Did anyone?' He gestured behind him with the wire-cutter. One of the men released the handle of the barrow and came and took it. 'Cut the bottom strand,' the sergeant-major said.

'Cut?' the man said.

'It, species of a species!' the sergeant-major said. The man started to stoop but the sergeant-major had already snatched the wire-cutter

back from him and stooped himself; the taut bottom-most strand sprang with a thin almost musical sound, recoiling. 'Get it out of the barrow,' the sergeant-major said. 'Lively.' They understood now. They lifted the long tarpaulin-wrapped object from the barrow and lowered it to the ground.

The woman had moved aside and the three men now waited at the fence, to draw, drag the long object along the ground and through the wire's vacancy, then up and into the cart. 'Wait,' the sergeant-major said. The woman paused. The sergeant-major fumbled inside his coat and produced a folded paper which he passed through the fence to her. She opened it and looked at it for a moment, with no expression whatever.

'Yes,' she said. 'It must be over, since you receive a diploma now with your execution. What shall I do with it? frame it on the parlor wall?' The sergeant-major reached through the wire and snatched the paper from between her hands, his other hand fumbling out the worn spectacle case again, then with both hands, still holding the opened paper, he got the spectacle on his nose and glanced at the paper a moment then with a violent gesture crumpled the paper into his side pocket and produced another folded one from inside his coat and extended it through the wire, shaking it violently open before the woman could touch it, saying in a repressed and seething voice: 'Say you dont need this one then.

Look at the signature on it.' The woman did so. She had never seen it before, the thin delicate faint cryptic indecipherable scrawl which few other people had ever seen either but which anyone in that half of Europe on that day competent to challenge a signature would have recognised at once.

'So he knows where his son's half-sister's husband's farm is too,' she said.

'Pah,' the sergeant-major said. 'Further than St Mihiel even. If at any place on the way you should be faced with a pearled and golden gate, that will pass you through it too. — This too,' he said, his hand coming

out of his pocket and through the wire again, opening on the dull bronze of the small emblem and the bright splash of its ribbon, the woman immobile again, not touching it yet, tall, looking down at the sergeant-major's open palm, until he felt the other woman looking at him and met the tranquil and incipient gaze; whereupon she said: 'He's really quite handsome, Sister. He's not so old either.'

'Pah!' the sergeant-major said again. 'Here!' he said, thrusting, fumbling the medal into the taller woman's hand until she had to take it, then snatching his own hand quickly back through the wire. 'Begone!' he said. 'Get on with you! Get out of here!' breathing a little hard now, irascible, almost raging, who was too old for this, feeling the second woman's eyes again though he did not meet them yet, flinging his head up to shout at the taller one's back: 'There were three of you. Where is the other one — his poule, whatever she is — was?' Then he had to meet the second woman's eyes, the face no longer incipient now but boundless with promise, giving him a sweet and tender smile, saying:

'It's all right. Dont be afraid. Goodbye.' Then they were gone, the five of them, the horse and the cart: rapidly; he turned and took the section of rusted wire from the barrow and flung it down beside the severed bottom strand.

'Tie it back,' he said.

'Isn't the war over?' one of the men said. The sergeant-major turned almost savagely.

'But not the army,' he said. 'How do you expect peace to put an end to an army when even war cant?'

When they passed through the old eastern city gate this time they were all riding, Marthe with the lines at one end of the high seat and the sister opposite with the girl between them. They were quite high, not in the city's dense and creeping outflux but above it, not a part of it but on it like a boat, the three of them riding out of the city as on a float in a carnival procession, fluxed out of the anguished city on the fading diffusion on the anguish as on a leg-less and wheel-less effigy of a horse and cart as though borne on the massed shoulders in a kind of triumph;

borne along so high in fact that they had almost reached the old gate before the owners of the shoulders even appeared or thought to raise their eyes or their attention high enough to remark what they carried and to assume, divine or simply recoil from, what the cart contained.

It was not a recoil, a shrinking, but rather an effacement, a recession: a suddenly widening ring of empty space beginning to enclose the moving cart as water recedes from a float, leaving the float to realise, discover only then that it was not maritime but terrestrial and not supported by a medium but attached to earth by legs and wheels; a recession, as though the shoulders which for a time had borne it were effacing not only the support but the cognizance too of the weight and presence of the burden, the crowd pressing steadily away from the cart and even transmitting on ahead as though by osmosis the warning of its coming, until presently the path was already opening before the cart itself ever reached it, the cart now moving faster than the crowd, the faces in the crowd not even looking toward it until the second sister, Marya, began to call down to them from her end of the high seat, not peremptory, not admonitory: just insistent and serene as if she were speaking to children: 'Come. You owe him no obligation; you don't need to hate. You haven't injured him; why should you be afraid?'

'Marya,' the other sister said.

'Nor ashamed either,' Marya said.

'Hush, Marya,' the other sister said. Marya sat back into the seat.

'All right, Sister,' she said. 'I didn't mean to frighten them: only to comfort them.' But she continued to watch them, bright and serene, the cart going on, the cleared space moving steadily before it as if the emptiness itself cleared its own advancing vacancy, so that when they came to the old gate the archway was completely vacant, the crowd now halted and banked on either side of it for the cart to pass; when suddenly a man in the crowd removed his hat, then one or two more, so that when the cart passed beneath the arch it was as though it had quit the city enclosed in a faint visible soundless rustling. 'You see, Sister?' Marya said with serene and peaceful triumph: 'Only to comfort them.'

Now they were out of the city, the long straight roads diverging away, radiating away like spokes from a hub; above them slowly crawled the intermittent small clouds of dust within which, singly, in groups, sometimes in carts also, the city emptied itself; the parents and kin of the revolted regiment who had hurried toward it in amazement and terror, to compound between the old walls vituperation and anguish, now fled it almost as though in something not quite of relief but shame.

They didn't look back at it though for a while yet it remained, squatting above the flat plain, supreme still, gray and crowned by the ancient Roman citadel and slowly fading until in time it was gone though they still had not looked once back to know it, going on themselves behind the strong slow heavy deliberate unhurryable farm-horse. They had food with them so they didn't need to stop save for a little while at noon in a wood to feed and water the horse. So they only passed through the villages — the silent arrested faces, that same faint visible soundless rustling as the hats and caps came off, almost as though they had an outrider or courier to presage them, the girl crouching in her shawl between the two older women, Marthe iron-faced, looking straight ahead and only the other sister, Marya, to look about them, serene and tranquil, never astonished, never surprised while the heavy shaggy feet of the horse rang the slow cobbles until that one too was behind.

Just before dark they reached Chalons. They were in an army zone now and approaching what five days ago had been a battle zone though there was peace now or at least quiet; still an army zone anyway because suddenly a French and an American sergeant stood at the horse's head, stopping him. 'I have the paper,' Marthe said, producing and extending it. 'Here.'

'Keep it,' the French sergeant said. 'You wont need it here. It is all arranged.' Then she saw something else: six French soldiers carrying a cheap wood coffin approaching the rear of the cart and even as she turned on the seat they had already set the coffin down and were drawing the tarpaulin-swaddled body from the cart.

‘Wait,’ Marthe said in her harsh strong tearless voice.

‘It is arranged, I tell you,’ the French sergeant said. ‘You go to St Mihiel by train.’

‘By train?’ Marthe said.

‘Why, Sister!’ Marya said. ‘In the train!’

‘Restrain yourself,’ the French sergeant said to Marthe. ‘You wont have to pay. It’s arranged, I tell you.’

‘This cart is not mine,’ Marthe said. ‘I borrowed it.’

‘We know that,’ the French sergeant said. ‘It will be returned.’

‘But I must still carry him from St Mihiel to Vienne-la-pucelle — You said St Mihiel, didn’t you?’

‘Why do you argue with me?’ the French sergeant said. ‘Have I not told you one million times it is all arranged? Your husband will meet you at St Mihiel with your own cart and horse. Get down. All of you. Just because the war has stopped, do you think the army has nothing else to do but cajole civilians? Come along now. You’re holding up your train; it has a little more to do than this too.’

Then they saw the train. They had not noticed it before though the tracks were almost beside them. It was a locomotive and a single van of the type known as forty-and-eight. They got down from the cart; it was dusk now. The French soldiers finished fastening down the lid of the coffin; they took it up and the three women and the two sergeants followed to the van and stopped again while the soldiers lifted the coffin into the open door, then climbed in themselves and took up the coffin again and carried it forward out of sight and then reappeared and dropped one by one to the ground again.

‘In with you,’ the French sergeant said. ‘And dont complain because you dont have seats. There’s plenty of clean straw. And here.’ It was an army blanket. None of the three of them knew where he had got it from. That is, they had not noticed it before either.

Then the American sergeant said something to the French one, in his own language without doubt since it meant nothing to them, not even when the French sergeant said, 'Attendez'; they just stood in the slow and failing light until the American sergeant returned carrying a wooden packing-case stencilled with the cryptic symbols of ordnance or supply, that didn't matter either, the American sergeant setting the box in place before the door and now they knew why, with a little of surprise perhaps, climbing in turn onto the box and then into the van, into almost complete darkness with only one pale shapeless gleam from the coffin's unpainted wood to break it.

They found the straw. Marthe spread the blanket on it and they sat down; at that moment someone else sprang, vaulted into the van — a man, a soldier, by his silhouette in the door where there was still a little light, an American soldier, carrying something in both hands they smelled the coffee, the American sergeant looming over them now, saying, very loud:

'Ici café. Café,' fumbling the three mugs down until Marthe took them and distributed them, feeling in her turn the man's hard hand gripping her hand and the mug both while he guided the spout of the coffee pot into the mug; he even seemed to anticipate the jerk, crying 'Watch it!' in his own language a second or two before the shrill peanut-parcher whistle which did not presage the lurch but rather accompanied it, bracing himself against the wall as the van seemed to rush from immobility into a sort of frantic celerity with no transition whatever; a gout of burning coffee leapt from the mug in her hand onto her lap.

Then the three of them managed to brace themselves back against the wall too, the whistle shrieking again shrill as friction, as though it actually were friction: not a warning of approach but a sound of protest and insensate anguish and indictment of the hard dark earth it rushed over, the vast weight of dark sky it burrowed frantically beneath, the constant and inviolable horizon it steadily clove.

This time the American sergeant knelt, braced still, using both hands again to fill the mugs, but only half full now so that, sitting against the

wall, they drank by installments the hot sweet comforting coffee, the van rushing on through darkness, themselves invisible even to one another in darkness, even the gleam of the coffin at the other end of the van gone now and, their own inert bodies now matched and reconciled with the van's speed, it was as though there were no motion at all if it had not been for the springless vibration and the anguished shrieks from the engine from time to time.

When light returned, the van had stopped. It would be St Mihiel; they had told her St Mihiel and this would be it, even if there had not been that sixth sense, even after almost four years, that tells people when they are nearing home. So as soon as the van stopped, she had started to get up, saying to the American sergeant: 'St Mihiel?' because at least he should understand that, then in a sort of despair of urgency she even said, began, 'Mon homme à moi — mon mari' before she stopped, the sergeant speaking himself now, using one or two more of the few other words which were his French vocabulary:

'No no no. Attention. Attention,' even in the van's darkness motioning downward at her with his hands as a trainer commands a dog to sit. Then he was gone, silhouetted for another instant against the paler door, and they waited, huddled together now for warmth in the cold spring dawn, the girl between them, whether asleep or not, whether she had ever slept during the night or not, Marthe could not tell though by her breathing Marya, the other sister, was. It was full light when the sergeant returned; they were all three awake now, who had slept or not slept; they could see the first of Saturday's sun and hear the eternal and perennial larks.

He had more coffee, the pot filled again, and this time he had bread too, saying, very loud: 'Monjay. Monjay' and they — she — could see him now — a young man with a hard drafted face and with something else in it — impatience or commiseration, she anyway could not tell which. Nor did she care, thinking again to try once more to communicate with him except that the French sergeant at Chalons had said that it was all arranged, and suddenly it was not that she could trust the American sergeant because he must know what he was doing

since he had obviously come along with them under orders, but because she — they — could do little else.

So they ate the bread and drank the hot sweet coffee again. The sergeant was gone again and they waited; she had no way to mark or gauge how long. Then the sergeant sprang or vaulted into the van again and she knew that the moment was here. This time the six soldiers who followed him were Americans; the three of them rose and stood and waited again while the six soldiers slid the coffin to the door then dropped to the ground, invisible to them now, so that the coffin itself seemed to flee suddenly through the door and vanish, the three of them following to the door while the sergeant dropped through the door; there was another box beneath the door for them to descend by, into another bright morning, blinking a little after the darkness in the sixth bright morning of that week during which there had been no rain nor adumbration at all.

Then she saw the cart, her own or theirs, her husband standing beside the horse's head while the six American soldiers slid the coffin into the cart, and she turned to the American sergeant and said 'Thank you' in French and suddenly and a little awkwardly he removed his hat and shook her hand, quick and hard, then the other sister's and put his hat back on without once looking at or offering to touch the girl, and she went on around the cart to where her husband stood — a broad strong man in corduroy, not as tall as she and definitely older.

They embraced, then all four of them turned to the cart, huddling for a moment in that indecision, as people will. But not for long; there would not be room for all four of them on the seat but the girl had already solved that, climbing up over the shafts and the seat and into the body of the cart, to crouch, huddle beside the coffin, huddled into the shawl, her face worn and sleepless and definitely needing soap and water now.

'Why, yes, Sister,' Marya, the older sister said in her voice of happy astonishment, almost of pleasure as though at so simple a solution: 'I'll ride back there too.' So the husband helped her up onto the shaft then

over the seat, where she sat also on the opposite side of the coffin. Then Marthe mounted strongly and without assistance to the seat, the husband following with the lines.

They were already on the edge of the city, so they did not need to pass through it, merely around it. Though actually there was no city, no boundaries enclosing and postulating a city from a countryside because this was not even a war zone: it was a battle zone, city and countryside annealed and indistinguishable one from the other beneath one vast concentration of troops, American and French, not poised but rather as though transfixed, suspended beneath, within that vast silence and cessation — all the clutter of battle in a state of arrestment like hypnosis: motionless and silent transport, dumps of ammunition and supplies, and soon they began to pass the guns squatting in batteries, facing eastward, still manned but not poised either, not waiting: just silent, following the now silent line of the old stubborn four-year salient so that now they were seeing war or what six days ago had been war — the shell-pocked fields, the topless trees some of which this spring had put out a few green and stubborn shoots from the blasted trunks — the familiar land which they had not seen in almost four years but which was familiar still, as though even war had failed to efface completely that old verity of peaceful human occupation.

But they were skirting the rubble of what had been Vienne-la-pucelle before it seemed to occur to her that there still might be dread and fear; it was only then that she said to the husband in a voice that did not even reach the two others in the body of the cart: 'The house.'

'The house was not damaged,' the husband said. 'I don't know why. But the fields, the land. Ruined. Ruined. It will take years. And they won't even let me start now. When they gave me permission to come back yesterday, they forbade me to work them until they have gone over them to locate the shells which might not have exploded.'

And the husband was right because here was the farm, the land pitted (not too severely; some of the trees had not even been topped) with shell craters where she herself had worked beside her husband in the

tense seasons and which had been the life of the brother in the cheap coffin behind her in the cart and which was to have been his some day whom she had brought back to sleep in it.

Then the house; the husband had been right; it was unmarked save for a pock a ragged gout of small holes in one wall which was probably a machine-gun burst, the husband not even looking at the house but getting down from the cart (a little stiffly; she remarked for the first time how his arthritis seemed to have increased) to go and stand looking out over his ruined land. Nor did she enter the house either, calling him by name; then she said:

‘Come now. Let’s finish this first.’ So he returned and entered the house; apparently he had brought some of the tools back with him yesterday too because he reappeared at once with a spade and mounted the cart again. Though this time she had the lines, as though she knew exactly where she wanted to go, the cart moving again, crossing the field now rank with weeds and wild poppies, skirting the occasional craters, on for perhaps half a kilometre to a bank beneath an ancient beech tree which also had escaped the shells.

The digging was easier here, into the bank, all of them taking turns, the girl too though Marthe tried once to dissuade her. ‘No,’ she said. ‘Let me. Let me be doing something.’ Though even then it took them a long time until the excavation was deep enough into the bank to contain the coffin, the four of them now shoving and sliding the box back into the cave they had made.

‘The medal,’ the husband said. ‘You dont want to put that in too? I can open the box.’ But Marthe didn’t even answer, taking the shovel herself first until the husband relieved her of it and at last the bank was smooth again save for the shovel marks; afternoon then and almost evening when they returned to the house and (the three women) entered it while the husband went on to the stable to put the horse up for the night. She had not seen it in almost four years, nor did she pause to examine it now.

She crossed the room and dropped, almost tossed, the medal onto the vacant mantel and then turned, not really examining the room now. The house had not been damaged: merely eviscerated.

They had moved out what the cart would carry that day in 1914, and the husband had fetched that back with him yesterday — enough dishes and bedding, the objects of no value which she had insisted on saving at the expense of things they would actually need when they returned; she could not even remember now what she had felt, thought, then: whether they would ever return or not, if perhaps that anguished day had not been the actual end of home and hope.

Nor did she try to remember now, going on to the kitchen; the husband had brought food and fuel for the stove and Marya and the girl were already starting a fire in the stove; again she said to the girl: 'Why dont you rest?'

'No,' the girl said again. 'Let me be doing something.' The lamp was lighted now; it was that near to darkness before she noticed that the husband had not yet come in from the stable. She knew at once where he would be: motionless, almost invisible in the faint last of light, looking at his ruined land. This time she approached and touched him.

'Come now,' she said. 'Supper is ready,' checking him again with her hand at the open lamplit door until he had seen the older sister and the girl moving between the stove and the table. 'Look at her,' she said. 'She has nothing left. She was not even kin to him. She only loved him.'

But he seemed incapable of remembering or grieving over anything but his land; they had eaten the meal and he and she lay again in the familiar bed between the familiar walls beneath the familiar rafters; he had gone to sleep at once though even as she lay rigid and sleepless beside him he flung his head suddenly and muttered, cried, 'The farm. The land:' waking himself. 'What?' he said. 'What is it?'

'It's all right,' she said. 'Go back to sleep.' Because suddenly she knew that he was right. Stefan was gone; all that was over, done, finished,

never to be recalled. He had been her brother but she had been his mother too, who knew now that she would have no children of her own and who had raised him from infancy; France, England, America too by now probably, were full of women who had given the lives of their sons to defend their countries and preserve justice and right; who was she to demand uniqueness for grieving? He was right: it was the farm, the land which was immune even to the blast and sear of war. It would take work of course, it might even take years of work, but the four of them were capable of work.

More: their palliation and their luck was the work they faced, since work is the only anesthetic to which grief is vulnerable. More still: restoring the land would not only palliate the grief, the minuscule integer of the farm would affirm that he had not died for nothing and that it was not for an outrage that they grieved, but for simple grief: the only alternative to which was nothing, and between grief and nothing only the coward takes nothing.

So she even slept at last, dreamless; so dreamless that she did not know she had been asleep until someone was shaking her. It was the older sister; behind her the girl stood with her worn dirty sleepwalker's face which might be pretty again with a little soap and water and a week of proper food. It was dawn and then she, Marthe, heard the sound too even before the older sister cried: 'Listen, Sister!', the husband waking too, to lie for an instant, then surging upright among the tumbled bedclothing.

'The guns!' he cried, 'the guns!' the four of them transfixed for another ten or fifteen seconds like a tableau while the uproar of the barrage seemed to be rolling directly toward them; transfixed still even after they began to hear above or beneath the steady roar of explosions, the whistle of the shells passing over the house itself. Then the husband moved.

'We must get out of here,' he said, lurching, plunging out of the bed, where he would have fallen if she had not caught and held him up, the four of them in their night clothing running across the room and then

out of the house, quitting one roof, one ceiling only to run stumbling on their bare feet beneath that other one filled with thunder and demonic whistling, not realising yet that the barrage was missing the house by two or three hundred metres, the three women following the husband, who seemed to know where he was going.

He did know: a tremendous crater in the field which must have been from a big howitzer, the four of them running, stumbling among the dew-heavy weeds and blood-red poppies, down into the crater, the husband pressing the three women against the wall beneath the lip facing the barrage where they crouched, their heads bowed almost as though in prayer, the husband crying steadily in a voice as thin and constant as a cicada's: 'The land. The land. The land.'

That is, all of them except Marthe. She had not even stooped, erect, tall, watching across the lip of the crater the barrage as it missed the house, skirting the house and the farm buildings as neatly and apparently as intentionally as a scythe skirts a rosebush, rolling on eastward across the field in one vast pall of dust filled with red flashes, the dust still hanging in the air after the flashes of the shell-bursts had winked and blinked rapidly on, to disappear beyond the field's edge like a furious migration of gigantic daylight-haunting fireflies, leaving behind only the thunder of their passing, it too already beginning to diminish.

Then Marthe began to climb out of the crater. She climbed rapid and strong, agile as a goat, kicking backward at the husband as he grasped at the hem of her nightdress and then at her bare feet, up and out of the crater, running strongly through the weeds and poppies, dodging the sparse old craters until she reached the swathe of the barrage, where the three still crouched in the crater could see her actually leaping across and among the thick new ones. Then the field was full of running men — a ragged line of French and American troops which overtook and passed her; they saw one, either an officer or a sergeant, pause and gesticulate at her, his mouth open and soundless with yelling for a moment before he too turned and ran on with the rest of the charge, the three of them out of the crater too now, running and

stumbling into the new craters and the fading dust and the fierce and fading stink of cordite.

At first they couldn't even find the bank. And when they did at last, the beech tree had vanished: no mark, nothing remained to orient by. 'It was here, Sister!' the older sister cried, but Marthe didn't answer, running strongly on, they following until they too saw what she had apparently seen — the splinters and fragments, whole limbs still intact with leaves, scattered for a hundred metres; when they overtook her, she was holding in her hand a shard of the pale new unpainted wood which had been the coffin; she spoke to the husband by name, quite gently:

'You'll have to go back and get the shovel.'

But before he could turn, the girl had already passed him, running, frantic yet unerring, deer-light among the craters and what remained of the weeds and the quenchless poppies, getting smaller and smaller yet still running, back toward the house. That was Sunday. When the girl returned with the shovel, still running, they took turns with it, all that day until it was too dark to see. They found a few more shards and fragments of the coffin, but the body itself was gone.

Tomorrow

ONCE MORE THERE were twelve of them though this time they were led by a sergeant. The carriage was a special one though it was still third class; the seats had been removed from the forward compartment and on the floor of it rested a new empty military coffin. The thirteen of them had left Paris at midnight and by the time they reached St Mihiel they were already fairly drunk.

Because the job, mission, was going to be an unpleasant one, now that peace and victory had really come to western Europe in November (six months after the false armistice in May, that curious week's holiday which the war had taken which had been so false that they remembered it only as phenomena) and a man, even though still in uniform, might have thought himself free, at least until they started the

next one, of yesterday's cadavers. So they had been issued an extra wine and brandy ration to compensate for this, in charge of the sergeant who was to have doled it out to them at need.

But the sergeant, who had not wanted the assignment either, was a dour introvert who had secluded himself in an empty compartment forward with a pornographic magazine as soon as the train left Paris. But, alert for the opportunity, when the sergeant quitted his compartment at Chalons (they didn't know why nor bother: perhaps to find a urinal; possibly it was merely official) two of them (one had been a fairly successful picklock in civilian life before 1914 and planned to resume that vocation as soon as he was permitted to doff his uniform) entered the compartment and opened the sergeant's valise and extracted two bottles of brandy from it.

So when the Bar-le-Duc express dropped their carriage at St Mihiel, where the local for Verdun would engage it, they (except the sergeant) were a shade better than fairly drunk; and when, shortly after daylight, the local set the carriage on a repaired siding in the rubble of Verdun, they were even another shade better than that; by that time also the sergeant had discovered the ravishing of his valise and counted the remaining bottles and, what with the consequent uproar of his outraged and angry denunciation, plus their own condition, they did not even notice the old woman at first; only then to remark that there had been something almost like a committee waiting for them, as though word of the time of their arrival and their purpose too had preceded them — a clump, a huddle, a small group, all men save one, of laborers from the town and peasants from the adjacent countryside, watching them quietly while the sergeant (carrying the valise) snarled and cursed at them, out of which that one, the old woman, had darted at once and was now tugging at the sergeant's sleeve — a peasant woman older in appearance than in years when seen close, with a worn lined face which looked as though she too had not slept much lately, but which was now tense and even alight with a sort of frantic eagerness and hope.

'Eh?' the sergeant said at last. 'What? What is it you want?'

'You are going out to the forts,' she said. 'We know why. Take me with you.'

'You?' the sergeant said; now they were all listening. 'What for?'

'It's Theodule,' she said. 'My son. They told me he was killed there in 1916 but they didn't send him back home and they wont let me go out there and find him.'

'Find him?' the sergeant said. 'After three years?'

'I will know him,' she said. 'Only let me go and look. I will know him. You have a mother; think how she would grieve for you if you had died and they had not sent you home. Take me with you. I will know him, I tell you. I will know him at once. Come now.' She was clinging to his arm now while he tried to shake her loose.

'Let go!' he said. 'I cant take you out there without an order, even if I would. We've got a job to do; you would be in the way. Let go!'

But she still clung to the sergeant's arm, looking about at the other faces watching her, her own face eager and unconvinced. 'Boys — children,' she said. 'You have mothers too — some of you — —'

'Let go!' the sergeant said, swapping the valise to the other hand and jerking himself free this time. 'Gwan! Beat it:' taking her by the shoulders, the valise pressed against her back, and turning her and propelling her across the platform toward the quiet group which had been watching too. 'There aint nothing out there anymore by now but rotten meat; you couldn't find him even if you went.'

'I can,' she said. 'I know I can. I sold the farm, I tell you. I have money. I can pay you — —'

'Not me,' the sergeant said. 'Not but that if I had my way, you could go out there and find yours and bring another one back for us, and we would wait for you here. But you aint going.' He released her, speaking almost gently. 'You go on back home and forget about this. Is your husband with you?'

'He is dead too. We lived in the Morbihan. When the war was over, I sold the farm and came here to find Theodule.'

'Then go on back to wherever it is you are living now. Because you cant go with us.'

But she went no further than the group she had emerged from, to turn and stand again, watching, the worn sleepless face still eager, unconvinced, indomitable, while the sergeant turned back to his squad and stopped and gave them another scathing and introverted look. 'All right,' he said at last. 'All of you that aint seeing double, let's go. Because I dont want to mess around out there long enough to get one stinking carcass, let alone two.'

'How about a drink first?' one said.

'Try and get it.'

'Want me to carry your grip, Sarge?' another said. The sergeant's answer was simple, brief and obscene. He turned, they followed raggedly. A lorry, a closed van, was waiting for them, with a driver and a corporal. They drew the empty coffin from its compartment and carried it to the van and slid it inside and got in themselves.

There was straw for them to sit on; the sergeant himself sat on the coffin, the valise in his lap and one hand still gripping the handle as if he expected one or maybe all of them to try to snatch it from him. The lorry moved.

'Dont we get any breakfast?' one said.

'You drank yours,' the sergeant said. 'After you stole it first.' But there was breakfast: bread and coffee at a zinc bar in a tiny bistro for some inscrutable reason untouched by the shelling except that it had a new American-made sheet-iron roof, which stuck upward from the tumbled masses of collapsed walls surrounding and enclosing it. That was arranged too; the meal was already paid for from Paris.

'Christ,' one said. 'The army sure wants this corpse bad if they have started buying grub from civilians.' The sergeant ate with the valise on

the bar before him, between his arms. Then they were in the lorry again, the sergeant gripping the valise on his lap; now, through the open rear door of the lorry as it crept between the piles of rubble and the old craters, they were able to see something of the ruined city — the mountains and hills of shattered masonry which men were already at work clearing away and out of which there rose already an astonishing number of the American-made iron roofs to glint like silver in the morning sun; maybe the Americans had not fought all the war but at least they were paying for the restoration of its devastation.

That is, the sergeant could have seen it because almost at once his men had entered a state resembling coma, even before they had crossed the Meuse bridge and reached the corner, where in time the five heroic-sized figures would stare steadily and indomitably eastward in bas-relief from the symbolical section of stone bastion which would frame and contain them.

Or rather, the sergeant could have been able to, sitting with the valise huddled between his arms on his lap like a mother with a sick baby, watching them intently for perhaps another ten minutes where they lay sprawled against one another in the straw, the lorry well out of the city now. Then he rose, still carrying the valise; there was a small sliding panel in the lorry's front wall.

He opened it and spoke rapidly and quietly for a moment with the corporal beside the driver, then he unlocked the valise and took all the bottles save one of brandy out of it and passed them to the corporal and locked the valise on the single remaining bottle and returned and sat on the coffin again, the valise huddled again on his lap.

So now, as the lorry climbed the repaired road to follow the curve of the Meuse Heights, the sergeant at least could watch beyond the open door the ruined and slain land unfold — the corpse of earth, some of which, its soil soured forever with cordite and human blood and anguish, would never live again, as though not only abandoned by man but repudiated forever by God Himself: the craters, the old trenches and rusted wire, the stripped and blasted trees, the little villages and

farms like shattered skulls no longer even recognisable as skulls, already beginning to vanish beneath a fierce rank colorless growth of nourishmentless grass coming not tenderly out of the earth's surface but as though miles and leagues up from Hell itself, as if the Devil himself were trying to hide what man had done to the earth which was his mother.

Then the battered fort which nevertheless had endured, steadfast still even though France, civilization no longer needed it; steadfast still even if only to taint the air not only more than two years after the battle had ended and the mass rotting should have annealed itself, but more than twice that many months after the war itself had stopped.

Because as soon as the sergeant, standing now and clasping the valise to his breast, roused them with the side of his boot, they were already smelling it: who had not thought they would have to begin that until they were actually inside the fort; though once the sergeant had kicked and cursed the last of them out of the lorry, they saw why — a midden of white bones and skulls and some still partly covered with strips and patches of what looked like brown or black leather, and boots and stained uniforms and now and then what would be an intact body wrapped in a fragment of tarpaulin, beside one of the low entrances in the stone wall; while they watched two more soldiers in butchers' aprons and with pieces of cloth bound over their nostrils and lower faces, emerged from the low entrance carrying between them a two-man wheel-less barrow heaped with more scraps and fragments of the fort's old 1916 defenders.

In time there would be a vast towered chapel, an ossuary, visible for miles across the Heights like the faintly futuristic effigy of a gigantic gray goose or an iguanodon created out of gray stone not by a sculptor but by expert masons — a long tremendous nave enclosed by niches in each of which a light would burn always, the entrance to each arched with the carven names taken not from identity discs but from regimental lists since there would be nothing to match them with — squatting over the vast deep pit into which the now clean inextricable anonymous bones of what had been man, men, would be shoveled and

sealed; facing it would be the slope white with the orderly parade of Christian crosses bearing the names and regimental designations of the bones which could be identified; and beyond it, that other slope ranked not with crosses but with rounded headstones set faintly but intractably oblique to face where Mecca was, set with a consistent and almost formal awryness and carved in cryptic and indecipherable hieroglyph because the bones here had been identifiable too which had once been men come this far from their hot sun and sand, this far from home and all familiar things, to make this last sacrifice in the northern rain and mud and cold, for what cause unless their leaders, ignorant too, could have explained some of it, a little of it to them in their own tongue.

But now there only the dun-colored battered and enduring walls of the fortress, flanked by the rounded sunken concrete domes of machine-gun placements like giant mushrooms, and the midden and the two soldiers in butchers' aprons dumping their barrow onto it then turning with the empty barrow to look at them for a moment above the taut rags over their nostrils and mouths with the fixed exhaustless unseeing unrecognising glares of sleepwalkers in nightmares before descending the steps again; and over all, permeant and invincible, the odor, the smell, as though, victims of man and therefore quit of him, they had bequeathed him that which had already been invulnerable to him for three years and would still be for thirty more or even three hundred more, so that all that remained to him was to abandon it, flee it.

They looked at the midden, then at the low orifice in the dun stone through which the two soldiers with the barrow had seemed to plunge, drop as though into the bowels of the earth; they did not know yet that in their eyes too now was that fixed assuageless glare of nightmares. 'Christ,' one said. 'Let's grab one off that dump there and get the hell out of here.'

'No,' the sergeant said; there was something behind his voice not vindictiveness so much as repressed gleeful anticipation — if they had known it.

He had worn his uniform ever since September 1914 without ever having become a soldier; he could remain in it for another decade and still would not be one. He was an office man, meticulous and reliable; his files were never out of order, his returns never late.

He neither drank nor smoked; he had never heard a gun fired in his life save the amateur sportsmen banging away at whatever moved on Sunday morning around the little Loire village where he had been born and lived until his motherland demanded him. Perhaps all this was why he had been given this assignment. 'No,' he said. 'The order says, Proceed to Verdun and thence with expedition and despatch to the catacombs beneath the Fort of Valaumont and extricate therefrom one complete cadaver of one French soldier unidentified and unidentifiable either by name regiment or rank, and return with it. And that's what we're going to do. Get on with you: forward.'

'Let's have a drink first,' one said.

'No,' the sergeant said. 'Afterward. Get it loaded into the lorry first.' 'Come on, Sarge,' another said. 'Think what that stink will be down that hole.'

'No, I tell you!' the sergeant said. 'Get on there! Forward!' He didn't lead them; he drove, herded them, to bow their heads one by one into the stone tunnel, to drop, plunge in their turn down the steep pitch of the stone stairs as though into the bowels of the earth, into damp and darkness, though presently, from beyond where the stairs flattened at last into a tunnel, they could see a faint unsteady red gleam not of electricity, it was too red and unsteady, but from torches.

They were torches; there was one fastened to the wall beside the first doorless opening in the wall and now they could see one another binding across their nostrils and lower faces what soiled handkerchiefs and filthy scraps of rag which they found on themselves (one who apparently had neither was holding the collar of his coat across his face), huddling and then halting here because an officer, his face swatched to the eyes in a silk one, had emerged from the opening;

huddling back against the wall of the narrow tunnel while the sergeant with his valise came forward and saluted and presented his order to the officer, who opened it and glanced briefly at it, then turned his head and spoke back into the room behind him, and a corporal carrying an electric torch and a folded stretcher came out; he had a gas-mask slung about his neck.

Then, the corporal with his torch leading now and the foremost man carrying the stretcher, they went on again between the sweating walls, the floor itself beneath the feet viscous and greasy so that there was a tendency to slip, passing the doorless orifices in the walls beyond which they could see the tiered bunks in which in time during those five months in 1916 men had actually learned to sleep beneath the muted thunder and the trembling of the earth, the smell which above ground had had a sort of vividness, as though even yet partaking invincibly still of something of that motion which is life, not increasing so much as becoming familiar — an old stale dead and worn accustomedness which man would never eradicate and so in time would even get used to and even cease to smell it — a smell subterrene and claustrophobe and doomed to darkness, not alone of putrefaction but of fear and old sweat and old excrement and endurance; fear attenuated to that point where it must choose between coma and madness and in the intermittent coma no longer feared but merely stank.

More soldiers in pairs with masked faces and heaped barrows or stretchers passed them; suddenly more sweating and viscid stairs plunged away beneath them; at the foot of the stairs the tunnel made a sharp angle, no longer floored and walled and roofed with concrete; and, turning the corner behind the corporal, it was no longer a tunnel even but an excavation a cavern a cave a great niche dug out of one wall in which during the height of the battle, when there had been no other way to dispose of them, the bodies which had merely been killed and the ones which had been killed and dismembered too in the fort or the connecting machine-gun pits had been tumbled and covered with earth, the tunnel itself continuing on beyond it: a timber-shored burrow not even high enough for a man to stand erect in, through or beyond which they now saw a steady white glare which would have to

be electricity, from which as they watched two more hooded and aproned soldiers emerged, carrying a stretcher with what would be an intact body this time.

‘Wait here,’ the corporal said.

‘My orders say — —’ the sergeant said.

‘... your orders,’ the corporal said. ‘We got a system here. We do things our way. Down here, you’re on active service, pal. Just give me two of your men and the stretcher. Though you can come too, if you think nothing less will keep your nose clean.’

‘That’s what I intend to do,’ the sergeant said. ‘My orders say — —’ But the corporal didn’t wait, going on, the two with the stretcher, the sergeant stooping last to enter the further tunnel, the valise still clasped against his breast like a sick child. It did not take them long, as if there were plenty in the next traverse to choose from; almost at once, it seemed to the remaining ten, they saw the sergeant come stooping out of the burrow, still clasping the valise, followed by the two men with the burdened stretcher at a sort of stumbling run, then last the corporal who didn’t even pause, walking around the stretcher where the two bearers had dropped it, already going on toward the stairs until the sergeant stopped him. ‘Wait,’ the sergeant said, the valise now clasped under one arm while he produced his order and a pencil from inside his coat and shook the folded order open. ‘We got systems in Paris too. It’s a Frenchman.’

‘Right,’ the corporal said.

‘It’s all here. Nothing missing.’

‘Right,’ the corporal said.

‘No identification of name regiment or rank.’

‘Right,’ the corporal said.

‘Then sign it,’ the sergeant said, holding out the pencil as the corporal approached. ‘You,’ he said to the nearest man. ‘About face and bend over.’ Which the man did, the sergeant holding the paper flat on his bowed back while the corporal signed. ‘Your lieutenant will have to sign

too,' the sergeant said, taking the pencil from the corporal. 'You might go on ahead and tell him.'

'Right,' the corporal said, going on again.

'All right,' the sergeant said to the stretcher bearers. 'Get it out of here.'

'Not yet,' the first stretcher bearer said. 'We're going to have that drink first.'

'No,' the sergeant said. 'When we get it into the lorry.' He had not wanted the assignment and indeed he did not belong here because this time they simply took the valise away from him in one concerted move of the whole twelve of them, not viciously, savagely, just rapidly: with no heat at all but almost impersonal, almost inattentive, as you might rip a last year's calendar from the wall to kindle a fire with it; the ex-picklock didn't even pretend to conceal his action this time, producing his instrument in plain view, the others crowding around him as he opened the valise.

Or they thought the rapidity and ease of the valise's rape had been because they were too many for the sergeant, staring down at the single bottle it contained with shock then outrage and then with something like terror while the sergeant stood back and over them, laughing steadily down at them with a sort of vindictive and triumphant pleasure.

'Where's the rest of it?' one said.

'I threw it away,' the sergeant said. 'Poured it out.'

'Poured it out, hell,' another said. 'He sold it.'

'When?' another said. 'When did he have a chance to? Or pour it out either.'

'While we were all asleep in the lorry coming out here.'

'I wasn't asleep,' the second said.

'All right, all right,' the ex-picklock said. 'What does it matter what he did with it? It's gone. We'll drink this one. Where's your corkscrew?' he

said to a third one. But the man already had the corkscrew out, opening the bottle. 'Okay,' the ex-picklock said to the sergeant, 'you go on and report to the officer and we'll take it up and be putting it into the coffin.'

'Right,' the sergeant said, taking up the empty valise. 'I want to get out of here too. I don't even need to want a drink to prove I don't like this.' He went on. They emptied the bottle rapidly, passing it from one to another, and flung it away.

'All right,' the ex-picklock said. 'Grab that thing up and let's get out of here.' Because already he was the leader, none to say or know or even care when it had happened. Because they were not drunk now, not inebriated but madmen, the last brandy lying in their stomachs cold and solid as balls of ice as they almost ran with the stretcher up the steep stairs.

'Where is it, then?' the one pressing behind the ex-picklock said.

'He gave it to that corporal riding up front,' the ex-picklock said. 'Through that panel while we were asleep.' They burst out into the air, the world, earth and sweet air again where the lorry waited, the driver and the corporal standing with a group of men some distance away.

They had all heard the ex-picklock and dropped the stretcher without even pausing and were rushing toward the lorry until the ex-picklock stopped them. 'Hold it,' he said. 'I'll do it.' But the missing bottles were nowhere in the lorry. The ex-picklock returned to the stretcher.

'Call that corporal over here,' one said. 'I know how to make him tell where it is.'

'Fool,' the ex-picklock said. 'If we start something now, don't you know what'll happen? He'll call the M.P.'s and put us all under arrest and get a new guard from the adjutant in Verdun. We can't do anything here. We've got to wait till we get back to Verdun.'

‘What’ll we do in Verdun?’ another said. ‘Buy some liquor? With what? You couldn’t get one franc out of the whole lot of us with a suction pump.’

‘Morache can sell his watch,’ a fourth said.

‘But will he?’ a fifth said. They all looked at Morache.

‘Forget that now,’ Morache said. ‘Picklock’s right; the first thing to do is to get back to Verdun. Come up. Let’s get this thing into that box.’ They carried the stretcher to the lorry and lifted the sheeted body into it. The lid of the coffin had not been fastened down; a hammer and nails were inside the coffin. They tumbled the body into it, whether face-up or facedown they didn’t know and didn’t bother, and replaced the top and caught the nails enough to hold it shut.

Then the sergeant with his now empty valise climbed through the rear door and sat again on the coffin; the corporal and the driver obviously had returned too because at once the lorry moved, the twelve men sitting on the straw against the walls, quiet now, outwardly as decorous as well-behaved children but actually temporarily insane, capable of anything, talking occasionally among themselves, peacefully, idle and extraneous while the lorry returned to Verdun, until they were actually in the city again and the lorry had stopped before a door beside which a sentry stood: obviously the commandant’s headquarters: and the sergeant began to get up from the coffin. Then Picklock made one last effort:

‘I understood orders said we were to have brandy not just to go to Valaumont and get the body out, but to get it back to Paris. Or am I wrong?’

‘If you are, who made you wrong?’ the sergeant said. He looked down at Picklock a moment longer. Then he turned toward the door; it was as though he too had recognised Picklock as their leader: ‘I’ll have to sign some bumf here. Take it on to the station and load it into the carriage and wait for me there. Then we’ll have lunch.’

'Right,' Picklock said. The sergeant dropped to the ground and vanished; at once, even before the lorry had begun to move again, their whole air, atmosphere changed, as if their very characters and personalities had altered, or not altered but rather as if they had shed masks or cloaks; their very speech was short, rapid, succinct, cryptic, at times even verbless, as if they did not need to communicate but merely to prompt one another in one mutual prescient cognizance.

'Morache's watch,' one said.

'Hold it,' Picklock said. 'The station first.'

'Tell him to hurry then,' another said. 'I'll do it,' he said, starting to get up.

'Hold it, I said,' Picklock said, gripping him. 'Do you want M.P.'s?' So they stopped talking and just sat, immobile and in motion, furious in immobility like men strained against a pyramid, as if they were straining at the back of the moving lorry itself with the urgency of their passion and need. The lorry stopped. They were already getting out of it, the first ones dropping to the ground before it had stopped moving, their hands already on the coffin.

The platform was empty now, or so they thought, would have thought if they had noticed, which they didn't, not even looking that way as they dragged the coffin out of the lorry, almost running again across the platform with it toward where the carriage waited on the siding; not until a hand began to tug at Picklock's sleeve, an urgent voice at his elbow saying:

'Mister Corporal! Mister Corporal!' Picklock looked down. It was the old woman of the morning whose son had died in the Verdun battle.

'Beat it, grandma,' Picklock said, twitching his arm free. 'Come on. Get that door open.'

But the old woman still clung to him, speaking still with that terrible urgency: 'You've got one. It might be Theodule. I will know. Let me look at him.'

'Beat it, I tell you!' Picklock said. 'We're busy.' So it was not Picklock at all, leader though he was, but one of the others who said suddenly and sharply, hissing it:

'Wait.' Though in the next second the same idea seemed to occur to them all, one end of the box resting now on the floor of the carriage and four of them braced to shove it the rest of the way, all of them paused now looking back while the speaker continued: 'You said something this morning about selling a farm.'

'Selling my farm?' the woman said.

'Money!' the other said in his hissing undertone.

'Yes! Yes!' the old woman said, fumbling under her shawl and producing an aged reticule almost as large as the sergeant's valise. Now Picklock did take charge.

'Hold it,' he said over his shoulder, then to the old woman: 'If we let you look at him, will you buy two bottles of brandy?'

'Make it three,' a third said.

'And in advance,' a fourth said. 'She cant tell anything from what's in that box now.'

'I can!' she said. 'I will know! Just let me look.'

'All right,' Picklock said. 'Go and get two bottles of brandy, and you can look at him. Hurry now, before the sergeant gets back.'

'Yes yes,' she said and turned, running, stiffly and awkwardly, clutching the reticule, back across the platform.

'All right,' Picklock said. 'Get it inside. One of you get the hammer out of the lorry.' Luckily their orders had been not to drive the nails home but merely to secure the lid temporarily (apparently the body was to be transferred to something a little more elegant or anyway commensurate with its purpose when it reached Paris) so they could draw them without difficulty.

Which they did and removed the lid and then recoiled from the thin burst, gout of odor which rushed up at them almost visibly, like thin smoke — one last faint thin valedictory of corruption and mortality, as if the corpse itself had hoarded it for three years against this moment or any similar one with the gleeful demonic sentience of a small boy.

Then the old woman returned, clasping two bottles against her breast, still running or at least trotting, panting now, shaking, almost as though from physical exhaustion because she couldn't even climb the steps when she reached the door, so that two of them dropped to the ground and lifted her bodily into the carriage.

A third one took the bottles from her, though she didn't seem to notice it. For a second or so she couldn't even seem to see the coffin. Then she saw it and half knelt half collapsed at the head of it and turned the tarpaulin back from what had been a face. They — the speaker — had been right; she could have told nothing from the face because it was no longer man. Then they knew that she was not even looking at it: just kneeling there, one hand resting on what had been the face and the other caressing what remained of its hair. She said:

'Yes. Yes. This is Theodule. This is my son.' Suddenly she rose, strongly now, and faced them, pressing back against the coffin, looking rapidly from face to face until she found Picklock; her voice was calm and strong too. 'I must have him.'

'You said just to look at him,' Picklock said.

'He is my son. He must go home. I have money. I will buy you a hundred bottles of brandy. Or the money itself, if you want it.'

'How much will you give?' Picklock said. She didn't even hesitate. She handed him the unopened reticule.

'Count it yourself,' she said.

'But how are you going to get it — him away from here? You cant carry it.'

'I have a horse and cart. It's been behind the station yonder ever since we heard yesterday what you were coming for.'

'Heard how?' Picklock said. 'This is official business.'

'Does that matter?' she said, almost impatiently. 'Count it.'

But Picklock didn't open the reticule yet. He turned to Morache. 'Go with her and get the cart. Bring it up to the window on the other side. Make it snappy. Landry'll be back any minute now.' It didn't take long. They got the window up; almost immediately Morache brought the cart up, the big farm-horse going at a heavy and astonished gallop.

Morache snatched it to a halt; already the others in the carriage had the sheeted body balanced on the window sill. Morache handed the lines to the old woman on the seat beside him and vaulted over the seat and snatched the body down into the cart and vaulted to the ground beside it; at that moment Picklock inside the carriage tossed the reticule through the window, into the cart.

'Go on,' Morache said to the old woman. 'Get the hell out of here. Quick.' Then she was gone. Morache re-entered the carriage. 'How much was it?' he said to Picklock.

'I took a hundred francs,' Picklock said.

'A hundred francs?' another said with incredulous amazement.

'Yes,' Picklock said. 'And tomorrow I'll be ashamed I took even that much. But that will be a bottle apiece.' He handed the money to the man who had spoken last. 'Go and get it.' Then to the others: 'Get that lid back on. What are you waiting for, anyway: for Landry to help you?' They replaced the coffin lid and set the nails in the old holes.

The absolute minimum of prudence would have dictated or at least suggested a weight of some kind, any kind in the coffin first, but they were not concerned with prudence. The ganymede returned, clasping a frayed wicker basket to his breast; they snatched it from him before he could even get into the carriage, the owner of the corkscrew opening the bottles rapidly as they were passed to him.

'He said to bring the basket back,' the ganymede said.

'Take it back then,' Picklock said: and then no more of that either; the hands snatching at the bottles almost before the corks were out, so that when the sergeant returned about an hour later, his outrage — not rage: outrage — knew no bounds.

But this time he was impotent because they were indeed in coma now, sprawled and snoring in one inextricable filth of straw and urine and vomit and spilled brandy and empty bottles, invulnerable and immune in that nepenthe when toward the end of the afternoon an engine coupled onto the carriage and took it back to St Mihiel and set it off on another siding, and waking them only because of the glare of yellow light which now filled the carriage through the windows, and the sound of hammers against the outside of it, which roused Picklock.

Clasping his throbbing head and shutting his eyes quickly against that unbearable glare, it seemed to him that there had never been so fierce a sunrise. It was almost like electricity; he didn't see how he could move beneath it to rise, and even on his feet, staggering until he braced himself, he didn't see how he had accomplished the feat, bracing himself against the wall while he kicked the others one by one into sentience or anyway consciousness. 'Get up,' he said. 'Get up. We've got to get out of here.'

'Where are we?' one said.

'Paris,' Picklock said. 'It's already tomorrow.'

'Oh Christ,' a voice said. Because they were all awake now, waking not into remembering, since even comatose they had not really forgotten, but into simple realisation like sleepwalkers waking to find themselves standing on the outside of forty-storey window ledges. They were not drunk now. They didn't even have time to be sick. 'Christ yes,' the voice said. They got up, staggering for balance, shaking and trembling, and stumbled through the door and huddled, blinking against the fierce glare until they could bear it.

Except that it was electricity; it was still last night (or perhaps tomorrow night, for all they knew or for the moment cared even): two

searchlights such as anti aircraft batteries had used against night-flying aeroplanes during the war, trained on the carriage and in the glare of which men on ladders were nailing long strips of black and funereal bunting along the eaves of the carriage: to whom — which — they paid no attention. Nor was it Paris either.

‘We’re still in Verdun,’ another said.

‘Then they’ve moved the station around to the other side of the tracks,’ Picklock said.

‘Anyway it’s not Paris,’ a third said. ‘I’ve got to have a drink.’

‘No,’ Picklock said. ‘You’ll take coffee and something to eat.’ He turned to the ganymede. ‘How much money have you got left?’

‘I gave it to you,’ the ganymede said.

‘Damn that,’ Picklock said, extending his hand. ‘Come on with it.’ The ganymede fumbled out a small wad of paper notes and coins. Picklock took and counted it rapidly. ‘It might do,’ he said. ‘Come on.’

There was a small bistro opposite the station. He led the way to it and inside — a small zinc bar at which a single man stood in a countryman’s corduroy coat, and two tables where other men in the rough clothes of farmers or laborers sat with glasses of coffee or wine, playing dominoes, all of them turning to look as Picklock led his party in and up to the bar, where a tremendous woman in black said, ‘Messieurs?’

‘Coffee, Madame, and bread if you have it,’ Picklock said.

‘I dont want coffee,’ the third said. ‘I want a drink.’

‘Sure,’ Picklock said in a calm and furious voice, even lowering it a little: ‘Stick around here until somebody comes and lifts that box, let alone opens it. I hear they always give you a drink before you climb the steps.’

‘Maybe we could find another—’ a fourth began.

‘Shut up,’ Picklock said. ‘Drink that coffee. I’ve got to think.’ Then a new voice spoke.

‘What’s the matter?’ it said. ‘You boys in trouble?’ It was the man who had been standing at the bar when they entered. They looked at him now — a solid stocky man, obviously a farmer, not quite as old as they had thought, with a round hard unguillible head and a ribbon in the lapel of the coat — not one of the best ones but still a good one, matching in fact one which Picklock himself wore; possibly that was why he spoke to them, he and Picklock watching one another for a moment.

‘Where’d you get it?’ Picklock said.

‘Combles,’ the stranger said.

‘So was I,’ Picklock said.

‘You in a jam of some sort?’ the stranger said.

‘What makes you think that?’ Picklock said.

‘Look, Buster,’ the stranger said. ‘Maybe you were under sealed orders when you left Paris, but there hasn’t been much secret about it since your sergeant got out of that carriage this afternoon. What is he, anyway? some kind of a reformist preacher, like they say they have in England and America? He was sure in a state. He didn’t seem to care a damn that you were drunk. What seemed to fry him was, how you managed to get twelve more bottles of brandy without him knowing how you did it.’

‘This afternoon?’ Picklock said. ‘You mean it’s still today? Where are we?’

‘St Mihiel. You lay over here tonight while they finish nailing enough black cloth on your carriage to make it look like a hearse. Tomorrow morning a special train will pick you up and take you on to Paris. What’s wrong? Did something happen?’

Suddenly Picklock turned. ‘Come on back here,’ he said. The stranger followed. They stood slightly apart from the others now, in the angle of

the bar and the rear wall. Picklock spoke rapidly yet completely, telling it all, the stranger listening quietly.

‘What you need is another body,’ the stranger said.

‘You’re telling me?’ Picklock said.

‘Why not? I’ve got one. In my field. I found it the first time I plowed. I reported it, but they haven’t done anything about it yet. I’ve got a horse and cart here; it will take about four hours to go and come.’ They looked at one another. ‘You’ve got all night — that is, now.’

‘All right,’ Picklock said. ‘How much?’

‘You’ll have to say. You’re the one that knows how bad you need it.’

‘We haven’t got any money.’

‘You break my heart,’ the stranger said. They looked at one another. Without removing his eyes, Picklock raised his voice a little. ‘Morache.’ Morache came up. ‘The watch,’ Picklock said.

‘Wait now,’ Morache said. It was a Swiss movement, in gold; he had wanted one ever since he saw one first, finding it at last on the wrist of a German officer lying wounded in a shell crater one night after he, Morache, had got separated from a patrol sent out to try for a live prisoner or at least one still alive enough to speak.

He even saw the watch first, before he saw who owned it, having hurled himself into the crater just in time before a flare went up, seeing the glint of the watch first in the corpse-glare of the magnesium before he saw the man — a colonel, apparently shot through the spine since he seemed to be merely paralysed, quite conscious and not even in much pain; he would have been exactly what they had been sent out to find, except for the watch.

So Morache murdered him with his trench knife (a shot here now would probably have brought a whole barrage down on him) and took the watch and lay just outside his own wire until the patrol came back (empty-handed) and found him. Though for a day or so he couldn’t seem to bring himself to wear the watch nor even look at it until he

remembered that his face had been blackened at the time and the German could not have told what he was even, let alone who; besides that, the man was dead now. 'Wait,' he said. 'Wait, now.'

'Sure,' Picklock said. 'Wait in that carriage yonder until they come for that box. I don't know what they'll do to you then, but I do know what they'll do if you run because that will be desertion.' He held out his hand. 'The watch.' Morache unstrapped the watch and handed it to Picklock.

'At least get some brandy too,' he said. The stranger reached for the watch in Picklock's hand.

'Whoa, look at it from there,' Picklock said, holding the watch on his raised open palm.

'Sure you can have brandy,' the stranger said. Picklock closed his hand over the watch and let the hand drop.

'How much?' he said.

'Fifty francs,' the stranger said.

'Two hundred,' Picklock said.

'A hundred francs.'

'Two hundred,' Picklock said.

'Where's the watch?' the stranger said.

'Where's the cart?' Picklock said. It took them a little over four hours ('You'd have to wait anyhow until they finish nailing up that black cloth and get away from the carriage,' the stranger said) and there were four of them ('Two more will be enough,' the stranger said. 'We can drive right up to it.') — himself and the stranger on the seat, Morache and another behind them in the cart, north and eastward out of the town into the country darkness, the horse itself taking the right road without guidance, knowing that it was going home, in the darkness the steady jounce of jogging horse and the thump and rattle of the cart a sound and a vibration instead of a progress, so that it was the roadside trees which seemed to move, wheeling up out of the darkness to rush slowly backward past them against the sky.

But they were moving, even though it did seem (to Picklock) forever, the roadside trees ravelling suddenly into a straggle of posts, the horse, still without guidance, swinging sharply to the left.

‘Sector, huh?’ Picklock said.

‘Yeah,’ the stranger said. ‘The Americans broke it in September. Vienne-la-pucelle yonder,’ he said, pointing. ‘It caught it. It was right up in the tip. Not long now.’ But it was a little longer than that though at last they were there — a farm and its farmyard, lightless. The stranger stopped the horse and handed Picklock the lines. ‘I’ll get a shovel. I’m going to throw in a ground-sheet too.’

He was not long, passing the shovel and the folded ground-sheet to the two in the back and mounting the seat again and took the lines, the horse lurching forward and making a determined effort to turn in the farmyard gate until the stranger reined it sharply away. Then a gate in a hedgerow; Morache got down and opened it for the cart to pass. ‘Leave it open,’ the stranger said. ‘We’ll close it when we come out.’

Which Morache did and swung up and into the cart as it passed him; they were in a field now, soft from plowing, the unguided horse still choosing its own unerring way, no longer a straight course now but weaving, at times almost doubling on itself though Picklock could still see nothing. ‘Dud shells,’ the stranger explained. ‘Fenced off with flags until they finish getting them out. We just plow circles around them.’

According to the women and the old men who were here then, the whole war started up again after that recess they took last May, right in that field yonder. It belongs to some people named Demont.

The man died that same summer; I guess two wars on his land only a week apart was too much for him. His widow works it now with a hired man. Not that she needs him; she can run a plow as good as he can. There’s another one, her sister. She does the cooking. She has flies up here.’ He was standing now, peering ahead; in silhouette against the

sky he tapped the side of his head. Suddenly he swung the horse sharply away and presently stopped it. 'Here we are,' he said.

'About fifty metres yonder on that bank dividing us, there used to be the finest beech tree in this country. My grandfather said that even his grandfather couldn't remember when it was a sapling. It probably went that same day too. All right,' he said. 'Let's get him up. You don't want to waste any time here either.'

He showed them where his plow had first exposed the corpse and he had covered it again and marked the place. It was not deep and they could see nothing and after this length of time or perhaps because it was only one, there was little odor either, the long inextricable mass of light bones and cloth soon up and out and on and then into the folds of the ground-sheet and then in the cart itself, the horse thinking that this time surely it was destined for its stall, trying even in the soft earth of the plowing to resume its heavy muscle-bound jog, Morache closing the hedge gate and having to run now to catch the cart again because the horse was now going at a heavy canter even against the lines, trying again to swing into the farmyard until the stranger sawed it away, using the whip now until he got it straightened out on the road back to St Mihiel.

A little more than four hours but perhaps it should have been. The town was dark now, and the bistro they had started from, a clump of shadow detaching itself from a greater mass of shadow and itself breaking into separate shapes as the nine others surrounded the cart, the cart itself not stopping but going steadily on toward where the carriage in its black pall of bunting had vanished completely into the night. But it was there; the ones who had remained in town had even drawn the nails again so that all necessary was to lift off the top and drag the ground-sheeted bundle through the window and dump it in and set the nails again. 'Drive them in,' Picklock said. 'Who cares about noise now? Where is the brandy?'

'It's all right,' a voice said.

'How many bottles did you open?'

'One,' a voice said.

'Counting from where?'

'Why should we lie when all you've got to do to prove it is to count the others?' the voice said.

'All right,' Picklock said. 'Get out of here now and shut the window.'

Then they were on the ground again. The stranger had never quitted his cart and this time surely the horse was going home. But they didn't wait for that departure. They turned as one, already running, clotting and jostling a little at the carriage door, but plunging at last back into their lightless catafalque as into the womb itself. They were safe now. They had a body, and drink to take care of the night. There was tomorrow and Paris of course, but God could take care of that.

Carrying the gather of eggs in the loop of her apron, Marya, the elder sister, crossed the yard toward the house as though borne on a soft and tender cloud of white geese.

They surrounded and enclosed her as though with a tender and eager yearning; two of them, one on either side, kept absolute pace with her, pressed against her skirts, their long undulant necks laid flat against her moving flanks, their heads tilted upward, the hard yellow beaks open slightly like mouths, the hard insentient eyes filmed over as with a sort of ecstasy: right up to the stoop itself when she mounted it and opened the door and stepped quickly through and closed it, the geese swarming and jostling around and over and onto the stoop itself to press against the door's blank wood, their necks extended and the heads fallen a little back as though on the brink of swoons, making with their hoarse harsh unmusical voices faint tender cries of anguish and bereavement and unassuageable grief.

This was the kitchen, already strong with the approaching mid-day's soup. She didn't even stop: putting the eggs away, lifting for a moment the lid of the simmering pot on the stove, then placed rapidly on the wooden table a bottle of wine, a glass, a soup bowl, a loaf, a napkin and spoon, then on through the house and out the front door giving onto the lane and the field beyond it where she could already see them — the horse and harrow and the man guiding them, the hired man they

had had since the death of her sister's husband four years ago, and the sister herself moving across the land's panorama like a ritual, her hand and arm plunging into the sack slung from her shoulder, to emerge in that long sweep which is the second oldest of man's immemorial gestures or acts, she — Marya — running now, skirting among the old craters picketed off by tiny stakes bearing scraps of red cloth where the rank and lifeless grass grew above the unexploded shells, already saying, crying in her bright serene and carrying voice: 'Sister! Here is the young Englishman come for the medal. There are two of them, coming up the lane.'

'A friend with him?' the sister said.

'Not a friend,' Marya said. 'This one is looking for a tree.'

'A tree?' the sister said.

'Yes, Sister. Cant you see him?'

And, themselves in the lane now, they could see them both — two men obviously but, even at that distance, one of them moving not quite like a human being and, in time nearer, not like a human being at all beside the other's tall and shambling gait, but at a slow and terrific lurch and heave like some kind of giant insect moving erect and seeming to possess no progress at all even before Marya said: 'He's on crutches:' the single leg swinging metronome and indefatigable yet indomitable too between the rhythmic twin counterstrokes of the crutches; interminable yet indomitable too and indubitably coming nearer until they could see that the arm on that side was gone somewhere near the elbow also, and (quite near now) that what they looked at was not even a whole man since one half of his visible flesh was one furious saffron scar beginning at the ruined homburg hat and dividing his face exactly down the bridge of the nose, across the mouth and chin, to the collar of his shirt.

But this seemed to be only outside because the voice was strong and unpitiful and the French he addressed them in was fluid and good and it was only the man with him who was sick — a tall thin cadaver of a man, whole to be sure and looking no less like a tramp, but with a sick insolent intolerable face beneath a filthy hat from the band of which

there stood a long and raking feather which made him at least eight feet tall.

‘Madame Demont?’ the first man said.

‘Yes,’ Marya said with her bright and tender and unpitied smile.

The man with the crutches turned to his companion. ‘All right,’ he said in French. ‘This is them. Go ahead.’ But Marya had not waited for him, speaking to the man on crutches in French:

‘We were waiting for you. The soup is ready and you must be hungry after your walk from the station.’ Then she too turned to the other, speaking not in French now but in the old Balkan tongue of her childhood: ‘You too. You will need to eat for a little while longer too.’

‘What?’ the sister said suddenly and harshly, then to the man with the feather in the same mountain tongue: ‘You are Zsettlani?’

‘What?’ the man with the feather said in French harshly and loudly. ‘I speak French. I will take soup too. I can pay for it. See?’ he said, thrusting his hand into his pocket. ‘Look.’

‘We know you have money,’ Marya said in French. ‘Come into the house.’

And, in the kitchen now, they could see the rest of the first man: the saffron-colored scar not stopping at the hat’s line but dividing the skull too into one furious and seared rigidity, no eye, no ear on that side of it, the corner of the mouth seized into rigidity as if it was not even the same face which talked and presently would chew and swallow; the filthy shirt held together at the throat by the frayed and faded stripes of what they did not know was a British regimental tie; the stained and soiled dinner jacket from the left breast of which two medals hung from their gaudy ribbons; the battered and filthy tweed trousers one leg of which was doubled back and up and fastened below the thigh with a piece of wire, the Englishman propped on the crutches for a moment yet in the center of the kitchen, looking about the room with that alert calm unpitied eye while his companion stood just inside the door behind him with his ravaged insolent peaceless face, still wearing

the hat whose feather now almost touched the ceiling, as though he were suspended from it.

‘So this is where he lived,’ the man with the crutches said.

‘Yes,’ Marthe said. ‘How did you know? How did you know where to find us?’

‘Now, Sister,’ Marya said. ‘How could he have come for the medal if he didn’t know where we were?’

‘The medal?’ the Englishman said.

‘Yes,’ Marya said. ‘But have your soup first. You are hungry.’

‘Thanks,’ the Englishman said. He jerked his head toward the man behind him. ‘He too? Is he invited too?’

‘Of course,’ Marya said. She took two of the bowls from the table and went to the stove, not offering to help him, nor could the sister, Marthe, have moved fast or quickly enough to help him as he swung the one leg over the wooden bench and propped the crutches beside him and was already uncorking the wine before the whole man at the door had even moved, Marya lifting the lid from the pot and half-turning to look back at the second man, saying in French this time: ‘Sit down. You can eat too. Nobody minds any more.’

‘Minds what?’ the man with the feather said harshly.

‘We have forgotten it,’ Marya said. ‘Take off your hat first.’

‘I can pay you,’ the man with the feather said. ‘You cant give me anything, see?’ He reached into his pocket and jerked his hand out already scattering the coins, flinging them toward and onto and past the table, scattering and clinking across the floor as he approached and flung himself onto the backless bench opposite the Englishman and reached for the wine bottle and a tumbler in one voracious motion.

‘Pick up your money,’ Marya said.

'Pick it up yourself, if you dont want it there,' the man said, filling the tumbler, splashing the wine into it until it was overfull, already raising the tumbler toward his mouth.

'Leave it now,' Marthe said. 'Give him his soup.' She had moved, not quite enough to stand behind the Englishman but rather over him, her hands resting one in the other, her high severe mountain face which would have been bold and handsome as a man's looking down at him while he reached and poured from the bottle and set the bottle down and raised his glass until he was looking at her across it.

'Health, Madame,' he said.

'But how did you know?' Marthe said. 'When did you know him?'

'I never knew him. I never saw him. I heard about him — them — when I came back out in '16. Then I learned what it was, and so after that I didn't need to see him — only to wait and keep out of his way until he would be ready to do the needing—'

'Bring the soup,' the man with the feather said harshly. 'Haven't I already shown you enough money to buy out your whole house?'

'Yes,' Marya said from the stove. 'Be patient. It wont be long now. I will even pick it up for you.' She brought the two bowls of soup; the man with the feather did not even wait for her to set his down, snatching and wolfing it, glaring across the bowl with his dead intolerant outrageous eyes while Marya stooped about their feet and beneath and around the table, gathering up the scattered coins. 'There are only twenty-nine,' she said. 'There should be one more.' Still holding the tilted bowl to his face, the man with the feather jerked another coin from his pocket and banged it onto the table.

'Does that satisfy you?' he said. 'Fill the bowl again.' She did so, at the stove, and brought the bowl back, while again he splashed the wanton and violent wine into his tumbler.

'Eat too,' she said to the man with the crutches.

'Thanks,' he said, not even looking at her but looking still at the tall cold-faced sister standing over him. 'Only about that time or during that time or at that time or whenever it was afterward that I woke up, I was in a hospital in England so it was next spring before I persuaded them to let me come back to France and go to Chaulnesmont until at last I found that sergeant-major and he told me where you were. Only there were three of you then. There was a girl too. His wife?' The tall woman just looked down at him, cold, calm, absolutely inscrutable. 'His fiancée, maybe?'

'Yes,' Marya said. 'That's it: his fiancée. That's the word. Eat your soup.' 'They were to be married,' Marthe said. 'She was a Marseille whore.' 'I beg pardon?' the Englishman said.

'But not any more,' Marya said. 'She was going to learn to be a farmer's wife. Eat your soup now before it is cold.'

'Yes,' the Englishman said. 'Thanks:' not even looking at her. 'What became of her?'

'She went back home.'

'Home? You mean, back to the — back to Marseilles?'

'Brothel,' the tall woman said. 'Say it. You English. The Americans too. Why did your French boggle at that word, being as good as it is with all the others? — She must live too,' she said.

'Thanks,' the Englishman said. 'But she could have stayed here.'

'Yes,' the woman said.

'But she didn't.'

'No,' the woman said.

'She couldn't, you see,' Marya said. 'She has an old grandmother she must support. I think it's quite admirable.'

'So do I,' the Englishman said. He took up the spoon.

'That's right,' Marya said. 'Eat.' But he was still looking at the sister, the spoon arrested above the bowl. Nor did the man with the feather wait this time to demand to be served, swinging his legs across the bench and carrying the bowl himself to the stove and plunging it, hand and all,

into the pot before returning with the dripping and streaming bowl to the table where Marya had made the neat small stack of his coins and where the Englishman was still watching the tall sister, talking:

‘You had a husband too then.’

‘He died. That same summer.’

‘Oh,’ the Englishman said. ‘The war?’

‘The peace,’ the tall woman said. ‘When they let him come home at last and then the war started again before he could even put a plow in the ground, he probably decided that he could not bear another peace. And so he died. Yes?’ she said. He had already taken up a spoon of soup. He stopped the spoon again.

‘Yes what?’

‘What else do you want of us? To show you his grave?’ She just said ‘his’ but they all knew whom she meant. ‘That is, where we think it was?’ So did the Englishman merely say ‘his’.

‘What for?’ he said. ‘He’s finished.’

‘Finished?’ she said in a harsh stern voice.

‘He didn’t mean it that way, Sister,’ the other woman said. ‘He just means that Brother did the best he could, all he could, and now he doesn’t need to worry any more. Now all he has to do is rest.’ She looked at him, serene and unsurprised and unpitying. ‘You like to laugh, dont you?’

He did so, laughing, strong and steady and completely, with that side of his mouth still capable of moving, opening to laugh, the single eye meeting hers — theirs — full and calm and unpitying and laughing too.

‘So can you,’ he said to Marya. ‘Cant you?’

‘Why of course,’ Marya said. ‘Now, Sister,’ she said. ‘The medal.’

So, in the lane once more, there were three of them now instead of the two he had brought with him — three bits of graved symbolic bronze dangling and glinting from the three candy-striped ribbons bright as carnivals and gaudy as sunsets on the breast of the filthy dinner jacket

as, facing them, he braced the two crutches into his armpits and with the hand he still had, removed the ruined homburg in a gesture sweeping and invulnerable and clapped it back on at its raked and almost swaggering angle and turned, the single leg once more strong and steady and tireless between the tireless rhythmic swing and recover of the crutches. But moving: back down the lane toward where he and the man with the feather had appeared, even if the infinitesimal progress was out of all proportion to the tremendous effort of the motion. Moving, unweariable and durable and persevering, growing smaller and smaller with distance until at last he had lost all semblance of advancement whatever and appeared as though fixed against a panorama in furious progressless unrest, not lonely: just solitary, invincibly single. Then he was gone.

‘Yes,’ Marya said. ‘He can move fast enough. He will be there in plenty of time,’ turning then, the two of them, though it was the sister who stopped as though it was only she who had remembered at last the other man, the one with the feather, because Marya said: ‘Oh yes, there will be plenty of time for him too.’

Because he was not in the house: only the stained table, the bowl and the overturned tumbler where he had fouled and wasted their substance, the stain of the wine and the soup making a little puddle in which sat the neat small stack of coins where Marya had arranged them; all that afternoon while the tall sister went back to the field, the sowing, and Marya cleaned the kitchen and the soiled dishes, wiping the coins neatly off and stacking them again in that mute still pyramidal gleam while the light faded, until dark when they came back into the kitchen and lighted the lamp and he loomed suddenly, cadaverous and tall beneath the raking feather, from the shadows, saying in his harsh intolerable voice:

‘What have you got against the money? Go on. Take it — —’ lifting his hand again to sweep, fling it to the floor, until the tall sister spoke.

‘She has picked it up for you once. Dont do it again.’

‘Here. Take it. Why wont you take it? I worked for it — sweated for it — the only money in my life I ever earned by honest sweat. I did it just for this — earned it and then went to all the trouble to find you and give it to you, and now you wont take it. Here.’ But they only looked at him, alien and composed, cold and composed the one, the other with that bright and pitiless serenity until at last he said with a kind of amazement: ‘So you wont take it. You really wont,’ and looked at them for a moment longer, then came to the table and took up the coins and put them into his pocket and turned and went to the door.

‘That’s right,’ Marya said in her serene and unpitying voice. ‘Go now. It is not much further. You dont have much longer to despair’: at which he turned, framed for a moment in the door, his face livid and intolerable, with nothing left now but the insolence, the tall feather in the hat which he had never removed breaking into the line of the lintel as if he actually were hanging on a cord from it against the vacant shape of the spring darkness. Then he was gone too.

‘Have you shut up the fowls yet?’ the tall sister said.

‘Of course, Sister,’ Marya said.

It was a gray day though not a gray year. In fact, time itself had not been gray since that day six years ago when the dead hero whom the quiet uncovered throngs which lined both sides of the Champs Élysées from the Place de la Concorde to the Arch and the dignitaries walking humbly on foot who composed the cortege itself had come to honor, had driven all adumbration from the face of Western Europe and indeed from the whole western world. Only the day was gray, as though in dirge for him to whom it owed (and would forever) for the right and privilege to mourn in peace without terror or concern.

He lay in his splendid casket in full uniform and his medals (the originals, the ones pinned to his breast by the actual hands of the President of his own motherland and the Kings and Presidents of the allied nations whose armies he had led to victory were in the Invalides; these which would return with him to the earth he came from were replicas), the baton of his marshalate lying on his breast beneath his

folded hands, on the gun caisson drawn by black-draped and -pompommed horses, beneath the flag to which he in his turn and in its most desperate moment had added glory and eagles; behind him in the slow and measured procession color guards bore the flags of the other nations over whose armies and fates he had been supreme.

But the flags were not first because first behind the caisson walked (doddered rather, in step with nothing as though self-immersed and oblivious of all) the aged batman who had outlived him, in the uniform and the steel helmet still pristine and innocent of war, the rifle through which no shot had ever been fired slung from the bowed shoulder in reverse and as gleaming with tender and meticulous care as a polished serving spoon or drawing-room poker or candelabrum, carrying before him on a black velvet cushion the furled sabre, his head bowed a little over it like an aged acolyte with a fragment of the Cross or the ashes of a saint.

Then came the two sergeant-grooms leading the charger, black-caparisoned too, the spurred boots reversed in the irons; and only then the flags and the muffled drums and the unrankable black-banded uniforms of the generals and the robes and mitres and monstrances of the Church and the sombre broadcloth and humble silk hats of the ambassadors, all moving beneath the gray and grieving day to the muffled drums and the minute-spaced thudding of a big gun somewhere in the direction of the Fort of Vincennes, up the broad and grieving avenue, between the half-staffed grieving flags of half the world, in pagan and martial retinue and rite: dead chief and slave and steed and the medal-symbols of his glory and the arms with which he had gained them, escorted back into the earth he came from by the lesser barons of his fiefhold and his magnificence — prince and cardinal, soldier and statesman, the heirs-apparent to the kingdoms and empires and the ambassadors and personal representatives of the republics, the humble and anonymous crowd itself flowing in behind the splendid last of them, escorting, guarding, seeing him too up the avenue toward where the vast and serene and triumphal and enduring Arch crowned the crest, as though into immolation or suttee.

It lifted toward the gray and grieving sky, invincible and impervious, to endure forever not because it was stone nor even because of its rhythm and symmetry but because of its symbolism, crowning the city; on the marble floor, exactly beneath the Arch's soaring center, the small perpetual flame burned above the eternal sleep of the nameless bones brought down five years ago from the Verdun battlefield, the cortege moving on to the Arch, the crowd dividing quietly and humbly behind it to flow away on either side until it had surrounded and enclosed that sacred and dedicated monument, the cortege itself stopping now, shifting, moiling a little until at last hushed protocol once more was discharged and only the caisson moving on until it halted directly before the Arch and the flame, and now there remained only silence and the grieving day and that minute's thud of the distant gun.

Then a single man stepped forward from among the princes and prelates and generals and statesmen, in full dress and medalled too; the first man in France: poet, philosopher, statesman patriot and orator, to stand bareheaded facing the caisson while the distant gun thudded another minute into eternity. Then he spoke:
'Marshal.'

But only the day answered, and the distant gun to mark another interval of its ordered dirge. Then the man spoke again, louder this time, urgent; not peremptory: a cry:
'Marshal!'

But still there was only the dirge of day, the dirge of victorious and grieving France, the dirge of Europe and from beyond the seas too where men had doffed the uniforms in which they had been led through suffering to peace by him who lay now beneath the draped flag on the caisson, and even further than that where people who had never heard his name did not even know that they were still free because of him, the orator's voice ringing now into the grieving circumambience for men everywhere to hear it:

'That's right, great general! Lie always with your face to the east, that the enemies of France shall always see it and beware!'

At which moment there was a sudden movement, surge, in the crowd to one side; the hats and capes and lifted batons of policemen could be seen struggling toward the disturbance. But before they could reach it, something burst suddenly out of the crowd — not a man but a mobile and upright scar, on crutches, he had one arm and one leg, one entire side of his hatless head was one hairless eyeless and earless sear, he wore a filthy dinner jacket from the left breast of which depended on their barber-pole ribbons a British Military Cross and Distinguished Conduct Medal, and a French Médaille Militaire: which (the French one) was probably why the French crowd itself had not dared prevent him emerging from it and even now did not dare grasp him and jerk him back as he swung himself with that dreadful animal-like lurch and heave with which men move on crutches, out into the empty space enclosing the Arch, and on until he too faced the caisson. Then he stopped and braced the crutches into his armpits and with his single hand grasped the French decoration on his breast, he too crying in a loud and ringing voice:

‘Listen to me too, Marshal! This is yours: take it!’ and snatched, ripped from his filthy jacket the medal which was the talisman of his sanctuary and swung his arm up and back to throw it. Apparently he knew himself what was going to happen to him as soon as he released the medal, and defied it; with the medal up-poised in his hand he even stopped and looked back at the crowd which seemed now to crouch almost, leashed and straining for the moment when he would absolve himself of immunity, and laughed, not triumphant: just indomitable, with that side of his ruined face capable of laughing, then turned and flung the medal at the caisson, his voice ringing again in the aghast air as the crowd rushed down upon him: ‘You too helped carry the torch of man into that twilight where he shall be no more; these are his epitaphs: They shall not pass. My country right or wrong. Here is a spot which is forever England — —’

Then they had him. He vanished as though beneath a wave, a tide of heads and shoulders above which one of the crutches appeared suddenly in a hand which seemed to be trying to strike down at him

with it until the converging police (there were dozens of them now, converging from everywhere) jerked it away, other police rapidly forming a cordon of linked arms, gradually forcing the crowd back while, rite and solemnity gone for good now, parade marshals' whistles shrilled and the chief marshal himself grasped the bridles of the horses drawing the caisson and swung them around, shouting to the driver: 'Go on!' the rest of the cortege huddling without order, protocol vanished for the moment too as they hurried after the caisson almost with an air of pell mell, as though in actual flight from the wreckage of the disaster.

The cause of it now lay in the gutter of a small cul-de-sac side street where he had been carried by the two policemen who had rescued him before the mob he had instigated succeeded in killing him, lying on his back, his unconscious face quite peaceful now, bleeding a little at one corner of his mouth, the two policemen standing over him though now that the heat was gone their simple uniforms seemed sufficient to hold back that portion of the crowd which had followed, to stand in a circle looking down at the unconscious and peaceful face.

'Who is he?' a voice said.

'Ah, we know him,' one of the policemen said. 'An Englishman. We've had trouble with him ever since the war; this is not the first time he has insulted our country and disgraced his own.'

'Maybe he will die this time,' another voice said.

Then the man in the gutter opened his eyes and began to laugh, or tried to, choking at first, trying to turn his head as though to clear his mouth and throat of what he choked on, when another man thrust through the crowd and approached him — an old man, a gaunt giant of a man with a vast worn sick face with hungry and passionate eyes above a white military moustache, in a dingy black overcoat in the lapel of which were three tiny faded ribbons, who came and knelt beside him and slipped one arm under his head and shoulders and raised him and turned his head a little until he could spit out the blood and shattered teeth and speak. Or laugh rather, which is what he did first, lying in the

cradle of the old man's arm, laughing up at the ring of faces enclosing him, then speaking himself in French:

'That's right,' he said: 'Tremble. I'm not going to die. Never.'

'I am not laughing,' the old man bending over him said. 'What you see are tears.'

December, 1944

Oxford — New York — Princeton

November, 1953

The End

The Town, William Faulkner

The Town

First published in 1957, this novel forms the second part of the Snopes Trilogy, following the history of the fictional family from Mississippi. Each chapter is narrated from the point of view of one of three characters: Chick Mallison, Gavin Stevens, or V.K. Ratliff. The Snopes family serves as the author's symbol for the grasping and destructive element of the post-bellum South. Like its predecessor *The Hamlet* and its successor *The Mansion*, *The Town* is a self-contained narrative. It details Flem Snopes' ruthless struggle to take over the town of Jefferson, Mississippi. Rich in typically Faulknerian episodes of humour

and of profundity, the novel fashions a realistic social milieu compared to some of the author's other works.

The first edition

Contents

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

Six

Seven

Eight

Nine

Ten

Eleven

Twelve

Thirteen

Fourteen

Fifteen

Sixteen

Seventeen

Eighteen

Nineteen

Twenty

Twenty one

Twenty two

Twenty three

Twenty four

To Phil Stone

He did half the laughing for thirty years

ONE

Charles Mallison

I WASN'T BORN yet so it was Cousin Gowan who was there and big enough to see and remember and tell me afterward when I was big enough for it to make sense. That is, it was Cousin Gowan plus Uncle Gavin or maybe Uncle Gavin rather plus Cousin Gowan. He — Cousin Gowan — was thirteen. His grandfather was Grandfather's brother so by the time it got down to us, he and I didn't know what cousin to each other we were.

So he just called all of us except Grandfather 'cousin' and all of us except Grandfather called him 'cousin' and let it go at that.

They lived in Washington, where his father worked for the State Department, and all of a sudden the State Department sent his father to China or India or some far place, to be gone two years; and his mother was going too so they sent Gowan down to stay with us and go to school in Jefferson until they got back. 'Us' was Grandfather and Mother and Father and Uncle Gavin then. So this is what Gowan knew about it until I got born and big enough to know about it too.

So when I say 'we' and 'we thought' what I mean is Jefferson and what Jefferson thought.

At first we thought that the water tank was only Flem Snopes's monument. We didn't know any better then. It wasn't until afterward that we realised that that object low on the sky above Jefferson, Mississippi, wasn't a monument at all. It was a footprint.

One day one summer he drove up the southeast road into town in a two-mule wagon containing his wife and baby and a small assortment of house-furnishings. The next day he was behind the counter of a small back-alley restaurant which belonged to V. K. Ratliff. That is, Ratliff owned it with a partner, since he — Ratliff — had to spend most of his time in his buckboard (this was before he owned the Model T Ford) about the county with his demonstrator sewing machine for which he was the agent.

That is, we thought Ratliff was still the other partner until we saw the stranger in the other greasy apron behind the counter — a squat uncommunicative man with a neat minute bow tie and opaque eyes and a sudden little hooked nose like the beak of a small hawk; a week after that, Snopes had set up a canvas tent behind the restaurant and he and his wife and baby were living in it. And that was when Ratliff told Uncle Gavin:

“Just give him time. Give him six months and he’ll have Grover Cleveland” (Grover Cleveland Winbush was the partner) “out of that café too.”

That was the first summer, the first Summer of the Snopes, Uncle Gavin called it. He was in Harvard now, working for his M.A. After that he was going to the University of Mississippi law school to get ready to be Grandfather’s partner. But already he was spending the vacations helping Grandfather be City Attorney; he had barely seen Mrs Snopes yet so he not only didn’t know he would ever go to Germany to enter Heidelberg University, he didn’t even know yet that he would ever want to: only to talk about going there someday as a nice idea to keep in mind or to talk about.

He and Ratliff talked together a lot. Because although Ratliff had never been to school anywhere much and spent his time travelling about our county selling sewing machines (or selling or swapping or trading anything else for that matter), he and Uncle Gavin were both interested in people — or so Uncle Gavin said. Because what I always thought they were mainly interested in was curiosity. Until this time, that is. Because this time it had already gone a good deal further than just curiosity. This time it was alarm.

Ratliff was how we first began to learn about Snopes. Or rather, Snopeses. No, that’s wrong: there had been a Snopes in Colonel Sartoris’s cavalry command in 1864 — in that part of it whose occupation had been raiding Yankee picket-lines for horses.

Only this time it was a Confederate picket which caught him — that Snopes — raiding a Confederate horse-line and, it was believed, hung

him. Which was evidently wrong too, since (Ratliff told Uncle Gavin) about ten years ago Flem and an old man who seemed to be his father appeared suddenly from nowhere one day and rented a little farm from Mr Will Varner who just about owned the whole settlement and district called Frenchman's Bend about twenty miles from Jefferson. It was a farm so poor and small and already wornout that only the most trifling farmer would undertake it, and even they stayed only one year.

Yet Ab and Flem rented it and evidently (this is Ratliff) he or Flem or both of them together found it — —

"Found what?" Uncle Gavin said.

"I dont know," Ratliff said. "Whatever it was Uncle Billy and Jody had buried out there and thought was safe." — because that winter Flem was the clerk in Uncle Billy's store. And what they found on that farm must have been a good one, or maybe they didn't even need it anymore; maybe Flem found something else the Varners thought was hidden and safe under the counter of the store itself.

Because in another year old Ab had moved into Frenchman's Bend to live with his son and another Snopes had appeared from somewhere to take over the rented farm; and in two years more still another Snopes was the official smith in Mr Varner's blacksmith shop. So there were as many Snopeses in Frenchman's Bend as there were Varners; and five years after that, which was the year Flem moved to Jefferson, there were even more Snopeses than Varners because one Varner was married to a Snopes and was nursing another small Snopes at her breast.

Because what Flem found that last time was inside Uncle Billy's house. She was his only daughter and youngest child, not just a local belle but a belle throughout that whole section. Nor was it just because of old Will's land and money. Because I saw her too and I knew what it was too, even if she was grown and married and with a child older than I was and I only eleven and twelve and thirteen. ("Oh ay," Uncle Gavin said.

“Even at twelve don't think you are the first man ever chewed his bitter thumbs for that like reason such as her.”) She wasn't too big, heroic, what they call Junoesque. It was that there was just too much of what she was for any just one human female package to contain and hold: too much of white, too much of female, too much of maybe just glory, I don't know: so that at first sight of her you felt a kind of shock of gratitude just for being alive and being male at the same instant with her in space and time, and then in the next second and forever after a kind of despair because you knew that there never would be enough of any one male to match and hold and deserve her; grief forever after because forever after nothing less would ever do.

That was what he found this time. One day, according to Ratliff, Frenchman's Bend learned that Flem Snopes and Eula Varner had driven across the line into the next county the night before and bought a license and got married; the same day, still according to Ratliff, Frenchman's Bend learned that three young men, three of Eula's old suitors, had left the country suddenly by night too, for Texas it was said, or anyway west, far enough west to be longer than Uncle Billy or Jody Varner could have reached if they had needed to try.

Then a month later Flem and Eula also departed for Texas (that bourne, Uncle Gavin said, in our time for the implicated the insolvent or the merely hopeful), to return the next summer with a girl baby a little larger than you would have expected at only three months — — “And the horses,” Uncle Gavin said. Because we did know about that, mainly because Flem Snopes had not been the first to import them. Every year or so someone brought into the county a string of wild unbroken plains ponies from somewhere in the west and auctioned them off.

This time the ponies arrived, in the charge of a man who was obviously from Texas, at the same time that Mr and Mrs Snopes returned home from that state. This string however seemed to be uncommonly wild, since the resultant scattering of the untamed and untameable calico-splotched animals covered not just Frenchman's Bend but the whole east half of the county too.

Though even to the last, no one ever definitely connected Snopes with their ownership. “No no,” Uncle Gavin said. “You were not one of the three that ran from the smell of Will Varner’s shotgun. And dont tell me Flem Snopes traded you one of those horses for your half of that restaurant because I wont believe it. What was it?”

Ratliff sat there with his bland brown smoothly-shaven face and his neat tieless blue shirt and his shrewd intelligent gentle eyes not quite looking at Uncle Gavin. “It was that old house,” he said. Uncle Gavin waited. “The Old Frenchman place.” Uncle Gavin waited. “That buried money.”

Then Uncle Gavin understood: not an old pre-Civil War plantation house in all Mississippi or the South either but had its legend of the money and plate buried in the flower garden from Yankee raiders; — in this particular case, the ruined mansion which in the old time had dominated and bequeathed its name to the whole section known as Frenchman’s Bend, which the Varners now owned.

“It was Henry Armstid’s fault, trying to get even with Flem for that horse that Texas man sold him that broke his leg. No,” Ratliff said, “it was me too as much as anybody else, as any of us. To figger out what Flem was doing owning that old place that anybody could see wasn’t worth nothing. I dont mean why Flem bought it.

I mean, why he even taken it when Uncle Billy give it to him and Eula for a wedding gift. So when Henry taken to following and watching Flem and finally caught him that night digging in that old flower garden, I dont reckon Henry had to persuade me very hard to go back the next night and watch Flem digging myself.”

“So when Flem finally quit digging and went away, you and Henry crawled out of the bushes and dug too,” Uncle Gavin said. “And found it. Some of it. Enough of it. Just exactly barely enough of it for you to hardly wait for daylight to swap Flem Snopes your half of that

restaurant for your half of the Old Frenchman place. How much longer did you and Henry dig before you quit?"

"I quit after the second night," Ratliff said. "That was when I finally thought to look at the money."

"All right," Uncle Gavin said. "The money."

"They was silver dollars me and Henry dug up. Some of them was pretty old. One of Henry's was minted almost twenty years ago."

"A salted goldmine," Uncle Gavin said. "One of the oldest tricks in the world, yet you fell for it. Not Henry Armstid: you."

"Yes," Ratliff said. "Almost as old as that handkerchief Eula Varner dropped. Almost as old as Uncle Billy Varner's shotgun." That was what he said then. Because another year had passed when he stopped Uncle Gavin on the street and said, "With the court's permission, Lawyer, I would like to take a exception. I want to change that-ere to 'still'."

"Change what-ere to 'still'?" Uncle Gavin said.

"Last year I said 'That handkerchief Miz Flem Snopes dropped'. I want to change that 'dropped' to 'still dropping'. They's one feller I know still following it."

Because in six months Snopes had not only eliminated the partner from the restaurant, Snopes himself was out of it, replaced behind the greasy counter and in the canvas tent too by another Snopes accreted in from Frenchman's Bend into the vacuum behind the first one's next advancement by that same sort of osmosis by which, according to Ratliff, they had covered Frenchman's Bend, the chain unbroken, every Snopes in Frenchman's Bend moving up one step, leaving that last slot at the bottom open for the next Snopes to appear from nowhere and fill, which without doubt he had already done though Ratliff had not yet had time to go out there and see.

And now Flem and his wife lived in a small rented house in a back street near the edge of town, and Flem was now superintendent of the town power-plant which pumped the water and produced the electricity. Our

outrage was primarily shock; shock not that Flem had the job, we had not got that far yet, but shock that we had not known until now that the job existed; that there was such a position in Jefferson as superintendent of the power-plant.

Because the plant — the boilers and the engines which ran the pump and dynamo — was operated by an old saw mill engineer named Harker, and the dynamos and the electric wiring which covered the town were cared for by a private electrician who worked on a retainer from the town; — a condition which had been completely satisfactory ever since running water and electricity first came to Jefferson. Yet suddenly and without warning, we needed a superintendent for it. And as suddenly and simultaneously and with that same absence of warning, a country man who had not been in town two years now and (we assumed) had probably never seen an electric light until that first night two years ago when he drove in, was that superintendent.

That was the only shock. It wasn't that the country man was Flem Snopes. Because we had all seen Mrs Snopes by now, what few times we did see her which was usually behind the counter in the restaurant in another greasy apron, frying the hamburgers and eggs and ham and the tough pieces of steak on the grease-crusting kerosene griddle, or maybe once a week on the Square, always alone; not, as far as we knew, going anywhere: just moving, walking in that aura of decorum and modesty and solitariness ten times more immodest and a hundred times more disturbing than one of the bathing suits young women would begin to wear about 1920 or so, as if in the second just before you looked, her garments had managed in one last frantic pell mell scurry to overtake and cover her.

Though only for a moment because in the next one, if only you followed long enough, they would wilt and fail from that mere plain and simple striding which would shred them away like the wheel of a constellation through a wisp and cling of trivial scud.

And we had known the mayor, Major de Spain, longer than that. Jefferson, Mississippi, the whole South for that matter, was still full at

that time of men called General or Colonel or Major because their fathers or grandfathers had been generals or colonels or majors or maybe just privates, in Confederate armies, or who had contributed to the campaign funds of successful state governors.

But Major de Spain's father had been a real major of Confederate cavalry, and De Spain himself was a West Pointer who had gone to Cuba as a second lieutenant with troops and came home with a wound — a long scar running from his hair through his left ear and down his jaw, which could have been left by the sabre or gun-rammer we naturally assumed some embattled Spaniard had hit him with, or by the axe which political tactics during the race for mayor claimed a sergeant in a dice game had hit him with.

Because he had not been long at home and out of his blue Yankee coat before we realised that he and Jefferson were incorrigibly and invincibly awry to one another, and that one of them was going to have to give. And that it would not be him: that he would neither flee Jefferson nor try to alter himself to fit Jefferson, but instead would try to wrench Jefferson until the town fitted him, and — the young people hoped — would succeed.

Until then, Jefferson was like all the other little Southern towns: nothing had happened in it since the last carpetbagger had given up and gone home or been assimilated into another unregenerate Mississippian.

We had the usual mayor and board of aldermen who seemed to the young people to have been in perpetuity since the Ark or certainly since the last Chickasaw departed for Oklahoma in 1820, as old then as now and even now no older: old Mr Adams the mayor with a long patriarchal white beard, who probably seemed to young people like Cousin Gowan older than God Himself, until he might actually have been the first man; Uncle Gavin said there were more than just boys of twelve and thirteen like Cousin Gowan that referred to him by name, leaving off the last s, and to his old fat wife as 'Miss Eve Adam', fat old

Eve long since free of the danger of inciting a snake or anything else to tempt her.

So we were wondering just what axe Lieutenant de Spain would use to chop the corners off Jefferson and make it fit him. One day he found it. The city electrician (the one who kept the town's generators and dynamos and transformers working) was a genius. One afternoon in 1904 he drove out of his back yard into the street in the first automobile we had ever seen, made by hand completely, engine and all, from magneto coil to radius rod, and drove into the Square at the moment when Colonel Sartoris the banker's surrey and blooded matched team were crossing it on the way home. Although Colonel Sartoris and his driver were not hurt and the horses when caught had no scratch on them and the electrician offered to repair the surrey (it was said he even offered to put a gasoline engine in it this time), Colonel Sartoris appeared in person before the next meeting of the board of aldermen, who passed an edict that no gasoline-propelled vehicle should ever operate on the streets of Jefferson.

That was De Spain's chance. It was more than just his. It was the opportunity which that whole contemporary generation of young people had been waiting for, not just in Jefferson but everywhere, who had seen in that stinking noisy little home-made self-propelled buggy which Mr Buffaloe (the electrician) had made out of odds and ends in his back yard in his spare time, not just a phenomenon but an augury, a promise of the destiny which would belong to the United States. He — De Spain — didn't even need to campaign for mayor: all he needed was to announce. And the old dug-in city fathers saw that too, which was why they spooked to the desperate expedient of creating or exhuming or repeating (whichever it was) the story of the Cuban dice game and the sergeant's axe. And De Spain settled that once and for all not even as a politician; Caesar himself couldn't have done it any neater.

It was one morning at mail-time. Mayor Adams and his youngest son Theron who was not as old as De Spain and not even very much bigger either, mainly just taller, were coming out of the post office when De Spain met them. That is, he was already standing there with a good

crowd watching, his finger already touching the scar when Mr Adams saw him. "Good morning, Mister Mayor," he said. "What's this I hear about a dice game with an axe in it?"

"That's what the voters of the city of Jefferson would like to ask you, sir," Mr Adams said. "If you know of any proof to the contrary nearer than Cuba, I would advise you to produce it."

"I know a quicker way than that," De Spain said. "Your Honor's a little too old for it, but Theron there's a good-sized boy now. Let him and me step over to McCaslin's hardware store and get a couple of axes and find out right now if you are right."

"Aw now, Lieutenant," Theron said.

"That's all right," De Spain said. "I'll pay for both of them."

"Gentlemen," Theron said. And that was all of that. In June De Spain was elected mayor. It was a landslide because more than just he had won, been elected. The new age had entered Jefferson; he was merely its champion, the Godfrey de Bouillon, the Tancred, the Jefferson Richard Lion-heart of the twentieth century.

He wore that mantle well. No: it wasn't a mantle: it was a banner, a flag and he was carrying it, already out in front before Jefferson knew we were even ready for it. He made Mr Buffaloe City Electrician with a monthly salary, though his first official act was about Colonel Sartoris's edict against automobiles. We thought of course that he and his new aldermen would have repealed it for no other reason than that one old mossback like Colonel Sartoris had told another old mossback like Mayor Adams to pass it, and the second old mossback did.

But they didn't do that. Like I said, it was a landslide that elected him; it was like that axe business with old Mayor Adams and Theron in front of the post office that morning had turned on a light for all the other young people in Jefferson. I mean, the ones who were not yet store- and gin-owners and already settled lawyers and doctors, but were only the clerks and book-keepers in the stores and gins and offices, trying to

save enough to get married on, who all went to work to get De Spain elected mayor.

And not only did that, but more: before they knew it or even intended it, they had displaced the old dug-in aldermen and themselves rode into office as the city fathers on Manfred de Spain's coat-tails or anyway axe. So you would have thought the first thing they would have done would be to throw out forever that automobile law.

Instead, they had it copied out on a piece of parchment like a diploma or a citation and framed and hung on the wall in a lighted glass case in the hall of the Courthouse, where pretty soon people were coming in automobiles from as far away as Chicago to laugh at it. Because Uncle Gavin said this was still that fabulous and legendary time when there was still no paradox between an automobile and mirth, before the time when every American had to have one and they were killing more people than wars did.

He — De Spain — did even more than that. He himself had brought into town the first real automobile — a red E.M.F. roadster, and sold the horses out of the livery stable his father had left him and tore out the stalls and cribs and tack-rooms and established the first garage and automobile agency in Jefferson, so that now all his aldermen and all the other young people to whom neither of the banks would lend one cent to buy a motor vehicle with, no matter how solvent they were, could own them too. Oh yes, the motor age had reached Jefferson and De Spain led it in that red roadster: that vehicle alien and debonair, as invincibly and irrevocably polygamous and bachelor as De Spain himself.

And would ever be, living alone in his late father's big wooden house with a cook and a houseman in a white coat; he led the yearly cotillion and was first on the list of the ladies' german; if café society — not the Social Register nor the Four Hundred: Café Society — had been invented yet and any of it had come to Jefferson, he would have led it; born a generation too soon, he would have been by acclamation ordained a high priest in that new national religious cult of Cheesecake

as it translated still alive the Harlows and Grables and Monroes into the hierarchy of American cherubim.

So when we first saw Mrs Snopes walking in the Square giving off that terrifying impression that in another second her flesh itself would burn her garments off, leaving not even a veil of ashes between her and the light of day, it seemed to us that we were watching Fate, a fate of which both she and Mayor de Spain were victims. We didn't know when they met, laid eyes for the first time on one another. We didn't need to. In a way, we didn't want to. We assumed of course that he was slipping her into his house by some devious means or method at night, but we didn't know that either.

With any else but them, some of us — some boy or boys or youths — would have lain in ambush just to find out. But not with him. On the contrary, we were on his side. We didn't want to know. We were his allies, his confederates; our whole town was accessory to that cuckolding — that cuckolding which for any proof we had, we had invented ourselves out of whole cloth; that same cuckoldry in which we would watch De Spain and Snopes walking amicably together while (though we didn't know it yet) De Spain was creating, planning how to create, that office of power-plant superintendent which we didn't even know we didn't have, let alone needed, and then get Mr Snopes into it.

It was not because we were against Mr Snopes; we had not yet read the signs and portents which should have warned, alerted, sprung us into frantic concord to defend our town from him. Nor were we really in favor of adultery, sin: we were simply in favor of De Spain and Eula Snopes, for what Uncle Gavin called the divinity of simple unadulterated uninhibited immortal lust which they represented; for the two people in each of whom the other had found his single ordained fate; each to have found out of all the earth that one match for his mettle; ours the pride that Jefferson would supply their battleground.

Even Uncle Gavin; Uncle Gavin also. He said to Ratliff: "This town aint that big. Why hasn't Flem caught them?"

“He dont want to,” Ratliff said. “He dont need to yet.”

Then we learned that the town — the mayor, the board of aldermen, whoever and however it was done — had created the office of power-plant superintendent, and appointed Flem Snopes to fill it.

At night Mr Harker, the veteran saw mill engineer, ran the power-plant, with Tomey’s Turl Beauchamp, the Negro fireman, to fire the boilers as long as Mr Harker was there to watch the pressure gauges, which Tomey’s Turl either could not or would not do, apparently simply declining to take seriously any connection between the firebox below the boiler and the little dirty clock-face which didn’t even tell the hour, on top of it.

During the day the other Negro fireman, Tom Tom Bird, ran the plant alone, with Mr Buffaloe to look in now and then though as a matter of routine since Tom Tom not only fired the boilers, he was as competent to read the gauges and keep the bearings of the steam engine and the dynamos cleaned and oiled as Mr Buffaloe or Mr Harker were: a completely satisfactory arrangement since Mr Harker was old enough not to mind or possibly even prefer the night shift, and Tom Tom — a big bull of a man weighing two hundred pounds and sixty years old but looking about forty and married about two years ago to his fourth wife: a young woman whom he kept with the strict jealous seclusion of a Turk in a cabin about two miles down the railroad track from the plant — declined to consider anything but the day one. Though by the time Cousin Gowan joined Mr Harker’s night shift, Mr Snopes had learned to read the gauges and even fill the oil cups too.

This was about two years after he became superintendent. Gowan had decided to go out for the football team that fall and he got the idea, I dont reckon even he knew where, that a job shovelling coal on a power-plant night shift would be the exact perfect training for dodging or crashing over enemy tacklers. Mother and Father didn’t think so until Uncle Gavin took a hand. (He had his Harvard M.A. now and had finished the University of Mississippi law school and passed his bar and Grandfather had begun to retire and now Uncle Gavin really was the city attorney; it had been a whole year now — this was in June, he had

just got home from the University and he hadn't seen Mrs Snopes yet this summer — since he had even talked of Heidelberg as a pleasant idea for conversation.)

“Why not?” he said. “Gowan’s going on thirteen now; it’s time for him to begin to stay out all night. And what better place can he find than down there at the plant where Mr Harker and the fireman can keep him awake?”

So Gowan got the job as Tomey’s Turl’s helper and at once Mr Harker began to keep him awake talking about Mr Snopes, talking about him with a kind of amoral amazement with which you would recount having witnessed the collision of a planet. According to Mr Harker, it began last year. One afternoon Tom Tom had finished cleaning his fires and was now sitting in the gangway smoking his pipe, pressure up and the safety-valve on the middle boiler blowing off, when Mr Snopes came in and stood there for a while, chewing tobacco and looking up at the whistling valve.

“How much does that whistle weigh?” he said.

“If you talking about that valve, about ten pounds,” Tom Tom said.

“Solid brass?” Mr Snopes said.

“All except that little hole it’s what you call whistling through,” Tom Tom said. And that was all then, Mr Harker said; it was two months later when he, Mr Harker, came on duty one evening and found the three safety-valves gone from the boilers and the vents stopped with one-inch steel screw plugs capable of a pressure of a thousand pounds and Tomey’s Turl still shovelling coal into the fireboxes because he hadn’t heard one of them blow off yet.

“And them three boiler heads you could poke a hole through with a sody straw,” Mr Harker said. “When I seen the gauge on the first boiler I never believed I would live to reach the injector.

“So when I finally got it into Turl’s head that that 100 on that dial meant where Turl wouldn’t only lose his job, he would lose it so good wouldn’t

nobody never find the job nor him again neither, I finally got settled down enough to inquire where them safety-valves had went to.

“ ‘Mr Snopes took um off,’ he says.

“ ‘What in hell for?’

“ ‘I dont know. I just telling you what Tom Tom told me. He say Mr Snopes say the shut-off float in the water tank aint heavy enough. Say that tank start leaking some day, so he going to fasten them three safety-valves on the float and weight it heavier.’

“ ‘You mean,’ I says. That’s as far as I could get. ‘You mean—’

“ ‘That’s what Tom Tom say. I dont know nothing about it.’

“Anyhow they was gone; whether they was in the water tank or not, was too late to find out now. Until then, me and Turl had been taking it pretty easy after the load went off and things got kind of quiet. But you can bet we never dozed none that night. Me and him spent the whole of it time about on the coal pile where we could watch them three gauges all at once. And from midnight on, after the load went off, we never had enough steam in all them three boilers put together to run a peanut parcher. And even when I was home in bed, I couldn’t go to sleep. Time I shut my eyes I would begin to see a steam gauge about the size of a washtub, with a red needle big as a coal scoop moving up toward a hundred pounds, and I would wake myself up hollering and sweating.

“So come daylight enough to see; and I never sent Turl neither: I clumb up there myself and looked at that float. And there wasn’t no safety-valves weighting it neither and maybe he hadn’t aimed for them to be fastened to it where the first feller that looked in could a reached them. And even if that tank is forty-two foot deep I still could a opened the cock and dreened it. Only I just work there, Mr Snopes was the superintendent, and it was the day shift now and Tom Tom could answer whatever questions Joe Buffaloe would want to know in case he happened in and seen them thousand-pound screw plugs where safety-valves was supposed to been.

“So I went on home and that next night I couldn’t hardly get Turl to run them gauge needles up high enough to turn the low-pressure piston, let alone move the dynamos; and the next night, and the next one, until about ten days when the express delivered a box; Tom Tom had waited and me and him opened the box (It was marked C.O.D. in big black paint but the tag itself had been wrenched off and gone temporarily. ‘I know where he threwed it,’ Tom Tom said.) and taken them screw plugs out of the vents and put the three new safety-valves back on; and sho enough Tom Tom did have the crumpled-up tag: Mister Flem Snopes Power-plant Jefferson Miss C.O.D. twenty-three dollars and eighty-one cents.”

And now there was some of it which Mr Harker himself didn’t know until Uncle Gavin told him after Tom Tom told Uncle Gavin: how one afternoon Tom Tom was smoking his pipe on the coal pile when Mr Snopes came in carrying in his hand what Tom Tom thought at first was a number three mule shoe until Mr Snopes took it into a corner behind the boilers where a pile of discarded fittings — valves, rods, bolts and such — had been accumulating probably since the first light was turned on in Jefferson; and, kneeling (Mr Snopes), tested every piece one by one into two separate piles in the gangway behind him. Then Tom Tom watched him test with the magnet every loose piece of metal in the whole boiler room, sorting the mere iron from the brass. Then Snopes ordered Tom Tom to gather up the separated brass and bring it to the office.

Tom Tom gathered the brass into a box. Snopes was waiting in the office, chewing tobacco. Tom Tom said he never stopped chewing even to spit. “How do you and Turl get along?” he said.

“I tend to my business,” Tom Tom said. “What Turl does with his aint none of mine.”

“That aint what Turl thinks,” Mr Snopes said. “He wants me to give him your day shift. He claims he’s tired of firing at night.”

“Let him fire as long as I is, and he can have it,” Tom Tom said.

“Turl dont aim to wait that long,” Mr Snopes said. Then he told Tom Tom: how Turl was planning to steal iron from the plant and lay it on Tom Tom and get him fired. That’s right. That’s what Tom Tom told Uncle Gavin Mr Snopes called it: iron. Maybe Mr Snopes hadn’t heard of a magnet himself until just yesterday and so he thought that Tom Tom had never heard of one and so didn’t know what he was doing. I mean, not of magnets nor brass either and couldn’t tell brass from iron. Or maybe he just thought that Tom Tom, being a Negro, wouldn’t care. Or maybe that, being a Negro, whether he knew or not or cared or not, he wouldn’t have any part of what a white man was mixed up in. Only we had to imagine this part of it of course. Not that it was hard to do: Tom Tom standing there about the size and shape and color (disposition too) of a Black Angus bull, looking down at the white man. Turl on the contrary was the color of a saddle and even with a scoop full of coal he barely touched a hundred and fifty pounds. “That’s what he’s up to,” Mr Snopes said. “So I want you to take this stuff out to your house and hide it and dont breathe a word to nobody. And soon as I get enough evidence on Turl, I’m going to fire him.”

“I knows a better way than that,” Tom Tom said.

“What way?” Snopes said. Then he said: “No no, that wont do. You have any trouble with Turl and I’ll fire you both. You do like I say. Unless you are tired of your job and want Turl to have it. Are you?”

“Aint no man complained about my pressure yet,” Tom Tom said.

“Then you do like I tell you,” Snopes said. “You take that stuff home with you tonight. Dont let nobody see you, even your wife. And if you dont want to do it, just say so. I reckon I can find somebody that will.”

So Tom Tom did. And each time the pile of discarded fittings accumulated again, he would watch Snopes test out another batch of brass with his magnet for Tom Tom to take home and hide. Because Tom Tom had been firing boilers for forty years now, ever since he became a man, and these three for the twenty they had been there, since it was he who built the first fires beneath them.

At first he had fired one boiler and he had got five dollars a month for it. Now he had the three and he got sixty dollars a month, and now he was sixty and he owned his little cabin and a little piece of corn land and a mule and wagon to ride to church in twice each Sunday, with a gold watch and the young wife which was the last new young wife he would probably have too.

Though all Mr Harker knew at this time was that the junked metal would accumulate slowly in the corner behind the boilers, then suddenly disappear overnight; now it became his nightly joke to enter the plant with his busy bustling air and say to Turl: "Well, I notice that-ere little engine is still running.

There's a right smart of brass in them bushings and wrist-pins, but I reckon they're moving too fast to hold that magnet against. But I reckon we're lucky, at that. I reckon he'd sell them boilers too if he knowed any way you and Tom Tom could keep up steam without them."

Though he — Mr Harker — did tell what came next, which was at the first of the year, when the town was audited: "They come down here, two of them in spectacles. They went over the books and poked around ever where, counting ever thing in sight and writing it down. Then they went back to the office and they was still there at six oclock when I come on.

It seems there was something a little out; it seems there was some old brass fittings wrote down in the books, except that that brass seemed to be missing or something. It was on the books all right, and the new valves and truck that had replaced it was there.

But be durn if they could find a one of them old fittings except one busted bib that had done got mislaid beyond magnet range you might say under a work bench some way or other. It was right strange. So I went back with them and held the light while they looked again in all the corners, getting a right smart of sut and grease and coaldust on

them white shirts. But that brass just naturally seemed to be plumb gone. So they went away.

“And the next morning they come back. They had the city clerk with them this time and they beat Mr Snopes down here and so they had to wait until he come in in his check cap and his chew of tobacco, chewing and looking at them while they hemmed and hawed until they told him. They was right sorry; they hemmed and hawed a right smart being sorry, but there wasn’t nothing else they could do except come back on him being as he was the superintendent; and did he want me and Turl and Tom Tom arrested right now or would tomorrow do? And him standing there chewing, with his eyes looking like two gobs of cup grease on a hunk of raw dough, and them still telling him how sorry they was.

“ ‘How much does it come to?’ he says.

“ ‘Two hundred and eighteen dollars and fifty-two cents, Mr Snopes.’

“ ‘Is that the full amount?’

“ ‘We checked our figgers twice, Mr Snopes.’

“ ‘All right,’ he says. And he reaches down and hauls out the money and pays the two hundred and eighteen dollars and fifty-two cents in cash and asks for a receipt.”

Only by the next summer Gowan was Turl’s student fireman, so now Gowan saw and heard it from Turl at first hand; it was evening when Mr Snopes stood suddenly in the door to the boiler room and crooked his finger at Turl and so this time it was Turl and Snopes facing one another in the office.

“What’s this trouble about you and Tom Tom?” he said.

“Me and which?” Turl said. “If Tom Tom depending on me for his trouble, he done quit firing and turned waiter. It takes two folks to have trouble and Tom Tom aint but one, I dont care how big he is.”

“Tom Tom thinks you want to fire the day shift,” Mr Snopes said.

Turl was looking at everything now without looking at anything. "I can handle as much coal as Tom Tom," he said.

"Tom Tom knows that too," Mr Snopes said. "He knows he's getting old. But he knows there aint nobody else can crowd him for his job but you." Then Mr Snopes told him how for two years now Tom Tom had been stealing brass from the plant and laying it on Turl to get him fired; how only that day Tom Tom had told him, Mr Snopes, that Turl was the thief.

"That's a lie," Turl said. "Cant no nigger accuse me of stealing something I aint, I dont care how big he is."

"Sho," Mr Snopes said. "So the thing to do is to get that brass back."

"Not me," Turl said. "That's what they pays Mr Buck Conner for." Buck Connors was the town marshal.

"Then you'll go to jail sho enough," Snopes said. "Tom Tom will say he never even knowed it was there. You'll be the only one that knew that. So what you reckon Mr Conner'll think? You'll be the one that knowed where it was hid at, and Buck Conner'll know that even a fool has got more sense than to steal something and hide it in his own corn crib. The only thing you can do is, get that brass back. Go out there in the daytime, while Tom Tom is here at work, and get that brass and bring it to me and I'll put it away to use as evidence on Tom Tom. Or maybe you dont want that day shift. Say so, if you dont. I can find somebody else."

Because Turl hadn't fired any boilers forty years. He hadn't done anything at all that long, since he was only thirty. And if he were a hundred, nobody could accuse him of having done anything that would aggregate forty years net. "Unless tomcatting at night would add up that much," Mr Harker said. "If Turl ever is unlucky enough to get married he would still have to climb in his own back window or he wouldn't even know what he come after. Aint that right, Turl?"

So, as Mr Harker said, it was not Turl's fault so much as Snopes's mistake. "Which was," Mr Harker said, "when Mr Snopes forgot to

remember in time about that young light-colored new wife of Tom Tom's. To think how he picked Turl out of all the Negroes in Jefferson, that's prowled at least once — or tried to — every gal within ten miles of town, to go out there to Tom Tom's house knowing all the time how Tom Tom is right here under Mr Snopes's eye wrastling coal until six o'clock a m and then with two miles to walk down the railroad home, and expect Turl to spend his time out there" (Gowan was doing nearly all the night firing now.

He had to; Turl had to get some sleep, on the coal pile in the bunker after midnight. He was losing weight too, which he could afford even less than sleep.) "hunting anything that aint hid in Tom Tom's bed. And when I think about Tom Tom in here wrastling them boilers in that-ere same amical cuckoldry like what your uncle says Miz Snopes and Mayor de Spain walks around in, stealing brass so he can keep Turl from getting his job away from him, and all the time Turl is out yonder tending by daylight to Tom Tom's night homework, sometimes I think I will jest die."

He was spared that; we all knew it couldn't last much longer. The question was, which would happen first: if Tom Tom would catch Turl, or if Mr Snopes would catch Turl, or if Mr Harker really would burst a blood vessel. Mr Snopes won. He was standing in the office door that evening when Mr Harker, Turl and Gowan came on duty; once more he crooked his finger at Turl and once more they stood facing each other in the office. "Did you find it this time?" Mr Snopes said.

"Find it which time?" Turl said.

"Just before dark tonight," Mr Snopes said. "I was standing at the corner of the crib when you crawled out of that corn patch and climbed in that back window." And now indeed Turl was looking everywhere fast at nothing. "Maybe you are still looking in the wrong place," Mr Snopes said. "If Tom Tom had hid that iron in his bed, you ought to found it three weeks ago. You take one more look. If you dont find it this time, maybe I better tell Tom Tom to help you." Turl was looking fast at nothing now.

"I'm gonter have to have three or four extra hours off tomorrow night," he said. "And Tom Tom gonter have to be held right here unto I gets back."

"I'll see to it," Snopes said.

"I mean held right here unto I walks in and touches him," Turl said. "I dont care how late it is."

"I'll see to that," Snopes said.

Except that it had already quit lasting any longer at all; Gowan and Mr Harker had barely reached the plant the next evening when Mr Harker took one quick glance around. But before he could even speak Mr Snopes was standing in the office door, saying, "Where's Tom Tom?"

Because it wasn't Tom Tom waiting to turn over to the night crew: it was Tom Tom's substitute, who fired the boilers on Sunday while Tom Tom was taking his new young wife to church; Gowan said Mr Harker said,

"Hell fire," already moving, running past Mr Snopes into the office and scrabbling at the telephone.

Then he was out of the office again, not even stopping while he hollered at Gowan: "All right, Otis" — his nephew or cousin or something who had inherited the saw mill, who would come in and take over when Mr Harker wanted a night off— "Otis'll be here in fifteen minutes. Jest do the best you can until then."

"Hold up," Gowan said. "I'm going too."

"Durn that," Mr Harker said, still running, "I seen it first:" on out the back where the spur track for the coal cars led back to the main line where Tom Tom would walk every morning and evening between his home and his job, running (Mr Harker) in the moonlight now because the moon was almost full. In fact, the whole thing was full of moonlight when Mr Harker and Turl appeared peacefully at the regular hour to relieve Tom Tom's substitute the next evening:

“Yes sir,” Mr Harker told Gowan, “I was jest in time. It was Turl’s desperation, you see. This would be his last go-round.

This time he was going to have to find that brass, or come back and tell Mr Snopes he couldn’t, in either case that country picnic was going to be over. So I was jest in time to see him creep up out of that corn patch and cross the moonlight to that back window and tomcat through it; jest exactly time enough for him to creep across the room to the bed and likely fling the quilt back and lay his hand on meat and say, ‘Honeybunch, lay calm.

Papa’s done arrived.’ “ And Gowan said how even twenty-four hours afterward he partook for the instant of Turl’s horrid surprise, who believed that at that moment Tom Tom was two miles away at the power plant waiting for him (Turl) to appear and relieve him of the coal scoop; — Tom Tom lying fully dressed beneath the quilt with a naked butcher knife in his hand when Turl flung it back.

“Jest exactly time enough,” Mr Harker said. “Jest exactly as on time as two engines switching freight cars. Tom Tom must a made his jump jest exactly when Turl whirled to run, Turl jumping out of the house into the moonlight again with Tom Tom and the butcher knife riding on his back so that they looked jest like — What do you call them double-jointed half-horse fellers in the old picture books?”

“Centaur,” Gowan said.

“ — looking jest like a centawyer running on its hind legs and trying to ketch up with itself with a butcher knife about a yard long in one of its extry front hoofs until they run out of the moonlight again into the woods. Yes sir, Turl aint even half as big as Tom Tom, but he sho toted him. If you’d a ever bobbled once, that butcher knife would a caught you whether Tom Tom did or not, wouldn’t it?”

“Tom Tom a big buck man,” Turl said. “Make three of me. But I toted him. I had to. And whenever I would fling my eye back and see the moon shining on that butcher knife I could a picked up two more like him without even slowing down.” Turl said how at first he just ran; it

was only after he found himself — or herself — among the trees that he thought about trying to rake Tom Tom off against the trunk of one. “But he held on so tight with that one arm that whenever I tried to bust him against a tree I busted myself too. Then we’d bounce off and I’d catch another flash of moonlight on that nekkid blade and all I could do was just run.

“ ‘Bout then was when Tom Tom started squalling to let him down. He was holding on with both hands now, so I knowed I had done outrun that butcher knife anyway. But I was good started then; my feets never paid Tom Tom no more mind when he started squalling to stop and let him off than they done me. Then he grabbed my head with both hands and started to wrenching it around like I was a runaway bareback mule, and then I seed the ditch too. It was about forty foot deep and it looked a solid mile across but it was too late then.

My feets never even slowed up. They run as far as from here to that coal pile yonder out into nekkid air before we even begun to fall. And they was still clawing moonlight when me and Tom Tom hit the bottom.”

The first thing Gowan wanted to know was, what Tom Tom had used in lieu of the dropped butcher knife. Turl told that. Nothing. He and Tom Tom just sat in the moonlight on the floor of the ditch and talked.

And Uncle Gavin explained that: a sanctuary, a rationality of perspective, which animals, humans too, not merely reach but earn by passing through unbearable emotional states like furious rage or furious fear, the two of them sitting there not only in Uncle Gavin’s amicable cuckoldry but in mutual and complete federation too: Tom Tom’s home violated not by Tomey’s Turl but by Flem Snopes; Turl’s life and limbs put into frantic jeopardy not by Tom Tom but by Flem Snopes.

“That was where I come in,” Mr Harker said.

“You?” Gowan said.

“He holp us,” Turl said.

“Be durn if that’s so,” Mr Harker said. “Have you and Tom Tom both already forgot what I told you right there in that ditch last night? I never knowed nothing and I dont aim to know nothing, I dont give a durn how hard either one of you try to make me?”

“All right,” Gowan said. “Then what?” Turl told that: how he and Tom Tom went back to the house and Tom Tom untied his wife where he had tied her to a chair in the kitchen and the three of them hitched the mule to the wagon and got the brass out of the corn crib and loaded it to haul it away. There was near a half-ton of it; it took them the rest of the night to finish moving it.

“Move it where?” Gowan said. Only he said he decided to let Mr Snopes himself ask that; it was nearing daylight now and soon Tom Tom would come up the spur track from the main line, carrying his lunch pail to take over for the day shift; and presently there he was, with his little high hard round intractable cannon ball head, when they all turned and there was Mr Snopes too standing in the boiler room door. And Gowan said that even Mr Snopes seemed to know he would just be wasting his time crooking his finger at anybody this time; he just said right out to Turl:

“Why didn’t you find it?”

“Because it wasn’t there,” Turl said.

“How do you know it wasn’t there?” Mr Snopes said.

“Because Tom Tom said it wasn’t,” Turl said.

Because the time for wasting time was over now. Mr Snopes just looked at Tom Tom a minute. Then he said: “What did you do with it?”

“We put it where you said you wanted it,” Tom Tom said.

“We?” Mr Snopes said.

“Me and Turl,” Tom Tom said. And now Mr Snopes looked at Tom Tom for another minute. Then he said:

“Where I said I wanted it when?”

“When you told me what you aimed to do with them safety-valves,” Tom Tom said.

Though by the time the water in the tank would begin to taste brassy enough for somebody to think about draining the tank to clean it, it wouldn't be Mr Snopes. Because he was no longer superintendent now, having resigned, as Mr de Spain would have said when he was still Lieutenant de Spain, “for the good of the service.” So he could sit all day now on the gallery of his little back street rented house and look at the shape of the tank standing against the sky above the Jefferson roof-line, — looking at his own monument, some might have thought. Except that it was not a monument: it was a footprint. A monument only says At least I got this far while a footprint says This is where I was when I moved again.

“Not even now?” Uncle Gavin said to Ratliff.

“Not even now,” Ratliff said. “Not catching his wife with Manfred de Spain yet is like that twenty-dollar gold piece pinned to your undershirt on your first maiden trip to what you hope is going to be a Memphis whorehouse. He dont need to unpin it yet.”

TWO

Gavin Stevens

HE HADN'T UNPINNED it yet. So we all wondered what he was using to live on, for money, sitting (apparently) all day long day after day through the rest of that summer on the flimsy porch of that little rented house, looking at his water tank. Nor would we ever know, until the town would decide to drain the tank and clean it and so rid the water of the brassy taste, exactly how much brass he had used one of the Negro firemen to blackmail the other into stealing for him and which the two Negroes, confederating for simple mutual preservation, had put into the tank where he could never, would never dare, recover it.

And even now we dont know whether or not that brass was all. We will never know exactly how much he might have stolen and sold privately (I mean before he thought of drafting Tom Tom or Turl to help him) either before or after someone — Buffaloe probably, since if old Harker had ever noticed those discarded fittings enough to miss any of them he would probably have beat Snopes to the market; very likely, for all his pretence of simple spectator enjoyment, his real feeling was rage at his own blindness — notified somebody at the city hall and had the auditors in.

All we knew was that one day the three safety-valves were missing from the boilers; we had to assume, imagine, what happened next: Manfred de Spain — it would be Manfred — sending for him and saying, “Well, Bud,” or Doc or Buster or whatever Manfred would call his ... you might say foster husband; who knows? maybe even Superintendent: “Well, Superintendent, this twenty-three dollars and eighty-one cents worth of brass” — naturally he would have looked in the catalogue before he sent for him— “was missing during your regime, which you naturally wish to keep spotless as Caesar’s wife: which a simple C.O.D. tag addressed to you will do.”

And that, according to Harker, the two auditors hemmed and hawed around the plant for two days before they got up nerve enough to tell Snopes what amount of brass they thought to the best of their knowledge was missing, and that Snopes took the cash out of his pocket and paid them.

That is, disregarding his salary of fifty dollars a month, the job cost Snopes two hundred and forty-two dollars and thirty-three cents out of his own pocket or actual cash money you might say. And even if he had saved every penny of his salary, less that two-hundred-plus dollar loss, and assuming there had been two hundred dollars more of brass for him to have stolen successfully during that time, that was still not enough for him to support his family on very long. Yet for two years now he had been sitting on that little front gallery, looking (as far as we knew) at that water tank. So I asked Ratliff.

He's farming, Ratliff said. "Farming?" I said (all right, cried if you like). "Farming what? Sitting there on that gallery from sunup to sundown watching that water tank?"

Farming Snopeses, Ratliff said. Farming Snopeses: the whole rigid hierarchy moving intact upward one step as he vacated ahead of it except that one who had inherited into the restaurant was not a Snopes.

Indubitably and indefensibly not a Snopes; even to impugn him so was indefensible and outrageous and forever beyond all pale of pardon, whose mother, like her incredible sister-by-marriage a generation later, had, must have, as the old bucolic poet said, cast a leglin girth herself before she married whatever Snopes was Eck's titular father.

That was his name: Eck. The one with the broken neck; he brought it to town when he moved in as Flem's immediate successor, rigid in a steel brace and leather harness. Never in the world a Snopes. Ratliff told it; it happened at the saw mill. (You see, even his family — Flem — knew he was not a Snopes: sending, disposing of him into a saw mill where even the owner must be a financial genius to avoid bankruptcy and there is nothing for a rogue at all since all to steal is lumber, and to embezzle a wagon-load of planks is about like embezzling an iron safe or a — yes: that damned water tank itself.)

So Flem sent Eck to Uncle Billy Varner's saw mill (it was that I suppose or chloroform or shoot him as you do a sick bird dog or a wornout mule) and Ratliff told about it: one day, and Eck made the proposition that for a dollar each, he and one of the Negro hands (one of the larger ones and of course the more imbecilic) would pick up a tremendous cypress log and set it onto the saw-carriage.

And they did (didn't I just say that one was not even a Snopes and the other already imbecile), had the log almost safely on, when the Negro slipped, something, anyway went down; whereupon all Eck had to do was let go his end and leap out from under. But not he: no Snopes nor no damned thing else, bracing his shoulder under and holding his end

up and even taking the shock when the Negro's end fell to the ground, still braced under it until it occurred to someone to drag the nigger out.

And still without sense enough to jump, let alone Snopes enough, not even knowing yet that even Jody Varner wasn't going to pay him anything for saving even a Varner Negro: just standing there holding that whole damned log up, with a little blood already beginning to run out of his mouth, until it finally occurred again to them to shim the log up with another one and pull him from under too, where he could sit hunkered over under a tree, spitting blood and complaining of a headache. ("Dont tell me they gave him the dollar," I said — all right: cried — to Ratliff. "Dont tell me that!")

Never in this world a Snopes: himself and his wife and son living in the tent behind the restaurant and Eck in his turn in the greasy apron and the steel-and-leather neck harness (behind the counter, frying on the crusted grill the eggs and meat which, because of the rigid brace, he couldn't even see to gauge the doneness, cooking, as the blind pianist plays, by simple ear), having less business here than even in the saw mill since at the saw mill all he could do was break his own bones where here he was a threat to his whole family's long tradition of slow and invincible rapacity because of that same incredible and innocent assumption that all people practise courage and honesty for the simple reason that if they didn't everybody would be frightened and confused; saying one day, not even privately but right out loud where half a dozen strangers not even kin by marriage to Snopeses heard him: "Aint we supposed to be selling beef in these here hamburgers? I dont know jest what this is yet but it aint no beef."

So of course they — when I say 'they' I mean Snopeses; when you say 'Snopeses' in Jefferson you mean Flem Snopes — fired him. They had to; he was intolerable there. Only of course the question rose immediately: where in Jefferson, not in the Jefferson economy but in the Snopes (oh yes, when you say Snopes in Jefferson you mean Flem Snopes) economy would he not be intolerable, would Snopeses be safe from him? Ratliff knew that too. I mean, everybody in Jefferson knew because within twenty-four hours everybody in Jefferson had heard

about that hamburger remark and naturally knew that something would have to be done about Eck Snopes and done quick and so of course (being interested) as soon as possible, almost as soon in fact as Flem himself knew, what and where.

I mean, it was Ratliff who told me. No: I mean it had to be Ratliff who told me: Ratliff with his damned smooth face and his damned shrewd bland innocent intelligent eyes, too damned innocent, too damned intelligent:

“He’s night watchman now down at Renfrow’s oil tank at the deepo. Where it wont be no strain on his neck like having to look down to see what that was he jest smelled burning. He wont need to look up to see whether the tank’s still there or not, he can jest walk up and feel the bottom of it.

Or even set there in his chair in the door and send that boy to look. That horse boy,” Ratliff said.

“That what boy?” I said, cried.

“That horse boy,” Ratliff said. “Eck’s boy. Wallstreet Panic. The day that Texas feller arctioned off them wild Snopes ponies, I was out there. It was jest dust-dark and we had done et supper at Miz Littlejohn’s and I was jest undressing in my room to go to bed when Henry Armstid and Eck and that boy of hisn went in the lot to ketch their horses; Eck had two: the one the Texas feller give him to get the arction started off, and the one Eck felt he had to at least bid on after having been give one for nothing, and won it.

So when Henry Armstid left the gate open and the whole herd stampeded over him and out of it, I reckon the hardest instantaneous decision Eck ever had to make in his life was to decide which one of them horses to chase: the one the Texas man give him, which represented the most net profit if he caught it, or the one that he already had five or six dollars of his own money invested in; that is, was a hundred-plus percent. of a free horse worth more than just a hundred percent. of a six-dollar horse? That is, jest how far can you risk losing a

horse that no matter what you get for him you will still have to subtract six dollars from it, to jest catch one that will be all net profit?

“Or maybe he decided him and that boy better split up after both of them while he figgered it out. Anyway, the first I knowed, I had done took off my britches and was jest leaning out the window in my shirt-tail trying to see what was going on, when I heerd a kind of sound behind me and looked over my shoulder and there was one of them horses standing in the door looking at me and standing in the hall behind him with a piece of plow-line was that boy of Eck’s.

I reckon we both moved at the same moment: me out the window in my shirt-tail and the horse swirling to run on down the hall, me realising I never had no britches on and running around the house toward the front steps jest about the time the horse met Miz Littlejohn coming onto the back gallery with a armful of washing in one hand and the washboard in the other; they claimed she said ‘git out of here you son of a bitch’ and split the washboard down the center of its face and throwed the two pieces at it without even changing hands, it swirling again to run back up the hall jest as I run up the front steps, and jumped clean over that boy still standing in the hall with his plow-line without touching a hair, on to the front gallery again and seen me and never even stopped: jest swirled and run to the end of the gallery and jumped the railing and back into the lot again, looking jest like a big circus-colored hawk, sailing out into the moonlight and across the lot again in about two jumps and out the gate that still hadn’t nobody thought to close yet; I heerd him once more when he hit the wooden bridge jest this side of Bookright’s turn-off. Then that boy come out of the house, still toting the plow-line. ‘Howdy, Mr Ratliff,’ he says. ‘Which way did he go?’ — Except you’re wrong.”

Horse boy, dog boy, cat boy, monkey boy, elephant boy: anything but Snopes boy. And then suppose, just suppose; suppose and tremble: one generation more removed from Eck Snopes and his innocence; one generation more until that innocent and outrageous belief that courage and honor are practical, has had time to fade and cool so that merely the habit of courage and honor remain; add to that then that

generation's natural heritage of cold rapacity as instinctive as breathing, and tremble at that prospect: the habit of courage and honor compounded by rapacity or rapacity raised to the absolute nth by courage and honor: not horse boy but a lion or tiger boy: Genghis Khan or Tamerlane or Attila in the defenseless midst of indefensible Jefferson.

Then Ratliff was looking at me. I mean, he always was. I mean I discovered with a kind of terror that for a second I had forgot it.

"What?" I said. "What did you say?"

"That you're wrong. About Eck's night watchman job at the oil tank. It wasn't Manfred de Spain this time. It was the Masons."

"What?" I said, cried.

"That's right. Eck was one of the biggest ones of Uncle Billy Varner's Frenchman's Bend Masons. It was Uncle Billy sent word in to the Masons in Jefferson to find Eck a good light broke-neck job."

"That bad?" I said. "That bad? The next one in the progression so outrageous and portentous and terrifying that Will Varner himself had to use influence twenty-two miles away to save Frenchman's Bend?" Because the next one after Eck behind the restaurant counter was I.O., the blacksmith-cum-schoolmaster-cum-bigamist, or -times bigamist, multiplied by bigamy — a thin undersized voluble weasel-faced man talking constantly in a steady stream of worn saws and proverbs usually having no connection with one another nor application to anything else, who even with the hammer would not have weighed as much as the anvil he abrogated and dispossessed; who (Ratliff of course, Ratliff always) entered Frenchman's Bend already talking, or rather appeared one morning already talking in Varner's blacksmith shop which an old man named Trumbull had run man and boy for fifty years.

But no blacksmith, I.O. He merely held the living. It was the other one, our Eck, his cousin (whatever the relationship was, unless simply being both Snopes was enough until one proved himself unworthy, as Eck was to do, like two Masons from that moment to apostasy like Eck's,

forever sworn to show a common front to life), who did the actual work.

Until one day, one morning, perhaps the curate, Eck, was not there or perhaps it simply occurred to the vicar, the high priest, for the first time that his actually was the right and the authority to hold a communion service and nobody could really prevent him: that morning, Zack Houston with his gaited stallion until Snopes quicked it with the first nail; whereupon Houston picked Snopes up and threw him hammer and all into the cooling tub and managed somehow to hold the plunging horse and wrench the shoe off and the nail out at the same time, and led the horse outside and tied it and came back and threw Snopes back into the cooling tub again.

And no schoolmaster either. He didn't merely usurp that as a position among strangers, he actually stole it as a vocation from his own kin. Though Frenchman's Bend didn't know that yet. They knew only that he was hardly out of the blacksmith shop (or dried again out of the cooling tub where Houston had flung him) when he was installed as teacher ('Professor', the teacher was called in Frenchman's Bend, provided of course he wore trousers) in the one-room schoolhouse which was an integer of old Varner's princedom — an integer not because old Varner or anyone else in Frenchman's Bend considered that juvenile education filled any actual communal lack or need, but simply because his settlement had to have a going schoolhouse to be complete as a freight train has to have a caboose to be complete.

So I.O. Snopes was now the schoolmaster; shortly afterward he was married to a Frenchman's Bend belle and within a year he was pushing a homemade perambulator about the village and his wife was already pregnant again; here, you would have said, was a man not merely settled but doomed to immobilization, until one day in the third year a vast gray-colored though still young woman, accompanied by a vast gray-colored five-year-old boy, drove up to Varner's store in a buggy — "It was his wife," Ratliff said.

"His wife?" I said, cried. "But I thought—"

“So did we,” Ratliff said. “Pushing that-ere homemade buggy with two of them in it this time, twins, already named Bilbo and Vardaman, besides the first one, Clarence. Yes sir, three chaps already while he was waiting for his other wife with that one to catch up with him — a little dried-up feller not much bigger than a crawfish, and that other wife — no, I mean the one he had now in Frenchman’s Bend when that-ere number one one druv up — wasn’t a big girl neither — Miz Vernon Tull’s sister’s niece by marriage she was — yet he got onto her too them same big gray-colored kind of chaps like the one in the buggy with his ma driving up to the store and saying to whoever was setting on the gallery at the moment: ‘I hear I.O. inside.’ (He was. We could all hear him.) ‘Kindly step in and tell him his wife’s come.’

“That was all. It was enough. When he come to the Bend that day three years ago he had a big carpet-bag, and in them three years he had probably accumulated some more stuff; I mean besides them three new chaps. But he never stopped for none of it. He jest stepped right out the back door of the store.

And Flem had done long since already sold old man Trumbull back to Varner for the blacksmith, but now they was needing a new professor too or anyhow they would as soon as I.O. could get around the first corner out of sight where he could cut across country. Which he evidently done; never nobody reported any dust-cloud travelling fast along a road nowhere. They said he even stopped talking, though I doubt that. You got to draw the line somewhere, aint you?”

You have indeed. Though I.O. didn’t. That is, he was already talking when he appeared in his turn behind the restaurant counter in the greasy apron, taking your order and cooking it wrong or cooking the wrong thing not because he worked so fast but simply because he never stopped talking long enough for you to correct or check him, babbling that steady stream of confused and garbled proverbs and metaphors attached to nothing and going nowhere.

And the wife. I mean the number one wife, what might be called the original wife, who was number one in the cast even though she was number two on the stage. The other one, the number two in the cast even though she was number one on the stage, the Tull's wife's sister's niece wife, who foaled the second set of what Ratliff called gray-colored chaps, Clarence and the twins Vardaman and Bilbo, remained in Frenchman's Bend.

It was the original one, who appeared in Frenchman's Bend sitting in the buggy and left Frenchman's Bend in the buggy, still sitting, and appeared in Jefferson five years later still sitting, translated, we knew not how, and with no interval between from the buggy where Ratliff had seen her twenty-two miles away that day five years ago, to the rocking chair on the front gallery of the boarding house where we saw her now, still at that same right angle enclosing her lap as if she had no movable hinge at the hips at all — a woman who gave an impression of specific density and immobility like lead or uranium, so that whatever force had moved her from the buggy to that chair had not been merely human, not even ten I.O.'s.

Because Snopes was moving his echelons up fast now.

That one — I.O. and the vast gray-colored sitting wife and that vast gray-colored boy (his name was Montgomery Ward) — did not even pause at the tent behind the restaurant where Eck and his wife and two sons now ("Why not?" Ratliff said. "There's a heap of more things besides frying a hamburger you dont really have to look down for.") were still living.

They — the I.O.'s — by-passed it completely, the wife already sitting in the rocking chair on the boarding house's front gallery — a big more-or-less unpainted square building just off the Square where itinerant cattle drovers and horse- and mule-traders stopped and where were incarcerated, boarded and fed, juries and important witnesses during court term, where she would sit rocking steadily — not doing anything, not reading, not particularly watching who passed in or out of the door or along the street: just rocking — for the next five years while and then after the place changed from a boarding house to a warren, with

nailed to one of the front veranda posts a pine board lettered
terrifically by hand, with both S's reversed:
NOPE HOTEL

And now Eck, whose innocence or honesty or both had long since
eliminated him from the restaurant into his night watchman's chair
beside the depot oil tank, had vacated his wife and sons (Wallstreet
Panic: oh yes, I was like Ratliff: I couldn't believe that one either,
though the younger one, Admiral Dewey, we both could) from the tent
behind it.

In fact, the restaurant was not sold lock stock barrel and goodwill, but
gutted, moved intact even to the customers and without even a single
whole day's closure, into the new boarding house where Mrs Eck was
now the landlady; moved intact past the rocking figure on the gallery
which continued to rock there through mere legend and into landmark
like the effigy signs before the old-time English public houses, so that
country men coming into town and inquiring for the Snopes hotel were
told simply to walk in that direction until they came to a woman
rocking, and that was it.

And now there entered that one, not whose vocation but at least the
designation of whose vocation, I.O. Snopes had usurped. This was the
actual Snopes schoolmaster. No: he looked like a schoolmaster.

No: he looked like John Brown with an ineradicable and unhideable
flaw: a tall gaunt man in a soiled frock coat and string tie and a wide
politician's hat, with cold furious eyes and the long chin of a talker: not
that verbal diarrhea of his cousin (whatever kin I.O. was; they none of
them seemed to bear any specific kinship to one another; they were
just Snopeses, like colonies of rats or termites are just rats and
termites) but a kind of unerring gift for a base and evil ratiocination in
argument, and for correctly reading the people with whom he dealt: a
demagogue's capacity for using people to serve his own appetites, all
clouded over with a veneer of culture and religion; the very names of
his two sons, Byron and Virgil, were not only instances but warnings.

And no schoolmaster himself either. That is, unlike his cousin, he was not even with us long enough to have to prove he was not. Or maybe, coming to us in the summer and then gone before the summer was, he was merely between assignments. Or maybe taking a busman's holiday from a busman's holiday.

Or maybe in and about the boarding house and the Square in the mere brief intervals from his true bucolic vocation whose stage and scene were the scattered country churches and creeks and horse-ponds where during the hot summer Sundays revival services and baptisings took place: himself (he had a good baritone voice and probably the last working pitch pipe in north Mississippi) setting the tune and lining out the words, until one day a posse of enraged fathers caught him and a fourteen-year-old girl in an empty cotton house and tarred and feathered him out of the country. There had been talk of castration also though some timid conservative dissuaded them into holding that as a promise against his return.

So of him there remained only the two sons, Byron and Virgil. Nor was Byron with us long either, gone to Memphis now to attend business college. To learn book-keeping; we learned with incredulity that Colonel Sartoris himself was behind that: Colonel Sartoris himself in the back room of the bank which was his office; — an incredulity which demanded, compelled inquiry while we remembered what some of us, the older ones, my father among them, had not forgot: the original Ab Snopes, the (depending on where you stand) patriot horse raider or simple horse thief who had been hanged (not by a Federal provost-marshal but by a Confederate one, the old story was) while a member of the cavalry command of old Colonel Sartoris, the real colonel, father of our present banker-honorary colonel who had been only an uncommissioned A.D.C. on his father's staff, back in that desperate twilight of 1864–65 when more people than men named Snopes had to choose not survival with honor but simply between empty honor and almost as empty survival.

The horse which came home to roost. Oh yes, we all said that, all us wits: we would not have missed that chance. Not that we believed it or

even disbelieved it, but simply to defend the old Colonel's memory by being first to say aloud among ourselves what we believed the whole Snopes tribe was long since chortling over to one another. Indeed, no Confederate provost-marshal hanged that first Ab Snopes, but Snopeses themselves had immolated him in that skeleton, to put, as the saying is, that monkey on the back of Ab's commander's descendant as soon as the lineage produced a back profitable to the monkey; in this case, the new bank which our Colonel Sartoris established about five years ago.

Not that we really believed that, of course. I mean, our Colonel Sartoris did not need to be blackmailed with a skeleton. Because we all in our country, even half a century after, sentimentalise the heroes of our gallant lost irrevocable unreconstructible debacle, and those heroes were indeed ours because they were our fathers and grandfathers and uncles and great-uncles when Colonel Sartoris raised the command right here in our contiguous counties.

And who with more right to sentimentalise them than our Colonel Sartoris, whose father had been the Colonel Sartoris who had raised and trained the command and saved its individual lives when he could in battle and even defended them or at least extricated them from their own simple human lusts and vices while idle between engagements; Byron Snopes was not the first descendant of those old company and battalion and regimental names who knew our Colonel Sartoris's bounty.

But the horse which at last came home to roost sounded better. Not witty, but rather an immediate unified irrevocably scornful front to what the word Snopes was to mean to us, and to all others, no matter who, whom simple juxtaposition to the word irrevocably smirched and contaminated.

Anyway, he (it: the horse come to roost) appeared in good time, armed and girded with his business college diploma; we would see him through, beyond, inside the grillework which guarded our money and the complex records of it whose custodian Colonel Sartoris was, bowed

(he, Snopes, Byron) over the book-keepers' desk in an attitude not really of prayer, obeisance; not really of humility before the shine, the blind glare of the blind money, but rather of a sort of respectful unhumble insistence, a deferent invincible curiosity and inquiry into the mechanics of its recording; he had not entered crawling into the glare of a mystery so much as, without attracting any attention to himself, he was trying to lift a corner of its skirt.

Using, since he was the low last man in that hierarchy, a long cane fishing-pole until he could accrete close enough for the hand to reach; using, to really mix, really confuse our metaphor, an humble cane out of that same quiver which had contained that power-plant superintendency, since Colonel Sartoris had been of that original group of old Major de Spain's bear and deer hunters when Major de Spain established his annual hunting camp in the Big Bottom shortly after the war; and when Colonel Sartoris started his bank five years ago, Manfred de Spain used his father's money to become one of the first stockholders and directors.

Oh yes: the horse home at last and stabled. And in time of course (we had only to wait, never to know how of course even though we watched it, but at least to know more or less when) to own the stable, Colonel Sartoris dis-stabled of his byre and rick in his turn as Ratliff and Grover Cleveland Winbush had been dis-restauranted in theirs. We not to know how of course since that was none of our business; indeed, who to say but there was not one among us but did not want to know: who, already realising that we would never defend Jefferson from Snopeses, let us then give, relinquish Jefferson to Snopeses, banker mayor aldermen church and all, so that, in defending themselves from Snopeses, Snopeses must of necessity defend and shield us, their vassals and chattels, too.

The quiver borne on Manfred de Spain's back, but the arrows drawn in turn by that hand, that damned incredible woman, that Frenchman's Bend Helen, Semiramis — — No: not Helen nor Semiramis: Lilith: the one before Eve herself whom earth's Creator had perforce in desperate and amazed alarm in person to efface, remove, obliterate, that Adam

might create a progeny to populate it; and we were in my office now where I had not sent for him nor even invited him: he had just followed, entered, to sit across the desk in his neat faded tieless blue shirt and the brown smooth bland face and the eyes watching me too damned shrewd, too damned intelligent.

“You used to laugh at them too,” he said.

“Why not?” I said. “What else are we going to do about them? Of course you’ve got the best joke: you dont have to fry hamburgers anymore. But give them time; maybe they have got one taking a correspondence school law course. Then I wont have to be acting city attorney anymore either.”

“I said ‘too’,” Ratliff said.

“What?” I said.

“At first you laughed at them too,” he said. “Or maybe I’m wrong, and this here is still laughing?” — looking at me, watching me, too damned shrewd, too damned intelligent. “Why dont you say it?”

“Say what?” I said.

“ ‘Get out of my office, Ratliff’,” he said.

“Get out of my office, Ratliff,” I said.

THREE

Charles Mallison

MAYBE IT WAS because Mother and Uncle Gavin were twins, that Mother knew what Uncle Gavin’s trouble was just about as soon as Ratliff did.

We were all living with Grandfather then. I mean Grandfather was still alive then and he and Uncle Gavin had one side of the house, Grandfather in his bedroom and what we all called the office downstairs, and Uncle Gavin on the same side upstairs, where he had built an outside stairway so he could go and come from the side yard,

and Mother and Father and Cousin Gowan on the other side while Gowan was going to the Jefferson high school while he was waiting to enter the prep school in Washington to get ready for the University of Virginia.

So Mother would sit at the end of the table where Grandmother used to sit, and Grandfather opposite at the other end, and Father on one side and Uncle Gavin and Gowan (I wasn't born then and even if I had been I would have been eating in the kitchen with Aleck Sander yet) on the other and, Gowan said, Uncle Gavin not even pretending anymore to eat: just sitting there talking about Snopeses like he had been doing now through every meal for the last two weeks.

It was almost like he was talking to himself, like something wound up that couldn't even run down, let alone stop, like there wasn't anybody or anything that wished he would stop more than he did. It wasn't snarling. Gowan didn't know what it was. It was like something Uncle Gavin had to tell, but it was so funny that his main job in telling it was to keep it from being as funny as it really was, because if he ever let it be as funny as it really was, everybody and himself too would be laughing so hard they couldn't hear him.

And Mother not eating either now: just sitting there perfectly still, watching Uncle Gavin, until at last Grandfather took his napkin out of his collar and stood up and Father and Uncle Gavin and Gowan stood up too and Grandfather said to Mother like he did every time: "Thank you for the meal, Margaret," and put the napkin on the table and Gowan went and stood by the door while he went out like I was going to have to do after I got born and got big enough.

And Gowan would have stood there while Mother and Father and Uncle Gavin went out too. But not this time. Mother hadn't even moved, still sitting there and watching Uncle Gavin; she was still watching Uncle Gavin when she said to Father: "Dont you and Gowan want to be excused too?"

“Nome,” Gowan said. Because he had been in the office that day when Ratliff came in and said,
“Evening, Lawyer. I just dropped in to hear the latest Snopes news,”
and Uncle Gavin said:
“What news?” and Ratliff said:
“Or do you jest mean what Snopes?” and sat there too looking at Uncle Gavin, until at last he said, “Why dont you go on and say it?” and Uncle Gavin said,
“Say what?” and Ratliff said,
“Git out of my office, Ratliff.” So Gowan said,
“Nome.”

“Then maybe you’ll excuse me,” Uncle Gavin said, putting his napkin down. But still Mother didn’t move.
“Would you like me to call on her?” she said.

“Call on who?” Uncle Gavin said. And even to Gowan he said it too quick. Because even Father caught on then. Though I dont know about that. Even if I had been there and no older than Gowan was, I would have known that if I had been about twenty-one or maybe even less when Mrs Snopes first walked through the Square, I not only would have known what was going on, I might even have been Uncle Gavin myself. But Gowan said Father sounded like he had just caught on. He said to Uncle Gavin:
“I’ll be damned. So that’s what’s been eating you for the past two weeks.” Then he said to Mother: “No, by Jupiter. My wife call on that —
—”

“That what?” Uncle Gavin said, hard and quick. And still Mother hadn’t moved: just sitting there between them while they stood over her.

“ ‘Sir’ ,” she said.

“What?” Uncle Gavin said.

“ ‘That what, sir?’ “ she said. “Or maybe just ‘sir’ with an inflection.”

“You name it then,” Father said to Uncle Gavin. “You know what. What this whole town is calling her. What this whole town knows about her and Manfred de Spain.”

“What whole town?” Uncle Gavin said. “Besides you? You and who else? the same ones that probably rake Maggie here over the coals too without knowing any more than you do?”

“Are you talking about my wife?” Father said.

“No,” Uncle Gavin said. “I’m talking about my sister and Mrs Snopes.”

“Boys, boys, boys,” Mother said. “At least spare my nephew.” She said to Gowan: “Gowan, dont you really want to be excused?”

“Nome,” Gowan said.

“Damn your nephew,” Father said. “I’m not going to have his aunt — —”

“Are you still talking about your wife?” Uncle Gavin said. This time Mother stood up too, between them while they both leaned a little forward, glaring at each other across the table.

“That really will be all now,” Mother said. “Both of you apologise to me.” They did. “Now apologise to Gowan.” Gowan said they did that too.

“But I’ll still be damned if I’m going to let—” Father said.

“Just the apology, please,” Mother said. “Even if Mrs Snopes is what you say she is, as long as I am what you and Gavin both agree I am since at least you agree on that, how can I run any risk sitting for ten minutes in her parlor? The trouble with both of you is, you know nothing about women. Women are not interested in morals. They aren’t even interested in unmorals. The ladies of Jefferson dont care what she does. What they will never forgive is the way she looks. No: the way the Jefferson gentlemen look at her.”

“Speak for your brother,” Father said. “I never looked at her in her life.” “Then so much the worse for me,” Mother said, “with a mole for a husband. No: moles have warm blood; a Mammoth Cave fish—”

“Well, I will be damned,” Father said. “That’s what you want, is it? a husband that will spend every Saturday night in Memphis chasing back and forth between Gayoso and Mulberry street — —”

“Now I will excuse you whether you want to be or not,” Mother said. So Uncle Gavin went out and on upstairs toward his room and Mother rang the bell for Guster and Gowan stood at the door again for Mother and Father and then Mother and Gowan went out to the front gallery (it was October, still warm enough to sit outside at noon) and she took up the sewing basket again and Father came out with his hat on and said,

“Flem Snopes’s wife, riding into Jefferson society on Judge Lemuel Stevens’s daughter’s coat-tail,” and went on to town to the store; and then Uncle Gavin came out and said:

“You’ll do it, then?”

“Of course,” Mother said. “Is it that bad?”

“I intend to try to not let it be,” Uncle Gavin said. “Even if you aren’t anything but just a woman, you must have seen her. You must have.”

“Anyway, I have watched men seeing her,” Mother said.

“Yes,” Uncle Gavin said. It didn’t sound like an out-breathe, like talking. It sounded like an in-breathe: “Yes.”

“You’re going to save her,” Mother said, not looking at Uncle Gavin now: just watching the sock she was darning.

“Yes!” Uncle Gavin said, fast, quick: no in-breathe this time, so quick he almost said the rest of it before he could stop himself, so that all Mother had to do was say it for him:

“ — from Manfred de Spain.”

But Uncle Gavin had caught himself by now; his voice was just harsh now. “You too,” he said. “You and your husband too. The best people, the pure, the unimpugnable. Charles who by his own affirmation has

never even looked at her; you by that same affirmation not only Judge Stevens's daughter, but Caesar's wife."

"Just what—" Mother said, then Gowan said she stopped and looked at him. "Dont you really want to be excused a little while? as a personal favor?" she said.

"Nome," Gowan said.

"You cant help it either, can you?" she said. "You've got to be a man too, haven't you?" She just talked to Uncle Gavin then: "Just what is it about this that you cant stand? That Mrs Snopes may not be chaste, or that it looks like she picked Manfred de Spain out to be unchaste with?"

"Yes!" Uncle Gavin said. "I mean no! It's all lies — gossip. It's all — —"

"Yes," Mother said. "You're right. It's probably all just that. Saturday's not a very good afternoon to get in the barbershop, but you might think about it when you pass."

"Thanks," Uncle Gavin said. "But if I'm to go on this crusade with any hope of success, the least I can do is look wild and shaggy enough to be believed. You'll do it, then?"

"Of course," Mother said.

"Thank you," Uncle Gavin said. Then he was gone.

"I suppose I could be excused now," Gowan said.

"What for now?" Mother said. She was still watching Uncle Gavin, down the walk and into the street now. "He should have married Melisandre Backus," she said. Melisandre Backus lived on a plantation about six miles from town with her father and a bottle of whiskey. I dont mean he was a drunkard. He was a good farmer. He just spent the rest of his time sitting on the gallery in summer and in the library in winter with the bottle, reading Latin poetry.

Miss Melisandre and Mother had been in school together, at high school and the Seminary both. That is, Miss Melisandre was always four

years behind Mother. "At one time I thought he might; I didn't know any better then."

"Cousin Gavin?" Gowan said. "Him married?"

"Oh yes," Mother said. "He's just too young yet. He's the sort of man doomed to marry a widow with grown children."

"He could still marry Miss Melisandre," Gowan said.

"It's too late," Mother said. "He didn't know she was there."

"He sees her every day she comes in to town," Gowan said.

"You can see things without looking at them, just like you can hear things without listening," Mother said.

"He sure didn't just do that when he saw Mrs Snopes that day," Gowan said. "Maybe he's waiting for her to have another child besides Linda and for them to grow up?"

"No no," Mother said. "You dont marry Semiramis: you just commit some form of suicide for her. Only gentlemen with as little to lose as Mr Flem Snopes can risk marrying Semiramis. — It's too bad you are so old too. A few years ago I could have made you come with me to call on her. Now you'll have to admit openly that you want to come; you may even have to say 'Please'."

But Gowan didn't.

It was Saturday afternoon and there was a football game and though he hadn't made the regular team yet you never could tell when somebody that had might break a leg or have a stroke or even a simple condition in arithmetic. Besides, he said Mother didn't need his help anyway, having the whole town's help in place of it; he said they hadn't even reached the Square the next morning on the way to church when the first lady they met said brightly:

"What's this I hear about yesterday afternoon?" and Mother said just as brightly:

"Indeed?" and the second lady they met said (she belonged to the Byron Society and the Cotillion Club too):

“I always say we’d all be much happier to believe nothing we don’t see with our own eyes, and only half of that,” and Mother said still just as brightly:

“Indeed?”

They — the Byron Society and the Cotillion Club, both when possible of course though either alone in a pinch — seemed to be the measure. Now Uncle Gavin stopped talking about Snopeses. I mean, Gowan said he stopped talking at all. It was like he didn’t have time anymore to concentrate on talk in order to raise it to conversation, art, like he believed was everybody’s duty. It was like he didn’t have time to do anything but wait, to get something done that the only way he knew to get it done was waiting.

More than that, than just waiting: not only never missing a chance to do things for Mother, he even invented little things to do for her, so that even when he would talk a little, it was like he was killing two birds with the same stone.

Because when he talked now, in sudden spells and bursts of it that sometimes never had any connection at all with what Father and Mother and Grandfather might have been talking about the minute before, it wouldn’t even be what he called BB gun conversation. It would be the most outrageous praise, praise so outrageous that even Gowan at just thirteen years old could tell that.

It would be of Jefferson ladies that he and Mother had known all their lives, so that whatever ideas either one of them must have had about them, the other must have known it a long time by now. Yet all of a sudden every few days during the next month Uncle Gavin would stop chewing fast over his plate and drag a fresh one of them by the hair you might say into the middle of whatever Grandfather and Mother and Father had been talking about, talking not to Grandfather or Father or Gowan, but telling Mother how good or pretty or intelligent or witty somebody was that Mother had grown up with or anyway known all her life.

Oh yes, members of the Byron Society and the Cotillion Club or maybe just one of them (probably only Mother knew it was the Cotillion Club he was working for) at a pinch, so that each time they would know that another new one had called on Mrs Flem Snopes. Until Gowan would wonder how Uncle Gavin would always know when the next one had called, how to scratch her off the list that hadn't or add her onto the score that had or whatever it was he kept. So Gowan decided that maybe Uncle Gavin watched Mrs Snopes's house.

And it was November now, good fine hunting weather, and since Gowan had finally given up on the football team, by rights he and Top (Top was Aleck Sander's older brother except that Aleck Sander wasn't born yet either. I mean, he was Guster's boy and his father was named Top too so they called him Big Top and Top Little Top) would have spent every afternoon after school with the beagles Uncle Gavin gave them after rabbits.

But instead, Gowan spent every afternoon for almost a week in the big ditch behind Mr Snopes's house, not watching the house but to see if Uncle Gavin was hid somewhere in the ditch too watching to see who called on Mrs Snopes next.

Because Gowan was only thirteen then: he was just watching for Uncle Gavin; it wasn't until later that he said how he realised that if he had tried harder or longer, he might have caught Mr de Spain climbing in or out of the back window like most of Jefferson was convinced he was doing, and then he really would have had something he could have sold for a dollar or two to a lot of people in town.

But if Uncle Gavin was hid somewhere in that ditch too, Gowan never caught him. Better still, Uncle Gavin never caught Gowan in it. Because if Mother had ever found out Gowan was hiding in that ditch behind Mr Snopes's house because he thought Uncle Gavin was hidden in it too, Gowan didn't know what she might have done about Uncle Gavin but he sure knew what would have happened to him. And worse: if Mr Snopes had ever found out Gowan thought Uncle Gavin might be hiding in that ditch spying on his house. Or worse still: if the town ever found

out Gowan was hiding in that ditch because he thought Uncle Gavin was.

Because when you are just thirteen you dont have sense enough to realise what you are doing and shudder. Because even now I can remember some of the things Aleck Sander and I did for instance and never think twice about it, and I wonder how any boys ever live long enough to grow up. I remember, I was just twelve; Uncle Gavin had just given me my shotgun; this was after (this is how Father put it) Mrs Snopes had sent him to Heidelberg to finish his education and he had been in the War and then come back home and got himself elected County Attorney in his own right; there were five of us: me and three other white boys and Aleck Sander, hunting rabbits one Saturday.

It was cold, one of the coldest spells we ever had; when we came to Harrykin Creek it was frozen over solid and we begun to talk about how much we would take to jump into it. Aleck Sander said he would do it if each one of us would give him a dollar so we said we would and sure enough, before we could have stopped him, Aleck Sander hauled off and jumped into the creek, right through the ice, clothes and all.

So we got him out and built a fire while he stripped off and wrapped up in our hunting coats while we tried to dry his clothes before they froze solid too and got him dressed again at last and then he said, "All right. Now pay me my money."

We hadn't thought about that. Back then, no Jefferson, Mississippi boy or anywhere else in Mississippi that I know of, ever had a whole dollar at one time very often, let alone four at the same time. So we had to trade with him. Buck Connors and Aleck Sander traded first: if Buck jumped through the ice, Aleck Sander would let him off his dollar. So Buck did, and while we dried him off I said,

"If that's what we got to do, let's all jump in at once and get it over with," and we even started for the creek when Aleck Sander said No, that we were all white boys taking advantage of him because he was a Negro by asking him to let us do the same thing he did.

So we had to trade again. Ashley Holcomb was next. He climbed up a tree until Aleck Sander said he was high enough and shut his eyes and jumped out of it, and Aleck Sander let him off his dollar. Then I was next, and somebody said how, because Aleck Sander's mother was our cook and Aleck Sander and I had more or less lived together ever since we were born, that Aleck Sander would probably let me off light.

But Aleck Sander said No, he had thought of that himself and for that very reason he was going to have to be harder on me than on Ashley and so the tree I would jump out of would be over a brier patch. And I did; it was like jumping into cold fire streaking my hands and face and tearing my britches though my hunting coat was brand new almost (Uncle Gavin had mailed it to me from Germany the day he got Mother's cable that I was born; it was the best hunting coat in Jefferson everybody said when I finally got big enough to wear it) so it didn't tear except for one pocket.

So that left only John Wesley Roebuck and maybe all of a sudden Aleck Sander realised that here was his last dollar going because John Wesley suggested everything but Aleck Sander still said No. Finally John Wesley offered to do all of them: jump through the ice then out of Ashley's tree and then out of mine but Aleck Sander still said No.

So this is how they finally traded though in a way that still wasn't fair to Aleck Sander because old man Ab Snopes had already shot John Wesley in the back once about two years ago and so John Wesley was used to it, which may have been one of the reasons why he agreed to the trade. This was it.

John Wesley borrowed my hunting coat to put on top of his because we had already proved that mine was the toughest, and he borrowed Ashley's sweater to wrap around his head and neck, and we counted off twenty-five steps for him and Aleck Sander put one shell in his gun and somebody, maybe me, counted One Two Three slow and when whoever it was said One John Wesley broke and ran and when whoever it was said Three Aleck Sander shot John Wesley in the back and John

Wesley gave me and Ashley back the sweater and my hunting coat and (it was late by then) we went home.

Except that I had to run all the way (it was cold, the coldest spell I ever remember) because we had to burn up my hunting coat because it would be easier to explain no hunting coat at all than one with the back full of Number Six shot.

Then we found out how Uncle Gavin would find out which one called next. It was Father did the scoring for him. I dont mean Father was Uncle Gavin's spy. The last thing Father was trying to do was to help Uncle Gavin, ease Uncle Gavin's mind.

If anything, he was harder against Uncle Gavin even than he had thought he was that first day against Mother going to call on Mrs Snopes; it was like he was trying to take revenge on Mother and Uncle Gavin both: on Uncle Gavin for even wanting Mother to call on Mrs Snopes, and on Mother for saying right out loud in front of Uncle Gavin and Gowan both that she not only was going to do it, she didn't see any harm in it.

In fact, Gowan said it was Father's mind that Mrs Snopes seemed to stay on now, more than on Uncle Gavin's. Almost any time now Father would walk in rubbing his hands and saying "oh you kid" or "twenty-three skiddoo" and they knew that he had just seen Mrs Snopes again on the street or had just heard that another Cotillion or Byron Society member had called on her; if they had invented wolf whistles then, Father would have been giving one.

Then it was December; Mother had just told how the Cotillion Club had finally voted to send Mr and Mrs Snopes an invitation to the Christmas Ball and Grandfather had got up and put his napkin down and said, "Thank you for the meal, Margaret," and Gowan went and held the door for him to go out, then Father said:

"Dance? Suppose she dont know how?" and Gowan said, "Does she have to?" and now they all stopped; he said they all stopped at exactly the same time and looked at him and he said that even if

Mother and Uncle Gavin were brother and sister one was a woman and the other was a man and Father wasn't any kin to either one of them. Yet he said they all three looked at him with exactly the same expression on their faces.

Then Father said to Mother:

"Hold him while I look at his teeth again. You told me he wasn't but thirteen."

"What have I said now?" Gowan said.

"Yes," Father said. "What were we saying? Oh yes, dancing, the Christmas Cotillion." He was talking to Uncle Gavin now. "Well by godfrey, that puts you one up on Manfred de Spain, dont it?"

He's a lone orphan; he hasn't got a wife or a twin sister who was one of the original founders of Jefferson literary and snobbery clubs; all he can do to Flem Snopes's wife is — —" Gowan said how until now Mother was always between Father and Uncle Gavin, with one hand on each of their chests to hold them apart. He said that now Mother and Uncle Gavin were both at Father, with Mother holding one hand on Father's mouth and reaching for his, Gowan's, ears with the other, and she and Uncle Gavin both saying the same thing, only Uncle Gavin was just using another set of words for it:

"Dont you dare!"

"Go on. Say it."

So Father didn't. But even he didn't anticipate what Uncle Gavin would do next: try to persuade Mother to make the Cotillion committee not invite Mr de Spain to the ball at all. "Hell fire," Father said. "You cant do that."

"Why cant we?" Mother said.

"He's the mayor!" Father said.

"The mayor of a town is a servant," Mother said. "He's the head servant of course: the butler. You dont invite a butler to a party because he's a butler. You invite him in spite of it."

But Mayor de Spain got his invitation too. Maybe the reason Mother didn't stop it like Uncle Gavin wanted her to, was simply for that reason she had already given, explained, described: that she and the Cotillion Club didn't have to invite him because he was Mayor, and so they invited him just to show it, prove it.

Only Father didn't think that was the reason. "No sir," he said. "You damned gals aint fooling me or anybody else. You want trouble. You want something to happen. You like it. You want two red-combed roosters strutting at one another, provided one of you hens is the reason for it.

And if there's anything else you can think of to shove them in to where one of them will have to draw blood in self defense, you'll do that too because every drop of that blood or every black eye or every public-torn collar or split or muddy britches is another item of revenge on that race of menfolks that hold you ladies thrall'd all day long day after day with nothing to do between meals but swap gossip over the telephone.

By godfrey," he said, "if there wasn't any club to give a Christmas dance two weeks from now, you all would probably organise one just to invite Mrs Snopes and Gavin and Manfred de Spain to it. Except you are wasting your time and money this trip. Gavin dont know how to make trouble."

"Gavin's a gentleman," Mother said.

"Sure," Father said. "That's what I said: it aint that he dont want to make trouble: he just dont know how. Oh I dont mean he wont try. He'll do the best he knows. But he just dont know how to make the kind of trouble that a man like Manfred de Spain will take seriously."

But Mr de Spain did the best he could to teach Uncle Gavin how. He began the day the invitations were sent out and he got his after all. When he bought that red E.M.F. the first thing he did was to have a cut-out put on it and until he got elected mayor the first time you could hear him all the way to the Square the moment he left home.

And soon after that Lucius Hogganbeck got somebody (it was Mr Roth Edmonds and maybe Mr de Spain too since Lucius's father, old Boon Hogganbeck, had been Mr Roth's father's, Mr McCaslin Edmonds, and his uncle's, Uncle Ike McCaslin, and old Major de Spain's huntsman-doghandler-man Friday back in the time of Major de Spain's old hunting camp) to sign a note for him to buy a Model T Ford and set up in the jitney passenger-hauling business, and he had a cut-out too and on Sunday afternoons half the men in Jefferson would slip off from their wives and go out to a straight stretch of road about two miles from town (even two miles back in town you could hear them when the wind was right) and Mr de Spain and Lucius would race each other. Lucius would charge his passengers a nickel a head to ride in the race, though Mr de Spain carried his free.

Though the first thing Mr de Spain did after he got to be mayor was to have an ordinance passed that no cut-out could be opened inside the town limits. So it had been years now since we had heard one. Then one morning we did. I mean we — Grandfather and Mother and Father and Uncle Gavin and Gowan — did, because it was right in front of our house.

It was just about the time everybody would be going to school or to work and Gowan knew which car it was even before he got to the window because Lucius's Ford made a different sound, and besides nobody but the mayor would have risked that cutout with the cut-out law in force. It was him: the red car just going out of sight and the cut-out off again as soon as he had passed the house; and Uncle Gavin still sitting at the table finishing his breakfast just as if there hadn't been any new noise at all.

And as Gowan reached the corner on the way home from school at noon, he heard it again; Mr de Spain had driven blocks out of his way to rip past our house again in second gear with the cut-out wide open; and again while Mother and Father and Grandfather and Uncle Gavin and he were still sitting at the table finishing dinner, with Mother sitting right still and not looking at anything and Father looking at Uncle

Gavin and Uncle Gavin sitting there stirring his coffee like there wasn't a sound anywhere in the world except maybe his spoon in the cup.

And again about half-past five, about dark, when the storekeepers and doctors and lawyers and mayors and such as that would be going home at the end of the day to eat supper all quiet and peaceful, without having to go back to town until tomorrow morning; and this time Gowan could even see Uncle Gavin listening to the cut-out when it passed the house.

I mean, this time Uncle Gavin didn't mind them seeing that he heard it, looking up from the paper a little and holding the paper in front of him until the sound went on and then quit off when Mr de Spain passed the end of our yard and picked up his foot; Uncle Gavin and Grandfather both looking up while it passed though all Grandfather did yet was just to frown a little and Uncle Gavin not even doing that: just waiting, almost peaceful, so that Gowan could almost hear him saying That's all at last. He had to make the fourth run past to get back home.

And so it was all, through supper and afterward when they went to the office where Mother would sit in the rocking chair always sewing something though it seemed to be mostly darning socks and Gowan's stockings and Grandfather and Father would sit across the desk from one another playing checkers and sometimes Uncle Gavin would come in too with his book when he wouldn't feel like trying again to teach Mother to play chess until I got born next year and finally got big enough so he could begin to try to teach me.

And now it was already past the time when the ones going to the picture show would have gone to it, and the men just going back to town after supper to loaf in Christian's drugstore or to talk with the drummers in the Holston House lobby or drink some more coffee in the café, and anybody would have thought he was safe. Only this time it wasn't even Father. It was Grandfather himself jerking his head up and saying:

"What the devil's that? That's the second time today."

"It's the fifth time today," Father said. "His foot slipped."

"What?" Grandfather said.

"He was trying to mash on the brake to go quiet past the house," Father said. "Only his foot slipped and mashed on the cut-out instead."

"Telephone Connors," Grandfather said. That was Mr Buck Connors. "I wont have it."

"That's Gavin's job," Father said. "He's the acting City Attorney when you're in a checker game. He's the one to speak to the marshal. Or better still, the mayor. Aint that right, Gavin?" And Gowan said they all looked at Uncle Gavin, and that he himself was ashamed, not of Uncle Gavin: of us, the rest of them.

He said it was like watching somebody's britches falling down while he's got to use both hands trying to hold up the roof: you are sorry it is funny, ashamed you had to be there watching Uncle Gavin when he never even had any warning he would need to try to hide his face's nakedness when that cut-out went on and the car ripped slow in second gear past the house again after you would have thought that anybody would have had the right to believe that other time before supper would be the last one at least until tomorrow, the cut-out ripping past and sounding just like laughing, still sounding like laughing even after the car had reached the corner where Mr de Spain would always lift his foot off the cut-out. Because it was laughing: it was Father sitting at his side of the checker board, looking at Uncle Gavin and laughing.

"Charley!" Mother said. "Stop it!" But it was already too late. Uncle Gavin had already got up, quick, going toward the door like he couldn't quite see it, and on out.

"What the devil's this?" Grandfather said.

"He rushed out to telephone Buck Connors," Father said. "Since this was the fifth time today, he must have decided that fellow's foot never slipped at all." Now Mother was standing right over Father with the

stocking and the darning egg in one hand and the needle in the other like a dagger.

“Will you please hush, dearest?” she said. “Will you please shut your gee dee mouth? — I’m sorry, Papa,” she said to Grandfather. “But he—” Then she was at Father again: “Will you? Will you now?”

“Sure, kid,” Father said. “I’m all for peace and quiet too.” Then Mother was gone too and then it was bed time and then Gowan told how he saw Uncle Gavin sitting in the dark parlor with no light except through the hall door, so that he couldn’t read if he tried. Which Gowan said he wasn’t: just sitting there in the half-dark, until Mother came down the stairs in her dressing gown and her hair down and said, “Why dont you go to bed? Go on now. Go on,” and Gowan said, “Yessum,” and she went on into the parlor and stood beside Uncle Gavin’s chair and said, “I’m going to telephone him,” and Uncle Gavin said, “Telephone who?” and Mother came back and said, “Come on now. This minute,” and waited until Gowan went up the stairs in front of her.

When he was in bed with the light off she came to the door and said Goodnight and all they would have to do now would be just to wait. Because even if five was an odd number and it would take an even number to make the night whole for Uncle Gavin, it couldn’t possibly be very long because the drugstore closed as soon as the picture show was out, and anybody still sitting in the Holston House lobby after the drummers had all gone to bed would have to explain it to Jefferson some time or other, no matter how much of a bachelor he was. And Gowan said he thought how at least Uncle Gavin and he had their nice warm comfortable familiar home to wait in, even if Uncle Gavin was having to sit up in the dark parlor by himself, instead of having to use the drugstore or the hotel to put off finally having to go home as long as possible.

And this time Gowan said Mr de Spain opened the cut-out as soon as he left the Square; he could hear it all the way getting louder and

louder as it turned the two corners into our street, the ripping loud and jeering but at least not in second gear this time, going fast past the house and the dark parlor where Uncle Gavin was sitting, and on around the other two corners he would have to turn to get back into the street he belonged in, dying away at last until all you could hear was just the night and then Uncle Gavin's feet coming quiet up the stairs. Then the hall light went out, and that was all.

All for that night, that day I mean. Because even Uncle Gavin didn't expect it to be completely all. In fact, the rest of them found out pretty quick that Uncle Gavin didn't aim for it to be all; the next morning at breakfast it was Uncle Gavin himself that raised his head first and said: "There goes Manfred back to our salt-mine," and then to Gowan: "Mr de Spain has almost as much fun with his automobile as you're going to have with one as soon as your Cousin Charley buys it, doesn't he?"

Whenever that would be because Father said almost before Uncle Gavin could finish getting the words out:

"Me own one of those stinking noisy things? I wouldn't dare. Too many of my customers use horses and mules for a living." But Gowan said that if Father ever did buy one while he was there, he would find something better to do with it besides running back and forth in front of the house with the cut-out open.

And again while he was on the way home at noon to eat dinner, and again while they were sitting at the table. Nor was it just Gowan who found out Uncle Gavin didn't aim for that to be all because Mother caught Gowan almost before Uncle Gavin turned his back. Gowan didn't know how she did it. Aleck Sander always said that his mother could see and hear through a wall (when he got bigger he said Guster could smell his breath over the telephone) so maybe all women that were already mothers or just acting like mothers like Mother had to while Gowan lived with us, could do that too and that was how Mother did it: stepping out of the parlor just as Gowan put his hand in his pocket.

“Where is it?” Mother said. “What Gavin just gave you. It was a box of tacks; wasn’t it a box of tacks? to scatter out there in the street where he will run over them? Wasn’t it? Acting just like a high school sophomore. He should marry Melisandre Backus before he ruins the whole family.”

“I thought you said it’s too late for that,” Gowan said. “That the one that marries Cousin Gavin will have to be a widow with four children.”

“Maybe I meant too early,” Mother said. “Melisandre hasn’t even got the husband yet.” Then she wasn’t seeing Gowan. “Which is exactly what Manfred de Spain is acting like,” she said. “A high school sophomore.” Gowan said she was looking right at him but she wasn’t seeing him at all, and all of a sudden he said she was pretty, looking just like a girl. “No: exactly what we are all acting like,” and now she was seeing him again. “But dont you dare let me see you doing it, do you hear? Dont you dare!”

“Yessum,” Gowan said. It was no trouble. All he and Top had to do after school was just divide the tacks into their hands and kind of fool around out in the middle of the street like they were trying to decide what to do next while the tacks dribbled down across the tracks of the automobile; Mr de Spain had made nine trips by now so Gowan said he almost had two ruts. Only he and Top had to stay out in the cold now because they wanted to see it. Top said that when the wheels blew up, they would blow the whole automobile up. Gowan didn’t think so, but he didn’t know either and Top might be partly right, enough right anyway to be worth watching.

So they had to stand behind the big jasmine bush and it began to get dark and it got colder and colder and Guster opened the kitchen door and begun to holler for Top then after a while she came to the front door and hollered for both of them; it was full dark and good and cold now when at last they saw the lights coming, it reached the corner of the yard and the cut-out went on and the car ripped slow and loud past and they listened and watched both but nothing happened, nothing at all, it just went on and even the cut-out went back off; Gowan said how maybe it would take a little time for the tacks to finally work in and

blow the wheels up and they waited for that too but nothing happened. And now it had been long enough for him to be home.

And after supper, all of them in the office again, but not anything at all this time, not even anything passed the house so Gowan thought maybe it hadn't blown up until after he was home and now Uncle Gavin never would know when it would be safe to come out of the dark parlor and go upstairs to bed; so that he, Gowan, made a chance to whisper to Uncle Gavin: "Do you want me to go up to his house and look?" Only Father said, "What? What're you whispering about?" so that didn't do any good either. And the next morning nothing happened either, the cut-out ripping slow past the house like next time it was coming right through the dining room itself.

And twice more at noon and that afternoon when Gowan got home from school Top jerked his head at him and they went to the cellar; Top had an old rake-head with a little of the handle still in it so they built a fire behind the stable and burned the handle out and when it was dark enough Gowan watched up and down the street while Top scraped a trench across the tire-rut and set the rake teeth-up in it and scattered some leaves over to hide it and they watched from behind the jasmine bush again while the car ripped past. And nothing happened though when the car was gone they went and saw for themselves where the wheels had mashed right across the rake.

"We'll try it once more," Gowan said. And they did: the next morning: and nothing. And that afternoon Top worked on the rake a while with an old file and then Gowan worked on it a while even after they both knew they would still be working on it that way when the Cotillion Club would be planning next year's Christmas Ball. "We need a grindstone," Gowan said.

"Unk Noon," Top said.

"We'll take the gun like we are going rabbit hunting," Gowan said. So they did: as far as Uncle Noon Gatewood's blacksmith shop on the edge of town. Uncle Noon was big and yellow; he had a warped knee that

just seemed to fit exactly into the break of a horse's forearm and pastern; he would pick up a horse's hind leg and set the foot inside the knee and reach out with one hand and take hold of the nearest post and if the post held, the horse could jerk and plunge all it wanted to and Uncle Noon and the horse might sway back and forth but the foot wouldn't move.

He let Gowan and Top use his rock and while Top turned and tilted the water-can Gowan held the teeth one by one to the stone until they would have gone through almost anything that mashed against them, let alone an automobile.

And Gowan said they sure did have to wait for dark this time. For dark and late too, when they knew nobody would see them. Because if the sharpened rake worked, the car might not blow up so bad that Mr de Spain wouldn't have time to wonder what caused it and start looking around and find the rake.

And at first it looked like it was going to be a good thing it was a long December night too because the ground was frozen that they had to dig the trench through, not just a short trench like before to set the rake in but one long enough so they could tie a string to the rake and then snatch the rake back into the yard between the time the wheel blew up and Mr de Spain could begin to hunt for what caused it. But Gowan said at least tomorrow was Saturday so they would have all day to fix the rake so they could be behind the jasmine bush and see it by daylight.

So they were: already behind the bush with the rake-head fixed and the end of the string in Gowan's hand when they heard it coming and then saw it, then the cut-out came on and it came ripping past with the cut-out like it was saying HAha-HAhaHAha until they were already thinking they had missed this time too when the wheel said BANG and Gowan said he didn't have time to snatch the string because the string did the snatching, out of his hand and around the jasmine bush like the tail of a snake, the car saying HAhaHAhaclankHAhaHAhaclank every time the

rake that seemed to be stuck to the wheel would wham against the mudguard again, until Mr de Spain finally stopped it.

Then Gowan said the parlor window behind them opened, with Mother and Father standing in it until Mother said:

“You and Top go out and help him so you both will learn something about automobiles when your Cousin Charley buys one.”

“Me buy one of those noisy stinking things?” Father said. “Why, I’d lose every horse and mule customer I’ve got—”

“Nonsense,” Mother said. “You’d buy one today if you thought Papa would stand for it. — No,” she said to Gowan. “Just you help Mr de Spain. I want Top in the house.”

So Top went into the house and Gowan went out to the car where Mr de Spain was standing beside the crumpled wheel holding the rake-head in his hand and looking down at it with his lips poked out like he was kind of whistling a tune to himself Gowan said.

Then he looked around at Gowan and took out his knife and cut the string loose and put the rake-head into his overcoat pocket and begun to roll the string up, watching the string where it came jerking out of our yard, his mouth still pursed out like he was whistling to himself. Then Top came up. He was wearing the white jacket he wore when Mother would try to teach him to wait on the table, carrying a tray with a cup of coffee and the cream and sugar bowl. “Miss Maggie say would you care for a cup of coffee while you resting in the cold?” he said.

“Much obliged,” Mr de Spain said. He finished rolling the string up and took the tray from Top and set it on the mudguard of the car and then handed the rolled-up string to Top. “Here’s a good fish line for you,” he said.

“It aint none of mine,” Top said.

“It is now,” Mr de Spain said. “I just gave it to you.” So Top took the string. Then Mr de Spain told him to take off that clean white coat first and then he opened the back of the automobile and showed Gowan and Top the jack and tire tool and then he drank the coffee while Top

crawled under the car and set the jack in place and he and Gowan wound up the wheel.

Then Mr de Spain put down the empty cup and took off his overcoat and hunkered down by the crumpled wheel with the tire tool. Except that from then on Gowan said all he and Top learned was some curse-words they never had heard before, until Mr de Spain stood up and threw the tire tool at the wheel and said, to Gowan this time: "Run in the house and telephone Buck Connors to bring Jabbo here double quick." Only Father was there by that time.

"Maybe you've got too many experts," he said. "Come on in and have a drink. I know it's too early in the morning but this is Christmas."

So they all went into the house and Father telephoned Mr Connors to bring Jabbo. Jabbo was Uncle Noon Gatewood's son. He was going to be a blacksmith too until Mr de Spain brought that first red automobile to town and, as Uncle Noon said, 'ruin him'.

Though Gowan said that never made much sense to him because Jabbo used to get drunk and wind up in jail three or four times a year while he was still only a blacksmith, while now, since automobiles had come to Jefferson, Jabbo was the best mechanic in the county and although he still got drunk and into jail as much as ever, he never stayed longer than just overnight anymore because somebody with an automobile always needed him enough to pay his fine by morning.

Then they went into the dining room, where Mother already had the decanter and glasses set out. "Wait," Father said. "I'll call Gavin." "He's already gone," Mother said right quick. "Sit down now and have your toddy."

"Maybe he hasn't," Father said, going out anyway.

"Please dont wait on them," Mother said to Mr de Spain.

"I dont mind waiting," Mr de Spain said. "It's too early in the morning to start drinking for the next few minutes." Then Father came back.

“Gavin says to please excuse him,” Father said. “He seems to have heart-burn these days.”

“Tell him salt is good for heart-burn,” Mr de Spain said.

“What?” Father said.

“Tell him to come on,” Mr de Spain said. “Tell him Maggie will set a salt-cellar between us.” And that was all then. Mr Connors came with a shotgun and Jabbo in handcuffs and they all went out to the car while Mr Connors handed the shotgun to Jabbo to hold while he got out the key and unlocked the handcuffs and took the shotgun back. Then Jabbo picked up the tire tool and had the tire off in no time.

“Why dont you,” Father said, “if you could just kind of embalm Jabbo a little — you know: so he wouldn’t get cold or hungry — tie him on the back of the car like he was an extra wheel or engine, then every time you had a puncture or it wouldn’t start, all you’d have to do would be to untie Jabbo and stand him up and unbalm him — is that the word? unbalm?”

“When you get it patched,” Mr de Spain said to Jabbo, “bring it on to my office.”

“Yessir,” Jabbo said. “Mr Buck can bring the fining paper along with us.”

“Thank your aunt for the coffee,” Mr de Spain said to Gowan.

“She’s my cousin,” Gowan said. “And the toddy.”

“I’ll walk to town with you,” Father said to Mr de Spain. That was Saturday. The Cotillion Ball would be Wednesday. On Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday Jefferson had the biggest run on flowers the town ever had, even when old General Compson died, who had not only been a Confederate brigadier, but for two days he had been Governor of Mississippi too.

It wasn’t through any of us that Mr de Spain found out what Uncle Gavin was planning to do, and decided that he — Mr de Spain — had better do it too. And it would be nice to think that the same notion occurred to Uncle Gavin and Mr de Spain at the same time. But that was too much to expect either.

So it was Mrs Rouncewell. She ran the flower shop; not, Uncle Gavin said, because she loved flowers nor even because she loved money but because she loved funerals; she had buried two husbands herself and took the second one's insurance and opened the flower shop and furnished the flowers for every funeral in Jefferson since; she would be the one that told Mr de Spain how Uncle Gavin had wanted to send Mrs Snopes a corsage to wear to the ball until Mother told him that Mrs Snopes already had a husband and he couldn't send one to her alone and Uncle Gavin said All right, did Mother want him to send one to Mr Snopes too? and Mother said he knew what she meant and Uncle Gavin said All right, he would send one to each one of the Cotillion ladies. Until Mr de Spain had to do the same thing, so that not just Mrs Snopes but all the ladies of the Cotillion Club were going to get two corsages apiece.

Not to mention the rest of the town: not just the husbands and beaux of the ladies in the Club, but the husbands and beaux of all the other ladies who were invited; especially the husbands who were already married because they wouldn't have had to send their wives a corsage at all because their wives wouldn't have expected one except for Uncle Gavin and Mr de Spain.

But mainly Uncle Gavin since he started the whole thing; to listen to them around the barbershop getting their hair cut for the dance, and in Mr Kneeland's tailor shop renting the dress suits, you would have thought they were going to lynch Uncle Gavin.

And one was more than just cussing Uncle Gavin: Mr Grenier Weddel and Mrs Maurice Priest. But all that came out later; we didn't hear about that until the day after the Ball. All we knew about now was the corsage-run on Mrs Rouncewell, what Father called the Rouncewell panic. ("I had to make that one myself," Father said. "It was Gavin's by right; he should have done it but right now he aint even as faintly close to humor as that one was.")

Because he was cussing Uncle Gavin too since now he would have to send Mother a corsage that he hadn't figured on doing since Uncle Gavin was, which would make three she would get — that is, if the rest of the men aiming to attend the Ball didn't panic too and decide they would all have to send the members a separate corsage.) Because by Monday night Mrs Rouncewell had run clean out of flowers; by the time the north-bound train ran Tuesday afternoon all the towns up and down the road from Jefferson had been milked dry too; and early Wednesday morning a special hired automobile made a night emergency run from Memphis with enough flowers to make out so Mrs Rouncewell could begin to deliver the corsages, using her own delivery boy and Lucius Hogganbeck's jitney and even renting Miss Eunice Habersham's home-made truck that she peddled vegetables from to finish the deliveries in time, delivering five of them at our house which they all thought were for Mother until she read the names on the boxes and said:

"This one's not for me.

It's for Gavin." And they all stood watching Uncle Gavin while he stood right still looking down at the box, his hand already raised toward the box and then his hand stopped too in midair. Until at last he broke the string and lifted the lid and moved the tissue paper aside and then — Gowan said it was all of a sudden yet it wasn't fast either — moved the tissue paper back and put the lid back on and picked up the box.

"Aren't you going to let us see it?" Mother said.

"No," Uncle Gavin said. But Gowan had already seen. It was the rake-head, with two flowers like a bouquet, all bound together with a band or strip of something that Gowan knew was thin rubber but it was another year or two until he was a good deal bigger and older that he knew what the thing was; and at the same time he realised what it was, he said he knew it had already been used; and at the same time he knew at least how Uncle Gavin was supposed to believe it had been used, which was the reason Mr de Spain sent it to him: that whether Uncle Gavin was right or not about how it had been used, he would never be sure and so forever afterward would have no peace about it.

And Gowan was just thirteen then; until that one, he wouldn't have thought that anybody could have paid him or even dragged him to a Cotillion Ball. But he said he had already had to see too much by now; he had to be there if there was going to be anything else, any more to it, even if he couldn't imagine what else there could be after this, what more could happen at just a dance.

So he put on his blue Sunday suit and watched Mother with her hair all primped and Grandmother's diamond ear-rings trying to make Father say which one of her four corsages to carry: the one he gave her or to agree with the one of the other three that she thought went best with her dress; then he went across to Uncle Gavin's room where Uncle Gavin got out another white bow tie like his and put it on Gowan and a flower for his buttonhole too and they all went downstairs, the hack was waiting and they drove through the cold to the Square and the Opera House where the other hacks and now and then a car were pulling up for the other guests to get out crimped and frizzed in scarves and ear-rings and perfume and long white gloves like Mother or in claw-hammer coats and boiled shirts and white ties and yesterday's haircuts like Father and Uncle Gavin and (the white tie at least) Gowan, with the loafers, Negro and white boys too, hanging around the door to hear the music after the band started to play.

It was Professor Handy, from Beale Street in Memphis. His band played at all the balls in north Mississippi and Gowan said how the hall was all decorated for Christmas and the Cotillion Club ladies and their escorts all lined up to receive the guests; he said you could smell all the corsages even before you began to climb the stairs and that when you got inside the ballroom it looked like you should have been able to see the smell from them too like mist in a swamp on a cold morning.

And he said how Mr Snopes was there too, in a rented dress suit, and Jefferson probably thought at first that that rented dress suit was just the second footprint made on it, until they had time to realise that it wasn't anymore just a footprint than that water tank was a monument: it was a red flag. No: it was that sign at the railroad crossing that says Look Out For The Locomotive.

And Gowan said how, since Mother was President of the Club that year, everybody (once Mrs Rouncewell finally realised that floral goldmine she had fallen into, there wasn't anybody in Jefferson in the dark any longer about Mr de Spain and Uncle Gavin and Mrs Snopes) expected her to give Uncle Gavin the first dance with Mrs Snopes. But she didn't.

She sent Grenier Weddel; he was a bachelor too. And even after that she still kept the dances equal between Uncle Gavin and Mr de Spain until Mr de Spain ruined it. Because he was a bachelor. I mean, like Uncle Gavin said: that there are some men who are incorrigibly and invincibly bachelor no matter how often they marry, just as some men are doomed and emasculate husbands if they never find a woman to take them. And Mr de Spain was one of them. I mean the first kind: incorrigibly and invincibly bachelor and threat no matter what happened to him because Uncle Gavin said things, circumstance and conditions, didn't happen to people like Mr de Spain: people like him happened to circumstances and conditions.

This time he had help. I wasn't there to see it and I know now that Gowan didn't know what he was seeing either. Because after a while I got born and then big enough to see Mrs Snopes myself, and after a while more I was old enough to feel what Uncle Gavin and Mr de Spain (and all the other men in Jefferson, and Frenchman's Bend and everywhere else that ever saw her I reckon, the little cautious men who were not as brave and unlucky as Uncle Gavin and brave and lucky as Mr de Spain, though they probably called it being more sensible) felt just looking at her.

And after a while more still and she was dead and Mr de Spain had left town wearing public mourning for her as if she had been his wife and Jefferson finally quit talking about her, my bet is there was more than me in Jefferson that even just remembering her could feel it still and grieve.

I mean, grieve because her daughter didn't have whatever it was that she had; until you realised that what you grieved for wasn't that the

daughter didn't have it too; grieved not that we didn't have it anymore, but that we couldn't have it anymore: that even a whole Jefferson full of little weak puny frightened men couldn't have stood more than one Mrs Snopes inside of just one one-hundred years. And I reckon there was a second or two at first when even Mr de Spain had time to be afraid. I reckon there was a second when even he said Hold on here; have I maybe blundered into something not just purer than me but even braver than me, braver and tougher than me because it is purer than me, cleaner than me? Because that was what it was.

Gowan said it was the way Mrs Snopes and Mr de Spain began to dance together. That is, the way that Mr de Spain all of a sudden began to dance with Mrs Snopes. Up to that time, Gowan said, Uncle Gavin and Mr de Spain and the other men Mother sent to write their names on Mrs Snopes's program had been taking turns all calm and peaceful. Then all of a sudden Gowan said everybody else stopped dancing and kind of fell back and he said he saw Mrs Snopes and Mr de Spain dancing together alone in a kind of aghast circle of people.

And when I was old enough, fourteen or fifteen or sixteen, I knew what Gowan had seen without knowing what he was seeing: that second when Mr de Spain felt astonishment, amazement and unbelief and terror too at himself because of what he found himself doing without even knowing he was going to: — dancing like that with Mrs Snopes to take revenge on Uncle Gavin for having frightened him, Mr de Spain, enough to make him play the sophomore tricks like the cut-out and the rake-head and the used rubber thing in a corsage; frightened at himself at finding out that he couldn't possibly be only what he had thought for all those years he was, if he could find himself in a condition capable of playing tricks like that; while Mrs Snopes was dancing that way, letting Mr de Spain get her into dancing that way in public, simply because she was alive and not ashamed of it like maybe right now or even for the last two weeks Mr de Spain and Uncle Gavin had been ashamed; was what she was and looked the way she looked and wasn't ashamed of it and not afraid or ashamed of being glad of it, nor even of doing this to prove it since this appeared to be the only way of proving it, not being afraid or ashamed, that the little puny people fallen back speechless

and aghast in a shocked circle around them, could understand; all the other little doomed mean cowardly married and unmarried husbands looking aghast and outraged in order to keep one another from seeing that what they really wanted to do was cry, weep because they were not that brave, each one knowing that even if there was no other man on earth, let alone in that ball room, they still could not have survived, let alone matched or coped with, that splendor, that splendid unshame.

It should have been Mr Snopes of course because he was the husband, the squire, the protector in the formal ritual. But it was Uncle Gavin and he wasn't any husband or squire or knight or defender or protector either except simply and quickly his own: who didn't really care even how badly Mrs Snopes got battered and bruised in the business provided there was enough of her left when he finally got the last spark of life trampled out of Mr de Spain.

Gowan said how he stepped in and grabbed Mr de Spain by the shoulder and jerked, and now a kind of sound went up and then he said all the men were streaming across the floor toward the back stairs that led down into the back alley and now the ladies were screaming good only Gowan said that a lot of them were streaking after the men too so that he had to kind of burrow along among skirts and legs, down the back stairs; he said he could see Uncle Gavin through the legs just getting up from the alley and he, Gowan, pushed on through to the front and saw Uncle Gavin just getting up from the alley again with his face all bloody and two men helping him or anyway trying to, because he flung them off and ran at Mr de Spain again: and when I was older I knew that too: that Uncle Gavin wasn't trying anymore to destroy or even hurt Mr de Spain because he had already found out by that time that he couldn't.

Because now Uncle Gavin was himself again. What he was doing was simply defending forever with his blood the principle that chastity and virtue in women shall be defended whether they exist or not.

"Damn it," Mr de Spain said, "hold him, some of you fellows, and let me get out of here." So Father held Uncle Gavin and somebody brought Mr

de Spain's hat and coat and he left; and Gowan said this was the time he expected to hear that cutout again for sure. But he didn't. There was nothing: just Uncle Gavin standing there wiping the blood from his face on his handkerchief then on Father's.

"You fool," Father said. "Dont you know you cant fight? You dont know how."

"Can you suggest a better way to learn than the one I just tried?" Uncle Gavin said.

And at home too, in his bathroom, where he could take off his vest and collar and tie and shirt and hold a wet towel against the bleeding, when Mother came in. She had a flower in her hand, a red rose from one of the corsages. "Here," she said. "She sent it to you."

"You lie," Uncle Gavin said. "You did it."

"Lie yourself!" Mother said. "She sent it!"

"No," Uncle Gavin said.

"Then she should have!" Mother said; and now Gowan said she was crying, half way holding to Uncle Gavin and half way beating him with both fists, crying: "You fool! You fool! They dont deserve you! They aren't good enough for you! None of them are, no matter how much they look and act like a — like a — like a god damn whorehouse! None of them! None of them!"

Only Mr Snopes left more footprints than them on Jefferson that night; he left another bloody nose and two black eyes. That fourth corsage Mother got that night was from Grenier Weddel. He was a bachelor like Mr de Spain. I mean, he was the kind of bachelor that Uncle Gavin said would still be one no matter how many times who married him.

Maybe that was why Sally Hampton turned him down. Anyway, she sent his ring back and married Maurice Priest instead and so when Uncle Gavin and Mr de Spain started what Father called the Mrs Rouncewell panic that day, Grenier saw his chance too and sent Mrs Priest not just what Father called a standard panic-size corsage, but a

triple one. Maybe that was why she didn't wear it to the ball that night: it was too big to carry.

Anyway she didn't but anyway after Uncle Gavin and Mr de Spain got through with the alley, Grenier and Maurice Priest went back there and Grenier came out with one of the black eyes and Maurice went home with the bloody nose and the next morning when Sally Priest came to town she had the other black eye. And maybe she didn't wear the corsage in public but she sure did that eye. She was not only around town all that morning, she came back that afternoon so everybody in Jefferson would have a chance to see it or at least hear about it. Gowan said you would even have thought she was proud of it.

Except that Flem Snopes wasn't the first Snopes in Jefferson neither.

FOUR

V.K. Ratliff

SHE WAS. HIS aunt (not his two uncles nor his grandpaw, but any of his womenfolks) could have told him why: proud she still had a husband that could and would black her eye; proud her husband had a wife that could still make him need to.

And he was right about Flem not being the first Snopes in Jefferson too. The first one was Mink, that spent two and a half months in the Jefferson jail on his way to his permanent residence in the penitentiary at Parchman for killing Zack Houston. And he spent them two and a half months laboring under a mistake.

I dont mean a mistake in killing Houston. He knowed what he aimed to do then. Zack was a proud man to begin with, and he had just lost his young wife that he had had a considerable trouble persuading her folks to let her marry him — she was old man Cal Bookright's youngest child, a school teacher, and although Zack owned his place and was a good farmer, that's all he was: just a farmer without no special schooling, besides being a hard liver when he was a young man and even right up

to when he got serious about Letty Bookright and found out that old Cal was serious too. Then when he, or both of them together I reckon, finally beat old Cal down and they was married, he never even had her a whole year before he lost her.

And even then he had to lose her hard, the hardest way: that same blood stallion killed her with his feet in the stall one day that Mink shot him off of that morning — and that made him a little extra morose because he was unhappy. So between being proud to begin with and then unhappy on top of that, he was a little overbearing. But since most of the folks around Frenchman's Bend knowed he was proud and knowed how hard he had had to work to persuade old Cal to let Letty marry him, he would a still been all right if he hadn't tangled with Mink Snopes.

Because Mink Snopes was mean. He was the only out-and-out mean Snopes we ever experienced. There was mad short-tempered barn-burners like old Ab, and there was the mild innocent ones like Eck that not only wasn't no Snopes, no matter what his maw said, he never had no more business being born into a Snopes nest than a sparrow would have in a hawk's nest; and there was the one pure out-and-out fool like I.O. But we never had run into one before that was just mean without no profit consideration or hope at all.

Maybe that was why he was the only mean Snopes: there wasn't no sign of any profit in it. Only he was bound or anyway must a had a little of his cousin I.O.'s foolishness too or he wouldn't have made his mistake. I mean, the mistake not of shooting Houston but of when he picked out to do it; picking out the time to do it while Flem was still off on his Texas honeymoon. Sholy he knowed that Flem hadn't got back yet.

Or maybe the night before he had got the Snopes grapevine word that he had been waiting for, that Flem would reach Frenchman's Bend tomorrow, and it was only then that he taken that old wore-out ten gauge britch-loader and hid in that thicket and bushwhacked Houston off the horse when he rid past. But then I dont know. Maybe by that

time nothing else mattered to him but seeing Houston over the end of them barrels then feeling that stock jolt back against his shoulder.

Anyhow, that's what he done. And likely it wasn't until Houston was laying in the mud in the road and that skeered stallion with the loose reins and the empty saddle and flapping stirrups already tearing on to Varner's store to spread the news, that he realised with whatever horror it was, that he had done too soon something it was long since too late to undo. Which was why he tried to hide the body and then dropped the gun into that slough and come on to the store, hanging around the store ever day while the sheriff was still hunting for Houston, not to keep up with whether the sheriff was getting warm or not but waiting for Flem to get back from Texas and save him; right up to the time when Houston's hound led them to the body and some fish-grabblers even found the gun in the slough that ever body knowed was hisn because wouldn't nobody else own it.

And that was when the rage and the outrage and the injustice and the betrayal must a got unbearable to him, when he decided or realised or whatever it was, that Flem by now must a heard about the killing and was deliberately keeping away from Frenchman's Bend or maybe even all Mississippi so he wouldn't have to help him, get him out of it. Not even despair: just simple anger and outrage: to show Flem Snopes that he never give a durn about him neither: handcuffed now and in the sheriff's surrey on the way in to the jail when he seen his chance right quick and wedged his neck tight into the V of the top stanchion and tried to fling his legs and body over the side until they caught him back.

But it was just the initial outrage and hurt and disappointment; it couldn't last. Which likely his good sense told him it wouldn't, and probably he was glad in a way he had got shut of it so calm good sense could come back. Which it did, since now all he had to do was just to be as comfortable as he could in jail and wait until Flem did get home since even Flem Snopes couldn't stay forever even on a honeymoon even in Texas.

So that's what he done. Up there on the top floor of the jail (since he was a authentic topclass murderer, he wouldn't have to go out and work on the streets like just a nigger crapshooter), not even impatient for a long time: just standing there with his hands laying in the crossbars where he could watch the street and the sidewalk that Flem would come walking up from the Square; not impatient during all that first month and not even bad worried in the second one after the Grand Jury indicted him: just hollering down now and then to somebody passing if Flem Snopes was in town yet; not even until the end of the second month that he begun to think that maybe Flem hadn't got back yet and he would holler down to folks to send word out to Frenchman's Bend for Will Varner to come in and see him.

So it wasn't until just them two last weeks before Court and no Will Varner nor nobody else had come in to see him that he probably found out he simply could not believe that Flem Snopes hadn't got back to Frenchman's Bend; he just could not believe that; he dassent to believe that: only that the grown folks he had been hollering down to hadn't never delivered his message, not sleeping much at night now so that (that-ere top floor behind the barred window would be dark and with the street light shining on it you could see the white blob of his face and the two blobs of his hands gripping the bars) he had plenty of time to stand there all night if necessary waiting for somebody to pass that he could trust would deliver his message: boys, a boy like that Stevens boy, Lawyer Stevens's visiting nephew, that hadn't been spoiled and corrupted yet by the world of growed-up men into being his enemies, whispering down to them until they would stop and look up at him; still whispering down at them even after they had done broke and run: "Boys! Fellers! You, there. You want ten dollars? Get word out to Frenchman's Bend, tell Flem Snopes his cousin Mink Snopes says to hurry in here, hurry — —"

And right up to that morning in court. As soon as they brung him in the door, handcuffed, he started to craning his neck, looking at all the faces, still craning his neck around at the folks still crowding in long after they had run out of anything to set on and still at it while they was choosing the jury, even trying to stand up on a chair to see better until

they would shove him down; still craning and darting his head while the clerk read the indictment and then said, "Guilty or not guilty?" Only this time he had already stood up before they could stop him, looking out over the crowd toward the last faces at the clean back of the room and says:

"Flem!"

And now the Judge was banging his little mallet and the lawyer the Court had appointed was up too and the bailiff hollering, "Order! Order in the court!"

And Mink says again, "Flem! Flem Snopes!" Only this time the Judge his-self leaned down toward him across the Bench and says, "You there! Snopes!" until Mink finally turned and looked at him. "Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"What?" Mink says.

"Did you kill Zack Houston or didn't you?" the Judge says.

"Dont bother me now," Mink says. "Cant you see I'm busy?" turning his head again toward the faces come to see if maybe they wouldn't hang him anyhow, no matter who said he was crazy, since that was what he seemed to want his-self, having already tried it once and so the Law wouldn't be doing no more than just accommodating him, saying: "Somebody there! Anybody with a car. To run out to Varner's store quick and get Flem Snopes. He will pay you, whatever you charge and whatever extry — ten dollars extry — twenty extry — —"

Last summer Lawyer had to do something, he didn't know what. Now he had to do something, he didn't care what. I dont even think he especially hunted around for something. I think he just reached his hand and snatched something, the first nearest thing, and it just happened to be that old quick-vanishing power-plant brass that ever body in Jefferson, including Flem Snopes — sholy including Flem Snopes — had been trying out of pure and simple politeness to forget about.

When as acting City Attorney he drew up the suit against Mayor de Spain's bonding company, charging malfeasance in office and criminal connivance or however they put it, naturally ever body thought all he

aimed to do then was to walk in and lay the papers on Manfred de Spain's desk. But they was wrong; he never no more wanted to buy anything from De Spain than he did that night in the alley behind that Christmas ball, when his brother-in-law told him he couldn't fight because he never knowed how — a piece of information already in Lawyer's possession, having already lived with hisself for more or less twenty-two or maybe twenty-three years. He didn't want nothing from De Spain because the only thing De Spain had that he wanted, Lawyer didn't know his-self that was what he wanted until his paw told him that last afternoon.

So Lawyer filed the suit. And the first thing was the pleasant young feller from the bonding company in his nice city suit getting off the morning train with his nice city suitcase, saying "Now fellers lets all have a drink of this-here nice city whiskey and see if we can jest all get together on this thing," then spending one quick horrified day, mostly on the long distance telephone between talking with them two Negro firemen, Tom Tom Bird and Tomey's Turl Beauchamp, while waiting for Flem to get back from where he had went suddenly on a visit into the next county.

So on the third day the one come from the bonding company that was big enough in it to have the gray hair and come in a Pullman in striped britches and a gold watch chain big enough to boom logs with and gold eyeglasses and even a gold toothpick and the pigeon-tailed coat and the plug hat until by nightfall you couldn't even a got a glass of water in the Holston Hotel for ever porter and waiter hanging around his door to wait on him and he could a owned ever other Negro in Jefferson too by tomorrow if he had had anything he could a done with them, saying "Gentlemen. Gentlemen. Gentlemen." and the mayor coming in where they was all setting around the table, to stand there laughing at them for a while and then saying, "You'll have to excuse me. Even the mayor of just Jefferson, Mississippi has got to do a little work now and then." And Lawyer Stevens setting there calm and white in the face and looking exactly like he done that night when he told his brother-in-law: "Can you suh-jest a better way for me to learn how to fight than the one I just tried?"

And Flem Snopes hadn't got back yet and in fact they couldn't even locate him, like he had evidently went on a camping trip in the woods where there wasn't no telephone; and the big boss one, the one with the white vest and the gold toothpick, says: "I'm sure Mr de Spain would resign. Why dont we jest let him resign and forget all this here unhappiness?" and Lawyer Stevens says, "He's a good mayor. We dont want him to resign," and the white vest says, "Then what do you want? You will have to prove our client's representative stole any brass and all you have is the word of them two nigras because Mr Snopes his-self has went out of town."

"That water tank aint went out of town," Lawyer says. "We can drain that water tank."

So what they called was a special meeting of the board of aldermen. What they got was like one of them mass carcasses to vote between two beauty queens, the courthouse bell beginning to ring about eight oclock like it actively was some kind of a night session of court, and the folks coming up the streets and gathering in the Square, laughing and making jokes back and forth, until they decided right quick that the mayor's office wouldn't hold even the start of it so they moved into the courtroom upstairs like it was Court.

Because this was just January; that Christmas ball wasn't barely three weeks old yet. Even when they chose sides it was still jest fun, because most of them had jest come to watch and listen anyhow, even after somebody beat the Judge's mallet on the table until they quit laughing and joking and hushed and one of the aldermen said, "I dont know how much it will cost to drain that tank, but I for one will be damned — —"

"I do," Lawyer Stevens says. "I already asked. It will cost three hundred and eighty dollars to rig a auxiliary tank long enough to drain and then fill the other one up again and then dismantle the auxiliary and get shut of it. It wont cost nothing to send somebody down inside of it to look because I'll do that myself."

"All right," the alderman says. "Then I will still be damned — —"

“All right,” Lawyer says. “Then I will pay for it myself,” and the old bonding feller, the white vest one, saying “Gentlemen. Gentlemen. Gentlemen.” and the young one, the first one, standing up now and hollering:

“Dont you see, Mr Stevens? Dont you see, Mr Stevens? If you find brass in the tank, there wont be no crime because the brass already belongs to the city?”

“I already thought of that too,” Lawyer says. “The brass still belongs to the city even if we dont drain the tank. Only, where is it at?” and the little bonding feller saying:

“Wait! Wait! That aint what I meant. I mean if the brass aint missing there aint no crime because it wasn’t never stole.”

“Tom Tom Bird and Tomey’s Turl Beauchamp says it was because they stole it,” Lawyer says. Now they was two aldermen talking at once, saying,

“Hold up here; hold up here,” until finally the loudest one, Henry Best, won:

“Then who are you charging, Gavin? Are them nigras under Manfred’s bond too?”

“But there aint no crime! We know the brass is in that tank because that’s where the nigras said they put it!” the little bonding feller was hollering and all this time the big one, the white vest one, still saying “Gentlemen. Gentlemen. Gentlemen.” like a big bass drum a far piece off that never nobody paid any attention to nohow; until Henry Best hollered,

“Wait, god damn it,” so loud that they did hush and Henry said: “Them nigras confessed they stole that brass, but there aint no evidence of theft until we drain that tank.

So right now, they didn’t steal no brass. And if we drain that damn tank and find brass in it, they did steal brass and are guilty of theft. Only, as soon as we find brass in that tank, they never stole any brass because the brass is not just once more in the possession of the city: it aint

never been out of it. God damn it, Gavin, is that what you are trying to tell us? Then what the hell do you want? What in hell do you want?"

And Lawyer Stevens setting there calm and still, with his face still white and still as paper. And maybe he hadn't learned how to fight yet neither. But he still hadn't heard about no rule against trying. "That's right," he says. "If there is brass in that tank — valuable property of the city unlawfully constrained into that tank by the connivance and condonance of a employee of the city, a crime has been committed.

If we find brass in that tank — valuable property belonging to the city unlawfully constrained into that tank with the connivance or condonance of a employee of the city, even if it is recovered, a attempt at a crime has been condoned by a employee of the city. But that tank per se and what brass may or may not per se be in it, is beside the point. What we have engaged the attention of this honorable bonding company about is, jest which malfeasance did our honorable mayor commit? Jest which crime by who did our chief servant of our city condone?" Because he didn't know either what he wanted. And even when next day his paw told him what his behavior acted like he wanted and for a minute Lawyer even agreed, that still wasn't it.

Because that was all they got then, which wasn't nothing to be settled jest off-hand by a passel of amateurs like a alderman board. It was something for a professional, a sho-enough active judge; whether they aimed to or not, they had done got themselves now to where they would have to have a court. Though I didn't know Judge Dukinfield was in the crowd until Henry Best stood up and looked out at us and hollered "Judge Dukinfield, is Judge Dukinfield still here?" and Judge Dukinfield stood up in the back and says, "Yes, Henry?"

"I reckon we'll have to have help, Judge," Henry says. "I reckon you heard as much of this as we done, and we all hope you made more sense out of it than we done—"

"Yes; all right," Judge Dukinfield says. "We will hold the hearing here in chambers tomorrow morning at nine. I dont believe either plaintiff or

defendant will need more counsel than are represented tonight but they are welcome to bring juniors if they like — or should we say seconds?”

Then we all got up to leave, still laughing and talking and joking back and forth, still not taking no sides but just mainly enjoying it, jest being in principle on whichever other side from them two foreign bonding fellers for the simple reason that they was foreigners, not even paying no attention to Lawyer’s twin sister standing there by him now until you could almost hear her telling Henry Best: “Now you’re satisfied; maybe you can let him alone now;” not even paying no attention when a boy — I didn’t recognise who he was — come burrowing through and up to the table and handed Lawyer something and Lawyer taken it; not realising until tomorrow that something had happened between that meeting that night and the next morning that we never knowed about and it’s my opinion we aint going to, just going on home or about our business until the Square was empty except for that one light in his and his paw’s office over the hardware store where he was setting alone — provided it was him of course and providing he was alone — how does the feller say it? inviting his soul?

FIVE

Gavin Stevens

THE POETS ARE wrong of course. According to them I should even have known the note was on the way, let alone who it was from. As it was, I didn’t even know who it was from after I read it. But then, poets are almost always wrong about facts. That’s because they are not really interested in facts: only in truth: which is why the truth they speak is so true that even those who hate poets by simple natural instinct are exalted and terrified by it.

No: that’s wrong. It’s because you dont dare to hope, you are afraid to hope. Not afraid of the extent of hope of which you are capable, but that you — the frail web of bone and flesh snaring that fragile temeritous boundless aspirant sleepless with dream and hope —

cannot match it; as Ratliff would say, Knowing always you wont never be man enough to do the harm and damage you would do if you were just man enough. — and, he might add, or maybe I do it for him, thank God for it. Ay, thank God for it or thank anything else for it that will give you any peace after it's too late; peace in which to coddle that frail web and its unsleeping ensnared anguish both on your knee and whisper to it: There, there, it's all right; I know you are brave.

The first thing I did on entering the office was to turn on all the lights; if it hadn't been January and the thermometer in the low thirties I would have propped the door to stand open too for that much more of a Mississippi gentleman's tender circumspection toward her good name. The second thing I did was to think My God all the lights on for the whole town to see because now I would have Grover Winbush (the night marshal) up the stairs as surely as if I had sent for him since with the usual single desk lamp on he would have thought I was merely working and would let me alone, where with all of them burning like this he would come up certainly, not to surprise the intruder but to participate in the conversation.

So I should have leaped to turn them off again, knowing that once I moved, turned loose the chair arms I would probably bolt, flee, run home to Maggie who has tried to be my mother ever since ours died and someday may succeed.

So I just sat there thinking how if there were only time and means to communicate, suggest, project onto her wherever she might be at this moment between her home and here, the rubber soles for silence and the dark enveloping night-blending cloak and scarf for invisibility; then in the next second thinking how the simple suggestion of secret shoes and concealing cloak would forever abrogate and render null all need for either since although I might still be I, she must forever be some lesser and baser other to be vulnerable to the base insult of secrecy and fearfulness and silence.

So when I heard her feet on the stairs I didn't even think For God's sake take off your shoes or at least tiptoe. What I thought was How can you

move and make that little noise, with only the sound of trivial human feet: who should have moved like Wagner: not with but in the sonorous sweep of thunder or brass music, even the very limbs moving in tune with the striding other in a sound of tuned wind and storm and mighty harps. I thought Since making this more or less secret date to meet me here at this hour of night is her idea, at least she will have to look at me.

Which she had never done yet. If she had ever even seen me yet while I was too busy playing the fool because of her to notice, buffoon for her, playing with tacks in the street like a vicious boy, using not even honest bribery but my own delayed vicious juvenility to play on the natural and normal savagery (plus curiosity; dont forget that) of an authentic juvenile — to gain what? for what? what did I want, what was I trying for: like the child striking matches in a hay-stack yet at the same time trembling with terror lest he does see holocaust.

You see? terror. I hadn't even taken time to wonder what in hell she wanted with me: only the terror after the boy put the note in my hand and I found privacy to open and read it and still (the terror) in the courage, desperation, despair — call it whatever you like and whatever it was and wherever I found it — to cross to the door and open it and think as I always had each time I was that near, either to dance with her or merely to challenge and give twenty or thirty pounds to an impugner of her honor: Why, she cant possibly be this small, this little, apparently standing only inches short of my own six feet yet small, little; too small to have displaced enough of my peace to contain this much unsleep, to have disarranged this much of what I had at least thought was peace.

In fact I might have said she stood almost eye to eye with me if she had looked at me that long, which she did not: that one quick unhasting blue (they were dark blue) envelopment and then no more; no more needing to look — if she ever had — at me, but rather instead one single complete perception to which that adjective complete were as trivial as the adjective dampness to the blue sea itself; that one single glance to add me up and then subtract and then dispense as if that calm unhasting blueness had picked me up whole and palped me over

front and back and sides and set me down again. But she didn't sit down herself. She didn't even move yet. Then I realised suddenly that she was simply examining the office as women examine a room they have never seen before.

"Wont you sit down?" I said.

"All right," she said. And, sitting in that ordinary chair across the desk, she was still too small to hold, compass without one bursting seam all that unslumber, all that chewed anguish of the poet's bitter thumbs which were not just my thumbs but all male Jefferson's or actually all male earth's by proxy, that thumb being all men's fate who had earned or deserved the right to call themselves men; too small, too little to contain, bear those ... I had, must have, seen her at least five years ago though it was only last summer that I must have looked at her; say only since last summer since until then I had been too busy passing bar examinations to have had time to prone and supine myself for proper relinquishment; call it two hundred for round numbers from June to January with some (not much) out for sleeping — two hundred nights of fevered projection of my brother's mantle to defend and save her honor from its ravisher.

You see? It still had not once occurred to me to ask her what she wanted. I was not even waiting for her to tell me. I was simply waiting for those two hundred nights to culminate as I had spent at least some of them or some small part of them expecting when this moment came, if it did, would, was fated: I to be swept up as into storm or hurricane or tornado itself and tossed and wrung and wrenched and consumed, the light last final spent insentient husk to float slowing and weightless, for a moment longer during the long vacant rest of life, and then no more.

Only it didn't happen, no consumption to wrench wring and consume me down to the ultimate last proud indestructible grateful husk, but rather simply to destroy me as the embalmer destroys with very intactness what was still life, was still life even though it was only the living worm's. Because she was not examining the office again because

I realised now that she had never stopped doing it, examining it rapidly once more with that comprehensive female glance.

“I thought it would be all right here,” she said. “Better here.”
“Here?” I said.

“Do it here. In your office. You can lock the door and I don't imagine there'll be anybody high enough up this late at night to see in the window. Or maybe—” Because she was already up and probably for a moment I couldn't have moved, just watching as she went to the window and had already begun to pull down the shade.

“Here?” I said again, like a parrot. “Here? In here?” Now she was looking at me over her shoulder. That's right. She didn't even turn: just her head, her face to look back at me across her shoulder, her hands still drawing the shade down across the window in little final tucking tugs against the sill. No: not again. She never had looked at me but that once as she entered.

She simply confronted me across her shoulder with that blue envelopment like the sea, not questioning nor waiting, as the sea itself doesn't need to question or wait but simply to be the sea. “Oh,” I said. “And be quick, hurry too maybe since you haven't got much time since you really ought to be in bed this minute with your husband, or is this one of Manfred's nights?” and she still watching me though turned now, standing, perhaps leaning a little against the window-sill behind her, watching me quite grave, just a little curious.

“But of course,” I said. “Naturally it's one of Manfred's nights since it's Manfred you're saving: not Flem. — No, wait,” I said. “Maybe I'm wrong; maybe it is both of them; maybe they both sent you: both of them that scared, that desperate; their mutual crisis and fear so critical as to justify even this last desperate gambit of your woman's — their mutual woman's — all?” And still she just watched me: the calm unfathomable serenely waiting blue, waiting not on me but simply on time. “I didn't mean that,” I said. “You know I didn't. I know it's

Manfred. And I know he didn't send you. Least of all, he." Now I could get up. "Say you forgive me first," I said.

"All right," she said. Then I went and opened the door. "Goodnight," I said.

"You mean you dont want to?" she said.

Now I could laugh too.

"I thought that was what you wanted," she said. And now she was looking at me. "What did you do it for?" Oh yes, I could laugh, with the door open in my hand and the cold dark leaning into the room like an invisible cloud and if Grover Winbush were anywhere on the Square now (which he would not be in this cold since he was not a fool about everything) he would not need merely to see all the lights. Oh yes, she was looking at me now: the sea which in a moment more would destroy me, not with any deliberate and calculated sentient wave but simply because I stood there in its insentient way. No: that was wrong too. Because she began to move.

"Shut the door," she said. "It's cold" — walking toward me, not fast.

"Was that what you thought I came here for? because of Manfred?"

"Didn't you?" I said.

"Maybe I did." She came toward me, not fast. "Maybe at first. But that doesn't matter. I mean, to Manfred. I mean that brass. He doesn't mind it. He likes it. He's enjoying himself. Shut the door before it gets so cold." I shut it and turned quickly, stepping back a little.

"Dont touch me," I said.

"All right," she said. "Because you cant...." Because even she stopped then; even the insentient sea compassionate too but then I could bear that too; I could even say it for her.

"Manfred wouldn't really mind because just I cant hurt him, harm him, do him any harm; not Manfred, not just me no matter what I do. That he would really just as soon resign as not and the only reason he doesn't is just to show me I cant make him. All right. Agreed. Then why dont you go home? What do you want here?"

“Because you are unhappy,” she said. “I dont like unhappy people. They’re a nuisance. Especially when it can—”

“Yes,” I said, cried, “this easy, at no more cost than this. When nobody will even miss it, least of all Manfred since we both agree that Gavin Stevens cant possibly hurt Manfred de Spain even by cuckolding him on his mistress. So you came just from compassion, pity: not even from honest fear or even just decent respect. Just compassion. Just pity.” Then I saw all of it. “Not just to prove to me that having what I think I want wont make me happy, but to show me that what I thought I wanted is not even worth being unhappy over. Does it mean that little to you? I dont mean with Flem: even with Manfred?” I said, cried: “Dont tell me next that this is why Manfred sent you: to abate a nuisance!”

But she just stood there looking at me with that blue serene terrible envelopment. “You spend too much time expecting,” she said. “Dont expect. You just are, and you need, and you must, and so you do. That’s all. Dont waste time expecting,” moving again toward me where I was trapped not just by the door but by the corner of the desk too.

“Dont touch me!” I said. “So if I had only had sense enough to have stopped expecting, or better still, never expected at all, never hoped at all, dreamed at all; if I had just had sense enough to say I am, I want, I will and so here goes — — If I had just done that, it might have been me instead of Manfred? But dont you see? cant you see? I wouldn’t have been me then?” No: she wasn’t even listening: just looking at me: the unbearable and unfathomable blue, speculative and serene.

“Maybe it’s because you’re a gentleman and I never knew one before.”

“So is Manfred!” I said. “And that other one, that first one — your child’s father — —” the only other one I thought because, yes, oh yes, I knew now: Snopes himself was impotent. I even said it: “The only other one besides Manfred. Back there in Frenchman’s Bend, that Ratliff told me about, that fought off the five or six men who tried to ambush you in the buggy that night, fought them off with the buggy whip and one

hand because he had to use the other to shield you with, whipped them all off even with one arm broken where I couldn't even finish the fight I started myself with just one opponent?" And still not moving: just standing there facing me so that what I smelled was not even just woman but that terrible, that drowning envelopment. "Both alike," I said. "But not like me. All three gentlemen but only two were men."

"Lock the door," she said. "I've already drawn the shade. Stop being afraid of things," she said. "Why are you afraid?"

"No," I said, cried. I might — would — have struck her with my out-flung arm, but there was room: out of the trap now and even around her until I could reach the door knob and open it. Oh yes, I knew now. "I might buy Manfred from you but I wont buy Flem," I said.

"Because it is Flem, isn't it? Isn't it?" But there was only the blue envelopment and the fading Wagner, trumpet and storm and rich brasses diminuendo toward the fading arm and hand and the rainbow-fading ring. "You told me not to expect; why dont you try it yourself? We've all bought Snopeses here, whether we wanted to or not; you of all people should certainly know that.

I dont know why we bought them. I mean, why we had to: what coin and when and where we so recklessly and improvidently spent that we had to have Snopeses too. But we do. But nothing can hurt you if you refuse it, not even a brass-stealing Snopes.

And nothing is of value that costs nothing so maybe you will value this refusal at what I value it cost me." She moved then and only then did I notice that she had evidently brought nothing with her: none of the scatter of gloves, bags, veils, this and that which women bring into a room with them so that the first minute of their quitting it is a problem resembling scavenging. "Dont worry about your husband," I said. "Just say I represent Jefferson and so Flem Snopes is my burden too. You see, the least I can do is to match you: to value him as highly as your coming here proves you do. Goodnight."

“Goodnight,” she said. The cold invisible cloud leaned in again. Again I closed it.

SIX

V.K. Ratliff

SO NEXT MORNING first thing we heard was that Judge Dukinfield had recused his-self and designated Judge Stevens, Lawyer’s paw, to preside in his stead. And they ought to rung the courthouse bell this time sholy, because whether or not it was a matter of communal interest and urgency last night, it was now. But it was to be in chambers this time and what Judge Dukinfield called his chambers wouldn’t a helt us. So all we done this time was just to happen to be somewhere about the Square, in the store doors or jest looking by chance and accident out of the upstairs doctors’ and suches’ windows while old man Job, that had been Judge Dukinfield’s janitor for longer than anybody in Jefferson, including Job and Judge Dukinfield too, knowed, in a old cast-off tailcoat of Judge Dukinfield’s that he wore on Sundays, bustled in and out of the little brick house back of the courthouse that Judge Dukinfield called his chambers, sweeping and dusting it until it suited him enough to let folks in it.

Then we watched Judge Stevens cross the Square from his office and go through the door and then we watched the two bonding fellers come out of the hotel and cross the Square with their little lawyers’ grips, the young one toting his own grip but Samson, the hotel porter, walking behind the white vest one toting his, and Samson’s least boy walking behind Samson toting what I reckon was the folded Memphis paper the white vest one had been reading while they et breakfast and they, except Samson and his boy, went in too.

Then Lawyer come up by his-self and went in, and sho enough before extra long we heard the car and then Mayor de Spain druv up and parked and got out and says,
“Morning, Gentlemen.

Any of you fellers looking for me? Excuse me a minute while I step inside and pass good morning with our out-of-town guests and I'll be right with you." Then he went in too and that was about all: Judge Stevens setting behind the desk with his glasses on and the paper open in his hand, and the two bonding fellers setting quiet and polite and anxious across from him, and Lawyer setting at one end of the table and Manfred de Spain that hadn't even set down: jest leaning against the wall with his hands in his pockets and that-ere dont-give-a-durn face of hisn already full of laughing even though it hadn't moved yet.

Until Judge Stevens folded the paper up slow and deliberate and laid it to one side and taken off his glasses and folded them too and then laid his hands one in the other on the desk in front of him and says: "The plaintiff in this suit has of this date withdrawn his charge and his bill of particulars.

The suit — if it was a suit — no longer exists. The litigants — plaintiff, defendant and prisoner — if there was a prisoner — are discharged. With the Court's apologies to the gentlemen from Saint Louis that their stay among us was marred, and its hope and trust that their next one will not be. Court is adjourned.

Good morning, gentlemen," and the two bonding fellers got up and begun to thank Judge Stevens for a little spell, until they stopped and taken up their grips and kind of tiptoed out; and now there wasn't nobody but just Lawyer still setting with his paper-colored face bent a little and Judge Stevens still setting there not looking at nothing in particular yet and Manfred de Spain still leaning with his feet crossed against the wall and his face still full of that laughing that was still jest waiting for a spell too. Then Judge Stevens was looking at him.

"Manfred," he says. "Do you want to resign?"

"Certainly, sir," De Spain says. "I'll be glad to. But not for the city: for Gavin. I want to do it for Gavin. All he's got to do is say Please."

And still Lawyer didn't move: jest setting there with that still paper-colored face like it was froze stiff and his hands too laying on the table in front of him: not clenched one inside the other like his paw's: jest laying there. Then Manfred begun to laugh, not loud, not even in no hurry: jest standing there laughing with his feet still crossed and his hands still in his pockets, jest laughing even while he turned and went across to the door and opened it and went out and closed it behind him. Which jest left Lawyer and his paw and that was when Lawyer said it.

"So you dont want him not to be mayor," Judge Stevens says. "Then what is it you do want? for him not to be alive? Is that it?"

That was when Lawyer said it: "What must I do now, Papa? Papa, what can I do now?"

So something happened somewhere between that board of aldermen meeting last night and that special court session this morning. Except that if we ever knowed what it was, it wasn't going to be Lawyer's fault. I mean, we might a knowed or anyway had a good idea what happened and where while them lights was burning in that upstairs office long after ever body else in Jefferson had done went home to bed; some day Lawyer his-self might tell it, probably would, would have to tell it to somebody jest to get some rest from it. What we wouldn't know would be jest how it happened. Because when Lawyer come to tell it, he wouldn't be having to tell what happened: he would be having to tell, to say, it wouldn't much matter what, to somebody, anybody listening, it wouldn't much matter who.

The only one of the whole three of them that understood her, was Flem. Because needing or expecting to understand one another hadn't never occurred between her and Manfred de Spain. All the understanding one another they needed was you might say for both of them to agree on when and where next and jest how long away it would have to be. But apart from that, they never no more needed to waste time understanding one another than sun and water did to make rain.

They never no more needed to be drawn together than sun and water needed to be. In fact, most of Manfred's work had already been done for him by that boy back in Frenchman's Bend — McCarron, who except that he come first, could a been Manfred's younger brother; who never even lived in Frenchman's Bend and nobody in Frenchman's Bend ever seen or heard of him before that summer, like he had been sent through Frenchman's Bend at the one exact moment to see her, like you might say Manfred de Spain had been sent through Jefferson at the one exact moment to see her.

And a heap of McCarron's work already done for him too because she done it: that night when them five Frenchman's Bend boys laid for them and bushwacked them in the buggy to drag him out of it and maybe beat him up or anyhow skeer him out of Frenchman's Bend. And gradually the tale come out how, even with one arm broke, he fought them all off and got the buggy turned around and got her back home all safe except for a natural maiden swoon. Which aint quite right.

Because them five boys (I knowed two of them) never told it, which you might say is proof. That after they broke his arm it was her that taken the loaded end of the buggy-whip and finished the last one or maybe two, and her that turned the buggy around in the road and got it away from there.

Jest far enough; not back home yet: jest far enough; to as the feller says crown the triumph on the still-hot field of the triumph; right there on the ground in the middle of the dark road because somebody had to still hold that skeered horse, with the horse standing over them and her likely having to help hold him up too off of that broke arm; not jest her first time but the time she got that baby. Which folks says aint likely to happen jest the first time but between what did happen and what ought to happened, I dont never have trouble picking ought.

But Lawyer Stevens never understood her and never would: that he never had jest Manfred de Spain to have to cope with, he was faced with a simple natural force repeating itself under the name of De Spain or McCarron or whatever into ever gap or vacancy in her breathing as

long as she breathed; and that wouldn't never none of them be him. And he never did realise that she understood him because she never had no way of telling him because she didn't know herself how she done it.

Since women learn at about two or three years old and then forget it, the knowledge about their-selves that a man stumbles on by accident forty-odd years later with the same kind of startled amazement of finding a twenty-five cent piece in a old pair of britches you had started to throw away. No, they dont forget it: they jest put it away until ten or twenty or forty years later the need for it comes up and they reach around and pick it out and use it and then hang it up again without no more remembering just which one it was than she could remember today which finger it was she scratched with yesterday: only that tomorrow maybe she will itch again but she will find something to scratch that one with too.

Or I dont know, maybe he did understand all that and maybe he did get what he wanted. I mean, not what he wanted but what he knew he could have, the next best, like any thing is better than nothing, even if that anything is jest a next-best anything.

Because there was more folks among the Helens and Juliets and Isoldes and Guineveres than jest the Launcelots and Tristrams and Romeos and Parises. There was them others that never got their names in the poetry books, the next-best ones that sweated and panted too. And being the next-best to Paris is jest a next-best too, but it aint no bad next-best to be. Not ever body had Helen, but then not ever body lost her neither.

So I kind of happened to be at the deepo that day when Lucius Hogganbeck's jitney drove up and Lawyer got out with his grips and trunk and his ticket to Mottstown junction to catch the express from Memphis to New York and get on the boat that would take him to that German university he had been talking for two years now about what a good idea it would be to go to it providing you happened to want to go to a university in Germany like that one; until that morning yesterday or

maybe it was the day before when he told his paw: "What must I do now, Papa? Papa, what can I do now?" It was still cold so he taken his sister on into the waiting room and then he come back out where I was.

"Good," he says, brisk and chipper as you could want. "I was hoping to see you before I left, to pass the torch on into your active hand. You'll have to hold the fort now. You'll have to tote the load."

"What fort?" I says. "What load?"

"Jefferson," he says. "Snopeses. Think you can handle them till I get back?"

"Not me nor a hundred of me," I says. "The only thing to do is get completely shut of them, abolish them."

"No no," he says. "Say a herd of tigers suddenly appears in Yoknapatawpha County; wouldn't it be a heap better to have them shut up in a mule-pen where we could at least watch them, keep up with them, even if you do lose a arm or a leg ever time you get within ten feet of the wire, than to have them roaming and strolling loose all over ever where in the entire country? No, we got them now; they're ourn now; I dont know jest what Jefferson could a committed back there whenever it was, to have won this punishment, gained this right, earned this privilege. But we did. So it's for us to cope, to resist; us to endure, and (if we can) survive."

"But why me?" I says. "Why out of all Jefferson pick on me?"

"Because you're the only one in Jefferson I can trust," Lawyer says. Except that that one dont really ever lose Helen, because for the rest of her life she dont never actively get rid of him. Likely it's because she dont want to.

SEVEN

Charles Mallison

I REMEMBER HOW Ratliff once said that the world's Helens never really lose forever the men who once loved and lost them; probably because they — the Helens — don't want to.

I still wasn't born when Uncle Gavin left for Heidelberg so as far as I know his hair had already begun to turn white when I first saw him. Because although I was born by then, I couldn't remember him when he came home from Europe in the middle of the War, to get ready to go back to it.

He said that at first, right up to the last minute, he believed that as soon as he finished his Ph.D. he was going as a stretcher-bearer with the German army; almost up to the last second before he admitted to himself that the Germany he could have loved that well had died somewhere between the Liège and Namur forts and the year 1848. Or rather, the Germany which had emerged between 1848 and the Belgian forts he did not love since it was no longer the Germany of Goethe and Bach and Beethoven and Schiller. This is what he said hurt, was hard to admit, to admit even after he reached Amsterdam and could begin to really ask about the American Field Service of which he had heard.

But he said how we — America — were not used yet to European wars and still took them seriously; and there was the fact that he had been for two years a student in a German university. But the French were different: to whom another Germanic war was just the same old chronic nuisance; a nation of practical and practising pessimists who were willing to let anyone regardless of his politics, who wanted to, do anything — particularly one who was willing to do it free. So he — Uncle Gavin — spent those five months with his stretcher just behind Verdun and presently was himself in a bed in an American hospital until he got over the pneumonia and could come home, in Jefferson again, waiting, he said, until we were in it, which would not be long.

And he was right: the Sartoris boys, Colonel Sartoris's twin grandsons, had already gone to England into the Royal Flying Corps and then it was April and then Uncle Gavin had his appointment as a Y.M.C.A. secretary, to go back to France with the first American troops; when suddenly there was Montgomery Ward Snopes, the first of what Ratliff

called “them big gray-colored chaps of I.O.’s”, the one whose mamma was still rocking in the chair in the front window of the Snopes Hotel because it was still too cold yet to move back onto the front gallery.

And Jackson McLendon had organised his Jefferson company and had been elected captain of it and Montgomery Ward could have joined them. But instead he came to Uncle Gavin, to go to France with Uncle Gavin in the Y.M.C.A.; and that was when Ratliff said what he did about sometimes the men that loved and lost Helen of Troy just thought they had lost her. Only he could have added, All her kinfolks too. Because Uncle Gavin did it. I mean, took Montgomery Ward.

“Confound it, Lawyer,” Ratliff said. “It’s a Snopes.”

“Certainly,” Uncle Gavin said. “Can you suggest a better place for a Snopes today than north-western France? as far west of Amiens and Verdun as you can get him?”

“But why?” Ratliff said.

“I thought of that too,” Uncle Gavin said. “If he had said he wanted to go in order to defend his country, I would have had Hub Hampton handcuff him hand and foot in jail and sit on him while I telephoned Washington. But what he said was, ‘They’re going to pass a law soon to draft us all anyhow, and if I go with you like you’re going, I figger I’ll get there first and have time to look around’.”

“To look around,” Ratliff said. He and Uncle Gavin looked at one another. Ratliff blinked two or three times.

“Yes,” Uncle Gavin said. Ratliff blinked two or three times again.

“To look around,” he said.

“Yes,” Uncle Gavin said. And Uncle Gavin took Montgomery Ward Snopes with him and that was the exact time when Ratliff said about the folks that thought they had finally lost Helen of Troy. But Gowan was still living with us maybe because of the war in Europe the State Department still hadn’t let his mother and father come back from China or wherever it was yet; at least once every week on the way home across the Square he would meet Ratliff, almost like Ratliff was waiting

for him, and Gowan would tell Ratliff the news from Uncle Gavin and Ratliff would say:

“Tell him to watch close. Tell him I’m doing the best I can here.”

“The best you can what?” Gowan said.

“Holding and toting,” Ratliff said.

“Holding and toting what?” Gowan said. That was when Gowan said he first noticed that you didn’t notice Ratliff hardly at all, until suddenly you did or anyway Gowan did. And after that, he began to look for him. Because the next time, Ratliff said:

“How old are you?”

“Seventeen,” Gowan said.

“Then of course your aunt lets you drink coffee,” Ratliff said. “What do you say — —”

“She’s not my aunt, she’s my cousin,” Gowan said. “Sure. I drink coffee. I dont specially like it. Why?”

“I like a occasional ice cream cone myself,” Ratliff said.

“What’s wrong with that?” Gowan said.

“What say me and you step in the drugstore here and have a ice cream cone?” Ratliff said. So they did. Gowan said Ratliff always had strawberry when they had it, and that he could expect Ratliff almost any afternoon now and now Gowan said he was in for it, he would have to eat the cone whether he wanted it or not, he and Ratliff now standing treat about, until finally Ratliff said, already holding the pink-topped cone in his brown hand:

“This here is jest about as pleasant a invention as any I know about. It’s so pleasant a feller jest dont dare risking getting burnt-out on it. I cant imagine no tragedy worse than being burnt-out on strawberry ice cream. So what you say we jest make this a once-a-week habit and the rest of the time jest swapping news?”

So Gowan said all right and after that they would just meet in passing and Gowan would give Ratliff Uncle Gavin’s last message: “He says to tell you he’s doing the best he can too but that you were right: just one aint enough. One what?” Gowan said. “Aint enough for what?” But

then Gowan was seventeen; he had a few other things to do, whether grown people believed it or not, though he didn't object to delivering the messages Mother said Uncle Gavin sent in his letters to Ratliff, when he happened to see Ratliff, or that is when Ratliff saw, caught him, which seemed to be almost every day so that he wondered just when Ratliff found time to earn a living.

But he didn't always listen to all Ratliff would be saying at those times, so that afterward he couldn't even say just how it was or when that Ratliff put it into his mind and he even got interested in it like a game, a contest or even a battle, a war, that Snopeses had to be watched constantly like an invasion of snakes or wild cats and that Uncle Gavin and Ratliff were doing it or trying to because nobody else in Jefferson seemed to recognise the danger.

So that winter when the draft finally came and got Byron Snopes out of Colonel Sartoris's bank, Gowan knew exactly what Ratliff was talking about when he said:

"I dont know how he will do it but I will lay a million to one he dont never leave the United States; I will lay a hundred to one he wont get further away from Mississippi than that first fort over in Arkansas where they first sends them; and if you will give me ten dollars I will give you eleven if he aint back here in Jefferson in three weeks."

Gowan didn't do it but he said later he wished he had because Ratliff would have lost by two days and so Byron was back in the bank again. But we didn't know how and even Ratliff never found out how he did it until after he had robbed the bank and escaped to Mexico, because Ratliff said the reason Snopeses were successful was that they had all federated unanimously to remove being a Snopes from just a zoological category into a condition composed of success by means of the single rule and regulation and sacred oath of never to tell anybody how.

The way Byron did it was to go to bed every night with a fresh plug of chewing tobacco taped into his left armpit until it ran his heart up to where the army doctors finally discharged him and sent him home.

So at least there was some fresh Snopes news to send Uncle Gavin, which was when Ratliff noticed that it had been months since Uncle Gavin had mentioned Montgomery Ward Snopes. Though by the time Uncle Gavin's letter got back saying Dont mention that name to me again. I wont discuss it. I will not we had some fresh Snopes news of our own to send him.

This time it was Eck. "Your uncle was right," Ratliff said. "He's my cousin, I tell you," Gowan said.

"All right, all right," Ratliff said. "Eck wasn't a Snopes. That's why he had to die. Like there wasn't no true authentic room for Snopeses in the world and they made their-selves one by that pure and simple mutual federation, and the first time one slips or falters or fails in being Snopes, it dont even need the rest of the pack like wolves to finish him: simple environment jest watched its chance and taken it."

Eck was the one with the steel brace where a log broke his neck one time, the night watchman of the oil company's storage tank at the depot; I knew about this myself because I was almost four years old now. It was just dust-dark; we were at supper when there came a tremendous explosion, the loudest sound at one time that Jefferson ever heard, so loud that we all knew it couldn't be anything else but that German bomb come at last that we — Mayor de Spain anyway — had been looking for ever since the Germans sank the Lusitania and we finally had to get into the war too.

That is, Mayor de Spain had gone to West Point and had been a lieutenant in Cuba and when this one started he wanted to get into it too. But he couldn't maybe so he tried to organise a Home Guard company, except that nobody but him took it very seriously. But at least he had an alarm system to ring the courthouse bell when a German attack came.

So when that tremendous big sound went off and the bell began to ring, we all knew what it was and we were all waiting for the next one to fall, until the people running out into the street hollering "Which way

was it?" finally located it down toward the depot. It was the oil storage tank. It was a big round tank, about thirty feet long and ten feet deep, sitting on brick trestles. That is, it had been there because there wasn't anything there now, not even the trestles. Then about that time they finally got Mrs Nunnery to hush long enough to tell what happened.

She was Cedric Nunnery's mamma. He was about five years old. They lived in a little house just up the hill from the depot and finally they made her sit down and somebody gave her a drink of whiskey and she quit screaming and told how about five o'clock she couldn't find Cedric anywhere and she came down to where Mr Snopes was sitting in his chair in front of the little house about the size of a privy that he called the office where he night watched the tank, to ask him if he had seen Cedric.

He hadn't but he got up right away to help her hunt, in all the box cars on the side track and in the freight warehouse and everywhere, hollering Cedric's name all around; only Mrs Nunnery didn't remember which of them thought of the oil tank first. Likely it was Mr Snopes since he was the one that knew it was empty, though probably Mrs Nunnery had seen the ladder too still leaning against it where Mr Snopes had climbed up to open the manhole in the top to let fresh air come in and drive the gas out.

And likely Mr Snopes thought all the gas was out by now, though they probably both must have figured there would still be enough left to fix Cedric when he climbed down inside. Because Mrs Nunnery said that's where they both thought Cedric was and that he was dead; she said she was so sure that she couldn't even bear to wait and see, she was already running — not running anywhere: just running — when Mr Snopes came out of his little office with the lighted lantern and still running while he was climbing up the ladder and still running when he swung the lantern over into the manhole; that is she said she was still running when the explosion (she said she never even heard it, she never heard anything, or she would have stopped) knocked her down and the air all around her whizzing with pieces of the tank like a swarm of bumble bees.

And Mr Harker from the power-plant that got there first and found her, said she begun to try to run again as soon as he picked her up, shrieking and screaming and thrashing around while they held her, until she sat down and drank the whiskey and the rest of them walked and hunted around among the scattered bricks from the trestles, still trying to find some trace of Cedric and Mr Snopes, until Cedric came at a dead run up the track from where he had been playing in a culvert about a half a mile away when he heard the explosion.

But they never did find Mr Snopes until the next morning when Tom Tom Bird, the day fireman at the power-plant, on his way in to work from where he lived about two miles down the track, saw something hanging in the telegraph wires about two hundred yards from where the tank had been and got a long pole and punched it down and when he showed it to Mr Harker at the plant, it was Mr Snopes's steel neck-brace though none of the leather was left.

But they never did find anything of Mr Snopes, who was a good man, everybody liked him, sitting in his chair beside the office door where he could watch the tank or walking around the tank when he would let the coal oil run into the cans and drums and delivery tanks, with his neck and head stiff in the steel brace so he couldn't turn his head at all: he would have to turn all of himself like turning a wooden post. All the boys in town knew him because pretty soon they all found out that he kept a meal sack full of raw peanuts from the country and would holler to any of them that passed and give them a handful.

Besides, he was a Mason too. He had been a Mason such a long time that he was a good one even if he wasn't very high up in it. So they buried the neck-brace anyway, in a coffin all regular, with the Masons in charge of the funeral, and more people than you would have thought sent flowers, even the oil company too although Mr Snopes had ruined their tank for nothing because Cedric Nunnery wasn't even in it.

So they buried what they did have of him; there was the Baptist preacher too, and the Masons in their aprons dropping a pinch of dirt

into the grave and saying “Alas my brother”, and covered the raw red dirt with the flowers (one of the flower pieces had the Mason signs worked into it); and the tank was insured so when the oil company got through cussing Mr Snopes for being a grown man with no more sense than that, they even gave Mrs Snopes a thousand dollars to show they were sorry for her even if she had married a fool. That is, they gave the money to Mrs Snopes because their oldest boy, Wallstreet, wasn’t but sixteen then. But he was the one that used it.

But that came later. All that happened now was that Mayor de Spain finally got to be a commanding officer long enough to ring his alarm bell at least, and we had some more fresh Snopes news to send Uncle Gavin. By ‘we’ I mean me now. Gowan’s mother and father had finally got home from China or wherever it was and now Gowan was in Washington (it was fall) for the last year anyway at the prep school getting ready for the University of Virginia next year and one afternoon Mother sent for me, into the parlor, and there was Ratliff in his neat faded blue tieless shirt and his smooth brown face, in the parlor like company (there was a tea tray and Ratliff had a teacup and a cucumber sandwich and I know now there were a lot of people in Jefferson, let alone in the county where Ratliff came from, that wouldn’t have known what to do with a cup of tea at four oclock in the afternoon and maybe Ratliff never saw one before then either but you couldn’t have told it by watching him) and Mother said,
“Make your manners to Mister Ratliff, bub.

He’s come to call on us,” and Ratliff said,
“Is that what you call him?” and Mother said,
“No, we just call him whatever is handy yet,” and Ratliff said,
“Sometimes fellers named Charles gets called Chick when they gets to school.” Then he said to me: “Do you like strawberry ice cream cones?” and I said,
“I like any kind of ice cream cones,” and Ratliff said:
“Then maybe your cousin—” and stopped and said to Mother: “Excuse me, Miz Mallison; I done been corrected so many times that it looks like it may take me a spell yet.”

So after that it was me and Ratliff instead of Gowan and Ratliff, only instead of two cones it cost Ratliff three now because when I went to town without Mother, Aleck Sander was with me.

And I dont know how Ratliff did it and of course I cant remember when because I wasn't even five yet. But he had put into my mind too, just like into Gowan's, that idea of Snopeses covering Jefferson like an influx of snakes or varmints from the woods and he and Uncle Gavin were the only ones to recognise the danger and the threat and now he was having to tote the whole load by himself until they would finally stop the war and Uncle Gavin could get back home and help. "So you might just as well start listening now," he said, "whether you aint but five or not. You're going to have to hear a heap of it before you get old enough or big enough to resist."

It was November. Then that day, the courthouse bell rang again and all the church bells too this time, wild and frantic too in the middle of the week from the Sunday steeples and a few shotguns and pistols too like the old veterans that were still alive when they unveiled the Confederate monument that day except that the ones this time hadn't been to a war yet so maybe what they were celebrating this time was that this one finally got over before they had to go to it.

So now Uncle Gavin could come home where Ratliff himself could ask him what Montgomery Ward Snopes had done that his name must not be mentioned or discussed. That was when Ratliff told me, "You might as well get used to hearing it even if you aint but five." That was when he said: "What do you reckon it was he done? Your cousin has been watching Snopeses for going on ten years now; he even taken one all the way to France with him to keep his-self abreast and up-to-date. What you reckon a Snopes could a done after ten years to shock and startle him so much he couldn't bear even to discuss it?"

Or this was when he meant it because when Uncle Gavin came home it was for only two weeks. He was out of the uniform, the army, the Y.M.C.A. now but as soon as he was out they put him into some kind of board or committee or bureau for war rehabilitation in Europe because

he had lived in Europe all that time, especially the two years as a student in Germany. And possibly the only reason he came home at all was that Grandfather had died during the last year of the war and he came home to see us as people do in bereavement.

Though I believed then that the reason he came was to tell Ratliff what it was about Montgomery Ward Snopes that was too bad to write on paper. Which was when Ratliff said about all the listening I would have to do, meaning that with him, Ratliff, alone again to tote the load, anyway I could do that much.

It was one day; sometimes Mother let me go to town by myself now. I mean, when she wasn't noticing enough to say Come back here. No: I mean, when she found out I had now she didn't jump on me too hard. — it was one day, Ratliff's voice said, "Come here." He had traded off his buckboard and team and now he had a Model T, with the little painted house with the sewing machine in it fastened to the back in place of a back seat; what they call pickup trucks now though Ratliff and Uncle Noon Gatewood had made this one. He was sitting in it with the door already open and I got in and he shut the door and we drove right slow along the back streets around the edge of town. "How old did you say you was?" he said. I told him again: five. "Well, we cant help that, can we?"

"Cant help what?" I said. "Why?"

"Come to think of it, maybe you're right at that," he said. "So all we got to do now is jest take a short ride. So what happened to Montgomery Ward Snopes was, he quit the fighting army and went into business."

"What business?" I said.

"The ... canteen business. Yes, the canteen business. That's what he done while he was with your cousin. They was at a town named Châlons, only your cousin had to stay in the town to run the office, so he give Montgomery Ward, since he had the most spare time, the job of running the canteen at another little town not far away that would be more convenient for the soldiers — a kind of a shack with counters like a store where soldiers could buy the candy bars and sody pop and

hand-knitted socks like your cousin told us about that time last week when they wasn't busy fighting, you remember? Except that after a while Montgomery Ward's canteen got to be jest about the most popular canteen the army or even the Y.M.C.A. either ever had in France or anywhere else; it got so popular that finally your cousin went his-self and looked at it and found that Montgomery Ward had cut off the back end and fixed it up as a new fresh entertainment room with a door in the back and a young French lady he happened to know in it, so that any time a soldier got tired of jest buying socks or eating chocolate bars he could buy a ticket from Montgomery Ward and go around through the back door and get his-self entertained.

"That was what your cousin found out. Only the army and the Y.M.C.A. had some kind of a rule against entertainment; they figgered that a soldier ought to be satisfied jest buying socks and sody pop in a canteen. Or maybe it was your cousin; likely it was him. Because if the army and the Y.M.C.A. had found out about that back room, they would a fired Montgomery Ward so hard he would likely a come back to Jefferson in handcuffs — providing he never stopped off at Leavenworth, Kansas, first. Which reminds me of something I may have said to your other cousin Gowan once when likely you wasn't present: about how some of the folks that lost Helen of Troy might someday wish they hadn't never found her to begin with."

"Why?" I said. "Where was I if I wasn't there then?"

"It was your cousin. Montgomery Ward might have even saved enough out of the back-room entertainment tickets to bought his-self out of it. But he never needed to. He had your cousin. He was the hair-shirt of your cousin's lost love and devotion, whether he knowed it or not or cared or not. Or maybe it was Jefferson. Maybe your cousin couldn't bear the idea of Jefferson being represented in Leavenworth prison even for the reward of one Snopes less in Jefferson itself. So likely it was him, and afterwards saying, 'But dont never let me see your face again in France.'

“That is, dont never bring your face to me again. Because Montgomery Ward was the hair-shirt; likely your cousin taken the same kind of proud abject triumphant submissive horror in keeping up with his doings that them old hermits setting on rocks out in the hot sun in the desert use to take watching their blood dry up and their legs swivelling, keeping up from a distance while Montgomery Ward added more and more entertaining ladies to that-ere new canteen he set up in Paris—”

“They have chocolate bars and soda pop in canteens,” I said. “Uncle Gavin said so. Chewing gum too.”

“That was the American army,” Ratliff said. “They had been in the war such a short time that likely they hadn’t got used to it yet. This new canteen of Montgomery Ward’s was you might say a French canteen, with only private American military connections. The French have been in enough wars long enough to find out that the best way to get shut of one is not to pay too much attention to it.

In fact the French probably thought the kind of canteen Montgomery Ward was running this time was just about the most solvent and economical and you might say self-perpetuating kind he could a picked out, since, no matter how much money you swap for ice cream and chocolate candy and sody pop, even though the money still exists, that candy and ice cream and sody pop dont anymore because it has been consumed and will cost some of that money to produce and replenish, where in jest strict entertainment there aint no destructive consumption at all that’s got to be replenished at a definite production labor cost: only a normal natural general overall depreciation which would have took place anyhow.”

“Maybe Montgomery Ward wont come back to Jefferson,” I said.

“If I was him, I wouldn’t,” Ratliff said.

“Unless he can bring the canteen with him,” I said.

“In that case I sholy wouldn’t,” Ratliff said.

“Is it Uncle Gavin you keep on talking about?” I said.

“I’m sorry,” Ratliff said.

“Then why dont you say so?” I said.

“I’m sorry,” Ratliff said. “Your uncle. It was your cousin Gowan (I’m right this time, aint I?) got me mixed up but I’ll remember now. I promise it.”

Montgomery Ward didn’t come home for two years. Though I had to be older than that before I understood what Ratliff meant when he said Montgomery Ward had done the best he knew to bring an acceptable Mississippi version of his Paris canteen back home with him. He was the last Yoknapatawpha soldier to return. One of Captain McLendon’s company was wounded in the first battle in which American troops were engaged and was back in uniform with his wound stripe in 1918. Then early in 1919 the rest of the company except two dead from flu and a few in hospital, were all home again to wear their uniforms too around the Square for a little while.

Then in May one of Colonel Sartoris’s twin grandsons (the other one had been shot down in July last year) got home from the British Air Force though he didn’t have on a uniform at all: just a big low-slung racing car that made the little red E.M.F. that Mayor de Spain used to own look like a toy, driving it fast around town between the times when Mr Connors would have to arrest him for speeding, but mostly about once a week back and forth to Memphis while he was getting settled down again. That is, that’s what Mother said he was trying to do.

Only he couldn’t seem to either, like the war had been too much for him too. I mean, Montgomery Ward Snopes couldn’t seem to settle down enough from it to come back home, and Bayard Sartoris came home all right but he couldn’t settle down, driving the car so fast between Sartoris Station and Jefferson that finally Colonel Sartoris, who hated automobiles almost as much as Grandfather did, who wouldn’t even lend the bank’s money to a man who was going to buy one, gave up the carriage and the matched team, to ride back and forth into town with Bayard in the car, in hopes that maybe that would make Bayard slow it down before he killed himself or somebody else.

So when Bayard finally did kill somebody, as we (all Yoknapatawpha County grown folks) all expected he would, it was his grandfather. Because we didn't know that either: that Colonel Sartoris had a heart condition; Doctor Peabody had told him that three years ago, and that he had no business in an automobile at all.

But Colonel Sartoris hadn't told anybody else, not even his sister, Mrs Du Pre that kept house for him: just riding in that car back and forth to town every day to keep Bayard slowed down (they even managed somehow to persuade Miss Narcissa Benbow to marry him in hopes maybe that would settle him down) until that morning they came over a hill at about fifty miles an hour and there was a Negro family in a wagon in the road and Bayard said, "Hold on, Grandfather," and turned the car off into the ditch; it didn't turn over or even wreck very bad: just stopped in the ditch with Colonel Sartoris still sitting in it with his eyes still open.

So now his bank didn't have a president anymore. Then we found out just who owned the stock in it: that Colonel Sartoris and Major de Spain, Mayor de Spain's father until he died, had owned two of the three biggest blocks, and old man Will Varner out in Frenchman's Bend owned the other one. So we thought that maybe it wasn't just Colonel Sartoris's father's cavalry command that got Byron Snopes his job in the bank, but maybe old Will Varner had something to do with it too. Except that we never really believed that since we knew Colonel Sartoris well enough to know that any single one of those old cavalry raids or even just one night around a bivouac fire would have been enough.

Of course there was more of it, that much again and even more scattered around in a dozen families like the Compsons and Benbows and Peabodys and Miss Eunice Habersham and us and a hundred others that were farmers around in the county.

Though it wasn't until Mayor de Spain got elected president of it to succeed Colonel Sartoris (in fact, because of that) that we found out that Mr Flem Snopes had been buying the stock in lots anywhere from

one to ten shares for several years; this, added to Mr Varner's and Mayor de Spain's own that he had inherited from his father, would have been enough to elect him up from vice president to president (There was so much going on that we didn't even notice that when the dust finally settled Mr Flem Snopes would be vice president of it too.) even if Mrs Du Pre and Bayard's wife (Bayard had finally got himself killed testing an aeroplane at an Ohio testing field that they said nobody else would fly and that Bayard himself didn't have any business in) hadn't voted theirs for him.

Because Mayor de Spain resigned from being mayor and sold his automobile agency and became president of the bank just in time. Colonel Sartoris's bank was a national bank because Ratliff said likely Colonel Sartoris knew that would sound safer to country folks with maybe an extra ten dollars to risk in a bank, let alone the female widows and orphans since females never had much confidence in menfolks' doings about anything, let alone money, even when they were not widows too.

So with a change of presidents like that, Ratliff said the government would have to send somebody to inspect the books even if the regular inspection wasn't about due; the two auditors waiting in front of the bank at eight o'clock that morning for somebody to unlock the door and let them in, which would have been Byron Snopes except that he didn't show up. So they had to wait for the next one with a key: which was Mr de Spain.

And by fifteen minutes after eight, which was about thirteen minutes after the auditors decided to start on the books that Byron kept, Mr de Spain found out from the Snopes hotel that nobody had seen Byron since the south-bound train at nine twenty-two last night, and by noon everybody knew that Byron was probably already in Texas though he probably wouldn't reach Mexico itself for another day yet.

Though it was not until two days later that the head auditor was ready to commit himself roughly as to how much money was missing; by that time they had called a meeting of the bank's board of directors and

even Mr Varner that Jefferson never saw once in twelve months, had come in and listened to the head auditor for about a minute and then said, "Police hell. Send somebody out home for my pistol, then show me which way he went."

Which wasn't anything to the uproar Mr de Spain himself was making, with all this time all Jefferson watching and listening, until on the third day Ratliff said, though I didn't know what he meant then: "That's how much it was, was it? At least we know now just how much Miz Flem Snopes is worth. Now your uncle wont need to worry about how much he lost when he gets home because now he can know exactly to the last decimal how much he saved." Because the bank itself was all right.

It was a national bank so whatever money Byron stole would be guaranteed whether they caught Byron or not. We were watching Mr de Spain. Since his father's money had helped Colonel Sartoris start it and Mr de Spain had himself been vice president of it, even if he had not been promoted president of it just ahead of when the auditors decided to look at Byron Snopes's books, we believed he would still have insisted on making good every cent of the money.

What we expected to hear was that he had mortgaged his home, and when we didn't hear that, we just thought that he had made money out of his automobile agency that was saved up and put away that we didn't know about.

Because we never expected anything else of him; when the next day they called another sudden meeting of the board of directors and announced the day after that that the stolen money had been made good by the voluntary personal efforts of the president, we were not even surprised. As Ratliff said, we were so unsurprised in fact that it was two or three days before anybody seemed to notice how at the same time they announced that Mr Flem Snopes was now the new vice president of it.

And now, it was another year, the last two Jefferson soldiers came home for good or anyway temporarily for good: Uncle Gavin finally

come back from rehabilitating war-torn Europe to get elected County Attorney, and a few months later, Montgomery Ward Snopes too except that he was the temporarily for good one.

Like Bayard Sartoris, he wasn't in uniform either but in a black suit and a black overcoat without any sleeves and a black thing on his head kind of drooping over one side like an empty cow's bladder made out of black velvet, and a long limp-ended bow tie; and his hair long and he had a beard and now there was another Snopes business in Jefferson.

It had a name on the window that Ratliff didn't know either and when I went up to the office where Uncle Gavin was waiting for the first of the year to start being County Attorney and told him, he sat perfectly still for a good two seconds and then got up already walking. "Show me," he said.

So we went back to where Ratliff was waiting for us. It was a store on the corner by an alley, with a side door on the alley; the painter was just finishing the curlicue letters on the glass window that said Atelier Monty and inside, beyond the glass, Montgomery Ward still wearing the French cap (Uncle Gavin said it was a Basque beret) but in his shirt sleeves. Because we didn't go in then; Uncle Gavin said, "Come on now. Let him finish it first." Except Ratliff. He said, "Maybe I can help him." But Uncle Gavin took hold of my arm that time.

"If atelier means just a studio," I said, "why dont he call it that?" "Yes," Uncle Gavin said. "That's what I want to know too." And even though Ratliff went in, he hadn't seen anything either. And he sounded just like me.

"Studio," he said. "I wonder why he dont just call it that?"

"Uncle Gavin didn't know either," I said.

"I know," Ratliff said. "I wasn't asking nobody yet. I was jest kind of looking around for a place to jump." He looked at me. He blinked two or three times. "Studio," he said. "That's right, you aint even up that far

yet. It's a photographing studio." He blinked again. "But why? His war record has done already showed he aint a feller to be satisfied with no jest dull run-of-the-mill mediocrity like us stay-at-homes back here in Yoknapatawpha County has to get used to."

But that was all we knew then. Because the next day he had newspapers fastened on the window so you couldn't see inside and he kept the door locked and all we ever saw would be the packages he would get out of the post office from Sears and Roebuck in Chicago and unlock the door long enough to take them inside.

Then on Thursday when the Clarion came out, almost half of the front page was the announcement of the formal opening, saying Ladies Especially Invited, and at the bottom: Tea. "What?" I said. "I thought it was going to be a studio."

"It is," Uncle Gavin said. "You get a cup of tea with it. Only he's wasting his money. All the women in town and half the men will go once just to see why he kept the door locked." Because Mother had already said she was going.

"Of course you wont be there," she told Uncle Gavin.

"All right," he said. "Most of the men then." He was right. Montgomery Ward had to keep the opening running all day long to take care of the people that came. He would have had to run it in sections even with the store empty like he rented it. But now it wouldn't have held hardly a dozen at a time, it was so full of stuff, with black curtains hanging all the way to the floor on all the walls that when you drew them back with a kind of pulley it would be like you were looking through a window at outdoors that he said one was the skyline of Paris and another was the Seine river bridges and ks whatever they are and another was the Eiffel tower and another Notre Dame, and sofas with black pillows and tables with vases and cups and something burning in them that made a sweet kind of smell; until at first you didn't hardly notice the camera.

But finally you did, and a door at the back and Montgomery Ward said, he said it quick and he kind of moved quick, like he had already begun to move before he had time to decide that maybe he better not:

“That’s the dark room. It’s not open yet.”

“I beg pardon?” Uncle Gavin said.

“That’s the dark room,” Montgomery Ward said. “It’s not open yet.”

“Are we expected to expect a dark room to be open to the public?” Uncle Gavin said. But Montgomery Ward was already giving Mrs Rouncewell another cup of tea. Oh yes, there was a vase of flowers too; in the Clarion announcement of the opening it said Flowers by Rouncewell and I said to Uncle Gavin, where else in Jefferson would anybody get flowers except from Mrs Rouncewell? and he said she probably paid for half the advertisement, plus a vase containing six overblown roses left over from another funeral, that she will probably take out in trade. Then he said he meant her trade and he hoped he was right. Now he looked at the door a minute, then he looked at Montgomery Ward filling Mrs Rouncewell’s cup. “Beginning with tea,” he said.

We left then. We had to, to make room. “How can he afford to keep on giving away tea?” I said.

“He wont after today,” Uncle Gavin said. “That was just bait, ladies’ bait. Now I’ll ask you one: why did he have to need all the ladies in Jefferson to come in one time and look at his joint?” And now he sounded just like Ratliff; he kind of happened to be coming out of the hardware store when we passed. “Had your tea yet?” Uncle Gavin said.

“Tea,” Ratliff said. He didn’t ask it. He just said it. He blinked at Uncle Gavin.

“Yes,” Uncle Gavin said. “So do we. The dark room aint open yet.”

“Ought it to be?” Ratliff said.

“Yes,” Uncle Gavin said. “So did we.”

“Maybe I can find out,” Ratliff said.

“Do you even hope so?” Uncle Gavin said.

“Maybe I will hear about it,” Ratliff said.

“Do you even hope so?” Uncle Gavin said.

“Maybe somebody else will find out about it and maybe I will be standing where I can hear him,” Ratliff said.

And that was all. Montgomery Ward didn't give away any more cups of tea but after a while photographs did begin to appear in the show window, faces that we knew — ladies with and without babies and high school graduating classes and the prettiest girls in their graduation caps and gowns and now and then a couple just married from the country looking a little stiff and uncomfortable and just a little defiant and a narrow white line between his haircut and his sunburn; and now and then a couple that had been married fifty years that we had known all the time without really realising it until now how much alike they looked, not to mention being surprised, whether at being photographed or just being married that long.

And even when we begun to realise that not just the same faces but the same photographs of them had been in the same place in the window for over two years now, as if all of a sudden as soon as Montgomery Ward opened his atelier folks stopped graduating and getting married or staying married either, Montgomery Ward was still staying in business, either striking new pictures he didn't put in the window or maybe just selling copies of the old ones, to pay his rent and stay open.

Because he was and maybe it was mostly dark room work because it was now that we begun to realise that most of his business was at night like he did need darkness, his trade seeming to be mostly men now, the front room where he had had the opening dark now and the customers going and coming through the side door in the alley; and them the kind of men you wouldn't hardly think it had ever occurred to them they might ever need to have their picture struck.

And his business was spreading too; in the second summer we begun to find out how people — men, the same kind of usually young men that his Jefferson customers were — were beginning to come from the next towns around us to leave or pick up their prints and negatives or whatever it was, by that alley door at night.

“No no,” Uncle Gavin told Ratliff. “It cant be that. You simply just cant do that in Jefferson.”

“There’s folks would a said you couldn’t a looted a bank in Jefferson too,” Ratliff said.

“But she would have to eat,” Uncle Gavin said. “He would have to bring her out now and then for simple air and exercise.”

“Out where?” I said. “Bring who out?”

“It cant be liquor,” Ratliff said. “At least that first suhjection of yours would a been quiet, which you cant say about peddling whiskey.”

“What first suggestion?” I said. “Bring who out?” Because it wasn’t whiskey or gambling either; Grover Cleveland Win-bush (the one that owned the other half of Ratliff’s café until Mr Flem Snopes froze him out too. He was the night marshal now.) had thought of that himself.

He came to Uncle Gavin before Uncle Gavin had even thought of sending for him or Mr Buck Connors either, and told Uncle Gavin that he had been spending a good part of the nights examining and watching and checking on the studio and he was completely satisfied there wasn’t any drinking or peddling whiskey or dice-shooting or card-playing going on in Montgomery Ward’s dark room; that we were all proud of the good name of our town and we all aimed to keep it free of any taint of big-city corruption and misdemeanor and nobody more than him.

Until for hours at night when he could have been sitting comfortably in his chair in the police station waiting for the time to make his next round, he would be hanging around that studio without once hearing any suspicion of dice or drinking or any one of Montgomery Ward’s customers to come out smelling or even looking like he had had a drink.

In fact, Grover Cleveland said, once during the daytime while it was not only his legal right but his duty to his job to be home in bed asleep, just like it was right now while he was giving up his rest to come back to town to make this report to Uncle Gavin as County Attorney, even though he had no warrant, not to mention the fact that by rights this was a job that Buck Connors himself should have done, he — Grover Cleveland — walked in the front door with the aim of walking right on into the dark room even if he had to break the door to do it since the reason the people of Jefferson appointed him night marshal was to keep down big-city misdemeanor and corruption like gambling and drinking, when to his surprise Montgomery Ward not only didn't try to stop him, he didn't even wait to be asked but instead opened the dark room door himself and told Grover Cleveland to walk right in and look around.

So Grover Cleveland was satisfied, and he wanted the people of Jefferson to be too, that there was no drinking or gambling or any other corruption and misdemeanor going on in that back room that would cause the christian citizens of Jefferson to regret their confidence in appointing him night marshal which was his sworn duty to do even if he didn't take any more pride in Jefferson's good name than just an ordinary citizen, and any time he could do anything else for Uncle Gavin in the line of his sworn duty, for Uncle Gavin just to mention it.

Then he went out, pausing long enough in the door to say: "Howdy, V.K.," before going on. Then Ratliff came the rest of the way in.

"He come hipering across the Square and up the stairs like maybe he had found something," Ratliff said. "But I reckon not. I dont reckon Montgomery Ward Snopes would have no more trouble easing him out of that studio than Flem Snopes done easing him out of the rest of our café."

"No," Uncle Gavin said. He said: "What did Grover Cleveland like for fun back then?"

“For fun?” Ratliff said. Then he said: “Oh. He liked excitement.”

“What excitement?” Uncle Gavin said.

“The excitement of talking about it,” Ratliff said.

“Of talking about what?” Uncle Gavin said.

“Of talking about excitement,” Ratliff said. He didn’t quite look at me. No: he didn’t quite not look at me. No, that’s wrong too because even watching him you couldn’t have said that he had ever stopped looking at Uncle Gavin. He blinked twice. “Female excitement,” he said.

“All right,” Uncle Gavin said. “How?”

“That’s right,” Ratliff said. “How?”

Because I was only eight now, going on nine, and if Uncle Gavin and Ratliff who were three times that and one of them had been all the way to Europe and back and the other had left at least one footprint in every back road and lane and turnrow too probably in Yoknapatawpha County, didn’t know what it was until somebody came and told them, it wasn’t any wonder that I didn’t.

There was another what Ratliff called Snopes industry in town now too, though Uncle Gavin refused to call it that because he still refused to believe that Eck was ever a Snopes. It was Eck’s boy, Wallstreet Panic, and from the way he began to act as soon as he reached Jefferson and could look around and I reckon find out for the first time in his life that you didn’t actually have to act like a Snopes in order to breathe, whether his father was a Snopes or not he sure wasn’t.

Because they said (he was about nine too when they moved in from Frenchman’s Bend) how as soon as he got to town and found out about school, he not only made his folks let him go to it but he took his brother, Admiral Dewey who wasn’t but six, with him, the two of them starting out together in the kindergarten where the mothers brought the little children who were not big enough yet to stay in one place more than just half a day, with Wallstreet Panic sticking up out of the middle of them like a horse in a duck-pond.

Because he wasn't ashamed to enter the kindergarten: he was just ashamed to stay in it, not staying in it himself much longer than a half a day because in a week he was in the first grade and by Christmas he was in the second and now Miss Vaiden Wyott who taught the second grade began to help him, telling him what Wallstreet Panic meant and that he didn't have to be named that, so that when she helped him pass the third grade by studying with her the next summer, when he entered the fourth grade that fall his name was just Wall Snopes because she told him that Wall was a good family name in Mississippi with even a general in it and that he didn't even need to keep the Street if he didn't want to.

And he said from that first day and he kept right on saying it when people asked him why he wanted to go to school so hard: "I want to learn how to count money," so that when he heard about it, Uncle Gavin said:

"You see? That proves what I said exactly: no Snopes wants to learn how to count money because he doesn't have to because you will do that for him — or you had damn well better."

He, I mean Wall, was going to need to learn to count it. Even during that first winter while he was making up two grades he had a job. The store next to the Snopes café that they lived behind in the tent was a grocery store about the same class as the Snopes café. Every morning Wall would get up before schooltime, as the days got shorter he would get up in the dark, to build a fire in the iron stove and sweep out the store and as soon as he got back after school in the afternoon he would be the delivery boy too, using a wheel barrow until finally the owner of the store bought him a second-hand bicycle and took the money out of his pay each week.

And on Saturdays and holidays he would clerk in the store too, and all that summer while Miss Wyott was helping him pass the third grade; and even that wasn't enough: he got enough recommendations around the Square to get the delivery route for one of the Memphis papers, only by that time he was so busy with his other affairs that he made his

brother the paper boy. And the next fall while he was in the fourth grade he managed to get a Jackson paper too and now he had two more boys besides Admiral Dewey working for him, so that by that time any merchant or stock-trader or revival preacher or candidate that wanted handbills put out always went to Wall because he had an organization already set up.

He could count money and save it too. So when he was sixteen and that empty oil tank blew his father away and the oil company gave Mrs Snopes the thousand dollars, about a month later we found out that Mrs Snopes had bought a half interest in the grocery store and Wall had graduated from high school by now and he was a partner in the store.

Though he was still the one that got up before daylight on the winter mornings to start the fire and sweep. Then he was nineteen years old and his partner had sold the rest of the store to Mrs Snopes and retired, and even if because of Wall's age the store still couldn't be in his name, we knew who it really belonged to, with a hired boy of his own now to come before daylight on the winter mornings to build the fire and sweep.

And another one too, except that another Snopes industry wouldn't be the right word for this one, because there wasn't any profit in it. No, that's wrong; we worked at it too hard and Uncle Gavin says that anything people work at as hard as all of us did at this, has a profit, is for profit whether you can convert that profit into dollars and cents or not or even want to.

The last Snopes they brought into Jefferson didn't quite make it. I mean, this one came just so far, right up to in sight of the town clock in fact, and then refused to go any further; even, they said, threatening to go back to Frenchman's Bend, like an old cow or a mule that you finally get right up to the open gate of the pen, but not a step more.

He was the old one. Some folks said he was Mr Flem's father but some said he was just his uncle: a short thick dirty old man with fierce eyes

under a tangle of eyebrows and a neck that would begin to swell and turn red before, as Ratliff said, you had barely had time to cross the first word with him. So they bought a little house for him about a mile from town, where he lived with an old maid daughter and the twin sons named Vardaman and Bilbo that belonged to I.O. Snopes's other wife, the one that Uncle Gavin called the Number Two wife that was different from the Number One one that rocked all day long on the front gallery of the Snopes hotel.

The house had a little piece of ground with it, that old man Snopes made into a truck garden and water-melon patch. The water-melon patch was the industry. No, that's wrong. Maybe I mean the industry took place because of the watermelon patch. Because it was like the old man didn't really raise the water-melons to sell or even just to be eaten, but as a bait for the pleasure or sport or contest or maybe just getting that mad, of catching boys robbing it; planting and cultivating and growing water-melons just so he could sit ambushed with a loaded shotgun behind a morning glory vine on his back gallery until he could hear sounds from the melon patch and then shooting at it.

Then one moonlight night he could see enough too and this time he actually shot John Wesley Roebuck with a load of squirrel shot, and the next morning Mr Hub Hampton, the sheriff, rode out there and told old Snopes that if he ever again let that shotgun off he would come back and take it away from him and throw him in jail to boot. So after that, old Snopes didn't dare use the gun. All he could do now was to stash away piles of rocks at different places along the fence, and just sit behind the vine with a heavy stick and a flashlight.

That was how the industry started. Mr Hampton had passed the word around town to all the mothers and fathers to tell their sons to stay out of that damned patch now; that any time they wanted a water-melon that bad, he, Mr Hampton, would buy them one, because if they kept on making old man Snopes that mad, someday he would burst a blood vessel and die and we would all be in jail. But old Snopes didn't know that because Vardaman and Bilbo didn't tell him.

They would wait until he was in the house, lying down maybe to take a nap after dinner, when they would run in and wake him, yelling, hollering that some boys were in the patch, and he would jump up yelling and cursing and grab up the oak cudgel and go tearing out to the patch, and nobody in it or near it except Vardaman and Bilbo behind the corner of the house dying laughing, then dodging and running and still laughing while the old man scabbled up his piled rocks to throw at them.

Because he never would catch on. No, that's wrong too: he always caught on. The trouble was, he didn't dare risk doing nothing when they would run in hollering "Grampaw! Grampaw! Chaps in the melon patch!" because it might be true.

He would have to jump up and grab the stick and run out, knowing before hand he probably wouldn't find anybody there except Vardaman and Bilbo behind the corner of the house that he couldn't even catch, throwing the rocks and cursing them until he would give out of rocks and breath both, then standing there gasping and panting with his neck as red as a turkey gobbler's and without breath anymore to curse louder than whispering.

That's what we — all the boys in Jefferson between six and twelve years old and sometimes even older — would go out there to hide behind the fence and watch. We never had seen anybody bust a blood vessel and die and we wanted to be there when it happened to see what it would look like.

This was after Uncle Gavin finally got home from rehabilitating Europe. We were crossing the Square when she passed us. I never could tell if she had looked at Uncle Gavin, though I know she never looked at me, let alone spoke when we passed. But then, that was all right; I didn't expect her either to or not to; sometimes she would speak to me but sometimes she never spoke to anybody and we were used to it. Like she did this time: just walking on past us exactly like a pointer dog walks just before it freezes onto the birds. Then I saw that Uncle Gavin had stopped and turned to look after her. But then I remembered he

had been away since 1914 which was eight years ago now so she was only about five or six when he saw her last.

“Who is that?” he said.

“Linda Snopes,” I said. “You know: Mr Flem Snopes’s girl.” And I was still watching her too. “She walks like a pointer,” I said. “I mean, a pointer that’s just — —”

“I know what you mean,” Uncle Gavin said. “I know exactly what you mean.”

EIGHT

Gavin Stevens

I KNEW EXACTLY what he meant. She was walking steadily toward us, completely aware of us, yet not once had she looked at either of us, the eyes not hard and fixed so much as intent, oblivious; fixed and unblinking on something past us, beyond us, behind us, as a young pointer will walk over you if you dont move out of the way, during the last few yards before the actual point, since now it no longer needs depend on clumsy and fumbling scent because now it is actually looking at the huddled trigger-set covey.

She went past us still walking, striding, like the young pointer bitch, the maiden bitch of course, the virgin bitch, immune now in virginity, not scorning the earth, spurning the earth, because she needed it to walk on in that immunity: just intent from earth and us too, not proud and not really oblivious: just immune in intensity and ignorance and innocence as the sleepwalker is for the moment immune from the anguishes and agonies of breath.

She would be thirteen, maybe fourteen now and the reason I did not know her and would not have known her was not because I had possibly not seen her in eight years and human females change so drastically in the years between ten and fifteen. It was because of her mother. It was as though I — you too perhaps — could not have

believed but that a woman like that must, could not other than, produce an exact replica of herself.

That Eula Varner — You see? Eula Varner. Never Eula Snopes even though I had — had had to — watched them in bed together. Eula Snopes it could never be simply because it must not simply because I would decline to have it so. — that Eula Varner owed that much at least to the simple male hunger which she blazed into anguish just by being, existing, breathing; having been born, becoming born, becoming a part of Motion; — that hunger which she herself could never assuage since there was but one of her to match with all that hungering.

And that single one doomed to fade; by the fact of that mortality doomed not to assuage nor even negate the hunger; doomed never to efface the anguish and the hunger from Motion even by her own act of quitting Motion and so fill with her own absence from it, the aching void where once had glared that incandescent shape.

That's what you thought at first, of course: that she must of necessity repeat herself, duplicate herself if she reproduced at all. Because immediately afterward you realised that obviously she must not, must not duplicate: very Nature herself would not permit that to occur, permit two of them in a place no larger than Jefferson, Mississippi in one century, let alone in overlapping succession, within the anguished scope of a single generation.

Because even Nature, loving concupiscent uproar and excitement as even Nature loves it, insists that it at least be reproductive of fresh fodder for the uproar and the excitement. Which would take time, the time necessary to produce that new crop of fodder, since she — Eula Varner — had exhausted, consumed, burned up that one of hers. Whereupon I would remember what Maggie said once to Gowan back there in the dead long time ago when I was in the throes of my own apprenticeship to holocaust: “You dont marry Helen and Semiramis; you just commit suicide for her.”

Because she — the child — didn't look at all like her mother. And then in that same second I knew exactly who she did resemble. Back there in that time of my own clowning belated adolescence (none the less either for being both), I remember how I could never decide which of the two unbearables was the least unbearable; which (as the poet has it) of the two chewed bitter thumbs was the least bitter for chewing.

That is, whether Manfred de Spain had seduced a chaste wife, or had simply been caught up in passing by a rotating nympholept. This was my anguish. If the first was right, what qualities of mere man did Manfred have that I didn't? If the second, what blind outrageous fortune's lightning-bolt was it that struck Manfred de Spain that mightn't, shouldn't, couldn't, anyway didn't, have blasted Gavin Stevens just as well? Or even also (oh yes, it was that bad once, that comical once) I would even have shared her if I had to, couldn't have had her any other way.

That was when (I mean the thinking why it hadn't been me in Manfred's place to check that glance's idle fateful swing that day whenever that moment had been) I would say that she must be chaste, a wife true and impeachless. I would think It's that damned child, that damned baby — that innocent infant which, simply by innocently being, breathing, existing, lacerated and scoriated and reft me of peace: if there had only been no question of the child's paternity; or better still, no child at all.

Thus I would even get a little relief from my chewed thumbs since I would need both of them for the moment to count with. Ratliff had told me how they departed for Texas immediately after the wedding and when they returned twelve months later, the child was already walking. Which (the walking at least) I did not believe, not because of the anguish, the jealousy, the despair, but simply because of Ratliff. In fact, it was Ratliff who gave me that ease of hope — or if you like, ease from anguish; all right: tears too, peaceful tears but tears, which are the jewel-baubles of the belated adolescence's clown-comedian — to pant with.

Because even if the child had been only one day old, Ratliff would have invented the walking, being Ratliff. In fact, if there had been no child at all yet, Ratliff would have invented one, invented one already walking for the simple sake of his own paradox and humor, secured as he was from checkable facts by this much miles and time between Frenchman's Bend and Jefferson two years later. That was when I would rather believe it was Flem's own child; rather defilement by Manfred de Spain than promiscuity by Eula Varner — whereupon I would need only to taste that thumb again to realise that any other thumb was less bitter, no matter which: let her accept the whole earth's Manfred de Spains and refuse Gavin Stevens, than to accept one Flem Snopes and still refuse him.

So you see how much effort a man will make and trouble he will invent, to guard and defend himself from the boredom of peace of mind. Or rather perhaps the pervert who deliberately infests himself with lice, not just for the simple pleasure of being rid of them again, since even in the folly of youth we know that nothing lasts; but because even in that folly we are afraid that maybe Nothing will last, that maybe Nothing will last forever, and anything is better than Nothing, even lice.

So now, as another poet sings, That Fancy passed me by And nothing will remain; which, praise the gods, is a damned lie since, praise, O gods! Nothing cannot remain anywhere since nothing is vacuum and vacuum is paradox and unbearable and we will have none of it even if we would, the damned-fool poet's Nothing steadily and perennially full of perennially new and perennially renewed anguishes for me to measure my stature against whenever I need reassure myself that I also am Motion.

Because the second premise was much better. If I was not to have her, then Flem Snopes shall never have. So instead of the poet's Fancy passes by And nothing remaining, it is Remaining which will always remain, never to be completely empty of that olden anguish. So no matter how much more the blood will slow and remembering grow more lascerant, the blood at least will always remember that once it was that capable, capable at least of anguish. So that girl-child was not

Flem Snopes's at all, but mine; my child and my grandchild both since the McCarron boy who begot her (oh yes, I can even believe Ratliff when it suits me) in that lost time, was Gavin Stevens in that lost time; and, since remaining must remain or quit being remaining, Gavin Stevens is fixed by his own child forever at that one age in that one moment. So since the son is father to the man, the McCarron fixed forever and timeless in that dead youth as Gavin Stevens, is of necessity now the son of Gavin Stevens's age, and McCarron's child is Gavin Stevens's grandchild.

Whether Gavin Stevens intended to be that father-grandfather or not, of course. But then neither did he dream that that one idle glance of Eula Varner's eye which didn't even mark him in passing, would confer on him foster-uncleship over every damned Snopes wanting to claim it out of that whole entire damned connection she married into. I mean foster-uncleship in the sense that simple enragement and outrage and obsession per se take care of their own just as simple per se poverty and (so they say) virtue do of theirs.

But foster-uncleship only to he: never she. So this was not the first time I ever thought how apparently all Snopeses are male, as if the mere and simple incident of woman's divinity precluded Snopesishness and made it paradox.

No: it was rather as if Snopes were some profound and incontrovertible hermaphroditic principle for the furtherance of a race, a species, the principle vested always physically in the male, any anonymous conceptive or gestative organ drawn into that radius to conceive and spawn, repeating that male principle and then vanishing; the Snopes female incapable of producing a Snopes and hence harmless like the malaria-bearing mosquito of whom only the female is armed and potent, turned upside down and backward.

Or even more than a mere natural principle: a divine one: the unsleeping hand of God Himself, unflagging and constant, else before now they would have owned the whole earth, let alone just Jefferson Mississippi.

Because now Flem Snopes was vice president of what we still called Colonel Sartoris's bank. Oh yes, our banks have vice presidents the same as anybody else's bank. Only nobody in Jefferson ever paid any attention to just the vice president of a bank before; he — a bank vice president — was like someone who had gained the privilege of calling himself major or colonel by having contributed time or money or influence to getting a governor elected, as compared to him who had rightfully inherited his title from a father or grandfather who had actually ridden a horse at a Yankee soldier, like Manfred de Spain or our Colonel Sartoris.

So Flem was the first actual living vice president of a bank we had ever seen to notice. We heard he had fallen heir to the vice presidency when Manfred de Spain moved up his notch, and we knew why: Uncle Billy Varner's stock plus the odds and ends which (we now learned) Flem himself had been picking up here and there for some time, plus Manfred de Spain himself. Which was all right; it was done now; too late to help; we were used to our own Jefferson breed or strain of bank vice presidents and we expected no more of even a Snopes bank vice president than simple conformation to pattern.

Then to our surprise we saw that he was trying to be what he — a Snopes or anyway a Flem Snopes — thought a bank vice president was or should be. He began to spend most of the day in the bank. Not in the back office where Colonel Sartoris had used to sit and where Manfred de Spain now sat, but in the lobby, standing a little back from the window watching the clients coming and going to leave their money or draw it out, still in that little cloth cap and the snap-on-behind bow tie he had come to town in thirteen years ago and his jaw still moving faintly and steadily as if he were chewing something though I anyway in my part of those thirteen years had never seen him spit.

Then one day we saw him at his post in the lobby and we didn't even know him. He was standing where he always stood, back where he would be out of the actual path to the window but where he could still watch it (watching how much money was going in or how much was

coming out, we didn't know which; whether perhaps what held him thrall'd there was the simple solvency of the bank which in a way — by deputy, by proxy — was now his bank, his pride: that no matter how much money people drew out of it, there was always that one who had just deposited that zero-plus-one dollar into it in time; or whether he actually did believe in an inevitable moment when De Spain or whoever the designated job would belong to, would come to the window from the inside and say "Sorry, folks, you cant draw out any more money because there aint any more", and he — Flem — simply wanted to prove to himself that he was wrong).

But this time we didn't know him. He still wore the little bow tie and his jaw was still pulsing faintly and steadily, but now he wore a hat, a new one of the broad black felt kind which country preachers and politicians wore. And the next day he was actually inside the cage where the money actually was and where the steel door opened into the concrete vault where it stayed at night; and now we realised that he was not watching the money any longer; he had learned all there was to learn about that. Now he was watching the records of it, how they kept the books.

And now we — some of us, a few of us — believed that he was preparing himself to show his nephew or cousin Byron how to really loot a bank. But Ratliff (naturally it was Ratliff) stopped that quick. "No no," he said, "he's jest trying to find out how anybody could think so light of money as to let a feller no brighter than Byron Snopes steal some of it. You boys have got Flem Snopes wrong. He's got too much respect and reverence not jest for money but for sharpness too, to outrage and debase one of them by jest crude robbing and stealing the other one."

And as the days followed, he — Snopes — had his coat off too, in his galluses now like he actually worked there, was paid money every Saturday to stay inside the cage, except that he still wore the new hat, standing now right behind the bookkeepers while he found out for himself how a bank was run.

And now we heard how always when people came in to pay off notes or the interest on them, and sometimes when they came to borrow the money too (except the old short-tempered ones, old customers from back in Colonel Sartoris's time, who would run Flem out of the back room without waiting for De Spain to do it or even asking his — De Spain's — leave) he would be there too, his jaw still faintly pulsing while he watched and learned; that was when Ratliff said that all he — Snopes — needed to learn now was how to write out a note so that the fellow borrowing the money couldn't even read when it was due, let alone the rate of interest, like Colonel Sartoris could write one (the tale, the legend was that once the colonel wrote out a note for a countryman customer, a farmer, who took the note and looked at it, then turned it upside down and looked at it, then handed it back to the colonel and said, "What does it say, Colonel? I can't read it," whereupon the colonel took it in his turn, looked at it, turned it upside down and looked at it, then tore it in two and threw it in the waste basket and said, "Be damned if I can either, Tom. We'll try another one."), then he — Snopes — would know all there was to learn about banking in Jefferson, and could graduate.

Evidently he learned that too. One day he was not in the bank anymore, and the day after that, and the day after that. On the day the bank first opened about twenty years ago Mrs Jennie Du Pre, Colonel Sartoris's sister, had put a tremendous great rubber plant in the corner of the lobby.

It was taller than a man, it took up as much room as a privy; it was in everybody's way and in summer they couldn't even open the front door all the way because of it. But she wouldn't let the colonel nor the board of directors either remove it, since she belonged to that school which believed that any room inhabited by people had to have something green in it to absorb the poison from the air.

Though why it had to be that monstrous rubber plant, nobody knew, unless perhaps she believed that nothing less than rubber and that much of it would be tough and durable and resilient enough to cope with air poisoned by the anxiety or exultation over as much money as

her brother's, a Sartoris, old Colonel Sartoris's son's, bank would naturally handle.

So when the days passed and Snopes was no longer to be seen taking up room in the lobby while he watched the borrowing and the lending and the paying in and the drawing out (or who did each, and how much of each, which according to Ratliff was the real reason he was there, was what he was really watching), it was as if Mrs Du Pre's rubber tree had vanished from the lobby, abandoned it. And when still more days passed and we finally realised he was not coming back anymore, it was like hearing that the rubber tree had been hauled away somewhere and burned, destroyed for ever.

It was as if the single aim and purpose of that long series of interlocked circumstances — the bank which a sentimentalist like Colonel Sartoris founded in order that, as Ratliff said, a feller no brighter than Byron Snopes could steal from it; the racing car which Bayard Sartoris drove too fast for our country roads (the Jefferson ladies said because he was grieving so over the death in battle of his twin brother that he too was seeking death though in my opinion Bayard liked war and now that there was no more war to go to, he was faced with the horrid prospect of having to go to work) until his grandfather took to riding with him in the hope that he would slow down: as a result of which, the normal check-up of the bank for reorganization revealed the fact that Byron Snopes had been robbing it: as a result of which, to save the good name of the bank which his father had helped to found, Manfred de Spain had to allow Flem Snopes to become vice president of it; — the single result of all this apparently was to efface that checked cap from Flem Snopes and put that hot-looking black politician-preacher's hat on him in its stead.

Because he still wore the hat. We saw that about the Square every day. But never again in the bank, his bank, the one in which he was not only a director but in whose hierarchy he had an official designated place, second-in-command. Not even to deposit his own money in it. Oh yes, we knew that; we had Ratliff's word for that. Ratliff had to know a fact like that by now.

After this many years of working to establish and maintain himself as what he uniquely was in Jefferson, Ratliff could not afford, he did not dare, to walk the streets and not have the answer to any and every situation which was not really any of his business. Ratliff knew: that not only was Flem Snopes no longer a customer of the bank of which he was vice president, but that in the second year he had transferred his account to the other rival bank, the old Bank of Jefferson.

So we all knew the answer to that. I mean, we had been right all along. All except Ratliff of course, who had dissuaded us before against our mutually combined judgments. We had watched Flem behind the grille of his bank while he taught himself the intricacies of banking in order to plumb laboriously the crude and awkward method by which his cousin or nephew Byron had made his petty and unambitious haul; we had seen him in and out of the vault itself while he learned the tide-cycle, the rise and fall of the actual cash against the moment when it would be most worth pillaging; we believed now that when that moment came, Flem would have already arranged himself for his profit to be one hundred percent., that he himself was seeing to it in advance that he would not have to steal even one forgotten penny of his own money.

“No,” Ratliff said. “No.”

“In which case, he will defeat himself,” I said. “What does he expect to happen when the other depositors, especially the ignorant ones that know too little about banks and the smart ones that know too much about Snopeses, begin to find out that the vice president of the bank doesn’t even keep his own loose change in it?”

“No, I tell you,” Ratliff said. “You folks—”

“So he’s hoping — wishing — dreaming of starting a run on his own bank, not to loot it but to empty it, abolish it. All right. Why? For revenge on Manfred de Spain because of his wife?”

“No no, I tell you!” Ratliff said. “I tell you, you got Flem all wrong, all of you have. I tell you, he aint just got respect for money: he’s got active”

(he always said active for actual, though in this case I believe his choice was better than Webster's) "reverence for it.

The last thing he would ever do is hurt that bank. Because any bank whether it's hisn or not stands for money, and the last thing he would ever do is to insult and degrade money by mishandling it. Likely the one and only thing in his life he is ashamed of is the one thing he wont never do again.

That was that-ere power-plant brass that time. Likely he wakes up at night right now and writhes and squirms over it. Not because he lost by it because dont nobody know yet, nor never will, whether he actively lost or not because dont nobody know yet jest how much of that old brass he might a sold before he made the mistake of trying to do it wholesale by using Tom Tom Bird and Tomey Beauchamp.

He's ashamed because when he made money that-a-way, he got hisself right down into the dirt with the folks that waste money because they stole it in the first place and aint got nowhere to put it down where they can risk turning their backs on it."

"Then what is he up to?" I said. "What is he trying to do?"

"I dont know," Ratliff said. And now he not only didn't sound like Ratliff, answering he didn't know to any question, he didn't even look like Ratliff: the customary bland smooth quizzical inscrutable face not quite baffled maybe but certainly questioning, certainly sober. "I jest dont know. We got to figger. That's why I come up here to see you: in case you did know. Hoping you knowed." Then he was Ratliff again, humorous, quizzical, invincibly ... maybe the word I want is not optimism or courage or even hope, but rather of sanity or maybe even of innocence. "But naturally you dont know neither. Confound it, the trouble is we dont never know beforehand, to anticipate him.

It's like a rabbit or maybe a bigger varmint, one with more poison or anyhow more teeth, in a patch or a brake: you can watch the bushes shaking but you cant see what it is or which-a-way it's going until it

breaks out. But you can see it then, and usually it's in time. Of course you got to move fast when he does break out, and he's got the advantage of you because he's already moving because he knows where he's going, and you aint moving yet because you dont. But it's usually in time."

That was the first time the bushes shook. The next time was almost a year later; he came in, he said "Good morning, Lawyer," and he was Ratliff again, bland, smooth, courteous, a little too damned intelligent. "I figgered you might like to hear the latest news first, being as you're a member of the family too by simple bad luck and exposure, you might say. Being as so far dont nobody know about it except the directors of the Bank of Jefferson."

"The Bank of Jefferson?" I said.

"That's right. It's that non-Snopes boy of Eck's, that other non-Snopes that blowed his-self up in that empty oil tank back while you was away at the war, wasting his time jest hunting a lost child that wasn't even lost, jest his maw thought he was — —"

"Yes," I said. "Wallstreet Panic." Because I already knew about that: the non-Snopes son of a non-Snopes who had had the good fortune to discover (or be discovered by) a good woman early in life: the second grade teacher who, obviously recognising that un-Snopes anomaly, not only told him what Wallstreet Panic meant, but that he didn't really have to have it for his name if he didn't want to; but if he thought a too-violent change might be too much, then he could call himself simply Wall Snopes since Wall was a good name, having been carried bravely by a brave Mississippi general at Chickamauga and Lookout Mountain, and though she didn't think that, being a non-Snopes, he would particularly need to remember courage, remembering courage never hurt anyone.

And how he had taken the indemnity money the oil company paid for his father's bizarre and needless and un-Snopesish death and bought into the little back street grocery store where he had been the afterschool-and-Saturday clerk and errand boy, and continued to save

his money until, when the old owner died at last, he, Wallstreet, owned the store. And how he got married who was never a Snopes, never in this world a Snopes: doomed damned corrupted and self-convicted not merely of generosity but of taste; holding simple foolish innocent rewardless generosity, not to mention taste, even higher than his own repute when the town should learn he had actually proposed marriage to a woman ten years his senior.

That's what he did, not even waiting to graduate — the day, the moment when in the hot stiff brand new serge suit, to walk sweating through the soundless agony of the cut flowers, across the highschool rostrum and receive his diploma from the hand of the principal — but only for the day when he knew he was done with the school, forever more beyond the range of its help or harm (he was nineteen. Seven years ago he and his six-year-old brother had entered the same kindergarten class.

In this last year his grades had been such that they didn't even ask him to take the examinations.) — to leave the store of which he was now actual even if not titular proprietor, just in time to be standing at the corner when the dismissal bell rang, standing there while the kindergarten then the first grade children streamed past him, then the second grade, standing there while the Lilliputian flow divided around them like a brook around two herons, while without even attempting to touch her in this all juvenile Jefferson's sight, he proposed to the second grade teacher and then saw her, as another teacher did from a distance, stare at him and partly raise one defending hand and then burst into tears, right there in plain view of the hundred children who at one time within the last three or four years had been second graders too, to whom she had been mentor, authority, infallible.

Until he could lead her aside, onto the vacating playground, himself to screen her while she used his handkerchief to regain composure, then, against all the rules of the school and of respectable decorum too, back into the empty room itself smelling of chalk and anguished cerebration and the dry inflexibility of facts, she leading the way, but not for the betrothing kiss, not to let him touch her even and least of all to remind

him that she had already been twenty-two years old that day seven years ago and twelve months from now he would discover that all Jefferson had been one year laughing at him.

Who had been divinitive enough to see seven years beyond that wallstreet panic, but was more, much more than that: a lady, the tears effaced now and she once more the Miss Wyott, or rather the 'Miss Vaiden' as Southern children called their teacher, telling him, feeding him none of those sorry reasons: saying simply that she was already engaged and some day she wanted him to know her fiancé because she knew they would be friends.

So that he would not know better until he was much older and had much more sense. Nor learning it then when it was too late because it was not too late since didn't I just say that she was wise, more than just wise: divinitive? Also, remember her own people had come from the country (her own branch of it remained there where they had owned the nearest ford, crossing, ferry before Jefferson even became Jefferson) so without doubt she even knew in advance the girl, which girl even since she seems to have taken him directly there, within the week, almost as though she said "This is she.

Marry her" and within the month he didn't even know probably that he had not remarked that Miss Vaiden Wyott had resigned from the Jefferson school where she had taught the second grade for a decade, to accept a position in a school in Bristol, Virginia, since when that fall day came he was two months husband to a tense fierce not quite plain-faced girl with an ambition equal to his and a will if anything even more furious against that morass, that swamp, that fetid seethe from which her husband (she naturally believed) had extricated himself by his own suspenders and boot straps, herself clerking in the store now so that the mother-in-law could now stay at home and do the cooking and housework; herself, although at that time she didn't weigh quite a hundred pounds, doing the apprentice chores — sweeping, wrestling the barrels of flour and molasses, making the rounds of the town on the bicycle in which the telephone orders were delivered until they could afford to buy the second-hand Model T Ford — during the hours while

the younger one, Admiral Dewey, was in school where it was she now, his sister-in-law, who made him go whether he would or not.

Yes, we all knew that; that was a part of our folklore, or Snopeslore, if you like: how Flem himself was anyway the second one to see that here was a young man who was going to make money by simple honesty and industry, and tried to buy into the business or anyway lend Wallstreet money to expand it; and we all knew who had refused the offer. That is, we liked to believe, having come to know Wallstreet a little now, that he would have declined anyway. But since we had come to know his wife, we knew that he was going to decline. And how he had learned to be a clerk and a partner the hard way, and he would have to learn to be a proprietor the hard way too: and sure enough in time he overbought his stock; and how he went to Colonel Sartoris's bank for help.

That was when we first realised that Flem Snopes actually was a member of the board of directors of a Jefferson bank. I mean, that a Flem Snopes actually could be. Oh, we had seen his name among the others on the annual bank report above the facsimile of Colonel Sartoris's illegible signature as president, but we merely drew the logical conclusion that that was simply old man Will Varner's voting proxy to save him a trip to town; all we thought was, "That means that Manfred de Spain will have Uncle Billy's stock too in case he ever wants anything."

And obviously we knew, believed, that Flem had tried again to buy into Wallstreet's business, save him with a personal private loan before he, as a director, blocked the loan from the bank. Because we thought we saw it all now; all we seemed to have missed was, what hold he could have had over the drummer to compel him to persuade Wallstreet to overbuy, and over the wholesale house in St Louis to persuade it to accept the sale; — very likely the same sign or hoodoo-mark he planned to use on the other bank, the Bank of Jefferson, to prevent them lending Wallstreet money after Colonel Sartoris's bank declined.

But there was never any question about which one of the Wallstreet Snopeses had turned Flem down. Anybody could have seen her that

morning, running, thin, not so much tense as fierce, still weighing less than a hundred pounds, even after six months of marriage looking still not so much like a nymph as like a deer, not around the Square as pedestrians walked but across it, through it, darting among the automobiles and teams and wagons, toward and into the bank (and how she knew, divined so quickly that he had been refused the loan we didn't know either, though on second thought that was obvious too: that simple automatic fierce Snopes antipathy which had reacted as soon as common sense told her it should not have taken the bank that long to say Yes, and that Flem Snopes was on the board of directors of it); — darting into the lobby already crying: "Where is he? Where is Wall?" and out again when they told her Gone, not at all desperate: just fierce and hurried, onto the street where someone else told her he went that way: which was the street leading to the back street leading to the rented house where Flem lived, who had no office nor other place of business, running now until she overtook him, in time.

And anyone there could have seen that too: clinging to him in broad daylight when even sweethearts didn't embrace on the street by daylight and no lady anywhere at any time said God damn in public, crying (weeping too but no tears, as if the fierce taut irreconcilable face blistered and evaporated tears away as fast as they emerged onto it): "Dont you dare! Them damn Snopes! God damn them! God damn them!"

So we thought of course that her father, a small though thrifty farmer, had found the money somehow. Because Wallstreet saved his business. And he had not only learned about solvency from that experience, he had learned something more about success too.

In another year he had rented (then bought it) the store next door and converted it into a warehouse, stock room, so he could buy in larger wholesale lots for less money; another few years and he had rented what had been the last livery stable in Jefferson for his warehouse and knocked down the wall between the two stores and now we had in Jefferson the first self-service grocery store we had ever seen, built on the pattern which the big chain grocery stores were to make nation-

wide in the purveying of food; the street his store faced on made an L with the alley where the old Snopes restaurant had been so that the tent in which he had passed his first night in Jefferson was directly behind his store too; he either bought or rented that lot (there were more automobiles in Jefferson now) and made a parking lot and so taught the housewives of Jefferson to come to town and seek his bargains and carry them home themselves.

That is, we — or that is, I — thought that it was his father-in-law who had found the money to save him, until now. “Well, I’ll be damned,” I said. “So it was you.”

“That’s right,” Ratliff said. “All I wanted was just a note for it. But he insisted on making me a partner. And I’ll tell you something else we’re fixing to do. We’re fixing to open a wholesale.”

“A what?” I said.

“A wholesale company like the big ones in St Louis, right here in Jefferson, so that instead of either having to pay high freight on a little shirt-tail full of stuff, or risk overloading on something perishable to save freight, a merchant anywhere in the county can buy jest what he needs at a decent price without having to add no freight a-tall.”

“Well I’ll be damned,” I said. “Why didn’t you think of that yourself years ago?”

“That’s right,” Ratliff said. “Why didn’t you?”

“Well I’ll be damned,” I still said. Then I said: “Hell fire, are you still selling stock? Can I get in?”

“Why not?” he said. “Long as your name aint Snopes. Maybe you could even buy some from him if your name wasn’t jest Flem Snopes. But you got to pass that-ere little gal first. His wife. You ought to stop in there sometime and hear her say Them goddamn Snopes once. Oh sho, all of us have thought that, and some of us have even said it out loud. But she’s different. She means it. And she aint going to never let him change neither.”

“Yes,” I said. “I’ve heard about that. I wonder why she never changed their name.”

“No no,” he said. “You dont understand. She dont want to change it. She jest wants to live it down. She aint trying to drag him by the hair out of Snopes, to escape from Snopes. She’s got to purify Snopes itself. She’s got to beat Snopes from the inside. Stop in there and listen sometimes.”

“A wholesale house,” I said. “So that’s why Flem — —” But that was foolish, as Ratliff himself saw even before I said it.

“ — why Flem changed his account from his own bank to the other one? No no. We aint using the banks here. We dont need them. Like Flem was the first feller in Jefferson to find out that. Wall’s credit is too good with the big wholesalers and brokers we deal with. The way they figger, he aint cutting into nobody’s private business: he’s helping all business. We dont need no bank. But we — he — still aims to keep it home-made. So you see him if you want to talk about stock.”

“I will,” I said. “But what is Flem himself up to? Why did he pull his money out of De Spain’s bank as soon as he got to be vice president of it? Because he’s still that, so he still owns stock in it. But he doesn’t keep his own money in it. Why?”

“Oh,” he said, “is that what you’re worried about? Why, we aint sho yet. All we’re doing now is watching the bushes shake.” Between the voice and the face there was always two Ratliffs: the second one offering you a fair and open chance to divine what the first one really meant by what it was saying, provided you were smart enough. But this time that second Ratliff was trying to tell me something which for whatever reason the other could not say in words.

“As long as that little gal lives, Flem aint got no chance to ever get a finger-hold on Wall. So Eck Snopes is out. And I.O. Snopes never was in because I.O. never was worth nothing even to I.O., let alone for anybody else to take a cut of the profit. So that jest about exhausts all

the Snopes in reach that a earnest hardworking feller might make a forced share-crop on.”

“There’s that—” I said.

“All right,” he said. “I’ll say it for you. Montgomery Ward. The photograph gallery. If Flem aint been in that thing all the time from the very first, he dont never aim to be. And the fact that there aint been a new photograph in his show window in over a year now, let alone Jason Compson collecting his maw’s rent prompt on time since the second month after Montgomery Ward opened up, is proof enough that Flem seen from the first day that there wasn’t nothing there for him to waste his time on. So I cant think of but one Snopes object that he’s got left.”

“All right,” I said. “I’ll bite.”

“That-ere twenty-dollar gold piece.”

“What twenty-dollar gold piece?”

“Dont you remember what I said that day, about how when a country boy makes his first Sad-dy night trip to Memphis, that-ere twenty-dollar bill he wears pinned inside his undershirt so he can at least get back home?”

“Go on,” I said. “You cant stop now.”

“What’s the one thing in Jefferson that Flem aint got yet? The one thing he might want. That maybe he’s been working at ever since they taken Colonel Sartoris out of that wrecked car and he voted Uncle Billy Varner’s stock to make Manfred de Spain president of that bank?”

“To be president of it himself,” I said. “No!” I said. “It cant be! It must not be!” But he was just watching me. “Nonsense,” I said.

“Why nonsense?” he said.

“Because, to use what you call that twenty-dollar gold piece, he’s got to use his wife too. Do you mean to tell me you believe for one moment that his wife will side with him against Manfred de Spain?” But still he just looked at me. “Dont you agree?” I said. “How can he hope for that?”

Yes, he was just looking at me. “That would jest be when he finally runs out of the bushes,” he said. “Out to where we can see him. Into the clearing. What’s that clearing?”

“Clearing?” I said.

“That he was working toward? — All right,” he said. “That druv him to burrow through the bushes to get out of them?”

“Rapacity,” I said. “Greed. Money. What else does he need? want? What else has ever driven him?”

But he just looked at me, and now I could actually watch that urgency fade until only the familiar face remained, bland, smooth, impenetrable and courteous. He drew out the dollar watch looped on a knotted shoelace between his button hole and his breast pocket. “I be dog if it aint almost dinner time,” he said. “Jest about time to walk to it.”

NINE

V. K. Ratliff

BECAUSE HE MISSED it. He missed it completely.

TEN

Charles Mallison

THEY FINALLY CAUGHT Montgomery Ward Snopes. I mean, they caught Grover Cleveland Winbush. Like Ratliff said, anybody bootlegging anything that never had any more sense than to sell Grover Cleveland Winbush some of it, deserved to be caught.

Except Uncle Gavin said that, even without Grover Cleveland, Montgomery Ward was bound to be caught sooner or later, since there simply wasn’t any place in Jefferson, Mississippi culture for a vocation or hobby or interest like the one Montgomery Ward had tried to establish among us. In Europe, yes; and maybe among the metropolitan

rich or bohemians, yes too. But not in a land composed mainly of rural Baptists.

So they caught Grover Cleveland. It was one night, not very late. I mean, the stores were all closed but folks were still going home from the second running of the picture show; and some of them, I reckon anybody that passed and happened to look inside, saw the two fellows inside Uncle Willy Christian's drug store working at the prescription case where Uncle Willy kept the medicines; and even though they were strangers — that is, nobody passing recognised them — the ones that looked in and saw them said the next day that they never thought anything of it, being that early and the lights on and Grover Cleveland not having anything to do as night marshal except to walk around the Square and look in the windows, that sooner or later he would have to see them if they never had any business there.

So it wasn't until the next morning when Uncle Willy opened up for business, that he found out somebody had unlocked the store and not only unlocked the safe and took what money he had in it, they had broke open his pharmacy cabinet and stole all his morphine and sleeping pills. That's what caused the trouble.

Ratliff said they could have taken the money or for that matter all the rest of the store too except that prescription case, including the alcohol because Walter Christian, the Negro janitor, had been taking that a drink at a time ever since he and Uncle Willy both were boys and first started in the store, and Uncle Willy would have cussed and stomped around of course and even had the Law in, but that was all. But whoever touched that prescription cabinet with the morphine in it raised the devil himself.

Uncle Willy was a bachelor, about sixty years old, and if you came in at the wrong time of day he even snarled at children too. But if you were careful to remember the right time of day he supplied the balls and bats for our baseball teams and after a game he would give the whole teams ice cream free whether they won or not. I mean, until one summer some of the church ladies decided to reform him. After that it

was hard to tell when to speak to him or not. Then the ladies would give up for a while and it would be all right again.

Besides that, the federal drug inspectors had been nagging and worrying at him for years about keeping the morphine in that little flimsy wooden drawer that anybody with a screwdriver or a knife blade or maybe just a hair pin could prize open, even though it did have a key to it that Uncle Willy kept hidden under a gallon jug marked Nux Vomica on a dark shelf that nobody but him was even supposed to bother because it was so dark back there that even Walter never went back there since Uncle Willy couldn't have seen whether he had swept there or not even if he had; and each time Uncle Willy would have to promise the inspectors to lock the morphine up in the safe from now on.

So now he was going to have more trouble than ever explaining to the inspectors why he hadn't put the morphine in the safe like he promised; reminding them how, even if he had, the robbers would still have got it and it wasn't going to do any good now because, like Ratliff said, federal folks were not interested in whether anything worked or not, all they were interested in was that you did it exactly like their rules said to do it.

So Uncle Willy was the real cause of them catching Montgomery Ward Snopes. He was good and wild at first. He was so wild for a while that nobody could find out how much had been stolen or even what he was talking about, with more folks coming in from the street not so much to see where the robbery was but to watch Uncle Willy; until finally, it was Ratliff of course, said: "Uncle Willy dont need no sheriff yet. What he needs first is Doc Peabody."

"Of course," Uncle Gavin said to Ratliff. "Why does it always have to be you?" He went back to where Skeets McGowan, Uncle Willy's clerk and soda-jerker, and two other boys were standing with their heads inside the open safe looking at where the money had been stolen from, and pulled Skeets out and told him to run upstairs quick and tell Doctor Peabody to hurry down. Then Uncle Gavin and the others kind of

crowded Uncle Willy more or less quiet without actually holding him until Doctor Peabody came in with the needle already in his hand even and ran most of them out and rolled up Uncle Willy's sleeve then rolled it back down again and then Uncle Willy settled down into being just mad.

So he was the one responsible for catching Montgomery Ward. Or the two fellows that stole his morphine were. By this time we knew that several people passing from the picture show had seen the two fellows in the store, and now Uncle Willy wanted to know where Grover Cleveland Winbush was all that time. Yes sir, he wasn't wild now. He was just mad, as calm and steady and deadly about it as a horsefly. By that time, nine o'clock in the morning, Grover Cleveland would be at home in bed asleep. Somebody said they would telephone out and wake him up and tell him to get on back to the Square fast as he could.

"Hell," Uncle Willy said. "That'll take too long. I'll go out there myself. I'll wake him up and get him back to town. He won't need to worry about quick because I'll tend to that. Who's got a car?"

Only Mr Buck Connors, the marshal, the chief of police, was there by this time. "Hold up now, Uncle Willy," he said. "There's a right way and a wrong way to do things. We want to do this one the right way. These folks have probably done already trompled up most of the evidence. But at least we can make an investigation according to police procedure regulations. Besides, Grover Cleveland was up all last night on duty. He's got to stay up again all night tonight. He's got to get his sleep."

"Exactly," Uncle Willy said. "Egg-zackly. Up all night, but not far enough up to see two damn scoundrels robbing my store in full view of the whole damn town. Robbed me of three hundred dollars' worth of valuable medicine, yet Grover Winbush—"

"How much cash did they get?" Mr Connors said.

"What?" Uncle Willy said.

"How much money was in the safe?"

“I dont know,” Uncle Willy said. “I didn’t count it. — yet Grover Winbush that we pay a hundred and twenty-five a month just to wake up once an hour during the night and look around the Square, has got to get his sleep. If nobody’s got a car here, get me a taxi. That son of a bitch has already cost me three hundred dollars; I aint going to stop at just one more quarter.”

But they still held him hemmed off while somebody telephoned Grover Cleveland.

And at first we thought that whoever telephoned and woke him up had scared him good too, until we learned the rest of it and realised all he needed for his scare was to hear that anything had happened anywhere in Jefferson last night that he would have seen if he had been where he was supposed to be or where folks thought he was. Because it wasn’t hardly any time before Ratliff said:

“There he was. I jest seen him.”

“Where?” somebody said.

“He jest snatched his head back in the alley yonder,” Ratliff said. We all watched the alley. It led from a side street onto the Square where Grover Cleveland could have cut across lots from his boarding house. Then he stepped out of it, already walking fast. He didn’t wear a uniform like Mr Connors, he wore ordinary clothes with usually his coat-tail hiked up over the handle of the pistol and the blackjack in his hip pocket, coming up the street fast, picking his feet up quick like a cat on a hot stove.

And if you thought it would have been Mr Connors or even Mr Hampton, the sheriff, that did the investigating, you would have been wrong. It was Uncle Willy himself. At first Grover Cleveland tried to bluff. Then he fell back on lying. Then he just fell back.

“Howdy, son,” Uncle Willy said. “Sorry to wake you up in the middle of the night like this, just to answer a few questions. The first one is, just where were you, roughly, more or less, at exactly half-past ten oclock last night, more or less?”

“Who, me?” Grover Cleveland said. “Where I’m always at at that time of night: standing right across yonder in the station door where if anybody after the last picture show might need anything, like maybe losing their car key or maybe they find out they got a flat tire—”

“Well, well,” Uncle Willy said. “And yet you never saw a light on in my store, and them two damned scoundrels — —”

“Wait,” Grover Cleveland said. “I’m wrong. When I seen the last picture show beginning to let out, I noticed the time, half past ten or maybe twenty-five to eleven, and I decided to go down and close up the Blue Goose and get that out of the way while I had time.” The Blue Goose was a Negro café below the cotton gin. “I’m wrong,” Grover Cleveland said. “That’s where I was.”

Uncle Willy never said anything. He just turned his head enough and hollered “Walter!” Walter came in. His grandfather had belonged to Uncle Willy’s grandfather before the Surrender and he and Uncle Willy were about the same age and a good deal alike, except that instead of morphine Walter would go into the medicinal alcohol every time Uncle Willy put the key down and turned his back, and if anything Walter was a little more irascible and short-tempered. He came in from the back and said,

“Who calling me?”

“I am,” Uncle Willy said. “Where were you at half past ten last night?”

“Who, me?” Walter said, exactly like Grover Cleveland did, except he said it like Uncle Willy had asked him where he was when Dr Einstein first propounded his theory of relativity. “You talking about last night?” he said. “Where you reckon? At home in bed.”

“You were at that damned Blue Goose café, where you are every night until Grover Winbush here comes in and runs all you niggers out and closes it up,” Uncle Willy said.

“Then what you asking me, if you know so much?” Walter said.

“All right,” Uncle Willy said. “What time last night did Mr Winbush close it?” Walter stood there, blinking. His eyes were always red. He made in an old fashioned hand freezer the ice cream which Uncle Willy sold over his soda fountain. He made it in the cellar: a dark cool place with a single door opening onto the alley behind the store, sitting in the gloom and grinding the freezer, so that when you passed about all you saw was his red eyes, looking not malevolent, not savage but just dangerous if you blundered out of your element and into his, like a dragon or a crocodile. He stood there, blinking. “What time did Grover Winbush close up the Blue Goose?” Uncle Willy said.

“I left before that,” Walter said. Now suddenly, and we hadn’t noticed him before, Mr Hampton was there, doing some of the looking too. He didn’t blink like Walter. He was a big man with a big belly and little hard pale eyes that didn’t seem to need to blink at all. They were looking at Grover Cleveland now.

“How do you know you did?” he said to Walter.

“Hell fire,” Uncle Willy said. “He aint never left that damned place before they turned the lights out since they first opened the door.”

“I know that,” Mr Hampton said. He was still looking at Grover Cleveland with his little hard pale unblinking eyes. “I’ve been marshal and sheriff both here a long time too.” He said to Grover Cleveland: “Where were you last night when folks needed you?” But Grover Cleveland still tried; you’ll have to give him that, even if now even he never believed in it:

“Oh, you mean them two fellers in Uncle Willy’s store about half past ten last night. Sure, I seen them. I naturally thought, taken for granted it was Uncle Willy and Skeets. So I....”

“So you what?” Mr Hampton said.

“I ... stepped back inside and ... taken up the evening paper,” Grover Cleveland said. “Yes, that’s where I was: setting right there in the station reading the Memphis evening paper....”

“When Whit Rouncewell saw them two fellows in here, he went back to the station looking for you,” Mr Hampton said. “He waited an hour. By

that time the lights were off in here but he never saw anybody come out the front door. And you never showed up. And Walter there says you never showed up at the Blue Goose either. Where were you last night, Grover?"

So now there wasn't anywhere for him to go. He just stood there with his coat-tail hiked up over the handle of his pistol and blackjack like a little boy's shirt-tail coming out. Maybe that's what it was: Grover Cleveland was too old to look like a boy. And Uncle Willy and Mr Hampton and all the rest of us looking at him until all of a sudden we were all ashamed to look at him anymore, ashamed to have to find out what we were going to find out. Except that Mr Hampton wasn't ashamed to. Maybe it was being sheriff so long had made him that way, learned him it wasn't Grover Cleveland you had to be ashamed of: it was all of us.

"One night Doc Peabody was coming back from a case about one o'clock and he saw you coming out of that alley side door to what Montgomery Ward Snopes calls his studio. Another night I was going home late myself, about midnight, and I saw you going into it. What's going on in there, Grover?"

Grover Cleveland didn't move now either. It was almost a whisper: "It's a club."

Now Mr Hampton and Uncle Gavin were looking at each other. "Dont look at me," Uncle Gavin said. "You're the law." That was the funny thing: neither one of them paid any attention to Mr Connors, who was the marshal and ought to have been attending to this already. Maybe that was why.

"You're the County Attorney," Mr Hampton said. "You're the one to say what the law is before I can be it."

"What are we waiting for then?" Uncle Gavin said.

"Maybe Grover wants to tell us what it is and save time," Mr Hampton said.

“No, dammit,” Uncle Gavin said. “Take your foot off him for a minute anyway.” He said to Grover Cleveland: “You go on back to the station until we need you.”

“You can read the rest of that Memphis paper,” Mr Hampton said. “And we wont want you either,” he said to Mr Connors.

“Like hell, Sheriff,” Mr Connors said. “Your jurisdiction’s just the county. What goes on in Jefferson is my jurisdiction. I got as much right — —” he stopped then but it was already too late. Mr Hampton looked at him with the little hard pale eyes that never seemed to need to blink at all.

“Go on,” Mr Hampton said. “Got as much right to see what Montgomery Ward Snopes has got hid as me and Gavin have. Why didn’t you persuade Grover to take you into that club then?” But Mr Connors could still blink. “Come on,” Mr Hampton said to Uncle Gavin, turning. Uncle Gavin moved too.

“That means you too,” he said to me.

“That means all of you,” Mr Hampton said. “All of you get out of Uncle Willy’s way now. He’s got to make a list of what’s missing for the narcotics folks and the insurance too.”

So we stood on the street and watched Mr Hampton and Uncle Gavin go on toward Montgomery Ward’s studio. “What?” I said to Ratliff.

“I dont know,” he said. “That is, I reckon I know. We’ll have to wait for Hub and your uncle to prove it.”

“What do you reckon it is?” I said.

Now he looked at me. “Let’s see,” he said. “Even if you are nine going on ten, I reckon you still aint outgrown ice cream, have you. Come on. We wont bother Uncle Willy and Skeets now neither. We’ll go to the Dixie Café.” So we went to the Dixie Café and got two cones and stood on the street again.

“What?” I said.

“My guess is, it’s a passel of French postcards Montgomery Ward brought back from the war in Paris. I reckon you dont know what that is, do you?”

"I dont know," I said.

"It's kodak pictures of men and women together, experimenting with one another. Without no clothes on much." I dont know whether he was looking at me or not. "Do you know now?"

"I dont know," I said.

"But maybe you do?" he said.

That's what it was. Uncle Gavin said he had a big album of them, and that he had learned enough about photography to have made slides from some of them so he could throw them magnified on a sheet on the wall with a magic lantern in that back room. And he said how Montgomery Ward stood there laughing at him and Mr Hampton both. But he was talking mostly to Uncle Gavin.

"Oh sure," he said. "I dont expect Hub here — —"

"Call me Mister Hampton," Mr Hampton said.

" — to know any better —"

"Call me Mister Hampton, boy," Mr Hampton said.

"Mister Hampton," Montgomery Ward said. " — but you're a lawyer; you dont think I got into this without reading a little law first myself, do you? You can confiscate these — all you'll find here; I dont guess Mister Hampton will let a little thing like law stop him from that — —"

That was when Mr Hampton slapped him. "Stop it, Hub!" Uncle Gavin said. "You damned fool!"

"Let him go ahead," Montgomery Ward said. "Suing his bondsmen is easier than running a magic lantern. Safer too. Where was I? Oh yes. Even if they had been sent through the mail, which they haven't, that would just be a federal charge, and I dont see any federal dicks around here. And even if you tried to cook up a charge that I've been making money out of them, where are your witnesses?"

All you got is Grover Winbush, and he dont dare testify, not because he will lose his job because he'll probably do that anyway, but because the God-fearing christian holy citizens of Jefferson wont let him because

they cant have it known that this is what their police do when they're supposed to be at work.

Let alone the rest of my customers not to mention any names scattered around in banks and stores and gins and filling stations and farmers too two counties wide in either direction — Sure: I just thought of this too: come on, put a fine on me and see how quick it will be paid....” and stopped and said with a kind of hushed amazement: “Sweet Christ.” He was talking fast now: “Come on, lock me up, give me a thousand stamped envelopes and I'll make more money in three days than I made in the whole two years with that damned magic lantern.”

Now he was talking to Mr Hampton: “Maybe that's what you wanted, to begin with: not the postcards but the list of customers; retire from sheriff and spend all your time on the collections. Or no: keep the star to bring pressure on the slow payers — —”

Only this time Uncle Gavin didn't have to say anything because this time Mr Hampton wasn't going to hit him. He just stood there with his little hard eyes shut until Montgomery Ward stopped. Then he said to Uncle Gavin:

“Is that right? We've got to have a federal officer? There's nothing on our books to touch him with? Come on, think. Nothing on the city books even?” Now it was Uncle Gavin who said By God.

“That automobile law,” he said. “That Sartoris law,” while Mr Hampton stood looking at him. “Hanging right there in that frame on the wall by your own office door? Didn't you ever look at it? that you cant drive an automobile on the streets of Jefferson—”

“What?” Montgomery Ward said.

“Louder,” Uncle Gavin said. “Mr Hampton cant hear you.”

“But that's just inside the city!” Montgomery Ward said. “Hampton's just County Sheriff; he cant make an arrest on just a city charge.”

“So you say,” Mr Hampton said; now he did put his hand on Montgomery Ward's shoulder; Uncle Gavin said if he had been

Montgomery Ward, he'd just as soon Mr Hampton had slapped him again. "Tell your own lawyer, not ours."

"Wait!" Montgomery Ward said to Uncle Gavin. "You own a car too! So does Hampton!"

"We're doing this alphabetically," Uncle Gavin said. "We've passed the H's. We're in S now, and S-n comes before S-t. Take him on, Hub."

So Montgomery Ward didn't have anywhere to go then, he had run completely out; he just stood there now and Uncle Gavin watched Mr Hampton take his hand off Montgomery Ward and pick up the album of pictures and the envelopes that held the rest of them and carry them to the sink where Montgomery Ward really would develop a film now and then, and tumble them in and then start hunting among the bottles and cans of developer stuff on the shelf above it.

"What are you looking for?" Uncle Gavin said.

"Alcohol — coal oil — anything that'll burn," Mr Hampton said.

"Burn?" Montgomery Ward said. "Hell, man, those things are valuable. Look, I'll make a deal: give them back to me and I'll get to hell out of your damned town and it'll never see me again. — All right," he said. "I've got close to a hundred bucks in my pocket. I'll lay it on the table here and you and Stevens turn your backs and give me ten minutes — —"

"Do you want to come back and hit him again?" Uncle Gavin said. "Dont mind me. Besides, he's already suggested we turn our backs so all you'll have to do is just swing your arm." But Mr Hampton just took another bottle down and took out the stopper and smelled it. "You cant do that," Uncle Gavin said. "They're evidence."

"All we need is just one," Mr Hampton said.

"That depends," Uncle Gavin said. "Do you just want to convict him, or do you want to exterminate him?" Mr Hampton stopped, the bottle in one hand and the stopper in the other. "You know what Judge Long will

do to the man that just owns one of these pictures.” Judge Long was the Federal Judge of our district. “Think what he’ll do to the man that owns a wheelbarrow full of them.”

So Mr Hampton put the bottle back and after a while a deputy came with a suitcase and they put the album and the envelopes into it and locked it and Mr Hampton locked the suitcase in his safe to turn over to Mr Gombault, the U.S. marshal, when he got back to town, and they locked Montgomery Ward up in the county jail for operating an automobile contrary to law in the city of Jefferson, with Montgomery Ward cussing a while then threatening a while then trying again to bribe anybody connected with the jail or the town that would take the money.

And we wondered how long it would be before he sent for Mr de Spain because of that connection. Because we knew that the last person on earth he would hope for help from would be his uncle or cousin Flem, who had already got shut of one Snopes through a murder charge so why should he balk at getting rid of another one with just a dirty postcard.

So even Uncle Gavin, that Ratliff said made a kind of religion of never letting Jefferson see that a Snopes had surprised him, didn’t expect Mr Flem that afternoon when he walked into the office and laid his new black hat on the corner of the desk and sat there with the joints of his jaws working faint and steady like he was trying to chew without unclamping his teeth.

You couldn’t see behind Mr Hampton’s eyes because they looked at you too hard; you couldn’t pass them like you couldn’t pass a horse in a lane that wasn’t big enough for a horse and a man both but just for the horse. You couldn’t see behind Mr Snopes’s eyes because they were not really looking at you at all, like a pond of stagnant water is not looking at you.

Uncle Gavin said that was why it took him a minute or two to realise that he and Mr Snopes were looking at exactly the same thing: it just wasn't with the same eye.

"I'm thinking of Jefferson," Mr Snopes said.

"So am I," Uncle Gavin said. "Of that damned Grover Winbush and every other arrested adolescent between fourteen and fifty-eight in half of north Mississippi with twenty-five cents to pay for one look inside that album."

"I forgot about Grover Winbush," Mr Snopes said. "He wont only lose his job but when he does folks will want to know why and this whole business will come out." That was Mr Snopes's trouble. I mean, that was our trouble with Mr Snopes: there wasn't anything to see even when you thought he might be looking at you. "I dont know whether you know it or not. His ma lives out at Whiteleaf. He sends her a dollar's worth of furnish by the mail rider every Saturday morning."

"So to save one is to save both," Uncle Gavin said. "If Grover Winbush's mother is to keep on getting that dollar's worth of fatback and molasses every Saturday morning, somebody will have to save your cousin, nephew — which is he, anyway? — too."

Like Ratliff said, Mr Snopes probably missed a lot folks said to him behind his back, but he never missed what folks didn't say to him to his face. Anyway, irony and sarcasm were not one of them. Or anyway it wasn't this time. "That's how I figgered it," he said. "But you're a lawyer. Your business is to know how to figger different."

Uncle Gavin didn't miss much of what wasn't quite said to his face either. "You've come to the wrong lawyer," he said. "This case is in federal court. Besides, I couldn't take it anyway; I draw a monthly salary to already be on the other side. Besides," he said (while he was just City Attorney he talked Harvard and Heidelberg.

But after that summer he and I spent travelling about the county running for County Attorney, he began to talk like the people he would

lean on fences or squat against the walls of country stores with, saying 'drug' for 'dragged' and 'me and you' instead of 'you and I' just like they did, even saying figgered just like Mr Snopes just said it), "let's you and me get together on this. I want him to go to the penitentiary."

And that's when Uncle Gavin found out that he and Mr Snopes were looking at exactly the same thing: they were just standing in different places because Mr Snopes said, as quick and calm as Uncle Gavin himself: "So do I." Because Montgomery Ward was his rival just like Wallstreet was, both of them alike in that there just wasn't room in Jefferson for either one of them and Mr Snopes too. Because according to Ratliff, Uncle Gavin was missing it. "So do I," Mr Snopes said. "But not this way. I'm thinking of Jefferson."

"Then it's just too bad for Jefferson," Uncle Gavin said. "He will get Judge Long and when Judge Long sees even one of those pictures, let alone a suitcase full of them, I will almost feel sorry even for Montgomery Ward. Have you forgotten about Wilbur Provine last year?"

Wilbur Provine lived in Frenchman's Bend too. Ratliff said he was really a Snopes; that when Providence realised that Eck Snopes was going to fail his lineage and tradition, it hunted around quick and produced Wilbur Provine to plug the gap.

He ran a still in the creek bottom by a spring about a mile and a half from his house, with a path worn smooth as a ribbon and six inches deep from his back door to the spring where he had walked it twice a day for two years until they caught him and took him to federal court before Judge Long, looking as surprised and innocent as if he didn't even know what the word 'still' meant while the lawyer questioned him, saying No, he never had any idea there was a still within ten miles, let alone a path leading from his back door to it because he himself hadn't been in that creek bottom in ten years, not even to hunt and fish since he was a christian and he believed that no christian should destroy God's creatures, and he had burned out on fish when he was eight years old and hadn't been able to eat it since.

Until Judge Long himself asked him how he accounted for that path, and Wilbur blinked at Judge Long once or twice and said he didn't have any idea, unless maybe his wife had worn it toting water from the spring; and Judge Long (he had the right name, he was six and a half feet tall and his nose looked almost a sixth of that) leaning down across the Bench with his spectacles at the end of his nose, looking down at Wilbur for a while, until he said: "I'm going to send you to the penitentiary, not for making whiskey but for letting your wife carry water a mile and a half from that spring."

That was who Montgomery Ward would get when he came up for trial and you would have thought that everybody in Yoknapatawpha County, let alone just Jefferson, had heard the story by now. But you would almost thought Mr Snopes hadn't. Because now even the hinges of his jaws had quit that little faint pumping.

"I heard Judge Long gave him five years," he said. "Maybe them extra four years was for the path."

"Maybe," Uncle Gavin said.

"It was five years, wasn't it?" Mr Snopes said.

"That's right," Uncle Gavin said.

"Send that boy out," Mr Snopes said.

"No," Uncle Gavin said.

Now the hinges of Mr Snopes's jaws were pumping again. "Send him out," he said.

"I'm thinking of Jefferson too," Uncle Gavin said. "You're vice president of Colonel Sartoris's bank. I'm even thinking of you."

"Much obliged," Mr Snopes said. He wasn't looking at anything. He didn't waste any time but he wasn't hurrying either: he just got up and took the new black hat from the desk and put it on and went to the door and opened it and didn't quite stop even then, just kind of changing feet to step around the opening door and said, not to

anybody anymore than he had ever been looking at anybody: “Good day,” and went out and closed the door behind him.

Then I said, “What—” and then stopped, Uncle Gavin and I both watching the door as it opened again, or began to, opening about a foot with no sound beyond it until we saw Ratliff’s cheek and one of his eyes, then it opened on and Ratliff came in, eased in, sidled in, still not making any sound.

“Am I too late, or jest too soon?” he said.

“Neither,” Uncle Gavin said. “He stopped, decided not to. Something happened. The pattern went wrong. It started out all regular. You know: this is not just for me, and least of all for my kinsman. Do you know what he said?”

“How can I yet?” Ratliff said. “That’s what I’m doing now.”

“I said ‘You and I should get together. I want him to go to the penitentiary.’ And he said, ‘So do I.’”

“All right,” Ratliff said. “Go on.”

“ ‘ — not for me, my kinsman’,” Uncle Gavin said. “ ‘For Jefferson’. So the next step should have been the threat. Only he didn’t—”

“Why threat?” Ratliff said.

“The pattern,” Uncle Gavin said. “First the soap, then the threat, then the bribe. As Montgomery Ward himself tried it.”

“This aint Montgomery Ward,” Ratliff said. “If Montgomery Ward had been named Flem, them pictures wouldn’t a never seen Jefferson, let alone vice versa. But we dont need to worry about Flem being smarter than Montgomery Ward; most anybody around here is that. What we got to worry about is, who else around here may not be as smart as him too. Then what?”

“He quit,” Uncle Gavin said. “He came right up to it. He even asked me to send Chick out. And when I said No, he just picked up his hat and

said Much obliged and went out as if he had just stopped in here to borrow a match.”

Ratliff blinked at Uncle Gavin. “So he wants Montgomery Ward to go to the penitentiary. Only he dont want him to go under the conditions he’s on his way there now. Then he changed his mind.”

“Because of Chick,” Uncle Gavin said.

“Then he changed his mind,” Ratliff said.

“You’re right,” Uncle Gavin said. “It was because he knew that by refusing to send Chick out I had already refused to be bribed.”

“No,” Ratliff said. “To Flem Snopes, there aint a man breathing that cant be bought for something; all you need to do is jest to find it. Only, why did he change his mind?”

“All right,” Uncle Gavin said. “Why?”

“What was the conversation about jest before he told you to send Chick out?”

“About the penitentiary,” Uncle Gavin said. “I just told you.”

“It was about Wilbur Provine,” I said.

Ratliff looked at me. “Wilbur Provine?”

“His still,” I said. “That path and Judge Long.”

“Oh,” Ratliff said. “Then what?”

“That’s all,” Uncle Gavin said. “He just said ‘Send that boy out’ and I said—”

“That wasn’t next,” I said. “The next was what Mr Snopes said about the five years, that maybe the extra four years was for the path, and you said Maybe and Mr Snopes said again, ‘It was five years, wasn’t it?’ and you said Yes and then he said to send me out.”

“All right, all right,” Uncle Gavin said. But he was looking at Ratliff.

“Well?” he said.

“I dont know neither,” Ratliff said. “All I know is, I’m glad I aint Montgomery Ward Snopes.”

“Yes,” Uncle Gavin said. “When Judge Long sees that suitcase.”
“Sho,” Ratliff said. “That’s jest Uncle Sam. It’s his Uncle Flem that Montgomery Ward wants to worry about, even if he dont know it yet. And us too. As long as all he wanted was jest money, at least you knowed which way to guess even if you knowed you couldn’t guess first. But this time — —” He looked at us, blinking.

“All right,” Uncle Gavin said. “How?”

“You mind that story about how the feller found his strayed dog? he jest set down and imagined where he would be if he was that dog and got up and went and got it and brung it home. All right. We’re Flem Snopes. We got a chance to get shut of our — what’s that old-timey word? unsavory — unsavory nephew into the penitentiary. Only we’re vice president of a bank now and we cant afford to have it knowed even a unsavory nephew was running a peep show of French postcards.

And the judge that will send him there is the same judge that told Wilbur Provine he was going to Parchman not for making whiskey but for letting his wife tote water a mile and a half.” He blinked at Uncle Gavin. “You’re right. The question aint ‘what’ a-tall: it’s jest ‘how’. And since you wasn’t interested in money, and he has got better sense than to offer it to Hub Hampton, we dont jest know what that ‘how’ is going to be. Unless maybe since he got to be a up-and-coming feller in the Baptist church, he is depending on Providence.”

Maybe he was. Anyway, it worked. It was the next morning, about ten oclock; Uncle Gavin and I were just leaving the office to drive up to Wyott’s Crossing where they were having some kind of a squabble over a drainage tax suit, when Mr Hampton came in. He was kind of blowing through his teeth, light and easy like he was whistling except that he wasn’t making any noise and even less than that of tune. “Morning,” he said. “Yesterday morning when we were in that studio and I was hunting through them bottles on that shelf for alcohol or something that would burn.”

"All right," Uncle Gavin said.

"How many of them bottles and jugs did I draw the cork or unscrew the cap and smell? You were there. You were watching."

"I thought all of them," Uncle Gavin said. "Why?"

"So did I," Mr Hampton said. "I could be wrong." He looked at Uncle Gavin with his hard little eyes, making that soundless whistling between his teeth.

"You've prepared us," Uncle Gavin said. "Got us into the right state of nervous excitement. Now tell us."

"About six this morning, Jack Crenshaw telephoned me." (Mr Crenshaw was the Revenue field agent that did the moonshine still hunting in our district.) "He told me to come on to that studio as soon as I could.

They were already inside, two of them. They had already searched it. Two of them gallon jugs on that shelf that I opened and smelled yesterday that never had nothing but kodak developer in them, had raw corn whiskey in them this morning, though like I said I could have been wrong and missed them.

Not to mention five gallons more of it in a oil can setting behind the heater, that I hadn't got around to smelling yesterday when you stopped me for the reason that I never seen it there when I looked behind the heater yesterday or I wouldn't been smelling at the bottles on that shelf for something to burn paper with. Though, as you say, I could be wrong."

"As you say," Uncle Gavin said.

"You may be right," Mr Hampton said. "After all, I've been having to snuff out moonshine whiskey in this county ever since I first got elected. And since 1919, I have been so in practice that now I dont even need to smell: I just kind of feel it the moment I get where some of it aint supposed to be. Not to mention that five-gallon coal oil can full of it setting where you would have thought I would have fell over it reaching my hand to that shelf."

“All right,” Uncle Gavin said. “Go on.”

“That’s all,” Mr Hampton said.

“How did he get in?” Uncle Gavin said.

“He?” Mr Hampton said.

“All right,” Uncle Gavin said. “Take ‘they’ if you like it better.”

“I thought of that too,” Mr Hampton said. “The key. I said THE key because even that fool would have more sense than to have a key to that place anywhere except on a string around his neck.”

“That one,” Uncle Gavin said.

“Yep,” Mr Hampton said. “I dropped it into the drawer where I usually keep such, handcuffs and a extra pistol. Anybody could have come in while me and Miss Elma” (she was the office deputy, widow of the sheriff Mr Hampton had succeeded last time) “was out, and taken it.”

“Or the pistol either,” Uncle Gavin said. “You really should start locking that place, Hub. Some day you’ll leave your star in there and come back to find some little boy out on the street arresting people.”

“Maybe I should,” Mr Hampton said. “All right,” he said. “Somebody took that key and planted that whiskey. It could have been any of them — any of the folks that that damned Grover Winbush says was coming from four counties around to sweat over them damn pictures at night.”

“Maybe it’s lucky you at least had that suitcase locked up. I suppose you’ve still got that, since Mr Gombault hasn’t got back yet?”

“That’s right,” Mr Hampton said.

“And Jack Crenshaw and his buddy are just interested in whiskey, not photography. Which means you haven’t turned that suitcase over to anybody yet.”

“That’s right,” Mr Hampton said.

“Are you going to?” Uncle Gavin said.

“What do you think?” Mr Hampton said.

“That’s what I think too,” Uncle Gavin said.

“After all, the whiskey is enough,” Mr Hampton said. “And even if it aint, all we got to do is show Judge Long just any one of them photographs right before he pronounces sentence. Damn it,” he said, “it’s Jefferson. We live here. Jefferson’s got to come first, even before the pleasure of crucifying that damned — —”

“Yes,” Uncle Gavin said. “I’ve heard that sentiment.” Then Mr Hampton left. And all we had to do was just to wait, and not long. You never had to wonder about how much Ratliff had heard because you knew in advance he had heard all of it. He closed the door and stood just inside it.

“Why didn’t you tell him yesterday about Flem Snopes?” he said. “Because he let Flem Snopes or whoever it was walk right in his office and steal that key. Hub’s already got about all the felonious malfeasance he can afford to compound,” Uncle Gavin said. He finished putting the papers into the brief case and closed it and stood up.

“You leaving?” Ratliff said.

“Yes,” Uncle Gavin said. “Wyott’s Crossing.”

“You aint going to wait for Flem?”

“He wont come back here,” Uncle Gavin said. “He wont dare. What he came here yesterday to try to bribe me to do, is going to happen anyway without the bribe. But he dont dare come back here to find out. He will have to wait and see like anybody else. He knows that.” But still Ratliff didn’t move from the door.

“The trouble with us is, we dont never estimate Flem Snopes right. At first we made the mistake of not estimating him a-tall. Then we made the mistake of over-estimating him. Now we’re fixing to make the mistake of under-estimating him again. When you jest want money, all you need to do to satisfy yourself is count it and put it where cant nobody get it, and forget about it.

But this-here new thing he has done found out it's nice to have, is different. It's like keeping warm in winter or cool in summer, or peace or being free or content-ment. You cant jest count it and lock it up somewhere safe and forget about it until you feel like looking at it again. You got to work at it steady, never to forget about it. It's got to be out in the open, where folks can see it, or there aint no such thing."

"No such thing as what?" Uncle Gavin said.

"This-here new discovery he's jest made," Ratliff said. "Call it civic virtue."

"Why not?" Uncle Gavin said. "Were you going to call it something else?" Ratliff watched Uncle Gavin, curious, intent; it was as if he were waiting for something. "Go on," Uncle Gavin said. "You were saying."

Then it was gone, whatever it had been. "Oh yes," Ratliff said. "He'll be in to see you. He'll have to, to make sho you recognise it too when you see it. He may kind of hang around until middle of the afternoon, to kind of give the dust a chance to settle. But he'll be back then, so a feller can at least see jest how much he missed heading him off."

So we didn't drive up to Wyott's then, and this time Ratliff was the one who under-estimated. It wasn't a half an hour until we heard his feet on the stairs and the door opened and he came in. This time he didn't take off the black hat: he just said "Morning, gentle-men" and came on to the desk and dropped the key to Montgomery Ward's studio on it and was going back toward the door when Uncle Gavin said:

"Much obliged. I'll give it back to the sheriff. You're like me," he said. "You dont give a damn about truth either. What you are interested in is justice."

"I'm interested in Jefferson," Mr Snopes said, reaching for the door and opening it. "We got to live here. Morning, gentlemen."

ELEVEN

V. K. Ratliff

AND STILL HE missed it, even set — sitting right there in his own office and actively watching Flem rid Jefferson of Montgomery Ward. And still I couldn't tell him.

TWELVE

Charles Mallison

WHATEVER IT WAS Ratliff thought Mr Snopes wanted, I dont reckon that what Uncle Gavin took up next helped it much either. And this time he didn't even have Miss Melisandre Backus for Mother to blame it on because Miss Melisandre herself was married now, to a man, a stranger, that everybody but Miss Melisandre (we never did know whether her father, sitting all day long out there on that front gallery with a glass of whiskey-and-water in one hand and Horace or Virgil in the other — a combination which Uncle Gavin said would have insulated from the reality of rural north Mississippi harder heads than his — knew or not) knew was a big rich New Orleans bootlegger.

In fact she still refused to believe it even when they brought him home with a bullet hole neatly plugged up in the middle of his forehead, in a bullet-proof hearse leading a cortege of Packards and Cadillac limousines that Hollywood itself, let alone Al Capone, wouldn't have been ashamed of.

No, that's wrong. We never did know whether she knew it or not too, even years after he was dead and she had all the money and the two children and the place which in her childhood had been just another Mississippi cotton farm but which he had changed with white fences and weather-vanes in the shape of horses so that it looked like a cross between a Kentucky country club and a Long Island race track, and plenty of friends who felt they owed it to her that she should know where all that money actually came from; and still, as soon as they approached the subject, she would change it — the slender dark girl still, even though she was a millionairess and the mother of two children, whose terrible power was that defenselessness and helplessness which conferred knighthood on any man who came within

range, before he had a chance to turn and flee; — changing the entire subject as if she had never heard her husband's name or, in fact, as though he had never lived.

I mean, this time Mother couldn't even say "If he would only marry Melisandre Backus, she would save him from all this", meaning Linda Snopes this time like she had meant Mrs Flem Snopes before. But at least she thought about saying it because almost at once she stopped worrying. "It's all right," she told Father. "It's the same thing again: dont you remember?"

He never was really interested in Melisandre. I mean.... you know: really interested. Books and flowers. Picking my jonquils and narcissus as fast as they bloomed, to send out there where that whole two-acre front yard was full of jonquils, cutting my best roses to take out there and sit in that hammock reading poetry to her. He was just forming her mind: that's all he wanted.

And Melisandre was only five years younger, where with this one he is twice her age, practically her grandfather. Of course that's all it is." Then Father said: "Heh heh heh. Form is right, only it's on Gavin's mind, not hers. It would be on mine too if I wasn't already married and scared to look. Did you ever take a look at her? You're human even if you are a woman." Yes, I could remember a heap of times when Father had been born too soon, before they thought of wolf whistles.

"Stop it," Mother said.

"But after all," Father said, "maybe Gavin should be saved from those sixteen-year-old clutches. Suppose you speak to him; tell him I am willing to make a sacrifice of myself on the family altar — —"

"Stop it! Stop it!" Mother said. "Cant you at least be funny?"

"I'm worse than that, I'm serious," Father said. "They were at a table in Christian's yesterday afternoon. Gavin just had a saucer of ice cream but she was eating something in a dish that must have set him back twenty or thirty cents. So maybe Gavin knows what he's doing after all; she's got some looks of her own, but she still aint quite up with her

mother: you know — —” using both hands to make a kind of undulating hourglass shape in the air in front of him while Mother stood watching him like a snake. “Maybe he’s concentrating on just forming her form first you might say, without bothering too much yet about her mind. And who knows? maybe some day she’ll even look at him like she was looking at that banana split or whatever it was when Skeets McGowan set it down in front of her.”

But by that time Mother was gone. And this time she sure needed somebody like Miss Melisandre, with all her friends (all Jefferson for that matter) on the watch to tell her whenever Uncle Gavin and Linda stopped in Christian’s drugstore after school while Linda ate another banana split or ice cream soda, with the last book of poetry Uncle Gavin had ordered for her lying in the melted ice cream or spilled coca cola on the marble table top.

Because I reckon Jefferson was too small for a thirty-five-year-old bachelor, even a Harvard M.A. and a Ph.D. from Heidelberg and his hair already beginning to turn white even at just twenty-five, to eat ice cream and read poetry with a sixteen-year-old high school girl. Though if it had to happen, maybe thirty-five was the best age for a bachelor to buy ice cream and poetry for a sixteen-year-old girl. I told Mother that. She didn’t sound like a snake because snakes cant talk. But if dentists’ drills could talk she would have sounded just like one.

“There’s no best or safe age for a bachelor anywhere between three and eighty to buy ice cream for a sixteen-year-old girl,” she said. “Forming her mind,” she said. But she sounded just like cream when she talked to Uncle Gavin. No: she didn’t sound like anything because she didn’t say anything. She waited for him to begin it. No: she just waited because she knew he would have to begin it. Because Jefferson was that small. No, I mean Uncle Gavin had lived in Jefferson or in little towns all his life so he not only knew what Jefferson would be saying about him and Linda Snopes and those banana splits and ice cream sodas and books of poetry by now, but that Mother had too many good friends to ever miss hearing about it.

So she just waited. It was Saturday. Uncle Gavin walked twice in and out of the office (we still called it that because Grandfather had, except when Mother could hear us. Though after a while even she stopped trying to call it the library) where Mother was sitting at the desk adding up something, maybe the laundry; he walked in and out twice and she never moved. Then he said:

“I was thinking—” Because they were like that. I mean, I thought the reason they were like that was because they were twins. I mean, I assumed that because I didn’t know any other twins to measure them against. She didn’t even stop adding.

“Of course,” she said. “Why not tomorrow?” So he could have gone out then since obviously both of them knew what the other was talking about. But he said:

“Thank you.” Then he said to me: “Aint Aleck Sander waiting for you outside?”

“Fiddlesticks,” Mother said. “Anything he will learn about sixteen-year-old girls from you will probably be a good deal more innocent than what he will learn someday from sixteen-year-old girls. Shall I telephone her mother and ask her to let her come for dinner tomorrow, or do you want to?”

“Thank you,” Uncle Gavin said. “Do you want me to tell you about it?”

“Do you want to?” Mother said.

“Maybe I’d better,” Uncle Gavin said.

“Do you have to?” Mother said. This time Uncle Gavin didn’t say anything. Then Mother said: “All right. We’re listening.” Again Uncle Gavin didn’t say anything. But now he was Uncle Gavin again. I mean, until now he sounded a good deal like I sounded sometimes. But now he stood looking at the back of Mother’s head, with his shock of white hair that always needed cutting and the stained bitt of the corncob pipe sticking out of his breast pocket and the eyes and the face that you never did quite know what they were going to say next except that when you heard it you realised it was always true, only a little cranksided; that nobody else would have said it quite that way.

“Well, well,” he said, “if that’s what a mind with no more aptitude for gossip and dirt than yours is inventing and thinking, just imagine what the rest of Jefferson, the experts, have made of it by now. By Cicero, it makes me feel young already; when I go to town this morning I believe I will buy myself a red necktie.” He looked at the back of Mother’s head. “Thank you, Maggie,” he said. “It will need all of us of good will. To save Jefferson from Snopeses is a crisis, an emergency, a duty. To save a Snopes from Snopeses is a privilege, an honor, a pride.”

“Especially a sixteen-year-old female one,” Mother said. “Yes,” Uncle Gavin said. “Do you deny it?”

“Have I tried to?” Mother said.

“Yes, you have tried.” He moved quick and put his hand on the top of her head, still talking. “And bless you for it. Tried always to deny that damned female instinct for uxorious and rigid respectability which is the backbone of any culture not yet decadent, which remains strong and undecadent only so long as it still produces an incorrigible unreconstructable with the temerity to assail and affront and deny it — like you—” and for a second both of us thought he was going to bend down and kiss her; maybe all three of us thought it.

Then he didn’t, or anyway Mother said:

“Stop it. Let me alone. Make up your mind: do you want me to telephone her, or will you do it?”

“I’ll do it,” he said. He looked at me. “Two red ties: one for you. I wish you were sixteen too. What she needs is a beau.”

“Then if by being sixteen I’d have to be her beau, I’m glad I’m not sixteen,” I said. “She’s already got a beau. Matt Levitt. He won the Golden Gloves up in Ohio or somewhere last year. He acts like he can still use them. Would like to, too. No, much obliged,” I said.

“What’s that?” Mother said.

“Nothing,” Uncle Gavin said.

“You never saw him box then,” I said. “Or you wouldn’t call him nothing. I saw him once. With Preacher Birdsong.”

“And just which of your sporting friends is Preacher Bird-song?” Mother said.

“He aint sporting,” I said. “He lives out in the country. He learned to box in France in the war. He and Matt Levitt—”

“Let me,” Uncle Gavin said. “He—”

“Which he?” Mother said. “Your rival?”

“ — is from Ohio,” Uncle Gavin said. “He graduated from that new Ford mechanic’s school and the company sent him here to be a mechanic in the agency garage—”

“He’s the one that owns that yellow cut-down racer,” I said. “And Linda rides in it?” Mother said.

“ — and since Jefferson is not that large and he has two eyes,” Uncle Gavin said, “sooner or later he saw Linda Snopes, probably somewhere between her home and the school house; being male and about twenty-one, he naturally lost no time in making her acquaintance; the Golden Gloves reputation which he either really brought with him or invented somewhere en route, has apparently eliminated what rivals he might have expected — —”

“Except you,” Mother said.

“That’s all,” Uncle Gavin said.

“Except you,” Mother said.

“He’s maybe five years her senior,” Uncle Gavin said. “I’m twice her age.”

“Except you,” Mother said. “I dont think you will live long enough to ever be twice any woman’s age, I dont care what it is.”

“All right,” Uncle Gavin said. “What was it I just said? to save Jefferson from a Snopes is a duty; to save a Snopes from a Snopes is a privilege.”

“An honor, you said,” Mother said. “A pride.”

“All right,” Uncle Gavin said. “A joy then. Are you pleased now?” That was all, then. After a while Father came home but Mother didn’t have much to tell him he didn’t already know, so there wasn’t anything for him to do except to keep on needing the wolf whistle that hadn’t been invented yet; not until the next day after dinner in fact.

She arrived a little after twelve, just about when she could have got here after church if she had been to church. Which maybe she had, since she was wearing a hat. Or maybe it was her mother who made her wear the hat on account of Mother, coming up the street from the corner, running. Then I saw that the hat was a little awry on her head as if something had pulled or jerked at it or it had caught on something in passing, and that she was holding one shoulder with the other hand.

Then I saw that her face was mad. It was scared too, but right now it was mostly just mad as she turned in the gate, still holding her shoulder but not running now, just walking fast and hard, the mad look beginning to give way to the scared one.

Then they both froze into something completely different because then the car passed, coming up fast from the corner — Matt Levitt’s racer because there were other stripped-down racers around now but his was the only one with that big double-barrel brass horn on the hood that played two notes when he pressed the button, going past fast; and suddenly it was like I had smelled something, caught a whiff of something for a second that even if I located it again I still wouldn’t know whether I had ever smelled it before or not; the racer going on and Linda still walking rigid and fast with her hat on a little crooked and still holding her shoulder and still breathing a little fast even if what was on her face now was mostly being scared, on to the gallery where Mother and Uncle Gavin were waiting.

“Good morning, Linda,” Mother said. “You’ve torn your sleeve.”

“It caught on a nail,” Linda said.

“I can see,” Mother said. “Come on up to my room and slip it off and I’ll tack it back for you.”

"It's all right," Linda said. "If you've just got a pin."

"Then you take the needle and do it yourself while I see about dinner," Mother said. "You can sew, cant you?"

"Yessum," Linda said. So they went up to Mother's room and Uncle Gavin and I went to the office so Father could say to Uncle Gavin: "Somebody been mauling at her before she could even get here? What's the matter, boy? Where's your spear and sword? where's your white horse?" Because Matt didn't blow the two-toned horn when he passed that first time so none of us knew yet what Linda was listening for, sitting at the dinner table with the shoulder of her dress sewed back all right but looking like somebody about ten years old had done it and her face still looking rigid and scared.

Because we didn't realise it then. I mean, that she was having to do so many things at once: having to look like she was enjoying her dinner and having to remember her manners in a strange house and with folks that she didn't have any particular reason to think were going to like her, and still having to wonder what Matt Levitt would do next without letting anybody know that's what was mainly on her mind.

I mean, having to expect what was going to happen next and then, even while it was happening, having to look like she was eating and saying Yessum and Nome to what Mother was saying, and that cut-down racer going past in the street again with that two-toned horn blowing this time, blowing all the way past the house, and Father suddenly jerking his head up and making a loud snuffing noise, saying, "What's that I smell?"

"Smell?" Mother said. "Smell what?"

"That," Father said. "Something we haven't smelled around here in ... how long was it, Gavin?" Because I knew now what Father meant, even if I wasn't born then and Cousin Gowan just told me. And Mother knew too. I mean, she remembered, since she had heard the other one when it was Mr de Spain's cut-out. I mean, even if she didn't know enough to

connect that two-toned horn with Matt Levitt, all she had to do was look at Linda and Uncle Gavin. Or maybe just Uncle Gavin's face was enough, which is what you get for being twins with anybody.

Because she said,

"Charley," and Father said:

"Maybe Miss Snopes will excuse me this time." He was talking at Linda now.

"You see, whenever we have a pretty girl to eat with us, the prettier she is, the harder I try to make jokes so they will want to come back again. This time I just tried too hard. So if Miss Snopes will forgive me for trying too hard to be funny, I'll forgive her for being too pretty."

"Good boy," Uncle Gavin said. "Even if that one wasn't on tiptoe, at least it didn't wear spikes like the joke did. Let's go out to the gallery where it's cool, Maggie."

"Let's," Mother said. Then we were all standing there in the hall, looking at Linda. It wasn't just being scared in her face now, of being a sixteen-year-old girl for the first time in the home of people that probably had already decided not to approve of her. I didn't know what it was. But Mother did, maybe because it was Mother she was looking at it with.

"I think it will be cooler in the parlor," Mother said. "Let's go there." But it was too late. We could hear the horn, not missing a note: da DA da DA da DA getting louder and louder then going past the house still not missing a note as it faded on, and Linda staring at Mother for just another second or two with the desperation. Because it — the desperation — went too; maybe it was something like despair for a moment, but then that was gone too and her face was just rigid again.

"I've got to go," she said. "I ... excuse me, I've got ..." Then at least she kind of got herself together. "Thank you for my dinner, Mrs Mallison," she said. "Thank you for my dinner, Mr Mallison. Thank you for my dinner, Mr Gavin," already moving toward the table where she had put

the hat and her purse. But then I hadn't expected her to thank me for it.

"Let Gavin drive you home," Mother said. "Gavin—"

"No no," she said. "I dont — he dont—" Then she was gone, out the front door and down the walk toward the gate, almost running again, then through the gate and then she was running, desperate and calm, not looking back. Then she was gone.

"By Cicero, Gavin," Father said. "You're losing ground. Last time you at least picked out a Spanish-American war hero with an E.M.F. sportster. Now the best you can do is a Golden Gloves amateur with a home-made racer. Watch yourself, bud, or next time you'll have a boy scout defying you to mortal combat with a bicycle."

"What?" Mother said.

"What would you do," Father said, "if you were a twenty-one-year-old garage mechanic who had to work until six p.m., and a white-headed old grandfather of a libertine was waylaying your girl on her way home from school every afternoon and tolling her into soda dens and plying her with ice cream? Because how could he know that all Gavin wants is just to form her mind?"

Only it wasn't every afternoon anymore.

It wasn't any afternoon at all. I dont know what happened, how it was done: whether she sent word to Uncle Gavin not to try to meet her after school or whether she came and went the back way where he wouldn't see her, or whether maybe she stopped going to school at all for a while. Because she was in high school and I was in grammar school so there was no reason for me to know whether she was still going to school or not.

Or whether she was still in Jefferson, for that matter. Because now and then I would see Matt Levitt in his racer after the garage closed in the afternoon, when Linda used to be with him, and now and then at night going to and from the picture show. But not anymore now. He would

be alone in the racer, or with another boy or man. But as far as I knew, Matt never saw her any more than Uncle Gavin did.

And you couldn't tell anything from Uncle Gavin. It used to be that on the way home from school I would see him and Linda inside Christian's drugstore eating ice cream and when he or they saw me he would beckon me in and we would all have ice cream.

But that — the fact that there was no longer any reason to look in Christian's when I passed — was the only difference in him. Then one day — it was Friday — he was sitting at the table inside waiting and watching to beckon me inside, and even though there was no second dish on the table I thought that Linda had probably just stepped away for a moment, maybe to the perfume counter or the magazine rack, and even when I was inside and he said, "I'm having peach. What do you want?" I still expected Linda to step out from behind whatever for the moment concealed her.

"Strawberry," I said. On the table was the last book — it was John Donne — he had ordered for her.

"It will cost the same dime to mail it to her here in Jefferson that it would cost if she were in Memphis," he said. "Suppose I stand the ice cream and give you the dime and you take it by her house on the way home."

"All right," I said. When Mr Snopes first came to Jefferson he rented the house. Then he must have bought it because since he became vice president of the bank they had begun to fix it up. It was painted now and Mrs Snopes I reckon had had the wistaria arbor in the side yard fixed up and when I came through the gate Linda called me and I saw the hammock under the arbor.

The wistaria was still in bloom and I remember how she looked with her black hair under it because her eyes were kind of the color of wistaria and her dress almost exactly was: lying in the hammock reading and I thought Uncle Gavin didn't need to send this book because she hasn't finished the other one yet. Then I saw the rest of her school books on

the ground beneath the hammock and that the one she was reading was geometry and I wondered if knowing she would rather study geometry than be out with him would make Matt Levitt feel much better than having her eat ice cream with Uncle Gavin.

So I gave her the book and went on home. That was Friday. The next day, Saturday, I went to the baseball game and then I came back to the office to walk home with Uncle Gavin. We heard the feet coming up the outside stairs, more than two of them, making a kind of scuffling sound and we could even hear hard breathing and something like whispering, then the door kind of banged open and Matt Levitt came in, quick and fast, holding something clamped under his arm, and shoved the door back shut against whoever was trying to follow him inside, holding the door shut with his braced knee until he fumbled at the knob until he found how to shoot the bolt and lock it. Then he turned. He was good-looking.

He didn't have a humorous or happy look, he had what Ratliff called a merry look, the merry look of a fellow that hadn't heard yet that they had invented doubt. But he didn't even look merry now and he took the book — it was the John Donne I had taken to Linda yesterday — and kind of shot it onto the desk so that the ripped and torn pages came scuttering and scattering out across the desk and some of them even on down to the floor.

“How do you like that?” Matt said, coming on around the desk where Uncle Gavin had stood up. “Dont you want to put up your dukes?” he said. “But that's right, you aint much of a fighter, are you. But that's O.K.; I aint going to hurt you much anyway: just mark you up a little to freshen up your memory.”

He didn't, he didn't seem to hit hard, his fists not travelling more than four or five inches it looked like, so that it didn't even look like they were drawing blood from Uncle Gavin's lips and nose but just instead wiping the blood onto them; two or maybe three blows before I could seem to move and grab up Grandfather's heavy walking stick where it

still stayed in the umbrella stand behind the door and raise it to swing at the back of Matt's head as hard as I could.

"You, Chick!" Uncle Gavin said. "Stop! Hold it!" Though even without that, I wouldn't have thought Matt could have moved that fast. Maybe it was the Golden Gloves that did it.

Anyway he turned and caught the stick and jerked it away from me almost before I knew it and naturally I thought he was going to hit me or Uncle Gavin or maybe both of us with it so I had already crouched to dive at his legs when he dropped the point of the stick like a bayoneted rifle, the point touching my chest just below the throat as if he were not holding me up but had really picked me up with the stick like you would a rag or a scrap of paper.

"Tough luck, kid," he said. "Nice going almost; too bad your uncle telegraphed it for you," and threw the stick into the corner and stepped around me toward the door, which was the first time I reckon that any of us realised that whoever it was he had locked out was still banging on it, and shot the bolt back and opened it then stepped back himself as Linda came in, blazing; yes, that's exactly the word for it: blazing: and without even looking at Uncle Gavin or me, whirled onto her tiptoes and slapped Matt twice, first with her left hand and then her right, panting and crying at the same time:

"You fool! You ox! You clumsy ignorant ox!

You clumsy ignorant stupid son of a bitch!" Which was the first time I ever heard a sixteen-year-old girl say that. No: the first time I ever heard any woman say that, standing there facing Matt and crying hard now, like she was too mad to even know what to do next, whether to slap him again or curse him again, until Uncle Gavin came around the desk and touched her and said,

"Stop it. Stop it now," and she turned and grabbed him, her face against his shirt where he had bled onto it, still crying hard, saying, "Mister Gavin, Mister Gavin, Mister Gavin."

“Open the door, Chick,” Uncle Gavin said. I opened it. “Get out of here, boy,” Uncle Gavin said to Matt. “Go on.” Then Matt was gone. I started to close the door. “You too,” Uncle Gavin said.

“Sir?” I said.

“You get out too,” Uncle Gavin said, still holding Linda where she was shaking and crying against him, his nose bleeding onto her too now.

THIRTEEN

Gavin Stevens

GO ON,” I said. “You get out too.” So he did, and I stood there holding her. Or rather, she was gripping me, quite hard, shuddering and gasping, crying quite hard now, burrowing her face into my shirt so that I could feel my shirt front getting wet. Which was what Ratliff would have called tit for tat, since what Victorians would have called the claret from my nose had already stained the shoulder of her dress.

So I could free one hand long enough to reach around and over her other shoulder to the handkerchief in my breast pocket and do a little emergency work with it until I could separate us long enough to reach the cold water tap.

“Stop it,” I said. “Stop it now.” But she only cried the harder, clutching me, saying,

“Mister Gavin. Mister Gavin. Oh, Mister Gavin.”

“Linda,” I said. “Can you hear me?” She didn’t answer, just clutching me; I could feel her nodding her head against my chest. “Do you want to marry me?” I said.

“Yes!” she said. “Yes! All right! All right!”

This time I got one hand under her chin and lifted her face by force until she would have to look at me. Ratliff had told me that McCarron’s eyes were gray, probably the same hard gray as Hub Hampton’s. Hers were

not gray at all. They were darkest hyacinth, what I have always imagined that Homer's hyacinthine sea must have had to look like.

"Listen to me," I said. "Do you want to get married?" Yes, they don't need minds at all, except for conversation, social intercourse. And I have known some who had charm and tact without minds even then. Because when they deal with men, with human beings, all they need is the instinct, the intuition before it became battered and dulled, the infinite capacity for devotion untroubled and unconfused by cold moralities and colder facts.

"You mean I don't have to?" she said.

"Of course not," I said. "Never if you like."

"I don't want to marry anybody!" she said, cried; she was clinging to me again, her face buried again in the damp mixture of blood and tears which seemed now to compose the front of my shirt and tie. "Not anybody!" she said. "You're all I have, all I can trust. I love you! I love you!"

FOURTEEN

Charles Mallison

WHEN HE GOT home, his face was clean. But his nose and his lip still showed, and there wasn't anything he could have done about his shirt and tie. Except he could have bought new ones, since on Saturday the stores were still open. But he didn't. Maybe even that wouldn't have made any difference with Mother; maybe that's one of the other things you have to accept in being a twin. And yes sir, if dentists' drills could talk, that's exactly what Mother would have sounded like after she got done laughing and crying both and saying Damn you, Gavin, damn you damn you, and Uncle Gavin had gone up stairs to put on a clean shirt and tie for supper.

"Forming her mind," Mother said.

It was like he could stand just anything except getting knocked down or getting his nose bloodied. Like if Mr de Spain hadn't knocked him down in the alley behind that Christmas dance, he could have got over Mrs Snopes without having to form Linda's mind. And like if Matt Levitt hadn't come into the office that afternoon and bloodied his nose again, he could have stopped there with Linda's mind without having to do any more to it.

So he didn't stop because he couldn't. But at least he got rid of Matt Levitt. That was in the spring, it was her last year in high school; she would graduate in May and any school afternoon I could see her walking along the street from school with a few books under her arm.

But if any of them was poetry now I didn't know it, because when she came to Christian's drugstore now she wouldn't even look toward the door, just walking on past with her face straight in front and her head up a little like the pointer just a step or two from freezing on the game; walking on like she saw people, saw Jefferson, saw the Square all right because at the moment, at any moment she had to walk on and among and through something and it might as well be Jefferson and Jefferson people and the Jefferson Square as anything else, but that was all.

Because Uncle Gavin wasn't there somewhere around like an accident any more now. But then, if Uncle Gavin wasn't sitting on the opposite side of that marble-topped table in Christian's watching her eating something out of a tall glass that cost every bit of fifteen or twenty cents, Matt Levitt wasn't there either.

Him and his cut-down racer both because the racer was empty now except for Matt himself after the garage closed on week days, creeping along the streets and across the Square in low gear, parallelling but a little behind where she would be walking to the picture show now with another girl or maybe two or three of them, her head still high and not once looking at him while the racer crept along at her elbow almost, the cutout going chuckle-chuckle-chuckle, right up to the picture show and the two or three or four girls had gone into it.

Then the racer would dash off at full speed around the block, to come rushing back with the cut-out as loud as he could make it, up the alley beside the picture show and then across in front of it and around the block and up the alley again, this time with Otis Harker, who had succeeded Grover Cleveland Winbush as night marshal after Grover Cleveland retired after what Ratliff called his eye trouble, waiting at the corner yelling at Matt at the same time he was jumping far enough back not to be run over.

And on Sunday through the Square, the cut-out going full blast and Mr Buck Connors, the day marshal now, hollering after him. And now he — Matt — had a girl with him, a country girl he had found somewhere, the racer rushing and roaring through the back streets into the last one, to rush slow and loud past Linda's house, as if the sole single symbol of frustrated love or anyway desire or maybe just frustration possible in Jefferson was an automobile cut-out; the sole single manifestation which love or anyway desire was capable of assuming in Jefferson, was rushing slow past the specific house with the cut-out wide open, so that he or she would have to know who was passing no matter how hard they worked at not looking out the window.

Though by that time Mr Connors had sent for the sheriff himself. He — Mr Connors — said his first idea was to wake up Otis Harker to come back to town and help him but when Otis heard that what Mr Connors wanted was to stop that racer, Otis wouldn't even get out of bed.

Later, afterward, somebody asked Matt if he would have run over Mr Hampton too and Matt said — he was crying then, he was so mad— “Hit him? Hub Hampton? have all them god-damn guts splashed over my paint job?” Though by then even Mr Hampton wasn't needed for the cut-out because Matt went right on out of town, maybe taking the girl back home; anyway about midnight that night they telephoned in for Mr Hampton to send somebody out to Caledonia where Matt had had a bad fight with Anse McCallum, one of Mr Buddy McCallum's boys, until Anse snatched up a fence rail or something and would have killed Matt except that folks caught and held them both while they telephoned for the sheriff and brought them both in to town and

locked them in the jail and the next morning Mr Buddy McCallum came in on his cork leg and paid them both out and took them down to the lot behind I.O. Snopes's mule barn and told Anse:

"All right. If you cant be licked fair without picking up a fence rail, I'm going to take my leg off and whip you with it myself."

So they fought again, without the fence rail this time, with Mr Buddy and a few more men watching them now, and Anse still wasn't as good as Matt's Golden Gloves but he never quit until at last Mr Buddy himself said, "All right. That's enough," and told Anse to wash his face at the trough and then go and get in the car and then said to Matt: "And I reckon the time has come for you to be moving on too."

Except that wasn't necessary now either; the garage said Matt was already fired and Matt said,

"Fired, hell. I quit. Tell the son of a bitch to come down here and say that to my face." And Mr Hampton was there too by then, tall, with his big belly and his little hard eyes looking down at Matt. "Where the hell is my car?" Matt said.

"It's at my house," Mr Hampton said. "I had it brought in this morning." "Well well," Matt said. "Too bad, aint it? McCallum came in and sprung me before you had time to sell it and stick the money in your pocket, huh? What are you going to say when I walk over there and get in it and start the engine?"

"Nothing, son," Mr Hampton said. "Whenever you want to leave." "Which is right now," Matt said. "And when I leave your.... ing town, my foot'll be right down to the floor board on that cut-out too. And you can stick that too, but not in your pocket. What do you think of that?"

"Nothing, son," Mr Hampton said. "I'll make a trade with you. Run that cut-out wide open all the way to the county line and then ten feet past it, and I wont let anybody bother you if you'll promise never to cross it again."

And that was all. That was Monday, trade day; it was like the whole county was there, had come to town just to stand quiet around the Square and watch Matt cross it for the last time, the paper suitcase he had come to Jefferson with on the seat by him and the cut-out clattering and popping; nobody waving goodbye to him and Matt not looking at any of us: just that quiet and silent suspension for the little gaudy car to rush slowly and loudly through, blatant and noisy and defiant yet at the same time looking as ephemeral and innocent and fragile as a child's toy, a birthday favor, so that looking at it you knew it would probably never get as far as Memphis, let alone Ohio; on across the Square and into the street which would become the Memphis highway at the edge of town, the sound of the cut-out banging and clattering and echoing between the walls, magnified a thousand times now beyond the mere size and bulk of the frail little machine which produced it; and we — some of us — thinking how surely now he would rush slow and roaring for the last time at least past Linda Snopes's house.

But he didn't. He just went on, the little car going faster and faster up the broad street empty too for the moment as if it too had vacated itself for his passing, on past where the last houses of town would give way to country, the vernal space of woods and fields where even the defiant uproar of the cut-out would become puny and fade and be at last absorbed.

So that was what Father called — said to Uncle Gavin — one down. And now it was May and already everybody knew that Linda Snopes was going to be the year's Number One student, the class's valedictorian; Uncle Gavin slowed us as we approached Wildermark's and nudged us in to the window, saying, "That one. Just behind the green one." It was a lady's fitted travelling case.

"That's for travelling," Mother said.

"All right," Uncle Gavin said.

"For travelling," Mother said. "For going away."

“Yes,” Uncle Gavin said. “She’s got to get away from here. Get out of Jefferson.”

“What’s wrong with Jefferson?” Mother said. The three of us stood there. I could see our three reflections in the plate glass, standing there looking at the fitted feminine case. She didn’t talk low or loud: just quiet. “All right,” she said. “What’s wrong with Linda then?”

Uncle Gavin didn’t either. “I dont like waste,” he said. “Everybody should have his chance not to waste.”

“Or his chance to the right not to waste a young girl?” Mother said.

“All right,” Uncle Gavin said. “I want her to be happy. Everybody should have the chance to be happy.”

“Which she cant possibly do of course just standing still in Jefferson,” Mother said.

“All right,” Uncle Gavin said. They were not looking at one another. It was like they were not even talking to one another but simply at the two empty reflections in the plate glass, like when you put the written idea into the anonymous and even interchangeable empty envelope, or maybe into the sealed empty bottle to be cast into the sea, or maybe two written thoughts sealed forever at the same moment into two bottles and cast into the sea to float and drift with the tides and the currents on to the cooling world’s end itself, still immune, still intact and inviolate, still ideas and still true and even still facts whether any eye ever saw them again or any other idea ever responded and sprang to them, to be elated or validated or grieved.

“The chance and duty and right to see that everybody is happy, whether they deserve it or not or even want it or not,” Mother said.

“All right,” Uncle Gavin said. “Sorry I bothered you. Come on. Let’s go home. Mrs Rouncewell can send her a dozen sunflowers.”

“Why not?” Mother said, taking his arm, already turning him, our three reflections turning in the plate glass, back toward the entrance and into the store, Mother in front now across to the luggage department.

"I think the blue one will suit her coloring, match her eyes," Mother said. "It's for Linda Snopes — her graduation," Mother told Miss Eunice Gant, the clerk.

"How nice," Miss Eunice said. "Is Linda going on a trip?"

"Oh yes," Mother said. "Very likely. At least probably to one of the eastern girls' schools next year perhaps. Or so I heard."

"How nice," Miss Eunice said. "I always say that every young boy and girl should go away from home for at least one year of school in order to learn how the other half lives."

"How true," Mother said. "Until you do go and see, all you do is hope. Until you actually see for yourself, you never do give up and settle down, do you?"

"Maggie," Uncle Gavin said.

"Give up?" Miss Eunice said. "Give up hope? Young people should never give up hope."

"Of course not," Mother said. "They don't have to. All they have to do is stay young, no matter how long it takes."

"Maggie," Uncle Gavin said.

"Oh," Mother said, "you want to pay cash for it instead of charge? All right; I'm sure Mr Wildermark won't mind." So Uncle Gavin took two twenty dollar bills from his wallet and took out one of his cards and gave it to Mother.

"Thank you," she said. "But Miss Eunice probably has a big one, that will hold all four names." So Miss Eunice gave her the big card and Mother held out her hand until Uncle Gavin uncapped his pen and gave it to her and we watched her write in the big sprawly hand that still looked like somebody thirteen years old in the ninth grade:

Mr and Mrs Charles Mallison Charles Mallison Jr

Mr Gavin Stevens

and capped the pen and handed it back to Uncle Gavin and took the card between the thumb and finger of one hand and waved it dry and gave it to Miss Eunice.

“I’ll send it out tonight,” Miss Eunice said. “Even if the graduation isn’t until next week. It’s such a handsome gift, why shouldn’t Linda have that much more time to enjoy it.”

“Yes,” Mother said. “Why shouldn’t she?” Then we were outside again, our three reflections jumbled into one walking now across the plate glass; Mother had Uncle Gavin’s arm again.

“All four of our names,” Uncle Gavin said. “At least her father wont know a white-headed bachelor sent his seventeen-year-old daughter a fitted travelling case.”

“Yes,” Mother said. “One of them wont know it.”

FIFTEEN

Gavin Stevens

THE DIFFICULTY WAS, how to tell her, explain to her. I mean, why. Not the deed, the act itself, but the reason for it, the why behind it — say point blank to her over one of the monstrous synthetic paradoxes which were her passion or anyway choice in Christian’s drugstore, or perhaps out on the street itself: “We wont meet anymore from now on because after Jefferson assimilates all the details of how your boyfriend tracked you down in my office and bloodied my nose one Saturday, and eight days later, having spent his last night in Jefferson in the county jail, shook our dust forever from his feet with the turbulent uproar of his racer’s cut-out; — after that, for you to be seen still meeting me in ice cream dens will completely destroy what little was left of your good name.”

You see? That was it: the very words reputation and good name. Merely to say them, speak them aloud, give their existence vocal recognition, would irrevocably soil and besmirch them, would destroy the immunity of the very things they represented, leaving them not just vulnerable but already doomed; from the inviolable and proud integrity of principles they would become, reduce to, the ephemeral and already doomed and damned fragility of human conditions; innocence and virginity become symbol and postulant of loss and grief, evermore to be

mourned, existing only in the past tense was and now is not, no more no more.

That was the problem. Because the act, the deed itself, was simple enough. Luckily the affair happened late on a Saturday afternoon, which would give my face thirty-six hours anyway before it would have to make a public appearance. (It wouldn't have needed that long except for the ring he wore — a thing not quite as large as a brass knuckle and not really noticeably unlike gold if you didn't get too close probably, of a tiger's head gripping between its jaws what had been — advisedly — a ruby; advisedly because the fact that the stone was missing at the moment was a loss only to my lip.)

Besides, the drugstore meetings were not even a weekly affair, let alone daily, so even a whole week could pass before

(1) it would occur to someone that we had not met in over a week, who

(2) would immediately assume that we had something to conceal was why we had not met in over a week, and

(3) the fact that we had met again after waiting over a week only proved it.

By which time I was even able to shave past my cut lip. So it was very simple; simple indeed in fact, and I the simple one. I had planned it like this: the carefully timed accident which would bring me out the drugstore door, the (say) tin of pipe tobacco still in plain sight on its way to the pocket, at the exact moment when she would pass on her way to school: "Good morning, Linda—" already stepping on past her and then already pausing: "I have another book for you. Meet me here after school this afternoon and we'll have a coke over it."

Which would be all necessary. Because I was the simple one, to whom it had never once occurred that the blow of that ruby-vacant reasonably almost-gold tiger's head might have marked her too even if it didn't leave a visible cut; that innocence is innocent not because it rejects but because it accepts; is innocent not because it is impervious

and invulnerable to everything, but because it is capable of accepting anything and still remaining innocent; innocent because it foreknows all and therefore doesn't have to fear and be afraid; the tin of tobacco now in my coat pocket because by this time even it had become noticeable, the last book-burdened stragglers now trotting toward the sound of the first strokes of the school bell and still she had not passed; obviously I had missed her somehow: either taken my post not soon enough or she had taken another route to school or perhaps would not leave home for school at all today, for whatever reasons no part of which were the middleaged bachelor's pandering her to Jonson and Herrick and Thomas Campion; crossing — I — the now-unchildrened street at last, mounting the outside stairs since tomorrow was always tomorrow; indeed, I could even use the tobacco tin again, provided I didn't break the blue stamp for verity, and opened the screen door and entered the office.

She was sitting neither in the revolving chair behind the desk nor in the leather client's one before it but in a straight hard armless one against the book-case as though she had fled, been driven until the wall stopped her, and turned then, her back against it, not quite sitting in the chair nor quite huddled in it because although her legs, knees were close and rigid and her hands were clasped tight in her lap, her head was still up watching the door and then me with the eyes the McCarron boy had marked her with which at a distance looked as black as her hair until you saw they were that blue so dark as to be almost violet.

"I thought ..." she said. "They — somebody said Matt quit his job and left — went yesterday. I thought you might...."

"Of course," I said. "I always want to see you," stopping myself in time from I've been waiting over there on the corner until the last bell rang, for you to pass though this is what I really stopped from Get up. Get out of here quick. Why did you come here anyway? Dont you see this is the very thing I have been lying awake at night with ever since Saturday? So I merely said that I had bought the can of tobacco which I must now find someone capable or anyway willing to smoke, to give it to, to create the chance to say: "I have another book for you.

I forgot to bring it this morning, but I'll bring it at noon. I'll wait for you at Christian's after school and stand you a soda too. Now you'll have to hurry; you're already late."

I had not even released the screen door and so had only to open it again, having also in that time in which she crossed the room, space to discard a thousand frantic indecisions: to remain concealed in the office as though I had not been there at all this morning, and let her leave alone; to follow to the top of the stairs and see her down them, avuncular and fond; to walk her to the school itself and wait to see her through the actual door: the family friend snatching the neighbor's child from the rife midst of truancy and restoring it to duty — family friend to Flem Snopes who had no more friends than Blackbeard or Pistol, to Eula Varner who no more had friends than man or woman either would have called them that Messalina and Helen had.

So I did all three: waited in the office too long, so that I had to follow down the stairs too fast, and then along the street beside her not far enough either to be un-noticed or forgotten. Then there remained only to suborn my nephew with the dollar bill and the book: I dont remember which one, I dont believe I even noticed.

"Sir?" Chick said. "I meet her in Christian's drugstore after school and give her the book and tell her you'll try to get there but not to wait. And buy her a soda. Why dont I just give her the book at school and save time?"

"Certainly," I said. "Why dont you just give me back the dollar?" "And buy her a soda," he said. "Do I have to pay for that out of the dollar?"

"All right," I said. "Twenty-five cents then. If she takes a banana split you can drink water and make a nickel more."

"Maybe she'll take a coke," he said. "Then I can have one too and still make fifteen cents."

"All right," I said.

"Or suppose she dont want anything."

"Didn't I say all right?" I said. "Just dont let your mother hear you say 'she dont'."

"Why?" he said. "Father and Ratliff say 'she dont' all the time, and so do you when you are talking to them. And Ratliff says 'taken' for 'took' and 'drug' for 'dragged' and so do you when you are talking to country people like Ratliff."

"How do you know?" I said.

"I've heard you. So has Ratliff."

"Why? Did you tell him to?"

"No sir," he said. "Ratliff told me."

My rejoinder may have been Wait until you get as old as Ratliff and your father and me and you can too, though I dont remember. But then, inside the next few months I was to discover myself doing lots of things he wasn't old enough yet for the privilege.

Which was beside the point anyway now; now only the afternoon remained: the interminable time until a few moments after half-past-three filled with a thousand indecisions which each fierce succeeding harassment would revise. You see? She had not only abetted me in making that date with which I would break, wreck, shatter, destroy, slay something, she had even forestalled me in it by the simplicity of directness.

So I had only to pass that time. That is, get it passed, live it down; the office window as good as any for that and better than most since it looked down on the drugstore entrance so I had only to lurk there.

Not to hear the dismissal bell of course this far away but rather to see them first: the little ones, the infantile inflow and scatter of primer- and first-graders, then the middle-graders boisterous and horsing as to the boys, then the mature ones, juniors and seniors grave with weight and alien with puberty; and there she was, tall (no: not for a girl that tall but

all right then: tall, like a heron out of a moil of frogs and tadpoles), pausing for just one quick second at the drugstore entrance for one quick glance, perhaps at the empty stairway.

Then she entered, carrying three books any one of which might have been that book and I thought He gave it to her at school; the damned little devil has foxed me for that odd quarter.

But then I saw Chick; he entered too, carrying the book and then I thought how if I had only thought to fill a glass with water, to count off slowly sixty seconds say to cover the time Skeets McGowan, the soda squirt, would need to tear his fascinations from whatever other female junior or senior and fill the order, then drink the water slowly to simulate the coke; thinking But maybe she did take the banana split; maybe there is still time, already across the office, the screen door already in my hand before I caught myself: at least the county attorney must not be actually seen running down his office stairs and across the street into a drugstore where a sixteen-year-old high school junior waited.

And I was in time but just in time. They had not even sat down, or if they had she had already risen, the two of them only standing beside the table, she carrying four books now and looking at me for only that one last instant and then no more with the eyes you thought were just dark gray or blue until you knew better.

"I'm sorry I'm late," I said. "I hope Chick told you."

"It's all right," she said. "I have to go on home anyway."

"Without a coke even?" I said.

"I have to go home," she said.

"Another time then," I said. "What they call a rain check."

"Yes," she said. "I have to go home now." So I moved so she could move, making the move first to let her go ahead, toward the door.

"Remember what you said about that quarter," Chick said.

And made the next move first too, opening the screen for her then stopping in it and so establishing severance and separation by that little space before she even knew it, not even needing to pause and half-glance back to prove herself intact and safe, intact and secure and unthreatened still, not needing to say Mister Stevens nor even Mister Gavin nor Goodbye nor even anything to need to say Thank you for, nor even to look back then although she did. "Thank you for the book," she said; and gone.

"Remember what you said about that quarter," Chick said.
"Certainly," I said. "Why the bejesus dont you go somewhere and spend it?"

Oh yes, doing a lot of things Chick wasn't old enough yet himself to do. Because dodging situations which might force me to use even that base shabby lash again was fun, excitement.

Because she didn't know (Must not know, at least not now, not yet: else why the need for that base and shabby lash?), could not be certainly sure about that afternoon, that one or two or three (whatever it was) minutes in the drugstore; never sure whether what Chick told her was the truth: that I actually was going to be late and had simply sent my nephew as the handiest messenger to keep her company until or when or if I did show up, I so aged and fatuous as not even to realise the insult either standing her up would be, or sending a ten-year-old boy to keep her company and believing that she, a sixteen-year-old high school junior, would accept him; or if I had done it deliberately: made the date then sent the ten-year-old boy to fill it as a delicate way of saying Stop bothering me.

So I must not even give her a chance to demand of me with the temerity of desperation which of these was right. And that was the fun, the excitement. I mean, dodging her. It was adolescence in reverse, turned upside down: the youth, himself virgin and — who knew? — maybe even more so, at once drawn and terrified of what draws him, contriving by clumsy and timorous artifice the accidental encounters in which he still would not and never quite touch, would not even hope to

touch, really want to touch, too terrified in fact to touch; but only to breathe the same air, be laved by the same circumambience which laved the mistress's moving limbs; to whom the glove or the handkerchief she didn't even know she had lost, the flower she didn't even know she had crushed, the very ninth- or tenth-grade arithmetic or grammar or geography bearing her name in her own magical hand on the flyleaf, are more terrible and moving than ever will be afterward the gleam of the actual naked shoulder or spread of unbound hair on the pillow's other twin.

That was me: not to encounter; continuously just to miss her yet never be caught at it. You know: in a little town of three thousand people like ours, the only thing that could cause more talk and notice than a middleaged bachelor meeting a sixteen-year-old maiden two or three times a week, would be a sixteen-year-old maiden and a middleaged bachelor just missing each other two or three times a week by darting into stores or up alleys. You know: a middleaged lawyer, certainly the one who was county attorney too, could always find enough to do even in a town of just three thousand to miss being on the one street between her home and the school house at eight-thirty and twelve and one and three-thirty o'clock when the town's whole infant roster must come and go, sometimes, a few times even, but not forever.

Yet that's what I had to do. I had no help, you see; I couldn't stop her suddenly on the street one day and say, "Answer quickly now. Exactly how much were you fooled or not fooled that afternoon in the drugstore? Say in one word exactly what you believe about that episode." All I could do was leave well-enough alone, even when the only well-enough I had wasn't anywhere that well.

So I had to dodge her. I had to plan not just mine but Yoknapatawpha County's business too ahead in order to dodge a sixteen-year-old girl. That was during the spring. So until school was out in May it would be comparatively simple, at least for five days of the week. But in time vacation would arrive, with no claims of regimen or discipline on her; and observation even if not personal experience had long since taught me that anyone sixteen years old not nursing a child or supporting a

family or in jail, could be almost anywhere at any time during the twenty-four hours.

So when the time came, which was that last summer before her final year in high school when she would graduate, I didn't even have the catalogues and brochures from the alien and outland schools sent first to me in person, to be handed by me to her, but sent direct to her, to Miss Linda Snopes, Jefferson, Mississippi, the Mississippi to be carefully spelt out in full else the envelope would go: first, to Jefferson, Missouri; second, to every other state in the forty-eight which had a Jefferson in it, before: third, it would finally occur to somebody somewhere that there might be someone in Mississippi capable of thinking vaguely of attending an eastern or northern school or capable of having heard of such or anyway capable of enjoying the pictures in the catalogues or even deciphering the one-syllable words, provided they were accompanied by photographs.

So I had them sent direct to her — the shrewd suave snob-enticements from the Virginia schools at which Southern mothers seemed to aim their daughters by simple instinct, I don't know why, unless because the mothers themselves did not attend them, and thus accomplishing by proxy what had been denied them in person since they had not had mothers driven to accomplish vicariously what they in their turn had been denied.

And not just the Virginia ones first but the ones from the smart 'finishing' schools north of Mason's and Dixon's too. I was being fair. No: we were being fair, she and I both, the two of us who never met anymore now for the sake of her good name, in federation and cahoots for the sake of her soul; the two of us together saying in absentia to her mother: There they all are: the smart ones, the snob ones. We have been fair, we gave you your chance.

Now, here is where we want to go, where you can help us go, if not by approval, at least by not saying No; arranging for the other catalogues to reach her only then: the schools which would not even notice what she wore and how she walked and used her fork and all the rest of how

she looked and acted in public because by this time all that would be too old and fixed to change, but mainly because it had not mattered anyway since what did matter was what she did and how she acted in the spirit's inviolable solitude.

So now — these last began to reach her about Christmas time of that last year in high school — she would have to see me, need to see me, not to help her decide which one of them but simply to discuss, canvass the decision before it became final. I waited, in fact quite patiently while it finally dawned on me that she was not going to make the first gesture to see me again.

I had avoided her for over six months now and she not only knew I had been dodging her since in a town the size of ours a male can no more avoid a female consistently for that long by mere accident than they can meet for that long by what they believed or thought was discretion and surreptition, even she realised by this time that that business in Christian's drugstore that afternoon last April had been no clumsy accident. (Oh yes, it had already occurred to me also that she had no reason whatever to assume I knew she had received the catalogues, let alone had instigated them. But I dismissed that as immediately as you will too if we are to get on with this.)

So I must make that first gesture. It would not be quite as simple now as it had used to be. A little after half-past-three on any weekday afternoon I could see her from the office window (if I happened to be there) pass along the Square in the school's scattering exodus. Last year, in fact during all the time before, she would be alone, or seemed to be. But now, during this past one, particularly since the Levitt troglodyte's departure, she would be with another girl who lived on the same street. Then suddenly (it began in the late winter, about St Valentine's day) instead of two there would be four of them: two boys, Chick said the Rouncewell boy and the youngest Bishop one, the year's high school athletic stars.

And now, after spring began, the four of them would be on almost any afternoon in Christian's drugstore (at least there harbored apparently

there no ghosts to make her blush and squirm and I was glad of that), with coca colas and the other fearsome (I was acquainted there) messes which young people, young women in particular, consume with terrifying equanimity not only in the afternoon but at nine and ten in the morning too: which — the four of them — I had taken to be two pairs, two couples in the steadfast almost uxorious fashion of high school juniors and seniors, until one evening I saw (by chance) her going toward the picture show squired by both of them.

Which would make it a little difficult now. But not too much. In fact, it would be quite simple (not to mention the fact that it was already May and I couldn't much longer afford to wait): merely to wait for some afternoon when she would be without her convoy, when the Bishop and the Rouncewell would have to practise their dedications or maybe simply be kept in by a teacher after school. Which I did, already seeing her about a block away but just in time to see her turn suddenly into a street which would by-pass the Square itself: obviously a new route home she had adopted to use on the afternoons when she was alone, was already or (perhaps) wanted to be.

But that was simple too: merely to back-track one block then turn myself one block more to the corner where the street she was in must intercept. But quicker than she, faster than she, so that I saw her first walking fast along the purlieus of rubbish and ashcans and loading platforms until she saw me at the corner and stopped in dead midstride and one quick fleeing half-raised motion of the hand. So that, who knows? at that sudden distance I might not have even stopped, being already in motion again, raising my hand and arm in return and on, across the alley, striding on as you would naturally expect a county attorney to be striding along a side street at forty-two minutes past three in the afternoon; one whole block more for safety and then safe, inviolate still the intactness, unthreatened again.

There was the telephone of course. But that would be too close, too near the alley and the raised hand. And grüss Gott they had invented the typewriter; the Board of Supervisors could subtract the letterhead

from my next pay check or who knows they might not even miss it; the typewriter and the time of course were already mine:

Dear Linda:

When you decide which one you like the best, let's have a talk. I've seen some of them myself and can tell you more than the catalogue may have. We should have a banana split too; they may not have heard of them yet at Bennington and Bard and Swarthmore and you'll have to be a missionary as well as a student.

Then in pencil, in my hand:

Saw you in the alley the other afternoon but didn't have time to stop. Incidentally, what were you doing in an alley?

You see? the other afternoon so that it wouldn't matter when I mailed it: two days from now or two weeks from now; two whole weeks in which to tear it up, and even addressed the stamped envelope, knowing as I did so that I was deliberately wasting two — no, three, bought singly — whole cents, then tore them neatly across once and matched the torn edges and tore them across again and built a careful small tepee on the cold hearth and struck a match and watched the burn and uncreaked mine ancient knees and shook my trousers down.

Because it was May now; in two weeks she would graduate. But then Miss Eunice Gant had promised to send the dressing case yesterday afternoon and grüss Gott they had invented the telephone too.

So once more (this would be the last one, the last lurk) to wait until half-past-eight o'clock (the bank would not open until nine but then even though Flem was not president of it you simply declined to imagine him hanging around the house until the last moment for the chance to leap to the ringing telephone) and then picked it up:

"Good morning, Mrs Snopes.

Gavin Stevens. May I speak to Linda if she hasn't already ... I see, I must have missed her. But then I was late myself this morning ... Thank you. We are all happy to know the dressing case pleased her. Maggie will be pleased to have the note.... If you'll give her the message when she

comes home to dinner. I have some information about a Radcliffe scholarship which might interest her. That's practically Harvard too and I can tell her about Cambridge ... Yes, if you will: that I'll be waiting for her in the drugstore after school this afternoon. Thank you." And goodbye. The sad word, even over the telephone.

I mean, not the word is sad nor the meaning of it, but that you really can say it, that the time comes always in time when you can say it without grief and anguish now but without even the memory of grief and anguish, remembering that night in this same office here (when was it? ten years ago? twelve years?) when I had said not just Goodbye but Get the hell out of here to Eula Varner, and no hair bleached, no bead of anguished sweat or tear sprang out, and what regret still stirred a little was regret that even if I had been brave enough not to say No then, even the courage would not matter now since even the cowardice was only thin regret.

At first I thought I would go inside and be already sitting at the table waiting. Then I thought better: it must be casual but not taken-for-granted casual. So I stood at the entrance, but back, not to impede the juvenile flood or perhaps rather not to be trampled by it.

Because she must not see me from a block away waiting, but casual, by accident outwardly and chance: first the little ones, first- and second- and third-grade; and now already the larger ones, the big grades and the high school; it would be soon now, any time now. Except that it was Chick, with a folded note.

"Here," he said. "It seems to be stuck."

"Stuck?" I said.

"The record. The victrola. This is the same tune it was playing before, aint it? just backward this time." Because she probably had insisted he read it first before she released it to him. So I was the second, not counting her:

Dear Mr Stevens

I will have to be a little late if you can wait for me

Linda

“Not quite the same,” I said. “I dont hear any dollar now.”

“Okay,” he said. “Neither did I. I reckon you aint coming home now.”

“So do I,” I said. So I went inside then and sat down at the table; I owed her that much anyway; the least I could give her was revenge so let it be full revenge; full satisfaction of watching from wherever she would be watching while I sat still waiting for her long after even I knew she would not come; let it be the full whole hour then since ‘finis’ is not ‘goodbye’ and has no cause to grieve the spring of grief.

So when she passed rapidly across the plate glass window, I didn’t know her. Because she was approaching not from the direction of the school but from the opposite one, as though she were on her way to school, not from it. No: that was not the reason.

She was already in the store now, rapidly, the screen clapping behind her, at the same instant and in the same physical sense both running and poised motionless, wearing not the blouse and skirt or print cotton dress above the flat-heeled shoes of school; but dressed, I mean ‘dressed’, in a hat and high heels and silk stockings and makeup who needed none and already I could smell the scent: one poised split-second of immobilised and utter flight in bizarre and paradox panoply of allure, like a hawk caught by a speed lense.

“It’s all right,” I said. Because at least I still had that much presence. “I cant,” she said. At least that much presence. There were not many people in the store but even one could have been too many so I was already up now, moving toward her.

“How nice you look,” I said. “Come on; I’ll walk a way with you,” and turned her that way, not even touching her arm, on and out, onto the pavement, talking (I presume I was; I usually am), speaking: which was perhaps why I did not even realise that she had chosen the direction, not in fact until I realised that she had actually turned toward the foot of the office stairs, only then touching her: her elbow, holding it a little,

on past the stairs so that none (one hoped intended must believe) had marked that falter, on along the late spring store-fronts — the hardware and farm-furnish stores cluttered with garden and farm tools and rolls of uncut plowline and sample sacks of slag and fertilizer and even the grocery ones exposing neat cases of seed packets stencilled with gaudy and incredible vegetables and flowers — talking (oh ay, trust me always) sedate and decorous: the young girl decked and scented to go wherever a young woman would be going at four oclock on a May afternoon, and the gray-headed bachelor, avuncular and what old Negroes called ‘settled’, incapable now of harm, slowed the blood and untroubled now the flesh by turn of wrist or ankle, faint and dusty-dry as memory now the hopes and anguishes of youth — until we could turn a corner into privacy or at least room or anyway so long as we did not actually stop.

“I cant,” she said.

“You said that before,” I said. “You cant what?”

“The schools,” she said. “The ones you.... the catalogues. From outside Jefferson, outside Mississippi.”

“I’m glad you cant,” I said. “I didn’t expect you to decide alone. That’s why I wanted to see you: to help you pick the right one.”

“But I cant,” she said. “Dont you understand? I cant.”

Then I — yes, I — stopped talking. “All right,” I said. “Tell me.”

“I cant go to any of them. I’m going to stay in Jefferson. I’m going to the Academy next year.” Oh yes, I stopped talking now. It wasn’t what the Academy was that mattered. It wasn’t even that the Academy was in Jefferson that mattered. It was Jefferson itself which was the mortal foe since Jefferson was Snopes.

“I see,” I said. “All right. I’ll talk to her myself.”

“No,” she said. “No. I dont want to go away.”

“Yes,” I said. “We must. It’s too important. It’s too important for even you to see now. Come on. We’ll go home now and talk to your mother—” already turning. But already she had caught at me, grasping

my wrist and forearm with both hands, until I stopped. Then she let go and just stood there in the high heels and the silk stockings and the hat that was a little too old for her or maybe I was not used to her in a hat or maybe the hat just reminded me of the only other time I ever saw her in a hat which was that fiasco of a Sunday dinner at home two years ago which was the first time I compelled, forced her to do something because she didn't know how to refuse; whereupon I said suddenly: "Of course I don't really need to ask you this, but maybe we'd better just for the record.

You don't really want to stay in Jefferson, do you? You really do want to go up East to school?" then almost immediately said: "All right, I take that back. I can't ask you that; I can't ask you to say outright you want to go against your mother. — All right," I said, "you don't want to be there yourself when I talk to her: is that it?" Then I said: "Look at me," and she did, with the eyes that were not blue or gray either but hyacinthine, the two of us standing there in the middle of that quiet block in full view of at least twenty discreet window-shades; looking at me even while she said, breathed, again:

"No. No."

"Come on," I said. "Let's walk again," and she did so, docile enough. "She knows you came to meet me this afternoon because of course she gave you my telephone message. — All right," I said. "I'll come to your house in the morning then, after you've left for school. But it's all right; you don't need to tell her. You don't need to tell her anything — say anything—" Not even No No again, since she had said nothing else since I saw her and was still saying it even in the way she walked and said nothing.

Because now I knew why the clothes, the scent, the makeup which belonged on her no more than the hat did. It was desperation, not to defend the ingratitude but at least to palliate the rudeness of it: the mother who said Certainly, meet him by all means.

Tell him I am quite competent to plan my daughter's education, and we'll both thank him to keep his nose out of it; the poor desperate child

herself covering, trying to hide the baseness of the one and the same of the other behind the placentae of worms and the urine and vomit of cats and cancerous whales. "I'll come tomorrow morning, after you've gone to school," I said. "I know. I know. But it's got too important now for either of us to stop."

So the next morning: who — I — had thought yesterday to have seen the last of lurking. But I had to be sure. And there was Ratliff.

"What?" he said. "You're going to see Eula because Eula wont let her leave Jefferson to go to school? You're wrong."

"All right," I said. "I'm wrong. I dont want to do it either. I'm not that brave — offering to tell anybody, let alone a woman, how to raise her child. But somebody's got to. She's got to get away from here. Away for good from all the very air that ever heard or felt breathed the name of Snopes — —"

"But wait, I tell you! wait!" he said. "Because you're wrong—"

But I couldn't wait. Anyway, I didn't. I mean, I just deferred, marked time until at least nine oclock. Because even on a hot Mississippi May morning, when people begin to get up more or less with the sun, not so much in self defense as to balance off as much as possible of the day against the hours between noon and four, a housewife would demand a little time to prepare (her house and herself or perhaps most of all and simply, her soul) for a male caller not only uninvited but already unwelcome.

But she was prepared, self house and soul too; if her soul was ever in her life unready for anything that just wore pants or maybe if any woman's soul ever needed pre-reading and pre-arming against anything in pants just named Gavin Stevens, passing through the little rented (still looking rented even though the owner or somebody had painted it) gate up the short rented walk toward the little rented veranda and onto it, my hand already lifted to knock before I saw her through the screen, standing there quite still in the little hallway watching me.

“Good morning,” she said. “Come in,” and now with no screen between us still watching me. No: just looking at me, not brazenly, not with welcome, not with anything.

Then she turned, the hair, where all the other women in Jefferson, even Maggie, had bobbed theirs now, still one heavy careless yellow bun at the back of her head, the dress which was not a morning gown nor a hostess gown nor even a house dress but just a simple cotton dress that was simply a dress and which, although she was thirty-five now — yes: thirty-six now by Ratliff’s counting from that splendid fall — like that one when she first crossed the Square that day sixteen years ago, appeared not so much as snatching in desperate haste to hide them but rather to spring in suppliance and adulation to the moving limbs, the very flowing of the fabric’s laving folds crying Evoe! Evoe!

Oh yes, it was a sitting room, exactly like the hall and both of them exactly like something else I had seen somewhere but didn’t have time to remember. Because she said, “Will you have some coffee?” and I saw that too: the service (not silver but the stuff the advertisements dont tell you is better than silver but simply newer.

New: inf. silver is quite all right and even proper for people still thrall to gaslight and horse-and-buggy) on a low table, with two chairs already drawn up and I thought I have lost even if she had met me wearing a barrel or a feed sack. Then I thought So it really is serious since this — the coffee, the low table, the two intimate chairs — was an assault not on the glands nor even just the stomach but on the civilised soul or at least the soul which believes it thirsts to be civilised.

“Thank you,” I said and waited and then sat too. “Only, do you mind if I wonder why? We dont need an armistice, since I have already been disarmed.”

“You came to fight then,” she said, pouring.

“How can I, without a weapon?” I said, watching: the bent head with the careless, almost untidy bun of hair, the arm, the hand which could have rocked a warrior-hero’s cradle or even caught up its father’s fallen

sword, pouring the trivial (it would probably not even be very good coffee) fluid from the trivial spurious synthetic urn — this, in that room, that house; and suddenly I knew where I had seen the room and hallway before.

In a photograph, the photograph from say Town and Country labelled American Interior, reproduced in color in a wholesale furniture catalogue, with the added legend: This is neither a Copy nor a Reproduction. It is our own Model scaled to your individual Requirements. “Thank you,” I said. “No cream. Just sugar. — Only it doesn’t look like you.”

“What?” she said.

“This room. Your house.” And that was why I didn’t even believe at first that I had heard her.

“It wasn’t me. It was my husband.”

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“My husband chose this furniture.”

“Flem?” I said, cried. “Flem Snopes?” — and she looking at me now, not startled, amazed: not anything or if anything, just waiting for my uproar to reach its end: nor was it only from McCarron that Linda got the eyes, but only the hair from him. “Flem Snopes!” I said. “Flem Snopes!”

“Yes. We went to Memphis. He knew exactly what he wanted. No, that’s wrong. He didn’t know yet. He only knew he wanted, had to have. Or does that make any sense to you?”

“Yes,” I said. “Terribly. You went to Memphis.”

“Yes,” she said. “That was why: to find somebody who could tell him what he had to have. He already knew which store he was going to. The first thing he said was, ‘When a man dont intend to buy anything from you, how much do you charge him just to talk?’ Because he was not trading now, you see. When you’re on a trade, for land or stock or whatever it is, both of you may trade or both of you may not, it all depends; you dont have to buy it or sell it; when you stop trading and part, neither of you may be any different from when you began.

But not this time. This was something he had to have and knew he had to have: he just didn't know what it was and so he would not only have to depend on the man who owned it to tell him what he wanted, he would even have to depend on the man selling it not to cheat him on the price or the value of it because he wouldn't know that either: only that he had to have it. Do you understand that too?"

"All right," I said. "Yes. And then?"

"It had to be exactly what it was, for exactly what he was. That was when the man began to say, 'Yes, I think I see. You started out as a clerk in a country store. Then you moved to town and ran a café. Now you're vice president of your bank. A man who came that far in that short time, is not going to stop just there, and why shouldn't everybody that enters his home know it, see it? Yes, I know what you want.'

And Flem said No. 'Not expensive,' the man said. 'Successful.' And Flem said No. 'All right,' the man said. 'Antique then,' and took us into a room and showed us what he meant. 'I can take this piece here for instance and make it look still older.' And Flem said, 'Why?' and the man said, 'For background. Your grandfather.' And Flem said, 'I had a grandfather because everybody had. I don't know who he was but I know that whoever he was he never owned enough furniture for a room, let alone a house. Besides, I don't aim to fool anybody.

Only a fool would try to fool smart people, and anybody that needs to fool fools is already one.' And that was when the man said wait while he telephoned. And we did, it was not long before a woman came in. She was his wife. She said to me: 'What are your ideas?' and I said, 'I don't care,' and she said 'What?' and I said it again and then she looked at Flem and I watched them looking at one another, a good while.

Then she said, not loud like her husband, quite quiet: 'I know,' and now it was Flem that said, 'Wait. How much will it cost?' and she said, 'You're a trader. I'll make a trade with you. I'll bring the stuff down to Jefferson and put it in your house myself. If you like it, you buy it. If you

dont like it, I'll load it back up and move it back here and it wont cost you a cent.'"

"All right," I said. "And then?"

"That's all," she said. "Your coffee's cold. I'll get another cup—" and began to rise until I stopped her.

"When was this?" I said.

"Four years ago," she said. "When he bought this house."

"Bought the house?" I said. "Four years ago? That's when he became vice president of the bank!"

"Yes," she said. "The day before it was announced. I'll get another cup."

"I dont want coffee," I said, sitting there saying Flem Snopes Flem Snopes until I said, cried: "I dont want anything! I'm afraid!" until I finally said "What?" and she repeated:

"Will you have a cigarette?" and I saw that too: a synthetic metal box also and there should have been a synthetic matching lighter but what she had taken from the same box with the cigarette was a kitchen match. "Linda says you smoke a corncob pipe. Smoke it if you want to."

"No," I said again. "Not anything. — But Flem Snopes," I said. "Flem Snopes."

"Yes," she said. "It's not me that wont let her go away from Jefferson to school."

"But why?" I said. "Why? When she's not even his — he's not even her — I'm sorry. But you can see how urgent, how we dont even have time for...."

"Politeness?" she said. Nor did I make that move either: just sitting there watching while she leaned and scratched the match on the sole of her side-turned slipper and lit the cigarette.

"For anything," I said. "For anything except her. Ratliff tried to tell me this this morning, but I wouldn't listen.

So maybe that's what you were telling me a moment ago when I wouldn't or didn't listen? The furniture. That day in the store. Didn't

know what he wanted because what he wanted didn't matter, wasn't important: only that he did want it, did need it, must have it, intended to have it no matter what cost or who lost or who anguished or grieved. To be exactly what he needed to exactly fit exactly what he was going to be tomorrow after it was announced: a vice president's wife and child along with the rest of the vice president's furniture in the vice president's house? Is that what you tried to tell me?"

"Something like that," she said.

"Just something like that," I said. "Because that's not enough. It's nowhere near enough. We won't mention the money because everybody who ever saw that bow tie would know he wouldn't pay out his own money to send his own child a sleeper-ticket distance to school, let alone another man's ba—" and stopped. But not she, smoking, watching the burning tip of the cigarette.

"Say it," she said. "Bastard."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Why?" she said.

"I'm trying," I said. "Maybe I could, if only you were. Looked like you were. Or even like you were trying to be."

"Go on," she said. "Not the money."

"Because he — you — could get that from Uncle Will probably, not to mention taking it from me as a scholarship. Or is that it? he can't even bear to see the money of even a mortal enemy like old man Will Varner probably is to him, wasted on sending a child out of the state to school when he pays taxes every year to support the Mississippi ones?"

"Go on," she said again. "Not the money."

"So it is that furniture catalogue picture after all, scaled in cheap color from the Charleston or Richmond or Long Island or Boston photograph, down to that one which Flem Snopes holds imperative that the people of Yoknapatawpha County must have of him. While he was just owner of a back-alley café it was all right for all Frenchman's Bend (and all Jefferson and the rest of the county too after Ratliff and a few others

like him got through with it) to know that the child who bore his name was really a — —”

“Bastard,” she said again.

“All right,” I said. But even then I didn’t say it: “ — and even when he sold the café for a nice profit and was superintendent of the power-plant, it still wouldn’t have mattered. And even after that when he held no public position but was simply a private usurer and property-grabber quietly minding his own business; not to mention the fact that ten or twelve years had now passed, by which time he could even begin to trust Jefferson to have enough tenderness for a twelve- or thirteen-year-old female child not to upset her life with that useless and gratuitous information.

But now he is vice president of a bank and now a meddling outsider is persuading the child to go away to school, to spend at least the three months until the Christmas holidays among people none of whose fathers owe him money and so must keep their mouths shut, any one of whom might reveal the fact which at all costs he must now keep secret. So that’s it,” I said, and still she wasn’t looking at me: just smoking quietly and steadily while she watched the slow curl and rise of the smoke.

“So it’s you, after all,” I said. “He forbade her to leave Jefferson, and blackmailed you into supporting him by threatening you with what he himself is afraid of: that he himself will tell her of her mother’s shame and her own illegitimacy. Well, that’s a blade with three edges. Ask your father for the money, or take it from me, and get her away from Jefferson or I’ll tell her myself who she is — or is not.”

“Do you think she will believe you?” she said.

“What?” I said. “Believe me? Believe me? Even without a mirror to look into, nothing to compare with and need to repudiate from, since all she needed was just to live with him for the seventeen years which she has.

What more could she want than to believe me, believe anyone, a chance to believe anyone compassionate enough to assure her she's not his child? What are you talking about? What more could she ask than the right to love the mother who by means of love saved her from being a Snopes? And if that were not enough, what more could anybody want than this, that most never have the chance to be, not one in ten million have the right to be, deserve to be: not just a love child but one of the elect to share cousinhood with the world's immortal love-children — fruit of that brave virgin passion not just capable but doomed to count the earth itself well lost for love, which down all the long record of man the weak and impotent and terrified and sleepless that the rest of the human race calls its poets, have dreamed and anguished and exulted and amazed over—" and she watching me now, not smoking: just holding the poised cigarette while the last blue vapor faded, watching me through it.

"You dont know very much about women, do you?" she said. "Women aren't interested in poets' dreams. They are interested in facts. It doesn't even matter whether the facts are true or not, as long as they match the other facts without leaving a rough seam. She wouldn't even believe you. She wouldn't even believe him if he were to tell her. She would just hate you both — you most of all because you started it."

"You mean she will take ... this — him — in preference to nothing? will throw away the chance for school and everything else? I dont believe you."

"To her, this isn't nothing. She will take it before a lot of things. Before most things."

"I dont believe you!" I said, cried, or thought I did. But only thought it, until I said: "So there's nothing I can do."

"Yes," she said. And now she was watching me, the cigarette motionless, not even seeming to burn. "Marry her."

"What?" I said, cried. "A gray-headed man more than twice her age? Dont you see, that's what I'm after: to set her free of Jefferson, not tie

her down to it still more, still further, still worse, but to set her free?
And you talk about the reality of facts.”

“The marriage is the only fact. The rest of it is still the poet’s romantic dream. Marry her. She’ll have you. Right now, in the middle of all this, she wont know how to say No. Marry her.”

“Goodbye,” I said. “Goodbye.”

And Ratliff again, still in the client’s chair where I had left him an hour ago.

“I tried to tell you,” he said. “Of course it’s Flem. What reason would Eula and that gal have not to jump at a chance to be shut of each other for nine or ten months for a change?”

“I can tell you that now myself,” I said. “Flem Snopes is vice president of a bank now with a vice president’s house with vice president’s furniture in it and some of that vice president’s furniture has got to be a vice president’s wife and child.”

“No,” he said.

“All right,” I said. “The vice president of a bank dont dare have it remembered that his wife was already carrying somebody else’s bastard when he married her, so if she goes off to school some stranger that dont owe him money will tell her who she is and the whole playhouse will blow up.”

“No,” Ratliff said.

“All right,” I said. “Then you tell a while.”

“He’s afraid she’ll get married,” he said.

“What?” I said.

“That’s right,” he said. “When Jody was born, Uncle Billy Varner made a will leaving half of his property to Miz Varner and half to Jody. When Eula was born, he made a new will leaving that same first half to Miz Varner and the other half split in two equal parts, one for Jody and one for Eula.

That's the will he showed Flem that day him and Eula was married and he aint changed it since. That is, Flem Snopes believed him when he said he wasn't going to change it, whether anybody else believed him or not — especially after Flem beat him on that Old Frenchman place trade."

"What?" I said. "He gave that place to them as Eula's dowry."

"Sho," Ratliff said. "It was told around so because Uncle Billy was the last man of all that would have corrected it. He offered Flem the place but Flem said he would rather have the price of it in cash money. Which was why Flem and Eula was a day late leaving for Texas: him and Uncle Billy was trading, with Uncle Billy beating Flem down to where he never even thought about it when Flem finally said all right, he would take that figger provided Uncle Billy would give him a option to buy the place at the same amount when he come back from Texas.

So they agreed, and Flem come back from Texas with them paint ponies and when the dust finally settled, me and Henry Armstid had done bought that Old Frenchman place from Flem for my half of that restaurant and enough of Henry's cash money to pay off Uncle Billy's option, which he had done forgot about.

And that's why Flem Snopes at least knows that Uncle Billy aint going to change that will. So he dont dare risk letting that girl leave Jefferson and get married, because he knows that Eula will leave him too then. It was Flem started it by saying No, but you got all three of them against you, Eula and that girl too until that girl finds the one she wants to marry. Because women aint interested — —"

"Wait," I said, "wait. It's my time now. Because I dont know anything about women because things like love and morality and jumping at any chance you can find that will keep you from being a Snopes are just a poet's romantic dream and women aren't interested in the romance of dreams; they are interested in the reality of facts, they dont care what facts, let alone whether they are true or not if they just dovetail with all the other facts without leaving a sawtooth edge. Right?"

“Well,” he said, “I might not a put it jest exactly that way.”

“Because I dont know anything about women,” I said. “So would you mind telling me how the hell you learned?”

“Maybe by listening,” he said. Which we all knew, since what Yoknapatawphian had not seen at some time during the past ten or fifteen years the tin box shaped and painted to resemble a house and containing the demonstrator machine, in the old days attached to the back of a horse-drawn buckboard and since then to the rear of a converted automobile, hitched or parked beside the gate to a thousand yards on a hundred back-country roads, while, surrounded by a group of four or five or six ladies come in sunbonnets or straw hats from anywhere up to a mile along the road, Ratliff himself with his smooth brown bland inscrutable face and his neat faded tieless blue shirt, sitting in a kitchen chair in the shady yard or on the gallery, listening. Oh yes, we all knew that.

“So I didn’t listen to the right ones,” I said.

“Or the wrong ones neither,” he said. “You never listened to nobody because by that time you were already talking again.”

Oh yes, easy. All I had to do was stand there on the street at the right time, until she saw me and turned, ducked with that semblance of flight, into the side street which would bypass the ambush. Nor even then to back-track that one block but merely to go straight through the drugstore itself, out the back door, so that no matter how fast she went I was in the alley first, ambushed again behind the wall’s angle in ample time to hear her rapid feet and then step out and grasp her arm just above the wrist almost before it began to rise in that reflex of flight and repudiation, holding the wrist, not hard, while she wrenched, jerked faintly at it, saying, “Please. Please.”

“All right,” I said. “All right. Just tell me this. When you went home first and changed before you met me in the drugstore that afternoon. It was your idea to go home first and change to the other dress. But it was your mother who insisted on the lipstick and the perfume and the silk

stockings and the high heels. Isn't that right?" And she still wrenching and jerking faintly at the arm I held, whispering:
"Please. Please."

SIXTEEN

Charles Mallison

THIS IS WHAT Ratliff said happened up to where Uncle his is what Ratliff said happened up to where Uncle Gavin could see it.

It was January, a gray day though not cold because of the fog. Old Het ran in Mrs Hait's front door and down the hall into the kitchen, already hollering in her strong bright happy voice, with strong and childlike pleasure:

"Miss Mannie! Mule in the yard!"

Nobody knew just exactly how old old Het really was. Nobody in Jefferson even remembered just how long she had been in the poorhouse. The old people said she was about seventy, though by her own counting, calculated from the ages of various Jefferson ladies from brides to grandmothers that she claimed to have nursed from infancy, she would be around a hundred and, as Ratliff said, at least triplets.

That is, she used the poorhouse to sleep in or anyway pass most or at least part of the night in. Because the rest of the time she was either on the Square or the streets of Jefferson or somewhere on the mile-and-a-half dirt road between town and the poorhouse; for twenty-five years at least ladies, seeing her through the front window or maybe even just hearing her strong loud cheerful voice from the house next door, had been locking themselves in the bathroom.

But even this did no good unless they had remembered first to lock the front and back doors of the house itself. Because sooner or later they would have to come out and there she would be, tall, lean, of a dark chocolate color, voluble, cheerful, in tennis shoes and the long rat-colored coat trimmed with what forty or fifty years ago had been fur,

and the purple toque that old Mrs Compson had given her fifty years ago while General Compson himself was still alive, set on the exact top of her headrag (at first she had carried a carpetbag of the same color and apparently as bottomless as a coal mine, though since the ten cent store came to Jefferson the carpetbag had given place to a succession of the paper shopping bags which it gave away), already settled in a chair in the kitchen, having established already upon the begging visitation a tone blandly and incorrigibly social.

She passed that way from house to house, travelling in a kind of moving island of alarm and consternation as she levied her weekly toll of food scraps and castoff garments and an occasional coin for snuff, moving in an urbane uproar and as inescapable as a tax-gatherer. Though for the last year or two since Mrs Hait's widowing, Jefferson had gained a sort of temporary respite from her because of Mrs Hait.

But even this was not complete. Rather, old Het had merely established a kind of local headquarters or advanced foraging post in Mrs Hait's kitchen soon after Mr Hait and five mules belonging to Mr I.O. Snopes died on a sharp curve below town under the fast north-bound through freight one night and even the folks at the poorhouse heard that Mrs Hait had got eight thousand dollars for him. She would come straight to Mrs Hait's as soon as she reached town, sometimes spending the entire forenoon there, so that only after noon would she begin her implacable rounds. Now and then when the weather was bad she spent the whole day with Mrs Hait.

On these days her regular clients or victims, freed temporarily, would wonder if in the house of the man-charactered and man-tongued woman who as Ratliff put it had sold her husband to the railroad company for eight thousand percent. profit, who chopped her own firewood and milked her cow and plowed and worked her own vegetable garden; — they wondered if maybe old Het helped with the work in return for her entertainment or if even now she still kept the relationship at its social level of a guest come to divert and be diverted.

She was wearing the hat and coat and was carrying the shopping bag when she ran into Mrs Hait's kitchen, already hollering: "Miss Mannie! Mule in the yard!"

Mrs Hait was squatting in front of the stove, raking live ashes from it into a scuttle. She was childless, living alone now in the little wooden house painted the same color that the railroad company used on its stations and boxcars — out of respect to and in memory of, we all said, that morning three years ago when what remained of Mr Hait had finally been sorted from what remained of the five mules and several feet of new manila rope scattered along the right-of-way.

In time the railroad claims adjuster called on her, and in time she cashed a check for eight thousand five hundred dollars, since (as Uncle Gavin said, these were the halcyon days when even the railroad companies considered their southern branches and divisions the rightful legitimate prey of all who dwelt beside them) although for several years before Mr Hait's death single mules and pairs (by coincidence belonging often to Mr Snopes too; you could always tell his because every time the railroad killed his mules they always had new strong rope on them) had been in the habit of getting themselves killed on that same blind curve at night, this was the first time a human being had — as Uncle Gavin put it — joined them in mutual apotheosis.

Mrs Hait took the money in cash; she stood in a calico wrapper and her late husband's coat sweater and the actual felt hat he had been wearing (it had been found intact) on that fatal morning and listened in cold and grim silence while the bank teller then the cashier then the president (Mr de Spain himself) tried to explain to her about bonds, then about savings accounts, then about a simple checking account, and put the money into a salt sack under her apron and departed; that summer she painted her house that serviceable and time-defying color which matched the depot and the boxcars, as though out of sentiment or (as Ratliff said) gratitude, and now she still lived in it, alone, in the calico wrapper and the sweater coat and the same felt hat which her husband had owned and wore until he no longer needed them; though her shoes by this time were her own: men's shoes which buttoned,

with toes like small tulip bulbs, of an archaic and obsolete pattern which Mr Wildermark himself ordered especially for her once a year.

She jerked up and around, still clutching the scuttle, and glared at old Het and said — her voice was a good strong one too, immediate too — “That son of a bitch,” and, still carrying the scuttle and with old Het still carrying the shopping bag and following, ran out of the kitchen into the fog. That’s why it wasn’t cold: the fog: as if all the sleeping and breathing of Jefferson during that whole long January night was still lying there imprisoned between the ground and the mist, keeping it from quite freezing, lying like a scum of grease on the wooden steps at the back door and on the brick coping and the wooden lid of the cellar stairs beside the kitchen door and on the wooden planks which led from the steps to the wooden shed in the corner of the back yard where Mrs Hait’s cow lived; when she stepped down onto the planks, still carrying the scuttle of live ashes, Mrs Hait skated violently before she caught her balance. Old Het in her rubber soles didn’t slip.

“Watch out!” she shouted happily. “They in the front!” One of them wasn’t. Because Mrs Hait didn’t fall either. She didn’t even pause, whirling and already running toward the corner of the house where, with silent and apparition-like suddenness, the mule appeared. It belonged to Mr. I.O. Snopes too. I mean, until they finally unravelled Mr Hait from the five mules on the railroad track that morning three years ago, nobody had connected him with Mr Snopes’s mule business, even though now and then somebody did wonder how Mr Hait didn’t seem to need to do anything steady to make a living.

Ratliff said the reason was that everybody was wondering too hard about what in the world I.O. Snopes was doing in the livestock business. Though Ratliff said that on second thought maybe it was natural: that back in Frenchman’s Bend I.O. had been a blacksmith without having any business at that, hating horses and mules both since he was deathly afraid of them, so maybe it was natural for him to take up the next thing he wouldn’t have any business in or sympathy or aptitude for, not to mention being six or eight or a dozen times as scared since now, instead of just one horse or mule tied to a post and with its owner

handy, he would have to deal alone with eight or ten or a dozen of them running loose until he could manage to put a rope on them.

That's what he did though — bought his mules at the Memphis market and brought them to Jefferson and sold them to farmers and widows and orphans black and white, for whatever he could get, down to some last irreducible figure, after which (up to the night when the freight train caught Mr Hait too and Jefferson made the first connection between Mr Hait and Mr Snopes's livestock business) single mules and pairs and gangs (always tied together with that new strong manila rope which Snopes always itemised and listed in his claim) would be killed by night freight trains on that same blind curve of Mr Hait's exit; somebody (Ratliff swore it wasn't him but the depot agent) finally sent Snopes through the mail a printed train schedule for the division.

Though after Mr Hait's misfortune (miscalculation, Ratliff said; he said it was Mr Hait the agent should have sent the train schedule to, along with a watch) Snopes's mules stopped dying of sudden death on the railroad track. When the adjuster came to adjust Mrs Hait, Snopes was there too, which Ratliff said was probably the most terrible decision Snopes ever faced in his whole life: between the simple prudence which told him to stay completely clear of the railroad company's investigation, and his knowledge of Mrs Hait which had already told him that his only chance to get any part of that indemnity would be by having the railroad company for his ally.

Because he failed. Mrs Hait stated calmly that her husband had been the sole owner of the five mules; she didn't even have to dare Snopes out loud to dispute it; all he ever saw of that money (oh yes, he was there in the bank, as close as he dared get, watching) was when she crammed it into the salt bag and folded the bag into her apron.

For five or six years before that, at regular intervals he had passed across the peaceful and somnolent Jefferson scene in dust and uproar, his approach heralded by forlorn shouts and cries, his passing marked by a yellow cloud of dust filled with the tossing jug-shaped heads and the clattering hooves, then last of all Snopes himself at a panting trot,

his face gaped with forlorn shouting and wrung with concern and terror and dismay.

When he emerged from his conference with the adjuster he still wore the concern and the dismay but the terror was now blended into an incredulous, a despairing, a shocked and passionate disbelief which still showed through the new overlay of hungry hope it wore during the next three years (again, Ratliff said, such a decision and problem as no man should be faced with: who — Snopes — heretofore had only to unload the mules into the receiving pen at the depot and then pay a Negro to ride the old bell mare which would lead them across town to his sales stable-lot, while now and single-handed he had to let them out of the depot pen and then force, herd them into the narrow street blocked at the end by Mrs Hait's small unfenced yard) when the uproar — the dust-cloud filled with plunging demonic shapes — would seem to be translated in one single burst across the peaceful edge of Jefferson and into Mrs Hait's yard, where the two of them, Mrs Hait and Snopes — Mrs Hait clutching a broom or a mop or whatever weapon she was able to snatch up as she ran out of the house cursing like a man, and Snopes, vengeance for the moment sated or at least the unbearable top of the unbearable sense of impotence and injustice and wrong taken off (Ratliff said he had probably long since given up any real belief of actually extorting even one cent of that money from Mrs Hait and all that remained now was the raging and baseless hope) who would now have to catch the animals somehow and get them back inside a fence — ducked and dodged among the thundering shapes in a kind of passionate and choreographic pantomime against the backdrop of that house whose very impervious paint Snopes believed he had paid for and within which its very occupant and chatelaine led a life of queenly and sybaritic luxury on his money (which according to Ratliff was exactly why Mrs Hait refused to appeal to the law to abate Snopes as a nuisance: this too was just a part of the price she owed for the amazing opportunity to swap her husband for eight thousand dollars); — this, while that whole section of town learned to gather — the ladies in the peignoirs and boudoir caps of morning, the children playing in the yards, and the people Negro and white who happened to be passing at

the moment — and watch from behind neighboring shades or the security of adjacent fences.

When they saw it, the mule was running too, its head high too in a strange place it had never seen before, so that coming suddenly out of the fog and all it probably looked taller than a giraffe rushing down at Mrs Hait and old Het with the halter-rope whipping about its ears.

“Dar hit!” old Het shouted, waving the shopping bag, “Hoo! Scat!” She told Ratliff how Mrs Hait whirled and skidded again on the greasy planks as she and the mule now ran parallel with one another toward the cowshed from whose open door the static and astonished face of the cow now looked out. To the cow, until a second ago standing peacefully in the door chewing and looking at the fog, the mule must have looked taller and more incredible than any giraffe, let alone looking like it aimed to run right through the shed as if it were straw or maybe even pure and simple mirage.

Anyway, old Het said the cow snatched her face back inside the shed like a match going out and made a sound inside the shed, old Het didn’t know what sound, just a sound of pure shock and alarm like when you pluck a single string on a harp or a banjo, Mrs Hait running toward the sound old Het said in a kind of pure reflex, in automatic compact of female with female against the world of mules and men, she and the mule converging on the shed at top speed, Mrs Hait already swinging the scuttle of live ashes to throw at the mule.

Of course it didn’t take this long; old Het said she was still hollering “Dar hit! Dar hit!” when the mule swerved and ran at her until she swung the shopping bag and turned it past her and on around the next corner of the house and back into the fog like a match going out too.

That was when Mrs Hait set the scuttle down on the edge of the brick coping of the cellar entrance and she and old Het turned the corner of the house in time to see the mule coincide with a rooster and eight white leghorn hens coming out from under the house. Old Het said it looked just like something out of the Bible, or maybe out of some kind

of hoodoo witches' bible: the mule that came out of the fog to begin with like a hant or a goblin, now kind of soaring back into the fog again borne on a cloud of little winged ones. She and Mrs Hait were still running; she said Mrs Hait was now carrying the worn-out stub of a broom though old Het didn't remember when she had picked it up.

"There's more in the front!" old Het hollered.

"That son of a bitch," Mrs Hait said. There were more of them. Old Het said that little handkerchief-sized yard was full of mules and I.O. Snopes. It was so small that any creature with a stride of three feet could have crossed it in two paces, yet when they came in sight of it it must have looked like watching a drop of water through a microscope. Except that this time it was like being in the middle of the drop of water yourself.

That is, old Het said that Mrs Hait and I.O. Snopes were in the middle of it because she said she stopped against the house where she would be more or less out of the way even though nowhere in that little yard was going to be safe, and watched Mrs Hait still clutching the broom and with a kind of sublime faith in something somewhere, maybe in just her own invulnerability though old Het said Mrs Hait was just too mad to notice, rush right into the middle of the drove, after the one with the flying halter-rein that was still vanishing into the fog still in that cloud of whirling loose feathers like confetti or the wake behind a speed boat.

And Mr Snopes too, the mules running all over him too, he and Mrs Hait glaring at each other while he panted:

"Where's my money? Where's my half of it?"

"Catch that big son of a bitch with the halter," Mrs Hait said. "Get that big son of a bitch out of here," both of them, old Het and Mrs Hait both, running on so that Snopes's panting voice was behind them now: "Pay me my money! Pay me my part of it!"

"Watch out!" old Het said she hollered. "He heading for the back again!"

“Get a rope!” Mrs Hait hollered back at Snopes.

“Fore God, where is ere rope?” Snopes hollered.

“In the cellar, fore God!” old Het hollered. She didn’t wait either. “Go round the other way and head him!” she said. And she said that when she and Mrs Hait turned that corner, there was the mule with the flying halter once more seeming to float lightly onward on a cloud of chickens with which, since the chickens had been able to go under the house and so along the chord while the mule had to go around on the arc, it had once more coincided. When they turned the next corner, they were in the back yard again.

“Fore God!” Het hollered, “he fixing to misuse the cow!” She said it was like a tableau. The cow had come out of the shed into the middle of the back yard; it and the mule were now facing each other about a yard apart, motionless, with lowered heads and braced legs like two mismatched bookends, and Snopes was half in and half out of the now-open cellar door on the coping of which the scuttle of ashes still sat, where he had obviously gone seeking the rope; afterward old Het said she thought at the time an open cellar door wasn’t a very good place for a scuttle of live ashes, and maybe she did. I mean, if she hadn’t said she thought that, somebody else would since there’s always somebody handy afterward to prove their foresight by your hindsight. Though if things were going as fast as she said they were, I dont see how anybody there had time to think anything much.

Because everything was already moving again; when they went around the next corner this time, I.O. was leading, carrying the rope (he had found it), then the cow, her tail raised and rigid and raked slightly like the flagpole on a boat, and then the mule, Mrs Hait and old Het coming last and old Het told again how she noticed the scuttle of live ashes sitting on the curb of the now-open cellar with its accumulation of human refuse and Mrs Hait’s widowhood — empty boxes for kindling, old papers, broken furniture — and thought again that wasn’t a very good place for the scuttle.

Then the next corner. Snopes and the cow and the mule were all three just vanishing on the cloud of frantic chickens which had once more crossed beneath the house just in time. Though when they reached the front yard there was nobody there but Snopes. He was lying flat on his face, the tail of his coat flung forward over his head by the impetus of his fall, and old Het swore there was the print of the cow's split foot and the mule's hoof too in the middle of his white shirt.

"Where'd they go?" she shouted at him. He didn't answer. "They tightening on the curves!" she hollered at Mrs Hait. "They already in the back again!" They were. She said maybe the cow had aimed to run back into the shed but decided she had too much speed and instead whirled in a kind of desperation of valor and despair on the mule itself. Though she said that she and Mrs Hait didn't quite get there in time to see it: only to hear a crash and clash and clatter as the mule swerved and blundered over the cellar entrance. Because when they got there, the mule was gone.

The scuttle was gone from the cellar coping too but old Het said she never noticed it then: only the cow in the middle of the yard where she had been standing before, her fore legs braced and her head lowered like somebody had passed and snatched away the other bookend. Because she and Mrs Hait didn't stop either, Mrs Hait running heavily now old Het said, with her mouth open and her face the color of putty and one hand against her side.

In fact she said they were both run out now, going so slow this time that the mule overtook them from behind and she said it jumped clean over them both: a brief demon thunder rank with the ammonia-reek of sweat, and went on (either the chickens had finally realised to stay under the house or maybe they were worn out too and just couldn't make it this time); when they reached the next corner the mule had finally succeeded in vanishing into the fog; they heard its hooves, brief, staccato and derisive on the hard street, dying away.

Old Het said she stopped. She said, "Well. Gentlemen, hush," she said. "Aint we had—" Then she smelled it. She said she stood right still,

smelling, and it was like she was actually looking at that open cellar as it was when they passed it last time without any coal scuttle setting on the coping. "Fore God," she hollered at Mrs Hait, "I smell smoke! Child, run in the house and get your money!"

That was about nine oclock. By noon the house had burned to the ground. Ratliff said that when the fire engine and the crowd got there, Mrs Hait, followed by old Het carrying her shopping bag in one hand and a framed crayon portrait of Mr Hait in the other, was just coming out of the house carrying an umbrella and wearing the army overcoat which Mr Hait had used to wear, in one pocket of which was a quart fruit jar packed with what remained of the eighty-five hundred dollars (which would be most of it, according to how the neighbors said Mrs Hait lived) and in the other a heavy nickel-plated revolver, and crossed the street to a neighbor's house, where with old Het beside her in a second rocker, she had been sitting ever since on the gallery, the two of them rocking steadily while they watched the volunteer fire-fighters flinging her dishes and furniture up and down the street. By that time Ratliff said there were plenty of them interested enough to go back to the Square and hunt up I.O. and keep him posted.

"What you telling me for?" I.O. said. "It wasn't me that set that-ere scuttle of live fire where the first thing that passed would knock it into the cellar."

"It was you that opened the cellar door though," Ratliff said.

"Sho," Snopes said. "And why? To get that rope, her own rope, right where she sent me to get it."

"To catch your mule, that was trespassing on her yard," Ratliff said.

"You cant get out of it this time. There aint a jury in the county that wont find for her."

"Yes," Snopes said. "I reckon not. And just because she's a woman. That's why. Because she is a durned woman. All right. Let her go to her durned jury with it. I can talk too; I reckon it's a few things I could tell a jury myself about — —" Then Ratliff said he stopped. Ratliff said he didn't sound like I.O. Snopes anyway because whenever I.O. talked

what he said was so full of mixed-up proverbs that you stayed so busy trying to unravel just which of two or three proverbs he had jumbled together that you couldn't even tell just exactly what lie he had told you until it was already too late. But right now Ratliff said he was too busy to have time for even proverbs, let alone lies. Ratliff said they were all watching him.

"What?" somebody said. "Tell the jury about what?"

"Nothing," he said. "Because why, because there aint going to be no jury. Me and Miz Mannie Hait? You boys dont know her if you think she's going to make trouble over a pure acci-dent couldn't me nor nobody else help. Why, there aint a fairer, finer woman in Yoknapatawpha County than Mannie Hait. I just wish I had a opportunity to tell her so." Ratliff said he had it right away. He said Mrs Hait was right behind them, with old Het right behind her, carrying the shopping bag. He said she just looked once at all of them generally. After that she looked at I.O.

"I come to buy that mule," she said.

"What mule?" I.O. said. He answered that quick, almost automatic, Ratliff said. Because he didn't mean it either. Then Ratliff said they looked at one another for about a half a minute. "You'd like to own that mule?" he said. "It'll cost you a hundred and fifty, Miz Mannie."

"You mean dollars?" Mrs Hait said.

"I dont mean dimes nor nickels neither, Miz Mannie," Snopes said.

"Dollars," Mrs Hait said. "Mules wasn't that high in Hait's time."

"Lots of things is different since Hait's time," Snopes said. "Including you and me, Miz Mannie."

"I reckon so," she said. Then she went away. Ratliff said she turned without a word and left, old Het following.

"If I'd a been you," Ratliff said, "I dont believe I'd a said that last to her."

And now Ratliff said the mean harried little face actually blazed, even frothing a little. "I just wisht she would," Snopes said. "Her or anybody else, I dont care who, to bring a court suit about anything, jest so it had the name mule and the name Hait in it—" and stopped, the face smooth again. "How's that?" he said. "What was you saying?"

"That you dont seem to be afraid she might sue you for burning down her house," Ratliff said.

"Sue me?" Snopes said. "Miz Hait? If she was fixing to try to law something out of me about that fire, do you reckon she would a hunted me up and offered to pay me for it?"

That was about one oclock. Then it was four oclock; Aleck Sander and I had gone out to Sartoris to shoot quail over the dogs that Miss Jenny Du Pre still kept, I reckon until Benbow Sartoris got big enough to hold a gun. So Uncle Gavin was alone in the office to hear the tennis shoes on the outside stairs. Then old Het came in; the shopping bag was bulging now and she was eating bananas from a paper sack which she clamped under one arm, the half-eaten banana in that hand while with the other she dug out a crumpled ten-dollar bill and gave it to Uncle Gavin.

"It's for you," old Het said. "From Miss Mannie. I done already give him hisn" — telling it: waiting on the corner of the Square until it looked like sure to God night would come first, before Snopes finally came along, and she handed the banana she was working on then to a woman beside her and got out the first crumpled ten-dollar bill. Snopes took it. "What?" he said. "Miz Hait told you to give it to me?"

"For that mule," old Het said. "You dont need to give me no receipt. I can be the witness I give it to you."

"Ten dollars?" Snopes said. "For that mule? I told her a hundred and fifty dollars."

"You'll have to contrack that with her yourself," old Het said. "She just give me this to hand to you when she left to get the mule."

“To get the — She went out there herself and taken that mule out of my lot?” Snopes said.

“Lord, child,” old Het said she said. “Miss Mannie aint skeered of no mule. Aint you done found that out? — And now here’s yourn,” she said to Uncle Gavin.

“For what?” Uncle Gavin said. “I dont have a mule to sell.”

“For a lawyer,” old Het said. “She fixing to need a lawyer. She say for you to be out there at her house about sundown, when she had time to get settled down again.”

“Her house?” Uncle Gavin said.

“Where it use to be, honey,” old Het said. “Would you keer for a banana? I done et about all I can hold.”

“No much obliged,” Uncle Gavin said.

“You’re welcome,” she said. “Go on. Take some. If I et one more, I’d be wishing the good Lord hadn’t never thought banana One in all His life.”

“No much obliged,” Uncle Gavin said.

“You’re welcome,” she said. “I dont reckon you’d have nothing like a extra dime for a little snuff.”

“No,” Uncle Gavin said, producing it. “All I have is a quarter.”

“That’s quality,” she said. “You talk about change to quality, what you gets back is a quarter or a half a dollar or sometimes even a whole dollar. It’s just trash that cant think no higher than a nickel or ten cents.” She took the quarter; it vanished somewhere. “There’s some folks thinks all I does, I tromps this town all day long from can-see to cant, with a hand full of gimme and a mouth full of much oblige.

They’re wrong. I serves Jefferson too. If it’s more blessed to give than to receive like the Book say, this town is blessed to a fare-you-well because it’s steady full of folks willing to give anything from a nickel up to a old hat. But I’m the onliest one I knows that steady receives. So how is Jefferson going to be steady blessed without me steady willing

from dust-dawn to dust-dark, rain or snow or sun, to say much oblige? I can tell Miss Mannie you be there?"

"Yes," Uncle Gavin said. Then she was gone. Uncle Gavin sat there looking at the crumpled bill on the desk in front of him. Then he heard the other feet on the stairs and he sat watching the door until Mr Flem Snopes came in and shut it behind him.

"Evening," Mr Snopes said. "Can you take a case for me?"

"Now?" Uncle Gavin said. "Tonight?"

"Yes," Mr Snopes said.

"Tonight," Uncle Gavin said again. "Would it have anything to do with a mule and Mrs Hait's house?"

And he said how Mr Snopes didn't say What house? or What mule? or How did you know? He just said, "Yes."

"Why did you come to me?" Uncle Gavin said.

"For the same reason I would hunt up the best carpenter if I wanted to build a house, or the best farmer if I wanted to share-crop some land," Mr Snopes said.

"Thanks," Uncle Gavin said. "Sorry," he said. He didn't even have to touch the crumpled bill. He said that Mr Snopes had not only seen it the minute he entered, but he believed he even knew at that same moment where it came from. "As you already noticed, I'm already on the other side."

"You going out there now?" Mr Snopes said.

"Yes," Uncle Gavin said.

"Then that's all right." He began to reach into his pocket. At first Uncle Gavin didn't know why; he just watched him dig out an old-fashioned snap-mouth wallet and open it and separate a ten-dollar bill and close the wallet and lay the bill on the desk beside the other crumpled one and put the wallet back into the pocket and stand looking at Uncle Gavin.

“I just told you I’m already on the other side,” Uncle Gavin said.
“And I just said that’s all right,” Mr Snopes said. “I don’t want a lawyer because I already know what I’m going to do. I just want a witness.”
“And why me for that?” Uncle Gavin said.

“That’s right,” Mr Snopes said. “The best witness too.”
So they went out there. The fog had burned away by noon and Mrs Hait’s two blackened chimneys now stood against what remained of the winter sunset; at the same moment Mr Snopes said, “Wait.”

“What?” Uncle Gavin said. But Mr Snopes didn’t answer so they stood, not approaching yet; Uncle Gavin said he could already smell the ham broiling over the little fire in front of the still-intact cowshed, with old Het sitting on a brand new kitchen chair beside the fire turning the ham in the skillet with a fork, and beyond the fire Mrs Hait squatting at the cow’s flank, milking into a new tin bucket.

“All right,” Mr Snopes said, and again Uncle Gavin said What? because he had not seen I.O. at all: he was just suddenly there as though he had materialised, stepped suddenly out of the dusk itself into the light of the fire (there was a brand new galvanised coffee pot sitting in the ashes near the blaze and now Uncle Gavin said he could smell that too), to stand looking down at the back of Mrs Hait’s head, not having seen Uncle Gavin and Mr Flem yet. But old Het had, already talking to Uncle Gavin while they were approaching:

“So this coffee and ham brought you even if them ten dollars couldn’t,” she said. “I’m like that, myself. I aint had no appetite in years it seems like now. A bird couldn’t live on what I eats. But just let me get a whiff of coffee and ham together, now. — Leave that milk go for a minute, honey,” she said to Mrs Hait. “Here’s your lawyer.”

Then I.O. saw them too, jerking quickly around over his shoulder his little mean harassed snarling face; and now Uncle Gavin could see inside the cowshed. It had been cleaned and raked and even swept, the floor was spread with fresh hay. A clean new kerosene stable lantern burned on a wooden box beside a pallet bed spread neatly on the straw and turned back for the night and now Uncle Gavin saw a second

wooden box set out for a table beside the fire, with a new plate and knife and fork and spoon and cup and saucer and a still-sealed loaf of machine-made bread.

But Uncle Gavin said there was no alarm in I.O.'s face at the sight of Mr Flem though he said the reason for that was that he, Uncle Gavin, hadn't realised yet that I.O. had simply reached that stage where utter hopelessness wears the mantle of temerity. "So here you are," I.O. said. "And bring your lawyer too. I reckon you come now to get that-ere lantern and them new dishes and chair and that milk bucket and maybe the milk in too soon as she's done, hey?"

That's jest fine. It's even downright almost honest, coming right out in the open here where it aint even full dark yet. Because of course your lawyer knows all the rest of these here recent mulery and arsonery circumstances; likely the only one here that aint up to date is old Aunt Het there, and sholy she should be learned how to reco-nise a circumstance that even if she was to get up and run this minute, likely she would find she never had no shirt nor britches left neither by the time she got home, since a stitch in time saves nine lives for even a cat, as the feller says. Not to mention the fact that when you dines in Rome you durn sho better watch your overcoat.

"All right then. Now, jest exactly how much of them eight thousand and five hundred dollars the railroad company paid Miz Hait here for that husband of hern and them five mules of mine, do you reckon Miz Hait actively" (Uncle Gavin said he said actively for actually too, just like Ratliff. And Uncle Gavin said they were both right) "got? Well, in that case you will be jest as wrong as everybody else was. She got half of it.

The reason being that the vice presi-dent here handled it for her. Of course, without a fi-nancial expert like the vice president to handle it for her, she wouldn't a got no more than that half nohow, if as much, so by rights she aint got nothing to complain of, not to mention the fact that jest half of even that half was rightfully hern, since jest Lonzo Hait was hern because them five mules was mine.

“All right. Now, what do you reckon become of the other half of them eight thousand and five hundred dollars? Then you’ll be jest as wrong this time as you was that other one. Because the vice presi-dent here taken them. Oh, it was done all open and legal; he explained it: if Miz Hait sued the railroad, a lone lorn widder by herself, likely she wouldn’t get more than five thousand at the most, and half of that she would have to give to me for owning the mules.

And if me and her brought the suit together, with a active man on her side to compel them cold hard millionaire railroad magnits to do a lone woman justice, once I claimed any part of them mules, due to the previous bad luck mules belonging to me had been having on that-ere curve, the railroad would smell a rat right away and wouldn’t nobody get nothing.

While with him, the vice presi-dent, handling it, it would be seventy-five hundred or maybe a even ten thousand, of which he would not only guarantee her a full half, he would even take out of his half the hundred dollars he would give me. All legal and open: I could keep my mouth shut and get a hundred dollars, where if I objected, the vice presi-dent his-self might accident-ly let out who them mules actively belonged to, and wouldn’t nobody get nothing, which would be all right with the vice presi-dent since he would be right where he started out, being as he never owned Lonzo Hait nor the five mules neither.

“A pure and simple easy choice, you see: either a feller wants a hundred dollars, or either he dont want a hundred dollars. Not to mention, as the vice presi-dent his-self pointed out, that me and Miz Hait was fellow townsmen and you might say business acquaintances and Miz Hait a woman with a woman’s natural tender gentle heart, so who would say that maybe in time it wouldn’t melt a little more to where she might want to share a little of her half of them eight thousand and five hundred dollars.

Which never proved much except that the vice presi-dent might know all there was to know about railroad companies and eight thousand and

five hundred dollars but he never knowed much about what Miz Hait toted around where other folks totes their hearts.

Which is neither here nor there; water that's still under a bridge dont fill no oceans, as the feller says, and I was simply outvoted two to one, or maybe eight thousand and five hundred dollars to one hundred dollars; or maybe it didn't even take that much: jest Miz Hait's half of them eight thousand and five hundred, against my one hundred since the only way I could a out-voted Miz Hait would a been with four thousand and two hundred and fifty-one dollars of my own, and even then I'd a had to split that odd dollar with her.

"But never mind. I done forgot all that now; that spilt milk aint going to help no ocean neither." Now Uncle Gavin said he turned rapidly to Mrs Hait with no break in the snarling and outraged babble: "What I come back for was to have a little talk with you. I got something that belongs to you, and I hear you got something that belongs to me. Though naturally I expected to a-just it in private."

"Lord, honey," old Het said. "If you talking at me. Dont you mind me. I done already had so much troubles myself that listening to other folks' even kind of rests me. You gawn talk what you wants to talk; I'll just set here and mind this ham."

"Come on," he said to Mrs Hait. "Run them all away for a minute." Mrs Hait had turned now, still squatting, watching him. "What for?" she said. "I reckon she aint the first critter that ever come in this yard when it wanted and went or stayed when it liked." Now Uncle Gavin said I.O. made a gesture, brief, fretted, and restrained.

"All right," he said. "All right. Let's get started then. So you taken the mule."

"I paid you for it," Mrs Hait said. "Het brought you the money."

"Ten dollars," I.O. said. "For a hundred-and-fifty-dollar mule."

"I dont know anything about hundred-and-fifty-dollar mules," Mrs Hait said. "All I know about mules is what the railroad pays for them. Sixty

dollars a head the railroad paid that other time before that fool Hait finally lost all his senses and tied himself to that track too — —”

“Hush!” I.O. said. “Hush!”

“What for?” Mrs Hait said. “What secret am I telling that you aint already blabbed to anybody within listening?”

“All right,” I.O. said. “But you just sent me ten.”

“I sent you the difference,” Mrs Hait said. “The difference between that mule and what you owed Hait.”

“What I owed Hait?” I.O. said.

“Hait said you paid him fifty dollars a trip, each time he got mules in front of the train in time, and the railroad had paid you sixty dollars a head for the mules. That last time, you never paid him because you never would pay him until afterward and this time there wasn’t no afterward.

So I taken a mule instead and sent you the ten dollars difference with Het here for the witness.” Uncle Gavin said that actually stopped him. He actually hushed; he and Mrs Hait, the one standing and the other still squatting, just stared at one another while again old Het turned the hissing ham in the skillet. He said they were so still that Mr Flem himself spoke twice before they even noticed him.

“You through now?” he said to I.O.

“What?” I.O. said.

“Are you through now?” Mr Flem said. And now Uncle Gavin said they all saw the canvas sack — one of the canvas sacks stamped with the name of the bank which the bank itself used to store money in the vault — in his hands.

“Yes,” I.O. said. “I’m through. At least I got one ten dollars out of the mule business you aint going to touch.” But Mr Flem wasn’t even talking to him now. He had already turned toward Mrs Hait when he drew a folded paper out of the sack.

"This is the mortgage on your house," he said. "Whatever the insurance company pays you now will be clear money; you can build it back again. Here," he said. "Take it."

But Mrs Hait didn't move. "Why?" she said.

"I bought it from the bank myself this afternoon," Mr Flem said. "You can drop it in the fire if you want to. But I want you to put your hand on it first." So she took the paper then, and now Uncle Gavin said they all watched Mr Flem reach into the sack again and this time draw out a roll of bills, I.O. watching too now, not even blinking.

"Fore God," old Het said. "You could choke a shoat with it."

"How many mules have you got in that lot?" Mr Flem said to I.O. Still I.O. just watched him. Then he blinked, rapid and hard.

"Seven," he said.

"You've got six," Mr Flem said. "You just finished selling one of them to Mrs Hait. The railroad says the kind of mules you deal in are worth sixty dollars a head. You claim they are worth a hundred and fifty. All right. We wont argue. Six times a hundred and fifty is—"

"Seven!" I.O. said, loud and harsh. "I aint sold Mrs Hait nor nobody else that mule. Watch." He faced Mrs Hait. "We aint traded. We aint never traded. I defy you to produce ara man or woman that seen or heard more than you tried to hand me this here same ten-dollar bill that I'm a handing right back to you. Here," he said, extending the crumpled bill, then jerking it at her so that it struck against her skirt and fell to the ground. She picked it up.

"You giving this back to me?" she said. "Before these witnesses?"

"You durn right I am," he said. "I jest wish we had ten times this many witnesses." Now he was talking to Mr Flem. "So I aint sold nobody no mule. And seven times a hundred and fifty dollars is ten hundred and fifty dollars — —"

"Nine hundred dollars," Mr Flem said.

“Ten hundred and fifty,” I.O. said.

“When you bring me the mule,” Mr Flem said. “And on the main condition.”

“What main condition?” I.O. said.

“That you move back to Frenchman’s Bend and never own a business in Jefferson again as long as you live.”

“And if I dont?” I.O. said.

“I sold the hotel this evening too,” Mr Flem said. And now even I.O. just watched him while he turned toward the light of the fire and began to count bills — they were mostly fives and ones, with an occasional ten — from the roll. I.O. made one last effort.

“Ten hundred and fifty,” he said.

“When you bring me the mule,” Mr Flem said. So it was still only nine hundred dollars which I.O. took and counted for himself and folded away into his hip pocket and buttoned the pocket and turned to Mrs Hait.

“All right,” he said, “where’s Mister Vice President Snopes’s other mule?”

“Tied to a tree in the ravine ditch behind Mr Spilmer’s house,” Mrs Hait said.

“What made you stop there?” I.O. said. “Why didn’t you take it right on up to Mottstown? Then you could a really enjoyed my time and trouble getting it back.” He looked around again, snarling, sneering, indomitably intractable. “You’re right fixed up here, aint you? You and the vice president could both save money if he jest kept that mortgage which aint on nothing now noway, and you didn’t build no house a-tall. Well, good night, all.

Soon as I get this-here missing extry mule into the lot with the vice president’s other six, I’ll do myself the honor and privilege of calling at his residence for them other hundred and fifty dollars since cash on the

barrel-head is the courtesy of kings, as the feller says, not to mention the fact that beggars' choices aint even choices when he aint even got a roof to lay his head in no more.

And if Lawyer Stevens has got ara thing loose about him the vice president might a taken a notion to, he better hold onto it since as the feller says even a fool wont tread where he jest got through watching somebody else get bit. Again, good night all." Then he was gone. And this time Uncle Gavin said that Mr Flem had to speak to him twice before he heard him.

"What?" Uncle Gavin said.

"I said, how much do I owe you?" Mr Flem said. And Uncle Gavin said he started to say One dollar, so that Mr Flem would say One dollar? Is that all? and then Uncle Gavin could say Yes, or your knife or pencil or just anything so that when I wake up tomorrow I'll know I didn't dream this. But he didn't. He just said:

"Nothing. Mrs Hait is my client." And he said how again Mr Flem had to speak twice. "What?" Uncle Gavin said.

"You can send me your bill."

"For what?" Uncle Gavin said.

"For being the witness," Mr Snopes said.

"Oh," Uncle Gavin said. And now Mr Snopes was going and Uncle Gavin said how he expected he might even have said Are you going back to town now? or maybe even Shall we walk together? or maybe at least Goodbye. But he didn't. He didn't say anything at all. He simply turned and left and was gone too. Then Mrs Hait said:

"Get the box."

"That's what I been aiming to do soon as you can turn loose all this business and steady this skillet," old Het said. So Mrs Hait came and took the chair and the fork and old Het went into the shed and set the lantern on the ground and brought the box and set it at the fire. "Now, honey," she said to Uncle Gavin, "set down and rest."

“You take it,” Uncle Gavin said. “I’ve been sitting down all day. You haven’t.” Though old Het had already begun to sit down on the box before he declined it; she had already forgotten him, watching now the skillet containing the still hissing ham which Mrs Hait had lifted from the fire.

“Was it you mentioned something about a piece of that ham,” she said, “or was it me?” So Mrs Hait divided the ham and Uncle Gavin watched them eat, Mrs Hait in the chair with the new plate and knife and fork, and old Het on the box eating from the skillet itself since Mrs Hait had apparently purchased only one of each new article, eating the ham and sopping the bread into the greasy residue of its frying, and old Het had filled the coffee cup from the pot and produced from somewhere an empty can for her own use when I.O. came back, coming up quietly out of the darkness (it was full dark now), to stand holding his hands to the blaze as though he were cold.

“I reckon I’ll take that ten dollars,” he said.

“What ten dollars?” Mrs Hait said. And now Uncle Gavin expected him to roar, or at least snarl. But he did neither, just standing there with his hands to the blaze; and Uncle Gavin said he did look cold, small, forlorn somehow since he was so calm, so quiet.

“You aint going to give it back to me?” he said.

“Give what back to you?” Mrs Hait said. Uncle Gavin said he didn’t seem to expect an answer nor even to hear her: just standing there musing at the fire in a kind of quiet and unbelieving amazement.

“I bear the worry and the risk and the agoment for years and years, and I get sixty dollars a head for them. While you, one time, without no trouble and risk a-tall, sell Lonzo Hait and five of my mules that never even belonged to him, for eighty-five hundred dollars. Of course most of that-ere eighty-five hundred was for Lonzo, which I never begrudged you.

Cant nere a man living say I did, even if it did seem a little strange that you should get it all, even my sixty standard price a head for them five

mules, when he wasn't working for you and you never even knowed where he was, let alone even owned the mules; that all you done to get half of that money was just to be married to him. And now, after all them years of not actively begrudging you it, you taken the last mule I had, not didn't jest beat me out of another hundred and forty dollars, but out of a entire another hundred and fifty."

"You got your mule back, and you aint satisfied yet?" old Het said.

"What does you want?"

"Justice," I.O. said. "That's what I want. That's all I want: justice. For the last time," he said. "Are you going to give me my ten dollars back?"

"What ten dollars?" Mrs Hait said. Then he turned. He stumbled over something — Uncle Gavin said it was old Het's shopping bag — and recovered and went on. Uncle Gavin said he could see him for a moment — he could because neither Mrs Hait nor old Het were watching him any longer — as though framed between the two blackened chimneys, flinging both clenched hands up against the sky. Then he was gone; this time it was for good. That is, Uncle Gavin watched him. Mrs Hait and old Het had not even looked up.

"Honey," old Het said to Mrs Hait, "what did you do with that mule?" Uncle Gavin said there was one slice of bread left. Mrs Hait took it and sopped the last of the gravy from her plate.

"I shot it," she said.

"You which?" old Het said. Mrs Hait began to eat the slice of bread.

"Well," old Het said, "the mule burnt the house and you shot the mule. That's what I calls more than justice: that's what I calls tit for tat."

It was full dark now, and ahead of her was still the mile-and-a-half walk to the poorhouse with the heavy shopping bag. But the dark would last a long time on a winter night, and Uncle Gavin said the poorhouse too wasn't likely to move any time soon. So he said that old Het sat back on the box with the empty skillet in her hand and sighed with peaceful and happy relaxation. "Gentlemen, hush," she said. "Aint we had a day."

And there, as Uncle Gavin would say, was Ratliff again, sitting in the client's chair with his blue shirt neat and faded and quite clean and still no necktie even though he was wearing the imitation leather jacket and carrying the heavy black policeman's slicker which were his winter overcoat; it was Monday and Uncle Gavin had gone that morning over to New Market to the supervisors' meeting on some more of the drainage canal business and I thought he would have told Ratliff that when Ratliff came to see him yesterday afternoon at home.

"He might a mentioned it," Ratliff said. "But it dont matter. I didn't want nothing. I jest stopped in here where it's quiet to laugh a little." "Oh," I said. "About I.O. Snopes's mule that burned down Mrs Hait's house. I thought you and Uncle Gavin laughed at that enough yesterday."

"That's right," he said. "Because soon as you set down to laugh at it, you find out it aint funny a-tall." He looked at me. "When will your uncle be back?"

"I thought he would be back now."

"Oh well," he said. "It dont matter." He looked at me again. "So that's two down and jest one more to go."

"One more what?" I said. "One more Snopes for Mr Flem to run out of Jefferson, and the only Snopes left will be him; or—"

"That's right," he said. " — one more uncivic ditch to jump like Montgomery Ward's photygraph studio and I.O.'s railroad mules, and there wont be nothing a-tall left in Jefferson but Flem Snopes." He looked at me. "Because your uncle missed it."

"Missed what?" I said.

"Even when he was looking right at it when Flem his — himself come in here the morning after them — those federals raided that studio and give your uncle that studio key that had been missing from the sheriff's office ever since your uncle and Hub found them — those pictures; and even when it was staring him in the face out yonder at Miz Hait's

chimbly Saturday night when Flem give — gave her that mortgage and paid I.O. for the mules, he still missed it. And I cant tell him.”

“Why cant you tell him?” I said.

“Because he wouldn’t believe me. This here is the kind of a thing you — a man has got to know his — himself. He has got to learn it out of his own hard dread and skeer. Because what somebody else jest tells you, you jest half believe, unless it was something you already wanted to hear. And in that case, you dont even listen to it because you had done already agreed, and so all it does is make you think what a sensible feller it was that told you.

But something you dont want to hear is something you had done already made up your mind against, whether you knowed — knew it or not; and now you can even insulate against having to believe it by resisting or maybe even getting even with that-ere scoundrel that meddled in and told you.”

“So he wouldn’t hear you because he wouldn’t believe it because it is something he dont want to be true. Is that it?”

“That’s right,” Ratliff said. “So I got to wait. I got to wait for him to learn it his — himself, the hard way, the sure way, the only sure way. Then he will believe it, enough anyhow to be afraid.”

“He is afraid,” I said. “He’s been afraid a long time.”

“That’s good,” Ratliff said. “Because he had purely better be. All of us better be. Because a feller that jest wants money for the sake of money, or even for power, there’s a few things right at the last that he wont do, will stop at.

But a feller that come — came up from where he did, that soon as he got big enough to count it he thought he discovered that money would buy anything he could or would ever want, and shaped all the rest of his life and actions on that, trompling when and where he had to but without no — any hard feelings because he knowed — knew that he

wouldn't ask nor expect no — any quarter his — himself if it had been him; — to do all this and then find out at last, when he was a man growed — grown and it was maybe already too late, that the one thing he would have to have if there was to be any meaning to his life or even peace in it, was not only something that jest money couldn't buy, it was something that not having money to begin with or even getting a holt of all he could count or imagine or even dream about and then losing it, couldn't even hurt or harm or grieve or change or alter; — to find out when it was almost too late that what he had to have was something that any child was born having for free until one day he growed — grew up and found out when it was maybe too late that he had throwed — thrown it away.”

“What?” I said. “What is it he's got to have?”

“Respectability,” Ratliff said.

“Respectability?”

“That's right,” Ratliff said. “When it's jest money and power a man wants, there is usually some place where he will stop; there's always one thing at least that ever — every man wont do for jest money.

But when it's respectability he finds out he wants and has got to have, there aint nothing he wont do to get it and then keep it. And when it's almost too late when he finds out that's what he's got to have, and that even after he gets it he cant jest lock it up and set — sit down on top of it and quit, but instead he has got to keep on working with ever — every breath to keep it, there aint nothing he will stop at, aint nobody or nothing within his scope and reach that may not anguish and grieve and suffer.”

“Respectability,” I said.

“That's right,” Ratliff said. “Vice president of that bank aint enough anymore. He's got to be president of it.”

“Got to be?” I said.

“I mean soon, that he dont dare risk waiting, putting it off. That girl of Miz Snopes's — Linda. She's going on—”

“She’ll be nineteen the twelfth of April,” I said.

“ — nineteen now, over there — How do you know it’s the twelfth?”
“That’s what Uncle Gavin says,” I said.

“Sho, now,” Ratliff said. Then he was talking again. “ — at the University at Oxford where there’s a thousand extry young fellers all new and strange and interesting and male and nobody a-tall to watch her except a hired dormitory matron that aint got no wife expecting to heir half of one half of Uncle Billy Varner’s money, when it was risky enough at the Academy right here in Jefferson last year before your uncle or her maw or whichever it was or maybe both of them together, finally persuaded Flem to let her quit at the Academy and go to the University after Christmas where he couldn’t his — himself supervise her masculine acquaintance down to the same boys she had growed — grown up with all her life so at least their folks might have kinfolks that owed him money to help handle them; not to mention having her home ever — every night where he could reach out and put his hand on her ever — every time the clock struck you might say.

So he cant, he dassent, risk it; any time now the telegram or the telephone might come saying she had jest finished running off to the next nearest town with a j.p. in it that never give a hoot who Flem Snopes was, and got married. And even if he located them ten minutes later and dragged her — —”

“Drug,” I said.

“ — back, the — What?” he said.

“Drug,” I said. “You said ‘dragged’.”

Ratliff looked at me a while. “For ten years now, whenever he would stop talking his-self long enough that is, and for five of them I been listening to you too, trying to learn — teach myself to say words right. And, jest when I call myself about to learn and I begin to feel a little good over it, here you come, of all people, correcting me back to what I been trying for ten years to forget.”

"I'm sorry," I said. "I didn't mean it that way. It's because I like the way you say it. When you say it, 'taken' sounds a heap more took than just 'took', just like 'drug' sounds a heap more dragged than just 'dragged'."

"And not jest you neither," Ratliff said. "Your uncle too: me saying 'dragged' and him saying 'drug' and me saying 'dragged' and him saying 'drug' again, until at last he would say, 'In a free country like this, why aint I got as much right to use your drug for my dragged as you got to use my dragged for your drug?'"

"All right," I said. " 'Even if he drug her back' ."

" — even if he drug — dragged — drug — You see?" he said. "Now you done got me so mixed up until even I dont know which one I dont want to say?"

" ' — it would be too late and the damage' —" I said.

"Yes," Ratliff said. "And at least even your Uncle Gavin knows this; even a feller as high- and delicate-minded as him must know that the damage would be done then and Miz Snopes would quit Flem too and he could kiss goodbye not jest to her share of Uncle Billy's money but even to the voting weight of his bank stock too. So Flem's got to strike now, and quick. He's not only got to be president of that bank to at least keep that much of a holt on that Varner money by at least being president of where Uncle Billy keeps it at, he's got to make his lick before the message comes that Linda's done got married or he'll lose the weight of Uncle Billy's voting stock."

SEVENTEEN

Gavin Stevens

AT LAST WE knew why he had moved his money. It was as a bait. Not putting it into the other bank, the old Bank of Jefferson, as the bait, but for the people of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County to find out that he had withdrawn his own money from the bank of which he himself was vice president, and put it somewhere else.

But that wasn't first. At first he was simply trying to save it. Because he knew no better then. His association with banks had been too brief and humble for the idea even to have occurred to him that there was a morality to banking, an inevitable ethics in it, else not only the individual bank but banking as an institution, a form of social behavior, could not endure.

His idea and concept of a bank was that of the Elizabethan tavern or a frontier inn in the time of the opening of the American wilderness: you stopped there before dark for shelter from the wilderness; you were offered food and lodging for yourself and horse, and a bed (of sorts) to sleep in; if you waked the next morning with your purse rifled or your horse stolen or even your throat cut, you had none to blame but yourself since nobody had compelled you to pass that way nor insisted on you stopping.

So when he realised that the very circumstances which had made him vice president of a bank had been born of the fact that the bank had been looted by an oaf with no more courage or imagination than he knew his cousin Byron to possess, his decision to remove his money from it as soon as he could was no more irrational than the traveller who, unsaddling in the inn yard, sees a naked body with its throat cut being flung from an upstairs window and recinches his saddle with no loss of time and remounts and rides on again, to find another inn perhaps or if not, to pass the night in the woods, which after all, Indians and bears and highwaymen to the contrary, would not be a great deal more unsafe.

It was simply to save his money — that money he had worked so hard to accumulate, too hard to accumulate, sacrificed all his life to gather together from whatever day it had been on whatever worn-out tenant farm his father had moved from, onto that other worn-out one of old Will Varner's at Frenchman's Bend which nobody else except a man who had nothing, would undertake, let alone hope, to wrest a living from; — from that very first day when he realised that he himself had nothing and would never have more than nothing unless he wrested it

himself from his environment and time, and that the only weapon he would ever have to do it with would be just money.

Oh yes, sacrificed all his life for, sacrificed all the other rights and passions and hopes which make up the sum of a man and his life. Perhaps he would never, could never, have fallen in love himself and knew it: himself constitutionally and generically unfated ever to match his own innocence and capacity for virginity against the innocence and virginity of who would be his first love. But, since he was a man, to do that was his inalienable right and hope. Instead, his was to father another man's bastard on the wife who would not even repay him with the passion of gratitude, let alone the passion of passion since he was obviously incapable of that passion, but merely with her dowry.

Too hard for it, all his life for it, knowing at the same time that as long as life lasted he could never for one second relax his vigilance, not just to add to it but simply to keep, hang on to, what he already had, had so far accumulated. Amassing it by terrible and picayune nickel by nickel, having learned soon, almost simultaneously probably, that he would never have any other method of gaining it save simple ruthless antlike industry, since (and this was the first time he ever experienced humility) he knew now that he not only had not the education with which to cope with those who did have education, whom he must outguess and outfigure and despoil, but that he never would have that education now since there was no time now since his was the fate to have first the need for the money before he had opportunity to acquire the means to get it. And, even having acquired some of the money, he still had no place to put it down in safety while he did acquire the education which would enable him to defend it from those with the education who would despoil him of it in their turn.

Humility, and maybe a little even of regret — what little time there was to regret in — but without despair, who had nothing save the will and the need and the ruthlessness and the industry and what talent he had been born with, to serve them; who never in his life had been given anything by any man yet and expected no more as long as life should last; who had no evidence yet that he could cope with and fend off that

enemy which the word Education represented to him, yet had neither qualm nor doubt that he was going to try.

So at first his only thought was to save that money which had cost him so dear, had in fact cost him everything since he had sacrificed his whole life to gain it and so it was his life, from the bank which his cousin had already proved vulnerable.

That was it: a bank so vulnerable that someone like the one he himself knew his cousin Byron to be could have robbed it — an oaf without courage or even vision in brigandage to see further than the simple temptation of a few temporarily unguarded nickels and dimes and dollar bills of the moment, a feller, as Ratliff would have said, hardly bright enough to be named Snopes even, not even bright enough to steal the money without having to run immediately all the way to Texas before he could stop long enough to count it; having in fact managed to steal just about enough to buy the railroad ticket with.

Because remember, he didn't merely know that banks could be looted (vide his cousin Byron which he had witnessed himself), he believed, it was a tenet of his very being, that they were constantly looted; that the normal condition of a bank was a steady and decorous embezzlement, its solvency an impregnable illusion like the reputation of a woman who everybody knows has none yet which is intact and invulnerable because of the known (maybe proven) fact that every one of her male connections will spring as one man, not just to repudiate but to avenge with actual gunfire the slightest whisper of a slur on it. Because that — the looting of them — was the reason for banks, the only reason why anybody would go to the trouble and expense of organising one and keeping it running.

That was what Colonel Sartoris had done (he didn't know how yet, that was the innocence, but give him time) while he was president, and what Manfred de Spain would do as long as he in his turn could or did remain on top. But decently, with decorum, as they had done and would do: not rieved like a boy snatching a handful of loose peanuts while the vendor's back was turned, as his cousin Byron had done.

Decently and peacefully and even more: cleverly, intelligently; so cleverly and quietly that the very people whose money had been stolen would not even discover it until after the looter was dead and safe.

Nor even then actually, since by that time the looter's successor would have already shouldered the burden of that yetintact disaster which was a natural part of his own heritage. Because, to repeat, what other reason was there to establish a bank, go to all the work and trouble to start one to be president of, as Colonel Sartoris had done; and to line up enough voting stock, figure and connive and finagle and swap and trade (not to mention digging into his own pocket — Ratliff always said De Spain borrowed some if not all of it on his personal note from old Will Varner — to replace the sum which Byron Snopes had stolen) to get himself elected president after the Colonel's death, as Manfred de Spain had done: who — De Spain — would have to be more clever even than the Colonel had been, since he — De Spain — must also contrive to cover up the Colonel's thievery in order to have any bank to loot himself.

He didn't — to repeat again — know how Colonel Sartoris had done it and how De Spain would continue to do it of course — how Colonel Sartoris had robbed it for twelve years yet still contrived to die and be buried in the odor of unimpugnable rectitude; and how De Spain would carry on in his turn and then quit his tenure (whenever that would be) not only with his reputation unimpaired but somehow even leaving intact that bubble of the bank's outward solvency. Or not yet, anyway. Which may have been when he first really tasted that which he had never tasted before — the humility of not knowing, of never having had any chance to learn the rules and methods of the deadly game in which he had gauged his life; whose fate was to have the dreadful need and the will and the ruthlessness, and then to have the opportunity itself thrust upon him before he had had any chance to learn how to use it.

So all he knew to do was to move his money out of the bank of which he was only vice president: not high enough in rank to rob it himself in one fell swoop which would net him enough to make it worth while fleeing beyond extradition for the rest of his life, nor even high enough

in its hierarchy to defend himself from the inevitable next Byron Snopes who would appear at the book-keeper's desk, let alone from the greater hereditary predator who already ranked him.

And then he had nowhere to put it. If he could withdraw it from his own bank in utter secrecy, with no one ever to know it, he could have risked hiding it in his house or burying it in the back yard. But it would be impossible to keep it a secret; if no one else, the very book-keeper who recorded the transaction would be an automatic threat. And if word did spread that he had withdrawn his money from the bank in cash, every man and his cousin in the county would be his threat and enemy until every one of them was incontrovertibly convinced that the actual money actually was somewhere else, and exactly where that somewhere else was.

So he had no choice. It would have to be another bank, and done publicly. Of course he thought at once of the best bank he could find, the strongest and safest one: a big Memphis bank for instance. And here he had a new thought: a big bank where his (comparative) widow's mite would be safe because of its very minuscularity; but, believing as he did that money itself, cash dollars, possessed an inherent life of its mutual own like cells or disease, his minuscule sum would increment itself by simple parasitic osmosis like a leech or a goitre or cancer.

And even when he answered that thought immediately with No. That wont do. The specific whereabouts of the money must be indubitably and incontrovertibly known. All Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County must know by incontrovertible evidence that the money still is and will remain in Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County, or I wont even dare leave my home long enough to go to the postoffice, for my neighbors and fellow citizens waiting to climb in the kitchen window to hunt for the sock inside the mattress or the coffee can beneath the hearth, he did not yet realise what his true reason for moving the money was going to be.

And even when he thought how by transferring it to the other Jefferson bank, he would simply be moving it from the frying pan into the fire itself by laying it vulnerable to whatever Byron Snopes the Bank of Jefferson contained, not to mention that one's own Colonel Sartoris or Manfred de Spain, and immediately rejected that by reminding himself that the Bank of Jefferson was older, had had a whole century since 1830 or so to adjust itself to the natural and normal thieving of its officers and employees which was the sole reason for a bank, and so by now its very unbroken longevity was a protection, its very unaltered walls themselves a guarantee, as the simple edifice of the longtime standing church contains diffuses and even compels a sanctity invulnerable to the human frailties and vices of parson or vestry or choir; — even when he told himself this, his eyes had still not seen the dazzling vista composed not only of civic rectitude but of personal and private triumph and revenge too which the simple withdrawing of that first dollar had opened before him.

He was too busy; his own activity blinded him. Not just getting the money from one bank to the other, but seeing to it, making sure, that everyone in the town and the county knew that he was doing so, laboring under his preconception that the one universal reaction of every man in the county to the news that he had withdrawn his money from the Sartoris bank, would be the determined intention of stealing it as soon as he put it down and turned his back; not for the county to know he had withdrawn it from a bank, but that he had put every cent of it into a bank.

It was probably days afterward, the money safe again or at least still again or at least for the moment still again; and I like to imagine it: one still in the overalls and the tieless shirt and still thrall, attached irrevocably by the lean umbilicus of bare livelihood which if it ever broke he would, solvently speaking, die, to the worn-out tenant farm which — the farm and the tie-less shirt and the overalls — he had not wrenched free of yet as Snopes himself had, nor ever would probably and who for that very reason had watched the rise of one exactly like himself, from the overalls and the grinding landlord to a white shirt and a tie and the vice presidency of a bank; watched this not with

admiration but simply with envy and respect (ay, hatred too), stopping Snopes on the street one day, calling him mister, servile and cringing because of the white shirt and the tie but hating them also because they were not his:

“Likely hit aint a thing to it, but I heerd tell you taken your money outen your bank.”

“That’s right,” Snopes said. “Into the Bank of Jefferson.”

“Outen the bank that you yourself are vice president of.”

“That’s right,” Snopes said. “Into the Bank of Jefferson.”

“You mean, the other one aint safe?” Which to Snopes was to laugh, to whom no bank was safe; to whom any bank was that clump of bushes at the forest’s edge behind the one-room frontier cabin, which the pioneer had to use for outhouse since he had no other: the whole land, the whole dark wilderness (which meant the clump of bushes too) infested with Indians and brigands, not to mention bears and wolves and snakes. Of course it was not safe. But he had to go there. Because not until then did that vista, prospect containing the true reason why he moved his money, open before him. “Then you advise me to move mine too.”

“No,” Snopes said. “I just moved mine.”

“Outen the bank that you yourself air vice president of.”

“That’s right,” Snopes said. “That I myself am vice president of.”

“I see,” the other said. “Well, much oblige.”

Because he saw it then, whose civic jealousy and pride four years later would evict and eliminate from Jefferson one of his own kinsmen who had set up a pay-as-you-enter peep show with a set of imported pornographic photographs, by planting in his place of business several gallons of untaxed home-made whiskey and then notifying the federal revenue people; the same civic jealousy and pride which six years later would evict and eliminate from Jefferson another (and the last) objectionable member of his tribe who had elevated into a profession the simple occupation of hitching mules between the rails at a strategic curve of the railroad where engine drivers couldn’t see them in time, by

the direct expedient of buying the kinsman's remaining mules at his — the kinsman's — own figure on condition that the kinsman never show his face in Jefferson again.

Civic jealousy and pride which you might say only discovered civic jealousy and pride at the same moment he realised that, in the simple process of saving his own private money from rapine and ravagement, he could with that same stroke evict and eliminate from his chosen community its arch-fiend among sinners too, its supremely damned among the lost infernal seraphim: a creature who was a living mockery of virtue and morality because he was a paradox: lately mayor of the town and now president of one of its two banks and a warden of the Episcopal church, who was not content to be a normal natural Saturday-night whoremonger or woman chaser whom the town could have forgiven for the simple reason that he was natural and human and understandable and censurable, but instead must set up a kind of outrageous morality of adultery, a kind of flaunted uxoriousness in par amours based on an unimpugnable fidelity which had already lasted flagrant and unimpugnable ever since the moment the innocent cuckolded husband brought the female partner of it into town twelve years ago and which promised, bade or boded, whichever side you are on, to last another twelve unless the husband found some way to stop it, and twice twelve probably if he — the husband — waited for the town itself to do anything about it.

Civic virtue which, like all virtue, was its own reward also. Because in that same blinding flash he saw his own vengeance and revenge too, as if not just virtue loved virtue but so did God since here He was actually offering to share with virtue that quality which He had jealously reserved solely to Himself: the husband's vengeance and revenge on the man who had presented him with the badge of his championship; vengeance and revenge on the man who had not merely violated his home but outraged it — the home which in all good faith he had tried to establish around a woman already irrevocably soiled and damaged in the world's (Frenchman's Bend's, which was synonymous enough then) sight, and so give her bastard infant a name. He had been paid for it, of course. That is, he had received her dowry: a plantation of barely

accessible worn-out land containing the weed-choked ruins of a formal garden and the remains (what the neighbors had not pulled down plank by plank for firewood) of a columned colonial house — a property so worthless that Will Varner gave it away since even as ruthless an old pirate as Will Varner had failed in a whole quarter-century of ownership to evolve any way to turn a penny out of it; so worthless in fact that even he, Snopes, had been reduced to one of the oldest and hoariest expedients man ever invented: the salted goldmine: in order to sell the place to Henry Armstid and V. K. Ratliff, one of whom, Ratliff anyhow, should certainly have known better, for which reason he, Snopes, had no pity on him.

So in return for that worthless dowry (worthless since what value it had he had not found in it but himself had brought there) he had assumed the burden not only of his wife's moral fall and shame, but of the nameless child too; giving his name to it. Not much of a name maybe, since like what remained of the Old Frenchman's plantation, what value he found in it he himself had brought there. But it was the only name he had, and even if it had been Varner (ay, or Sartoris or De Spain or Compson or Grenier or Habersham or McCaslin or any of the other cognomens long and splendid in the annals of Yoknapatawpha County) he would have done the same.

Anyway, he gave the child a name and then moved the mother herself completely away from that old stage and scene and milieu of her shame, onto, into a new one, where at least no man could say I saw that fall but only This is what gossip said. Not that he expected gratitude from her, anymore than he did from old Will Varner, who by his (Varner's) lights had already paid him. But he did expect from her the simple sense and discretion taught by hard experience: not gratitude toward him but simple sensibleness toward herself, as you neither expect nor care that the person you save from burning is grateful for being saved but at least you expect that from now on that person will stay away from fire.

But that was not the point, that maybe women are no more capable of sensibleness than they are of gratitude. Maybe women are capable

only of gratitude, capable of nothing else but gratitude. Only, since the past no more exists for them than morality does, they have nothing which might have taught them sensibility with which to deal with the future and gratitude toward what or who saved them from the past; gratitude in them is a quality like electricity: it has to be produced projected and consumed all in the same instant to exist at all.

Which was simply saying what any and every man whose fate — doom, destiny, call it whatever you will — finally led him into marriage, long since and soon learned the hard way: his home had been violated not because his wife was ungrateful and a fool, but simply because she was a woman.

She had no more been seduced from the chastity of wifedom by the incorrigible bachelor flash and swagger of Manfred de Spain than she had been seduced from that of maidenhood by that same quality in that boy — youth — man — McCarron — back there in her virginity which he was convinced she no longer even remembered. She was seduced simply by herself: by a nymphomania not of the uterus: the hot unbearable otherwise unreachable itch and burn of the mare or heifer or sow or bitch in season, but by a nymphomania of a gland whose only ease was in creating a situation containing a recipient for gratitude, then supplying the gratitude.

Which still didn't exculpate Manfred de Spain. He didn't expect Manfred de Spain to have such high moral standards that they would forbid him seducing somebody else's wife. But he did expect him to have enough sense not to, since he wasn't a woman; to have too much sense this time, enough sense to look a little ahead into the future and refrain from seducing this wife anyway. But he hadn't. Worse: De Spain had even tried to recompense him for the privilege of that violation and defilement; out of base fear to pay him in base and niggling coin for what he, De Spain, juxtaposing De Spain against Snopes, considered his natural and normal droit de seigneur. True, old Will Varner had paid him for marrying his damaged daughter, but that was not the same. Old Will wasn't even trying to cover up, let alone liquidate, his daughter's shame. The very fact of what he offered for it — that ruined and valueless plantation of which even he, with a quarter of a century to do

it in, had been able to make nothing, revealed what value he held that honor at; and as for liquidating the shame, he — old Will — would have done that himself with his pistol, either in his hand or in that of his oafish troglodyte son Jody, if he had ever caught McCarron. He — old Will — had simply used that forthrightness to offer what he considered a fair price to get out of his house the daughter who had already once outraged his fireside peace and in time would very likely do it again.

But not De Spain, who without courage at all had tried to barter and haggle, using his position as mayor of the town to offer the base coinage of its power-plant superintendency and its implied privileges of petty larceny, not only to pay for the gratification of his appetite but to cover his reputation, trying to buy at the same time the right to the wife's bed and the security of his good name from the husband who owned them both; — this, for the privilege of misappropriating a handful of brass which he — Snopes — had availed himself of not for the petty profit it brought him but rather to see what depth De Spain's base and timorous fear would actually descend to.

He saw. They both did. It was not his — Snopes's — shame anymore than it was De Spain's pride that when the final crisis of the brass came which could have destroyed him, De Spain found for ally his accuser himself. The accuser, the city official sworn and — so he thought until that moment — dedicated too, until he too proved to be vulnerable (not competent: merely vulnerable) to that same passion from which derived what should have been his — De Spain's — ruin and desolation; the sworn and heretofore dedicated city official who found too dangerous for breathing too that same air simply because she had breathed it, walked in it while it laved and ached; the accuser, the community's civic champion likewise blasted and stricken by that same lightning-bolt out of the old passion and the old anguish. But for him (the accuser) only the grieving without even the loss; for him not even ruin to crown the grieving: only the desolation, who was not competent for but merely vulnerable to, since it was not even for him to hold her hand.

So De Spain brazened that through too, abrogating to courage what had merely been his luck. And as if that were not temerity enough, effrontery enough: Colonel Sartoris barely dead of his heart attack in his grandson's racing automobile (almost as though he — De Spain — had suborned the car and so contrived the accident) and the presidency of the bank barely vacant, when here he — De Spain — was again not requesting or suggesting but with that crass and brazen gall assuming, taking it for granted that he, Snopes, was downright panting for the next new chance not merely to re-compound but publicly affirm again his own cuckolding, that mutual co-violating of his wife's bed, — ay, publicly affirming her whoredom; the last clod still echoing as it were on Colonel Sartoris's coffin when De Spain approaches, figuratively rubbing his hands, already saying, "All right, let's get going.

That little shirt-tail full of stock you own will help some of course. But we need a big block of it. You step out to Frenchman's Bend tomorrow — tonight if possible — and sew up Uncle Billy before somebody else gets to him.

Get moving now." Or maybe even the true explicit words: Your kinsman — cousin — has destroyed this bank by removing a link, no matter how small or large, in the chain of its cash integrity. Which means not just the value of the stock you own in it, but the actual dollars and cents which you worked so hard to acquire and deposit in it, and which until last night were available to you on demand, were still yours.

The only way to anneal that chain is to restore that link to the last penny which your cousin stole. I will do that, but in return for it I must be president of the bank; anyone who restores that money will insist on being president in return, just as anyone to become president will have to restore that money first.

That's your choice: keep the par of your stock and the full value of your deposit through a president that you know exactly how far you can trust him, or take your chance with a stranger to whom the value of your stock and deposit may possibly mean no more than they did to your cousin Byron.

He obeyed. He had no choice. Because there was the innocence; ignorance, if you like. He had naturally taught himself all he could about banking since he had to use them or something equivalent to keep his money in.

But so far his only opportunities had been while waiting in line at a window, to peer through the grilled barricade which separated the money and the methods of handling it from the people to whom it belonged, who brought it in and relinquished it on that simple trust of one human being in another, since there was no alternative between that baseless trust and a vulnerable coffee can buried under a bush in the back yard.

Nor was it only to save his own money that he obeyed. In going out to Frenchman's Bend to solicit the vote of old Will Varner's stock for Manfred de Spain, he not only affirmed the fact that simple baseless unguaranteed unguaranteeable trust between man and man was solvent, he defended the fact that it not only could endure: it must endure since the robustness of a nation was in the solvency of its economy, and the solvency of an economy depended on the rectitude of its banks and the sacredness of the individual dollars they contained, no matter to whom the dollars individually belonged, and that rectitude and sanctity must in the last analysis depend on the will of man to trust and the capacity of man to be trusted; in sacrificing the sanctity of his home to the welfare of Jefferson, he immolated the chastity of his wife on the altar of mankind.

And at what added price: not just humbling his pride but throwing it completely away to go out there and try to persuade, perhaps even plead and beg with that old pirate in his dingy country store at Varner's Crossroads — that tall lean choleric outrageous old brigand with his grim wife herself not church-ridden but herself running the local church she belonged to with the cold high-handedness of a ward-boss, and his mulatto concubines (Ratliff said he had three: the first Negroes in that section of the county and for a time the only ones he would permit there, by whom he now had grandchildren, this — the second —

generation already darkening back but carrying intact still the worst of their fatherless or two-fathered grandmothers' combined original ones), who was anything in the world but unmoral since his were the strictest of simple moral standards: that whatever Will Varner decided to do was right, and anybody in the way had damned well better beware.

Yet he went, to deal with the old man who despised him for having accepted an already-dishonored wife for a price no greater than what he, Varner, considered the Old Frenchman place to be worth; and who feared him because he, Snopes, had been smart enough to realise from it what he, Varner, had not been able to in twenty-five years; who feared him for what that smartness threatened and implied and therefore hated him because he had to fear.

And dealt with him too, persuaded or tricked or forced. Even Ratliff, whose Yoknapatawpha County reputation and good name demanded that he have an answer to everything, did not have that one, Ratliff himself knowing no more than the rest of us did. Which was, one day there was a rumored coalition De Spain-Varner-Snopes; on the second day De Spain's own personal hand restored the money which Byron Snopes had absconded to Texas with; on the third day the stockholders elected De Spain president of the bank and Flem Snopes vice president.

That was all. Because there was the innocence. Not ignorance; he didn't know the inner workings of banks not because of ignorance but simply because he had not had opportunity and time yet to teach himself. Now he had only the need, the desperate necessity of having to save the entire bank in order to free his own deposit in it long enough to get the money out and into safety somewhere.

And now that he was privileged, the actual vice president of it, from whom all the most secret mechanisms and ramifications of banking and the institution of banks, not only the terror and threat of them but the golden perquisites too, could no longer be hidden, he had less than ever of time.

He had in fact time only to discover how simple and easy it was to steal from a bank since even a courageless unimaginative clod like his cousin Byron, who probably could not even conceive of a sum larger than a thousand or two dollars, had been able to do it with impunity; and to begin to get his own money out of it before all the rest of the employees, right on down to the Negro janitor who swept the floor every morning, would decide that the dust and alarm had settled enough to risk (or perhaps simply that the supply of loose money had built up enough again to make it worth while) emulating him.

That was it: the rush, the hurry, the harassment; it was probably with something very like shame that he remembered how it was not his own perspicuity at all but the chance meeting with an ignorant country man alarmed over his own (probably) two-figure bank balance, which opened to him that vista, that dazzling opportunity to combine in one single stroke security for himself and revenge on his enemy — that vengeance which had apparently been afoot for days and even weeks since a well-nigh nameless tenant farmer who probably never came to town four times a year, had been his first notice of its existence; that revenge which he was not only unaware of which he himself had not even planned and instigated, as if the gods or fates — circumstance — something — had taken up the cudgel in his behalf without even asking his permission, and naturally would some day send him a bill for it.

But he saw it now. Not to destroy the bank itself, wreck it, bring it down about De Spain's ears like Samson's temple; but simply to move it still intact out from under De Spain. Because the bank stood for money. A bank was money, and as Ratliff said, he would never injure money, cause to totter for even one second the parity and immunity of money; he had too much veneration for it.

He would simply move the bank and the money it represented and stood for, out from under De Spain, intact and uninjured and not even knowing it had been moved, into a new physical niche in the hegemony and economy of the town, leaving De Spain high and dry with nothing remaining save the mortgage on his house which (according to Ratliff)

he had given old Will Varner for the money with which to restore what Byron Snopes had stolen.

Only, how to do it. How to evict De Spain from the bank or remove the bank from under De Spain without damaging it — snatch it intact from under De Spain by persuading or frightening enough more of the depositors into withdrawing their money; how to start the avalanche of dollars which would suck it dry; persuade enough of the depositors and stock-holders to move their stock and funds bodily out of this one and into a new set of walls across the Square, or perhaps even (who knew) into the set of walls right next door to De Spain's now empty ones without even breaking the slumber of the bank's solvency.

Because even if every other one-gallused share-cropper in the county whose sole cash value was the October or November sale of the single bale of cotton which was his tithe of his year's work, withdrew his balance also, it would not be enough. Nor did he have nature, biology, nepotism, for his weapon. Although there were probably more people named Snopes or married to a Snopes or who owed sums ranging from twenty-five cents to five dollars to a Snopes, than any other name in that section of Mississippi, with one exception not one of them represented the equity of even one bale of share-crop cotton, and that exception — Wallstreet Panic, the grocer — already banked with the other bank and so could not have been used even if he — Flem — could have found any way to cope with the fierce implacable enmity of his — Wallstreet's — wife.

And less than any did he possess that weapon which could have served him best of all: friendship, a roster of people whom he could have approached without fear or alarm and suggested or formed a cabal against De Spain. He had no friends. I mean, he knew he didn't have any friends because he had never (and never would) intended to have them, be cluttered with them, be constantly vulnerable or anyway liable to the creeping sentimental parasitic importunity which his observation had shown him friendship meant.

I mean, this was probably when he discovered, for the first time in his life, that you needed friends for the simple reason that at any time a situation could — and in time would, no matter who you were — arise when you could use them; could not only use them but would have to since nothing else save friendship, someone to whom you could say “Dont ask why; just take this mortgage or lien or warrant or distrainer or pistol and point it where I tell you, and pull the trigger”, would do.

Which was the innocence again: having had to scratch and scabble and clutch and fight so soon and so hard and so unflaggingly long to get the money which he had to have, that he had had no time to teach himself how to hold onto it, defend and keep it (and this too with no regret either, since he still had no time to spend regretting).

Yes, no regret for lack of that quantity which his life had denied him the opportunity to teach himself that he would need, not because he had no time for regret at this specific moment, but because that desperate crisis had not yet risen where even friendship would not have been enough. Even Time was on his side now; it would be five years yet before he would be forced to the last desperate win-all lose-all by the maturation of a female child.

Though he did have his one tool, weapon, implement — that nethermost stratum of unfutured, barely-solvent one-bale tenant farmers which pervaded, covered thinly the whole county and on which in fact the entire cotton-economy of the county was founded and supported; he had that at least, with running through his head probably all the worn platitudinous saws about the incrementation of the mere enoughts: enough grains of sand and single drops of water and pennies saved. And working underground now.

He had always worked submerged each time until the mine was set and then blew up in the unsuspecting face. But this time he actually consorted with the moles and termites — not with Sartorises and Benbows and Edmondses and Habershams and the other names long in the county annals, which (who) owned the bank stock and the ponderable deposits, but with the other nameless tenants and croppers

like his first interlocutor who as that one would have put it: “Knewed a rat when he smelt one.”

He didn’t proselytise among them. He was simply visible, depending on that first one to have spread the word, the idea, letting himself be seen going and coming out of the other bank, the Bank of Jefferson, himself biding until they themselves would contrive the accidental encounter for corroboration, in pairs or even groups, like a committee, straight man and clown, like this:

“Mawnin, Mister Snopes. Aint you strayed off the range a little, over here at this bank?”

“Maybe Mister Flem has done got so much money now that jest one bank wont hold it.”

“No, boys, it’s like my old pappy used to say: Two traps will hold twice as many coons as one trap.”

“Did your pappy ever ask that smart old coon which trap he would ruther be in, Mister Snopes?”

“No, boys. All that old coon ever said was, Just so it aint the wrong trap.”

That would be all. They would guffaw; one might even slap the faded blue of his overalled knee. But that afternoon (or maybe they would even wait a day or two days or even a week) they would appear singly at the teller’s window of the old long-established Bank of Jefferson, the gnarled warped sunburned hands relinquishing almost regretfully the meagre clutch of banknotes; never to transfer the account by a simple check at the counter but going in person first to the bank which because of a whispered word supported by a clumsy parable they were repudiating, and withdraw the thin laborious sum in its actual cash and carry it across the Square to the other bank which at that same cryptic anonymous sourceless breath they would repudiate in its turn.

Because they were really neither moles nor termites. Moles can undermine foundations and the termites can reduce the entire house to one little pile of brown dust. But these had neither the individual determination of moles nor the communal determination of the

termites even though they did resemble ants in numbers. Because like him, Snopes, they simply were trying to save their meagre individual dollars, and he — Flem — knew it: that another breath, word, would alarm them back into the other bank; that if De Spain himself only wanted to, with the judicious planting of that single word he could recover not merely his own old one-bale clients, but the Bank of Jefferson's entire roster too.

Which he nor any other sane banker would want, since it would mean merely that many more Noes to say to the offers of galled mules and wornout farm- and household-gear as security to make down payments on second-hand and wornout automobiles.

It was not enough. It would be nowhere near enough. He recast his mind, again down the diminishing vain roster of names which he had already exhausted, as though he had never before weighed them and found them all of no avail: his nephew or cousin Wallstreet Panic the grocer, who less than ten years ago, by simple industry and honesty and hard work, plus the thousand-dollar compensation for his father's violent death, had gained an interest in a small side-street grocery store and now, in that ten years, owned a small chain of them scattered about north Mississippi, with his own wholesale warehouse to supply them; who — Wallstreet — would alone have been enough to remove De Spain's bank from under him except for two insurmountable obstacles: the fact that he already banked and owned stock in the other bank, and the implacable enmity of his wife toward the very word Snopes, who, it was said in Jefferson, was even trying to persuade her husband to change his own by law.

Then the rest of his tribe of Snopes, and the other Snopeses about the county who were not Snopeses nor tenant farmers either, who had been paying him the usury on five or ten or twenty-dollar loans for that many years, who, even if he could have enrolled them at the price of individual or maybe lump remission, would have added no weight to his cause for the simple reason that anyone with any amount of money in a public institution anywhere would never have dared put his signature on any piece of paper to remain in his, Flem's, possession.

Which brought him back to where he had started, once more to rack and cast his mind down the vain and diminishing list, knowing that he had known all the while that one name to which he would finally be reduced, and had been dodging it. Old man Will Varner, his father-in-law, knowing all the time that in the end he would have to eat that crow: go back to the choleric irascible old man who never had and never would forgive him for having tricked him into selling him the Old Frenchman place for five hundred dollars, which he, Flem, sold within two weeks for a profit of three or four hundred percent.; go back again to the old man whom only five years ago he had swallowed his pride and approached and persuaded to use the weight of his stock and money to make president of the bank the same man he must now persuade Varner to dispossess.

You see? That was his problem. Probably, except for the really incredible mischance that the bastard child he had given his name to happened to be female, he would never have needed to surmount it. He may have contented himself with the drowsy dream of his revenge, himself but half awake in the long-familiar embrace of his cuckoldry as you recline in a familiar chair with a familiar book, if his wife's bastard had not been a girl.

But she was. Which fact (oh yes, men are interested in facts too, even ones named Flem Snopes) must have struck him at last, whatever the day, moment, was, with an incredible unanticipated shock. Here was this thing, creature, which he had almost seen born you might say, and had seen, watched, every day of its life since. Yet in all innocence, unsuspecting, unfore-warned. Oh he knew it was female, and, continuing to remain alive, it must inevitably mature; and, being a human creature, on maturing it would have to be a woman. But he had been too busy making money, having to start from scratch (scratch? scratch was euphonism indeed for where he started from) to make money without owning or even hoping for anything to make it with, to have had time to learn or even to discover that he might need to learn anything about women.

You see? a little thing, creature, is born; you say: It will be a horse or a cow, and in time it does become that horse or that cow and fits, merges, fades into environment with no seam, juncture, suture. But not that female thing or creature which becomes (you cannot stop it; not even Flem Snopes could) a woman — woman who shapes, fits herself to no environment, scorns the fixitude of environment and all the behavior patterns which had been mutually agreed on as being best for the greatest number; but on the contrary just by breathing, just by the mere presence of that fragile and delicate flesh, warps and wrenches milieu itself to those soft unangled rounds and curves and planes.

That's what he had. That's what happened to him. Because by that time he had probably resigned himself to no more than the vain and hopeless dream of vengeance and revenge on his enemy. I mean, to canvass and canvass, cast and recast, only to come always back to that one-gallused one-bale residuum which, if all their resources, including the price of the secondhand overalls too, could have been pooled, the result would not have shaken the economy of a country church, let alone a county-seat bank. So he probably gave up, not to the acceptance of his horns, but at least to living with them.

Then the bastard child to whom in what you might call all innocence he had given his name, not satisfied with becoming just a woman, must become or threaten to become this particular and specific woman. Being female, she had to become a woman, which he had expected of her and indeed would not have held against her, provided she was content to become merely an ordinary woman. If he had had choice, he naturally would have plumped for a homely one, not really insisting on actual deformity, but one merely homely and frightened from birth and hence doomed to spinsterhood to that extent that her coeval young men would as one have taken one glance at her and then forgot they had ever seen her; and the one who would finally ask for her hand would have one eye, probably both, on her (purported) father's money and so would be malleable to his hand.

But not this one, who was obviously not only doomed for marriage from the moment she entered puberty, but as obviously doomed for

marriage with someone beyond his control, either because of geography or age or, worst, most outrageous of all: simply because the husband already had money and would neither need nor want his. Vide the gorilla-sized bravo drawn from as far away as Ohio while she was still only fifteen years old, who with his Golden Gloves fists or maybe merely his Golden Gloves reputation intimidated into a male desert except for himself her very surrounding atmosphere; until he was dispossessed by a fact which even his Golden Gloves could not cope with: that she was a woman and hence not just unpredictable: incorrigible.

You see? the gorilla already destined to own at least a Ford agency if not an entire labor union, not dispossessed by nor even superseded by, because they overlapped: the crown prince of the motor age merely on the way out because his successor was already in: the bachelor lawyer twice her age who, although apparently now fixed fast and incapable of harm in the matrix of the small town, bringing into her life and her imagination that same deadly whiff of outland, meeting her in the afternoon at soft-drink stands, not just to entice and corrupt her female body but far worse: corrupting her mind, inserting into her mind and her imagination not just the impractical and dreamy folly in poetry books but the fatal poison of dissatisfaction's hopes and dreams.

You see? the middleaged (whiteheaded too even) smalltown lawyer you would have thought incapable and therefore safe, who had actually served as his, Flem's, champion in the ejection of that first, the Ohio gorilla, threat, had now himself become even more of a danger since he was persuading the girl herself to escape beyond the range of his control, not only making her dissatisfied with where she was and should be, but even showing her where she could go to seek images and shapes she didn't know she had until he put them in her mind.

That was his problem. He couldn't even solve it by choosing, buying for her a husband whom he could handle and control. Because he dared not let her marry anybody at all until God or the devil or justice or maybe simple nature herself, wearied to death of him, removed old Will Varner from the surface at least of the earth. Because the moment

she married, the wife who had taken him for her husband for the single reason of providing her unborn child with a name (a little perhaps because of old Will's moral outrage and fury, a good deal maybe just to escape the noise he was probably making at the moment, but mostly, almost all, for the child) would quit him too, either with her present lover or without; in any case, with her father's will drawn eighteen years before she married Flem Snopes and ten or twelve before she ever heard of him, still unchanged.

She must not marry at all yet. Which was difficult enough to prevent even while she was at home in Jefferson, what with half the football and baseball teams escorting her home from school in the afternoon and squiring her in gangs to the picture show during her junior and senior high school years. Because at least she was living at home where her father could more or less control things either by being her father (oh yes, her father; she knew no different and in fact would have denied, repudiated the truth if anyone had tried to tell her it since women are not interested in truth or romance but only in facts whether they are true or not, just so they fit all the other facts, and to her the fact was that he was her father for the simple fact that all the other girls (boys too of course) had fathers unless they were dead beneath locatable tombstones) or by threatening to call in or foreclose a usurious note or mortgage bearing the signature of the father or kin of the would-be bridegroom, or — if he, Flem, were lucky — that of the groom himself.

Then who must appear but this meddling whiteheaded outsider plying her with ice cream sodas and out-of-state college catalogues and at last convincing her that not only her pleasure and interest but her duty too lay in leaving Jefferson, getting out of it the moment she graduated from high school. Upon which, she would carry that rich female provocation which had already drawn blood (ay, real blood once anyway) a dozen times in Jefferson, out into a world rife teeming with young single men vulnerable to marriage whether they knew it or not before they saw her.

Which he forestalled or rather stalled off for still another year which compelled, persuaded (I don't know what he used; tears even perhaps; certainly tears if he could have found any to use) her to waste at the Academy (one of the last of those gentle and stubbornly fading anachronisms called Miss So-and-So's or The So-and-So Female Academy or Institute whose curriculum included deportment and china-painting, which continue to dot the South though the rest of the United States knows them no more); this, while he racked his brain for how to eliminate this menace and threat to his wife's inheritance which was the middleaged country lawyer with his constant seduction of out-of-state school brochures.

The same middleaged lawyer in fact who had evicted the preceding menace of the Ohio garage mechanic. But none appeared to eliminate the lawyer save he, the embattled father, and the only tool he knew was money. So I can imagine this: Flem Snopes during all that year, having to remain on constant guard against any casual stranger like a drummer with a line of soap or hardware stopping off the train overnight, and at the same time wring and rack his harassed imagination for some means of compelling me to accept a loan of enough money at usurious enough interest, to be under his control.

Which was what I expected of course. I had even reached the point of planning, dreaming what I would do with the money, what buy with the money for which I would continue to betray him. But he didn't do that. He fooled me. Or perhaps he did me that honor too: not just to save my honor for me by withholding the temptation to sully it, but assuming that I would even sell honor before I would sully it and so temptation to do the one would be automatically refused because of the other. Anyway, he didn't offer me the bribe. And I know why now. He had given up. I mean, he realised at last that he couldn't possibly keep her from marriage even though he kept her in Jefferson, and that the moment that happened, he could kiss goodbye forever to old Will Varner's money.

Because sometime during that last summer — this last summer or fall rather, since school had opened again and she had begun her second

year at the Academy, wasting another year within the fading walls where Miss Melissa Hogganbeck still taught stubbornly to the dwindling few who were present, that not just American history but all history had not yet reached Christmas Day, 1865, since although General Lee (and other soldiers too, including her own grandfather) had surrendered, the war itself was not done and in fact the next ten years would show that even those token surrenders were mistakes — he sat back long enough to take stock.

Indeed, he — or any other male — had only to look at her to know that this couldn't go on much longer, even if he never let her out of the front yard — that girl (woman now; she will be nineteen this month) who simply by moving, being, promised and demanded and would have not just passion, not her mother's fierce awkward surrender in a roadside thicket at night with a lover still bleeding from a gang fight; but love, something worthy to match not just today's innocent and terrified and terrifying passion, but tomorrow's strength and capacity for serenity and growth and accomplishment and the realisation of hope and at last the contentment of one mutual peace and one mutual conjoined old age.

It — the worst, disaster, catastrophe, ruin, the last irrevocable chance to get his hands on any part of old Will Varner's money — could happen at any time now; and who knows what relief there might have been in the simple realization that at any moment now he could stop worrying not only about the loss of the money but having to hope for it, like when the receptionist opens the door to the dentist's torture-chamber and looks at you and says "Next" and it's too late now, simple face will not let you leap up and flee.

You see? Peace. No longer to have to waste time hoping or even regretting, having canvassed all the means and rejected all, since who knows too if during that same summer while he racked his harassed and outraged brain for some means to compel me to accept a loan at a hundred percent. interest, he had not also toyed with the possibility of finding some dedicated enthusiast panting for martyrdom in the simple name of Man who would shoot old Will some night through his kitchen

window and then rejected that too, relinquishing not hope so much as just worry.

And not just peace, but joy too since, now that he could relinquish forever that will-o-the-wisp of his father-in-law's money, he could go back to his original hope and dream of vengeance and revenge on the man responsible for the situation because of which he must give over all hope of his wife's inheritance. In fact he knew now why he had deferred that vengeance so long, dodged like a coward the actual facing of old Will's name in the canvass of possibilities. It was because he had known instinctively all the time that only Will could serve him, and once he had employed Will for his vengeance, by that same stroke he himself would have destroyed forever any chance of participating in that legacy.

But now that was all done, finished, behind him. He was free. Now there remained only the method to compel, force, cajole, persuade, trick — whichever was handiest or quickest or most efficient — the voting power of old Will's stock, plus the weight of that owned by others who were too afraid of old Will to resist him, in addition to his — Flem's — own stock and his corps of one-gallused depositors and their whispering campaign, to remove De Spain's bank from under him by voting him out of its presidency.

All that remained was how, how to handle — in a word, lick — Will Varner. And who to dispute that he already knew that too, that plan already tested and retested back in the very time while he was still dodging the facing of old Will's name. Because, apparently once his mind was made up and he had finally brought himself to cut out and cauterise with his own hand that old vain hope of his wife's inheritance, he didn't hesitate.

Here was the girl, the one pawn which could wreck his hopes of the Varner money, whom he had kept at home where he could delay to that extent at least the inevitable marriage which would ruin him, keeping her at home not only against her own wishes but against those of her mother too (not to mention the meddling neighbor); keeping her at home even when to him too probably it meant she was wasting her

time in that anachronistic vacuum which was the Female Academy. This for one entire year and up to the Christmas holidays in the second one; then suddenly, without warning, overnight, he gives his permission for her to go, leave Jefferson and enter the State University; only fifty miles away to be sure, yet they were fifty miles, where it would be impossible for her to report back home every night and where she would pass all her waking hours among a thousand young men, all bachelors and all male.

Why? It's obvious. Why did he ever do any of the things he did? Because he got something in return more valuable to him than what he gave. So you don't really need to imagine this: he and his wife talking together (of course they talked sometimes; they were married, and you have to talk sometime to someone even when you're not married) — or four of them that is since there would be two witnesses waiting in the synthetic hall until she should take up the pen: Sign this document guaranteeing me one half of whatever you will inherit under your father's will, regardless of whatever your and my status in respect to one another may be at that time, and I will give my permission for Linda to go away from Jefferson to school.

All right, granted it could be broken, abrogated, set aside, would not hold. She would not know that. And even if she had never doubted it would hold, had the actual inheritance in her hand at the moment, would she have refused to give him half of it for that in return? Besides, it wasn't her it was to alarm, spook out of the realm of cool judgment.

That was the 'how'. Now remained only the 'when'; the rest of the winter and she away at the University now and he still about town, placid, inscrutable, unchanged, in the broad black planter's hat and the minute bow tie seen somewhere about the Square at least once during the day as regular as the courthouse clock itself; on through the winter and into the spring, until yesterday morning.

That's right. Just gone. So you will have to imagine this too since there would be no witnesses even waiting in a synthetic hall this time: once more the long, already summer-dusty gravel road (it had been simple

dirt when he traversed it that first time eighteen years ago) out to Varner's store. And in an automobile this time, it was that urgent, 'how' and 'when' having at last coincided. And secret; the automobile was a hired one. I mean, an imported hired one.

Although most of the prominent people in Jefferson and the county too owned automobiles now, he was not one of them. And not just because of the cost, of what more men than he in Yoknapatawpha County considered the foolish, the almost criminal immobilisation of that many dollars and cents in something which, even though you ran it for hire, would not pay for itself before it wore out, but because he was not only not a prominent man in Jefferson yet, he didn't even want to be: who would have defended as he did his life the secret even of exactly how solvent he really was.

But this was so urgent that he must use one for speed, and so secret that he would have hired one, paid money for the use of one, even if he had owned one, so as not to be seen going out there in his own; too secret even to have ridden out with the mail carrier, which he could have done for a dollar; too secret even to have commandeered from one of his clients a machine which he actually did own since it had been purchased with his money secured by one of his myriad usurious notes. Instead, he hired one.

We would never know which one nor where: only that it would not bear Yoknapatawpha County license plates, and drove out there in it, out to Varner's Crossroads once more and for the last time, dragging, towing a fading cloud of yellow dust along the road which eighteen years ago he had travelled in the mule-drawn wagon containing all he owned: the wife and her bastard daughter, the few sticks of furniture Mrs Varner had given them, the deed to Ratliff's half of the little back-street Jefferson restaurant and the few dollars remaining from what Henry Armstid (now locked up for life in a Jackson asylum) and his wife had scrimped and hoarded for ten years, which Ratliff and Armstid had paid him for the Old Frenchman place where he had buried the twenty-five silver dollars where they would find them with their spades.

For the last time, completing that ellipsis which would contain those entire eighteen years of his life since Frenchman's Bend and Varner's Crossroads and Varner's store would be one, perhaps the one, place to which he would never go again as long as he lived since, win or lose he would not need to, and win or lose he certainly would not dare to.

And who knows? thinking even then what a shame that he must go to the store and old Will instead of to Varner's house where at this hour in the forenoon there would be nobody but Mrs Varner and the Negro cook, — must go to the store and beard and beat down by simple immobility and a scrap of signed and witnessed paper, that violent and choleric old brigand instead. Because women are not interested in romance or morals or sin and its punishment, but only in facts, the immutable facts necessary to the living of life while you are in it and which they are going to damned well see themselves dont fiddle and fool and back and fill and mutate.

How simple to have gone straight to her, a woman (the big hard cold gray woman who never came to town anymore now, spending all her time between her home and her church, both of which she ran exactly alike: herself self-appointed treasurer of the collections she browbeat out of the terrified congregation, herself selecting and choosing and hiring the ministers and firing them too when they didn't suit her; legend was that she chose one of them out of a cotton field while passing in her buggy, hoicked him from between his plow-handles and ordered him to go home and bathe and change his clothes and followed herself thirty minutes later and ordained him).

How simple to ride up to the gate and say to the hired driver: "Wait here. I wont be long," and go up the walk and enter his ancestral halls (all right, his wife's; he was on his way now to dynamite his own equity in them) and on through them until he found Mrs Varner wherever she was, and say to her: "Good morning, Ma-in-law. I just found out last night that for eighteen years now our Eula's been sleeping with a feller in Jefferson named Manfred de Spain.

I packed up and moved out before I left town but I aint filed the divorce yet because the judge was still asleep when I passed his house. I'll tend to that when I get back tonight," and turn and go back to the car and say to the driver: "All right, son. Back to town," and leave Mrs Varner to finish it, herself to enter the lair where old Will sat among the symbolical gnawed bones — the racks of hames and plow-handles, the rank side meat and flour and cheap molasses and cheese and shoes and coal oil and work gloves and snuff and chewing tobacco and fly-specked candy and the liens and mortgages on crops and plow-tools and mules and horses and land — of his fortune.

There would be a few loungers though not many since this was planting time and even the ones there should have been in the field, which they would realise, already starting in an alarmed surge of guilt when they saw her, though not fast enough.

"Get out of here," she would say while they were already moving. "I want to talk to Will. — Wait. One of you go to the sawmill and tell Jody I want his automobile and hurry." And they would say "Yessum Miz Varner," which she would not hear either, standing over old Will now in his rawhide-bottomed chair. "Get up from there. Flem has finally caught Eula, or says he has. He hasn't filed the suit yet so you will have time before the word gets all over the county. I dont know what he's after, but you go in there and stop it. I wont have it. We had enough trouble with Eula twenty years ago. I aint going to have her back in my house worrying me now."

But he couldn't do that. It wasn't that simple. Because men, especially one like old Will Varner, were interested in facts too, especially a man like old Will in a fact like the one he, Flem, had signed and witnessed and folded inside his coat pocket. So he had to go, walk himself into that den and reach his own hand and jerk the unsuspecting beard and then stand while the uproar beat and thundered about his head until it spent itself temporarily to where his voice could be heard: "That's her signature. If you dont know it, them two witnesses do. All you got to do is help me take that bank away from Manfred de Spain — transfer your stock to my name, take my postdated check if you want, the stock to be

yourn again as soon as Manfred de Spain is out, or you to vote the stock yourself if you had druther — and you can have this paper. I'll even hold the match while you burn it."

That was all. And here was Ratliff again (oh yes, Jefferson could do without Ratliff, but not I — we — us; not I nor the whole damned tribe of Snopes could do without him), all neat and clean and tieless in his blue shirt, blinking a little at me. "Uncle Billy rid into town in Jody's car about four oclock this morning and went straight to Flem's. And Flem aint been to town today. What you reckon is fixing to pop now?" He blinked at me. "What do you reckon it was?"

"What what was?" I said.

"That he taken out there to Miz Varner yesterday that was important enough to have Uncle Billy on the road to town at four oclock this morning?"

"To Mrs Varner?" I said. "He gave it to Will."

"No no," Ratliff said. "He never seen Will. I know. I taken him out there. I had a machine to deliver to Miz Ledbetter at Rockyford and he suggested would I mind going by Frenchman's Bend while he spoke to Miz Varner a minute and we did, he was in the house about a minute and come back out and we went on and et dinner with Miz Ledbetter and set up the machine and come on back to town." He blinked at me. "Jest about a minute. What do you reckon he could a said or handed to Miz Varner in one minute that would put Uncle Billy on the road to Jefferson that soon after midnight?"

EIGHTEEN

V. K. Ratliff

NO NO, NO no, no no. He was wrong. He's a lawyer, and to a lawyer, if it aint complicated it dont matter whether it works or not because if it aint complicated up enough it aint right and so even if it works, you dont believe it. So it wasn't that — a paper phoned up on the spur of the moment, that I dont care how many witnesses signed it, a lawyer

not nowhere near as smart as Lawyer Stevens would a been willing to pay the client for the fun he would have breaking it wide open.

It wasn't that. I dont know what it was, coming up to me on the Square that evening and saying, "I hear Miz Ledbetter's sewing machine come in this morning. When you take it out to her, I'll make the run out and back with you if you wont mind going by Frenchman's Bend a minute." Sho. You never even wondered how he heard about things because when the time come around to wonder how he managed to hear about it, it was already too late because he had done already made his profit by that time. So I says,

"Well, a feller going to Rockyford could go by Frenchman's Bend. But then, a feller going to Memphis could go by Birmingham too. He wouldn't have to, but he could." — You know: jest to hear him dicker. But he fooled me.

"That's right," he says. "It's a good six miles out of your way. Would four bits a mile pay for it?"

"It would more than pay for it," I says. "To ride up them extra three dollars, me and you wouldn't get back to town before sunup Wednesday. So I'll tell you what I'll do. You buy two cigars, and if you'll smoke one of them yourself, I'll carry you by Frenchman's Bend for one minute jest for your company and conversation."

"I'll give them both to you," he says. So we done that. Oh sho, he beat me out of my half of that little café me and Grover Winbush owned, but who can say jest who lost then? If he hadn't a got it, Grover might a turned it into a French postcard peepshow too, and then I'd be out there where Grover is now: nightwatchman at that brick yard.

So I druv him by Frenchman's Bend. And we had the conversation too, provided you can call the monologue you have with Flem Snopes a conversation. But you keep on trying. It's because you hope to learn. You know silence is valuable because it must be, there's so little of it. So each time you think Here's my chance to find out how a expert uses it.

Of course you wont this time and never will the next neither, that's how come he's a expert. But you can always hope you will. So we druv on, talking about this and that, mostly this of course, with him stopping chewing ever three or four miles to spit out the window and say "Yep" or "That's right" or "Sounds like it" until finally — there was Varner's Crossroads jest over the next rise — he says, "Not the store.

The house," and I says,
"What? Uncle Billy wont be home now. He'll be at the store this time of morning."

"I know it," he says. "Take this road here." So we taken that road; we never even seen the store, let alone passed it, on to the house, the gate.

"You said one minute," I says. "If it's longer than that, you'll owe me two more cigars."

"All right," he says. And he got out and went on, up the walk and into the house, and I switched off the engine and set there thinking What? What? Miz Varner. Not Uncle Billy: MIZ Varner. That Uncle Billy jest hated him because Flem beat him fair and square, at Uncle Billy's own figger, out of that Old Frenchman place, while Miz Varner hated him like he was a Holy Roller or even a Baptist because he had not only condoned sin by marrying her daughter after somebody else had knocked her up, he had even made sin pay by getting the start from it that wound him up vice president of a bank. Yet it was Miz Varner he had come all the way out here to see, was willing to pay me three extra dollars for it. (I mean, offered. I know now I could a asked him ten.)

No, not thinking What? What? because what I was thinking was Who, who ought to know about this, trying to think in the little time I would have, since he his-self had volunteered that-ere one minute so one minute it was going to be, jest which who that was. Not me, because there wasn't no more loose dangling Ratliff-ends he could need; and not Lawyer Stevens and Linda and Eula and that going-off-to-school business that had been the last what you might call Snopes uproar to

draw attention on the local scene, because that was ended too now, with Linda at least off at the University over at Oxford even if it wasn't one of them Virginia or New England colleges Lawyer was panting for. I didn't count Manfred de Spain because I wasn't on Manfred de Spain's side. I wasn't against him neither; it was jest like Lawyer Stevens his-self would a said: the feller that already had as much on his side as Manfred de Spain already had or anyway as everybody in Jefferson whose business it wasn't neither, believed he had, didn't need no more. Let alone deserve it.

Only there wasn't time. It wasn't one minute quite but it wasn't two neither when he come out the door in that-ere black hat and his bow tie, still chewing because I doubt if he ever quit chewing any more than he probably taken off that hat while he was inside, back to the car and spit and got in and I started the engine and says, "It wasn't quite a full two, so I'll let you off for one," and he says, "All right," and I put her in low and set with my foot on the clutch and says, "In case she was out, you want to run by the store and tell Uncle Billy you left a message on the hatrack for her?" and he chewed a lick or two more and balled up the ambeer and leaned to the window and spit again and set back and we went on to Rockyford and I set up the machine for Miz Ledbetter and she invited us to dinner and we et and come home and at four oclock this morning Uncle Billy druv up to Flem's house in Jody's car with his Negro driver and I know why four oclock because that was Miz Varner.

I mean Uncle Billy would go to bed soon as he et his supper, which would be before sundown this time of year, so he would wake up anywhere about one or two oclock in the morning. Of course he had done already broke the cook into getting up then to cook his breakfast but jest one Negro woman rattling pans in the kitchen wasn't nowhere near enough for Uncle Billy, ever body else hadn't jest to wake up then but to get up too: stomping around and banging doors and hollering for this and that until Miz Varner was up and dressed too. Only Uncle Billy could eat his breakfast then set in a chair until he smoked his pipe out and then he would go back to sleep until daylight. Only Miz Varner

couldn't never go back to sleep again, once he had done woke her up good.

So this was her chance. I dont know what it was Flem told her or handed her that was important enough to make Uncle Billy light out for town at two oclock in the morning. But it wasn't no more important to Miz Varner than her chance to go back to bed in peace and quiet and sleep until a decent Christian hour. So she jest never told him or give it to him until he woke up at his usual two a.m.; if it was something Flem jest handed her that she never needed to repeat, likely she never had to get up a-tall but jest have it leaning against the lamp when Uncle Billy struck a match to light it so he could see to wake up the rest of the house and the neighbors.

So I dont know what it was. But it wasn't no joked-up piece of paper jest in the hopes of skeering Uncle Billy into doing something that until now he hadn't aimed to do. Because Uncle Billy dont skeer, and Flem Snopes knows it. It had something to do with folks, people, and the only people connected with Jefferson that would make Uncle Billy do something he hadn't suspected until this moment he would do, are Eula and Linda. Not Flem; Uncle Billy has knowed for twenty years now exactly what he will do to Flem the first time Flem's eye falters or his hand slips or his attention wanders.

Let alone going to Uncle Billy his-self with it. Because anything in reference to that bank that Flem would know in advance that jest by handing it or saying it to Miz Varner, would be stout enough to move Uncle Billy from Frenchman's Bend to Jefferson as soon as he heard about it, would sooner or later have to scratch or leastways touch Eula.

And maybe Uncle Billy Varner dont skeer and Flem Snopes knows it, but Flem Snopes dont skeer neither and most folks knows that too. And it dont take no especial coward to not want to walk into that store and up to old man Will Varner and tell him his daughter aint reformed even yet, that she's been sleeping around again for eighteen years now with a feller she aint married to, and that her husband aint got guts enough to know what to do about it.

NINETEEN

Charles Mallison

IT WAS LIKE a circus day or the County fair. Or more: it was like the District or even the whole State field meet because we even had a holiday for it. Only it was more than just a fair or a field day because this one was going to have death in it too though of course we didn't know that then.

It even began with a school holiday that we didn't even know we were going to have. It was as if time, circumstance, geography, contained something which must, anyway was going to, happen and now was the moment and Jefferson, Mississippi was the place, and so the stage was cleared and set for it.

The school holiday began Tuesday morning. Last week some new people moved to Jefferson, a highway engineer, and their little boy entered the second grade. He must have been already sick when his mother brought him because he had to go home, they sent for her and she came and got him that same afternoon and that night they took him to Memphis. That was Thursday but it wasn't until Monday afternoon that they got the word back that what he had was polio and they sent word around that the school would be closed while they found out what to do next or what to not do or whatever it was while they tried to learn more about polio or about the engineer's little boy or whatever it was.

Anyhow it was a holiday we hadn't expected or even hoped for, in April; that April morning when you woke up and you would think how April was the best, the very best time of all not to have to go to school, until you would think Except in the fall with the weather brisk and not-cold at the same time and the trees all yellow and red and you could go hunting all day long; and then you would think Except in the winter with the Christmas holidays over and now nothing to look forward to until summer; and you would think how no time is the best time to not

have to go to school and so school is a good thing after all because without it there wouldn't be any holidays or vacations.

Anyhow we had the holiday, we didn't know how long; and that was fine too because now you never had to say Only two days left or Only one day left since all you had to do was just be holiday, breathe holiday, today and tomorrow too and who knows? tomorrow after that and, who knows? still tomorrow after that. So on Wednesday when even the children who would have been in school except for the highway engineer's little boy, began to know that something was happening, going on inside the president's office of the bank — not the old one, the Bank of Jefferson, but the other, the one we still called the new bank or even Colonel Sartoris's bank although he had been dead seven years now and Mr de Spain was president of it — it was no more than we expected, since this was just another part of whatever it was time or circumstance or whatever it was had cleared the stage and emptied the school so it could happen.

No, to say that the stage was limited to just one bank; to say that time, circumstance, geography, whatever it was, had turned school out in the middle of April in honor of something it wanted to happen inside just one set of walls, was wrong. It was all of Jefferson. It was all the walls of Jefferson, the ground they stood on, the air they rose up in; all the walls and air in Jefferson that people moved and breathed and talked in; we were already at dinner except Uncle Gavin, who was never late unless he was out of town on county business, and when he did come in something was already wrong.

I mean, I didn't always notice when something was wrong with him and it wasn't because I was only twelve yet, it was because you didn't have to notice Uncle Gavin because you could always tell from Mother since she was his twin; it was like when you said "What's the matter?" to Mother, you and she and everybody else knew you were saying What's wrong with Uncle Gavin.

But we could always depend on Father. Uncle Gavin came in at last and sat down and unfolded his napkin and said something wrong and

Father glanced at him and then went back to eating and then looked at Uncle Gavin again.

“Well,” he said, “I hear they got old Will Varner out of bed at two this morning and brought him all the way in to town to promote Manfred de Spain. Promote him where?”

“What?” Uncle Gavin said.

“Where do you promote a man that’s already president of the bank?” Father said.

“Charley,” Mother said.

“Or maybe promote aint the word I want,” Father said. “The one I want is when you promote a man quick out of bed—”

“Charley!” Mother said.

“ — especially a bed he never had any business in, not to mention having to send all the way out to Frenchman’s Bend for your pa-in-law to pronounce that word—”

“Charles!” Mother said. That’s how it was. It was like we had had something in Jefferson for eighteen years and whether it had been right or whether it had been wrong to begin with didn’t matter anymore now because it was ours, we had lived with it and now it didn’t even show a scar, like the nail driven into the tree years ago that violated and outraged and anguished that tree.

Except that the tree hasn’t got much choice either: either to put principle above sap and refuse the outrage and next year’s sap both, or accept the outrage and the sap for the privilege of going on being a tree as long as it can, until in time the nail disappears. It don’t go away; it just stops being so glaring in sight, barked over; there is a lump, a bump of course, but after a while the other trees forgive that and everything else accepts that tree and that bump too until one day the saw or the axe goes into it and hits that old nail.

Because I was twelve then. I had reached for the second time that point in the looping circles children — boys anyway — make growing up when for a little while they enter, live in, the same civilisation that grown people use, when it occurs to you that maybe the sensible and harmless things they wont let you do really seem as silly to them as the things they seem either to want to do or have to do, seem to you. No: it's when they laugh at you and suddenly you say, Why, maybe I am funny, and so the things they do are not outrageous and silly or shocking at all: they're just funny; and more than that, it's the same funny.

So now I could ask. A few more years and I would know more than I knew then. But the loop, the circle, would be swinging on away out into space again where you cant ask grown people because you cant talk to anybody, not even the others your age because they too are rushing on out into space where you cant touch anybody, you dont dare try, you are too busy just hanging on; and you know that all the others out there are just as afraid of asking as you are, nobody to ask, nothing to do but make noise, the louder the better, then at least the other scared ones wont know how scared you are.

But I could still ask now, for a little while. I asked Mother.
“Why dont you ask Uncle Gavin?” she said.

She wanted to tell me. Maybe she even tried. But she couldn't. It wasn't because I was only twelve. It was because I was her child, created by her and Father because they wanted to be in bed together and nothing else would do, nobody else would do. You see? If Mrs Snopes and Mr de Spain had been anything else but people, she could have told me. But they were people too, exactly like her and Father; and it's not that the child mustn't know that the same magic which made him was the same thing that sent an old man like Mr Will Varner into town at four oclock in the morning just to take something as sorry and shabby as a bank full of money away from another man named Manfred de Spain: it's because the child couldn't believe that.

Because to the child, he was not created by his mother's and his father's passion or capacity for it. He couldn't have been because he was there first, he came first, before the passion; he created the passion, not only it but the man and the woman who served it; his father is not his father but his son-in-law, his mother not his mother but his daughter-in-law if he is a girl.

So she couldn't tell me because she could not. And Uncle Gavin couldn't tell me because he wasn't able to, he couldn't have stopped talking in time. That is, that's what I thought then. I mean, that's what I thought then was the reason why they — Mother — didn't tell me: that the reason was just my innocence and not Uncle Gavin's too and she had to guard both since maybe she was my mother but she was Uncle Gavin's twin and if a boy or a girl really is his father's and her mother's father-in-law or mother-in-law, which would make the girl her brother's mother no matter how much younger she was, then a girl with just one brother and him a twin at that, would maybe be his wife and mother too.

So maybe that was why: not that I wasn't old enough to accept biology, but that everyone should be, deserves to be, must be, defended and protected from the spectators of his own passion save in the most general and unspecific and impersonal terms of the literary and dramatic lay-figures of the protagonists of passion in their bloodless and griefless posturings of triumph or anguish; that no man deserves love since nature did not equip us to bear it but merely to endure and survive it, and so Uncle Gavin's must not be watched where she could help and fend him, while it anguished on his own unarmored bones.

Though even if they had tried to tell me, it would have been several years yet, not from innocence but from ignorance, before I would know, understand, what I had actually been looking at during the rest of that Wednesday afternoon while all of Jefferson waited for the saw to touch that buried nail. No: not buried, not healed or annealed into the tree but just cysted into it, alien and poison; not healed over but scabbed over with a scab which merely renewed itself, incapable of healing, like a signpost.

Because ours was a town founded by Aryan Baptists and Methodists, for Aryan Baptists and Methodists. We had a Chinese laundryman and two Jews, brothers with their families, who ran two clothing stores.

But one of them had been trained in Russia to be a rabbi and spoke seven languages including classic Greek and Latin and worked geometry problems for relaxation and he was absolved, lumped in the same absolution with old Doctor Wyott, president emeritus of the Academy (his grandfather had founded it) who could read not only Greek and Hebrew but Sanskrit too, who wore two foreign decorations for (we, Jefferson, believed) having been not just a professing but a militant and even boasting atheist for at least sixty of his eighty years and who had even beaten the senior Mr Wildermark at chess; and the other Jewish brother and his family and the Chinaman all attended, were members of, the Methodist church and so they didn't count either, being in our eyes merely non-white people, not actually colored.

And although the Chinese was definitely a colored man even if not a Negro, he was only he, single peculiar and barren; not just kinless but even kindless, half the world or anyway half the continent (we all knew about San Francisco's Chinatown) sundered from his like and therefore as threatless as a mule.

There is a small Episcopal church in Jefferson, the oldest extant building in town (It was built by slaves and called the best, the finest too, I mean by the Northern tourists who passed through Jefferson now with cameras, expecting — we dont know why since they themselves had burned it and blown it up with dynamite in 1863 — to find Jefferson much older or anyway older looking than it is and faulting us a little because it isn't.) and a Presbyterian congregation too, the two oldest congregations in the county, going back to the old days of Issetibbeha, the Chickasaw chief, and his sister's son Ikkemo-tubbe whom they called Doom, before the county was a County and Jefferson was Jefferson.

But nowadays there wasn't much difference between the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches and Issetibbeha's old mounds in the low creek bottoms about the county because the Baptists and Methodists had heired from them, usurped and dispossessed; ours a town established and decreed by people neither Catholics nor Protestants nor even atheists but incorrigible Nonconformists, nonconformists not just to everybody else but to each other in mutual accord; a nonconformism defended and preserved by descendants whose ancestors hadn't quitted home and security for a wilderness in which to find freedom of thought as they claimed and oh yes, believed, but to find freedom in which to be incorrigible and unreconstructible Baptists and Methodists; not to escape from tyranny as they claimed and believed, but to establish one.

And now, after eighteen years, the saw of retribution which we of course called that of righteousness and simple justice, was about to touch that secret hidden unhealed nail buried in the moral tree of our community — that nail not only corrupted and unhealed but unhealable because it was not just sin but mortal sin — a thing which should not exist at all, whose very conception should be self-annihilative, yet a sin which people seemed constantly and almost universally to commit with complete impunity; as witness these two for eighteen years, not only flouting decency and morality but even compelling decency and morality to accept them simply by being discrete: nobody had actually caught them yet; outraging morality itself by allying economics on their side since the very rectitude and solvency of a bank would be involved in their exposure.

In fact, the town itself was divided into two camps, each split in turn into what you might call a hundred individual nonconforming bivouacs: the women who hated Mrs Snopes for having grabbed Mr de Spain first or hated Mr de Spain for having preferred Mrs Snopes to them, and the men who were jealous of De Spain because they were not him or hated him for being younger than they or braver than they (they called it luckier of course); and those of both sexes — no: the same sour genderless sex — who hated them both for having found or made together something which they themselves had failed to make,

whatever the reason; and in consequence of which that splendor must not only not exist, it must never have existed — the females of it who must abhor the splendor because it was, had to be, barren; the males of it who must hate the splendor because they had set the cold stability of currency above the wild glory of blood: they who had not only abetted the sin but had kept alive the anguish of their own secret regret by supporting the sinners' security for the sake of De Spain's bank.

Two camps: the one that said the sin must be exposed now, it had already lasted eighteen years too long; the other which said it dare not be exposed now and so reveal our own baseness in helping to keep it hidden all this long time.

Because the saw was not just seeking that nail. As far as Jefferson was concerned it had already touched it; we were merely waiting now to see in what direction the fragments of that particular tree in our wood (not the saw itself, never the saw: if that righteous and invincible moral blade flew to pieces at the contact, let us all dissolve too since the very fabric of Baptist and Methodist life were delusion, nothing) would scatter and disintegrate.

That was that whole afternoon while old Mr Varner still stayed hidden or anyway invisible in Mr Snopes's house. We didn't even know definitely that he was actually in town, nobody had seen him; we only had Ratliff's word that he had come in in his son's automobile at four o'clock this morning, and we didn't know that for sure unless Ratliff had sat up all night watching the Snopes's front door. But then Mr Varner was there, he had to be or there wouldn't be any use for the rest of it.

And Mr de Spain's bank continued its ordinary sober busy prosperous gold-aura-ed course to the closing hour at three o'clock, when almost at once the delivery boy from Christian's drugstore knocked at the side door and was admitted with his ritual tray of four coca colas for the two girl book-keepers and Miss Killebrew the teller and Mr Hovis the cashier.

And presently, at his ordinary hour, Mr de Spain came out and got in his car as usual and drove away to look at one of the farms which he now owned or on which the bank held a mortgage, as he always did: no rush, no panic to burst upon the ordered financial day. And some time during the day, either forenoon or afternoon, somebody claimed to have seen Mr Snopes himself, unchanged too, unhurried and unalarmed, the wide black planter's hat still looking brand new (the tiny bow tie which he had worn for eighteen years now always did), going about his inscrutable noncommunicable affairs.

Then it was five o'clock and nothing had happened; soon now people would begin to go home to eat supper and then it would be too late and at first I thought of going up to the office to wait for Uncle Gavin to walk home, only I would have to climb the stairs and then turn around right away and come back down again and I thought how what a good name spring fever was to excuse not doing something you didn't want to do, then I thought how maybe spring fever wasn't an excuse at all because maybe spring fever actually was.

So I just stood on the corner where he would have to pass, to wait for him. Then I saw Mrs Snopes. She had just come out of the beauty parlor and as soon as you looked at her you could tell that's where she had been and I remembered how Mother said once she was the only woman in Jefferson that never went to one because she didn't need to since there was nothing in a beauty shop that she could have lacked.

But she had this time, standing there for a minute and she really did look both ways along the street before she turned and started toward me and then she saw me and came on and said, "Hello, Chick," and I tipped my cap, only she came up and stopped and I took my cap off; she had a bag on her arm like ladies do, already opening it to reach inside.

"I was looking for you," she said. "Will you give this to your uncle when you go home?"

"Yessum," I said. It was an envelope.

“Thank you,” she said. “Have they heard any more about the little Riddell boy?”

“I dont know’m,” I said. It wasn’t sealed. It didn’t have any name on the front either.

“Let’s hope they got him to Memphis in time,” she said. Then she said Thank you again and went on, walking like she does, not like a pointer about to make game like Linda, but like water moves somehow. And she could have telephoned him at home and I almost said You dont want me to let Mother see it before I caught myself.

Because it wasn’t sealed. But then, I wouldn’t have anyway. Besides, I didn’t have to. Mother wasn’t even at home yet and then I remembered: Wednesday, she would be out at Sartoris at the meeting of the Byron Society though Mother said it had been a long time now since anybody listened to anybody read anything because they played bridge now but at least she said that when it met with Miss Jenny Du Pre they had toddies or juleps instead of just coffee or coca colas.

So nothing had happened and now it was already too late, the sun going down though the pear tree in the side yard had bloomed and gone a month ago and now the mocking bird had moved over to the pink dogwood, already beginning where he had sung all night long all week until you would begin to wonder why in the world he didn’t go somewhere else and let people sleep. And nobody at home at all yet except Aleck Sander sitting on the front steps with the ball and bat. “Come on,” he said. “I’ll knock you out some flies.” Then he said, “All right, you knock out and I’ll chase um.”

So it was almost dark inside the house; I could already smell supper cooking and it was too late now, finished now: Mr de Spain gone out in his new Buick to watch how much money his cotton was making, and Mrs Snopes coming out of the beauty shop with her hair even waved or something or whatever it was, maybe for a party at her house tonight so maybe it hadn’t even begun; maybe old Mr Varner wasn’t even in town at all, not only wasn’t coming but never had aimed to and so all the Riddell boy did by catching polio was just to give us a holiday we

didn't expect and didn't know what to do with; until I heard Uncle Gavin come in and come up the stairs and I met him in the upstairs hall with the envelope in my hand: just the shape of him coming up the stairs and along the hall until even in that light I saw his face all of a sudden and all of a sudden I said:

"You're not going to be here for supper."

"No," he said. "Will you tell your mother?"

"Here," I said and held out the envelope and he took it.

TWENTY

Gavin Stevens

THOUGH YOU HAVE to eat. So after I went back and unlocked the office and left the door on the latch, I drove out to Seminary Hill, to eat cheese and crackers and listen to old Mr Garraway curse Calvin Coolidge while he ran the last loafing Negroes out of the store and closed it for the night.

Or so I thought. Because you simply cannot go against a community. You can stand singly against any temporary unanimity of even a city-full of human behavior, even a mob. But you cannot stand against the cold inflexible abstraction of a long-suffering community's moral point of view. Mr Garraway had been one of the first — no: the first — to move his account from Colonel Sartoris's bank to the Bank of Jefferson, even before Flem Snopes ever thought or had reason to think of his tenant-farmer panic. He had moved it in fact as soon as we — the town and county — knew that Manfred de Spain was definitely to be president of it.

Because he — Mr Garraway — had been one of that original small inflexible unreconstructible puritan group, both Baptist and Methodist, in the county who would have moved their fiscal allegiance also from Jefferson while De Spain was mayor of it, to escape the moral contamination and express their opinion of that liaison which he

represented, if there had been another fiscal town in the county to have moved it to. Though later, a year or two afterward, he moved the account back, perhaps because he was just old or maybe he could stay in his small dingy store out at Seminary Hill and not have to come to town, have to see with his own eyes and so be reminded of his county's shame and disgrace and sin if he didn't want to be. Or maybe once you accept something, it doesn't really matter anymore whether you like it or not. Or so I thought.

The note said ten o'clock. That was all: Please meet me at your office at ten tonight. Not if convenient, let alone when could you see me at your office? but simply at ten tonight please. You see. Because in the first place, Why me? Me? To say that to all of them, all three of them — no, all four, taking De Spain with me: Why can't you let me alone? What more can you want of me than I have already failed to do? But there would be plenty of time for that; I would have plenty of time to eat the sardines and crackers and say What a shame to the account of whatever the recent outrage the President and his party had contrived against Mr Garraway, when he — Mr Garraway — said suddenly (an old man with an old man's dim cloudy eyes magnified and enormous behind the thick lenses of his iron-framed spectacles): "Is it so that Will Varner came in to town this morning?"

"Yes," I said.

"So he caught them." Now he was trembling, shaking, standing there behind the worn counter which he had inherited from his father, racked with tins of meat and spools of thread and combs and needles and bottles of cooking extract and malaria tonic and female compound some of which he had probably inherited too, saying in a shaking voice: "Not the husband! The father himself had to come in and catch them after eighteen years!"

"But you put your money back," I said. "You took it out at first, when you just heard at second hand about the sin and shame and outrage. Then you put it back. Was it because you saw her too at last? She came

out here one day, into your store, and you saw her yourself, got to know her, to believe that she at least was innocent? Was that it?"

"I knew the husband," he said, cried almost, holding his voice down so the Negroes couldn't hear what we — he was talking about. "I knew the husband! He deserved it!"

Then I remembered. "Yes," I said, "I thought I saw you in town this afternoon." Then I knew. "You moved it again today, didn't you? You drew it out again and put it back into the Bank of Jefferson today, didn't you?" and he standing there, shaking even while he tried to hold himself from it. "Why?" I said. "Why again today?"

"She must go," he said. "They must both go — she and De Spain too."

"But why?" I said, muttered too, not to be overheard: two white men discussing in a store full of Negroes a white woman's adultery. More: adultery in the very top stratum of a white man's town and bank. "Why only now? It was one thing as long as the husband accepted it; it became another when somebody — how did you put it? — catches them, blows the gaff? They become merely sinners then, criminals then, lepers then? nothing for constancy, nothing for fidelity, nothing for devotion, unpoliced devotion, eighteen years of devotion?"

"Is that all you want?" he said. "I'm tired. I want to go home." Then we were on the gallery where a few of the Negroes still lingered, the arms and faces already fading back into the darkness behind the lighter shades of shirts and hats and pants as if they were slowly vacating them, while his shaking hands fumbled the heavy padlock through the hasp and fumbled it shut; until suddenly I said, quite loud:

"Though if anything the next one will be worse because the next president will probably be Governor Smith and you know who Governor Smith is of course: a Catholic," and would have stopped that in time in very shame but could not, or maybe should have stopped it in time in very shame but would not.

Since who was I, what anguish's missionary I that I must compound it blindly right and left like some blind unrational minor force of nature?

who had already spoiled supper and ruined sleep both for the old man standing there fumbling with his clumsy lock as if I had actually struck him, — the old man who in his fashion, in a lot of people's fashion, really was a kindly old man who never in his life wittingly or unwittingly harmed anyone black or white, not serious harm: not more than adding a few extra cents to what it would have been for cash, when the article went on credit; or selling to a Negro for half-price or often less (oh yes, at times even giving it to him) the tainted meat or rancid lard or weevilled flour or meal he would not have permitted a white man — a Protestant gentile white man of course — to eat at all out of his store; standing there with his back turned fumbling at the giant padlock as though I had actually struck him, saying, "They must go. They must go, both of them."

There is a ridge; you drive on beyond Seminary Hill and in time you come upon it: a mild unhurried farm road presently mounting to cross the ridge and on to join the main highway leading from Jefferson to the world. And now, looking back and down, you see all Yoknapatawpha in the dying last of day beneath you. There are stars now, just pricking out as you watch them among the others already coldly and softly burning; the end of day is one vast green soundless murmur up the northwest toward the zenith. Yet it is as though light were not being subtracted from earth, drained from earth backward and upward into that cooling green, but rather had gathered, pooling for an unmoving moment yet, among the low places of the ground so that ground, earth itself is luminous and only the dense clumps of trees are dark, standing darkly and immobile out of it.

Then, as though at signal, the fireflies — lightning-bugs of the Mississippi child's vernacular — myriad and frenetic, random and frantic, pulsing; not questing, not quiring, but choring as if they were tiny incessant appeaseless voices, cries, words. And you stand suzerain and solitary above the whole sum of your life beneath that incessant ephemeral spangling.

First is Jefferson, the center, radiating weakly its puny glow into space; beyond it, enclosing it, spreads the County, tied by the diverging roads

to that center as is the rim to the hub by its spokes, yourself detached as God himself for this moment above the cradle of your nativity and of the men and women who made you, the record and annal of your native land proffered for your perusal in ring by concentric ring like the ripples on living water above the dreamless slumber of your past; you to preside unanguished and immune above this miniature of man's passions and hopes and disasters — ambition and fear and lust and courage and abnegation and pity and honor and sin and pride — all bound, precarious and ramshackle held together, by the web, the iron-thin warp and woof of his rapacity but withal yet dedicated to his dreams.

They are all here, supine beneath you, stratified and superposed, osseous and durable with the frail dust and the phantoms: — the rich alluvial river-bottom land of old Issetibbeha, the wild Chickasaw king, with his Negro slaves and his sister's son called Doom who murdered his way to the throne and, legend said (record itself said since there were old men in the county in my own childhood who had actually seen it), stole an entire steamboat and had it dragged intact eleven miles overland to convert into a palace proper to aggrandise his state; the same fat black rich plantation earth still synonymous of the proud fading white plantation names whether we — I mean of course they — ever actually owned a plantation or not: Sutpen and Sartoris and Compson and Edmonds and McCaslin and Beauchamp and Grenier and Habersham and Holston and Stevens and De Spain, generals and governors and judges, soldiers (even if only Cuban lieutenants) and statesmen failed or not, and simple politicians and over-reachers and just simple failures, who snatched and grabbed and passed and vanished, name and face and all.

Then the roadless, almost pathless perpendicular hill-country of McCallum and Gowrie and Frazier and Muir translated intact with their pot stills and speaking only the old Gaelic and not much of that, from Culloden to Carolina, then from Carolina to Yoknapatawpha still intact and not speaking much of anything except that they now called the pots 'kettles' though the drink (even I can remember this) was still usquebaugh; then and last on to where Frenchman's Bend lay beyond

the south-eastern horizon, cradle of Varners and ant-heap for the north-east crawl of Snopes.

And you stand there — you, the old man, already white-headed (because it doesn't matter if they call your gray hairs premature because life itself is always premature which is why it aches and anguishes) and pushing forty, only a few years from forty — while there rises up to you, proffered up to you, the spring darkness, the unsleeping darkness which, although it is of the dark itself declines the dark since dark is of the little death called sleeping. Because look how, even though the last of west is no longer green and all of firmament is now one unlidded studded slow-wheeling arc and the last of earth-pooled visibility has drained away, there still remains one faint diffusion since everywhere you look about the dark panorama you still see them, faint as whispers: the faint and shapeless lambence of blooming dogwood returning loaned light to light as the phantoms of candles would.

And you, the old man, standing there while there rises to you, about you, suffocating you, the spring dark peopled and myriad two and two seeking never at all solitude but simply privacy, the privacy decreed and created for them by the spring darkness, the spring weather, the spring which an American poet, a fine one, a woman and so she knows, called girls' weather and boys' luck. Which was not the first day at all, not Eden morning at all because girls' weather and boys' luck is the sum of all the days: the cup, the bowl proffered once to the lips in youth and then no more; proffered to quench or sip or drain that lone one time and even that sometimes premature, too soon. Because the tragedy of life is, it must be premature, inconclusive and inconcludable, in order to be life; it must be before itself, in advance of itself, to have been at all.

And now for truth was the one last chance to choose, decide: whether or not to say Why me? Why bother me? Why cant you let me alone? Why must it be my problem whether I was right and your husband just wants your lover's scalp, or Ratliff is right and your husband doesn't care a damn about you or his honor either and just wants De Spain's bank? — the Square empty beneath the four identical faces of the

courthouse clock saying ten minutes to ten to the north and east and south and west, vacant now beneath the arlight-stippled shadows of fledged leaves like small bites taken out of the concrete paving, the drugstores closed and all still moving now were the late last homeward stragglers from the second running of the picture show. Or better still, what she herself should have thought without my needing to say it: Take Manfred de Spain in whatever your new crisis is, since you didn't hesitate to quench with him your other conflagration eighteen years ago. Or do you already know in advance he will be no good this time, since a bank is not a female but neuter?

And of course Otis Harker. "Evening, Mr Stevens," he said. "When you drove up I almost hoped maybe it was a gang come to rob the postoffice or the bank or something to bring us a little excitement for a change."

"But it was just another lawyer," I said, "and lawyers dont bring excitement: only misery?"

"I dont believe I quite said that, did I?" he said. "But leastways lawyers stays awake so if you're going to be around a while, maybe I'll jest mosey back to the station and maybe take a nap while you watch them racing clock-hands a spell for me." Except that he was looking at me. No: he wasn't looking at me at all: he was watching me, deferent to my white hairs as a well-'raised' Mississippian should be, but not my representative position as his employer; not quite servile, not quite impudent, waiting maybe or calculating maybe.

"Say it," I said. "Except that—"

"Except that Mr Flem Snopes and Mr Manfred de Spain might cross the Square any time now with old Will Varner chasing them both out of town with that pistol."

"Good night," I said. "If I dont see you again."

"Good night," he said. "I'll likely be somewhere around. I mean around awake. I wouldn't want Mr Buck himself to have to get up out of bed and come all the way to town to catch me asleep."

You see? You cant beat it. Otis Harker too, who, assuming he does keep awake all night as he is paid to do, should have been at home all day in bed asleep. But of course, he was there; he actually saw old Varner cross the Square at four this morning on his way to Flem's house. Yes. You cant beat it: the town itself officially on record now in the voice of its night marshal; the county itself had spoken through one of its minor clowns; eighteen years ago when Manfred de Spain thought he was just bedding another loose-girdled bucolic Lilith, he was actually creating a piece of buffoon's folklore.

Though there were still ten minutes, and it would take Otis Harker at least twenty-five to "round up" the gin and compress and their purlieus and get back to the Square. And I know now that I already smelled tobacco smoke even before I put my hand on what I thought was an unlocked door for the reason that I myself had made a special trip back to leave it unlocked, still smelling the tobacco while I still tried to turn the knob, until the latch clicked back from inside and the door opened, she standing there against the dark interior in what little there was of light. Though it was enough to see her hair, that she had been to the beauty parlor: who according to Maggie had never been to one, the hair not bobbed of course, not waved, but something, I dont know what it was except that she had been to the beauty parlor that afternoon.

"Good for you for locking it," I said. "We wont need to risk a light either. Only I think that Otis Harker already—"

"That's all right," she said. So I closed the door and locked it again and turned on the desk lamp. "Turn them all on if you want to," she said. "I wasn't trying to hide. I just didn't want to have to talk to somebody."

"Yes," I said, and sat behind the desk. She had been in the client's chair, sitting in the dark smoking; the cigarette was still burning in the little tray with two other stubs. Now she was sitting again in the client's chair at the end of the desk where the light fell upon her from the shoulder down but mostly on her hands lying quite still on the bag on her lap. Though I could still see her hair — no makeup, lips or nails either: just

her hair that had been to the beauty shop. “You’ve been to the beauty shop,” I said.

“Yes,” she said. “That’s where I met Chick.”

“But not inside,” I said, already trying to stop. “Not where water and soap are coeval, conjunctive,” still trying to stop. “Not for a few years yet,” and did. “All right,” I said. “Tell me. What was it he took out there to your mother yesterday that had old Will on the road to town at two o’clock this morning?”

“There’s your cob pipe,” she said. They were in the brass bowl beside the tobacco jar. “You’ve got three of them. I’ve never seen you smoke one. When do you smoke them?”

“All right,” I said. “Yes. What was it he took out there?”

“The will,” she said.

“No no,” I said. “I know about the will; Ratliff told me. I mean, what was it Flem took out there to your mother yesterday morning—”

“I told you. The will.”

“Will?” I said.

“Linda’s will. Giving her share of whatever she would inherit from me, to her — him.” And I sat there and she too, opposite one another across the desk, the lamp between us low on the desk so that all we could really see of either probably was just the hands: mine on the desk and hers quite still, almost like two things asleep, on the bag in her lap, her voice almost like it was asleep too so that there was no anguish, no alarm, no outrage anywhere in the little quiet dingy mausoleum of human passions, high and secure, secure even from any random exigency of what had been impressed on Otis Harker as his duty for which he was paid his salary, since he already knew it would be me in it: “The will. It was her idea. She did it herself. I mean, she believes she thought of it, wanted to do it, did it, herself. Nobody can tell her otherwise. Nobody will. Nobody. That’s why I wrote the note.”

“You’ll have to tell me,” I said. “You’ll have to.”

“It was the ... school business. When you told her she wanted to go, get away from here; all the different schools to choose among that she hadn’t even known about before, that it was perfectly natural for a young girl — young people to want to go to them and to go to one of them, that until then she hadn’t even thought about, let alone known that she wanted to go to one of them. Like all she needed to do to go to one of them was just to pick out the one she liked the best and go to it, especially after I said Yes. Then her — he said No.

“As if that was the first time she ever thought of No, ever heard of No. There was a ... scene. I dont like scenes. You dont have to have scenes. Nobody needs to have a scene to get what you want. You just get it.

But she didn’t know that, you see. She hadn’t had time to learn it maybe, since she was just seventeen then. But then you know that yourself. Or maybe it was more than not knowing better. Maybe she knew too much. Maybe she already knew, felt even then that he had already beat her. She said: ‘I will go! I will! You cant stop me! Damn your money; if Mamma wont give it to me, Grandpa will — Mr Stevens (oh yes, she said that too) will—’ While he just sat there — we were sitting then, still at the table; only Linda was standing up — just sat there saying, ‘That’s right. I cant stop you.’ Then she said, ‘Please.’ Oh yes, she knew she was beaten as well as he did. ‘No,’ he said. ‘I want you to stay at home and go to the Academy.’

“And that was all. I mean ... nothing. That was just all. Because you — a girl anyway — dont really hate your father no matter how much you think you do or should or should want to because people expect you to or that it would look well to because it would be romantic to—”

“Yes,” I said, “ — because girls, women, are not interested in romance but only facts. Oh yes, you were not the only one: Ratliff told me that too, that same day in fact.”

“Vladimir too?” she said.

“No: Ratliff,” I said. Then I said, “Wait.” Then I said: “Vladimir? Did you say Vladimir? V.K. Is his name Vladimir?” And now she did sit still, even the hands on the bag that had been like things asleep and breathing their own life apart, seemed to become still now.

“I didn’t intend to do that,” she said.

“Yes,” I said. “I know: nobody else on earth knows his name is Vladimir because how could anybody named Vladimir hope to make a living selling sewing machines or anything else in rural Mississippi? But he told you: the secret he would have defended like that of insanity in his family or illegitimacy. Why? — No, dont answer that. Why shouldn’t I know why he told you; didn’t I breathe one blinding whiff of that same liquor too? Tell me. I wont either. Vladimir K. What K?”

“Vladimir Kyrilytch.”

“Vladimir Kyrilytch what? Not Ratliff. Kyrilytch is only his middle name; all Russian middle names are itch or ovna. That’s just son or daughter of. What was his last name before it became Ratliff?”

“He doesn’t know. His ... six or eight or ten times grandfather was ... not lieutenant—”

“Ensign.”

“ — in a British army that surrendered in the Revolution—”

“Yes,” I said. “Burgoyne. Saratoga.”

“ — and was sent to Virginia and forgotten and Vla — his grandfather escaped. It was a woman of course, a girl, that hid him and fed him. Except that she spelled it R-a-t-c-l-i-f-f-e and they married and had a son or had the son and then married. Anyway he learned to speak English and became a Virginia farmer.

And his grandson, still spelling it with a c and an e at the end but with his name still Vladimir Kyrilytch though nobody knew it, came to Mississippi with old Doctor Habersham and Alexander Holston and Louis Grenier and started Jefferson. Only they forgot how to spell it Ratcliffe and just spelled it like it sounds but one son is always named

Vladimir Kyrilytch. Except that like you said, nobody named Vladimir Kyrilytch could make a living as a Mississippi country man—”

“No,” I said, cried. “Wait. That’s wrong. We’re both wrong. We’re completely backward. If only everybody had known his name was really Vladimir Kyrilytch, he would be a millionaire by now since any woman anywhere would have bought anything or everything he had to sell or trade or swap. Or maybe they already do?” I said, cried. “Maybe they already do? — All right,” I said. “Go on.”

“But one in each generation still has to have the name because Vla — V.K. says the name is their luck.”

“Except that it didn’t work against Flem Snopes,” I said. “Not when he tangled with Flem Snopes that night in that old Frenchman’s garden after you came back from Texas. — All right,” I said. “ ‘So that was all because you dont really hate your father—’ ”

“He did things for her. That she didn’t expect, hadn’t even thought about asking for. That young girls like, almost as though he had put himself inside a young girl’s mind even before she thought of them. He gave me the money and sent us both to Memphis to buy things for her graduation from high school — not just a graduating dress but one for dancing too, and other things for the summer; almost a trousseau. He even tried — offered, anyway told her he was going to — to have a picnic for her whole graduating class but she refused that.

You see? He was her father even if he did have to be her enemy. You know: the one that said ‘Please’ accepting the clothes, while the one that defied him to stop her refused the picnic.

“And that summer he gave me the money and even made the hotel reservation himself for us to go down to the coast — you may remember that—”

“I remember,” I said.

“ — to spend a month so she could swim in the ocean and meet people, meet young men; he said that himself: meet young men. And we came

back and that fall she entered the Academy and he started giving her a weekly allowance. Would you believe that?"

"I do now," I said. "Tell me."

"It was too much, more than she could need, had any business with, too much for a seventeen-year-old girl to have every week just in Jefferson. Yet she took that too that she didn't really need just like she took the Academy that she didn't want. Because he was her father, you see. You've got to remember that. Can you?"

"Tell me," I said.

"That was the fall, the winter. He still gave her things — clothes she didn't need, had no business with, seventeen years old in Jefferson; you may have noticed that too; even a fur coat until she refused to let him, said No in time. Because you see, that was the You cant stop me again; she had to remind him now and then that she had defied him; she could accept the daughter's due but not the enemy's bribe.

"Then it was summer, last summer. That was when it happened. I saw it, we were all at the table again and he said, 'Where do you want to go this summer? The coast again? or maybe the mountains this time?

How would you like to take your mother and go to New York?' And he had her; she was already beat; she said, 'Wont that cost a lot of money?' and he said, 'That doesn't matter. When would you like to go?' and she said, 'No. It will cost too much money. Why dont we just stay here?' Because he had her, he had beat her.

And the ... terrible thing was, she didn't know it, didn't even know there had been a battle and she had surrendered. Before, she had defied him and at least she knew she was defying him even if she didn't know what to do with it, how to use it, what to do next. Now she had come over to his side and she didn't even know it.

"And that's all. Then it was fall, last October, she was at the Academy again and this time we had finished supper, we were in the living room before the fire and she was reading, sitting on one of her feet I

remember and I remember the book too, the John Donne you gave her — I mean, the new one, the second one, to replace the one that boy — what was his name? the garage mechanic, Matt Something, Levitt — tore up that day in your office — when he said, ‘Linda,’ and she looked up, still holding the book (that’s when I remember seeing what it was) and he said, ‘I was wrong. I thought the Academy ought to be good enough, because I never went to school and didn’t know any better. But I know better now, and the Academy’s not good enough anymore. Will you give up the Yankee schools and take the University at Oxford?’

“And she still sat there, letting the book come down slow onto her lap, just looking at him. Then she said, ‘What?’

“ ‘Will you forget about Virginia and the northern schools for this year, and enter the University after Christmas?’ She threw the book, she didn’t put it down at all: she just threw it, flung it as she stood up out of the chair and said:

“ ‘Daddy.’ I had never seen her touch him. He was her father, she never refused to speak to him or to speak any way except respectfully. But he was her enemy; she had to keep him reminded always that although he had beaten her about the schools, she still hadn’t surrendered. But I had never seen her touch him until now, sprawled, flung across his lap, clutching him around the shoulders, her face against his collar, crying, saying, ‘Daddy! Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!’”

“Go on,” I said.

“That’s all. Oh, that was enough; what more did he need to do than that? have that thing — that piece of paper — drawn up himself and then twist her arm until she signed her name to it?

He didn’t have to mention any paper. He probably didn’t even need to see her again and even if he did, all he would have needed — she already knew about the will, I mean Papa’s will leaving my share to just Eula Varner without even mentioning the word Snopes — all he would need would be just to say something like ‘Oh yes, your grandfather’s a fine old gentleman but he just never did like me.

But that's all right; your mother will be taken care of no matter what happens to me myself; he just fixed things so I nor nobody else can take her money away from her before you inherit it' — something like that.

Or maybe he didn't even need to do that much, knew he didn't have to. Not with her. He was her father, and if he wouldn't let her go off to school it was because he loved her since that was the reason all parents seemed to have for the things they wont let their children do; then for him to suddenly turn completely around and almost order her to do the thing she wanted, which he had forbidden her for almost two years to do, what reason could that be except that he loved her still more: loved her enough to let her do the one thing in her life he had ever forbidden her?

"Or I dont know. He may have suggested it, even told her how to word it; what does it matter now? It's done, there: Papa storming into the house at four this morning and flinging it down on my bed before I was even awake — Wait," she said, "I know all that too; I've already done all that myself. It was legal, all regular — What do they call it?"

"Drawn up," I said.

" — drawn up by a lawyer in Oxford, Mr Stone — not the old one: the young one. I telephoned him this morning. He was very nice. He—"

"I know him," I said. "Even if he did go to New Haven."

" — said he had wanted to talk to me about it, but there was the ..."

"Inviolacy," I said.

"Inviolacy. — between client and lawyer. He said she came to him, it must have been right after she reached Oxford — Wait," she said. "I asked him that too: why she came to him and he said — He said she was a delightful young lady who would go far in life even after she ran out of — of—"

"Contingencies," I said.

" — contingencies to bequeath people — she said that she had just asked someone who was the nicest lawyer for her to go to and they told her him. So she told him what she wanted and he wrote it that

way; oh yes, I saw it: 'my share of whatever I might inherit from my mother, Eula Varner Snopes, as distinct and separate from whatever her husband shall share in her property, to my father Flem Snopes'.

Oh yes, all regular and legal though he said he tried to explain to her that she was not bequeathing a quantity but merely devising a — what was it? contingency, and that nobody would take it very seriously probably since she might die before she had any inheritance or get married or even change her mind without a husband to help her or her mother might not have any inheritance beyond the one specified or might spend it or her father might die and she would inherit half of his inheritance from herself plus the other half which her mother would inherit as her father's relict, which she would heir in turn back to her father's estate to pass to her mother as his relict to be inherited once more by her; but she was eighteen years old and competent and he, Mr Stone, was a competent lawyer or at least he had a license saying so, and so it was at least in legal language and on the right kind of paper.

He — Mr Stone — even asked her why she felt she must make the will and she told him: Because my father has been good to me and I love and admire and respect him — do you hear that? Love and admire and respect him. Oh yes, legal. As if that mattered, legal or illegal, contingency or incontinency—”

Nor did she need to tell me that either: that old man seething out there in his country store for eighteen years now over the way his son-in-law had tricked him out of that old ruined plantation and then made a profit out of it, now wild with rage and frustration at the same man who had not only out-briganded him in brigandage but since then had even out-usury-ed him in sedentary usury, and who now had used the innocence of a young girl, his own grand-daughter, who could repay what she thought was love with gratitude and generosity at least, to disarm him of the one remaining weapon which he still held over his enemy.

Oh yes, of course it was worth nothing except its paper but what did that matter, legal or valid either. It didn't even matter now if he

destroyed it (which of course was why Flem ever let it out of his hand in the first place); only that he saw it, read it, comprehended it: took one outraged incredulous glance at it, then came storming into town —

“I couldn’t make him hush,” she said. “I couldn’t make him stop, be quiet. He didn’t even want to wait until daylight to get hold of Manfred.”

“De Spain?” I said. “Then? At four in the morning?”

“Didn’t I tell you I couldn’t stop him, make him stop or hush? Oh yes, he got Manfred there right away. And Manfred attended to everything. It was quite simple to him. That is, when I finally made him and Papa both believe that in another minute they would wake up, rouse the whole neighborhood and before that happened I would take Papa’s — Jody’s — car and drive to Oxford and get Linda and none of them would ever see us again. So he and Papa hushed then—”

“But Flem,” I said.

“He was there. — for a little while, long enough—”

“But what was he doing?” I said.

“Nothing,” she said. “What was he supposed to do? What did he need to do now?”

“Oh,” I said. “‘long enough to—’”

“ — enough for Manfred to settle everything: we would simply leave, go away together, he and I, which was what we should have done eighteen years ago—”

“What?” I said, cried. “Leave — elope?”

“Oh yes, it was all fixed; he stopped right there with Papa still standing over him and cursing him — cursing him or cursing Flem; you couldn’t tell now which one he was talking to or about or at — and wrote out the bill of sale. Papa was ... what’s that word? neutral.

He wanted both of them out of the bank, intended to have both of them out of it, came all the way in from home at four o'clock in the morning to fling both of them out of Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha

County and Mississippi all three — Manfred for having been my lover for eighteen years, and Flem for waiting eighteen years to do anything about it. Papa didn't know about Manfred until this morning. That is, he acted like he didn't. I think Mamma knew.

I think she has known all the time. But maybe she didn't. Because people are really kind, you know. All the people in Yoknapatawpha County that might have made sure Mamma knew about us, for her own good, so she could tell Papa for his own good. For everybody's own good. But I don't think Papa knew. He's like you. I mean, you can do that too."

"Do what?" I said.

"Be able to not have to believe something just because it might be so or somebody says it is so or maybe even it is so."

"Wait," I said. "Wait. What bill of sale?"

"For his bank stock. Manfred's bank stock. Made out to Flem. To give Flem the bank, since that was what all the trouble and uproar was about. — and then the check for Flem to sign to buy it with, dated a week from now to give Flem time to have the money ready when we cashed the check in Texas — when people are not married, or should have been married but aren't yet, why do they still think Texas is far enough? or is it just big enough? — or California or Mexico or wherever we would go."

"But Linda," I said. "Linda."

"All right," she said. "Linda."

"Don't you see? Either way, she is lost? Either to go with you, if that were possible, while you desert her father for another man; or stay here in all the stink without you to protect her from it and learn at last that he is not her father at all and so she has nobody, nobody?"

"That's why I sent the note. Marry her."

“No. I told you that before. Besides, that wont save her. Only Manfred can save her. Let him sell Flem his stock, give Flem the damned bank; is that too high a price to pay for what — what he — he—”

“I tried that,” she said. “No.”

“I’ll talk to him,” I said. “I’ll tell him. He must. He’ll have to; there’s no other—”

“No,” she said. “Not Manfred.” Then I watched her hands, not fast, open the bag and take out the pack of cigarettes and the single kitchen match and extract the cigarette and put the pack back into the bag and close it and (no, I didn’t move) strike the match on the turned sole of her shoe and light the cigarette and put the match into the tray and put her hands again on the bag. “Not Manfred. You dont know Manfred. And so maybe I dont either.

Maybe I dont know about men either. Maybe I was completely wrong that morning when I said how women are only interested in facts because maybe men are just interested in facts too and the only difference is, women dont care whether they are facts or not just so they fit, and men dont care whether they fit or not just so they are facts. If you are a man, you can lie unconscious in the gutter bleeding and with most of your teeth knocked out and somebody can take your pocketbook and you can wake up and wash the blood off and it’s all right; you can always get some more teeth and even another pocketbook sooner or later.

But you cant just stand meekly with your head bowed and no blood and all your teeth too while somebody takes your pocketbook because even though you might face the friends who love you afterward you never can face the strangers that never heard of you before. Not Manfred. If I dont go with him, he’ll have to fight. He may go down fighting and wreck everything and everybody else, but he’ll have to fight. Because he’s a man. I mean, he’s a man first. I mean, he’s got to be a man first. He can swap Flem Snopes his bank for Flem Snopes’s wife, but he cant just stand there and let Flem Snopes take the bank away from him.”

“So Linda’s sunk,” I said. “Finished. Done. Sunk.” I said, cried: “But you anyway will save something! To get away yourself at least, out of here, never again to.... never again Flem Snopes, never again, never—”

“Oh, that,” she said. “You mean that. That doesn’t matter. That’s never been any trouble. He ... cant. He’s — what’s the word? impotent. He’s always been. Maybe that’s why, one of the reasons. You see? You’ve got to be careful or you’ll have to pity him. You’ll have to. He couldn’t bear that, and it’s no use to hurt people if you dont get anything for it. Because he couldn’t bear being pitied. It’s like V.K.’s Vladimir. Ratliff can live with Ratliff’s Vladimir, and you can live with Ratliff’s Vladimir. But you mustn’t ever have the chance to, the right to, the choice to. Like he can live with his impotence, but you mustn’t have the chance to help him with pity. You promised about the Vladimir, but I want you to promise again about this.”

“I promise,” I said. Then I said: “Yes. You’re going tonight. That’s why the beauty parlor this afternoon: not for me but for Manfred. No: not even for Manfred after eighteen years: just to elope with, get on the train with. To show your best back to Jefferson. That’s right, isn’t it? You’re leaving tonight.”

“Marry her, Gavin,” she said. I had known her by sight for eighteen years, with time out of course for the war; I had dreamed about her at night for eighteen years including the war. We had talked to one another twice: here in the office one night fourteen years ago, and in her living room one morning two years back. But not once had she ever called me even Mister Stevens. Now she said Gavin. “Marry her, Gavin.”

“Change her name by marriage, then she wont miss the one she will lose when you abandon her.”

“Marry her, Gavin,” she said.

“Put it that I’m not too old so much as simply discrepant; that having been her husband once, I would never relinquish even her widowhood to another. Put it that way then.”

“Marry her, Gavin,” she said. And now I stopped, she sitting beyond the desk, the cigarette burning on the tray, balancing its muted narrow windless feather where she had not touched it once since she lit it and put it down, the hands still quiet on the bag and the face now turned to look at me out of the half-shadow above the rim of light from the lamp — the big broad simple still unpainted beautiful mouth, the eyes not the hard and dusty blue of fall but the blue of spring blooms all one inextricable mixture of wistaria cornflowers larkspur bluebells weeds and all, all the lost girls’ weather and boys’ luck and too late the grief, too late.

“Then this way. After you’re gone, if or when I become convinced that conditions are going to become such that something will have to be done, and nothing else but marrying me can help her, and she will have me. But have me, take me. Not just give up, surrender.”

“Swear it then,” she said.

“I promise. I have promised. I promise again.”

“No,” she said. “Swear.”

“I swear,” I said.

“And even if she wont have you. Even after that. Even if she w — you cant marry her.”

“How can she need me then?” I said. “Flem — unless your father really does get shut of the whole damned boiling of you, runs Flem out of Jefferson too — will have his bank and wont need to swap, sell, trade her anymore; maybe he will even prefer to have her in a New England school or even further than that if he can manage it.”

“Swear,” she said.

“All right,” I said. “At any time. Anywhere. No matter what happens.”

“Swear,” she said.

“I swear,” I said.

“I’m going now,” she said and rose and picked up the burning cigarette and crushed it carefully out into the tray and I rose too.

“Of course,” I said. “You have some packing to do even for an elopement, dont you. I’ll drive you home.”

“You dont need to,” she said.

“A lady, walking home alone at — it’s after midnight. What will Otis Harker say? You see, I’ve got to be a man too; I cant face Otis Harker otherwise since you wont stop being a lady to him until after tomorrow’s south-bound train; I believe you did say Texas, didn’t you?” Though Otis was not in sight this time though with pencil paper and a watch I could have calculated about where he would be now.

Though the figures could have been wrong and only Otis was not in sight, not we, crossing the shadow-bitten Square behind the flat rapid sabre-sweep of the headlights across the plate glass storefronts, then into the true spring darkness where the sparse street lights were less than stars.

And we could have talked if there had been more to talk about or maybe there had been more to talk about if we had talked. Then the small gate before the short walk to the small dark house not rented now of course and of course not vacant yet with a little space yet for decent decorum, and I wondered, thought Will Manfred sell him his house along with his bank or just abandon both to him — provided of course old Will Varner leaves him time to collect either one and stopped.

“Dont get out,” she said and got out and shut the door and said, stooping a little to look at me beneath the top: “Swear again.”

“I swear,” I said.

“Thank you,” she said. “Good night,” and turned and I watched her, through the gate and up the walk, losing dimension now, onto or rather into the shadow of the little gallery and losing even substance now. And then I heard the door and it was as if she had not been. No, not that; not not been, but rather no more is, since was remains always and forever, inexplicable and immune, which is its grief. That’s what I mean: a dimension less, then a substance less, then the sound of a door and

then, not never been but simply no more is since always and forever that was remains, as if what is going to happen to one tomorrow already gleams faintly visible now if the watcher were only wise enough to discern it or maybe just brave enough.

The spring night, cooler now, as if for a little while, until tomorrow's dusk and the new beginning, somewhere had suspired into sleep at last the amazed hushed burning of hope and dream two-and-two engendered. It would even be quite cold by dawn, daybreak. But even then not cold enough to chill, make hush for sleep the damned mocking bird for three nights now keeping his constant racket in Maggie's pink dogwood just under my bedroom window.

So the trick of course would be to divide, not him but his racket, the having to listen to him: one Gavin Stevens to cross his dark gallery too and into the house and up the stairs to cover his head in the bedclothes, losing in his turn a dimension of Gavin Stevens, an ectoplasm of Gavin Stevens impervious to cold and hearing too to bear its half of both, bear its half or all of any other burdens anyone wanted to shed and shuck, having only this moment assumed that one of a young abandoned girl's responsibility.

Because who would miss a dimension? who indeed but would be better off for having lost it, who had nothing in the first place to offer but just devotion, eighteen years of devotion, the ectoplasm of devotion too thin to be crowned by scorn, warned by hatred, annealed by grief. That's it: unpin, shed, cast off the last clumsy and anguished dimension, and so be free. Unpin: that's the trick, remembering Vladimir Kyrilytch's "He aint unpinned it yet" — the twenty-dollar gold piece pinned to the undershirt of the country boy on his first trip to Memphis, who even if he has never been there before, has as much right as any to hope he can be, may be, will be tricked or trapped into a whorehouse before he has to go back home again. He has unpinned it now I thought.

TWENTY ONE

Charles Mallison

YOU KNOW HOW it is, you wake in the morning and you know at once that it has already happened and you are already too late. You didn't know what it was going to be, which was why you had to watch so hard for it, trying to watch in all directions at once. Then you let go for a second, closed your eyes for just one second, and bang! it happened and it was too late, not even time to wake up and still hold off a minute, just to stretch and think What is it that makes today such a good one? then to let it come in, flow in: Oh yes, there's not any school today. More: Thursday and in April and still there's not any school today.

But not this morning. And halfway down the stairs I heard the swish of the pantry door shutting and I could almost hear Mother telling Guster: "Here he comes. Quick. Get out," and I went into the dining room and Father had already had breakfast, I mean even when Guster has moved the plate and cup and saucer you can always tell where Father has eaten something; and by the look of his place Uncle Gavin hadn't been to the table at all and Mother was sitting at her place just drinking coffee, with her hat already on and her coat over Uncle Gavin's chair and her bag and gloves by her plate and the dark glasses she wore in the car whenever she went beyond the city limits as if light didn't have any glare in it except one mile from town.

And I reckon she wished for a minute that I was about three or four because then she could have put one arm around me against her knee and held the back of my head with the other hand. But now she just held my hand and this time she had to look up at me. "Mrs Snopes killed herself last night," she said. "I'm going over to Oxford with Uncle Gavin to bring Linda home."

"Killed herself?" I said. "How?"

"What?" Mother said. Because I was only twelve then, not yet thirteen. "What did she do it with?" I said. But then Mother remembered that too by that time. She was already getting up.

“With a pistol,” she said. “I’m sorry, I didn’t think to ask whose.” She almost had the coat on too. Then she came and got the gloves and bag and the glasses. “We may be back by dinner, but I don’t know. Will you try to stay at home, at least stay away from the Square, find something to do with Aleck Sander in the back yard? Guster’s not going to let him leave the place today, so why don’t you stay with him?”

“Yessum,” I said. Because I was just twelve; to me that great big crepe knot dangling from the front door of Mr de Spain’s bank signified only waste: another holiday when school was suspended for an indefinite time; another holiday piled on top of one we already had, when the best, the hardest holiday user in the world couldn’t possibly use two of them at once, when it could have been saved and added on to the end of the one we already had when the little Riddell boy either died or got well or anyway they started school again. Or better still: just to save it for one of those hopeless days when Christmas is so long past you have forgotten it ever was, and it looks like summer itself has died somewhere and will never come again.

Because I was just twelve; I would have to be reminded that the longest school holiday in the world could mean nothing to the people which that wreath on the bank door freed for one day from work. And I would have to be a lot older than twelve before I realised that that wreath was not the myrtle of grief, it was the laurel of victory; that in that dangling chunk of black tulle and artificial flowers and purple ribbons was the eternal and deathless public triumph of virtue itself proved once more supreme and invincible.

I couldn’t even know now what I was looking at. Oh yes, I went to town, not quite as soon as Mother and Uncle Gavin were out of sight, but close enough. So did Aleck Sander. We could hear Guster calling us both a good while after we had turned the corner, both of us going to look at the wreath on the closed bank door and seeing a lot of other people too, grown people, come to look at it for what I know now was no braver reason than the one Aleck Sander and I had.

And when Mr de Spain came to town as he always did just before nine o'clock and got his mail from the postoffice like he always did and let himself into the back door of the bank with his key like he always did because the back door always stayed locked, we — I couldn't know that the reason he looked exactly like nothing had happened was because that was exactly the way he had to come to town that morning to have to look.

That he had to get up this morning and shave and dress and maybe practise in front of the mirror a while in order to come to the Square at the time he always did so everybody in Jefferson could see him doing exactly as he always did, like if there was grief and trouble anywhere in Jefferson that morning, it was not his grief and trouble, being an orphan and unmarried; even to going on into the closed bank by the back door as if he still had the right to.

Because I know now that we — Jefferson — all knew that he had lost the bank. I mean, whether old Mr Will Varner ran Mr Flem Snopes out of Jefferson too after this, Mr de Spain himself wouldn't stay. In a way, he owed that not just to the memory of his dead love, his dead mistress; he owed that to Jefferson too. Because he had outraged us.

He had not only flouted the morality of marriage which decreed that a man and a woman can't sleep together without a certificate from the police, he had outraged the economy of marriage which is the production of children, by making public display of the fact that you can be barren by choice with impunity; he had outraged the institution of marriage twice: not just his own but the Flem Snopes's too.

So they already hated him twice: once for doing it, once for not getting caught at it for eighteen years. But that would be nothing to the hatred he would get if, after his guilty partner had paid with her life for her share of the crime, he didn't even lose that key to the back door of the bank to pay for his.

We all knew that. So did he. And he knew we knew. And we in our turn knew he knew we did. So that was all right. He was finished, I mean, he

was fixed. His part was set. No: I was right the first time; and now I know that too. He was done, ended. That shot had finished him too and now what he did or didn't do either didn't matter any more. It was just Linda now; and when I was old enough I knew why none of us expected that day that old Mr Varner would come charging out of Mr Snopes's house with the same pistol maybe seeking more blood, if for no other reason than that there would have been no use in it.

Nor were we surprised when (after a discreet interval of course, for decorum, the decorum of bereavement and mourning) we learned that 'for business reasons and health' Mr de Spain had resigned from the bank and was moving out West (he actually left the afternoon of the funeral, appeared at the grave — alone and nobody to speak to him except to nod — with a crape armband which was of course all right since the deceased was the wife of his vice president, and then turned from the grave when we all did except that he was the first one and an hour later that afternoon his Buick went fast across the Square and into the Memphis highway with him in it and the back full of baggage) and that his bank stock — not his house; Ratliff said that even Flem Snopes didn't have that much nerve: to buy the house too the same day he bought the bank stock — was offered for sale, and even less surprised that (even more discreetly) Mr Snopes had bought it.

It was Linda now. And now I know that the other people, the grown people, who had come to look at that wreath on the bank door for exactly the same reason that Aleck Sander and I had come to look at it, had come only incidentally to look at the wreath since they had really come for exactly the same reason Aleck Sander and I had really come: to see Linda Snopes when Mother and Uncle Gavin brought her home even if mine and Aleck Sander's reason was to see how much Mrs Snopes's killing herself would change the way Linda looked so that we would know how we would look if Mother and Guster ever shot themselves.

It was Linda because I know now what Uncle Gavin believed then (not knew: believed: because he couldn't have known because the only one that could have told him would have been Mrs Snopes herself and if

she had told him in that note she gave me that afternoon before she was going to commit suicide, he would have stopped her or tried to because Mother anyway would have known it if he had tried to stop her and failed), and not just Uncle Gavin but other people in Jefferson too.

So now they even forgave Mrs Snopes for the eighteen years of carnal sin, and now they could even forgive themselves for condoning adultery by forgiving it, by reminding themselves (one another too I reckon) that if she had not been an abomination before God for eighteen years, she wouldn't have reached the point where she would have to choose death in order to leave her child a mere suicide for a mother instead of a whore.

Oh yes, it was Linda. She had the whole town on her side now, the town and the county and everybody who ever heard of her and Mr de Spain or knew or even suspected or just guessed anything about the eighteen years, to keep any part of the guessing or suspecting or actual knowing (if there was any, ever was any) from ever reaching her.

Because I know now that people really are kind, they really are; there are lots of times when they stop hurting one another not just when they want to keep on hurting but even when they have to; even the most Methodist and Baptist of the Baptists and Methodists and Presbyterians — all right, Episcopalians too: — the car coming at last with Linda in the front seat between Mother and Uncle Gavin; across the Square and on to Linda's house so that Aleck Sander and I had plenty of time to be waiting at the corner to flag Uncle Gavin when he came back.

"I thought Guster and your mother told both of you to stay home this morning," he said.

"Yes sir," we said. We went home. And he didn't eat any dinner either: just trying to make me eat, I don't know why. I mean, I don't know why all grown people in sight believe they have to try to persuade you to eat whether you want to or not or even whether they really want to try to

persuade you or not, until at last even Father noticed what was going on.

“Come on,” he told me. “Either eat it or leave the table. I don’t want to lie to your mother when she comes home and asks me why you didn’t eat it and I can always say you left suddenly for Texas.” Then he said, “What’s the matter, you too?” because Uncle Gavin had got up, right quick, and said,

“Excuse me,” and went out; yes, Uncle Gavin too; Mr de Spain was finished now as far as Jefferson was concerned and now we — Jefferson — could put all our mind on who was next in sight, what else the flash of that pistol had showed up like when you set off a flashlight powder in a cave; and one of them was Uncle Gavin. Because I know now there were people in Jefferson then who believed that Uncle Gavin had been her lover too, or if he hadn’t he should have been or else not just the whole Jefferson masculine race but the whole masculine race anywhere that called itself a man, ought to be ashamed.

Because they knew about that old Christmas ball older ago than I was then, and the whole town had seen and then heard about it so they could come, pass by accident and see for themselves Uncle Gavin and Linda drinking ice cream sodas in Christian’s with a book of poetry on the table between them.

Except that they knew he really hadn’t been Mrs Snopes’s lover too, that not only if he had really wanted her, tried for her, he would have failed there too for simple consistency, but that even if by some incredible chance or accident he had beat Mr de Spain’s time, it would have showed on the outside of him for the reason that Uncle Gavin was incapable of having a secret life which remained secret; he was, Ratliff said, “a feller that even his in-growed toe-nails was on the outside of his shoes.”

So, since Uncle Gavin had failed, he was the pure one, the only pure one; not Mr Snopes, the husband, who if he had been a man, would have got a pistol even if he, Flem Snopes, had to buy one and blown

them both, his wife and her fancy banker both, clean out of Jefferson. It was Uncle Gavin. He was the bereaved, the betrayed husband forgiving for the sake of the half-orphan child.

It was that same afternoon, he had left right after he went out of the dining room, then Mother came back alone in the car, then about three o'clock Uncle Gavin came back in a taxi and said (Oh yes, Aleck Sander and I stayed at home after Guster got hold of us, let alone Mother.): "Four gentlemen are coming to see me.

They're preachers so you'd better show them into the parlor." And I did: the Methodist, the Baptist, the Presbyterian and ours, the Episcopal, all looking like any other bankers or doctors or storekeepers except Mr Thorndyke and the only thing against him was his hind-part-before dog collar; all very grave and long in the face, like horses; I mean, not looking unhappy: just looking long in the face like horses, each one shaking hands with me and kind of stumbling with each other while they were getting through the door, into the parlor where Uncle Gavin was standing too, speaking to each of them by name while they all shook hands with him too, calling them all Doctor, the four of them stumbling again until the oldest one, the Presbyterian, did the talking: they had come to offer themselves singly or jointly to conduct the service; that Mr Snopes was a Baptist and Mrs Snopes had been born a Methodist but neither of them had attended, been a communicant of, any church in Jefferson; that Mr Stevens had assumed — offered his — that is, they had been directed to call on Mr Stevens in regard to the matter, until Uncle Gavin said:

"That is, you were sent. Sent by a damned lot of damned old women of both sexes, including none.

Not to bury her: to forgive her. Thank you, gentlemen. I plan to conduct this service myself." But that was just until Father came home for supper and Mother could sick him on Uncle Gavin too.

Because we had all thought, taken it for granted, that the Varners (maybe Mr Flem too) would naturally want her buried in Frenchman's Bend; that Mr Varner would pack her up too when he went back home

along with whatever else he had brought to town with him (Ratliff said it wouldn't be much since the only thing that travelled lighter than Uncle Billy Varner was a crow) and take her back with him.

But Uncle Gavin said No, speaking for Linda — and there were people enough to say Gavin Stevens said No speaking to the daughter. Anyway, it was No, the funeral to be tomorrow after Jody Varner's car could get back in from Frenchman's Bend with Jody and Mrs Varner; and now Uncle Gavin had Father at him too.

"Dammit, Gavin," he said. "You cant do it. We all admit you're a lot of things but one of them aint an ordained minister."

"So what?" Uncle Gavin said. "Do you believe that this town believes that any preacher that ever breathed could get her into heaven without having to pass through Jefferson, and that even Christ Himself could get her through on that route?"

"Wait," Mother said. "Both of you hush." She was looking at Uncle Gavin. "Gavin, at first I thought I would never understand why Eula did it. But now I'm beginning to believe that maybe I do. Do you want Linda to have to say afterward that another bachelor had to bury her?"

And that was all. And tomorrow Mrs Varner and Jody came in and brought with them the old Methodist minister who had christened her thirty-eight years ago — an old man who had been a preacher all his adult life but would have for the rest of it the warped back and the wrenched bitter hands of a dirt farmer — and we — the town — gathered at their little house, the women inside and the men standing around the little front yard and along the street, all neat and clean and wearing coats and not quite looking at each other while they talked quietly about crops and weather; then to the graveyard and the new lot empty except for the one raw excavation and even that not long, hidden quickly, rapidly beneath the massed flowers, themselves already doomed in the emblem-shapes — wreaths and harps and urns — of the mortality which they de-stingered, euphemised; and Mr de Spain standing there not apart: just solitary, with his crape armband and his face looking like it must have when he was a lieutenant in Cuba back in

that time, day, moment after he had just led the men that trusted him or anyway followed him because they were supposed to, into the place where they all knew some of them wouldn't come back for the reason that all of them were not supposed to come back which was all right too if the lieutenant said it was, provided old Mayor Adams had been wrong that day in front of the postoffice and Mr de Spain really had been a lieutenant in Cuba.

Then we came home and Father said, "Dammit, Gavin, why dont you get drunk?" and Uncle Gavin said, "Certainly, why not?" — not even looking up from the paper. Then it was supper time and I wondered why Mother didn't nag at him about not eating. But at least as long as she didn't think about eating, her mind wouldn't hunt around and light on me. Then we — Uncle Gavin and Mother and I — went to the office. I mean that for a while after Grandfather died Mother still tried to make us all call it the library but now even she called it the office just like Grandfather did, and Uncle Gavin sitting beside the lamp with a book and even turning a page now and then, until the door bell rang.

"I'll go," Mother said. But then, nobody else seemed to intend to or be even curious. Then she came back down the hall to the office door and said, "It's Linda. Come in, honey," and stood to one side and beckoned her head at me as Linda came in and Uncle Gavin got up and Mother jerked her head at me again and said, "Chick," and Linda stopped just inside the door and this time Mother said, "Charles!" so I got up and went out and she closed the door after us. But it was all right. I was used to it by this time. As soon as I saw who it was I even expected it.

TWENTY TWO

Gavin Stevens

THEN MAGGIE FINALLY got Chick out and closed the door. I said, "Sit down, Linda." But she just stood there. "Cry," I said. "Let yourself go and cry."

"I cant," she said. "I tried." She looked at me. "He's not my father," she said.

"Of course he's your father," I said. "Certainly he is. What in the world are you talking about?"

"No," she said.

"Yes," I said. "Do you want me to swear? All right. I swear he's your father."

"You were not there. You dont know. You never even saw her until she — we came to Jefferson."

"Ratliff did. Ratliff was there. He knows. He knows who your father is. And I know from Ratliff. I am sure. Have I ever lied to you?"

"No," she said. "You are the one person in the world I know will never lie to me."

"All right," I said. "I swear to you then. Flem Snopes is your father." And now she didn't move: it was just the tears, the water, not springing, just running quietly and quite fast down her face. I moved toward her.

"No," she said, "dont touch me yet," catching, grasping both my wrists and gripping, pressing my hands hard in hers against her breast. "When I thought he wasn't my father, I hated her and Manfred both. Oh yes, I knew about Manfred: I have ... seen them look at each other, their voices when they would talk to each other, speak one another's name, and I couldn't bear it, I hated them both. But now that I know he is my father, it's all right. I'm glad. I want her to have loved, to have been happy. — I can cry now," she said.

TWENTY THREE

V. K. Ratliff

IT WAS LIKEN a contest, like Lawyer had stuck a stick of dynamite in his hind pocket and lit a long fuse to it and was interested now would or wouldn't somebody step in in time and tromple the fire out. Or a race, like would he finally get Linda out of Jefferson and at least get his-self

shut forever of the whole tribe of Snopes first, or would he jest blow up his-self beforehand first and take ever body and ever thing in the neighborhood along with him.

No, not a contest. Not a contest with Flem Snopes anyway because it takes two to make a contest and Flem Snopes wasn't the other one. He was a umpire, if he was anything in it. No, he wasn't even a umpire. It was like he was running a little mild game against his-self, for his own amusement, like solitaire. He had ever thing now that he had come to Jefferson to get.

He had more. He had things he didn't even know he was going to want until he reached Jefferson because he didn't even know they was until then. He had his bank and his money in it and his-self to be president of it so he could not only watch his money from ever being stole by another twenty-two calibre rogue like his cousin Byron, but nobody could ever steal from him the respectability that being president of one of the two Yoknapatawpha County banks toted along with it.

And he was going to have one of the biggest residences in the county or maybe Mississippi too when his carpenters got through with Manfred de Spain's old home. And he had got rid of the only two downright arrant outrageous Snopeses when he run Montgomery Ward and I.O. finally out of town so that now, for the time being at least, the only other Snopes actively inside the city limits was a wholesale grocer not only as respectable but maybe even more solvent than jest a banker. So you would think he would a been satisfied now. But he wasn't. He had to make a young girl (woman now) that wasn't even his child, say "I humbly thank you, papa, for being so good to me."

That's right, a contest. Not even against Linda, and last of all against Lawyer Stevens since he had already milked out of Lawyer Stevens all he needed from him, which was to get his wife buried all right and proper and decorous and respectable, without no uproarious elements making a unseemly spectacle in the business. His game of solitaire was against Jefferson. It was like he was trying to see jest exactly how much Jefferson would stand, put up with.

It was like he knowed that his respectability depended completely on Jefferson not jest accepting but finally getting used to the fact that he not only had evicted Manfred de Spain from his bank but he was remodeling to move into it De Spain's birthsite likewise, and that the only remaining threat now was what might happen if that-ere young gal that believed all right so far that he was her paw, might stumble onto something that would tell her different.

That she might find out by accident that the man that was leastways mixed up somehow in her mother's suicide, whether he actively caused it or not, wasn't even her father, since if somebody's going to be responsible why your maw killed herself, at least let it be somebody kin to you and not jest a outright stranger.

So you would a thought that the first thing he would do soon as the dust settled after that funeral, would be to get her clean out of Jefferson and as far away as he could have suh-jested into her mind she wanted to go. But not him. And the reason he give was that monument. And naturally that was Lawyer Stevens too.

I mean, I dont know who delegated Lawyer into the monument business, who gave it to him or if he jest taken it or if maybe by this time the relationship between him and anybody named Snopes, or anyway maybe jest the Flem Snopeses (or no: it was that for him Eula Varner hadn't never died and never would because oh yes, I know about that too) was like that one between a feller out in a big open field and a storm of rain: there aint no being give nor accepting to it: he's already got it.

Anyway it was him — Lawyer — that helped Linda hunt through that house and her mother's things until they found the right photograph and had it — Lawyer still — enlarged, the face part, and sent it to Italy to be carved into a ... yes, medallion to fasten onto the front of the monument, and him that the practice drawings would come back to to decide and change here and there and send back. Which would a been his right by his own choice even if Flem had tried to interfere in and

stop him because he wanted that monument set up where Flem could pass on it more than anybody wanted it because then Flem would let her go.

But it was Flem's monument; don't make no mistake about that. It was Flem that paid for it, first thought of it, planned and designed it, picked out what size and what was to be wrote on it — the face and the letters — and never once mentioned price. Don't make no mistake about that. It was Flem. Because this too was a part of what he had come to Jefferson for and went through all he went through afterward to get it.

Oh yes, Lawyer had it all arranged for Linda to leave, get away at last; all they was hung on was the monument because Flem had give his word he would let her go then. It was to a place named Greenwich Village in New York; Lawyer had it all arranged, friends he knowed in Harvard to meet the train at the depot and take care of her, get her settled and ever thing.

"Is it a college?" I says. "Like out at Seminary Hill?"

"No no," he says. "I mean, yes. But not the kind you are talking about." "I thought you was set on her going to a college up there."

"That was before," he says. "Too much has happened to her since. Too much, too fast, too quick. She outgrew colleges all in about twenty-four hours two weeks ago. She'll have to grow back down to them again, maybe in a year or two. But right now, Greenwich Village is the place for her."

"What is Greenwich Village?" I says. "You still aint told me."

"It's a place with a few unimportant boundaries but no limitations where young people of any age go to seek dreams."

"I never knowed before that place had no particular geography," I says.

"I thought that-ere was a varmint you hunted anywhere."

"Not always. Not for her, anyway. Sometimes you need a favorable scope of woods to hunt, a place where folks have already successfully hunted and found the same game you want. Sometimes, some people,

even need help in finding it. The particular quarry they want to catch, they have to make first. That takes two.”

“Two what?” I says.

“Yes,” he says. “Two.”

“You mean a husband,” I says.

“All right,” he says. “Call him that. It dont matter what you call him.”

“Why, Lawyer,” I says. “You sound like what a heap, a right smart in fact, jest about all in fact, unanimous in fact of our good God-fearing upright embattled christian Jeffersons and Yoknapatawphas too that can proudly affirm that never in their life did they ever have one minute’s fun that the most innocent little child couldn’t a stood right there and watched, would call a deliberate incitement and pandering to the Devil his-self.”

Only Lawyer wasn’t laughing. And then I wasn’t neither. “Yes,” he says. “It will be like that with her. It will be difficult for her. She will have to look at a lot of them, a long time. Because he will face something almost impossible to match himself against. He will have to have courage, because it will be doom, maybe disaster too. That’s her fate. She is doomed to anguish and to bear it, doomed to one passion and one anguish and all the rest of her life to bear it, as some people are doomed from birth to be robbed or betrayed or murdered.”

Then I said it. “Marry her. Naturally you never thought of that.”

“I?” he says. It was right quiet: no surprise, no nothing. “I thought I had just been talking about that for the last ten minutes. She must have the best. It will be impossible even for him.”

“Marry her,” I says.

“No,” he says. “That’s my fate: just to miss marriage.”

“You mean escape it?”

“No no,” he says. “I never escape it. Marriage is constantly in my life. My fate is constantly to just miss it or it to, safely again, once more safe, just miss me.”

So it was all fixed, and now all he needed was to get his carved marble face back from Italy, nagging by long distance telephone and telegraph dispatch ever day or so in the most courteous affable legal manner you could want, at the Italian consul in New Orleans, so he could get it fastened onto the monument and then (if necessary) take a holt on Flem's coat collar and shove him into the car and take him out to the cemetery and snatch the veil offen it, with Linda's ticket to New York (he would a paid for that too except it wasn't necessary since the last thing Uncle Billy done before he went back home after the funeral was to turn over to the bank — not Flem: the bank, with Lawyer as one of the trustees — a good size chunk of what would be Eula's inheritance under that will of hisn that he hadn't never changed to read Snopes) in his other hand.

So we had to wait. Which was interesting enough. I mean, Lawyer had enough to keep him occupied worrying the Italian government, and all I ever needed was jest something to look at, watch, providing of course it had people in it. They — Flem and Linda — still lived in the same little house that folks believed for years after he bought it that he was still jest renting it. Though pretty soon Flem owned a automobile. I mean, presently, after the polite amount of time after he turned up president of the bank; not to have Santy Claus come all at once you might say.

It wasn't a expensive car: jest a good one, jest the right unnoticeable size, of a good polite unnoticeable black color and he even learned to drive it because maybe he had to because now ever afternoon after the bank closed he would have to go and watch how the carpenters was getting along with his new house (it was going to have colyums across the front now, I mean the extry big ones so even a feller that never seen colyums before wouldn't have no doubt a-tall what they was, like in the photographs where the Confedrit sweetheart in a hoop skirt and a magnolia is saying goodbye to her Confedrit beau jest before he rides off to finish tending to General Grant) and Flem would have to drive his-self because, although Linda could drive it right off and done it now and then and never mind if all women are naturally interested in the housebuilding or -remodeling occupation no matter whose it is the

same as a bird is interested in the nesting occupation, although she druv him there the first afternoon to look at the house, she wouldn't go inside to look at it and after that one time she never even drove him back anymore.

But like I said we was all busy or anyway occupied or at least interested, so we could wait. And sho enough, even waiting ends if you can jest wait long enough. So finally the medallion came. It was October now, a good time of year, one of the best. Naturally it was Lawyer went to the depot and got it though I'm sho Flem paid the freight on it for no other reason than Lawyer wouldn't a waited long enough for the agent to add it up, herding the two Negroes toting it all wrapped up in straw and nailed up in a wooden box, across the platform to his car like he was herding two geese.

And for the next three days when his office seen him it was on the fly you might say, from a distance when he happened to pass it. Which was a good thing there wasn't no passel of brigands or highwaymen or contractors or jest simple lawyers making a concerted financial attack on Yoknapatawpha County at that time because Yoknapatawpha would a jest had to rock along the best it could without no help from its attorney.

Because he had the masons already hired and waiting with likely even the mortar already mixed, even before the medallion come; one morning I even caught him, put my hand on the car door and says, "I'll ride out to the cemetery with you," and he jest reached across, the car already in gear and the engine already racing, and lifted my hand off and throwed it away and says, "Get out of the way," and went on and so I went up to the office, the door never was locked nohow even when he was jest normal and jest out of it most of the time, and opened the bottom drawer where he kept the bottle but it never even smelled like he used to keep whiskey in it.

So I waited on the street until school let out and finally caught that boy, Chick, and says,

“Hasn’t your uncle got some whiskey at home somewhere?” and he says,

“I dont know. I’ll look. You want me to pour up a drink in something and bring it?” and I says,

“No. He dont need a drink. He needs a whole bottle, providing it’s big enough and full enough. Bring all of it; I’ll stay with him and watch.”

Then the monument was finished, ready for Flem to pass on it, and he — Lawyer — sent me the word too, brisk and lively as a general jest getting ready to capture a town: “Be at the office at three-thirty so we can pick up Chick. The train leaves Memphis at eight oclock so we wont have any time to waste.”

So I was there. Except it wasn’t in the office at all because he was already in the car with the engine already running when I got there.

“What train at eight oclock to where and whose?” I says.

“Linda’s,” he says. “She’ll be in New York Saturday morning. She’s all packed and ready to leave. Flem’s sending her to Memphis in his car as soon as we are done.”

“Flem’s sending her?” I says.

“Why not?” he says. “She’s his daughter. After all you owe something to your children even if it aint your fault. Get in,” he says. “Here’s Chick.”

So we went out to the cemetery and there it was — another colyum not a-tall saying what it had cost Flem Snopes because what it was saying was exactly how much it was worth to Flem Snopes, standing in the middle of that new one-grave lot, at the head of that one grave that hadn’t quite healed over yet, looking — the stone, the marble — whiter than white itself in the warm October sun against the bright yellow and red and dark red hickories and sumacs and gums and oaks like splashes of fire itself among the dark green cedars.

Then the other car come up with him and Linda in the back seat, and the Negro driver that would drive her to Memphis in the front seat with

the baggage (it was all new too) piled on the seat by him; coming up and stopping, and him setting there in that black hat that still looked brand new and like he had borrowed it, and that little bow tie that never had and never would look anything but new, chewing slow and steady at his tobacco; and that gal setting there by him, tight and still and her back not even touching the back of the seat, in a kind of dark suit for travelling and a hat and a little veil and her hands in white gloves still and kind of clenched on her knees and not once, not never once ever looking at that stone monument with that marble medallion face that Lawyer had picked out and selected that never looked like Eula a-tall you thought at first, never looked like nobody nowhere you thought at first, until you were wrong because it never looked like all women because what it looked like was one woman that ever man that was lucky enough to have been a man would say, "Yes, that's her.

I knowed her five years ago or ten years ago or fifty years ago and you would a thought that by now I would a earned the right not to have to remember her anymore," and under it the carved letters that he his-self, and I dont mean Lawyer this time, had picked out:

EULA VARNER SNOPE

1889 1927

A virtuous Wife is a Crown to her Husband

Her Children rise and call Her Blessed

and him setting there chewing, faint and steady, and her still and straight as a post by him, not looking at nothing and them two white balls of her fists on her lap. Then he moved. He leant a little and spit out the window and then set back in the seat. "Now you can go," he says.

TWENTY FOUR

Charles Mallison

SO THE CAR went on. Then I turned and started walking back to ours when Ratliff said behind me: "Wait. You got a clean handkerchief?" and

I turned and saw Uncle Gavin walking on away from us with his back to us, not going anywhere: just walking on, until Ratliff took the handkerchief from me and we caught up with him. But he was all right then, he just said:

“What’s the matter?” Then he said, “Well, let’s get on back. You boys are free to loaf all day long if you want to but after all I work for the County so I have to stay close enough to the office so that anybody that wants to commit a crime against it can find me.”

So we got in the car and he started it and we drove back to town. Except that he was talking about football now, saying to me: “Why dont you wake up and get out of that kindergarden and into high school so you can go out for the team? I’ll need somebody I know on it because I think I know what’s wrong with football the way they play it now;” going on from there, talking and even turning loose the wheel with both hands to show us what he meant: how the trouble with football was, only an expert could watch it because nobody else could keep up with what was happening; how in baseball everybody stood still and the ball moved and so you could keep up with what was happening.

But in football, the ball and everybody else moved at the same time and not only that but always in a clump, a huddle with the ball hidden in the middle of them so you couldn’t even tell who did have it, let alone who was supposed to have it; not to mention the ball being already the color of dirt and all the players thrashing and rolling around in the mud and dirt until they were all that same color too; going on like that, waving both hands with Ratliff and me both hollering, “Watch the wheel! Watch the wheel!” and Uncle Gavin saying to Ratliff, “Now you dont think so,” or “You claim different of course,” or “No matter what you say,” and Ratliff saying, “Why, I never,” or “No I dont,” or “I aint even mentioned football,” until finally he — Ratliff — said to me: “Did you find that bottle?”

“No sir,” I said. “I reckon Father drank it. Mr Gowrie wont bring the next kag until Sunday night.”

“Let me out here,” Ratliff said to Uncle Gavin. Uncle Gavin stopped talking long enough to say,

“What?”

“I’ll get out here,” Ratliff said. “See you in a minute.”

So Uncle Gavin stopped long enough for Ratliff to get out (we had just reached the Square) then we went on, Uncle Gavin talking again or still talking since he had only stopped long enough to say What? to Ratliff, and parked the car and went up to the office and he was still talking that same kind of foolishness that you never could decide whether it didn’t make any sense or not, and took one of the pipes from the bowl and began to look around the desk until I went and shoved the tobacco jar up and he looked at the jar and said, “Oh yes, thanks,” and put the pipe down, still talking. Then Ratliff came in and went to the cooler and got a glass and the spoon and sugar-bowl from the cabinet and took a pint bottle of white whiskey from inside his shirt, Uncle Gavin still talking, and made the toddy and came and held it out.

“Here,” he said.

“Why, much obliged,” Uncle Gavin said. “That looks fine. That sure looks fine.” But he didn’t touch it. He didn’t even take it while Ratliff set it down on the desk where I reckon it was still sitting when Clefus came in the next morning to sweep the office and found it and probably had already started to throw it out when he caught his hand back in time to smell it or recognise it or anyway drink it. And now Uncle Gavin took up the pipe again and filled it and fumbled in his pocket and then Ratliff held out a match and Uncle Gavin stopped talking and looked at it and said, “What?”

Then he said, “Thanks,” and took the match and scratched it carefully on the underside of the desk and blew it carefully out and put it into the tray and put the pipe into the tray and folded his hands on the desk and said to Ratliff:

“So maybe you can tell me because for the life of me, I cant figure it out. Why did she do it? Why?”

Because as a rule women dont really care about facts just so they fit; it’s just men that dont give a damn whether they fit or not, who is hurt,

how many are hurt, just so they are hurt bad enough. So I want to ask your opinion. You know women, travelling around the country all day long right in the middle of them, from one parlor to another all day long all high and mighty, as dashing and smooth and welcome as if you were a damned rush—” and stopped and Ratliff said, “What? What rush? Rush where?”

“Did I say rush?” Uncle Gavin said. “No no, I said Why? a young girl’s grief and anguish when young girls like grief and anguish and besides, they can get over it. Will get over it. And just a week from her birthday too of course but after all Flem is the one to get the zero for that: for missing by a whole week anything as big as a young girl’s nineteenth birthday.

Besides, forget all that; didn’t somebody just say that young girls really like grief and anguish? No no, what I said was, Why?” He sat there looking at Ratliff. “Why? Why did she have to? Why did she? The waste. The terrible waste. To waste all that, when it was not hers to waste, not hers to destroy because it is too valuable, belonged to too many, too little of it to waste, destroy, throw away and be no more.” He looked at Ratliff. “Tell me, V.K. Why?”

“Maybe she was bored,” Ratliff said.

“Bored,” Uncle Gavin said. Then he said it again, not loud: “Bored.” And that was when he began to cry, sitting there straight in the chair behind the desk with his hands folded together on the desk, not even hiding his face. “Yes,” he said. “She was bored. She loved, had a capacity to love, for love, to give and accept love. Only she tried twice and failed twice to find somebody not just strong enough to deserve, earn it, match it, but even brave enough to accept it. Yes,” he said, sitting there crying, not even trying to hide his face from us, “of course she was bored.”

And one more thing. One morning — it was summer again now, July — the north-bound train from New Orleans stopped and the first man off was usually the Negro porter — not the pullman porters, they were

always back down the track at the end; we hardly ever saw them, but the one from the day coaches at the front end — to get down and strut a little while he talked to the section hands and the other Negroes that were always around to meet the passenger trains. But this time it was the conductor himself, almost jumping down before the train stopped, with the white flagman at his heels, almost stepping on them; the porter himself didn't get off at all: just his head sticking out a window about half way down the car.

Then four things got off. I mean, they were children. The tallest was a girl though we never did know whether she was the oldest or just the tallest, then two boys, all three in overalls, and then a little one in a single garment down to its heels like a man's shirt made out of a flour- or meal-sack or maybe a scrap of an old tent. Wired to the front of each one of them was a shipping tag written in pencil:

From: Byron Snopes, El Paso, Texas

To: Mr Flem Snopes, Jefferson, Mississippi

Though Mr Snopes wasn't there. He was busy being a banker now and a deacon in the Baptist church, living in solitary widowerhood in the old De Spain house which he had remodeled into an ante-bellum Southern mansion; he wasn't there to meet them. It was Dink Quistenberry. He had married one of Mr Snopes's sisters or nieces or something out at Frenchman's Bend and when Mr Snopes sent I.O. Snopes back to the country the Quistenberrys came in to buy or rent or anyway run the Snopes Hotel, which wasn't the Snopes Hotel anymore now but the Jefferson Hotel though the people that stayed there were still the stock traders and juries locked up by the Circuit Court. I mean, Dink was old enough to be Mr Snopes's brother-in-law or whatever it was but he was the kind of man it just didn't occur to you to say Mister to.

He was there; I reckon Mr Snopes sent him. And when he saw them I reckon he felt just like we did when we saw them, and like the conductor and the flagman and the porter all looked like they had been feeling ever since the train left New Orleans, which was evidently where they got on it. Because they didn't look like people. They looked like snakes. Or maybe that's too strong too. Anyway, they didn't look

like children; if there was one thing in the world they didn't look like it was children, with kind of dark pasty faces and black hair that looked like somebody had put a bowl on top of their heads and then cut their hair up to the rim of the bowl with a dull knife, and perfectly black perfectly still eyes that nobody in Jefferson (Yoknapatawpha County either) ever afterward claimed they saw blink.

I don't know how Dink talked to them because the conductor had already told everybody listening (there was a good crowd by that time) that they didn't talk any language or anything else that he had ever heard of and that to watch them because one of them had a switch knife with a six-inch blade, he didn't know which one and he himself wasn't going to try to find out. But anyway Dink got them into his car and the train went on.

Maybe it was the same thing they used in drugstores or at least with Skeets McGowan in Christian's because it wasn't a week before they could go into Christian's, all four of them (it was always all four of them, as if when the medicine man or whoever it was separated each succeeding one from the mother, he just attached the severed cord to the next senior child. Because by that time we knew who they were: Byron Snopes's children out of a Jicarilla Apache squaw in Old Mexico), and come out two minutes later all eating ice cream cones.

They were always together and anywhere in town or near it at any time of day, until we found out it was any time of night too; one night at two o'clock in the morning when Otis Harker caught them coming in single file from behind the coca cola bottling plant; Otis said he didn't know how in the world they got into it because no door was open nor window broken, but he could smell warm coca cola syrup spilled down the front of the little one's nightshirt or dressing-sacque or whatever it was from five or six feet away. Because that was as close as he got; he said he hollered at them to go on home to the Snopes, I mean the Jefferson Hotel but they just stood there looking at him and he said he never intended anything: just to get them moving since maybe they didn't understand what he meant yet.

So he sort of flung his arms out and was just kind of jumping at them, hollering again, when he stopped himself just in time, the knife already in one of their hands with the blade open at least six inches long; so fast that he never even saw where it came from and in the next minute gone so fast he still didn't even know which one of the three in overalls — the girl or the two boys — had it; that was when Mr Connors went to Dink Quistenberry the next morning and told him he would have to keep them off the streets at night.

“Sure,” Dink said. “You try it. You keep them off the streets or off anywhere else. You got my full permission. You're welcome to it!”

So when the dog business happened, even Mr Hub Hampton himself didn't get any closer than that to them. This was the dog business. We were getting paved streets in Jefferson now and so more new families, engineers and contractors and such like the little Riddell boy's that gave us that holiday two years ago, had moved to Jefferson.

One of them didn't have any children but they had a Cadillac and his wife had a dog that they said cost five hundred dollars, the only dog higher than fifty dollars except a field-trial pointer or setter (and a part Airedale bear dog named Lion that Major de Spain, Mr de Spain's father, owned once that hunting people in north Mississippi still talked about) that Jefferson ever heard of, let alone saw — a Pekinese with a gold name-plate on its collar that probably didn't even know it was a dog, that rode in the Cadillac and sneered through the window not just at other dogs but at people too, and even ate special meat that Mr Wall Snopes's butcher ordered special from Kansas City because it cost too much for just people to buy and eat it.

One day it disappeared. Nobody knew how, since the only time it wasn't sneering out through the Cadillac window, it was sneering out through a window in the house where it — they — lived. But it was gone and I don't think anywhere else ever saw a woman take on over anything like Mrs Widrington did, with rewards in all the Memphis and north Mississippi and west Tennessee and east Arkansas papers and Mr Hampton and Mr Connors neither able to sleep at night for Mrs

Widrington ringing their telephone, and the man from the insurance company (its life was insured too so maybe there were more people insured in Jefferson than there were dogs but then there was more of them not insured in Jefferson than there was dogs too) and Mrs Widrington herself likely at almost any time day or night to be in your back yard calling what Aleck Sander and I thought was Yow! Yow! Yow! until Uncle Gavin told us it was named Lao T'se for a Chinese poet. Until one day the four Snopes Indians came out of Christian's drugstore and somebody passing on the street pointed his finger and hollered "Look!"

It was the collar with the gold name-plate. The little one was wearing it around its neck above the nightshirt. Mr Connors came quick and sent about as quick for Mr Hampton. And that was when Mr Hampton didn't come any closer either and I reckon we all were thinking about what he was: what a mess that big gut of his would make on the sidewalk if he got too close to that knife before he knew it.

And the four Snopes Indians or Indian Snopeses, whichever is right, standing in a row watching him, not looking dangerous, not looking anything; not innocent especially and nobody would have called it affectionate, but not dangerous in the same sense that four shut pocket knives dont look threatening. They look like four shut pocket knives but they dont look lethal. Until Mr Hampton said:

"What do they do when they aint eating ice cream up here or breaking in or out of that bottling plant at two oclock in the morning?"

"They got a kind of camp or reservation or whatever you might call it in a cave they dug in the big ditch behind the school house," Mr Connors said.

"Did you look there?" Mr Hampton said.

"Sure," Mr Connors said. "Nothing there but just some trash and bones and stuff they play with."

"Bones?" Mr Hampton said. "What bones?"

"Just bones," Mr Connors said. "Chicken bones, spare ribs, stuff like that they been eating I reckon."

So Mr Hampton went and got in his car and Mr Connors went to his that had the red light and the siren on it and a few others got in while there was still room, and the two cars went to the school house, the rest of us walking because we wanted to see if Mr Hampton with his belly really would try to climb down into that ditch and if he did how he was going to get out again.

But he did it, with Mr Connors showing him where the cave was but letting him go first since he was the sheriff, on to where the little pile of bones was behind the fireplace and turned them over with his toe and then raked a few of them to one side. Because he was a hunter, a woodsman, a good one before his belly got too big to go through a thicket. "There's your dog," he said.

And I remember that time, five years ago now, we were all at the table and Matt Levitt's cut-out passing in the street and Father said at Uncle Gavin: "What's that sound I smell?" Except that Mr Snopes's brass business at the power-plant was before I was even born: Uncle Gavin's office that morning and Mrs Widrington and the insurance man because the dog's life had been insured only against disease or accident or acts of God, and the insurance man's contention (I reckon he had been in Jefferson long enough to have talked with Ratliff; any stranger in town for just half a day, let alone almost a week, would find himself doing that) was that four half-Snopeses and half-Jicarilla Apache Indians were none of them and so Jefferson itself was liable and vulnerable to suit.

So I had only heard about Mr Snopes and the missing brass from Uncle Gavin, but I thought about what Father said that day because I had been there then: "What's that sound I smell?" when Mr Snopes came in, removing his hat and saying "Morning" to everybody without saying it to anybody; then to the insurance man: "How much on that dog?"

"Full pedigree value, Mr Snopes. Five hundred dollars," the insurance man said and Mr Snopes (the insurance man himself got up and turned his chair around to the desk for him) sat down and took a blank check from his pocket and filled in the amount and pushed it across the desk

in front of Uncle Gavin and got up and said “Morning” without saying it to anybody and put his hat on and went out.

Except that he didn’t quite stop there. Because the next day Byron Snopes’s Indians were gone. Ratliff came in and told us.

“Sho,” he said. “Flem sent them out to the Bend. Neither of their grandmaws, I mean I.O.’s wives, would have them but finally Dee-wit Binford” — Dewitt Binford had married another of the Snopes girls. They lived near Varner’s store— “taken them in. On a contract, the Snopeses all clubbing together pro rata and paying Dee-wit a dollar a head a week on them, providing of course he can last a week. Though naturally the first four dollars was in advance, what you might call a retainer you might say.”

It was. I mean, just about a week. Ratliff came in again; it was in the morning. “We jest finished using up Frenchman’s Bend at noon yesterday, and that jest about cleans up the county.

We’re down at the dee-po now, all tagged and the waybill paid, waiting for Number Twenty-Three southbound or any other train that will connect more or less or thereabouts for El Paso, Texas” — telling about that too: “A combination you might say of scientific interest and what’s that word?” until Uncle Gavin told him anthropological “anthropological coincidence; them four vanishing Americans coming durn nigh taking one white man with them if Clarence Snopes’s maw and a few neighbors hadn’t got there in time.”

He told it: how when Dewitt Binford got them home he discovered they wouldn’t stay in a bed at all, dragging a quilt off onto the floor and lying in a row on it and the next morning he and his wife found the bedstead itself dismantled and leaned against the wall in a corner out of the way; and that they hadn’t heard a sound during the process.

He — Dewitt — said that’s what got on his mind even before he began to worry about the little one: you couldn’t hear them; you didn’t even know they were in the house or not, when they had entered it or left it;

for all you knew, they might be right there in your bedroom in the dark, looking at you.

“So he tried it,” Ratliff said. “He went over to Tull’s and borrowed Vernon’s flashlight and waited until about midnight and he said he never moved quieter in his life, across the hall to the door of the room, trying to not even breathe if he could help it; he had done already cut two sighting notches in the door-frame so that when he laid the flashlight into them by feel it would be aimed straight at where the middle two heads would be on the pallet; and held his breath again, listening until he was sho there wasn’t a sound, and snapped on the light. And them four faces and them eight black eyes already laying there wide open looking straight at him.

“And Dee-wit said he would like to a give up then. But by that time that least un wouldn’t give him no rest a-tall. Only he didn’t know what to do because he had done been warned about that knife even if he hadn’t never seen it.

Then he remembered them pills, that bottle of knock-out opium pills that Doc Peabody had give Miz Dee-wit that time the brooder lamp blowed up and burnt most of her front hair off so he taken eight of them and bought four bottles of sody pop at the store and put two capsules into each bottle and druv the caps back on and hid the bottles jest exactly where he figgered they would have to hunt jest exactly hard enough to find them.

And by dark the four bottles was gone and he waited again to be sho it had had plenty of time to work and taken Vernon’s flashlight and went across the hall and got on his hands and knees and crawled across to the pallet — he knowed by practice now exactly where on the pallet that least un slept or anyway laid — and reached out easy and found the hem of that nightshirt with one hand and the flashlight ready to snap on in the other.

“And when he told about it, he was downright crying, not with jest skeer so much as pure and simple unbelief. ‘I wasn’t doing nothing,’ he

says. 'I wasn't going to hurt it. All in the world I wanted was jest to see which it was—'"

"Which is it?" Uncle Gavin said.

"That's what I'm telling you," Ratliff said. "He never even got to snap the flashlight on. He jest felt them two thin quick streaks of fire, one down either cheek of his face; he said that all that time he was already running backward on his hands and knees toward the door he knowed there wouldn't even be time to turn around, let alone get up on his feet to run, not to mention shutting the door behind him; and when he run back into his and Miz Dee-wit's room there wouldn't be no time to shut that one neither except he had to, banging it shut and hollering for Miz Dee-wit now, dragging the bureau against it while Miz Dee-wit lit the lamp and then come and help him until he hollered at her to shut the windows first; almost crying, with them two slashes running from each ear, jest missing his eye on one side, right down to the corners of his mouth like a great big grin that would bust scab and all if he ever let his face go, telling how they would decide that the best thing would be to put the lamp out too and set in the dark until he remembered how they had managed somehow to get inside that locked-up coca cola plant without even touching the patented burglar alarm.

"So they jest shut and locked the windows and left the lamp burning, setting there in that air-tight room on that hot summer night, until it come light enough for Miz Dee-wit to at least jump and dodge on the way back to the kitchen to start a fire in the stove and cook breakfast. Though the house was empty then.

Not safe of course: jest empty except for themselves while they tried to decide whether to try to get word in to Flem or Hub Hampton to come out and get them, or jest pack up themselves without even waiting to wash up the breakfast dishes, and move over to Tull's.

Anyhow Dee-wit said him and Miz Dee-wit was through and they knowed it, four dollars a week or no four dollars a week; and so, it was about nine oclock, he was on his way to the store to use the telephone to call Jefferson, when Miz I.O. Snopes, I mean the Number Two one

that got superseded back before she ever had a chance to move to town, saved him the trouble.”

We knew Clarence Snopes ourselves. He would be in town every Saturday, or every other time he could get a ride in, according to Ratliff — a big hulking man now, eighteen or nineteen, who was all a gray color: a graying tinge to his tow-colored hair, a grayish pasty look to his flesh, which looked as if it would not flow blood from a wound but instead a pallid fluid like thin oatmeal; he was the only Snopes or resident of Frenchman’s Bend or Yoknapatawpha County either for that matter, who made his Texas cousins welcome.

“You might say he adopted them,” Ratliff said. “Right from that first day. He even claimed he could talk to them and that he was going to train them to hunt in a pack; they would be better than any jest pack of dogs because sooner or later dogs always quit and went home, while it didn’t matter to them where they was.

“So he trained them. The first way he done it was to set a bottle of sody pop on a stump in front of the store with a string running from it to where he would be setting on the gallery, until they would maneuver around and finally bushwack up to where one of them could reach for it, when he would snatch it off the stump with the string and drag it out of their reach.

Only that never worked but once so then he would have to drink the bottles empty and then fill them again with muddy water or some such, or another good training method was to gather up a few throwed-away candy bar papers and wrap them up again with mud inside or maybe jest not nothing a-tall because it taken them a good while to give up then, especially if now and then he had a sho enough candy bar or a sho enough bottle of strawberry or orange shuffled into the other ones.

“Anyhow he was always with them, hollering at them and waving his arms to go this way or that way when folks was watching, like dogs; they even had some kind of a play house or cave or something in another ditch about half a mile up the road. That’s right. What you

think you are laughing at is the notion of a big almost grown man like Clarence, playing, until all of a sudden you find out that what you're laughing at is calling anything playing that them four things would be interested in.

"So Dee-wit had just reached the store when here come Clarence's maw, down the road hollering 'Them Indians! Them Indians!' just like that: a pure and simple case of mother love and mother instinct.

Because likely she didn't know anything yet and even if she had, in that state she couldn't a told nobody: just standing there in the road in front of the store wringing her hands and hollering Them Indians until the men squatting along the gallery begun to get up and then to run because about that time Dee-wit come up. Because he knowed what Miz Snopes was trying to say. Maybe he never had no mother love and mother instinct but then neither did Miz Snopes have a last-night's knife-slash down both cheeks.

" 'Them Indians?' he says. 'Fore God, men, run. It may already be too late.'

"But it wasn't. They was in time. Pretty soon they could hear Clarence bellowing and screaming and then they could line him out and the fastest ones run on ahead and down into the ditch to where Clarence was tied to a blackjack sapling with something less than a cord of wood stacked around him just beginning to burn good.

"So they was in time. Jody telephoned Flem right away and in fact all this would a formally took place yesterday evening except that Clarence's hunting pack never reappeared in sight until this morning when Dee-wit lifted the shade enough to see them waiting on the front gallery for breakfast.

But then his house was barred in time because he hadn't never unbarred it from last night. And Jody's car was already standing by on emergency alert as they say and it wasn't much trouble to toll them into it since like Clarence said one place was just like another to them.

“So they’re down at the dee-po now. Would either of you gentlemen like to go down with me and watch what they call the end of a era, if that’s what they call what I’m trying to say? The last and final end of Snopes out-and-out unvarnished behavior in Jefferson, if that’s what I’m trying to say?”

So Ratliff and I went to the station while he told me the rest of it. It was Miss Emily Habersham; she had done the telephoning herself: to the Travellers’ Aid in New Orleans to meet the Jefferson train and put them on the one for El Paso, and to the El Paso Aid to get them across the border and turn them over to the Mexican police to send them back home, to Byron Snopes or the reservation or wherever it was.

Then I noticed the package and said, “What’s that?” but he didn’t answer. He just parked the pickup and took the cardboard carton and we went around onto the platform where they were: the three in the overalls and what Ratliff called the least un in the nightshirt, each with the new shipping tag wired to the front of its garment, but printed in big block capitals this time, like shouting this time:

From: FLEM SNOPE, Jefferson, Miss.

To: BYRON SNOPE

EL PASO, TEXAS

There was a considerable crowd around them, at a safe distance, when we came up and Ratliff opened the carton; it contained four of everything: four oranges and apples and candy bars and bags of peanuts and packages of chewing gum. “Watch out, now,” Ratliff said. “Maybe we better set it on the ground and shove it up with a stick or something.” But he didn’t mean that. Anyway, he didn’t do it.

He just said to me, “Come on; you aint quite growed so they may not snap at you,” and moved near and held out one of the oranges, the eight eyes not once looking at it nor at us nor at anything that we could see; until the girl, the tallest one, said something, something quick and

brittle that sounded quite strange in the treble of a child; whereupon the first hand came out and took the orange, then the next and the next, orderly, not furtive: just quick, while Ratliff and I dealt out the fruit and bars and paper bags, the empty hand already extended again, the objects vanishing somewhere faster than we could follow, except the little one in the nightshirt which apparently had no pockets: until the girl herself leaned and relieved the overflow.

Then the train came in and stopped; the day coach vestibule clanged and clashed open, the narrow steps hanging downward from the orifice like a narrow dropped jaw. Evidently, obviously, Miss Habersham had telephoned a trainmaster or a superintendent (maybe a vice president) somewhere too because the conductor and the porter both got down and the conductor looked rapidly at the four tags and motioned, and we — all of us; we represented Jefferson — watched them mount and vanish one by one into that iron impatient maw: the girl and the two boys in overalls and Ratliff's least un in its ankle-length single garment like a man's discarded shirt made out of flour- or meal-sacking or perhaps the remnant of an old tent. We never did know which it was.

Oxford — Charlottesville — Washington — New York

November 1955–September 1956.

The End

The Mansion, William Faulkner

The Mansion

The final instalment of the Snopes Trilogy, this novel charts the downfall of Flem Snopes at the hands of his relative Mink Snopes, in part aided by Flem's deaf Spanish-Civil-War-veteran daughter, Linda.

The novel falls into three parts: 'Mink', 'Linda', and 'Flem'. The Mansion continues to explore the theme of the South's displaced economic landscape in the first half of the twentieth century, as well as dealing with the issues of rural populism and racial tensions.

Contents

Mink

One

Two

Three

Four

Linda

Six

Seven

Eight

Nine

Ten

Eleven

Flem

Twelve

Thirteen

Fourteen

Fifteen

Sixteen

Seventeen

Eighteen

TO PHIL STONE

The Mansion

This book is the final chapter of, and the summation of, a work conceived and begun in 1925. Since the author likes to believe, hopes that his entire life's work is a part of a living literature, and since "living" is motion, and "motion" is change and alteration and therefore the only alternative to motion is un-motion, stasis, death, there will be found discrepancies and contradictions in the thirty-four-year progress

of this particular chronicle; the purpose of this note is simply to notify the reader that the author has already found more discrepancies and contradictions than he hopes the reader will — contradictions and discrepancies due to the fact that the author has learned, he believes, more about the human heart and its dilemma than he knew thirty-four years ago; and is sure that, having lived with them that long time, he knows the characters in this chronicle better than he did then.

W. F.

Mink

One

THE JURY SAID “Guilty” and the Judge said “Life”, but he didn’t hear them. He wasn’t listening. In fact, he hadn’t been able to listen since that first day when the Judge banged his little wooden hammer on the high desk until he, Mink, dragged his gaze back from the far door of the courtroom to see what in the world the man wanted, and he, the Judge, leaned down across the desk hollering: “You, Snopes! Did you or didn’t you kill Jack Houston?” and he, Mink, said, “Don’t bother me now.

Can’t you see I’m busy?” then turned his own head to look again toward the distant door at the back of the room, himself hollering into, against, across the wall of little wan faces hemming him in: “Snopes! Flem Snopes! Anybody here that’ll go and bring Flem Snopes! I’ll pay you — Flem’ll pay you!”

Because he hadn’t had time to listen. In fact, that whole first trip, handcuffed to the deputy, from his jail cell to the courtroom, had been a senseless, a really outrageously foolish interference with and interruption, and each subsequent daily manacled trip and transference, of the solution to both their problems — his and the damned law’s both — if they had only waited and let him alone: the watching, his dirty hands gripping among the grimed interstices of the barred window above the street, which had been his one, his imperious

need during the long months between his incarceration and the opening of the Court.

At first, during the first few days behind the barred window, he had simply been impatient with his own impatience and — yes, he admitted it — his own stupidity. Long before the moment came when he had had to aim the gun and fire the shot, he knew that his cousin Flem, the only member of his clan with the power to and the reason to, or who could at least be expected to, extricate him from its consequences, would not be there to do it.

He even knew why Flem would not be there for at least a year; Frenchman's Bend was too small: everybody in it knew everything about everybody else; they would all have seen through that Texas trip even without the hurrah and hullabaloo that Varner girl had been causing ever since she (or whoever else it was) found the first hair on her bump, not to mention just this last past spring and summer while that durn McCarron boy was snuffing and fighting everybody else off exactly like a gang of rutting dogs.

So that before Flem married her, he, Mink, and everybody else in ten miles of the Bend knew that old Will Varner was going to have to marry her off to somebody, and that quick, if he didn't want a woods colt in his back yard next grass. And when it was Flem that finally married her, he, Mink, anyway was not surprised. It was Flem, with his usual luck.

All right, more than just luck then: the only man in Frenchman's Bend that ever stood up to and held his own with old Will Varner; that had done already more or less eliminated Jody, old Will's son, out of the store, and now was fixing to get hold of half of all the rest of it by being old Will's son-in-law.

That just by marrying her in time to save her from dropping a bastard, Flem would not only be the rightful husband of that damn girl that had kept every man under eighty years old in Frenchman's Bend in an uproar ever since she was fifteen years old by just watching her walk past, but he had got paid for it to boot: not only the right to fumble his

hand every time the notion struck him under that dress that rutted a man just thinking even about somebody else's hand doing it, but was getting a free deed to that whole Old Frenchman place for doing it.

So he knew Flem would not be there when he would need him, since he knew that Flem and his new wife would have to stay away from Frenchman's Bend at least long enough for what they would bring back with them to be able to call itself only one month old without everybody that looked at it dying of laughing.

Only, when the moment finally came, when the instant finally happened when he could no longer defer having to aim the gun and pull the trigger, he had forgot that. No, that was a lie. He hadn't forgot it. He simply could wait no longer: Houston himself would not let him wait longer — and that too was one more injury which Jack Houston, in the very act of dying, had done him: compelled him, Mink, to kill him at a time when the only person who had the power to save him and would have had to save him whether he wanted to or not because of the ancient immutable laws of simple blood kinship, was a thousand miles away; and this time it was an irreparable injury because in the very act of committing it, Houston had escaped forever all retribution for it.

He had not forgotten that his cousin would not be there. He simply couldn't wait any longer. He had simply had to trust them — the Them of whom it was promised that not even a sparrow should fall unmarked. By them he didn't mean that whatever-it-was that folks referred to as Old Moster. He didn't believe in any Old Moster. He had seen too much in his time that, if any Old Moster existed, with eyes as sharp and power as strong as was claimed He had, He would have done something about.

Besides, he, Mink, wasn't religious. He hadn't been to a church since he was fifteen years old and never aimed to go again — places which a man with a hole in his gut and a rut in his britches that he couldn't satisfy at home, used, by calling himself a preacher of God, to get conveniently together the biggest possible number of women that he could tempt with the reward of the one in return for the job of the

other — the job of filling his hole in payment for getting theirs plugged the first time the husband went to the field and she could slip off to the bushes where the preacher was waiting; the wives coming because here was the best market they knowed of to swap a mess of fried chicken or a sweet-potato pie; the husbands coming not to interrupt the trading because the husband knowed he couldn't interrupt it or even keep up with it, but at least to try and find out if his wife's name would come to the head of the waiting list today or if maybe he could still finish scratching that last forty before he would have to tie her to the bedpost and hide behind the door watching; and the young folks not even bothering to enter the church a-tall for already running to be the first couple behind the nearest handy thicket bush.

He meant, simply, that them — they — it, whichever and whatever you wanted to call it, who represented a simple fundamental justice and equity in human affairs, or else a man might just as well quit; the they, them, it, call them what you like, which simply would not, could not harass and harry a man forever without some day, at some moment, letting him get his own just and equal licks back in return.

They could harass and worry him, or they could even just sit back and watch everything go against him right along without missing a lick, almost like there was a pattern to it; just sit back and watch and (all right, why not? he — a man — didn't mind, as long as he was a man and there was a justice to it) enjoy it too; maybe in fact They were even testing him, to see if he was a man or not, man enough to take a little harassment and worry and so deserve his own licks back when his turn came.

But at least that moment would come when it was his turn, when he had earned the right to have his own just and equal licks back, just as They had earned the right to test him and even to enjoy the testing; the moment when they would have to prove to him that They were as much a man as he had proved to Them that he was; when he not only would have to depend on Them but had won the right to depend on Them and find Them faithful; and They dared not, They would not dare, to let him down, else it would be as hard for Them to live with

themselves afterward as it had finally become for him to live with himself and still keep on taking what he had taken from Jack Houston.

So he knew that morning that Flem was not going to be there. It was simply that he could wait no longer; the moment had simply come when he and Jack Houston could, must, no longer breathe the same air. And so, lacking his cousin's presence, he must fall back on that right to depend on them which he had earned by never before in his life demanding anything of them.

It began in the spring.

No, it began in the fall before. No, it began a long time before that even. It began at the very instant Houston was born already shaped for arrogance and intolerance and pride. Not at the moment when the two of them, he, Mink Snopes also, began to breathe the same north Mississippi air, because he, Mink, was not a contentious man. He had never been. It was simply that his own bad luck had all his life continually harassed and harried him into the constant and unflagging necessity of defending his own simple rights.

Though it was not until the summer before that first fall that Houston's destiny had actually and finally impinged on his, Mink's, own fate — which was another facet of the outrage: that nothing, not even they, least of all they, had vouchsafed him any warning of what that first encounter would end in. This was after Houston's young wife had gone into the stallion's stall hunting a hen nest and the horse had killed her and any decent man would have thought that any decent husband would never have had another stallion on the place as long as he lived. But not Houston.

Houston was not only rich enough to own a blooded stallion capable of killing his wife, but arrogant and intolerant enough to defy all decency, after shooting the horse that killed her, to turn right around and buy another stallion exactly like it, maybe in case he did get married again; to act so grieving over his wife that even the neighbours didn't dare knock on his front door any more, yet two or three times a week ripping up and down the road on that next murderer of a horse, with

that big Bluetick hound running like a greyhound or another horse along beside it, right up to Varner's store and not even getting down: the three of them just waiting there in the road — the arrogant intolerant man and the bad-eyed horse and the dog that bared its teeth and raised its hackles any time anybody went near it — while Houston ordered whoever was on the front gallery to step inside and fetch him out whatever it was he had come for like they were Negroes.

Until one morning when he, Mink, was walking to the store (he had no horse to ride when he had to go for a tin of snuff or a bottle of quinine or a piece of meat); he had just come over the brow of a short hill when he heard the horse behind him, coming fast and hard, and he would have given Houston the whole road if he had had time, the horse already on top of him until Houston wrenched it savagely off and past, the damn hound leaping so close it almost brushed his chest, snarling right into his face, Houston whirling the horse and holding it dancing and plunging, shouting down at him: "Why in hell didn't you jump when you heard me coming? Get off the road! Do you still want him to beat your brains out too before I can get him down again?"

Well, maybe that was what they call grieving for the wife that maybe you didn't actually kill her yourself and you even killed the horse that did it.

But still arrogant enough or rich enough to afford to buy another one exactly like the one that did kill her. Which was all right with him, Mink, especially since all anybody had to do was just wait until sooner or later the son-of-a-bitching horse would kill Houston too; until the next thing happened which he had not counted on, planned on, not even anticipated.

It was his milk cow, the only one he owned, not being a rich man like Houston but only an independent one, asking no favours of any man, paying his own way. She — the cow — had missed some way, failed to freshen; and there he was, not only having gone a winter without milk and now faced with another whole year without it, he had also missed out on the calf for which he had had to pay a fifty-cents-cash bull fee,

since the only bull in reach he could get for less than a dollar was the scrub bull belonging to a Negro who insisted on cash at the gate.

So he fed the cow all that winter, waiting for the calf which wasn't even there. Then he had to lead the cow the three miles back to the Negro's house, not to claim the return of the fifty cents but only to claim a second stand from the bull, which the Negro refused to permit without the payment in advance of another fifty cents, he, Mink, standing in the yard cursing the Negro until the Negro went back into the house and shut the door, Mink standing in the empty yard cursing the Negro and his family inside the blank house until he had exhausted himself enough to lead the still-barren cow the three miles again back home.

Then he had to keep the barren and worthless cow up under fence while she exhausted his own meagre pasture, then he had to feed her out of his meagre crib during the rest of that summer and fall, since the local agreement was that all stock would be kept up until all crops were out of the field. Which meant November before he could turn her out for the winter. And even then he had to divert a little feed to her from his winter's meat hogs, to keep her in the habit of coming more or less back home at night; until she had been missing three or four days and he finally located her in Houston's pasture with his beef herd.

In fact, he was already in the lane leading to Houston's house, the coiled ploughline in his hand, when without even knowing he was going to and without even pausing or breaking stride he had turned about, already walking back toward home, rapidly stuffing the coiled rope inside his shirt where it would be concealed, not to return to the paintless repairless tenant cabin in which he lived, but simply to find privacy in which to think, stopping presently to sit on a log beside the road while he realised the full scope of what had just dawned before him.

By not claiming the worthless cow yet, he would not only winter her, he would winter her twice — ten times — as well as he himself could afford to. He would not only let Houston winter her (Houston, a man not only rich enough to be able to breed and raise beef cattle, but rich

enough to keep a Negro to do nothing else save feed and tend them — a Negro to whom Houston furnished a better house to live in than the one that he, Mink, a white man with a wife and two daughters, lived in) but when he would reclaim the cow in the spring she would have come in season again and, running with Houston's beef herd-bull, would now be carrying a calf which would not only freshen her for milk but would itself be worth money as grade beef where the offspring of the Negro's scrub bull would have been worth almost nothing.

Naturally he would have to be prepared for the resulting inevitable questions; Frenchman's Bend was too little, too damn little for a man to have any privacy about what he did, let alone about what he owned or lacked. It didn't even take four days. It was at Varner's store, where he would walk down to the crossroads and back every day, giving them a chance to go ahead and get it over with. Until finally one said — he didn't remember who; it didn't matter: "Ain't you located your cow yet?"

"What cow?" he said. The other said,

"Jack Houston says for you to come and get that bone rack of yours out of his feed lot; he's tired of boarding it."

"Oh, that," he said. "That ain't my cow any more. I sold that cow last summer to one of the Gowrie boys up at Caledonia Chapel."

"I'm glad to hear that," the other said. "Because if I was you and my cow was in Jack Houston's feed lot, I would take my rope and go and get it, without even noticing myself doing it, let alone letting Jack Houston notice me. I don't believe I would interrupt him right now even to say Much obliged." Because all Frenchman's Bend knew Houston: sulking and sulling in his house all alone by himself since the stallion killed his wife four years ago. Like nobody before him had ever lost a wife, even when, for whatever incomprehensible reason the husband could have had, he didn't want to get shut of her.

Sulking and sulling alone on that big place with two nigger servants, the man and the woman to cook, and the stallion and the big Bluetick hound that was a high-nosed and intolerant and surly as Houston

himself — a durn surly sullen son of a bitch that didn't even know he was lucky: rich, not only rich enough to afford a wife to whine and nag and steal his pockets ragged of every dollar he made, but rich enough to do without a wife if he wanted: rich enough to be able to hire a woman to cook his victuals instead of having to marry her.

Rich enough to hire another nigger to get up in his stead on the cold mornings and go out in the wet and damp to feed not only the beef cattle which he sold at the top fat prices because he could afford to hold them till then, but that blooded stallion too, and even that damn hound running beside the horse he thundered up and down the road on, until a fellow that never had anything but his own two legs to travel on, would have to jump clean off the road into the bushes or the son-of-a-bitching horse would have killed him too with its shod feet and left him laying there in the ditch for the son-of-a-bitching hound to eat before Houston would even have reported it.

All right, if Houston was in too high and mighty a mood to be said much obliged to, he, Mink, for one wasn't going to break in on him uninvited. Not that he didn't owe a much obliged to something somewhere. This was a week later, then a month later, then Christmas had passed and the hard wet dreary winter had set in. Each afternoon, in the slicker held together with baling wire and automobile tyre patching which was the only winter outer garment he owned over his worn patched cotton overalls, he would walk up the muddy road in the dreary and fading afternoons to watch Houston's pedigreed beef herd, his own sorry animal among them, move, not even hurrying, toward and into the barn which was warmer and tighter against the weather than the cabin he lived in, to be fed by the hired Negro who wore warmer clothing than any he and his family possessed, cursing into the steamy vapour of his own breathing, cursing the Negro for his black skin inside the warmer garments than his, a white man's, cursing the rich feed devoted to cattle instead of humans even though his own animal shared it; cursing above all the unaware white man through or because of whose wealth such a condition could obtain, cursing the fact that his very revenge and vengeance — what he himself believed to be simple justice and inalienable rights — could not be done at one stroke but

instead must depend on the slow incrementation of feed converted to weight, plus the uncontrollable, even unpredictable, love mood of the cow and the long subsequent nine months of gestation; cursing his own condition that the only justice available to him must be this prolonged and passive one.

That was it. Prolongation. Not only the anguish of hope deferred, not even the outrage of simple justice deferred, but the knowledge that, even when the blow fell on Houston, it would cost him, Mink, eight dollars in cash — the eight dollars which he would have to affirm that the imaginary purchaser of the cow had paid him for the animal in order to make good the lie that he had sold it, which, when he reclaimed the cow in the spring, he would have to give to Houston as an earnest that until that moment he really believed he had sold the animal — or at least had established eight dollars as its value — when he went to Houston and told him how the purchaser had come to him, Mink, only that morning and told him the cow had escaped from the lot the same night he had bought it and brought it home, and so reclaimed the eight dollars he had paid for it, thus establishing the cow not only in Houston's arrogant contempt but in the interested curiosity of the rest of Frenchman's Bend too, as having now cost him, Mink, sixteen dollars to reclaim his own property.

That was the outrage: the eight dollars. The fact that he could not even have wintered the cow for eight dollars, let alone put on it the weight of flesh he could see with his own eyes it now carried, didn't count. What mattered was, he would have to give Houston, who didn't need it and wouldn't even miss the feed the cow had eaten, the eight dollars with which he, Mink, could have bought a gallon of whiskey for Christmas, plus a dollar or two of the gewgaw finery his wife and his two daughters were forever whining at him for.

But there was no help for it. And even then, his pride was that he was not reconciled. Not he to be that meagre and niggling and puny as meekly to accept something just because he didn't see yet how he could help it. More, since this too merely bolstered the anger and rage at the injustice: that he would have to go fawning and even cringing a

little when he went to recover his cow; would have to waste a lie for the privilege of giving eight dollars which he wanted, must sacrifice to spare, to a man who didn't even need them, would not even miss their lack, did not even know yet that he was going to receive them.

The moment, the day at last at the end of winter when by local custom the livestock which had run loose in the skeletoned cornfields since fall, must be taken up by their owners and put inside fences so the land could be ploughed and planted again; one afternoon, evening rather, waiting until his cow had received that final feeding with the rest of Houston's herd before he approached the feed lot, the worn ploughline coiled over his arm and the meagre lump of worn dollar bills and nickels and dimes and quarters wadded into his overall pocket, not needing to fawn and cringe yet because only the Negro with his hayfork would be in the lot now, the rich man himself in the house, the warm kitchen, with in his hand a toddy not of the stinking gagging home-made corn such as he, Mink, would have had to buy with his share of the eight dollars if he could have kept them, but of good red chartered whiskey ordered out of Memphis.

Not having to fawn and cringe yet: just saying, level and white-man, to the nigger paused in the door to the feeding shed to look back at him: "Hidy.

I see you got my cow there. Put this rope on her and I'll get her outen your way," the Negro looking back at him a second longer then gone, on through the shed toward the house; not coming back to take the rope, which he, Mink, had not expected anyway, but gone first to tell the white man, to know what to do. Which was exactly what he, Mink, had expected, leaning his cold-raw, cold-reddened wrists which even the frayed slicker sleeves failed to cover, on the top rail of the white-painted fence. Oh yes, Houston with the toddy of good red whiskey in his hand and likely with his boots off and his stocking feet in the oven of the stove, warming for supper, who now, cursing, would have to withdraw his feet and drag on again the cold wet muddy rubber and come back to the lot.

Which Houston did: the very bang of the kitchen door and the squish and slap of the gum boots across the back yard and into the lot sounding startled and outraged. Then he came on through the shed too, the Negro about ten feet behind him. "Hidy, Jack," Mink said. "Too bad to have to roust you out into the cold and wet again. That nigger could have tended to it. I jest learned today you wintered my cow for me. If your nigger'll put this ploughline on her, I'll get her out of your way."

"I thought you sold that cow to Nub Gowrie," Houston said.

"So did I," Mink said. "Until Nub rid up this morning on a mule and said that cow broke out of his lot the same night he got her home and he ain't seen her since, and collected back the eight dollars he paid me for her," already reaching into his pocket, the meagre wad of frayed notes and coins in his hand. "So, since eight dollars seems to be the price of this cow, I reckon I owe you that for wintering her. Which makes her a sixteen-dollar cow now, don't it, whether she knows it or not. So here. Take your money and let your nigger put this ploughline on her and I'll—"

"That cow wasn't worth eight dollars last fall," Houston said. "But she's worth a considerable more now. She's eaten more than sixteen dollars' worth of my feed. Not to mention my young bull topped her last week. It was last week, wasn't it, Henry?" he said to the Negro.

"Yes sir," the Negro said. "Last Tuesday. I put it on the book." "If you had jest notified me sooner I'd have saved the strain on your bull and that nigger and his pitchfork too," Mink said. He said to the Negro: "Here. Take this rope—"

"Hold it," Houston said; he was reaching into his pocket too. "You yourself established the price of that cow at eight dollars. All right. I'll buy her."

"You yourself jest finished establishing the fact that she has done went up since then," Mink said. "I'm trying right now to give the rest of

sixteen for her. So evidently I wouldn't take sixteen, let alone jest eight. So take your money. And if your nigger's too wore out to put this rope on her, I'll come in and do it myself." Now he even began to climb the fence.

"Hold it," Houston said again. He said to the Negro: "What would you say she's worth now?"

"She'd bring thirty," the Negro said. "Maybe thirty-five." "You hear that?" Houston said.

"No," Mink said, still climbing the fence. "I don't listen to niggers: I tell them. If he don't want to put this rope on my cow, tell him to get outen my way."

"Don't cross that fence, Snopes," Houston said.

"Well well," Mink said, one leg over the top rail, the coil of rope dangling from one raw-red hand, "don't tell me you bring a pistol along every time you try to buy a cow. Maybe you even tote it to put a cotton-seed or a grain of corn in the ground too?" It was tableau: Mink with one leg over the top rail, Houston standing inside the fence, the pistol hanging in one hand against his leg, the Negro not moving either, not looking at anything, the whites of his eyes just showing a little. "If you had sent me word, maybe I could a brought a pistol too."

"All right," Houston said. He laid the pistol carefully on the top of the fence post beside him. "Put that rope down. Get over the fence at your post. I'll back off one post and you can count three and we'll see who uses it to trade with."

"Or maybe your nigger can do the counting," Mink said. "All he's got to do is say Three. Because I ain't got no nigger with me neither. Evidently a man needs a tame nigger and a pistol both to trade livestock with you." He swung his leg back to the ground outside the fence. "So I reckon I'll jest step over to the store and have a word with Uncle Billy and the constable. Maybe I ought to done that at first, saved a walk up here in the cold. I would a suh-jested leaving my ploughline here, to save toting it again, only likely you would be charging me thirty-five dollars to get it back, since that seems to be your bottom price for

anything in your lot that don't belong to you." He was leaving now. "So long then. In case you do make any eight-dollar stock deals, be sho you don't take no wooden nickels."

He walked away steadily enough but in such a thin furious rage that for a while he couldn't even see, and with his ears ringing as if someone had fired a shotgun just over his head. In fact he had expected the rage too and now, in solitude and privacy, was the best possible time to let it exhaust itself. Because he knew now he had anticipated something like what had happened and he would need his wits about him. He had known by instinct that his own outrageous luck would invent something like this, so that even the fact that going to Varner, the justice of the peace, for a paper for the constable to serve on Houston to recover the cow would cost him another two dollars and a half, was not really a surprise to him: it was simply them again, still testing, trying him to see just how much he could bear and would stand.

So, in a way, he was not really surprised at what happened next either. It was his own fault in a way: he had simply underestimated them: the whole matter of taking the eight dollars to Houston and putting the rope on the cow and leading it back home had seemed too simple, too puny for Them to bother with. But he was wrong; They were not done yet. Varner would not even issue the paper; whereupon two days later there were seven of them, counting the Negro — himself, Houston, Varner and the constable and two professional cattle buyers — standing along the fence of Houston's feed lot while the Negro led his cow out for the two experts to examine her.

"Well?" Varner said at last.

"I'd give thirty-five," the first trader said.

"Bred to a paper bull, I might go to thirty-seven and a half," the second said.

"Would you go to forty?" Varner said.

"No," the second said. "She might not a caught."

“That’s why I wouldn’t even match thirty-seven and a half,” the first said.

“All right,” Varner said — a tall, gaunt, narrow-hipped, heavily moustached man who looked like what his father had been: one of Forrest’s cavalymen. “Call it thirty-seven and a half then. So we’ll split the difference then.” He was looking at Mink now. “When you pay Houston eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents, you can have your cow. Only you haven’t got eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents, have you?”

He stood there, his raw-red wrists which the slicker did not cover lying quiet on the top rail of the fence, his eyes quite blind again and his ears ringing again as though somebody had fired a shotgun just over his head, and on his face that expression faint and gentle and almost like smiling. “No,” he said.

“Wouldn’t his cousin Flem let him have it?” the second trader said. Nobody bothered to answer that at all, not even to remind them that Flem was still in Texas on his honeymoon, where he and his wife had been since the marriage last August.

“Then he’ll have to work it out,” Varner said. He was talking to Houston now. “What have you got that he can do?”

“I’m going to fence in another pasture,” Houston said. “I’ll pay him fifty cents a day. He can make thirty-seven days and from light till noon on the next one digging post holes and stringing wire. What about the cow? Do I keep her, or does Quick” (Quick was the constable) “take her?”

“Do you want Quick to?” Varner said.

“No,” Houston said. “She’s been here so long now she might get homesick. Besides, if she’s here Snopes can see her every day and keep his spirits up about what he’s really working for.”

“All right, all right,” Varner said quickly. “It’s settled now. I don’t want any more of that now.”

That was what he had to do. And his pride still was that he would not be, would never be, reconciled to it. Not even if he were to lose the cow, the animal itself to vanish from the entire equation and leave him in what might be called peace. Which — eliminating the cow — he could have done himself. More: he could have got eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents for doing it, which, with the eight dollars Houston had refused to accept, would have made practically twenty-seven dollars, more cash at one time than he had seen in he could not remember when, since even with the fall sale of his bale or two of cotton, the subtraction of Varner's landlord's share, plus his furnish bill at Varner's store, barely left him that same eight or ten dollars in cash with which he had believed in vain that he could redeem the cow.

In fact, Houston himself made that suggestion. It was the second or third day of digging the post holes and setting the heavy locust posts in them; Houston came up on the stallion and sat looking down at him. He didn't even pause, let alone look up.

"Look," Houston said. "Look at me." He looked up then, not pausing. Houston's hand was already extended; he, Mink, could see the actual money in it. "Varner said eighteen seventy-five. All right, here it is. Take it and go on home and forget about that cow." Now he didn't even look up any longer, heaving on to his shoulder the post that anyway looked heavier and more solid than he did and dropping it into the hole, tamping the dirt home with the reversed shovel handle so that he only had to hear the stallion turn and go away. Then it was the fourth day; again he only needed to hear the stallion come up and stop, not even looking up when Houston said, "Snopes," then again, "Snopes," then he said, "Mink," he — Mink — not even looking up, let alone pausing while he said: "I hear you."

"Stop this now. You got to break your land for your crop. You got to make your living. Go on home and get your seed in the ground and then come back."

“I ain’t got time to make a living,” he said, not even pausing, “I got to get my cow back home.”

The next morning it was not Houston on the stallion but Varner himself in his buckboard. Though he, Mink, did not know yet that it was Varner himself who was suddenly afraid, afraid for the peace and quiet of the community which he held in his iron usurious hand, buttressed by the mortgages and liens in the vast iron safe in his store. And now he, Mink, did look up and saw money in the closed fist resting on Varner’s knee.

“I’ve put this on your furnish bill for this year,” Varner said. “I just come from your place. You ain’t broke a furrow yet. Pick up them tools and take this money and give it to Jack and take that damn cow on home and get to ploughing.”

Though this was only Varner; he could pause and even lean on the post hole digger now. “Have you heard any complaint from me about that-ere cow court judgment of yourn?” he said.

“No,” Varner said.

“Then get out of my way and tend to your business while I tend to mine,” he said. Then Varner was out of the buckboard — a man already old enough to be called Uncle Billy by the debtors who fawned on him, yet agile too: enough so to jump down from the buckboard in one motion, the lines in one hand and the whip in the other.

“God damn you,” he said, “pick up them tools and go on home. I’ll be back before dark, and if I don’t find a furrow run by then, I’m going to dump every sorry stick you’ve got in that house out in the road and rent it to somebody else tomorrow morning.”

And he, Mink, looking at him, with on his face that faint gentle expression almost like smiling. “Likely you would do jest exactly that,” he said.

“You’re god-damned right I will,” Varner said. “Get on. Now. This minute.”

“Why, sholy,” he said. “Since that’s the next court judgment in this case, and a law-abiding feller always listens to a court judgment.” He turned.

“Here,” Varner said to his back. “Take this money.”

“Ain’t it?” he said, going on.

By midafternoon he had broken the better part of an acre. When he swung the plough at the turn-row he saw the buckboard coming up the lane. It carried two this time, Varner and the constable, Quick, and it was moving at a snail’s pace because, on a lead rope at the rear axle, was his cow. He didn’t hurry; he ran out that furrow too, then unhitched the traces and tied the mule to the fence and only then walked on to where the two men still sat in the buckboard, watching him.

“I paid Houston the eighteen dollars and here’s your cow,” Varner said. “And if ever again I hear of you or anything belonging to you on Jack Houston’s land, I’m going to send you to jail.”

“And seventy-five cents,” he said. “Or maybe them six bits evaporated. That cow’s under a court judgment. I can’t accept it until that judgment is satisfied.”

“Lon,” Varner said to the constable in a voice flat and almost gentle, “put that cow in the lot yonder and take that rope off it and get to hell back in this buggy.”

“Lon,” Mink said in a voice just as gentle and just as flat, “if you put that cow in my lot I’ll get my shotgun and kill her.”

Nor did he watch them. He went back to the mule and untied the lines from the fence and hooked up the traces and ran another furrow, his back now to the house and the lane, so that not until he swung the mule at the turn-row did he see for a moment the buckboard going back down the lane at that snail’s pace matched to the plodding cow. He ploughed steadily on until dark, until his supper of the coarse fatback and cheap molasses and probably weevilly flour which, even after he had eaten it, would still be the property of Will Varner until he,

Mink, had ginned and sold the cotton next fall which he had not even planted yet.

An hour later, with a coal-oil lantern to light dimly the slow lift and thrust of the digger, he was back at Houston's fence. He had not lain down nor even stopped moving, working, since daylight this morning; when daylight came again he would not have slept in twenty-four hours; when the sun did rise on him he was back in his own field with the mule and plough, stopping only for dinner at noon, then back to the field again, ploughing again — or so he thought until he waked to find himself lying in the very furrow he had just run, beneath the canted handles of the still-bedded plough, the anchored mule still standing in the traces and the sun just going down.

Then supper again like last night's meal and this morning's breakfast too, and carrying the lighted lantern he once more crossed Houston's pasture toward where he had left the post hole digger. He didn't even see Houston sitting on the pile of waiting posts until Houston stood up, the shotgun cradled in his left arm. "Go back," Houston said. "Don't never come on my land again after sundown. If you're going to kill yourself, it won't be here. Go back now. Maybe I can't stop you from working out that cow by daylight, but I reckon I can after dark." But he could stand that too. Because he knew the trick of it. He had learned that the hard way; himself taught that to himself through simple necessity: that a man can bear anything by simply and calmly refusing to accept it, be reconciled to it, give up to it. He could even sleep at night now. It was not so much that he had time to sleep now, as because he now had a kind of peace, freed of hurry and haste. He broke the rest of his rented land now, then opened out the middles while the weather held good, using the bad days on Houston's fence, marking off one day less which meant fifty cents less toward the recovery of his cow. But with no haste now, no urgency; when spring finally came and the ground warmed for the reception of seed and he saw before him a long hiatus from the fence because of the compulsion of his own crop, he faced it calmly, getting his corn- and cotton-seed from Varner's store and planting his ground, making a better job of sowing than he had ever done before, since all he had to do now was to

fill the time until he could get back to the fence and with his own sweat dissolve away another of the half-dollars. Because patience was his pride too: never to be reconciled since by this means he could beat Them; They might be stronger for a moment than he but nobody, no man, no nothing could wait longer than he could wait when nothing else but waiting would do, would work, would serve him.

Then the sun set at last on the day when he could put down patience also along with the digger and the stretchers and what remained of the wire. Houston would know it was the last day too of course. Likely Houston had spent the whole day expecting him to come trotting up the lane to get the cow the minute the sun was below the western trees; likely Houston had spent the whole day from sunrise on in the kitchen window to see him, Mink, show up for that last day's work already carrying the ploughline to lead the cow home with. In fact, throughout that whole last day while he dug the last holes and tamped into them the post at all but the last of that outrage which They had used old Will Varner himself as their tool to try him with, to see how much he really could stand, he could imagine Houston hunting vainly up and down the lane, trying every bush and corner to find where he must have hidden the rope.

Which — the rope — he had not even brought yet, working steadily on until the sun was completely down and no man could say the full day was not finished and done, and only then gathering up the digger and shovel and stretchers, to carry them back to the feed lot and set them neatly and carefully in the angle of the fence where the nigger or Houston or anybody else that wanted to look couldn't help but see them, himself not glancing even once toward Houston's house, not even glancing once at the cow which no man could now deny was his, before walking on back down the lane toward his cabin two miles away.

He ate his supper, peacefully and without haste, not even listening for the cow and whoever would be leading it this time. It might even be Houston himself. Though on second thought, Houston was like him; Houston didn't scare easy either.

It would be old Will Varner's alarm and concern sending the constable to bring the cow back, now that the judgment was worked out to the last penny, he, Mink, chewing his fatback and biscuits and drinking his coffee with that same gentle expression almost like smiling, imagining Quick cursing and stumbling up the lane with the lead rope for having to do the job in the dark when he too would rather be at home with his shoes off eating supper; Mink was already rehearsing, phrasing what he would tell him: "I worked out eighteen and a half days.

It takes a light and a dark both to make one of them, and this one ain't up until daylight tomorrow morning. Just take that cow back where you and Will Varner put it eighteen and a half days ago, and I'll come in the morning and get it. And remind that nigger to feed early, so I won't have to wait."

But he heard nothing. And only then did he realise that he had actually expected the cow, had counted on its return you might say. He had a sudden quick shock of fear, terror, discovering now how spurious had been that peace he thought was his since his run-in with Houston and the shotgun at the fence line that night two months ago; so light a hold on what he had thought was peace that he must be constantly on guard now, since almost anything apparently could throw him back to that moment when Will Varner had told him he would have to work out eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents at fifty cents a day to gain possession of his own cow.

Now he would have to go to the lot and look to make sure Quick hadn't put the cow in it unheard and then run, fled; he would have to light a lantern and go out in the dark to look for what he knew he would not find. And as if that was not enough, he would have to explain to his wife where he was going with the lantern.

Sure enough, he had to do it, using the quick hard unmannered word when she said, "Where you going? I thought Jack Houston warned you," — adding, not for the crudeness but because she too would not let him alone:

"Lessen of course you will step outside and do it for me."

“You nasty thing!” she cried. “Using words like that in front of the girls!”

“Sholy,” he said. “Or maybe you could send them. Maybe both of them together could make up for one a-dult. Though from the way they eat, ara one of them alone ought to do hit.”

He went to the barn. The cow was not there of course, as he had known. He was glad of it. The whole thing — realising that even if one of them brought the cow home, he would still have to go out to the barn to make sure — had been good for him, teaching him, before any actual harm had been done, just exactly what They were up to: to fling, jolt, surprise him off balance and so ruin him: Who couldn't beat him in any other way: couldn't beat him with money or its lack, couldn't outwait him; could beat him only by catching him off balance and so topple him back into that condition of furious blind earless rage where he had no sense.

But he was all right now. He had actually gained; when he took his rope tomorrow morning and went to get his cow, it wouldn't be Quick but Houston himself who would say, “Why didn't you come last night? The eighteenth-and-a-half day was up at dark last night”; it would be Houston himself to whom he would answer:

“It takes a light and a dark both to make a day.

That-ere eighteenth-and-a-half day is up this morning — providing that delicate nigger of yourn has done finished feeding her.”

He slept. He ate breakfast; sunrise watched him walk without haste up the lane to Houston's feed lot, the ploughline coiled on his arm, to lean his folded arms on the top rail of the fence, the coiled rope loosely dangling, watching the Negro with his pitchfork and Houston also for a minute or two before they saw him. He said:

“Mawnin, Jack. I come by for that-ere court-judgment cow if you'll kindly have your nigger to kindly put this here rope on her if he'll be so kindly obliging,” then still leaning there while Houston came across the lot and stopped about ten feet away.

“You're not through yet,” Houston said. “You owe two more days.”

“Well well,” he said, easily and peacefully, almost gently. “I reckon a man with a lot full of paper bulls and heifers, not to mention a half a mile of new pasture fence he got built free for nothing, might get mixed up about a little thing not no more important than jest dollars, especially jest eighteen dollars and seventy-five cents of them. But I jest own one eight-dollar cow, or what I always thought was jest a eight-dollar cow. I ain’t rich enough not to be able to count up to eighteen seventy-five.”

“I’m not talking about eighteen dollars,” Houston said. “I’m—”
“And seventy-five cents,” Mink said.
“ — talking about nineteen dollars. You owe one dollar more.”

He didn’t move; his face didn’t change; he just said: “What one dollar more?”

“The pound fee,” Houston said. “The law says that when anybody has to take up a stray animal and the owner don’t claim it before dark that same day, the man that took it up is entitled to a one-dollar pound fee.”

He stood quite still; his hand did not even tighten on the coiled rope. “So that was why you were so quick that day to save Lon the trouble of taking her to his lot,” he said. “To get that extra dollar.”

“Damn the extra dollar,” Houston said. “Damn Quick too. He was welcome to her. I kept her instead to save you having to walk all the way to Quick’s house to get her. Not to mention I have fed her every day, which Quick wouldn’t have done. The digger and shovel and stretchers are in the corner yonder where you left them last night. Any time you want to—”

But he had already turned, already walking, peacefully and steadily, carrying the coiled rope, back down the lane to the road, not back toward his home but in the opposite direction toward Varner’s store four miles away.

He walked through the bright sweet young summer morning between the burgeoning woodlands where the dogwood and redbud and wild plum had long since bloomed and gone, beside the planted fields standing strongly with corn and cotton, some of it almost as good as his own small patches (obviously the people who planted these had not had the leisure and peace he had thought he had to sow in); treading peacefully the rife and vernal earth boiling with life — the frantic flash and glint and crying of birds, a rabbit bursting almost beneath his feet, so young and thin as to have but two dimensions, unless the third one could be speed — on to Varner's store.

The gnawed wood gallery above the gnawed wood steps should be vacant now. The overalled men who after laying-by would squat or stand all day against the front wall or inside the store itself, should be in the field too today, ditching or mending fences or running the first harrows and shovels and cultivators among the stalks. The store was too empty, in fact.

He thought If Flem was jest here — because Flem was not there; he, Mink, knew if anyone did that that honeymoon would have to last until they could come back home and tell Frenchman's Bend that the child they would bring with them hadn't been born sooner than this past May at the earliest.

But even if it hadn't been that, it would have been something else; his cousin's absence when he was needed was just one more test, harassment, enagement They tried him with, not to see if he would survive it because They had no doubt of that, but simply for the pleasure of watching him have to do something extra there was no reason whatever for him to have to do.

Only Varner was not there either. Mink had not expected that. He had taken it for granted that They certainly would not miss this chance: to have the whole store crammed with people who should have been busy in the field — loose idle ears all strained to hear what he had come to say to Will Varner. But even Varner was gone; there was

nobody in the store but Jody Varner and Lump Snopes, the clerk Flem had substituted in when he quit to get married last summer.

“If he went to town, he won’t be back before night,” Mink said.

“Not to town,” Jody said. “He went over to look at a mill on Punkin Creek. He said he’ll be back by dinner time.”

“He won’t be back until night,” Mink said.

“All right,” Jody said. “Then you can go back home and come back tomorrow.”

So he had no choice. He could have walked the five miles back home and then the five more back to the store in just comfortable time before noon, if he had wanted a walk. Or he could stay near the store until noon and wait there until old Varner would finally turn up just about in time for supper, which he would do, since naturally They would not miss that chance to make him lose a whole day. Which would mean he would have to put in half of one night digging Houston’s post holes since he would have to complete the two days by noon of day after tomorrow in order to finish what he would need to do since he would have to make one trip into town himself.

Or he could have walked back home just in time to eat his noon meal and then walk back, since he would already have lost a whole day anyway. But They would certainly not miss that chance; as soon as he was out of sight, the buckboard would return from Punkin Creek and Varner would get out of it. So he waited, through noon when, as soon as Jody left to go home to dinner, Lump hacked off a segment of hoop cheese and took a handful of crackers from the barrel.

“Ain’t you going to eat no dinner?” Lump said. “Will won’t miss it.”

“No,” Mink said.

“I’ll put it on your furnish then, if you’re all that tender about one of Will Varner’s nickels,” Lump said.

“I’m not hungry,” he said. But there was one thing he could be doing, one preparation he could be making while he waited, since it was not

far. So he went there, to the place he had already chosen, and did what was necessary since he already knew what Varner was going to tell him, and return to the store and yes, at exactly midafternoon, just exactly right to exhaust the balance of the whole working day, the buckboard came up and Varner got out and was tying the lines to the usual gallery post when Mink came up to him.

“All right,” Varner said. “Now what?”

“A little information about the Law,” he said. “This here pound-fee law.”

“What?” Varner said.

“That’s right,” he said, peaceful and easy, his face quiet and gentle as smiling. “I thought I had finished working out them thirty-seven and a half-bit days at sundown last night. Only when I went this morning to get my cow, it seems like I ain’t quite yet, that I owe two more days for the pound fee.”

“Hell fire,” Varner said. He stood over the smaller man, cursing. “Did Houston tell you that?”

“That’s right,” he said.

“Hell fire,” Varner said again. He dragged a huge worn leather wallet strapped like a suitcase from his hip pocket and took a dollar bill from it. “Here,” he said.

“So the Law does say I got to pay another dollar before I can get my cow.”

“Yes,” Varner said. “If Houston wants to claim it. Take this dollar—”

“I don’t need it,” he said, already turning. “Me and Houston don’t deal in money, we deal in post holes. I jest wanted to know the Law. And if that’s the Law, I reckon there ain’t nothing for a law-abiding feller like me to do but jest put up with it. Because if folks don’t put up with the Law, what’s the use of all the trouble and expense of having it?”

“Wait,” Varner said. “Don’t you go back there. Don’t you go near Houston’s place. You go on home and wait. I’ll bring your cow to you as soon as I get hold of Quick.”

“That’s all right,” he said. “Maybe I ain’t got as many post holes in me as Houston has dollars, but I reckon I got enough for just two more days.”

“Mink!” Varner said. “Mink! Come back here!” But he was gone. But there was no hurry now; the day was already ruined; until tomorrow morning, when he was in Houston’s new pasture until sundown. This time he hid the tools under a bush as he always did when he would return tomorrow, and went home and ate the sowbelly and flour gravy and undercooked biscuits; they had one timepiece, the tin alarm clock which he set for eleven and rose again then; he had left coffee in the pot and some of the meat cold in the congealed skillet and two biscuits so it was almost exactly midnight when the savage baying of the Bluetick hound brought the Negro to his door and he, Mink, said, “Hit’s Mister Snopes. Reporting for work. Hit’s jest gone exactly midnight for the record.” Because he would have to do this in order to quit at noon. And They — Houston — were still watching him because when the sun said noon and he carried the tools back to the fence corner, his cow was already tied there in a halter, which he removed and tied his ploughline around her horns and this time he didn’t lead her but, himself at a trot, drove her trotting before him by lashing her across the hocks with the end of the rope.

Because he was short for time, to get her back home and into the lot. Nor would he have time to eat his dinner, again today, with five miles still to do, even straight across country, to catch the mail carrier before he left Varner’s store at two o’clock for Jefferson, since Varner did not carry ten-gauge buckshot shells. But his wife and daughters were at the table, which at least saved argument, the necessity to curse them silent or perhaps even to have actually to strike, hit his wife, in order to go to the hearth and dig out the loose brick and take from the snuff tin behind it the single five-dollar bill which through all vicissitudes they kept there as the boat owner will sell or pawn or lose all his gear but

will still cling on to one life preserver or ring buoy. Because he had five shells for the ancient ten-gauge gun, ranging from bird shot to one Number Two for turkey or geese. But he had had them for years, he did not remember how long; besides, even if he were guaranteed that they would fire, Houston deserved better than this.

So he folded the bill carefully into the fob pocket of his overalls and caught the mail carrier and by four that afternoon Jefferson was in sight across the last valley and by simple precaution, a simple instinctive preparatory gesture, he thrust his fingers into the fob pocket, then suddenly dug frantically, himself outwardly immobile, into the now vacant pocket where he knew he had folded and stowed carefully the bill, then sat immobile beside the mail carrier while the buckboard began to descend the hill. I got to do it he thought so I might as well and then said quietly aloud, "All right, I reckon I'll take that-ere bill now."

"What?" the carrier said.

"That-ere five-dollar bill that was in my pocket when I got in this buggy back yonder at Varner's."

"Why, you little son of a bitch," the carrier said. He pulled the buckboard off to the side of the road and wrapped the lines around the whip stock and got out and came around to Mink's side of the vehicle. "Get out," he said.

Now I got to fight him Mink thought and I ain't got no knife and likely he will beat me to ere a stick I try to grab. So I might jest as well get it over with and got out of the buckboard, the carrier giving him time to get his puny and vain hands up. Then a shocking blow which Mink didn't even feel very much, aware instead rather merely of the hard ungiving proneness of the earth, ground against his back, lying there, peaceful almost, watching the carrier get back into the buckboard and drive on.

Then he got up. He thought I not only could a saved a trip, I might still had them five dollars. But for only a moment; he was already in the

road, already walking steadily on toward town as if he knew what he was doing.

Which he did, he had already remembered: two, three years ago it was when Solon Quick or Vernon Tull or whoever it was had seen the bear, the last bear in that part of the country, when it ran across Varner's mill dam and into the thicket, and how the hunt had been organised and somebody rode a horse in to Jefferson to get hold of Ike McCaslin and Walter Ewell, the best hunters in the country, and they came out with their buckshot big-game shells and the bear and deer hounds and set the standers and drove the bottom where the bear had been seen but it was gone by then.

So he knew what to do, or at least where to try, until he crossed the Square and entered the hardware store where McCaslin was junior partner and saw McCaslin's eyes. Mink thought quietly Hit won't do no good. He has done spent too much time in the woods with deer and bears and panthers that either are or they ain't, right quick and now and not no shades between. He won't know how to believe a lie even if I could tell him one. But he had to try.

"What do you want with two buckshot shells?" McCaslin said.

"A nigger came in this morning and said he seen that bear's foot in the mud at Blackwater Slough."

"No," McCaslin said. "What do you want with buckshot shells?"

"I can pay you soon as I gin my cotton," Mink said.

"No," McCaslin said. "I ain't going to let you have them. There ain't anything out there at Frenchman's Bend you need to shoot buckshot at."

It was not that he was hungry so much, even though he hadn't eaten since midnight: it was simply that he would have to pass the time some way until tomorrow morning when he would find out whether the mail carrier would take him back to Varner's store or not. He knew a small dingy back-street eating place owned by the sewing machine agent,

Ratliff, who was well known in Frenchman's Bend, where, if he had a half a dollar or even forty cents, he could have had two hamburgers and a nickel's worth of bananas and still had twenty-five cents left.

For that he could have had a bed in the Commercial Hotel (an unpainted two-storey frame building on a back street also; in two years his cousin Flem would own it though of course Mink didn't know that now. In fact, he had not even begun to think about his cousin yet, not once again after that moment when he entered Varner's store yesterday morning, where until his and his wife's departure for Texas last August, the first object he would have seen on entering it would have been Flem), but all he had to do was to pass time until eight o'clock tomorrow morning and if it cost cash money just to pass time he would have been in the poorhouse years ago.

Now it was evening, the lights had come on around the Square, the lights from the drugstore falling outward across the pavement, staining the pavement with dim rose and green from the red- and green-liquid-filled jars in the windows; he could see the soda fountain and the young people, young men and girls in their city clothes eating and drinking the gaudy sweet concoctions, and he could watch them, the couples, young men and girls and old people and children, all moving in one direction.

Then he heard music, a piano, loud. He followed also and saw in a vacant lot the big high plank stockade with its entrance beside the lighted ticket window: the Airdome they called it; he had seen it before from the outside by day while in town for Saturdays, and three times at night too, lighted as now.

But never the inside because on the three previous times he had been in Jefferson after dark he had ridden a mule in from Frenchman's Bend with companions of his age and sex to take the early train to a Memphis brothel with in his pocket the few meagre dollars he had wrenched as though by main strength from his bare livelihood, as he had likewise wrenched the two days he would be gone from earning the replacement of them, and in his blood a need far more urgent and passionate than a moving-picture show.

Though this time he could have spared the dime it would cost. Instead he stood a little aside while the line of patrons crept slowly past the ticket window until the last one passed inside. Then the glare and glow of light from beyond the fence blinked out and into a cold flickering; approaching the fence and laying his eye to a crack he could see through the long vertical interstice a section, a fragment — the dark row of motionless heads above which the whirring cone of light burst, shattered into the passionate and evanescent posturings where danced and flickered the ephemeral hopes and dreams, tantalising and inconsequent since he could see only his narrow vertical strip of it, until a voice spoke from the ticket window behind him: “Pay a dime and go inside. Then you can see.”

“No much obliged,” he said. He went on. The Square was empty now, until the show would let out and once more the young people, young men and girls, would drink and eat the confections which he had never tasted either, before strolling home.

He had hoped maybe to see one of the automobiles; there were two in Jefferson already: the red racer belonging to the mayor, Mr de Spain, and the White Steamer that the president of the old bank, the Bank of Jefferson, owned (Colonel Sartoris, the other rich bank president, president of the new bank, not only wouldn't own an automobile, he even had a law passed three years ago that no motor-driven vehicle could operate on the streets of Jefferson after the home-made automobile a man named Buffaloe had made in his back yard frightened the colonel's matched team into running away).

But he didn't see either one; the Square was still empty when he crossed it. Then the hotel, the Holston House, the drummers sitting in leather chairs along the sidewalk in the pleasant night; one of the livery-stable hacks was already there, the Negro porter loading the grips and sample cases in it for the south-bound train.

So he had better walk on, to be in time, even though the four lighted faces of the clock on top of the courthouse said only ten minutes past

eight and he knew by his own experience that the New Orleans train from Memphis Junction didn't pass Jefferson until two minutes to nine. Though he knew too that freight trains might pass at almost any time, let alone the other passenger train, the one his experience knew too, going north at half-past four. So just by spending the night, without even moving, he would see certainly two and maybe five or six trains before daylight.

He had left the Square, passing the dark homes where some of the old people who didn't go to the picture show either sat in dim rocking-chairs in the cool dark of the yards, then a section all Negro homes, even with electric lights too, peaceful, with no worries, no need to fight and strive single-handed, not to gain right and justice because they were already lost, but just to defend the principle of them, his rights to them, but instead could talk a little while and then go even into a nigger house and just lay down and sleep in place of walking all the way to the depot just to have something to look at until the durn mail carrier left at eight o'clock tomorrow.

Then the depot: the red and green eyes of the signal lamps, the hotel bus and the livery-stable hacks and Lucius Hogganbeck's automobile jitney, the long electric-lighted shed already full of the men and boys come down to see the train pass, that were there the three times he had got off of it, looking at him also like he had come from a heap further than a Memphis whorehouse.

Then the train itself: the four whistle blasts for the north crossing, then the headlight, the roar, the clanging engine, the engineer and the fireman crouched dim and high above the hissing steam, slowing, the baggage and day coaches then the dining-car and the cars in which people slept while they rode. It stopped, a Negro even more uppity than Houston's getting out with his footstool, then the conductor, and the rich men and women getting gaily aboard where the other rich ones were already asleep, followed by the nigger with his footstool and the conductor, the conductor leaning back to wave at the engine, the engine speaking back to the conductor, to all of them, with the first deep short ejaculations of starting.

Then the twin ruby lamps on the last car diminished rapidly together in one last flick! at the curve, the four blasts came fading back from the south crossing and he thought of distance, of New Orleans where he had never been and perhaps never would go, with distance even beyond New Orleans, with Texas somewhere in it; and now for the first time he began really to think about his absent cousin: the one Snopes of them all who had risen, broken free, had either been born with or had learned, taught himself, the knack or the luck to cope with, hold his own, handle the They and Them which he, Mink, apparently did not have the knack or the luck to do. Maybe I ought to waited till he got back he thought, turning at last back to the now empty and vacant platform, noticing only then that he had thought, not should wait for Flem, but should have waited, it already being too late.

The waiting-room was empty too, with its hard wooden benches and the cold iron tobacco-spattered stove. He knew about signs in depots against spitting but he never heard of one against a man without a ticket sitting down. Anyhow, he would find out — a small man anyway, fleshless, sleepless and more or less foodless too for going on twenty-two hours now, looking in the empty barren room beneath the single unshaded bulb as forlorn and defenceless as a child, a boy, in faded patched overalls and shirt, sockless in heavy worn iron-hard brogan shoes and a sweat-and-grease-stained black felt hat. From beyond the ticket window he could hear the intermittent clatter of the telegraph, and two voices where the night operator talked to somebody now and then, until the voices ceased and the telegraph operator in his green eyeshade was looking at him through the window. “You want something?” he said.

“No much obliged,” Mink said. “When does the next train pass?”

“Four twenty-two,” the operator said. “You waiting for it?”

“That’s right,” he said.

“That’s six hours off yet. You can go home and go to bed and then come back.”

“I live out at Frenchman’s Bend,” he said.

“Oh,” the operator said. Then the face was gone from the window and he sat again. It was quiet now and he even began to notice, hear the katydids in the dark trees beyond the tracks buzzing and chirring back and forth, interminable and peaceful, as if they might be the sound of the peaceful minutes and seconds themselves of the dark peaceful summer night clicking to one another.

Then the whole room shook and trembled, filled with thunder; the freight train was already passing and even now he couldn't seem to get himself awake enough to get outside in time. He was still sitting on the hard bench, cramped and cold while the ruby lights on the caboose flicked across the windows then across the open door, sucking the thunder behind them; the four crossing blasts came back and died away. This time the operator was in the room with him and the overhead bulb had been switched off. “You were asleep,” he said.

“That's right,” Mink said, “I nigh missed that un.”

“Why don't you lay down on the bench and be comfortable?”

“You ain't got no rule against it?”

“No,” the operator said. “I'll call you when they signal Number Eight.”

“Much obliged,” he said, and lay back. The operator went back into the room where the telegraph was already chattering again. Yes he thought peacefully if Flem had been here he could a stopped all this on that first day before it ever got started. Working for Varner like he done, being in with Houston and Quick and all the rest of them. He could do it now if I could jest a waited. Only it wasn't me that couldn't wait. It was Houston his-self that wouldn't give me time.

Then immediately he knew that that was wrong too, that no matter how long he had waited They Themselves would have prevented Flem from getting back in time. He must drain this cup too: must face, accept this last ultimate useless and reasonless risk and jeopardy too just to show how much he could stand before They would let his cousin come back where he could save him. This same cup also contained Houston's life, but he wasn't thinking about Houston. In a way, he had quit

thinking about Houston at the same moment when Varner told him he would have to pay the pound fee. "All right," he said peacefully, aloud this time, "if that's what They want, I reckon I can stand that too."

At half-past seven he was standing in the small lot behind the post office where R.F.D. carriers' buckboards would stand until the carriers came out the back door with the bags of mail. He had already discerned the one for Frenchman's Bend and he stood quietly, not too near: simply where the carrier could not help but see him, until the man who had knocked him down yesterday came out and saw, recognised, him, a quick glance, then came on and stowed the mail pouch into the buckboard, Mink not moving yet, just standing there, waiting, to be refused or not refused, until the carrier got in and released the wrapped lines from the whip stock and said, "All right. I reckon you got to get back to your crop. Come on," and Mink approached and got in.

It was just past eleven when he got down at Varner's store and said Much obliged and began the five-mile walk home. So he was home in time for dinner, eating steadily and quietly while his wife nagged and whined at him (evidently she hadn't noticed the disturbed brick) about where he was last night and why, until he finished, drank the last of his coffee and rose from the table and with vicious and obscene cursing drove the three of them, his wife and the two girls, with the three hoes out to the patch to chop out his early cotton, while he lay on the floor in the cool draft of the dog-trot hall, sleeping away the afternoon.

Then it was tomorrow morning. He took from its corner behind the door the tremendous ten-gauge double-barrelled shotgun which had belonged to his grandfather, the twin hammers standing above the receiver almost as tall as the ears of a rabbit. "Now what?" his wife said, cried. "Where you fixing to go with that?"

"After a rabbit," he said. "I'm burnt out on sowbelly," and with two of the heaviest loads out of his meagre stock of Number-Two and -Five and -Eight-shot shells, he went not even by back roads and lanes but by hedgerows and patches of woods and ditches and whatever else would keep him private and unseen, back to the ambush he had prepared two

days ago while waiting for Varner to return, where the road from Houston's to Varner's store crossed the creek bridge — the thicket beside the road, with a log to sit on and the broken-off switches not yet healed over where he had opened a sort of port to point the gun through, with the wooden planks of the bridge fifty yards up the road to serve as an alert beneath the stallion's hooves in case he dozed off.

Because sometimes a week would pass before Houston would ride in to the store. But sooner or later he would do so. And if all he, Mink, needed to beat Them with was just waiting, They could have given up three months ago and saved Themselves and everybody else trouble. So it was not the first day nor the second either that he would go home with no rabbit, to eat his supper in quiet and inflexible silence while his wife nagged and whined at him about why there was none, until he would push away his empty plate and in a cold level vicious monotone curse her silent.

And it might not have been the third day either. In fact, he couldn't remember how many days it had been, when at last he heard the sudden thunder of the hooves on the bridge and then saw them: the stallion boring, frothing a little, wrenching its arrogant vicious head at the snaffle and curb both with which Houston rode it, the big lean hound bounding along beside it.

He cocked the two hammers and pushed the gun through the porthole, and even as he laid the sight on Houston's chest, leading him just a little, his finger already taking up the slack in the front trigger, he thought And even now.

They still ain't satisfied yet as the first shell clicked dully without exploding, his finger already moving back to the rear trigger, thinking And even yet as this one crashed and roared, thinking how if there had only been time, space, between the roar of the gun and the impact of the shot, for him to say to Houston and for Houston to have to hear it: "I ain't shooting you because of them thirty-seven and a half four-bit days.

That's all right; I done long ago forgot and forgive that. Likely Will Varner couldn't do nothing else, being a rich man too and all you rich folks has got to stick together or else maybe some day the ones that ain't rich might take a notion to raise up and take hit away from you. That ain't why I shot you. I killed you because of that-ere extry one-dollar pound fee."

Two

SO THE JURY said "Guilty" and the Judge said "Life", but he wasn't even listening. Because something had happened to him. Even while the sheriff was bringing him in to town that first day, even though he knew that his cousin was still in Texas, he believed that at every mile post Flem or a messenger from him would overtake them or step into the road and stop them, with the money or the word or whatever it would be that would make the whole thing dissolve, vanish like a dream.

And during all the long weeks while he waited in jail for his trial, he would stand at the little window of his cell, his grimed hands gripped among the bars and his face craned and pressed against them, to watch a slice of the street before the jail and the slice of the Square which his cousin would have to cross to come to the jail and abolish the dream, free him, get him out. "Which is all I want," he would tell himself. "Jest to get out of here and go back home and farm. That don't seem like a heap to ask."

And at night too still standing there, his face invisible but his wan hands looking almost white, almost clean in the grimed interstices against the cell's darkness, watching the free people, men and women and young people who had nothing but peaceful errands or pleasures as they strolled in the evening cool toward the Square, to watch the picture show or eat ice-cream in the drugstore or maybe just stroll peaceful and free because they were free, he beginning at last to call down to them, timidly at first, then louder and louder, more and more urgent as they would pause, almost as though startled, to look up at his window and then seem almost to hurry on, like they were trying to get beyond where he could see them; finally he began to offer, promise them

money: "Hey! Mister! Missus! Somebody! anybody that will send word out to Varner's store to Flem Snopes! He will pay you! Ten dollars! Twenty dollars!"

And even when the day finally came and they brought him handcuffed into the room where he would face his jeopardy, he had not even looked once toward the Bench, the dais which could well be his Golgotha too, for looking, staring out over the pale identical anonymous faces of the crowd for that of his cousin or at least the messenger from him; right up to the moment when the Judge himself had to lean down from his high desk and say, "You, Snopes! Look at me. Did you or didn't you kill Jack Houston?" and he answered: "Don't bother me now. Can't you see I'm busy?"

And the next day too, while the lawyers shouted and wrangled and nagged, he hearing none of it even if he could have understood it, for watching the door at the rear where his cousin or the messenger would have to enter; and on the way back to the cell, still handcuffed, his unflagging glance which at first had been merely fretted and impatient but which now was beginning to be concerned, a little puzzled and quite sober, travelling rapid and quick and searching from face to face as he passed them or they passed him, to stand again at his cell window, his unwashed hands gripping the grimed bars and his face wrenched and pressed against them to see as much as possible of the street and the Square below where his kinsman or the messenger would have to pass.

So when on the third day, handcuffed again to the jailor he realised that he had crossed the Square without once looking at one of the faces which gaped at him, and had entered the courtroom and taken his accustomed place in the dock still without once looking out over the massed faces toward that rear door, he still did not dare admit to himself that he knew why. He just sat there, looking as small and frail and harmless as a dirty child while the lawyers ranted and wrangled, until the end of the day when the jury said Guilty and the Judge said Life and he was returned, handcuffed, to his cell, and the door clanged to and he sitting now, quiet and still and composed on the mattressless

steel cot, this time only looking at the small barred window where for months now he had stood sixteen or eighteen hours a day in quenchless expectation and hope.

Only then did he say it, think it, let it take shape in his mind: He ain't coming. Likely he's been in Frenchman's Bend all the time. Likely he heard about that cow clean out there in Texas and jest waited till the word came back they had me safe in jail, and then come back to make sho they would do ever thing to me they could now that they had me helpless. He might even been hid in the back of that room all the time, to make sho wouldn't nothing slip up before he finally got rid of me for good and all.

So now he had peace. He had thought he had peace as soon as he realised what he would have to do about Houston, and that Houston himself wasn't going to let him wait until Flem got back. But he had been wrong. That wasn't peace then; it was too full of too many uncertainties: such as if anybody would send word to Flem about his trouble at all, let alone in time.

Or even if the word was sent in time, would the message find Flem in time. And even if Flem got the message in time, there might be a flood or a wreck on the railroad so he couldn't get back in time.

But all that was finished now. He didn't have to bother and worry at all now since all he had to do was wait, and he had already proved to himself that he could do that. Just to wait: that's all he needed; he didn't even need to ask the jailor to send a message since the lawyer himself had said he would come back to see him after supper.

So he ate his supper when they brought it — the same sidemeat and molasses and undercooked biscuits he would have had at home; this in fact a little better since the meat had more lean in it than he could afford to eat. Except that his at home had been free, eaten in freedom. But then he could stand that too if that was all they demanded of him now. Then he heard the feet on the stairs, the door clashed, letting the lawyer in, and clashed again on both of them — the lawyer young and

eager, just out of law school they told him, whom the Judge had appointed for him — commanded rather, since even he, Mink, busy as he was at the time, could tell that the man didn't really want any part of him and his trouble — he never did know why then because then he still thought that all the Judge or anybody else needed to do to settle the whole business was just to send out to Frenchman's Bend and get hold of his cousin.

Too young and eager in fact, which was why he — the lawyer — had made such a hash of the thing. But that didn't matter now either; the thing now was to get on to what came next. So he didn't waste any time. "All right," he said. "How long will I have to stay there?" "It's Parchman — the penitentiary," the lawyer said. "Can't you understand that?"

"All right," he said again. "How long will I have to stay?" "He gave you life," the lawyer said. "Didn't you even hear him? For the rest of your life. Until you die." "All right," he said for the third time, with that peaceful, that almost compassionate patience: "How long will I have to stay?"

By that time even this lawyer understood. "Oh. That depends on you and your friends — if you have any. It may be all your life, like Judge Brummage said. But in twenty or twenty-five years you will be eligible under the Law to apply for pardon or parole — if you have responsible friends to support your petition, and your record down there at Parchman don't hold anything against you."

"Suppose a man ain't got friends," he said. "Folks that hide in bushes and shoot other folks off their horses without saying Look out first or even whistling, don't have," the lawyer said. "So you won't have anybody left except you to get you out."

"All right," he said, with that unshakable, that infinite patience, "that's what I'm trying to get you to stop talking long enough to tell me. What do I have to do to get out in twenty or twenty-five years?"

“Not to try to escape yourself or engage in any plot to help anybody else escape. Not to get in a fight with another prisoner or a guard. To be on time for whatever they tell you to do, and do it without shirking or complaining or talking back, until they tell you to quit. In other words, to start right now doing all the things that, if you had just been doing them all the time since that day last fall when you decided to let Mr Houston winter your cow for nothing, you wouldn’t be sitting in this cell here trying to ask somebody how to get out of it. But mainly, don’t try to escape.”

“Escape?” he said.

“Break out. Try to get away.”

“Try?” he said.

“Because you can’t,” the lawyer said with a kind of seething yet patient rage. “Because you can’t escape. You can’t make it. You never can. You can’t plan it without some of the others catching on to it and they always try to escape with you and so you all get caught.

And even if they don’t go with you, they tell the Warden on you and you are caught just the same. And even if you manage to keep everybody else from knowing about it and go alone, one of the guards shoots you before you can climb the fence. So even if you are not in the dead house or the hospital, you are back in the penitentiary with twenty-five more years added on to your sentence. Do you understand now?”

“That’s all I got to do to get out in twenty or twenty-five years. Not try to escape. Not get in no fights with nobody. Do whatever they tell me to do, as long as they say to do it. But mainly not try to escape. That’s all I got to do to get out in twenty or twenty-five years.”

“That’s right,” the lawyer said.

“All right,” he said. “Now go back and ask that judge if that’s right, and if he says it is, to send me a wrote-out paper saying so.”

“So you don’t trust me,” the lawyer said.

“I don’t trust nobody,” he said. “I ain’t got time to waste twenty or twenty-five years to find out whether you know what you’re talking about or not. I got something I got to attend to when I get back out. I want to know. I want a wrote-out paper from that judge.”

“Maybe you never did trust me then,” the lawyer said. “Maybe you think I made a complete bust of your whole case. Maybe you think that if it hadn’t been for me, you wouldn’t even be here now. Is that it?”

And he, Mink, still with that inflexible and patient calm: “You done the best you knowed. You jest wasn’t the man for the job. You’re young and eager, but that wasn’t what I needed. I needed a trader, a smart trader, that knowed how to swap. You wasn’t him. Now you go get that paper from that judge.”

Now he, the lawyer, even tried to laugh. “Not me,” he said. “The Court discharged me from this case right after he sentenced you this afternoon. I just stopped in to say good-bye and to see if there was anything else I could do for you. But evidently folks that don’t have friends don’t need well-wishers either.”

“But I ain’t discharged you yet,” Mink said, rising now, without haste, the lawyer already on his feet, springing, leaping back against the locked door, looking at the small figure moving toward him as slight and frail and harmless-looking as a child and as deadly as a small viper — a half-grown asp or cobra or krait. Then the lawyer was shouting, bellowing, even while the turnkey’s feet galloped on the stairs and the door clashed open and the turnkey stood in it with a drawn pistol.

“What is it?” the turnkey said. “What did he try to do?”

“Nothing,” the lawyer said. “It’s all right. I’m through here. Let me out.” Only he was not through; he only wished he were. He didn’t even wait until morning. Instead, not fifteen minutes later he was in the hotel room of the Circuit Judge who had presided on the case and pronounced the sentence, he, the lawyer, still breathing hard, still incredulous at his recent jeopardy and still amazed at his escape from it.

“He’s crazy, I tell you!” he said. “He’s dangerous! Just to send him to Parchman, where he will be eligible for parole and freedom in only twenty or twenty-five years, let alone if some of his kin — God knows he has enough — or someone with an axe to grind or maybe just some bleeding-heart meddler with access to the Governor’s ear, doesn’t have him out before that time even! He must go to Jackson, the asylum, for life, where he’ll be safe. No: we’ll be safe.”

And ten minutes after that the District Attorney who had prosecuted the case was in the room too, saying (to the lawyer): “So now you want a suspended sentence, and a motion for a new trial. Why didn’t you think of this before?”

“You saw him too,” the lawyer said, cried. “You were in that courtroom with him all day long for three days too!”

“That’s right,” the District Attorney said. “That’s why I’m asking you why now.”

“Then you haven’t seen him since!” the lawyer said. “Come up to that cell and look at him now, like I did thirty minutes ago!”

But the Judge was an old man, he wouldn’t go then so it was next morning when the turnkey unlocked the cell and let the three of them in where the frail-looking fleshless small figure in the patched and faded overalls and shirt and the sockless iron-stiff brogans got up from the cot. They had shaved him this morning and his hair was combed too, parted and flattened down with water across his skull.

“Come in, gentlemen,” he said. “I ain’t got no chair, but likely you ain’t fixing to stay long enough to set nohow. Well, Judge, you not only brought me my wrote-out paper, you brought along two witnesses to watch you hand it to me.”

“Wait,” the lawyer said rapidly to the Judge. “Let me.” He said to Mink: “You won’t need that paper. They — the Judge — is going to give you another trial.”

Now Mink stopped. He looked at the lawyer. “What for?” he said. “I done already had one that I never got much suption out of.”

“Because that one was wrong,” the lawyer said. “That’s what we’ve come to tell you about.”

“If that un was wrong, what’s the use of wasting time and money having another one? Jest tell that feller there to bring me my hat and open that door and I’ll go back home and get back to me crop, providing I still got one.”

“No, wait,” the lawyer said. “That other trial was wrong because it sent you to Parchman. You won’t have to go to Parchman now, where you’ll have to work out in the hot sun all day long in a crop that isn’t even yours.” And now, with the pale faded grey eyes watching him as if not only were they incapable of blinking but never since birth had they ever needed to, the lawyer found himself babbling, not even able to stop it: “Not Parchman: Jackson, where you’ll have a nice room to yourself — nothing to do all day long but just rest — doctors—” and stopped then; not he that stopped his babbling but the fixed unwinking pale eyes that did it.

“Doctors,” Mink said. “Jackson.” He stared at the lawyer. “That’s where they send crazy folks.”

“Hadn’t you rather—” the District Attorney began. That was as far as he got too. He had been an athlete in college and still kept himself fit. Though even then he managed to grasp the small frantic creature only after it had hurled itself on the lawyer and both of them had gone to the floor. And even then it took him and the turnkey both to drag Mink up and away and hold him, frantic and frothing and hard to hold as a cat, panting,

“Crazy, am I? Crazy, am I? Ain’t no son a bitch going to call me crazy, I don’t care how big he is or how many of them.”

“You damn right, you little bastard,” the District Attorney panted.

“You’re going to Parchman. That’s where they’ve got the kind of doctors you need.”

So he went to Parchman, handcuffed to a deputy sheriff, the two of them transferring from smoking-car to smoking-car of local trains, this one having left the hills which he had known all his life, for the Delta which he had never seen before — the vast flat alluvial swamp of cypress and gum and brake and thicket lurked with bear and deer and panthers and snakes, out of which man was still hewing savagely and violently the rich ragged fields in which cotton stalks grew ranker and taller than a man on a horse, he, Mink, sitting with his face glued to the window like a child.

“This here’s all swamp,” he said. “It don’t look healthy.”

“It ain’t healthy,” the deputy said. “It ain’t intended to be. This is the penitentiary. I can’t imagine no more unhealth a man can have than to be locked up inside a bobwire pen for twenty or twenty-five years.

Besides, a good unhealthy place ought to just suit you; you won’t have to stay so long.”

So that’s how he saw Parchman, the penitentiary, his destination, doom, his life the Judge had said; for the rest of his life as long as he lived. But the lawyer had told him different, even if he couldn’t really trust him: only twenty-five, maybe only twenty years, and even a lawyer a man couldn’t trust could at least be trusted to know his own business that he had even went to special law school to be trained to know it, where all a judge had to do to get to be a judge was just to win a election vote-race for it.

And even if the Judge hadn’t signed a paper saying only twenty or twenty-five years, that didn’t matter either since the Judge was on the other side and would naturally lie to a man coming up against him, where a lawyer, a man’s own lawyer, wouldn’t. More: his own lawyer couldn’t lie to him, because there was some kind of rule somebody had told him about that if the client didn’t lie to his lawyer, the Law itself wouldn’t let the lawyer lie to his own client.

And even if none of that was so, that didn’t matter either because he couldn’t stay at Parchman all his life, he didn’t have time, he would

have to get out before then. And looking at the tall wire stockade with its single gate guarded day and night by men with shotguns, and inside it the low grim brick buildings with their barred windows, he thought, tried to remember, with a kind of amazement of the time when his only reason for wanting to get out was to go back home and farm, remembering it only for a moment and then no more, because now he had to get out.

He had to get out. His familiar patched faded blue overalls and shirt were exchanged now for the overalls and jumper of coarse white barred laterally with black which, according to the Judge, would have been his fate and doom until he died, if the lawyer hadn't known better.

He worked now — gangs of them — in the rich black cotton land while men on horses with shotguns across the pommels watched them, doing the only work he knew how to do, had done all his life, in a crop which would never be his for the rest of his life if the Judge had his way, thinking And that's all right too. Hit's even better. If a feller jest wants to do something, he might make it and he might not. But if he's GOT to do something, can't nothing stop him.

And in the wooden bunk at night too, sheetless, with a cheap coarse blanket and his rolled-up clothing for a pillow, thinking, dinning it into himself since he was now having to change overnight and forever for twenty or twenty-five years his whole nature and character and being: To do whatever they tell me to do. Not to talk back to nobody. Not to get into no fights. That's all I got to do for jest twenty-five or maybe even jest twenty years. But mainly not to try to escape.

Nor did he even count off the years as they accomplished. Instead, he simply trod them behind him into oblivion beneath the heavy brogan shoes in the cotton middles behind the mule which drew the plough and then the sweep, then with the chopping and thinning hoe and at last with the long dragging sack into which he picked, gathered the cotton. He didn't need to count them; he was in the hands of the Law now and as long as he obeyed the four rules set down by the Law for

his side, the Law would have to obey its single rule of twenty-five years or maybe even just twenty.

He didn't know how many years it had been when the letter came, whether it was two or three as he stood in the Warden's office, turning the stamped pencil-addressed envelope in his hand while the Warden watched him. "You can't read?" the Warden said.

"I can read reading, but I can't read writing good."

"You want me to open it?" the Warden said.

"All right," he said. So the Warden did.

"It's from your wife. She wants to know when you want her to come to see you, and if you want her to bring the girls."

Now he held the letter himself, the page of foolscap out of a school writing-pad, pencilled over, spidery and hieroglyph, not one jot less forever beyond him than Arabic or Sanscrit. "Yettie can't even read reading, let alone write writing," he said. "Miz Tull must a wrote it for her."

"Well?" the Warden said. "What do you want me to tell her?"

"Tell her it ain't no use in her coming all the way here because I'll be home soon."

"Oh," the Warden said. "You're going to get out soon, are you?" He looked at the small frail creature not much larger than a fifteen-year-old boy, who had been one of his charges for three years now without establishing an individual entity in the prison's warp. Not a puzzle, not an enigma: he was not anything at all; no record of run-in or reprimand with or from any guard or trusty or official, never any trouble with any other inmate.

A murderer, in for life, who in the Warden's experience fell always into one of two categories: either an irreconcilable, with nothing more to lose, a constant problem and trouble to the guards and the other prisoners; or a sycophant, sucking up to whatever of his overlords could make things easiest for him. But not this one: who assumed his

assigned task each morning and worked steady and unflagging in the cotton as if it was his own crop he was bringing to fruit. More: he worked harder for this crop from which he would not derive one cent of profit than, in the Warden's experience, men of his stamp and kind worked in their own. "How?" the Warden said.

Mink told him; it was automatic now after three years; he had only to open his mouth and breathe: "By doing what they tell me to. Not talking back and not fighting. Not to try to escape. Mainly that: not to try to escape."

"So in either seventeen or twenty-two years you'll go home," the Warden said. "You've already been here three."

"Have I?" he said. "I ain't kept count. — No," he said. "Not right away. There's something I got to attend to first."

"What?" the Warden said.

"Something private. When I finish that, then I'll come on home. Write her that." Yes sir he thought. It looks like I done had to come all the way to Parchman jest to turn right around and go back home and kill Flem.

Three

V. K. Ratliff

LIKELY WHAT BOLLIxed Montgomery Ward at first, and for the next two or three days too, was exactly why Flem wanted him specifically in Parchman. Why wouldn't no other equally secure retired place do, such as Atlanta or Leavenworth or maybe even Alcatraz two thousand miles away out in California, where old Judge Long would a already had him on the first train leaving Jefferson while he was still looking at the top one of them French post cards; jest exactly why wouldn't no other place do Flem to have Montgomery Ward sent to but Parchman, Mississippi.

Because even in the initial excitement, Montgomery Ward never had one moment's confusion about what was actively happening to him.

The second moment after Lawyer and Hub walked in the door, he knowed that at last something was happening that he had been expecting ever since whenever that other moment was when Flem found out or suspected that whatever was going on up at that alley had a money profit in it.

The only thing that puzzled him was, why Flem was going to all that extra trouble and complication jest to usurp him outen that nekkid-picture business. That was like the story about the coon in the tree that asked the name of the feller aiming the gun at him and when the feller told him, the coon says, "Hell fire, is that who you are? Then you don't need to waste all this time and powder jest on me. Stand to one side and I'll climb down."

Not to mention reckless. Having Flem Snopes take his business away from him was all right. He had been expecting that: that sooner or later his turn would come too, running as he did the same risk with ever body else in Yoknapatawpha County owning a business solvent enough for Flem to decide he wanted it too.

But to let the county attorney and the county sheriff get a-holt of them pictures, the two folks of all the folks in Yoknapatawpha County that not even Grover Winbush would a been innocent enough to dream would ever turn them loose again — Lawyer Stevens, so dedicated to civic improvement and the moral advancement of folks that his purest notion of duty was browbeating twelve-year-old boys into running five-mile foot races when all they really wanted to do was jest to stay at home and set fire to the barn; and Hub Hampton, a meat-eating Hard-Shell-Baptist deacon whose purest notion of pleasure was counting off the folks he personally knowed was already bound for hell.

Why, in fact, Montgomery Ward had to go anywhere, if all his uncle or cousin wanted was jest to take his business away from him, except maybe jest to stay outen sight for a week or maybe a month or two to

give folks time to forget about them nekkid pictures, or anyway that anybody named Snopes was connected with them. Flem being a banker now and having to deal not jest in simple usury but in respectability too.

No, what really should a puzzled Montgomery Ward, filled him in fact with delighted surprise, was how he had managed to last even this long. It never needed the Law nor Flem Snopes neither to close out that studio, pull the blinds down (or rather up) for good and all on the French-postcard industry in Jefferson, Mississippi. Grover Winbush done that when he let whoever it was ketch him slipping outen that alley at two o'clock that morning. No: Grover Winbush had done already wrecked and ruined that business in Jefferson at the same moment when he found out there was a side door in a Jefferson alley with what you might call a dry whorehouse behind it.

No, that business was wrecked in Jefferson the same moment Grover Winbush got appointed night marshal, Grover having jest exactly enough sense to be a night policeman providing the two wasn't no bigger and never stayed awake no later than Jefferson, Mississippi, since that would be the one job in all paid laborious endeavour — leaning all night against a lamppost looking at the empty Square — you would a thought he could a held indefinitely, providing the influence of whoever got it for him or give it to him lasted that long, without stumbling over anything he could do any harm with, to his-self or the job or a innocent bystander or maybe all three; and so naturally he would be caught by somebody, almost anybody, the second or third time he come slipping outen that alley.

Which was jest a simple unavoidable occupational hazard of running a business like that in the same town where Grover Winbush was night marshal, which Montgomery Ward knowed as well as anybody else that knowed Grover. So when the business had been running over a year without no untoward interruption, Montgomery Ward figgered that whoever had been catching Grover slipping in and out of that alley after midnight once a month for the last nine or ten of them, was maybe

business acquaintances Grover had made raiding crap games or catching them with a pint of moonshine whiskey in their hind pockets.

Or who knows? Maybe even Flem his-self had got a-holt of each one of them in time, protecting not so much his own future interests and proposed investments, because maybe at that time he hadn't even found out he wanted to go into the a-teelyer (that's what Montgomery Ward called it; he had the name painted on the window: Atelier Monty) business, but simply protecting and defending solvency and moderate profit itself, not jest out of family loyalty to another Snopes but from pure and simple principle, even if he was a banker now and naturally would have to compromise, to a extent at least, profit with respectability, since any kind of solvency redounds to the civic interest providing it don't get caught, and even respectability can go hand in hand with civic interest providing the civic interest has got sense enough to take place after dark and not make no loud noise at it.

So when the county attorney and the county sheriff walked in on him that morning, Montgomery Ward naturally believed that pure and simple destiny was simply taking its natural course, and the only puzzling thing was the downright foolhardy, let alone reckless way Flem Snopes was hoping to take advantage of destiny. I mean, getting Lawyer Stevens and Sheriff Hampton into it, letting them get one whiff or flash of them nekkid pictures.

Because of what you might call the late night shift his business had developed into, the Square never seen Montgomery Ward before noon. So until Lawyer and Hub told him about it, he hadn't had time yet to hear about them two fellers robbing Uncle Willy Christian's drug cabinet last night, that none of the folks watching the robbers through the front window could find hide nor hair of Grover Winbush to tell him about it until Grover finally come slipping back outen Montgomery Ward's alley, by which time even the robbers, let alone the folks watching them, had done all went home.

I don't mean Montgomery Ward was puzzled that Lawyer and Hub was the first ones there. Naturally they would a been when his a-teelyer

business finally blowed up, no matter what was the reason for the explosion.

He would a expected them first even if Yoknapatawpha County hadn't never heard the word Flem Snopes — a meal-mouthed sanctimonious Harvard- and Europe-educated lawyer that never even needed the excuse of his office and salaried job to meddle in anything providing it wasn't none of his business and wasn't doing him no harm; and old pussel-gutted Hampton that could be fetched along to look at anything, even a murder, once somebody remembered he was Sheriff and told him about it and where it was. No.

What baffled Montgomery Ward was, what in creation kind of a aberration could Flem Snopes been stricken with to leave him believing he could use Lawyer Stevens and Hub Hampton to get them pictures, and ever dream of getting them away from them.

So for a moment his faith and confidence in Flem Snopes his-self wavered and flickered you might say. For that one horrid moment he believed that Flem Snopes could be the victim of pure circumstance compounded by Grover Winbush, jest like anybody else. But only a moment.

If that durn boy that seen them two robbers in Uncle Willy's drug cabinet had to pick out to go to the late picture show that same one night in that whole week that Grover picked out to take jest one more slip up that alley to Montgomery Ward's back room; if Flem Snopes was subject to the same outrageous misfortune and coincidence that the rest of us was, then we all might jest as well pack up and quit.

So even after Lawyer and Hub told him about them two robbers in Uncle Willy's store, and that boy that his paw ought to burned his britches off for not being home in bed two hours ago, Montgomery Ward still never had one second's doubt that it had been Flem all the time — Flem his-self, with his pure and simple nose for money like a preacher's for sin and fried chicken, finding out fast and quick that profit of some degree was taking place at night behind that alley door,

and enough of it to keep folks from as far away as three county seats sneaking up and down that alley at two and three o'clock in the morning.

So all Flem needed now was to find out exactly what was going on up that alley that was that discreet and that profitable, setting his spies — not that Grover Winbush would a needed anybody calling his-self a respectable spy with pride in his profession to ketch him, since any little child hired with a ice-cream cone would a done for that — to watch who come and went around that corner; until sooner or later, and likely sooner than later, one turned up that Flem could handle.

Likely a good deal sooner than later; even spread over four counties like that business was, there wasn't many among the set Montgomery Ward drawed his clientele from that hadn't at least offered to put his name on to a piece of paper to Flem at forty or fifty percent of three or four dollars, so that Flem could say to him: "About that-ere little note of yourn. I'd like to hold the bank offen you myself, but I ain't only vice-president of it, and I can't do nothing with Manfred de Spain."

Or maybe it was Grover his-self that Flem caught, catching Grover his-self in the active flesh on that second or third time which was the absolute outside for Grover to slip outen that alley without somebody ketching him, long in fact before them two fellers robbing Uncle Willy Christian's store exposed him by rifling that prescription desk in plain sight of half Jefferson evidently going home from the late picture show except that couldn't nobody locate Grover to tell him about it.

Anyway, Flem caught somebody he could squeeze enough to find out jest what Montgomery Ward was selling behind that door. So now all Flem had to do was move in on that industry too, move Montgomery Ward outen it or move it out from under Montgomery Ward the same way he had been grazing on up through Jefferson ever since he eased me and Grover Winbush outen that café we thought we owned back there when I never had no more sense neither than to believe I could tangle with Flem.

Only, a banker now, a vice-president, not to mention being the third man, after the Negro that fired the furnace and the preacher his-self, inside the Baptist Church ever Sunday morning, and the rest of his career in Jefferson doomed to respectability like a feller in his Sunday suit trying to run through a field of cuckleburs and beggarlice, naturally Flem not only couldn't show in it, it couldn't even have no connection with the word Snopes.

So as far as Jefferson was concerned the Atelier Monty would be closed out, cleaned up and struck off the commercial register forevermore and the business moved into another alley that hadn't never heard of it before and under a management that, if possible, couldn't even spell Snopes. Or likely, if Flem had any sense, clean to another town in Montgomery Ward's old district, where it would be clean outen Grover Winbush's reach until at least next summer when he taken his next two weeks' vacation.

So all Montgomery Ward had to do, all he could do in fact, was jest to wait until Flem decided the moment was ripe to usurp him outen his a-teelyer or usurp that a-teelyer out from under him, whichever Flem seen fittest. Likely Montgomery Ward had at least one moment or two of regretful musing that his business wasn't the kind where he could a held some kind of a quick-fire sale before Flem would have time to hear about it.

But his stock in trade being such a nebulous quantity that it never had no existence except during the moment when the customer was actively buying and consuming it, the only thing he could a sold would be his capital investment itself, which would not only be contrary to all the economic laws, he wouldn't even have no nebulous stock in trade to sell to nobody during whatever time he would have left before Flem foreclosed him, which might be weeks or even months yet.

So all he could do was to apply whatever methods and means of speed-up and increased turnover was available while waiting for Flem to move, naturally speculating on jest what method Flem would finally use — whether Flem had done found some kind of handle or crowbar in

his, Montgomery Ward's, own past to prize him out, or maybe would do something as crude and unimaginative as just offering him money for it.

So he expected Flem. But he never expected Hub Hampton and Lawyer Stevens. So for what you might call a flashing moment or two after Hub and Lawyer busted in that morning, Montgomery Ward figured it was this here new respectability Flem had done got involved with: a respectability that delicate and tetchous that wouldn't nothing else suit it but it must look like the Law itself had purified the Snopes a-teelyer industry outen Jefferson, and so Flem was jest using Lawyer Stevens and Hub Hampton for a cat's-paw.

Of course another moment of thoughtful deliberation would a suggested to him that once a feller dedicated to civic improvement and the moral advancement of youth like Lawyer Stevens, and a meat-eating Hard-Shell Baptist deacon like Hub Hampton got a-holt of them nekkid photographs, there wouldn't be nothing left of that business for Flem to move nowhere except the good will.

Though them little hard pale-coloured eyes looking down at him across the top of Hub Hampton's belly wasn't hardly the time for meditation and deliberation of any kind, thoughtful or not.

In fact, Montgomery Ward was so far from being deliberate or even thinking a-tall for that matter, that it ain't surprising if in that same flashing moment he likely cast on his cousin Flem the horrid aspersion that Flem had let Lawyer Stevens and Hub Hampton outfigger him; that Flem had merely aimed to close him, Montgomery Ward, out, and was innocent enough to believe he could get them nekkid pictures back outen Hub Hampton's hands once Hub had seen them, and that that cat's-paw's real name was Flem Snopes.

Though even in his extremity Montgomery Ward had more simple sense and judgment, let alone family pride and loyalty, than to actively believe that ten thousand Lawyer Stevenses and Hub Hamptons, let alone jest one each of them, could a diddled Flem Snopes. In fact,

sooner than that foul aspersion, he would believe that Flem Snopes was subject to bad luck too, jest like a human being — not the bad luck of misreading Grover Winbush's character that Grover could slip up and down that alley two or three times a week for seven or eight months without ever body in Yoknapatawpha County ketching him at least once, but the back luck being unable to anticipate that them two robbers would pick out the same night to rob Uncle Willy Christian's drugstore that that Rouncewell boy would to climb down the drain pipe and go to the late picture show.

So all Montgomery Ward had to do now was set in his jail cell where Hub taken him and wait with what you might call almost professional detachment and interest to see how Flem was going to get them pictures back from Hub. It would take time of course; even with all his veneration and family pride for Flem Snopes, he knowed that even for Flem it wouldn't be as simple as picking up a hat or a umbrella.

So when the rest of that day passed and hadn't nothing more happened, it was exactly as he had anticipated. Naturally he had toyed with the notion that, took by surprise too, Flem might call on him, Montgomery Ward, to pick up whatever loose useful ends of information he might have without even knowing he had none. But when Flem never showed up nor sent word, if anything his admiration and veneration for Flem jest increased that much more since here was active proof that Flem wasn't going to need even what little more, even if it wasn't no more than encouragement and moral support, that Montgomery Ward could a told him.

And he anticipated right on through that night and what you might call them mutual Yoknapatawpha County bedbugs, on into the next morning too. So you can imagine his interested surprise — not alarm yet nor even astonishment: jest interest and surprise — when whatever thoughtful acquaintance (it was Euphus Tubbs, the jailor; he was a interested party too, not to mention having spent most of his life being surprised) come in that afternoon and told him how Hub Hampton had went back to the studio that morning jest in case him and Lawyer had overlooked any further evidence yesterday, and instead captured five

gallons of moonshine whiskey setting in the bottles on the shelf that Montgomery Ward his-self assumed never held nothing but photograph developer.

“Now you can go to Parchman instead of Atlanta,” Euphus says. “Which won’t be so fur away. Not to mention being in Mississippi, where a native Mississippi jailor can get the money for your keep instead of these durn judges sending our Mississippi boys clean out of the country where folks we never even heard of before can collect on them.”

Not alarm, not astonishment: jest interest and surprise and even that mostly jest interest. Because Montgomery Ward knowed that them bottles never had nothing but developer in them when him and Hub and Lawyer left the a-teelyer yesterday morning, and he knowed that Hub Hampton and Lawyer Stevens both knowed that was all there was in them, because for a feller in the nekkid-photograph business in Jefferson, Mississippi, to complicate it up with peddling whiskey, would be jest pleading for trouble, like the owner of a roulette wheel or a crap table dreaming of running a counterfeiting press in the same basement.

Because he never had one moment’s doubt it was Flem that planted that whiskey where Hub Hampton would have to find it; and this time his admiration and veneration notched right up to the absolute top because he knowed that Flem, being a banker now and having to be as tender about respectability as a unescorted young gal waking up suddenly in the middle of a drummers’ convention, not only couldn’t a afforded to deal with no local bootlegger and so probably had to go his-self back out to Frenchman’s Bend or maybe even all the way up into Beat Nine to Nub Gowrie to get it, he even had to pay twenty-five or thirty dollars of his own cash money to boot.

And indeed for a unguarded fraction of the next moment the thought might a occurred to him how them twenty-five or thirty dollars revealed that Flem too in the last analysis wasn’t immune neither to the strong and simple call of blood kinship. Though that was jest a fraction of a moment, if as much as that even, because even though Flem too at times might be victim of weakness and aberration,

wouldn't none of them ever been paying even twenty dollars for a Snopes.

No, them twenty-five or thirty dollars simply meant that it was going to be a little harder than Flem had expected or figgered. But the fact that he hadn't hesitated even twenty-four hours to pay it, showed that Flem anyhow never had no doubts about the outcome.

So naturally Montgomery Ward never had none neither, not even needing to anticipate no more but jest to wait, because by that time about half of Jefferson was doing the anticipating for him and half the waiting too, not to mention the watching. Until the next day we watched Flem cross the Square and go up the street to the jail and go into it and half a hour later come out again.

And the next day after that Montgomery Ward was out too with Flem for his bond. And the next day after that one Clarence Snopes was in town — Senator Clarence Egglestone Snopes of the state legislature now, that used to be Constable Snopes of Frenchman's Bend until he made the mistake of pistol-whipping in the name of the Law some feller that was spiteful and vindictive enough to object to being pistol-whipped jest because the one doing the whipping was bigger than him and wore a badge.

So Uncle Billy Varner had to do something with Clarence so he got a-holt of Flem and both of them got a-holt of Manfred de Spain at the bank and all three of them got a-holt of enough other folks to get Clarence into the legislature in Jackson, where he wouldn't even know nothing to do until somebody Uncle Billy and Manfred could trust would tell him when to mark his name or hold up his hand.

Except that, as Lawyer Stevens said, he seemed to found his true vocation before that: finally coming in to town from Frenchman's Bend one day and finding out that the country extended even on past Jefferson, on to the north-west in fact until it taken in Mulberry and Gayoso and Pontotoc streets in Memphis, Tennessee, so that when he got back three days later the very way his hair still stood up and his

eyes still bugged out seemed to be saying, “Hell fire, hell fire, why wasn’t I told about this sooner?”

How long has this been going on?” But he was making up fast for whatever time he had missed. You might say in fact he had done already passed it because now ever time he went or come between Frenchman’s Bend and Jackson by way of Jefferson he went by way of Memphis too, until now he was what Lawyer Stevens called the apostolic venereal ambassador from Gayoso Avenue to the entire north Mississippi banloo.

So when on the fourth morning Montgomery Ward and Clarence got on Number Six north-bound, we knowed Clarence was jest going by Memphis to Jackson or Frenchman’s Bend. But all we thought about Montgomery Ward was, jest what could he a had in that a-teelyer that even Hub never found, that was worth two thousand dollars of bond money to Flem Snopes to get him to Mexico or wherever Montgomery Ward would wind up?

So ours wasn’t jest interested surprise: ours was interested all right but it was astonishment and some good hard fast thinking too when two days later Clarence and Montgomery Ward both got off of Number Five south-bound and Clarence turned Montgomery Ward back over to Flem and went on to Jackson or Frenchman’s Bend or wherever he would have to go to leave from to come back by Gayoso Street, Memphis, next time. And Flem turned Montgomery Ward back over to Euphus Tubbs, back into the cell in the jail, that two-thousand-dollar bond of Flem’s rescinded or maybe jest withdrewed for all time like you hang your Sunday hat back on the rack until the next wedding or funeral or whenever you might need it again.

Who — I mean Euphus — apparently in his turn turned Montgomery Ward over to Miz Tubbs. We heard how she had even hung a old shade over the cell window to keep the morning sun from waking him up so early. And how any time Lawyer Stevens or Hub Hampton or any other such members of the Law would want a word with Montgomery Ward now, the quickest place to look for him would be in Miz Tubbs’s kitchen

with one of her aprons on, shelling peas or husking roasting ears. And we — all right, me then — would kind of pass along the alley by the jail and there Montgomery Ward would be, him and Miz Tubbs in the garden while Montgomery Ward hoed out the vegetable rows, not making much of a out at it maybe, but anyhow swinging the hoe as long as Miz Tubbs showed him where to chop next.

“Maybe she’s still trying to find out about them pictures,” Homer Bookwright says.

“What?” I says. “Miz Tubbs?”

“Of course she wants to know about them,” Homer says. “Ain’t she human too, even if she is a woman?”

And three weeks later Montgomery Ward stood up in Judge Long’s court and Judge Long give him two years in the state penitentiary at Parchman for the possession of one developer jug containing one gallon of moonshine whiskey herewith in evidence.

So ever body was wrong. Flem Snopes hadn’t spent no two thousand dollars’ worth of bond money to purify Montgomery Ward outen the U.S.A. America, and he hadn’t spent no twenty-five or thirty dollars’ worth of white-mule whiskey jest to purify the Snopes family name outen Atlanta, Georgia. What he had done was to spend twenty-five or thirty dollars to send Montgomery Ward to Parchman when the government would a sent him to Georgia free. Which was a good deal more curious than jest surprising, and a good deal more interesting than all three.

So the next morning I happened to be on the depot platform when Number Eleven south-bound was due and sho enough, there was Montgomery Ward and Hunter Killegrew, the deputy, and I says to Hunter: “Don’t you need to step into the washroom before you get on the train for such a long trip? I’ll watch Montgomery Ward for you. Besides, a feller that wouldn’t run off three weeks ago under a two-thousand-dollar bond ain’t likely to try it now with nothing on him but a handcuff.”

So Hunter handed me his half of the handcuff and moved a little away and I says to Montgomery Ward:

“So you’re going to Parchman instead. That’ll be a heap better. Not only you won’t be depriving no native-born Mississippi grub contractor outen his rightful and natural profit on the native-born Mississippi grub they’ll be feeding a native-born Mississippi convict, you won’t be lonesome there neither, having a native-born Mississippi cousin or uncle to pass the time with when you ain’t otherwise occupied with field work or something. What’s his name? Mink Snopes, your uncle or cousin that got in that little trouble a while back for killing Jack Houston and kept trying to wait for Flem to come back from Texas in time to get him outen it, except that Flem was otherwise occupied too and so Mink acted kind to put out about it? Which was he, your uncle or your cousin?”

“Yeah?” Montgomery Ward says.

“Well, which?” I says.

“Which what?” Montgomery Ward says.

“Is he your uncle or is he your cousin?” I says.

“Yeah?” Montgomery Ward says.

Four

Montgomery Ward Snopes

“SO THE SON of a bitch fooled you,” I said. “You thought they were going to hang him, but all he got was life.”

He didn’t answer. He just sat there in the kitchen chair — he had toted it up himself from Tubbs’s kitchen. For me, there wasn’t anything in the cell but the cot — for me and the bedbugs that is. He just sat there with the shadow of the window bars crisscrossing that white shirt and that damn little ten-cent snap-on bow tie; they said the same one he had worn in from Frenchman’s Bend sixteen years ago. No: they said not the same one he took out of Varner’s stock and put on the day he came in from that tenant farm and went to work as Varner’s clerk and married Varner’s whore of a daughter in and wore to Texas while the

bastard kid was getting born and then wore back again; that was when he wore the cloth cap about the size for a fourteen-year-old child.

And the black felt hat somebody told him was the kind of hat bankers wore, that he didn't throw away the cap: he sold it to a nigger boy for a dime that he took out in work and put the hat on for the first time three years ago and they said had never taken it off since, not even in the house, except in church, and still looked new. No, it didn't look like it belonged to anybody, even after day and night for three years, not even sweated, which would include while he was laying his wife too which would be all right with her probably since the sort of laying she was used to they probably didn't even take off their gloves, let alone their hats and shoes and overcoats.

And chewing. They said when he first came in to Frenchman's Bend as Varner's clerk it was tobacco. Then he found out about money. Oh, he had heard about money and had even seen a little of it now and then. But now he found out for the first time that there was more of it each day than you could eat up each day if you ate twice as much fried sowbelly and white gravy. Not only that, but that it was solid, harder than bones and heavy like gravel, and that if you could shut your hands on some of it, there was no power anywhere that could make you let go of more of it than you had to let go of, so he found out that he couldn't afford to chew up ten cents' worth of it every week because he had discovered chewing gum by then that a nickel's worth of would last five weeks, a new stick every Sunday.

Then he came to Jefferson and he really saw some money, I mean all at one time, and then he found out that the only limit to the amount of money you could shut your hands on and keep and hold, was just how much money there was, provided you had a good safe place to put that other handful down and fill your fists again. And then was when he found out he couldn't afford to chew even one cent a week. When he had nothing, he could afford to chew tobacco; when he had a little, he could afford to chew gum; when he found out he could be rich provided he just didn't die beforehand, he couldn't afford to chew anything, just sitting there in that kitchen chair with the shadow of the

cell bars crisscrossing him, chewing that and not looking at me or not any more anyway.

“Life,” I said. “That means twenty years, the way they figure it, unless something happens between now and then. How long has it been now? Nineteen eight, wasn’t it, when he hung all day long maybe in this same window here, watching the street for you to come on back from Texas and get him out, being as you were the only Snopes then that had enough money and influence to help him as he figured it, hollering down to anybody that passed to get word out to Varner’s store for you to come in and save him, then standing up there in that courtroom on that last day and giving you your last chance, and you never came then either? Nineteen eight to nineteen twenty-three from twenty years, and he’ll be out again. Hell fire, you’ve only got five more years to live, haven’t you? All right. What do you want me to do?”

He told me.

“All right,” I said. “What do I get for it?”

He told me that. I stood there for a while leaning against the wall, laughing down at him. Then I told him.

He didn’t even move. He just quit chewing long enough to say, “Ten thousand dollars.”

“So that’s too high,” I said. “All your life is worth to you is about five hundred, mostly in trade, on the installment plan.” He sat there in that cross-barred shadow, chewing his mouthful of nothing, watching me or at least looking toward me. “Even if it works, the best you can do is get his sentence doubled, get twenty more years added on to it. That means that in nineteen forty-three you’ll have to start all over again worrying about having only five years more to live. Quit sucking and smouching around for bargains. Buy the best: you can afford it. Take ten grand cash and have him killed. From what I hear, for that jack you could have all Chicago bidding against each other. Or ten grand, hell, and Chicago, hell too; for one you could stay right here in Mississippi and have a dozen trusties right there in Parchman drawing straws for him, for which one would shoot him first in the back.”

He didn't even quit chewing this time.

"Well well," I said. "So there's something that even a Snopes won't do. No, that's wrong; Uncle Mink never seemed to have any trouble reconciling Jack Houston up in front of that shotgun when the cheese began to bind. Maybe what I mean is, every Snopes has one thing he won't do to you — provided you can find out what it is before he has ruined and wrecked you. Make it five then," I said. "I won't haggle. What the hell, ain't we cousins or something?"

This time he quit chewing long enough to say, "Five thousand dollars." "Okay, I know you haven't got five grand cash either now," I said. "You don't even need it now. That lawyer says you got two years to raise it in, hock or sell or steal whatever you'll have to hock or sell or steal."

That got to him — or so I thought then. I'm a pretty slow learner myself sometimes, now and then, mostly now in fact. Because he said something: "You won't have to stay two years. I can get you out."

"When?" I said. "When you're satisfied? When I have wrecked the rest of his life by getting twenty more years hung on to it? Not me, you won't. Because I won't come out. I wouldn't even take the five grand; I was kidding you. This is how we'll do it. I'll go on down there and fix him, get him whatever additional time the traffic will bear. Only I won't come out then. I'll finish out my two years first; give you a little more time of your own, see. Then I'll come out and come on back home. You know: start a new life, live down that old bad past.

Of course I won't have any job, business, but after all there's my own father's own first cousin every day and every way getting to be bigger and bigger in the bank and the church and local respectability and civic reputation and what the hell, ain't blood thicker than just water even if some of it is just back from Parchman for bootlegging, not to mention at any minute now his pride might revolt at charity even from his respectable blood-kin banker cousin and he might decide to set up that old unrespectable but fairly damned popular business again.

Because I can get plenty more stock in trade and the same old good will will still be here just waiting for me to tell them where to go and maybe this time there won't be any developer-fluid jugs sitting carelessly around. And suppose they are, what the hell? it's just two years and I'll be back again, already reaching to turn over that old new leaf—"

He put his hand inside his coat and he didn't say "Yep" in that tone because he didn't know how yet, but if he had known he would. So he said, "Yep, that's what I figured," and drew out the envelope. Oh sure, I recognised it. It was one of mine, the Atelier Monty Jefferson Miss in the left corner, all stamped and showing the cancellation clear as an etching and addressed to G. C. Winbush, City so I already knew what was in it before he even took it out: the photo that Winbush had insisted on buying for five bucks for his private files as they call it that I hadn't wanted to let him have it because anybody associating with him in anything was already in jeopardy.

But what the hell, he was the Law, or what passed for it in that alley at one or two in the morning anyway. And oh yes, it had been through the mail all right even though I never mailed it and it hadn't been any further than through that damn cancelling machine inside the Jefferson post=office.

And with the trouble Winbush was already in from being in my back room instead of getting what he called his brains beaten out by old dope-eating Will Christian's burglars, it wouldn't have taken any Simon Legree to find out he had the picture and then to get it away from him; nor anything at all to make him swear or perjure to anything anybody suggested to him regarding it.

Because he had a wife and all you'd need would be just to intimate to Winbush you were going to show it to her since she was the sort of wife that no power on earth would unconvince her that the girl in the photo — she happened to be alone in this one and happened not to be doing anything except just being buck-naked — was not only Winbush's private playmate but that probably only some last desperate leap got Winbush himself out of the picture without his pants on.

And it wouldn't take any Sherlock Holmes to discern what that old sanctimonious lantern-jawed son of a bitch up there on that federal bench would do when he saw that cancelled envelope. So I said, "So it looks like I've been raised. And it looks like I won't call. In fact, it looks like I'm going to pass. After I go down there and get him fixed, you get me out. Then what?"

"A railroad ticket to wherever you want, and a hundred dollars."

"Make it five," I said. Then I said, "All right. I won't haggle. Make it two-fifty." And he didn't haggle either.

"A hundred dollars," he said.

"Only I'm going to cut the pot for the house kitty," I said. "If I've got to spend at least a year locked up in a god-damned cotton farm—" No, he didn't haggle; you could say that for him.

"I figgered that too," he said. "It's all arranged. You'll be out on bond tomorrow. Clarence will pick you up on his way through town to Memphis. You can have two days." And by God he had even thought of that too. "Clarence will have the money. It will be enough."

Whether what he would call enough or what I would call enough. So nobody was laughing at anybody any more now. I just stood there looking down at him where he sat in that kitchen chair, chewing, not looking at anything and not even chewing anything, that everybody that knew him said he never took a drink in his life yet hadn't hesitated to buy thirty or forty dollars' worth of whiskey to get me into Parchman where I could wreck Mink, and evidently was getting ready to spend another hundred (or more likely two if he intended to pay for Clarence too) to reconcile me to staying in Parchman long enough to do the wrecking that would keep Mink from getting out in five years; and all of a sudden I knew what it was that had bothered me about him ever since I got big enough to understand about such and maybe draw a conclusion.

"So you're a virgin," I said. "You never had a lay in your life, did you? You even waited to get married until you found a woman who not only

was already knocked up, she wouldn't even have let you run your hand up her dress. Jesus, you do want to stay alive, don't you? Only, why?" And still he said nothing: just sitting there chewing nothing. "But why put out money on Clarence too?"

Even if he does prefer nigger houses where the top price is a dollar, it'll cost you something with Clarence as the operator. Give me all the money and let me go by myself." But as soon as I said it I knew the answer to that too. He couldn't risk letting me get one mile out of Jefferson without somebody along to see I came back, even with that cancelled envelope in his pocket. He knew better, but he couldn't risk finding out he was right. He didn't dare. He didn't dare at his age to find out that all you need to handle nine people out of ten is just to trust them.

Tubbs knew about the bond so he was all for turning me out that night so he could put the cost of my supper in his pocket and hope that in the confusion it wouldn't be noticed but I said Much obliged. I said: "Don't brag. I was in (on the edge of it anyway) the U.S. Army; if you think this dump is lousy, you should have seen some of the places I slept in," with Tubbs standing there in the open cell door with the key ring in one hand and scratching his head with the other. "But what you can do, go out and get me a decent supper; Mr Snopes will pay for it; my rich kinfolks have forgiven me now. And while you're about it, bring me the Memphis paper." So he started out until this time I hollered it: "Come back and lock the door! I don't want all Jefferson in here; one son of a bitch in this kennel is enough."

So the next morning Clarence showed up and Flem gave him the money and that night we were in Memphis, at the Teaberry. That was me. Clarence knew a dump where he was a regular customer, where we could stay for a dollar a day even when it wasn't even his money. Flem's money, that you would have thought anybody else named Snopes would have slept on the bare ground provided it just cost Flem twice as much as anywhere else would.

“Now what?” Clarence said. It was what they call rhetorical. He already knew what, or thought he did. He had it all lined up. One thing about Clarence: he never let you down. He couldn’t; everybody that knew him knew he would have to be a son of a bitch, being my half-brother.

Last year Virgil (that’s right. Snopes. You guessed it: Uncle Wesley’s youngest boy — the revival song leader that they caught after church that day with the fourteen-year-old girl in the empty cotton house and tar-and-feathered him to Texas or anyway out of Yoknapatawpha County; Virgil’s gift was inherited) and Fonzo Winbush, my patient’s nephew I believe it is, came up to Memphis to enter a barbers’ college. Somebody — it would be Mrs Winbush; she wasn’t a Snopes — evidently told them never to rent a room to live in unless the woman of the house looked mature and Christian, but most of all motherly.

So they were probably still walking concentric circles around the railroad station, still carrying their suitcases, when they passed Reba Rivers’s at the time when every afternoon she would come out her front door to exercise those two damn nasty little soiled white dogs that she called Miss Reba and Mr Binford after Lucius Binford who had been her pimp until they both got too old and settled down and all the neighbourhood — the cop, the boy that brought the milk and collected for the paper, and the people on the laundry truck — called him landlord until he finally died.

She looked mature all right in anything, let alone the wrappers she wore around that time in the afternoon, and she would probably sound Christian all right whether religious or not, to anybody near enough to hear what she would say to those dogs at times when she had had a little extra gin; and I suppose anybody weighing two hundred pounds in a wrapper fastened with safety pins would look motherly even while she was throwing out a drunk, let alone to two eighteen-year-old boys from Jefferson, Mississippi.

Maybe she was motherly and Virgil and Fonzo, in the simple innocence of children, saw what us old long-standing mere customers and friends missed. Or maybe they just walked impervious in that simple

Yoknapatawpha juvenile rural innocence where even an angel would have left his pocketbook at the depot first. Anyway, they asked if she had an empty room and she rented them one; likely they had already unpacked those paper suitcases before she realised they didn't even know they were in a whorehouse.

Anyhow, there she was, having to pay the rent and pay off the cops and the man that supplied the beer, and pay the laundry and Minnie, the maid, something on Sunday night, not to mention having to keep those big yellow diamonds shined and cleaned until they wouldn't look too much like big chunks of a broken beer bottle; and that Yoknapatawpha innocence right in the middle of the girls running back and forth to the bathroom in nighties and negligees or maybe not even that, and the customers going and coming and Minnie running stacks of towels and slugs of gin up the stairs and the women screaming and fighting and pulling each other's hair over their boys and clients and money, and Reba herself in the hall cursing a drunk while they tried to throw him out before the cops got there; until in less than a week she had that house as quiet and innocent as a girls' school until she could get Virgil and Fonzo upstairs into their room and in bed and, she hoped, asleep.

Naturally it couldn't last. To begin with, there was the barbers' college where they would have to listen to barbers all day long when you have to listen to enough laying just spending thirty minutes getting your hair cut. Then to come back there and get a flash of a leg or a chemise or maybe a whole naked female behind running through a door, would be bound to give them ideas after a time even though Virgil and Fonzo still thought they were all Reba's nieces or wards or something just in town maybe attending female equivalents of barbers' colleges themselves. Not to mention that pure instinct which Virgil and Fonzo (did I say he was Grover Winbush's nephew?) had inherited from the pure fountainheads themselves.

It didn't last past the second month. And since the Memphis red-light district is not all that big, it was only the course of time until they and Clarence turned up at the same time in the same place, especially as Virgil and Fonzo, still forced to devote most of their time to learning yet

and not earning, had to hunt for bargains. Where right away Virgil showed himself the owner of a really exceptional talent — a capacity to take care of two girls in succession to their satisfaction or at least until they hollered quit, that was enough for two dollars, in his youthful enthusiasm and innocence not only doing it for pleasure but even paying for the chance until Clarence discovered him and put him into the money.

He — Clarence — would loaf around the poolrooms and the sort of hotel lobbies he patronised himself, until he would find a sucker who refused to believe his bragging about his — what's the word? — protégé's powers, and Clarence would bet him; the first victim would usually give odds. Of course Virgil would fail now and then —

"And pay half the bet," I said.

"What?" Clarence said. "Penalise the boy for doing his best? Besides, it don't happen once in ten times and he's going to get better as time goes on. What a future that little sod's got if the supply of two-dollar whores just holds out."

Anyway, that's what we were going to do tonight. "Much obliged," I said. "You go ahead, I'm going to make a quiet family call on an old friend and then coming back to bed. Let me have twenty-five — make it thirty of the money."

"Flem gave me a hundred."

"Thirty will do," I said.

"Be damned if that's so," he said. "You'll take half of it. I don't aim to take you back to Jefferson and have you tell Flem a god-damn lie about me. Here."

I took the money. "See you at the station tomorrow at train time."

"What?" he said.

"I'm going home tomorrow. You don't have to."

"I promised Flem I'd stay with you and bring you back."

"Break it," I said. "Haven't you got fifty dollars of his money?"

"That's it," he said. "Damn a son of a bitch that'll break his word after he's been paid for it."

Wednesday evenings were nearly always quiet unless there was a convention in town, maybe because so many of the women (clients too) came from little Tennessee and Arkansas and Mississippi country towns and Baptist and Methodist families, that they established among the joints and dives and cathouses themselves some . . . analogous? analogous rhythm to the midweek prayer meeting night. Minnie answered the bell. She had her hat on. I mean her whole head was in it like a football helmet.

"Evening, Minnie," I said. "You going out?"

"No sir," she said. "You been away? We ain't seen you in a long time."

"Just busy," I answered. That was what Reba said too. The place was quiet: nobody in the dining-room but Reba and a new girl and one customer, drinking beer, Reba in all her big yellow diamonds but wearing a wrapper instead of the evening-gown she would have had on if it had been Saturday night. It was a new wrapper, but it was already fastened with safety pins. I answered the same thing too. "Just busy," I said.

"I wish I could return the compliment," she said. "I might as well be running a Sunday-school. Meet Captain Strutterbuck," she said. He was tall, pretty big, with a kind of roustabout's face; I mean, that tried to look tough but wasn't sure yet how you were going to take it, and hard pale eyes that looked at you hard enough, only he couldn't seem to look at you with both of them at the same time. He was about fifty. "Captain Strutterbuck was in both wars," Reba said. "That Spanish one about twenty-five years ago, and the last one too. He was just telling us about the last one. And this is Thelma. She just came in last week."

"Howdy," Strutterbuck said. "Were you a buddy too?"

"More or less," I said.

"What outfit?"

"Lafayette Escadrille," I said.

“Laughing what?” he said. “Oh, La-Fayette Esker-Drill. Flying boys. Don’t know anything about flying, myself. I was cavalry, in Cuba in ‘98 and on the Border in ‘16, not commissioned any longer, out of the army in fact: just sort of a private citizen aide to Black Jack because I knew the country. So when they decided to send him to France to run the show over there, he told me if I ever got across to look him up, he would try to find something for me.

So when I heard that Rick — Eddie Rickenbacker, the Ace,” he told Reba and the new girl, “the General’s driver — that Rick had left him for the air corps, I decided that was my chance and I managed to get over all right but he already had another driver, a Sergeant Somebody, I forgot his name. So there I was, with no status. But I still managed to see a little of it, from the back seat you might say — Argonne, Showmont, Vymy Ridge, Shatter Theory; you probably saw most of the hot places yourself. Where you were stationed?”

“Y.M.C.A.,” I said.

“What?” he said. He got up, slow. He was tall, pretty big; this probably wasn’t the first time both his eyes had failed to look at the same thing at the same time. Maybe he depended on it. By that time Reba was up too. “You wouldn’t be trying to kid me, would you?” he said.

“Why?” I said. “Don’t it work?”

“All right, all right,” Reba said. “Are you going upstairs with Thelma, or ain’t you? If you ain’t, and you usually ain’t, tell her so.”

“I don’t know whether I am or not,” he said. “What I think right now is—”

“Folks don’t come in here to think,” Reba said. “They come in here to do business and then get out. Do you aim to do any business or don’t you?”

“Okay, okay,” he said. “Let’s go,” he told Thelma. “Maybe I’ll see you again,” he told me.

"After the next war," I said. He and Thelma went out. "Are you going to let him?" I said.

"He gets a pension from that Spanish war," Reba said. "It came today. I saw it. I watched him sign his name on the back of it so I can cash it."

"How much?" I said.

"I didn't bother with the front of it. I just made damn sure he signed his name where the notice said sign. It was a United States Government post office money order. You don't fool around with the United States Government."

"A post office money order can be for one cent provided you can afford the carrying charges," I said. She looked at me. "He wrote his name on the back of a piece of blue paper and put it back in his pocket. I suppose he borrowed the pen from you. Was that it?"

"All right, all right," she said. "What do you want me to do: lean over the foot of the bed and say, Just a second there, Buster?" — Minnie came in with another bottle of beer. It was for me.

"I didn't order it," I said. "Maybe I should have told you right off. I'm not going to spend any money tonight."

"It's on me then. Why did you come here then? Just to try to pick a fight with somebody?"

"Not with him," I said. "He even got his name out a book. I don't remember what book right now, but it was a better book than the one he got his war out of."

"All right, all right," she said. "Why in hell did you tell him where you were staying? Come to think of it, why are you staying there?"

"Staying where?" I said.

"At the Y.M.C.A. I have some little squirts in here now and then that ought to be at the Y.M.C.A. whether they are or not. But I never had one of them bragging about it before."

"I'm at the Teaberry," I said. "I belonged to the Y.M.C.A. in the war."

“The Y.M.C.A.? In the war? They don’t fight. Are you trying to kid me too?”

“I know they don’t,” I said. “That’s why I was in it. That’s right. That’s where I was. Gavin Stevens, a lawyer down in Jefferson, can tell you. The next time he’s in here ask him.”

Minnie appeared in the door with a tray with two glasses of gin on it. She didn’t say anything: she just stood in the door there where Reba could see her. She still wore the hat.

“All right,” Reba said. “But no more. He never paid for that beer yet. But Miss Thelma’s new in Memphis and we want to make her feel at home.” Minnie went away. “So you’re not going to unbutton your pocket tonight.”

“I came to ask you a favour,” I said. But she wasn’t even listening.

“You never did spend much. Oh, you were free enough buying beer and drinks around. But you never done any jazzing. Not with any of my girls, anyway.” She was looking at me. “Me neither. I’ve done outgrown that too. We could get along.” She was looking at me. “I heard about that little business of yours down there in the country. A lot of folks in business here don’t like it. They figure you are cutting into trade un — un — What’s that word? Lawyers and doctors are always throwing it at you.”

“Unethical,” I said. “It means dry.”

“Dry?” she said.

“That’s right. You might call my branch of your business the arid or waterproof branch. The desert-outpost branch.”

“Yes, sure, I see what you mean. That’s it exactly. That’s what I would tell them: that just looking at pictures might do all right for a while down there in the country where there wasn’t no other available handy outlet but that sooner or later somebody was going to run up enough temperature to where he would have to run to the nearest well for a bucket of real water, and maybe it would be mine.” She was looking at me. “Sell it out and come on up here.”

“Is this a proposition?” I said.

“All right. Come on up here and be the landlord. The beer and drinks is already on the house and you wouldn’t need much but cigarettes and clothes and a little jack to rattle in your pocket and I can afford that and I wouldn’t have to be always watching you about the girls, just like Mr Binford because I could always trust him too, always—” She was looking at me. There was something in her eyes or somewhere I never had seen before or expected either for that matter.

“I nee — A man can do what a woman can’t. You know: paying off protection, handling drunks, checking up on the son-a-bitching beer and whiskey peddlers that mark up prices and miscount bottles if you ain’t watching day and night like a god-damn hawk.” Sitting there looking at me, one fat hand with that diamond the size of a piece of gravel holding the beer glass. “I need . . . I . . . not jazzing; I done outgrewed that too long a time ago. It’s — it’s . . . Three years ago he died, yet even now I still can’t quite believe it.

” It shouldn’t have been there: the fat raddled face and body that had worn themselves out with the simple hard physical work of being a whore and making a living at it like an old prize fighter or football player or maybe an old horse until they didn’t look like a man’s or a woman’s either in spite of the cheap rouge and too much of it and the big diamonds that were real enough even if you just did not believe that colour, and the eyes with something in or behind them that shouldn’t have been there; that, as they say, shouldn’t happen to a dog. Minnie passed the door going back down the hall. The tray was empty now.

“For fourteen years we was like two doves.” She looked at me. Yes, not even to a dog. “Like two doves,” she roared and lifted the glass of beer then banged it down hard and shouted at the door: “Minnie!” Minnie came back to the door. “Bring the gin,” Reba said.

“Now, Miss Reba, you don’t want to start that,” Minnie said. “Don’t you remember, last time you started grieving about Mr Binford we had po-

lice in here until four o'clock in the morning. Drink your beer and forget about gin."

"Yes," Reba said. She even drank some of the beer. Then she set the glass down. "You said something about a favour. It can't be money — I ain't talking about your nerve: I mean your good sense. So it might be interesting—"

"Expect it is money," I said. I took out the fifty dollars and separated ten from it and pushed the ten across to her. "I'm going away for a couple of years. That's for you to remember me by." She didn't touch it. She wasn't even looking at it, though Minnie was. She just looked at me. "Maybe Minnie can help too," I said. "I want to make a present of forty dollars to the poorest son of a bitch I can find. Who is the poorest son of a bitch anywhere at this second that you and Minnie know?"

They were both looking at me, Minnie too from under the hat. "How do you mean, poor?" Reba said.

"That's in trouble or jail or somewhere that maybe wasn't his fault."

"Minnie's husband is a son of a bitch and he's in jail all right," Reba said. "But I wouldn't call him poor. Would you, Minnie?"

"Nome," Minnie said.

"But at least he's out of woman trouble for a while," Reba told Minnie.

"That ought to make you feel a little better."

"You don't know Ludus," Minnie said. "I like to see any place, chain gang or not, where Ludus can't find some fool woman to believe him."

"What did he do?" I said.

"He quit his job last winter and laid around here ever since, eating out of my kitchen and robbing Minnie's pocketbook every night after she went to sleep, until she caught him actually giving the money to the other woman, and when she tried to ask him to stop he snatched the flatiron out of her hand and damn near tore her ear off with it. That's why she has to wear a hat all the time even in the house. So I'd say if any — if anybody deserved them forty dollars it would be Minnie—"

A woman began screaming at the top of the stairs in the upper hall. Minnie and Reba ran out. I picked up the money and followed. The woman screaming the curses was the new girl, Thelma, standing at the head of the stairs in a flimsy kimono, or more or less of it. Captain Strutterbuck was halfway down the stairs, wearing his hat and carrying his coat in one hand and trying to button his fly with the other. Minnie was at the foot of the stairs. She didn't outshout Thelma nor even shout her silent: Minnie just had more volume, maybe more practice: "Course he never had no money. He ain't never had more than two dollars at one time since he been coming here. Why you ever let him get on the bed without the money in your hand first, I don't know. I bet he never even took his britches off. A man won't take his britches off, don't never have no truck with him a-tall; he done already shook his foot, no matter what his mouth still saying."

"All right," Reba told Minnie. "That'll do." Minnie stepped back; even Thelma hushed; she saw me or something and even pulled the kimono back together in front. Strutterbuck came on down the stairs, still fumbling at the front of his pants; maybe the last thing he did want was for both his eyes to look at the same thing at the same time. But I don't know; according to Minnie he had no more reason to be alarmed and surprised now at where he was than a man walking a tightrope. Concerned of course and damned careful, but not really alarmed and last of all surprised. He reached the downstairs floor. But he was not done yet. There were still eight or ten feet to the front door.

But Reba was a lady. She just held her hand out until he quit fumbling at his fly and took the folded money order out of whatever pocket it was in and handed it to her. A lady. She never raised her hand at him. She never even cursed him. She just went to the front door and took hold of the knob and turned and said, "Button yourself up. Ain't no man going to walk out of my house at just eleven o'clock at night with his pants still hanging open." Then she closed the door after him and locked it. Then she unfolded the money order. Minnie was right. It was for two dollars, issued at Lonoke, Arkansas. The sender's name was

spelled Q'Milla Strutterbuck. "His sister or his daughter?" Reba said. "What's your guess?"

Minnie was looking too. "It's his wife," she said. "His sister or mama or grandma would sent five. His woman would sent fifty — if she had it and felt like sending it. His daughter would sent fifty cents. Wouldn't nobody but his wife sent two dollars."

She brought two more bottles of beer to the dining-room table. "All right," Reba said. "You want a favour. What favour?" I took out the money again and shoved the ten across to her again, still holding the other forty. "This is for you and Minnie, to remember me until I come back in two years. I want you to send the other to my great-uncle in the Mississippi penitentiary at Parchman."

"Will you come back in two years?"

"Yes," I said. "You can look for me. Two years. The man I'm going to be working for says I'll be back in one, but I don't believe him."

"All right. Now what do I do with the forty?"

"Send it to my great-uncle Mink Snopes in Parchman."

"What's he in for?"

"He killed a man named Jack Houston back in 1908."

"Did Houston deserve killing?"

"I don't know. But from what I hear, he sure worked to earn it."

"The poor son of a bitch. How long is your uncle in for?"

"Life," I said.

"All right," she said. "I know about that too. When will he get out?"

"About 1948 if he lives and nothing else happens to him."

"All right. How do I do it?" I told her, the address and all.

"You could send it From another prisoner."

"I doubt it," she said. "I ain't never been in jail. I don't aim to be."

"Send it From a friend then."

“All right,” she said. She took the money and folded it. “The poor son of a bitch,” she said.

“Which one are you talking about now?”

“Both of them,” she said. “All of us. Every one of us. The poor son of a bitches.”

I hadn't expected to see Clarence at all until tomorrow morning. But there he was, a handful of crumpled bills scattered on the top of the dresser like the edge of a crap game and Clarence undressed down to his trousers standing looking at them and yawning and rooting in the pelt on his chest. This time they — Clarence — had found a big operator, a hot sport who, Virgil having taken on the customary two successfully, bet them he couldn't handle a third one without stopping, offering them the odds this time, which Clarence covered with Flem's other fifty since this really would be a risk; he said how he even gave Virgil a chance to quit and not hold it against him: “ ‘We're ahead now, you know; you done already proved yourself.’

And do you know, the little sod never even turned a hair. ‘Sure,’ he says, ‘Send her in.’ And now my conscience hurts me,” he said, yawning again. “It was Flem's money. My conscience says don't tell him a darn thing about it: the money just got spent like he thinks it was. But shucks, a man don't want to be a hog.”

So we went back home. “Why do you want to go back to the jail?” Flem said. “It'll be three weeks yet.”

“Call it for practice,” I said. “Call it a dry run against my conscience.” So now I had a set of steel bars between; now I was safe from the free world, safe and secure for a little while from the free Snopes world where Flem was parlaying his wife into the presidency of a bank and Clarence even drawing per diem as a state senator between Jackson and Gayoso Street to take the wraps off Virgil whenever he could find another Arkansas sport who refused to believe what he was looking at, and Byron in Mexico or wherever he was with whatever was still left of the bank's money, and mine and Clarence's father I.O. and all of our

Uncle Wesley leading a hymn with one hand and fumbling the skirt of an eleven-year-old infant with the other; I don't count Wallstreet and Admiral Dewey and their father Eck, because they don't belong to us: they are only our shame.

Not to mention Uncle Murdering Mink six or seven weeks later (I had to wait a little while you see not to spook him too quick). "Flem?" he said. "I wouldn't a thought Flem wanted me out. I'd a thought he'd been the one wanted to keep me here longest."

"He must have changed," I said. He stood there in his barred overalls, blinking a little — a damn little worn-out dried-up shrimp of a man not as big as a fourteen-year-old boy. Until you wondered how in hell anything as small and frail could have held enough mad, let alone steadied and aimed a ten-gauge shotgun, to kill anybody.

"I'm obliged to him," he said. "Only, if I got out tomorrow, maybe I won't done changed. I been here a long time now. I ain't had much to do for a right smart while now but jest work in the field and think. I wonder if he knows to risk that? A man wants to be fair, you know."

"He knows that," I said. "He don't expect you to change inside here because he knows you can't. He expects you to change when you get out. Because he knows that as soon as the free air and sun shine on you again, you can't help but be a changed man even if you don't want to." "But jest suppose I don't—" He didn't add change in time because he stopped himself.

"He's going to take that risk," I said. "He's got to. I mean, he's got to now. He couldn't have stopped them from sending you here. But he knows you think he didn't try. He's got to help you get out not only to prove to you he never put you here but so he can quit thinking and remembering that you believe he did. You see?"

He was completely still, just blinking a little, his hands hanging empty but even now shaped inside the palms like the handles of a plow and even his neck braced a little as though still braced against the loop of

the ploughlines. "I just got five more years, then I'll get out by myself. Then won't nobody have no right to hold expectations against me. I won't owe nobody no help then."

"That's right," I said. "Just five more years. That's practically nothing to a man that has already put in fifteen years with a man with a shotgun watching him plow cotton that ain't his whether he feels like plowing that day or not, and another man with a shotgun standing over him while he eats grub that he either ate it or not whether he felt like eating or not, and another man with a shotgun to lock him up at night so he could either go to sleep or stay awake whether he felt like doing it or not. Just five years more, then you'll be out where the free sun and air can shine on you without any man with a shotgun's shadow to cut it off. Because you'll be free."

"Free," he said, not loud: just like that: "Free." That was all. It was that easy. Of course the guard I welshed to cursed me; I had expected that: it was a free country; every convict had a right to try to escape just as every guard and trusty had the right to shoot him in the back the first time he didn't halt. But no unprintable stool pigeon had the right to warn the guard in advance.

I had to watch it too. That was on the bill too: the promissory note of breathing in a world that had Snopeses in it. I wanted to turn my head or anyway shut my eyes. But refusing to not look was all I had left now: the last sorry lousy almost worthless penny — the damn little thing looking like a little girl playing mama in the calico dress and sunbonnet that he believed was Flem's idea (that had been difficult; he still wanted to believe that a man should be permitted to run at his fate, even if that fate was doom, in the decency and dignity of pants; it took a little doing to persuade him that a petticoat and a woman's sunbonnet was all Flem could get).

Walking; I had impressed that on him: not to run, but walk; as forlorn and lonely and fragile and alien in that empty penitentiary compound as a paper doll blowing across a rolling-mill; still walking even after he had passed the point where he couldn't come back and knew it; even

still walking on past the moment when he knew that he had been sold and that he should have known all along he was being sold, not blaming anybody for selling him nor even needing to sell him because hadn't he signed — he couldn't read but he could sign his name — that same promissory note too to breathe a little while, since his name was Snopes?

So he even ran before he had to. He ran right at them before I even saw them, before they stepped out of the ambush. I was proud, not just to be kin to him but of belonging to what Reba called all of us poor son of a bitches. Because it took five of them striking and slashing at his head with pistol barrels and even then it finally took the blackjack to stop him, knock him out.

The Warden sent for me. "Don't tell me anything," he said. "I wish I didn't even know as much already as I suspect. In fact, if it was left to me, I'd like to lock you and him both in a cell and leave you, you for choice in handcuffs. But I'm under a bond too so I'm going to move you into solitary for a week or so, for your own protection. And not from him."

"Don't brag or grieve," I said. "You had to sign one of them too."

"What?" he said. "What did you say?"

"I said you don't need to worry. He hasn't got anything against me. If you don't believe me, send for him."

So he came in. The bruises and slashes from the butts and the blades of the sights were healing fine. The blackjack of course never had showed.

"Hidy," he said. To me. "I reckon you'll see Flem before I will now."

"Yes," I said.

"Tell him he hadn't ought to used that dress. But it don't matter. If I had made it out then, maybe I would a changed. But I reckon I won't now. I reckon I'll jest wait."

So Flem should have taken that suggestion about the ten grand. He could still do it. I could write him a letter: Sure you can raise ten

thousand. All you need to do is swap Manfred de Spain a good jump at your wife. No: that won't do: trying to peddle Eula Varner to Manfred de Spain is like trying to sell a horse to a man that's already been feeding and riding it for ten or twelve years. But you got that girl, Linda. She ain't but eleven or twelve but what the hell, put smoked glasses and high heels on her and rush her in quick and maybe De Spain won't notice it.

Except that I wasn't going to. But it wasn't that that worried me. It was knowing that I wasn't, knowing I was going to throw it away — I mean my commission of the ten grand for contacting the Chi syndicate for him. I don't remember just when it was, I was probably pretty young, when I realised that I had come from what you might call a family, a clan, a race, maybe even a species, of pure sons of bitches. So I said, Okay, okay, if that's the way it is, we'll just show them. They call the best of lawyers, lawyers' lawyers and the best of actors an actor's actor and the best of athletes a ballplayer's ballplayer. All right, that's what we'll do: every Snopes will make it his private and personal aim to have the whole world recognise him as THE son of a bitch's son of a bitch.

But we never do it. We never make it. The best we ever do is to be just another Snopes son of a bitch. All of us, every one of us — Flem, and old Ab that I don't even know exactly what kin he is, and Uncle Wes and mine and Clarence's father I.O., then right on down the line: Clarence and me by what you might call simultaneous bigamy, and Virgil and Vardaman and Bilbo and Byron and Mink. I don't even mention Eck and Wallstreet and Admiral Dewey because they don't belong to us. I have always believed that Eck's mother took some extracurricular night work nine months before he was born. So the one true bitch we had was not a bitch at all but a saint and martyr, the one technically true pristine immaculate unchallengeable son of a bitch we ever produced wasn't even a Snopes.

Five

When his nephew was gone, the Warden said, "Sit down." He did so. "You got in the paper," the Warden said. It was folded on the desk facing him:

TRIES PRISON BREAK

DISGUISED IN WOMEN'S CLOTHES

Parchman, Miss. Sept 8, 1923 M. C.

"Mink" Snopes, under life sentence for murder from Yoknapatawpha County . . .

"What does the 'C' in your name stand for?" the Warden said. His voice was almost gentle. "We all thought your name was just Mink. That's what you told us, wasn't it?"

"That's right," he said. "Mink Snopes."

"What does the 'C' stand for? They've got it M. C. Snopes here."

"Oh," he said. "Nothing. Just M. C. Snopes like I.C. Railroad. It was them young fellers from the paper in the hospital that day. They kept on asking me what my name was and I said Mink Snopes and they said Mink ain't a name, it's jest a nickname. What's your real name? And so I said M. C. Snopes."

"Oh," the Warden said. "Is Mink all the name you've got?"

"That's right. Mink Snopes."

"What did your mother call you?"

"I don't know. She died. The first I knowed my name was just Mink." He got up. "I better go. They're likely waiting for me."

"Wait," the Warden said. "Didn't you know it wouldn't work? Didn't you know you couldn't get away with it?"

"They told me," he said. "I was warned." He stood, not moving, relaxed, small and frail, his face downbent a little, musing, peaceful, almost like faint smiling. "He hadn't ought to fooled me to get caught in that dress and sunbonnet," he said. "I wouldn't a done that to him."

"Who?" the Warden said. "Not your . . . is it nephew?"

“Montgomery Ward?” he said. “He was my uncle’s grandson. No. Not him.” He waited a moment. Then he said again, “Well, I better—”
“You would have got out in five more years,” the Warden said. “You know they’ll probably add on another twenty now, don’t you?”
“I was warned of that too,” he said.
“All right,” the Warden said. “You can go.”

This time it was he who paused, stopped. “I reckon you never did find out who sent me them forty dollars.”
“How could I?” the Warden said. “I told you that at the time. All it said was From a Friend. From Memphis.”
“It was Flem,” he said.

“Who?” the Warden said. “The cousin you told me refused to help you after you killed that man? That you said could have saved you if he had wanted to? Why would he send you forty dollars now, after fifteen years?”

“It was Flem,” he said. “He can afford it. Besides, he never had no money hurt against me. He was jest getting a holt with Will Varner then and maybe he figgered he couldn’t rest getting mixed up with a killing, even if hit was his blood kin. Only I wish he hadn’t used that dress and sunbonnet. He never had to do that.”

They were picking the cotton now; already every cotton county in Mississippi would be grooming their best fastest champions to pick against the best of Arkansas and Missouri for the championship picker of the Mississippi Valley. But he wouldn’t be here. No champion at anything would ever be here because only failures wound up here: the failures at killing and stealing and lying.

He remembered how at first he had cursed his bad luck for letting them catch him, but he knew better now: that there was no such thing as bad luck or good luck: you were either born a champion or not a champion, and if he had been born a champion Houston not only couldn’t, he wouldn’t have dared, misuse him about that cow to where he had to kill him; that some folks were born to be failures and get caught always,

some folks were born to be lied to and believe it, and he was one of them.

It was a fine crop, one of the best he remembered, as though everything had been exactly right: season: wind and sun and rain to sprout it, the fierce long heat of summer to grow and ripen it. As though back there in the spring the ground itself had said, All right, for once let's confederate instead of fighting — the ground, the dirt which any and every tenant farmer and sharecropper knew to be his sworn foe and mortal enemy — the hard implacable land which wore out his youth and his tools and then his body itself.

And not just his body but that soft mysterious one he had touched that first time with amazement and reverence and incredulous excitement the night of his marriage, now worn too to such leather-toughness that half the time, it seemed to him most of the time, he would be too spent with physical exhaustion to remember it was even female.

And not just their two, but those of their children, the two girls to watch growing up and be able to see what was ahead of that tender and elfin innocence; until was it any wonder that a man would look at that inimical irreconcilable square of dirt to which he was bound and chained for the rest of his life, and say to it: You got me, you'll wear me out because you are stronger than me since I'm just bone and flesh. I can't leave you because I can't afford to, and you know it.

Me and what used to be the passion and excitement of my youth until you wore out the youth and I forgot the passion, will be here next year with the children of our passion for you to wear that much nearer the grave, and you know it; and the year after that, and the year after that, and you know that too. And not just me, but all my tenant and cropper kind that have immolated youth and hope on thirty or forty or fifty acres of dirt that wouldn't nobody but our kind work because you're all our kind have.

But we can burn you. Every late February or March we can set fire to the surface of you until all of you in sight is scorched and black, and

there ain't one god-damn thing you can do about it. You can wear out our bodies and dull our dreams and wreck our stomachs with the sowbelly and corn meal and molasses which is all you afford us to eat but every spring we can set you afire again and you know that too.

It was different now. He didn't own this land; he referred of course to the renter's or cropper's share of what it made. Now, what it produced or failed to produce — bumper or bust, flood or drouth, cotton at ten cents a pound or a dollar a pound — would make not one tittle of difference in his present life.

Because now (years had passed; the one in which he would have been free again if he had not allowed his nephew to talk him into that folly which anybody should have known — even that young fool of a lawyer they had made him take back there at the trial when he, Mink, could have run his case much better, that didn't have any sense at all, at least knew this much and even told him so and even what the result to him would be — not only wouldn't work, it wasn't even intended to work, was now behind him) he had suddenly discovered something.

People of his kind never had owned even temporarily the land which they believed they had rented between one New Year's and the next one. It was the land itself which owned them, and not just from a planting to its harvest but in perpetuity; not the owner, the landlord who evacuated them from one worthless rental in November, on to the public roads to seek desperately another similar worthless one two miles or ten miles or two counties or ten counties away before time to seed the next crop in March, but the land, the earth itself passing their doomed indigence and poverty from holding to holding of its thralldom as a family or a clan does a hopelessly bankrupt tenth cousin.

That was past now. He no longer belonged to the land even on those sterile terms. He belonged to the government, the state of Mississippi. He could drag dust up and down cotton middles from year in to year out and if nothing whatever sprang up behind him, it would make no difference to him. No more now to go to a commissary store every Saturday morning to battle with the landlord for every gram of the

cheap bad meat and meal and molasses and the tumbler of snuff which was his and his wife's one spendthrift orgy.

No more to battle with the landlord for every niggard sack of fertiliser, then gather the poor crop which suffered from that niggard lack and still have to battle the landlord for his niggard insufficient share of it. All he had to do was just to keep moving; even the man with the shotgun standing over him neither knew nor cared whether anything came up behind him or not just so he kept moving, any more than he cared.

At first he was ashamed, in shame and terror lest the others find that he felt this way; until one day he knew (he could not have said how) that all the others felt like this; that, given time enough, Parchman brought them all to this; he thought in a kind of musing amazement Yes sir, a man can get used to jest anything, even to being in Parchman, if you jest give him time enough.

But Parchman just changed the way a man looked at what he saw after he got in Parchman. It didn't change what he brought with him. It just made remembering easier because Parchman taught him how to wait. He remembered back there that day even while the Judge was still saying "Life" down at him, when he still believed that Flem would come in and save him, until he finally realised that Flem wasn't, had never intended to, how he had pretty near actually said it out loud: Just let me go long enough to get out to Frenchman's Bend or wherever he is and give me ten minutes and I'll come back here and you can go on and hang me if that's what you want to do.

And how even that time three or five or eight years or whenever it was back there when Flem had used that nephew — what was his name? Montgomery Ward — to trick him into trying to escape in a woman's dress and sunbonnet and they had given him twenty years more exactly like that young fool lawyer had warned him they would at the very beginning, how even while he was fighting with the five guards he was still saying the same thing: Just let me go long enough to reach Jefferson and have ten minutes and I will come back myself and you can hang me.

He didn't think things like that any more now because he had learned to wait. And, waiting, he found out that he was listening, hearing too; that he was keeping up with what went on by just listening and hearing even better than if he had been right there in Jefferson because like this all he had to do was just watch them without having to worry about them too. So his wife had gone back to her people they said and died, and his daughters had moved away too, grown girls now, likely somebody around Frenchman's Bend would know where.

And Flem was a rich man now, president of the bank and living in a house he rebuilt that they said was as big as the Union Depot in Memphis, with his daughter, old Will Varner's girl's bastard, that was grown now, that went away and married and her and her husband had been in another war they had in Spain and a shell or cannon ball or something blew up and killed the husband but just made her stone deaf.

And she was back home now, a widow, living with Flem, just the two of them in the big house where they claimed she couldn't even hear it thunder, the rest of the folks in Jefferson not thinking much of it because she was already mixed up in a nigger Sunday-school and they said she was mixed up in something called commonists, that her husband had belonged to and that in fact they were both fighting on the commonists side in that war.

Flem was getting along now. They both were. When he got out in 1948 he and Flem would both be old men. Flem might not even be alive for him to get out for in 1948 and he himself might not even be alive to get out in 1948 and he could remember how at one time that too had driven him mad: that Flem might die, either naturally or maybe this time the other man wouldn't be second class and doomed to fail and be caught, and it would seem to him that he couldn't bear it: who hadn't asked for justice since justice was only for the best, for champions, but at least a man might expect a chance, anybody had a right to a chance.

But that was gone too now, into, beneath the simple waiting; in 1948 he and Flem both would be old men and he even said aloud: “What a shame we can’t both of us jest come out two old men setting peaceful in the sun or the shade, waiting to die together, not even thinking no more of hurt or harm or getting even, not even remembering no more about hurt or harm or anguish or revenge” — two old men not only incapable of further harm to anybody but even incapable of remembering hurt or harm, as if whatever necessary amount of the money which Flem no longer needed and soon now would not need at all ever again, could be used to blot, efface, obliterate those forty years which he, Mink, no longer needed now and soon also, himself too, would not even miss. But I reckon not he thought. Can’t neither of us help nothing now. Can’t neither one of us take nothing back.

So again he had only five more years and he would be free. And this time he had learned the lesson which the fool young lawyer had tried to teach him thirty-five years ago. There were eleven of them. They worked and ate and slept as a gang, a unit, living in a detached wire-canvas-and-plank hut (it was summer); shackled to the same chain they went to the mess hall to eat, then to the field to work and, chained again, back to the hut to sleep again. So when the escape was planned, the other ten had to take him into their plot to prevent his giving it away by simple accident. They didn’t want to take him in; two of them were never converted to the idea. Because ever since his own abortive attempt eighteen or twenty years ago he had been known as a sort of self-ordained priest of the doctrine of non-escape.

So when they finally told him simply because he would have to be in the secret to protect it, whether he joined them or not, the moment he said, cried, “No! Here now, wait! Wait! Don’t you see, if any of us tries to get out they’ll come down on all of us and won’t none of us ever get free even when our forty years is up,” he knew he had already talked too much. So when he said to himself, “Now I got to get out of this chain and get away from them,” he did not mean Because if dark catches me alone in this room with them and no guard handy, I’ll never see light again but simply I got to get to the Warden in time, before they try it maybe tonight even and wreck ever body.

And even he would have to wait for the very darkness he feared, until the lights were out and they were all supposed to have settled down for sleep, so that his murderers would make their move, since only during or because of the uproar of the attack on him could he hope to get the warning, his message, to a guard and be believed.

Which meant he would have to match guile with guile: to lie rigid on his cot until they set up the mock snoring which was to lull him off guard, himself tense and motionless and holding his own breath to distinguish in time through the snoring whatever sound would herald the plunging knife (or stick or whatever it would be) in time to roll, fling himself off the cot and in one more convulsive roll underneath it, as the men — he could not tell how many since the spurious loud snoring had if anything increased — hurled themselves on to the vacancy where a split second before he had been lying.

“Grab him,” one hissed, panted.

“Who’s got the knife?” Then another:

“I’ve got the knife. Where in hell is he?” Because he — Mink — had not even paused; another convulsive roll and he was out from under the cot, on all-fours among the thrashing legs, scrabbling, scuttling to get as far away from the cot as he could. The whole room was now in a sort of sotto-voce uproar. “We got to have a light,” a voice muttered. “Just a second of light.”

Suddenly he was free, clear; he could stand up. He screamed, shouted: no word, cry: just a loud human sound; at once the voice muttered, panted: “There. Grab him,” but he had already sprung, leaped, to carom from invisible body to body, shouting, bellowing steadily even after he realised he could see, the air beyond the canvas walls not only full of searchlights but the siren too, himself surrounded, enclosed by the furious silent faces which seemed to dart like fish in then out of the shoulder-high light which came in over the plank half-walls, through the wire mesh; he even saw the knife gleam once above him as he plunged, hurling himself among the surging legs, trying to get back under a cot, any cot, anything to intervene before the knife.

But it was too late, they could also see him now. He vanished beneath them all. But it was too late for them too: the glaring and probing of all the searchlights, the noise of the siren itself, seemed to concentrate downward upon, into the flimsy ramshackle cubicle filled with cursing men. Then the guards were among them, clubbing at heads with pistols and shotgun barrels, dragging them off until he lay exposed, once more battered and bleeding but this time still conscious. He had even managed one last convulsive wrench and twist so that the knife which should have pinned him to it merely quivered in the floor beside his throat.

“Hit was close,” he told the guard. “But looks like we made hit.”

But not quite. He was in the infirmary again and didn’t hear until afterward how on the very next night two of them — Stillwell, a gambler who had cut the throat of a Vicksburg prostitute (he had owned the knife), and another, who had been the two who had held out against taking him into the plot at all but advocated instead killing him at once — made the attempt anyway though only Stillwell escaped, the other having most of his head blown off by a guard’s shotgun blast.

Then he was in the Warden’s office again. This time he had needed little bandaging and no stitches at all; they had not had time enough, and no weapons save their feet and fists except Stillwell’s knife. “It was Stillwell that had the knife, wasn’t it?” the Warden said.

He couldn’t have said why he didn’t tell. “I never seen who had it,” he answered. “I reckon hit all happened too quick.”

“That’s what Stillwell seems to think,” the Warden said. He took from his desk a slitted envelope and a sheet of cheap ruled paper, folded once or twice. “This came this morning. But that’s right: you can’t read writing, can you?”

“No,” he said. The Warden unfolded the sheet.

“It was mailed yesterday in Texarkana. It says, ‘He’s going to have to explain Jake Barron’ ” (he was the other convict, whom the guard had

killed) “ ‘to somebody someday so take good care of him. Maybe you better take good care of him anyway since there are some of us still inside.’ ” The Warden folded the letter back into the envelope and put it back into the drawer and closed the drawer. “So there you are. I can’t let you go around loose inside here, where any of them can get at you. You’ve only got five more years; even though you didn’t stop all of them, probably on a recommendation from me, the Governor would let you out tomorrow. But I can’t do that because Stillwell will kill you.”

“If Cap’m Jabbo” (the guard who shot) “had jest killed Stillwell too, I could go home tomorrow?” he said. “Couldn’t you trace out where he’s at by the letter, and send Cap’m Jabbo wherever that is?”

“You want the same man to kill Stillwell that kept Stillwell from killing you two nights ago?”

“Send somebody else then. It don’t seem fair for him to get away when I got to stay here five more years.” Then he said, “But hit’s all right. Maybe we did have at least one champion here, after all.”

“Champion?” the Warden said. “One what here?” But he didn’t answer that. And now for the first time he began to count off the days and months. He had never done this before, not with that original twenty years they had given him at the start back there in Jefferson, nor even with the second twenty years they had added on to it after he let Montgomery Ward persuade him into that woman’s mother hubbard and sunbonnet. Because nobody was to blame for that but himself; when he thought of Flem in connection with it, it was with a grudging admiration, almost pride that they were of the same blood; he would think, say aloud, without envy even: “That Flem Snopes. You can’t beat him. There ain’t a man in Mississippi nor the U.S. and A. both put together that can beat Flem Snopes.”

But this was different. He had tried himself to escape and had failed and had accepted the added twenty years of penalty without protest; he had spent fifteen of them not only never trying to escape again himself, but he had risked his life to foil ten others who planned to: as his reward for which he would have been freed the next day, only a

trained guard with a shotgun in his hands let one of the ten plotters get free. So these last five years did not belong to him at all. He had discharged his forty years in good faith; it was not his fault that they actually added up to only thirty-five, and these five extra ones had been compounded on to him by a vicious, even a horseplayish, gratuator.

That Christmas his (now: for the first time) slowly diminishing sentence began to be marked off for him. It was a Christmas card, postmarked in Mexico, addressed to him in care of the Warden, who read it to him; they both knew who it was from: "Four years now. Not as far as you think." On Valentine's Day it was home-made: the coarse ruled paper bearing, drawn apparently with a carpenter's or a lumberman's red crayon, a crude heart into which a revolver was firing. "You see?" the Warden said. "Even if your five years were up . . ."

"It ain't five now," he said. "Hit's four years and six months and nineteen days. You mean, even then you won't let me out?"

"And have you killed before you could even get home?"

"Send out and ketch him."

"Send where?" the Warden said. "Suppose you were outside and didn't want to come back and knew I wanted to get you back. Where would I send to catch you?"

"Yes," he said. "So there jest ain't nothing no human man can do."

"Yes," the Warden said. "Give him time and he will do something else the police somewhere will catch him for."

"Time," he said. "Suppose a man ain't got time jest to depend on time."

"At least you have got your four years and six months and nineteen days before you have to worry about it."

"Yes," he said. "He'll have that much time to work in."

Then Christmas again, another card with the Mexican postmark: "Three years now. Not near as far as you think." He stood there, fragile and small and durable in the barred overalls, his face lowered a little,

peaceful. "Still Mexico, I notice," he said. "Maybe He will kill him there."

"What?" the Warden said. "What did you say?"

He didn't answer. He just stood there, peaceful, musing, serene. Then he said: "Before I had that-ere cow trouble with Jack Houston, when I was still a boy, I used to go to church ever Sunday and Wednesday prayer meeting too with the lady that raised me until I—"

"Who were they?" the Warden said. "You said your mother died."

"He was a son of a bitch. She wasn't no kin a-tall. She was jest his wife — ever Sunday until I—"

"Was his name Snopes?" the Warden said.

"He was my paw — until I got big enough to burn out on God like you do when you think you are already growed up and don't need nothing from nobody. Then when you told me how by keeping nine of them ten fellers from breaking out I didn't jest add five more years to my time, I fixed it so you wasn't going to let me out a-tall, I taken it back."

"Took what back?" the Warden said. "Back from who?"

"I taken it back from God."

"You mean you've rejoined the church since that night two years ago? No you haven't. You've never been inside the chapel since you came here back in 1908." Which was true. Though the present Warden and his predecessor had not really been surprised at that. What they had expected him to gravitate to was one of the small violent irreconcilable nonconformist non-everything and -everybody else which existed along with the regular prison religious establishment in probably all Southern rural penitentiaries — small fierce cliques and groups (this one called themselves Jehovah's Shareholders) headed by self-ordained leaders who had reached prison through a curiously consistent pattern: by the conviction of crimes peculiar to the middle class, to respectability, originating in domesticity or anyway uxoriousness: bigamy, rifling the sect's funds for a woman: his wife or someone else's or, in an occasional desperate case, a professional prostitute.

"I didn't need no church," he said. "I done it in confidence."
"In confidence?" the Warden said.

"Yes," he said, almost impatiently. "You don't need to write God a letter. He has done already seen inside you long before He would even need to bother to read it. Because a man will learn a little sense in time even outside. But he learns it quick in here. That when a Judgment powerful enough to help you, will help you if you got to do is jest take back and accept it, you are a fool not to."

"So He will take care of Stillwell for you," the Warden said.

"Why not? What's He got against me?"

"Thou shalt not kill," the Warden said.

"Why didn't He tell Houston that? I never went all the way in to Jefferson to have to sleep on a bench in the depot jest to try to buy them shells, until Houston made me."

"Well I'll be damned," the Warden said. "I will be eternally damned. You'll be out of here in three more years anyway, but if I had my way you'd be out of here now, today, before whatever the hell it is that makes you tick starts looking cross-eyed at me. I don't want to spend the rest of my life even thinking somebody is thinking the kind of hopes about me you wish about folks that get in your way. Go on now. Get back to work."

So when it was only October, no holiday valentine or Christmas card month that he knew of, when the Warden sent for him, he was not even surprised. The Warden sat looking at him for maybe half a minute, with something not just aghast but almost respectful in the look, then said: "I will be damned." It was a telegram this time. "It's from the Chief of Police in San Diego, California.

There was a church in the Mexican quarter. They had stopped using it as a church, had a new one or something. Anyway it had been deconsecrated, so what went on inside it since, even the police haven't

quite caught up with yet. Last week it fell down. They don't know why: it just fell down all of a sudden. They found a man in it — what was left of him. This is what the telegram says: 'Fingerprints F.B.I, identification your man number 08213 Shuford H. Stillwell.' " The Warden folded the telegram back into the envelope and put it back into the drawer. "Tell me again about that church you said you used to go to before Houston made you kill him."

He didn't answer that at all. He just drew a long breath and exhaled it. "I can go now," he said. "I can be free."

"Not right this minute," the Warden said. "It will take a month or two. The petition will have to be got up and sent to the Governor. Then he will ask for my recommendation. Then he will sign the pardon."

"The petition?" he said.

"You got in here by law," the Warden said. "You'll have to get out by law."

"A petition," he said.

"That your family will have a lawyer draw up, asking the Governor to issue a pardon. Your wife — but that's right, she's dead. One of your daughters then."

"Likely they done married away too by now."

"All right," the Warden said. Then he said, "Hell, man, you're already good as out. Your cousin, whatever he is, right there in Jackson now in the legislature — Egglestone Snopes, that got beat for Congress two years ago?"

He didn't move, his head bent a little; he said, "Then I reckon I'll stay here after all." Because how could he tell a stranger: Clarence, my own oldest brother's grandson, is in politics that depends on votes. When I leave here I won't have no vote. What will I have to buy Clarence Snopes's name on my paper? Which just left Eck's boy, Wallstreet, whom nobody yet had ever told what to do. "I reckon I'll be with you them other three years too," he said.

“Write your sheriff yourself,” the Warden said. “I’ll write the letter for you.”

“Hub Hampton that sent me here is dead.”

“You’ve still got a sheriff, haven’t you? What’s the matter with you? Have forty years in here scared you for good of fresh air and sunshine?”

“Thirty-eight years this coming summer,” he said.

“All right. Thirty-eight. How old are you?”

“I was born in eighty-three,” he said.

“So you’ve been here ever since you were twenty-five years old.”

“I don’t know. I never counted.”

“All right,” the Warden said. “Beat it. When you say the word I’ll write a letter to your sheriff.”

“I reckon I’ll stay,” he said. But he was wrong. Five months later the petition lay on the Warden’s desk.

“Who is Linda Snopes Kohl?” the Warden said.

He stood completely still for quite a long time. “Her paw’s a rich banker in Jefferson. His and my grandpaw had two sets of chillen.”

“She was the member of your family that signed the petition to the Governor to let you out.”

“You mean the sheriff sent for her to come and sign it?”

“How could he? You wouldn’t let me write the sheriff.”

“Yes,” he said. He looked down at the paper which he could not read. It was upside down to him, though that meant nothing either. “Show me where the ones signed to not let me out.”

“What?” the Warden said.

“The ones that don’t want me out.”

“Oh, you mean Houston’s family. No, the only other names on it are the District Attorney who sent you here and your Sheriff, Hubert Hampton, Junior, and V. K. Ratliff. Is he a Houston?”

“No,” he said. He drew the slow deep breath again. “So I’m free.”

“With one thing more,” the Warden said. “Your luck’s not even holding: it’s doubling.” But he handled that too the next morning after they gave him a pair of shoes, a shirt, overalls and jumper and a hat, all brand new, and a ten-dollar bill and the three dollars and eighty-five cents which were still left from the forty dollars Flem had sent him eighteen years ago, and the Warden said, “There’s a deputy here today with a prisoner from Greenville. He’s going back tonight. For a dollar he’ll drop you off right at the end of the bridge to Arkansas, if you want to go that way.”

“Much obliged,” he said. “I’m going by Memphis first. I got some business to tend to there.”

It would probably take all of the thirteen dollars and eighty-five cents to buy a pistol even in a Memphis pawn shop. He had planned to beat his way to Memphis on a freight train, riding the rods underneath a boxcar or between two of them, as he had once or twice as a boy and a youth. But as soon as he was outside the gate, he discovered that he was afraid to.

He had been shut too long, he had forgotten how; his muscles might have lost the agility and co-ordination, the simple bold quick temerity for physical risk. Then he thought of watching his chance to scramble safely into an empty car and found that he didn’t dare that either, that in thirty-eight years he might even have forgotten the unspoken rules of the freemasonry of petty lawbreaking without knowing it until too late.

So he stood beside the paved highway which, when his foot touched it last thirty-eight years ago, had not even been gravel but instead was dirt marked only by the prints of mules and the iron tyres of wagons; now it looked and felt as smooth and hard as a floor, what time you could see it or risk feeling it either for the cars and trucks rushing past on it.

In the old days any passing wagon would have stopped to no more than his raised hand. But these were not wagons so he didn’t know what the

new regulations for this might be either; in fact if he had known anything else to do but this he would already be doing it instead of standing, frail and harmless and not much larger than a child in the new overalls and jumper still showing their off-the-shelf creases and the new shoes and the hat, until the truck slowed in toward him and stopped and the driver said, "How far you going, dad?"

"Memphis," he said.

"I'm going to Clarksdale. You can hook another ride from there. As good as you can here, anyway."

It was fall, almost October, and he discovered that here was something else he had forgotten about during the thirty-eight years: seasons. They came and went in the penitentiary too, but for thirty-eight years the only right he had to them was the privilege of suffering because of them: from the heat and sun of summer whether he wanted to work in the heat of the day or not, and the rain and icelike mud of winter whether he wanted to be in it or not. But now they belonged to him again: October next week, not much to see in this flat Delta country which he had misdoubted the first time he laid eyes on it from the train window that day thirty-eight years ago; just cotton stalks and cypress needles.

But back home in the hills, all the land would be gold and crimson with hickory and gum and oak and maple, and the old fields warm with sage and splattered with scarlet sumac; in thirty-eight years he had forgotten that.

When suddenly, somewhere deep in memory, there was a tree, a single tree. His mother was dead; he couldn't remember her nor even how old he was when his father married again. So the woman wasn't even kin to him and she never let him forget it: that she was raising him not from any tie or claim and not because he was weak and helpless and a human being, but because she was a Christian. Yet there was more than that behind it.

He knew that at once — a gaunt harried slattern of a woman whom he remembered always either with a black eye or holding a dirty rag to her bleeding where her husband had struck her. Because he could always depend on her, not to do anything for him because she always failed there, but for constancy, to be always there and always aware of him, surrounding him always with that shield which actually protected, defended him from nothing but on the contrary seemed actually to invite more pain and grief. But simply to be there, lachrymose, harassed, yet constant.

She was still in bed, it was midmorning; she should have been hours since immolated into the ceaseless drudgery which composed her days. She was never ill, so it must have been the man had beat her this time even harder than he knew, lying there in bed talking about food — the fatback, the coarse meal, the molasses which as far as he knew was the only food all people ate except when they could catch or kill something else; evidently this new blow had been somewhere about her stomach.

“I can’t eat hit,” she whimpered. “I need to relish something else. Maybe a squirrel.” He knew now; that was the tree. He had to steal the shotgun: his father would have beat him within an inch of his life — to lug the clumsy weapon even taller than he was, into the woods, to the tree, the hickory, to ambush himself beneath it and crouch, waiting, in the drowsy splendour of the October afternoon, until the little creature appeared.

Whereupon he began to tremble (he had but the one shell) and he remembered that too: the tremendous effort to raise the heavy gun long enough, panting against the stock, “Please God please God,” into the shock of the recoil and the reek of the black powder until he could drop the gun and run and pick up the still warm small furred body with hands that trembled and shook until he could barely hold it.

And her hands trembling too as she fondled the carcass. “We’ll dress hit and cook hit now,” she said. “We’ll relish hit together right now.” The hickory itself was of course gone now, chopped into firewood or wagon spokes or single trees years ago; perhaps the very place where it had

stood was eradicated now into ploughed land — or so they thought who had felled and destroyed it probably. But he knew better: unaxed in memory and unaxeable, inviolable and immune, golden and splendid with October. Why yes he thought it ain't a place a man wants to go back to; the place don't even need to be there no more. What aches a man to go back to is what he remembers.

Suddenly he craned his neck to see out the window. "Hit looks like—" and stopped. But he was free; let all the earth know where he had been for thirty-eight years. " — Parchman," he said. "Yep," the driver said. "P.O.W. camp."

"What?" he said.

"Prisoners from the war."

"From the war?"

"Where you been the last five years, dad?" the driver said. "Asleep?"

"I been away," he said. "I mind one war they fit with the Spaniards when I was a boy, and there was another with the Germans after that one. Who did they fight this time?"

"Everybody." The driver cursed. "Germans, Japanese, Congress too. Then they quit. If they had let us lick the Russians too, we might a been all right. But they just licked the Krauts and Japs and then decided to choke everybody else to death with money."

He thought Money. He said: "If you had twenty-five dollars and found thirty-eight more, how much would you have?"

"What?" the driver said. "I wouldn't even stop to pick up just thirty-eight dollars. What the hell you asking me? You mean you got sixty-three dollars and can't find nothing to do with it?"

Sixty-three he thought. So that's how old I am. He thought quietly. Not justice; I never asked that; jest fairness, that's all. That was all; not to have anything for him: just not to have anything against him. That was all he wanted, and sure enough, here it was.

Linda

Six

V. K. Ratliff

“YOU AIN’T EVEN going to meet the train?” Chick says. Lawyer never even looked up, setting there at the desk with his attention (his nose anyway) buried in the papers in front of him like there wasn’t nobody else in the room. “Not just a new girl coming to town,” Chick says, “but a wounded female war veteran.

Well, maybe not a new girl,” he says. “Maybe that’s the wrong word. In fact maybe ‘new’ is the wrong word all the way round. Not a new girl in Jefferson, because she was born and raised here. And even if she was a new girl in Jefferson or new anywhere else once, that would be just once because no matter how new you might have been anywhere once, you wouldn’t be very new anywhere any more after you went to Spain with a Greenwich Village poet to fight Hitler.

That is, not after the kind of Greenwich Village poet that would get you both blown up by a shell anyhow. That is, provided you were a girl. So just say, not only an old girl that used to be new, coming back to Jefferson, but the first girl old or new either that Jefferson ever had to come home wounded from a war.

Men soldiers yes, of course yes. But this is the first female girl soldier we ever had, not to mention one actually wounded by the enemy. Naturally we don’t include rape for the main reason that we ain’t talking about rape.”

Still his uncle didn’t move. “I’d think you’d have the whole town down there at the depot to meet her. Out of simple sympathetic interest, not to mention pity: a girl that went all the way to Spain to a war and the best she got out of it was to lose her husband and have both eardrums busted by a shell. Mrs Cole,” he says.

Nor did Lawyer look up even then. "Kohl," he says.

"That's what I said," Chick says. "Mrs Cole."

This time Lawyer spelled it. "K-o-h-l," he says. But even before he spelled it, it had a different sound from the way Chick said it. "He was a sculptor, not a poet. The shell didn't kill him. It was an aeroplane."

"Oh well, no wonder, if he was just a sculptor," Chick says. "Naturally a sculptor wouldn't have the footwork to dodge machine-gun bullets like a poet. A sculptor would have to stay in one place too much of his time. Besides, maybe it wasn't Saturday so he didn't have his hat on."

"He was in the aeroplane," Lawyer says. "It was shot down. It crashed and burned."

"What?" Chick says. "A Greenwich Village sculptor named K-o-h-l actually in an aeroplane where it could get shot down by an enemy?" He was looking more or less at the top of his uncle's head. "Not Cole," he says: "K-o-h-l. I wonder why he didn't change it. Don't they, usually?"

Now Lawyer closed the papers without no haste a-tall and laid them on the desk and pushed the swivel chair back and set back in it and clasped his hands behind his head. His hair had done already started turning grey when he come back from the war in France in 1919.

Now it was pretty near completely white, and him setting there relaxed and easy in the chair with that white mop of it and the little gold key he got when he was at Harvard on his watch chain and one of the cob pipes stuck upside down in his shirt pocket like it was a pencil or a toothpick, looking at Chick for about a half a minute. "You didn't find that at Harvard," he says. "I thought that maybe after two years in Cambridge, you might not even recognise it again when you came back to Mississippi."

"All right," Chick says. "I'm sorry." But Lawyer just sat there easy in the chair, looking at him. "Damn it," Chick says, "I said I'm sorry."

"Only you're not sorry yet," Lawyer says. "You're just ashamed."

“Ain’t it the same thing?” Chick says.

“No,” Lawyer says. “When you are just ashamed of something, you don’t hate it. You just hate getting caught.”

“Well, you caught me,” Chick says. “I am ashamed. What more do you want?” Only Lawyer didn’t even need to answer that. “Maybe I can’t help it yet, even after two years at Harvard,” Chick says. “Maybe I just lived too long a time among what us Mississippi folks call white people before I went there. You can’t be ashamed of me for what I didn’t know in time, can you?”

“I’m not ashamed of you about anything,” Lawyer says.

“All right,” Chick says. “Sorry, then.”

“I’m not sorry over you about anything either,” Lawyer says.

“Then what the hell is all this about?” Chick says.

So a stranger that never happened to be living in Jefferson or Yoknapatawpha County ten or twelve years ago might have thought it was Chick that was the interested party. Not only interested enough to be jealous of his uncle, but interested enough to already be jealous even when the subject or bone of contention not only hadn’t even got back home yet, he wouldn’t even seen her since ten years ago.

Which would make him jealous not only over a gal he hadn’t even seen in ten years, but that he wasn’t but twelve or thirteen years old and she was already nineteen, a growed woman, when he seen her that last time — a insurmountable barrier of difference in age that would still been a barrier even with three or four more years added on to both of them, providing of course it was the gal that still had the biggest number of them.

In fact you would think how a boy jest twelve or thirteen years old couldn’t be man-jealous yet; wouldn’t have enough fuel yet to fire jealousy and keep it burning very long or even a-tall over a gal nineteen years old or any other age between eight and eighty for that matter,

except that how young does he have to be before he can dare to risk not having that fuel capable of taking fire and combusting?

Jest how young must he be to be safe for a little while longer yet, as the feller says, from having his heart strangled as good as any other man by that one strand of Lilith's hair? Or how old either, for the matter of that. Besides, this time when she come back, even though she would still be the same six or seven years older, this time they would be jest six or seven years older than twenty-two or twenty-three instead of six or seven years older than twelve or thirteen, and that ain't no barrier a-tall. This time he wouldn't be no innocent infantile by-standing victim of that loop because this time he would be in there fighting for the right and privilege of being lassoed; fighting not jest for the right and privilege of being strangled too, but of being strangled first.

Which was exactly what he looked like he was trying to do: nudging and whetting at his uncle, reaching around for whatever stick or club or brickbat come to his hand like he was still jest twelve or thirteen years old or even less than that, grabbing up that one about Linda's husband being a Jew for instance, because even at jest twelve, if he had stopped long enough to think, he would a knowed that that wouldn't even be a good solid straw as far as his present opponent or rival was concerned.

Maybe that — swinging that straw at his uncle about how Lawyer had been the main one instrumental in getting Linda up there in New York where couldn't no homefolks look after her and so sho enough she had went and married a Jew — was what give Chick away. Because he ain't even seen her again yet; he couldn't a knowed all that other yet. I mean, knowed that even at jest twelve he already had all the jealousy he would ever need at twenty-two or eighty-two either.

He would need to actively see her again to find out he had jest as much right as any other man in it to be strangled to death by this here new gal coming to town, and wasn't no man wearing hair going to interfere in the way and save him. When he thought about her now, he would have to remember jest what that twelve- or thirteen-year-old boy had seen: not a gal but a woman growed, the same general size and shape

of his own maw, belonging to and moving around in the same alien human race the rest of the world except twelve-year-old boys belonged to.

And, if it hadn't been for his uncle finally stopping long enough his-self to look at her and then you might say ketching Chick by the scruff of the neck and grinding his attention on to her by conscripting up half his out-of-school time toting notes back and forth to her for them after-school ice-cream-parlour dates her and Lawyer started to having, nowhere near as interesting.

So when Chick remembered her now, he would still have to see what twelve or thirteen years old had seen: Hell fire, she's durn nigh old as maw. He would have to actively look at her again to see what twenty-two or twenty-three would see: Hell fire, suppose she is a year or two older than me, jest so it's me that's the man of the two of us.

So you and that stranger both would a thought how maybe it taken a boy of twelve or thirteen; maybe only a boy of twelve or thirteen is capable of pure and undefiled, what you might call virgin, jealousy toward a man of thirty over a gal of nineteen — or of any other age between eight and eighty for that matter, jest as it takes a boy of twelve or thirteen to know the true anguish and passion and hope and despair of love; you and that stranger both thinking that right up to that last final moment when Chick give his-self away free-for-nothing by grabbing up that one about Linda's husband being not only a poet but a Jew too to hit at his uncle with.

Then even that stranger would a realised Chick wasn't throwing it at Linda a-tall: he was throwing it at his uncle; that it wasn't his uncle he was jealous of over Linda Snopes: he was jealous of Linda over his uncle. Then even that stranger would a had to say to Chick in his mind: Maybe you couldn't persuade me on to your side at first, but we're sholy in the same agreement now.

Leastways if that stranger had talked to me a little. Because I could remember, I was actively watching it, that time back there when

Lawyer first got involved into Linda's career as the feller says. I don't mean when Lawyer thought her career got mixed up into hisn, nor even when he first thought he actively noticed her.

Because she was already twelve or thirteen herself then and so Lawyer had already knowed her all her life or anyway since she was them one or two years old or whatever it is when hit's folks begin to bring it out into the street in a baby buggy or toting it and you first notice how it not only is beginning to look like a human being, hit even begins to look like some specific family of folks you are acquainted with.

And in a little town like Jefferson where not only ever body knows ever body else but ever body has got to see ever body else in town at least once in the twenty-four hours whether he wants to or not, except for the time Lawyer was away at the war likely he had to see her at least once a week.

Not to mention having to know even before he could recognise her to remember, that she was Eula Varner's daughter that all Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County both that had ever seen Eula Varner first, couldn't help but look at Eula Varner's child with a kind of amazement, like at some minute-sized monster, since anybody, any man anyhow, that ever looked at Eula once couldn't help but believe that all that much woman in jest one simple normal-sized chunk couldn't a possibly been fertilised by anything as frail and puny in comparison as jest one single man; that it would a taken that whole generation of young concentrated men to seeded them, as the feller says, splendid — no: he would a said magnificent — loins.

And I don't mean when Lawyer voluntarily went outen his way and adopted Linda's career into a few spare extra years of hisn like he thought he was doing. What I mean is, when Eula Varner taken that first one look of hern at Lawyer — or let him take that first one look of hisn at her, whichever way you want to put it — and adopted the rest of his life into that of whatever first child she happened to have, providing of course it's a gal. Like when you finally see the woman that had ought to been yourn all the time, only it's already too late.

The woman that ought to be sixteen maybe at this moment and you not more than nineteen (which at that moment when he first seen Eula Lawyer actively was; it was Eula that was out of focus, being as she was already a year older than Lawyer to start with) and you look at her that first one time and in the next moment says to her: "You're beautiful. I love you. Let's don't never part again," and she says, "Yes, of course" — no more concerned than that: "Of course I am.

Of course you do. Of course we won't." Only it's already too late. She is already married to somebody else. Except it wasn't too late. It ain't never too late and won't never be, providing, no matter how old you are, you still are that-ere nineteen-year-old boy that said that to that sixteen-year-old gal at that one particular moment outen all the moments you might ever call yourn.

Because how can it ever be too late to that nineteen-year-old boy, because how can that sixteen-year-old gal you had to say that to ever be violated, it don't matter how many husbands she might a had in the meantime, providing she actively was the one that had to say "Of course" right back at you? And even when she is toting the active proof of that violation around in her belly or even right out in plain sight on her arm or dragging at the tail of her skirt, immolating hit and her both back into virginity wouldn't be no trick a-tall to that nineteen-year-old boy, since naturally that sixteen-year-old gal couldn't possibly be fertilised by no other seed except hisn, I don't care who would like to brag his-self as being the active instrument.

Except that Lawyer didn't know all that yet neither. Mainly because he was to busy. I mean, that day when Eula first walked through the Jefferson Square where not jest Lawyer but all Jefferson too would have to see her. That time back there when Flem had finally grazed up Uncle Billy Varner and Frenchman's Bend and so he would have to move on somewhere, and Jefferson was as good a place as any since, as the feller says, any spoke leads sooner or later to the rim. Or in fact maybe Jefferson was for the moment unavoidable, being as Flem had done beat me outen my half of that café me and Grover Winbush

owned, and since there wasn't no easy quick practical way to get Grover out to Frenchman's Bend, Flem would simply have to make a stopover at least in Jefferson while he evicted Grover outen the rest of it.

Anyhow, Lawyer seen her at last. And there he was, entering not jest bare-handed but practically nekkid too, that engagement that he couldn't afford to do anything but lose it — Lawyer, a town-raised bachelor that was going to need a Master of Arts from Harvard and a Doctor of Philosophy from Heidelberg jest to stiffen him up to where he could cope with the natural normal Yoknapatawpha County folks that never wanted nothing except jest to break a few aggravating laws that was in their way or get a little free money outen the country treasury; and Eula Varner that never needed to be educated nowhere because jest what the Lord had already give her by letting her stand up and breathe and maybe walk around a little now and then was trouble and danger enough for ever male man in range.

For Lawyer to win that match would be like them spiders, that the end of the honeymoon is when she finally finishes eating up his last drumstick. Which likely enough Lawyer knowed too, being nineteen years old and already one year at Harvard. Though even without Harvard, a boy nineteen years old ought to know that much about women jest by instinct, like a child or a animal knows fire is hot without having to actively put his hand or his foot in it. Even when a nineteen-year-old-boy says "You're beautiful and I love you," even he ought to know whether it's a sixteen-year-old gal or a tiger that says "Certainly" back at him.

Anyhow, there Lawyer was, rushing headlong into that engagement that not only the best he could expect and hope for but the best he could want would be to lose it, since losing it wouldn't do nothing but jest knock off some of his hide here and there.

Rushing in with nothing in his hand to fight with but that capacity to say nineteen years old the rest of his life, to take on that McCarron boy that had not only cuckolded him before he ever seen Eula, but that was

going to keep on cuckolding him in one or another different name and shape even after he would finally give up. Because maybe Flem never had no reason to pick out Jefferson to come to; maybe one spoke was jest the same as another to him since all he wanted was a rim. Or maybe he jest didn't know he had a reason for Jefferson.

Or maybe married men don't even need reasons, being as they already got wives. Or maybe it's women that don't need reasons, for the simple reason that they never heard of a reason and wouldn't recognise it face to face, since they don't function from reasons but from necessities that couldn't nobody help nohow and that don't nobody but a fool man want to help in the second place, because he don't know no better; it ain't women, it's men that takes ignorance seriously, getting into a skeer over something for no more reason than that they don't happen to know what it is.

So it wasn't Grover Winbush and what you might call that dangling other half of mine and his café that brought Miz Flem Snopes to Jefferson so she could walk across the Square whatever that afternoon was when Lawyer had to look at her. It wasn't even Eula herself. It was that McCarron boy. And I seen some of that too and heard about all the rest of it. Because that was about all folks within five miles of Varner's store talked about that spring.

The full unchallenged cynosure you might say of the whole Frenchman's Bend section, from sometime in March to the concluding dee-neweyment or meelee which taken place jest beyond the creek bridge below Varner's house one night in the following July — that McCarron boy coming in to Frenchman's Bend that day without warning out of nowhere like a cattymount into a sheep pen among them Bookwrights and Binfords and Quicks and Tulls that for about a year now had been hitching their buggies and saddle mules to Will Varner's fence.

Like a wild buck from the woods jumping the patch fence and already trompling them tame domestic local carrots and squashes and eggplants that until that moment was thinking or leastways hoping that

Eula's maiden citadel was actively being threatened and endangered, before they could even blench, let alone cover their heads. Likely — in fact, they had done a little local bragging to that effect — they called themselves pretty unbitted too, until he come along that day, coming from nowhere jest exactly like a wild buck from the woods, like he had done located Eula from miles and even days away outen the hard unerring air itself and come as straight as a die to where she was waiting, not for him especially but maybe for jest any wild strong buck that was wild and strong enough to deserve and match her.

Yes sir. As the feller says, the big buck: the wild buck right off the mountain itself, with his tail already up and his eyes already flashing. Because them Bookwrights and Quicks and Tulls was pretty fair bucks themselves, on that-ere home Frenchman's Bend range and reservation you might say, providing them outside boundary limits posted signs wasn't violated by these here footloose rambling uninvited strangers.

In fact, they was pretty good at kicking and gouging and no holts barred and no bad feelings afterward, in all innocent friendliness and companionship not jest among one another but with that same friendly willingness to give and take when it was necessary to confederate up and learn him a lesson on some foreigner from four or five or six miles away that ought to stayed at home, had no business there, neither needed nor wanted, that had happened to see Eula somewhere once or maybe jest heard about her from somebody else that had watched her walk ten or fifteen feet.

So he had to come crowding his buggy or mule up to Varner's picket fence some Sunday night, then coming innocently back down the road toward the gum and cypress thicket where the road crossed the creek bridge, his head still filled with female Varner dreams until the unified corporation stepped outen the thicket and bushwhacked them outen it and throwed creek water on him and put him back in the buggy or on the mule and wrapped the lines around the whipstock or the horn and headed him on toward wherever it was he lived and if he'd a had any sense he wouldn't a left it in the first place or at least in this direction.

But this here new one was a different animal. Because they — including them occasional volunteers — was jest bucks in the general — or maybe it's the universal — Frenchman's Bend pattern, while McCarron wasn't in nobody's pattern; he was unbitted not because he was afraid of a bit but simply because so fur he didn't prefer to be. So there not only wasn't nere a one of them would stand up to him alone, the whole unified confederated passel of them, that never hesitated one second to hide in that thicket against any other interloper that come sniffing at Varner's fence, never nerved their selves up to him until it was already too late.

Oh sho, they had chances. They had plenty of chances. In fact, he give them so many chances that by the end of May they wouldn't even walk a Frenchman's Bend road after dark, even in sight of one of their own houses, without they was at least three of them. Because this here was a different kind of a buck, coming without warning right off the big mountain itself and doing what Lawyer would call arrogating to his-self what had been the gynecological cynosure of a whole section of north Mississippi for going on a year or two now. Not ravishing Eula away: not riding up on his horse and snatching her up behind him and galloping off, but jest simply moving in and dispossessing them; not even evicting them but like he was keeping them on hand for a chorus you might say, or maybe jest for spice, like you keep five or six cellars of salt setting handy while you are eating the watermelon, until it was already too late, until likely as not, as fur as they or Frenchman's Bend either knowed, Eula was already pregnant with Linda.

Except I don't think that was exactly it. I don't think I prefer it to happen that way. I think I prefer it to happen all at once. Or that ain't quite right neither. I think what I prefer is, that them five timorous local stallions actively brought about the very exact thing they finally nerved their desperation up to try to prevent. There they all was, poised on the brink you might say of that-ere still intact maiden citadel, all seven of them: Eula and McCarron, and them five Tulls and Bookwrights and Turpins and Binfords and Quicks. Because what them Tulls and Quicks would a called the worst hadn't happened yet.

I don't mean the worst in respects to Eula's chastity nor to the violated honour of Uncle Billy Varner's home, but in respects to them two years' investment of buggies and mules tied to the Varner fence when them and the five folks keeping them hitched there half the night both had ought to been home getting a little rest before going back to the field to plough at sunup, instead of having to live in a constantly shifting confederation of whatever four of them happened to believe that the fifth one was out in front in that-ere steeplechase, not to mention the need for all five of them having to gang up at a moment's notice maybe at almost any time on some stray interloper that turned up without warning with his head full of picket fence ideas too.

So I prefer to believe it didn't happen yet. I don't know what Eula and McCarron was waiting on. I mean, what McCarron was waiting on. Eula never done no waiting. Likely she never even knowed what the word meant, like the ground, dirt, the earth, whatever it is in it that makes seed sprout at the right time, don't know nor need to know what waiting means. Since to know what waiting means, you got to be skeered or weak or self-doubtful enough to know what impatience or hurry means, and Eula never needed them no more than that dirt does. All she needed was jest to be, like the ground of the field, until the right time come, the right wind, the right sun, the right rain; until in fact that-ere single unique big buck jumped that tame garden fence outen the big woods or the high mountain or the tall sky, and finally got through jest standing there among the sheep with his head up, looking proud.

So it was McCarron that put off that what long you might call that-ere inevitable. Maybe that was why: having to jest stand there for a while looking proud among the sheep. Maybe that was it: maybe he was jest simply having too much fun at first, playing with them Bookwright and Quick sheep, tantalising them up maybe to see jest how much they would have to stand to forget for a moment they was sheep, or to remember that maybe they was sheep but at least there was five of them, until at last they would risk him jest like he actively wasn't nothing but jest one more of them natural occupational local hazards Eula had done already got them accustomed to handling.

So maybe you can figger what they was waiting on. They was church folks. I mean, they went to church a heap of Sundays, and Wednesday night prayer meeting too, unless something else come up. Because church was as good a place as any to finish up one week and start another, especially as there wasn't no particular other place to go on Sunday morning; not to mention a crap game down back of the spring while the church was busy singing or praying or listening; and who knowed but how on almost any Wednesday night you might ketch some young gal and persuade her off into the bushes before her paw or maw noticed she was missing. Or maybe they never needed to ever heard it, since likely it wasn't even Samson and Delilah that was the first ones to invent that hair-cutting eupheemism neither.

So the whole idea might be what you would call a kind of last desperate instinctive hereditary expedient waiting handy for ever young feller (or old one either) faced with some form of man-trouble over his gal. So at least you knowed what they was waiting for. Naturally they would preferred to preserve that-ere maiden Varner citadel until one of them could manage to shake loose from the other four by luck or expedient long enough to ravage it. But now that this uninvited ringer had come in and wrecked ever thing anyhow, at least they could use that violation and rapine not only for revenge but to evict him for good from meddling around Frenchman's Bend.

Naturally not jest laying cravenly back to ketch him at a moment when he was wore out and exhausted with pleasure and success; they wasn't that bad. But since they couldn't prevent the victory, at least ketch him at a moment when he wasn't watching, when his mind was still fondly distracted and divided between what you might call bemusements with the recent past, which would a been last night, and aspirations toward the immediate future, which would be in a few minutes now as soon as the buggy reached a convenient place to hitch the horse. Which is what they — the ambushment — done.

They was wrong of course; hadn't nothing happened yet. I mean, I prefer that even that citadel was still maiden right up to this moment. No: what I mean is, I won't have nothing else for the simple dramatic

verities except that ever thing happened right there that night and all at once; that even that McCarron boy, that compared to them other five was a wild stag surrounded by a gang of goats — that even he wasn't enough by his-self but that it taken all six of them even to ravage that citadel, let alone seed them loins with a child: that July night and the buggy coming down the hill until they heard the horse's feet come off the creek bridge and the five of them, finally nerved up to even this last desperate gambit, piling outen that familiar bushwhacking thicket that up to this time had handled them local trespassing rams so simple and easy you wouldn't hardly need to dust off your hands afterward.

Naturally they never brought no bystanders with them and after the first two or three minutes there wasn't no witness a-tall left, since he was already laying out cold in the ditch. So my conjecture is jest as good as yourn, maybe better since I'm a interested party, being as I got what the feller calls a theorem to prove. In fact, it may not taken even three minutes, one of them jumping to ketch the horse's head and the other four rushing to snatch McCarron outen the buggy, providing of course he was still in the buggy by that time and not already blazing bushes up the creek, having chosen quick between discretion and valour, it don't matter a hoot who was looking, as had happened before with at least one of the invaders that had been quick enough.

Which, by the trompled evidence folks went to look at the next day, McCarron wasn't, though not for the already precedented reason. Nor did the evidence explain jest what the wagon spoke was doing there neither that broke McCarron's arm: only that McCarron had the wagon spoke now in his remaining hand in the road while Eula was standing up in the buggy with that lead-loaded buggy whip reversed in both hands like a hoe or a axe, swinging the leaded butt of it at whatever head come up next.

Not over three minutes, at the outside. It wouldn't needed more than that. It wouldn't wanted more: it was all that simple and natural — a pure and simple natural circumstance as simple and natural and ungreedy as a tide-wave or a cloudburst, that didn't even want but one swipe — a considerable of trompling and panting and cussing and

nothing much to see except a kind of moil of tangled shadows around the horse (It never moved.

But then it spent a good part of its life ever summer right in the middle of Will's sawmill and it stood right there in the yard all the time Will was evicting Ab Snopes from a house he hadn't paid no rent on in two years, which was the nearest thing to a cyclone Frenchman's Bend ever seen; it was said that Will could drive up to a depot and get outen the buggy and not even hitch it while a train passed, and only next summer it was going to be tied to the same lot gate that them wild Texas ponies Flem Snopes brought back from Texas demolished right up to the hinges when they run over Frenchman's Bend) and buggy and the occasional gleam of that hickory wagon spoke interspersed among the mush-melon thumps of that loaded buggy whip handle on them Frenchman's Bend skulls.

And then jest the empty horse and buggy standing there in the road like the tree or rock or barn or whatever it was the tide-wave or cloudburst has done took its one rightful ungreedy swipe at and went away, and that-ere one remaining evidence — it was Theron Quick; for a week after it you could still see the print of that loaded buggy whip across the back of his skull; not the first time naming him Quick turned out to be what the feller calls jest a humorous allusion — laying cold in the weeds beside the road. And that's when I believe it happened. I don't even insist or argue that it happened that way. I jest simply decline to have it any other way except that one because there ain't no acceptable degrees between what has got to be right and what jest can possibly be.

So it never even stopped. I mean, the motion, movement. It was one continuous natural rush from the moment five of them busted outen that thicket and grabbed at the horse, on through the cussing and trompling and hard breathing and the final crashing through the bushes and the last rapid and fading footfall, since likely the other four thought Theron was dead; then jest the peaceful quiet and the dark road and the horse standing quiet in the buggy in the middle of it and Theron Quick sleeping peacefully in the weeds.

And that's when I believe it happened: not no cessation a-tall, not even no active pausing; not jest that maiden bastion capitulate and overrun but them loins themselves seeded, that child, that girl, Linda herself created into life right there in the road with likely Eula to help hold him up offen the broke arm and the horse standing over them among the stars like one of them mounted big-game trophy heads sticking outen the parlour or the liberry or (I believe they call them now) den wall. In fact maybe that's what it was.

So in almost no time there was Will Varner with a pregnant unmarried daughter. I mean, there Frenchman's Bend was because even in them days when you said "Frenchman's Bend" you smiled at Uncle Billy Varner, or vice versa. Because if Eula Varner was a natural phenomenon like a cyclone or a tide-wave, Uncle Billy was one too even if he wasn't no more than forty yet: that had shaved notes and foreclosed liens and padded furnish bills and evicted tenants until the way Will Varner went Frenchman's Bend had done already left and the folks that composed it had damn sho better hang on and go too, unless they jest wanted to settle down in vacant space twenty-two miles south-east of Jefferson.

Naturally the McCarron boy was the man to handle the Varner family honour right there on the spot. After the first shock, folks all thought that's what he had aimed to do. He was the only child of a well-to-do widow maw up in Tennessee somewhere until he happened to be wherever it was his fate arranged for him to have his look at Eula Varner like theirn would do for Lawyer Stevens and Manfred de Spain about a year later. And, being the only child of a well-to-do maw and only educated in one of them fancy gentleman's schools, you would naturally expect him to lit out without even stopping to have his broke arm splinted up, let alone waiting for Will Varner to reach for his shotgun.

Except you would be wrong. Maybe you not only don't run outen the middle of a natural catastrophe — you might be flung outen it by centrifugal force or, if you had any sense, you might tried to dodge it.

But you don't change your mind and plans in the middle of it. Or he might in his case even wanted to stay in the middle of that particular one until it taken the rest of his arms and legs too, as likely any number of them other Quicks and Tulls and Bookwrights would elected to do.

Not to mention staying in that select school that even in that short time some of them high academic standards of honour and chivalry rubbed off on him by jest exposure. Anyhow it wasn't him that left that-ere now-flyspecked Varner family honour high and dry. It was Eula herself that done it. So now all you can do is try to figger. So maybe it was the McCarron boy that done it, after all. Like maybe that centrifugal force that hadn't touched him but that one light time and he had already begun to crumple.

That simple natural phenomenon that maybe didn't expect to meet another phenomenon even a natural one, but at least expected or maybe jest hoped for something at least tough enough to crash back without losing a arm or a leg the first time they struck. Because next time it might be a head, which would mean the life along with it, and then all that force and power and unskeeredness and unskeerableness to give and to take and suffer the consequences it taken to be a female natural phenomenon in its phenomenal moment, would be wasted, thrown away.

Because I ain't talking about love. Natural phenomena ain't got no more concept of love than they have of the alarm and uncertainty and impotence you got to be capable of to know what waiting means. When she said to herself, and likely she did: The next one of them creek bridge episodes might destroy him completely, it wasn't that McCarron boy's comfort she had in mind.

Anyhow, the next morning he was gone from Frenchman's Bend. I presume it was Eula that put what was left of the buggy whip back into the socket and druv the buggy back up the hill. Leastways they waked Will, and Will in his nightshirt (no shotgun: it would be anywhere up to twenty-eight days, give or take a few, before he would find out he needed the shotgun; it was jest his little grip of veterinary tools yet)

patched up the arm to where he could drive on home or somewhere that more than a local cow-and-mule doctor could get a-holt of him.

But he was back in Jefferson at least once about a month later, about the time when Eula likely found out if she didn't change her condition pretty quick now, it was going to change itself for her. And he even paid the mail rider extra to carry a special wrote-out private message to Eula. But nothing come of that neither, and at last he was gone.

And sho enough, about sixty-five or seventy days after that-ere hors-de-combat creek bridge evening — and if you had expected a roar of some kind to come up outen the Varner residence and environment, you would been wrong there too: it was jest a quick announcement that even then barely beat the wedding itself — Herman Bookwright and Theron Quick left Frenchman's Bend suddenly overnight too though it's my belief they was both not even bragging but jest wishing they had, and Eula and Flem was married; and after the one more week it taken Will to do what he thought was beating Flem down to accept that abandoned Old Frenchman place as full receipt for Eula's dowry, Eula and Flem left for Texas, which was fur enough away so that when they come back, that-ere new Snopes baby would look at least reasonably legal or maybe what I mean is orthodox.

Not to mention as Texas would be where it had spent the presumable most of its prenatal existence, wouldn't nobody be surprised if it was cutting its teeth at three months old. And when they was back in Frenchman's Bend a year later, anybody meddlesome enough to remark how it had got to be a pretty good-size gal in jest them three possible months, all he had to do was remind his-self that them three outside months had been laid in Texas likewise.

Jest exactly fourteen months since that McCarron boy started to crumple at the seams at that first encounter. But it wasn't waiting. Not a natural phenomenon like Eula. She was jest being, breathing, setting with that baby in a rocking chair on Varner's front gallery while Flem changed enough money into them sixty silver dollars and buried them in that Old Frenchman place rose garden jest exactly where me and

Henry Armstid and Odum Bookwright couldn't help but find them. And still jest being and breathing, setting with the baby in the wagon that day they moved in to Jefferson so Flem could get a active holt on Grover Winbush to evict him outen the other half of that café me and Grover owned.

And still jest being and breathing but not setting now because likely even the tide-wave don't need to be informed when it's on the right spoke to whatever rim it's due at next, her and Flem and the baby living in that canvas tent behind the café between when she would walk across the Square until finally Manfred de Spain, the McCarron that wouldn't start or break up when they collided together, would look up and see her.

Who hadn't had none of them select advantages of being the only child of a well-to-do widowed maw living in Florida hotels while he was temporarily away at them select eastern schools, but instead had had to make out the best he could with jest being the son of a Confederate cavalry officer, that graduated his-self from West Point into what his paw would a called the Yankee army and went to Cuba as a lieutenant and come back with a long jagged scar down one cheek that the folks trying to beat him for mayor rumoured around wasn't made by no Spanish bayonet a-tall but instead by a Missouri sergeant with a axe in a crap game: which, whether it was so or not, never stood up long between him and getting elected mayor of Jefferson, nor between him and getting to be president of Colonel Sartoris's bank when that come up, not to mention between him and Eula Varner Snopes when that come up.

I ain't even mentioning Lawyer. It wasn't even his bad luck he was on that rim too because tide-waves ain't concerned with luck. It was his fate. He jest got run over by coincidence, like a ant using the same spoke a elephant happened to find necessary or convenient. It wasn't that he was born too soon or too late or even in the wrong place. He was born at exactly the right time, only in the wrong envelope. It was his fate and doom not to been born into one of them McCarron separate covers too instead of into that fragile and what you might call

gossamer-sinewed envelope of boundless and hopeless aspiration Old Moster give him.

So there he was, rushing headlong into that engagement that the best he could possibly hope would be to lose it quick, since any semblance or intimation of the most minorest victory would a destroyed him like a lightning bolt, while Flem Snopes grazed gently on up them new Jefferson pastures, him and his wife and infant daughter still living in the tent behind the café and Flem his-self frying the hamburgers now after Grover Winbush found out suddenly one day that he never owned one half of a café neither; then the Rouncewells that thought they still owned what Miz Rouncewell called the Commercial Hotel against all the rest of Yoknapatawpha County calling it the Rouncewell boarding house, found they was wrong too and the Flem Snopeses lived there now, during the month or so it taken him to eliminate the Rouncewells outen it, with the next Snopes from Frenchman's Bend imported into the tent behind the café and frying the hamburgers because Flem his-self was now superintendent of the power plant; Manfred de Spain had not only seen Eula, he was already mayor of Jefferson when he done it.

And still Lawyer was trying, even while at least once ever day he would have to see his mortal victorious rival and conqueror going in and out of the mayor's office or riding back and forth across the Square in that red brass-trimmed E.M.F. roadster that most of north Mississippi, let alone jest Yoknapatawpha County, hadn't seen nothing like before; right on up and into that alley behind the Ladies' Cotillion Club Christmas ball where he tried to fight Manfred with his bare fists until his sister's husband drug him up outen the gutter and held him long enough for Manfred to get outen sight and then taken him home to the bathroom to wash him off and says to him: "What the hell do you mean? Don't you know you don't know how to fight?" And Lawyer leaning over the washbowl trying to stanch his nose with handfuls of tissue paper, saying, "Of course I know it.

But can you suh-jest a better way than this for me to learn?"

And still trying, on up to that last desperate cast going all the way back to that powerhouse brass business. I mean, that pile of old wore-out faucets and valves and pieces of brass pipe and old bearings and such that had accumulated into the power plant until they all disappeared sometime during the second year of Flem's reign as superintendent, though there wasn't no direct evidence against nobody even after the brass safety valves vanished from both the boilers and was found to be replaced with screwed-in steel plugs; it was jest that finally the city auditors had to go to the superintendent and advise him as delicate as possible that that brass was missing and Flem quit chewing long enough to say "How much?" and paid them and then the next year they done the books again and found they had miscounted last year and went to him again and suh-jested they had made a mistake before and Flem quit chewing again long enough to say "How much?" and paid them that too.

Going (I mean Lawyer) all the way back to them old by-gones even though Flem was not only long since resigned from being superintendent, he had even bought two new safety valves outen his own pocket as a free civic gift to the community; bringing all that up again, with evidence, in a suit to impeach Manfred outen the mayor's office until Judge Dukinfield recused his-self and appointed Judge Stevens, Lawyer's paw, to hear the case.

Only we didn't know what happened then because Judge Stevens cleared the court and heard the argument in chambers as they calls it, jest Lawyer and Manfred and the judge his-self. And that was all; it never taken long; almost right away Manfred come out and went back to his mayor's office, and the tale, legend, report, whatever you want to call it, of Lawyer standing there with his head bent a little in front of his paw, saying, "What must I do now, Papa? Papa, what can I do now?"

But he was chipper enough the next morning when I seen him off on the train, that had done already graduated from Harvard and the University law school over at Oxford and was now on his way to a town in Germany to go to school some more. Yes sir, brisk and chipper as you

could want. "Here you are," he says. "This is what I want with you before I leave: to pass the torch on into your personal hand. You'll have to hold the fort alone now. You'll have to tote the load by yourself."

"What fort?" I says. "What load?"

"Jefferson," he says. "Snopeses. Think you can handle them alone for two years?" That's what he thought then: that he was all right now; he had done been disenchanted for good at last of Helen, and so now all he had to worry about was what them Menelaus-Snopeses might be up to in the Yoknapatawpha-Argive community while he had his back turned. Which was all right; it would ease his mind. He would have plenty of time after he come back to find out that ain't nobody yet ever lost Helen, since for the rest of not jest her life but hisn too she don't never get shut of him. Likely it's because she don't want to.

Except it wasn't two years. It was nearer five. That was in the early spring of 1914, and that summer the war come, and maybe that — a war — was what he was looking for. Not hoping for, let alone expecting to have one happen jest on his account, since like most other folks in this country he didn't believe no war was coming. But looking for something, anything, and certainly a war would do as well as another, since no matter what his brains might a been telling him once he had that much water between him and Eula Snopes, even his instincts likely told him that jest two years wasn't nowhere near enough for him or Helen either to have any confidence in that disenchantment.

So even if he couldn't anticipate no war to save him, back in his mind somewhere he was still confident that Providence would furnish something, since like he said, God was anyhow a gentleman and wouldn't bollix up the same feller twice with the same trick, at least in the same original package.

So he had his war. Only you would a wondered — at least I did — why he never went into it on the German side. Not jest because he was already in Germany and the Germans handy right there surrounding him, but because he had already told me how, although it was the

culture of England that had sent folks this fur across the water to establish America, right now it was the German culture that had the closest tie with the modern virile derivations of the northern branch of the old Aryan stock.

Because he said that tie was mystical, not what you seen but what you heard, and that the present-day Aryan, in America at least, never had no confidence a-tall in what he seen, but on the contrary would believe anything he jest heard and couldn't prove; and that the modern German culture since the revolutions of 1848 never had no concern with, and if anything a little contempt for, anything that happened to man on the outside, or through the eyes and touch, like sculpture and painting and civil laws for his social benefit, but jest with what happened to him through his ears, like music and philosophy and what was wrong inside of his mind.

Which he said was the reason why German was such a ugly language, not musical like Italian and Spanish nor what he called the epicene exactitude of French, but was harsh and ugly, not to mention full of spit (like as the feller says, you speak Italian to men, French to women, and German to horses), so that there wouldn't be nothing to interfere and distract your mind from what your nerves and glands was hearing: the mystical ideas, the glorious music — Lawyer said, the best of music, from the mathematical inevitability of Mozart through the godlike passion of Beethoven and Bach to the combination bawdy-house street-carnival uproar that Wagner made — that come straight to the modern virile northern Aryan's heart without bothering his mind a-tall.

Except that he didn't join the German army. I don't know what lies he managed to tell the Germans to get out of Germany where he could join the enemy fighting them, nor what lies he thought up for the English and French to explain why a student out of a German university was a safe risk to have around where he might overhear somebody telling what surprise they was fixing up next. But he done it.

And it wasn't the English army he joined neither. It was the French one: them folks that, according to him, spent all their time talking about

epicene exactitudes to ladies. And I didn't know why even four years later when I finally asked him: "After all you said about that-ere kinship of German culture, and the German army right there in the middle of you, or leastways you in the middle of it, you still had to lie or trick your way to join the French one." Because all he said was, "I was wrong." And not even another year after that when I said to him, "Even despite that splendid glorious music and them splendid mystical ideas?" he jest says:

"They are still glorious, still splendid. It's the word mystical that's wrong.

The music and the ideas both come out of obscurity, darkness. Not out of shadow: out of obscurity, obfuscation, darkness. Man must have light. He must live in the fierce full constant glare of light, where all shadow will be defined and sharp and unique and personal: the shadow of his own singular rectitude or baseness. All human evils have to come out of obscurity and darkness, where there is nothing to dog man constantly with the shape of his own deformity."

In fact, not until two or three years more and he was back home now, settled now; and Eula, still without having to do no more than jest breathe as far as he was concerned, had already adopted the rest of his life as long as it would be needed, into the future of that eleven- or twelve-year-old girl, and I said to him:

"Helen walked in light," And he says,

"Helen was light. That's why we can still see her, not changed, not even dimmer, from five thousand years away," And I says,

"What about all them others you talk about? Semiramises and Judiths and Liliths and Francescas and Isoldes?"

And he says,

"But not like Helen. Not that bright, that luminous, that enduring. It's because the others all talked. They are fading steadily into the obscurity of their own vocality within which their passions and tragedies took place. But not Helen. Do you know there is not one recorded word of hers anywhere in existence, other than that one presumable Yes she must have said that time to Paris?"

So there they was. That gal of thirteen and fourteen and fifteen that wasn't trying to do nothing but jest get shut of having to go to school by getting there on time and knowing the lesson to make the rise next year, that likely wouldn't barely ever looked at him long enough to know him again except that she found out on a sudden that for some reason he was trying to adopt some of her daily life into hisn, or adopt a considerable chunk of his daily life into hern, whichever way you want to put it.

And that bachelor lawyer twice her age, that was already more or less in the public eye from being county attorney, not to mention in a little town like Jefferson where ever time you had your hair cut your constituency knowed about it by supertime. So that the best they knowed to do was to spend fifteen minutes after school one or two afternoons a week at a table in the window of Uncle Willy Christian's drugstore while she et a ice-cream soddy or a banana split and the ice melted into the unteched Coca-Cola in front of him.

Not jest the best but the only thing, not jest for the sake of her good name but also for them votes that two years from now might not consider buying ice-cream for fourteen-year-old gals a fitting qualification for a county attorney.

About twice a week meeting her by that kind of purely coincidental accident that looked jest exactly as accidental as you would expect: Lawyer ambushed behind his upstairs office window across the street until the first of the let-out school would begin to pass, which would be the kindergarden and the first grade, then by that same accidental coincidence happening to be on the corner at the exact time to cut her outen the seventh or eighth or ninth grade, her looking a little startled and surprised the first time or two; not alarmed: jest startled a little, wondering jest a little at first maybe what he wanted.

But not for long; that passed too and pretty soon Lawyer was even drinking maybe a inch of the Coca-Cola before it got too lukewarm to

swallow. Until one day I says to him: "I envy you," and he looked at me and I says, "Your luck," and he says, "My which luck?" and I says, "You are completely immersed twenty-four hours a day in being busy."

Most folks ain't. Almost nobody ain't. But you are. Doing the one thing you not only got to do, but the one thing in the world you want most to do. And if that wasn't already enough, it's got as many or maybe even more interesting technical complications in it than if you had invented it yourself instead of jest being discovered by it. For the sake of her good name, you got to do it right out in that very same open public eye that would ruin her good if it ever found a chance, but maybe wouldn't never even suspect you and she knowed one another's name if you jest kept it hidden in secret. Don't you call that keeping busy?"

Because he was unenchanted now, you see, done freed at last of that fallen seraphim. It was Eula herself had give him a salve, a ointment, for that bitter thumb the poets say ever man once in his life has got to gnaw at: that gal thirteen then fourteen then fifteen setting opposite him in Christian's drugstore maybe two afternoons a week in the intervals of them coincidental two or three weeks ever year while Miz Flem Snopes and her daughter would be on a holiday somewhere at the same coincidental time Manfred de Spain would be absent on hisn — not Mayor de Spain now but Banker de Spain since Colonel Sartoris finally vacated the presidency of the bank him and De Spain's paw and Will Varner had established, by letting his grandson run the automobile off into a ditch on the way to town one morning, and now Manfred de Spain was president of the bank, moving outen the mayor's office into the president's office at about the same more or less coincidental moment that Flem Snopes moved outen being the ex-superintendent of the power plant, into being vice-president of the bank, vacating simultaneously outen that little cloth cap he come to Jefferson in (jest vacated, not abandoned it, the legend being he sold it to a Negro boy for ten cents.

Which wouldn't be a bad price, since who knows if maybe some of that-
ere financial acumen might not a sweated off on to it.) into a black felt
planter's hat suitable to his new position and avocation.

Oh yes, Lawyer was unenchanted now, even setting alone now and
then in Christian's window while the ice melted into the Coca-Cola until
they would get back home, maybe to be ready and in practice when
them two simultaneous coincidences was over and school would open
again on a whole fresh year of two afternoons a week — providing of
course that sixteen- and seventeen-year-old gal never run into a Hoake
McCarron or a Manfred de Spain of her own between two of them and
Lawyer could say to you like the man in the book: What you see ain't
tears. You jest think that's what you're looking at.

Sixteen and seventeen and going on eighteen now and Lawyer still
lending her books to read and keeping her stalled twice a week on ice-
cream sundaes and banana splits, so anyhow Jefferson figured it
knowed what Lawyer was up to whether he admitted it out or not. And
naturally Eula had already knowed for five or six years what she was
after.

Like there's a dog, maybe not no extra dog but leastways a good sound
what you might call a dog's dog, that don't seem to belong to nobody
else, that seems to show a preference for your vicinity, that even after
the five or six years you ain't completely convinced there won't never
be no other dog available, and that even them five or six years back and
even with another five or six years added on to now, you never needed
and you ain't going to need that dog personally, there ain't any use in
simply throwing away and wasting its benefits and accomplishments,
even if they ain't nothing but fidelity and devotion, by letting somebody
else get a-holt of it.

Or say you got a gal child coming along, that the older and bigger she
gets, the more of a nuisance she's bound to be on your time and
private occupations: in which case not only won't that fidelity and
devotion maybe come into handy use, but even the dog itself might

that could still be capable of them long after even hit had give up all expectation of even one bone.

Which is what Jefferson figgered. But not me. Maybe even though she got rid of Hoake McCarron, even after she knowed she was pregnant, there is still moments when even female physical phenomenons is female first whether they want to be or not.

So I believe that women ain't so different from men: that if it ain't no trouble nor shock neither for a man to father on to his-self the first child of the woman he loved and lost and still can't rid outen his mind, no matter how many other men help to get it, it ain't no trouble neither for that woman to father a dozen different men's chillen on to that man that lost her and still never expected nothing of her except to accept his devotion.

And since she was a female too, likely by the time Linda was thirteen or fourteen or even maybe as soon as she got over that first startle, which would a been at the second or third ice-cream sody, she taken for granted she knowed what he was aiming at too. And she would a been wrong. That wasn't Lawyer. Jest to train her up and marry her wasn't it. She wouldn't a been necessary for that — I mean, the simple natural normal following lifetime up to the divorce of steady uxorious hymeneal conflict that any female he could a picked outen that school crowd or from Christian's sody counter would been fully competent for.

Jest that wouldn't a been worth his effort. He had to be the sole one masculine feller within her entire possible circumambience, not jest to recognise she had a soul still capable of being saved from what he called Snopesism: a force and power that stout and evil as to jeopardise it jest from her believing for twelve or thirteen years she was blood kin when she actively wasn't no kin a-tall, but that couldn't nobody else in range and reach but him save it — that-ere bubble-glass thing somewhere inside her like one of them shimmer-coloured balls balanced on the seal's nose, fragile yet immune too jest that one constant fragile inch above the smutch and dirt of Snopes as long as the seal don't trip or stumble or let her attention wander.

So all he aimed to do was jest to get her outen Jefferson or, better, safer still, completely outen Mississippi, starting off with the nine months of the school year, until somebody would find her and marry her and she would be gone for good — a optimist pure and simple and undefiled if there ever was one since ever body knowed that the reason Flem Snopes was vice-president of De Spain's bank was the same reason he was ex-superintendent of the power plant: in the one case folks wanting to smile at Eula Varner had to at least be able to pronounce Flem Snopes, and in the other De Spain has to take Flem along with him to get the use of Will Varner's voting stock to get his-self president.

And the only reason why Will Varner never used this chance to get back at Flem about that Old Frenchman homesite that Will thought wasn't worth nothing until Flem sold it to me and Odum Bookwright and Henry Armstid for my half of mine and Grover Winbush's café and Odum Bookwright's cash and the two-hundred-dollar mortgage on Henry's farm less them five or six dollars or whatever they was where Henry's wife tried to keep them buried from him behind the outhouse, was the same reason why Eula didn't quit Flem and marry De Spain: that staying married to Flem kept up a establishment and name for that gal that otherwise wouldn't a had either.

So once that gal was married herself or leastways settled for good away from Jefferson so she wouldn't need Flem's name and establishment no more, and in consequence Flem wouldn't have no holt over her any more, Flem his-self would be on the outside trying to look back in and Flem knowed it.

Only Lawyer didn't know it. He believed right up to the last that Flem was going to let him get Linda away from Jefferson to where the first strange young man that happened by would marry her and then Eula could quit him and he would be finished. He — I mean Lawyer — had been giving her books to read ever since she was fourteen and then kind of holding examinations on them while the Coca-Cola ice melted. Then she was going on seventeen, next spring she would graduate from

the high school and now he was ordering off for the catalogues from the extra-select girls' schools up there close to Harvard.

Now the part comes that don't nobody know except Lawyer, who naturally never told it. So as he his-self would say, you got to surmise from the facts in evidence: not jest the mind-improving books and the school catalogues accumulating into a dusty stack in his office, but the ice-cream sessions a thing of the past too. Because now she was going to and from school the back way, up alleys. Until finally in about a week maybe Lawyer realised that she was dodging him. And she was going to graduate from high school in less than two months now and there wasn't no time to waste.

So that morning Lawyer went his-self to talk to her maw and he never told that neither so now we got to presume on a little more than jest evidence. Because my childhood too come out of that same similar Frenchman's Bend background and mill-yew that Flem Snopes had lifted his-self out of by his own unaided bootstraps, if you don't count Hoake McCarron.

So all I had to do was jest to imagine my name was Flem Snopes and that the only holt I had on Will Varner's money was through his daughter, and if I ever lost what light holt I had on the granddaughter, the daughter would be gone. Yet here was a durn meddling outsider with a complete set of plans that would remove that granddaughter to where I wouldn't never see her again, if she had any sense a-tall.

And since the daughter had evidently put up with me for going on eighteen years now for the sake of that granddaughter, the answer was simple: all I needed to do was go to my wife and say, "If you give that gal permission to go away to school, I'll blow up this-here entire Manfred de Spain business to where she won't have no home to have to get away from, let alone one to come back to for Christmas and holidays."

And for her first eighteen years Eula breathed that same Frenchman's Bend mill-yew atmosphere too so maybe all I got to do is imagine my

name is Eula Varner to know what she said back to Lawyer: "No, she can't go off to school but you can marry her. That will solve ever thing." You see?

Because the kind of fidelity and devotion that could keep faithful and devoted that long without even wanting no bone any more, was not only too valuable to let get away, it even deserved to be rewarded. Because maybe the full rounded satisfaction and completeness of being Helen was bigger than a thousand Parises and McCarrons and De Spains could satisfy.

I don't mean jest the inexhaustible capacity for passion, but of power: the power not jest to draw and enchant and consume, but the power and capacity to give away and reward; the power to draw to you, not more than you can handle because the words "can't-handle" and "Helen" ain't even in the same language, but to draw to you so much more than you can possibly need that you could even afford to give the surplus away, be that prodigal — except that you are Helen and you can't give nothing away that was ever yourn: all you can do is share it and reward its fidelity and maybe even, for a moment, soothe and assuage its grief.

And cruel too, prodigal in that too, because you are Helen and can afford it; you got to be Helen to be that cruel, that prodigal in cruelty, and still be yourself unscathed and immune, likely calling him by his first name for the first time too: "Marry her, Gavin."

And saw in his face not jest startlement and a little surprise like he seen in Linda's that time, but terror, fright, not at having to answer "No" that quick nor even at being asked it because he believed he had done already asked and decided that suh-jestion forever a long while back. It was at having it suh-jested to him by her.

Like, since he hadn't been able to have no hope since that moment when he realised Manfred de Spain had already looked at her too, he had found out how to live at peace with hoping since he was the only one alive that knowed he never had none. But now, when she said that

right out loud to his face, it was like she had said right out in public that he wouldn't a had no hope even if Manfred de Spain hadn't never laid eyes on her. And if he could jest get that "No" out quick enough, it would be like maybe she hadn't actively said what she said, and he would still not be destroyed.

At least wasn't nobody, no outsider, there to hear it so maybe even before next January he was able to believe hadn't none of it even been said, like miracle: what ain't believed ain't seen. Miracle, pure miracle anyhow, how little a man needs to outlast jest about anything. Which — miracle — is about what looked like had happened next January: Linda graduated that spring from high school and next fall she entered the Seminary where she would be home ever night and all day Saturday and Sunday the same as before so Flem could keep his hand on her.

Then jest after Christmas we heard how she had withdrew from the Seminary and was going over to Oxford and enter the University. Yes sir, over there fifty miles from Flem day and night both right in the middle of a nest of five or six hundred bachelors under twenty-five years old any one of which could marry her that had two dollars for a licence. A pure miracle, especially after I run into Eula on the street and says,

"How did you manage it?" and she says,

"Manage what?" and I says,

"Persuade Flem to let her go to the University," and she says,

"I didn't. It was his idea.

He gave the permission without even consulting me. I didn't know he was going to do it either." Only the Frenchman's Bend background should have been enough, without even needing the sixteen or seventeen years of Jefferson environment, to reveal even to blind folks that Flem Snopes didn't deal in miracles: that he preferred spot cash or at least a signed paper with a X on it.

So when it was all over and finished, Eula dead and De Spain gone from Jefferson for good too and Flem was now president of the bank and even living in De Spain's rejuvenated ancestral home and Linda gone

with her New York husband to fight in the Spanish war, when Lawyer finally told me what little he actively knowed, it was jest evidence I had already presumed on.

Because of course all Helen's children would have to inherit something of generosity even if they couldn't inherit more than about one-millionth of their maw's bounty to be generous with. Not to mention that McCarron boy, that even if he wasn't durable enough to stand more than that-ere first creek bridge, was at least brave enough or rash enough to try to. So likely Flem already knowed in advance that he wouldn't have to bargain, swap, with her.

That all he needed was jest to do what he probably done: ketching her after she had give up and then had had them three months to settle down into having give up, then saying to her: "Let's compromise. If you will give up them eastern schools, maybe you can go to the University over at Oxford." You see? Offering to give something that, in all the fourteen or fifteen years she could remember knowing him in, she had never dreamed he would do.

Then that day in the next April; she had been at the University over at Oxford since right after New Year's. I was jest leaving for Rockyford to deliver Miz Ledbetter's new sewing machine when Flem stopped me on the Square and offered me four bits extra to carry him by Varner's store a minute. Urgent enough to pay me four bits when the mail carrier would have took him for nothing; secret enough that he couldn't risk either public conveyance: the mail carrier that would a took him out and back free but would a needed all day, or a hired automobile that would had him at Varner's front gate in not much over a hour.

Secret enough and urgent enough to have Will Varner storming into his daughter's and son-in-law's house in Jefferson before daylight the next morning loud enough to wake up the whole neighbourhood until somebody (Eula naturally) stopped him. So we got to presume on a few known facts again: that Old Frenchman place that Will deeded to Flem because he thought it was worthless until Flem sold it to me and Odum Bookwright and Henry Armstid (less of course the active silver dollars

Flem had had to invest into that old rose garden with a shovel where we — or any other Ratliffs and Bookwrights and Armstids that was handy — would find them).

And that president's chair in the bank that we knowed now Flem had had his eye on ever since Manfred de Spain taken it over after Colonel Sartoris. And that gal that had done already inherited generosity from her maw and then was suddenly give another gob of it that she not only never in the world expected but that she probably never knowed how bad she wanted it until it was suddenly give to her free.

What Flem taken out to Frenchman's Bend that day was a will. Maybe when Linda finally got over the shock of getting permission to go away to school after she had long since give up any hope of it, even if no further away than Oxford, maybe when she looked around and realised who that permission had come from, she jest could not bear to be under obligations to him. Except I don't believe that neither.

It wasn't even that little of bounty and generosity which would be all Helen's child could inherit from her, since half of even Helen's child would have to be corrupted by something less than Helen, being as even Helen couldn't get a child on herself alone. What Linda wanted was not jest to give. It was to be needed: not jest to be loved and wanted, but to be needed too; and maybe this was the first time in her life she ever had anything that anybody not jest wanted but needed too.

It was a will; Eula of course told Lawyer. Flem his-self could a suh-jested the idea to Linda; it wouldn't a been difficult. Which I don't believe neither. He didn't need to; he knowed her well enough to presume on that, jest like she knowed him enough to presume too. It was Linda herself that evolved the idea when she realised that as long as he lived and drew breath as Flem Snopes, he wasn't never going to give her permission to leave Jefferson for any reason.

And her asking herself, impotent and desperate: But why? why? until finally she answered it — a answer that maybe wouldn't a helt much

water but she was jest sixteen and seventeen then, during which sixteen and seventeen years she had found out that the only thing he loved was money. Because she must a knowed something anyway about Manfred de Spain. Jefferson wasn't that big, if in fact any place is.

Not to mention them two or three weeks of summer holiday at the seashore or mountains or wherever, when here all of a sudden who should turn up but a old Jefferson neighbour happening by accident to take his vacation too from the bank at the same time and place. So what else would she say? It's grandfather's money, that his one and only chance to keep any holt on it is through mama and me so he believes that once I get away from him his holt on both of us will be broken and mama will leave too and marry Manfred and any hope of grandfather's money will be gone forever.

Yet here was this man that had had sixteen or seventeen years to learn her he didn't love nothing but money and would do anything you could suh-jest to get another dollar of it, coming to her his-self, without no pressure from nobody and not asking for nothing back, saying, You can go away to school if you still want to; only, this first time anyhow stay at least as close to home as Oxford; saying in effect: I was wrong. I won't no longer stand between you and your life, even though I am convinced I will be throwing away all hope of your grandpaw's money.

So what else could she do but what she done, saying in effect back at him: If you jest realised now that grandfather's money ain't as important as my life, I could a told you that all the time; if you had jest told me two years ago that all you was was jest skeered, I would a eased you then — going (Lawyer his-self told me this) to a Oxford lawyer as soon as she was settled in the University and drawing up a will leaving whatever share she might ever have in her grandpaw's or her maw's estate to her father Flem Snopes. Sho, that wouldn't a held no water neither, but she was jest eighteen and that was all she had to give that she thought anybody wanted or needed from her; and besides, all the water it would need to hold would be what old Will Varner would sweat out when Flem showed it to him.

So jest after ten that morning I stopped not at the store where Will would be at this hour but at his front gate jest exactly long enough for Flem to get out and walk into the house until he coincided with Miz Varner I reckon it was and turn around and come back out and get back into the pickup and presumably at their two o'clock a.m. morning family breakfast it occurred to Miz Varner or anyway she decided to or anyhow did hand Will the paper his son-in-law left yestiddy for him to look at.

And by sunup Will had that whole Snopes street woke up hollering inside Flem's house until Eula got him shut up. And by our normal ee-feet Jefferson breakfast time Manfred de Spain was there too. And that done it.

Will Varner, that Flem had done already tricked outen that Old Frenchman place, then turned right around and used him again to get his-self and Manfred de Spain vice-president and president respectively of Colonel Sartoris's bank, and now Flem had done turned back around the third time and somehow tricked his granddaughter into giving him a quit-claim to half of his active cash money that so far even Flem hadn't found no way to touch.

And Flem, that all he wanted was for Manfred de Spain to resign from the bank so he could be president of it and would jest as lief done it quiet and discreet and all private in the family you might say by a simple friendly suh-jestion from Will Varner to Manfred to resign from the bank, as a even swap for that paper of Linda's, which should a worked with anybody and would with anybody else except Manfred. He was the trouble; likely Eula could a handled them all except for him.

Maybe he got that-ere scar on his face by actively toting a flag up a hill in Cuba and running over a cannon or a fort with it, and maybe it come from the axe in that crap game that old mayor's-race rumour claimed. But leastways it was on his front and not on his back and so maybe a feller could knock him out with a piece of lead pipe and pick his pocket

while he was laying there, but couldn't no Snopes nor nobody else pick it jest by pointing at him what the other feller thought was a pistol.

And Eula in the middle of them, that likely could a handled it all except for Manfred, that had even made Will shut up but she couldn't make Manfred hush.

That had done already spent lacking jest a week of nineteen years holding together a home for Linda to grow up and live in so she wouldn't never need to say, Other children have got what I never had; there was Eula having to decide right there right now, If I was a eighteen-year-old gal, which would I rather have: my mother publicly notarised as a suicide, or publicly condemned as a whore? and by noon the next day all Jefferson knowed how the afternoon before she come to town and went to the beauty parlour that hadn't never been in one before because she never needed to, and had her hair waved and her fingernails shined and went back home and presumably et supper or anyhow was present at it since it wasn't until about eleven o'clock that she seemed to taken up the pistol and throwed the safety off.

And the next morning Lawyer and his sister drove over to Oxford and brought Linda home; a pure misfortune coincidence that all this had to happen jest a week before her nineteenth birthday. But as soon as Flem received that will from her, naturally he figgered Will Varner would want to see it as soon as possible, being a interested party; it was Will that never had no reason a-tall to pick out that special day to come bellering in to town two hours after he first seen it. He could a jest as well waited two weeks or even a month to come in, since wasn't nobody hurrying him; Flem would certainly a waited on his convenience.

And Lawyer that tended to the rest of it too: arranged for the funeral and sent out to Frenchman's Bend for Miz Varner and the old Methodist preacher that had baptised Eula, and then seen to the grave. Because naturally the bereaved husband couldn't be expected to break into his grief jest to do chores. Not to mention having to be ready to take over the bank after a decent interval, being as Manfred de Spain

his-self had packed up and departed from Jefferson right after the burying.

And then, after another decorious interval, a little longer this time being as a bank ain't like jest a house because a bank deals with active cash money and can't wait, getting ready to move into De Spain's house too since De Spain had give ever evident intention of not aiming to return to Jefferson from his last what you might still call Varner trip and there wasn't no use in letting a good sound well-situated house stand vacant and empty.

Which — De Spain's house — was likely a part of that same swapping and trading between Flem and Will Varner that included Varner's bank-stock votes and that-ere financial Midsummer Night's Dream masque or rondeau that Linda and that Oxford lawyer composed betwixt them that had Linda's signature on it.

Not to mention Lawyer being appointed by old man Will to be trustee of Linda's money since it was now finally safe from Flem until he thought up something that Lawyer would believe too this time.

Will appointing Lawyer for the reason that likely he couldn't pass by Lawyer to get to no one else, Lawyer being not only in the middle of that entire monetary and sepulchrial crisis but all around ever part of it too, like one of them frantic water bugs skating and rushing immune and unwettable on top of a stagnant pond.

I mean, Lawyer was now busy over the headstone Flem had decided on. Because it would have to be made in Italy, which would take time, and so would demand ever effort on Lawyer's part before Linda could pack up and leave Jefferson too, being as Flem felt that that same filial decorum demanded that Linda wait until her maw's headstone was up and finished before leaving.

Only I don't mean jest headstone: I mean monument: Lawyer combing and currying not jest Jefferson and Frenchman's Bend but most of the rest of Yoknapatawpha County too, hunting out ever photograph of

Eula he could locate to send to Italy so they could carve Eula's face in stone to put on it.

Which is when I noticed again how there ain't nobody quite as temerious as a otherwise timid feller that finds out that his moral standards and principles is now demanding him to do something that, if all he had to depend on was jest his own satisfaction and curiosity, he wouldn't a had the brass to do, penetrating into ever house that not only might a knowed Eula but that jest had a Brownie Kodak, thumbing through albums and intimate photographic family records, courteous and polite of course but jest a man obviously not in no condition to be said No to, let alone merely Please don't.

He could keep busy now. Because he was contented and happy now, you see. He never had nothing to worry him now. Eula was safely gone now and now he could be safe forevermore from ever again having to chew his bitter poetic thumbs over the constant anticipation of who would turn up next named McCarron or De Spain.

And now Linda was not only safe for good from Flem, he, Lawyer, even had the full charge and control of her money from her maw and grandpaw, so that now she could go anywhere she wanted — providing of course he could nag and harry them folks across the water to finish carving that face before the millennium or judgment day come, gathering up all the pictures of Eula he could find and sending them to Italy and then waiting until a drawing or a photograph of how the work was coming along would get back for him to see jest how wrong it was, and he would send me word to be at his office at a certain hour for the conference, with the newest fresh Italian sketch or photograph laid out on the desk with a special light on it and him saying, "It's the ear, or the line of the jaw, or the mouth — right here: see what I mean?" and I would say,
"It looks all right to me.

It looks beautiful to me." And he would say,
"No. It's wrong right here. Hand me a pencil." Except he would already have a pencil, and he couldn't draw neither so he would have to rub

that out and try again. Except that time was passing so he would have to send it back; and Flem and Linda living in De Spain's house now and now Flem had done bought a automobile that he couldn't drive but anyhow he had a daughter that could, leastways now and then; until at last even that was over. It was October and Lawyer sent me word the unveiling at the graveyard would be that afternoon. Except I had done already got word to Chick, since from the state of peace and contentment Lawyer had got his-self into by this time, it might take both of us. So Chick stayed outen school that afternoon so all three of us went out to the cemetery together in Lawyer's car.

And there was Linda and Flem too, in Flem's car with the Negro driver that was going to drive her on to Memphis to take the New York train with her packed grips already in the car, and Flem leaning back in the seat with that black hat on that even after five years still didn't look like it actively belonged to him, chewing, and Linda beside him in her dark going-away dress and hat with her head bent a little and them little white gloves shut into fists on her lap.

And there it was: that-ere white monument with on the front of it that face that even if it was carved outen dead stone, was still the same face that ever young man no matter how old he got would still never give up hope and belief that some day before he died he would finally be worthy to be wrecked and ruined and maybe even destroyed by it, above the motto that Flem his-self had picked:

A Virtuous Wife Is a Crown to Her Husband

Her Children Rise and Call Her Blessed

Until at last Flem leaned out the window and spit and then set back in the car and tells her: "All right. You can go now."

Yes sir, Lawyer was free now. He never had nothing to worry him now: him and Chick and me driving back to the office and him talking about how the game of football could be brought up to date in keeping with the progress of the times by giving ever body a football too so ever body would be in the game; or maybe better still, keep jest one football but abolish the boundaries so that a smart feller for instance could hide the ball under his shirt-tail and slip off into the bushes and circle around

town and come in through a back alley and cross the goal before anybody even missed he was gone; right on into the office where he set down behind the desk and taken up one of the cob pipes and struck three matches to it until Chick taken it away from him and filled it from the tobacco jar and handed it back and Lawyer says, "Much obliged," and dropped the filled pipe into the wastebasket and folded his hands on the desk, still talking, and I says to Chick:

"Watch him. I won't be long," and went around into the alley; I never had much time so what was in the pint bottle was pretty bad but leastways it had something in it that for a moment anyhow would feel like alcohol.

And I got the sugar bowl and glass and spoon from the cabinet and made the toddy and set it on the desk by him and he says, "Much obliged," not even touching it, jest setting there with his hands folded in front of him, blinking quick and steady like he had sand in his eyes, saying: "All us civilised people date our civilisation from the discovery of the principle of distillation.

And even though the rest of the world, at least that part of it in the United States, rates us folks in Mississippi at the lowest rung of culture, what man can deny that, even if this is as bad as I think it's going to be, we too grope toward the stars? Why did she do it, V.K.? That — all that — that she walked in, lived in, breathed in — it was only loaned to her; it wasn't hers to destroy and throw away. It belonged to too many. It belonged to all of us. Why, V.K.?" he says. "Why?"

"Maybe she was bored," I says, and he says:

"Bored. Yes, bored." And that was when he began to cry. "She loved, had the capacity to love, to give and to take it. Only she tried twice and failed twice not jest to find somebody strong enough to deserve it but even brace enough to accept it. Yes," he says, setting there bolt upright with jest the tears running down his face, at peace now, with nothing nowhere in the world any more to anguish or grieve him. "Of course she was bored."

V. K. Ratliff

SO HE WAS free. He had not only got shut of his sireen, he had even got shut of the ward he found out she had heired to him. Because I says, "Grinnich Village?" and he says, "Yes. A little place without physical boundaries located as far as she is concerned in New York City, where young people of all ages below ninety go in search of dreams." Except I says, "Except she never had to leave Mississippi to locate that place." And then I said it, what Eula herself must have, had to have, said to him that day: "Why didn't you marry her?"

"Because she wasn't but nineteen," he says. "And you are all of thirty-five, ain't you," I says. "When the papers are full of gals still carrying a doll in one hand marrying folks of sixty and seventy, providing of course they got a little extra money."

"I mean, she's got too much time left to run into something where she might need me. How many papers are full of people that got married because someday they might need the other one?" "Oh," I says. "So all you got to do now is jest stay around close where you can hear the long-distance telephone or the telegram boy can find you. Because naturally you won't be waiting for her to ever come back to Mississippi. Or maybe you are?"

"Naturally not," he says. "Why should she?" "Thank God!" I says. He didn't answer. "Because who knows," I says, "she may done already found that dream even in jest these . . . two days, ain't it? three? Maybe he was already settled there when she arrived. That's possible in Grinnich Village, ain't it?"

Then he said it too. "Yes," he says, "thank God." So he was free. And in fact, when you had time to look around a little, he never had nothing no more to do but jest rest in peace and quiet and contentment. Because not only him but all Jefferson was free of Snopeses; for the

first time in going on twenty years, Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha County too was in what you might call a kind of Snopes doldrum.

Because at last even Flem seemed to be satisfied: setting now at last in the same chair the presidents of the Merchants and Farmers Bank had been setting in ever since the first one, Colonel Sartoris, started it twenty-odd years ago, and actively living in the very house the second one of it was born in, so that all he needed to do too after he had done locked up the money and went home was to live in solitary peace and quiet and contentment too, not only shut of the daughter that had kept him on steady and constant tenterhooks for years whether she might not escape at any moment to where he couldn't watch her and the first male feller that come along would marry her and he would lose her share of Will Varner's money, but shut of the wife that at any time her and Manfred de Spain would get publicly caught up with and cost him all the rest of Varner's money and bank voting stock too. In fact for the moment Flem was the only true Snopes actively left in Jefferson.

Old man Ab never had come no closer than that hill two miles out where you could jest barely see the water tank, where he taken the studs that day back about 1910 and hadn't moved since. And four years ago Flem had ci-devanted I.O. back to Frenchman's Bend for good. And even before that Flem had eliminated Montgomery Ward into the penitentiary at Parchman where Mink already was (Mink hadn't really resided in Jefferson nohow except jest them few months in the jail waiting for his life sentence to be awarded).

And last month them four half-Snopes Indians that Byron Snopes, Colonel Sartoris's bank clerk that resigned by the simple practical expedient of picking up as much of the loose money he could tote and striking for the nearest U.S. border, sent back collect from Mexico until somebody could get close enough to fasten the return prepaid tags on them before whichever one had it at the moment could get out that switch-blade knife.

And as for Eck's boys, Wall Street Panic and Admiral Dewey, they hadn't never been Snopeses to begin with, since all Wall Street evidently wanted to do was run a wholesale grocery business by the outrageous un-Snopesish method of jest selling ever body exactly what they thought they was buying, for exactly what they thought they was going to pay for it.

Or almost satisfied that is. I mean Flem and his new house. It was jest a house: two-storey, with a gallery for Major de Spain, Manfred's paw, to set on when he wasn't fishing or hunting or practising a little law, and it was all right for that-ere second president of the Merchants and Farmers Bank to live in, especially since he had been born in it. But this was a different president. His road to that chair and that house had been longer than them other two. Likely he knowed he had had to come from too fur away to get where he was, and had to come too hard to reach it by the time he did. Because Colonel Sartoris had been born into money and respectability too, and Manfred de Spain had been born into respectability at least even if he had made a heap of the money since.

But he, Flem Snopes, had had to earn both of them, snatch and tear and scabble both of them outen the hard enduring resisting rock you might say, not jest with his bare hands but with jest one bare hand since he had to keep the other bare single hand fending off while he tore and scabbled with the first one. So the house the folks owning the money would see Manfred de Spain walk into ever evening after he locked the money up and went home, wouldn't be enough for Flem Snopes. The house they would see him walk into ever evening until time to unlock the money tomorrow morning, would have to be the physical symbol of all them generations of respectability and aristocracy that not only would a been too proud to mishandle other folks' money, but couldn't possibly ever needed to.

So there was another Snopes in Jefferson after all. Not transplanted in from Frenchman's Bend: jest imported in for temporary use. This was Wat Snopes, the carpenter, Watkins Products Snopes his full name was, like it was painted on both sides and the back of Doc Meeks's patent-

medicine truck; evidently there was a Snopes somewhere now and then that could read reading, whether he could read writing or not.

So during the next nine or ten months anybody that had or could think up the occasion, could pass along the street and watch Wat and his work gang of kinfolks and in-laws tearing off Major de Spain's front gallery and squaring up the back of the house and building and setting up them colyums to reach all the way from the ground up to the second-storey roof, until even when the painting was finished it still wouldn't be as big as Mount Vernon of course, but then Mount Vernon was a thousand miles away so there wasn't no chance of invidious or malicious eye-to-eye comparison.

So that when he locked up the bank and come home in the evening he could walk into a house and shut the door that the folks owning the money he was custodian of would some of them be jealous a little but all of them, even the jealous ones, would be proud and all of them would approve, laying down to rest undisturbed at night with their money that immaculate, that impeccable, that immune. He was completely complete, as the feller says, with a Negro cook and a yardboy that could even drive that-ere automobile now and then since he no longer had a only daughter to drive it maybe once a month to keep the battery up like the man told him he would have to do or buy a new one.

But it was jest the house that was altered and transmogrified and symbolised: not him. The house he disappeared into about four p.m. ever evening until about eight a.m. tomorrow, might a been the solid aristocratic ancestral symbol of Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr and Astor and Morgan and Harriman and Hill and ever other golden advocate of hard quick-thinking vested interest, but the feller the owners of that custodiated money seen going and coming out of it was the same one they had done got accustomed to for twenty years now: the same little snap-on bow tie he had got outen the Frenchman's Bend mule wagon in and only the hat was new and different; and even that old cloth cap, that maybe was plenty good enough to be Varner's clerk in but that wasn't to be seen going in and out of a Jefferson bank on

the head of its vice-president — even the cap not thrown away or even give away, but sold, even if it wasn't but jest a dime because ten cents is money too around a bank, so that all the owners of that money that he was already vice-custodian of could look at the hat and know that, no matter how little they might a paid for one similar to it, hisn had cost him ten cents less.

It wasn't that he rebelled at changing Flem Snopes: he done it by deliberate calculation, since the feller you trust ain't necessarily the one you never knowed to do nothing untrustable: its the one you have seen from experience that he knows exactly when being untrustable will pay a net profit and when it will pay a loss.

And that was jest the house on the outside too, up to the moment when he passed in and closed the front door behind him until eight o'clock tomorrow.

And he hadn't never invited nobody in, and so far hadn't nobody been able to invent no way in, so the only folks that ever seen the inside of it was the cook and the yardman and so it was the yardman that told me: all them big rooms furnished like De Spain left them, plus them interior-decorated sweets the Memphis expert learned Eula that being vice-president of a bank he would have to have; that Flem never even went into them except to eat in the dining-room, except that one room at the back where when he wasn't in the bed sleeping he was setting in another swivel chair like the one in the bank, with his feet propped against the side of the fireplace: not reading, not doing nothing: jest setting with his hat on, chewing that same little mouth-sized chunk of air he had been chewing ever since he quit tobacco when he finally got to Jefferson and heard about chewing gum and then quit chewing gum too when he found out folks considered the vice-president of a bank rich enough not to have to chew anything.

And how Wat Snopes had found a picture in a magazine how to do over all the fireplaces with colonial moulding and colyums and cornices too and at first Flem would jest set with his feet propped on the white

paint, scratching it a little deeper ever day with the pegs in his heels. Until one day about a year after the house was finished over.

Wat Snopes was there to eat dinner and after Wat finally left the yardman said how he went into the room and seen it: not a defiance, not a simple reminder of where he had come from but rather as the feller says a reaffirmation of his-self and maybe a warning to his-self too: a little wood ledge, not even painted, nailed to the front of that hand-carved hand-painted Mount Vernon mantelpiece at the exact height for Flem to prop his feet on it.

And time was when that first president, Colonel Sartoris, had come the four miles between his ancestral symbol and his bank in a surrey and matched pair drove by a Negro coachman in a linen duster and one of the Colonel's old plug hats; and time ain't so was when the second president still come and went in that fire-engine-coloured E.M.F. racer until he bought that black Packard and a Negro too except in a white coat and a showfer's cap to drive it.

This here new third president had a black automobile too even if it wasn't a Packard, and a Negro that could drive it too even if he never had no white coat and showfer's cap yet and even if the president didn't ride back and forth to the bank or at least not yet. Them two previous presidents would ride around the county in the evening after the bank closed and on Sunday, in that surrey and pair or the black Packard, to look at the cotton farms they represented the mortgages on, while this new president hadn't commenced that neither.

Which wasn't because he jest couldn't believe yet that he actively represented the mortgages. He never doubted that. He wasn't skeered to believe it, and he wasn't too meek to nor doubtful to. It was because he was watching yet and learning yet. It wasn't that he had learned two lessons while he thought he was jest learning that single one about how he would need respectability, because he had done already brought that second lesson in from Frenchman's Bend with him.

That was humility, the only kind of humility that's worth a hoot: the humility to know they's a heap of things you don't know yet but if you jest got the patience to be humble and watchful long enough, especially keeping one eye on your back trail, you will. So now on the evenings and Sundays there was jest that house where you wasn't invited in to see him setting in that swivel chair in that one room he used, with his hat on and chewing steady on nothing and his feet propped on that little wooden additional ledge nailed in unpainted paradox to that hand-carved and painted mantel like one of them framed mottoes you keep hanging on the wall where you work or think, saying Remember Death or Keep Smiling or -Working or God is Love to remind not jest you but the strangers that see it too, that you got at least a speaking acquaintance with the fact that it might be barely possible it taken a little something more than jest you to get you where you're at.

But all that, footrest and all, would come later. Right now, Lawyer was free. And then — it wasn't no three days after Linda reached New York, but it wasn't no three hundred neither — he become, as the feller says, indeed free. He was leaning against the counter in the post office lobby with the letter already open in his hand when I come in; it wasn't his fault neither that the lobby happened to be empty at the moment.

"His name is Barton Kohl," he says.

"Sho now," I says. "Whose name is?"

"That dream's name," he says.

"Cole," I says.

"No," he says. "You're pronouncing it Cole. It's spelled K-o-h-l."

"Oh," I says. "Kohl. That don't sound very American to me."

"Does Vladimir Kyrilytch sound very American to you?"

But the lobby was empty. Which, as I said, wasn't his fault. "Confound it," I says, "with one Ratliff in ever generation for them whole hundred and fifty years since your durn Yankee Congress banished us into the Virginia mountains, has had to spend half his life trying to live down his

front name before somebody spoke it out loud where folks could hear it. It was Eula told you.”

“All right,” he says. “I’ll help you bury your family shame. — Yes,” he says. “He’s a Jew. A sculptor, probably a damned good one.”

“Because of that?” I says.

“Probably, but not exclusively. Because of her.”

“Linda’ll make him into a good sculptor, no matter what he was before, because she married him?”

“No. He would have to be the best of whatever he was for her to pick him out.”

“So she’s married now,” I says.

“What?” he says. “No. She just met him, I tell you.”

“So you ain’t—” I almost said safe yet before I changed it: “ — sure yet. I mean, she ain’t decided yet.”

“What the hell else am I talking about? Don’t you remember what I told you last fall? that she would love once and it would be for keeps.”

“Except that you said ‘doomed to’.”

“All right,” he says.

“Doomed to fidelity and grief, you said. To love once quick and lose him quick and for the rest of her life to be faithful and to grieve. But leastways she ain’t lost him yet. In fact, she ain’t even got him yet. That’s correct, aint it?”

“Didn’t I say all right?” he says.

That was the first six months, about. Another year after that, that-ere little footrest ledge was up on that hand-painted Mount Vernon mantel — that-ere little raw wood step like out of a scrap pile, nailed by a country carpenter on to that what you might call respectability’s virgin Matterhorn for the Al-pine climber to cling to panting, gathering his-self for that last do-or-die upsurge to deface the ultimate crowning pinnacle and peak with his own victorious initials.

But not this one; and here was that humility again: not in public where it would be an insult to any and all that held Merchants and Farmers Bank Al-pine climbing in veneration, but in private like a secret chapel or a shrine: not to cling panting to it, desperate and indomitable, but to prop his feet on it while setting at his ease.

This time I was passing the office stairs when Lawyer come rushing around the corner as usual, with most of the law papers flying along loose in his outside pockets but a few of them still in his hand too as usual. I mean, he had jest two gaits: one standing more or less still and the other like his coat-tail was on fire. "Run back home and get your grip," he says. "We're leaving Memphis tonight for New York."

So we went up the stairs and as soon as we was inside the office he changed to the other gait as usual. He threw the loose papers on to the desk and taken one of the cob pipes outen the dish and set down, only when he fumbled in his coat for the matches or tobacco or whatever it was he discovered the rest of the papers and threwed them on to the desk and set back in the chair like he had done already had all the time in the world and couldn't possibly anticipate nothing else happening in the next hundred years neither. "For the housewarming," he says.

"You mean the reception, don't you? Ain't that what they call it after the preacher has done collected his two dollars?" He didn't say anything, jest setting there working at lighting that pipe like a jeweller melting one exact drop of platinum maybe into a watch. "So they ain't going to marry," I says. "They're jest going to confederate. I've heard that: that that's why they call them Grinnich Village samples dreams: you can wake up without having to jump outen the bed in a dead run for the nearest lawyer."

He didn't move. He jest bristled, that lively and quick he never had time to change his position. He sat there and bristled like a hedgehog, not moving of course: jest saying cold and calm, since even a hedgehog, once it has got itself arranged and prickled out, can afford a cold and calm collected voice too: "All right. I'll arrogate the term 'marriage' to it

then. Do you protest or question it? Maybe you would even suggest a better one? — Because there's not enough time left," he says. "Enough left? There's none left. Young people today don't have any left because only fools under twenty-five can believe, let alone hope, that there's any left at all — for any of us, anybody alive today—"

"It don't take much time to say We both do in front of a preacher and then pay whatever the three of you figger it's worth."

"Didn't I just say there's not even that much left if all you've had is just twenty-five or thirty years—"

"So that's how old he is," I says. "You stopped at jest twenty-five before."

He didn't stop at nowhere now: "Barely a decade since their fathers and uncles and brothers just finished the one which was to rid the phenomenon of government forever of the parasites — the hereditary properties, the farmers-general of the human dilemma who had just killed eight million human beings and ruined a forty-mile-wide strip down the middle of western Europe.

Yet less than a dozen years later and the same old cynical manipulators not even bothering to change their names and faces but merely assuming a set of new titles out of the shibboleth of the democratic lexicon and its mythology, not even breaking stride to coalesce again to wreck the one doomed desperate hope—" Now he will resume the folks that broke President Wilson's heart and killed the League of Nations I thought, but he was the one that didn't even break stride: "That one already in Italy and one a damned sight more dangerous in Germany because all Mussolini has to work with are Italians while this other man has Germans. And the one in Spain that all he needs is to be let alone a little longer by the rest of us who still believe that if we just keep our eyes closed long enough it will all go away. Not to mention—"

"Not to mention the one in Russia," I said.

" — the ones right here at home: the organisations with the fine names confederated in unison in the name of God against the impure in

morals and politics and with the wrong skin colour and ethnology and religion: K.K.K. and Silver Shirts; not to mention the indigenous local champions like Long in Louisiana and our own Bilbo in Mississippi, not to mention our very own Senator Clarence Egglestone Snopes right here in Yoknapatawpha County—”

“Not to mention the one in Russia,” I says.

“What?” he says.

“So that’s why,” I says. “He ain’t jest a sculptor. He’s a communist too.”

“What?” Lawyer says.

“Barton Kohl. The reason they didn’t marry first is that Barton Kohl is a communist. He can’t believe in churches and marriage. They won’t let him.”

“He wanted them to marry,” Lawyer says. “It’s Linda that won’t.” So now it was me that said What? and him setting there fierce and untouchable as a hedgehog. “You don’t believe that?” he says.

“Yes,” I says. “I believe it.”

“Why should she want to marry? What could she have ever seen in the one she had to look at for nineteen years, to make her want any part of it?”

“All right,” I says. “All right. Except that’s the one I don’t believe. I believe the first one, about there ain’t enough time left. That when you are young enough, you can believe. When you are young enough and brave enough at the same time, you can hate intolerance and believe in hope and, if you are sho enough brave, act on it.” He still looked at me.

“I wish it was me,” I says.

“Not just to marry somebody, but to marry anybody just so it’s marriage. Just so it’s not adultery. Even you.”

“Not that,” I says. “I wish I was either one of them. To believe in intolerance and hope and act on it. At any price. Even at having to be under twenty-five again like she is, to do it. Even to being a thirty-year-old Grinnich Village sculptor like he is.”

“So you do refuse to believe that all she wants is to cuddle up together and be what she calls happy.”

“Yes,” I says. “So do I.” So I didn’t go that time, not even when he said: “Nonsense. Come on. Afterward we will run up to Saratoga and look at that ditch or hill or whatever it was where your first immigrant Vladimir Kyrilytch Ratliff ancestor entered your native land.”

“He wasn’t no Ratliff then yet,” I says. “We don’t know what his last name was. Likely Nelly Ratliff couldn’t even spell that one, let alone pronounce it. Maybe in fact neither could he. Besides, it wasn’t even Ratliff then. It was Ratcliffe. — No,” I says, “jest you will be enough. You can get cheaper corroboration than one that will not only need a round-trip ticket but three meals a day too.”

“Corroboration for what?” he says.

“At this serious moment in her life when she is fixing to officially or leastways formally confederate or shack up with a gentleman friend of the opposite sex as the feller says, ain’t the reason for this trip to tell her and him at last who she is? or leastways who she ain’t?” Then I says, “Of course. She already knows,” and he says, “How could she help it? How could she have lived in the same house with Flem for nineteen years and still believe he could possibly be her father, even if she had incontrovertible proof of it?”

“And you ain’t never told her,” I says. Then I says, “It’s even worse than that. Whenever it occurs to her enough to maybe fret over it a little and she comes to you and says maybe, ‘Tell me the truth now. He ain’t my father,’ she can always depend on you saying, ‘You’re wrong, he is.’ Is that the dependence and need you was speaking of?” Now he wasn’t looking at me. “What would you do if she got it turned around backwards and said to you, ‘Who is my father?’ ” No, he wasn’t looking at me. “That’s right,” I says. “She won’t never ask that. I reckon she has done watched Gavin Stevens too, enough to know there’s some lies even he ought not to need to cope with.” He wasn’t looking at me a-tall. “So that there dependence, is on a round-trip ticket too,” I says.

He was back after ten days. And I thought how maybe if that sculptor could jest ketch her unawares, still half asleep maybe, and seduce her outen the bed and up to a altar or even jest a J.P. before she noticed where she was at, maybe he — Lawyer — would be free. Then I knowed that wasn't even wishful thinking because there wasn't nothing in that idea that could be called thinking a-tall.

Because once I got rid of them hopeful cobwebs I realised I must a knowed for years what likely Eula knowed the moment she laid eyes on him: that he wouldn't never be free because he wouldn't never want to be free because this was his life and if he ever lost it he wouldn't have nothing left. I mean, the right and privilege and opportunity to dedicate forever his capacity for responsibility to something that wouldn't have no end to its appetite and that wouldn't never threaten to give him even a bone back in recompense.

And I remembered what he said back there about how she was doomed to fidelity and monogamy — to love once and lose him and then to grieve, and I said I reckoned so, that being Helen of Troy's daughter was kind of like being say the ex-Pope of Rome or the ex-Emperor of Japan: there wasn't much future to it. And I knowed now he was almost right, he jest had that word "doomed" in the wrong place: that it wasn't her that was doomed, she would likely do fine; it was the one that was recipient of the fidelity and the monogamy and the love, and the one that was the proprietor of the responsibility that never even wanted, let alone expected, a bone back, that was the doomed one; and how even between them two the lucky one might be the one that had the roof fall on him while he was climbing into or out of the bed.

So naturally I would a got a fur piece quick trying to tell him that, so naturally my good judgment told me not to try it. And so partly by jest staying away from him but mainly by fighting like a demon, like Jacob with his angel, I finally resisted actively saying it — a temptation about as strong as a human man ever has to face, which is to deliberately throw away the chance to say afterward, "I told you so."

So time passed. That little additional mantelpiece footrest was up now that hadn't nobody ever seen except that Negro yardman — a Jefferson legend after he mentioned it to me and him (likely) and me both happened to mention it in turn to some of our close intimates: a part of the Snopes legend and another Flem Snopes monument in that series mounting on and up from that water tank that we never knowed yet if they had got out of it all that missing Flem Snopes regime powerhouse brass them two mad skeered Negro firemen put into it.

Then it was 1936 and there was less and less of that time left: Mussolini in Italy and Hitler in Germany and sho enough, like Lawyer said, that one in Spain too; Lawyer said, "Pack your grip. We will take the airplane from Memphis tomorrow morning. — No no," he says, "you don't need to fear contamination from association this time. They're going to be married. They're going to Spain to join the Loyalist army and apparently he nagged and worried at her until at last she probably said, 'Oh hell, have it your way then.' "

"So he wasn't a liberal emancipated advanced-thinking artist after all," I says. "He was jest another ordinary man that believed if a gal was worth sleeping with she was worth deserving to have a roof over her head and something to eat and a little money in her pocket for the balance of her life."

"All right," he says. "All right."

"Except we'll go on the train," I says. "It ain't that I'm jest simply skeered to go in a airplane: it's because when we go across Virginia I can see the rest of the place where that-ere first immigrant Vladimir Kyrilytch worked his way into the United States." So I was already on the corner with my grip when he drove up and stopped and opened the door and looked at me and then done what the moving pictures call a double-take and says,
"Oh hell."

"It's mine," I says. "I bought it."

"You," he says, "in a necktie. That never even had one on before, let alone owned one, in your life."

“You told me why. It’s a wedding.”

“Take it off,” he says.

“No,” I says.

“I won’t travel with you. I won’t be seen with you.”

“No,” I says. “Maybe it ain’t jest the wedding. I’m going back to let all them V. K. Ratliff beginnings look at me for the first time. Maybe it’s them I’m trying to suit. Or leastways not to shame.”

So we taken the train to Memphis that night and the next day we was in Virginia — Bristol then Roanoke and Lynchburg and turned north-east alongside the blue mountains and somewhere ahead, we didn’t know jest where, was where that first Vladimir Kyrilytch finally found a place where he could stop, that we didn’t know his last name or maybe he didn’t even have none until Nelly Ratliff, spelled Ratcliffe then, found him, any more than we knowed what he was doing in one of them hired German regiments in General Burgoyne’s army that got licked at Saratoga except that Congress refused to honour the terms of surrender and banished the whole kit-and-biling of them to struggle for six years in Virginia without no grub nor money and the ones like that first V.K. without no speech neither.

But he never needed none of the three of them to escape not only to the right neighbourhood but into the exact right hayloft where Nelly Ratcliffe, maybe hunting eggs or such, would find him. And never needed no language to eat the grub she toted him; and maybe he never knowed nothing about farming before the day when she finally brought him out where her folks could see him; nor never needed no speech to speak of for the next development, which was when somebody — her maw or paw or brothers or whoever it was, maybe jest a neighbour — noticed the size of her belly; and so they married and so that V.K. actively did have a active legal name of Ratcliffe, and the one after him come to Tennessee and the one after him moved to Mississippi, except that by that time it was spelled Ratliff, where the oldest son is still named Vladimir Kyrilytch and still spends half his life trying to keep anybody from finding it out.

The next morning we was in New York. It was early; not even seven o'clock yet. It was too early. "Likely they ain't even finished breakfast yet," I says.

"Breakfast hell," Lawyer says. "They haven't even gone to bed yet. This is New York, not Yoknapatawpha County." So we went to the hotel where Lawyer had already engaged a room. Except it wasn't a room, it was three of them: a parlour and two bedrooms. "We can have breakfast up here too," he says.

"Breakfast?" I says.

"They'll send it up here."

"This is New York," I says. "I can eat breakfast in the bedroom or kitchen or on the back gallery in Yoknapatawpha County." So we went downstairs to the dining-room. Then I says, "What time do they eat breakfast then? Sundown? Or is that jest when they get up?"

"No," he says. "We got a errand first. — No," he says, "we got two errands." He was looking at it again, though I will have to do him the justice to say he hadn't mentioned it again since that first time when I got in the car back in Jefferson.

And I remember how he told me once how maybe New York wasn't made for no climate known to man but at least some weather was jest made for New York. In which case, this was sholy some of it: one of them soft blue drowsy days in the early fall when the sky itself seems like it was resting on the earth like a soft blue mist, with the tall buildings rushing up into it and then stopping, the sharp edges fading like the sunshine wasn't jest shining on them but kind of humming, like wires singing. Then I seen it: a store, with a shop window, a entire show window with not nothing in it but one necktie.

"Wait," I says.

"No," he says. "It was all right as long as just railroad conductors looked at it, but you can't face a preacher in it."

“No,” I says, “wait.” Because I had heard about these New York side-alley stores too. “If it takes that whole show window to deserve jest one necktie, likely they will want three or four dollars for it.”

“We can’t help it now,” he says. “This is New York. Come on.”

And nothing inside neither except some gold chairs and two ladies in black dresses and a man dressed like a congressman or at least a preacher, that knowed Lawyer by active name.

And then a office with a desk and a vase of flowers and a short dumpy dark woman in a dress that wouldn’t a fitted nobody, with grey-streaked hair and the handsomest dark eyes I ever seen even if they was popped a little, that kissed Lawyer and then he said to her, “Myra Allanovna, this is Vladimir Kyrilytch,” and she looked at me and said something; yes, I know it was Russian, and Lawyer saying: “Look at it. Just once if you can bear it,” and I says,

“Sholy it ain’t quite as bad as that. Of course I had ruther it was yellow and red instead of pink and green. But all the same—” and she says, “You like yellow and red?”

“Yessum,” I says. Then I says, “In fact” before I could stop, and she says, “Yes, tell me,” and I says,

“Nothing. I was jest thinking that if you could jest imagine a necktie and then pick it right up and put it on, I would imagine one made outen red with a bunch or maybe jest one single sunflower in the middle of it,” and she says,

“Sunflower?” and Lawyer says,

“Helianthe.” Then he says, “No, that’s wrong. Tournesol.

Sonnenblume,” and she says Wait and was already gone, and now I says Wait myself.

“Even a five-dollar necktie couldn’t support all them gold chairs.”

“It’s too late now,” Lawyer says. “Take it off.” Except that when she come back, it not only never had no sunflower, it wasn’t even red. It was jest dusty. No, that was wrong; you had looked at it by that time. It

looked like the outside of a peach, that you know that in a minute, providing you can keep from blinking, you will see the first beginning of when it starts to turn peach. Except that it don't do that. It's still jest dusted over with gold, like the back of a sunburned gal. "Yes," Lawyer says, "send out and get him a white shirt. He never wore a white shirt before either."

"No, never," she says. "Always blue, not? And this blue, always? The same blue as your eyes?"

"That's right," I says.

"But how?" she says. "By fading them? By just washing them?"

"That's right," I says, "I jest washes them."

"You mean, you wash them? Yourself?"

"He makes them himself too," Lawyer says.

"That's right," I says. "I sells sewing machines. First thing I knowed I could run one too."

"Of course," she says. "This one for now. Tomorrow, the other one, red with sonnenblume." Then we was outside again. I was still trying to say Wait.

"Now I got to buy two of them," I says. "I'm trying to be serious. I mean, please try to believe I am as serious right now as ere a man in your experience. Jest exactly how much you reckon was the price on that one in that window?"

And Lawyer not even stopping, saying over his shoulder in the middle of folks pushing past and around us in both directions: "I don't know. Her ties run up to a hundred and fifty. Say, seventy-five dollars—" It was exactly like somebody had hit me a quick light lick with the edge of his hand across the back of the neck until next I knowed I was leaning against the wall back out of the rush of folks in a fit of weak trembles with Lawyer more or less holding me up. "You all right now?" he says. "No I ain't," I says. "Seventy-five dollars for a necktie? I can't! I won't!"

“You’re forty years old,” he says. “You should a been buying at the minimum one tie a year ever since you fell in love the first time. When was it? eleven? twelve? thirteen? Or maybe it was eight or nine, when you first went to school — provided the first-grade teacher was female of course. But even call it twenty.

That’s twenty years, at one dollar a tie a year. That’s twenty dollars. Since you are not married and never will be and don’t have any kin close enough to exhaust and wear you out by taking care of you or hoping to get anything out of you, you may live another forty-five. That’s sixty-five dollars. That means you will have an Allanovna tie for only ten dollars. Nobody else in the world ever got an Allanovna tie for ten dollars.”

“I won’t!” I says. “I won’t!”

“All right. I’ll make you a present of it then.”

“I can’t do that,” I says.

“All right. You want to go back there and tell her you don’t want the tie?”

“Don’t you see I can’t do that?”

“All right,” he says. “Come on. We’re already a little late.” So when we got to this hotel we went straight to the saloon.

“We’re almost there,” I says. “Can’t you tell me yet who it’s going to be?”

“No,” he says. “This is New York. I want to have a little fun and pleasure too.” And a moment later, when I realised that Lawyer hadn’t never laid eyes on him before, I should a figgered why he had insisted so hard on me coming on this trip. Except that I remembered how in this case Lawyer wouldn’t need no help since you are bound to have some kind of affinity or outragement anyhow for the man that for twenty-five years has been as much a part and as big a part of your simple natural normal anguish of jest having to wake up again tomorrow, as this one had. So I says,

“I’ll be durned. Howdy, Hoake.” Because there he was, a little grey at the temples, with not jest a sunburned outdoors look but a rich

sunburned outdoors look that never needed that-ere dark expensive-looking city suit, let alone two waiters jumping around the table where he was at, to prove it, already setting there where Lawyer had drawn him from wherever it was out west he had located him, the same as he had drawn me for this special day.

No, it wasn't Lawyer that had drawn McCarron and me from a thousand miles away and two thousand more miles apart, the three of us to meet at this moment in a New York saloon: it was that gal that done it — that gal that never had seen one of us and fur as I actively heard it to take a oath, never had said much more than good-morning to the other two — that gal that likely not even knowed but didn't even care that she had inherited her maw's fatality to draw four men anyhow to that web, that one strangling hair; drew all four of us without even lifting her hand — her husband, her father, the man that was still trying to lay down his life for her maw if he could jest find somebody that wanted it, and what you might call a by-standing family friend — to be the supporting cast while she said "I do" outen the middle of a matrimonial production line at the City Hall before getting on a ship to go to Europe to do whatever it was she figgered she was going to do in that war. So I was the one that said, "This is Lawyer Stevens, Hoake," with three waiters now (he was evidently that rich) bustling around helping us set down.

"What's yours?" he says to Lawyer. "I know what V.K. wants. — Bushmill's," he says to the waiter. "Bring the bottle. — You'll think you're back home," he says to me. "It tastes jest like that stuff Calvin Bookwright used to make — do you remember?" Now he was looking at it too.

"That's an Allanovna, isn't it?" he says. "You've branched out a little since Frenchman's Bend too, haven't you?" Now he was looking at Lawyer. He taken his whole drink at one swallow though the waiter was already there with the bottle before he could a signalled. "Don't worry," he says. "You've got my word. I'm going to keep it."

“You stop worrying too,” I says. “Lawyer’s already got Linda. She’s going to believe him first, no matter what anybody else might forget and try to tell her.” And we could have et dinner there too, but Lawyer says, “This is New York. We can eat dinner in Uncle Cal Bookwright’s springhouse back home.” So we went to that dining-room. Then it was time. We went to the City Hall in a taxicab. While he was getting out, the other taxicab come up and they got out. He was not big, he jest looked big, like a football player. No: like a prize fighter. He didn’t look jest tough, and ruthless ain’t the word neither.

He looked like he would beat you or maybe you would beat him but you probably wouldn’t, or he might kill you or you might kill him though you probably wouldn’t. But he wouldn’t never dicker with you, looking at you with eyes that was pale like Hub Hampton’s but they wasn’t hard: jest looking at you without no hurry and completely, missing nothing, and with already a pretty good idea beforehand of what he was going to see.

We went inside. It was a long hall, a corridor, a line of folks two and two that they would a been the last one in it except it was a line that never had no last: jest a next to the last and not that long: on to a door that said REGISTRAR and inside. That wasn’t long neither; the two taxicabs was still waiting.

“So this is Grinnich Village,” I says. The door give right off the street but with a little shirt-tail of ground behind it you could a called a yard though maybe city folks called it a garden; It even had one tree in it, with three things on it that undoubtedly back in the spring or summer was leaves.

But inside it was nice: full of folks of course, with two waiters dodging in and out with trays of glasses of champagne and three or four of the company helping too, not to mention the folks that was taking over the apartment while Linda and her new husband was off at the war in Spain — a young couple about the same age as them. “Is he a sculptor too?” I says to Lawyer.

“No,” Lawyer says. “He’s a newspaperman.”

“Oh,” I says. “Then likely they been married all the time.”

It was nice: a room with plenty of window lights. It had a heap of stuff in it too but it looked like it was used — a wall full of books and a piano and I knowed they was pictures because they was hanging on the wall and I knowed that some of the other things was sculpture but the rest of them I didn’t know what they was, made outen pieces of wood or iron or strips of tin and wires.

Except that I couldn’t ask then because of the rest of the poets and painters and sculptors and musicians, since he would still have to be the host until we — him and Linda and Lawyer and Hoake and me — could slip out and go down to where the ship was; evidently a heap of folks found dreams in Grinnich Village but evidently it was a occasion when somebody married in it. And one of them wasn’t even a poet or painter or sculptor or musician or even jest a ordinary moral newspaperman but evidently a haberdasher taking Saturday evening off. Because we was barely in the room before he was not only looking at it too but rubbing it between his thumb and finger. “Allanovna,” he says.

“That’s right,” I says.

“Oklahoma?” he says. “Oil?”

“Sir?” I says.

“Oh,” he says. “Texas. Cattle then. In Texas you can choose your million between oil and cattle, right?”

“No sir,” I says, “Missippi. I sell sewing machines.”

So it was a while before Kohl finally come to me to fill my glass again.

“I understand you grew up with Linda’s mother,” he says.

“That’s right,” I says. “Did you make these?”

“These what?” he says.

“In this room,” I says.

“Oh,” he says. “Do you want to see more of them? Why?”

“I don’t know yet,” I says. “Does that matter?” So we shoved on through the folks — it had begun to take shoving by now — into a hall and then up some stairs. And this was the best of all: a loft with one whole side of the roof jest window lights — a room not jest where folks used but where somebody come off by his-self and worked. And him jest standing a little behind me, outen the way, giving me time and room both to look. Until at last he says, “Shocked? Mad?” Until I says, “Do I have to be shocked and mad at something jest because I never seen it before?”

“At your age, yes,” he says. “Only children can stand surprise for the pleasure of surprise. Grown people can’t bear surprise unless they are promised in advance they will want to own it.” “Maybe I ain’t had enough time yet,” I says.

“Take it then,” he says. So he leaned against the wall with his arms folded like a football player, with the noise of the party where he was still supposed to be host at coming up the stairs from below, while I taken my time to look: at some I did recognise and some I almost could recognise and maybe if I had time enough I would, and some I knowed I wouldn’t never quite recognise, until all of a sudden I knowed that wouldn’t matter neither, not jest to him but to me too.

Because anybody can see and hear and smell and feel and taste what he expected to hear and see and feel and smell and taste, and won’t nothing much notice your presence nor miss your lack. So maybe when you can see and feel and smell and hear and taste what you never expected to and hadn’t never even imagined until that moment, maybe that’s why Old Moster picked you out to be the one of the ones to be alive.

So now it was time for that-ere date. I mean the one that Lawyer and Hoake had fixed up, with Hoake saying, “But what can I tell her — her husband — her friends?” and Lawyer says,

“Why do you need to tell anybody anything? I’ve attended to all that. As soon as enough of them have drunk her health, just take her by the arm and clear out. Just don’t forget to be aboard the ship by eleven-thirty.”

Except Hoake still tried, the two of them standing in the door ready to leave, Hoake in that-ere dark expensive city suit and his derby hat in his hand, and Linda in a kind of a party dress inside her coat. And it wasn’t that they looked alike, because they didn’t. She was tall for a woman, so tall she didn’t have much shape (I mean, the kind that folks whistle at), and he wasn’t tall for a man and in fact kind of stocky. But their eyes was exactly alike. Anyhow, it seemed to me that anybody that seen them couldn’t help but know they was kin. So he still had to try it: “A old friend of her mother’s family. Her grandfather and my father may have been distantly related—” and Lawyer saying,

“All right, all right, beat it. Don’t forget the time,” and Hoake saying, “Yes yes, we’ll be at Twenty-One for dinner and afterward at the Stork Club if you need to telephone.” Then they was gone and the rest of the company went too except three other men that I found out was newspapermen too, foreign correspondents; and Kohl his-self helped his new tenant’s wife cook the spaghetti and we et it and drunk some more wine, red this time, and they talked about the war, about Spain and Ethiopia and how this was the beginning: the lights was going off all over Europe soon and maybe in this country too; until it was time to go to the ship. And more champagne in the bedroom there, except that Lawyer hadn’t hardly got the first bottle open when Linda and Hoake come in.

“Already?” Lawyer says. “We didn’t expect you for at least a hour yet.” “She — we decided to skip the Stork Club,” Hoake says. “We took a fiacre through the Park instead. And now,” he says, that hadn’t even put the derby hat down.

“Stay and have some champagne,” Lawyer says, and Kohl said something too. But Linda had done already held out her hand.

“Good-bye, Mr McCarron,” she says. “Thank you for the evening and for coming to my wedding.”

“Can’t you say ‘Hoake’ yet?” he says.

“Good-bye, Hoake,” she says.

“Wait in the cab then,” Lawyer says. “We’ll join you in a minute.”

“No,” Hoake says. “I’ll take another cab and leave that one for you.”

Then he was gone. She shut the door behind him and came toward Lawyer, taking something out of her pocket.

“Here,” she says. It was a gold cigarette-lighter. “I know you won’t ever use it, since you say you think you can taste the fluid when you light your pipe.”

“No,” Lawyer says. “What I said was, I know I can taste it.”

“All right,” she says. “Take it anyway.” So Lawyer took it. “It’s engraved with your initials: see?”

“G L S,” Lawyer says. “They are not my initials. I just have two: G S.”

“I know. But the man said a monogram should have three so I loaned you one of mine.” Then she stood there facing him, as tall as him almost, looking at him. “That was my father,” she says.

“No,” Lawyer says.

“Yes,” she says.

“You don’t mean to tell me he told you that,” Lawyer says.

“You know he didn’t. You made him swear not to.”

“No,” Lawyer says.

“You swear then.”

“All right,” Lawyer says. “I swear.”

“I love you,” she says. “Do you know why?”

“Tell me,” Lawyer says.

“It’s because every time you lie to me I can always know you will stick to it.”

Then the second sentimental pilgrimage. No, something else come first. It was the next afternoon. "Now we'll go pick up the necktie," Lawyer says.

"No," I says.

"You mean you want to go alone?"

"That's right," I says. So I was alone, the same little office again and her still in the same dress that wouldn't fitted nobody already looking at my empty collar even before I put the necktie and the hundred and fifty dollars on the desk by the new one that I hadn't even teched yet because I was afraid to. It was red jest a little under what you see in a black-gum leaf in the fall, with not no single sunflower nor even a bunch of them but little yellow sunflowers all over it in a kind of diamond pattern, each one with a little blue centre almost the exact blue my shirts gets to after a while. I didn't dare touch it.

"I'm sorry," I says. "But you see I jest can't. I sells sewing machines in Mississippi. I can't have it knowed back there that I paid seventy-five dollars apiece for neckties. But if I'm in the Mississippi sewing machine business and can't wear seventy-five dollar neckties, so are you in the New York necktie business and can't afford to have folks wear or order neckties and not pay for them. So here," I says. "And I ask your kindness to excuse me."

But she never even looked at the money. "Why did he call you Vladimir Kyrilytch?" she says. I told her.

"Except we live in Mississippi now, and we got to live it down. Here," I says. "And I ask you again to ex—"

"Take that off my desk," she says. "I have given the ties to you. You cannot pay for them."

"Don't you see I can't do that neither?" I says. "No more than I could let anybody back in Mississippi order a sewing machine from me and then say he had done changed his mind when I delivered it to him?"

"So," she says. "You cannot accept the ties, and I cannot accept the money. Good. We do this—" There was a thing on the desk that looked

like a cream pitcher until she snapped it open and it was a cigarette-lighter. “We burn it then, half for you, half for me—” until I says, “Wait! Wait!” and she stopped. “No,” I says, “no. Not burn money,” and she says, “Why not?” and us looking at each other, her hand holding the lit lighter and both our hands on the money.

“Because it’s money,” I says. “Somebody somewhere at some time went to — went through — I mean, money stands for too much hurt and grief somewhere to somebody that jest the money wasn’t never worth — I mean, that ain’t what I mean . . .” and she says, “I know exactly what you mean. Only the gauche, the illiterate, the frightened and the pastless destroy money. You will keep it then. You will take it back to — how you say?” “Missippi,” I says.

“Missippi. Where is one who, not needs: who cares about so base as needs? Who wants something that costs one hundred fifty dollar — a hat, a picture, a book, a jewel for the ear; something never never never anyhow just to eat — but believes he — she — will never have it, has even long ago given up, not the dream but the hope — This time do you know what I mean?”

“I know exactly what you mean because you jest said it,” I says.

“Then kiss me,” she says. And that night me and Lawyer went up to Saratoga.

“Did you tell Hoake better than to try to give her a lot of money, or did he jest have that better sense his-self?” I says.

“Yes,” Lawyer says.

“Yes which?” I says.

“Maybe both,” Lawyer says. And in the afternoon we watched the horses, and the next morning we went out to Bemis’s Heights and Freeman’s Farm. Except that naturally there wasn’t no monument to one mercenary Hessian soldier that maybe couldn’t even speak German, let alone American, and naturally there wasn’t no hill or ditch

or stump or rock that spoke up and said aloud: On this spot your first ancestral V.K. progenitor forswore Europe forever and entered the United States.

And two days later we was back home, covering in two days the distance it taken that first V.K. four generations to do; and now we watched the lights go out in Spain and Ethiopia, the darkness that was going to creep eastward across all Europe and Asia too, until the shadow of it would fall across the Pacific islands until it reached even America. But that was a little while away yet when Lawyer says, "Come up to the office," and then he says, "Barton Kohl is dead. The airplane — it was a worn-out civilian passenger carrier, armed with 1918 infantry machine guns, with home-made bomb bays through which the amateur crew dumped by hand the home-made bombs; that's what they fought Hitler's Luftwaffe with — was shot down in flames so she probably couldn't have identified him even if she could have reached the crash. She doesn't say what she intends to do now."

"She'll come back here," I says.

"Here?" he says. "Back here?" then he says, "Why the hell shouldn't she? It's home."

"That's right," I says. "It's doom."

"What?" he says. "What did you say?"

"Nothing," I says. "I jest said I think so too."

Eight

Charles Mallison

LINDA KOHL (SNOPEs that was, as Thackeray would say. Kohl that was too, since he was dead) wasn't the first wounded war hero to finally straggle back to Jefferson. She was just the first one my uncle bothered to meet at the station. I don't mean the railroad station; by 1937 it had been a year or so since a train had passed through Jefferson that a paid passenger could have got off of. And not even the bus depot because I don't even mean Jefferson. It was the Memphis airport we went to meet her, my uncle apparently discovering at the last minute that

morning that he was not able to make an eighty-mile trip and back alone in his car.

She was not even the first female hero. For two weeks back in 1919 we had had a nurse, an authentic female lieutenant — not a denizen, citizen of Jefferson to be sure, but at least kin to (or maybe just interested in a member of) a Jefferson family, who had been on the staff of a base hospital in France and — so she said — had actually spent two days at a casualty clearing station within sound of the guns behind Montdidier.

In fact, by 1919 even the five-year-old Jeffersonians like I was then were even a little blasé about war heroes, not only unscratched ones but wounded too getting off trains from Memphis Junction or New Orleans. Not that I mean that even the unscratched ones actually called themselves heroes or thought they were or in fact thought one way or the other about it until they got home and found the epithet being dinned at them from all directions until finally some of them, a few of them, began to believe that perhaps they were.

I mean, dinned at them by the ones who organised and correlated the dinning — the ones who hadn't gone to that war and so were already on hand in advance to organise the big debarkation-port parades and the smaller county-seat local ones, with inbuilt barbecue and beer; the ones that hadn't gone to that one and didn't intend to go to the next one nor the one after that either, as long as all they had to do to stay out was buy the tax-free bonds and organise the hero-dinning parades so that the next crop of eight- and nine- and ten-year-old males could see the divisional shoulder patches and the wound- and service-stripes and the medal ribbons.

Until some of them anyway would begin to believe that that many voices dinning it at them must be right, and they were heroes. Because, according to Uncle Gavin, who had been a soldier too in his fashion (in the American Field Service with the French army in '16 and '17 until we got into it, then still in France as a Y.M.C.A. secretary or whatever they were called), they had nothing else left: young men or even boys most

of whom had only the vaguest or completely erroneous idea of where and what Europe was, and none at all about armies, let alone about war, snatched up by lot overnight and regimented into an expeditionary force, to survive (if they could) before they were twenty-five years old what they would not even recognise at the time to be the biggest experience of their lives.

Then to be spewed, again willy-nilly and again overnight, back into what they believed would be the familiar world they had been told they were enduring disruption and risking injury and death so that it would still be there when they came back, only to find that it wasn't there any more.

So that the bands and the parades and the barbecues and all the rest of the hero-dinning not only would happen only that once and was already fading even before they could get adjusted to it, it was already on the way out before the belated last of them even got back home, already saying to them above the cold congealing meat and the flat beer while the last impatient brazen chord died away: "All right, little boys; eat your beef and potato salad and drink your beer and get out of our way, who are already up to our necks in this new world whose single and principal industry is not just solvent but dizzily remunerative peace."

So, according to Gavin, they had to believe they were heroes even though they couldn't remember now exactly at what point or by what action they had reached, entered for a moment or a second, that heroic state.

Because otherwise they had nothing left: with only a third of life over, to know now that they had already experienced their greatest experience, and now to find that the world for which they had so endured and risked was in their absence so altered out of recognition by the ones who had stayed safe at home as to have no place for them in it any more.

So they had to believe that at least some little of it had been true. Which (according to Gavin) was the why of the veterans' clubs and legions: the one sanctuary where at least once a week they could find refuge among the other betrayed and dispossessed reaffirming to each other that at least that one infinitesimal scrap had been so.

In fact (in Jefferson anyway) even the ones that came back with an arm or a leg gone, came back just like what they were when they left: merely underlined, italicised. There was Tug Nightingale. His father was the cobbler, with a little cubbyhole of a shop around a corner off the Square — a little scrawny man who wouldn't have weighed a hundred pounds with his last and bench and all his tools in his lap, with a fierce moustache which hid most of his chin too, and fierce undefeated intolerant eyes — a Hard-Shell Baptist who didn't merely have to believe it, because he knew it was so: that the earth was flat and that Lee had betrayed the whole South when he surrendered at Appomattox.

He was a widower. Tug was his only surviving child. Tug had got almost as far as the fourth grade when the principal himself told Mr Nightingale it would be better for Tug to quit. Which Tug did, and now he could spend all his time hanging around the auction lot behind Dilazuck's livery-stable, where he had been spending all his spare time anyhow, and where he now came into his own: falling in first with Lonzo Hait, our local horse and mule trader, then with Pat Stamper himself, who in the horse and mule circles not just in Yoknapatawpha County or north Mississippi but over most of Alabama and Tennessee and Arkansas too, was to Lonzo Hait what Fritz Kreisler would be to the fiddle player at a country picnic, and so recognised genius when he saw it.

Because Tug didn't have any piddling mere affinity for and rapport with mules: he was an homme fatal to them, any mule, horse or mare either, being putty in his hands; he could do anything with them except buy and sell them for a profit. Which is why he never rose higher than a simple hostler and handy man and so finally had to become a house painter also to make a living: not a first-rate one, but at least he could

stir the paint and put it on a wall or fence after somebody had shown him where to stop.

Which was his condition up to about 1916, when he was about thirty years old, maybe more, when something began to happen to him. Or maybe it had already happened and we — Jefferson — only noticed it then.

Up to now he had been what you might call a standard-type provincial county-seat house painter: a bachelor, living with his father in a little house on the edge of town, having his weekly bath in the barbershop on Saturday night and then getting a little drunk afterward — not too much so: only once every two or three years waking up Sunday morning in the jail until they would release him on his own recognisance; this not for being too drunk but for fighting, though the fighting did stem from the whiskey, out of that mutual stage of it when the inevitable one (never the same one: it didn't need to be) challenged his old fixed father-bequeathed convictions that General Lee had been a coward and a traitor and that the earth was a flat plane with edges like the shed roofs he painted — then shooting a little dice in the big ditch behind the cemetery while he sobered up Sunday afternoon to go back to his turpentine Monday morning; with maybe four trips a year to the Memphis brothels.

Then it happened to him. He still had the Saturday night barbershop bath and he still drank a little, though as far as Jefferson knew, never enough any more to need to go to combat over General Lee and Ptolemy and Isaac Newton, so that not only the jail but the harassed night marshal too who at the mildest would bang on the locked barbershop or poolroom door at two o'clock Sunday morning, saying, "If you boys don't quiet down and go home," knew him no more.

Nor did the dice game in the cemetery ditch; on Sunday morning now he would be seen walking with his scrawny fiercely moustached miniature father toward the little back-street Hard-Shell church, and that afternoon sitting on the minute gallery of their doll-sized house poring (whom the first three grades of school rotationally licked and

the fourth one completely routed) over the newspapers and magazines which brought us all we knew about the war in Europe.

He had changed. Even we (Jefferson. I was only three then) didn't know how much until the next April, 1917, after the Lusitania and the President's declaration, and Captain (Mister then until he was elected captain of it) McLendon organised the Jefferson company to be known as the Sartoris Rifles in honour of the original Colonel Sartoris (there would be no Sartoris in it since Bayard and his twin brother John were already in England training for the Royal Flying Corps), and then we heard the rest of it: how Tug Nightingale, past thirty now and so even when the draft came would probably escape it, was one of the first to apply, and we — they — found out what his dilemma was: which was simply that he did not dare let his father find out that he planned to join the Yankee army, since if his father ever learned it, he, Tug, would be disinherited and thrown out.

So it was more than Captain McLendon who said, "What? What's that?" and McLendon and another — the one who would be elected his First Sergeant — went home with Tug and the sergeant-to-be told it: "It was like being shut up in a closet with a buzz saw that had jumped off the axle at top speed, or say a bundle of dynamite with the fuse lit and snapping around the floor like a snake, that you not only can't get close enough to step on it, you don't want to: all you want is out, and Mack saying, 'Wait, Mr Nightingale, it ain't the Yankee army: it's the army of the United States: your own country,' and that durn little maniac shaking and seething until his moustache looked like it was on fire too, hollering, 'Shoot the sons of bitches! Shoot em! Shoot em!' and then Tug himself trying it: 'Papa, papa, Captain McLendon and Crack here both belong to it,' and old man Nightingale yelling, 'Shoot them then.

Shoot all the blue-bellied sons of bitches,' and Tug still trying, saying 'Papa, papa, if I don't join now, when they pass that draft they will come and get me anyway,' and still that little maniac hollering, 'Shoot you all! Shoot all you sons of bitches!' Yes sir. Likely Tug could join the German army or maybe even the French or British, and had his

blessing. But not the one that General Lee betrayed him to that day back in 1865. So he threw Tug out. The three of us got out of that house as fast as we could, but before we even reached the sidewalk he was already in the room that was evidently Tug's. He never even waited to open the door: just kicked the window out, screen and all, and started throwing Tug's clothes out into the yard."

So Tug had crossed his Rubicon, and should have been safe now. I mean, Captain McLendon took him in. He — McLendon — was one of a big family of brothers in a big house with a tremendous mother weighing close to two hundred pounds, who liked to cook and eat both so one more wouldn't matter; maybe she never even noticed Tug.

So he should have been safe now while the company waited for orders to move. But the others wouldn't let him alone; his method of joining the colours was a little too unique, not to mention East Lynne; there was always one to say:

"Tug, is it really so that General Lee didn't need to give up when he did?" and Tug would say,

"That's what papa says.

He was there and seen it, even if he wasn't but seventeen years old."

And the other would say:

"So you had to go clean against him, clean against your own father, to join the Rifles?"

And Tug sitting there quite still now, the hands that never would be able to paint more than the roughest outhouse walls and finesseless fences but which could do things to the intractable and unpredictable mule which few other hands dared, hanging quiet too between his knees, because by now he would know what was coming next.

And the other — and all the rest of them within range — watching Tug with just half an eye since the other three halves would be watching Captain McLendon across the room; in fact they usually waited until McLendon had left, was actually out.

"That's right," Tug would say; then the other:

"Why did you do it, Tug? You're past thirty now, safe from the draft, and your father's an old man alone here with nobody to take care of him."

"We can't let them Germans keep on treating folks like they're doing. Somebody's got to make them quit."

"So you had to go clean against your father to join the army to make them quit. And now you'll have to go clean against him again to go round to the other side of the world where you can get at them."

"I'm going to France," Tug would say.

"That's what I said: halfway round. Which way are you going? east or west? You can pick either one and still get there. Or better still, and I'll make you a bet. Pick out east, go on east until you find the war, do whatever you aim to do to them Germans and then keep right on going east, and I'll bet you a hundred dollars to one that when you see Jefferson next time, you'll be looking at it right square across Miss Joanna Burden's mailbox one mile west of the courthouse."

But by that time Captain McLendon would be there; probably somebody had gone to fetch him. He may have been such a bad company commander that he was relieved of his command long before it ever saw the lines, and a few years after this he was going to be the leader in something here in Jefferson that I anyway am glad I don't have to lie down with in the dark every time I try to go to sleep.

But at least he held his company together (and not by the bars on his shoulders since, if they had been all he had, he wouldn't have had a man left by the first Saturday night, but by simple instinctive humanity, of which even he, even in the middle of that business he was going to be mixed up in later, seemed to have had a little, like now) until a better captain could get hold of it. He was already in uniform. He was a cotton man, a buyer for one of the Memphis export houses, and he spent most of his commissions gambling on cotton futures in the market, but he never had looked like a farmer until he put on the uniform.

“What the hell’s going on here?” he said. “What the hell do you think Tug is? a damn ant running around a damn orange or something? He ain’t going around anything: he’s going straight across it, across the water to France to fight for his country, and when they don’t need him in France any longer he’s coming back across the same water, back here to Jefferson the same way he went out of it, like we’ll all be damn glad to get back to it. So don’t let me hear any more of this” (excrement: my word) “any more.”

Whether or not Tug would continue to need Captain McLendon, he didn’t have him much longer. The company was mustered that week and sent to Texas for training; whereupon, since Tug was competent to paint any flat surface provided it was simple enough, with edges and not theoretical boundaries, and possessed that gift with horses and mules which the expert Pat Stamper had recognised at once to partake of that inexplicable quality called genius, naturally the army made him a cook and detached him the same day, so that he was not only the first Yoknapatawpha County soldier (the Sartoris boys didn’t count since they were officially British troops) to go overseas, he was among the last of all American troops to get back home, which was in late 1919, since obviously the same military which would decree him into a cook, would mislay where it had sent him (not lose him; my own experience between ‘42 and ‘45 taught me that the military never loses anything: it merely buries it).

So now he was back home again, living alone now (old Mr Nightingale had died in that same summer of 1917, killed, Uncle Gavin said, by simple inflexibility, having set his intractable and contemptuous face against the juggernaut of history and science both that April day in 1865 and never flinched since), a barn and fence painter once more, with his Saturday night bath in the barbershop and again drinking and gambling again within his means, only with on his face now a look, as V. K. Ratliff put it, as if he had been taught and believed all his life that the fourth dimension was invisible, then suddenly had seen one. And he didn’t have Captain McLendon now. I mean, McLendon was back home too but they were no longer commander and man.

Or maybe it was that even that natural humanity of Captain McLendon's, of which he should have had a pretty good supply since none of it seemed to be within his reach on his next humanitarian crises after that one when he shielded Tug from the harsh facts of cosmology, would not have sufficed here.

This happened in the barbershop too (no, I wasn't there; I still wasn't old enough to be tolerated in the barbershop at ten o'clock on Saturday night even if I could have got away from Mother; this was hearsay from Ratliff to Uncle Gavin to me). This time the straight man was Skeets McGowan, Uncle Willy Christian's soda jerker — a young man with a swagger and dash to him, who probably smelled more like toilet water than just water, with a considerable following of fourteen- and fifteen-year-old girls at Uncle Willy's fountain, who we realised afterward had been just a little older than we always thought and, as Ratliff said, even ten years later would never know as much as he — Skeets — figured he had already forgotten ten years ago; he had just been barbered and scented, and Tug had finished his bath and was sitting quietly enough while the first drink or two began to take hold.

"So when you left Texas, you went north," Skeets said.

"That's right," Tug said.

"Come on," Skeets said. "Tell us about it. You left Texas going due north, to New York. Then you got on the boat, and it kept right on due north too."

"That's right," Tug said.

"But suppose they fooled you a little. Suppose they turned the boat, to the east or west or maybe right back south—"

"God damn it," Tug said. "Don't you think I know where north is? You can wake me up in the bed in the middle of the night and I can point my hand due north without even turning on the light."

"What'll you bet? Five dollars? Ten?"

"I'll bet you ten dollars to one dollar except that any dollar you ever had you already spent on that shampoo or that silk shirt."

“All right, all right,” Skeets said. “So the boat went straight north, to France. And you stayed in France two years and then got on another boat and it went straight north too. Then you got off that boat and got on a train and it—”

“Shut up,” Tug said.

“ — went straight north too. And when you got off, you were back in Jefferson.”

“Shut up, you goddam little bastard,” Tug said.

“So don’t you see what that means? Either one of two things: either they moved Jefferson—” Now Tug was on his feet though even now apparently Skeets knew no better: “ — which all the folks that stayed around here and didn’t go to that war can tell you they didn’t. Or you left Jefferson going due north by way of Texas and come back to Jefferson still going due north without even passing Texas again—” It took all the barbers and customers and loafers too and finally the night marshal himself to immobilise Tug. Though by that time Skeets was already in the ambulance on his way to the hospital.

And there was Bayard Sartoris. He got back in the spring of ‘19 and bought the fastest car he could find and spent his time ripping around the country or back and forth to Memphis until (so we all believed) his aunt, Mrs Du Pre, looked over Jefferson and picked out Narcissa Benbow and then caught Bayard between trips with the other hand long enough to get them married, hoping that would save Bayard’s neck since he was now the last Sartoris Mohican (John had finally got himself shot down in July of ‘18), only it didn’t seem to work.

I mean, as soon as he got Narcissa pregnant, which must have been pretty quick, he was back in the car again until this time Colonel Sartoris himself stepped into the breach, who hated cars yet gave up his carriage and pair to let Bayard drive him back and forth to the bank, to at least slow the car down during that much of the elapsed mileage.

Except that Colonel Sartoris had a heart condition, so when the wreck came it was him that died: Bayard just walked out of the crash and

disappeared, abandoned pregnant wife and all, until the next spring when he was still trying to relieve his boredom by seeing how much faster he could make something travel than he could invent a destination for; this time another aeroplane: a new experimental type at the Dayton testing field: only this one fooled him by shedding all four of its wings in midair.

That's right: boredom, Uncle Gavin said — that war was the only civilised condition which offered any scope for the natural blackguardism inherent in men, that not just condoned and sanctioned it but rewarded it, and that Bayard was simply bored: he would never forgive the Germans not for starting the war but for stopping it, ending it. But Mother said that was wrong.

She said that Bayard was frightened and ashamed: not ashamed because he was frightened but terrified when he discovered himself to be capable of, vulnerable to being ashamed. She said that Sartoris were different from other people. That most people, nearly all people, loved themselves first, only they knew it secretly and maybe even admitted it secretly; and so they didn't have to be ashamed of it — or if they were ashamed, they didn't need to be afraid of being ashamed.

But that Sartoris didn't even know they loved themselves first, except Bayard. Which was all right with him and he wasn't ashamed of it until he and his twin brother reached England and got into flight training without parachutes in aeroplanes made out of glue and baling wire; or maybe not even until they were at the front, where even for the ones that had lived that far the odds were near zero against scout pilots surviving the first three weeks of active service.

When suddenly Bayard realised that, unique in the squadron and, for all he knew, unique in all the R.F.C. or maybe all military air forces, he was not one individual creature at all but there was two of him since he had a twin engaged in the same risk and chance. And so in effect he alone out of all the people flying in that war had been vouchsafed a double indemnity against those odds (and vice versa of course since his twin would enjoy the identical obverse vouchsafement) — and in the

next second, with a kind of terror, discovered that he was ashamed of the idea, knowledge, of being capable of having thought it even.

That was what Mother said his trouble was — why he apparently came back to Jefferson for the sole purpose of trying, in that sullen and pleasureless manner, to find out just how many different ways he could risk breaking his neck that would keep the most people anguished or upset or at least annoyed: that completely un-Sartoris-like capacity for shame which he could neither live with nor quit; could neither live in toleration with it nor by his own act repudiate it.

That was why the risking, the chancing, the fatalism. Obviously the same idea — twinship's double indemnity against being shot down — must have occurred to the other twin at the same moment, since they were twins. But it probably hadn't worried John any more than the things he had done in his war (Uncle Gavin said — and in about five years I was going to have a chance to test it myself — that no man ever went to a war, even in the Y.M.C.A., without bringing back something he wished he hadn't done or anyway would stop thinking about) worried that old original Colonel Sartoris who had been their great-grandfather; only he, Bayard, of all his line was that weak, that un-Sartoris.

So now (if Mother was right) he had a double burden. One was anguish over what base depths of imagination and selfish hope he knew himself to be, not so much capable of as doomed to be ashamed of; the other, the fact that if that twinship double indemnity did work in his favour and John was shot down first, he — Bayard — would, no matter how much longer he survived, have to face his twin some day in the omniscience of the mutual immortality, with the foul stain of his weakness now beyond concealment. The foul stain being not the idea, because the same idea must have occurred to his twin at the same instant with himself although they were in different squadrons now, but that of the two of them, John would not have been ashamed of it.

The idea being simply this: John had managed to shoot down three huns before he himself was killed (he was probably a better shot than

Bayard or maybe his flight commander liked him and set up targets) and Bayard himself had racked up enough ninths and sixteenths, after the British method of scoring (unless somebody was incredible enough to say “Not me; I was too damn scared to remember to pull up the cocking handles”) to add up to two and maybe an inch over; now that John was gone and no longer needed his, suppose, just suppose he could wangle, bribe, forge, corrupt the records and whoever kept them, into transferring all the Sartoris bumf under one name, so that one of them anyway could come back home an ace — an idea not base in itself, because John had not only thought of it too but if he had lived and Bayard had died, would have managed somehow to accomplish it, but base only after he, Bayard, had debased and befouled it by being ashamed of it.

And he could not quit it of his own volition, since when he faced John’s ghost some day in the course of simple fatality, John would be just amused and contemptuous; where if he did it by putting the pistol barrel in his mouth himself, that ghost would be not just risible and contemptuous but forever unreconciled, irreconcilable.

But Linda Snopes — excuse me: Snopes Kohl — would be our first female one. So you would think the whole town would turn out, or at least be represented by delegates: from the civic clubs and churches, not to mention the American Legion and the V.F.W., which would have happened if she had been elected Miss America instead of merely blown up by a Franco shell or land mine or whatever it was that went off in or under the ambulance she was driving and left her stone deaf.

So I said, “What does she want to come back home for? There’s nothing for her to join. What would she want in a Ladies’ Auxiliary, raffling off home-made jam and lamp-shades. Even if she could make jam, since obviously cooking is the last thing a sculptor would demand of his girl. Who was just passing time anyway between Communist meetings until somebody started a Fascist war he could get into.

Not to mention the un-kosher stuff she would have had to learn in Jefferson, Mississippi. Especially if where she learned to cook was in

that Dirty Spoon her papa beat Ratliff out of back there when they first came to town.” But I was wrong. It wouldn’t be municipal: only private: just three people only incidentally from Jefferson because they were mainly out of her mother’s past: my uncle, her father, and Ratliff. Then I saw there would be only two. Ratliff wouldn’t even get in the car.

“Come on,” Uncle Gavin said. “Go with us.”

“I’ll wait here,” Ratliff said. “I’ll be the local committee. Until next time,” he said at me.

“What?” Uncle Gavin said.

“Nothing,” Ratliff said. “Jest a joke Chick told me that I’m reminding him of.”

Then I saw it wasn’t going to be even two out of her mother’s past. We were not even going by the bank, let alone stop at it. I said, “What the hell would Mr Snopes want, throwing away at least six hours of good usury to make a trip all the way to Memphis to meet his daughter, after all the expense he had to go to get her out of Jefferson — not only butchering up De Spain’s house, but all that imported Italian marble over her mother’s grave to give her something worth going away from or not coming back to if you like that better.”

I said: “So it’s my fault I wasn’t born soon enough either to defend Das Democracy in your war or Das Kapital in hers. Meaning there’s still plenty of time for me yet. Or maybe what you mean is that Hitler and Mussolini and Franco all three working together cannot get an authentic unimpeachable paid-up member of the Harvard R.O.T.C. into really serious military trouble. Because I probably won’t make Porcellian either; F.D.R. didn’t.”

I said: “That’s it. That’s why you insisted on me coming along this morning: although she hasn’t got any eardrums now and can’t hear you say No or Please No or even For God’s sake No, at least she can’t marry you before we get back to Jefferson with me right here in the car too. But there’s the rest of the afternoon when you can chase me out, not to mention the eight hours of the night when Mother likes to believe I am upstairs asleep. Not to mention I’ve got to go back to Cambridge

next month — unless you believe your . . . is it virginity or just celibacy? is worth even that sacrifice? But then why not, since it was your idea to send me all the way to Cambridge, Mass, for what we laughingly call an education. Being as Mother says she's been in love with you all her life, only she was too young to know it and you were too much of a gentleman to tell her. Or does Mother really always know best?"

By this time we had reached the airport; I mean Memphis. Uncle Gavin said, "Park the car and let's have some coffee. We've probably got at least a half-hour yet." We had the coffee in the restaurant; I don't know why they don't call it the Skyroom here too. Maybe Memphis is still off quota. Ratliff said she would have to marry somebody sooner or later, and every day that passed made it that much sooner. No, that wasn't the way he put it: that he — Uncle Gavin — couldn't escape forever, that almost any day now some woman would decide he was mature and dependable enough at last for steady work in place of merely an occasional chore; and that the sooner this happened the better, since only then would he be safe. I said, "How safe? He seems to me to be doing all right; I never knew anybody that scatheless."

"I don't mean him," Ratliff said. "I mean us, Yoknapatawpha County; that he would maybe be safe to live with then because he wouldn't have so much time for meddling."

In which case, saving us would take some doing. Because he — Gavin — had one defect in his own character which always saved him, no matter what jeopardy it left the rest of us in. I mean, the fact that people get older, especially young girls of fifteen or sixteen, who seem to get older all of a sudden in six months or one year than they or anybody else ever does in about ten years.

I mean, he always picked out children, or maybe he was just vulnerable to female children and they chose him, whichever way you want it. That the selecting or victim-falling was done at an age when the oath of eternal fidelity would have ceased to exist almost before the breath was dry on it.

I'm thinking now of Melisandre Backus naturally, before my time and Linda Snopes's too. That is, Melisandre was twelve and thirteen and fourteen several years before she vacated for Linda to take her turn in the vacuum, Gavin selecting and ordering the books of poetry to read to Melisandre or anyway supervise and check on, which was maybe how by actual test, trial and error, he knew which ones to improve Linda's mind and character with when her turn came, or anyway alter them.

Though pretty soon Melisandre committed the irrevocable error of getting a year older and so quitting forever that fey unworld of Spenser and the youth Milton, for the human race where even the sort of girl that he picked out or that picked out him, when a man talked about fidelity and devotion to her, she was in a position to tell him either to put up or shut up.

Anyway, he was saved that time. Though I wasn't present to remember exactly what the sequence was: whether Gavin went off to Harvard first or maybe it was between Harvard and Heidelberg, or whether she got married first. Anyway, when he got back from his war, she was married.

To a New Orleans underworld big shot named Harriss with two esses. And how in the world or where on earth she ever managed to meet him — a shy girl, motherless and an only child, who lived on what used to be one of our biggest plantations two or three miles from town but that for years had been gradually going to decay, with her widowed father who spent all his time on the front gallery in summer and in the library in winter with a bottle of whiskey and a volume of Horace.

Who (Melisandre) had as far as we knew never been away from it in her life except to be driven daily in to town by a Negro coachman in a victoria while she graduated from the grammar school then the high school then the Female Academy. And a man about whom all we knew was what he said: that his name was Harriss with two esses, which maybe it was, and that he was a New Orleans importer. Which we knew he was, since (this was early 1919, before Uncle Gavin got back home) even Jefferson recognised when it saw one a bullet-proof Cadillac that

needed two chauffeurs, both in double-breasted suits that bulged a little at the left armpit.

Not to mention the money. Mr Backus died about then and of course there were some to say it was with a broken heart over his only child marrying a bootleg czar. Though apparently he waited long enough to make sure his son-in-law was actually a czar or anyway the empire a going and solvent one, since the money had already begun to show a little before he died — the roofs and galleries patched and shored up even if Mr Backus evidently balked at paint on the house yet, and gravel in the drive so that when she came home to spend that first Christmas, she and the nurse and the czarevitch could go back and forth to town in an automobile instead of the old victoria drawn by a plough team.

Then Mr Backus died and the house and outbuildings too got painted. And now Harriss with both his esses began to appear in Jefferson, making friends even in time though most of Yoknapatawpha County was unsold still, just neutral, going out there in the Model T's and on horses and mules, to stand along the road and watch what had been just a simple familiar red-ink north Mississippi cotton plantation being changed into a Virginia or Long Island horse farm, with miles of white panel fence where the rest of us were not a bit too proud for what we called bobwire and any handy sapling post, and white stables with electric light and steam heat and running water and butlers and footmen for the horses where a lot of the rest of us still depended on coal-oil lamps for light and our wives to tote firewood and water from the nearest woodlot and spring or well.

Then there were two children, an heir and a princess too, when Harriss died with his two esses in a New Orleans barber's chair of his ordinary thirty-eight-calibre occupational disease. Whereupon the horses and their grooms and valets became sold and the house closed except for a caretaker, vacant now of Mrs Harriss with her two esses and the two children and the five maids and couriers and nannies and secretaries, and now Mother and the other ones who had been girls with her in the old Academy days would get the letters and post cards from the

fashionable European cities telling how just the climate at first but presently, in time, the climate and the schools both were better for the children and (on Mother's naturally) she hoped Gavin was well and maybe even married. "So at least he's safe from that one," I told Ratliff, who said,

"Safe?"

. . "Why the hell not? She not only got too big for the fairy tale, she's got two children and all that money: what the hell does she want to marry anybody for? Or not Gavin anyway; he don't want money: all he wants is just to meddle and change. Why the hell isn't he safe now?"

"That's right," Ratliff said. "It looks like he would almost have to be, don't it? At least until next time." Joke. And still worth repeating two hours ago when he declined to come with us. And Gavin sitting there drinking a cup of what whoever ran the airport restaurant called coffee, looking smug and inscrutable and arrogant and immune as a louse on a queen's arse. Because maybe Linda Kohl (pardon me, Snopes Kohl) had plenty of money too, not only what her mother must have left her but what Uncle Gavin, as her guardian, had managed to chisel out of old Will Varner.

Not chiselled out of her father too because maybe old Snopes was glad to stump up something just to have what Gavin or Ratliff would call that reproachless virgin rectitude stop looking at him.

But she didn't have two children so all Ratliff and I had to trust, depend on this time was that old primary condition founded on simple evanescence, that every time a moment occurred they would be one moment older: that they had to be alive for him to notice them, and they had to be in motion to be alive, and the only moment of motion which caught his attention, his eye, was that one at which they entered puberty like the swirl of skirt or flow or turn of limb when entering, passing through a door, slowed down by the camera trick but still motion, still a moment, irrevocable.

That was really what saved him each time: that the moment had to be motion. They couldn't stop in the door, and once through it they didn't

stop either; sometimes they didn't even pause long enough to close it behind them before going on to the next one and through it, which was into matrimony — from maturation to parturition in one easy lesson you might say. Which was all right. Uncle Gavin wouldn't be at that next door. He would still be watching the first one.

And since life is not so much motion as an inventless repetition of motion, he would never be at that first door long before there would be another swirl, another unshaped vanishing adolescent leg. So I should have thought to tell Ratliff that, while I was in Memphis helping Uncle Gavin say good-bye to this one, he might be looking around the Square to see who the next one was going to be, as Linda had already displaced Melisandre Backus probably before Melisandre even knew she had been dispossessed. Then in the next moment I knew that would not be necessary; obviously Uncle Gavin had already picked her out himself, which was why he could sit there placid and composed, drinking coffee while we waited for the plane to be announced.

Which it was at last. We went out to the ramp. I stopped at the rail. "I'll wait here," I said. "You'll want a little privacy while you can still get it even if it's only anonymity and not solitude. Have you got your slate ready? or maybe she'll already have one built in on her cuff, or maybe strapped to her leg like aviators carry maps."

But he had gone on. Then the plane taxied up, one of the new DC 3's, and in time there she was. I couldn't see her eyes from this distance, but then it wasn't them, it was just her ears the bomb or shell or mine or whatever it was blew up — the same tall girl too tall to have a shape but then I don't know: women like that and once you get their clothes off they surprise you even if she was twenty-nine years old now. Then I could see her eyes, so dark blue that at first you thought they were black. And I for one never did know how or where she got them or the black hair either since old Snopes's eyes were the colour of stagnant pond water and his hair didn't have any colour at all, and her mother had had blue eyes too but her hair was blonde.

So that when I tried to remember her, she always looked like she had just been raided out of a brothel in the Scandinavian Valhalla and the cops had just managed to fling a few garments on her before they hustled her into the wagon. Fine eyes too, that probably if you were the one to finally get the clothes off you would have called them beautiful too.

And she even had the little pad and pencil in her hand while she was kissing Gavin. I mean, kissing him. Though evidently he would need a little time to get used to using it or depending on it because he said aloud, just like she was anybody else:

“Here’s Chick too,” and she remembered me; she was as tall as Gavin and damn near as tall as me, as well as a nail-biter though maybe that had come after the shell or perhaps after the bereavement.

And when she shook hands she really had driven that ambulance and apparently changed the tyres on it too, speaking not loud but in that dry harsh quacking voice that deaf people learn to use, even asking about Mother and Father as if she really cared, like any ordinary Jefferson woman that never dreamed of going to wars and getting blown up. Though Uncle Gavin remembered now, or at least was learning fast, taking the pad and pencil and scrawling something on it, baggage I reckon, since she said, “Oh yes,” just like she could hear too, and got the checks out of her handbag.

I brought the car up while they untangled the bags. So she had lived with the guy for years before they married but it didn’t show on her. And she had gone to Spain to the war and got blown up at the front, and that didn’t show on her either. I said, “Why don’t you let her drive? Then maybe she won’t be so nervous because she can’t talk to you.”

“Maybe you’d better drive then,” he said. So we did, and brought the hero home, the two of them in the hack. And somebody may have said, “Why don’t we all ride in front? the seat’s wide enough.” Though I don’t remember it. Or at least nobody did. Or anyway at least they got into the back seat. So I don’t remember that either: only Uncle Gavin: “You can relax now. You’re quite safe. I’m holding her hand.”

Which they were, she holding his hand in both hers on her lap and every mile or so the duck voice would say, "Gavin," and then after a mile or so, "Gavin." And evidently she hadn't had the pad and pencil long enough to get used to them either or maybe when you lose hearing and enter real silence you forget everything does not take place in that privacy and solitude.

Or maybe after he took the pencil from her to answer on the pad, she couldn't wait to get the pencil back so both should have had slates: "Yes it does. I can feel it, somewhere in my skull or the back of my mouth. It's an ugly sound. Isn't it?" But evidently Gavin was learning because it was still the duck voice: "Yes it is. I can feel it, I tell you." And still the duck voice: "How?"

If I try to practise, how can I know when it's right?" Which I agree with myself: if you're going to take time out from your law practice and being county attorney to restore to your deaf girl friend the lost bridehead of her mellifluity, how would you go about it. Though what a chance for a husband: to teach your stone-deaf wife that all she needed to make her tone and pitch beautiful was merely to hold her breath while she spoke.

Or maybe what Uncle Gavin wrote next was simply Jonson (or some of that old Donne or Herrick maybe or even just Suckling maybe — any or all of them annotated to that one ear — eye now — by that old Stevens) Vale not these cherry lips with vacant speech But let her drink instead thy tender Yes. Or maybe what he wrote was simpler still: Hold it till we get home. This is no place to restore your voice. Besides, this infant will have to go back to Cambridge next month and then we'll have plenty of time, plenty of privacy.

Thus we brought the hero home. Now we could see Jefferson, the clock on the courthouse, not to mention her father's water tank, and now the duck voice was saying Ratliff. "Bart liked him. He said he hadn't expected to like anybody from Mississippi, but he was wrong." What Gavin wrote this time was obvious, since the voice said: "Not even you.

He made me promise — I mean, whichever one of us it was, would give Ratliff one of his things. You remember it — the Italian boy that you didn't know what it was even though you had seen sculpture before, but Ratliff that had never even seen an Italian boy, nor anything else beyond the Confederate monument in front of the courthouse, knew at once what it was, and even what he was doing?"

And I would have liked the pad myself long enough to write What was the Italian boy doing? only we were home now, the hero; Gavin said: "Stop at the bank first. He should have some warning; simple decency commands it.

Unless he has had his warning and has simply left town for a little space in which to wrestle with his soul and so bring it to the moment which it must face. Assuming of course that even he has realised by now that he simply cannot foreclose her out of existence like a mortgage or a note." "And have a public reception here in the street before she has had a chance to fix her makeup?" I said.

"Relax," he said again. "When you are a little older you will discover that people really are much more gentle and considerate and kind than you want right now to believe."

I pulled up at the bank. But If I had been her I wouldn't even have reached for the pencil, duck quack or not, to say, "What the hell? Take me on home." She didn't.

She sat there, holding his hand in both hers, not just on her lap but right against her belly, looking around at the Square, the duck voice saying, "Gavin. Gavin." Then: "There goes Uncle Willy, coming back from dinner." Except it wasn't old man Christian: he was dead. But then it didn't really matter whether anybody wrote that on the pad or not. And Gavin was right. Nobody stopped. I watched two of them recognise her.

No, I mean they recognised juxtaposition: Gavin Stevens's car at the curb before the bank at twenty-two minutes past one in the afternoon with me at the wheel and Gavin and a woman in the back seat. Who

had all heard about Linda Kohl I mean Snopes Kohl, anyhow that she was female and from Jefferson and had gone near enough to a war for it to bust her eardrums. Because he is right: people are kind and gentle and considerate. It's not that you don't expect them to be, it's because you have already made up your mind they are not and so they upset you, throw you off. They didn't even stop, just one of them said Howdy Gavin and went on.

I got out and went into the bank. Because what would I do myself if I had a daughter, an only child, and her grandfather had plenty of money for it and I could have afforded myself to let her go away to school.

Only I didn't and nobody knew why I wouldn't, until suddenly I let her go, but only as far as the University which was only fifty miles away; and nobody knew why for that either: only that I aimed to become president of the bank that the president of it now was the man everybody believed had been laying my wife ever since we moved to town. That is, nobody knew why until three months later, when my wife went to the beauty parlour for the first time in her life and that night shot herself carefully through the temple so as not to disarrange the new permanent, and when the dust finally settled sure enough that fornicating bank president had left town and now I was not only president of his bank but living in his house and you would have thought I wouldn't need the daughter any more and she could go wherever the hell she wanted provided it wasn't ever Jefferson, Mississippi, again.

Except I wouldn't even let her do that until we could both sit in the car and see the monument over her mother's grave unveiled, sitting there defenceless before the carved face and the carved defenceless taunt: A Virtuous Wife Is a Crown to Her Husband Her Children Rise and Call Her Blessed and then I said, "All right. You can go now." And I came back out.

"Mr Snopes has taken the afternoon off," I said. "To go home and wait there for his daughter." So we went there, on to the colonial monstrosity which was the second taunt. He had three monuments in

Jefferson now: the water tank, the gravestone, and the mansion. And who knows at which of the windows he lurked his wait or waited out his lurk, whichever way you prefer. "Maybe I should come in too," I said.

"Maybe we should each have a pad and pencil," Uncle Gavin said. "Then everybody could hear." We were expected. Almost at once the Negro yardman-chauffeur came out the front door. I got the luggage out on to the sidewalk while they still stood there, she as tall as him and Gavin in her arms just as much as she was in his, kissing right on the street in the broad daylight, the duck voice saying "Gavin Gavin" not so much as if she still couldn't believe it was him at last but as if she still hadn't got used to the new sound she was convinced she made.

Then she turned him loose and he said, "Come on," and we got back in the car, and that was all. The hero was home. I turned in the middle of the block and looked not back, I would have liked to say, if it had been true: the houseman still scuttling up the walk with the bags and she still standing there, looking at us, a little too tall for my taste, immured, inviolate in silence, invulnerable, serene.

That was it: silence. If there were no such thing as sound. If it only took place in silence, no evil man has invented could really harm him: explosion, treachery, the human voice.

That was it: deafness. Ratliff and I couldn't beat that. Those others, the other times had flicked the skirt or flowed or turned the limb at and into mere puberty; beyond it and immediately, was the other door immediately beyond which was the altar and the long line of drying diapers: fulfilment, the end. But she had beat him.

Not in motion continuous through a door, a moment, but immobilised by a thunderclap into silence, herself the immobile one while it was the door and the walls it opened which fled away and on, herself no moment's child but the inviolate bride of silence, inviolable in maidenhead, fixed, forever safe from change and alteration. Finally I ran Ratliff to ground; it took three days.

“Her husband is sending you a present,” I said. “It’s that sculpture you liked: the Italian boy doing whatever it was you liked that Gavin himself who has not only seen Italian boys before but maybe even one doing whatever this one is doing, didn’t even know where first base was. But it’s all right. You don’t have a female wife nor any innocent female daughters either. So you can probably keep it right there in the house. — She’s going to marry him,” I said.

“Why not?” he said. “I reckon he can stand it. Besides, if somebody jest marries him, maybe the rest of us will be safe.”

“The rest of them, you mean?” I said.

“I mean jest what I said,” Ratliff answered. “I mean the rest of all of us.”

Nine

Charles Mallison

GAVIN WAS RIGHT. That was late August. Three weeks later I was back in Cambridge again, hoping, I mean trying, or maybe what I mean is I belonged to the class that would, or anyway should, graduate next June. But I had been in Jefferson three weeks, plenty long enough even if they had insisted on having banns read: something quite unnecessary for a widow who was not only a widow but a wounded war hero too. So then I thought maybe they were waiting until they would be free of me. You know: the old road-company drummer reversed in gender: the frantic child clinging this time to the prospective broom’s coat-tail, crying “Papa papa papa” (in this case Uncle uncle uncle) “please don’t make us marry Mrs Smith.”

Then I thought (it was Thanksgiving now; pretty soon I would be going home for Christmas) Naturally it won’t occur to any of them to bother to notify me way up here in Massachusetts. So I even thought of writing and asking, not Mother of course and certainly not Uncle Gavin, since if it had happened he would be too busy to answer, and if it hadn’t he would still be too busy either dodging for his life if he was the one still

saying No, or trying to learn her enough language to hear Please if he was the one saying Yes.

But to Ratliff, who would be an interested bystander even if you couldn't call that much curiosity about other people's affairs which he possessed merely innocent — maybe even a wire: Are they bedded formally yet or not? I mean is it rosa yet or still just sub, assuming you assume the same assumption they teach us up here at Harvard that once you get the clothes off those tall up-and-down women you find out they ain't all that up-and-down at all.

Then it was Christmas and I thought Maybe I wronged them. Maybe they have been waiting for me all along, not to interrupt my education by an emergency call but for the season of peace and good will to produce me available to tote the ring or bouquet or whatever it is. But I didn't even see her. Uncle Gavin and I even spent most of one whole day together.

I was going out to Sartoris to shoot quail with Benbow (he wasn't but seventeen but he was considered one of the best bird shots in the county, second only to Luther Biglin, a half farmer, half dog trainer, half market hunter, who shot left-handed, not much older than Benbow, in fact about my age, who lived up near Old Wyottsport on the river) and Uncle Gavin invited himself along. He — Gavin — wouldn't be much of a gun even if he stopped talking long enough, but now and then he would go with me. And all that day, nothing; it was me that finally said: "How are the voice lessons coming?"

"Mrs Kohl? Fair. But your fresh ear would be the best judge," and I said: "When will that be?" and he said:

"Any time you're close enough to hear it." And again on Christmas day, it was me. Ratliff usually had Christmas dinner with us, Uncle Gavin's guest though Mother liked him too, whether or not because she was Uncle Gavin's twin. Or sometimes Uncle Gavin ate with Ratliff and then he would take me because Ratliff was a damned good cook, living alone in the cleanest little house you ever saw, doing his own housework and

he even made the blue shirts he always wore. And this time too it was me.

“What about Mrs Kohl for dinner too?” I asked Mother, and Uncle Gavin said:

“My God, did you come all the way down here from Cambridge to spend Christmas too looking at that old fish-blooded son—” and caught himself in time and said, “Excuse me, Maggie,” and Mother said:

“Certainly she will have to take her first Christmas dinner at home with her father.”

And the next day I left. Spoade — his father had been at Harvard back in 1909 with Uncle Gavin — had invited me to Charleston to see what a Saint Cecilia ball looked like from inside. Because we always broke up then anyway; the day after Christmas Father always went to Miami to spend a week looking at horses and Mother would go too, not that she was interested in running horses but on the contrary: because of her conviction that her presence or anyway adjacence or at least contiguity would keep him from buying one.

Then it was 1938 and I was back in Cambridge. Then it was September 1938, and I was still or anyway again in Cambridge, in law school now. Munich had been observed or celebrated or consecrated, whichever it was, and Uncle Gavin said, “It won’t be long now.” But he had been saying that back last spring. So I said:

“Then what’s the use of me wasting two or three more years becoming a lawyer when if you’re right nobody will have time for civil cases any more, even if I’m still around to prosecute or defend them?” and he said:

“Because when this one is over, all humanity and justice will have left will be the law,” and I said:

“What else is it using now?” and he said:

“These are good times, boom halcyon times when what do you want with justice when you’ve already got welfare? Now the law is the last resort, to get your hand into the pocket which so far has resisted or foiled you.”

That was last spring, in June when he and Mother (they had lost Father at Saratoga though he had promised to reach Cambridge in time for the actual vows) came up to see me graduate in Ack. And I said, "What? No wedding bells yet?" and he said:

"Not mine anyway," and I said:

"How are the voice lessons coming? Come on," I said, "I'm a big boy now; I'm a Harvard A.M. too even if I won't have Heidelberg. Tell me. Is that really all you do when you are all cosy together? practise talking?" and he said:

"Hush and let me talk awhile now. You're going to Europe for the summer; that's my present to you. I have your tickets and your passport application; all you need do is go down to the official photographer and get mugged."

"Why Europe? and Why now? Besides, what if I don't want to go?" and he said:

"Because it may not be there next summer. So it will have to be this one. Go and look at the place; you may have to die in it."

"Why not wait until then, then?" and he said:

"You will go as a host then."

This summer you can still be a guest." There were three of us; by fast footwork and pulling all the strings we could reach, we even made the same boat. And that summer we — I: two of us at the last moment found themselves incapable of passing Paris — saw a little of Europe on a bicycle. I mean, that part still available: that presumable corridor of it where I might have to do Uncle Gavin's dying: Britain, France, Italy — the Europe which Uncle Gavin said would be no more since the ones who survived getting rid of Hitler and Mussolini and Franco would be too exhausted and the ones who merely survived them wouldn't care anyway.

So I did try to look at it, to see, since even at twenty-four I still seemed to believe what he said just as I believed him at fourteen and (I presume: I can't remember) at four. In fact, the Europe he remembered or thought he remembered was already gone. What I saw was a kind of composed and collected hysteria: a frenetic holiday in which everybody

was a tourist, native and visitor alike. There were too many soldiers. I mean, too many people dressed as, and for the moment behaving like, troops, as if for simple police or temporary utility reasons they had to wear masquerade and add to the Maginot Line (so that they — the French ones anyway — seemed to be saying, “Have a heart; don’t kid us.

We don’t believe it either.”) right in the middle of the fight for the thirty-nine-hour week; the loud parliamentary conclaves about which side of Piccadilly or the Champs-Élysées the sandbags would look best on like which side of the room to hang the pictures; the splendid glittering figure of Gamelin still wiping the soup from his moustache and saying, “Be calm. I am here” — as though all Europe (oh yes, us too; the place was full of Americans too) were saying, “Since Evil is the thing, not only de rigueur but successful too, let us all join Evil and so make it the Good.”

Then me too in Paris for the last two weeks, to see if the Paris of Hemingway and the Paris of Scott Fitzgerald (they were not the same ones; they merely used the same room) had vanished completely or not too; then Cambridge again, only a day late: all of which, none of which that is, ties up with anything but only explains to me why it was almost a year and a half before I saw her again. And so we had Munich: that moment of respectful silence, then once more about our affairs; and Uncle Gavin’s letter came saying “It won’t be long now.”

Except that it was probably already too late for me. When I had to go — no, I don’t mean that: when the time came for me to go — I wanted to be a fighter pilot. But I was already twenty-four now; in six years I would be thirty and even now it might be too late; Bayard and John Sartoris were twenty when they went to England in ‘16 and Uncle Gavin told me about one R.F.C. (I mean R.A.F. now) child who was a captain with such a record that the British government sent him back home and grounded him for good so that he might at least be present on the day of his civilian majority. So I would probably wind up as a navigator or engineer on bombers, or maybe at thirty they wouldn’t let me go up at all.

But still no wedding bells. Maybe it was the voice. My spies — I only needed one of course: Mother — reported that the private lessons were still going on, so maybe she felt that the Yes would not be dulcet enough yet to be legal. Which — legality — she would of course insist on, having tried cohabitation the first time au naturel you might say, and it blew up in her face. No, that's wrong.

The cohabitation didn't blow up until after it became legal, until whichever one it was finally said, "Oh hell then, get the licence and the preacher but please for sweet please sake shut up." So now she would fear a minister or a J.P. like Satan or the hangman, since to appear before one in the company of someone of the opposite sex would be the same as a death warrant. Which she certainly would not wish for Uncle Gavin, since not only was the Yes to him going to be tender enough to have brought her all the way back to Jefferson to say it, he wouldn't leave enough money to make it worth being his widow in case that Yes wasn't so tender.

No, that's wrong too. If she had to shack up with a man for five years before he would consent to marry her, I mean, with a sculptor so advanced and liberal that even Gavin couldn't recognise what he sculpted, made, he must have been pretty advanced in liberalism. And if he had to quit anything as safe and pleasant as being a Greenwich Village sculptor living with a girl that could afford and wanted to pay the rent and buy the grub whether he married her or not — if he had to quit all this to go to Spain to fight on what anybody could have told him would be the losing side, he must have been advanced even beyond just liberalism.

And if she loved him enough to wait five years for him to say All right, dammit, call the parson, and then went to Spain to get blown up herself just to be with him, she must be one of them too since apparently you can't even be moderate about communism: you either violently are or violently are not. (I asked him; I mean of course Uncle Gavin. "Suppose she is," he said. "All right," I said. "So what the hell?" he said. "All right,

all right," I said. "What the hell's business is it of yours anyway?" he said.

"All right, all right, all right," I said.) And just being blown up wouldn't cure it. So there would be no wedding bells; that other one had been a mere deviation due to her youth, not to happen again; she was only for a moment an enemy of the people, and paid quickly for it.

So there would be no preacher. They were just going to practise people's democracy, where everybody was equal no matter what you looked like when he finally got your clothes off, right here in Jefferson. So all you had to figure out was, how the bejesus they would manage it in a town no bigger and equal than Jefferson. Or not they: he, Gavin, I mean, it would be his trouble, problem, perhaps need. Not hers. She was free, absolved of mundanity; who knows, who is not likewise castrate of sound, circumcised from having to hear, of need too. She had the silence: that thunderclap instant to fix her forever inviolate and private in solitude; let the rest of the world blunder in all the loud directions over its own feet trying to find first base at the edge of abyss like one of the old Chaplin films.

He would have to find the ways and means; all she would bring would be the capability for compliance, and what you might call a family precedence. Except that she wasn't her mother, not to mention Gavin not being Manfred de Spain. I mean — I was only thirteen when Mrs Snopes shot herself that night so I still don't know how much I saw and remembered and how much was compelled onto or into me from Uncle Gavin, being, as Ratliff put it, as I had spent the first eleven or twelve years of my existence in the middle of Uncle Gavin, thinking what he thought and seeing what he saw, not because he taught me to but maybe just because he let me, allowed me to.

I mean, Linda and Uncle Gavin wouldn't have that one matchless natural advantage which her mother and Manfred de Spain had, which was that aura, nimbus, condition, whatever the word is, in which Mrs Snopes not just existed, lived, breathed, but created about herself by just existing, living, breathing.

I don't know what word I want: an aura not of licence, unchastity, because (this may even be Ratliff; I don't remember now) little petty moral conditions like restraint and purity had no more connection with a woman like Mrs Snopes — or rather, a woman like her had no more concern with or even attention for them — than conventions about what force you use or when or how or where have to do with wars or cyclones. I mean, when a community suddenly discovered that it has the sole ownership of Venus for however long it will last, she cannot, must not be a chaste wife or even a faithful mistress whether she is or not or really wants to be or not.

That would be not only intolerable, but a really criminal waste; and for the community so accoladed to even condone, let alone abet, the chastity, continence, would be an affront to the donors deserving their godlike vengeance. Like having all miraculous and matchless season — wind, sun, rain, heat and frost — concentrated into one miraculous instant over the county, then us to try to arrogate to ourselves the puny right to pick and choose and select instead of every man woman and child that could walk turning out to cultivate to the utmost every seed the land would hold.

So we — I mean the men and the women both — would not even ask to escape the anguish and uproar she would cause by breathing and existing among us and the jealousy we knew ourselves to be unworthy of, so long as we did have one who could match and cope with her in fair combat and so be our champion and pride like the county ownership of the fastest horse in the country. We would all be on hers and De Spain's side; we would even engineer and guard the trysts; only the preachers would hate her because they would be afraid of her since the god she represented without even trying to, for the men to pant after and even the women to be proud that at least one of their sex was its ambassador, was a stronger one than the pale and desperate Galilean who was all they had to challenge with.

Because Linda didn't have that quality; that one was not transferable. So all that remained for her and Gavin was continence. To put it

crudely, morality. Because where could they go. Not to her house because between her and her father, the wrong one was deaf. And not to his because the house he lived in wasn't his but Mother's and one of the earliest (when the time came of course) principles he taught me was that a gentleman does not bring his paramour into the home of: in this order: His wife. His mother. His sister. His mistress.

And they couldn't make the coincidental trips to the available places in Memphis or New Orleans or maybe as far away as St Louis and Chicago that (we assumed) her mother and Manfred de Spain used to make, since even police morality, not to mention that of that semi-underworld milieu to which they would have had to resort, would have revolted at the idea of seducing a stone-deaf woman from the safety and innocence of her country home town, to such a purpose.

So that left only his automobile, concealed desperately and frantically behind a bush — Gavin Stevens, aged fifty, M.A. Harvard, Ph.D. Heidelberg, LL.B. Mississippi, American Field Service and Y.M.C.A., France, 1915-1918, County Attorney; and Linda Kohl, thirty, widow, wounded in action with the communist forces in Spain, fumbling and panting in a parked automobile like they were seventeen years old.

Especially when the police found out (I mean if, of course, if somebody came and told them) that she was a communist. Or Jefferson either, for that matter. We had two Finns who had escaped by the skin of their teeth from Russia in 1917 and from Europe in 1919 and in the early twenties wound up in Jefferson; nobody knew why — one the cobbler who had taken over Mr Nightingale's little shop, the other a tinsmith — who were not professed communists nor confessed either since they still spoke too little English by the time Mr Roosevelt's N.R.A. and the labour unions had made "communist" a dirty word referring mostly to John L. Lewis's C.I.O. In fact, there was no need as they saw it to confess or profess either.

They simply took it for granted that there was a proletariat in Jefferson as specific and obvious and recognisable as the day's climate, and as soon as they learned English they would find it and, all being

proletarians together, they would all be communists together too as was not only their right and duty but they couldn't help themselves.

That was fifteen years ago now, though the big one, the cobbler, the one slower at learning English, was still puzzled and bewildered, believing it was simply the barrier of language instead of a condition in which the Jefferson proletariat declined not only to know it was the proletariat but even to be content as the middle class, being convinced instead that it was merely in a temporary interim state toward owning in its turn Mr Snopes's bank or Wall Street, Snopes's wholesale grocery chain or (who knows?) on the way to the governor's mansion in Jackson or even the White House in Washington.

The little one, the tinsmith, was quicker than that. Maybe, as distinct from the cobbler's sedentary and more meditative trade, he got around more. Anyway he had learned some time ago that any proletariat he became a member of in Jefferson he would have to manufacture first. So he set about it. The only means he had was to recruit, convert communists, and the only material he had were Negroes.

Because among us white male Jeffersons there was one concert of unanimity, no less strong and even louder at the bottom, extending from the operators of Saturday curb-side peanut- and popcorn-vending machines, through the side-street and back-alley grocers, up to the department store owners and automobile and gasoline agencies, against everybody they called communists now — Harry Hopkins, Hugh Johnson and everybody else associated with N.R.A., Eugene Debs, the I.W.W., the C.I.O. — any and everybody who seemed even to question our native-born Jefferson right to buy or raise or dig or find anything as cheaply as cajolery or trickery or threat or force could do it, and then sell it as dear as the necessity or ignorance or timidity of the buyer would stand.

And that was what Linda had, all she had in our alien capitalist waste this far from home if she really was a communist and communism really is not just a political ideology but a religion which has to be practised in order to stay alive — two Arctic Circle immigrants: one

practically without human language, a troglodyte, the other a little quick-tempered irreconcilable hornet because of whom both of them were already well advanced outside the Jefferson pale, not by being professed communists (nobody would have cared how much of a communist the little one merely professed himself to be so long as he didn't actually interfere with local wage scales, just as they could have been Republicans so long as they didn't try to interfere with our Democratic town and county elections or Catholics as long as they didn't picket churches or break up prayer meetings) but Negro lovers: consorters, political affiliators with Negroes.

Not social consorters: we would not have put up with that from even them and the little one anyway knew enough Jefferson English to know it. But association of any sort was too much; the local police were already looking cross-eyed at them even though we didn't really believe a foreigner could do any actual harm among our own loyal coloured.

So, you see, all they — Gavin and Linda — had left now was marriage. Then it was Christmas 1938, the last one before the lights began to go out, and I came home for the holidays and she came to supper one night. Not Christmas dinner. I don't know what happened there: whether Mother and Gavin decided it would be more delicate to ask her and let her decline, or not ask her at all. No, that's wrong. I'll bet Mother invited them both — her and old Snopes too.

Because women are marvellous. They stroll perfectly bland and serene through a fact that the men have been bloodying their heads against for years; whereupon you find that the fact not only wasn't important, it wasn't really there. She invited them both, exactly as if she had been doing it whenever she thought of it maybe at least once a month for the last hundred years, whenever she decided to give them a little pleasure by having them to a meal, or whenever she decided it would give her pleasure to have them whether they thought so or not; and Linda declined for both of them in exactly the same way.

So you can imagine that Christmas dinner in that house that nobody I knew had seen the inside of except Mother (oh yes, she would have by

now, with Linda home again) and Uncle Gavin: the dining-room — table, chairs, sideboard, cabinets, chandeliers and all — looking exactly as it had looked in the Memphis interior decorator's warehouse when he — Snopes — traded in Major de Spain's mother's furniture for it, with him at one end of the table and Linda at the other and the yardman in a white coat serving them — the old fish-blooded son of a bitch who had a vocabulary of two words, one being No and the other Foreclose, and the bride of silence more immaculate in that chastity than ever Caesar's wife because she was invulnerable too, forever safe, in that chastity forever pure, that couldn't have heard him if he had had anything to say to her, any more than he could have heard her, since he wouldn't even recognise the language she spoke in.

The two of them sitting there face to face through the long excruciating ritual which the day out of all the days compelled; and nobody to know why they did it, suffered it, why she suffered and endured it, what ritual she served or compulsion exiated — or who knows? what portent she postulated to keep him reminded. Maybe that was why. I mean, why she came back to Jefferson. Evidently it wasn't to marry Gavin Stevens. Or at least not yet.

So it would be just an ordinary supper, though Mother would have said (and unshakably believed) that it was in honour of me being at home again. And didn't I just say that women are wonderful? She — Linda: a present from Guess Who — had a little pad of thin ivory leaves just about big enough to hold three words at a time, with gold corners, on little gold rings to turn the pages, with a little gold stylus thing to match, that you could write on and then efface it with a handkerchief or a piece of tissue or, in a mere masculine emergency, a little spit on your thumb and then use it again (sure, maybe he gave it to her in return for that gold cigarette-lighter engraved G L S when he didn't have L for his middle initial or in fact any middle initial at all, that she gave him about five years ago that he never had used because nobody could unconvince him he could taste the fluid through his cob pipe).

And though Mother used the pad like the rest of us, it was just coincidental, like any other gesture of the hands while talking. Because

she was talking to Linda at the same time, not even watching her hand but looking at Linda instead, so that she couldn't have deciphered the marks she was making even provided she was making marks, just talking away at Linda exactly as she did to the rest of us. And be damned if Linda wouldn't seem to understand her, the two of them chattering and babbling away at one another like women do, so that maybe no women ever listen to the other one because they don't have to, they have already communicated before either one begins to speak.

Because at those times Linda would talk. Oh yes, Gavin's voice lessons had done some good because they must have, there had been too many of them or anyway enough of them, assuming they did spend some of the time together trying to soften down her voice. But it was still the duck's voice: dry, lifeless, dead. That was it: dead. There was no passion, no heat in it; and, what was worse, no hope.

I mean, in bed together in the dark and to have more of love and excitement and ecstasy than just one can bear and so you must share it, murmur it, and to have only that dry and lifeless quack to murmur, whisper with. This time (there were other suppers during the next summer but this was the first one when I was at table too) she began to talk about Spain. Not about the war. I mean, the lost war. It was queer. She mentioned it now and then, not as if it had never happened but as if their side hadn't been licked.

Some of them like Kohl had been killed and a lot of the others had had the bejesus blown out of the eardrums and arms and legs like her, and the rest of them were scattered (and in no time now would begin to be proscribed and investigated by the F.B.I., not to mention harried and harassed by the amateurs, but we hadn't quite reached that yet) but they hadn't been whipped and hadn't lost anything at all. She was talking about the people in it, the people like Kohl.

She told about Ernest Hemingway and Malraux, and about a Russian, a poet that was going to be better than Pushkin only he got himself killed; and Mother scribbling on the pad but not paying any more attention to what she thought she was writing than Linda was, saying,

“Oh, Linda, no!” — you know: how tragic, to be cut off so young, the work unfinished, and Gavin taking the pad away from Mother but already talking too:

“Nonsense. There’s no such thing as a mute inglorious Milton. If he had died at the age of two, somebody would still write it for him.”

Only I didn’t bother with the pad; I doubt if I could have taken it away from them. “Named Bacon or Marlowe,” I said.

“Or maybe a good sound synthetic professional name like Shakespeare,” Uncle Gavin said.

But Linda hadn’t even glanced at the pad. I tell you, she and Mother didn’t need it.

“Why?” she said. “What line or paragraph or even page can you compose and write to match giving your life to say No to people like Hitler and Mussolini?” and Gavin not bothering with the pad either now:

“She’s right. She’s absolutely right, and thank God for it. Nothing is ever lost. Nothing. Nothing.” Except Linda of course. Gavin said how Kohl had been a big man, I don’t mean just a hunk of beef, but virile, alive; a man who loved what the old Greeks meant by laughter, who would have been a match for, competent to fulfil, any woman’s emotional and physical life too.

And Linda was just thirty now and oh yes, the eyes were beautiful, and more than just the eyes; maybe it never mattered to Kohl what was inside her clothes, nor would to anyone else lucky enough to succeed him, including Uncle Gavin.

So now I understood at last what I was looking at: neither Mother nor Linda either one needed to look at what Mother thought she was scribbling on that damned ivory slate, since evidently from the second day after Linda got home Mother had been as busy and ruthless and undeviating as one of the old Victorian head-hunting mamas during the open season at Bath or Tunbridge Wells in Fielding or Dickens or Smollett. Then I found out something else.

I remembered how not much more than a year ago we were alone in the office and Ratliff said,
“Look-a-here, what you want to waste all this good weather being jealous of your uncle for? Somebody’s bound to marry him sooner or later. Someday you’re going to outgrow him and you’ll be too busy yourself jest to hang around and protect him. So it might jest as well be Linda.” You see what I mean? that evidently it was transferable. I mean, whatever it was her mother had had. Gavin had seen her once when she was thirteen years old, and look what happened to him.

Then Barton Kohl saw her once when she was nineteen years old, and look where he was now. And now I had seen her twice, I mean after I was old enough to know what I was looking at: once at the Memphis airport last summer, and here tonight at the supper table, and now I knew it would have to be me to take Uncle Gavin off to the library or den or wherever such interview happen, and say:
“Look here, young man. I know how dishonourable your intentions are. What I want to know is, how serious they are.” Or if not him, at least somebody. Because it wouldn’t be him. Ratliff had told me how Gavin said her doom would be to love once and lose him and then to mourn.

Which could have been why she came back to Jefferson: since if all you want is to grieve, it doesn’t matter where you are. So she was lost; she had even lost that remaining one who should have married her for no other reason than that he had done more than anybody else while she was a child to make her into what she was now. But it wouldn’t be him; he had his own prognosis to defend, make his own words good no matter who anguished and suffered.

Yes, lost. She had been driving that black country-banker-cum-Baptist-deacon’s car ever since she got home; apparently she had assumed at first that she would drive it alone, until old Snopes himself objected because of the deafness.

So each afternoon she would be waiting in the car when the bank closed and the two of them would drive around the adjacent country while he could listen for the approaching horns if any. Which — the

country drives — was in his character since the county was his domain, his barony — the acres, the farms, the crops — since even where he didn't already hold the mortgage, perhaps already in process of foreclosure even, he could measure and calculate with his eye the ones which so far had escaped him.

That is, except one afternoon a week, usually Wednesday. Old Snopes neither smoked nor drank nor even chewed tobacco; what his jaws worked steadily on was, as Ratliff put it, the same little chunk of Frenchman's Bend air he had brought in his mouth when he moved to Jefferson thirty years ago.

Yes, lost: it wasn't even to Uncle Gavin: it was Ratliff she went to that afternoon and said, "I can't find who sells the whiskey now." No, not lost so much, she had just been away too long, explaining to Ratliff why she hadn't gone to Uncle Gavin: "He's the County Attorney; I thought—" and Ratliff patting her on the back right there in the street, saying for anybody to hear it since obviously she couldn't: "You been away from home too long. Come on. We'll go git him."

So the three of them in Gavin's car drove up to Jakeleg Wattman's so-called fishing camp at Wyott's Crossing so she would know where and how herself next time. Which was to drive up to Jakeleg's little unpainted store (Jakeleg kept it unpainted so that whenever a recurrent new reform-administration sheriff would notify him he had to be raided again, Jakeleg wouldn't have a lot of paint to scratch up in drawing the nails and dismantling the sections and carrying them another mile deeper into the bottom until the reform reached its ebb and he could move back convenient to the paved road and the automobiles) and get out of the car and step inside where the unpainted shelves were crowded with fishhooks and sinkers and lines and tobacco and flashlight batteries and coffee and canned beans and shotgun shells and the neat row of United States Internal Revenue Department liquor licences tacked on the wall and Jakeleg in the flopping rubber hip boots he wore winter and summer with a loaded pistol in one of them, behind the chicken-wire-barricaded counter, and you would say, "Howdy, Jake.

What you got today?" And he would tell you: the same one brand like he didn't care whether you liked that brand or not, and the same one price like he didn't give a damn whether that suited you either. And as soon as you said how many the Negro man (in the flopping hip boots Jakeleg had worn last year) would duck out or down or at least out of sight and reappear with the bottles and stand holding them until you had given Jakeleg the money and got your change (if any) back and Jakeleg would open the wicket in the wire and shove the bottles through and you would return to your car and that was all there was to it; taking (Uncle Gavin) Linda right on in with him, saying as likely as not: "Howdy, Jake. Meet Mrs Kohl.

She can't hear but there's nothing wrong with her taste and swallowing." And maybe Linda said, "What does he have?" and likely what Uncle Gavin wrote on the pad for that was That's fighting talk here This is a place where you take it or leave it Just give him eight dollars or sixteen if you want 2.

So next time maybe she came alone. Or maybe Uncle Gavin himself walked into the bank and on to that little room at the back and said, "Look here, you old fish-blooded son of a bitch, are you going to just sit here and let your only female daughter that won't even hear the trump of doom, drive alone up yonder to Jakeleg Wattman's bootleg joint to buy whiskey?" Or maybe it was simple coincidence: a Wednesday afternoon and he — Mr Snopes — can't say, "Here, hold on; where the hell you going? This ain't the right road."

Because she can't hear him and in fact I don't know how he did talk to her since I can't imagine his hand writing anything except adding a percent symbol or an expiration date; maybe they just had a county road map he could point to that worked up until this time.

So now he had not one dilemma but three: not just the bank president's known recognisable car driving up to a bootleg joint, but with him in it; then the dilemma of whether to let every prospective mortgagee in Yoknapatawpha County hear how he would sit there in

the car and let his only female child walk into a notorious river-bottom joint to buy whiskey, or go in himself and with his own Baptist deacon's hand pay out sixteen dollars' worth of his own life's blood.

Lost. Gavin told me how over a year ago the two Finn communists had begun to call on her at night (at her invitation of course) and you can imagine this one. It would be the parlour. Uncle Gavin said she had fixed up a sitting-room for herself upstairs, but this would be in the parlour diagonally across the hall from the room where old Snopes was supposed to spend all his life that didn't take place in the bank.

The capitalist parlour and the three of them, the two Finnish immigrant labourers and the banker's daughter, one that couldn't speak English and another that couldn't hear any language, trying to communicate through the third one who hadn't yet learned to spell, talking of hope, millennium, dream: of the emancipation of man from his tragedy, the liberation at last and forever from pain and hunger and injustice, of the human condition.

While two doors away in the room where he did everything but eat and keep the bank's cash money, with his feet propped on that little unpainted ledge nailed to his Adam fireplace and chewing steadily at what Ratliff called his little chunk of Frenchman's Bend air — the capitalist himself who owned the parlour and the house, the very circumambience they dreamed in, who had begun life as a nihilist and then softened into a mere anarchist and now was not only a conservative but a tory too: a pillar, rock-fixed, of things as they are.

Lost. Shortly after that she began what Jefferson called meddling with the Negroes. Apparently she went without invitation or warning, into the different classrooms of the Negro grammar and high school, who couldn't hear thunder, mind you, and so all she could do was watch — the faces, expressions, gestures of the pupils and teachers both who were already spooked, perhaps alarmed, anyway startled and alerted to cover, by the sudden presence of the unexplained white woman who was presently talking to the teacher in the quacking duck's voice of the deaf and then holding out a tablet and pencil for the teacher to answer.

Until presently, as quick as the alarmed messenger could find him I suppose, the principal was there — a college-bred man, Uncle Gavin said, of intelligence and devotion too — and then she and the principal and the senior woman teacher were in the principal's office, where it probably was not so much that she, the white woman, was trying to explain, as that they, the two Negroes, had already divined and maybe understood even if they did not agree with her.

Because they, Negroes, when the problems are not from the passions of want and ignorance and fear — gambling, drink — but are of simple humanity, are a gentle and tender people, a little more so than white people because they have had to be; a little wiser in their dealings with white people than white people are with them, because they have had to survive in a minority. As if they already knew that the ignorance and superstition she would have to combat — the ignorance and superstition which would counteract, cancel her dream and, if she remained bullheaded enough in perseverance, would destroy her — would not be in the black race she proposed to raise but in the white one she represented.

So finally the expected happened, anticipated by everyone except her apparently, maybe because of the deafness, the isolation, the solitude of living not enclosed with sound but merely surrounded by gestures. Or maybe she did anticipate it but, having been through a war, she just didn't give a damn. Anyway, she bulled right ahead with her idea.

Which was to establish a kind of competitive weekly test, the winners, who would be the top students for that week in each class, to spend the following week in a kind of academy she would establish, with white teachers, details to be settled later but for temporary they would use her sitting-room in her father's house for a sort of general precept, the winners of each week to be replaced by next week's winners; these to embrace the whole school from kindergarden to seniors, her theory being that if you were old enough to be taught at eighteen you were old enough at eight too when learning something new would be even easier.

Because she couldn't hear, you see, not just the words but the tones, over- and under-tones of alarm, fright, terror in which the black voice would have to say Thank you. So it was the principal himself who finally came to see Uncle Gavin at the office — the intelligent dedicated man with his composed and tragic face.

"I've been expecting you," Uncle Gavin said. "I know what you want to say."

"Thank you," the principal said. "Then you know yourself it won't work. That you are not ready for it yet and neither are we."

"Not many of your race will agree with you," Uncle Gavin said.

"None of them will," the principal said. "Just as none of them agreed when Mr Washington said it."

"Mr Washington?"

"Booker T.," the principal said. "Mr Carver too."

"Oh," Uncle Gavin said. "Yes?"

"That we have got to make the white people need us first. In the old days your people did need us, in your economy if not your culture, to make your cotton and tobacco and indigo. But that was the wrong need, bad and evil in itself. So it couldn't last. It had to go. So now you don't need us.

There is no place for us now in your culture or economy either. We both buy the same instalment-plan automobiles to burn up the same gasoline in, and the same radios to listen to the same music and the same iceboxes to keep the same beer in, but that's all. So we have got to make a place of our own in your culture and economy too.

Not you to make a place for us just to get us out from under your feet, as in the South here, or to get our votes for the aggrandisement of your political perquisites, as in the North, but us to make a place for ourselves by compelling you to need us, you cannot do without us

because nobody else but us can fill that place in your economy and culture which only we can fill and so that place will have to be ours.

So that you will not just say Please to us, you will need to say Please to us, you will want to say Please to us. Will you tell her that? Say we thank her and we won't forget this. But to leave us alone. Let us have your friendship all the time, and your help when we need it. But keep your patronage until we ask for it."

"This is not patronage," Uncle Gavin said. "You know that too."

"Yes," the principal said. "I know that too. I'm sorry. I am ashamed that I . . ." Then he said: "Just say we thank her and will remember her, but to let us alone."

"How can you say that to someone who will face that much risk, just for justice, just to abolish ignorance?"

"I know," the principal said. "It's difficult. Maybe we can't get along without your help for a while yet, since I am already asking for it. — Good-day, sir," he said, and was gone. So how could Uncle Gavin tell her either. Or anybody else tell her, everybody else tell her, white and black both.

Since it wasn't that she couldn't hear: she wouldn't listen, not even to the unified solidarity of No in the Negro school itself — that massive, not resistance but immobility, like the instinct of the animal to lie perfectly still, not even breathing, not even thinking. Or maybe she did hear that because she reversed without even stopping, from the school to the board of education itself: if she could not abolish the ignorance by degrees of individual cases, she would attempt it wholesale by putting properly educated white teachers in the Negro school, asking no help, not even from Gavin, hunting down the school board then, they retreating into simple evaporation, the county board of supervisors in their own sacred lair, armed with no petty ivory tablet and gold stylus this time but with a vast pad of yellow foolscap and enough pencils for everybody. Evidently they committed the initial error of letting her in.

Then Gavin said it went something like this:

The president, writing: Assuming for the moment just for argument you understand that we substitute white teachers in the negro school what will become of the negro teachers or perhaps you plan to retire them on pensions yourself

The duck's voice: "Not exactly. I will send them North to white schools where they will be accepted and trained as white teachers are."

The pencil: Still assuming for the sake of argument we have got the negro teachers out where will you find white teachers to fill vacancies left by negroes in Mississippi and how long do you think they will be permitted to fill negro vacancies in Mississippi

The duck's voice: "I will find them if you will protect them."

The pencil: Protect them from who Mrs Kohl Only she didn't need to answer that. Because it had already started: the words Nigger Lover scrawled huge in chalk on the sidewalk in front of the mansion the next morning for her father to walk steadily through them in his black banker's hat and his little snap-on bow tie, chewing his steady chunk of Frenchman's Bend air. Sure he saw it.

Gavin said nobody could have helped seeing it, that by noon a good deal of the rest of Jefferson had managed to happen to pass by to look at it. But what else — a banker, THE banker — could he do? spit on his handkerchief and get down on his knees and rub it out? And later Linda came out on her way back to the courthouse to badger the rest of the county authorities back behind their locked doors. And maybe, very likely, she really didn't see it.

Anyway, it wasn't either of them nor the cook nor the yardman either. It was a neighbour, a woman, who came with a broom and at least obscured it, viciously, angrily, neither to defend Linda's impossible dream nor even in instinctive female confederation with another female, but because she lived on this street. The words could have been the quick short primer-bald words of sex or excrement, as happened now and then even on sidewalks in this part of town, and she

would have walked through them too since to pause would have been public admission that a lady knew what they meant.

But nobody was going to write Nigger Lover nor -Hater either, delineate in visible taunting chalk that ancient subterrene atavistic ethnic fear on the sidewalk of the street she (and her husband of course) lived and owned property on.

Until at last the president of the board of supervisors crossed the Square to the bank and on to that back room where old Snopes sat with his feet propped on that mantelpiece between foreclosures, and I would have liked to hear that: the outsider coming in and saying, more or less: Can't you for God's sake keep your daughter at home or at least out of the courthouse. In desperation, because what change could he have hoped to get back, she was not only thirty years old and independent and a widow, she was a war veteran too who had actually — Ratliff would say, actively — stood gunfire. Because she didn't stop; it had got now to where the board of supervisors didn't dare unlock their door while they were in session even to go home at noon to eat, but instead had sandwiches from the Dixie Café passed in through the back window. Until suddenly you were thinking how suppose she were docile and amenable and would have obeyed him, but it was he, old Snopes, that didn't dare ask, let alone order, her to quit. You didn't know why of course. All you could do was speculate: on just what I.O.U. or mortgage bearing his signature she might have represented out of that past which had finally gained for him that back room in the bank where he could sit down and watch himself grow richer by lending and foreclosing other people's I.O.U.s.

Because pretty soon he had something more than just that unsigned Nigger Lover to have to walk through practically any time he came out his front door. One night (this was while I was in Europe) a crude cross soaked in gasoline blazed suddenly on the lawn in front of the mansion until the cops came and put it out, outraged and seething of course, but helpless; who — the cops — would still have been helpless even if they hadn't been cops.

You know: if she had only lived alone, or had been the daughter of a mere doctor or lawyer or even a minister, it would have been one thing, and served them both — her and her old man — right.

Instead, she had to be the daughter of not just a banker but THE banker, so that what the cross really illuminated was the fact that the organisation which put it there were dopes and saps: if the sole defence and protection of its purity rested in hands which didn't — or what was worse, couldn't — distinguish a banker's front yard, the white race was in one hell of a fix.

Then the next month was Munich. Then Hitler's and Stalin's pact and now when he came out of his house in the morning in his black banker's hat and bow tie and his little cud of Ratliff's Frenchman's Bend air, what he walked through was no longer anonymous and unspecific, the big scrawled letters, the three words covering the sidewalk before the house in their various mutations and combinations:

KOHL
COMMUNIST
JEW

JEW
KOHL
COMMUNIST

COMMUNIST
KOHL
JEW

and he, the banker, the conservative, the tory who had done more than any other man in Jefferson or Yoknapatawpha County either to repeal time back to 1900 at least, having to walk through them as if they were not there or were in another language and age which he could not be expected to understand, with all Jefferson watching him at least by proxy, to see if his guard would ever drop. Because what else could he do.

Because now you knew you had figured right and it actually was durst not, with that record of success and victory behind him which already had two deaths in it: not only the suicide which left her motherless, but if he had been another man except the one whose wife would finally have to shoot herself, he might have raised the kind of daughter whose Barton Kohl wouldn't have been a Jewish sculptor with that Spanish war in his horoscope.

Then in the very next second you would find you were thinking the exact opposite: that those words on his sidewalk he had to walk through every time he left home were no more portents and threats of wreckage and disaster to him than any other loan he had guessed wrong on would be an irremediable disaster, as long as money itself remained unabolished. That the last thing in the world he was thinking to himself was This is my cross; I will bear it because what he was thinking was All I got to do now is keep folks thinking this is a cross and not a gambit.

Then Poland. I said, "I'm going now," and Gavin said, "You're too old. They wouldn't possibly take you for flight training yet," and I said, "Yet?" and he said, "Finish one more year of law. You don't know what will be happening then, but it won't be what you're looking at now." So I went back to Cambridge and he wrote me how the F.B.I. was investigating her now and he wrote me: I'm frightened. Not about her. Not at what they will find out because she would tell them all that herself if it only occurred to them that the simple thing would be to come and ask her.

And told me the rest of it: how she had at last quit beating on the locked door behind which the board of supervisors and the school board crouched holding their breath, and now she was merely meeting a class of small children each Sunday at one of the Negro churches, where she would read aloud in the dry inflectionless quacking, not the orthodox Biblical stories perhaps but at least the Mesopotamian folklore and the Nordic fairy tales which the Christian religion has

arrogated into its seasonal observances, safe now since even the white ministers could not go on record against this paradox.

So now there was no more Jew Communist Kohl on the sidewalk and no more Nigger Lover either (you would like to think, from shame) to walk through in order to be seen daily on the Square: the bride of quietude and silence striding inviolate in the isolation of unhearing, immune, walking still like she used to walk when she was fourteen and fifteen and sixteen years old: exactly like a young pointer bitch just about to locate and pin down a covey of birds.

So that when I got home Christmas I said to Gavin: "Tell her to tear up that god-damn party card, if she's got one. Go on. Tell her. She can't help people. They are not worth it. They don't want to be helped any more than they want advice or work. They want cake and excitement, both free. Man stinks. How the hell can she have spent a year in a war that not only killed her husband and blew the bejesus out of the inside of her skull, but even at that price the side she was fighting for still lost, without finding that out?"

Oh sure, I know, I know, you and Ratliff both have told me often enough; if I've heard Ratliff one time I've heard him a hundred: 'Man ain't really evil, he jest ain't got any sense.'

But so much the more reason, because that leaves him completely hopeless, completely worthless of anybody's anguish and effort and trouble." Then I stopped, because he had put his hand on my head. He had to reach up to do it now, but he did it exactly as he used to when I was half as tall and only a third as old, gentle and tender and stroking it a little, speaking quiet and gentle too:

"Why don't you tell her?" he said. Because he is a good man, wise too except for the occasions when he would aberrate, go momentarily haywire and take a wrong turn that even I could see was wrong, and then go hell-for-leather, with absolutely no deviation from logic and rationality from there on, until he wound us up in a mess of trouble or embarrassment that even I would have had sense enough to dodge.

But he is a good man. Maybe I was wrong sometimes to trust and follow him, but I never was wrong to love him.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“Don’t be,” he said. “Just remember it. Don’t ever waste time regretting errors. Just don’t forget them.”

So I ran Ratliff to earth again. No: I just took advantage of him. It was the regular yearly Christmas-season supper that Ratliff cooked himself at his house and invited Uncle Gavin and me to eat it with him. But this time Gavin had to go to Jackson on some drainage-district business so I went alone, to sit in Ratliff’s immaculate little kitchen with a cold toddy of old Mr Calvin Bookwright’s corn whiskey that Ratliff seemed to have no trouble getting from him, though now, in his old age, with anybody else Mr Cal might sell it to you or give it to you or order you off his place, you never knew which; sipping the cold toddy as Ratliff made them — first the sugar dissolved into a little water, then the whiskey added while the spoon still stirred gently, then rain water from the cistern to fill the glass — while Ratliff in a spotless white apron over one of the neat tieless faded blue shirts which he made himself, cooked the meal, cooking it damned well, not just because he loved to eat it but because he loved the cooking, the blending up to perfection’s ultimate moment.

Then he removed the apron and we ate it at the kitchen table, with the bottle of claret Uncle Gavin and I always furnished. Then with the coffee and the decanter of whiskey we moved (as always) to the little immaculate room he called his parlour, with the spotlessly waxed melodeon in the corner and the waxed chairs and the fireplace filled with fluted green paper in the summer but with a phony gas log in the winter, now that progress had reached, whelmed us, and the waxed table in the centre of the room on which, on a rack under a glass bell, rested the Allanovna necktie — a rich not-quite-scarlet, not-quite-burgundy ground patterned with tiny yellow sunflowers each with a tiny blue centre of almost the exact faded blue of his shirts, that he had brought home from New York that time three or four years ago when he and Gavin went to see Linda married and off to Spain, that I would

have cut my tongue out before I would have told him it probably cost whoever (Gavin I suppose) paid for it around seventy-five dollars; until that day when I inadvertently said something to that effect and Ratliff said, "I know how much."

I paid it. It was a hundred and fifty dollars." "What?" I said. "A hundred and fifty?" "There was two of them," he said. "I never saw but one," I said. "I doubt if you will," he said. "The other one is a private matter." — and beside it, the piece of sculpture that Barton Kohl had bequeathed him that, if Gavin was still looking for first base, I had already struck out because I didn't even know what it was, let alone what it was doing.

"All it needs is that gold cigarette-lighter she gave him," I said. "The Linda Snopes room."

"No," he said. "The Eula Varner room. It ought to have more in it, but maybe this will do. Leastways it's something. When a community is lucky enough to be the community that every thousand years or so has a Eula Varner to pick it out to do her breathing in, the least we can do is for somebody to set up something; a . . . monument ain't quite the word I want."

"Shrine," I said.

"That's it," he said. "A shrine to mark and remember it, for the folks that wasn't that lucky, that was already doomed to be too young. . . ." He stopped. He stood there quite still. Except that you would think of him as being quizzical, maybe speculative, but not bemused. Then I said it:

"You were wrong. They aren't going to."

"What?" he said. "What's that?"

"She's not going to marry Gavin."

"That's right," he said. "It will be worse than that."

Now it was me that said, "What? What did you say?" But he was already himself again, bland, serene, inscrutable.

“But I reckon Lawyer can stand that too,” he said.

Ten

Gavin Stevens

I COULD HAVE suggested that, told her to do that, and she would have done it — torn the card up at once, quickly, immediately, with passion and exultation. She was like her mother in one thing at least: needing, fated to need, to find something competent enough, strong enough (in her case, this case, not tough enough because Kohl was tough enough: he happened to be mere flesh and bones and so wasn't durable enough) to take what she had to give; and at the same time doomed to fail, in this, her case, not because Barton failed her but because he also had doom in his horoscope.

So if the Communist party, having already proved itself immune to bullets and therefore immortal, had replaced him, not again to bereave her, of course she would have torn her card up, with passion and exultation and joy too. Since what sacrifice can love demand more complete than abasement, abnegation, particularly at the price of what the unknowing materialist world would in its crass insensitive ignorance dub cowardice and shame? I have always had a sneaking notion that that old Christian martyr actually liked, perhaps even loved, his aurochs or his lion.

But I did suggest something else. It was 1940 now. The Nibelung maniac had destroyed Poland and turned back west where Paris, the civilised world's eternal and splendid courtesan, had been sold to him like any whore and only the English national character turned him east again; another year and Lenin's Frankenstein would be our ally but too late for her; too late for us too, too late for all the western world's peace for the next hundred years, as a tubby little giant of a man in England was already saying in private, but needs must when the devil etcetera.

It began in my office. He was a quiet, neat, almost negative man of no particular age between twenty-five and fifty, as they all appear, who

showed me briefly the federal badge (his name was Gihon) and accepted the chair and said Thank you and opened his business quietly and impersonally, as they do, as if they are simply delivering a not-too-important message. Oh yes, I was doubtless the last, the very last on his list since he would have checked thoroughly on or into me without my knowing it as he had days and maybe months ago penetrated and resolved and sifted all there was to be learned about her.

“We know that all she has done, tried to do, has been done quite openly, where everybody would have a chance to hear about it, know about it—”

“I think you can safely say that,” I said.

“Yes,” he said. “ — quite openly. Quite harmless. With the best of intentions, only not very . . . practical. Nothing in fact that a lady wouldn’t do, only a little . . .”

“Screwy,” I suggested.

“Thank you. But there you are. I can tell you in confidence that she holds a Communist party card. Naturally you are not aware of that.” Now I said, “Thank you.”

“And, once a communist — I grant you, that’s like the old saying (no imputation of course, I’m sure you understand that), Once a prostitute. Which anyone after calm reflection knows to be false. But there you are. This is not a time of calmness and reflection; to ask or expect, let alone hope for, that from the government and the people too, faced with what we are going to have to meet sooner probably than we realise—”

“Yes,” I said. “What do you want me to do? What do you assume I can do?”

“She . . . I understand, have been informed, that you are her earliest and still are her closest friend—”

“No imputation of course,” I said. But he didn’t say Thank you in his turn. He didn’t say anything, anything at all. He just sat there watching me through his glasses, grey, negative as a chameleon, terrifying as the

footprint on Crusoe's beach, too negative and neuter in that one frail articulation to bear the terrible mantle he represented. "What you want then is for me to use my influence—"

" — as a patriotic citizen who is intelligent enough to know that he too will be in this war within five years — I set five years as an outside maximum since it took the Germans only three years before to go completely mad and defy us into that one — with exactly who for our enemy we may not know until it is already too late—"

" — to persuade her to surrender that card quietly to you and swear whatever binding oath you are authorised to give her," I said. "Didn't you just say yourself that Once a whore (with no imputations) always a whore?"

"I quite agree with you," he said. "In this case, not the one with the imputations."

"Then what do you want of me — her?"

He produced a small notebook and opened it; he even had the days of the week and the hours: "She and her husband were in Spain, members of the Loyalist communist army six months and twenty-nine days until he was killed in action; she herself remained, serving as an orderly in the hospital after her own wound, until the Loyalists evacuated her across the border into France—"

"Which is on record even right here in Jefferson."

"Yes," he said. "Before that she lived for seven years in New York City as the common-law wife—"

" — which of course damns her not only in Jefferson, Mississippi, but in Washington too." But he had not even paused.

" — of a known registered member of the Communist party, and the close associate of other known members of the Communist party, which may not be in your Jefferson records."

"Yes," I said. "And then?"

He closed the notebook and put it back inside his coat and sat looking at me again, quite cold, quite impersonal, as if the space between us were the lens of a microscope. “So she knew people, not only in Spain but in the United States too, people who so far are not even in our records — Communists members and agents, important people, who are not as noticeable as Jewish sculptors and Columbia professors and other such intelligent amateurs—” Because that was when I finally understood.

“I see,” I said. “You offer a swap. You will trade her immunity for names. Your bureau will whitewash her from an enemy into a simple stool pigeon. Have you a warrant of any sort?”

“No,” he said. I got up.

“Then good-day, sir.” But he didn’t move yet.

“You won’t suggest it to her?”

“I will not,” I said.

“Your country is in danger, perhaps in jeopardy.”

“Not from her,” I said. Then he rose too and took his hat from the desk.

“I hope you won’t regret this, Mr Stevens.”

“Good-day, sir,” I said.

Or that is, I wrote it. Because it was three years now and she had tried, really tried to learn lip reading. But I don’t know. Maybe to live outside human sound is to live outside human time too, and she didn’t have time to learn, to bother to learn. But again I don’t know. Maybe it didn’t take even three years of freedom, immunity from it to learn that perhaps the entire dilemma of man’s condition is because of the ceaseless gabble with which he has surrounded himself, enclosed himself, insulated himself from the penalties of his own folly, which otherwise — the penalties, the simple red-ink — might have enabled him by now to have made his condition solvent, workable, successful. So I wrote it.

Leave here Go away

“You mean, move?” she said. “Find a place of my own? an apartment or a house?”

I mean leave Jefferson I wrote. Go completely away for good Give me that damn card & leave Jefferson

“You said that to me before.”

“No I didn’t,” I said. I even spoke it, already writing, already planning out the whole paragraph it would take: We’ve never even mentioned that card or the Communist party either. Even back there three years ago when you first tried to tell me you had one and show it to me and I wouldn’t let you, stopped you, refused to listen: don’t you remember? But she was already talking again:

“I mean back there when I was fifteen or sixteen and you said I must get away from Jefferson.”

So I didn’t even write the other; I wrote But you couldn’t then Now you can Give me the card & go She stood quietly for a moment, a time. We didn’t even try to use the ivory tablet on occasions of moment and crisis like this. It was a bijou, a gewgaw, a bangle, feminine; really almost useless: thin ivory sheets bound with gold and ringed together with more of it, each sheet about the size of a playing card so that it wouldn’t really contain more than about three words at a time, like an anagram, an acrostic at the level of children — a puzzle say or maybe a continued story ravished from a primer. Instead, we were in her upstairs sitting-room she had fitted up, standing at the mantel which she had designed at the exact right height and width to support a foolscap pad when he had something to discuss that there must be no mistake about or something which wasn’t worth not being explicit about, like money, so that she could read the words as my hand formed them, like speech, almost like hearing.

“Go where?” she said. “Where could I go?”

Anywhere New York Back to Europe of course but in New York some of the people still you & Barton knew the friends your own age She looked at me. With the pupils expanded like this, her eyes looked almost black; blind too.

“I’m afraid,” she said.

I spoke; she could read single words if they were slow: "You? Afraid?"
She said:

"Yes. I don't want to be helpless. I won't be helpless. I won't have to depend."

I thought fast, like that second you have to raise or draw or throw in your hand, while each fraction of the second effaces another pip from your hole card. I wrote quite steadily while she watched Then why am I here and drew my hand back so she could read it. Then she said, in that dry, lifeless, what Chick calls duck's quack:

"Gavin." I didn't move. She said it again: "Gavin." I didn't move. She said: "All right. I lied. Not the depend part. I won't depend. I just must be where you are." She didn't even add Because you're all I have now. She just stood, our eyes almost level, looking at me out of, across, something — abyss, darkness; not abject, not questioning, not even hoping; in a moment I would know it; saying again in the quacking voice: "Gavin."

I wrote rapidly, in three- or four-word bursts, gaggles, clumps, whatever you want to call them, so she could read as I wrote Its all right don't Be afraid I Refuse to marry you 20 years too much Difference for it To work besides I Don't want to
"Gavin," she said.

I wrote again, ripping the yellow sheets off the pad and shoving them aside on the mantel I don't want to
"I love you," she said. "Even when I have to tell a lie, you have already invented it for me."

I wrote No lie nobody Mentioned Barton Kohl
"Yes," she said.

I wrote No

"But you can me," she said. That's right. She used the explicit word, speaking the hard brutal guttural in the quacking duck's voice. That had been our problem as soon as we undertook the voice lessons: the tone,

to soften the voice which she herself couldn't hear. "It's exactly backward," she told me. "When you say I'm whispering, it feels like thunder inside my head. But when I say it this way, I can't even feel it." And this time it would be almost a shout. Which is the way it was now, since she probably believed she had lowered her voice, I standing there while what seemed to me like reverberations of thunder died away.

"You're blushing," she said.

I wrote that word

"What word?"

that you just said

"Tell me another one to use. Write it down so I can see it and remember it."

I wrote There is no other that's the right one only one I am old fashioned it still shocks me a little No what shocks is when a woman uses it & is not shocked at all until she realises I am Then I wrote that's wrong too what shocks is that all that magic passion excitement be summed up & dismissed in that one bald unlovely sound
"All right," she said. "Don't use any word then."

I wrote Do you mean you want to

"Of course you can," she said. "Always. You know that."

I wrote That's not what I asked you She read it. Then she didn't move. I wrote Look at me She did so, looking at me from out or across what it was that I would recognise in a moment now.

"Yes," she said.

I wrote Didn't I just tell you you don't ever have to be afraid and this time I had to move the pad slightly to draw her attention to it, until she said, not looking up:

"I don't have to go away either?"

I wrote No under her eyes this time, then she looked up, at me, and I knew what it was she looked out of or across: the immeasurable loss,

the appeaseless grief, the fidelity and the enduring, the dry quacking voice saying, "Gavin. Gavin. Gavin." while I wrote because we are the 2 in all the world who can love each other without having to the end of it tailing off in a sort of violent rubric as she clasped me, clinging to me, quite hard, the dry clapping voice saying, "Gavin. Gavin. I love you. I love you," so that I had to break free to reach the pad and write

Give me the card

She stared down at it, her hands arrested in the act of leaving my shoulders. "Card?" she said. Then she said, "I've lost it."

Then I knew: a flash, like lightning. I wrote your father even while I was saying out loud: "Oh the son of a bitch, the son of a bitch," saying to myself Wait. Wait! He had to. Put yourself in his place. What else could he do, what other weapon did he have to defend his very existence before she destroyed it — the position he had sacrificed everything for — wife home friends peace — to gain the only prize he knew since it was the only one he could understand since the world itself as he understood it assured him that was what he wanted because that was the only thing worth having.

Of course: his only possible weapon: gain possession of the card, hold the threat of turning it in to the F.B.I. over her and stop her before she destroyed him. Yet all this time I was telling myself You know better. He will use it to destroy her. It was he himself probably who scrawled Jew Communist Kohl on his own sidewalk at midnight to bank a reserve of Jefferson sympathy against the day when he would be compelled to commit his only child to the insane asylum. I wrote

Ransacked your room drawers desk

"Somebody did," she said. "It was last year. I thought—" I wrote

It was your father

"Was it?" Yes, it was exactly that tone. I wrote

Don't you know it was

“Does it matter? They will send me another one I suppose. But that doesn’t matter either. I haven’t changed. I don’t have to have a little printed card to show it.”

This time I wrote slowly and carefully You don’t have to go I won’t ask any more but when I do ask you again to go will you just believe me & go at once I will make all plans will you do that

“Yes,” she said.

I wrote Swear

“Yes,” she said. “Then you can marry.” I couldn’t have written anyway; she had caught up both my hands, holding them between hers against her chest. “You must. I want you to. You mustn’t miss that. Nobody must never have had that once. Nobody. Nobody.” She was looking at me. “That word you didn’t like. My mother said that to you once too, didn’t she.” It wasn’t even a question. “Did you?”

I freed my hands and wrote You know we didn’t

“Why didn’t you?”

I wrote Because she felt sorry for me when you do things for people just because you feel sorry for them what you do is probably not very important to you

“I don’t feel sorry for you. You know that. Don’t you know it will be important to me?”

I wrote Then maybe it was because I wasn’t worthy of her & we both knew it but I thought if we didn’t maybe she might always think maybe I might have been and ripped the sheet off and crumpled it into my pocket and wrote I must go now

“Don’t go,” she said. Then she said, “Yes, go. You see, I’m all right now, I’m not even afraid any more.”

I wrote why should you ever have been then on the same sheet My hat and she went and got it while I gathered up the rest of the used sheets into my pocket and took the hat and went toward the door, the quacking voice saying “Gavin” until I turned. “How did we say it? the only two people in the world that love each other and don’t have to? I love you, Gavin,” in that voice, tone which to her was whispering,

murmuring perhaps but to anyone tragic enough to still have ears was as penetrating and shocking almost as an old-time klaxon automobile horn.

And out, fast and quick out of his house, his mansion, his palace, on to his bank fast and quick too, right on back into that little room and bump, nudge, startle the propped feet off the fireplace, my hand already out: "I will now take that card, if you please."

Except that would be wantonly throwing away an opportunity, a gift actually; why let him pick his moment to surrender, produce the evidence on his side, to the F.B.I.? Why not strike first, sic the F.B.I. on him before he could, as Ratliff would say, snatch back: that mild neutral grey man flashing that badge on him, saying, "We have it on authority, Mr Snopes, that you have a Communist party card in your possession. Do you care to make a statement?"

But I didn't know where Gihon would be now and, his declared enemy, he wouldn't believe me. So the F.B.I. as represented by him was out; I would have to go straight to that vast Omnipotence called Govment; the stool-pigeoning itself must be unimpeachable; it must stem from the milieu and hold rigidly to the vernacular.

A post card of course, a penny post card. I thought first of addressing it to the President of the United States but with the similar nut mail Mr Roosevelt was probably already getting, mine would be drowned in that flood. Which left the simple military.

But although the military never loses any piece of paper once it has been written on and signed (anything else yes, it will abandon or give away or destroy, but a piece of signed paper never, though it have to subsidise and uniform a thousand people to do nothing else but guard it); it would inevitably reappear someday even if it took a hundred years, but that would be too long also.

Whereupon I suddenly overheard myself asking, What's wrong with your first idea of the F.B.I.? to which the only answer was, Nothing. So I

could even see the completed card. The vernacular was an informed one, it knew there were two Hoovers: one a carpet sweeper and the other had been President, and that the head of the F.B.I. was said to be named Hoover.

So I could see it:
Herbert Hoover

F.B.I. Department

then paused, because not Washington; this vernacular was not only knowledgeable but consistent too so I thought first of Parchman, Mississippi, the State Penitentiary, except that the mail clerk there would probably be a trusty possibly in for life so what would a span of time computable in mere days, especially in regard to a piece of mail, be to him? and again it would be lost. Then I had the answer: Jackson, the Capital. It would be perfect: not really a big city, so that the agents there would be just bored and idle enough to leap at this opportunity; besides not being far. So that's what it would be:

Herbert Hoover

F B & I Depment

Jackson Miss

If you will come up to Jefferson Miss and serch warrant the bank and home of Flem Snopes you will fined a commonist part Card
Patriotic Citizen

Whereupon you will object that "search warrant" is a little outside this writer's vernacular and that the spelling of "find" is really going a little too far. Whereupon I rebut you that this writer knows exactly what he is talking about; that "search warrant" and "fined" are the two words of them all which he would never make any mistake regarding, no matter how he might spell them: the one being constantly imminent in his (by his belief, in yours too) daily future and the other or its synonym "jailed" being its constant co-adjutant.

If I only dared. You see? even if I burgled his house or bank vault and found the card and erased her name and substituted his to pass their

gimlet muster, she herself would be the first to leap, spring, deny, refute, claim and affirm it for her own; she would probably have gone to Gihon or any else available before this and declared her convictions if it had occurred to her they might be interested.

Whereupon, from then until even the stronger alliance of cosmic madmen had finally exhausted themselves into peace and oblivion, she would be harried and harassed and spied upon day and night, waking and eating and sleeping too. So finally I had to fall back, not on her innocent notion that it wasn't important, really wouldn't matter anyway, but on my own more evil or — and/or — legal conviction that it was his only weapon of defence and he wouldn't use it until he was frightened into it.

Or hope perhaps. Anyway, that's how it stood until in fact the Battle of Britain saved her; otherwise all that remained was simply to go to him and say, "I want that card," which would be like walking up to a stranger and saying Did you steal my wallet. So the Battle of Britain saved her, him too for a time.

I mean, the reports, stories now coming back to us of the handful of children fighting it. Because during the rest of that spring and summer and fall of 1940 she was getting more and more restless. Oh, she was still doing her Negro Sunday-school classes, still "meddling" as the town called it, but after a fashion condoned now, perhaps by familiarity and also that no one had discovered yet any way to stop her.

This, until June when Chick came home from Cambridge. Whereupon I suddenly realised — discovered — two things: that it was apparently Chick now who was our family's representative in her social pattern; and that she knew more than even he of the R.A.F. names and the machines they flew: Malan and Aitken and Finucane and Spitfire and Beaufighter and Hurricane and Buerling and Deere and the foreigners too like the Americans who wouldn't wait and the Poles and Frenchmen who declined to be whipped: Daymond and Wzlewski and Clostermann; until that September, when we compromised: Chick

agreed to take one more year of law and we agreed to let it be the University over at Oxford instead of Cambridge.

Which was perhaps the reason: when he left, she no longer had anyone to swap the names with. So I should not have been surprised when she came to the office. Nor did she say I must do something to help, I've got to do something, I can't just sit here idle; she said:
"I'm going away.

I've got a job, in a factory in California where they make aircraft to be sent to Europe," and I scribbling, scrawling Wait. "It's all right," she said. "It's all settled. I wrote them that I couldn't hear but that I was familiar enough with truck engines and gears to learn what they needed. And they said for me to come on out, just bring a few papers with me.

You know: letters saying you have known me long enough to assure them she is moral and doesn't get too tight and nobody has caught her stealing yet. That's what you are to do because you can even sign them Chairman of the Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, Draft Board," and I still scrawling Wait, or no, not writing it again because I already had: just gripping her with one hand and holding the pad up with the other until she read it and stopped or stopped long enough to read it or at least hushed and I could write:

at this factory all factories an individual of limitless power called Security whose job position is the 1 thing on earth between him & being drafted into the and ripped that sheet off, already writing again, her hand, her arm across my shoulder so I could feel her breathing and feel smell her hair against my cheek army which naturally he will defend with his life by producing not too far apart provable subversives so that sooner or later he will reach you & fire you you re and ripped that one off, not stopping member the Mississippi coast Biloxi Ocean Springs you were there

"Yes. With Mother and" — and now I thought she would stop but she didn't even pause— "Manfred. I remember."

I wrote Pascagoula a shipyard where they are building ships to carry airplanes guns tanks if California will take you so will they will you go there

“Yes,” she said. She said, “Russia.” She drew a long breath. “But the Security will be there too.”

I wrote yes but that’s close I could come there quick & even if Security I could probably find you something else

“Yes,” she said, breathing quiet and slow at my shoulder. “Close. I could come home on week-ends.”

I wrote you might have to work week-ends they need ships

“Then you can come there. The draft board is closed on week-ends, isn’t it?”

I wrote we will see

“But together sometimes now and then. That’s why I was afraid about California, because it’s so far. But Pascagoula is close. At least occasionally now and then.”

I wrote Of course

“All right,” she said. “Of course I’ll go.”

Which she did, right after New Year’s, 1941 now. I know a lawyer there so she had a small apartment with its own entrance in a private home. And apparently her belief was that, once she was free of Jefferson, at least twelve hours away from interdiction by Snopes or me or either or both, nobody could challenge her intention to buy a small car and run it herself, until I threatened to tell the Pascagoula police myself that she was deaf the first time I heard about it. So she agreed to refrain and my lawyer friend arranged for her in a car pool and presently she was at work as a tool checker, though almost at once she wrote that she had almost got them to agree to let her become a riveter, where the deafness would be an actual advantage.

Anyway, she could wear overalls again, once more minuscule in that masculine or rather sexless world engaged, trying to cope with the lethal mechanical monstrosities which war has become now, and

perhaps she was even at peace again, if peace is possible to anyone. Anyway, at first there were the letters saying When you come we will and then If you come don't forget and then several weeks and just a penny post card saying I miss you and nothing more — that almost inarticulate paucity of the picture cards saying Wish you were here or This is our room which the semiliterate send back, until the last one, a letter again.

I mean, in an envelope: It's all right. I understand. I know how busy the draft board has to be. Just come when you can because I have something to ask you. To which I answered at once, immediately (I was about to add, Because I don't know what I thought. Only I know exactly what I thought) Ask me or tell me? so that I already knew beforehand what her answer would be: Yes. Ask you.

So (it was summer again now) I telegraphed a date and she answered Have booked room will meet what train love and I answered that (who had refused to let her own one) Coming by car will pick you up at shipyard Tuesday quitting time love and I was there. She came out with the shift she belonged in, in the overall, already handing me the tablet and stylus before she kissed me, clinging to me, hard, saying, "Tell me everything," until I could free myself to write, restricted again to the three- or four-word bursts and gaggles before having to erase:
You tell me what It is

"Let's go to the beach." And I:

You don't want to Go home first & Change

"No. Let's go to the beach." We did. I parked the car and it seemed to me I had already written Now tell me but she was already out of the car, already waiting for me, to take the tablet and stylus from me and thrust them into her pocket, then took my near arm in both her hands, we walking so, she clinging with both hands to my arm so that we would bump and stagger every few steps, the sun just setting and our one shadow along the tide-edge before us and I thinking No, no, that can't be it when she said, "Wait," and released me, digging into the other overall pocket from the tablet.

“I’ve got something for you. I almost forgot it.” It was a shell; we had probably trodden on a million of them since we left the car two hundred yards back, I still thinking It can’t be that. That can’t be so “I found it the first day. I was afraid I might lose it before you got here, but I didn’t. Do you like it?”

“It’s beautiful,” I said.

“What?” she said, already handing me the tablet and stylus. I wrote
Damn fine now Tell me

“Yes,” she said. She clung, gripping my arm hard and strong in both hands again, we walking again and I thinking Why not, why shouldn’t it be so, why should there not be somewhere in the world at least one more Barton Kohl or at least a fair substitute, something to do, at least something a little better than grief when she said, “Now,” and stopped and turned us until we faced the moment’s pause before the final plunge of the sun, the tall and ragged palms and pines fixed by that already fading explosion until the night breeze would toss and thresh them.

Then it passed. Now it was just sunset. “There,” she said. “It’s all right now. We were here. We saved it. Used it. I mean, for the earth to have come all this long way from the beginning of the earth, and the sun to have come all this long way from the beginning of time, for this one day and minute and second out of all the days and minutes and seconds, and nobody to use it, no two people who are finally together at last after all the difficulties and waiting, and now they are together at last and are desperate because of all the long waiting, they are even running along the beach toward where the place is, not far now, where they will finally be alone together at last and nobody in the world to know or care or interfere so that it’s like the world itself wasn’t except you so now the world that wasn’t even invented yet can begin.” And I thinking Maybe it’s the fidelity and the enduring which must be so at least once in your lifetime, no matter who suffers.

That you have heard of love and loss and grief and fidelity and enduring and you have seen love and loss and maybe you have even seen love and loss and grief but not all five of them — or four of them since the

fidelity and enduring I am speaking of were inextricable: one — this, even while she was saying, “I don’t mean just—” and stopped herself before I could have raised the hand to clap to on her lips — if I had been going to, saying: “It’s all right, I haven’t forgotten; I’m not going to say that one any more.” She looked at me. “So maybe you already know what I’m going to ask you.”

“Yes,” I said; she could read that. I wrote marriage

“How do you know?”

What does it Matter I wrote I’m glad

“I love you,” she said. “Let’s go eat. Then we will go home and I can tell you.”

I wrote Not home first To change

“No,” she said. “I won’t need to change where we’re going.”

She didn’t. Among the other female customers, she could have worn anything beyond an ear trumpet and a G-string, and even then probably the ear trumpet would have drawn the attention. It was a joint. By midnight on Saturday (possibly any other night in such boom ship-building times) it would be bedlam, jumping as they say; with the radio going full blast, it already was to me. But then, I was not deaf. But the food — the flounder and shrimp — was first-rate and the waitress produced glasses and ice to match the flask I had brought; and with all the other uproar her voice was not so noticeable.

Because she used it, as if by premeditation, about things I would need only Yes and No for, babbling actually, about the shipyard, the work, the other people, sounding almost like a little girl home on her first holiday from school, eating rapidly too, not chewing it enough, until we had done and she said, “We can go now.”

She hadn’t told me yet where I was to stay, nor did I know where her place was either. So when we were in the car again I snapped on the dash light so she could see the tablet and wrote Where.

“That way,” she said. It was back toward the centre of town and I drove on until she said, “Turn here,” and I did; presently she said, “There it is,” so that I had to pull in to the curb to use the tablet

Which is

“The hotel,” she said. “Right yonder.” I wrote

We want to talk Havent you got a Sitting room your place Quiet & private

“We’re going to both stay there tonight. It’s all arranged. Our rooms are next door with just the wall between and I had both beds moved against it so after we talk and are in bed any time during the night I can knock on the wall and you can hear it and if I hold my hand against the wall I can feel you answer. — I know, I won’t knock loud enough to disturb anybody, for anybody to hear it except you.”

The hotel had its own parking lot. I took my bag and we went in. The proprietor knew her, perhaps by this time everybody in the town knew or knew of the young deaf woman working in the shipyard.

Anyway, nobody stopped us, he called her by name and she introduced me and he gave me the two keys and still nobody stopped us, on to her door and unlocked it, her overnight bag was already in the room and there were flowers in a vase too and she said, “Now I can have a bath. Then I will knock on the wall,” and I said, “Yes,” since she could read that and went to my room; yes, why should there have to be fidelity and enduring too just because you imagined them?

If mankind matched his dreams too, where would his dreams be? Until presently she knocked on the wall and I went out one door, five steps, into the other one and closed it behind me.

She was in bed, propped on both pillows, in a loose jacket or robe, her hair (evidently she had cut it short while she was driving the ambulance but now it was long enough again to bind in a ribbon dark blue like her eyes) brushed or dressed for the night, the tablet and stylus in one hand on her lap, the other hand patting the bed beside her for me to sit down.

“You won’t really need this,” she said, raising the tablet slightly then lowering it again, “since all you’ll need is just to say Yes and I can hear that. Besides, since you already know what it is, it will be easy to talk about. And maybe if I tell you I want you to do it for me, it will be even easier for you to do. So I do say that. I want you to do it for me.” I took the tablet

Of course I will Do what

“Do you remember back there at the beach when the sun finally went down and there was nothing except the sunset and the pines and the sand and the ocean and you and me and I said how that shouldn’t be wasted after all that waiting and distance, there should be two people out of all the world desperate and anguish for one another to deserve not to waste it any longer and suddenly they were hurrying, running toward the place at last not far now, almost here now and no more the desperation and the anguish no more, no more—” when suddenly, as I watched, right under the weight of my eyes you might say, her face sprang and ran with tears, though I had never seen her cry before and apparently she herself didn’t even know it was happening. I wrote Stop it

“Stop what?” And I
you’re crying

“No I’m not.” And I
look at your Face

There was the customary, the standard, hand-glass and box of tissue on the table but instead I took my handkerchief and held it out. But instead she simply set the heels of her palms to her face, smearing the moisture downward and outward like you do sweat, even snapping, flicking the moisture away at the end of the movement as you do sweat.

“Don’t be afraid,” she said. “I’m not going to say that word. Because I don’t even mean that. That’s not important, like breathing’s not important as long as you don’t even have to think about it but just do it when it’s necessary. It’s important only when it becomes a question or

a problem or an issue, like breathing's important only when it becomes a question or a problem of whether or not you can draw another one.

It's the rest of it, the little things: it's this pillow still holding the shape of the head, this necktie still holding the shape of the throat that took it off last night even just hanging empty on a bedpost, even the empty shoes on the floor still sit with the right one turned out a little like his feet were still in them and even still walking the way he walked, stepping a little higher with one foot than the other like the old-time Negroes say a proud man walks—" And I stop it stop It you're crying Again

"I can't feel it. I can't feel anything on my face since that day, not heat nor cold nor rain nor water nor wind nor anything." This time she took the handkerchief and used it, but when I handed her the mirror and even started to write where's your compact she didn't even take the mirror. "I'll be careful now. — So that's what I want you to have too. I love you. If it hadn't been for you, probably I wouldn't have got this far. But I'm all right now. So I want you to have that too. I want you to do it for me." And I

But what for you You never have Told me yet

"Marry," she said. "I thought you knew. Didn't you tell me you knew what it was?" And I

Me marry You mean me

"Who did you think I meant? Did you think I was — Gavin."

"No," I said.

"I read that. You said No. You're lying. You thought I meant me."

"No," I said.

"Do you remember that time when I told you that any time you believe you had to lie for my sake, I could always count on you sticking to it, no matter how bad you were disproved?"

"Yes," I said.

"So that's settled, then," she said. "No, I mean you. That's what I want you to do for me. I want you to marry. I want you to have that too.

Because then it will be all right. We can always be together no matter how far apart either one of us happens to be or has to be. How did you say it? the two people in all the earth out of all the world that can love each other not only without having to but we don't even have to not say that word you don't like to hear? Will you promise?"

"Yes," I said.

"I know you can't just step outdoors tomorrow and find her. It may take a year or two. But all you've got to do is just stop resisting the idea of being married. Once you do that it's all right because the rest of it will happen. Will you do that?"

"I swear," I said.

"Why, you said Swear, didn't you?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then kiss me." I did so, her arms quite hard, quite strong around my neck; a moment, then gone. "And early tomorrow morning, go back home." And I, writing

I was going to Stay all day

"No. Tomorrow. Early. I'll put my hand on the wall and when you're in bed knock on it and if I wake up in the night I can knock and if you're awake or still there you can knock back and if I don't feel you knock you can write me from Jefferson tomorrow or the next day. Because I'm all right now. Good-night, Gavin."

"Good-night, Linda," I said.

"I read that too. I love you."

"I love you," I said.

"I read that too but write it on the tablet anyway and I can have that for a — what do you call it? — eye opener in the morning."

"Yes," I said, extending my hand for the tablet.

Eleven

Charles Mallison

THIS TIME, I was in uniform. So now all I need is to decide, find out, what this-time I mean or time for what I mean. It wasn't the next time I saw Linda, because she was still in Pascagoula building ships for Russia too now. And it wasn't the next time I was in Jefferson, because I passed through home en route to the brown suit. So maybe I mean the next time I ran Ratliff to earth. Though maybe what I really mean is that the next time I saw Uncle Gavin after his marriage, he was a husband.

Because it was 1942 and Gavin was married now, to Melisandre Harriss (Backus that was as Thackeray said); that pitcher had went to that well jest that one time too many, as Ratliff said, provided of course he had said it.

One Sunday morning there was Pearl Harbour and I wired Gavin by return mail you might say from Oxford This is it am gone now. I wired Gavin because otherwise I would have had to talk to Mother on the telephone and on long-distance Mother ran into money, so by wiring Gavin for forty-two cents the telephone call from Mother would be on Father's bill in Jefferson.

So I was at home in time to be actually present at the first innocent crumbings of what he had obviously assumed to be his impregnable bastions; to "stand up" with him, be groomsman to his disaster. It happened like this.

I was unable to get into the government flight-training programme course at the University but they told me that anybody with a college degree and any number of hours from one up of flying time, especially solo, would have about as good a chance of going straight into military training for a commission.

So there was a professional crop-duster operating from the same field and he took me on as a student, on even bigger aircraft, one of (he claimed) the actual type of army primary training, than the little fifty h.p. popguns the official course used.

So when I sent Uncle Gavin the wire I had around fifteen logged hours, three of which were solo, and when Mother rang my telephone I was already packed up and the car already pointed toward Jefferson. So I was there to see the beginning of it whether Gavin recognised it as banns or not.

I mean the Long Island horse farm that Miss Melisandre Harriss Backus that was used to bring the two children (they were grown now; Gavin was marrying not stepchildren but in-laws) back home to now and then from Europe until the Germans began to blow up Americans in actual sight of the Irish coast.

So after that it had to be South America, this last time bringing the Argentine steeplechasing cavalry officer that that maniac boy of the two Harriss children (I don't mean that both Aunt Melisandre's children were maniacs but that only one of them was a boy) believed was trying to marry the money his mother was still trustee of instead of just his sister who just had an allowance like him.

So he (the maniac of course) set out to murder the Argentine steeplechaser with that wild stallion of Rafe McCallum's that he (the maniac) bought or tricked or anyway got inside that stall where the innocent Argentine would have walked up in the dark and opened the door on what he (the innocent Argentine) thought was going to be not only a gentle horse but a partly blind one too. Except that Gavin read his tea leaves or used his second sight or divining rod or whatever it was he did in cases like this, and got hold of Rafe in time to reach the stall door first and stop him.

So the Argentine was saved, and that night the maniac took his choice between the army recruiting station in Memphis, and Uncle Gavin, and chose the army so he was safe, and that afternoon the Argentine and the maniac's sister were married and left Jefferson and they were safe. But Uncle Gavin remained, and the next day I had to go on to ground school, preflight, so when I got home next time I was in uniform and Gavin was not only a husband but father too of a stepson who would

have been as neat a by-standing murderer as you could hope to see except for a stroke of arrant meddling which to a dog shouldn't happen, and a stepdaughter married to an Argentine steeplechasing son-in-law. (By which time I was married too, to a bombsight — I hadn't made pilot but at least I would be riding up front — allotted to me by a government which didn't trust me with it and so set spies to watch what I did with it, which before entrusting it to me had trained me not to trust my spies nor anybody else respecting it, in a locked black case which stayed locked by a chain to me even while I was asleep — a condition of constant discomfort of course but mainly of unflagging mutual suspicion and mutual distrust and in time mutual hatred which you even come to endure, which is probably the best of all training for successful matrimony.)

So when I saw Jefferson next I was in uniform, long enough to call on the squire and his dame among his new ancestral white fences and electric-lit stables and say Bless you my children and then run Ratliff once more to earth.

"He can't marry her now," I said. "He's already got a wife."

And you never thought of soberly in connection with Ratliff either. Anyway, not before now, not until this time. "That's right," he said. "She ain't going to marry him. It's going to be worse than that."

Flem

Twelve

WHEN THE PICKUP truck giving him the ride onward from Clarksdale turned off at a town called Lake Cormorant and he had to get out, he had to walk. And he was apparently still nowhere near Memphis. He was realising now that this was the biggest, in a way terrifying, thing that had happened to him in the thirty-eight years: he had forgotten distance. He had forgot how far one place could be from another.

And now he was going to have to eat too. Because all he had was the ten-dollar bill they had given him along with the new overalls and hat and shoes at the Parchman gate, plus the three dollars and eighty-five cents still left out of the forty dollars his cousin Flem — it must have been Flem; after he finally realised that Flem wasn't going to come or even send in from Frenchman's Bend to help him and he quit calling down from the jail window to anybody passing that would send word out to Flem, nobody else but Flem and maybe the judge knew or even bothered to care what became of him, where he was — had sent him back there eighteen years ago just before Flem sent Montgomery Ward to trick him into trying to escape in that woman's wrapper and sunbonnet and he got caught of course and they gave him the other twenty years.

It was a small tight neatly cluttered store plastered with placards behind a gasoline pump beside the highway; a battered dust- and mud-stained car was parked beside it and inside were only the proprietor and a young Negro man in the remnants of an army uniform.

He asked for a loaf of bread and suddenly he remembered sardines, the taste of them from almost forty years ago; he could afford another nickel one time, when to his shock and for the moment unbelief, possibly in his own hearing, he learned that the tin would now cost him twenty-six cents — the small flat solid-feeling tin ubiquitous for five cents through all his previous days until Parchman — and even while he stood in that incredulous shock the proprietor set another small tin before him, saying, "You can have this one for eleven."

"What is it?" he said.

"Lunch meat," the proprietor said.

"What is lunch meat?" he said.

"Don't ask," the proprietor said. "Just eat it. What else can you buy with eleven cents?"

Then he saw against the opposite wall a waist-high stack of soft-drink cases and something terrible happened inside his mouth and throat — a leap, a spring of a thin liquid like fire or the myriad stinging of ants all

the way down to his stomach; with a kind of incredulous terror, even while he was saying No! No! That will cost at least a quarter too, his voice was saying aloud: "I reckon I'll have one of them."

"A whole case?" the proprietor said.

"You can't jest buy one bottle?" he said, counting rapidly, thinking At least twenty bottles. That would take all the ten dollars. Maybe that will save me. Nor, when the proprietor set the uncapped coldly sweating bottle on the counter before him, did he even have time to tell himself I'm going to pick it up and put my mouth on it before I ask the price because otherwise I might not be able to touch it because his hand had already picked up the bottle, already tilting it, almost ramming the neck into his mouth, the first swallow coldly afire and too fast to taste until he could curb, restrain the urgency and passion so he could taste and affirm that he had not forgot the taste at all in the thirty-eight years: only how good it was, draining that bottle in steady controlled swallows now and only then removing it and in horror hearing his voice saying, "I'll have another one," even while he was telling himself Stop it!

Stop it! then stood perfectly calm and perfectly composed while the proprietor uncapped the second sweating bottle and took that one up and closed his eyes gently and drank it steadily empty and fingered one of the bills loose in the pocket where he carried the three dollar ones (the ten-dollar note was folded carefully beneath a wad of newspaper and safety-pinned inside the fob pocket of the overall bib) and put it on the counter, not looking at it nor at anything while he waited for the proprietor to ask for a second bill or maybe two more; until the proprietor laid sixty-eight cents in coins on the counter and picked up the bill.

Because the two empty bottles were still sitting on the counter in plain sight, he thought rapidly If I could jest pick up the change and git outside before he notices them — if not an impossibility, certainly a gamble he dared not take, had not time to risk: to gamble perhaps two dollars against a shout, a leap over the counter to bar the door until

another sheriff came for him. So he said, not touching the change: "You never taken out for the sody."

"What's that?" the proprietor said. He scattered the coins on the counter. "Lunch meat, eleven; bread—" He stopped and as suddenly huddled the coins into a pile again. "Where did you say you come from?"

"I never said," Mink said. "Down the road."

"Been away a long time, have you?"

"That's right," he said,

"Much obliged," the proprietor said. "I sure forgot about them two Cokes. Damn labour unions have even run Coca-Cola up out of sight like everything else. You had two of them, didn't you?" taking the half-dollar from the change and shoving the rest of it across to him. "I don't know what folks are going to do unless somebody stops them somewhere. Looks like we're going to have to get shut of these damn Democrats to keep out of the poorhouse. Where'd you say you were headed? Memphis?"

"I ain't said," he started to say. But the other was already, or still, speaking to the Negro now, already extending toward the Negro another opened soda.

"This is on the house. Jump in your car and run him up to the crossroads; he'll have double chance to catch a ride there, maybe someone from the other highway."

"I wasn't fixing to leave yet," the Negro said.

"Yes you are," the proprietor said. "Just a half a mile? You got plenty of time. Don't let me see you around here until you get back. All right," he said to Mink. "You'll sure catch a ride there."

So he rode again, in the battered mud-stained car; just for a moment the Negro slid his eyes toward him, then away. "Where down the road

did you come from?" the Negro said. He didn't answer. "It was Parchman, wasn't it?" Then the car stopped. "Here's the crossroads," the Negro said. "Maybe you can catch a ride." He got out. "Much obliged," he said.

"You done already paid him," the Negro said. So now he walked again. But mainly it was to be out of the store; he must not stop at one again. If the bottles had been a dollar apiece, there was a definite limit beyond which temptation, or at least his lack of will power, could no longer harm him. But at only a quarter apiece, until he could reach Memphis and actually have the pistol in his hand, there was no foreseeable point within the twelve remaining dollars where he would have peace; already, before he was even outside the store, he was saying Be a man, Be a man.

You got to be a man, you got too much to do, too much to resk and, walking again, he was still sweating a little, not panting so much as simply breathing deeply like one who has just blundered unwarned into then out of the lair, the arms, of Semiramis or Messalina, still incredulous, still aghast at his own temerity and still amazed that he has escaped with his life.

And now he was discovering something else. For most of the twenty-odd years before he went to Parchman, and during the thirty-eight since, he had walked only on soft dirt. Now he walked on concrete; not only were his feet troubling him but his bones and muscles ached all the way up to his skull, until presently he found a foul puddle of water among rank shadeless weeds at the end of a culvert and removed the new stiff brogans they had given him with the new overalls and sat with his feet in the water, eating the tinned meat and the bread, thinking I got to watch myself.

Maybe I dassent to even go inside where they sell hit thinkin, not with despair really: still indomitable Likely hit will cost the whole ten-dollar bill, maybe more. That jest leaves three dollars and eighty-five cents and I done already spent eighty-two of that and stopped and took the handful of coins from his pocket and spread them carefully on the

ground beside him; he had had three one-dollar bills and the eighty-five cents and he counted slowly the eighty-five cents, a half-dollar, a quarter, and two nickels, and set them aside.

He had given the man at the store one of the dollar bills and the man had given him back change for bread, eleven cents, lunch meat eleven cents, which was twenty-two cents, then the man had taken up the half-dollar for the sodas, which was seventy-two cents, which should have left twenty-eight cents; counting what remained slowly over coin by coin again, then counting the coins he had already set aside to be sure they were right. And still it was only eighteen cents instead of twenty-eight.

A dime was gone somewhere. And the lunch meat was just eleven cents, he remembered that because there had been a kind of argument about it. So it was the bread, it would have to be the bread. It went up another dime right while I was standing there he thought. And if bread could jump up ten cents right while I was looking at it, maybe I can't buy a pistol even for the whole thirteen dollars.

So I got to stop somewhere and find a job.

The highway was dense with traffic, but going fast now, the automobiles big ones, brand new, and the trucks were big as railroad cars; no more the dusty pickups which would have offered him a lift, but vehicles now of the rich and hurried who would not even have seen a man walking by himself in overalls. Or probably worse: they probably would have hedged away with their own size and speed and shining paint any other one of them which might have stopped for him, since they would not have wanted him under their feet in Memphis either. Not that it mattered now.

He couldn't even see Memphis yet. And now he couldn't even say when he was going to see it, thinking So I may need as much as ten dollars more before I even get to where I can buy one. But at least he would have to reach Memphis before that became an actual problem, obstacle; at least when he did reach Memphis the thirteen dollars and

three cents he still had must be intact, no matter how much more he might have to add to it to get there.

So he would have to get more money some way, who knew he could not be trusted in another roadside store where they sold soda pop. So I will have to stop somewhere and ask for work and I ain't never asked no man for work in my life so maybe I don't even know how thinking And that will add at least one more day, maybe even more than one thinking quietly but still without despair I'm too old for this. A feller sixty-three years old ought not to have to handle such as this thinking, but without despair: quite indomitable still But a man that's done already had to wait thirty-eight years, one more day or two or even three ain't going to hurt.

The woman was thick but not fat and not old, a little hard-looking, in a shapeless not very clean dress, standing in a small untidy yard pulling dead clematis vines from a frame beside a small house. "Are you a man of God?" she said.

"Ma'am?" he said.

"You look like a preacher."

"Nome," he said. "I been away."

"What kind of work can you do?"

"I kin do that. I kin rake the yard."

"What else?"

"I been a farmer. I reckon I can do most anything."

"I reckon first you want something to eat," she said. "All right. We're all God's creatures. Finish pulling down these vines. Then you'll find a rake by the kitchen door. And remember. I'll be watching you."

Perhaps she was, from behind the curtains. He couldn't tell. He didn't try to. Though evidently she was, already standing on the minuscule front gallery when he put the last rake-full on the pile, and told him where the wheelbarrow was and gave him three kitchen matches and stood watching while he wheeled the trash into the adjoining vacant lot

and set fire to it. "Put the wheelbarrow and rake back where you got them and come in the kitchen," she said.

He did so — a stove, sink, refrigerator, a table and chair set and on the table a platter of badly cooked greens and livid pork lumps in it and two slices of machine-made bread on a saucer and a glass of water; he standing for a time quite still, his hands hanging quietly at his sides, looking at it. "Are you too proud to eat it?" she said.

"It ain't that," he said. "I ain't hungry. I needed the money to get on. I got to get to Memphis and then back to Mississippi."

"Do you want that dinner, or don't you?" she said.

"Yessum," he said. "Much obliged," and sat down, she watching him a moment, then she opened the refrigerator and took out an opened tin and set it on the table before him. It contained one half of a canned peach.

"Here," she said.

"Yessum," he said. "Much obliged." Perhaps she was still watching him. He ate what he could (it was cold) and had carried the plate and knife and fork to the sink to wash them when she came suddenly in again.

"I'll do that," she said. "You go on up the road four miles. You'll come to a mailbox with Brother Goodyhay on it. You can read, can't you?"

"I'll find it," he said.

"Tell him Beth Holcomb sent you."

He found it. He had to. He thought I got to find it thinking how maybe he would be able to read the name on the mailbox simply because he would have to read it, would have to penetrate through the inscrutable hieroglyph; thinking while he stood looking at the metal hutch with the words Bro J C Goodyhay not stencilled but painted on it, not sloven nor careless but impatiently, with a sort of savage impatience: thinking, either before or at least simultaneous with his realisation that someone near by was shouting at him Maybe I could read all the time and jest never knowed it until I had to. Anyway, hearing the voice and looking

up the tiny savagely untended yard, to another small frame house on that minuscule gallery of which a man stood waving one arm and shouting at him: "This is it. Come on." — a lean quick-moving man in the middle thirties with coldly seething eyes and the long upper lip of a lawyer or an orator and the long chin of the old-time comic-strip Puritan, who said,
"Hell, you're a preacher."

"No," he said. "I been away. I'm trying to get to—"

"All right, all right," the other said. "I'll meet you round back," and went rapidly back into the house. He, Mink, went around it into the back yard, which if anything was of an even more violent desolation than the front, since the back yard contained another house not dismantled so much as collapsed — a jumble of beams, joists, window- and door-frames and even still-intact sections of siding, among which moved or stood rather a man apparently as old as he, Mink, was, although he wore a battle jacket of the type which hadn't been copied from the British model until after Pearl Harbour, with the shoulder patch of a division which hadn't existed before then either, who when Mink came in sight began to chop rapidly with the axe in his hand among the jumble of lumber about him; barely in time as the back door of the house crashed open and the first man came out, carrying a buck saw; now Mink saw the sawbuck and a small heap of sawn lengths.

"All right, all right" the first man said, handing Mink the saw. "Save all the sound pieces. Don't split the nails out, pull them out. Saw up all the scraps, same length. Dad is in charge. I'll be in the house," and went back into it; even doors which he barely released seemed to clap to behind him violently, as though his passage had sucked them shut.

"So they caught you too did they, mac?" the man in the battle jacket (he would be Dad) said.
Mink didn't answer that. He said: "Is that the reverend?"

"That's Goodyhay," the other said. "I ain't heard him preach yet, but even if he hadn't opened his mouth he would be a better preacher than

he is a cook. But then, somebody's got to scorch the biscuits. They claim his wife ran off with a son-a-bitching Four-F potato-chip salesman before he even got back from fighting in the Pacific. They were all doing it back then and what I notice, they ain't quit, even without any war to blame it on. But what the hell, I always say there's still a frog in the puddle for every one that jumps out. So they caught you too, huh?"

This time he answered. "I got to get to Memphis and then back down to Mississippi. I'm already behind. I got to get on tonight. How much does he pay here?"

"That's what you think," the other said. "That's what I thought three days ago: pick up a dollar or so and move on. Because you're building a church this time, bully boy. So maybe we both better hope the bastard can preach since we ain't going to get our money until they take up the collection Sunday."

"Sunday?" he said.

"That's right," the other said. "This is Thursday; count it."

"Sunday," he said. "That's three days."

"That's right," the other said. "Sunday's always three days after Thursday around here. It's a law they got."

"How much will we get on Sunday?"

"It may be as much as a dollar cash; you're working for the Lord now, not mammon, jack. But anyway you'll be fed and slept—"

"I can't work that long for jest a dollar," he said. "I ain't got the time."

"It may be more than a dollar. What I hear around here, he seems to have something. Anyway, he gets them. It seems he was a Marine sergeant on one of them landing barges out in the Pacific one day when a Jap dive bomber dove right at them and everybody tried to jump off into the water before the bomb hit, except one mama's boy that got scared or tangled up in something so he couldn't jump and the reverend (except he hadn't turned reverend then, not for the next few minutes yet) went back to try and untangle him, when the whole barge blew up and took the reverend and the mama's boy both right on down

to the bottom with it before the reverend could get them both loose and up to the top again.

Which is just the official version when they gave him the medal, since according to the reverend or leastways his congregation — What I hear, the rest of them are mostly ex-soldiers too or their wives or the other broads they just knocked up without marrying, mostly young, except for a few old ones that seem to got dragged in by the passing suction you might say; maybe the moms and pops of soldiers that got killed, or the ones like that Sister Holcomb one that caught you down the road, that probably never thawed enough to have a child of any kind and God help the husband either if she ever had one, that wasn't even sucked in but flagged the bus herself because the ride looked like it was free—” He stopped. Then he said: “No, I know exactly why she come: to listen to some of the words he uses doing what he calls preaching. Where was I? Oh yes: that landing barge.

According to the reverend, he was already safe and dead and peacefully out of it at last on the bottom of the Pacific Ocean when all of a sudden Jesus Himself was standing over him saying Fall in and he did it and Jesus said TenSHUN, about-FACE and assigned him to this new permanent hitch right down here on the edge of Memphis, Tennessee.

He's got something, enough of whatever it took to recruit this new-faith boot camp to need a church to hold it. And I be damned if I don't believe he's even going to get a carpenter to nail it together. What did he say when he first saw you?”

“What?” Mink said.

“What were his first words when he looked at you?”

“He said, ‘Hell, you're a preacher.’ ”

“You see what I mean? He's mesmerised enough folks to scour the country for any edifice that somebody ain't actually sitting on the front porch of, and knocking it down and hauling it over here to be broke up like we're doing. But he ain't got a master-carpenter yet to nail it

together into a church. Because master carpenters belong to unions, and deal in cash money per diem on the barrel-head, where his assignment come direct from Jesus Christ Who ain't interested in money or at least from the putting-out angle. So him and his outpost foxholes up and down the road like that Sister Holcomb that snagged you are sifting for one."

"Sifting?" he said.

"Sivving. Like flour. Straining folks through this back yard until somebody comes up that knows how to nail that church together when we get enough boards and planks and window frames ripped a-loose and stacked up. Which maybe we better get at it. I ain't actually caught him spying behind a window shade yet, but likely an ex-Marine sergeant even reformed into the ministry is no man to monkey with too far."

"You mean I can't leave?"

"Sure you can. All the outdoors is yours around here. You ain't going to get any money until they take up that collection Sunday though. Not to mention a place to sleep tonight and what he calls cooking if you ain't particular."

In fact, this house had no shades nor curtains whatever to be spied from behind. Indeed, as he really looked about it for the first time, the whole place had an air of violent transience similar to the indiscriminate jumble of walls and windows and doors among which he and the other man worked: merely still nailed together and so standing upright; from time to time, as the stack of reclaimed planks and the pile of fire-lengths to which his saw was reducing the spoiled fragments slowly rose, Mink could hear the preacher moving about inside the intact one, so that he thought If he jest went back inside to compose up his sermon, it sounds like getting ready to preach takes as much activity and quickness as harnessing up a mule.

Now it was almost sunset; he thought This will have to be at least a half a dollar. I got to have it. I got to get on. I can't wait till Sunday when the

back door jerked, burst open and the preacher said, "All right. Supper's ready. Come on."

He followed Dad inside. Nothing was said by anyone about washing. "I figgered—" he began. But it was already too late. This was a kitchen too, but not Spartan so much as desolate, like a public camp site in a roadside park, with what he called another artermatic stove since he had never seen a gas or electric stove until he saw Mrs Holcomb's, Goodyhay standing facing it in violent immobility enclosed in a fierce sound of frying; Mink said again. "I figgered—" as Goodyhay turned from the stove with three platters bearing each a charred splat of something which on the enamel surfaces looked as alien and solitary and not for eating as the droppings of cows. "I done already et," Mink said. "I figgered I would jest get on."

"What?" Goodyhay said.

"Even after I get to Memphis, I still ain't hardly begun," he said. "I got to get on tonight."

"So you want your money now," Goodyhay said, setting the platters on the table where there already sat a tremendous bottle of tomato ketchup and a plate of machine-sliced bread and a sugar bowl and a can of condensed milk with holes punched in the top. "Sit down," Goodyhay said, turning back to the stove, where Mink could smell the coffee overboiled too with that same violent impatience of the fried hamburger and the woodpiles in the yard and the lettering on the mailbox; until Goodyhay turned again with the three cups of coffee and said again, "Sit down." Dad was already seated. "I said, sit down," Goodyhay said. "You'll get your money Sunday after the collection."

"I can't wait that long."

"All right," Goodyhay said, dashing ketchup over his plate. "Eat your supper first. You've already paid for that." He sat down; the other two were already eating. In fact Goodyhay had already finished, rising in the same motion with which he put his fork down, still chewing, and went and swung inward an open door (on the back of which was hanging

what Mink did not recognise to be a camouflaged battle helmet worn by Marine troops on the Pacific beachheads and jungles because what he was looking at was the automatic-pistol butt projecting from its webbing belt beneath the helmet) and from the refrigerator behind it took a tin also of canned peach halves and brought it to the table and dealt, splashed the halves and the syrup with exact impartiality on to the three greasy plates and they ate that too, Goodyhay once more finishing first; and now, for the first time since Mink had known him, sitting perfectly motionless, almost as though asleep, until they had finished also.

Then he said, "Police it," himself leading the way to the sink with his plate and utensils and cup and washed them beneath the tap, then stood and watched while the other two followed suit and dried and racked them as he had done. Then he said to Mink: "All right. You going or staying?"

"I got to stay," Mink said. "I got to have the money."

"All right," Goodyhay said. "Kneel down," and did so first again, the other two following, on the kitchen floor beneath the hard dim glare of the single unshaded low-watt bulb on a ceiling cord, Goodyhay on his knees but no more, his head up, the coldly seething desert-hermit's eyes not even closed, and said, "Save us, Christ, the poor sons of bitches," and rose and said, "All right. Lights out. The truck'll be here at seven o'clock."

The room was actually a lean-to, a little larger than a closet. It had one small window, a door connecting with the house, a single bulb on a drop cord, a thin mattress on the floor with a tarpaulin cover but no pillows nor sheets, and nothing else, Goodyhay holding the door for them to enter and then closing it. They were alone.

"Go ahead," Dad said. "Try it."

"Try what?" Mink said.

"The door. It's locked. Oh, you can get out any time you want; the window ain't locked. But that door leads back into the house and he

don't aim to have none of us master-carpenter candidates maybe ramshagging the joint as a farewell gesture on the way out. You're working for the Lord now, buster, but there's still a Marine sergeant running the detail." He yawned. "But at least you will get your two dollars Sunday — three, if he counts today as a day too.

Not to mention hearing him preach. Which may be worth even three dollars. You know: one of them special limited editions they can charge ten prices for because they never printed but two or three of." He blinked at Mink. "Because why. It ain't going to last much longer." He blinked at Mink. "Because they ain't going to let it."

"They won't even pay me two dollars?" Mink said.

"No no," the other said. "I mean the rest of the folks in the neighbourhood he ain't converted yet, ain't going to put up with no such as this. The rest of the folks that already had to put up with that damn war for four-five years now and want to forget about it. That've already gone to all that five years of trouble and expense to get shut of it, only just when they are about to get settled back down again, be damned if here ain't a passel of free-loading government-subsidised exdrafted sons of bitches acting like whatever had caused the war not only actually happened but was still going on, and was going to keep on going on until somebody did something about it.

A passel of mostly non-taxpaying folks that like as not would have voted for Norman Thomas even ahead of Roosevelt, let alone Truman, trying to bring Jesus Christ back alive in the middle of 1946. So it may be worth three dollars just to hear him in the free outside air. Because next time you might have to listen through a set of jail bars." He yawned again, prodigiously, beginning to remove the battle jacket. "Well, we ain't got a book to curl up with in here even if we wanted to. So all that leaves is to go to bed."

Which they did. The lights was off, he lay breathing quietly on his back, his hands folded on his breast. He thought Sholy it will be three dollars. Sholy they will count today too thinking And Sunday will make three

days lost because even if I go to Memphis Sunday after we are paid off the stores where I can buy one will still be closed until Monday morning thinking But I reckon I can wait three more days a little wryly now Likely because I can't jigger out no way to help it and almost immediately was asleep, peacefully, sleeping well because it was daylight when he knew next, lying there peacefully for a little time yet before he realised he was alone.

It seemed to him afterward that he still lay there peaceful and calm, his hand still playing idly with the safety pin it had found lying open on his chest, for the better part of a minute after he knew what had happened; then sitting, surging up, not even needing to see the open window and the dangling screen, his now frantic hand scrabbling from the bib pocket of the overalls the wad of newspaper beneath which the ten-dollar bill had been pinned, his voice making a puny whimpering instead of the cursing he was trying for, beating his fists on the locked door until it jerked open and Goodyhay stood in it, also taking one look at the ravished window.

"So the son of a bitch robbed you," Goodyhay said.

"It was ten dollars," Mink said. "I got to ketch him. Let me out."

"Hold it," Goodyhay said, still barring the doorway. "You can't catch him now."

"I got to," he said. "I got to have that ten dollars."

"You mean you've got to have ten dollars to get home?"

"Yes!" he said, cursing again. "I can't do nothing without it. Let me out."

"How long since you been home?" Goodyhay said.

"Thirty-eight years. Tell me which way you figger he went."

"Hold it," Goodyhay said, still not moving. "All right," he said. "I'll see you get your ten dollars back Sunday. Can you cook?"

"I can fry eggs and meat," Mink said.

"All right. You cook breakfast and I'll load the truck. Come on."

Goodyhay showed him how to light the stove and left him; he filled up last night's coffee-pot with water as his tradition was until the grounds

had lost all flavour and colour too, and sliced the fatback and dusted it with meal into the skillet in his tradition also, and got eggs out to fry, standing for a while with the door in his hand while he looked, mused, at the heavy holstered pistol beneath the helmet, thinking quietly If I jest had that for two days I wouldn't need no ten dollars thinking I done been robbed in good faith without warning; why ain't that enough to free me to rob in my turn. Not to mention my need being ten times, a hundred times, a thousand times more despaired than ara other man's need for jest ten dollars thinking quietly peacefully indeed now No. I ain't never stole. I ain't never come to that and I won't never.

When he went to the door to call them, Goodyhay and another man had the truck loaded with intact sections of wall and disassembled planks; he rode on top of the load, once more on the highway toward Memphis; he thought Maybe they'll even go through Memphis and if I jest had the ten dollars and then quit, just riding, in motion, until the truck turned into a side road; now they were passing, perhaps entering, already on, a big place, domain, plantation — broad cotton fields still white for the pickers; presently they turned into a farm road across a field and came to a willow-grown bayou and another pickup truck and another stack of dismembered walls and a group of three or four men all curiously similar somehow to Goodyhay and the driver of his — their — truck; he, Mink, couldn't have said how nor why, and not even speculating: remarking without attention another battle jacket, remarking without much attention either a rectangle of taut string between driven stakes in the dimensions of whatever it was they were going to build, where they unloaded the truck and Goodyhay said, "All right. You and Albert go back of another load."

So he rode in the cab this time, back to the parsonage or whatever it was, where he and Albert loaded the truck and they returned to the bayou, where by this time, with that many folks working — if any of the other four worked half as fast and as hard as Goodyhay did — they would probably have one wall already up. Instead, the other truck and Goodyhay and the stake-and-string rectangle were gone and only three men sat quietly beside the pile of lumber. "Well?" Albert said.

"Yep," one of the others said. "Somebody changed his mind."

"Who?" Mink said. "Changed what? I got to get on. I'm already late."

"Fellow that owns this place," Albert said. "That gave us permission to put the chapel here. Somebody changed his mind for him. Maybe the bank that holds his mortgage. Maybe the Legion."

"What Legion?" he said.

"The American Legion. That's still holding the line at 1918. You never heard of it?"

"Where's Reverend Goodyhay?" he said. "I got to get on."

"All right," Albert said. "So long." So he waited. Now it was early afternoon when the other truck returned, being driven fast, Goodyhay already getting out of it before it stopped.

"All right," he said. "Load up." Then they were on the Memphis highway again, going fast now to keep at least in sight of Goodyhay, as fast as any of the traffic they dashed among, he thinking If I jest had the ten dollars, even if we ain't going all the way to Memphis this time neither.

They didn't. Goodyhay turned off and they ran again, faster than they dared except that Goodyhay in the front truck would have lost them, into a region of desolation, the lush Delta having played out now into eroded barren clay hills; into a final, the uttermost of desolation, where Goodyhay stopped — a dump, a jumbled plain of rusted automobile bodies and boilers and gin machinery and brick and concrete rubble; already the stakes had been re-driven and the rectangular string tautened rigid between them, Goodyhay standing beside his halter truck beckoning his arm, shouting, "All right. Here we are. Let's go."

So there was actual work again at last. But it was already late; most of the day was gone and tomorrow was Saturday, only one more full day. But Goodyhay didn't even give him a chance to speak. "Didn't I tell you you'd get your ten dollars Sunday? All right then." Nor did Goodyhay say, "Can you cook supper?" He just jerked, flung open the refrigerator

door and jerked out the bloodstained paper of hamburger meat and left the kitchen.

And now Mink remembered from somewhere that he had cooked grits once and found grits and the proper vessel. And tonight Goodyhay didn't lock the door; he, Mink, tried it to see, then closed it and lay down, again peacefully on his back, his hands folded on his breast like a corpse, until Goodyhay waked him to fry the side meat and the eggs again.

The pickup truck was already there and a dozen men on hand this time and now you could begin to see what the chapel (they called it) was going to look like; until dark. He said: "It ain't cold tonight and besides I can lay under that-ere roofing paper and get started at daylight until the rest of them—"

"We don't work on Sunday," Goodyhay said. "Come on. Come on." Then it was Sunday. It was raining: the thin steady drizzle of early fall. A man and his wife called for them, not a pickup this time but a car, hard-used and a little battered. They turned again into a crossroad, not into desolate country this time but simply empty, coming at last to an unpainted box of a building which somebody somewhere back before the thirty-eight years in the penitentiary recognised, remembered.

It's a nigger schoolhouse he thought, getting out among five or six other stained and battered cars and pickup trucks and a group of people already waiting, a few older ones but usually men and women about the age of Goodyhay or a little younger; again he sensed that identity, similarity among them even beyond the garments they wore — more battle jackets, green army slickers, one barracks cap still showing where the officer's badge had been removed; someone said, "Howdy," at his elbow.

It was Albert and now he, Mink, recognised the Miss or Mrs Holcomb whose yard he had raked, and then he saw a big Negro woman — a woman no longer young, who looked at the same time gaunt yet fat too. He stopped, not quite startled: just watchful.

“You all take niggers too?” he said.

“We do this one,” Albert said. Goodyhay had already entered the house. The rest of them now moved slowly toward the door, clotting a little. “Her son had it too just like she was a white woman, even if they didn’t put his name on the same side of the monument with the others. See that woman yonder with the yellow hat?” The hat was soiled now but still flash, the coat below it had been white once too, a little flash too; the face between could have been twenty-five and probably at one time looked it, thin now, not quite raddled.

“That’s right,” Albert said. “She still looks a little like a whore yet but you should have seen her last spring when she came out of that Catalpa Street house. Her husband commanded an infantry platoon back there when the Japs were running us out of Asia, when we were falling back all mixed up together — Aussies, British, French from Indo-China — not trying to hold anything any more except a line of foxholes after dark, fell long enough to get the stragglers up and move again tomorrow, including the ones in the foxholes too if any of them were still there by daylight.

His platoon was the picket that night, him in one foxhole and his section strung out, when the nigger crawled up with the ammunition. He was new, you see. I mean, the nigger. This was as close as he had been to a Jap yet.

“So you know how it is: crouched in the stinking pitch dark in a stinking sweating hole in the ground with your eyes and ears both strained until in another minute they will pop right out of your head like marbles, and all around in front of you the chirping voices like crickets in a hayfield until you realise they ain’t crickets because pretty soon what they are chirping is English: ‘Maline.

Tonigh youdigh. Maline. Tonigh youdigh.’ So here comes the nigger with his sack of grenades and Garand clips and the lieutenant tells him to get down into the hole and puts the nigger’s finger on the trigger of

the Garand and tells him to stay there while he crawls back to report to the p.c. or something.

“You know how it is. A man can stand just so much. He don’t even know when it will be, but all of a sudden a moment comes and he knows that’s all, he’s already had it; he hates it as much as you do but he didn’t ask for it and he can’t help it. That’s the trouble; you don’t know beforehand, there’s nothing to warn you, to tell you to brace. Especially in war. It makes you think that just something no tougher than men ain’t got any business in war, don’t it? that if they’re going to keep on having them, they ought to invent something a little more efficient to fight them with.

Anyway, it’s the next morning, first light, when the first of the cut-off heads that maybe last night you split a can of dog ration with, comes tumbling down among you like somebody throwing a basketball. Only this time it’s that black head. Because why not? a nigger bred up on a Arkansas plantation, that a white man, not just a lieutenant but talking Arkansas to boot, says, ‘Take a-holt of this here hoe or rifle and stay here till I get back.’ So as soon as we finished fighting the Japs far enough back to get organised to spend another day dodging the strafing planes, the lieutenant goes around behind the dump of stuff we can tote with us and are trying to set fire to it and make it burn — It’s funny about jungles.

You’re sweating all the time, even in the dark, and you are always parched for water because there ain’t any in a jungle no matter what you thought, and when you step into a patch of sun you blister before you can even button your shirt. Until you believe that if you so much as drop a canteen or a bayonet or even strike a boot calk against a root a spark will jump out and set the whole country afire.

But just try to start one. Just try to burn something up and you’ll see different. Anyway, the lieutenant went around behind the dump where he would have a little privacy and put his pistol barrel in his mouth. Sure, she can get in here.”

Now they were all inside, and he recognised this from thirty-eight years back too — how the smell of Negroes remained long after the rooms themselves were vacant of them — the smell of poverty and secret fear and patience and enduring without enough hope to deodorise it — they (he supposed they would call themselves a congregation) filing on to the backless benches, the woman in the yellow hat on the front one, the big Negress alone on the back one, Goodyhay himself facing them at the end of the room behind a plank laid across two sawhorses, his hands resting, not clenched: just closed into fists, on the plank until everybody was quiet.

“All right,” Goodyhay said. “Anybody that thinks all he’s got to do is sit on his stern and have salvation come down on him like a cloudburst or something, don’t belong in here. You got to get up on your feet and hunt it down until you can get a-hold of it and then hold it, even fighting off if you have to. And if you can’t find it, then by God make it. Make a salvation. He will pass and then earn the right to grab it and hold on and fight off too if you have to but anyway hold it, hell and high water be damned—” when a voice, a man, interrupted: “Tell it again, Joe. Go on. Tell it again.”

“What?” Goodyhay said.

“Tell it again,” the man said. “Go on.”

“I tried to,” Goodyhay said. “You all heard me. I can’t tell it.”

“Yes you can,” the man said; now there were women’s voices too:

“Yes, Joe. Tell it,” and he, Mink, still watching the hands not clenched but just closed on the plank, the coldly seething anchorite’s eyes — the eyes of a fifth-century hermit looking at nothing from the entrance of his Mesopotamian cave — the body rigid in an immobility like a tremendous strain beneath a weight.

“All right,” Goodyhay said. “I was laying there. I was all right, everything snafu so I was all right. You know how it is in water when you don’t have any weight at all, just laying there with the light coming way down from up on top like them lattice blinds when they shake and shiver slow in a breeze without making any sound at all. Just laying there watching

my hands floating along without me even having to hold them up, with the shadow of them lattice blinds winking and shaking across them, and my feet and legs too, no weight at all, nowhere to have to go or march, not even needing to breathe, not even needing to be asleep or nothing: just all right.

When there He was standing over me, looking like any other shavetail just out of a foxhole, maybe a little older, except he didn't have a hat, bucket: just standing there bareheaded with the shadow of the lattice running up and down him, smoking a cigarette. 'Fall in, soldier,' He said.

" 'I can't,' I says. Because I knew that as long as I laid still, I would be all right. But that once I let myself start thinking about moving, or tried to, I would find out I couldn't. But what the hell, why should I? I was all right. I had had it. I had it made. I was sacked up. Let them do whatever theying wanted to with theiring war up on top.

" 'That's once,' He said. 'You ain't got but three times. You, the Top Soldier, saying can't. At Château-Thierry and St-Mihiel the company would have called you the Top Soldier. Do they still do that in the Corps on Guadalcanal?'

" 'Yes,' I says.

" 'All right, Top Soldier,' He said. 'Fall in.' So I got up. 'At ease,' He said. 'You see?' He said.

" 'I thought I couldn't,' I says. 'I don't believe I could.'

" 'Sure,' He said. 'What else do we want with you. We're already full up with folks that know they can but don't, since because they already know they can, they don't have to do it. What we want are folks that believe they can't, and then do it. The other kind don't need us and we don't need them. I'll say more: we don't even want them in the outfit. They won't be accepted; we won't even have them under our feet. If it ain't worth that much, it ain't worth anything. Right?'

" 'Yes sir,' I says.

“ ‘You can say Sir up there too if you want,’ He said. ‘It’s a free country. Nobody gives a damn. You all right now?’

“ ‘Yes sir,’ I says.

“ ‘TenSHUN!’ He said. And I made them pop, mud or no mud. ‘About-FACE!’ He said. And He never saw one smarter than that one neither. ‘Forward MARCH!’ He said. And I had already stepped off when He said, ‘Halt!’ and I stopped. ‘You’re going to leave him laying there,’ He said. And there he was, I had forgot about him, laying there as peaceful and out of it too as you please — the damned little bastard that had gone chicken at the exact wrong time, like they always do, turned the wheel a-loose and tried to duck and caused the whole damn mess; luck for all of us he never had a ...ing bar on his shoulder so he could have ...ed up the whole detail and done for all of us.

“ ‘I can’t carry him too,’ I says.

“ ‘That’s two times,’ He said. ‘You’ve got one more. Why not go on and use it now and get shut of it for good?’ ”

“ ‘I can’t carry him too,’ I says.

“ ‘Fine,’ He said. ‘That’s three and finished. You won’t ever have to say can’t again. Because you’re a special case; they gave you three times. But there’s a general order coming down today that after this nobody has but one. Pick him up.’ So I did. ‘Dismiss,’ He said. And that’s all. I told you I can’t tell it. I was just there. I can’t tell it.” He, Mink, watching them all, himself alien, not only unreconciled but irreconcilable: not contemptuous, because he was just waiting, not impatient because even if he were in Memphis right this minute, at ten or eleven or whatever o’clock it was on Sunday morning, he would still have almost twenty-four hours to get through somehow before he could move on to the next step.

He just watched them: the two oldish couples, man and wife of course, farmers obviously, without doubt tenant farmers come up from the mortgaged bank- or syndicate-owned cotton plantation from which the son had been drafted three or four or five years ago to make that far from home that sacrifice, old, alien too, too old for this, unreconciled

by the meagre and arid tears which were less of tears than blisters; none of the white people actually watching as the solitary Negro woman got up from her back bench and walked down the aisle to where the young woman's soiled yellow hat was crushed into the crook of her elbow like a child in a child's misery and desolation, the white people on the bench making way for the Negro woman to sit down beside the young white woman and put her arm around her; Goodyhay still standing, his arms propped on the closed fists on the plank, the cold seething eyes not even closed, speaking exactly as he had spoken three nights ago while the three of them knelt on the kitchen floor: "Save us, Christ.

The poor sons of bitches." Then Goodyhay was looking at him. "You, there," Goodyhay said. "Stand up." Mink did so. "He's trying to get home. He hasn't put in but one full day, but he needs ten dollars to get home on. He hasn't been home in thirty-eight years. He needs nine bucks more. How about it?"

"I'll take it," the man in the officer's cap said. "I won thirty-four in a crap game last night. He can have ten of that."

"I said nine," Goodyhay said. "He's got one dollar coming. Give him the ten and I'll give you one. He says he's got to go to Memphis first. Anybody going in tonight?"

"I am," another said.

"All right," Goodyhay said. "Anybody want to sing?"

That was how he saw Memphis again under the best, the matchless condition for one who hadn't seen it in . . . He could figure that. He was twenty years old when he got married. Three times before that he had wrenched wrung enough money from the otherwise unpaid labour he did on the tenant farm of the kinsman who had raised him from orphanhood, to visit the Memphis brothels. The last visit was in the same year of his marriage. He was twenty-six years old when he went to Parchman. Twenty dollars from twenty-six dollars was six dollars. He was in Parchman thirty-eight years.

Six dollars and thirty-eight dollars was forty-four dollars to see Memphis again not only after forty-four years but under the matchless condition: at night, the dark earth on either hand and ahead already random and spangled with the neon he had never seen before, and in the distance the low portentous glare of the city itself, he sitting on the edge of the seat as a child sits, almost as small as a child, peering ahead as the car rushed, merging into one mutual spangled race bearing toward, as though by the acceleration of gravity or suction, the distant city; suddenly off to the right a train fled dragging a long string of lighted windows as rapid and ephemeral as dream; he became aware of a convergence like the spokes of a gigantic dark wheel lying on its hub, along which sped dense and undeviable as ants, automobiles and what they told him were called buses as if all the earth was hurrying, plunging, being sucked, decked with diamond and ruby lights, into the low glare on the sky as into some monstrous, frightening, unimaginable joy or pleasure.

Now the converging roads themselves were decked with globular lights as big and high in the trees as roosting turkeys. "Tell me when we get close," he said.

"Close to what?" the driver said.

"Close to Memphis."

"We're already in Memphis," the driver said. "We crossed the city limits a mile back." So now he realised that if he had still been walking, alone, with none to ask or tell him, his troubles would have really begun only after he reached Memphis. Because the Memphis he remembered from forty-four years back no longer existed; he thought I been away too long; when you got something to handle like I got to handle, and by yourself and not no more to handle it with than I got, not to mention eighty more miles to go yet, a man jest can't afford to been away as long as I had to be.

Back then you would catch a ride in somebody's wagon coming in from Frenchman's Bend or maybe two or three of you would ride plough mules in to Jefferson, with a croker sack of corn behind the borrowed saddle, to leave the mules in the lot behind the Commercial Hotel and

pay the nigger there a quarter to feed them until you got back, and get on the train at the depot and change at the Junction to one that went right into the middle of Memphis, the depot there almost in the centre of town.

But all that was changed now. They had told him four days ago that most of the trains were gone, quit running, even if he had had that much extra money to spend just riding. They had told him how they were buses now but in all the four days he had yet to see anything that looked like a depot where he could buy a ticket and get on one. And as for the edge of Memphis that back there forty-four years ago a man could have walked in from in an hour, he, according to the driver, had already crossed it over a mile back yet still all he could see of it was just that glare on the sky.

Even though he was actually in Memphis, he was apparently still as far from the goal he remembered and sought as from Varner's store to Jefferson; except for the car giving him a ride and the driver of it who knew in general where he needed to go, he might have had to spend even the ten dollars for food wandering around inside Memphis before he ever reached the place where he could buy the pistol.

Now the car was wedged solid into a rushing mass of other vehicles all winking and glittering and flashing with coloured lights; all circumambience in fact flashed and glared luminous and myriad with colour and aloud with sound: suddenly a clutch of winking red green and white lights slid across the high night itself; he knew, sensed what they were but was much too canny to ask, telling, hissing to himself Remember. Remember. It won't hurt you long as don't nobody find out you don't know it.

Now he was in what he knew was the city. For a moment it merely stood glittering and serried and taller than stars. Then it engulfed him; it stooped soaring down, bearing down upon him like breathing the vast concrete mass and weight until he himself was breathless, having to pant for air. Then he knew what it was. It's unsleeping, he thought. It ain't slept in so long now it's done forgot how to sleep and now there

ain't no time to stop long enough to try to learn how again; the car rigid in its rigid mass, creeping then stopping then creeping again to the ordered blink and change of coloured lights like the railroads used to have, until at last it drew out and could stop.

"Here's the bus station," the driver said. "This was where you wanted, wasn't it?"

"It's fine," he said.

"Buses leave here for everywhere. You want me to come in with you and find out about yours?"

"Much obliged," he said. "It's jest fine."

"So long then," the driver said.

"I thank you kindly," he said. "So long." Sure enough, it was a bus depot at last. Only if he went inside, one of the new laws he had heard about in Parchman — laws that a man couldn't saw boards and hammer nails unless he paid money to an association that would let him, couldn't even raise cotton on his own land unless the government said he could — might be that he would have to get on the first bus that left, no matter where it was going. So there was the rest of the night, almost all of it since it wasn't even late yet.

But it would only be twelve hours and for that time he could at least make one anonymous more among the wan anonymous faces thronging about him, hurrying and myriad beneath the coloured glare, passionate and gay and unsleeping.

Then something happened. Without warning the city spun, whirled, vertiginous, infinitesimal and dizzying, then as suddenly braked and immobilised again and he not only knew exactly where he was, but how to pass the twelve hours. He would have to cross the street, letting the throng itself enclot and engulf him as the light changed; once across he could free himself and go on.

And there it was: the Confederate Park they called it — the path- and flower-bed-crisscrossed vacancy exactly as he remembered it, the line

of benches along the stone parapet in the gaps of which the old iron cannon from the War squatted and beyond that the sense and smell of the River, where forty-four and -five and -six years ago, having spent half his money in the brothel last night and the other half saved for tonight, after which he would have nothing left but the return ticket to Jefferson, he would come to watch the steamboats.

The levee would be lined with them bearing names like Stacker Lee and Ozark Belle and Crescent Queen, come from as far apart as Cairo and New Orleans, to meet and pass while he watched them, the levee clattering with horse- and mule-drawn drays and chanting stevedores while the cotton bales and the crated machinery and the rest of the bags and boxes moved up and down the gangplanks, and the benches along the bluff would be crowded with other people watching them too.

But now the benches were vacant and even when he reached the stone parapet among the old cannon there was nothing of the River but the vast and vacant expanse, only the wet dark cold blowing, breathing up from across the vast empty River so that already he was buttoning the cotton jumper over his cotton shirt; no sound here at all: only the constant unsleeping murmur of the city behind him, no movement save the minute crawl of the automobiles on the bridge far down the River, hurrying, drawn also toward and into that unceasing murmur of passion and excitement, into this backwash of which he seemed to have blundered, strayed, and then abandoned, betrayed by having had to be away from it so long.

And cold too, even here behind one of the old cannon, smelling the cold aged iron too, huddled into the harsh cotton denim too new to have acquired his own body's shape and so warm him by contact; it was going to be cold here before much longer even though he did have peace and quiet to pass the rest of the twelve hours in. But he had already remembered the other one, the one they called Court Square, where he would be sheltered from the River air by the tall buildings themselves provided he waited a little longer to give the people who might be sitting on the benches there time to get sleepy and go home.

So when he turned back toward the glare and the murmur, the resonant concrete hum, though unsleeping still, now had a spent quality like rising fading smoke or steam, so that what remained of it was now high among the ledges and cornices; the random automobiles which passed now, though gleaming with coloured lights still, seemed now as though fleeing in terror, in solitude from solitude. It was warmer here. And after a while he was right: there was nobody here save himself; on a suitable bench he lay down, drawing and huddling his knees up into the buttoned jumper, looking no larger than a child and no less waif, abandoned, when something hard was striking the soles of his feet and time, a good deal of it, had passed and the night itself was now cold and vacant. It was a policeman; he recognised that even after forty-four years of change and alteration.

“Damn Mississippi,” the policeman said. “I mean, where are you staying in town here? You mean, you haven’t got anywhere to sleep? You know where the railroad station is? Go on down there; you can find a bed for fifty cents. Go on now.” He didn’t move, waiflike and abandoned true enough but no more pitiable than a scorpion. “Hell, you’re broke too. Here.” It was a half-dollar. “Go on now. Beat it. I’m going to stand right here and watch you out of sight.”

“Much obliged,” he said. A half a dollar. So that was another part of the new laws they had been passing; come to remember, he had heard about that in Parchman too; they called it Relief or W P and A: the same government that wouldn’t let you raise cotton on your own land would turn right around and give you a mattress or groceries or even cash money, only first you had to swear you didn’t own any property of your own and even had to prove it by giving your house or land or even your wagon and team to your wife or children or any kinfolks you could count on, depend on, trust. And who knew? even if second-hand pistols had gone up too like everything else, maybe the one fifty cents more would be enough without another policeman.

Though he found another. Here was the depot. It at least hadn’t changed: the same hollowly sonorous rotunda through which he had

passed from the Jefferson train on the three other times he had seen Memphis — that first unforgettable time (he had figured it now: the last time had been forty-four years ago and the first time was three dollars on to that, which was forty-seven years) with the niggard clutch of wrenched and bitter dollars and the mentor and guide who had told him about the houses in Memphis for no other purpose, filled with white women any one of which he could have if he had the money: whose experiences until then had been furious unplanned episodes as violent as vomiting, with no more preparation than the ripping of buttons before stooping downward into the dusty roadside weeds or cotton middle where the almost invisible unwashed Negro girl lay waiting.

But different in Memphis: himself and his guide stepping out into the street where the whole city lay supine to take him into itself like embrace, like arms, the very meagre wad of bills in his pocket on fire too which he had wrung, wrested from between-crops labour at itinerant sawmills, or from the implacable rented ground by months behind a plough, his pittance of which he would have to fight his father each time to get his hands on a nickel of it. It was warm here too and almost empty and this time the policeman had jerked him awake before he even knew he was going to sleep. Though this one was not in uniform. But he knew about that kind too.

“I said, what train are you waiting for?” the policeman said.

“I ain’t waiting for no train,” he said.

“All right,” the policeman said. “Then get out of here. Go on home.” Then, exactly like the other one: “You ain’t got anywhere to sleep? Okay, but you damn sure got some place to leave from, whether you go to bed or not. Go on now. Beat it.” And then, since he didn’t move: “Go on, I said. What’re you waiting for?”

“The half a dollar,” he said.

“The what?” the policeman said. “The half a — Why, you—” so that this time he moved, turned quickly, already dodging, not much bigger than

a small boy and therefore about as hard for a man the size of the policeman to catch in a place as big as this.

He didn't run: he walked, just fast enough for the policeman to be not quite able to touch him, yet still not have cause to shout at him, through the rotunda and out into the street, not looking back at the policeman standing in the doorway shouting after him: "And don't let me catch you in here again neither."

He was becoming more and more oriented now. There was another depot just down a cross street, but then the same thing would happen there; evidently the railroad policemen who just wore clothes like everybody else didn't belong to the W P and A free-relief laws. Besides, the night was moving toward its end now; he could feel it.

So he just walked, never getting very far away because he knew where he was now; and now and then in the vacant side streets and alleys he could stop and sit down, in a doorway or behind a cluster of garbage or trash cans and once more be waking up before he knew he had gone to sleep. Then he would walk again, the quiet and empty city — this part of it anyway — his impeachless own, thinking, with the old amazement no less fresh and amazed for being almost as old as he A man can get through anything if he can jest keep on walking.

Then it was day, not waking the city; the city had never slept, not resuming but continuing back into visibility the faces pallid and wan and unsleeping, hurrying, passionate and gay, toward the tremendous, the unimaginable pleasures. He knew exactly where he was now; this pavement could have shown his print from forty-four years ago; for the first time since he had come out the Parchman gate five mornings ago he was confident, invulnerable and immune.

I could even spend a whole dollar of it now and hit wouldn't stop me he thought, inside the small dingy store where a few Negroes were already trafficking. A Negro man seemed to be running it or anyway serving the customers. Maybe he even owned it; maybe the new laws even said a

nigger could even own a store, remembering something else from thirty-eight years back.

“Animal crackers,” he said. Because he was there now, safe, immune and invulnerable. “I reckon they done jumped them up ten or fifteen cents too, ain’t they?” looking at the small cardboard box coloured like a circus wagon itself and blazoned with beasts like a heraldry.

“Ten cents,” the Negro said.

“Ten cents more than what?” he said.

“It’s ten cents,” the Negro said. “Do you want it or don’t you?”

“I’ll take two of them,” he said. He walked again, in actual sunlight now, himself one with the hurrying throng, eating his minute vanilla menagerie; there was plenty of time now since he was not only safe but he knew exactly where he was; by merely turning his head (which he did not) he could have seen the street, the actual housefront (he didn’t know it of course and probably wouldn’t have recognised her either, but his younger daughter was now the madam of it) which he had entered with his mentor that night forty-seven years ago, where waited the glittering arms of women not only shaped like Helen and Eve and Lilith, not only functional like Helen and Eve and Lilith, but coloured white like them too, where he had said No not just to all the hard savage years of his hard and barren life, but to Death too in the bed of a public prostitute.

The window had not changed: the same unwashed glass behind the wire grillework containing the same tired banjos and ornate clocks and trays of glass jewelry. “I want to buy a pistol,” he said to one of the two men blue-jowled as pirates behind the counter.

“You got a permit?” the man said.

“A permit?” he said. “I jest want to buy a pistol. They told me before you sold pistols here. I got the money.”

“Who told you we sold pistols here?” the man said.

“Maybe he don’t want to buy one but just reclaim one,” the second man said.

“Oh,” the first said. “That’s different. What sort of pistol do you want to reclaim, dad?”

“What?” he said.

“How much money have you got?” the first said. He removed the wadded paper from the bib of his overalls and took out the ten-dollar bill and unfolded it. “That all you got?”

“Let me see the pistol,” he said.

“You can’t buy a pistol for ten dollars, grandpaw,” the first said. “Come on. Try them other pockets.”

“Hold it,” the second said. “Maybe he can reclaim one out of my private stock.” He stooped and reached under the counter.

“That’s an idea,” the first said. “Out of your private stock, he wouldn’t need a permit.” The second man rose and laid an object on the counter. Mink looked at it quietly.

“Hit looks like a cooter,” he said. It did: snub-nosed, short-barrelled, swollen of cylinder and rusted over, with its curved butt and flat reptilian hammer it did resemble the fossil relic of some small antediluvian terrapin.

“What are you talking about?” the first said. “That’s a genuine bulldog detective special forty-one, the best protection a man could have. That’s what you want, ain’t it — protection? Because it it’s more than that; if you aim to take it back to Arkansaw and start robbing and shooting folks with it, the Law ain’t going to like it. They’ll put you in jail for that even in Arkansaw. Even right down in Mississippi you can’t do that.”

“That’s right,” Mink said. “Protection.” He put the bill on the counter and took up the pistol and broke it and held the barrel up to the light. “Hit’s dirty inside,” he said.

“You can see through it, can’t you?” the first said. “Do you think a forty-one-calibre bullet can’t go through any hole you can see through?”

Mink lowered the pistol and was in the act of closing it again when he saw that the bill was gone.

“Wait,” he said.

“Sure, sure,” the first said, putting the bill back on the counter. “Give me the pistol. We can’t reclaim even that one to you for just ten dollars.”

“How much will you have to have?”

“How much have you got?”

“I got jest three more. I got to get home to Jefferson.”

“Sure he’s got to get home,” the second said. “Let him have it for eleven. We ain’t robbers.”

“It ain’t loaded,” he said.

“There’s a store around the corner on Main where you can buy all the forty-ones you want at four dollars a box,” the first said.

“I ain’t got four dollars,” he said. “I won’t have but two now. And I got to get—”

“What does he want with a whole box, just for protection?” the second said. “Tell you what. I’ll let you have a couple out of my private stock for another dollar.”

“I got to have at least one bullet to try it with,” he said. “Unless you will guarantee it.”

“Do we ask you to guarantee you ain’t going to rob or shoot anybody with it?” the first said.

“Okay, okay, he’s got to try it out,” the second said. “Give him another bullet for a — You could spare another quarter, couldn’t you? Them forty-one bullets are hard to get, you know.”

“Could it be a dime?” he said. “I got to get home yet.”

“Okay, okay,” the second said. “Give him the pistol and three bullets for twelve dollars and a dime. He’s got to get home. To hell with a man that’ll rob a man trying to get home.”

So he was all right; he stepped out into the full drowsing sunlight of early fall, into the unsleeping and passionate city. He was all right now. All he had to do now was to get to Jefferson and that wasn't but eighty miles.

Thirteen

WHEN CHARLES MALLISON got home in September of 1945, there was a new Snopes in Jefferson. They had got shot down ("of course," Charles always added, telling it) though it wasn't a crash. Plexiglass was the pilot. Plex. His name was Harold Baddrington, but he had an obsession on the subject of cellophane, which he called plexiglass, amounting to a phobia; the simple sight or even the mere idea of a new pack of cigarettes or a new shirt or handkerchief as you had to buy them now pre-encased in an invisible impenetrable cocoon, threw him to the sort of virulent almost hysterical frenzy which Charles had seen the idea of Germans or Japanese throw some civilians, especially ones around fifty years old.

He — Plex — had a scheme for winning the war with cellophane: instead of bombs, the seventeens and twenty-fours and the British Lancasters and Blenheims would drop factory-vulcanised packs of tobacco and new shirts and underclothes, and while the Germans were queued up waiting turns at the ice pick, they could be strafed en masse or even captured without a shot by paratroop drops.

It wasn't even a bailout; Plex made a really magnificent one-engine landing. The trouble was, he picked out a farm that a German patrol had already selected that morning to practise a new occupation innovation or something whose directive had just come down, so in almost no time the whole crew of them were in the P.O.W. camp at Limbourg, which almost immediately turned out to be the most dangerous place any of them had been in during the war; it was next door to the same marshalling yard that the R.A.F. bombed regularly every Wednesday night from an altitude of about thirty or forty feet.

They would spend six days watching the calendar creep inexorably toward Wednesday, when as regular as clockwork the uproar of crashes and thuds and snarling engines would start up, and the air full of searchlights and machine-gun bullets and whizzing fragments of AA, the entire barracks crouching under bunks or anything else that would interpose another inch of thickness, no matter what, with that frantic desire, need, impulse to rush outdoors waving their arms and shouting up at the pandemonium overhead: "Hey, fellows! For Christ's sake have a heart! It's us! It's us!" If it had been a moving-picture or a book instead of a war, Charles said they would have escaped.

But he himself didn't know and never knew anyone who ever actually escaped from a genuine authentic stalag, so they had to wait for regular routine liberation before he came back home and found there was already another Snopes in Jefferson.

But at least they — Jefferson — were holding their own. Because in that same summer, 1945, when Jefferson gained the new Snopes, Ratliff eliminated Clarence. Not that Ratliff shot him or anything like that: he just simply eliminated Clarence as a factor in what Charles's Uncle Gavin also called their constant Snopes-fear and -dread, or you might say, Snopes-dodging. It happened during the campaign which ended in the August primary election; Charles hadn't got back home yet by a month, nor was his Uncle Gavin actually present at the picnic where it actually happened, where Clarence Snopes was actually defeated in the race for Congress which, being a national election, wouldn't even take place until next year.

That's what he, Charles, meant by Ratliff doing it. He was in the office when his Uncle Gavin this time ran Ratliff to earth and bayed him and said, "All right. Just exactly what did happen out there that day?"

Senator Clarence Egglestone Snopes, pronounced "Cla'-nce" by every free white Yoknapatawpha American whose right and duty it was to go to the polls and mark his X each time old man Will Varner told him to; just Senator Clarence Snopes for the first few years after old Varner ordained or commanded — anyway, translated — him into the upper

house of the state legislature in Jackson; beginning presently to put on a little flesh (he had been a big, hulking youth and young man but reasonably hard and active in an awkward kind of way until the sedentary brain work of being one of the elected fathers and guardians and mentors of the parliamentary interests of Yoknapatawpha County began to redden his nose and pouch his eyes and paunch his belt a little) until one hot July day in the middle twenties when no other man in Jefferson or Yoknapatawpha County either under sixty years of age had on a coat, Clarence appeared on the Square in a complete white linen suit with a black Windsor tie, and either just before or just after or maybe it was that same simultaneous start or shock brought it to their notice, they realised that he was now signing himself Senator C. E. Snopes, and Charles's Uncle Gavin said, "Where did the 'E' come from?" and Ratliff said, "Maybe he picked it up along with that-ere white wedding suit going and coming through Memphis to get back and forth to Jackson to work. Because why not? Ain't even a elected legislative senator got a few private rights like any free ordinary voter?"

What Charles meant was that Clarence already had them all a little off balance like a prize fighter does his opponent without really hitting him yet. So their emotion was simple docility when they learned that their own private Cincinnatus was not even C. any longer but was Senator Egglestone Snopes; his Uncle Gavin merely said, "Egglestone? Why Egglestone?" and Ratliff merely said,

"Why not?" and even his Uncle Gavin merely said, "Yes, why not?" So they didn't really mark it when one day the C. was back again — Senator C. Egglestone Snopes now, with a definite belly and the pouched eyes and a lower lip now full from talking, forensic.

Because Clarence was making speeches, anywhere and everywhere, at bond rallies and women's clubs, any place or occasion where there was a captive audience, because Charles was still in the German prison camp when his Uncle Gavin and Ratliff realised that Clarence intended to run for Congress in Washington and that old Will Varner might quite possibly get him elected to it — the same Clarence Snopes who had

moved steadily onward and upward from being old Varner's privately appointed constable in Varner's own private Beat Two, then supervisor of the Beat and then elected out of the entire county by means of old Will's diffused usurious capacity for blackmail, to be the county representative in Jackson; and now, 1945, tapped by all the mutually compounding vote-swapping Varners of the whole congressional district for the House of Representatives in Washington itself, where in the clutches not of a mere neighbourhood or sectional Will Varner but of a Will Varner of really national or even international scope, there would be no limit to what he might be capable of unless somebody did something about it.

This, until that day in July at the annual Varner's Mill picnic where by custom and tradition not only the local candidates for county and state offices but even the regional and sectional ones for national offices, like Clarence, even though the election itself would not happen until next year, started the ball rolling.

Whereupon Clarence had not only failed to appear on the speakers' platform to announce his candidacy, he disappeared from the picnic grounds before the dinner was even served. And the next day word went over the county that Clarence had not only decided not to run for Congress, he was even withdrawing from public life altogether when his present term in the state senate was up.

So what Charles's Uncle Gavin really wanted to know was not so much what had happened to Clarence, as what had happened to old Will Varner. Because whatever eliminated Clarence from the congressional race would have to impact not on Clarence but on old Will; it wouldn't have needed to touch Clarence at all in fact. Because nobody really minded Clarence just as you don't mind a stick of dynamite until somebody fuses it; otherwise he was just so much sawdust and greasy paper that wouldn't even burn good set on fire.

He was unprincipled and without morals of course, but without a guiding and prompting and absolving hand or intelligence, Clarence himself was anybody's victim since all he had was his blind instinct for

sadism and overreaching, and was himself really dangerous only to someone he would have the moral and intellectual ascendancy of, which out of the entire world's population couldn't possibly be anybody except another Snopes, and out of the entire Snopes population couldn't possibly be more than just one of them.

In this case it was his youngest brother Doris — a hulking youth of seventeen who resembled Clarence not only in size and shape but the same mentality of a child and the moral principles of a wolverine, the only difference being that Doris hadn't been elected to the state legislature yet.

Back in the late twenties Byron Snopes, who looted Colonel Sartoris's bank and fled to Texas, sent back C.O.D. four half-Snopes half-Apache Indian children which Clarence, spending the summer at home between two legislative sessions, adopted into a kind of peonage of practical jokes. Only, being a state senator now, Clarence had to be a little careful about his public dignity, not for the sake of his constituency but because even he knew a damn sight better than to take chances with old Will Varner's standards of amour-propre.

So he would merely invent the jokes and use his brother Doris to perpetrate them, until the four Indian children finally caught Doris alone in no man's land and captured him and tied him to a stake in the woods and even had the fire burning when someone heard his screams and got there in time to save him.

But Clarence himself was in his late twenties then, already a state senator; his career had begun long before that, back when he was eighteen or nineteen years old out at Varner's store and became leader of a subjugated (he was big and strong and Ratliff said really liked fighting, provided the equality in size was enough in his favour) gang of cousins and toadies who fought and drank and gambled and beat up Negroes and terrified women and young girls around Frenchman's Bend until (Ratliff said) old Varner became irritated and exasperated enough to take him out of the public domain by ordering the local J.P. to appoint Clarence his constable. That was where and when Clarence's

whole life, existence, destiny, seemed at last to find itself like a rocket does at the first touch of fire.

Though his career didn't go quite that fast, not at first anyway. Or maybe it wasn't his career so much as his exposure, revealment. At first it was almost like he was just looking around, orienting himself, learning just where he now actually was; and only then looking in a sort of amazed incredulity at the vista opening before him. Merely amazed at first, before the exultation began, at the limitless prospect which nobody had told him about.

Because at first he even behaved himself. At first everybody thought that, having been as outrageous as he had been with no other backing than the unanimity of his old lawless pack, he would be outrageous indeed now with the challengeless majesty of organised law according to Will Varner to back him. But he fooled them. Instead, he became the champion and defender of the civic mores and the public peace of Frenchman's Bend. Of course the first few Negroes who ran afoul of his new official capacity suffered for it. But there was now something impersonal even to the savaging of Negroes.

Previous to his new avatar, he and his gang had beaten up Negroes as a matter of principle. Not chastising them as individual Negroes nor even, Charles's Uncle Gavin said, warring against them as representatives of a race which was alien because it was of a different appearance and therefore enemy per se, but (and his Uncle Gavin said Clarence and his gang did not know this because they dared not know it was so) because they were afraid of that alien race.

They were afraid of it not because it was black but because they — the white man — had taught the black one how to threaten the white economy of material waste, when the white man compelled the black man to learn how to do more with less and worse if the black man wanted to survive in the white economy — less and worse of tools to farm and work with, less of luxury to be content with, less of waste to keep alive with.

But not any more now. Now when Clarence manhandled a Negro with the blackjack he carried or with the butt of the pistol which he now officially wore, it was with a kind of detachment, as if he were using neither the man's black skin nor even his human flesh, but simply the man's present condition of legal vulnerability as testing ground or sounding board on which to prove again, perhaps even reassure himself from day to day, just how far his official power and legal immunity actually went and just how physically strong, even with the inevitable passage of time, he actually remained.

Because they were not always Negroes. In fact, one of the first victims of Clarence's new condition was his lieutenant, his second-in-command, in the old gang; if anything, Clarence was even more savage this time because the man had tried to trade on the old relationship and the past; it was as if Clarence had now personally invested a kind of incorruptibility and integrity into his old natural and normal instinct and capacity for violence and physical anguish; had had to borrow them — the incorruptibility and the integrity — at so high a rate that he had to defend them with his life. Anyway, he had changed.

And, Charles's Uncle Gavin said, since previous to his elevation to grace, everybody had believed Clarence incapable of change, now the same people believed immediately that the new condition was for perpetuity, for the rest of his life. They still believed this even after they found out — it was no rumour; Clarence himself bragged, boasted quietly of it — that he was a member of the Ku Klux Klan when it appeared in the country (it never got very far and didn't last very long; it was believed that it wouldn't have lasted at all except for Clarence), taken in because the Klan needed him or could use him, or, as Charles's Uncle Gavin said, probably because there was no way under heaven that they could have kept him out since it was his dish just as he was its.

This was before he became constable of Frenchman's Bend; his virgin advent from private life you might say, his initial accolade of public recognition, comparatively harmless yet, since even a Ku Klux Klan would have more sense than to depend on Clarence very far; he

remained just one more obedient integer, muscle man — what in a few more years people would mean by “goon” — until the day came when old Will Varner’s irritation or exasperation raised him to constable, whereupon within the year it was rumoured that he was now an officer in the Klavern or whatever they called it; and in two more years was himself the local Dragon or Kleagle: who having been designated by old Varner custodian of the public peace, had now decreed himself arbiter of its morals too.

Which was probably when he really discerned at last the breadth and splendour of his rising destiny; with amazement and incredulity at that apparently limitless expanse and, who knows? maybe even humility too that he should have been chosen, found worthy — that limitless field for his capacity and talents: not merely to beat, hammer men into insensibility and submission, but to use them; not merely to expend their inexhaustible numbers like ammunition or consume them like hogs or sheep, but to use, employ them like mules or oxen, with one eye constant for the next furrow tomorrow or next year; using not just their competence to mark an X whenever and wherever old Will Varner ordered them to, but their capacity for passion and greed and alarm as well, as though Clarence had been in the business of politics all his life instead of those few mere years as a hick constable.

And, as Charles’s uncle said, doing it all by simple infallible instinct, without preceptor or example. Because this was even before Huey Long had risen far enough to show their own Mississippi Bilbo just what a man with a little brass and courage and no inhibitions could really accomplish.

So when Clarence announced for the state legislature, they — the County — knew he would need no other platform than Uncle Billy Varner’s name. In fact they decided immediately that his candidacy was not even Clarence’s own idea but Uncle Billy’s; that Uncle Billy’s irritation had simply reached a point where Clarence must be removed completely from his sight. But they were wrong.

Clarence had a platform. Which was the moment when some of them, a few of them like Charles's uncle and Ratliff and a few more of the young ones like Charles (he was only eight or ten then) who would listen (or anyway had to listen, like Charles) to them, discovered that they had better fear him, tremble and beware. His platform was his own. It was one which only his amoral temerity would have dared because it set him apostate to his own constituency; the thin deciding margin of his vote came from sources not only beyond the range of Will Varner's autocracy, it came from people who under any other conditions would have voted for almost any other member of the human race first: he came out publicly against the Ku Klux Klan.

He had been the local Kleagle, Dragon, whatever the title was, right up to the day he announced his candidacy — or so the County thought. But now he was its mortal enemy, stumping the county apparently only coincidentally to win an office, since his dedication was to destroy a dragon, winning the race by that scant margin of votes coming mostly from Jefferson itself — schoolteachers, young professional people, women — the literate and liberal innocents who believed that decency and right and personal liberty would prevail simply because they were decent and right; who until Clarence offered them one, had had no political unanimity and had not even bothered always to vote, until at last the thing they feared and hated seemed to have produced for them a champion.

So he went to Jackson not as the successful candidate for a political office but as the dedicated paladin of a cause, walking (Charles's uncle said) into the legislative halls in an aura half the White Knight's purity and half the shocked consternation of his own kind whom he had apparently wrenched himself from and repudiated. Because he did indeed destroy the Ku Klux Klan in Yoknapatawpha County; as one veteran klansman expressed it: "Durn it, if we can't beat a handful of schoolteachers and editors and Sunday-school superintendents, how in hell can we hope to beat a whole race of niggers and catholics and jews?"

So Clarence was in. Now he had it made, as Charles's generation would say. He was safe now for the next two years, when there would be another election, to look around, find out where to go next like the alpinist on his ledge. That's what Charles's uncle said it was: like the mountain climber.

Except that the climber climbs the mountain not just to get to the top. He would try to climb it even if he knew he would never get there. He climbs it simply because he can have the solitary peace and contentment of knowing constantly that only his solitary nerve, will and courage stand between him and destruction, while Clarence didn't even know it was a mountain because there wasn't anything to fall off, you could only be pushed off; and anybody that felt himself strong enough or quick enough to push Clarence Snopes off anything was welcome to try it.

So at first what the County thought Clarence was doing now was simply being quiet while he watched and listened to learn the rules of the new trade. They didn't know that what he was teaching himself was how to recognise opportunities when they occurred; that he was still doing that even after he began at last to talk, address the House, himself still the White Knight who had destroyed bigotry and intolerance in Yoknapatawpha County in the eyes of the innocent illusionees whose narrow edge of additional votes had elected him, long after the rest of the County realised that Clarence was preaching the same hatred of Negroes and Catholics and Jews that had been the tenet of the organisation by wrecking which he had got where he now was; when the Silver Shirts appeared, Clarence was one of the first in Mississippi to join it, joining, his uncle said, not because of the principles the Silver Shirts advocated but simply because Clarence probably decided that it would be more durable than the merely county-autonomous Klan which he had wrecked.

Because by this time his course was obvious: to join things, anything, any organisation to which human beings belonged, which he might compel or control or coerce through the emotions of religion or patriotism or just simple greed, political gravy-hunger; he had been

born into the Baptist Church in Frenchman's Bend; he was now affiliated in Jackson, where (he had been re-elected twice now) he now taught a Sunday-school class; in that same summer the County heard that he was contemplating resigning his seat in the legislature long enough to do a hitch in the army or navy to be eligible for the American Legion.

Clarence was in now. He had it made. He had — Charles was about to say “divided the county” except that “divided” implied balance or at least suspension even though the lighter end of the beam was irrevocably in the air.

Where with Clarence and Yoknapatawpha County, the lesser end of that beam was not in suspension at all but rather in a condition of aerial banishment, making now only the soundless motions of vociferation in vacuum; Clarence had engorged the county whole as whales and owls do and, as owls do, disgorged onto that airy and harmless pinnacle the refuse of bones and hair he didn't need — the doomed handful of literate liberal underpaid white-collar illusionees who had elected him into the state senate because they thought he had destroyed the Ku Klux Klan, plus the other lesser handful of other illusionees like Charles's Uncle Gavin and Ratliff, who had voted for Clarence that time as the lesser of two evils because he had come out against the Klan and hence were even more doomed since where the school- and music-teachers and the other white-collar innocents who learned by heart President Roosevelt's speeches, could believe anew each time that honour and justice and decency would prevail just because they were honourable and just and decent, his uncle and Ratliff never had believed this and never would.

Clarence didn't destroy them. There were not enough of them. They were so few of them in fact that he could continue to send them year after year the mass-produced Christmas cards which it was said he obtained from the same firm he was instrumental in awarding the yearly contract for automobile licence plates.

As for the rest of the county voters, they only waited for Clarence to indicate where he wanted the X marked to elect him to any office he wanted, right up to the ultimate one which the County (including for a time even Charles's uncle's branch of the illusioned) believed was his goal: governor of the state.

Huey Long now dominated the horizon of every Mississippi politician's ambition; it seemed only natural to the County that their own should pattern on him; even when Clarence took up Long's soak-the-rich battle cry as though he, Clarence, had invented it, even Charles's Uncle Gavin and Ratliff still believed that Clarence's sights were set no higher than the governor's mansion.

Because, though at that time — 1930-'35 — Mississippi had no specific rich to soak — no industries, no oil, no gas to speak of — the idea of taking from anybody that had it that which they deserved no more than he did, being no more intelligent or industrious but simply luckier, struck straight to the voting competence of every sharecropper and tenant farmer not only in Yoknapatawpha County but in all the rest of Mississippi too; Clarence could have been elected governor of Mississippi on the simple platform of soaking the rich in Louisiana or Alabama, or for that matter in Maine or Oregon.

So their (his uncle's and Ratliff's little forlorn cell of unreconstructed purists) shock at the rumour that Clarence had contemplated for a moment taking over the American Legion in Mississippi was nothing to the one when they learned three years ago (Charles himself was not present; he had already departed from Yoknapatawpha County to begin training for his ten months in the German P.O.W. camp) that the most potent political faction in the state, the faction which was sure to bring their man in as governor, had offered to run Clarence for lieutenant-governor, and Clarence had declined. He gave no reason but then he didn't need to because now all the county — not just Charles's uncle's little cell, but everybody — knew what Clarence's aim, ambition was and had been all the time: Washington, Congress. Which was horror only among the catacombs behind the bestiarium; with everyone else it was triumph and exultation: who had already ridden

Clarence's coat-tails to the (comparatively) minor-league hog trough at Jackson and who saw now the clear path to that vast and limitless one in Washington.

And not just shock and horror, but dread and fear too of the man who had used the Ku Klux Klan while he needed it and then used their innocence to wreck the Klan when he no longer did, who was using the Baptist Church as long as he believed it would serve him; who had used W.P.A. and N.R.A. and A.A.A. and C.C.C. and all the other agencies created in the dream or hope that people should not suffer or, if they must, at least suffer equally in times of crisis and fear; being either for them or against them as the political breeze indicated, since in the late thirties he turned against the party which had fathered them, ringing the halls which at least occasionally had echoed the voices of statesmen and humanitarians, with his own voice full of racial and religious and economic intolerance (once the strongest plank in his political creed had been soaking the rich; now the loudest one was the menace of organised labour), with nothing to intervene between him and Congress but that handful of innocents still capable of believing that evil could be destroyed simply because it was evil, whom Clarence didn't even fear enough to stop sending them the cheap Christmas cards.

"Which won't be enough," Charles's uncle said, "as it never has been enough in the country, even if they could multiply themselves by the ten-thousand. Because he would only fool them again."

"Maybe," Ratliff said. (This was Charles's Uncle Gavin telling him what had happened when he got back home in September after it was all over and whatever it was had licked Clarence, caused him to withdraw from the race, at old Will Varner's annual picnic in July; this was back in April when his uncle and Ratliff were talking.) "What you need is to have the young folks back for at least a day or two between now and the seventeenth of next August. What a shame the folks that started this war and drafted all the young voters away never had sense enough to hold off at least long enough to keep Clarence Snopes outen Congress, ain't it?"

“You need?” Charles’s uncle said. “What do you mean, you?”

“I thought you jest said how the old folks like you and me can’t do nothing about Clarence but jest fold our hands and feel sorry,” Ratliff said.

“No more we can,” his uncle said. “Oh, there are enough of us. It was the ones of your and my age and generation who carried on the good work of getting things into the shape they’re in now. But it’s too late for us now. We can’t now; maybe we’re just afraid to stick our necks out again. Or if not afraid, at least ashamed. No: not afraid: we are just too old. Call it just tired, too tired to be afraid any longer of losing. Just to hate evil is not enough. You — somebody — has got to do something about it. Only now it will have to be somebody else, and even if the Japs should quit too before the August primary, there still won’t be enough somebody else’s here. Because it won’t be us.”

“Maybe,” Ratliff said. And his uncle was right. And then, maybe Ratliff was right too. One of the first to announce for the race to challenge Clarence from the district was a member of his uncle’s somebody else’s — a man from the opposite end of the district, who was no older than Charles: only — as Charles put it — braver. He announced for Congress even before Clarence did. The election for Congress wouldn’t be until next year, 1946, so there was plenty of time.

But then, Clarence always did it this way: waited until the other candidate or candidates had announced and committed or anyway indicated what their platforms would be. And Clarence had taught Yoknapatawpha County to know why: that by waiting to be the last, he didn’t even need to invent a platform because by that time his chief, most dangerous opponent had supplied him with one. As happened now, Clarence using this one in his turn, using his valour as an instrument to defeat him with.

His name was Devries; Yoknapatawpha County had never heard of him before 1941. But they had since. In 1940 he had been Number One in his R.O.T.C. class at the University, had graduated with a regular army

commission and by New Year's 1942 was already overseas; in 1943 when he was assigned back to the United States to be atmosphere in bond drives, he was a major with (this is Charles telling it) enough ribbons to make a four-in-hand tie which he had acquired while commanding Negro infantry in battle, having been posted to Negro troops by some brass-hatted theorist in Personnel doubtless on the premise that, being a Southerner, he would indubitably "understand" Negroes; and (Charles supposed) just as indubitably commanded them well for the same reason: that, being a Southerner, he knew that no white man understood Negroes and never would so long as the white man compelled the black man to be first a Negro and only then a man, since this, the impenetrable dividing wall, was the black man's only defence and protection for survival.

Maybe he couldn't sell bonds. Anyway apparently he didn't really put his back into it. Because the story was that almost before his folks knew he was home he was on his way back to the war and when he came out this time, in 1944, he was a full bird colonel with next to the last ribbon and a tin leg; and while he was on his way to Washington to be given the last one, the top one, the story came out how he had finished the second tour up front and was already posted stateside when the general pinned the next to the last medal on him.

But instead he dropped the medal into his foot locker and put back on the battle fatigues and worried them until they let him go back up the third time, and one night he turned the rest of the regiment over to the second and with a Negro sergeant and a runner crawled out to where what was left of the other battalion had been trapped by a barrage and sent them back with the runner for guide, he and the sergeant holding off one attack single-handed until they were clear, then he, Devries, was carrying the sergeant back when he took one too and this time a hulking giant of an Arkansas Negro cotton-field hand crawled out and picked them both up and brought them in.

And when he, Devries, came out of the ether with the remaining leg he worried enough people until they sent in the field hand and he, Devries,

had the nurse dig the medal out of the foot locker and said to the field hand, "Lift me up, you big bastard," and pinned the medal on him.

That was Clarence's opponent for Congress. That is, even if the army hadn't anyone else at all for the experts to assume he understood Negroes, Devries (this is Charles talking) couldn't have talked himself back up front with one leg missing. So all he had now to try to persuade to send him somewhere where civilians, and apparently the only place he could think of was Congress. So (this is still Charles) maybe it would take somebody with no more sense than to volunteer twice for the same war, to have the temerity to challenge a long-vested interest like Clarence Snopes.

Because even if they had arranged things better, more practical: either for 1944 to have happened in 1943 or have the election year itself moved forward one, or in fact if the Japs quit in 1945 too and all the ruptured ducks in the congressional district were back home in time, there still would not be enough of them and in the last analysis all Devries would have would be the heirs of the same unco-ordinated political illusionees innocent enough to believe still that demagoguery and bigotry and intolerance must not and cannot and will not endure simply because they are bigotry and demagoguery and intolerance, that Clarence himself had already used up and thrown away twenty-odd years ago; Charles's uncle said to Ratliff:

"They'll always be wrong. They think they are fighting Clarence Snopes.

They're not. They're not faced with an individual nor even a situation: they are beating their brains out against one of the foundation rocks of our national character itself. Which is the premise that politics and political office are not and never have been the method and means by which we can govern ourselves in peace and dignity and honour and security, but instead are our national refuge for our incompetents who have failed at every other occupation by means of which they might make a living for themselves and their families; and whom as a result we would have to feed and clothe and shelter out of our own private purses and means.

The surest way to be elected to office in America is to have fathered seven or eight children and then lost your arm or leg in a sawmill accident: both of which — the reckless optimism which begot seven or eight children with nothing to feed them by but a sawmill, and the incredible ineptitude which would put an arm or a leg in range of a moving saw — should already have damned you from any form of public trust.

They can't beat him. He will be elected to Congress for the simple reason that if he fails to be elected, there is nothing else he can do that anybody on earth would pay him for on Saturday night; and old Will Varner and the rest of the interlocked Snopes kin and connections have no intention whatever of boarding and feeding Clarence for the rest of his life. You'll see."

It looked like he was going to be right. It was May now almost time for the political season to open; a good one again after four years, now that the Germans had collapsed too. And still Clarence hadn't announced his candidacy in actual words.

Everybody knew why of course. What they couldn't figure out yet was just how Clarence planned to use Devries's military record for his, Clarence's, platform; exactly how Clarence intended to use Devries's military glory to beat him for Congress with it. And when the pattern did begin to appear at last, Yoknapatawpha County — some of it anyway — found out something else about the Clarence they had lived in innocence with for twenty and more years.

Which was just how dangerous Clarence really was in his capacity to unify normal — you might even say otherwise harmless — human baseness and get it to the polls. Because this time he compelled them whose champion he was going to be, to come to him and actually beg him to be their champion; not just beg him to be their knight, but themselves to invent or anyway establish the cause for which they would need him.

Charles's Uncle Gavin told him how suddenly one day in that May or early June, the whole county learned that Clarence was not only not going to run for Congress, he was going to retire from public life altogether; this not made as a formal public announcement but rather breathed quietly from sheep to sheep of old Will Varner's voting flock which had been following Clarence to the polls for twenty-five years now; gently, his Uncle Gavin said, even a little sadly, with a sort of mild astonishment that it was not self-evident:

"Why, I'm an old man now," Clarence (he was past forty) said. "It's time I stepped aside. Especially since we got a brave young man like this Captain Devries—"

"Colonel Devries," they told him.

"Colonel Devries — to represent you, carry on the work which I tried to do to better our folks and our country—"

"You mean, you're going to endorse him? You going to support him?"

"Of course," Clarence said. "Us old fellows have done the best we could for you, but now the time has come for us to step down. What we need in Congress now is the young men, especially the ones that were brave in the war. Of course General Devries—"

"Colonel Devries," they told him.

"Colonel Devries — is a little younger maybe than I would have picked out myself. But time will cure that. Of course he's got some ideas that I myself could never agree with and that lots of other old fogies like me in Mississippi and the South won't never agree with either. But maybe we are all too old now, out of date, and the things we believed in and stood up for and suffered when necessary, ain't true any more, ain't what folks want any more, and his new ideas are the right ones for Yoknapatawpha County and Mississippi and the South—"

And then of course they asked it: "What new ideas?"

And that was all. He told them: this man, Colonel Devries (no trouble any more about the exactness of his rank), who had become so attached to Negroes by commanding them in battle that he had volunteered twice, possibly even having to pull a few strings (since

everyone would admit that he had more than done his share of fighting for his country and democracy and was entitled to — more: had earned the right to — be further excused) to get back into the front lines in order to consort with Negroes; who had there risked his life to save one Negro and then had his own life saved by another Negro.

A brave man (had not his government and country recorded and affirmed that by the medals it gave him, including that highest one in its gift?) and an honourable one (that medal meant honour too; did not its very designation include the word?), what course would — could — dared he take, once he was a member of that Congress already passing legislation to break down forever the normal and natural (natural? God Himself had ordained and decreed them) barriers between the white man and the black one.

And so on. And that was all; as his uncle said, Clarence was already elected, the county and the district would not even need to spend the money to have the ballots cast and counted; that Medal of Honor which the government had awarded Devries for risking death to defend the principles on which that government was founded and by which it existed, had destroyed forever his chance to serve in the Congress which had accoladed him.

“You see?” Charles’s uncle said to Ratliff. “You can’t beat him.”
“You mean, even you can’t think of nothing to do about it?” Ratliff said.
“Certainly,” his uncle said. “Join him.”

“Join him?” Ratliff said.

“The most efficacious, the oldest — oh yes, without doubt the first, the very first, back to the very dim moment when two cave men confederated against the third one — of all political maxims.”

“Join — him?” Ratliff said.

“All right,” his uncle said. “You tell me then. I’ll join you.”

His uncle told how Ratliff blinked at him awhile. “There must be some simpler way than that. It’s a pure and simple proposition; there must be

a pure and simple answer to it. Clarence jest purely and simply wants to get elected to Congress, he don't keer how; there must be some pure and simple way for the folks that purely and simply don't want him in Congress to say No to him, they don't keer how neither."

His uncle said again, "All right. Find it. I'll join you." But evidently it wasn't that pure and simple to Ratliff either: only to Clarence. His uncle said that after that Clarence didn't even need to make a campaign, a race; that all he would need to do would be to get up on the speakers' platform at the Varner's Mill picnic long enough to be sure that the people who had turned twenty-one since old Will Varner had last told them who to vote for, would know how to recognise the word Snopes on the ballot.

In fact, Devries could have quit now, and his uncle said there were some who thought he ought to. Except how could he, with that medal — all five or six of them — for guts and valour in the trunk in the attic or wherever he kept them.

Devries even came to Jefferson, into Clarence's own bailiwick, and made his speech as if nothing were happening. But there you were. There were not enough soldiers back yet who would know what the medal meant. And even though the election itself would not happen until next year, nobody could know now that the Japs would cave this year too.

To the others, the parents and Four-F cousins and such to whom they had sent their voting proxies, Devries was a nigger lover who had actually been decorated by the Yankee government for it. In fact, the story now was that Devries had got his Congressional Medal by choosing between a Negro and a white boy to save, and had chosen the Negro and left the white boy to die. Though Charles's uncle said that Clarence himself did not start this one: they must do him that justice at least. Not that Clarence would have flinched from starting it: he simply didn't need that additional ammunition now, having been, not so much in politics but simply a Snopes long enough now to know that only a fool would pay two dollars for a vote when fifty cents would buy it.

It must have been even a little sad: the man who had already been beaten in advance by the very medal which wouldn't let him quit. It was more than just sad. Because his Uncle Gavin told him how presently even the ones who had never owned a mechanical leg and, if the odds held up, never would, began to realise what owning, having to live with one, let alone stand up and walk on it, must have meant. Devries didn't sit in the car on the Square or even halted on the road, letting the constituency, the votes, do the standing and walking out to the car to shake his hand and listen to him as was Clarence's immemorial and successful campaigning method. Instead, he walked himself, swinging that dead mechanical excrescence or bracing it to stand for an hour on a platform to speak, rationalising for the votes which he already knew he had lost, while trying to keep all rumour of the chafed and outraged stump out of his face while he did it. Until at last Charles's uncle said how the very ones who would vote for him would dread having to look at him and keep the rumour of that stump out of their faces too; until they themselves began to wish the whole thing was over, the debacle accomplished, wondering (his uncle said) how they themselves might end it and set him free to go home and throw the tin leg away, chop it up, destroy it, and be just peacefully maimed.

Then the day approached for Uncle Billy Varner's election-year picnic, where by tradition all county aspirants for office, county state or national, delivered themselves and so Clarence too would have to announce formally his candidacy, his Uncle Gavin saying how they clutched even at that straw: that once Clarence had announced for Congress, Devries might feel he could withdraw his name and save his face.

Only he didn't have to. After the dinner was eaten and the speakers gathered on the platform, Clarence wasn't even among them; shortly afterward the word spread that he had even left the grounds and by the next morning the whole county knew that he had not only withdrawn from the race for Congress, he had announced his retirement from public life altogether.

And that this time he meant it because it was not Clarence but old man Will Varner himself who had sent the word out that Clarence was through. That was July 1945; a year after that, when the election for Congress finally came around, the Japanese had quit too and Charles and most of the rest of them who knew what Devries's medal meant, were home in person with their votes.

But they merely increased Devries's majority; he didn't really need the medal because Ratliff had already beat Clarence Snopes. Then it was September, Charles was home again and the next day his uncle ran Ratliff to earth on the Square and brought him up to the office and said, "All right. Tell us just exactly what did happen out there that day."

"Out where what day?" Ratliff said.

"You know what I mean. At Uncle Billy Varner's picnic when Clarence Snopes withdrew from the race for Congress."

"Oh, that," Ratliff said. "Why, that was what you might call a kind of a hand of God, help a little of course by them two twin boys of Colonel Devries's sister."

"Yes," his uncle said. "That too: why Devries brought his sister and her family all the way over here from Cumberland County just to hear him announce for a race everybody knew he had already lost."

"That's that hand of God I jest mentioned," Ratliff said. "Because naturally otherwise Colonel Devries couldn't a possibly heard away over there in Cumberland County about one little old lonesome gum thicket behind Uncle Billy Varner's water mill now, could he?"

"All right, all right," his uncle said. "Thicket. Twin boys. Stop now and just tell us."

"The twin boys was twin boys and the thicket was a dog thicket," Ratliff said. "You and Chick both naturally know what twin boys is and I was about to say you and Chick both of course know what a dog thicket is too. Except that on second thought I reckon you don't because I never

heard of a dog thicket neither until I seen this clump of gum and ash and hickory and pin-oak switches on the bank jest above Varner's millpond where it will be convenient for the customers like them city hotels that keeps a reservoy of fountain-pen ink open to anybody that needs it right next to the writing-room—"

"Hold it," his uncle said. "Dog thicket. Come on now. I'm supposed to be busy this morning even if you're not."

"That's what I'm trying to tell you," Ratliff said. "It was a dog way-station. A kind of a dog post office you might say. Every dog in Beat Two uses it at least once a day, and every dog in the congressional district, let alone jest Yoknapatawpha County, has lifted his leg there at least once in his life and left his visiting card. You know: two dogs conies trotting up and takes a snuff and Number One says 'I be dawg if here ain't that old bobtail Bluetick from up at Wyott's Crossing.

What you reckon he's doing away down here?' 'No it ain't,' Number Two says. 'This here is that-ere fyce that Res Grier swapped Solon Quick for that half a day's work shingling the church that time, don't you remember?' and Number One says, 'No, that fyce come afterward. This here is that old Wyott's Crossing Bluetick. I thought he'd a been skeered to come back here after what that Littlejohn half-Airedale done to him that day.' You know: that sort of thing."

"All right," his uncle said. "Go on."

"That's all," Ratliff said, "Jest that-ere what you might call select debutant Uncle Billy Varner politics coming-out picnic and every voter and candidate in forty miles that owned a pickup or could bum a ride in one or even a span of mules either if wasn't nothing else handy, the sovereign votes theirselves milling around the grove where Senator Clarence Egglestone Snopes could circulate among them until the time come when he would stand up on the platform and actively tell them where to mark the X.

You know: ever thing quiet and peaceful and ordinary and law-abiding as usual until this-here anonymous underhanded son-of-a-gun — I won't say scoundrel because evidently it must a been Colonel Devries his-self couldn't nobody else a knowed who them two twin boys was, let alone what they was doing that far from Cumberland County; leastways not them particular two twin boys and that-ere local dog thicket in the same breath you might say — until whoever this anonymous underhanded feller was, suh-jested to them two boys what might happen say if two folks about that size would shoo them dogs outen that thicket long enough to cut off a handful of them switches well down below the dog target level and kind of walk up behind where Senator C. Egglestone Snopes was getting out the vote, and draw them damp switches light and easy, not to disturb him, across the back of his britches legs.

Light and easy, not to disturb nobody, because apparently Clarence nor nobody else even noticed the first six or eight dogs until maybe Clarence felt his britches legs getting damp or maybe jest cool, and looked over his shoulder to see the waiting line-up of his political fate with one eye while already breaking for the nearest automobile or pickup you could roll the windows up in with the other, with them augmenting standing-room-only customers strung out behind him like the knots in a kite's tail until he got inside the car with the door slammed and the glass rolled up, them frustrated dogs circling round and round the automobile like the spotted horses and swan boats on a flying jenny, except the dogs was travelling on three legs, being already loaded and cocked and aimed you might say.

Until somebody finally located the owner of the car and got the key and druv Clarence home, finally outdistancing the last dog in about two miles, stopping at last in the ex-Senator's yard where he was safe, the Snopes dogs evidently having went to the picnic too, while somebody went into the house and fetched out a pair of dry britches for the ex-Senator to change into in the automobile. That's right. Ex-Senator. Because even with dry britches he never went back to the picnic; likely he figgered that even then it would be too much risk and strain. I mean, the strain of trying to keep your mind on withdrawing from a political

race and all the time having to watch over your shoulder in case some dog recollected your face even if your britches did smell fresh and uninteresting.”

“Well I’ll be damned,” his uncle said. “It’s too simple. I don’t believe it.” “I reckon he figgered that to convince folks how to vote for him and all the time standing on one foot trying to kick dogs away from his other leg, was a little too much to expect of even Mississippi voters,” Ratliff said.

“I don’t believe you, I tell you,” his uncle said. “That wouldn’t be enough to make him withdraw even if everybody at the picnic had known about it, seen it. Didn’t you just tell me they got him into a car and away almost at once?” Then his uncle stopped. He looked at Ratliff, who stood blinking peacefully back at him. His uncle said: “Or at least—”

“That’s right,” Ratliff said. “That was the trade.”

“What trade?” his uncle said.

“It was likely that same low-minded anonymous scoundrel again,” Ratliff said. “Anyhow, somebody made the trade that if Senator Snopes would withdraw from this-here particular race for Congress, the folks that had seen them pro-Devries dogs would forget it, and the ones that hadn’t wouldn’t never need to know about it.”

“But he would have beat that too,” his uncle said. “Clarence Snopes stopped or even checked just because a few dogs raised their legs against him? Hell, he would have wound up having every rabies tag in Yoknapatawpha County counted as an absentee ballot.”

“Oh, you mean Clarence,” Ratliff said. “I thought you meant Uncle Billy Varner.”

“Uncle Billy Varner?” his uncle said.

“That’s right,” Ratliff said. “It was Uncle Billy his-self that that low-minded rascal must a went to. Leastways Uncle Billy his-self sent word back that same afternoon that Senator Clarence Egglestone Snopes had

withdrawed from the race for Congress; Uncle Billy never seemed to notified the ex-Senator a-tall. Oh yes, they told Uncle Billy the same thing you jest said: how it wouldn't hurt Clarence none in the long run; they even used your same words about the campaign tactics of the dogs, only a little stronger. But Uncle Billy said No, that Clarence Snopes wasn't going to run for nothing in Beat Two.

“ 'But he ain't running in jest Beat Two,' they said. 'He ain't even running in jest Yoknapatawpha County now. He's running in a whole one-eighth of the state of Mississippi.' ” And Uncle Billy said:
“ 'Durn the whole hundred eighths of Mississippi and Yoknapatawpha County too. I ain't going to have Beat Two and Frenchman's Bend represented nowhere by nobody that-ere a son-a-bitching dog that happens by can't tell from a fence post.' ”

His uncle was looking at Ratliff. He had been looking at Ratliff for some time. “So this anonymous meddler you speak of not only knew the twin nephews and that dog thicket, he knew old Will Varner too.”

“It looks like it,” Ratliff said.

“So it worked,” his uncle said.

“It looks like it,” Ratliff said.

Both he and his uncle looked at Ratliff sitting neat and easy, blinking, bland and inscrutable in one of the neat blue shirts he made himself, which he never wore a tie with though Charles knew he had two at home he had paid Allanova seventy-five dollars apiece for that time his uncle and Ratliff went to New York ten years ago to see Linda Snopes married, which Ratliff had never had on. “O Cincinnatus,” his uncle said.

“What?” Ratliff said.

“Nothing,” his uncle said. “I was just wondering who it was that told those twin boys about that dog thicket.”

“Why, Colonel Devries, I reckon,” Ratliff said. “A soldier in the war with all them medals, after three years of practice on Germans and I-talians

and Japanese, likely it wasn't nothing to him to think up a little political strategy too."

"They were mere death worshippers and simple pre-absolved congenital sadists," his uncle said. "This was a born bred and trained American professional ward-level politician."

"Maybe ain't neither of them so bad, providing a man jest keeps his eyes open and uses what he has, the best he knows," Ratliff said. Then he said, "Well," and rose, lean and easy, perfectly bland, perfectly inscrutable, saying to Charles now: "You mind that big oat field in the bend below Uncle Billy's pasture, Major? It stayed full of geese all last winter they say. Why don't you come out when the season opens and shoot a few of them? I reckon Uncle Billy will let us."

"Much obliged," Charles said.

"It's a trade then," Ratliff said. "Good-day, gentlemen." Then Ratliff was gone. Now Charles was looking at his uncle, whereupon his uncle drew a sheet of paper to him and began to write on it, not fast: just extremely preoccupied, absorbed.

"So, quote," Charles said, "it will have to be you, the young people unquote. I believe that's about how it went, wasn't it? — that summer back in '37 when us moralists were even having to try to beat Roosevelt himself in order to get to Clarence Snopes?"

"Good-day, Charles," his uncle said.

"Because quote it won't be us," Charles said. "We are too old, too tired, have lost the capacity to believe in ourselves—"

"Damn it," his uncle said, "I said good-day."

"Yes sir," Charles said. "In just a moment. Because quote the United States, America: the greatest country in the world if we can just keep on affording it unquote. Only, let 'afford' read 'depend on God'. Because He saved you this time, using V. K. Ratliff of course as His instrument. Only next time Ratliff may be off somewhere selling somebody a sewing machine or a radio" — That's right, Ratliff now had

a radio agency too, the radio riding inside the same little imitation house on the back of his pickup truck that the demonstrator sewing machine rode in; two years more and the miniature house would have a miniature TV stalk on top of it— “and God may not be able to put His hand on him in time.

So what you need is to learn how to trust in God without depending on Him. In fact, we need to fix things so He can depend on us for a while. Then He won't need to waste Himself being everywhere at once.” Now his uncle looked up at him and suddenly Charles thought Oh yes, I liked Father too all right but Father just talked to me while Uncle Gavin listened to me, no matter how foolish what I was saying finally began to sound even to me, listening to me until I had finished, then saying, “Well, I don't know whether it will hold together or not but I know a good way to find out. Let's try it.” Not YOU try it but US try it.

“Yes,” his uncle said. “So do I.”

Fourteen

THOUGH BY THE time Ratliff eliminated Clarence back into private life in Frenchman's Bend, there had already been a new Snopes living in Jefferson for going on two years. So Jefferson was merely holding its own in what Charles's uncle would call the Snopes condition or dilemma.

This was a brand-new one, a bachelor named Orestes, called Res. That's right, Orestes. Even Charles's Uncle Gavin didn't know how either. His uncle told him how back in 1943 the town suddenly learned that Flem Snopes now owned what was left of the Compson place. Which wasn't much.

The tale was they had sold a good part of it off back in 1909 for the municipal golf course in order to send the oldest son, Quentin, to Harvard, where he committed suicide at the end of his freshman year; and about ten years ago the youngest son, Benjy, the idiot, had set himself and the house both on fire and burned up in it. That is, after

Quentin drowned himself at Harvard and Candace's, the sister's, marriage blew up and she disappeared, nobody knew where, and her daughter, Quentin, that nobody knew who her father was, climbed down the rainpipe one night and ran off with a carnival, Jason, the middle one, finally got rid of Benjy too by finally persuading his mother to commit him to the asylum only it didn't stick, Jason's version being that his mother whined and wept until he, Jason, gave up and brought Benjy back home, where sure enough in less than two years Benjy not only burned himself up but completely destroyed the house too.

So Jason took the insurance and borrowed a little more on the now vacant lot and built himself and his mother a new brick bungalow up on the main street to the Square. But the lot was a valuable location; Jefferson had already begun to surround it; in fact the golf links had already moved out to the country club back in 1929, selling the old course back to Jason Compson. Which was not surprising.

While he was still in high school Jason had started clerking after school and on Saturdays in Uncle Ike McCaslin's hardware store, which even then was run by a man named Earl Triplett that Uncle Ike got from somewhere, everybody supposed off a deer stand or a Delta fishing lake, since that was where Uncle Ike spent most of his time.

For which reason it was not surprising for the town to assume presently that Triplett had long since gently eliminated Uncle Ike from the business even though Uncle Ike still loafed in the store when he wasn't hunting or fishing and without doubt Triplett still let him have his rifle and shotgun ammunition and fishing tackle at cost. Which without doubt the town assumed Jason did too when Jason had eliminated Triplett in his turn back to his deer stand or trotline or minnow bucket.

Anyhow, for all practical purposes Jason Compson was now the McCaslin Hardware Company. So nobody was surprised when it was learned that Jason had bought back into the original family holding the portion which his father had sacrificed to send his older brother to Harvard — a school which Jason held in contempt for the reason that

he held all schools beyond the tenth grade to be simply refuges for the inept and the timid.

Charles's uncle said that what surprised him was when he went to the courthouse and looked at the records and saw that, although Jason had apparently paid cash for the abandoned golf course, he had not paid off the mortgage on the other part of the property on which he had raised the money to build his new bungalow, the interest on which he had paid promptly in to Flem Snopes's bank ever since, and apparently planned to continue.

This, right up to Pearl Harbour. So that you would almost believe Jason had a really efficient and faithful spy in the Japanese Diet. And then in the spring of 1942, another spy just as efficient and loyal in the U.S. Cabinet too; his uncle said that to listen to Jason, you would believe he not only had advance unimpeachable information that an air-training field was to be located in Jefferson, he had an unimpeachable promise that it would be located nowhere else save on that old golf links; his uncle said how back then nobody in Jefferson knew or had thought much about airfields and they were willing to follow Jason in that anything open enough to hit golf balls in was open enough to land airplanes on.

Or anyway the right one believed him. The right one being Flem Snopes, the president of the bank which held the mortgage on the other half of Jason's property. His Uncle Gavin said it must have been like a two-handed stud game when both have turned up a hole-ace and by mutual consent decreed the other two aces dead cards. Gavin said that of course nobody knew what really happened.

All they knew was what they knew about Jason Compson and Flem Snopes; Gavin said there must have come a time when Flem, who knew all along that he didn't know as much about airfields as Jason did, must have had a terrifying moment when he believed maybe he didn't know as much about money either. So Flem couldn't risk letting Jason draw another card and maybe raise him; Flem had to call.

Or (Gavin said) so Jason thought. That Jason was simply waving that imaginary airfield around the Square to spook Mr Snopes into making the first move. Which was evidently what Snopes did: he called in the note his bank held on Jason's mortgage. All amicable and peaceful of course, which was the way Jason expected it, inviting him (Jason) into that private back room in the bank and saying, "I'm just as sorry about this as you can ever be, Mr Compson. But you can see how it is. With our country fighting for its very life and existence on both sides of the world, it's every man's duty and privilege too to add his little mite to the battle. So my board of directors feel that every possible penny of the bank's resources should go into matters pertaining directly to the war effort."

Which was just what Jason wanted: "Why certainly, Mr Snopes. Any patriotic citizen will agree whole-heartedly with you. Especially when there is a direct war effort right here in Jefferson, like this airfield I understand they have practically let the contract for, just as soon as the title to the land is cleared:" naming his price for the ex-golf course, out of which sum naturally the mortgage note would be paid.

Or, if Mr Snopes and his directors preferred, he, Jason, would name a lump sum for the entire Compson property, including the mortgage, and so leave the bank's directors or some patriotic civic body representing the town itself to deal with the government for the airfield; Jason reserving only the right to hope that the finished flying field might be christened Compson Field as a monument not to him, Jason, but to the hope that his family had had a place in the history of Jefferson at least not to be ashamed of, including as it did one governor and one brigadier-general, whether it was worth commemorating or not.

Because Charles's uncle said that Jason was shrewd too in his way, enough to speculate that the man who had spent as much as Snopes had to have his name on a marble monument over the grave of his unfaithful wife, might spend some more to have an airfield named for him too.

Or so Jason thought. Because in January '43 Jefferson learned that Mr Snopes — not the bank: Mr Private Individual Snopes — now owned the Compson place. And now his Uncle Gavin said how Jason exposed his hand a little from triumph. But then, who could really blame him since until now nobody but the Italian marble syndicate had ever managed to sell Flem Snopes anything as amorphous as prestige.

And what the Italians had sold him was respectability, which was not a luxury but a necessity: referring (Jason did) to his old home property as Snopes Field, even (Charles's uncle said) waylaying, ambushing Mr Snopes himself now and then on the street when there was an audience, to ask about the progress of the project; this after even the ones who didn't know what an airfield really was, had realised there would not be one here since the government had already designated the flatter prairie land to the east near Columbus, and the perfectly flat Delta land to the west near Greenville, as the only acceptable terrain for flight training.

Because then Jason began to commiserate with Mr Snopes in reverse, by delivering long public tirades on the government's stupidity; that Mr Snopes in fact was ahead of his time but that inevitably, in the course of time as the war continued and we all had to tighten our belts still further, the Snopes concept of a flying field composed of hills would be recognised as the only practical one and would become known throughout the world as the Snopes Airport Plan, since under it runways that used to have to be a mile long could be condensed into half that distance, since by simply bulldozing away the hill beneath it both sides of the runway could be used for each takeoff and landing, like a fly on a playing card wedged in a crack.

Or maybe Jason was whistling in the dark, Gavin said, saying No in terror to terrified realisation, already too late. Because Jason was shrewd in his way, having had to practise shrewdness pretty well to have got where he now was without any outside help and not much of a stake either.

That maybe as soon as he signed the deed and before he even cashed the cheque, it may have occurred to him that Flem Snopes had practised shrewdness pretty well too, to be president of a bank now from even less of a stake than he, Jason, who at least had had a house and some land where Flem's had been only a wife. That Jason may have divined, as through some prescience bequeathed him by their mutual master, the Devil, that Flem Snopes didn't want and didn't intend to have a flying field on that property.

That it was only Jason Compson who assumed that that by-product of war would go on forever which condemned and compelled real estate to the production and expansion of airplanes and tanks and cannon, but that Flem Snopes knew better. Flem Snopes knew that the airplanes and tanks and guns were self-consuming in their own nihilism and inherent obsolescence, and that the true by-product of the war which was self-perpetuating and -compounding and would prevail and continue to self-compound into perpetuity, was the children, the birth rate, the space on which to build walls to house it from weather and temperature and contain its accumulating junk.

Too late. Because now Snopes owned it and all he had to do was just to sit still and wait while the war wore itself out. Since whether America, Jefferson, won it or lost it wouldn't matter; in either case population would compound and government or somebody would have to house it, and the houses would have to stand on something somewhere — a plot of land extending a quarter of a mile in both directions except for a little holding in one corner owned by a crotchety old man named Meadowfill, whom Flem Snopes would take care of in ten or fifteen minutes as soon as he got around to needing it, which even before Pearl Harbour had already begun to be by-passed and surrounded and enclosed by the town.

So what Jason did next didn't surprise anyone; Charles's uncle said the only surprising thing was why Jason chose him, Gavin Stevens, to try to bribe either to find a flaw in the title he had conveyed to Mr Snopes; or if he, Stevens, couldn't find one, to invent one into it. His uncle said Jason answered that one himself: "Hell, ain't you supposed to be the

best-educated lawyer in this section? Not only Harvard but that German place too?"

"That is, if Harvard can't trick your property back from Flem Snopes, Heidelberg should," his uncle said. "Get out of here, Jason."

"That's right," Jason said. "You can afford virtue, now that you have married money, can't you?"

"I said get out of here, Jason," his uncle said.

"Okay, okay," Jason said. "I can probably find a lawyer somewhere that ain't got enough money in Flem Snopes's bank to be afraid of him."

Except that Jason Compson shouldn't have needed anybody to tell him that Flem Snopes wasn't going to buy a title from anybody capable of having a flaw in it, or anything else in it to make it vulnerable. But Jason continued to try; Charles's uncle told him about it: Jason going about the business of trying to find some way, any way to overturn or even just shake Snopes's title, with a kind of coldly seething indefatigable outrage like that of a revivalist who finds that another preacher has stepped in behind his back and converted the client or patient he had been working on all summer, or a liar or a thief who has been tricked or robbed by another liar or thief.

But he failed each time: Snopes's title to the entire old Compson place stood, so that even Jason gave up at last; and that same week the same Wat Snopes who had transformed the old De Spain house into Flem's antebellum mansion twenty years ago, came in again and converted the Compson carriage house (it was detached from the main house so Benjy had failed to burn it) into a small two-storey residence, and a month later the new Jefferson Snopes, Orestes, was living in it.

And not merely as Flem Snopes's agent in actual occupation against whatever machinations Jason might still discover or invent. Because by summer Res had fenced up the adjacent ground into lots and was now engaged in the business of buying and selling scrubby cattle and hogs. Also, by that time he was engaged in an active kind of guerrilla feud

with old man Meadowfill, whose orchard boundary was Res Snopes's hog-lot fence.

Even before the war old Meadowfill had a reputation in Jefferson: he was so mean as to be solvent and retired even from the savings on a sawmill. He had been active as a mill owner and timber dealer for a year or so after he bought his little corner of the Compson place and built his little unwired un-plumbing-ed house, until he sold his mill and retired into the house with his grey drudge of a wife and their one child; where, since it was obvious to anyone that a man retiring still alive and with all his limbs from a sawmill could not possibly possess one extra dollar for anyone to borrow or sell him anything for, he could devote his full time to gaining and holding the top name for curmudgeonry in all Jefferson and probably all Yoknapatawpha County too.

Charles remembered the daughter — a quiet modest mousy girl nobody even looked at twice until suddenly in 1942 she graduated not only valedictorian of her high school class but with the highest grades ever made in it, plus a five-hundred-dollar scholarship offered by the president of the Bank of Jefferson (not Snopes's bank: the other one) as a memorial to his only son, a navy pilot who had been killed in one of the first Pacific battles. She refused the scholarship.

She went to Mr Holland and told him she had already taken a job with the telephone company and wouldn't need the scholarship but instead she wanted to borrow five hundred dollars from the bank against her future salary, and, pressed, finally divulged the reason for it: to put a bathroom in her home; how once a week, on Saturday night, winter and summer, the mother would heat water on the kitchen stove and fill a round galvanised washtub in the middle of the floor, in which single filling all three of them bathed in turn: the father, then the child, then last of all the mother: at which point Mr Holland himself took over, had the bathroom installed despite old Meadowfill's outraged fury (he didn't intend to have his house meddled with at all by outsiders and strangers but if it was he wanted the cash money instead) and gave Essie a job for life in his bank.

Whereupon, now that the only child was not only secure but was actually contributing to the family budget, old Meadowfill soared to heights of outrageousness of which even he hadn't dreamed. Up to this time he had done the grocery shopping himself, walking to town each morning with an empty jute feed sack, to haggle in the small dingy back- and side-street stores which catered mostly to Negroes, for wilted and damaged leftovers of food which even Negroes would have scorned.

The rest of the day he would spend, not lurking exactly but certainly in wait, ambushed, about his yard to shout and curse at the stray dogs which crossed his unfenced property, and the small boys who had a game of raiding the few sorry untended fruit trees which he called his orchard. Now he stopped that.

He waited exactly one year, as though to be really sure Essie had her job for good. Then on the morning following the death of a paralytic old lady neighbour, he went and bought from the family the wheel chair she had inhabited for years, not even waiting until the funeral had left the house, and pushed the chair home along the street for his last appearance on it, and retired into the chair. Not completely at first. Although Charles's uncle said that Essie now did the daily shopping, Meadowfill could still be seen in the yard, still snarling and cursing at the small boys or throwing rocks (he kept a small pile handy, like the cannon balls of a war memorial) at the stray dogs.

But he never left his own premises any more and presently he seemed to have retired permanently into the wheel chair, sitting in it like it was a rocking chair in a window which looked out over the vegetable patch he no longer worked at all now, and the scraggy fruit trees he had always been either too stingy or too perverse to spray and tend enough to produce even an edible crop, let alone a saleable one.

Then Flem Snopes let Jason Compson overreach himself out of his ancestral acres, and Res Snopes built a hog lot along the boundary of old Meadowfill's orchard and made a new man of old Meadowfill.

Because the trespassing of little boys merely broke a limb now and then, and stray dogs merely dug up flower beds if he had had flower beds. But one rooting hog could foul and sour and make sterile the very dirt itself. So now Meadowfill had a reason for staying alive. He even abandoned the wheel chair temporarily, it would have been in his way now, spending all day while Res and a hired Negro built the wire fence along his boundary, watching the digging of every post hole and the setting and tamping of the post, grasping the post in both hands to shake and test it, on the verge of apoplexy, a little mad by this time, shouting at Snopes and his helper as they stretched the wire: "Tighter! Tighter!

Hell fire, what do you figger you're doing? hanging a hammock?" until Snopes — a lean gangling man with a cast in one sardonic eye — would say,

"Now, Mr Meadowfill, don't you worry a-tall. Before I would leave a old broke-down wheel chair gentleman like you to have to climb this fence by hand, I aim to put slip bars in it that you could even get down and crawl under when you don't feel like opening them," with Meadowfill almost past speech now, saying,

"If ara one of them hogs — if jest ara durn one of them hogs—" and Snopes:

"Then all you got to do is jest ketch it and shut it up in your kitchen or bedroom or any other handy place and the pound law will make me pay you a dollar for it. In fact, that might even be good easy work for a retired wheel chair old gentleman—"

By which time Meadowfill would be in such a state that Snopes would call toward the kitchen, from the window or door of which by this time the grey wife would be watching or anyway hovering: "Maybe you better come and git him away from here."

Which she would do — until the next day. But at last the fence was finished. Or at least Snopes was no longer where Meadowfill could curse at him: only the hogs rooting and rubbing along the new fence which did hold them, or anyway so far. But only so far, only up to the moment it got too dark to see the orchard last night.

So now he had something to stay alive for, to get up in the morning for, hurry out of bed and across to the window as soon as darkness thinned, to see if perhaps darkness itself hadn't betrayed him in which he couldn't have seen a hog in his orchard even if he had been able to stay awake twenty-four hours a day watching for it; to get into his chair and wheel himself across to the window and see his orchard for one more night anyway unravished; for one more night at least he had been spared. Then to begrudge the very time he would have to spend at table eating, since this would leave the orchard unguarded, unwatched of course he meant.

Because, as Charles's uncle said, Meadowfill wasn't worrying at all about what he would do next when he did look out the window and actually see a hog on his property — an old bastard who, as Charles himself remembered, had already alienated all his neighbours before he committed himself to invalidism and the wheel chair, so that not one of them would have raised a hand to eject the hog for him or do anything else for him except maybe hide the body if and when his grey drab of a wife did what she should have done years ago: murdered him some night. Meadowfill hadn't thought about what to do with the hog at all. He didn't need to.

He was happy, for the first time in his life probably, Charles's Uncle Gavin said: that you are happy when your life is filled, and any life is filled when it is so busy living from moment to moment that it has no time over to remember yesterday or dread tomorrow. Which of course couldn't last, his uncle said. That in time Meadowfill would reach the point where if he didn't look out that window some morning and see a hog in his orchard, he would die of simply hope unbearably deferred; and if he did some morning look out and see one, he would surely die because he would have nothing else left.

The atom bomb saved him. Charles meant that at last the Japs quit too and now the troops could come home from all directions, back to the women they had begun to marry before the echo of the first Pearl Harbour bomb had died away, and had been marrying ever since

whenever they could get two days' leave, coming back home now either to already going families or to marry the rest of the women they hadn't got around to yet, the blood money already in the hands of the government housing loan (as his Uncle Gavin put it: "The hero who a year ago was rushing hand grenades and Garand clips up to front-line foxholes, is now rushing baskets of soiled didies out of side- and back-street Veterans Administration tenements.") and now Jason Compson was undergoing an anguish which he probably believed not only no human should suffer, but no human could really bear.

Because when Charles reached home in September of '45, Jason's old lost patrimony was already being chopped up into a subdivision of standardised Veterans' Housing matchboxes; within the week Ratliff came to the office and told him and his uncle the official name of the subdivision: Eula Acres.

Not Jason's old triumphant jeering gibe of Snopes Field, Snopes's Demolitional Jump-off, but Eula Acres, Eula's Uxorious Nestplace. And Charles didn't know whether old Flem Snopes had named it that himself or not but he would remember his uncle's face while Ratliff was telling them.

But even without that he, Charles, would still prefer to believe it was not really Flem but his builder and (the town assumed) partner Wat Snopes who thought of it, maybe because Charles still wanted to believe that there are some things, at least one thing, that even Flem Snopes wouldn't do, even if the real reason was that Flem himself never thought of naming it anything because to him it couldn't matter whether it had a name or not.

By Christmas it was already dotted over with small brightly painted pristinely new hutches as identical (and about as permanent) as squares of gingerbread or teacakes, the ex-soldier or -sailor or -marine with his ruptured duck pushing the perambulator with one hand and carrying the second (or third) infant in the other arm, waiting to get inside almost before the last painter could gather up his dropcloth.

And by New Year's a new arterial highway had been decreed and surveyed which would run the whole length of Mr Snopes's subdivision, including the corner which old Meadowfill owned; whereupon there opened before Meadowfill a prospect of excitement and entertainment beside which the mere depredations of a hog would have been as trivial as the trespass of a frog or a passing bird. Because now one of the big oil companies wanted to buy the corner where Meadowfill's lot and the old Compson (now Snopes) place joined — that is, a strip of Meadowfill's orchard, with a contiguous strip of Res Snopes's hog lot — to build a filling station on.

Because old Meadowfill didn't even own thirteen feet of the strip of his land which the oil company wanted. In fact, as the town knew, the title to none of his land vested in him. During the early second Roosevelt days he had naturally been among the first to apply for relief, learning to his outraged and incredulous amazement that a finicking and bureaucratic federal government declined absolutely and categorically to let him be a pauper and a property owner at the same time.

So he came to Gavin, choosing him from among the other Jefferson lawyers for the simple reason that he, Meadowfill, knew that in five minutes he would have Stevens so mad that very likely Stevens would refuse to accept any fee at all for drawing the deed transferring all his property to his nine-year-old (this was 1934) daughter. He was wrong only in his estimate of the time, since it required only two minutes for Stevens to reach the boil which carried him into the chancery clerk's vault, where he discovered that the deed which Jason Compson's father had executed to Meadowfill read "South to the road known as the Freedom Springs Road, thence East along said Road . . ."

The Freedom Springs road being, by the time Meadowfill bought his corner, an eroded thicket-grown ditch ten feet deep with only a footpath in it: as ponderable and inescapable a geographical condition as the Grand Canyon, since this was before the era when the bulldozer and the dragline would not only alter but efface geography.

Which was thirteen feet short of the actual survey-line boundary which Mohataha, the Chickasaw matriarch, had granted to Quentin Compson in 1821, and Charles's uncle said his first impulse was the ethical one to tell old Meadowfill how he actually owned thirteen feet more of the surface of the earth than he thought he did, provided he did something about it before somebody else did.

But if he, Stevens, did that, he would be ethically bound to accept Meadowfill's ten dollars for the title search, so he decided to let one ethic cancel the other and allow simple justice to prevail.

That was the situation when the survey line for the new highway was run to follow the old Chickasaw line, and Meadowfill discovered that his property only extended to the ditch which was thirteen feet short of it. But rage was a mild term for his condition when the oil company approached him to buy his part of the corner and he found that his mortal enemy, the hog-raising Snopes, owned the thirteen feet without a clear title to which the oil company would buy none of his, Meadowfill's, ground. There was rage in it too of course, since rage had been Meadowfill's normal condition for a year now.

But now it was triumph too. More: it was vindication, revenge. Revenge on the Compsons who had uttered a false deed to him, allowing him to buy in good faith. Revenge on the community which had badgered him for years with small boys and stray dogs, by holding up a new taxpaying industry (if he could, by stopping the new highway itself). Revenge on the man who for a year now had ruined his sleep and his digestion too by the constant threat of that hog lot.

Because he simply declined to sell any part of his property, under any conditions, to anyone: which, since his was in front of Snopes's, except for the thirteen-foot strip, would cut the oil company off from its proposed corner station as effectively as a toll gate, as a result of which the oil company declined to buy any part of Snopes's.

Of course, as the town knew, Snopes (Charles meant of course Res Snopes) had already approached Essie Meadowfill, in whose name the

deed lay, who answered, as the town knew too: "You'll have to see papa."

Because Snopes was under a really impossible handicap: his hog lot had forever interdicted him from approaching old Meadowfill in person, of having any sort of even momentary civilised contact with him. In fact, Snopes was under two insurmountable handicaps: the second one being the idea, illusion, dream that mere money could move a man who for years now had become so accustomed to not having or wanting one extra dollar, that the notion of a thousand could not even tempt him.

So Snopes misread his man. But he didn't quit trying. (That's right. A stranger might have wondered what Flem Snopes was doing all this time, who owned the land in the first place. But they in the town were not strangers.) He went to the oil company's purchasing agent and said, "Tell him if he'll sign his deed, I'll give him ten percent of what you pay me for them thirteen feet." Then he said, "All right. Fifty percent then. Half of it."

Then he said, "All right. How much will he take?" Then he said — and according to the oil company man, bland and affable and accommodating was no description for his voice: "All right. A good citizen can't stand in the way of progress, even if it does cost him money. Tell him if he will sign he can have them thirteen feet."

This time apparently Meadowfill didn't even bother to say No, sitting in his wheel chair at the window where he could look out upon the land which he wouldn't sell and the adjoining land which its owner couldn't sell because of him. So in a way, Snopes had a certain amount of local sympathy in his next move, which he made shortly before something happened to Essie Meadowfill which revealed her to be, underneath anyway, anything but mousy; and although demure might still be one word for her, the other wasn't quietness but determination.

One morning when Meadowfill wheeled his chair from the breakfast table to the window and looked out, he saw what he had been waiting

to see for over a year now: a loose hog rooting among the worthless peaches beneath his worthless and untended trees; and even as he sat bellowing for Mrs Meadowfill, Snopes himself crossed the yard with an ear of corn and a loop of rope and snared the hog by one foot and half-drove half-led it back across the yard and out of sight, old Meadowfill leaning from the chair into the open window, bellowing curses at both of them even after they had disappeared.

The next morning he was already seated at the window when he actually saw the hog come at a steady trot up the lane and into his orchard; he was still leaning in the open window bellowing and cursing when the drab wife emerged from the house, clutching a shawl about her head, and hurried up the lane to knock at Snopes's locked front door until Meadowfill's bellowing, which had never stopped, drew her back home.

By that time most of the neighbours were there watching what followed: the old man still bellowing curses from the wheel chair in the window while his wife tried single-handed to drive the hog out of the unfenced yard, when Snopes himself appeared (from where everybody knew now he had been concealed watching), innocent, apologetic and amazed, with his ear of corn and his looped plowline, and caught the hog and removed it.

Next, Meadowfill had the rifle — an aged, battered single-shot .22. That is, it looked second-hand simply by being in his possession, though nobody knew when he had left the wheel chair and the window (not to mention the hog) long enough to have hunted down the small boy owner and haggled or browbeat him out of it; the town simply could not imagine him ever having been a boy passionate and proud to own a single-shot .22 and to have kept it all these long years as a memento of that pure and innocent time.

But he had it, cartridges too — not solid bullets but loaded with tiny shot such as naturalists use: incapable of killing the hog at all and even of hurting it much at this distance. In fact, Charles's uncle said

Meadowfill didn't even really want to drive the hog away: he simply wanted to shoot it every day as other people play croquet or bingo.

He would rush straight from the breakfast table, to crouch in his wheeled ambush at the window until the hog appeared. Then (he would have to rise from the chair to do this) he would stand up and slowly and quietly raise the window sash and the screen (he kept the grooves of both greased for speed and silence, and had equipped both of them with handles at the bottom so that he could raise either one with a single jerk) and deliver the shot, the hog giving its convulsive start and leap, until, forgetting, it would settle down again and receive the next shot, until at last its dim processes would connect the sting with the report and after the next shot it would go home, to return no more until tomorrow morning.

Until finally it even connected the scattered peaches themselves with the general inimicality and for a whole week it didn't return at all; then the neighbourhood legend rose that Meadowfill had contracted with the boy who delivered the Memphis and Jackson papers (he didn't take a paper himself, not being interested in any news which cost a dollar a month) to scavenge the neighbourhood garbage cans and bait his orchard at night.

Now the town wondered more than ever just exactly what Snopes could be up to. That is, Snopes would naturally be expected to keep the hog at home after the first time old Meadowfill shot it. Or even sell it, which was Snopes's profession or trade, though probably no one would give the full market price per pound for a hog containing fourteen or fifteen months of Number Ten lead shot.

Until finally Charles's uncle said they divined Snopes's intention: his hope that someday, by either error or mistake or maybe simple rage, swept beyond all check of morality or fear of consequences by his vice like a drunkard or gambler, Meadowfill would put a solid bullet in the gun; whereupon Snopes would not merely sue him for killing the hog, he would invoke the town ordinance against firing guns inside the city limits, and between the two of them somehow blackmail Meadowfill

into making his, Snopes's, lot available to the oil company. Then the thing happened to Essie Meadowfill.

It was a Marine corporal. The town never did know how or where Essie managed to meet him. She had never been anywhere except occasionally for the day in Memphis, like everybody in north Mississippi went at least once a year. She had never missed a day from the bank except her summer vacations, which as far as anybody knew, she spent carrying her share of the burden of the wheel chair's occupation.

Yet she met him, maybe through a lovelorn correspondence agency. Anyway, still carrying the parcels of the day's marketing, she was waiting at the station when the Memphis bus came in and he got out of it, whom Jefferson had never seen before, he carrying the grocery bag now along the street where Essie was now an hour late (people used to set their watches by her passing).

And the town realised that "mousy" had been the wrong word for her for years evidently since obviously no girl deserving the word "mousy" could have bloomed that much, got that round and tender and girl-looking just in the brief time since the bus came up.

And "quiet" was going to be the wrong word too; she was going to need the determination whether her Marine knew it yet or not, the two of them walking into the house and up to the wheel chair, into the point-blank range of that rage compared to which the cursing of small boys and throwing rocks at dogs and even shooting live ammunition at Snopes's hog was mere reflex hysteria, since this trespasser threatened the very system of peonage by which Meadowfill lived, and saying, "Papa, this is McKinley Smith. We're going to be married."

Then walking back out to the street with him five minutes later and there, in full view of whoever wanted to look, kissing him — maybe not the first time she ever kissed him but probably the first time she ever kissed anyone without bothering (more, caring) whether or not it was a sin. And evidently McKinley had some determination too: son of an east Texas tenant farmer, who probably had barely heard of Mississippi until

he met Essie wherever and however that was; who, once he realised that, because of the wheel chair and the grey mother, Essie was not going to cut away from her family and marry him regardless, should have given up and gone back to Texas by the next bus.

Or maybe what they had was a single determination held in collaboration, like they seemed to own everything else in common. They were indeed doomed and fated, whether they were star-crossed too or not. Because they even acted alike. It was obvious at once that he had cast his lot for keeps in Jefferson.

Since for some time now (this was January 1946, Charles was home now and saw the rest of it himself) the United States had been full of ex-G.I.s going to school whether they were fitted for it or not or even really wanted to go, the obvious thing would be for him to enter the vocational school which had just been added to the Jefferson Academy, where at government expense he could hold her hand at least once every day while they waited for simple meanness finally to kill off old Meadowfill.

But Essie's Marine dismissed higher education as immediately and firmly as Essie had, and for the same reason. He explained it: "I was a soldier for two years. The only thing I learned in that time was, the only place you can be safe in is a private hole, preferably with a iron lid you can pull down on top of you. I aim to own me a hole. Only I ain't a soldier now and so I can pick where I want it, and even make it comfortable. I'm going to build a house."

He bought a small lot. In Eula Acres of course. And Essie selected it of course. It was not even very far from where she had lived most of her life; in fact, after the house began to go up, Meadowfill (he had to unless he gave the hog up and went back to bed) could sit right there in his window and watch every plank of its daily advancement: a constant reminder and warning that he dared not make the mistake of dying. Which at least was a valid reason for sitting in the wheel chair at the window, since he no longer had the hog. It anyway had given up — or

anyway for the time being. Or Snopes had given up — for the time being.

The hog had made its last sortie about the same day that Essie brought her Marine to the house for that first interview, and had not appeared in the orchard since. Snopes still owned it, or plenty of others (by the wind from that direction), or — since that was his business — he could have replaced it whenever he decided the time was right again. But for now at least he had desisted, patched his fence or (as the neighbours believed) simply stopped leaving the gate unfastened on what he considered strategic days. So now all old Meadowfill had to watch was the house.

McKinley built it himself, doing all the rough heavy work, with one professional carpenter to mark off the planks for him to saw, with the seething old man ambushed in the wheel chair behind the window without even the hog any more to vent his rage on. Obviously, as well as from habit, Meadowfill would have to keep the loaded rifle at hand. He could have no way whatever of knowing the hog would not come back; and now the town began to speculate on just how long it would be, how much he would be able to stand, before he fired the rifle at one of them — McKinley or the carpenter.

Presently it would have to be the carpenter unless Meadowfill took to jack-lighting, because one day (it was spring now) McKinley had a mule too and the town learned that he had rented a small piece of land two miles from town and was making a cotton crop on it. The house was about finished now, down to the millwork and trim which only the expert carpenter could do, so McKinley would depart on the mule each morning at sunrise, to be gone until nightfall.

Which was when old Meadowfill probably touched the absolute of rage and impotence: McKinley might yet have been harried or frightened into selling his unfinished house and lot at any moment, possibly even for a profit. But no man in his senses would buy a cotton crop that hadn't even sprouted yet. Nothing could help him now but death — his own or McKinley's.

Then the hog came back. It simply reappeared; probably one morning Meadowfill wheeled himself from the breakfast table to the window, expecting to face nothing save one more day of static outrage, when there was the hog again, rooting for the ghosts of last year's peaches as though it had never been away.

In fact, maybe that's what Meadowfill wanted to believe at that moment: that the hog had never been away at all and so all that had happened since to outrage him had been only a dream, and even the dream to be exorcised away by the next shot he would deliver. Which was immediately; evidently he had kept the loaded rifle at his hand all the time; some of the neighbours said they heard the vicious juvenile spat while they were still in bed.

The sound of it had spread over the rest of town by noon, though Charles's Uncle Gavin was one of the few who actually felt the repercussion. He was just leaving the office to go home to dinner when he heard the feet on the stairs. Then Res Snopes entered, the five-dollar bill already in his hand. He laid it on the desk and said, "Good-morning, Lawyer.

I won't keep you long. I jest want a little advice — about five dollars' worth." Stevens didn't touch the bill yet: just looking from it to its owner who had never been known to pay five dollars for anything he didn't already know he could sell for at least twenty-five cents profit: "It's that hawg of mine that old gentleman — Mister Meadowfill — likes to shoot with them little bird shot."

"I heard about it," his uncle said. "Just what do you want for your five dollars?" Charles uncle told it: Snopes standing beyond the desk, not secret: just polite and inscrutable. "For telling you what you already know? that once you sue him for injuring your hog, he will invoke the law against livestock running loose inside the city limits? For telling you what you already knew over a year ago when he fired the first shot at it? Either fix the fence or get rid of the hog."

“It costs a right smart to feed a hawg,” Snopes said. “As for getting rid of it, that old gentleman has done shot it so much now, I doubt wouldn’t nobody buy it.”

“Then eat it,” Stevens said.

“A whole hawg, for jest one man? Let alone with going on two years of bird shot in it?”

“Then give it away,” Stevens said, and tried to stop himself but it was too late.

“That’s your legal lawyer’s advice then,” Snopes said. “Give the hawg away. Much obliged,” he said, already turning.

“Here,” Stevens said, “wait;” holding out the bill.

“I come to you for legal lawyer’s advice,” Snopes said. “You give it to me: give the hawg away. I owe the fee for it. If five dollars ain’t enough, say so.” Then he was gone. Stevens was thinking fast now, not Why did he choose me? because that was obvious: he had drawn Essie Meadowfill’s deed to the property under dispute; he was the only person in Jefferson outside Meadowfill’s family with whom old Meadowfill had had anything resembling human contact in almost twenty years.

Nor even Why did Snopes need to notify any outsider, lawyer or not, that he intended to give that hog away? Nor even Why did he lead me into saying the actual words first myself, technically constituting them paid-for legal advice? Instead, what Stevens thought was How, by giving that hog away, is he going to compel old Meadowfill to sell that lot?

His Uncle Gavin always said he was not really interested in truth nor even justice: that all he wanted was just to know, to find out, whether the answer was any of his business or not; and that all means to that end were valid, provided he left neither hostile witnesses nor incriminating evidence. Charles didn’t believe him; some of his methods were not only too hard, they took too long; and there are some things you simply do not do even to find out. But his uncle said that Charles

was wrong: that curiosity is another of the mistresses whose slaves decline no sacrifice.

The trouble in this case was, his uncle didn't know what he was looking for. He had two methods — inquiry and observation — and three leads — Snopes, the hog and Meadowfill — to discover what he might not recognise in time even when he found it. He couldn't use inquiry, because the only one who might know the answer — Snopes — had already told all he intended for anyone to know. And he couldn't use observation on the hog because, like Snopes, it could move too.

Which left only the one immobile: old Meadowfill. So he picked Charles up the next morning and at daylight they were ambushed also in his uncle's parked car where they could see the Meadowfill house and orchard and the lane leading to Snopes's house and, as the other point of the triangle, the little new house which McKinley Smith had almost finished. They sat there for two hours. They watched McKinley depart on his mule for his cotton patch. Then Snopes himself came out of his yard into the lane and went on toward town, the Square. Presently it was time for even Essie Meadowfill to go to work. Then there remained only old Meadowfill ambushed behind his window. Only the hog was missing.

"If that's what we're waiting for," Charles said.

"I agree," his uncle said.

"I mean, to distract the eyes that have probably been watching us for the last two hours long enough for us to get away."

"I didn't want to come either," his uncle said. "But I had to or give that five dollars back."

And the next morning was the same. By then it was too late to quit; they both had too much invested now, not even counting Snopes's five dollars: two days of getting up before dawn, to sit for two hours in the parked car without even a cup of coffee, waiting for what they were not even sure they would recognise when they saw it.

It was the third morning; McKinley and his mule had departed on schedule: so regular and normal that he and his uncle didn't even realise they had not seen Snopes yet until Essie Meadowfill herself came out of the house on her way to work. To Charles it was like one of those shocks, starts such as when you find yourself waking up without knowing until then you were asleep; his uncle was already getting out of the car to begin to run when they saw the hog.

That is, it was the hog and it was doing exactly what they expected it to do: moving toward Meadowfill's orchard at that twinkling purposeful porcine trot. Only it was not where it should have been when it first became visible.

It was going where they expected it to be going, but it was not coming from where it should have been coming from. It was coming not from the direction of Snopes's house but from that of McKinley Smith's. His uncle was already running, possibly from what Ratliff called his uncle's simple instinct or affinity for being where something was going to happen, even if he wasn't always quite on time, hurrying — Charles too of course — across the street and the little yard and into the house before old Meadowfill would see the hog through the window and make the shot.

His uncle didn't knock; they entered running, his uncle choosing by simple orientation the door beyond which old Meadowfill would have to be to use that particular window, and he was there, leaning forward in the wheel chair at the window, the glass sash of which was already raised though the screen was still down, the little rifle already half raised in one hand, the other hand grasping the handle to the screen to jerk it up. But he — Meadowfill — was just sitting there yet, looking at the hog. The town had got used to seeing meanness and vindictiveness and rage in his face; they were normal. But this time there was nothing in his face but gloating. He didn't even turn his head when Charles and his uncle entered: he just said, "Come right in; you got a grandstand seat." Now they could hear him cursing: not hard honest outdoors swearing but the quiet murmuring indoors obscenity which, Charles thought, if he ever had used it, his grey hairs should have forgot it now.

Then he began to stand up from the wheel chair and then Charles saw it too — a smallish lump a little longer than a brick, wrapped in a piece of gunny sack, bound in a crotch of the nearest peach tree about twenty feet from the house so that it pointed at the window, his uncle saying, “Stop! Stop! Don’t raise it!” and even reaching for the screen, but too late; old Meadowfill, standing now, leaned the rifle beside the window and put both hands on the handle and jerked the screen up.

Then the light sharp vicious spat of the .22 cartridge from the peach tree; his uncle said he was actually looking at the rising screen when the wire frayed and vanished before the miniature blast; Charles himself seemed actually to hear the tiny pellets hiss across old Meadowfill’s belly and chest as the old man half-leaped half-fell backward into the chair which rushed from under him, leaving him asprawl on the floor, where he lay for a moment with on his face an expression of incredulous outrage: not pain, not anguish, fright: just outrage, already reaching for the rifle as he sat up.

“Somebody shot me!” he said.

“Certainly,” his uncle said, taking the rifle away from him. “That hog did. Can you blame it? Just lie still now until we can see.”

“Hog, hell,” old Meadowfill said. “It was that blank blank blank McKinley Smith!”

He wasn’t hurt: just burned, blistered, the tiny shot which had had to penetrate not only his pants and shirt but his winter underwear too, barely under his skin. But mad as a hornet, raging, bellowing and cursing and still trying to take the rifle away from Charles’s uncle (Mrs Meadowfill was in the room now, the shawl already clutched about her head as if some fatalistic hopeless telepathy communicated to her the instant the hog crossed their unfenced boundary, like the electric eye that opens doors) until at last he exhausted himself into what would pass with him for rationality. Then he told it: how Snopes had told Essie two days ago that he had given the hog to McKinley as a housewarming present or maybe even — Snopes hoped — a wedding gift some day soon, with Charles’s uncle saying, “Hold on a minute. Did Essie say Mr

Snopes gave the hog to McKinley, or did she say Mr Snopes told her he had?"

"What?" Meadowfill said. "What?" Then he just began to curse again. "Lie still," Charles's uncle said. "You've been shooting that hog for over a year now without hurting it so I reckon you can stand one shot yourself. But we'll have a doctor on your wife's account."

His uncle had the gun too: a very neat home-made booby trap: a cheap single-shot .22 also, sawed-off barrel and stock and fastened to a board, the whole thing wrapped in the piece of feed sack and bound in the crotch of the tree, a black strong small-gauge length of reel-backing running from the trigger through a series of screw eyes to the sash of the window screen, the muzzle trained at the centre of the window about a foot above the sill.

"If he hadn't stood up before he raised that screen, the charge would have hit him square in the face," Charles said.

"So what?" his uncle said. "Do you think who put it there cared? Whether it merely frightened and enraged him into rushing at Smith with that rifle" — it had a solid bullet in it this time, the big one: the long rifle; this time old Meadowfill aimed to hurt what he shot— "and compelling Smith to kill him in self-defence, or whether the shot blinded him or killed him right there in his wheel chair and so solved the whole thing? Her father dead and her sweetheart in jail for murdering him, and only Essie to need to deal with?"

"It was pretty smart," Charles said.

"It was worse. It was bad. Nobody would ever have believed anyone except a Pacific veteran would have invented a booby trap, no matter how much he denied it."

"It was still smart," Charles said. "Even Smith will agree."

"Yes," his uncle said. "That's why I wanted you along. You were a soldier too. I may need an interpreter to talk to him."

"I was just a major," Charles said. "I never had enough rank to tell anything to any sergeant, let alone a Marine one."

"He was just a corporal," his uncle said.

"He was still a Marine," Charles said.

Only they didn't go to Smith first; he would be in his cotton patch now anyway. And, Charles told himself, if Snopes had been him, there wouldn't be anybody in Snopes's house either. But there was. Snopes opened the door himself; he was wearing an apron and carrying a frying pan; there was even a fried egg in it. But there wasn't anything in his face at all. "Gentle-men," he said. "Come in."

"No thanks," Charles's uncle said. "It won't take that long. This is yours, I think." There was a table; his uncle laid the sack-wrapped bundle on it and flipped the edge of the sacking, the mutilated rifle sliding across the table. And still there was nothing whatever in Snopes's face or voice:

"That-ere is what you lawyers call debateable, ain't it?"

"Oh yes," Charles's uncle said. "Everybody knows about fingerprints now, just as they do about booby traps."

"Yes," Snopes said. "Likely you ain't making me a present of it."

"That's right," his uncle said. "I'm selling it to you. For a deed to Essie Meadowfill for that strip of your lot the oil company wants to buy, plus that thirteen feet that Mr Meadowfill thought he owned." And now indeed Snopes didn't move, immobile with the cold egg in the frying pan. "That's right," his uncle said. "In that case, I'll see if McKinley Smith wants to buy it."

Snopes looked at his uncle a moment. He was smart; you would have to give him that, Charles thought. "I reckon you would," he said. "Likely that's what I would do myself."

"That's what I thought," his uncle said.

"I reckon I'll have to go and see Cousin Flem," Snopes said.

"I reckon not," his uncle said. "I just came from the bank."

"I reckon I would have done that myself too," Snopes said. "What time will you be in your office?"

And he and his uncle could have met Smith at his house at sundown too. Instead, it was not even noon when Charles and his uncle stood at the fence and watched McKinley and the mule come up the long black shear of turning earth like the immobilised wake of the plough's mould board. Then he was standing across the fence from them, naked from the waist up in his overalls and combat boots. Charles's uncle handed him the deed. "Here," his uncle said.

Smith read it. "This is Essie's."

"Then marry her," his uncle said. "Then you can sell the lot and buy a farm. Ain't that what you both want? Haven't you got a shirt or a jumper here with you? Get it and you can ride back with me; the major here will bring the mule."

"No," Smith said; he was already shoving, actually ramming the deed into his pocket as he turned back to the mule. "I'll bring him in. I'm going home first. I ain't going to marry nobody without a necktie and a shave."

Then they had to wait for the Baptist minister to wash his hands and put on his coat and necktie; Mrs Meadowfill was already wearing the first hat anybody had ever seen on her; it looked a good deal like the first hat anybody ever made. "But papa," Essie said.

"Oh," Charles's uncle said. "You mean that wheel chair. It belongs to me now. It was a legal fee. I'm going to give it to you and McKinley for a christening present as soon as you earn it."

Then it was two days later, in the office.

"You see?" his uncle said. "It's hopeless. Even when you get rid of one Snopes, there's already another one behind you even before you can turn around."

“That’s right,” Ratliff said serenely. “As soon as you look, you see right away it ain’t nothing but jest another Snopes.”

Fifteen

LINDA KOHL WAS already home too when Charles got back. From her war also: the Pascagoula shipyard where she finally had her way and became a riveter; his Uncle Gavin told him, a good one. At least her hands, fingernails, showed it: not bitten, gnawed down, but worn off. And now she had a fine, a really splendid dramatic white streak in her hair running along the top of her skull almost like a plume. A collapsed plume; in fact, maybe that was what it was, he thought: a collapsed plume lying flat athwart her skull instead of cresting upward first then back and over; it was the fall of 1945 now and the knight had run out of tourneys and dragons, the war itself had slain them, used them up, made them obsolete.

In fact Charles thought how all the domestic American knights-errant liberal reformers would be out of work now, with even the little heretofore lost places like Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, fertilised to overflowing not only with ex-soldiers’ blood money but with the two or three or four dollars per hour which had been forced on the other ex-riveters and -bricklayers and -machinists like Linda Kohl Snopes, he meant Linda Snopes Kohl, so fast that they hadn’t had time to spend it. Even the two Finn communists, even the one that still couldn’t speak English, had got rich during the war and had had to become capitalists and bull-market investors simply because they had not yet acquired any private place large enough to put that much money down while they turned their backs on it. And as for the Negroes, by now they had a newer and better high school building in Jefferson than the white folks had.

Plus an instalment-plan automobile and radio and refrigerator full of canned beer down-paid with the blood money which at least drew no colour line in every unwired unscreened plumbingless cabin: double-plus the new social-revolution laws which had abolished not merely hunger and inequality and injustice, but work too by substituting for it a

new self-compounding vocation or profession for which you would need no schooling at all: the simple production of children.

So there was nothing for Linda to tilt against now in Jefferson. Come to think of it, there was nothing for her to tilt against anywhere now, since the Russians had fixed the Germans and even they didn't need her any more. In fact, come to think of it, there was really nothing for her in Jefferson at all any more, now that his Uncle Gavin was married — if she had ever wanted him for herself.

Because maybe Ratliff was right and whatever she had ever wanted of him, it wasn't a husband. So in fact you would almost have to wonder why she stayed in Jefferson at all now, with nothing to do all day long but wait, pass the time somehow until night and sleep came, in that Snopes-colonial mausoleum with that old son of a bitch that needed a daughter or anybody else about as much as he needed a spare bow tie or another hat. So maybe everybody was right this time and she wasn't going to stay in Jefferson much longer, after all.

But she was here now, with her nails, his uncle said, not worn down from smithing but scraped down to get them clean (and whether his uncle added it or not: feminine) again, with no more ships to rivet, and that really dramatic white plume collapsed in gallantry across her skull, with all the dragons dead. Only, even blacksmithing hadn't been enough. What he meant was, she wasn't any older. No, that wasn't what he meant not just older.

Something had happened to him during the three-plus years between December '41 and April '45 or at least he hoped it had or at least what had seemed suffering and enduring to him at least met the standards of suffering and enduring enough to enrich his spiritual and moral development whether it did anything for the human race or not, and if it had purified his soul it must show on his outside too or at least he hoped it did. But she hadn't changed at all, least of all the white streak in her hair which it seemed that some women did deliberately to themselves. When he finally — All right, finally. So what if he did spend the better part of his first three days at home at least hoping he didn't

look like he was hanging around the Square in case she did cross it or enter it.

There were towns bigger than Jefferson that didn't have a girl — woman — in it that the second you saw her eight years ago getting out of an airplane you were already wondering what she would look like with her clothes off except that she was too old for you, the wrong type for you, except that that was exactly backward, you were too young for her, the wrong type for her and so only your uncle that you had even spent some of the ten months in the Nazi stalag wondering if he ever got them off before he got married to Aunt Melisandre or maybe even after and if he didn't, what happened, what was wrong. Because his uncle would never tell him himself whether he ever did or not but maybe after three years and a bit he could tell by looking at her, that maybe a woman really couldn't hide that from another man who was . . . call it simpatico.

Except that when he finally saw her on the street on the third day there was nothing at all, she had not changed at all, except for the white streak which didn't count anyway — the same one that on that day eight years ago when he and his uncle had driven up to the Memphis airport to get her, was at that first look a little too tall and a little too thin for his type so that in that same second he was saying Well that's one anyway that won't have to take her clothes off on my account and then almost before he could get it out, something else was already saying Okay, buster, who suggested she was going to? and he had been right: not her for him, but rather not him for her: a lot more might still happen to him in his life yet (he hoped), but removing that particular skirt wouldn't be one even if when you got the clothes off the too tall too thin ones sometimes they surprised you.

And just as well; evidently his soul or whatever it was had improved some in the three years and a bit; anyway he knew now that if such had been his fate to get this particular one off, what would happen to him might, probably would, have several names but none of them would be surprise.

With no more ships to rivet now, and what was worse: no need any more for ships to rivet. So not just he, Charles, but all the town in time sooner or later would see her — or be told about it by the ones who had — walking, striding, most of the time dressed in what they presumed was the same army-surplus khaki she had probably riveted the ships in, through the back streets and alleys of the town or the highways and lanes and farm roads and even the fields and woods themselves within two or three miles of town, alone, walking not fast so much as just hard, as if she were walking off insomnia or perhaps even a hangover. “Maybe that’s what it is,” Charles said. Again his uncle looked up, a little impatiently, from the brief.

“What?” he said.

“You said maybe she has insomnia. Maybe it’s hangover she’s walking off.”

“Oh,” his uncle said. “All right.” He went back to the brief. Charles watched him.

“Why don’t you walk with her?” he said.

This time his uncle didn’t look up. “Why don’t you? Two ex-soldiers, you could talk about war.”

“She couldn’t hear me. I wouldn’t have time to write on a pad while we were walking.”

“That’s what I mean,” his uncle said. “My experience has been that the last thing two ex-soldiers under fifty years old want to talk about is war. You two even can’t.”

“Oh,” he said. His uncle read the brief. “Maybe you’re right,” he said.

His uncle read the brief. “Is it all right with you if I try to lay her?” His uncle didn’t move. Then he closed the brief and sat back in the chair.

“Certainly,” he said.

“So you think I can’t,” Charles said.

“I know you can’t,” his uncle said. He added quickly: “Don’t grieve; it’s not you. Just despair if you like. It’s not anybody.”

“So you know why,” Charles said.

“Yes,” his uncle said.

“But you’re not going to tell me.”

“I want you to see for yourself. You will probably never have the chance again. You read and hear and see about it in all the books and pictures and music, in Harvard and Heidelberg both. But you are afraid to believe it until you actually see it face to face, because you might be wrong and you couldn’t bear that, and be happy. What you can’t bear is to doubt it.”

“I never got to Heidelberg,” Charles said. “All I had was Harvard and Stalag umpty-nine.”

“All right,” his uncle said. “The high school and the Jefferson Academy then.”

Anyway he, Charles, knew the answer now. He said so. “Oh, that. Even little children know all that nowadays. She’s frigid.”

“Well, that’s as good a Freudian term as another to cover chastity or discretion,” his uncle said. “Beat it now. I’m busy. Your mother invited me to dinner so I’ll see you at noon.”

So it was more than that, and his uncle was not going to tell him. And his uncle had used the word “discretion” also to cover something he had not said. Though Charles at least knew what that was because he knew his uncle well enough to know that the discretion applied not to Linda but to him. If he had never been a soldier himself, he would not have bothered, let alone waited, to ask his uncle’s leave: he would probably already have waylaid her at some suitable secluded spot in the woods on one of her walks, on the innocent assumption of those who have never been in a war that she, having come through one, had been wondering for days now what in hell was wrong with Jefferson, why he or any other personable male had wasted all this time.

Because he knew now why young people rushed so eagerly to war was their belief that it was one endless presanctioned opportunity for unlicensed rapine and pillage; that the tragedy of war was that you brought nothing away from it but only left something valuable there; that you carried into war things which, except for the war, you could

have lived out your life in peace with without ever having to know they were inside you.

So it would not be him. He had been a soldier too even if he had brought back no wound to prove it. So if it would take physical assault on her to learn what his uncle said he didn't know existed, he would never know it; he would just have to make one more in the town who believed she was simply walking off one hangover to be ready for the next one, having evidence to go on, or at least a symptom. Which was that once a week, Wednesday or Thursday afternoon (the town could set its watches and calendars by this too), she would be waiting at the wheel of her father's car outside the bank when it closed and her father came out and they would drive up to what Jakeleg Wattman euphemiously called his fishing camp at Wyott's Crossing, and lay in her next week's supply of bootleg whiskey.

Not her car: her father's car. She could have owned a covey of automobiles out of that fund his uncle was trustee of from her grandfather, old Will Varner rich out at Frenchman's Bend, or maybe from Varner and her father together as a part of or maybe a result of that old uproar and scandal twenty years ago when her mother had committed suicide and the mother's presumed lover had abandoned the bank and his ancestral home both to her father, not to mention the sculptor she married being a New York Jew and hence (as the town was convinced) rich.

And driven it — them — too, even stone deaf, who could have afforded to hire somebody to sit beside her and do nothing else but listen. Only she didn't. Evidently she preferred walking, sweating out the hard way the insomnia or hangover or whatever the desperate price she paid for celibacy — unless of course Lawyer Gavin Stevens had been a slicker and smoother operator for the last eight years than anybody suspected; though even he had a wife now.

And her supply: not her father's. Because the town, the county, knew that too: Snopes himself never drank, never touched it. Yet he would never let his daughter make the trip alone. Some were satisfied with

the simple explanation that Wattman, like everybody else nowadays, was making so much money that he would have to leave some of it somewhere, and Snopes, a banker, figured it might as well be in his bank and so he called on Jakeleg once a week exactly as he would and did look in socially on any other merchant or farmer or cotton ginner of the bank's profitable customers or clients.

But there were others, among them his Uncle Gavin and his uncle's special crony, the sewing machine agent and rural bucolic grass-roots philosopher and Cincinnatus, V. K. Ratliff, who went a little further: it was for respectability, the look of things: that on those afternoons Snopes was not just a banker, he was a leading citizen and father; and even though his widowed only daughter was pushing forty and had spent the four years of the war working like a man in a military shipyard where unspinsterish things had a way of happening to women who were not even widows, he still wasn't going to let her drive alone fifteen miles to a bootlegger's joint and buy a bottle of whiskey.

Or a case of it; since it was hangover she walked off, she would need, or anyway need to have handy, a fresh bottle every day. So presently even the town would realise it wasn't just hangover since people who can afford a hangover every day don't want to get rid of it, walk it off, even if they had time to. Which left only jealousy and rage; what she walked four or five miles every day to conquer or anyway contain was the sleepless frustrated rage at his Uncle Gavin for having jilted her while she was away riveting ships to save Democracy, to marry Melisandre Harriss Backus that was as Thackeray says, thinking (Charles) how he could be glad it wasn't him that got the clothes off since if what was under them — provided of course his uncle had got them off — had driven his uncle to marry a widow with two grown children, one of them already married too, so that his Uncle Gavin might already have been a grandfather before he even became a bridegroom.

Then apparently jealousy and frustrated unforgiving rage were wrong too. Christmas came and went and the rest of that winter followed it, into spring. His uncle was not only being but even acting the squire now. No boots and breeks true enough and although a squire might

have looked like one behind a Phi Beta Kappa key even in Mississippi, he never could under a shock of premature white hair like a concert pianist or a Hollywood Cadillac agent. But at least he behaved like one, once each month and sometimes oftener, sitting at the head of the table out at Rosa Hill with Charles's new Aunt Melisandre opposite him and Linda and Charles across from each other while his uncle interpreted for Linda from the ivory tablet.

Or rather, interpreted for himself into audible English to Charles and his new Aunt Em. Because Linda didn't talk now any more than she ever had: just sitting there with that white streak along the top of her head like a collapsed plume, eating like a man; Charles didn't mean eating grossly: just soundly, heartily, and looking . . . yes, by God, that was exactly the word: happy. Happy, satisfied, like when you have accomplished something, produced, created, made something: gone to some — maybe a lot — trouble and expense, stuck your neck out maybe against your own better judgment; and sure enough, be damned if it didn't work, exactly as you thought it would, maybe even better than you had dared hope it would. Something you had wanted for yourself only you missed it so you began to think it wasn't so, was impossible, until you made one yourself, maybe when it was too late for you to want it any more but at least you had proved it could be.

And in the drawing-room afterward also, with coffee and brandy for the ladies and port and a cigar for Charles though his uncle still stuck to the cob pipes which anyway used to cost only a nickel. Still happy, satisfied; and that other thing which Charles had sensed, recognised: proprietorial.

As if Linda herself had actually invented the whole business: his Uncle Gavin, his Aunt Melisandre, Rose Hill — the old, once-small and -simple frame house which old Mr Backus with his Horace and Catullus and his weak whiskey-and-water would not recognise now save by its topographical location, transmogrified by the New Orleans gangster's money as old Snopes had tried to do to the De Spain house with his Yoknapatawpha County gangster's money and failed since here the rich and lavish cash had been spent with taste so that you didn't really see it

at all but merely felt it, breathed it, like warmth or temperature; with, surrounding it, enclosing it, the sense of the miles of white panel fences marking the combed and curried acres and the electric-lighted and -heated stables and tack rooms and grooms' quarters and the manager's house all in one choral concord in the background darkness — and then invented him, Charles, to be presented to at least look at her creation whether he approved of what she had made or not.

Then the hour to say Thank you and Good-night and drive back to town through the April or May darkness and escort Linda home, back to her father's Frenchman's Bend-dreamed palace, to draw up at the curb, where she would say each time in the harsh duck voice (he, Charles, thinking each time too Which maybe at least wouldn't sound quite so bad in the dark whispering after you finally got the clothes off thinking If of course it had been you): "Come in for a drink." Nor enough light in the car for her to have read the ivory tablet if she had offered it. Because he would do this each time too: grin, he would hope loud enough, and shake his head — sometimes there would be moonlight to help — Linda already opening the door on her side so that Charles would have to get out fast on his to get around the car in time.

Though no matter how fast that was, she would be already out, already turning up the walk toward the portico: who perhaps had left the South too young too long ago to have formed the Southern female habit-rite of a cavalier's unflagging constancy, or maybe the simple riveting of ships had cured the old muscles of the old expedition. Whichever it was, Charles would have to overtake, in effect outrun her already halfway to the house; whereupon she would check, almost pause in fact, to glance back at him, startled — not alarmed: just startled; merely what Hollywood called a double-take, still not so far dis severed from her Southern heritage but to recall that he, Charles, dared not risk some casual passerby reporting to his uncle that his nephew permitted the female he was seeing home to walk at least forty feet unaccompanied to her front door.

So they would reach that side by side anyway — the vast dim home-made columned loom of her father's dream, nightmare, monstrous

hope or terrified placatement, whichever it was, whatever it had been, the cold mausoleum in which old Snopes had immolated that much of his money at least without grace or warmth, Linda stopping again to say, "Come in and have a drink," exactly as though she hadn't said it forty feet back at the car, Charles still with nothing but the grin and the shake of the head as if he had only that moment discovered his ability to do that too. Then her hand, hard and firm like a man's since after all it was a ship riveter's or at least an ex-ship riveter's. Then he would open the door, she would stand for an instant in it in the midst of motion against a faint light in the hall's depth; the door would close again.

Oh yes, it could have had several names but surprise would not have been one of them, thinking about his uncle, the poor dope, if his uncle really had got the clothes off once maybe. Whereupon he thought now maybe his uncle actually had, that once, and couldn't stand it, bear it, and ran, fled back those eighteen or twenty years to Melisandre Backus (that used to be), where he would be safe. So if the word wouldn't be surprise, maybe it wouldn't really have to be grief either: just relief. A little of terror maybe at how close the escape had been, but mainly relief that it had been escape under any condition, on any terms.

Because he, Charles, had been too young at the time. He didn't know whether he actually remembered Linda's mother as his uncle and Ratliff obviously did, or not. But he had had to listen to both of them often enough and long enough to know that he surely did know all that they remembered, Ratliff especially; he could almost hear Ratliff saying again: "We was lucky. We not only had Helen of Argos right here in Jefferson, which most towns don't, we even knowed who she was and then we even had our own Paris to save us Argoses by jest wrecking Troy instead. What you want to do is not to own Helen, but jest own the right and privilege of looking at her. The worst thing that can happen to you is for her to notice you enough to stop and look back."

So, assuming that whatever made Helen was transferable or anyway inheritable, the word would not be grief at all but simple and perhaps amazed relief; and maybe his uncle's luck and fate was simply to be

cursed with less of fire and heat than Paris and Manfred de Spain; to simply have taken simple fear from that first one time (if his uncle really had got them off that first one time) and fled while he still had life. You know: the spider lover wise enough with age or cagey enough with experience or maybe just quick enough to spook from sheer timid instinct, to sense, anticipate, that initial tender caressing probe of the proboscis or suction tube or whatever it is his gal uses to empty him of his blood too while all he thinks he is risking is his semen; and leap, fling himself free, losing of course the semen and most of the rest of his insides too in the same what he thought at first was just peaceful orgasm, but at least keeping his husk, his sac, his life.

Or the grape, say, a mature grape, a little on the oversunned and juiceless side, but at least still intact enough even if only in sapless hull after the spurting ejaculation of the nymphic kiss, to retain at least the flattened semblance of a grape. Except that about then you would have to remember what Ratliff said that time: “No, she ain’t going to marry him. It’s going to be worse than that,” and you would wonder what in the world Helen or her inheritrix could or would want with that emptied sac or flattened hull, and so what in the hell could Ratliff have meant? Or anyway thought he meant? Or at least was afraid he might have meant or mean?

Until it finally occurred to him to do the reasonable and logical thing that anybody else would have thought about doing at first: ask Ratliff himself what he meant or thought he meant or was afraid he meant. So he did. It was summer now, June; McKinley Smith’s cotton was not only up, Essie was pregnant. The whole town knew it; she had made a public announcement in the bank one morning as soon as the doors opened and the first depositors had lined up at the windows; in less than two months she and McKinley had won old Meadowfill’s wheel chair.

“Because this ain’t enough,” Ratliff said.

“Enough what?” Charles said.

“Enough to keep her busy and satisfied. No ships to rivet, and now she’s done run out of coloured folks too for the time being. This here is

peace and plenty — the same peace and plenty us old folks like me and your uncle spent four whole years sacrificing sugar and beefsteak and cigarettes all three to keep the young folks like you happy while you was winning it. So much plenty that even the downtrod communist shoe patchers and tinsmiths and Negro children can afford to not need her now. I mean, maybe if she had asked them first they never actively needed her before neither, only they couldn't afford in simple dollars and cents to say so. Now they can." He blinked at Charles. "She has done run out of injustice."

"I didn't know you could do that," Charles said.

"That's right," Ratliff said. "So she will have to think of something, even if she has to invent it."

"All right," Charles said. "Suppose she does. If she was tough enough to stand what we thought up around here, she can certainly stand anything she can invent herself."

"I ain't worried about her," Ratliff said. "She's all right. She's jest dangerous. I'm thinking about your uncle."

"What about him?" Charles said.

"When she finally thinks of something and tells him, he will likely do it," Ratliff said.

Sixteen

THEY MET THAT morning in the post office, as they often did by complete uncalculation at morning mail time, she dressed as usual in the clothes she seemed to spend most of her time walking about the adjacent countryside in — the expensive English brogues scuffed and scarred but always neatly polished each morning, with wool stockings or socks beneath worn flannel trousers or a skirt or sometimes what looked like a khaki boilersuit under a man's stained burberry; this in the fall and winter and spring; in the summer it would be cotton — dress or skirt or trousers, her head with its single white plume bare even in the worst weather. Afterward they would go to the coffee shop in the

Holston House and drink coffee but this time instead Stevens took the gold-cornered ivory tablet he had given her eight years ago and wrote:
An appointment At the office To see me

“Shouldn’t you make an appointment to see lawyers?” she said.

His next speech of course would be: “So it’s as a lawyer you need me now.” And if they both could have used speech he would have said that, since at the age of fifty-plus talking is no effort. But writing is still an effort at any age, so even a lawyer pauses at the obvious if he has got to use a pen or pencil. So he wrote Tonight after supper At your house

“No,” she said.

He wrote Why

“Your wife will be jealous. I don’t want to hurt Milly.”

His next of course would be: “Melisandre, jealous? Of you and me? After all this, all this time?” Which of course was too long to write on a two-by-three-inch ivory tablet. So he had already begun to write Nonsense when he stopped and erased it with his thumb. Because she was looking at him, and now he knew too. He wrote You want her To be jealous

“She’s your wife,” she said. “She loves you. She would have to be jealous.” He hadn’t erased the tablet yet; he needed only to hold it up before her face until she looked at it again. “Yes,” she said. “Being jealous is part of love too. I want you to have all of it too. I want you to have everything. I want you to be happy.”

“I am happy,” he said. He took one of the unopened envelopes just out of his mailbox and wrote on the back of it I am happy I was given the privilege of meddling with impunity in other people’s affairs without really doing any harm by belonging to that avocation whose acolytes have been absolved in advance for holding justice above truth I have been denied the chance to destroy what I loved by touching it Can you tell me now what it is here or shall I come to your house after supper tonight

“All right,” she said. “After supper then.”

At first his wife's money was a problem. In fact, if it hadn't been for the greater hysteria of the war, the lesser hysteria of that much sudden money could have been a serious one. Even four years later Melisandre still tried to make it a problem: on these warm summer evenings the Negro houseman and one of the maids would serve the evening meal on a flagged terrace beneath a wistaria arbor in the back yard, whereupon each time there were guests, even the same guest or guests again, Melisandre would say, "It would be cooler in the dining-room" (in the rebuilt house the dining-room was not quite as large as a basketball court) "and no bugs either. But the dining-room makes Gavin nervous." Whereupon he would say, as he always did too, even before the same guest or guests again: "Dammit, Milly, nothing can make me nervous because I was already born that way."

They were sitting there now over the sandwiches and the iced tea. She said, "Why didn't you invite her out here." He merely chewed so she said, "But of course you did." So he merely chewed and she said, "So it must be something serious." Then she said, "But it can't be serious or she couldn't have waited, she would have told you right there in the post office." So then she said, "What do you suppose it is?" and he wiped his mouth and dropped the napkin, rising, and came around the table and leaned and kissed her.

"I love you," he said. "Yes. No. I don't know. Don't wait up." Melisandre had given him a Cadillac roadster for her wedding present to him; this was during the first year of the war and God only knew where she had got a new Cadillac convertible and what she had paid for it. "Unless you really don't want it," she said.

"I do," he said. "I've always wanted a Cadillac convertible — provided I can do exactly what I want to with it."

"Of course you can," she said. "It's yours." So he drove the car back to town and arranged with a garage to store it for ten dollars a month and removed the battery and radio and the tires and the spare wheel and

sold them and took the keys and the bill of sale to Snopes's bank and mortgaged the car for the biggest loan they would make on it.

By that time progress, industrial renaissance and rejuvenation had reached even rural Mississippi banks, so Snopes's bank now had a professional cashier or working vice-president imported from Memphis six months back to give it the New Look, that is, to bring rural banks abreast of the mental condition which accepted, could accept, the automobile as a definite ineradicable part of not only the culture but the economy also; where, as Stevens knew, Snopes alone would not lend God Himself one penny on an automobile.

So Stevens could have got the loan from the imported vice-president on this simple recognisance, not only for the above reason but because the vice-president was a stranger and Stevens represented one of the three oldest families in the county and the vice-president would not have dared to say No to him. But Stevens didn't do it that way; this was to be, as the saying had it, Snopes's baby.

He waylaid, ambushed, caught Snopes himself in public, in the lobby of his bank with not only all the staff but the moment's complement of customers, to explain in detail how he didn't intend to sell his wife's wedding gift but simply to convert it into war bonds for the duration of the war. So the loan was made, the keys surrendered and the lien recorded, which Stevens naturally had no intention whatever of ever redeeming, plus the ten dollars a month storage accrued to whatever moment when Snopes realised that his bank owned a brand-new though outdated Cadillac automobile complete except for battery and tires.

Though even with the six-year-old coupé which (as it were) he had got married from, the houseman still got there first to hold the door for him to get in and depart, down the long driveway lined immediately with climbing roses on the white-panelled fences where the costly pedigreed horses had once ranged in pampered idleness; gone now since there was no one on the place to ride them unless somebody paid him for it, Stevens himself hating horses even more than dogs, rating

the horse an unassailable first in loathing since though both were parasites, the dog at least had the grace to be a sycophant too; it at least fawned on you and so kept you healthily ashamed of the human race. But the real reason was, though neither the horse nor the dog ever forgot anything, the dog at least forgave you, which the horse did not; and his, Steven's, thought was that what the world needed was more forgiving: that if you had a good sensitive quick-acting capacity for forgiving, it didn't really matter whether you ever learned or even remembered anything or not.

Because he had no idea what Linda wanted either; he thought Because women are wonderful: it doesn't really matter what they want or if they themselves even know what it is they think they want. At least there was the silence. She would have to organise, correlate, tell him herself, rather than have whatever it was she wanted him to know dug out of her by means of the infinitesimal legal mining which witnesses usually required; he would need only write on the tablet At least don't make me have to write out in writing whatever questions you want me to ask you so whenever you come to one of them just ask it yourself and go on from there.

Even as he stopped the car he could already see her, her white dress in the portico, between two of the columns which were too big for the house, for the street, for Jefferson itself; it would be dim and probably cooler and anyway pleasant to sit there. But there was the silence; he thought how there should be a law for everybody to carry a flashlight in his car or perhaps he could ask her with the tablet to get a flashlight from the house so she could read the first sentence; except that she couldn't read the request for the flashlight until she was inside the house.

She kissed him, as always unless they met on the street, almost as tall as he; he thought Of course it will have to be upstairs, in her sitting-room with the doors closed too probably; anything urgent enough to demand a private appointment following her through the hall at the end of which was the door to the room where her father (he believed that out of all Jefferson only he and Ratliff knew better) sat, local

legend had it not reading, not chewing tobacco: just sitting with his feet propped on the unpainted wooden ledge he had had his Frenchman's Bend carpenter-kinsman nail at the proper height across the Adam mantel; on up the stairs and, sure enough, into her sitting-room whose own mantel had been designed to the exact height for them to stand before while he used the foolscap pad and pencil which was its fixture since she led him here only when there was more than the two-by-three ivory surface could hold. Though this time he hadn't even picked up the pencil when she spoke the eight or nine words which froze him for almost half that many seconds. He repeated one of them.

"Mink?" he said. "Mink?" He thought rapidly Oh Hell, not this thinking rapidly Nineteen . . . eight. Twenty years then twenty more on top of that. He will be out in two more years anyway. We had forgotten that. Or had we. He didn't need to write Tell me either; she was already doing that; except for the silence he could, would have asked her what in the world, what stroke of coincidence (he had not yet begun to think chance, fate, destiny) had caused her to think of the man whom she had never seen and whose name she could have heard only in connection with a cowardly and savage murder. But that didn't matter now: which was the instant when he began to think destiny and fate.

With the houseman to do the listening, she had taken her father's car yesterday and driven out to Frenchman's Bend and talked with her mother's brother Jody; she stood now facing him beside the mantel on which the empty pad lay, telling him: "He had just twenty years at first, which would have been nineteen twenty-eight; he would have got out then. Only in nineteen twenty-three he tried to escape. In a woman's what Uncle Jody called mother hubbard and a sunbonnet. How did he get hold of a mother hubbard and a sunbonnet in the penitentiary." Except for the silence he could have used gentleness. But all he had now was the yellow pad. Because he knew the answer himself now, writing What did Jody tell you

"That it was my . . . other cousin, Montgomery Ward, that had the dirty magic-lantern slides until they sent him to Parchman too, in nineteen twenty-three too, you remember?"

Oh yes, he remembered: how he and the then sheriff, old Hub Hampton, dead now, both knew that it was Flem Snopes himself who planted the moonshine liquor in his kinsman's studio and got him sentenced to two years in Parchman, yet how it was Flem himself who not only had two private interviews with Montgomery Ward while he lay in jail waiting trial, but put up the money for his bond and surety which permitted Montgomery Ward a two-day absence from the jail and Jefferson too before returning to accept his sentence and be taken to Parchman to serve it, after which Jefferson saw him no more nor heard of him until eight or ten years ago the town learned that Montgomery Ward was now in Los Angeles, engaged in some quite lucrative adjunct or correlative to the motion-picture industry or anyway colony.

So that's why Montgomery Ward had to go to Parchman and nowhere else he thought instead of merely Atlanta or Leavenworth where only the dirty post cards would have sent him. Oh yes, he remembered that one, and the earlier one too: in the courtroom also with the little child-sized gaunt underfed maniacal murderer, when the Court itself leaned down to give him his constitutional right to elect his plea, saying, "Don't bother me now; can't you see I'm busy?" then turning to shout again into the packed room: "Flem! Flem Snopes! Won't anybody here get word to Flem Snopes—" Oh yes, he, Stevens, knew now why Montgomery Ward had had to go to Parchman: Flem Snopes had bought twenty more years of life with that five gallons of planted evidence.

He wrote You want me to get him out now
"Yes," she said. "How do you do it?"

He wrote He will be out in 2 more years why not wait till then He wrote
He has known nothing else but that cage for 38 years He won't live a
month free like an old lion or tiger At least give him 2 more years
"Two years of life are not important," she said. "Two years of jail are."

He had even moved the pencil again when he stopped and spoke aloud
instead; later he told Ratliff why. "I know why," Ratliff said. "You jest

wanted to keep your own skirts clean. Maybe by this time she had done learned to read your lips and even if she couldn't you would at least been on your own record anyhow." "No," Stevens said. "It was because I not only believe in and am an advocate of fate and destiny, I admire them; I want to be one of the instruments too, no matter how modest." So he didn't write: he spoke:

"Don't you know what he's going to do the minute he gets back to Jefferson or anywhere else your father is?"

"Say it slow and let me try again," she said.

He wrote I love you thinking rapidly If I say No she will find somebody else, anybody else, maybe some jackleg who will bleed her to get him out then continue to bleed her for what the little rattlesnake is going to do the moment he is free, and wrote Yes we can get him out it will take a few weeks a petition I will draw them up for you his blood kin the judge sheriff at the time Judge Long and old Hub Hampton are dead but Little Hub will do even if he won't be sheriff again until next election I will take them to the Governor myself

Ratliff too he thought. Tomorrow the petition lay on his desk, Ratliff standing over it pen in hand. "Go on," Stevens said. "Sign it. I'm going to take care of that too. What do you think I am — a murderer?"

"Not yet anyway," Ratliff said. "How take care of it?"

"Mrs Kohl is going to," Stevens said.

"I thought you told me you never mentioned out loud where she could hear it what Mink would do as soon as he got back inside the same town limits with Flem," Ratliff said.

"I didn't need to," Stevens said. "Linda and I both agreed that there was no need for him to come back here. After forty years, with his wife dead and his daughters scattered God knows where; that in fact he would be better off if he didn't. So she's putting up the money. She wanted to make it a thousand but I told her that much in a lump would destroy him sure. So I'm going to leave two-fifty with the Warden, to be handed to him the minute before they unlock the gate to let him

through it, with the understanding that the moment he accepts the money, he has given his oath to cross the Mississippi state line before sundown, and that another two-fifty will be sent every three months to whatever address he selects, provided he never again crosses the Mississippi line as long as he lives.”

“I see,” Ratliff said. “He can’t tech the money a-tall except on the condition that he don’t never lay eyes on Flem Snopes again as long as he lives.”

“That’s right,” Stevens said.

“Suppose jest money ain’t enough,” Ratliff said. “Suppose he won’t take jest two hundred and fifty dollars for Flem Snopes.”

“Remember,” Stevens said. “He’s going to face having to measure thirty-eight years he has got rid of, put behind him, against two more years he has still got to spend inside a cage to get rid of. He’s selling Flem Snopes for these next two years, with a thousand dollars a year bonus thrown in free for the rest of his life. Sign it.”

“Don’t rush me,” Ratliff said. “Destiny and fate. They was what you told me about being proud to be a handmaid of, wasn’t they?”

“So what?” Stevens said. “Sign it.”

“Don’t you reckon you ought to maybe include a little luck into them too?”

“Sign it,” Stevens said.

“Have you told Flem yet?”

“He hasn’t asked me yet,” Stevens said.

“When he does ask you?” Ratliff said.

“Sign it,” Stevens said.

“I already did,” Ratliff said. He laid the pen back on the desk. “You’re right. We never had no alternative not to. If you’d a said No, she would jest got another lawyer that wouldn’t a said No nor even invented that

two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar gamble neither. And then Flem Snopes wouldn't a had no chance a-tall."

None of the other requisite documents presented any difficulty either. The judge who had presided at the trial was dead of course, as was the incumbent sheriff, old Hub Hampton. But his son, known as Little Hub, had inherited not only his father's four-year alternation as sheriff, but also his father's capacity to stay on the best of political terms with his alternating opposite number, Ephriam Bishop.

So Stevens had those two names; also the foreman of the grand jury at the time was a hale (hence still quick) eighty-five, even running a small electric-driven corn mill while he wasn't hunting and fishing with Uncle Ike McCaslin, another octogenarian: plus a few other select signatures which Stevens compelled on to his petition as simply and ruthlessly as he did Ratliff's. Though what he considered his strongest card was a Harvard classmate, an amateur in state politics who had never held any office, who for years had been a sort of friend-of-the-court adviser to governors simply because all the state factions knew he was not only a loyal Mississippian but one already too wealthy to want anything.

So Stevens would have — indeed, intended to have — nothing but progress to report to his client after he sent the documents in to the state capital and the rest of the summer passed toward and into fall — September, when Mississippi (including governors and legislatures and pardon boards) would put their neckties and coats back on and assume work again. Indeed, he felt he could almost select the specific day and hour he preferred to have the prisoner freed, choosing late September and explaining why to his client on the pad of yellow office foolscap, specious, voluble, convincing since he himself was convinced.

September, the mounting apex of the cotton-picking season when there would be not only work, familiar work, but work which of all the freed man had the strongest emotional ties with, which after thirty-eight years of being compelled to it by loaded shotguns, he would now be paid by the hundredweight for performing it. This, weighed against being freed at once, back in June, with half a summer of idleness plus

the gravitational pull back to where he was born; not explaining to Linda his reasons why the little child-size creature who must have been mad to begin with and whom thirty-eight years in a penitentiary could not have improved any, must not come back to Jefferson; hiding that too behind the rational garrulity of the pencil flying along the ruled lines — until suddenly he would look up (she of course had heard nothing) and Ratliff would be standing just inside the office door looking at them, courteous, bland, inscrutable, and only a little grave and thoughtful too now.

So little in fact that Linda anyway never noticed it, at least not before Stevens, touching, jostling her arm or elbow as he rose (though this was never necessary; she had felt the new presence by now), saying, “Howdy, V.K. Come in. Is it that time already?”

“Looks like it,” Ratliff would say. “Mawnin, Linda.”

“Howdy, V.K.,” she would answer in her deaf voice but almost exactly with Stevens’s inflection: who could not have heard him greet Ratliff since, and even he could not remember when she could have heard him before. Then Stevens would produce the gold lighter monogrammed G L S though L was not his initial, and light her cigarette, then at the cabinet above the wash basin he and Ratliff would assemble the three thick tumblers and the sugar basin and the single spoon and a sliced lemon and Ratliff would produce from his clothing somewhere the flask of corn whiskey a little of which old Mr Calvin Bookwright still made and aged each year and shared now and then with the few people tactful enough to retain his precarious irascible friendship.

Then, Linda with her cigarette and Stevens with his cob pipe, the three of them would sit and sip the toddies, Stevens still talking and scribbling now and then on the pad for her to answer, until she would set down her empty glass and rise and say good-bye and leave them. Then Ratliff said:

“So you ain’t told Flem yet.” Stevens smoked. “But then of course you don’t need to, being as it’s pretty well over the county now that Mink

Snopes's cousin Linda or niece Linda or whichever it is, is getting him out." Stevens smoked. Ratliff picked up one of the toddy glasses. "You want another one?"

"No, much obliged," Stevens said.

"So you ain't lost your voice," Ratliff said. "Except, maybe back there in that vault in the bank where he would have to be counting his money, he can't hear what's going on. Except maybe that one trip he would have to make outside." Stevens smoked. "To go across to the sheriff's office." Stevens smoked. "You right sho you don't want another toddy?"

"All right," Stevens said. "Why?"

"That's what I'm asking you. You'd a thought the first thing Flem would a done would been to go to the sheriff and remind him of them final words of Mink's before Judge Long invited him to Parchman. Only he ain't done that. Maybe because at least Linda told him about them two hundred and fifty dollars and even Flem Snopes can grab a straw when there ain't nothing else in sight?"

Because naturally Flem can't walk right up to her and write on that tablet, The minute you let that durn little water moccasin out he's going to come straight back here and pay you up to date for your maw's grave and all the rest of it that these Jefferson meddlers have probably already persuaded you I was to blame for; naturally he won't dare risk putting no such idea as that in her head and have her grab a-holt of you and go to Parchman and take him out tonight and have him back in Jefferson by breakfast tomorrow, when as it is he's still got three more weeks, during which anything might happen: Linda or Mink or the Governor or the pardon board might die or Parchman itself might blow up. When did you say it would be?"

"When what will be?" Stevens said.

"The day they will let him out."

"Oh. Some time after the twentieth. Probably the twenty-sixth."

"The twenty-sixth," Ratliff said. "And you're going down there before?"

“Next week,” Stevens said. “To leave the money and talk with the Warden myself. That he is not to touch the money until he promises to leave Mississippi before sundown and never come back.”

“In that case,” Ratliff said, “everything’s all right. Especially if I—” He stopped.

“If you what?” Stevens said.

“Nothing,” Ratliff said. “Fate, and destiny, and luck, and hope, and all of us mixed up in it — us and Linda and Flem and that durn little half-starved wildcat down there in Parchman, all mixed up in the same luck and destiny and fate and hope until can’t none of us tell where it stops and we begin.

Especially the hope. I mind I used to think that hope was about all folks had, only now I’m beginning to believe that that’s about all anybody needs — jest hope. The pore son of a bitch over yonder in that bank vault counting his money because that’s the one place on earth Mink Snopes can’t reach him in, and long as he’s got to stay in it he might as well count money to be doing something, have something to do.

And I wonder if maybe he wouldn’t give Linda back her two hundred and fifty dollars without even charging her no interest on it, for them two years of pardon. And I wonder jest how much of the rest of the money in that vault he would pay to have another twenty years added on to them. Or maybe jest ten more. Or maybe jest one more.”

Ten days later Stevens was in the Warden’s office at the state penitentiary. He had the money with him — twenty-five ten-dollar notes, quite new. “You don’t want to see him yourself?” the Warden said.

“No,” Stevens said. “You can do it. Anybody can. Simply offer him his choice: take the pardon and the two hundred and fifty dollars and get out of Mississippi as fast as he can, plus another two hundred and fifty every three months for the rest of his life if he never crosses the state

line again; or stay here in Parchman another two years and rot and be damned to him.”

“Well, that ought to do it,” the Warden said. “It certainly would with me. Why is it whoever owns the two hundred and fifty dollars don’t want him to come back home so bad?”

Stevens said rapidly, “Nothing to come back to. Family gone and scattered, wife died twenty-five or thirty years ago and nobody knows what became of his two daughters. Even the tenant house he lived in either collapsed of itself or maybe somebody found it and chopped it up and hauled it away for firewood.”

“That’s funny,” the Warden said. “Almost anybody in Mississippi has got at least one cousin. In fact, it’s hard not to have one.”

“Oh, distant relations,” Stevens said. “Yes, it seems to have been the usual big scattered country clan.”

“So one of these big scattered connections don’t want him back home enough to pay two hundred and fifty dollars for it.”

“He’s mad,” Stevens said. “Somebody here during the last thirty-eight years must have had that idea occur to them and suggested it to you even if you hadn’t noticed it yourself.”

“We’re all mad here,” the Warden said. “Even the prisoners too. Maybe it’s the climate. I wouldn’t worry, if I were you. They all make these threats at the time — big threats, against the judge or the prosecuting lawyer or a witness that stood right up in public and told something that any decent man would have kept to himself; big threats: I notice there’s no place on earth where a man can be as loud and dangerous as handcuffed to a policeman. But even one year is a long time sometimes. And he’s had thirty-eight of them. So he don’t get the pardon until he agrees to accept the money. Why do you know he won’t take the money and doublecross you?”

“I’ve noticed a few things about people too,” Stevens said. “One of them is, how a bad man will work ten times as hard and make ten times

the sacrifice to be credited with at least one virtue no matter how Spartan, as the upright man will to avoid the most abject vice provided it's fun.

He tried to kill his lawyer right there in the jail during the trial when the lawyer suggested pleading him crazy. He will know that the only sane thing to do is to accept the money and the pardon, since to refuse the pardon because of the money, in two more years he not only wouldn't have the two thousand dollars, he might even be dead. Or, what would be infinitely worse, he would be alive and free at last and poor, and Fle—" and stopped himself.

"Yes?" the Warden said. "Who is Fleh, that might be dead himself in two years more and so out of reach for good? The one that owns the two hundred and fifty dollars? Never mind," he said. "I'll agree with you. Once he accepts the money, everything is jake, as they say. That's what you want?"

"That's right," Stevens said. "If there should be any sort of hitch, you can call me at Jefferson collect."

"I'll call you anyway," the Warden said. "You're trying too hard not to sound serious."

"No," Stevens said. "Only if he refuses the money."

"You mean the pardon, don't you?"

"What's the difference?" Stevens said.

So when about midafternoon on the twenty-sixth he answered his telephone and Central said, "Parchman, Mississippi, calling Mr Gavin Stevens. Go ahead, Parchman," and the faint voice said, "Hello. Lawyer?" Stevens thought rapidly So I am a coward after all. When it happens two years from now, at least none of it will spatter on me. At least I can tell her now because this will prove it and said into the mouthpiece:

"So he refused to take the money."

"Then you already know," Ratliff's voice said.

“. . . What?” Stevens said after less than a second actually. “Hello?”

“It’s me,” Ratliff said. “V.K. At Parchman. So they already telephoned you.”

“Telephoned me what?” Stevens said. “He’s still there? He refused to leave?”

“No, he’s gone. He left about eight this morning. A truck going north—”

“But you just said he didn’t take the money.”

“That’s what I’m trying to tell you. We finally located the money about fifteen minutes ago. It’s still here. He—”

“Hold it,” Stevens said. “You said eight this morning. Which direction?”

“A Negro seen him standing by the highway until he caught a ride on a cattle truck going north, toward Tutwiler. At Tutwiler he could have went to Clarksdale and then on to Memphis. Or he could have went from Tutwiler to Batesville and on to Memphis that-a-way. Except that anybody wanting to go from Parchman to Jefferson could go by Batesville too lessen he jest wanted to go by way of Chicago or New Orleans for the trip. Otherwise he could be in Jefferson pretty close to now. I’m leaving right now myself and maybe you better—”

“All right,” Stevens said.

“And maybe Flem too,” Ratliff said.

“Damn it, I said all right,” Stevens said.

“But not her yet,” Ratliff said. “Ain’t no need to tell her yet that likely she’s jest finished killing her maw’s husband—”

But he didn’t even hear that, the telephone was already down; he didn’t even have his hat when he reached the Square, the street below, the bank where Snopes would be in one direction, the courthouse where the Sheriff would be in the other: not that it really mattered which one he saw first, thinking So I really am a coward after all the talk about destiny and fate that didn’t even sell Ratliff.

“You mean,” the Sheriff said, “he had already spent thirty-eight years in Parchman, and the minute somebody gets him out he’s going to try to

do something that will send him straight back even if it don't hang him first this time? Don't be foolish. Even a fellow like they say he was would learn that much sense in thirty-eight years."

"Ha," Stevens said without mirth. "You expressed it exactly that time. You were probably not even a shirt-tail boy back in 1908. You were not in that courtroom that day and saw his face and heard him. I was."

"All right," the Sheriff said. "What do you want me to do?"

"Arrest him. What do you call them? roadblocks? Don't even let him get into Yoknapatawpha County."

"On what grounds?"

"You just catch him, I'll furnish you with grounds as fast as you need them. If necessary we will hold him for obtaining money under false pretences."

"I thought he didn't take the money."

"I don't know what happened yet about the money. But I'll figure out some way to use it, at least long enough to hold him on for a while."

"Yes," the Sheriff said. "I reckon you would. Let's step over to the bank and see Mr Snopes; maybe all three of us can figure out something. Or maybe Mrs Kohl. You'll have to tell her too, I reckon."

Whereupon Stevens repeated almost verbatim what Ratliff had said into the telephone after he had put it down: "Tell a woman that apparently she just finished murdering her father at eight o'clock this morning?"

"All right, all right," the Sheriff said. "You want me to come to the bank with you?"

"No," Stevens said. "Not yet anyway."

"I still think you have found a booger where there wasn't one," the Sheriff said. "If he comes back here at all, it'll just be out at Frenchman's Bend. Then all we'll have to do is pick him up the first time we notice him in town and have a talk with him."

“Notice, hell,” Stevens said. “Ain’t that what I’m trying to tell you? that you don’t notice him. That was the mistake Jack Houston made thirty-eight years ago: he didn’t notice him either until he stepped out from behind that bush that morning with that shotgun — if he even stepped out of the bushes before he shot, which I doubt.”

He recrossed the Square rapidly, thinking Yes, I really am a coward, after all when that quantity, entity with which he had spent a great deal of his life talking or rather having to listen to (his skeleton perhaps, which would outlast the rest of him by a few months or years — and without doubt would spend that time moralising at him while he would be helpless to answer back) answered immediately Did anyone ever say you were not? Then he But I am not a coward: I am a humanitarian. Then the other You are not even an original; that word is customarily used as a euphemism for it.

The bank would be closed now. But when he crossed the Square to the sheriff’s office the car with Linda behind the wheel had not been waiting so this was not the day of the weekly whiskey run. The shades were drawn but after some knob-rattling at the side door one of the bookkeepers peered out and recognised him and let him in; he passed on through the machine-clatter of the day’s recapitulation — the machines themselves sounding immune and even inattentive to the astronomical sums they reduced to staccato trivia — and knocked at the door on which Colonel Sartoris had had the word PRIVATE lettered by hand forty years ago, and opened it.

Snopes was sitting not at the desk but with his back to it, facing the cold now empty fireplace, his feet raised and crossed against the same heel scratches whose initial inscribing Colonel Sartoris had begun. He was not reading, he was not doing anything: just sitting there with his black planter’s hat on, his lower jaw moving faintly and steadily as though he were chewing something, which as the town knew also he was not; he didn’t even lower his feet when Stevens came to the desk (it was a broad flat table littered with papers in a sort of neat, almost orderly way) and said almost in one breath:
“Mink left Parchman at eight o’clock this morning.

I don't know whether you know it or not but we — I had some money waiting to be given to him at the gate, under condition that in accepting it he had passed his oath to leave Mississippi without returning to Jefferson and never cross the state line again. He didn't take the money; I don't know yet how since he was not to be given the pardon until he did. He caught a ride in a passin' truck and has disappeared. The truck was headed north."

"How much was it?" Snopes said.

"What?" Stevens said.

"The money," Snopes said.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars," Stevens said.

"Much obliged," Snopes said.

"Good God, man," Stevens said. "I tell you a man left Parchman at eight o'clock this morning on his way here to murder you and all you say is Much obliged?"

The other didn't move save for the faint chewing motion; Stevens thought with a kind of composed and seething rage If he would only spit now and then. "Then all he had was that ten dollars they give them when they turn them loose," Snopes said.

"Yes," Stevens said. "As far as we — I know. But yes." Or even just go through the motions of spitting now and then he thought.

"Say a man thought he had a grudge against you," Snopes said. "A man sixty-three years old now with thirty-eight of that spent in the penitentiary and even before that wasn't much, bigger than a twelve-year-old boy—"

That had to use a shotgun from behind a bush even then Stevens thought. Oh yes, I know exactly what you mean: too small and frail even then, even without thirty-eight years in jail, to have risked a mere knife or bludgeon. And he can't go out to Frenchman's Bend, the only place on earth where someone might remember him enough to lend him one because even though nobody in Frenchman's Bend would

knock up the muzzle aimed at you, they wouldn't lend him theirs to aim with.

So he will either have to buy a gun for ten dollars, or steal one. In which case, you might even be safe: the ten-dollar one won't shoot and in the other some policeman might save you honestly. He thought rapidly Of course. North. He went to Memphis. He would have to. He wouldn't think of anywhere else to go to buy a gun with ten dollars.

And, since Mink had only the ten dollars, he would have to hitchhike all the way, first to Memphis, provided he got there before the pawnshops closed, then back to Jefferson. Which could not be before tomorrow, since anything else would leave simple destiny and fate too topheavy with outrageous hope and coincidence for even Ratliff's sanguine nature to pass. "Yes," he said. "So do I.

You have at least until tomorrow night." He thought rapidly And now for it. How to persuade him not to tell her without letting him know that was what he agreed to, promised, and that it was me who put it into his mind. So suddenly he heard himself say: "Are you going to tell Linda?"

"Why?" Snopes said.

"Yes," Stevens said. Then heard himself say in his turn: "Much obliged." Then, suddenly indeed this time: "I'm responsible for this, even if I probably couldn't have stopped it. I just talked to Eef Bishop. What else do you want me to do?" If he would just spit once he thought.

"Nothing," Snopes said.

"What?" Stevens said.

"Yes," Snopes said. "Much obliged."

At least he knew where to start. Only, he didn't know how. Even if — when — he called the Memphis police, what would — could — he tell them: a city police force a hundred miles away, who had never heard of Mink and Flem Snopes and Jack Houston, dead these forty years now, either.

When he, Stevens, had already failed to move very much the local sheriff who at least had inherited the old facts. How to explain what he himself was convinced Mink wanted in Memphis, let alone convince them that Mink was or would be in Memphis.

And even if he managed to shake them that much, how to describe whom they were supposed to look for: whose victim forty years ago had got himself murdered mainly for the reason that the murderer was the sort of creature whom nobody, even his victim, noticed enough in time to pay any attention to what he was or might do.

Except Ratliff. Ratliff alone out of Yoknapatawpha County would know Mink on sight. To be unschooled, untravelled, and to an extent unread, Ratliff had a terrifying capacity for knowledge or local information or acquaintanceship to match the need of any local crisis.

Stevens admitted to himself now what he was waiting, dallying, really wasting time for: for Ratliff to drive back to his pickup truck from Parchman, to be hurried on to Memphis without even stopping, cutting the engine, to reveal Mink to the Memphis police and so save Mink's cousin, kinsman, whatever Flem was, from that just fate; knowing — Stevens — better all the while: that what he really wanted with Ratliff was to find out how Mink had not only got past the Parchman gate without that absolute contingent money, but had managed it in such a way that apparently only the absolutely unpredicted and unwarranted presence of Ratliff at a place and time that he had no business whatever being, revealed the fact that he hadn't taken it.

It was not three o'clock when Ratliff phoned; it would be almost nine before he reached Jefferson. It was not that the pickup truck wouldn't have covered the distance faster. It was that no vehicle owned by Ratliff (provided he was in it and conscious, let alone driving it) was going to cover it faster.

Besides, at some moment not too long after six o'clock he was going to stop to eat at the next dreary repetitive little cotton-gin hamlet, or

(nowadays) on the highway itself, drawing neatly in and neatly parking before the repetitive Dixie Cafés or Mac's or Lorraine's, to eat, solitary, neatly and without haste the meat a little too stringy to chew properly and too overcooked to taste at all, the stereotyped fried potatoes and the bread you didn't chew but mumbled, like one of the paper napkins, the machine-chopped prefrozen lettuce and tomatoes like (except for the tense inviolate colour) something exhumed by paleontologists from tundras, the machine-made prefrozen pie and what they would call coffee — the food perfectly pure and perfectly tasteless except for the dousing of machine-made tomato ketchup.

He (Stevens) could, perhaps should, have had plenty of time to drive out to Rose Hill and eat his own decent evening meal. Instead, he telephoned his wife.

"I'll come in and we can eat at the Holston House," she said.

"No, honey. I've got to see Ratliff as soon as he gets back from Parchman."

"All right. I think I'll come in and have supper with Maggie" (Maggie was his sister) "and maybe we'll go to the picture show and I'll see you tomorrow. I can come in to town, can't I, if I promise to stay off the streets?"

"You see, you don't help me. How can I resist togetherness if you won't fight back?"

"I'll see you tomorrow then," she said. "Good-night." So they ate at the Holston House; he didn't feel quite up to his sister and brother-in-law and his nephew Charles tonight. The Holston House still clung to the old ways, not desperately nor even gallantly: just with a cold and inflexible indomitability, owned and run by two maiden sisters (that is, one of them, the younger, had been married once but so long ago and so briefly that it no longer counted) who were the last descendants of the Alexander Holston, one of Yoknapatawpha County's three original settlers, who had built the log ordinary which the modern edifice had long since swallowed, who had had his part — been in fact the catalyst — in the naming of Jefferson over a century ago; they still called the

dining-room simply the dining-room and (nobody knew how) they still kept Negro men waiters, some of whose seniority still passed from father to son; the guests still ate the table d'hôte meals mainly at two long communal tables at the head of each of which a sister presided; no man came there without a coat and necktie and no woman with her head covered (there was a dressing-room with a maid for that purpose), not even if she had a railroad ticket in her hand.

Though his sister did pick his wife up in time for the picture show. So he was back in the office when a little after eight-thirty he heard Ratliff on the stairs and said, "All right. What happened?" Then he said, "No. Wait. What were you doing at Parchman?"

"I'm a — what do you call it? optimist," Ratliff said. "Like any good optimist, I don't expect the worst to happen. Only, like any optimist worth his salt, I like to go and look as soon as possible afterward jest in case it did. Especially when the difference between the best and the worst is liable to reach all the way back up here to Jefferson.

It taken a little doing, too. This was about ten o'clock this morning; he had been gone a good two hours by then, and they was a little impatient with me. They had done their share, took him and had him for thirty-eight years all fair and regular, like the man said for them to, and they felt they had done earned the right to be shut of him.

You know: his new fresh pardon and them new fresh two hundred and fifty dollars all buttoned up neat and safe and secure in his new fresh overhalls and jumper and the gate locked behind him again jest like the man said too and the official Mink Snopes page removed outen the ledger and officially marked Paid in Full and destroyed a good solid two hours back, when here comes this here meddling out-of-town son-of-a-gun that ain't even a lawyer saying Yes yes, that's jest fine, only let's make sho he actively had that money when he left.

"The Warden his-self had tended to the money in person: had Mink in alone, with the table all ready for him, the pardon in one pile and them two hundred and fifty dollars that Mink hadn't never seen that much at one time before in his life, in the other pile; and the Warden his-self

explaining how there wasn't no choice about it: to take the pardon he would have to take the money too, and once he teched the money he had done give his sworn word and promise and Bible oath to strike for the quickest place outside the state of Mississippi and never cross the line again as long as he lived.

'Is that what I got to do to get out?' Mink says. 'Take the money?' 'That's it,' the Warden says, and Mink reached and taken the money and the Warden his-self helped him button the money and the pardon both inside his jumper and the Warden shaken his hand and the trusty come to take him out to where the turnkey was waiting to unlock the gate into liberty and freedom—"

"Wait," Stevens said. "Trusty."

"Ain't it?" Ratliff said with pleased, almost proud approval. "It was so simple. Likely that's why it never occurred to none of them, especially as even a Parchman deserving any name a-tall for being well conducted, ain't supposed to contain nobody eccentric and antisocial enough to behave like he considered anything like free-will choice to even belong in the same breath with two hundred and fifty active dollars give him free for nothing so he never even had to say Much obliged for them.

That's what I said too: 'That trusty. He left here for the gate with them two hundred and fifty dollars. Let's just see if he still had them when he went outen it.' So that's what I said too: 'That trusty.'

" 'A lifer too,' the Warden says. 'Killed his wife with a ball-peen hammer, was converted and received salvation in the jail before he was even tried and has one of the best records here, is even a lay preacher.'

" 'Than which, if Mink had had your whole guest list to pick from and time to pick in, he couldn't a found a better feller for his purpose,' I says. 'So it looks like I'm already fixing to begin to have to feel sorry for this here snatched brand even if he was too impatient to think of a better answer to the enigma of wedlock than a garage hammer. That is,

I reckon you still got a few private interrogation methods for reluctant conversationalists around here, ain't you?'

"That's why I was late calling you: it taken a little time too, though I got to admit nothing showed on his outside. Because people are funny. No, they ain't funny: they're jest sad. Here was this feller already in for life and even if they had found out that was a mistake or somebody even left the gate unlocked, he wouldn't a dast to walk outen it because the gal's paw had done already swore he would kill him the first time he crossed the Parchman fence. So what in the world could he a done with two hundred and fifty dollars even if he could ever a dreamed he could get away with this method of getting holt of it."

"But how, dammit?" Stevens said. "How?"

"Why, the only way Mink could a done it, which was likely why never nobody thought to anticipate it. On the way from the Warden's office to the gate he jest told the trusty he needed to step into the gentlemen's room a minute and when they was inside he give the trusty the two hundred and fifty dollars and asked the trusty to hand it back to the Warden the first time the trusty conveniently got around to it, the longer the better after he, Mink, was outside the gate and outen sight, and tell the Warden Much obliged but he had done changed his mind and wouldn't need it.

So there the trusty was: give Mink another hour or two and he would be gone, likely forever, nobody would know where or care. Because I don't care where you are: the minute a man can really believe that never again in his life will he have any use for two hundred and fifty dollars, he's done already been dead and has jest this minute found it out. And that's all. I don't—"

"I do," Stevens said. "Flem told me. He's in Memphis. He's too little and frail and old to use a knife or a club so he will have to go to the nearest place he can hope to get a gun with ten dollars."

"So you told Flem. What did he say?"

“He said, Much obliged,” Stevens said. After a moment he said, “I said, when I told Flem Mink had left Parchman at eight o’clock this morning on his way up here to kill him, he said Much obliged.”

“I heard you,” Ratliff said. “What would you a said? You would sholy be as polite as Flem Snopes, wouldn’t you? So maybe it’s all right, after all. Of course you done already talked to Memphis.”

“Tell them what?” Stevens said. “How describe to a Memphis policeman somebody I wouldn’t recognise myself, let alone that he’s actually in Memphis trying to do what I assume he is trying to do, for the simple reason that I don’t know what to do next either?”

“What’s wrong with Memphis?” Ratliff said.

“I’ll bite,” Stevens said. “What is?”

“I thought it would took a heap littler place than Memphis not to have nobody in it you used to go to Harvard with.”

“Well I’ll be damned,” Stevens said. He put in the call at once and presently was talking with him: the classmate, the amateur Cincinnatus at his plantation not far from Jackson, who had already been instrumental in getting the pardon through, so that Stevens needed merely explain the crisis, not the situation.

“You don’t actually know he went to Memphis, of course,” the friend said.

“That’s right,” Stevens said. “But since we are forced by emergency to challenge where he might be, at least we should be permitted one assumption in good faith.”

“All right,” the friend said. “I know the mayor and the commissioner of police both. All you want — all they can do really — is check any places where anyone might have tried to buy a gun or pistol for ten dollars since say noon today. Right?”

“Right,” Stevens said. “And ask them please to call me collect here when — if they do.”

“I’ll call you myself,” the friend said. “You might say I also have a small equity in your friend’s doom.”

“When you call me that to Flem Snopes, smile,” Stevens said.

That was Thursday; during Friday Central would run him to earth all right no matter where he happened to be about the Square. However, there was plenty to do in the office if he composed himself to it. Which he managed to do in time and was so engaged when Ratliff came in carrying something neatly folded in a paper bag and said, “Good mawnin,” Stevens not looking up, writing on the yellow foolscap pad, steadily, quite composed in fact even with Ratliff standing for a moment looking down at the top of his head.

Then Ratliff moved and took one of the chairs beyond the desk, the one against the wall, then half rose and placed the little parcel neatly on the filing case beside him and sat down, Stevens still writing steadily between pauses now and then to read from the open book beneath his left hand; until presently Ratliff reached and took the morning Memphis paper from the desk and opened it and rattled faintly the turn of the page and after a while rattled that one faintly, until Stevens said,

“Dammit, either get out of here or think about something else. You make me nervous.”

“I ain’t busy this mawnin,” Ratliff said. “If you got anything to tend to outside, I can set here and listen for the phone.”

“I have plenty I can do here if you’ll just stop filling the damned air with—” He flung, slammed the pencil down. “Obviously he hasn’t reached Memphis yet or anyway hasn’t tried to buy the gun, or we would have heard. Which is all we want: to get word there first. Do you think that any reputable pawnshop or sporting-goods store that cares a damn about its licence will sell him a gun now after the police—”

“If my name was Mink Snopes, I don’t believe I would go to no place that had a licence to lose for selling guns or pistols.”

“For instance?” Stevens said.

“Out at Frenchman’s Bend they said Mink was a considerable hell-raiser when he was young, within his means of course, which wasn’t much. But he made two or three of them country-boy Memphis trips with the young bloods of his time — Quicks and Tulls and Turpins and such: enough to probably know where to begin to look for the kind of places that don’t keep the kind of licences to have police worrying them ever time a gun or a pistol turns up in the wrong place or don’t turn up in the right one.”

“Don’t you think the Memphis police know as much about Memphis as any damned little murdering maniac, let alone one that’s been locked up in a penitentiary for forty years? The Memphis police, that have a damned better record than a dozen, hell, a hundred cities I could name—”

“All right, all right,” Ratliff said.

“By God, God Himself is not so busy that a homicidal maniac with only ten dollars in the world can hitchhike a hundred miles and buy a gun for ten dollars then hitchhike another hundred and shoot another man with it.”

“Don’t that maybe depend on who God wants shot this time?” Ratliff said. “Have you been by the sheriff’s this mawnin?”

“No,” Stevens said.

“I have. Flem ain’t been to him either yet. And he ain’t left town neither. I checked on that too. So maybe that’s the best sign we want: Flem ain’t worried. Do you reckon he told Linda?”

“No,” Stevens said.

“How do you know?”

“He told me.”

“Flem did? You mean he jest told you, or you asked him?”

“I asked him,” Stevens said. “I said, ‘Are you going to tell Linda?’ ”

“And what did he say?”

“He said, ‘Why?’ ” Stevens said.

“Oh,” Ratliff said.

Then it was noon. What Ratliff had in the neat parcel was a sandwich, as neatly made. “You go home and eat dinner,” he said. “I’ll set here and listen for it.”

“Didn’t you just say that if Flem himself don’t seem to worry, why the hell should we?”

“I won’t worry then,” Ratliff said. “I’ll jest set and listen.”

Though Stevens was back in the office when the call came in midafternoon. “Nothing,” the classmate’s voice said. “None of the pawnshops nor any other place a man might go to buy a gun or pistol of any sort, let alone a ten-dollar one. Maybe he hasn’t reached Memphis yet, though it’s more than twenty-four hours now.”

“That’s possible,” Stevens said.

“Maybe he never intended to reach Memphis.”

“All right, all right,” Stevens said. “Shall I write the commissioner myself a letter of thanks or—”

“Sure. But let him earn it first. He agreed that it not only won’t cost much more, it will even be a good idea to check his list every morning for the next two or three days, just in case. I thanked him for you. I even went further and said that if you ever found yourselves in the same voting district and he decided to run for an office instead of just sitting for it—” as Stevens put the telephone down and turned to Ratliff again without seeing him at all and said,

“Maybe he never will.”

“What?” Ratliff said. “What did he say?” Stevens told, repeated, the gist. “I reckon that’s all we can do,” Ratliff said.

“Yes,” Stevens said. He thought Tomorrow will prove it. But I’ll wait still another day. Maybe until Monday.

But he didn't wait that long. On Saturday his office was always not busy with the county business he was paid a salary to handle, so much as constant with the social coming and going of the countrymen who had elected him to his office. Ratliff, who knew them all too, as well or even better, was unobtrusive in his chair against the wall where he could reach the telephone without even getting up; he even had another neat home-made sandwich, until at noon Stevens said, "Go on home and eat a decent meal, or come home with me. It won't ring today."

"You must know why," Ratliff said.

"Yes. I'll tell you Monday. No: tomorrow. Sunday will be appropriate. I'll tell you tomorrow."

"So you know it's all right now. All settled and finished now. Whether Flem knows it yet or not, he can sleep from now on."

"Don't ask me yet," Stevens said. "It's like a thread; it's true only until I — something breaks it."

"You was right all the time then. There wasn't no need to tell her."

"There never has been," Stevens said. "There never will be."

"That's jest what I said," Ratliff said. "There ain't no need now."

"And what I just said was there never was any need to tell her and there never would have been, no matter what happened."

"Not even as a moral question?" Ratliff said.

"Moral hell and question hell," Stevens said. "It ain't any question at all: it's a fact: the fact that not you nor anybody else that wears hair is going to tell her that her act of pity and compassion and simple generosity murdered the man who passes as her father whether he is or not or a son of a bitch or not."

"All right, all right," Ratliff said. "This here thread you jest mentioned. Maybe another good way to keep it from getting broke before time is to keep somebody handy to hear that telephone when it don't ring at three o'clock this afternoon."

So they were both in the office at three o'clock. Then it was four. "I reckon we can go now," Ratliff said.

"Yes," Stevens said.

"But you still won't tell me now," Ratliff said.

"Tomorrow," Stevens said. "The call will have to come by then."

"So this here thread has got a telephone wire inside of it after all."

"So long," Stevens said. "See you tomorrow."

And Central would know where to find him at any time on Sunday too and in fact until almost half-past two that afternoon he still believed he was going to spend the whole day at Rose Hill. His life had known other similar periods of unrest and trouble and uncertainty even if he had spent most of it as a bachelor; he could recall one or two of them when the anguish and unrest were due to the fact that he was a bachelor, that is, circumstances, conditions insisted on his continuing celibacy despite his own efforts to give it up.

But back then he had had something to escape into: nepenthe, surcease: the project he had decreed for himself while at Harvard of translating the Old Testament back into the classic Greek of its first translating; after which he would teach himself Hebrew and really attain to purity; he had thought last night Why yes, I have that for tomorrow; I had forgotten about that. Then this morning he knew that that would not suffice any more, not ever again now.

He meant of course the effort: not just the capacity to concentrate but to believe in it; he was too old now and the real tragedy of age is that no anguish is any longer grievous enough to demand, justify, any sacrifice.

So it was not even two-thirty when with no surprise really he found himself getting into his car and still no surprise when, entering the empty Sunday afternoon Square, he saw Ratliff waiting at the foot of the office stairs, the two of them, in the office now, making no pretence as the clock crawled on to three. "What happened that we set

exactly three o'clock as the magic deadline in this here business?" Ratliff said.

"Does it matter?" Stevens said.

"That's right," Ratliff said. "The main thing is not to jar or otherwise startle that-ere thread." Then the courthouse clock struck its three heavy mellow blows into the Sabbath somnolence and for the first time Stevens realised how absolutely he had not just expected, but known, that his telephone would not ring before that hour. Then in that same second, instant, he knew why it had not rung; the fact that it had not rung was more proof of what it would have conveyed than the message itself would have been.

"All right," he said. "Mink is dead."

"What?" Ratliff said.

"I don't know where, and it doesn't matter. Because we should have known from the first that three hours of being free would kill him, let alone three days of it." He was talking rapidly, not babbling: "Don't you see? a little kinless tieless frail alien animal that never really belonged to the human race to start with, let alone belonged in it, then locked up in a cage for thirty-eight years and now at sixty-three years old suddenly set free, shoved, flung out of safety and security into freedom like a krait or a fer-de-lance that is quick and deadly dangerous as long as it can stay inside the man-made man-tended tropic immunity of its glass box, but wouldn't live even through the first hour set free, flung, hoicked on a pitchfork or a pair of long-handled tongs into a city street?"

"Wait," Ratliff said, "wait."

But Stevens didn't even pause. "Of course we haven't heard yet where he was found or how or by whom identified because nobody cares; maybe nobody has even noticed him yet. Because he's free. He can even die wherever he wants to now. For thirty-eight years until last Thursday morning he couldn't have had a pimple or a hangnail without it being in a record five minutes later. But he's free now. Nobody cares when or where or how he dies provided his carrion doesn't get under

somebody's feet. So we can go home now, until somebody does telephone and you and Flem can go and identify him."

"Yes," Ratliff said. "Well—"

"Give it up," Stevens said. "Come on out home with me and have a drink."

"We could go by first and kind of bring Flem up to date," Ratliff said.

"Maybe even he might take a dram then."

"I'm not really an evil man," Stevens said. "I wouldn't have loaned Mink a gun to shoot Flem with; I might not even have just turned my head while Mink used his own. But neither am I going to lift my hand to interfere with Flem spending another day or two expecting any moment that Mink will."

He didn't even tell the Sheriff his conviction that Mink was dead. The fact was, the Sheriff told him; he found the Sheriff in his courthouse office and told him his and Ratliff's theory of Mink's first objective and the reason for it and that the Memphis police would still check daily the places where Mink might try to buy a weapon.

"So evidently he's not in Memphis," the Sheriff said. "That's how many days now?"

"Since Thursday."

"And he's not in Frenchman's Bend."

"How do you know?"

"I drove out yesterday and looked around a little."

"So you did believe me, after all," Stevens said.

"I get per diem on my car," the Sheriff said. "Yesterday was a nice day for a country drive. So he's had four days now, to come a hundred miles. And he don't seem to be in Memphis. And I know he ain't in Frenchman's Bend. And according to you, Mr Snopes knows he ain't in Jefferson here. Maybe he's dead."

Whereupon, now that another had stated it, spoke it aloud, Stevens knew that he himself had never believed it, hearing without listening while the Sheriff went on: "A damned little rattlesnake that they say never had any friends to begin with and nobody out at the Bend knows what became of his wife and his two girls or even when they disappeared. To be locked up for thirty-eight years and then suddenly turned out like you do a cat at night, with nowhere to go and nobody really wanting him out. Maybe he couldn't stand being free. Maybe just freedom killed him. I've known it to happen."

"Yes," Stevens said, "you're probably right," thinking quietly We won't stop him. We can't stop him — not all of us together, Memphis police and all. Maybe even a rattlesnake with destiny on his side don't even need luck, let alone friends. He said: "Only we don't know yet. We can't count on that."

"I know," the Sheriff said. "I deputised two men at Varner's store yesterday that claim they remember him, would know him again. And I can have Mr Snopes followed, watched back and forth to the bank. But dammit, watch for who, what, when, where? I can't put a man inside his house until he asks for it, can I? His daughter. Mrs Kohl. Maybe she could do something. You still don't want her to know?"

"You must give me your word," Stevens said.

"All right," the Sheriff said. "I suppose your Jackson buddy will let you know the minute the Memphis police get any sort of a line, won't he?"

"Yes," Stevens said. Though the call didn't come until Wednesday. Ratliff had rung him up a little after ten Tuesday night and told him the news, and on his way to the office this morning he passed the bank whose drawn shades would not be raised today, and as he stood at his desk with the telephone in his hand he could see through his front window the sombre black-and-white-and-violet convolutions of tulle and ribbon and waxen asphodels fastened to the locked front door.

"He found a ten-dollar pistol," the classmate's voice said. "Early Monday morning. It wasn't really a properly licensed pawnshop, so

they almost missed it. But under a little . . . persuasion the proprietor recalled the sale. But he said not to worry, the pistol was only technically still a pistol and it would require a good deal more nourishment than the three rounds of ammunition they threw in with it to make it function.”

“Ha,” Stevens said without mirth. “Tell the proprietor from me he doesn’t know his own strength. The pistol was here last night. It functioned.”

Seventeen

WHEN HE REACHED the Junction a little before eleven o’clock Monday morning, he was in the cab of another cattle truck.

The truck was going on east into Alabama, but even if it had turned south here actually to pass through Jefferson, he would have left it at this point. If it had been a Yoknapatawpha County truck or driven by someone from the county or Jefferson, he would not have been in it at all.

Until he stepped out of the store this morning with the pistol actually in his pocket, it had all seemed simple; he had only one problem: to get the weapon; after that, only geography stood between him and the moment when he would walk up to the man who had seen him sent to the penitentiary without raising a finger, who had not even had the decency and courage to say No to his bloodcry for help from kin to kin, and say, “Look at me, Flem,” and kill him.

But now he was going to have to do what he called “figger” a little. It seemed to him that he was confronted by an almost insurmountable diffusion of obstacles. He was in thirty miles of Jefferson now, home, one same mutual north Mississippi hill-country people even if there was still a trivial county line to cross; it seemed to him that from now on anyone, everyone he met or who saw him, without even needing to recognise or remember his specific face and name, would know at once who he was and where he was going and what he intended to do.

On second thought — an immediate, flashing, almost simultaneous second thought — he knew this to be a physical impossibility, yet he dared not risk it; that the thirty-eight years of being locked up in Parchman had atrophied, destroyed some quality in him which in people who has not been locked up had very likely got even sharper, and they would recognise, know, divine who he was without his even knowing it had happened. It's because I done had to been away so long he thought. Like now I'm fixing to have to learn to talk all over again.

He meant not talk, but think. As he walked along the highway (blacktop now, following a graded survey line, on which automobiles sped, which he remembered as winding dirt along which slow mules and wagons, or at best a saddle horse, followed the arbitrary and random ridges) it would be impossible to disguise his appearance — change his face, his expression, alter his familiar regional clothes or the way he walked; he entertained for a desperate and bizarre moment then dismissed it the idea of perhaps walking backward, at least whenever he heard a car or truck approaching, to give the impression that he was going the other way.

So he would have to change his thinking, as you change the colour of the bulb inside the lantern even though you can't change the lantern itself; as he walked he would have to hold himself unflagging and undeviating to thinking like he was someone who had never heard the name Snopes and the town Jefferson in his life, wasn't even aware that if he kept on this road he would have to pass through it; to think instead like someone whose destination and goal was a hundred and more miles away and who in spirit was already there and only his carcass, his progressing legs, walked this particular stretch of road.

Also, he was going to have to find somebody he could talk with without rousing suspicion, not to get information so much as to validate it. Until he left Parchman, was free at last, the goal for which he had bided patiently for thirty-eight years now practically in his hand, he believed he had got all the knowledge he would need from the, not day-to-day of course and not always year-to-year, but at least decade-to-decade

trickling which had penetrated even into Parchman — how and where his cousin lived, how he spent his days, his habits, what time he came and went and where to and from; even who lived in or about his house with him.

But now that the moment was almost here, that might not be enough. It might even be completely false, wrong, he thought again It's having to been away so long like I had to been; having to been in the place I had to been as though he had spent those thirty-eight years not merely out of the world but out of life, so that even facts when they finally reached him had already ceased to be truth in order to have penetrated there; and, being inside Parchman walls, were per se inimical and betraying and fatal to him if he attempted to use them, depend on them, trust them.

Third, there was the pistol. The road was empty now, running between walls of woods, no sound of traffic and no house or human in sight and he took the pistol out and looked at it again with something like despair. It had not looked very much like a pistol in the store this morning; here, in the afternoon's sunny rural solitude and silence, it looked like nothing recognisable at all; looking, if anything, more than ever like the fossilised terrapin of his first impression. Yet he would have to test it, spend one of his three cartridges simply to find out if it really would shoot and for a moment, a second something nudged at his memory. It's got to shoot he thought. It's jest got to. There ain't nothing else for hit to do. Old Moster jest punishes; He don't play jokes.

He was hungry too. He had not eaten since the animal crackers at sunrise. He had a little money left and he had already passed two gasoline station-stores. But he was home now; he dared not stop in one and be seen buying the cheese and crackers which he could still afford. Which reminded him of night also.

The sun was now less than three hours high; he could not possibly reach Jefferson until tomorrow so it would have to be tomorrow night so he turned from the highway into a dirt crossroad, by instinct almost since he could not remember when he had begun to notice the wisps of

cotton lint snared into the roadside weeds and brambles from the passing gin-bound wagons, since this type of road was familiar out of his long-ago tenant farmer freedom too: a Negro road, a road marked with many wheels and traced with cotton wisps, yet dirt, not even gravel, since the people who lived on and used it had neither the voting power to compel nor the money to persuade the Beat supervisor to do more than scrape and grade it twice a year.

So what he found was not only what he was hunting for but what he had expected: a weathered paintless dog-trot cabin enclosed and backed by a ramshackle of also-paintless weathered fences and outhouses — barns, cribs, sheds — on a rise of ground above a creek-bottom cotton patch where he could already see the whole Negro family and perhaps a neighbour or so too dragging the long stained sacks more or less abreast up the parallel rows — the father, the mother, five children between five or six and twelve, and four girls and young men who were probably the neighbours swapping the work, he, Mink, waiting at the end of the row until the father, who would be the boss, reached him.

“Hidy,” Mink said. “Looks like you could use another hand in here.”

“You want to pick?” the Negro said.

“What you paying?”

“Six bits.”

“I’ll help you a spell,” Mink said. The Negro spoke to the twelve-year-old girl beside him.

“Hand him your sack. You go on to the house and start supper.”

He took the sack. There was nothing unfamiliar about it. He had been picking cotton at this time of the year all his life. The only difference was that for the last thirty-eight years there had been a shotgun and a bull whip at the end of the row behind him as a promise for lagging, where here again were the weighing scales and the money they designated as a reward for speed. And, as he had expected, his employer was presently in the row next him.

“You don’t stay around here,” the Negro said.

“That’s right,” he said. “I’m jest passing through. On my way down to the Delta where my daughter lives.”

“Where?” the Negro said. “I made a Delta crop one year myself.”

It wasn’t that he should have expected this next question and would have avoided it if he knew how. It was rather that the question would not matter if he only didn’t forget to think himself someone else except who he was. He didn’t hesitate; he even volunteered: “Doddsville,” he said. “Not fur from Parchman.” And he knew what the next question would have been too, the one the Negro didn’t ask and would not ask, answering that one too: “I been over a year in a hospital up in Memphis. The doctor said walking would be good for me. That’s why I’m on the road instead of the train.”

“The Vetruns Hospital?” the Negro said.

“What?” he said.

“The Govment Vetruns Hospital?”

“That’s right,” he said. “The govment had me. Over a year.”

Now it was sundown. The wife had gone to the house some time ago.

“You want to weigh out now?” the Negro said.

“I ain’t in no rush,” he said. “I can give you a half a day tomorrow; jest so I knock off at noon. If your wife can fix me a plate of supper and a pallet somewhere, you can take that out of the weighing.”

“I don’t charge nobody to eat at my house,” the Negro said.

The dining-room was an oilcloth-covered table bearing a coal-oil lamp in the same lean-to room where the wood-burning stove now died slowly. He ate alone, the family had vanished, the house itself might have been empty, the plate of fried sidemeat and canned corn and tomatoes stewed together, the pale soft barely cooked biscuits, the cup of coffee already set and waiting for him when the man called him to come and eat. Then he returned to the front room where a few wood embers burned on the hearth against the first cool of autumn night;

immediately the wife and the oldest girl rose and went back to the kitchen to set the meal for the family.

He turned before the fire, spreading his legs; at his age he would feel the cool tonight. He spoke, casual, conversational, in the amenities, idly; at first, for a little while, you would have thought inattentively: "I reckon you gin and trade in Jefferson. I used to know a few folks there. The banker. Dee Spain his name was, I remember. A long time back, of course."

"I don't remember him," the Negro said. "The main banker in Jefferson now is Mr Snopes."

"Oh yes, I heard tell about him. Big banker, big rich. Lives in the biggest house in town with a hired cook and a man to wait on the table for jest him and that daughter is it that makes out she's deaf."

"She is deaf. She was in the war. A cannon broke her eardrums."

"So she claims." The Negro didn't answer. He was sitting in the room's — possibly the house's — one rocking chair, not moving anyway. But now something beyond just stillness had come over him: an immobility, almost like held breath. Mink's back was to the fire, the light, so his face was invisible; his voice anyway had not altered. "A woman in a war. She must have ever body fooled good. I've knowed them like that myself. She jest makes claims and ever body around is too polite to call her a liar. Likely she can hear ever bit as good as you and me."

Now the Negro spoke, quite sternly. "Whoever it was told you she is fooling is the one that's lying. There are folks in more places than right there in Jefferson that know the truth about her whether the word has got up to that Vetrun Hospital where you claim you was at or not. If I was you, I don't believe I would dispute it. Or leastways I would be careful who I disputed it to."

"Sho, sho," Mink said. "You Jefferson folks ought to know. You mean, she can't hear nothing? You could walk right up behind her, say, into the same room even, and she wouldn't know it?"

“Yes,” the Negro said. The twelve-year-old girl now stood in the kitchen door. “She’s deaf. You don’t need to dispute it. The Lord touched her, like He touches a heap of folks better than you, better than me. Don’t worry about that.”

“Well, well,” Mink said. “Sho, now. Your supper’s ready.” The Negro got up.

“What you going to do tonight?” he said. “I ain’t got room for you.”

“I don’t need none,” Mink said. “That doctor said for me to get all the fresh air I can. If you got a extry quilt. I’ll sleep in the cotton truck and be ready for a early start back in that patch tomorrow.”

The cotton which half-filled the bed of the pickup truck had been covered for the night with a tarpaulin, so he didn’t even need the quilt. He was quite comfortable. But mainly he was off the ground. That was the danger, what a man had to watch against: once you laid flat on the ground, right away the earth started in to draw you back down into it.

The very moment you were born out of your mother’s body, the power and drag of the earth was already at work on you; if there had not been other womenfolks in the family or neighbours or even a hired one to support you, hold you up, keep the earth from touching you, you would not live an hour. And you knew it too.

As soon as you could move you would raise your head even though that was all, trying to break the pull, trying to pull erect on chairs and things even when you still couldn’t stand, to get away from the earth, save yourself. Then you could stand alone and take a step or two but even then during those first few years you still spent half of them on the ground, the old patient biding ground saying to you, “It’s all right, it was just a fall, it don’t hurt, don’t be afraid.”

Then you are a man grown, strong, at your peak; now and then you can deliberately risk laying down on it in the woods hunting at night; you are too far from home to get back so you can even risk sleeping the rest of the night on it. Of course you will try to find something, anything — a plank, boards, a log, even brush tops — something, anything to

intervene between your unconsciousness, helplessness, and the old patient ground that can afford to wait because it's going to get you someday, except that there ain't any use in giving you a full mile just because you dared an inch. And you know it; being young and strong you will risk one night on it but even you won't risk two nights in a row.

Because even, say you take out in the field for noon and set under a tree or a hedgerow and eat your lunch and then lay down and you take a short nap and wake up and for a minute you don't even know where you are, for the good reason that you ain't all there; even in that short time while you wasn't watching, the old patient biding unhurried ground has already taken that first light holt on you, only you managed to wake up in time. So, if he had had to, he would have risked sleeping on the ground this last one night. But he had not had to chance it. It was as if Old Moster Himself had said, "I ain't going to help you none, but I ain't going to downright hinder you neither."

Then it was dawn, daybreak. He ate again, in solitude; when the sun rose they were in the cotton again; during these benisoned harvest days between summer's dew and fall's first frost the cotton was moisture-free for picking as soon as you could see it; until noon. "There," he told the Negro. "That ought to help you out a little. You got a good bale for that Jefferson gin now so I reckon I'll go on down the road while I can get a ride for a change."

At last he was that close, that near. It had taken thirty-eight years and he had made a long loop down into the Delta and out again, but he was close now. But this road was a new approach to Jefferson, not the old one from Varner's store which he remembered. These new iron numbers along the roads were different too from the hand-lettered mile boards of recollection and though he could read figures all right, some, most of these were not miles because they never got any smaller. But if they had, in this case too he would have had to make sure:

"I believe this road goes right through Jefferson, don't it?"

"Yes," the Negro said. "You can branch off there for the Delta."

“So I can. How far do you call it to town?”

“Eight miles,” the Negro said. But he could figger a mile whether he saw mileposts or not, seven then six then five, the sun only barely past one o’clock; then four miles, a long hill with a branch bottom at the foot of it and he said,

“Durn it, let me out at that bridge. I ain’t been to the bushes this morning.” The Negro slowed the truck toward the bridge. “It’s all right,” Mink said. “I’ll walk on from here. In fact I’d pure hate for that-ere doctor to see me getting out of even a cotton truck or likely he’d try his durndest to collect another dollar from me.”

“I’ll wait for you,” the Negro said.

“No no,” Mink said. “You want to get ginned and back home before dark. You ain’t got time.” He got out of the cab and said, in the immemorial country formula of thanks: “How much do I owe you?” And the Negro answered in it:

“It ain’t no charge. I was coming anyway.”

“Much obliged,” Mink said. “Jest don’t mention to that doctor about it if you every run across him. See you in the Delta someday.”

Then the truck was gone. The road was empty when he left it. Out of sight from the road would be far enough. Only, if possible, nobody must even hear the sound of the trial shot. He didn’t know why; he could not have said that, having had to do without privacy for thirty-eight years, he now wanted, intended to savour, every minuscule of it which freedom entitled him to; also he still had five or six hours until dark, and probably even less than that many miles, following the dense brier-cypress-willow jungle of the creek-bottom for perhaps a quarter of a mile, maybe more, when suddenly he stopped dead with a kind of amazed excitement, even exhilaration.

Before him, spanning the creek, was a railroad trestle. Now he not only knew how to reach Jefferson without the constant risk of passing the people who from that old Yoknapatawpha County affinity would know who he was and what he intended to do, he would have something to do to pass the time until dark when he could go on.

It was as though he had not seen a railroad in thirty-eight years. One ran along one entire flank of the Parchman wire and he could see trains on it as far as he recalled every day. Also, from time to time gangs of convicts under their shotgun guards did rough construction or repair public works jobs in sight of railroads through the Delta where he could see trains. But even without the intervening wire, he looked at them from prison; the trains themselves were looked at, seen, alien in freedom, fleeing, existing in liberty and hence unreal, chimaeras, apparitions, without past or future, not even going anywhere since their destinations could not exist for him: just in motion a second, an instant, then nowhere; they had not been.

But now it would be different. He could watch them, himself in freedom, as they fled past in freedom, the two of them mutual, in a way even interdependent: it to do the fleeing in smoke and noise and motion, he to do the watching; remembering how thirty-eight or forty years ago, just before he went to Parchman in fact — this occasion connected also with some crisis in his affairs which he had forgotten now; but then so were all his moments: connected, involved in some crisis of the constant outrage and injustice he was always having to drop everything to cope with, handle, with no proper tools and equipment for it, not even the time to spare from the unremitting work it took to feed himself and his family; this was one of those moments or maybe it had been simply the desire to see the train which had brought him the twenty-two miles in from Frenchman's Bend.

Anyway, he had had to pass the night in town whatever the reason was and had gone down to the depot to see the New Orleans-bound passenger train come in — the hissing engine, the lighted cars each with an uppity impudent nigger porter, one car in which people were eating supper while more niggers waited on them, before going back to the sleeping-cars that had actual beds in them; the train pausing for a moment then gone: a long airtight chunk of another world dragged along the dark earth for the poor folks in overalls like him to gape at free for a moment without the train itself, let alone the folks in it, even knowing he was there.

But as free to stand and watch it as any man even if he did wear overalls instead of diamonds; and as free now, until he remembered something else he had learned in Parchman during the long tedious years while he prepared for freedom — the information, the trivia he had had to accumulate since when the time, the freedom came, he might not know until too late when he lacked: there had not been a passenger train through Jefferson since 1935, that the railroad which old Colonel Sartoris (not the banker they called Colonel but his father, the real colonel, that had commanded all the local boys in the old slavery war) had built, which according to the old folks whom even he, Mink, knew and remembered, had been the biggest thing to happen in Yoknapatawpha County, that was to have linked Jefferson and the county all the way from the Gulf of Mexico in one direction to the Great Lakes in the other, was now a fading weed-grown branch line knowing no wheels any more save two local freight trains more or less every day.

In which case, more than ever would the track, the right-of-way be his path into town where the privacy of freedom it had taken him thirty-eight years to earn would not be violated, so he turned and retraced his steps perhaps a hundred yards and stopped; there was nothing: only the dense jungle dappled with September-afternoon silence. He took out the pistol.

Hit does look like a cooter he thought, with what at the moment he believed was just amusement, humour, until he realised it was despair because he knew now that the thing would not, could not possibly fire, so that when he adjusted the cylinder to bring the first of the three cartridges under the hammer and cocked it and aimed at the base of a cypress four or five feet away and pulled the trigger and heard the faint vacant click, his only emotion was calm vindication, almost of superiority, at having been right, of being in an unassailable position to say I told you so, not even remembering cocking the hammer again since this time he didn't know where the thing was aimed when it jerked and roared, incredible with muzzle-blast because of the short barrel; only now, almost too late, springing in one frantic convulsion to

catch his hand back before it cocked and fired the pistol on the last remaining cartridge by simple reflex.

But he caught himself in time, freeing thumb and finger completely from the pistol until he could reach across with his left hand and remove it from the right one which in another second might have left him with an empty and useless weapon after all this distance and care and time. Maybe the last one won't shoot neither he thought, but for only a moment, a second, less than a second, thinking No sir. It will have to. It will jest have to. There ain't nothing else for it to do. I don't need to worry. Old Moster jest punishes; He don't play jokes.

And now (it was barely two o'clock by the sun, at least four hours till sundown) he could even risk the ground once more, this late, this last time, especially as he had last night in the cotton truck on the credit side. So he moved on again, beneath and beyond the trestle this time, just in case somebody had heard the shot and came to look, and found a smooth place behind a log and lay down. At once he began to feel the slow, secret, tentative palpating start as the old biding unimpatient unhurried ground said to itself, "Well, well, be dawg if here ain't one already laying right here on my doorstep so to speak." But it was all right, he could risk it for this short time.

It was almost as though he had an alarm clock; he woke exactly in time to see through a leafed interstice overhead the last of sun drain, fade from the zenith, just enough light left to find his way back through the jungle to the railroad and mount on to it.

Though it was better here, enough of day left to see him most of the last mile to town before it faded completely, displaced by darkness random with the sparse lights of the town's purlieus, the beginning, the first quiet edge-of-town back street beneath the rigid semaphore arms of the crossing warning and a single lonely street light where the Negro boy on the bicycle had ample time to see him standing in the centre of the crossing and brake to a stop. "Hidy, son," he said, using the old country-Negroid idiom for "live" too: "Which-a-way from here does Mr Flem Snopes stay?"

By now, since the previous Thursday night in fact, from about nine-thirty or ten each night until daybreak the next morning, Flem Snopes had had a bodyguard, though no white person in Jefferson, including Snopes himself, except the guard's wife, knew it. His name was Luther Biglin, a countryman, a professional dog trainer and market hunter and farmer until the last sheriff's election.

Not only was his wife the niece of the husband of Sheriff Ephriam Bishop's wife's sister, Biglin's mother was the sister of the rural political boss whose iron hand ruled one of the county divisions (as old Will Varner ruled his at Frenchman's Bend) which had elected Bishop sheriff. So Biglin was now jailor under Bishop's tenure. Though with a definite difference from the standard nepotic run.

Where as often as not, the holders of such lesser hierarchic offices gave nothing to the position they encumbered, having not really wanted it anyway but accepting it merely under family pressure to keep some member of the opposite political faction out of it, Biglin brought to his the sort of passionate enthusiastic devotion and fidelity to the power and immaculacy and integrity of his kinsman-by-marriage's position as say Murat's orderly corporal might have felt toward the symbology of his master's baton.

He was not only honourable (even in his market hunting of venison and duck and quail, where he broke only the law: never his word), he was brave too. After Pearl Harbour, although his mother's brother might, probably could and would, have found or invented for him absolution from the draft, Biglin himself volunteered for the Marine Corps, finding to his amazement that by military standards he had next to no vision whatever in his right eye. He had not noticed this himself.

He was a radio man, not a reading man, and in shooting (he was one of the best wing shots in the county though in an exuberant spendthrift southpaw fashion — he was left-handed, shooting from his left shoulder; in the course of two of his three previous vocations he shot up more shells than anyone in the county; at the age of thirty he had

already shot out two sets of shotgun barrels) the defect had been an actual service to him since he had never had to train himself to keep both eyes open and see the end of the gun and the target at the same instant, or half-close the right one to eliminate parallax.

So when (not by curiosity, but by simple bureaucratic consanguinity) he learned — even quicker than the Sheriff did because he, Biglin, immediately believed it — that the Mink Snopes free at last from the state penitentiary, his old threats against his cousin, even though forty years old, durst not be ignored, let alone dismissed as his patron and superior seemed inclined to do.

So his aim, intent, was still basically to defend and preserve the immaculacy of his kinsman-by-marriage's office, which was to preserve the peace and protect human life and well-being, in which he modestly shared. But there was something else too, though only his wife knew it. Even the Sheriff didn't know about his plan, campaign; he only told his wife: "There may be nothing to it, like Cousin Eef says: just another of Lawyer Stevens's nightmares.

But suppose Cousin Eef is wrong and Lawyer is right; suppose—" He could visualise it: the last split second, Mr Snopes helpless in bed beneath his doom, one last hopeless cry for the help which he knew was not there, the knife (hatchet, hammer, stick of stovewood, whatever the vengeance-ridden murderer would use) already descending when he, Biglin, would step, crash in, flashlight in one hand and pistol in the other: one single shot, the assassin falling across his victim, the expression of demonic anticipation and triumph fading to astonishment on his face— "Why, Mr Snopes will make us rich! He'll have to! There won't be nothing else he can do!"

Since Mr Snopes mustn't know about it either (the Sheriff had explained to him that in America you can't wet-nurse a free man unless he requests it or at least knowingly accepts it), he could not be inside the bedroom itself, where he should be, but would have to take the best station he could find or contrive outside the nearest window he

could enter fastest or at least see to aim through. Which meant of course he would have to sit up all night.

He was a good jailor, conscientious, keeping his jail clean and his prisoners properly fed and tended; besides the errands he did for the Sheriff. Thus the only time he would have to sleep in during the twenty-four hours would be between supper and the latest imperative moment when he must be at his station outside Snopes's bedroom window.

So each night he would go to bed immediately after he rose from the supper table, and his wife would go to the picture show, on her return from which, usually about nine-thirty, she would wake him. Then, with his flashlight and pistol and a sandwich and a folding chair and a sweater against the chill as the late September nights cooled toward midnight, he would stand motionless and silent against the hedge facing the window where, as all Jefferson knew, Snopes spent all his life outside the bank, until the light went out at last; by which time, the two Negro servants would have long since left.

Then he would move quietly across the lawn and open the chair beneath the window and sit down, sitting so immobile that the stray dogs which roamed all Jefferson during the hours of darkness, would be almost upon him before they would sense, smell, however they did it, that he was not asleep, and crouch and whirl in one silent motion and flee; until first light, when he would fold up the chair and make sure the crumpled sandwich wrapping was in his pocket, and depart; though by Sunday night, if Snopes had not been asleep and his daughter not stone deaf, now and then they could have heard him snoring — until, that is, the nocturnal dog crossing the lawn this time would tense, smell — however they did it — that he was asleep and harmless until actually touched by the cold nose.

Mink didn't know this. But even if he had, it probably would have made little difference. He would simply have regarded the whole thing — Biglin, the fact that Snopes was now being guarded — as just one more symptom of the infinite capacity for petty invention of the inimical

forces which had always dogged his life. So even if he had known that Biglin was already on station under the window of the room where his cousin now sat (He had not hurried. On the contrary: once the Negro boy on the bicycle had given him directions, he thought I'm even a little ahead.

Let them eat supper first and give them two niggers time to be outen the way.) he would have behaved no differently: not hiding, not lurking: just unseen unheard and irrevocably alien like a coyote or a small wolf; not crouching, not concealed by the hedge as Biglin himself would do when he arrived, but simply squatting on his hams — as, a countryman, he could do for hours without discomfort — against it while he examined the house whose shape and setting he already knew out of the slow infinitesimal Parchman trickle of facts and information which he had had to garner, assimilate, from strangers yet still conceal from them the import of what he asked; looking in fact at the vast white columned edifice with something like pride that someone named Snopes owned it; a complete and absolute unjealousy: at another time, tomorrow, though he himself would never dream nor really ever want to be received in it, he would have said proudly to a stranger: “My cousin lives there. He own it.”

It looked exactly as he had known it would. There were the lighted rear windows of the corner room where his cousin would be sitting (they would surely have finished supper by now; he had given them plenty of time) with his feet propped on the little special ledge he had heard in Parchman how another kinsman Mink had never seen, Wat Snopes having been born too late, had nailed on to the hearth for that purpose. There were lights also in the windows of the room in front of that one, which he had not expected, knowing also about the special room upstairs the deaf daughter had fixed up for herself.

But no light showed upstairs at all, so evidently the daughter was still downstairs too. And although the lights in the kitchen indicated that the two Negro servants had not left either, his impulse was so strong that he had already begun to rise without waiting longer, to cross to

the window and see, if necessary begin now; who had had thirty-eight years to practise patience in and should have been perfect.

Because if he waited too long, his cousin might be in bed, perhaps even asleep. Which would be intolerable and must not be: there must be that moment, even if it lasted only a second, for him to say, "Look at me, Flem," and his cousin would do so.

But he restrained himself, who had had thirty-eight years to learn to wait in, and sank, squatted back again, easing the hard lump of the pistol which he now carried inside the bib front of his overalls; her room would be on the other side of the house where he couldn't see the lighted windows from here, and the lights in the other room meant nothing since if he was big rich like his cousin Flem, with a fine big house like that, he would have all the lights on downstairs too.

Then the lights went off in the kitchen; presently he could hear the Negro man and the woman still talking as they approached and (he didn't even hold his breath) passed within ten feet of him and went through the gate in the hedge, the voices moving slowly up the lane beyond it until they died away.

Then he rose, quietly, without haste, not furtive, not slinking: just small, just colourless, perhaps simply too small to be noticed, and crossed the lawn to the window and (he had to stand on tiptoe) looked into it at his cousin sitting in the swivel chair like in a bank or an office, with his feet propped against the chimney and his hat on, as he, Mink, had known he would be sitting, looking not too different even though Mink hadn't seen him in forty years; a little changed of course: the black planter's hat he had heard about in Parchman but the little bow tie might have been the same one he had been wearing forty years ago behind the counter in Varner's store, the shirt a white city shirt and the pants dark city pants too and the shoes polished city shoes instead of farmer's brogans.

But no different, really: not reading, just sitting there with his feet propped and his hat on, his jaw moving faintly and steadily as if he were chewing.

Just to be sure, he would circle the house until he could see the lighted upper windows on the other side and had already started around the back when he thought how he might as well look into the other lighted room also while he was this close to it and moved, no less quiet than a shadow and with not much more substance, along the wall until he could stand on tiptoe again and look in the next window, the next room.

He saw her at once and knew her at once — a room walled almost to the ceiling with more books than he knew existed, a woman sitting beneath a lamp in the middle of the room reading one, in horn-rim glasses and that single white streak through the centre of her black hair that he had heard about in Parchman too.

For a second the old helpless fury and outrage possessed him again and almost ruined, destroyed him this time — the rage and fury when, during the first two or three years after he learned that she was back home again apparently for good and living right there in the house with Flem, he would think Suppose she ain't deaf a-tall; suppose she's jest simply got ever body fooled for whatever devilment of her own she's up to since this — the real truth of whether she was deaf or just pretending — was one gambit which he would not only have to depend on somebody else for, but on something as frail and undependable as second- or third-hand hearsay.

Finally he had lied, tricked his way in to the prison doctor but there he was again: daring not to ask what he wanted to know, had to know, find out, learn: only that even the stone-deaf would — could — feel the concussion of the air if the sound were loud enough or close enough. "Like a—" Mink said before he could stop himself. But too late; the doctor finished it for him: "That's right. A shot. But even if you could make us believe you are, how would that get you out of here?" "That's right," Mink said. "I wouldn't need to hear that bull whip: jest feel it."

But that would be all right; there was that room she had fixed up for herself upstairs, while every word from home that trickled down to him in Parchman — you had to believe folks sometimes, you had to, you jest had to — told how his cousin spent all his time in the one downstairs catty-corner across that house that was bigger they said than even the jail.

Then to look in the window and find her, not upstairs and across the house where she should have been, where in a way it had been promised to him she would be, but right there in the next room. In which case everything else he had believed in and depended on until now was probably trash and rubble too; there didn't even need to be an open door between the two rooms so she could be sure to feel what the prison doctor had called the concussion because she wasn't even deaf.

Everything had lied to him; he thought quietly And I ain't even got but one bullet left even if I would have time to use two before somebody come busting in from the street. I got to find a stick of stovewood or a piece of ahrn somewhere — that close, that near to ruination and destruction before he caught himself back right on the brink, murmuring, whispering, "Wait now, wait.

Ain't I told you and told you Old Moster don't play jokes; He jest punishes? Of course she's deaf: ain't all up and down Mississippi been telling you that for ten years now? I don't mean that durn Parchman doctor nor all the rest of them durn jailbird son of a bitches that was all I had to try to find out what I had to know from, but that nigger jest yestiddy evening that got almost impident, durn nigh called a white man a liar to his face the least suh-jestion I made that maybe she was fooling folks. Niggers that don't only know all the undercover about white folks, let alone one that they already claim is a nigger lover and even one of them commonists to boot, until all the niggers in Yoknapatawpha County and likely Memphis and Chicago too know the truth about whether she is deaf or not or ever thing else about her or not.

Of course she's deaf, setting there with her back already to the door where you got to pass and they's bound to be a back door too that all you got to do is jest find it and walk right on out." and moved on, without haste: not furtive, just small and light-footed and invisible, on around the house and up the steps and on between the soaring columns of the portico like any other guest, visitor, caller, opening the screen door quietly into the hall and through it, passing the open door beyond which the woman sat, not even glancing toward it, and went on to the next one and drew the pistol from his overall bib; and, thinking hurriedly, a little chaotically, almost like tiny panting I ain't got but one bullet so it will have to be in the face, the head; I can't resk jest the body with jest one bullet entered the room where his cousin sat and ran a few more steps toward him.

He didn't need to say, "Look at me, Flem." His cousin was already doing that, his head turned over his shoulder. Otherwise he hadn't moved, only the jaws ceased chewing in midmotion. Then he moved, leaned slightly forward in the chair and he had just begun to lower his propped feet from the ledge, the chair beginning to swivel around, when Mink from about five feet away stopped and raised the toad-shaped iron-rust-coloured weapon in both hands and cocked and steadied it, thinking Hit's got to hit his face: not I've got to but It's got to and pulled the trigger and rather felt than heard the dull foolish almost inattentive click.

Now his cousin, his feet now flat on the floor and the chair almost swivelled to face him, appeared to sit immobile and even detached too, watching too Mink's grimed shaking child-sized hands like the hands of a pet coon as one of them lifted the hammer enough for the other to roll the cylinder back one notch so that the shell would come again under the hammer; again that faint something out of the past nudged, prodded: not a warning nor even really a repetition: just faint and familiar and unimportant still since, whatever it had been, even before it had not been strong enough to alter anything nor even remarkable enough to be remembered; in the same second he had dismissed it.

Hit's all right he thought Hit'll go this time: Old Moster don't play jokes and cocked and steadied the pistol again in both hands, his cousin not moving at all now though he was chewing faintly again, as though he too were watching the dull point of light on the cock of the hammer when it flicked away.

It made a tremendous sound though in the same instant Mink no longer heard it. His cousin's body was now making a curious half-stifled convulsive surge which in another moment was going to carry the whole chair over; it seemed to him, Mink, that the report of the pistol was nothing but that when the chair finished falling and crashed to the floor, the sound would wake all Jefferson. He whirled; there was a moment yet when he tried to say, cry, "Stop! Stop! You got to make sho he's dead or you will have throwed away ever thing!" but he could not, he didn't remember when he had noticed the other door in the wall beyond the chair but it was there; where it led to didn't matter just so it led on and not back.

He ran to it, scrabbling at the knob, still shaking and scrabbling at it even after he realised it was locked, still shaking the knob, quite blind now, even after the voice spoke behind him and he whirled again and saw the woman standing in the hall door; for an instant he thought So she could hear all the time before he knew better: she didn't need to hear; it was the same power had brought her here to catch him that by merely pointing her finger at him could blast, annihilate, vaporise him where he stood.

And no time to cock and aim the pistol again even if he had had another bullet so even as he whirled he flung, threw the pistol at her, nor even able to follow that because in the same second it seemed to him she already had the pistol in her hand, holding it toward him, saying in that quacking duck's voice that deaf people use: "Here. Come and take it. That door is a closet. You'll have to come back this way to get out."

Eighteen

“STOP THE CAR,” Stevens said. Ratliff did so. He was driving though it was Stevens’s car. They had left the highway at the crossroads — Varner’s store and gin and blacksmith shop, and the church and the dozen or so dwellings and other edifices, all dark now though it was not yet ten o’clock, which composed the hamlet — and had now traversed and left behind the rest of the broad flat rich valley land on which old Varner — in his eighties now, his hair definitely grey, twelve years a widower until two years ago when he married a young woman of twenty-five or so who at the time was supposed to be engaged to, anyway courted by, his grandson — held liens and mortgages where he didn’t own it outright; and now they were approaching the hills: a section of small worn-out farms tilted and precarious among the eroded folds like scraps of paper.

The road had ceased some time back to be even gravel and at any moment now it would cease to be passable to anything on wheels; already, in the fixed glare (Ratliff had stopped the car) of the headlights, it resembled just one more eroded ravine twisting up the broken rise crested with shabby and shaggy pine and worthless blackjack.

The sun had crossed the equator, in Libra now; and in the cessation of motion and the quiet of the idling engine, there was a sense of autumn after the slow drizzle of Sunday and the bright spurious cool which had lasted through Monday almost; the jagged rampart of pines and scrub oak was a thin dike against the winter and rain and cold, under which the worn-out fields overgrown with sumac and sassafras and persimmon had already turned scarlet, the persimmons heavy with fruit waiting only for frost and the baying of potlicker possum hounds. “What makes you think he will be there even if we can get there ourselves?” Stevens said.

“Where else would he be?” Ratliff said. “Where else has he got to go? Back to Parchman, after all this recent trouble and expense it taken him to get out? What else has he got but home?”

“He hasn’t even got that home any more,” Stevens said. “When was it — three years ago — that day we drove out here about that boy — what was his name?—”

“Turpin,” Ratliff said.

“ — that didn’t answer his draft call and we came out looking for him. There wasn’t anything left of the house then but the shell. Part of the roof, and what was left of the walls above the height convenient to pull off for firewood. This road was better then too.”

“Yes,” Ratliff said. “Folks kept it kind of graded and scraped up dragging out that kindling.”

“So there’s not even the shell any more.”

“There’s a cellar under it,” Ratliff said.

“A hole in the ground?” Stevens said. “A den like an animal?”

“He’s tired,” Ratliff said. “Even if he wasn’t sixty-three or -four years old. He’s been under a strain for thirty-eight years, let alone the last — this is Thursday, ain’t it? — seven days. And now he ain’t got no more strain to prop him up. Jest suppose you had spent thirty-eight years waiting to do something, and sho enough one day you finally done it. You wouldn’t have much left neither. So what he wants now is jest to lay down in the dark and the quiet somewhere for a spell.”

“He should have thought of that last Thursday,” Stevens said. “It’s too late to do that now.”

“Ain’t that exactly why we’re out here?” Ratliff said.

“All right,” Stevens said. “Drive on.” Instead, Ratliff switched off the engine. Now indeed they could sense, feel the change of the season and the year. Some of the birds remained but the night was no longer full of the dry loud cacophony of summer nocturnal insects. There were only the crickets in the dense hedgerows and stubble of mown hayfields, where at noon the dusty grasshoppers would spurt, frenetic and random, going nowhere. And now Stevens knew what was coming, what Ratliff was going to talk about.

“You reckon she really never knowed what that durn little rattlesnake was going to do the minute they turned him loose?” Ratliff said. “Certainly not,” Stevens said, quickly, too quickly, too late. “Drive on.”

But Ratliff didn't move. Stevens noticed that he still held his hand over the switch key so that Stevens himself couldn't have started the engine. “I reckon she'll stop over in Memphis tonight,” Ratliff said. “With ther-ere fancy brand-new automobile and all.”

Stevens remembered all that. His trouble was, to forget it. She had told him herself — or so he believed then — this morning after she had given him the necessary information to draw the deed: how she wasn't going to accept her so-called father's automobile either but instead had ordered a new one from Memphis, which would be delivered in time for her to leave directly after the funeral; he could bring the deed to the house for her signature when they said good-bye, or what they — she and he — would have of good-bye.

It was a big funeral: a prominent banker and financier who had not only died in his prime (financial anyway) of a pistol wound but from the wrong pistol wound, since by ordinary a banker dying of a pistol in his own bedroom at nine o'clock in the evening should have just said good-night to a state or federal (maybe both) bank inspector.

He (the deceased) had no auspices either: fraternal, civic, nor military: only finance; not an economy — cotton or cattle or anything else which Yoknapatawpha County and Mississippi were established on and kept running by, but belonging simply to Money. He had been a member of a Jefferson church true enough, as the outward and augmented physical aspect of the edifice showed, but even that had been not a subservience nor even an aspiration nor even really a confederation nor even an amnesty, but simply an armistice temporary between two irreconcilable tongues.

Yet not just the town but the county too came to it. He (Stevens) sat, a member of the cast itself, by the (sic) daughter's request, on the front row in fact and next her by her insistence: himself and Linda and her

Uncle Jody, a balding man who had added another hundred pounds of jowl and belly to his father's long skeleton; and yes, Wall Street Snopes, Wall Street Panic Snopes, who not only had never acted like a Snopes, he never had even looked like one: a tall dark man except for the eyes of an incredible tender youthful periwinkle blue, who had begun as the delivery boy in a side-street grocery to carry himself and his younger brother, Admiral Dewey, through school, and went from there to create a wholesale grocery supply house in Jefferson serving all the county; and now, removed with his family to Memphis, owned a chain of wholesale grocery establishments blanketing half of Mississippi and Tennessee and Arkansas too; all of them facing the discreetly camouflaged excavation beside the other grave over which not her husband (who has merely ordained and paid for it) but Stevens himself had erected the outrageous marble lie which had been the absolution for Linda's freedom nineteen years ago. As it would be he who would erect whatever lie this one would postulate; they — he and Linda — had discussed that too this morning.

"No. Nothing," she said.

Yes he wrote.

"No," she said. He merely raised the tablet and held the word facing her; he could not have written It's for your sake Then he didn't need to.

"You're right," she said. "You will have to do another one too."

He wrote We will

"No," she said. "You always have for me. You always will for me. I know now I've never really had anybody but you. I've never really needed anybody else but you."

Sitting there while the Baptist minister did his glib and rapid office, he (Stevens) looked around at the faces, town faces and country faces, the citizens who represented the town because the town should be represented at this obsequy; the ones who represented simply themselves because some day they would be where Flem Snopes now lay, as friendless and dead and alone too; the diffident anonymous hopeful faces who had owed him or his bank money and, as people will and can, hoped, were even capable of believing that, now that he was

dead, the debt might, barely might become lost or forgotten or even simply undemanded, uncollected. Then suddenly he saw something else.

There were not many of them: he distinguished only three, country faces also, looking no different from the other country faces diffident, even effacing, in the rear of the crowd; until suddenly they leaped, sprang out, and he knew who they were.

They were Snopeses; he had never seen them before but they were incontrovertible: not alien at all: simply identical, not so much in expression as in position, attitude; he thought rapidly, in something like that second of simple panic when you are wakened They're like wolves come to look at the trap where another bigger wolf, the boss wolf, the head wolf, what Ratliff would call the bull wolf, died; if maybe there was not a shred or scrap of hide still snared in it.

Then that was gone. He could not keep on looking behind him and now the minister had finished and the undertaker signalled for the select, the publicly bereaved, to depart; and when he looked, could look again, the faces were gone. He left Linda there.

That is, her uncle would drive her home, where by this time the new automobile she had told him she had telephoned to Memphis for after she decided yesterday afternoon to drive alone to New York as soon as the funeral was over, would be waiting; she would probably be ready to leave, the new car packed and all, by the time he got there with the deed for her to sign.

So he went to the office and picked it up — a deed of gift (with the usual consideration of one dollar) returning the house and its lot to the De Spains. She had done it all herself, she hadn't even informed him in the process, let alone beforehand.

She had been unable to locate Manfred, whom Snopes had dispossessed of it along with the bank and the rest of his, Manfred's, name and dignity in Jefferson, but she had found at last what remained

of his kin — the only sister of old Major de Spain, Manfred's father, and her only child: a bedridden old woman living in Los Angeles with her spinster daughter of sixty, the retired principal of a suburban Los Angeles grammar school; she, Linda, tracing, running them down herself without even consulting her lawyer: an outrage really, when the Samaritan, the philanthropist, the benefactor, begins not only to find but even to invent his own generosity, not only without recourse to but even ignoring the lawyers and secretaries and public relations counsellors; outrageous, antisocial in fact, taking the very cake out of that many mouths.

The papers wanted only her signature; it had not been fifteen minutes yet when he slowed his car in toward the curb before the house, not even noticing the small group — men, boys, a Negro or so — in front of him except to say, "The local committee validating her new automobile," and parked his own and got out with the briefcase and had even turned, his glance simply passing across the group because it was there, when he said with a quick, faint, not really yet surprise, "It's a British Jaguar.

It's brand new," and was even walking on when suddenly it was as if a staircase you are mounting becomes abruptly a treadmill, you still walking, mounting, expending energy and motion but without progress; so abrupt and sudden in fact that you are only your aura, your very momentum having carried your corporeality one whole step in advance of you; he thought No place on earth from which a brand-new Jaguar could be delivered to Jefferson, Mississippi, since even noon yesterday, let alone not even telephoned for until last night thinking, desperately now No! No! It is possible! They could have had one, found one in Memphis last night or this morning — this ramshackle universe which has nothing to hold it together but coincidence and walked smartly up and paused beside it, thinking So she knew she was going to leave after last Thursday; she just didn't know until Tuesday night exactly what day that would be.

It was spanking unblemished new, the youngish quite decent-looking agent or deliverer stood beside it and at that moment the Negro houseman came out the front door carrying some of her luggage.

"Afternoon," Stevens said. "Damned nice car. Brand new, isn't it?"

"That's right," the young man said. "Never even touched the ground until Mrs Kohl telephoned for it yesterday."

"Lucky you had one on hand for her," Stevens said.

"Oh, we've had it since the tenth of this month. When she ordered it last July she just told us to keep it when it came in, until she wanted it. I suppose her father's . . . death changed her plans some."

"Things like that do," Stevens said. "She ordered it in July."

"That's right. They haven't caught the fellow yet, I hear."

"Not yet," Stevens said. "Damned nice car. Would like to afford one myself," and went on, into the open door and up the stairs which knew his feet, into the sitting-room which knew him too. She stood watching him while he approached, dressed for the drive in a freshly laundered suit of the faded khaki coveralls, her face and mouth heavily made up against the wind of motion; on a chair lay the stained burberry and her purse and heavy gloves and a scarf for her head; she said, At least I didn't lie to you. I could have hidden it in the garage until you had come and gone, but I didn't.

Though not in words: she said,

"Kiss me, Gavin," taking the last step to him herself and taking him into her arms, firm and without haste and set her mouth to his, firmly and deliberately too, and opened it, he holding her, his hand moving down her back while the dividing incleft outswell of her buttocks rose under the harsh khaki, as had happened before now and then, the hand unchallenged — it had never been challenged, it would never be, the fidelity unthreatened and secure even if there had been nothing at all between the hand and the inswelling incleft woman flesh, he simply touching her, learning and knowing not with despair or grief but just

sorrow a little, simply supporting her buttocks as you cup the innocent hipless bottom of a child.

But not now, not this time. It was terror now; he thought with terror How did it go? the man “whose irresistible attraction to women was that simply by being in their presence he gave them to convince themselves that he was capable of any sacrifice for them”.

Which is backward, completely backward; the poor dope not only didn't know where first base was, he didn't even know he was playing baseball. You don't need to tempt them because they have long since already selected you by that time, choosing you simply because they believe that in the simple act of being selected you have at once become not merely willing and ready but passionately desirous of making a sacrifice for them just as soon as the two of you can think of one good enough, worthy.

He thought Now she will realise that she cannot trust me but only hoped she could so now the thrust of hips, gripping both shoulders to draw me into the backward-falling even without a bed and was completely wrong; he thought Why should she waste her time trusting me when she has known all her life that all she has to do is just depend on me. She just stood holding him and kissing him until he himself moved first to be free. Then she released him and stood looking at his face out of the dark blue eyes not secret, not tender, perhaps not even gentle.

“Your mouth is a mess,” she said. “You'll have to go to the bathroom. — You are right,” she said. “You always are right about you and me.” They were not secret: intent enough yes, but not secret; someday perhaps he would remember that they never had been really tender even. “I love you,” she said. “You haven't had very much, have you. No, that's wrong. You haven't had anything. You have had nothing.”

He knew exactly what she meant: her mother first, then her; that he had offered the devotion twice and got back for it nothing but the privilege of being obsessed, bewitched, besotted if you like; Ratliff

certainly would have said besotted. And she knew he knew it; that was (perhaps) their curse: they both knew any and every mutual thing immediately.

It was not because of the honesty, nor because she believed she had been in love with him all her life, that she had let him discover the new Jaguar and what it implied in the circumstances of her so-called father's death. It was because she knew she could not have kept concealed from him the fact that she had ordered the car from New York or London or wherever it came from, the moment she knew for sure he could get Mink the pardon.

She had pockets in all her clothes into which the little ivory tablet with its clipped stylus exactly fitted. He knew all of them, the coveralls too, and reached his hand and took it out. He could have written I have everything. You trusted me. You chose to let me find you murdered your so-called father rather than tell me a lie. He could, perhaps should have written I have everything. Haven't I just finished being accessory before a murder. Instead, he wrote We have had everything
"No," she said.

He wrote Yes
"No," she said.

He printed YES this time in letters large enough to cover the rest of the face of the tablet and erased it clean with the heel of his palm and wrote Take someone with You to hear you Will be killed
She barely glanced at it, nowhere near long enough, anyone would have thought, to have read it, then stood looking at him again, the dark blue eyes that whether they were gentle or not or tender or not or really candid or not, it didn't matter. Her mouth was smeared too behind the faint smiling, itself — the smiling — like a soft smear, a drowsing stain. "I love you," she said. "I have never loved anybody but you." He wrote No
"Yes," she said.

He wrote No again and even while she said "Yes" again he wrote No No No No until he had completely filled the tablet and erased it and wrote Deed And, standing side by side at the mantel where they transacted all her business which required communication between them, he spread the document and uncapped his pen for her to sign it and folded the paper and was putting it back into the briefcase when she said, "This too." It was a plain long envelope, he had noticed it on the mantel.

When he took it he could feel the thick sheaf of banknotes through the paper, too many of them; a thousand dollars would destroy him in a matter of weeks, perhaps days, as surely as that many bullets. He had been tempted last night to tell her so: "A thousand dollars will kill him too. Will you be satisfied then?" even though he was still ignorant last night how much truth that would be. But he refrained. He would take care of that himself when the time came. "Do you know where you can find him?"

Ratliff does he wrote and erased it and wrote Go out 2 minutes Bathroom your Mouth too and stood while she read it and then herself stood a moment longer, not moving, her head bent as if he had written perhaps in cryptogram. "Oh," she said. Then she said: "Yes. It's time," and turned and went to the door and stopped and half-turned and only then looked at him: no faint smile, no nothing: just the eyes which even at this distance were not quite black. Then she was gone.

He already had the briefcase in his hand. His hat was on the table. He put the envelope into his pocket and scrubbed at his mouth with his handkerchief, taking up the hat in passing, and went on, down the stairs, wetting the handkerchief with spittle to scrub his mouth. There would be a mirror in the hall but this would have to do until he reached the office; there would be, was a back door of course but there was the houseman somewhere and maybe even the cook too.

Besides, there was no law against crossing the front lawn itself from the front entrance and so through the side gate into the lane, from which he could reach the street without even having to not look at the new car again. Until Ratliff, happening to be standing by chance or

coincidence near the foot of the office stairs, said, "Where's your car? Never mind, I'll go pick it up. Meantime you better use some water when you get upstairs."

He did, and locked the stained handkerchief into a drawer and sat in the office. In time he heard Ratliff's feet on the stairs though Ratliff shook the locked door only; here was another time when he could have worked at his youthful dream of restoring the Old Testament to its virgin's pristinity. But he was too old now. Evidently it takes more than just anguish to be all that anguishing. In time the telephone rang. "She's gone," Ratliff said. "I've got your car. You want to come and eat supper with me?"

"No," he said.

"You want me to telephone your wife that's what you're doing?"

"Dammit, I told you No," he said. Then he said, "Much obliged."

"I'll pick you up at eight o'clock say," Ratliff said.

He was at the curb waiting; the car — his — moved immediately he was in it. "I'm not safe," he said.

"I reckon so," Ratliff said. "It's all over now, soon that is as we get used to it."

"I mean, you're not safe. Nobody is, around me. I'm dangerous. Can't you understand I've just committed murder?"

"Oh, that," Ratliff said. "I decided some time back that maybe the only thing that would make you safe to have around would be for somebody to marry you. That never worked but at least you're all right now. As you jest said, you finally committed a murder. What else is there beyond that for anybody to think up for you to do?" Now they were on the highway, the town behind them and they could pick up a little speed to face the twenty miles out to Varner's store. "You know the one in this business I'm really sorry for? It's Luther Biglin.

You ain't heard about that and likely wouldn't nobody else if it hadn't kind of come out today in what you might call a private interview or absolvment between Luther and Eef Bishop. It seems that ever night

between last Thursday and the following Tuesday, Luther has been standing or setting guard as close as he could get outside that window from as soon as he could get there after Miz Biglin would get back from the picture show and wake him up, to daylight.

You know: having to spend all day long taking care of his jail and prisoners in addition to staying close to the sheriff's office in case Eef might need him, he would have to get some rest and the only way he could work it would be after he et supper until Miz Biglin, who acted as his alarm clock, got back from the picture show, which would be from roughly seven o'clock to roughly more or less half-past nine or ten o'clock, depending on how long the picture show was, the balance of the night standing or setting in a folding chair jest outside Flem's window, not for a reward or even glory, since nobody but Miz Biglin knowed it, but simply outen fidelity to Eef Bishop's sworn oath to defend and protect human life in Jefferson even when the human life was Flem Snopes's. Yet outen the whole twenty-four hours Mink could a picked, he had to pick one between roughly seven o'clock and roughly nine-thirty to walk in on Flem with that thing whoever sold it to him told him was a pistol, almost like Mink done it outen pure and simple spite — a thing which, as the feller says, to a dog shouldn't happen."

"Drive on," Stevens said. "Pick it up."

"Yes," Ratliff said. "So this is what it all come down to. All the ramshacking and foreclosing and grabbling and snatching, doing it by gentle underhand when he could but by honest hard trompling when he had to, with a few of us trying to trip him and still dodge outen the way when we could but getting over-trompled too when we couldn't. And now all that's left of it is a bedrode old lady and her retired old-maid schoolteacher daughter that would a lived happily ever after in sunny golden California.

But now they got to come all the way back to Mississippi and live in that-ere big white elephant of a house where likely Miss Allison will have to go back to work again, maybe might even have to hump and hustle some to keep it up since how can they have mere friends and

acquaintances, let alone strangers, saying how a Mississippi-born and -bred lady refused to accept a whole house not only gift-free-for-nothing but that was actively theirs anyhow to begin with, without owing even Much obliged to nobody for getting it back. So maybe there's even a moral in it somewhere, if you jest knowed where to look."

"There aren't any morals," Stevens said. "People just do the best they can."

"The pore sons of bitches," Ratliff said.

"The poor sons of bitches," Stevens said. "Drive on. Pick it up."

So somewhere about ten o'clock he sat beside Ratliff in the dark car on a hill road that had already ceased to be a road and soon would cease to be even passable, while Ratliff said, "So you think she really didn't know what he was going to do when he got out?"

"Yes I tell you," Stevens said. "Drive on."

"We got time," Ratliff said. "He ain't going nowhere. Talking about that thing he used for a pistol, that he dropped or throwed it away while he was running through that back yard. Eef Bishop let me look at it. That Memphis feller was right. It didn't even look like a pistol. It looked like a old old mud-crusted cooter. It had two shells in it, the hull and another live one.

The cap of the hull was punched all right, only it and the live one both had a little nick jest outside the cap, both of the nicks jest alike and even in the same place, so that when Eef taken the live one out and turned the hull a little and set it back under the hammer and cocked it and snapped it and we opened the cylinder, there was another of them little nicks in the case jest outside the cap, like sometimes that mossback firing pin would hit the cap and sometimes it wouldn't.

So it looks like Mink either tried out both of them shells beforehand for practice test and both of them snapped once, yet he still walked in there to kill Flem jest hoping one of them would go off this time, which

don't sound reasonable; or that he stood there in front of Flem and snapped both of them at him and then turned the cylinder back to try again since that was all he had left he could do at that moment, and this time one of them went off. In that case, what do you reckon Flem's reason was for setting there in that chair letting Mink snap them two shells at him until one of them went off and killed him?"

"I don't know," Stevens said harshly. "Drive on!"

"Maybe he was jest bored too," Ratliff said. "Like Eula. Maybe there was two of them. The pore son of a bitch."

"He was impotent," Stevens said.

"What?" Ratliff said.

"Impotent. When he got in bed with a woman all he could do was go to sleep. — Yes!" Stevens said. "The poor sons of bitches that have to cause all the grief and anguish they have to cause! Drive on!"

"But suppose it was more than that," Ratliff said. "You was town-raised when you was a boy; likely you never heard of Give-me-lief. It was a game we played. You would pick out another boy about your own size and you would walk up to him with a switch or maybe a light stick or a hard green apple or maybe even a rock, depending on how hard a risk you wanted to take, and say to him, 'Gimme lief,' and if he agreed, he would stand still and you would take one cut or one lick at him with the switch or stick, as hard as you picked out, or back off and throw at him once with the green apple or the rock. Then you would stand still and he would take the same switch or stick or apple or rock or anyways another one jest like it, and take one cut or throw at you. That was the rule. So jest suppose—"

"Drive on!" Stevens said.

" — Flem had had his lief fair and square like the rule said, so there wasn't nothing for him to do but jest set there, since he had likely found out years back when she finally turned up here again even outen a communist war, that he had already lost—"

"Stop it!" Stevens said. "Don't say it!"

“ — and now it was her lief and so suppose—”

“No!” Stevens said “No!” But Ratliff was not only nearer the switch, his hand was already on it, covering it.

“ — she knowed all the time what was going to happen when he got out, that not only she knowed but Flem did too—”

“I won’t believe it!” Stevens said. “I won’t! I can’t believe it,” he said.

“Don’t you see I cannot?”

“Which brings up something else,” Ratliff said. “So she had a decision to make too that once she made it, it would be for good and all and too late to change it. She could a waited two more years and God His-self couldn’t a kept Mink in Parchman without He killed him, and saved herself not jest the bother and worry but the moral responsibility too, even if you do say they ain’t no morals.

Only she didn’t. And so you wonder why. If maybe, if there wasn’t no folks in heaven, it wouldn’t be heaven, and if you couldn’t recognise them as folks you knowed, wouldn’t nobody want to go there.

And that someday her maw would be saying to her, ‘Why didn’t you revenge me and my love that I finally found it, instead of jest standing back and blind hoping for happen-so? Didn’t you never have no love of your own to learn you what it is?’ — Here,” he said.

He took out the immaculately clean, impeccably laundered and ironed handkerchief which the town said he not only laundered himself but hemstitched himself too, and put it into Stevens’s blind hand and turned the switch and flicked on the headlights. “I reckon we’ll be about right now,” he said.

Now the road even ceased to be two ruts. It was a gash now, choked with brier, still mounting. “I’ll go in front,” Ratliff said. “You growed up in town. I never even seen a light bulb until after I could handle a straight razor.” Then he said, “There it is” — a canted roof line where one end of the gable had collapsed completely (Stevens did not recognise, he simply agreed it could once have been a house) above which stood one worn gnarled cedar.

He almost stumbled through, across what had been a fence, a yard fence, fallen too, choked fiercely with rose vines long since gone wild again. "Walk behind me," Ratliff said. "They's a old cistern. I think I know where it is. I ought to brought a flashlight."

And now, in a crumbling slant downward into, through, what had been the wall's old foundation, an orifice, a black and crumbled aperture yawned at their feet as if the ruined house itself had gaped at them. Ratliff had stopped. He said quietly: "You never seen that pistol. I did. It didn't look like no one-for-ten-dollars pistol. It looked like one of a two-for-nine-and-a-half pistols.

Maybe he's still got the other one with him," when Stevens, without stopping, pushed past him and, fumbling one foot downward, found what had been a step; and, taking the gold initialled lighter from his pocket, snapped it on and by the faint wavered gleam continued to descend, Ratliff, behind now, saying, "Of course. He's free now.

He won't never have to kill nobody else in all his life," and followed, into the old cellar — the cave, the den where on a crude platform he had heaped together, the man they sought half-squatted half-knelt blinking up at them like a child interrupted at its bedside prayers: not surprised in prayer: interrupted, kneeling in the new overalls which were stained and foul now, his hands lying half-curved on the front of his lap, blinking at the tiny light which Stevens held.

"Hidy," he said.

"You can't stay here," Stevens said. "If we knew where you were, don't you know the Sheriff will think of this place too by tomorrow morning?"

"I ain't going to stay," he said. "I jest stopped to rest. I'm fixing to go on pretty soon. Who are you fellers?"

"Never mind that," Stevens said. He took out the envelope containing the money. "Here," he said. It was two hundred and fifty dollars again. The amount was indubitable out of the whole thousand it had

contained. Stevens had not even troubled to rationalise his decision of the amount. The kneeling man looked at it quietly.

"I left that money in Parchman. I had done already got shut of it before I went out the gate. You mean a son of a bitch stole that too?"

"This is not that money," Stevens said. "They got that back. This is new money she sent you this morning. This is different."

"You mean when I take it I ain't promised nobody nothing?"

"Yes," Stevens said. "Take it."

He did so. "Much obliged," he said. "That other time they said I would get another two hundred and fifty again in three months if I went straight across Mississippi without stopping and never come back again. I reckon that's done stopped this time."

"No," Stevens said. "That too. In three months tell me where you are and I'll send it."

"Much obliged," Mink said. "Send it to M. C. Snopes."

"What?" Stevens said.

"To M. C. Snopes. That's my name: M. C."

"Come on," Ratliff said, almost roughly, "let's get out of here," taking him by the arm even as Stevens turned, Ratliff taking the burning lighter from him and holding it up while Stevens found the fading earthen steps again, once more up and out into the air, the night, the moonless dark, the worn-out eroded fields supine beneath the first faint breath of fall, waiting for winter.

Overhead, celestial and hierarchate, the constellations wheeled through the zodiacal pastures: Scorpion and Bear and Scales; beyond cold Orion and the Sisters the fallen and homeless angels choired, lamenting. Gentle and tender as a woman, Ratliff opened the car door for Stevens to get in. "You all right now?" he said.

"Yes I tell you, goddammit," Stevens said.

Ratliff closed the door and went around the car and opened his and got in and closed it and turned the switch and snapped on the lights and

put the car in gear — two old men themselves, approaching their sixties. “I don’t know if she’s already got a daughter stashed out somewhere, or if she jest ain’t got around to one yet. But when she does I jest hope for Old Lang Zyne’s sake she don’t never bring it back to Jefferson. You done already been through two Eula Varners and I don’t think you can stand another one.”

When the two strangers took the light away and were gone, he didn’t lie down again. He was rested now, and any moment now the time to go on again would come. So he just continued to kneel on the crude platform of old boards he had gathered together to defend himself from the ground in case he dropped off to sleep.

Luckily the man who robbed him of his ten dollars last Thursday night hadn’t taken the safety pin too, so he folded the money as small as it would fold into the bib pocket and pinned it. It would be all right this time, it made such a lump that even asleep he couldn’t help but feel anybody fooling with it.

Then the time came to go on. He was glad of it in a way; a man can get tired, burnt out on resting like on anything else. Outside it was dark, cool and pleasant for walking, empty except for the old ground. But then a man didn’t need to have to keep his mind steadily on the ground after sixty-three years.

In fact, the ground itself never let a man forget it was there waiting, pulling gently and without no hurry at him between every step, saying, Come on, lay down; I ain’t going to hurt you. Jest lay down. He thought I’m free now.

I can walk any way I want to. So he would walk west now, since that was the direction people always went: west. Whenever they picked up and moved to a new country, it was always west, like Old Moster Himself had put it into a man’s very blood and nature his paw had give him at the very moment he squirted him into his maw’s belly.

Because he was free now. A little further along toward dawn, any time the notion struck him to, he could lay down. So when the notion struck him he did so, arranging himself, arms and legs and back, already feeling the first faint gentle tug like the durned old ground itself was trying to make you believe it wasn't really noticing itself doing it.

Only he located the right stars at that moment, he was not laying exactly right since a man must face the east to lay down; walk west but when you lay down, face the exact east. So he moved, shifted a little, and now he was exactly right and he was free now, he could afford to risk it; to show how much he dared risk it, he even would close his eyes, give it all the chance it wanted; whereupon as if believing he really was asleep, it gradually went to work a little harder, easy of course, not to really disturb him: just harder, increasing.

Because a man had to spend not just all his life but all the time of Man too guarding against it; even back when they said man lived in caves, he would raise up a bank of dirt to at least keep him that far off the ground while he slept, until he invented wood floors to protect him and at last beds too, raising the floors storey by storey until they would be laying a hundred and even a thousand feet up in the air to be safe from the earth.

But he could risk it, he even felt like giving it a fair active chance just to show him, prove what it could do if it wanted to try. And in fact, as soon as he thought that, it seemed to him he could feel the Mink Snopes that had had to spend so much of his life just having unnecessary bother and trouble, beginning to creep, seep, flow easy as sleeping; he could almost watch it, following all the little grass blades and tiny roots, the little holes the worms made, down and down into the ground already full of the folks that had the trouble but were free now, so that it was just the ground and the dirt that had to bother and worry and anguish with the passions and hopes and skeers, the justice and the injustice and the griefs, leaving the folks themselves easy now, all mixed and jumbled up comfortable and easy so wouldn't nobody even know or even care who was which any more, himself among them, equal to any, good as any, brave as any, being inextricable from,

anonymous with all of them: the beautiful, the splendid, the proud and the brave, right on up to the very top itself among the shining phantoms and dreams which are the milestones of the long human recording — Helen and the bishops, the kings and the unhomed angels, the scornful and graceless seraphim.

Charlottesville, Virginia

9 March 1959

The End

The Reivers, William Faulkner

The Reivers

A Reminiscence

Faulkner's last novel, *The Reivers* was published in 1962 and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction the following year. The author had previously won the award for *A Fable*, making him one of only three authors to be awarded the Pulitzer more than once. Unlike many of his earlier narratives, it is structured as a straightforward narration, avoiding the complicated literary techniques of his more famous novels. It is a picaresque novel, surprisingly light-hearted given its subject matter.

The plot takes place in the first decade of the twentieth century and concerns the young boy Lucius Priest (a distant cousin of the McCaslin/Edmonds family in *Go Down, Moses*) who accompanies a family friend, employee and protégé named Boon Hogganbeck to

Memphis. Boon hopes to convince a prostitute called “Miss Corrie” to marry him.

Since he has no way to make his journey to Memphis, he steals (‘reives’) Lucius’ grandfather’s car, the first car in Yoknapatawpha County. After they set out on their adventure, they discover that Ned McCaslin, a black man that works with Boon at Lucius’ grandfather’s horse stables, has stowed away with them. Once in Memphis, Ned trades in the car for a racehorse, while Lucius finally comes of age and Boon sets about trying to win the heart of Miss Corrie...

Contents

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

IX

X

XI

XII

XIII

I

GRANDFATHER SAID:

This is the kind of a man Boon Hogganbeck was. Hung on the wall, it could have been his epitaph, like a Bertillon chart or a police poster; any cop in north Mississippi would have arrested him out of any crowd after merely reading the date.

It was Saturday morning, about ten o'clock. We — your great-grandfather and I — were in the office, Father sitting at the desk totting up the money from the canvas sack and matching it against the list of freight bills which I had just collected around the Square; and I sitting in the chair against the wall waiting for noon when I would be paid my Saturday's (week's) wage of ten cents and we would go home and eat dinner and I would be free at last to overtake (it was May) the baseball game which had been running since breakfast without me: the idea (not mine: your great-grandfather's) being that even at eleven a man should already have behind him one year of paying-for, assuming responsibility for, the space he occupied, the room he took up, in the world's (Jefferson, Mississippi's, anyway) economy.

I would leave home with Father immediately after breakfast each Saturday morning, when all the other boys on the street were merely arming themselves with balls and bats and gloves — not to mention my three brothers, who, being younger and therefore smaller than I, were more fortunate, assuming this was Father's logic or premise: that since any adult man worth his salt could balance or stand off four children in economic occupancy, any one of the children, the largest certainly, would suffice to carry the burden of the requisite economic motions: in this case, making the rounds each Saturday morning with the bills for the boxes and cases of freight which our Negro drivers had picked up at the depot during the week and delivered to the back doors of the grocery and hardware and farmers' supply stores, and bring the canvas sack back to the livery stable for Father to count and balance it, then sit in the office for the rest of the morning ostensibly to answer the telephone — this for the sum of ten cents a week, which it was assumed I would live inside of.

That's what we were doing when Boon came jumping through the door. That's right. Jumping. It was not really a high step up from the hallway, even for a boy of eleven (though John Powell, the head hostler, had had Son Thomas, the youngest driver, find, borrow, take — anyway, snaffle — from somewhere a wooden block as an intermediate step for me), and Boon could have taken it as he always did in his own six-foot-four stride.

But not this time: jumping into the room. In its normal state his face never looked especially gentle or composed; at this moment it looked like it was about to explode right out from between his shoulders with excitement, urgency, whatever it was, jumping on across the office toward the desk and already hollering at Father: “Look out, Mr Maury, get out of the way,” reaching, lunging across Father toward the lower drawer where the livery-stable pistol lived; I couldn’t tell whether it was Boon lunging for the drawer who knocked the chair (it was a swivel chair on casters) back or whether it was Father who flung the chair back to make himself room to kick at Boon’s reaching hand, the neat stacks of coins scattering in all directions across the desk and Father hollering too now, still stomping either at the drawer or Boon’s hand or maybe both:

“God damn it, stop it!”

“I’m going to shoot Ludus!” Boon hollered. “He’s probably clean across the Square by now! Look out, Mr Maury!”

“No!” Father said. “Get away!”

“You wont let me have it?” Boon said.

“No, God damn it,” Father said.

“All right,” Boon said, already jumping again, back toward the door and out of it. But Father just sat there. I’m sure you have often noticed how ignorant people beyond thirty or forty are. I dont mean forgetful. That’s specious and easy, too easy to say Oh papa (or grandpa) or mama (or grandma), they’re just old; they have forgotten. Because there are some things, some of the hard facts of life, that you dont forget, no matter how old you are. There is a ditch, a chasm; as a boy you crossed it on a footlog. You come creeping and doddering back at thirty-five or forty and the footlog is gone; you may not even remember the footlog but at least you dont step out onto that empty gravity that footlog once spanned.

That was Father then. Boon came jumping without warning into the office and almost knocked Father chair and all over, grabbling at the drawer where the pistol was, until Father managed to kick or stomp or whatever it was his hand away, then Boon turned and went jumping

back out of the office and apparently, obviously, Father thought that was all of it, that it was finished. He even finished cursing, just on principle, as though there were no urgency anywhere, heeling the chair back to the desk and seeing the scattered money which would have to be counted all over now, and then he started to curse at Boon again, not even about the pistol but simply at Boon for being Boon Hogganbeck, until I told him.

“He’s gone to try to borrow John Powell’s,” I said.

“What?” Father said. Then he jumped too, both, of us, across the office and down into the hallway and down the hallway toward the lot behind the stable where John Powell and Luster were helping Gabe, the blacksmith, shoe three of the mules and one of the harness horses, Father not even taking time to curse now, just hollering “John! Boon! John! Boon!” every three steps.

But he was too late this time too. Because Boon fooled him — us. Because John Powell’s pistol was not just a moral problem in the stable, it was an emotional one too.

It was a .41 caliber snub-nosed revolver, quite old but in excellent condition because John had kept it that way ever since he bought it from his father the day he was twenty-one years old. Only, he was not supposed to have it. I mean, officially it did not exist. The decree, as old as the stable itself, was that the only pistol connected with it would be the one which stayed in the bottom right-hand drawer of the desk in the office, and the mutual gentlemen’s assumption was that no one on the staff of the establishment even owned a firearm from the time he came on duty until he went back home, let alone brought one to work with him.

Yet — and John had explained it to all of us and had our confederated sympathy and understanding, a unified and impregnable front to the world and even to Father himself if that unimaginable crisis had ever arisen, which it would not have except for Boon Hogganbeck — telling us (John) how he had earned the price of the pistol by doing outside work on his own time, on time apart from helping his father on the

farm, time which was his own to spend eating or sleeping, until on his twenty-first birthday he had paid the final coin into his father's hand and received the pistol; telling us how the pistol was the living symbol of his manhood, the ineffaceable proof that he was now twenty-one and a man; that he never intended to, declined even to imagine the circumstance in which he would ever, pull its trigger against a human being, yet he must have it with him; he would no more have left the pistol at home when he came away than he would have left his manhood in a distant closet or drawer when he came to work; he told us (and we believed him) that if the moment ever came when he would have to choose between leaving the pistol at home, or not coming to work himself, there would have been but one possible choice for him.

So at first his wife had stitched a neat strong pocket exactly fitting the pistol on the inside of the bib of his overalls. But John himself realised at once that this wouldn't do. Not that the pistol might fall out at some irretrievable moment, but that the shape of it was obvious through the cloth; it couldn't have been anything else but a pistol. Obvious not to us: we all knew it was there, from Mr Ballott, the white stable foreman, and Boon, his assistant (whose duty was night duty and so he should have been at home in bed at this moment), on down through all the Negro drivers and hostlers, down to the last lowly stall cleaner and even to me, who only collected the Saturday accumulation of freight bills and answered the telephone.

On even to old Dan Grinnup, a dirty man with a tobacco-stained beard, who was never quite completely drunk, who had no official position in the stable, partly because of the whiskey maybe but mostly because of his name, which was not Grinnup at all but Grenier: one of the oldest names in the county until the family went to seed — the Huguenot Louis Grenier who crossed the mountains from Virginia and Carolina after the Revolution and came down into Mississippi in the seventeen nineties and established Jefferson and named it — who (old Dan) lived nowhere (and had no family save an idiot nephew or cousin or something still living in a tent in the river jungle beyond Frenchman's Bend which had once been a part of the Grenier plantation) until he (old Dan) would appear, never too drunk to drive it, at the stable in

time to take the hack to the depot and meet the 9:30 p.m. and the 4:12 a.m. trains and deliver the drummers to the hotel, or on duty all night sometimes when there were balls or minstrel or drama shows at the opera house (at times, at some cold and scornful pitch of drink, he would say that once Greniers led Yoknapatawpha society; now Grinnups drove it), holding his job, some said, because Mr Ballott's first wife had been his daughter, though we in the stable all believed it was because when Father was a boy he used to fox hunt with old Dan's father out at Frenchman's Bend.

Obvious (the pistol) not only to us but to Father himself. Because Father knew about it too. He had to know about it; our establishment was too small, too intricate, too closely knit. So Father's moral problem was exactly the same as John Powell's, and both of them knew it and handled it as mutual gentlemen must and should: if Father were ever compelled to acknowledge the pistol was there, he would have to tell John either to leave it at home tomorrow, or not come back himself. And John knew this and, a gentlemen too, he himself would never be the one to compel Father to acknowledge the pistol existed.

So, instead of in the overall bib, John's wife stitched the pocket just under the left armpit of the jumper itself, invisible (anyway unobtrusive) when John was wearing the jumper or when in warm weather (like now) the jumper hung on John's private nail in the harness room. That was the situation of the pistol when Boon, who was being paid to be and who in a sense had given his word that he would be at home in bed at this hour instead of hanging around the Square, where he would be vulnerable to what had sent him rushing back to the stable, came jumping through the office door a minute ago and made Father and John Powell both liars.

Only Father was too late again. Boon fooled him — us. Because Boon knew about that nail in the harness room too. And smart too, too smart to come back up the hallway where he would have to pass the office; when we reached the lot John and Luster and Gabe (the three mules and the horse too) were still watching the still-swinging side gate through which Boon had just vanished, carrying the pistol in his hand.

John and Father looked at each other for about ten seconds while the whole edifice of *entendre-de-noblesse* collapsed into dust. Though the noblesse, the *oblige*, still remained.

“It was mine,” John said.

“Yes,” Father said. “He saw Ludus on the Square.”

“I’ll catch him,” John said. “Take it away from him too. Say the word.”

“Catch Ludus, somebody,” Gabe said. Though short, he was a tremendously big man, bigger than Boon, with a terrifically twisted leg from an old injury in his trade; he would pick up the hind foot of a horse or mule and lock it behind the warped knee and (if there was something — a post — anything — for him to hold to) the horse or mule might throw itself but no more: neither snatch that foot free nor get enough balance to kick him with the other one. “Here, Luster, you jump and catch—”

“Aint nobody studying Ludus,” John said. “Ludus the safest man there. I seen Boon Hogganbeck” — he didn’t say Mister and he knew Father heard him: something he would never have failed to do in the hearing of any white man he considered his equal, because John was a gentleman. But Father was competent for noblesse too: it was that pistol which was unforgivable, and Father knew it— “shoot before. Say the word, Mr Maury.”

“No,” Father said. “You run to the office and telephone Mr Hampton.” (That’s right. A Hampton was sheriff then too.) “Tell him I said to grab Mr Boon as quick as he can.” Father went toward the gate.

“Go with him,” Gabe told Luster. “He might need somebody to run for him. And latch that gate.”

So the three of us went up the alley toward the Square, me trotting now to keep up, not really trying to overtake Boon so much as to stay between Boon and the pistol and John Powell. Because, as John himself had said, nobody needed to study Ludus. Because we all knew Boon’s marksmanship, and with Boon shooting at Ludus, Ludus himself was

safe. He (Ludus) had been one of our drivers too until last Tuesday morning. This is what happened, as reconstructed from Boon and Mr Ballott and John Powell and a little from Ludus himself.

A week or two before, Ludus had found a new girl, daughter (or wife: we didn't know which) of a tenant on a farm six miles from town. On Monday evening, when Boon came in to relieve Mr Ballott for the night shift, all the teams and wagons and drivers were in except Ludus. Mr Ballott told Boon to telephone him when Ludus came in, and went home. That was Mr Ballott's testimony.

This was Boon's, corroborated in part by John Powell (Father himself had gone home some time before): Mr Ballott was barely out the front door when Ludus came in the back way, on foot. Ludus told Boon that the tire on one of his wheels had loosened and he had stopped at our house and seen Father, who had told him to drive the wagon into the pond in the pasture where the wood of the wheel would swell back to the tire, and stable and feed the mules in our lot and come and get them in the morning.

Which you could have expected even Boon to believe, as John Powell immediately did not, since anyone who knew either would have known that, whatever disposition he made of the wagon for the night, Father would have sent Ludus to lead the team back to their stalls in the livery stable where they could be cleaned and fed properly. But that's what Boon said he was told, which he said was why he didn't interrupt Mr Ballott's evening meal to notify him, since Father knew where the mules and wagon were, and it was Father, not Mr Ballott, who owned them.

Now John Powell telling it: but reluctantly; he would likely never have told it at all if Boon had not made his (John's) silence about the truth a larger moral issue than his loyalty to his race. Once he saw Ludus walk empty-handed into the back door of the stable at the next coincident moment to Mr Ballott's departure by the front one, leaving only Boon in charge, John didn't even bother to listen to what tale Ludus would tell.

He simply went back through the hallway and across the lot into the alley and on to the end of the alley and was actually standing beside the wagon when Ludus returned to it. It now contained a sack of flour, a gallon jug of coal oil and (John said) a nickel sack of peppermint candy.

This is about what happened, because although John's word about any horse or mule while inside the stable was law, inviolable, even beyond Boon, right up to Mr Ballott or Father himself, out here in no man's land he was just another wage hand in Maury Priest's livery stable and he and Ludus both knew it. Maybe Ludus even reminded him of this, but I doubt it. Because all Ludus needed to say was something like: "If word gets back to Maury Priest about how I borried this wagon and team tonight, maybe the same word gonter get back to him about what's sewed up in that jumper you wears."

And I dont think he said that either because he and John both knew that too, just as they both knew that if Ludus waited for John to report to Father what Ludus called the "borrying" of the wagon and team, Father would never know it, and if John waited for Ludus (or any other Negro in the stable or Jefferson either) to tell Father about that pistol, Father would never know that either. So Ludus probably said nothing at all, and John only said, "All right.

But if them mules aint back in their stalls, without one sweat or whip mark on them and not even looking sleepy, a good solid hour before Mr Ballott gets here tomorrow morning" (you will have already noticed how both of them had completely dismissed Boon from the affair: neither Ludus to say, "Mr Boon knows these mules wont be in tonight; aint he the boss until Mr Ballott comes back in the morning?" nor John to say, "Anybody that would believe the tale you brought in here tonight in place of them mules, aint competent to be the boss of nothing.

And I aint even good convinced yet that his name is Boon Hogganbeck”) “Mr Maury aint just gonter know where that team and wagon wasn’t last night, he’s gonter know where they was.”

But John didn’t say it. And sure enough, although Ludus’s mules had been back in their stalls a good hour before daylight, fifteen minutes after Mr Ballott reached the stable at six the next morning, he sent for Ludus and told him he was fired. “Mr Boon knowed my team was out,” Ludus said. “He sent me himself to get him a jug of whiskey. I brung it back to him about four this morning.”

“I didn’t send you anywhere,” Boon said. “When he come in here last night with that cock-and-bull story about them mules being in Mr Maury’s lot, I never even listened. I didn’t even bother to ask him where that wagon actually was, let alone why he was in such a sweating need of a wagon and team last night.

What I told him was, before he brought that wagon back this morning I would expect him to go by Mack Winbush’s and bring me back a gallon of Uncle Cal Bookwright’s whiskey. I give him the money for it — two dollars.”

“And I brung you the whiskey,” Ludus said. “I dont know what you done with it.”

“You brought me a half a jug of rotgut, mainly lye and red pepper,” Boon said. “I dont know what Mr Maury’s going to do to you about keeping them mules out all night but it aint a circumstance to what Calvin Bookwright will do to you when I show him that whiskey and tell him you claim he made it.”

“Mr Winbush stays a solid eight miles from town,” Ludus said. “It would a been midnight before I could get back to—” and stopped.

“So that’s why you needed a wagon,” Boon said. “You finally tomcatted yourself clean out of Jefferson and now you got to ramshack the country to locate another back window you can crawl in. Well, you’ll have plenty of time now; the only trouble is, you’ll have to walk—”

“You tole me a jug of whiskey,” Ludus said sullenly. “I brung you a jug—”

“It wasn’t even half full,” Boon said. Then to Mr Ballott: “Hell fire, you wont even have to give him a week’s pay now.” (The weekly pay of drivers was two dollars; this was 1905, remember.) “He already owes me that for that whiskey. What you waiting for? for Mr Maury to come in his-self and fire him?”

Though if Mr Ballott (and Father) had really intended to fire Ludus for good, they would have given him his week’s pay. The very fact that they didn’t indicated (and Ludus knew it) that he was merely being docked a week’s pay (with vacation) for keeping a team out all night without proper authority; next Monday morning Ludus would appear with the other drivers at the regular time and John Powell would have his team ready for him as if nothing had happened. Only, Fate — Rumor — gossip, had to intervene.

So Father, Luster and I hurried up the alley toward the Square, me trotting now, and still too late. We hadn’t even reached the end of the alley when we heard the shots, all five of them: WHOW WHOW WHOW WHOW WHOW like that, then we were in the Square and (it wasn’t far: right at the corner in front of Cousin Isaac McCaslin’s hardware store) we could see it. There were plenty of them; Boon sure picked his day for witnesses; First Saturdays were trade days even then, even in May when you would think people would be too busy getting land planted.

But not in Yoknapatawpha County. They were all there, black and white: one crowd where Mr Hampton (the grandfather of this same Little Hub who is sheriff now, or will be again next year) and two or three bystanders were wrestling with Boon, and another crowd where another deputy was holding Ludus about twenty feet away and still in the frozen attitude of running or frozen in the attitude of running or in the attitude of frozen running, whichever is right, and another crowd around the window of Cousin Ike’s store which one of Boon’s bullets (they never did find where the other four went) had shattered after creasing the buttock of a Negro girl who was now lying on the

pavement screaming until Cousin Ike himself came jumping out of the store and drowned her voice with his, roaring with rage at Boon not for ruining his window but (Cousin Ike was young then but already the best woodsman and hunter this county ever had) for being unable to hit with five shots an object only twenty feet away.

It continued to go fast. Doctor Peabody's office was just across the street, above Christian's drugstore; with Mr Hampton carrying John Powell's pistol and leading, Luster and another Negro man carried the girl, still screaming and bleeding like a stuck pig, up the stairs, Father following with Boon, then me and the deputy with Ludus, and as many more as could crowd onto the stairs until Mr Hampton stopped and turned and bellowed at them. Judge Stevens's office was just down the gallery from Doctor Peabody's; he was standing at the top of the steps as we came up. So we — I mean Father and me and Boon and Ludus and the deputy — went in there to wait for Mr Hampton to come back from Doctor Peabody's office. It wasn't long.

"All right," Mr Hampton said. "It barely creased her. Buy her a new dress" (there wasn't anything under it) "and a bag of candy and give her father ten dollars, and that'll settle Boon with her. I aint quite decided yet what'll settle him with me." He breathed hard at Boon a moment: a big man with hard little gray eyes, as big as Boon in fact, though not as tall. "All right," he told Boon.

"He insulted me," Boon said. "He told Son Thomas I was a narrow-asted son of a bitch."

Now Mr Hampton looked at Ludus. "All right," he said.

"I never said he was norrer-asted," Ludus said. "I said he was norrer-headed."

"What?" Boon said.

"That's worse," Judge Stevens said.

"Of course it's worse," Boon said, cried. "Cant you see? And I aint even got any choice. Me, a white man, have got to stand here and let a damn mule-wrestling nigger either criticise my private tail, or state before five

public witnesses that I aint got any sense. Cant you see? Because you cant take nothing back, not nothing. You cant even correct it because there aint nothing to correct neither one of them to.” He was almost crying now, his big ugly florid walnut-tough walnut-hard face wrung and twisted like a child’s. “Even if I managed to get another pistol somewhere to shoot Son Thomas with, I’d likely miss him too.”

Father got up, quickly and briskly. He was the only one sitting down; even Judge Stevens was standing spraddled on the hearth before the cold fireplace with his hands under his coattails exactly like it was winter and there was a fire burning. “I must get back to work,” Father said. “What does the old saw say about idle hands?” He said, not to anybody: “I want both of them, Boon and this boy, put under bond to keep the peace: say, a hundred dollars each; I will make the bond. Only, I want two mutual double-action bonds. I want two bonds, both of which will be abrogated, fall due, at the same moment that either one of them does anything that — that I—”

“That dont suit you,” Judge Stevens said.

“Much obliged,” Father said. “ — the same second that either one of them breaks the peace. I dont know if that is legal or not.”

“I dont either,” Judge Stevens said. “We can try. If such a bond is not legal, it ought to be.”

“Much obliged,” Father said. We — Father and I and Boon — went toward the door.

“I could come back now, without waiting to Monday,” Ludus said. “Iffen you needs me.”

“No,” Father said. We — Father and I and Boon — went on down the stairs, to the street. It was still First Saturday and trade day, but that’s all it was now — that is, until somebody else named Boon Hogganbeck got hold of another pistol. We went on back along the street toward the stable, Father and I and Boon; he spoke now across the top of my head toward the back of Father’s:

“A dollar a week for two hundred dollars is a year and forty-eight weeks. That window of Ike’s will be another ten or fifteen I reckon, besides that girl that got in the way. Say two years and three months. I’ve got about forty dollars in money. If I gave you that as a cash down-payment, I still dont reckon you’d put me and Ludus and Son Thomas in one of the empty stalls and lock the door for ten minutes. Would you?”

“No,” Father said.

II

THAT WAS SATURDAY. Ludus was back at work Monday morning. On the next Friday my grandfather — the other one, Mother’s father, your great-grandmother’s father — died in Bay St. Louis. Boon didn’t actually belong to us. I mean, not solely to us, the Priests. Or rather I mean the McCaslins and Edmondses, of whom we Priests are what might be called the cadet branch.

Boon had three proprietors: not only us, as represented by Grandfather and Father and Cousin Ike McCaslin and our other cousin, Zachary Edmonds, to whose father, McCaslin Edmonds, Cousin Ike on his twenty-first birthday had abdicated the McCaslin plantation — he belonged not just to us but to Major de Spain and General Compson too until he died.

Boon was a corporation, a holding company in which the three of us — McCaslins, De Spain, and General Compson — had mutually equal but completely undefined shares of responsibility, the one and only corporation rule being that whoever was nearest at the crises would leap immediately into whatever breach Boon had this time created or committed or simply fallen heir to; he (Boon) was a mutual benevolent protective benefit association, of which the benefits were all Boon’s and the mutuality and the benevolence and the protecting all ours.

His grandmother had been the daughter of one of old Issetibbeha’s Chickasaws who married a white whiskey trader; at times, depending on the depth of his cups, Boon would declare himself to be at least

ninety-nine one-hundredths Chickasaw and in fact a lineal royal descendant of old Issetibbeha himself; the next time he would offer to fight any man who dared even intimate that he had one drop of Indian blood in his veins.

He was tough, faithful, brave and completely unreliable; he was six feet four inches tall and weighed two hundred and forty pounds and had the mentality of a child; over a year ago Father had already begun to say that at any moment now I would outgrow him.

In fact, although he was obviously a perfectly normal flesh-and-blood biological result (vide the moments in his cups when he was not merely ready and willing but even eager to fight any man or men either pro or con, depending on how the drink had taken him, for the right to ancestry) and hence he had to have been somewhere during those first nine or ten or eleven years, it was as if Boon had been created whole and already nine or ten or eleven years old, by the three of us, McCaslin-De Spain-Compson, as a solution to a dilemma one day at Major de Spain's hunting camp.

That's right, the same camp which you will probably continue to call McCaslin's camp for a few years after your Cousin Ike is gone, just as we — your fathers — continued to call it De Spain's camp for years after Major de Spain was gone.

But in the time of my fathers, when Major de Spain bought or borrowed or leased the land (however men managed to acquire valid titles in Mississippi between 1865 and '70) and built the lodge and stables and kennels, it was his camp: who culled and selected the men he considered worthy to hunt the game he decreed to be hunted, and so in that sense not only owned who hunted it but where they hunted and even what: the bear and deer, and wolves and panthers also ranged it then, less than twenty miles from Jefferson — the four or five sections of river bottom jungle which had been a portion of old Thomas Sutpen's vast kingly dream which in the end had destroyed not only itself but Sutpen too, which in those days was a sort of eastern gateway to the still almost virgin wilderness of swamp and jungle which

stretched westward from the hills to the towns and plantations along the Mississippi.

It was only twenty miles then; our fathers could leave Jefferson at midnight in buggies and wagons (a man on a horse did it even quicker) on the fifteenth of November and be on a deer- or bear-stand by daybreak.

Even in 1905 the wilderness had retreated only twenty more miles; the wagons bearing the guns and food and bedding had merely to start at sundown; and now a northern lumber company had built a narrow-gauge railroad for hauling logs, which connected with the main line, passing within a mile of Major de Spain's new camp, with a courtesy stop to let Major de Spain and his guests off, to be met by the wagons which had gone in the day before.

Though by 1925 we could already see the doom. Major de Spain and the rest of that old group, save your Cousin Ike and Boon, were gone now and (there was gravel now all the way from Jefferson to De Spain's flag stop) their inheritors switched off their automobile engines to the sound of axes and saws where a year ago there had been only the voices of the running hounds.

Because Manfred de Spain was a banker, not a hunter like his father; he sold lease, land and timber and by 1940 (it was McCaslin's camp now) they — we — would load everything into pickup trucks and drive two hundred miles over paved highways to find enough wilderness to pitch tents in; though by 1980 the automobile will be as obsolete to reach wilderness with as the automobile will have made the wilderness it seeks. But perhaps they — you — will find wilderness on the back side of Mars or the moon, with maybe even bear and deer to run it.

But then, when Boon materialized at the camp one day, full panoplied and already ten or eleven or twelve years old, there were only twenty miles for Major de Spain and General Compson and McCaslin Edmonds and Walter Ewell and old Bob Legate and the half-dozen others who would come and go, to travel.

But General Compson, although he had commanded troops not too unsuccessfully as a colonel at Shiloh, and again not too unsuccessfully as a brigadier during Johnston's retreat on Atlanta, was a little short in terrain, topography, and would promptly get lost ten minutes after he left camp (the mule he preferred to ride would have brought him back at any time but, not only a paroled Confederate general but a Compson too, he declined to accept counsel or advice from a mule), so as soon as the last hunter was in from the morning's drive, everyone would take turns blowing a horn until General Compson at last got in.

Which was satisfactory, anyway served, until General Compson's hearing began to fail too. Until finally one afternoon Walter Ewell and Sam Fathers, who was half Negro and half Chickasaw Indian, had to track him down and camp in the woods with him all night, facing Major de Spain with the alternative of either forbidding him to leave the tent or expelling him from the club, when lo, there was Boon Hogganbeck, already a giant, even at ten or eleven already bigger than General Compson, whose nurse he became — a waif, who seemed to have nothing and know nothing but his name; even Cousin Ike is not sure whether it was McCaslin Edmonds or Major de Spain who found Boon first where whoever bore him had abandoned him.

All Ike knows — remembers — is that Boon was already there, about twelve years old, out at old Carothers McCaslin's place, where McCaslin Edmonds was already raising Ike as if he was his father and now and without breaking stride took over Boon too as though he had been Boon's father also, though at that time McCaslin Edmonds himself was only thirty.

Anyway, as soon as Major de Spain realised that he must either expel General Compson from the club, which would be difficult, or forbid him to leave the camp, which would be impossible, and hence he must equip General Compson with something resembling a Boon Hogganbeck, there was the Boon Hogganbeck, produced either by McCaslin Edmonds or perhaps by both, of them — Edmonds and De Spain himself — in simultaneous crisis.

Ike could remember that: the loading of the bedding and guns and food into the wagon on the fourteenth of November, with Tennie's Jim (grandfather of this Bobo Beauchamp of whom you will hear presently) and Sam Fathers and Boon (he, Ike, was only five or six then; another four or five years before he would be ten and could make one also) and McCaslin himself riding ahead on the horse, to the camp where each morning Boon would follow General Compson on a second mule until by simple force probably, since at twelve Boon was already bigger than his charge, Boon would compel him to the right direction in time to reach camp before dark.

Thus General Compson made a woodsman of Boon despite himself, you might say, in simple self-defense. But even eating at the same table and ranging the same woods and sleeping in the same rain even with Walter Ewell never made a marksman of him; one of the camp's favorite stories was about Boon's shooting, told by Walter Ewell: of being on a stand where he had left Boon (old General Compson had gone to his fathers at last — or to whatever bivouac old soldiers of that war, blue or gray either, probably insisted on going to since probably no place would suit them for anything resembling a permanent stay — and now Boon was a regular hunter like anybody else) and of hearing the hounds and realising that the deer was going to cross at Boon's stand, then of hearing the five shots from Boon's ramshackle pump gun (General Compson had bequeathed it to him; it had never been in the best condition while Compson owned it and Walter said his real surprise was that the gun had fired even twice without jamming, let alone five times) and then Boon's voice across the woods between them: "God damn! Yonder he goes! Head him! Head him!" And how he — Walter — hurried across to Boon's stand and found the five exploded shells on the ground and not ten paces away the prints of the running buck which Boon had not even touched.

Then Grandfather bought that automobile and Boon found his soul's mate. By this time he was officially (by mutual McCaslin-Edmonds-Priest consent, even McCaslin Edmonds having given up or seen the light at last when Boon failed the third grade for the second time too —

or maybe the real light McCaslin saw was that Boon would never stay on any farm long enough to learn to be a farmer) a member of the livery stable staff.

At first the jobs were mostly still the odd ones — feeding, cleaning harness and buggies. But I told you he had a way with horses and mules, and soon he was a regular driver of hired vehicles — hacks and cabs which met the daytime trains, and the buggies and surreys and light wagons in which the drummers made the rounds of the country stores. He lived in town now, except when McCaslin and Zachary both were away at night and Boon would sleep in the house to protect the women and children. I mean, he lived in Jefferson.

I mean, he actually had a home — a single rented room in what in my grandfather's time was the Commercial Hotel, established in hopeful rivalry of the Holston House but never making the grade in that rivalry.

But solid enough: where juries were lodged and fed during court terms and where country litigants and horse- and mule-traders felt more at ease than among the carpets and brass cuspidors and leather chairs and linen tablecloths across town; then in my time the Snopes Hotel with both hand-painted esses upside down when Mr Flem Snopes (the banker, murdered ten or twelve years ago by the mad kinsman who perhaps didn't believe his cousin had actually sent him to the penitentiary but at least could have kept him out or anyway tried to) began to lead his tribe out of the wilderness behind Frenchman's Bend, into town; then for a brief time in the mid-thirties leased by a brassy-haired gentlewoman who came briefly from nowhere and went briefly back, known to your father and the police as Little Chicago; and which you know, those glories but memories now, as Mrs Rouncewell's boarding house.

But in Boon's time it was still the Commercial Hotel; in the intervals between sleeping on the floor of some Compson or Edmonds or Priest kitchen, he was living there when my grandfather bought the automobile.

My grandfather didn't want an automobile at all; he was forced to buy one. A banker, president of the older Bank of Jefferson, the first bank in Yoknapatawpha County, he believed then and right on to his death many years afterward, by which time everybody else even in Yoknapatawpha County had realised that the automobile had come to stay, that the motor vehicle was an insolvent phenomenon like last night's toadstool and, like the fungus, would vanish with tomorrow's sun. But Colonel Sartoris, president of the newer, the mushroom Merchants and Farmers Bank, forced him to buy one.

Or rather, another insolvent, a dreamy myopic gentian-eyed mechanical wizard named Buffaloe, compelled him to. Because my grandfather's car wasn't even the first one in Jefferson. (I don't count Manfred de Spain's red E.M.F. racer.

Although De Spain owned it and drove it daily through Jefferson streets for several years, it had no more place in the decorous uxorious pattern of a community than Manfred himself did, both of them being incorrigible and bachelor, not in the town but on it and up to no good like one prolonged unbroken Saturday night even while Manfred was actually mayor, its very scarlet color being not even a scornful defiance of the town but rather a kind of almost inattentive disavowal.)

Grandfather's was not even the first automobile to see Jefferson or vice versa. It was not even the first one to inhabit Jefferson. Two years before, one had driven all the way down from Memphis, making the eighty-mile trip in less than three days. Then it rained, and the car stayed in Jefferson two weeks, during which time we almost had no electric lights at all; nor, if the livery stable had depended solely on Boon, no public transportation either.

Because Mr Buffaloe was the man — the one man, the sole human being nearer than Memphis who knew how to — who kept the steam-driven electric plant running; and from the moment the automobile indicated that it was not going any further, at least today, Mr Buffaloe and Boon were inseparable from it like two shadows, a big one and a little one — the hulking giant smelling of ammonia and harness oil, and

the little grease-covered soot-colored man with eyes like two bluebird feathers moulted onto a small lump of coal, who would barely have tipped a hundred pounds with all his (the city's too) tools in his pockets — the one motionless, staring at the car with a kind of incredulous yearning, like a fixed bull; the other dreaming at it, gentle, tender, his grimed hand gentle as a woman's as he touched it, stroked it, caressed it, then the next moment plunged to the hips under the raised bonnet.

Then it rained all that night and was still raining the next morning. The owner of the car was told, assured — by Mr Buffaloe, it appeared; a little strange since nobody had ever known him to be far enough away from the light plant or the little shop in his back yard, to have ever used roads enough to prophesy their condition — that the roads would be impassable for at least a week, maybe ten days. So the owner went back to Memphis by train, leaving the automobile to be stored in what, in anybody else's back yard but Mr Buffaloe's, would have been a horse- or cow-barn.

Nor could we figure this: how Mr Buffaloe, a meek mild almost inarticulate little man in a constant condition of unworldly grease-coated dreamlike somnambulism — how, by what means, what mesmeric and hypnotic gifts which until now even he could not have known he possessed, he had persuaded the complete stranger to abandon his expensive toy into Mr Buffaloe's charge.

But he did, and went back to Memphis; and now when electric trouble occurred in Jefferson, someone had to go by foot or horse or bicycle out to Mr Buffaloe's home on the edge of town, whereupon Mr Buffaloe would appear, vague and dreaming and without haste and still wiping his hands, around the corner of his house from his back yard; and by the third day Father finally found out where Boon would be (had been) during the time when he — Boon — should have been in the livery stable.

Because on that day Boon himself revealed the secret, spilled the beans, with frantic and raging urgency. He and Mr Buffaloe had come to what would have been physical battle, had not Mr Buffaloe — that

apparently inexhaustible reservoir of surprises and capabilities — drawn a greasy and soot-grimed but perfectly efficient pistol on Boon.

That was how Boon told it. He and Mr Buffaloe had been not merely in complete, but instantaneous, accord and understanding in the whole process of getting the automobile into Mr Buffaloe's hands and the owner of it out of town; so that, Boon naturally thought, Mr Buffaloe would quickly solve the mystery of how to operate it and they would slip it out after dark and ride in it.

But to Boon's shocked and outraged amazement, all Mr Buffaloe wanted was to find out why it ran. "He's ruined it!" Boon said. "He's done took it all to pieces just to see what was inside! He wont never get it all back together again!"

But Buffaloe did. He stood, mild and grease-stained and gently dreaming, when two weeks later the owner returned and cranked it up and drove away; and a year later Buffaloe had made one of his own, engine, gears and all, into a rubber-tired buggy; that afternoon, stinking noisily and sedately and not at all fast across the Square, he frightened Colonel Sartoris's matched carriage horses into bolting with the luckily empty surrey and more or less destroying it; by the next night there was formally recorded into the archives of Jefferson a city ordinance against the operation of any mechanically propelled vehicle inside the corporate limits. So, as president of the older, the senior bank in Yoknapatawpha County, my grandfather was forced to buy one or else be dictated to by the president of the junior one.

You see what I mean? not senior and junior in the social hierarchy of the town, least of all rivals in it, but bankers, dedicated priests in the impenetrable and ineluctable mysteries of Finance; it was as though, despite his life-long ramrod-stiff and unyielding opposition to, refusal even to acknowledge, the machine age, Grandfather had been vouchsafed somewhere in the beginning a sort of — to him — nightmare vision of our nation's vast and boundless future in which the basic unit of its economy and prosperity would be a small mass-produced cubicle containing four wheels and an engine.

So he bought the automobile, and Boon found his soul's lily maid, the virgin's love of his rough and innocent heart. It was a Winton Flyer. (This was the first one he — we — owned, before the White Steamer which Grandfather traded it for when Grandmother finally decided two years later that she couldn't bear the smell of gasoline at all.) You cranked it by hand while standing in front of it, with no more risk (provided you had remembered to take it out of gear) than a bone or two in your forearm; it had kerosene lamps for night driving and when rain threatened five or six people could readily put up the top and curtains in ten or fifteen minutes, and Grandfather himself equipped it with a kerosene lantern, a new axe and a small coil of barbed wire attached to a light block and tackle for driving beyond the town limits.

With which equipment it could — and did once, of which I shall speak presently — go as far as Memphis. Also, all of us, grandparents, parents, aunts, cousins and children, had special costumes for riding in it, consisting of veils, caps, goggles, gauntlet gloves and long shapeless throat-close neutral-colored garments called dusters, of which I shall also speak later.

By this time Mr Buffaloe had long since taught Boon to operate his homemade one. They couldn't use the streets of Jefferson of course — in fact never again did it cross the line of Mr Buffaloe's front fence — but there was an area of open land behind his house which in time Mr Buffaloe and Boon had beaten down and (relatively) smoothed into a fair motordrome.

So by the time Boon and Mr Wordwin, the cashier in Grandfather's bank (he was a bachelor, one of our most prominent clubmen or men about town; in ten years he had been a groomsman in thirteen weddings), went to Memphis by train and brought the automobile back (in less than two days this time; a record), Boon was already destined to be the dean of Jefferson motor-car drivers.

Then, as far as Boon's dream was concerned, my grandfather abolished that automobile. He merely bought it, paid what Boon called a sizable

chunk of hard valuable cash for it, looked at it thoroughly and inscrutably once and then eliminated it from circulation. He — Grandfather — couldn't do that completely of course; there was that arrogant decree of Colonel Sartoris's which he — Grandfather — being the senior, could not permit himself to allow to stand, no matter what his own opinion of motor vehicles was.

In fact, in this opinion he and Colonel Sartoris were absolutely eye-to-eye; until their deaths (by which time all Yoknapatawpha County's daytime air was odorous with gasoline fumes and its nights, Saturdays especially, filled with the clash of colliding fenders and the squeal of brakes) neither of them would lend a penny to any man they merely suspected was going to buy an automobile with it.

Colonel Sartoris's crime was simply in having taken the pas of his senior in a move which they both approved — officially banning automobiles from Jefferson even before they got there. You see? Grandfather bought the automobile not as a defiance of Colonel Sartoris's decree. It was simply a calm and deliberately considered abrogation of it, even if only by weekly token.

Even before Colonel Sartoris's decree, Grandfather had had his carriage and horses moved from his back yard to the livery stable, where they were actually more accessible to Grandmother's telephone call than to her shout from an upstairs back window, because somebody always answered the telephone at the livery stable. Which Ned, in the kitchen or stable or wherever he happened to be (or was supposed to happen to be when Grandmother wanted him), didn't always. In fact, he was more often nowhere in range of any voice from Grandmother's house since one of them was his wife's. So now we come to Ned. He was Grandfather's coachman. His wife (the one he had then; he had four) was Delphine, Grandmother's cook.

At that time he was "Uncle" Ned only to Mother. I mean, she was the one who insisted that all us children — three of us, that is, because Alexander couldn't call anybody anything yet — call him Uncle Ned. Nobody else cared whether we did or not, not even Grandmother, who

was a McCaslin too, and certainly not Ned himself, who hadn't earned it even by just living long enough for the fringe of hair embracing his bald skull to begin to turn gray, let alone white (it never did. I mean, his hair: turn white nor even gray.

When he died at seventy-four, except for having run through four wives he hadn't changed at all), and who indeed may not have wanted to be called Uncle; none of these but only Mother, who in the McCaslin sense was not even kin to us, insisted on it.

Because he — Ned — was a McCaslin, born in the McCaslin back yard in 1860. He was our family skeleton; we inherited him in turn, with his legend (which had no firmer supporter than Ned himself) that his mother had been the natural daughter of old Lucius Quintus Carothers himself and a Negro slave; never did Ned let any of us forget that he, along with Cousin Isaac, was an actual grandson to old time-honored Lancaster where we moiling Edmondses and Priests, even though three of us — you, me and my grandfather — were named for him, were mere diminishing connections and hangers-on.

So when Boon and Mr Wordwin arrived with the car, the carriage house was all ready for it: new-floored and -doored, with a brand-new padlock already in Grandfather's hand while he walked slowly around the car, looking at it exactly as he would have examined the plow or reaper or wagon (the client too for that matter) on which a would-be patron of the bank was offering to borrow money. Then he motioned Boon to drive it on into the garage (oh yes, we already knew that was the name of an automobile shed, even in 1904, even in Mississippi). "What?" Boon said.

"Drive it in," Grandfather said.

"You aint even going to try it?" Boon said.

"No," Grandfather said. Boon drove it into the garage and (just Boon) came out again. There had been astonishment in his face; now there was shock, divination, something like terror. "Has it got a key?" Grandfather said.

“What?” Boon said.

“A catch. A pin. A hook. Something you start it with.” Slowly Boon took something from his pocket and put it into Grandfather’s hand. “Shut the doors,” Grandfather said, and himself walked up and snapped the new padlock through the hasp and put that key into his pocket also. Now Boon was fighting a battle with himself.

He was in crisis; the matter was desperate. I — we, Mr Wordwin, Grandmother, Ned, Delphine and everybody else white and black who had happened along the street when the automobile came up — watched him win it, or that initial engagement of pickets anyway.

“I’ll come back after dinner, so Miss Sarah” (that was Grandmother) “can try it. About one oclock. I can come sooner if that’ll be too late.”

“I’ll send word to the stable,” Grandfather said. Because it was a full-scale action: no mere squabbling of outposts. It was all out, win or lose; logistics came into it, and terrain; feint thrust and parry, deception; but most of all, patience, the long view. It lasted the remaining three days until Saturday.

Boon returned to the livery stable; all that afternoon he was never very far from the telephone, though not ostensibly, obviously so, revealing nothing; he even did his work — or so they thought, until Father discovered that Boon on his own authority had deputised Luster to meet with the hack the afternoon train whose arrival (unless it was late) always coincided with the time, moment when Grandfather left the bank for the day.

But although the battle was still a holding action requiring — nay, demanding — constant alertness and vigilance instead of a drive capable of carrying itself with its own momentum, Boon was still confident, still on top: “Sure. I sent Luster. The way this town is growing, we will need two hacks at them trains any day now, and I been had my eye on Luster for the second driver a good while now. Dont worry; I’m going to watch him.”

But no telephone. By six o'clock, even Boon admitted that today there would be none. But it was a holding action; nothing was lost yet, and in the dark he could even shift his forces a little. The next morning about ten he — we — entered the bank as though by passing afterthought. "Lemme have the keys," he told Grandfather.

"All that Mississippi dust and mud, let alone the Tennessee mud and dust already under it. I'll take the hose with me from the stable in case Ned has mislaid yours out of sight somewhere."

Grandfather was looking at Boon, just looking at him with no hurry, like Boon really was the one with the wagon or hay baler offering to borrow fifteen dollars. "I don't want the inside of the carriage house wet," Grandfather said. But Boon matched him, as detached and even more indifferent, with even more time to spare, use.

"Sure, sure. Remember, the man said the engine ought to be run every day. Not to go nowhere: just to keep the spark plugs and magneto from rusting and costing you twenty, twenty-five dollars for a new one all the way from Memphis or somewhere, maybe all the way back to the factory. I don't blame you; all I know is what he told you; I'd just have to take his word too. But then you can afford it. You own the automobile; if you want to rust it up, it ain't nobody else's business. A horse would a been different.

Even if you hadn't even paid a hundred dollars for a horse you'd a had me out there at daylight lunging him on a rope just to keep his guts working." Because Grandfather was a good banker and Boon knew it: that Grandfather not only knew when to foreclose, but when to compound and cancel too. He reached into his pocket and handed Boon the two keys — the one to the padlock and the thing that turned the automobile on. "Come on," Boon told me, already turning.

While we were still up the street we could already hear Grandmother hollering for Ned from the upstairs back window, though by the time we reached the gate she had quit. As we crossed the back yard to get

the hose, Delphine came out the kitchen door. "Where is Ned?" she said. "We been hollering for him all morning. Is he up there at the livery stable?"

"Sure," Boon said. "I'll tell him too. Just dont expect him neither." Ned was there. He and two of my brothers were like a row of stairsteps trying to see through the cracks in the garage door. I reckon Alexander would have been there too except he couldn't walk yet; I dont know why Aunt Callie hadn't thought of it yet.

Then Alexander was there; Mother came across the street from our house carrying him. So maybe Aunt Callie was still washing diapers. "Morning, Miss Alison," Boon said. "Morning, Miss Sarah," he said, because now Grandmother was there too, with Delphine behind her. And now there were two more ladies, neighbors, still in their boudoir caps.

Because maybe Boon wasn't a banker nor even a very good trader either. But he was proving to be a pretty damned good guerrilla fighter. He went and unlocked the garage door and opened it. Ned was the first one inside.

"Well," Boon said to him, "you been here ever since daylight to peep at it through that crack. What do you think about it?"

"I dont think nothing about it," Ned said. "Boss Priest could a bought the best two-hundred-dollar horse in Yoknapatawpha County for this money."

"There aint any two-hundred-dollar horse in Yoknapatawpha County," Boon said. "If there was, this automobile would buy ten of them. Go be hooking up that hose."

"Go be hooking up that hose, Lucius," Ned said to me; he didn't even look around. He went to the automobile door and opened it. It was the back seat. Front seats didn't have doors in those days; you just walked up and got in. "Come on, Miss Sarah, you and Miss Alison," Ned said. "Delphine can wait with the children for the next trip."

"You go hook up that hose like I told you," Boon said. "I got to get it out of here before I can do anything to it."

"You aint gonter tote it out in your hand, is you?" Ned said. "I reckon we can ride that far. I reckon I'm gonter have to drive it so the sooner I starts, the quicker it will be." He said: "Hee hee hee." He said: "Come on, Miss Sarah."

"Will it be all right, Boon?" Grandmother said.

"Yessum, Miss Sarah," Boon said. Grandmother and Mother got in. Before Boon could close the door, Ned was already in the front seat. "Get out of there," Boon said.

"Go ahead and tend to your business, if you knows how to," Ned said. "I aint gonter touch nothing until I learns how, and just setting here aint gonter learn me. Go on and hook up, or whatever you does to it."

Boon went around to the driver's side and set the switches and levers, and went to the front and jerked the crank. On the third pull, the engine roared.

"Boon!" Grandmother cried.

"It's all right, Miss Sarah!" Boon hollered above the noise, running back to the guiding wheel.

"I dont care!" Grandmother said. "Get in quick! I'm nervous!" Boon got in and quieted the engine and shifted the levers; a moment, then the automobile moved quietly and slowly backward out of the shed, into the lot, the sunshine, and stopped.

"Hee hee hee," Ned said.

"Be careful, Boon," Grandmother said. I could see her hand gripping the stanchion of the top.

"Yessum," Boon said. The automobile moved again, backward, beginning to turn. Then it moved forward, still turning; Grandmother's hand still gripped the stanchion. Mother's face looked like a girl's. The car went slowly and quietly across the lot until it was facing the gate to the lane, to the outside, to the world, and stopped. And Boon didn't say

anything: he just sat there behind the wheel, the engine running smooth and quiet, his head turned just enough for Grandmother to see his face.

Oh yes, maybe he wasn't a negotiable-paper wizard like Grandfather, and there were folks in Jefferson that would say he wasn't much of anything else either, but for this skirmish anyway he was a skirmish fighter of consummate skill and grace. Grandmother sat for maybe a half a minute. Then she drew a long breath and expelled it.

"No," she said. "We must wait for Mister Priest." Maybe it wasn't a victory, but anyway our side — Boon — had not only discovered the weak point in the enemy's (Grandfather's) front, by supertime that night the enemy himself would discover it too.

Discover in fact that his flank had been turned. The next afternoon (Saturday) after the bank closed, and each succeeding Saturday afternoon, and then when summer came, every afternoon except when rain was actually falling, Grandfather in front beside Boon and the rest of us in rotation — Grandmother, Mother, me and my three brothers and Aunt Callie that nursed us in turn, including Father, and Delphine and our various connections and neighbors and Grandmother's close friends in their ordered rote — in the linen dusters and goggles, would drive through Jefferson and the adjacent countryside; Aunt Callie and Delphine in their turns, but not Ned.

He rode in it once: that one minute while it backed slowly out of the garage, and the two minutes while it turned and moved slowly forward across the lot until Grandmother lost her nerve and said No to the open gate and the public world, but not again.

By the second Saturday he had realised, accepted — anyway become convinced — that even if Grandfather had ever intended to make him the official operator and custodian of the automobile, he could have approached it only over Boon's dead body.

But although he declined to recognise that the automobile existed on the place, he and Grandfather had met on some unspoken gentlemen's ground regarding it: Ned never to speak in scorn or derogation of its ownership and presence, Grandfather never to order Ned to wash and polish it as he used to do the carriage — which Grandfather and Ned both knew Ned would have refused to do, even if Boon had let him: by which Grandfather visited on Ned his only punishment for his apostasy: he refused to give Ned the public chance to refuse to wash the automobile before Boon might have had a public chance to refuse to let him do it.

Because that was when Boon transferred — was transferred by mutual and instantaneous consent — from the day shift at the stable to the night shift. Otherwise, the livery business would have known him no more. That part of our Jefferson leisure class, friends or acquaintances of Father's or maybe just friends of horses, who could have used the stable as a permanent business address — if they had had any business or expected any mail — were less strangers there than Boon.

If — when — you, meaning Father, wanted Boon now, you sent me to Grandfather's lot, where he would be washing and polishing the automobile — this, even during those first weeks when it had not left the lot since last Saturday and would not leave it again until the next one, backing it out of the shed and washing it again each morning, with tender absorption, right down to the last spoke and nut, then sitting guard over it while it dried.

"He's going to soak all the paint off of it," Mr Ballott said. "Does Boss know he's running the hose on that automobile four or five hours every day?"

"What if he did?" Father said. "Boon would still sit there in the lot all day looking at it."

"Put him on the night shift," Mr Ballott said. "Then he could do whatever he wants to with his daylight and John Powell could go home and sleep in a bed every night for a change."

“I already have,” Father said. “As soon as I can find somebody to go to that lot and tell him.”

There was a shuck mattress in the harness room on which until now John Powell or one of the other drivers or hostlers under his command always spent the night, mainly as night watchmen against fire.

Now Father installed a cot and mattress in the office itself, where Boon could get some sleep, which he needed, since now he could spend all day with complete immunity in Grandfather’s lot either washing the automobile or just looking at it.

So now every afternoon, as many of us as the back seat would hold in our ordered turns would drive through the Square and into the country; Grandfather had already installed the extraneous emergency gear to be as much and inseparable a part of the automobile’s equipment as the engine which moved it.

But always through the Square first. You would have thought that as soon as he bought the automobile, Grandfather would have done what you would have done, having bought the automobile for that end: lain in wait for Colonel Sartoris and his carriage and ambushed, bushwhacked him and really taught him how to pass ordinances restricting others’ rights and privileges without consulting his betters first. But Grandfather didn’t do this. We finally realised that he wasn’t interested in Colonel Sartoris: he was interested in teams, vehicles.

Because I told you he was a far-sighted man, a man capable of vision: Grandmother sitting tense and rigid and gripping the top stanchion and not even calling Grandfather Mister Priest now, as she had done as long as we had known her, but calling him by his given name as though she were no kin to him, the horse or team we were approaching reined back and braced to shy and sometimes even rearing and Grandmother saying, “Lucius! Lucius!” and Grandfather (if a man was driving and there were no women or children in the buggy or wagon) saying quietly to Boon:

“Dont stop. Keep going.

But slow now.” Or, when a woman had the lines, telling Boon to stop and himself getting out, talking quietly and steadily to the spooked horse until he could get hold of the bit and lead the vehicle past and remove his hat to the ladies in the buggy and come back and get back into the front seat and only then answer Grandmother: “We must get them used to it. Who knows? there may be another automobile in Jefferson in the next ten or fifteen years.”

In fact, that homemade dream which Mr Buffaloe had created single-handed in his back yard two years ago came within an ace of curing Grandfather of a habit which he had had since he was nineteen years old. He chewed tobacco. The first time he turned his head to spit out of the moving automobile, we in the back seat didn't know what was going to happen until it was already too late.

Because how could we? None of us had ever ridden in an automobile before farther than (this was the first trip) from the carriage house to the lot gate, let alone one going fifteen miles an hour (and this was something else: when we were going ten miles an hour Boon always said we were doing twenty; at twenty, he always said forty; we discovered a straight stretch about a half a mile long a few miles out of town where the automobile would get up to twenty-five, where I heard him tell a group of men on the Square that the automobile made sixty miles an hour; this was before he knew that we knew that the thing on the dashboard which looked like a steam gauge was a speedometer), so how could we be expected to? Besides, it didn't make any difference to the rest of us; we all had our goggles and dusters and veils and even if the dusters were new, the spots and splashes were just brown spots and splashes and just because they were called dusters was no reason why they should not be called on to face anything else but dust.

Maybe it was because Grandmother was sitting on the left side (in those days automobiles operated from the right side, like buggies; even Henry Ford, a man as long-visioned as Grandfather, had not yet divined that the steering wheel would be on the left) directly behind Grandfather.

She said at once to Boon: "Stop the automobile," and sat there, not mad so much as coldly and implacably outraged and shocked. She was just past fifty then (she was fifteen when she and Grandfather married) and in all those fifty years she had no more believed that a man, let alone her husband, would spit in her face than she could have believed that Boon for instance would approach a curve in the road without tooting the horn. She said, to nobody; she didn't even raise her hand to wipe the spit away:

"Take me home."

"Now, Sarah," Grandfather said. "Now, Sarah." He threw the chew away and took out the clean handkerchief from his other pocket, but Grandmother wouldn't even take it. Boon had already started to get out and go to a house we could see and get a pan of water and soap and a towel, but Grandmother wouldn't have that either.

"Dont touch me," she said. "Drive on." So we went on, Grandmother with the long drying brown splash across one of her goggles and down her cheek even though Mother kept on offering to spit on her handkerchief and wipe it off. "Let me alone, Alison," Grandmother said.

But not Mother. She didn't mind tobacco, not in the car. Maybe that was why. But more and more that summer it would be just Mother and us and Aunt Callie and one or two neighbor children in the back seat, Mother's face flushed and bright and eager, like a girl's. Because she had invented a kind of shield on a handle like a big fan, light enough for her to raise in front of us almost as fast as Grandfather could turn his head.

So he could chew now, Mother always alert and ready with the screen; all of us were quick now in fact, so that almost before the instant when Grandfather knew he was going to turn his head to the left to spit, the screen had already come up and all of us in the back seat had leaned to the right like we were on the same wire, actually doing twenty and twenty-five miles an hour now because there were already two more automobiles in Jefferson that summer; it was as though the

automobiles themselves were beating the roads smooth long before the money they represented would begin to compel smoother roads.

“Twenty-five years from now there wont be a road in the county you cant drive an automobile on in any weather,” Grandfather said.

“Wont that cost a lot of money, Papa?” Mother said.

“It will cost a great deal of money,” Grandfather said. “The road builders will issue bonds. The bank will buy them.”

“Our bank?” Mother said. “Buy bonds for automobiles?”

“Yes,” Grandfather said. “We will buy them.”

“But what about us? — I mean, Maury.”

“He will still be in the livery business,” Grandfather said. “He will just have a new name for it. Priest’s Garage maybe, or the Priest Motor Company. People will pay any price for motion. They will even work for it. Look at bicycles. Look at Boon. We dont know why.”

Then the next May came and my other grandfather, Mother’s father, died in Bay St Louis.

III

IT WAS SATURDAY again. The next one in fact; Ludus was going to start getting paid again every Saturday night; maybe he had even stopped borrowing mules. It was barely eight oclock; I wasn’t even halfway around the Square with the freight bills and my canvas sack to carry the money in, just finishing in the Farmers Supply when Boon came in, fast, too quick for him. I should have suspected at once. No, I should have known at once, having known Boon all my life, let alone having watched him for a year now with that automobile. He was already reaching for the money sack, taking it right out of my hand before I could even close my fist. “Leave it,” he said. “Come on.”

“Here,” I said. “I’ve barely started.”

"I said leave it. Shake it up. Hurry. They've got to make Twenty-three," he said, already turning. He had completely ignored the unpaid freight bills themselves. They were just paper; the railroad company had plenty more of them. But the sack contained money.

"Who's got to make Twenty-three?" I said. Number Twenty-three was the southbound morning train. Oh yes, Jefferson had passenger trains then, enough of them so they had to number them to keep them separate.

"Goddammit," Boon said, "how can I break it gentle to you when you wont even listen? Your grandpa died last night. We got to hurry."
"He didn't!" I said, cried. "He was on the front gallery this morning when we passed." He was. Father and I both saw him, either reading the paper or just standing or sitting there like he was every morning, waiting for time to go to the bank.

"Who the hell's talking about Boss?" Boon said. "I said your other grandpa, your ma's papa down there at Jackson or Mobile or wherever it is."

"Oh," I said. "Dont you even know the difference between Bay St. Louis and Mobile?" Because it was all right now. This was different. Bay St. Louis was three hundred miles; I hardly knew Grandfather Lessep except twice at Christmas in Jefferson and three times we went down there in the summer. Also, he had been sick a long time; we — Mother and us — had been there last summer actually to see him enter what was to be his last bed even if we didn't know it then (Mother and Aunt Callie, because your Great-uncle Alexander had arrived a month before, had been down last winter when they thought he was going to die). I say "if," meaning Mother; to a child, when an old person becomes sick he or she has already quitted living; the actual death merely clears the atmosphere so to speak, incapable of removing anything which was already gone.

"All right, all right," Boon said. "Just come on. Jackson, Mobile, New Orleans — all I know is, it's down that way somewhere, and wherever it

is, they still got to catch that train.” And that — the name New Orleans, not dropped so much as escaped into that context — should have told me all, revealed the whole of Boon’s outrageous dream, intent, determination; his later elaborate machinations to seduce me to it should merely have corroborated. But maybe I was still recovering from shock; also, at that moment I didn’t have as many facts as Boon did. So we just went on, fast, I trotting to keep up, the shortest way across the Square, until we reached home.

Where was much commotion. It was barely two hours until the train and Mother was far too busy to take time to mourn or grieve: merely pale-faced, intent, efficient. Because I now learned what Boon had already told me twice: that Grandfather and Grandmother were going to bury Grandfather Lessep also.

He and Grandfather had been roommates, in the same class at the University; they had been groomsmen in each other’s wedding, which possibly had a little something to do with why Mother and Father chose one another out of all the earth to look into her eyes forever more (I understand you call it going steady), and Grandmother and Grandmother Lessep lived far enough apart to continue to be civil and even pleasant to the other mother of an only child. Besides that, people took funerals seriously in those days.

Not death: death was our constant familiar: no family but whose annals were dotted with headstones whose memorialees had been too brief in tenure to bear a name even — unless of course the mother slept there too in that one grave, which happened more often than you would like to think.

Not to mention the husbands and uncles and aunts in the twenties and thirties and forties, and the grandparents and childless great-uncles and -aunts who died at home then, in the same rooms and beds they were born in, instead of in cubicled euphemisms with names pertaining to sunset. But the funerals, the ritual ceremonial of interment, with tenuous yet steel-strong threads capable of extending even further and

bearing even more weight than the distance between Jefferson and the Gulf of Mexico.

So Grandfather and Grandmother were also going to the funeral. Which meant only incidentally that, lacking any other close kinfolks in town, we — me and my three brothers and Aunt Callie — would have to be sent out to Cousin Zachary Edmonds's farm seventeen miles away to stay until Father and Mother got back; it meant only incidentally that Father and Mother would be gone four days. What it actually meant was that Grandfather and Grandmother would not even come back after four days.

Because Grandfather never left Jefferson at all, even to go only to Memphis, without spending two or three days in New Orleans, which he loved, either going or coming; and this time they might quite possibly take Mother and Father with them. It meant in fact what Boon had already told me twice by exuberant and still unbelieving inadvertence: that the owner of that automobile, and everyone else having or even assuming authority over it, would be three hundred miles from it for anywhere from four days to a week. So all his clumsy machinations to seduce and corrupt me were only corroboration. They were not even cumshaw, lagniappe.

He could have taken the car alone, and doubtless would if I had been incorruptible, even knowing that someday he must bring it back or come back himself in order to face lesser music than he would if — when — Grandfather's police caught up with him. Because come back he must. Where else could he go, who knew nowhere else, to whom the words, names — Jefferson, McCaslin, De Spain, Compson — were not just home but father and mother both?

But some frayed ragtag judgment, some embryo gleam of simple yet-
virgin discretion and common sense, persuaded him at least to try me first, to have me by as a kind of hostage. And he didn't need to try, test me first. When grown people speak of the innocence of children, they don't really know what they mean. Pressed, they will go a step further and say, Well, ignorance then. The child is neither.

There is no crime which a boy of eleven had not envisaged long ago. His only innocence is, he may not yet be old enough to desire the fruits of it, which is not innocence but appetite; his ignorance is, he does not know how to commit it, which is not ignorance but size.

But Boon didn't know this. He must seduce me.

And he had so little time: only from the time the train left until dark. He could have started cold, from scratch, tomorrow or next day or any day up to and including Wednesday. But today, now, was his best, with the car visible to all Jefferson, already in motion, already involved in the condition of departure; it was as if the gods themselves had offered him these scot-free hours between eleven-two and sunset, he to scorn, ignore them at his peril.

The car came up, Grandfather and Grandmother already in it, with the shoebox of fried chicken and devilled eggs and cake for dinner since there wouldn't be a dining car until they changed to the Limited at the junction at one o'clock and Grandmother and Mother both knew Grandfather and Father well enough by this time to know they were not going to wait until one o'clock to eat dinner, no matter who was dead. No: Grandmother too, if the bereaved had been anybody but Mother. No, that's wrong too; Grandmother had a wider range than her son's wife; maybe all Mother would have needed was to be a female.

It's not men who cope with death; they resist, try to fight back and get their brains trampled out in consequence; where women just flank it, envelop it in one soft and instantaneous confederation of unresistance like cotton batting or cobwebs, already de-stingered and harmless, not merely reduced to size and usable but even useful like a penniless bachelor or spinster connection always available to fill an empty space or conduct an extra guest down to dinner. Their grips were already tied onto the fenders and Son Thomas had already brought Mother's and Father's out to the street and now we all followed, Mother in her black veil and Father with his black arm band, us following with Aunt Callie carrying Alexander.

“Good-bye,” Mother said, “good-bye,” kissing us veil and all, smelling like she always did but with something black in the smell too, like the thin black veil which really hid nothing, as if more than just a mechanical electric message over the copper wire had come that three hundred miles up from Bay St Louis; oh yes, I could smell it when she kissed me, saying, “You’re the big boy, the man now. You must help Aunt Callie with the others, so they wont worry Cousin Louisa,” already getting quick into the automobile beside Grandmother, when Boon said,

“I’ll have to fill the tank for the trip out to McCaslin after dinner. I thought Lucius could come along now and help me on the way back from the depot.” You see, how easy it was going to be. It was too easy, making you a little ashamed. It was as if the very cards of virtue and rectitude were stacked against Grandfather and Grandmother and Mother and Father. All right then: against me too.

Even the fact that automobiles were only two or three years old in Jefferson abetted Boon — all right, us. Mr Rouncewell, the oil company agent who supplied all the stores in Yoknapatawpha County from his tanks on the side track at the depot, for the last two years had also had a special tank of gasoline, with a pump and a Negro to pump it; all Boon or anyone else who wanted gasoline had to do was, simply drive up and stop and get out and the Negro would lift off the front seat and measure the tank with his special notched stick and fill the tank and collect the money or (if Mr Rouncewell himself wasn’t there) let you yourself write down your name and how many gallons in a greasy ledger.

But, although Grandfather had owned the car almost a year now, not one of them — Grandfather or Grandmother or Father or Mother — had either the knowledge about how cars operated or the temerity (or maybe it was just the curiosity) to question or challenge Boon.

So he and I stood on the platform; Mother waved to us through the window as the train drew away. Now it was his move. He would have to say something, have to begin. He had managed to get the decks cleared

and me in his power, at least until Aunt Callie began to wonder where I was to eat my dinner. I mean, Boon didn't know he didn't have to say anything, other than perhaps to tell me where we were going, and even that — the destination — didn't matter. He had learned nothing since about human beings, and apparently had even forgot what he once must have known about boys.

And now Boon himself didn't know how to begin. He had prayed for luck, and immediately, by return post you might say, had been vouchsafed more than he knew what to do with. They have told you before this probably that Fortune is a fickle jade, who never withholds but gives, either good or bad: more of the former than you ever believe (perhaps with justice) that you deserve; more of the latter than you can handle. So with Boon. So all he said was, "Well."

Nor did I help him; I took that revenge. All right, revenge on whom? Not on Boon of course: on me, my shame; perhaps on Father and Mother, who had abandoned me to the shame; perhaps on Grandfather, whose automobile had made the shame available; who knows? perhaps on Mr Buffaloe himself — that rapt and divinely stricken somnambulist who had started the whole thing two innocent years ago. But I did feel sorry for Boon because he had so little time.

It was after eleven now; Aunt Callie would be expecting me back in a matter of minutes, not because she knew it couldn't take more than ten minutes to get back home after she heard Twenty-three whistle for the lower crossing, but because she would already be in a driving impatience to get us all fed and on the way to McCaslin; she had been born in the country and still preferred it. Boon wasn't looking at me. He very carefully wasn't looking at me.

"Three hundred miles," he said. "Good thing somebody invented trains. If they'd a had to go by mule wagon like folks used to, they couldn't even get there in ten days, let alone back in ten days too."

"Father said four days," I said.

“That’s right,” Boon said. “So he did. Maybe we got four days to get back to the house in, but that still dont give us forever.” We went back to the car and got in it. But he didn’t start it. “Maybe when Boss gets back in te — four days he’ll let me learn you to run this thing. You’re big enough. Besides, you already know how. Have you ever thought about that?”

“No,” I said. “Because he aint going to let me.”

“Well, you dont need to rush at it. You got four days for him to change his mind in. Though my guess is nearer ten.” Still he didn’t move to start the car. “Ten days,” he said. “How far do you reckon this automobile could travel in ten days?”

“Father said four,” I said.

“All right,” he said. “How far in four days?”

“I aint going to know that either,” I said. “Because aint anybody around here going to find out to tell me.”

“All right,” he said. He started the car suddenly and backed and turned it, already going fast, neither toward the Square nor toward Mr Rouncewell’s gasoline pump.

“I thought we had to get gasoline,” I said.

We were going fast. “I changed my mind,” Boon said. “I’ll tend to that just before we leave for McCaslin after dinner. Then so much of it wont evaporate away just standing around.” We were in a lane now, going fast between Negro cabins and vegetable patches and chicken yards, with chickens and mongrel dogs leaping frantically from the dust just in time, out of the lane and into a vacant field, a waste place marked faintly with tire tracks but no hooves; and now I recognised it: Mr Buffaloe’s homemade motordrome where Colonel Sartoris’s law had driven him two years ago and where he had taught Boon to operate an automobile. And still I didn’t understand until Boon wrenched the car to a stop and said, “Move over here.”

So I was late for dinner after all; Aunt Callie was already standing on the front gallery, carrying Alexander and already yelling at Boon and me

even before he stopped the car to let me out. Because Boon licked me in fair battle after all; evidently he hadn't quite forgot all he remembered from his own youth about boys. I know better now of course, and I even knew better then: that Boon's fall and mine were not only instantaneous but simultaneous too: back at the identical instant when Mother got the message that Grandfather Lessep was dead. But that's what I would have liked to believe: that Boon simply licked me.

Anyway, that's what I told myself at the time: that, secure behind that inviolable and inescapable rectitude concomitant with the name I bore, patterned on the knightly shapes of my male ancestors as bequeathed — nay, compelled — to me by my father's word-of-mouth, further bolstered and made vulnerable to shame by my mother's doting conviction, I had been merely testing Boon; not trying my own virtue but simply testing Boon's capacity to undermine it; and, in my innocence, trusting too much in the armor and shield of innocence; expected, demanded, assumed more than that frail Milanese was capable of withstanding.

I say "frail Milanese" not advisedly but explicitly: having noticed in my time how quite often the advocates and even the practitioners of virtue evidently have grave doubts of their own regarding the impregnability of virtue as a shield, putting their faith and trust not in virtue but rather in the god or goddess whose charge virtue is; by-passing virtue as it were in allegiance to the Over-goddess herself, in return for which the goddess will either divert temptation away or anyhow intercede between them. Which explains a lot, having likewise noticed in my time that the goddess in charge of virtue seems to be the same one in charge of luck, if not of folly also.

So Boon beat me in fair battle, using, as a gentleman should and would, gloves. When he stopped the car and said, "Move over," I thought I knew what he intended. We had done this before at four or five convenient and discreet times in Grandfather's lot, me sitting on Boon's lap holding the wheel and steering while he let the automobile move slowly in low gear across the lot. So I was ready for him. I was already

en garde and had even begun the counterthrust, opening my mouth to say It's too hot to sit on anybody today. Besides we better get on back on home when I saw that he was already out of the car on his side while he was still speaking, standing there with one hand on the wheel and the engine still running. For another second or two I still couldn't believe it. "Hurry up," he said. "Any minute now Callie will come running out of that lane toting that baby under one arm and already yelling."

So I moved under the wheel, and with Boon beside me, over me, across me, one hand on mine to shift the gears, one hand on mine to regulate the throttle, we moved back and forth across that vacant sun-glared waste, forward a while, backward a while, intent, timeless, Boon as much as I, immersed, rapt, steadying me (he was playing for such stakes, you see), out of time, beyond it, invulnerable to time until the courthouse clock striking noon a half-mile away restored us, hurled us back into the impending hard world of finagle and deception.

"All right," Boon said, "quick," not even waiting but lifting me bodily across him as he slid under the wheel, the car already rushing back across the field toward home, we talking man-to-man now, mutual in crime, confederate of course but not coeval yet because of my innocence; I already beginning to say What do I do now? You'll have to tell me when once again Boon spoke first and made us equal too: "Have you figured how to do it? We aint got much time."

"All right," I said. "Go on. Get on back to the house before Aunt Callie starts hollering." So you see what I mean about Virtue? You have heard — or anyway you will — people talk about evil times or an evil generation. There are no such things. No epoch of history nor generation of human beings either ever was or is or will be big enough to hold the un-virtue of any given moment, any more than they could contain all the air of any given moment; all they can do is hope to be as little soiled as possible during their passage through it.

Because what pity that Virtue does not — possibly cannot — take care of its own as Non-virtue does. Probably it cannot: who to the dedicated

to Virtue, offer in reward only cold and odorless and tasteless virtue: as compared not only to the bright rewards of sin and pleasure but to the ever watchful unflagging omniprescient skill — that incredible matchless capacity for invention and imagination — with which even the tottering footsteps of infancy are steadily and firmly guided into the primrose path.

Because oh yes, I had matured terrifyingly since that clock struck two minutes ago. It has been my observation that, except in a few scattered cases of what might be called malevolent hyper-prematurity, children, like poets, lie rather for pleasure than profit. Or so I thought I had until then, with a few negligible exceptions involving simple self-defense against creatures (my parents) bigger and stronger than me. But not any more. Or anyway, not now.

I was as bent as Boon, and — during the next step anyway — even more culpable. Because (I realised; no: knew; it was obvious; Boon himself admitted it in so many words) I was smarter than Boon. I realised, felt suddenly that same exultant fever-flash which Faustus himself must have experienced: that of we two doomed and irrevocable, I was the leader, I was the boss, the master.

Aunt Callie was already standing on the front gallery, carrying Alexander and yelling.

“Dry up,” I said. “Aint dinner ready? The automobile broke down. Boon fixed it. We never had time to get the gasoline and now I have to eat in a hurry and go back and help him fill the tank.” I went back to the dining room. Dinner was already on the table.

Lessep and Maury were already eating. Aunt Callie had already dressed them (she had dressed them to go seventeen miles out to Cousin Zack’s to spend four days as if they were going to Memphis; I dont know why, unless it was because she didn’t have anything else to do between the time Mother and Father left and dinner. Because Maury and Alexander would both have to take a nap before we could leave) but by the front of his blouse, she would have to wash Maury off and dress him again.

Even then, I finished before they did and went back (Aunt Callie was still yelling, not loud in the house of course. But what could she do, single-handed — and a Negro — against Non-virtue?) across the street to Grandfather's. Ned had probably left for town as soon as the automobile drove off. But he would probably come back for his dinner. He had. We stood in the back yard. He blinked at me. Quite often, most of the time in fact, his eyes had a reddish look, like a fox's. "Why dont you aim to stay out there?" he said.

"I promised some fellows we would slip off tomorrow and try a new fishing hole one of them knows about."

Ned blinked at me. "So you aims to ride out to McCaslin with Boon Hogganbeck and then turn right around and come back with him. Only you got to have something to tell Miss Louisa so she'll let you come back and so you needs me to front for you."

"No," I said. "I dont need anything from you. I'm just telling you so you'll know where I am and they wont blame you. I aint even going to bother you. I'm going to stay with Cousin Ike." Before the rest of them came, I mean my brothers, when Mother and Father were out late at night and Grandfather and Grandmother were gone too, I used to stay with Ned and Delphine.

Sometimes I would sleep in their house all night, just for fun. I could have done that now, if it would have worked. But Cousin Ike lived alone in a single room over his hardware store. Even if Ned (or somebody else concerned) asked him point-blank if I was with him Saturday night, it would be at least Monday by then, and I had already decided quick and hard not to think about Monday. You see, if only people didn't refuse quick and hard to think about next Monday, Virtue wouldn't have such a hard and thankless time of it.

"I see," Ned said. "You aint needing nothing from me. You just being big-hearted to save me bother and worry over you. Save everybody bother and worry that comes around wanting to know why you aint out

at McCaslin where your paw told you to be.” He blinked at me. “Hee hee hee,” he said.

“All right,” I said. “Tell Father I went fishing on Sunday while they were gone. See if I care.”

“I aint fixing to tell nobody nothing about you,” he said. “You aint none of my business. You’s Callie’s business unto your maw gets back. Unlesen you gonter transfer to Mr Ike’s business for tonight, like you said.” He blinked at me. “When is Boon Hogganbeck coming for yawl?”

“Pretty soon now,” I said. “And you better not let Father or Boss hear you calling him Boon Hogganbeck.”

“I calls him Mister in plenty of time for him to earn it,” Ned said. “Let alone deserve it.” He said, “Hee hee hee.”

You see? I was doing the best I could. My trouble was, the tools I had to use. The innocence and the ignorance: I not only didn’t have strength and knowledge, I didn’t even have time enough. When the fates, gods — all right, Non-virtue — give you opportunities, the least they can do is give you room. But at least Cousin Ike was easy to find on Saturday. “You bet,” he said. “Come and stay with me tonight. Maybe we’ll go fishing tomorrow — just dont tell your father.”

“No sir,” I said. “Not stay with you tonight. I’m going to stay with Ned and Delphine, like I always do. I just wanted you to know, since Mother’s not here where I can tell her. I mean, ask her.” You see: doing the best I could with what I had, knew. Not that I was losing faith in ultimate success: it simply seemed to me that Non-virtue was wasting in merely testing me that time which was urgent and even desperate for greater ends. I went back home, not running: Jefferson must not see me running; but as fast as I could without it. You see, I did not dare trust Boon unbacked in Aunt Callie’s hands.

I was in time. In fact, it was Boon and the automobile who were late. Aunt Callie even had Maury and Alexander re-dressed again; if they had had naps since dinner, it was the shortest fastest sleep on record in our house. Also, Ned was there, where he had no business being. No, that’s

not right. I mean, his being there was completely wrong: not being at our house, he was often there, but being anywhere where he could be doing something useful with Grandfather and Grandmother out of town. Because he was carrying the baggage out — the wicker basket of Alexander's diapers and other personal odds and ends, the grips containing mine and Lessep's and Maury's clothes for four days, and Aunt Callie's cloth-wrapped bundle, lumping them without order at the gate and telling Aunt Callie: "You might just as well set down and rest your feet. Boon Hogganbeck's done broke that thing and is somewhere trying to fix it. If you really wants to get out to McCaslin before suppertime, telefoam Mr Ballott at the stable to send Son Thomas with the carriage and I'll drive you out there like folks ought to travel."

And after a while it began to look like Ned was right. Half past one came (which time Alexander and Maury could have spent sleeping) and no Boon; then Maury and Alexander could have slept another half an hour on top of that; Ned had said "I tole you so" so many times by now that Aunt Callie had quit yelling about Boon and yelled at Ned himself until he went and sat in the scuppernong arbor; she was just about to send me to look for Boon and the automobile when he drove up. When I saw him, I was terrified.

He had changed his clothes. I mean, he had shaved and he had on not merely a white shirt but a clean one, with a collar and necktie; without doubt when he got out of the car to load us in he would have a coat over his arm and the first thing Aunt Callie would see when she reached the car would be his grip on the floor.

Horror, but rage too (not at Boon: I discovered, realised that at once) at myself, who should have known, anticipated this, having known (I realised this too now) all my life that who dealt with Boon dealt with a child and had not merely to cope with but even anticipate its unpredictable vagaries; not the folly of Boon's lack of the simplest rudiments of common sense, but the shame of my failure to anticipate, assume he would lack them, saying, crying to Whoever it is you indict in such crises Dont You realise I aint but eleven years old? How do You expect me to do all this at just eleven years old? Dont You see You are

putting on me more than I can handle? But in the next second, rage at Boon too: not that his stupidity had now wrecked for good our motor trip to Memphis (that's right, Memphis as our destination has never been mentioned, either to you or between Boon and me.

Why should it have been? Where else did we have to go? Indeed, where else could anyone in north Mississippi want to go?

Some aged and finished creature on his or her deathbed might contemplate or fear a more distant destination, but they were not Boon and me). In fact, at this moment I wished I had never heard of Memphis or Boon or automobiles either; I was on Colonel Sartoris's side now, to have abolished Mr Buffaloe and his dream both from the face of the earth at the instant of its inception.

My rage at Boon was for having destroyed, cast down with that one childish blow like the blind kick of an infant's foot, the precarious and frantic ramshackle of my lies and false promises and false swearing; revealing the clay-footed sham for which I had bartered — nay, damned — my soul; that, or maybe the exposing of the true shoddy worthlessness of the soul I had been vain enough to assume the devil would pay anything for: like losing your maidenhead through some shabby inattentive mischance, such as not watching where you were going, innocent even of pleasure, let alone of sin. Then even the rage was gone. Nothing remained, nothing. I didn't want to go anywhere, be anywhere.

I mean, I didn't want to be is anywhere. If I had to be something, I wanted it to be was. I said, and I believed it (I know I believed it because I have said it a thousand times since and I still believe it and I hope to say it a thousand times more in my life and I defy anyone to say I will not believe it) I will never lie again. It's too much trouble. It's too much like trying to prop a feather upright in a saucer of sand. There's never any end to it. You never get any rest. You're never finished. You never even use up the sand so that you can quit trying.

Only, nothing happened. Boon got out, without any coat. Ned was already loading our grips and baskets and bundles into the car. He said grimly: "Hee hee hee." He said, "Come on, get started so you can break down and still have time to fix it and get back to town before dark." So he was talking to Boon now. He said, "Are you coming back to town before you leaves?"

Then Boon said: "Leave for where?"

"Leave to eat supper," Ned said. "Where does anybody with good sense leave to do at sundown?"

"Oh," Boon said. "You worry about your supper. That's the only supper you got to worry about eating."

We got in and started, me in front with Boon and the rest of them in the back. We crossed the Square crowded with Saturday afternoon, and then we were out of town. But there we were. I mean, we were no forrader. We would come presently to the fork of the road which led to Cousin Zack's, and we would even be going in the wrong direction. And even if it had been the right direction, we still would not be free; as long as we still had Aunt Callie and Lessep and Maury and Alexander in the back seat, we were only free of Ned being where nobody in the world had expected him to be, saying Hee hee hee and Are you coming back to town before. Boon had never once looked at me, nor I at him.

Nor had he spoken to me either; possibly he sensed that he had frightened me with his clean shirt and collar and necktie and the shave in the middle of the day and all the rest of the give-away aura of travel, departure, separation, severance; sensed that I was not only frightened but angry that I had been vulnerable to fright; going on, the sunny early afternoon road stretching on ahead for the seventeen miles during which something would have to be decided, agreed upon; on across the bright May land, our dust spurting and coiling behind us unless we had to slow down for a bridge or a sandy stretch which required the low gears; the seventeen miles which would not last forever even though there were seventeen of them, the mileposts diminishing much too rapidly while something had to be done, decided sooner and sooner and nearer and nearer and I didn't know what yet; or maybe just

something said, a voice, noise, a human sound, since no matter what bitter forfeit Non-virtue may afterward wrench and wring from you, loneliness, solitude, silence should not be part of it.

But at least Boon tried. Or maybe with him it was just the silence too and any un-silence were better, no matter how foolish nor long-ago pre-doomed. No, it was more than that; we had less than half the distance left now and something had to be done, started, fused-off: “The roads are sure fine now, everywhere, even further than Yoknapatawpha County.

A man couldn't want better roads for a long trip like a automobile funeral or something than they are now. How far do you reckon this car could go between now and sundown?” You see? addressed to nobody, like the drowning man thrusting one desperate hand above the surface hoping there might be a straw there. He found none:

“I dont know,” Aunt Callie said from the back seat, holding Alexander, who had been asleep since we left town and didn't deserve a car ride of one mile, let alone seventeen. “And you aint gonter know neither, unlesen you studies it out setting in that front seat locked up in that shed in Boss's back yard tonight.”

Now we were almost there. “So you want—” Boon said, out of the side of his mouth, just exactly loud enough for me to hear, aimed exactly at my right ear like a gun or an arrow or maybe a handful of sand at a closed window.

“Shut up,” I said, exactly like him. The simple and cowardly thing would be to tell him suddenly to stop and as he did so, leap from the car, already running, presenting to Aunt Callie the split-second alternative either to abandon Alexander to Boon and try to run me down in the bushes, or stick with Alexander and pursue me with simple yelling.

I mean, have Boon drive on and leave them at the house and I to spring out from the roadside and leap back aboard as he passed going back to town or any direction opposite from all who would miss me and have authority over me; the cowardly way, so why didn't I take it, who was

already a lost liar, already damned by deceit; why didn't I go the whole hog and be a coward too; be irrevocable and irremediable like Faustus became? glory in baseness, make, compel my new Master to respect me for my completeness even if he did scorn my size? Only I didn't.

It wouldn't have worked, one of us anyway had to be practical; granted that Boon and I would be well on our way before Cousin Louisa could send someone to the field where Cousin Zack would be at three o'clock in the afternoon during planting time, and granted that Cousin Zack couldn't possibly have overtaken us on his saddle horse: he wouldn't have tried to: he would have ridden straight to town and after one minute each with Ned and Cousin Ike, he would have known exactly what to do and would have done it, using the telephone and the police.

We were there. I got out and opened the gate (the same posts of old Lucius Quintus Carothers's time; your present Cousin Carothers has a cattle guard in it now so automobiles can cross, not owning hooves) and we went on up the locust drive toward the house (it is still there: the two-room mud-chinked log half domicile and half fort which old Lucius came with his slaves and foxhounds across the mountains from Carolina in 1813 and built; it is still there somewhere, hidden beneath the clapboards and Greek Revival and steamboat scroll-work which the women the successive Edmondses marry have added to it).

Cousin Louisa and everybody else on the place had already heard us approaching and (except probably the ones Cousin Zack could actually see from his horse) were all on the front gallery and steps and the yard when we drove up and stopped.

"All right," Boon said, again out of the side of his mouth, "do you want." Because, as you say nowadays, this was it; no time any more, let alone privacy, to get some — any — inkling of what he now must desperately know. Because we — he and I — were so new at this, you see. We were worse than amateurs: innocents, complete innocents at stealing automobiles even though neither of us would have called it stealing since we intended to return it unharmed; and even, if people,

the world (Jefferson anyway) had just let us alone, unmissed. Even if I could have answered him if he had asked.

Because it was even worse for me than for him; both of us were desperate but mine was the more urgent desperation since I had to do something, and quick, in a matter of seconds now, while all he had to do was sit in the car with at most his fingers crossed.

I didn't know what to do now; I had already told more lies than I had believed myself capable of inventing, and had had them believed or at least accepted with a consistency which had left me spellbound if not already appalled; I was in the position of the old Negro who said, "Here I is, Lord. If You wants me saved, You got the best chance You ever seen standing right here looking at You." I had shot my bow, Boon's too. If Non-virtue still wanted either of us, it was now her move.

Which she did. She was dressed as Cousin Zachary Edmonds. He came out the front door at that moment and at the same moment I saw that a Negro boy in the yard was holding the reins of his saddle horse.

You see what I mean? Zachary Edmonds, whom Jefferson never saw on a weekday between the first ground-breaking in March and laying-by in July, had been in town this morning (something urgent about the grist mill) and had stopped in Cousin Ike's store barely minutes after I had done so myself; which, dovetailed neatly and exactly with the hour and more Non-virtue had required to shave Boon and change his shirt, had given Cousin Zack the exact time necessary to ride home and be getting off his horse at his doorstep when they heard us coming.

He said — to me: "What are you doing out here? Ike told me you were going to stay in town tonight and he is going to take you fishing tomorrow."

So of course Aunt Callie began yelling then so I didn't need to say anything at all even if I had known anything to say. "Fishing?" she hollered. "On Sunday? If his paw could hear that, he would jump off that train this minute without even waiting to telegraph! His maw too!

Miss Alison aint told him to stay in town with no Mister Ike nor nobody else! She told him to come on out here with me and these other chillen and if he dont behave his-self, Mister Zack would make him!”

“All right, all right,” Cousin Zack said. “Stop yelling a minute; I cant hear him. Maybe he’s changed his mind. Have you?”

“Sir?” I said. “Yes sir. I mean, no sir.”

“Well, which? Are you going to stay out here, or are you going back with Boon?”

“Yes sir,” I said. “I’m going back. Cousin Ike told me to ask you if I could.” And Aunt Callie yelled again (she had never really stopped except for maybe that one long breath when Cousin Zack told her to) but that was all: she still yelling and Cousin Zack saying, “Stop it, stop it, stop it. I cant hear my ears. If Ike dont bring him out tomorrow, I’ll send in for him Monday.” I went back to the car: Boon had the engine already running.

“Well I’ll be damned,” he said, not loud but with complete respect, even awe a little.

“Come on,” I said. “Get away from here.” We went on, smoothly but quick, faster, back down the drive toward the gate.

“Maybe we’re wasting something, just spending it on a automobile trip,” he said. “Maybe I ought to use you for something that’s got money in it.”

“Just get on,” I said. Because how could I tell him, how say it to him? I’m sick and tired of lying, of having to lie. Because I knew, realised now that it had only begun; there would be no end to it, not only no end to the lies I would continue to have to tell merely to protect the ones I had already told, but that I would never be free of the old worn-out ones I had already used and exhausted.

We went back to town. We went fast this time; if there was scenery now, nobody in that automobile used any of it. It was going on five oclock now. Boon spoke, tense and urgent but quite composed: “We got to let it cool awhile. They saw me drive out of town taking you folks

out to McCaslin; they'll see me come back with just you and me alone; they'll expect to see me put the car back in Boss's carriage house. Then they got to see me and you, but separate, just walking around like wasn't nothing going on." But how could I say that either? No. Let's go now.

If I've got to tell more lies, at least let it be to strangers. He was still talking: " — car. What was that he said about were we coming back through town before we left?"

"What? Who said?"

"Ned. Back there just before we left town."

"I dont remember," I said. "What about the car?"

"Where to leave it. While I take a santer around the Square and you go home and get a clean shirt or whatever you'll need. I had to unload all the stuff out at McCaslin, remember. Yours too. I mean, just in case some meddling busybody is hanging around just on the happen-chance." We both knew who he meant.

"Why cant you lock it in the carriage house?"

"I aint got the key," he said. "All I got is the lock. Boss took the key away from me this morning and unlocked the lock and give the key to Mr Ballott to keep until he gets back. I'm supposed to run the car in as soon as I get back from McCaslin and lock the lock shut and Boss will telegraph Mr Ballott what train to unlock the door so I can meet them."

"Then we'll just have to risk it," I said.

"Yes, we'll have to risk it. Maybe with Boss and Miss Sarah gone, even Delphine aint going to see him again until Monday morning." So we risked it. Boon drove into the carriage house and got his grip and coat down from where he had hidden them in the loft and reached up again and dragged down a folded tarpaulin and put his grip and coat in on the floor of the back seat.

The gasoline can was all ready: a brand-new five-gallon can which Grandfather had had the tinsmith who made the toolbox more or less rebuild until it was smell-tight, since Grandmother already didn't like the smell of gasoline, which we had never used yet because the automobile had never been this far before; the funnel and the chamois strainer were already in the toolbox with the tire tools and jack and wrenches that came with the car, and the lantern and axe and shovel and coil of barbed wire and the block and tackle which Grandfather had added, along with the tin bucket to fill the radiator when we passed creeks or barrow pits.

He put the can (it was full; maybe that was what took him the extra time before he came for us) in the back and opened the tarpaulin, not spreading it but rumbling it into the back until everything was concealed to just look like a jumbled mass of tarpaulin. "We'll shove yours under the same way," he said. "Then it wont look like nothing but a wad of tarpollyon somebody was too lazy to fold up. What you better do is go home and get your clean shirt and come straight back here and wait. I wont be long: just santer around the Square in case Ike wants to start asking questions too. Then we'll be gone."

We closed the door. Boon started to hang the open padlock back in the staple. "No," I said; I couldn't even have said why, so fast I had progressed in evil. "Put it in your pocket."

But he knew why; he told me. "You damn right," he said. "We done gone through too much to have somebody happen-chance by and snap it shut because they thought I forgot to."

I went home. It was just across the street. A filling station is there now, and what was Grandfather's house is now chopped into apartments, precarious of tenure. The house was empty, unlocked of course, since nobody in Jefferson locked mere homes in those innocent days.

It was only a little after five, nowhere near sundown, yet the day was finished, done for; the empty silent house was not vacant at all but filled with presences like held breath; and suddenly I wanted my mother; I wanted no more of this, no more of free will; I wanted to

return, relinquish, be secure, safe from the sort of decisions and deciding whose foster twin was this having to steal an automobile.

But it was too late now; I had already chosen, elected; if I had sold my soul to Satan for a mess of pottage, at least I would damn well collect the pottage and eat it too: hadn't Boon himself just reminded me, almost as if he had foreseen this moment of weakness and vacillation in the empty house, and forewarned me: "We done gone through too much to let nothing stop us now."

My clothes — fresh blouses, pants, stockings, my toothbrush — were out at McCaslin now. I had more in my drawer of course, except the toothbrush, which in Mother's absence it was a fair gamble that neither Aunt Callie nor Cousin Louisa would remember about. But I took no clothes, nothing; not that I forgot to but probably because I had never intended to. I just entered the house and stood inside the door long enough to prove to myself that of Boon and me it wouldn't be me who failed us, and went back across the street and across Grandfather's back yard to the lot.

Nor was Boon the one who would fail us; I heard the engine running quietly before I reached the carriage house. Boon was already behind the wheel; I think the automobile was even already in gear. "Where's your clean shirt?" he said. "Never mind. I'll buy you one in Memphis. Come on. We can move now." He backed the car out. The open lock was once more hanging in the staple. "Come on," he said. "Dont stop to lock it. It's too late now."

"No," I said. I couldn't have said then why either: with the padlock snapped through the staple and hasp of the closed door, it would look like the automobile was safely inside. And so it would be: the whole thing no more than a dream from which I could wake tomorrow, perhaps now, the next moment, and be safe, saved.

So I closed the door and locked the padlock and opened the lot gate for Boon to drive out and closed that too and got in, the car already in

motion — if in fact it had ever completely stopped. “If we go the back way, we can dodge the Square,” I said. And again he said: “It’s too late now. All they can do now is holler.” But none hollered. But even with the Square behind, it still was not too late. That irrevocable decision was still a mile ahead, where the road to McCaslin forked away from the Memphis road, where I could say Stop.

Let me out and he would do it. More: I could say I’ve changed my mind. Take me back to McCaslin and I knew he would do that too. Then suddenly I knew that if I said Turn around. I will get that key from Mr Ballott and we will lock this automobile up in the carriage house where Boss believes it already is at this moment and he would do that.

And more: that he wanted me to do that, was silently begging me to do that; he and I both aghast not at his individual temerity but at our mutual, our confederated recklessness, and that Boon knew he had not the strength to resist his and so must cast himself on my strength and rectitude. You see? What I told you about Non-virtue? If things had been reversed and I had silently pled with Boon to turn back, I could have depended on his virtue and pity, where he to whom Boon pled had neither.

So I said nothing; the fork, the last frail impotent hand reached down to save me, flew up and passed and fled, was gone, irrevocable; I said All right then. Here I come. Maybe Boon heard it, since I was still boss. Anyway, he put Jefferson behind us; Satan would at least defend his faithful from the first one or two tomorrows; he said: “We aint really got anything to worry about but Hell Creek bottom tomorrow. Harrykin Creek aint anything.”

“Who said it was?” I said. Hurricane Creek is four miles from town; you have passed over it so fast all your life you probably dont even know its name. But people who crossed it then knew it. There was a wooden bridge over the creek itself, but even in the top of summer the approaches to it were a series of mudholes.

“That’s what I’m telling you,” Boon said. “It aint anything. Me and Mr Wordwin got through it that day last year without even using the block and tackle: just a shovel and axe Mr Wordwin borrowed from a house about a half a mile away, that now you mention it I dont believe he took back. Likely though the fellow come and got them the next day.”

He was almost right. We got through the first mudhole and even across the bridge. But the other mudhole stopped us. The automobile lurched once, twice, tilted and hung spinning. Boon didn’t waste any time, already removing his shoes (I forgot to say he had had them shined too), and rolled up his pants legs and stepped out into the mud. “Move over,” he said. “Put it in low gear and start when I tell you. Come on. You know how to do it; you learned how this morning.”

I got under the wheel. He didn’t even stop for the block and tackle. “I dont need it. It’ll take too much time getting it out and putting it back and we aint got time.” He didn’t need it. There was a snake fence beside the road; he had already wrenched the top rail off and, himself knee-deep in mud and water, wedged the end under the back axle and said, “Now.

Pour the coal to her,” and lifted the automobile bodily and shot it forward lurching and heaving, by main strength up onto dry ground again, shouting at me: “Shut it off! Shut it off!” which I did, managed to, and he came and shoved me over and got in under the wheel; he didn’t even stop to roll his muddy pants down.

Because the sun was almost down now; it would be nearly dark by the time we reached Ballenbaugh’s, where we would spend the night; we went as fast as we dared now and soon we were passing Mr Wyott’s — a family friend of ours; Father took me bird hunting there that Christmas — which was eight miles from Jefferson and still four miles from the river, with the sun just setting behind the house.

We went on; there would be a moon after a while, because our oil headlights were better to show someone else you were coming rather than to light you where you were going; when suddenly Boon said,

“What’s that smell? Was it you?” But before I could deny it he had jerked the automobile to a stop, sat for an instant, then turned and reached back and flung back the lumped and jumbled mass of the tarpaulin which had filled the back of the car. Ned sat up from the floor.

He had on the black suit and hat and the white shirt with the gold collar stud without either collar or tie, which he wore on Sunday; he even had the small battered hand grip (you would call it a brief or attaché case now) which had belonged to old Lucius McCaslin before even Father was born; I dont know what else he might have carried in it at other times.

All I ever saw in it was the Bible (likewise from Great-great-grandmother McCaslin), which he couldn’t read, and a pint flask containing maybe a good double tablespoonful of whiskey. “I’ll be a son of a bitch,” Boon said.

“I wants a trip too,” Ned said. “Hee hee hee.”

IV

“I GOT JUST as much right to a trip as you and Lucius,” Ned said. “I got more. This automobile belongs to Boss and Lucius aint nothing but his grandboy and you aint no kin to him a-tall.”

“All right, all right,” Boon said. “What I’m talking about, you laid there under that tarpollyon all the time and let me get out in the mud and lift this whole car out single-handed by main strength.”

“And hot under there too, mon,” Ned said. “I dont see how I stood it. Not to mention having to hold off this here sheet-iron churn from knocking my brains out every time you bounced, let alone waiting for that gasoline or whatever you calls it to get all joggled up to where it would decide to blow up too. What did you aim for me to do? That was just four miles from town. You’d make me walk back home.”

“This is ten miles now,” Boon said. “What makes you think you aint going to walk them back home?”

I said, rapidly, quickly: "Have you forgot? That was Wyott's about two miles back. We might just as well be two miles from Bay St. Louis."

"That's right," Ned said pleasantly. "The walking aint near so fur from here." Boon didn't look at him long.

"Get out and fold up that tarpollyon where it wont take up no more room than it has to," he told Ned. "And air it off some too if we got to ride with it."

"It was all that bumping and jolting you done," Ned said. "You talk like I broke my manners just on purpose to get caught."

Also, Boon lit the headlights while we were stopped, and now he wiped his feet and legs off on a corner of the tarpaulin and put his socks and shoes on and rolled his pants back down; they were already drying. The sun was gone now; already you could see the moonlight. It would be full night when we reached Ballenbaugh's.

I understand that Ballenbaugh's is now a fishing camp run by an off-and-on Italian bootlegger — off I mean during the one or two weeks it takes each new sheriff every four years to discover the true will of the people he thought voted for him; all that stretch of river bottom which was a part of Thomas Sutpen's doomed baronial dream and the site of Major de Spain's hunting camp is now a drainage district; the wilderness where Boon himself in his youth hunted (or anyway was present while his betters did) bear and deer and panther, is tame with cotton and corn now and even Wyott's Crossing is only a name.

Even in 1905 there was still vestigial wilderness, though most of the deer and all the bears and panthers (also Major de Spain and his hunters) were gone; the ferry also; and now we called Wyott's Crossing the Iron Bridge, THE Iron Bridge since it was the first iron bridge and for several years yet the only one we in Yoknapatawpha County had or knew of.

But back in the old days, in the time of our own petty Chickasaw kings, Issetibbeha and Mocketubbe and the regicide-usurper who called himself Doom, and the first Wyott came along and the Indians showed

him the crossing and he built his store and ferryboat and named it after himself, this was not only the only crossing within miles but the head of navigation too; boats (in the high water of winter, even a small steamboat) came as it were right to Wyott's front door, bringing the whiskey and plows and coal oil and peppermint candy up from Vicksburg and carrying the cotton and furs back.

But Memphis was nearer than Vicksburg even by mule team, so they built a road as straight from Jefferson to the south bend of Wyott's ferryboat as they could run it, and as straight from the north end of the ferryboat to Memphis as they could run that.

So the cotton and freight began to come and go that way, mule- or ox-drawn; whereupon there appeared immediately from nowhere an ancestryless giant calling himself Ballenbaugh; some said he actually bought from Wyott the small dim heretofore peaceful one-room combined residence and store, including whatever claim he (Wyott) considered he had in the old Chickasaw crossing; others said that Ballenbaugh simply suggested to Wyott that he (Wyott) had been there long enough now and the time had come for him to move four miles back from the river and become a farmer.

Anyway, that's what Wyott did. And then his little wilderness-cradled hermitage became a roaring place indeed: it became dormitory, grubbing station and saloon for the transient freighters and the fixed crews of hard-mouthed hard-souled mule skinnners who met the wagons at both edges of the bottom, with two and three and (when necessary) four span of already geared-up mules, to curse the heavy wagons in to the ferry on one side of the river, and from the ferry to high ground once more on the other.

A roaring place; who faced it were anyway men. But just tough men then, no more, until Colonel Sartoris (I dont mean the banker with his courtesy title acquired partly by inheritance and partly by propinquity, who was responsible for Boon and me being where we at this moment were; I mean his father, the actual colonel, C.S.A. — soldier, statesman, politician, duelist; the collateral descending nephews and cousins of

one twenty-year-old Yoknapatawpha County youth say, murderer) built his railroad in the mid-seventies and destroyed it.

But not Ballenbaugh's, let alone Ballenbaugh. The wagon trains came and drove the boats from the river and changed the name of Wyatt's Crossing to Ballenbaugh's Ferry; the railroads came and removed the cotton bales from the wagons and therefore the ferry from Ballenbaugh's, but that was all; forty years before, in the modest case of the trader, Wyatt, Ballenbaugh showed himself perfectly capable of anticipating the wave of the future and riding it; now, in the person of his son, another giant who in 1865 returned with (it was said) his coat lined with uncut United States bank notes, from (he said) Arkansas, where (he said) he had served and been honorably discharged from a troop of partisan rangers, the name of whose commander he was never subsequently able to recall, he showed that he had lost none of his old deftness and skill and omniscience.

Formerly, people passed through Ballenbaugh's, pausing for the night; now they travelled to Ballenbaugh's, always at night and often rapidly, to give Ballenbaugh as much time as possible to get the horse or cow concealed in the swamp before the law or the owner arrived. Because, in addition to gangs of angry farmers following the nonreturning prints of horses and cattle, and sheriffs following those of actual murderers into Ballenbaugh's, at least one federal revenue agent left a set of nonreturning footprints.

Because where Ballenbaugh senior merely sold whiskey, this one made it too; he was now the patron of what is covered by the euphemistic blanket-term of dance hall, and by the mid-eighties Ballenbaugh's was a byword miles around for horror and indignation; ministers and old ladies tried to nominate sheriffs whose entire platform would be running Ballenbaugh and his drunks and fiddlers and gamblers and girls out of Yoknapatawpha County and Mississippi too if possible.

But Ballenbaugh and his entourage — stable, pleasure-dome, whatever you want to call it — never bothered us outsiders: they never came out of their fastness and there was no law compelling anyone to go there;

also, seemingly his new avocation (avatar) was so rewarding that word went round that anyone with sights and ambition no higher than one spavined horse or dry heifer was no longer welcome there.

So sensible people simply let Ballenbaugh's alone. Which certainly included sheriffs, who were not only sensible but family men too, and who had the example of the federal revenuer who had vanished in that direction not so long ago.

That is, until the summer of 1886, when a Baptist minister named Hiram Hightower — also a giant of a man, as tall and almost as big as Ballenbaugh himself, who on Sunday from 1861 to 1865 had been one of Forrest's company chaplains and on the other six days one of his hardest and most outrageous troopers — rode into Ballenbaugh's armed with a Bible and his bare hands and converted the entire settlement with his fists, one at a time when he could, two or three at a time when he had to.

So when Boon and Ned and I approached it in this May dusk of 1905, Ballenbaugh was accomplishing his third avatar in the person of a fifty-year-old maiden: his only child: a prim fleshless severe iron-gray woman who farmed a quarter section of good bottom cotton- and corn-land and conducted a small store with a loft above it containing a row of shuck mattresses each with its neat perfectly clean sheets and pillow cases and blankets for the accommodation of fox- and coon-hunters and fishermen, who (it was said) returned the second time not for the hunting and fishing but for the table Miss Ballenbaugh set.

She heard us too. Nor were we the first; she told us that we were the thirteenth automobile to pass there in the last two years, five of them in the last forty days; she had already lost two hens and would probably have to begin keeping everything penned up, even the hounds. She and the cook and a Negro man were already on the front gallery, shading their eyes against the ghostly flicker of our headlights as we drove up. She not only knew Boon of old, she recognised the automobile first; already, even after only thirteen of them, her eye for individual cars was that good.

“So you really did make it to Jefferson, after all,” she said.

“In a year?” Boon said. “Lord, Miss Ballenbaugh, this automobile has been a hundred times farther than Jefferson since then. A thousand times. You might as well give up: you got to get used to automobiles like everybody else.” That was when she told us about the thirteen cars in two years, and the two hens.

“At least they got a ride on an automobile for a little piece anyway,” she said. “Which is more than I can say.”

“You mean to say you aint never rode in one?” Boon said. “Here, Ned,” he said, “jump out of there and get them grips out too. Loosh, let Miss Ballenbaugh set up in front where she can see out.”

“Wait,” Miss Ballenbaugh said. “I must tell Alice about supper.”

“Supper can wait,” Boon said. “I bet Alice aint never had a car ride neither. Come on, Alice. Who’s that with you? Your husband?”

“I aint studying no husband,” the cook said. “And I wouldn’t be studying Ephum even if I was.”

“Bring him on anyway,” Boon said. The cook and the man came and got in too, into the back seat with the gasoline can and the folded tarpaulin. Ned and I stood in the lamplight from the open door and watched the automobile, the red tail lamp, move on up the road, then stop and back and turn and come back past us, Boon blowing the horn now, Miss Ballenbaugh sitting erect and a little tense in the front seat, Alice and Ephum in the back seat waving to us as they passed.

“Whoeee, boy,” Ephum shouted at Ned. “Git a horse!”

“Showing off,” Ned said; he meant Boon. “He better be sho proud Boss Priest aint standing here too. He’d show him off.” The car stopped and backed and turned again and came back to us and stopped. After a moment Miss Ballenbaugh said,

“Well.” Then she moved; she said briskly: “All right, Alice.” So we had supper. And I knew why the hunters and fishermen came back. Then

Ned went off with Ephum and I made my manners to Miss Ballenbaugh and, Boon carrying the lamp, we went upstairs to the loft above the store.

“Didn’t you bring nothing?” Boon said. “Not even a clean handkerchief?”

“I wont need anything,” I said.

“Well, you cant sleep like that. Look at them clean sheets. At least take off your shoes and pants. And your maw would make you brush your teeth too.”

“No she wouldn’t,” I said. “She couldn’t. I aint got anything to brush them with.”

“That wouldn’t stop her, and you know it. If you couldn’t find something, you’d make something to do it with or know the reason why.”

“All right,” I said. I was already on my mattress. “Good night.” He stood with his hand up to blow out the lamp.

“You all right?” he said.

“Shut up,” I said.

“Say the word. We’ll go back home. Not now but in the morning.”

“Did you wait this long to get scared?” I said.

“Good night,” he said. He blew out the lamp and got on his mattress. Then there was all the spring darkness: the big bass-talking frogs from the sloughs, the sound that the woods makes, the big woods, the wilderness with the wild things: coons and rabbits and mink and mushrats and the big owls and the big snakes — moccasins and rattlers — and maybe even the trees breathing and the river itself breathing, not to mention the ghosts — the old Chickasaws who named the land before the white men ever saw it, and the white men afterward — Wyott and old Sutpen and Major de Spain’s hunters and the flatboats full of cotton and then the wagon trains and the brawling teamsters and the line of brigands and murderers which produced Miss

Ballenbaugh; suddenly I realised what the noise was that Boon was making.

“What are you laughing at?” I said.

“I’m thinking about Hell Creek bottom. We’ll hit it about eleven o'clock tomorrow morning.”

“I thought you said we’ll have trouble there.”

“You damn right we will,” Boon said. “It’ll take that axe and shovel and bob wire and block and tackle and all the fence rails and me and you and Ned all three. That’s who I’m laughing at: Ned. By the time we are through Hell Creek tomorrow, he’s going to wish he hadn’t busted what he calls his manners nor et nor done nothing else under that tarpollyon until he felt Memphis itself under them wheels.”

Then he waked me early. And everybody else within a half mile, though it still took some time to get Ned up from where he had slept in Ephum’s house, to the kitchen to eat his breakfast (and even longer than that to get him out of the kitchen again with a woman in it). We ate breakfast — and after that breakfast if I had been a hunter or a fisherman I wouldn’t have felt like walking anywhere for a while — and Boon gave Miss Ballenbaugh another ride in the automobile, but without Alice and Ephum this time, though Ephum was on hand.

Then we — Boon — filled the gasoline tank and the radiator, not because they needed it but I think because Miss Ballenbaugh and Ephum were there watching, and started. The sun was just rising as we crossed the Iron Bridge over the river (and the ghost of that steamboat too; I had forgot that last night) into foreign country, another county; by night it would even be another state, and Memphis.

“Providing we get through Hell Creek,” Boon said.

“Maybe if you’d just stop talking about it,” I said.

“Sure,” Boon said. “Hell Creek bottom dont care whether you talk about it or not. It dont have to give a durn. You’ll see.” Then he said, “Well, there it is.” It was only a little after ten; we had made excellent

time following the ridges, the roads dry and dusty between the sprouting fields, the land vacant and peaceful with Sunday, the people already in their Sunday clothes idle on the front galleries, the children and dogs already running toward the fence or road to watch us pass; then in the surreys and buggies and wagons and horse- and mule-back, anywhere from one to three on the horse but not on the mule (a little after nine we passed another automobile; Boon said it was a Ford; he had an eye for automobiles like Miss Ballenbaugh's), on the way to the small white churches in the spring groves.

A wide valley lay before us, the road descending from the plateau toward a band of willow and cypress which marked the creek. It didn't look very bad to me, nowhere near as wide as the river bottom we had already crossed, and we could even see the dusty gash of the road mounting to the opposite plateau beyond it. But Boon had already started to curse, driving even faster down the hill almost as if he were eager, anxious to reach and join battle with it, as if it were something sentient, not merely inimical but unredeemable, like a human enemy, another man. "Look at it," he said. "Innocent as a new-laid egg. You can even see the road beyond it like it was laughing at us, like it was saying If you could just get here you could durn near see Memphis; except just see if you can get here."

"If it's all that bad, why dont we go around it?" Ned said. "That's what I would do if it was me setting there where you is."

"Because Hell Creek bottom aint got no around," Boon said violently. "Go one way and you'd wind up in Alabama; go the other way and you'll fall off in the Mississippi River."

"I seen the Mississippi River at Memphis once," Ned said. "Now you mention it, I done already seen Memphis too. But I aint never seen Alabama. Maybe I'd like a trip there."

"You aint never visited Hell Creek bottom before neither," Boon said. "Providing what you hid under that tarpollyon for yesterday is education. Why do you reckon the only two automobiles we have seen

between now and Jefferson was this one and that Ford? Because there aint no other automobiles in Mississippi below Hell Creek, that's why."

"Miss Ballenbaugh counted thirteen passed her house in the last two years," I said.

"Two of them was this one," Boon said. "And even them other eleven she never counted crossing Hell Creek, did she?"

"Maybe it depends on who's doing the driving," Ned said. "Hee hee hee."

Boon stopped the car, quickly. He turned his head. "All right. Jump out. You want to visit Alabama. You done already made yourself fifteen minutes late running your mouth."

"Why you got to snatch a man up just for passing the day with you?" Ned said.

But Boon wasn't listening to him. I dont think he was really speaking to Ned. He was already out of the car; he opened the toolbox Grandfather had had made on the running board to hold the block and tackle and axe and spade and the lantern, taking everything out but the lantern and tumbling them into the back seat with Ned.

"So we wont waste any time," he said, speaking rapidly, but quite composed, calm, without hysteria or even urgency, closing the box and getting back under the wheel. "Let's hit it. What're we waiting for?"

Still it didn't look bad to me — just another country road crossing another swampy creek, the road no longer dry but not really wet yet, the holes and boggy places already filled for our convenience by previous pioneers with brush tops and limbs, and sections of it even corduroyed with poles laid crossways in the mud (oh yes, I realised suddenly that the road — for lack of any closer term — had stopped being not really wet yet too) so perhaps Boon himself was responsible; he himself had populated the stagnant cypress- and willow-arched mosquito-whined gloom with the wraiths of stuck automobiles and sweating and cursing people.

Then I thought we had struck it, except for that fact that I not only couldn't see any rise of drier ground which would indicate we were reaching, approaching the other side of the swamp, I couldn't even see the creek itself ahead yet, let alone a bridge. Again the automobile lurched, canted, and hung as it did yesterday at Hurricane Creek; again Boon was already removing his shoes and socks and rolling up his pants. "All right," he said to Ned over his shoulder, "get out."

"I dont know how," Ned said, not moving. "I aint learned about automobiles yet. I'll just be in your way. I'll set here with Lucius so you can have plenty of room."

"Hee hee hee," Boon said in savage and vicious mimicry. "You wanted a trip. Now you got one. Get out."

"I got my Sunday clothes on," Ned said.

"So have I," Boon said. "If I aint scared of a pair of britches, you needn't be."

"You can talk," Ned said. "You got Mr Maury. I has to work for my money. When my clothes gets ruint or wore out, I has to buy new ones myself."

"You never bought a garment of clothes or shoes or a hat neither in your life," Boon said. "You got one pigeon-tailed coat I know of that old Lucius McCaslin himself wore, let alone General Compson's and Major de Spain's and Boss's too. You can roll your britches up and take off your shoes or not, that's your business. But you're going to get out of this automobile."

"Let Lucius get out," Ned said. "He's younger than me and stouter too for his size."

"He's got to steer it," Boon said.

"I'll steer it, if that's all you needs," Ned said. "I been what you calls steering horses and mules and oxen all my life and I reckon gee and haw with that steering wheel aint no different from gee and haw with a pair of lines or a goad." Then to me: "Jump out, boy, and help Mr Boon. Better take your shoes and stockings—"

“Are you going to get out, or do I pick you up with one hand and snatch this automobile out from under you with the other?” Boon said. Ned moved then, fast enough when he finally accepted the fact that he had to, only grunting a little as he took off his shoes and rolled up his pants and removed his coat. When I looked back at Boon, he was already dragging two poles, sapling-sized tree trunks, out of the weeds and briars.

“Aint you going to use the block and tackle yet?” I said.

“Hell no,” Boon said. “When the time comes for that, you wont need to ask nobody’s permission about it. You’ll already know it.” So it’s the bridge I thought. Maybe there’s not even a bridge at all and that’s what’s wrong. And Boon read my mind there too. “Don’t worry about the bridge. We aint even come to the bridge yet.”

I would learn what he meant by that too, but not now. Ned lowered one foot gingerly into the water. “This water got dirt in it,” he said. “If there’s one thing I hates, it’s dirt betwixt my nekkid toes.”

“That’s because your circulation aint warmed up yet,” Boon said. “Take a-holt of this pole. You said you aint acquainted with automobiles yet. That’s one complaint you wont never have to make again for the rest of your life. All right” — to me— “ease her ahead now and whenever she bites, keep her going.”

Which we did, Boon and Ned levering their poles forward under the back axle, pinching us forward for another lurch of two or three or sometimes five feet, until the car hung spinning again, the whirling back wheels coating them both from knee to crown as if they had been swung at with one of the spray nozzles which house painters use now.

“See what I mean?” Boon said, spitting, giving another terrific wrench and heave which sent us lurching forward, “about getting acquainted with automobiles? Exactly like horses and mules: dont never stand directly behind one that’s got one hind foot already lifted.”

Then I saw the bridge. We had come up onto a patch of earth so (comparatively) dry that Boon and Ned, almost indistinguishable now with mud, had to trot with their poles and even then couldn't keep up, Boon hollering, panting, "Go on! Keep going!" until I saw the bridge a hundred yards ahead and then saw what was still between us and the bridge and I knew what he meant. I stopped the car. The road (the passage, whatever you would call it now) in front of us had not altered so much as it had transmogrified, exchanged mediums, elements.

It now resembled a big receptacle of milk-infused coffee from which protruded here and there a few forlorn impotent hopeless odds and ends of sticks and brush and logs and an occasional hump of actual earth which looked startlingly like it had been deliberately thrown up by a plow. Then I saw something else, and understood what Boon had been telling me by indirection about Hell Creek bottom for over a year now, and what he had been reiterating with a kind of haunted bemused obsession ever since we left Jefferson yesterday.

Standing hitched to a tree just off the road (canal) were two mules in plow gear — that is, in bridles and collars and hames, the trace chains looped over the hames and the plowlines coiled into neat hanks and hanging from the hames also; leaning against another tree nearby was a heavy double-winged plow — a middlebuster — caked, wings shank and the beam itself, with more of the same mud which was rapidly encasing Boon and Ned, a doubletree, likewise mud-caked, leaning against the plow; and in the immediate background a new two-room paintless shotgun cabin on the gallery of which a man sat tilted in a splint chair, barefoot, his galluses down about his waist and his (likewise muddy) brogan shoes against the wall beside the chair.

And I knew that this, and not Hurricane Creek, was where (Boon said) he and Mr Wordwin had had to borrow the shovel last year, which (Boon said) Mr Wordwin had forgot to return, and which (the shovel) Mr Wordwin might as well have forgot to borrow also for all the good it did them.

Ned had seen it too. He had already had one hard look at the mudhole. Now he looked at the already geared-up mules standing there swishing and slapping at mosquitoes while they waited for us. “Now, that’s what I calls convenient—” he said.

“Shut up,” Boon said in a fierce murmur. “Not a word. Dont make a sound.” He spoke in a tense controlled fury, propping his muddy pole against the car and hauling out the block and tackle and the barbed wire and the axe and spade. He said Son of a bitch three times. Then he said to me: “You too.”

“Me?” I said.

“But look at them mules,” Ned said. “He even got a log chain already hooked to that doubletree—”

“Didn’t you hear me say shut up?” Boon said in that fierce, quite courteous murmur. “If I didn’t speak plain enough, excuse me. What I’m trying to say is, shut up.”

“Only, what in the world do he want with the middlebuster?” Ned said. “And it muddy clean up to the handles too. Like he been — You mean to say he gets in here with that team and works this place like a patch just to keep it boggy?” Boon had the spade, axe and block and tackle all three in his hands. For a second I thought he would strike Ned with any one or maybe all three of them. I said quickly:

“What do you want me—”

“Yes,” Boon said. “It will take all of us. I — me and Mr Wordwin had a little trouble with him here last year; we got to get through this time—”

“How much did you have to pay him last year to get drug out?” Ned said.

“Two dollars,” Boon said. “ — so you better take off your whole pants, take off your shirt too; it’ll be all right here—”

“Two dollars?” Ned said. “This sho beats cotton. He can farm right here setting in the shade without even moving. What I wants Boss to get me is a well-travelled mudhole.”

“Fine,” Boon said. “You can learn how on this one.” He gave Ned the block and tackle and the piece of barbed wire. “Take it yonder to that willow, the big one, and get a good holt with it.”

Ned payed out the rope and carried the head block to the tree. I took off my pants and shoes and stepped down into the mud. It felt good, cool. Maybe it felt that way to Boon too. Or maybe his — Ned’s too — was just release, freedom from having to waste any time now trying not to get muddy. Anyway, from now on he simply ignored the mud, squatting in it, saying Son of a bitch quietly and steadily while he fumbled the other piece of barbed wire into a loop on the front of the car to hook the block in.

“Here,” he told me, “you be dragging up some of that brush over yonder,” reading my mind again too: “I dont know where it came from neither. Maybe he stacks it up there himself to keep handy for folks so they can find out good how bad they owe him two dollars.”

So I dragged up the brush — branches, tops — into the mud in front of the car, while Boon and Ned took up the slack in the tackle and got ready, Ned and I on the take-up rope of the tackle, Boon at the back of the car with his prize pole again. “You got the easy job,” he told us. “All you got to do is grab and hold when I heave.

All right,” he said, “Let’s go.”

There was something dreamlike about it. Not nightmarish: just dreamlike — the peaceful, quiet, remote, sylvan, almost primeval setting of ooze and slime and jungle growth and heat in which the very mules themselves, peacefully swishing and stamping at the teeming infinitesimal invisible myriad life which was the actual air we moved and breathed in, were not only unalien but in fact curiously appropriate, being themselves biological dead ends and hence already obsolete before they were born; the automobile: the expensive useless mechanical toy rated in power and strength by the dozens of horses, yet held helpless and impotent in the almost infantile clutch of a few inches of the temporary confederation of two mild and pacific elements — earth and water — which the frailest integers and units of motion as

produced by the ancient unmechanical methods, had coped with for countless generations without really having noticed it; the three of us, three forked identical and now unrecognisable mud-colored creatures engaged in a life-and-death struggle with it, the progress — if any — of which had to be computed in dreadful and glacier-like inches.

And all the while, the man sat in his tilted chair on the gallery watching us while Ned and I strained for every inch we could get on the rope which by now was too slippery with mud to grip with the hands, and at the rear of the car Boon strove like a demon, titanic, ramming his pole beneath the automobile and lifting and heaving it forward; at one time he dropped, flung away the pole and, stooping, grasped the car with his hands and actually ran it forward for a foot or two as though it were a wheel-barrow. No man could stand it.

No man should ever have to. I said so at last. I stopped pulling, I said, panted: “No. We cant do it. We just cant.” And Boon, in an expiring voice as faint and gentle as the whisper of love: “Then get out of the way or I’ll run it over you.”

“No,” I said. I stumbled, slipping and plunging, back to him. “No,” I said. “You’ll kill yourself.”

“I aint tired,” Boon said in that light dry voice. “I’m just getting started good. But you and Ned can take a rest. While you’re getting your breath, suppose you drag up some more of that brush—”

“No,” I said, “no! Here he comes! Do you want him to see it?” Because we could see him as well as hear — the suck and plop of the mules’ feet as they picked their delicate way along the edge of the mudhole, the almost musical jangle of the looped chains, the man riding one and leading the other, his shoes tied together by the laces looped over one of the hames, the doubletree balanced in front of him as the old buffalo hunters in the pictures carried their guns — a gaunt man, older than we — I anyway — had assumed.

"Morning, boys," he said. "Looks like you're about ready for me now. Howdy, Jefferson," he said to Boon. "Looks like you did get through last summer, after all."

"Looks like it," Boon said. He had changed, instantaneous and complete, like a turned page: the poker player who has just seen the second deuce fall to a hand across the table. "We might a got through this time too if you folks didn't raise such heavy mud up here."

"Dont hold that against us," the man said. "Mud's one of our best crops up thisaway."

"At two dollars a mudhole, it ought to be your best," Ned said. The man blinked at Ned a moment.

"I dont know but what you're right," he said. "Here. You take this doubletree; you look like a boy that knows which end of a mule to hook to."

"Get down and do it yourself," Boon said. "Why else are we paying you two dollars to be the hired expert? You done it last year."

"That was last year," the man said. "Dabbling around in this water hooking log chains to them things undermined my system to where I come down with rheumatism if I so much as spit on myself." So he didn't stir. He just brought the mules up and turned them side by side while Boon and Ned hooked the trace chains to the singletrees and then Boon squatted in the mud to make the log chain fast to the car.

"What do you want me to hook it to?" he said.

"I dont care myself," the man said. "Hook up to any part of it you want out of this mudhole. If you want all of it to come out at the same time, I'd say hook to the axle. But first I'd put all them spades and ropes back in the automobile. You wont need them no more, at least here." So Ned and I did that, and Boon hooked up and we all three stood clear and watched. He was an expert of course, but by now the mules were experts too, breaking the automobile free of the mud, keeping the strain balanced on the doubletree as delicately as wire walkers, getting the automobile into motion and keeping it there with no more

guidance than a word now and then from the man who rode the near mule, and an occasional touch from the peeled switch he carried; on to where the ground was more earth than water.

“All right, Ned,” Boon said. “Unhook him.”

“Not yet,” the man said. “There’s another hole just this side of the bridge that I’m throwing in free. You aint been acquainted here for a year now.” He said to Ned: “What we call the reserve patch up thisaway.”

“You means the Christmas middle,” Ned said.

“Maybe I do,” the man said. “What is it?”

Ned told him. “It’s how we done at McCaslin back before the Surrender when old L.Q.C. was alive, and how the Edmonds boy still does. Every spring a middle is streaked off in the best ground on the place, and every stalk of cotton betwixt that middle and the edge of the field belongs to the Christmas fund, not for the boss but for every McCaslin nigger to have a Christmas share of it. That’s what a Christmas middle is. Likely you mud-farming folks up here never heard of it.” The man looked at Ned awhile. After a while Ned said, “Hee hee hee.”

“That’s better,” the man said. “I thought for a minute me and you was about to misunderstand one another.” He said to Boon: “Maybe somebody better guide it.”

“Yes,” Boon said. “All right,” he told me. So I got under the wheel, mud and all. But we didn’t move yet. The man said, “I forgot to mention it, so maybe I better. Prices have doubled around here since last year.”

“Why?” Boon said. “It’s the same car, the same mudhole; be damned if I dont believe it’s even the same mud.”

“That was last year. There’s more business now. So much more that I cant afford not to go up.”

“All right, goddammit,” Boon said. “Go on.” So we moved, ignominious, at the pace of the mules, on, into the next mudhole without stopping,

on and out again. The bridge was just ahead now; beyond it, we could see the road all the way to the edge of the bottom and safety.

“You’re all right now,” the man said. “Until you come back.” Boon was unhooking the log chain while Ned freed the traces and handed the doubletree back up to the man on the mule.

“We aint coming back this way,” Boon said.

“I wouldn’t neither,” the man said. Boon went back to the last puddle and washed some of the mud from his hands and came back and took four dollars from his wallet. The man didn’t move.

“It’s six dollars,” he said.

“Last year it was two dollars,” Boon said. “You said it’s double now. Double two is four. All right. Here’s four dollars.”

“I charge a dollar a passenger,” the man said. “There was two of you last year. That was two dollars. The price is doubled now. There’s three of you. That’s six dollars. Maybe you’d rather walk back to Jefferson than pay two dollars, but maybe that boy and that nigger wouldn’t.”

“And maybe I aint gone up neither,” Boon said. “Suppose I dont pay you six dollars. Suppose in fact I dont pay you nothing.”

“You can do that too,” the man said. “These mules has had a hard day, but I reckon there’s still enough git in them to drag that thing back where they got it from.”

But Boon had already quit, given up, surrendered. “God damn it,” he said, “this boy aint nothing but a child! Sholy for just a little child—”

“Walking back to Jefferson might be lighter for him,” the man said, “but it wont be no shorter.”

“All right,” Boon said, “but look at the other one! When he gets that mud washed off, he aint even white!”

The man looked at distance awhile. Then he looked at Boon. “Son,” he said, “both these mules is color-blind.”

BOON HAD TOLD Ned and me that, once we had conquered Hell Creek bottom, we would be in civilisation; he drew a picture of all the roads from there on cluttered thick as fleas with automobiles. Though maybe it was necessary first to put Hell Creek as far behind us as limbo, or forgetfulness, or at least out of sight; maybe we would not be worthy of civilisation until we had got the Hell Creek mud off. Anyway, nothing happened yet.

The man took his six dollars and went away with his mules and doubletree; I noticed in fact that he didn't return to his little house but went on back through the swamp and vanished, as if the day were over; so did Ned notice it. "He aint a hog," Ned said. "He dont need to be. He's done already made six dollars and it aint even dinnertime yet."

"It is as far as I'm concerned," Boon said. "Bring the lunch too." So we took the lunch box Miss Ballenbaugh had packed for us and the block and tackle and axe and shovel and our shoes and stockings and my pants (we couldn't do anything about the automobile, besides being a waste of work until we could reach Memphis, where surely — at least we hoped — there wouldn't be any more mudholes) and went back down to the creek and washed the tools off and coiled down the block and tackle.

And there wasn't much to be done about Boon's and Ned's clothes either, though Boon got bodily into the water, clothes and all, and washed himself off and tried to persuade Ned to follow suit since he — Boon — had a change of clothes in his grip. But all Ned would do was to remove his shirt and put his coat back on.

I think I told you about his attaché case, which he didn't so much carry when abroad as he wore it, as diplomats wear theirs, carrying (I mean Ned's Bible and the two tablespoonfuls of — probably — Grandfather's best whiskey) I suspect at times even less in them.

Then we ate lunch — the ham and fried chicken and biscuits and homemade pear preserves and cake and the jug of buttermilk — and

put back the emergency mud-defying gear (which in the end had been not a defiance but an inglorious brag) and measured the gasoline tank — a gesture not to distance but to time — and went on. Because the die was indeed cast now; we looked not back to remorse or regret or might-have-been; if we crossed Rubicon when we crossed the Iron Bridge into another county, when we conquered Hell Creek we locked the portcullis and set the bridge on fire.

And it did seem as though we had won to reprieve as a reward for invincible determination, or refusal to recognise defeat when we faced it or it faced us. Or maybe it was just Virtue who had given up, relinquished us to Non-virtue to cherish and nurture and coddle in the style whose right we had won with the now irrevocable barter of our souls.

The very land itself seemed to have changed. The farms were bigger, more prosperous, with tighter fences and painted houses and even barns; the very air was urban. We came at last to a broad highway running string-straight into distance and heavily marked with wheel prints; Boon said, with a kind of triumph, as if we had doubted him or as if he had invented it to disprove us, created it, cleared and graded and smoothed it with his own hands (and perhaps even added the wheel marks): “What did I tell you?

The highway to Memphis.” We could see for miles; much closer than that was a rapid and mounting cloud of dust like a portent, a promise. It was indubitable, travelling that fast and that much of it; we were not even surprised when it contained an automobile; we passed each other, commingling our dust into one giant cloud like a pillar, a signpost raised and set to cover the land with the adumbration of the future: the antlike to and fro, the incurable down-payment itch-foot; the mechanised, the mobilised, the inescapable destiny of America.

And now, gray with dust from toes to eyelids (particularly Boon’s still-damp clothes), we could make time, even if, for a while, not speed; without switching off the engine Boon got out and walked briskly around the car to my side, saying briskly to me: “All right. Slide over.

You know how. Just dont get the idea you're a forty-mile-a-hour railroad engine." So I drove, on across the sunny May afternoon. I couldn't look at it though, I was too busy, too concentrated (all right, too nervous and proud): the Sabbath afternoon, workless, the cotton and corn growing unvexed now, the mules themselves Sabbatical and idle in the pastures, the people still in their Sunday clothes on galleries and in shady yards with glasses of lemonade or saucers of the ice cream left from dinner.

Then we made speed too; Boon said, "We're coming to some towns now. I better take it." We went on. Civilisation was now constant: single country stores and crossroads hamlets; we were barely free of one before here was another; commerce was rife about us, the air was indeed urban, the very dust itself which we raised and moved in had a metropolitan taste to tongue and nostrils; even the little children and the dogs no longer ran to the gates and fences to watch us and the three other automobiles we had passed in the last thirteen miles.

Then the country itself was gone. There were no longer intervals between the houses and shops and stores; suddenly before us was a wide tree-bordered and ordered boulevard with car tracks in the middle; and sure enough, there was the streetcar itself, the conductor and motor-man just lowering the back trolley and raising the front one to turn it around and go back to Main Street. "Two minutes to five oclock," Boon said. "Twenty-three and a half hours ago we were in Jefferson, Mississippi, eighty miles away. A record." I had been in Memphis before (so had Ned.

This morning he had told us so; thirty minutes from now he would prove it) but always by train, never like this: to watch Memphis grow, increase; to assimilate it deliberately like a spoonful of ice cream in the mouth. I had never thought about it other than to assume we would go to the Gayoso Hotel as we — I anyway — always had. So I dont know what mind Boon read this time.

“We’re going to a kind a boarding house I know,” he said. “You’ll like it. I had a letter last week from one of the g — ladies staying there that she’s got her nephew visiting her so you’ll even have somebody to play with. The cook can locate a place for Ned to sleep too.”

“Hee hee hee,” Ned said. Besides the streetcars there were buggies and surreys — phaetons, traps, stanhopes, at least one victoria, the horses a little white-eyed at us but still collected; evidently Memphis horses were already used to automobiles — so Boon couldn’t turn his head to look at Ned. But he could turn one eye.

“Just what do you mean by that?” he said.

“Nothing,” Ned said. “Mind where you’re going and nemmine me. Nemmine me nohow. I got friends here too. You just show me where this automobile gonter be at tomorrow morning and I’ll be there too.”

“And you damn well better be,” Boon said. “If you aim to go back to Jefferson in it. Me and Lucius never invited you on this trip so you aint none of mine and his responsibility. As far as me and Jefferson are concerned, I dont give a damn whether you come back or not.”

“When we gets this automobile back in Jefferson and has to try to look Boss Priest and Mr Maury in the eye, aint none of us gonter have time to give a damn who is back and who aint,” Ned said. But it was too late now, far too late to keep on bringing that up. So Boon just said,

“All right, all right. All I said was, if you want to be back in Jefferson when you start doing your not having time to give a damn, you better be where I can see you when I start back.” We were getting close to Main Street now — the tall buildings, the stores, the hotels: the Gaston (gone now) and the Peabody (they have moved it since) and the Gayoso, to which all us McCaslins-Edmondses-Priests devoted our allegiance as to a family shrine because our remote uncle and cousin, Theophilus McCaslin, Cousin Ike’s father, had been a member of the party of horsemen which legend said (that is, legend to some people maybe.

To us it was historical fact) General Forrest's brother led at a gallop into the lobby itself and almost captured a Yankee general. We didn't go that far though. Boon turned into a side street, almost a back alley, with two saloons at the corner and lined with houses that didn't look old or new either, all very quiet, as quiet as Jefferson itself on Sunday afternoon.

Boon in fact said so. "You ought to seen it last night, I bet. On any Saturday night. Or even on a week night when there's a fireman's or policeman's or a Elk or something convention in town."

"Maybe they've all gone to early prayer meeting," I said.

"No," Boon said. "I dont think so. Likely they're just resting."

"From what?" I said.

"Hee hee hee," Ned said in the back seat. Obviously, we were learning, Ned had been in Memphis before. Though probably even Grandfather, though he might have known when, didn't know how often. And you see, I was only eleven. This time, the street being empty, Boon did turn his head.

"Just one more out of you," he told Ned.

"One more which?" Ned said. "All I says is, point out where this thing gonter be at tomorrow morning, and I'll already be setting in it when it leaves." So Boon did. We were almost there: a house needing about the same amount of paint the others did, in a small grassless yard but with a sort of lattice vestibule like a well house at the front door. Boon stopped the car at the curb. Now he could turn and look at Ned.

"All right," he said. "I'm taking you at your word. And you better take me at mine. On the stroke of eight oclock tomorrow morning. And I mean the first stroke, not the last one. Because I aint even going to be here to hear it."

Ned was already getting out, carrying his little grip and his muddy shirt. "Aint you got enough troubles of your own on your mind, without trying to tote mine too?" he said. "If you can finish your business here

by eight o'clock tomorrow morning, how come you think I can't neither?" He walked on. Then he said, still walking on and not looking back: "Hee hee hee."

"Come on," Boon said. "Miss Reba'll let us wash up." We got out. Boon reached into the back and started to pick up his grip and said, "Oh yes," and reached to the dashboard and took the switch key out of the slot and put it in his pocket and started to pick up the grip and stopped and took the switch key out of his pocket and said, "Here. You keep it.

I might lay it down somewhere and mislay it. Put it in your pocket good so it won't fall out. You can wrap your handkerchief on top of it." I took the key and he started to reach for the grip again and stopped again and looked quick over his shoulder at the boarding house and turned sideways a little and took his wallet out of his hind pocket and opened it close to him and took out a five-dollar bill and stopped and then took out a one-dollar bill also and closed the wallet and slid it toward me behind his body, saying, not quick so much as quiet: "Keep this too.

I might forget it somewhere too. Whenever we need money out of it I'll tell you how much to give me." Because I had never been inside a boarding house either; and remember, I was just eleven. So I put the wallet into my pocket too and Boon took the grip and we went through the gate and up the walk and into the lattice vestibule, and there was the front door. Boon had barely touched the bell when we heard feet inside. "What did I tell you?"

Boon said rapidly. "They probably are all peeping from behind the window curtains at that automobile." The door opened. It was a young Negro woman but before she could open her mouth a white woman pushed her aside — a young woman too, with a kind hard handsome face and hair that was too red, with two of the biggest yellowish-colored diamonds I ever saw in her ears.

"Dammit, Boon," she said. "The minute Corrie got that dispatch yesterday I told her to telegraph you right back not to bring that child here. I've already had one in the house for a week now, and one hell-

on-wheels is enough for any house or street either for that matter. Or even all Memphis, providing it's that one we already got. And don't lie that you never got the message neither."

"I didn't," Boon said. "We must have already left Jefferson before it got there. What do you want me to do with him then? tie him out in the yard?"

"Come on in," she said. She moved out of the door so we could enter; as soon as we did so, the maid locked the door again. I didn't know why then; maybe that was the way all people in Memphis did, even while they were at home. It was like any other hall, with a stairway going up, only at once I smelled something; the whole house smelled that way. I had never smelled it before. I didn't dislike it; I was just surprised.

I mean, as soon as I smelled it, it was like a smell I had been waiting all my life to smell. I think you should be tumbled pell-mell, without warning, only into experience which you might well have spent the rest of your life not having to meet.

But with an inevitable (ay, necessary) one, it's not really decent of Circumstance, Fate, not to prepare you first, especially when the preparation is as simple as just being fifteen years old. That was the kind of smell it was. The woman was still talking.

"You know as well as I do that Mr Binford disapproves like hell of kids using houses for holiday vacations; you heard him last summer when Corrie brought that little s.o.b. in here the first time because she claims he don't get enough refinement on that Arkansas tenant farm.

Like Mr Binford says, they'll be in here soon enough anyhow, so why rush them until at least they have some jack and are capable of spending it. Not to mention the customers, coming in here for business and finding instead we're running a damn kindergarden." We were in the dining room now. It had a Pianola in it. The woman was still talking. "What's his name?"

“Lucius,” Boon said. “Make your manners to Miss Reba,” he told me. I did so, the way I always did: that I reckon Grandfather’s mother taught him and Grandmother taught Father and Mother taught us: what Ned called “drug my foot.” When I straightened up, Miss Reba was watching me. She had a curious look on her face.

“I’ll be damned,” she said. “Minnie, did you see that? Is Miss Corrie—”

“She dressing as fast as she can,” the maid said. And that was when I saw it. I mean, Minnie’s tooth. I mean, that was how — yes, why — I, you, people, everybody, remembered Minnie. She had beautiful teeth anyhow, like small richly alabaster matched and evenly serrated headstones against the rich chocolate of her face when she smiled or spoke. But she had more.

The middle right-hand upper one was gold; in her dark face it reigned like a queen among the white dazzle of the others, seeming actually to glow, gleam as with a slow inner fire or lambence of more than gold, until that single tooth appeared even bigger than both of Miss Reba’s yellowish diamonds put together. (Later I learned — no matter how — that she had had the gold one taken out and an ordinary white one, like anybody else’s, put in; and I grieved.

I thought that, had I been of her race and age group, it would have been worth being her husband just to watch that tooth in action across the table every day; a child of eleven, it seemed to me that the very food it masticated must taste different, better.)

Miss Reba turned to Boon again. “What you been doing? wrassling with hogs?”

“We got in a mudhole back down the road. We drove up. The automobile’s outside now.”

“I saw it,” Miss Reba said. “We all did. Dont tell me it’s yours. Just tell me if the police are after it. If they are, get it away from my door. Mr Binford’s strict about having police around here too. So am I.”

“The automobile’s all right,” Boon said.

“It better be,” Miss Reba said. She was looking at me again. She said, “Lucius,” not to anybody. “Too bad you didn’t get here sooner. Mr Binford likes kids. He still likes them even after he begins to have doubts, and this last week would have raised doubts in anybody that aint a ossified corpse. I mean, he was still willing to give Otis the benefit of the doubt to take him to the zoo right after dinner. Lucius could have gone too. But then on the other hand, maybe not.

If Otis is still using up doubts at the same rate he was before they left here, he aint coming back — providing there’s some way to get him up close enough to the cage for one of them lions or tigers to reach him — providing a lion or tiger would want him, which they wouldn’t if they’d ever spent a week in the same house with him.” She was still looking at me. She said, “Lucius,” again, not at anybody.

Then she said to Minnie: “Go up and tell everybody to stay out of the bathroom for the next half an hour.” She said to Boon: “You got a change of clothes with you?”

“Yes,” Boon said.

“Then wash yourself off and put them on; this is a decent place: not a joint. Let them use Vera’s room, Minnie. Vera’s visiting her folks up in Paducah.” She said to Boon or maybe to both of us: “Minnie fixed a bed for Otis up in the attic. Lucius can sleep with him tonight—”

There were feet on the stairs, then in the hall and in the door. This time it was a big girl. I dont mean fat: just big, like Boon was big, but still a girl, young too, with dark hair and blue eyes and at first I thought her face was plain. But she came into the room already looking at me, and I knew it didn’t matter what her face was. “Hi, kiddo,” Boon said. But she didn’t pay any attention to him at all yet; she and Miss Reba were both looking at me.

“Watch now,” Miss Reba said. “Lucius, this is Miss Corrie.” I made my manners again. “See what I mean?” Miss Reba said. “You brought that nephew of yours over here hunting refinement. Here it is, waiting for him. He wont know what it means, let alone why he’s doing it. But

maybe Lucius could learn him to at least ape it. All right," she said to Boon. "Go get cleaned up."

"Maybe Corrie'll come help us," Boon said. He was holding Miss Corrie's hand. "Hi, kiddo," he said again.

"Not looking like a shanty-boat swamp rat," Miss Reba said. "I'll keep this damned place respectable on Sunday anyhow."

Minnie showed us where the room and the bathroom were upstairs and gave us soap and a towel apiece and went out. Boon put his grip on the bed and opened it and took out a clean shirt and his other pants. They were his everyday pants but the Sunday ones he had on wouldn't be fit to wear anywhere until they were cleaned with naphtha probably. "You see?" he said. "I told you so. I done the best I could to make you bring at least a clean shirt."

"My blouse aint muddy," I said.

"But you ought to have a fresh one just on principle to put on after you bathe."

"I aint going to bathe," I said. "I had a bath yesterday."

"So did I," he said. "But you heard what Miss Reba said, didn't you?"

"I heard her," I said. "I never knew any ladies anywhere that wasn't trying to make somebody take a bath."

"By the time you've known Miss Reba a few hours longer, you'll find out you done learned something else about ladies too: that when she suggests you to do something, it's a good idea to do it while you're still deciding whether you're going to or not." He had already unpacked his other pants and shirt.

It doesn't take long to unpack one pair of pants and one shirt from one grip, but he seemed to be having trouble, mainly about putting them down after he took them out, not looking at me, bending over the open grip, busy, holding the shirt in his hand while he decided where to put the pants, then putting the shirt on the bed and picking up the pants

again and moving them about a foot further along the bed, then picking up the shirt again and putting it where the pants were; then he cleared his throat loud and hard and went to the window and opened it and leaned out and spit and closed the window and came back to the bed, not looking at me, talking loud, like somebody that comes upstairs first on Christmas morning and tells you what you're going to get on the Christmas tree that's not the thing you wrote Santa Claus for:

"Dont it beat all how much a fellow can learn and in what a short time, about something he not only never knowed before, he never even had no idea he would ever want to know it, let alone would find it useful to him for the rest of his life — providing he kept it, never let it get away from him. Take you, for instance.

Just think. Here it aint but yesterday morning, not even two days back yet, and think how much you have learned: how to drive a automobile, how to go to Memphis across the country without depending on the railroad, even how to get a automobile out of a mudhole. So that when you get big and own a automobile of your own, you will not only already know how to drive it but the road to Memphis too and even how to get it out of a mudhole."

"Boss says that when I get old enough to own an automobile, there wont be any more mudholes to get into. That all the roads everywhere will be so smooth and hard that automobiles will be foreclosed and reclaimed by the bank or even wear out without ever seeing a mudhole."

"Sure, sure," Boon said, "all right, all right. Say there aint no more need to know how to get out of a mudhole, at least you'll still know how to. Because why? Because you aint give the knowing how away to nobody."

"Who could I give it to?" I said. "Who would want to know how, if there aint any more mudholes?"

"All right, all right," Boon said. "Just listen to me a minute, will you? I aint talking about mudholes. I'm talking about the things a fellow —

boy can learn that he never even thought about before, that forever afterward, when he needs them he will already have them. Because there aint nothing you ever learn that the day wont come when you'll need it or find use for it — providing you've still got it, aint let it get away from you by chance or, worse than that, give it away from carelessness or pure and simple bad judgment. Do you see what I mean now? Is that clear?"

"I dont know," I said. "It must be, or you couldn't keep on talking about it."

"All right," he said. "That's point number one. Now for point number two. Me and you have been good friends as long as we have known each other, we're having a nice trip together; you done already learned a few things you never seen nor heard of before, and I'm proud to be the one to be along and help you learn them.

And tonight you're fixing to learn some more things I dont think you have thought about before neither — things and information and doings that a lot of folks in Jefferson and other places too will try to claim you aint old enough yet to be bothered with knowing about them. But shucks, a boy that not only learned to run a automobile but how to drive it to Memphis and get it out of that son of a bitch's private mudhole too, all in one day, is plenty old enough to handle anything he'll meet.

Only—" He had to cough again, hard, and clear his throat and then go to the window and open it and spit again and close it again. Then he came back.

"And that's point number three. That's what I'm trying to impress on you. Everything a m — fel — boy sees and learns and hears about, even if he dont understand it at the time and cant even imagine he will ever have any use to know it, some day he will have a use for it and will need it, providing he has still got it and aint give it away to nobody.

And then he will thank his stars for the good friend that has been his friend since he had to be toted around that livery stable on his back like a baby and held him on the first horse he ever rode, that warned him in time not to throw it away and lose it for good by forgetfulness or accident or mischance or maybe even just friendly blabbing about what aint nobody else's business but theirs—"

"What you mean is, whatever I see on this trip up here, not to tell Boss or Father or Mother or Grandmother when we get back home. Is that it?"

"Dont you agree?" Boon said. "Aint that not a bit more than just pure and sensible good sense and nobody's business but yours and mine? Dont you agree?"

"Then why didn't you just come right out and say so?" I said. Only he still remembered to make me take another bath; the bathroom smelled even more. I dont mean stronger: I just mean more. I didn't know much about boarding houses, so maybe they could have one with just ladies in it. I asked Boon; we were on the way back downstairs then; it was beginning to get dark and I was hungry.

"You damn right they're ladies," he said. "If I so much as catch you trying to show any sass to any of them—"

"I mean, dont any men board here? live here?"

"No. Dont no men actively live here except Mr Binford, and there aint no boarding to speak of neither. But they have plenty of company here, in and out after supper and later on; you'll see. Of course this is Sunday night, and Mr Binford is pretty strict about Sunday: no dancing and frolicking: just visiting their particular friends quiet and polite and not wasting too much time, and Mr Binford sees to it they damn sure better keep on being quiet and polite while they are here.

In fact, he's a good deal that way even on week nights. Which reminds me. All you need to do is be quiet and polite yourself and enjoy yourself and listen good in case he happens to say anything to you in particular, because he dont talk very loud the first time and he dont never like it

when somebody makes him have to talk twice. This way. They're likely in Miss Reba's room."

They were: Miss Reba, Miss Corrie, Mr Binford and Otis. Miss Reba had on a black dress now, and three more diamonds, yellowing too. Mr Binford was little, the littlest one in the room above Otis and me. He had on a black Sunday suit and gold studs and a big gold watch chain and a heavy moustache, and a gold-headed cane and his derby hat and a glass of whiskey on the table at his elbow. But the first thing you noticed about him was his eyes because the first thing you found out was that he was already looking at you. Otis had his Sunday clothes on too.

He was not even as big as me but there was something wrong about him.

"Evening, Boon," Mr Binford said.

"Evening, Mr Binford," Boon said. "This is a friend of mine. Lucius Priest." But when I made my manners to him, he didn't say anything at all. He just quit looking at me. "Reba," he said, "buy Boon and Corrie a drink. Tell Minnie to make these boys some lemonade."

"Minnie's putting supper on," Miss Reba said. She unlocked the closet door. It had a kind of bar in it — one shelf with glasses, another with bottles. "Besides, that one of Corrie's dont want lemonade no more than Boon does. He wants beer."

"I know it," Mr Binford said. "He slipped away from me out at the park. He would have made it only he couldn't find anybody to go into the saloon for him. Is yours a beer-head too, Boon?"

"No sir," I said. "I dont drink beer."

"Why?" Mr Binford said. "You dont like it or you cant get it?"

"No sir," I said. "I'm not old enough yet."

"Whiskey, then?" Mr Binford said.

“No sir,” I said. “I dont drink anything. I promised my mother I wouldn’t unless Father or Boss invited me.”

“Who’s his boss?” Mr Binford said to Boon.

“He means his grandfather,” Boon said.

“Oh,” Mr Binford said. “The one that owns the automobile. So evidently nobody promised him anything.”

“You dont need to,” Boon said. “He tells you what to do and you do it.”

“You sound like you call him boss too,” Mr Binford said. “Sometimes.”

“That’s right,” Boon said. That’s what I meant about Mr Binford: he was already looking at me before I even knew it.

“But your mother’s not here now,” he said. “You’re on a tear with Boon now. Eighty — is it? — miles away.”

“No sir,” I said. “I promised her.”

“I see,” Mr Binford said. “You just promised her you wouldn’t drink with Boon. You didn’t promise not to go whore-hopping with him.”

“You son of a bitch,” Miss Reba said. I dont know how to say it. Without moving, she and Miss Corrie jumped, sprang, confederated, Miss Reba with the whiskey bottle in one hand and three glasses in the other.

“That’ll do,” Mr Binford said.

“Like hell,” Miss Reba said. “I can throw you out too. Dont think I wont. What the hell kind of language is that?”

“And you too!” Miss Corrie said; she was talking at Miss Reba. “You’re just as bad! Right in front of them—”

“I said, that’ll do,” Mr Binford said. “One of them cant get beer and the other dont drink it so maybe they both just come here for refinement and education. Call it they just got some. They just learned that whore and son of a bitch are both words to think twice before pulling the trigger on because both of them can backfire.”

“Aw, come on, Mr Binford,” Boon said.

“Why, be damned if here aint still another hog in this wallow,” Mr Binford said. “A big one, too. Wake up, Miss Reba, before these folks

suffocate for moisture.” Miss Reba poured the whiskey, her hand shaking, enough to clink the bottle against the glass, saying son of a bitch, son of a bitch, son of a bitch, in a thick fierce whisper.

“That’s better,” Mr Binford said. “Let’s have peace around here. Let’s drink to it.” He raised his glass and was saying, “Ladies and gents all,” when somebody — Minnie I suppose — began to ring a hand bell somewhere in the back. Mr Binford got up. “That’s better still,” he said. “Hash time. Learn us all the refinement and education that there’s a better use for the mouth than running private opinions through it.”

We went back toward the dining room, not fast, Mr Binford leading the way. There were feet again, going fast; two more ladies, girls — that is, one of them was still a girl — hurried down the stairs, still buttoning their clothes, one in a red dress and the other in pink, panting a little. “We hurried as fast as we could,” one of them said quickly to Mr Binford. “We’re not late.”

“I’m glad of that,” Mr Binford said. “I dont feel like lateness tonight.” We went in. There were more than enough places at the table, even with Otis and me. Minnie was still bringing things, all cold — fried chicken and biscuits and vegetables left over from dinner, except Mr Binford’s. His supper was hot: not a plate, a dish of steak smothered in onions at his place. (You see? how much ahead of his time Mr Binford was? Already a Republican.

I dont mean a 1905 Republican — I dont know what his Tennessee politics were, or if he had any — I mean a 1961 Republican. He was more: he was a Conservative. Like this: a Republican is a man who made his money; a Liberal is a man who inherited his; a Democrat is a barefooted Liberal in a cross-country race; a Conservative is a Republican who has learned to read and write.) We all sat down, the two new ladies too; I had met so many people by now that I couldn’t get names any more and had stopped trying; besides, I never saw these two again.

We began to eat. Maybe the reason Mr Binford's steak smelled so extra was that the rest of the food had smelled itself out at noon. Then one of the new ladies — the one who was no longer a girl — said, "Were we, Mr Binford?" Now the other one, the girl, had stopped eating too.

"Were you what?" Mr Binford said.

"You know what," the girl said, cried. "Miss Reba," she said, "you know we do the best we can — dont dare make no extra noise — no music on Sunday when all the other places do — always shushing our customers up every time they just want to have a little extra fun — but if we aint already setting down at our places in this dining room when he sticks his nose in the door, next Saturday we got to drop twenty-five cents into that God damned box—"

"They are house rules," Mr Binford said. "A house without rules is not a house. The trouble with you bitches is, you have to act like ladies some of the time but you dont know how. I'm learning you how."

"You cant talk to me that way," the older one said.

"All right," Mr Binford said. "Well turn it around. The trouble with you ladies is, you dont know how to quit acting like bitches."

The older one was standing now. There was something wrong about her too. It wasn't that she was old, like Grandmother is old, because she wasn't. She was alone. It was just that she shouldn't have had to be here, alone, to have to go through this. No, that's wrong too. It's that nobody should ever have to be that alone, nobody, not ever. She said, "I'm sorry, Miss Reba. I'm going to move out. Tonight."

"Where?" Mr Binford said. "Across the street to Birdie Watts's? Maybe she'll let you bring your trunk back with you this time — unless she's already sold it."

"Miss Reba," the woman said quietly. "Miss Reba."

"All right," Miss Reba said briskly. "Sit down and eat your supper; you aint going nowhere. Yes," she said, "I like peace too. So I'm going to mention just one more thing, then we'll close this subject for good." She was talking up the table at Mr Binford now. "What the hell's wrong with you? What the hell happened this afternoon to get you into this God damned humor?"

"Nothing that I noticed," Mr Binford said.

"That's right," Otis said suddenly. "Nothing sure didn't happen. He wouldn't even run." There was something, like a quick touch of electricity; Miss Reba was sitting with her mouth open and her fork halfway in it. I didn't understand yet but everybody else, even Boon, did. And in the next minute I did too.

"Who wouldn't run?" Miss Reba said.

"The horse," Otis said. "The horse and buggy we bet on in the race. Did they, Mr Binford?" Now the silence was no longer merely electric: it was shocked, electrocuted. Remember I told you there was something wrong somewhere about Otis. Though I still didn't think this was quite it, or at least all of it. But Miss Reba was still fighting.

Because women are wonderful. They can bear anything because they are wise enough to know that all you have to do with grief and trouble is just go on through them and come out on the other side. I think they can do this because they not only decline to dignify physical pain by taking it seriously, they have no sense of shame at the idea of being knocked out. She didn't quit, even then.

"A horse race," she said. "At the zoo? in Overton Park?"

"Not Overton Park," Otis said. "The driving park. We met a man on the streetcar that knowed which horse and buggy was going to win, and changed our mind about Overton Park. Only, they didn't win, did they, Mr Binford? But even then, we never lost as much as the man did, we didn't even lose forty dollars because Mr Binford give me twenty-five cents of it not to tell, so all we lost was just thirty-nine dollars and seventy-five cents. Only, on top of that, my twenty-five cents got away from me in that beer mix-up Mr Binford was telling about.

Didn't it, Mr Binford?" And then some more silence. It was quite peaceful. Then Miss Reba said, "You son of a bitch." Then she said, "Go on. Finish your steak first if you want." And Mr Binford wasn't a quitter either. He was proud too: that gave no quarter and accepted none, like a gamecock. He crossed his knife and fork neatly and without haste on the steak he had barely cut into yet; he even folded his napkin and pushed it back through the ring and got up and said, "Excuse me, all," and went out, looking at nobody, not even Otis.

"Well, Jesus," the younger of the two late ones, the girl, said; it was then I noticed Minnie standing in the half-open kitchen door. "What do you know?"

"Get to hell out of here," Miss Reba said to the girl. "Both of you." The girl and the woman rose quickly.

"You mean . . . leave?" the girl said.

"No," Miss Corrie said. "Just get out of here. If you're not expecting anybody in the next few minutes, why dont you take a walk around the block or something?" They didn't waste any time either. Miss Corrie got up. "You too," she told Otis. "Go upstairs to your room and stay there." "He'll have to pass Miss Reba's door to do that," Boon said. "Have you forgot about that quarter?"

"It was more than a quarter," Otis said. "There was them eighty-five cents I made pumping the pee a noler for them to dance Saturday night. When he found out about the beer, he taken that away from me too." But Miss Reba looked at him.

"So you sold him out for eighty-five cents," she said.

"Go to the kitchen," Miss Corrie told Otis. "Let him come back there, Minnie."

"All right," Minnie said. "I'll try to keep him out of the icebox. But he's too fast for me."

“Hell, let him stay here,” Miss Reba said. “It’s too late now. He should have been sent somewhere else before he ever got off that Arkansas train last week.” Miss Corrie went to the chair next to Miss Reba.

“Why dont you go and help him pack?” she said, quite gently.

“Who the hell are you accusing?” Miss Reba said. “I will trust him with every penny I’ve got. Except for those God damn horses.” She stood up suddenly, with her trim rich body and the hard handsome face and the hair that was too richly red. “Why the hell cant I do without him?” she said. “Why the hell cant I?”

“Now, now,” Miss Corrie said. “You need a drink. Give Minnie the keys — No, she cant go to your room yet—”

“He gone,” Minnie said. “I heard the front door. It dont take him long. It never do.”

“That’s right,” Miss Reba said. “Me and Minnie have been here before, haven’t we, Minnie?” She gave Minnie the keys and sat down and Minnie went out and came back with a bottle of gin this time and they all had a glass of gin, Minnie too (though she declined to drink with this many white people at once, each time carrying her full glass back to the kitchen then reappearing a moment later with the glass empty), except Otis and me. And so I found out about Mr Binford.

He was the landlord. That was his official even if unwritten title and designation. All places, houses like this, had one, had to have one. In the alien outside world fortunate enough not to have to make a living in this hard and doomed and self-destroying way, he had a harder and more contemptuous name.

But here, the lone male not even in a simple household of women but in a hysteria of them, he was not just lord but the unthanked and thankless catalyst, the single frail power wearing the shape of respectability sufficient to compel enough of order on the hysteria to keep the unit solvent or anyway eating — he was the agent who counted down the money and took the receipt for the taxes and

utilities, who dealt with the tradesmen from the liquor dealers through the grocers and coal merchants, down through the plumbers who thawed the frozen pipes in winter and the casual labor which cleaned the chimneys and gutters and cut the weeds out of the yard; his was the hand which paid the blackmail to the law; it was his voice which fought the losing battles with the street- and assessment-commissioners and cursed the newspaper boy the day after the paper wasn't delivered.

And of these (I mean, landlords) in this society, Mr Binford was the prince and paragon: a man of style and presence and manner and ideals; incorruptible in principles, impeccable in morals, more faithful than many husbands during the whole five years he had been Miss Reba's lover: whose sole and only vice was horses running in competition on which bets could be placed. This he could not resist; he knew it was his weakness and he fought against it. But each time, at the cry of "They're off!" he was putty in the hands of any stranger with a dollar to bet.

"He knowed it his-self," Minnie said. "He was ashamed of his-self and for his-self both, for being so weak, of there being anything bigger than him; to find out he aint bigger than anything he could meet up with, he dont care where nor what, even if on the outside, to folks that didn't know him, he just looked like a banty rooster.

So he would promise us and mean it, like he done that time two years ago when we finally had to throw him out. You remember how much work it taken to get him back that time," she told Miss Reba.

"I remember," Miss Reba said. "Pour another round."

"I dont know how he'll manage it," Minnie said. "Because when he leaves, he dont take nothing but his clothes, I mean, just the ones he's got on since it was Miss Reba's money that paid for them. But wont two days pass before a messenger will be knocking on the door with every cent of them forty dollars—"

"You mean thirty-nine, six bits," Boon said.

“No,” Minnie said. “Every one of them forty dollars, even that quarter, was Miss Reba’s. He wont be satisfied less. Then Miss Reba will send for him and he wont come; last year when we finally found him he was working in a gang laying a sewer line way down past the Frisco depot until she had to beg him right down on her bended knee—”

“Come on,” Miss Reba said. “Stop running your mouth long enough to pour the gin, anyway.” Minnie began to pour. Then she stopped, the bottle suspended.

“What’s that hollering?” she said. Now we all heard it — a faint bawling from somewhere toward the back.

“Go and see,” Miss Reba said. “Here, give me the bottle.” Minnie gave her the bottle and went back to the kitchen. Miss Reba poured and passed the bottle.

“He’s two years older now,” Miss Corrie said. “He’ll have more sense—”

“What’s he saving it for?” Miss Reba said. “Go on. Pass it.” Minnie came back. She said:

“Man standing in the back yard hollering Mr Boon Hogganbeck at the back wall of the house. He got something big with him.”

We ran, following Boon, through the kitchen and out onto the back gallery. It was quite dark now; the moon was not high enough yet to do any good. Two dim things, a little one and a big one, were standing in the middle of the back yard, the little one bawling “Boon Hogganbeck! Mister Boon Hogganbeck! Hellow. Hellow” toward the upstairs windows until Boon overrode him by simple volume:

“Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!”

It was Ned. What he had with him was a horse.

VI

WE WERE ALL in the kitchen. “Good Godalmighty,” Boon said. “You swapped Boss’s automobile for a horse?” He had to say it twice even. Because Ned was still looking at Minnie’s tooth. I mean, he was waiting

for it again. Maybe Miss Reba had said something to her or maybe Minnie had spoken herself.

What I do remember is the rich instantaneous glint of gold out of the middle of whatever Minnie said, in the electric light of the kitchen, as if the tooth itself had gained a new luster, lambence from the softer light of the lamp in the outside darkness, like the horse's eyes had — this, and its effect on Ned.

It had stopped him cold for that moment, instant, like basilisk. So had it stopped me when I first saw it, so I knew what Ned was experiencing. Only his was more so. Because I realised this dimly too, even at only eleven: that I was too far asunder, not merely in race but in age, to feel what Ned felt; I could only be awed, astonished and pleased by it; I could not, like Ned, participate in that tooth. Here, in the ancient battle of the sexes, was a foeman worthy of his steel; in the ancient mystic solidarity of race, here was a high priestess worth dying for — if such was your capacity for devotion: which, it was soon obvious, was not what Ned intended (anyway hoped) to do with Minnie. So Boon had to repeat before Ned heard — or anyway noticed — him.

“You know good as me,” Ned said, “that Boss dont want no automobile. He bought that thing because he had to, because Colonel Sartoris made him. He had to buy that automobile to put Colonel Sartoris back in his place he had done upstarted from. What Boss likes is a horse — and I dont mean none of these high-named harness plugs you and Mr Maury has in that livery stable: but a horse. And I got him one.

The minute he sees this horse, he's gonter say right down much oblige to me just for being where I could get a-holt of it before somebody else done it—” It was like a dream, a nightmare; you know it is, and if you can only touch something hard, real, actual, unaltered, you can wake yourself; Boon and I had the same idea, instantaneous: I moved quicker only because there was less of me to put in motion. Ned stopped us; he read two minds: “No need to go look,” he said. “He done already come and got it.”

Boon, frozen in midstride, glared at me, the two of us mutual in one horrified unbelief while I fumbled in my pocket. But the switch key was there. “Sho,” Ned said, “he never needed that thing. He was a expert. He claimed he knowed how to reach his hand in behind the lock and turn it on from the back. He done it, too. I didn’t believe it neither, until I seen it. It never give him no trouble a-tall. He even throwed in the halter with the horse—”

We — Boon and I — were not running, but fast enough, Miss Reba and Miss Corrie too, to the front door. The automobile was gone. That was when I realised that Miss Reba and Miss Corrie were there too, and that they had said nothing whatever themselves — no surprise, shock; watching and listening, not missing any part of it but not saying anything at all, as if they belonged to a different and separate society, kind, from Boon and me and Ned and Grandfather’s automobile and the horse (whoever it belonged to) and had no concern with us and our doings but entertainment; and I remembered how that was exactly the way Mother would watch me and my brothers and whatever neighborhood boys were involved, not missing anything, quite constant and quite dependable, even warmly so, bright and kind but insulate until the moment, the need arrived to abolish the bone and (when necessary) stanch the consequent blood.

We went back to the kitchen, where we had left Ned and Minnie. We could already hear Ned: “ — money you talking about, Good-looking, I got it or I can get it. Lemme get this horse put up and fed and me and you gonter step out and let that tooth do its shining amongst something good enough to match it, like a dish of catfish or maybe hog meat if it likes hog meat better—”

“All right,” Boon said. “Go get that horse. Where does the man live?”

“Which man?” Ned said. “What you want with him?”

“To get Boss’s automobile back. I’ll decide then whether to send you to jail here or take you back to Jefferson and let Boss have the fun.”

“Whyn’t you stop talking a minute and listen to me?” Ned said. “In course I knows where the man lives: didn’t I just trade a horse from him this evening? Let him alone. We dont want him yet. We wont need him until after the race. Because we aint just got the horse: he throwed in the horse race too. A man at Possum got a horse waiting right this minute to run against him as soon as we get there. In case you ladies dont know where Possum’s at, it’s where the railroad comes up from Jefferson and crosses the Memphis one where you changes cars unlesen you comes by automobile like we done—”

“All right,” Boon said. “A man at Possum—”

“Oh,” Miss Reba said. “Parsham.”

“That’s right,” Ned said. “Where they has the bird-dog trials. It aint no piece. — got a horse done already challenged this un to a three-heat race, fifty dollars a heat, winner take all. But that aint nothing: just a hundred and fifty dollars. What we gonter do is win back that automobile.”

“How?” Boon said. “How the hell are you going to use the horse to win the automobile back from the man that has already give you the horse for it?”

“Because the man dont believe the horse can run. Why you think he swapped me as cheap as a automobile? Why didn’t he just keep the horse and win him a automobile of his own, if he wanted one, and have both of them — a horse and a automobile too?”

“I’ll bite,” Boon said. “Why?”

“I just told you. This horse done already been beat twice by that Possum horse because never nobody knowed how to make him run. So naturally the man will believe that if the horse wouldn’t run them other two times, he aint gonter run this time neither.

So all we got to do is, bet him the horse against Boss’s automobile. Which he will be glad to bet because naturally he wouldn’t mind owning the horse back too, long as he’s already got the automobile,

especially when it aint no more risk than just having to wait at the finish line until the horse finally comes up to where he can catch him and tie him behind the automobile and come on back to Memphis—”

This was the first time Miss Reba spoke. She said, “Jesus.”

“ — because he dont believe I can make that horse run neither. But unlesen I done got rusty on my trading and made a mistake I dont know about, he dont disbelieve it enough not to be at Possum day after tomorrow to find out.

And if you cant scrap up enough extra boot amongst these ladies here to make him good interested in betting that automobile against it, you better hadn’t never laid eyes on Boss Priest in your born life. It would have tooken a braver man than me to just took his automobile back to him. But maybe this horse will save you. Because the minute I laid my eyes on that horse, it put me in mind of—”

“Hee hee hee,” Boon said, in that harsh and savage parody. “You give away Boss’s automobile for a horse that cant run, and now you’re fixing to give the horse back providing I can scrape up enough boot to interest him—”

“Let me finish,” Ned said. Boon stopped. “You gonter let me finish?” Ned said.

“Finish then,” Boon said. “And make it—”

“ — put me in mind of a mule I use to own,” Ned said. Now they both stopped, looking at each other; we all watched them. After a moment Ned said, gently, almost dreamily: “These ladies wasn’t acquainted with that mule. Naturally, being young ladies like they is, not to mention so fur away as Yoknapatawpha County. It’s too bad Boss or Mr Maury aint here now to tell them about him.”

I could have done that. Because the mule was one of our family legends. It was back when Father and Ned were young men, before Grandfather moved in from McCaslin to become a Jefferson banker.

One day, during Cousin McCaslin's (Cousin Zack's father's) absence, Ned bred the mare of his matched standard-bred carriage team to the farm jack.

When the consequent uproar exhausted itself and the mule colt was foaled, Cousin McCaslin made Ned buy it from him at ten cents a week subtracted from Ned's wages. It took Ned three years, by which time the mule had consistently beaten every mule matched against him for fifteen or twenty miles around, and was now being challenged by mules from forty and fifty, and beating them.

You were born too late to be acquainted with mules and so comprehend the startling, the even shocking, import of this statement. A mule which will gallop for a half-mile in the single direction elected by its rider even one time becomes a neighborhood legend; one that will do it consistently time after time is an incredible phenomenon.

Because, unlike a horse, a mule is far too intelligent to break its heart for glory running around the rim of a mile-long saucer. In fact, I rate mules second only to rats in intelligence, the mule followed in order by cats, dogs, and horses last — assuming of course that you accept my definition of intelligence: which is the ability to cope with environment: which means to accept environment yet still retain at least something of personal liberty.

The rat of course I rate first. He lives in your house without helping you to buy it or build it or repair it or keep the taxes paid; he eats what you eat without helping you raise it or buy it or even haul it into the house; you cannot get rid of him; were he not a cannibal, he would long since have inherited the earth.

The cat is third, with some of the same qualities but a weaker, punier creature; he neither toils nor spins, he is a parasite on you but he does not love you; he would die, cease to exist, vanish from the earth (I mean, in his so-called domestic form) but so far he has not had to. (There is the fable, Chinese I think, literary I am sure: of a period on earth when the dominant creatures were cats: who after ages of trying

to cope with the anguishes of mortality — famine, plague, war, injustice, folly, greed — in a word, civilised government — convened a congress of the wisest cat philosophers to see if anything could be done: who after long deliberation agreed that the dilemma, the problems themselves were insoluble and the only practical solution was to give it up, relinquish, abdicate, by selecting from among the lesser creatures a species, race optimistic enough to believe that the mortal predicament could be solved and ignorant enough never to learn better.

Which is why the cat lives with you, is completely dependent on you for food and shelter but lifts no paw for you and loves you not; in a word, why your cat looks at you the way it does.)

The dog I rate fourth. He is courageous, faithful, monogamous in his devotion; he is your parasite too: his failure (as compared to the cat) is that he will work for you — I mean, willingly, gladly, ape any trick, no matter how silly, just to please you, for a pat on the head; as sound and first-rate a parasite as any, his failure is that he is a sycophant, believing that he has to show gratitude also; he will debase and violate his own dignity for your amusement; he fawns in return for a kick, he will give his life for you in battle and grieve himself to starvation over your bones.

The horse I rate last. A creature capable of but one idea at a time, his strongest quality is timidity and fear. He can be tricked and cajoled by a child into breaking his limbs or his heart too in running too far too fast or jumping things too wide or hard or high; he will eat himself to death if not guarded like a baby; if he had only one gram of the intelligence of the most backward rat, he would be the rider.

The mule I rate second. But second only because you can make him work for you. But that too only within his own rigid self-set regulations. He will not permit himself to eat too much. He will draw a wagon or a plow, but he will not run a race. He will not try to jump anything he does not indubitably know beforehand he can jump; he will not enter any place unless he knows of his own knowledge what is on the other

side; he will work for you patiently for ten years for the chance to kick you once.

In a word, free of the obligations of ancestry and the responsibilities of posterity, he has conquered not only life but death too and hence is immortal; were he to vanish from the earth today, the same chanceful biological combination which produced him yesterday would produce him a thousand years hence, unaltered, unchanged, incorrigible still within the limitations which he himself had proved and tested; still free, still coping.

Which is why Ned's mule was unique, a phenomenon. Put a dozen mules on a track and when the word Go is given, a dozen different directions will be taken, like a scattering of disturbed bugs on the surface of a pond; the one of the twelve whose direction happens to coincide with the track, will inevitably win.

But not Ned's mule. Father said it ran like a horse, but without the horse's frantic frenzy, the starts and falterings and the frightened heartbreaking bursts of speed. It ran a race like a job: it sprang into what it had already calculated would be the exact necessary speed at Ned's touch (or voice or whatever his signal was) and that speed never altered until it crossed the finish line and Ned stopped it. And nobody, not even Father — who was Ned's, well, not groom exactly but rather his second and betting agent — knew just what Ned did to it.

Naturally the legend of that grew and mounted (doing no harm to their stable either) also. I mean, of just what magic Ned had found or invented to make the mule run completely unlike any known mule. But they — we — never learned what it was, nor did anybody else ever ride as its jockey, even after Ned began to put on years and weight, until the mule died, unbeaten at twenty-two years of age; its grave (any number of Edmondses have certainly already shown it to you) is out there at McCaslin now.

That's what Ned meant and Boon knew it, and Ned knew he knew it. They stared at each other. "This aint that mule," Boon said. "This is a horse."

"This horse got the same kind of sense that mule had," Ned said. "He aint got as much of it but it's the same kind." They stared at each other. Then Boon said, "Let's go look at him." Minnie lighted a lamp. With Boon carrying it, we all went out to the back porch and into the yard, Minnie and Miss Corrie and Miss Reba too.

The moon was just getting up now and we could see a little. The horse was tied beneath a locust tree in the corner. Its eyes glowed, then flashed away; it snorted and we could hear one nervous foot.

"You ladies kindly stand back a minute, please," Ned said. "He aint used to much society yet." We stopped, Boon holding the lamp high; the eyes glowed coldly and nervously again as Ned walked toward it, talking to it until he could touch its shoulder, stroking it, still talking to it until he had the halter in his hand. "Now, dont run that lamp at him," he told Boon. "Just walk up and hold the light where the ladies can see a horse if they wants to. And when I says horse, I means horse. Not them plugs they calls horses back yonder in Jefferson." "Stop talking and bring him out where we can see him," Boon said.

"You're looking at him now," Ned said. "Hold the lamp up." Nevertheless he brought the horse out and moved him a little. Oh yes, I remember him: a three-year-old three-quarters-bred (at least, maybe more: I wasn't expert enough to tell) chestnut gelding, not large, not even sixteen hands, but with the long neck for balance and the laid-back shoulders for speed and the big hocks for drive (and, according to Ned, Ned McCaslin for heart and will). So that even at only eleven, I believe I was thinking exactly what Boon proved a moment later that he was. He looked at the horse. Then he looked at Ned. But when he spoke his voice was no more than a murmur: "This horse is—"

“Wait,” Miss Corrie said. That’s right. I hadn’t even noticed Otis. That was something else about him: when you noticed him, it was just a second before it would have been too late. But that was still not what was wrong about him.

“God, yes,” Miss Reba said. I tell you, women are wonderful. “Get out of here,” she told Otis.

“Go in the house, Otis,” Miss Corrie said.

“You bet,” Otis said. “Come on, Lucius.”

“No,” Miss Corrie said. “Just you. Go on now. You can go up to your room now.”

“It’s early yet,” Otis said. “I aint sleepy neither.”

“I aint going to tell you twice,” Miss Reba said. Boon waited until Otis was in the house. We all did, Boon holding the lamp high so its light fell mostly on his and Ned’s faces, speaking again in that heatless monotone, he and Ned both:

“This horse is stolen,” Boon murmured.

“What would you call that automobile?” Ned murmured.

Yes, wonderful; Miss Reba’s tone was no more than Boon’s and Ned’s: only brisker: “You got to get it out of town.”

“That’s just exactly the idea I brought him here with,” Ned said. “Soon as I eats my supper, me and him gonter start for Possum.”

“Have you got any idea how far it is to Possum, let alone in what direction?” Boon said.

“Does it matter?” Ned said. “When Boss left town without taking that automobile with him right in his hand, did your mind worry you about how far Memphis was?”

Miss Reba moved. “Come in the house,” she said. “Can anybody see him here?” she said to Ned.

"Nome," Ned said. "I got that much sense. I done already seen to that." He tied the horse to the tree again and we followed Miss Reba up the back steps.

"The kitchen," she said. "It's getting time for company to start coming in." In the kitchen she said to Minnie: "Sit in my room where you can answer the door. Did you give me the keys back or have you — All right. Dont give no credit to anybody unless you know them; make the change before you even pull the cork if you can. See who's in the house now too. If anybody asks for Miss Corrie, just say her friend from Chicago's in town."

"In case any of them dont believe you, tell them to come around the alley and knock on the back door," Boon said.

"For Christ's sake," Miss Reba said. "Haven't you got troubles enough already to keep you busy? If you dont want Corrie having company, why the hell dont you buy her outright instead of just renting her once every six months?"

"All right, all right," Boon said.

"And see where everybody in the house is, too," Miss Reba told Minnie.

"I'll see about him, myself," Miss Corrie said.

"Make him stay there," Miss Reba said. "He's already played all the hell with horses I'm going to put up with in one day." Miss Corrie went out. Miss Reba went herself and closed the door and stood looking at Ned. "You mean, you were going to walk to Parsham and lead that horse?"

"That's right," Ned said.

"Do you know how far it is to Parsham?"

"Do it matter?" Ned said again. "I dont need to know how far it is to Possum. All I needs is Possum. That's why I changed my mind about leading him: it might be far. At first I thought, being as you're in the connection business—"

“What the hell do you mean?” Miss Reba said. “I run a house. Anybody that’s too polite to call it that, I dont want in my front door or back door neither.”

“I mean, one of your ladies’ connections,” Ned said. “That might have a saddle horse or even a plow horse or even a mule I could ride whilst Lucius rides the colt, and go to Possum that way. But we aint only got to run a solid mile the day after tomorrow, we got to do it three times and at least two of them gonter have to be before the next horse can. So I’m gonter walk him to Possum.”

“All right,” Miss Reba said. “You and the horse are in Parsham. All you need now is a horse race.”

“Any man with a horse can find a horse race anywhere,” Ned said. “All he needs is for both of them to be able to stand up long enough to start.”

“Can you make this one stand up that long?”

“That’s right,” Ned said.

“Can you make him run while he’s standing up?”

“That’s right,” Ned said.

“How do you know you can?”

“I made that mule run,” Ned said.

“What mule?” Miss Reba said. Miss Corrie came in, shutting the door behind her. “Shut it good,” Miss Reba said. She said to Ned: “All right. Tell me about that race.” Now Ned looked at her, for a full quarter of a minute; the spoiled immune privileged-retainer impudence of his relations with Boon and the avuncular bossiness of those with me, were completely gone.

“You sounds like you want to talk sense for a while,” he said.

“Try me,” Miss Reba said.

“All right,” Ned said. “A man, another rich white man, I dont call his name but I can find him; aint but one horse like that in twenty miles of

Possum, let alone ten — owns a blood horse too that has already run twice against this horse last winter and beat him twice. That Possum horse beat this horse just enough bad the first time, for the other rich white man that owned this horse to bet twice as much the second time. And got beat just enough more bad that second time, that when this horse turns up in Possum day after tomorrow, wanting to run him another race, that Possum rich white man wont be just willing to run his horse again, he'll likely be proud and ashamed both to take the money."

"All right," Miss Reba said. "Go on."

"That's all," Ned said. "I can make this horse run. Only dont nobody but me know it yet. So just in case you ladies would like to make up a little jackpot, me and Lucius and Mr Hogganbeck can take that along with us too."

"That includes the one that's got that automobile now too?" Miss Reba said. "I mean, among the ones that dont know you can make it run?"

"That's right," Ned said.

"Then why didn't he save everybody trouble and send you and the horse both to Parsham, since he believes all he's got to do to have the horse and the automobile both, is to run that race?" Now there was no sound; they just looked at each other. "Come on," Miss Reba said. "You got to say something. What's your name?"

"Ned William McCaslin Jefferson Mississippi," Ned said.

"Well?" Miss Reba said.

"Maybe he couldn't afford it," Ned said.

"Hell," Boon said. "Neither have we—"

"Shut up," Miss Reba said to Boon. She said to Ned: "I thought you said he was rich."

"I'm talking about the one I swapped with," Ned said.

"Did he buy the horse from the rich one?"

"He had the horse," Ned said.

“Did he give you a paper of any kind when you swapped?”

“I got the horse,” Ned said.

“You cant read,” Miss Reba said. “Can you?”

“I got the horse,” Ned said. Miss Reba stared at him.

“You’ve got the horse. You’ve got him to Parsham. You say you got a system that will make him run. Will the same system get that automobile to Parsham too?”

“Use your sense,” Ned said. “You got plenty of it. You done already seen more and seen it quicker than anybody else here. Just look a little harder and see that them folks I swapped that horse from—”

“Them?” Miss Reba said. “You said a man.” But Ned hadn’t even stopped:

“ — is in exactly the same fix we is: they got to go back home sometime too sooner or later.”

“Whether his name is Ned William McCaslin or Boon Hogganbeck or whether it’s them folks I swapped the horse from, to go back home with just the horse or just the automobile aint going to be enough: he’s got to have both of them. Is that it?” Miss Reba said.

“Not near enough,” Ned said. “Aint that what I been trying to tell you for two hours now?” Miss Reba stared at Ned. She breathed quietly, once.

“So now you’re going to walk him to Parsham, with every cop in west Tennessee snuffing every road out of Memphis for horse—”

“Reba!” Miss Corrie said.

“ — by daylight tomorrow morning.”

“That’s right,” Ned said. “It’s long past too late for nobody to get caught now. But you doing all right. You doing fine. You tell me.” She was looking at him; she breathed twice this time; she didn’t even move her eyes when she spoke to Miss Corrie:

“That brakeman—”

“What brakeman?” Miss Corrie said.

“You know the one I mean. That his mother’s uncle or cousin or something—”

“He’s not a brakeman,” Miss Corrie said. “He’s a flagman. On the Memphis Special, to New York. He wears a uniform too, just like the conductor—”

“All right,” Miss Reba said. “Flagman.” Now she was talking to Boon: “One of Corrie’s . . .” She looked at Ned a moment. “Connections. Maybe I like that word of yours, after all. — His mother’s uncle or something is vice president or something of the railroad that goes through Parsham—”

“His uncle is division superintendent,” Miss Corrie said.

“Division superintendent,” Miss Reba said. “That is, between the times when he’s out at the driving park here or in any of the other towns his trains go through where he can watch horse races while his nephew is working his way up from the bottom with the silver spoon already in his mouth as long as he dont bite down on it hard enough to draw too much notice. See what I mean?”

“The baggage car,” Boon said.

“Right,” Miss Reba said. “Then they’ll be in Parsham and already out of sight by daylight tomorrow.”

“Even with the baggage car, it will still cost money,” Boon said. “Then to stay hid until the race, and then we got to put up a hundred and fifty for the race itself and all I got is fifteen or twenty dollars.” He rose. “Go get that horse,” he told Ned. “Where did you say the man you gave that automobile lives?”

“Sit down,” Miss Reba said. “Jesus, the trouble you’re already in when you get back to Jefferson, and you still got time to count pennies.” She looked at Ned. “What did you say your name was?”

Ned told her again. "You wants to know about that mule. Ask Boon Hogganbeck about him."

"Dont you ever make him call you mister?" she said to Boon.

"I always does," Ned said. "Mister Boon Hogganbeck. Ask him about that mule."

She turned to Miss Corrie. "Is Sam in town tonight?"

"Yes," Miss Corrie said.

"Can you get hold of him now?"

"Yes," Miss Corrie said.

Miss Reba turned to Boon. "You get out of here. Take a walk for a couple of hours. Or go over to Birdie Watts's if you want. Only, for Christ's sake dont get drunk. What the hell do you think Corrie eats and pays her rent with while you're down there in that Mississippi swamp stealing automobiles and kidnapping children? air?"

"I aint going nowhere," Boon said. "God damn it," he said to Ned, "go get that horse."

"I dont need to entertain him," Miss Corrie said. "I can use the telephone." It was not smug nor coy: it was just serene. She was much too big a girl, there was much too much of her, for smugness or coyness. But she was exactly right for serenity.

"You sure?" Miss Reba said.

"Yes," Miss Corrie said.

"Then get at it," Miss Reba said.

"Come here," Boon said. Miss Corrie stopped. "Come here, I said," Boon said. She approached then, just outside Boon's reach; I noticed suddenly that she wasn't looking at Boon at all: she was looking at me. Which was perhaps why Boon, still sitting, was able to reach suddenly and catch her arm before she could evade him, drawing her toward him, she struggling belatedly, as a girl that big would have to, still watching me.

"Turn loose," she said. "I've got to telephone."

“Sure, sure,” Boon said, “plenty of time for that,” drawing her on; until, with that counterfeit composure, that desperate willing to look at once forceful and harmless, with which you toss the apple in your hand (or any other piece of momentary distraction) toward the bull you suddenly find is also on your side of the fence, she leaned briskly down and kissed him, pecked him quickly on the top of the head, already drawing back.

But again too late, his hand dropping and already gripping one cheek of her bottom, in sight of us all, she straining back and looking at me again with something dark and beseeching in her eyes — shame, grief, I don't know what — while the blood rushed slowly into her big girl's face that was not really plain at all except at first. But only a moment; she was still going to be a lady. She even struggled like a lady. But she was simply too big, too strong for even anyone as big and strong as Boon to hold with just one hand, with no more grip than that; she was free.

“Aint you ashamed of yourself,” she said.

“Cant you save that long enough for her to make one telephone call even?” Miss Reba said to Boon. “If you're going to run fevers over her purity, why the hell don't you set her up in a place of her own where she can keep pure and still eat?” Then to Miss Corrie: “Go on and telephone. It's already nine o'clock.”

Already late for all we had to do. The place had begun to wake up— “jumping,” as you say nowadays. But decorously: no uproar either musical or simply convivial; Mr Binford's ghost still reigned, still adumbrated his callipygian grottoes since only two of the ladies actually knew he was gone and the customers had not missed him yet; we had heard the bell and Minnie's voice faintly at the front door and the footsteps of the descending nymphs themselves had penetrated from the stairs; and even as Miss Corrie stood with the knob in her hand, the chink of glasses interspersed in orderly frequency the bass rumble of the entertained and the shriller pipes of their entertainers beyond the door she opened and went through and then closed again.

Then Minnie came back too; it seems that the unoccupied ladies would take turn-about as receptionists during the emergency.

You see how indeed the child is father to the man, and mother to the woman also. Back there in Jefferson I had thought that the reason corruption, Non-virtue, had met so puny a foeman in me as to be not even worthy of the name, was because of my tenderness and youth's concomitant innocence. But that victory at least required the three hours between the moment I learned of Grandfather Lessep's death and that one when the train began to move and I realised that Boon would be in unchallenged possession of the key to Grandfather's automobile for at least four days.

While here were Miss Reba and Miss Corrie: foemen you would say already toughened, even if not wisened, by constant daily experience to any wile or assault Non-virtue (or Virtue) might invent against them, already sacked and pillaged: who thirty minutes before didn't even know that Ned existed, let alone the horse. Not to mention the complete stranger whom Miss Corrie had just left the room tranquilly confident to conquer with no other weapon than the telephone.

She had been gone nearly two minutes now. Minnie had taken the lamp and gone back to the back porch; I noticed that Ned was not in the room either. "Minnie," Miss Reba said toward the back door, "was any of that chicken—"

"Yessum," Minnie said. "I already fixed him a plate. He setting down to it now." Ned said something. We couldn't hear it. But we could hear Minnie: "If all you got to depend on for appetite is me, you gonter starve twice between here and morning." We couldn't hear Ned. Now Miss Corrie had been gone almost four minutes. Boon stood up, quick. "God damn it—" he said.

"Are you even jealous of a telephone?" Miss Reba said. "What the hell can he do to her through that damn gutta-percha earpiece?" But we could hear Minnie: a quick sharp flat sound, then her feet. She came in.

She was breathing a little quick, but not much. "What's wrong?" Miss Reba said.

"Aint nothing wrong," Minnie said. "He like most of them. He got plenty of appetite but he cant seem to locate where it is."

"Give him a bottle of beer. Unless you're afraid to go back out there."

"I aint afraid," Minnie said. "He just nature-minded. Maybe a little extra. I'm used to it. A heap of them are that way: so nature-minded dont nobody get no rest until they goes to sleep."

"I bet you are," Boon said. "It's that tooth. That's the hell of women: you wont let well enough alone."

"What do you mean?" Miss Reba said.

"You know damn well what I mean," Boon said. "You dont never quit. You aint never satisfied. You dont never have no mercy on a damn man. Look at her: aint satisfied until she has saved and scraped to put a gold tooth, a gold tooth in the middle of her face just to drive crazy a poor ignorant country nigger—"

"— or spending five minutes talking into a wooden box just to drive crazy another poor ignorant country bastard that aint done nothing in the world but steal an automobile and now a horse. I never knew anybody that needed to get married as bad as you do."

"He sure do," Minnie said from the door. "That would cure him. I tried it twice and I sho learned my lesson—" Miss Corrie came in.

"All right," she said: serene, no more plain than a big porcelain lamp with the wick burning inside is plain. "He's coming too. He's going to help us. He—"

"Not me," Boon said. "The son of a bitch aint going to help me."

"Then beat it," Miss Reba said. "Get out of here. How you going to do it? walk back to Mississippi or ride the horse? Go on. Sit down. You might as well while we wait for him. Tell us," she said to Miss Corrie.

You see? “He’s not a brakeman! He’s a flagman! He wears a uniform just the same as the conductor’s. He’s going to help us.” All the world loves a lover, quoth (I think) the Swan: who saw deeper than any into the human heart. What pity he had no acquaintance with horses, to have added, All the world apparently loves a stolen race horse also. Miss Corrie told us; and Otis was in the room now though I hadn’t seen him come in, with something still wrong about him though not noticing him until it was almost too late still wasn’t it:

“We’ll have to buy at least one ticket to Possum to have—”

“It’s Parsham,” Miss Reba said.

“All right,” Miss Corrie said, “ — something to check him as baggage on, like you do a trunk; Sam will bring the ticket and the baggage check with him. But it will be all right; an empty boxcar will be on a side track — Sam will know where — and all we have to do is get the horse in it and Sam said wall him up in one corner with planks so he cant slip down; Sam will have some planks and nails ready too; he said this was the best he could do at short notice because he didn’t dare tell his uncle any more than he had to or his uncle would want to come too. So Sam says the only risk will be getting the horse from here to where the boxcar is waiting. He says it wont do for . . .” She stopped, looking at Ned.

“Ned William McCaslin Jefferson Mississippi,” Ned said.

“. . . Ned to be walking along even a back-street this late at night leading a horse; the first policeman they pass will stop him. So he — Sam — is bringing a blanket and he’s going to wear his uniform and him and Boon and me will lead the horse to the depot and nobody will notice anything. Oh yes; and the passenger train will—”

“Jesus,” Miss Reba said. “A whore, a pullman conductor and a Mississippi swamp rat the size of a water tank leading a race horse through Memphis at midnight Sunday night, and nobody will notice it?”

“You stop!” Miss Corrie said.

“Stop what?” Miss Reba said.

“You know. Talking like that in front of—”

“Oh,” Miss Reba said. “If he just dropped up here from Mississippi with Boon on a friendly visit you might say, we might of could protected his ears. But using this place as headquarters while they steal automobiles and horses, he’s got to take his chances like anybody else. What were you saying about the train?”

“Yes. The passenger train that leaves for Washington at four a.m. will pick the boxcar up and we’ll all be in Possum before daylight.”

“Parsham, God damn it,” Miss Reba said. “We?”

“Aint you coming too?” Miss Corrie said.

VII

THAT’S WHAT WE did. Though first Sam had to see the horse. He came in the back way, through the kitchen, carrying the horse blanket. He was in his uniform. He was almost as big as Boon.

So we — all of us again — stood once more in the back yard, Ned holding the lamp this time, to shine its light not on the horse but on Sam’s brass-buttoned coat and vest and the flat cap with the gold lettering across the front. In fact, I had expected trouble with Ned over Sam and the horse, but I was wrong.

“Who, me?” Ned said. “What for? We couldn’t be no better off with a policeman himself leading that horse to Possum.” On the contrary, the trouble we were going to have about Sam would be with Boon. Sam looked at the horse.

“That’s a good horse,” Sam said. “He looks like a damn good horse to me.”

“Sure,” Boon said. “He aint got no whistle nor bell neither on him. He aint even got a headlight. I’m surprised you can see him a-tall.”

“What do you mean by that?” Sam said.

"I dont mean nothing," Boon said. "Just what I said. You're an iron-horse man. Maybe you better go on to the depot without waiting for us."

"You bas — —" Miss Reba said. Then she started over: "Cant you see, the man's just trying to help you? going out of his way so that the minute you get back home, the first live animal you'll see wont be the sheriff? He's the one to be inviting you to get to hell back where you came from and take your goddamn horse along with you. Apologise."

"All right," Boon said. "Forget it."

"You call that an apology?" Miss Reba said.

"What do you want?" Boon said. "Me to bend over and invite him to—"

"You hush! Right this minute!" Miss Corrie said.

"And you dont help none neither," Boon said. "You already got me and Miss Reba both to where we'll have to try to forget the whole English language before we can even pass the time of day."

"That's no lie," Miss Reba said. "That one you brought here from Arkansas was bad enough, with one hand in the icebox after beer and the other one reaching for whatever was little and not nailed down whenever anybody wasn't looking. And now Boon Hogganbeck's got to bring another one that's got me scared to even open my mouth."

"He didn't!" Miss Corrie said. "Otis dont take anything without asking first! Do you, Otis?"

"That's right," Miss Reba said. "Ask him. He certainly ought to know."

"Ladies, ladies, ladies," Sam said. "Does this horse want to go to Parsham tonight, or dont he?"

So we started. But at first Miss Corrie was still looking at Otis and me.

"They ought to be in bed," she said.

"Sure," Miss Reba said. "Over in Arkansas or back down there in Mississippi or even further than that, if I had my way. But it's too late

now. You cant send one to bed without the other, and that one of Boon's owns part of the horse." Only at the last, Miss Reba couldn't go either. She and Minnie couldn't be spared. The place was jumping indeed now, but still discreetly, with Sabbath decorum: Saturday night's fading tide rip in one last spumy upfling against the arduous humdrum of day-by-day for mere bread and shelter.

So Ned and Boon put the blanket on the horse. Then from the sidewalk we — Ned and Otis and me — watched Boon and Sam in polyandrous . . . maybe not amity but at least armistice, Miss Corrie between them, leading the horse down the middle of the street from arc light to arc light through the Sunday evening quiet of Second and Third streets, toward the Union depot.

It was after ten now; there were few lights, these only in the other boarding houses (I was experienced now; I was a sophisticate — not a connoisseur of course but at least cognizant; I recognised a place similar to Miss Reba's when I saw one). The saloons though were all dark.

That is, I didn't know a saloon just by passing it; there were still a few degrees yet veiled to me; it was Ned who told us — Otis and me — they were saloons, and that they were closed. I had expected them to be neither one: neither closed nor open; remember, I had been in Memphis (or in Catalpa Street) less than six hours, without my mother or father either to instruct me; I was doing pretty well.

"They calls it the blue law," Ned said.

"What's a blue law?" I said.

"I dont know neither," Ned said. "Lessen it means they blewed in all the money Saturday night and aint none of them got enough left now to make it worth burning the coal oil."

"That's just the saloons," Otis said. "It dont hurt nobody that way. What they dont sell Sunday night they can just save it and sell it to somebody, maybe the same folks, Monday.

But pugnuckling's different. You can sell it tonight and turn right around again and sell the same pugnuckling again tomorrow. You aint lost nothing. Likely if they tried to put that blue law onto pugnuckling, the police would come in and stop them."

"What's pugnuckling?" I said.

"You knows a heap, dont you?" Ned said to Otis. "No wonder Arkansaw cant hold you. If the rest of the folks there knows as much as you do at your age, time they's twenty-one even Texas wont be big enough."

" — t," Otis said.

"What's pugnuckling?" I said.

"Try can you put your mind on knuckling up some feed for that horse," Ned said to me, still louder. "To try to keep him quiet long enough to get him to Possum, let alone into that train in the first place. That there railroad-owning conductor, flinging boxcars around without even taking his hand out of his pocket, is somebody reminded him of that? Maybe even a bucket of soap and water too, so your aunt" — he was talking to Otis now— "can take you around behind something and wash your mouth out."

" — t," Otis said.

"Or maybe even the nearest handy stick," Ned said.

" — t," Otis said. And sure enough, we met a policeman. I mean, Otis saw the policeman even before the policeman saw the horse. "Twenty-three skiddoo," Otis said. The policeman knew Miss Corrie. Then apparently he knew Sam too.

"Where you taking him?" he said. "Did you steal him?"

"Borrowed him," Sam said. They didn't stop. "We rode him to prayer meeting tonight and now we're taking him back home." We went on. Otis said Twenty-three skiddoo again.

"I never seen that before," he said. "Every policeman I ever seen before speaking to anybody, they give him something. Like Minnie and Miss

Reba already having a bottle of beer waiting for him before he could even get his foot inside, even if Miss Reba cussed him before he come and cussed him again after he left.

And ever since I got here last summer and found out about it, every day I go up to Court Square where that I-talian wop has got that fruit and peanut stand and, sho enough, here the policeman comes and without even noticing it, takes a apple or a handful of peanuts." He was almost trotting to keep up with us; he was that much smaller than me.

I mean, he didn't seem so much smaller until you saw him trotting to keep up. There was something wrong about him. When it's you, you say to yourself Next year I'm going to be bigger than I am now simply because being bigger is not only natural, it's inevitable; it doesn't even matter that you cant imagine to yourself how or what you will look like then. And the same with other children; they cant help it either.

But Otis looked like two or three years ago he had already reached where you wont be until next year, and since then he had been going backward. He was still talking. "So what I thought back then was that the only thing to be was a policeman. But I never taken long to get over that. It's too limited."

"Limited to what?" Ned said.

"To beer and apples and peanuts," Otis said. "Who's going to waste his time on beer and apples and peanuts?" He said Twenty-three skiddoo three times now. "This town is where the jack's at."

"Jacks?" Ned said. "In course they has jacks here. Dont Memphis need mules the same as anybody else?"

"Jack," Otis said. "Spondulicks. Cash. When I think about all that time I wasted in Arkansas before anybody ever told me about Memphis. That tooth. How much do you reckon that tooth by itself is worth? if she just walked into the bank and taken it out and laid it on the counter and said, Gimme change for it?"

“Yes,” Ned said. “I mind a boy like you back there in Jefferson used to keep his mind on money all the time too. You know where he’s at now?”

“Here in Memphis, if he’s got any sense,” Otis said.

“He never got that far,” Ned said. “The most he could get was into the state penitentiary at Parchman. And at the rate you sounds like going, that’s where you’ll wind up too.”

“But not tomorrow,” Otis said. “Maybe not the next day neither. Twenty-three skiddoo, where even a durn policeman cant even pass by without a bottle of beer or a apple or a handful of peanuts put right in his hand before he can even ask for it.

Them eighty-five cents them folks give me last night for pumping the pee a noler that that son of a bitch taken away from me this evening. That I might a even pumped that pee a noler free for nothing if I hadn’t found out by pure accident that they was aiming to pay me for it; if I had just happened to step out the door a minute, I might a missed it.

And if I hadn’t even been there, they would still a give it to somebody, anybody that just happened to pass by. See what I mean? Sometime just thinking about it, I feel like just giving up, just quitting.”

“Quitting what?” Ned said. “Quitting for what?”

“Just quitting,” Otis said. “When I think of all them years I spent over there on a durn farm in Arkansas with Memphis right here across the river and I never even knowed it. How if I had just knowed when I was four or five years old, what I had to wait until just last year to find out about, sometimes I just want to give up and quit. But I reckon I wont. I reckon maybe I can make it up. How much you folks figger on making out of that horse?”

“Never you mind about that horse,” Ned said. “And the making up you needs to do is to make back up that street to wherever it is you gonter sleep tonight, and go to bed.” He even paused, half turning. “Do you know the way back?”

“There aint nothing there,” Otis said. “I already tried it. They watch too close. It aint like over in Arkansas, when Aunt Corrie was still at Aunt Fittie’s and I had that peephole. If you swapped that automobile for him, you must be figgering on at least two hundred—” This time Ned turned completely around.

Otis sprang, leaped away, cursing Ned, calling him nigger — something Father and Grandfather must have been teaching me before I could remember because I dont know when it began, I just knew it was so: that no gentleman ever referred to anyone by his race or religion.

“Go on,” I said. “They’re leaving us.” They were: almost two blocks ahead now and already turning a corner; we ran, trotted, Ned too, to catch up and barely did so: the depot was in front of us and Sam was talking to another man, in greasy overalls, with a lantern — a switchman, a railroad man anyway.

“See what I mean?” Ned said. “Can you imagine police sending out a man with a lantern to show us the way?” And you see what I mean too: all the world (I mean about a stolen race horse); who serves Virtue works alone, unaided, in a chilly vacuum of reserved judgment; where, pledge yourself to Non-virtue and the whole countryside boils with volunteers to help you.

It seems that Sam was trying to persuade Miss Corrie to wait in the depot with Otis and me while they located the boxcar and loaded the horse into it, even voluntarily suggesting that Boon attend us with the protection of his size and age and sex: proving that Sam’s half anyway of the polyandrous stalemate was amicable and trusting. But Miss Corrie would have no part of it, speaking for all of us.

So we turned aside, following the lantern, through a gate into a maze of loading platforms and tracks; now Ned himself had to come forward and take the halter and quiet the horse to where we could move again in the aura now of the horse’s hot ammoniac reek (you never smelled a frightened horse, did you?) and the steady murmur of Ned’s voice

talking to it, both of them — murmur and smell — thickened, dense, concentrated now between the loom of lightless baggage cars and passenger coaches among the green-and-ruby gleams of switch points; on until we were clear of the passenger yard and were now following a cinder path beside a spur track leading to a big dark warehouse with a loading platform in front of it.

And there was the boxcar too, with a good twenty-five feet of moonlit (that's right. We were in moonlight now. Free of the street- and depot-lights, we — I — could see it now) vacancy between it and the nearest point of the platform — a good big jump for even a jumping horse, let alone a three-year-old flat racer that (according to Ned) had a little trouble running anyway. Sam cursed quietly the entire depot establishment: switchmen, yard crews, ticket sellers and all.

"I'll go get the goat," the man with the lantern said.

"We dont need no goat," Ned said. "No matter how far he can jump. What we needs is to either move that platform or that boxcar."

"He means the switch engine," Sam told Ned. "No," he told the man with the lantern. "I expected this. For a switching crew to miss just twenty-five feet is practically zero. That's why I told you to bring the key to the section house. Get the crowbars. Maybe Mr Boon wont mind helping you."

"Why dont you go yourself?" Boon said. "It's your railroad. I'm a stranger here."

"Why dont you take these boys on back home to bed, if you're all that timid around strangers?" Miss Corrie said.

"Why dont you take them back home yourself?" Boon said. "Your old buddy-boy there has already told you once you aint got no business here."

"I'll go with him to get the crowbars," Miss Corrie told Sam. "Will you keep your eye on the boys?"

"All right, all right," Boon said. "Let's do something, for Christ's sake. That train will be along in four or five hours while we're still debating

who's first at the lick dog. Where's that tool shed, Jack?" So he and the man with the lantern went on; we had only moonlight now. The horse hardly smelled at all now and I could see it nuzzling at Ned's coat like a pet. And Sam was thinking what I had been thinking ever since I saw the platform.

"There's a ramp around at the back," he said. "Did he ever walk a ramp before? Why dont you take him on now and let him look at it. When we get the car placed, we can all help you carry him up if we have to—"

"Dont you waste your time worrying about us," Ned said. "You just get that boxcar to where we wont have to jump no ten-foot gash into it. This horse wants to get out of Memphis as bad as you does." Only I was afraid Sam would say, Dont you want this boy to go with you? Because I wanted to see that boxcar moved. I didn't believe it. So we waited. It wasn't long; Boon and the man with the lantern came back with two crowbars that looked at least eight feet long and I watched (Miss Corrie and Otis too) while they did it.

The man set his lantern down and climbed the ladder onto the roof and released the brake wheel and Sam and Boon jammed the ends of the bars between the back wheels and the rails, pinching and nudging in short strokes like pumping and I still didn't believe it: the car looming black and square and high in the moon, solid and rectangular as a black wall inside the narrow silver frame of the moonlight, one high puny figure wrenching at the brake wheel on top and two more puny figures crouching, creeping, nudging the silver-lanced iron bars behind the back wheels; so huge and so immobile that at first it looked, not like the car was moving forward, but rather Boon and Sam in terrific pantomimic obeisance were pinching infinitesimally rearward past the car's fixed and foundationed mass, the moon-mazed panoramic earth: so delicately balanced now in the massive midst of Motion that Sam and Boon dropped the bars and Boon alone pressed the car gently on with his hands as though it were a child's perambulator, up alongside the platform and into position and Sam said, "All right," and the man on top set the brake wheel again. So all we had to do now was get the horse into it. Which was like saying, Here we are

in Alaska; all we have to do now is find the gold mine. We went around to the back of the warehouse. There was a cleated ramp.

But the platform had been built at the right height for the drays to load and unload from it, and the ramp was little more than a track for hand trucks and wheelbarrows, stout enough but only about five feet wide, rail-less. Ned was standing there talking to the horse. "He done seen it," he said. "He know we want him to walk up it but he aint decided yet do he want to. I wish now Mr Boxcar Man had went a little further and borried a whup too."

"You got one," Boon said. He meant me — one of my tricks, graces. I made it with my tongue, against the sounding board of my mouth, throat, gorge — a sound quite sharp and loud, as sharp and loud when done right as the crack of a whip; Mother finally forbade me to do it anywhere inside our yard, let alone in the house. Then it made Grandmother jump once and use a swear word. But just once. That was almost a year ago so I might have forgotten how by this time.

"That's right," Ned said. "So we has." He said to me: "Get you a long switch. They ought to be one in that hedge bush yonder." There was: a privet bush; all this was probably somebody's lawn or garden before progress, industry, commerce, railroads came. I cut the switch and came back. Ned led the horse up, facing the ramp. "Now you big folks, Mr Boon and Mr Boxcar, come up one on either side like you was the gateposts." They did so, Ned halfway up the ramp now, with the lead rope, facing the horse and talking to it.

"There you is," he said. "Right straight up this here chicken walk to glory and Possum, Tennessee, by sunup tomorrow." He came back down, already turning the horse, moving fairly rapidly, speaking to me now: "He done seen the switch. Fall right in behind him. Dont touch him nor pop till I tell you to."

I did that, the three of us — Ned, the horse, then me — moving directly away from the ramp for perhaps twenty yards, when without stopping Ned turned and wheeled the horse, I still following, until it faced the

rise of the ramp between Boon and Sam twenty yards away. When it saw the ramp, it checked. "Pop," Ned said. I made the sound, a good one; the horse sprang a little, Ned already moving on, a little faster now, back toward the ramp.

"When I tells you to pop this time, touch him with the switch. Dont hit: just tap him at the root of his tail a second after you pops." He had already passed between Boon and Sam and was on the ramp. The horse was now trying to decide which to do: refuse, or run out (with the additional confusion of having to decide which of Boon and Sam would run over the easiest) or simply bolt over and through us all. You could almost see it happening: which was maybe what Ned was counting on: an intelligence panicky and timorous and capable of only one idea at a time, in which the intrusion of a second one reduces all to chaos. "Pop," Ned said.

This time I tapped the horse too, as Ned had told me. It surged, leaped, its forefeet halfway up the ramp, the near hind foot (Boon's side) striking the edge of the ramp and sliding off until Boon, before Ned could speak, grasped the leg in both hands and set it back on the ramp, leaning his weight against the flank, the horse motionless now, trembling, all four feet on the ramp now. "Now," Ned said, "lay your switch right across his hocks so he'll know he got something behind him to not let him fall."

"To not let him back off the ramp, you mean," Sam said. "We need one of the crowbars. Go get it, Charley."

"That's right," Ned said. "We gonter need that crowbar in a minute. But all we needs right now is that switch. You's too little," he told me. "Let Mr Boon and Mr Boxcar have it. Loop it behind his hocks like britching."

They did so; one at each end of the limber switch. "Now, walk him right on up. When I say pop this time, pop loud, so he will think the lick gonter be loud too." But I didn't need to pop at all again. Ned said to the horse: "Come on, son. Let's go to Possum," and the horse moved, Boon and Sam moving with it, the switch like a loop of string pressing it

on, its forefeet on the solid platform now, then one final scuffling scabbling surge, the platform resounding once as if it had leaped onto a wooden bridge.

“It’s going to take more than this switch or that boy popping his tongue either, to get him into that car,” Sam said.

“What gonter get him into that boxcar is that crowbar,” Ned said. “Aint it come yet?” It was here now. “Prize that-ere chicken walk loose,” Ned said.

“Wait,” Sam said. “What for?”

“So he can walk on it into that boxcar,” Ned said. “He’s used to it now. He’s done already found out aint nothing at the other end gonter hint or skeer him.”

“He aint smelled the inside of an empty boxcar yet though,” Sam said.

“That’s what I’m thinking about.” But Ned’s idea did make sense.

Besides, we had gone much too far now to boggle even if Ned had commanded us to throw down both walls of the warehouse so the horse wouldn’t have to turn corners. So Boon and the railroad man prized the ramp away from the platform.

“God damn it,” Sam said. “Do it quiet, cant you?”

“Aint you right here with us?” Ned said. “Sholy you can get a little more benefit outen them brass buttons than just walking around in them.”

Though it took all of us, including Miss Corrie, to lift the ramp onto the platform and carry it across and lay it like a bridge from the platform into the black yawn of the open car door.

Then Ned led the horse up and at once I understood what Sam had meant. The horse had not only never smelled an empty boxcar before, but unlike mere humans it could see inside too; I remember thinking Now that we’ve torn up the ramp, we cant even get it down off the platform again before daylight catches us. But nothing like that happened. I mean, nothing happened. I mean, I dont know what happened; none of us did.

Ned led the horse, its hooves ringing loud and hollow on the planks, up to the end of the ramp which was now a bridge, Ned standing on the bridge just inside the door, talking to the horse, pulling lightly on the halter until the horse put one foot forward onto the bridge and I don't know what I was thinking; a moment ago I had believed that not in all Memphis were there enough people to get that horse into that black orifice, then the next instant I was expecting that same surge and leap which would have taken the horse inside the boxcar as it had up the ramp; when the horse lifted the foot and drew it back to the platform, it and Ned facing each other like a tableau.

I heard Ned breathe once. "You folks just step back to the wall," he said. We did so. I didn't know then what he did. I just saw him, one hand holding the lead rope, the other stroking, touching the horse's muzzle. Then he stepped back into the car and vanished; the lead rope tightened but only his voice came out: "Come on, son. I got it."

"I'll be God damned," Sam said. Because that was all. The loose bridge clattered a little, the cavernous blackness inside the car boomed to the hooves, but no more. We carried the lantern in; the horse's eyes glowed coldly and vanished where Ned stood with it in the corner.

"Where's them planks and nails you talked about?" he asked Sam. "Bring that chicken walk on in; that's already one whole wall." "Hell," Sam said. "Hold on now."

"Folks coming in here tomorrow morning already missing a whole boxcar," Ned said, "aint gonter have time to be little-minded over a homemade ladder outen somebody's henhouse." So all of us again except Ned — including Miss Corrie — carried the ravished ramp into the car and set it up and held it in place while Boon and Sam and the railroad man (Sam had the planks and nails ready too) built a stall around the horse in the corner of the car; before Ned could even complain, Sam had a bucket for water and a box for grain and even a bundle of hay too; we all stood back now in the aura of the horse's contented munching. "He just the same as in Possum right this minute," Ned said.

“What you folks better wish is that he has already crossed that finish line first day after tomorrow,” Sam said. “What time is it?” Then he told us himself: “Just past midnight. Time for a little sleep before the train leaves at four.” He was talking to Boon now. “You and Ned will want to stay here with your horse of course; that’s why I brought all that extra hay. So you bed down here and I’ll take Corrie and the boys on back home and we’ll all meet here at—”

“You says,” Boon said, not harshly so much as with a kind of cold grimness. “You do the meeting here at four oclock. If you dont oversleep, maybe we’ll see you.” He was already turning. “Come on, Corrie.”

“You’re going to leave your boss’s automobile — I mean your boss’s horse — I mean this horse, whoever it really belongs to — here with nobody to watch it but this colored boy?” Sam said.

“Naw,” Boon said. “That horse belongs to the railroad now. I got a baggage check to prove it. Maybe you just borrowed that railroad suit to impress women and little boys in but as long as you’re in it you better use it to impress that baggage check or the railroad might not like it.”

“Boon!” Miss Corrie said. “I’m not going home with anybody! Come on, Lucius, you and Otis.”

“It’s all right,” Sam said. “We keep on forgetting how Boon has to slave for five or six months in that cotton patch or whatever it is, to make one night on Catalpa Street. You all go on. I’ll see you at the train.”

“Cant you even say much obliged?” Miss Corrie said to Boon.

“Sure,” Boon said. “Who do I owe one to? the horse?”

“Try one on Ned,” Sam said. He said to Ned: “You want me to stay here with you?”

“We’ll be all right,” Ned said. “Maybe if you go too it might get quiet enough around here to where somebody can get some sleep. I just wish now I had thought in time to—”

"I did," Sam said. "Where's that other bucket, Charley?" The railroad man — switchman, whatever he was — had it too; it was in the same corner of the car with the planks and nails and tools and the feed; it contained a thick crude ham sandwich and a quart bottle of water and a pint bottle of whiskey. "There you are," Sam said. "Breakfast too."

"I see it," Ned said. "What's your name, Whitefolks?"

"Sam Caldwell," Sam said.

"Sam Caldwell," Ned said. "It strikes me that Sam Caldwell is a better name for this kind of horse business than twice some others a man could mention around here. A little more, and I could be wishing me and you was frequent enough to be permanent. Kindly much obliged."

"You're kindly welcome," Sam said. So we said good night to Sam and Ned and Charley (all of us except Boon and Otis, that is) and went back to Miss Reba's. The streets were empty and quiet now; Memphis was using the frazzled worn-out end of the week to get at least a little sleep and rest to face Monday morning with; we walked quietly too from vacant light to light between the dark windows and the walls: but one faint single light dimly visible in what my new infallible roué's instinct recognised immediately as a competitor of Miss Reba; a single light similar in wanness behind Miss Reba's curtains because even here throe must by this time have spent itself; even Minnie herself gone to bed or home or wherever she retired to at her and Miss Reba's trade's evensong. Because Miss Reba herself unlocked the front door to us, smelling strongly of gin and, in her hard handsome competent way, even beginning to look like it.

She had changed her dress too. This one didn't have hardly any top to it at all, and in those days ladies — women — didn't really paint their faces, so that was the first time I ever saw that too. And she had on still more diamonds, as big and yellowish as the first two. No: five. But Minnie hadn't gone to bed either. She was standing in the door to Miss Reba's room, looking just about worn out.

"All fixed?" Miss Reba said, locking the door behind us.

“Yes,” Miss Corrie said. “Why dont you go to bed? Minnie, make her go to bed.”

“You could a asked me that a hour back from now,” Minnie said. “I just wish wouldn’t nobody still be asking it two hours ahead from now. But you wasn’t here that other time two years ago.”

“Come on to bed,” Miss Corrie said. “When we get back from Possum Wednesday—”

“God damn it, Parsham,” Miss Reba said.

“All right,” Miss Corrie said. “ — Wednesday, Minnie will have found out where he is and we can go and get him.”

“Sure,” Miss Reba said. “And bury him right there in the same ditch this time, pick and shovel and all, if I had any sense. You want a drink?” she said to Boon. “Minnie’s a damn christian scientist or republican or something and wont take one.”

“Somebody around here has got to not take one,” Minnie said. “It dont need no republican for that. All it needs is just to be wore out and want to go to bed.”

“That’s what we all need,” Miss Corrie said. “That train leaves at four, and it’s already after one. Come on, now.”

“Go to bed then,” Miss Reba said. “Who the hell’s stopping you?” So we went upstairs. Then Otis and I went upstairs again; he knew the way: an attic, with nothing in it but some trunks and boxes and a mattress made up into a bed on the floor. Otis had a nightshirt but (the nightshirt still had the creases in it where Miss Corrie I suppose had bought it off the shelf in the store) he went to bed just like I had to: took off his pants and shoes and turned off the light and lay down too.

There was one little window and now we could see the moon and then I could even see inside the room because of the moonlight; there was something wrong with him; I was tired and coming up the stairs I had thought I would be asleep almost before I finished lying down. But I could feel him lying there beside me, not just wide awake, but rather

like something that never slept in its life and didn't even know it never had. And suddenly there was something wrong with me too.

It was like I didn't know what it was yet: only that there was something wrong and in a minute now I would know what and I would hate it; and suddenly I didn't want to be there at all, I didn't want to be in Memphis or ever to have heard of Memphis: I wanted to be at home. Otis said Twenty-three skiddoo again.

"The jack that's here," he said. "You can even smell it. It aint fair that it's just women can make money pugnuckling while all a man can do is just try to snatch onto a little of it while it's passing by—" There was that word again, that I had asked twice what it meant.

But not any more, not again: lying there tense and rigid with the moon-shaped window lying across mine and Otis's legs, trying not to hear him but having to: " — one of the rooms is right under here; on a busy night like Sad-dy was you can hear them right up through the floor. But there aint no chance here.

Even if I could get a auger and bore a peephole through it, that nigger and Miss Reba wouldn't let me bring nobody up here to make no money off of and even if I did they would probably take the money away from me like that son of a bitch done that pee a noler money today. But it was different back home at Aunt Fittie's, when Bee—" He stopped. He lay perfectly still. He said Twenty-three skiddoo again.

"Bee?" I said. But it was too late. No, it wasn't too late. Because I already knew now.

"How old are you?" he said.

"Eleven," I said.

"You got a year on me then," he said. "Too bad you aint going to be here after tonight. If you just stayed around here next week, we might figger that peephole out some way."

"What for?" I said. You see, I had to ask it. Because what I wanted was to be back home. I wanted my mother. Because you should be

prepared for experience, knowledge, knowing: not bludgeoned unaware in the dark as by a highwayman or footpad. I was just eleven, remember.

There are things, circumstances, conditions in the world which should not be there but are, and you can't escape them and indeed, you would not escape them even if you had the choice, since they too are a part of Motion, of participating in life, being alive. But they should arrive with grace, decency. I was having to learn too much too fast, unassisted; I had nowhere to put it, no receptacle, pigeonhole prepared yet to accept it without pain and lacerations. He was lying face up, as I was. He hadn't moved, not even his eyes. But I could feel him watching me.

"You don't know much, do you?" he said. "Where did you say you was from?"

"Mississippi," I said.

"— t," he said. "No wonder you don't know nothing."

"All right," I said. "Bee is Miss Corrie."

"Here I am, throwing money away like it wasn't nothing," he said. "But maybe me and you both can make something out of it. Sure. Her name is Everbe Corinthia, named for Grandmaw. And what a hell of a name that is to have to work under. Bad enough even over there around Kiblett, where some of them already knowed it and was used to it and the others was usually in too much of a hurry to give a hoot whether she called herself nothing or not.

But here in Memphis, in a house like this that they tell me every girl in Memphis is trying to get into it as soon as a room is vacant. So it never made much difference over there around Kiblett after her maw died and Aunt Fittie taken her to raise and started her out soon as she got big enough. Then when she found out how much more money there was in Memphis and come over here, never nobody knowed about the Everbe and so she could call herself Corrie.

So whenever I'm over here visiting her, like last summer and now, since I know about the Everbe, she gives me five cents a day not to tell

nobody. You see? Instead of telling you like I slipped up and done, if I had just went to her instead and said, At five cents a day I can try not to forget, but ten cents a day would make it twice as hard to. But never mind; I can tell her tomorrow that you know it too, and maybe we both can—”

“Who was Aunt Fittie?” I said.

“I dont know,” he said. “Folks just called her Aunt Fittie. She might have been kin to some of us, but I dont know. Lived by herself in a house on the edge of town until she taken Bee in after Bee’s maw died and soon as Bee got big enough, which never taken long because Bee was already a big girl even before she got to be ten or eleven or twelve or whenever it was and got started—”

“Started at what?” I said. You see? I had to. I had gone too far to stop now, like in Jefferson yesterday — or was it yesterday? last year: another time: another life: another Lucius Priest. “What is pugnuckling?”

He told me, with some of contempt but mostly a sort of incredulous, almost awed, almost respectful amazement. “That’s where I had the peephole — a knothole in the back wall with a tin slide over it that never nobody but me knowed how to work, while Aunt Fittie was out in front collecting the money and watching out. Folks your size would have to stand on a box and I would charge a nickel until Aunt Fittie found out I was letting grown men watch for a dime that otherwise might have went inside for fifty cents, and started hollering like a wildcat—”

Standing now, I was hitting him, so much to his surprise (mine too) that I had had to stoop and take hold of him and jerk him up within reach.

I knew nothing about boxing and not too much about fighting. But I knew exactly what I wanted to do: not just hurt him but destroy him; I remember a second perhaps during which I regretted (from what ancient playing-fields-of-Eton avatar) that he was not nearer my size.

But not longer than a second; I was hitting, clawing, kicking not at one wizened ten-year-old boy, but at Otis and the procuress both: the demon child who debased her privacy and the witch who debauched her innocence — one flesh to bruise and burst, one set of nerves to wrench and anguish; more: not just those two, but all who had participated in her debasement: not only the two panders, but the insensitive blackguard children and the brutal and shameless men who paid their pennies to watch her defenseless and undefended and unavenged degradation.

He had plunged sprawling across the mattress, on his hands and knees now, scrabbling at his discarded trousers; I didn't know why (nor care), not even when his hand came out and up. Only then did I see the blade of the pocketknife in his fist, nor did I care about that either; that made us in a way the same size; that was my *carte blanche*. I took the knife away from him. I don't know how; I never felt the blade at all; when I flung the knife away and hit him again, the blood I saw on his face I thought was his.

Then Boon was holding me clear of the floor, struggling and crying now. He was barefoot, wearing only his pants. Miss Corrie was there too, in a kimono, with her hair down; it reached further than her waist. Otis was scrunched back against the wall, not crying but cursing like he had cursed at Ned. "What the damned hell," Boon said.

"His hand," Miss Corrie said. She paused long enough to look back at Otis. "Go to my room," she said. "Go on." He went out. Boon put me down. "Let me see it," she said. That was the first I knew where the blood came from — a neat cut across the cushions of all four fingers; I must have grasped the blade just as Otis tried to snatch it away. It was still bleeding. That is, it bled again when Miss Corrie opened my hand.

"What the hell were you fighting about?" Boon said.

"Nothing," I said. I drew my hand back.

"Keep it closed till I get back," Miss Corrie said. She went out and came back with a basin of water and a towel and a bottle of something and

what looked like a scrap of a man's shirt. She washed the blood off and uncorked the bottle. "It's going to sting," she said. It did. She tore a strip from the shirt and bound my hand.

"He still wont tell what they were fighting about," Boon said. "At least I hope he started it: not half your size even if he is a year older. No wonder he pulled a knife—"

"He aint even as old," I said. "He's ten."

"He told me he was twelve," Boon said. Then I found out what was wrong about Otis.

"Twelve?" Miss Corrie said. "He'll be fifteen years old next Monday." She was looking at me. "Do you want—"

"Just keep him out of here," I said. "I'm tired. I want to go to sleep."

"Don't worry about Otis," she said. "He's going back home this morning. There's a train that leaves at nine oclock. I'm going to send Minnie to the depot with him and tell her to watch him get on it and stand where she can see his face through the window until the train moves."

"Sure," Boon said. "And he can have my grip to carry the refinement and culture back in. Bringing him over here to spend a week in a Memphis—"

"You hush," Miss Corrie said.

"— house hunting refinement and culture. Maybe he found it; he might a hunted for years through Arkansas cat-cribs and still not found nobody near enough his size to draw that pocketknife on—"

"Stop it! Stop it!" Miss Corrie said.

"Sure sure," Boon said. "But after all, Lucius has got to know the name of where he's at in order to brag about where he's been." Then they turned the light out and were gone. Or so I thought. It was Boon this time, turning the light on again. "Maybe you better tell me what it was," he said.

“Nothing,” I said. He looked down at me, huge, naked to the waist, his hand on the light to turn it out again.

“Eleven years old,” he said, “and already knife-cut in a whorehouse brawl.” He looked at me. “I wish I had knowed you thirty years ago. With you to learn me when I was eleven years old, maybe by this time I’d a had some sense too. Good night.”

“Good night,” I said. He turned off the light. Then I had been asleep, it was Miss Corrie this time, kneeling beside the mattress; I could see the shape of her face and the moon through her hair. She was the one crying this time — a big girl, too big to know how to cry daintily: only quietly.

“I made him tell me,” she said. “You fought because of me. I’ve had people — drunks — fighting over me, but you’re the first one ever fought for me. I aint used to it, you see. That’s why I dont know what to do about it. Except one thing. I can do that. I want to make you a promise. Back there in Arkansas it was my fault. But it wont be my fault any more.” You see?

You have to learn too fast; you have to leap in the dark and hope that Something — It — They — will place your foot right. So maybe there are after all other things besides just Poverty and Non-virtue who look after their own.

“It wasn’t your fault then,” I said.

“Yes it was. You can choose. You can decide. You can say No. You can find a job and work. But it wont be my fault any more. That’s the promise I want to make you. For me to keep like you kept that one you told Mr Binford about before supper tonight. You’ll have to take it. Will you take it?”

“All right,” I said.

“But you’ll have to say you’ll take it. You’ll have to say it out loud.”

“Yes,” I said. “I’ll take it.”

“Now try to get back to sleep,” she said. “I’ve brought a chair and I’m going to sit here where I’ll be ready to wake you in time to go to the depot.”

“You go back to bed too,” I said.

“I aint sleepy,” she said. “I’ll just sit here. You go on back to sleep.” And this time, Boon again. The moon-shaped square of window had shifted, so I had slept this time, his voice trying at least for whisper or anyway monotone, looming still naked from the waist up over the kitchen chair where Everbe (I mean Miss Corrie) sat, his hand grasping the backward-straining of her arm:

“Come on now. We aint got but a hour left.”

“Let me go.” She whispered too. “It’s too late now. Let me go, Boon.”

Then his rasping murmur, still trying for, calling itself whisper:

“What the hell do you think I came all the way for, waited all this long for, all this working and saving up and waiting for—” Then the shape of the mooned window had moved still more and I could hear a rooster somewhere and my cut hand was partly under me and hurting, which was maybe what waked me.

So I couldn’t tell if this was the same time or he had gone and then come back: only the voices, still trying for whisper and if a rooster was crowing, it was time to get up. And oh yes, she was crying again.

“I wont! I wont! Let me alone!”

“All right, all right. But tonight is just tonight; tomorrow night, when we’re settled down in Possum—”

“No! Not tomorrow either! I cant! I cant! Let me alone! Please, Boon. Please!”

VIII

WE — EVERBE and Boon and I — were at the depot in plenty of time — or so we thought. The first person we saw was Ned, waiting for us in

front of it. He had on a clean white shirt — either a new one, or he had managed somehow to get the other one washed. But almost at once things began to go too fast for anyone to learn yet that the new shirt was one of Sam's. Ned didn't even give Boon time to open his mouth. "Calm yourself," he said.

"Mr Sam is keeping Lightning whilst I finishes the outside arrangements. The boxcar has done already been picked up and switched onto the train waiting behind the depot right now for you all to get on. When Mr Sam Caldwell runs a railroad, it's run, mon. We done already named him too — Forkid Lightning." Then he saw my bandage. He almost pounced. "What you done to it?"

"I cut it," I said. "It's all right."

"How bad?" he said.

"Yes," Everbe said. "It's cut across all four fingers. He ought not to move it even." Nor did Ned waste any more time there either. He looked quickly about us.

"Where's that other one?" he said.

"That other what?" Boon said.

"Whistle-bitches," Ned said. "That money-mouthed runt boy that was with us last night. I may need two hands on that horse. Who do you think is gonter ride that race? me and you that's even twice as heavy as me?"

Lucius was going to, but being as we already got that other one, we dont need to risk it. He's even less weight than Lucius and even if he aint got as much sense as Lucius, he's at least old enough in meanness to ride a horse race, and wropped up enough in money to want to win it, and likely too much of a coward to turn loose and fall off. Which is all we needs. Where is he?"

"Gone back to Arkansas," Boon said. "How old do you think he is?"

"What he looks like," Ned said. "About fifteen, aint he? Gone to Arkansaw? Then somebody better go get him quick."

“Yes,” Everbe said. “I’ll bring him. There wont be time to go back and get him now. So I’ll stay and bring him on the next train this afternoon.”
“Now you talking,” Ned said. “That’s Mr Sam’s train. Just turn Whistle-britches over to Mr Sam; he’ll handle him.”

“Sure,” Boon said to Everbe. “That’ll give you a whole hour free to practise that No on Sam. Maybe he’s a better man than me and wont take it.” But she just looked at him.

“Then why dont you wait and bring Otis on and we’ll meet you in Parsham tonight,” I said. Now Boon looked at me.

“Well well,” he said. “What’s that Mr Binford said last night? If here aint still another fresh hog in this wallow. Except that this one’s still just a shoat yet. That is, I thought it was.”

“Please, Boon,” Everbe said. Like that: “Please, Boon.”

“Take him too and the both of you get to hell back to that slaughterhouse that maybe you ought not to left in the first place,” Boon said. She didn’t say anything this time. She just stood there, looking down a little: a big girl that stillness suited too. Then she turned, already walking.

“Maybe I will,” I said. “Right on back home. Ned’s got somebody else to ride the horse and you dont seem to know what to do with none of the folks trying to help us.”

He looked, glared at me: a second maybe. “All right,” he said. He strode past me until he overtook her. “I said, all right,” he said. “Is it all right?”
“All right,” she said.

“I’ll meet the first train today. If you aint on it, I’ll keep on meeting them. All right?”

“All right,” she said. She went on.

“I bet aint none of you thought to bring my grip,” Ned said.

“What?” Boon said.

"Where is it?" I said.

"Right there in the kitchen where I set it," Ned said. "That gold-tooth high-brown seen it."

"Miss Corrie'll bring it tonight," I said. "Come on." We went into the depot. Boon bought our tickets and we went out to where the train was waiting, with people already getting on it. Up ahead we could see the boxcar. Sam and the conductor and two other men were standing by the open door; one of them must have been the engineer. You see? not just one casual off-duty flagman, but a functioning train crew.

"You going to run him today?" the conductor said.

"Tomorrow," Boon said.

"Well, we got to get him there first," the conductor said, looking at his watch. "Who's going to ride with him?"

"Me," Ned said. "Soon as I can find a box or something to climb up on."

"Gimme your foot," Sam said. Ned cocked his knee and Sam threw him up into the car. "See you in Parsham tomorrow," he said.

"I thought you went all the way to Washington," Boon said.

"Who, me?" Sam said. "That's just the train. I'm going to double back from Chattanooga tonight on Two-O-Nine. I'll be back in Parsham at seven oclock tomorrow morning. I'd go with you now and pick up Two-O-Eight in Parsham tonight, only I got to get some sleep. Besides, you wont need me anyhow. You can depend on Ned until then."

So did Boon and I. I mean, need sleep. We got some, until the conductor waked us and we stood on the cinders at Parsham in the first light and watched the engine (there was a cattle-loading chute here) spot the boxcar, properly this time, and take its train again and go on, clicking car by car across the other tracks which went south to Jefferson.

Then the three of us dismantled the stall and Ned led the horse out; and of course, naturally, materialised from nowhere, a pleasant-looking Negro youth of about nineteen, standing at the bottom of the chute, said, "Howdy, Mr McCaslin."

"That you, son?" Ned said. "Whichaway?" So we left Boon for that time; his was the Motion role now, the doing: to find a place for all of us to live, not just him and me, but Otis and Everbe when they came tonight: to locate a man whose name Ned didn't even know, whom nobody but Ned said owned a horse, and then persuade him to run it, race it — one figment of Ned's imagination to race another figment — in a hypothetical race which was in the future and therefore didn't exist, against a horse it had already beaten twice (this likewise according only to Ned, or Figment Three), as a result of which Ned intended to recover Grandfather's automobile; all this Boon must do while still keeping clear of being challenged about who really did own the horse.

We — Ned and the youth and me — were walking now, already out of town, which didn't take long in those days — a hamlet, two or three stores where the two railroads crossed, the depot and loading chute and freight shed and a platform for cotton bales.

Though some of it has not changed: the big rambling multigalleried multistoried steamboat-gothic hotel where the overalled aficionados and the professionals who trained the fine bird dogs and the northern millionaires who owned them (one night in the lounge in 1933, his Ohio business with everybody else's under the Damocles sword of the federally closed banks, I myself heard Horace Lytle refuse five thousand dollars for Mary Montrose) gathered for two weeks each February; Paul Rainey also, who liked our country enough — or anyway our bear and deer and panther enough — to use some of the Wall Street money to own enough Mississippi land for him and his friends to hunt them in: a hound man primarily, who took his pack of bear hounds to Africa to see what they would do on lion or vice versa.

“This white boy’s going to sleep walking,” the youth said. “Aint you got no saddle?” But I wasn’t going to sleep yet. I had to find out, to ask: “I didn’t even know you knew anybody here, let alone getting word ahead to them.”

Ned walked on as if I had not even spoken. After a while he said over his shoulder: “So you wants to know how, do you?” He walked on. He said: “Me and that boy’s grandpappy are Masons.”

“Why are you whispering?” I said. “Boss is a Mason too but I never heard him whisper about it.”

“I didn’t know I was,” Ned said. “But suppose I was. What do you want to belong to a lodge for, unless it’s so secret cant hardly nobody else get in it? And how are you gonter keep it secret unless you treat it like one?”

“But how did you get word to him?” I said.

“Let me tell you something,” Ned said. “If you ever need to get something done, not just done but done quick and quiet and so you can depend on it and not no blabbing and gabbling around about it neither, you hunt around until you finds somebody like Mr Sam Caldwell, and turn it over to him. You member that. Folks around Jefferson could use some of him. They could use a heap of Sam Caldwells.”

Then we were there. The sun was well up now. It was a dog-trot house, paintless but quite sound and quite neat among locust and chinaberry trees, in a swept yard inside a fence which had all its palings too and a hinged gate that worked, with chickens in the dust and a cow and a pair of mules in the stable lot behind it, and two pretty good hounds which had already recognised the youth with us, and an old man at the top of the gallery steps above them — an old man very dark in a white shirt and galluses and a planter’s hat, with perfectly white moustaches and an imperial, coming down the steps now and across the yard to look at the horse. Because he knew, remembered the horse, and so one at least of Ned’s figment’s vanished.

“You all buy him?” he said.

“We got him,” Ned said.

“Long enough to run him?”

“Once, anyway,” Ned said. He said to me: “Make your manners to Uncle Possum Hood.” I did so.

“Rest yourself,” Uncle Parsham said. “You all about ready for breakfast, aint you?” I could already smell it — the ham.

“All I want is to go to sleep,” I said.

“He’s been up all night,” Ned said. “Both of us. Only he had to spend his in a house full of women hollering why and how much whilst all I had was just a quiet empty boxcar with a horse.” But I was still going to help stable and feed Lightning. They wouldn’t let me. “You go with Lycurgus and get some sleep,” Ned said. “I’m gonter need you soon, before it gets too hot. We got to find out about this horse, and the sooner we starts, the sooner it will be.”

I followed Lycurgus. It was a lean-to room, a bed with a bright perfectly clean harlequin-patched quilt; it seemed to me I was asleep before I even lay down, and that Ned was shaking me before I had ever slept. He had a clean heavy wool sock and a piece of string. I was hungry now. “You can eat your breakfast afterwards,” Ned said. “You can learn a horse better on a empty stomach. Here—” holding the sock open. “Whistle-bitches aint showed up yet.

It might be better if he dont a-tall. He the sort that no matter how bad you think you need him, you find out afterward you was better off. Hold out your hand.” He meant the bandaged one. He slipped the sock over it, bandage and all, and tied it around my wrist with the string. “You can still use your thumb, but this’ll keep you from forgetting and trying to open your hand and bust them cuts again.”

Uncle Parsham and Lycurgus were waiting with the horse. He was bridled now, under an old, used, but perfectly cared-for McClellan saddle. Ned looked at it. “We might run him bareback, unless they makes us. But leave it on. We can try him both ways and let him learn us which he likes best.”

It was a small pasture beside the creek, flat and smooth, with good footing. Ned shortened the leathers, to suit not me so much as him, and threw me up. "You know what to do: the same as with them colts out at McCaslin. Let him worry about which hand he's on; likely all anybody ever tried to learn him is just to run as fast as the bit will let him, whichever way somebody points his head. Which is all we wants too. You dont need no switch yet. Besides, we dont want to learn a switch: we wants to learn him. Go on."

I moved him out, into the pasture, into a trot. He was nothing on the bit; a cobweb would have checked him. I said so. "I bet," Ned said. "I bet he got a heap more whip calluses on his behind than bit chafes in his jaw. Go on. Move him." But he wouldn't. I kicked, pounded my heels, but he just trotted, a little faster in the back stretch (I was riding a circular course like the one we had beaten out in Cousin Zack's paddock) until I realised suddenly that he was simply hurrying back to Ned.

But still behind the bit; he had never once come into the bridle, his whole head bent around and rucked but with no weight whatever on the hand, as if the bit were a pork rind and he a Mohammedan (or a fish spine and he a Mississippi candidate for constable whose Baptist opposition had accused him of seeking the Catholic vote, or one of Mrs Roosevelt's autographed letters and a secretary of the Citizens Council, or Senator Goldwater's cigar butt and the youngest pledge to the A.D.A.), on until he reached Ned, and with a jerk I felt clean up to my shoulder, snatched his head free and began to nuzzle at Ned's shirt. "U-huh," Ned said. He had one hand behind him; I could see a peeled switch in it now.

"Head him back." He said to the horse: "You got to learn, son, not to run back to me until I sends for you." Then to me: "He aint gonter stop this time. But you make like he is: just one stride ahead of where, if you was him, you would think about turning to come to me, reach back with your hand and whop him hard as you can. Now set tight," and stepped back and cut the horse quick and hard across the buttocks.

It leapt, sprang into full run: the motion (not our speed nor even our progress: just the horse's motion) seemed terrific: graceless of course, but still terrific. Because it was simple reflex from fright, and fright does not become horses.

They are built wrong for it, being merely mass and symmetry, while fright demands fluidity and grace and bizarreness and the capacity to enchant and enthrall and even appall and aghast, like an impala or a giraffe or a snake; even as the fright faded I could feel, sense the motion become simply obedience, no more than an obedient hand gallop, on around the back turn and stretch and into what would be the home stretch, when I did as Ned ordered: one stride before the point at which he had turned to Ned before, I reached back and hit him as hard as I could with the flat of my sound hand; and again the leap, the spring, but only into willingness, obedience, alarm: not anger nor even eagerness. "That'll do," Ned said. "Bring him in." We came up and stopped. He was sweating a little, but that was all. "How do he feel?" Ned said.

I tried to tell him. "The front half of him dont want to run."
"He reached out all right when I touched him," Ned said.

I tried again. "I dont mean his front end. His legs feel all right. His head just dont want to go anywhere."

"U-huh," Ned said. He said to Uncle Parsham: "You seen one of them races. What happened?"

"I saw both of them," Uncle Parsham said. "Nothing happened. He was running good until all of a sudden he must have looked up and seen there wasn't nothing in front of him but empty track."

"U-huh," Ned said. "Jump down." I got down. He stripped off the saddle. "Hand me your foot."

"How do you know that horse has been ridden bareback before?"
Uncle Parsham said.

"I dont," Ned said. "We gonter find out."

“This boy aint got but one hand,” Uncle Parsham said. “Here, Lycurgus—”

But Ned already had my foot. “This boy learnt holding on riding Zack Edmonds’s colts back in Mississippi. I watched him at least one time when I didn’t know what he was holding on with lessen it was his teeth.” He threw me up. The horse did nothing: it squatted, flinched a moment, trembling a little; that was all. “U-huh,” Ned said. “Let’s go eat your breakfast. Whistle-bitches will be here to work him this evening, then maybe Lightning will start having some fun outen this too.”

Lycurgus’s mother, Uncle Parsham’s daughter, was cooking dinner now; the kitchen smelled of the boiling vegetables. But she had kept my breakfast warm — fried sidemeat, grits, hot biscuits and buttermilk or sweet milk or coffee; she untied my riding-glove from my hand so I could eat, a little surprised that I had never tasted coffee since Lycurgus had been having it on Sunday morning since he was two years old.

And I thought I was just hungry until I went to sleep right there in the plate until Lycurgus half dragged, half carried me to his bed in the lean-to. And, as Ned said, Mr Sam Caldwell was some Sam Caldwell; Everbe and Otis got down from the caboose of a freight train which stopped that long at Parsham a few minutes before noon.

It was a through freight, not intended to stop until it reached Florence, Alabama, or some place like that. I dont know how much extra coal it took to pump up the air brakes to stop it dead still at Parsham and then fire the boiler enough to regain speed and make up the lost time. Some Sam Caldwell. Twenty-three skiddoo, as Otis said.

So when the loud unfamiliar voice waked me and Lycurgus’s mother tied the riding-sock back on from where she had put it away when I went to sleep in my plate, and I went outside, there they all were: a surrey tied outside the gate and Uncle Parsham standing again at the top of his front steps, still wearing his hat, and Ned sitting on the next-to-bottom step and Lycurgus standing in the angle between steps and

gallery as if the three of them were barricading the house; and in the yard facing them Everbe (yes, she brought it.

I mean, Ned's grip) and Otis and Boon and the one who was doing the loud talking — a man almost as big as Boon and almost as ugly, with a red face and a badge and a bolstered pistol stuck in his hind pocket, standing between Boon and Everbe, who was still trying to pull away from the hand which was holding her arm.

"Yep," he was saying, "I know old Possum Hood. And more than that, old Possum Hood knows me, dont you, boy?"

"We all knows you here, Mr Butch," Uncle Parsham said with no inflection whatever.

"If any dont, it's just a oversight and soon corrected," Butch said. "If your womenfolks are too busy dusting and sweeping to invite us in the house, tell them to bring some chairs out here so this young lady can set down.

You, boy," he told Lycurgus, "hand down two of them chairs on the gallery there where me and you" — he was talking at Everbe now— "can set in the cool and get acquainted while Sugar Boy" — he meant Boon. I dont know how I knew it— "takes these boys down to look at that horse. Huh?"

Still holding Everbe's elbow, he would tilt her gently away from him until she was almost off balance; then, a little faster though still not a real jerk, pull her back again, she still trying to get loose; now she used her other hand, pushing at his wrist. And now I was watching Boon. "You sure I aint seen you somewhere? at Birdie Watts's maybe? Where you been hiding, anyway? a good-looking gal Like you?" Now Ned got up, not fast.

"Morning, Mr Boon," he said. "You and Mr Shurf want Lucius to bring the horse out?" Butch stopped tilting Everbe. He still held her though.

“Who’s he?” he said. “As a general rule, we dont take to strange niggers around here. We dont object though, providing they notify themselves and then keep their mouths shut.”

“Ned William McCaslin Jefferson Mississippi,” Ned said.

“You got too much name,” Butch said. “You want something quick and simple to answer to around here until you can raise a white mush-tash and goat whisker like old Possum there, and earn it. We dont care where you come from neither; all you’ll need here is just somewhere to go back to. But you’ll likely do all right; at least you got sense enough to recognise Law when you see it.”

“Yes sir,” Ned said. “I’m acquainted with Law. We got it back in Jefferson too.” He said to Boon: “You want the horse?”

“No,” Everbe said; she had managed to free her arm; she moved quickly away; she could have done it sooner by just saying Boon: which was what Butch — deputy, whatever he was — wanted her to do, and we all knew that too. She moved, quickly for a big girl, on until she had me between her and Butch, holding my arm now; I could feel her hand trembling a little as she gripped me. “Come on, Lucius. Show us the way.” She said, her voice tense: a murmur, almost passionate: “How’s your hand? Does it hurt?”

“It’s all right,” I said.

“You sure? You’d tell me? Does wearing that sock on it help?”

“It’s all right,” I said. “I’d tell you.” We went back to the stable that way, Everbe almost dragging me to keep me between her and Butch. But it was no good; he simply walked me off; I could smell him now — sweat and whiskey — and now I saw the top of the pint bottle in his other hind pocket; he (Butch) holding her elbow again and suddenly I was afraid, because I knew I didn’t — and I wasn’t sure Boon did — know Everbe that well yet. No: not afraid, that wasn’t the word; not afraid, because we — Boon alone — would have taken the pistol away from him and then whipped him, but afraid for Everbe and Uncle Parsham

and Uncle Parsham's home and family when it happened. But I was more than afraid.

I was ashamed that such a reason for fearing for Uncle Parsham, who had to live here, existed; hating (not Uncle Parsham doing the hating, but me doing it) it all, hating all of us for being the poor frail victims of being alive, having to be alive — hating Everbe for being the vulnerable helpless lodestar victim; and Boon for being the vulnerable and helpless victimised; and Uncle Parsham and Lycurgus for being where they had to, couldn't help but watch white people behaving exactly as white people bragged that only Negroes behaved — just as I had hated Otis for telling me about Everbe in Arkansas and hated Everbe for being that helpless lodestar for human debasement which he had told me about and hated myself for listening, having to hear about it, learn about it, know about it; hating that such not only was, but must be, had to be if living was to continue and mankind be a part of it.

And suddenly I was anguished with homesickness, wrenched and wrung and agonised with it: to be home, not just to retrace but to retract, obliterate: make Ned take the horse back to wherever and whoever and however he had got it and get Grandfather's automobile and take it back to Jefferson, in reverse if necessary, travelling backward to unwind, ravel back into No-being, Never-being, that whole course of dirt roads, mudholes, the man and the color-blind mules, Miss Ballenbaugh and Alice and Ephum, so that, as far as I was concerned, they had never been; when sudden and quiet and plain inside me something said Why dont you? Because I could; I needed only say to Boon, "We're going home," and Ned would have returned the horse and my own abject confession would have the automobile located and recovered by the police at the price of merely my shame.

Because I couldn't now. It was too late. Maybe yesterday, while I was still a child, but not now. I knew too much, had seen too much. I was a child no longer now; innocence and childhood were forever lost, forever gone from me. And Everbe was loose again. I had missed seeing how she did it this time: only that she was free, facing him; she said

something inaudible, quick; anyway he was not even touching her now, just looking down at her, grinning.

“Sure, sure,” he said. “Thrash around a little; maybe I like that too; makes it look a little better to old Sugar Boy too. All right, boy,” he said to Ned. “Let’s see that horse.”

“You stay here,” Ned told me. “Me and Lycurgus will get him.” So I stood, next to Everbe at the fence; she was holding my arm again, her hand still shaking a little. Ned and Lycurgus led the horse out. Ned was already looking toward us; he said quickly: “Where’s that other one?”

“Dont tell me you got two of them,” Butch said. But I knew what Ned meant. So did Everbe. She turned quickly.

“Otis!” she said. But he was nowhere in sight.

“Run,” Ned told Lycurgus. “If he aint got into the house yet, maybe you can cut him off. Tell him his aunt wants him. And you stay right with him.” Lycurgus didn’t even wait to say Yes sir: he just gave the lead rope to Ned and departed running. The rest of us stood along the fence — Everbe trying for immobility since that was all she had to find effacement in, but too big for it like the doe is too big for the plum thicket which is all she has available for safety; Boon furious and seething, restraining himself who never before had restrained himself from anything.

Not from fear; I tell you, he was not afraid of that gun and badge: he could and would have taken them both away from Butch and, in a kind of glory, tossed the pistol on the ground halfway between them and then given Butch the first step toward it; and only half from the loyalty which would shield me — and my family (his family) — from the result of such a battle, no matter who won it. Because the other half was chivalry: to shield a woman, even a whore, from one of the predators who debase police badges by using them as immunity to prey on her helpless kind. And a little further along, dissociated though present, Uncle Parsham, the patrician (he bore in his Christian name the patronymic of the very land we stood on), the aristocrat of us all and judge of us all.

“Hell,” Butch said. “He cant win races standing still in a halter. Go on. Trot him across the lot.”

“We just sent for his jockey,” Ned said. “Then you can see him work.” Then he said, “Unlesen you in a hurry to get back to yourn.”

“My what?” Butch said.

“Your law work,” Ned said. “Back in Possum or wherever it is.”

“After coming all the way out here to see a race horse?” Butch said. “All I see so far is a plug standing half asleep in a lot.”

“I’m sho glad you told me that,” Ned said. “I thought maybe you wasn’t interested.” He turned to Boon. “So maybe what you and Miss Corrie better do is go on back to town now and be ready to meet the others when the train comes. You can send the surrey back for Mr Butch and Lucius and that other boy after we breezes Lightning.”

“Ha ha ha,” Butch said, without mirth, without anything. “How’s that for a idea? Huh, Sugar Boy? You and Sweet Thing bobbasheely on back to the hotel now, and me and Uncle Remus and Lord Fauntleroy will mosey along any time up to midnight, providing of course we are through here.” He moved easily along the fence to where Boon stood, watching Boon though addressing Ned: “I cant let Sugar Boy leave without me. I got to stay right with him, or he might get everybody in trouble. They got a law now, about taking good-looking gals across state lines for what they call immortal purposes. Sugar Boy’s a stranger here; he dont know exactly where that state line’s at, and his foot might slip across it while his mind’s on something else — something that aint a foot.

At least we dont call it foot around here. Huh, Sugar Boy?” He slapped Boon on the back, still grinning, watching Boon — one of those slaps which jovial men give one another, but harder, a little too hard but not quite too hard. Boon didn’t move, his hands on the top rail of the gate. They were too sunburned or maybe too ingrained with dirt to turn white.

But I could see the muscles. “Yes sir,” Butch said, watching Boon, grinning, “all friends together for a while yet anyhow. Come one, come all, or come none — for a while longer anyhow. At least until something happens that might put a man not watching what he was doing out of circulation — say a stranger that wouldn’t be missed nohow. Huh, Sugar Boy?” and slapped Boon again on the back, still harder this time, watching him, grinning. And Everbe saw Boon’s hand this time too; she said, quick, not loud:

“Boon.” Like that: “Boon.” So had Uncle Parsham.

“Here come the other boy,” he said. Otis was just coming around the corner of the house, Lycurgus looming almost twice as tall right behind him. Even knowing what was wrong about him didn’t help Otis much. But Ned was the one who was looking at him hard. He came up gently; strolling, in fact.

“Somebody want me?” he said.

“It was me,” Ned said. “But I aint seed you in daylight before and maybe my mind gonter change.” He said to Lycurgus: “Get the tack.” So we — they — tacked up and Lycurgus and Ned led the way back along the lane to the creek pasture, we following, even Butch giving his attention to the matter in hand now; unless, as the angler does, he was deliberately giving Everbe a little rest to build up her strength to rush and thrash once more against the hook of that tin star on his sweaty shirt.

When we reached the pasture, Ned and Otis were already facing each other about eight feet apart; behind them, Lycurgus stood with the horse. Ned looked strained and tired. As far as I knew, he had had no sleep at all unless he actually had slept for an hour or so on the hay in the boxcar. But that’s all he was: not exhausted by sleeplessness, just annoyed by it. Otis was picking his nose, still gently. “A know-boy,” Ned was saying. “As knowing a boy as I ever seed. I just hopes that when you’re twice your age, you will still know half as much.”

“Much obliged,” Otis said.

“Can you ride a horse?” Ned said.

“I been living on a Arkansas farm for a right smart number of years,” Otis said.

“Can you ride a horse?” Ned said. “Nemmine where you used to live or still does.”

“Now, that depends, as the fellow says,” Otis said. “I figgered I was going back home this morning. That I would a long been in Kiblett, Arkansas, right this minute. But since my plans got changed without nobody asking me, I aint decided quite yet just what I’m going to do next. How much you paying to get that horse rode?”

“Otis!” Everbe said.

“We aint come to that yet,” Ned said, as gentle as Otis. “The first thing is to get them three heats run and to be in front when at least two of them is finished. Then we’ll git around to how much.”

“Heh heh heh,” Otis said, not laughing either. “That is, there aint going to be nothing to pay nobody with until you win it — that’s you. And you cant even run at it without somebody setting on the horse — that’s me. Is that right?”

“Otis!” Everbe said.

“That’s right,” Ned said. “We all of us working on shares so we’ll have something to divide afterward. Your share will have to wait too, like ourn.”

“Yeah,” Otis said. “I seen that kind of share dividing in the Arkansas cotton business. The trouble is, the share of the fellow that does the sharing is always a little different from the share of the fellow that done the dividing. The fellow that done the sharing is still waiting for his share because he aint yet located where it’s at. So from now on, I’ll just take the cash-in-advance share and let you folks keep all the dividing.”

“How much do that come to?” Ned said.

“You cant be interested, because you aint even run the first heat yet, let alone won it. But I dont mind telling you, in confidence, you might say. It’ll be ten dollars.”

“Otis!” Everbe said. She moved now; she cried, “Aint you ashamed?”

“Hold up, Miss,” Ned said. “I’ll handle it.” He looked tired, but that was all. Without haste he drew a folded flour sack from his hip pocket and unfolded it and took out his worn snap purse and opened it. “Hold out your hand,” he told Lycurgus, who did so while Ned counted slowly onto the palm six frayed dollar bills and then about a cupful of coins of various denominations. “It’s gonter be fifteen cents short, but Mr Hogganbeck will make it up.”

“Make it up to what?” Otis said.

“To what you said. Ten dollars,” Ned said.

“You cant seem to hear neither,” Otis said. “What I said was twenty dollars.” Now Boon moved.

“God damn it,” he said.

“Just hold up,” Ned told him. His hand didn’t even stop, now returning the coins one by one from Lycurgus’s hand, and then the frayed bills, back into the purse, and closed it and folded it back into the flour sack and put the sack back into his pocket. “So you aint gonter ride the horse,” he said to Otis.

“I aint seen my price—” Otis said.

“Mr Boon Hogganbeck there is fixing to hand it to you right now,” Ned said. “Whyn’t you just come right out like a man and say you aint gonter ride that horse? It dont matter why you aint.” They looked at each other. “Come on. Say it out.”

“Naw,” Otis said. “I aint going to ride it.” He said something else, foul, which was his nature; vicious, which was his nature; completely unnecessary, which was his nature too. Yes, even finally knowing what it was didn’t help with him. By this time Everbe had him. She snatched him, hard. And this time he snarled. He cursed her. “Watch out. I aint near done talking yet — if I’m a mind.”

“Say the word,” Butch said. “I’ll beat the hell out of him just on principle; I won’t even bother with pleasure. How the hell did Sugar Boy ever let him get this far without at least one whelp on him?”

“No!” Everbe said to Butch. She still held Otis by the arm. “You’re going back home on the next train!”

“Now you’re tooting,” Otis said. “I’d a been there right now except for you.” She released him.

“Go on back to the surrey,” she said.

“You can’t risk it,” Boon said rapidly to her. “You’ll have to go with him.” He said: “All right. You all go back to town. You can send for me and Lucius about sundown.”

And I knew what that meant, what decision he had wrestled with and licked. But Butch fooled us; the confident angler was letting his fish have the backing too. “Sure,” he said. “Send back for us.” Everbe and Otis went on. “Now that that’s settled, who is going to ride the horse?”

“This boy here,” Ned said. “He a one-handed horse.”

“Heh heh heh,” Butch said; he was laughing this time. “I seen this horse run here last winter. If one hand can even wake him up, it will take more hands than a spider or a daddy longlegs to get him out in front of that horse of Colonel Linscomb’s.”

“Maybe you right,” Ned said. “That’s what we gonter find out now. Son,” he said to Lycurgus, “hand me my coat.” I had not even noticed the coat yet, but now Lycurgus had it; also the peeled switch. Ned took both and put the coat on. He said to Boon and Butch: “Yawl stand over yonder under them trees with Uncle Possum where you’ll be in the shade and won’t distract his mind. Hand me your foot,” he told me.

We did so. I mean, Ned threw me up and Boon and Butch and Lycurgus went back to the tree where Uncle Parsham was already standing. Even though we had made only three trips around the pasture this morning, we had a vestigial path which Lightning would remember whether I could see it or not. Ned led him out to what had been our old starting point this morning.

He spoke, quiet and succinct. He was not Uncle Remus now. But then, he never was when it was just me and members of his own race around:

“That track tomorrow aint but a half a mile, so you gonter go around it twice. Make like this is it, so when he sees that real track tomorrow, he’ll already know beforehand what to expect and to do. You understand?”

“Yes,” I said. “Ride him around it twice—”

He handed me the switch. “Get him going quick and hard. Cut him once with this before he even knows it. Then dont touch him again with it until I tells you to. Keep him going as fast as you can with your heels and talking to him but dont bother him: just set there. Keep your mind on it that you’re going around twice, and try to think his mind onto that too, like you done with them colts out at McCaslin. You cant do it, but you got the switch this time.

But dont touch him with it until I tells you to.” He turned his back; he was doing something now inside the shelter of his coat — something infinitesimal with his hidden hands; suddenly I smelled something, faint yet sharp; I realise now that I should have recognised it at once but I didn’t have time then. He turned back; as when he had coaxed the horse into the boxcar this morning, his hand touched, caressed Lightning’s muzzle for maybe a second, then he stepped back, Lightning already trying to follow him had I not reined him back. “Go!” Ned said. “Cut him!”

I did. He leapt, sprang, out of simple fright: nothing else; it took a half-stride to get his head back and another stride before he realised we wanted to follow the track, path again, at full gallop now, on just enough outside rein to hold him on the course; I already heeling him as hard as I could even before the fright began to fade.

Only, there we were again, just like this morning: going good, obedient enough, plenty of power, but once more with that sense that his head

didn't really want to go anywhere; until we entered the back stretch and he saw Ned again on the opposite side of the ring.

It was the explosion again; he had taken the bit away from me; he had already left the path and was cutting straight across to Ned before I got balance enough to reach my good hand down and take the rein short and haul, wrench him angling back into the track, going hard now; I had to hold him on the outside to make the back turn and into the stretch where he could see Ned again and once more reached for the bit to go straight to him; I was using the cut hand too now to hold him onto the track; it seemed forever until Ned spoke. "Cut him," he said. "Then throw the switch away."

I did so and flung the switch backward; the leap again but I had him now since it only took one rein, the outside one, to keep him on the course, going good now, around the first turn and I was ready for him this time when he would see Ned, on through the back stretch still going, into and around the last turn, still going, Ned standing now about twenty yards beyond where our finish line would be, speaking just exactly loud enough for Lightning to hear him and just exactly as he had spoken to him in the boxcar door last night — and I didn't need the switch now; I wouldn't have had time to use it if I had had it and I thought until then that I had ridden at least one horse that I called hot anyway: a half-bred colt of Cousin Zack's with Morgan on the bottom: but nothing like this, this burst, surge, as if until now we had been dragging a rope with a chunk of wood at the end of it behind us and Ned's voice had cut the rope: "Come on, son. I got it."

So we were standing there, Lightning's muzzle buried to the nostrils in Ned's hand, though all I could smell now was horse-reek and all I could see was the handful of grass which Lightning was eating; Ned himself saying "Hee hee hee" so gentle and quiet that I whispered too: "What?" I said. "What?" But Boon didn't whisper, coming up. "I'll be God damned. What the hell did you tell him?"

“Nothing,” Ned said. “Just if he want his supper, to come on and get it.” And not Butch either: bold, confident, unconvinced, without scruple or pity.

“Well, well,” he said. He didn’t draw Lightning’s head up out of Ned’s hand: he jerked it up, then rammed the bit home when Lightning started back.

“Lemme do it,” Ned said quickly. “What you want to find out?”

“Any time I need help handling horses around here, I’ll holler,” Butch said. “And not for you. I’ll save you to holler for down in Mississippi.” He lifted Lightning’s lip and looked at his gums, then at his eyes. “Dont you know it’s against the law to dope a horse for a race? Maybe you folks down there in them swamps aint heard about it, but it’s so.”

“We got horse doctors in Mississippi though,” Ned said. “Send for one of them to come and see if he been doped.”

“Sure, sure,” Butch said. “Only, why did you give it to him a day ahead of the race? to see if it would work?”

“That’s right,” Ned said. “If I give him nothing. Which I aint. Which if you knows horses, you already knows.”

“Sure, sure,” Butch said again. “I dont interfere with no man’s business secrets — providing they work. Is this horse going to run like that again tomorrow? I dont mean once: I mean three times.”

“He dont need to do it but twice,” Ned said.

“All right,” Butch said. “Twice. Is he?”

“Ask Mr Hogganbeck there if he hadn’t better do it twice,” Ned said.

“I aint asking Mr Sugar Boy,” Butch said. “I’m asking you.”

“I can make him do it twice,” Ned said.

“Fair enough,” Butch said. “In fact, if all you got is three more doses, I wouldn’t even risk but twice. Then if he misses the second one, you can use the last one to get back to Mississippi on.”

“I done thought of that too,” Ned said. “Walk him back to the barn,” he said to me. “Cool him out. Then we’ll bath him.”

Butch watched that too, some of it. We went back to the barn and untacked and Lycurgus brought a bucket and a rag and Lycurgus washed him down and dried him with crokersacks before stalling and feeding him — or had started to. Because Butch said, “Here, boy, run to the house and set the water bucket and some sugar on the front gallery.

Me and Mr Sugar Boy are going to have a toddy.” Though Lycurgus didn’t move until Uncle Parsham said, “Go.” He went then, Boon and Butch following. Uncle Parsham stood at the door of the stable, watching them (Butch, that is) — a lean dramatic old man all black-and-white: black pants, white shirt, black face and hat behind the white hair and moustache and imperial. “Law,” he said. He said it calmly, with cold and detached contempt.

“A man that never had nothing in it nohow, one of them little badges goes to his head so fast it makes yourn swim too,” Ned said. “Except it aint the badge so much as that pistol, that likely all the time he was a little boy, he wanted to tote, only he knowed all the time that soon as he got big enough to own one, the law wouldn’t let him tote it. Now with that badge too, he dont run no risk of being thrown in jail and having it took away from him; he can still be a little boy in spite of he had to grow up. The risk is, that pistol gonter stay on that little boy mind just so long before some day it gonter shoot at something alive before he even knowed he aimed to.” Then Lycurgus came back.

“They waiting for you,” he told me. “The surrey.”
“It’s back from town already?” I said.

“It never went to town,” Lycurgus said. “It never left. She been setting in it out there with that-ere boy all the time, waiting for you all. She say to come on.”

“Wait,” Ned said. I stopped; I still had the riding-sock on and I thought he meant that. But he was looking at me. “You gonter start running into folks now.”

“What folks?” I said.

“That word has done got around to. About this race.”

“How got around?” I said.

“How do word ever get around?” he said. “It dont need no messenger; all it needs is two horses that can run to be inside the same ten miles of each other. How you reckon that Law got here? maybe smelled that white girl four or five miles away like a dog? I know; maybe I hoped like Boon Hogganbeck still believes: that we could get these two horses together here all nice and private and run that race, win or lose, and me and you and him could either go back home or go any other place we wants providing it’s longer away than Boss Priest’s arm. But not now. You gonter start meeting them from now on. And tomorrow they gonter be thicker still.”

“You mean we can run the race?”

“We got to now. Maybe we been had to ever since me and Boon realised that Boss had done took his hand off of that automobile for as long as twenty-four hours. But now we sho got to run it.”

“What do you want me to do?” I said.

“Nothing. I’m just telling you so you wont be surprised in advance. All we got to do is get them two horses on the same track and pointed the same way and you just set there on Lightning and do like I tell you. Go on, now, before they start hollering for you.”

IX

NED WAS RIGHT. I mean, about word already being around. There was nothing wrong with my hand when Everbe took the riding-sock off. I mean, it felt like anybody’s hand would that had been cut across the inside of the fingers yesterday. I dont believe it had bled any more even when I used it against Lightning’s pulling this afternoon. But not Everbe. So we stopped at the doctor’s first, about a mile this side of town. Butch knew him, knew where but I dont know how Everbe persuaded him to take us there — nagged him or threatened or promised or

maybe just did it like a big girl trout so busy fussing around a child trout that she quit behaving like there was any such thing in existence as a barbed hook with a line fastened to it and so the fisherman had to do something even if only getting rid of the child trout.

Or maybe it was not Everbe but rather the empty flask, since the next drink would have to be at the hotel in Parsham. Because as I came around the house, Lycurgus's mother was standing at the edge of the gallery holding a sugar bowl and a water bucket with a gourd dipper and Butch and Boon were just draining the two tumblers and Lycurgus was just picking up the empty flask where Butch had flung it into a rosebush.

So Butch took us to the doctor's — a little once-white house in a little yard filled with the kind of rank-growing rank-smelling dusty flowers that bloom in the late summer and fall, a fat iron-gray woman in pince-nez like a retired schoolteacher who even fifteen years later still hated eight-year-old children, who came to the door and looked at us once (Ned was right) and said back into the house, "It's them race horse folks," and turned and vanished toward the back, Butch moving right on in before she could turn, jovial, already welcome — or somebody damn well better see that he was (the badge again, you see; wearing it or simply being known to possess one, to enter any house in any other manner would be not a mere individual betrayal but a caste betrayal and debasement) — saying,

"Howdy, Doc; got a patient for you," to an iron-gray man too if the tobacco juice were bleached out of his unshaven whiskers, in a white shirt like Ned's but not as clean, and a black coat too with a long streak of day before yesterday's egg on it, who looked and smelled like something also, except it wasn't just alcohol, or anyway all alcohol.

"Me and Brother Hogganbeck will wait in the parlor," Butch said. "Dont bother; I know where the bottle's at. Dont worry about Doc," he said to Boon. "He dont hardly ever touch whiskey unless he just has to. The law allows him one shot of ether as a part of the cure for every patient that can show blood or a broken bone. If it's just a little old cut or broke finger or ripped hide like this, Doc divides the treatment with the

patient: he drinks all the ether and lets the patient have all the cure. Haw haw haw. This way.”

So Butch and Boon went that way, and Everbe and I (you have doubtless noticed that nobody had missed Otis yet. We got out of the surrey; it appeared to be Butch’s; anyway he was driving it; there had been some delay at Uncle Parsham’s while Butch tried to persuade, then cajole, then force Everbe to get in the front seat with him, which she foiled by getting into the back seat and holding me by one arm and holding Otis in the surrey with her other hand, until Boon got in front with Butch — and first Butch, then the rest of us were somehow inside the doctor’s hall but nobody remembered Otis at that moment) followed the doctor into another room containing a horsehair sofa with a dirty pillow and a wadded quilt on it, and a roll-top desk cluttered with medicine bottles and more of them on the mantel beneath which the ashes of last winter’s final fire had not yet been disturbed, and a washstand with a bowl and pitcher and a chamber pot that somebody hadn’t emptied yet either in one corner and a shotgun in the other; and if Mother had been there his fingernails would have touched no scratch belonging to her, let alone four cut fingers, and evidently Everbe agreed with her; she — Everbe — said, “I’ll unwrap it,” and did so. I said the hand was all right. The doctor looked at it through his steel-rimmed spectacles.

“What did you put on it?” he said. Everbe told him. I know what it is now. The doctor looked at her. “How’d you happen to have that handy?” he said. Then he lifted the spectacles by one corner and looked at her again and said, “Oh.” Then he said, “Well, well,” and lowered the spectacles again and — yes he did: it was a sigh — said, “I aint been to Memphis in thirty-five years,” and stood there a minute and — I tell you, it was a sigh — said, “Yes. Thirty-five years,” and said, “If I was you I wouldn’t do anything to it. Just bandage it again.” Yes, exactly like Mother: he got the bandage out but she put it on. “You the boy going to ride that horse tomorrow?” he said.

“Yes,” Everbe said.

“Beat that Linscomb horse this time, durn him.”

“We’ll try,” Everbe said. “How much do we owe you?”

“Nothing,” he said. “You already cured it. Just beat that durn Linscomb horse tomorrow.”

“I want to pay you something for looking at it,” Everbe said. “For telling us it’s all right.”

“No,” he said. He looked at her: the old man’s eyes behind the spectacles magnified yet unfocusable, as irreparable as eggs, until you would think they couldn’t possibly grasp and hold anything as recent as me and Everbe.

“Yes,” Everbe said. “What is it?”

“Maybe if you had a extra handkerchief or something . . .” He said: “Yes, thirty-five years. I had one once, when I was a young man, thirty, thirty-five years ago. Then I got married, and it . . .” He said, “Yes. Thirty-five years.”

“Oh,” Everbe said. She turned her back to us and bent over; her skirts rustled; it was not long; they rustled again and she turned back. “Here,” she said. It was a garter.

“Beat that durn horse!” he said. “Beat him! You can do it!” Now we heard the voices — voice, that is, Butch’s — loud in the little hall before we got there:

“What do you know? Sugar Boy wont take a drink no more. All boys together, give and take, never snatch without whistling first, and now he insults me.” He stood grinning at Boon, triumphant, daring. Boon looked really dangerous now. Like Ned (all of us) he was worn out for sleep too. But all the load Ned had to carry was the horse; Everbe and Butch’s badge were not his burden. “Huh, boy?” Butch said; now he was going to slap Boon on the back again with that jovial force which was just a little too hard but not quite.

“Dont do it again,” Boon said. Butch stopped. He didn’t retract the motion: he just stopped it, grinning at Boon.

“My name’s Mister Lovemaiden,” he said. “But call me Butch.”

After a while Boon said, "Lovemaiden."

"Butch," Butch said.

After a while Boon said, "Butch."

"That's a boy," Butch said. He said to Everbe: "Doc fix you up all right? Maybe I ought to warn you about Doc. They claim when he was a young squirt fifty-sixty years ago, he would have had one snatch at your drawers before he even tipped his hat."

"Come on," Boon said. "You paid him?"

"Yes," Everbe said. We went outside. And that was when somebody said, Where is Otis? No, it was Everbe of course; she just looked once and said, "Otis!" quite loud, strong, not to say urgent, not to say alarmed and desperate.

"Don't tell me he's scared of horses even tied to a gatepost," Butch said.

"Come on," Boon said. "He's just gone on ahead; he ain't got nowhere else to go. We'll pick him up."

"But why?" Everbe said. "Why didn't he—"

"How do I know?" Boon said. "Maybe he's right." He meant Butch.

Then he meant Otis: "For all he's as knowing a little son of a bitch as ever come out of Arkansas or Mississippi either for that matter, he's still an arrant coward. Come on."

So we got in the surrey and went on to town. Except that I was on Everbe's side about Otis; when you couldn't see him was a good time to be already wondering where he was and why. I never saw anybody lose public confidence as fast as he could; he would have had a hard time now finding anybody in this surrey to take him to another zoo or anywhere else. And it wasn't going to be much longer before he couldn't have found anybody in Parsham either.

Only we didn't overtake him. He wasn't on the road all the way to the hotel. And Ned was wrong. I mean about the increasing swarm of horse race devotees we would be running into from now on. Maybe I had expected to find the entire hotel veranda lined with them, waiting for

us and watching us arrive. If so, I was wrong; there was nobody there at all. In the winter of course, during the quail season and especially during the two weeks of the National Trials, it would be different.

But in those days, unlike London, Parsham had no summer season; people went elsewhere: to water or mountains: Raleigh, near Memphis, or Iuka not far away in Mississippi, or to the Ozarks or Cumberlands. (Nor, for that matter, does it have one now, nor indeed does any place else, either winter or summer season; there are no seasons at all any more, with interiors artificially contrived at sixty degrees in summer and ninety degrees in winter, so that mossbacked recidivists like me must go outside in summer to escape cold and in winter to escape heat; including the automobiles also which once were mere economic necessities but are now social ones, the moment already here when, if all the human race ever stops moving at the same instant, the surface of the earth will seize, solidify: there are too many of us; humanity will destroy itself not by fission but by another beginning with f which is a verb-active also as well as a conditional state; I won't see it but you may: a law compelled and enforced by dire and frantic social — not economic: social — desperation permitting a woman but one child as she is now permitted but one husband.)

But in winter of course (as now), it was different, with the quail season and the Grand National Trials, with the rich money of oil and wheat barons from Wall Street and Chicago and Saskatchewan, and the fine dogs with pedigrees more jealous than princes, and the fine breeding and training kennels only minutes away now by automobile — Red Banks and Michigan City and La Grange and Germantown, and the names — Colonel Linscomb, whose horse (we assumed) we were going to race against tomorrow, and Horace Lytle and George Peyton as magical among bird-dog people as Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb among baseball aficionados, and Mr Jim Avant from Hickory Flat and Mr Paul Rainey just a few miles down Colonel Sartoris's railroad toward Jefferson — hound men both, who (I suppose) among these mere pedigreed pointers and setters, called themselves slumming; the vast rambling hotel booming then, staffed and elegant, the very air itself

suave and murmurous with money, littered with colored ribbons and cluttered with silver cups.

But there was nobody there now, the quiet street empty with May dust (it was after six now; Parsham would be at home eating — or preparing to eat — supper), vacant even of Otis, though he could be, probably was, inside. And what was even more surprising, to me anyway, vacant also of Butch. He simply drove us up to the door and put us out and drove away, pausing only long enough to give Everbe one hard jeering leer and Boon one hard leering jeer, if anything a little harder than Everbe's, saying, "Dont worry, boy, I'll be back.

If you got any business still hanging, better get it unhung before I get back or something might get tore," and drove away. So apparently he also had somewhere he had to be occasionally: a home; I was still ignorant and innocent (not as much as I was twenty-four hours ago, but still tainted) but I was on Boon's side, my loyalty was to him, not to mention to Everbe, and I had assimilated enough (whether I had digested all of it yet or not) since yesterday, to know exactly what I meant when I hoped that maybe he had a wife in it — some innocent ravished out of a convent whose friendless avengeless betrayal would add another charge to the final accounting of his natural ruthless baseness; or better: an ambidextrous harridan who could cope with him by at least recording into his face each one of his countermarital victories. Because probably half the pleasure he got out of fornication was having it known who the victim was. But I wronged him. He was a bachelor.

But Otis was not inside either: only the single temporary clerk in the half-shrouded lobby and the single temporary waiter flapping his napkin in the door of the completely shrouded dining room save for a single table set out for such anonymous passers-by as we were — so far were, that is. But Otis had not been seen. "I aint wondering so much where he's at," Boon said, "as I am about what the hell he has done this time that we aint found out about yet."

"Nothing!" Everbe said. "He's just a child!"

“Sure,” Boon said. “Just a little armed child. When he gets big enough to steal—”

“Stop!” Everbe said. “I wont—”

“All right, all right,” Boon said. “Find, then. Find enough money to buy a knife with a six-inch blade in place of that two-inch pocketknife, anybody that turns his back on him had sho enough better be wearing one of them old-time iron union suits like you see in museums. I got to talk to you,” he told her. “Supper’ll be soon, and then we got to meet the train. And that tin-badge stallion will be neighing and prancing back here any time now.” He took her arm. “Come on.”

That was when I had to begin to listen to Boon. I mean, I had to. Everbe compelled it. She wouldn’t even go with him unless I came too. We — they — went to the ladies’ parlor; there wasn’t much time now; we would have to eat supper and then go to the depot to meet Miss Reba.

In those days females didn’t run in and out of gentlemen’s rooms in hotels as, I am told, they do now, even wearing, I am told, what the advertisements call the shorts or scanties capable of giving women the freedom they need in their fight for freedom; in fact, I had never seen a woman alone in a hotel before (Mother would not have been here without Father) and I remember how I wondered how Everbe without a wedding ring even could have got in.

They — the hotels — had what were known as ladies’ parlors, like this one where we now were — a smaller though still more elegant room, most of it likewise shrouded in holland bags. But I was still on Boon’s side; I didn’t pass the doorway but stopped outside, where Everbe could know where I was, within call, even if she couldn’t actually see me. So I heard.

Oh yes, listened. I would have listened anyway; I had gone too far by now in sophistication and the facts of life to stop now, just as I had gone too far in stealing automobiles and race horses to quit now. So I could hear them: Everbe; and almost at once she was crying again: “No! I wont! Let me alone!” Then Boon:

“But why? You said you loved me. Was that just lying too?” Then Everbe:

“I do love you. That’s why. Let me alone! Turn me loose! Lucius! Lucius!” Then Boon:

“Shut up. Stop now.” Then nothing for a minute. I didn’t look, peep, I just listened. No: just heard: “If I thought you were just two-timing me with that God damned tin-badged—” Then Everbe:

“No! No! I’m not!” Then something I couldn’t hear, until Boon said:

“What? Quit? What do you mean, quit?” Then Everbe:

“Yes! I’ve quit! Not any more. Never!” Then Boon:

“How’re you going to live? What will you eat? Where you going to sleep?” And Everbe:

“I’m going to get a job. I can work.”

“What can you do? You aint got no more education than me. What can you do to make a living?”

“I can wash dishes. I can wash and iron. I can learn to cook. I can do something, I can even hoe and pick cotton. Let me go, Boon. Please. Please. I’ve got to. Cant you see I’ve got to?” Then her feet running, even on the thick carpet; she was gone. So Boon caught me this time. His face was pretty bad now. Ned was lucky; all he had to frazzle over was just a horse race.

“Look at me,” Boon said. “Look at me good. What’s wrong with me? What the hell’s wrong with me?”

It used to be that I . . .” His face looked like it was going to burst. He started again: “And why me? Why the hell me? Why the hell has she got to pick out me to reform on? God damn it, she’s a whore, cant she understand that? She’s in the paid business of belonging to me exclusive the minute she sets her foot where I’m at like I’m in the paid business of belonging to Boss and Mr Maury exclusive the minute I set my foot where they’re at. But now she’s done quit.

For private reasons. She cant no more. She aint got no more private rights to quit without my say-so too than I got to quit without Boss’s and Mr Maury’s say-so too—” He stopped, furious and baffled, raging

and helpless; and more: terrified. It was the Negro waiter, flapping his napkin in this doorway now.

Boon made a tremendous effort; Ned with nothing but a horse race to win didn't even know what trouble was. "Go tell her to come on to supper. We got to meet that train. Her room is Number Five."

But she wouldn't come out. So Boon and I ate alone. His face still didn't look much better. He ate like you put meat into a grinder: not like he either wanted it or didn't want it, but it was just time to eat. After a while I said, "Maybe he started walking back to Arkansas. He said two or three times this afternoon that that's where he would have been by now if folks hadn't kept on interfering with him."

"Sure," Boon said. "Maybe he just went on ahead to locate that dish-washing job for her. Or maybe he reformed too and they're both going right straight to heaven without stopping off at Arkansas or nowhere else, and he just went ahead to find out how to pass Memphis without nobody seeing them." Then it was time to go. I had been watching the edge of her dress beyond the dining room door for about two minutes, but now the waiter himself came.

"Two-O-Eight, sir," he said. "Just blowed for One Mile Crossing." So we went across to the depot, not far, the three of us walking together, mutual overnight hotel guests. I mean we — they — were not fighting now; we — they — could even have talked, conversed, equable and inconsequential. Everbe would have, only Boon would need to speak first.

Not far: merely to cross the tracks to reach the platform, the train already in sight now, the two of them (Boon and Everbe) shackled yet estranged, alien yet indissoluble, confounded yet untwainable by no more than what Boon thought was a whim: who (Boon) for all his years was barely older than me and didn't even know that women no more have whims than they have doubts or illusions or prostate troubles; the train, the engine passing us in hissing thunder, sparks flying from the brake shoes; it was the long one, the big one, the cannonball, the

Special: the baggage cars, the half Jim Crow smoker, then the day coaches and the endless pullmans, the dining car at the end, slowing; it was Sam Caldwell's train and if Everbe and Otis had travelled to Parsham in the caboose of a scheduled through freight, Miss Reba would be in a drawing room, if indeed she was not in the president's private car; the train stopping at last though still no vestibule opened, no white-jacketed porter nor conductor, though certainly Sam would have been watching for us; until Boon said, "Hell.

The smoker," and began to run. Then we all saw them, far ahead: Sam Caldwell in his uniform on the cinders helping Miss Reba down, someone — another woman — following her, and not from the smoking car at all but from the Jim Crow half of it where Negroes travelled; the train — it was the Special for Washington and New York, the cannonball wafting the rich women in diamonds and the men with dollar cigars in suave and insulate transmigration across the earth — already moving again so that Sam had only time to wave back at us from the step, diminishing eastward behind the short staccato puffs and the long whistle blasts and at last the red diminishing twin lamps, and the two women standing among the grips and bags on the vacant cinders, Miss Reba bold and handsome and chic and Minnie beside her looking like death.

"We've had trouble," Miss Reba said. "Where's the hotel?" We went there. Now, in the lighted lobby, we could see Minnie. Her face was not like death. Death is peaceful. What Minnie's fixed close-lipped brooding face boded was not peaceful and it wasn't boded at her either. The clerk came. "I'm Mrs Binford," Miss Reba said. "You got my wire about a cot in my room for my maid?"

"Yes, Mrs Binford," the clerk said. "We have special quarters for servants, with their own dining room—"

"Keep them," Miss Reba said. "I said a cot in my room. I want her with me. We'll wait in the parlor while you make it up. Where is it?" But she had already located the ladies' parlor, we following. "Where is he?" she said.

"Where is who?" Everbe said.

“You know who,” Miss Reba said. And suddenly I knew who, and that in another moment I would know why. But I didn’t have time. Miss Reba sat down. “Sit down,” she told Minnie. But Minnie didn’t move. “All right,” Miss Reba said. “Tell them.” Minnie smiled at us. It was ghastly: a frantic predatory rictus, an anguished ravening gash out of which the beautiful and matchless teeth arched outward to the black orifice where the gold one had been; I knew now why Otis had fled Parsham even though he had had to do it on foot; oh yes, at that moment fifty-six years ago I was one with you now in your shocked and horrified unbelief, until Minnie and Miss Reba told us.

“It was him!” Minnie said. “I know it was him! He taken it while I was asleep!”

“Hell fire,” Boon said. “Somebody stole a tooth out of your mouth and you didn’t even know it?”

“God damn it, listen,” Miss Reba said. “Minnie had that tooth made that way, so she could put it in and take it out — worked extra and scrimped and saved for — how many years was it, Minnie? three, wasn’t it? — until she had enough money to have her own tooth took out and that God damned gold one put in. Oh sure, I tried my best to talk her out of it — ruin that set of natural teeth that anybody else would give a thousand dollars apiece, and anything else she had too; not to mention all the extra it cost her to have it made so she could take it out when she ate—”

“Took it out when she ate?” Boon said. “What the hell is she saving her teeth for?”

“I wanted that tooth a long time,” Minnie said, “and I worked and saved to get it, extra work. I aint going to have it all messed up with no spit-mixed something to eat.”

“So she would take it out when she ate,” Miss Reba said, “and put it right there in front of her plate where she could see it, not only watch it but enjoy it too while she was eating. But that wasn’t the way he got it; she says she put it back in when she finished breakfast, and I believe

her; she aint never forgot it before because she was proud of it, it was valuable, it had cost her too much; no more than you would put that God damned horse down somewhere that's probably cost you a damned sight more than a gold tooth, and forget it—”

“I know I never,” Minnie said. “I put it back as soon as I ate. I remember. Only I was plumb wore out and tired—”

“That’s right,” Miss Reba said. She was talking to Everbe now: “I reckon I was going good when you all come in last night. It was daybreak before I come to my senses enough to quit, and the sun was up when I finally persuaded Minnie to take a good slug of gin and see the front door was bolted and go on back to bed, and I went up myself and woke Jackie and told her to keep the place shut, I didn’t care if every horny bastard south of St Louis come knocking, not to let nobody in before six oclock this evening. So Minnie went back and laid down on her cot in the storeroom off the back gallery and I thought at first maybe she forgot to lock that door—”

“Course I locks it,” Minnie said. “That’s where the beer’s at. I been keeping that door locked ever since that boy got here because I remembered him from last summer when he come to visit.”

“So there she was,” Miss Reba said, “wore out and dead asleep on that cot with the door locked and never knowed nothing until—”

“I woke up,” Minnie said. “I was still so tired and wore out that I slept too hard, like you do; I just laid there and I knowed something felt a little funny in my mouth. But I just thought maybe it was a scrap of something had done got caught in it no matter how careful I was, until I got up and went to the looking glass and looked—”

“I wonder they never heard her in Chattanooga, let alone just in Parsham,” Miss Reba said. “And the door still locked—”

“It was him!” Minnie said, cried. “I know it was! He been worrying me at least once every day how much it cost and why didn’t I sell it and how much could I get for it and where would I go to sell it at—”

“Sure,” Miss Reba said. “That’s why he squalled like a wildcat this morning when you told him he wasn’t going back home but would have to come on to Parsham with you,” she told Everbe. “So when he heard the train whistle, he run, huh? Where do you figger he is? Because I’m going to have Minnie’s tooth back.”

“We dont know,” Everbe said. “He just disappeared out of the surrey about half past five oclock. We thought he would have to be here, because he aint got anywhere else to go. But we haven’t found him yet.”

“Maybe you aint looked right,” Miss Reba said. “He aint the kind you can whistle out. You got to smoke him out like a rat or a snake.” The clerk came back. “All right now?” Miss Reba said.

“Yes, Mrs Binford,” the clerk said. Miss Reba got up.

“I’ll get Minnie settled down and stay with her until she goes to sleep. Then I’d like some supper,” she told the clerk. “It dont matter what it is.”

“It’s a little late,” the clerk said. “The dining room—”

“And it’s going to be still later after a while,” Miss Reba said. “It dont matter what it is. Come on, Minnie.” She and Minnie went out. Then the clerk was gone too. We stood there; none of us had sat down; she — Everbe — just stood there: a big girl that stillness looked well on; grief too, as long as it was still, like this. Or maybe not grief so much as shame.

“He never had no chance back there,” she said. “That’s why I thought . . . To get him away even for just a week last summer. And then this year, especially after you all came too and as soon as I saw Lucius I knew that that was the way I had been wanting him to be all the time, only I didn’t know neither how to tell him, learn him. And so I thought maybe just being around Lucius, even for just two or three days—”

“Sure,” Boon said. “Refinement.” Now he went to her, awkward. He didn’t offer to put his arms around her again. He didn’t even touch her, really. He just patted her back; it looked almost as hard, his hand did, as insensitive and heavy, as when Butch had slapped his this afternoon. But it wasn’t at all. “It’s all right,” he said. “It aint nothing, see. You were doing the best you knowed. You done good. Come on, now.” It was the waiter again.

“Your coachman’s in the kitchen, sir,” he said. “He says it’s important.”
“My coachman?” Boon said. “I aint got no coachman.”

“It’s Ned,” I said, already moving. Then Everbe was too, ahead of Boon. We followed the waiter back to the kitchen. Ned was standing quite close to the cook, a tremendous Negro woman who was drying dishes at the sink. He was saying,

“If it’s money worrying your mind, Good-looking, I’m the man what—” and saw us and read Boon’s mind like a flash: “Ease your worry. He’s out at Possum’s. What’s he done this time?”

“What?” Boon said.

“It’s Otis,” I said. “Ned found him.”

“I didn’t,” Ned said. “I hadn’t never lost him. Uncle Possum’s hounds did. Put him up a gum sapling behind the henhouse about a hour ago, until Lycurgus went and got him. He wouldn’t come in with me. In fact, he acted like he didn’t aim to go nowhere right away. What’s he done this time?” We told him. “So she’s here too,” he said. He said quietly: “Hee hee hee.” He said: “Then he wont be there when I get back.”

“What do you mean?” Boon said.

“Would you still be there, if you was him?” Ned said. “He knows that by this time that gal’s done woke up and found that tooth missing. He must a been knowing that Miss Reba long enough by now to know she aint gonter stop until she gets her hand on him and turns him upside down and shake until that tooth falls out of wherever he’s got it.

I told him myself where I was going on that mule, and anybody there can tell him what time that train got in and how long it will take

somebody to get back out there. Would you still be there if you had that tooth?"

"All right," Boon said. "What's he going to do with it?"

"If it was anybody else but him," Ned said, "I'd say he had three chances with it: sell it or hide it or give it away. But since it's him, he aint got but two: sell it or hide it, and if it's got to just stay hid somewhere, it might just as well be back in that gal's mouth as fur as he's concerned. So the best place to sell a gold tooth quick would be back in Memphis.

Only Memphis is too fur to walk, and to get on the train (which would cost money, which he likely is got providing he is desperate enough to spend some of hisn) he would have to come back to Possum, where somebody might see him. So the next best quick place to sell that gold tooth will be at that race track tomorrow.

If it was you or me, we might likely bet that tooth on one of them horses tomorrow. But he aint no betting man. Betting's too slow for him, not to mention uncertain. But that race track will be a good place to start looking for him. It's too bad I didn't know about that tooth whilst I had my hand on him tonight. Maybe I could a reasoned it out of him.

Then, if he belonged to me, Mr Sam Caldwell gonter be through here on that west-bound train at six-fawty tomorrow morning and I'd a had him at the depot and turned him over to Mr Sam and told Mr Sam not to lift his hand offen him until the door shut on the first train leaving for Arkansas tomorrow."

"Can you find him tomorrow?" Everbe said. "I've got to find him. He's just a child. I'll pay for the tooth, I'll buy Minnie another one. But I've got to find him. He'll say he hasn't got it, he never saw it, but I've got—"

"Sho," Ned said. "That's what I'd say too if it was me. I'll try. I'll be in early tomorrow morning to get Lucius, but the best chance gonter be at

that track tomorrow just before the race.” He said to me: “Folks is already kind of dropping by Possum’s lot like they wasn’t noticing themselves doing it, likely trying to find out who it is this time that still believes that horse can run a race. So likely we gonter have a nice crowd tomorrow. It’s late now, so you go get some sleep whilst I takes that mule of Possum’s back home to bed too. Where’s your sock? You aint lost it?”

“It’s in my pocket,” I said.

“Be sho you dont,” he said. “The mate to it is the left-footed one and a left-footed sock is unlucky unlesen you wears both of them.” He turned, but no further than the fat cook; he said to her now: “Unlesen my mind changes to staying in town tonight. What time you setting breakfast, Good-looking?”

“The soonest time after your jaws is too far away to chomp it,” the cook said.

“Good night, all,” Ned said. Then he was gone. We went back to the dining room, where the waiter, in his short sleeves now and without his collar and tie, brought Miss Reba a plate of the pork chops and grits and biscuits and blackberry jam we had had for supper, neither hot nor cold now but lukewarm, in deshabelle like the waiter, you might say.

“Did you get her to sleep?” Everbe said.

“Yes,” Miss Reba said. “That little son of a—” and cut it off and said, “Excuse me. I thought I had seen everything in my business, but I never thought I’d have a tooth stolen in one of my houses. I hate little bastards. They’re like little snakes. You can handle a big snake because you been already warned to watch out.

But a little one has already bit you behind before you even knew it had teeth. Where’s my coffee?” The waiter brought it and went away. And then even that big shrouded dining room was crowded; it was like every time Boon and Butch got inside the same four walls everything compounded, multiplied, leaving not really room for anything else.

He — Butch — had been back to the doctor's, or maybe in the tin badge business you knew everybody who didn't dare refuse you a free drink. And it was getting late, and I was tired, but here he was again; and suddenly I knew that up to now he hadn't really been anything and that we were only just starting with him now, standing in the door, bulging, bright-eyed, confident, breezy and a little redder, the badge itself seeming to bulge at us as with a life of its own on his sweaty shirt, he — Butch — wearing it not as the official authorisation of his unique dedication, but as a boy scout wears his merit badge: as both the unique and hard-won reward and emblem of a specialisation and the pre-absolution for any other activities covered or embraced by its mystic range; at that moment Everbe rose quickly across the table and almost scuttled around it and into the chair next Miss Reba, whom Butch was looking at, bulging at now. And that was when I rated Boon down a notch and left Everbe first for trouble. All Boon had was Butch; she had Boon and Butch both.

“Well well,” Butch said, “is all Catalpa Street moving east to Possum?” So that at first I thought he might be a friend or at least a business acquaintance of Miss Reba's. But if he was, he didn't remember her name. But then even at eleven I was learning that there are people like Butch who don't remember anybody except in the terms of their immediate need of them, and what he needed now (or anyway could use) was another woman, he didn't care who provided she was more or less young and pleasing. No: he didn't really need one: he just happened to find one already in the path, like one lion on his way to fight another lion over an antelope that he never had any doubts about licking (I mean licking the lion, not the antelope) would still be a fool not to try throwing in, just for luck you might say, another antelope if he happened to find one straying in the path. Except that Miss Reba turned out not to be an antelope. What Butch found was another lion. He said: “This is what I call Sugar Boy using his head; what's the use of him and me being all racked up over one hunk of meat when here's another exactly like it in all important details except maybe a little difference in the pelt.”

“Who’s that?” Miss Reba said to Everbe. “Friend of yours?”

“No,” Everbe said; she was actually crouching: a big girl, too big to crouch. “Please—”

“She’s telling you,” Boon said. “She aint got no friends no more. She dont want none. She’s quit, gone out of business. Soon as we finish losing this horse race, she’s going away somewhere and get a job washing dishes. Ask her.”

Miss Reba was looking at Everbe. “Please,” Everbe said.

“What do you want?” Miss Reba asked Butch.

“Nothing,” Butch said. “Nothing a-tall. Me and Sugar Boy was kind of bollixed up at one another for a while. But now you showed up, everything is hunky-dory. Twenty-three skiddoo.” He came and took hold of Everbe’s arm. “Come on. The surrey’s outside. Let’s give them a little room.”

“Call the manager,” Miss Reba said, quite loud, to me. I didn’t even have to move; likely, if I had been looking, I could have seen the edge of him too beyond the door. He came in. “Is this man the law here?” Miss Reba said.

“Why, we all know Butch around here, Mrs Binford,” the clerk said. “He’s got as many friends in Parsham as anybody I know. Of course he’s from up at Hardwick; properly speaking, we dont have a law officer right here in Parsham; we aint quite that big yet.” Butch’s rich and bulging warmth had embraced, invited the clerk almost before he could enter the door, as though he — the clerk — had fallen headlong into it and vanished like a mouse into a lump of still-soft ambergris. But now Butch’s eyes were quite cold, hard.

“Maybe that’s what’s wrong around here,” he told the clerk. “Maybe that’s why you dont have no progress and advancement: what you need is a little more law.”

“Aw, Butch,” the clerk said.

“You mean, anybody that wants to can walk in off the street and drag whichever one of your women guests he likes the looks of best, off to the nearest bed like you were running a cat-house?” Miss Reba said.

“Drag who where?” Butch said. “Drag with what? a two-dollar bill?” Miss Reba rose.

“Come on,” she said to Everbe. “There’s a train back to Memphis tonight. I know the owner of this dump. I think I’ll go see him tomorrow—”

“Aw, Butch,” the clerk said. “Wait, Mrs Binford—”

“You go back out front, Virgil,” Butch told the clerk. “It aint only four months to November; some millionaire with two registered bird dogs might walk in any minute, and there wont be nobody out there to show him where to sign his name at. Go on. We’re all friends here.” The clerk went. “Now that that’s all out of the way,” Butch said, reaching for Everbe’s arm again.

“Then you’ll do,” Miss Reba said to Butch. “Let’s me and you go out front, or anywhere else that’s private, too. I got a word for you.”

“About what?” Butch said. She didn’t answer, already walking toward the door. “Private, you say?” Butch said. “Why, sure; any time I cant accommodate a good-looking gal private, I’ll give Sugar Boy full lief to step in.” They went out.

And now, from the lobby, we couldn’t see them beyond the door of the ladies’ parlor, for almost a minute in fact, maybe even a little more, before Miss Reba came back out, still walking steadily, hard and handsome and composed; then Butch a second later, saying, “Is that so, huh? We’ll just see about that,” Miss Reba coming steadily on to where we waited, watching Butch go on across the lobby without even looking at us.

“All right?” Everbe said.

“Yes,” Miss Reba said. “And that goes for you too,” she told Boon. She looked at me. “Jesus,” she said.

“What the hell did you do to him?” Boon said.

“Nothing,” she said over her shoulder, because she was looking at me. “— thought I had seen all the cat-house problems possible. Until I had one with children in it. You brought one in” — she was talking to Everbe now— “that run the landlord off and robbed all the loose teeth and fourteen dollars’ worth of beer; and if that wasn’t enough, Boon Hogganbeck brings one that’s driving my damned girls into poverty and respectability. I’m going to bed and you—”

“Come on,” Boon said. “What did you tell him?”

“What’s that town of yours?” Miss Reba said.

“Jefferson,” Boon said.

“You big-town folks from places like Jefferson and Memphis, with your big-city ideas, you dont know much about Law. You got to come to little places, like this. I know, because I was raised in one. He’s the constable.

He could spend a week in Jefferson or Memphis, and you wouldn’t even see him. But here among the folks that elected him (the majority of twelve or thirteen that voted for him, and the minority of nine or ten or eleven that didn’t and are already sorry for it or damned soon will be) he dont give a damn about the sheriff of the county nor the governor of the state nor the president of the United States all three rolled into one. Because he’s a Baptist.

I mean, he’s a Baptist first, and then he’s the Law. When he can be a Baptist and the Law both at the same time, he will. But any time the law comes conflicting up where nobody invited it, the law knows what it can do and where to do it. They tell how that old Pharaoh was pretty good at kinging, and another old one back in the Bible times named Caesar, that did the best he knew how. They should have visited down here and watched a Arkansas or Mississippi or Tennessee constable once.”

“But how do you know who he is?” Everbe said. “How do you even know there’s one here?”

“There’s one everywhere,” Miss Reba said. “Didn’t I just tell you I grew up in a place like this — as long as I could stand it? I don’t need to know who he is. All I needed was to let that bastard know I knew there was one here too. I’m going—”

“But what did you tell him?” Boon said. “Come on. I may want to remember it.”

“Nothing, I told you,” Miss Reba said. “If I hadn’t learned by now how to handle these damned stud horses with his badge in one hand and his fly in the other, I’d been in the poorhouse years ago. I told him if I saw his mug around here again tonight, I would send that sheep-faced clerk to wake the constable up and tell him a deputy sheriff from Hardwick has just registered a couple of Memphis whores at the Parsham Hotel. I’m going to bed, and you better too.”

Come on, Corrie. I put your outraged virtue on record with that clerk and now you got to back it up, at least where he can see you.” They went on. Then Boon was gone too; possibly he had followed Butch to the front door just to make sure the surrey was gone. Then suddenly Everbe swooped down at me, that big: a big girl, muttering rapidly: “You didn’t bring anything at all, did you? I mean, clothes. You been wearing the same ones ever since you left home.”

“What’s wrong with them?” I said.

“I’m going to wash them,” she said. “Your underthings and stockings, your blouse. And the sock you ride with too. Come on and take them off.”

“But I aint got any more,” I said.

“That’s all right. You can go to bed. I’ll have these all ready again when you get up. Come on.” So she stood outside the door while I undressed and shoved my blouse and underwear and stockings and the riding-sock through the crack in the door to her and she said Good night and I closed the door and got into bed; and still there was something unfinished, that we hadn’t done, attended to yet: the secret pre-race

conference; the close, grim, fierce murmurous plotting of tomorrow's strategy.

Until I realised that, strictly speaking, we had no strategy; we had nothing to plan for nor even with: a horse whose very ownership was dubious and even (unless Ned himself really knew) unknown, of whose past we knew only that he had consistently run just exactly fast enough to finish second to the other horse in the race; to be raced tomorrow, exactly where I anyway didn't know, against a horse none of us had ever seen and whose very existence (as far as we were concerned) had to be taken on trust. Until I realised that, of all human occupations, the racing of horses, and all concerned or involved in it, were the most certainly in God's hands. Then Boon came in; I was already in bed, already half asleep.

"What've you done with your clothes?" he said.

"Everbe's washing them," I said. He had taken off his pants and shoes and was already reaching to turn out the light. He stopped, dead still.

"Who did you say?" I was awake now but it was already too late. I lay there with my eyes closed, not moving. "What name did you say?"

"Miss Corrie is," I said.

"You said something else." I could feel him looking at me. "You called her Everbe." I could feel him looking at me. "Is that her name?" I could feel him looking at me. "So she told you her real name." Then he said, quite gently: "God damn," and I saw through my eyelids the room go dark, then the bed creaked as he lay down on it, as beds always do since there is so much of him, as I have heard them ever since I can remember when I would sleep with him: once or twice at home when Father would be away and he would stay in the house so Mother wouldn't be afraid, and at Miss Ballenbaugh's two nights ago, and in Memphis last night, until I remembered that I hadn't slept with him in Memphis: it was Otis. "Good night," he said.

"Good night," I said.

THEN IT WAS morning, it was tomorrow: THE day on which I would ride my first actual horse race (and by winning it, set Boon and Ned — me too of course, but then I was safe, immune; I was not only just a child, I was kin to them — free to go home again, not with honor perhaps, not even unscathed, but at least they could go back) toward which all the finagling and dodging and manipulating and scrabbling around (what other crimes subsequent to — all right, consequent to — the simple and really spontaneous and in a way innocent stealing of Grandfather's automobile, I didn't even know) had been leading up to; now it was here. "So she told you what her real name is," Boon said. Because you see, it was too late now; I had been half asleep last night and off my guard.

"Yes," I said; whereupon I realised that that was completely false: she hadn't told me; she didn't even know I knew it, that I had been calling her Everbe ever since Sunday night. But it was too late now. "But you've got to promise," I said. "Not promise her: promise me. Never to say it out loud until she tells it first."

"I promise," he said. "I aint never lied to you yet. I mean, lied bad. I mean . . . I aint . . . All right," he said. "I done promised." Then he said again, like last night, gentle and almost amazed: "God damn." And my clothes — blouse, stockings and underwear and the riding-sock — were neatly folded, laundered and ironed, on a chair just outside our door. Boon handed them in to me. "With all them clean clothes, you got to bathe again," he said.

"You just made me bathe Saturday," I said.

"We was on the road Saturday night," he said. "We never even got to Memphis until Sunday."

"All right. Sunday," I said.

"This is Tuesday," he said. "Two days."

"Just one day," I said. "Two nights, but just one day."

"You been travelling since," Boon said. "You got two sets of dirt now."

"It's almost seven oclock," I said. "We're already late for breakfast."

“You can bathe first,” he said.

“I got to get dressed so I can thank Everbe for washing my clothes.”

“Bathe first,” Boon said.

“I’ll get my bandage wet.”

“Hold your hand on your neck,” Boon said “You aint going to wash that nohow.”

“Why dont you bathe then?” I said.

“We aint talking about me. We’re talking about you.” So I went to the bathroom and bathed and put my clothes back on and went to the dining room. And Ned was right. Last night there had been just the one table, the end of it cleared and set up for us. Now there were seven or eight people, all men (but not aliens, foreigners, mind you; in fact they were strangers only to us who didn’t live in Parsham. None of them had got down from pullmans in silk underclothes and smoking Upmann cigars; we had not opened the cosmopolitan Parsham winter sporting season here in the middle of May.

Some were in overalls, all but one were tieless: people like us except that they lived here, with the same passions and hopes and dialect, enjoying — Butch too — our inalienable constitutional right of free will and private enterprise which has made our country what it is, by holding a private horse race between two local horses; if anyone, committee or individual, from no further away than the next county, had come to interfere or alter or stop it or even participate beyond betting on the horse of his choice, all of us, partisans of either horse, would have risen as one man and repulsed him). And besides the waiter, I saw the back of a maid in uniform just going through the swing door to the pantry or kitchen, and there were two men (one of them had the necktie) at our table talking to Boon and Miss Reba.

But Everbe wasn’t there, and for an instant, second, I had a horrified vision of Butch finally waylaying and capturing her by force, ambushing her in the corridor perhaps while she was carrying the chair to mine and Boon’s door with my laundered clothes on it. But only for a second, and too fantastical; if she had washed for me last night, she had

probably, doubtless been up quite late washing for herself and maybe Miss Reba too, and was still asleep. So I went on to the table, where one of the men said,

“This the boy going to ride him? Looks more like you got him taped up for a fist fight.”

“Yes,” Boon said, shoving the dish of ham toward me as I sat down; Miss Reba passed the eggs and grits across. “He cut himself eating peas last night.”

“Haw haw,” the man said. “Anyway, he’ll be carrying less weight this time.”

“Sure,” Boon said. “Unless he eats the knives and forks and spoons while we aint watching him and maybe takes along one of the fire dogs for a snack.”

“Haw haw,” the man said. “From the way he run here last winter, he’s going to need a good deal more than just less weight. But then, that’s the secret, huh?”

“Sure,” Boon said; he was eating again now. “Even if we never had no secret, we would have to act like we did.”

“Haw haw,” the man said again; they got up. “Well, good luck, anyway. That might be as good for that horse as less weight.” The maid came, bringing me a glass of milk and carrying a plate of hot biscuits. It was Minnie, in a fresh apron and cap where Miss Reba had either loaned or hired her to the hotel to help out, with her ravished and unforgiving face, but calm and quiet now; evidently she had rested, even slept some even if she hadn’t forgiven anybody yet. The two strangers went away.

“You see?” Miss Reba said to nobody. “All we need is the right horse and a million dollars to bet.”

“You heard Ned Sunday night,” Boon said. “You were the one that believed him. I mean, decided to believe him. I was different. After that God damned automobile vanished and all we had was the horse, I had to believe him.”

“All right,” Miss Reba said. “Keep your shirt on.”

“And you can stop worrying too,” Boon said to me. “She just went to the depot in case them dogs caught him again last night and Ned brought him in to the train. Or so she said—”

“Did Ned find him?” I said.

“Naw,” Boon said. “Ned’s in the kitchen now. You can ask him — or so she said. Yes. So maybe you had better worry some, after all. Miss Reba got shut of that tin badge for you, but that other one — what’s his name: Caldwell — as on that train this morning.”

“What are you talking about now?” Miss Reba said.

“Nothing,” Boon said. “I aint got nothing to talk about now. I’ve quit. Lucius is the one that’s got tin badge and pullman cap rivals now.” But I was already getting up because I knew now where she was.

“Is that all the breakfast you want?” Miss Reba said.

“Let him alone,” Boon said. “He’s in love.” I crossed the lobby. Maybe Ned was right, and all it took for a horse race was two horses with the time to run a race, within ten miles of each other, and the air itself spread the news of it. Though not as far as the ladies’ parlor yet.

So maybe what I meant by crying looking well on Everbe was that she was big enough to cry as much as she seemed to have to do, and still have room for that many tears to dry off without streaking. She was sitting by herself in the ladies’ parlor and crying again, the third time — no: four, counting two Sunday night. Until you wondered why.

I mean, nobody made her come with us and she could have gone back to Memphis on any train that passed. Yet here she was, so she must be where she wanted to be. Yet this was the second time she had cried since we reached Parsham. I mean, anybody with as many extra tears as she had, still didn’t have enough to waste that many on Otis. So I said,

“He’s all right. Ned will find him today. Much obliged for washing my clothes. Where’s Mr Sam? I thought he was going to be on that train.”
“He had to take the train on to Memphis and take his uniform off,” she said. “He cant go to a horse race in it. He’ll be back on the noon freight. I cant find my handkerchief.”

I found it for her. “Maybe you ought to wash your face,” I said. “When Ned finds him, he will get the tooth back.”
“It aint the tooth,” she said. “I’m going to buy Minnie another tooth. It’s that . . . He never had no chance. He . . . Did you promise your mother you wouldn’t never take things too?”
“You dont have to promise anybody that,” I said. “You dont take things.”

“But you would have promised, if she had asked you?”
“She wouldn’t ask me,” I said. “You dont take things.”
“Yes,” she said. She said: “I aint going to stay in Memphis. I talked to Sam at the depot this morning and he says that’s a good idea too. He can find me a job in Chattanooga or somewhere. But you’ll still be in Jefferson, so maybe I could write you a post card where I’m at and then if you took a notion—”

“Yes,” I said. “I’ll write to you. Come on. They’re still eating breakfast.”
“There’s something about me you dont know. You couldn’t even guess it.”

“I know it,” I said. “It’s Everbe Corinthia. I been calling you that two or three days now. That’s right. It was Otis. But I wont tell anybody. But I dont see why.”
“Why? A old-timey countrified name like that? Can you imagine anybody in Reba’s saying, Send up Everbe Corinthia? They would be ashamed. They would die laughing. So I thought of changing it to Yvonne or Billie or Ken. But Reba said Corrie would do.”

“Shucks,” I said.

“You mean, it’s all right? You say it.” I said it. She listened. Then she kept on listening, exactly as you wait for an echo. “Yes,” she said. “That’s what it can be now.”

“Then come on and eat breakfast,” I said. “Ned’s waiting for me and I got to go.” But Boon came in first.

“There are too many people out there,” he said. “Maybe I shouldn’t a told that damn fellow you were going to ride him today.” He looked at me. “Maybe I shouldn’t a never let you leave Jefferson.” There was a small door behind a curtain at the back of the room. “Come on,” he said. It was another corridor. Then we were in the kitchen. The vast cook was at the sink again. Ned was sitting at a table finishing his breakfast, but mainly saying,

“When I sugars up a woman, it aint just empty talk. They can buy something with it too—” and stopped and rose at once; he said to me: “You ready?”

Time you and me was getting back to the country. They’s too many folks around here. If they all had money and would bet it, and the horse they bet on would just be the wrong horse, and we just had the money to cover it and knowed the right horse to cover it with, we wouldn’t just take no automobile back to Jefferson tonight: we’d take all Possum too, to maybe sugar back Boss Priest’s nature. He aint never owned a town before, and he might like it.”

“Wait,” Boon said. “Aint we got to make some plans?”

“The onliest one that needs any plan is Lightning,” Ned said. “And the only plan he needs is to plan to get out in front and stay there until somebody tells him to stop. But I know what you mean. We gonter run on Colonel Linscomb’s track. The first heat is at two oclock. That’s four miles from here. Me and Lightning and Lucius gonter show up there about two minutes beforehand. You better get out there earlier. You better leave here soon as Mr Sam gets off that freight train. Because that’s yourn and his plan: to get to that track in time to bet the money, and to have some money to bet when you get there.”

“Wait,” Boon said. “What about that automobile? What the hell good will money do us if we go back home without—”

“Stop fretting about that automobile,” Ned said. “Aint I told you them boys got to go back home not much longer than tonight too?”

“What boys?” Boon said.

“Yes sir,” Ned said. “The trouble with Christmas is the first of January; that’s what’s wrong with it.” Minnie came in with a tray of dirty dishes — the brown calm tragic hungry and inconsolable mask. “Come on,” Ned told her, “gimme that smile again so I’ll have the right measure to fit that tooth when I brings it back tonight.”

“Dont do it, girl,” the fat cook said. “Maybe that Mississippi sugar will spend where it come from, but it wont buy nothing up here in Tennessee. Not in this kitchen, nohow.”

“But wait,” Boon said.

“You wait for Mr Sam,” Ned said. “He can tell you. In fact, whilst me and Lucius are winning this race, maybe you and Mr Sam can locate around amongst the folks for Whistle-bitches and that tooth.” He had Uncle Parsham’s buggy this time, with one of the mules. And he was right: the little hamlet had changed overnight. It was not that there were so many people in sight, any more than yesterday. It was the air itself — an exhilaration, almost; for the first time I really realised that I was going to ride in a horse race before many more hours, and I could taste my spit sudden and sharp around my tongue.

“I thought you said last night that Otis would be gone when you got back from town,” I said.

“He was,” Ned said. “But not far. He aint got nowhere to go neither. The hounds give mouth twice during the night back toward the barn; them hounds taken the same quick mislike to him that human folks does. Likely soon as I left this morning, he come up for his breakfast.”

“But suppose he sells the tooth before we can catch him.”

“I done fixed that,” Ned said. “He aint gonter sell it. He aint gonter find nobody to buy it. If he aint come up for breakfast, Lycurgus gonter take

the hounds and tree him again, and tell him that when I come back from Parsham last night, I said a man in Memphis offered that gal twenty-eight dollars for that tooth, cash. He'll believe that. If it had been a hundred dollars or even fifty, he wouldn't believe it.

But he'll believe a extra number like twenty-eight dollars, mainly because he'll think it aint enough: that that Memphis man was beating Minnie down. And when he tries to sell it at that race track this evening, wont nobody give him even that much, so wont be nothing left for him to do but wait until he can get back to Memphis with it. So you get your mind off that tooth and put it on this horse race. On them last two heats, I mean. We gonter lose the first one, so you dont need to worry about that—”

“What?” I said. “Why?”

“Why not?” Ned said. “All we needs to win is two of them.”

“But why lose the first one? Why dont we win that one, get that much ahead as soon as we can—” He drove on, maybe a half a minute.

“The trouble with this race, it's got too many different things mixed up in it.”

“Too many what?” I said.

“Too many of everything,” he said. “Too many folks. But mainly, too many heats. If it was just one heat, one run, off in the bushes somewhere and not nobody around but me and you and Lightning and that other horse and whoever gonter ride him, we would be all right. Because we found out yestiddy we can make Lightning run one time. Only, now he got to run three of them.”

“But you made that mule run every time,” I said.

“This horse aint that mule,” Ned said. “Aint no horse ever foaled was that mule. Or any other mule. And this horse we got to depend on now aint even got as much sense as some horses. So you can see what our fix is. We knows I can make him run once, and we hopes I can make him run twice.

But that's all. We just hopes. So we cant risk that one time we knows I can make him run, until we got to have it. So the most we got at the best, is two times. And since we got to lose one of them, no matter what, we gonter lose the one we can maybe learn something from to use next time. And that's gonter be the first one."

"Have you told Boon that? so he wont—"

"Let him lose on the first heat, providing he dont put up all the money them ladies scraps up for him to bet. Which, from what I seen of that Miss Reba, he aint gonter do. That will make the odds that much better for them next two. Besides, we can tell him all he needs to know when the time comes. So you just—"

"I didn't mean that," I said. "I meant Boss's—"

"Didn't I tell you I was tending to that?" he said. "Now you quit worrying. I dont mean quit thinking about the race, because you cant do that. But quit worrying about winning it. Just think about what Lightning taught you yesterday about riding him. That's all you got to do. I'll tend to all the rest of it. You got your sock, aint you?"

"Yes," I said. Only we were not going back to Uncle Parsham's; we were not even going in that direction now.

"We got our own private stable for this race," Ned said. "A spring branch in a hollow that belongs to one of Possum's church members, where we can be right there not half a quarter from the track without nobody knowing to bother us until we wants them. Lycurgus and Uncle Possum went on with Lightning right after breakfast."

"The track," I said. Of course, there would have to be a track. I had never thought of that. If I thought at all, I reckon I simply assumed that somebody would ride or lead the other horse up, and we would run the race right there in Uncle Parsham's pasture.

"That's right," Ned said. "A regular track, just like a big one except it's just a half a mile and aint got no grandstands and beer-and-whiskey counters like anybody that wants to run horse racing right ought to

have. It's right there in Colonel Linscomb's pasture, that owns the other horse.

Me and Lycurgus went and looked at it last night. I mean the track, not the horse. I aint seen the horse yet. But we gonter have a chance to look at him today, leastways, one end of him. Only what we want is to plan for that horse to spend the last half of two of these heats looking at that end of Lightning. So I need to talk to the boy that's gonter ride him. A colored boy; Lycurgus knows him. I want to talk to him in a way that he wont find out until afterward that I talked to him."

"Yes," I said. "How?"

"Let's get there first," Ned said. We went on; it was new country to me, of course. Obviously we were now crossing Colonel Linscomb's plantation, or anyway somebody's — big neat fields of sprouting cotton and corn, and pastures with good fences and tenant cabins and cotton houses at the turnrow ends; and now I could see the barns and stables and sure enough, there was the neat white oval of the small track; we — Ned — turning now, following a faint road, on into a grove; and there it was, isolate and secure, even secret if we wished: a grove of beeches about a spring, Lightning standing with Lycurgus at his head, groomed and polished and even glowing faintly in the dappled light, the other mule tied in the background and Uncle Parsham, dramatic in black and white, even regal, prince and martinet in the dignity of solvent and workless age, sitting on the saddle which Lycurgus had propped against a tree into a sort of chair for him, all waiting for us.

And then in the next instant I knew what was wrong: they were all waiting for me. And that was the real moment when — Lightning and me standing in (not to mention breathing it) the same air not a thousand feet from the race track and not much more than a tenth of that in minutes from the race itself — when I actually realised not only how Lightning's and my fate were now one, but that the two of us together carried that of the rest of us too, certainly Boon's and Ned's, since on us depended under what conditions they could go back home,

or indeed if they could go back home — a mystical condition which a boy of only eleven should not really be called to shoulder.

Which is perhaps why I noticed nothing, or anyway missed what I did see: only that Lycurgus handed Lightning's lead rope to Uncle Parsham and came and took our bridle and Ned said, "You get that message to him all right?" and Lycurgus said Yes sir, and Ned said to me, "Whyn't you go and take Lightning offen Uncle Possom so he wont have to get up?" and I did so, leaving Ned and Lycurgus standing quite close together at the buggy; and that not long before Ned came on to us, leaving Lycurgus to take the mule out of the buggy and loop the lines and traces up and tie the mule beside its mate and come on to us, where Ned was now squatting beside Uncle Parsham. He said: "Tell again about them two races last winter. You said nothing happened. What kind of nothing?"

"Ah," Uncle Parsham said. "It was a three-heat race just like this one, only they never run but two of them. By that time there wasn't no need to run the third one. Or maybe somebody got tired."

"Tired reaching into his hind pocket, maybe," Ned said.

"Maybe," Uncle Parsham said. "The first time, your horse run too soon, and the second time he run too late. Or maybe it was the whip whipped too soon the first time and not soon enough the second. Anyhow, at the first lick your horse jumped out in front, a good length, and stayed there all the way around the first lap, even after the whipping had done run out, like it does with a horse or a man either: he can take just so much whipping and after that it aint no more than spitting on him.

Then they come into the home stretch and it was like your horse saw that empty track in front of him and said to himself, This aint polite; I'm a stranger here, and dropped back just enough to lay his head more or less on Colonel Linscomb's boy's knee, and kept it there until somebody told him he could stop.

And the next time your horse started out like he still thought he hadn't finished that first heat, his head all courteous and polite about opposite

Colonel Linscomb's boy's knee, on into the back turn of the last lap, where that Memphis boy hit him the first lick, not late enough this time, because all that full-length jump done this time was to show him that empty track again."

"Not too late to scare McWillie," Lycurgus said.

"Skeer him how much?" Ned said.

"Enough," Lycurgus said. Ned squatted there. He must have got a little sleep last night, even with the hounds treeing Otis every now and then. He didn't look it too much though.

"All right," he said to me. "You and Lycurgus just stroll up yonder to that stable awhile. All you're doing is taking your natural look at the horse you gonter ride against this evening. For the rest of it, let Lycurgus do the talking, and dont look behind you on the way back." I didn't even ask him why. He wouldn't have told me. It was not far: past the neat half-mile track with its white-painted rails that it would be nice to be rich too, on to the barns, the stable that if Cousin Zack had one like it out at McCaslin, Cousin Louisa would probably have them living in it. There was nobody in sight.

I dont know what I had expected: maybe still more of the overalled and tieless aficionados squatting and chewing tobacco along the wall as we had seen them in the dining room at breakfast. Maybe it was too early yet: which, I now realised, was probably exactly why Ned had sent us; we — Lycurgus — lounging into the hallway which — the stable — was as big as our dedicated-to-a-little-profit livery one in Jefferson and a good deal cleaner — a tack room on one side and what must have been an office on the other, just like ours; a Negro stableman cleaning a stall at the rear and a youth who for size and age and color might have been Lycurgus's twin, lounging on a bale of hay against the wall, who said to Lycurgus: "Hidy, son. Looking for a horse?"

"Hidy, son," Lycurgus said. "Looking for two. We thought maybe the other one might be here too."

"You mean Mr van Tosch aint even come yet?"

“He aint coming a-tall,” Lycurgus said. “Some other folks running Coppermine this time. Whitefolks named Mr Boon Hogganbeck. This white boy gonter ride him. This is McWillie,” he told me. McWillie looked at me a minute. Then he went back to the office door and opened it and said something inside and stood back while a white man (“Trainer,” Lycurgus murmured. “Name Mr Walter”) came out and said,

“Morning, Lycurgus. Where you folks keeping that horse hid, anyway? You aint ringing in a sleeper on us, are you?”

“No sir,” Lycurgus said. “I reckon he aint come out from town yet. We thought they might have sent him out here. So we come to look.”

“You walked all the way here from Possum’s?”

“No sir,” Lycurgus said. “We rid the mules.”

“Where’d you tie them? I cant even see them. Maybe you painted them with some of that invisible paint you put on that horse when you took him out of that boxcar yesterday morning.”

“No sir,” Lycurgus said. “We just rid as far as the pasture and turned them loose. We walked the balance of the way.”

“Well, anyway, you come to see a horse, so we wont disappoint you. Bring him out, McWillie, where they can look at him.”

“Look at his face for a change,” McWillie said. “Folks on that Coppermine been looking at Akron’s hind end all winter, but aint none of them seen his face yet.”

“Then at least this boy can start out knowing what he looks like in front. What’s your name, son?” I told him. “You aint from around here.”

“No sir. Jefferson, Mississippi.”

“He travelling with Mr Hogganbeck that’s running Coppermine now,” Lycurgus said.

“Oh,” Mr Walter said. “Mr Hogganbeck buy him?”

“I dont know, sir,” Lycurgus said. “Mr Hogganbeck’s running him.” McWillie brought the horse out; he and Mr Walter stripped off the blanket. He was black, bigger than Lightning but very nervous; he came out showing eye-white; every time anybody moved or spoke near him

his ears went back and he stood on the point of one hind foot as though ready to lash out with it, Mr Walter and McWillie both talking, murmuring at him but both of them always watching him.

“All right,” Mr Walter said. “Give him a drink and put him back up.” We followed him toward the front. “Dont let him discourage you,” he said. “After all, it’s just a horse race.”

“Yes sir,” Lycurgus said. “That’s what they says. Much oblige for letting us look at him.”

“Thank you, sir,” I said.

“Good-bye,” Mr Walter said. “Dont keep them mules waiting. See you at post time this afternoon.”

“No sir,” Lycurgus said.

“Yes sir,” I said. We went on, past the stables and the track once more.

“Mind what Mr McCaslin told us,” Lycurgus said.

“Mr McCaslin?” I said. “Oh yes,” I said. I didn’t ask What? this time either. I think I knew now. Or maybe I didn’t want to believe I knew; didn’t want to believe even yet that at a mere eleven you could progress that fast in weary unillusion; maybe if I had asked What? it would have been an admission that I had. “That horse is bad,” I said.

“He’s scared,” Lycurgus said. “That’s what Mr McCaslin said last night.”

“Last night?” I said. “I thought you all came to look at the track.”

“What do he want to look at that track for?” Lycurgus said. “That track dont move. He come to see that horse.”

“In the dark?” I said. “Didn’t they have a watchman or wasn’t the stable locked or anything?”

“When Mr McCaslin make up his mind to do something, he do it,” Lycurgus said. “Aint you found out that about him yet?” So we — I — didn’t look back. We went on to our sanctuary, where Lightning — I mean Coppermine — and the two mules stamped and swished in the dappled shade and Ned squatted beside Uncle Parsham’s saddle and another man sat on his heels across the spring from them — another

Negro; I almost knew him, had known him, seen him, something — before Ned spoke:

“It’s Bobo,” he said. And then it was all right. He was a McCaslin too, Bobo Beauchamp, Lucas’s cousin — Lucas Quintus Carothers McCaslin Beauchamp, that Grandmother, whose mother had described old Lucius to her, said looked (and behaved: just as arrogant, just as iron-headed, just as intolerant) exactly like him except for color. Bobo was another motherless Beauchamp child whom Aunt Tennie raised until the call of the out-world became too much for him and he went to Memphis three years ago. “Bobo used to work for the man that used to own Lightning,” Ned said.

“He come to watch him run.” Because it was all right now: the one remaining thing which had troubled us — me: Bobo would know where the automobile was. In fact, he might even have it. But that was wrong, because in that case Boon and Ned would simply have taken it away from him — until suddenly I realised that the reason it was wrong was, I didn’t want it to be; if we could get the automobile back for no more than just telling Bobo to go get it and be quick about it, what were we doing here? what had we gone to all this trouble and anxiety for? camouflaging and masquerading Lightning at midnight through the Memphis tenderloin to get him to the depot; ruthlessly using a combination of uxoriousness and nepotism to disrupt a whole boxcar from the railroad system to get him to Parsham; not to mention the rest of it: having to cope with Butch, Minnie’s tooth, invading and outraging Uncle Parsham’s home, and sleeplessness and (yes) homesickness and (me again) not even a change of underclothes; all that striving and struggling and finagling to run a horse race with a horse which was not ours, to recover an automobile we had never had any business with in the first place, when all we had to do to get the automobile was to send one of the family colored boys to fetch it.

You see what I mean? if the successful outcome of the race this afternoon wasn’t really the pivot; if Lightning and I were not the last desperate barrier between Boon and Ned and Grandfather’s anger, even if not his police; if without winning the race or even having to run it, Ned and Boon could go back to Jefferson (which was the only home

Ned knew, and the only milieu in which Boon could have survived) as if nothing had happened, and take up again as though they had never been away, then all of us were engaged in a make-believe not too different from a boys' game of cops and robbers. But Bobo could know where the automobile was; that would be allowable, that would be fair; and Bobo was one of us. I said so to Ned.

"I thought I told you to stop worrying about that automobile," he said. "Aint I promised you I'd tend to it when the right time come? You got plenty other things to fret your mind over: you got a horse race. Aint that enough to keep it busy?" He said to Lycurgus: "All right?"

"I think so," Lycurgus said. "We never looked back to see."

"Then maybe," Ned said. But Bobo had already gone. I neither saw nor heard him; he was just gone. "Get the bucket," Ned told Lycurgus.

"Now is a good time to eat our snack whilst we still got a little peace and quiet around here." Lycurgus brought it — a tin lard bucket with a clean dishcloth over it, containing pieces of corn bread with fried sidemeat between; there was another bucket of buttermilk sitting in the spring.

"You et breakfast?" Uncle Parsham said to me.

"Yes sir," I said.

"Then dont eat no more," he said. "Just nibble a piece of bread and a little water."

"That's right," Ned said. "You can ride better empty." So he gave me a single piece of corn bread and we all squatted now around Uncle Parsham's saddle, the two buckets on the ground in the center; we heard one step or maybe two up the bank behind us, then McWillie said,

"Hidy, Uncle Possum, morning, reverend" (that was Ned), and came down the bank, already — or still — looking at Lightning. "Yep, that's Coppermine, all right. These boys had Mr Walter skeered this morning that maybe yawl had rung in another horse on him. You running him, reverend?"

“Call him Mr McCaslin,” Uncle Parsham said.

“Yes sir,” McWillie said. “Mr McCaslin. You running him?”

“White man named Mr Hogganbeck is,” Ned said. “We waiting on him now.”

“Too bad you aint got something else besides Coppermine to wait with, that would maybe give Akron a race,” McWillie said.

“I already told Mr Hogganbeck that, myself,” Ned said. He swallowed. Without haste he lifted the bucket of buttermilk and drank, still without haste. McWillie watched him. He set the bucket down. “Set down and eat something,” he said.

“Much obliged,” McWillie said, “I done et. Maybe that’s why Mr Hogganbeck’s late, waiting to bring out that other horse.”

“There aint time now,” Ned said. “He’ll have to run this one now. The trouble is, the only one around here that knows how to rate this horse, is the very one that knows better than to let him run behind. This horse dont like to be in front. He wants to run right behind up until he can see the finish line, and have something to run at.

I aint seen him race yet, but I’d be willing to bet that the slower the horse in front of him goes, the more carefuller he is not to get out in front where he aint got no company — until he can see that finish line and find out it’s a race he’s in and run at it. All anybody got to do to beat him is to keep his mind so peaceful that when he does notice he’s in a race, it’s too late. Some day somebody gonter let him get far enough behind to scare him, then look out. But it wont be this race. The trouble is, the onliest one around here that knows that too, is the wrong one.”

“Who’s that?” McWillie said.

Ned took another bite. “Whoever’s gonter ride that other horse today.”

“That’s me,” McWillie said. “Dont tell me Uncle Possum and Lycurgus both aint already told you that.”

“Then you oughter be talking to me instead,” Ned said. “Set down and eat; Uncle Possum got plenty here.”

“Much obliged,” McWillie said again. “Well,” he said. “Mr Walter’ll be glad to know it aint nobody but Coppermine. We was afraid we would have to break in a new one. See yawl at the track.” Then he was gone. But I waited another minute.

“But why?” I said.

“I dont know,” Ned said. “We may not even need it. But if we does, we already got it there. You mind I told you this morning how the trouble with this race was, it had too many different things all mixed up in it? Well, this aint our track and country, and it aint even our horse except just in a borried manner of speaking, so we cant take none of them extra things out. So the next best we can do is, to put a few extry ones into it on our own account.

That’s what we just done. That horse up yonder is a Thoroughbred paper horse; why aint he in Memphis or Louisville or Chicago running races, instead of back here in a homemade country pasture running races against whoever can slip in the back way, like us? Because why, because I felt him last night and he’s weedy, like a horse that cant nothing catch for six furlongs, but fifty foot more and he’s done folded up right under you before you knowed it. And so far, all that boy—”

“McWillie,” I said.

“ — McWillie has had to worry about is just staying on top of him and keeping him headed in the right direction; he’s won twice now and likely he thinks if he just had the chance, he would run Earl Sande and Dan Patch both clean outen the horse business. Now we’ve put something else in his mind; he’s got two things in it now that dont quite fit one another. So we’ll just wait and see. And whilst we’re waiting, you go over behind them bushes yonder and lay down and rest. Word’s out now, and folks gonter start easing in and out of here to see what they can find out, and over there they wont worry you.”

Which I did. Though not always asleep; I heard the voices; I wouldn't have needed to see them even if I had raised onto one elbow and opened one eye past a bush: the same overalls, tieless, the sweated hats, the chewing tobacco, squatting, unhurried, not talking very much, looking inscrutably at the horse.

Nor always awake, because Lycurgus was standing over me and time had passed; the very light looked postmeridian. "Time to go," he said. There was nobody with Lightning now but Ned and Uncle Parsham; if they were all up at the track already, it must be even later still.

I had expected Boon and Sam and probably Everbe and Miss Reba too. (But not Butch. I hadn't even thought of him; maybe Miss Reba had really got rid of him for good, back up to Hardwick or wherever it was the clerk said last night he really belonged. I had forgotten him; I realised now what the morning's peace actually was.) I said so. "Haven't they come yet?"

"Aint nobody told them where to come yet," Ned said. "We dont need Boon Hogganbeck now. Come on. You can walk him up and limber him on the way." I got up: the worn perfectly cared-for McClellan saddle and the worn perfectly cared-for cavalry bridle which was the other half of Uncle Parsham's (somebody's) military loot from that Cause which, the longer I live the more convinced I am, your spinster aunts to the contrary, that whoever lost it, it wasn't us.

"Maybe they're looking for Otis," I said.

"Maybe they are," Ned said. "It's a good place to hunt for him, whether they finds him or not." We went on, Uncle Parsham and Ned walking at Lightning's head; Lycurgus would bring the buggy and the other mule around by the road, provided he could find enough clear space to hitch them in. Because already the pasture next to the track was filled up — wagons, the teams unhitched and reversed and tied to the stanchions and tail gates; buggies, saddle-horses and -mules hitched to the fence itself; and now we — I — could see the people, black and white, the

tieless shirts and the overalls, already dense along the rail and around the paddock.

Because this race was homemade, remember; this was democracy, not triumphant, because anything can be triumphant provided it is tenderly and firmly enough protected and guarded and shielded in its innocent fragility, but democracy working: Colonel Linscomb, the aristocrat, the baron, the suzerain, was not even present. As far as I knew, nobody knew where he was.

As far as I knew, nobody cared. He owned one of the horses (I still didn't know for certain just who owned the one I was sitting on) and the dirt we were going to race on and the nice white rail enclosing it and the adjacent pasture which the tethered wagons and buggies were cutting up and the fence one entire panel of which a fractious or frightened saddle horse had just wrenched into kindling, but nobody knew where he was or seemed to bother or care.

We went to the paddock. Oh yes, we had one; we had everything a race track should have except, as Ned said, grandstands and stalls for beer and whiskey; we had everything else that any track had, but we had democracy too: the judges were the night telegraph operator at the depot and Mr McDiarmid, who ran the depot eating room, who, the legend went, could slice a ham so thin that his entire family had made a summer trip to Chicago on the profits from one of them; our steward and marshal was a dog trainer who shot quail for the market and was now out on bond for his part in (participation in or maybe just his presence at) a homicide which had occurred last winter at a neighboring whiskey still; did I not tell you this was free and elective will and choice and private enterprise at its purest? And there were Boon and Sam waiting for us. "I cant find him," Boon said. "Aint you seen him?"

"Seen who?" Ned said. "Jump down," he told me. The other horse was there too, still nervous, still looking what I would have called bad but that Lycurgus said Ned said was afraid. "Now, what did this horse—"

“That damn boy!” Boon said. “You said this morning he would be out here.”

“Maybe he’s behind something,” Ned said. He came back to me. “What did this horse learn you yesterday? You was on a twice-around track that time too. What did he learn you? Think.” I thought hard. But there still wasn’t anything.

“Nothing,” I said. “All I did was to keep him from going straight to you whenever he saw you.”

“And that’s exactly what you want to do this first heat: just keep him in the middle of the track and keep him going and then dont bother him. Dont bother nohow; we gonter lose this first heat anyway and get shut of it—”

“Lose it?” Boon said. “What the hell—”

“Do you want to run this horse race, or do you want me to?” Ned asked him.

“All right,” Boon said. “But, God damn it—” Then he said: “You said that damn boy—”

“Lemme ask you another way then,” Ned said. “Do you want to run this horse race and lemme go hunt for that tooth?”

“Here they come,” Sam said. “We aint got time now. Gimme your foot.” He threw me up. So we didn’t have time, for Ned to instruct me further or for anything else. But we didn’t need it; our victory in the first heat (we didn’t win it; it was only a dividend which paid off later) was not due to me or even to Lightning, but to Ned and McWillie; I didn’t even really know what was happening until afterward. Because of my (indubitable) size and (more than indubitable) inexperience, not to mention the unmanageable state toward which the other horse was now well on his way, it was stipulated and agreed that we should be led up to the wire by grooms, and there released at the word Go.

Which we did (or were), Lightning behaving as he always did when Ned was near enough for him to nuzzle at his coat or hand, Acheron behaving as (I assumed, having seen him but that once) he always did

when anyone was near his head, skittering, bouncing, snatching the groom this way and that but gradually working up to the wire; it would be any moment now; it seemed to me that I actually saw the marshal-murderer fill his lungs to holler Go! when I don't know what happened, I mean the sequence: Ned said suddenly:

"Set tight," and my head, arms, shoulders and all, snapped; I don't know what it was he used — awl, ice pick, or maybe just a nail in his palm, the spring, the leap; the voice not hollering Go! because it never had, hollering instead:

"Stop! Stop! Whoa! Whoa!" which we — Lightning and me — did, to see Acheron's groom still on his knees where Acheron had flung him, and Acheron and McWillie already at top speed going into the first turn, McWillie sawing back on him, wrenching Acheron's whole neck sideways.

But he already had the bit, the marshal and three or four spectators cutting across the ring to try to stop him in the back stretch, though they might as well have been hollering at Sam's cannonball limited between two flag stops. But McWillie had slowed him now, though it was now a matter of mere choice: whether to come on around the track or turn and go back, the distance being equal, McWillie (or maybe it was Acheron) choosing the former, Ned murmuring rapidly at my knee now:

"Anyhow, we got one extra half a mile on him.

This time you'll have to do it yourself because them judges gonter—" They were; they were already approaching. Ned said: "Just remember. This un dont matter nohow—" Then they did: disqualified him. Though they had seen nothing: only that he had released Lightning's head before the word Go. So this time I had a volunteer from the crowd to hold Lightning's head, McWillie glaring at me while Acheron skittered and plunged under him while the groom gradually worked him back toward position.

And this time the palm went to McWillie. You see what I mean? Even if Non-virtue knew nothing about back-country horse racing, she didn't need to: all necessary was to supply me with Sam, to gain that extra

furtherance in evil by some primeval and insentient process like osmosis or maybe simple juxtaposition.

I didn't even wait for Lightning to come in to the bridle, I didn't know why: I brought the bit back to him and (with no little, in fact considerable, help from the volunteer who was mine and Lightning's individual starter) held so, fixed; and sure enough, I saw the soles of Acheron's groom's feet and Acheron himself already two leaps on his next circuit of the track, Lightning and me still motionless.

But McWillie was on him this time, before he reached the turn, so that the emergency squad not only reached the back stretch first but even stopped and caught Acheron and led him back. So our — mine and Ned's — net was only six furlongs, and the last one of them debatable. Though our main gain was McWillie; he was not just mad now, he was scared too, glaring at me again but with more than just anger in it, two grooms holding Acheron now long enough for us to be more or less in position, Lightning and me well to the outside to give them room, when the word Go came.

And that's all. We were off, Lightning strong and willing, every quality you could want in fact except eagerness, his brain not having found out yet that this was a race, McWillie holding Acheron back now so that we were setting the pace, on around the first lap, Lightning moving slower and slower, confronted with all that solitude, until Acheron drew up and passed us despite all McWillie could do; whereupon Lightning also moved out again, with companionship now, around the second lap and really going now, Acheron a neck ahead and our crowd even beginning to yell now as though they were getting their money's worth; the wire ahead now and McWillie, giving Acheron a terrific cut with his whip, might as well have hit Lightning too; twenty more feet, and we would have passed McWillie on simple momentum.

But the twenty more feet were not there, McWillie giving me one last glare over his shoulder of rage and fright, but triumph too now as I slowed Lightning and turned him and saw it: not a fight but rather a turmoil, a seething of heads and shoulders and backs out of the middle

of the crowd around the judges' stand, out of the middle of which Boon stood suddenly up like a pine sapling out of a plum thicket, his shirt torn half off and one flailing arm with two or three men clinging to it: I could see him bellowing. Then he vanished and I saw Ned running toward me up the track. Then Butch and another man came out of the crowd toward us. "What?" I said to Ned.

"Nemmine that," he said. He took the bridle with one hand, his other hand already digging into his hip pocket. "It's that Butch again; it dont matter why. Here." He held his hand up to me. He was not rushed, hurried: he was just rapid. "Take it. They aint gonter bother you." It was a cloth tobacco sack containing a hardish lump about the size of a pecan. "Hide it and keep it. Dont lose it. Just remember who it come from: Ned William McCaslin. Will you remember that? Ned William McCaslin Jefferson Mississippi."

"Yes," I said. I put it in my hip pocket. "But what—" He didn't even let me finish.

"Soon as you can, find Uncle Possum and stay with him. Nemmine about Boon and the rest of them. If they got him, they got all the others too. Go straight to Uncle Possum and stay with him. He will know what to do."

"Yes," I said. Butch and the other man had reached the gate onto the track; part of Butch's shirt was gone too. They were looking at us.

"That it?" the man with him said.

"Yep," Butch said.

"Bring that horse here, boy," the man said to Ned. "I want it."

"Set still," Ned told me. He led the horse up to where they waited.

"Jump down, son," the man told me, quite kindly. "I dont want you." I did so. "Hand me the reins," he told Ned. Ned did so. "I'll take you bareback," the man told Ned. "You're under arrest."

WE WERE GOING to have all the crowd too presently. We just stood there, facing Butch and the other man, who now held Lightning.

“What’s it for, Whitefolks?” Ned said.

“It’s for jail, son,” the other man said. “That’s what we call it here. I dont know what you call it where you come from.”

“Yes sir,” Ned said. “We has that back home too. Only they mentions why, even to niggers.”

“Oh, a lawyer,” Butch said. “He wants to see a paper. Show him one. — Never mind, I’ll do it.” He took something from his hip pocket: a letter in a soiled envelope. Ned took it. He stood there quietly, holding it in his hand. “What do you think of that,” Butch said. “A man that cant even read, wanting to see a paper. Smell it then. Maybe it smells all right.”

“Yes sir,” Ned said. “It’s all right.”

“Dont say you are satisfied if you aint,” Butch said.

“Yes sir,” Ned said. “It’s all right.” We had the crowd now. Butch took the envelope back from Ned and put it back in his pocket and spoke to them: “It’s all right, boys; just a little legal difficulty about who owns this horse. The race aint cancelled. The first heat will still stand; the next ones are just put off until tomorrow. Can you hear me back there?”

“We likely cant, if the bets is cancelled too,” a voice said. There was a guffaw, then two or three.

“I dont know,” Butch said. “Anybody that seen this Memphis horse run against Akron them two heats last winter and still bet on him, has done already cancelled his money out before he even got it put up.” He waited, but there was no laughter this time; then the voice — or another — said:

“Does Walter Clapp think that too? Ten foot more, and that chestnut would a beat him today.”

“All right, all right,” Butch said. “Settle it tomorrow. Aint nothing changed; the next two heats is just put off until tomorrow. The fifty-dollar heat bets is still up and Colonel Linscomb aint won but one of

them. Come on, now; we got to get this horse and these witnesses in to town where we can get everything cleared up and be ready to run again tomorrow. Somebody holler back there to send my surrey."

Then I saw Boon, a head above them. His face was quite calm now, still blood-streaked, and somebody (I had expected him to be handcuffed, but he wasn't; we were still democracy; he was still only a minority and not a heresy) had tied the sleeves of his torn shirt around his neck so that he was covered.

Then I saw Sam too; he was barely marked; he was the one who pushed through first. "Now, Sam," Butch said. "We been trying for thirty minutes to step around you, but you wont let us."

"You damn right I wont," Sam said. "I'll ask you again, and let this be the last one. Are we under arrest?"

"Are who under arrest?" Butch said.

"Hogganbeck. Me. That Negro there."

"Here's another lawyer," Butch said to the other man. I learned quite quick now that he was the Law in Parsham; he was who Miss Reba had told us about last night: the elected constable of the Beat, where Butch for all his badge and pistol was just another guest like we were, being (Butch) just one more tenureless appointee from the nepotic files of the County Sheriff's office in the county seat at Hardwick thirteen miles away. "Maybe he wants to see a paper too."

"No," the other man, the constable, told Sam. "You can go whenever you want to."

"Then I'm going back to Memphis to find some law," Sam said. "I mean the kind of law a man like me can approach without having his britches and underwear both ripped off. If I aint back tonight, I'll be here early tomorrow morning." He had already seen me. He said, "Come on. You come with me."

"No," I said. "I'm going to stay here." The constable was looking at me.

"You can go with him, if you want," he said.

"No sir," I said. "I'm going to stay here."

“Who does he belong to?” the constable said.

“He’s with me,” Ned said. The constable said, as though Ned had not spoken, there had been no sound:

“Who brought him here?”

“Me,” Boon said. “I work for his father.”

“I work for his grandfather,” Ned said. “We done already fixed to take care of him.”

“Just hold on,” Sam said. “I’ll try to get back tonight. Then we can attend to everything.”

“And when you come back,” the constable said, “remember that you aint in Memphis or Nashville either. That you aint even in Hardwick County except primarily. What you’re in right now, and what you’ll be in every time you get off of a train at that depot yonder, is Beat Four.”

“That’s telling them, judge,” Butch said. “The free state of Possum, Tennessee.”

“I was talking to you too,” the constable told Butch. “You may be the one that better try hardest to remember it.” The surrey came up to where they were holding Boon. The constable gestured Ned toward it. Suddenly Boon was struggling; Ned was saying something to him. Then the constable turned back to me. “That Negro says you are going home with old Possum Hood.”

“Yes sir,” I said.

“I dont think I like that — a white boy staying with a family of niggers. You come home with me.”

“No sir,” I said.

“Yes,” he said, but still really kind. “Come on. I’m busy.”

“There’s somewhere you stops,” Ned said. The constable became completely motionless, half turned.

“What did you say?” he said.

“There’s somewhere the Law stops and just people starts,” Ned said. And still for another moment the constable didn’t move — an older

man than you thought at first, spare, quite hale, but older, who wore no pistol, in his pocket or anywhere else, and if he had a badge, it wasn't in sight either.

"You're right," he said. He said to me: "That's where you want to stay? with old Possum?"

"Yes sir," I said.

"All right," he said. He turned. "Get in, boys," he said.

"What you going to do with the nigger?" Butch said. He had taken the lines from the man who brought the surrey up; his foot was already on the stirrup to get into the driver's seat; Boon and Sam were already in the back. "Let him ride your horse?"

"You're going to ride my horse," the constable said. "Jump up, son," he told Ned. "You're the horse expert around here." Ned took the lines from Butch and got up and cramped the wheel for the constable to get up beside him. Boon was still looking down at me, his face battered and bruised but quiet now under the drying blood.

"Come on with Sam," he said.

"I'm all right," I said.

"No," Boon said. "I cant—"

"I know Possum Hood," the constable said. "If I get worried about him, I'll come back tonight and get him. Drive on, son." They went on. They were gone. I was alone. I mean, if I had been left by myself like when two hunters separate in the woods or fields, to meet again later, even as late as camp that night, I would not have been so alone. As it was, I was anything but solitary. I was an island in that ring of sweated hats and tieless shirts and overalls, the alien nameless faces already turning away from me as I looked about at them, and not one word to me of Yes or No or Go or Stay: who — me — was being reabandoned who had already been abandoned once: and at only eleven you are not really big enough in size to be worth that much abandonment; you would be obliterated, effaced, dissolved, vaporised beneath it.

Until one of them said:

“You looking for Possum Hood? I think he’s over yonder by his buggy, waiting for you.” He was. The other wagons and buggies were pulling out now; most of them and all the saddled horses and mules were already gone. I went up to the buggy and stopped. I dont know why: I just stopped. Maybe there was nowhere else to go. I mean, there was no room for the next step forward until somebody moved the buggy.

“Get in,” Uncle Parsham said. “We’ll go home and wait for Lycurgus.”

“Lycurgus,” I said as though I had never heard the name before even.

“He rode on to town on the mule. He will find out what all this is about and come back and tell us. He’s going to find out what time a train goes to Jefferson tonight.”

“To Jefferson?” I said.

“So you can go home.” He didn’t quite look at me. “If you want to.”

“I cant go home yet,” I said. “I got to wait for Boon.”

“I said if you want to,” Uncle Parsham said. “Get in.” I got in. He drove across the pasture, into the road. “Close the gate,” Uncle Parsham said.

“It’s about time somebody remembered to.” I closed the gate and got back in the buggy. “You ever drive a mule to a buggy?”

“No sir,” I said. He handed me the lines. “I dont know how,” I said.

“Then you can learn now. A mule aint like a horse. When a horse gets a wrong notion in his head, all you got to do is swap him another one for it. Most anything will do — a whip or spur or just scare him by hollering at him. A mule is different. He can hold two notions at the same time and the way to change one of them is to act like you believe he thought of changing it first.

He’ll know different, because mules have got sense. But a mule is a gentleman too, and when you act courteous and respectful at him without trying to buy him or scare him, he’ll act courteous and respectful back at you — as long as you dont overstep him. That’s why you dont pet a mule like you do a horse: he knows you dont love him:

you're just trying to fool him into doing something he already dont aim to do, and it insults him.

Handle him like that. He knows the way home, and he will know it aint me holding the lines. So all you need to do is tell him with the lines that you know the way too but he lives here and you're just a boy so you want him to go in front."

We went on, at a fair clip now, the mule neat and nimble, raising barely half as much dust as a horse would; already I could feel what Uncle Parsham meant; there came back to me through the lines not just power, but intelligence, sagacity; not just the capacity but the willingness to choose when necessary between two alternatives and to make the right decision without hesitation. "What do you do at home?" Uncle Parsham said.

"I work on Saturdays," I said.

"Then you going to save some of the money. What are you going to buy with it?" And so suddenly I was talking, telling him: about the beagles: how I wanted to be a fox hunter like Cousin Zack and how Cousin Zack said the way to learn was with a pack of beagles on rabbits; and how Father paid me ten cents each Saturday at the livery stable and Father would match whatever I saved of it until I could buy the first couple to start my pack, which would cost twelve dollars and I already had eight dollars and ten cents; and then, all of a sudden too, I was crying, bawling: I was tired, not from riding a mile race because I had ridden more than that at one time before, even though it wasn't real racing; but maybe from being up early and chasing back and forth across the country without any dinner but a piece of corn bread.

Maybe that was it: I was just hungry. But anyway, there I sat, bawling like a baby, worse than Alexander and even Maury, against Uncle Parsham's shirt while he held me with one arm and took the lines from me with his other hand, not saying anything at all, until he said, "Now you can quit. We're almost home; you'll have just time to wash your face at the trough before we go in the house. You dont want womenfolks to see it like that."

Which I did. That is, we unhitched the mule first and watered him and hung the harness up and wiped him down and stalled and fed him and pushed the buggy back under its shed and then I smeared my face with water at the trough and dried it (after a fashion) with the riding-sock and we went into the house. And the evening meal — supper — was ready although it was barely five o'clock, as country people, farmers, ate; and we sat down: Uncle Parsham and his daughter and me since Lycurgus was not yet back from town, and Uncle Parsham said, "You gives thanks at your house too," and I said, "Yes sir," and he said, "Bow your head," and we did so and he said grace, briefly, courteously but with dignity, without abasement or cringing: one man of decency and intelligence to another: notifying Heaven that we were about to eat and thanking It for the privilege, but at the same time reminding It that It had had some help too; that if someone named Hood or Briggins (so that was Lycurgus's and his mother's name) hadn't sweated some, the acknowledgment would have graced mainly empty dishes, and said Amen and unfolded his napkin and stuck the corner in his collar exactly as Grandfather did, and we ate: the dishes of cold vegetables which should have been eaten hot at the country hour of eleven o'clock, but there were hot biscuits and three kinds of preserves, and buttermilk.

And still it wasn't even sundown: the long twilight and even after that, still the long evening, the long night and I didn't even know where I was going to sleep nor even on what, Uncle Parsham sitting there picking his teeth with a gold toothpick just like Grandfather's and reading my mind like it was a magic-lantern slide: "Do you like to go fishing?" I didn't really like it. I couldn't seem to learn to want — or maybe want to learn — to be still that long. I said quickly: "Yes sir."

"Come on then. By that time Lycurgus will be back." There were three cane poles, with lines floats sinkers hooks and all, on two nails in the wall of the back gallery. He took down two of them. "Come on," he said. In the tool shed there was a tin bucket with nail holes punched through the lid. "Lycurgus's cricket bucket," he said. "I like worms

myself." They were in a shallow earth-filled wooden tray; he — no: I; I said,

"Lemme do it," and took the broken fork from him and dug the long frantic worms out of the dirt, into a tin can.

"Come on," he said, shouldering his pole, passing the stable but turning sharp away and down toward the creek bottom, not far; there was a good worn path among the blackberry thickets and then the willows, then the creek, the water seeming to gather gently the fading light and then as gently return it; there was even a log to sit on. "This is where my daughter fishes," he said, "We call it Mary's hole.

But you can use it now. I'll be on down the bank." Then he was gone. The light was going fast now; it would be night before long. I sat on the log, in a gentle whine of mosquitoes. It wouldn't be too difficult; all I would have to do would just be to say I wont think whenever it was necessary. After a while I thought about putting the hook into the water, then I could watch how long it would take the float to disappear into darkness when night finally came. Then I even thought about putting one of Lycurgus's crickets on the hook, but crickets were not always easy to catch and Lycurgus lived by a creek and would have more time to fish and would need them.

So I just thought I wont think; I could see the float plainer than ever, now that it was on the water; it would probably be the last of all to vanish into the darkness, since the water itself would be next to last; I couldn't see or hear Uncle Parsham at all, I didn't know how much further he called on down the bank and now was the perfect time, chance to act like a baby, only what's the good of acting like a baby, of wasting it with nobody there to know it or offer sympathy — if anybody ever wants sympathy or even in fact really to be back home because what you really want is just a familiar soft bed to sleep in for a change again, to go to sleep in; there were whippoorwills now and back somewhere beyond the creek an owl too, a big one by his voice; maybe there were big woods there and if Lycurgus's (or maybe they were Uncle Parsham's) hounds were all that good on Otis last night, they sure ought to be able to handle rabbits or coons or possums.

So I asked him. It was full night now for some time. He said quietly behind me; I hadn't even heard him until then:

"Had a bite yet?"

"I aint much of a fisherman," I said. "How do your hounds hunt?"

"Good," he said. He didn't even raise his voice: "Pappy." Uncle Parsham's white shirt held light too, up to us where Lycurgus took the two poles and we followed, up the path again where the two hounds met us, on into the house again, into the lamplight, a plate of supper with a cloth over it ready for Lycurgus.

"Sit down," Uncle Parsham said. "You can talk while you eat." Lycurgus sat down.

"They're still there," he said.

"They aint took them to Hardwick yet?" Uncle Parsham said. "Possum hasn't got a jail," he told me. "They lock them in the woodshed behind the schoolhouse until they can take them to the jail at Hardwick. Men, that is. They aint had women before."

"No sir," Lycurgus said. "The ladies is still in the hotel, with a guard at the door. Just Mr Hogganbeck is in the woodshed. Mr Caldwell went back to Memphis on Number Thirty-one. He taken that boy with him." "Otis?" I said. "Did they get the tooth back?"

"They never said," Lycurgus said, eating; he glanced briefly at me. "And the horse is all right too. I went and seen him. He's in the hotel stable. Before he left, Mr Caldwell made a bond for Mr McCaslin so he can watch the horse." He ate. "A train leaves for Jefferson at nine-forty. We could make it all right if we hurry." Uncle Parsham took a vast silver watch from his pocket and looked at it. "We could make it," Lycurgus said.

"I cant," I said. "I got to wait." Uncle Parsham put the watch back. He rose. He said, not loud:

"Mary." She was in the front room; I hadn't heard a sound. She came to the door.

"I already did it," she said. She said to Lycurgus: "Your pallet's ready in the hall." Then to me: "You sleep in Lycurgus's bed where you was yestiddy."

"I dont need to take Lycurgus's bed," I said. "I can sleep with Uncle Parsham. I wont mind." They looked at me, quite still, quite identical. "I sleep with Boss a lot of times," I said. "He snores too. I dont mind."

"Boss?" Uncle Parsham said.

"That's what we call Grandfather," I said. "He snores too. I wont mind."

"Let him," Uncle Parsham said. We went to his room. His lamp had flowers painted on the china shade and there was a big gold-framed portrait on a gold easel in one corner: a woman, not very old but in old-timey clothes; the bed had a bright patchwork quilt on it like Lycurgus's and even in May there was a smolder of fire on the hearth. There was a chair, a rocking chair too, but I didn't sit down. I just stood there. Then he came in again. He wore a nightshirt now and was winding the silver watch. "Undress," he said. I did so. "Does your mother let you sleep like that at home?"

"No sir," I said.

"You aint got anything with you, have you?"

"No sir," I said. He put the watch on the mantel and went to the door and said,

"Mary." She answered. "Bring one of Lycurgus's clean shirts." After a while her hand held the shirt through the door crack. He took it.

"Here," he said. I came and put it on. "Do you say your Now I lay me in bed or kneeling down?"

"Kneeling down," I said.

"Say them," he said. I knelt beside the bed and said my prayers. The bed was already turned back. I got into it and he blew out the lamp and I heard the bed again and then — the moon would be late before it was very high tonight but there was already enough light — I could see him, all black and white against the white pillow and the white moustache

and imperial, lying on his back, his hands folded on his breast.

“Tomorrow morning I’ll take you to town and we’ll see Mr Hogganbeck. If he says you have done all you can do here and for you to go home, will you go then?”

“Yes sir,” I said.

“Now go to sleep,” he said. Because even before he said it, I knew that that was exactly what I wanted, what I had been wanting probably ever since yesterday: to go home. I mean, nobody likes to be licked, but maybe there are times when nobody can help being; that all you can do about it is not quit. And Boon and Ned hadn’t quit, or they wouldn’t be where they were right now. And maybe they wouldn’t say that I had quit either, when it was them who told me to go home. Maybe I was just too little, too young; maybe I just wasn’t able to tote whatever my share was, and if they had had somebody else bigger or older or maybe just smarter, we wouldn’t have been licked. You see?

like that: all specious and rational; unimpugnable even, when the simple truth was, I wanted to go home and just wasn’t brave enough to say so, let alone do it. So now, having admitted at last that I was not only a failure but a coward too, my mind should be peaceful and easy and I should go on to sleep like a baby: where Uncle Parsham already was, just barely snoring (who should hear Grandfather once).

Not that that mattered either, since I would be home tomorrow with nothing — no stolen horses nor chastity-stricken prostitutes and errant pullman conductors and Ned and Boon Hogganbeck in his normal condition once he had slipped Father’s leash — to interfere with sleep, hearing the voice, the bawling two or three times before I struggled up and out, into daylight, sunlight; Uncle Parsham’s side of the bed was empty and now I could hear the bawling from outside the house: “Hellow. Hellow. Lycurgus. Lycurgus,” and leapt, sprang from the bed, already running, across to the window where I could look out into the front yard. It was Ned. He had the horse.

SO ONCE AGAIN, at two o'clock in the afternoon, McWillie and I sat our (his was anyway) skittering mounts — we had scared Mr Clapp enough yesterday to where we had drawn for pole position this time and McWillie won it — poised for the steward-starter's (the bird-dog trainer-market hunter-homicidist's) Go!

A few things came before that though. One of them was Ned. He looked bad. He looked terrible. It wasn't just lack of sleep; we all had that lack. But Boon and I had at least spent the four nights in bed since we left Jefferson, where Ned had spent maybe two, one of the others in a boxcar with a horse and the other in a stable with him, both on hay if on anything.

It was his clothes too. His shirt was filthy and his black pants were not much better. At least Everbe had washed some of mine night before last, but Ned hadn't even had his off until now: sitting now in a clean faded suit of Uncle Parsham's overalls and jumper while Mary was washing his shirt and doing what she could with his pants, at the kitchen table now, he and I eating our breakfast while Uncle Parsham sat and listened.

He said that a little before daylight one of the white men — it wasn't Mr Poleyus, the constable — woke him where he was asleep on some bales of hay and told him to take the horse and get out of town with it —

"Just you and Lightning, and not Boon and the others?" I said. "Where are they?"

"Where them white folks put um," Ned said. "So I said, Much oblige, Whitefolks, and took Lightning in my hand and—"

"Why?" I said.

"What do you care why? All we need to do now is be up behind that starting wire at two o'clock this afternoon and win them two heats and get a holt of Boss's automobile and get on back to Jefferson that we hadn't ought to never left nohow—"

“We cant go back without Boon,” I said. “If they let you and Lightning go, why didn’t they let him go?”

“Look,” Ned said. “Me and you got enough to do just running that horse race. Why dont you finish your breakfast and then go back and lay down and rest until I calls you in time—”

“Stop lying to him,” Uncle Parsham said. Ned ate, his head bent over his plate, eating fast. He was tired; his eye-whites were not even just pink any more: they were red.

“Mr Boon Hogganbeck aint going anywhere for a while. He’s in jail good this time. They gonter take him to Hardwick this morning where they can lock him up sho enough. But forget that. What you and me have got to do is—”

“Tell him,” Uncle Parsham said. “He’s stood everything else you folks got him into since you brought him here; what makes you think he cant stand the rest of it too, until you manage somehow to come out on the other side and can take him back home? Didn’t he have to watch it too, right here in my yard and my house, and down yonder in my pasture both, not to mention what he might have seen in town since — that man horsing and studding at that gal, and her trying to get away from him, and not nobody but this eleven-year-old boy to run to? not Boon Hogganbeck and not the Law and not the grown white folks to count on and hope for, but just him? Tell him.” And already the thing inside me saying No No Dont ask Leave it Leave it. I said, “What did Boon do?” Ned chewed over his plate, blinking his reddened eyes like when you have sand in them.

“He whupped that Law. That Butch. He nigh ruint him. They let him out before they done me and Lightning. He never even stopped. He went straight to that gal—”

“It was Miss Reba,” I said. “It was Miss Reba.”

“No,” Ned said. “It was that other one. That big one. They never called her name to me. — and whupped her and turned around—”

“He hit her?” I said. “Boon hit Ever — Miss Corrie?”

“Is that her name? Yes. — and turned around and went straight back until he found that Law and whupped him, pistol and all, before they could pull him off—”

“Boon hit her,” I said. “He hit her.”

“That’s right,” Ned said. “She is the reason me and Lightning are free right now. That Butch found out he couldn’t get to her no other way, and when he found out that me and you and Boon had to win that race today before we could dare to go back home, and all we had to win it with was Lightning, he took Lightning and locked him up.

That’s what happened. That’s all it was; Uncle Possum just told you how he watched it coming Monday, and maybe I ought to seen it too and maybe I would if I hadn’t been so busy with Lightning, or maybe if I had been a little better acquainted with that Butch—”

“I dont believe it,” I said.

“Yes,” he said. “That’s what it was. It was just bad luck, the kind of bad luck you cant count against beforehand. He likely just happened to be wherever he was just by chance when he seen her Monday and figgered right off that that badge and pistol would be all he would need, being likely used to having them be enough around here. Only this time they wasn’t and so he had to look again, and sho enough, there was Lightning that we had to depend on to win that race so we could get back Boss’s automobile and maybe go back home—”

“No!” I said. “No! It wasn’t her! She’s not even here! She went back to Memphis with Sam yesterday evening! They just didn’t tell you! It was somebody else! It was another one!”

“No,” Ned said. “It was her. You seen it Monday out here.” Oh yes; and on the way back in the surrey that afternoon, and at the doctor’s, and at the hotel that night until Miss Reba frightened him away, we — I anyway — thought for good. Because Miss Reba was only a woman too. I said:

“Why didn’t somebody else help her? a man to help her — that man, that man that took you and Lightning, that told Sam and Butch both they could be whatever they wanted in Memphis or Nashville or Hardwick either, but that here in Possum he was the one—” I said, cried: “I dont believe it!”

“Yes,” Ned said. “It was her that bought Lightning loose to run again today. I aint talking about me and Boon and them others; Butch never cared nothing about us, except to maybe keep Boon outen the way until this morning.

All he needed was Lightning, only he had to throw in me and Boon and the rest to make Mr Poleymus believe him. Because Butch tricked him too, used him too, until whatever it was that happened this morning — whether that Butch, having done been paid off now, said it was all a mistake or it was the wrong horse, or maybe by that time Mr Poleymus his-self had added one to one and smelled a mouse and turned everybody loose and before he could turn around, Boon went and whupped that gal and then come straight back without even stopping and tried to tear that Butch’s head off, pistol and all, with his bare hands, and Mr Poleymus smelled a whole rat.

And Mr Poleymus may be little, and he may be old; but he’s a man, mon. They told me how last year his wife had one of them strokes and cant even move her hand now, and all the chillen are married and gone, so he has to wash her and feed her and lift her in and outen the bed day and night both, besides cooking and keeping house too unlesen some neighbor woman comes in to help. But you dont know it to look at him and watch him act.

He come in there — I never seen none of it; they just told me: two or three holding Boon and another one trying to keep that Butch from whupping him with the pistol whilst they was holding him — and walked up to Butch and snatched that pistol outen his hand and reached up and ripped that badge and half his shirt off too and telefoamed to Hardwick to send a automobile to bring them all back to jail, the women too. When it’s women, they calls it fragrancy.”

“Vagrancy,” Uncle Parsham said.

“That’s what I said,” Ned said. “You call it whatever you want. I calls it jail.”

“I dont believe it,” I said. “She quit.”

“Then we sho better say much obliged that she started again,” Ned said. “Else me and you and Lightning—”

“She’s quit,” I said. “She promised me.”

“Aint we got Lightning back?” Ned said. “Aint all we got to do now is just run him? Didn’t Mr Sam say he will be back today and will know what to do, and then me and you and Boon will be just the same as already back home?”

I sat there. It was still early. I mean, even now it was still only eight oclock. It was going to be hot today, the first hot day, precursor of summer. You see, just to keep on saying I dont believe it served only for the moment; as soon as the words, the noise, died, there it still was — anguish, rage, outrage, grief, whatever it was — unchanged. “I have to go to town right away,” I said to Uncle Parsham. “If I can use one of the mules, I’ll send you the money as soon as I get home.” He rose at once.

“Come on,” he said.

“Hold on,” Ned said. “It’s too late now, Mr Poleymus sent for a automobile. They’ve already left before now.”

“He can cut them off,” Uncle Parsham said. “It aint a half a mile from here to the road they’ll be on.”

“I got to get some sleep,” Ned said.

“I know it,” Uncle Parsham said. “I’m going with him. I told him last night I would.”

“I’m not going home yet,” I said. “I’m just going to town for a minute. Then I’ll come back here.”

“All right,” Ned said. “At least lemme finish my coffee.” We didn’t wait for him. One of the mules was gone, probably to the field with

Lycurgus. But the other was there. Ned came out before we had the gear on.

Uncle Parsham showed us the short cut to the Hardwick road, but I didn't care. I mean, it didn't matter to me now where I met him. If I hadn't been just about worn out with race horses and women and deputy sheriffs and everybody else that wasn't back home where they belonged, I might have preferred to hold my interview with Boon in some quick private place for both our sakes.

But it didn't matter now; it could be in the middle of the big road or in the middle of the Square either, as far as I was concerned; there could be a whole automobile full of them. But we didn't meet the automobile; obviously I was being protected; to have had to do it in public would have been intolerable, gratuitously intolerable for one who had served Non-virtue this faithfully for four days and asked so little in return. I mean, not to have to see any more of them than I had to.

Which was granted; the still-empty automobile had barely reached the hotel itself when we got there: a seven-passenger Stanley Steamer: enough room even for the baggage of two — no, three: Minnie too — women on a two-day trip from Memphis to Parsham, which they would all be upstairs packing now, so even horse stealing took care of its own. Ned cramped the wheel for me to get down. "You still dont want to tell me what you come for?" he said.

"No," I said. None of the long row of chairs on the gallery were occupied, Caesar could have held his triumph there and had all the isolation Boon's and Butch's new status required; the lobby was empty, and Mr Poleyms could have used that. But he was a man, mon; they were in the ladies' parlor — Mr Poleyms, the driver of the car (another deputy; anyway, in a badge), Butch and Boon fresh and marked from battle.

Though only Boon for me, who read my face (he had known it long enough) or maybe it was his own heart or anyway conscience; he said quickly:

“Look out, now, Lucius; look out!” already flinging up one arm as he rose quickly, already stepping back, retreating, I walking at him, up to him, not tall enough by more than half and nothing to stand on either (that ludicrous anticlimax of shame), having to reach, to jump even, stretch the best I could to strike at his face; oh yes, I was crying, bawling again; I couldn’t even see him now: just hitting as high as I could, having to jump at him to do so, against his Alp-hard Alp-tall crags and cliffs, Mr Poleyms saying behind me:

“Hit him again. He struck a woman, I dont care who she is,” and (or somebody) holding me until I wrenched, jerked free, turning, blind, for the door or where I thought I remembered it, the hand guiding me now.

“Wait,” Boon said. “Dont you want to see her?” You see, I was tired and my feet hurt. I was about worn out, and I needed sleep too. But more: I was dirty. I wanted fresh clothes. She had washed for me Monday night but I didn’t want just rewashed clothes: I wanted a change of clothes that had had time to rest for a while, like at home, smelling of rest and quiet drawers and starch and bluing; but mainly my feet; I wanted fresh stockings and my other shoes.

“I dont want to see nobody!” I said. “I want to go home!”

“All right,” Boon said. “Here — anybody — will somebody put him on that train this morning? I got money — can get it—”

“Shut up,” I said. “I aint going nowhere now.” I went on, still blind; or that is, the hand carried me.

“Wait,” Boon said. “Wait, Lucius.”

“Shut up,” I said. The hand curved me around; there was a wall now.

“Wipe your face,” Mr Poleyms said. He held out a bandanna handkerchief but I didn’t take it; my bandage would sop it up all right. Anyway, the riding-sock did. It was used to being cried into. Who knew?

if it stayed with me long enough, it might even win a horse race. I could see now; we were in the lobby. I started to turn but he held me. "Hold up a minute," he said. "If you still dont want to see anybody."

It was Miss Reba and Everbe coming down the stairs carrying their grips but Minnie wasn't with them. The car-driving deputy was waiting. He took the grips and they went on; they didn't look toward us, Miss Reba with her head mad and hard and high; if the deputy hadn't moved quick she would have tromped right over him, grips and all. They went out. "I'll buy you a ticket home," Mr Poleymus said. "Get on that train." I didn't say Shut up to him. "You've run out of folks sure enough now, I'll stay with you and tell the conductor—"

"I'm going to wait for Ned," I said. "I cant go without him. If you hadn't ruined everything yesterday, we'd all been gone by now."

"Who's Ned?" he said. I told him. "You mean you're going to run that horse today anyhow? you and Ned by yourself?" I told him. "Where's Ned now?" I told him. "Come on," he said. "We can go out the side door." Ned was standing at the mule's head. The back of the automobile was toward us. And Minnie still wasn't with them. Maybe she went back to Memphis yesterday with Sam and Otis; maybe now that she had Otis again she wasn't going to lift her hand off of him until it had that tooth in it. That's what I would have done, anyway.

"So Mr Poleymus finally caught you too, did he?" Ned said. "What's the matter? aint he got no handcuffs your size?"

"Shut up," I said.

"When you going to get him back home, son?" Mr Poleymus said to Ned.

"I hope tonight," Ned said; he wasn't being Uncle Remus or smart or cute or anything now. "Soon as I get rid of this horse race and can do something about it."

"Have you got enough money?"

“Yes sir,” Ned said. “Much oblige. We’ll be all right after this race.” He cramped the wheel and we got in. Mr Poleymus stood with his hand on the top stanchion. He said:

“So you really are going to race that Linscomb horse this afternoon.”

“We gonter beat that Linscomb horse this afternoon,” Ned said.

“You hope so,” Mr Poleymus said.

“I know so,” Ned said.

“How much do you know so?” Mr Poleymus said.

“I wish I had a hundred dollars of my own to bet on it,” Ned said. They looked at each other; it was a good while. Then Mr Poleymus turned loosed the stanchion and took from his pocket a worn snap purse that when I saw it I thought I was seeing double because it was exactly like Ned’s, scuffed and worn and even longer than the riding-sock, that you didn’t even know who was paying who for what, and unsnapped it and took out two one-dollar bills and snapped the purse shut and handed the bills to Ned.

“Bet this for me,” he said. “If you’re right, you can keep half of it.” Ned took the money.

“I’ll bet it for you,” he said. “But much oblige. By sundown tonight I can lend you half of three or four times this much.” We drove on then — I mean, Ned drove on — turning; we didn’t pass the automobile at all.

“Been crying again,” he said. “A race horse jockey and still aint growed out of crying.”

“Shut up,” I said. But he was turning the buggy again, on across the tracks and on along what would have been the other side of the Square if Parsham ever got big enough to have a Square, and stopped; we were in front of a store.

“Hold him,” Ned said and got out and went in the store, not long, and came back with a paper sack and got in and took the lines, back toward

home — I mean Uncle Parsham's — now and with his free hand took from the big bag a small one; it was peppermint drops. "Here," he said.

"I got some bananas too and soon as we get Lightning back to that private spring-branch paddock we uses, we can set down and eat um and then maybe I can get some sleep before I forget how to. And meanwhile, stop fretting about that gal, now you done said your say to Boon Hogganbeck. Hitting a woman dont hurt her because a woman dont shove back at a lick like a man do; she just gives to it and then when your back is turned, reaches for the flatiron or the butcher knife.

That's why hitting them dont break nothing; all it does is just black her eye or cut her mouf a little. And that aint nothing to a woman. Because why? Because what better sign than a black eye or a cut mouf can a woman want from a man that he got her on his mind?"

So once more, in the clutch of our respective starting grooms, McWillie and I sat our skittering and jockeying mounts behind that wire. (That's right, skittering and jockeying, Lightning too; at least he had learned — anyway remembered from yesterday — that he was supposed to be at least up with Acheron when the running started, even if he hadn't discovered yet that he was supposed — hoped — to be in front when it stopped.)

This time Ned's final instructions were simple, explicit, and succinct: "Just remember, I knows I can make him run once, and I believes I can make him run twice. Only, we wants to save that once I knows, until we knows we needs it. So here's what I want you to do for this first heat: Just before them judges and such hollers Go! you say to yourself My name is Ned William McCaslin and then do it."

"Do what?" I said.

"I dont know yet neither," he said. "But Akrum is a horse, and with a horse anything can happen. And with a nigger boy on him, it's twice as likely to. You just got to watch and be ready, so that when it do happen, you done already said My name is Ned William McCaslin and then do it and do it quick. And dont worry. If it dont work and dont nothing

happen, I'll be waiting right there at the finish, where I come in. Because we knows I can make him run once."

Then the voice hollered Go! and our grooms sprang for their lives and we were off (as I said, we had drawn this time and McWillie had the pole). Or McWillie was off, that is. Because I dont remember: whether I had planned it or just did it by instinct, so that when McWillie broke, I was already braced and Lightning's first spring rammed him into the bridle all the way up to my shoulders, bad hand and all.

Acheron already in full run and three lengths ahead when I let Lightning go, but still kept the three-length gap, both of us going now but three horses apart, when I saw McWillie do what you call nowadays a double-take: a single quick glance aside, using only his eyeballs, expecting to see me of course more or less at his knee, then seeming to drive on at full speed for another stride or so before his vision told his intelligence that Lightning and I were not there.

Then he turned, jerked his whole head around to look back and I remember still the whites of his eyes and his open mouth; I could see him sawing frantically at Acheron to slow him; I sincerely believe I even heard him yell back at me: "Goddammit, white boy, if you gonter race, race!" the gap between us closing fast now because he now had Acheron wrenched back and crossways until he was now at right angles to the course, more or less filling the track sideways from rail to rail it looked like and facing the outside rail and for that moment, instant, second, motionless; I am convinced that McWillie's now frantic mind actually toyed with the idea of turning and running back until he could turn again with Lightning in front.

Nor no premeditation, nothing: I just said in my mind My name is Ned William McCaslin and cut Lightning as hard as I could with the switch, pulling his head over so that when he sprang for the gap between Acheron's stern and the inside rail, we would scrape Acheron; I remember I thought My leg will be crushed and I sat there, the switch poised again, in complete detachment, waiting in nothing but curiosity

for the blow, shock, crack, spurt of blood and bones or whatever it would be.

But we had just exactly room enough or speed enough or maybe it was luck enough: not my leg but Lightning's hip which scraped across Acheron's buttocks: at which second I cut again with the switch as hard as I could. Nor any judge or steward, dog trainer, market hunter or murderer, nor purist or stickler of the most finicking and irreproachable, to affirm it was not my own mount I struck; in fact, we were so inextricable at that second that, of the four of us, only Acheron actually knew who had been hit.

Then on. I mean, Lightning and me. I didn't — couldn't — look back yet, so I had to wait to learn what happened. They said that Acheron didn't try to jump the rail at all: he just reared and fell through it in a kind of whirling dust of white planks, but still on his feet, frantic now, running more or less straight out into the pasture, spectators scattering before him, until McWillie wrenched him around; and they said that this time McWillie actually set him quartering at the fence (it was too late now to go back to the gap in it he had already made; we — Lightning — were too far ahead by this time) as though he were a hunter.

But he refused it, running instead at full speed along the rail, but still on the outside of it, the spectators hollering and leaping like frogs from in front of him as he cleared his new path or precedent. That was when I began to hear him again.

He — they: McWillie and Acheron — was closing fast now, though with the outside rail between us: Lightning with the whole track to himself now and going with that same fine strong rhythm and reach and power to which it had simply not occurred yet that there was any hurry about it; in the back stretch now and Acheron, who had already run at least one extra fifty yards and would have to run another one before he finished, already abreast of us beyond the rail; around the far turn of the first lap now and now I could actually see McWillie's desperate mind grappling frantically with the rapidly diminishing choice of whether to swing Acheron wide enough to bring him back through his

self-made gap and onto the track again and have him refuse its jumbled wreckage, or play safe and stay where they were in the new track which they had already cleared of obstacles.

Conservatism won (as it should and does); again the back stretch (second lap now); now the far turn (second one also) and even on the outside longer curve, they were drawing ahead; there was the wire and Acheron a length at least ahead and I believe I thought for an instant of going to the whip just for the looks of the thing; on; our crowd was yelling now and who could blame them? few if any had seen a heat like this before between two horses running on opposite sides of the rail; on, Acheron still at top speed along his path as empty and open for him as the path to heaven; two lengths ahead when we — Lightning — passed under the wire, and (Acheron: evidently he liked running outside) already into his third lap when McWillie dragged him by main strength away and into the pasture and into a tightening circle which even he could no longer negotiate.

And much uproar behind us now: shouts: “Foul! Foul! No! No! Yes! No heat! No heat! Yes it was! No it wasn’t! Ask the judge! Ask Ed! What was it, Ed?” — that part of the crowd which Acheron had scattered from the outside rail now pouring across the track through the shattered gap to join the others in the infield; I was looking for Ned; I thought I saw him but it was Lycurgus, trotting up the track toward me until he could take Lightning’s bit, already turning him back.

“Come on,” he said. “You can stop. You got to cool him out. Mr McCaslin said to get him away from the track, take him over yonder to them locust trees where the buggy’s at, where he can be quiet and we can rub him down.” But I tried to hold back.

“What happened?” I said. “Is it going to count? We won, didn’t we? We went under the wire. They just went around it. Here,” I said, “you take him while I go back and see.”

“No, I tell you,” Lycurgus said. He had Lightning trotting now. “Mr McCaslin dont want you there neither. He said for me and you to stay

right with Lightning and have him ready to run again; that next heat's in less than a hour now and we got to win that one now, because if this throws this one out, we got to win the next one no matter what happens."

So we went on. He lifted down a rail at the end of the track and we went through, on to the clump of locust trees about two hundreds yards away; now I could see Uncle Parsham's buggy hitched to one of them. And I could still hear the voices from the judges' stand in the infield and I still wanted to go back and find out. But Lycurgus had forestalled that too: he had the pails and sponges and cloths and even a churn of water in the buggy for us to strip Lightning and go to work on him.

So I had to get my first information about what had happened (and was still happening too) from hearsay — what little Lycurgus had seen before Ned sent him to meet me, and from others later — before Ned came up: the uproar, vociferation of protest and affirmation (oh yes, even after losing two races — heats, whatever they were — last winter, and the first heat of this one yesterday, there were still people who had bet on Lightning.

Because I was only eleven; I had not learned yet that no horse ever walked to post, provided he was still on his feet when he got there, that somebody didn't bet on), coming once or twice almost to blows, with Ned in the center of it, in effect the crux of it, polite and calm but dogged and insistent too, rebutting each attack: "It wasn't a race.

It takes at least two horses to make a race, and one of these wasn't even on the track." And Ned:

"No sir. The rule book dont mention how many horses. It just talks about one horse at a time: that if it dont commit fouls and dont stop forward motion and the jockey dont fall off and it cross the finish line first, it wins." Then another:

"Then you just proved yourself that black won: it never fouled nothing but about twenty foot of that fence and it sho never stopped forward motion because I myself seen a least a hundred folks barely get out

from under it in time and you yourself seen it pass that finish line a good two lengths ahead of that chestnut.” And Ned:

“No sir. That finish wire just runs across that track from one rail to the other. It dont run on down into Mississippi too. If it done that, there are horses down there been crossing it ever since sunup this morning that we aint even heard about yet.

No sir. It’s too bad about that little flimsy railing, but we was too busy running our horse to have time to stop and wait for that other one to come back.” When suddenly three newcomers were on the scene, or anyway in the telling of it: not three strangers, because one of them was Colonel Linscomb himself and they all knew him since they were his neighbors.

So probably what they meant was that the other two were simply his guests, city men too or very likely simply of Colonel Linscomb’s age and obvious solvency and likewise wearing coats and neckties, who — one of them — seemed to take charge of the matter, coming into the crowd clamoring around Ned and the harassed officials and saying, “Gentlemen, let me offer a solution. As this man” — meaning Ned— “says, his horse ran according to the rules and went under the wire first.

Yet we all saw the other horse run the fastest race and was in the lead at the finish. The owners of the horses are these gentlemen right here behind me: Colonel Linscomb, your neighbor, and Mr van Tosch from Memphis, near enough to be your neighbor too when you get to know him better. They have agreed, and your judges will approve it, to put this heat that was just run, into what the bankers call escrow.

You all have done business with bankers whether you wanted to or not” — they said he even paused for the guffaw, and got it— “and you know how they have a name for everything—”

“Interest on it too,” a voice said, and so he got that guffaw free and joined it.

“What escrow means this time is, suspended. Not abolished or cancelled: just suspended. The bets still stand just as you made them; nobody won and nobody lost; you can increase them or hedge them or whatever you want to; the stake money for the last heat still stands and the owners are already adding another fifty a side for the next heat, the winner of this next heat to be the winner of the one that was just run. Win this next heat, and win all. What do you say?”

That’s what I — we — Lycurgus and me — heard later. Right now we knew nothing: just waiting for Ned or somebody to come for us or send for us, Lightning cleaned and blanketed now and Lycurgus leading him up and down, keeping him moving, and I sitting against a tree with my riding-sock off to dry out my bandage; it seemed hours, forever, then in the next thinking it seemed no time, collapsed, condensed. Then Ned came up, walking fast. I told you how he had looked terrible this morning, but that was partly because of his clothes. His shirt was white (or almost) again now, and his pants were clean too.

But it would not have been his clothes this time, even if they were still filthy. It was his face. He didn’t look like he had seen a simple and innocent hant: he looked like he had without warning confronted Doom itself, except that Doom had said to him: Calm down.

It will be thirty or forty minutes yet before I will want you. Be ready then but in the meantime stop worrying and tend to your business. But he gave me — us — no time. He went to the buggy and took his black coat out and put it on, already talking:

“They put it in what they calls escrow. That means whoever loses this next one has done lost everything. Tack up.” But Lycurgus already had the blanket off; it didn’t take us long. Then I was up, Ned standing at Lightning’s head, holding the bridle with one hand, his other hand in the pocket of the coat, fumbling at something.

“This one is gonter be easy for you. We nudged him a little yestiddy, then you fooled him bad today. So you aint gonter trick him again. But it wont matter. We wont need to trick him now; I’ll tend to this one

myself. All you got to do is, still be on him at the finish. Dont fall off: that's all you got to do until right at the last.

Just keep him between them two rails, and dont fall off of him. Remember what he taught you Monday. When you comes around the first lap, and just before he will think about where I was standing Monday, hit him. Keep him going; dont worry about that other horse, no matter where he is or what he's doing: just tend to yourn. You mind that?"

"Yes," I said.

"All right. Then here's the onliest other thing you got to do. When you comes around the last lap and around the back turn into the home stretch toward that wire, dont just believe, know that Lightning is where he can see the whole track in front of him.

When you get there, you will know why. But before that, dont just think maybe he can, or that by now he sholy ought to, but know he can see that whole track right up to the wire and beyond it.

If that other horse is in front of you, pull Lightning all the way across the track to the outside rail if you needs to where there wont be nothing in the way to keep him from seeing that wire and on beyond it too.

Dont worry about losing distance; just have Lightning where he can see everything in front of him." His other hand was out now; Lightning was nuzzling his nose into it again and again I smelled that faint thin odor which I had smelled in Uncle Parsham's pasture Monday, that I or anybody else should recognise at once, and that I would recognise if it would only happen when I had time. "Can you remember that?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then go on," he said. "Lead him on, Lycurgus."

“Aint you coming?” I said. Lycurgus pulled at the bridle; he had to get Lightning’s muzzle out of Ned’s hand by force; finally Ned had to put his hand back in his pocket.

“Go on,” he said. “You knows what to do.” Lycurgus led on; he had to for a while; Lightning even tried once to whirl back until Lycurgus snatched him.

“Hit him a little,” Lycurgus said. “Get his mind back on what he’s doing.” So I did and we went on and so for the third time McWillie and I crouched our poised thunderbolts behind that wire. McWillie’s starting groom having declined to be hurled to earth three times, and nobody else either volunteering or even accepting conscription, they used a piece of cotton-bagging jute stretched from rail to rail in the hands of two more democrats facing each other across the track.

It was probably the best start we had had yet. Acheron, who had thought nothing of diving through a six-inch plank, naturally wouldn’t go within six feet of it, and Lightning, though with his nose almost touching it, was standing as still as a cow now, I suppose scanning the crowd for Ned, when the starter hollered Go! and the string dropped and in the same second Acheron and McWillie shot past us, McWillie shouting almost in my ear:

“I’ll learn you this time, white boy!” and already gone, though barely a length before Lightning pulled obediently up to McWillie’s knee — the power, the rhythm, everything in fact except that still nobody had told his head yet this was a race.

And, in fact, for the first time, at least since I had participated, been a factor, we even looked like a race, the two horses as though bolted together and staggered a little, on into the back stretch of the first lap, our relative positions, in relation to our forward motion, changing and altering with almost dreamlike indolence, Acheron drawing ahead until it would look like he really was about to leave us, then Lightning would seem to notice the gap and close it.

It would even look like a challenge; I could hear them along the rail, who didn’t really know Lightning yet: that he just didn’t want to be that

far back by himself; on around the back turn and into the home stretch of the first lap and I give you my word Lightning came into it already looking for Ned; I give you my word he whinnied; going at a dead run, he whinnied: the first time I ever heard a horse nicker while running. I didn't even know they could.

I cut him as hard as I could. He broke, faltered, sprang again; we had already made McWillie a present of two lengths so I cut him again; we went into the second lap two lengths back and traveling now on the peeled switch until the gap between him and Acheron replaced Ned in what Lightning called his mind, and he closed it again until his head was once more at McWillie's knee, completely obedient but not one inch more — this magnificently equipped and organised organisation whose muscles had never been informed by their brain, or whose brain had never been informed by its outposts of observation and experience, that the sole aim and purpose of this entire frantic effort was to get somewhere first.

McWillie was whipping now, so I didn't need to; he could no more have drawn away from Lightning than he could have dropped behind him, through the back stretch again and around the back turn again, me still on Lightning and Lightning still between the rails, so all that remained from here out were Ned's final instructions: to pull, ease him out, presenting McWillie again with almost another length, until nothing impeded his view of the track, the wire, and beyond it.

He — Lightning — even saw Ned first. The first I knew was that neck-snapping surge and lunge as though he — Lightning — had burst through some land of invisible band or yoke. Then I saw Ned myself, maybe forty yards beyond the wire, small and puny and lonely in the track's vacancy while Acheron and McWillie's flailing arm fled rapidly back to us; then McWillie's wrung face for an instant too, then gone too; the wire flashed overhead. "Come on, son," Ned said. "I got it."

He — Lightning — almost unloaded me stopping, cutting back across the track (Acheron was somewhere close behind us, trying — I hoped — to stop too) and went to Ned at that same dead run, bit bridle and all

notwithstanding, and simply stopped running, his nose already buried in Ned's hand, and me up around his ears grabbing at whatever was in reach, sore hand too. "We did it!" I said, cried. "We did it! We beat him!"

"We done this part of it," Ned said. "Just hope to your stars it's gonter be enough." Because I had just ridden and won my first race, you see. I mean, a man-size race, with people, grown people, more people than I could remember at one time before, watching me win it and (some of them anyway) betting their money that I would. Also, I didn't have time to notice, remark anything in his face or voice or what he said, because they were already through the rail and on the track, coming toward us: the whole moil and teem of sweated hats and tieless shirts and faces still gaped with yelling.

"Look out now," Ned said; and still to me, nothing: only the faces and the voices like a sea:

"That's riding him, boy! That's bringing him in!" but we not stopping, Ned leading Lightning on, saying,

"Let us through, Whitefolks; let us through, Whitefolks," until they gave back enough to let us go on, but still moving along with us, like the wave, until we reached the gate to the infield where the judges were waiting, and Ned said again: "Look out, now"; and now I don't remember: only the stopped horse with Ned at the bit like a tableau, and me looking past Lightning's ears at Grandfather leaning a little on his cane (the gold-headed one) and two other people whom I had known somewhere a long time ago just behind him.

"Boss," I said.

"What did you do to your hand?" he said.

"Yes sir," I said. "Boss."

"You're busy now," he said. "So am I." It was quite kind, quite cold. No: it wasn't anything. "We'll wait until we get home," he said. Then he was gone. Now the two people were Sam and Minnie looking up at me with her calm grim inconsolable face for it seemed to me a long time while Ned was still pawing at my leg.

“Where’s that tobacco sack I give you to keep yestiddy?” he said. “You sholy aint lost it?”

“Oh yes,” I said, reaching it from my pocket.

XIII

“SHOW THEM,” MISS Reba told Minnie. They were in our — I mean Boon’s — no, I mean Grandfather’s — automobile: Everbe and Miss Reba and Minnie and Sam and Colonel Linscomb’s chauffeur; he was McWillie’s father; Colonel Linscomb had an automobile too. They — the chauffeur and Sam and Minnie — had gone up to Hardwick to get Miss Reba and Everbe and Boon and bring them all back to Parsham, where Miss Reba and Minnie and Sam could take the train for Memphis. Except that Boon didn’t come back with them. He was in jail again, the third time now, and they had stopped at Colonel Linscomb’s to tell Grandfather. Miss Reba told it, sitting in the car, with Grandfather and Colonel Linscomb and me standing around it because she wouldn’t come in; she told about Boon and Butch.

“It was bad enough in the automobile going up there. But at least we had that deputy, let alone that little old constable you folks got that dont look like much but I’d say people dont fool around with him much either. When we got to Hardwick, they at least had sense enough to lock them in separate cells.

The trouble was, they never had no way to lock up Corrie’s new friend’s mouth—” and stopped; and I didn’t want to have to look at Everbe either: a big girl, too big for little things to have to happen to like the black eye or the cut mouth, whichever one she would have, unless maybe she wouldn’t, couldn’t, be content with less than both; sitting there, having to, without anywhere to go or room to do it even, with the slow painful blood staining up the cheek I could see from here. “I’m sorry, kid; forget it,” Miss Reba said. “Where was I?”

“You were telling what Boon did this time,” Grandfather said.

“Oh yes,” Miss Reba said. “ — locked them up in separate cells across the corridor and they were taking Corrie and me — sure; they treated us fine: just like ladies — down to the jailor’s wife’s room where we were going to stay, when what’s-his-name — Butch — pipes up and says, ‘Well, there’s one thing about it: me and Sugar Boy lost some blood and skin and a couple of shirts too, but at least we got these excuse my French,’” Miss Reba said, “ ‘Memphis whores off the street.’

So Boon started in right away to tear that steel door down but they had remembered to already lock it, so you would think that would have calmed him: you know: having to sit there and look at it for a while. Anyhow, we thought so. Then when Sam came with the right papers or whatever they were — and much obliged to you,” she told Grandfather. “I dont know how much you had to put up, but if you’ll send the bill to me when I get home, I’ll attend to it. Boon knows the address and knows me.”

“Thank you,” Grandfather said. “If there’s any charge, I’ll let you know. What happened to Boon? You haven’t told me yet.”

“Oh yes. They unlocked What’s-his-name first; that was the mistake, because they hadn’t even got the key back out of Boon’s lock before he was out of the cell and on—”

“Butch,” I said.

“Butch,” Miss Reba said. “ — one good lick anyhow, knocked him down and was right on top of him before anybody woke up. So they never even let Boon stop; all the out he got was that trip across the corridor and back, into the cell and locked up again before they even had time to take the key out of the lock. But at least you got to admire him for it.” But she stopped.

“For what?” I said.

“What did you say?” she said.

“What he did that we’re going to admire him for. You didn’t tell us that. What did he do?”

“You think that still trying to tear that—”

“Butch,” I said.

“ — Butch’s head off before they even let him out of jail, aint nothing?”
Miss Reba said.

“He had to do that,” I said.

“I’ll be damned,” Miss Reba said. “Let’s get started; we got to catch that train. You wont forget to send that bill,” she told Grandfather.

“Get out and come in,” Colonel Linscomb said. “Supper’s about ready. You can catch the midnight train.”

“No much obliged,” Miss Reba said. “No matter how long your wife stays at Monteagle, she’ll come back home some day and you’ll have to explain it.”

“Nonsense,” Colonel Linscomb said. “I’m boss in my house.”

“I hope you’ll keep on being,” Miss Reba said. “Oh yes,” she said to Minnie. “Show them.” She — Minnie — didn’t smile at us: she smiled at me. It was beautiful: the even, matched and matchless unblemished porcelain march, curving outward to embrace, almost with passion, the restored gold tooth which looked bigger than any three of the natural merely white ones possibly could.

Then she closed her lips again, serene, composed, once more immune, once more invulnerable to that extent which our frail webs of bone and flesh and coincidence ever hold or claim on Invulnerability. “Well,” Miss Reba said.

McWillie’s father cranked the engine and got back in; the automobile moved on. Grandfather and Colonel Linscomb turned and went back toward the house and I had begun to move too when the automobile horn tooted, not loud, once, and I turned back. It had stopped and Sam was standing beside it, beckoning to me.

“Come here,” he said. “Miss Reba wants to see you a minute.” He watched me while I came up. “Why didn’t you and Ned tell me that horse was really going to run?” he said.

“I thought you knew,” I said. “I thought that was why we came here.”

“Sure, sure,” he said. “Ned told me. You told me. Everybody told me. Only, why didn’t somebody make me believe it? Oh sure, I never broke a leg. But if I’d just had Miss Reba’s nerve, maybe I could have got that boxcar covered too. Here,” he said. It was a tight roll of money, bills. “This is Ned’s.

Tell him the next time he finds a horse that wont run, not to wait to come and get me: just telegraph me.” Miss Reba was leaning out, hard and handsome. Everbe was on the other side of her, not moving but still too big not to notice. Miss Reba said:

“I didn’t expect to wind up in jail here too. But then, maybe I didn’t expect not to, neither. Anyway, Sam bet for me too. I put up fifty for Mr Binford and five for Minnie. Sam got three for two. I — I mean we — want to split fifty-fifty with you. I aint got that much cash now, what with this unexpected side trip I took this morning—”

“I dont want it,” I said.

“I thought you’d say that,” she said. “So I had Sam put up another five for you. You got seven-fifty coming. Here.” She held out her hand.

“I dont want it,” I said.

“What did I tell you?” Sam said.

“Is it because it was gambling?” she said. “Did you promise that too?” I hadn’t. Maybe Mother hadn’t thought about gambling yet. But I wouldn’t have needed to have promised anybody anyway.

Only, I didn’t know how to tell her when I didn’t know why myself: only that I wasn’t doing it for money: that money would have been the last thing of all; that once we were in it, I had to go on, finish it, Ned and me both even if everybody else had quit; it was as though only by making Lightning run and run first could we justify (not escape consequences: simply justify) any of it. Not to hope to make the beginning of it any less wrong — I mean, what Boon and I had deliberately, of our own free will, to do back there in Jefferson four days ago; but at least not to shirk, dodge — at least to finish — what we ourselves had started. But I didn’t know how to say it. So I said,

“Nome. I dont want it.”

“Go on,” Sam said. “Take it so we can go. We got to catch that train. Give it to Ned, or maybe to that old boy who took care of you last night. They’ll know what to do with it.” So I took the money; I had two rolls of it now, the big one and this little one.

And still Everbe hadn’t moved, motionless, her hands in her lap, big, too big for little things to happen to. “At least pat her on the head,” Sam said. “Ned never taught you to kick dogs too, did he?”

“He wont though,” Miss Reba said. “Watch him. Jesus, you men. And here’s another one that aint but eleven years old. What the hell does one more matter? aint she been proving ever since Sunday she’s quit?”

If you’d been sawing logs as long as she has, what the hell does one more log matter when you’ve already cancelled the lease and even took down the sign?” So I went around the car to the other side. Still she didn’t move, too big for little things to happen to, too much of her to have to be the recipient of things petty and picayune, like bird splashes on a billboard or a bass drum; just sitting there, too big to shrink even, shamed (because Ned was right), her mouth puffed a little but mostly the black eye; with her, even a simple shiner was not content but must look bigger, more noticeable, more unhidable, than on anyone else.

“It’s all right,” I said.

“I thought I had to,” she said. “I didn’t know no other way.”

“You see?” Miss Reba said. “How easy it is? That’s all you need to tell us; we’ll believe you. There aint the lousiest puniest bastard one of you, providing he’s less than seventy years old, that cant make any woman believe there wasn’t no other way.”

“You did have to,” I said. “We got Lightning back in time to run the race. It dont matter now any more. You better go on or you’ll miss that train.”

“Sure,” Miss Reba said. “Besides, she’s got supper to cook too. You aint heard that yet; that’s the surprise. She aint going back to Memphis. She aint just reformed from the temptation business: she’s reformed from temptation too, providing what they claim, is right: that there aint no temptation in a place like Parsham except a man’s own natural hopes and appetites.

She’s got a job in Parsham washing and cooking and lifting his wife in and out of bed and washing her off, for that constable. So she’s even reformed from having to divide half she makes and half she has with the first tin badge that passes, because all she’ll have to do now is shove a coffeepot or a greasy skillet in the way. Come on,” she told Sam. “Even you cant make that train wait from here.”

Then they were gone. I turned and went back toward the house. It was big, with columns and porticoes and formal gardens and stables (with Lightning in one of them) and carriage houses and what used to be slave quarters — the (still is) old Parsham place, what remains of the plantation of the man, family, which gave its name to the town and the countryside and to some of the people too, like Uncle Parsham Hood.

The sun was gone now, and soon the day would follow. And then, for the first time, I realised that it was all over, finished — all the four days of scuffling and scrabbling and dodging and lying and anxiety; all over except the paying-for. Grandfather and Colonel Linscomb and Mr van Tosch would be somewhere in the house now, drinking presupper toddies; it might be half an hour yet before the supper bell rang, so I turned aside and went through the rose garden and on to the back. And, sure enough, there was Ned sitting on the back steps.

“Here,” I said, holding out the big roll of money. “Sam said this is yours.” He took it. “Aint you going to count it?” I said.

“I reckon he counted it,” Ned said. I took the little one from my pocket. Ned looked at it. “Did he give you that too?”

“Miss Reba did. She bet for me.”

"It's gambling money," Ned said. "You're too young to have anything to do with gambling money. Aint nobody ever old enough to have gambling money, but you sho aint." And I couldn't tell him either. Then I realised that I had expected him, Ned anyway, to already know without having to be told. And in the very next breath he did know. "Because we never done it for money," he said.

"You aint going to keep yours either?"

"Yes," he said. "It's too late for me. But it aint too late for you. I'm gonter give you a chance, even if it aint nothing but taking a chance away from you."

"Sam said I could give it to Uncle Parsham. But he wouldn't take gambling money either, would he?"

"Is that what you want to do with it?"

"Yes," I said.

"All right," he said. He took the little roll too and took out his snap purse and put both the rolls into it and now it was almost dark but I could certainly hear the supper bell here.

"How did you get the tooth back?" I said.

"It wasn't me," he said. "Lycurgus done it. That first morning, when I come back to the hotel to get you. It wasn't no trouble. The hounds had already treed him once, and Lycurgus said he thought at first he would just use them, put him up that gum sapling again and not call off the hounds until Whistle-britches wropped the tooth up in his cap or something, and dropped it.

But Lycurgus said he was still a little rankled up over the upstarty notions Whistle-britches had about horses, mainly about Lightning. So, since Lightning was gonter have to run a race that afternoon and would need his rest, Lycurgus said he decided to use one of the mules. He said how Whistle-britches drawed a little old bitty pocketknife on him, but Lycurgus is gonter take good care of it until he can give it back to some of them."

He stopped. He still looked bad. He still hadn't had any sleep. But maybe it is a relief to finally meet doom and have it set a definite moment to start worrying at.

"Well?" I said. "What?"

"I just told you. The mule done it."

"How?" I said.

"Lycurgus put Whistle-bitches on the mule without no bridle or saddle and tied his feet underneath and told him any time he decided to wrop that tooth up in his cap and drop it off, he would stop the mule. And Lycurgus give the mule a light cut, and about halfway round the first circle of the lot Whistle-bitches dropped the cap, only there wasn't nothing in it that time.

So Lycurgus handed the cap back up to him and give the mule another cut and Lycurgus said he had disremembered that this was the mule that jumped fences until it had already jumped that four-foot bobwire and Lycurgus said it looked like it was fixing to take Whistle-bitches right on back to Possum. But it never went far until it turned around and come back and jumped back into the lot again so next time Whistle-bitches dropped the cap the tooth was in it. Only he might as well kept it, for all the good it done me. She went back to Memphis too, huh?"

"Yes," I said.

"That's what I figgered. Likely she knows as good as I do it's gonter be a long time before Memphis sees me or Boon Hogganbeck either again. And if Boon's back in jail again, I dont reckon Jefferson, Mississippi's gonter see us tonight neither."

I didn't know either; and suddenly I knew that I didn't want to know; I not only didn't want to have to make any more choices, decisions, I didn't even want to know the ones being made for me until I had to face the results. Then McWillie's father came to the door behind us, in a white coat; he was the houseman too. Though I hadn't heard any bell.

I had already washed (changed my clothes too; Grandfather had brought a grip for me, and even my other shoes), so the houseman showed me the way to the dining room and I stood there; Grandfather and Mr van Tosch and Colonel Linscomb came in, the old fat Llewellyn setter walking at Colonel Linscomb's hand, and we all stood while Colonel Linscomb said grace. Then we sat down, the old setter beside Colonel Linscomb's chair, and ate, with not just McWillie's father but a uniformed maid too to change the plates.

Because I had quit; I wasn't making choices and decisions any more. I almost went to sleep in my plate, into the dessert, when Grandfather said:

"Well, gentlemen, shall the guard fire first?"

"We'll go to the office," Colonel Linscomb said. It was the best room I ever saw. I wished Grandfather had one like it. Colonel Linscomb was a lawyer too, so there were cases of law books, but there were farm- and horse-papers too and a glass case of jointed fishing rods and guns, and chairs and a sofa and a special rug for the old setter to lie on in front of the fireplace, and pictures of horses and jockeys on the walls, with the rose wreaths and the dates they won, and a bronze figure of Manassas (I didn't know until then that Colonel Linscomb was the one who had owned Manassas) on the mantel, and a special table for the big book which was his stud book, and another table with a box of cigars and a decanter and water pitcher and sugar bowl and glasses already on it, and a French window that opened onto the gallery above the rose garden so that you could smell the roses even in the house, and honeysuckle too and a mockingbird somewhere outside.

Then the houseman came back with Ned and set a chair at the corner of the hearth for him, and they — we — sat down — Colonel Linscomb in a white linen suit and Mr van Tosch in the sort of clothes they wore in Chicago (which was where he came from until he visited Memphis and liked it and bought a place to breed and raise and train race horses too, and gave Bobo Beauchamp a job on it five or six years ago) and Grandfather in the Confederate-gray pigeon-tailed suit that he inherited (I mean, inherited not the suit but the Confederate-gray

because he hadn't been a soldier himself; he was only fourteen in Carolina, the only child, so he had to stay with his mother while his father was a color sergeant of Wade Hampton's until a picket of Fitz-John Porter's shot him out of his saddle at one of the Chickahominy crossings the morning after Gaines's Mill, and Grandfather stayed with his mother until she died in 1864, and still stayed until General Sherman finally eliminated him completely from Carolina in 1865 and he came to Mississippi hunting for the descendants of a distant kinsman named McCaslin — he and the kinsman even had the same baptismal names: Lucius Quintus Carothers — and found one in the person of a great-granddaughter named Sarah Edmonds and in 1869 married her).

"Now," Grandfather told Ned, "begin at the beginning."

"Wait," Colonel Linscomb said. He leaned and poured whiskey into a glass and held it out toward Ned. "Here," he said.

"Thank you kindly," Ned said. But he didn't drink it. He set the glass on the mantel and sat down again. He had never looked at Grandfather and he didn't now: he just waited.

"Now," Grandfather said.

"Drink it," Colonel Linscomb said. "You may need it." So Ned took the drink and swallowed it at one gulp and sat holding the empty glass, still not looking at Grandfather.

"Now," Grandfather said. "Begin—"

"Wait," Mr van Tosch said. "How did you make that horse run?"

Ned sat perfectly still, the empty glass motionless in his hand while we watched him, waiting. Then he said, addressing Grandfather for the first time: "Will these white gentlemen excuse me to speak to you private?"

"What about?" Grandfather said.

"You will know," Ned said. "If you thinks they ought to know too, you can tell them."

Grandfather rose. "Will you excuse us?" he said. He started toward the door to the hall.

“Why not the gallery?” Colonel Linscomb said. “It’s dark there; better for conspiracy or confession either.” So we went that way. I mean, I was already up too. Grandfather paused again. He said to Ned:

“What about Lucius?”

“He used it too,” Ned said. “Anybody got a right to know what his benefits is.” We went out onto the gallery, into the darkness and the smell of the roses and the honeysuckle too, and besides the mockingbird which was in a tree not far away, we could hear two whippoorwills and, as always at night in Mississippi and so Tennessee wasn’t too different, a dog barking. “It was a sour dean,” Ned said quietly.

“Dont lie to me,” Grandfather said. “Horses dont eat sardines.”

“This one do,” Ned said. “You was there and saw it. Me and Lucius tried him out beforehand. But I didn’t even need to try him first. As soon as I laid eyes on him last Sunday, I knowed he had the same kind of sense my mule had.”

“Ah,” Grandfather said. “So that’s what you and Maury used to do to that mule.”

“No sir,” Ned said. “Mr Maury never knowed it neither. Nobody knowed it but me and that mule. This horse was just the same. When he run that last lap this evening, I had that sour dean waiting for him and he knowed it.”

We went back inside. They were already looking at us. “Yes,” Grandfather said. “But it’s a family secret. I wont withhold it if it becomes necessary. But will you let me be the judge, under that stipulation? Of course, Van Tosch has the first claim on it.”

“In that case, I’ll either have to buy Ned or sell you Coppermine,” Mr van Tosch said. “But shouldn’t all this wait until your man Hogganbeck is here too?”

“You dont know my man Hogganbeck,” Grandfather said. “He drove my automobile to Memphis. When I take him out of jail tomorrow, he will

drive it back to Jefferson. Between those two points in time, his presence would have been missed no more than his absence is." Only this time he didn't have to even start to tell Ned to begin.

"Bobo got mixed up with a white man," Ned said. And this time it was Mr van Tosch who said Ah. And that was how we began to learn it: from Ned and Mr van Tosch both. Because Mr van Tosch was an alien, a foreigner, who hadn't lived in our country long enough yet to know the kind of white blackguard a young country-bred Negro who had never been away from home before, come to a big city to get more money and fun for the work he intended to do, would get involved with.

It was probably gambling, or it began with gambling; that would be their simplest mutual meeting ground. But by this time, it was more than just gambling; even Ned didn't seem to know exactly what it was — unless maybe Ned did know exactly what it was, but it was in a white man's world.

Anyway, according to Ned, it was by now so bad — the money sum involved was a hundred and twenty-eight dollars — that the white man had convinced Bobo that, if the law found out about it, merely being fired from his job with Mr van Tosch would be the least of Bobo's troubles; in fact, he had Bobo believing that his real trouble wouldn't even start until after he no longer had a white man to front for him.

Until at last, the situation, crisis, so desperate and the threat so great, Bobo went to Mr van Tosch and asked for a hundred and twenty-eight dollars, getting the answer which he had probably expected from the man who was not only a white man and a foreigner, but settled too, past the age when he could remember a young man's passions and predicaments, which was No. That was last fall —

"I remember that," Mr van Tosch said. "I ordered the man never to come on my place again. I thought he was gone." You see what I mean. He — Mr van Tosch — was a good man. But he was a foreigner. — Then Bobo, abandoned by that last hope, which he had never really believed in anyway, "got up" as he put it (Ned didn't know how either or

perhaps he did know or perhaps the way in which Bobo “got it up” was such that he wouldn’t even tell a member of his own race who was his kinsman too) fifteen dollars and gave it to the man, and bought with it just what you might expect and what Bobo himself probably expected. But what else could he do, where else turn? only more threat and pressure, having just proved that he could get money when driven hard enough— “But why didn’t he come to me?” Mr van Tosch said.

“He did,” Ned said. “You told him No.” They sat quite still. “You’re a white man,” Ned said gently. “Bobo was a nigger boy.”

“Then why didn’t he come to me,” Grandfather said. “Back where he should never have left in the first place, instead of stealing a horse?”

“What would you a done?” Ned said. “If he had come in already out of breath from Memphis and told you, Dont ask me no questions: just hand me a hundred and a few extra dollars and I’ll go back to Memphis and start paying you back the first Saturday I gets around to it?”

“He could have told me why,” Grandfather said, “I’m a McCaslin too.” “You’re a white man too,” Ned said.

“Go on,” Grandfather said. — So Bobo discovered that the fifteen dollars which he had thought might save him, had actually ruined him. Now, according to Ned, Bobo’s demon gave him no rest at all. Or perhaps the white man began to fear Bobo — that a mere dribble, a few dollars at a time, would take too long; or perhaps that Bobo, because of his own alarm and desperation, plus what the white man doubtless considered the natural ineptitude of Bobo’s race, would commit some error or even crime which would blow everything up.

Anyway, this was when he — the white man — began to work on Bobo to try for a one-stroke killing which would rid him of the debt, creditor, worry and all. His first idea was to have Bobo rifle Mr van Tosch’s tack room, load into the buggy or wagon or whatever it would be, as many saddles and bridles and driving harnesses as it would carry, and clear out; Bobo of course would be suspected at once, but the white man would be safely away by then; and if Bobo moved fast enough, which

even he should have the sense to do, he had all the United States to flee into and find another job.

But (Ned said) even the white man abandoned this one; he would not only have a buggy- or wagon-load of horseless horse gear and daylight coming, it would have taken days to dispose of it piecemeal, even if he had had days to do it in.

So that was when they thought of a horse: to condense the wagon- or buggy-load of uncohered fragments of leather into one entity which could be sold in a lump, and — if the white man worked fast enough and didn't haggle over base dollars — without too much delay.

That is, the white man, not Bobo, believed that Bobo was going to steal a horse for him. Only, Bobo knew, if he didn't steal the horse, he could see the end of everything — job, liberty, all — when next Monday morning (the crisis had reached its crux last Saturday, the same day Boon and I — and Ned — left Jefferson in the automobile) came. And the reason for the crisis at this particular moment, what made it so desperate, was that there was a horse of Mr van Tosch's so available for safe stealing that it might almost have been planted for that purpose.

This of course was Lightning (I mean, Coppermine) himself, who at the moment was in a sales stable less than half a mile away, where, as Mr van Tosch's known groom (it was Bobo who had delivered the horse to the sales stable in the first place) Bobo could go and get him at any time for no more trouble than putting a halter on him and leading him away. Which by itself might have been tolerable.

The trouble was, the white man knew it — a horse bred and trained for running, but which would not run, and which in consequence was in such bad repute with Mr van Tosch and Mr Clapp, the trainer, that it was at the sales stable waiting for the first to come along who would make an offer for it; in further consequence of which, Bobo could go and remove it and it would very likely not even be reported to Mr van Tosch unless he happened to inquire; in still further consequence of

which, Bobo had until tomorrow morning (Monday) to do something about it, or else.

That was the situation when Ned left us in front of Miss Reba's Sunday afternoon and walked around the corner to Beale Street and entered the first blind tiger he came to and found Bobo trying to outface his doom through the bottom of a whiskey bottle. Grandfather said: "So that's what it was. Now I'm beginning to understand. A nigger Saturday night. Bobo already drunk, and your tongue hanging out all the way from Jefferson to get to the first saloon you could reach—" and stopped and said, pounced almost: "Wait. That's wrong. It wasn't even Saturday. You got to Memphis Sunday evening," and Ned sitting there, quite still, the empty glass in his hand. He said, "With my people, Saturday night runs over into Sunday."

"And into Monday morning too," Colonel Linscomb said. "You wake up Monday morning, sick, with a hangover, filthy in a filthy jail, and lie there until some white man comes and pays your fine and takes you straight back to the cotton field or whatever it is and puts you back to work without even giving you time to eat breakfast.

And you sweat it out there, and maybe by sundown you feel you are not really going to die; and the next day, and the day after that, and after that, until it's Saturday again and you can put down the plow or the hoe and go back as fast as you can to that stinking jail cell on Monday morning. Why do you do it? I dont know."

"You cant know," Ned said. "You're the wrong color. If you could just be a nigger one Saturday night, you wouldn't never want to be a white man again as long as you live."

"All right," Grandfather said. "Go on." — So Bobo told Ned of his predicament: the horse less than half a mile away, practically asking to be stolen; and the white man who knew it and who had given Bobo an ultimatum measurable now in mere hours— "All right," Grandfather said. "Now get to my automobile."

“We’re already to it,” Ned said. They — he and Bobo — went to the stable to look at the horse. “And soon as I laid eyes on him, I minded that mule I used to own.” And Bobo, like me, was too young actually to remember the mule; but, also like me, he had grown up with its legend.

“So we decided to go to that white man and tell him something had happened and Bobo couldn’t get that horse outen that stable for him like Bobo thought he could, but we could get him a automobile in place of it. — Now, wait,” he told Grandfather quickly.

“We knowed as good as you that that automobile would be safe at least long enough for us to finish. Maybe in thirty or forty years you can stand on a Jefferson street corner and count a dozen automobiles before sundown, but you cant yet. Maybe then you can steal a automobile and find somebody to buy it that wont worry you with a lot of how-come and who and why.

But you cant now. So for a man that looked like I imagined he looked (I hadn’t never seen him yet) to travel around trying to sell a automobile quick and private, would be about as hard as selling a elephant quick and private. You never had no trouble locating where it was at and getting your hand on it, once you and Mr van Tosch got started, did you?”

“Go on,” Grandfather said. Ned did.

“Then the white man would ask what automobile? and Bobo would let me tend to that; and then the white man would maybe ask what I’m doing in it nohow, and then Bobo would tell him that I want that horse because I know how to make it run; that we already got a match race waiting Tuesday, and if the white man wanted, he could come along too and win enough on the horse to pay back three or four times them hundred and thirteen dollars, and then he wouldn’t even have to worry with the automobile if he didn’t want to.

Because he would be the kind of a white man that done already had enough experience to know what would sell easy and what would be a

embarrassment to get caught with. So that's what we were gonter do until yawl come and ruint it: let that white man just watch the first heat without betting yes or no, which he would likely do, and see Lightning lose it like he always done, which the white man would a heard all about too, by now; then we would say Nemmine, just wait to the next heat, and then bet him the horse against the automobile on that one without needing to remind him that when Lightning got beat this time, he would own him too." They — Grandfather and Colonel Linscomb and Mr van Tosch — looked at Ned. I wont try to describe their expressions. I cant. "Then yawl come and ruint it,"

Ned said.

"I see," Mr van Tosch said. "It was all just to save Bobo. Suppose you had failed to make Coppermine run, and lost him too. What about Bobo then?"

"I made him run," Ned said. "You seen it."

"But just suppose, for the sake of the argument," Mr van Tosch said.

"That would a been Bobo's lookout," Ned said. "It wasn't me advised him to give up Mississippi cotton farming and take up Memphis frolicking and gambling for a living in place of it."

"But I thought Mr Priest said he's your cousin," Mr van Tosch said.

"Everybody got kinfolks that aint got no more sense than Bobo," Ned said.

"Well," Mr van Tosch said.

"Let's all have a toddy," Colonel Linscomb said briskly. He got up and mixed and passed them. "You too," he told Ned. Ned brought his glass and Colonel Linscomb poured. This time when Ned set the untasted glass on the mantel, nobody said anything.

"Yes," Mr van Tosch said. Then he said: "Well, Priest, you've got your automobile. And I've got my horse. And maybe I frightened that damn scoundrel enough to stay clear of my stable hands anyway." They sat there. "What shall I do about Bobo?" They sat there. "I'm asking you," Mr van Tosch said to Ned.

“Keep him,” Ned said. “Folks — boys and young men anyhow — in my people dont convince easy—”

“Why just Negroes?” Mr van Tosch said.

“Maybe he means McCaslins,” Colonel Linscomb said.

“That’s right,” Ned said. “McCaslins and niggers both act like the mixtry of the other just makes it worse. Right now I’m talking about young folks, even if this one is a nigger McCaslin. Maybe they dont hear good. Anyhow, they got to learn for themselves that roguishness dont pay. Maybe Bobo learnt it this time. Aint that easier for you than having to break in a new one?”

“Yes,” Mr van Tosch said. They sat there. “Yes,” Mr van Tosch said again. “So I’ll either have to buy Ned, or sell you Coppermine.” They sat there. “Can you make him run again, Ned?”

“I made him run that time,” Ned said.

“I said, again,” Mr van Tosch said. They sat there. “Priest,” Mr van Tosch said, “do you believe he can do it again?”

“Yes,” Grandfather said.

“How much do you believe it?” They sat there.

“Are you addressing me as a banker or a what?” Grandfather said.

“Call it a perfectly normal and natural northwest Mississippi countryman taking his perfectly normal and natural God-given and bill-of-rights-defended sabbatical among the fleshpots of southwestern Tennessee,” Colonel Linscomb said.

“All right,” Mr van Tosch said. “I’ll bet you Coppermine against Ned’s secret, one heat of one mile. If Ned can make Coppermine beat that black of Linscomb’s again, I get the secret and Coppermine is yours. If Coppermine loses, I dont want your secret and you take or leave Coppermine for five hundred dollars—”

“That is, if he loses, I can have Coppermine for five hundred dollars, or if I pay you five hundred dollars, I dont have to take him,” Grandfather said.

“Right,” Mr van Tosch said. “And to give you a chance to hedge, I will bet you two dollars to one that Ned cant make him run again.” They sat there.

“So I’ve either got to win that horse or buy him in spite of anything I can do,” Grandfather said.

“Or maybe you didn’t have a youth,” Mr van Tosch said. “But try to remember one. You’re among friends here; try for a little while not to be a banker. Try.” They sat there.

“Two-fifty,” Grandfather said.

“Five,” Mr van Tosch said.

“Three-fifty,” Grandfather said.

“Five,” Mr van Tosch said.

“Four-and-a-quarter,” Grandfather said.

“Five,” Mr van Tosch said.

“Four-fifty,” Grandfather said.

“Four-ninety-five,” Mr van Tosch said.

“Done,” Grandfather said.

“Done,” Mr van Tosch said.

So for the fourth time McWillie on Acheron and I on Lightning (I mean Coppermine) skittered and jockeyed behind that taut little frail jute string. McWillie wasn’t speaking to me at all now; he was frightened and outraged, baffled and determined; he knew that something had happened yesterday which should not have happened; which in a sense should not have happened to anyone, certainly not to a nineteen-year-old boy who was simply trying to win what he had thought was a simple horse race: no holds barred, of course, but at least a mutual agreement that nobody would resort to necromancy. We had not drawn for position this time. We — McWillie and I — had been offered the privilege, but Ned said at once: “Nemmine this time.

McWillie needs to feel better after yesterday, so let him have the pole where he can start feeling better now.” Which, from rage or chivalry, I didn’t know which, McWillie refused, bringing us to what appeared

insoluble impasse, until the official — the pending homicide one — solved it quick by saying,

“Here, you boys, if you aim to run this race, get on up behind that-ere bagging twine where you belong.” Nor had Ned gone through his preliminary incantation or ritual of rubbing Lightning’s muzzle. I dont say, forgot to; Ned didn’t forget things. So obviously I hadn’t been watching, noticing closely enough; anyway, it was too late now.

Nor had he given me any last-minute instructions this time either; but then, what was there for him to say? And last night Mr van Tosch and Colonel Linscomb and Grandfather had agreed that, since this was a private running, almost you might say a grudge match, effort should be made and all concerned cautioned to keep it private.

Which would have been as easy to do in Parsham as to keep tomorrow’s weather private and restricted to Colonel Linscomb’s pasture, since — a community composed of one winter-resort hotel and two stores and a cattle chute and depot at a railroad intersection and the churches and schools and scattered farmhouses of a remote countryside — any news, let alone word of any horse race, not to mention a repeat between these two horses, spread across Parsham as instantaneously as weather does.

So they were here today too, including the night-telegraphist judge who really should sleep sometimes: not as many as yesterday, but a considerable more than Grandfather and Mr van Tosch had given the impression of wanting — the stained hats, the tobacco, the tieless shirts and overalls — when somebody hollered Go! and the string snatched away and we were off.

We were off, McWillie as usual two strides out before Lightning seemed to notice we had started, and pulled quickly and obediently up until he could more or less lay his cheek against McWillie’s knee (in case he wanted to), near turn, back stretch, mine and McWillie’s juxtaposition altering, closing and opening with that dreamlike and unhurried quality probably quite familiar to people who fly aeroplanes in close formation; far turn and into the stretch for the first lap, I by

simple rote whipping Lightning onward about one stride before he would remember to begin to look for Ned; I took one quick raking glance at the faces along the rail looking for Ned's and Lightning ran that whole stretch not watching where he was going at all but scanning the rush of faces for Ned's, likewise in vain; near turn again, the back stretch again and into the far turn, the home stretch; I was already swinging Lightning out toward the outside rail where (Acheron might be beating us but at least he wouldn't obstruct our view) he could see.

But if he had seen Ned this time, he didn't tell me. Nor could I tell him, Look! Look yonder! There he is! because Ned wasn't there: only the vacant track beyond the taut line of the wire as fragile-looking as a filtered or maybe attenuated moonbeam, McWillie whipping furiously now and Lightning responding like a charm, exactly one neck back; if Acheron had known any way to run sixty miles an hour, we would too — one neck back; if Acheron had decided to stop ten feet before the wire, so would we — one neck back.

But he didn't. We went on, still paired but staggered a little, as though bolted together; the wire flicked overhead, McWillie and I speaking again now — that is, he was, yelling back at me in a kind of cannibal glee: "Yah-yah-yah, yah-yah-yah," slowing also but not stopping, going straight on (I suppose) to the stable; he and Acheron certainly deserved to. I turned Lightning and walked back. Ned was trotting toward us, Grandfather behind him though not trotting; our sycophants and adulators of yesterday had abandoned us; Caesar was not Caesar now.

"Come on," Ned said, taking the bit, rapid but calm: only impatient, almost inattentive. "Hand—"

"What happened?" Grandfather said. "What the devil happened?"

"Nothing," Ned said. "I never had no sour dean for him this time, and he knowed it. Didn't I tell you this horse got sense?" Then to me: "There's Bobo over yonder waiting. Hand this plug back to him so he can take it on to Memphis. We're going home tonight."

"But wait," I said. "Wait."

“Forget this horse,” Ned said. “We dont want him. Boss has got his automobile back and all he lost was four hundred and ninety-six dollars and it’s worth four hundred and ninety-six dollars not to own this horse. Because what in the world would we do with him, supposing they was to quit making them stinking little fishes? Let Mr van Man have him back; maybe some day Coppermine will tell him and Bobo what happened here yesterday.”

We didn’t go home tonight though. We were still at Colonel Linscomb’s, in the office again, after supper again. Boon looked battered and patched up and a considerable subdued, but he was calm and peaceful enough. And clean too: he had shaved and had on a fresh shirt. I mean, a new shirt that he must have bought in Hardwick, sitting on the same straight hard chair Ned had sat on last night.

“Naw,” he said. “I wasn’t fighting him about that. I wasn’t even mad about that no more. That was her business. Besides, you cant just cut right off: you got to — got—”

“Taper off?” Grandfather said.

“No sir,” Boon said. “Not taper off. You quit, only you still got to clean up the trash, litter, no matter how good you finished. It wasn’t that. What I aimed to break his neck for was for calling my wife a whore.”

“You mean you’re going to marry her?” Grandfather said. But it was not Grandfather: it was me that Boon pounced, almost jumped at.

“God damn it,” he said, “if you can go bare-handed against a knife defending her, why the hell cant I marry her? Aint I as good as you are, even if I aint eleven years old?”

And that’s about all. About six the next afternoon we came over the last hill, and there was the clock on the courthouse above the trees around the Square. Ned said, “Hee hee hee.” He was in front with Boon. He said: “Seems like I been gone two years.”

“When Delphine gets through with you tonight, maybe you’ll wish you had,” Grandfather said.

“Or maybe not come back a-tall,” Ned said. “But a woman, got to keep sweeping and cooking and washing and dusting on her mind all day long, I reckon she needs a little excitement once in a while.”

Then we were there. The automobile stopped. I didn’t move. Grandfather got out, so I did too. “Mr Ballott’s got the key,” Boon said.

“No he hasn’t,” Grandfather said. He took the key from his pocket and gave it to Boon. “Come on,” he said. We crossed the street toward home. And do you know what I thought? I thought It hasn’t even changed. Because it should have. It should have been altered, even if only a little. I dont mean it should have changed of itself, but that I, bringing back to it what the last four days must have changed in me, should have altered it.

I mean, if those four days — the lying and deceiving and tricking and decisions and undecisions, and the things I had done and seen and heard and learned that Mother and Father wouldn’t have let me do and see and hear and learn — the things I had had to learn that I wasn’t even ready for yet, had nowhere to store them nor even anywhere to lay them down; if all that had changed nothing, was the same as if it had never been — nothing smaller or larger or older or wiser or more pitying — then something had been wasted, thrown away, spent for nothing; either it was wrong and false to begin with and should never have existed, or I was wrong or false or weak or anyway not worthy of it.

“Come on,” Grandfather said — not kind, not unkind, not anything; I thought If Aunt Callie would just come out whether she’s carrying Alexander or not and start hollering at me. But nothing: just a house I had known since before I could have known another, at a little after six oclock on a May evening, when people were already thinking about supper; and Mother should have had a few gray hairs at least, kissing me for a minute, then looking at me; then Father, whom I had always been a little . . . afraid is not the word but I cant think of another — afraid of because if I hadn’t been, I think I would have been ashamed of us both. Then Grandfather said, “Maury.”

“Not this time, Boss,” Father said. Then to me: “Let’s get it over with.”

“Yes sir,” I said, and followed him, on down the hall to the bathroom and stopped at the door while he took the razor strop from the hook and I stepped back so he could come out and we went on; Mother was at the top of the cellar stairs; I could see the tears, but no more; all she had to do would be to say Stop or Please or Maury or maybe if she had just said Lucius.

But nothing, and I followed Father on down and stopped again while he opened the cellar door and we went in, where we kept the kindling in winter and the zinc-lined box for ice in summer, and Mother and Aunt Callie had shelves for preserves and jelly and jam, and even an old rocking chair for Mother and Aunt Callie while they were putting up the jars, and for Aunt Callie to sleep in sometimes after dinner, though she always said she hadn’t been asleep.

So here we were at last, where it had taken me four days of dodging and scrabbling and scurrying to get to; and it was wrong, and Father and I both knew it. I mean, if after all the lying and deceiving and disobeying and conniving I had done, all he could do about it was to whip me, then Father was not good enough for me.

And if all that I had done was balanced by no more than that shaving strop, then both of us were debased. You see? it was impasse, until Grandfather knocked. The door was not locked, but Grandfather’s father had taught him, and he had taught Father, and Father had taught me that no door required a lock: the closed door itself was sufficient until you were invited to enter it. But Grandfather didn’t wait, not this time.

“No,” Father said. “This is what you would have done to me twenty years ago.”

“Maybe I have more sense now,” Grandfather said. “Persuade Alison to go on back upstairs and stop snivelling.” Then Father was gone, the door closed again. Grandfather sat in the rocking chair: not fat, but with

just the right amount of paunch to fill the white waist-coat and make the heavy gold watch chain hang right.

"I lied," I said.

"Come here," he said.

"I cant," I said. "I lied, I tell you."

"I know it," he said.

"Then do something about it. Do anything, just so it's something."

"I cant," he said.

"There aint anything to do? Not anything?"

"I didn't say that," Grandfather said. "I said I couldn't. You can."

"What?" I said. "How can I forget it? Tell me how to."

"You cant," he said. "Nothing is ever forgotten. Nothing is ever lost. It's too valuable."

"Then what can I do?"

"Live with it," Grandfather said.

"Live with it? You mean, forever? For the rest of my life? Not ever to get rid of it? Never? I cant. Dont you see I cant?"

"Yes you can," he said. "You will. A gentleman always does. A gentleman can live through anything. He faces anything. A gentleman accepts the responsibility of his actions and bears the burden of their consequences, even when he did not himself instigate them but only acquiesced to them, didn't say No though he knew he should. Come here."

Then I was crying hard, bawling, standing (no: kneeling; I was that tall now) between his knees, one of his hands at the small of my back, the other at the back of my head holding my face down against his stiff collar and shirt and I could smell him — the starch and shaving lotion and chewing tobacco and benzine where Grandmother or Delphine had cleaned a spot from his coat, and always a faint smell of whiskey which

I always believed was from the first toddy which he took in bed in the morning before he got up.

When I slept with him, the first thing in the morning would be Ned (he had no white coat; sometimes he didn't have on any coat or even a shirt, and even after Grandfather sent the horses to stay at the livery stable, Ned still managed to smell like them) with the tray bearing the decanter and water jug and sugar bowl and spoon and tumbler, and Grandfather would sit up in bed and make the toddy and drink it, then put a little sugar into the heel-tap and stir it and add a little water and give it to me until Grandmother came suddenly in one morning and put a stop to it. "There," he said at last. "That should have emptied the cistern. Now go wash your face. A gentleman cries too, but he always washes his face."

And this is all. It was Monday afternoon, after school (Father wouldn't let Mother write me an excuse, so I had to take the absent marks. But Miss Rhodes was going to let me make up the work) and Ned was sitting on the back steps again, Grandmother's steps this time, but in the shade this time too. I said:

"If we'd just thought to bet that money Sam gave us on Lightning that last time, we could have settled what to do about it good."

"I did settle it good," Ned said. "I got five for three this time. Old Possum Hood's got twenty dollars for his church now."

"But we lost," I said.

"You and Lightning lost," Ned said. "Me and that money was on Akrum."

"Oh," I said. Then I said, "How much was it?" He didn't move. I mean, he didn't do anything. I mean, he looked no different at all; it might have been last Friday instead of this one; all the four days of dodging and finagling and having to guess right and guess fast and not having but one guess to do it with, had left no mark on him, even though I had seen him once when he not only had had no sleep, he didn't even have any clothes to wear. (You see, how I keep on calling it four days? It was Saturday afternoon when Boon and I — we thought — left Jefferson,

and it was Friday afternoon when Boon and Ned and I saw Jefferson again.

But to me, it was the four days between that Saturday night at Miss Ballenbaugh's when Boon would have gone back home tomorrow if I had said so, and the moment when I looked down from Lightning Wednesday and saw Grandfather and passed to him, during which Ned had carried the load alone, held back the flood, shored up the crumbling levee with whatever tools he could reach — including me — until they broke in his hand.

I mean, granted we had no business being behind that levee: a gentleman always sticks to his lie whether he told it or not.) And I was only eleven; I didn't know how I knew that too, but I did: that you never ask anyone how much he won or lost gambling. So I said: "I mean, would there be enough to pay back Boss his four hundred and ninety-six dollars?"

And he still sat there, unchanged; so why should Mother have a gray hair since I saw her last? since I would have to be unchanged too? Because now I knew what Grandfather meant: that your outside is just what you live in, sleep in, and has little connection with who you are and even less with what you do. Then he said: "You learned a considerable about folks on that trip; I'm just surprised you aint learnt more about money too. Do you want Boss to insult me, or do you want me to insult Boss, or do you want both?"

"How do you mean?" I said.

"When I offers to pay his gambling debt, aint I telling him to his face he aint got enough sense to bet on horses? And when I tells him where the money come from I'm gonter pay it with, aint I proving it?"

"I still dont see where the insult to you comes in," I said.

"He might take it," Ned said.

Then the day came at last. Everbe sent for me and I walked across town to the little back-street almost doll-size house that Boon was buying by

paying Grandfather fifty cents every Saturday. She had a nurse and she should have been in bed. But she was sitting up, waiting for me, in a wrapper; she even walked across to the cradle and stood with her hand on my shoulder while we looked at it.

“Well?” she said. “What do you think?”

I didn’t think anything. It was just another baby, already as ugly as Boon even if it would have to wait twenty years to be as big. I said so. “What are you going to call it?”

“Not it,” she said. “Him. Cant you guess?”

“What?” I said.

“His name is Lucius Priest Hogganbeck,” she said.

THE END

These 13, William Faulkner

These 13

Contents

Victory

Ad Astra

All the Dead Pilots

Crevasse

Red Leaves

A Rose for Emily

A Justice

Hair

That Evening Sun

Dry September

Mistral

Divorce in Naples

Carcassonne

Victory, William Faulkner

Victory

I

THOSE WHO SAW him descend from the Marseilles express in the Gare de Lyon on that damp morning saw a tall man, a little stiff, with a bronze face and spike-ended moustaches and almost white hair. "A milord," they said, remarking his sober, correct suit, his correct stick correctly carried, his sparse baggage; "a milord military.

But there is something the matter with his eyes." But there was something the matter with the eyes of so many people, men and women too, in Europe since four years now. So they watched him go on, a half head above the French people, with his gaunt, strained eyes, his air strained, purposeful, and at the same time assured, and vanish into a cab, thinking, if they thought about him any more at all: "You will see him in the Legation offices or at a table on the Boulevards, or in a carriage with the fine English ladies in the Bois." That was all.

And those who saw him descend from the same cab at the Gare du Nord, they thought: "This milord returns home by haste"; the porter who took his bag wished him good morning in fair English and told him that he was going to England, receiving for reply the English glare which the porter perhaps expected, and put him into a first-class carriage of the boat train.

And that was all, too. That was all right, too, even when he got down at Amiens. English milords even did that.

It was only at Rozières that they began to look at him and after him when he had passed.

In a hired car he jounced through a gutted street between gutted walls rising undoorred and unwindowed in jagged shards in the dusk. The

street was partially blocked now and then by toppled walls, with masses of masonry in the cracks of which a thin grass sprouted, passing empty and ruined courtyards, in one of which a tank, mute and tilted, rusted among rank weeds.

This was Rozières, but he didn't stop there because no one lived there and there was no place to stop.

So the car jounced and crept on out of the ruin. The muddy and unpaved street entered a village of harsh new brick and sheet iron and tarred paper roofs made in America, and halted before the tallest house. It was flush with the street: a brick wall with a door and one window of American glass bearing the word RESTAURANT. "Here you are, sir," the driver said.

The passenger descended, with his bag, his ulster, his correct stick. He entered a biggish, bare room chill with new plaster. It contained a billiard table at which three men played. One of the men looked over his shoulder and said, "Bonjour, monsieur."

The newcomer did not reply at all. He crossed the room, passing the new zinc bar, and approached an open door beyond which a woman of any age around forty looked at him above the sewing on her lap.

"Bong jour, madame," he said. "Dormie, madame?"

The woman gave him a single glance, brief, still. "C'est ça, monsieur," she said, rising.

"Dormie, madame?" he said, raising his voice a little, his spiked moustache beaded a little with rain, dampness beneath his strained yet assured eyes. "Dormie, madame?"

"Bon, monsieur," the woman said. "Bon. Bon."

"Dor—" the newcomer essayed again. Someone touched his arm. It was the man who had spoken from the billiard table when he entered.

“Regardez, Monsieur l’Anglais,” the man said. He took the bag from the newcomer and swept his other arm toward the ceiling. “La chambre.” He touched the traveler again; he laid his face upon his palm and closed his eyes; he gestured again toward the ceiling and went on across the room toward a wooden stair without balustrade.

As he passed the bar he took a candle stub from it and lit the candle (the big room and the room beyond the door where the woman sat were lighted by single bulbs hanging naked on cords from the ceiling) at the foot of the stair.

They mounted, thrusting their fitful shadows before them, into a corridor narrow, chill, and damp as a tomb. The walls were of rough plaster not yet dried. The floor was of pine, without carpet or paint. Cheap metal doorknobs glinted symmetrically. The sluggish air lay like a hand upon the very candle.

They entered a room, smelling too of wet plaster, and even colder than the corridor; a sluggish chill almost substantial, as though the atmosphere between the dead and recent walls were congealing, like a patent three-minute dessert. The room contained a bed, a dresser, a chair, a washstand; the bowl, pitcher, and slop basin were of American enamel.

When the traveler touched the bed the linen was soundless under his hand, coarse as sacking, clinging damply to the hand in the dead air in which their two breathings vaporized in the faint candle.

The host set the candle on the dresser. “Dîner, monsieur?” he said. The traveler stared down at the host, incongruous in his correct clothes, with that strained air. His waxed moustaches gleamed like faint bayonets above a cravat striped with what the host could not have known was the patterned coloring of a Scottish regiment. “Manger?” the host shouted. He chewed violently in pantomime. “Manger?” he roared, his shadow aping his gesture as he pointed toward the floor.

"Yes," the traveler shouted in reply, their faces not a yard apart. "Yes. Yes."

The host nodded violently, pointed toward the floor and then at the door, nodded again, went out.

He returned below stairs. He found the woman now in the kitchen, at the stove. "He will eat," the host said.

"I knew that," the woman said.

"You would think that they would stay at home," the host said. "I'm glad I was not born of a race doomed to a place too small to hold all of us at one time."

"Perhaps he has come to look at the war," the woman said.

"Of course he has," the host said. "But he should have come four years ago. That was when we needed Englishmen to look at the war."

"He was too old to come then," the woman said. "Didn't you see his hair?"

"Then let him stay at home now," the host said. "He is no younger."

"He may have come to look at the grave of his son," the woman said.

"Him?" the host said. "That one? He is too cold to ever have had a son."

"Perhaps you are right," the woman said. "After all, that is his affair. It is our affair only that he has money."

"That's right," the host said. "A man in this business, he cannot pick and choose."

"He can pick, though," the woman said.

"Good!" the host said. "Very good! Pick! That is worth telling to the English himself."

"Why not let him find it out when he leaves?"

"Good!" the host said. "Better still. Good! Oh, good!"

"Attention," the woman said. "Here he comes."

They listened to the traveler's steady tramp, then he appeared in the door. Against the lesser light of the bigger room, his dark face and his white hair looked like a kodak negative.

The table was set for two, a carafe of red wine at each place.

As the traveller seated himself, the other guest entered and took the other place — a small, rat-faced man who appeared at first glance to have no eyelashes at all. He tucked his napkin into the top of his vest and took up the soup ladle (the tureen sat between them in the center of the table) and offered it to the other. “Faites-moi l’honneur, monsieur,” he said. The other bowed stiffly; accepting the ladle.

The small man lifted the cover from the tureen. “Vous venez examiner ce scène de nos victoires, monsieur?” he said, helping himself in turn. The other looked at him. “Monsieur l’Anglais a peut-être beaucoup des amis qui sont tombés en voisinage.”

“A speak no French,” the other said, eating.

The little man did not eat. He held his yet unwetted spoon above his bowl. “What agreeable for me. I speak the Engleesh. I am Suisse, me. I speak all langue.” The other did not reply. He ate steadily, not fast. “You ave return to see the grave of your galant countreemans, eh? You ave son here, perhaps, eh?”

“No,” the other said. He did not cease to eat.

“No?” The other finished his soup and set the bowl aside. He drank some wine. “What deplorable, that man who ave,” the Swiss said. “But it is finish now. Not?” Again the other said nothing. He was not looking at the Swiss. He did not seem to be looking at anything, with his gaunt eyes, his rigid moustaches upon his rigid face. “Me, I suffer too. All suffer. But I tell myself, What would you? It is war.”

Still the other did not answer. He ate steadily, deliberately, and finished his meal and rose and left the room. He lit his candle at the bar, where the host, leaning beside a second man in a corduroy coat, lifted a glass slightly to him. “Au bon dormir, monsieur,” the host said.

The traveler looked at the host, his face gaunt in the candle, his waxed moustaches rigid, his eyes in shadow. “What?” he said. “Yes. Yes.” He

turned and went toward the stairs. The two men at the bar watched him, his stiff, deliberate back.

Ever since the train left Arras, the two women had been watching the other occupant of the carriage. It was a third-class carriage because no first-class trains ran on this line, and they sat with their shawled heads and the thick, still hands of peasants folded upon closed baskets on their laps, watching the man sitting opposite them — the white distinction of the hair against the bronze, gaunt face, the needles of the moustaches, the foreign-made suit and the stick — on a worn and greasy wooden seat, looking out the window.

At first they had just looked, ready to avert their gaze, but as the man did not seem to be aware of them, they began to whisper quietly to one another behind their hands. But the man did not seem to notice this, so they soon were talking in undertone, watching with bright, alert, curious eyes the stiff, incongruous figure leaning a little forward on the stick, looking out a foul window beyond which there was nothing to see save an occasional shattered road and man-high stump of shattered tree breaking small patches of tilled land whorled with apparent unreason about islands of earth indicated by low signboards painted red, the islands inscrutable, desolate above the destruction which they wombed.

Then the train, slowing, ran suddenly among tumbled brick, out of which rose a small house of corrugated iron bearing a name in big letters; they watched the man lean forward.

“See!” one of the women said. “His mouth. He is reading the name. What did I tell you? It is as I said. His son fell here.”

“Then he had lots of sons,” the other woman said. “He has read the name each time since we left Arras. Eh! Eh! Him a son? That cold?”

“They do get children, though.”

“That is why they drink whisky. Otherwise . . .”

“That’s so. They think of nothing save money and eating, the English.”

Presently they got out; the train went on. Then others entered the carriage, other peasants with muddy boots, carrying baskets or live or dead beasts; they in turn watched the rigid, motionless figure leaning at the window while the train ran across the ruined land and past the brick or iron stations among the tumbled ruins, watching his lips move as he read the names.

“Let him look at the war, about which he has apparently heard at last,” they told one another. “Then he can go home. It was not in his barnyard that it was fought.”

“Nor in his house,” a woman said.

II

The battalion stands at ease in the rain. It has been in rest billets two days, equipment has been replaced and cleaned, vacancies have been filled and the ranks closed up, and it now stands at ease with the stupid docility of sheep in the ceaseless rain, facing the streaming shape of the sergeant-major.

Presently the colonel emerges from a door across the square. He stands in the door a moment, fastening his trench coat, then, followed by two A.D.C.'s, he steps gingerly into the mud in polished boots and approaches.

“Para-a-a-de— ‘Shun!” the sergeant-major shouts. The battalion clashes, a single muffled, sullen sound. The sergeant-major turns, takes a pace toward the officers, and salutes, his stick beneath his armpit. The colonel jerks his stick toward his cap peak.

“Stand at ease, men,” he says. Again the battalion clashes, a single sluggish, trickling sound. The officers approach the guide file of the first platoon, the sergeant-major falling in behind the last officer. The sergeant of the first platoon takes a pace forward and salutes. The colonel does not respond at all.

The sergeant falls in behind the sergeant-major, and the five of them pass down the company front, staring in turn at each rigid, forward-staring face as they pass it. First Company.

The sergeant salutes the colonel's back and returns to his original position and comes to attention. The sergeant of the second company has stepped forward, saluted, is ignored, and falls in behind the sergeant-major, and they pass down the second company front. The colonel's trench coat sheathes water onto his polished boots. Mud from the earth creeps up his boots and meets the water and is channelled by the water as the mud creeps up the polished boots again.

Third Company. The colonel stops before a soldier, his trench coat hunched about his shoulders where the rain trickles from the back of his cap, so that he looks somehow like a choleric and outraged bird. The other two officers, the sergeant-major and the sergeant halt in turn, and the five of them glare at the five soldiers whom they are facing. The five soldiers stare rigid and unwinking straight before them, their faces like wooden faces, their eyes like wooden eyes.

"Sergeant," the colonel says in his pettish voice, "has this man shaved today?"

"Sir!" the sergeant says in a ringing voice; the sergeant-major says: "Did this man shave today, Sergeant?" and all five of them glare now at the soldier, whose rigid gaze seems to pass through and beyond them, as if they were not there. "Take a pace forward when you speak in ranks!" the sergeant-major says.

The soldier, who has not spoken, steps out of ranks, splashing a jet of mud yet higher up the colonel's boots.

"What is your name?" the colonel says.

"024186 Gray," the soldier raps out glibly. The company, the battalion, stares straight ahead.

"Sir!" the sergeant-major thunders.

“Sir-r,” the soldier says.

“Did you shave this morning?” the colonel says.

“Nae, sir-r.”

“Why not?”

“A dinna shave, sir-r.”

“You dont shave?”

“A am nae auld enough tae shave.”

“Sir!” the sergeant-major thunders.

“Sir-r,” the soldier says.

“You are not . . .” The colonel’s voice dies somewhere behind his choleric glare, the trickling water from his cap peak. “Take his name, Sergeant-major,” he says, passing on.

The battalion stares rigidly ahead. Presently it sees the colonel, the two officers and the sergeant-major reappear in single file. At the proper place the sergeant-major halts and salutes the colonel’s back. The colonel jerks his stick hand again and goes on, followed by the two officers, at a trot toward the door from which he had emerged.

The sergeant-major faces the battalion again. “Para-a-a-de—” he shouts. An indistinguishable movement passes from rank to rank, an indistinguishable precursor of that damp and sullen clash which dies borning. The sergeant-major’s stick has come down from his armpit; he now leans on it, as officers do. For a time his eye roves along the battalion front.

“Sergeant Cunninghame!” he says at last.

“Sir!”

“Did you take that man’s name?”

There is silence for a moment — a little more than a short moment, a little less than a long one. Then the sergeant says: “What man, sir?”

“You, soldier!” the sergeant-major says.

The battalion stands rigid. The rain lances quietly into the mud between it and the sergeant-major as though it were too spent to either hurry or cease.

“You soldier that dont shave!” the sergeant-major says.

“Gray, sir!” the sergeant says.

“Gray. Double out 'ere.”

The man Gray appears without haste and tramps stolidly before the battalion, his kilts dark and damp and heavy as a wet horse-blanket. He halts, facing the sergeant-major.

“Why didn't you shave this morning?” the sergeant-major says.

“A am nae auld enough tae shave,” Gray says.

“Sir!” the sergeant-major says.

Gray stares rigidly beyond the sergeant-major's shoulder.

“Say sir when addressing a first-class warrant officer!” the sergeant-major says. Gray stares doggedly past his shoulder, his face beneath his vizorless bonnet as oblivious of the cold lances of rain as though it were granite. The sergeant-major raises his voice:

“Sergeant Cunninghame!”

“Sir!”

“Take this man's name for insubordination also.”

“Very good, sir!”

The sergeant-major looks at Gray again. “And I'll see that you get the penal battalion, my man. Fall in!”

Gray turns without haste and returns to his place in ranks, the sergeant-major watching him. The sergeant-major raises his voice again:

“Sergeant Cunninghame!”

“Sir!”

“You did not take that man's name when ordered. Let that happen again and you'll be for it yourself.”

“Very good, sir!”

“Carry on!” the sergeant-major says.

“But why did ye no shave?” the corporal asked him. They were back in billets: a stone barn with leprous walls, where no light entered, squatting in the ammoniac air on wet straw about a reeking brazier. “Ye kenned we were for inspection thae mor-rn.”

“A am nae auld enough tae shave,” Gray said.

“But ye kenned thae colonel would mar-rk ye on parade.”

“A am nae auld enough tae shave,” Gray repeated doggedly and without heat.

III

“For two hundred years,” Matthew Gray said, “there’s never a day, except Sunday, has passed but there is a hull rising on Clyde or a hull going out of Clydemouth with a Gray-driven nail in it.” He looked at young Alec across his steel spectacles, his neck bowed. “And not excepting their godless Sabbath hammering and sawing either.

Because if a hull could be built in a day, Grays could build it,” he added with dour pride. “And now, when you are big enough to go down to the yards with your granddadder and me and take a man’s place among men, to be trusted manlike with hammer and saw yersel.”

“Whisht, Matthew,” old Alec said. “The lad can saw as straight a line and drive as mony a nail a day as yersel or even me.”

Matthew paid his father no attention. He continued to speak his slow, considered words, watching his oldest son across the spectacles. “And with John Wesley not old enough by two years, and wee Matthew by ten, and your grandfather an auld man will soon be—”

“Whisht,” old Alec said. “I’m no but sixty-eight. Will you be telling the lad he’ll make his bit journey to London and come back to find me in the parish house, mayhap? ‘Twill be over by Christmastide.”

“Christmastide or no,” Matthew said, “a Gray, a shipwright, has no business at an English war.”

“Whisht ye,” old Alec said. He rose and went to the chimney cupboard and returned, carrying a box. It was of wood, dark and polished with age, the corners bound with iron, and fitted with an enormous iron lock which any child with a hairpin could have solved. From his pocket he took an iron key almost as big as the lock.

He opened the box and lifted carefully out a small velvet-covered jeweler’s box and opened it in turn. On the satin lining lay a medal, a bit of bronze on a crimson ribbon: a Victoria Cross. “I kept the hulls going out of Clydemouth while your uncle Simon was getting this bit of brass from the Queen,” old Alec said. “I heard naught of complaint.

And if need be, I’ll keep them going out while Alec serves the Queen a bit himsel. Let the lad go,” he said. He put the medal back into the wooden box and locked it. “A bit fighting winna hurt the lad. If I were his age, or yours either, for that matter, I’d gang mysel.

Alec, lad, hark ye. Ye’ll see if they’ll no take a hale lad of sixty-eight and I’ll gang wi ye and leave the auld folk like Matthew to do the best they can. Nay, Matthew; dinna ye thwart the lad; have no the Grays ever served the Queen in her need?”

So young Alec went to enlist, descending the hill on a weekday in his Sunday clothes, with a New Testament and a loaf of homebaked bread tied in a handkerchief. And this was the last day’s work which old Alec ever did, for soon after that, one morning Matthew descended the hill to the shipyard alone, leaving old Alec at home.

And after that, on the sunny days (and sometimes on the bad days too, until his daughter-in-law found him and drove him back into the house) he would sit shawled in a chair on the porch, gazing south and eastward, calling now and then to his son’s wife within the house: “Hark now. Do you hear them? The guns.”

“I hear nothing,” the daughter-in-law would say. “It’s only the sea at Kinkeadbright. Come into the house, now. Matthew will be displeased.”
“Whisht, woman. Do you think there is a Gray in the world could let off a gun and me not know the sound of it?”

They had a letter from him shortly after he enlisted, from England, in which he said that being a soldier, England, was different from being a shipwright, Clydeside, and that he would write again later.

Which he did, each month or so, writing that soldiering was different from building ships and that it was still raining. Then they did not hear from him for seven months. But his mother and father continued to write him a joint letter on the first Monday of each month, letters almost identical with the previous one, the previous dozen:
We are well. Ships are going out of Clyde faster than they can sink them. You still have the Book?

This would be in his father’s slow, indomitable hand. Then, in his mother’s:

Are you well? Do you need anything? Jessie and I are knitting the stockings and will send them. Alec, Alec.

He received this one during the seven months, during his term in the penal battalion, forwarded to him by his old corporal, since he had not told his people of his changed life. He answered it, huddled among his fellow felons, squatting in the mud with newspapers buttoned inside his tunic and his head and feet wrapped in strips of torn blanket:
I am well. Yes I still have the Book (not telling them that his platoon was using it to light tobacco with and that they were now well beyond Lamentations). It still rains. Love to Grandadder and Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley.

Then his time in the penal battalion was up. He returned to his old company, his old platoon, finding some new faces, and a letter:
We are well. Ships are going out of Clyde yet. You have a new sister. Your Mother is well.

He folded the letter and put it away. "A see mony new faces in thae battalion," he said to the corporal. "We ha a new sair-rgeant-major too, A doot not?"

"Naw," the corporal said. "'Tis the same one." He was looking at Gray, his gaze intent, speculative; his face cleared. "Ye ha shaved thae morn," he said.

"Ay," Gray said. "Am auld enough tae shave noo."

That was the night on which the battalion was to go up to Arras. It was to move at midnight, so he answered the letter at once:

I am well. Love to Granddadder and Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and the baby.

"Morning! Morning!" The General, lap-robed and hooded, leans from his motor and waves his gloved hand and shouts cheerily to them as they slog past the car on the Bapaume road, taking the ditch to pass.

"A's a cheery auld card," a voice says.

"Awfficers," a second drawls; he falls to cursing as he slips in the greaselike mud, trying to cling to the crest of the kneedeep ditch.

"Aweel," a third says, "thae awfficers wud gang tae thae war-r too, A doot not."

"Why dinna they gang then?" a fourth says. "Thae war-r is no back that way."

Platoon by platoon they slip and plunge into the ditch and drag their heavy feet out of the clinging mud and pass the halted car and crawl terrifically onto the crown of the road again: "A says tae me, a says: 'Fritz has a new gun that will carry to Par-ris,' a says, and A says tae him: "'Tis nawthin: a has one that will hit our Cor-rps Headquar-rters.'"

"Morning! Morning!" The General continues to wave his glove and shout cheerily as the battalion detours into the ditch and heaves itself back onto the road again.

They are in the trench. Until the first rifle explodes in their faces, not a shot has been fired. Gray is the third man. During all the while that they crept between flares from shellhole to shellhole, he has been working

himself nearer to the sergeant-major and the Officer; in the glare of that first rifle he can see the gap in the wire toward which the Officer was leading them, the moiled rigid glints of the wire where bullets have nicked the mud and rust from it, and against the glare the tall, leaping shape of the sergeant-major. Then Gray, too, springs bayonet first into the trench full of grunting shouts and thudding blows.

Flares go up by dozens now; in the corpse glare Gray sees the sergeant-major methodically tossing grenades into the next traverse. He runs toward him, passing the Officer leaning, bent double, against the fire step. The sergeant-major has vanished beyond the traverse. Gray follows and comes upon the sergeant-major. Holding the burlap curtain aside with one hand, the sergeant-major is in the act of tossing a grenade into a dugout as if he might be tossing an orange hull into a cellar.

The sergeant-major turns in the rocket glare. "'Tis you, Gray," he says. The earth-muffled bomb thuds; the sergeant-major is in the act of catching another bomb from the sack about his neck as Gray's bayonet goes into his throat. The sergeant-major is a big man. He falls backward, holding the rifle barrel with both hands against his throat, his teeth glaring, pulling Gray with him. Gray clings to the rifle. He tries to shake the speared body on the bayonet as he would shake a rat on an umbrella rib.

He frees the bayonet. The sergeant-major falls. Gray reverses the rifle and hammers its butt into the sergeant-major's face, but the trench floor is too soft to supply any resistance. He glares about. His gaze falls upon a duckboard upended in the mud. He drags it free and slips it beneath the sergeant-major's head and hammers the face with his riflebutt. Behind him in the first traverse the Officer is shouting: "Blow your whistle, Sergeant-major!"

IV

In the citation it told how Private Gray, on a night raid, one of four survivors, following the disablement of the Officer and the death of all

the N.C.O.'s, took command of the situation and (the purpose of the expedition was a quick raid for prisoners); held a foothold in the enemy's front line until a supporting attack arrived and consolidated the position.

The Officer told how he ordered the men back out, ordering them to leave him and save themselves, and how Gray appeared with a German machine gun from somewhere and, while his three companions built a barricade, overcame the Officer and took from him his Very pistol and fired the colored signal which called for the attack; all so quickly that support arrived before the enemy could counterattack or put down a barrage.

It is doubtful if his people ever saw the citation at all. Anyway, the letters which he received from them during his sojourn in hospital, the tenor of them, were unchanged: "We are well. Ships are still going out."

His next letter home was once more months late. He wrote it when he was sitting up again, in London:

I have been sick but I am better now. I have a ribbon like in the box but not all red. The Queen was there. Love to Granddaddy and Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and the baby.

The reply was written on Friday:

Your mother is glad that you are better. Your grandfather is dead. The baby's name is Elizabeth. We are well. Your mother sends her love.

His next letter was three months later, in winter again:

My hurt is well. I am going to a school for officers. Love to Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and Elizabeth.

Matthew Gray pondered over this letter for a long while; so long that the reply was a week late, written on the second Monday instead of the first. He wrote it carefully, waiting until his family was in bed. It was such a long letter, or he had been at it so long, that after a time his wife came into the room in her nightdress.

"Go back to bed," he told her. "I'll be coming soon. 'Tis something to be said to the lad."

When at last he laid the pen down and sat back to reread the letter, it was a long one, written out slowly and deliberately and without retraction or blot:

. . . your bit ribbon . . . for that way lies vainglory and pride. The pride and vainglory of going for an officer. Never miscall your birth, Alec. You are not a gentleman. You are a Scottish shipwright. If your grandfather were here he would not be last to tell you so. . . . We are glad your hurt is well. Your mother sends her love.

He sent home the medal, and his photograph in the new tunic with the pips and ribbon and the barred cuffs. But he did not go home himself. He returned to Flanders in the spring, with poppies blowing in the churned beet- and cabbage-fields. When his leaves came, he spent them in London, in the haunts of officers, not telling his people that he had any leave.

He still had the Book. Occasionally he came upon it among his effects and opened it at the jagged page where his life had changed: . . . and a voice said, Peter, raise thyself; kill —

Often his batman would watch him as, unawares and oblivious, he turned the Book and mused upon the jagged page — the ranker, the gaunt, lonely man with a face that belied his years or lack of them: a sobriety, a profound and mature calm, a grave and deliberate conviction of expression and gesture (“like a mout be Haig hissel,” the batman said) — watching him at his clean table, writing steadily and slowly, his tongue in his cheek as a child writes:

I am well. It has not rained in a fortnight. Love to Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and Elizabeth.

Four days ago the battalion came down from the lines. It has lost its major and two captains and most of the subalterns, so that now the remaining captain is major, and two subalterns and a sergeant have the companies. Meanwhile, replacements have come up, the ranks are filled, and the battalion is going in again tomorrow. So today K Company stands with ranks open for inspection while the subaltern-captain (his name is Gray) moves slowly along each platoon front.

He passes from man to man, slowly, thoroughly, the sergeant behind him. He stops.

“Where is your trenching tool?” he says.

“Blawn—” the soldier begins. Then he ceases, staring rigidly before him.

“Blawn out of your pack, eh?” the captain finishes for him. “Since when? What battles have ye taken par-rt in since four days?”

The soldier stares rigidly across the drowsy street. The captain moves on. “Take his name, Sergeant.”

He moves on to the second platoon, to the third. He halts again. He looks the soldier up and down.

“What is your name?”

“010801 McLan, sir-r.”

“Replacement?”

“Replacement, sir-r.”

The captain moves on. “Take his name, Sergeant. Rifle’s filthy.”

The sun is setting. The village rises in black silhouette against the sunset; the river gleams in mirrored fire. The bridge across the river is a black arch upon which slowly and like figures cut from black paper, men are moving.

The party crouches in the roadside ditch while the captain and the sergeant peer cautiously across the parapet of the road. “Do ye make them out?” the captain says in a low voice.

“Huns, sir-r,” the sergeant whispers. “A ken their-r helmets.”

Presently the column has crossed the bridge. The captain and the sergeant crawl back into the ditch, where the party crouches, among them a wounded man with a bandaged head. “Keep yon man quiet, now,” the captain says.

He leads the way along the ditch until they reach the outskirts of the village. Here they are out of the sun, and here they sit quietly beneath a wall, surrounding the wounded man, while the captain and the

sergeant again crawl away. They return in five minutes. "Fix bayonets," the sergeant says in a low voice. "Quiet, now."

"Wull A stay wi thae hur-rt lad, Sair-rgent?" one whispers.
"Nay," the sergeant says. "A'll tak's chance wi us. Forrard."

They steal quietly along the wall, behind the captain. The wall approaches at right angles to the street, the road which crosses the bridge. The captain raises his hand. They halt and watch him as he peers around the corner.

They are opposite the bridgehead. It and the road are deserted; the village dreams quietly in the setting sun. Against the sky beyond the village the dust of the retreating column hangs, turning to rose and gold.

Then they hear a sound, a short, guttural word. Not ten yards away and behind a ruined wall leveled breast-high and facing the bridge, four men squat about a machine gun. The captain raises his hand again. They grasp their rifles: a rush of hobnails on cobblestones, a cry of astonishment cut sharply off; blows, short, hard breaths, curses; not a shot.

The man with the bandaged head begins to laugh, shrilly, until someone hushes him with a hand that tastes like brass. Under the captain's direction they bash in the door of the house and drag the gun and the four bodies into it. They hoist the gun upstairs and set it up in a window looking down upon the bridgehead. The sun sinks further, the shadows fall long and quiet across village and river. The man with the bandaged head babbles to himself.

Another column swings up the road, dogged and orderly beneath coalhod helmets. It crosses the bridge and passes on through the village. A party detaches itself from the rear of the column and splits into three squads.

Two of them have machine guns, which they set up on opposite sides of the street, the near one utilizing the barricade behind which the other gun had been captured. The third squad returns to the bridge, carrying sappers' tools and explosive. The sergeant tells off six of the nineteen men, who descend the stairs silently. The captain remains with the gun in the window.

Again there is a brief rush, a scuffle, blows. From the window the captain sees the heads of the machine-gun crew across the street turn, then the muzzle of the gun swings, firing. The captain rakes them once with his gun, then he sweeps with it the party on the bridge, watching it break like a covey of quail for the nearest wall.

The captain holds the gun on them. They wilt running and dot the white road and become motionless. Then he swings the gun back to the gun across the street. It ceases.

He gives another order. The remaining men, except the man with the bandage, run down the stairs. Half of them stop at the gun beneath the window and drag it around. The others dash on across the street, toward the second gun. They are halfway across when the other gun rattles.

The running men plunge as one in midstep. Their kilts whip forward and bare their pale thighs. The gun rakes across the doorway where the others are freeing the first gun of bodies.

As the captain sweeps his gun down again, dust puffs from the left side of the window, his gun rings metallically, something sears along his arm and across his ribs, dust puffs from the right side of the window. He rakes the other gun again. It ceases. He continues to fire into the huddled clump about it long after the gun has ceased.

The dark earth bites into the sun's rim. The street is now all in shadow; a final level ray comes into the room, and fades. Behind him in the twilight the wounded man laughs, then his laughter sinks into a quiet contented gibberish.

Just before dark another column crosses the bridge. There is still enough light for it to be seen that these troops wear khaki and that their helmets are flat. But likely there is no one to see, because when a party mounted to the second story and found the captain propped in the window beside the cold gun, they thought that he was dead.

This time Matthew Gray saw the citation. Someone clipped it from the Gazette and sent it to him, and he sent it in turn to his son in the hospital, with a letter:

. . . Since you must go to a war we are glad that you are doing well in it. Your mother thinks that you have done your part and that you should come home.

But women do not understand such things. But I myself think that it is time they stopped fighting. What is the good in the high wages when food is so high that there is profit for none save the profiteers. When a war gets to where the battles do not even prosper the people who win them, it is time to stop.

V

In the bed next his, and later in the chair next his on the long glassed veranda, there was a subaltern. They used to talk. Or rather, the subaltern talked while Gray listened. He talked of peace, of what he would do when it was over, talking as if it were about finished, as if it would not last past Christmas.

“We’ll be back out there by Christmas,” Gray said.

“Gas cases? They don’t send gas cases out again. They have to be cured.”

“We will be cured.”

“But not in time. It will be over by Christmas. It can’t last another year. You don’t believe me, do you? Sometimes I believe you want to go back. But it will be. It will be finished by Christmas, and then I’m off. Canada. Nothing at home for us now.” He looked at the other, at the

gaunt, wasted figure with almost white hair, lying with closed eyes in the fall sunlight. "You'd better come with me."

"I'll meet you in Givenchy on Christmas Day," Gray said.

But he didn't. He was in the hospital on the eleventh of November, hearing the bells, and he was still there on Christmas Day, where he received a letter from home:

You can come on home now. It will not be too soon now. They will need ships worse than ever now, now that the pride and the vainglory have worn themselves out.

The medical officer greeted him cheerfully. "Dammit, stuck here, when I know a place in Devon where I could hear a nightingale, by jove." He thumped Gray's chest. "Not much: just a bit of a murmur. Give you no trouble, if you'll stop away from wars from now on. Might keep you from getting in again, though."

He waited for Gray to laugh, but Gray didn't laugh. "Well, it's all finished now, damn them. Sign here, will you." Gray signed. "Forget it as quickly as it began, I hope. Well—" He extended his hand, smiling his antiseptic smile. "Cheer-O, Captain. And good luck."

Matthew Gray, descending the hill at seven o'clock in the morning, saw the man, the tall, hospital-colored man in city clothing and carrying a stick, and stopped.

"Alec?" he said. "Alec." They shook hands. "I could not — I did not . . ." He looked at his son, at the white hair, the waxed moustaches. "You have two ribbons now for the box, you have written." Then Matthew turned back up the hill at seven o'clock in the morning. "We'll go to your mother."

Then Alec Gray reverted for an instant. Perhaps he had not progressed as far as he thought, or perhaps he had been climbing a hill, and the return was not a reversion so much as something like an avalanche waiting the pebble, momentary though it was to be. "The shipyard, Father."

His father strode firmly on, carrying his lunchpail. “‘Twill wait,” he said. “We’ll go to your mother.”

His mother met him at the door. Behind her he saw young Matthew, a man now, and John Wesley, and Elizabeth whom he had never seen. “You did not wear your uniform home,” young Matthew said. “No,” he said. “No, I—”

“Your mother had wanted to see you in your regimentals and all,” his father said. “No,” his mother said. “No! Never! Never!”

“Hush, Annie,” his father said. “Being a captain now, with two ribbons now for the box. This is false modesty. Ye hae shown courage; ye should have — But ’tis of no moment: the proper uniform for a Gray is an overall and a hammer.”

“Ay, sir,” Alec said, who had long since found out that no man has courage but that any man may blunder blindly into valor as one stumbles into an open manhole in the street. He did not tell his father until that night, after his mother and the children had gone to bed. “I am going back to England. I have work promised there.”

“Ah,” his father said. “At Bristol, perhaps? They build ships there.” The lamp glowed, touching with faint gleams the black and polished surface of the box on the mantel-shelf. There was a wind getting up, hollowing out the sky like a dark bowl, carving house and hill and headland out of dark space. “‘Twill be blowing out yon the night,” his father said.

“There are other things,” Alec said. “I have made friends, you see.” His father removed the iron-rimmed spectacles. “You have made friends. Officers and such, I doubt not?” “Yes, sir.”

“And friends are good to have, to sit about the hearth of nights and talk with. But beyond that, only them that love you will bear your faults. You must love a man well to put up with all his trying ways, Alec.”

“But they are not that sort of friends, sir. They are . . .” He ceased. He did not look at his father. Matthew sat, slowly polishing the spectacles with his thumb. They could hear the wind. “If this fails, I’ll come back to the shipyard.”

His father watched him gravely, polishing the spectacles slowly.

“Shipwrights are not made like that, Alec. To fear God, to do your work like it was your own hull you were putting the ribs in . . .” He moved.

“We’ll see what the Book will say.” He replaced the glasses.

On the table was a heavy, brass-bound Bible. He opened it; the words seemed to him to rise to meet him from the page. Yet he read them, aloud: “. . . and the captains of thousands and the captains of ten thousands . . . A paragraph of pride. He faced his son, bowing his neck to see across the glasses. “You will go to London, then?”

“Yes, sir,” Alec said.

VI

His position was waiting. It was in an office. He had already had cards made: Captain A. Gray, M.C., D.S.M., and on his return to London he joined the Officers’ Association, donating to the support of the widows and orphans.

He had rooms in the proper quarter, and he would walk to and from the office, with his cards and his waxed moustaches, his sober correct clothes and his stick carried in a manner inimitable, at once jaunty and unobtrusive, giving his coppers to blind and maimed in Piccadilly, asking of them the names of their regiments. Once a month he wrote home: I am well. Love to Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and Elizabeth.

During that first year Jessie was married. He sent her a gift of plate, stinting himself a little to do so, drawings from his savings. He was

saving, not against old age; he believed too firmly in the Empire to do that, who had surrendered completely to the Empire like a woman, a bride. He was saving against the time when he would recross the Channel among the dead scenes of his lost and found life.

That was three years later. He was already planning to ask for leave, when one day the manager broached the subject himself. With one correct bag he went to France. But he did not bear eastward at once. He went to the Riviera; for a week he lived like a gentleman, spending his money like a gentleman, lonely, alone in that bright aviary of the svelte kept women of all Europe.

That was why those who saw him descend from the Mediterranean Express that morning in Paris said, "Here is a rich milord," and why they continued to say it in the hard-benched third-class trains, as he sat leaning forward on his stick, lip-moving the names on sheet-iron stations about the battered and waking land lying now three years quiet beneath the senseless and unbroken battalions of days.

He reached London and found what he should have known before he left. His position was gone. Conditions, the manager told him, addressing him punctiliously by his rank.

What savings he had left melted slowly; he spent the last of them on a black silk dress for his mother, with the letter:

I am well. Love to Matthew and John Wesley and Elizabeth.

He called upon his friends, upon the officers whom he had known. One, the man he knew best, gave him whisky in a comfortable room with a fire: "You aren't working now? Rotten luck. By the way, you remember Whiteby? He had a company in the — th. Nice chap: no people, though. He killed himself last week. Conditions."

"Oh. Did he? Yes. I remember him. Rotten luck."

"Yes. Rotten luck. Nice chap."

He no longer gave his pennies to the blind and the maimed in Piccadilly. He needed them for papers:

Artisans needed

Become stonemason

Men to drive motorcars. War record not necessary

Shop-assistants (must be under twenty-one)

Shipwrights needed

and at last:

Gentleman with social address and connections to meet out-of-town clients. Temporary

He got the place, and with his waxed moustaches and his correct clothes he revealed the fleshpots of the West End to Birmingham and Leeds. It was temporary.

Artisans

Carpenters

Housepainters

Winter was temporary, too. In the spring he took his waxed moustaches and his ironed clothes into Surrey, with a set of books, an encyclopedia, on commission. He sold all his things save what he stood in, and gave up his rooms in town.

He still had his stick, his waxed moustaches, his cards. Surrey, gentle, green, mild. A tight little house in a tight little garden. An oldish man in a smoking jacket puttering in a flower bed: "Good day, sir. Might I—"

The man in the smoking jacket looks up. "Go to the side, can't you? Don't come this way."

He goes to the side entrance. A slatted gate, freshly white, bearing an enameled plate:

NO

HAWKERS

BEGGARS

He passes through and knocks at a tidy door smug beneath a vine.

"Good day, miss. May I see the—"

"Go away. Didn't you see the sign on the gate?"

"But I—"

“Go away, or I’ll call the master.”

In the fall he returned to London. Perhaps he could not have said why himself. Perhaps it was beyond any saying, instinct perhaps bringing him back to be present at the instant out of all time of the manifestation, apotheosis, of his life which had died again. Anyway, he was there, still with his waxed moustaches, erect, his stick clasped beneath his left armpit, among the Household troops in brass cuirasses, on dappled geldings, and Guards in scarlet tunics, and the Church militant in stole and surplice and Prince defenders of God in humble mufti, all at attention for two minutes, listening to despair. He still had thirty shillings, and he replenished his cards: Captain A. Gray, M.C., D.S.M.

It is one of those spurious, pale days like a sickly and premature child of spring while spring itself is still weeks away. In the thin sunlight buildings fade upward into misty pinks and golds. Women wear violets pinned to their furs, appearing to bloom themselves like flowers in the languorous, treacherous air.

It is the women who look twice at the man standing against the wall at a corner: a gaunt man with white hair, and moustaches twisted into frayed points, with a bleached and frayed regimental scarf in a celluloid collar, a once-good suit now threadbare yet apparently pressed within twenty-four hours, standing against the wall with closed eyes, a dilapidated hat held bottom-up before him.

He stood there for a long time, until someone touched his arm. It was a constable. “Move along, sir. Against orders.” In his hat were seven pennies and three halfpence. He bought a cake of soap and a little food.

Another anniversary came and passed; he stood again, his stick at his armpit, among the bright, silent uniforms, the quiet throng in either frank or stubborn cast-offs, with patient, bewildered faces. In his eyes now is not that hopeful resignation of a beggar, but rather that bitterness, that echo as of bitter and unheard laughter of a hunchback.

A meager fire burns on the sloping cobbles. In the fitful light the damp, fungus-grown wall of the embankment and the stone arch of the bridge loom. At the foot of the cobbled slope the invisible river clucks and gurgles with the tide.

Five figures lie about the fire, some with heads covered as though in slumber, others smoking and talking. One man sits upright, his back to the wall, his hands lying beside him; he is blind: he sleeps that way. He says that he is afraid to lie down.

“Cant you tell you are lying down, without seeing you are?” another says.

“Something might happen,” the blind man says.

“What? Do you think they would give you a shell, even if it would bring back your sight?”

“They’d give him the shell, all right,” a third said.

“Ow. Why dont they line us all up and put down a bloody barrage on us?”

“Was that how he lost his sight?” a fourth says. “A shell?”

“Ow. He was at Mons. A dispatch rider, on a motorbike. Tell them about it, mate.”

The blind man lifts his face a little. Otherwise he does not move. He speaks in a flat voice. “She had the bit of scar on her wrist. That was how I could tell. It was me put the scar on her wrist, you might say. We was working in the shop one day. I had picked up an old engine and we was fitting it onto a bike so we could—”

“What?” the fourth says. “What’s he talking about?”

“Shhhh,” the first says. “Not so loud. He’s talking about his girl. He had a bit of a bike shop on the Brighton Road and they were going to marry.” He speaks in a low tone, his voice just under the weary,

monotonous voice of the blind man. “Had their picture taken and all the day he enlisted and got his uniform.

He had it with him for a while, until one day he lost it. He was fair wild. So at last we got a bit of a card about the same size of the picture. ‘Here’s your picture, mate,’ we says. ‘Hold onto it this time.’ So he’s still got the card. Likely he’ll show it to you before he’s done. So dont you let on.”

“No,” the other says. “I shant let on.”

The blind man talks. “ — got them at the hospital to write her a letter, and sure enough, here she come. I could tell her by the bit of scar on her wrist. Her voice sounded different, but then everything sounded different since. But I could tell by the scar. We would sit and hold hands, and I could touch the bit of scar inside her left wrist. In the cinema too. I would touch the scar and it would be like I—”

“The cinema?” the fourth says. “Him?”

“Yes,” the other says. “She would take him to the cinema the comedies, so he could hear them laughing.”

The blind man talks. “ — told me how the pictures hurt her eyes, and that she would leave me at the cinema and when it was over she would come and fetch me. So I said it was all right. And the next night it was again.

And I said it was all right. And the next night I told her I wouldn’t go either. I said we would stop at home, at the hospital. And then she didn’t say anything for a long while. I could hear her breathing. Then she said it was all right.

So after that we didn’t go to the cinema. We would just sit, holding hands, and me feeling the scar now and then. We couldn’t talk loud in the hospital, so we would whisper. But mostly we didn’t talk. We just held hands. And that was for eight nights. I counted.

Then it was the eighth night. We were sitting there, with the other hand in my hand, and me touching the scar now and then. Then on a sudden the hand jerked away. I could hear her standing up. 'Listen,' she says. 'This cant go on any longer. You will have to know sometime,' she says. And I says, 'I dont want to know but one thing. What is your name?' I says. She told me her name; one of the nurses. And she says—

"What?" the fourth says. "What is this?"

"He told you," the first said. "It was one of the nurses in the hospital. The girl had been buggering off with another fellow and left the nurse for him to hold her hand, thinking he was fooled."

"But how did he know?" the fourth says.

"Listen," the first says.

"— 'and you knew all the time,' she says, 'since the first time?' 'It was the scar,' I says. 'You've got it on the wrong wrist. You've got it on your right wrist,' I says. 'And two nights ago, I lifted up the edge of it a bit. What is it,' I says. 'Courtplaster?'"

The blind man sits against the wall, his face lifted a little, his hands motionless beside him. "That's how I knew, by the scar. Thinking they could fool me, when it was me put the scar on her, you might say—"

The prone figure farthest from the fire lifts its head. "Hup," he says; "ere e comes."

The others turn as one and look toward the entrance.

"Here who comes?" the blind man says. "Is it the bobbies?"

They do not answer. They watch the man who enters: a tall man with a stick. They cease to talk, save the blind man, watching the tall man come among them. "Here who comes, mates?" the blind man says. "Mates!"

The newcomer passes them, and the fire; he does not look at them. He goes on. "Watch, now," the second says. The blind man is now leaning

a little forward; his hands fumble at the ground beside him as though he were preparing to rise.

“Watch who?” he says. “What do you see?”

They do not answer. They are watching the newcomer covertly, attentively, as he disrobes and then, a white shadow, a ghostly gleam in the darkness, goes down to the water and washes himself, slapping his body hard with icy and filthy handfuls of river water.

He returns to the fire; they turn their faces quickly aside, save the blind man (he still sits forward, his arms propped beside him as though on the point of rising, his wan face turned toward the sound, the movement) and one other. “Yer stones is ot, sir,” this one says. “I’ve ad them right in the blaze.”

“Thanks,” the newcomer says. He still appears to be utterly oblivious of them, so they watch him again, quietly, as he spreads his sorry garments on one stone and takes a second stone from the fire and irons them. While he is dressing, the man who spoke to him goes down to the water and returns with the cake of soap which he had used. Still watching, they see the newcomer rub his fingers on the cake of soap and twist his moustaches into points.

“A bit more on the left one, sir,” the man holding the soap says. The newcomer soaps his fingers and twists his left moustache again, the other man watching him, his head bent and tilted a little back, in shape and attitude and dress like a caricatured scarecrow.

“Right, now?” the newcomer says.

“Right, sir,” the scarecrow says. He retreats into the darkness and returns without the cake of soap, and carrying instead the hat and the stick. The newcomer takes them. From his pocket he takes a coin and puts it into the scarecrow’s hand. The scarecrow touches his cap; the newcomer is gone.

They watch him, the tall shape, the erect back, the stick, until he disappears.

“What do you see, mates?” the blind man says. “Tell a man what you see.”

VII

Among the demobilized officers who emigrated from England after the Armistice was a subaltern named Walkley. He went out to Canada, where he raised wheat and prospered, both in pocket and in health. So much so that, had he been walking out of the Gare de Lyon in Paris instead of in Piccadilly Circus on this first evening (it is Christmas eve) of his first visit home, they would have said, “Here is not only a rich milord; it is a well one.”

He had been in London just long enough to outfit himself with the beginning of a wardrobe, and in his new clothes (bought of a tailor which in the old days he could not have afforded) he was enjoying himself too much to even go anywhere. So he just walked the streets, among the cheerful throngs, until suddenly he stopped dead still, staring at a face. The man had almost white hair, moustaches waxed to needle points.

He wore a frayed scarf in which could be barely distinguished the colors and pattern of a regiment. His threadbare clothes were freshly ironed and he carried a stick. He was standing at the curb, and he appeared to be saying something to the people who passed, and Walkley moved suddenly forward, his hand extended. But the other man only stared at him with eyes that were perfectly dead.

“Gray,” Walkley said, “don’t you remember me?” The other stared at him with that dead intensity. “We were in hospital together. I went out to Canada. Don’t you remember?”

“Yes,” the other said. “I remember you. You are Walkley.” Then he quit looking at Walkley.

He moved a little aside, turning to the crowd again, his hand extended; it was only then that Walkley saw that the hand contained three or four

boxes of the matches which may be bought from any tobacconist for a penny a box. "Matches? Matches, sir?" he said. "Matches? Matches?" Walkley moved also, getting again in front of the other. "Gray—" he said.

The other looked at Walkley again, this time with a kind of restrained yet raging impatience. "Let me alone, you son of a bitch!" he said, turning immediately toward the crowd again, his hand extended. "Matches! Matches, sir!" he chanted.

Walkley moved on. He paused again, half turning, looking back at the gaunt face above the waxed moustaches. Again the other looked him full in the face, but the glance passed on, as though without recognition. Walkley went on. He walked swiftly. "My God," he said. "I think I am going to vomit."

The End

Ad Astra, William Faulkner

Ad Astra

I DONT KNOW what we were. With the exception of Comyn, we had started out Americans, but after three years, in our British tunics and British wings and here and there a ribbon, I dont suppose we had even bothered in three years to wonder what we were, to think or to remember.

And on that day, that evening, we were even less than that, or more than that: either beneath or beyond the knowledge that we had not even wondered in three years. The subadar — after a while he was there, in his turban and his trick major's pips — said that we were like men trying to move in water.

“But soon it will clear away,” he said. “The effluvium of hatred and of words. We are like men trying to move in water, with held breath watching our terrific and infinitesimal limbs, watching one another’s terrific stasis without touch, without contact, robbed of all save the impotence and the need.”

We were in the car then, going to Amiens, Sartoris driving and Comyn sitting half a head above him in the front seat like a tackling dummy, the subadar, Bland and I in back, each with a bottle or two in his pockets. Except the subadar, that is. He was squat, small and thick, yet his sobriety was colossal.

In that maelstrom of alcohol where the rest of us had fled our inescapable selves he was like a rock, talking quietly in a grave bass four sizes too big for him: “In my country I was prince. But all men are brothers.”

But after twelve years I think of us as bugs in the surface of the water, isolant and aimless and unflagging. Not on the surface; in it, within that line of demarcation not air and not water, sometimes submerged, sometimes not.

You have watched an unbreaking groundswell in a cove, the water shallow, the cove quiet, a little sinister with satiate familiarity, while beyond the darkling horizon the dying storm has raged on. That was the water, we the flotsam. Even after twelve years it is no clearer than that.

It had no beginning and no ending. Out of nothing we howled, unwitting the storm which we had escaped and the foreign strand which we could not escape; that in the interval between two surges of the swell we died who had been too young to have ever lived.

We stopped in the middle of the road to drink again. The land was dark and empty. And quiet: that was what you noticed, remarked. You could hear the earth breathe, like coming out of ether, like it did not yet

know, believe, that it was awake. "But now it is peace," the subadar said. "All men are brothers."

"You spoke before the Union once," Bland said. He was blond and tall. When he passed through a room where women were he left a sighing wake like a ferry boat entering the slip. He was a Southerner, too, like Sartoris; but unlike Sartoris, in the five months he had been out, no one had ever found a bullet hole in his machine.

But he had transferred out of an Oxford battalion — he was a Rhodes scholar — with a barnacle and a wound-stripe. When he was tight he would talk about his wife, though we all knew that he was not married.

He took the bottle from Sartoris and drank. "I've got the sweetest little wife," he said. "Let me tell you about her."

"Dont tell us," Sartoris said. "Give her to Comyn. He wants a girl."

"All right," Bland said. "You can have her, Comyn."

"Is she blonde?" Comyn said.

"I dont know," Bland said. He turned back to the subadar. "You spoke before the Union once. I remember you."

"Ah," the subadar said. "Oxford. Yes."

"He can attend their schools among the gentleborn, the bleach-skinned," Bland said. "But he cannot hold their commission, because gentility is a matter of color and not lineage or behavior."

"Fighting is more important than truth," the subadar said. "So we must restrict the prestige and privileges of it to the few so that it will not lose popularity with the many who have to die."

"Why more important?" I said. "I thought this one was being fought to end war forevermore."

The subadar made a brief gesture, dark, deprecatory, tranquil. "I was a white man also for that moment. It is more important for the Caucasian because he is only what he can do; it is the sum of him."

“So you see further than we see?”

“A man sees further looking out of the dark upon the light than a man does in the light and looking out upon the light. That is the principle of the spyglass. The lens is only to tease him with that which the sense that suffers and desires can never affirm.”

“What do you see, then?” Bland said.

“I see girls,” Comyn said. “I see acres and acres of the yellow hair of them like wheat and me among the wheat. Have ye ever watched a hidden dog quartering a wheat field, any of yez?”

“Not hunting bitches,” Bland said.

Comyn turned in the seat, thick and huge. He was big as all outdoors. To watch two mechanics shoehorning him into the cockpit of a Dolphin like two chambermaids putting an emergency bolster into a case too small for it, was a sight to see. “I will beat the head off ye for a shilling,” he said.

“So you believe in the rightness of man?” I said.

“I will beat the heads off yez all for a shilling,” Comyn said.

“I believe in the pitiableness of man,” the subadar said. “That is better.”

“I will give yez a shilling, then,” Comyn said.

“All right,” Sartoris said. “Did you ever try a little whisky for the night air, any of you all?”

Comyn took the bottle and drank. “Acres and acres of them,” he said, “with their little round white woman parts gleaming among the moiling wheat.”

So we drank again, on the lonely road between two beet fields, in the dark quiet, and the turn of the inebriation began to make. It came back from wherever it had gone, rolling down upon us and upon the grave sober rock of the subadar until his voice sounded remote and tranquil and dreamlike, saying that we were brothers.

Monaghan was there then, standing beside our car in the full glare of the headlights of his car, in an R.F.C. cap and an American tunic with both shoulder straps flapping loose, drinking from Comyn's bottle. Beside him stood a second man, also in a tunic shorter and trimmer than ours, with a bandage about his head.

"I'll fight you," Comyn told Monaghan. "I'll give you the shilling."
"All right," Monaghan said. He drank again.

"We are all brothers," the subadar said. "Sometimes we pause at the wrong inn. We think it is night and we stop, when it is not night. That is all."

"I'll give you a sovereign," Comyn told Monaghan.

"All right," Monaghan said. He extended the bottle to the other man, the one with the bandaged head.

"I thank you," the man said. "I haf plenty yet."

"I'll fight him," Comyn said.

"It is because we can do only within the heart," the subadar said.

"While we see beyond the heart."

"I'll be damned if you will," Monaghan said. "He's mine." He turned to the man with the bandaged head. "Aren't you mine? Here; drink."

"I haf plenty, I thank you, gentlemen," the other said. But I dont think any of us paid much attention to him until we were inside the Cloche-Clos. It was crowded, full of noise and smoke.

When we entered all the noise ceased, like a string cut in two, the end raveling back into a sort of shocked consternation of pivoting faces, and the waiter — an old man in a dirty apron — falling back before us, slack-jawed, with an expression of outraged unbelief, like an atheist confronted with either Christ or the devil.

We crossed the room, the waiter retreating before us, paced by the turning outraged faces, to a table adjacent to one where three French

officers sat watching us with that same expression of astonishment and then outrage and then anger.

As one they rose; the whole room, the silence, became staccato with voices, like machine guns. That was when I turned and looked at Monaghan's companion for the first time, in his green tunic and his black snug breeks and his black boots and his bandage.

He had cut himself recently shaving, and with his bandaged head and his face polite and dazed and bloodless and sick, he looked like Monaghan had been using him pretty hard. Roundfaced, not old, with his immaculately turned bandage which served only to emphasize the generations of difference between him and the turbaned subadar, flanked by Monaghan with his wild face and wild tunic and surrounded by the French people's shocked and outraged faces, he appeared to contemplate with a polite and alert concern his own struggle against the inebriation which Monaghan was forcing upon him.

There was something Anthony-like about him: rigid, soldierly, with every button in place, with his unblemished bandage and his fresh razor cuts, he appeared to muse furiously upon a clear flame of a certain conviction of individual behavior above a violent and inexplicable chaos.

Then I remarked Monaghan's second companion: an American military policeman. He was not drinking. He sat beside the German, rolling cigarettes from a cloth sack.

On the German's other side Monaghan was filling his glass. "I brought him down this morning," he said. "I'm going to take him home with me."

"Why?" Bland said. "What do you want with him?"

"Because he belongs to me," Monaghan said. He set the full glass before the German. "Here; drink."

"I once thought about taking one home to my wife," Bland said. "So I could prove to her that I have only been to a war. But I never could find a good one. A whole one, I mean."

"Come on," Monaghan said. "Drink."

"I haf plenty," the German said. "All day I haf plenty."

"Do you want to go to America with him?" Bland said:

"Yes. I would ligk it. Thanks."

"Sure you'll like it," Monaghan said. "I'll make a man of you. Drink."

The German raised the glass, but he merely held it in his hand. His face was strained, deprecatory, yet with a kind of sereneness, like that of a man who has conquered himself. I imagine some of the old martyrs must have looked at the lions with that expression. He was sick, too.

Not from the liquor: from his head. "I haf in Beyreuth a wife and a little wohn. Mine son. I haf not him yet seen."

"Ah," the subadar said. "Beyreuth. I was there one spring."

"Ah," the German said. He looked quickly at the subadar. "So? The music?"

"Yes," the subadar said. "In your music a few of you have felt, tasted, lived, the true brotherhood. The rest of us can only look beyond the heart. But we can follow them for a little while in the music."

"And then we must return," the German said. "That iss not good. Why must we yet return always?"

"It is not the time for that yet," the subadar said. "But soon . . . It is not as far as it once was. Not now."

"Yes," the German said. "Defeat will be good for us. Defeat iss good for art; victory, it iss not good."

"So you admit you were whipped," Comyn said. He was sweating again, and Sartoris' nostrils were quite white. I thought of what the subadar had said about men in water. Only our water was drunkenness: that isolation of alcoholism which drives men to shout and laugh and fight,

not with one another but with their unbearable selves which, drunk, they are even more fain and still less fell to escape.

Loud and overloud, unwitting the black thunderhead of outraged France (steadily the other tables were being emptied; the other customers were now clotted about the high desk where the patronne, an old woman in steel spectacles, sat, a wad of knitting on the ledge before her) we shouted at one another, speaking in foreign tongues out of our inescapable isolations, reiterant, unlistened to by one another; while submerged by us and more foreign still, the German and the subadar talked quietly of music, art, the victory born of defeat.

And outside in the chill November darkness was the suspension, the not-quite-believing, not-quite-awakened nightmare, the breathing spell of the old verbiaged lusts and the buntinged and panoplied greeds.

“By God, I’m shanty Irish,” Monaghan said. “That’s what I am.”

“What about it?” Sartoris said, his nostrils like chalk against his high-colored face. His twin brother had been killed in July. He was in a Camel squadron below us, and Sartoris was down there when it happened. For a week after that, as soon as he came in from patrol he would fill his tanks and drums and go out again, alone.

One day somebody saw him, roosting about five thousand feet above an old Ak.W. I suppose the other guy who was with his brother that morning had seen the markings on the Hun patrol leader’s crate; anyway, that’s what Sartoris was doing, using the Ak.W. for bait. Where he got it and who he got to fly it, we didn’t know.

But he got three Huns that week, catching them dead when they dived on the Ak.W., and on the eighth day he didn’t go out again. “He must have got him,” Hume said. But we didn’t know. He never told us. But after that, he was all right again. He never did talk much; just did his patrols and maybe once a week he’d sit and drink his nostrils white in a quiet sort of way.

Bland was filling his glass, a drop at a time almost, with a catlike indolence. I could see why men didn't like him and why women did. Comyn, his arms crossed on the table, his cuff in a pool of spilt liquor, was staring at the German. His eyes were bloodshot, a little protuberant. Beneath his downcrushed monkey cap the American M.P. smoked his meager cigarettes, his face quite blank.

The steel chain of his whistle looped into his breast pocket, his pistol was hunched forward onto his lap. Beyond, the French people, the soldiers, the waiter, the patronne, clotted at the desk. I could hear their voices like from a distance, like crickets in September grass, the shadows of their hands jerking up the wall and flicking away.

"I'm not a soldier," Monaghan said. "I'm not a gentleman. I'm not anything." At the base of each flapping shoulder strap there was a small rip; there were two longer ones parallel above his left pocket where his wings and ribbon had been. "I dont know what I am. I have been in this damn war for three years and all I know is, I'm not dead. I—"

"How do you know you're not dead?" Bland said.

Monaghan looked at Bland, his mouth open upon his uncompleted word.

"I'll kill you for a shilling," Comyn said. "I dont like your bloody face, Lootenant. Bloody lootenant."

"I'm shanty Irish," Monaghan said. "That's what I am. My father was shanty Irish, by God. And I dont know what my grandfather was. I dont know if I had one. My father dont remember one. Likely it could have been one of several. So he didn't even have to be a gentleman. He never had to be.

That's why he could make a million dollars digging sewers in the ground. So he could look up at the tall glittering windows and say — I've heard him, and him smoking the pipe would gas the puking guts out of you damn, niggling, puny—"

“Are you bragging about your father’s money or about his sewers?”
Bland said.

“ — would look up at them and he’d say to me, he’d say, ‘When you’re with your fine friends, the fathers and mothers and sisters of them you met at Yale, ye might just remind them that every man is the slave of his own refuse and so your old dad they would be sending around to the forty-story back doors of their kitchens is the king of them all—’ What did you say?” He looked at Bland.

“Look here, buddy,” the M.P. said. “This is about enough of this. I’ve got to report this prisoner.”

“Wait,” Monaghan said. He did not cease to look at Bland. “What did you say?”

“Are you bragging about your father’s money or about his sewers?”
Bland said.

“No,” Monaghan said. “Why should I? Any more than I would brag about the thirteen Huns I got, or the two ribbons, one of which his damned king—” he jerked his head at Comyn— “gave me.”

“Dont call him my damned king,” Comyn said, his cuff soaking slowly in the spilt liquor.

“Look,” Monaghan said. He jerked his hand at the rips on his flapping shoulder straps, at the two parallel rips on his breast. “That’s what I think of it. Of all your goddamn twaddle about glory and gentlemen. I was young; I thought you had to be. Then I was in it and there wasn’t time to stop even when I found it didn’t count. But now it’s over; finished now. Now I can be what I am.

Shanty Irish; son of an immigrant that knew naught but shovel and pick until youth and the time for pleasuring was wore out of him before his time. Out of a peat bog he came, and his son went to their gentlemen’s school and returned across the water to swank it with any of them that owned the peat bogs and the bitter sweat of them that mired it, and the king said him well.”

“I will give yez the shilling and I will beat the head off yez,” Comyn said.

“But why do you want to take him back with you?” Bland said.

Monaghan just looked at Bland. There was something of the crucified about Monaghan, too: furious, inarticulate not with stupidity but at it, like into him more than any of us had distilled the ceased drums of the old lust and greed waking at last aghast at their own impotence and accrued despair.

Bland sat on his spine, legs extended, his hands in his slacks, his handsome face calmly insufferable.

“What stringed pick would he bow? maybe a shovel strung with the gut of an alley-cat? he will create perhaps in music the flushed toilets of Manhattan to play for your father after supper of an evening?”

Monaghan just looked at Bland with that wild, rapt expression. Bland turned his lazy face a little to the German.

“Look here,” the M.P. said.

“You have a wife, Herr Leutnant?” Bland said.

The German looked up. He glanced swiftly from face to face. “Yes, thank you,” he said. He still had not touched his full glass save to hold it in his hand. But he was no nearer sober than before, the liquor become the hurting of his head, his head the pulse and beat of alcohol in him.

“My people are of Prussia little barons. There are four brothers: the second for the Army, the third who did nothing in Berlin, the little one a cadet of dragoons; I, the eldest, in the University. There I learned.

There was a time then.

It was as though we, young from the quiet land, were brought together, chosen and worthy to witness a period quick like a woman with a high destiny of the earth and of man. It is as though the old trash, the old litter of man’s blundering, is to be swept away for a new race that will in the heroic simplicity of olden time walk the new earth. You knew

that time, not? When the eye sparkled, the blut ran quick?" He looked about at our faces. "No?

Well, in America perhaps not. America iss new; in a new house it is not the litter so much as in old." He looked at his glass for a moment, his face tranquil. "I return home; I say to my father, in the University I haf learned it iss not good; baron I will not be. He cannot believe. He talks of Germany, the fatherland; I say to him, It iss there; so.

You say fatherland; I, brotherland, I say, the word father iss that barbarism which will be first swept away; it iss the symbol of that hierarchy which hass stained the history of man with injustice of arbitrary instead of moral; force instead of love.

"From Berlin they send for that one; from the Army that one comes. I still say baron I will not be, for it iss not good. We are in the little hall where my ancestors on the walls hang; I stand before them like court-martial; I say that Franz must be baron, for I will not be.

My father says you can; you will; it iss for Germany. Then I say, For Germany then will my wife be baroness? And like a court-martial I tell them I haf married the daughter of a musician who wass peasant.

"So it iss that. That one of Berlin iss to be baron. He and Franz are twin, but Franz iss captain already, and the most humble of the Army may eat meat with our kaiser; he does not need to be baron. So I am in Beyreuth with my wife and my music.

It iss as though I am dead. I do not get letter until to say my father iss dead and I haf killed him, and that one iss now home from Berlin to be baron. But he does not stay at home. In 1912 he iss in Berlin newspaper dead of a lady's husband and so Franz iss baron after all.

"Then it iss war. But I am in Beyreuth with my wife and my music, because we think that it will not be long, since it was not long before. The fatherland in its pride needed us of the schools, but when it needed us it did not know it. And when it did realize that it needed us it

wass too late and any peasant who would be hard to die would do. And so—”

“Why did you go, then?” Bland said. “Did the women make you? throw eggs at you, maybe?”

The German looked at Bland. “I am German; that iss beyond the I, the I am. Not for baron and kaiser.” Then he quit looking at Bland without moving his eyes. “There wass a Germany before there wass barons,” he said. “And after, there will be.”

“Even after this?”

“More so. Then it was pride, a word in the mouth. Now it is a — how you call it? . . .”

“A nation vanquishes its banners,” the subadar said. “A man conquers himself.”

“Or a woman a child bears,” the German said.

“Out of the lust, the travail,” the subadar said; “out of the travail, the affirmation, the godhead; truth.”

The M.P. was rolling another cigarette. He watched the subadar, upon his face an expression savage, restrained, and cold. He licked the cigarette and looked at me.

“When I came to this goddamn country,” he said, “I thought niggers were niggers. But now I’ll be damned if I know what they are. What’s he? snake-charmer?”

“Yes,” I said. “Snake-charmer.”

“Then he better get his snake out and beat it. I’ve got to report this prisoner. Look at those frogs yonder.” As I turned and looked three of the Frenchmen were leaving the room, insult and outrage in the shapes of their backs. The German was talking again.

“I hear by the newspapers how Franz is colonel and then general, and how the cadet, who wass still the round-headed boy part of a gun always when I last saw him, iss now ace with iron cross by the kaiser’s

own hand. Then it iss 1916. I see by the paper how the cadet iss killed by your Bishop—” he bowed slightly to Comyn— “that good man.

So now I am cadet myself. It iss as though I know. It iss as though I see what iss to be. So I transfer to be aviator, and yet though I know now that Franz iss general of staff and though to myself each night I say, ‘You have again returned,’ I know that it iss no good.

“That, until our kaiser fled. Then I learn that Franz iss now in Berlin; I believe that there iss a truth, that we haf not forfeited all in pride, because we know it will not be much longer now, and Franz in Berlin safe, the fighting away from.

“Then it iss this morning. Then comes the letter in my mother’s hand that I haf not seen in seven years, addressed to me as baron. Franz iss shot from his horse by German soldier in Berlin street.

It iss as though all had been forgotten, because women can forget all that quick, since to them nothing iss real — truth, justice, all — nothing that cannot be held in the hands or cannot die. So I burn all my papers, the picture of my wife and my son that I haf not yet seen, destroy my identity disk and remove all insignia from my tunic—” he gestured toward his collar.

“You mean,” Bland said, “that you had no intention of coming back? Why didn’t you take a pistol to yourself and save your government an aeroplane?”

“Suicide iss just for the body,” the German said. “The body settles nothing. It iss of no importance. It iss just to be kept clean when possible.”

“It is merely a room in the inn,” the subadar said. “It is just where we hide for a little while.”

“The lavatory,” Bland said; “the toilet.”

The M.P. rose. He tapped the German on the shoulder. Comyn was staring at the German.

“So you admit you were whipped,” he said.

“Yes,” the German said. “It was our time first, because we were the sickest. It will be your England’s next. Then she too will be well.”

“Don’t say my England,” Comyn said. “I am of the Irish nation.” He turned to Monaghan. “You said, my damned king. Don’t say my damned king. Ireland has had no king since the Ur Neill, God bless the red-haired stern of him.”

Rigid, controlled, the German made a faint gesture. “You see?” he said to no one at all.

“The victorious lose that which the vanquished gain,” the subadar said. “And what will you do now?” Bland said.

The German did not answer. He sat bolt upright with his sick face and his immaculate bandage.

“What will you do?” the subadar said to Bland. “What will any of us do? All this generation which fought in the war are dead tonight. But we do not yet know it.”

We looked at the subadar: Comyn with his bloodshot pig’s eyes, Sartoris with his white nostrils, Bland slumped in his chair, indolent, insufferable, with his air of a spoiled woman. Above the German the M.P. stood.

“It seems to worry you a hell of a lot,” Bland said.

“You do not believe?” the subadar said. “Wait. You will see.”

“Wait?” Bland said. “I don’t think I’ve done anything in the last three years to have acquired that habit. In the last twenty-six years. Before that I don’t remember. I may have.”

“Then you will see sooner than waiting,” the subadar said. “You will see.” He looked about at us, gravely serene. “Those who have been four years rotting out yonder—” he waved his short thick arm— “are not more dead than we.”

Again the M.P. touched the German’s shoulder. “Hell,” he said. “Come along, buddy.” Then he turned his head and we all looked up at the two

Frenchmen, an officer and a sergeant, standing beside the table. For a while we just remained so.

It was like all the little bugs had suddenly found that their orbits had coincided and they wouldn't even have to be aimless any more or even to keep on moving. Beneath the alcohol I could feel that hard, hot ball beginning in my stomach, like in combat, like when you know something is about to happen; that instant when you think Now. Now I can dump everything overboard and just be. Now. Now. It is quite pleasant.

"Why is that here, monsieur?" the officer said. Monaghan looked up at him, thrust backward and sideways in his chair, poised on the balls of his thighs as though they were feet, his arm lying upon the table. "Why do you make disagreeable for France, monsieur, eh?" the officer said.

Someone grasped Monaghan as he rose; it was the M.P. behind him, holding him half risen. "Wa-a-a-i-daminate," the M.P. said; "wa-a-a-i-daminate." The cigarette bobbed on his lower lip as he talked, his hands on Monaghan's shoulders, the brassard on his arm lifted into bold relief.

"What's it to you, Frog?" he said. Behind the officer and the sergeant the other French people stood, and the old woman. She was trying to push through the circle. "This is my prisoner," the M.P. said. "I'll take him anywhere I please and keep him there as long as I like. What do you think about that?"

"By which authority, monsieur?" the officer said. He was tall, with a gaunt, tragic face. I saw then that one of his eyes was glass. It was motionless, rigid in a face that looked even deader than the spurious eye.

The M.P. glanced toward his brassard, then instead he looked at the officer again and tapped the pistol swinging low now against his flank. "I'll take him all over your goddamn lousy country. I'll take him into your goddamn senate and kick your president up for a chair for him and

you can suck your chin until I come back to wipe the latrine off your feet again.”

“Ah,” the officer said, “a devil-dog, I see.”

He said “dehvildahg” between his teeth, with no motion of his dead face, in itself insult. Behind him the patronne began to shriek in French: “Boche! Boche! Broken! Broken! Every cup, every saucer, glass, plate — all, all! I will show you! I have kept them for this day. Eight months since the obus I have kept them in a box against this day: plates, cups, saucers, glasses, all that I have had since thirty years, all gone, broken at one time! And it costing me fifty centimes the glass for such that I shame myself to have my patrons—”

There is an unbearable point, a climax, in weariness. Even alcohol cannot approach it. Mobs are motivated by it, by a sheer attenuation of sameness become unbearable. As Monaghan rose, the M.P. flung him back. Then it was as though we all flung everything overboard at once, facing unbashed and without shame the specter which for four years we had been decking out in high words, leaping forward with concerted and orderly promptitude each time the bunting slipped.

I saw the M.P. spring at the officer, then Comyn rose and met him. I saw the M.P. hit Comyn three times on the point of the jaw with his fist before Comyn picked him up bodily and threw him clean over the crowd, where he vanished, horizontal in midair, tugging at his pistol. I saw three poilus on Monaghan’s back and the officer trying to hit him with a bottle, and Sartoris leaping upon the officer from behind. Comyn was gone; through the gap which he had made the patronne emerged, shrieking.

Two men caught at her and she strove forward, trying to spit on the German. “Boche! Boche!” she shrieked, spitting and slobbering, her gray hair broken loose about her face; she turned and spat full at me. “Thou, too!” she shrieked, “it was not England that was devastated! Thou, too, come to pick the bones of France.

Jackal! Vulture! Animal! Broken, broken! All! All! All!” And beneath it all, unmoved, unmoving, alert, watchful and contained, the German and the subadar sat, the German with his high, sick face, the subadar tranquil as a squat idol, the both of them turbaned like prophets in the Old Testament.

It didn't take long. There was no time in it. Or rather, we were outside of time; within, not on, that surface, that demarcation between the old where we knew we had not died and the new where the subadar said that we were dead.

Beyond the brandished bottles, the blue sleeves and the grimed hands, the faces like masks grimaced into rigid and soundless shouts to frighten children, I saw Comyn again. He came plowing up like a laden ship in a chop sea; beneath his arm was the ancient waiter, to his lips he held the M.P.'s whistle. Then Sartoris swung a chair at the single light.

It was cold in the street, a cold that penetrated the clothing, the alcohol-distended pores, and murmured to the skeleton itself. The plaza was empty, the lights infrequent and remote. So quiet it was that I could hear the faint water in the fountain.

From some distance away came sound, remote too under the thick low sky — shouting, far-heard, on a thin female note like all shouting, even a mob of men, broken now and then by the sound of a band. In the shadow of the wall Monaghan and Comyn held the German on his feet. He was unconscious; the three of them invisible save for the faint blur of the bandage, inaudible save for the steady monotone of Monaghan's cursing.

“There should never have been an alliance between Frenchmen and Englishmen,” the subadar said. He spoke without effort; invisible, his effortless voice had an organ quality, out of all proportion to his size. “Different nations should never join forces to fight for the same object.

Let each fight for something different; ends that do not conflict, each in his own way.” Sartoris passed us, returning from the fountain, carrying his bulging cap carefully before him, bottom-up.

We could hear the water dripping from it between his footsteps. He became one of the blob of thicker shadow where the bandage gleamed and where Monaghan cursed steadily and quietly. “And each after his own tradition,” the subadar said. “My people.

The English gave them rifles. They looked at them and came to me: ‘This spear is too short and too heavy: how can a man slay a swift enemy with a spear of this size and weight?’

They gave them tunics with buttons to be kept buttoned; I have passed a whole trench of them squatting, motionless, buried to the ears in blankets, straw, empty sand bags, their faces gray with cold; I have lifted the blankets away from patient torsos clad only in a shirt.

“The English officers would say to them, ‘Go there and do thus’; they would not stir. Then one day at full noon the whole battalion, catching movement beyond a crater, sprang from the trench, carrying me and an officer with it.

We carried the trench without firing a shot; what was left of us — the officer, I, and seventeen others — lived three days in a traverse of the enemy’s front line; it required a whole brigade to extricate us.

‘Why didn’t you shoot?’ the officer said. ‘You let them pick you off like driven pheasant.’ They did not look at him. Like children they stood, murmurous, alert, without shame. I said to the headman, ‘Were the rifles loaded, O Das?’ Like children they stood, diffident, without shame. ‘O Son of many kings,’ Das said. ‘Speak the truth of thy knowing to the sahib,’ I said. ‘They were not loaded, sahib,’ Das said.”

Again the band came, remote, thudding in the thick air. They were giving the German drink from a bottle. Monaghan said: “Now. Feel better now?”

"It iss mine head," the German said. They spoke quietly, like they were discussing wall-paper.

Monaghan cursed again. "I'm going back. By God, I—"

"No, no," the German said. "I will not permit. You haf already obligated—"

We stood in the shadow beneath the wall and drank. We had one bottle left. Comyn crashed it, empty, against the wall.

"Now what?" Bland said.

"Girls," Comyn said. "Would ye watch Comyn of the Irish nation among the yellow hair of them like a dog among the wheat?"

We stood there, hearing the far band, the far shouting. "You sure you feel all right?" Monaghan said.

"Thanks," the German said. "I feel goot."

"Come on, then," Comyn said.

"You going to take him with you?" Bland said.

"Yes," Monaghan said. "What of it?"

"Why not take him on to the A.P.M.? He's sick."

"Do you want me to bash your bloody face in?" Monaghan said.

"All right," Bland said.

"Come on," Comyn said. "What fool would rather fight than fush? All men are brothers, and all their wives are sisters. So come along, yez midnight fusileers."

"Look here," Bland said to the German, "do you want to go with them?" With his bandaged head, he and the subadar alone were visible, like two injured men among five spirits.

"Hold him up a minute," Monaghan told Comyn. Monaghan approached Bland. He cursed Bland. "I like fighting," he said, in that same monotone. "I even like being whipped."

“Wait,” the German said. “Again I will not permit.” Monaghan halted, he and Bland not a foot apart. “I haf wife and son in Beyreuth,” the German said. He was speaking to me. He gave me the address, twice, carefully.

“I’ll write to her,” I said. “What shall I tell her?”

“Tell her it iss nothing. You will know.”

“Yes. I’ll tell her you are all right.”

“Tell her this life iss nothing.”

Comyn and Monaghan took his arms again, one on either side. They turned and went on, almost carrying him. Comyn looked back once. “Peace be with you,” he said.

“And with you, peace,” the subadar said. They went on. We watched them come into silhouette in the mouth of an alley where a light was. There was an arch there, and the faint cold pale light on the arch and on the walls so that it was like a gate and they entering the gate, holding the German up between them.

“What will they do with him?” Bland said. “Prop him in the corner and turn the light off? Or do French brothels have he-beds too?”

“Who the hell’s business is that?” I said.

The sound of the band came, thudding; it was cold. Each time my flesh jerked with alcohol and cold I believed that I could hear it rasp on the bones.

“Since seven years now I have been in this climate,” the subadar said. “But still I do not like the cold.” His voice was deep, quiet, like he might be six feet tall. It was like when they made him they said among themselves, “We’ll give him something to carry his message around with.” “Why? Who’ll listen to his message?” “He will. So we’ll give him something to hear it with.”

“Why dont you go back to India then?” Bland said.

“Ah,” the subadar said. “I am like him; I too will not be baron.”

“So you clear out and let foreigners who will treat the people like oxen or rabbits come in and take it.”

“By removing myself I undid in one day what it took two thousand years to do. Is not that something?”

We shook with the cold. Now the cold was the band, the shouting, murmuring with cold hands to the skeleton, not the ears.

“Well,” Bland said, “I suppose the English government is doing more to free your people than you could.”

The subadar touched Bland on the chest, lightly. “You are wise, my friend. Let England be glad that all Englishmen are not so wise.”

“So you will be an exile for the rest of your days, eh?”

The subadar jerked his short, thick arm toward the empty arch where Comyn and the German and Monaghan had disappeared. “Did you not hear what he said? This life is nothing.”

“You can think so,” Bland said. “But, by God, I’d hate to think that what I saved out of the last three years is nothing.”

“You saved a dead man,” the subadar said serenely. “You will see.”

“I saved my destiny,” Bland said. “You nor nobody else knows what that will be.”

“What is your destiny except to be dead? It is unfortunate that your generation had to be the one. It is unfortunate that for the better part of your days you will walk the earth a spirit. But that was your destiny.”

From far away came the shouting, on that sustained note, feminine and childlike all at once, and then the band again, brassy, thudding, like the voices, forlornly gay, hysteric, but most of all forlorn. The arch in the cold glow of the light yawned empty, profound, silent, like the gate to another city, another world.

Suddenly Sartoris left us. He walked steadily to the wall and leaned against it on his propped arms, vomiting.

“Hell,” Bland said. “I want a drink.” He turned to me. “Where’s your bottle?”

“It’s gone.”

“Gone where? You had two.”

“I haven’t got one now, though. Drink water.”

“Water?” he said. “Who the hell drinks water?”

Then the hot hard ball came into my stomach again, pleasant, unbearable, real; again that instant when you say Now. Now I can dump everything. “You will, you goddamn son,” I said.

Bland was not looking at me. “Twice,” he said in a quiet, detached tone.

“Twice in an hour. How’s that for high?” He turned and went toward the fountain. Sartoris came back, walking steadily erect. The band blent with the cold along the bones.

“What time is it?” I said.

Sartoris peered at his wrist. “Twelfth.”

“It’s later than midnight,” I said. “It must be.”

“I said it was the twelfth,” Sartoris said.

Bland was stooping at the fountain. There was a little light there. As we reached him he stood up, mopping at his face. The light was on his face and I thought for some time that he must have had his whole head under to be mopping that high up his face before I saw that he was crying. He stood there, mopping at his face, crying hard but quiet.

“My poor little wife,” he said. “My poor little wife.”

The end

All the Dead Pilots, William Faulkner

All the Dead Pilots

I

IN THE PICTURES, the snapshots hurriedly made, a little faded, a little dog-eared with the thirteen years, they swagger a little. Lean, hard, in their brass-and-leather martial harness, posed standing beside or leaning upon the esoteric shapes of wire and wood and canvas in which they flew without parachutes, they too have an esoteric look; a look not exactly human, like that of some dim and threatful apotheosis of the race seen for an instant in the glare of a thunderclap and then forever gone.

Because they are dead, all the old pilots, dead on the eleventh of November, 1918. When you see modern photographs of them, the recent pictures made beside the recent shapes of steel and canvas with the new cowlings and engines and slotted wings, they look a little outlandish: the lean young men who once swaggered.

They look lost, baffled. In this saxophone age of flying they look as out of place as, a little thick about the waist, in the sober business suits of thirty and thirty-five and perhaps more than that, they would look among the saxophones and miniature brass bowlers of a night club orchestra.

Because they are dead too, who had learned to respect that whose respect in turn their hardness had commanded before there were welded center sections and parachutes and ships that would not spin.

That's why they watch the saxophone girls and boys with slipstream-proof lipstick and aeronautical flasks piling up the saxophone crates in private driveways and on golf greens, with the quick sympathy and the bafflement too. "My gad," one of them — ack emma, warrant officer

pilot, captain and M.C. in turn — said to me once; “if you can treat a crate that way, why do you want to fly at all?”

But they are all dead now. They are thick men now, a little thick about the waist from sitting behind desks, and maybe not so good at it, with wives and children in suburban homes almost paid out, with gardens in which they putter in the long evenings after the 5:15 is in, and perhaps not so good at that either: the hard, lean men who swaggered hard and drank hard because they had found that being dead was not as quiet as they had heard it would be.

That’s why this story is composite: a series of brief glares in which, instantaneous and without depth or perspective, there stood into sight the portent and the threat of what the race could bear and become, in an instant between dark and dark.

II

In 1918 I was at Wing Headquarters, trying to get used to a mechanical leg, where, among other things, I had the censoring of mail from all squadrons in the Wing. The job itself wasn’t bad, since it gave me spare time to experiment with a synchronized camera on which I was working. But the opening and reading of the letters, the scrawled, brief pages of transparent and honorable lies to mothers and sweethearts, in the script and spelling of schoolboys.

But a war is such a big thing, and it takes so long. I suppose they who run them (I dont mean the staffs, but whoever or whatever it is that controls events) do get bored now and then. And it’s when you get bored that you turn petty, play horse.

So now and then I would go up to a Camel squadron behind Amiens and talk with the gunnery sergeant about the synchronization of the machine guns. This was Spoomer’s squadron. His uncle was the corps commander, the K.G., and so Spoomer, with his Guards’ Captaincy, had also got in turn a Mons Star, a D.S.O., and now a pursuit squadron of

single seaters, though the third barnacle on his tunic was still the single wing of an observer.

In 1914 he was in Sandhurst: a big, ruddy-colored chap with china eyes, and I like to think of his uncle sending for him when the news got out, the good news. Probably at the uncle's club (the uncle was a brigadier then, just recalled hurriedly from Indian service) and the two of them opposite one another across the mahogany, with the newsboys crying in the street, and the general saying, "By gad, it will be the making of the Army. Pass the wine, sir."

I daresay the general was put out, not to say outraged, when he finally realized that neither the Hun nor the Home Office intended running this war like the Army wanted it run. Anyway, Spoomer had already gone out to Mons and come back with his Star (though Ffollansbye said that the general sent Spoomer out to get the Star, since it was going to be one decoration you had to be on hand to get) before the uncle got him transferred to his staff, where Spoomer could get his D.S.O.

Then perhaps the uncle sent him out again to tap the stream where it came to surface. Or maybe Spoomer went on his own this time. I like to think so. I like to think that he did it through pro patria, even though I know that no man deserves praise for courage or opprobrium for cowardice, since there are situations in which any man will show either of them. But he went out, and came back a year later with his observer's wing and a dog almost as large as a calf.

That was in 1917, when he and Sartoris first came together, collided. Sartoris was an American, from a plantation at Mississippi, where they grew grain and Negroes, or the Negroes grew the grain — something. Sartoris had a working vocabulary of perhaps two hundred words, and I daresay to tell where and how and why he lived was beyond him, save that he lived in the plantation with his great-aunt and his grandfather.

He came through Canada in 1916, and he was at Pool. Ffollansbye told me about it. It seems that Sartoris had a girl in London, one of those three-day wives and three-year widows. That's the bad thing about

war. They — the Sartorises and such — didn't die until 1918, some of them. But the girls, the women, they died on the fourth of August, 1914.

So Sartoris had a girl. Ffollansbye said they called her Kitchener, "because she had such a mob of soldiers." He said they didn't know if Sartoris knew this or not, but that anyway for a while Kitchener — Kit — appeared to have ditched them all for Sartoris. They would be seen anywhere and any time together, then Ffollansbye told me how he found Sartoris alone and quite drunk one evening in a restaurant. Ffollansbye told how he had already heard that Kit and Spoomer had gone off somewhere together about two days ago.

He said that Sartoris was sitting there, drinking himself blind, waiting for Spoomer to come in. He said he finally got Sartoris into a cab and sent him to the aerodrome. It was about dawn then, and Sartoris got a captain's tunic from someone's kit, and a woman's garter from someone else's kit, perhaps his own, and pinned the garter on the tunic like a barnacle ribbon. Then he went and waked a corporal who was an ex-professional boxer and with whom Sartoris would put on the gloves now and then, and made the corporal put on the tunic over his underclothes.

"Namesh Spoomer," Sartoris told the corporal. "Cap'm Spoomer"; swaying and prodding at the garter with his finger. "Dishtinguish Sheries Thighs," Sartoris said. Then he and the corporal in the borrowed tunic, with his woolen underwear showing beneath, stood there in the dawn, swinging at one another with their naked fists.

III

You'd think that when a war had got you into it, it would let you be. That it wouldn't play horse with you. But maybe it wasn't that. Maybe it was because the three of them, Spoomer and Sartoris and the dog, were so humorless about it. Maybe a humorless person is an unflagging challenge to them above the thunder and the alarms.

Anyway, one afternoon — it was in the spring, just before Cambrai fell — I went up to the Camel aerodrome to see the gunnery sergeant, and I saw Sartoris for the first time. They had given the squadron to Spoomer and the dog the year before, and the first thing they did was to send Sartoris out to it.

The afternoon patrol was out, and the rest of the people were gone too, to Amiens I suppose, and the aerodrome was deserted. The sergeant and I were sitting on two empty petrol tins in the hangar door when I saw a man thrust his head out the door of the officers' mess and look both ways along the line, his air a little furtive and very alert. It was Sartoris, and he was looking for the dog.

“The dog?” I said. Then the sergeant told me, this too composite, out of his own observation and the observation of the entire enlisted personnel exchanged and compared over the mess tables or over pipes at night: that terrible and omniscient inquisition of those in an inferior station.

When Spoomer left the aerodrome, he would lock the dog up somewhere. He would have to lock it up in a different place each time, because Sartoris would hunt until he found it, and let it out.

It appeared to be a dog of intelligence, because if Spoomer had only gone down to Wing or somewhere on business, the dog would stay at home, spending the interval grubbing in the refuse bin behind the men's mess, to which it was addicted in preference to that of the officers. But if Spoomer had gone to Amiens, the dog would depart up the Amiens road immediately on being freed, to return later with Spoomer in the squadron car.

“Why does Mr. Sartoris let it out?” I said. “Do you mean that Captain Spoomer objects to the dog eating kitchen refuse?”

But the sergeant was not listening. His head was craned around the door, and we watched Sartoris. He had emerged from the mess and he now approached the hangar at the end of the line, his air still alert, still

purposeful. He entered the hangar. "That seems a rather childish business for a grown man," I said.

The sergeant looked at me. Then he quit looking at me. "He wants to know if Captain Spoomer went to Amiens or not."

After a while I said, "Oh. A young lady. Is that it?"

He didn't look at me. "You might call her a young lady. I suppose they have young ladies in this country."

I thought about that for a while. Sartoris emerged from the first hangar and entered the second one. "I wonder if there are any young ladies any more anywhere," I said.

"Perhaps you are right, sir. War is hard on women."

"What about this one?" I said. "Who is she?"

He told me. They ran an estaminet, a "bit of a pub" he called it — an old harridan of a woman, and the girl. A little place on a back street, where officers did not go. Perhaps that was why Sartoris and Spoomer created such a furore in that circle.

I gathered from the sergeant that the contest between the squadron commander and one of his greenest cubs was the object of general interest and the subject of the warmest conversation and even betting among the enlisted element of the whole sector of French and British troops. "Being officers and all," he said.

"They frightened the soldiers off, did they?" I said. "Is that it?" The sergeant did not look at me. "Were there many soldiers to frighten off?"

"I suppose you know these young women," the sergeant said. "This war and all."

And that's who the girl was. What the girl was. The sergeant said that the girl and the old woman were not even related. He told me how Sartoris bought her things — clothes, and jewelry; the sort of jewelry

you might buy in Amiens, probably. Or maybe in a canteen, because Sartoris was not much more than twenty.

I saw some of the letters which he wrote to his great-aunt back home, letters that a third-form lad in Harrow could have written, perhaps bettered. It seemed that Spoomer did not make the girl any presents. "Maybe because he is a captain," the sergeant said. "Or maybe because of them ribbons he dont have to."

"Maybe so," I said.

And that was the girl, the girl who, in the centime jewelry which Sartoris gave her, dispensed beer and wine to British and French privates in an Amiens back street, and because of whom Spoomer used his rank to betray Sartoris with her by keeping Sartoris at the aerodrome on special duties, locking up the dog to hide from Sartoris what he had done. And Sartoris taking what revenge he could by letting out the dog in order that it might grub in the refuse of plebeian food.

He entered the hangar in which the sergeant and I were: a tall lad with pale eyes in a face that could be either merry or surly, and quite humorless. He looked at me. "Hello," he said.

"Hello," I said. The sergeant made to get up.

"Carry on," Sartoris said. "I dont want anything." He went on to the rear of the hangar. It was cluttered with petrol drums and empty packing cases and such. He was utterly without self-consciousness, utterly without shame of his childish business.

The dog was in one of the packing cases. It emerged, huge, of a napped, tawny color; Ffollansbye had told me that, save for Spoomer's wing and his Mons Star and his D.S.O., he and the dog looked alike. It quitted the hangar without haste, giving me a brief, sidelong glance. We watched it go on and disappear around the corner of the men's mess. Then Sartoris turned and went back to the officers' mess and also disappeared.

Shortly afterward, the afternoon patrol came in. While the machines were coming up to the line, the squadron car turned onto the aerodrome and stopped at the officers' mess and Spoomer got out. "Watch him," the sergeant said. "He'll try to do it like he wasn't watching himself, noticing himself."

He came along the hangars, big, hulking, in green golf stockings. He did not see me until he was turning into the hangar. He paused; it was almost imperceptible, then he entered, giving me a brief, sidelong glance. "How do," he said in a high, fretful, level voice. The sergeant had risen. I had never seen Spoomer even glance toward the rear, toward the overturned packing case, yet he had stopped. "Sergeant," he said.

"Sir," the sergeant said.

"Sergeant," Spoomer said. "Have those timers come up yet?"

"Yes, sir. They came up two weeks ago. They're all in use now, sir."

"Quite so. Quite so." He turned; again he gave me a brief, sidelong glance, and went on down the hangar line, not fast. He disappeared.

"Watch him, now," the sergeant said. "He wont go over there until he thinks we have quit watching him."

We watched. Then he came into sight again, crossing toward the men's mess, walking briskly now. He disappeared beyond the corner. A moment later he emerged, dragging the huge, inert beast by the scruff of its neck. "You mustn't eat that stuff," he said. "That's for soldiers."

IV

I didn't know at the time what happened next. Sartoris didn't tell me until later, afterward. Perhaps up to that time he had not anything more than instinct and circumstantial evidence to tell him that he was being betrayed: evidence such as being given by Spoomer some duty not in his province at all and which would keep him on the aerodrome for the afternoon, then finding and freeing the hidden dog and watching it vanish up the Amiens road at its clumsy hand gallop.

But something happened. All I could learn at the time was, that one afternoon Sartoris found the dog and watched it depart for Amiens. Then he violated his orders, borrowed a motor bike and went to Amiens too.

Two hours later the dog returned and repaired to the kitchen door of the men's mess, and a short time after that, Sartoris himself returned on a lorry (they were already evacuating Amiens) laden with household effects and driven by a French soldier in a peasant's smock. The motor bike was on the lorry too, pretty well beyond repair. The soldier told how Sartoris had driven the bike full speed into a ditch, trying to run down the dog.

But nobody knew just what had happened, at the time. But I had imagined the scene, before he told me. I imagined him there, in that bit of a room full of French soldiers, and the old woman (she could read pips, no doubt; ribbons, anyway) barring him from the door to the living quarters.

I can imagine him, furious, baffled, inarticulate (he knew no French) standing head and shoulders above the French people whom he could not understand and that he believed were laughing at him.

"That was it," he told me. "Laughing at me behind their faces, about a woman. Me knowing that he was up there, and them knowing I knew that if I busted in and dragged him out and bashed his head off, I'd not only be cashiered, I'd be clinked for life for having infringed the articles of alliance by invading foreign property without warrant or something."

Then he returned to the aerodrome and met the dog on the road and tried to run it down. The dog came on home, and Spoomer returned, and he was just dragging it by the scruff of the neck from the refuse bin behind the men's mess, when the afternoon patrol came in.

They had gone out six and come back five, and the leader jumped down from his machine before it had stopped rolling. He had a bloody rag

about his right hand and he ran toward Spoomer stooped above the passive and stiff-legged dog. "By gad," he said, "they have got Cambrai!"

Spoomer did not look up. "Who have?"

"Jerry has, by gad!"

"Well, by gad," Spoomer said. "Come along, now. I have told you about that muck."

A man like that is invulnerable. When Sartoris and I talked for the first time, I started to tell him that. But then I learned that Sartoris was invincible too. We talked, that first time. "I tried to get him to let me teach him to fly a Camel," Sartoris said. "I will teach him for nothing. I will tear out the cockpit and rig the duals myself, for nothing."

"Why?" I said. "What for?"

"Or anything. I will let him choose it. He can take an S.E. if he wants to, and I will take an Ak.W. or even a Fee and I will run him clean out of the sky in four minutes. I will run him so far into the ground he will have to stand on his head to swallow."

We talked twice: that first time, and the last time. "Well, you did better than that," I said the last time we talked.

He had hardly any teeth left then, and he couldn't talk very well, who had never been able to talk much, who lived and died with maybe two hundred words. "Better than what?" he said.

"You said before that you would run him clean out of the sky. You didn't do that; you did better: you have run him clean off the continent of Europe."

V

I think I said that he was invulnerable too. November 11, 1918, couldn't kill him, couldn't leave him growing a little thicker each year behind an office desk, with what had once been hard and lean and immediate

grown a little dim, a little baffled, and betrayed, because by that day he had been dead almost six months.

He was killed in July, but we talked that second time, that other time before that. This last time was a week after the patrol had come in and told that Cambrai had fallen, a week after we heard the shells falling in Amiens. He told me about it himself, through his missing teeth.

The whole squadron went out together. He left his flight as soon as they reached the broken front, and flew back to Amiens with a bottle of brandy in his overall leg. Amiens was being evacuated, the roads full of lorries and carts of household goods, and ambulances from the Base hospital, and the city and its immediate territory was now interdict.

He landed in a short meadow. He said there was an old woman working in a field beyond the canal (he said she was still there when he returned an hour later, stooping stubbornly among the green rows, beneath the moist spring air shaken at slow and monstrous intervals by the sound of shells falling in the city) and a light ambulance stopped halfway in the roadside ditch.

He went to the ambulance. The engine was still running. The driver was a young man in spectacles.

He looked like a student, and he was dead drunk, half sprawled out of the cab. Sartoris had a drink from his own bottle and tried to rouse the driver, in vain. Then he had another drink (I imagine that he was pretty well along himself by then; he told me how only that morning, when Spoomer had gone off in the car and he had found the dog and watched it take the Amiens road, how he had tried to get the operations officer to let him off patrol and how the operations officer had told him that La Fayette awaited him on the Santerre plateau) and tumbled the driver back into the ambulance and drove on to Amiens himself.

He said the French corporal was drinking from a bottle in a doorway when he passed and stopped the ambulance before the estaminet. The door was locked. He finished his brandy bottle and he broke the

estaminet door in by diving at it as they do in American football. Then he was inside.

The place was empty, the benches and tables overturned and the shelves empty of bottles, and he said that at first he could not remember what it was he had come for, so he thought it must be a drink. He found a bottle of wine under the bar and broke the neck off against the edge of the bar, and he told how he stood there, looking at himself in the mirror behind the bar, trying to think what it was he had come to do. "I looked pretty wild," he said.

Then the first shell fell. I can imagine it: he standing there in that quiet, peaceful, redolent, devastated room, with the banged-in door and the musing and waiting city beyond it, and then that slow, unhurried, reverberant sound coming down upon the thick air of spring like a hand laid without haste on the damp silence; he told how dust or sand or plaster, something, sifted somewhere, whispering down in a faint hiss, and how a big, lean cat came up over the bar without a sound and flowed down to the floor and vanished like dirty quicksilver.

Then he saw the closed door behind the bar and he remembered what he had come for. He went around the bar. He expected this door to be locked too, and he grasped the knob and heaved back with all his might. It wasn't locked. He said it came back into the shelves with a sound like a pistol, jerking him off his feet. "My head hit the bar," he said. "Maybe I was a little groggy after that."

Anyway, he was holding himself up in the door, looking down at the old woman. She was sitting on the bottom stair, her apron over her head, rocking back and forth. He said that the apron was quite clean, moving back and forth like a piston, and he standing in the door, drooling a little at the mouth. "Madame," he said. The old woman rocked back and forth.

He propped himself carefully and leaned and touched her shoulder. "Toinette," he said. "Où est-elle, 'Toinette?" That was probably all the

French he knew; that, with *vin* added to his 196 English words, composed his vocabulary.

Again the old woman did not answer. She rocked back and forth like a wound-up toy. He stepped carefully over her and mounted the stair. There was a second door at the head of the stair. He stopped before it, listening. His throat filled with a hot, salty liquid. He spat it, drooling; his throat filled again. This door was unlocked also. He entered the room quietly.

It contained a table, on which lay a khaki cap with the bronze crest of the Flying Corps, and as he stood drooling in the door, the dog heaved up from the corner furthest from the window, and while he and the dog looked at one another above the cap, the sound of the second shell came dull and monstrous into the room, stirring the limp curtains before the window.

As he circled the table the dog moved too, keeping the table between them, watching him. He was trying to move quietly, yet he struck the table in passing (perhaps while watching the dog) and he told how, when he reached the opposite door and stood beside it, holding his breath, drooling, he could hear the silence in the next room. Then a voice said:

“Maman?”

He kicked the locked door, then he dived at it, again like the American football, and through it, door and all. The girl screamed. But he said he never saw her, never saw anyone. He just heard her scream as he went into the room on all-fours. It was a bedroom; one corner was filled by a huge wardrobe with double doors.

The wardrobe was closed, and the room appeared to be empty. He didn't go to the wardrobe. He said he just stood there on his hands and knees, drooling, like a cow, listening to the dying reverberation of the third shell, watching the curtains on the window blow once into the room as though to a breath.

He got up. "I was still groggy," he said. "And I guess that brandy and the wine had kind of got joggled up inside me." I daresay they had. There was a chair. Upon it lay a pair of slacks, neatly folded, a tunic with an observer's wing and two ribbons, an ordnance belt. While he stood looking down at the chair, the fourth shell came.

He gathered up the garments. The chair toppled over and he kicked it aside and lurched along the wall to the broken door and entered the first room, taking the cap from the table as he passed. The dog was gone.

He entered the passage. The old woman still sat on the bottom step, her apron over her head, rocking back and forth. He stood at the top of the stair, holding himself up, waiting to spit. Then beneath him a voice said: "Que faites-vous en haut?"

He looked down upon the raised moustached face of the French corporal whom he had passed in the street drinking from the bottle. For a time they looked at one another. Then the corporal said, "Descendez," making a peremptory gesture with his arm. Claspings the garments in one hand, Sartoris put the other hand on the stair rail and vaulted over it.

The corporal jumped aside. Sartoris plunged past him and into the wall, banging his head hollowly again. As he got to his feet and turned, the corporal kicked at him, striking for his pelvis. The corporal kicked him again.

Sartoris knocked the corporal down, where he lay on his back in his clumsy overcoat, tugging at his pocket and snapping his boot at Sartoris' groin. Then the corporal freed his hand and shot point-blank at Sartoris with a short-barreled pistol.

Sartoris sprang upon him before he could shoot again, trampling the pistol hand. He said he could feel the man's bones through his boot, and that the corporal began to scream like a woman behind his brigand's moustaches.

That was what made it funny, Sartoris said: that noise coming out of a pair of moustaches like a Gilbert and Sullivan pirate. So he said he stopped it by holding the corporal up with one hand and hitting him on the chin with the other until the noise stopped. He said that the old woman had not ceased to rock back and forth under her starched apron. "Like she might have dressed up to get ready to be sacked and ravaged," he said.

He gathered up the garments. In the bar he had another pull at the bottle, looking at himself in the mirror. Then he saw that he was bleeding at the mouth. He said he didn't know if he had bitten his tongue when he jumped over the stair rail or if he had cut his mouth with the broken bottle neck. He emptied the bottle and flung it to the floor.

He said he didn't know then what he intended to do. He said he didn't realize it even when he had dragged the unconscious driver out of the ambulance and was dressing him in Captain Spoomer's slacks and cap and ribboned tunic, and tumbled him back into the ambulance.

He remembered seeing a dusty inkstand behind the bar. He sought and found in his overalls a bit of paper, a bill rendered him eight months ago by a London tailor, and, leaning on the bar, drooling and spitting, he printed on the back of the bill Captain Spoomer's name and squadron number and aerodrome, and put the paper into the tunic pocket beneath the ribbons and the wing, and drove back to where he had left his aeroplane.

There was an Anzac battalion resting in the ditch beside the road. He left the ambulance and the sleeping passenger with them, and four of them helped him to start his engine, and held the wings for his tight take-off.

Then he was back at the front. He said he did not remember getting there at all; he said the last thing he remembered was the old woman in the field beneath him, then suddenly he was in a barrage, low

enough to feel the concussed air between the ground and his wings, and to distinguish the faces of troops. He said he didn't know what troops they were, theirs or ours, but that he strafed them anyway.

"Because I never heard of a man on the ground getting hurt by an aeroplane," he said. "Yes, I did; I'll take that back. There was a farmer back in Canada plowing in the middle of a thousand-acre field, and a cadet crashed on top of him."

Then he returned home. They told at the aerodrome that he flew between two hangars in a slow roll, so that they could see the valve stems in both wheels, and that he ran his wheels across the aerodrome and took off again. The gunnery sergeant told me that he climbed vertically until he stalled, and that he held the Camel mushing on its back. "He was watching the dog," the sergeant said.

"It had been home about an hour and it was behind the men's mess, grubbing in the refuse bin." He said that Sartoris dived at the dog and then looped, making two turns of an upward spin, coming off on one wing and still upside down. Then the sergeant said that he probably did not set back the air valve, because at a hundred feet the engine conked, and upside down Sartoris cut the tops out of the only two poplar trees they had left.

The sergeant said they ran then, toward the gout of dust and the mess of wire and wood. Before they reached it, he said the dog came trotting out from behind the men's mess. He said the dog got there first and that they saw Sartoris on his hands and knees, vomiting, while the dog watched him. Then the dog approached and sniffed tentatively at the vomit and Sartoris got up and balanced himself and kicked it, weakly but with savage and earnest purpose.

VI

The ambulance driver, in Spoomer's uniform, was sent back to the aerodrome by the Anzac major. They put him to bed, where he was still sleeping when the brigadier and the Wing Commander came up that

afternoon. They were still there when an ox cart turned onto the aerodrome and stopped, with, sitting on a wire cage containing chickens, Spoomer in a woman's skirt and a knitted shawl. The next day Spoomer returned to England. We learned that he was to be a temporary colonel at ground school.

"The dog will like that, anyway," I said.

"The dog?" Sartoris said.

"The food will be better there," I said.

"Oh," Sartoris said. They had reduced him to second lieutenant, for dereliction of duty by entering a forbidden zone with government property and leaving it unguarded, and he had been transferred to another squadron, to the one which even the B.E. people called the Laundry.

This was the day before he left. He had no front teeth at all now, and he apologized for the way he talked, who had never really talked with an intact mouth. "The joke is," he said, "it's another Camel squadron. I have to laugh."

"Laugh?" I said.

"Oh, I can ride them. I can sit there with the gun out and keep the wings level now and then. But I can't fly Camels. You have to land a Camel by setting the air valve and flying it into the ground. Then you count ten, and if you have not crashed, you level off. And if you can get up and walk away, you have made a good landing. And if they can use the crate again, you are an ace. But that's not the joke."

"What's not?"

"The Camels. The joke is, this is a night-flying squadron. I suppose they are all in town and they don't get back until after dark to fly them. They're sending me to a night-flying squadron. That's why I have to laugh."

"I would laugh," I said. "Isn't there something you can do about it?"

“Sure. Just keep that air valve set right and not crash. Not wash out and have those wing flares explode. I’ve got that beat. I’ll just stay up all night, pop the flares and sit down after sunrise. That’s why I have to laugh, see. I cant fly Camels in the daytime, even. And they dont know it.”

“Well, anyway, you did better than you promised,” I said. “You have run him off the continent of Europe.”

“Yes,” he said. “I sure have to laugh. He’s got to go back to England, where all the men are gone. All those women, and not a man between fourteen and eighty to help him. I have to laugh.”

VII

When July came, I was still in the Wing office, still trying to get used to my mechanical leg by sitting at a table equipped with a paper cutter, a pot of glue and one of red ink, and laden with the meager, thin, here soiled and here clean envelopes that came down in periodical batches — envelopes addressed to cities and hamlets and sometimes less than hamlets, about England — when one day I came upon two addressed to the same person in America: a letter and a parcel. I took the letter first. It had neither location nor date:

Dear Aunt Jenny

Yes I got the socks Elnora knitted. They fit all right because I gave them to my batman he said they fit all right. Yes I like it here better than where I was these are good guys here except these damn Camels. I am all right about going to church we dont always have church.

Sometimes they have it for the ak emmas because I reckon a ak emma needs it but usually I am pretty busy Sunday but I go enough I reckon. Tell Elnora much oblige for the socks they fit all right but maybe you better not tell her I gave them away. Tell Isom and the other niggers hello and Grandfather tell him I got the money all right but war is expensive as hell.

Johnny.

But then, the Malbroucks dont make the wars, anyway. I suppose it takes too many words to make a war. Maybe that's why.

The package was addressed like the letter, to Mrs Virginia Sartoris, Jefferson, Mississippi, U.S.A., and I thought, What in the world would it ever occur to him to send to her? I could not imagine him choosing a gift for a woman in a foreign country; choosing one of those trifles which some men can choose with a kind of infallible tact.

His would be, if he thought to send anything at all, a section of crank shaft or maybe a handful of wrist pins salvaged from a Hun crash. So I opened the package. Then I sat there, looking at the contents.

It contained an addressed envelope, a few dog-eared papers, a wrist watch whose strap was stiff with some dark dried liquid, a pair of goggles without any glass in one lens, a silver belt buckle with a monogram. That was all.

So I didn't need to read the letter. I didn't have to look at the contents of the package, but I wanted to. I didn't want to read the letter, but I had to.

— Squadron, R.A.F., France.

5th July, 1918.

Dear Madam,

I have to tell you that your son was killed on yesterday morning. He was shot down while in pursuit of duty over the enemy lines. Not due to carelessness or lack of skill. He was a good man. The E.A. outnumbered your son and had more height and speed which is our misfortune but no fault of the Government which would give us better machines if they had them which is no satisfaction to you.

Another of ours, Mr R. Kyerling 1000 feet below could not get up there since your son spent much time in the hangar and had a new engine in his machine last week. Your son took fire in ten seconds Mr Kyerling said and jumped from your son's machine since he was side slipping

safely until the E.A. shot away his stabiliser and controls and he began to spin.

I am very sad to send you these sad tidings though it may be a comfort to you that he was buried by a minister. His other effects sent you later.

I am, madam, and etc.

C. Kaye Major

He was buried in the cemetery just north of Saint Vaast since we hope it will not be shelled again since we hope it will be over soon by our padre since there were just two Camels and seven E.A. and so it was on our side by that time.

C. K. Mjr.

The other papers were letters, from his great-aunt, not many and not long. I don't know why he had kept them. But he had. Maybe he just forgot them, like he had the bill from the London tailor he had found in his overalls in Amiens that day in the spring.

. . . let those foreign women alone. I lived through a war myself and I know how women act in war, even with Yankees. And a good-for-nothing hellion like you . . .

And this:

. . . we think it's about time you came home. Your grandfather is getting old, and it don't look like they will ever get done fighting over there. So you come on home. The Yankees are in it now. Let them fight if they want to. It's their war. It's not ours.

And that's all. That's it. The courage, the recklessness, call it what you will, is the flash, the instant of sublimation; then flick! the old darkness again. That's why. It's too strong for steady diet. And if it were a steady diet, it would not be a flash, a glare.

And so, being momentary, it can be preserved and prolonged only on paper: a picture, a few written words that any match, a minute and harmless flame that any child can engender, can obliterate in an instant. A one-inch sliver of sulphur-tipped wood is longer than

memory or grief; a flame no larger than a sixpence is fiercer than courage or despair.

The End

Crevasse, William Faulkner

Crevasse

THE PARTY GOES on, skirting the edge of the barrage weaving down into shell craters old and new, crawling out again. Two men half drag, half carry between them a third, while two others carry the three rifles. The third man's head is bound in a bloody rag; he stumbles his aimless legs along, his head lolling, sweat channeling slowly down his mud-crusted face.

The barrage stretches on and on across the plain, distant, impenetrable. Occasionally a small wind comes up from nowhere and thins the dun smoke momentarily upon clumps of bitten poplars. The party enters and crosses a field which a month ago was sown to wheat and where yet wheatspears thrust and cling stubbornly in the churned soil, among scraps of metal and seething hunks of cloth.

It crosses the field and comes to a canal bordered with tree stumps sheared roughly at a symmetrical five-foot level. The men flop and drink of the contaminated water and fill their water bottles. The two bearers let the wounded man slip to earth; he hangs lax on the canal bank with both arms in the water and his head too, had not the others held him up.

One of them raises water in his helmet, but the wounded man cannot swallow. So they set him upright and the other holds the helmet brim to his lips and refills the helmet and pours the water on the wounded

man's head, sopping the bandage. Then he takes a filthy rag from his pocket and dries the wounded man's face with clumsy gentleness.

The captain, the subaltern and the sergeant, still standing, are poring over a soiled map. Beyond the canal the ground rises gradually; the canal cutting reveals the chalk formation of the land in pallid strata. The captain puts the map away and the sergeant speaks the men to their feet, not loud.

The two bearers raise the wounded man and they follow the canal bank, coming after a while to a bridge formed by a water-logged barge hull lashed bow and stern to either bank, and so pass over. Here they halt again while once more the captain and the subaltern consult the map.

Gunfire comes across the pale spring noon like a prolonged clashing of hail on an endless metal roof. As they go on the chalky soil rises gradually underfoot. The ground is dryly rough, shaling, and the going is harder still for the two who carry the wounded man. But when they would stop the wounded man struggles and wrenches free and staggers on alone, his hands at his head, and stumbles, falling.

The bearers catch and raise him and hold him muttering between them and wrenching his arms. He is muttering ". . . bonnet . . ." and he frees his hands and tugs again at his bandage. The commotion passes forward. The captain looks back and stops; the party halts also, unbidden, and lowers rifles.

"A's pickin at's bandage, sir-r," one of the bearers tells the captain. They let the man sit down between them; the captain kneels beside him.

". . . bonnet . . . bonnet," the man mutters. The captain loosens the bandage. The sergeant extends a water bottle and the captain wets the bandage and lays his hand on the man's brow. The others stand about, looking on with a kind of sober, detached interest. The captain rises.

The bearers raise the wounded man again. The sergeant speaks them into motion.

They gain the crest of the ridge. The ridge slopes westward into a plateau slightly rolling. Southward, beneath its dun pall, the barrage still rages; westward and northward about the shining empty plain smoke rises lazily here and there above clumps of trees. But this is the smoke of burning things, burning wood and not powder, and the two officers gaze from beneath their hands, the men halting again without order and lowering arms.

“Gad, sir,” the subaltern says suddenly in a high, thin voice; “it’s houses burning! They’re retreating! Beasts! Beasts!”

“Tis possible,” the captain says, gazing beneath his hand. “We can get around that barrage now. Should be a road just yonder.” He strides on again.

“For-rard,” the sergeant says, in that tone not loud. The men slope arms once more with unquestioning docility.

The ridge is covered with a tough, gorselike grass. Insects buzz in it, zip from beneath their feet and fall to slatting again beneath the shimmering noon. The wounded man is babbling again. At intervals they pause and give him water and wet the bandage again, then two others exchange with the bearers and they hurry the man on and close up again.

The head of the line stops; the men jolt prodding into one another like a train of freight cars stopping. At the captain’s feet lies a broad shallow depression in which grows a sparse, dead-looking grass like clumps of bayonets thrust up out of the earth. It is too big to have been made by a small shell, and too shallow to have been made by a big one. It bears no traces of having been made by anything at all, and they look quietly down into it. “Queer,” the subaltern says. “What do you fancy could have made it?”

The captain does not answer. He turns. They circle the depression, looking down into it quietly as they pass it. But they have no more than passed it when they come upon another one, perhaps not quite so large. "I didn't know they had anything that could make that," the subaltern says. Again the captain does not answer. They circle this one also and keep on along the crest of the ridge. On the other hand the ridge sheers sharply downward stratum by stratum of pallid eroded chalk.

A shallow ravine gashes its crumbling yawn abruptly across their path. The captain changes direction again, paralleling the ravine, until shortly afterward the ravine turns at right angles and goes on in the direction of their march. The floor of the ravine is in shadow; the captain leads the way down the shelving wall, into the shade. They lower the wounded man carefully and go on.

After a time the ravine opens. They find that they have debouched into another of those shallow depressions. This one is not so clearly defined, though, and the opposite wall of it is nicked by what is apparently another depression, like two overlapping disks. They cross the first depression, while more of the dead-looking grass bayonets saber their legs dryly, and pass through the gap into the next depression.

This one is like a miniature valley between miniature cliffs. Overhead they can see only the drowsy and empty bowl of the sky, with a few faint smoke smudges to the northwest. The sound of the barrage is now remote and far away: a vibration in earth felt rather than heard. There are no recent shell craters or marks here at all.

It is as though they had strayed suddenly into a region, a world where the war had not reached, where nothing had reached, where no life is, and silence itself is dead. They give the wounded man water and go on.

The valley, the depression, strays vaguely before them. They can see that it is a series of overlapping, vaguely circular basins formed by no apparent or deducible agency. Pallid grass bayonets saber at their legs, and after a time they are again among old healed scars of trees to

which there cling sparse leaves neither green nor dead, as if they too had been overtaken and caught by a hiatus in time, gossiping dryly among themselves though there is no wind. The floor of the valley is not level.

It in itself descends into vague depressions, rises again as vaguely between its shelving walls. In the center of these smaller depressions whitish knobs of chalk thrust up through the thin topsoil. The ground has a resilient quality, like walking on cork; feet make no sound. "Jolly walking," the subaltern says.

Though his voice is not raised, it fills the small valley with the abruptness of a thunderclap, filling the silence, the words seeming to hang about them as though silence here had been so long undisturbed that it had forgot its purpose; as one they look quietly and soberly about, at the shelving walls, the stubborn ghosts of trees, the bland, hushed sky. "Topping hole-up for embusqué birds and such," the subaltern says.

"Ay," the captain says. His word in turn hangs sluggishly and fades. The men at the rear close up, the movement passing forward, the men looking quietly and soberly about.

"But no birds here," the subaltern says. "No insects even."

"Ay," the captain says. The word fades, the silence comes down again, sunny, profoundly still. The subaltern pauses and stirs something with his foot. The men halt also, and the subaltern and the captain, without touching it, examine the half-buried and moldering rifle. The wounded man is babbling again.

"What is it, sir?" the subaltern says. "Looks like one of those things the Canadians had. A Ross. Right?"

"French," the captain says; "1914."

"Oh," the subaltern says. He turns the rifle aside with his toe. The bayonet is still attached to the barrel, but the stock has long since rotted away. They go on, across the uneven ground, among the chalky

knobs thrusting up through the soil. Light, the wan and drowsy sunlight, is laked in the valley, stagnant, bodiless, without heat. The saberlike grass thrusts sparsely and rigidly upward.

They look about again at the shaling walls, then the ones at the head of the party watch the subaltern pause and prod with his stick at one of the chalky knobs and turn presently upward its earth-stained eyesockets and its unbottomed grin.

“Forward,” the captain says sharply. The party moves; the men look quietly and curiously at the skull as they pass. They go on, among the other whitish knobs like marbles studded at random in the shallow soil. “All in the same position, do you notice, sir?” the subaltern says, his voice chattily cheerful; “all upright. Queer way to bury chaps: sitting down. Shallow, too.”

“Ay,” the captain says. The wounded man babbles steadily. The two bearers stop with him, but the others crowd on after the officers, passing the two bearers and the wounded man. “Dinna stop to gi’s sup water,” one of the bearers says.

“A’ll drink walkin.” They take up the wounded man again and hurry him on while one of them tries to hold the neck of a water bottle to the wounded man’s mouth, clattering it against his teeth and spilling the water down the front of his tunic. The captain looks back.

“What’s this?” he says sharply. The men crowd up. Their eyes are wide, sober; he looks about at the quiet, intent faces. “What’s the matter back there, Sergeant?”

“Wind-up,” the subaltern says. He looks about at the eroded walls, the whitish knobs thrusting quietly out of the earth. “Feel it myself,” he says. He laughs, his laughter a little thin, ceasing. “Let’s get out of here, sir,” he says. “Let’s get into the sun again.”

“You are in the sun here,” the captain says. “Ease off there, men. Stop crowding. We’ll be out soon. We’ll find the road and get past the

barrage and make contact again.” He turns and goes on. The party gets into motion again.

Then they all stop as one, in the attitudes of walking, in an utter suspension, and stare at one another. Again the earth moves under their feet. A man screams, high, like a woman or a horse; as the firm earth shifts for a third time beneath them the officers whirl and see beyond the downplunging man a gaping hole with dry dust still crumbling about the edges before the orifice crumbles again beneath a second man.

Then a crack springs like a sword slash beneath them all; the earth breaks under their feet and tilts like jagged squares of pale fudge, framing a black yawn out of which, like a silent explosion, bursts the unmistakable smell of rotted flesh. While they scramble and leap (in silence now; there has been no sound since the first man screamed) from one cake to another, the cakes tilt and slide until the whole floor of the valley rushes slowly under them and plunges them downward into darkness. A grave rumbling rises into the sunlight on a blast of decay and of faint dust which hangs and drifts in the faint air about the black orifice.

The captain feels himself plunging down a sheer and shifting wall of moving earth, of sounds of terror and of struggling in the ink dark. Someone else screams. The scream ceases; he hears the voice of the wounded man coming thin and reiterant out of the plunging bowels of decay: “A’ m no dead! A’ m no dead!” and ceasing abruptly, as if a hand had been laid on his mouth.

Then the moving cliff down which the captain plunges slopes gradually off and shoots him, uninjured, onto a hard floor, where he lies for a time on his back while across his face the lightward- and airward-seeking blast of death and dissolution rushes. He has fetched up against something; it tumbles down upon him lightly, with a muffled clatter as if it had come to pieces.

Then he begins to see the light, the jagged shape of the cavern mouth high overhead, and then the sergeant is bending over him with a pocket torch. "McKie?" the captain says. For reply the sergeant turns the flash upon his own face. "Where's Mr. McKie?" the captain says.

"A's gone, sir-r," the sergeant says in a husky whisper. The captain sits up.

"How many are left?"

"Fourteen, sir-r," the sergeant whispers.

"Fourteen. Twelve missing. We'll have to dig fast." He gets to his feet. The faint light from above falls coldly upon the heaped avalanche, upon the thirteen helmets and the white bandage of the wounded man huddled about the foot of the cliff. "Where are we?"

For answer the sergeant moves the torch. It streaks laterally into the darkness, along a wall, a tunnel, into yawning blackness, the walls faceted with pale glints of chalk. About the tunnel, sitting or leaning upright against the walls, are skeletons in dark tunics and bagging Zouave trousers, their moldering arms beside them; the captain recognizes them as Senegalese troops of the May fighting of 1915, surprised and killed by gas probably in the attitudes in which they had taken refuge in the chalk caverns.

He takes the torch from the sergeant.

"We'll see if there's anyone else," he says. "Have out the trenching tools." He flashes the light upon the precipice. It rises into gloom, darkness, then into the faint rumor of daylight overhead. With the sergeant behind him he climbs the shifting heap, the earth sighing beneath him and shaling downward.

The injured man begins to wail again, "A'm no dead! A'm no dead!" until his voice goes into a high sustained screaming. Someone lays a hand over his mouth. His voice is muffled, then it becomes laughter on a rising note, becomes screaming again, is choked again.

The captain and the sergeant mount as high as they dare, prodding at the earth while the earth shifts beneath them in long hushed sighs. At the foot of the precipice the men huddle, their faces lifted faint, white, and patient into the light. The captain sweeps the torch up and down the cliff. There is nothing, no arm, no hand, in sight. The air is clearing slowly. "We'll get on," the captain says.

"Ay, sir-r," the sergeant says.

In both directions the cavern fades into darkness, plumbless and profound, filled with the quiet skeletons sitting and leaning against the walls, their arms beside them.

"The cave-in threw us forward," the captain says.

"Ay, sir-r," the sergeant whispers.

"Speak out," the captain says. "It's but a bit of a cave. If men got into it, we can get out."

"Ay, sir-r," the sergeant whispers.

"If it threw us forward, the entrance will be yonder."

"Ay, sir-r," the sergeant whispers.

The captain flashes the torch ahead. The men rise and huddle quietly behind him, the wounded man among them. He whimpers. The cavern goes on, unrolling its glinted walls out of the darkness; the sitting shapes grin quietly into the light as they pass. The air grows heavier; soon they are trotting, gasping, then the air grows lighter and the torch sweeps up another slope of earth, closing the tunnel.

The men halt and huddle. The captain mounts the slope. He snaps off the light and crawls slowly along the crest of the slide, where it joins the ceiling of the cavern, sniffing. The light flashes on again. "Two men with trenching tools," he says.

Two men mount to him. He shows them the fissure through which air seeps in small, steady breaths. They begin to dig, furiously, hurling the dirt back. Presently they are relieved by two others; presently the fissure becomes a tunnel and four men can work at once. The air

becomes fresher. They burrow furiously, with whimpering cries like dogs.

The wounded man, hearing them perhaps, catching the excitement perhaps, begins to laugh again, meaningless and high. Then the man at the head of the tunnel bursts through. Light rushes in around him like water; he burrows madly; in silhouette they see his wallowing buttocks lunge from sight and a burst of daylight surges in.

The others leave the wounded man and surge up the slope, fighting and snarling at the opening. The sergeant springs after them and beats them away from the opening with a trenching spade, cursing in his hoarse whisper.

“Let them go, Sergeant,” the captain says. The sergeant desists. He stands aside and watches the men scramble into the tunnel. Then he descends, and he and the captain help the wounded man up the slope. At the mouth of the tunnel the wounded man rebels.

“A’m no dead! A’m no dead!” he wails, struggling. By cajolery and force they thrust him, still wailing and struggling, into the tunnel, where he becomes docile again and scuttles through.

“Out with you, Sergeant,” the captain says.

“After you, sir-r,” the sergeant whispers.

“Out wi ye, man!” the captain says. The sergeant enters the tunnel. The captain follows. He emerges onto the outer slope of the avalanche which had closed the cave, at the foot of which the fourteen men are kneeling in a group.

On his hands and knees like a beast, the captain breathes, his breath making a hoarse sound. “Soon it will be summer,” he thinks, dragging the air into his lungs faster than he can empty them to respire again. “Soon it will be summer, and the long days.” At the foot of the slope the fourteen men kneel.

The one in the center has a Bible in his hand, from which he is intoning monotonously. Above his voice the wounded man's gibberish rises, meaningless and unemphatic and sustained.

The End

Red Leaves, William Faulkner

Red Leaves

I

THE TWO INDIANS crossed the plantation toward the slave quarters. Neat with whitewash, of baked soft brick, the two rows of houses in which lived the slaves belonging to the clan, faced one another across the mild shade of the lane marked and scored with naked feet and with a few homemade toys mute in the dust. There was no sign of life.

"I know what we will find," the first Indian said.

"What we will not find," the second said. Although it was noon, the lane was vacant, the doors of the cabins empty and quiet; no cooking smoke rose from any of the chinked and plastered chimneys.

"Yes. It happened like this when the father of him who is now the Man, died."

"You mean, of him who was the Man."

"Yao."

The first Indian's name was Three Basket. He was perhaps sixty. They were both squat men, a little solid, burgher-like; paunchy, with big heads, big, broad, dust-colored faces of a certain blurred serenity like carved heads on a ruined wall in Siam or Sumatra, looming out of a mist. The sun had done it, the violent sun, the violent shade. Their hair

looked like sedge grass on burnt-over land. Clamped through one ear
Three Basket wore an enameled snuffbox.

“I have said all the time that this is not the good way. In the old days there were no quarters, no Negroes. A man’s time was his own then. He had time. Now he must spend most of it finding work for them who prefer sweating to do.”

“They are like horses and dogs.”

“They are like nothing in this sensible world. Nothing contents them save sweat. They are worse than the white people.”

“It is not as though the Man himself had to find work for them to do.”

“You said it. I do not like slavery. It is not the good way. In the old days, there was the good way. But not now.”

“You do not remember the old way either.”

“I have listened to them who do. And I have tried this way. Man was not made to sweat.”

“That’s so. See what it has done to their flesh.”

“Yes. Black. It has a bitter taste, too.”

“You have eaten of it?”

“Once. I was young then, and more hardy in the appetite than now. Now it is different with me.”

“Yes. They are too valuable to eat now.”

“There is a bitter taste to the flesh which I do not like.”

“They are too valuable to eat, anyway, when the white men will give horses for them.”

They entered the lane. The mute, meager toys — the fetish-shaped objects made of wood and rags and feathers — lay in the dust about the patinaed doorsteps, among bones and broken gourd dishes. But there was no sound from any cabin, no face in any door; had not been

since yesterday, when Issetibbeha died. But they already knew what they would find.

It was in the central cabin, a house a little larger than the others, where at certain phases of the moon the Negroes would gather to begin their ceremonies before removing after nightfall to the creek bottom, where they kept the drums. In this room they kept the minor accessories, the cryptic ornaments, the ceremonial records which consisted of sticks daubed with red clay in symbols.

It had a hearth in the center of the floor, beneath a hole in the roof, with a few cold wood ashes and a suspended iron pot. The window shutters were closed; when the two Indians entered, after the abashless sunlight they could distinguish nothing with the eyes save a movement, shadow, out of which eyeballs rolled, so that the place appeared to be full of Negroes. The two Indians stood in the doorway.

“Yao,” Basket said. “I said this is not the good way.”

“I don’t think I want to be here,” the second said.

“That is black man’s fear which you smell. It does not smell as ours does.”

“I don’t think I want to be here.”

“Your fear has an odor too.”

“Maybe it is Issetibbeha which we smell.”

“Yao. He knows. He knows what we will find here. He knew when he died what we should find here today.” Out of the rank twilight of the room the eyes, the smell, of Negroes rolled about them. “I am Three Basket, whom you know,” Basket said into the room. “We are come from the Man. He whom we seek is gone?” The Negroes said nothing. The smell of them, of their bodies, seemed to ebb and flux in the still hot air.

They seemed to be musing as one upon something remote, inscrutable. They were like a single octopus. They were like the roots of a huge tree

uncovered, the earth broken momentarily upon the writhen, thick, fetid tangle of its lightless and outraged life. "Come," Basket said. "You know our errand. Is he whom we seek gone?"

"They are thinking something," the second said. "I do not want to be here."

"They are knowing something," Basket said.
"They are hiding him, you think?"

"No. He is gone. He has been gone since last night. It happened like this before, when the grandfather of him who is now the Man died. It took us three days to catch him. For three days Doom lay above the ground, saying 'I see my horse and my dog. But I do not see my slave. What have you done with him that you will not permit me to lie quiet?'"

"They do not like to die."

"Yao. They cling. It makes trouble for us, always. A people without honor and without decorum. Always a trouble."

"I do not like it here."

"Nor do I. But then, they are savages; they cannot be expected to regard usage. That is why I say that this way is a bad way."

"Yao. They cling. They would even rather work in the sun than to enter the earth with a chief. But he is gone."

The Negroes had said nothing, made no sound. The white eyeballs rolled, wild, subdued; the smell was rank, violent. "Yes, they fear," the second said. "What shall we do now?"

"Let us go and talk with the Man."

"Will Mocketubbe listen?"

"What can he do? He will not like to. But he is the Man now."

"Yao. He is the Man. He can wear the shoes with the red heels all the time now." They turned and went out. There was no door in the door frame. There were no doors in any of the cabins.

“He did that anyway,” Basket said.

“Behind Issetibbeha’s back. But now they are his shoes, since he is the Man.”

“Yao. Issetibbeha did not like it. I have heard. I know that he said to Mocketubbe: ‘When you are the Man, the shoes will be yours. But until then, they are my shoes.’ But now Mocketubbe is the Man; he can wear them.”

“Yao,” the second said. “He is the Man now. He used to wear the shoes behind Issetibbeha’s back, and it was not known if Issetibbeha knew this or not. And then Issetibbeha became dead, who was not old, and the shoes are Mocketubbe’s, since he is the Man now. What do you think of that?”

“I don’t think about it,” Basket said. “Do you?”

“No,” the second said.

“Good,” Basket said. “You are wise.”

II

The house sat on a knoll, surrounded by oak trees. The front of it was one story in height, composed of the deck house of a steamboat which had gone ashore and which Doom, Issetibbeha’s father, had dismantled with his slaves and hauled on cypress rollers twelve miles home overland. It took them five months. His house consisted at the time of one brick wall.

He set the steamboat broadside on to the wall, where now the chipped and flaked gilding of the rococo cornices arched in faint splendor above the gilt lettering of the stateroom names above the jalousied doors.

Doom had been born merely a subchief, a Mingo, one of three children on the mother’s side of the family. He made a journey — he was a young man then and New Orleans was a European city — from north Mississippi to New Orleans by keel boat, where he met the Chevalier

Sœur Blonde de Vitry, a man whose social position, on its face, was as equivocal as Doom's own.

In New Orleans, among the gamblers and cutthroats of the river front, Doom, under the tutelage of his patron, passed as the chief, the Man, the hereditary owner of that land which belonged to the male side of the family; it was the Chevalier de Vitry who called him du homme, and hence Doom.

They were seen everywhere together — the Indian, the squat man with a bold, inscrutable, underbred face, and the Parisian, the expatriate, the friend, it was said, of Carondelet and the intimate of General Wilkinson.

Then they disappeared, the two of them, vanishing from their old equivocal haunts and leaving behind them the legend of the sums which Doom was believed to have won, and some tale about a young woman, daughter of a fairly well-to-do West Indian family, the son and brother of whom sought Doom with a pistol about his old haunts for some time after his disappearance.

Six months later the young woman herself disappeared, boarding the St. Louis packet, which put in one night at a wood landing on the north Mississippi side, where the woman, accompanied by a Negro maid, got off. Four Indians met her with a horse and wagon, and they traveled for three days, slowly, since she was already big with child, to the plantation, where she found that Doom was now chief. He never told her how he accomplished it, save that his uncle and his cousin had died suddenly.

At that time the house consisted of a brick wall built by shiftless slaves, against which was propped a thatched lean-to divided into rooms and littered with bones and refuse, set in the center of ten thousand acres of matchless parklike forest where deer grazed like domestic cattle.

Doom and the woman were married there a short time before Issetibbeha was born, by a combination itinerant minister and slave

trader who arrived on a mule, to the saddle of which was lashed a cotton umbrella and a three-gallon demijohn of whisky. After that, Doom began to acquire more slaves and to cultivate some of his land, as the white people did.

But he never had enough for them to do. In utter idleness the majority of them led lives transplanted whole out of African jungles, save on the occasions when, entertaining guests, Doom coursed them with dogs.

When Doom died, Issetibbeha, his son, was nineteen. He became proprietor of the land and of the quintupled herd of blacks for which he had no use at all. Though the title of Man rested with him, there was a hierarchy of cousins and uncles who ruled the clan and who finally gathered in squatting conclave over the Negro question, squatting profoundly beneath the golden names above the doors of the steamboat.

“We cannot eat them,” one said.

“Why not?”

“There are too many of them.”

“That’s true,” a third said. “Once we started, we should have to eat them all. And that much flesh diet is not good for man.”

“Perhaps they will be like deer flesh. That cannot hurt you.”

“We might kill a few of them and not eat them,” Issetibbeha said.

They looked at him for a while. “What for?” one said.

“That is true,” a second said. “We cannot do that. They are too valuable; remember all the bother they have caused us, finding things for them to do. We must do as the white men do.”

“How is that?” Issetibbeha said.

“Raise more Negroes by clearing more land to make corn to feed them, then sell them. We will clear the land and plant it with food and raise Negroes and sell them to the white men for money.”

“But what will we do with this money?” a third said.

They thought for a while.

“We will see,” the first said. They squatted, profound, grave.

“It means work,” the third said.

“Let the Negroes do it,” the first said.

“Yao. Let them. To sweat is bad. It is damp. It opens the pores.”

“And then the night air enters.”

“Yao. Let the Negroes do it. They appear to like sweating.”

So they cleared the land with the Negroes and planted it in grain. Up to that time the slaves had lived in a huge pen with a lean-to roof over one corner, like a pen for pigs. But now they began to build quarters, cabins, putting the young Negroes in the cabins in pairs to mate; five years later Issetibbeha sold forty head to a Memphis trader, and he took the money and went abroad upon it, his maternal uncle from New Orleans conducting the trip.

At that time the Chevalier Sœur Blonde de Vitry was an old man in Paris, in a toupee and a corset, with a careful toothless old face fixed in a grimace quizzical and profoundly tragic. He borrowed three hundred dollars from Issetibbeha and in return he introduced him into certain circles; a year later Issetibbeha returned home with a gilt bed, a pair of girandoles by whose light it was said that Pompadour arranged her hair while Louis smirked at his mirrored face across her powdered shoulder, and a pair of slippers with red heels. They were too small for him, since he had not worn shoes at all until he reached New Orleans on his way abroad.

He brought the slippers home in tissue paper and kept them in the remaining pocket of a pair of saddlebags filled with cedar shavings, save when he took them out on occasion for his son, Mocketubbe, to play with. At three years of age Mocketubbe had a broad, flat, Mongolian face that appeared to exist in a complete and unfathomable lethargy, until confronted by the slippers.

Moketubbe's mother was a comely girl whom Issetibbeha had seen one day working in her shift in a melon patch. He stopped and watched her for a while — the broad, solid thighs, the sound back, the serene face. He was on his way to the creek to fish that day, but he didn't go any farther; perhaps while he stood there watching the unaware girl he may have remembered his own mother, the city woman, the fugitive with her fans and laces and her Negro blood, and all the tawdry shabbiness of that sorry affair.

Within the year Moketubbe was born; even at three he could not get his feet into the slippers. Watching him in the still, hot afternoons as he struggled with the slippers with a certain monstrous repudiation of fact, Issetibbeha laughed quietly to himself. He laughed at Moketubbe and the shoes for several years, because Moketubbe did not give up trying to put them on until he was sixteen. Then he quit.

Or Issetibbeha thought he had. But he had merely quit trying in Issetibbeha's presence. Issetibbeha's newest wife told him that Moketubbe had stolen and hidden the shoes. Issetibbeha quit laughing then, and he sent the woman away, so that he was alone. "Yao," he said. "I too like being alive, it seems." He sent for Moketubbe. "I give them to you," he said.

Moketubbe was twenty-five then, unmarried. Issetibbeha was not tall, but he was taller by six inches than his son and almost a hundred pounds lighter. Moketubbe was already diseased with flesh, with a pale, broad, inert face and dropsical hands and feet. "They are yours now," Issetibbeha said, watching him. Moketubbe had looked at him once when he entered, a glance brief, discreet, veiled. "Thanks," he said.

Issetibbeha looked at him. He could never tell if Moketubbe saw anything, looked at anything. "Why will it not be the same if I give the slippers to you?"

“Thanks,” Mocketubbe said. Issetibbeha was using snuff at the time; a white man had shown him how to put the powder into his lip and scour it against his teeth with a twig of gum or of alpea.

“Well,” he said, “a man cannot live forever.” He looked at his son, then his gaze went blank in turn, unseeing, and he mused for an instant. You could not tell what he was thinking, save that he said half aloud: “Yao. But Doom’s uncle had no shoes with red heels.” He looked at his son again, fat, inert.

“Beneath all that, a man might think of doing anything and it not be known until too late.” He sat in a splint chair hammocked with deer thongs. “He cannot even get them on; he and I are both frustrated by the same gross meat which he wears. He cannot even get them on. But is that my fault?”

He lived for five years longer, then he died. He was sick one night, and though the doctor came in a skunk-skin vest and burned sticks, he died before noon.

That was yesterday; the grave was dug, and for twelve hours now the People had been coming in wagons and carriages and on horseback and afoot, to eat the baked dog and the succotash and the yams cooked in ashes and to attend the funeral.

III

“It will be three days,” Basket said, as he and the other Indian returned to the house. “It will be three days and the food will not be enough; I have seen it before.”

The second Indian’s name was Louis Berry. “He will smell too, in this weather.”

“Yao. They are nothing but a trouble and a care.”

“Maybe it will not take three days.”

“They run far. Yao. We will smell this Man before he enters the earth. You watch and see if I am not right.”

They approached the house.

“He can wear the shoes now,” Berry said. “He can wear them now in man’s sight.”

“He cannot wear them for a while yet,” Basket said. Berry looked at him. “He will lead the hunt.”

“Moketubbe?” Berry said. “Do you think he will? A man to whom even talking is travail?”

“What else can he do? It is his own father who will soon begin to smell.”

“That is true,” Berry said. “There is even yet a price he must pay for the shoes. Yao. He has truly bought them. What do you think?”

“What do you think?”

“What do you think?”

“I think nothing.”

“Nor do I. Issetibbeha will not need the shoes now. Let Moketubbe have them; Issetibbeha will not care.”

“Yao. Man must die.”

“Yao. Let him; there is still the Man.”

The bark roof of the porch was supported by peeled cypress poles, high above the texas of the steamboat, shading an unfloored banquette where on the trodden earth mules and horses were tethered in bad weather. On the forward end of the steamboat’s deck sat an old man and two women. One of the women was dressing a fowl, the other was shelling corn. The old man was talking. He was barefoot, in a long linen frock coat and a beaver hat.

“This world is going to the dogs,” he said. “It is being ruined by white men. We got along fine for years and years, before the white men foisted their Negroes upon us. In the old days the old men sat in the shade and ate stewed deer’s flesh and corn and smoked tobacco and talked of honor and grave affairs; now what do we do?”

Even the old wear themselves into the grave taking care of them that like sweating." When Basket and Berry crossed the deck he ceased and looked up at them. His eyes were querulous, bleared; his face was myriad with tiny wrinkles. "He is fled also," he said.

"Yes," Berry said, "he is gone."

"I knew it. I told them so. It will take three weeks, like when Doom died. You watch and see."

"It was three days, not three weeks," Berry said.

"Were you there?"

"No," Berry said. "But I have heard."

"Well, I was there," the old man said. "For three whole weeks, through the swamps and the briers—" They went on and left him talking.

What had been the saloon of the steamboat was now a shell, rotting slowly; the polished mahogany, the carving glinting momentarily and fading through the mold in figures cabalistic and profound; the gutted windows were like cataracted eyes.

It contained a few sacks of seed or grain, and the fore part of the running gear of a barouche, to the axle of which two C-springs rusted in graceful curves, supporting nothing. In one corner a fox cub ran steadily and soundlessly up and down a willow cage; three scrawny gamecocks moved in the dust, and the place was pocked and marked with their dried droppings.

They passed through the brick wall and entered a big room of chinked logs. It contained the hinder part of the barouche, and the dismantled body lying on its side, the window slatted over with willow withes, through which protruded the heads, the still, beady, outraged eyes and frayed combs of still more game chickens.

It was floored with packed clay; in one corner leaned a crude plow and two hand-hewn boat paddles. From the ceiling, suspended by four deer thongs, hung the gilt bed which Issetibbeha had fetched from Paris. It

had neither mattress nor springs, the frame crisscrossed now by a neat hammocking of thongs.

Issetibbeha had tried to have his newest wife, the young one, sleep in the bed. He was congenitally short of breath himself, and he passed the nights half reclining in his splint chair. He would see her to bed and, later, wakeful, sleeping as he did but three or four hours a night, he would sit in the darkness and simulate slumber and listen to her sneak infinitesimally from the gilt and ribboned bed, to lie on a quilt pallet on the floor until just before daylight. Then she would enter the bed quietly again and in turn simulate slumber, while in the darkness beside her Issetibbeha quietly laughed and laughed.

The girandoles were lashed by thongs to two sticks propped in a corner where a ten-gallon whisky keg lay also. There was a clay hearth; facing it, in the splint chair, Mocketubbe sat. He was maybe an inch better than five feet tall, and he weighed two hundred and fifty pounds.

He wore a broadcloth coat and no shirt, his round, smooth copper balloon of belly swelling above the bottom piece of a suit of linen underwear. On his feet were the slippers with the red heels. Behind his chair stood a stripling with a punkah-like fan made of fringed paper. Mocketubbe sat motionless, with his broad, yellow face with its closed eyes and flat nostrils, his flipperlike arms extended. On his face was an expression profound, tragic, and inert. He did not open his eyes when Basket and Berry came in.

“He has worn them since daylight?” Basket said.

“Since daylight,” the stripling said. The fan did not cease. “You can see.”

“Yao,” Basket said. “We can see.” Mocketubbe did not move. He looked like an effigy, like a Malay god in frock coat, drawers, naked chest, the trivial scarlet-heeled shoes.

“I wouldn’t disturb him, if I were you,” the stripling said.

“Not if I were you,” Basket said. He and Berry squatted. The stripling moved the fan steadily. “O Man,” Basket said, “listen.” Mocketubbe did not move. “He is gone,” Basket said.

“I told you so,” the stripling said. “I knew he would flee. I told you.”

“Yao,” Basket said. “You are not the first to tell us afterward what we should have known before. Why is it that some of you wise men took no steps yesterday to prevent this?”

“He does not wish to die,” Berry said.

“Why should he not wish it?” Basket said.

“Because he must die some day is no reason,” the stripling said. “That would not convince me either, old man.”

“Hold your tongue,” Berry said.

“For twenty years,” Basket said, “while others of his race sweat in the fields, he served the Man in the shade. Why should he not wish to die, since he did not wish to sweat?”

“And it will be quick,” Berry said. “It will not take long.”

“Catch him and tell him that,” the stripling said.

“Hush,” Berry said. They squatted, watching Mocketubbe’s face. He might have been dead himself. It was as though he were cased so in flesh that even breathing took place too deep within him to show.

“Listen, O Man,” Basket said. “Issetibbeha is dead. He waits. His dog and his horse we have. But his slave has fled. The one who held the pot for him, who ate of his food, from his dish, is fled. Issetibbeha waits.”

“Yao,” Berry said.

“This is not the first time,” Basket said. “This happened when Doom, thy grandfather, lay waiting at the door of the earth. He lay waiting three days, saying, ‘Where is my Negro?’ And Issetibbeha, thy father, answered, ‘I will find him. Rest; I will bring him to you so that you may begin the journey.’”

“Yao,” Berry said.

Moketubbe had not moved, had not opened his eyes.

“For three days Issetibbeha hunted in the bottom,” Basket said. “He did not even return home for food, until the Negro was with him; then he said to Doom, his father, ‘Here is thy dog, thy horse, thy Negro; rest.’ Issetibbeha, who is dead since yesterday, said it. And now Issetibbeha’s Negro is fled. His horse and his dog wait with him, but his Negro is fled.”

“Yao,” Berry said.

Moketubbe had not moved. His eyes were closed; upon his supine monstrous shape there was a colossal inertia, something profoundly immobile, beyond and impervious to flesh. They watched his face, squatting.

“When thy father was newly the Man, this happened,” Basket said.

“And it was Issetibbeha who brought back the slave to where his father waited to enter the earth.” Moketubbe’s face had not moved, his eyes had not moved. After a while Basket said, “Remove the shoes.”

The stripling removed the shoes. Moketubbe began to pant, his bare chest moving deep, as though he were rising from beyond his unfathomed flesh back into life, like up from the water, the sea. But his eyes had not opened yet.

Berry said, “He will lead the hunt.”

“Yao,” Basket said. “He is the Man. He will lead the hunt.”

IV

All that day the Negro, Issetibbeha’s body servant, hidden in the barn, watched Issetibbeha’s dying. He was forty, a Guinea man. He had a flat nose, a close, small head; the inside corners of his eyes showed red a little, and his prominent gums were a pale bluish red above his square, broad teeth. He had been taken at fourteen by a trader off Kamerun,

before his teeth had been filed. He had been Issetibbeha's body servant for twenty-three years.

On the day before, the day on which Issetibbeha lay sick, he returned to the quarters at dusk. In that unhurried hour the smoke of the cooking fires blew slowly across the street from door to door, carrying into the opposite one the smell of the identical meat and bread. The women tended them; the men were gathered at the head of the lane, watching him as he came down the slope from the house, putting his naked feet down carefully in a strange dusk. To the waiting men his eyeballs were a little luminous.

"Issetibbeha is not dead yet," the headman said.

"Not dead," the body servant said. "Who not dead?"

In the dusk they had faces like his, the different ages, the thoughts sealed inscrutable behind faces like the death masks of apes. The smell of the fires, the cooking, blew sharp and slow across the strange dusk, as from another world, above the lane and the pickaninnies naked in the dust.

"If he lives past sundown, he will live until daybreak," one said.

"Who says?"

"Talk says."

"Yao. Talk says. We know but one thing." They looked at the body servant as he stood among them, his eyeballs a little luminous. He was breathing slow and deep. His chest was bare; he was sweating a little.

"He knows. He knows it."

"Let us let the drums talk."

"Yao. Let the drums tell it."

The drums began after dark. They kept them hidden in the creek bottom. They were made of hollowed cypress knees, and the Negroes kept them hidden; why, none knew. They were buried in the mud on the bank of a slough; a lad of fourteen guarded them. He was

undersized, and a mute; he squatted in the mud there all day, clouded over with mosquitoes, naked save for the mud with which he coated himself against the mosquitoes, and about his neck a fiber bag containing a pig's rib to which black shreds of flesh still adhered, and two scaly barks on a wire.

He slobbered onto his clutched knees, drooling; now and then Indians came noiselessly out of the bushes behind him and stood there and contemplated him for a while and went away, and he never knew it.

From the loft of the stable where he lay hidden until dark and after, the Negro could hear the drums. They were three miles away, but he could hear them as though they were in the barn itself below him, thudding and thudding. It was as though he could see the fire too, and the black limbs turning into and out of the flames in copper gleams.

Only there would be no fire. There would be no more light there than where he lay in the dusty loft, with the whispering arpeggios of rat feet along the warm and immemorial ax-squared rafters.

The only fire there would be the smudge against mosquitoes where the women with nursing children crouched, their heavy sluggish breasts nipped full and smooth into the mouths of men children; contemplative, oblivious of the drumming, since a fire would signify life.

There was a fire in the steamboat, where Issetibbeha lay dying among his wives, beneath the lashed girandoles and the suspended bed. He could see the smoke, and just before sunset he saw the doctor come out, in a waistcoat made of skunk skins, and set fire to two clay-daubed sticks at the bows of the boat deck. "So he is not dead yet," the Negro said into the whispering gloom of the loft, answering himself; he could hear the two voices, himself and himself:

"Who not dead?"

"You are dead."

"Yao, I am dead," he said quietly. He wished to be where the drums were. He imagined himself springing out of the bushes, leaping among

the drums on his bare, lean, greasy, invisible limbs. But he could not do that, because man leaped past life, into where death was; he dashed into death and did not die, because when death took a man, it took him just this side of the end of living. It was when death overran him from behind, still in life.

The thin whisper of rat feet died in fainting gusts along the rafters. Once he had eaten rat. He was a boy then, but just come to America. They had lived ninety days in a three-foot-high 'tween-deck in tropic latitudes, hearing from topside the drunken New England captain intoning aloud from a book which he did not recognize for ten years afterward to be the Bible.

Squatting in the stable so, he had watched the rat, civilized, by association with man reft of its inherent cunning of limb and eye; he had caught it without difficulty, with scarce a movement of his hand, and he ate it slowly, wondering how any of the rats had escaped so long. At that time he was still wearing the single white garment which the trader, a deacon in the Unitarian church, had given him, and he spoke then only his native tongue.

He was naked now, save for a pair of dungaree pants bought by Indians from white men, and an amulet slung on a thong about his hips. The amulet consisted of one half of a mother-of-pearl lorgnon which Issetibbeha had brought back from Paris, and the skull of a cottonmouth moccasin. He had killed the snake himself and eaten it, save the poison head. He lay in the loft, watching the house, the steamboat, listening to the drums, thinking of himself among the drums.

He lay there all night. The next morning he saw the doctor come out, in his skunk vest, and get on his mule and ride away, and he became quite still and watched the final dust from beneath the mule's delicate feet die away, and then he found that he was still breathing and it seemed strange to him that he still breathed air, still needed air. Then he lay and watched quietly, waiting to move, his eyeballs a little luminous, but

with a quiet light, and his breathing light and regular, and saw Louis Berry come out and look at the sky.

It was good light then, and already five Indians squatted in their Sunday clothes along the steamboat deck; by noon there were twenty-five there. That afternoon they dug the trench in which the meat would be baked, and the yams; by that time there were almost a hundred guests — decorous, quiet, patient in their stiff European finery — and he watched Berry lead Issetibbeha's mare from the stable and tie her to a tree, and then he watched Berry emerge from the house with the old hound which lay beside Issetibbeha's chair.

He tied the hound to the tree too, and it sat there, looking gravely about at the faces. Then it began to howl. It was still howling at sundown, when the Negro climbed down the back wall of the barn and entered the spring branch, where it was already dusk. He began to run then.

He could hear the hound howling behind him, and near the spring, already running, he passed another Negro. The two men, the one motionless and the other running, looked for an instant at each other as though across an actual boundary between two different worlds. He ran on into full darkness, mouth closed, fists doubled, his broad nostrils bellowing steadily.

He ran on in the darkness. He knew the country well, because he had hunted it often with Issetibbeha, following on his mule the course of the fox or the cat beside Issetibbeha's mare; he knew it as well as did the men who would pursue him. He saw them for the first time shortly before sunset of the second day. He had run thirty miles then, up the creek bottom, before doubling back; lying in a pawpaw thicket he saw the pursuit for the first time.

There were two of them, in shirts and straw hats, carrying their neatly rolled trousers under their arms, and they had no weapons. They were middle-aged, paunchy, and they could not have moved very fast

anyway; it would be twelve hours before they could return to where he lay watching them.

“So I will have until midnight to rest,” he said. He was near enough to the plantation to smell the cooking fires, and he thought how he ought to be hungry, since he had not eaten in thirty hours.

“But it is more important to rest,” he told himself. He continued to tell himself that, lying in the pawpaw thicket, because the effort of resting, the need and the haste to rest, made his heart thud the same as the running had done. It was as though he had forgot how to rest, as though the six hours were not long enough to do it in, to remember again how to do it.

As soon as dark came he moved again. He had thought to keep going steadily and quietly through the night, since there was nowhere for him to go, but as soon as he moved he began to run at top speed, breasting his panting chest, his broad-flaring nostrils through the choked and whipping darkness.

He ran for an hour, lost by then, without direction, when suddenly he stopped, and after a time his thudding heart unraveled from the sound of the drums. By the sound they were not two miles away; he followed the sound until he could smell the smudge fire and taste the acrid smoke.

When he stood among them the drums did not cease; only the headman came to him where he stood in the drifting smudge, panting, his nostrils flaring and pulsing, the hushed glare of his ceaseless eyeballs in his mud-daubed face as though they were worked from lungs.

“We have expected thee,” the headman said. “Go, now.”
“Go?”

“Eat, and go. The dead may not consort with the living; thou knowest that.”

“Yao. I know that.” They did not look at one another. The drums had not ceased.

“Wilt thou eat?” the headman said.

“I am not hungry. I caught a rabbit this afternoon, and ate while I lay hidden.”

“Take some cooked meat with thee, then.”

He accepted the cooked meat, wrapped in leaves, and entered the creek bottom again; after a while the sound of the drums ceased. He walked steadily until daybreak. “I have twelve hours,” he said. “Maybe more, since the trail was followed by night.”

He squatted and ate the meat and wiped his hands on his thighs. Then he rose and removed the dungaree pants and squatted again beside a slough and coated himself with mud — face, arms, body and legs — and squatted again, clasping his knees, his head bowed.

When it was light enough to see, he moved back into the swamp and squatted again and went to sleep so. He did not dream at all. It was well that he moved, for, waking suddenly in broad daylight and the high sun, he saw the two Indians. They still carried their neatly rolled trousers; they stood opposite the place where he lay hidden, paunchy, thick, soft-looking, a little ludicrous in their straw hats and shirt tails.

“This is wearying work,” one said.

“I’d rather be at home in the shade myself,” the other said. “But there is the Man waiting at the door to the earth.”

“Yao.” They looked quietly about; stooping, one of them removed from his shirt tail a clot of cockleburs. “Damn that Negro,” he said.

“Yao. When have they ever been anything but a trial and a care to us?”

In the early afternoon, from the top of a tree, the Negro looked down into the plantation. He could see Issetibbeha’s body in a hammock between the two trees where the horse and the dog were tethered,

and the concourse about the steamboat was filled with wagons and horses and mules, with carts and saddle-horses, while in bright clumps the women and the smaller children and the old men squatted about the long trench where the smoke from the barbecuing meat blew slow and thick.

The men and the big boys would all be down there in the creek bottom behind him, on the trail, their Sunday clothes rolled carefully up and wedged into tree crotches. There was a clump of men near the door to the house, to the saloon of the steamboat, though, and he watched them, and after a while he saw them bring Mocketubbe out in a litter made of buckskin and persimmon poles; high hidden in his leafed nook the Negro, the quarry, looked quietly down upon his irrevocable doom with an expression as profound as Mocketubbe's own. "Yao," he said quietly. "He will go then. That man whose body has been dead for fifteen years, he will go also."

In the middle of the afternoon he came face to face with an Indian. They were both on a footlog across a slough — the Negro gaunt, lean, hard, tireless and desperate; the Indian thick, soft-looking, the apparent embodiment of the ultimate and the supreme reluctance and inertia. The Indian made no move, no sound; he stood on the log and watched the Negro plunge into the slough and swim ashore and crash away into the undergrowth.

Just before sunset he lay behind a down log. Up the log in slow procession moved a line of ants. He caught them and ate them slowly, with a kind of detachment, like that of a dinner guest eating salted nuts from a dish. They too had a salt taste, engendering a salivary reaction out of all proportion. He ate them slowly, watching the unbroken line move up the log and into oblivious doom with a steady and terrific undeviation. He had eaten nothing else all day; in his caked mud mask his eyes rolled in reddened rims.

At sunset, creeping along the creek bank toward where he had spotted a frog, a cottonmouth moccasin slashed him suddenly across the forearm with a thick, sluggish blow. It struck clumsily, leaving two long

slashes across his arm like two razor slashes, and half sprawled with its own momentum and rage, it appeared for the moment utterly helpless with its own awkwardness and choleric anger. "Olé, grandfather," the Negro said.

He touched its head and watched it slash him again across his arm, and again, with thick, raking, awkward blows. "It's that I do not wish to die," he said. Then he said it again— "It's that I do not wish to die" — in a quiet tone, of slow and low amaze, as though it were something that, until the words had said themselves, he found that he had not known, or had not known the depth and extent of his desire.

V

Moketubbe took the slippers with him. He could not wear them very long while in motion, not even in the litter where he was slung reclining, so they rested upon a square of fawnskin upon his lap — the cracked, frail slippers a little shapeless now, with their scaled patent-leather surfaces and buckleless tongues and scarlet heels, lying upon the supine obese shape just barely alive, carried through swamp and brier by swinging relays of men who bore steadily all day long the crime and its object, on the business of the slain.

To Moketubbe it must have been as though, himself immortal, he were being carried rapidly through hell by doomed spirits which, alive, had contemplated his disaster, and, dead, were oblivious partners to his damnation.

After resting for a while, the litter propped in the center of the squatting circle and Moketubbe motionless in it, with closed eyes and his face at once peaceful for the instant and filled with inescapable foreknowledge, he could wear the slippers for a while.

The stripling put them on him, forcing his big, tender, dropsical feet into them; whereupon into his face came again that expression tragic, passive and profoundly attentive, which dyspeptics wear. Then they went on. He made no move, no sound, inert in the rhythmic litter out of

some reserve of inertia, or maybe of some kingly virtue such as courage or fortitude.

After a time they set the litter down and looked at him, at the yellow face like that of an idol, beaded over with sweat. Then Three Basket or Had-Two-Fathers would say: "Take them off. Honor has been served." They would remove the shoes. Mocketubbe's face would not alter, but only then would his breathing become perceptible, going in and out of his pale lips with a faint ah-ah-ah sound, and they would squat again while the couriers and the runners came up.

"Not yet?"

"Not yet. He is going east. By sunset he will reach Mouth of Tippah. Then he will turn back. We may take him tomorrow."

"Let us hope so. It will not be too soon."

"Yao. It has been three days now."

"When Doom died, it took only three days."

"But that was an old man. This one is young."

"Yao. A good race. If he is taken tomorrow, I will win a horse."

"May you win it."

"Yao. This work is not pleasant."

That was the day on which the food gave out at the plantation. The guests returned home and came back the next day with more food, enough for a week longer. On that day Issetibbeha began to smell; they could smell him for a long way up and down the bottom when it got hot toward noon and the wind blew.

But they didn't capture the Negro on that day, nor on the next. It was about dusk on the sixth day when the couriers came up to the litter; they had found blood. "He has injured himself."

"Not bad, I hope," Basket said. "We cannot send with Issetibbeha one who will be of no service to him."

“Nor whom Issetibbeha himself will have to nurse and care for,” Berry said.

“We do not know,” the courier said. “He has hidden himself. He has crept back into the swamp. We have left pickets.”

They trotted with the litter now. The place where the Negro had crept into the swamp was an hour away. In the hurry and excitement they had forgotten that Mocketubbe still wore the slippers; when they reached the place Mocketubbe had fainted. They removed the slippers and brought him to.

With dark, they formed a circle about the swamp. They squatted, clouded over with gnats and mosquitoes; the evening star burned low and close down the west, and the constellations began to wheel overhead. “We will give him time,” they said. “Tomorrow is just another name for today.”

“Yao. Let him have time.” Then they ceased, and gazed as one into the darkness where the swamp lay. After a while the noise ceased, and soon the courier came out of the darkness.

“He tried to break out.”

“But you turned him back?”

“He turned back. We feared for a moment, the three of us. We could smell him creeping in the darkness, and we could smell something else, which we did not know. That was why we feared, until he told us. He said to slay him there, since it would be dark and he would not have to see the face when it came. But it was not that which we smelled; he told us what it was.

A snake had struck him. That was two days ago. The arm swelled, and it smelled bad.

But it was not that which we smelled then, because the swelling had gone down and his arm was no larger than that of a child. He showed us. We felt the arm, all of us did; it was no larger than that of a child. He

said to give him a hatchet so he could chop the arm off. But tomorrow is today also.”

“Yao. Tomorrow is today.”

“We feared for a while. Then he went back into the swamp.”

“That is good.”

“Yao. We feared. Shall I tell the Man?”

“I will see,” Basket said. He went away. The courier squatted, telling again about the Negro. Basket returned. “The Man says that it is good. Return to your post.”

The courier crept away. They squatted about the litter; now and then they slept. Sometime after midnight the Negro waked them. He began to shout and talk to himself, his voice coming sharp and sudden out of the darkness, then he fell silent. Dawn came; a white crane flapped slowly across the jonquil sky. Basket was awake. “Let us go now,” he said. “It is today.”

Two Indians entered the swamp, their movements noisy. Before they reached the Negro they stopped, because he began to sing. They could see him, naked and mud-caked, sitting on a log, singing. They squatted silently a short distance away, until he finished. He was chanting something in his own language, his face lifted to the rising sun. His voice was clear, full, with a quality wild and sad.

“Let him have time,” the Indians said, squatting, patient, waiting. He ceased and they approached. He looked back and up at them through the cracked mud mask. His eyes were bloodshot, his lips cracked upon his square short teeth. The mask of mud appeared to be loose on his face, as if he might have lost flesh since he put it there; he held his left arm close to his breast.

From the elbow down it was caked and shapeless with black mud. They could smell him, a rank smell. He watched them quietly until one touched him on the arm. “Come,” the Indian said. “You ran well. Do not be ashamed.”

As they neared the plantation in the tainted bright morning, the Negro's eyes began to roll a little, like those of a horse. The smoke from the cooking pit blew low along the earth and upon the squatting and waiting guests about the yard and upon the steamboat deck, in their bright, stiff, harsh finery; the women, the children, the old men. They had sent couriers along the bottom, and another on ahead, and Issetibbeha's body had already been removed to where the grave waited, along with the horse and the dog, though they could still smell him in death about the house where he had lived in life. The guests were beginning to move toward the grave when the bearers of Mocketubbe's litter mounted the slope.

The Negro was the tallest there, his high, close, mud-caked head looming above them all. He was breathing hard, as though the desperate effort of the six suspended and desperate days had catapulted upon him at once; although they walked slowly, his naked scarred chest rose and fell above the close-clutched left arm.

He looked this way and that continuously, as if he were not seeing, as though sight never quite caught up with the looking. His mouth was open a little upon his big white teeth; he began to pant. The already moving guests halted, pausing, looking back, some with pieces of meat in their hands, as the Negro looked about at their faces with his wild, restrained, unceasing eyes.

"Will you eat first?" Basket said. He had to say it twice.

"Yes," the Negro said. "That's it. I want to eat."

The throng had begun to press back toward the center; the word passed to the outermost: "He will eat first."

They reached the steamboat. "Sit down," Basket said. The Negro sat on the edge of the deck. He was still panting, his chest rising and falling, his head ceaseless with its white eyeballs, turning from side to side. It was as if the inability to see came from within, from hopelessness, not from

absence of vision. They brought food and watched quietly as he tried to eat it.

He put the food into his mouth and chewed it, but chewing, the half-masticated matter began to emerge from the corners of his mouth and to drool down his chin, onto his chest, and after a while he stopped chewing and sat there, naked, covered with dried mud, the plate on his knees, and his mouth filled with a mass of chewed food, open, his eyes wide and unceasing, panting and panting. They watched him, patient, implacable, waiting.

“Come,” Basket said at last.

“It’s water I want,” the Negro said. “I want water.”

The well was a little way down the slope toward the quarters. The slope lay dappled with the shadows of noon, of that peaceful hour when, Issetibbeha napping in his chair and waiting for the noon meal and the long afternoon to sleep in, the Negro, the body servant, would be free. He would sit in the kitchen door then, talking with the women who prepared the food.

Beyond the kitchen the lane between the quarters would be quiet, peaceful, with the women talking to one another across the lane and the smoke of the dinner fires blowing upon the pickaninnies like ebony toys in the dust.

“Come,” Basket said.

The Negro walked among them, taller than any. The guests were moving on toward where Issetibbeha and the horse and the dog waited. The Negro walked with his high ceaseless head, his panting chest. “Come,” Basket said. “You wanted water.”

“Yes,” the Negro said. “Yes.” He looked back at the house, then down to the quarters, where today no fire burned, no face showed in any door, no pickaninny in the dust, panting. “It struck me here, raking me across this arm; once, twice, three times. I said, ‘Olé, Grandfather.’”

“Come now,” Basket said. The Negro was still going through the motion of walking, his knee action high, his head high, as though he were on a treadmill. His eyeballs had a wild, restrained glare, like those of a horse. “You wanted water,” Basket said. “Here it is.”

There was a gourd in the well. They dipped it full and gave it to the Negro, and they watched him try to drink. His eyes had not ceased as he tilted the gourd slowly against his caked face. They could watch his throat working and the bright water cascading from either side of the gourd, down his chin and breast. Then the water stopped. “Come,” Basket said.

“Wait,” the Negro said. He dipped the gourd again and tilted it against his face, beneath his ceaseless eyes. Again they watched his throat working and the unswallowed water sheathing broken and myriad down his chin, channeling his caked chest.

They waited, patient, grave, decorous, implacable; clansman and guest and kin. Then the water ceased, though still the empty gourd tilted higher and higher, and still his black throat aped the vain motion of his frustrated swallowing. A piece of water-loosened mud carried away from his chest and broke at his muddy feet, and in the empty gourd they could hear his breath: ah-ah-ah.

“Come,” Basket said, taking the gourd from the Negro and hanging it back in the well.

The End

A Rose for Emily, William Faulkner

A Rose for Emily

I

WHEN MISS EMILY Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant — a combined gardener and cook — had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street.

But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps — an eyesore among eyesores.

And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor — he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron — remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity.

Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.

When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little

dissatisfaction. On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply.

They wrote her a formal letter, asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased giving china-painting lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse — a close, dank smell.

The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in the single sun-ray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father.

They rose when she entered — a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head.

Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.

She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the door and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt. Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain.

Her voice was dry and cold. "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yourselves."

"But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn't you get a notice from the sheriff, signed by him?"

"I received a paper, yes," Miss Emily said. "Perhaps he considers himself the sheriff . . . I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see. We must go by the—"

"See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But, Miss Emily—"

"See Colonel Sartoris." (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.) "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobe!" The Negro appeared.

"Show these gentlemen out."

II

So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell. That was two years after her father's death and a short time after her sweetheart — the one we believed would marry her — had deserted her. After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man — a young man then — going in and out with a market basket.

"Just as if a man — any man — could keep a kitchen properly," the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons.

A neighbor, a woman, complained to the mayor, Judge Stevens, eighty years old.

“But what will you have me do about it, madam?” he said.

“Why, send her word to stop it,” the woman said. “Isn’t there a law?”

“I’m sure that won’t be necessary,” Judge Stevens said. “It’s probably just a snake or a rat that nigger of hers killed in the yard. I’ll speak to him about it.”

The next day he received two more complaints, one from a man who came in diffident deprecation. “We really must do something about it, Judge. I’d be the last one in the world to bother Miss Emily, but we’ve got to do something.” That night the Board of Aldermen met — three graybeards and one younger man, a member of the rising generation.

“It’s simple enough,” he said. “Send her word to have her place cleaned up. Give her a certain time to do it in, and if she don’t . . .”

“Dammit, sir,” Judge Stevens said, “will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?”

So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily’s lawn and slunk about the house like burglars, sniffing along the base of the brickwork and at the cellar openings while one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his shoulder. They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all the outbuildings.

As they recrossed the lawn, a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol. They crept quietly across the lawn and into the shadow of the locusts that lined the street. After a week or two the smell went away.

That was when people had begun to feel really sorry for her. People in our town, remembering how old lady Wyatt, her great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last, believed that the Griersons held themselves a

little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such.

We had long thought of them as a tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door. So when she got to be thirty and was still single, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated; even with insanity in the family she wouldn't have turned down all of her chances if they had really materialized.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized. Now she too would know the old thrill and the old despair of a penny more or less.

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the house and offer condolence and aid, as is our custom. Miss Emily met them at the door, dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly.

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.

III

She was sick for a long time. When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows — sort of tragic and serene.

The town had just let the contracts for paving the sidewalks, and in the summer after her father's death they began the work. The construction company came with niggers and mules and machinery, and a foreman named Homer Barron, a Yankee — a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face. The little boys would follow in groups to hear him cuss the niggers, and the niggers singing in time to the rise and fall of picks. Pretty soon he knew everybody in town.

Whenever you heard a lot of laughing anywhere about the square, Homer Barron would be in the center of the group. Presently we began to see him and Miss Emily on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable.

At first we were glad that Miss Emily would have an interest, because the ladies all said, "Of course a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer." But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget *noblesse oblige* — without calling it *noblesse oblige*. They just said, "Poor Emily.

Her kinsfolk should come to her." She had some kin in Alabama; but years ago her father had fallen out with them over the estate of old lady Wyatt, the crazy woman, and there was no communication between the two families. They had not even been represented at the funeral.

And as soon as the old people said, "Poor Emily," the whispering began. "Do you suppose it's really so?" they said to one another. "Of course it is. What else could . . ." This behind their hands; rustling of craned silk and satin behind jalousies closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon as the thin, swift clop-clop-clop of the matched team passed: "Poor Emily."

She carried her head high enough — even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness. Like when she bought the

rat poison, the arsenic. That was over a year after they had begun to say "Poor Emily," and while the two female cousins were visiting her.

"I want some poison," she said to the druggist. She was over thirty then, still a slight woman, though thinner than usual, with cold, haughty black eyes in a face the flesh of which was strained across the temples and about the eye-sockets as you imagine a lighthouse-keeper's face ought to look. "I want some poison," she said.

"Yes, Miss Emily. What kind? For rats and such? I'd recom—" "I want the best you have. I don't care what kind."

The druggist named several. "They'll kill anything up to an elephant. But what you want is—"

"Arsenic," Miss Emily said. "Is that a good one?"

"Is . . . arsenic? Yes, ma'am. But what you want—"

"I want arsenic."

The druggist looked down at her. She looked back at him, erect, her face like a strained flag. "Why, of course," the druggist said. "If that's what you want. But the law requires you to tell what you are going to use it for."

Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up. The Negro delivery boy brought her the package; the druggist didn't come back. When she opened the package at home there was written on the box, under the skull and bones: "For rats."

IV

So the next day we all said, "She will kill herself"; and we said it would be the best thing. When she had first begun to be seen with Homer Barron, we had said, "She will marry him." Then we said, "She will persuade him yet," because Homer himself had remarked — he liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks' Club — that he was not a marrying man. Later we said, "Poor Emily"

behind the jalousies as they passed on Sunday afternoon in the glittering buggy, Miss Emily with her head high and Homer Barron with his hat cocked and a cigar in his teeth, reins and whip in a yellow glove.

Then some of the ladies began to say that it was a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people. The men did not want to interfere, but at last the ladies forced the Baptist minister — Miss Emily's people were Episcopal — to call upon her. He would never divulge what happened during that interview, but he refused to go back again. The next Sunday they again drove about the streets, and the following day the minister's wife wrote to Miss Emily's relations in Alabama.

So she had blood-kin under her roof again and we sat back to watch developments. At first nothing happened. Then we were sure that they were to be married. We learned that Miss Emily had been to the jeweler's and ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H. B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men's clothing, including a nightshirt, and we said, "They are married." We were really glad. We were glad because the two female cousins were even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been.

So we were not surprised when Homer Barron — the streets had been finished some time since — was gone. We were a little disappointed that there was not a public blowing-off, but we believed that he had gone on to prepare for Miss Emily's coming, or to give her a chance to get rid of the cousins. (By that time it was a cabal, and we were all Miss Emily's allies to help circumvent the cousins.) Sure enough, after another week they departed. And, as we had expected all along, within three days Homer Barron was back in town. A neighbor saw the Negro man admit him at the kitchen door at dusk one evening.

And that was the last we saw of Homer Barron. And of Miss Emily for some time. The Negro man went in and out with the market basket, but the front door remained closed. Now and then we would see her at a window for a moment, as the men did that night when they sprinkled

the lime, but for almost six months she did not appear on the streets. Then we knew that this was to be expected too; as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die.

When we next saw Miss Emily, she had grown fat and her hair was turning gray. During the next few years it grew grayer and grayer until it attained an even pepper-and-salt iron-gray, when it ceased turning. Up to the day of her death at seventy-four it was still that vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man.

From that time on her front door remained closed, save for a period of six or seven years, when she was about forty, during which she gave lessons in china-painting. She fitted up a studio in one of the downstairs rooms, where the daughters and granddaughters of Colonel Sartoris' contemporaries were sent to her with the same regularity and in the same spirit that they were sent to church on Sundays with a twenty-five-cent piece for the collection plate. Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted.

Then the newer generation became the backbone and the spirit of the town, and the painting pupils grew up and fell away and did not send their children to her with boxes of color and tedious brushes and pictures cut from the ladies' magazines. The front door closed upon the last one and remained closed for good. When the town got free postal delivery, Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them.

Daily, monthly, yearly we watched the Negro grow grayer and more stooped, going in and out with the market basket. Each December we sent her a tax notice, which would be returned by the post office a week later, unclaimed. Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows — she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house — like the carven torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. Thus she passed from

generation to generation — dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse.

And so she died. Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows, with only a doddering Negro man to wait on her. We did not even know she was sick; we had long since given up trying to get any information from the Negro. He talked to no one, probably not even to her, for his voice had grown harsh and rusty, as if from disuse.

She died in one of the downstairs rooms, in a heavy walnut bed with a curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight.

V

The Negro met the first of the ladies at the front door and let them in, with their hushed, sibilant voices and their quick, curious glances, and then he disappeared. He walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again.

The two female cousins came at once. They held the funeral on the second day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of bought flowers, with the crayon face of her father musing profoundly above the bier and the ladies sibilant and macabre; and the very old men — some in their brushed Confederate uniforms — on the porch and the lawn, talking of Miss Emily as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and courted her perhaps, confusing time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottle-neck of the most recent decade of years.

Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced. They waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before they opened it.

The violence of breaking down the door seemed to fill this room with pervading dust. A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured. Among them lay a collar and tie, as if they had just been removed, which, lifted, left upon the surface a pale crescent in the dust. Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mute shoes and the discarded socks.

The man himself lay in the bed.

For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust.

Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair.

The End

A Justice, William Faulkner

A Justice

I

UNTIL GRANDFATHER DIED, we would go out to the farm every Saturday afternoon. We would leave home right after dinner in the surrey, I in front with Roskus, and Grandfather and Caddy and Jason in the back.

Grandfather and Roskus would talk, with the horses going fast, because it was the best team in the county. They would carry the surrey fast along the levels and up some of the hills even. But this was in north Mississippi, and on some of the hills Roskus and I could smell Grandfather's cigar.

The farm was four miles away. There was a long, low house in the grove, not painted but kept whole and sound by a clever carpenter from the quarters named Sam Fathers, and behind it the barns and smokehouses, and further still, the quarters themselves, also kept whole and sound by Sam Fathers.

He did nothing else, and they said he was almost a hundred years old. He lived with the Negroes and they — the white people; the Negroes called him a blue-gum — called him a Negro. But he wasn't a Negro. That's what I'm going to tell about.

When we got there, Mr. Stokes, the manager, would send a Negro boy with Caddy and Jason to the creek to fish, because Caddy was a girl and Jason was too little, but I wouldn't go with them. I would go to Sam Fathers' shop, where he would be making breast-yokes or wagon wheels, and I would always bring him some tobacco.

Then he would stop working and he would fill his pipe — he made them himself, out of creek clay with a reed stem — and he would tell me about the old days. He talked like a nigger — that is, he said his words like niggers do, but he didn't say the same words — and his hair was nigger hair. But his skin wasn't quite the color of a light nigger and his nose and his mouth and chin were not nigger nose and mouth and chin.

And his shape was not like the shape of a nigger when he gets old. He was straight in the back, not tall, a little broad, and his face was still all

the time, like he might be somewhere else all the while he was working or when people, even white people, talked to him, or while he talked to me.

It was just the same all the time, like he might be away up on a roof by himself, driving nails. Sometimes he would quit work with something half-finished on the bench, and sit down and smoke. And he wouldn't jump up and go back to work when Mr. Stokes or even Grandfather came along.

So I would give him the tobacco and he would stop work and sit down and fill his pipe and talk to me.

"These niggers," he said. "They call me Uncle Blue-Gum. And the white folks, they call me Sam Fathers."

"Isn't that your name?" I said.

"No. Not in the old days. I remember. I remember how I never saw but one white man until I was a boy big as you are; a whisky trader that came every summer to the Plantation. It was the Man himself that named me. He didn't name me Sam Fathers, though."

"The Man?" I said.

"He owned the Plantation, the Negroes, my mammy too. He owned all the land that I knew of until I was grown. He was a Choctaw chief. He sold my mammy to your great-grandpappy. He said I didn't have to go unless I wanted to, because I was a warrior too then. He was the one who named me Had-Two-Fathers."

"Had-Two-Fathers?" I said. "That's not a name. That's not anything."

"It was my name once. Listen."

II

This is how Herman Basket told it when I was big enough to hear talk. He said that when Doom came back from New Orleans, he brought this woman with him. He brought six black people, though Herman Basket said they already had more black people in the Plantation than they

could find use for. Sometimes they would run the black men with dogs, like you would a fox or a cat or a coon. And then Doom brought six more when he came home from New Orleans.

He said he won them on the steamboat, and so he had to take them. He got off the steamboat with the six black people, Herman Basket said, and a big box in which something was alive, and the gold box of New Orleans salt about the size of a gold watch.

And Herman Basket told how Doom took a puppy out of the box in which something was alive, and how he made a bullet of bread and a pinch of the salt in the gold box, and put the bullet into the puppy and the puppy died.

That was the kind of a man that Doom was, Herman Basket said. He told how, when Doom got off the steamboat that night, he wore a coat with gold all over it, and he had three gold watches, but Herman Basket said that even after seven years, Doom's eyes had not changed. He said that Doom's eyes were just the same as before he went away, before his name was Doom, and he and Herman Basket and my pappy were sleeping on the same pallet and talking at night, as boys will.

Doom's name was Ikkemotubbe then, and he was not born to be the Man, because Doom's mother's brother was the Man, and the Man had a son of his own, as well as a brother. But even then, and Doom no bigger than you are, Herman Basket said that sometimes the Man would look at Doom and he would say: "O Sister's Son, your eye is a bad eye, like the eye of a bad horse."

So the Man was not sorry when Doom got to be a young man and said that he would go to New Orleans, Herman Basket said. The Man was getting old then. He used to like to play mumble-peg and to pitch horseshoes both, but now he just liked mumble-peg. So he was not sorry when Doom went away, though he didn't forget about Doom.

Herman Basket said that each summer when the whisky-trader came, the Man would ask him about Doom. "He calls himself David Callicoat

now,” the Man would say. “But his name is Ikkemotubbe. You haven’t heard maybe of a David Calliccoat getting drowned in the Big River, or killed in the white man’s fight at New Orleans?”

But Herman Basket said they didn’t hear from Doom at all until he had been gone seven years. Then one day Herman Basket and my pappy got a written stick from Doom to meet him at the Big River. Because the steamboat didn’t come up our river any more then. The steamboat was still in our river, but it didn’t go anywhere any more. Herman Basket told how one day during the high water, about three years after Doom went away, the steamboat came and crawled up on a sand-bar and died.

That was how Doom got his second name, the one before Doom. Herman Basket told how four times a year the steamboat would come up our river, and how the People would go to the river and camp and wait to see the steamboat pass, and he said that the white man who told the steamboat where to swim was named David Calliccoat.

So when Doom told Herman Basket and pappy that he was going to New Orleans, he said, “And I’ll tell you something else. From now on, my name is not Ikkemotubbe. It’s David Calliccoat. And some day I’m going to own a steamboat, too.” That was the kind of man that Doom was, Herman Basket said.

So after seven years he sent them the written stick and Herman Basket and pappy took the wagon and went to meet Doom at the Big River, and Doom got off the steamboat with the six black people. “I won them on the steamboat,” Doom said. “You and Craw-ford (my pappy’s name was Crawfishford, but usually it was Craw-ford) can divide them.”

“I don’t want them,” Herman Basket said that pappy said.

“Then Herman can have them all,” Doom said.

“I don’t want them either,” Herman Basket said.

“All right,” Doom said. Then Herman Basket said he asked Doom if his name was still David Calliccoat, but instead of answering, Doom told one

of the black people something in the white man's talk, and the black man lit a pine knot. Then Herman Basket said they were watching Doom take the puppy from the box and make the bullet of bread and the New Orleans salt which Doom had in the little gold box, when he said that pappy said:

"I believe you said that Herman and I were to divide these black people."

Then Herman Basket said he saw that one of the black people was a woman.

"You and Herman don't want them," Doom said.

"I wasn't thinking when I said that," pappy said. "I will take the lot with the woman in it. Herman can have the other three."

"I don't want them," Herman Basket said.

"You can have four, then," pappy said. "I will take the woman and one other."

"I don't want them," Herman Basket said.

"I will take only the woman," pappy said. "You can have the other five."

"I don't want them," Herman Basket said.

"You don't want them, either," Doom said to pappy. "You said so yourself."

Then Herman Basket said that the puppy was dead. "You didn't tell us your new name," he said to Doom.

"My name is Doom now," Doom said. "It was given me by a French chief in New Orleans. In French talking, Doo-um; in our talking, Doom."

"What does it mean?" Herman Basket said.

He said how Doom looked at him for a while. "It means the Man," Doom said.

Herman Basket told how they thought about that. He said they stood there in the dark, with the other puppies in the box, the ones that Doom hadn't used, whimpering and scuffing, and the light of the pine

knot shining on the eyeballs of the black people and on Doom's gold coat and on the puppy that had died.

"You cannot be the Man," Herman Basket said. "You are only on the sister's side. And the Man has a brother and a son."

"That's right," Doom said. "But if I were the Man, I would give Crawford those black people. I would give Herman something, too. For every black man I gave Crawford, I would give Herman a horse, if I were the Man."

"Craw-ford only wants this woman," Herman Basket said.

"I would give Herman six horses, anyway," Doom said. "But maybe the Man has already given Herman a horse."

"No," Herman Basket said. "My ghost is still walking."

It took them three days to reach the Plantation. They camped on the road at night. Herman Basket said that they did not talk.

They reached the Plantation on the third day. He said that the Man was not very glad to see Doom, even though Doom brought a present of candy for the Man's son. Doom had something for all his kinsfolk, even for the Man's brother. The Man's brother lived by himself in a cabin by the creek. His name was Sometimes-Wakeup. Sometimes the People took him food. The rest of the time they didn't see him.

Herman Basket told how he and pappy went with Doom to visit Sometimes-Wakeup in his cabin. It was at night, and Doom told Herman Basket to close the door. Then Doom took the puppy from pappy and set it on the floor and made a bullet of bread and the New Orleans salt for Sometimes-Wakeup to see how it worked. When they left, Herman Basket said how Sometimes-Wakeup burned a stick and covered his head with the blanket.

That was the first night that Doom was at home. On the next day Herman Basket told how the Man began to act strange at his food, and died before the doctor could get there and burn sticks. When the

Willow-Bearer went to fetch the Man's son to be the Man, they found that he had acted strange and then died too.

"Now Sometimes-Wakeup will have to be the Man," pappy said. So the Willow-Bearer went to fetch Sometimes-Wakeup to come and be the Man. The Willow-Bearer came back soon. "Sometimes-Wakeup does not want to be the Man," the Willow-Bearer said. "He is sitting in his cabin with his head in his blanket."

"Then Ikkemotubbe will have to be the Man," pappy said. So Doom was the Man. But Herman Basket said that pappy's ghost would not be easy. Herman Basket said he told pappy to give Doom a little time. "I am still walking," Herman Basket said. "But this is a serious matter with me," pappy said.

He said that at last pappy went to Doom, before the Man and his son had entered the earth, before the eating and the horse-racing were over. "What woman?" Doom said.

"You said that when you were the Man," pappy said. Herman Basket said that Doom looked at pappy but that pappy was not looking at Doom.

"I think you don't trust me," Doom said. Herman Basket said how pappy did not look at Doom. "I think you still believe that that puppy was sick," Doom said. "Think about it." Herman Basket said that pappy thought.

"What do you think now?" Doom said. But Herman Basket said that pappy still did not look at Doom. "I think it was a well dog," pappy said.

III

At last the eating and the horse-racing were over and the Man and his son had entered the earth. Then Doom said, "Tomorrow we will go and fetch the steamboat." Herman Basket told how Doom had been talking about the steamboat ever since he became the Man, and about how

the House was not big enough. So that evening Doom said, "Tomorrow we will go and fetch the steamboat that died in the river."

Herman Basket said how the steamboat was twelve miles away, and that it could not even swim in the water. So the next morning there was no one in the Plantation except Doom and the black people. He told how it took Doom all that day to find the People. Doom used the dogs, and he found some of the People in hollow logs in the creek bottom. That night he made all the men sleep in the House. He kept the dogs in the House, too.

Herman Basket told how he heard Doom and pappy talking in the dark.

"I don't think you trust me," Doom said.

"I trust you," pappy said.

"That is what I would advise," Doom said.

"I wish you could advise that to my ghost," pappy said.

The next morning they went to the steamboat. The women and the black people walked. The men rode in the wagons, with Doom following behind with the dogs.

The steamboat was lying on its side on the sand-bar. When they came to it, there were three white men on it. "Now we can go back home," pappy said.

But Doom talked to the white men. "Does this steamboat belong to you?" Doom said.

"It does not belong to you," the white men said. And though they had guns, Herman Basket said they did not look like men who would own a boat.

"Shall we kill them?" he said to Doom. But he said that Doom was still talking to the men on the steamboat.

"What will you take for it?" Doom said.

"What will you give for it?" the white men said.

"It is dead," Doom said. "It's not worth much."

"Will you give ten black people?" the white men said.

“All right,” Doom said. “Let the black people who came with me from the Big River come forward.” They came forward, the five men and the woman. “Let four more black people come forward.” Four more came forward. “You are now to eat of the corn of those white men yonder,” Doom said. “May it nourish you.” The white men went away, the ten black people following them. “Now,” Doom said, “let us make the steamboat get up and walk.”

Herman Basket said that he and pappy did not go into the river with the others, because pappy said to go aside and talk. They went aside. Pappy talked, but Herman Basket said that he said he did not think it was right to kill white men, but pappy said how they could fill the white men with rocks and sink them in the river and nobody would find them.

So Herman Basket said they overtook the three white men and the ten black people, then they turned back toward the boat. Just before they came to the steamboat, pappy said to the black men: “Go on to the Man. Go and help make the steamboat get up and walk. I will take this woman on home.”

“This woman is my wife,” one of the black men said. “I want her to stay with me.”

“Do you want to be arranged in the river with rocks in your inside too?” pappy said to the black man.

“Do you want to be arranged in the river yourself?” the black man said to pappy. “There are two of you, and nine of us.”

Herman Basket said that pappy thought. Then pappy said, “Let us go to the steamboat and help the Man.”

They went to the steamboat. But Herman Basket said that Doom did not notice the ten black people until it was time to return to the Plantation. Herman Basket told how Doom looked at the black people, then looked at pappy. “It seems that the white men did not want these black people,” Doom said.

“So it seems,” pappy said.

“The white men went away, did they?” Doom said.

“So it seems,” pappy said.

Herman Basket told how every night Doom would make all the men sleep in the House, with the dogs in the House too, and how each morning they would return to the steamboat in the wagons. The wagons would not hold everybody, so after the second day the women stayed at home.

But it was three days before Doom noticed that pappy was staying at home too. Herman Basket said that the woman’s husband may have told Doom. “Craw-ford hurt his back lifting the steamboat,” Herman Basket said he told Doom. “He said he would stay at the Plantation and sit with his feet in the Hot Spring so that the sickness in his back could return to the earth.”

“That is a good idea,” Doom said. “He has been doing this for three days, has he? Then the sickness should be down in his legs by now.” When they returned to the Plantation that night, Doom sent for pappy. He asked pappy if the sickness had moved. Pappy said how the sickness moved very slow. “You must sit in the Spring more,” Doom said.

“That is what I think,” pappy said.

“Suppose you sit in the Spring at night too,” Doom said.

“The night air will make it worse,” pappy said.

“Not with a fire there,” Doom said. “I will send one of the black people with you to keep the fire burning.”

“Which one of the black people?” pappy said.

“The husband of the woman which I won on the steamboat,” Doom said.

“I think my back is better,” pappy said.

“Let us try it,” Doom said.

“I know my back is better,” pappy said.

“Let us try it, anyway,” Doom said. Just before dark Doom sent four of the People to fix pappy and the black man at the Spring. Herman Basket

said the People returned quickly. He said that as they entered the House, pappy entered also.

“The sickness began to move suddenly,” pappy said. “It has reached my feet since noon today.”

“Do you think it will be gone by morning?” Doom said.

“I think so,” pappy said.

“Perhaps you had better sit in the Spring tonight and make sure,” Doom said.

“I know it will be gone by morning,” pappy said.

IV

When it got to be summer, Herman Basket said that the steamboat was out of the river bottom. It had taken them five months to get it out of the bottom, because they had to cut down the trees to make a path for it. But now he said the steamboat could walk faster on the logs.

He told how pappy helped. Pappy had a certain place on one of the ropes near the steamboat that nobody was allowed to take, Herman Basket said. It was just under the front porch of the steamboat where Doom sat in his chair, with a boy with a branch to shade him and another boy with a branch to drive away the flying beasts. The dogs rode on the boat too.

In the summer, while the steamboat was still walking, Herman Basket told how the husband of the woman came to Doom again. “I have done what I could for you,” Doom said. “Why don’t you go to Crawford and adjust this matter yourself?”

The black man said that he had done that. He said that pappy said to adjust it by a cock-fight, pappy’s cock against the black man’s, the winner to have the woman, the one who refused to fight to lose by default. The black man said he told pappy he did not have a cock, and that pappy said that in that case the black man lost by default and that

the woman belonged to pappy. "And what am I to do?" the black man said.

Doom thought. Then Herman Basket said that Doom called to him and asked him which was pappy's best cock and Herman Basket told Doom that pappy had only one. "That black one?" Doom said.

Herman Basket said he told Doom that was the one. "Ah," Doom said. Herman Basket told how Doom sat in his chair on the porch of the steamboat while it walked, looking down at the People and the black men pulling the ropes, making the steamboat walk. "Go and tell Crawford you have a cock," Doom said to the black man. "Just tell him you will have a cock in the pit. Let it be tomorrow morning.

We will let the steamboat sit down and rest." The black man went away. Then Herman Basket said that Doom was looking at him, and that he did not look at Doom. Because he said there was but one better cock in the Plantation than pappy's, and that one belonged to Doom. "I think that that puppy was not sick," Doom said. "What do you think?"

Herman Basket said that he did not look at Doom. "That is what I think," he said.

"That is what I would advise," Doom said.

Herman Basket told how the next day the steamboat sat and rested. The pit was in the stable. The People and the black people were there. Pappy had his cock in the pit. Then the black man put his cock into the pit. Herman Basket said that pappy looked at the black man's cock.

"This cock belongs to Ikkemotubbe," pappy said.

"It is his," the People told pappy. "Ikkemotubbe gave it to him with all to witness."

Herman Basket said that pappy had already picked up his cock. "This is not right," pappy said. "We ought not to let him risk his wife on a cock-fight."

"Then you withdraw?" the black man said.

“Let me think,” pappy said. He thought. The People watched. The black man reminded pappy of what he had said about defaulting. Pappy said he did not mean to say that and that he withdrew it. The People told him that he could only withdraw by forfeiting the match. Herman Basket said that pappy thought again. The People watched. “All right,” pappy said. “But I am being taken advantage of.”

The cocks fought. Pappy’s cock fell. Pappy took it up quickly. Herman Basket said it was like pappy had been waiting for his cock to fall so he could pick it quickly up. “Wait,” he said. He looked at the People. “Now they have fought. Isn’t that true?” The People said that it was true. “So that settles what I said about forfeiting.”

Herman Basket said that pappy began to get out of the pit.

“Aren’t you going to fight?” the black man said.

“I don’t think this will settle anything,” pappy said. “Do you?”

Herman Basket told how the black man looked at pappy. Then he quit looking at pappy. He was squatting. Herman Basket said the People looked at the black man looking at the earth between his feet. They watched him take up a clod of dirt, and then they watched the dust come out between the black man’s fingers.

“Do you think that this will settle anything?” pappy said.

“No,” the black man said. Herman Basket said that the People could not hear him very good. But he said that pappy could hear him.

“Neither do I,” pappy said. “It would not be right to risk your wife on a cock-fight.”

Herman Basket told how the black man looked up, with the dry dust about the fingers of his hand. He said the black man’s eyes looked red in the dark pit, like the eyes of a fox. “Will you let the cocks fight again?” the black man said.

“Do you agree that it doesn’t settle anything?” pappy said.

“Yes,” the black man said.

Pappy put his cock back into the ring. Herman Basket said that pappy’s cock was dead before it had time to act strange, even. The black man’s cock stood upon it and started to crow, but the black man struck the live cock away and he jumped up and down on the dead cock until it did not look like a cock at all, Herman Basket said.

Then it was fall, and Herman Basket told how the steamboat came to the Plantation and stopped beside the House and died again. He said that for two months they had been in sight of the Plantation, making the steamboat walk on the logs, but now the steamboat was beside the House and the House was big enough to please Doom. He gave an eating.

It lasted a week. When it was over, Herman Basket told how the black man came to Doom a third time. Herman Basket said that the black man’s eyes were red again, like those of a fox, and that they could hear his breathing in the room. “Come to my cabin,” he said to Doom. “I have something to show you.”

“I thought it was about that time,” Doom said. He looked about the room, but Herman Basket told Doom that pappy had just stepped out. “Tell him to come also,” Doom said. When they came to the black man’s cabin, Doom sent two of the People to fetch pappy. Then they entered the cabin. What the black man wanted to show Doom was a new man.

“Look,” the black man said. “You are the Man. You are to see justice done.”

“What is wrong with this man?” Doom said.

“Look at the color of him,” the black man said. He began to look around the cabin. Herman Basket said that his eyes went red and then brown and then red, like those of a fox. He said they could hear the black man’s breathing. “Do I get justice?” the black man said. “You are the Man.”

“You should be proud of a fine yellow man like this,” Doom said. He looked at the new man. “I don’t see that justice can darken him any,” Doom said. He looked about the cabin also. “Come forward, Crawford,” he said. “This is a man, not a copper snake; he will not harm you.” But Herman Basket said that pappy would not come forward. He said the black man’s eyes went red and then brown and then red when he breathed.

“Yao,” Doom said, “this is not right. Any man is entitled to have his melon patch protected from these wild bucks of the woods. But first let us name this man.” Doom thought. Herman Basket said the black man’s eyes went quieter now, and his breath went quieter too. “We will call him Had-Two-Fathers,” Doom said.

V

Sam Fathers lit his pipe again. He did it deliberately, rising and lifting between thumb and forefinger from his forge a coal of fire. Then he came back and sat down. It was getting late. Caddy and Jason had come back from the creek, and I could see Grandfather and Mr. Stokes talking beside the carriage, and at that moment, as though he had felt my gaze, Grandfather turned and called my name.

“What did your pappy do then?” I said.

“He and Herman Basket built the fence,” Sam Fathers said. “Herman Basket told how Doom made them set two posts into the ground, with a sapling across the top of them. The nigger and pappy were there.

Doom had not told them about the fence then. Herman Basket said it was just like when he and pappy and Doom were boys, sleeping on the same pallet, and Doom would wake them at night and make them get up and go hunting with him, or when he would make them stand up with him and fight with their fists, just for fun, until Herman Basket and pappy would hide from Doom.

“They fixed the sapling across the two posts and Doom said to the nigger: ‘This is a fence. Can you climb it?’

“Herman Basket said the nigger put his hand on the sapling and sailed over it like a bird.

“Then Doom said to pappy: ‘Climb this fence.’

“‘This fence is too high to climb,’ pappy said.

“‘Climb this fence, and I will give you the woman,’ Doom said.

“Herman Basket said pappy looked at the fence a while. ‘Let me go under this fence,’ he said.

“‘No,’ Doom said.

“Herman Basket told me how pappy began to sit down on the ground.

‘It’s not that I don’t trust you,’ pappy said.

“‘We will build the fence this high,’ Doom said.

“‘What fence?’ Herman Basket said.

“‘The fence around the cabin of this black man,’ Doom said.

“‘I can’t build a fence I couldn’t climb,’ pappy said.

“‘Herman will help you,’ Doom said.

“Herman Basket said it was just like when Doom used to wake them and make them go hunting. He said the dogs found him and pappy about noon the next day, and that they began the fence that afternoon. He told me how they had to cut the saplings in the creek bottom and drag them in by hand, because Doom would not let them use the wagon.

So sometimes one post would take them three or four days. ‘Never mind,’ Doom said. ‘You have plenty of time. And the exercise will make Craw-ford sleep at night.’

“He told me how they worked on the fence all that winter and all the next summer, until after the whisky trader had come and gone. Then it was finished. He said that on the day they set the last post, the nigger came out of the cabin and put his hand on the top of a post (it was a

palisade fence, the posts set upright in the ground) and flew out like a bird.

‘This is a good fence,’ the nigger said. ‘Wait,’ he said. ‘I have something to show you.’ Herman Basket said he flew back over the fence again and went into the cabin and came back. Herman Basket said that he was carrying a new man and that he held the new man up so they could see it above the fence. ‘What do you think about this for color?’ he said.”

Grandfather called me again. This time I got up. The sun was already down beyond the peach orchard. I was just twelve then, and to me the story did not seem to have got anywhere, to have had point or end.

Yet I obeyed Grandfather’s voice, not that I was tired of Sam Fathers’ talking, but with that immediacy of children with which they flee temporarily something which they do not quite understand; that, and the instinctive promptness with which we all obeyed Grandfather, not from concern of impatience or reprimand, but because we all believed that he did fine things, that his waking life passed from one fine (if faintly grandiose) picture to another.

They were in the surrey, waiting for me. I got in; the horses moved at once, impatient too for the stable. Caddy had one fish, about the size of a chip, and she was wet to the waist. We drove on, the team already trotting. When we passed Mr. Stokes’ kitchen we could smell ham cooking.

The smell followed us on to the gate. When we turned onto the road home it was almost sundown. Then we couldn’t smell the cooking ham any more. “What were you and Sam talking about?” Grandfather said.

We went on, in that strange, faintly sinister suspension of twilight in which I believed that I could still see Sam Fathers back there, sitting on his wooden block, definite, immobile, and complete, like something looked upon after a long time in a preservative bath in a museum. That was it. I was just twelve then, and I would have to wait until I had

passed on and through and beyond the suspension of twilight. Then I knew that I would know. But then Sam Fathers would be dead.

“Nothing, sir,” I said. “We were just talking.”

The End

Hair, William Faulkner

Hair

I

THIS GIRL, THIS Susan Reed, was an orphan. She lived with a family named Burchett, that had some more children, two or three more. Some said that Susan was a niece or a cousin or something; others cast the usual aspersions on the character of Burchett and even of Mrs Burchett: you know. Women mostly, these were.

She was about five when Hawkshaw first came to town. It was his first summer behind that chair in Maxey’s barber shop that Mrs Burchett brought Susan in for the first time. Maxey told me about how him and the other barbers watched Mrs Burchett trying for three days to get Susan (she was a thin little girl then, with big scared eyes and this straight, soft hair not blonde and not brunette) into the shop.

And Maxey told how at last it was Hawkshaw that went out into the street and worked with the girl for about fifteen minutes until he got her into the shop and into his chair — him that hadn’t never said more than Yes or No to any man or woman in the town that anybody ever saw. “Be durn if it didn’t look like Hawkshaw had been waiting for her to come along,” Maxey told me.

That was her first haircut. Hawkshaw gave it to her, and her sitting there under the cloth like a little scared rabbit. But six months after that she was coming to the shop by herself and letting Hawkshaw cut her hair, still looking like a little old rabbit, with her scared face and those big eyes and that hair without any special name showing above the cloth. If Hawkshaw was busy, Maxey said she would come in and sit on the waiting bench close to his chair with her legs sticking straight out in front of her until Hawkshaw got done.

Maxey says they considered her Hawkshaw's client the same as if she had been a Saturday night shaving customer. He says that one time the other barber, Matt Fox, offered to wait on her, Hawkshaw being busy, and that Hawkshaw looked up like a flash. "I'll be done in a minute," he says. "I'll tend to her." Maxey told me that Hawkshaw had been working for him for almost a year then, but that was the first time he ever heard him speak positive about anything.

That fall the girl started to school. She would pass the barber shop each morning and afternoon. She was still shy, walking fast like little girls do, with that yellow-brown head of hers passing the window level and fast like she was on skates. She was always by herself at first, but pretty soon her head would be one of a clump of other heads, all talking, not looking toward the window at all, and Hawkshaw standing there in the window, looking out.

Maxey said him and Matt would not have to look at the clock at all to tell when five minutes to eight and to three o'clock came, because they could tell by Hawkshaw. It was like he would kind of drift up to the window without watching himself do it, and be looking out about the time for the school children to begin to pass. When she would come to the shop for a haircut, Hawkshaw would give her two or three of those peppermints where he would give the other children just one, Maxey told me.

No; it was Matt Fox, the other barber, told me that. He was the one who told me about the doll Hawkshaw gave her on Christmas. I don't know how he found it out. Hawkshaw never told him. But he knew

some way; he knew more about Hawkshaw than Maxey did. He was a married man himself, Matt was.

A kind of fat, flabby fellow, with a pasty face and eyes that looked tired or sad — something. A funny fellow, and almost as good a barber as Hawkshaw. He never talked much either, and I don't know how he could have known so much about Hawkshaw when a talking man couldn't get much out of him. I guess maybe a talking man hasn't got the time to ever learn much about anything except words.

Anyway, Matt told me about how Hawkshaw gave her a present every Christmas, even after she got to be a big girl. She still came to him, to his chair, and him watching her every morning and afternoon when she passed to and from school. A big girl, and she wasn't shy any more.

You wouldn't have thought she was the same girl. She got grown fast. Too fast. That was the trouble. Some said it was being an orphan and all. But it wasn't that. Girls are different from boys. Girls are born weaned and boys don't ever get weaned. You see one sixty years old, and be damned if he won't go back to the perambulator at the bat of an eye.

It's not that she was bad. There's not any such thing as a woman born bad, because they are all born bad, born with the badness in them. The thing is, to get them married before the badness comes to a natural head.

But we try to make them conform to a system that says a woman can't be married until she reaches a certain age. And nature don't pay any attention to systems, let alone women paying any attention to them, or to anything. She just grew up too fast. She reached the point where the badness came to a head before the system said it was time for her to. I think they can't help it. I have a daughter of my own, and I say that.

So there she was. Matt told me they figured up and she couldn't have been more than thirteen when Mrs Burchett whipped her one day for using rouge and paint, and during that year, he said, they would see her

with two or three other girls giggling and laughing on the street at all hours when they should have been in school; still thin, with that hair still not blonde and not brunette, with her face caked with paint until you would have thought it would crack like dried mud when she laughed, with the regular simple gingham and such dresses that a thirteen-year-old child ought to wear pulled and dragged to show off what she never had yet to show off, like the older girls did with their silk and crepe and such.

Matt said he watched her pass one day, when all of a sudden he realized she never had any stockings on. He said he thought about it and he said he could not remember that she ever did wear stockings in the summer, until he realized that what he had noticed was not the lack of stockings, but that her legs were like a woman's legs: female. And her only thirteen.

I say she couldn't help herself. It wasn't her fault. And it wasn't Burchett's fault, either. Why, nobody can be as gentle with them, the bad ones, the ones that are unlucky enough to come to a head too soon, as men. Look at the way they — all the men in town — treated Hawkshaw.

Even after folks knew, after all the talk began, there wasn't a man of them talked before Hawkshaw. I reckon they thought he knew too, had heard some of the talk, but whenever they talked about her in the shop, it was while Hawkshaw was not there. And I reckon the other men were the same, because there was not a one of them that hadn't seen Hawkshaw at the window, looking at her when she passed, or looking at her on the street; happening to kind of be passing the picture show when it let out and she would come out with some fellow, having begun to go with them before she was fourteen. Folks said how she would have to slip out and meet them and slip back into the house again with Mrs Burchett thinking she was at the home of a girl friend.

They never talked about her before Hawkshaw. They would wait until he was gone, to dinner, or on one of those two-weeks' vacations of his in April that never anybody could find out about; where he went or

anything. But he would be gone, and they would watch the girl slipping around, skirting trouble, bound to get into it sooner or later, even if Burchett didn't hear something first. She had quit school a year ago. For a year Burchett and Mrs Burchett thought that she was going to school every day, when she hadn't been inside the building even.

Somebody — one of the high-school boys maybe, but she never drew any lines: schoolboys, married men, anybody — would get her a report card every month and she would fill it out herself and take it home for Mrs Burchett to sign. It beats the devil how the folks that love a woman will let her fool them.

So she quit school and went to work in the ten-cent store. She would come to the shop for a haircut, all painted up, in some kind of little flimsy off-color clothes that showed her off, with her face watchful and bold and discreet all at once, and her hair gummed and twisted about her face.

But even the stuff she put on it couldn't change that brown-yellow color. Her hair hadn't changed at all. She wouldn't always go to Hawkshaw's chair. Even when his chair was empty, she would sometimes take one of the others, talking to the barbers, filling the whole shop with noise and perfume and her legs sticking out from under the cloth. Hawkshaw wouldn't look at her then. Even when he wasn't busy, he had a way of looking the same: intent and down-looking like he was making out to be busy, hiding behind the making-out.

That was how it was when he left two weeks ago on that April vacation of his, that secret trip that folks had given up trying to find where he went ten years ago. I made Jefferson a couple of days after he left, and I was in the shop. They were talking about him and her.

"Is he still giving her Christmas presents?" I said.

"He bought her a wrist watch two years ago," Matt Fox said. "Paid sixty dollars for it."

Maxey was shaving a customer. He stopped, the razor in his hand, the blade loaded with lather. "Well, I'll be durned," he said. "Then he must — You reckon he was the first one, the one that—"

Matt hadn't looked around. "He aint give it to her yet," he said.

"Well, durn his tight-fisted time," Maxey said. "Any old man that will fool with a young girl, he's pretty bad. But a fellow that will trick one and then not even pay her nothing—"

Matt looked around now; he was shaving a customer too. "What would you say if you heard that the reason he aint give it to her is that he thinks she is too young to receive jewelry from anybody that aint kin to her?"

"You mean, he dont know? He dont know what everybody else in this town except maybe Mr and Mrs Burchett has knowed for three years?" Matt went back to work again, his elbow moving steady, the razor moving in little jerks. "How would he know? Aint anybody but a woman going to tell him. And he dont know any women except Mrs Cowan. And I reckon she thinks he's done heard."

"That's a fact," Maxey says.

That was how things were when he went off on his vacation two weeks ago. I worked Jefferson in a day and a half, and went on. In the middle of the next week I reached Division. I didn't hurry. I wanted to give him time. It was on a Wednesday morning I got there.

II

If there had been love once, a man would have said that Hawkshaw had forgotten her. Meaning love, of course. When I first saw him thirteen years ago (I had just gone on the road then, making North Mississippi and Alabama with a line of work shirts and overalls) behind a chair in the barber shop in Porterfield, I said, "Here is a bachelor born. Here is a man who was born single and forty years old."

A little, sandy-complected man with a face you would not remember and would not recognize again ten minutes later, in a blue serge suit

and a black bow tie, the kind that snaps together in the back, that you buy already tied in the store. Maxey told me he was still wearing that serge suit and tie when he got off the south-bound train in Jefferson a year later, carrying one of these imitation leather suitcases.

And when I saw him again in Jefferson in the next year, behind a chair in Maxey's shop, if it had not been for the chair I wouldn't have recognized him at all. Same face, same tie; be damned if it wasn't like they had picked him up, chair, customer and all, and set him down sixty miles away without him missing a lick.

I had to look back out the window at the square to be sure I wasn't in Porterfield myself any time a year ago. And that was the first time I realized that when I had made Porterfield about six weeks back, he had not been there.

It was three years after that before I found out about him. I would make Division about five times a year — a store and four or five houses and a sawmill on the State line between Mississippi and Alabama. I had noticed a house there. It was a good house, one of the best there, and it was always closed. When I would make Division in the late spring or the early summer there would always be signs of work around the house. The yard would be cleaned up of weeds, and the flower beds tended to and the fences and roof fixed.

Then when I would get back to Division along in the fall or the winter, the yard would be grown up in weeds again, and maybe some of the pickets gone off the fence where folks had pulled them off to mend their own fences or maybe for firewood; I don't know. And the house would be always closed; never any smoke at the kitchen chimney. So one day I asked the storekeeper about it and he told me.

It had belonged to a man named Starnes, but the family was all dead. They were considered the best folks, because they owned some land, mortgaged. Starnes was one of these lazy men that was satisfied to be a landowner as long as he had enough to eat and a little tobacco.

They had one daughter that went and got herself engaged to a young fellow, son of a tenant farmer. The mother didn't like the idea, but Starnes didn't seem to object. Maybe because the young fellow (his name was Stribling) was a hard worker; maybe because Starnes was just too lazy to object. Anyway, they were engaged and Stribling saved his money and went to Birmingham to learn barbering. Rode part of the way in wagons and walked the rest, coming back each summer to see the girl.

Then one day Starnes died, sitting in his chair on the porch; they said that he was too lazy to keep on breathing, and they sent for Stribling. I heard he had built up a good trade of his own in the Birmingham shop, saving his money; they told me he had done picked out the apartment and paid down on the furniture and all, and that they were to be married that summer. He came back. All Starnes had ever raised was a mortgage, so Stribling paid for the burial. It cost a right smart, more than Starnes was worth, but Mrs Starnes had to be suited. So Stribling had to start saving again.

But he had already leased the apartment and paid down on the furniture and the ring and he had bought the wedding license when they sent for him again in a hurry. It was the girl this time. She had some kind of fever. These backwoods folks: you know how it is. No doctors, or veterinaries, if they are. Cut them and shoot them: that's all right.

But let them get a bad cold and maybe they'll get well or maybe they'll die two days later of cholera. She was delirious when Stribling got there. They had to cut all her hair off. Stribling did that, being an expert you might say; a professional in the family. They told me she was one of these thin, unhealthy girls anyway, with a lot of straight hair not brown and not yellow.

She never knew him, never knew who cut off her hair. She died so, without knowing anything about it, without knowing even that she died, maybe. She just kept on saying, "Take care of maw.

The mortgage. Paw wont like it to be left so. Send for Henry (That was him: Henry Stribling; Hawkshaw: I saw him the next year in Jefferson. "So you're Henry Stribling," I said). The mortgage. Take care of maw. Send for Henry. The mortgage. Send for Henry." Then she died. There was a picture of her, the only one they had. Hawkshaw sent it, with a lock of the hair he had cut off, to an address in a farm magazine, to have the hair made into a frame for the picture. But they both got lost, the hair and the picture, in the mail somehow. Anyway he never got either of them back.

He buried the girl too, and the next year (he had to go back to Birmingham and get shut of the apartment which he had engaged and let the furniture go so he could save again) he put a headstone over her grave. Then he went away again and they heard how he had quit the Birmingham shop. He just quit and disappeared, and they all saying how in time he would have owned the shop. But he quit, and next April, just before the anniversary of the girl's death, he showed up again. He came to see Mrs Starnes and went away again in two weeks.

After he was gone they found out how he had stopped at the bank at the county seat and paid the interest on the mortgage. He did that every year until Mrs Starnes died. She happened to die while he was there. He would spend about two weeks cleaning up the place and fixing it so she would be comfortable for another year, and she letting him, being as she was better born than him; being as he was one of these parveynoos. Then she died too. "You know what Sophie said to do," she says. "That mortgage. Mr Starnes will be worried when I see him."

So he buried her too. He bought another headstone, to suit her. Then he begun to pay the principal on the mortgage. Starnes had some kin in Alabama. The folks in Division expected the kin to come and claim the place. But maybe the kin were waiting until Hawkshaw had got the mortgage cleared.

He made the payment each year, coming back and cleaning up the place. They said he would clean up that house inside like a woman,

washing and scrubbing it. It would take him two weeks each April. Then he would go away again, nobody knew where, returning each April to make the payment at the bank and clean up that empty house that never belonged to him.

He had been doing that for about five years when I saw him in Maxey's shop in Jefferson, the year after I saw him in a shop in Porterfield, in that serge suit and that black bow tie. Maxey said he had them on when he got off the south-bound train that day in Jefferson, carrying that paper suitcase.

Maxey said they watched him for two days about the square, him not seeming to know anybody or to have any business or to be in any hurry; just walking about the square like he was just looking around.

It was the young fellows, the loafers that pitch dollars all day long in the clubhouse yard, waiting for the young girls to come giggling down to the post office and the soda fountain in the late afternoon, working their hips under their dresses, leaving the smell of perfume when they pass, that gave him his name.

They said he was a detective, maybe because that was the last thing in the world anybody would suspect him to be. So they named him Hawkshaw, and Hawkshaw he remained for the twelve years he stayed in Jefferson, behind that chair in Maxey's shop. He told Maxey he was from Alabama.

"What part?" Maxey said. "Alabama's a big place. Birmingham?" Maxey said, because Hawkshaw looked like he might have come from almost anywhere in Alabama except Birmingham.

"Yes," Hawkshaw said. "Birmingham."

And that was all they ever got out of him until I happened to notice him behind the chair and to remember him back in Porterfield.

"Porterfield?" Maxey said. "My brother-in-law owns that shop. You mean you worked in Porterfield last year?"

"Yes," Hawkshaw said. "I was there."

Maxey told me about the vacation business. How Hawkshaw wouldn't take his summer vacation; said he wanted two weeks in April instead. He wouldn't tell why. Maxey said April was too busy for vacations, and Hawkshaw offered to work until then, and quit. "Do you want to quit then?" Maxey said that was in the summer, after Mrs Burchett had brought Susan Reed to the shop for the first time.

"No," Hawkshaw said. "I like it here. I just want two weeks off in April."

"On business?" Maxey said.

"On business," Hawkshaw said.

When Maxey took his vacation, he went to Porterfield to visit his brother-in-law; maybe shaving his brother-in-law's customers, like a sailor will spend his vacation in a rowboat on an artificial lake. The brother-in-law told him Hawkshaw had worked in his shop, would not take a vacation until April, went off and never came back. "He'll quit you the same way," the brother-in-law said. "He worked in a shop in Bolivar, Tennessee, and in one in Florence, Alabama, for a year and quit the same way. He wont come back. You watch and see."

Maxey said he came back home and he finally got it out of Hawkshaw how he had worked for a year each in six or eight different towns in Alabama and Tennessee and Mississippi. "Why did you quit them?" Maxey said. "You are a good barber; one of the best children's barbers. I ever saw. Why did you quit?"

"I was just looking around," Hawkshaw said.

Then April came, and he took his two weeks. He shaved himself and packed up that paper suitcase and took the north-bound train.

"Going on a visit, I reckon," Maxey said.

"Up the road a piece," Hawkshaw said.

So he went away, in that serge suit and black bow tie. Maxey told me how, two days later, it got out how Hawkshaw had drawn from the bank his year's savings. He boarded at Mrs Cowan's and he had joined the church and he spent no money at all. He didn't even smoke. So

Maxey and Matt and I reckon everybody else in Jefferson thought that he had saved up steam for a year and was now bound on one of these private sabbaticals among the fleshpots of Memphis.

Mitch Ewing, the depot freight agent, lived at Mrs Cowan's too. He told how Hawkshaw had bought his ticket only to the junction-point. "From there he can go to either Memphis or Birmingham or New Orleans," Mitch said.

"Well, he's gone, anyway," Maxey said. "And mark my words, that's the last you'll see of that fellow in this town."

And that's what everybody thought until two weeks later. On the fifteenth day Hawkshaw came walking into the shop at his regular time, like he hadn't even been out of town, and took off his coat and begun to hone his razors. He never told anybody where he had been. Just up the road a piece.

Sometimes I thought I would tell them. I would make Jefferson and find him there behind that chair. He didn't change, grow any older in the face, any more than that Reed girl's hair changed, for all the gum and dye she put on it.

But there he would be, back from his vacation "up the road a piece," saving his money for another year, going to church on Sunday, keeping that sack of peppermints for the children that came to him to be barbered, until it was time to take that paper suitcase and his year's savings and go back to Division to pay on the mortgage and clean up the house.

Sometimes he would be gone when I got to Jefferson, and Maxey would tell me about him cutting that Reed girl's hair, snipping and snipping it and holding the mirror up for her to see like she was an actress. "He dont charge her," Matt Fox said. "He pays the quarter into the register out of his own pocket."

"Well, that's his business," Maxey said. "All I want is the quarter. I dont care where it comes from."

Five years later maybe I would have said, "Maybe that's her price." Because she got in trouble at last. Or so they said. I don't know, except that most of the talk about girls, women, is envy or retaliation by the ones that don't dare to and the ones that failed to. But while he was gone one April they were whispering how she had got in trouble at last and had tried to doctor herself with turpentine and was bad sick.

Anyhow, she was off the streets for about three months; some said in a hospital in Memphis, and when she came into the shop again she took Matt's chair, though Hawkshaw's was empty at the time, like she had already done before to devil him, maybe. Maxey said she looked like a painted ghost, gaunt and hard, for all her bright dress and such, sitting there in Matt's chair, filling the whole shop with her talking and her laughing and her perfume and her long, naked-looking legs, and Hawkshaw making out he was busy at his empty chair.

Sometimes I thought I would tell them. But I never told anybody except Gavin Stevens. He is the district attorney, a smart man: not like the usual pedagogue lawyer and office holder. He went to Harvard, and when my health broke down (I used to be a bookkeeper in a Gordonville bank and my health broke down and I met Stevens on a Memphis train when I was coming home from the hospital) it was him that suggested I try the road and got me my position with this company.

I told him about it two years ago. "And now the girl has gone bad on him, and he's too old to hunt up another one and raise her," I said. "And some day he'll have the place paid out and those Alabama Starnes can come and take it, and he'll be through. Then what do you think he will do?"

"I don't know," Stevens said.

"Maybe he'll just go off and die," I said.

"Maybe he will," Stevens said.

"Well," I said, "he won't be the first man to tilt at windmills."

"He won't be the first man to die, either," Stevens said.

So last week I went on to Division. I got there on a Wednesday. When I saw the house, it had just been painted. The storekeeper told me that the payment Hawkshaw had made was the last one; that Starnes' mortgage was clear. "Them Alabama Starnes can come and take it now," he said.

"Anyway, Hawkshaw did what he promised her, promised Mrs Starnes," I said.

"Hawkshaw?" he said. "Is that what they call him? Well, I'll be durned. Hawkshaw. Well, I'll be durned."

It was three months before I made Jefferson again. When I passed the barber shop I looked in without stopping. And there was another fellow behind Hawkshaw's chair, a young fellow. "I wonder if Hawk left his sack of peppermints," I said to myself. But I didn't stop. I just thought, 'Well, he's gone at last,' wondering just where he would be when old age got him and he couldn't move again; if he would probably die behind a chair somewhere in a little three-chair country shop, in his shirt sleeves and that black tie and those serge pants.

I went on and saw my customers and had dinner, and in the afternoon I went to Stevens' office. "I see you've got a new barber in town," I said. "Yes," Stevens said. He looked at me a while, then he said, "You haven't heard?"

"Heard what?" I said. Then he quit looking at me.

"I got your letter," he said, "that Hawkshaw had paid off the mortgage and painted the house. Tell me about it."

So I told him how I got to Division the day after Hawkshaw had left. They were talking about him on the porch of the store, wondering just when those Alabama Starnes would come in. He had painted the house himself, and he had cleaned up the two graves; I don't reckon he wanted to disturb Starnes by cleaning his. I went up to see them. He

had even scrubbed the headstones, and he had set out an apple shoot over the girl's grave.

It was in bloom, and what with the folks all talking about him, I got curious too, to see the inside of that house. The storekeeper had the key, and he said he reckoned it would be all right with Hawkshaw.

It was clean inside as a hospital. The stove was polished and the woodbox filled. The storekeeper told me Hawkshaw did that every year, filled the woodbox before he left. "Those Alabama kinsfolk will appreciate that," I said. We went on back to the parlor. There was a melodeon in the corner, and a lamp and a Bible on the table.

The lamp was clean, the bowl empty and clean too; you couldn't even smell oil on it. That wedding license was framed, hanging above the mantel like a picture. It was dated April 4, 1905.

"Here's where he keeps that mortgage record," the storekeeper (his name is Bidwell) said. He went to the table and opened the Bible. The front page was the births and deaths, two columns. The girl's name was Sophie. I found her name in the birth column, and on the death side it was next to the last one. Mrs Starnes had written it. It looked like it might have taken her ten minutes to write it down. It looked like this:
Sofy starnes Dide april 16 th 1905

Hawkshaw wrote the last one himself; it was neat and well written, like a bookkeeper's hand:

Mrs Will Starnes. April 23, 1916.

"The record will be in the back," Bidwell said.

We turned to the back. It was there, in a neat column, in Hawkshaw's hand. It began with April 16, 1917, \$200.00. The next one was when he made the next payment at the bank: April 16, 1918, \$200.00; and April 16, 1919, \$200.00; and April 16, 1920, \$200.00; and on to the last one: April 16, 1930, \$200.00. Then he had totaled the column and written under it:

"Paid in full. April 16, 1930."

It looked like a sentence written in a copy book in the old-time business colleges, like it had flourished, the pen had, in spite of him. It didn't look like it was written boastful; it just flourished somehow, the end of it, like it had run out of the pen somehow before he could stop it.

"So he did what he promised her he would," Stevens said.

"That's what I told Bidwell," I said.

Stevens went on like he wasn't listening to me much.

"So the old lady could rest quiet. I guess that's what the pen was trying to say when it ran away from him: that now she could lie quiet. And he's not much over forty-five. Not so much anyway. Not so much but what, when he wrote 'Paid in full' under that column, time and despair rushed as slow and dark under him as under any garlanded boy or crownless and crestless girl."

"Only the girl went bad on him," I said. "Forty-five's pretty late to set out to find another. He'll be fifty-five at least by then."

Stevens looked at me then. "I didn't think you had heard," he said.

"Yes," I said. "That is, I looked in the barber shop when I passed. But I knew he would be gone. I knew all the time he would move on, once he had that mortgage cleared. Maybe he never knew about the girl, anyway. Or likely he knew and didn't care."

"You think he didn't know about her?"

"I dont see how he could have helped it. But I dont know. What do you think?"

"I dont know. I dont think I want to know. I know something so much better than that."

"What's that?" I said. He was looking at me. "You keep on telling me I haven't heard the news. What is it I haven't heard?"

"About the girl," Stevens said. He looked at me.

"On the night Hawkshaw came back from his last vacation, they were married. He took her with him this time."

The End

That Evening Sun, William Faulkner

That Evening Sun

I

MONDAY IS NO different from any other weekday in Jefferson now. The streets are paved now, and the telephone and electric companies are cutting down more and more of the shade trees — the water oaks, the maples and locusts and elms — to make room for iron poles bearing clusters of bloated and ghostly and bloodless grapes, and we have a city laundry which makes the rounds on Monday morning, gathering the bundles of clothes into bright-colored, specially-made motor cars: the soiled wearing of a whole week now flees apparitionlike behind alert and irritable electric horns, with a long diminishing noise of rubber and asphalt like tearing silk, and even the Negro women who still take in white people's washing after the old custom, fetch and deliver it in automobiles.

But fifteen years ago, on Monday morning the quiet, dusty, shady streets would be full of Negro women with, balanced on their steady, turbaned heads, bundles of clothes tied up in sheets, almost as large as cotton bales, carried so without touch of hand between the kitchen door of the white house and the blackened washpot beside a cabin door in Negro Hollow.

Nancy would set her bundle on the top of her head, then upon the bundle in turn she would set the black straw sailor hat which she wore winter and summer. She was tall, with a high, sad face sunken a little where her teeth were missing. Sometimes we would go a part of the way down the lane and across the pasture with her, to watch the balanced bundle and the hat that never bobbed nor wavered, even when she walked down into the ditch and up the other side and

stooped through the fence. She would go down on her hands and knees and crawl through the gap, her head rigid, uptilted, the bundle steady as a rock or a balloon, and rise to her feet again and go on.

Sometimes the husbands of the washing women would fetch and deliver the clothes, but Jesus never did that for Nancy, even before father told him to stay away from our house, even when Dilsey was sick and Nancy would come to cook for us.

And then about half the time we'd have to go down the lane to Nancy's cabin and tell her to come on and cook breakfast. We would stop at the ditch, because father told us to not have anything to do with Jesus — he was a short black man, with a razor scar down his face — and we would throw rocks at Nancy's house until she came to the door, leaning her head around it without any clothes on.

“What yawl mean, chunking my house?” Nancy said. “What you little devils mean?”

“Father says for you to come on and get breakfast,” Caddy said. “Father says it's over a half an hour now, and you've got to come this minute.”

“I aint studying no breakfast,” Nancy said. “I going to get my sleep out.”

“I bet you're drunk,” Jason said. “Father says you're drunk. Are you drunk, Nancy?”

“Who says I is?” Nancy said. “I got to get my sleep out. I aint studying no breakfast.”

So after a while we quit chunking the cabin and went back home. When she finally came, it was too late for me to go to school. So we thought it was whisky until that day they arrested her again and they were taking her to jail and they passed Mr Stovall. He was the cashier in the bank and a deacon in the Baptist church, and Nancy began to say:

“When you going to pay me, white man? When you going to pay me, white man? It's been three times now since you paid me a cent—” Mr Stovall knocked her down, but she kept on saying, “When you going to pay me, white man? It's been three times now since—” until Mr Stovall kicked her in the mouth with his heel and the marshal caught Mr Stovall

back, and Nancy lying in the street, laughing. She turned her head and spat out some blood and teeth and said, "It's been three times now since he paid me a cent."

That was how she lost her teeth, and all that day they told about Nancy and Mr Stovall, and all that night the ones that passed the jail could hear Nancy singing and yelling. They could see her hands holding to the window bars, and a lot of them stopped along the fence, listening to her and to the jailer trying to make her stop.

She didn't shut up until almost daylight, when the jailer began to hear a bumping and scraping upstairs and he went up there and found Nancy hanging from the window bar. He said that it was cocaine and not whisky, because no nigger would try to commit suicide unless he was full of cocaine, because a nigger full of cocaine wasn't a nigger any longer.

The jailer cut her down and revived her; then he beat her, whipped her. She had hung herself with her dress. She had fixed it all right, but when they arrested her she didn't have on anything except a dress and so she didn't have anything to tie her hands with and she couldn't make her hands let go of the window ledge. So the jailer heard the noise and ran up there and found Nancy hanging from the window, stark naked, her belly already swelling out a little, like a little balloon.

When Dilsey was sick in her cabin and Nancy was cooking for us, we could see her apron swelling out; that was before father told Jesus to stay away from the house. Jesus was in the kitchen, sitting behind the stove, with his razor scar on his black face like a piece of dirty string. He said it was a watermelon that Nancy had under her dress.

"It never come off of your vine, though," Nancy said.

"Off of what vine?" Caddy said.

"I can cut down the vine it did come off of," Jesus said.

"What makes you want to talk like that before these chillen?" Nancy said. "Whyn't you go on to work? You done et. You want Mr Jason to

catch you hanging around his kitchen, talking that way before these chillen?"

"Talking what way?" Caddy said. "What vine?"

"I cant hang around white man's kitchen," Jesus said. "But white man can hang around mine. White man can come in my house, but I cant stop him. When white man want to come in my house, I aint got no house. I cant stop him, but he cant kick me outen it. He cant do that."

Dilsey was still sick in her cabin." Father told Jesus to stay off our place. Dilsey was still sick. It was a long time. We were in the library after supper.

"Isn't Nancy through in the kitchen yet?" mother said. "It seems to me that she has had plenty of time to have finished the dishes."

"Let Quentin go and see," father said. "Go and see if Nancy is through, Quentin. Tell her she can go on home."

I went to the kitchen. Nancy was through. The dishes were put away and the fire was out. Nancy was sitting in a chair, close to the cold stove. She looked at me.

"Mother wants to know if you are through," I said.

"Yes," Nancy said. She looked at me. "I done finished." She looked at me.

"What is it?" I said. "What is it?"

"I aint nothing but a nigger," Nancy said. "It aint none of my fault."

She looked at me, sitting in the chair before the cold stove, the sailor hat on her head. I went back to the library. It was the cold stove and all, when you think of a kitchen being warm and busy and cheerful. And with a cold stove and the dishes all put away, and nobody wanting to eat at that hour.

"Is she through?" mother said.

"Yessum," I said.

"What is she doing?" mother said.

"She's not doing anything. She's through."

"I'll go and see," father said.

"Maybe she's waiting for Jesus to come and take her home," Caddy said.

"Jesus is gone," I said. Nancy told us how one morning she woke up and Jesus was gone.

"He quit me," Nancy said. "Done gone to Memphis, I reckon. Dodging them city po-lice for a while, I reckon."

"And a good riddance," father said. "I hope he stays there."

"Nancy's scaired of the dark," Jason said.

"So are you," Caddy said.

"I'm not," Jason said.

"Scairy cat," Caddy said.

"I'm not," Jason said.

"You, Candace!" mother said. Father came back.

"I am going to walk down the lane with Nancy," he said. "She says that Jesus is back."

"Has she seen him?" mother said.

"No. Some Negro sent her word that he was back in town. I wont be long."

"You'll leave me alone, to take Nancy home?" mother said. "Is her safety more precious to you than mine?"

"I wont be long," father said.

"You'll leave these children unprotected, with that Negro about?"

"I'm going too," Caddy said. "Let me go, Father."

"What would he do with them, if he were unfortunate enough to have them?" father said.

"I want to go, too," Jason said.

"Jason!" mother said. She was speaking to father. You could tell that by the way she said the name. Like she believed that all day father had been trying to think of doing the thing she wouldn't like the most, and that she knew all the time that after a while he would think of it.

I stayed quiet, because father and I both knew that mother would want him to make me stay with her if she just thought of it in time. So father didn't look at me. I was the oldest. I was nine and Caddy was seven and Jason was five.

"Nonsense," father said. "We wont be long."

Nancy had her hat on. We came to the lane. "Jesus always been good to me," Nancy said. "Whenever he had two dollars, one of them was mine." We walked in the lane. "If I can just get through the lane," Nancy said, "I be all right then."

The lane was always dark. "This is where Jason got scared on Hallowe'en," Caddy said.

"I didn't," Jason said.

"Cant Aunt Rachel do anything with him?" father said. Aunt Rachel was old. She lived in a cabin beyond Nancy's, by herself. She had white hair and she smoked a pipe in the door, all day long; she didn't work any more. They said she was Jesus' mother. Sometimes she said she was and sometimes she said she wasn't any kin to Jesus.

"Yes, you did," Caddy said. "You were scairder than Frony. You were scairder than T.P. even. Scairder than niggers."

"Cant nobody do nothing with him," Nancy said. "He say I done woke up the devil in him and aint but one thing going to lay it down again."

"Well, he's gone now," father said. "There's nothing for you to be afraid of now. And if you'd just let white men alone."

"Let what white men alone?" Caddy said. "How let them alone?"

"He aint gone nowhere," Nancy said. "I can feel him. I can feel him now, in this lane. He hearing us talk, every word, hid somewhere, waiting. I

aint seen him, and I aint going to see him again but once more, with that razor in his mouth. That razor on that string down his back, inside his shirt. And then I aint going to be even surprised.”

“I wasn’t scaired,” Jason said.

“If you’d behave yourself, you’d have kept out of this,” father said. “But it’s all right now. He’s probably in St. Louis now. Probably got another wife by now and forgot all about you.”

“If he has, I better not find out about it,” Nancy said. “I’d stand there right over them, and every time he wropped her, I’d cut that arm off. I’d cut his head off and I’d slit her belly and I’d shove—”

“Hush,” father said.

“Slit whose belly, Nancy?” Caddy said.

“I wasn’t scaired,” Jason said. “I’d walk right down this lane by myself.”

“Yah,” Caddy said. “You wouldn’t dare to put your foot down in it if we were not here too.”

II

Dilsey was still sick, so we took Nancy home every night until mother said, “How much longer is this going on? I to be left alone in this big house while you take home a frightened Negro?”

We fixed a pallet in the kitchen for Nancy. One night we waked up, hearing the sound. It was not singing and it was not crying, coming up the dark stairs. There was a light in mother’s room and we heard father going down the hall, down the back stairs, and Caddy and I went into the hall. The floor was cold. Our toes curled away from it while we listened to the sound. It was like singing and it wasn’t like singing, like the sounds that Negroes make.

Then it stopped and we heard father going down the back stairs, and we went to the head of the stairs. Then the sound began again, in the stairway, not loud, and we could see Nancy’s eyes halfway up the stairs, against the wall. They looked like cat’s eyes do, like a big cat against the wall, watching us.

When we came down the steps to where she was, she quit making the sound again, and we stood there until father came back up from the kitchen, with his pistol in his hand. He went back down with Nancy and they came back with Nancy's pallet.

We spread the pallet in our room. After the light in mother's room went off, we could see Nancy's eyes again. "Nancy," Caddy whispered, "are you asleep, Nancy?"

Nancy whispered something. It was oh or no, I don't know which. Like nobody had made it, like it came from nowhere and went nowhere, until it was like Nancy was not there at all; that I had looked so hard at her eyes on the stairs that they had got printed on my eyeballs, like the sun does when you have closed your eyes and there is no sun. "Jesus," Nancy whispered. "Jesus."

"Was it Jesus?" Caddy said. "Did he try to come into the kitchen?"

"Jesus," Nancy said. Like this: Jeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeesus, until the sound went out, like a match or a candle does.

"It's the other Jesus she means," I said.

"Can you see us, Nancy?" Caddy whispered. "Can you see our eyes too?"

"I aint nothing but a nigger," Nancy said. "God knows. God knows."

"What did you see down there in the kitchen?" Caddy whispered.

"What tried to get in?"

"God knows," Nancy said. We could see her eyes. "God knows."

Dilsey got well. She cooked dinner. "You'd better stay in bed a day or two longer," father said.

"What for?" Dilsey said. "If I had been a day later, this place would be to rack and ruin. Get on out of here now, and let me get my kitchen straight again."

Dilsey cooked supper too. And that night, just before dark, Nancy came into the kitchen.

"How do you know he's back?" Dilsey said. "You aint seen him."

"Jesus is a nigger," Jason said.

"I can feel him," Nancy said. "I can feel him laying yonder in the ditch."

"Tonight?" Dilsey said. "Is he there tonight?"

"Dilsey's a nigger too," Jason said.

"You try to eat something," Dilsey said.

"I dont want nothing," Nancy said.

"I aint a nigger," Jason said.

"Drink some coffee," Dilsey said. She poured a cup of coffee for Nancy.

"Do you know he's out there tonight? How come you know it's tonight?"

"I know," Nancy said. "He's there, waiting. I know. I done lived with him too long. I know what he is fixing to do fore he know it himself."

"Drink some coffee," Dilsey said. Nancy held the cup to her mouth and blew into the cup. Her mouth pursed out like a spreading adder's, like a rubber mouth, like she had blown all the color out of her lips with blowing the coffee.

"I aint a nigger," Jason said. "Are you a nigger, Nancy?"

"I hellborn, child," Nancy said. "I wont be nothing soon. I going back where I come from soon."

III

She began to drink the coffee. While she was drinking, holding the cup in both hands, she began to make the sound again. She made the sound into the cup and the coffee splashed out onto her hands and her dress. Her eyes looked at us and she sat there, her elbows on her knees, holding the cup in both hands, looking at us across the wet cup, making the sound. "Look at Nancy," Jason said. "Nancy cant cook for us now. Dilsey's got well now."

"You hush up," Dilsey said. Nancy held the cup in both hands, looking at us, making the sound, like there were two of them: one looking at us

and the other making the sound. "Whyn't you let Mr Jason telefoam the marshal?" Dilsey said. Nancy stopped then, holding the cup in her long brown hands. She tried to drink some coffee again, but it splashed out of the cup, onto her hands and her dress, and she put the cup down. Jason watched her.

"I cant swallow it," Nancy said. "I swallows but it wont go down me."
"You go down to the cabin," Dilsey said. "Frony will fix you a pallet and I'll be there soon."

"Wont no nigger stop him," Nancy said.

"I aint a nigger," Jason said. "Am I, Dilsey?"

"I reckon not," Dilsey said. She looked at Nancy. "I dont reckon so. What you going to do, then?"

Nancy looked at us. Her eyes went fast, like she was afraid there wasn't time to look, without hardly moving at all. She looked at us, at all three of us at one time. "You member that night I stayed in yawls' room?" she said.

She told about how we waked up early the next morning, and played. We had to play quiet, on her pallet, until father woke up and it was time to get breakfast. "Go and ask your maw to let me stay here tonight," Nancy said. "I wont need no pallet. We can play some more."

Caddy asked mother. Jason went too. "I cant have Negroes sleeping in the bedrooms," mother said. Jason cried. He cried until mother said he couldn't have any dessert for three days if he didn't stop. Then Jason said he would stop if Dilsey would make a chocolate cake. Father was there.

"Why dont you do something about it?" mother said. "What do we have officers for?"

"Why is Nancy afraid of Jesus?" Caddy said. "Are you afraid of father, mother?"

“What could the officers do?” father said. “If Nancy hasn’t seen him, how could the officers find him?”

“Then why is she afraid?” mother said.

“She says he is there. She says she knows he is there tonight.”

“Yet we pay taxes,” mother said. “I must wait here alone in this big house while you take a Negro woman home.”

“You know that I am not lying outside with a razor,” father said.

“I’ll stop if Dilsey will make a chocolate cake,” Jason said. Mother told us to go out and father said he didn’t know if Jason would get a chocolate cake or not, but he knew what Jason was going to get in about a minute. We went back to the kitchen and told Nancy.

“Father said for you to go home and lock the door, and you’ll be all right,” Caddy said. “All right from what, Nancy? Is Jesus mad at you?” Nancy was holding the coffee cup in her hands again, her elbows on her knees and her hands holding the cup between her knees. She was looking into the cup. “What have you done that made Jesus mad?” Caddy said.

Nancy let the cup go. It didn’t break on the floor, but the coffee spilled out, and Nancy sat there with her hands still making the shape of the cup. She began to make the sound again, not loud. Not singing and not unsinging. We watched her.

“Here,” Dilsey said. “You quit that, now. You get ahold of yourself. You wait here. I going to get Versh to walk home with you.” Dilsey went out. We looked at Nancy. Her shoulders kept shaking, but she quit making the sound. We watched her. “What’s Jesus going to do to you?” Caddy said. “He went away.”

Nancy looked at us. “We had fun that night I stayed in yawls’ room, didn’t we?”

“I didn’t,” Jason said. “I didn’t have any fun.”

“You were asleep in mother’s room,” Caddy said. “You were not there.”

“Let’s go down to my house and have some more fun,” Nancy said.
“Mother wont let us,” I said. “It’s too late now.”

“Dont bother her,” Nancy said. “We can tell her in the morning. She wont mind.”

“She wouldn’t let us,” I said.

“Dont ask her now,” Nancy said. “Dont bother her now.”

“She didn’t say we couldn’t go,” Caddy said.

“We didn’t ask,” I said.

“If you go, I’ll tell,” Jason said.

“We’ll have fun,” Nancy said. “They won’t mind, just to my house. I been working for yawl a long time. They won’t mind.”

“I’m not afraid to go,” Caddy said. “Jason is the one that’s afraid. He’ll tell.”

“I’m not,” Jason said.

“Yes, you are,” Caddy said. “You’ll tell.”

“I won’t tell,” Jason said. “I’m not afraid.”

“Jason ain’t afraid to go with me,” Nancy said. “Is you, Jason?”

“Jason is going to tell,” Caddy said. The lane was dark. We passed the pasture gate. “I bet if something was to jump out from behind that gate, Jason would holler.”

“I wouldn’t,” Jason said. We walked down the lane. Nancy was talking loud.

“What are you talking so loud for, Nancy?” Caddy said.

“Who; me?” Nancy said. “Listen at Quentin and Caddy and Jason saying I’m talking loud.”

“You talk like there was five of us here,” Caddy said. “You talk like father was here too.”

“Who; me talking loud, Mr Jason?” Nancy said.

“Nancy called Jason ‘Mister,’” Caddy said.

“Listen how Caddy and Quentin and Jason talk,” Nancy said.

“We’re not talking loud,” Caddy said. “You’re the one that’s talking like father—”

“Hush,” Nancy said; “hush, Mr Jason.”

“Nancy called Jason ‘Mister’ aguh—”

“Hush,” Nancy said. She was talking loud when we crossed the ditch and stooped through the fence where she used to stoop through with the clothes on her head. Then we came to her house. We were going fast then. She opened the door. The smell of the house was like the lamp and the smell of Nancy was like the wick, like they were waiting for one another to begin to smell. She lit the lamp and closed the door and put the bar up. Then she quit talking loud, looking at us.

“What’re we going to do?” Caddy said.

“What do yawl want to do?” Nancy said.

“You said we would have some fun,” Caddy said.

There was something about Nancy’s house; something you could smell besides Nancy and the house. Jason smelled it, even. “I don’t want to stay here,” he said. “I want to go home.”

“Go home, then,” Caddy said.

“I don’t want to go by myself,” Jason said.

“We’re going to have some fun,” Nancy said.

“How?” Caddy said.

Nancy stood by the door. She was looking at us, only it was like she had emptied her eyes, like she had quit using them. “What do you want to do?” she said.

“Tell us a story,” Caddy said. “Can you tell a story?”

“Yes,” Nancy said.

“Tell it,” Caddy said. We looked at Nancy. “You don’t know any stories.”

“Yes,” Nancy said. “Yes, I do.”

She came and sat in a chair before the hearth. There was a little fire there. Nancy built it up, when it was already hot inside. She built a good blaze. She told a story. She talked like her eyes looked, like her eyes watching us and her voice talking to us did not belong to her. Like she was living somewhere else, waiting somewhere else.

She was outside the cabin. Her voice was inside and the shape of her, the Nancy that could stoop under a barbed wire fence with a bundle of clothes balanced on her head as though without weight, like a balloon, was there. But that was all. "And so this here queen come walking up to the ditch, where that bad man was hiding. She was walking up to the ditch, and she say, 'If I can just get past this here ditch,' was what she say . . ."

"What ditch?" Caddy said. "A ditch like that one out there? Why did a queen want to go into a ditch?"

"To get to her house," Nancy said. She looked at us. "She had to cross the ditch to get into her house quick and bar the door."

"Why did she want to go home and bar the door?" Caddy said.

IV

Nancy looked at us. She quit talking. She looked at us. Jason's legs stuck straight out of his pants where he sat on Nancy's lap. "I don't think that's a good story," he said. "I want to go home."

"Maybe we had better," Caddy said. She got up from the floor. "I bet they are looking for us right now." She went toward the door.

"No," Nancy said. "Don't open it." She got up quick and passed Caddy. She didn't touch the door, the wooden bar.

"Why not?" Caddy said.

"Come back to the lamp," Nancy said. "We'll have fun. You don't have to go."

"We ought to go," Caddy said. "Unless we have a lot of fun." She and Nancy came back to the fire, the lamp.

"I want to go home," Jason said. "I'm going to tell."

"I know another story," Nancy said. She stood close to the lamp. She looked at Caddy, like when your eyes look up at a stick balanced on your nose. She had to look down to see Caddy, but her eyes looked like that, like when you are balancing a stick.

"I won't listen to it," Jason said. "I'll bang on the floor."

"It's a good one," Nancy said. "It's better than the other one."

"What's it about?" Caddy said. Nancy was standing by the lamp. Her hand was on the lamp, against the light, long and brown.

"Your hand is on that hot globe," Caddy said. "Don't it feel hot to your hand?"

Nancy looked at her hand on the lamp chimney. She took her hand away, slow. She stood there, looking at Caddy, wringing her long hand as though it were tied to her wrist with a string.

"Let's do something else," Caddy said.

"I want to go home," Jason said.

"I got some popcorn," Nancy said. She looked at Caddy and then at Jason and then at me and then at Caddy again. "I got some popcorn."

"I don't like popcorn," Jason said. "I'd rather have candy."

Nancy looked at Jason. "You can hold the popper." She was still wringing her hand; it was long and limp and brown.

"All right," Jason said. "I'll stay a while if I can do that. Caddy can't hold it. I'll want to go home again if Caddy holds the popper."

Nancy built up the fire. "Look at Nancy putting her hands in the fire," Caddy said. "What's the matter with you, Nancy?"

"I got popcorn," Nancy said. "I got some." She took the popper from under the bed. It was broken. Jason began to cry.

"Now we can't have any popcorn," he said.

"We ought to go home, anyway," Caddy said. "Come on, Quentin."

“Wait,” Nancy said; “wait. I can fix it. Don’t you want to help me fix it?”
“I don’t think I want any,” Caddy said. “It’s too late now.”
“You help me, Jason,” Nancy said. “Don’t you want to help me?”

“No,” Jason said. “I want to go home.”

“Hush,” Nancy said; “hush. Watch. Watch me. I can fix it so Jason can hold it and pop the corn.” She got a piece of wire and fixed the popper.

“It won’t hold good,” Caddy said.

“Yes, it will,” Nancy said. “Yawl watch. Yawl help me shell some corn.”
The popcorn was under the bed too. We shelled it into the popper and Nancy helped Jason hold the popper over the fire.

“It’s not popping,” Jason said. “I want to go home.”

“You wait,” Nancy said. “It’ll begin to pop. We’ll have fun then.” She was sitting close to the fire. The lamp was turned up so high it was beginning to smoke.

“Why don’t you turn it down some?” I said.

“It’s all right,” Nancy said. “I’ll clean it. Yawl wait. The popcorn will start in a minute.”

“I don’t believe it’s going to start,” Caddy said. “We ought to start home, anyway. They’ll be worried.”

“No,” Nancy said. “It’s going to pop. Dilsey will tell um yawl with me. I been working for yawl long time. They won’t mind if yawl at my house. You wait, now. It’ll start popping any minute now.”

Then Jason got some smoke in his eyes and he began to cry. He dropped the popper into the fire. Nancy got a wet rag and wiped Jason’s face, but he didn’t stop crying.

“Hush,” she said. “Hush.” But he didn’t hush. Caddy took the popper out of the fire.

“It’s burned up,” she said. “You’ll have to get some more popcorn, Nancy.”

“Did you put all of it in?” Nancy said.

“Yes,” Caddy said. Nancy looked at Caddy. Then she took the popper and opened it and poured the cinders into her apron and began to sort the grains, her hands long and brown, and we watching her.

“Haven’t you got any more?” Caddy said.

“Yes,” Nancy said; “yes. Look. This here ain’t burnt. All we need to do is—”

“I want to go home,” Jason said. “I’m going to tell.”

“Hush,” Caddy said. We all listened. Nancy’s head was already turned toward the barred door, her eyes filled with red lamplight. “Somebody is coming,” Caddy said.

Then Nancy began to make that sound again, not loud, sitting there above the fire, her long hands dangling between her knees; all of a sudden water began to come out on her face in big drops, running down her face, carrying in each one a little turning ball of firelight like a spark until it dropped off her chin. “She’s not crying,” I said.

“I ain’t crying,” Nancy said. Her eyes were closed. “I ain’t crying. Who is it?”

“I don’t know,” Caddy said. She went to the door and looked out.

“We’ve got to go now,” she said. “Here comes father.”

“I’m going to tell,” Jason said. “Yawl made me come.”

The water still ran down Nancy’s face. She turned in her chair. “Listen. Tell him. Tell him we going to have fun. Tell him I take good care of yawl until in the morning. Tell him to let me come home with yawl and sleep on the floor. Tell him I won’t need no pallet. We’ll have fun. You member last time how we had so much fun?”

“I didn’t have fun,” Jason said. “You hurt me. You put smoke in my eyes. I’m going to tell.”

V

Father came in. He looked at us. Nancy did not get up.

“Tell him,” she said.

“Caddy made us come down here,” Jason said. “I didn’t want to.”
Father came to the fire. Nancy looked up at him. “Can’t you go to Aunt Rachel’s and stay?” he said. Nancy looked up at father, her hands between her knees. “He’s not here,” father said. “I would have seen him. There’s not a soul in sight.”

“He in the ditch,” Nancy said. “He waiting in the ditch yonder.”
“Nonsense,” father said. He looked at Nancy. “Do you know he’s there?”

“I got the sign,” Nancy said.

“What sign?”

“I got it. It was on the table when I come in. It was a hogbone, with blood meat still on it, laying by the lamp. He’s out there. When yawl walk out that door, I gone.”

“Gone where, Nancy?” Caddy said.

“I’m not a tattletale,” Jason said.

“Nonsense,” father said.

“He out there,” Nancy said. “He looking through that window this minute, waiting for yawl to go. Then I gone.”

“Nonsense,” father said. “Lock up your house and we’ll take you on to Aunt Rachel’s.”

“Twont do no good,” Nancy said. She didn’t look at father now, but he looked down at her, at her long, limp, moving hands. “Putting it off wont do no good.”

“Then what do you want to do?” father said.

“I don’t know,” Nancy said. “I can’t do nothing. Just put it off. And that don’t do no good. I reckon it belong to me. I reckon what I going to get ain’t no more than mine.”

“Get what?” Caddy said. “What’s yours?”

“Nothing,” father said. “You all must get to bed.”

“Caddy made me come,” Jason said.

“Go on to Aunt Rachel’s,” father said.

“It won’t do no good,” Nancy said. She sat before the fire, her elbows on her knees, her long hands between her knees. “When even your own kitchen wouldn’t do no good. When even if I was sleeping on the floor in the room with your chillen, and the next morning there I am, and blood—”

“Hush,” father said. “Lock the door and put out the lamp and go to bed.”

“I scared of the dark,” Nancy said. “I scared for it to happen in the dark.”

“You mean you’re going to sit right here with the lamp lighted?” father said. Then Nancy began to make the sound again, sitting before the fire, her long hands between her knees. “Ah, damnation,” father said. “Come along, chillen. It’s past bedtime.”

“When yawl go home, I gone,” Nancy said. She talked quieter now, and her face looked quiet, like her hands. “Anyway, I got my coffin money saved up with Mr. Lovelady.” Mr. Lovelady was a short, dirty man who collected the Negro insurance, coming around to the cabins or the kitchens every Saturday morning, to collect fifteen cents. He and his wife lived at the hotel.

One morning his wife committed suicide. They had a child, a little girl. He and the child went away. After a week or two he came back alone. We would see him going along the lanes and the back streets on Saturday mornings.

“Nonsense,” father said. “You’ll be the first thing I’ll see in the kitchen tomorrow morning.”

“You’ll see what you’ll see, I reckon,” Nancy said. “But it will take the Lord to say what that will be.”

We left her sitting before the fire.

"Come and put the bar up," father said. But she didn't move. She didn't look at us again, sitting quietly there between the lamp and the fire. From some distance down the lane we could look back and see her through the open door.

"What, Father?" Caddy said. "What's going to happen?"

"Nothing," father said. Jason was on father's back, so Jason was the tallest of all of us. We went down into the ditch. I looked at it, quiet. I couldn't see much where the moonlight and the shadows tangled.

"If Jesus is hid here, he can see us, cant he?" Caddy said.

"He's not there," father said. "He went away a long time ago."

"You made me come," Jason said, high; against the sky it looked like father had two heads, a little one and a big one. "I didn't want to."

We went up out of the ditch. We could still see Nancy's house and the open door, but we couldn't see Nancy now, sitting before the fire with the door open, because she was tired. "I just done got tired," she said. "I just a nigger. It ain't no fault of mine."

But we could hear her, because she began just after we came up out of the ditch, the sound that was not singing and not unsinging. "Who will do our washing now, Father?" I said.

"I'm not a nigger," Jason said, high and close above father's head.

"You're worse," Caddy said, "you are a tattletale. If something was to jump out, you'd be scairder than a nigger."

"I wouldn't," Jason said.

"You'd cry," Caddy said.

"Caddy," father said.

"I wouldn't!" Jason said.

"Scairy cat," Caddy said.

"Candace!" father said.

The End

Dry September, William Faulkner

Dry September

I

THROUGH THE BLOODY September twilight, aftermath of sixty-two rainless days, it had gone like a fire in dry grass — the rumor, the story, whatever it was. Something about Miss Minnie Cooper and a Negro.

Attacked, insulted, frightened: none of them, gathered in the barber shop on that Saturday evening where the ceiling fan stirred, without freshening it, the vitiated air, sending back upon them, in recurrent surges of stale pomade and lotion, their own stale breath and odors, knew exactly what had happened.

“Except it wasn’t Will Mayes,” a barber said. He was a man of middle age; a thin, sand-colored man with a mild face, who was shaving a client. “I know Will Mayes. He’s a good nigger. And I know Miss Minnie Cooper, too.”

“What do you know about her?” a second barber said.

“Who is she?” the client said. “A young girl?”

“No,” the barber said. “She’s about forty, I reckon. She aint married. That’s why I dont believe—”

“Believe, hell!” a hulking youth in a sweat-stained silk shirt said. “Wont you take a white woman’s word before a nigger’s?”

“I dont believe Will Mayes did it,” the barber said. “I know Will Mayes.”

“Maybe you know who did it, then. Maybe you already got him out of town, you damn niggerlover.”

"I dont believe anybody did anything. I dont believe anything happened. I leave it to you fellows if them ladies that get old without getting married dont have notions that a man cant—"

"Then you are a hell of a white man," the client said. He moved under the cloth. The youth had sprung to his feet.

"You dont?" he said. "Do you accuse a white woman of lying?" The barber held the razor poised above the half-risen client. He did not look around.

"It's this durn weather," another said. "It's enough to make a man do anything. Even to her."

Nobody laughed. The barber said in his mild, stubborn tone: "I aint accusing nobody of nothing. I just know and you fellows know how a woman that never—"

"You damn niggerlover!" the youth said.

"Shut up, Butch," another said. "We'll get the facts in plenty of time to act."

"Who is? Who's getting them?" the youth said. "Facts, hell! I—"

"You're a fine white man," the client said. "Aint you?" In his frothy beard he looked like a desert rat in the moving pictures. "You tell them, Jack," he said to the youth. "If there aint any white men in this town, you can count on me, even if I aint only a drummer and a stranger."

"That's right, boys," the barber said. "Find out the truth first. I know Will Mayes."

"Well, by God!" the youth shouted. "To think that a white man in this town—"

"Shut up, Butch," the second speaker said. "We got plenty of time."

The client sat up. He looked at the speaker. "Do you claim that anything excuses a nigger attacking a white woman? Do you mean to tell me you are a white man and you'll stand for it? You better go back North where you came from. The South dont want your kind here."

“North what?” the second said. “I was born and raised in this town.”
“Well, by God!” the youth said. He looked about with a strained, baffled gaze, as if he was trying to remember what it was he wanted to say or to do. He drew his sleeve across his sweating face. “Damn if I’m going to let a white woman—”

“You tell them, Jack,” the drummer said. “By God, if they—”
The screen door crashed open. A man stood in the floor, his feet apart and his heavy-set body poised easily. His white shirt was open at the throat; he wore a felt hat. His hot, bold glance swept the group. His name was McLendon. He had commanded troops at the front in France and had been decorated for valor.

“Well,” he said, “are you going to sit there and let a black son rape a white woman on the streets of Jefferson?”

Butch sprang up again. The silk of his shirt clung flat to his heavy shoulders. At each armpit was a dark halfmoon. “That’s what I been telling them! That’s what I—”

“Did it really happen?” a third said. “This aint the first man scare she ever had, like Hawkshaw says. Wasn’t there something about a man on the kitchen roof, watching her undress, about a year ago?”

“What?” the client said. “What’s that?” The barber had been slowly forcing him back into the chair; he arrested himself reclining, his head lifted, the barber still pressing him down.

McLendon whirled on the third speaker. “Happen? What the hell difference does it make? Are you going to let the black sons get away with it until one really does it?”

“That’s what I’m telling them!” Butch shouted. He cursed, long and steady, pointless.

“Here, here,” a fourth said. “Not so loud. Dont talk so loud.”

“Sure,” McLendon said; “no talking necessary at all. I’ve done my talking. Who’s with me?” He poised on the balls of his feet, roving his gaze.

The barber held the drummer's face down, the razor poised. "Find out the facts first, boys. I know Willy Mayes. It wasn't him. Let's get the sheriff and do this thing right."

McLendon whirled upon him his furious, rigid face. The barber did not look away. They looked like men of different races. The other barbers had ceased also above their prone clients. "You mean to tell me," McLendon said, "that you'd take a nigger's word before a white woman's? Why, you damn niggerloving—"

The third speaker rose and grasped McLendon's arm; he too had been a soldier. "Now, now. Let's figure this thing out. Who knows anything about what really happened?"

"Figure out hell!" McLendon jerked his arm free. "All that're with me get up from there. The ones that aint—" He roved his gaze, dragging his sleeve across his face.

Three men rose. The drummer in the chair sat up. "Here," he said, jerking at the cloth about his neck; "get this rag off me. I'm with him. I dont live here, but by God, if our mothers and wives and sisters—" He smeared the cloth over his face and flung it to the floor. McLendon stood in the floor and cursed the others. Another rose and moved toward him. The remainder sat uncomfortable, not looking at one another, then one by one they rose and joined him.

The barber picked the cloth from the floor. He began to fold it neatly. "Boys, dont do that. Will Mayes never done it. I know."

"Come on," McLendon said. He whirled. From his hip pocket protruded the butt of a heavy automatic pistol. They went out. The screen door crashed behind them reverberant in the dead air.

The barber wiped the razor carefully and swiftly, and put it away, and ran to the rear, and took his hat from the wall.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," he said to the other barbers. "I cant let—" He went out, running. The two other barbers followed him to the door and caught it on the rebound, leaning out and looking up the

street after him. The air was flat and dead. It had a metallic taste at the base of the tongue.

“What can he do?” the first said. The second one was saying “Jees Christ, Jees Christ” under his breath. “I’d just as lief be Will Mayes as Hawk, if he gets McLendon riled.”

“Jees Christ, Jees Christ,” the second whispered.

“You reckon he really done it to her?” the first said.

II

She was thirty-eight or thirty-nine. She lived in a small frame house with her invalid mother and a thin, sallow, unflagging aunt, where each morning between ten and eleven she would appear on the porch in a lace-trimmed boudoir cap, to sit swinging in the porch swing until noon. After dinner she lay down for a while, until the afternoon began to cool.

Then, in one of the three or four new voile dresses which she had each summer, she would go downtown to spend the afternoon in the stores with the other ladies, where they would handle the goods and haggle over the prices in cold, immediate voices, without any intention of buying.

She was of comfortable people — not the best in Jefferson, but good people enough — and she was still on the slender side of ordinary looking, with a bright, faintly haggard manner and dress. When she was young she had had a slender, nervous body and a sort of hard vivacity which had enabled her for a time to ride upon the crest of the town’s social life as exemplified by the high school party and church social period of her contemporaries while still children enough to be unclassconscious.

She was the last to realize that she was losing ground; that those among whom she had been a little brighter and louder flame than any other were beginning to learn the pleasure of snobbery — male — and retaliation — female. That was when her face began to wear that bright, haggard look.

She still carried it to parties on shadowy porticoes and summer lawns, like a mask or a flag, with that bafflement of furious repudiation of truth in her eyes. One evening at a party she heard a boy and two girls, all schoolmates, talking. She never accepted another invitation.

She watched the girls with whom she had grown up as they married and got homes and children, but no man ever called on her steadily until the children of the other girls had been calling her “aunty” for several years, the while their mothers told them in bright voices about how popular Aunt Minnie had been as a girl. Then the town began to see her driving on Sunday afternoons with the cashier in the bank.

He was a widower of about forty — a high-colored man, smelling always faintly of the barber shop or of whisky. He owned the first automobile in town, a red runabout; Minnie had the first motoring bonnet and veil the town ever saw. Then the town began to say: “Poor Minnie.” “But she is old enough to take care of herself,” others said. That was when she began to ask her old schoolmates that their children call her “cousin” instead of “aunty.”

It was twelve years now since she had been relegated into adultery by public opinion, and eight years since the cashier had gone to a Memphis bank, returning for one day each Christmas, which he spent at an annual bachelors’ party at a hunting club on the river.

From behind their curtains the neighbors would see the party pass, and during the over-the-way Christmas day visiting they would tell her about him, about how well he looked, and how they heard that he was prospering in the city, watching with bright, secret eyes her haggard, bright face. Usually by that hour there would be the scent of whisky on her breath. It was supplied her by a youth, a clerk at the soda fountain: “Sure; I buy it for the old gal. I reckon she’s entitled to a little fun.”

Her mother kept to her room altogether now; the gaunt aunt ran the house. Against that background Minnie’s bright dresses, her idle and

empty days, had a quality of furious unreality. She went out in the evenings only with women now, neighbors, to the moving pictures.

Each afternoon she dressed in one of the new dresses and went downtown alone, where her young "cousins" were already strolling in the late afternoons with their delicate, silken heads and thin, awkward arms and conscious hips, clinging to one another or shrieking and giggling with paired boys in the soda fountain when she passed and went on along the serried store fronts, in the doors of which the sitting and lounging men did not even follow her with their eyes any more.

III

The barber went swiftly up the street where the sparse lights, insect-swirled, glared in rigid and violent suspension in the lifeless air. The day had died in a pall of dust; above the darkened square, shrouded by the spent dust, the sky was as clear as the inside of a brass bell. Below the east was a rumor of the twice-waxed moon.

When he overtook them McLendon and three others were getting into a car parked in an alley. McLendon stooped his thick head, peering out beneath the top. "Changed your mind, did you?" he said. "Damn good thing; by God, tomorrow when this town hears about how you talked tonight—"

"Now, now," the other ex-soldier said. "Hawkshaw's all right. Come on, Hawk; jump in."

"Will Mayes never done it, boys," the barber said. "If anybody done it. Why, you all know well as I do there aint any town where they got better niggers than us. And you know how a lady will kind of think things about men when there aint any reason to, and Miss Minnie anyway—"

"Sure, sure," the soldier said. "We're just going to talk to him a little; that's all."

"Talk hell!" Butch said. "When we're through with the—"

“Shut up, for God’s sake!” the soldier said. “Do you want everybody in town—”

“Tell them, by God!” McLendon said. “Tell every one of the sons that’ll let a white woman—”

“Let’s go; let’s go: here’s the other car.” The second car slid squealing out of a cloud of dust at the alley mouth. McLendon started his car and took the lead. Dust lay like fog in the street. The street lights hung nimbused as in water. They drove on out of town.

A rutted lane turned at right angles. Dust hung above it too, and above all the land. The dark bulk of the ice plant, where the Negro Mayes was night watchman, rose against the sky. “Better stop here, hadn’t we?” the soldier said. McLendon did not reply. He hurled the car up and slammed to a stop, the headlights glaring on the blank wall.

“Listen here, boys,” the barber said; “if he’s here, dont that prove he never done it? Dont it? If it was him, he would run. Dont you see he would?” The second car came up and stopped. McLendon got down; Butch sprang down beside him. “Listen, boys,” the barber said.

“Cut the lights off!” McLendon said. The breathless dark rushed down. There was no sound in it save their lungs as they sought air in the parched dust in which for two months they had lived; then the diminishing crunch of McLendon’s and Butch’s feet, and a moment later McLendon’s voice:

“Will! . . . Will!”

Below the east the wan hemorrhage of the moon increased. It heaved above the ridge, silvering the air, the dust, so that they seemed to breathe, live, in a bowl of molten lead. There was no sound of nightbird nor insect, no sound save their breathing and a faint ticking of contracting metal about the cars. Where their bodies touched one another they seemed to sweat dryly, for no more moisture came.

“Christ!” a voice said; “let’s get out of here.”

But they didn't move until vague noises began to grow out of the darkness ahead; then they got out and waited tensely in the breathless dark. There was another sound: a blow, a hissing expulsion of breath and McLendon cursing in undertone. They stood a moment longer, then they ran forward. They ran in a stumbling clump, as though they were fleeing something. "Kill him, kill the son," a voice whispered. McLendon flung them back.

"Not here," he said. "Get him into the car." "Kill him, kill the black son!" the voice murmured. They dragged the Negro to the car. The barber had waited beside the car. He could feel himself sweating and he knew he was going to be sick at the stomach.

"What is it, captains?" the Negro said. "I aint done nothing. 'Fore God, Mr John." Someone produced handcuffs. They worked busily about the Negro as though he were a post, quiet, intent, getting in one another's way. He submitted to the handcuffs, looking swiftly and constantly from dim face to dim face. "Who's here, captains?" he said, leaning to peer into the faces until they could feel his breath and smell his sweaty reek. He spoke a name or two. "What you all say I done, Mr John?"

McLendon jerked the car door open. "Get in!" he said.

The Negro did not move. "What you all going to do with me, Mr John? I aint done nothing. White folks, captains, I aint done nothing: I swear 'fore God." He called another name.

"Get in!" McLendon said. He struck the Negro. The others expelled their breath in a dry hissing and struck him with random blows and he whirled and cursed them, and swept his manacled hands across their faces and slashed the barber upon the mouth, and the barber struck him also. "Get him in there," McLendon said. They pushed at him. He ceased struggling and got in and sat quietly as the others took their places.

He sat between the barber and the soldier, drawing his limbs in so as not to touch them, his eyes going swiftly and constantly from face to

face. Butch clung to the running board. The car moved on. The barber nursed his mouth with his handkerchief.

“What’s the matter, Hawk?” the soldier said.

“Nothing,” the barber said. They regained the highroad and turned away from town. The second car dropped back out of the dust. They went on, gaining speed; the final fringe of houses dropped behind.

“Goddamn, he stinks!” the soldier said.

“We’ll fix that,” the drummer in front beside McLendon said. On the running board Butch cursed into the hot rush of air. The barber leaned suddenly forward and touched McLendon’s arm.

“Let me out, John,” he said.

“Jump out, niggerlover,” McLendon said without turning his head. He drove swiftly. Behind them the sourceless lights of the second car glared in the dust. Presently McLendon turned into a narrow road. It was rutted with disuse.

It led back to an abandoned brick kiln — a series of reddish mounds and weed- and vine-choked vats without bottom. It had been used for pasture once, until one day the owner missed one of his mules. Although he prodded carefully in the vats with a long pole, he could not even find the bottom of them.

“John,” the barber said.

“Jump out, then,” McLendon said, hurling the car along the ruts. Beside the barber the Negro spoke:

“Mr Henry.”

The barber sat forward. The narrow tunnel of the road rushed up and past. Their motion was like an extinct furnace blast: cooler, but utterly dead. The car bounded from rut to rut.

“Mr Henry,” the Negro said.

The barber began to tug furiously at the door. “Look out, there!” the soldier said, but the barber had already kicked the door open and

swung onto the running board. The soldier leaned across the Negro and grasped at him, but he had already jumped. The car went on without checking speed.

The impetus hurled him crashing through dust-sheathed weeds, into the ditch. Dust puffed about him, and in a thin, vicious crackling of sapless stems he lay choking and retching until the second car passed and died away.

Then he rose and limped on until he reached the highroad and turned toward town, brushing at his clothes with his hands. The moon was higher, riding high and clear of the dust at last, and after a while the town began to glare beneath the dust. He went on, limping.

Presently he heard cars and the glow of them grew in the dust behind him and he left the road and crouched again in the weeds until they passed. McLendon's car came last now. There were four people in it and Butch was not on the running board.

They went on; the dust swallowed them; the glare and the sound died away. The dust of them hung for a while, but soon the eternal dust absorbed it again. The barber climbed back onto the road and limped on toward town.

IV

As she dressed for supper on that Saturday evening, her own flesh felt like fever. Her hands trembled among the hooks and eyes, and her eyes had a feverish look, and her hair swirled crisp and crackling under the comb. While she was still dressing the friends called for her and sat while she donned her sheerest underthings and stockings and a new voile dress. "Do you feel strong enough to go out?" they said, their eyes bright too, with a dark glitter. "When you have had time to get over the shock, you must tell us what happened. What he said and did; everything."

In the leafed darkness, as they walked toward the square, she began to breathe deeply, something like a swimmer preparing to dive, until she ceased trembling, the four of them walking slowly because of the terrible heat and out of solicitude for her. But as they neared the square she began to tremble again, walking with her head up, her hands clenched at her sides, their voices about her murmurous, also with that feverish, glittering quality of their eyes.

They entered the square, she in the center of the group, fragile in her fresh dress. She was trembling worse. She walked slower and slower, as children eat ice cream, her head up and her eyes bright in the haggard banner of her face, passing the hotel and the coatless drummers in chairs along the curb looking around at her: "That's the one: see? The one in pink in the middle." "Is that her? What did they do with the nigger? Did they — ?" "Sure. He's all right." "All right, is he?" "Sure.

He went on a little trip." Then the drug store, where even the young men lounging in the doorway tipped their hats and followed with their eyes the motion of her hips and legs when she passed.

They went on, passing the lifted hats of the gentlemen, the suddenly ceased voices, deferent, protective. "Do you see?" the friends said. Their voices sounded like long, hovering sighs of hissing exultation. "There's not a Negro on the square. Not one."

They reached the picture show. It was like a miniature fairyland with its lighted lobby and colored lithographs of life caught in its terrible and beautiful mutations. Her lips began to tingle. In the dark, when the picture began, it would be all right; she could hold back the laughing so it would not waste away so fast and so soon. So she hurried on before the turning faces, the undertones of low astonishment, and they took their accustomed places where she could see the aisle against the silver glare and the young men and girls coming in two and two against it.

The lights flicked away; the screen glowed silver, and soon life began to unfold, beautiful and passionate and sad, while still the young men and girls entered, scented and sibilant in the half dark, their paired backs in

silhouette delicate and sleek, their slim, quick bodies awkward, divinely young, while beyond them the silver dream accumulated, inevitably on and on.

She began to laugh. In trying to suppress it, it made more noise than ever; heads began to turn. Still laughing, her friends raised her and led her out, and she stood at the curb, laughing on a high, sustained note, until the taxi came up and they helped her in.

They removed the pink voile and the sheer underthings and the stockings, and put her to bed, and cracked ice for her temples, and sent for the doctor. He was hard to locate, so they ministered to her with hushed ejaculations, renewing the ice and fanning her. While the ice was fresh and cold she stopped laughing and lay still for a time, moaning only a little. But soon the laughing welled again and her voice rose screaming.

“Shhhhhhhhhhh! Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!” they said, freshening the icepack, smoothing her hair, examining it for gray; “poor girl!” Then to one another: “Do you suppose anything really happened?” their eyes darkly aglitter, secret and passionate. “Shhhhhhhhhhh! Poor girl! Poor Minnie!”

V

It was midnight when McLendon drove up to his neat new house. It was trim and fresh as a birdcage and almost as small, with its clean, green-and-white paint. He locked the car and mounted the porch and entered. His wife rose from a chair beside the reading lamp. McLendon stopped in the floor and stared at her until she looked down.

“Look at that clock,” he said, lifting his arm, pointing. She stood before him, her face lowered, a magazine in her hands. Her face was pale, strained, and weary-looking. “Haven’t I told you about sitting up like this, waiting to see when I come in?”

“John,” she said. She laid the magazine down. Poised on the balls of his feet, he glared at her with his hot eyes, his sweating face.

“Didn’t I tell you?” He went toward her. She looked up then. He caught her shoulder. She stood passive, looking at him.

“Don’t, John. I couldn’t sleep . . . The heat; something. Please, John. You’re hurting me.”

“Didn’t I tell you?” He released her and half struck, half flung her across the chair, and she lay there and watched him quietly as he left the room.

He went on through the house, ripping off his shirt, and on the dark, screened porch at the rear he stood and mopped his head and shoulders with the shirt and flung it away. He took the pistol from his hip and laid it on the table beside the bed, and sat on the bed and removed his shoes, and rose and slipped his trousers off.

He was sweating again already, and he stooped and hunted furiously for the shirt. At last he found it and wiped his body again, and, with his body pressed against the dusty screen, he stood panting. There was no movement, no sound, not even an insect. The dark world seemed to lie stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars.

The End

Mistral, William Faulkner

Mistral

I

IT WAS THE last of the Milanese brandy. I drank, and passed the bottle to Don, who lifted the flask until the liquor slanted yellowly in the narrow slot in the leather jacket, and while he held it so the soldier came up the path, his tunic open at the throat, pushing the bicycle.

He was a young man, with a bold lean face. He gave us a surly good day and looked at the flask a moment as he passed. We watched him disappear beyond the crest, mounting the bicycle as he went out of sight.

Don took a mouthful, then he poured the rest out. It splattered on the parched earth, pocking it for a fading moment. He shook the flask to the ultimate drop. "Salut," he said, returning the flask. "Thanks, O gods. My Lord, if I thought I'd have to go to bed with any more of that in my stomach."

"It's too bad, the way you have to drink it," I said. "Just have to drink it." I stowed the flask away and we went on, crossing the crest. The path began to descend, still in shadow.

The air was vivid, filled with sun which held a quality beyond that of mere light and heat, and a sourceless goat bell somewhere beyond the next turn of the path, distant and unimpeded.

"I hate to see you lugging the stuff along day after day," Don said. "That's the reason I do. You couldn't drink it, and you wouldn't throw it away."

"Throw it away? It cost ten lire. What did I buy it for?"

"God knows," Don said. Against the sun-filled valley the trees were like the bars of a grate, the path a gap in the bars, the valley blue and sunny. The goat bell was somewhere ahead. A fainter path turned off at right angles, steeper than the broad one which we were following. "He went that way," Don said.

"Who did?" I said. Don was pointing to the faint mark of bicycle tires where they had turned into the fainter path.

"See."

"This one must not have been steep enough for him," I said.

"He must have been in a hurry."

"He sure was, after he made that turn."

"Maybe there's a haystack at the bottom."

"Or he could run on across the valley and up the other mountain and then run back down that one and up this one again until his momentum gave out."

"Or until he starved to death," Don said.

"That's right," I said. "Did you ever hear of a man starving to death on a bicycle?"

"No," Don said. "Did you?"

"No," I said. We descended. The path turned, and then we came upon the goat bell. It was on a laden mule cropping with delicate tinkling jerks at the pathside near a stone shrine. Beside the shrine sat a man in corduroy and a woman in a bright shawl, a covered basket beside her. They watched us as we approached.

"Good day, signor," Don said. "Is it far?"

"Good day, signori," the woman said. The man looked at us. He had blue eyes with dissolving irises, as if they had been soaked in water for a long time. The woman touched his arm, then she made swift play with her fingers before his face. He said, in a dry metallic voice like a cicada's:

"Good day, signori."

"He doesn't hear any more," the woman said. "No, it is not far. From yonder you will see the roofs."

"Good," Don said. "We are fatigued. Might one rest here, signora?"

"Rest, signori," the woman said. We slipped our packs and sat down. The sun slanted upon the shrine, upon the serene, weathered figure in the niche and upon two bunches of dried mountain asters lying there.

The woman was making play with her fingers before the man's face. Her other hand in repose upon the basket beside her was gnarled and rough. Motionless, it had that rigid quality of unaccustomed idleness,

not restful so much as quite spent, dead. It looked like an artificial hand attached to the edge of the shawl, as if she had donned it with the shawl for conventional complement. The other hand, the one with which she talked to the man, was swift and supple as a prestidigitator's.

The man looked at us. "You walk, signori," he said in his light, cadenceless voice.

"Sì," we said. Don took out the cigarettes. The man lifted his hand in a slight, deprecatory gesture. Don insisted. The man bowed formally, sitting, and fumbled at the pack. The woman took the cigarette from the pack and put it into his hand. He bowed again as he accepted a light. "From Milano," Don said. "It is far."

"It is far," the woman said. Her fingers rippled briefly. "He has been there," she said.

"I was there, signori," the man said. He held the cigarette carefully between thumb and forefinger. "One takes care to escape the carriages."

"Yes." Don said. "Those without horses."

"Without horses," the woman said. "There are many. Even here in the mountains we hear of it."

"Many," Don said. "Always whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh."

"Sì," the woman said. "Even here I have seen it." Her hand rippled in the sunlight. The man looked at us quietly, smoking. "It was not like that when he was there, you see," she said.

"I am there long time ago, signori," he said. "It is far." He spoke in the same tone she had used, the same tone of grave and courteous explanation.

"It is far," Don said. We smoked. The mule crooped with delicate, jerking tinkles of the bell. "But we can rest yonder," Don said, extending his hand toward the valley swimming blue and sunny beyond the precipice where the path turned. "A bowl of soup, wine, a bed?"

The woman watched us across that serene and topless rampart of the deaf, the cigarette smoking close between thumb and finger. The woman's hand flickered before his face. "Sì," he said; "sì. With the priest: why not? The priest will take them in." He said something else, too swift for me. The woman removed the checked cloth which covered the basket, and took out a wineskin. Don and I bowed and drank in turn, the man returning the bows.

"Is it far to the priest's?" Don said.

The woman's hand flickered with unbelievable rapidity. Her other hand, lying upon the basket, might have belonged to another body. "Let them wait for him there, then," the man said. He looked at us. "There is a funeral today. You will find him at the church. Drink, signori."

We drank in decorous turn, the three of us. The wine was harsh and sharp and potent. The mule crooped, its small bell tinkling, its shadow long in the slanting sun, across the path. "Who is it that's dead, signora?" Don said.

"He was to have married the priest's ward after this harvest," the woman said; "the banns were read and all. A rich man, and not old. But two days ago, he died."

The man watched her lips. "Tchk. He owned land, a house: so do I. It is nothing."

"He was rich," the woman said. "Because he was both young and fortunate, my man is jealous of him."

"But not now," the man said. "Eh, signori?"

"To live is good," Don said. He said, e bello.

"It is good," the man said; he also said, bello.

"He was to have married the priest's niece, you say," Don said.

"She is no kin to him," the woman said. "The priest just raised her. She was six when he took her, without people, kin, of any sort. The mother was workhouse-bred. She lived in a hut on the mountain yonder. It was not known who the father was, although the priest tried for a long while to persuade one of them to marry her for the child's—"

“One of which?” Don said.

“One of those who might have been the father, signor. But it was never known which one it was, until in 1916. He was a young man, a laborer; the next day we learned that the mother had gone too, to the war also, for she was never seen again by those who knew her until one of our boys came home after Caporetto, where the father had been killed, and told how the mother had been seen in a house in Milano that was not a good house.

So the priest went and got the child. She was six then, brown and lean as a lizard. She was hidden on the mountain when the priest got there; the house was empty. The priest pursued her among the rocks and captured her like a beast: she was half naked and without shoes and it winter time.”

“So the priest kept her,” Don said. “Stout fellow.”

“She had no people, no roof, no crust to call hers save what the priest gave her. But you would not know it. Always with a red or a green dress for Sundays and feast days, even at fourteen and fifteen, when a girl should be learning modesty and industry, to be a crown to her husband.

The priest had told that she would be for the church, and we wondered when he would make her put such away for the greater glory of God. But at fourteen and fifteen she was already the brightest and loudest and most tireless in the dances, and the young men already beginning to look after her, even after it had been arranged between her and him who is dead yonder.”

“The priest changed his mind about the church and got her a husband instead,” Don said.

“He found for her the best catch in this parish, signor. Young, and rich, with a new suit each year from the Milano tailor. Then the harvest came, and what do you think, signori? she would not marry him.”

“I thought you said the wedding was not to be until after this harvest,” Don said. “You mean, the wedding had already been put off a year before this harvest?”

“It had been put off for three years. It was made three years ago, to be after that harvest. It was made in the same week that Giulio Farinzale was called to the army. I remember how we were all surprised, because none had thought his number would come up so soon, even though he was a bachelor and without ties save an uncle and aunt.”

“Is that so?” Don said. “Governments surprise everybody now and then. How did he get out of it?”

“He did not get out of it.”

“Oh. That’s why the wedding was put off, was it?”

The woman looked at Don for a minute. “Giulio was not the fiancé’s name.”

“Oh, I see. Who was Giulio?”

The woman did not answer at once. She sat with her head bent a little. The man had been watching their lips when they spoke. “Go on,” he said; “tell them. They are men: they can listen to women’s tittle-tattle with the ears alone. They cackle, signori; give them a breathing spell, and they cackle like geese, Drink.”

“He was the one she used to meet by the river in the evenings; he was younger still: that was why we were surprised that his number should be called so soon. Before we had thought she was old enough for such, she was meeting him. And hiding it from the priest as skillfully as any grown woman could—” For an instant the man’s washed eyes glinted at us, quizzical.

“She was meeting this Giulio all the while she was engaged to the other one?” Don said.

“No. The engagement was later. We had not thought her old enough for such yet. When we heard about it, we said how an anonymous child is like a letter in the post office: the envelope might look like any other

envelope, but when you open it . . . And the holy can be fooled by sin as quickly as you or I, signori. Quicker, because they are holy.”

“Did he ever find it out?” Don said.

“Yes. It was not long after. She would slip out of the house at dusk; she was seen, and the priest was seen, hidden in the garden to watch the house: a servant of the holy God forced to play watchdog for the world to see. It was not good, signori.”

“And then the young man got called suddenly to the army,” Don said. “Is that right?”

“It was quite sudden; we were all surprised. Then we thought that it was the hand of God, and that now the priest would send her to the convent. Then in that same week we learned that it was arranged between her and him who is dead yonder, to be after the harvest, and we said it was the hand of God that would confer upon her a husband beyond her deserts in order to protect His servant. For the holy are susceptible to evil, even as you and I, signori; they too are helpless before sin without God’s aid.”

“Tchk, tchk,” the man said. “It was nothing. The priest looked at her, too,” he said. “For a man is a man, even under a cassock. Eh, signori?” “You would say so,” the woman said. “You without grace.”

“And the priest looked at her, too,” Don said.

“It was his trial, his punishment, for having been too lenient with her. And the punishment was not over: the harvest came, and we heard that the wedding was put off for a year: what do you think of that, signori? that a girl, come from what she had come from, to be given the chance which the priest had given her to save her from herself, from her blood . . .

We heard how they quarreled, she and the priest, of how she defied him, slipping out of the house after dark and going to the dances where her fiancé might see her or hear of it at any time.”

“Was the priest still looking at her?” Don said.

“It was his punishment, his expiation. So the next harvest came, and it was put off again, to be after the next harvest; the banns were not even begun. She defied him to that extent, signori, she, a pauper, and we all saying, ‘When will her fiancé hear of it, learn that she is no good, when there are daughters of good houses who had learned modesty and seemliness?’”

“You have unmarried daughters, signora?” Don said.

“Sì. One. Two have I married, one still in my house. A good girl, signori, if I do say it.”

“Tchk, woman,” the man said.

“That is readily believed,” Don said. “So the young man had gone to the army, and the wedding was put off for another year.”

“And another year, signori. And then a third year. Then it was to be after this harvest; within a month it was to have been. The banns were read; the priest read them himself in the church, the third time last Sunday, with him there in his new Milano suit and she beside him in the shawl he had given her — it cost a hundred lire — and a golden chain, for he gave her gifts suitable for a queen rather than for one who could not name her own father, and we believed that at last the priest had served his expiation out and that the evil had been lifted from his house at last, since the soldier’s time would also be up this fall. And now the fiancé is dead.”

“Was he very sick?” Don said.

“It was very sudden. A hale man; one you would have said would live a long time. One day he was well, the second day he was quite sick. The third day he was dead. Perhaps you can hear the bell, with listening, since you have young ears.” The opposite mountains were in shadow. Between, the valley lay invisible still. In the sunny silence the mule’s bell tinkled in random jerks. “For it is in God’s hands,” the woman said. “Who will say that his life is his own?”

“Who will say?” Don said. He did not look at me. He said in English:
“Give me a cigarette.”
“You’ve got them.”
“No, I haven’t.”
“Yes, you have. In your pants pocket.”

He took out the cigarettes. He continued to speak in English. “And he died suddenly. And he got engaged suddenly. And at the same time, Giulio got drafted suddenly. It would have surprised you. Everything was sudden except somebody’s eagerness for the wedding to be. There didn’t seem to be any hurry about that, did there?”

“I don’t know. I no spika.”

“In fact, they seemed to stop being sudden altogether until about time for Giulio to come home again. Then it began to be sudden again. And so I think I’ll ask if priests serve on the draft boards in Italy.” The old man watched his lips, his washed gaze grave and intent. “And if this path is the main path down the mountain, and that bicycle turned off into that narrow one back there, what do you think of that, signori?”

“I think it was fine. Only a little sharp to the throat. Maybe we can get something down there to take away the taste.”

The man was watching our lips; the woman’s head was bent again; her stiff hand smoothed the checked cover upon the basket. “You will find him at the church, signori,” the man said.

“Yes,” Don said. “At the church.”

We drank again. The man accepted another cigarette with that formal and unflinching politeness, conferring upon the action something finely ceremonious yet not incongruous. The woman put the wineskin back into the basket and covered it again. We rose and took up our packs.

“You talk swiftly with the hand, signora,” Don said.

“He reads the lips too. The other we made lying in the bed in the dark. The old do not sleep so much. The old lie in bed and talk. It is not like that with you yet.”

“It is so. You have made the padrone many children, signora?”

“Sì. Seven. But we are old now. We lie in bed and talk.”

II

Before we reached the village the bell had begun to toll. From the gaunt steeple of the church the measured notes seemed to blow free as from a winter branch, along the wind. The wind began as soon as the sun went down.

We watched the sun touch the mountains, whereupon the sky lost its pale, vivid blueness and took on a faintly greenish cast, like glass, against which the recent crest, where the shrine faded with the dried handful of flowers beneath the fading crucifix, stood black and sharp. Then the wind began: a steady moving wall of air full of invisible particles of something.

Before it the branches leaned without a quiver, as before the pressure of an invisible hand, and in it our blood began to cool at once, even before we had stopped walking where the path became a cobbled street.

The bell still tolled. “Funny hour for a funeral,” I said. “You’d think he would have kept a long time at this altitude. No need to be hurried into the ground like this.”

“He got in with a fast gang,” Don said. The church was invisible from here, shut off by a wall. We stood before a gate, looking into a court enclosed by three walls and roofed by a vine on a raftered trellis. It contained a wooden table and two backless benches. We stood at the gate, looking into the court, when Don said. “So this is Uncle’s house.”

“Uncle?”

“He was without ties save an uncle and aunt,” Don said. “Yonder, by the door.” The door was at the bottom of the court. There was a fire beyond it, and beside the door a bicycle leaned against the wall. “The bicycle, unconscious,” Don said.

“Is that a bicycle?”

“Sure. That’s a bicycle.” It was an old-style machine, with high back-swept handlebars like gazelle horns. We looked at it.

“The other path is the back entrance,” I said. “The family entrance.” We heard the bell, looking into the court.

“Maybe the wind doesn’t blow in there,” Don said. “Besides, there’s no hurry. We couldn’t see him anyway, until it’s over.”

“These places are hotels sometimes.” We entered. Then we saw the soldier. When we approached the table he came to the door and stood against the firelight, looking at us. He wore a white shirt now. But we could tell him by his legs. Then he went back into the house.

“So Malbrouck is home,” Don said.

“Maybe he came back for the funeral.” We listened to the bell. The twilight was thicker inside. Overhead the leaves streamed rigid on the wind, stippled black upon the livid translucent sky. The strokes of the bell sounded as though they too were leaves flattening away upon an inviolable vine in the wind.

“How did he know there was going to be one?” Don said.

“Maybe the priest wrote him a letter.”

“Maybe so,” Don said. The firelight looked good beyond the door. Then a woman stood in it, looking at us. “Good day, padrona,” Don said.

“Might one have a mouthful of wine here?” She looked at us, motionless against the firelight. She was tall. She stood tall and motionless against the firelight, not touching the door. The bell tolled.

“She used to be a soldier too,” Don said. “She was a sergeant.”

"Maybe she was the colonel who ordered Malbrouck to go home."

"No. He wasn't moving fast enough when he passed us up yonder, for it to have been her." Then the woman spoke:

"It is so, signori. Rest yourselves." She went back into the house. We slipped our packs and sat down. We looked at the bicycle.

"Cavalry," Don said. "Wonder why he came the back way."

"All right," I said.

"All right what?"

"All right. Wonder."

"Is that a joke?"

"Sure. That's a joke. It's because we are old. We lie in the draft. That's a joke too."

"Tell me something that's not a joke."

"All right."

"Did you hear the same thing I think I heard up there?"

"No spika. I love Italy. I love Mussolini." The woman brought the wine. She set it on the table and was turning away. "Ask her," I said. "Why don't you?"

"All right. I will. — You have military in the house, signora?"

The woman looked at him. "It is nothing, signor. It is my nephew returned."

"Finished, signora?"

"Finished, signor."

"Accept our felicitations. He has doubtless many friends who will rejoice at his return." She was thin, not old, with cold eyes, looking down at Don with brusque attention, waiting. "You have a funeral in the village today." She said nothing at all. She just stood there, waiting for Don to get done talking. "He will be mourned," Don said.

"Let us hope so," she said. She made to go on; Don asked her about lodgings. There were none, she answered with immediate finality. Then

we realized that the bell had ceased. We could hear the steady whisper of the wind in the leaves overhead.

“We were told that the priest—” Don said.

“Yes? You were told that the priest.”

“That we might perhaps find lodgings there.”

“Then you would do well to see the priest, signor.” She returned to the house. She strode with the long stride of a man into the firelight, and disappeared. When I looked at Don, he looked away and reached for the wine.

“Why didn’t you ask her some more?” I said. “Why did you quit so soon?”

“She was in a hurry. Her nephew is just home from the army, she said. He came in this afternoon. She wants to be with him, since he is without ties.”

“Maybe she’s afraid he’ll be drafted.”

“Is that a joke too?”

“It wouldn’t be to me.” He filled the glasses. “Call her back. Tell her you heard that her nephew is to marry the priest’s ward. Tell her we want to give them a present. A stomach pump. That’s not a joke, either.”

“I know it’s not.” He filled his glass carefully. “Which had you rather do, or stay at the priest’s tonight?”

“Salut,” I said.

“Salut.” We drank. The leaves made a dry, wild, continuous sound.

“Wish it was still summer.”

“It would be pretty cold tonight, even in a barn.”

“Yes. Glad we don’t have to sleep in a barn tonight.”

“It wouldn’t be so bad, after we got the hay warm and got to sleep.”

“We don’t have to, though. We can get a good sleep and get an early start in the morning.”

I filled the glasses. “I wonder how far it is to the next village.”

“Too far.” We drank. “I wish it were summer. Don’t you?”

“Yes.” I emptied the bottle into the glasses. “Have some wine.” We raised our glasses. We looked at one another. The particles in the wind seemed to drive through the clothing, through the flesh, against the bones, penetrating the brick and plaster of the walls to reach us.

“Salut.”

“We said that before,” Don said.

“All right. Salut, then.”

“Salut.”

We were young: Don, twenty-three; I, twenty-two. And age is so much a part of, so inextricable from, the place where you were born or bred. So that away from home, some distance away — space or time or experience away — you are always both older and eternally younger than yourself, at the same time.

We stood in the black wind and watched the funeral — priest, coffin, a meager clump of mourners — pass, their garments, and particularly the priest’s rusty black, ballooning ahead of them, giving an illusion of unseemly haste, as though they were outstripping themselves across the harsh green twilight (the air was like having to drink iced lemonade in the winter time) and into the church. “We’ll be out of the wind too,” Don said.

“There’s an hour of light yet.”

“Sure; we might even reach the crest by dark.” He looked at me. Then I looked away. The red tiles of the roofs were black, too, now. “We’ll be out of the wind.” Then the bell began to toll again. “We don’t know anything. There’s probably not anything.

Anyway, we don’t know it. We don’t have to know it. Let’s get out of the wind.” It was one of those stark, square, stone churches, built by those harsh iron counts and bishops of Lombardy. It was built old; time

had not even mellowed it, could not ever mellow it, not all of time could have.

They might have built the mountains too and invented the twilight in a dungeon underground, in the black ground. And beside the door the bicycle leaned. We looked at it quietly as we entered the church and we said quietly, at the same time:

“Beaver.”

“He’s one of the pallbearers,” Don said. “That’s why he came home.” The bell tolled. We passed through the chancel and stopped at the back of the church. We were out of the wind now, save for the chill eddies of it that licked in at our backs. We could hear it outside, ripping the slow strokes of the bell half-born out of the belfry, so that by the time we heard them, they seemed to have come back as echoes from a far distance.

The nave, groined upward into the gloom, dwarfed the meager clot of bowed figures. Beyond them, above the steady candles, the Host rose, soaring into sootlike shadows like festooned cobwebs, with a quality sorrowful and triumphant, like wings.

There was no organ, no music, no human sound at all at first. They just knelt there among the dwarfing gloom and the cold, serene, faint light of the candles. They might have all been dead. “It’ll be dark long before they can get done,” Don whispered.

“Maybe it’s because of the harvest,” I whispered. “They probably have to work all day. The living can’t wait on the dead, you know.”

“But, if he was as rich as they told us he was, it seems like . . .”

“Who buries the rich? Do the rich do it, or do the poor do it?”

“The poor do it,” Don whispered. Then the priest was there, above the bowed heads. We had not seen him at first, but now he was there, shapeless, blurring out of the shadows below the candles, his face like a smudge, a thumb print, upon the gloom where the Host rose in a series

of dissolving gleams like a waterfall; his voice filled the church, slow, steady, like wings beating against the cold stone, upon the resonance of wind in which the windless candles stood as though painted.

“And so he looked at her,” Don whispered. “He had to sit across the table from her, say, and watch her. Watch her eating the food that made her change from nothing and become everything, knowing she had no food of her own and that it was his food that was doing it, and not for him changing.

You know: girls: they are not anything, then they are everything. You watch them become everything before your eyes. No, not eyes: it’s the same in the dark. You know it before they do; it’s not their becoming everything that you dread: it’s their finding it out after you have long known it: you die too many times. And that’s not right. Not fair. I hope I’ll never have a daughter.”

“That’s incest,” I whispered.

“I never said it wasn’t. I said it was like fire. Like watching the fire lean up and away rushing.”

“You must either watch a fire, or burn up in it. Or not be there at all. Which would you choose?”

“I don’t know. If it was a girl, I’d rather burn up in it.”

“Than to not be there at all, even?”

“Yes.” Because we were young. And the young seem to be impervious to anything except trifles. We can invest trifles with a tragic profundity, which is the world. Because, after all, there’s nothing particularly profound about reality.

Because when you reach reality, along about forty or fifty or sixty, you find it to be only six feet deep and eighteen feet square.

Then it was over. Outside again, the wind blew steadily down from the black hills, hollowing out the green glass bowl of the sky.

We watched them file out of the church and carry the coffin into the churchyard. Four of them carried iron lanterns and in the dusk they

clotted quietly antic about the grave while the wind leaned steadily upon them and upon the lantern flames, and blew fine dust into the grave as though all nature were quick to hide it.

Then they were done. The lanterns bobbed into motion, approaching, and we watched the priest. He crossed the churchyard toward the presbytery at a scuttling gait, blown along in his gusty black. The soldier was in mufti now. He came out of the throng, striding also with that long-limbed thrust like his aunt. He looked briefly at us with his bold surly face and got on the bike and rode away. "He was one of the pallbearers," Don said. "And what do you think of that, signori?"

"No spika," I said. "I love Italy. I love Mussolini."

"You said that before."

"All right. Salut, then."

Don looked at me. His face was quite sober. "Salut," he said. Then he looked toward the presbytery, hitching his pack forward. The door of the presbytery was closed.

"Don," I said. He stopped, looking at me. The mountains had lost all perspective; they appeared to lean in toward us. It was like being at the bottom of a dead volcano filled with that lost savage green wind dead in its own motion and full of its own driving and unsleeping dust. We looked at one another.

"All right, damn it," Don said. "You say what to do next, then." We looked at one another. After a while the wind would sound like sleep, maybe. If you were warm and close between walls, maybe.

"All right," I said.

"Why can't you mean, all right? Damn it, we've got to do something. This is October; it's not summer. And we don't know anything. We haven't heard anything. We don't speak Italian. We love Italy."

"I said, all right," I said. The presbytery was of stone too, bleak in a rank garden. We were halfway up the flagged path when a casement

beneath the eaves opened and somebody in white looked down at us and closed the shutter again. It was done all in one movement. Again we said together, quietly:

“Beaver.” But it was too dark to see much, and the casement was closed again. It had not taken ten seconds.

“Only we should have said, Beaverette,” Don said.

“That’s right. Is that a joke?”

“Yes. That’s a joke.” A wooden-faced peasant woman opened the door. She held a candle, the flame leaning inward from the wind. The hall behind her was dark; a stale, chill smell came out of it. She stood there, the harsh planes of her face in sharp relief, her eyes two caverns in which two little flames glittered, looking at us.

“Go on,” I said. “Tell her something.”

“We were told that his reverence, signora,” Don said, “that we might—” The candle leaned and recovered. She raised the other hand and sheltered it, blocking the door with her body. “We are travelers, en promenade; we were told — supper and a bed . . .”

When we followed her down the hall we carried with us in our ears the long rush of the recent wind, like in a sea shell. There was no light save the candle which she carried. So that, behind her, we walked in gloom out of which the serrated shadow of a stair on one wall reared dimly into the passing candle and dissolved in mounting serrations, carrying the eye with it up the wall where there was not any light. “Pretty soon it’ll be too dark to see anything from that window,” Don said.

“Maybe she won’t have to, by then.”

“Maybe so.” The woman opened a door; we entered a lighted room. It contained a table on which sat a candle in an iron candlestick, a carafe of wine, a long loaf, a metal box with a slotted cover. The table was set for two. We slung our packs into the corner and watched her set another place and fetch another chair from the hall. But that made only

three places and we watched her take up her candle and go out by a second door. Then Don looked at me. "Maybe we'll see her, after all."

"How do you know he doesn't eat?"

"When? Don't you know where he'll be?" I looked at him. "He'll have to stay out there in the garden."

"How do you know?"

"The soldier was at the church. He must have seen him. Must have heard—" We looked at the door, but it was the woman. She had three bowls. "Soup, signora?" Don said.

"Sì. Soup."

"Good. We have come far." She set the bowls on the table. "From Milano." She looked briefly over her shoulder at Don.

"You'd better have stayed there," she said. And she went out. Don and I looked at one another. My ears were still full of wind.

"So he is in the garden," Don said.

"How do you know he is?"

After a while Don quit looking at me. "I don't know."

"No. You don't know. And I don't know. We don't want to know. Do we?"

"No. No spika."

"I mean, sure enough."

"That's what I mean," Don said. The whisper in our ears seemed to fill the room with wind. Then we realized that it was the wind that we heard, the wind itself we heard, even though the single window was shuttered tight. It was as though the quiet room were isolated on the ultimate peak of space, hollowed murmurous out of chaos and the long dark fury of time. It seemed strange that the candle flame should stand so steady above the wick.

So we did not see him until we were in the house. Until then he had been only a shabby shapeless figure, on the small size, scuttling through the blowing dusk at the head of the funeral, and a voice. It was as though neither of them was any part of the other: the figure in blowing black, and the voice beating up the still air above the candles, detached and dispassionate, tireless and spent and forlorn.

There was something precipitate about the way he entered, like a diver taking a full breath in the act of diving. He did not look at us and he was already speaking, greeting us and excusing his tardiness in one breath, in a low rapid voice. Still, without having ceased to speak or having looked at us, he motioned toward the other chairs and seated himself and bowed his head over his plate and began a Latin grace without a break in his voice; again his voice seemed to rush slow and effortless just above the sound of the wind, like in the church.

It went on for some time; so that after a while I raised my head. Don was watching me, his eyebrows arched a little; we looked toward the priest and saw his hands writhing slowly on either side of his plate. Then the woman spoke a sharp word behind me; I had not heard her enter: a gaunt woman, not tall, with a pale, mahogany-colored face that might have been any age between twenty-five and sixty.

The priest stopped. He looked at us for the first time, out of weak, rushing eyes. They were brown and irisless, like those of an old dog. Looking at us, it was as though he had driven them up with whips and held them so, in cringing and rushing desperation. "I forget," he said. "There come times—" Again the woman snapped a word at him, setting a tureen on the table, the shadow of her arm falling across his face and remaining there: but we had already looked away.

The long wind rushed past the stone eaves; the candle flame stood steady as a sharpened pencil in the still sound of the wind. We heard her filling the bowls, yet she still stood for a time, the priest's face in the shadow of her arm; she seemed to be holding us all so until the moment — whatever it was — had passed. She went out. Don and I

began to eat. We did not look toward him. When he spoke at last, it was in a tone of level, polite uninterest. “You have come far, signori?”

“From Milano,” we both said.

“Before that, Firenze,” Don said. The priest’s head was bent over his bowl. He ate rapidly. Without looking up he gestured toward the loaf. I pushed it along to him. He broke the end off and went on eating.

“Ah,” he said. “Firenze. That is a city. More — what do you say? — spirituel than our Milano.” He ate hurriedly, without finesse. His robe was turned back over a flannel undershirt, the sleeves were. His spoon clattered; at once the woman entered with a platter of broccoli.

She removed the bowls. He reached his hand. She handed him the carafe and he filled the glasses without looking up and lifted his with a brief phrase. But he had only feigned to drink; he was watching my face when I looked at him. I looked away; I heard him clattering at the dish and Don was looking at me too.

Then the woman’s shoulder came between us and the priest. “There come times—” he said. He clattered at the dish. When the woman spoke to him in that shrill, rapid patois he thrust his chair back and for an instant we saw his driven eyes across her arm. “There come times—” he said, raising his voice.

Then she drowned the rest of it, getting completely between us and Don and I stopped looking and heard them leave the room. The steps ceased. Then we could hear only the wind.

“It was the burial service,” Don said. Don was a Catholic. “That grace was.”

“Yes,” I said. “I didn’t know that.”

“Yes. It was the burial service. He got mixed up.”

“Sure,” I said. “That’s it. What do we do now?” Our packs lay in the corner. Two packs can look as human, as utterly human and spent, as

two shoes. We were watching the door when the woman entered. But she wasn't going to stop. She didn't look at us.

"What shall we do now, signora?" Don said.

"Eat." She did not stop. Then we could hear the wind again.

"Have some wine," Don said. He raised the carafe, then he held it poised above my glass, and we listened. The voice was beyond the wall, maybe two walls, in a sustained rush of indistinguishable words. He was not talking to anyone there: you could tell that. In whatever place he was, he was alone: you could tell that. Or maybe it was the wind.

Maybe in any natural exaggerated situation — wind, rain, drouth — man is always alone. It went on for longer than a minute while Don held the carafe above my glass. Then he poured. We began to eat. The voice was muffled and sustained, like a machine might have been making it.

"If it were just summer," I said.

"Have some wine." He poured. We held our poised glasses. It sounded just like a machine. You could tell that he was alone. Anybody could have. "That's the trouble," Don said. "Because there's not anybody there. Not anybody in the house."

"The woman."

"So are we." He looked at me.

"Oh," I said.

"Sure. What better chance could she have wanted, have asked for? He was in here at least five minutes. And he just back from the army after three years. The first day he is home, and then afternoon and then twilight and then darkness. You saw her there. Didn't you see her up there?"

"He locked the door. You know he locked it."

"This house belongs to God: you can't have a lock on it. You didn't know that."

"That's right. I forgot you're a Catholic. You know things. You know a lot, don't you?"

"No. I don't know anything. I no spika too. I love Italy too." The woman entered. She didn't bring anything this time. She came to the table and stood there, her gaunt face above the candle, looking down at us.

"Look, then," she said. "Will you go away?"

"Go away?" Don said. "Not stop here tonight?" She looked down at us, her hand lying on the table. "Where could we stop? Who would take us in? One cannot sleep on the mountain in October, signora."

"Yes," she said. She was not looking at us now. Through the walls we listened to the voice and to the wind.

"What is this, anyway?" Don said. "What goes on here, signora?"

She looked at him gravely, speculatively, as if he were a child. "You are seeing the hand of God, signorino," she said. "Pray God that you are too young to remember it." Then she was gone. And after a while the voice ceased, cut short off like a thread. And then there was just the wind.

"As soon as we get out of the wind, it won't be so bad," I said.

"Have some wine." Don raised the carafe. It was less than half full.

"We'd better not drink any more."

"No." He filled the glasses. We drank. Then we stopped. It began again, abruptly, in full stride, as though silence were the thread this time. We drank. "We might as well finish the broccoli, too."

"I don't want any more."

"Have some wine then."

"You've already had more than I have."

"All right." He filled my glass. I drank it. "Now, have some wine."

"We ought not to drink it all."

He raised the carafe. "Two more glasses left. No use in leaving that."

“There aren’t two glasses left.”

“Bet you a lira.”

“All right. But let me pour.”

“All right.” He gave me the carafe. I filled my glass and reached toward his. “Listen,” he said. For about a minute now the voice had been rising and falling, like a wheel running down. This time it didn’t rise again; there was only the long sound of the wind left. “Pour it,” Don said.

I poured. The wine mounted three quarters. It began to dribble away. “Tilt it up.” I did so. A single drop hung for a moment, then fell into the glass. “Owe you a lira,” Don said.

The coins rang loud in the slotted box. When he took it up from the table and shook it, it made no sound. He took the coins from his pocket and dropped them through the slot. He shook it again. “Doesn’t sound like quite enough. Cough up.”

I dropped some coins through the slot; he shook the box again. “Sounds all right now.” He looked at me across the table, his empty glass bottom-up before him. “How about a little wine?”

When we rose I took my pack from the corner. It was on the bottom. I had to tumble Don’s aside. He watched me. “What are you going to do with that?” he said. “Take it out for a walk?”

“I don’t know,” I said. Past the cold invisible eaves the long wind steadily sighed. Upon the candle the flame stood like the balanced feather on the long white nose of a clown.

The hall was dark; there was no sound in it. There was nothing in it save the cold smell of sunless plaster and silence and the smell of living, of where people have, and will have, lived. We carried our packs low and close against our legs like we had stolen them.

We went on to the door and opened it, entering the black wind again. It had scoured the sky clear and clean, hollowing it out of the last of light, the last of twilight. We were halfway to the gate when we saw him. He

was walking swiftly back and forth beside the wall. His head was bare, his robes ballooning about him. When he saw us he did not stop. He didn't hurry, either. He just turned and went back beside the wall and turned again, walking fast. We waited at the gate.

We thanked him for the food, he motionless in his whipping robes, his head bent and averted a little, as a deaf man listens. When Don knelt at his feet he started back as though Don had offered to strike him. Then I felt like a Catholic too and I knelt too and he made the sign hurriedly above us, upon the black-and-green wind and dusk, like he would have made it in water.

When we passed out the gate and looked back we could still see, against the sky and the blank and lightless house, his head rushing back and forth like a midget running along the top of the wall.

IV

The café was on the lee side of the street; we sat out of the wind. But we could see gusts and eddies of trash swirl along the gutter, and an occasional tongue of it licked chill across our legs, and we could hear the steady rushing of it in the high twilight among the roofs. On the curb two musicians from the hills — a fiddler and a piper — sat, playing a wild and skirling tune. Now and then they stopped to drink, then they resumed the same tune.

It was without beginning and seemingly without end, the wild unmusic of it swirling along the wind with a quality at once martial and sad. The waiter fetched us brandy and coffee, his dirty apron streaming suddenly and revealing beneath it a second one of green baize and rigid as oxidized copper.

At the other table five young men sat, drinking and ringing separately small coins onto the waiter's tray, which he appeared to count by the timbre of the concussion before tilting them into his waistcoat in one motion, and a long-flanked young peasant woman stopped to hear the music, a child riding her hip.

She set the child down and it scuttled under the table where the young men sat, they withdrawing their legs to permit it, while the woman was not looking. She was looking at the musicians, her face round and tranquil, her mouth open a little.

“Let’s have some wine,” Don said.

“All right,” I said. “I like Italy,” I said. We had another brandy. The woman was trying to cajole the child from under the table. One of the young men extracted it and gave it back to her. People stopped in the street to hear the music, and a high two-wheeled cart, full of fagots and drawn by a woman and a diminutive mule, passed without stopping, and then the girl came up the street in her white dress, and I didn’t feel like a Catholic any more.

She was all in white, coatless, walking slender and supple. I didn’t feel like anything any more, watching her white dress swift in the twilight, carrying her somewhere or she carrying it somewhere: anyway, it was going too, moving when she moved and because she moved, losing her when she would be lost because it moved when she moved and went with her to the instant of loss.

I remember how, when I learned about Thaw and White and Evelyn Nesbitt, how I cried. I cried because Evelyn, who was a word, was beautiful and lost or I would never have heard of her. Because she had to be lost for me to find her and I had to find her to lose her.

And when I learned that she was old enough to have a grown daughter or son or something, I cried, because I had lost myself then and I could never again be hurt by loss. So I watched the white dress, thinking, She’ll be as near me in a second as she’ll ever be and then she’ll go on away in her white dress forevermore, in the twilight forevermore.

Then I felt Don watching her too and then we watched the soldier spring down from the bike. They came together and stopped and for a while they stood there in the street, among the people, facing one another but not touching. Maybe they were not even talking, and it

didn't matter how long; it didn't matter about time. Then Don was nudging me.

"The other table," he said. The five young men had all turned; their heads were together, now and then a hand, an arm, secret, gesticulant, their faces all one way. They leaned back, without turning their faces, and the waiter stood, tray on hip — a squat, sardonic figure older than Grandfather Lust himself — looking also.

At last they turned and went on up the street together in the direction from which he had come, he leading the bicycle. Just before they passed from sight they stopped and faced one another again among the people, the heads, without touching at all. Then they went on. "Let's have some wine," Don said.

The waiter set the brandies on the table, his apron like a momentary board on the wind. "You have military in town," Don said.

"That's right," the waiter said. "One."

"Well, one is enough," Don said. The waiter looked up the street. But they were gone now, with her white dress shaping her stride, her girl-white, not for us.

"Too many, some say." He looked much more like a monk than the priest did, with his long thin nose and his bald head. He looked like a devastated hawk. "You're stopping at the priest's, eh?"

"You have no hotel," Don said.

The waiter made change from his waistcoat, ringing the coins deliberately upon the table. "What for? Who would stop here, without he walked? Nobody walks except you English."

"We're Americans."

"Well." He raised his shoulders faintly. "That's your affair." He was not looking at us exactly; not at Don, that is. "Did you try Cavalcanti's?"

"A wineshop at the edge of town? The soldier's aunt, isn't it? Yes. But she said—"

The waiter was watching him now. "She didn't send you to the priest?"

“No.”

“Ah,” the waiter said. His apron streamed suddenly. He fought it down and scoured the top of the table with it. “Americans, eh?”

“Yes,” Don said. “Why wouldn’t she tell us where to go?”

The waiter scoured the table. “That Cavalcanti. She’s not of this parish.”

“Not?”

“Not since three years. The padrone belongs to that one beyond the mountain.” He named a village which we had passed in the forenoon.

“I see,” Don said. “They aren’t natives.”

“Oh, they were born here. Until three years ago they belonged to this parish.”

“But three years ago they changed.”

“They changed.” He found another spot on the table. He removed it with the apron. Then he examined the apron. “There are changes and changes; some further than others.”

“The padrona changed further than across the mountain, did she?”

“The padrona belongs to no parish at all.” He looked at us. “Like me.”

“Like you?”

“Did you try to talk to her about the church?” He watched Don. “Stop there tomorrow and mention the church to her.”

“And that happened three years ago,” Don said. “That was a year of changes for them.”

“You said it. The nephew to the army, the padrone across the mountain, the padrona . . . All in one week, too. Stop there tomorrow and ask her.”

“What do they think here about all these changes?”

“What changes?”

“These recent changes.”

“How recent?” He looked at Don. “There’s no law against changes.”

“No. Not when they’re done like the law says. Sometimes the law has a look, just to see if they were changed right. Isn’t that so?”

The waiter had assumed an attitude of sloven negligence, save his eyes, his long face. It was too big for him, his face was. “How did you know he was a policeman?”

“Policeman?”

“You said soldier; I knew you meant policeman and just didn’t speak the language good. But you’ll pick it up with practice.” He looked at Don. “So you made him too, did you? Came in here this afternoon; said he was a shoe-drummer. But I made him.”

“Here already,” Don said. “I wonder why he didn’t stop the . . . before they . . .”

“How do you know he’s a policeman?” I said.

The waiter looked at me. “I don’t care whether he is or not, buddy. Which had you rather do? think a man is a cop and find he’s not, or think he’s not a cop, and find he is?”

“You’re right,” Don said. “So that’s what they say here.”

“They say plenty. Always have and always will. Like any other town.”

“What do you say?” Don said.

“I don’t say. You don’t either.”

“No.”

“It’s no skin off of my back. If they want to drink, I serve them; if they want to talk, I listen. That keeps me as busy as I want to be all day.”

“You’re right,” Don said. “It didn’t happen to you.”

The waiter looked up the street; it was almost full dark. He appeared not to have heard. “Who sent for the cop, I wonder?” Don said.

“When a man’s got jack, he’ll find plenty of folks to help him make trouble for folks even after he’s dead,” the waiter said. Then he looked at us. “I?” he said. He leaned; he slapped his chest lightly.

He looked quickly at the other table, then he leaned down and hissed: "I am atheist, like in America," and stood back and looked at us. "In America, all are atheists. We know." He stood there in his dirty apron, with his long, weary, dissolute face while we rose in turn and shook hands with him gravely, the five young men turning to look.

He flipped his other hand at us, low against his flank. "Rest, rest," he hissed. He looked over his shoulder at the young men. "Sit down," he whispered. He jerked his head toward the doorway behind us, where the padrona sat behind the bar. "I've got to eat, see?"

He scuttled away and returned with two more brandies, carrying them with his former sloven, precarious skill, as if he had passed no word with us save to take the order. "It's on me," he said. "Put it down."

"Now, what?" Don said. The music had ceased; from across the street we watched the fiddler, fiddle under arm, standing before the table where the young men sat, his other hand and the clutched hat gesticulant. The young woman was already going up the street, the child riding her hip again, its head nodding to a somnolent rhythm, like a man on an elephant. "Now, what?"

"I don't care."

"Oh, come on."

"No."

"There's no detective here. He never saw one. He wouldn't know a detective. There aren't any detectives in Italy: can you imagine an official Italian in plain clothes for a uniform?"

"No."

"She'll show us where the bed is, and in the morning early—"

"No. You can, if you want to. But I'm not."

He looked at me. Then he swung his pack onto his shoulder. "Good night. See you in the morning. At the café yonder."

“All right.” He did not look back. Then he turned the corner. I stood in the wind. Anyway, I had the coat. It was a shooting coat of Harris tweed; we had paid eleven guineas for it, wearing it day about while the other wore the sweater.

In the Tyrol last summer Don held us up three days while he was trying to make the girl who sold beer at the inn. He wore the coat for three successive days, swapping me a week, to be paid on demand.

On the third day the girl’s sweetheart came back. He was as big as a silo, with a green feather in his hat. We watched him pick her over the bar with one hand. I believe she could have done Don the same way: all yellow and pink and white she was, like a big orchard.

Or like looking out across a snowfield in the early sunlight. She could have done it at almost any hour for three days too, by just reaching out her hand. Don gained four pounds while we were there.

V

Then I came into the full sweep of the wind. The houses were all dark, yet there was still a little light low on the ground, as though the wind held it there flattened to the earth and it had been unable to rise and escape. The walls ceased at the beginning of the bridge; the river looked like steel.

I thought I had already come into the full sweep of the wind, but I hadn’t. The bridge was of stone, balustrades and roadway and all, and I squatted beneath the lee of the weather rail. I could hear the wind above and beneath, coming down the river in a long sweeping hum, like through wires. I squatted there, waiting. It wasn’t very long.

He didn’t see me at first, until I rose. “Did you think to have the flask filled?” he said.

“I forgot. I intended to. Damn the luck. Let’s go back—”

“I got a bottle. Which way now?”

“I don’t care. Out of the wind. I don’t care.” We crossed the bridge. Our feet made no sound on the stones, because the wind blew it away. It flattened the water, scoured it; it looked just like steel.

It had a sheen, holding light like the land between it and the wind, reflecting enough to see by. But it swept all sound away before it was made almost, so that when we reached the other side and entered the cut where the road began to mount, it was several moments before we could hear anything except our ears; then we heard. It was a smothered whimpering sound that seemed to come out of the air overhead. We stopped. “It’s a child,” Don said. “A baby.”

“No: an animal. An animal of some sort.” We looked at one another in the pale darkness, listening.

“It’s up there, anyway,” Don said. We climbed up out of the cut. There was a low stone wall enclosing a field, the field a little luminous yet, dissolving into the darkness. Just this side of the darkness, about a hundred yards away, a copse stood black, blobbed shapeless on the gloom.

The wind rushed up across the field and we leaned on the wall, listening into it, looking at the copse. But the sound was nearer than that, and after a moment we saw the priest.

He was lying on his face just inside the wall, his robes over his head, the black blur of his gown moving faintly and steadily, either because of the wind or because he was moving under them. And whatever the sound meant that he was making, it was not meant to be listened to, for his voice ceased when we made a noise. But he didn’t look up, and the faint shuddering of his gown didn’t stop.

Shuddering, writhing, twisting from side to side — something. Then Don touched me. We went on beside the wall. “Get down easier here,” he said quietly. The pale road rose gradually beneath us as the hill flattened. The copse was a black blob. “Only I didn’t see the bicycle.”

“Then go back to Cavalcanti’s,” I said. “Where in hell do you expect to see it?”

“They would have hidden it. I forgot. Of course they would have hidden it.”

“Go on,” I said. “Don’t talk so goddamn much.”

“Unless they thought he would be busy with us and wouldn’t—” he ceased and stopped. I jolted into him and then I saw it too, the handlebars rising from beyond the wall like the horns of a hidden antelope.

Against the gloom the blob of the copse seemed to pulse and fade, as though it breathed, lived. For we were young, and night, darkness, is terrible to young people, even icy driving blackness like this. Young people should be so constituted that with sunset they would enter a coma state, by slumber shut safe from the darkness, the secret nostalgic sense of frustration and of objectless and unappeasable desire.

“Get down, damn you,” I said. With his high hunched pack, his tight sweater, he was ludicrous; he looked like a clown; he was terrible and ugly and sad all at once, since he was ludicrous and, without the coat, he would be so cold. And so was I: ugly and terrible and sad. “This damn wind.

This damn wind.” We regained the road. We were sheltered for the moment, and he took out the bottle and we drank. It was fiery stuff. “Talk about my Milan brandy,” I said. “That damn wind. That damn wind. That damn wind.”

“Give me a cigarette.”

“You’ve got them.”

“I gave them to you.”

“You’re a goddamn liar. You didn’t.” He found them in his pocket. But I didn’t wait.

“Don’t you want one? Better light it here, while we are . . .” I didn’t wait. The road rose, became flush with the field. After a while I heard him just behind me, and we entered the wind. I could see past my shoulder his cigarette shredding away in fiery streamers upon the unimpeded rush of the mistral, that black chill wind full of dust like sparks of ice.

The End

Divorce in Naples, William Faulkner

Divorce in Naples

I

WE WERE SITTING at a table inside: Monckton and the bosun and Carl and George and me and the women, the three women of that abject glittering kind that seamen know or that know seamen. We were talking English and they were not talking at all. By that means they could speak constantly to us above and below the sound of our voices in a tongue older than recorded speech and time too.

Older than the thirty-four days of sea time which we had but completed, anyway. Now and then they spoke to one another in Italian. The women in Italian, the men in English, as if language might be the sex difference, the functioning of the vocal cords the inner bidding until the dark pairing time. The men in English, the women in Italian: a decorum as of two parallel streams separated by a levee for a little while.

We were talking about Carl, to George.

“Why did you bring him here, then?” the bosun said.

“Yes,” Monckton said. “I sure wouldn’t bring my wife to a place like this.”

George cursed Monckton: not with a word or even a sentence; a paragraph. He was a Greek, big and black, a full head taller than Carl; his eyebrows looked like two crows in overlapping flight. He cursed us all with immediate thoroughness and in well-nigh faultless classic Anglo-Saxon, who at other times functioned in the vocabulary of an eight-year-old by-blow of a vaudeville comedian and a horse, say.

“Yes, sir,” the bosun said. He was smoking an Italian cigar and drinking ginger beer; the same tumbler of which, incidentally, he had been engaged with for about two hours and which now must have been about the temperature of a ship’s showerbath. “I sure wouldn’t bring my girl to a dive like this, even if he did wear pants.”

Carl meanwhile had not stirred. He sat serene among us, with his round yellow head and his round eyes, looking like a sophisticated baby against the noise and the glitter, with his glass of thin Italian beer and the women murmuring to one another and watching us and then Carl with that biding and inscrutable foreknowledge which they do not appear to know that they possess.

“Èinnocente,” one said; again they murmured, contemplating Carl with musing, secret looks. “He may have fooled you already,” the bosun said. “He may have slipped through a porthole on you any time these three years.”

George glared at the bosun, his mouth open for cursing. But he didn’t curse. Instead he looked at Carl, his mouth still open. His mouth closed slowly. We all looked at Carl. Beneath our eyes he raised his glass and drank with contained deliberation.

“Are you still pure?” George said. “I mean, sho enough.”

Beneath our fourteen eyes Carl emptied the glass of thin, bitter, three per cent beer. “I been to sea three years,” he said. “All over Europe.”

George glared at him, his face baffled and outraged. He had just shaved; his close blue jowls lay flat and hard as a prizefighter’s or a

pirate's, up to the black explosion of his hair. He was our second cook. "You damn lying little bastard," he said.

The bosun raised his glass of ginger beer with an exact replica of Carl's drinking. Steadily and deliberately, his body thrown a little back and his head tilted, he poured the ginger beer over his right shoulder at the exact speed of swallowing, still with that air of Carl's, that grave and cosmopolitan swagger. He set the glass down, and rose. "Come on," he said to Monckton and me, "let's go. Might as well be board ship if we're going to spend the evening in one place."

Monckton and I rose. He was smoking a short pipe. One of the women was his, another the bosun's. The third one had a lot of gold teeth. She could have been thirty, but maybe she wasn't. We left her with George and Carl. When I looked back from the door, the waiter was just fetching them some more beer.

II

They came into the ship together at Galveston, George carrying a portable victrola and a small parcel wrapped in paper bearing the imprint of a well-known ten-cent store, and Carl carrying two bulging imitation leather bags that looked like they might weigh forty pounds apiece.

George appropriated two berths, one above the other like a Pullman section, cursing Carl in a harsh, concatenant voice a little overburred with v's and r's and ordering him about like a nigger, while Carl stowed their effects away with the meticulousness of an old maid, producing from one of the bags a stack of freshly laundered drill serving jackets that must have numbered a dozen.

For the next thirty-four days (he was the messboy) he wore a fresh one for each meal in the saloon, and there were always two or three recently washed ones drying under the poop awning.

And for thirty-four evenings, after the galley was closed, we watched the two of them in pants and undershirts, dancing to the victrola on the after well deck above a hold full of Texas cotton and Georgia resin. They had only one record for the machine and it had a crack in it, and each time the needle clucked George would stamp on the deck. I don't think that either one of them was aware that he did it.

It was George who told us about Carl. Carl was eighteen, from Philadelphia. They both called it Philly; George in a proprietorial tone, as if he had created Philadelphia in order to produce Carl, though it later appeared that George had not discovered Carl until Carl had been to sea for a year already.

And Carl himself told some of it: a fourth or fifth child of a first generation of Scandinavian-American shipwrights, brought up in one of an identical series of small frame houses a good trolley ride from salt water, by a mother or an older sister: this whom, at the age of fifteen and weighing perhaps a little less than a hundred pounds, some ancestor long knocking his quiet bones together at the bottom of the sea (or perhaps havened by accident in dry earth and become restive with ease and quiet) had sent back to the old dream and the old unrest three or maybe four generations late.

"I was a kid, then," Carl told us, who had yet to experience or need a shave. "I thought about everything but going to sea. I thought once I'd be a ballplayer or maybe a prize fighter. They had pictures of them on the walls, see, when Sis would send me down to the corner after the old man on a Saturday night. Jeez, I'd stand outside on the street and watch them go in, and I could see their legs under the door and hear them and smell the sawdust and see the pictures of them on the walls through the smoke. I was a kid then, see. I hadn't been nowhere then."

We asked George how he had ever got a berth, even as a messman, standing even now about four inches over five feet and with yet a face that should have followed monstrosities up church aisles, if not looked down from one of the colored windows themselves.

“Why shouldn’t he have come to sea?” George said. “Ain’t this a free country? Even if he ain’t nothing but a damn mess.” He looked at us, black, serious. “He’s a virgin, see? Do you know what that means?” He told us what it meant. Someone had evidently told him what it meant not so long ago, told him what he used to be himself, if he could remember that far back, and he thought that perhaps we didn’t know the man, or maybe he thought it was a new word they had just invented.

So he told us what it meant. It was in the first night watch and we were on the poop after supper, two days out of Gibraltar, listening to Monckton talking about cauliflower. Carl was taking a shower (he always took a bath after he had cleared the saloon after supper. George, who only cooked, never bathed until we were in port and the petite cleared) and George told us what it meant.

Then he began to curse. He cursed for a long time.

“Well, George,” the bosun said, “suppose you were one, then? What would you do?”

“What would I do?” George said. “What wouldn’t I do?” He cursed for some time, steadily. “It’s like the first cigarette in the morning,” he said. “By noon, when you remember how it tasted, how you felt when you was waiting for the match to get to the end of it, and when that first drag—” He cursed, long, impersonal, like a chant.

Monckton watched him: not listened: watched, nursing his pipe. “Why, George,” he said, “you’re by way of being almost a poet.”

There was a swipe, some West India Docks crum; I forget his name.

“Call that lobbing the tongue?” he said. “You should hear a Lymus mate laying into a fo’c’sle of bloody Portygee ginneys.”

“Monckton wasn’t talking about the language,” the bosun said.

“Any man can swear.” He looked at George. “You’re not the first man that ever wished that, George. That’s something that has to be was

because you don't know you are when you are." Then he paraphrased unwitting and with unprintable aptness Byron's epigram about women's mouths. "But what are you saving him for? What good will it do you when he stops being?"

George cursed, looking from face to face, baffled and outraged.

"Maybe Carl will let George hold his hand at the time," Monckton said. He reached a match from his pocket. "Now, you take Brussels sprouts—"

"You might get the Old Man to quarantine him when we reach Naples," the bosun said.

George cursed.

"Now, you take Brussels sprouts," Monckton said.

III

It took us some time that night, to get either started or settled down. We — Monckton and the bosun and the two women and I — visited four more cafés, each like the other one and like the one where we had left George and Carl — same people, same music, same thin, colored drinks. The two women accompanied us, with us but not of us, biding and acquiescent, saying constantly and patiently and without words that it was time to go to bed. So after a while I left them and went back to the ship. George and Carl were not aboard.

The next morning they were not there either, though Monckton and the bosun were, and the cook and the steward swearing up and down the galley; it seemed that the cook was planning to spend the day ashore himself.

So they had to stay aboard all day. Along toward midafternoon there came aboard a smallish man in a soiled suit who looked like one of those Columbia day students that go up each morning on the East Side subway from around Chatham Square. He was hatless, with an oiled

pompadour. He had not shaved recently, and he spoke no English in a pleasant, deprecatory way that was all teeth. But he had found the right ship and he had a note from George, written on the edge of a dirty scrap of newspaper, and we found where George was. He was in jail.

The steward hadn't stopped cursing all day, anyhow. He didn't stop now, either. He and the messenger went off to the consul's. The steward returned a little after six o'clock, with George. George didn't look so much like he had been drunk; he looked dazed, quiet, with his wild hair and a blue stubble on his jaw.

He went straight to Carl's bunk and he began to turn Carl's meticulous covers back one by one like a traveler examining the bed in a third-class European hotel, as if he expected to find Carl hidden among them. "You mean," he said, "he ain't been back? He ain't been back a-tall?"

"We haven't seen him," we told George. "The steward hasn't seen him either. We thought he was in jail with you."

He began to replace the covers; that is, he made an attempt to draw them one by one up the bed again in a kind of detached way, as if he were not conscious, sentient. "They run," he said in a dull tone. "They ducked out on me. I never thought he'd a done it. I never thought he'd a done me this way. It was her. She was the one made him done it. She knew what he was, and how I . . ." Then he began to cry, quietly, in that dull, detached way. "He must have been sitting there with his hand in her lap all the time. And I never suspicioned.

She kept on moving her chair closer and closer to his. But I trusted him. I never suspicioned nothing. I thought he wouldn't a done nothing serious without asking me first, let alone . . . I trusted him."

It appeared that the bottom of George's glass had distorted their shapes enough to create in George the illusion that Carl and the woman were drinking as he drank, in a serious but celibate way. He left them at the table and went back to the lavatory; or rather, he said that he realized suddenly that he was in the lavatory and that he had better be

getting back, concerned not over what might transpire while he was away, but over the lapse, over his failure to be present at his own doings which the getting to the lavatory inferred. So he returned to the table, not yet alarmed; merely concerned and amused. He said he was having a fine time.

So at first he believed that he was still having such a good time that he could not find his own table. He found the one which he believed should be his, but it was vacant save for three stacks of saucers, so he made one round of the room, still amused, still enjoying himself; he was still enjoying himself when he repaired to the center of the dance floor where, a head above the dancers, he began to shout "Porteus ahoy!" in a loud voice, and continued to do so until a waiter who spoke English came and removed him and led him back to that same vacant table bearing the three stacks of saucers and the three glasses, one of which he now recognized as his own.

But he was still enjoying himself, though not so much now, believing himself to be the victim of a practical joke, first on the part of the management, and it appeared that he must have created some little disturbance, enjoying himself less and less all the while, the center of an augmenting clump of waiters and patrons.

When at last he did realize, accept the fact, that they were gone, it must have been pretty bad for him: the outrage, the despair, the sense of elapsed time, an unfamiliar city at night in which Carl must be found, and that quickly if it was to do any good. He tried to leave, to break through the crowd, without paying the score. Not that he would have beaten the bill; he just didn't have time. If he could have found Carl within the next ten minutes, he would have returned and paid the score twice over: I am sure of that.

And so they held him, the wild American, a cordon of waiters and clients — women and men both — and he dragging a handful of coins from his pockets ringing onto the tile floor. Then he said it was like having your legs swarmed by a pack of dogs: waiters, clients, men and women, on hands and knees on the floor, scrabbling after the rolling

coins, and George slapping about with his big feet, trying to stamp the hands away.

Then he was standing in the center of an abrupt wide circle, breathing a little hard, with the two Napoleons in their swords and pallbearer gloves and Knights of Pythias bonnets on either side of him. He did not know what he had done; he only knew that he was under arrest. It was not until they reached the Prefecture, where there was an interpreter, that he learned that he was a political prisoner, having insulted the king's majesty by placing foot on the king's effigy on a coin. They put him in a forty-foot dungeon, with seven other political prisoners, one of whom was the messenger.

"They taken my belt and my necktie and the strings out of my shoes," he told us dully. "There wasn't nothing in the room but a barrel fastened in the middle of the floor and a wooden bench running all the way round the walls.

I knew what the barrel was for right off, because they had already been using it for that for some time. You was expected to sleep on the bench when you couldn't stay on your feet no longer. When I stooped over and looked at it close, it was like looking down at Forty-second Street from a airplane. They looked just like Yellow cabs. Then I went and used the barrel. But I used it with the end of me it wasn't intended to be used with."

Then he told about the messenger. Truly, Despair, like Poverty, looks after its own. There they were: the Italian who spoke no English, and George who scarcely spoke any language at all; certainly not Italian. That was about four o'clock in the morning. Yet by daylight George had found the one man out of the seven who could have served him or probably would have.

"He told me he was going to get out at noon, and I told him I would give him ten lire as soon as I got out, and he got me the scrap of paper and the pencil (this, in a bare dungeon, from among seven men stripped to the skin of everything save the simplest residue of clothing necessary

for warmth: of money, knives, shoelaces, even pins and loose buttons) and I wrote the note and he hid it and they left him out and after about four hours they come and got me and there was the steward.”

“How did you talk to him, George?” the bosun said. “Even the steward couldn’t find out anything until they got to the consul’s.”

“I don’t know,” George said. “We just talked. That was the only way I could tell anybody where I was at.”

We tried to get him to go to bed, but he wouldn’t do it. He didn’t even shave. He got something to eat in the galley and went ashore. We watched him go down the side.

“Poor bastard,” Monckton said.

“Why?” the bosun said. “What did he take Carl there for? They could have gone to the movies.”

“I wasn’t thinking about George,” Monckton said.

“Oh,” the bosun said. “Well, a man can’t keep on going ashore anywhere, let alone Europe, all his life without getting ravaged now and then.”

“Good God,” Monckton said. “I should hope not.”

George returned at six o’clock the next morning. He still looked dazed, though still quite sober, quite calm. Overnight his beard had grown another quarter inch. “I couldn’t find them,” he said quietly. “I couldn’t find them nowheres.”

He had to act as messman now, taking Carl’s place at the officers’ table, but as soon as breakfast was done, he disappeared; we heard the steward cursing him up and down the ship until noon, trying to find him. Just before noon he returned, got through dinner, departed again. He came back just before dark.

“Found him yet?” I said. He didn’t answer. He stared at me for a while with that blank look. Then he went to their bunks and hauled one of the imitation leather bags down and tumbled all of Carl’s things into it and crushed down the lid upon the dangling sleeves and socks and

hurled the bag out onto the well deck, where it tumbled once and burst open, vomiting the white jackets and the mute socks and the underclothes. Then he went to bed, fully dressed, and slept fourteen hours. The cook tried to get him up for breakfast, but it was like trying to rouse up a dead man.

When he waked he looked better. He borrowed a cigarette of me and went and shaved and came back and borrowed another cigarette. "Hell with him," he said. "Leave the bastard go. I don't give a damn."

That afternoon he put Carl's things back into his bunk. Not carefully and not uncarefully: he just gathered them up and dumped them into the berth and paused for a moment to see if any of them were going to fall out, before turning away.

IV

It was just before daylight. When I returned to the ship about midnight, the quarters were empty. When I waked just before daylight, all the bunks save my own were still vacant. I was lying in a halfdoze, when I heard Carl in the passage. He was coming quietly; I had scarcely heard him before he appeared in the door. He stood there for a while, looking no larger than an adolescent boy in the halflight, before he entered. I closed my eyes quickly. I heard him, still on tiptoe, come to my bunk and stand above me for a while. Then I heard him turn away. I opened my eyes just enough to watch him.

He undressed swiftly, ripping his clothes off, ripping off a button that struck the bulkhead with a faint click. Naked, in the wan light, he looked smaller and frailer than ever as he dug a towel from his bunk where George had tumbled his things, flinging the other garments aside with a kind of dreadful haste. Then he went out, his bare feet whispering in the passage.

I could hear the shower beyond the bulkhead running for a long time; it would be cold now, too.

But it ran for a long time, then it ceased and I closed my eyes again until he had entered. Then I watched him lift from the floor the undergarment which he had removed and thrust it through a porthole quickly, with something of the air of a recovered drunkard putting out of sight an empty bottle. He dressed and put on a fresh white jacket and combed his hair, leaning to the small mirror, looking at his face for a long time.

And then he went to work. He worked about the bridge deck all day long; what he could have found to do there we could not imagine. But the crew's quarters never saw him until after dark. All day long we watched the white jacket flitting back and forth beyond the open doors or kneeling as he polished the brightwork about the companions.

He seemed to work with a kind of fury. And when he was forced by his duties to come topside during the day, we noticed that it was always on the port side, and we lay with our starboard to the dock. And about the galley or the after deck George worked a little and loafed a good deal, not looking toward the bridge at all.

"That's the reason he stays up there, polishing that brightwork all day long," the bosun said. "He knows George can't come up there."

"It don't look to me like George wants to," I said.

"That's right," Monckton said. "For a dollar George would go up to the binnacle and ask the Old Man for a cigarette."

"But not for curiosity," the bosun said.

"You think that's all it is?" Monckton said. "Just curiosity?"

"Sure," the bosun said. "Why not?"

"Monckton's right," I said. "This is the most difficult moment in marriage: the day after your wife has stayed out all night."

"You mean the easiest," the bosun said. "George can quit him now."

"Do you think so?" Monckton said.

We lay there five days. Carl was still polishing the brightwork in the bridge-deck companions. The steward would send him out on deck, and go away; he would return and find Carl still working on the port side and he would make him go to starboard, above the dock and the Italian boys in bright, soiled jerseys and the venders of pornographic postcards.

But it didn't take him long there, and then we would see him below again, sitting quietly in his white jacket in the stale gloom, waiting for supertime. Usually he would be darning socks.

George had not yet said one word to him; Carl might not have been aboard at all, the very displacement of space which was his body, impedeless and breathable air. It was now George's turn to stay away from the ship most of the day and all of the night, returning a little drunk at three and four o'clock, to waken everyone by hand, save Carl, and talk in gross and loud recapitulation of recent and always different women before climbing into his bunk.

As far as we knew, they did not even look at one another until we were well on our way to Gibraltar.

Then Carl's fury of work slacked somewhat. Yet he worked steadily all day, then, bathed, his blond hair wet and smooth, his slight body in a cotton singlet, we would see him leaning alone in the long twilight upon the rail midships or forward. But never about the poop where we smoked and talked and where George had begun again to play the single record on the victrola, committing, unrequested and anathemaed, cold-blooded encore after encore.

Then one night we saw them together. They were leaning side by side on the poop rail. That was the first time Carl had looked astern, looked toward Naples since that morning when he returned to the ship, and even now it was the evening on which the Gates of Hercules had sunk into the waxing twilight and the River Ocean began to flow down into the darkling sea and overhead the crosstrees swayed in measured and slow recover against the tall night and the low new moon.

“He’s all right now,” Monckton said. “The dog’s gone back to his vomit.”

“I said he was all right all the time,” the bosun said. “George didn’t give a damn.”

“I wasn’t talking about George,” Monckton said. “George hasn’t made the grade yet.”

V

George told us. “He’d keep on moping and mooning, see, and I’d keep on trying to talk to him, to tell him I wasn’t mad no more. Jeez, it had to come some day; a man can’t be a angel all your life. But he wouldn’t even look back that way. Until all of a sudden he says one night:

“‘What do you do to them?’ I looked at him. ‘How does a man treat them?’

“‘You mean to tell me,’ I says, ‘that you spent three days with her and she ain’t showed you that?’

“‘I mean, give them,’ he says. ‘Don’t men give—’

“‘Jeez Christ,’ I says, ‘you done already give her something they would have paid you money for it in Siam. Would have made you the prince or the prime minister at the least. What do you mean?’

“‘I don’t mean money,’ he says. ‘I mean . . .’

“‘Well,’ I says, ‘if you was going to see her again, if she was going to be your girl, you’d give her something. Bring it back to her. Like something to wear or something: they don’t care much what, them foreign women, hustling them wops all their life that wouldn’t give them a full breath if they was a toy balloon; they don’t care much what it is. But you ain’t going to see her again, are you?’

“‘No,’ he says. ‘No,’ he says. ‘No.’ And he looked like he was fixing to jump off the boat and swim on ahead and wait for us at Hatteras.

“So you don’t want to worry about that,’ I says. Then I went and played the vic again, thinking that might cheer him up, because he ain’t the first, for Christ’s sake; he never invented it. But it was the next night; we was at the poop rail then — the first time he had looked back — watching the phosrus along the logline, when he says:

“‘Maybe I got her into trouble.’

“‘Doing what?’ I says. ‘With what? With the police? Didn’t you make her show you her petite?’ Like she would have needed a ticket, with that face full of gold; Jeez, she could have rode the train on her face alone; maybe that was her savings bank instead of using her stocking.

“‘What ticket?’ he says. So I told him. For a minute I thought he was crying, then I seen that he was just trying to not puke. So I knew what the trouble was, what had been worrying him. I remember the first time it come as a surprise to me. ‘Oh,’ I says, ‘the smell. It don’t mean nothing,’ I says; you don’t want to let that worry you. It ain’t that they smell bad,’ I says, ‘that’s just the Italian national air.’”

And then we thought that at last he really was sick. He worked all day long, coming to bed only after the rest of us were asleep and snoring, and I saw him in the night get up and go topside again, and I followed and saw him sitting on a windlass. He looked like a little boy, still, small, motionless in his underclothes.

But he was young, and even an old man can’t be sick very long with nothing but work to do and salt air to breathe; and so two weeks later we were watching him and George dancing again in their undershirts after supper on the after well deck while the victrola lifted its fatuous and reiterant ego against the waxing moon and the ship snored and hissed through the long seas off Hatteras. They didn’t talk; they just danced, gravely and tirelessly as the nightly moon stood higher and higher up the sky.

Then we turned south, and the Gulf Stream ran like blue ink alongside, bubbled with fire by night in the softening latitudes, and one night off Tortugas the ship began to tread the moon’s silver train like an

awkward and eager courtier, and Carl spoke for the first time after almost twenty days.

“George,” he said, “do me a favor, will you?”

“Sure, bud,” George said, stamping on the deck each time the needle clucked, his black head shoulders above Carl’s sleek pale one, the two of them in decorous embrace, their canvas shoes hissing in unison: “Sure,” George said. “Spit it out.”

“When we get to Galveston, I want you to buy me a suit of these pink silk teddybears that ladies use. A little bigger than I’d wear, see?”

The End

Carcassonne, William Faulkner

Carcassonne

AND ME ON a buckskin pony with eyes like blue electricity and a mane like tangled fire, galloping up the hill and right off into the high heaven of the world

His skeleton lay still. Perhaps it was thinking about this. Anyway, after a time it groaned. But it said nothing. which is certainly not like you he thought you are not like yourself. but I can’t say that a little quiet is not pleasant

He lay beneath an unrolled strip of tarred roofing made of paper. All of him that is, save that part which suffered neither insects nor temperature and which galloped unflagging on the destinationless pony, up a piled silver hill of cumulae where no hoof echoed nor left print, toward the blue precipice never gained. This part was neither flesh nor unflesh and he tingled a little pleasantly with its lackful contemplation as he lay beneath the tarred paper bedclothing.

So were the mechanics of sleeping, of denning up for the night, simplified. Each morning the entire bed rolled back into a spool and stood erect in the corner. It was like those glasses, reading glasses which old ladies used to wear, attached to a cord that rolls onto a spindle in a neat case of unmarked gold; a spindle, a case, attached to the deep bosom of the mother of sleep.

He lay still, savoring this. Beneath him Rincon followed its fatal, secret, nightly pursuits, where upon the rich and inert darkness of the streets lighted windows and doors lay like oily strokes of broad and overladen brushes. From the docks a ship's siren unsourced itself. For a moment it was sound, then it compassed silence, atmosphere, bringing upon the eardrums a vacuum in which nothing, not even silence, was. Then it ceased, ebbed; the silence breathed again with a clashing of palm fronds like sand hissing across a sheet of metal.

Still his skeleton lay motionless. Perhaps it was thinking about this and he thought of his tarred paper bed as a pair of spectacles through which he nightly perused the fabric of dreams:

Across the twin transparencies of the spectacles the horse still gallops with its tangled welter of tossing flames. Forward and back against the taut roundness of its belly its legs swing, rhythmically reaching and overreaching, each spurning overreach punctuated by a flicking limberness of shod hooves.

He can see the saddlegirth and the soles of the rider's feet in the stirrups. The girth cuts the horse in two just back of the withers, yet it still gallops with rhythmic and unflagging fury and without progression, and he thinks of that riderless Norman steed which galloped against the Saracen Emir, who, so keen of eye, so delicate and strong the wrist which swung the blade, severed the galloping beast at a single blow, the several halves thundering on in the sacred dust where him of Bouillon and Tancred too clashed in sullen retreat; thundering on through the assembled foes of our meek Lord, wrapped still in the fury and the pride of the charge, not knowing that it was dead.

The ceiling of the garret slanted in a ruined pitch to the low eaves. It was dark, and the body consciousness, assuming the office of vision, shaped in his mind's eye his motionless body grown phosphorescent with that steady decay which had set up within his body on the day of his birth. the flesh is dead living on itself subsisting consuming itself thriftily in its own renewal will never die for I am the Resurrection and the Life Of a man, the worm should be lusty, lean, hairedover.

Of women, of delicate girls briefly like heard music in tune, it should be suavely shaped, falling feeding into prettinesses, feeding. what though to Me but as a seething of new milk Who am the Resurrection and the Life

It was dark. The agony of wood was soothed by these latitudes; empty rooms did not creak and crack. Perhaps wood was like any other skeleton though, after a time, once reflexes of old compulsions had spent themselves.

Bones might lie under seas, in the caverns of the sea, knocked together by the dying echoes of waves. Like bones of horses cursing the inferior riders who bestrode them, bragging to one another about what they would have done with a first-rate rider up. But somebody always crucified the first-rate riders. And then it's better to be bones knocking together to the spent motion of falling tides in the caverns and the grottoes of the sea.

where him of Bouillon and Tancred too

His skeleton groaned again. Across the twin transparencies of the glassy floor the horse still galloped, unflagging and without progress, its destination the barn where sleep was stabled. It was dark. Luis, who ran the cantina downstairs, allowed him to sleep in the garret. But the Standard Oil Company, who owned the garret and the roofing paper, owned the darkness too; it was Mrs Widdrington's, the Standard Oil Company's wife's, darkness he was using to sleep in.

She'd make a poet of you too, if you did not work anywhere. She believed that, if a reason for breathing were not acceptable to her, it was no reason. With her, if you were white and did not work, you were either a tramp or a poet. Maybe you were. Women are so wise. They have learned how to live unconfused by reality, impervious to it. It was dark.

and knock my bones together and together It was dark, a darkness filled with a fairy pattering of small feet, stealthy and intent. Sometimes the cold patter of them on his face waked him in the night, and at his movement they scurried invisibly like an abrupt disintegration of dead leaves in a wind, in whispering arpeggios of minute sound, leaving a thin but definite effluvium of furtiveness and voracity.

At times, lying so while daylight slanted grayly along the ruined pitch of the eaves, he watched their shadowy flickings from obscurity to obscurity, shadowy and huge as cats, leaving along the stagnant silences those whisperings gusts of fairy feet.

Mrs Widdrington owned the rats too. But wealthy people have to own so many things. Only she didn't expect the rats to pay for using her darkness and silence by writing poetry. Not that they could not have, and pretty fair verse probably. Something of the rat about Byron: allocutions of stealthful voracity; a fairy pattering of little feet behind a bloody arras where fell where fell where I was King of Kings but the woman with the woman with the dog's eyes to knock my bones together and together

"I would like to perform something," he said, shaping his lips soundlessly in the darkness, and the galloping horse filled his mind again with soundless thunder. He could see the saddlegirth and the soles of the rider's stirrured feet, and he thought of that Norman steed, bred of many fathers to bear iron mail in the slow, damp, green valleys of England, maddened with heat and thirst and hopeless horizons filled with shimmering nothingness, thundering along in two halves and not knowing it, fused still in the rhythm of accrued

momentum. Its head was mailed so that it could not see forward at all, and from the center of the plates projected a — projected a —

“Chamfron,” his skeleton said.

“Chamfron.” He mused for a time, while the beast that did not know that it was dead thundered on as the ranks of the Lamb’s foes opened in the sacred dust and let it through. “Chamfron,” he repeated. Living, as it did, a retired life, his skeleton could know next to nothing of the world. Yet it had an astonishing and exasperating way of supplying him with bits of trivial information that had temporarily escaped his mind. “All you know is what I tell you,” he said.

“Not always,” the skeleton said. “I know that the end of life is lying still. You haven’t learned that yet. Or you haven’t mentioned it to me, anyway.”

“Oh, I’ve learned it,” he said. “I’ve had it dinned into me enough. It isn’t that. It’s that I don’t believe it’s true.”

The skeleton groaned.

“I don’t believe it, I say,” he repeated.

“All right, all right,” the skeleton said testily. “I shan’t dispute you. I never do. I only give you advice.”

“Somebody has to, I guess,” he agreed sourly. “At least, it looks like it.” He lay still beneath the tarred paper, in a silence filled with fairy patterings. Again his body slanted and slanted downward through opaline corridors groined with ribs of dying sunlight upward dissolving dimly, and came to rest at last in the windless gardens of the sea. About him the swaying caverns and the grottoes, and his body lay on the rippled floor, tumbling peacefully to the wavering echoes of the tides.

I want to perform something bold and tragical and austere he repeated, shaping the soundless words in the pattering silence me on a buckskin pony with eyes like blue electricity and a mane like tangled fire, galloping up the hill and right off into the high heaven of the world Still galloping, the horse soars outward; still galloping, it thunders up the long blue hill of heaven, its tossing mane in golden swirls like fire. Steed

and rider thunder on, thunder punily diminishing: a dying star upon the immensity of darkness and of silence within which, steadfast, fading, deepbreasted and grave of flank, muses the dark and tragic figure of the Earth, his mother.

The End

Collected Stories, William Faulkner

Collected Stories

Contents

I. THE COUNTRY

Barn Burning

Shingles for the Lord

The Tall Men

A Bear Hunt

Two Soldiers

Shall Not Perish

II. THE VILLAGE

A Rose for Emily

Hair

Centaur in Brass

Dry September

Death Drag

Elly

Uncle Willy

Mule in the Yard

That Will Be Fine

That Evening Sun

III. THE WILDERNESS

Red Leaves
A Justice
A Courtship
Lo!

IV. THE WASTELAND

Ad Astra
Victory
Crevasse
Turnabout
All the Dead Pilots

V. THE MIDDLE GROUND

Wash
Honor
Dr. Martino
Fox Hunt
Pennsylvania Station
Artist at Home
The Brooch
My Grandmother Millard
Golden Land
There Was a Queen
Mountain Victory

VI. BEYOND

Beyond
Black Music
The Leg
Mistral
Divorce in Naples
Carcassonne

I. THE COUNTRY

Barn Burning, William Faulkner

Barn Burning

THE STORE IN which the Justice of the Peace's court was sitting smelled of cheese. The boy, crouched on his nail keg at the back of the crowded room, knew he smelled cheese, and more: from where he sat he could see the ranked shelves close-packed with the solid, squat, dynamic shapes of tin cans whose labels his stomach read, not from the lettering which meant nothing to his mind but from the scarlet devils and the silver curve of fish — this, the cheese which he knew he smelled and the hermetic meat which his intestines believed he smelled coming in intermittent gusts momentary and brief between the other constant one, the smell and sense just a little of fear because mostly of despair and grief, the old fierce pull of blood.

He could not see the table where the Justice sat and before which his father and his father's enemy (our enemy he thought in that despair; ourn! mine and hisn both! He's my father!) stood, but he could hear them, the two of them that is, because his father had said no word yet: "But what proof have you, Mr. Harris?"

"I told you. The hog got into my corn. I caught it up and sent it back to him. He had no fence that would hold it. I told him so, warned him. The next time I put the hog in my pen. When he came to get it I gave him enough wire to patch up his pen. The next time I put the hog up and kept it. I rode down to his house and saw the wire I gave him still rolled on to the spool in his yard.

I told him he could have the hog when he paid me a dollar pound fee. That evening a nigger came with the dollar and got the hog. He was a strange nigger. He said, 'He say to tell you wood and hay kin burn.' I said, 'What?' 'That whut he say to tell you,' the nigger said. 'Wood and hay kin burn.' That night my barn burned. I got the stock out but I lost the barn."

"Where is the nigger? Have you got him?"

“He was a strange nigger, I tell you. I don’t know what became of him.”
“But that’s not proof. Don’t you see that’s not proof?”

“Get that boy up here. He knows.” For a moment the boy thought too that the man meant his older brother until Harris said, “Not him. The little one. The boy,” and, crouching, small for his age, small and wiry like his father, in patched and faded jeans even too small for him, with straight, uncombed, brown hair and eyes gray and wild as storm scud, he saw the men between himself and the table part and become a lane of grim faces, at the end of which he saw the Justice, a shabby, collarless, graying man in spectacles, beckoning him. He felt no floor under his bare feet; he seemed to walk beneath the palpable weight of the grim turning faces.

His father, stiff in his black Sunday coat donned not for the trial but for the moving, did not even look at him. He aims for me to lie, he thought, again with that frantic grief and despair. And I will have to do hit.

“What’s your name, boy?” the Justice said.
“Colonel Sartoris Snopes,” the boy whispered.

“Hey?” the Justice said. “Talk louder. Colonel Sartoris? I reckon anybody named for Colonel Sartoris in this country can’t help but tell the truth, can they?” The boy said nothing. Enemy! Enemy! he thought; for a moment he could not even see, could not see that the Justice’s face was kindly nor discern that his voice was troubled when he spoke to the man named Harris: “Do you want me to question this boy?” But he could hear, and during those subsequent long seconds while there was absolutely no sound in the crowded little room save that of quiet and intent breathing it was as if he had swung outward at the end of a grape vine, over a ravine, and at the top of the swing had been caught in a prolonged instant of mesmerized gravity, weightless in time.

“No!” Harris said violently, explosively. “Damnation! Send him out of here!” Now time, the fluid world, rushed beneath him again, the voices coming to him again through the smell of cheese and sealed meat, the fear and despair and the old grief of blood:

“This case is closed. I can’t find against you, Snopes, but I can give you advice. Leave this country and don’t come back to it.”

His father spoke for the first time, his voice cold and harsh, level, without emphasis: “I aim to. I don’t figure to stay in a country among people who . . .” he said something unprintable and vile, addressed to no one.

“That’ll do,” the Justice said. “Take your wagon and get out of this country before dark. Case dismissed.”

His father turned, and he followed the stiff black coat, the wiry figure walking a little stiffly from where a Confederate provost’s man’s musket ball had taken him in the heel on a stolen horse thirty years ago, followed the two backs now, since his older brother had appeared from somewhere in the crowd, no taller than the father but thicker, chewing tobacco steadily, between the two lines of grim-faced men and out of the store and across the worn gallery and down the sagging steps and among the dogs and half-grown boys in the mild May dust, where as he passed a voice hissed:

“Barn burner!”

Again he could not see, whirling; there was a face in a red haze, moonlike, bigger than the full moon, the owner of it half again his size, he leaping in the red haze toward the face, feeling no blow, feeling no shock when his head struck the earth, scrabbling up and leaping again, feeling no blow this time either and tasting no blood, scrabbling up to see the other boy in full flight and himself already leaping into pursuit as his father’s hand jerked him back, the harsh, cold voice speaking above him: “Go get in the wagon.”

It stood in a grove of locusts and mulberries across the road. His two hulking sisters in their Sunday dresses and his mother and her sister in calico and sunbonnets were already in it, sitting on and among the sorry residue of the dozen and more movings which even the boy could remember — the battered stove, the broken beds and chairs, the clock inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which would not run, stopped at some

fourteen minutes past two o'clock of a dead and forgotten day and time, which had been his mother's dowry. She was crying, though when she saw him she drew her sleeve across her face and began to descend from the wagon. "Get back," the father said.

"He's hurt. I got to get some water and wash his . . ."

"Get back in the wagon," his father said. He got in too, over the tail-gate. His father mounted to the seat where the older brother already sat and struck the gaunt mules two savage blows with the peeled willow, but without heat. It was not even sadistic; it was exactly that same quality which in later years would cause his descendants to over-run the engine before putting a motor car into motion, striking and reining back in the same movement. The wagon went on, the store with its quiet crowd of grimly watching men dropped behind; a curve in the road hid it. Forever he thought. Maybe he's done satisfied now, now that he has . . . stopping himself, not to say it aloud even to himself. His mother's hand touched his shoulder.

"Does hit hurt?" she said.

"Naw," he said. "Hit don't hurt. Lemme be."

"Can't you wipe some of the blood off before hit dries?"

"I'll wash to-night," he said. "Lemme be, I tell you."

The wagon went on. He did not know where they were going. None of them ever did or ever asked, because it was always somewhere, always a house of sorts waiting for them a day or two days or even three days away. Likely his father had already arranged to make a crop on another farm before he . . . Again he had to stop himself. He (the father) always did.

There was something about his wolflike independence and even courage when the advantage was at least neutral which impressed strangers, as if they got from his latent ravening ferocity not so much a sense of dependability as a feeling that his ferocious conviction in the rightness of his own actions would be of advantage to all whose interest lay with his.

That night they camped, in a grove of oaks and beeches where a spring ran. The nights were still cool and they had a fire against it, of a rail lifted from a nearby fence and cut into lengths — a small fire, neat, niggard almost, a shrewd fire; such fires were his father's habit and custom always, even in freezing weather.

Older, the boy might have remarked this and wondered why not a big one; why should not a man who had not only seen the waste and extravagance of war, but who had in his blood an inherent voracious prodigality with material not his own, have burned everything in sight?

Then he might have gone a step farther and thought that that was the reason: that niggard blaze was the living fruit of nights passed during those four years in the woods hiding from all men, blue or gray, with his strings of horses (captured horses, he called them). And older still, he might have divined the true reason: that the element of fire spoke to some deep mainspring of his father's being, as the element of steel or of powder spoke to other men, as the one weapon for the preservation of integrity, else breath were not worth the breathing, and hence to be regarded with respect and used with discretion.

But he did not think this now and he had seen those same niggard blazes all his life. He merely ate his supper beside it and was already half asleep over his iron plate when his father called him, and once more he followed the stiff back, the stiff and ruthless limp, up the slope and on to the starlit road where, turning, he could see his father against the stars but without face or depth — a shape black, flat, and bloodless as though cut from tin in the iron folds of the frockcoat which had not been made for him, the voice harsh like tin and without heat like tin: "You were fixing to tell them. You would have told him." He didn't answer. His father struck him with the flat of his hand on the side of the head, hard but without heat, exactly as he had struck the two mules at the store, exactly as he would strike either of them with any stick in order to kill a horse fly, his voice still without heat or anger: "You're getting to be a man. You got to learn. You got to learn to stick to your own blood or you ain't going to have any blood to stick to you."

Do you think either of them, any man there this morning, would? Don't you know all they wanted was a chance to get at me because they knew I had them beat? Eh?" Later, twenty years later, he was to tell himself, "If I had said they wanted only truth, justice, he would have hit me again." But now he said nothing. He was not crying. He just stood there. "Answer me," his father said.

"Yes," he whispered. His father turned.

"Get on to bed. We'll be there tomorrow."

To-morrow they were there. In the early afternoon the wagon stopped before a paintless two-room house identical almost with the dozen others it had stopped before even in the boy's ten years, and again, as on the other dozen occasions, his mother and aunt got down and began to unload the wagon, although his two sisters and his father and brother had not moved.

"Likely hit ain't fitten for hawgs," one of the sisters said.

"Nevertheless, fit it will and you'll hog it and like it," his father said.

"Get out of them chairs and help your Ma unload."

The two sisters got down, big, bovine, in a flutter of cheap ribbons; one of them drew from the jumbled wagon bed a battered lantern, the other a worn broom. His father handed the reins to the older son and began to climb stiffly over the wheel. "When they get unloaded, take the team to the barn and feed them." Then he said, and at first the boy thought he was still speaking to his brother: "Come with me."

"Me?" he said.

"Yes," his father said. "You."

"Abner," his mother said. His father paused and looked back — the harsh level stare beneath the shaggy, graying, irascible brows.

"I reckon I'll have a word with the man that aims to begin to-morrow owning me body and soul for the next eight months."

They went back up the road. A week ago — or before last night, that is — he would have asked where they were going, but not now. His father

had struck him before last night but never before had he paused afterward to explain why; it was as if the blow and the following calm, outrageous voice still rang, reperculated, divulging nothing to him save the terrible handicap of being young, the light weight of his few years, just heavy enough to prevent his soaring free of the world as it seemed to be ordered but not heavy enough to keep him footed solid in it, to resist it and try to change the course of its events.

Presently he could see the grove of oaks and cedars and the other flowering trees and shrubs where the house would be, though not the house yet. They walked beside a fence massed with honeysuckle and Cherokee roses and came to a gate swinging open between two brick pillars, and now, beyond a sweep of drive, he saw the house for the first time and at that instant he forgot his father and the terror and despair both, and even when he remembered his father again (who had not stopped) the terror and despair did not return. Because, for all the twelve movings, they had sojourned until now in a poor country, a land of small farms and fields and houses, and he had never seen a house like this before.

Hit's big as a courthouse he thought quietly, with a surge of peace and joy whose reason he could not have thought into words, being too young for that: They are safe from him. People whose lives are a part of this peace and dignity are beyond his touch, he no more to them than a buzzing wasp: capable of stinging for a little moment but that's all; the spell of this peace and dignity rendering even the barns and stable and cribs which belong to it impervious to the puny flames he might contrive . . . this, the peace and joy, ebbing for an instant as he looked again at the stiff black back, the stiff and implacable limp of the figure which was not dwarfed by the house, for the reason that it had never looked big anywhere and which now, against the serene columned backdrop, had more than ever that impervious quality of something cut ruthlessly from tin, depthless, as though, sidewise to the sun, it would cast no shadow.

Watching him, the boy remarked the absolutely undeviating course which his father held and saw the stiff foot come squarely down in a

pile of fresh droppings where a horse had stood in the drive and which his father could have avoided by a simple change of stride. But it ebbed only for a moment, though he could not have thought this into words either, walking on in the spell of the house, which he could even want but without envy, without sorrow, certainly never with that ravaging and jealous rage which unknown to him walked in the ironlike black coat before him: Maybe he will feel it too. Maybe it will even change him now from what maybe he couldn't help but be.

They crossed the portico. Now he could hear his father's stiff foot as it came down on the boards with clocklike finality, a sound out of all proportion to the displacement of the body it bore and which was not dwarfed either by the white door before it, as though it had attained to a sort of vicious and ravaging minimum not to be dwarfed by anything — the flat, wide, black hat, the formal coat of broadcloth which had once been black but which had now that friction-glazed greenish cast of the bodies of old house flies, the lifted sleeve which was too large, the lifted hand like a curled claw. The door opened so promptly that the boy knew the Negro must have been watching them all the time, an old man with neat grizzled hair, in a linen jacket, who stood barring the door with his body, saying, "Wipe yo foots, white man, fo you come in here. Major ain't home nohow."

"Get out of my way, nigger," his father said, without heat too, flinging the door back and the Negro also and entering, his hat still on his head. And now the boy saw the prints of the stiff foot on the doorjamb and saw them appear on the pale rug behind the machinelike deliberation of the foot which seemed to bear (or transmit) twice the weight which the body compassed.

The Negro was shouting "Miss Lula! Miss Lula!" somewhere behind them, then the boy, deluged as though by a warm wave by a suave turn of carpeted stair and a pendant glitter of chandeliers and a mute gleam of gold frames, heard the swift feet and saw her too, a lady — perhaps he had never seen her like before either — in a gray, smooth gown with lace at the throat and an apron tied at the waist and the sleeves turned back, wiping cake or biscuit dough from her hands with a towel as she

came up the hall, looking not at his father at all but at the tracks on the blond rug with an expression of incredulous amazement.

“I tried,” the Negro cried. “I tole him to . . .”

“Will you please go away?” she said in a shaking voice. “Major de Spain is not at home. Will you please go away?”

His father had not spoken again. He did not speak again. He did not even look at her. He just stood stiff in the center of the rug, in his hat, the shaggy iron-gray brows twitching slightly above the pebble-colored eyes as he appeared to examine the house with brief deliberation. Then with the same deliberation he turned; the boy watched him pivot on the good leg and saw the stiff foot drag round the arc of the turning, leaving a final long and fading smear. His father never looked at it, he never once looked down at the rug. The Negro held the door.

It closed behind them, upon the hysteric and indistinguishable woman-wail. His father stopped at the top of the steps and scraped his boot clean on the edge of it. At the gate he stopped again. He stood for a moment, planted stiffly on the stiff foot, looking back at the house. “Pretty and white, ain’t it?” he said. “That’s sweat. Nigger sweat. Maybe it ain’t white enough yet to suit him. Maybe he wants to mix some white sweat with it.”

Two hours later the boy was chopping wood behind the house within which his mother and aunt and the two sisters (the mother and aunt, not the two girls, he knew that; even at this distance and muffled by walls the flat loud voices of the two girls emanated an incorrigible idle inertia) were setting up the stove to prepare a meal, when he heard the hooves and saw the linen-clad man on a fine sorrel mare, whom he recognized even before he saw the rolled rug in front of the Negro youth following on a fat bay carriage horse — a suffused, angry face vanishing, still at full gallop, beyond the corner of the house where his father and brother were sitting in the two tilted chairs; and a moment later, almost before he could have put the axe down, he heard the hooves again and watched the sorrel mare go back out of the yard, already galloping again. Then his father began to shout one of the

sisters' names, who presently emerged backward from the kitchen door dragging the rolled rug along the ground by one end while the other sister walked behind it.

"If you ain't going to tote, go on and set up the wash pot," the first said.

"You, Sarty!" the second shouted. "Set up the wash pot!" His father appeared at the door, framed against that shabbiness, as he had been against that other bland perfection, impervious to either, the mother's anxious face at his shoulder.

"Go on," the father said. "Pick it up." The two sisters stooped, broad, lethargic; stooping, they presented an incredible expanse of pale cloth and a flutter of tawdry ribbons.

"If I thought enough of a rug to have to git hit all the way from France I wouldn't keep hit where folks coming in would have to tromp on hit," the first said. They raised the rug.

"Abner," the mother said. "Let me do it."

"You go back and git dinner," his father said. "I'll tend to this."

From the woodpile through the rest of the afternoon the boy watched them, the rug spread flat in the dust beside the bubbling wash-pot, the two sisters stooping over it with that profound and lethargic reluctance, while the father stood over them in turn, implacable and grim, driving them though never raising his voice again.

He could smell the harsh homemade lye they were using; he saw his mother come to the door once and look toward them with an expression not anxious now but very like despair; he saw his father turn, and he fell to with the axe and saw from the corner of his eye his father raise from the ground a flattish fragment of field stone and examine it and return to the pot, and this time his mother actually spoke: "Abner. Abner. Please don't. Please, Abner."

Then he was done too. It was dusk; the whippoorwills had already begun. He could smell coffee from the room where they would

presently eat the cold food remaining from the mid-afternoon meal, though when he entered the house he realized they were having coffee again probably because there was a fire on the hearth, before which the rug now lay spread over the backs of the two chairs. The tracks of his father's foot were gone. Where they had been were now long, water-cloudy scoriations resembling the sporadic course of a lilliputian mowing machine.

It still hung there while they ate the cold food and then went to bed, scattered without order or claim up and down the two rooms, his mother in one bed, where his father would later lie, the older brother in the other, himself, the aunt, and the two sisters on pallets on the floor.

But his father was not in bed yet. The last thing the boy remembered was the depthless, harsh silhouette of the hat and coat bending over the rug and it seemed to him that he had not even closed his eyes when the silhouette was standing over him, the fire almost dead behind it, the stiff foot prodding him awake. "Catch up the mule," his father said.

When he returned with the mule his father was standing in the black door, the rolled rug over his shoulder. "Ain't you going to ride?" he said.

"No. Give me your foot."

He bent his knee into his father's hand, the wiry, surprising power flowed smoothly, rising, he rising with it, on to the mule's bare back (they had owned a saddle once; the boy could remember it though not when or where) and with the same effortless power his father swung the rug up in front of him. Now in the starlight they retraced the afternoon's path, up the dusty road rife with honeysuckle, through the gate and up the black tunnel of the drive to the lightless house, where he sat on the mule and felt the rough warp of the rug drag across his thighs and vanish.

“Don’t you want me to help?” he whispered. His father did not answer and now he heard again that stiff foot striking the hollow portico with that wooden and clocklike deliberation, that outrageous overstatement of the weight it carried. The rug, hunched, not flung (the boy could tell that even in the darkness) from his father’s shoulder struck the angle of wall and floor with a sound unbelievably loud, thunderous, then the foot again, unhurried and enormous; a light came on in the house and the boy sat, tense, breathing steadily and quietly and just a little fast, though the foot itself did not increase its beat at all, descending the steps now; now the boy could see him.

“Don’t you want to ride now?” he whispered. “We kin both ride now,” the light within the house altering now, flaring up and sinking. He’s coming down the stairs now, he thought. He had already ridden the mule up beside the horse block; presently his father was up behind him and he doubled the reins over and slashed the mule across the neck, but before the animal could begin to trot the hard, thin arm came round him, the hard, knotted hand jerking the mule back to a walk.

In the first red rays of the sun they were in the lot, putting plow gear on the mules. This time the sorrel mare was in the lot before he heard it at all, the rider collarless and even bareheaded, trembling, speaking in a shaking voice as the woman in the house had done, his father merely looking up once before stooping again to the hame he was buckling, so that the man on the mare spoke to his stooping back:

“You must realize you have ruined that rug. Wasn’t there anybody here, any of your women . . .” he ceased, shaking, the boy watching him, the older brother leaning now in the stable door, chewing, blinking slowly and steadily at nothing apparently. “It cost a hundred dollars. But you never had a hundred dollars. You never will. So I’m going to charge you twenty bushels of corn against your crop. I’ll add it in your contract and when you come to the commissary you can sign it. That won’t keep Mrs. de Spain quiet but maybe it will teach you to wipe your feet off before you enter her house again.”

Then he was gone. The boy looked at his father, who still had not spoken or even looked up again, who was now adjusting the logger-head in the hame.

“Pap,” he said. His father looked at him — the inscrutable face, the shaggy brows beneath which the gray eyes glinted coldly. Suddenly the boy went toward him, fast, stopping as suddenly. “You done the best you could!” he cried. “If he wanted hit done different why didn’t he wait and tell you how? He won’t git no twenty bushels! He won’t git none! We’ll gether hit and hide hit! I kin watch . . .”

“Did you put the cutter back in that straight stock like I told you?”

“No, sir,” he said.

“Then go do it.”

That was Wednesday. During the rest of that week he worked steadily, at what was within his scope and some which was beyond it, with an industry that did not need to be driven nor even commanded twice; he had this from his mother, with the difference that some at least of what he did he liked to do, such as splitting wood with the half-size axe which his mother and aunt had earned, or saved money somehow, to present him with at Christmas.

In company with the two older women (and on one afternoon, even one of the sisters), he built pens for the shoat and the cow which were a part of his father’s contract with the landlord, and one afternoon, his father being absent, gone somewhere on one of the mules, he went to the field.

They were running a middle buster now, his brother holding the plow straight while he handled the reins, and walking beside the straining mule, the rich black soil shearing cool and damp against his bare ankles, he thought Maybe this is the end of it.

Maybe even that twenty bushels that seems hard to have to pay for just a rug will be a cheap price for him to stop forever and always from being what he used to be; thinking, dreaming now, so that his brother

had to speak sharply to him to mind the mule: Maybe he even won't collect the twenty bushels.

Maybe it will all add up and balance and vanish — corn, rug, fire; the terror and grief, the being pulled two ways like between two teams of horses — gone, done with for ever and ever.

Then it was Saturday; he looked up from beneath the mule he was harnessing and saw his father in the black coat and hat. "Not that," his father said. "The wagon gear." And then, two hours later, sitting in the wagon bed behind his father and brother on the seat, the wagon accomplished a final curve, and he saw the weathered paintless store with its tattered tobacco- and patent-medicine posters and the tethered wagons and saddle animals below the gallery.

He mounted the gnawed steps behind his father and brother, and there again was the lane of quiet, watching faces for the three of them to walk through. He saw the man in spectacles sitting at the plank table and he did not need to be told this was a Justice of the Peace; he sent one glare of fierce, exultant, partisan defiance at the man in collar and cravat now, whom he had seen but twice before in his life, and that on a galloping horse, who now wore on his face an expression not of rage but of amazed unbelief which the boy could not have known was at the incredible circumstance of being sued by one of his own tenants, and came and stood against his father and cried at the Justice: "He ain't done it! He ain't burnt . . ."

"Go back to the wagon," his father said.

"Burnt?" the Justice said. "Do I understand this rug was burned too?"

"Does anybody here claim it was?" his father said. "Go back to the wagon." But he did not, he merely retreated to the rear of the room, crowded as that other had been, but not to sit down this time, instead, to stand pressing among the motionless bodies, listening to the voices: "And you claim twenty bushels of corn is too high for the damage you did to the rug?"

“He brought the rug to me and said he wanted the tracks washed out of it. I washed the tracks out and took the rug back to him.”

“But you didn’t carry the rug back to him in the same condition it was in before you made the tracks on it.”

His father did not answer, and now for perhaps half a minute there was no sound at all save that of breathing, the faint, steady suspiration of complete and intent listening.

“You decline to answer that, Mr. Snopes?” Again his father did not answer. “I’m going to find against you, Mr. Snopes. I’m going to find that you were responsible for the injury to Major de Spain’s rug and hold you liable for it. But twenty bushels of corn seems a little high for a man in your circumstances to have to pay. Major de Spain claims it cost a hundred dollars.

October corn will be worth about fifty cents. I figure that if Major de Spain can stand a ninety-five dollar loss on something he paid cash for, you can stand a five-dollar loss you haven’t earned yet. I hold you in damages to Major de Spain to the amount of ten bushels of corn over and above your contract with him, to be paid to him out of your crop at gathering time. Court adjourned.”

It had taken no time hardly, the morning was but half begun. He thought they would return home and perhaps back to the field, since they were late, far behind all other farmers.

But instead his father passed on behind the wagon, merely indicating with his hand for the older brother to follow with it, and crossed the road toward the blacksmith shop opposite, pressing on after his father, overtaking him, speaking, whispering up at the harsh, calm face beneath the weathered hat: “He won’t git no ten bushels neither.

He won’t git one. We’ll . . .” until his father glanced for an instant down at him, the face absolutely calm, the grizzled eyebrows tangled above the cold eyes, the voice almost pleasant, almost gentle: “You think so? Well, we’ll wait till October anyway.”

The matter of the wagon — the setting of a spoke or two and the tightening of the tires — did not take long either, the business of the tires accomplished by driving the wagon into the spring branch behind the shop and letting it stand there, the mules nuzzling into the water from time to time, and the boy on the seat with the idle reins, looking up the slope and through the sooty tunnel of the shed where the slow hammer rang and where his father sat on an upended cypress bolt, easily, either talking or listening, still sitting there when the boy brought the dripping wagon up out of the branch and halted it before the door.

“Take them on to the shade and hitch,” his father said. He did so and returned. His father and the smith and a third man squatting on his heels inside the door were talking, about crops and animals; the boy, squatting too in the ammoniac dust and hoof-parings and scales of rust, heard his father tell a long and unhurried story out of the time before the birth of the older brother even when he had been a professional horsetrader.

And then his father came up beside him where he stood before a tattered last year’s circus poster on the other side of the store, gazing rapt and quiet at the scarlet horses, the incredible poisonings and convolutions of tulle and tights and the painted leers of comedians, and said, “It’s time to eat.”

But not at home. Squatting beside his brother against the front wall, he watched his father emerge from the store and produce from a paper sack a segment of cheese and divide it carefully and deliberately into three with his pocket knife and produce crackers from the same sack. They all three squatted on the gallery and ate, slowly, without talking; then in the store again, they drank from a tin dipper tepid water smelling of the cedar bucket and of living beech trees.

And still they did not go home. It was a horse lot this time, a tall rail fence upon and along which men stood and sat and out of which one by one horses were led, to be walked and trotted and then cantered

back and forth along the road while the slow swapping and buying went on and the sun began to slant westward, they — the three of them — watching and listening, the older brother with his muddy eyes and his steady, inevitable tobacco, the father commenting now and then on certain of the animals, to no one in particular.

It was after sundown when they reached home. They ate supper by lamplight, then, sitting on the doorstep, the boy watched the night fully accomplish, listening to the whippoorwills and the frogs, when he heard his mother's voice: "Abner! No! No! Oh, God. Oh, God. Abner!" and he rose, whirled, and saw the altered light through the door where a candle stub now burned in a bottle neck on the table and his father, still in the hat and coat, at once formal and burlesque as though dressed carefully for some shabby and ceremonial violence, emptying the reservoir of the lamp back into the five-gallon kerosene can from which it had been filled, while the mother tugged at his arm until he shifted the lamp to the other hand and flung her back, not savagely or viciously, just hard, into the wall, her hands flung out against the wall for balance, her mouth open and in her face the same quality of hopeless despair as had been in her voice. Then his father saw him standing in the door.

"Go to the barn and get that can of oil we were oiling the wagon with," he said. The boy did not move. Then he could speak.

"What . . ." he cried. "What are you . . ."

"Go get that oil," his father said. "Go."

Then he was moving, running, outside the house, toward the stable: this the old habit, the old blood which he had not been permitted to choose for himself, which had been bequeathed him willy nilly and which had run for so long (and who knew where, battering on what of outrage and savagery and lust) before it came to him. I could keep on, he thought. I could run on and on and never look back, never need to see his face again.

Only I can't. I can't, the rusted can in his hand now, the liquid splashing in it as he ran back to the house and into it, into the sound of his mother's weeping in the next room, and handed the can to his father. "Ain't you going to even send a nigger?" he cried. "At least you sent a nigger before!"

This time his father didn't strike him. The hand came even faster than the blow had, the same hand which had set the can on the table with almost excruciating care flashing from the can toward him too quick for him to follow it, gripping him by the back of his shirt and on to tiptoe before he had seen it quit the can, the face stooping at him in breathless and frozen ferocity, the cold, dead voice speaking over him to the older brother who leaned against the table, chewing with that steady, curious, sidewise motion of cows:

"Empty the can into the big one and go on. I'll catch up with you."

"Better tie him up to the bedpost," the brother said.

"Do like I told you," the father said. Then the boy was moving, his bunched shirt and the hard, bony hand between his shoulder-blades, his toes just touching the floor, across the room and into the other one, past the sisters sitting with spread heavy thighs in the two chairs over the cold hearth, and to where his mother and aunt sat side by side on the bed, the aunt's arms about his mother's shoulders.

"Hold him," the father said. The aunt made a startled movement. "Not you," the father said. "Lennie. Take hold of him. I want to see you do it." His mother took him by the wrist. "You'll hold him better than that. If he gets loose don't you know what he is going to do? He will go up yonder." He jerked his head toward the road. "Maybe I'd better tie him."

"I'll hold him," his mother whispered.

"See you do then." Then his father was gone, the stiff foot heavy and measured upon the boards, ceasing at last.

Then he began to struggle. His mother caught him in both arms, he jerking and wrenching at them. He would be stronger in the end, he

knew that. But he had no time to wait for it. "Lemme go!" he cried. "I don't want to have to hit you!"

"Let him go!" the aunt said. "If he don't go, before God, I am going up there myself!"

"Don't you see I can't?" his mother cried. "Sarty! Sarty! No! No! Help me, Lizzie!"

Then he was free. His aunt grasped at him but it was too late. He whirled, running, his mother stumbled forward on to her knees behind him, crying to the nearer sister: "Catch him, Net! Catch him!" But that was too late too, the sister (the sisters were twins, born at the same time, yet either of them now gave the impression of being, encompassing as much living meat and volume and weight as any other two of the family) not yet having begun to rise from the chair, her head, face, alone merely turned, presenting to him in the flying instant an astonishing expanse of young female features untroubled by any surprise even, wearing only an expression of bovine interest.

Then he was out of the room, out of the house, in the mild dust of the starlit road and the heavy rifelessness of honeysuckle, the pale ribbon unspooling with terrific slowness under his running feet, reaching the gate at last and turning in, running, his heart and lungs drumming, on up the drive toward the lighted house, the lighted door. He did not knock, he burst in, sobbing for breath, incapable for the moment of speech; he saw the astonished face of the Negro in the linen jacket without knowing when the Negro had appeared.

"De Spain!" he cried, panted. "Where's . . ." then he saw the white man too emerging from a white door down the hall. "Barn!" he cried.

"Barn!"

"What?" the white man said. "Barn?"

"Yes!" the boy cried. "Barn!"

"Catch him!" the white man shouted.

But it was too late this time too. The Negro grasped his shirt, but the entire sleeve, rotten with washing, carried away, and he was out that

door too and in the drive again, and had actually never ceased to run even while he was screaming into the white man's face.

Behind him the white man was shouting, "My horse! Fetch my horse!" and he thought for an instant of cutting across the park and climbing the fence into the road, but he did not know the park nor how high the vine-massed fence might be and he dared not risk it.

So he ran on down the drive, blood and breath roaring; presently he was in the road again though he could not see it. He could not hear either: the galloping mare was almost upon him before he heard her, and even then he held his course, as if the very urgency of his wild grief and need must in a moment more find him wings, waiting until the ultimate instant to hurl himself aside and into the weed-choked roadside ditch as the horse thundered past and on, for an instant in furious silhouette against the stars, the tranquil early summer night sky which, even before the shape of the horse and rider vanished, stained abruptly and violently upward: a long, swirling roar incredible and soundless, blotting the stars, and he springing up and into the road again, running again, knowing it was too late yet still running even after he heard the shot and, an instant later, two shots, pausing now without knowing he had ceased to run, crying "Pap! Pap!", running again before he knew he had begun to run, stumbling, tripping over something and scabbling up again without ceasing to run, looking backward over his shoulder at the glare as he got up, running on among the invisible trees, panting, sobbing, "Father! Father!"

At midnight he was sitting on the crest of a hill. He did not know it was midnight and he did not know how far he had come. But there was no glare behind him now and he sat now, his back toward what he had called home for four days anyhow, his face toward the dark woods which he would enter when breath was strong again, small, shaking steadily in the chill darkness, hugging himself into the remainder of his thin, rotten shirt, the grief and despair now no longer terror and fear but just grief and despair. Father. My father, he thought. "He was brave!" he cried suddenly, aloud but not loud, no more than a whisper: "He was! He was in the war! He was in Colonel Sartoris' cav'ry!" not

knowing that his father had gone to that war a private in the fine old European sense, wearing no uniform, admitting the authority of and giving fidelity to no man or army or flag, going to war as Malbrouck himself did: for booty — it meant nothing and less than nothing to him if it were enemy booty or his own.

The slow constellations wheeled on. It would be dawn and then sun-up after a while and he would be hungry. But that would be to-morrow and now he was only cold, and walking would cure that. His breathing was easier now and he decided to get up and go on, and then he found that he had been asleep because he knew it was almost dawn, the night almost over. He could tell that from the whippoorwills. They were everywhere now among the dark trees below him, constant and inflectioned and ceaseless, so that, as the instant for giving over to the day birds drew nearer and nearer, there was no interval at all between them. He got up. He was a little stiff, but walking would cure that too as it would the cold, and soon there would be the sun.

He went on down the hill, toward the dark woods within which the liquid silver voices of the birds called unceasing — the rapid and urgent beating of the urgent and quiring heart of the late spring night. He did not look back.

The End

Shingles for the Lord, William Faulkner

Shingles for the Lord

PAP GOT UP a good hour before daylight and caught the mule and rid down to Killegrews' to borrow the froe and maul. He ought to been back with it in forty minutes. But the sun had rose and I had done milked and fed and was eating my breakfast when he got back, with the mule not only in a lather but right on the edge of the thumps too.

“Fox hunting,” he said. “Fox hunting. A seventy-year-old man, with both feet and one knee, too, already in the grave, squatting all night on a hill and calling himself listening to a fox race that he couldn’t even hear unless they had come right up onto the same log he was setting on and bayed into his ear trumpet. Give me my breakfast,” he told maw.

“Whitfield is standing there right this minute, straddle of that board tree with his watch in his hand.”

And he was. We rid on past the church, and there was not only Solon Quick’s school-bus truck but Reverend Whitfield’s old mare too. We tied the mule to a sapling and hung our dinner bucket on a limb, and with pap toting Killegrew’s froe and maul and the wedges and me toting our ax, we went on to the board tree where Solon and Homer Bookwright, with their froes and mauls and axes and wedges, was setting on two upended cuts, and Whitfield was standing jest like pap said, in his boiled shirt and his black hat and pants and necktie, holding his watch in his hand.

It was gold and in the morning sunlight it looked big as a full-growed squash.

“You’re late,” he said.

So pap told again about how Old Man Killegrew had been off fox hunting all night, and nobody at home to lend him the froe but Mrs. Killegrew and the cook. And naturally, the cook wasn’t going to lend none of Killegrew’s tools out, and Mrs. Killegrew was worser deaf than even Killegrew.

If you was to run in and tell her the house was afire, she would jest keep on rocking and say she thought so, too, unless she began to holler back to the cook to turn the dogs loose before you could even open your mouth.

“You could have gone yesterday and borrowed the froe,” Whitfield said. “You have known for a month now that you had promised this one day out of a whole summer toward putting a roof on the house of God.”

“We ain’t but two hours late,” pap said. “I reckon the Lord will forgive it. He ain’t interested in time, nohow. He’s interested in salvation.”

Whitfield never even waited for pap to finish. It looked to me like he even got taller, thundering down at pap like a cloudburst. “He ain’t interested in neither! Why should He be, when He owns them both?

And why He should turn around for the poor, mizzling souls of men that can’t even borrow tools in time to replace the shingles on His church, I don’t know either. Maybe it’s just because He made them. Maybe He just said to Himself: ‘I made them; I don’t know why. But since I did, I Godfrey, I’ll roll My sleeves up and drag them into glory whether they will or no!’”

But that wasn’t here nor there either now, and I reckon he knowed it, jest like he knowed there wasn’t going to be nothing atall here as long as he stayed. So he put the watch back into his pocket and motioned Solon and Homer up, and we all taken off our hats except him while he stood there with his face raised into the sun and his eyes shut and his eyebrows looking like a big iron-gray caterpillar lying along the edge of a cliff.

“Lord,” he said, “make them good straight shingles to lay smooth, and let them split out easy; they’re for You,” and opened his eyes and looked at us again, mostly at pap, and went and untied his mare and clumb up slow and stiff, like old men do, and rid away.

Pap put down the froe and maul and laid the three wedges in a neat row on the ground and taken up the ax.

“Well, men,” he said, “let’s get started. We’re already late.”

“Me and Homer ain’t,” Solon said. “We was here.” This time him and Homer didn’t set on the cuts. They squatted on their heels. Then I seen that Homer was whittling on a stick. I hadn’t noticed it before. “I make it two hours and a little over,” Solon said. “More or less.”

Pap was still about half stooped over, holding the ax. “It’s nigher one,” he said. “But call it two for the sake of the argument. What about it?” “What argument?” Homer said. “All right,” pap said. “Two hours then. What about it?”

“Which is three man-hour units a hour, multiplied by two hours,” Solon said. “Or a total of six work units.” When the WPA first come to Yoknapatawpha County and started to giving out jobs and grub and mattresses, Solon went in to Jefferson to get on it. He would drive his school-bus truck the twenty-two miles in to town every morning and come back that night.

He done that for almost a week before he found out he would not only have to sign his farm off into somebody else’s name, he couldn’t even own and run the school bus that he had built himself.

So he come back that night and never went back no more, and since then hadn’t nobody better mention WPA to him unless they aimed to fight, too, though every now and then he would turn up with something all figured down into work units like he done now. “Six units short.”

“Four of which you and Homer could have already worked out while you was setting here waiting on me,” pap said.

“Except that we didn’t,” Solon said. “We promised Whitfield two units of twelve three-unit hours toward getting some new shingles on the church roof. We been here ever since sunup, waiting for the third unit to show up, so we could start. You don’t seem to kept up with these modren ideas about work that’s been flooding and uplifting the country in the last few years.”

“What modren ideas?” pap said. “I didn’t know there was but one idea about work — until it is done, it ain’t done, and when it is done, it is.” Homer made another long, steady whittle on the stick. His knife was sharp as a razor.

Solon taken out his snuffbox and filled the top and tilted the snuff into his lip and offered the box to Homer, and Homer shaken his head, and Solon put the top back on the box and put the box back into his pocket.

“So,” pap said, “jest because I had to wait two hours for a old seventy-year man to get back from fox hunting that never had no more business setting out in the woods all night than he would ‘a’ had setting all night in a highway juke joint, we all three have got to come back here tomorrow to finish them two hours that you and Homer—”

“I ain’t,” Solon said. “I don’t know about Homer. I promised Whitfield one day. I was here at sunup to start it. When the sun goes down, I will consider I have done finished it.”

“I see,” pap said. “I see. It’s me that’s got to come back. By myself.

I got to break into a full morning to make up them two hours that you and Homer spent resting. I got to spend two hours of the next day making up for the two hours of the day before that you and Homer never even worked.”

“It’s going to more than jest break into a morning,” Solon said. “It’s going to wreck it. There’s six units left over. Six one-man-hour units. Maybe you can work twice as fast as me and Homer put together and finish them in four hours, but I don’t believe you can work three times as fast and finish in two.”

Pap was standing up now. He was breathing hard. We could hear him. “So,” he said. “So.” He swung the ax and druv the blade into one of the cuts and snatched it up onto its flat end, ready to split. “So I’m to be penalized a half a day of my own time, from my own work that’s waiting for me at home right this minute, to do six hours more work than the work you fellers lacked two hours of even doing atall, purely

and simply because I am jest a average hard-working farmer trying to do the best he can, instead of a durn froe-owning millionaire named Quick or Bookwright.”

They went to work then, splitting the cuts into bolts and riving the bolts into shingles for Tull and Snopes and the others that had promised for tomorrow to start nailing onto the church roof when they finished pulling the old shingles off.

They set flat on the ground in a kind of circle, with their legs spraddled out on either side of the propped-up bolt, Solon and Homer working light and easy and steady as two clocks ticking, but pap making every lick of hisn like he was killing a moccasin.

If he had jest swung the maul half as fast as he swung it hard, he would have rove as many shingles as Solon and Homer together, swinging the maul up over his head and holding it there for what looked like a whole minute sometimes and then swinging it down onto the blade of the froe, and not only a shingle flying off every lick but the froe going on into the ground clean up to the helve eye, and pap setting there wrenching at it slow and steady and hard, like he jest wished it would try to hang on a root or a rock and stay there.

“Here, here,” Solon said. “If you don’t watch out you won’t have nothing to do neither during them six extra units tomorrow morning but rest.”

Pap never even looked up. “Get out of the way,” he said. And Solon done it. If he hadn’t moved the water bucket, pap would have split it, too, right on top of the bolt, and this time the whole shingle went whirling past Solon’s shin jest like a scythe blade.

“What you ought to do is to hire somebody to work out them extra overtime units,” Solon said.

“With what?” Pap said. “I ain’t had no WPA experience in dickering over labor. Get out of the way.”

But Solon had already moved this time. Pap would have had to change his whole position or else made this one curve. So this one missed Solon, too, and pap set there wrenching the froe, slow and hard and steady, back out of the ground.

“Maybe there’s something else besides cash you might be able to trade with,” Solon said. “You might use that dog.”

That was when pap actually stopped. I didn’t know it myself then either, but I found it out a good long time before Solon did. Pap set there with the maul up over his head and the blade of the froe set against the block for the next lick, looking up at Solon. “The dog?” he said.

It was a kind of mixed hound, with a little bird dog and some collie and maybe a considerable of almost anything else, but it would ease through the woods without no more noise than a hant and pick up a squirrel’s trail on the ground and bark jest once, unless it knowed you was where you could see it, and then tiptoe that trail out jest like a man and never make another sound until it treed, and only then when it knowed you hadn’t kept in sight of it.

It belonged to pap and Vernon Tull together. Will Varner give it to Tull as a puppy, and pap raised it for a half interest; me and him trained it and it slept in my bed with me until it got so big maw finally run it out of the house, and for the last six months Solon had been trying to buy it.

Him and Tull had agreed on two dollars for Tull’s half of it, but Solon and pap was still six dollars apart on ourn, because pap said it was worth ten dollars of anybody’s money and if Tull wasn’t going to collect his full half of that, he was going to collect it for him.

“So that’s it,” pap said. “Them things wasn’t work units atall. They was dog units.”

“Jest a suggestion,” Solon said. “Jest a friendly offer to keep them runaway shingles from breaking up your private business for six hours

tomorrow morning. You sell me your half of that trick overgrown fyce and I'll finish these shingles for you."

"Naturally including them six extra units of one dollars," pap said.

"No, no," Solon said. "I'll pay you the same two dollars for your half of that dog that me and Tull agreed on for his half of it. You meet me here tomorrow morning with the dog and you can go on back home or wherever them urgent private affairs are located, and forget about that church roof."

For about ten seconds more, pap set there with the maul up over his head, looking at Solon. Then for about three seconds he wasn't looking at Solon or at nothing else. Then he was looking at Solon again. It was jest exactly like after about two and nine-tenths seconds he found out he wasn't looking at Solon, so he looked back at him as quick as he could. "Hah," he said.

Then he began to laugh. It was laughing all right, because his mouth was open and that's what it sounded like. But it never went no further back than his teeth and it never come nowhere near reaching as high up as his eyes. And he never said "Look out" this time neither. He jest shifted fast on his hips and swung the maul down, the froe done already druv through the bolt and into the ground while the shingle was still whirling off to slap Solon across the shin.

Then they went back at it again. Up to this time I could tell pap's licks from Solon's and Homer's, even with my back turned, not because they was louder or steadier, because Solon and Homer worked steady, too, and the froe never made no especial noise jest going into the ground, but because they was so infrequent; you would hear five or six of Solon's and Homer's little polite chipping licks before you would hear pap's froe go "chug!" and know that another shingle had went whirling off somewhere.

But from now on pap's sounded jest as light and quick and polite as Solon's or Homer's either, and, if anything, even a little faster, with the shingles piling up steadier than I could stack them, almost; until now

there was going to be more than a plenty of them for Tull and the others to shingle with tomorrow, right on up to noon, when we heard Armstid's farm bell, and Solon laid his froe and maul down and looked at his watch too.

And I wasn't so far away neither, but by the time I caught up with pap he had untied the mule from the sapling and was already on it. And maybe Solon and Homer thought they had pap, and maybe for a minute I did, too, but I jest wish they could have seen his face then. He reached our dinner bucket down from the limb and handed it to me.

"Go on and eat," he said. "Don't wait for me. Him and his work units. If he wants to know where I went, tell him I forgot something and went home to get it. Tell him I had to go back home to get two spoons for us to eat our dinner with.

No, don't tell him that. If he hears I went somewhere to get something I needed to use, even if it's jest a tool to eat with, he will refuse to believe I jest went home, for the reason that I don't own anything there that even I would borrow." He hauled the mule around and heeled him in the flank. Then he pulled up again. "And when I come back, no matter what I say, don't pay no attention to it. No matter what happens, don't you say nothing. Don't open your mouth a-tall, you hear?"

Then he went on, and I went back to where Solon and Homer was setting on the running board of Solon's school-bus truck, eating, and sho enough Solon said jest exactly what pap said he was going to.

"I admire his optimism, but he's mistaken. If it's something he needs that he can't use his natural hands and feet for, he's going somewhere else than jest his own house."

We had jest went back to the shingles when pap rid up and got down and tied the mule back to the sapling and come and taken up the ax and snicked the blade into the next cut.

"Well, men," he said, "I been thinking about it. I still don't think it's right, but I still ain't thought of anything to do about it. But somebody's got to make up for them two hours nobody worked this morning, and since you fellers are two to one against me, it looks like it's going to be me that makes them up. But I got work waiting at home for me tomorrow.

I got corn that's crying out loud for me right now. Or maybe that's jest a lie too. Maybe the whole thing is, I don't mind admitting here in private that I been outfigured, but I be dog if I'm going to set here by myself tomorrow morning admitting it in public. Anyway, I ain't. So I'm going to trade with you, Solon. You can have the dog."

Solon looked at pap. "I don't know as I want to trade now," he said. "I see," pap said. The ax was still stuck in the cut. He began to pump it up and down to back it out.

"Wait," Solon said. "Put that durn ax down." But pap held the ax raised for the lick, looking at Solon and waiting. "You're swapping me half a dog for a half a day's work," Solon said. "Your half of the dog for that half a day's work you still owe on these shingles."

"And the two dollars," pap said. "That you and Tull agreed on. I sell you half the dog for two dollars, and you come back here tomorrow and finish the shingles. You give me the two dollars now, and I'll meet you here in the morning with the dog, and you can show me the receipt from Tull for his half then."

"Me and Tull have already agreed," Solon said.

"All right," pap said. "Then you can pay Tull his two dollars and bring his receipt with you without no trouble."

"Tull will be at the church tomorrow morning, pulling off them old shingles," Solon said.

"All right," pap said. "Then it won't be no trouble at all for you to get a receipt from him. You can stop at the church when you pass. Tull ain't

named Grier. He won't need to be off somewhere borrowing a crowbar."

So Solon taken out his purse and paid pap the two dollars and they went back to work. And now it looked like they really was trying to finish that afternoon, not jest Solon, but even Homer, that didn't seem to be concerned in it nohow, and pap, that had already swapped a half a dog to get rid of whatever work Solon claimed would be left over. I quit trying to stay up with them; I jest stacked shingles.

Then Solon laid his froe and maul down. "Well, men," he said, "I don't know what you fellers think, but I consider this a day."

"All right," pap said. "You are the one to decide when to quit, since whatever elbow units you consider are going to be shy tomorrow will be yourn."

"That's a fact," Solon said. "And since I am giving a day and a half to the church instead of jest a day, like I started out doing, I reckon I better get on home and tend to a little of my own work." He picked up his froe and maul and ax, and went to his truck and stood waiting for Homer to come and get in.

"I'll be here in the morning with the dog," pap said.

"Sholy," Solon said. It sounded like he had forgot about the dog, or that it wasn't no longer any importance. But he stood there again and looked hard and quiet at pap for about a second. "And a bill of sale from Tull for his half of it. As you say, it won't be no trouble a-tall to get that from him." Him and Homer got into the truck and he started the engine. You couldn't say jest what it was.

It was almost like Solon was hurrying himself, so pap wouldn't have to make any excuse or pretense toward doing or not doing anything. "I have always understood the fact that lightning don't have to hit twice is one of the reasons why they named it lightning. So getting lightning-struck is a mistake that might happen to any man.

The mistake I seem to have made is, I never realized in time that what I was looking at was a cloud. I'll see you in the morning."

"With the dog," pap said.

"Certainly," Solon said, again like it had slipped his mind completely.

"With the dog."

Then him and Homer drove off. Then pap got up.

"What?" I said. "What? You swapped him your half of Tull's dog for that half a day's work tomorrow. Now what?"

"Yes," pap said. "Only before that I had already swapped Tull a half a day's work pulling off them old shingles tomorrow, for Tull's half of that dog. Only we ain't going to wait until tomorrow. We're going to pull them shingles off tonight, and without no more racket about it than is necessary.

I don't aim to have nothing on my mind tomorrow but watching Mr. Solon Work-Unit Quick trying to get a bill of sale for two dollars or ten dollars either on the other half of that dog. And we'll do it tonight. I don't want him jest to find out at sunup tomorrow that he is too late. I want him to find out then that even when he laid down to sleep he was already too late."

So we went back home and I fed and milked while pap went down to Killebrews' to carry the froe and maul back and to borrow a crowbar. But of all places in the world and doing what under the sun with it, Old Man Killebrew had went and lost his crowbar out of a boat into forty feet of water.

And pap said how he come within a inch of going to Solon's and borrowing his crowbar out of pure poetic justice, only Solon might have smelled the rat jest from the idea of the crowbar. So pap went to Armstid's and borrowed hisn and come back and we et supper and cleaned and filled the lantern while maw still tried to find out what we was up to that couldn't wait till morning.

We left her still talking, even as far as the front gate, and come on back to the church, walking this time, with the rope and crowbar and a hammer for me, and the lantern still dark. Whitfield and Snopes was unloading a ladder from Snopes' wagon when we passed the church on the way home before dark, so all we had to do was to set the ladder up against the church.

Then pap clumb up onto the roof with the lantern and pulled off shingles until he could hang the lantern inside behind the decking, where it could shine out through the cracks in the planks, but you couldn't see it unless you was passing in the road, and by that time anybody would 'a' already heard us.

Then I clumb up with the rope, and pap reached it through the decking and around a rafter and back and tied the ends around our waists, and we started. And we went at it. We had them old shingles jest raining down, me using the claw hammer and pap using the crowbar, working the bar under a whole patch of shingles at one time and then laying back on the bar like in one more lick or if the crowbar ever happened for one second to get a solid holt, he would tilt up that whole roof at one time like a hinged box lid.

That's exactly what he finally done. He laid back on the bar and this time it got a holt. It wasn't jest a patch of shingles, it was a whole section of decking, so that when he lunged back he snatched that whole section of roof from around the lantern like you would shuck a corn nubbin. The lantern was hanging on a nail.

He never even moved the nail, he jest pulled the board off of it, so that it looked like for a whole minute I watched the lantern, and the crowbar, too, setting there in the empty air in a little mess of floating shingles, with the empty nail still sticking through the bail of the lantern, before the whole thing started down into the church. It hit the floor and bounced once. Then it hit the floor again, and this time the whole church jest blowed up into a pit of yellow jumping fire, with me and pap hanging over the edge of it on two ropes.

I don't know what become of the rope nor how we got out of it. I don't remember climbing down. Jest pap yelling behind me and pushing me about halfway down the ladder and then throwing me the rest of the way by a handful of my overalls, and then we was both on the ground, running for the water barrel.

It set under the gutter spout at the side, and Armstid was there then; he had happened to go out to his lot about a hour back and seen the lantern on the church roof, and it stayed on his mind until finally he come up to see what was going on, and got there jest in time to stand yelling back and forth with pap across the water barrel.

And I believe we still would have put it out. Pap turned and squatted against the barrel and got a holt of it over his shoulder and stood up with that barrel that was almost full and run around the corner and up the steps of the church and hooked his toe on the top step and come down with the barrel busting on top of him and knocking him cold out as a wedge.

So we had to drag him back first, and maw was there then, and Mrs. Armstid about the same time, and me and Armstid run with the two fire buckets to the spring, and when we got back there was a plenty there, Whitfield, too, with more buckets, and we done what we could, but the spring was two hundred yards away and ten buckets emptied it and it taken five minutes to fill again, and so finally we all jest stood around where pap had come to again with a big cut on his head and watched it go.

It was a old church, long dried out, and full of old colored-picture charts that Whitfield had accumulated for more than fifty years, that the lantern had lit right in the middle of when it finally exploded. There was a special nail where he would keep a old long nightshirt he would wear to baptize in.

I would use to watch it all the time during church and Sunday school, and me and the other boys would go past the church sometimes jest to peep in at it, because to a boy of ten it wasn't jest a cloth garment or

even a iron armor; it was the old strong Archangel Michael his self, that had fit and strove and conquered sin for so long that it finally had the same contempt for the human beings that returned always to sin as hogs and dogs done that the old strong archangel his self must have had.

For a long time it never burned, even after everything else inside had. We could watch it, hanging there among the fire, not like it had knowed in its time too much water to burn easy, but like it had strove and fit with the devil and all the hosts of hell too long to burn in jest a fire that Res Grier started, trying to beat Solon Quick out of half a dog. But at last it went, too, not in a hurry still, but jest all at once, kind of roaring right on up and out against the stars and the far dark spaces.

And then there wasn't nothing but jest pap, drenched and groggy-looking, on the ground, with the rest of us around him, and Whitfield like always in his boiled shirt and his black hat and pants, standing there with his hat on, too, like he had strove too long to save what hadn't ought to been created in the first place, from the damnation it didn't even want to escape, to bother to need to take his hat off in any presence. He looked around at us from under it; we was all there now, all that belonged to that church and used it to be born and marry and die from — us and the Armstids and Tulls, and Bookwright and Quick and Snopes.

"I was wrong," Whitfield said. "I told you we would meet here tomorrow to roof a church. We'll meet here in the morning to raise one."

"Of course we got to have a church," pap said. "We're going to have one. And we're going to have it soon. But there's some of us done already give a day or so this week, at the cost of our own work. Which is right and just, and we're going to give more, and glad to. But I don't believe that the Lord—"

Whitfield let him finish. He never moved. He jest stood there until pap finally run down of his own accord and hushed and set there on the ground mostly not looking at maw, before Whitfield opened his mouth.

“Not you,” Whitfield said. “Arsonist.”

“Arsonist?” pap said.

“Yes,” Whitfield said. “If there is any pursuit in which you can engage without carrying flood and fire and destruction and death behind you, do it. But not one hand shall you lay to this new house until you have proved to us that you are to be trusted again with the powers and capacities of a man.” He looked about at us again. “Tull and Snopes and Armstid have already promised for tomorrow. I understand that Quick had another half day he intended—”

“I can give another day,” Solon said.

“I can give the rest of the week,” Homer said.

“I ain’t rushed neither,” Snopes said.

“That will be enough to start with, then,” Whitfield said. “It’s late now. Let us all go home.”

He went first. He didn’t look back once, at the church or at us. He went to the old mare and clumb up slow and stiff and powerful, and was gone, and we went too, scattering. But I looked back at it. It was jest a shell now, with a red and fading core, and I had hated it at times and feared it at others, and I should have been glad. But there was something that even that fire hadn’t even touched.

Maybe that’s all it was — jest indestructibility, durability — that old man that could plan to build it back while its walls was still fire-fierce and then calmly turn his back and go away because he knowed that the men that never had nothing to give toward the new one but their work would be there at sunup tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that, too, as long as it was needed, to give that work to build it back again.

So it hadn't gone a-tall; it didn't no more care for that little fire and flood than Whitfield's old baptizing gown had done. Then we was home. Maw had left so fast the lamp was still lit, and we could see pap now, still leaving a puddle where he stood, with a cut across the back of his head where the barrel had busted and the blood-streaked water soaking him to the waist.

"Get them wet clothes off," maw said.

"I don't know as I will or not," pap said. "I been publicly notified that I ain't fitten to associate with white folks, so I publicly notify them same white folks and Methodists, too, not to try to associate with me, or the devil can have the hindmost."

But maw hadn't even listened. When she come back with a pan of water and a towel and the liniment bottle, pap was already in his nightshirt.

"I don't want none of that neither," he said. "If my head wasn't worth busting, it ain't worth patching." But she never paid no mind to that neither. She washed his head off and dried it and put the bandage on and went out again, and pap went and got into bed.

"Hand me my snuff; then you get out of here and stay out too," he said. But before I could do that maw come back. She had a glass of hot toddy, and she went to the bed and stood there with it, and pap turned his head and looked at it.

"What's that?" he said.

But maw never answered, and then he set up in bed and drewed a long, shuddering breath — we could hear it — and after a minute he put out his hand for the toddy and set there holding it and drawing his breath, and then he taken a sip of it.

"I Godfrey, if him and all of them put together think they can keep me from working on my own church like ary other man, he better be a good man to try it." He taken another sip of the toddy. Then he taken a long one. "Arsonist," he said. "Work units. Dog units. And now arsonist. I Godfrey, what a day!"

The End

The Tall Men, William Faulkner

The Tall Men

THEY PASSED THE dark bulk of the cotton gin. Then they saw the lamplit house and the other car, the doctor's coupé, just stopping at the gate, and they could hear the hound baying.

"Here we are," the old deputy marshal said.

"What's that other car?" the younger man said, the stranger, the state draft investigator.

"Doctor Schofield's," the marshal said. "Lee McCallum asked me to send him out when I telephoned we were coming."

"You mean you warned them?" the investigator said. "You telephoned ahead that I was coming out with a warrant for these two evaders? Is this how you carry out the orders of the United States Government?"

The marshal was a lean, clean old man who chewed tobacco, who had been born and lived in the county all his life.

"I understood all you wanted was to arrest these two McCallum boys and bring them back to town," he said.

"It was!" the investigator said. "And now you have warned them, given them a chance to run. Possibly put the Government to the expense of hunting them down with troops. Have you forgotten that you are under a bond yourself?"

"I ain't forgot it," the marshal said. "And ever since we left Jefferson I been trying to tell you something for you not to forget. But I reckon it will take these McCallums to impress that on you. . . . Pull in behind the

other car. We'll try to find out first just how sick whoever it is that is sick is."

The investigator drew up behind the other car and switched off and blacked out his lights. "These people," he said. Then he thought, But this doddering, tobacco-chewing old man is one of them, too, despite the honor and pride of his office, which should have made him different.

So he didn't speak it aloud, removing the keys and getting out of the car, and then locking the car itself, rolling the windows up first, thinking, These people who lie about and conceal the ownership of land and property in order to hold relief jobs which they have no intention of performing, standing on their constitutional rights against having to work, who jeopardize the very job itself through petty and transparent subterfuge to acquire a free mattress which they intend to attempt to sell; who would relinquish even the job, if by so doing they could receive free food and a place, any rathole, in town to sleep in; who, as farmers, make false statements to get seed loans which they will later misuse, and then react in loud vituperative outrage and astonishment when caught at it.

And then, when at long last a suffering and threatened Government asks one thing of them in return, one thing simply, which is to put their names down on a selective-service list, they refuse to do it.

The old marshal had gone on. The investigator followed, through a stout paintless gate in a picket fence, up a broad brick walk between two rows of old shabby cedars, toward the rambling and likewise paintless sprawl of the two-story house in the open hall of which the soft lamplight glowed and the lower story of which, as the investigator now perceived, was of logs.

He saw a hall full of soft lamplight beyond a stout paintless gallery running across the log front, from beneath which the same dog which they had heard, a big hound, came booming again, to stand foursquare

facing them in the walk, bellowing, until a man's voice spoke to it from the house. He followed the marshal up the steps onto the gallery.

Then he saw the man standing in the door, waiting for them to approach — a man of about forty-five, not tall, but blocky, with a brown, still face and horseman's hands, who looked at him once, brief and hard, and then no more, speaking to the marshal, "Howdy, Mr. Gombault. Come in."

"Howdy, Rafe," the marshal said. "Who's sick?"

"Buddy," the other said. "Slipped and caught his leg in the hammer mill this afternoon."

"Is it bad?" the marshal said.

"It looks bad to me," the other said. "That's why we sent for the doctor instead of bringing him in to town. We couldn't get the bleeding stopped."

"I'm sorry to hear that," the marshal said. "This is Mr. Pearson." Once more the investigator found the other looking at him, the brown eyes still, courteous enough in the brown face, the hand he offered hard enough, but the clasp quite limp, quite cold. The marshal was still speaking. "From Jackson. From the draft board." Then he said, and the investigator could discern no change whatever in his tone: "He's got a warrant for the boys."

The investigator could discern no change whatever anywhere. The limp hard hand merely withdrew from his, the still face now looking at the marshal. "You mean we have declared war?"

"No," the marshal said.

"That's not the question, Mr. McCallum," the investigator said. "All required of them was to register. Their numbers might not even be drawn this time; under the law of averages, they probably would not be. But they refused — failed, anyway — to register."

“I see,” the other said. He was not looking at the investigator. The investigator couldn’t tell certainly if he was even looking at the marshal, although he spoke to him, “You want to see Buddy? The doctor’s with him now.”

“Wait,” the investigator said. “I’m sorry about your brother’s accident, but I—” The marshal glanced back at him for a moment, his shaggy gray brows beetling, with something at once courteous yet a little impatient about the glance, so that during the instant the investigator sensed from the old marshal the same quality which had been in the other’s brief look.

The investigator was a man of better than average intelligence; he was already becoming aware of something a little different here from what he had expected. But he had been in relief work in the state several years, dealing almost exclusively with country people, so he still believed he knew them. So he looked at the old marshal, thinking, Yes.

The same sort of people, despite the office, the authority and responsibility which should have changed him. Thinking again, These people. These people. “I intend to take the night train back to Jackson,” he said. “My reservation is already made. Serve the warrant and we will—”

“Come along,” the old marshal said. “We are going to have plenty of time.”

So he followed — there was nothing else to do — fuming and seething, attempting in the short length of the hall to regain control of himself in order to control the situation, because he realized now that if the situation were controlled, it would devolve upon him to control it; that if their departure with their prisoners were expedited, it must be himself and not the old marshal who would expedite it. He had been right.

The doddering old officer was not only at bottom one of these people, he had apparently been corrupted anew to his old, inherent, shiftless

sloth and unreliability merely by entering the house. So he followed in turn, down the hall and into a bedroom; whereupon he looked about him not only with amazement but with something very like terror.

The room was a big room, with a bare unpainted floor, and besides the bed, it contained only a chair or two and one other piece of old-fashioned furniture.

Yet to the investigator it seemed so filled with tremendous men cast in the same mold as the man who had met them that the very walls themselves must bulge. Yet they were not big, not tall, and it was not vitality, exuberance, because they made no sound, merely looking quietly at him where he stood in the door, with faces bearing an almost identical stamp of kinship — a thin, almost frail old man of about seventy, slightly taller than the others; a second one, white-haired, too, but otherwise identical with the man who had met them at the door; a third one about the same age as the man who had met them, but with something delicate in his face and something tragic and dark and wild in the same dark eyes; the two absolutely identical blue-eyed youths; and lastly the blue-eyed man on the bed over which the doctor, who might have been any city doctor, in his neat city suit, leaned — all of them turning to look quietly at him and the marshal as they entered.

And he saw, past the doctor, the slit trousers of the man on the bed and the exposed, bloody, mangled leg, and he turned sick, stopping just inside the door under that quiet, steady regard while the marshal went up to the man who lay on the bed, smoking a cob pipe, a big, old-fashioned, wicker-covered demijohn, such as the investigator's grandfather had kept his whisky in, on the table beside him.

"Well, Buddy," the marshal said, "this is bad."

"Ah, it was my own damn fault," the man on the bed said. "Stuart kept warning me about that frame I was using."

"That's correct," the second old one said.

Still the others said nothing. They just looked steadily and quietly at the investigator until the marshal turned slightly and said, "This is Mr. Pearson. From Jackson. He's got a warrant for the boys."

Then the man on the bed said, "What for?"

"That draft business, Buddy," the marshal said.

"We're not at war now," the man on the bed said.

"No," the marshal said. "It's that new law. They didn't register."

"What are you going to do with them?"

"It's a warrant, Buddy. Swore out."

"That means jail."

"It's a warrant," the old marshal said. Then the investigator saw that the man on the bed was watching him, puffing steadily at the pipe.

"Pour me some whisky, Jackson," he said.

"No," the doctor said. "He's had too much already."

"Pour me some whisky, Jackson," the man on the bed said. He puffed steadily at the pipe, looking at the investigator. "You come from the Government?" he said.

"Yes," the investigator said. "They should have registered. That's all required of them yet. They did not—" His voice ceased, while the seven pairs of eyes contemplated him, and the man on the bed puffed steadily.

"We would have still been here," the man on the bed said. "We wasn't going to run." He turned his head. The two youths were standing side by side at the foot of the bed. "Anse, Lucius," he said.

To the investigator it sounded as if they answered as one, "Yes, father."

"This gentleman has come all the way from Jackson to say the Government is ready for you. I reckon the quickest place to enlist will be Memphis. Go upstairs and pack."

The investigator started, moved forward. "Wait!" he cried.

But Jackson, the eldest, had forestalled him. He said, "Wait," also, and now they were not looking at the investigator. They were looking at the doctor.

"What about his leg?" Jackson said.

"Look at it," the doctor said. "He almost amputated it himself. It won't wait. And he can't be moved now. I'll need my nurse to help me, and some ether, provided he hasn't had too much whisky to stand the anesthetic too. One of you can drive to town in my car. I'll telephone—"

"Ether?" the man on the bed said. "What for? You just said yourself it's pretty near off now. I could whet up one of Jackson's butcher knives and finish it myself, with another drink or two. Go on. Finish it."

"You couldn't stand any more shock," the doctor said. "This is whisky talking now."

"Shucks," the other said. "One day in France we was running through a wheat field and I saw the machine gun, coming across the wheat, and I tried to jump it like you would jump a fence rail somebody was swinging at your middle, only I never made it. And I was on the ground then, and along toward dark that begun to hurt, only about that time something went whang on the back of my helmet, like when you hit a anvil, so I never knowed nothing else until I woke up.

There was a heap of us racked up along a bank outside a field dressing station, only it took a long time for the doctor to get around to all of us, and by that time it was hurting bad. This here ain't hurt none to speak of since I got a-holt of this johnny-jug. You go on and finish it. If it's help you need, Stuart and Rafe will help you. . . . Pour me a drink, Jackson."

This time the doctor raised the demijohn and examined the level of the liquor. "There's a good quart gone," he said. "If you've drunk a quart of whisky since four o'clock, I doubt if you could stand the anesthetic. Do you think you could stand it if I finished it now?"

"Yes, finish it. I've ruined it; I want to get shut of it."

The doctor looked about at the others, at the still, identical faces watching him. "If I had him in town, in the hospital, with a nurse to watch him, I'd probably wait until he got over this first shock and got the whisky out of his system. But he can't be moved now, and I can't stop the bleeding like this, and even if I had ether or a local anesthetic—"

"Shucks," the man on the bed said. "God never made no better local nor general comfort or anesthetic neither than what's in this johnny-jug. And this ain't Jackson's leg nor Stuart's nor Rafe's nor Lee's. It's mine. I done started it; I reckon I can finish cutting it off any way I want to."

But the doctor was still looking at Jackson. "Well, Mr. McCallum?" he said. "You're the oldest."

But it was Stuart who answered. "Yes," he said. "Finish it. What do you want? Hot water, I reckon."

"Yes," the doctor said. "Some clean sheets. Have you got a big table you can move in here?"

"The kitchen table," the man who had met them at the door said. "Me and the boys—"

"Wait," the man on the bed said. "The boys won't have time to help you." He looked at them again. "Anse, Lucius," he said.

Again it seemed to the investigator that they answered as one, "Yes, father."

"This gentleman yonder is beginning to look impatient. You better start: Come to think of it, you won't need to pack. You will have uniforms in a day or two. Take the truck. There won't be nobody to drive you to Memphis and bring the truck back, so you can leave it at the Gayoso Feed Company until we can send for it. I'd like for you to enlist into the old Sixth Infantry, where I used to be.

But I reckon that's too much to hope, and you'll just have to chance where they send you. But it likely won't matter, once you are in. The Government done right by me in my day, and it will do right by you. You just enlist wherever they want to send you, need you, and obey your sergeants and officers until you find out how to be soldiers. Obey them, but remember your name and don't take nothing from no man. You can go now."

"Wait!" the investigator cried again; again he started, moved forward into the center of the room. "I protest this! I'm sorry about Mr. McCallum's accident. I'm sorry about the whole business. But it's out of my hands and out of his hands now. This charge, failure to register according to law, has been made and the warrant issued. It cannot be evaded this way. The course of the action must be completed before any other step can be taken.

They should have thought of this when these boys failed to register. If Mr. Gombault refuses to serve this warrant, I will serve it myself and take these men back to Jefferson with me to answer this charge as made. And I must warn Mr. Gombault that he will be cited for contempt!"

The old marshal turned, his shaggy eyebrows beetling again, speaking down to the investigator as if he were a child, "Ain't you found out yet that me or you neither ain't going nowhere for a while?"

"What?" the investigator cried. He looked about at the grave faces once more contemplating him with that remote and speculative regard. "Am I being threatened?" he cried.

"Ain't anybody paying any attention to you at all," the marshal said. "Now you just be quiet for a while, and you will be all right, and after a while we can go back to town."

So he stopped again and stood while the grave, contemplative faces freed him once more of that impersonal and unbearable regard, and saw the two youths approach the bed and bend down in turn and kiss

their father on the mouth, and then turn as one and leave the room, passing him without even looking at him.

And sitting in the lamplit hall beside the old marshal, the bedroom door closed now, he heard the truck start up and back and turn and go down the road, the sound of it dying away, ceasing, leaving the still, hot night — the Mississippi Indian summer, which had already outlasted half of November — filled with the loud last shrilling of the summer's cicadas, as though they, too, were aware of the imminent season of cold weather and of death.

"I remember old Anse," the marshal said pleasantly, chattily, in that tone in which an adult addresses a strange child. "He's been dead fifteen-sixteen years now. He was about sixteen when the old war broke out, and he walked all the way to Virginia to get into it.

He could have enlisted and fought right here at home, but his ma was a Carter, so wouldn't nothing do him but to go all the way back to Virginia to do his fighting, even though he hadn't never seen Virginia before himself; walked all the way back to a land he hadn't never even seen before and enlisted in Stonewall Jackson's army and stayed in it all through the Valley, and right up to Chancellorsville, where them Carolina boys shot Jackson by mistake, and right on up to that morning in 'Sixty-five when Sheridan's cavalry blocked the road from Appomattox to the Valley, where they might have got away again.

And he walked back to Mississippi with just about what he had carried away with him when he left, and he got married and built the first story of this house — this here log story we're in right now — and started getting them boys boys — Jackson and Stuart and Raphael and Lee and Buddy.

"Buddy come along late, late enough to be in the other war, in France in it. You heard him in there. He brought back two medals, an American medal and a French one, and no man knows till yet how he got them, just what he done.

I don't believe he even told Jackson and Stuart and them. He hadn't hardly got back home, with them numbers on his uniform and the wound stripes and them two medals, before he had found him a girl, found her right off, and a year later them twin boys was born, the livin', spittin' image of old Anse McCallum. If old Anse had just been about seventy-five years younger, the three of them might have been thriblets.

I remember them — two little critters exactly alike, and wild as spikehorn bucks, running around here day and night both with a pack of coon dogs until they got big enough to help Buddy and Stuart and Lee with the farm and the gin, and Rafe with the horses and mules, when he would breed and raise and train them and take them to Memphis to sell, right on up to three, four years back, when they went to the agricultural college for a year to learn more about whiteface cattle.

“That was after Buddy and them had quit raising cotton. I remember that too. It was when the Government first begun to interfere with how a man farmed his own land, raised his cotton.

Stabilizing the price, using up the surplus, they called it, giving a man advice and help, whether he wanted it or not. You may have noticed them boys in yonder tonight; curious folks almost, you might call them.

That first year, when county agents was trying to explain the new system to farmers, the agent come out here and tried to explain it to Buddy and Lee and Stuart, explaining how they would cut down the crop, but that the Government would pay farmers the difference, and so they would actually be better off than trying to farm by themselves.

“‘Why, we're much obliged,’ Buddy says. ‘But we don't need no help. We'll just make the cotton like we always done; if we can't make a crop of it, that will just be our lookout and our loss, and we'll try again.’

“So they wouldn't sign no papers nor no cards nor nothing. They just went on and made the cotton like old Anse had taught them to; it was

like they just couldn't believe that the Government aimed to help a man whether he wanted help or not, aimed to interfere with how much of anything he could make by hard work on his own land, making the crop and ginning it right here in their own gin, like they had always done, and hauling it to town to sell, hauling it all the way into Jefferson before they found out they couldn't sell it because, in the first place, they had made too much of it and, in the second place, they never had no card to sell what they would have been allowed.

So they hauled it back. The gin wouldn't hold all of it, so they put some of it under Rafe's mule shed and they put the rest of it right here in the hall where we are setting now, where they would have to walk around it all winter and keep themselves reminded to be sho and fill out that card next time.

"Only next year they didn't fill out no papers neither. It was like they still couldn't believe it, still believed in the freedom and liberty to make or break according to a man's fitness and will to work, guaranteed by the Government that old Anse had tried to tear in two once and failed, and admitted in good faith he had failed and taken the consequences, and that had give Buddy a medal and taken care of him when he was far away from home in a strange land and hurt.

"So they made that second crop. And they couldn't sell it to nobody neither because they never had no cards. This time they built a special shed to put it under, and I remember how in that second winter Buddy come to town one day to see Lawyer Gavin Stevens. Not for legal advice how to sue the Government or somebody into buying the cotton, even if they never had no card for it, but just to find out why. 'I was for going ahead and signing up for it,' Buddy says.

'If that's going to be the new rule. But we talked it over, and Jackson ain't no farmer, but he knowed father longer than the rest of us, and he said father would have said no, and I reckon now he would have been right.'

“So they didn’t raise any more cotton; they had a plenty of it to last a while — twenty-two bales, I think it was. That was when they went into whiteface cattle, putting old Anse’s cotton land into pasture, because that’s what he would have wanted them to do if the only way they could raise cotton was by the Government telling them how much they could raise and how much they could sell it for, and where, and when, and then pay them for not doing the work they didn’t do.

Only even when they didn’t raise cotton, every year the county agent’s young fellow would come out to measure the pasture crops they planted so he could pay them for that, even if they never had no not-cotton to be paid for. Except that he never measured no crop on this place. ‘You’re welcome to look at what we are doing,’ Buddy says. ‘But don’t draw it down on your map.’

“‘But you can get money for this,’ the young fellow says. ‘The Government wants to pay you for planting all this.’

“‘We are aiming to get money for it,’ Buddy says. ‘When we can’t, we will try something else. But not from the Government. Give that to them that want to take it. We can make out.’

“And that’s about all. Them twenty-two bales of orphan cotton are down yonder in the gin right now, because there’s room for it in the gin now because they ain’t using the gin no more.

And them boys grew up and went off a year to the agricultural college to learn right about whiteface cattle, and then come back to the rest of them — these here curious folks living off here to themselves, with the rest of the world all full of pretty neon lights burning night and day both, and easy, quick money scattering itself around everywhere for any man to grab a little, and every man with a shiny new automobile already wore out and throwed away and the new one delivered before the first one was even paid for, and everywhere a fine loud grabble and snatch of AAA and WPA and a dozen other three-letter reasons for a man not to work.

Then this here draft comes along, and these curious folks ain't got around to signing that neither, and you come all the way up from Jackson with your paper all signed and regular, and we come out here, and after a while we can go back to town. A man gets around, don't he?"

"Yes," the investigator said. "Do you suppose we can go back to town now?"

"No," the marshal told him in that same kindly tone, "not just yet. But we can leave after a while. Of course you will miss your train. But there will be another one tomorrow."

He rose, though the investigator had heard nothing. The investigator watched him go down the hall and open the bedroom door and enter and close it behind him. The investigator sat quietly, listening to the night sounds and looking at the closed door until it opened presently and the marshal came back, carrying something in a bloody sheet, carrying it gingerly.

"Here," he said. "Hold it a minute."

"It's bloody," the investigator said.

"That's all right," the marshal said. "We can wash when we get through." So the investigator took the bundle and stood holding it while he watched the old marshal go back down the hall and on through it and vanish and return presently with a lighted lantern and a shovel. "Come along," he said. "We're pretty near through now."

The investigator followed him out of the house and across the yard, carrying gingerly the bloody, shattered, heavy bundle in which it still seemed to him he could feel some warmth of life, the marshal striding on ahead, the lantern swinging against his leg, the shadow of his striding scissoring and enormous along the earth, his voice still coming back over his shoulder, chatty and cheerful, "Yes, sir.

A man gets around and he sees a heap; a heap of folks in a heap of situations. The trouble is, we done got into the habit of confusing the

situations with the folks. Take yourself, now,” he said in that same kindly tone, chatty and easy; “you mean all right. You just went and got yourself all fogged up with rules and regulations. That’s our trouble. We done invented ourselves so many alphabets and rules and recipes that we can’t see anything else; if what we see can’t be fitted to an alphabet or a rule, we are lost.

We have come to be like critters doctor folks might have created in laboratories, that have learned how to slip off their bones and guts and still live, still be kept alive indefinite and forever maybe even without even knowing the bones and the guts are gone. We have slipped our backbone; we have about decided a man don’t need a backbone any more; to have one is old-fashioned.

But the groove where the backbone used to be is still there, and the backbone has been kept alive, too, and someday we’re going to slip back onto it. I don’t know just when nor just how much of a wrench it will take to teach us, but someday.”

They had left the yard now. They were mounting a slope; ahead of them the investigator could see another clump of cedars, a small clump, somehow shaggily formal against the starred sky. The marshal entered it and stopped and set the lantern down and, following with the bundle, the investigator saw a small rectangle of earth enclosed by a low brick coping. Then he saw the two graves, or the headstones — two plain granite slabs set upright in the earth.

“Old Anse and Mrs. Anse,” the marshal said. “Buddy’s wife wanted to be buried with her folks. I reckon she would have been right lonesome up here with just McCallums. Now, let’s see.” He stood for a moment, his chin in his hand; to the investigator he looked exactly like an old lady trying to decide where to set out a shrub.

“They was to run from left to right, beginning with Jackson. But after the boys was born, Jackson and Stuart was to come up here by their pa and ma, so Buddy could move up some and make room. So he will be about here.” He moved the lantern nearer and took up the shovel.

Then he saw the investigator still holding the bundle. "Set it down," he said. "I got to dig first."

"I'll hold it," the investigator said.

"Nonsense, put it down," the marshal said. "Buddy won't mind."

So the investigator put the bundle down on the brick coping and the marshal began to dig, skillfully and rapidly, still talking in that cheerful, interminable voice, "Yes, sir. We done forgot about folks.

Life has done got cheap, and life ain't cheap. Life's a pretty durn valuable thing. I don't mean just getting along from one WPA relief check to the next one, but honor and pride and discipline that make a man worth preserving, make him of any value.

That's what we got to learn again. Maybe it takes trouble, bad trouble, to teach it back to us; maybe it was the walking to Virginia because that's where his ma come from, and losing a war and then walking back, that taught it to old Anse.

Anyway, he seems to learned it, and to learned it good enough to bequeath it to his boys. Did you notice how all Buddy had to do was to tell them boys of his it was time to go, because the Government had sent them word? And how they told him good-by? Growned men kissing one another without hiding and without shame. Maybe that's what I am trying to say. . . . There," he said. "That's big enough."

He moved quickly, easily; before the investigator could stir, he had lifted the bundle into the narrow trench and was covering it, covering it as rapidly as he had dug, smoothing the earth over it with the shovel. Then he stood up and raised the lantern — a tall, lean old man, breathing easily and lightly.

"I reckon we can go back to town now," he said.

The End

A Bear Hunt, William Faulkner

A Bear Hunt

RATLIFF IS TELLING this. He is a sewing-machine agent; time was when he traveled about our county in a light, strong buckboard drawn by a sturdy, wiry, mismatched team of horses; now he uses a model T Ford, which also carries his demonstrator machine in a tin box on the rear, shaped like a dog kennel and painted to resemble a house.

Ratliff may be seen anywhere without surprise — the only man present at the bazaars and sewing bees of farmers' wives; moving among both men and women at all-day singings at country churches, and singing, too, in a pleasant barytone.

He was even at this bear hunt of which he speaks, at the annual hunting camp of Major de Spain in the river bottom twenty miles from town, even though there was no one there to whom he might possibly have sold a machine, since Mrs. de Spain doubtless already owned one, unless she had given it to one of her married daughters, and the other man — the man called Lucius Provine — with whom he became involved, to the violent detriment of his face and other members, could not have bought one for his wife even if he would, without Ratliff sold it to him on indefinite credit.

Provine is also a native of the county. But he is forty now and most of his teeth are gone, and it is years now since he and his dead brother and another dead and forgotten contemporary named Jack Bonds were known as the Provine gang and terrorized our quiet town after the unimaginative fashion of wild youth by letting off pistols on the square late Saturday nights or galloping their horses down scurrying and screaming lanes of churchgoing ladies on Sunday morning.

Younger citizens of the town do not know him at all save as a tall, apparently strong and healthy man who loafs in a brooding, saturnine fashion wherever he will be allowed, never exactly accepted by any group, and who makes no effort whatever to support his wife and three children.

There are other men among us now whose families are in want; men who, perhaps, would not work anyway, but who now, since the last few years, cannot find work. These all attain and hold to a certain respectability by acting as agents for the manufacturers of minor articles like soap and men's toilet accessories and kitchen objects, being seen constantly about the square and the streets carrying small black sample cases.

One day, to our surprise, Provine also appeared with such a case, though within less than a week the town officers discovered that it contained whisky in pint bottles. Major de Spain extricated him somehow, as it was Major de Spain who supported his family by eking out the money which Mrs. Provine earned by sewing and such — perhaps as a Roman gesture of salute and farewell to the bright figure which Provine had been before time whipped him.

For there are older men who remember the Butch — he has even lost somewhere in his shabby past the lusty dare-deviltry of the nickname — Provine of twenty years ago; that youth without humor, yet with some driving, inarticulate zest for breathing which has long since burned out of him, who performed in a fine frenzy, which was, perhaps, mostly alcohol, certain outrageous and spontaneous deeds, one of which was the Negro-picnic business. The picnic was at a Negro church a few miles from town.

In the midst of it, the two Provines and Jack Bonds, returning from a dance in the country, rode up with drawn pistols and freshly lit cigars; and taking the Negro men one by one, held the burning cigar ends to the popular celluloid collars of the day, leaving each victim's neck ringed with an abrupt and faint and painless ring of carbon. This is he of whom Ratliff is talking.

But there is one thing more which must be told here in order to set the stage for Ratliff. Five miles farther down the river from Major de Spain's camp, and in an even wilder part of the river's jungle of cane and gum and pin oak, there is an Indian mound. Aboriginal, it rises profoundly and darkly enigmatic, the only elevation of any kind in the wild, flat jungle of river bottom.

Even to some of us — children though we were, yet we were descended of literate, town-bred people — it possessed inferences of secret and violent blood, of savage and sudden destruction, as though the yells and hatchets which we associated with Indians through the hidden and secret dime novels which we passed among ourselves were but trivial and momentary manifestations of what dark power still dwelled or lurked there, sinister, a little sardonic, like a dark and nameless beast lightly and lazily slumbering with bloody jaws — this, perhaps, due to the fact that a remnant of a once powerful clan of the Chickasaw tribe still lived beside it under Government protection. They now had American names and they lived as the sparse white people who surrounded them in turn lived.

Yet we never saw them, since they never came to town, having their own settlement and store. When we grew older we realized that they were no wilder or more illiterate than the white people, and that probably their greatest deviation from the norm — and this, in our country, no especial deviation — was the fact that they were a little better than suspect to manufacture moonshine whisky back in the swamps.

Yet to us, as children, they were a little fabulous, their swamp-hidden lives inextricable from the life of the dark mound, which some of us had never seen, yet of which we had all heard, as though they had been set by the dark powers to be guardians of it.

As I said, some of us had never seen the mound, yet all of us had heard of it, talked of it as boys will. It was as much a part of our lives and background as the land itself, as the lost Civil War and Sherman's

march, or that there were Negroes among us living in economic competition who bore our family names; only more immediate, more potential and alive.

When I was fifteen, a companion and I, on a dare, went into the mound one day just at sunset. We saw some of those Indians for the first time; we got directions from them and reached the top of the mound just as the sun set. We had camping equipment with us, but we made no fire. We didn't even make down our beds.

We just sat side by side on that mound until it became light enough to find our way back to the road. We didn't talk. When we looked at each other in the gray dawn, our faces were gray, too, quiet, very grave. When we reached town again, we didn't talk either. We just parted and went home and went to bed. That's what we thought, felt, about the mound. We were children, it is true, yet we were descendants of people who read books and who were — or should have been — beyond superstition and impervious to mindless fear.

Now Ratliff tells about Lucius Provine and his hiccup.

When I got back to town, the first fellow I met says, "What happened to your face, Ratliff? Was De Spain using you in place of his bear hounds?" "No, boys," I says. "Hit was a cattymount."

"What was you trying to do to hit, Ratliff?" a fellow says.

"Boys," I says, "be dog if I know."

And that was the truth. Hit was a good while after they had done hauled Luke Provine offen me that I found that out. Because I never knowed who Old Man Ash was, no more than Luke did. I just knowed that he was Major's nigger, a-helping around camp.

All I knowed, when the whole thing started, was what I thought I was aiming to do — to maybe help Luke sho enough, or maybe at the outside to just have a little fun with him without hurting him, or even maybe to do Major a little favor by getting Luke outen camp for a while. And then hyer hit is about midnight and that durn fellow comes

swurging outen the woods wild as a skeered deer, and runs in where they are setting at the poker game, and I says, "Well, you ought to be satisfied. You done run clean out from under them."

And he stopped dead still and give me a kind of glare of wild astonishment; he didn't even know that they had quit; and then he swurged all over me like a barn falling down.

Hit sho stopped that poker game. Hit taken three or four of them to drag him offen me, with Major turned in his chair with a set of threes in his hand, a-hammering on the table and hollering cusses. Only a right smart of the helping they done was stepping on my face and hands and feet. Hit was like a fahr — the fellows with the water hose done the most part of the damage.

"What the tarnation hell does this mean?" Major hollers, with three or four fellows holding Luke, and him crying like a baby.

"He set them on me!" Luke says. "He was the one sent me up there, and I'm a-going to kill him!"

"Set who on you?" Major says.

"Them Indians!" Luke says, crying. Then he tried to get at me again, flinging them fellows holding his arms around like they was rag dolls, until Major pure cussed him quiet. He's a man yet. Don't let hit fool you none because he claims he ain't strong enough to work. Maybe hit's because he ain't never wore his strength down toting around one of them little black satchels full of pink galluses and shaving soap. Then Major asked me what hit was all about, and I told him how I had just been trying to help Luke get shed of them hiccups.

Be dog if I didn't feel right sorry for him. I happened to be passing out that way, and so I just thought I would drop in on them and see what luck they was having, and I druv up about sundown, and the first fellow I see was Luke. I wasn't surprised, since this here would be the biggest present gathering of men in the county, let alone the free eating and whisky, so I says, "Well, this is a surprise." And he says:

"Hic-uh! Hic-ow! Hic-oh! Hic — oh, God!" He had done already had them since nine o'clock the night before; he had been teching the jug

ever' time Major offered him one and ever' time he could get to hit when Old Man Ash wasn't looking; and two days before Major had killed a bear, and I reckon Luke had already et more possum-rich bear pork — let alone the venison they had, with maybe a few coons and squirrels throwed in for seasoning — than he could have hauled off in a waggin. So here he was, going three times to the minute, like one of these here clock bombs; only hit was bear meat and whisky instead of dynamite, and so he couldn't explode and put himself outen his misery.

They told me how he had done already kept ever'body awake most of the night before, and how Major got up mad anyway, and went off with his gun and Ash to handle them two bear hounds, and Luke following — outen pure misery, I reckon, since he hadn't slept no more than nobody else — walking along behind Major, saying, "Hic-ah! Hic-ow! Hic-oh! Hic — oh, Lord!" until Major turns on him and says:

"Get to hell over yonder with them shotgun fellows on the deer stands. How do you expect me to walk up on a bear or even hear the dogs when they strike? I might as well be riding a motorcycle."

So Luke went on back to where the deer standers was along the log-line levee. I reckon he never so much went away as he kind of died away in the distance like that ere motorcycle Major mentioned. He never tried to be quiet. I reckon he knowed hit wouldn't be no use. He never tried to keep to the open, neither. I reckon he thought that any fool would know from his sound that he wasn't no deer. No. I reckon he was so mizzable by then that he hoped somebody would shoot him.

But nobody never, and he come to the first stand, where Uncle Ike McCaslin was, and set down on a log behind Uncle Ike with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands, going, "Hic-uh! Hic-uh! Hic-uh! Hic-uh!" until Uncle Ike turns and says:

"Confound you, boy; get away from here. Do you reckon any varmint in the world is going to walk up to a hay baler? Go drink some water."

"I done already done that," Luke says, without moving. "I been drinking water since nine o'clock last night. I done already drunk so much water that if I was to fall down I would gush like a artesian well."

“Well, go away anyhow,” Uncle Ike says. “Get away from here.”

So Luke gets up and kind of staggers away again, kind of dying away again like he was run by one of these hyer one-cylinder gasoline engines, only a durn sight more often and regular. He went on down the levee to where the next stand was, and they druv him way from there, and he went on toward the next one. I reckon he was still hoping that somebody would take pity on him and shoot him, because now he kind of seemed to give up. Now, when he come to the “oh, God” part of hit, they said you could hyear him clean back to camp.

They said he would echo back from the canebrake across the river like one of these hyer loud-speakers down in a well. They said that even the dogs on the trail quit baying, and so they all come up and made him come back to camp. That’s where he was when I come in. And Old Man Ash was there, too, where him and Major had done come in so Major could take a nap, and neither me nor Luke noticing him except as just another nigger around.

That was hit. Neither one of us knowed or even thought about him. I be dog if hit don’t look like sometimes that when a fellow sets out to play a joke, hit ain’t another fellow he’s playing that joke on; hit’s a kind of big power laying still somewhere in the dark that he sets out to prank with without knowing hit, and hit all depends on whether that ere power is in the notion to take a joke or not, whether or not hit blows up right in his face like this one did in mine.

Because I says, “You done had them since nine o’clock yesterday? That’s nigh twenty-four hours. Seems like to me you’d ‘a’ done something to try to stop them.” And him looking at me like he couldn’t make up his mind whether to jump up and bite my head off or just to try and bite hisn off, saying “Hic-uh! Hic-uh!” slow and regular. Then he says,
“I don’t want to get shed of them. I like them. But if you had them, I would get shed of them for you. You want to know how?”

“How?” I says.

“I’d just tear your head off. Then you wouldn’t have nothing to hiccup with. They wouldn’t worry you then. I’d be glad to do hit for you.”

“Sho now,” I says, looking at him setting there on the kitchen steps — hit was after supper, but he hadn’t et none, being as his throat had done turned into a one-way street on him, you might say — going “Hic-uh! Hic-oh! Hic-oh! Hic-uh!” because I reckon Major had done told him what would happen to him if he taken to hollering again. I never meant no harm.

Besides, they had done already told me how he had kept everybody awake all night the night before and had done skeered all the game outen that part of the bottom, and besides, the walk might help him to pass his own time. So I says, “I believe I know how you might get shed of them. But, of course, if you don’t want to get shed of them—”

And he says, “I just wish somebody would tell me how. I’d pay ten dollars just to set here for one minute without saying ‘hic’ —” Well, that set him off sho enough. Hit was like up to that time his insides had been satisfied with going “hic-uh” steady, but quiet, but now, when he reminded himself, hit was like he had done opened a cut-out, because right away he begun hollering, “Hic — oh, God!” like when them fellows on the deer stands had made him come back to camp, and I heard Major’s feet coming bup-bup-bup across the floor. Even his feet sounded mad, and I says quick,

“Sh-h-h-h! You don’t want to get Major mad again, now.”

So he quieted some, setting there on the kitchen steps, with Old Man Ash and the other niggers moving around inside the kitchen, and he says, “I will try anything you can sugest. I done tried ever’thing I knowed and ever’thing anybody else told me to.

I done held my breath and drunk water until I feel just like one of these hyer big automobile tahrs they use to advertise with, and I hung by my knees offen that limb yonder for fifteen minutes and drunk a pint bottle full of water upside down, and somebody said to swallow a buckshot and I done that. And still I got them. What do you know that I can do?”

“Well,” I says, “I don’t know what you would do. But if hit was me that had them, I’d go up to the mound and get old John Basket to cure me.” Then he set right still, and then he turned slow and looked at me; I be dog if for a minute he didn’t even hiccup. “John Basket?” he says.

“Sho,” I says. “Them Indians knows all sorts of dodges that white doctors ain’t hheard about yet. He’d be glad to do that much for a white man, too, them pore aboriginees would, because the white folks have been so good to them — not only letting them keep that ere hump of dirt that don’t nobody want noways, but letting them use names like oun and selling them flour and sugar and farm tools at not no more than a fair profit above what they would cost a white man. I hhear tell how pretty soon they are even going to start letting them come to town once a week. Old Basket would be glad to cure them hiccups for you.”

“John Basket,” he says; “them Indians,” he says, hiccuping slow and quiet and steady. Then he says right sudden, “I be dog if I will!” Then I be dog if hit didn’t sound like he was crying. He jumped up and stood there cussing, sounding like he was crying. “Hit ain’t a man hyer has got any mercy on me, white or black. Hyer I done suffered and suffered more than twenty-four hours without food or sleep, and not a sonabitch of them has any mercy or pity on me!”

“Well, I was trying to,” I says. “Hit ain’t me that’s got them. I just thought, seeing as how you had done seemed to got to the place where couldn’t no white man help you. But hit ain’t no law making you go up there and get shed of them.” So I made like I was going away.

I went back around the corner of the kitchen and watched him set down on the steps again, going “Hic-uh! Hic-uh!” slow and quiet again; and then I seen, through the kitchen window, Old Man Ash standing just inside the kitchen door, right still, with his head bent like he was listening.

But still I never suspected nothing. Not even did I suspect nothing when, after a while, I watched Luke get up again, sudden but quiet, and stand for a minute looking at the window where the poker game and the folks was, and then look off into the dark towards the road that went down the bottom.

Then he went into the house, quiet, and come out a minute later with a lighted lantrun and a shotgun. I don't know whose gun hit was and I don't reckon he did, nor cared neither. He just come out kind of quiet and determined, and went on down the road.

I could see the lantrun, but I could hyear him a long time after the lantrun had done disappeared. I had come back around the kitchen then and I was listening to him dying away down the bottom, when old Ash says behind me:

"He gwine up dar?"

"Up where?" I says.

"Up to de mound," he says.

"Why, I be dog if I know," I says. "The last time I talked to him he never sounded like he was fixing to go nowhere. Maybe he just decided to take a walk. Hit might do him some good; make him sleep tonight and help him get up a appetite for breakfast maybe. What do you think?"

But Ash never said nothing. He just went on back into the kitchen. And still I never suspected nothing. How could I? I hadn't never even seen Jefferson in them days. I hadn't never even seen a pair of shoes, let alone two stores in a row or a arc light.

So I went on in where the poker game was, and I says, "Well, gentlemen, I reckon we might get some sleep tonight." And I told them what had happened, because more than like he would stay up there until daylight rather than walk them five miles back in the dark, because maybe them Indians wouldn't mind a little thing like a fellow with hiccups, like white folks would. And I be dog if Major didn't rear up about hit.

"Dammit, Ratliff," he says, "you ought not to done that."

"Why, I just sujested hit to him, Major, for a joke," I says. "I just told him about how old Basket was a kind of doctor. I never expected him to take hit serious. Maybe he ain't even going up there. Maybe's he's just went out after a coon."

But most of them felt about hit like I did. "Let him go," Mr. Fraser says. "I hope he walks around all night. Damn if I slept a wink for him all night long. . . . Deal the cards, Uncle Ike."

"Can't stop him now, noways," Uncle Ike says, dealing the cards. "And maybe John Basket can do something for his hiccups. Durn young fool, eating and drinking himself to where he can't talk nor swallow neither. He set behind me on a log this morning, sounding just like a hay baler. I thought once I'd have to shoot him to get rid of him. . . . Queen bets a quarter, gentlemen."

So I set there watching them, thinking now and then about that durn fellow with his shotgun and his lantrun stumbling and blundering along through the woods, walking five miles in the dark to get shed of his hiccups, with the varmints all watching him and wondering just what kind of a hunt this was and just what kind of a two-leg varmint hit was that made a noise like that, and about them Indians up at the mound when he would come walking in, and I would have to laugh until Major says, "What in hell are you mumbling and giggling at?"

"Nothing," I says. "I was just thinking about a fellow I know."

"And damn if you hadn't ought to be out there with him," Major says. Then he decided hit was about drink time and he begun to holler for Ash. Finally I went to the door and hollered for Ash towards the kitchen, but hit was another one of the niggers that answered. When he come in with the demijohn and fixings, Major looks up and says "Where's Ash?"

"He done gone," the nigger says.

"Gone?" Major says. "Gone where?"

“He say he gwine up to’ds de mound,” the nigger says. And still I never knowed, never suspected. I just thought to myself, “That old nigger has turned powerful tender-hearted all of a sudden, being skeered for Luke Provine to walk around by himself in the dark. Or maybe Ash likes to listen to them hiccups,” I thought to myself.

“Up to the mound?” Major says. “By dad, if he comes back here full of John Basket’s bust-skull whisky I’ll skin him alive.”

“He ain’t say what he gwine fer,” the nigger says. “All he tell me when he left, he gwine up to’ds de mound and he be back by daylight.”

“He better be,” Major says. “He better be sober too.”

So we set there and they went on playing and me watching them like a durn fool, not suspecting nothing, just thinking how hit was a shame that that durned old nigger would have to come in and spoil Luke’s trip, and hit come along towards eleven o’clock and they begun to talk about going to bed, being as they was all going out on stand tomorrow, when we hyeard the sound.

Hit sounded like a drove of wild horses coming up that road, and we hadn’t no more than turned towards the door, a-asking one another what in tarnation hit could be, with Major just saying, “What in the name of—” when hit come across the porch like a harrycane and down the hall, and the door busted open and there Luke was.

He never had no gun and lantrun then, and his clothes was nigh tore clean offen him, and his face looked wild as ere a man in the Jackson asylum. But the main thing I noticed was that he wasn’t hiccuping now. And this time, too, he was nigh crying.

“They was fixing to kill me!” he says. “They was going to burn me to death! They had done tried me and tied me onto the pile of wood, and one of them was coming with the fahr when I managed to bust loose and run!”

“Who was?” Major says. “What in the tarnation hell are you talking about?”

"Them Indians!" Luke says. "They was fixing to—"

"What?" Major hollers. "Damn to blue blazes, what?"

And that was where I had to put my foot in hit. He hadn't never seen me until then. "At least they cured your hiccups," I says.

Hit was then that he stopped right still. He hadn't never even seen me, but he seen me now. He stopped right still and looked at me with that ere wild face that looked like hit had just escaped from Jackson and had ought to be took back there quick.

"What?" he says.

"Anyway, you done run out from under them hiccups," I says.

Well, sir, he stood there for a full minute. His eyes had done gone blank, and he stood there with his head cocked a little, listening to his own insides. I reckon hit was the first time he had took time to find out that they was gone. He stood there right still for a full minute while that ere kind of shocked astonishment come onto his face.

Then he jumped on me. I was still setting in my chair, and I be dog if for a minute I didn't think the roof had done fell in.

Well, they got him offen me at last and got him quieted down, and then they washed me off and give me a drink, and I felt better. But even with that drink I never felt so good but what I felt hit was my duty to my honor to call him outen the back yard, as the fellow says. No, sir. I know when I done made a mistake and guessed wrong; Major de Spain wasn't the only man that caught a bear on that hunt; no, sir.

I be dog, if it had been daylight, I'd a hitched up my Ford and taken out of there. But hit was midnight, and besides, that nigger, Ash, was on my mind then. I had just begun to suspect that hit was more to this business than met the nekkid eye. And hit wasn't no good time then to go back to the kitchen then and ask him about hit, because Luke was using the kitchen.

Major had give him a drink, too, and he was back there, making up for them two days he hadn't et, talking a right smart about what he aimed to do to such and such a sonabitch that would try to play his durn jokes on him, not mentioning no names; but mostly laying himself in a new set of hiccups, though I ain't going back to see.

So I waited until daylight, until I hheard the niggers stirring around in the kitchen; then I went back there. And there was old Ash, looking like he always did, oiling Major's boots and setting them behind the stove and then taking up Major's rifle and beginning to load the magazine. He just looked once at my face when I come in, and went on shoving ca'tridges into the gun.

"So you went up to the mound last night," I says. He looked up at me again, quick, and then down again. But he never said nothing, looking like a durned old frizzle-headed ape. "You must know some of them folks up there," I says.

"I knows some of um," he says, shoving ca'tridges into the gun.

"You know old John Basket?" I says.

"I knows some of um," he says, not looking at me.

"Did you see him last night?" I says. He never said nothing at all. So then I changed my tone, like a fellow has to do to get anything outen a nigger. "Look here," I says. "Look at me." He looked at me. "Just what did you do up there last night?"

"Who, me?" he says.

"Come on," I says. "Hit's all over now. Mr. Provine has done got over his hiccups and we done both forgot about anything that might have happened when he got back last night. You never went up there just for fun last night. Or maybe hit was something you told them up there, told old man Basket. Was that hit?"

He had done quit looking at me, but he never stopped shoving ca'tridges into that gun. He looked quick to both sides. "Come on," I says. "Do you want to tell me what happened up there, or do you want

me to mention to Mr. Provine that you was mixed up in hit some way?" He never stopped loading the rifle and he never looked at me, but I be dog if I couldn't almost see his mind working. "Come on," I says. "Just what was you doing up there last night?"

Then he told me. I reckon he knowed hit wasn't no use to try to hide hit then; that if I never told Luke, I could still tell Major. "I jest dodged him and got dar first en told um he was a new revenue agent coming up dar tonight, but dat he warn't much en dat all dey had to do was to give um a good skeer en likely he would go away. En dey did en he did."

"Well!" I says. "Well! I always thought I was pretty good at joking folks," I says, "but I take a back seat for you. What happened?" I says. "Did you see hit?"

"Never much happened," he says. "Dey jest went down de road a piece en atter a while hyer he come a-hickin' en a-blumpin' up de road wid de lant'un en de gun. They took de lant'un en de gun away frum him en took him up pon topper de mound en talked de Injun language at him fer a while. Den dey piled up some wood en fixed him on hit so he could git loose in a minute, en den one of dem come up de hill wid de fire, en he done de rest."

"Well!" I says. "Well, I'll be eternally durned!" And then all on a sudden hit struck me. I had done turned and was going out when hit struck me, and I stopped and I says, "There's one more thing I want to know. Why did you do hit?"

Now he set there on the wood box, rubbing the gun with his hand, not looking at me again. "I wuz jest helping you kyo him of dem hiccups." "Come on," I says. "That wasn't your reason. What was hit? Remember, I got a right smart I can tell Mr. Provine and Major both now. I don't know what Major will do, but I know what Mr. Provine will do if I was to tell him."

And he set there, rubbing that ere rifle with his hand. He was kind of looking down, like he was thinking. Not like he was trying to decide

whether to tell me or not, but like he was remembering something from a long time back. And that's exactly what he was doing, because he says:

"I ain't skeered for him to know. One time dey was a picnic. Hit was a long time back, nigh twenty years ago. He was a young man den, en in de middle of de picnic, him en he brother en nudder white man — I fergit he name — dey rid up wid dey pistols out en cotch us niggers one at a time en burned our collars off. Hit was him dat burnt mine."

"And you waited all this time and went to all this trouble, just to get even with him?" I says.

"Hit warn't dat," he says, rubbing the rifle with his hand. "Hit wuz de collar. Back in dem days a top nigger hand made two dollars a week. I paid fo' bits fer dat collar. Hit wuz blue, wid a red picture of de race betwixt de Natchez en de Robert E. Lee running around hit.

He burnt hit up. I makes ten dollars a week now. En I jest wish I knowed where I could buy another collar like dat un fer half of hit. I wish I did."

The End

Two Soldiers, William Faulkner

Two Soldiers

ME AND PETE would go down to Old Man Killegrew's and listen to his radio. We would wait until after supper, after dark, and we would stand outside Old Man Killegrew's parlor window, and we could hear it because Old Man Killegrew's wife was deaf, and so he run the radio as loud as it would run, and so me and Pete could hear it plain as Old Man Killegrew's wife could, I reckon, even standing outside with the window closed.

And that night I said, “What? Japanese? What’s a pearl harbor?” and Pete said, “Hush.”

And so we stood there, it was cold, listening to the fellow in the radio talking, only I couldn’t make no heads nor tails neither out of it. Then the fellow said that would be all for a while, and me and Pete walked back up the road to home, and Pete told me what it was. Because he was nigh twenty and he had done finished the Consolidated last June and he knowed a heap: about them Japanese dropping bombs on Pearl Harbor and that Pearl Harbor was across the water.

“Across what water?” I said. “Across that Government reservoy up at Oxford?”

“Naw,” Pete said. “Across the big water. The Pacific Ocean.”

We went home. Maw and pap was already asleep, and me and Pete laid in the bed, and I still couldn’t understand where it was, and Pete told me again — the Pacific Ocean.

“What’s the matter with you?” Pete said. “You’re going on nine years old. You been in school now ever since September. Ain’t you learned nothing yet?”

“I reckon we ain’t got as fer as the Pacific Ocean yet,” I said.

We was still sowing the vetch then that ought to been all finished by the fifteenth of November, because pap was still behind, just like he had been ever since me and Pete had knowed him. And we had firewood to git in, too, but every night me and Pete would go down to Old Man Killebrew’s and stand outside his parlor window in the cold and listen to his radio; then we would come back home and lay in the bed and Pete would tell me what it was. That is, he would tell me for a while. Then he wouldn’t tell me. It was like he didn’t want to talk about it no more.

He would tell me to shut up because he wanted to go to sleep, but he never wanted to go to sleep.

He would lay there, a heap stiller than if he was asleep, and it would be something, I could feel it coming out of him, like he was mad at me even, only I knowed he wasn't thinking about me, or like he was worried about something, and it wasn't that neither, because he never had nothing to worry about.

He never got behind like pap, let alone stayed behind. Pap give him ten acres when he graduated from the Consolidated, and me and Pete both reckoned pap was durn glad to get shut of at least ten acres, less to have to worry with himself; and Pete had them ten acres all sowed to vetch and busted out and bedded for the winter, and so it wasn't that.

But it was something. And still we would go down to Old Man Killebrew's every night and listen to his radio, and they was at it in the Philippines now, but General MacArthur was holding um. Then we would come back home and lay in the bed, and Pete wouldn't tell me nothing or talk at all.

He would just lay there still as a ambush and when I would touch him, his side or his leg would feel hard and still as iron, until after a while I would go to sleep.

Then one night — it was the first time he had said nothing to me except to jump on me about not chopping enough wood at the wood tree where we was cutting — he said, "I got to go."

"Go where?" I said.

"To that war," Pete said.

"Before we even finish gittin' in the firewood?"

"Firewood, hell," Pete said.

"All right," I said. "When we going to start?"

But he wasn't even listening. He laid there, hard and still as iron in the dark. "I got to go," he said. "I jest ain't going to put up with no folks treating the Unity States that way."

"Yes," I said. "Firewood or no firewood, I reckon we got to go."

This time he heard me. He laid still again, but it was a different kind of still.

“You?” he said. “To a war?”

“You’ll whup the big uns and I’ll whup the little uns,” I said.

Then he told me I couldn’t go. At first I thought he just never wanted me tagging after him, like he wouldn’t leave me go with him when he went sparking them girls of Tull’s. Then he told me the Army wouldn’t leave me go because I was too little, and then I knowed he really meant it and that I couldn’t go nohow noways. And somehow I hadn’t believed until then that he was going himself, but now I knowed he was and that he wasn’t going to leave me go with him a-tall.

“I’ll chop the wood and tote the water for you-all then!” I said. “You got to have wood and water!”

Anyway, he was listening to me now. He wasn’t like iron now.

He turned onto his side and put his hand on my chest because it was me that was laying straight and hard on my back now.

“No,” he said. “You got to stay here and help pap.”

“Help him what?” I said. “He ain’t never caught up nohow. He can’t get no further behind. He can sholy take care of this little shirrtail of a farm while me and you are whupping them Japanese. I got to go too. If you got to go, then so have I.”

“No,” Pete said. “Hush now. Hush.” And he meant it, and I knowed he did. Only I made sho from his own mouth. I quit.

“So I just can’t go then,” I said.

“No,” Pete said. “You just can’t go. You’re too little, in the first place, and in the second place—”

“All right,” I said. “Then shut up and leave me go to sleep.”

So he hushed then and laid back. And I laid there like I was already asleep, and pretty soon he was asleep and I knowed it was the wanting

to go to the war that had worried him and kept him awake, and now that he had decided to go, he wasn't worried any more.

The next morning he told maw and pap. Maw was all right. She cried.

"No," she said, crying, "I don't want him to go. I would rather go myself in his place, if I could. I don't want to save the country. Them Japanese could take it and keep it, so long as they left me and my family and my children alone.

But I remember my brother Marsh in that other war. He had to go to that one when he wasn't but nineteen, and our mother couldn't understand it then any more than I can now. But she told Marsh if he had to go, he had to go. And so, if Pete's got to go to this one, he's got to go to it. Jest don't ask me to understand why."

But pap was the one. He was the feller. "To the war?" he said. "Why, I just don't see a bit of use in that. You ain't old enough for the draft, and the country ain't being invaded. Our President in Washington, D. C., is watching the conditions and he will notify us.

Besides, in that other war your ma just mentioned, I was drafted and sent clean to Texas and was held there nigh eight months until they finally quit fighting. It seems to me that that, along with your Uncle Marsh who received a actual wound on the battlefields of France, is enough for me and mine to have to do to protect the country, at least in my lifetime. Besides, what'll I do for help on the farm with you gone? It seems to me I'll get mighty far behind."

"You been behind as long as I can remember," Pete said. "Anyway, I'm going. I got to."

"Of course he's got to go," I said. "Them Japanese—"

"You hush your mouth!" maw said, crying. "Nobody's talking to you! Go and get me a armful of wood! That's what you can do!"

So I got the wood. And all the next day, while me and Pete and pap was getting in as much wood as we could in that time because Pete said how pap's idea of plenty of wood was one more stick laying against the

wall that maw ain't put on the fire yet, Maw was getting Pete ready to go.

She washed and mended his clothes and cooked him a shoe box of vittles. And that night me and Pete laid in the bed and listened to her packing his grip and crying, until after a while Pete got up in his nightshirt and went back there, and I could hear them talking, until at last maw said, "You got to go, and so I want you to go. But I don't understand it, and I won't never, and so don't expect me to."

And Pete come back and got into the bed again and laid again still and hard as iron on his back, and then he said, and he wasn't talking to me, he wasn't talking to nobody: "I got to go. I just got to."

"Sho you got to," I said. "Them Japanese—" He turned over hard, he kind of surged over onto his side, looking at me in the dark.

"Anyway, you're all right," he said. "I expected to have more trouble with you than with all the rest of them put together."

"I reckon I can't help it neither," I said. "But maybe it will run a few years longer and I can get there. Maybe someday I will jest walk in on you."

"I hope not," Pete said. "Folks don't go to wars for fun. A man don't leave his maw crying just for fun."

"Then why are you going?" I said.

"I got to," he said. "I just got to. Now you go on to sleep. I got to ketch that early bus in the morning."

"All right," I said. "I hear tell Memphis is a big place. How will you find where the Army's at?"

"I'll ask somebody where to go to join it," Pete said. "Go on to sleep now."

"Is that what you'll ask for? Where to join the Army?" I said.

"Yes," Pete said. He turned onto his back again. "Shut up and go to sleep."

We went to sleep. The next morning we et breakfast by lamplight because the bus would pass at six o'clock. Maw wasn't crying now. She jest looked grim and busy, putting breakfast on the table while we et it. Then she finished packing Pete's grip, except he never wanted to take no grip to the war, but maw said decent folks never went nowhere, not even to a war, without a change of clothes and something to tote them in.

She put in the shoe box of fried chicken and biscuits and she put the Bible in, too, and then it was time to go. We didn't know until then that maw wasn't going to the bus. She jest brought Pete's cap and overcoat, and still she didn't cry no more, she jest stood with her hands on Pete's shoulders and she didn't move, but somehow, and just holding Pete's shoulders, she looked as hard and fierce as when Pete had turned toward me in the bed last night and tole me that anyway I was all right.

"They could take the country and keep the country, so long as they never bothered me and mine," she said. Then she said, "Don't never forget who you are. You ain't rich and the rest of the world outside of Frenchman's Bend never heard of you. But your blood is good as any blood anywhere, and don't you never forget it."

Then she kissed him, and then we was out of the house, with pap toting Pete's grip whether Pete wanted him to or not. There wasn't no dawn even yet, not even after we had stood on the highway by the mailbox, a while. Then we seen the lights of the bus coming and I was watching the bus until it come up and Pete flagged it, and then, sho enough, there was daylight — it had started while I wasn't watching.

And now me and Pete expected pap to say something else foolish, like he done before, about how Uncle Marsh getting wounded in France and that trip to Texas pap taken in 1918 ought to be enough to save the Unity States in 1942, but he never. He done all right too. He jest said, "Good-by, son.

Always remember what your ma told you and write her whenever you find the time." Then he shaken Pete's hand, and Pete looked at me a

minute and put his hand on my head and rubbed my head durn nigh hard enough to wring my neck off and jumped into the bus, and the feller wound the door shut and the bus begun to hum; then it was moving, humming and grinding and whining louder and louder; it was going fast, with two little red lights behind it that never seemed to get no littler, but jest seemed to be running together until pretty soon they would touch and jest be one light. But they never did, and then the bus was gone, and even like it was, I could have pretty nigh busted out crying, nigh to nine years old and all.

Me and pap went back to the house. All that day we worked at the wood tree, and so I never had no good chance until about middle of the afternoon. Then I taken my slingshot and I would have liked to took all my bird eggs, too, because Pete had give me his collection and he help me with mine, and he would like to git the box out and look at them as good as I would, even if he was nigh twenty years old.

But the box was too big to tote a long ways and have to worry with, so I just taken the shikepoke egg, because it was the best un, and wropped it up good into a matchbox and hid it and the slingshot under the corner of the barn. Then we et supper and went to bed, and I thought then how if I would 'a' had to stayed in that room and that bed like that even for one more night, I jest couldn't 'a' stood it.

Then I could hear pap snoring, but I never heard no sound from maw, whether she was asleep or not, and I don't reckon she was. So I taken my shoes and drapped them out the window, and then I clumb out like I used to watch Pete do when he was still jest seventeen and pap held that he was too young yet to be tom-cattin around at night, and wouldn't leave him out, and I put on my shoes and went to the barn and got the slingshot and the shikepoke egg and went to the highway.

It wasn't cold, it was jest durn confounded dark, and that highway stretched on in front of me like, without nobody using it, it had stretched out half again as fer just like a man does when he lays down, so that for a time it looked like full sun was going to ketch me before I

had finished them twenty-two miles to Jefferson. But it didn't. Daybreak was jest starting when I walked up the hill into town.

I could smell breakfast cooking in the cabins and I wished I had thought to brought me a cold biscuit, but that was too late now. And Pete had told me Memphis was a piece beyond Jefferson, but I never knowed it was no eighty miles. So I stood there on that empty square, with daylight coming and coming and the street lights still burning and that Law looking down at me, and me still eighty miles from Memphis, and it had took me all night to walk jest twenty-two miles, and so, by the time I got to Memphis at that rate, Pete would 'a' done already started for Pearl Harbor.

"Where do you come from?" the Law said.

And I told him again. "I got to get to Memphis. My brother's there."

"You mean you ain't got any folks around here?" the Law said. "Nobody but that brother? What are you doing way off down here and your brother in Memphis?"

And I told him again, "I got to get to Memphis. I ain't got no time to waste talking about it and I ain't got time to walk it. I got to git there today."

"Come on here," the Law said.

We went down another street. And there was the bus, jest like when Pete got into it yestiddy morning, except there wasn't no lights on it now and it was empty. There was a regular bus dee-po like a railroad dee-po, with a ticket counter and a feller behind it, and the Law said, "Set down over there," and I set down on the bench, and the Law said, "I want to use your telephone," and he talked in the telephone a minute and put it down and said to the feller behind the ticket counter, "Keep your eye on him. I'll be back as soon as Mrs. Habersham can arrange to get herself up and dressed." He went out. I got up and went to the ticket counter.

"I want to go to Memphis," I said.

“You bet,” the feller said. “You set down on the bench now. Mr. Foote will be back in a minute.”

“I don’t know no Mr. Foote,” I said. “I want to ride that bus to Memphis.”

“You got some money?” he said. “It’ll cost you seventy-two cents.” I taken out the matchbox and unwrapped the shikepoke egg. “I’ll swap you this for a ticket to Memphis,” I said.

“What’s that?” he said.

“It’s a shikepoke egg,” I said. “You never seen one before. It’s worth a dollar. I’ll take seventy-two cents fer it.”

“No,” he said, “the fellers that own that bus insist on a cash basis. If I started swapping tickets for bird eggs and livestock and such, they would fire me. You go and set down on the bench now, like Mr. Foote—”

I started for the door, but he caught me, he put one hand on the ticket counter and jumped over it and caught up with me and reached his hand out to ketch my shirt. I whupped out my pocketknife and snapped it open.

“You put a hand on me and I’ll cut it off,” I said.

I tried to dodge him and run at the door, but he could move quicker than any grown man I ever see, quick as Pete almost. He cut me off and stood with his back against the door and one foot raised a little, and there wasn’t no other way to get out. “Get back on that bench and stay there,” he said.

And there wasn’t no other way out. And he stood there with his back against the door. So I went back to the bench. And then it seemed like to me that dee-po was full of folks. There was that Law again, and there was two ladies in fur coats and their faces already painted. But they still looked like they had got up in a hurry and they still never liked it, a old one and a young one, looking down at me.

“He hasn’t got a overcoat!” the old one said. “How in the world did he ever get down here by himself?”

“I ask you,” the Law said. “I couldn’t get nothing out of him except his brother is in Memphis and he wants to get back up there.”

“That’s right,” I said. “I got to git to Memphis today.”

“Of course you must,” the old one said. “Are you sure you can find your brother when you get to Memphis?”

“I reckon I can,” I said. “I ain’t got but one and I have knowed him all my life. I reckon I will know him again when I see him.”

The old one looked at me. “Somehow he doesn’t look like he lives in Memphis,” she said.

“He probably don’t,” the Law said. “You can’t tell though. He might live anywhere, overhalls or not. This day and time they get scattered overnight from he — hope to breakfast; boys and girls, too, almost before they can walk good. He might have been in Missouri or Texas either yestiddy, for all we know. But he don’t seem to have any doubt his brother is in Memphis. All I know to do is send him up there and leave him look.”

“Yes,” the old one said.

The young one set down on the bench by me and opened a hand satchel and taken out a artermatic writing pen and some papers.

“Now, honey,” the old one said, “we’re going to see that you find your brother, but we must have a case history for our files first. We want to know your name and your brother’s name and where you were born and when your parents died.”

“I don’t need no case history neither,” I said. “All I want is to get to Memphis. I got to get there today.”

“You see?” the Law said. He said it almost like he enjoyed it. “That’s what I told you.”

“You’re lucky, at that, Mrs. Habersham,” the bus feller said. “I don’t think he’s got a gun on him, but he can open that knife da — I mean, fast enough to suit any man.”

But the old one just stood there looking at me.

“Well,” she said. “Well. I really don’t know what to do.”

“I do,” the bus feller said. “I’m going to give him a ticket out of my own pocket, as a measure of protecting the company against riot and bloodshed. And when Mr. Foote tells the city board about it, it will be a civic matter and they will not only reimburse me, they will give me a medal too. Hey, Mr. Foote?”

But never nobody paid him no mind. The old one still stood looking down at me. She said “Well,” again. Then she taken a dollar from her purse and give it to the bus feller. “I suppose he will travel on a child’s ticket, won’t he?”

“Wellum,” the bus feller said, “I just don’t know what the regulations would be. Likely I will be fired for not crating him and marking the crate Poison. But I’ll risk it.”

Then they were gone. Then the Law come back with a sandwich and give it to me.

“You’re sure you can find that brother?” he said.

“I ain’t yet convinced why not,” I said. “If I don’t see Pete first, he’ll see me. He knows me too.”

Then the Law went out for good, too, and I et the sandwich. Then more folks come in and bought tickets, and then the bus feller said it was time to go, and I got into the bus just like Pete done, and we was gone.

I seen all the towns. I seen all of them. When the bus got to going good, I found out I was jest about wore out for sleep. But there was too much I hadn’t never saw before. We run out of Jefferson and run past fields and woods, then we would run into another town and out of that un and past fields and woods again, and then into another town with stores and gins and water tanks, and we run along by the railroad for a spell and I seen the signal arm move, and then I seen the train and then some more towns, and I was jest about plumb wore out for sleep, but I couldn’t resk it.

Then Memphis begun. It seemed like, to me, it went on for miles. We would pass a patch of stores and I would think that was sholy it and the bus would even stop. But it wouldn't be Memphis yet and we would go on again past water tanks and smokestacks on top of the mills, and if they was gins and sawmills, I never knowed there was that many and I never seen any that big, and where they got enough cotton and logs to run um I don't know.

Then I seen Memphis. I knowed I was right this time. It was standing up into the air. It looked like about a dozen whole towns bigger than Jefferson was set up on one edge in a field, standing up into the air higher than ara hill in all Yoknapatawpha County.

Then we was in it, with the bus stopping ever' few feet, it seemed like to me, and cars rushing past on both sides of it and the street crowded with folks from ever'where in town that day, until I didn't see how there could 'a' been nobody left in Mis'sippi a-tall to even sell me a bus ticket, let alone write out no case histories. Then the bus stopped. It was another bus dee-po, a heap bigger than the one in Jefferson. And I said, "All right. Where do folks join the Army?"

"What?" the bus feller said.

And I said it again, "Where do folks join the Army?"

"Oh," he said. Then he told me how to get there. I was afraid at first I wouldn't ketch on how to do in a town big as Memphis. But I caught on all right. I never had to ask but twice more. Then I was there, and I was durn glad to git out of all them rushing cars and shoving folks and all that racket fer a spell, and I thought, It won't be long now, and I thought how if there was any kind of a crowd there that had done already joined the Army, too, Pete would likely see me before I seen him. And so I walked into the room. And Pete wasn't there.

He wasn't even there. There was a soldier with a big arrerhead on his sleeve, writing, and two fellers standing in front of him, and there was some more folks there, I reckon. It seems to me I remember some more folks there.

I went to the table where the soldier was writing, and I said, "Where's Pete?" and he looked up and I said, "My brother. Pete Grier. Where is he?"

"What?" the soldier said. "Who?"

And I told him again. "He joined the Army yestiddy. He's going to Pearl Harbor. So am I. I want to ketch him. Where you all got him?" Now they were all looking at me, but I never paid them no mind. "Come on," I said. "Where is he?"

The soldier had quit writing. He had both hands spraddled out on the table. "Oh," he said. "You're going, too, hah?" "Yes," I said. "They got to have wood and water. I can chop it and tote it. Come on. Where's Pete?"

The soldier stood up. "Who let you in here?" he said. "Go on. Beat it." "Durn that," I said. "You tell me where Pete—"

I be dog if he couldn't move faster than the bus feller even. He never come over the table, he come around it, he was on me almost before I knowed it, so that I jest had time to jump back and whup out my pocket-knife and snap it open and hit one lick, and he hollered and jumped back and grabbed one hand with the other and stood there cussing and hollering.

One of the other fellers grabbed me from behind, and I hit at him with the knife, but I couldn't reach him.

Then both of the fellers had me from behind, and then another soldier come out of a door at the back. He had on a belt with a britching strop over one shoulder.

"What the hell is this?" he said.

"That little son cut me with a knife!" the first soldier hollered. When he said that I tried to git at him again, but both them fellers was holding me, two against one, and the soldier with the backing strop said, "Here,

here. Put your knife up, feller. None of us are armed. A man don't knife-fight folks that are barehanded." I could begin to hear him then. He sounded jest like Pete talked to me. "Let him go," he said. They let me go. "Now what's all the trouble about?" And I told him. "I see," he said. "And you come up to see if he was all right before he left."

"No," I said. "I came to—"

But he had already turned to where the first soldier was wropping a handkerchief around his hand.

"Have you got him?" he said. The first soldier went back to the table and looked at some papers.

"Here he is," he said. "He enlisted yestiddy. He's in a detachment leaving this morning for Little Rock." He had a watch stropped on his arm. He looked at it. "The train leaves in about fifty minutes. If I know country boys, they're probably all down there at the station right now." "Get him up here," the one with the backing strop said. "Phone the station. Tell the porter to get him a cab. And you come with me," he said.

It was another office behind that un, with jest a table and some chairs. We set there while the soldier smoked, and it wasn't long; I knowed Pete's feet soon as I heard them. Then the first soldier opened the door and Pete come in.

He never had no soldier clothes on. He looked jest like he did when he got on the bus yestiddy morning, except it seemed to me like it was at least a week, so much had happened, and I had done had to do so much traveling. He come in and there he was, looking at me like he hadn't never left home, except that here we was in Memphis, on the way to Pearl Harbor.

"What in durnation are you doing here?" he said.

And I told him, "You got to have wood and water to cook with. I can chop it and tote it for you-all."

"No," Pete said. "You're going back home."

“No, Pete,” I said. “I got to go too. I got to. It hurts my heart, Pete.”

“No,” Pete said. He looked at the soldier. “I jest don’t know what could have happened to him, lootenant,” he said. “He never drewed a knife on anybody before in his life.” He looked at me. “What did you do it for?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “I jest had to. I jest had to git here. I jest had to find you.”

“Well, don’t you never do it again, you hear?” Pete said. “You put that knife in your pocket and you keep it there. If I ever again hear of you drawing it on anybody, I’m coming back from wherever I am at and whup the fire out of you. You hear me?”

“I would pure cut a throat if it would bring you back to stay,” I said.

“Pete,” I said. “Pete.”

“No,” Pete said. Now his voice wasn’t hard and quick no more, it was almost quiet, and I knowed now I wouldn’t never change him. “You must go home. You must look after maw, and I am depending on you to look after my ten acres. I want you to go back home. Today. Do you hear?”

“I hear,” I said.

“Can he get back home by himself?” the soldier said.

“He come up here by himself,” Pete said.

“I can get back, I reckon,” I said. “I don’t live in but one place. I don’t reckon it’s moved.”

Pete taken a dollar out of his pocket and give it to me. “That’ll buy your bus ticket right to our mailbox,” he said. “I want you to mind the lootenant. He’ll send you to the bus. And you go back home and you take care of maw and look after my ten acres and keep that durn knife in your pocket. You hear me?”

“Yes, Pete,” I said.

“All right,” Pete said. “Now I got to go.” He put his hand on my head again. But this time he never wrung my neck. He just laid his hand on my head a minute. And then I be dog if he didn’t lean down and kiss me, and I heard his feet and then the door, and I never looked up and that was all, me setting there, rubbing the place where Pete kissed me and the soldier throwed back in his chair, looking out the window and coughing. He reached into his pocket and handed something to me without looking around. It was a piece of chewing gum.

“Much obliged,” I said. “Well, I reckon I might as well start back. I got a right fer piece to go.”

“Wait,” the soldier said. Then he telephoned again and I said again I better start back, and he said again, “Wait. Remember what Pete told you.”

So we waited, and then another lady come in, old, too, in a fur coat, too, but she smelled all right, she never had no artermatic writing pen nor no case history neither. She come in and the soldier got up, and she looked around quick until she saw me, and come and put her hand on my shoulder light and quick and easy as maw herself might ‘a’ done it. “Come on,” she said. “Let’s go home to dinner.”

“Nome,” I said. “I got to ketch the bus to Jefferson.”

“I know. There’s plenty of time. We’ll go home and eat dinner first.”

She had a car. And now we was right down in the middle of all them other cars. We was almost under the busses, and all them crowds of people on the street close enough to where I could have talked to them if I had knowed who they was. After a while she stopped the car. “Here we are,” she said, and I looked at it, and if all that was her house, she sho had a big family.

But all of it wasn’t. We crossed a hall with trees growing in it and went into a little room without nothing in it but a nigger dressed up in a uniform a heap shinier than them soldiers had, and the nigger shut the door, and then I hollered, “Look out!” and grabbed, but it was all right; that whole little room jest went right on up and stopped and the door

opened and we was in another hall, and the lady unlocked a door and we went in, and there was another soldier, a old feller, with a britching strop, too, and a silver-colored bird on each shoulder.

"Here we are," the lady said. "This is Colonel McKellogg. Now, what would you like for dinner?"

"I reckon I'll jest have some ham and eggs and coffee," I said.

She had done started to pick up the telephone. She stopped. "Coffee?" she said. "When did you start drinking coffee?"

"I don't know," I said. "I reckon it was before I could remember."

"You're about eight, aren't you?" she said.

"Nome," I said. "I'm eight and ten months. Going on eleven months."

She telephoned then. Then we set there and I told them how Pete had jest left that morning for Pearl Harbor and I had aimed to go with him, but I would have to go back home to take care of maw and look after Pete's ten acres, and she said how they had a little boy about my size, too, in a school in the East. Then a nigger, another one, in a short kind of shirrtail coat, rolled a kind of wheelbarrer in. It had my ham and eggs and a glass of milk and a piece of pie, too, and I thought I was hungry. But when I taken the first bite I found out I couldn't swallow it, and I got up quick.

"I got to go," I said.

"Wait," she said.

"I got to go," I said.

"Just a minute," she said. "I've already telephoned for the car. It won't be but a minute now. Can't you drink the milk even? Or maybe some of your coffee?"

"Nome," I said. "I ain't hungry. I'll eat when I git home." Then the telephone rung. She never even answered it.

"There," she said. "There's the car." And we went back down in that 'ere little moving room with the dressed-up nigger. This time it was a big car with a soldier driving it. I got into the front with him. She give

the soldier a dollar. "He might get hungry," she said. "Try to find a decent place for him."

"O.K., Mrs. McKellogg," the soldier said.

Then we was gone again. And now I could see Memphis good, bright in the sunshine, while we was swinging around it. And first thing I knowed, we was back on the same highway the bus run on this morning — the patches of stores and them big gins and sawmills, and Memphis running on for miles, it seemed like to me, before it begun to give out. Then we was running again between the fields and woods, running fast now, and except for that soldier, it was like I hadn't never been to Memphis a-tall.

We was going fast now. At this rate, before I knowed it we would be home again, and I thought about me riding up to Frenchman's Bend in this big car with a soldier running it, and all of a sudden I begun to cry. I never knowed I was fixing to, and I couldn't stop it. I set there by that soldier, crying. We was going fast.

The End

Shall Not Perish, William Faulkner

Shall Not Perish

WHEN THE MESSAGE came about Pete, Father and I had already gone to the field. Mother got it out of the mailbox after we left and brought it down to the fence, and she already knew beforehand what it was because she didn't even have on her sunbonnet, so she must have been

watching from the kitchen window when the carrier drove up. And I already knew what was in it too.

Because she didn't speak. She just stood at the fence with the little pale envelope that didn't even need a stamp on it in her hand, and it was me that hollered at Father, from further away across the field than he was, so that he reached the fence first where Mother waited even though I was already running. "I know what it is," Mother said. "But I can't open it. Open it."

"No it ain't!" I hollered, running. "No it ain't!" Then I was hollering, "No, Pete! No, Pete!" Then I was hollering, "God damn them Japs! God damn them Japs!" and then I was the one Father had to grab and hold, trying to hold me, having to wrastle with me like I was another man instead of just nine.

And that was all. One day there was Pearl Harbor. And the next week Pete went to Memphis, to join the army and go there and help them; and one morning Mother stood at the field fence with a little scrap of paper not even big enough to start a fire with, that didn't even need a stamp on the envelope, saying, A ship was. Now it is not.

Your son was one of them. And we allowed ourselves one day to grieve, and that was all. Because it was April, the hardest middle push of planting time, and there was the land, the seventy acres which were our bread and fire and keep, which had outlasted the Griers before us because they had done right by it, and had outlasted Pete because while he was here he had done his part to help and would outlast Mother and Father and me if we did ours.

Then it happened again. Maybe we had forgotten that it could and was going to, again and again, to people who loved sons and brothers as we loved Pete, until the day finally came when there would be an end to it. After that day when we saw Pete's name and picture in the Memphis paper, Father would bring one home with him each time he went to town. And we would see the pictures and names of soldiers and sailors from other counties and towns in Mississippi and Arkansas and

Tennessee, but there wasn't another from ours, and so after a while it did look like Pete was going to be all.

Then it happened again. It was late July, a Friday. Father had gone to town early on Homer Bookwright's cattletruck and now it was sundown. I had just come up from the field with the light sweep and I had just finished stalling the mule and come out of the barn when Homer's truck stopped at the mailbox and Father got down and came up the lane, with a sack of flour balanced on his shoulder and a package under his arm and the folded newspaper in his hand.

And I took one look at the folded paper and then no more. Because I knew it too, even if he always did have one when he came back from town. Because it was bound to happen sooner or later; it would not be just us out of all Yoknapatawpha County who had loved enough to have sole right to grief. So I just met him and took part of the load and turned beside him, and we entered the kitchen together where our cold supper waited on the table and Mother sat in the last of sunset in the open door, her hand and arm strong and steady on the dasher of the churn.

When the message came about Pete, Father never touched her. He didn't touch her now. He just lowered the flour onto the table and went to the chair and held out the folded paper. "It's Major de Spain's boy," he said. "In town. The av-aytor. That was home last fall in his officer uniform. He run his airplane into a Japanese battleship and blowed it up. So they knowed where he was at." And Mother didn't stop the churn for a minute either, because even I could tell that the butter had almost come. Then she got up and went to the sink and washed her hands and came back and sat down again.

"Read it," she said.

So Father and I found out that Mother not only knew all the time it was going to happen again, but that she already knew what she was going to do when it did, not only this time but the next one too, and the one after that and the one after that, until the day finally came when all the

grieving about the earth, the rich and the poor too, whether they lived with ten nigger servants in the fine big painted houses in town or whether they lived on and by seventy acres of not extra good land like us or whether all they owned was the right to sweat today for what they would eat tonight, could say, At least this there was some point to why we grieved.

We fed and milked and came back and ate the cold supper, and I built a fire in the stove and Mother put on the kettle and whatever else would heat enough water for two, and I fetched in the washtub from the back porch, and while Mother washed the dishes and cleaned up the kitchen, Father and I sat on the front steps. This was about the time of day that Pete and I would walk the two miles down to Old Man Killebrew's house last December, to listen to the radio tell about Pearl Harbor and Manila.

But more than Pearl Harbor and Manila has happened since then, and Pete don't make one to listen to it. Nor do I: it's like, since nobody can tell us exactly where he was when he stopped being is, instead of just becoming was at some single spot on the earth where the people who loved him could weight him down with a stone, Pete still is everywhere about the earth, one among all the fighters forever, was or is either.

So Mother and Father and I don't need a little wooden box to catch the voices of them that saw the courage and the sacrifice. Then Mother called me back to the kitchen. The water smoked a little in the washtub, beside the soap dish and my clean nightshirt and the towel Mother made out of our worn-out cotton sacks, and I bathe and empty the tub and leave it ready for her, and we lie down.

Then morning, and we rose. Mother was up first, as always. My clean white Sunday shirt and pants were waiting, along with the shoes and stockings I hadn't even seen since frost was out of the ground. But in yesterday's overalls still I carried the shoes back to the kitchen where Mother stood in yesterday's dress at the stove where not only our breakfast was cooking but Father's dinner too, and set the shoes beside her Sunday ones against the wall and went to the barn, and Father and

I fed and milked and came back and sat down and ate while Mother moved back and forth between the table and the stove till we were done, and she herself sat down.

Then I got out the blacking-box, until Father came and took it away from me — the polish and rag and brush and the four shoes in succession. “De Spain is rich,” he said. “With a monkey nigger in a white coat to hold the jar up each time he wants to spit. You shine all shoes like you aimed yourself to wear them: just the parts that you can see yourself by looking down.”

Then we dressed. I put on my Sunday shirt and the pants so stiff with starch that they would stand alone, and carried my stockings back to the kitchen just as Mother entered, carrying hers, and dressed too, even her hat, and took my stockings from me and put them with hers on the table beside the shined shoes, and lifted the satchel down from the cupboard shelf.

It was still in the cardboard box it came in, with the colored label of the San Francisco drugstore where Pete bought it — a round, square-ended, water-proof satchel with a handle for carrying, so that as soon as Pete saw it in the store he must have known too that it had been almost exactly made for exactly what we would use it for, with a zipper opening that Mother had never seen before nor Father either.

That is, we had all three been in the drugstore and the ten-cent-store in Jefferson but I was the only one who had been curious enough to find out how one worked, even though even I never dreamed we would ever own one. So it was me that zipped it open, with a pipe and a can of tobacco in it for Father and a hunting cap with a carbide headlight for me and for Mother the satchel itself, and she zipped it shut and then open and then Father tried it, running the slide up and down the little clicking track until Mother made him stop before he wore it out; and she put the satchel, still open, back into the box and I fetched in from the barn the empty quart bottle of cattle-dip and she scalded the bottle and cork and put them and the clean folded towel into the satchel and set the box onto the cupboard shelf, the zipper still open because when

we came to need it we would have to open it first and so we would save that much wear on the zipper too.

She took the satchel from the box and the bottle from the satchel and filled the bottle with clean water and corked it and put it back into the satchel with the clean towel and put our shoes and stockings in and zipped the satchel shut, and we walked to the road and stood in the bright hot morning beside the mailbox until the bus came up and stopped.

It was the school bus, the one I rode back and forth to Frenchman's Bend to school in last winter, and that Pete rode in every morning and evening until he graduated, but going in the opposite direction now, in to Jefferson, and only on Saturday, seen for a long time down the long straight stretch of Valley road while other people waiting beside other mailboxes got into it. Then it was our turn.

Mother handed the two quarters to Solon Quick, who built it and owned it and drove it, and we got in too and it went on, and soon there was no more room for the ones that stood beside the mailboxes and signalled and then it went fast, twenty miles then ten then five then one, and up the last hill to where the concrete streets began, and we got out and sat on the curb and Mother opened the satchel and took our shoes and the bottle of water and the towel and we washed our feet and put on our shoes and stockings and Mother put the bottle and towel back and shut the bag.

And we walked beside the iron picket fence long enough to front a cotton patch; we turned into the yard which was bigger than farms I had seen and followed the gravel drive wider and smoother than roads in Frenchman's Bend, on to the house that to me anyway looked bigger than the courthouse, and mounted the steps between the stone columns and crossed the portico that would have held our whole house, galleries and all, and knocked at the door. And then it never mattered whether our shoes were shined at all or not: the whites of the monkey nigger's eyes for just a second when he opened the door for us, the white of his coat for just a second at the end of the hall before it

was gone too, his feet not making any more noise than a cat's leaving us to find the right door by ourselves, if we could.

And we did — the rich man's parlor that any woman in Frenchman's Bend and I reckon in the rest of the county too could have described to the inch but which not even the men who would come to Major de Spain after bank-hours or on Sunday to ask to have a note extended, had ever seen, with a light hanging in the middle of the ceiling the size of our whole washtub full of chopped-up ice and a gold-colored harp that would have blocked our barn door and a mirror that a man on a mule could have seen himself and the mule both in, and a table shaped like a coffin in the middle of the floor with the Confederate flag spread over it and the photograph of Major de Spain's son and the open box with the medal in it and a big blue automatic pistol weighting down the flag, and Major de Spain standing at the end of the table with his hat on until after a while he seemed to hear and recognize the name which Mother spoke; — not a real major but just called that because his father had been a real one in the old Confederate war, but a banker powerful in money and politics both, that Father said had made governors and senators too in Mississippi; — an old man, too old you would have said to have had a son just twenty-three; too old anyway to have had that look on his face.

"Ha," he said. "I remember now. You too were advised that your son poured out his blood on the altar of unpreparedness and inefficiency. What do you want?"

"Nothing," Mother said. She didn't even pause at the door. She went on toward the table. "We had nothing to bring you. And I don't think I see anything here we would want to take away."

"You're wrong," he said. "You have a son left. Take what they have been advising to me: go back home and pray. Not for the dead one: for the one they have so far left you, that something somewhere, somehow will save him!" She wasn't even looking at him. She never had looked at him again.

She just went on across that barn-sized room exactly as I have watched her set mine and Father's lunch pail into the fence corner when there wasn't time to stop the plows to eat, and turn back toward the house.

"I can tell you something simpler than that," she said. "Weep." Then she reached the table. But it was only her body that stopped, her hand going out so smooth and quick that his hand only caught her wrist, the two hands locked together on the big blue pistol, between the photograph and the little hunk of iron medal on its colored ribbon, against that old flag that a heap of people I knew had never seen and a heap more of them wouldn't recognize if they did, and over all of it the old man's voice that ought not to have sounded like that either.

"For his country! He had no country: this one I too repudiate. His country and mine both was ravaged and polluted and destroyed eighty years ago, before even I was born. His forefathers fought and died for it then, even though what they fought and lost for was a dream. He didn't even have a dream. He died for an illusion. In the interests of usury, by the folly and rapacity of politicians, for the glory and aggrandisement of organized labor!"

"Yes," Mother said. "Weep."

"The fear of elective servants for their incumbencies! The subservience of misled workingmen for the demagogues who misled them! Shame? Grief? How can poltroonery and rapacity and voluntary thralldom know shame or grief?"

"All men are capable of shame," Mother said. "Just as all men are capable of courage and honor and sacrifice. And grief too. It will take time, but they will learn it. It will take more grief than yours and mine, and there will be more. But it will be enough."

"When? When all the young men are dead? What will there be left then worth the saving?"

"I know," Mother said. "I know. Our Pete was too young too to have to die." Then I realized that their hands were no longer locked, that he was erect again and that the pistol was hanging slack in Mother's hand

against her side, and for a minute I thought she was going to unzip the satchel and take the towel out of it.

But she just laid the pistol back on the table and stepped up to him and took the handkerchief from his breast pocket and put it into his hand and stepped back. "That's right," she said. "Weep. Not for him: for us, the old, who don't know why. What is your Negro's name?"

But he didn't answer. He didn't even raise the handkerchief to his face. He just stood there holding it, like he hadn't discovered yet that it was in his hand, or perhaps even what it was Mother had put there. "For us, the old," he said. "You believe. You have had three months to learn again, to find out why; mine happened yesterday. Tell me."

"I don't know," Mother said. "Maybe women are not supposed to know why their sons must die in battle; maybe all they are supposed to do is just to grieve for them. But my son knew why And my brother went to the war when I was a girl, and our mother didn't know why either, but he did.

And my grandfather was in that old one there too, and I reckon his mother didn't know why either, but I reckon he did. And my son knew why he had to go to this one, and he knew I knew he did even though I didn't, just as he knew that this child here and I both knew he would not come back. But he knew why, even if I didn't, couldn't, never can. So it must be all right, even if I couldn't understand it. Because there is nothing in him that I or his father didn't put there. What is your Negro's name?"

He called the name then. And the nigger wasn't so far away after all, though when he entered Major de Spain had already turned so that his back was toward the door. He didn't look around. He just pointed toward the table with the hand Mother had put the handkerchief into, and the nigger went to the table without looking at anybody and without making any more noise on the floor than a cat and he didn't stop at all; it looked to me like he had already turned and started back before he even reached the table: one flick of the black hand and the

white sleeve and the pistol vanished without me even seeing him touch it and when he passed me again going out, I couldn't see what he had done with it. So Mother had to speak twice before I knew she was talking to me.

"Come," she said.

"Wait," said Major de Spain. He had turned again, facing us. "What you and his father gave him. You must know what that was."

"I know it came a long way," Mother said. "So it must have been strong to have lasted through all of us. It must have been all right for him to be willing to die for it after that long time and coming that far. Come," she said again.

"Wait," he said. "Wait. Where did you come from?"
Mother stopped. "I told you: Frenchman's Bend."

"I know. How? By wagon? You have no car."

"Oh," Mother said. "We came in Mr. Quick's bus. He comes in every Saturday."

"And waits until night to go back. I'll send you back in my car." He called the nigger's name again. But Mother stopped him. "Thank you," she said. "We have already paid Mr. Quick. He owes us the ride back home."

There was an old lady born and raised in Jefferson who died rich somewhere in the North and left some money to the town to build a museum with. It was a house like a church, built for nothing else except to hold the pictures she picked out to put in it — pictures from all over the United States, painted by people who loved what they had seen or where they had been born or lived enough to want to paint pictures of it so that other people could see it too; pictures of men and women and children, and the houses and streets and cities and the woods and fields and streams where they worked or lived or pleased, so that all the people who wanted to, people like us from Frenchman's Bend or from littler places even than Frenchman's Bend in our county or

beyond our state too, could come without charge into the cool and the quiet and look without let at the pictures of men and women and children who were the same people that we were even if their houses and barns were different and their fields worked different, with different things growing in them.

So it was already late when we left the museum, and later still when we got back to where the bus waited, and later still more before we got started, although at least we could get into the bus and take our shoes and stockings back off.

Because Mrs. Quick hadn't come yet and so Solon had to wait for her, not because she was his wife but because he made her pay a quarter out of her egg-money to ride to town and back on Saturday, and he wouldn't go off and leave anybody who had paid him.

And so, even though the bus ran fast again, when the road finally straightened out into the long Valley stretch, there was only the last sunset spoking out across the sky, stretching all the way across America from the Pacific ocean, touching all the places that the men and women in the museum whose names we didn't even know had loved enough to paint pictures of them, like a big soft fading wheel.

And I remembered how Father used to always prove any point he wanted to make to Pete and me, by Grandfather. It didn't matter whether it was something he thought we ought to have done and hadn't, or something he would have stopped us from doing if he had just known about it in time. "Now, take your Grandpap," he would say. I could remember him too: Father's grandfather even, old, so old you just wouldn't believe it, so old that it would seem to me he must have gone clean back to the old fathers in Genesis and Exodus that talked face to face with God, and Grandpap outlived them all except him.

It seemed to me he must have been too old even to have actually fought in the old Confederate war, although that was about all he talked about, not only when we thought that maybe he was awake but even when we knew he must be asleep, until after a while we had to

admit that we never knew which one he really was. He would sit in his chair under the mulberry in the yard or on the sunny end of the front gallery or in his corner by the hearth; he would start up out of the chair and we still wouldn't know which one he was, whether he never had been asleep or whether he hadn't ever waked even when he jumped up, hollering, "Look out! Look out!

Here they come!" He wouldn't even always holler the same name; they wouldn't even always be on the same side or even soldiers: Forrest, or Morgan, or Abe Lincoln, or Van Dorn, or Grant or Colonel Sartoris himself, whose people still lived in our county, or Mrs. Rosa Millard, Colonel Sartoris's mother-in-law who stood off the Yankees and carpetbaggers too for the whole four years of the war until Colonel Sartoris could get back home. Pete thought it was just funny. Father and I were ashamed. We didn't know what Mother thought nor even what it was, until the afternoon at the picture show.

It was a continued picture, a Western; it seemed to me that it had been running every Saturday afternoon for years. Pete and Father and I would go in to town every Saturday to see it, and sometimes Mother would go too, to sit there in the dark while the pistols popped and snapped and the horses galloped and each time it would look like they were going to catch him but you knew they wouldn't quite, that there would be some more of it next Saturday and the one after that and the one after that, and always the week in between for me and Pete to talk about the villain's pearlhandled pistol that Pete wished was his and the hero's spotted horse that I wished was mine. Then one Saturday Mother decided to take Grandpap.

He sat between her and me, already asleep again, so old now that he didn't even have to snore, until the time came that you could have set a watch by every Saturday afternoon: when the horses all came plunging down the cliff and whirled around and came boiling up the gully until in just one more jump they would come clean out of the screen and go galloping among the little faces turned up to them like corn shucks scattered across a lot. Then Grandpap waked up. For about five seconds he sat perfectly still.

I could even feel him sitting still, he sat so still so hard. Then he said, "Cavalry!" Then he was on his feet. "Forrest!" he said. "Bedford Forrest! Get out of here! Get out of the way!" clawing and scrabbling from one seat to the next one whether there was anybody in them or not, into the aisle with us trying to follow and catch him, and up the aisle toward the door still hollering, "Forrest! Forrest! Here he comes!

Get out of the way!" and outside at last, with half the show behind us and Grandpap blinking and trembling at the light and Pete propped against the wall by his arms like he was being sick, laughing, and father shaking Grandpap's arm and saying, "You old fool! You old fool!" until Mother made him stop. And we half carried him around to the alley where the wagon was hitched and helped him in and Mother got in and sat by him, holding his hand until he could begin to stop shaking. "Go get him a bottle of beer," she said.

"He don't deserve any beer," Father said. "The old fool, having the whole town laughing. . . ."

"Go get him some beer!" Mother said. "He's going to sit right here in his own wagon and drink it. Go on!" And Father did, and Mother held the bottle until Grandpap got a good hold on it, and she sat holding his hand until he got a good swallow down him. Then he begun to stop shaking.

He said, "Ah-h-h," and took another swallow and said, "Ah-h-h," again and then he even drew his other hand out of Mother's and he wasn't trembling now but just a little, taking little darting sips at the bottle and saying "Hah!" and taking another sip and saying "Hah!" again, and not just looking at the bottle now but looking all around, and his eyes snapping a little when he blinked.

"Fools yourselves!" Mother cried at Father and Pete and me. "He wasn't running from anybody! He was running in front of them, hollering at all clods to look out because better men than they were

coming, even seventy-five years afterwards, still powerful, still dangerous, still coming!”

And I knew them too. I had seen them too, who had never been further from Frenchman’s Bend than I could return by night to sleep. It was like the wheel, like the sunset itself, hubbed at that little place that don’t even show on a map, that not two hundred people out of all the earth know is named Frenchman’s Bend or has any name at all, and spoking out in all the directions and touching them all, never a one too big for it to touch, never a one too little to be remembered: — the places that men and women have lived in and loved whether they had anything to paint pictures of them with or not, all the little places quiet enough to be lived in and loved and the names of them before they were quiet enough, and the names of the deeds that made them quiet enough and the names of the men and the women who did the deeds, who lasted and endured and fought the battles and lost them and fought again because they didn’t even know they had been whipped, and tamed the wilderness and overpassed the mountains and deserts and died and still went on as the shape of the United States grew and went on.

I knew them too: the men and women still powerful seventy-five years and twice that and twice that again afterward, still powerful and still dangerous and still coming, North and South and East and West, until the name of what they did and what they died for became just one single word, louder than any thunder. It was America, and it covered all the western earth.

The End

II. THE VILLAGE

A Rose for Emily, William Faulkner

A Rose for Emily

WHEN MISS EMILY Grierson died, our whole town went to her funeral: the men through a sort of respectful affection for a fallen monument, the women mostly out of curiosity to see the inside of her house, which no one save an old manservant — a combined gardener and cook — had seen in at least ten years.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street.

But garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps — an eyesore among eyesores.

And now Miss Emily had gone to join the representatives of those august names where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the battle of Jefferson.

Alive, Miss Emily had been a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town, dating from that day in 1894 when Colonel Sartoris, the mayor — he who fathered the edict that no Negro woman should appear on the streets without an apron — remitted her taxes, the dispensation dating from the death of her father on into perpetuity.

Not that Miss Emily would have accepted charity. Colonel Sartoris invented an involved tale to the effect that Miss Emily's father had loaned money to the town, which the town, as a matter of business, preferred this way of repaying. Only a man of Colonel Sartoris' generation and thought could have invented it, and only a woman could have believed it.

When the next generation, with its more modern ideas, became mayors and aldermen, this arrangement created some little dissatisfaction. On the first of the year they mailed her a tax notice. February came, and there was no reply.

They wrote her a formal letter, asking her to call at the sheriff's office at her convenience. A week later the mayor wrote her himself, offering to call or to send his car for her, and received in reply a note on paper of an archaic shape, in a thin, flowing calligraphy in faded ink, to the effect that she no longer went out at all. The tax notice was also enclosed, without comment.

They called a special meeting of the Board of Aldermen. A deputation waited upon her, knocked at the door through which no visitor had passed since she ceased giving china-painting lessons eight or ten years earlier. They were admitted by the old Negro into a dim hall from which a stairway mounted into still more shadow. It smelled of dust and disuse — a close, dank smell.

The Negro led them into the parlor. It was furnished in heavy, leather-covered furniture. When the Negro opened the blinds of one window, they could see that the leather was cracked; and when they sat down, a faint dust rose sluggishly about their thighs, spinning with slow motes in the single sun-ray. On a tarnished gilt easel before the fireplace stood a crayon portrait of Miss Emily's father.

They rose when she entered — a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head.

Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her. She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another while the visitors stated their errand.

She did not ask them to sit. She just stood in the door and listened quietly until the spokesman came to a stumbling halt. Then they could hear the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain.

Her voice was dry and cold. "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Colonel Sartoris explained it to me. Perhaps one of you can gain access to the city records and satisfy yourselves."

"But we have. We are the city authorities, Miss Emily. Didn't you get a notice from the sheriff, signed by him?"

"I received a paper, yes," Miss Emily said. "Perhaps he considers himself the sheriff . . . I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But there is nothing on the books to show that, you see. We must go by the—"

"See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson."

"But, Miss Emily—"

"See Colonel Sartoris." (Colonel Sartoris had been dead almost ten years.) "I have no taxes in Jefferson. Tobe!" The Negro appeared.

"Show these gentlemen out."

II

So she vanquished them, horse and foot, just as she had vanquished their fathers thirty years before about the smell. That was two years after her father's death and a short time after her sweetheart — the one we believed would marry her — had deserted her. After her father's death she went out very little; after her sweetheart went away, people hardly saw her at all. A few of the ladies had the temerity to call, but were not received, and the only sign of life about the place was the Negro man — a young man then — going in and out with a market basket.

"Just as if a man — any man — could keep a kitchen properly," the ladies said; so they were not surprised when the smell developed. It was another link between the gross, teeming world and the high and mighty Griersons.

A neighbor, a woman, complained to the mayor, Judge Stevens, eighty years old.

“But what will you have me do about it, madam?” he said.

“Why, send her word to stop it,” the woman said. “Isn’t there a law?”

“I’m sure that won’t be necessary,” Judge Stevens said. “It’s probably just a snake or a rat that nigger of hers killed in the yard. I’ll speak to him about it.”

The next day he received two more complaints, one from a man who came in diffident deprecation. “We really must do something about it, Judge. I’d be the last one in the world to bother Miss Emily, but we’ve got to do something.” That night the Board of Aldermen met — three graybeards and one younger man, a member of the rising generation.

“It’s simple enough,” he said. “Send her word to have her place cleaned up. Give her a certain time to do it in, and if she don’t . . .”

“Dammit, sir,” Judge Stevens said, “will you accuse a lady to her face of smelling bad?”

So the next night, after midnight, four men crossed Miss Emily’s lawn and slunk about the house like burglars, sniffing along the base of the brickwork and at the cellar openings while one of them performed a regular sowing motion with his hand out of a sack slung from his shoulder. They broke open the cellar door and sprinkled lime there, and in all the outbuildings.

As they recrossed the lawn, a window that had been dark was lighted and Miss Emily sat in it, the light behind her, and her upright torso motionless as that of an idol. They crept quietly across the lawn and into the shadow of the locusts that lined the street. After a week or two the smell went away.

That was when people had begun to feel really sorry for her. People in our town, remembering how old lady Wyatt, her great-aunt, had gone completely crazy at last, believed that the Griersons held themselves a

little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such.

We had long thought of them as a tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door. So when she got to be thirty and was still single, we were not pleased exactly, but vindicated; even with insanity in the family she wouldn't have turned down all of her chances if they had really materialized.

When her father died, it got about that the house was all that was left to her; and in a way, people were glad. At last they could pity Miss Emily. Being left alone, and a pauper, she had become humanized. Now she too would know the old thrill and the old despair of a penny more or less.

The day after his death all the ladies prepared to call at the house and offer condolence and aid, as is our custom. Miss Emily met them at the door, dressed as usual and with no trace of grief on her face. She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body. Just as they were about to resort to law and force, she broke down, and they buried her father quickly.

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.

III

She was sick for a long time. When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows — sort of tragic and serene.

The town had just let the contracts for paving the sidewalks, and in the summer after her father's death they began the work. The construction company came with niggers and mules and machinery, and a foreman named Homer Barron, a Yankee — a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face. The little boys would follow in groups to hear him cuss the niggers, and the niggers singing in time to the rise and fall of picks. Pretty soon he knew everybody in town.

Whenever you heard a lot of laughing anywhere about the square, Homer Barron would be in the center of the group. Presently we began to see him and Miss Emily on Sunday afternoons driving in the yellow-wheeled buggy and the matched team of bays from the livery stable.

At first we were glad that Miss Emily would have an interest, because the ladies all said, "Of course a Grierson would not think seriously of a Northerner, a day laborer." But there were still others, older people, who said that even grief could not cause a real lady to forget *noblesse oblige* — without calling it *noblesse oblige*. They just said, "Poor Emily.

Her kinsfolk should come to her." She had some kin in Alabama; but years ago her father had fallen out with them over the estate of old lady Wyatt, the crazy woman, and there was no communication between the two families. They had not even been represented at the funeral.

And as soon as the old people said, "Poor Emily," the whispering began. "Do you suppose it's really so?" they said to one another. "Of course it is. What else could . . ." This behind their hands; rustling of craned silk and satin behind jalousies closed upon the sun of Sunday afternoon as the thin, swift clop-clop-clop of the matched team passed: "Poor Emily."

She carried her head high enough — even when we believed that she was fallen. It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness. Like when she bought the

rat poison, the arsenic. That was over a year after they had begun to say "Poor Emily," and while the two female cousins were visiting her.

"I want some poison," she said to the druggist. She was over thirty then, still a slight woman, though thinner than usual, with cold, haughty black eyes in a face the flesh of which was strained across the temples and about the eye-sockets as you imagine a lighthouse-keeper's face ought to look. "I want some poison," she said.

"Yes, Miss Emily. What kind? For rats and such? I'd recom—" "I want the best you have. I don't care what kind."

The druggist named several. "They'll kill anything up to an elephant. But what you want is—"

"Arsenic," Miss Emily said. "Is that a good one?"

"Is . . . arsenic? Yes, ma'am. But what you want—"

"I want arsenic."

The druggist looked down at her. She looked back at him, erect, her face like a strained flag. "Why, of course," the druggist said. "If that's what you want. But the law requires you to tell what you are going to use it for."

Miss Emily just stared at him, her head tilted back in order to look him eye for eye, until he looked away and went and got the arsenic and wrapped it up. The Negro delivery boy brought her the package; the druggist didn't come back. When she opened the package at home there was written on the box, under the skull and bones: "For rats."

IV

So the next day we all said, "She will kill herself"; and we said it would be the best thing. When she had first begun to be seen with Homer Barron, we had said, "She will marry him." Then we said, "She will persuade him yet," because Homer himself had remarked — he liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks' Club — that he was not a marrying man. Later we said, "Poor Emily"

behind the jalousies as they passed on Sunday afternoon in the glittering buggy, Miss Emily with her head high and Homer Barron with his hat cocked and a cigar in his teeth, reins and whip in a yellow glove.

Then some of the ladies began to say that it was a disgrace to the town and a bad example to the young people. The men did not want to interfere, but at last the ladies forced the Baptist minister — Miss Emily's people were Episcopal — to call upon her. He would never divulge what happened during that interview, but he refused to go back again. The next Sunday they again drove about the streets, and the following day the minister's wife wrote to Miss Emily's relations in Alabama.

So she had blood-kin under her roof again and we sat back to watch developments. At first nothing happened. Then we were sure that they were to be married. We learned that Miss Emily had been to the jeweler's and ordered a man's toilet set in silver, with the letters H. B. on each piece. Two days later we learned that she had bought a complete outfit of men's clothing, including a nightshirt, and we said, "They are married." We were really glad. We were glad because the two female cousins were even more Grierson than Miss Emily had ever been.

So we were not surprised when Homer Barron — the streets had been finished some time since — was gone. We were a little disappointed that there was not a public blowing-off, but we believed that he had gone on to prepare for Miss Emily's coming, or to give her a chance to get rid of the cousins. (By that time it was a cabal, and we were all Miss Emily's allies to help circumvent the cousins.) Sure enough, after another week they departed. And, as we had expected all along, within three days Homer Barron was back in town. A neighbor saw the Negro man admit him at the kitchen door at dusk one evening.

And that was the last we saw of Homer Barron. And of Miss Emily for some time. The Negro man went in and out with the market basket, but the front door remained closed. Now and then we would see her at a window for a moment, as the men did that night when they sprinkled

the lime, but for almost six months she did not appear on the streets. Then we knew that this was to be expected too; as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die.

When we next saw Miss Emily, she had grown fat and her hair was turning gray. During the next few years it grew grayer and grayer until it attained an even pepper-and-salt iron-gray, when it ceased turning. Up to the day of her death at seventy-four it was still that vigorous iron-gray, like the hair of an active man.

From that time on her front door remained closed, save for a period of six or seven years, when she was about forty, during which she gave lessons in china-painting. She fitted up a studio in one of the downstairs rooms, where the daughters and granddaughters of Colonel Sartoris' contemporaries were sent to her with the same regularity and in the same spirit that they were sent to church on Sundays with a twenty-five-cent piece for the collection plate. Meanwhile her taxes had been remitted.

Then the newer generation became the backbone and the spirit of the town, and the painting pupils grew up and fell away and did not send their children to her with boxes of color and tedious brushes and pictures cut from the ladies' magazines. The front door closed upon the last one and remained closed for good. When the town got free postal delivery, Miss Emily alone refused to let them fasten the metal numbers above her door and attach a mailbox to it. She would not listen to them.

Daily, monthly, yearly we watched the Negro grow grayer and more stooped, going in and out with the market basket. Each December we sent her a tax notice, which would be returned by the post office a week later, unclaimed. Now and then we would see her in one of the downstairs windows — she had evidently shut up the top floor of the house — like the carven torso of an idol in a niche, looking or not looking at us, we could never tell which. Thus she passed from

generation to generation — dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse.

And so she died. Fell ill in the house filled with dust and shadows, with only a doddering Negro man to wait on her. We did not even know she was sick; we had long since given up trying to get any information from the Negro. He talked to no one, probably not even to her, for his voice had grown harsh and rusty, as if from disuse.

She died in one of the downstairs rooms, in a heavy walnut bed with a curtain, her gray head propped on a pillow yellow and moldy with age and lack of sunlight.

V

The Negro met the first of the ladies at the front door and let them in, with their hushed, sibilant voices and their quick, curious glances, and then he disappeared. He walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again.

The two female cousins came at once. They held the funeral on the second day, with the town coming to look at Miss Emily beneath a mass of bought flowers, with the crayon face of her father musing profoundly above the bier and the ladies sibilant and macabre; and the very old men — some in their brushed Confederate uniforms — on the porch and the lawn, talking of Miss Emily as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and courted her perhaps, confusing time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottle-neck of the most recent decade of years.

Already we knew that there was one room in that region above stairs which no one had seen in forty years, and which would have to be forced. They waited until Miss Emily was decently in the ground before they opened it.

The violence of breaking down the door seemed to fill this room with pervading dust. A thin, acrid pall as of the tomb seemed to lie everywhere upon this room decked and furnished as for a bridal: upon the valance curtains of faded rose color, upon the rose-shaded lights, upon the dressing table, upon the delicate array of crystal and the man's toilet things backed with tarnished silver, silver so tarnished that the monogram was obscured. Among them lay a collar and tie, as if they had just been removed, which, lifted, left upon the surface a pale crescent in the dust. Upon a chair hung the suit, carefully folded; beneath it the two mute shoes and the discarded socks.

The man himself lay in the bed.

For a long while we just stood there, looking down at the profound and fleshless grin. The body had apparently once lain in the attitude of an embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust.

Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron-gray hair.

The End

Hair, William Faulkner

Hair

I

THIS GIRL, THIS Susan Reed, was an orphan. She lived with a family named Burchett, that had some more children, two or three more. Some said that Susan was a niece or a cousin or something; others cast the usual aspersions on the character of Burchett and even of Mrs Burchett: you know. Women mostly, these were.

She was about five when Hawkshaw first came to town. It was his first summer behind that chair in Maxey's barber shop that Mrs Burchett brought Susan in for the first time. Maxey told me about how him and the other barbers watched Mrs Burchett trying for three days to get Susan (she was a thin little girl then, with big scared eyes and this straight, soft hair not blonde and not brunette) into the shop.

And Maxey told how at last it was Hawkshaw that went out into the street and worked with the girl for about fifteen minutes until he got her into the shop and into his chair — him that hadn't never said more than Yes or No to any man or woman in the town that anybody ever saw. "Be durn if it didn't look like Hawkshaw had been waiting for her to come along," Maxey told me.

That was her first haircut. Hawkshaw gave it to her, and her sitting there under the cloth like a little scared rabbit. But six months after that she was coming to the shop by herself and letting Hawkshaw cut her hair, still looking like a little old rabbit, with her scared face and those big eyes and that hair without any special name showing above the cloth. If Hawkshaw was busy, Maxey said she would come in and sit on the waiting bench close to his chair with her legs sticking straight out in front of her until Hawkshaw got done.

Maxey says they considered her Hawkshaw's client the same as if she had been a Saturday night shaving customer. He says that one time the other barber, Matt Fox, offered to wait on her, Hawkshaw being busy, and that Hawkshaw looked up like a flash. "I'll be done in a minute," he says. "I'll tend to her." Maxey told me that Hawkshaw had been working for him for almost a year then, but that was the first time he ever heard him speak positive about anything.

That fall the girl started to school. She would pass the barber shop each morning and afternoon. She was still shy, walking fast like little girls do, with that yellow-brown head of hers passing the window level and fast like she was on skates. She was always by herself at first, but pretty soon her head would be one of a clump of other heads, all talking, not looking toward the window at all, and Hawkshaw standing there in the window, looking out.

Maxey said him and Matt would not have to look at the clock at all to tell when five minutes to eight and to three o'clock came, because they could tell by Hawkshaw. It was like he would kind of drift up to the window without watching himself do it, and be looking out about the time for the school children to begin to pass. When she would come to the shop for a haircut, Hawkshaw would give her two or three of those peppermints where he would give the other children just one, Maxey told me.

No; it was Matt Fox, the other barber, told me that. He was the one who told me about the doll Hawkshaw gave her on Christmas. I don't know how he found it out. Hawkshaw never told him. But he knew some way; he knew more about Hawkshaw than Maxey did. He was a married man himself, Matt was.

A kind of fat, flabby fellow, with a pasty face and eyes that looked tired or sad — something. A funny fellow, and almost as good a barber as Hawkshaw. He never talked much either, and I don't know how he could have known so much about Hawkshaw when a talking man couldn't get much out of him. I guess maybe a talking man hasn't got the time to ever learn much about anything except words.

Anyway, Matt told me about how Hawkshaw gave her a present every Christmas, even after she got to be a big girl. She still came to him, to his chair, and him watching her every morning and afternoon when she passed to and from school. A big girl, and she wasn't shy any more.

You wouldn't have thought she was the same girl. She got grown fast. Too fast. That was the trouble. Some said it was being an orphan and

all. But it wasn't that. Girls are different from boys. Girls are born weaned and boys don't ever get weaned. You see one sixty years old, and be damned if he won't go back to the perambulator at the bat of an eye.

It's not that she was bad. There's not any such thing as a woman born bad, because they are all born bad, born with the badness in them. The thing is, to get them married before the badness comes to a natural head.

But we try to make them conform to a system that says a woman can't be married until she reaches a certain age. And nature don't pay any attention to systems, let alone women paying any attention to them, or to anything. She just grew up too fast. She reached the point where the badness came to a head before the system said it was time for her to. I think they can't help it. I have a daughter of my own, and I say that.

So there she was. Matt told me they figured up and she couldn't have been more than thirteen when Mrs Burchett whipped her one day for using rouge and paint, and during that year, he said, they would see her with two or three other girls giggling and laughing on the street at all hours when they should have been in school; still thin, with that hair still not blonde and not brunette, with her face caked with paint until you would have thought it would crack like dried mud when she laughed, with the regular simple gingham and such dresses that a thirteen-year-old child ought to wear pulled and dragged to show off what she never had yet to show off, like the older girls did with their silk and crepe and such.

Matt said he watched her pass one day, when all of a sudden he realized she never had any stockings on. He said he thought about it and he said he could not remember that she ever did wear stockings in the summer, until he realized that what he had noticed was not the lack of stockings, but that her legs were like a woman's legs: female. And her only thirteen.

I say she couldn't help herself. It wasn't her fault. And it wasn't Burchett's fault, either. Why, nobody can be as gentle with them, the bad ones, the ones that are unlucky enough to come to a head too soon, as men. Look at the way they — all the men in town — treated Hawkshaw.

Even after folks knew, after all the talk began, there wasn't a man of them talked before Hawkshaw. I reckon they thought he knew too, had heard some of the talk, but whenever they talked about her in the shop, it was while Hawkshaw was not there. And I reckon the other men were the same, because there was not a one of them that hadn't seen Hawkshaw at the window, looking at her when she passed, or looking at her on the street; happening to kind of be passing the picture show when it let out and she would come out with some fellow, having begun to go with them before she was fourteen. Folks said how she would have to slip out and meet them and slip back into the house again with Mrs Burchett thinking she was at the home of a girl friend.

They never talked about her before Hawkshaw. They would wait until he was gone, to dinner, or on one of those two-weeks' vacations of his in April that never anybody could find out about; where he went or anything. But he would be gone, and they would watch the girl slipping around, skirting trouble, bound to get into it sooner or later, even if Burchett didn't hear something first. She had quit school a year ago. For a year Burchett and Mrs Burchett thought that she was going to school every day, when she hadn't been inside the building even.

Somebody — one of the high-school boys maybe, but she never drew any lines: schoolboys, married men, anybody — would get her a report card every month and she would fill it out herself and take it home for Mrs Burchett to sign. It beats the devil how the folks that love a woman will let her fool them.

So she quit school and went to work in the ten-cent store. She would come to the shop for a haircut, all painted up, in some kind of little flimsy off-color clothes that showed her off, with her face watchful and

bold and discreet all at once, and her hair gummed and twisted about her face.

But even the stuff she put on it couldn't change that brown-yellow color. Her hair hadn't changed at all. She wouldn't always go to Hawkshaw's chair. Even when his chair was empty, she would sometimes take one of the others, talking to the barbers, filling the whole shop with noise and perfume and her legs sticking out from under the cloth. Hawkshaw wouldn't look at her then. Even when he wasn't busy, he had a way of looking the same: intent and down-looking like he was making out to be busy, hiding behind the making-out.

That was how it was when he left two weeks ago on that April vacation of his, that secret trip that folks had given up trying to find where he went ten years ago. I made Jefferson a couple of days after he left, and I was in the shop. They were talking about him and her.

"Is he still giving her Christmas presents?" I said.

"He bought her a wrist watch two years ago," Matt Fox said. "Paid sixty dollars for it."

Maxey was shaving a customer. He stopped, the razor in his hand, the blade loaded with lather. "Well, I'll be durned," he said. "Then he must — You reckon he was the first one, the one that—"

Matt hadn't looked around. "He aint give it to her yet," he said.

"Well, durn his tight-fisted time," Maxey said. "Any old man that will fool with a young girl, he's pretty bad. But a fellow that will trick one and then not even pay her nothing—"

Matt looked around now; he was shaving a customer too. "What would you say if you heard that the reason he aint give it to her is that he thinks she is too young to receive jewelry from anybody that aint kin to her?"

"You mean, he dont know? He dont know what everybody else in this town except maybe Mr and Mrs Burchett has knowed for three years?"

Matt went back to work again, his elbow moving steady, the razor moving in little jerks. "How would he know? Aint anybody but a woman going to tell him. And he dont know any women except Mrs Cowan. And I reckon she thinks he's done heard."

"That's a fact," Maxey says.

That was how things were when he went off on his vacation two weeks ago. I worked Jefferson in a day and a half, and went on. In the middle of the next week I reached Division. I didn't hurry. I wanted to give him time. It was on a Wednesday morning I got there.

II

If there had been love once, a man would have said that Hawkshaw had forgotten her. Meaning love, of course. When I first saw him thirteen years ago (I had just gone on the road then, making North Mississippi and Alabama with a line of work shirts and overalls) behind a chair in the barber shop in Porterfield, I said, "Here is a bachelor born. Here is a man who was born single and forty years old."

A little, sandy-complected man with a face you would not remember and would not recognize again ten minutes later, in a blue serge suit and a black bow tie, the kind that snaps together in the back, that you buy already tied in the store. Maxey told me he was still wearing that serge suit and tie when he got off the south-bound train in Jefferson a year later, carrying one of these imitation leather suitcases.

And when I saw him again in Jefferson in the next year, behind a chair in Maxey's shop, if it had not been for the chair I wouldn't have recognized him at all. Same face, same tie; be damned if it wasn't like they had picked him up, chair, customer and all, and set him down sixty miles away without him missing a lick.

I had to look back out the window at the square to be sure I wasn't in Porterfield myself any time a year ago. And that was the first time I realized that when I had made Porterfield about six weeks back, he had not been there.

It was three years after that before I found out about him. I would make Division about five times a year — a store and four or five houses and a sawmill on the State line between Mississippi and Alabama. I had noticed a house there. It was a good house, one of the best there, and it was always closed. When I would make Division in the late spring or the early summer there would always be signs of work around the house. The yard would be cleaned up of weeds, and the flower beds tended to and the fences and roof fixed.

Then when I would get back to Division along in the fall or the winter, the yard would be grown up in weeds again, and maybe some of the pickets gone off the fence where folks had pulled them off to mend their own fences or maybe for firewood; I don't know. And the house would be always closed; never any smoke at the kitchen chimney. So one day I asked the storekeeper about it and he told me.

It had belonged to a man named Starnes, but the family was all dead. They were considered the best folks, because they owned some land, mortgaged. Starnes was one of these lazy men that was satisfied to be a landowner as long as he had enough to eat and a little tobacco.

They had one daughter that went and got herself engaged to a young fellow, son of a tenant farmer. The mother didn't like the idea, but Starnes didn't seem to object. Maybe because the young fellow (his name was Stribling) was a hard worker; maybe because Starnes was just too lazy to object. Anyway, they were engaged and Stribling saved his money and went to Birmingham to learn barbering. Rode part of the way in wagons and walked the rest, coming back each summer to see the girl.

Then one day Starnes died, sitting in his chair on the porch; they said that he was too lazy to keep on breathing, and they sent for Stribling. I heard he had built up a good trade of his own in the Birmingham shop, saving his money; they told me he had done picked out the apartment and paid down on the furniture and all, and that they were to be married that summer. He came back. All Starnes had ever raised was a

mortgage, so Stribling paid for the burial. It cost a right smart, more than Starnes was worth, but Mrs Starnes had to be suited. So Stribling had to start saving again.

But he had already leased the apartment and paid down on the furniture and the ring and he had bought the wedding license when they sent for him again in a hurry. It was the girl this time. She had some kind of fever. These backwoods folks: you know how it is. No doctors, or veterinaries, if they are. Cut them and shoot them: that's all right.

But let them get a bad cold and maybe they'll get well or maybe they'll die two days later of cholera. She was delirious when Stribling got there. They had to cut all her hair off. Stribling did that, being an expert you might say; a professional in the family. They told me she was one of these thin, unhealthy girls anyway, with a lot of straight hair not brown and not yellow.

She never knew him, never knew who cut off her hair. She died so, without knowing anything about it, without knowing even that she died, maybe. She just kept on saying, "Take care of maw.

The mortgage. Paw wont like it to be left so. Send for Henry (That was him: Henry Stribling; Hawkshaw: I saw him the next year in Jefferson. "So you're Henry Stribling," I said). The mortgage. Take care of maw. Send for Henry. The mortgage. Send for Henry." Then she died. There was a picture of her, the only one they had. Hawkshaw sent it, with a lock of the hair he had cut off, to an address in a farm magazine, to have the hair made into a frame for the picture. But they both got lost, the hair and the picture, in the mail somehow. Anyway he never got either of them back.

He buried the girl too, and the next year (he had to go back to Birmingham and get shut of the apartment which he had engaged and let the furniture go so he could save again) he put a headstone over her grave. Then he went away again and they heard how he had quit the Birmingham shop. He just quit and disappeared, and they all saying

how in time he would have owned the shop. But he quit, and next April, just before the anniversary of the girl's death, he showed up again. He came to see Mrs Starnes and went away again in two weeks.

After he was gone they found out how he had stopped at the bank at the county seat and paid the interest on the mortgage. He did that every year until Mrs Starnes died. She happened to die while he was there. He would spend about two weeks cleaning up the place and fixing it so she would be comfortable for another year, and she letting him, being as she was better born than him; being as he was one of these parveynoos. Then she died too. "You know what Sophie said to do," she says. "That mortgage. Mr Starnes will be worried when I see him."

So he buried her too. He bought another headstone, to suit her. Then he begun to pay the principal on the mortgage. Starnes had some kin in Alabama. The folks in Division expected the kin to come and claim the place. But maybe the kin were waiting until Hawkshaw had got the mortgage cleared.

He made the payment each year, coming back and cleaning up the place. They said he would clean up that house inside like a woman, washing and scrubbing it. It would take him two weeks each April. Then he would go away again, nobody knew where, returning each April to make the payment at the bank and clean up that empty house that never belonged to him.

He had been doing that for about five years when I saw him in Maxey's shop in Jefferson, the year after I saw him in a shop in Porterfield, in that serge suit and that black bow tie. Maxey said he had them on when he got off the south-bound train that day in Jefferson, carrying that paper suitcase.

Maxey said they watched him for two days about the square, him not seeming to know anybody or to have any business or to be in any hurry; just walking about the square like he was just looking around.

It was the young fellows, the loafers that pitch dollars all day long in the clubhouse yard, waiting for the young girls to come giggling down to the post office and the soda fountain in the late afternoon, working their hips under their dresses, leaving the smell of perfume when they pass, that gave him his name.

They said he was a detective, maybe because that was the last thing in the world anybody would suspect him to be. So they named him Hawkshaw, and Hawkshaw he remained for the twelve years he stayed in Jefferson, behind that chair in Maxey's shop. He told Maxey he was from Alabama.

"What part?" Maxey said. "Alabama's a big place. Birmingham?" Maxey said, because Hawkshaw looked like he might have come from almost anywhere in Alabama except Birmingham.

"Yes," Hawkshaw said. "Birmingham."

And that was all they ever got out of him until I happened to notice him behind the chair and to remember him back in Porterfield.

"Porterfield?" Maxey said. "My brother-in-law owns that shop. You mean you worked in Porterfield last year?"

"Yes," Hawkshaw said. "I was there."

Maxey told me about the vacation business. How Hawkshaw wouldn't take his summer vacation; said he wanted two weeks in April instead. He wouldn't tell why. Maxey said April was too busy for vacations, and Hawkshaw offered to work until then, and quit. "Do you want to quit then?" Maxey said that was in the summer, after Mrs Burchett had brought Susan Reed to the shop for the first time.

"No," Hawkshaw said. "I like it here. I just want two weeks off in April."

"On business?" Maxey said.

"On business," Hawkshaw said.

When Maxey took his vacation, he went to Porterfield to visit his brother-in-law; maybe shaving his brother-in-law's customers, like a sailor will spend his vacation in a rowboat on an artificial lake. The

brother-in-law told him Hawkshaw had worked in his shop, would not take a vacation until April, went off and never came back. "He'll quit you the same way," the brother-in-law said. "He worked in a shop in Bolivar, Tennessee, and in one in Florence, Alabama, for a year and quit the same way. He wont come back. You watch and see."

Maxey said he came back home and he finally got it out of Hawkshaw how he had worked for a year each in six or eight different towns in Alabama and Tennessee and Mississippi. "Why did you quit them?" Maxey said. "You are a good barber; one of the best children's barbers. I ever saw. Why did you quit?"

"I was just looking around," Hawkshaw said.

Then April came, and he took his two weeks. He shaved himself and packed up that paper suitcase and took the north-bound train.

"Going on a visit, I reckon," Maxey said.

"Up the road a piece," Hawkshaw said.

So he went away, in that serge suit and black bow tie. Maxey told me how, two days later, it got out how Hawkshaw had drawn from the bank his year's savings. He boarded at Mrs Cowan's and he had joined the church and he spent no money at all. He didn't even smoke. So Maxey and Matt and I reckon everybody else in Jefferson thought that he had saved up steam for a year and was now bound on one of these private sabbaticals among the fleshpots of Memphis.

Mitch Ewing, the depot freight agent, lived at Mrs Cowan's too. He told how Hawkshaw had bought his ticket only to the junction-point. "From there he can go to either Memphis or Birmingham or New Orleans," Mitch said.

"Well, he's gone, anyway," Maxey said. "And mark my words, that's the last you'll see of that fellow in this town."

And that's what everybody thought until two weeks later. On the fifteenth day Hawkshaw came walking into the shop at his regular time, like he hadn't even been out of town, and took off his coat and begun

to hone his razors. He never told anybody where he had been. Just up the road a piece.

Sometimes I thought I would tell them. I would make Jefferson and find him there behind that chair. He didn't change, grow any older in the face, any more than that Reed girl's hair changed, for all the gum and dye she put on it.

But there he would be, back from his vacation "up the road a piece," saving his money for another year, going to church on Sunday, keeping that sack of peppermints for the children that came to him to be barbered, until it was time to take that paper suitcase and his year's savings and go back to Division to pay on the mortgage and clean up the house.

Sometimes he would be gone when I got to Jefferson, and Maxey would tell me about him cutting that Reed girl's hair, snipping and snipping it and holding the mirror up for her to see like she was an actress. "He dont charge her," Matt Fox said. "He pays the quarter into the register out of his own pocket."

"Well, that's his business," Maxey said. "All I want is the quarter. I dont care where it comes from."

Five years later maybe I would have said, "Maybe that's her price." Because she got in trouble at last. Or so they said. I dont know, except that most of the talk about girls, women, is envy or retaliation by the ones that dont dare to and the ones that failed to. But while he was gone one April they were whispering how she had got in trouble at last and had tried to doctor herself with turpentine and was bad sick.

Anyhow, she was off the streets for about three months; some said in a hospital in Memphis, and when she came into the shop again she took Matt's chair, though Hawkshaw's was empty at the time, like she had already done before to devil him, maybe. Maxey said she looked like a painted ghost, gaunt and hard, for all her bright dress and such, sitting there in Matt's chair, filling the whole shop with her talking and her

laughing and her perfume and her long, naked-looking legs, and Hawkshaw making out he was busy at his empty chair.

Sometimes I thought I would tell them. But I never told anybody except Gavin Stevens. He is the district attorney, a smart man: not like the usual pedagogue lawyer and office holder. He went to Harvard, and when my health broke down (I used to be a bookkeeper in a Gordonville bank and my health broke down and I met Stevens on a Memphis train when I was coming home from the hospital) it was him that suggested I try the road and got me my position with this company.

I told him about it two years ago. "And now the girl has gone bad on him, and he's too old to hunt up another one and raise her," I said. "And some day he'll have the place paid out and those Alabama Starnes can come and take it, and he'll be through. Then what do you think he will do?"

"I dont know," Stevens said.

"Maybe he'll just go off and die," I said.

"Maybe he will," Stevens said.

"Well," I said, "he wont be the first man to tilt at windmills."

"He wont be the first man to die, either," Stevens said.

III

So last week I went on to Division. I got there on a Wednesday. When I saw the house, it had just been painted. The storekeeper told me that the payment Hawkshaw had made was the last one; that Starnes' mortgage was clear. "Them Alabama Starnes can come and take it now," he said.

"Anyway, Hawkshaw did what he promised her, promised Mrs Starnes," I said.

"Hawkshaw?" he said. "Is that what they call him? Well, I'll be durned. Hawkshaw. Well, I'll be durned."

It was three months before I made Jefferson again. When I passed the barber shop I looked in without stopping. And there was another fellow behind Hawkshaw's chair, a young fellow. "I wonder if Hawk left his sack of peppermints," I said to myself. But I didn't stop. I just thought, 'Well, he's gone at last,' wondering just where he would be when old age got him and he couldn't move again; if he would probably die behind a chair somewhere in a little three-chair country shop, in his shirt sleeves and that black tie and those serge pants.

I went on and saw my customers and had dinner, and in the afternoon I went to Stevens' office. "I see you've got a new barber in town," I said. "Yes," Stevens said. He looked at me a while, then he said, "You haven't heard?"

"Heard what?" I said. Then he quit looking at me.

"I got your letter," he said, "that Hawkshaw had paid off the mortgage and painted the house. Tell me about it."

So I told him how I got to Division the day after Hawkshaw had left. They were talking about him on the porch of the store, wondering just when those Alabama Starnes would come in. He had painted the house himself, and he had cleaned up the two graves; I don't reckon he wanted to disturb Starnes by cleaning his. I went up to see them. He had even scrubbed the headstones, and he had set out an apple shoot over the girl's grave.

It was in bloom, and what with the folks all talking about him, I got curious too, to see the inside of that house. The storekeeper had the key, and he said he reckoned it would be all right with Hawkshaw.

It was clean inside as a hospital. The stove was polished and the woodbox filled. The storekeeper told me Hawkshaw did that every year, filled the woodbox before he left. "Those Alabama kinsfolk will appreciate that," I said. We went on back to the parlor. There was a melodeon in the corner, and a lamp and a Bible on the table.

The lamp was clean, the bowl empty and clean too; you couldn't even smell oil on it. That wedding license was framed, hanging above the mantel like a picture. It was dated April 4, 1905.

"Here's where he keeps that mortgage record," the storekeeper (his name is Bidwell) said. He went to the table and opened the Bible. The front page was the births and deaths, two columns. The girl's name was Sophie. I found her name in the birth column, and on the death side it was next to the last one. Mrs Starnes had written it. It looked like it might have taken her ten minutes to write it down. It looked like this:
Sofy starnes Dide april 16 th 1905

Hawkshaw wrote the last one himself; it was neat and well written, like a bookkeeper's hand:

Mrs Will Starnes. April 23, 1916.

"The record will be in the back," Bidwell said.

We turned to the back. It was there, in a neat column, in Hawkshaw's hand. It began with April 16, 1917, \$200.00. The next one was when he made the next payment at the bank: April 16, 1918, \$200.00; and April 16, 1919, \$200.00; and April 16, 1920, \$200.00; and on to the last one: April 16, 1930, \$200.00. Then he had totaled the column and written under it:

"Paid in full. April 16, 1930."

It looked like a sentence written in a copy book in the old-time business colleges, like it had flourished, the pen had, in spite of him. It didn't look like it was written boastful; it just flourished somehow, the end of it, like it had run out of the pen somehow before he could stop it.

"So he did what he promised her he would," Stevens said.

"That's what I told Bidwell," I said.

Stevens went on like he wasn't listening to me much.

"So the old lady could rest quiet. I guess that's what the pen was trying to say when it ran away from him: that now she could lie quiet. And he's not much over forty-five. Not so much anyway. Not so much but

what, when he wrote 'Paid in full' under that column, time and despair rushed as slow and dark under him as under any garlanded boy or crownless and crestless girl."

"Only the girl went bad on him," I said. "Forty-five's pretty late to set out to find another. He'll be fifty-five at least by then."

Stevens looked at me then. "I didn't think you had heard," he said.

"Yes," I said. "That is, I looked in the barber shop when I passed. But I knew he would be gone. I knew all the time he would move on, once he had that mortgage cleared. Maybe he never knew about the girl, anyway. Or likely he knew and didn't care."

"You think he didn't know about her?"

"I dont see how he could have helped it. But I dont know. What do you think?"

"I dont know. I dont think I want to know. I know something so much better than that."

"What's that?" I said. He was looking at me. "You keep on telling me I haven't heard the news. What is it I haven't heard?"

"About the girl," Stevens said. He looked at me.

"On the night Hawkshaw came back from his last vacation, they were married. He took her with him this time."

The End

Centaur in Brass, William Faulkner

Centaur in Brass

IN OUR TOWN Flem Snopes now has a monument to himself, a monument of brass, none the less enduring for the fact that, though it is constantly in sight of the whole town and visible from three or four points miles out in the country, only four people, two white men and

two Negroes, know that it is his monument, or that it is a monument at all.

He came to Jefferson from the country, accompanied by his wife and infant daughter and preceded by a reputation for shrewd and secret dealing. There lives in our county a sewing-machine agent named Suratt, who used to own a half interest in a small back-street restaurant in town — himself no mean hand at that technically unassailable opportunism which passes with country folks — and town folks, too — for honest shrewdness.

He travels about the county steadily and constantly, and it was through him that Snopes's doings first came to our ears: how first, a clerk in a country store, Snopes one day and to everyone's astonishment was married to the store owner's daughter, a young girl who was the belle of the countryside. They were married suddenly, on the same day upon which three of the girl's erstwhile suitors left the county and were seen no more.

Soon after the wedding Snopes and his wife moved to Texas, from where the wife returned a year later with a well-grown baby. A month later Snopes himself returned, accompanied by a broad-hatted stranger and a herd of half-wild mustang ponies, which the stranger auctioned off, collected the money, and departed.

Then the purchasers discovered that none of the ponies had ever had a bridle on. But they never learned if Snopes had had any part in the business, or had received any part of the money.

The next we heard of him was when he appeared one day in a wagon laden with his family and household goods, and with a bill-of-sale for Suratt's half of the restaurant. How he got the bill-of-sale, Suratt never told, and we never learned more than that there was somehow involved in the affair a worthless piece of land which had been a portion of Mrs. Snopes's dowry.

But what the business was even Suratt, a humorous, talkative man who was as ready to laugh at a joke on himself as at one on anyone else, never told. But when he mentioned Snopes's name after that, it was in a tone of savage and sardonic and ungrudging admiration.

"Yes, sir," he said, "Flem Snopes outsmarted me. And the man that can do that, I just wish I was him, with this whole State of Mississippi to graze on."

In the restaurant business Snopes appeared to prosper. That is, he soon eliminated his partner, and presently he was out of the restaurant himself, with a hired manager to run it, and we began to believe in the town that we knew what was the mainspring of his rise and luck. We believed that it was his wife; we accepted without demur the evil which such little lost towns like ours seem to foist even upon men who are of good thinking despite them. She helped in the restaurant at first.

We could see her there behind the wooden counter worn glass-smooth by elbows in their eating generations: young, with the rich coloring of a calendar; a face smooth, unblemished by any thought or by anything else: an appeal immediate and profound and without calculation or shame, with (because of its unblemishment and not its size) something of that vast, serene, impervious beauty of a snowclad virgin mountain flank, listening and not smiling while Major Hoxey, the town's lone rich middle-aged bachelor, graduate of Yale and soon to be mayor of the town, incongruous there among the collarless shirts and the overalls and the grave, country-eating faces, sipped his coffee and talked to her.

Not impregnable: impervious. That was why it did not need gossip when we watched Snopes's career mount beyond the restaurant and become complement with Major Hoxey's in city affairs, until less than six months after Hoxey's inauguration Snopes, who had probably never been close to any piece of machinery save a grindstone until he moved to town, was made superintendent of the municipal power plant. Mrs. Snopes was born one of those women the deeds and fortunes of whose husbands alone are the barometers of their good name; for to do her

justice, there was no other handle for gossip save her husband's rise in Hoxey's administration.

But there was still that intangible thing: partly something in her air, her face; partly what we had already heard about Flem Snopes's methods. Or perhaps what we knew or believed about Snopes was all; perhaps what we thought to be her shadow was merely his shadow falling upon her.

But anyway, when we saw Snopes and Hoxey together we would think of them and of adultery in the same instant, and we would think of the two of them walking and talking in amicable cuckoldry.

Perhaps, as I said, this was the fault of the town. Certainly it was the fault of the town that the idea of their being on amicable terms outraged us more than the idea of the adultery itself. It seemed foreign, decadent, perverted: we could have accepted, if not condoned, the adultery had they only been natural and logical and enemies.

But they were not. Yet neither could they have been called friends. Snopes had no friends; there was no man nor woman among us, not even Hoxey or Mrs. Snopes, who we believed could say, "I know his thought" — least of all, those among whom we saw him now and then, sitting about the stove in the rear of a certain smelly, third-rate grocery, listening and not talking, for an hour or so two or three nights a week. And so we believed that, whatever his wife was, she was not fooling him. It was another woman who did that: a Negro woman, the new young wife of Tom-Tom, the day fireman in the power plant.

Tom-Tom was black: a big bull of a man weighing two hundred pounds and sixty years old and looking about forty. He had been married about a year to his third wife, a young woman whom he kept with the strictness of a Turk in a cabin two miles from town and from the power plant where he spent twelve hours a day with shovel and bar.

One afternoon he had just finished cleaning the fires and he was sitting in the coal-bunker, resting and smoking his pipe, when Snopes, his

superintendent, employer and boss, came in. The fires were clean and the steam was up again, and the safety valve on the middle boiler was blowing off.

Snopes entered: a potty man of no particular age, broad and squat, in a clean though collarless white shirt and a plaid cap. His face was round and smooth, either absolutely impenetrable or absolutely empty. His eyes were the color of stagnant water; his mouth was a tight, lipless seam. Chewing steadily, he looked up at the whistling safety valve.

“How much does that whistle weigh?” he said after a time.

“Must weight ten pound, anyway,” Tom-Tom said.

“Is it solid brass?”

“If it ain’t, I ain’t never seed no brass what is solid,” Tom-Tom said.

Snopes had not once looked at Tom-Tom. He continued to look upward toward the thin, shrill, excruciating sound of the valve. Then he spat, and turned and left the boiler-room.

II

He built his monument slowly. But then, it is always strange to what involved and complex methods a man will resort in order to steal something. It’s as though there were some intangible and invisible social force that mitigates against him, confounding his own shrewdness with his own cunning, distorting in his judgment the very value of the object of his greed, which in all probability, had he but picked it up and carried it openly away, nobody would have remarked or cared.

But then, that would not have suited Snopes, since he apparently had neither the high vision of a confidence man nor the unrecking courage of a brigand.

His vision at first, his aim, was not even that high; it was no higher than that of a casual tramp who pauses in passing to steal three eggs from

beneath a setting hen. Or perhaps he was merely not certain yet that there really was a market for brass.

Because his next move was five months after Harker, the night engineer, came on duty one evening and found the three safety whistles gone and the vents stopped with one-inch steel screw plugs capable of a pressure of a thousand pounds.

“And them three boiler heads you could poke a hole through with a soda straw!” Harker said. “And that damn black night fireman, Turl, that couldn’t even read a clock face, still throwing coal into them! When I looked at the gauge on the first boiler, I never believed I would get to the last boiler in time to even reach the injector.

“So when I finally got it into Turl’s head that that 100 on that dial meant where Turl would not only lose his job, he would lose it so good they wouldn’t even be able to find the job to give it to the next misbegotten that believed that live steam was something you blowed on a window pane in cold weather, I got settled down enough to ask him where them safety valves had gone to.

“‘Mr. Snopes took um off,’ Turl says.

“‘What in the hell for?’

“‘I don’t know. I just telling you what Tom-Tom told me. He say Mr. Snopes say the shut-off float in the water tank ain’t heavy enough. Say that tank start leaking some day, and so he going to fasten them three safety valves on the float and make it heavier.’

“‘You mean—’ I says. That’s as far as I could get: ‘You mean—’

“‘That what Tom-Tom say. I don’t know nothing about it.’

“But they were gone. Up to that night, me and Turl had been catching forty winks or so now and then when we got caught up and things was quiet. But you can bet we never slept none that night. Me and him spent that whole night, time about, on that coal pile, where we could watch them three gauges. And from midnight on, after the load went

off, we never had enough steam in all three of them boilers put together to run a peanut parcher.

And even when I was in bed, at home, I couldn't sleep. Time I shut my eyes I would begin to see a steam gauge about the size of a washtub, with a red needle big as a shovel moving up toward a hundred pounds, and I would wake myself up hollering and sweating."

But even that wore away after a while, and then Turl and Harker were catching their forty winks or so again. Perhaps they decided that Snopes had stolen his three eggs and was done. Perhaps they decided that he had frightened himself with the ease with which he had got the eggs. Because it was five months before the next act took place.

Then one afternoon, with his fires cleaned and steam up again, Tom-Tom, smoking his pipe on the coal pile, saw Snopes enter, carrying in his hand an object which Tom-Tom said later he thought was a mule shoe.

He watched Snopes retire into a dim corner behind the boilers, where there had accumulated a miscellaneous pile of metal junk, all covered with dirt: fittings, valves, rods and bolts and such, and, kneeling there, begin to sort the pieces, touching them one by one with the mule shoe and from time to time removing one piece and tossing it behind him, into the runway.

Tom-Tom watched him try with the magnet every loose piece of metal in the boiler-room, sorting out the iron from the brass: then Snopes ordered Tom-Tom to gather up the segregated pieces of brass and bring them in to his office.

Tom-Tom gathered the pieces into a box. Snopes was waiting in the office. He glanced once into the box, then he spat. "How do you and Turl get along?" he said. Turl, I had better repeat, was the night fireman; a Negro too, though he was saddle-colored where Tom-Tom was black, and in place of Tom-Tom's two hundred pounds Turl, even with his laden shovel, would hardly have tipped a hundred and fifty.

"I tends to my business," Tom-Tom said. "What Turl does wid hisn ain't no trouble of mine."

"That ain't what Turl thinks," Snopes said, chewing, watching Tom-Tom, who looked at Snopes as steadily in turn; looked down at him. "Turl wants me to give him your day shift. He says he's tired firing at night."

"Let him fire here long as I is, and he can have it," Tom-Tom said.

"Turl don't want to wait that long," Snopes said, chewing, watching Tom-Tom's face. Then he told Tom-Tom how Turl was planning to steal some iron from the plant and lay it at Tom-Tom's door and so get Tom-Tom fired. And Tom-Tom stood there, huge, hulking, with his hard round little head.

"That's what he's up to," Snopes said. "So I want you to take this stuff out to your house and hide it where Turl can't find it. And as soon as I get enough evidence on Turl, I'm going to fire him."

Tom-Tom waited until Snopes had finished, blinking his eyes slowly. Then he said immediately: "I knows a better way than that."

"What way?" Snopes said. Tom-Tom didn't answer. He stood, big, humorless, a little surly; quiet; more than a little implacable though heatless. "No, no," Snopes said. "That won't do. You have any trouble with Turl, and I'll fire you both. You do like I say, unless you are tired of your job and want Turl to have it. Are you tired of it?"

"Ain't no man complained about my pressure yet," Tom-Tom said sullenly.

"Then you do like I say. You take that stuff out home with you tonight. Don't let nobody see you; not even your wife. And if you don't want to do it, just say so. I reckon I can get somebody that will do it."

And that's what Tom-Tom did. And he kept his own counsel too, even when afterward, as discarded fittings and such accumulated again, he

would watch Snopes test them one by one with the magnet and sort him out another batch to take out home and hide.

Because he had been firing those boilers for forty years, ever since he was a man. At that time there was but one boiler, and he had got twelve dollars a month for firing it, but now there were three, and he got sixty dollars a month; and now he was sixty, and he owned his little cabin and a little piece of corn, and a mule and a wagon in which he rode into town to church twice each Sunday, with his new young wife beside him and a gold watch and chain.

And Harker didn't know then, either, even though he would watch the junked metal accumulate in the corner and then disappear over night until it came to be his nightly joke to enter with his busy, bustling air and say to Turl: "Well, Turl, I notice that little engine is still running.

There's a right smart of brass in them bushings and wrist pins, but I reckon it's moving too fast to hold that magnet against it." Then more soberly; quite soberly, in fact, without humor or irony at all, since there was some of Suratt in Harker too: "That durn fellow! I reckon he'd sell the boilers too, if he knowed of any way you and Tom-Tom could keep steam up without them."

And Turl didn't answer. Because by that time Turl had his own private temptations and worries, the same as Tom-Tom, of which Harker was also unaware.

In the meantime, the first of the year came and the city was audited.

"They come down here," Harker said, "two of them, in glasses. They went over the books and they poked around everywhere, counting everything in sight and writing it down. Then they went back to the office and they was still there at six o'clock when I come on. It seems that there was something wrong; it seems like there was some old brass parts wrote down in the books, only the brass seemed to be missing or something.

It was on the books all right, and the new valves and things it had been replaced with was there. But be durn if they could find a one of them old pieces except one busted bib that had got mislaid under the work-bench someway or other. It was right strange.

So I went back with them and held the light while they looked again in all the corners, getting a right smart of soot and grease on them, but that brass just naturally seemed to be plumb missing. So they went away.

“And the next morning early they come back. They had the city clerk with them this time and they beat Mr. Snopes down here and so they had to wait till he come in in his check cap and his chew, chewing and looking at them while they told him.

They was right sorry; they hemmed and hawed a right smart, being sorry. But it wasn't nothing else they could do except to come back on him, long as he was the superintendent; and did he want me and Turl and Tom-Tom arrested right now, or would tomorrow do? And him standing there, chewing, with them eyes like two gobs of cup grease on a hunk of raw dough, and them still telling him how sorry they was.

“‘How much does it come to?’ he says.

“‘Three hundred and four dollars and fifty-two cents, Mr. Snopes.’

“‘Is that the full amount?’

“‘We checked our figures twice, Mr. Snopes.’

“‘All right,’ he says. And he reaches down and hauls out the money and pays them the three hundred and four dollars and fifty-two cents in cash, and asks for a receipt.”

III

Then the next Summer came, with Harker still laughing at and enjoying what he saw, and seeing so little, thinking how they were all fooling one another while he looked on, when it was him who was being fooled. For in that Summer the thing ripened, came to a head. Or

maybe Snopes just decided to cut his first hay crop; clean the meadow for reseeding. Because he could never have believed that on the day when he sent for Turl, he had set the capital on his monument and had started to tear the scaffolding down.

It was in the evening; he returned to the plant after supper and sent for Turl; again two of them, white man and Negro, faced one another in the office.

“What’s this about you and Tom-Tom?” Snopes said.

“‘Bout me and which?” Turl said. “If Tom-Tom depending on me for his trouble, he sho’ done quit being a fireman and turned waiter. It take two folks to have trouble, and Tom-Tom ain’t but one, I don’t care how big he is.”

Snopes watched Turl. “Tom-Tom thinks you want to fire the day shift.”

Turl looked down. He looked briefly at Snopes’s face; at the still eyes, the slow unceasing jaw, and down again. “I can handle as much coal as Tom-Tom,” he said.

Snopes watched him: the smooth, brown, aside-looking face. “Tom-Tom knows that, too. He knows he’s getting old. But he knows there ain’t nobody else can crowd him but you.” Then, watching Turl’s face, Snopes told him how for two years Tom-Tom had been stealing brass from the plant, in order to lay it on Turl and get him fired; how only that day Tom-Tom had told him that Turl was the thief.

Turl looked up. “That’s a lie,” he said. “Can’t no nigger accuse me of stealing when I ain’t, I don’t care how big he is.”

“Sho’,” Snopes said. “So the thing to do is to get that brass back.”

“If Tom-Tom got it, I reckon Mr. Buck Conner the man to get it back,” Turl said. Buck Conner was the city marshal.

“Then you’ll go to jail, sure enough. Tom-Tom’ll say he didn’t know it was there. You’ll be the only one that knew it was there. So what you

reckon Buck Conner'll think? You'll be the one that knew where it was hid at, and Buck Conner'll know that even a fool has got more sense than to steal something and hide it in his corn-crib.

The only thing you can do is to get that brass back. Go out there in the daytime, while Tom-Tom is at work, and get it and bring it to me and I'll put it away somewhere to use as evidence on Tom-Tom. Unless maybe you don't want that day shift. Just say so, if you don't. I reckon I can find somebody else that does."

And Turl agreed to do that. He hadn't fired any boilers for forty years. He hadn't done anything at all for as long as forty years, since he was just past thirty. But even if he were a hundred, no man could ever accuse him of having done anything that would aggregate forty years net.

"Unless Turl's night prowling might add up that much," Harker said. "If Turl ever gets married, he wan't need no front door a-tall; he wouldn't know what it was for. If he couldn't come tom-cattin in through the back window, he wouldn't know what he come after. Would you, Turl?"

So from here on it is simple enough, since a man's mistakes, like his successes, usually are simple. Particularly the success. Perhaps that's why it is so often missed: it was just over-looked.

"His mistake was in picking out Turl to pull his chestnuts," Harker said. "But even Turl wasn't as bad as the second mistake he made at the same time without knowing it. And that was, when he forgot about that high yellow wife of Tom-Tom's.

When I found out how he had picked out Turl, out of all the niggers in Jefferson, that's prowled at least once (or tried to) every gal within ten miles of town, to go out to Tom-Tom's house knowing all the time how Tom-Tom would be down here wrastling coal until seven o'clock and then have two miles to walk home, and expect Turl to spend his time out there hunting for anything that ain't hid in Tom-Tom's bed, and when I would think about Tom-Tom down here, wrastling them boilers

with this same amical cuckoldry like the fellow said about Mr. Snopes and Colonel Hoxey, stealing brass so he can keep Turl from getting his job away from him, and Turl out yonder tending to Tom-Tom's home business at the same time, sometimes I think I will die.

"It was bound to not last. The question was, which would happen first: if Tom-Tom would catch Turl, or if Mr. Snopes would catch Turl, or if I would bust a blood vessel laughing some night. Well, it was Turl. He seemed to be having too much trouble locating that brass; he had been hunting it for three weeks already, coming in a little late almost every night now, with Tom-Tom having to wait until Turl come before he could start home.

Maybe that was it. Or maybe Mr. Snopes was out there himself one day, hid in the bushes too, waiting for it to get along toward dark (it was already April then); him on one side of Tom-Tom's house and Turl creeping up through the corn patch on the other. Anyway, he come back down here one night and he was waiting when Turl come in about a half hour late, as usual, and Tom-Tom all ready to go home soon as Turl got here. Mr. Snopes sent for Turl and asked him if he had found it.

"'Find it when?' Turl says.

"'While you was out there hunting for it about dusk tonight,' Mr. Snopes says. And there's Turl, wondering just how much Mr. Snopes knows, and if he can risk saying how he has been at home in bed since six-thirty this morning, or maybe up to Mottstown on business. 'Maybe you are still looking for it in the wrong place,' Mr. Snopes says, watching Turl, and Turl not looking at Mr. Snopes except maybe now and then. 'If Tom-Tom had hid that iron in his bed, you ought to done found it three weeks ago,' Mr. Snopes says. 'So suppose you look in that corn-crib where I told you to look.'

"So Turl went out to look one more time. But he couldn't seem to find it in the corn-crib neither. Leastways, that's what he told Mr. Snopes when Mr. Snopes finally run him down back here about nine o'clock one night.

Turl was on a kind of a spot, you might say. He would have to wait until along toward dark to go up to the house, and already Tom-Tom had been grumbling some about how Turl was getting later and later about coming to work every night. And once he found that brass, he would have to begin getting back to the plant at seven o'clock, and the days getting longer all the time.

“So Turl goes back to give one more go-round for that brass evidence. But still he can't find it. He must have looked under every shuck and thread in Tom-Tom's bed tick, but without no more success than them two audits had. He just couldn't seem to find that evidence nohow.

So then Mr. Snopes says he will give Turl one more chance, and if he don't find that evidence this time, Mr. Snopes is going to tell Tom-Tom how there is a strange tom-cat on his back fence. And whenever a nigger husband in Jefferson hears that, he finds out where Turl is at before he even sharpens his razor: ain't that so, Turl?

“So the next evening Turl goes out to look again. To do or die this time. He comes creeping up out of the woods about sundown, the best time of day for brass hunting, specially as there is a moon that night.

So here he comes, creeping up through the corn patch to the back porch, where the cot is, and pretty soon he can make out somebody in a white nightgown laying on the cot. But Turl don't rise up and walk even then; that ain't Turl's way. Turl plays by the rules.

He creeps up — it's dust-dark by then, and the moon beginning to shine a little — all careful and quiet, and tom-cats up on to the back porch and stoops over the cot and puts his hand on nekkid meat and says, ‘Honeybunch, papa's done arrived.’”

IV

In the very quiet hearing of it I seemed to partake for the instant of Turl's horrid surprise. Because it was Tom-Tom on the cot; Tom-Tom,

whom Turl believed to be at the moment two miles away, waiting for Turl to come and take over from him at the power plant.

The night before, on his return home Tom-Tom had brought with him a last year's watermelon which the local butcher had kept all Winter in cold storage and which he had given to Tom-Tom, being himself afraid to eat it, and a pint of whiskey. Tom-Tom and his wife consumed them and went to bed, where an hour later she waked Tom-Tom by her screaming. She was violently ill, and she was afraid that she was dying. She was too frightened to let Tom-Tom go for help, and while he dosed her as he could, she confessed to him about herself and Turl.

As soon as she told it she became easier and went off to sleep, either before she had time to realize the enormity of what she had done, or while she was still too occupied in being alive to care.

But Tom-Tom wasn't. The next morning, after he convinced himself that she was all right, he reminded her of it. She wept some, and tried to retract; she ran the gamut of tears to anger, through denial and cajolery back to tears again. But she had Tom-Tom's face to look at all the while, and so after a time she hushed and she just lay there, watching him as he went methodically about cooking breakfast, her own and his, saying no word, apparently oblivious of even her presence. Then he fed her, made her eat, with the same detachment, implacable and without heat.

She was waiting for him to leave for work; she was doubtless then and had been all the while inventing and discarding practical expedients; so busy that it was mid-morning before she realized that he had no intention of going to town, though she did not know that he had arranged to get word to the plant by seven that morning that he would take the day off.

So she lay there in the bed, quite quiet, her eyes a little wide, still as an animal, while he cooked their dinner and fed her again with that clumsy and implacable care. And just before sundown he locked her in the bedroom, she still saying no word, not asking him what he was about,

just watching with her quiet, still eyes the door until it closed and the key clicked.

Then Tom-Tom put on one of her nightgowns and with a naked butcher knife beside him, he lay down on the cot on the back porch. And there he was, without having moved for almost an hour, when Turl crept on to the porch and touched him.

In the purely reflex action of Turl's turning to flee, Tom-Tom rose, clutching the knife, and sprang at Turl. He leaped astride of Turl's neck and shoulders; his weight was the impetus which sent Turl off the porch, already running when his feet touched earth, carrying with him on the retina of his fear a single dreadful glint of moonlight on the blade of the lifted knife, as he crossed the back lot and, with Tom-Tom on his back, entered the trees — the two of them a strange and furious beast with two heads and a single pair of legs like an inverted centaur speeding phantomlike just ahead of the boardlike streaming of Tom-Tom's shirt-tail and just beneath the silver glint of the lifted knife, through the moony April woods.

"Tom-Tom big buck man," Turl said. "Make three of me. But I sho' toted him. And whenever I would see the moon glint that butcher knife, I could a picked up two more like him without even stopping." He said that at first he just ran; it was only when he found himself among the trees that it occurred to him that his only hope was to rake Tom-Tom off against a tree trunk. "But he helt on so tight with that one arm that whenever I busted him into a tree, I had to bust into the tree too. And then we'd bounce off and I'd catch that moonglint in that nekkid knife, and I could a picked up two more Tom-Toms.

"'Bout that time was when Tom-Tom started squalling. He was holding on with both hands then, so I knowed that I had done outrun that butcher knife anyhow. But I was good started then; my feets never paid Tom-Tom no more mind when he started squalling to stop and let him off than they did me.

Then Tom-Tom grabbed my head with both hands and begun to haul it around like I was a runaway bareback mule, and then I seed the ditch. It was about forty foot deep and it looked a solid mile across, but it was too late then. My feets never even slowed up. They run far as from here to that door yonder out into nekkid air before us even begun to fall. And they was still clawing that moonlight when me and Tom-Tom hit the bottom.”

The first thing I wanted to know was, what Tom-Tom used in lieu of the butcher knife which he had dropped. He didn't use anything. He and Turl just sat there in the ditch and talked. Because there is a sanctuary beyond despair for any beast which has dared all, which even its mortal enemy respects. Or maybe it was just nigger nature.

Anyway, it was perfectly plain to both of them as they sat there, perhaps panting a little while they talked, that Tom-Tom's home had been outraged, not by Turl, but by Flem Snopes; that Turl's life and limbs had been endangered, not by Tom-Tom, but by Flem Snopes.

That was so plain to them that they sat there quietly in the ditch, getting their wind back, talking a little without heat like two acquaintances meeting in the street; so plain that they made their concerted plan without recourse to definite words on the subject. They merely compared notes; perhaps they laughed a little at themselves.

Then they climbed out of the ditch and returned to Tom-Tom's cabin, where Tom-Tom unlocked his wife, and he and Turl sat before the hearth while the woman prepared a meal for them, which they ate as quietly but without loss of time: the two grave, scratched faces leaned to the same lamp, above the same dishes, while in the background the woman watched them, shadowy and covert and unspeaking.

Tom-Tom took her to the barn with them to help load the brass into the wagon, where Turl spoke for the first time since they climbed together out of the ditch in Harker's "amical" cuckoldry: "Great God, man, how long did it take you to tote all this stuff out here?"

“Not long,” Tom-Tom said. “Been working at it ‘bout two years.” It required four trips in the wagon; it was daybreak when the last load was disposed of, and the sun was rising when Turl entered the power plant, eleven hours late.

“Where in hell you been?” Harker said.

Turl glanced up at the three gauges, his scratched face wearing an expression of monkeylike gravity. “Been helping a friend of mine.”

“Helping what friend of yours?”

“Boy named Turl,” Turl said, squinting at the gauges.

V

“And that was all he said,” Harker said. “And me looking at that scratched face of hisn, and at the mate of it that Tom-Tom brought in at six o’clock. But Turl didn’t tell me then. And I ain’t the only one he never told nothing that morning. Because Mr. Snopes got there before six o’clock, before Turl had got away. He sent for Turl and asked him if he had found that brass and Turl told him no.

“‘Why didn’t you find it?’ Mr. Snopes said.

“Turl didn’t look away, this time. ‘Because it ain’t no brass there. That’s the main reason.’

“‘How do you know there ain’t?’ Mr. Snopes says.

“And Turl looked him straight in them eyes. ‘Because Tom-Tom say it ain’t,’ Turl says.

“Maybe he ought to knew then. But a man will go to any length to fool himself; he will tell himself stuff and believe it that he would be downright mad with a fellow he had done trimmed for believing it. So now he sends for Tom-Tom.

“‘I ain’t got no brass,’ Tom-Tom says.

“‘Where is it, then?’

“‘It’s where you said you wanted it.’

“‘Where I said I wanted it when?’

“When you took them whistle valves off the boilers,’ Tom-Tom says.

“That’s what whipped him. He didn’t dare to fire neither one of them, you see. And so he’d have to see one of them there all day long every day, and know that the other one was there all night long every night; he would have to know that during every twenty-four hours that passed, one or the other of them was there, getting paid — paid, mind you, by the hour — for living half their lives right there under that tank with them four loads of brass in it that now belonged to him by right of purchase and which he couldn’t claim now because now he had done waited too late.

“It sure was too late. But next New Year it got later. Come New Year’s and the town got audited again; again them two spectacled fellows come down here and checked the books and went away and come back with not only the city clerk, but with Buck Conner too, with a warrant for Turl and Tom-Tom. And there they were, hemming and hawing, being sorry again, pushing one another in front to talk.

It seems how they had made a mistake two years ago, and instead of three-hundred-and-four-fifty-two of this here evaporating brass, there was five-hundred-and-twenty-five dollars worth, leaving a net of over two-hundred-and-twenty dollars. And there was Buck Conner with the warrant, all ready to arrest Turl and Tom-Tom when he give the word, and it so happening that Turl and Tom-Tom was both in the boiler-room at that moment, changing shifts.

“So Snopes paid them. Dug down and hauled out the money and paid them the two-hundred-and-twenty and got his receipt. And about two hours later I happened to pass through the office. At first I didn’t see nobody, because the light was off. So I thought maybe the bulb was burned out, seeing as that light burned all the time.

But it wasn’t burned out; it was just turned out. Only before I turned it on I saw him, setting there. So I didn’t turn the light on. I just went on out and left him setting there, setting right still.”

VI

In those days Snopes lived in a new little bungalow on the edge of town, and, when shortly after that New Year he resigned from the power plant, as the weather warmed into Spring they would see him quite often in his tiny grassless and treeless side yard.

It was a locality of such other hopeless little houses inhabited half by Negroes, and washed clay gullies and ditches filled with scrapped automobiles and tin cans, and the prospect was not pleasing. Yet he spent quite a lot of his time there, sitting on the steps, not doing anything.

And so they wondered what he could be looking at there, since there was nothing to see above the massed trees which shaded the town itself except the low smudge of the power plant, and the water tank. And it too was condemned now, for the water had suddenly gone bad two years ago and the town now had a new reservoir underground.

But the tank was a stout one and the water was still good to wash the streets with, and so the town let it stand, refusing at one time a quite liberal though anonymous offer to purchase and remove it.

So they wondered what Snopes was looking at. They didn't know that he was contemplating his monument: that shaft taller than anything in sight and filled with transient and symbolical liquid that was not even fit to drink, but which, for the very reason of its impermanence, was more enduring through its fluidity and blind renewal than the brass which poisoned it, than columns of basalt or of lead.

The end

Dry September, William Faulkner

Dry September

I

THROUGH THE BLOODY September twilight, aftermath of sixty-two rainless days, it had gone like a fire in dry grass — the rumor, the story, whatever it was. Something about Miss Minnie Cooper and a Negro.

Attacked, insulted, frightened: none of them, gathered in the barber shop on that Saturday evening where the ceiling fan stirred, without freshening it, the vitiated air, sending back upon them, in recurrent surges of stale pomade and lotion, their own stale breath and odors, knew exactly what had happened.

“Except it wasn’t Will Mayes,” a barber said. He was a man of middle age; a thin, sand-colored man with a mild face, who was shaving a client. “I know Will Mayes. He’s a good nigger. And I know Miss Minnie Cooper, too.”

“What do you know about her?” a second barber said.

“Who is she?” the client said. “A young girl?”

“No,” the barber said. “She’s about forty, I reckon. She aint married. That’s why I dont believe—”

“Believe, hell!” a hulking youth in a sweat-stained silk shirt said. “Wont you take a white woman’s word before a nigger’s?”

“I dont believe Will Mayes did it,” the barber said. “I know Will Mayes.”

“Maybe you know who did it, then. Maybe you already got him out of town, you damn niggerlover.”

“I dont believe anybody did anything. I dont believe anything happened. I leave it to you fellows if them ladies that get old without getting married dont have notions that a man cant—”

“Then you are a hell of a white man,” the client said. He moved under the cloth. The youth had sprung to his feet.

“You dont?” he said. “Do you accuse a white woman of lying?”

The barber held the razor poised above the half-risen client. He did not look around.

"It's this durn weather," another said. "It's enough to make a man do anything. Even to her."

Nobody laughed. The barber said in his mild, stubborn tone: "I aint accusing nobody of nothing. I just know and you fellows know how a woman that never—"

"You damn niggerlover!" the youth said.

"Shut up, Butch," another said. "We'll get the facts in plenty of time to act."

"Who is? Who's getting them?" the youth said. "Facts, hell! I—"

"You're a fine white man," the client said. "Aint you?" In his frothy beard he looked like a desert rat in the moving pictures. "You tell them, Jack," he said to the youth. "If there aint any white men in this town, you can count on me, even if I aint only a drummer and a stranger."

"That's right, boys," the barber said. "Find out the truth first. I know Will Mayes."

"Well, by God!" the youth shouted. "To think that a white man in this town—"

"Shut up, Butch," the second speaker said. "We got plenty of time."

The client sat up. He looked at the speaker. "Do you claim that anything excuses a nigger attacking a white woman? Do you mean to tell me you are a white man and you'll stand for it? You better go back North where you came from. The South dont want your kind here."

"North what?" the second said. "I was born and raised in this town."

"Well, by God!" the youth said. He looked about with a strained, baffled gaze, as if he was trying to remember what it was he wanted to say or to do. He drew his sleeve across his sweating face. "Damn if I'm going to let a white woman—"

"You tell them, Jack," the drummer said. "By God, if they—"

The screen door crashed open. A man stood in the floor, his feet apart and his heavy-set body poised easily. His white shirt was open at the throat; he wore a felt hat. His hot, bold glance swept the group. His name was McLendon. He had commanded troops at the front in France and had been decorated for valor.

“Well,” he said, “are you going to sit there and let a black son rape a white woman on the streets of Jefferson?”

Butch sprang up again. The silk of his shirt clung flat to his heavy shoulders. At each armpit was a dark halfmoon. “That’s what I been telling them! That’s what I—”

“Did it really happen?” a third said. “This aint the first man scare she ever had, like Hawkshaw says. Wasn’t there something about a man on the kitchen roof, watching her undress, about a year ago?”

“What?” the client said. “What’s that?” The barber had been slowly forcing him back into the chair; he arrested himself reclining, his head lifted, the barber still pressing him down.

McLendon whirled on the third speaker. “Happen? What the hell difference does it make? Are you going to let the black sons get away with it until one really does it?”

“That’s what I’m telling them!” Butch shouted. He cursed, long and steady, pointless.

“Here, here,” a fourth said. “Not so loud. Dont talk so loud.”

“Sure,” McLendon said; “no talking necessary at all. I’ve done my talking. Who’s with me?” He poised on the balls of his feet, roving his gaze.

The barber held the drummer’s face down, the razor poised. “Find out the facts first, boys. I know Willy Mayes. It wasn’t him. Let’s get the sheriff and do this thing right.”

McLendon whirled upon him his furious, rigid face. The barber did not look away. They looked like men of different races. The other barbers had ceased also above their prone clients. “You mean to tell me,”

McLendon said, "that you'd take a nigger's word before a white woman's? Why, you damn niggerloving—"

The third speaker rose and grasped McLendon's arm; he too had been a soldier. "Now, now. Let's figure this thing out. Who knows anything about what really happened?"

"Figure out hell!" McLendon jerked his arm free. "All that're with me get up from there. The ones that aint—" He roved his gaze, dragging his sleeve across his face.

Three men rose. The drummer in the chair sat up. "Here," he said, jerking at the cloth about his neck; "get this rag off me. I'm with him. I dont live here, but by God, if our mothers and wives and sisters—" He smeared the cloth over his face and flung it to the floor. McLendon stood in the floor and cursed the others. Another rose and moved toward him. The remainder sat uncomfortable, not looking at one another, then one by one they rose and joined him.

The barber picked the cloth from the floor. He began to fold it neatly. "Boys, dont do that. Will Mayes never done it. I know."

"Come on," McLendon said. He whirled. From his hip pocket protruded the butt of a heavy automatic pistol. They went out. The screen door crashed behind them reverberant in the dead air.

The barber wiped the razor carefully and swiftly, and put it away, and ran to the rear, and took his hat from the wall.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," he said to the other barbers. "I cant let—" He went out, running. The two other barbers followed him to the door and caught it on the rebound, leaning out and looking up the street after him. The air was flat and dead. It had a metallic taste at the base of the tongue.

"What can he do?" the first said. The second one was saying "Jees Christ, Jees Christ" under his breath. "I'd just as lief be Will Mayes as Hawk, if he gets McLendon riled."

"Jees Christ, Jees Christ," the second whispered.

“You reckon he really done it to her?” the first said.

II

She was thirty-eight or thirty-nine. She lived in a small frame house with her invalid mother and a thin, sallow, unflagging aunt, where each morning between ten and eleven she would appear on the porch in a lace-trimmed boudoir cap, to sit swinging in the porch swing until noon. After dinner she lay down for a while, until the afternoon began to cool.

Then, in one of the three or four new voile dresses which she had each summer, she would go downtown to spend the afternoon in the stores with the other ladies, where they would handle the goods and haggle over the prices in cold, immediate voices, without any intention of buying.

She was of comfortable people — not the best in Jefferson, but good people enough — and she was still on the slender side of ordinary looking, with a bright, faintly haggard manner and dress. When she was young she had had a slender, nervous body and a sort of hard vivacity which had enabled her for a time to ride upon the crest of the town’s social life as exemplified by the high school party and church social period of her contemporaries while still children enough to be unclassconscious.

She was the last to realize that she was losing ground; that those among whom she had been a little brighter and louder flame than any other were beginning to learn the pleasure of snobbery — male — and retaliation — female. That was when her face began to wear that bright, haggard look.

She still carried it to parties on shadowy porticoes and summer lawns, like a mask or a flag, with that bafflement of furious repudiation of truth in her eyes. One evening at a party she heard a boy and two girls, all schoolmates, talking. She never accepted another invitation.

She watched the girls with whom she had grown up as they married and got homes and children, but no man ever called on her steadily until the children of the other girls had been calling her “aunty” for several years, the while their mothers told them in bright voices about how popular Aunt Minnie had been as a girl. Then the town began to see her driving on Sunday afternoons with the cashier in the bank.

He was a widower of about forty — a high-colored man, smelling always faintly of the barber shop or of whisky. He owned the first automobile in town, a red runabout; Minnie had the first motoring bonnet and veil the town ever saw. Then the town began to say: “Poor Minnie.” “But she is old enough to take care of herself,” others said. That was when she began to ask her old schoolmates that their children call her “cousin” instead of “aunty.”

It was twelve years now since she had been relegated into adultery by public opinion, and eight years since the cashier had gone to a Memphis bank, returning for one day each Christmas, which he spent at an annual bachelors’ party at a hunting club on the river.

From behind their curtains the neighbors would see the party pass, and during the over-the-way Christmas day visiting they would tell her about him, about how well he looked, and how they heard that he was prospering in the city, watching with bright, secret eyes her haggard, bright face. Usually by that hour there would be the scent of whisky on her breath. It was supplied her by a youth, a clerk at the soda fountain: “Sure; I buy it for the old gal. I reckon she’s entitled to a little fun.”

Her mother kept to her room altogether now; the gaunt aunt ran the house. Against that background Minnie’s bright dresses, her idle and empty days, had a quality of furious unreality. She went out in the evenings only with women now, neighbors, to the moving pictures.

Each afternoon she dressed in one of the new dresses and went downtown alone, where her young “cousins” were already strolling in the late afternoons with their delicate, silken heads and thin, awkward arms and conscious hips, clinging to one another or shrieking and

giggling with paired boys in the soda fountain when she passed and went on along the serried store fronts, in the doors of which the sitting and lounging men did not even follow her with their eyes any more.

III

The barber went swiftly up the street where the sparse lights, insect-swirled, glared in rigid and violent suspension in the lifeless air. The day had died in a pall of dust; above the darkened square, shrouded by the spent dust, the sky was as clear as the inside of a brass bell. Below the east was a rumor of the twice-waxed moon.

When he overtook them McLendon and three others were getting into a car parked in an alley. McLendon stooped his thick head, peering out beneath the top. "Changed your mind, did you?" he said. "Damn good thing; by God, tomorrow when this town hears about how you talked tonight—"

"Now, now," the other ex-soldier said. "Hawkshaw's all right. Come on, Hawk; jump in."

"Will Mayes never done it, boys," the barber said. "If anybody done it. Why, you all know well as I do there aint any town where they got better niggers than us. And you know how a lady will kind of think things about men when there aint any reason to, and Miss Minnie anyway—"

"Sure, sure," the soldier said. "We're just going to talk to him a little; that's all."

"Talk hell!" Butch said. "When we're through with the—"

"Shut up, for God's sake!" the soldier said. "Do you want everybody in town—"

"Tell them, by God!" McLendon said. "Tell every one of the sons that'll let a white woman—"

"Let's go; let's go: here's the other car." The second car slid squealing out of a cloud of dust at the alley mouth. McLendon started his car and

took the lead. Dust lay like fog in the street. The street lights hung nimbused as in water. They drove on out of town.

A rutted lane turned at right angles. Dust hung above it too, and above all the land. The dark bulk of the ice plant, where the Negro Mayes was night watchman, rose against the sky. "Better stop here, hadn't we?" the soldier said. McLendon did not reply. He hurled the car up and slammed to a stop, the headlights glaring on the blank wall.

"Listen here, boys," the barber said; "if he's here, dont that prove he never done it? Dont it? If it was him, he would run. Dont you see he would?" The second car came up and stopped. McLendon got down; Butch sprang down beside him. "Listen, boys," the barber said.

"Cut the lights off!" McLendon said. The breathless dark rushed down. There was no sound in it save their lungs as they sought air in the parched dust in which for two months they had lived; then the diminishing crunch of McLendon's and Butch's feet, and a moment later McLendon's voice:

"Will! . . . Will!"

Below the east the wan hemorrhage of the moon increased. It heaved above the ridge, silvering the air, the dust, so that they seemed to breathe, live, in a bowl of molten lead. There was no sound of nightbird nor insect, no sound save their breathing and a faint ticking of contracting metal about the cars. Where their bodies touched one another they seemed to sweat dryly, for no more moisture came. "Christ!" a voice said; "let's get out of here."

But they didn't move until vague noises began to grow out of the darkness ahead; then they got out and waited tensely in the breathless dark. There was another sound: a blow, a hissing expulsion of breath and McLendon cursing in undertone. They stood a moment longer, then they ran forward. They ran in a stumbling clump, as though they were fleeing something. "Kill him, kill the son," a voice whispered. McLendon flung them back.

“Not here,” he said. “Get him into the car.” “Kill him, kill the black son!” the voice murmured. They dragged the Negro to the car. The barber had waited beside the car. He could feel himself sweating and he knew he was going to be sick at the stomach.

“What is it, captains?” the Negro said. “I aint done nothing. ‘Fore God, Mr John.” Someone produced handcuffs. They worked busily about the Negro as though he were a post, quiet, intent, getting in one another’s way. He submitted to the handcuffs, looking swiftly and constantly from dim face to dim face. “Who’s here, captains?” he said, leaning to peer into the faces until they could feel his breath and smell his sweaty reek. He spoke a name or two. “What you all say I done, Mr John?”

McLendon jerked the car door open. “Get in!” he said.

The Negro did not move. “What you all going to do with me, Mr John? I aint done nothing. White folks, captains, I aint done nothing: I swear ‘fore God.” He called another name.

“Get in!” McLendon said. He struck the Negro. The others expelled their breath in a dry hissing and struck him with random blows and he whirled and cursed them, and swept his manacled hands across their faces and slashed the barber upon the mouth, and the barber struck him also. “Get him in there,” McLendon said. They pushed at him. He ceased struggling and got in and sat quietly as the others took their places.

He sat between the barber and the soldier, drawing his limbs in so as not to touch them, his eyes going swiftly and constantly from face to face. Butch clung to the running board. The car moved on. The barber nursed his mouth with his handkerchief.

“What’s the matter, Hawk?” the soldier said.

“Nothing,” the barber said. They regained the highroad and turned away from town. The second car dropped back out of the dust. They went on, gaining speed; the final fringe of houses dropped behind.

“Goddamn, he stinks!” the soldier said.

“We’ll fix that,” the drummer in front beside McLendon said. On the running board Butch cursed into the hot rush of air. The barber leaned suddenly forward and touched McLendon’s arm.

“Let me out, John,” he said.

“Jump out, niggerlover,” McLendon said without turning his head. He drove swiftly. Behind them the sourceless lights of the second car glared in the dust. Presently McLendon turned into a narrow road. It was rutted with disuse.

It led back to an abandoned brick kiln — a series of reddish mounds and weed- and vine-choked vats without bottom. It had been used for pasture once, until one day the owner missed one of his mules. Although he prodded carefully in the vats with a long pole, he could not even find the bottom of them.

“John,” the barber said.

“Jump out, then,” McLendon said, hurling the car along the ruts. Beside the barber the Negro spoke:

“Mr Henry.”

The barber sat forward. The narrow tunnel of the road rushed up and past. Their motion was like an extinct furnace blast: cooler, but utterly dead. The car bounded from rut to rut.

“Mr Henry,” the Negro said.

The barber began to tug furiously at the door. “Look out, there!” the soldier said, but the barber had already kicked the door open and swung onto the running board. The soldier leaned across the Negro and grasped at him, but he had already jumped. The car went on without checking speed.

The impetus hurled him crashing through dust-sheathed weeds, into the ditch. Dust puffed about him, and in a thin, vicious crackling of sapless stems he lay choking and retching until the second car passed and died away.

Then he rose and limped on until he reached the highroad and turned toward town, brushing at his clothes with his hands. The moon was higher, riding high and clear of the dust at last, and after a while the town began to glare beneath the dust. He went on, limping.

Presently he heard cars and the glow of them grew in the dust behind him and he left the road and crouched again in the weeds until they passed. McLendon's car came last now. There were four people in it and Butch was not on the running board.

They went on; the dust swallowed them; the glare and the sound died away. The dust of them hung for a while, but soon the eternal dust absorbed it again. The barber climbed back onto the road and limped on toward town.

IV

As she dressed for supper on that Saturday evening, her own flesh felt like fever. Her hands trembled among the hooks and eyes, and her eyes had a feverish look, and her hair swirled crisp and crackling under the comb. While she was still dressing the friends called for her and sat while she donned her sheerest underthings and stockings and a new voile dress. "Do you feel strong enough to go out?" they said, their eyes bright too, with a dark glitter. "When you have had time to get over the shock, you must tell us what happened. What he said and did; everything."

In the leafed darkness, as they walked toward the square, she began to breathe deeply, something like a swimmer preparing to dive, until she ceased trembling, the four of them walking slowly because of the terrible heat and out of solicitude for her. But as they neared the square she began to tremble again, walking with her head up, her hands clenched at her sides, their voices about her murmurous, also with that feverish, glittering quality of their eyes.

They entered the square, she in the center of the group, fragile in her fresh dress. She was trembling worse. She walked slower and slower, as children eat ice cream, her head up and her eyes bright in the haggard banner of her face, passing the hotel and the coatless drummers in chairs along the curb looking around at her: "That's the one: see? The one in pink in the middle." "Is that her? What did they do with the nigger? Did they — ?" "Sure. He's all right." "All right, is he?" "Sure.

He went on a little trip." Then the drug store, where even the young men lounging in the doorway tipped their hats and followed with their eyes the motion of her hips and legs when she passed.

They went on, passing the lifted hats of the gentlemen, the suddenly ceased voices, deferent, protective. "Do you see?" the friends said. Their voices sounded like long, hovering sighs of hissing exultation. "There's not a Negro on the square. Not one."

They reached the picture show. It was like a miniature fairyland with its lighted lobby and colored lithographs of life caught in its terrible and beautiful mutations. Her lips began to tingle. In the dark, when the picture began, it would be all right; she could hold back the laughing so it would not waste away so fast and so soon. So she hurried on before the turning faces, the undertones of low astonishment, and they took their accustomed places where she could see the aisle against the silver glare and the young men and girls coming in two and two against it.

The lights flicked away; the screen glowed silver, and soon life began to unfold, beautiful and passionate and sad, while still the young men and girls entered, scented and sibilant in the half dark, their paired backs in silhouette delicate and sleek, their slim, quick bodies awkward, divinely young, while beyond them the silver dream accumulated, inevitably on and on.

She began to laugh. In trying to suppress it, it made more noise than ever; heads began to turn. Still laughing, her friends raised her and led her out, and she stood at the curb, laughing on a high, sustained note, until the taxi came up and they helped her in.

They removed the pink voile and the sheer underthings and the stockings, and put her to bed, and cracked ice for her temples, and sent for the doctor. He was hard to locate, so they ministered to her with hushed ejaculations, renewing the ice and fanning her. While the ice was fresh and cold she stopped laughing and lay still for a time, moaning only a little. But soon the laughing welled again and her voice rose screaming.

“Shhhhhhhhhhh! Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!” they said, freshening the icepack, smoothing her hair, examining it for gray; “poor girl!” Then to one another: “Do you suppose anything really happened?” their eyes darkly aglitter, secret and passionate. “Shhhhhhhhhhh! Poor girl! Poor Minnie!”

V

It was midnight when McLendon drove up to his neat new house. It was trim and fresh as a birdcage and almost as small, with its clean, green-and-white paint. He locked the car and mounted the porch and entered. His wife rose from a chair beside the reading lamp. McLendon stopped in the floor and stared at her until she looked down.

“Look at that clock,” he said, lifting his arm, pointing. She stood before him, her face lowered, a magazine in her hands. Her face was pale, strained, and weary-looking. “Haven’t I told you about sitting up like this, waiting to see when I come in?”

“John,” she said. She laid the magazine down. Poised on the balls of his feet, he glared at her with his hot eyes, his sweating face.

“Didn’t I tell you?” He went toward her. She looked up then. He caught her shoulder. She stood passive, looking at him.

“Don’t, John. I couldn’t sleep . . . The heat; something. Please, John. You’re hurting me.”

“Didn’t I tell you?” He released her and half struck, half flung her across the chair, and she lay there and watched him quietly as he left the room.

He went on through the house, ripping off his shirt, and on the dark, screened porch at the rear he stood and mopped his head and shoulders with the shirt and flung it away. He took the pistol from his hip and laid it on the table beside the bed, and sat on the bed and removed his shoes, and rose and slipped his trousers off.

He was sweating again already, and he stooped and hunted furiously for the shirt. At last he found it and wiped his body again, and, with his body pressed against the dusty screen, he stood panting. There was no movement, no sound, not even an insect. The dark world seemed to lie stricken beneath the cold moon and the lidless stars.

The End

Death Drag, William Faulkner

Death Drag

THE AIRPLANE APPEARED over town with almost the abruptness of an apparition. It was travelling fast; almost before we knew it was there it was already at the top of a loop; still over the square, in violation of both city and government ordinance. It was not a good loop either, performed viciously and slovenly and at top speed, as though the pilot were either a very nervous man or in a hurry, or (and this queerly: there is in our town an ex-army aviator.

He was coming out of the post office when the airplane appeared going south; he watched the hurried and ungraceful loop and he made the

comment) as though the pilot were trying to make the minimum of some specified manoeuvre in order to save gasoline.

The airplane came over the loop with one wing down, as though about to make an Immelmann turn. Then it did a half roll, the loop three-quarters complete, and without any break in the whine of the full-throttled engine and still at top speed and with that apparition-like suddenness, it disappeared eastward toward our airport. When the first small boys reached the field, the airplane was on the ground, drawn up into a fence corner at the end of the field.

It was motionless and empty. There was no one in sight at all. Resting there, empty and dead, patched and shabby and painted awkwardly with a single thin coat of dead black, it gave again that illusion of ghostliness, as though it might have flown there and made that loop and landed by itself.

Our field is still in an embryonic state. Our town is built upon hills, and the field, once a cotton field, is composed of forty acres of ridge and gully, upon which, by means of grading and filling, we managed to build an X-shaped runway into the prevailing winds. The runways are long enough in themselves, but the field, like our town, is controlled by men who were of middle age when younger men first began to fly, and so the clearance is not always good.

On one side is a grove of trees which the owner will not permit to be felled; on another is the barnyard of a farm: sheds and houses, a long barn with a roof of rotting shingles, a big haycock. The airplane had come to rest in the fence corner near the barn. The small boys and a Negro or two and a white man, descended from a halted wagon in the road, were standing quietly about it when two men in helmets and lifted goggles emerged suddenly around the corner of the barn.

One was tall, in a dirty coverall. The other was quite short, in breeches and puttees and a soiled, brightly patterned overcoat which looked as if he had got wet in it and it had shrunk on him. He walked with a decided limp.

They had stopped at the corner of the barn. Without appearing to actually turn their heads, they seemed to take in at one glance the entire scene, quickly. The tall man spoke. "What town is this?"

One of the small boys told him the name of the town.

"Who lives here?" the tall man said.

"Who lives here?" the boy repeated.

"Who runs this field? Is it a private field?"

"Oh. It belongs to the town. They run it."

"Do they all live here? The ones that run it?"

The white man, the Negroes, the small boys, all watched the tall man.

"What I mean, is there anybody in this town that flies, that owns a ship? Any strangers here that fly?"

"Yes," the boy said. "There's a man lives here that flew in the war, the English army."

"Captain Warren was in the Royal Flying Corps," a second boy said.

"That's what I said," the first boy said.

"You said the English army," the second boy said.

The second man, the short one with the limp, spoke. He spoke to the tall man, quietly, in a dead voice, in the diction of Weber and Fields in vaudeville, making his wh's into v's and his th's into d's. "What does that mean?" he said.

"It's all right," the tall man said. He moved forward. "I think I know him." The short man followed, limping, terrific, crablike. The tall man had a gaunt face beneath a two-days' stubble. His eyeballs looked dirty, too, with a strained, glaring expression. He wore a dirty helmet of cheap, thin cloth, though it was January. His goggles were worn, but even we could tell that they were good ones.

But then everybody quit looking at him to look at the short man; later, when we older people saw him, we said among ourselves that he had the most tragic face we had ever seen; an expression of outraged and convinced and indomitable despair, like that of a man carrying through

choice a bomb which, at a certain hour each day, may or may not explode.

He had a nose which would have been out of proportion to a man six feet tall. As shaped by his close helmet, the entire upper half of his head down to the end of his nose would have fitted a six-foot body. But below that, below a lateral line bisecting his head from the end of his nose to the back of his skull, his jaw, the rest of his face, was not two inches deep.

His jaw was a long, flat line clapping-to beneath his nose like the jaw of a shark, so that the tip of his nose and the tip of his jaw almost touched. His goggles were merely flat pieces of window-glass held in felt frames. His helmet was leather. Down the back of it, from the top to the hem, was a long savage tear, held together top and bottom by strips of adhesive tape almost black with dirt and grease.

From around the corner of the barn there now appeared a third man, again with that abrupt immobility, as though he had materialized there out of thin air; though when they saw him he was already moving toward the group. He wore an overcoat above a neat civilian suit; he wore a cap. He was a little taller than the limping man, and broad, heavily built.

He was handsome in a dull, quiet way; from his face, a man of infrequent speech. When he came up the spectators saw that he, like the limping man, was also a Jew. That is, they knew at once that two of the strangers were of a different race from themselves, without being able to say what the difference was. The boy who had first spoken probably revealed by his next speech what they thought the difference was. He, as well as the other boys, was watching the man who limped.

“Were you in the war?” the boy said. “In the air war?”

The limping man did not answer. Both he and the tall man were watching the gate. The spectators looked also and saw a car enter the gate and come down the edge of the field toward them. Three men got

out of the car and approached. Again the limping man spoke quietly to the tall man: "Is that one?"

"No," the tall man said, without looking at the other. He watched the newcomers, looking from face to face. He spoke to the oldest of the three. "Morning," he said. "You run this field?"

"No," the newcomer said. "You want the secretary of the Fair Association. He's in town."

"Any charge to use it?"

"I don't know. I reckon they'll be glad to have you use it."

"Go on and pay them," the limping man said.

The three newcomers looked at the airplane with that blank, knowing, respectful air of groundlings. It reared on its muddy wheels, the propeller motionless, rigid, with a quality immobile and poised and dynamic. The nose was big with engine, the wings taut, the fuselage streaked with oil behind the rusting exhaust pipes. "Going to do some business here?" the oldest one said.

"Put you on a show," the tall man said.

"What kind of show?"

"Anything you want. Wing-walking; death-drag."

"What's that? Death-drag?"

"Drop a man onto the top of a car and drag him off again. Bigger the crowd, the more you'll get."

"You will get your money's worth," the limping man said.

The boys still watched him. "Were you in the war?" the first boy said. The third stranger had not spoken up to this time. He now said: "Let's get on to town."

"Right," the tall man said. He said generally, in his flat, dead voice, the same voice which the three strangers all seemed to use, as though it

were their common language: "Where can we get a taxi? Got one in town?"

"We'll take you to town," the men who had come up in the car said.
"We'll pay," the limping man said.

"Glad to do it," the driver of the car said. "I won't charge you anything. You want to go now?"

"Sure," the tall man said. The three strangers got into the back seat, the other three in front. Three of the boys followed them to the car.

"Lemme hang on to town, Mr. Black?" one of the boys said.

"Hang on," the driver said. The boys got onto the running boards. The car returned to town. The three in front could hear the three strangers talking in the back. They talked quietly, in low, dead voices, somehow quiet and urgent, discussing something among themselves, the tall man and the handsome one doing most of the talking. The three in front heard only one speech from the limping man: "I won't take less . . ."

"Sure," the tall man said. He leaned forward and raised his voice a little: "Where'll I find this Jones, this secretary?"

The driver told him.

"Is the newspaper or the printing shop near there? I want some handbills."

"I'll show you," the driver said. "I'll help you get fixed up."

"Fine," the tall man said. "Come out this afternoon and I'll give you a ride, if I have time."

The car stopped at the newspaper office. "You can get your handbills here," the driver said.

"Good," the tall man said. "Is Jones's office on this street?"

"I'll take you there, too," the driver said.

"You see about the editor," the tall man said. "I can find Jones, I guess." They got out of the car. "I'll come back here," the tall man said. He

went on down the street, swiftly, in his dirty coverall and helmet. Two other men had joined the group before the newspaper office. They all entered, the limping man leading, followed by the three boys.

“I want some handbills,” the limping man said. “Like this one.” He took from his pocket a folded sheet of pink paper. He opened it; the editor, the boys, the five men, leaned to see it. The lettering was black and bold:

DEMON DUNCAN
DAREDEVIL OF THE AIR
DEATH DEFYING SHOW WILL BE GIVEN
UNDER THE AUSPICES OF
THIS P.M. AT TWO P.M.
COME ONE COME ALL AND SEE DEMON DUNCAN
DEFY DEATH IN DEATH DROP & DRAG OF DEATH

“I want them in one hour,” the limping man said.

“What you want in this blank space?” the editor said.

“What you got in this town?”

“What we got?”

“What auspices? American Legion? Rotary Club? Chamber of Commerce?”

“We got all of them.”

“I’ll tell you which one in a minute, then,” the limping man said. “When my partner gets back.”

“You have to have a guarantee before you put on the show, do you?” the editor said.

“Why, sure. Do you think I should put on a daredevil without auspices? Do you think I should for a nickel maybe jump off the airplane?”

“Who’s going to jump?” one of the later comers said; he was a taxi-driver.

The limping man looked at him. "Don't you worry about that," he said. "Your business is just to pay the money. We will do all the jumping you want, if you pay enough."

"I just asked which one of you all was the jumper."

"Do I ask you whether you pay me in silver or in green-backs?" the limping man said. "Do I ask you?"

"No," the taxi-driver said.

"About these bills," the editor said. "You said you wanted them in an hour."

"Can't you begin on them, and leave that part out until my partner comes back?"

"Suppose he don't come before they are finished?"

"Well, that won't be my fault, will it?"

"All right," the editor said. "Just so you pay for them."

"You mean, I should pay without a auspices on the hand-bill?"

"I ain't in this business for fun," the editor said.

"We'll wait," the limping man said.

They waited.

"Were you a flyer in the war, Mister?" the boy said.

The limping man turned upon the boy his long, misshapen, tragic face.

"The war? Why should I fly in a war?"

"I thought maybe because of your leg. Captain Warren limps, and he flew in the war. I reckon you just do it for fun?"

"For fun? What for fun? Fly? Gruss Gott. I hate it, I wish the man what invented them was here; I would put him into that machine yonder and I would print on his back, Do not do it, one thousand times."

"Why do you do it, then?" the man who had entered with the taxi-driver said.

"Because of that Republican Coolidge. I was in business, and that Coolidge ruined business; ruined it. That's why. For fun? Gruss Gott."

They looked at the limping man. "I suppose you have a license?" the second late-comer said.

The limping man looked at him. "A license?"
"Don't you have to have a license to fly?"

"Oh; a license. For the airplane to fly; sure, I understand. Sure. We got one. You want to see it?"

"You're supposed to show it to anybody that wants to see it, aren't you?"

"Why, sure. You want to see it?"
"Where is it?"

"Where should it be? It's nailed to the airplane, where the government put it. Did you thought maybe it was nailed to me? Did you thought maybe I had a engine on me and maybe wings? It's on the airplane. Call a taxi and go to the airplane and look at it."

"I run a taxi," the driver said.

"Well, run it. Take this gentleman out to the field where he can look at the license on the airplane."

"It'll be a quarter," the driver said. But the limping man was not looking at the driver. He was leaning against the counter. They watched him take a stick of gum from his pocket and peel it. They watched him put the gum into his mouth. "I said it'll be a quarter, Mister," the driver said.

"Was you talking to me?" the limping man said.
"I thought you wanted a taxi out to the airport."

"Me? What for? What do I want to go out to the airport for? I just come from there. I ain't the one that wants to see that license. I have already seen it. I was there when the government nailed it onto the airplane."

Captain Warren, the ex-army flyer, was coming out of the store, where he met the tall man in the dirty coverall. Captain Warren told about it in the barber shop that night, when the airplane was gone.

“I hadn’t seen him in fourteen years, not since I left England for the front in ‘17. ‘So it was you that rolled out of that loop with two passengers and a twenty model Hisso smokepot?’ I said.

“‘Who else saw me?’ he said. So he told me about it, standing there, looking over his shoulder every now and then. He was sick; a man stopped behind him to let a couple of ladies pass, and Jock whirled like he might have shot the man if he’d had a gun, and while we were in the café some one slammed a door at the back and I thought he would come out of his monkey suit. ‘It’s a little nervous trouble I’ve got,’ he told me. ‘I’m all right.’

I had tried to get him to come out home with me for dinner, but he wouldn’t. He said that he had to kind of jump himself and eat before he knew it, sort of. We had started down the street and we were passing the restaurant when he said: ‘I’m going to eat,’ and he turned and ducked in like a rabbit and sat down with his back to the wall and told Vernon to bring him the quickest thing he had.

He drank three glasses of water and then Vernon brought him a milk bottle full and he drank most of that before the dinner came up from the kitchen. When he took off his helmet, I saw that his hair was pretty near white, and he is younger than I am. Or he was, up there when we were in Canada training. Then he told me what the name of his nervous trouble was. It was named Ginsfarb. The little one; the one that jumped off the ladder.”

“What was the trouble?” we asked. “What were they afraid of?”

“They were afraid of inspectors,” Warren said. “They had no licenses at all.”

“There was one on the airplane.”

“Yes. But it did not belong to that airplane. That one had been grounded by an inspector when Ginsfarb bought it. The license was for another airplane that had been wrecked, and some one had helped Ginsfarb compound another felony by selling the license to him. Jock had lost his license about two years ago when he crashed a big plane full of Fourth-of-July holidayers.

Two of the engines quit, and he had to land. The airplane smashed up some and broke a gas line, but even then they would have been all right if a passenger hadn't got scared (it was about dusk) and struck a match. Jock was not so much to blame, but the passengers all burned to death, and the government is strict.

So he couldn't get a license, and he couldn't make Ginsfarb even pay to take out a parachute rigger's license. So they had no license at all; if they were ever caught, they'd all go to the penitentiary.”

“No wonder his hair was white,” some one said.

“That wasn't what turned it white,” Warren said. “I'll tell you about that. So they'd go to little towns like this one, fast, find out if there was anybody that might catch them, and if there wasn't, they'd put on the show and then clear out and go to another town, staying away from the cities. They'd come in and get handbills printed while Jock and the other one would try to get underwritten by some local organization.

They wouldn't let Ginsfarb do this part, because he'd stick out for his price too long and they'd be afraid to risk it. So the other two would do this, get what they could, and if they could not get what Ginsfarb told them to, they'd take what they could and then try to keep Ginsfarb fooled until it was too late. Well, this time Ginsfarb kicked up. I guess they had done it too much on him.

“So I met Jock on the street. He looked bad; I offered him a drink, but he said he couldn't even smoke any more. All he could do was drink water; he said he usually drank about a gallon during the night, getting up for it.

“You look like you might have to jump yourself to sleep, too,” I said.

“No, I sleep fine. The trouble is, the nights aren’t long enough. I’d like to live at the North Pole from September to April, and at the South Pole from April to September. That would just suit me.’

“You aren’t going to last long enough to get there,” I said.

“I guess so. It’s a good engine. I see to that.’

“I mean, you’ll be in jail.’

“Then he said: ‘Do you think so? Do you guess I could?’

“We went on to the café. He told me about the racket, and showed me one of those Demon Duncan handbills. ‘Demon Duncan?’ I said.

“Why not? Who would pay to see a man named Ginsfarb jump from a ship?’

“I’d pay to see that before I’d pay to see a man named Duncan do it,” I said.

“He hadn’t thought of that. Then he began to drink water, and he told me that Ginsfarb had wanted a hundred dollars for the stunt, but that he and the other fellow only got sixty.

“What are you going to do about it?” I said.

“Try to keep him fooled and get this thing over and get to hell away from here,” he said.

“Which one is Ginsfarb?” I said. ‘The little one that looks like a shark?’

“Then he began to drink water. He emptied my glass too at one shot and tapped it on the table. Vernon brought him another glass. ‘You must be thirsty,’ Vernon said.

“Have you got a pitcher of it?” Jock said.

“I could fill you a milk bottle.’

“Let’s have it,” Jock said. ‘And give me another glass while I’m waiting.’ Then he told me about Ginsfarb, why his hair had turned gray.

“How long have you been doing this?” I said.

“Ever since the 26th of August.’

“This is just January,’ I said.

“What about it?’

“The 26th of August is not six months past.’”

He looked at me. Vernon brought the bottle of water. Jock poured a glass and drank it. He began to shake, sitting there, shaking and sweating, trying to fill the glass again. Then he told me about it, talking fast, filling the glass and drinking.

“Jake (the other one’s name is Jake something; the good-looking one) drives the car, the rented car. Ginsfarb swaps onto the car from the ladder. Jock said he would have to fly the ship into position over a Ford or a Chevrolet running on three cylinders, trying to keep Ginsfarb from jumping from twenty or thirty feet away in order to save gasoline in the ship and in the rented car. Ginsfarb goes out on the bottom wing with his ladder, fastens the ladder onto a strut, hooks himself into the other end of the ladder, and drops off; everybody on the ground thinks that he has done what they all came to see: fallen off and killed himself.

That’s what he calls his death-drop. Then he swaps from the ladder onto the top of the car, and the ship comes back and he catches the ladder and is dragged off again. That’s his death-drag.

“Well, up till the day when Jock’s hair began to turn white, Ginsfarb, as a matter of economy, would do it all at once; he would get into position above the car and drop off on his ladder and then make contact with the car, and sometimes Jock said the ship would not be in the air three minutes. Well, on this day the rented car was a bum or something; anyway, Jock had to circle the field four or five times while the car was getting into position, and Ginsfarb, seeing his money being blown out the exhaust pipes, finally refused to wait for Jock’s signal and dropped off anyway.

It was all right, only the distance between the ship and the car was not as long as the rope ladder. So Ginsfarb hit on the car, and Jock had just enough soup to zoom and drag Ginsfarb, still on the ladder, over a high-

power electric line, and he held the ship in that climb for twenty minutes while Ginsfarb climbed back up the ladder with his leg broken. He held the ship in a climb with his knees, with the throttle wide open and the engine revving about eleven hundred, while he reached back and opened that cupboard behind the cockpit and dragged out a suitcase and propped the stick so he could get out on the wing and drag Ginsfarb back into the ship. He got Ginsfarb in the ship and on the ground again and Ginsfarb says: 'How far did we go?' and Jock told him they had flown with full throttle for thirty minutes and Ginsfarb says: 'Will you ruin me yet?'"

III

The rest of this is composite. It is what we (groundlings, dwellers in and backbone of a small town interchangeable with and duplicate of ten thousand little dead clottings of human life about the land) saw, refined and clarified by the expert, the man who had himself seen his own lonely and scudding shadow upon the face of the puny and remote earth.

The three strangers arrived at the field, in the rented car. When they got out of the car, they were arguing in tense, dead voices, the pilot and the handsome man against the man who limped. Captain Warren said they were arguing about the money.

"I want to see it," Ginsfarb said. They stood close; the handsome man took something from his pocket.

"There. There it is. See?" he said.

"Let me count it myself," Ginsfarb said.

"Come on, come on," the pilot hissed, in his dead, tense voice. "We tell you we got the money! Do you want an inspector to walk in and take the money and the ship too and put us in jail? Look at all these people waiting."

"You fooled me before," Ginsfarb said.

“All right,” the pilot said. “Give it to him. Give him his ship too. And he can pay for the car when he gets back to town. We can get a ride in; there’s a train out of here in fifteen minutes.”

“You fooled me once before,” Ginsfarb said.

“But we’re not fooling you now. Come on. Look at all these people.”

They moved toward the airplane, Ginsfarb limping terrifically, his back stubborn, his face tragic, outraged, cold. There was a good crowd: country people in overalls; the men a general dark clump against which the bright dresses of the women, the young girls, showed. The small boys and several men were already surrounding the airplane. We watched the limping man begin to take objects from the body of it: a parachute, a rope ladder. The handsome man went to the propeller. The pilot got into the back seat.

“Off!” he said, sudden and sharp. “Stand back, folks. We’re going to wring the old bird’s neck.”

They tried three times to crank the engine.

“I got a mule, Mister,” a countryman said. “How much’ll you pay for a tow?”

The three strangers did not laugh. The limping man was busy attaching the rope ladder to one wing.

“You can’t tell me,” a countrywoman said. “Even he ain’t that big a fool.”

The engine started then. It seemed to lift bodily from the ground a small boy who stood behind it and blow him aside like a leaf. We watched it turn and trundle down the field.

“You can’t tell me that thing’s flying,” the countrywoman said. “I reckon the Lord give me eyes. I can see it ain’t flying. You folks have been fooled.”

“Wait,” another voice said. “He’s got to turn into the wind.”

“Ain’t there as much wind right there or right here as there is down yonder?” the woman said. But it did fly. It turned back toward us; the noise became deafening. When it came broadside on to us, it did not seem to be going fast, yet we could see daylight beneath the wheels and the earth.

But it was not going fast; it appeared rather to hang gently just above the earth until we saw that, beyond and beneath it, trees and earth in panorama were fleeing backward at dizzy speed, and then it tilted and shot skyward with a noise like a circular saw going into a white oak log. “There ain’t nobody in it!” the countrywoman said. “You can’t tell me!”

The third man, the handsome one in the cap, had got into the rented car. We all knew it: a battered thing which the owner would rent to any one who would make a deposit of ten dollars. He drove to the end of the field, faced down the runway, and stopped. We looked back at the airplane. It was high, coming back toward us; some one cried suddenly, his voice puny and thin: “There! Out on the wing! See?”

“It ain’t!” the countrywoman said. “I don’t believe it!”

“You saw them get in it,” some one said.

“I don’t believe it!” the woman said.

Then we sighed; we said, “Aaahhhhhh”; beneath the wing of the airplane there was a falling dot. We knew it was a man. Some way we knew that that lonely, puny, falling shape was that of a living man like ourselves. It fell. It seemed to fall for years, yet when it checked suddenly up without visible rope or cord, it was less far from the airplane than was the end of the delicate pen-slash of the profiled wing.

“It ain’t a man!” the woman shrieked.

“You know better,” the man said. “You saw him get in it.”

“I don’t care!” the woman cried. “It ain’t a man! You take me right home this minute!”

The rest is hard to tell. Not because we saw so little; we saw everything that happened, but because we had so little in experience to postulate

it with. We saw that battered rented car moving down the field, going faster, jouncing in the broken January mud, then the sound of the airplane blotted it, reduced it to immobility; we saw the dangling ladder and the shark-faced man swinging on it beneath the death-colored airplane.

The end of the ladder raked right across the top of the car, from end to end, with the limping man on the ladder and the capped head of the handsome man leaning out of the car. And the end of the field was coming nearer, and the airplane was travelling faster than the car, passing it. And nothing happened. "Listen!" some one cried. "They are talking to one another!"

Captain Warren told us what they were talking about, the two Jews yelling back and forth at one another: the shark-faced man on the dangling ladder that looked like a cobweb, the other one in the car; the fence, the end of the field, coming closer.

"Come on!" the man in the car shouted.

"What did they pay?"

"Jump!"

"If they didn't pay that hundred, I won't do it."

Then the airplane zoomed, roaring, the dangling figure on the gossamer ladder swinging beneath it. It circled the field twice while the man got the car into position again. Again the car started down the field; again the airplane came down with its wild, circular-saw drone which died into a splutter as the ladder and the clinging man swung up to the car from behind; again we heard the two puny voices shrieking at one another with a quality at once ludicrous and horrible: the one coming out of the very air itself, shrieking about something sweated out of the earth and without value anywhere else:

"How much did you say?"

"Jump!"

"What? How much did they pay?"

"Nothing! Jump!"

“Nothing?” the man on the ladder wailed in a fading, outraged shriek. “Nothing?” Again the airplane was dragging the ladder irrevocably past the car, approaching the end of the field, the fences, the long barn with its rotting roof. Suddenly we saw Captain Warren beside us; he was using words we had never heard him use.

“He’s got the stick between his knees,” Captain Warren said. “Exalted suzerain of mankind; saccharine and sacred symbol of eternal rest.” We had forgot about the pilot, the man still in the airplane. We saw the airplane, tilted upward, the pilot standing upright in the back seat, leaning over the side and shaking both hands at the man on the ladder.

We could hear him yelling now as again the man on the ladder was dragged over the car and past it, shrieking:

“I won’t do it! I won’t do it!” He was still shrieking when the airplane zoomed; we saw him, a diminishing and shrieking spot against the sky above the long roof of the barn: “I won’t do it!

I won’t do it!” Before, when the speck left the airplane, falling, to be snubbed up by the ladder, we knew that it was a living man; again, when the speck left the ladder, falling, we knew that it was a living man, and we knew that there was no ladder to snub him up now. We saw him falling against the cold, empty January sky until the silhouette of the barn absorbed him; even from here, his attitude froglike, outraged, implacable. From somewhere in the crowd a woman screamed, though the sound was blotted out by the sound of the airplane. It reared skyward with its wild, tearing noise, the empty ladder swept backward beneath it. The sound of the engine was like a groan, a groan of relief and despair.

IV

Captain Warren told us in the barber shop on that Saturday night. “Did he really jump off, onto that barn?” we asked him.

“Yes. He jumped. He wasn’t thinking about being killed, or even hurt. That’s why he wasn’t hurt. He was too mad, too in a hurry to receive

justice. He couldn't wait to fly back down. Providence knew that he was too busy and that he deserved justice, so Providence put that barn there with the rotting roof.

He wasn't even thinking about hitting the barn; if he'd tried to, let go of his belief in a cosmic balance to bother about landing, he would have missed the barn and killed himself."

It didn't hurt him at all, save for a long scratch on his face that bled a lot, and his overcoat was torn completely down the back, as though the tear down the back of the helmet had run on down the overcoat. He came out of the barn running before we got to it. He hobbled right among us, with his bloody face, his arms waving, his coat dangling from either shoulder.

"Where is that secretary?" he said.

"What secretary?"

"That American Legion secretary." He went on, limping fast, toward where a crowd stood about three women who had fainted. "You said you would pay a hundred dollars to see me swap to that car. We pay rent on the car and all, and now you would—"

"You got sixty dollars," some one said.

The man looked at him. "Sixty? I said one hundred. Then you would let me believe it was one hundred and it was just sixty; you would see me risk my life for sixty dollars. . . ." The airplane was down; none of us were aware of it until the pilot sprang suddenly upon the man who limped. He jerked the man around and knocked him down before we could grasp the pilot. We held the pilot, struggling, crying, the tears streaking his dirty, unshaven face. Captain Warren was suddenly there, holding the pilot.

"Stop it!" he said. "Stop it!"

The pilot ceased. He stared at Captain Warren, then he slumped and sat on the ground in his thin, dirty garment, with his unshaven face, dirty, gaunt, with his sick eyes, crying. "Go away," Captain Warren said. "Let him alone for a minute."

We went away, back to the other man, the one who limped. They had lifted him and he drew the two halves of his overcoat forward and looked at them. Then he said: "I want some chewing gum." Some one gave him a stick. Another offered him a cigarette. "Thanks," he said. "I don't burn up no money. I ain't got enough of it yet." He put the gum into his mouth. "You would take advantage of me. If you thought I would risk my life for sixty dollars, you fool yourself."

"Give him the rest of it," some one said. "Here's my share." The limping man did not look around. "Make it up to a hundred, and I will swap to the car like on the handbill," he said.

Somewhere a woman screamed behind him. She began to laugh and to cry at the same time. "Don't . . ." she said, laughing and crying at the same time. "Don't let . . ." until they led her away. Still the limping man had not moved. He wiped his face on his cuff and he was looking at his bloody sleeve when Captain Warren came up.

"How much is he short?" Warren said. They told Warren. He took out some money and gave it to the limping man.

"You want I should swap to the car?" he said.

"No," Warren said. "You get that crate out of here quick as you can."

"Well, that's your business," the limping man said. "I got witnesses I offered to swap." He moved; we made way and watched him, in his severed and dangling overcoat, approach the airplane. It was on the runway, the engine running. The third man was already in the front seat. We watched the limping man crawl terrifically in beside him. They sat there, looking forward.

The pilot began to get up. Warren was standing beside him. "Ground it," Warren said. "You are coming home with me."

"I guess we'd better get on," the pilot said. He did not look at Warren. Then he put out his hand. "Well . . ." he said. Warren did not take his hand. "You come on home with me," he said.

"Who'd take care of that bastard?"

"Who wants to?"

"I'll get him right, some day. Where I can beat hell out of him."

"Jock," Warren said.

"No," the other said.

"Have you got an overcoat?"

"Sure I have."

"You're a liar." Warren began to pull off his overcoat.

"No," the other said; "I don't need it." He went on toward the machine. "See you some time," he said over his shoulder. We watched him get in, heard an airplane come to life, come alive. It passed us, already off the ground. The pilot jerked his hand once, stiffly; the two heads in the front seat did not turn nor move. Then it was gone, the sound was gone.

Warren turned. "What about that car they rented?" he said.

"He give me a quarter to take it back to town," a boy said.

"Can you drive it?"

"Yes, sir. I drove it out here. I showed him where to rent it."

"The one that jumped?"

"Yes, sir." The boy looked a little aside. "Only I'm a little scared to take it back. I don't reckon you could come with me."

"Why, scared?" Warren said.

"That fellow never paid nothing down on it, like Mr. Harris wanted. He told Mr. Harris he might not use it, but if he did use it in his show, he would pay Mr. Harris twenty dollars for it instead of ten like Mr. Harris

wanted. He told me to take it back and tell Mr. Harris he never used the car. And I don't know if Mr. Harris will like it. He might get mad."

The end

Elly, William Faulkner

Elly

BORDERING THE SHEER drop of the precipice, the wooden railing looked like a child's toy. It followed the curving road in thread-like embrace, passing the car in a flimsy blur. Then it flicked behind and away like a taut ribbon cut with scissors.

Then they passed the sign, the first sign, Mills City. 6 mi and Elly thought, with musing and irrevocable astonishment, 'Now we are almost there. It is too late now'; looking at Paul beside her, his hands on the wheel, his face in profile as he watched the fleeing road.

She said, "Well. What can I do to make you marry me, Paul?" thinking 'There was a man plowing in that field, watching us when we came out of those woods with Paul carrying the motor-robe, and got back into the car,' thinking this quietly, with a certain detachment and inattention, because there was something else about to obliterate it.

'Something dreadful that I have forgotten about,' she thought, watching the swift and increasing signs which brought Mills City nearer and nearer. 'Something terrible that I shall remember in a minute,' saying aloud, quietly: "There's nothing else I can do now, is there?"

Still Paul did not look at her. "No," he said. "There's nothing else you can do."

Then she remembered what it was she had forgotten. She remembered her grandmother, thinking of the old woman with her dead hearing and her inescapable cold eyes waiting at Mills City, with amazed and quiet

despair: 'How could I have ever forgot about her? How could I have? How could I?'

She was eighteen. She lived in Jefferson, two hundred miles away, with her father and mother and grandmother, in a biggish house. It had a deep veranda with screening vines and no lights.

In this shadow she half lay almost nightly with a different man — youths and young men of the town at first, but later with almost anyone, any transient in the small town whom she met by either convention or by chance, provided his appearance was decent. She would never ride in their cars with them at night, and presently they all believed that they knew why, though they did not always give up hope at once — until the courthouse clock struck eleven. Then for perhaps five minutes longer they (who had been practically speechless for an hour or more) would talk in urgent whispers:

"You must go now."

"No. Not now."

"Yes. Now."

"Why?"

"Because. I'm tired. I want to go to bed."

"I see. So far, and no mother. Is that it?"

"Maybe." In the shadow now she would be alert, cool, already fled, without moving, beyond some secret reserve of laughter. And he would leave, and she would enter the dark house and look up at the single square of light which fell upon the upper hallway, and change completely. Wearily now, with the tread almost of an old woman, she would mount the stairs and pass the open door of the lighted room where her grandmother sat, erect, an open book in her hands, facing the hall.

Usually she did not look into the room when she passed. But now and then she did. Then for an instant they would look full at one another: the old woman cold, piercing; the girl weary, spent, her face, her dark dilated eyes, filled with impotent hatred.

Then she would go on and enter her own room and lean for a time against the door, hearing the grandmother's light click off presently, sometimes crying silently and hopelessly, whispering, "The old bitch. The old bitch." Then this would pass.

She would undress and look at her face in the mirror, examining her mouth now pale of paint and heavy, flattened (so she would believe) and weary and dulled with kissing, thinking 'My God.

Why do I do it? What is the matter with me?' thinking of how tomorrow she must face the old woman again with the mark of last night upon her mouth like bruises, with a feeling of the pointlessness and emptiness of life more profound than the rage or the sense of persecution.

Then one afternoon at the home of a girl friend she met Paul de Montigny. After he departed the two girls were alone. Now they looked at one another quietly, like two swordsmen, with veiled eyes.

"So you like him, do you?" the friend said. "You've got queer taste, haven't you?"

"Like who?" Elly said. "I don't know who you are talking about."

"Oh yeah?" the friend said. "You didn't notice his hair then. Like a knitted cap. And his lips. Blubber, almost." Elly looked at her.

"What are you talking about?" Elly said.

"Nothing," the other said. She glanced toward the hall, then she took a cigarette from the front of her dress and lit it. "I don't know anything about it. I just heard it, too. How his uncle killed a man once that accused him of having nigger blood."

"You're lying," Elly said.

The other expelled smoke. "All right. Ask your grandmother about his family. Didn't she used to live in Louisiana too?"

"What about you?" Elly said. "You invited him into your house."

“I wasn’t hid in the cloak closet, kissing him, though.”

“Oh, yeah?” Elly said. “Maybe you couldn’t.”

“Not till you got your face out of the way, anyhow,” the other said.

That night she and Paul sat on the screened and shadowed veranda.

But at eleven o’clock it was she who was urgent and tense: “No! No! Please. Please.”

“Oh, come on. What are you afraid of?”

“Yes. I’m afraid. Go, please. Please.”

“Tomorrow, then?”

“No. Not tomorrow or any time.”

“Yes. Tomorrow.”

This time she did not look in when she passed her grandmother’s door. Neither did she lean against her own door to cry. But she was panting, saying aloud against the door in thin exultation: “A nigger. A nigger. I wonder what she would say if she knew about that.”

The next afternoon Paul walked up onto the veranda. Elly was sitting in the swing, her grandmother in a chair nearby. She rose and met Paul at the steps. “Why did you come here?” she said. “Why did you?” Then she turned and seemed to watch herself walking before him toward the thin old woman sitting bolt upright, sitting bolt and implacably chaste in that secret place, peopled with ghosts, very likely to Elly at any given moment uncountable and unnamable, who might well have owned one single mouth. She leaned down, screaming: “This is Mr. de Montigny, Grandmother!”

“What?”

“Mr. de Montigny! From Louisiana!” she screamed, and saw the grandmother, without moving below the hips, start violently backward as a snake does to strike. That was in the afternoon. That night Elly quitted the veranda for the first time. She and Paul were in a close clump of shrubbery on the lawn; in the wild close dark for that instant

Elly was lost, her blood aloud with desperation and exultation and vindication too, talking inside her at the very brink of surrender loud as a voice: "I wish she were here to see! I wish she were here to see!" when something — there had been no sound — shouted at her and she made a mad awkward movement of recovery. The grandmother stood just behind and above them. When she had arrived, how long she had been there, they did not know.

But there she stood, saying nothing, in the long anti-climax while Paul departed without haste and Elly stood, thinking stupidly, 'I am caught in sin without even having time to sin.' Then she was in her room, leaning against the door, trying to still her breathing, listening for the grandmother to mount the stairs and go to her father's room. But the old woman's footsteps ceased at her own door.

Elly went to her bed and lay upon it without undressing, still panting, the blood still aloud. 'So,' she thought, 'it will be tomorrow. She will tell him in the morning.' Then she began to writhe, to toss lightly from side to side. 'I didn't even have a chance to sin,' she thought, with panting and amazed regret. 'She thinks I did and she will tell that I did, yet I am still virgin. She drove me to it, then prevented me at the last moment.' Then she was lying with the sun in her eyes still fully dressed. 'So it will be this morning, today,' she thought dully. 'My God. How could I. How could I. I don't want any man, anything.'

She was waiting in the dining-room when her father came down to breakfast. He said nothing, apparently knew nothing. 'Maybe it's mother she told,' Elly thought. But after a while her mother, too, appeared and departed for town also, saying nothing. 'So it has not been yet,' she thought, mounting the stairs. Her grandmother's door was closed.

When she opened it, the old woman was sitting up in bed, reading a newspaper; she looked up, cold, still, implacable, while Elly screamed at her in the empty house: "What else can I do, in this little dead, hopeless town?"

I'll work. I don't want to be idle. Just find me a job — anything, anywhere, so that it's so far away that I'll never have to hear the word Jefferson again." She was named for the grandmother — Ailanthia, though the old woman had not heard her own name or her granddaughter's or anyone else's in almost fifteen years save when it was screamed at her as Elly now screamed: "It hadn't even happened last night! Won't you believe me?"

That's it. It hadn't even happened! At least, I would have had something, something . . ." with the other watching her with that cold, fixed, immobile, inescapable gaze of the very deaf. "All right!" Elly cried. "I'll get married then! Will you be satisfied then?"

That afternoon she met Paul downtown. "Was everything all right last night?" he said. "Why, what is it? Did they—"

"No. Paul, marry me." They were in the rear of the drugstore, partially concealed by the prescription counter, though anyone might appear behind it at any moment. She leaned against him, her face wan, tense, her painted mouth like a savage scar upon it. "Marry me. Or it will be too late, Paul."

"I don't marry them," Paul said. "Here. Pull yourself together." She leaned against him, rife with promise. Her voice was wan and urgent. "We almost did last night. If you'll marry me, I will." "You will, eh? Before or after?"

"Yes. Now. Any time."

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Not even if I will now?"

"Come on, now. Pull yourself together."

"Oh, I can hear you. But I don't believe you. And I am afraid to try and find out." She began to cry. He spoke in thin and mounting annoyance: "Stop it, I tell you!"

“Yes. All right. I’ve stopped. You won’t, then? I tell you, it will be too late.”

“Hell, no. I don’t marry them, I tell you.”

“All right. Then it’s good-bye. Forever.”

“That’s O.K. by me, too. If that’s how you feel. If I ever see you again, you know what it will mean. But no marrying. And I’ll see next time that we don’t have any audience.”

“There won’t be any next time,” Elly said.

The next day he was gone. A week later, her engagement was in the Memphis papers. It was to a young man whom she had known from childhood. He was assistant cashier in the bank, who they said would be president of it some day. He was a grave, sober young man of impeccable character and habits, who had been calling on her for about a year with a kind of placid formality.

He took supper with the family each Sunday night, and when infrequent road shows came to town he always bought tickets for himself and Elly and her mother. When he called on her, even after the engagement was announced, they did not sit in the dark swing.

Perhaps he did not know that anyone had ever sat in it in the darkness. No one sat in it at all now, and Elly passed the monotonous round of her days in a kind of dull peace. Sometimes at night she cried a little, though not often; now and then she examined her mouth in the glass and cried quietly, with quiet despair and resignation. ‘Anyway I can live quietly now,’ she thought. ‘At least I can live out the rest of my dead life as quietly as if I were already dead.’

Then one day, without warning, as though she, too, had accepted the armistice and the capitulation, the grandmother departed to visit her son in Mills City. Her going seemed to leave the house bigger and emptier than it had ever been, as if the grandmother had been the only other actually living person in it.

There were sewing women in the house daily now, making the trousseau, yet Elly seemed to herself to move quietly and aimlessly, in a hiatus without thought or sense, from empty room to empty room giving upon an identical prospect too familiar and too peaceful to be even saddening any longer.

For long hours now she would stand at her mother's bedroom window, watching the slow and infinitesimal clematis tendrils as they crept and overflowed up the screen and onto the veranda roof with the augmenting summer. Two months passed so; she would be married in three weeks. Then one day her mother said, "Your grandmother wants to come home Sunday.

Why don't you and Philip drive down to Mills City and spend Saturday night with your uncle, and bring her back Sunday?" Five minutes later, at the mirror, Elly looked at her reflection as you look at someone who has just escaped a fearful danger. 'God,' she thought, 'what was I about to do? What was I about to do?'

Within the hour she had got Paul on the telephone, leaving home to do it, taking what precautions for secrecy her haste would afford her.

"Saturday morning?" he said.

"Yes. I'll tell mother Phi . . . he wants to leave early, at daylight. They won't recognize you or the car. I'll be ready and we can get away quick."

"Yes." She could hear the wire, distance; she had a feeling of exultation, escape. "But you know what it means. If I come back. What I told you."

"I'm not afraid. I still don't believe you, but I am not afraid to try it now."

Again she could hear the wire. "I'm not going to marry you, Elly."

"All right, darling. I tell you I'm not afraid to try it any more. Exactly at daylight. I'll be waiting."

She went to the bank. After a time Philip was free and came to her where she waited, her face tense and wan beneath the paint, her eyes

bright and hard. "There is something you must do for me. It's hard to ask, and I guess it will be hard to do."

"Of course I'll do it. What is it?"

"Grandmother is coming home Sunday. Mother wants you and me to drive down Saturday and bring her back."

"All right. I can get away Saturday."

"Yes. You see, I told you it would be hard. I don't want you to go."

"Don't want me to . . ." He looked at her bright, almost haggard face.

"You want to go alone?" She didn't answer, watching him. Suddenly she came and leaned against him with a movement practiced, automatic. She took one of his arms and drew it around her. "Oh," he said. "I see. You want to go with someone else."

"Yes. I can't explain now. But I will later. But mother will never understand. She won't let me go unless she thinks it is you."

"I see." His arm was without life; she held it about her. "It's another man you want to go with."

She laughed, not loud, not long. "Don't be foolish. Yes. There's another man in the party. People you don't know and that I don't expect to see again before I am married. But mother won't understand. That's why I must ask you. Will you do it?"

"Yes. It's all right. If we can't trust one another, we haven't got any business marrying."

"Yes. We must trust one another." She released his arm. She looked at him intently, speculatively, with a cold and curious contempt. "And you'll let mother believe . . ."

"You can trust me. You know that."

"Yes. I'm sure I can." Suddenly she held out her hand. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye?"

She leaned against him again. She kissed him. "Careful," he said.

"Somebody might . . ."

“Yes. Until later, then. Until I explain.” She moved back, looked at him absently, speculatively. “This is the last trouble I’ll ever give you, I expect. Maybe this will be worth that to you. Good-bye.”

That was Thursday afternoon. On Saturday morning, at dawn, when Paul stopped his car before the dark house, she seemed to materialize at once, already running across the lawn. She sprang into the car before he could descend and open the door, swirling down into the seat, leaning forward and taut with urgency and flight like an animal.

“Hurry!” she said. “Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!”

But he held the car a moment longer. “Remember. I told you what it meant if I came back. O.K.?”

“I heard you. I tell you I’m not afraid to risk it now. Hurry! Hurry!”

And then, ten hours later, with the Mills City signs increasing with irrevocable diminishment, she said, “So you won’t marry me? You won’t?”

“I told you that all the time.”

“Yes. But I didn’t believe you. I didn’t believe you. I thought that when I — after — And now there is nothing else I can do, is there?”

“No,” he said.

“No,” she repeated. Then she began to laugh, her voice beginning to rise.

“Elly!” he said. “Stop it, now!”

“All right,” she said. “I just happened to think about my grandmother. I had forgotten her.”

Pausing at the turn of the stair, Elly could hear Paul and her uncle and aunt talking in the living-room below. She stood quite still, in an attitude almost pensive, nun-like, virginal, as though posing, as though she had escaped for the moment into a place where she had forgotten where she came from and where she intended to go.

Then a clock in the hall struck eleven, and she moved. She went on up the stairs quietly and went to the door of her cousin's room, which she was to occupy for the night, and entered.

The grandmother sat in a low chair beside the dressing table littered with the frivolous impedimenta of a young girl . . . bottles, powder puffs, photographs, a row of dance programs stuck into the mirror frame. Elly paused. They looked at one another for a full moment before the old woman spoke: "Not contented with deceiving your parents and your friends, you must bring a Negro into my son's house as a guest."

"Grandmother!" Elly said.

"Having me sit down to table with a negro man."

"Grandmother!" Elly cried in that thin whisper, her face haggard and grimaced. She listened. Feet, voices were coming up the stairs, her aunt's voice and Paul's. "Hush!" Elly cried. "Hush!"

"What? What did you say?"

Elly ran to the chair and stooped and laid her fingers on the old woman's thin and bloodless lips and, one furiously importunate and the other furiously implacable, they glared eye to eye across the hand while the feet and the voices passed the door and ceased.

Elly removed her hand. From the row of them in the mirror frame she jerked one of the cards with its silken cord and tiny futile pencil. She wrote on the back of the card. He is not a negro he went to Va. and Harvard and everywhere.

The grandmother read the card. She looked up. "I can understand Harvard, but not Virginia. Look at his hair, his fingernails, if you need proof. I don't. I know the name which his people have borne for four generations." She returned the card. "That man must not sleep under this roof."

Elly took another card and scrawled swiftly. He shall. He is my guest. I asked him here. You are my grandmother you would not have me treat any guest that way not even a dog.

The grandmother read it. She sat with the card in her hand. "He shall not drive me to Jefferson. I will not put a foot in that car, and you shall not. We will go home on the train. No blood of mine shall ride with him again."

Elly snatched another card, scrawled furiously. I will. You cannot stop me. Try and stop me.

The grandmother read it. She looked at Elly. They glared at one another. "Then I will have to tell your father."

Already Elly was writing again. She thrust the card at her grandmother almost before the pencil had ceased; then in the same motion she tried to snatch it back. But the grandmother had already grasped the corner of it and now they glared at one another, the card joining them like a queer umbilical cord. "Let go!" Elly cried. "Let it go!"

"Turn loose," the grandmother said.

"Wait," Elly cried thinly, whispering, tugging at the card, twisting it. "I made a mistake. I—" With an astonishing movement, the grandmother bent the card up as Elly tried to snatch it free.

"Ah," she said, then she read aloud: Tell him. What do you know. "So. You didn't finish it, I see. What do I know?"

"Yes," Elly said. Then she began to speak in a fierce whisper: "Tell him! Tell him we went into a clump of trees this morning and stayed there two hours. Tell him!" The grandmother folded the card carefully and quietly. She rose. "Grandmother!" Elly cried.

"My stick," the grandmother said. "There; against the wall."

When she was gone Elly went to the door and turned the latch and recrossed the room. She moved quietly, getting a robe of her cousin's from the closet, and undressed, slowly, pausing to yawn terrifically.

“God, I’m tired,” she said aloud, yawning. She sat down at the dressing table and began to manicure her nails with the cousin’s equipment. There was a small ivory clock on the dressing table. She glanced at it now and then.

Then the clock below stairs struck midnight. She sat for a moment longer with her head above her glittering nails, listening to the final stroke. Then she looked at the ivory one beside her. ‘I’d hate to catch a train by you,’ she thought. As she looked at it her face began again to fill with the weary despair of the afternoon.

She went to the door and passed into the dark hall. She stood in the darkness, on her naked feet, her head bent, whimpering quietly to herself with bemused and childish self-pity. ‘Everything’s against me,’ she thought.

‘Everything.’ When she moved, her feet made no sound. She walked with her arms extended into the darkness. She seemed to feel her eyeballs turning completely and blankly back into her skull with the effort to see. She entered the bathroom and locked the door.

Then haste and urgency took her again. She ran to the angle of the wall beyond which the guest room was and stooped, cupping her voice into the angle with her hands. “Paul!” she whispered, “Paul!” holding her breath while the dying and urgent whisper failed against the cold plaster. She stooped, awkward in the borrowed robe, her blind eyes unceasing in the darkness with darting despair.

She ran to the lavatory, found the tap in the darkness and tempered the drip of water to a minor but penetrating monotony. Then she opened the door and stood just within it. She heard the clock below stairs strike the half hour. She had not stirred, shaking slowly as with cold, when it struck one.

She heard Paul as soon as he left the guest room. She heard him come down the hall; she heard his hand seek the switch. When it clicked on, she found that her eyes were closed.

“What’s this?” Paul said. He wore a suit of her uncle’s pajamas. “What the devil—”

“Lock the door,” she whispered.

“Like hell. You fool. You damned fool.”

“Paul!” She held him as though she expected him to flee. She shut the door behind him and fumbled for the latch when he caught her wrist.

“Let me out of here!” he whispered.

She leaned against him, shaking slowly, holding him. Her eyes showed no iris at all. “She’s going to tell daddy. She’s going to tell daddy tomorrow, Paul!” Between the whispers the water dripped its unhurried minor note.

“Tell what? What does she know?”

“Put your arms around me, Paul.”

“Hell, no. Let go. Let’s get out of here.”

“Yes. You can help it. You can keep her from telling daddy.”

“How help it? Damn it, let me go!”

“She will tell, but it won’t matter then. Promise. Paul. Say you will.”

“Marry you? Is that what you are talking about? I told you yesterday I wouldn’t. Let me go, I tell you.”

“All right. All right.” She spoke in an eager whisper. “I believe you now. I didn’t at first, but I do now. You needn’t marry me, then. You can help it without marrying me.” She clung to him, her hair, her body, rich with voluptuous and fainting promise. “You won’t have to marry me. Will you do it?”

“Do what?”

“Listen. You remember that curve with the little white fence, where it is so far down to the bottom? Where if a car went through that little fence. . . .”

“Yes. What about it?”

“Listen. You and she will be in the car. She won’t know, won’t have time to suspect. And that little old fence wouldn’t stop anything and they will all say it was an accident. She is old; it wouldn’t take much; maybe even the shock and you are young and maybe it won’t even . . . Paul! Paul!” With each word her voice seemed to faint and die, speaking with a dying cadence out of urgency and despair while he looked down at her blanched face, at her eyes filled with desperate and voluptuous promise. “Paul!”

“And where will you be all this time?” She didn’t stir, her face like a sleepwalker’s. “Oh. I see. You’ll go home on the train. Is that it?” “Paul!” she said in that prolonged and dying whisper. “Paul!”

In the instant of striking her his hand, as though refusing of its own volition the office, opened and touched her face in a long, shuddering motion almost a caress. Again, gripping her by the back of the neck, he assayed to strike her; again his hand, something, refused.

When he flung her away she stumbled backward into the wall. Then his feet ceased and then the water began to fill the silence with its steady and unhurried sound. After a while the clock below struck two, and she moved wearily and heavily and closed the tap.

But that did not seem to stop the sound of the water. It seemed to drip on into the silence where she lay rigid on her back in bed, not sleeping, not even thinking. It dripped on while behind the frozen grimace of her aching face she got through the ritual of breakfast and of departure, the grandmother between Paul and herself in the single seat.

Even the sound of the car could not drown it out, until suddenly she realized what it was. ‘It’s the signboards,’ she thought, watching them as they diminished in retrograde. ‘I even remember that one; now it’s only about two miles. I’ll wait until the next one; then I will . . . now. Now.’ “Paul,” she said. He didn’t look at her. “Will you marry me?”

“No.” Neither was she looking at his face. She was watching his hands as they jockeyed the wheel slightly and constantly. Between them the

grandmother sat, erect, rigid beneath the archaic black bonnet, staring straight ahead like a profile cut from parchment.

“I’m going to ask you just once more. Then it will be too late. I tell you it will be too late then, Paul . . . Paul?”

“No, I tell you. You don’t love me. I don’t love you. We’ve never said we did.”

“All right. Not love, then. Will you marry me without it? Remember, it will be too late.”

“No. I will not.”

“But why? Why, Paul?” He didn’t answer. The car fled on. Now it was the first sign which she had noticed; she thought quietly, ‘We must be almost there now. It is the next curve.’ She said aloud, speaking across the deafness of the old woman between them: “Why not, Paul? If it’s that story about nigger blood, I don’t believe it. I don’t care.” ‘Yes,’ she thought, ‘this is the curve.’ The road entered the curve, descending.

She sat back, and then she found her grandmother looking full at her. But she did not try now to veil her face, her eyes, any more than she would have tried to conceal her voice: “Suppose I have a child?”

“Suppose you do? I can’t help it now. You should have thought of that. Remember, you sent for me; I didn’t ask to come back.”

“No. You didn’t ask. I sent for you. I made you. And this is the last time. Will you? Quick!”

“No.”

“All right,” she said. She sat back; at that instant the road seemed to poise and pause before plunging steeply downward beside the precipice; the white fence began to flicker past. As Elly flung the robe aside she saw her grandmother still watching her; as she lunged forward across the old woman’s knees they glared eye to eye — the haggard and desperate girl and the old woman whose hearing had long since escaped everything and whose sight nothing escaped — for a profound instant of despairing ultimatum and implacable refusal.

“Then die!” she cried into the old woman’s face; “die!” grasping at the wheel as Paul tried to fling her back. But she managed to get her elbow into the wheel spokes with all her weight on it, sprawling across her grandmother’s body, holding the wheel hard over as Paul struck her on the mouth with his fist.

“Oh,” she screamed, “you hit me. You hit me!” When the car struck the railing it flung her free, so that for an instant she lay lightly as an alighting bird upon Paul’s chest, her mouth open, her eyes round with shocked surprise.

“You hit me!” she wailed. Then she was falling free, alone in a complete and peaceful silence like a vacuum. Paul’s face, her grandmother, the car, had disappeared, vanished as though by magic; parallel with her eyes the shattered ends of white railing, the crumbling edge of the precipice where dust whispered and a faint gout of it hung like a toy balloon, rushed mutely skyward.

Overhead somewhere a sound passed, dying away — the snore of an engine, the long hissing of tires in gravel, then the wind sighed in the trees again, shivering the crests against the sky. Against the bole of one of them the car lay in an inextricable and indistinguishable mass, and Elly sat in a litter of broken glass, staring dully at it.

“Something happened,” she whimpered. “He hit me. And now they are dead; it’s me that’s hurt, and nobody will come.” She moaned a little, whimpering. Then with an air of dazed astonishment she raised her hand.

The palm was red and wet. She sat whimpering quietly, digging stupidly at her palm. “There’s glass all in it and I can’t even see it,” she said, whimpered, gazing at her palm while the warm blood stained slowly down upon her skirt. Again the sound rushed steadily past high overhead, and died away. She looked up, following it. “There goes another one,” she whimpered.

“They won’t even stop to see if I am hurt.”

The End

Uncle Willy, William Faulkner

Uncle Willy

I KNOW WHAT they said. They said I didn't run away from home but that I was tolled away by a crazy man who, if I hadn't killed him first, would have killed me inside another week. But if they had said that the women, the good women in Jefferson had driven Uncle Willy out of town and I followed him and did what I did because I knew that Uncle Willy was on his last go-round and this time when they got him again it would be for good and forever, they would have been right.

Because I wasn't tolled away and Uncle Willy wasn't crazy, not even after all they had done to him. I didn't have to go; I didn't have to go any more than Uncle Willy had to invite me instead of just taking it for granted that I wanted to come.

I went because Uncle Willy was the finest man I ever knew, because even women couldn't beat him, because in spite of them he wound up his life getting fun out of being alive and he died doing the thing that was the most fun of all because I was there to help him. And that's something that most men and even most women too don't get to do, not even the women that call meddling with other folks' lives fun.

He wasn't anybody's uncle, but all of us, and grown people too, called him (or thought of him) as Uncle Willy. He didn't have any kin at all except a sister in Texas married to an oil millionaire.

He lived by himself in a little old neat white house where he had been born on the edge of town, he and an old nigger named Job Wylie that was older than he was even, that cooked and kept the house and was the porter at the drugstore which Uncle Willy's father had established and which Uncle Willy ran without any other help than old Job; and during the twelve or fourteen years (the life of us as children and then boys), while he just used dope, we saw a lot of him. We liked to go to his store because it was always cool and dim and quiet inside because he never washed the windows; he said the reason was that he never had to bother to dress them because nobody could see in anyway, and so the heat couldn't get in either.

And he never had any customers except country people buying patent medicines that were already in bottles, and niggers buying cards and dice, because nobody had let him fill a prescription in forty years I reckon, and he never had any soda fountain trade because it was old Job who washed the glasses and mixed the syrups and made the ice cream ever since Uncle Willy's father started the business in eighteen-fifty-something and so old Job couldn't see very well now, though papa said he didn't think that old Job took dope too, it was from breathing day and night the air which Uncle Willy had just exhaled.

But the ice cream tasted all right to us, especially when we came in hot from the ball games. We had a league of three teams in town and Uncle Willy would give the prize, a ball or a bat or a mask, for each game though he would never come to see us play, so after the game both teams and maybe all three would go to the store to watch the winner get the prize.

And we would eat the ice cream and then we would all go behind the prescription case and watch Uncle Willy light the little alcohol stove and fill the needle and roll his sleeve up over the little blue myriad punctures starting at his elbow and going right on up into his shirt.

And the next day would be Sunday and we would wait in our yards and fall in with him as he passed from house to house and go on to Sunday school, Uncle Willy with us, in the same class with us, sitting there while

we recited. Mr. Barbour from the Sunday school never called on him. Then we would finish the lesson and we would talk about baseball until the bell rang and Uncle Willy still not saying anything, just sitting there all neat and clean, with his clean collar and no tie and weighing about a hundred and ten pounds and his eyes behind his glasses kind of all run together like broken eggs. Then we would all go to the store and eat the ice cream that was left over from Saturday and then go behind the prescription case and watch him again: the little stove and his Sunday shirt rolled up and the needle going slow into his blue arm and somebody would say, "Don't it hurt?" and he would say, "No. I like it."

II

Then they made him quit dope. He had been using it for forty years, he told us once, and now he was sixty and he had about ten years more at the outside, only he didn't tell us that because he didn't need to tell even fourteen-year-old boys that. But they made him quit. It didn't take them long.

It began one Sunday morning and it was finished by the next Friday; we had just sat down in our class and Mr. Barbour had just begun, when all of a sudden Reverend Schultz, the minister, was there, leaning over Uncle Willy and already hauling him out of his seat when we looked around, hauling him up and saying in that tone in which preachers speak to fourteen-year-old boys that I don't believe even pansy boys like: "Now, Brother Christian, I know you will hate to leave Brother Barbour's class, but let's you and I go in and join Brother Miller and the men and hear what he can tell us on this beautiful and heartwarming text," and Uncle Willy still trying to hold back and looking around at us with his run-together eyes blinking and saying plainer than if he had spoke it: "What's this? What's this, fellows? What are they fixing to do to me?"

We didn't know any more than he did. We just finished the lesson; we didn't talk any baseball that day; and we passed the alcove where Mr. Miller's men's Bible class met, with Reverend Schultz sitting in the middle of them like he did every Sunday, like he was just a plain man

like the rest of them yet kind of bulging out from among the others like he didn't have to move or speak to keep them reminded that he wasn't a plain man; and I would always think about April Fool's one year when Miss Callaghan called the roll and then stepped down from her desk and said, "Now I'm going to be a pupil today," and took a vacant seat and called out a name and made them go to her desk and hold the lesson and it would have been fun if you could have just quit remembering that tomorrow wouldn't be April Fool's and the day after that wouldn't be either.

And Uncle Willy was sitting by Reverend Schultz looking littler than ever, and I thought about one day last summer when they took a country man named Bundren to the asylum at Jackson but he wasn't too crazy not to know where he was going, sitting there in the coach window handcuffed to a fat deputy sheriff that was smoking a cigar.

Then Sunday school was over and we went out to wait for him, to go to the store and eat the ice cream. And he didn't come out. He didn't come out until church was over too, the first time that he had ever stayed for church that any of us knew of — that anybody knew of, papa told me later — coming out with Mrs. Merridew on one side of him and Reverend Schultz on the other still holding him by the arm and he looking around at us again with his eyes saying again only desperate now: "Fellows, what's this?"

What's this, fellows?" and Reverend Schultz shoving him into Mrs. Merridew's car and Mrs. Merridew saying, loud, like she was in the pulpit: "Now, Mr. Christian, I'm going to take you right out to my house and I'm going to fix you a nice glass of cool lemonade and then we will have a nice chicken dinner and then you are going to take a nice nap in my hammock and then Brother and Sister Schultz are coming out and we will have some nice ice cream," and Uncle Willy saying, "No. Wait, ma'am, wait! Wait! I got to go to the store and fill a prescription I promised this morning—"

So they shoved him into the car and him looking back at us where we stood there; he went out of sight like that, sitting beside Mrs. Merridew

in the car like Darl Bundren and the deputy on the train, and I reckon she was holding his wrist and I reckon she never needed any handcuffs and Uncle Willy giving us that single look of amazed and desperate despair.

Because now he was already an hour past the time for his needle and that afternoon when he finally slipped away from Mrs. Merridew he was five hours past it and so he couldn't even get the key into the lock, and so Mrs. Merridew and Reverend Schultz caught him and this time he wasn't talking or looking either: he was trying to get away like a half-wild cat tries to get away.

They took him to his home and Mrs. Merridew telegraphed his sister in Texas and Uncle Willy didn't come to town for three days because Mrs. Merridew and Mrs. Hovis took turn about staying in the house with him day and night until his sister could get there.

That was vacation then and we played the game on Monday and that afternoon the store was still locked and Tuesday it was still locked, and so it was not until Wednesday afternoon and Uncle Willy was running fast.

He didn't have any shirt on and he hadn't shaved and he could not get the key into the lock at all, panting and whimpering and saying, "She went to sleep at last; she went to sleep at last," until one of us took the key and unlocked the door. We had to light the little stove too and fill the needle and this time it didn't go into his arm slow, it looked like he was trying to jab it clean through the bone.

He didn't go back home. He said he wouldn't need anything to sleep on and he gave us the money and let us out the back door and we bought the sandwiches and the bottle of coffee from the café and we left him there.

Then the next day, it was Mrs. Merridew and Reverend Schultz and three more ladies; they had the marshal break in the door and Mrs. Merridew holding Uncle Willy by the back of the neck and shaking him

and kind of whispering, “You little wretch! You little wretch! Slip off from me, will you?” and Reverend Schultz saying, “Now, Sister; now, Sister; control yourself,” and the other ladies hollering Mr. Christian and Uncle Willy and Willy, according to how old they were or how long they had lived in Jefferson. It didn’t take them long.

The sister got there from Texas that night and we would walk past the house and see the ladies on the front porch or going in and out, and now and then Reverend Schultz kind of bulging out from among them like he would out of Mr. Miller’s Bible class, and we could crawl up behind the hedge and hear them through the window, hear Uncle Willy crying and cussing and fighting to get out of the bed and the ladies saying, “Now, Mr. Christian; now, Uncle Willy,” and “Now, Bubber,” too, since his sister was there; and Uncle Willy crying and praying and cussing.

And then it was Friday, and he gave up. We could hear them holding him in the bed; I reckon this was his last go-round, because none of them had time to talk now; and then we heard him, his voice weak but clear and his breath going in and out.

“Wait,” he said. “Wait! I will ask it one more time. Won’t you please quit? Won’t you please go away? Won’t you please go to hell and just let me come on at my own gait?”

“No, Mr. Christian,” Mrs. Merridew said. “We are doing this to save you.”

For a minute we didn’t hear anything. Then we heard Uncle Willy lay back in the bed, kind of flop back.

“All right,” he said. “All right.”

It was like one of those sheep they would sacrifice back in the Bible. It was like it had climbed up onto the altar itself and flopped onto its back with its throat held up and said: “All right. Come on and get it over with. Cut my damn throat and go away and let me lay quiet in the fire.”

He was sick for a long time. They took him to Memphis and they said that he was going to die. The store stayed locked all the time now, and after a few weeks we didn't even keep up the league. It wasn't just the balls and the bats. It wasn't that. We would pass the store and look at the big old lock on it and at the windows you couldn't even see through, couldn't even see inside where we used to eat the ice cream and tell him who beat and who made the good plays and him sitting there on his stool with the little stove burning and the dope boiling and bubbling and the needle waiting in his hand, looking at us with his eyes blinking and all run together behind his glasses so you couldn't even tell where the pupil was like you can in most eyes.

And the niggers and the country folks that used to trade with him coming up and looking at the lock too, and asking us how he was and when he would come home and open up again. Because even after the store opened again, they would not trade with the clerk that Mrs. Merridew and Reverend Schultz put in the store. Uncle Willy's sister said not to bother about the store, to let it stay shut because she would take care of Uncle Willy if he got well.

But Mrs. Merridew said no, she not only aimed to cure Uncle Willy, she was going to give him a complete rebirth, not only into real Christianity but into the practical world too, with a place in it waiting for him so he could hold up his head not only with honor but pride too among his fellow men; she said that at first her only hope had been to fix it so he would not have to face his Maker slave body and soul to morphine, but now since his constitution was stronger than anybody could have believed, she was going to see that he assumed that position in the world which his family's name entitled him to before he degraded it.

She and Reverend Schultz found the clerk. He had been in Jefferson about six months. He had letters to the church, but nobody except Reverend Schultz and Mrs. Merridew knew anything about him. That is, they made him the clerk in Uncle Willy's store; nobody else knew anything about him at all.

But Uncle Willy's old customers wouldn't trade with him. And we didn't either. Not that we had much trade to give him and we certainly didn't expect him to give us any ice cream and I don't reckon we would have taken it if he had offered it to us.

Because it was not Uncle Willy, and pretty soon it wasn't even the same ice cream because the first thing the clerk did after he washed the windows was to fire old Job, only old Job refused to quit.

He stayed around the store anyhow, mumbling to himself and the clerk would run him out the front door and old Job would go around to the back and come in and the clerk would find him again and cuss him, whispering, cussing old Job good even if he did have letters to the church; he went and swore out a warrant and the marshal told old Job he would have to stay out of the store. Then old Job moved across the street.

He would sit on the curb all day where he could watch the door and every time the clerk came in sight old Job would holler, "I ghy tell um! I ghy do hit!" So we even quit passing the store.

We would cut across the corner not to pass it, with the windows clean now and the new town trade the clerk had built up — he had a lot of trade now — going in and out, just stopping long enough to ask old Job about Uncle Willy, even though we had already got what news came from Memphis about him every day and we knew that old Job would not know, would not be able to get it straight even if someone told him, since he never did believe that Uncle Willy was sick, he just believed that Mrs. Merridew had taken him away somewhere by main force and was holding him in another bed somewhere so he couldn't get up and come back home; and old Job sitting on the curb and blinking up at us with his little watery red eyes like Uncle Willy would and saying, "I ghy tell um! Holting him up dar whilst whipper-snappin' trash makin' free wid Marse Hoke Christian's sto. I ghy tell um!"

Uncle Willy didn't die. One day he came home with his skin the color of tallow and weighing about ninety pounds now and with his eyes like broken eggs still but dead eggs, eggs that had been broken so long now that they didn't even smell dead any more — until you looked at them and saw that they were anything in the world except dead. That was after he got to know us again. I don't mean that he had forgotten about us exactly.

It was like he still liked us as boys, only he had never seen us before and so he would have to learn our names and which faces the names belonged to. His sister had gone back to Texas now, because Mrs. Merridew was going to look after him until he was completely recovered, completely cured. Yes. Cured.

I remember that first afternoon when he came to town and we walked into the store and Uncle Willy looked at the clean windows that you could see through now and at the town customers that never had traded with him, and at the clerk and said, "You're my clerk, hey?" and the clerk begun to talk about Mrs. Merridew and Reverend Schultz and Uncle Willy said, "All right, all right," and now he ate some ice cream too, standing at the counter with us like he was a customer too and still looking around the store while he ate the ice cream, with those eyes that were not dead at all and he said, "Looks like you been getting more work out of my damned old nigger than I could," and the clerk began to say something else about Mrs. Merridew and Uncle Willy said, "All right, all right."

Just get a holt of Job right away and tell him I am going to expect him to be here every day and that I want him to keep this store looking like this from now on." Then we went on behind the prescription case, with Uncle Willy looking around here too, at how the clerk had it neated up, with a big new lock on the cabinet where the drugs and such were kept, with those eyes that wouldn't anybody call dead, I don't care who he was, and said, "Step up there and tell that fellow I want my keys."

But it wasn't the stove and the needle. Mrs. Merridew had busted both of them that day. But it wasn't that anyway, because the clerk came

back and begun to talk about Mrs. Merridew and Reverend Schultz, and Uncle Willy listening and saying, "All right, all right," and we never had seen him laugh before and his face didn't change now but we knew that he was laughing behind it.

Then we went out. He turned sharp off the square, down Nigger Row to Sonny Barger's store and I took the money and bought the Jamaica ginger from Sonny and caught up with them and we went home with Uncle Willy and we sat in the pasture while he drank the Jamaica ginger and practiced our names some more.

And that night we met him where he said. He had the wheelbarrow and the crowbar and we broke open the back door and then the cabinet with the new lock on it and got the can of alcohol and carried it to Uncle Willy's and buried it in the barn.

It had almost three gallons in it and he didn't come to town at all for four weeks and he was sick again, and Mrs. Merridew storming into the house, jerking out drawers and flinging things out of closets and Uncle Willy lying in the bed and watching her with those eyes that were a long way from being dead.

But she couldn't find anything because it was all gone now, and besides she didn't know what it was she was looking for because she was looking for a needle. And the night Uncle Willy was up again we took the crowbar and went back to the store and when we went to the cabinet we found that it was already open and Uncle Willy's stool sitting in the door and a quart bottle of alcohol on the stool in plain sight, and that was all. And then I knew that the clerk knew who got the alcohol before but I didn't know why he hadn't told Mrs. Merridew until two years later.

I didn't know that for two years, and Uncle Willy a year now going to Memphis every Saturday in the car his sister had given him. I wrote the letter with Uncle Willy looking over my shoulder and dictating, about how his health was improving but not as fast as the doctor seemed to want and that the doctor said he ought not to walk back and forth to

the store and so a car, not an expensive car, just a small car that he could drive himself or maybe find a negro boy to drive for him if his sister thought he ought not to: and she sent the money and he got a burr-headed nigger boy about my size named Secretary to drive it for him.

That is, Secretary said he could drive a car; certainly he and Uncle Willy both learned on the night trips they would make back into the hill country to buy corn whisky and Secretary learned to drive in Memphis pretty quick, too, because they went every Saturday, returning Monday morning with Uncle Willy insensible on the back seat, with his clothes smelling of that smell whose source I was not to discover at first hand for some years yet, and two or three half-empty bottles and a little notebook full of telephone numbers and names like Lorine and Billie and Jack.

I didn't know it for two years, not until that Monday morning when the sheriff came and padlocked and sealed what was left of Uncle Willy's stock and when they tried to find the clerk they couldn't even find out what train he had left town on; a hot morning in July and Uncle Willy sprawled out on the back seat, and on the front seat with Secretary a woman twice as big as Uncle Willy, in a red hat and a pink dress and a dirty white fur coat over the back of the seat and two straw suitcases on the fenders, with hair the color of a brand new brass hydrant bib and her cheeks streaked with mascara and caked powder where she had sweated.

It was worse than if he had started dope again. You would have thought he had brought smallpox to town. I remember how when Mrs. Merridew telephoned Mamma that afternoon you could hear her from away out at her house, over the wire, clean out to the back door and the kitchen: "Married! Married! Whore! Whore! Whore!" like the clerk used to cuss old Job, and so maybe the church can go just so far and maybe the folks that are in it are the ones that know the best or are entitled to say when to disconnect religion for a minute or two.

And Papa was cussing too, not cussing anybody; I knew he was not cussing Uncle Willy or even Uncle Willy's new wife, just like I knew that I wished Mrs. Merridew could have been there to hear him. Only I reckon if she had been there she couldn't have heard anything because they said she still had on a house dress when she went and snatched Reverend Schultz into her car and went out to Uncle Willy's, where he was still in bed like always on Monday and Tuesday, and his new wife run Mrs. Merridew and Reverend Schultz out of the house with the wedding license like it was a gun or a knife.

And I remember how all that afternoon — Uncle Willy lived on a little quiet side street where the other houses were all little new ones that country people who had moved to town within the last fifteen years, like mail carriers and little storekeepers, lived — how all that afternoon mad-looking ladies with sun-bonnets on crooked came busting out of that little quiet street dragging the little children and the grown girls with them, heading for the mayor's office and Reverend Schultz's house, and how the young men and the boys that didn't work and some of the men that did would drive back and forth past Uncle Willy's house to look at her sitting on the porch smoking cigarettes and drinking something out of a glass; and how she came down town the next day to shop, in a black hat now and a red-and-white striped dress so that she looked like a great big stick of candy and three times as big as Uncle Willy now, walking along the street with men popping out of the stores when she passed like she was stepping on a line of spring triggers and both sides of her behind kind of pumping up and down inside the dress until somebody hollered, threw back his head and squalled: "YIPPEEE!" like that and she kind of twitched her behind without even stopping and then they hollered sure enough.

And the next day the wire came from his sister, and Papa for the lawyer and Mrs. Merridew for the witness went out there and Uncle Willy's wife showed them the license and told them to laugh that off, that Manuel Street or not she was married as good and tight as any high-nosed bitch in Jefferson or anywhere else and Papa saying, "Now, Mrs. Merridew; now, Mrs. Christian," and he told Uncle Willy's wife how Uncle Willy was bankrupt now and might even lose the house too, and

his wife said how about that sister in Texas, was Papa going to tell her that the oil business was bankrupt too and not to make her laugh.

So they telegraphed the sister again and the thousand dollars came and they had to give Uncle Willy's wife the car too. She went back to Memphis that same afternoon, driving across the square with the straw suitcases, in a black lace dress now and already beginning to sweat again under her new makeup because it was still hot, and stopping where the men were waiting at the post office for the afternoon mail and she said, "Come on up to Manuel Street and see me sometime and I will show you hicks what you and this town can do to yourselves and one another."

And that afternoon Mrs. Merridew moved back into Uncle Willy's house and Papa said the letter she wrote Uncle Willy's sister had eleven pages to it because Papa said she would never forgive Uncle Willy for getting bankrupted. We could hear her from behind the hedge: "You're crazy, Mr. Christian; crazy. I have tried to save you and make something out of you besides a beast but now my patience is exhausted. I am going to give you one more chance.

I am going to take you to Keeley and if that fails, I am going to take you myself to your sister and force her to commit you to an asylum." And the sister sent papers from Texas declaring that Uncle Willy was incompetent and making Mrs. Merridew his guardian and trustee, and Mrs. Merridew took him to the Keeley in Memphis. And that was all.

V

That is, I reckon they thought that that was all, that this time Uncle Willy would surely die. Because even Papa thought that he was crazy now because even Papa said that if it hadn't been for Uncle Willy I would not have run away, and therefore I didn't run away, I was tolled away by a lunatic; it wasn't Papa, it was Uncle Robert that said that he wasn't crazy because any man who could sell Jefferson real estate for cash while shut up in a Keeley institute wasn't crazy or even drunk.

Because they didn't even know that he was out of Keeley, even Mrs. Merridew didn't know it until he was gone two days and they couldn't find him. They never did find him or find out how he got out and I didn't either until I got the letter from him to take the Memphis bus on a certain day and he would meet me at a stop on the edge of Memphis. I didn't even realize that I had not seen Secretary or old Job either in two weeks.

But he didn't toll me away. I went because I wanted to, because he was the finest man I ever knew, because he had had fun all his life in spite of what they had tried to do to him or with him, and I hoped that maybe if I could stay with him a while I could learn how to, so I could still have fun too when I had to get old.

Or maybe I knew more than that, without knowing it, like I knew that I would do anything he asked me to do, no matter what it was, just like I helped him break into the store for the alcohol when he took it for granted that I would without asking me to at all and then helped him hide it from Mrs. Merridew.

Maybe I even knew what old Job was going to do. Not what he did do, but that he would do it if the occasion arose, and that this would have to be Uncle Willy's last go-round and if I wasn't there it would be just him against all the old terrified and timid clinging to dull and rule-ridden breathing which Jefferson was to him and which, even though he had escaped Jefferson, old Job still represented.

So I cut some grass that week and I had almost two dollars. I took the bus on the day he said and he was waiting for me at the edge of town, in a Ford now without any top on it and you could still read the chalk letters, \$85 cash on the wind-shield, and a brand new tent folded up in the back of it and Uncle Willy and old Job in the front seat, and Uncle Willy looked fine with a checked cap new except for a big oil stain, with the bill turned round behind and a pair of goggles cocked up on the front of it and his celluloid collar freshly washed and no tie in it and his nose peeling with sunburn and his eyes bright behind his glasses.

I would have gone with him anywhere; I would do it over again right now, knowing what was going to happen. He would not have to ask me now any more than he did then. So I got on top of the tent and we didn't go toward town, we went the other way.

I asked where we were going but he just said wait, rushing the little car along like he couldn't get there quick enough himself, and I could tell from his voice that this was fine, this was the best yet, better than anybody else could have thought about doing, and old Job hunched down in the front seat, holding on with both hands and yelling at Uncle Willy about going so fast. Yes. Maybe I knew from old Job even then that Uncle Willy may have escaped Jefferson but he had just dodged it; he hadn't gotten away.

Then we came to the sign, the arrow that said Airport, and we turned and I said: "What? What is it?" but Uncle Willy just said: "Wait; just wait," like he couldn't hardly wait himself, hunched over the wheel with his white hair blowing under his cap and his collar riding up behind so you could see his neck between the collar and the shirt; and old Job saying (Oh yes, I could tell even then): "He got hit, all right. He done done hit. But I done tole him. Nemmine. I done warned him." Then we came to the airport and Uncle Willy stopped quick and pointed up without even getting out and said, "Look."

It was an airplane flying around and Uncle Willy running up and down the edge of the field waving his handkerchief until it saw him and came down and landed and rolled up to us, a little airplane with a two-cylinder engine. It was Secretary, in another new checked cap and goggles like Uncle Willy's and they told me how Uncle Willy had bought one for old Job too but old Job wouldn't wear it.

And that night — we stayed in a little tourist camp about two miles away and he had a cap and goggles all ready for me too; and then I knew why they hadn't been able to find him — Uncle Willy told me how he had bought the airplane with some of the money he had sold his house for after his sister saved it because she had been born in it too, but that Captain Bean at the airport wouldn't teach him to run it

himself because he would need a permit from a doctor (“By God,” Uncle Willy said, “damn if these Republicans and Democrats and XYZ’s ain’t going to have it soon where a man can’t even flush the toilet in his own bathroom.”) and he couldn’t go to the doctor because the doctor might want to send him back to the Keeley or tell Mrs. Merridew where he was.

So he just let Secretary learn to run it first and now Secretary had been running it for two weeks, which was almost fourteen days longer than he had practiced on the car before they started out with it. So Uncle Willy bought the car and tent and camping outfit yesterday and tomorrow we were going to start.

We would go first to a place named Renfro where nobody knew us and where there was a big pasture that Uncle Willy had found out about and we would stay there a week while Secretary taught Uncle Willy to run the airplane. Then we would head west.

When we ran out of the house money we would stop at a town and take up passengers and make enough to buy gasoline and food to get to the next town, Uncle Willy and Secretary in the airplane and me and old Job in the car; and old Job sitting in a chair against the wall, blinking at Uncle Willy with his little weak red sullen eyes, and Uncle Willy reared up on the cot with his cap and goggles still on and his collar without any tie (it wasn’t fastened to his shirt at all: just buttoned around his neck) sometimes sideways and sometimes even backward like an Episcopal minister’s, and his eyes bright behind his glasses and his voice bright and fine. “And by Christmas we will be in California!” he said. “Think of that. California!”

VI

So how could they say that I had to be tolled away? How could they? I suppose I knew then that it wouldn’t work, couldn’t work, that it was too fine to be true. I reckon I even knew how it was going to end just from the glum way Secretary acted whenever Uncle Willy talked about learning to run the airplane himself, just as I knew from the way old Job

looked at Uncle Willy, not what he did of course, but what he would do if the occasion arose. Because I was the other white one.

I was white, even if old Job and Secretary were both older than me, so it would be all right; I could do it all right. It was like I knew even then that, no matter what might happen to him, he wouldn't ever die and I thought that if I could just learn to live like he lived, no matter what might happen to me I wouldn't ever die either.

So we left the next morning, just after daylight because there was another fool rule that Secretary would have to stay in sight of the field until they gave him a license to go away. We filled the airplane with gas and Secretary went up in it just like he was going up to practice.

Then Uncle Willy got us into the car quick because he said the airplane could make sixty miles an hour and so Secretary would be at Renfro a long while before we got there.

But when we got to Renfro Secretary wasn't there and we put the tent up and ate dinner and he still didn't come and Uncle Willy beginning to cuss and we ate supper and dark came but Secretary didn't and Uncle Willy was cussing good now. He didn't come until the next day. We heard him and ran out and watched him fly right over us, coming from the opposite direction of Memphis, going fast and us all hollering and waving.

But he went on, with Uncle Willy jumping up and down and cussing, and we were loading the tent into the car to try to catch him when he came back. We didn't hear him at all now and we could see the propeller because it wasn't running and it looked like Secretary wasn't even going to light in the pasture but he was going to light in some trees on the edge of it.

But he skinned by them and kind of bumped down and we ran up and found him still sitting in the airplane with his eyes closed and his face the color of wood ashes and he said, "Captin, will you please tell me

where to find Ren—" before he even opened his eyes to see who we were.

He said he had landed seven times yesterday and it wouldn't be Renfro and they would tell him how to get to Renfro and he would go there and that wouldn't be Renfro either and he had slept in the airplane last night and he hadn't eaten since we left Memphis because he had spent the three dollars Uncle Willy gave him for gasoline and if he hadn't run out of gas when he did he wouldn't never have found us.

Uncle Willy wanted me to go to town and get some more gas so he could start learning to run it right away but Secretary wouldn't. He just refused. He said the airplane belonged to Uncle Willy and he reckoned he belonged to Uncle Willy too, leastways until he got back home, but that he had flown all he could stand for a while. So Uncle Willy started the next morning.

I thought for a while that I would have to throw old Job down and hold him and him hollering, "Don't you git in dat thing!" and still hollering, "I ghy tell um! I ghy tell um!" while we watched the airplane with Secretary and Uncle Willy in it kind of jump into the air and then duck down like Uncle Willy was trying to take the short cut to China and then duck up again and get to going pretty straight at last and fly around the pasture and then turn down to land, and every day old Job hollering at Uncle Willy and field hands coming up out of the fields and folks in wagons and walking stopping in the road to watch them and the airplane coming down, passing us with Uncle Willy and Secretary side by side and looking exactly alike, I don't mean in the face but exactly alike like two tines of a garden fork look exactly like just before they chop into the ground; we could see Secretary's eyes and his mouth run out so you could almost hear him saying, "Hooooooooooo!" and Uncle Willy's glasses shining and his hair blowing from under his cap and his celluloid collar that he washed every night before he went to bed and no tie in it and they would go by, fast, and old Job hollering, "You git outer dar! You git outer dat thing!" and we could hear Secretary too: "Turn hit loose, Unker Willy! Turn hit loose!" and the airplane would go

on, ducking up one second and down the next and with one wing higher than the other one second and lower the next and then it would be traveling sideways and maybe it would hit the ground sideways the first time, with a kind of crashing sound and the dust spurting up and then bounce off again and Secretary hollering, "Unker Willy! Turn loose!" and at night in the tent Uncle Willy's eyes would still be shining and he would be too excited to stop talking and go to sleep and I don't believe he even remembered that he had not taken a drink since he first thought about buying the airplane.

Oh yes, I know what they said about me after it was all over, what Papa said when he and Mrs. Merridew got there that morning, about me being the white one, almost a man, and Secretary and old Job just irresponsible niggers, yet it was old Job and Secretary who tried to prevent him. Because that was it; that was what they couldn't understand.

I remember the last night and Secretary and old Job both working on him, when old Job finally made Secretary tell Uncle Willy that he would never learn to fly, and Uncle Willy stopped talking and stood up and looked at Secretary. "Didn't you learn to run it in two weeks?" he said. Secretary said yes.

"You, a damn, trifling, worthless, ignorant, burr-headed nigger?" and Secretary said yes. "And me that graduated from a university and ran a fifteen-thousand-dollar business for forty years, yet you tell me I can't learn to run a damn little fifteen-hundred-dollar airplane?" Then he looked at me. "Don't you believe I can run it?" he said. And I looked at him and I said, "Yes. I believe you can do anything."

VII

And now I can't tell them. I can't say it. Papa told me once that somebody said that if you know it you can say it. Or maybe the man that said that didn't count fourteen-year-old boys. Because I must have known it was going to happen. And Uncle Willy must have known it too, known that the moment would come.

It was like we both had known it and we didn't even have to compare notes, tell one another that we did: he not needing to say that day in Memphis, "Come with me so you will be there when I will need you," and me not needing to say, "Let me come so I can be there when you will."

Because old Job telephoned Mrs. Merridew. He waited until we were asleep and slipped out and walked all the way to town and telephoned her; he didn't have any money and he probably never telephoned in his life before, yet he telephoned her and the next morning he came up running in the dew (the town, the telephone, was five miles away) just as Secretary was getting the engine started and I knew what he had done even before he got close enough to holler, running and stumbling along slow across the pasture, hollering, "Holt um! Holt um!

Dey'll be here any minute! Jest holt um ten minutes en dey'll be here," and I knew and I ran and met him and now I did hold him and him fighting and hitting at me and still hollering at Uncle Willy in the airplane. "You telephoned?" I said. "Her? Her? Told her where he is?"

"Yes," Uncle Job hollered. "En she say she gonter git yo pappy and start right away and be here by six o'clock," and me holding him; he felt like a handful of scrawny dried sticks and I could hear his lungs wheezing and I could feel his heart, and Secretary came up running too and old Job begun to holler at Secretary, "Git him outer dar!

Dey comin! Dey be here any minute if you can jest holt um!" and Secretary saying, "Which? Which?" and old Job hollered at him to run and hold the airplane and Secretary turned and I tried to grab his leg but I couldn't and I could see Uncle Willy looking toward us and Secretary running toward the airplane and I got onto my knees and waved and I was hollering too.

I don't reckon Uncle Willy could hear me for the engine. But I tell you he didn't need to, because we knew, we both knew; and so I knelt there and held old Job on the ground and we saw the airplane start,

with Secretary still running after it, and jump into the air and duck down and then jump up again and then it looked like it had stopped high in the air above the trees where we thought Secretary was fixing to land that first day before it ducked down beyond them and went out of sight and Secretary was already running and so it was only me and Uncle Job that had to get up and start.

Oh, yes, I know what they said about me; I knew it all that afternoon while we were going home with the hearse in front and Secretary and old Job in the Ford next and Papa and me in our car coming last and Jefferson getting nearer and nearer; and then all of a sudden I began to cry.

Because the dying wasn't anything, it just touched the outside of you that you wore around with you for comfort and convenience like you do your clothes: it was because the old garments, the clothes that were not worth anything had betrayed one of the two of us and the one betrayed was me, and Papa with his other arm around my shoulders now, saying, "Now, now; I didn't mean that. You didn't do it. Nobody blames you."

You see? That was it. I did help Uncle Willy. He knows I did. He knows he couldn't have done it without me. He knows I did; we didn't even have to look at one another when he went. That's it.

And now they will never understand, not even Papa, and there is only me to try to tell them and how can I ever tell them, and make them understand? How can I?

The End

Mule in the Yard, William Faulkner

Mule in the Yard

IT WAS A gray day in late January, though not cold because of the fog. Old Het, just walked in from the poorhouse, ran down the hall toward the kitchen, shouting in a strong, bright, happy voice. She was about seventy probably, though by her own counting, calculated from the ages of various housewives in the town from brides to grandmothers whom she claimed to have nursed in infancy, she would have to be around a hundred and at least triplets.

Tall, lean, fog-beaded, in tennis shoes and a long rat-colored cloak trimmed with what forty or fifty years ago had been fur, a modish though not new purple toque set upon her headrag and carrying (time was when she made her weekly rounds from kitchen to kitchen carrying a brocaded carpetbag though since the advent of the ten-cent stores the carpetbag became an endless succession of the convenient paper receptacles with which they supply their customers for a few cents) the shopping-bag, she ran into the kitchen and shouted with strong and childlike pleasure: "Miss Mannie! Mule in de yard!"

Mrs. Hait, stooping to the stove, in the act of drawing from it a scuttle of live ashes, jerked upright; clutching the scuttle, she glared at old Het, then she too spoke at once, strong too, immediate.

"Them sons of bitches," she said. She left the kitchen, not running exactly, yet with a kind of outraged celerity, carrying the scuttle — a compact woman of forty-odd, with an air of indomitable yet relieved bereavement, as though that which had relicted her had been a woman and a not particularly valuable one at that. She wore a calico wrapper and a sweater coat, and a man's felt hat which they in the town knew had belonged to her ten years' dead husband.

But the man's shoes had not belonged to him. They were high shoes which buttoned, with toes like small tulip bulbs, and in the town they knew that she had bought them new for herself. She and old Het ran down the kitchen steps and into the fog.

That's why it was not cold: as though there lay supine and prisoned between earth and mist the long winter night's suspiration of the sleeping town in dark, close rooms — the slumber and the rousing; the stale waking thermostatic, by re-heating heat-engendered: it lay like a scum of cold grease upon the steps and the wooden entrance to the basement and upon the narrow plank walk which led to a shed building in the corner of the yard: upon these planks, running and still carrying the scuttle of live ashes, Mrs. Hait skated viciously.

"Watch out!" old Het, footed securely by her rubber soles, cried happily. "Dey in de front!" Mrs. Hait did not fall. She did not even pause. She took in the immediate scene with one cold glare and was running again when there appeared at the corner of the house and apparently having been born before their eyes of the fog itself, a mule. It looked taller than a giraffe. Longheaded, with a flying halter about its scissorlike ears, it rushed down upon them with violent and apparitionlike suddenness.

"Dar hit!" old Het cried, waving the shopping-bag. "Hoo!" Mrs. Hait whirled. Again she skidded savagely on the greasy planks as she and the mule rushed parallel with one another toward the shed building, from whose open doorway there now projected the static and astonished face of a cow. To the cow the fog-born mule doubtless looked taller and more incredibly sudden than a giraffe even, and apparently bent upon charging right through the shed as though it were made of straw or were purely and simply mirage. The cow's head likewise had a quality transient and abrupt and unmundane.

It vanished, sucked into invisibility like a match flame, though the mind knew and the reason insisted that she had withdrawn into the shed, from which, as proof's burden, there came an indescribable sound of shock and alarm by shed and beast engendered, analogous to a single note from a profoundly struck lyre or harp.

Toward this sound Mrs. Hait sprang, immediately, as if by pure reflex, as though in invulnerable compact of female with female against a world of mule and man. She and the mule converged upon the shed at

top speed, the heavy scuttle poised lightly in her hand to hurl. Of course it did not take this long, and likewise it was the mule which refused the gambit.

Old Het was still shouting “Dar hit! Dar hit!” when it swerved and rushed at her where she stood tall as a stove pipe, holding the shopping-bag which she swung at the beast as it rushed past her and vanished beyond the other corner of the house as though sucked back into the fog which had produced it, profound and instantaneous and without any sound.

With that unhasteful celerity Mrs. Hait turned and set the scuttle down on the brick coping of the cellar entrance and she and old Het turned the corner of the house in time to see the now wraithlike mule at the moment when its course converged with that of a choleric-looking rooster and eight Rhode Island Red hens emerging from beneath the house. Then for an instant its progress assumed the appearance and trappings of an apotheosis: hell-born and hell-returning, in the act of dissolving completely into the fog, it seemed to rise vanishing into a sunless and dimensionless medium borne upon and enclosed by small winged goblins.

“Dey’s mo in de front!” old Het cried.

“Them sons of bitches,” Mrs. Hait said, again in that grim, prescient voice without rancor or heat. It was not the mules to which she referred; it was not even the owner of them. It was her whole town-dwelling history as dated from that April dawn ten years ago when what was left of Hait had been gathered from the mangled remains of five mules and several feet of new Manila rope on a blind curve of the railroad just out of town; the geographical hap of her very home; the very components of her bereavement — the mules, the defunct husband, and the owner of them.

His name was Snopes; in the town they knew about him too — how he bought his stock at the Memphis market and brought it to Jefferson and sold it to farmers and widows and orphans black and white, for

whatever he could contrive — down to a certain figure; and about how (usually in the dead season of winter) teams and even small droves of his stock would escape from the fenced pasture where he kept them and, tied one to another with sometimes quite new hemp rope (and which item Snopes included in the subsequent claim), would be annihilated by freight trains on the same blind curve which was to be the scene of Hait's exit from this world; once a town wag sent him through the mail a printed train schedule for the division.

A squat, pasty man perennially tieless and with a strained, harried expression, at stated intervals he passed athwart the peaceful and somnolent life of the town in dust and uproar, his advent heralded by shouts and cries, his passing marked by a yellow cloud filled with tossing jug-shaped heads and clattering hooves and the same forlorn and earnest cries of the drovers; and last of all and well back out of the dust, Snopes himself moving at a harried and panting trot, since it was said in the town that he was deathly afraid of the very beasts in which he cleverly dealt.

The path which he must follow from the railroad station to his pasture crossed the edge of town near Hait's home; Hait and Mrs. Hait had not been in the house a week before they waked one morning to find it surrounded by galloping mules and the air filled with the shouts and cries of the drovers.

But it was not until that April dawn some years later, when those who reached the scene first found what might be termed foreign matter among the mangled mules and the savage fragments of new rope, that the town suspected that Hait stood in any closer relationship to Snopes and the mules than that of helping at periodical intervals to drive them out of his front yard. After that they believed that they knew; in a three days' recess of interest, surprise, and curiosity they watched to see if Snopes would try to collect on Hait also.

But they learned only that the adjuster appeared and called upon Mrs. Hait and that a few days later she cashed a check for eight thousand five hundred dollars, since this was back in the old halcyon days when

even the companies considered their southern branches and divisions the legitimate prey of all who dwelt beside them.

She took the cash: she stood in her sweater coat and the hat which Hait had been wearing on the fatal morning a week ago and listened in cold, grim silence while the teller counted the money and the president and the cashier tried to explain to her the virtues of a bond, then of a savings account, then of a checking account, and departed with the money in a salt sack under her apron; after a time she painted her house: that serviceable and time-defying color which the railroad station was painted, as though out of sentiment or (as some said) gratitude.

The adjuster also summoned Snopes into conference, from which he emerged not only more harried-looking than ever, but with his face stamped with a bewildered dismay which it was to wear from then on, and that was the last time his pasture fence was ever to give inexplicably away at dead of night upon mules coupled in threes and fours by adequate rope even though not always new. And then it seemed as though the mules themselves knew this, as if, even while haltered at the Memphis block at his bid, they sensed it somehow as they sensed that he was afraid of them.

Now, three or four times a year and as though by fiendish concord and as soon as they were freed of the box car, the entire uproar — the dust cloud filled with shouts earnest, harried, and dismayed, with plunging demoniac shapes — would become translated in a single burst of perverse and uncontrollable violence, without any intervening contact with time, space, or earth, across the peaceful and astonished town and into Mrs. Hait's yard, where, in a certain hapless despair which abrogated for the moment even physical fear, Snopes ducked and dodged among the thundering shapes about the house (for whose very impervious paint the town believed that he felt he had paid and whose inmate lived within it a life of idle and queenlike ease on money which he considered at least partly his own) while gradually that section and neighborhood gathered to look on from behind adjacent window curtains and porches screened and not, and from the sidewalks and

even from halted wagons and cars in the street — housewives in the wrappers and boudoir caps of morning, children on the way to school, casual Negroes and casual whites in static and entertained repose.

They were all there when, followed by old Het and carrying the stub of a worn-out broom, Mrs. Hait ran around the next corner and onto the handkerchief-sized plot of earth which she called her front yard. It was small; any creature with a running stride of three feet could have spanned it in two paces, yet at the moment, due perhaps to the myopic and distortive quality of the fog, it seemed to be as incredibly full of mad life as a drop of water beneath the microscope.

Yet again she did not falter. With the broom clutched in her hand and apparently with a kind of sublime faith in her own invulnerability, she rushed on after the haltered mule which was still in that arrested and wraithlike process of vanishing furiously into the fog, its wake indicated by the tossing and dispersing shapes of the nine chickens like so many jagged scraps of paper in the dying air blast of an automobile, and the madly dodging figure of a man.

The man was Snopes; beaded too with moisture, his wild face gaped with hoarse shouting and the two heavy lines of shaven beard descending from the corners of it as though in alluvial retrospect of years of tobacco, he screamed at her: "Fore God, Miz Hait! I done everything I could!" She didn't even look at him.

"Ketch that big un with the bridle on," she said in her cold, panting voice. "Git that big un outen here."

"Sho!" Snopes shrieked. "Jest let um take their time. Jest don't git um excited now."

"Watch out!" old Het shouted. "He headin fer de back again!"

"Git the rope," Mrs. Hait said, running again. Snopes glared back at old Het.

"Fore God, where is ere rope?" he shouted.

"In de cellar fo God!" old Het shouted, also without pausing. "Go roun de udder way en head um." Again she and Mrs. Hait turned the corner

in time to see again the still-vanishing mule with the halter once more in the act of floating lightly onward in its cloud of chickens with which, they being able to pass under the house and so on the chord of a circle while it had to go around on the arc, it had once more coincided. When they turned the next corner they were in the back yard again.

“Fo God!” old Het cried. “He fixin to misuse de cow!” For they had gained on the mule now, since it had stopped. In fact, they came around the corner on a tableau. The cow now stood in the centre of the yard. She and the mule faced one another a few feet apart.

Motionless, with lowered heads and braced forelegs, they looked like two book ends from two distinct pairs of a general pattern which some one of amateurly bucolic leanings might have purchased, and which some child had salvaged, brought into idle juxtaposition and then forgotten; and, his head and shoulders projecting above the back-flung slant of the cellar entrance where the scuttle still sat, Snopes standing as though buried to the armpits for a Spanish-Indian-American suttee.

Only again it did not take this long. It was less than tableau; it was one of those things which later even memory cannot quite affirm. Now and in turn, man and cow and mule vanished beyond the next corner, Snopes now in the lead, carrying the rope, the cow next with her tail rigid and raked slightly like the stern staff of a boat. Mrs. Hait and old Het ran on, passing the open cellar gaping upon its accumulation of human necessities and widowed womanyears — boxes for kindling wood, old papers and magazines, the broken and outworn furniture and utensils which no woman ever throws away; a pile of coal and another of pitch pine for priming fires — and ran on and turned the next corner to see man and cow and mule all vanishing now in the wild cloud of ubiquitous chickens which had once more crossed beneath the house and emerged.

They ran on, Mrs. Hait in grim and unflagging silence, old Het with the eager and happy amazement of a child. But when they gained the front again they saw only Snopes. He lay flat on his stomach, his head and shoulders upreared by his outstretched arms, his coat tail swept

forward by its own arrested momentum about his head so that from beneath it his slack-jawed face mused in wild repose like that of a burlesqued nun.

“Whar’d dey go?” old Het shouted at him. He didn’t answer.

“Dey tightenin’ on de curves!” she cried. “Dey already in de back again!” That’s where they were. The cow made a feint at running into her shed, but deciding perhaps that her speed was too great, she whirled in a final desperation of despair-like valor. But they did not see this, nor see the mule, swerving to pass her, crash and blunder for an instant at the open cellar door before going on. When they arrived, the mule was gone.

The scuttle was gone too, but they did not notice it; they saw only the cow standing in the centre of the yard as before, panting, rigid, with braced forelegs and lowered head facing nothing, as if the child had returned and removed one of the book ends for some newer purpose or game.

They ran on. Mrs. Hait ran heavily now, her mouth too open, her face putty-colored and one hand pressed to her side. So slow was their progress that the mule in its third circuit of the house overtook them from behind and soared past with undiminished speed, with brief demon thunder and a keen ammonia-sweet reek of sweat sudden and sharp as a jeering cry, and was gone.

Yet they ran doggedly on around the next corner in time to see it succeed at last in vanishing into the fog; they heard its hoofs, brief, staccato, and derisive, on the paved street, dying away.

“Well!” old Het said, stopping. She panted, happily. “Gentlemen, hush! Ain’t we had—” Then she became stone still; slowly her head turned, high-nosed, her nostrils pulsing; perhaps for the instant she saw the open cellar door as they had last passed it, with no scuttle beside it. “Fo God I smells smoke!” she said. “Chile, run, git yo money.”

That was still early, not yet ten o'clock. By noon the house had burned to the ground. There was a farmers' supply store where Snopes could be usually found; more than one had made a point of finding him there by that time.

They told him about how when the fire engine and the crowd reached the scene, Mrs. Hait, followed by old Het carrying her shopping-bag in one hand and a framed portrait of Mr. Hait in the other, emerged with an umbrella and wearing a new, dun-colored, mail-order coat, in one pocket of which lay a fruit jar filled with smoothly rolled banknotes and in the other a heavy, nickel-plated pistol, and crossed the street to the house opposite, where with old Het beside her in another rocker, she had been sitting ever since on the veranda, grim, inscrutable, the two of them rocking steadily, while hoarse and tireless men hurled her dishes and furniture and bedding up and down the street.

"What are you telling me for?" Snopes said. "Hit warn't me that set that ere scuttle of live fire where the first thing that passed would knock hit into the cellar."

"It was you that opened the cellar door, though."

"Sho. And for what? To git that rope, her own rope, where she told me to git it."

"To catch your mule with, that was trespassing on her property. You can't get out of it this time, I. O. There ain't a jury in the county that won't find for her."

"Yes. I reckon not. And just because she is a woman. That's why. Because she is a durn woman. All right. Let her go to her durn jury with hit. I can talk too; I reckon hit's a few things I could tell a jury myself about—" He ceased. They were watching him.

"What? Tell a jury about what?"

"Nothing. Because hit ain't going to no jury. A jury between her and me? Me and Mannie Hait? You boys don't know her if you think she's going to make trouble over a pure acci-dent couldn't nobody help.

Why, there ain't a fairer, finer woman in the county than Miz Mannie Hait.

I just wisht I had a opportunity to tell her so." The opportunity came at once. Old Het was behind her, carrying the shopping-bag. Mrs. Hait looked once, quietly, about at the faces, making no response to the murmur of curious salutation, then not again. She didn't look at Snopes long either, nor talk to him long.

"I come to buy that mule," she said.

"What mule?" They looked at one another. "You'd like to own that mule?" She looked at him. "Hit'll cost you a hundred and fifty, Miz Mannie."

"You mean dollars?"

"I don't mean dimes nor nickels neither, Miz Mannie."

"Dollars," she said. "That's more than mules was in Hait's time."

"Lots of things is different since Hait's time. Including you and me."

"I reckon so," she said. Then she went away. She turned without a word, old Het following.

"Maybe one of them others you looked at this morning would suit you," Snopes said. She didn't answer. Then they were gone.

"I don't know as I would have said that last to her," one said.

"What for?" Snopes said. "If she was aiming to law something outen me about that fire, you reckon she would have come and offered to pay me money for hit?" That was about one o'clock. About four o'clock he was shouldering his way through a throng of Negroes before a cheap grocery store when one called his name. It was old Het, the now bulging shopping-bag on her arm, eating bananas from a paper sack.

"Fo God I wuz jest dis minute huntin fer you," she said. She handed the banana to a woman beside her and delved and fumbled in the shopping-bag and extended a greenback. "Miz Mannie gimme dis to

give you; I wuz jest on de way to de sto whar you stay at. Here.” He took the bill.

“What’s this? From Miz Hait?”

“Fer de mule.” The bill was for ten dollars. “You don’t need to gimme no receipt. I kin be de witness I give hit to you.”

“Ten dollars? For that mule? I told her a hundred and fifty dollars.”

“You’ll have to fix dat up wid her yo’self. She jest gimme dis to give ter you when she sot out to fetch de mule.”

“Set out to fetch — She went out there herself and taken my mule outen my pasture?”

“Lawd, chile,” old Het said, “Miz Mannie ain’t skeered of no mule. Ain’t you done foun dat out?”

And then it became late, what with the yet short winter days; when she came in sight of the two gaunt chimneys against the sunset, evening was already finding itself. But she could smell the ham cooking before she came in sight of the cow shed even, though she could not see it until she came around in front where the fire burned beneath an iron skillet set on bricks and where nearby Mrs. Hait was milking the cow. “Well,” old Het said, “you is settled down, ain’t you?” She looked into the shed, neated and raked and swept even, and floored now with fresh hay.

A clean new lantern burned on a box, beside it a pallet bed was spread neatly on the straw and turned neatly back for the night. “Why, you is fixed up,” she said with pleased astonishment. Within the door was a kitchen chair. She drew it out and sat down beside the skillet and laid the bulging shopping-bag beside her.

“I’ll tend dis meat whilst you milks. I’d offer to strip dat cow fer you ef I wuzn’t so wo out wid all dis excitement we been had.” She looked around her. “I don’t believe I sees yo new mule, dough.” Mrs. Hait grunted, her head against the cow’s flank. After a moment she said, “Did you give him that money?”

“I give um ter him. He ack surprise at first, lak maybe he think you didn’t aim to trade dat quick. I tole him to settle de details wid you later. He taken de money, dough. So I reckon dat’s offen his mine en yo’n bofe.” Again Mrs. Hait grunted.

Old Het turned the ham in the skillet. Beside it the coffee pot bubbled and steamed. “Cawfee smell good too,” she said. “I ain’t had no appetite in years now. A bird couldn’t live on de vittles I eats.

But jest lemme git a whiff er cawfee en seem lak hit always whets me a little. Now, ef you jest had nudder little piece o dis ham, now — Fo God, you got company aready.” But Mrs. Hait did not even look up until she had finished. Then she turned without rising from the box on which she sat.

“I reckon you and me better have a little talk,” Snopes said. “I reckon I got something that belongs to you and I hear you got something that belongs to me.” He looked about, quickly, ceaselessly, while old Het watched him. He turned to her. “You go away, aunty. I don’t reckon you want to set here and listen to us.”

“Lawd, honey,” old Het said. “Don’t you mind me. I done already had so much troubles myself dat I kin set en listen to udder folks’ widout hit worryin me a-tall. You gawn talk whut you came ter talk; I jest set here en tend de ham.” Snopes looked at Mrs. Hait.

“Ain’t you going to make her go away?” he said.

“What for?” Mrs. Hait said. “I reckon she ain’t the first critter that ever come on this yard when hit wanted and went or stayed when hit liked.” Snopes made a gesture, brief, fretted, restrained.

“Well,” he said. “All right. So you taken the mule.”

“I paid you for it. She give you the money.”

“Ten dollars. For a hundred-and-fifty-dollar mule. Ten dollars.”

"I don't know anything about hundred-and-fifty-dollar mules. All I know is what the railroad paid." Now Snopes looked at her for a full moment. "What do you mean?"

"Them sixty dollars a head the railroad used to pay you for mules back when you and Hait—"

"Hush," Snopes said; he looked about again, quick, ceaseless. "All right. Even call it sixty dollars. But you just sent me ten."

"Yes. I sent you the difference." He looked at her, perfectly still.

"Between that mule and what you owed Hait."

"What I owed—"

"For getting them five mules onto the tr—"

"Hush!" he cried. "Hush!" Her voice went on, cold, grim, level.

"For helping you. You paid him fifty dollars each time, and the railroad paid you sixty dollars a head for the mules. Ain't that right?" He watched her. "The last time you never paid him. So I taken that mule instead. And I sent you the ten dollars difference."

"Yes," he said in a tone of quiet, swift, profound bemusement; then he cried: "But look! Here's where I got you. Hit was our agreement that I wouldn't never owe him nothing until after the mules was—"

"I reckon you better hush yourself," Mrs. Hait said.

"— until hit was over. And this time, when over had come, I never owed nobody no money because the man hit would have been owed to wasn't nobody," he cried triumphantly. "You see?" Sitting on the box, motionless, downlooking, Mrs. Hait seemed to muse. "So you just take your ten dollars back and tell me where my mule is and we'll just go back good friends to where we started at. Fore God, I'm as sorry as ere a living man about that fire—"

"Fo God!" old Het said, "hit was a blaze, wuzn't it?"

"— but likely with all that ere railroad money you still got, you just been wanting a chance to build new, all along. So here. Take hit." He

put the money into her hand. "Where's my mule?" But Mrs. Hait didn't move at once.

"You want to give it back to me?" she said.

"Sho. We been friends all the time; now we'll just go back to where we left off being. I don't hold no hard feelings and don't you hold none. Where you got the mule hid?"

"Up at the end of that ravine ditch behind Spilmer's," she said.

"Sho. I know. A good, sheltered place, since you ain't got nere barn. Only if you'd a just left hit in the pasture, hit would a saved us both trouble. But hit ain't no hard feelings though. And so I'll bid you goodnight. You're all fixed up, I see. I reckon you could save some more money by not building no house a-tall."

"I reckon I could," Mrs. Hait said. But he was gone.

"Whut did you leave de mule dar fer?" old Het said.

"I reckon that's far enough," Mrs. Hait said.

"Fer enough?" But Mrs. Hait came and looked into the skillet, and old Het said, "Wuz hit me er you dat mentioned something erbout er nudder piece o dis ham?" So they were both eating when in the not-quite-yet accomplished twilight Snopes returned. He came up quietly and stood, holding his hands to the blaze as if he were quite cold. He did not look at any one now.

"I reckon I'll take that ere ten dollars," he said.

"What ten dollars?" Mrs. Hait said. He seemed to muse upon the fire. Mrs. Hait and old Het chewed quietly, old Het alone watching him.

"You ain't going to give hit back to me?" he said.

"You was the one that said to let's go back to where we started," Mrs. Hait said.

"Fo God you wuz, en dat's de fack," old Het said. Snopes mused upon the fire; he spoke in a tone of musing and amazed despair:

“I go to the worry and the risk and the agoment for years and years and I get sixty dollars. And you, one time, without no trouble and no risk, without even knowing you are going to git it, git eighty-five hundred dollars.

I never begrudged hit to you; can't nere a man say I did, even if hit did seem a little strange that you should git it all when he wasn't working for you and you never even knowed where he was at and what doing; that all you done to git it was to be married to him. And now, after all these ten years of not begrudging you hit, you taken the best mule I had and you ain't even going to pay me ten dollars for hit. Hit ain't right. Hit ain't justice.”

“You got de mule back, en you ain't satisfried yit,” old Het said. “Whut does you want?” Now Snopes looked at Mrs. Hait.

“For the last time I ask hit,” he said. “Will you or won't you give hit back?”

“Give what back?” Mrs. Hait said. Snopes turned. He stumbled over something — it was old Het's shopping-bag — and recovered and went on. They could see him in silhouette, as though framed by the two blackened chimneys against the dying west; they saw him fling up both clenched hands in a gesture almost Gallic, of resignation and impotent despair. Then he was gone. Old Het was watching Mrs. Hait.

“Honey,” she said. “Whut did you do wid de mule?” Mrs. Hait leaned forward to the fire. On her plate lay a stale biscuit. She lifted the skillet and poured over the biscuit the grease in which the ham had cooked.

“I shot it,” she said.

“You which?” old Het said. Mrs. Hait began to eat the biscuit. “Well,” old Het said, happily, “de mule burnt de house en you shot de mule. Dat's whut I calls justice.” It was getting dark fast now, and before her was still the three-mile walk to the poorhouse. But the dark would last a long time in January, and the poorhouse too would not move at once.

She sighed with weary and happy relaxation. "Gentlemen, hush! Ain't we had a day!"

The End

That Will Be Fine, William Faulkner

That Will Be Fine

WE COULD HEAR the water running into the tub. We looked at the presents scattered over the bed where mamma had wrapped them in the colored paper, with our names on them so Grandpa could tell who they belonged to easy when he would take them off the tree. There was a present for everybody except Grandpa because mamma said that Grandpa is too old to get presents any more.

"This one is yours," I said.

"Sho now," Rosie said. "You come on and get in that tub like your mamma tell you."

"I know what's in it," I said. "I could tell you if I wanted to."

Rosie looked at her present. "I reckon I kin wait twell hit be handed to me at the right time," she said.

"I'll tell you what's in it for a nickel," I said.

Rosie looked at her present. "I ain't got no nickel," she said. "But I will have Christmas morning when Mr. Rodney give me that dime."

"You'll know what's in it anyway then and you won't pay me," I said.

"Go and ask mamma to lend you a nickel."

Then Rosie grabbed me by the arm. "You come on and get in that tub," she said. "You and money! If you ain't rich time you twenty-one, hit will be because the law done abolished money or done abolished you."

So I went and bathed and came back, with the presents all scattered out across mamma's and papa's bed and you could almost smell it and tomorrow night they would begin to shoot the fireworks and then you could hear it too.

It would be just tonight and then tomorrow we would get on the train, except papa, because he would have to stay at the livery stable until after Christmas Eve, and go to Grandpa's, and then tomorrow night and then it would be Christmas and Grandpa would take the presents off the tree and call out our names, and the one from me to Uncle Rodney that I bought with my own dime and so after a while Uncle Rodney would prize open Grandpa's desk and take a dose of Grandpa's tonic and maybe he would give me another quarter for helping him, like he did last Christmas, instead of just a nickel, like he would do last summer while he was visiting mamma and us and we were doing business with Mrs. Tucker before Uncle Rodney went home and began to work for the Compress Association, and it would be fine. Or maybe even a half a dollar and it seemed to me like I just couldn't wait.

"Jesus, I can't hardly wait," I said.

"You which?" Rosie hollered. "Jesus?" she hollered. "Jesus? You let your mamma hear you cussing and I bound you'll wait. You talk to me about a nickel! For a nickel I'd tell her just what you said."

"If you'll pay me a nickel I'll tell her myself," I said.

"Get into that bed!" Rosie hollered. "A seven-year-old boy, cussing!"

"If you will promise not to tell her, I'll tell you what's in your present and you can pay me the nickel Christmas morning," I said.

"Get in that bed!" Rosie hollered. "You and your nickel! I bound if I thought any of you all was fixing to buy even a dime present for your grandpa, I'd put in a nickel of hit myself."

"Grandpa don't want presents," I said. "He's too old."

"Hah," Rosie said. "Too old, is he? Suppose everybody decided you was too young to have nickels: what would you think about that? Hah?"

So Rosie turned out the light and went out. But I could still see the presents by the firelight: the ones for Uncle Rodney and Grandma and Aunt Louisa and Aunt Louisa's husband Uncle Fred, and Cousin Louisa and Cousin Fred and the baby and Grandpa's cook and our cook, that was Rosie, and maybe somebody ought to give Grandpa a present only maybe it ought to be Aunt Louisa because she and Uncle Fred lived with Grandpa, or maybe Uncle Rodney ought to because he lived with Grandpa too.

Uncle Rodney always gave mamma and papa a present but maybe it would be just a waste of his time and Grandpa's time both for Uncle Rodney to give Grandpa a present, because one time I asked mamma why Grandpa always looked at the present Uncle Rodney gave her and papa and got so mad, and papa began to laugh and mamma said papa ought to be ashamed, that it wasn't Uncle Rodney's fault if his generosity was longer than his pocket book, and papa said Yes, it certainly wasn't Uncle Rodney's fault, he never knew a man to try harder to get money than Uncle Rodney did, that Uncle Rodney had tried every known plan to get it except work, and that if mamma would just think back about two years she would remember one time when Uncle Rodney could have thanked his stars that there was one man in the connection whose generosity, or whatever mamma wanted to call it, was at least five hundred dollars shorter than his pocket book, and mamma said she defied papa to say that Uncle Rodney stole the money, that it had been malicious persecution and papa knew it, and that papa and most other men were prejudiced against Uncle Rodney, why she didn't know, and that if papa begrudged having lent Uncle Rodney the five hundred dollars when the family's good name was at stake to say so and Grandpa would raise it somehow and pay papa back, and then she began to cry and papa said All right, all right, and mamma cried and said how Uncle Rodney was the baby and that must be why papa hated him and papa said All right, all right; for God's sake, all right.

Because mamma and papa didn't know that Uncle Rodney had been handling his business all the time he was visiting us last summer, any more than the people in Mottstown knew that he was doing business

last Christmas when I worked for him the first time and he paid me the quarter.

Because he said that if he preferred to do business with ladies instead of men it wasn't anybody's business except his, not even Mr. Tucker's. He said how I never went around telling people about papa's business and I said how everybody knew papa was in the livery-stable business and so I didn't have to tell them, and Uncle Rodney said Well, that was what half of the nickel was for and did I want to keep on making the nickels or did I want him to hire somebody else?

So I would go on ahead and watch through Mr. Tucker's fence until he came out to go to town and I would go along behind the fence to the corner and watch until Mr. Tucker was out of sight and then I would put my hat on top of the fence post and leave it there until I saw Mr. Tucker coming back. Only he never came back while I was there because Uncle Rodney would always be through before then, and he would come up and we would walk back home and he would tell mamma how far we had walked that day and mamma would say how good that was for Uncle Rodney's health.

So he just paid me a nickel at home. It wasn't as much as the quarter when he was in business with the other lady in Mottstown Christmas, but that was just one time and he visited us all summer and so by that time I had a lot more than a quarter. And besides the other time was Christmas and he took a dose of Grandpa's tonic before he paid me the quarter and so maybe this time it might be even a half a dollar. I couldn't hardly wait.

II

But it got to be daylight at last and I put on my Sunday suit, and I would go to the front door and watch for the hack and then I would go to the kitchen and ask Rosie if it wasn't almost time and she would tell me the train wasn't even due for two hours yet. Only while she was telling me we heard the hack, and so I thought it was time for us to go and get on the train and it would be fine, and then we would go to Grandpa's and

then it would be tonight and then tomorrow and maybe it would be a half a dollar this time and Jesus it would be fine.

Then mamma came running out without even her hat on and she said how it was two hours yet and she wasn't even dressed and John Paul said Yessum but papa sent him and papa said for John Paul to tell mamma that Aunt Louisa was here and for mamma to hurry.

So we put the basket of presents into the hack and I rode on the box with John Paul and mamma hollering from inside the hack about Aunt Louisa, and John Paul said that Aunt Louisa had come in a hired buggy and papa took her to the hotel to eat breakfast because she left Mottstown before daylight even. And so maybe Aunt Louisa had come to Jefferson to help mamma and papa get a present for Grandpa.

"Because we have one for everybody else," I said, "I bought one for Uncle Rodney with my own money."

Then John Paul began to laugh and I said Why? and he said it was at the notion of me giving Uncle Rodney anything that he would want to use, and I said Why? and John Paul said because I was shaped like a man, and I said Why? and John Paul said he bet papa would like to give Uncle Rodney a present without even waiting for Christmas, and I said What? and John Paul said A job of work.

And I told John Paul how Uncle Rodney had been working all the time he was visiting us last summer, and John Paul quit laughing and said Sho, he reckoned anything a man kept at all the time, night and day both, he would call it work no matter how much fun it started out to be, and I said Anyway Uncle Rodney works now, he works in the office of the Compress Association, and John Paul laughed good then and said it would sholy take a whole association to compress Uncle Rodney.

And then mamma began to holler to go straight to the hotel, and John Paul said Nome, papa said to come straight to the livery stable and wait for him. And so we went to the hotel and Aunt Louisa and papa came out and papa helped Aunt Louisa into the hack and Aunt Louisa began

to cry and mamma hollering Louisa! Louisa! What is it? What has happened? and papa saying Wait now. Wait. Remember the nigger, and that meant John Paul, and so it must have been a present for Grandpa and it didn't come.

And then we didn't go on the train after all. We went to the stable and they already had the light road hack hitched up and waiting, and mamma was crying now and saying how papa never even had his Sunday clothes and papa cussing now and saying Damn the clothes; if we didn't get to Uncle Rodney before the others caught him, papa would just wear the clothes Uncle Rodney had on now. So we got into the road hack fast and papa closed the curtains and then mamma and Aunt Louisa could cry all right and papa hollered to John Paul to go home and tell Rosie to pack his Sunday suit and take her to the train; anyway that would be fine for Rosie.

So we didn't go on the train but we went fast, with papa driving and saying Didn't anybody know where he was? and Aunt Louisa quit crying a while and said how Uncle Rodney didn't come to supper last night, but right after supper he came in and how Aunt Louisa had a terrible feeling as soon as she heard his step in the hall and how Uncle Rodney wouldn't tell her until they were in his room and the door closed and then he said he must have two thousand dollars and Aunt Louisa said where in the world could she get two thousand dollars? and Uncle Rodney said Ask Fred, that was Aunt Louisa's husband, and George, that was papa; tell them they would have to dig it up, and Aunt Louisa said she had that terrible feeling and she said Rodney! Rodney!

What — and Uncle Rodney begun to cuss and say Dammit, don't start sniveling and crying now, and Aunt Louisa said Rodney, what have you done now? and then they both heard the knocking at the door and how Aunt Louisa looked at Uncle Rodney and she knew the truth before she even laid eyes on Mr. Pruitt and the sheriff, and how she said Don't tell pa! Keep it from pa! It will kill him. . . .

"Who?" papa said. "Mister who?"

“Mr. Pruitt,” Aunt Louisa said, crying again. “The president of the Compress Association. They moved to Mottstown last spring. You don’t know him.”

So she went down to the door and it was Mr. Pruitt and the sheriff. And how Aunt Louisa begged Mr. Pruitt for Grandpa’s sake and how she gave Mr. Pruitt her oath that Uncle Rodney would stay right there in the house until papa could get there, and Mr. Pruitt said how he hated it to happen at Christmas too and so for Grandpa’s and Aunt Louisa’s sake he would give them until the day after Christmas if Aunt Louisa would promise him that Uncle Rodney would not try to leave Mottstown. And how Mr. Pruitt showed her with her own eyes the check with Grandpa’s name signed to it and how even Aunt Louisa could see that Grandpa’s name had been — and then mamma said Louisa! Louisa!

Remember Georgie! and that was me, and papa cursed too, hollering How in damnation do you expect to keep it from him? By hiding the newspapers? and Aunt Louisa cried again and said how everybody was bound to know it, that she didn’t expect or hope that any of us could ever hold our heads up again, that all she hoped for was to keep it from Grandpa because it would kill him.

She cried hard then and papa had to stop at a branch and get down and soak his handkerchief for mamma to wipe Aunt Louisa’s face with it and then papa took the bottle of tonic out of the dash pocket and put a few drops on the handkerchief, and Aunt Louisa smelled it and then papa took a dose of the tonic out of the bottle and mamma said George! and papa drank some more of the tonic and then made like he was handing the bottle back for mamma and Aunt Louisa to take a dose too and said, “I don’t blame you.

If I was a woman in this family I’d take to drink too. Now let me get this bond business straight.”

“It was those road bonds of ma’s,” Aunt Louisa said.

We were going fast again now because the horses had rested while papa was wetting the handkerchief and taking the dose of tonic, and papa was saying All right, what about the bonds? when all of a sudden he jerked around in the seat and said, "Road bonds? Do you mean he took that damn screw driver and prized open your mother's desk too?"

Then mamma said George! how can you? only Aunt Louisa was talking now, quick now, not crying now, not yet, and papa with his head turned over his shoulder and saying Did Aunt Louisa mean that that five hundred papa had to pay out two years ago wasn't all of it?

And Aunt Louisa said it was twenty-five hundred, only they didn't want Grandpa to find it out, and so Grandma put up her road bonds for security on the note, and how they said now that Uncle Rodney had redeemed Grandma's note and the road bonds from the bank with some of the Compress Association's bonds out of the safe in the Compress Association office, because when Mr. Pruitt found the Compress Association's bonds were missing he looked for them and found them in the bank and when he looked in the Compress Association's safe all he found was the check for two thousand dollars with Grandpa's name signed to it, and how Mr. Pruitt hadn't lived in Mottstown but a year but even he knew that Grandpa never signed that check and besides he looked in the bank again and Grandpa never had two thousand dollars in it, and how Mr. Pruitt said how he would wait until the day after Christmas if Aunt Louisa would give him her sworn oath that Uncle Rodney would not go away, and Aunt Louisa did it and then she went back upstairs to plead with Uncle Rodney to give Mr. Pruitt the bonds and she went into Uncle Rodney's room where she had left him, and the window was open and Uncle Rodney was gone.

"Damn Rodney!" papa said. "The bonds! You mean, nobody knows where the bonds are?"

Now we were going fast because we were coming down the last hill and into the valley where Mottstown was. Soon we would begin to smell it again; it would be just today and then tonight and then it would be Christmas, and Aunt Louisa sitting there with her face white like a

whitewashed fence that has been rained on and papa said Who in hell ever gave him such a job anyway, and Aunt Louisa said Mr. Pruitt, and papa said how even if Mr. Pruitt had only lived in Mottstown a few months, and then Aunt Louisa began to cry without even putting her handkerchief to her face this time and mamma looked at Aunt Louisa and she began to cry too and papa took out the whip and hit the team a belt with it even if they were going fast and he cussed. "Damnation to hell," papa said. "I see. Pruitt's married."

Then we could see it too. There were holly wreaths in the windows like at home in Jefferson, and I said, "They shoot fireworks in Mottstown too like they do in Jefferson."

Aunt Louisa and mamma were crying good now, and now it was papa saying Here, here; remember Georgie, and that was me, and Aunt Louisa said, "Yes, yes! Painted common thing, traipsing up and down the streets all afternoon alone in a buggy, and the one and only time Mrs. Church called on her, and that was because of Mr. Pruitt's position alone, Mrs. Church found her without corsets on and Mrs. Church told me she smelled liquor on her breath."

And papa saying Here, here, and Aunt Louisa crying good and saying how it was Mrs. Pruitt that did it because Uncle Rodney was young and easy led because he never had had opportunities to meet a nice girl and marry her, and papa was driving fast toward Grandpa's house and he said, "Marry?"

Rodney marry? What in hell pleasure would he get out of slipping out of his own house and waiting until after dark and slipping around to the back and climbing up the gutter and into a room where there wasn't anybody in it but his own wife."

And so mamma and Aunt Louisa were crying good when we got to Grandpa's.

III

And Uncle Rodney wasn't there. We came in, and Grandma said how Mandy, that was Grandpa's cook, hadn't come to cook breakfast and

when Grandma sent Emmeline, that was Aunt Louisa's baby's nurse, down to Mandy's cabin in the back yard, the door was locked on the inside but Mandy wouldn't answer and then Grandma went down there herself and Mandy wouldn't answer and so Cousin Fred climbed in the window and Mandy was gone and Uncle Fred had just got back from town then and he and papa both hollered, "Locked? on the inside? and nobody in it?"

And then Uncle Fred told papa to go in and keep Grandpa entertained and he would go and then Aunt Louisa grabbed papa and Uncle Fred both and said she would keep Grandpa quiet and for both of them to go and find him, find him, and papa said if only the fool hasn't tried to sell them to somebody, and Uncle Fred said Good God, man, don't you know that check was dated ten days ago?

And so we went in where Grandpa was reared back in his chair and saying how he hadn't expected papa until tomorrow but by God he was glad to see somebody at last because he waked up this morning and his cook had quit and Louisa had chased off somewhere before daylight and now he couldn't even find Uncle Rodney to go down and bring his mail and a cigar or two back, and so thank God Christmas never came but once a year and so be damned if he wouldn't be glad when it was over, only he was laughing now because when he said that about Christmas before Christmas he always laughed, it wasn't until after Christmas that he didn't laugh when he said that about Christmas.

Then Aunt Louisa got Grandpa's keys out of his pocket herself and opened the desk where Uncle Rodney would prize it open with a screw driver, and took out Grandpa's tonic and then mamma said for me to go and find Cousin Fred and Cousin Louisa.

So Uncle Rodney wasn't there. Only at first I thought maybe it wouldn't be a quarter even, it wouldn't be nothing this time, so at first all I had to think about was that anyway it would be Christmas and that would be something anyway. Because I went on around the house, and so after a while papa and Uncle Fred came out, and I could see them

through the bushes knocking at Mandy's door and calling, "Rodney, Rodney," like that.

Then I had to get back in the bushes because Uncle Fred had to pass right by me to go to the woodshed to get the axe to open Mandy's door. But they couldn't fool Uncle Rodney. If Mr. Tucker couldn't fool Uncle Rodney in Mr. Tucker's own house, Uncle Fred and papa ought to know they couldn't fool him right in his own papa's back yard. So I didn't even need to hear them.

I just waited until after a while Uncle Fred came back out the broken door and came to the woodshed and took the axe and pulled the lock and hasp and steeple off the woodhouse door and went back and then papa came out of Mandy's house and they nailed the woodhouse lock onto Mandy's door and locked it and they went around behind Mandy's house, and I could hear Uncle Fred nailing the windows up. Then they went back to the house.

But it didn't matter if Mandy was in the house too and couldn't get out, because the train came from Jefferson with Rosie and papa's Sunday clothes on it and so Rosie was there to cook for Grandpa and us and so that was all right too.

But they couldn't fool Uncle Rodney. I could have told them that. I could have told them that sometimes Uncle Rodney even wanted to wait until after dark to even begin to do business. And so it was all right even if it was late in the afternoon before I could get away from Cousin Fred and Cousin Louisa.

It was late; soon they would begin to shoot the fireworks downtown, and then we would be hearing it too, so I could just see his face a little between the slats where papa and Uncle Fred had nailed up the back window; I could see his face where he hadn't shaved, and he was asking me why in hell it took me so long because he had heard the Jefferson train come before dinner, before eleven o'clock, and laughing about how papa and Uncle Fred had nailed him up in the house to keep him

when that was exactly what he wanted, and that I would have to slip out right after supper somehow and did I reckon I could manage it?

And I said how last Christmas it had been a quarter, but I didn't have to slip out of the house that time, and he laughed, saying Quarter? Quarter? did I ever see ten quarters all at once? and I never did, and he said for me to be there with the screw driver right after supper and I would see ten quarters, and to remember that even God didn't know where he is and so for me to get the hell away and stay away until I came back after dark with the screw driver.

And they couldn't fool me either. Because I had been watching the man all afternoon, even when he thought I was just playing and maybe because I was from Jefferson instead of Mottstown and so I wouldn't know who he was. But I did, because once when he was walking past the back fence and he stopped and lit his cigar again and I saw the badge under his coat when he struck the match and so I knew he was like Mr. Watts at Jefferson that catches the niggers. So I was playing by the fence and I could hear him stopping and looking at me and I played and he said, "Howdy, son. Santy Claus coming to see you tomorrow?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"You're Miss Sarah's boy, from up at Jefferson, ain't you?" he said.

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Come to spend Christmas with your grandpa, eh?" he said. "I wonder if your Uncle Rodney's at home this afternoon."

"No, sir," I said.

"Well, well, that's too bad," he said. "I wanted to see him a minute. He's downtown, I reckon?"

"No, sir," I said.

"Well, well," he said. "You mean he's gone away on a visit, maybe?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Well, well," he said. "That's too bad. I wanted to see him on a little business. But I reckon it can wait." Then he looked at me and then he said, "You're sure he's out of town, then?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

“Well, that was all I wanted to know,” he said. “If you happen to mention this to your Aunt Louisa or your Uncle Fred you can tell them that was all I wanted to know.”

“Yes, sir,” I said. So he went away. And he didn’t pass the house any more. I watched for him, but he didn’t come back. So he couldn’t fool me either.

IV

Then it began to get dark and they started to shoot the fireworks downtown. I could hear them, and soon we would be seeing the Roman candles and skyrockets and I would have the ten quarters then and I thought about the basket full of presents and I thought how maybe I could go on downtown when I got through working for Uncle Rodney and buy a present for Grandpa with a dime out of the ten quarters and give it to him tomorrow and maybe, because nobody else had given him a present, Grandpa might give me a quarter too instead of the dime tomorrow, and that would be twenty-one quarters, except for the dime, and that would be fine sure enough.

But I didn’t have time to do that. We ate supper, and Rosie had to cook that too, and mamma and Aunt Louisa with powder on their faces where they had been crying, and Grandpa; it was papa helping him take a dose of tonic every now and then all afternoon while Uncle Fred was downtown, and Uncle Fred came back and papa came out in the hall and Uncle Fred said he had looked everywhere, in the bank and in the Compress, and how Mr. Pruitt had helped him but they couldn’t find a sign either of them or of the money, because Uncle Fred was afraid because one night last week Uncle Rodney hired a rig and went somewhere and Uncle Fred found out Uncle Rodney drove over to the main line at Kingston and caught the fast train to Memphis, and papa said Damnation, and Uncle Fred said By God we will go down there after supper and sweat it out of him, because at least we have got him. I told Pruitt that and he said that if we hold to him, he will hold off and give us a chance.

So Uncle Fred and papa and Grandpa came in to supper together, with Grandpa between them saying Christmas don't come but once a year, thank God, so hooray for it, and papa and Uncle Fred saying Now you are all right, pa; straight ahead now, pa, and Grandpa would go straight ahead awhile and then begin to holler Where in hell is that damn boy? and that meant Uncle Rodney, and that Grandpa was a good mind to go downtown himself and haul Uncle Rodney out of that damn pool hall and make him come home and see his kinfolks.

And so we ate supper and mamma said she would take the children upstairs and Aunt Louisa said No, Emmeline could put us to bed, and so we went up the back stairs, and Emmeline said how she had done already had to cook breakfast extra today and if folks thought she was going to waste all her Christmas doing extra work they never had the sense she give them credit for and that this looked like to her it was a good house to be away from nohow, and so we went into the room and then after a while I went back down the back stairs and I remembered where to find the screw driver too. Then I could hear the firecrackers plain from downtown, and the moon was shining now but I could still see the Roman candles and the skyrockets running up the sky.

Then Uncle Rodney's hand came out of the crack in the shutter and took the screw driver. I couldn't see his face now and it wasn't laughing exactly, it didn't sound exactly like laughing, it was just the way he breathed behind the shutter. Because they couldn't fool him. "All right," he said. "Now that's ten quarters. But wait. Are you sure nobody knows where I am?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "I waited by the fence until he come and asked me."

"Which one?" Uncle Rodney said.

"The one that wears the badge," I said.

Then Uncle Rodney cussed. But it wasn't mad cussing. It sounded just like it sounded when he was laughing except the words.

"He said if you were out of town on a visit, and I said Yes, sir," I said.

“Good,” Uncle Rodney said. “By God, some day you will be as good a business man as I am. And I won’t make you a liar much longer, either. So now you have got ten quarters, haven’t you?”

“No,” I said. “I haven’t got them yet.”

Then he cussed again, and I said, “I will hold my cap up and you can drop them in it and they won’t spill then.”

Then he cussed hard, only it wasn’t loud. “Only I’m not going to give you ten quarters,” he said, and I begun to say You said — and Uncle Rodney said, “Because I am going to give you twenty.”

And I said Yes, sir, and he told me how to find the right house, and what to do when I found it. Only there wasn’t any paper to carry this time because Uncle Rodney said how this was a twenty-quarter job, and so it was too important to put on paper and besides I wouldn’t need a paper because I would not know them anyhow, and his voice coming hissing down from behind the shutter where I couldn’t see him and still sounding like when he cussed while he was saying how papa and Uncle Fred had done him a favor by nailing up the door and window and they didn’t even have sense enough to know it.

“Start at the corner of the house and count three windows. Then throw the handful of gravel against the window. Then when the window opens — never mind who it will be, you won’t know anyway — just say who you are and then say ‘He will be at the corner with the buggy in ten minutes. Bring the jewelry.’ Now you say it,” Uncle Rodney said.

“He will be at the corner with the buggy in ten minutes. Bring the jewelry,” I said.

“Say ‘Bring all the jewelry,’” Uncle Rodney said.

“Bring all the jewelry,” I said.

“Good,” Uncle Rodney said. Then he said, “Well? What are you waiting on?”

“For the twenty quarters,” I said.

Uncle Rodney cussed again. “Do you expect me to pay you before you have done the work?” he said.

“You said about a buggy,” I said. “Maybe you will forget to pay me before you go and you might not get back until after we go back home. And besides, that day last summer when we couldn’t do any business with Mrs. Tucker because she was sick and you wouldn’t pay me the nickel because you said it wasn’t your fault Mrs. Tucker was sick.”

Then Uncle Rodney cussed hard and quiet behind the crack and then he said, “Listen. I haven’t got the twenty quarters now. I haven’t even got one quarter now. And the only way I can get any is to get out of here and finish this business. And I can’t finish this business tonight unless you do your work. See? I’ll be right behind you. I’ll be waiting right there at the corner in the buggy when you come back. Now, go on. Hurry.”

V

So I went on across the yard, only the moon was bright now and I walked behind the fence until I got to the street. And I could hear the firecrackers and I could see the Roman candles and skyrockets sliding up the sky, but the fireworks were all downtown, and so all I could see along the street was the candles and wreaths in the windows.

So I came to the lane, went up the lane to the stable, and I could hear the horse in the stable, but I didn’t know whether it was the right stable or not; but pretty soon Uncle Rodney kind of jumped around the corner of the stable and said Here you are, and he showed me where to stand and listen toward the house and he went back into the stable.

But I couldn’t hear anything but Uncle Rodney harnessing the horse, and then he whistled and I went back and he had the horse already hitched to the buggy and I said Whose horse and buggy is this; it’s a lot skinnier than Grandpa’s horse? And Uncle Rodney said It’s my horse now, only damn this moonlight to hell.

Then I went back down the lane to the street and there wasn’t anybody coming so I waved my arm in the moonlight, and the buggy came up

and I got in and we went fast. The side curtains were up and so I couldn't see the skyrockets and Roman candles from town, but I could hear the firecrackers and I thought maybe we were going through town and maybe Uncle Rodney would stop and give me some of the twenty quarters and I could buy Grandpa a present for tomorrow, but we didn't; Uncle Rodney just raised the side curtain without stopping and then I could see the house, the two magnolia trees, but we didn't stop until we came to the corner.

"Now," Uncle Rodney said, "when the window opens, say 'He will be at the corner in ten minutes. Bring all the jewelry.' Never mind who it will be. You don't want to know who it is. You want to even forget what house it is. See?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "And then you will pay me the—"

"Yes!" he said, cussing. "Yes! Get out of here quick!"

So I got out and the buggy went on and I went back up the street. And the house was dark all right except for one light, so it was the right one, besides the two trees. So I went across the yard and counted the three windows and I was just about to throw the gravel when a lady ran out from behind a bush and grabbed me. She kept on trying to say something, only I couldn't tell what it was, and besides she never had time to say very much anyhow because a man ran out from behind another bush and grabbed us both. Only he grabbed her by the mouth, because I could tell that from the kind of slobbering noise she made while she was fighting to get loose.

"Well, boy?" he said. "What is it? Are you the one?"

"I work for Uncle Rodney," I said.

"Then you're the one," he said. Now the lady was fighting and slobbering sure enough, but he held her by the mouth. "All right. What is it?"

Only I didn't know Uncle Rodney ever did business with men. But maybe after he began to work in the Compress Association he had to.

And then he had told me I would not know them anyway, so maybe that was what he meant.

“He says to be at the corner in ten minutes,” I said. “And to bring all the jewelry. He said for me to say that twice. Bring all the jewelry.”

The lady was slobbering and fighting worse than ever now, so maybe he had to turn me loose so he could hold her with both hands.

“Bring all the jewelry,” he said, holding the lady with both hands now. “That’s a good idea. That’s fine. I don’t blame him for telling you to say that twice. All right. Now you go back to the corner and wait and when he comes, tell him this: ‘She says to come and help carry it.’ Say that to him twice, too. Understand?”

“Then I’ll get my twenty quarters,” I said.

“Twenty quarters, hah?” the man said, holding the lady. “That’s what you are to get, is it? That’s not enough. You tell him this, too: ‘She says to give you a piece of the jewelry.’ Understand?”

“I just want my twenty quarters,” I said.

Then he and the lady went back behind the bushes again and I went on, too, back toward the corner, and I could see the Roman candles and skyrocketes again from toward town and I could hear the firecrackers, and then the buggy came back and Uncle Rodney was hissing again behind the curtain like when he was behind the slats on Mandy’s window.

“Well?” he said.

“She said for you to come and help carry it,” I said.

“What?” Uncle Rodney said. “She said he’s not there?”

“No, sir. She said for you to come and help carry it. For me to say that twice.” Then I said, “Where’s my twenty quarters?” because he had already jumped out of the buggy and jumped across the walk into the shadow of some bushes. So I went into the bushes too and said, “You said you would give—”

“All right; all right!” Uncle Rodney said. He was kind of squatting along the bushes; I could hear him breathing. “I’ll give them to you tomorrow. I’ll give you thirty quarters tomorrow. Now you get to hell on home. And if they have been down to Mandy’s house, you don’t know anything. Run, now. Hurry.”

“I’d rather have the twenty quarters tonight,” I said.

He was squatting fast along in the shadow of the bushes, and I was right behind him, because when he whirled around he almost touched me, but I jumped back out of the bushes in time and he stood there cussing at me and then he stooped down and I saw it was a stick in his hand and I turned and ran.

Then he went on, squatting along in the shadow, and then I went back to the buggy, because the day after Christmas we would go back to Jefferson, and so if Uncle Rodney didn’t get back before then I would not see him again until next summer and then maybe he would be in business with another lady and my twenty quarters would be like my nickel that time when Mrs. Tucker was sick.

So I waited by the buggy and I could watch the skyrockets and the Roman candles and I could hear the firecrackers from town, only it was late now and so maybe all the stores would be closed and so I couldn’t buy Grandpa a present, even when Uncle Rodney came back and gave me my twenty quarters. So I was listening to the firecrackers and thinking about how maybe I could tell Grandpa that I had wanted to buy him a present and so maybe he might give me fifteen cents instead of a dime anyway, when all of a sudden they started shooting firecrackers back at the house where Uncle Rodney had gone.

Only they just shot five of them fast, and when they didn’t shoot any more I thought that maybe in a minute they would shoot the skyrockets and Roman candles too. But they didn’t. They just shot the five firecrackers right quick and then stopped, and I stood by the buggy and then folks began to come out of the houses and holler at one another and then I began to see men running toward the house where Uncle Rodney had gone, and then a man came out of the yard fast and went

up the street toward Grandpa's and I thought at first it was Uncle Rodney and that he had forgotten the buggy, until I saw that it wasn't.

But Uncle Rodney never came back and so I went on toward the yard to where the men were, because I could still watch the buggy too and see Uncle Rodney if he came back out of the bushes, and I came to the yard and I saw six men carrying something long and then two other men ran up and stopped me and one of them said Hell-fire, it's one of those kids, the one from Jefferson.

And I could see then that what the men were carrying was a window blind with something wrapped in a quilt on it and so I thought at first that they had come to help Uncle Rodney carry the jewelry, only I didn't see Uncle Rodney anywhere, and then one of the men said, "Who? One of the kids? Hell-fire, somebody take him on home."

So the man picked me up, but I said I had to wait on Uncle Rodney, and the man said that Uncle Rodney would be all right, and I said But I wanted to wait for him here, and then one of the men behind us said Damn it, get him on out of here, and we went on. I was riding on the man's back and then I could look back and see the six men in the moonlight carrying the blind with the bundle on it, and I said Did it belong to Uncle Rodney? and the man said No, if it belonged to anybody now it belonged to Grandpa. And so then I knew what it was.

"It's a side of beef," I said. "You are going to take it to Grandpa." Then the other man made a funny sound and the one I was riding on said Yes, you might call it a side of beef, and I said, "It's a Christmas present for Grandpa. Who is it going to be from? Is it from Uncle Rodney?"

"No," the man said. "Not from him. Call it from the men of Mottstown. From all the husbands in Mottstown."

VI

Then we came in sight of Grandpa's house. And now the lights were all on, even on the porch, and I could see folks in the hall, I could see

ladies with shawls over their heads, and some more of them going up the walk toward the porch, and then I could hear somebody in the house that sounded like singing and then papa came out of the house and came down the walk to the gate and we came up and the man put me down and I saw Rosie waiting at the gate too. Only it didn't sound like singing now because there wasn't any music with it, and so maybe it was Aunt Louisa again and so maybe she didn't like Christmas now any better than Grandpa said he didn't like it.

"It's a present for Grandpa," I said.

"Yes," papa said. "You go on with Rosie and go to bed. Mamma will be there soon. But you be a good boy until she comes. You mind Rosie. All right, Rosie. Take him on. Hurry."

"You don't need to tell me that," Rosie said. She took my hand. "Come on."

Only we didn't go back into the yard, because Rosie came out the gate and we went up the street. And then I thought maybe we were going around the back to dodge the people and we didn't do that, either. We just went on up the street, and I said, "Where are we going?" And Rosie said, "We gonter sleep at a lady's house name Mrs. Jordon."

So we went on. I didn't say anything. Because papa had forgotten to say anything about my slipping out of the house yet and so maybe if I went on to bed and stayed quiet he would forget about it until tomorrow too. And besides, the main thing was to get a holt of Uncle Rodney and get my twenty quarters before we went back home, and so maybe that would be all right tomorrow too. So we went on and Rosie said Yonder's the house, and we went in the yard and then all of a sudden Rosie saw the possum. It was in a persimmon tree in Mrs. Jordon's yard and I could see it against the moonlight too, and I hollered, "Run! Run and get Mrs. Jordon's ladder!"

And Rosie said, "Ladder my foot! You going to bed!"

But I didn't wait. I began to run toward the house, with Rosie running behind me and hollering You, Georgie! You come back here! But I didn't stop. We could get the ladder and get the possum and give it to Grandpa along with the side of meat and it wouldn't cost even a dime and then maybe Grandpa might even give me a quarter too, and then when I got the twenty quarters from Uncle Rodney I would have twenty-one quarters and that will be fine.

The End

That Evening Sun, William Faulkner

That Evening Sun

I

MONDAY IS NO different from any other weekday in Jefferson now. The streets are paved now, and the telephone and electric companies are cutting down more and more of the shade trees — the water oaks, the maples and locusts and elms — to make room for iron poles bearing clusters of bloated and ghostly and bloodless grapes, and we have a city laundry which makes the rounds on Monday morning, gathering the bundles of clothes into bright-colored, specially-made motor cars: the soiled wearing of a whole week now flees apparitionlike behind alert and irritable electric horns, with a long diminishing noise of rubber and asphalt like tearing silk, and even the Negro women who still take in white people's washing after the old custom, fetch and deliver it in automobiles.

But fifteen years ago, on Monday morning the quiet, dusty, shady streets would be full of Negro women with, balanced on their steady, turbaned heads, bundles of clothes tied up in sheets, almost as large as cotton bales, carried so without touch of hand between the kitchen door of the white house and the blackened washpot beside a cabin door in Negro Hollow.

Nancy would set her bundle on the top of her head, then upon the bundle in turn she would set the black straw sailor hat which she wore winter and summer. She was tall, with a high, sad face sunken a little where her teeth were missing. Sometimes we would go a part of the way down the lane and across the pasture with her, to watch the balanced bundle and the hat that never bobbed nor wavered, even when she walked down into the ditch and up the other side and stooped through the fence. She would go down on her hands and knees and crawl through the gap, her head rigid, uptilted, the bundle steady as a rock or a balloon, and rise to her feet again and go on.

Sometimes the husbands of the washing women would fetch and deliver the clothes, but Jesus never did that for Nancy, even before father told him to stay away from our house, even when Dilsey was sick and Nancy would come to cook for us.

And then about half the time we'd have to go down the lane to Nancy's cabin and tell her to come on and cook breakfast. We would stop at the ditch, because father told us to not have anything to do with Jesus — he was a short black man, with a razor scar down his face — and we would throw rocks at Nancy's house until she came to the door, leaning her head around it without any clothes on.

"What yawl mean, chunking my house?" Nancy said. "What you little devils mean?"

"Father says for you to come on and get breakfast," Caddy said. "Father says it's over a half an hour now, and you've got to come this minute."

"I aint studying no breakfast," Nancy said. "I going to get my sleep out."

"I bet you're drunk," Jason said. "Father says you're drunk. Are you drunk, Nancy?"

"Who says I is?" Nancy said. "I got to get my sleep out. I aint studying no breakfast."

So after a while we quit chunking the cabin and went back home. When she finally came, it was too late for me to go to school. So we thought it

was whisky until that day they arrested her again and they were taking her to jail and they passed Mr Stovall. He was the cashier in the bank and a deacon in the Baptist church, and Nancy began to say: "When you going to pay me, white man? When you going to pay me, white man? It's been three times now since you paid me a cent—" Mr Stovall knocked her down, but she kept on saying, "When you going to pay me, white man? It's been three times now since—" until Mr Stovall kicked her in the mouth with his heel and the marshal caught Mr Stovall back, and Nancy lying in the street, laughing. She turned her head and spat out some blood and teeth and said, "It's been three times now since he paid me a cent."

That was how she lost her teeth, and all that day they told about Nancy and Mr Stovall, and all that night the ones that passed the jail could hear Nancy singing and yelling. They could see her hands holding to the window bars, and a lot of them stopped along the fence, listening to her and to the jailer trying to make her stop.

She didn't shut up until almost daylight, when the jailer began to hear a bumping and scraping upstairs and he went up there and found Nancy hanging from the window bar. He said that it was cocaine and not whisky, because no nigger would try to commit suicide unless he was full of cocaine, because a nigger full of cocaine wasn't a nigger any longer.

The jailer cut her down and revived her; then he beat her, whipped her. She had hung herself with her dress. She had fixed it all right, but when they arrested her she didn't have on anything except a dress and so she didn't have anything to tie her hands with and she couldn't make her hands let go of the window ledge. So the jailer heard the noise and ran up there and found Nancy hanging from the window, stark naked, her belly already swelling out a little, like a little balloon.

When Dilsey was sick in her cabin and Nancy was cooking for us, we could see her apron swelling out; that was before father told Jesus to stay away from the house. Jesus was in the kitchen, sitting behind the

stove, with his razor scar on his black face like a piece of dirty string. He said it was a watermelon that Nancy had under her dress.

"It never come off of your vine, though," Nancy said.

"Off of what vine?" Caddy said.

"I can cut down the vine it did come off of," Jesus said.

"What makes you want to talk like that before these chillen?" Nancy said. "Whyn't you go on to work? You done et. You want Mr Jason to catch you hanging around his kitchen, talking that way before these chillen?"

"Talking what way?" Caddy said. "What vine?"

"I cant hang around white man's kitchen," Jesus said. "But white man can hang around mine. White man can come in my house, but I cant stop him. When white man want to come in my house, I aint got no house. I cant stop him, but he cant kick me outen it. He cant do that."

Dilsey was still sick in her cabin." Father told Jesus to stay off our place. Dilsey was still sick. It was a long time. We were in the library after supper.

"Isn't Nancy through in the kitchen yet?" mother said. "It seems to me that she has had plenty of time to have finished the dishes."

"Let Quentin go and see," father said. "Go and see if Nancy is through, Quentin. Tell her she can go on home."

I went to the kitchen. Nancy was through. The dishes were put away and the fire was out. Nancy was sitting in a chair, close to the cold stove. She looked at me.

"Mother wants to know if you are through," I said.

"Yes," Nancy said. She looked at me. "I done finished." She looked at me.

"What is it?" I said. "What is it?"

"I aint nothing but a nigger," Nancy said. "It aint none of my fault."

She looked at me, sitting in the chair before the cold stove, the sailor hat on her head. I went back to the library. It was the cold stove and all, when you think of a kitchen being warm and busy and cheerful. And with a cold stove and the dishes all put away, and nobody wanting to eat at that hour.

"Is she through?" mother said.

"Yessum," I said.

"What is she doing?" mother said.

"She's not doing anything. She's through."

"I'll go and see," father said.

"Maybe she's waiting for Jesus to come and take her home," Caddy said.

"Jesus is gone," I said. Nancy told us how one morning she woke up and Jesus was gone.

"He quit me," Nancy said. "Done gone to Memphis, I reckon. Dodging them city po-lice for a while, I reckon."

"And a good riddance," father said. "I hope he stays there."

"Nancy's scaired of the dark," Jason said.

"So are you," Caddy said.

"I'm not," Jason said.

"Scairy cat," Caddy said.

"I'm not," Jason said.

"You, Candace!" mother said. Father came back.

"I am going to walk down the lane with Nancy," he said. "She says that Jesus is back."

"Has she seen him?" mother said.

"No. Some Negro sent her word that he was back in town. I wont be long."

"You'll leave me alone, to take Nancy home?" mother said. "Is her safety more precious to you than mine?"

"I wont be long," father said.

"You'll leave these children unprotected, with that Negro about?"

"I'm going too," Caddy said. "Let me go, Father."

"What would he do with them, if he were unfortunate enough to have them?" father said.

"I want to go, too," Jason said.

"Jason!" mother said. She was speaking to father. You could tell that by the way she said the name. Like she believed that all day father had been trying to think of doing the thing she wouldn't like the most, and that she knew all the time that after a while he would think of it.

I stayed quiet, because father and I both knew that mother would want him to make me stay with her if she just thought of it in time. So father didn't look at me. I was the oldest. I was nine and Caddy was seven and Jason was five.

"Nonsense," father said. "We wont be long."

Nancy had her hat on. We came to the lane. "Jesus always been good to me," Nancy said. "Whenever he had two dollars, one of them was mine." We walked in the lane. "If I can just get through the lane," Nancy said, "I be all right then."

The lane was always dark. "This is where Jason got scared on Hallowe'en," Caddy said.

"I didn't," Jason said.

"Cant Aunt Rachel do anything with him?" father said. Aunt Rachel was old. She lived in a cabin beyond Nancy's, by herself. She had white hair and she smoked a pipe in the door, all day long; she didn't work any more. They said she was Jesus' mother. Sometimes she said she was and sometimes she said she wasn't any kin to Jesus.

"Yes, you did," Caddy said. "You were scairder than Frony. You were scairder than T.P. even. Scairder than niggers."

"Cant nobody do nothing with him," Nancy said. "He say I done woke up the devil in him and aint but one thing going to lay it down again."

"Well, he's gone now," father said. "There's nothing for you to be afraid of now. And if you'd just let white men alone."

"Let what white men alone?" Caddy said. "How let them alone?"

"He aint gone nowhere," Nancy said. "I can feel him. I can feel him now, in this lane. He hearing us talk, every word, hid somewhere, waiting. I aint seen him, and I aint going to see him again but once more, with that razor in his mouth. That razor on that string down his back, inside his shirt. And then I aint going to be even surprised."

"I wasn't scaired," Jason said.

"If you'd behave yourself, you'd have kept out of this," father said. "But it's all right now. He's probably in St. Louis now. Probably got another wife by now and forgot all about you."

"If he has, I better not find out about it," Nancy said. "I'd stand there right over them, and every time he wropped her, I'd cut that arm off. I'd cut his head off and I'd slit her belly and I'd shove—"

"Hush," father said.

"Slit whose belly, Nancy?" Caddy said.

"I wasn't scaired," Jason said. "I'd walk right down this lane by myself."

"Yah," Caddy said. "You wouldn't dare to put your foot down in it if we were not here too."

II

Dilsey was still sick, so we took Nancy home every night until mother said, "How much longer is this going on? I to be left alone in this big house while you take home a frightened Negro?"

We fixed a pallet in the kitchen for Nancy. One night we waked up, hearing the sound. It was not singing and it was not crying, coming up the dark stairs. There was a light in mother's room and we heard father going down the hall, down the back stairs, and Caddy and I went into the hall. The floor was cold. Our toes curled away from it while we

listened to the sound. It was like singing and it wasn't like singing, like the sounds that Negroes make.

Then it stopped and we heard father going down the back stairs, and we went to the head of the stairs. Then the sound began again, in the stairway, not loud, and we could see Nancy's eyes halfway up the stairs, against the wall. They looked like cat's eyes do, like a big cat against the wall, watching us.

When we came down the steps to where she was, she quit making the sound again, and we stood there until father came back up from the kitchen, with his pistol in his hand. He went back down with Nancy and they came back with Nancy's pallet.

We spread the pallet in our room. After the light in mother's room went off, we could see Nancy's eyes again. "Nancy," Caddy whispered, "are you asleep, Nancy?"

Nancy whispered something. It was oh or no, I don't know which. Like nobody had made it, like it came from nowhere and went nowhere, until it was like Nancy was not there at all; that I had looked so hard at her eyes on the stairs that they had got printed on my eyeballs, like the sun does when you have closed your eyes and there is no sun. "Jesus," Nancy whispered. "Jesus."

"Was it Jesus?" Caddy said. "Did he try to come into the kitchen?"

"Jesus," Nancy said. Like this: Jeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeesus, until the sound went out, like a match or a candle does.

"It's the other Jesus she means," I said.

"Can you see us, Nancy?" Caddy whispered. "Can you see our eyes too?"

"I aint nothing but a nigger," Nancy said. "God knows. God knows."

"What did you see down there in the kitchen?" Caddy whispered.

"What tried to get in?"

"God knows," Nancy said. We could see her eyes. "God knows."

Dilsey got well. She cooked dinner. "You'd better stay in bed a day or two longer," father said.

"What for?" Dilsey said. "If I had been a day later, this place would be to rack and ruin. Get on out of here now, and let me get my kitchen straight again."

Dilsey cooked supper too. And that night, just before dark, Nancy came into the kitchen.

"How do you know he's back?" Dilsey said. "You aint seen him."

"Jesus is a nigger," Jason said.

"I can feel him," Nancy said. "I can feel him laying yonder in the ditch."

"Tonight?" Dilsey said. "Is he there tonight?"

"Dilsey's a nigger too," Jason said.

"You try to eat something," Dilsey said.

"I dont want nothing," Nancy said.

"I aint a nigger," Jason said.

"Drink some coffee," Dilsey said. She poured a cup of coffee for Nancy.

"Do you know he's out there tonight? How come you know it's tonight?"

"I know," Nancy said. "He's there, waiting. I know. I done lived with him too long. I know what he is fixing to do fore he know it himself."

"Drink some coffee," Dilsey said. Nancy held the cup to her mouth and blew into the cup. Her mouth pursed out like a spreading adder's, like a rubber mouth, like she had blown all the color out of her lips with blowing the coffee.

"I aint a nigger," Jason said. "Are you a nigger, Nancy?"

"I hellborn, child," Nancy said. "I wont be nothing soon. I going back where I come from soon."

She began to drink the coffee. While she was drinking, holding the cup in both hands, she began to make the sound again. She made the sound into the cup and the coffee splashed out onto her hands and her dress. Her eyes looked at us and she sat there, her elbows on her knees, holding the cup in both hands, looking at us across the wet cup, making the sound. "Look at Nancy," Jason said. "Nancy can't cook for us now. Dilsey's got well now."

"You hush up," Dilsey said. Nancy held the cup in both hands, looking at us, making the sound, like there were two of them: one looking at us and the other making the sound. "Why'n't you let Mr Jason telefoam the marshal?" Dilsey said. Nancy stopped then, holding the cup in her long brown hands. She tried to drink some coffee again, but it splashed out of the cup, onto her hands and her dress, and she put the cup down. Jason watched her.

"I can't swallow it," Nancy said. "I swallows but it won't go down me."
"You go down to the cabin," Dilsey said. "Frony will fix you a pallet and I'll be there soon."
"Won't no nigger stop him," Nancy said.

"I ain't a nigger," Jason said. "Am I, Dilsey?"
"I reckon not," Dilsey said. She looked at Nancy. "I don't reckon so. What you going to do, then?"

Nancy looked at us. Her eyes went fast, like she was afraid there wasn't time to look, without hardly moving at all. She looked at us, at all three of us at one time. "You member that night I stayed in yawls' room?" she said.

She told about how we waked up early the next morning, and played. We had to play quiet, on her pallet, until father woke up and it was time to get breakfast. "Go and ask your maw to let me stay here tonight," Nancy said. "I won't need no pallet. We can play some more."

Caddy asked mother. Jason went too. "I can't have Negroes sleeping in the bedrooms," mother said. Jason cried. He cried until mother said he

couldn't have any dessert for three days if he didn't stop. Then Jason said he would stop if Dilsey would make a chocolate cake. Father was there.

"Why don't you do something about it?" mother said. "What do we have officers for?"

"Why is Nancy afraid of Jesus?" Caddy said. "Are you afraid of father, mother?"

"What could the officers do?" father said. "If Nancy hasn't seen him, how could the officers find him?"

"Then why is she afraid?" mother said.

"She says he is there. She says she knows he is there tonight."

"Yet we pay taxes," mother said. "I must wait here alone in this big house while you take a Negro woman home."

"You know that I am not lying outside with a razor," father said.

"I'll stop if Dilsey will make a chocolate cake," Jason said. Mother told us to go out and father said he didn't know if Jason would get a chocolate cake or not, but he knew what Jason was going to get in about a minute. We went back to the kitchen and told Nancy.

"Father said for you to go home and lock the door, and you'll be all right," Caddy said. "All right from what, Nancy? Is Jesus mad at you?" Nancy was holding the coffee cup in her hands again, her elbows on her knees and her hands holding the cup between her knees. She was looking into the cup. "What have you done that made Jesus mad?" Caddy said.

Nancy let the cup go. It didn't break on the floor, but the coffee spilled out, and Nancy sat there with her hands still making the shape of the cup. She began to make the sound again, not loud. Not singing and not unsinging. We watched her.

"Here," Dilsey said. "You quit that, now. You get ahold of yourself. You wait here. I going to get Versh to walk home with you." Dilsey went out.

We looked at Nancy. Her shoulders kept shaking, but she quit making the sound. We watched her. "What's Jesus going to do to you?" Caddy said. "He went away."

Nancy looked at us. "We had fun that night I stayed in yawls' room, didn't we?"

"I didn't," Jason said. "I didn't have any fun."

"You were asleep in mother's room," Caddy said. "You were not there."

"Let's go down to my house and have some more fun," Nancy said.

"Mother wont let us," I said. "It's too late now."

"Dont bother her," Nancy said. "We can tell her in the morning. She wont mind."

"She wouldn't let us," I said.

"Dont ask her now," Nancy said. "Dont bother her now."

"She didn't say we couldn't go," Caddy said.

"We didn't ask," I said.

"If you go, I'll tell," Jason said.

"We'll have fun," Nancy said. "They won't mind, just to my house. I been working for yawl a long time. They won't mind."

"I'm not afraid to go," Caddy said. "Jason is the one that's afraid. He'll tell."

"I'm not," Jason said.

"Yes, you are," Caddy said. "You'll tell."

"I won't tell," Jason said. "I'm not afraid."

"Jason ain't afraid to go with me," Nancy said. "Is you, Jason?"

"Jason is going to tell," Caddy said. The lane was dark. We passed the pasture gate. "I bet if something was to jump out from behind that gate, Jason would holler."

"I wouldn't," Jason said. We walked down the lane. Nancy was talking loud.

“What are you talking so loud for, Nancy?” Caddy said.

“Who; me?” Nancy said. “Listen at Quentin and Caddy and Jason saying I’m talking loud.”

“You talk like there was five of us here,” Caddy said. “You talk like father was here too.”

“Who; me talking loud, Mr Jason?” Nancy said.

“Nancy called Jason ‘Mister,’” Caddy said.

“Listen how Caddy and Quentin and Jason talk,” Nancy said.

“We’re not talking loud,” Caddy said. “You’re the one that’s talking like father—”

“Hush,” Nancy said; “hush, Mr Jason.”

“Nancy called Jason ‘Mister’ aguh—”

“Hush,” Nancy said. She was talking loud when we crossed the ditch and stooped through the fence where she used to stoop through with the clothes on her head. Then we came to her house. We were going fast then. She opened the door. The smell of the house was like the lamp and the smell of Nancy was like the wick, like they were waiting for one another to begin to smell. She lit the lamp and closed the door and put the bar up. Then she quit talking loud, looking at us.

“What’re we going to do?” Caddy said.

“What do yawl want to do?” Nancy said.

“You said we would have some fun,” Caddy said.

There was something about Nancy’s house; something you could smell besides Nancy and the house. Jason smelled it, even. “I don’t want to stay here,” he said. “I want to go home.”

“Go home, then,” Caddy said.

“I don’t want to go by myself,” Jason said.

“We’re going to have some fun,” Nancy said.

“How?” Caddy said.

Nancy stood by the door. She was looking at us, only it was like she had emptied her eyes, like she had quit using them. "What do you want to do?" she said.

"Tell us a story," Caddy said. "Can you tell a story?"

"Yes," Nancy said.

"Tell it," Caddy said. We looked at Nancy. "You don't know any stories."

"Yes," Nancy said. "Yes, I do."

She came and sat in a chair before the hearth. There was a little fire there. Nancy built it up, when it was already hot inside. She built a good blaze. She told a story. She talked like her eyes looked, like her eyes watching us and her voice talking to us did not belong to her. Like she was living somewhere else, waiting somewhere else.

She was outside the cabin. Her voice was inside and the shape of her, the Nancy that could stoop under a barbed wire fence with a bundle of clothes balanced on her head as though without weight, like a balloon, was there. But that was all. "And so this here queen come walking up to the ditch, where that bad man was hiding. She was walking up to the ditch, and she say, 'If I can just get past this here ditch,' was what she say . . ."

"What ditch?" Caddy said. "A ditch like that one out there? Why did a queen want to go into a ditch?"

"To get to her house," Nancy said. She looked at us. "She had to cross the ditch to get into her house quick and bar the door."

"Why did she want to go home and bar the door?" Caddy said.

IV

Nancy looked at us. She quit talking. She looked at us. Jason's legs stuck straight out of his pants where he sat on Nancy's lap. "I don't think that's a good story," he said. "I want to go home."

"Maybe we had better," Caddy said. She got up from the floor. "I bet they are looking for us right now." She went toward the door.

“No,” Nancy said. “Don’t open it.” She got up quick and passed Caddy. She didn’t touch the door, the wooden bar.

“Why not?” Caddy said.

“Come back to the lamp,” Nancy said. “We’ll have fun. You don’t have to go.”

“We ought to go,” Caddy said. “Unless we have a lot of fun.” She and Nancy came back to the fire, the lamp.

“I want to go home,” Jason said. “I’m going to tell.”

“I know another story,” Nancy said. She stood close to the lamp. She looked at Caddy, like when your eyes look up at a stick balanced on your nose. She had to look down to see Caddy, but her eyes looked like that, like when you are balancing a stick.

“I won’t listen to it,” Jason said. “I’ll bang on the floor.”

“It’s a good one,” Nancy said. “It’s better than the other one.”

“What’s it about?” Caddy said. Nancy was standing by the lamp. Her hand was on the lamp, against the light, long and brown.

“Your hand is on that hot globe,” Caddy said. “Don’t it feel hot to your hand?”

Nancy looked at her hand on the lamp chimney. She took her hand away, slow. She stood there, looking at Caddy, wringing her long hand as though it were tied to her wrist with a string.

“Let’s do something else,” Caddy said.

“I want to go home,” Jason said.

“I got some popcorn,” Nancy said. She looked at Caddy and then at Jason and then at me and then at Caddy again. “I got some popcorn.”

“I don’t like popcorn,” Jason said. “I’d rather have candy.”

Nancy looked at Jason. “You can hold the popper.” She was still wringing her hand; it was long and limp and brown.

“All right,” Jason said. “I’ll stay a while if I can do that. Caddy can’t hold it. I’ll want to go home again if Caddy holds the popper.”

Nancy built up the fire. "Look at Nancy putting her hands in the fire," Caddy said. "What's the matter with you, Nancy?"

"I got popcorn," Nancy said. "I got some." She took the popper from under the bed. It was broken. Jason began to cry.

"Now we can't have any popcorn," he said.

"We ought to go home, anyway," Caddy said. "Come on, Quentin."

"Wait," Nancy said; "wait. I can fix it. Don't you want to help me fix it?"

"I don't think I want any," Caddy said. "It's too late now."

"You help me, Jason," Nancy said. "Don't you want to help me?"

"No," Jason said. "I want to go home."

"Hush," Nancy said; "hush. Watch. Watch me. I can fix it so Jason can hold it and pop the corn." She got a piece of wire and fixed the popper.

"It won't hold good," Caddy said.

"Yes, it will," Nancy said. "Yawl watch. Yawl help me shell some corn." The popcorn was under the bed too. We shelled it into the popper and Nancy helped Jason hold the popper over the fire.

"It's not popping," Jason said. "I want to go home."

"You wait," Nancy said. "It'll begin to pop. We'll have fun then." She was sitting close to the fire. The lamp was turned up so high it was beginning to smoke.

"Why don't you turn it down some?" I said.

"It's all right," Nancy said. "I'll clean it. Yawl wait. The popcorn will start in a minute."

"I don't believe it's going to start," Caddy said. "We ought to start home, anyway. They'll be worried."

"No," Nancy said. "It's going to pop. Dilsey will tell um yawl with me. I been working for yawl long time. They won't mind if yawl at my house. You wait, now. It'll start popping any minute now."

Then Jason got some smoke in his eyes and he began to cry. He dropped the popper into the fire. Nancy got a wet rag and wiped Jason's face, but he didn't stop crying.

"Hush," she said. "Hush." But he didn't hush. Caddy took the popper out of the fire.

"It's burned up," she said. "You'll have to get some more popcorn, Nancy."

"Did you put all of it in?" Nancy said.

"Yes," Caddy said. Nancy looked at Caddy. Then she took the popper and opened it and poured the cinders into her apron and began to sort the grains, her hands long and brown, and we watching her.

"Haven't you got any more?" Caddy said.

"Yes," Nancy said; "yes. Look. This here ain't burnt. All we need to do is—"

"I want to go home," Jason said. "I'm going to tell."

"Hush," Caddy said. We all listened. Nancy's head was already turned toward the barred door, her eyes filled with red lamplight. "Somebody is coming," Caddy said.

Then Nancy began to make that sound again, not loud, sitting there above the fire, her long hands dangling between her knees; all of a sudden water began to come out on her face in big drops, running down her face, carrying in each one a little turning ball of firelight like a spark until it dropped off her chin. "She's not crying," I said.

"I ain't crying," Nancy said. Her eyes were closed. "I ain't crying. Who is it?"

"I don't know," Caddy said. She went to the door and looked out.

"We've got to go now," she said. "Here comes father."

"I'm going to tell," Jason said. "Yawl made me come."

The water still ran down Nancy's face. She turned in her chair. "Listen. Tell him. Tell him we going to have fun. Tell him I take good care of yawl until in the morning. Tell him to let me come home with yawl and

sleep on the floor. Tell him I won't need no pallet. We'll have fun. You member last time how we had so much fun?"

"I didn't have fun," Jason said. "You hurt me. You put smoke in my eyes. I'm going to tell."

V

Father came in. He looked at us. Nancy did not get up.

"Tell him," she said.

"Caddy made us come down here," Jason said. "I didn't want to."

Father came to the fire. Nancy looked up at him. "Can't you go to Aunt Rachel's and stay?" he said. Nancy looked up at father, her hands between her knees. "He's not here," father said. "I would have seen him. There's not a soul in sight."

"He in the ditch," Nancy said. "He waiting in the ditch yonder."

"Nonsense," father said. He looked at Nancy. "Do you know he's there?"

"I got the sign," Nancy said.

"What sign?"

"I got it. It was on the table when I come in. It was a hogbone, with blood meat still on it, laying by the lamp. He's out there. When yawl walk out that door, I gone."

"Gone where, Nancy?" Caddy said.

"I'm not a tattletale," Jason said.

"Nonsense," father said.

"He out there," Nancy said. "He looking through that window this minute, waiting for yawl to go. Then I gone."

"Nonsense," father said. "Lock up your house and we'll take you on to Aunt Rachel's."

"Twont do no good," Nancy said. She didn't look at father now, but he looked down at her, at her long, limp, moving hands. "Putting it off wont do no good."

“Then what do you want to do?” father said.

“I don’t know,” Nancy said. “I can’t do nothing. Just put it off. And that don’t do no good. I reckon it belong to me. I reckon what I going to get ain’t no more than mine.”

“Get what?” Caddy said. “What’s yours?”

“Nothing,” father said. “You all must get to bed.”

“Caddy made me come,” Jason said.

“Go on to Aunt Rachel’s,” father said.

“It won’t do no good,” Nancy said. She sat before the fire, her elbows on her knees, her long hands between her knees. “When even your own kitchen wouldn’t do no good. When even if I was sleeping on the floor in the room with your chillen, and the next morning there I am, and blood—”

“Hush,” father said. “Lock the door and put out the lamp and go to bed.”

“I scared of the dark,” Nancy said. “I scared for it to happen in the dark.”

“You mean you’re going to sit right here with the lamp lighted?” father said. Then Nancy began to make the sound again, sitting before the fire, her long hands between her knees. “Ah, damnation,” father said.

“Come along, chillen. It’s past bedtime.”

“When yawl go home, I gone,” Nancy said. She talked quieter now, and her face looked quiet, like her hands. “Anyway, I got my coffin money saved up with Mr. Lovelady.” Mr. Lovelady was a short, dirty man who collected the Negro insurance, coming around to the cabins or the kitchens every Saturday morning, to collect fifteen cents. He and his wife lived at the hotel.

One morning his wife committed suicide. They had a child, a little girl. He and the child went away. After a week or two he came back alone.

We would see him going along the lanes and the back streets on Saturday mornings.

“Nonsense,” father said. “You’ll be the first thing I’ll see in the kitchen tomorrow morning.”

“You’ll see what you’ll see, I reckon,” Nancy said. “But it will take the Lord to say what that will be.”

VI

We left her sitting before the fire.

“Come and put the bar up,” father said. But she didn’t move. She didn’t look at us again, sitting quietly there between the lamp and the fire. From some distance down the lane we could look back and see her through the open door.

“What, Father?” Caddy said. “What’s going to happen?”

“Nothing,” father said. Jason was on father’s back, so Jason was the tallest of all of us. We went down into the ditch. I looked at it, quiet. I couldn’t see much where the moonlight and the shadows tangled.

“If Jesus is hid here, he can see us, cant he?” Caddy said.

“He’s not there,” father said. “He went away a long time ago.”

“You made me come,” Jason said, high; against the sky it looked like father had two heads, a little one and a big one. “I didn’t want to.”

We went up out of the ditch. We could still see Nancy’s house and the open door, but we couldn’t see Nancy now, sitting before the fire with the door open, because she was tired. “I just done got tired,” she said. “I just a nigger. It ain’t no fault of mine.”

But we could hear her, because she began just after we came up out of the ditch, the sound that was not singing and not unsinging. “Who will do our washing now, Father?” I said.

“I’m not a nigger,” Jason said, high and close above father’s head.

“You’re worse,” Caddy said, “you are a tattletale. If something was to jump out, you’d be scairder than a nigger.”

“I wouldn’t,” Jason said.

“You’d cry,” Caddy said.

“Caddy,” father said.

“I wouldn’t!” Jason said.

“Scairy cat,” Caddy said.

“Candace!” father said.

The End

III. THE WILDERNESS

Red Leaves, William Faulkner

Red Leaves

I

THE TWO INDIANS crossed the plantation toward the slave quarters. Neat with whitewash, of baked soft brick, the two rows of houses in which lived the slaves belonging to the clan, faced one another across the mild shade of the lane marked and scored with naked feet and with a few homemade toys mute in the dust. There was no sign of life.

“I know what we will find,” the first Indian said.

“What we will not find,” the second said. Although it was noon, the lane was vacant, the doors of the cabins empty and quiet; no cooking smoke rose from any of the chinked and plastered chimneys.

“Yes. It happened like this when the father of him who is now the Man, died.”

“You mean, of him who was the Man.”

“Yao.”

The first Indian’s name was Three Basket. He was perhaps sixty. They were both squat men, a little solid, burgher-like; paunchy, with big heads, big, broad, dust-colored faces of a certain blurred serenity like carved heads on a ruined wall in Siam or Sumatra, looming out of a mist. The sun had done it, the violent sun, the violent shade. Their hair looked like sedge grass on burnt-over land. Clamped through one ear Three Basket wore an enameled snuffbox.

“I have said all the time that this is not the good way. In the old days there were no quarters, no Negroes. A man’s time was his own then. He had time. Now he must spend most of it finding work for them who prefer sweating to do.”

“They are like horses and dogs.”

“They are like nothing in this sensible world. Nothing contents them save sweat. They are worse than the white people.”

“It is not as though the Man himself had to find work for them to do.”

“You said it. I do not like slavery. It is not the good way. In the old days, there was the good way. But not now.”

“You do not remember the old way either.”

“I have listened to them who do. And I have tried this way. Man was not made to sweat.”

“That’s so. See what it has done to their flesh.”

“Yes. Black. It has a bitter taste, too.”

“You have eaten of it?”

“Once. I was young then, and more hardy in the appetite than now. Now it is different with me.”

“Yes. They are too valuable to eat now.”

“There is a bitter taste to the flesh which I do not like.”

“They are too valuable to eat, anyway, when the white men will give horses for them.”

They entered the lane. The mute, meager toys — the fetish-shaped objects made of wood and rags and feathers — lay in the dust about the patinaed doorsteps, among bones and broken gourd dishes. But there was no sound from any cabin, no face in any door; had not been since yesterday, when Issetibbeha died. But they already knew what they would find.

It was in the central cabin, a house a little larger than the others, where at certain phases of the moon the Negroes would gather to begin their ceremonies before removing after nightfall to the creek bottom, where they kept the drums. In this room they kept the minor accessories, the cryptic ornaments, the ceremonial records which consisted of sticks daubed with red clay in symbols.

It had a hearth in the center of the floor, beneath a hole in the roof, with a few cold wood ashes and a suspended iron pot. The window shutters were closed; when the two Indians entered, after the abashless sunlight they could distinguish nothing with the eyes save a movement, shadow, out of which eyeballs rolled, so that the place appeared to be full of Negroes. The two Indians stood in the doorway.

“Yao,” Basket said. “I said this is not the good way.”

“I don’t think I want to be here,” the second said.

“That is black man’s fear which you smell. It does not smell as ours does.”

“I don’t think I want to be here.”

“Your fear has an odor too.”

“Maybe it is Issetibbeha which we smell.”

“Yao. He knows. He knows what we will find here. He knew when he died what we should find here today.” Out of the rank twilight of the room the eyes, the smell, of Negroes rolled about them. “I am Three Basket, whom you know,” Basket said into the room. “We are come from the Man. He whom we seek is gone?” The Negroes said nothing. The smell of them, of their bodies, seemed to ebb and flux in the still hot air.

They seemed to be musing as one upon something remote, inscrutable. They were like a single octopus. They were like the roots of a huge tree uncovered, the earth broken momentarily upon the writhen, thick, fetid tangle of its lightless and outraged life. “Come,” Basket said. “You know our errand. Is he whom we seek gone?”

“They are thinking something,” the second said. “I do not want to be here.”

“They are knowing something,” Basket said.

“They are hiding him, you think?”

“No. He is gone. He has been gone since last night. It happened like this before, when the grandfather of him who is now the Man died. It took us three days to catch him. For three days Doom lay above the ground, saying ‘I see my horse and my dog. But I do not see my slave. What have you done with him that you will not permit me to lie quiet?’”

“They do not like to die.”

“Yao. They cling. It makes trouble for us, always. A people without honor and without decorum. Always a trouble.”

“I do not like it here.”

“Nor do I. But then, they are savages; they cannot be expected to regard usage. That is why I say that this way is a bad way.”

“Yao. They cling. They would even rather work in the sun than to enter the earth with a chief. But he is gone.”

The Negroes had said nothing, made no sound. The white eyeballs rolled, wild, subdued; the smell was rank, violent. "Yes, they fear," the second said. "What shall we do now?"

"Let us go and talk with the Man."

"Will Mocketubbe listen?"

"What can he do? He will not like to. But he is the Man now."

"Yao. He is the Man. He can wear the shoes with the red heels all the time now." They turned and went out. There was no door in the door frame. There were no doors in any of the cabins.

"He did that anyway," Basket said.

"Behind Issetibbeha's back. But now they are his shoes, since he is the Man."

"Yao. Issetibbeha did not like it. I have heard. I know that he said to Mocketubbe: 'When you are the Man, the shoes will be yours. But until then, they are my shoes.' But now Mocketubbe is the Man; he can wear them."

"Yao," the second said. "He is the Man now. He used to wear the shoes behind Issetibbeha's back, and it was not known if Issetibbeha knew this or not. And then Issetibbeha became dead, who was not old, and the shoes are Mocketubbe's, since he is the Man now. What do you think of that?"

"I don't think about it," Basket said. "Do you?"

"No," the second said.

"Good," Basket said. "You are wise."

II

The house sat on a knoll, surrounded by oak trees. The front of it was one story in height, composed of the deck house of a steamboat which had gone ashore and which Doom, Issetibbeha's father, had dismantled with his slaves and hauled on cypress rollers twelve miles home

overland. It took them five months. His house consisted at the time of one brick wall.

He set the steamboat broadside on to the wall, where now the chipped and flaked gilding of the rococo cornices arched in faint splendor above the gilt lettering of the stateroom names above the jalousied doors.

Doom had been born merely a subchief, a Mingo, one of three children on the mother's side of the family. He made a journey — he was a young man then and New Orleans was a European city — from north Mississippi to New Orleans by keel boat, where he met the Chevalier Sœur Blonde de Vitry, a man whose social position, on its face, was as equivocal as Doom's own.

In New Orleans, among the gamblers and cutthroats of the river front, Doom, under the tutelage of his patron, passed as the chief, the Man, the hereditary owner of that land which belonged to the male side of the family; it was the Chevalier de Vitry who called him *du homme*, and hence Doom.

They were seen everywhere together — the Indian, the squat man with a bold, inscrutable, underbred face, and the Parisian, the expatriate, the friend, it was said, of Carondelet and the intimate of General Wilkinson.

Then they disappeared, the two of them, vanishing from their old equivocal haunts and leaving behind them the legend of the sums which Doom was believed to have won, and some tale about a young woman, daughter of a fairly well-to-do West Indian family, the son and brother of whom sought Doom with a pistol about his old haunts for some time after his disappearance.

Six months later the young woman herself disappeared, boarding the St. Louis packet, which put in one night at a wood landing on the north Mississippi side, where the woman, accompanied by a Negro maid, got off. Four Indians met her with a horse and wagon, and they traveled for three days, slowly, since she was already big with child, to the

plantation, where she found that Doom was now chief. He never told her how he accomplished it, save that his uncle and his cousin had died suddenly.

At that time the house consisted of a brick wall built by shiftless slaves, against which was propped a thatched lean-to divided into rooms and littered with bones and refuse, set in the center of ten thousand acres of matchless parklike forest where deer grazed like domestic cattle.

Doom and the woman were married there a short time before Issetibbeha was born, by a combination itinerant minister and slave trader who arrived on a mule, to the saddle of which was lashed a cotton umbrella and a three-gallon demijohn of whisky. After that, Doom began to acquire more slaves and to cultivate some of his land, as the white people did.

But he never had enough for them to do. In utter idleness the majority of them led lives transplanted whole out of African jungles, save on the occasions when, entertaining guests, Doom coursed them with dogs.

When Doom died, Issetibbeha, his son, was nineteen. He became proprietor of the land and of the quintupled herd of blacks for which he had no use at all. Though the title of Man rested with him, there was a hierarchy of cousins and uncles who ruled the clan and who finally gathered in squatting conclave over the Negro question, squatting profoundly beneath the golden names above the doors of the steamboat.

“We cannot eat them,” one said.

“Why not?”

“There are too many of them.”

“That’s true,” a third said. “Once we started, we should have to eat them all. And that much flesh diet is not good for man.”

“Perhaps they will be like deer flesh. That cannot hurt you.”

“We might kill a few of them and not eat them,” Issetibbeha said.

They looked at him for a while. "What for?" one said.

"That is true," a second said. "We cannot do that. They are too valuable; remember all the bother they have caused us, finding things for them to do. We must do as the white men do."

"How is that?" Issetibbeha said.

"Raise more Negroes by clearing more land to make corn to feed them, then sell them. We will clear the land and plant it with food and raise Negroes and sell them to the white men for money."

"But what will we do with this money?" a third said.

They thought for a while.

"We will see," the first said. They squatted, profound, grave.

"It means work," the third said.

"Let the Negroes do it," the first said.

"Yao. Let them. To sweat is bad. It is damp. It opens the pores."

"And then the night air enters."

"Yao. Let the Negroes do it. They appear to like sweating."

So they cleared the land with the Negroes and planted it in grain. Up to that time the slaves had lived in a huge pen with a lean-to roof over one corner, like a pen for pigs. But now they began to build quarters, cabins, putting the young Negroes in the cabins in pairs to mate; five years later Issetibbeha sold forty head to a Memphis trader, and he took the money and went abroad upon it, his maternal uncle from New Orleans conducting the trip.

At that time the Chevalier Sœur Blonde de Vitry was an old man in Paris, in a toupee and a corset, with a careful toothless old face fixed in a grimace quizzical and profoundly tragic. He borrowed three hundred dollars from Issetibbeha and in return he introduced him into certain circles; a year later Issetibbeha returned home with a gilt bed, a pair of girandoles by whose light it was said that Pompadour arranged her hair while Louis smirked at his mirrored face across her powdered shoulder,

and a pair of slippers with red heels. They were too small for him, since he had not worn shoes at all until he reached New Orleans on his way abroad.

He brought the slippers home in tissue paper and kept them in the remaining pocket of a pair of saddlebags filled with cedar shavings, save when he took them out on occasion for his son, Mocketubbe, to play with. At three years of age Mocketubbe had a broad, flat, Mongolian face that appeared to exist in a complete and unfathomable lethargy, until confronted by the slippers.

Mocketubbe's mother was a comely girl whom Issetibbeha had seen one day working in her shift in a melon patch. He stopped and watched her for a while — the broad, solid thighs, the sound back, the serene face. He was on his way to the creek to fish that day, but he didn't go any farther; perhaps while he stood there watching the unaware girl he may have remembered his own mother, the city woman, the fugitive with her fans and laces and her Negro blood, and all the tawdry shabbiness of that sorry affair.

Within the year Mocketubbe was born; even at three he could not get his feet into the slippers. Watching him in the still, hot afternoons as he struggled with the slippers with a certain monstrous repudiation of fact, Issetibbeha laughed quietly to himself. He laughed at Mocketubbe and the shoes for several years, because Mocketubbe did not give up trying to put them on until he was sixteen. Then he quit.

Or Issetibbeha thought he had. But he had merely quit trying in Issetibbeha's presence. Issetibbeha's newest wife told him that Mocketubbe had stolen and hidden the shoes. Issetibbeha quit laughing then, and he sent the woman away, so that he was alone. "Yao," he said. "I too like being alive, it seems." He sent for Mocketubbe. "I give them to you," he said.

Mocketubbe was twenty-five then, unmarried. Issetibbeha was not tall, but he was taller by six inches than his son and almost a hundred pounds lighter. Mocketubbe was already diseased with flesh, with a

pale, broad, inert face and dropsical hands and feet. "They are yours now," Issetibbeha said, watching him. Mocketubbe had looked at him once when he entered, a glance brief, discreet, veiled.

"Thanks," he said.

Issetibbeha looked at him. He could never tell if Mocketubbe saw anything, looked at anything. "Why will it not be the same if I give the slippers to you?"

"Thanks," Mocketubbe said. Issetibbeha was using snuff at the time; a white man had shown him how to put the powder into his lip and scour it against his teeth with a twig of gum or of alpea.

"Well," he said, "a man cannot live forever." He looked at his son, then his gaze went blank in turn, unseeing, and he mused for an instant. You could not tell what he was thinking, save that he said half aloud: "Yao. But Doom's uncle had no shoes with red heels." He looked at his son again, fat, inert.

"Beneath all that, a man might think of doing anything and it not be known until too late." He sat in a splint chair hammocked with deer thongs. "He cannot even get them on; he and I are both frustrated by the same gross meat which he wears. He cannot even get them on. But is that my fault?"

He lived for five years longer, then he died. He was sick one night, and though the doctor came in a skunk-skin vest and burned sticks, he died before noon.

That was yesterday; the grave was dug, and for twelve hours now the People had been coming in wagons and carriages and on horseback and afoot, to eat the baked dog and the succotash and the yams cooked in ashes and to attend the funeral.

"It will be three days," Basket said, as he and the other Indian returned to the house. "It will be three days and the food will not be enough; I have seen it before."

The second Indian's name was Louis Berry. "He will smell too, in this weather."

"Yao. They are nothing but a trouble and a care."

"Maybe it will not take three days."

"They run far. Yao. We will smell this Man before he enters the earth. You watch and see if I am not right."

They approached the house.

"He can wear the shoes now," Berry said. "He can wear them now in man's sight."

"He cannot wear them for a while yet," Basket said. Berry looked at him. "He will lead the hunt."

"Moketubbe?" Berry said. "Do you think he will? A man to whom even talking is travail?"

"What else can he do? It is his own father who will soon begin to smell."

"That is true," Berry said. "There is even yet a price he must pay for the shoes. Yao. He has truly bought them. What do you think?"

"What do you think?"

"What do you think?"

"I think nothing."

"Nor do I. Issetibbeha will not need the shoes now. Let Moketubbe have them; Issetibbeha will not care."

"Yao. Man must die."

"Yao. Let him; there is still the Man."

The bark roof of the porch was supported by peeled cypress poles, high above the texas of the steamboat, shading an unfloored banquette where on the trodden earth mules and horses were tethered in bad

weather. On the forward end of the steamboat's deck sat an old man and two women. One of the women was dressing a fowl, the other was shelling corn. The old man was talking. He was barefoot, in a long linen frock coat and a beaver hat.

"This world is going to the dogs," he said. "It is being ruined by white men. We got along fine for years and years, before the white men foisted their Negroes upon us. In the old days the old men sat in the shade and ate stewed deer's flesh and corn and smoked tobacco and talked of honor and grave affairs; now what do we do?

Even the old wear themselves into the grave taking care of them that like sweating." When Basket and Berry crossed the deck he ceased and looked up at them. His eyes were querulous, bleared; his face was myriad with tiny wrinkles. "He is fled also," he said.

"Yes," Berry said, "he is gone."

"I knew it. I told them so. It will take three weeks, like when Doom died. You watch and see."

"It was three days, not three weeks," Berry said.

"Were you there?"

"No," Berry said. "But I have heard."

"Well, I was there," the old man said. "For three whole weeks, through the swamps and the briers—" They went on and left him talking.

What had been the saloon of the steamboat was now a shell, rotting slowly; the polished mahogany, the carving glinting momentarily and fading through the mold in figures cabalistic and profound; the gutted windows were like cataracted eyes.

It contained a few sacks of seed or grain, and the fore part of the running gear of a barouche, to the axle of which two C-springs rusted in graceful curves, supporting nothing. In one corner a fox cub ran steadily and soundlessly up and down a willow cage; three scrawny gamecocks moved in the dust, and the place was pocked and marked with their dried droppings.

They passed through the brick wall and entered a big room of chinked logs. It contained the hinder part of the barouche, and the dismantled body lying on its side, the window slatted over with willow withes, through which protruded the heads, the still, beady, outraged eyes and frayed combs of still more game chickens.

It was floored with packed clay; in one corner leaned a crude plow and two hand-hewn boat paddles. From the ceiling, suspended by four deer thongs, hung the gilt bed which Issetibbeha had fetched from Paris. It had neither mattress nor springs, the frame crisscrossed now by a neat hammocking of thongs.

Issetibbeha had tried to have his newest wife, the young one, sleep in the bed. He was congenitally short of breath himself, and he passed the nights half reclining in his splint chair. He would see her to bed and, later, wakeful, sleeping as he did but three or four hours a night, he would sit in the darkness and simulate slumber and listen to her sneak infinitesimally from the gilt and ribboned bed, to lie on a quilt pallet on the floor until just before daylight. Then she would enter the bed quietly again and in turn simulate slumber, while in the darkness beside her Issetibbeha quietly laughed and laughed.

The girandoles were lashed by thongs to two sticks propped in a corner where a ten-gallon whisky keg lay also. There was a clay hearth; facing it, in the splint chair, Mocketubbe sat. He was maybe an inch better than five feet tall, and he weighed two hundred and fifty pounds.

He wore a broadcloth coat and no shirt, his round, smooth copper balloon of belly swelling above the bottom piece of a suit of linen underwear. On his feet were the slippers with the red heels. Behind his chair stood a stripling with a punkah-like fan made of fringed paper. Mocketubbe sat motionless, with his broad, yellow face with its closed eyes and flat nostrils, his flipperlike arms extended. On his face was an expression profound, tragic, and inert. He did not open his eyes when Basket and Berry came in.

“He has worn them since daylight?” Basket said.

“Since daylight,” the stripling said. The fan did not cease. “You can see.”

“Yao,” Basket said. “We can see.” Mocketubbe did not move. He looked like an effigy, like a Malay god in frock coat, drawers, naked chest, the trivial scarlet-heeled shoes.

“I wouldn’t disturb him, if I were you,” the stripling said.

“Not if I were you,” Basket said. He and Berry squatted. The stripling moved the fan steadily. “O Man,” Basket said, “listen.” Mocketubbe did not move. “He is gone,” Basket said.

“I told you so,” the stripling said. “I knew he would flee. I told you.”

“Yao,” Basket said. “You are not the first to tell us afterward what we should have known before. Why is it that some of you wise men took no steps yesterday to prevent this?”

“He does not wish to die,” Berry said.

“Why should he not wish it?” Basket said.

“Because he must die some day is no reason,” the stripling said. “That would not convince me either, old man.”

“Hold your tongue,” Berry said.

“For twenty years,” Basket said, “while others of his race sweat in the fields, he served the Man in the shade. Why should he not wish to die, since he did not wish to sweat?”

“And it will be quick,” Berry said. “It will not take long.”

“Catch him and tell him that,” the stripling said.

“Hush,” Berry said. They squatted, watching Mocketubbe’s face. He might have been dead himself. It was as though he were cased so in flesh that even breathing took place too deep within him to show.

“Listen, O Man,” Basket said. “Issetibbeha is dead. He waits. His dog and his horse we have. But his slave has fled. The one who held the pot for him, who ate of his food, from his dish, is fled. Issetibbeha waits.”

“Yao,” Berry said.

“This is not the first time,” Basket said. “This happened when Doom, thy grandfather, lay waiting at the door of the earth. He lay waiting three days, saying, ‘Where is my Negro?’ And Issetibbeha, thy father, answered, ‘I will find him. Rest; I will bring him to you so that you may begin the journey.’”

“Yao,” Berry said.

Moketubbe had not moved, had not opened his eyes.

“For three days Issetibbeha hunted in the bottom,” Basket said. “He did not even return home for food, until the Negro was with him; then he said to Doom, his father, ‘Here is thy dog, thy horse, thy Negro; rest.’ Issetibbeha, who is dead since yesterday, said it. And now Issetibbeha’s Negro is fled. His horse and his dog wait with him, but his Negro is fled.”

“Yao,” Berry said.

Moketubbe had not moved. His eyes were closed; upon his supine monstrous shape there was a colossal inertia, something profoundly immobile, beyond and impervious to flesh. They watched his face, squatting.

“When thy father was newly the Man, this happened,” Basket said.

“And it was Issetibbeha who brought back the slave to where his father waited to enter the earth.” Moketubbe’s face had not moved, his eyes had not moved. After a while Basket said, “Remove the shoes.”

The stripling removed the shoes. Moketubbe began to pant, his bare chest moving deep, as though he were rising from beyond his unfathomed flesh back into life, like up from the water, the sea. But his eyes had not opened yet.

Berry said, “He will lead the hunt.”

“Yao,” Basket said. “He is the Man. He will lead the hunt.”

IV

All that day the Negro, Issetibbeha's body servant, hidden in the barn, watched Issetibbeha's dying. He was forty, a Guinea man. He had a flat nose, a close, small head; the inside corners of his eyes showed red a little, and his prominent gums were a pale bluish red above his square, broad teeth. He had been taken at fourteen by a trader off Kamerun, before his teeth had been filed. He had been Issetibbeha's body servant for twenty-three years.

On the day before, the day on which Issetibbeha lay sick, he returned to the quarters at dusk. In that unhurried hour the smoke of the cooking fires blew slowly across the street from door to door, carrying into the opposite one the smell of the identical meat and bread. The women tended them; the men were gathered at the head of the lane, watching him as he came down the slope from the house, putting his naked feet down carefully in a strange dusk. To the waiting men his eyeballs were a little luminous.

"Issetibbeha is not dead yet," the headman said.

"Not dead," the body servant said. "Who not dead?"

In the dusk they had faces like his, the different ages, the thoughts sealed inscrutable behind faces like the death masks of apes. The smell of the fires, the cooking, blew sharp and slow across the strange dusk, as from another world, above the lane and the pickaninnies naked in the dust.

"If he lives past sundown, he will live until daybreak," one said.

"Who says?"

"Talk says."

"Yao. Talk says. We know but one thing." They looked at the body servant as he stood among them, his eyeballs a little luminous. He was breathing slow and deep. His chest was bare; he was sweating a little.

"He knows. He knows it."

“Let us let the drums talk.”

“Yao. Let the drums tell it.”

The drums began after dark. They kept them hidden in the creek bottom. They were made of hollowed cypress knees, and the Negroes kept them hidden; why, none knew. They were buried in the mud on the bank of a slough; a lad of fourteen guarded them. He was undersized, and a mute; he squatted in the mud there all day, clouded over with mosquitoes, naked save for the mud with which he coated himself against the mosquitoes, and about his neck a fiber bag containing a pig's rib to which black shreds of flesh still adhered, and two scaly barks on a wire.

He slobbered onto his clutched knees, drooling; now and then Indians came noiselessly out of the bushes behind him and stood there and contemplated him for a while and went away, and he never knew it.

From the loft of the stable where he lay hidden until dark and after, the Negro could hear the drums. They were three miles away, but he could hear them as though they were in the barn itself below him, thudding and thudding. It was as though he could see the fire too, and the black limbs turning into and out of the flames in copper gleams.

Only there would be no fire. There would be no more light there than where he lay in the dusty loft, with the whispering arpeggios of rat feet along the warm and immemorial ax-squared rafters.

The only fire there would be the smudge against mosquitoes where the women with nursing children crouched, their heavy sluggish breasts nipples full and smooth into the mouths of men children; contemplative, oblivious of the drumming, since a fire would signify life.

There was a fire in the steamboat, where Issetibbeha lay dying among his wives, beneath the lashed girandoles and the suspended bed. He could see the smoke, and just before sunset he saw the doctor come out, in a waistcoat made of skunk skins, and set fire to two clay-daubed sticks at the bows of the boat deck. “So he is not dead yet,” the Negro

said into the whispering gloom of the loft, answering himself; he could hear the two voices, himself and himself:

“Who not dead?”

“You are dead.”

“Yao, I am dead,” he said quietly. He wished to be where the drums were. He imagined himself springing out of the bushes, leaping among the drums on his bare, lean, greasy, invisible limbs. But he could not do that, because man leaped past life, into where death was; he dashed into death and did not die, because when death took a man, it took him just this side of the end of living. It was when death overran him from behind, still in life.

The thin whisper of rat feet died in fainting gusts along the rafters. Once he had eaten rat. He was a boy then, but just come to America. They had lived ninety days in a three-foot-high ‘tween-deck in tropic latitudes, hearing from topside the drunken New England captain intoning aloud from a book which he did not recognize for ten years afterward to be the Bible.

Squatting in the stable so, he had watched the rat, civilized, by association with man reft of its inherent cunning of limb and eye; he had caught it without difficulty, with scarce a movement of his hand, and he ate it slowly, wondering how any of the rats had escaped so long. At that time he was still wearing the single white garment which the trader, a deacon in the Unitarian church, had given him, and he spoke then only his native tongue.

He was naked now, save for a pair of dungaree pants bought by Indians from white men, and an amulet slung on a thong about his hips. The amulet consisted of one half of a mother-of-pearl lorgnon which Issetibbeha had brought back from Paris, and the skull of a cottonmouth moccasin. He had killed the snake himself and eaten it, save the poison head. He lay in the loft, watching the house, the steamboat, listening to the drums, thinking of himself among the drums.

He lay there all night. The next morning he saw the doctor come out, in his skunk vest, and get on his mule and ride away, and he became quite still and watched the final dust from beneath the mule's delicate feet die away, and then he found that he was still breathing and it seemed strange to him that he still breathed air, still needed air. Then he lay and watched quietly, waiting to move, his eyeballs a little luminous, but with a quiet light, and his breathing light and regular, and saw Louis Berry come out and look at the sky.

It was good light then, and already five Indians squatted in their Sunday clothes along the steamboat deck; by noon there were twenty-five there. That afternoon they dug the trench in which the meat would be baked, and the yams; by that time there were almost a hundred guests — decorous, quiet, patient in their stiff European finery — and he watched Berry lead Issetibbeha's mare from the stable and tie her to a tree, and then he watched Berry emerge from the house with the old hound which lay beside Issetibbeha's chair.

He tied the hound to the tree too, and it sat there, looking gravely about at the faces. Then it began to howl. It was still howling at sundown, when the Negro climbed down the back wall of the barn and entered the spring branch, where it was already dusk. He began to run then.

He could hear the hound howling behind him, and near the spring, already running, he passed another Negro. The two men, the one motionless and the other running, looked for an instant at each other as though across an actual boundary between two different worlds. He ran on into full darkness, mouth closed, fists doubled, his broad nostrils bellowing steadily.

He ran on in the darkness. He knew the country well, because he had hunted it often with Issetibbeha, following on his mule the course of the fox or the cat beside Issetibbeha's mare; he knew it as well as did the men who would pursue him. He saw them for the first time shortly before sunset of the second day. He had run thirty miles then, up the

creek bottom, before doubling back; lying in a pawpaw thicket he saw the pursuit for the first time.

There were two of them, in shirts and straw hats, carrying their neatly rolled trousers under their arms, and they had no weapons. They were middle-aged, paunchy, and they could not have moved very fast anyway; it would be twelve hours before they could return to where he lay watching them.

“So I will have until midnight to rest,” he said. He was near enough to the plantation to smell the cooking fires, and he thought how he ought to be hungry, since he had not eaten in thirty hours.

“But it is more important to rest,” he told himself. He continued to tell himself that, lying in the pawpaw thicket, because the effort of resting, the need and the haste to rest, made his heart thud the same as the running had done. It was as though he had forgot how to rest, as though the six hours were not long enough to do it in, to remember again how to do it.

As soon as dark came he moved again. He had thought to keep going steadily and quietly through the night, since there was nowhere for him to go, but as soon as he moved he began to run at top speed, breasting his panting chest, his broad-flaring nostrils through the choked and whipping darkness.

He ran for an hour, lost by then, without direction, when suddenly he stopped, and after a time his thudding heart unraveled from the sound of the drums. By the sound they were not two miles away; he followed the sound until he could smell the smudge fire and taste the acrid smoke.

When he stood among them the drums did not cease; only the headman came to him where he stood in the drifting smudge, panting, his nostrils flaring and pulsing, the hushed glare of his ceaseless eyeballs in his mud-daubed face as though they were worked from lungs.

“We have expected thee,” the headman said. “Go, now.”
“Go?”

“Eat, and go. The dead may not consort with the living; thou knowest that.”

“Yao. I know that.” They did not look at one another. The drums had not ceased.

“Wilt thou eat?” the headman said.

“I am not hungry. I caught a rabbit this afternoon, and ate while I lay hidden.”

“Take some cooked meat with thee, then.”

He accepted the cooked meat, wrapped in leaves, and entered the creek bottom again; after a while the sound of the drums ceased. He walked steadily until daybreak. “I have twelve hours,” he said. “Maybe more, since the trail was followed by night.”

He squatted and ate the meat and wiped his hands on his thighs. Then he rose and removed the dungaree pants and squatted again beside a slough and coated himself with mud — face, arms, body and legs — and squatted again, clasping his knees, his head bowed.

When it was light enough to see, he moved back into the swamp and squatted again and went to sleep so. He did not dream at all. It was well that he moved, for, waking suddenly in broad daylight and the high sun, he saw the two Indians. They still carried their neatly rolled trousers; they stood opposite the place where he lay hidden, paunchy, thick, soft-looking, a little ludicrous in their straw hats and shirt tails.

“This is wearying work,” one said.

“I’d rather be at home in the shade myself,” the other said. “But there is the Man waiting at the door to the earth.”

“Yao.” They looked quietly about; stooping, one of them removed from his shirt tail a clot of cockleburs. “Damn that Negro,” he said.

“Yao. When have they ever been anything but a trial and a care to us?”

In the early afternoon, from the top of a tree, the Negro looked down into the plantation. He could see Issetibbeha’s body in a hammock between the two trees where the horse and the dog were tethered, and the concourse about the steamboat was filled with wagons and horses and mules, with carts and saddle-horses, while in bright clumps the women and the smaller children and the old men squatted about the long trench where the smoke from the barbecuing meat blew slow and thick.

The men and the big boys would all be down there in the creek bottom behind him, on the trail, their Sunday clothes rolled carefully up and wedged into tree crotches. There was a clump of men near the door to the house, to the saloon of the steamboat, though, and he watched them, and after a while he saw them bring Mocketubbe out in a litter made of buckskin and persimmon poles; high hidden in his leafed nook the Negro, the quarry, looked quietly down upon his irrevocable doom with an expression as profound as Mocketubbe’s own. “Yao,” he said quietly. “He will go then. That man whose body has been dead for fifteen years, he will go also.”

In the middle of the afternoon he came face to face with an Indian. They were both on a footlog across a slough — the Negro gaunt, lean, hard, tireless and desperate; the Indian thick, soft-looking, the apparent embodiment of the ultimate and the supreme reluctance and inertia. The Indian made no move, no sound; he stood on the log and watched the Negro plunge into the slough and swim ashore and crash away into the undergrowth.

Just before sunset he lay behind a down log. Up the log in slow procession moved a line of ants. He caught them and ate them slowly, with a kind of detachment, like that of a dinner guest eating salted nuts from a dish. They too had a salt taste, engendering a salivary reaction out of all proportion. He ate them slowly, watching the unbroken line

move up the log and into oblivious doom with a steady and terrific undeviation. He had eaten nothing else all day; in his caked mud mask his eyes rolled in reddened rims.

At sunset, creeping along the creek bank toward where he had spotted a frog, a cottonmouth moccasin slashed him suddenly across the forearm with a thick, sluggish blow. It struck clumsily, leaving two long slashes across his arm like two razor slashes, and half sprawled with its own momentum and rage, it appeared for the moment utterly helpless with its own awkwardness and choleric anger. "Olé, grandfather," the Negro said.

He touched its head and watched it slash him again across his arm, and again, with thick, raking, awkward blows. "It's that I do not wish to die," he said. Then he said it again— "It's that I do not wish to die" — in a quiet tone, of slow and low amaze, as though it were something that, until the words had said themselves, he found that he had not known, or had not known the depth and extent of his desire.

V

Moketubbe took the slippers with him. He could not wear them very long while in motion, not even in the litter where he was slung reclining, so they rested upon a square of fawnskin upon his lap — the cracked, frail slippers a little shapeless now, with their scaled patent-leather surfaces and buckleless tongues and scarlet heels, lying upon the supine obese shape just barely alive, carried through swamp and brier by swinging relays of men who bore steadily all day long the crime and its object, on the business of the slain.

To Moketubbe it must have been as though, himself immortal, he were being carried rapidly through hell by doomed spirits which, alive, had contemplated his disaster, and, dead, were oblivious partners to his damnation.

After resting for a while, the litter propped in the center of the squatting circle and Moketubbe motionless in it, with closed eyes and

his face at once peaceful for the instant and filled with inescapable foreknowledge, he could wear the slippers for a while.

The stripling put them on him, forcing his big, tender, dropsical feet into them; whereupon into his face came again that expression tragic, passive and profoundly attentive, which dyspeptics wear. Then they went on. He made no move, no sound, inert in the rhythmic litter out of some reserve of inertia, or maybe of some kingly virtue such as courage or fortitude.

After a time they set the litter down and looked at him, at the yellow face like that of an idol, beaded over with sweat. Then Three Basket or Had-Two-Fathers would say: "Take them off. Honor has been served." They would remove the shoes. Mocketubbe's face would not alter, but only then would his breathing become perceptible, going in and out of his pale lips with a faint ah-ah-ah sound, and they would squat again while the couriers and the runners came up.

"Not yet?"

"Not yet. He is going east. By sunset he will reach Mouth of Tippah. Then he will turn back. We may take him tomorrow."

"Let us hope so. It will not be too soon."

"Yao. It has been three days now."

"When Doom died, it took only three days."

"But that was an old man. This one is young."

"Yao. A good race. If he is taken tomorrow, I will win a horse."

"May you win it."

"Yao. This work is not pleasant."

That was the day on which the food gave out at the plantation. The guests returned home and came back the next day with more food, enough for a week longer. On that day Issetibbeha began to smell; they could smell him for a long way up and down the bottom when it got hot toward noon and the wind blew.

But they didn't capture the Negro on that day, nor on the next. It was about dusk on the sixth day when the couriers came up to the litter; they had found blood. "He has injured himself."

"Not bad, I hope," Basket said. "We cannot send with Issetibbeha one who will be of no service to him."

"Nor whom Issetibbeha himself will have to nurse and care for," Berry said.

"We do not know," the courier said. "He has hidden himself. He has crept back into the swamp. We have left pickets."

They trotted with the litter now. The place where the Negro had crept into the swamp was an hour away. In the hurry and excitement they had forgotten that Mocketubbe still wore the slippers; when they reached the place Mocketubbe had fainted. They removed the slippers and brought him to.

With dark, they formed a circle about the swamp. They squatted, clouded over with gnats and mosquitoes; the evening star burned low and close down the west, and the constellations began to wheel overhead. "We will give him time," they said. "Tomorrow is just another name for today."

"Yao. Let him have time." Then they ceased, and gazed as one into the darkness where the swamp lay. After a while the noise ceased, and soon the courier came out of the darkness.

"He tried to break out."

"But you turned him back?"

"He turned back. We feared for a moment, the three of us. We could smell him creeping in the darkness, and we could smell something else, which we did not know. That was why we feared, until he told us. He said to slay him there, since it would be dark and he would not have to see the face when it came. But it was not that which we smelled; he told us what it was.

A snake had struck him. That was two days ago. The arm swelled, and it smelled bad.

But it was not that which we smelled then, because the swelling had gone down and his arm was no larger than that of a child. He showed us. We felt the arm, all of us did; it was no larger than that of a child. He said to give him a hatchet so he could chop the arm off. But tomorrow is today also."

"Yao. Tomorrow is today."

"We feared for a while. Then he went back into the swamp."

"That is good."

"Yao. We feared. Shall I tell the Man?"

"I will see," Basket said. He went away. The courier squatted, telling again about the Negro. Basket returned. "The Man says that it is good. Return to your post."

The courier crept away. They squatted about the litter; now and then they slept. Sometime after midnight the Negro waked them. He began to shout and talk to himself, his voice coming sharp and sudden out of the darkness, then he fell silent. Dawn came; a white crane flapped slowly across the jonquil sky. Basket was awake. "Let us go now," he said. "It is today."

Two Indians entered the swamp, their movements noisy. Before they reached the Negro they stopped, because he began to sing. They could see him, naked and mud-caked, sitting on a log, singing. They squatted silently a short distance away, until he finished. He was chanting something in his own language, his face lifted to the rising sun. His voice was clear, full, with a quality wild and sad.

"Let him have time," the Indians said, squatting, patient, waiting. He ceased and they approached. He looked back and up at them through the cracked mud mask. His eyes were bloodshot, his lips cracked upon his square short teeth. The mask of mud appeared to be loose on his

face, as if he might have lost flesh since he put it there; he held his left arm close to his breast.

From the elbow down it was caked and shapeless with black mud. They could smell him, a rank smell. He watched them quietly until one touched him on the arm. "Come," the Indian said. "You ran well. Do not be ashamed."

VI

As they neared the plantation in the tainted bright morning, the Negro's eyes began to roll a little, like those of a horse. The smoke from the cooking pit blew low along the earth and upon the squatting and waiting guests about the yard and upon the steamboat deck, in their bright, stiff, harsh finery; the women, the children, the old men. They had sent couriers along the bottom, and another on ahead, and Issetibbeha's body had already been removed to where the grave waited, along with the horse and the dog, though they could still smell him in death about the house where he had lived in life. The guests were beginning to move toward the grave when the bearers of Mocketubbe's litter mounted the slope.

The Negro was the tallest there, his high, close, mud-caked head looming above them all. He was breathing hard, as though the desperate effort of the six suspended and desperate days had catapulted upon him at once; although they walked slowly, his naked scarred chest rose and fell above the close-clutched left arm.

He looked this way and that continuously, as if he were not seeing, as though sight never quite caught up with the looking. His mouth was open a little upon his big white teeth; he began to pant. The already moving guests halted, pausing, looking back, some with pieces of meat in their hands, as the Negro looked about at their faces with his wild, restrained, unceasing eyes.

"Will you eat first?" Basket said. He had to say it twice.
"Yes," the Negro said. "That's it. I want to eat."

The throng had begun to press back toward the center; the word passed to the outermost: "He will eat first."

They reached the steamboat. "Sit down," Basket said. The Negro sat on the edge of the deck. He was still panting, his chest rising and falling, his head ceaseless with its white eyeballs, turning from side to side. It was as if the inability to see came from within, from hopelessness, not from absence of vision. They brought food and watched quietly as he tried to eat it.

He put the food into his mouth and chewed it, but chewing, the half-masticated matter began to emerge from the corners of his mouth and to drool down his chin, onto his chest, and after a while he stopped chewing and sat there, naked, covered with dried mud, the plate on his knees, and his mouth filled with a mass of chewed food, open, his eyes wide and unceasing, panting and panting. They watched him, patient, implacable, waiting.

"Come," Basket said at last.

"It's water I want," the Negro said. "I want water."

The well was a little way down the slope toward the quarters. The slope lay dappled with the shadows of noon, of that peaceful hour when, Issetibbeha napping in his chair and waiting for the noon meal and the long afternoon to sleep in, the Negro, the body servant, would be free. He would sit in the kitchen door then, talking with the women who prepared the food.

Beyond the kitchen the lane between the quarters would be quiet, peaceful, with the women talking to one another across the lane and the smoke of the dinner fires blowing upon the pickaninnies like ebony toys in the dust.

"Come," Basket said.

The Negro walked among them, taller than any. The guests were moving on toward where Issetibbeha and the horse and the dog

waited. The Negro walked with his high ceaseless head, his panting chest. "Come," Basket said. "You wanted water."

"Yes," the Negro said. "Yes." He looked back at the house, then down to the quarters, where today no fire burned, no face showed in any door, no pickaninny in the dust, panting. "It struck me here, raking me across this arm; once, twice, three times. I said, 'Olé, Grandfather.'"

"Come now," Basket said. The Negro was still going through the motion of walking, his knee action high, his head high, as though he were on a treadmill. His eyeballs had a wild, restrained glare, like those of a horse. "You wanted water," Basket said. "Here it is."

There was a gourd in the well. They dipped it full and gave it to the Negro, and they watched him try to drink. His eyes had not ceased as he tilted the gourd slowly against his caked face. They could watch his throat working and the bright water cascading from either side of the gourd, down his chin and breast. Then the water stopped. "Come," Basket said.

"Wait," the Negro said. He dipped the gourd again and tilted it against his face, beneath his ceaseless eyes. Again they watched his throat working and the unswallowed water sheathing broken and myriad down his chin, channeling his caked chest.

They waited, patient, grave, decorous, implacable; clansman and guest and kin. Then the water ceased, though still the empty gourd tilted higher and higher, and still his black throat aped the vain motion of his frustrated swallowing. A piece of water-loosened mud carried away from his chest and broke at his muddy feet, and in the empty gourd they could hear his breath: ah-ah-ah.

"Come," Basket said, taking the gourd from the Negro and hanging it back in the well.

The End

A Justice, William Faulkner

A Justice

I

UNTIL GRANDFATHER DIED, we would go out to the farm every Saturday afternoon. We would leave home right after dinner in the surrey, I in front with Roskus, and Grandfather and Caddy and Jason in the back.

Grandfather and Roskus would talk, with the horses going fast, because it was the best team in the county. They would carry the surrey fast along the levels and up some of the hills even. But this was in north Mississippi, and on some of the hills Roskus and I could smell Grandfather's cigar.

The farm was four miles away. There was a long, low house in the grove, not painted but kept whole and sound by a clever carpenter from the quarters named Sam Fathers, and behind it the barns and smokehouses, and further still, the quarters themselves, also kept whole and sound by Sam Fathers.

He did nothing else, and they said he was almost a hundred years old. He lived with the Negroes and they — the white people; the Negroes called him a blue-gum — called him a Negro. But he wasn't a Negro. That's what I'm going to tell about.

When we got there, Mr. Stokes, the manager, would send a Negro boy with Caddy and Jason to the creek to fish, because Caddy was a girl and Jason was too little, but I wouldn't go with them. I would go to Sam Fathers' shop, where he would be making breast-yokes or wagon wheels, and I would always bring him some tobacco.

Then he would stop working and he would fill his pipe — he made them himself, out of creek clay with a reed stem — and he would tell me

about the old days. He talked like a nigger — that is, he said his words like niggers do, but he didn't say the same words — and his hair was nigger hair. But his skin wasn't quite the color of a light nigger and his nose and his mouth and chin were not nigger nose and mouth and chin.

And his shape was not like the shape of a nigger when he gets old. He was straight in the back, not tall, a little broad, and his face was still all the time, like he might be somewhere else all the while he was working or when people, even white people, talked to him, or while he talked to me.

It was just the same all the time, like he might be away up on a roof by himself, driving nails. Sometimes he would quit work with something half-finished on the bench, and sit down and smoke. And he wouldn't jump up and go back to work when Mr. Stokes or even Grandfather came along.

So I would give him the tobacco and he would stop work and sit down and fill his pipe and talk to me.

"These niggers," he said. "They call me Uncle Blue-Gum. And the white folks, they call me Sam Fathers."

"Isn't that your name?" I said.

"No. Not in the old days. I remember. I remember how I never saw but one white man until I was a boy big as you are; a whisky trader that came every summer to the Plantation. It was the Man himself that named me. He didn't name me Sam Fathers, though."

"The Man?" I said.

"He owned the Plantation, the Negroes, my mammy too. He owned all the land that I knew of until I was grown. He was a Choctaw chief. He sold my mammy to your great-grandpappy. He said I didn't have to go unless I wanted to, because I was a warrior too then. He was the one who named me Had-Two-Fathers."

"Had-Two-Fathers?" I said. "That's not a name. That's not anything."

"It was my name once. Listen."

II

This is how Herman Basket told it when I was big enough to hear talk. He said that when Doom came back from New Orleans, he brought this woman with him. He brought six black people, though Herman Basket said they already had more black people in the Plantation than they could find use for. Sometimes they would run the black men with dogs, like you would a fox or a cat or a coon. And then Doom brought six more when he came home from New Orleans.

He said he won them on the steamboat, and so he had to take them. He got off the steamboat with the six black people, Herman Basket said, and a big box in which something was alive, and the gold box of New Orleans salt about the size of a gold watch.

And Herman Basket told how Doom took a puppy out of the box in which something was alive, and how he made a bullet of bread and a pinch of the salt in the gold box, and put the bullet into the puppy and the puppy died.

That was the kind of a man that Doom was, Herman Basket said. He told how, when Doom got off the steamboat that night, he wore a coat with gold all over it, and he had three gold watches, but Herman Basket said that even after seven years, Doom's eyes had not changed. He said that Doom's eyes were just the same as before he went away, before his name was Doom, and he and Herman Basket and my pappy were sleeping on the same pallet and talking at night, as boys will.

Doom's name was Ikkemotubbe then, and he was not born to be the Man, because Doom's mother's brother was the Man, and the Man had a son of his own, as well as a brother. But even then, and Doom no bigger than you are, Herman Basket said that sometimes the Man would look at Doom and he would say: "O Sister's Son, your eye is a bad eye, like the eye of a bad horse."

So the Man was not sorry when Doom got to be a young man and said that he would go to New Orleans, Herman Basket said. The Man was getting old then. He used to like to play mumble-peg and to pitch horseshoes both, but now he just liked mumble-peg. So he was not sorry when Doom went away, though he didn't forget about Doom.

Herman Basket said that each summer when the whisky-trader came, the Man would ask him about Doom. "He calls himself David Callicoot now," the Man would say. "But his name is Ikkemotubbe. You haven't heard maybe of a David Callicoot getting drowned in the Big River, or killed in the white man's fight at New Orleans?"

But Herman Basket said they didn't hear from Doom at all until he had been gone seven years. Then one day Herman Basket and my pappy got a written stick from Doom to meet him at the Big River. Because the steamboat didn't come up our river any more then. The steamboat was still in our river, but it didn't go anywhere any more. Herman Basket told how one day during the high water, about three years after Doom went away, the steamboat came and crawled up on a sand-bar and died.

That was how Doom got his second name, the one before Doom. Herman Basket told how four times a year the steamboat would come up our river, and how the People would go to the river and camp and wait to see the steamboat pass, and he said that the white man who told the steamboat where to swim was named David Callicoot.

So when Doom told Herman Basket and pappy that he was going to New Orleans, he said, "And I'll tell you something else. From now on, my name is not Ikkemotubbe. It's David Callicoot. And some day I'm going to own a steamboat, too." That was the kind of man that Doom was, Herman Basket said.

So after seven years he sent them the written stick and Herman Basket and pappy took the wagon and went to meet Doom at the Big River, and Doom got off the steamboat with the six black people. "I won them

on the steamboat,” Doom said. “You and Crawford (my pappy’s name was Crawfishford, but usually it was Crawford) can divide them.”

“I don’t want them,” Herman Basket said that pappy said.

“Then Herman can have them all,” Doom said.

“I don’t want them either,” Herman Basket said.

“All right,” Doom said. Then Herman Basket said he asked Doom if his name was still David Callicoat, but instead of answering, Doom told one of the black people something in the white man’s talk, and the black man lit a pine knot. Then Herman Basket said they were watching Doom take the puppy from the box and make the bullet of bread and the New Orleans salt which Doom had in the little gold box, when he said that pappy said:

“I believe you said that Herman and I were to divide these black people.”

Then Herman Basket said he saw that one of the black people was a woman.

“You and Herman don’t want them,” Doom said.

“I wasn’t thinking when I said that,” pappy said. “I will take the lot with the woman in it. Herman can have the other three.”

“I don’t want them,” Herman Basket said.

“You can have four, then,” pappy said. “I will take the woman and one other.”

“I don’t want them,” Herman Basket said.

“I will take only the woman,” pappy said. “You can have the other five.”

“I don’t want them,” Herman Basket said.

“You don’t want them, either,” Doom said to pappy. “You said so yourself.”

Then Herman Basket said that the puppy was dead. “You didn’t tell us your new name,” he said to Doom.

“My name is Doom now,” Doom said. “It was given me by a French chief in New Orleans. In French talking, Doo-um; in our talking, Doom.”

“What does it mean?” Herman Basket said.

He said how Doom looked at him for a while. “It means the Man,” Doom said.

Herman Basket told how they thought about that. He said they stood there in the dark, with the other puppies in the box, the ones that Doom hadn’t used, whimpering and scuffing, and the light of the pine knot shining on the eyeballs of the black people and on Doom’s gold coat and on the puppy that had died.

“You cannot be the Man,” Herman Basket said. “You are only on the sister’s side. And the Man has a brother and a son.”

“That’s right,” Doom said. “But if I were the Man, I would give Crawford those black people. I would give Herman something, too. For every black man I gave Crawford, I would give Herman a horse, if I were the Man.”

“Craw-ford only wants this woman,” Herman Basket said.

“I would give Herman six horses, anyway,” Doom said. “But maybe the Man has already given Herman a horse.”

“No,” Herman Basket said. “My ghost is still walking.”

It took them three days to reach the Plantation. They camped on the road at night. Herman Basket said that they did not talk.

They reached the Plantation on the third day. He said that the Man was not very glad to see Doom, even though Doom brought a present of candy for the Man’s son. Doom had something for all his kinsfolk, even for the Man’s brother. The Man’s brother lived by himself in a cabin by the creek. His name was Sometimes-Wakeup. Sometimes the People took him food. The rest of the time they didn’t see him.

Herman Basket told how he and pappy went with Doom to visit Sometimes-Wakeup in his cabin. It was at night, and Doom told

Herman Basket to close the door. Then Doom took the puppy from pappy and set it on the floor and made a bullet of bread and the New Orleans salt for Sometimes-Wakeup to see how it worked. When they left, Herman Basket said how Sometimes-Wakeup burned a stick and covered his head with the blanket.

That was the first night that Doom was at home. On the next day Herman Basket told how the Man began to act strange at his food, and died before the doctor could get there and burn sticks. When the Willow-Bearer went to fetch the Man's son to be the Man, they found that he had acted strange and then died too.

"Now Sometimes-Wakeup will have to be the Man," pappy said. So the Willow-Bearer went to fetch Sometimes-Wakeup to come and be the Man. The Willow-Bearer came back soon. "Sometimes-Wakeup does not want to be the Man," the Willow-Bearer said. "He is sitting in his cabin with his head in his blanket."

"Then Ikkemotubbe will have to be the Man," pappy said. So Doom was the Man. But Herman Basket said that pappy's ghost would not be easy. Herman Basket said he told pappy to give Doom a little time. "I am still walking," Herman Basket said. "But this is a serious matter with me," pappy said.

He said that at last pappy went to Doom, before the Man and his son had entered the earth, before the eating and the horse-racing were over. "What woman?" Doom said.

"You said that when you were the Man," pappy said. Herman Basket said that Doom looked at pappy but that pappy was not looking at Doom.

"I think you don't trust me," Doom said. Herman Basket said how pappy did not look at Doom. "I think you still believe that that puppy was sick," Doom said. "Think about it."

Herman Basket said that pappy thought.

"What do you think now?" Doom said.

But Herman Basket said that pappy still did not look at Doom. "I think it was a well dog," pappy said.

III

At last the eating and the horse-racing were over and the Man and his son had entered the earth. Then Doom said, "Tomorrow we will go and fetch the steamboat." Herman Basket told how Doom had been talking about the steamboat ever since he became the Man, and about how the House was not big enough. So that evening Doom said, "Tomorrow we will go and fetch the steamboat that died in the river."

Herman Basket said how the steamboat was twelve miles away, and that it could not even swim in the water. So the next morning there was no one in the Plantation except Doom and the black people. He told how it took Doom all that day to find the People. Doom used the dogs, and he found some of the People in hollow logs in the creek bottom. That night he made all the men sleep in the House. He kept the dogs in the House, too.

Herman Basket told how he heard Doom and pappy talking in the dark.

"I don't think you trust me," Doom said.

"I trust you," pappy said.

"That is what I would advise," Doom said.

"I wish you could advise that to my ghost," pappy said.

The next morning they went to the steamboat. The women and the black people walked. The men rode in the wagons, with Doom following behind with the dogs.

The steamboat was lying on its side on the sand-bar. When they came to it, there were three white men on it. "Now we can go back home," pappy said.

But Doom talked to the white men. "Does this steamboat belong to you?" Doom said.

"It does not belong to you," the white men said. And though they had guns, Herman Basket said they did not look like men who would own a boat.

"Shall we kill them?" he said to Doom. But he said that Doom was still talking to the men on the steamboat.

"What will you take for it?" Doom said.

"What will you give for it?" the white men said.

"It is dead," Doom said. "It's not worth much."

"Will you give ten black people?" the white men said.

"All right," Doom said. "Let the black people who came with me from the Big River come forward." They came forward, the five men and the woman. "Let four more black people come forward." Four more came forward. "You are now to eat of the corn of those white men yonder," Doom said. "May it nourish you." The white men went away, the ten black people following them. "Now," Doom said, "let us make the steamboat get up and walk."

Herman Basket said that he and pappy did not go into the river with the others, because pappy said to go aside and talk. They went aside. Pappy talked, but Herman Basket said that he said he did not think it was right to kill white men, but pappy said how they could fill the white men with rocks and sink them in the river and nobody would find them.

So Herman Basket said they overtook the three white men and the ten black people, then they turned back toward the boat. Just before they came to the steamboat, pappy said to the black men: "Go on to the Man. Go and help make the steamboat get up and walk. I will take this woman on home."

"This woman is my wife," one of the black men said. "I want her to stay with me."

"Do you want to be arranged in the river with rocks in your inside too?" pappy said to the black man.

"Do you want to be arranged in the river yourself?" the black man said to pappy. "There are two of you, and nine of us."

Herman Basket said that pappy thought. Then pappy said, "Let us go to the steamboat and help the Man."

They went to the steamboat. But Herman Basket said that Doom did not notice the ten black people until it was time to return to the Plantation. Herman Basket told how Doom looked at the black people, then looked at pappy. "It seems that the white men did not want these black people," Doom said.

"So it seems," pappy said.

"The white men went away, did they?" Doom said.

"So it seems," pappy said.

Herman Basket told how every night Doom would make all the men sleep in the House, with the dogs in the House too, and how each morning they would return to the steamboat in the wagons. The wagons would not hold everybody, so after the second day the women stayed at home.

But it was three days before Doom noticed that pappy was staying at home too. Herman Basket said that the woman's husband may have told Doom. "Craw-ford hurt his back lifting the steamboat," Herman Basket said he told Doom. "He said he would stay at the Plantation and sit with his feet in the Hot Spring so that the sickness in his back could return to the earth."

"That is a good idea," Doom said. "He has been doing this for three days, has he? Then the sickness should be down in his legs by now." When they returned to the Plantation that night, Doom sent for pappy. He asked pappy if the sickness had moved. Pappy said how the sickness moved very slow. "You must sit in the Spring more," Doom said.

"That is what I think," pappy said.

"Suppose you sit in the Spring at night too," Doom said.

"The night air will make it worse," pappy said.

“Not with a fire there,” Doom said. “I will send one of the black people with you to keep the fire burning.”

“Which one of the black people?” pappy said.

“The husband of the woman which I won on the steamboat,” Doom said.

“I think my back is better,” pappy said.

“Let us try it,” Doom said.

“I know my back is better,” pappy said.

“Let us try it, anyway,” Doom said. Just before dark Doom sent four of the People to fix pappy and the black man at the Spring. Herman Basket said the People returned quickly. He said that as they entered the House, pappy entered also.

“The sickness began to move suddenly,” pappy said. “It has reached my feet since noon today.”

“Do you think it will be gone by morning?” Doom said.

“I think so,” pappy said.

“Perhaps you had better sit in the Spring tonight and make sure,” Doom said.

“I know it will be gone by morning,” pappy said.

IV

When it got to be summer, Herman Basket said that the steamboat was out of the river bottom. It had taken them five months to get it out of the bottom, because they had to cut down the trees to make a path for it. But now he said the steamboat could walk faster on the logs.

He told how pappy helped. Pappy had a certain place on one of the ropes near the steamboat that nobody was allowed to take, Herman Basket said. It was just under the front porch of the steamboat where Doom sat in his chair, with a boy with a branch to shade him and another boy with a branch to drive away the flying beasts. The dogs rode on the boat too.

In the summer, while the steamboat was still walking, Herman Basket told how the husband of the woman came to Doom again. "I have done what I could for you," Doom said. "Why don't you go to Crawford and adjust this matter yourself?"

The black man said that he had done that. He said that pappy said to adjust it by a cock-fight, pappy's cock against the black man's, the winner to have the woman, the one who refused to fight to lose by default. The black man said he told pappy he did not have a cock, and that pappy said that in that case the black man lost by default and that the woman belonged to pappy. "And what am I to do?" the black man said.

Doom thought. Then Herman Basket said that Doom called to him and asked him which was pappy's best cock and Herman Basket told Doom that pappy had only one. "That black one?" Doom said.

Herman Basket said he told Doom that was the one. "Ah," Doom said. Herman Basket told how Doom sat in his chair on the porch of the steamboat while it walked, looking down at the People and the black men pulling the ropes, making the steamboat walk. "Go and tell Crawford you have a cock," Doom said to the black man. "Just tell him you will have a cock in the pit. Let it be tomorrow morning.

"We will let the steamboat sit down and rest." The black man went away. Then Herman Basket said that Doom was looking at him, and that he did not look at Doom. Because he said there was but one better cock in the Plantation than pappy's, and that one belonged to Doom. "I think that that puppy was not sick," Doom said. "What do you think?"

Herman Basket said that he did not look at Doom. "That is what I think," he said.

"That is what I would advise," Doom said.

Herman Basket told how the next day the steamboat sat and rested. The pit was in the stable. The People and the black people were there.

Pappy had his cock in the pit. Then the black man put his cock into the pit. Herman Basket said that pappy looked at the black man's cock.

"This cock belongs to Ikkemotubbe," pappy said.

"It is his," the People told pappy. "Ikkemotubbe gave it to him with all to witness."

Herman Basket said that pappy had already picked up his cock. "This is not right," pappy said. "We ought not to let him risk his wife on a cock-fight."

"Then you withdraw?" the black man said.

"Let me think," pappy said. He thought. The People watched. The black man reminded pappy of what he had said about defaulting. Pappy said he did not mean to say that and that he withdrew it. The People told him that he could only withdraw by forfeiting the match. Herman Basket said that pappy thought again. The People watched. "All right," pappy said. "But I am being taken advantage of."

The cocks fought. Pappy's cock fell. Pappy took it up quickly. Herman Basket said it was like pappy had been waiting for his cock to fall so he could pick it quickly up. "Wait," he said. He looked at the People. "Now they have fought. Isn't that true?" The People said that it was true. "So that settles what I said about forfeiting."

Herman Basket said that pappy began to get out of the pit.

"Aren't you going to fight?" the black man said.

"I don't think this will settle anything," pappy said. "Do you?"

Herman Basket told how the black man looked at pappy. Then he quit looking at pappy. He was squatting. Herman Basket said the People looked at the black man looking at the earth between his feet. They watched him take up a clod of dirt, and then they watched the dust come out between the black man's fingers.

"Do you think that this will settle anything?" pappy said.

“No,” the black man said. Herman Basket said that the People could not hear him very good. But he said that pappy could hear him.

“Neither do I,” pappy said. “It would not be right to risk your wife on a cock-fight.”

Herman Basket told how the black man looked up, with the dry dust about the fingers of his hand. He said the black man’s eyes looked red in the dark pit, like the eyes of a fox. “Will you let the cocks fight again?” the black man said.

“Do you agree that it doesn’t settle anything?” pappy said.

“Yes,” the black man said.

Pappy put his cock back into the ring. Herman Basket said that pappy’s cock was dead before it had time to act strange, even. The black man’s cock stood upon it and started to crow, but the black man struck the live cock away and he jumped up and down on the dead cock until it did not look like a cock at all, Herman Basket said.

Then it was fall, and Herman Basket told how the steamboat came to the Plantation and stopped beside the House and died again. He said that for two months they had been in sight of the Plantation, making the steamboat walk on the logs, but now the steamboat was beside the House and the House was big enough to please Doom. He gave an eating.

It lasted a week. When it was over, Herman Basket told how the black man came to Doom a third time. Herman Basket said that the black man’s eyes were red again, like those of a fox, and that they could hear his breathing in the room. “Come to my cabin,” he said to Doom. “I have something to show you.”

“I thought it was about that time,” Doom said. He looked about the room, but Herman Basket told Doom that pappy had just stepped out. “Tell him to come also,” Doom said. When they came to the black man’s cabin, Doom sent two of the People to fetch pappy. Then they

entered the cabin. What the black man wanted to show Doom was a new man.

“Look,” the black man said. “You are the Man. You are to see justice done.”

“What is wrong with this man?” Doom said.

“Look at the color of him,” the black man said. He began to look around the cabin. Herman Basket said that his eyes went red and then brown and then red, like those of a fox. He said they could hear the black man’s breathing. “Do I get justice?” the black man said. “You are the Man.”

“You should be proud of a fine yellow man like this,” Doom said. He looked at the new man. “I don’t see that justice can darken him any,” Doom said. He looked about the cabin also. “Come forward, Crawford,” he said. “This is a man, not a copper snake; he will not harm you.” But Herman Basket said that pappy would not come forward. He said the black man’s eyes went red and then brown and then red when he breathed.

“Yao,” Doom said, “this is not right. Any man is entitled to have his melon patch protected from these wild bucks of the woods. But first let us name this man.” Doom thought. Herman Basket said the black man’s eyes went quieter now, and his breath went quieter too. “We will call him Had-Two-Fathers,” Doom said.

V

Sam Fathers lit his pipe again. He did it deliberately, rising and lifting between thumb and forefinger from his forge a coal of fire. Then he came back and sat down. It was getting late. Caddy and Jason had come back from the creek, and I could see Grandfather and Mr. Stokes talking beside the carriage, and at that moment, as though he had felt my gaze, Grandfather turned and called my name.

“What did your pappy do then?” I said.

“He and Herman Basket built the fence,” Sam Fathers said. “Herman Basket told how Doom made them set two posts into the ground, with a sapling across the top of them. The nigger and pappy were there.

Doom had not told them about the fence then. Herman Basket said it was just like when he and pappy and Doom were boys, sleeping on the same pallet, and Doom would wake them at night and make them get up and go hunting with him, or when he would make them stand up with him and fight with their fists, just for fun, until Herman Basket and pappy would hide from Doom.

“They fixed the sapling across the two posts and Doom said to the nigger: ‘This is a fence. Can you climb it?’

“Herman Basket said the nigger put his hand on the sapling and sailed over it like a bird.

“Then Doom said to pappy: ‘Climb this fence.’

“‘This fence is too high to climb,’ pappy said.

“‘Climb this fence, and I will give you the woman,’ Doom said.

“Herman Basket said pappy looked at the fence a while. ‘Let me go under this fence,’ he said.

“‘No,’ Doom said.

“Herman Basket told me how pappy began to sit down on the ground.

‘It’s not that I don’t trust you,’ pappy said.

“‘We will build the fence this high,’ Doom said.

“‘What fence?’ Herman Basket said.

“‘The fence around the cabin of this black man,’ Doom said.

“‘I can’t build a fence I couldn’t climb,’ pappy said.

“‘Herman will help you,’ Doom said.

“Herman Basket said it was just like when Doom used to wake them and make them go hunting. He said the dogs found him and pappy about noon the next day, and that they began the fence that afternoon. He told me how they had to cut the saplings in the creek bottom and

drag them in by hand, because Doom would not let them use the wagon.

So sometimes one post would take them three or four days. 'Never mind,' Doom said. 'You have plenty of time. And the exercise will make Craw-ford sleep at night.'

"He told me how they worked on the fence all that winter and all the next summer, until after the whisky trader had come and gone. Then it was finished. He said that on the day they set the last post, the nigger came out of the cabin and put his hand on the top of a post (it was a palisade fence, the posts set upright in the ground) and flew out like a bird.

'This is a good fence,' the nigger said. 'Wait,' he said. 'I have something to show you.' Herman Basket said he flew back over the fence again and went into the cabin and came back. Herman Basket said that he was carrying a new man and that he held the new man up so they could see it above the fence. 'What do you think about this for color?' he said."

Grandfather called me again. This time I got up. The sun was already down beyond the peach orchard. I was just twelve then, and to me the story did not seem to have got anywhere, to have had point or end.

Yet I obeyed Grandfather's voice, not that I was tired of Sam Fathers' talking, but with that immediacy of children with which they flee temporarily something which they do not quite understand; that, and the instinctive promptness with which we all obeyed Grandfather, not from concern of impatience or reprimand, but because we all believed that he did fine things, that his waking life passed from one fine (if faintly grandiose) picture to another.

They were in the surrey, waiting for me. I got in; the horses moved at once, impatient too for the stable. Caddy had one fish, about the size of a chip, and she was wet to the waist. We drove on, the team already

trotting. When we passed Mr. Stokes' kitchen we could smell ham cooking.

The smell followed us on to the gate. When we turned onto the road home it was almost sundown. Then we couldn't smell the cooking ham any more. "What were you and Sam talking about?" Grandfather said.

We went on, in that strange, faintly sinister suspension of twilight in which I believed that I could still see Sam Fathers back there, sitting on his wooden block, definite, immobile, and complete, like something looked upon after a long time in a preservative bath in a museum. That was it. I was just twelve then, and I would have to wait until I had passed on and through and beyond the suspension of twilight. Then I knew that I would know. But then Sam Fathers would be dead.

"Nothing, sir," I said. "We were just talking."

The End

A Courtship, William Faulkner

A Courtship

THIS IS HOW it was in the old days, when old Issetibbeha was still the Man, and Ikkemotubbe, Issetibbeha's nephew, and David Hogganbeck, the white man who told the steamboat where to walk, courted Herman Basket's sister.

The People all lived in the Plantation now. Issetibbeha and General Jackson met and burned sticks and signed a paper, and now a line ran through the woods, although you could not see it. It ran straight as a bee's flight among the woods, with the Plantation on one side of it, where Issetibbeha was the Man, and America on the other side, where General Jackson was the Man.

So now when something happened on one side of the line, it was a bad fortune for some and a good fortune for others, depending on what the white man happened to possess, as it had always been. But merely by occurring on the other side of that line which you couldn't even see, it became what the white men called a crime punishable by death if they could just have found who did it.

Which seemed foolish to us. There was one uproar which lasted off and on for a week, not that the white man had disappeared, because he had been the sort of white man which even other white men did not regret, but because of a delusion that he had been eaten.

As if any man, no matter how hungry, would risk eating the flesh of a coward or thief in this country where even in winter there is always something to be found to eat; — this land for which, as Issetibbeha used to say after he had become so old that nothing more was required of him except to sit in the sun and criticise the degeneration of the People and the folly and rapacity of politicians, the Great Spirit has done more and man less than for any land he ever heard of.

But it was a free country, and if the white man wished to make a rule even that foolish in their half of it, it was all right with us.

Then Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck saw Herman Basket's sister. As who did not, sooner or later, young men and old men too, bachelors and widowers too, and some who were not even widowers yet, who for more than one reason within the hut had no business looking anywhere else, though who is to say what age a man must reach or just how unfortunate he must have been in his youthful compliance, when he shall no longer look at the Herman Basket's sisters of this world and chew his bitter thumbs too, aihee.

Because she walked in beauty, Or she sat in it, that is, because she did not walk at all unless she had to. One of the earliest sounds in the Plantation would be the voice of Herman Basket's aunt crying to know why she had not risen and gone to the spring for water with the other girls, which she did not do sometimes until Herman Basket himself rose

and made her, or in the afternoon crying to know why she did not go to the river with the other girls and women to wash, which she did not do very often either. But she did not need to. Anyone who looks as Herman Basket's sister did at seventeen and eighteen and nineteen does not need to wash.

Then one day Ikkemotubbe saw her, who had known her all his life except during the first two years. He was Issetibbeha's sister's son. One night he got into the steamboat with David Hogganbeck and went away.

And suns passed and then moons and then three high waters came and went and old Issetibbeha had entered the earth a year and his son Mocketubbe was the Man when Ikkemotubbe returned, named Doom now, with the white friend called the Chevalier Sœur-Blonde de Vitry and the eight new slaves which we did not need either, and his gold-laced hat and cloak and the little gold box of strong salt and the wicker wine hamper containing the four other puppies which were still alive, and within two days Mocketubbe's little son was dead and within three Ikkemotubbe whose name was Doom now was himself the Man.

But he was not Doom yet. He was still just Ikkemotubbe, one of the young men, the best one, who rode the hardest and fastest and danced the longest and got the drunkest and was loved the best, by the young men and the girls and the older women too who should have had other things to think about. Then one day he saw Herman Basket's sister, whom he had known all his life except for the first two years.

After Ikkemotubbe looked at her, my father and Owl-by-Night and Sylvester's John and the other young men looked away. Because he was the best of them and they loved him then while he was still just Ikkemotubbe. They would hold the other horse for him as, stripped to the waist, his hair and body oiled with bear's grease as when racing (though with honey mixed into the bear's grease now) and with only a rope hackamore and no saddle as when racing, Ikkemotubbe would ride on his new racing pony past the gallery where Herman Basket's sister sat shelling corn or peas into the silver wine pitcher which her

aunt had inherited from her second cousin by marriage's great-aunt who was old David Colbert's wife, while Log-in-the-Creek (one of the young men too, though nobody paid any attention to him.

He raced no horses and fought no cocks and cast no dice, and even when forced to, he would not even dance fast enough to keep out of the other dancers' way, and disgraced both himself and the others each time by becoming sick after only five or six horns of what was never even his whisky) leaned against one of the gallery posts and blew into his harmonica.

Then one of the young men held the racing pony, and on his gaited mare now and wearing his flower-painted weskit and pigeon-tailed coat and beaver hat in which he looked handsomer than a steamboat gambler and richer even than the whisky-trader, Ikkemotubbe would ride past the gallery where Herman Basket's sister shelled another pod of peas into the pitcher and Log-in-the-Creek sat with his back against the post and blew into the harmonica.

Then another of the young men would take the mare too and Ikkemotubbe would walk to Herman Basket's and sit on the gallery too in his fine clothes while Herman Basket's sister shelled another pod of peas perhaps into the silver pitcher and Log-in-the-Creek lay on his back on the floor, blowing into the harmonica. Then the whisky-trader came and Ikkemotubbe and the young men invited Log-in-the-Creek into the woods until they became tired of carrying him.

And although a good deal wasted outside, as usual Log-in-the-Creek became sick and then asleep after seven or eight horns, and Ikkemotubbe returned to Herman Basket's gallery, where for a day or two at least he didn't have to not listen to the harmonica.

Finally Owl-at-Night made a suggestion. "Send Herman Basket's aunt a gift." But the only thing Ikkemotubbe owned which Herman Basket's aunt didn't, was the new racing pony. So after a while Ikkemotubbe said, "So it seems I want this girl even worse than I believed," and sent

Owl-at-Night to tie the racing pony's hackamore to Herman Basket's kitchen door handle.

Then he thought how Herman Basket's aunt could not even always make Herman Basket's sister just get up and go to the spring for water. Besides, she was the second cousin by marriage to the grand-niece of the wife of old David Colbert, the chief Man of all the Chickasaws in our section, and she looked upon Issetibbeha's whole family and line as mushrooms.

"But Herman Basket has been known to make her get up and go to the spring," my father said. "And I never heard him claim that old Dave Colbert's wife or his wife's niece or anybody else's wife or niece or aunt was any better than anybody else. Give Herman the horse."

"I can beat that," Ikkemotubbe said. Because there was no horse in the Plantation or America either between Natchez and Nashville whose tail Ikkemotubbe's new pony ever looked at. "I will run Herman a horse-race for his influence," he said. "Run," he told my father. "Catch Owl-at-Night before he reaches the house." So my father brought the pony back in time.

But just in case Herman Basket's aunt had been watching from the kitchen window or something, Ikkemotubbe sent Owl-at-Night and Sylvester's John home for his crate of gamecocks, though he expected little from this since Herman Basket's aunt already owned the best cocks in the Plantation and won all the money every Sunday morning anyway.

And then Herman Basket declined to commit himself, so a horse-race would have been merely for pleasure and money. And Ikkemotubbe said how money could not help him, and with that damned girl on his mind day and night his tongue had forgotten the savor of pleasure. But the whisky-trader always came, and so for a day or two at least he wouldn't have to not listen to the harmonica.

Then David Hogganbeck also looked at Herman Basket's sister, whom he too had been seeing once each year since the steamboat first walked to the Plantation. After a while even winter would be over and we would begin to watch the mark which David Hogganbeck had put on the landing to show us when the water would be tall enough for the steamboat to walk in. Then the river would reach the mark, and sure enough within two suns the steamboat would cry in the Plantation.

Then all the People — men and women and children and dogs, even Herman Basket's sister because Ikkemotubbe would fetch a horse for her to ride and so only Log-in-the-Creek would remain, not inside the house even though it was still cold, because Herman Basket's aunt wouldn't let him stay inside the house where she would have to step over him each time she passed, but squatting in his blanket on the gallery with an old cooking-pot of fire inside the blanket with him — would stand on the landing, to watch the upstairs and the smokestack moving among the trees and hear the puffing of the smokestack and its feet walking fast in the water too when it was not crying.

Then we would begin to hear David Hogganbeck's fiddle, and then the steamboat would come walking up the last of the river like a race-horse, with the smoke rolling black and its feet flinging the water aside as a running horse flings dirt, and Captain Studenmare who owned the steamboat chewing tobacco in one window and David Hogganbeck playing his fiddle in the other, and between them the head of the boy slave who turned the wheel, who was not much more than half as big as Captain Studenmare and not even a third as big as David Hogganbeck. And all day long the trading would continue, though David Hogganbeck took little part in this.

And all night long the dancing would continue, and David Hogganbeck took the biggest part in this. Because he was bigger than any two of the young men put together almost, and although you would not have called him a man built for dancing or running either, it was as if that very double size which could hold twice as much whisky as any other, could also dance twice as long, until one by one the young men fell away and only he was left.

And there was horse-racing and eating, and although David Hogganbeck had no horses and did not ride one since no horse could have carried him and run fast too, he would eat a match each year for money against any two of the young men whom the People picked, and David Hogganbeck always won. Then the water would return toward the mark he had made on the landing, and it would be time for the steamboat to leave while there was still enough water in the river for it to walk in.

And then it did not go away. The river began to grow little, yet still David Hogganbeck played his fiddle on Herman Basket's gallery while Herman Basket's sister stirred something for cooking into the silver wine pitcher and Ikkemotubbe sat against a post in his fine clothes and his beaver hat and Log-in-the-Creek lay on his back on the floor with the harmonica cupped in both hands to his mouth, though you couldn't hear now whether he was blowing into it or not.

Then you could see the mark which David Hogganbeck had marked on the landing while he still played his fiddle on Herman Basket's gallery where Ikkemotubbe had brought a rocking chair from his house to sit in until David Hogganbeck would have to leave in order to show the steamboat the way back to Natchez.

And all that afternoon the People stood along the landing and watched the steamboat's slaves hurling wood into its stomach for steam to make it walk; and during most of that night, while David Hogganbeck drank twice as much and danced twice as long as even David Hogganbeck, so that he drank four times as much and danced four times as long as even Ikkemotubbe, even an Ikkemotubbe who at last had looked at Herman Basket's sister or at least had looked at someone else looking at her, the older ones among the People stood along the landing and watched the slaves hurling wood into the steamboat's stomach, not to make it walk but to make its voice cry while Captain Studenmare leaned out of the upstairs with the end of the crying-rope tied to the door-handle. And the next day Captain Studenmare himself

came onto the gallery and grasped the end of David Hogganbeck's fiddle.

"You're fired," he said.

"All right," David Hogganbeck said. Then Captain Studenmare grasped the end of David Hogganbeck's fiddle.

"We will have to go back to Natchez where I can get money to pay you off," he said.

"Leave the money at the saloon," David Hogganbeck said. "I'll bring the boat back out next spring."

Then it was night. Then Herman Basket's aunt came out and said that if they were going to stay there all night, at least David Hogganbeck would have to stop playing his fiddle so other people could sleep. Then she came out and said for Herman Basket's sister to come in and go to bed. Then Herman Basket came out and said, "Come on now, fellows. Be reasonable."

Then Herman Basket's aunt came out and said that the next time she was going to bring Herman Basket's dead uncle's shotgun. So Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck left Log-in-the-Creek lying on the floor and stepped down from the gallery. "Goodnight," David Hogganbeck said.

"I'll walk home with you," Ikkemotubbe said. So they walked across the Plantation to the steamboat. It was dark and there was no fire in its stomach now because Captain Studenmare was still asleep under Issetibbeha's back porch. Then Ikkemotubbe said, "Goodnight."

"I'll walk home with you," David Hogganbeck said. So they walked back across the Plantation to Ikkemotubbe's house. But David Hogganbeck did not have time to say goodnight now because Ikkemotubbe turned as soon as they reached his house and started back toward the steamboat. Then he began to run, because David Hogganbeck still did not look like a man who could run fast.

But he had not looked like a man who could dance a long time either, so when Ikkemotubbe reached the steamboat and turned and ran again, he was only a little ahead of David Hogganbeck. And when they reached Ikkemotubbe's house he was still only a little ahead of David Hogganbeck when he stopped, breathing fast but only a little fast, and held the door open for David Hogganbeck to enter.

"My house is not very much house," he said. "But it is yours." So they both slept in Ikkemotubbe's bed in his house that night. And the next afternoon, although Herman Basket would still do no more than wish him success, Ikkemotubbe sent my father and Sylvester's John with his saddle mare for Herman Basket's aunt to ride on, and he and Herman Basket ran the horse-race. And he rode faster than anyone had ever ridden in the Plantation.

He won by lengths and lengths and, with Herman Basket's aunt watching, he made Herman Basket take all the money, as though Herman Basket had won, and that evening he sent Owl-at-Night to tie the racing pony's hackamore to the door-handle of Herman Basket's kitchen. But that night Herman Basket's aunt did not even warn them.

She came out the first time with Herman Basket's dead uncle's gun, and hardly a moment had elapsed before Ikkemotubbe found out that she meant him too. So he and David Hogganbeck left Log-in-the-Creek lying on the gallery and they stopped for a moment at my father's house on the first trip between Ikkemotubbe's house and the steamboat, though when my father and Owl-at-Night finally found Ikkemotubbe to tell him that Herman Basket's aunt must have sent the racing pony far into the woods and hidden it because they had not found it yet, Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck were both asleep in David Hogganbeck's bed in the steamboat.

And the next morning the whisky-trader came, and that afternoon Ikkemotubbe and the young men invited Log-in-the-Creek into the woods and my father and Sylvester's John returned for the whisky-trader's buckboard and, with my father and Sylvester's John driving the buckboard and Log-in-the-Creek lying on his face on top of the little

house on the back of the buckboard where the whisky-kegs rode and Ikkemotubbe standing on top of the little house, wearing the used general's coat which General Jackson gave Issetibbeha, with his arms folded and one foot advanced onto Log-in-the-Creek's back, they rode slow past the gallery where David Hogganbeck played his fiddle while Herman Basket's sister stirred something for cooking into the silver wine pitcher.

And when my father and Owl-at-Night found Ikkemotubbe that night to tell him they still had not found where Herman Basket's aunt had hidden the pony, Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck were at Ikkemotubbe's house.

And the next afternoon Ikkemotubbe and the young men invited David Hogganbeck into the woods and it was a long time this time and when they came out, David Hogganbeck was driving the buckboard while the legs of Ikkemotubbe and the other young men dangled from the open door of the little whisky-house like so many strands of vine hay and Issetibbeha's general's coat was tied by its sleeves about the neck of one of the mules.

And nobody hunted for the racing pony that night, and when Ikkemotubbe waked up, he didn't know at first even where he was. And he could already hear David Hogganbeck's fiddle before he could move aside enough of the young men to get out of the little whisky-house, because that night neither Herman Basket's aunt nor Herman Basket and then finally Herman Basket's dead uncle's gun could persuade David Hogganbeck to leave the gallery and go away or even to stop playing the fiddle.

So the next morning Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck squatted in a quiet place in the woods while the young men, except Sylvester's John and Owl-by-Night who were still hunting for the horse, stood on guard. "We could fight for her then," David Hogganbeck said.

"We could fight for her," Ikkemotubbe said. "But white men and the People fight differently. We fight with knives, to hurt good and to hurt

quickly. That would be all right, if I were to lose. Because I would wish to be hurt good. But if I am to win, I do not wish you to be hurt good.

If I am to truly win, it will be necessary for you to be there to see it. On the day of the wedding, I wish you to be present, or at least present somewhere, not lying wrapped in a blanket on a platform in the woods, waiting to enter the earth."

Then my father said how Ikkemotubbe put his hand on David Hogganbeck's shoulder and smiled at him. "If that could satisfy me, we would not be squatting here discussing what to do. I think you see that."

"I think I do," David Hogganbeck said.

Then my father said how Ikkemotubbe removed his hand from David Hogganbeck's shoulder. "And we have tried whisky," he said.

"We have tried that," David Hogganbeck said.

"Even the racing pony and the general's coat failed me," Ikkemotubbe said. "I had been saving them, like a man with two hole-cards."

"I wouldn't say that the coat completely failed," David Hogganbeck said. "You looked fine in it."

"Aihee," Ikkemotubbe said. "So did the mule." Then my father said how he was not smiling either as he squatted beside David Hogganbeck, making little marks in the earth with a twig. "So there is just one other thing," he said. "And I am already beaten at that too before we start."

So all that day they ate nothing. And that night when they left Log-in-the-Creek lying on Herman Basket's gallery, instead of merely walking for a while and then running for a while back and forth between Ikkemotubbe's house and the steamboat, they began to run as soon as they left Herman Basket's.

And when they lay down in the woods to sleep, it was where they would not only be free of temptation to eat but of opportunity too, and from which it would take another hard run as an appetiser to reach the Plantation for the match.

Then it was morning and they ran back to where my father and the young men waited on horses to meet them and tell Ikkemotubbe that they still hadn't found where under the sun Herman Basket's aunt could have hidden the pony and to escort them back across the Plantation to the race-course, where the People waited around the table, with Ikkemotubbe's rocking chair from Herman Basket's gallery for Issetibbeha and a bench behind it for the judges.

First there was a recess while a ten-year-old boy ran once around the race-track, to let them recover breath. Then Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck took their places on either side of the table, facing each other across it, and Owl-at-Night gave the word.

First, each had that quantity of stewed bird chitterlings which the other could scoop with two hands from the pot. Then each had as many wild turkey eggs as he was old, Ikkemotubbe twenty-two and David Hogganbeck twenty-three, though Ikkemotubbe refused the advantage and said he would eat twenty-three too.

Then David Hogganbeck said he was entitled to one more than Ikkemotubbe so he would eat twenty-four, until Issetibbeha told them both to hush and get on, and Owl-at-Night tallied the shells. Then there was the tongue, paws and melt of a bear, though for a little while Ikkemotubbe stood and looked at his half of it while David Hogganbeck was already eating.

And at the half-way he stopped and looked at it again while David Hogganbeck was finishing. But it was all right; there was a faint smile on his face such as the young men had seen on it at the end of a hard running when he was going from now on not on the fact that he was still alive but on the fact that he was Ikkemotubbe.

And he went on, and Owl-at-Night tallied the bones, and the women set the roasted shote on the table and Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck moved back to the tail of the shote and faced one another across it and

Owl-at-Night had even given the word to start until he gave another word to stop.

“Give me some water,” Ikkemotubbe said. So my father handed him the gourd and he even took a swallow. But the water returned as though it had merely struck the back of his throat and bounced, and Ikkemotubbe put the gourd down and raised the tail of his shirt before his bowed face and turned and walked away as the People opened aside to let him pass.

And that afternoon they did not even go to the quiet place in the woods. They stood in Ikkemotubbe’s house while my father and the others stood quietly too in the background. My father said that Ikkemotubbe was not smiling now. “I was right yesterday,” he said.

“If I am to lose to thee, we should have used the knives. You see,” he said, and now my father said he even smiled again, as at the end of the long hard running when the young men knew that he would go on, not because he was still alive but because he was Ikkemotubbe; “ — you see, although I have lost, I still cannot reconcile.”

“I had you beat before we started,” David Hogganbeck said. “We both knew that.”

“Yes,” Ikkemotubbe said. “But I suggested it.”

“Then what do you suggest now?” David Hogganbeck said. And now my father said how they loved David Hogganbeck at that moment as they loved Ikkemotubbe; that they loved them both at that moment while Ikkemotubbe stood before David Hogganbeck with the smile on his face and his right hand flat on David Hogganbeck’s chest, because there were men in those days.

“Once more then, and then no more,” Ikkemotubbe said. “The Cave.” Then he and David Hogganbeck stripped and my father and the others oiled them, body and hair too, with bear’s grease mixed with mint, not just for speed this time but for lasting too, because the Cave was a hundred and thirty miles away, over in the country of old David Colbert

— a black hole in the hill which the spoor of wild creatures merely approached and then turned away and which no dog could even be beaten to enter and where the boys from among all the People would go to lie on their first Night-away-from-Fire to prove if they had the courage to become men, because it had been known among the People from a long time ago that the sound of a whisper or even the disturbed air of a sudden movement would bring parts of the roof down and so all believed that not even a very big movement or sound or maybe none at all at some time would bring the whole mountain into the cave. Then Ikkemotubbe took the two pistols from the trunk and drew the loads and reloaded them. “Whoever reaches the Cave first can enter it alone and fire his pistol,” he said.

“If he comes back out, he has won.”

“And if he does not come back out?” David Hogganbeck said.

“Then you have won,” Ikkemotubbe said.

“Or you,” David Hogganbeck said.

And now my father said how Ikkemotubbe smiled again at David Hogganbeck. “Or me,” he said. “Though I think I told you yesterday that such as that for me will not be victory.”

Then Ikkemotubbe put another charge of powder, with a wadding and bullet, into each of two small medicine bags, one for himself and one for David Hogganbeck, just in case the one who entered the Cave first should not lose quick enough, and, wearing only their shirts and shoes and each with his pistol and medicine bag looped on a cord around his neck, they emerged from Ikkemotubbe’s house and began to run.

It was evening then. Then it was night, and since David Hogganbeck did not know the way, Ikkemotubbe continued to set the pace. But after a time it was daylight again and now David Hogganbeck could run by the sun and the landmarks which Ikkemotubbe described to him while they rested beside a creek, if he wished to go faster.

So sometimes David Hogganbeck would run in front and sometimes Ikkemotubbe, then David Hogganbeck would pass Ikkemotubbe as he sat beside a spring or a stream with his feet in the water and Ikkemotubbe would smile at David Hogganbeck and wave his hand.

Then he would overtake David Hogganbeck and the country was open now and they would run side by side in the prairies with his hand lying lightly on David Hogganbeck's shoulder, not on the top of the shoulder but lightly against the back of it until after a while he would smile at David Hogganbeck and draw ahead.

But then it was sundown, and then it was dark again so Ikkemotubbe slowed and then stopped until he heard David Hogganbeck and knew that David Hogganbeck could hear him and then he ran again so that David Hogganbeck could follow the sound of his running.

So when David Hogganbeck fell, Ikkemotubbe heard it and went back and found David Hogganbeck in the dark and turned him onto his back and found water in the dark and soaked his shirt in it and returned and wrung the water from the shirt into David Hogganbeck's mouth.

And then it was daylight and Ikkemotubbe waked also and found a nest containing five unfledged birds and ate and brought the other three to David Hogganbeck and then he went on until he was just this side of where David Hogganbeck could no longer see him and sat down again until David Hogganbeck got up onto his feet.

And he gave David Hogganbeck the landmarks for that day too, talking back to David Hogganbeck over his shoulder as they ran, though David Hogganbeck did not need them because he never overtook Ikkemotubbe again. He never came closer than fifteen or twenty paces, although it looked at one time like he was. Because this time it was Ikkemotubbe who fell.

And the country was open again so Ikkemotubbe could lie there for a long time and watch David Hogganbeck coming. Then it was sunset again, and then it was dark again, and he lay there listening to David

Hogganbeck coming for a long time until it was time for Ikkemotubbe to get up and he did and they went on slowly in the dark with David Hogganbeck at least a hundred paces behind him, until he heard David Hogganbeck fall and then he lay down too.

Then it was day again and he watched David Hogganbeck get up onto his feet and come slowly toward him and at last he tried to get up too but he did not and it looked like David Hogganbeck was going to come up with him.

But he got up at last while David Hogganbeck was still four or five paces away and they went on until David Hogganbeck fell, and then Ikkemotubbe thought he was just watching David Hogganbeck fall until he found that he had fallen too but he got up onto his hands and knees and crawled still another ten or fifteen paces before he too lay down.

And there in the sunset before him was the hill in which the Cave was, and there through the night, and there still in the sunrise.

So Ikkemotubbe ran into the Cave first, with his pistol already cocked in his hand. He told how he stopped perhaps for a second at the entrance, perhaps to look at the sun again or perhaps just to see where David Hogganbeck had stopped. But David Hogganbeck was running too and he was still only that fifteen or twenty paces behind, and besides, because of that damned sister of Herman Basket's, there had been no light nor heat either in that sun for moons and moons.

So he ran into the Cave and turned and saw David Hogganbeck also running into the Cave and he cried, "Back, fool!" But David Hogganbeck still ran into the Cave even as Ikkemotubbe pointed his pistol at the roof and fired. And there was a noise, and a rushing, and a blackness and a dust, and Ikkemotubbe told how he thought, Aihee.

It comes. But it did not, and even before the blackness he saw David Hogganbeck cast himself forward onto his hands and knees, and there was not a complete blackness either because he could see the sunlight and air and day beyond the tunnel of David Hogganbeck's arms and

legs as, still on his hands and knees, David Hogganbeck held the fallen roof upon his back. "Hurry," David Hogganbeck said. "Between my legs. I can't—"

"Nay, brother," Ikkemotubbe said. "Quickly thyself, before it crushes thee. Crawl back."

"Hurry," David Hogganbeck said behind his teeth. "Hurry, damn you." And Ikkemotubbe did, and he remembered David Hogganbeck's buttocks and legs pink in the sunrise and the slab of rock which supported the fallen roof pink in the sunrise too across David Hogganbeck's back.

But he did not remember where he found the pole nor how he carried it alone into the Cave and thrust it into the hole beside David Hogganbeck and stooped his own back under it and lifted until he knew that some at least of the weight of the fallen roof was on the pole.

"Now," he said. "Quickly."

"No," David Hogganbeck said.

"Quickly, brother," Ikkemotubbe said. "The weight is off thee."

"Then I can't move," David Hogganbeck said. But Ikkemotubbe couldn't move either, because now he had to hold the fallen roof up with his back and legs. So he reached one hand and grasped David Hogganbeck by the meat and jerked him backward out of the hole until he lay face-down upon the earth.

And maybe some of the weight of the fallen roof was on the pole before, but now all of the weight was on it and Ikkemotubbe said how he thought, This time surely aihee. But it was the pole and not his back which snapped and flung him face-down too across David Hogganbeck like two flung sticks, and a bright gout of blood jumped out of David Hogganbeck's mouth.

But by the second day David Hogganbeck had quit vomiting blood, though Ikkemotubbe had run hardly forty miles back toward the

Plantation when my father met him with the horse for David Hogganbeck to ride. Presently my father said, "I have a news for thee." "So you found the pony," Ikkemotubbe said. "All right. Come on. Let's get that damned stupid fool of a white man—"

"No, wait, my brother," my father said. "I have a news for thee." And presently Ikkemotubbe said, "All right."

But when Captain Studenmare borrowed Issetibbeha's wagon to go back to Natchez in, he took the steamboat slaves too. So my father and the young men built a fire in the steamboat's stomach to make steam for it to walk, while David Hogganbeck sat in the upstairs and drew the crying-rope from time to time to see if the steam was strong enough yet, and at each cry still more of the People came to the landing until at last all the People in the Plantation except old Issetibbeha perhaps stood along the bank to watch the young men hurl wood into the steamboat's stomach: — a thing never before seen in our Plantation at least.

Then the steam was strong and the steamboat began to walk and then the People began to walk too beside the steamboat, watching the young men for a while then Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck for a while as the steamboat walked out of the Plantation where hardly seven suns ago Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck would sit all day long and half the night too until Herman Basket's aunt would come out with Herman Basket's dead uncle's gun, on the gallery of Herman Basket's house while Log-in-the-Creek lay on the floor with his harmonica cupped to his mouth and Log-in-the-Creek's wife shelled corn or peas into old Dave Colbert's wife's grand-niece's second cousin by marriage's wine pitcher.

Presently Ikkemotubbe was gone completely away, to be gone a long time before he came back named Doom, with his new white friend whom no man wished to love either and the eight more slaves which we had no use for either because at times someone would have to get up and walk somewhere to find something for the ones we already owned to do, and the fine gold-trimmed clothes and the little gold box

of salt which caused the other four puppies to become dead too one after another, and then anything else which happened to stand between Doom and what he wanted.

But he was not quite gone yet. He was just Ikkemotubbe yet, one of the young men, another of the young men who loved and was not loved in return and could hear the words and see the fact, yet who, like the young men who had been before him and the ones who would come after him, still could not understand it.

“But not for her!” Ikkemotubbe said. “And not even because it was Log-in-the-Creek. Perhaps they are for myself: that such a son as Log-in-the-Creek could cause them to wish to flow.”

“Don’t think about her,” David Hogganbeck said.

“I don’t. I have already stopped. See?” Ikkemotubbe said while the sunset ran down his face as if it had already been rain instead of light when it entered the window. “There was a wise man of ours who said once how a woman’s fancy is like a butterfly which, hovering from flower to flower, pauses at the last as like as not where a horse has stood.”

“There was a wise man of ours named Solomon who often said something of that nature too,” David Hogganbeck said. “Perhaps there is just one wisdom for all men, no matter who speaks it.”

“Aihee.

At least, for all men one same heart-break,” Ikkemotubbe said. Then he drew the crying-rope, because the boat was now passing the house where Log-in-the-Creek and his wife lived, and now the steamboat sounded like it did the first night while Captain Studenmare still thought David Hogganbeck would come and show it the way back to Natchez, until David Hogganbeck made Ikkemotubbe stop. Because they would need the steam because the steamboat did not always walk.

Sometimes it crawled, and each time its feet came up there was mud on them, and sometimes it did not even crawl until David Hogganbeck drew the crying-rope as the rider speaks to the recalcitrant horse to remind it with his voice just who is up.

Then it crawled again and then it walked again, until at last the People could no longer keep up, and it cried once more beyond the last bend and then there was no longer either the black shapes of the young men leaping to hurl wood into its red stomach or even the sound of its voice in the Plantation or the night. That's how it was in the old days.

The End

Lo! William Faulkner

Lo!

THE PRESIDENT STOOD motionless at the door of the Dressing Room, fully dressed save for his boots. It was half-past six in the morning and it was snowing; already he had stood for an hour at the window, watching the snow.

Now he stood just inside the door to the corridor, utterly motionless in his stockings, stooped a little from his lean height as though listening, on his face an expression of humorless concern, since humor had departed from his situation and his view of it almost three weeks before. Hanging from his hand, low against his flank, was a hand mirror of elegant French design, such as should have been lying upon a lady's dressing table: certainly at this hour of a February day.

At last he put his hand on the knob and opened the door infinitesimally; beneath his hand the door crept by inches and without any sound; still with that infinitesimal silence he put his eye to the crack and saw, lying upon the deep, rich pile of the corridor carpet, a bone. It was a cooked

bone, a rib; to it still adhered close shreds of flesh holding in mute and overlapping halfmoons the marks of human teeth. Now that the door was open he could hear the voices too.

Still without any sound, with that infinite care, he raised and advanced the mirror. For an instant he caught his own reflection in it and he paused for a time and with a kind of cold unbelief he examined his own face — the face of the shrewd and courageous lighter, of that wellnigh infallible expert in the anticipation of and controlling of man and his doings, overlaid now with the baffled helplessness of a child.

Then he slanted the glass a little further until he could see the corridor reflected in it. Squatting and facing one another across the carpet as across a stream of water were two men. He did not know the faces, though he knew the Face, since he had looked upon it by day and dreamed upon it by night for three weeks now. It was a squat face, dark, a little flat, a little Mongol; secret, decorous, impenetrable, and grave.

He had seen it repeated until he had given up trying to count it or even estimate it; even now, though he could see the two men squatting before him and could hear the two quiet voices, it seemed to him that in some idiotic moment out of attenuated sleeplessness and strain he looked upon a single man facing himself in a mirror.

They wore beaver hats and new frock coats; save for the minor detail of collars and waistcoats they were impeccably dressed — though a little early — for the forenoon of the time, down to the waist. But from here down credulity, all sense of fitness and decorum, was outraged.

At a glance one would have said that they had come intact out of Pickwickian England, save that the tight, light-colored smallclothes ended not in Hessian boots nor in any boots at all, but in dark, naked feet.

On the floor beside each one lay a neatly rolled bundle of dark cloth; beside each bundle in turn, mute toe and toe and heel and heel, as

though occupied by invisible sentries facing one another across the corridor, sat two pairs of new boots.

From a basket woven of whiteoak withes beside one of the squatting men there shot suddenly the snake-like head and neck of a game cock, which glared at the faint flash of the mirror with a round, yellow, outraged eye. It was from these that the voices came, pleasant, decorous, quiet:

“That rooster hasn’t done you much good up here.”

“That’s true. Still, who knows? Besides, I certainly couldn’t have left him at home, with those damned lazy Indians. I wouldn’t find a feather left. You know that. But it is a nuisance, having to lug this cage around with me day and night.”

“This whole business is a nuisance, if you ask me.”

“You said it. Squatting here outside this door all night long, without a gun or anything. Suppose bad men tried to get in during the night: what could we do? If anyone would want to get in. I don’t.”

“Nobody does. It’s for honor.”

“Whose honor? Yours? Mine? Frank Weddel’s?”

“White man’s honor. You don’t understand white people. They are like children: you have to handle them careful because you never know what they are going to do next. So if it’s the rule for guests to squat all night long in the cold outside this man’s door, we’ll just have to do it. Besides, hadn’t you rather be in here than out yonder in the snow in one of those damn tents?”

“You said it. What a climate. What a country. I wouldn’t have this town if they gave it to me.”

“Of course you wouldn’t. But that’s white men: no accounting for taste. So as long as we are here, we’ll have to try to act like these people believe that Indians ought to act. Because you never know until afterward just what you have done to insult or scare them. Like this having to talk white talk all the time. . . .”

The President withdrew the mirror and closed the door quietly. Once more he stood silent and motionless in the middle of the room, his head bent, musing, baffled yet indomitable: indomitable since this was not the first time that he had faced odds; baffled since he faced not an enemy in the open field, but was besieged within his very high and lonely office by them to whom he was, by legal if not divine appointment, father.

In the iron silence of the winter dawn he seemed, clairvoyant of walls, to be ubiquitous and one with the waking of the stately House. Invisible and in a kind of musing horror he seemed to be of each group of his Southern guests — that one squatting without the door, that larger one like so many figures carved of stone in the very rotunda itself of this concrete and visible apotheosis of the youthful Nation's pride — in their new beavers and frock coats and woolen drawers.

With their neatly rolled pantaloons under their arms and their virgin shoes in the other hand; dark, timeless, decorous and serene beneath the astonished faces and golden braid, the swords and ribbons and stars, of European diplomats.

The President said quietly, "Damn. Damn. Damn." He moved and crossed the room, pausing to take up his boots from where they sat beside a chair, and approached the opposite door. Again he paused and opened this door too quietly and carefully, out of the three weeks' habit of expectant fatalism, though there was only his wife beyond it, sleeping peacefully in bed.

He crossed this room in turn, carrying his boots, pausing to replace the hand glass on the dressing table, among its companion pieces of the set which the new French Republic had presented to a predecessor, and tiptoed on and into the anteroom, where a man in a long cloak looked up and then rose, also in his stockings. They looked at one another soberly. "All clear?" the President said in a low tone.

"Yes, General."

“Good. Did you . . .” The other produced a second long, plain cloak. “Good, good,” the President said. He swung the cloak about him before the other could move. “Now the . . .” This time the other anticipated him; the President drew the hat well down over his face. They left the room on tiptoe, carrying their boots in their hands.

The back stairway was cold; their stockinged toes curled away from the treads, their vaporized breath wisped about their heads. They descended quietly and sat on the bottom step and put on their boots.

Outside it still snowed; invisible against snow-colored sky and snow-colored earth, the flakes seemed to materialize with violent and silent abruptness against the dark orifice of the stables.

Each bush and shrub resembled a white balloon whose dark shroud lines descended, light and immobile, to the white earth. Interspersed among these in turn and with a certain regularity were a dozen vaguely tent-shaped mounds, from the ridge of each of which a small column of smoke rose into the windless snow, as if the snow itself were in a state of peaceful combustion. The President looked at these, once, grimly. “Get along,” he said.

The other, his head lowered and his cloak held closely about his face, scuttled on and ducked into the stable. Perish the day when these two words were applied to the soldier chief of a party and a nation, yet the President was so close behind him that their breaths made one cloud.

And perish the day when the word flight were so applied, yet they had hardly vanished into the stable when they emerged, mounted now and already at a canter, and so across the lawn and past the snow-hidden tents and toward the gates which gave upon that Avenue in embryo yet but which in time would be the stage upon which each four years would parade the proud panoply of the young Nation’s lusty man’s estate for the admiration and envy and astonishment of the weary world.

At the moment, though, the gates were occupied by those more immediate than splendid augurs of the future.

“Look out,” the other man said, reining back. They reined aside — the President drew the cloak about his face — and allowed the party to enter: the squat, broad, dark men dark against the snow, the beaver hats, the formal coats, the solid legs clad from thigh to ankle in woolen drawers. Among them moved three horses on whose backs were lashed the carcasses of six deer. They passed on, passing the two horsemen without a glance.

“Damn, damn, damn,” the President said; then aloud: “You found good hunting.”

One of the group glanced at him, briefly. He said courteously, pleasantly, without inflection, going on: “So so.”

The horses moved again. “I didn’t see any guns,” the other man said.

“Yes,” the President said grimly. “I must look into this, too. I gave strict orders. . . .” He said fretfully, “Damn. Damn. Do they carry their pantaloons when they go hunting too, do you know?”

The Secretary was at breakfast, though he was not eating. Surrounded by untasted dishes he sat, in his dressing gown and unshaven; his expression too was harried as he perused the paper which lay upon his empty plate. Before the fire were two men — one a horseman with unmelted snow still upon his cloak, seated on a wooden settle, the other standing, obviously the secretary to the Secretary.

The horseman rose as the President and his companion entered. “Sit down, sit down,” the President said. He approached the table, slipping off the cloak, which the secretary came forward and took. “Give us some breakfast,” the President said. “We don’t dare go home.” He sat down; the Secretary served him in person. “What is it now?” the President said.

“Do you ask?” the Secretary said. He took up the paper again and glared at it. “From Pennsylvania, this time.” He struck the paper.

“Maryland, New York, and now Pennsylvania; apparently the only thing that can stop them is the temperature of the water in the Potomac River.”

He spoke in a harsh, irascible voice. “Complaint, complaint, complaint: here is a farmer near Gettysburg. His Negro slave was in the barn, milking by lantern light after dark, when — the Negro doubtless thought about two hundred, since the farmer estimated them at ten or twelve — springing suddenly out of the darkness in plug hats and carrying knives and naked from the waist down.

Result, item: One barn and loft of hay and cow destroyed when the lantern was kicked over; item: one able-bodied slave last seen departing from the scene at a high rate of speed, headed for the forest, and doubtless now dead of fear or by the agency of wild beasts. Debit the Government of the United States: for barn and hay, one hundred dollars; for cow, fifteen dollars; for Negro slave, two hundred dollars. He demands it in gold.”

“Is that so?” the President said, eating swiftly. “I suppose the Negro and the cow took them to be ghosts of Hessian soldiers.”

“I wonder if they thought the cow was a deer,” the horseman said.

“Yes,” the President said. “That’s something else I want. . . .”

“Who wouldn’t take them for anything on earth or under it?” the Secretary said. “The entire Atlantic seaboard north of the Potomac River overrun by creatures in beaver hats and frock coats and woolen drawers, frightening women and children, setting fire to barns and running off slaves, killing deer. . . .”

“Yes,” the President said. “I want to say a word about that, myself. I met a party of them returning as I came out. They had six deer. I thought I gave strict orders that they were not to be permitted guns.”

Again it was the horseman who spoke. “They don’t use guns.”

“What?” the President said. “But I saw myself . . .”

“No, sir. They use knives. They track the deer down and slip up on them and cut their throats.”

“What?” the President said.

“All right, sir. I seen one of the deer. It never had a mark on it except its throat cut up to the neckbone with one lick.”

Again the President said, “Damn. Damn. Damn.” Then the President ceased and the Soldier cursed steadily for a while. The others listened, gravely, their faces carefully averted, save the Secretary, who had taken up another paper. “If you could just persuade them to keep their pantaloons on,” the President said. “At least about the House. . . .”

The Secretary started back, his hair upcrested like an outraged, iron-gray cockatoo. “I, sir? I persuade them?”

“Why not? Aren’t they subject to your Department? I’m just the President. Confound it, it’s got to where my wife no longer dares leave her bedroom, let alone receive lady guests. How am I to explain to the French Ambassador, for instance, why his wife no longer dares call upon my wife because the corridors and the very entrance to the House are blocked by half-naked Chickasaw Indians asleep on the floor or gnawing at half-raw ribs of meat? And I, myself, having to hide away from my own table and beg breakfast, while the official representative of the Government has nothing to do but . . .”

“. . . but explain again each morning to the Treasury,” the Secretary said in shrill rage, “why another Dutch farmer in Pennsylvania or New York must have three hundred dollars in gold in payment for the destruction of his farm and livestock, and explain to the State Department that the capital is not being besieged by demons from hell itself, and explain to the War Department why twelve brand-new army tents must be ventilated at the top with butcher knives. . . .”

“I noticed that, too,” the President said mildly. “I had forgot it.”

“Ha. Your Excellency noted it,” the Secretary said fiercely. “Your Excellency saw it and then forgot it. I have neither seen it nor been

permitted to forget it. And now Your Excellency wonders why I do not persuade them to wear their pantaloons.”

“It does seem like they would,” the President said fretfully. “The other garments seem to please them well enough. But there’s no accounting for taste.” He ate again. The Secretary looked at him, about to speak. Then he did not. As he watched the oblivious President a curious, secret expression came into his face; his gray and irate crest settled slowly, as if it were deflating itself. When he spoke now his tone was bland, smooth; now the other three men were watching the President with curious, covert expressions.

“Yes,” the Secretary said, “there’s no accounting for taste. Though it does seem that when one has been presented with a costume as a mark of both honor and esteem, let alone decorum, and by the chief of a well, tribe . . .”

“That’s what I thought,” the President said innocently. Then he ceased chewing and said “Eh?” sharply, looking up. The three lesser men looked quickly away, but the Secretary continued to watch the President with that bland, secret expression. “What the devil do you mean?” the President said. He knew what the Secretary meant, just as the other three knew.

A day or two after his guest had arrived without warning, and after the original shock had somewhat abated, the President had decreed the new clothing for them. He commanded, out of his own pocket, merchants and hatters as he would have commanded gunsmiths and bulletmakers in war emergency; incidentally he was thus able to estimate the number of them, the men at least, and within forty-eight hours he had transformed his guest’s grave and motley train into the outward aspect of decorum at least.

Then, two mornings after that, the guest — the half Chickasaw, half Frenchman, the squat, obese man with the face of a Gascon brigand and the mannerisms of a spoiled eunuch and dingy lace at throat and wrist, who for three weeks now had dogged his waking hours and his

sleeping dreams with bland inescapability — called formally upon him while he and his wife were still in bed at five o'clock in the morning, with two of his retainers carrying a bundle and what seemed to the President at least a hundred others, men, women and children, thronging quietly into the bedroom, apparently to watch him array himself in it.

For it was a costume — even in the shocked horror of the moment, the President found time to wonder wildly where in the capital Weddel (or Vidal) had found it — a mass, a network, of gold braid — frogs, epaulets, sash and sword — held loosely together by bright green cloth and presented to him in return.

This is what the Secretary meant, while the President glared at him and while behind them both the three other men stood looking at the fire with immobile gravity. “Have your joke,” the President said. “Have it quickly. Are you done laughing now?”

“I laugh?” the Secretary said. “At what?”

“Good,” the President said. He thrust the dishes from him. “Then we can get down to business. Have you any documents you will need to refer to?”

The Secretary's secretary approached. “Shall I get the other papers, sir?”

“Papers?” the Secretary said; once more his crest began to rise. “What the devil do I need with papers? What else have I thought about night and day for three weeks?”

“Good; good,” the President said. “Suppose you review the matter briefly, in case I have forgot anything else.”

“Your Excellency is indeed a fortunate man, if you have been able to forget,” the Secretary said. From the pocket of his dressing gown he took a pair of steel-bowed spectacles. But he used them merely to glare again at the President in cockatoo-crested outrage.

“This man, Weddel, Vidal — whatever his name is — he and his family or clan or whatever they are — claim to own the entire part of Mississippi which lies on the west side of this river in question. Oh, the grant is in order: that French father of his from New Orleans saw to that. — Well, it so happens that facing his home or plantation is the only ford in about three hundred miles.”

“I know all this,” the President said impatiently. “Naturally I regret now that there was any way of crossing the river at all. But otherwise I don’t see . . .”

“Neither did they,” the Secretary said. “Until the white man came.”

“Ah,” the President said. “The man who was mur . . .”

The Secretary raised his hand. “Wait. He stayed about a month with them, ostensibly hunting, since he would be absent all day long, though obviously what he was doing was assuring himself that there was no other ford close by. He never brought any game in; I imagine they laughed at that a good deal, in their pleasant way.”

“Yes,” the President said. “Weddel must have found that very amusing.”

“. . . or Vidal — whatever his name is,” the Secretary said fretfully. “He don’t even seem to know or even to care what his own name is.”

“Get on,” the President said. “About the ford.”

“Yes. Then one day, after a month, the white man offered to buy some of Weddel’s land — Weddel, Vidal — Damn, da . . .”

“Call him Weddel,” the President said.

“. . . from Weddel. Not much; a piece about the size of this room, for which Weddel or V — charged him about ten prices. Not out of any desire for usufruct, you understand; doubtless Weddel would have given the man the land or anyway wagered it on a game of mumble peg, it not having yet occurred to any of them apparently that the small plot which the man wanted contained the only available entrance to or exit from the ford.

Doubtless the trading protracted itself over several days or perhaps weeks, as a kind of game to while away otherwise idle afternoons or evenings, with the bystanders laughing heartily and pleasantly at the happy scene.

They must have laughed a great deal, especially when the man paid Weddel's price; they must have laughed hugely indeed later when they watched the white man out in the sun, building a fence around his property, it doubtless not even then occurring to them that what the white man had done was to fence off the only entrance to the ford."

"Yes," the President said impatiently. "But I still don't see . . ."
Again the Secretary lifted his hand, pontifical, admonitory. "Neither did they; not until the first traveler came along and crossed at the ford. The white man had built himself a tollgate."

"Oh," the President said.

"Yes. And now it must have been, indeed, amusing for them to watch the white man sitting now in the shade — he had a deerskin pouch fastened to a post for the travelers to drop their coins in, and the gate itself arranged so he could operate it by a rope from the veranda of his one-room domicile without having to even leave his seat; and to begin to acquire property — among which was the horse."

"Ah," the President said. "Now we are getting at it."

"Yes. They got at it swiftly from then on. It seems that the match was between the white man's horse and this nephew's horse, the wager the ford and tollgate against a thousand or so acres of land. The nephew's horse lost. And that night . . ."

"Ah," the President said. "I see. And that night the white man was mur . . ."

"Let us say, died," the Secretary said primly, "since it is so phrased in the agent's report. Though he did add in a private communication that the white man's disease seemed to be a split skull. But that is neither here nor there."

“No,” the President said. “It’s up yonder at the House.” Where they had been for three weeks now, men, women, children and Negro slaves, coming for fifteen hundred miles in slow wagons since that day in late autumn when the Chickasaw agent had appeared to inquire into the white man’s death.

For fifteen hundred miles, across winter swamps and rivers, across the trackless eastern backbone of the continent, led by the bland, obese mongrel despot and patriarch in a carriage, dozing, his nephew beside him and one fat, ringed hand beneath its fall of soiled lace lying upon the nephew’s knee to hold him in charge. “Why didn’t the agent stop him?” the President said.

“Stop him?” the Secretary cried. “He finally compromised to the extent of offering to allow the nephew to be tried on the spot, by the Indians themselves, he reserving only the intention of abolishing the tollgate, since no one knew the white man anyway. But no.

The nephew must come to you, to be absolved or convicted in person.” “But couldn’t the agent stop the rest of them? Keep the rest of them from . . .”

“Stop them?” the Secretary cried again. “Listen. He moved in there and lived — Weddel, Vi — Damn! damn!! Where was — Yes. Weddel told him that the house was his; soon it was. Because how could he tell there were fewer faces present each morning than the night before? Could you have? Could you now?”

“I wouldn’t try,” the President said. “I would just declare a national thanksgiving. So they slipped away at night.”

“Yes. Weddel and the carriage and a few forage wagons went first; they had been gone about a month before the agent realized that each morning the number which remained had diminished somewhat. They would load the wagons and go at night, by families — grandparents, parents, children; slaves, chattels and dogs — everything. And why not?”

Why should they deny themselves this holiday at the expense of the Government?

Why should they miss, at the mere price of a fifteen-hundred-mile journey through unknown country in the dead of winter, the privilege and pleasure of spending a few weeks or months in new beavers and broadcloth coats and underdrawers, in the home of the beneficent White Father?"

"Yes," the President said. He said: "And you have told him that there is no charge here against this nephew?"

"Yes. And that if they will go back home, the agent himself will declare the nephew innocent publicly, in whatever ceremony they think fit. And he said — how was it he put it?" The Secretary now spoke in a pleasant, almost lilting tone, in almost exact imitation of the man whom he repeated: "All we desire is justice. If this foolish boy has murdered a white man, I think that we should know it."

"Damn, damn, damn," the President said. "All right. We'll hold the investigation. Get them down here and let's have it over with."

"Here?" The Secretary started back. "In my house?"

"Why not? I've had them for three weeks; at least you can have them for an hour." He turned to the companion. "Hurry. Tell them we are waiting here to hold his nephew's trial."

And now the President and the Secretary sat behind the cleared table and looked at the man who stood as though framed by the opened doors through which he had entered, holding his nephew by the hand like an uncle conducting for the first time a youthful provincial kinsman into a metropolitan museum of wax figures.

Immobile, they contemplated the soft, paunchy man facing them with his soft, bland, inscrutable face — the long, monk-like nose, the slumbrous lids, the flabby, café-au-lait-colored jowls above a froth of

soiled lace of an elegance fifty years outmoded and vanished; the mouth was full, small, and very red.

Yet somewhere behind the face's expression of flaccid and weary disillusion, as behind the bland voice and the almost feminine mannerisms, there lurked something else: something willful, shrewd, unpredictable and despotic. Behind him clotted, quiet and gravely decorous, his dark retinue in beavers and broadcloth and woolen drawers, each with his neatly rolled pantaloons beneath his arm.

For a moment longer he stood, looking from face to face until he found the President. He said, in a voice of soft re-proach: "This is not your house."

"No," the President said. "This is the house of this chief whom I have appointed myself to be the holder of justice between me and my Indian people. He will deal justice to you."

The uncle bowed slightly. "That is all that we desire."

"Good," the President said. On the table before him sat inkstand, quill, and sandbox, and many papers with ribbons and golden seals much in evidence, though none could have said if the heavy gaze had remarked them or not. The President looked at the nephew. Young, lean, the nephew stood, his right wrist clasped by his uncle's fat, lace-foamed hand, and contemplated the President quietly, with grave and alert repose. The President dipped the quill into the ink. "Is this the man who . . ."

"Who performed this murder?" the uncle said pleasantly. "That is what we made this long winter's journey to discover. If he did, if this white man really did not fall from that swift horse of his perhaps and strike his head upon a sharp stone, then this nephew of mine should be punished. We do not think that it is right to slay white men like a confounded Cherokee or Creek."

Perfectly inscrutable, perfectly decorous, he looked at the two exalted personages playing behind the table their clumsy deception with

dummy papers; for an instant the President himself met the slumbrous eyes and looked down. The Secretary though, upthrust, his crest roached violently upward, glared at the uncle.

“You should have held this horse-race across the ford itself,” he said. “Water wouldn’t have left that gash in the white man’s skull.”

The President, glancing quickly up, saw the heavy, secret face musing upon the Secretary with dark speculation. But almost immediately the uncle spoke. “So it would. But this white man would have doubtless required a coin of money from my nephew for passing through his gate.” Then he laughed, mirthful, pleasant, decorous. “Perhaps it would have been better for that white man if he had allowed my nephew to pass through free. But that is neither here nor there now.”

“No,” the President said, almost sharply, so that they looked at him again. He held the quill above the paper. “What is the correct name? Weddel or Vidal?”

Again the pleasant, inflectionless voice came: “Weddel or Vidal. What does it matter by what name the White Chief calls us? We are but Indians: remembered yesterday and forgotten tomorrow.”

The President wrote upon the paper. The quill scratched steadily in the silence in which there was but one other sound: a faint, steady, minor sound which seemed to emerge from the dark and motionless group behind the uncle and nephew. He sanded what he had written and folded it and rose and stood for a moment so while they watched him quietly — the soldier who had commanded men well on more occasions than this.

“Your nephew is not guilty of this murder. My chief whom I have appointed to hold justice between us says for him to return home and never do this again, because next time he will be displeased.”

His voice died into a shocked silence; even for that instant the heavy lids fluttered, while from the dark throng behind him that faint, unceasing sound of quiet scratching by heat and wool engendered, like

a faint, constant motion of the sea, also ceased for an instant. The uncle spoke in a tone of shocked disbelief: "My nephew is free?"

"He is free," the President said. The uncle's shocked gaze traveled about the room.

"This quick? And in here? In this house? I had thought. . . . But no matter." They watched him; again the face was smooth, enigmatic, blank. "We are only Indians; doubtless these busy white men have but little time for our small affairs. Perhaps we have already incommoded them too much."

"No, no," the President said quickly. "To me, my Indian and my white people are the same." But again the uncle's gaze was traveling quietly about the room; standing side by side, the President and the Secretary could feel from one to another the same dawning alarm. After a while the President said: "Where had you expected this council to be held?"

The uncle looked at him. "You will be amused. In my ignorance I had thought that even our little affair would have been concluded in . . . But no matter."

"In what?" the President said.

The bland, heavy face mused again upon him for a moment. "You will laugh; nevertheless, I will obey you. In the big white council house beneath the golden eagle."

"What?" the Secretary cried, starting again. "In the . . ."

The uncle looked away. "I said that you would be amused. But no matter. We will have to wait, anyway."

"Have to wait?" the President said. "For what?"

"This is really amusing," the uncle said. He laughed again, in his tone of mirthful detachment. "More of my people are about to arrive. We can wait for them, since they will wish to see and hear also." No one exclaimed at all now, not even the Secretary. They merely stared at him

while the bland voice went on: "It seems that some of them mistook the town.

They had heard the name of the White Chief's capital spoken, but it so happens that there is also a town in our country with the same name, so that when some of the People inquired on the road, they became misdirected and went there instead, poor ignorant Indians."

He laughed, with fond and mirthful tolerance behind his enigmatic and sleepy face. "But a messenger has arrived; they will arrive themselves within the week. Then we will see about punishing this headstrong boy." He shook the nephew's arm lightly. Except for this the nephew did not move, watching the President with his grave and unwinking regard.

For a long moment there was no sound save the faint, steady scratching of the Indians. Then the Secretary began to speak, patiently, as though addressing a child: "Look. Your nephew is free. This paper says that he did not slay the white man and that no man shall so accuse him again, else both I and the great chief beside me will be angered.

He can return home now, at once. Let all of you return home at once. For is it not well said that the graves of a man's fathers are never quiet in his absence?"

Again there was silence. Then the President said, "Besides, the white council house beneath the golden eagle is being used now by a council of chiefs who are more powerful there than I am."

The uncle's hand lifted; foamed with soiled lace, his forefinger waggled in reproachful deprecation. "Do not ask even an ignorant Indian to believe that," he said. Then he said, with no change of inflection whatever; the Secretary did not know until the President told him later, that the uncle was now addressing him: "And these chiefs will doubtless be occupying the white council hut for some time yet, I suppose."

“Yes,” the Secretary said. “Until the last snow of winter has melted among the flowers and the green grass.”

“Good,” the uncle said. “We will wait, then. Then the rest of the People will have time to arrive.”

And so it was that up that Avenue with a high destiny the cavalcade moved in the still falling snow, led by the carriage containing the President and the uncle and nephew, the fat, ringed hand lying again upon the nephew’s knee, and followed by a second carriage containing the Secretary and his secretary, and this followed in turn by two files of soldiers between which walked the dark and decorous cloud of men, women and children on foot and in arms; so it was that behind the Speaker’s desk of that chamber which was to womb and contemplate the high dream of a destiny superior to the injustice of events and the folly of mankind, the President and the Secretary stood, while below them, ringed about by the living manipulators of, and interspersed by the august and watching ghosts of the dreamers of, the destiny, the uncle and nephew stood, with behind them the dark throng of kin and friends and acquaintances from among which came steadily and unabated that faint sound of wool and flesh in friction. The President leaned to the Secretary.

“Are they ready with the cannon?” he whispered. “Are you sure they can see my arm from the door? And suppose those damned guns explode: they have not been fired since Washington shot them last at Cornwallis: will they impeach me?”

“Yes,” the Secretary hissed.

“Then God help us. Give me the book.” The Secretary passed it to him: it was Petrarch’s Sonnets, which the Secretary had snatched from his table in passing. “Let us hope that I remember enough law Latin to keep it from sounding like either English or Chickasaw,” the President said. He opened the book, and then again the President, the conqueror of men, the winner of battles diplomatic, legal and martial, drew himself erect and looked down upon the dark, still, intent, waiting faces; when he spoke his voice was the voice which before this had caused men to pause and attend and then obey: “Francis Weddel, chief

in the Chickasaw Nation, and you, nephew of Francis Weddel and some day to be a chief, hear my words.”

Then he began to read. His voice was full, sonorous, above the dark faces, echoing about the august dome in profound and solemn syllables. He read ten sonnets. Then, with his arm lifted, he perorated; his voice died profoundly away and he dropped his arm. A moment later, from outside the building, came a ragged crash of artillery.

And now for the first time the dark throng stirred; from among them came a sound, a murmur, of pleased astonishment. The President spoke again: “Nephew of Francis Weddel, you are free. Return to your home.”

And now the uncle spoke; again his finger waggled from out its froth of lace. “Heedless boy,” he said. “Consider the trouble which you have caused these busy men.” He turned to the Secretary, almost briskly; again his voice was bland, pleasant, almost mirthful: “And now, about the little matter of this cursed ford. . . .”

With the autumn sun falling warmly and pleasantly across his shoulders, the President said, “That is all,” quietly and turned to his desk as the secretary departed. While he took up the letter and opened it the sun fell upon his hands and upon the page, with its inference of the splendid dying of the year, of approaching harvests and of columns of quiet wood smoke — serene pennons of peace — above peaceful chimneys about the land.

Suddenly the President started; he sprang up, the letter in his hand, glaring at it in shocked and alarmed consternation while the bland words seemed to explode one by one in his comprehension like musketry:

Dear sir and friend:

This is really amusing. Again this hot-headed nephew — he must have taken his character from his father’s people, since it is none of mine — has come to trouble you and me. It is this cursed ford again.

Another white man came among us, to hunt in peace we thought, since God's forest and the deer which He put in it belong to all. But he too became obsessed with the idea of owning this ford, having heard tales of his own kind who, after the curious and restless fashion of white men, find one side of a stream of water superior enough to the other to pay coins of money for the privilege of reaching it.

So the affair was arranged as this white man desired it. Perhaps I did wrong, you will say. But — do I need to tell you? — I am a simple man and some day I shall be old, I trust, and the continuous interruption of these white men who wish to cross and the collecting and care of the coins of money is only a nuisance.

For what can money be to me, whose destiny it apparently is to spend my declining years beneath the shade of familiar trees from whose peaceful shade my great white friend and chief has removed the face of every enemy save death? That was my thought, but when you read further you will see that it was not to be.

Once more it is this rash and heedless boy. It seems that he challenged this new white man of ours (or the white man challenged him: the truth I will leave to your unerring wisdom to unravel) to a swimming race in the river, the stakes to be this cursed ford against a few miles of land, which (this will amuse you) this wild nephew of mine did not even own.

The race took place, but unfortunately our white man failed to emerge from the river until after he was dead.

And now your agent has arrived, and he seems to feel that perhaps this swimming race should not have taken place at all. And so now there is nothing for me to do save to bestir old bones and bring this rash boy to you for you to reprimand him. We will arrive in about . . .

The President sprang to the bell and pulled it violently. When his secretary entered, he grasped the man by the shoulders and whirled

him toward the door again. "Get me the Secretary of War, and maps of all the country between here and New Orleans!" he cried. "Hurry."

And so again we see him; the President is absent now and it is the Soldier alone who sits with the Secretary of War behind the map-strewn table, while there face them the officers of a regiment of cavalry. At the table his secretary is writing furiously while the President looks over his shoulder. "Write it big," he says, "so that even an Indian cannot mistake it. Know all men by these presents," he quotes.

"Francis Weddel his heirs, descendants and assigns from now on in perpetuity . . . provided — Have you got provided? Good — provided that neither he nor his do ever again cross to the eastern side of the above described River. . . . And now to that damned agent," he said.

"The sign must be in duplicate, at both ends of the ford: The United States accepts no responsibility for any man, woman or child, black, white, yellow or red, who crosses this ford, and no white man shall buy, lease or accept it as a gift save under the severest penalty of the law. Can I do that?"

"I'm afraid not, Your Excellency," the Secretary said.

The President mused swiftly. "Damn," he said. "Strike out The United States, then." The Secretary did so. The President folded the two papers and handed them to the cavalry colonel.

"Ride," he said. "Your orders are, Stop them."

"Suppose they refuse to stop," the colonel said. "Shall I fire then?"

"Yes," the President said. "Shoot every horse, mule, and ox. I know they won't walk. Off with you, now." The officers withdrew. The President turned back to the maps — the Soldier still: eager, happy, as though he rode himself with the regiment, or as if in spirit already he deployed it with that shrewd cunning which could discern and choose the place most disadvantageous to the enemy, and get there first.

“It will be here,” he said. He put his finger on the map. “A horse, General, that I may meet him here and turn his flank and drive him.”
“Done, General,” the Secretary said.

The End

IV. THE WASTELAND

Ad Astra, William Faulkner

Ad Astra

I DONT KNOW what we were. With the exception of Comyn, we had started out Americans, but after three years, in our British tunics and British wings and here and there a ribbon, I dont suppose we had even bothered in three years to wonder what we were, to think or to remember.

And on that day, that evening, we were even less than that, or more than that: either beneath or beyond the knowledge that we had not even wondered in three years. The subadar — after a while he was there, in his turban and his trick major’s pips — said that we were like men trying to move in water.

“But soon it will clear away,” he said. “The effluvium of hatred and of words. We are like men trying to move in water, with held breath watching our terrific and infinitesimal limbs, watching one another’s terrific stasis without touch, without contact, robbed of all save the impotence and the need.”

We were in the car then, going to Amiens, Sartoris driving and Comyn sitting half a head above him in the front seat like a tackling dummy, the subadar, Bland and I in back, each with a bottle or two in his

pockets. Except the subadar, that is. He was squat, small and thick, yet his sobriety was colossal.

In that maelstrom of alcohol where the rest of us had fled our inescapable selves he was like a rock, talking quietly in a grave bass four sizes too big for him: "In my country I was prince. But all men are brothers."

But after twelve years I think of us as bugs in the surface of the water, isolant and aimless and unflagging. Not on the surface; in it, within that line of demarcation not air and not water, sometimes submerged, sometimes not.

You have watched an unbreaking groundswell in a cove, the water shallow, the cove quiet, a little sinister with satiate familiarity, while beyond the darkling horizon the dying storm has raged on. That was the water, we the flotsam. Even after twelve years it is no clearer than that.

It had no beginning and no ending. Out of nothing we howled, unwitting the storm which we had escaped and the foreign strand which we could not escape; that in the interval between two surges of the swell we died who had been too young to have ever lived.

We stopped in the middle of the road to drink again. The land was dark and empty. And quiet: that was what you noticed, remarked. You could hear the earth breathe, like coming out of ether, like it did not yet know, believe, that it was awake. "But now it is peace," the subadar said. "All men are brothers."

"You spoke before the Union once," Bland said. He was blond and tall. When he passed through a room where women were he left a sighing wake like a ferry boat entering the slip. He was a Southerner, too, like Sartoris; but unlike Sartoris, in the five months he had been out, no one had ever found a bullet hole in his machine.

But he had transferred out of an Oxford battalion — he was a Rhodes scholar — with a barnacle and a wound-stripe. When he was tight he would talk about his wife, though we all knew that he was not married.

He took the bottle from Sartoris and drank. “I’ve got the sweetest little wife,” he said. “Let me tell you about her.”

“Dont tell us,” Sartoris said. “Give her to Comyn. He wants a girl.”

“All right,” Bland said. “You can have her, Comyn.”

“Is she blonde?” Comyn said.

“I dont know,” Bland said. He turned back to the subadar. “You spoke before the Union once. I remember you.”

“Ah,” the subadar said. “Oxford. Yes.”

“He can attend their schools among the gentleborn, the bleach-skinned,” Bland said. “But he cannot hold their commission, because gentility is a matter of color and not lineage or behavior.”

“Fighting is more important than truth,” the subadar said. “So we must restrict the prestige and privileges of it to the few so that it will not lose popularity with the many who have to die.”

“Why more important?” I said. “I thought this one was being fought to end war forevermore.”

The subadar made a brief gesture, dark, deprecatory, tranquil. “I was a white man also for that moment. It is more important for the Caucasian because he is only what he can do; it is the sum of him.”

“So you see further than we see?”

“A man sees further looking out of the dark upon the light than a man does in the light and looking out upon the light. That is the principle of the spyglass. The lens is only to tease him with that which the sense that suffers and desires can never affirm.”

“What do you see, then?” Bland said.

"I see girls," Comyn said. "I see acres and acres of the yellow hair of them like wheat and me among the wheat. Have ye ever watched a hidden dog quartering a wheat field, any of yez?"

"Not hunting bitches," Bland said.

Comyn turned in the seat, thick and huge. He was big as all outdoors. To watch two mechanics shoehorning him into the cockpit of a Dolphin like two chambermaids putting an emergency bolster into a case too small for it, was a sight to see. "I will beat the head off ye for a shilling," he said.

"So you believe in the rightness of man?" I said.

"I will beat the heads off yez all for a shilling," Comyn said.

"I believe in the pitiableness of man," the subadar said. "That is better."

"I will give yez a shilling, then," Comyn said.

"All right," Sartoris said. "Did you ever try a little whisky for the night air, any of you all?"

Comyn took the bottle and drank. "Acres and acres of them," he said, "with their little round white woman parts gleaming among the moiling wheat."

So we drank again, on the lonely road between two beet fields, in the dark quiet, and the turn of the inebriation began to make. It came back from wherever it had gone, rolling down upon us and upon the grave sober rock of the subadar until his voice sounded remote and tranquil and dreamlike, saying that we were brothers.

Monaghan was there then, standing beside our car in the full glare of the headlights of his car, in an R.F.C. cap and an American tunic with both shoulder straps flapping loose, drinking from Comyn's bottle. Beside him stood a second man, also in a tunic shorter and trimmer than ours, with a bandage about his head.

"I'll fight you," Comyn told Monaghan. "I'll give you the shilling."

"All right," Monaghan said. He drank again.

“We are all brothers,” the subadar said. “Sometimes we pause at the wrong inn. We think it is night and we stop, when it is not night. That is all.”

“I’ll give you a sovereign,” Comyn told Monaghan.

“All right,” Monaghan said. He extended the bottle to the other man, the one with the bandaged head.

“I thangk you,” the man said. “I haf plenty yet.”

“I’ll fight him,” Comyn said.

“It is because we can do only within the heart,” the subadar said.

“While we see beyond the heart.”

“I’ll be damned if you will,” Monaghan said. “He’s mine.” He turned to the man with the bandaged head. “Aren’t you mine? Here; drink.”

“I haf plenty, I thangk you, gentlemen,” the other said. But I dont think any of us paid much attention to him until we were inside the Cloche-Clos. It was crowded, full of noise and smoke.

When we entered all the noise ceased, like a string cut in two, the end raveling back into a sort of shocked consternation of pivoting faces, and the waiter — an old man in a dirty apron — falling back before us, slack-jawed, with an expression of outraged unbelief, like an atheist confronted with either Christ or the devil.

We crossed the room, the waiter retreating before us, paced by the turning outraged faces, to a table adjacent to one where three French officers sat watching us with that same expression of astonishment and then outrage and then anger.

As one they rose; the whole room, the silence, became staccato with voices, like machine guns. That was when I turned and looked at Monaghan’s companion for the first time, in his green tunic and his black snug breeks and his black boots and his bandage.

He had cut himself recently shaving, and with his bandaged head and his face polite and dazed and bloodless and sick, he looked like Monaghan had been using him pretty hard. Roundfaced, not old, with his immaculately turned bandage which served only to emphasize the generations of difference between him and the turbaned subadar, flanked by Monaghan with his wild face and wild tunic and surrounded by the French people's shocked and outraged faces, he appeared to contemplate with a polite and alert concern his own struggle against the inebriation which Monaghan was forcing upon him.

There was something Anthony-like about him: rigid, soldierly, with every button in place, with his unblemished bandage and his fresh razor cuts, he appeared to muse furiously upon a clear flame of a certain conviction of individual behavior above a violent and inexplicable chaos.

Then I remarked Monaghan's second companion: an American military policeman. He was not drinking. He sat beside the German, rolling cigarettes from a cloth sack.

On the German's other side Monaghan was filling his glass. "I brought him down this morning," he said. "I'm going to take him home with me."

"Why?" Bland said. "What do you want with him?"

"Because he belongs to me," Monaghan said. He set the full glass before the German. "Here; drink."

"I once thought about taking one home to my wife," Bland said. "So I could prove to her that I have only been to a war. But I never could find a good one. A whole one, I mean."

"Come on," Monaghan said. "Drink."

"I haf plenty," the German said. "All day I haf plenty."

"Do you want to go to America with him?" Bland said:

"Yes. I would ligk it. Thanks."

"Sure you'll like it," Monaghan said. "I'll make a man of you. Drink."

The German raised the glass, but he merely held it in his hand. His face was strained, deprecatory, yet with a kind of sereneness, like that of a man who has conquered himself. I imagine some of the old martyrs must have looked at the lions with that expression. He was sick, too.

Not from the liquor: from his head. "I haf in Beyreuth a wife and a little wohn. Mine son. I haf not him yet seen."

"Ah," the subadar said. "Beyreuth. I was there one spring."

"Ah," the German said. He looked quickly at the subadar. "So? The music?"

"Yes," the subadar said. "In your music a few of you have felt, tasted, lived, the true brotherhood. The rest of us can only look beyond the heart. But we can follow them for a little while in the music."

"And then we must return," the German said. "That iss not good. Why must we yet return always?"

"It is not the time for that yet," the subadar said. "But soon . . . It is not as far as it once was. Not now."

"Yes," the German said. "Defeat will be good for us. Defeat iss good for art; victory, it iss not good."

"So you admit you were whipped," Comyn said. He was sweating again, and Sartoris' nostrils were quite white. I thought of what the subadar had said about men in water. Only our water was drunkenness: that isolation of alcoholism which drives men to shout and laugh and fight, not with one another but with their unbearable selves which, drunk, they are even more fain and still less fell to escape.

Loud and overloud, unwitting the black thunderhead of outraged France (steadily the other tables were being emptied; the other customers were now clotted about the high desk where the patronne, an old woman in steel spectacles, sat, a wad of knitting on the ledge before her) we shouted at one another, speaking in foreign tongues out of our inescapable isolations, reiterant, unlistened to by one another;

while submerged by us and more foreign still, the German and the subadar talked quietly of music, art, the victory born of defeat.

And outside in the chill November darkness was the suspension, the not-quite-believing, not-quite-awakened nightmare, the breathing spell of the old verbiaged lusts and the buntinged and panoplied greeds.

“By God, I’m shanty Irish,” Monaghan said. “That’s what I am.”

“What about it?” Sartoris said, his nostrils like chalk against his high-colored face. His twin brother had been killed in July. He was in a Camel squadron below us, and Sartoris was down there when it happened. For a week after that, as soon as he came in from patrol he would fill his tanks and drums and go out again, alone.

One day somebody saw him, roosting about five thousand feet above an old Ak.W. I suppose the other guy who was with his brother that morning had seen the markings on the Hun patrol leader’s crate; anyway, that’s what Sartoris was doing, using the Ak.W. for bait. Where he got it and who he got to fly it, we didn’t know.

But he got three Huns that week, catching them dead when they dived on the Ak.W., and on the eighth day he didn’t go out again. “He must have got him,” Hume said. But we didn’t know. He never told us. But after that, he was all right again. He never did talk much; just did his patrols and maybe once a week he’d sit and drink his nostrils white in a quiet sort of way.

Bland was filling his glass, a drop at a time almost, with a catlike indolence. I could see why men didn’t like him and why women did. Comyn, his arms crossed on the table, his cuff in a pool of spilt liquor, was staring at the German. His eyes were bloodshot, a little protuberant. Beneath his downcrushed monkey cap the American M.P. smoked his meager cigarettes, his face quite blank.

The steel chain of his whistle looped into his breast pocket, his pistol was hunched forward onto his lap. Beyond, the French people, the

soldiers, the waiter, the patronne, clotted at the desk. I could hear their voices like from a distance, like crickets in September grass, the shadows of their hands jerking up the wall and flicking away.

“I’m not a soldier,” Monaghan said. “I’m not a gentleman. I’m not anything.” At the base of each flapping shoulder strap there was a small rip; there were two longer ones parallel above his left pocket where his wings and ribbon had been. “I dont know what I am. I have been in this damn war for three years and all I know is, I’m not dead. I—”

“How do you know you’re not dead?” Bland said.

Monaghan looked at Bland, his mouth open upon his uncompleted word.

“I’ll kill you for a shilling,” Comyn said. “I dont like your bloody face, Lootenant. Bloody lootenant.”

“I’m shanty Irish,” Monaghan said. “That’s what I am. My father was shanty Irish, by God. And I dont know what my grandfather was. I dont know if I had one. My father dont remember one. Likely it could have been one of several. So he didn’t even have to be a gentleman. He never had to be.

That’s why he could make a million dollars digging sewers in the ground. So he could look up at the tall glittering windows and say — I’ve heard him, and him smoking the pipe would gas the puking guts out of you damn, niggling, puny—”

“Are you bragging about your father’s money or about his sewers?” Bland said.

“ — would look up at them and he’d say to me, he’d say, ‘When you’re with your fine friends, the fathers and mothers and sisters of them you met at Yale, ye might just remind them that every man is the slave of his own refuse and so your old dad they would be sending around to the forty-story back doors of their kitchens is the king of them all—’ What did you say?” He looked at Bland.

“Look here, buddy,” the M.P. said. “This is about enough of this. I’ve got to report this prisoner.”

“Wait,” Monaghan said. He did not cease to look at Bland. “What did you say?”

“Are you bragging about your father’s money or about his sewers?” Bland said.

“No,” Monaghan said. “Why should I? Any more than I would brag about the thirteen Huns I got, or the two ribbons, one of which his damned king—” he jerked his head at Comyn— “gave me.”

“Dont call him my damned king,” Comyn said, his cuff soaking slowly in the spilt liquor.

“Look,” Monaghan said. He jerked his hand at the rips on his flapping shoulder straps, at the two parallel rips on his breast. “That’s what I think of it. Of all your goddamn twaddle about glory and gentlemen. I was young; I thought you had to be. Then I was in it and there wasn’t time to stop even when I found it didn’t count. But now it’s over; finished now. Now I can be what I am.

Shanty Irish; son of an immigrant that knew naught but shovel and pick until youth and the time for pleasuring was wore out of him before his time. Out of a peat bog he came, and his son went to their gentlemen’s school and returned across the water to swank it with any of them that owned the peat bogs and the bitter sweat of them that mired it, and the king said him well.”

“I will give yez the shilling and I will beat the head off yez,” Comyn said.

“But why do you want to take him back with you?” Bland said.

Monaghan just looked at Bland. There was something of the crucified about Monaghan, too: furious, inarticulate not with stupidity but at it, like into him more than any of us had distilled the ceased drums of the old lust and greed waking at last aghast at their own impotence and accrued despair.

Bland sat on his spine, legs extended, his hands in his slacks, his handsome face calmly insufferable.

“What stringed pick would he bow? maybe a shovel strung with the gut of an alley-cat? he will create perhaps in music the flushed toilets of Manhattan to play for your father after supper of an evening?” Monaghan just looked at Bland with that wild, rapt expression. Bland turned his lazy face a little to the German.

“Look here,” the M.P. said.

“You have a wife, Herr Leutnant?” Bland said.

The German looked up. He glanced swiftly from face to face. “Yes, thank you,” he said. He still had not touched his full glass save to hold it in his hand. But he was no nearer sober than before, the liquor become the hurting of his head, his head the pulse and beat of alcohol in him.

“My people are of Prussia little barons. There are four brothers: the second for the Army, the third who did nothing in Berlin, the little one a cadet of dragoons; I, the eldest, in the University. There I learned. There was a time then.

It was as though we, young from the quiet land, were brought together, chosen and worthy to witness a period quick like a woman with a high destiny of the earth and of man. It iss as though the old trash, the old litter of man’s blundering, iss to be swept away for a new race that will in the heroic simplicity of olden time walk the new earth. You knew that time, not? When the eye sparkled, the blut ran quick?” He looked about at our faces. “No?

Well, in America perhaps not. America iss new; in a new house it is not the litter so much as in old.” He looked at his glass for a moment, his face tranquil. “I return home; I say to my father, in the University I haf learned it iss not good; baron I will not be. He cannot believe. He talks of Germany, the fatherland; I say to him, It iss there; so.

You say fatherland; I, brotherland, I say, the word father iss that barbarism which will be first swept away; it iss the symbol of that hierarchy which hass stained the history of man with injustice of arbitrary instead of moral; force instead of love.

“From Berlin they send for that one; from the Army that one comes. I still say baron I will not be, for it iss not good. We are in the little hall where my ancestors on the walls hang; I stand before them like court-martial; I say that Franz must be baron, for I will not be.

My father says you can; you will; it iss for Germany. Then I say, For Germany then will my wife be baroness? And like a court-martial I tell them I haf married the daughter of a musician who wass peasant.

“So it iss that. That one of Berlin iss to be baron. He and Franz are twin, but Franz iss captain already, and the most humble of the Army may eat meat with our kaiser; he does not need to be baron. So I am in Beyreuth with my wife and my music.

It iss as though I am dead. I do not get letter until to say my father iss dead and I haf killed him, and that one iss now home from Berlin to be baron. But he does not stay at home. In 1912 he iss in Berlin newspaper dead of a lady’s husband and so Franz iss baron after all.

“Then it iss war. But I am in Beyreuth with my wife and my music, because we think that it will not be long, since it was not long before. The fatherland in its pride needed us of the schools, but when it needed us it did not know it. And when it did realize that it needed us it wass too late and any peasant who would be hard to die would do. And so—”

“Why did you go, then?” Bland said. “Did the women make you? throw eggs at you, maybe?”

The German looked at Bland. “I am German; that iss beyond the I, the I am. Not for baron and kaiser.” Then he quit looking at Bland without moving his eyes. “There wass a Germany before there wass barons,” he said. “And after, there will be.”

“Even after this?”

“More so. Then it was pride, a word in the mouth. Now it is a — how you call it? . . .”

“A nation vanquishes its banners,” the subadar said. “A man conquers himself.”

“Or a woman a child bears,” the German said.

“Out of the lust, the travail,” the subadar said; “out of the travail, the affirmation, the godhead; truth.”

The M.P. was rolling another cigarette. He watched the subadar, upon his face an expression savage, restrained, and cold. He licked the cigarette and looked at me.

“When I came to this goddamn country,” he said, “I thought niggers were niggers. But now I’ll be damned if I know what they are. What’s he? snake-charmer?”

“Yes,” I said. “Snake-charmer.”

“Then he better get his snake out and beat it. I’ve got to report this prisoner. Look at those frogs yonder.” As I turned and looked three of the Frenchmen were leaving the room, insult and outrage in the shapes of their backs. The German was talking again.

“I hear by the newspapers how Franz is colonel and then general, and how the cadet, who was still the round-headed boy part of a gun always when I last saw him, is now ace with iron cross by the kaiser’s own hand. Then it is 1916. I see by the paper how the cadet is killed by your Bishop—” he bowed slightly to Comyn— “that good man.

So now I am cadet myself. It is as though I know. It is as though I see what is to be. So I transfer to be aviator, and yet though I know now that Franz is general of staff and though to myself each night I say, ‘You have again returned,’ I know that it is no good.

“That, until our kaiser fled. Then I learn that Franz is now in Berlin; I believe that there is a truth, that we have not forfeited all in pride,

because we know it will not be much longer now, and Franz in Berlin safe, the fighting away from.

“Then it iss this morning. Then comes the letter in my mother’s hand that I haf not seen in seven years, addressed to me as baron. Franz iss shot from his horse by German soldier in Berlin street.

It iss as though all had been forgotten, because women can forget all that quick, since to them nothing iss real — truth, justice, all — nothing that cannot be held in the hands or cannot die. So I burn all my papers, the picture of my wife and my son that I haf not yet seen, destroy my identity disk and remove all insignia from my tunic—” he gestured toward his collar.

“You mean,” Bland said, “that you had no intention of coming back? Why didn’t you take a pistol to yourself and save your government an aeroplane?”

“Suicide iss just for the body,” the German said. “The body settles nothing. It iss of no importance. It iss just to be kept clean when possible.”

“It is merely a room in the inn,” the subadar said. “It is just where we hide for a little while.”

“The lavatory,” Bland said; “the toilet.”

The M.P. rose. He tapped the German on the shoulder. Comyn was staring at the German.

“So you admit you were whipped,” he said.

“Yes,” the German said. “It wass our time first, because we were the sickest. It will be your England’s next. Then she too will be well.”

“Dont say my England,” Comyn said. “I am of the Irish nation.” He turned to Monaghan. “You said, my damned king. Dont say my damned king. Ireland has had no king since the Ur Neill, God bless the red-haired stern of him.”

Rigid, controlled, the German made a faint gesture. “You see?” he said to no one at all.

“The victorious lose that which the vanquished gain,” the subadar said. “And what will you do now?” Bland said.

The German did not answer. He sat bolt upright with his sick face and his immaculate bandage.

“What will you do?” the subadar said to Bland. “What will any of us do? All this generation which fought in the war are dead tonight. But we do not yet know it.”

We looked at the subadar: Comyn with his bloodshot pig’s eyes, Sartoris with his white nostrils, Bland slumped in his chair, indolent, insufferable, with his air of a spoiled woman. Above the German the M.P. stood.

“It seems to worry you a hell of a lot,” Bland said.

“You do not believe?” the subadar said. “Wait. You will see.”

“Wait?” Bland said. “I dont think I’ve done anything in the last three years to have acquired that habit. In the last twenty-six years. Before that I dont remember. I may have.”

“Then you will see sooner than waiting,” the subadar said. “You will see.” He looked about at us, gravely serene. “Those who have been four years rotting out yonder—” he waved his short thick arm— “are not more dead than we.”

Again the M.P. touched the German’s shoulder. “Hell,” he said. “Come along, buddy.” Then he turned his head and we all looked up at the two Frenchmen, an officer and a sergeant, standing beside the table. For a while we just remained so.

It was like all the little bugs had suddenly found that their orbits had coincided and they wouldn’t even have to be aimless any more or even to keep on moving. Beneath the alcohol I could feel that hard, hot ball beginning in my stomach, like in combat, like when you know something is about to happen; that instant when you think Now. Now I can dump everything overboard and just be. Now. Now. It is quite pleasant.

“Why is that here, monsieur?” the officer said. Monaghan looked up at him, thrust backward and sideways in his chair, poised on the balls of his thighs as though they were feet, his arm lying upon the table. “Why do you make desagreable for France, monsieur, eh?” the officer said.

Someone grasped Monaghan as he rose; it was the M.P. behind him, holding him half risen. “Wa-a-a-i-daminate,” the M.P. said; “wa-a-a-i-daminate.” The cigarette bobbed on his lower lip as he talked, his hands on Monaghan’s shoulders, the brassard on his arm lifted into bold relief.

“What’s it to you, Frog?” he said. Behind the officer and the sergeant the other French people stood, and the old woman. She was trying to push through the circle. “This is my prisoner,” the M.P. said. “I’ll take him anywhere I please and keep him there as long as I like. What do you think about that?”

“By which authority, monsieur?” the officer said. He was tall, with a gaunt, tragic face. I saw then that one of his eyes was glass. It was motionless, rigid in a face that looked even deader than the spurious eye.

The M.P. glanced toward his brassard, then instead he looked at the officer again and tapped the pistol swinging low now against his flank. “I’ll take him all over your goddamn lousy country. I’ll take him into your goddamn senate and kick your president up for a chair for him and you can suck your chin until I come back to wipe the latrine off your feet again.”

“Ah,” the officer said, “a devil-dog, I see.”

He said “dehvildahg” between his teeth, with no motion of his dead face, in itself insult. Behind him the patronne began to shriek in French: “Boche! Boche! Broken! Broken! Every cup, every saucer, glass, plate — all, all! I will show you! I have kept them for this day. Eight months since the obus I have kept them in a box against this day: plates, cups, saucers, glasses, all that I have had since thirty years, all gone, broken

at one time! And it costing me fifty centimes the glass for such that I shame myself to have my patrons—”

There is an unbearable point, a climax, in weariness. Even alcohol cannot approach it. Mobs are motivated by it, by a sheer attenuation of sameness become unbearable. As Monaghan rose, the M.P. flung him back. Then it was as though we all flung everything overboard at once, facing unbashed and without shame the specter which for four years we had been decking out in high words, leaping forward with concerted and orderly promptitude each time the bunting slipped.

I saw the M.P. spring at the officer, then Comyn rose and met him. I saw the M.P. hit Comyn three times on the point of the jaw with his fist before Comyn picked him up bodily and threw him clean over the crowd, where he vanished, horizontal in midair, tugging at his pistol. I saw three poilus on Monaghan's back and the officer trying to hit him with a bottle, and Sartoris leaping upon the officer from behind. Comyn was gone; through the gap which he had made the patronne emerged, shrieking.

Two men caught at her and she strove forward, trying to spit on the German. “Boche! Boche!” she shrieked, spitting and slobbering, her gray hair broken loose about her face; she turned and spat full at me. “Thou, too!” she shrieked, “it was not England that was devastated! Thou, too, come to pick the bones of France.

Jackal! Vulture! Animal! Broken, broken! All! All! All!” And beneath it all, unmoved, unmoving, alert, watchful and contained, the German and the subadar sat, the German with his high, sick face, the subadar tranquil as a squat idol, the both of them turbaned like prophets in the Old Testament.

It didn't take long. There was no time in it. Or rather, we were outside of time; within, not on, that surface, that demarcation between the old where we knew we had not died and the new where the subadar said that we were dead.

Beyond the brandished bottles, the blue sleeves and the grimed hands, the faces like masks grimaced into rigid and soundless shouts to frighten children, I saw Comyn again. He came plowing up like a laden ship in a chop sea; beneath his arm was the ancient waiter, to his lips he held the M.P.'s whistle. Then Sartoris swung a chair at the single light.

It was cold in the street, a cold that penetrated the clothing, the alcohol-distended pores, and murmured to the skeleton itself. The plaza was empty, the lights infrequent and remote. So quiet it was that I could hear the faint water in the fountain.

From some distance away came sound, remote too under the thick low sky — shouting, far-heard, on a thin female note like all shouting, even a mob of men, broken now and then by the sound of a band. In the shadow of the wall Monaghan and Comyn held the German on his feet. He was unconscious; the three of them invisible save for the faint blur of the bandage, inaudible save for the steady monotone of Monaghan's cursing.

"There should never have been an alliance between Frenchmen and Englishmen," the subadar said. He spoke without effort; invisible, his effortless voice had an organ quality, out of all proportion to his size. "Different nations should never join forces to fight for the same object.

Let each fight for something different; ends that do not conflict, each in his own way." Sartoris passed us, returning from the fountain, carrying his bulging cap carefully before him, bottom-up.

We could hear the water dripping from it between his footsteps. He became one of the blob of thicker shadow where the bandage gleamed and where Monaghan cursed steadily and quietly. "And each after his own tradition," the subadar said. "My people.

The English gave them rifles. They looked at them and came to me: 'This spear is too short and too heavy: how can a man slay a swift enemy with a spear of this size and weight?'

They gave them tunics with buttons to be kept buttoned; I have passed a whole trench of them squatting, motionless, buried to the ears in blankets, straw, empty sand bags, their faces gray with cold; I have lifted the blankets away from patient torsos clad only in a shirt.

“The English officers would say to them, ‘Go there and do thus’; they would not stir. Then one day at full noon the whole battalion, catching movement beyond a crater, sprang from the trench, carrying me and an officer with it.

We carried the trench without firing a shot; what was left of us — the officer, I, and seventeen others — lived three days in a traverse of the enemy’s front line; it required a whole brigade to extricate us.

‘Why didn’t you shoot?’ the officer said. ‘You let them pick you off like driven pheasant.’ They did not look at him. Like children they stood, murmurous, alert, without shame. I said to the headman, ‘Were the rifles loaded, O Das?’ Like children they stood, diffident, without shame. ‘O Son of many kings,’ Das said. ‘Speak the truth of thy knowing to the sahib,’ I said. ‘They were not loaded, sahib,’ Das said.”

Again the band came, remote, thudding in the thick air. They were giving the German drink from a bottle. Monaghan said: “Now. Feel better now?”

“It iss mine head,” the German said. They spoke quietly, like they were discussing wall-paper.

Monaghan cursed again. “I’m going back. By God, I—”

“No, no,” the German said. “I will not permit. You haf already obligated—”

We stood in the shadow beneath the wall and drank. We had one bottle left. Comyn crashed it, empty, against the wall.

“Now what?” Bland said.

“Girls,” Comyn said. “Would ye watch Comyn of the Irish nation among the yellow hair of them like a dog among the wheat?”

We stood there, hearing the far band, the far shouting. "You sure you feel all right?" Monaghan said.

"Thanks," the German said. "I feel goot."

"Come on, then," Comyn said.

"You going to take him with you?" Bland said.

"Yes," Monaghan said. "What of it?"

"Why not take him on to the A.P.M.? He's sick."

"Do you want me to bash your bloody face in?" Monaghan said.

"All right," Bland said.

"Come on," Comyn said. "What fool would rather fight than fush? All men are brothers, and all their wives are sisters. So come along, yez midnight fusileers."

"Look here," Bland said to the German, "do you want to go with them?" With his bandaged head, he and the subadar alone were visible, like two injured men among five spirits.

"Hold him up a minute," Monaghan told Comyn. Monaghan approached Bland. He cursed Bland. "I like fighting," he said, in that same monotone. "I even like being whipped."

"Wait," the German said. "Again I will not permit." Monaghan halted, he and Bland not a foot apart. "I haf wife and son in Beyreuth," the German said. He was speaking to me. He gave me the address, twice, carefully.

"I'll write to her," I said. "What shall I tell her?"

"Tell her it iss nothing. You will know."

"Yes. I'll tell her you are all right."

"Tell her this life iss nothing."

Comyn and Monaghan took his arms again, one on either side. They turned and went on, almost carrying him. Comyn looked back once. "Peace be with you," he said.

"And with you, peace," the subadar said. They went on. We watched them come into silhouette in the mouth of an alley where a light was. There was an arch there, and the faint cold pale light on the arch and on the walls so that it was like a gate and they entering the gate, holding the German up between them.

"What will they do with him?" Bland said. "Prop him in the corner and turn the light off? Or do French brothels have he-beds too?"

"Who the hell's business is that?" I said.

The sound of the band came, thudding; it was cold. Each time my flesh jerked with alcohol and cold I believed that I could hear it rasp on the bones.

"Since seven years now I have been in this climate," the subadar said. "But still I do not like the cold." His voice was deep, quiet, like he might be six feet tall. It was like when they made him they said among themselves, "We'll give him something to carry his message around with." "Why? Who'll listen to his message?" "He will. So we'll give him something to hear it with."

"Why dont you go back to India then?" Bland said.

"Ah," the subadar said. "I am like him; I too will not be baron."

"So you clear out and let foreigners who will treat the people like oxen or rabbits come in and take it."

"By removing myself I undid in one day what it took two thousand years to do. Is not that something?"

We shook with the cold. Now the cold was the band, the shouting, murmuring with cold hands to the skeleton, not the ears.

"Well," Bland said, "I suppose the English government is doing more to free your people than you could."

The subadar touched Bland on the chest, lightly. "You are wise, my friend. Let England be glad that all Englishmen are not so wise."

"So you will be an exile for the rest of your days, eh?"

The subadar jerked his short, thick arm toward the empty arch where Comyn and the German and Monaghan had disappeared. "Did you not hear what he said? This life is nothing."

"You can think so," Bland said. "But, by God, I'd hate to think that what I saved out of the last three years is nothing."

"You saved a dead man," the subadar said serenely. "You will see."

"I saved my destiny," Bland said. "You nor nobody else knows what that will be."

"What is your destiny except to be dead? It is unfortunate that your generation had to be the one. It is unfortunate that for the better part of your days you will walk the earth a spirit. But that was your destiny."

From far away came the shouting, on that sustained note, feminine and childlike all at once, and then the band again, brassy, thudding, like the voices, forlornly gay, hysteric, but most of all forlorn. The arch in the cold glow of the light yawned empty, profound, silent, like the gate to another city, another world.

Suddenly Sartoris left us. He walked steadily to the wall and leaned against it on his propped arms, vomiting.

"Hell," Bland said. "I want a drink." He turned to me. "Where's your bottle?"

"It's gone."

"Gone where? You had two."

"I haven't got one now, though. Drink water."

"Water?" he said. "Who the hell drinks water?"

Then the hot hard ball came into my stomach again, pleasant, unbearable, real; again that instant when you say Now. Now I can dump everything. "You will, you goddamn son," I said. Bland was not looking at me. "Twice," he said in a quiet, detached tone.

"Twice in an hour. How's that for high?" He turned and went toward the fountain. Sartoris came back, walking steadily erect. The band blent with the cold along the bones.

"What time is it?" I said.

Sartoris peered at his wrist. "Twelfth."

"It's later than midnight," I said. "It must be."

"I said it was the twelfth," Sartoris said.

Bland was stooping at the fountain. There was a little light there. As we reached him he stood up, mopping at his face. The light was on his face and I thought for some time that he must have had his whole head under to be mopping that high up his face before I saw that he was crying. He stood there, mopping at his face, crying hard but quiet.

"My poor little wife," he said. "My poor little wife."

The end

Victory, William Faulkner

Victory

I

THOSE WHO SAW him descend from the Marseilles express in the Gare de Lyon on that damp morning saw a tall man, a little stiff, with a bronze face and spike-ended moustaches and almost white hair. "A

milord,” they said, remarking his sober, correct suit, his correct stick correctly carried, his sparse baggage; “a milord military.

But there is something the matter with his eyes.” But there was something the matter with the eyes of so many people, men and women too, in Europe since four years now. So they watched him go on, a half head above the French people, with his gaunt, strained eyes, his air strained, purposeful, and at the same time assured, and vanish into a cab, thinking, if they thought about him any more at all: “You will see him in the Legation offices or at a table on the Boulevards, or in a carriage with the fine English ladies in the Bois.” That was all.

And those who saw him descend from the same cab at the Gare du Nord, they thought: “This milord returns home by haste”; the porter who took his bag wished him good morning in fair English and told him that he was going to England, receiving for reply the English glare which the porter perhaps expected, and put him into a first-class carriage of the boat train.

And that was all, too. That was all right, too, even when he got down at Amiens. English milords even did that.

It was only at Rozières that they began to look at him and after him when he had passed.

In a hired car he jounced through a gutted street between gutted walls rising undooed and unwindowed in jagged shards in the dusk. The street was partially blocked now and then by toppled walls, with masses of masonry in the cracks of which a thin grass sprouted, passing empty and ruined courtyards, in one of which a tank, mute and tilted, rusted among rank weeds.

This was Rozières, but he didn’t stop there because no one lived there and there was no place to stop.

So the car jounced and crept on out of the ruin. The muddy and unpaved street entered a village of harsh new brick and sheet iron and

tarred paper roofs made in America, and halted before the tallest house. It was flush with the street: a brick wall with a door and one window of American glass bearing the word RESTAURANT. "Here you are, sir," the driver said.

The passenger descended, with his bag, his ulster, his correct stick. He entered a biggish, bare room chill with new plaster. It contained a billiard table at which three men played. One of the men looked over his shoulder and said, "Bonjour, monsieur."

The newcomer did not reply at all. He crossed the room, passing the new zinc bar, and approached an open door beyond which a woman of any age around forty looked at him above the sewing on her lap.

"Bong jour, madame," he said. "Dormie, madame?"

The woman gave him a single glance, brief, still. "C'est ça, monsieur," she said, rising.

"Dormie, madame?" he said, raising his voice a little, his spiked moustache beaded a little with rain, dampness beneath his strained yet assured eyes. "Dormie, madame?"

"Bon, monsieur," the woman said. "Bon. Bon."

"Dor—" the newcomer essayed again. Someone touched his arm. It was the man who had spoken from the billiard table when he entered.

"Regardez, Monsieur l'Anglais," the man said. He took the bag from the newcomer and swept his other arm toward the ceiling. "La chambre." He touched the traveler again; he laid his face upon his palm and closed his eyes; he gestured again toward the ceiling and went on across the room toward a wooden stair without balustrade.

As he passed the bar he took a candle stub from it and lit the candle (the big room and the room beyond the door where the woman sat were lighted by single bulbs hanging naked on cords from the ceiling) at the foot of the stair.

They mounted, thrusting their fitful shadows before them, into a corridor narrow, chill, and damp as a tomb. The walls were of rough plaster not yet dried. The floor was of pine, without carpet or paint. Cheap metal doorknobs glinted symmetrically. The sluggish air lay like a hand upon the very candle.

They entered a room, smelling too of wet plaster, and even colder than the corridor; a sluggish chill almost substantial, as though the atmosphere between the dead and recent walls were congealing, like a patent three-minute dessert. The room contained a bed, a dresser, a chair, a washstand; the bowl, pitcher, and slop basin were of American enamel.

When the traveler touched the bed the linen was soundless under his hand, coarse as sacking, clinging damply to the hand in the dead air in which their two breathings vaporized in the faint candle.

The host set the candle on the dresser. "Dîner, monsieur?" he said. The traveler stared down at the host, incongruous in his correct clothes, with that strained air. His waxed moustaches gleamed like faint bayonets above a cravat striped with what the host could not have known was the patterned coloring of a Scottish regiment. "Manger?" the host shouted. He chewed violently in pantomime. "Manger?" he roared, his shadow aping his gesture as he pointed toward the floor.

"Yes," the traveler shouted in reply, their faces not a yard apart. "Yes. Yes."

The host nodded violently, pointed toward the floor and then at the door, nodded again, went out.

He returned below stairs. He found the woman now in the kitchen, at the stove. "He will eat," the host said.

"I knew that," the woman said.

"You would think that they would stay at home," the host said. "I'm glad I was not born of a race doomed to a place too small to hold all of us at one time."

"Perhaps he has come to look at the war," the woman said.

“Of course he has,” the host said. “But he should have come four years ago. That was when we needed Englishmen to look at the war.”

“He was too old to come then,” the woman said. “Didn’t you see his hair?”

“Then let him stay at home now,” the host said. “He is no younger.”

“He may have come to look at the grave of his son,” the woman said.

“Him?” the host said. “That one? He is too cold to ever have had a son.”

“Perhaps you are right,” the woman said. “After all, that is his affair. It is our affair only that he has money.”

“That’s right,” the host said. “A man in this business, he cannot pick and choose.”

“He can pick, though,” the woman said.

“Good!” the host said. “Very good! Pick! That is worth telling to the English himself.”

“Why not let him find it out when he leaves?”

“Good!” the host said. “Better still. Good! Oh, good!”

“Attention,” the woman said. “Here he comes.”

They listened to the traveler’s steady tramp, then he appeared in the door. Against the lesser light of the bigger room, his dark face and his white hair looked like a kodak negative.

The table was set for two, a carafe of red wine at each place.

As the traveller seated himself, the other guest entered and took the other place — a small, rat-faced man who appeared at first glance to have no eyelashes at all. He tucked his napkin into the top of his vest and took up the soup ladle (the tureen sat between them in the center of the table) and offered it to the other. “Faites-moi l’honneur, monsieur,” he said. The other bowed stiffly; accepting the ladle.

The small man lifted the cover from the tureen. “Vous venez examiner ce scène de nos victoires, monsieur?” he said, helping himself in turn.

The other looked at him. "Monsieur l'Anglais a peut-être beaucoup des amis qui sont tombés en voisinage."

"A speak no French," the other said, eating.

The little man did not eat. He held his yet unwetted spoon above his bowl. "What agreeable for me. I speak the Engleesh. I am Suisse, me. I speak all langue." The other did not reply. He ate steadily, not fast.

"You ave return to see the grave of your galant countreemans, eh? You ave son here, perhaps, eh?"

"No," the other said. He did not cease to eat.

"No?" The other finished his soup and set the bowl aside. He drank some wine. "What deplorable, that man who ave," the Swiss said. "But it is finish now. Not?" Again the other said nothing. He was not looking at the Swiss. He did not seem to be looking at anything, with his gaunt eyes, his rigid moustaches upon his rigid face. "Me, I suffer too. All suffer. But I tell myself, What would you? It is war."

Still the other did not answer. He ate steadily, deliberately, and finished his meal and rose and left the room. He lit his candle at the bar, where the host, leaning beside a second man in a corduroy coat, lifted a glass slightly to him. "Au bon dormir, monsieur," the host said.

The traveler looked at the host, his face gaunt in the candle, his waxed moustaches rigid, his eyes in shadow. "What?" he said. "Yes. Yes." He turned and went toward the stairs. The two men at the bar watched him, his stiff, deliberate back.

Ever since the train left Arras, the two women had been watching the other occupant of the carriage. It was a third-class carriage because no first-class trains ran on this line, and they sat with their shawled heads and the thick, still hands of peasants folded upon closed baskets on their laps, watching the man sitting opposite them — the white distinction of the hair against the bronze, gaunt face, the needles of the moustaches, the foreign-made suit and the stick — on a worn and greasy wooden seat, looking out the window.

At first they had just looked, ready to avert their gaze, but as the man did not seem to be aware of them, they began to whisper quietly to one another behind their hands. But the man did not seem to notice this, so they soon were talking in undertone, watching with bright, alert, curious eyes the stiff, incongruous figure leaning a little forward on the stick, looking out a foul window beyond which there was nothing to see save an occasional shattered road and man-high stump of shattered tree breaking small patches of tilled land whorled with apparent unreason about islands of earth indicated by low signboards painted red, the islands inscrutable, desolate above the destruction which they wombed.

Then the train, slowing, ran suddenly among tumbled brick, out of which rose a small house of corrugated iron bearing a name in big letters; they watched the man lean forward.

“See!” one of the women said. “His mouth. He is reading the name. What did I tell you? It is as I said. His son fell here.”

“Then he had lots of sons,” the other woman said. “He has read the name each time since we left Arras. Eh! Eh! Him a son? That cold?”

“They do get children, though.”

“That is why they drink whisky. Otherwise . . .”

“That’s so. They think of nothing save money and eating, the English.”

Presently they got out; the train went on. Then others entered the carriage, other peasants with muddy boots, carrying baskets or live or dead beasts; they in turn watched the rigid, motionless figure leaning at the window while the train ran across the ruined land and past the brick or iron stations among the tumbled ruins, watching his lips move as he read the names.

“Let him look at the war, about which he has apparently heard at last,” they told one another. “Then he can go home. It was not in his barnyard that it was fought.”

“Nor in his house,” a woman said.

II

The battalion stands at ease in the rain. It has been in rest billets two days, equipment has been replaced and cleaned, vacancies have been filled and the ranks closed up, and it now stands at ease with the stupid docility of sheep in the ceaseless rain, facing the streaming shape of the sergeant-major.

Presently the colonel emerges from a door across the square. He stands in the door a moment, fastening his trench coat, then, followed by two A.D.C.'s, he steps gingerly into the mud in polished boots and approaches.

“Para-a-a-de— ‘Shun!” the sergeant-major shouts. The battalion clashes, a single muffled, sullen sound. The sergeant-major turns, takes a pace toward the officers, and salutes, his stick beneath his armpit. The colonel jerks his stick toward his cap peak.

“Stand at ease, men,” he says. Again the battalion clashes, a single sluggish, trickling sound. The officers approach the guide file of the first platoon, the sergeant-major falling in behind the last officer. The sergeant of the first platoon takes a pace forward and salutes. The colonel does not respond at all.

The sergeant falls in behind the sergeant-major, and the five of them pass down the company front, staring in turn at each rigid, forward-staring face as they pass it. First Company.

The sergeant salutes the colonel's back and returns to his original position and comes to attention. The sergeant of the second company has stepped forward, saluted, is ignored, and falls in behind the sergeant-major, and they pass down the second company front. The colonel's trench coat sheathes water onto his polished boots. Mud from the earth creeps up his boots and meets the water and is

channelled by the water as the mud creeps up the polished boots again.

Third Company. The colonel stops before a soldier, his trench coat hunched about his shoulders where the rain trickles from the back of his cap, so that he looks somehow like a choleric and outraged bird. The other two officers, the sergeant-major and the sergeant halt in turn, and the five of them glare at the five soldiers whom they are facing. The five soldiers stare rigid and unwinking straight before them, their faces like wooden faces, their eyes like wooden eyes.

“Sergeant,” the colonel says in his pettish voice, “has this man shaved today?”

“Sir!” the sergeant says in a ringing voice; the sergeant-major says: “Did this man shave today, Sergeant?” and all five of them glare now at the soldier, whose rigid gaze seems to pass through and beyond them, as if they were not there. “Take a pace forward when you speak in ranks!” the sergeant-major says.

The soldier, who has not spoken, steps out of ranks, splashing a jet of mud yet higher up the colonel’s boots.

“What is your name?” the colonel says.

“024186 Gray,” the soldier raps out glibly. The company, the battalion, stares straight ahead.

“Sir!” the sergeant-major thunders.

“Sir-r,” the soldier says.

“Did you shave this morning?” the colonel says.

“Nae, sir-r.”

“Why not?”

“A dinna shave, sir-r.”

“You dont shave?”

“A am nae auld enough tae shave.”

“Sir!” the sergeant-major thunders.

“Sir-r,” the soldier says.

“You are not . . .” The colonel’s voice dies somewhere behind his choleric glare, the trickling water from his cap peak. “Take his name, Sergeant-major,” he says, passing on.

The battalion stares rigidly ahead. Presently it sees the colonel, the two officers and the sergeant-major reappear in single file. At the proper place the sergeant-major halts and salutes the colonel’s back. The colonel jerks his stick hand again and goes on, followed by the two officers, at a trot toward the door from which he had emerged.

The sergeant-major faces the battalion again. “Para-a-a-de—” he shouts. An indistinguishable movement passes from rank to rank, an indistinguishable precursor of that damp and sullen clash which dies borning. The sergeant-major’s stick has come down from his armpit; he now leans on it, as officers do. For a time his eye roves along the battalion front.

“Sergeant Cunninghame!” he says at last.

“Sir!”

“Did you take that man’s name?”

There is silence for a moment — a little more than a short moment, a little less than a long one. Then the sergeant says: “What man, sir?”

“You, soldier!” the sergeant-major says.

The battalion stands rigid. The rain lances quietly into the mud between it and the sergeant-major as though it were too spent to either hurry or cease.

“You soldier that dont shave!” the sergeant-major says.

“Gray, sir!” the sergeant says.

“Gray. Double out ’ere.”

The man Gray appears without haste and tramps stolidly before the battalion, his kilts dark and damp and heavy as a wet horse-blanket. He halts, facing the sergeant-major.

“Why didn’t you shave this morning?” the sergeant-major says.

“A am nae auld enough tae shave,” Gray says.

“Sir!” the sergeant-major says.

Gray stares rigidly beyond the sergeant-major’s shoulder.

“Say sir when addressing a first-class warrant officer!” the sergeant-major says. Gray stares doggedly past his shoulder, his face beneath his vizorless bonnet as oblivious of the cold lances of rain as though it were granite. The sergeant-major raises his voice:

“Sergeant Cunninghame!”

“Sir!”

“Take this man’s name for insubordination also.”

“Very good, sir!”

The sergeant-major looks at Gray again. “And I’ll see that you get the penal battalion, my man. Fall in!”

Gray turns without haste and returns to his place in ranks, the sergeant-major watching him. The sergeant-major raises his voice again:

“Sergeant Cunninghame!”

“Sir!”

“You did not take that man’s name when ordered. Let that happen again and you’ll be for it yourself.”

“Very good, sir!”

“Carry on!” the sergeant-major says.

“But why did ye no shave?” the corporal asked him. They were back in billets: a stone barn with leprous walls, where no light entered, squatting in the ammoniac air on wet straw about a reeking brazier. “Ye kenned we were for inspection thae mor-rn.”

“A am nae auld enough tae shave,” Gray said.

“But ye kenned thae colonel would mar-rk ye on parade.”

“A am nae auld enough tae shave,” Gray repeated doggedly and without heat.

III

“For two hundred years,” Matthew Gray said, “there’s never a day, except Sunday, has passed but there is a hull rising on Clyde or a hull going out of Clydemouth with a Gray-driven nail in it.” He looked at young Alec across his steel spectacles, his neck bowed. “And not excepting their godless Sabbath hammering and sawing either.

Because if a hull could be built in a day, Grays could build it,” he added with dour pride. “And now, when you are big enough to go down to the yards with your granddadder and me and take a man’s place among men, to be trusted manlike with hammer and saw yersel.”

“Whisht, Matthew,” old Alec said. “The lad can saw as straight a line and drive as mony a nail a day as yersel or even me.”

Matthew paid his father no attention. He continued to speak his slow, considered words, watching his oldest son across the spectacles. “And with John Wesley not old enough by two years, and wee Matthew by ten, and your grandfather an auld man will soon be—”

“Whisht,” old Alec said. “I’m no but sixty-eight. Will you be telling the lad he’ll make his bit journey to London and come back to find me in the parish house, mayhap? ‘Twill be over by Christmastide.”

“Christmastide or no,” Matthew said, “a Gray, a shipwright, has no business at an English war.”

“Whisht ye,” old Alec said. He rose and went to the chimney cupboard and returned, carrying a box. It was of wood, dark and polished with age, the corners bound with iron, and fitted with an enormous iron lock which any child with a hairpin could have solved. From his pocket he took an iron key almost as big as the lock.

He opened the box and lifted carefully out a small velvet-covered jeweler's box and opened it in turn. On the satin lining lay a medal, a bit of bronze on a crimson ribbon: a Victoria Cross. "I kept the hulls going out of Clydemouth while your uncle Simon was getting this bit of brass from the Queen," old Alec said. "I heard naught of complaint.

And if need be, I'll keep them going out while Alec serves the Queen a bit himsel. Let the lad go," he said. He put the medal back into the wooden box and locked it. "A bit fighting winna hurt the lad. If I were his age, or yours either, for that matter, I'd gang mysel.

Alec, lad, hark ye. Ye'll see if they'll no take a hale lad of sixty-eight and I'll gang wi ye and leave the auld folk like Matthew to do the best they can. Nay, Matthew; dinna ye thwart the lad; have no the Grays ever served the Queen in her need?"

So young Alec went to enlist, descending the hill on a weekday in his Sunday clothes, with a New Testament and a loaf of homebaked bread tied in a handkerchief. And this was the last day's work which old Alec ever did, for soon after that, one morning Matthew descended the hill to the shipyard alone, leaving old Alec at home.

And after that, on the sunny days (and sometimes on the bad days too, until his daughter-in-law found him and drove him back into the house) he would sit shawled in a chair on the porch, gazing south and eastward, calling now and then to his son's wife within the house: "Hark now. Do you hear them? The guns."

"I hear nothing," the daughter-in-law would say. "It's only the sea at Kinkeadbight. Come into the house, now. Matthew will be displeased." "Whisht, woman. Do you think there is a Gray in the world could let off a gun and me not know the sound of it?"

They had a letter from him shortly after he enlisted, from England, in which he said that being a soldier, England, was different from being a shipwright, Clydeside, and that he would write again later.

Which he did, each month or so, writing that soldiering was different from building ships and that it was still raining. Then they did not hear from him for seven months. But his mother and father continued to write him a joint letter on the first Monday of each month, letters almost identical with the previous one, the previous dozen:
We are well. Ships are going out of Clyde faster than they can sink them. You still have the Book?

This would be in his father's slow, indomitable hand. Then, in his mother's:

Are you well? Do you need anything? Jessie and I are knitting the stockings and will send them. Alec, Alec.

He received this one during the seven months, during his term in the penal battalion, forwarded to him by his old corporal, since he had not told his people of his changed life. He answered it, huddled among his fellow felons, squatting in the mud with newspapers buttoned inside his tunic and his head and feet wrapped in strips of torn blanket:
I am well. Yes I still have the Book (not telling them that his platoon was using it to light tobacco with and that they were now well beyond Lamentations). It still rains. Love to Grandadder and Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley.

Then his time in the penal battalion was up. He returned to his old company, his old platoon, finding some new faces, and a letter:
We are well. Ships are going out of Clyde yet. You have a new sister. Your Mother is well.

He folded the letter and put it away. "A see mony new faces in thae battalion," he said to the corporal. "We ha a new sair-rgeant-major too, A doot not?"

"Naw," the corporal said. "'Tis the same one." He was looking at Gray, his gaze intent, speculative; his face cleared. "Ye ha shaved thae morn," he said.

"Ay," Gray said. "Am auld enough tae shave noo."

That was the night on which the battalion was to go up to Arras. It was to move at midnight, so he answered the letter at once:

I am well. Love to Granddadder and Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and the baby.

“Morning! Morning!” The General, lap-robed and hooded, leans from his motor and waves his gloved hand and shouts cheerily to them as they slog past the car on the Bapaume road, taking the ditch to pass.

“A’s a cheery auld card,” a voice says.

“Awfficers,” a second drawls; he falls to cursing as he slips in the greaselike mud, trying to cling to the crest of the kneedeep ditch.

“Aweel,” a third says, “thae awfficers wud gang tae thae war-r too, A doot not.”

“Why dinna they gang then?” a fourth says. “Thae war-r is no back that way.”

Platoon by platoon they slip and plunge into the ditch and drag their heavy feet out of the clinging mud and pass the halted car and crawl terrifically onto the crown of the road again: “A says tae me, a says: ‘Fritz has a new gun that will carry to Par-ris,’ a says, and A says tae him: ‘Tis nawthin: a has one that will hit our Cor-rps Headquar-rters.’” “Morning! Morning!” The General continues to wave his glove and shout cheerily as the battalion detours into the ditch and heaves itself back onto the road again.

They are in the trench. Until the first rifle explodes in their faces, not a shot has been fired. Gray is the third man. During all the while that they crept between flares from shellhole to shellhole, he has been working himself nearer to the sergeant-major and the Officer; in the glare of that first rifle he can see the gap in the wire toward which the Officer was leading them, the moiled rigid glints of the wire where bullets have nicked the mud and rust from it, and against the glare the tall, leaping shape of the sergeant-major. Then Gray, too, springs bayonet first into the trench full of grunting shouts and thudding blows.

Flares go up by dozens now; in the corpse glare Gray sees the sergeant-major methodically tossing grenades into the next traverse. He runs toward him, passing the Officer leaning, bent double, against the fire step. The sergeant-major has vanished beyond the traverse. Gray follows and comes upon the sergeant-major. Holding the burlap curtain aside with one hand, the sergeant-major is in the act of tossing a grenade into a dugout as if he might be tossing an orange hull into a cellar.

The sergeant-major turns in the rocket glare. "'Tis you, Gray," he says. The earth-muffled bomb thuds; the sergeant-major is in the act of catching another bomb from the sack about his neck as Gray's bayonet goes into his throat. The sergeant-major is a big man. He falls backward, holding the rifle barrel with both hands against his throat, his teeth glaring, pulling Gray with him. Gray clings to the rifle. He tries to shake the speared body on the bayonet as he would shake a rat on an umbrella rib.

He frees the bayonet. The sergeant-major falls. Gray reverses the rifle and hammers its butt into the sergeant-major's face, but the trench floor is too soft to supply any resistance. He glares about. His gaze falls upon a duckboard upended in the mud. He drags it free and slips it beneath the sergeant-major's head and hammers the face with his riflebutt. Behind him in the first traverse the Officer is shouting: "Blow your whistle, Sergeant-major!"

IV

In the citation it told how Private Gray, on a night raid, one of four survivors, following the disablement of the Officer and the death of all the N.C.O.'s, took command of the situation and (the purpose of the expedition was a quick raid for prisoners); held a foothold in the enemy's front line until a supporting attack arrived and consolidated the position.

The Officer told how he ordered the men back out, ordering them to leave him and save themselves, and how Gray appeared with a German

machine gun from somewhere and, while his three companions built a barricade, overcame the Officer and took from him his Very pistol and fired the colored signal which called for the attack; all so quickly that support arrived before the enemy could counterattack or put down a barrage.

It is doubtful if his people ever saw the citation at all. Anyway, the letters which he received from them during his sojourn in hospital, the tenor of them, were unchanged: "We are well. Ships are still going out."

His next letter home was once more months late. He wrote it when he was sitting up again, in London:

I have been sick but I am better now. I have a ribbon like in the box but not all red. The Queen was there. Love to Granddaddy and Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and the baby.

The reply was written on Friday:

Your mother is glad that you are better. Your grandfather is dead. The baby's name is Elizabeth. We are well. Your mother sends her love.

His next letter was three months later, in winter again:

My hurt is well. I am going to a school for officers. Love to Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and Elizabeth.

Matthew Gray pondered over this letter for a long while; so long that the reply was a week late, written on the second Monday instead of the first. He wrote it carefully, waiting until his family was in bed. It was such a long letter, or he had been at it so long, that after a time his wife came into the room in her nightdress.

"Go back to bed," he told her. "I'll be coming soon. 'Tis something to be said to the lad."

When at last he laid the pen down and sat back to reread the letter, it was a long one, written out slowly and deliberately and without retraction or blot:

. . . your bit ribbon . . . for that way lies vainglory and pride. The pride and vainglory of going for an officer. Never miscall your birth, Alec. You are not a gentleman. You are a Scottish shipwright. If your grandfather

were here he would not be last to tell you so. . . . We are glad your hurt is well. Your mother sends her love.

He sent home the medal, and his photograph in the new tunic with the pips and ribbon and the barred cuffs. But he did not go home himself. He returned to Flanders in the spring, with poppies blowing in the churned beet- and cabbage-fields. When his leaves came, he spent them in London, in the haunts of officers, not telling his people that he had any leave.

He still had the Book. Occasionally he came upon it among his effects and opened it at the jagged page where his life had changed: . . . and a voice said, Peter, raise thyself; kill —

Often his batman would watch him as, unawares and oblivious, he turned the Book and mused upon the jagged page — the ranker, the gaunt, lonely man with a face that belied his years or lack of them: a sobriety, a profound and mature calm, a grave and deliberate conviction of expression and gesture (“like a mout be Haig hissel,” the batman said) — watching him at his clean table, writing steadily and slowly, his tongue in his cheek as a child writes:

I am well. It has not rained in a fortnight. Love to Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and Elizabeth.

Four days ago the battalion came down from the lines. It has lost its major and two captains and most of the subalterns, so that now the remaining captain is major, and two subalterns and a sergeant have the companies. Meanwhile, replacements have come up, the ranks are filled, and the battalion is going in again tomorrow. So today K Company stands with ranks open for inspection while the subaltern-captain (his name is Gray) moves slowly along each platoon front.

He passes from man to man, slowly, thoroughly, the sergeant behind him. He stops.

“Where is your trenching tool?” he says.

“Blawn—” the soldier begins. Then he ceases, staring rigidly before him.

“Blawn out of your pack, eh?” the captain finishes for him. “Since when? What battles have ye taken part in since four days?” The soldier stares rigidly across the drowsy street. The captain moves on. “Take his name, Sergeant.” He moves on to the second platoon, to the third. He halts again. He looks the soldier up and down.

“What is your name?”

“010801 McLan, sir-r.”

“Replacement?”

“Replacement, sir-r.”

The captain moves on. “Take his name, Sergeant. Rifle’s filthy.”

The sun is setting. The village rises in black silhouette against the sunset; the river gleams in mirrored fire. The bridge across the river is a black arch upon which slowly and like figures cut from black paper, men are moving.

The party crouches in the roadside ditch while the captain and the sergeant peer cautiously across the parapet of the road. “Do ye make them out?” the captain says in a low voice.

“Huns, sir-r,” the sergeant whispers. “A ken their-r helmets.”

Presently the column has crossed the bridge. The captain and the sergeant crawl back into the ditch, where the party crouches, among them a wounded man with a bandaged head. “Keep yon man quiet, now,” the captain says.

He leads the way along the ditch until they reach the outskirts of the village. Here they are out of the sun, and here they sit quietly beneath a wall, surrounding the wounded man, while the captain and the sergeant again crawl away. They return in five minutes. “Fix bayonets,” the sergeant says in a low voice. “Quiet, now.”

“Wull A stay wi thae hur-rt lad, Sair-rgent?” one whispers.

“Nay,” the sergeant says. “A’ll tak’s chance wi us. Forrard.”

They steal quietly along the wall, behind the captain. The wall approaches at right angles to the street, the road which crosses the bridge. The captain raises his hand. They halt and watch him as he peers around the corner.

They are opposite the bridgehead. It and the road are deserted; the village dreams quietly in the setting sun. Against the sky beyond the village the dust of the retreating column hangs, turning to rose and gold.

Then they hear a sound, a short, guttural word. Not ten yards away and behind a ruined wall leveled breast-high and facing the bridge, four men squat about a machine gun. The captain raises his hand again. They grasp their rifles: a rush of hobnails on cobblestones, a cry of astonishment cut sharply off; blows, short, hard breaths, curses; not a shot.

The man with the bandaged head begins to laugh, shrilly, until someone hushes him with a hand that tastes like brass. Under the captain's direction they bash in the door of the house and drag the gun and the four bodies into it. They hoist the gun upstairs and set it up in a window looking down upon the bridgehead. The sun sinks further, the shadows fall long and quiet across village and river. The man with the bandaged head babbles to himself.

Another column swings up the road, dogged and orderly beneath coalhod helmets. It crosses the bridge and passes on through the village. A party detaches itself from the rear of the column and splits into three squads.

Two of them have machine guns, which they set up on opposite sides of the street, the near one utilizing the barricade behind which the other gun had been captured. The third squad returns to the bridge, carrying sappers' tools and explosive. The sergeant tells off six of the nineteen men, who descend the stairs silently. The captain remains with the gun in the window.

Again there is a brief rush, a scuffle, blows. From the window the captain sees the heads of the machine-gun crew across the street turn, then the muzzle of the gun swings, firing. The captain rakes them once with his gun, then he sweeps with it the party on the bridge, watching it break like a covey of quail for the nearest wall.

The captain holds the gun on them. They wilt running and dot the white road and become motionless. Then he swings the gun back to the gun across the street. It ceases.

He gives another order. The remaining men, except the man with the bandage, run down the stairs. Half of them stop at the gun beneath the window and drag it around. The others dash on across the street, toward the second gun. They are halfway across when the other gun rattles.

The running men plunge as one in midstep. Their kilts whip forward and bare their pale thighs. The gun rakes across the doorway where the others are freeing the first gun of bodies.

As the captain sweeps his gun down again, dust puffs from the left side of the window, his gun rings metallically, something sears along his arm and across his ribs, dust puffs from the right side of the window. He rakes the other gun again. It ceases. He continues to fire into the huddled clump about it long after the gun has ceased.

The dark earth bites into the sun's rim. The street is now all in shadow; a final level ray comes into the room, and fades. Behind him in the twilight the wounded man laughs, then his laughter sinks into a quiet contented gibberish.

Just before dark another column crosses the bridge. There is still enough light for it to be seen that these troops wear khaki and that their helmets are flat. But likely there is no one to see, because when a party mounted to the second story and found the captain propped in the window beside the cold gun, they thought that he was dead.

This time Matthew Gray saw the citation. Someone clipped it from the Gazette and sent it to him, and he sent it in turn to his son in the hospital, with a letter:

. . . Since you must go to a war we are glad that you are doing well in it. Your mother thinks that you have done your part and that you should come home.

But women do not understand such things. But I myself think that it is time they stopped fighting. What is the good in the high wages when food is so high that there is profit for none save the profiteers. When a war gets to where the battles do not even prosper the people who win them, it is time to stop.

V

In the bed next his, and later in the chair next his on the long glassed veranda, there was a subaltern. They used to talk. Or rather, the subaltern talked while Gray listened. He talked of peace, of what he would do when it was over, talking as if it were about finished, as if it would not last past Christmas.

“We’ll be back out there by Christmas,” Gray said.

“Gas cases? They don’t send gas cases out again. They have to be cured.”

“We will be cured.”

“But not in time. It will be over by Christmas. It can’t last another year. You don’t believe me, do you? Sometimes I believe you want to go back. But it will be. It will be finished by Christmas, and then I’m off. Canada. Nothing at home for us now.” He looked at the other, at the gaunt, wasted figure with almost white hair, lying with closed eyes in the fall sunlight. “You’d better come with me.”

“I’ll meet you in Givenchy on Christmas Day,” Gray said.

But he didn’t. He was in the hospital on the eleventh of November, hearing the bells, and he was still there on Christmas Day, where he received a letter from home:

You can come on home now. It will not be too soon now. They will need ships worse than ever now, now that the pride and the vainglory have worn themselves out.

The medical officer greeted him cheerfully. "Dammit, stuck here, when I know a place in Devon where I could hear a nightingale, by jove." He thumped Gray's chest. "Not much: just a bit of a murmur. Give you no trouble, if you'll stop away from wars from now on. Might keep you from getting in again, though."

He waited for Gray to laugh, but Gray didn't laugh. "Well, it's all finished now, damn them. Sign here, will you." Gray signed. "Forget it as quickly as it began, I hope. Well—" He extended his hand, smiling his antiseptic smile. "Cheer-O, Captain. And good luck."

Matthew Gray, descending the hill at seven o'clock in the morning, saw the man, the tall, hospital-colored man in city clothing and carrying a stick, and stopped.

"Alec?" he said. "Alec." They shook hands. "I could not — I did not . . ." He looked at his son, at the white hair, the waxed moustaches. "You have two ribbons now for the box, you have written." Then Matthew turned back up the hill at seven o'clock in the morning. "We'll go to your mother."

Then Alec Gray reverted for an instant. Perhaps he had not progressed as far as he thought, or perhaps he had been climbing a hill, and the return was not a reversion so much as something like an avalanche waiting the pebble, momentary though it was to be. "The shipyard, Father."

His father strode firmly on, carrying his lunchpail. "'Twill wait," he said. "We'll go to your mother."

His mother met him at the door. Behind her he saw young Matthew, a man now, and John Wesley, and Elizabeth whom he had never seen. "You did not wear your uniform home," young Matthew said.

“No,” he said. “No, I—”

“Your mother had wanted to see you in your regimentals and all,” his father said.

“No,” his mother said. “No! Never! Never!”

“Hush, Annie,” his father said. “Being a captain now, with two ribbons now for the box. This is false modesty. Ye hae shown courage; ye should have — But ’tis of no moment: the proper uniform for a Gray is an overall and a hammer.”

“Ay, sir,” Alec said, who had long since found out that no man has courage but that any man may blunder blindly into valor as one stumbles into an open manhole in the street.

He did not tell his father until that night, after his mother and the children had gone to bed. “I am going back to England. I have work promised there.”

“Ah,” his father said. “At Bristol, perhaps? They build ships there.” The lamp glowed, touching with faint gleams the black and polished surface of the box on the mantel-shelf. There was a wind getting up, hollowing out the sky like a dark bowl, carving house and hill and headland out of dark space. “’Twill be blowing out yon the night,” his father said.

“There are other things,” Alec said. “I have made friends, you see.”

His father removed the iron-rimmed spectacles. “You have made friends. Officers and such, I doubt not?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And friends are good to have, to sit about the hearth of nights and talk with. But beyond that, only them that love you will bear your faults. You must love a man well to put up with all his trying ways, Alec.”

“But they are not that sort of friends, sir. They are . . .” He ceased. He did not look at his father. Matthew sat, slowly polishing the spectacles

with his thumb. They could hear the wind. "If this fails, I'll come back to the shipyard."

His father watched him gravely, polishing the spectacles slowly. "Shipwrights are not made like that, Alec. To fear God, to do your work like it was your own hull you were putting the ribs in . . ." He moved. "We'll see what the Book will say." He replaced the glasses.

On the table was a heavy, brass-bound Bible. He opened it; the words seemed to him to rise to meet him from the page. Yet he read them, aloud: ". . . and the captains of thousands and the captains of ten thousands . . . A paragraph of pride. He faced his son, bowing his neck to see across the glasses. "You will go to London, then?"

"Yes, sir," Alec said.

VI

His position was waiting. It was in an office. He had already had cards made: Captain A. Gray, M.C., D.S.M., and on his return to London he joined the Officers' Association, donating to the support of the widows and orphans.

He had rooms in the proper quarter, and he would walk to and from the office, with his cards and his waxed moustaches, his sober correct clothes and his stick carried in a manner inimitable, at once jaunty and unobtrusive, giving his coppers to blind and maimed in Piccadilly, asking of them the names of their regiments. Once a month he wrote home: I am well. Love to Jessie and Matthew and John Wesley and Elizabeth.

During that first year Jessie was married. He sent her a gift of plate, stinting himself a little to do so, drawings from his savings. He was saving, not against old age; he believed too firmly in the Empire to do that, who had surrendered completely to the Empire like a woman, a bride. He was saving against the time when he would recross the Channel among the dead scenes of his lost and found life.

That was three years later. He was already planning to ask for leave, when one day the manager broached the subject himself. With one correct bag he went to France. But he did not bear eastward at once. He went to the Riviera; for a week he lived like a gentleman, spending his money like a gentleman, lonely, alone in that bright aviary of the svelte kept women of all Europe.

That was why those who saw him descend from the Mediterranean Express that morning in Paris said, "Here is a rich milord," and why they continued to say it in the hard-benched third-class trains, as he sat leaning forward on his stick, lip-moving the names on sheet-iron stations about the battered and waking land lying now three years quiet beneath the senseless and unbroken battalions of days.

He reached London and found what he should have known before he left. His position was gone. Conditions, the manager told him, addressing him punctiliously by his rank.

What savings he had left melted slowly; he spent the last of them on a black silk dress for his mother, with the letter:

I am well. Love to Matthew and John Wesley and Elizabeth.

He called upon his friends, upon the officers whom he had known. One, the man he knew best, gave him whisky in a comfortable room with a fire: "You aren't working now? Rotten luck. By the way, you remember Whiteby? He had a company in the — th. Nice chap: no people, though. He killed himself last week. Conditions."

"Oh. Did he? Yes. I remember him. Rotten luck."

"Yes. Rotten luck. Nice chap."

He no longer gave his pennies to the blind and the maimed in Piccadilly. He needed them for papers:

Artisans needed

Become stonemason

Men to drive motorcars. War record not necessary

Shop-assistants (must be under twenty-one)

Shipwrights needed

and at last:

Gentleman with social address and connections to meet out-of-town clients. Temporary

He got the place, and with his waxed moustaches and his correct clothes he revealed the fleshpots of the West End to Birmingham and Leeds. It was temporary.

Artisans

Carpenters

Housepainters

Winter was temporary, too. In the spring he took his waxed moustaches and his ironed clothes into Surrey, with a set of books, an encyclopedia, on commission. He sold all his things save what he stood in, and gave up his rooms in town.

He still had his stick, his waxed moustaches, his cards. Surrey, gentle, green, mild. A tight little house in a tight little garden. An oldish man in a smoking jacket puttering in a flower bed: "Good day, sir. Might I—"

The man in the smoking jacket looks up. "Go to the side, can't you? Don't come this way."

He goes to the side entrance. A slatted gate, freshly white, bearing an enameled plate:

NO

HAWKERS

BEGGARS

He passes through and knocks at a tidy door smug beneath a vine.

"Good day, miss. May I see the—"

"Go away. Didn't you see the sign on the gate?"

"But I—"

"Go away, or I'll call the master."

In the fall he returned to London. Perhaps he could not have said why himself. Perhaps it was beyond any saying, instinct perhaps bringing him back to be present at the instant out of all time of the

manifestation, apotheosis, of his life which had died again. Anyway, he was there, still with his waxed moustaches, erect, his stick clasped beneath his left armpit, among the Household troops in brass cuirasses, on dappled geldings, and Guards in scarlet tunics, and the Church militant in stole and surplice and Prince defenders of God in humble mufti, all at attention for two minutes, listening to despair. He still had thirty shillings, and he replenished his cards: Captain A. Gray, M.C., D.S.M.

It is one of those spurious, pale days like a sickly and premature child of spring while spring itself is still weeks away. In the thin sunlight buildings fade upward into misty pinks and golds. Women wear violets pinned to their furs, appearing to bloom themselves like flowers in the languorous, treacherous air.

It is the women who look twice at the man standing against the wall at a corner: a gaunt man with white hair, and moustaches twisted into frayed points, with a bleached and frayed regimental scarf in a celluloid collar, a once-good suit now threadbare yet apparently pressed within twenty-four hours, standing against the wall with closed eyes, a dilapidated hat held bottom-up before him.

He stood there for a long time, until someone touched his arm. It was a constable. "Move along, sir. Against orders." In his hat were seven pennies and three halfpence. He bought a cake of soap and a little food.

Another anniversary came and passed; he stood again, his stick at his armpit, among the bright, silent uniforms, the quiet throng in either frank or stubborn cast-offs, with patient, bewildered faces. In his eyes now is not that hopeful resignation of a beggar, but rather that bitterness, that echo as of bitter and unheard laughter of a hunchback.

A meager fire burns on the sloping cobbles. In the fitful light the damp, fungus-grown wall of the embankment and the stone arch of the bridge loom. At the foot of the cobbled slope the invisible river clucks and gurgles with the tide.

Five figures lie about the fire, some with heads covered as though in slumber, others smoking and talking. One man sits upright, his back to the wall, his hands lying beside him; he is blind: he sleeps that way. He says that he is afraid to lie down.

“Cant you tell you are lying down, without seeing you are?” another says.

“Something might happen,” the blind man says.

“What? Do you think they would give you a shell, even if it would bring back your sight?”

“They’d give him the shell, all right,” a third said.

“Ow. Why dont they line us all up and put down a bloody barrage on us?”

“Was that how he lost his sight?” a fourth says. “A shell?”

“Ow. He was at Mons. A dispatch rider, on a motorbike. Tell them about it, mate.”

The blind man lifts his face a little. Otherwise he does not move. He speaks in a flat voice. “She had the bit of scar on her wrist. That was how I could tell. It was me put the scar on her wrist, you might say. We was working in the shop one day. I had picked up an old engine and we was fitting it onto a bike so we could—”

“What?” the fourth says. “What’s he talking about?”

“Shhhh,” the first says. “Not so loud. He’s talking about his girl. He had a bit of a bike shop on the Brighton Road and they were going to marry.” He speaks in a low tone, his voice just under the weary, monotonous voice of the blind man. “Had their picture taken and all the day he enlisted and got his uniform.

He had it with him for a while, until one day he lost it. He was fair wild. So at last we got a bit of a card about the same size of the picture.

‘Here’s your picture, mate,’ we says. ‘Hold onto it this time.’ So he’s still got the card. Likely he’ll show it to you before he’s done. So dont you let on.”

“No,” the other says. “I shant let on.”

The blind man talks. “ — got them at the hospital to write her a letter, and sure enough, here she come. I could tell her by the bit of scar on her wrist. Her voice sounded different, but then everything sounded different since. But I could tell by the scar. We would sit and hold hands, and I could touch the bit of scar inside her left wrist. In the cinema too. I would touch the scar and it would be like I—”

“The cinema?” the fourth says. “Him?”

“Yes,” the other says. “She would take him to the cinema the comedies, so he could hear them laughing.”

The blind man talks. “ — told me how the pictures hurt her eyes, and that she would leave me at the cinema and when it was over she would come and fetch me. So I said it was all right. And the next night it was again.

And I said it was all right. And the next night I told her I wouldn’t go either. I said we would stop at home, at the hospital. And then she didn’t say anything for a long while. I could hear her breathing. Then she said it was all right.

So after that we didn’t go to the cinema. We would just sit, holding hands, and me feeling the scar now and then. We couldn’t talk loud in the hospital, so we would whisper. But mostly we didn’t talk. We just held hands. And that was for eight nights. I counted.

Then it was the eighth night. We were sitting there, with the other hand in my hand, and me touching the scar now and then. Then on a sudden the hand jerked away. I could hear her standing up. ‘Listen,’ she says. ‘This cant go on any longer. You will have to know sometime,’ she says. And I says, ‘I dont want to know but one thing. What is your

name?' I says. She told me her name; one of the nurses. And she says—
”

“What?” the fourth says. “What is this?”

“He told you,” the first said. “It was one of the nurses in the hospital. The girl had been bugging off with another fellow and left the nurse for him to hold her hand, thinking he was fooled.”

“But how did he know?” the fourth says.

“Listen,” the first says.

“— ‘and you knew all the time,’ she says, ‘since the first time?’ ‘It was the scar,’ I says. ‘You’ve got it on the wrong wrist. You’ve got it on your right wrist,’ I says. ‘And two nights ago, I lifted up the edge of it a bit. What is it,’ I says. ‘Courtplaster?’”

The blind man sits against the wall, his face lifted a little, his hands motionless beside him. “That’s how I knew, by the scar. Thinking they could fool me, when it was me put the scar on her, you might say—”

The prone figure farthest from the fire lifts its head. “Hup,” he says; “ere e comes.”

The others turn as one and look toward the entrance.

“Here who comes?” the blind man says. “Is it the bobbies?”

They do not answer. They watch the man who enters: a tall man with a stick. They cease to talk, save the blind man, watching the tall man come among them. “Here who comes, mates?” the blind man says. “Mates!”

The newcomer passes them, and the fire; he does not look at them. He goes on. “Watch, now,” the second says. The blind man is now leaning a little forward; his hands fumble at the ground beside him as though he were preparing to rise.

“Watch who?” he says. “What do you see?”

They do not answer. They are watching the newcomer covertly, attentively, as he disrobes and then, a white shadow, a ghostly gleam in the darkness, goes down to the water and washes himself, slapping his body hard with icy and filthy handfuls of river water.

He returns to the fire; they turn their faces quickly aside, save the blind man (he still sits forward, his arms propped beside him as though on the point of rising, his wan face turned toward the sound, the movement) and one other. "Yer stones is ot, sir," this one says. "I've ad them right in the blaze."

"Thanks," the newcomer says. He still appears to be utterly oblivious of them, so they watch him again, quietly, as he spreads his sorry garments on one stone and takes a second stone from the fire and irons them. While he is dressing, the man who spoke to him goes down to the water and returns with the cake of soap which he had used. Still watching, they see the newcomer rub his fingers on the cake of soap and twist his moustaches into points.

"A bit more on the left one, sir," the man holding the soap says. The newcomer soaps his fingers and twists his left moustache again, the other man watching him, his head bent and tilted a little back, in shape and attitude and dress like a caricatured scarecrow.

"Right, now?" the newcomer says.

"Right, sir," the scarecrow says. He retreats into the darkness and returns without the cake of soap, and carrying instead the hat and the stick. The newcomer takes them. From his pocket he takes a coin and puts it into the scarecrow's hand. The scarecrow touches his cap; the newcomer is gone.

They watch him, the tall shape, the erect back, the stick, until he disappears.

"What do you see, mates?" the blind man says. "Tell a man what you see."

Among the demobilized officers who emigrated from England after the Armistice was a subaltern named Walkley. He went out to Canada, where he raised wheat and prospered, both in pocket and in health. So much so that, had he been walking out of the Gare de Lyon in Paris instead of in Piccadilly Circus on this first evening (it is Christmas eve) of his first visit home, they would have said, "Here is not only a rich milord; it is a well one."

He had been in London just long enough to outfit himself with the beginning of a wardrobe, and in his new clothes (bought of a tailor which in the old days he could not have afforded) he was enjoying himself too much to even go anywhere. So he just walked the streets, among the cheerful throngs, until suddenly he stopped dead still, staring at a face. The man had almost white hair, moustaches waxed to needle points.

He wore a frayed scarf in which could be barely distinguished the colors and pattern of a regiment. His threadbare clothes were freshly ironed and he carried a stick. He was standing at the curb, and he appeared to be saying something to the people who passed, and Walkley moved suddenly forward, his hand extended. But the other man only stared at him with eyes that were perfectly dead.

"Gray," Walkley said, "don't you remember me?" The other stared at him with that dead intensity. "We were in hospital together. I went out to Canada. Don't you remember?"

"Yes," the other said. "I remember you. You are Walkley." Then he quit looking at Walkley.

He moved a little aside, turning to the crowd again, his hand extended; it was only then that Walkley saw that the hand contained three or four boxes of the matches which may be bought from any tobacconist for a penny a box. "Matches? Matches, sir?" he said. "Matches? Matches?" Walkley moved also, getting again in front of the other. "Gray—" he said.

The other looked at Walkley again, this time with a kind of restrained yet raging impatience. "Let me alone, you son of a bitch!" he said, turning immediately toward the crowd again, his hand extended. "Matches! Matches, sir!" he chanted.

Walkley moved on. He paused again, half turning, looking back at the gaunt face above the waxed moustaches. Again the other looked him full in the face, but the glance passed on, as though without recognition. Walkley went on. He walked swiftly. "My God," he said. "I think I am going to vomit."

The End

Crevasse, William Faulkner

Crevasse

THE PARTY GOES on, skirting the edge of the barrage weaving down into shell craters old and new, crawling out again. Two men half drag, half carry between them a third, while two others carry the three rifles. The third man's head is bound in a bloody rag; he stumbles his aimless legs along, his head lolling, sweat channeling slowly down his mud-crusted face.

The barrage stretches on and on across the plain, distant, impenetrable. Occasionally a small wind comes up from nowhere and thins the dun smoke momentarily upon clumps of bitten poplars. The party enters and crosses a field which a month ago was sown to wheat and where yet wheatspears thrust and cling stubbornly in the churned soil, among scraps of metal and seething hunks of cloth.

It crosses the field and comes to a canal bordered with tree stumps sheared roughly at a symmetrical five-foot level. The men flop and drink of the contaminated water and fill their water bottles. The two

bearers let the wounded man slip to earth; he hangs lax on the canal bank with both arms in the water and his head too, had not the others held him up.

One of them raises water in his helmet, but the wounded man cannot swallow. So they set him upright and the other holds the helmet brim to his lips and refills the helmet and pours the water on the wounded man's head, sopping the bandage. Then he takes a filthy rag from his pocket and dries the wounded man's face with clumsy gentleness.

The captain, the subaltern and the sergeant, still standing, are poring over a soiled map. Beyond the canal the ground rises gradually; the canal cutting reveals the chalk formation of the land in pallid strata. The captain puts the map away and the sergeant speaks the men to their feet, not loud.

The two bearers raise the wounded man and they follow the canal bank, coming after a while to a bridge formed by a water-logged barge hull lashed bow and stern to either bank, and so pass over. Here they halt again while once more the captain and the subaltern consult the map.

Gunfire comes across the pale spring noon like a prolonged clashing of hail on an endless metal roof. As they go on the chalky soil rises gradually underfoot. The ground is dryly rough, shaling, and the going is harder still for the two who carry the wounded man. But when they would stop the wounded man struggles and wrenches free and staggers on alone, his hands at his head, and stumbles, falling.

The bearers catch and raise him and hold him muttering between them and wrenching his arms. He is muttering “. . . bonnet . . .” and he frees his hands and tugs again at his bandage. The commotion passes forward. The captain looks back and stops; the party halts also, unbidden, and lowers rifles.

"A's pickin at's bandage, sir-r," one of the bearers tells the captain. They let the man sit down between them; the captain kneels beside him.

". . . bonnet . . . bonnet," the man mutters. The captain loosens the bandage. The sergeant extends a water bottle and the captain wets the bandage and lays his hand on the man's brow. The others stand about, looking on with a kind of sober, detached interest. The captain rises. The bearers raise the wounded man again. The sergeant speaks them into motion.

They gain the crest of the ridge. The ridge slopes westward into a plateau slightly rolling. Southward, beneath its dun pall, the barrage still rages; westward and northward about the shining empty plain smoke rises lazily here and there above clumps of trees. But this is the smoke of burning things, burning wood and not powder, and the two officers gaze from beneath their hands, the men halting again without order and lowering arms.

"Gad, sir," the subaltern says suddenly in a high, thin voice; "it's houses burning! They're retreating! Beasts! Beasts!"

"Tis possible," the captain says, gazing beneath his hand. "We can get around that barrage now. Should be a road just yonder." He strides on again.

"For-rard," the sergeant says, in that tone not loud. The men slope arms once more with unquestioning docility.

The ridge is covered with a tough, gorselike grass. Insects buzz in it, zip from beneath their feet and fall to slatting again beneath the shimmering noon. The wounded man is babbling again. At intervals they pause and give him water and wet the bandage again, then two others exchange with the bearers and they hurry the man on and close up again.

The head of the line stops; the men jolt prodding into one another like a train of freight cars stopping. At the captain's feet lies a broad shallow

depression in which grows a sparse, dead-looking grass like clumps of bayonets thrust up out of the earth. It is too big to have been made by a small shell, and too shallow to have been made by a big one. It bears no traces of having been made by anything at all, and they look quietly down into it. "Queer," the subaltern says. "What do you fancy could have made it?"

The captain does not answer. He turns. They circle the depression, looking down into it quietly as they pass it. But they have no more than passed it when they come upon another one, perhaps not quite so large. "I didn't know they had anything that could make that," the subaltern says. Again the captain does not answer. They circle this one also and keep on along the crest of the ridge. On the other hand the ridge sheers sharply downward stratum by stratum of pallid eroded chalk.

A shallow ravine gashes its crumbling yawn abruptly across their path. The captain changes direction again, paralleling the ravine, until shortly afterward the ravine turns at right angles and goes on in the direction of their march. The floor of the ravine is in shadow; the captain leads the way down the shelving wall, into the shade. They lower the wounded man carefully and go on.

After a time the ravine opens. They find that they have debouched into another of those shallow depressions. This one is not so clearly defined, though, and the opposite wall of it is nicked by what is apparently another depression, like two overlapping disks. They cross the first depression, while more of the dead-looking grass bayonets saber their legs dryly, and pass through the gap into the next depression.

This one is like a miniature valley between miniature cliffs. Overhead they can see only the drowsy and empty bowl of the sky, with a few faint smoke smudges to the northwest. The sound of the barrage is now remote and far away: a vibration in earth felt rather than heard. There are no recent shell craters or marks here at all.

It is as though they had strayed suddenly into a region, a world where the war had not reached, where nothing had reached, where no life is, and silence itself is dead. They give the wounded man water and go on.

The valley, the depression, strays vaguely before them. They can see that it is a series of overlapping, vaguely circular basins formed by no apparent or deducible agency. Pallid grass bayonets saber at their legs, and after a time they are again among old healed scars of trees to which there cling sparse leaves neither green nor dead, as if they too had been overtaken and caught by a hiatus in time, gossiping dryly among themselves though there is no wind. The floor of the valley is not level.

It in itself descends into vague depressions, rises again as vaguely between its shelving walls. In the center of these smaller depressions whitish knobs of chalk thrust up through the thin topsoil. The ground has a resilient quality, like walking on cork; feet make no sound. "Jolly walking," the subaltern says.

Though his voice is not raised, it fills the small valley with the abruptness of a thunderclap, filling the silence, the words seeming to hang about them as though silence here had been so long undisturbed that it had forgot its purpose; as one they look quietly and soberly about, at the shelving walls, the stubborn ghosts of trees, the bland, hushed sky. "Topping hole-up for embusqué birds and such," the subaltern says.

"Ay," the captain says. His word in turn hangs sluggishly and fades. The men at the rear close up, the movement passing forward, the men looking quietly and soberly about.

"But no birds here," the subaltern says. "No insects even."

"Ay," the captain says. The word fades, the silence comes down again, sunny, profoundly still. The subaltern pauses and stirs something with his foot. The men halt also, and the subaltern and the captain, without touching it, examine the half-buried and moldering rifle. The wounded man is babbling again.

“What is it, sir?” the subaltern says. “Looks like one of those things the Canadians had. A Ross. Right?”

“French,” the captain says; “1914.”

“Oh,” the subaltern says. He turns the rifle aside with his toe. The bayonet is still attached to the barrel, but the stock has long since rotted away. They go on, across the uneven ground, among the chalky knobs thrusting up through the soil. Light, the wan and drowsy sunlight, is laked in the valley, stagnant, bodiless, without heat. The saberlike grass thrusts sparsely and rigidly upward.

They look about again at the shaling walls, then the ones at the head of the party watch the subaltern pause and prod with his stick at one of the chalky knobs and turn presently upward its earth-stained eyesockets and its unbottomed grin.

“Forward,” the captain says sharply. The party moves; the men look quietly and curiously at the skull as they pass. They go on, among the other whitish knobs like marbles studded at random in the shallow soil. “All in the same position, do you notice, sir?” the subaltern says, his voice chattily cheerful; “all upright. Queer way to bury chaps: sitting down. Shallow, too.”

“Ay,” the captain says. The wounded man babbles steadily. The two bearers stop with him, but the others crowd on after the officers, passing the two bearers and the wounded man. “Dinna stop to gi’s sup water,” one of the bearers says.

“A’ll drink walkin.” They take up the wounded man again and hurry him on while one of them tries to hold the neck of a water bottle to the wounded man’s mouth, clattering it against his teeth and spilling the water down the front of his tunic. The captain looks back.

“What’s this?” he says sharply. The men crowd up. Their eyes are wide, sober; he looks about at the quiet, intent faces. “What’s the matter back there, Sergeant?”

“Wind-up,” the subaltern says. He looks about at the eroded walls, the whitish knobs thrusting quietly out of the earth. “Feel it myself,” he says. He laughs, his laughter a little thin, ceasing. “Let’s get out of here, sir,” he says. “Let’s get into the sun again.”

“You are in the sun here,” the captain says. “Ease off there, men. Stop crowding. We’ll be out soon. We’ll find the road and get past the barrage and make contact again.” He turns and goes on. The party gets into motion again.

Then they all stop as one, in the attitudes of walking, in an utter suspension, and stare at one another. Again the earth moves under their feet. A man screams, high, like a woman or a horse; as the firm earth shifts for a third time beneath them the officers whirl and see beyond the downplunging man a gaping hole with dry dust still crumbling about the edges before the orifice crumbles again beneath a second man.

Then a crack springs like a sword slash beneath them all; the earth breaks under their feet and tilts like jagged squares of pale fudge, framing a black yawn out of which, like a silent explosion, bursts the unmistakable smell of rotted flesh. While they scramble and leap (in silence now; there has been no sound since the first man screamed) from one cake to another, the cakes tilt and slide until the whole floor of the valley rushes slowly under them and plunges them downward into darkness. A grave rumbling rises into the sunlight on a blast of decay and of faint dust which hangs and drifts in the faint air about the black orifice.

The captain feels himself plunging down a sheer and shifting wall of moving earth, of sounds of terror and of struggling in the ink dark. Someone else screams. The scream ceases; he hears the voice of the wounded man coming thin and reiterant out of the plunging bowels of decay: “A’m no dead! A’m no dead!” and ceasing abruptly, as if a hand had been laid on his mouth.

Then the moving cliff down which the captain plunges slopes gradually off and shoots him, uninjured, onto a hard floor, where he lies for a time on his back while across his face the lightward- and airward-seeking blast of death and dissolution rushes. He has fetched up against something; it tumbles down upon him lightly, with a muffled clatter as if it had come to pieces.

Then he begins to see the light, the jagged shape of the cavern mouth high overhead, and then the sergeant is bending over him with a pocket torch. "McKie?" the captain says. For reply the sergeant turns the flash upon his own face. "Where's Mr. McKie?" the captain says.

"A's gone, sir-r," the sergeant says in a husky whisper. The captain sits up.

"How many are left?"

"Fourteen, sir-r," the sergeant whispers.

"Fourteen. Twelve missing. We'll have to dig fast." He gets to his feet. The faint light from above falls coldly upon the heaped avalanche, upon the thirteen helmets and the white bandage of the wounded man huddled about the foot of the cliff. "Where are we?"

For answer the sergeant moves the torch. It streaks laterally into the darkness, along a wall, a tunnel, into yawning blackness, the walls faceted with pale glints of chalk. About the tunnel, sitting or leaning upright against the walls, are skeletons in dark tunics and bagging Zouave trousers, their moldering arms beside them; the captain recognizes them as Senegalese troops of the May fighting of 1915, surprised and killed by gas probably in the attitudes in which they had taken refuge in the chalk caverns.

He takes the torch from the sergeant.

"We'll see if there's anyone else," he says. "Have out the trenching tools." He flashes the light upon the precipice. It rises into gloom, darkness, then into the faint rumor of daylight overhead. With the

sergeant behind him he climbs the shifting heap, the earth sighing beneath him and shaling downward.

The injured man begins to wail again, "A'm no dead! A'm no dead!" until his voice goes into a high sustained screaming. Someone lays a hand over his mouth. His voice is muffled, then it becomes laughter on a rising note, becomes screaming again, is choked again.

The captain and the sergeant mount as high as they dare, prodding at the earth while the earth shifts beneath them in long hushed sighs. At the foot of the precipice the men huddle, their faces lifted faint, white, and patient into the light. The captain sweeps the torch up and down the cliff. There is nothing, no arm, no hand, in sight. The air is clearing slowly. "We'll get on," the captain says.

"Ay, sir-r," the sergeant says.

In both directions the cavern fades into darkness, plumbless and profound, filled with the quiet skeletons sitting and leaning against the walls, their arms beside them.

"The cave-in threw us forward," the captain says.

"Ay, sir-r," the sergeant whispers.

"Speak out," the captain says. "It's but a bit of a cave. If men got into it, we can get out."

"Ay, sir-r," the sergeant whispers.

"If it threw us forward, the entrance will be yonder."

"Ay, sir-r," the sergeant whispers.

The captain flashes the torch ahead. The men rise and huddle quietly behind him, the wounded man among them. He whimpers. The cavern goes on, unrolling its glinted walls out of the darkness; the sitting shapes grin quietly into the light as they pass. The air grows heavier; soon they are trotting, gasping, then the air grows lighter and the torch sweeps up another slope of earth, closing the tunnel.

The men halt and huddle. The captain mounts the slope. He snaps off the light and crawls slowly along the crest of the slide, where it joins the ceiling of the cavern, sniffing. The light flashes on again. "Two men with trenching tools," he says.

Two men mount to him. He shows them the fissure through which air seeps in small, steady breaths. They begin to dig, furiously, hurling the dirt back. Presently they are relieved by two others; presently the fissure becomes a tunnel and four men can work at once. The air becomes fresher. They burrow furiously, with whimpering cries like dogs.

The wounded man, hearing them perhaps, catching the excitement perhaps, begins to laugh again, meaningless and high. Then the man at the head of the tunnel bursts through. Light rushes in around him like water; he burrows madly; in silhouette they see his wallowing buttocks lunge from sight and a burst of daylight surges in.

The others leave the wounded man and surge up the slope, fighting and snarling at the opening. The sergeant springs after them and beats them away from the opening with a trenching spade, cursing in his hoarse whisper.

"Let them go, Sergeant," the captain says. The sergeant desists. He stands aside and watches the men scramble into the tunnel. Then he descends, and he and the captain help the wounded man up the slope. At the mouth of the tunnel the wounded man rebels.

"A'm no dead! A'm no dead!" he wails, struggling. By cajolery and force they thrust him, still wailing and struggling, into the tunnel, where he becomes docile again and scuttles through.

"Out with you, Sergeant," the captain says.

"After you, sir-r," the sergeant whispers.

"Out wi ye, man!" the captain says. The sergeant enters the tunnel. The captain follows. He emerges onto the outer slope of the avalanche

which had closed the cave, at the foot of which the fourteen men are kneeling in a group.

On his hands and knees like a beast, the captain breathes, his breath making a hoarse sound. "Soon it will be summer," he thinks, dragging the air into his lungs faster than he can empty them to respire again. "Soon it will be summer, and the long days." At the foot of the slope the fourteen men kneel.

The one in the center has a Bible in his hand, from which he is intoning monotonously. Above his voice the wounded man's gibberish rises, meaningless and unemphatic and sustained.

The End

Turnabout, William Faulkner

Turnabout

THE AMERICAN — THE older one — wore no pink Bedfords. His breeches were of plain whipcord, like the tunic. And the tunic had no long London-cut skirts, so that below the Sam Browne the tail of it stuck straight out like the tunic of a military policeman beneath his holster belt.

And he wore simple puttees and the easy shoes of a man of middle age, instead of Savile Row boots, and the shoes and the puttees did not match in shade, and the ordnance belt did not match either of them, and the pilot's wings on his breast were just wings. But the ribbon beneath them was a good ribbon, and the insigne on his shoulders were the twin bars of a captain.

He was not tall. His face was thin, a little aquiline; the eyes intelligent and a little tired. He was past twenty-five; looking at him, one thought,

not Phi Beta Kappa exactly, but Skull and Bones perhaps, or possibly a Rhodes scholarship.

One of the men who faced him probably could not see him at all. He was being held on his feet by an American military policeman. He was quite drunk, and in contrast with the heavy-jawed policeman who held him erect on his long, slim, boneless legs, he looked like a masquerading girl.

He was possibly eighteen, tall, with a pink-and-white face and blue eyes, and a mouth like a girl's mouth. He wore a pea-coat, buttoned awry and stained with recent mud, and upon his blond head, at that unmistakable and rakish swagger which no other people can ever approach or imitate, the cap of a Royal Naval Officer.

"What's this, corporal?" the American captain said. "What's the trouble? He's an Englishman. You'd better let their M. P.'s take care of him."

"I know he is," the policeman said. He spoke heavily, breathing heavily, in the voice of a man under physical strain; for all his girlish delicacy of limb, the English boy was heavier — or more helpless — than he looked. "Stand up!" the policeman said. "They're officers!"

The English boy made an effort then. He pulled himself together, focusing his eyes. He swayed, throwing his arms about the policeman's neck, and with the other hand he saluted, his hand flicking, fingers curled a little, to his right ear, already swaying again and catching himself again. "Cheer-o, sir," he said. "Name's not Beatty, I hope." "No," the captain said.

"Ah," the English boy said. "Hoped not. My mistake. No offense, what?" "No offense," the captain said quietly. But he was looking at the policeman. The second American spoke. He was a lieutenant, also a pilot. But he was not twenty-five and he wore the pink breeches, the London boots, and his tunic might have been a British tunic save for the collar.

"It's one of those navy eggs," he said. "They pick them out of the gutters here all night long. You don't come to town often enough."

"Oh," the captain said. "I've heard about them. I remember now." He also remarked now that, though the street was a busy one — it was just outside a popular café — and there were many passers, soldier, civilian, women, yet none of them so much as paused, as though it were a familiar sight. He was looking at the policeman. "Can't you take him to his ship?"

"I thought of that before the captain did," the policeman said. "He says he can't go aboard his ship after dark because he puts the ship away at sundown."

"Puts it away?"

"Stand up, sailor!" the policeman said savagely, jerking at his lax burden. "Maybe the captain can make sense out of it. Damned if I can. He says they keep the boat under the wharf. Run it under the wharf at night, and that they can't get it out again until the tide goes out tomorrow."

"Under the wharf? A boat? What is this?" He was now speaking to the lieutenant. "Do they operate some kind of aquatic motorcycles?"

"Something like that," the lieutenant said. "You've seen them — the boats. Launches, camouflaged and all. Dashing up and down the harbor. You've seen them. They do that all day and sleep in the gutters here all night."

"Oh," the captain said. "I thought those boats were ship commanders' launches. You mean to tell me they use officers just to—"

"I don't know," the lieutenant said. "Maybe they use them to fetch hot water from one ship to another. Or buns. Or maybe to go back and forth fast when they forget napkins or something."

"Nonsense," the captain said. He looked at the English boy again.

"That's what they do," the lieutenant said. "Town's lousy with them all night long. Gutters full, and their M. P.'s carting them away in batches,

like nursemaids in a park. Maybe the French give them the launches to get them out of the gutters during the day.”

“Oh,” the captain said, “I see.” But it was clear that he didn’t see, wasn’t listening, didn’t believe what he did hear. He looked at the English boy. “Well, you can’t leave him here in that shape,” he said.

Again the English boy tried to pull himself together. “Quite all right, ‘sure you,” he said glassily, his voice pleasant, cheerful almost, quite courteous. “Used to it. Confounded rough pavé, though. Should force French do something about it. Visiting lads jolly well deserve decent field to play on, what?”

“And he was jolly well using all of it too,” the policeman said savagely. “He must think he’s a one-man team, maybe.”

At that moment a fifth man came up. He was a British military policeman. “Nah then,” he said. “What’s this? What’s this?” Then he saw the Americans’ shoulder bars. He saluted. At the sound of his voice the English boy turned, swaying, peering.

“Oh, hullo, Albert,” he said.

“Nah then, Mr. Hope,” the British policeman said. He said to the American policeman, over his shoulder: “What is it this time?”

“Likely nothing,” the American said. “The way you guys run a war. But I’m a stranger here. Here. Take him.”

“What is this, corporal?” the captain said. “What was he doing?”

“He won’t call it nothing,” the American policeman said, jerking his head at the British policeman. “He’ll just call it a thrush or a robin or something. I turn into this street about three blocks back a while ago, and I find it blocked with a line of trucks going up from the docks, and the drivers all hollering ahead what the hell the trouble is.

So I come on, and I find it is about three blocks of them, blocking the cross streets too; and I come on to the head of it where the trouble is, and I find about a dozen of the drivers out in front, holding a caucus or something in the middle of the street, and I come up and I say, ‘What’s

going on here?’ and they leave me through and I find this egg here laying—”

“Yer talking about one of His Majesty’s officers, my man,” the British policeman said.

“Watch yourself, corporal,” the captain said. “And you found this officer—”

“He had done gone to bed in the middle of the street, with an empty basket for a pillow. Laying there with his hands under his head and his knees crossed, arguing with them about whether he ought to get up and move or not. He said that the trucks could turn back and go around by another street, but that he couldn’t use any other street, because this street was his.”

“His street?”

The English boy had listened, interested, pleasant. “Billet, you see,” he said. “Must have order, even in war emergency. Billet by lot. This street mine; no poaching, eh? Next street Jamie Wutherspoon’s. But trucks can go by that street because Jamie not using it yet. Not in bed yet. Insomnia. Knew so. Told them. Trucks go that way. See now?”

“Was that it, corporal?” the captain said.

“He told you. He wouldn’t get up. He just laid there, arguing with them. He was telling one of them to go somewhere and bring back a copy of their articles of war—”

“King’s Regulations; yes,” the captain said.

“ — and see if the book said whether he had the right of way, or the trucks. And then I got him up, and then the captain come along. And that’s all. And with the captain’s permission I’ll now hand him over to His Majesty’s wet nur—”

“That’ll do, corporal,” the captain said. “You can go. I’ll see to this.” The policeman saluted and went on. The British policeman was now supporting the English boy. “Can’t you take him?” the captain said. “Where are their quarters?”

“I don’t rightly know, sir, if they have quarters or not. We — I usually see them about the pubs until daylight. They don’t seem to use quarters.”

“You mean, they really aren’t off of ships?”

“Well, sir, they might be ships, in a manner of speaking. But a man would have to be a bit sleepier than him to sleep in one of them.”

“I see,” the captain said. He looked at the policeman. “What kind of boats are they?”

This time the policeman’s voice was immediate, final and completely inflectionless. It was like a closed door. “I don’t rightly know, sir.”

“Oh,” the captain said. “Quite. Well, he’s in no shape to stay about pubs until daylight this time.”

“Perhaps I can find him a bit of a pub with a back table, where he can sleep,” the policeman said. But the captain was not listening. He was looking across the street, where the lights of another café fell across the pavement. The English boy yawned terrifically, like a child does, his mouth pink and frankly gaped as a child’s.

The captain turned to the policeman:

“Would you mind stepping across there and asking for Captain Bogard’s driver? I’ll take care of Mr. Hope.”

The policeman departed. The captain now supported the English boy, his hand beneath the other’s arm. Again the boy yawned like a weary child. “Steady,” the captain said. “The car will be here in a minute.”

“Right,” the English boy said through the yawn.

II

Once in the car, he went to sleep immediately with the peaceful suddenness of babies, sitting between the two Americans. But though

the aerodrome was only thirty minutes away, he was awake when they arrived, apparently quite fresh, and asking for whisky.

When they entered the mess he appeared quite sober, only blinking a little in the lighted room, in his raked cap and his awry-buttoned pea-jacket and a soiled silk muffler, embroidered with a club insignia which Bogard recognized to have come from a famous preparatory school, twisted about his throat.

“Ah,” he said, his voice fresh, clear now, not blurred, quite cheerful, quite loud, so that the others in the room turned and looked at him. “Jolly. Whisky, what?” He went straight as a bird dog to the bar in the corner, the lieutenant following. Bogard had turned and gone on to the other end of the room, where five men sat about a card table.

“What’s he admiral of?” one said.

“Of the whole Scotch navy, when I found him,” Bogard said.

Another looked up. “Oh, I thought I’d seen him in town.” He looked at the guest. “Maybe it’s because he was on his feet that I didn’t recognize him when he came in. You usually see them lying down in the gutter.”

“Oh,” the first said. He, too, looked around. “Is he one of those guys?”
“Sure. You’ve seen them. Sitting on the curb, you know, with a couple of limey M. P.’s hauling at their arms.”

“Yes. I’ve seen them,” the other said. They all looked at the English boy. He stood at the bar, talking, his voice loud, cheerful. “They all look like him too,” the speaker said. “About seventeen or eighteen. They run those little boats that are always dashing in and out.”

“Is that what they do?” a third said. “You mean, there’s a male marine auxiliary to the Waacs? Good Lord, I sure made a mistake when I enlisted. But this war never was advertised right.”

“I don’t know,” Bogard said. “I guess they do more than just ride around.”

But they were not listening to him. They were looking at the guest. "They run by clock," the first said. "You can see the condition of one of them after sunset and almost tell what time it is. But what I don't see is, how a man that's in that shape at one o'clock every morning can even see a battleship the next day."

"Maybe when they have a message to send out to a ship," another said, "they just make duplicates and line the launches up and point them toward the ship and give each one a duplicate of the message and let them go. And the ones that miss the ship just cruise around the harbor until they hit a dock somewhere."

"It must be more than that," Bogard said.

He was about to say something else, but at that moment the guest turned from the bar and approached, carrying a glass. He walked steadily enough, but his color was high and his eyes were bright, and he was talking, loud, cheerful, as he came up.

"I say. Won't you chaps join—" He ceased. He seemed to remark something; he was looking at their breasts. "Oh, I say. You fly. All of you. Oh, good gad! Find it jolly, eh?"

"Yes," somebody said. "Jolly."

"But dangerous, what?"

"A little faster than tennis," another said. The guest looked at him, bright, affable, intent.

Another said quickly, "Bogard says you command a vessel."

"Hardly a vessel. Thanks, though. And not command. Ronnie does that. Ranks me a bit. Age."

"Ronnie?"

"Yes. Nice. Good egg. Old, though. Stickler."

"Stickler?"

"Frightful. You'd not believe it. Whenever we sight smoke and I have the glass, he sheers away. Keeps the ship hull down all the while. No beaver then. Had me two down a fortnight yesterday."

The Americans glanced at one another. "No beaver?"

"We play it. With basket masts, you see. See a basket mast. Beaver! One up. The Ergenstrasse doesn't count any more, though."

The men about the table looked at one another. Bogard spoke. "I see. When you or Ronnie see a ship with basket masts, you get a beaver on the other. I see. What is the Ergenstrasse?"

"She's German. Interned. Tramp steamer. Foremast rigged so it looks something like a basket mast. Booms, cables, I dare say. I didn't think it looked very much like a basket mast, myself. But Ronnie said yes. Called it one day. Then one day they shifted her across the basin and I called her on Ronnie. So we decided to not count her any more. See now, eh?"

"Oh," the one who had made the tennis remark said, "I see. You and Ronnie run about in the launch, playing beaver. H'm'm. That's nice. Did you ever pl—"

"Jerry," Bogard said. The guest had not moved. He looked down at the speaker, still smiling, his eyes quite wide.

The speaker still looked at the guest. "Has yours and Ronnie's boat got a yellow stern?"

"A yellow stern?" the English boy said. He had quit smiling, but his face was still pleasant.

"I thought that maybe when the boats had two captains, they might paint the sterns yellow or something."

"Oh," the guest said. "Burt and Reeves aren't officers."

"Burt and Reeves," the other said, in a musing tone. "So they go, too. Do they play beaver too?"

"Jerry," Bogard said. The other looked at him. Bogard jerked his head a little. "Come over here." The other rose. They went aside. "Lay off of him," Bogard said. "I mean it, now. He's just a kid. When you were that

age, how much sense did you have? Just about enough to get to chapel on time.”

“My country hadn’t been at war going on four years, though,” Jerry said. “Here we are, spending our money and getting shot at by the clock, and it’s not even our fight, and these limeys that would have been goose-stepping twelve months now if it hadn’t been—”

“Shut it,” Bogard said. “You sound like a Liberty Loan.”

“ — taking it like it was a fair or something. ‘Jolly.’” His voice was now falsetto, lilting. ““But dangerous, what?””

“Sh-h-h-h,” Bogard said.

“I’d like to catch him and his Ronnie out in the harbor, just once. Any harbor. London’s. I wouldn’t want anything but a Jenny, either. Jenny? Hell, I’d take a bicycle and a pair of water wings! I’ll show him some war.”

“Well, you lay off him now. He’ll be gone soon.”

“What are you going to do with him?”

“I’m going to take him along this morning. Let him have Harper’s place out front. He says he can handle a Lewis. Says they have one on the boat. Something he was telling me — about how he once shot out a channel-marker light at seven hundred yards.”

“Well, that’s your business. Maybe he can beat you.”

“Beat me?”

“Playing beaver. And then you can take on Ronnie.”

“I’ll show him some war, anyway,” Bogard said. He looked at the guest.

“His people have been in it three years now, and he seems to take it like a sophomore in town for the big game.” He looked at Jerry again.

“But you lay off him now.”

As they approached the table, the guest’s voice was loud and cheerful:
“. . . if he got the glasses first, he would go in close and look, but when I

got them first, he'd sheer off where I couldn't see anything but the smoke. Frightful stickler. Frightful. But Ergenstrasse not counting any more. And if you make a mistake and call her, you lose two beaver from your score. If Ronnie were only to forget and call her we'd be even."

III

At two o'clock the English boy was still talking, his voice bright, innocent and cheerful. He was telling them how Switzerland had been spoiled by 1914, and instead of the vacation which his father had promised him for his sixteenth birthday, when that birthday came he and his tutor had had to do with Wales.

But that he and the tutor had got pretty high and that he dared to say — with all due respect to any present who might have had the advantage of Switzerland, of course — that one could see probably as far from Wales as from Switzerland.

"Perspire as much and breathe as hard, anyway," he added. And about him the Americans sat, a little hard-bitten, a little sober, somewhat older, listening to him with a kind of cold astonishment.

They had been getting up for some time now and going out and returning in flying clothes, carrying helmets and goggles. An orderly entered with a tray of coffee cups, and the guest realized that for some time now he had been hearing engines in the darkness outside.

At last Bogard rose. "Come along," he said. "We'll get your togs." When they emerged from the mess, the sound of the engines was quite loud — an idling thunder. In alignment along the invisible tarmac was a vague rank of short banks of flickering blue-green fire suspended apparently in mid-air. They crossed the aerodrome to Bogard's quarters, where the lieutenant, McGinnis, sat on a cot fastening his flying boots. Bogard reached down a Sidcott suit and threw it across the cot. "Put this on," he said.

"Will I need all this?" the guest said. "Shall we be gone that long?"

“Probably,” Bogard said. “Better use it. Cold upstairs.”

The guest picked up the suit. “I say,” he said. “I say, Ronnie and I have a do ourselves, tomor — today. Do you think Ronnie won’t mind if I am a bit late? Might not wait for me.”

“We’ll be back before teatime,” McGinnis said. He seemed quite busy with his boot. “Promise you.” The English boy looked at him.

“What time should you be back?” Bogard said.

“Oh, well,” the English boy said, “I dare say it will be all right. They let Ronnie say when to go, anyway. He’ll wait for me if I should be a bit late.”

“He’ll wait,” Bogard said. “Get your suit on.”

“Right,” the other said. They helped him into the suit. “Never been up before,” he said, chattily, pleasantly. “Dare say you can see farther than from mountains, eh?”

“See more, anyway,” McGinnis said. “You’ll like it.”

“Oh, rather. If Ronnie only waits for me. Lark. But dangerous, isn’t it?”

“Go on,” McGinnis said. “You’re kidding me.”

“Shut your trap, Mac,” Bogard said. “Come along. Want some more coffee?” He looked at the guest, but McGinnis answered:

“No. Got something better than coffee. Coffee makes such a confounded stain on the wings.”

“On the wings?” the English boy said. “Why coffee on the wings.”

“Stow it, I said, Mac,” Bogard said. “Come along.”

They recrossed the aerodrome, approaching the muttering banks of flame. When they drew near, the guest began to discern the shape, the outlines, of the Handley-Page. It looked like a Pullman coach run upslanted aground into the skeleton of the first floor of an incomplete skyscraper. The guest looked at it quietly.

"It's larger than a cruiser," he said in his bright, interested voice. "I say, you know. This doesn't fly in one lump. You can't pull my leg. Seen them before. It comes in two parts: Captain Bogard and me in one; Mac and 'nother chap in other. What?"

"No," McGinnis said. Bogard had vanished. "It all goes up in one lump. Big lark, eh? Buzzard, what?"

"Buzzard?" the guest murmured. "Oh, I say. A cruiser. Flying. I say, now."

"And listen," McGinnis said. His hand came forth; something cold fumbled against the hand of the English boy — a bottle. "When you feel yourself getting sick, see? Take a pull at it."

"Oh, shall I get sick?"

"Sure. We all do. Part of flying. This will stop it. But if it doesn't. See?"

"What? Quite. What?"

"Not overside. Don't spew it overside."

"Not overside?"

"It'll blow back in Bogy's and my face. Can't see. Bingo. Finished. See?"

"Oh, quite. What shall I do with it?" Their voices were quiet, brief, grave as conspirators.

"Just duck your head and let her go."

"Oh, quite."

Bogard returned. "Show him how to get into the front pit, will you?" he said. McGinnis led the way through the trap. Forward, rising to the slant of the fuselage, the passage narrowed; a man would need to crawl.

"Crawl in there and keep going," McGinnis said.

"It looks like a dog kennel," the guest said.

"Doesn't it, though?" McGinnis agreed cheerfully. "Cut along with you." Stooping, he could hear the other scuttling forward. "You'll find a Lewis gun up there, like as not," he said into the tunnel.

The voice of the guest came back: "Found it."

"The gunnery sergeant will be along in a minute and show you if it is loaded."

"It's loaded," the guest said; almost on the heels of his words the gun fired, a brief staccato burst. There were shouts, the loudest from the ground beneath the nose of the aeroplane. "It's quite all right," the English boy's voice said. "I pointed it west before I let it off. Nothing back there but Marine office and your brigade headquarters. Ronnie and I always do this before we go anywhere. Sorry if I was too soon. Oh, by the way," he added, "my name's Claude. Don't think I mentioned it."

On the ground, Bogard and two other officers stood. They had come up running. "Fired it west," one said. "How in hell does he know which way is west?"

"He's a sailor," the other said. "You forgot that."

"He seems to be a machine gunner too," Bogard said.

"Let's hope he doesn't forget that," the first said.

IV

Nevertheless, Bogard kept an eye on the silhouetted head rising from the round gunpit in the nose ten feet ahead of him. "He did work that gun, though," he said to McGinnis beside him. "He even put the drum on himself, didn't he?"

"Yes," McGinnis said. "If he just doesn't forget and think that that gun is him and his tutor looking around from a Welsh alp."

"Maybe I should not have brought him," Bogard said. McGinnis didn't answer. Bogard jockeyed the wheel a little. Ahead, in the gunner's pit, the guest's head moved this way and that continuously, looking. "We'll get there and unload and haul air for home," Bogard said. "Maybe in the dark — Confound it, it would be a shame for his country to be in

this mess for four years and him not even to see a gun pointed in his direction.”

“He’ll see one tonight if he don’t keep his head in,” McGinnis said.

But the boy did not do that. Not even when they had reached the objective and McGinnis had crawled down to the bomb toggles. And even when the searchlights found them and Bogard signaled to the other machines and dived, the two engines snarling full speed into and through the bursting shells, he could see the boy’s face in the searchlight’s glare, leaned far overside, coming sharply out as a spotlighted face on a stage, with an expression upon it of child-like interest and delight.

“But he’s firing that Lewis,” Bogard thought. “Straight too”; nosing the machine farther down, watching the pinpoint swing into the sights, his right hand lifted, waiting to drop into McGinnis’ sight. He dropped his hand; above the noise of the engines he seemed to hear the click and whistle of the released bombs as the machine, freed of the weight, shot zooming in a long upward bounce that carried it for an instant out of the light.

Then he was pretty busy for a time, coming into and through the shells again, shooting athwart another beam that caught and held long enough for him to see the English boy leaning far over the side, looking back and down past the right wing, the undercarriage. “Maybe he’s read about it somewhere,” Bogard thought, turning, looking back to pick up the rest of the flight.

Then it was all over, the darkness cool and empty and peaceful and almost quiet, with only the steady sound of the engines. McGinnis climbed back into the office, and standing up in his seat, he fired the colored pistol this time and stood for a moment longer, looking backward toward where the searchlights still probed and sabered. He sat down again.

“O.K.,” he said. “I counted all four of them. Let’s haul air.” Then he looked forward. “What’s become of the King’s Own? You didn’t hang him onto a bomb release, did you?” Bogard looked. The forward pit was empty. It was in dim silhouette again now, against the stars, but there was nothing there now save the gun. “No,” McGinnis said: “there he is. See? Leaning overside. Dammit, I told him not to spew it! There he comes back.” The guest’s head came into view again. But again it sank out of sight.

“He’s coming back,” Bogard said. “Stop him. Tell him we’re going to have every squadron in the Hun Channel group on top of us in thirty minutes.”

McGinnis swung himself down and stooped at the entrance to the passage. “Get back!” he shouted. The other was almost out; they squatted so, face to face like two dogs, shouting at one another above the noise of the still-unthrottled engines on either side of the fabric walls. The English boy’s voice was thin and high.

“Bomb!” he shrieked.

“Yes,” McGinnis shouted, “they were bombs! We gave them hell! Get back, I tell you! Have every Hun in France on us in ten minutes! Get back to your gun!”

Again the boy’s voice came, high, faint above the noise: “Bomb! All right?”

“Yes! Yes! All right. Back to your gun, damn you!”

McGinnis climbed back into the office. “He went back. Want me to take her awhile?”

“All right,” Bogard said. He passed McGinnis the wheel. “Ease her back some. I’d just as soon it was daylight when they come down on us.”

“Right,” McGinnis said. He moved the wheel suddenly. “What’s the matter with that right wing?” he said. “Watch it. . . . See? I’m flying on the right aileron and a little rudder. Feel it.”

Bogard took the wheel a moment. "I didn't notice that. Wire somewhere, I guess. I didn't think any of those shells were that close. Watch her, though."

"Right," McGinnis said. "And so you are going with him on his boat tomorrow — today."

"Yes. I promised him. Confound it, you can't hurt a kid, you know."

"Why don't you take Collier along, with his mandolin? Then you could sail around and sing."

"I promised him," Bogard said. "Get that wing up a little."

"Right," McGinnis said.

Thirty minutes later it was beginning to be dawn; the sky was gray. Presently McGinnis said: "Well, here they come. Look at them! They look like mosquitoes in September. I hope he don't get worked up now and think he's playing beaver. If he does he'll just be one down to Ronnie, provided the devil has a beard. . . . Want the wheel?"

V

At eight o'clock the beach, the Channel, was beneath them. Throttled back, the machine drifted down as Bogard ruddered it gently into the Channel wind. His face was strained, a little tired.

McGinnis looked tired, too, and he needed a shave.

"What do you guess he is looking at now?" he said. For again the English boy was leaning over the right side of the cockpit, looking backward and downward past the right wing.

"I don't know," Bogard said. "Maybe bullet holes." He blasted the port engine. "Must have the riggers—"

"He could see some closer than that," McGinnis said. "I'll swear I saw tracer going into his back at one time. Or maybe it's the ocean he's looking at. But he must have seen that when he came over from England." Then Bogard leveled off; the nose rose sharply, the sand, the curling tide edge fled alongside.

Yet still the English boy hung far overside, looking backward and downward at something beneath the right wing, his face rapt, with utter and childlike interest.

Until the machine was completely stopped he continued to do so. Then he ducked down, and in the abrupt silence of the engines they could hear him crawling in the passage. He emerged just as the two pilots climbed stiffly down from the office, his face bright, eager; his voice high, excited.

“Oh, I say! Oh, good gad! What a chap. What a judge of distance! If Ronnie could only have seen! Oh, good gad! Or maybe they aren’t like ours — don’t load themselves as soon as the air strikes them.”

The Americans looked at him. “What don’t what?” McGinnis said. “The bomb. It was magnificent; I say, I shan’t forget it. Oh, I say, you know! It was splendid!”

After a while McGinnis said, “The bomb?” in a fainting voice. Then the two pilots glared at each other; they said in unison: “That right wing!” Then as one they clawed down through the trap and, with the guest at their heels, they ran around the machine and looked beneath the right wing.

The bomb, suspended by its tail, hung straight down like a plumb bob beside the right wheel, its tip just touching the sand. And parallel with the wheel track was the long delicate line in the sand where its ultimate tip had dragged. Behind them the English boy’s voice was high, clear, childlike:

“Frightened, myself. Tried to tell you. But realized you knew your business better than I. Skill. Marvelous. Oh, I say, I shan’t forget it.”

VI

A Marine with a bayoneted rifle passed Bogard onto the wharf and directed him to the boat. The wharf was empty, and he didn’t even see

the boat until he approached the edge of the wharf and looked directly down into it and upon the backs of two stooping men in greasy dungarees, who rose and glanced briefly at him and stooped again.

It was about thirty feet long and about three feet wide. It was painted with gray-green camouflage. It was quarter-decked forward, with two blunt, raked exhaust stacks. "Good Lord," Bogard thought, "if all that deck is engine—" Just aft the deck was the control seat; he saw a big wheel, an instrument panel.

Rising to a height of about a foot above the free-board, and running from the stern forward to where the deck began, and continuing on across the after edge of the deck and thence back down the other gunwale to the stern, was a solid screen, also camouflaged, which inclosed the boat save for the width of the stern, which was open. Facing the steersman's seat like an eye was a hole in the screen about eight inches in diameter.

And looking down into the long, narrow, still, vicious shape, he saw a machine gun swiveled at the stern, and he looked at the low screen — including which the whole vessel did not sit much more than a yard above water level — with its single empty forward-staring eye, and he thought quietly: "It's steel. It's made of steel." And his face was quite sober, quite thoughtful, and he drew his trench coat about him and buttoned it, as though he were getting cold.

He heard steps behind him and turned. But it was only an orderly from the aerodrome, accompanied by the marine with the rifle. The orderly was carrying a largish bundle wrapped in paper.

"From Lieutenant McGinnis to the captain," the orderly said.

Bogard took the bundle. The orderly and the marine retreated. He opened the bundle. It contained some objects and a scrawled note. The objects were a new yellow silk sofa cushion and a Japanese parasol, obviously borrowed, and a comb and a roll of toilet paper. The note said:

Couldn't find a camera anywhere and Collier wouldn't let me have his mandolin. But maybe Ronnie can play on the comb.

MAC.

Bogard looked at the objects. But his face was still quite thoughtful, quite grave. He rewrapped the things and carried the bundle on up the wharf and dropped it quietly into the water.

As he returned toward the invisible boat he saw two men approaching.

He recognized the boy at once — tall, slender, already talking, voluble, his head bent a little toward his shorter companion, who plodded along beside him, hands in pockets, smoking a pipe.

The boy still wore the pea-coat beneath a flapping oilskin, but in place of the rakish and casual cap he now wore an infantryman's soiled Balaclava helmet, with, floating behind him as though upon the sound of his voice, a curtainlike piece of cloth almost as long as a burnous. "Hullo, there!" he cried, still a hundred yards away.

But it was the second man that Bogard was watching, thinking to himself that he had never in his life seen a more curious figure. There was something stolid about the very shape of his hunched shoulders, his slightly down-looking face. He was a head shorter than the other.

His face was ruddy, too, but its mold was of a profound gravity that was almost dour. It was the face of a man of twenty who has been for a year trying, even while asleep, to look twenty-one.

He wore a high-necked sweater and dungaree slacks; above this a leather jacket; and above this a soiled naval officer's warmer that reached almost to his heels and which had one shoulder strap missing and not one remaining button at all.

On his head was a plaid fore-and-aft deer stalker's cap, tied on by a narrow scarf brought across and down, hiding his ears, and then

wrapped once about his throat and knotted with a hangman's noose beneath his left ear.

It was unbelievably soiled, and with his hands elbow-deep in his pockets and his hunched shoulders and his bent head, he looked like someone's grandmother hung, say, for a witch. Clamped upside down between his teeth was a short brier pipe.

"Here he is!" the boy cried. "This is Ronnie. Captain Bogard."

"How are you?" Bogard said. He extended his hand. The other said no word, but his hand came forth, limp. It was quite cold, but it was hard, calloused. But he said no word; he just glanced briefly at Bogard and then away. But in that instant Bogard caught something in the look, something strange — a flicker; a kind of covert and curious respect, something like a boy of fifteen looking at a circus trapezist.

But he said no word. He ducked on; Bogard watched him drop from sight over the wharf edge as though he had jumped feet first into the sea. He remarked now that the engines in the invisible boat were running.

"We might get aboard too," the boy said. He started toward the boat, then he stopped. He touched Bogard's arm. "Yonder!" he hissed.

"See?" His voice was thin with excitement.

"What?" Bogard also whispered; automatically he looked backward and upward, after old habit. The other was gripping his arm and pointing across the harbor.

"There! Over there. The Ergenstrasse. They have shifted her again." Across the harbor lay an ancient, rusting, swaybacked hulk. It was small and nondescript, and, remembering, Bogard saw that the foremast was a strange mess of cables and booms, resembling — allowing for a great deal of license or looseness of imagery — a basket mast. Beside him the boy was almost chortling. "Do you think that Ronnie noticed?" he hissed. "Do you?"

"I don't know," Bogard said.

"Oh, good gad! If he should glance up and call her before he notices, we'll be even. Oh, good gad! But come along." He went on; he was still chortling. "Careful," he said. "Frightful ladder."

He descended first, the two men in the boat rising and saluting. Ronnie had disappeared, save for his backside, which now filled a small hatch leading forward beneath the deck. Bogard descended gingerly.

"Good Lord," he said. "Do you have to climb up and down this every day?"

"Frightful, isn't it?" the other said, in his happy voice. "But you know yourself. Try to run a war with makeshifts, then wonder why it takes so long." The narrow hull slid and surged, even with Bogard's added weight. "Sits right on top, you see," the boy said. "Would float on a lawn, in a heavy dew. Goes right over them like a bit of paper."

"It does?" Bogard said.

"Oh, absolutely. That's why, you see." Bogard didn't see, but he was too busy letting himself gingerly down to a sitting posture. There were no thwarts; no seats save a long, thick, cylindrical ridge which ran along the bottom of the boat from the driver's seat to the stern. Ronnie had backed into sight. He now sat behind the wheel, bent over the instrument panel.

But when he glanced back over his shoulder he did not speak. His face was merely interrogatory. Across his face there was now a long smudge of grease. The boy's face was empty, too, now.

"Right," he said. He looked forward, where one of the seamen had gone. "Ready forward?" he said.

"Aye, sir," the seaman said.

The other seaman was at the stern line. "Ready aft?"

"Aye, sir."

"Cast off." The boat sheered away, purring, a boiling of water under the stern. The boy looked down at Bogard. "Silly business. Do it shipshape,

though. Can't tell when silly fourstriper—" His face changed again, immediate, solicitous. "I say. Will you be warm? I never thought to fetch—"

"I'll be all right," Bogard said. But the other was already taking off his oilskin. "No, no," Bogard said. "I won't take it."

"You'll tell me if you get cold?"

"Yes. Sure." He was looking down at the cylinder on which he sat. It was a half cylinder — that is, like the hotwater tank to some Gargantuan stove, sliced down the middle and bolted, open side down, to the floor plates. It was twenty feet long and more than two feet thick. Its top rose as high as the gunwales and between it and the hull on either side was just room enough for a man to place his feet to walk.

"That's Muriel," the boy said.

"Muriel?"

"Yes. The one before that was Agatha. After my aunt. The first one Ronnie and I had was Alice in Wonderland. Ronnie and I were the White Rabbit. Jolly, eh?"

"Oh, you and Ronnie have had three, have you?"

"Oh, yes," the boy said. He leaned down. "He didn't notice," he whispered. His face was again bright, gleeful. "When we come back," he said. "You watch."

"Oh," Bogard said. "The Ergenstrasse." He looked astern, and then he thought: "Good Lord! We must be going — traveling." He looked out now, broadside, and saw the harbor line fleeing past, and he thought to himself that the boat was well-nigh moving at the speed at which the Handley-Page flew, left the ground.

They were beginning to bound now, even in the sheltered water, from one wave crest to the next with a distinct shock. His hand still rested on the cylinder on which he sat. He looked down at it again, following it from where it seemed to emerge beneath Ronnie's seat, to where it beveled into the stern. "It's the air in her, I suppose," he said.

“The what?” the boy said.

“The air. Stored up in her. That makes the boat ride high.”

“Oh, yes. I dare say. Very likely. I hadn’t thought about it.” He came forward, his burnous whipping in the wind, and sat down beside Bogard. Their heads were below the top of the screen. Astern the harbor fled, diminishing, sinking into the sea.

The boat had begun to lift now, swooping forward and down, shocking almost stationary for a moment, then lifting and swooping again; a gout of spray came aboard over the bows like a flung shovelful of shot. “I wish you’d take this coat,” the boy said.

Bogard didn’t answer. He looked around at the bright face. “We’re outside, aren’t we?” he said quietly.

“Yes. . . . Do take it, won’t you?”

“Thanks, no. I’ll be all right. We won’t be long, anyway, I guess.”

“No. We’ll turn soon. It won’t be so bad then.”

“Yes. I’ll be all right when we turn.” Then they did turn. The motion became easier. That is, the boat didn’t bang head-on, shuddering, into the swells. They came up beneath now, and the boat fled with increased speed, with a long, sickening, yawing motion, first to one side and then the other. But it fled on, and Bogard looked astern with that same soberness with which he had first looked down into the boat.

“We’re going east now,” he said.

“With just a spot of north,” the boy said. “Makes her ride a bit better, what?”

“Yes,” Bogard said. Astern there was nothing now save empty sea and the delicate needlelike cant of the machine gun against the boiling and slewing wake, and the two seamen crouching quietly in the stern. “Yes. It’s easier.” Then he said: “How far do we go?”

The boy leaned closer. He moved closer. His voice was happy, confidential, proud, though lowered a little: "It's Ronnie's show. He thought of it. Not that I wouldn't have, in time. Gratitude and all that. But he's the older, you see. Thinks fast. Courtesy, noblesse oblige — all that. Thought of it soon as I told him this morning. I said, 'Oh, I say. I've been there.

I've seen it'; and he said, 'Not flying'; and I said, 'Strewth'; and he said 'How far? No lying now'; and I said, 'Oh, far. Tremendous. Gone all night'; and he said, 'Flying all night. That must have been to Berlin'; and I said, 'I don't know. I dare say'; and he thought.

I could see him thinking. Because he is the older, you see. More experience in courtesy, right thing. And he said, 'Berlin. No fun to that chap, dashing out and back with us.' And he thought and I waited, and I said, 'But we can't take him to Berlin. Too far. Don't know the way, either'; and he said — fast, like a shot — said, 'But there's Kiel'; and I knew—"

"What?" Bogard said. Without moving, his whole body sprang. "Kiel? In this?"

"Absolutely. Ronnie thought of it. Smart, even if he is a stickler. Said at once, 'Zeebrugge no show at all for that chap. Must do best we can for him. Berlin,' Ronnie said. 'My Gad! Berlin.'"

"Listen," Bogard said. He had turned now, facing the other, his face quite grave. "What is this boat for?"

"For?"

"What does it do?" Then, knowing beforehand the answer to his own question, he said, putting his hand on the cylinder: "What is this in here? A torpedo, isn't it?"

"I thought you knew," the boy said.

"No," Bogard said. "I didn't know." His voice seemed to reach him from a distance, dry, cricketlike: "How do you fire it?"

"Fire it?"

“How do you get it out of the boat? When that hatch was open a while ago I could see the engines. They were right in front of the end of this tube.”

“Oh,” the boy said. “You pull a gadget there and the torpedo drops out astern. As soon as the screw touches the water it begins to turn, and then the torpedo is ready, loaded. Then all you have to do is turn the boat quickly and the torpedo goes on.”

“You mean—” Bogard said. After a moment his voice obeyed him again. “You mean you aim the torpedo with the boat and release it and it starts moving, and you turn the boat out of the way and the torpedo passes through the same water that the boat just vacated?”

“Knew you’d catch on,” the boy said. “Told Ronnie so. Airman. Tamer than yours, though. But can’t be helped. Best we can do, just on water. But knew you’d catch on.”

“Listen,” Bogard said. His voice sounded to him quite calm. The boat fled on, yawing over the swells. He sat quite motionless. It seemed to him that he could hear himself talking to himself: “Go on. Ask him. Ask him what? Ask him how close to the ship do you have to be before you fire. . . . Listen,” he said, in that calm voice. “Now, you tell Ronnie, you see.

You just tell him — just say—” He could feel his voice rattling off on him again, so he stopped it. He sat quite motionless, waiting for it to come back; the boy leaning now, looking at his face. Again the boy’s voice was solicitous:

“I say. You’re not feeling well. These confounded shallow boats.”

“It’s not that,” Bogard said. “I just — Do your orders say Kiel?”

“Oh, no. They let Ronnie say. Just so we bring the boat back. This is for you. Gratitude. Ronnie’s idea. Tame, after flying. But if you’d rather, eh?”

“Yes, some place closer. You see, I—”

“Quite. I see. No vacations in wartime. I’ll tell Ronnie.” He went forward. Bogard did not move. The boat fled in long, slewing swoops. Bogard looked quietly astern, at the scudding sea, the sky. “My God!” he thought. “Can you beat it? Can you beat it?”

The boy came back; Bogard turned to him a face the color of dirty paper. “All right now,” the boy said. “Not Kiel. Nearer place, hunting probably just as good. Ronnie says he knows you will understand.” He was tugging at his pocket. He brought out a bottle. “Here. Haven’t forgot last night. Do the same for you. Good for the stomach, eh?”

Bogard drank, gulping — a big one. He extended the bottle, but the boy refused. “Never touch it on duty,” he said. “Not like you chaps. Tame here.”

The boat fled on. The sun was already down the west. But Bogard had lost all count of time, of distance. Ahead he could see white seas through the round eye opposite Ronnie’s face, and Ronnie’s hand on the wheel and the granitelike jut of his profiled jaw and the dead upside-down pipe. The boat fled on.

Then the boy leaned and touched his shoulder. He half rose. The boy was pointing. The sun was reddish; against it, outside them and about two miles away, a vessel — a trawler, it looked like — at anchor swung a tall mast.

“Lightship!” the boy shouted. “Theirs.” Ahead Bogard could see a low, flat mole — the entrance to a harbor. “Channel!” the boy shouted. He swept his arm in both directions. “Mines!” His voice swept back on the wind. “Place filthy with them. All sides. Beneath us too. Lark, eh?”

VII

Against the mole a fair surf was beating. Running before the seas now, the boat seemed to leap from one roller to the next; in the intervals while the screw was in the air the engine seemed to be trying to tear

itself out by the roots. But it did not slow; when it passed the end of the mole the boat seemed to be standing almost erect on its rudder, like a sailfish.

The mole was a mile away. From the end of it little faint lights began to flicker like fireflies. The boy leaned. "Down," he said. "Machine guns. Might stop a stray."

"What do I do?" Bogard shouted. "What can I do?"

"Stout fellow! Give them hell, what? Knew you'd like it!"

Crouching, Bogard looked up at the boy, his face wild. "I can handle the machine gun!"

"No need," the boy shouted back. "Give them first innings. Sporting. Visitors, eh?" He was looking forward. "There she is. See?" They were in the harbor now, the basin opening before them. Anchored in the channel was a big freighter.

Painted midships of the hull was a huge Argentine flag. "Must get back to stations!" the boy shouted down to him. Then at that moment Ronnie spoke for the first time. The boat was hurtling along now in smoother water. Its speed did not slacken and Ronnie did not turn his head when he spoke. He just swung his jutting jaw and the clamped cold pipe a little, and said from the side of his mouth a single word: "Beaver."

The boy, stooped over what he had called his gadget, jerked up, his expression astonished and outraged. Bogard also looked forward and saw Ronnie's arm pointing to starboard. It was a light cruiser at anchor a mile away. She had basket masts, and as he looked a gun flashed from her after turret. "Oh, damn!" the boy cried. "Oh, you putt!

Oh, confound you, Ronnie! Now I'm three down!" But he had already stooped again over his gadget, his face bright and empty and alert again; not sober; just calm, waiting.

Again Bogard looked forward and felt the boat pivot on its rudder and head directly for the freighter at terrific speed, Ronnie now with one hand on the wheel and the other lifted and extended at the height of his head.

But it seemed to Bogard that the hand would never drop. He crouched, not sitting, watching with a kind of quiet horror the painted flag increase like a moving picture of a locomotive taken from between the rails. Again the gun crashed from the cruiser behind them, and the freighter fired point-blank at them from its poop. Bogard heard neither shot.

“Man, man!” he shouted. “For God’s sake!”

Ronnie’s hand dropped. Again the boat spun on its rudder. Bogard saw the bow rise, pivoting; he expected the hull to slam broadside on into the ship. But it didn’t. It shot off on a long tangent. He was waiting for it to make a wide sweep, heading seaward, putting the freighter astern, and he thought of the cruiser again. “Get a broadside, this time, once we clear the freighter,” he thought.

Then he remembered the freighter, the torpedo, and he looked back toward the freighter to watch the torpedo strike, and saw to his horror that the boat was now bearing down on the freighter again, in a skidding turn.

Like a man in a dream, he watched himself rush down upon the ship and shoot past under her counter, still skidding, close enough to see the faces on her decks. “They missed and they are going to run down the torpedo and catch it and shoot it again,” he thought idiotically.

So the boy had to touch his shoulder before he knew he was behind him. The boy’s voice was quite calm: “Under Ronnie’s seat there. A bit of a crank handle. If you’ll just hand it to me—”

He found the crank.

He passed it back; he was thinking dreamily: “Mac would say they had a telephone on board.” But he didn’t look at once to see what the boy was doing with it, for in that still and peaceful horror he was watching Ronnie, the cold pipe rigid in his jaw, hurling the boat at top speed round and round the freighter, so near that he could see the rivets in the plates.

Then he looked aft, his face wild, importunate, and he saw what the boy was doing with the crank. He had fitted it into what was obviously a small windlass low on one flank of the tube near the head. He glanced up and saw Bogard’s face. “Didn’t go that time!” he shouted cheerfully.

“Go?” Bogard shouted. “It didn’t — The torpedo—”

The boy and one of the seamen were quite busy, stooping over the windlass and the tube. “No. Clumsy. Always happening. Should think clever chaps like engineers — Happens, though. Draw her in and try her again.”

“But the nose, the cap!” Bogard shouted. “It’s still in the tube, isn’t it? It’s all right, isn’t it?”

“Absolutely. But it’s working now. Loaded. Screw’s started turning. Get it back and drop it clear. If we should stop or slow up it would overtake us. Drive back into the tube. Bingo! What?”

Bogard was on his feet now, turned, braced to the terrific merry-go-round of the boat. High above them the freighter seemed to be spinning on her heel like a trick picture in the movies. “Let me have that winch!” he cried.

“Steady!” the boy said. “Mustn’t draw her back too fast. Jam her into the head of the tube ourselves. Same bingo! Best let us. Every cobbler to his last, what?”

“Oh, quite,” Bogard said. “Oh, absolutely.” It was like someone else was using his mouth. He leaned, braced, his hands on the cold tube, beside the others. He was hot inside, but his outside was cold.

He could feel all his flesh jerking with cold as he watched the blunt, grained hand of the seaman turning the windlass in short, easy, inch-long arcs, while at the head of the tube the boy bent, tapping the cylinder with a spanner, lightly, his head turned with listening delicate and deliberate as a watchmaker. The boat rushed on in those furious, slewing turns. Bogard saw a long, drooping thread loop down from somebody's mouth, between his hands, and he found that the thread came from his own mouth.

He didn't hear the boy speak, nor notice when he stood up. He just felt the boat straighten out, flinging him to his knees beside the tube. The seaman had gone back to the stern and the boy stooped again over his gadget. Bogard knelt now, quite sick.

He did not feel the boat when it swung again, nor hear the gun from the cruiser which had not dared to fire and the freighter which had not been able to fire, firing again. He did not feel anything at all when he saw the huge, painted flag directly ahead and increasing with locomotive speed, and Ronnie's lifted hand drop. But this time he knew that the torpedo was gone; in pivoting and spinning this time the whole boat seemed to leave the water; he saw the bow of the boat shoot skyward like the nose of a pursuit ship going into a wingover.

Then his outraged stomach denied him. He saw neither the geyser nor heard the detonation as he sprawled over the tube. He felt only a hand grasp him by the slack of his coat, and the voice of one of the seamen: "Steady all, sir. I've got you."

VIII

A voice roused him, a hand. He was half sitting in the narrow starboard runway, half lying across the tube. He had been there for quite a while; quite a while ago he had felt someone spread a garment over him. But he had not raised his head. "I'm all right," he had said. "You keep it." "Don't need it," the boy said. "Going home now."

"I'm sorry I—" Bogard said.

“Quite. Confounded shallow boats. Turn any stomach until you get used to them. Ronnie and I both, at first. Each time. You wouldn’t believe it. Believe human stomach hold so much. Here.” It was the bottle. “Good drink. Take enormous one. Good for stomach.”

Bogard drank. Soon he did feel better, warmer. When the hand touched him later, he found that he had been asleep.

It was the boy again. The pea-coat was too small for him; shrunken, perhaps. Below the cuffs his long, slender, girl’s wrists were blue with cold. Then Bogard realized what the garment was that had been laid over him. But before Bogard could speak, the boy leaned down, whispering; his face was gleeful: “He didn’t notice!”

“What?”

“Ergenstrasse! He didn’t notice that they had shifted her. Gad, I’d be just one down, then.” He watched Bogard’s face with bright, eager eyes. “Beaver, you know. I say. Feeling better, eh?”

“Yes,” Bogard said, “I am.”

“He didn’t notice at all. Oh, gad! Oh, Jove!”

Bogard rose and sat on the tube. The entrance to the harbor was just ahead; the boat had slowed a little. It was just dusk. He said quietly: “Does this often happen?” The boy looked at him. Bogard touched the tube. “This. Failing to go out.”

“Oh, yes. Why they put the windlass on them. That was later. Made first boat; whole thing blew up one day. So put on windlass.”

“But it happens sometimes, even now? I mean, sometimes they blow up, even with the windlass?”

“Well, can’t say, of course. Boats go out. Not come back. Possible. Not ever know, of course. Not heard of one captured yet, though. Possible. Not to us, though. Not yet.”

“Yes,” Bogard said. “Yes.” They entered the harbor, the boat moving still fast, but throttled now and smooth, across the dusk-filled basin. Again the boy leaned down, his voice gleeful.

“Not a word, now!” he hissed. “Steady all!” He stood up; he raised his voice: “I say, Ronnie.” Ronnie did not turn his head, but Bogard could tell that he was listening. “That Argentine ship was amusing, eh? In there. How do you suppose it got past us here?”

Might have stopped here as well. French would buy the wheat.” He paused, diabolical — Machiavelli with the face of a strayed angel. “I say. How long has it been since we had a strange ship in here? Been months, eh?” Again he leaned, hissing. “Watch, now!” But Bogard could not see Ronnie’s head move at all. “He’s looking, though!” the boy whispered, breathed. And Ronnie was looking, though his head had not moved at all.

Then there came into view, in silhouette against the dusk-filled sky, the vague, basket-like shape of the interned vessel’s foremast. At once Ronnie’s arm rose, pointing; again he spoke without turning his head, out of the side of his mouth, past the cold, clamped pipe, a single word: “Beaver.”

The boy moved like a released spring, like a heeled dog freed. “Oh, damn you!” he cried. “Oh, you putt! It’s the Ergenstrasse! Oh, confound you! I’m just one down now!” He had stepped in one stride completely over Bogard, and he now leaned down over Ronnie. “What?” The boat was slowing in toward the wharf, the engine idle. “Aren’t I, Ronnie? Just one down now?”

The boat drifted in; the seaman had again crawled forward onto the deck. Ronnie spoke for the third and last time. “Right,” he said.

IX

“I want,” Bogard said, “a case of Scotch. The best we’ve got. And fix it up good. It’s to go to town. And I want a responsible man to deliver it.” The responsible man came. “This is for a child,” Bogard said, indicating the package. “You’ll find him in the Street of the Twelve Hours, somewhere near the Café Twelve Hours.

He'll be in the gutter. You'll know him. A child about six feet long. Any English M. P. will show him to you. If he is asleep, don't wake him. Just sit there and wait until he wakes up. Then give him this. Tell him it is from Captain Bogard."

X

About a month later a copy of the English Gazette which had strayed onto an American aerodrome carried the following item in the casualty lists:

MISSING: Torpedo Boat XOOI. Midshipmen R. Boyce Smith and L. C. W. Hope, R. N. R., Boatswain's Mate Burt and Able Seaman Reeves. Channel Fleet, Light Torpedo Division. Failed to return from coast patrol duty.

Shortly after that the American Air Service headquarters also issued a bulletin:

For extraordinary valor over and beyond the routine of duty, Captain H. S. Bogard, with his crew, composed of Second Lieutenant Darrel McGinnis and Aviation Gunners Watts and Harper, on a daylight raid and without scout protection, destroyed with bombs an ammunition depot several miles behind the enemy's lines. From here, beset by enemy aircraft in superior numbers, these men proceeded with what bombs remained to the enemy's corps headquarters at Blank and partially demolished this château, and then returned safely without loss of a man.

And regarding which exploit, it might have added, had it failed and had Captain Bogard come out of it alive, he would have been immediately and thoroughly court-martialed.

Carrying his remaining two bombs, he had dived the Handley-Page at the château where the generals sat at lunch, until McGinnis, at the toggles below him, began to shout at him, before he ever signaled. He didn't signal until he could discern separately the slate tiles of the roof.

Then his hand dropped and he zoomed, and he held the aeroplane so, in its wild snarl, his lips parted, his breath hissing, thinking: "God! God! If they were all there — all the generals, the admirals, the presidents and the kings — theirs, ours — all of them."

The end

All the Dead Pilots, William Faulkner

All the Dead Pilots

I

IN THE PICTURES, the snapshots hurriedly made, a little faded, a little dog-eared with the thirteen years, they swagger a little. Lean, hard, in their brass-and-leather martial harness, posed standing beside or leaning upon the esoteric shapes of wire and wood and canvas in which they flew without parachutes, they too have an esoteric look; a look not exactly human, like that of some dim and threatful apotheosis of the race seen for an instant in the glare of a thunderclap and then forever gone.

Because they are dead, all the old pilots, dead on the eleventh of November, 1918. When you see modern photographs of them, the recent pictures made beside the recent shapes of steel and canvas with the new cowlings and engines and slotted wings, they look a little outlandish: the lean young men who once swaggered.

They look lost, baffled. In this saxophone age of flying they look as out of place as, a little thick about the waist, in the sober business suits of thirty and thirty-five and perhaps more than that, they would look among the saxophones and miniature brass bowlers of a night club orchestra.

Because they are dead too, who had learned to respect that whose respect in turn their hardness had commanded before there were welded center sections and parachutes and ships that would not spin.

That's why they watch the saxophone girls and boys with slipstream-proof lipstick and aeronautical flasks piling up the saxophone crates in private driveways and on golf greens, with the quick sympathy and the bafflement too. "My gad," one of them — ack emma, warrant officer pilot, captain and M.C. in turn — said to me once; "if you can treat a crate that way, why do you want to fly at all?"

But they are all dead now. They are thick men now, a little thick about the waist from sitting behind desks, and maybe not so good at it, with wives and children in suburban homes almost paid out, with gardens in which they putter in the long evenings after the 5:15 is in, and perhaps not so good at that either: the hard, lean men who swaggered hard and drank hard because they had found that being dead was not as quiet as they had heard it would be.

That's why this story is composite: a series of brief glares in which, instantaneous and without depth or perspective, there stood into sight the portent and the threat of what the race could bear and become, in an instant between dark and dark.

II

In 1918 I was at Wing Headquarters, trying to get used to a mechanical leg, where, among other things, I had the censoring of mail from all squadrons in the Wing. The job itself wasn't bad, since it gave me spare time to experiment with a synchronized camera on which I was working. But the opening and reading of the letters, the scrawled, brief pages of transparent and honorable lies to mothers and sweethearts, in the script and spelling of schoolboys.

But a war is such a big thing, and it takes so long. I suppose they who run them (I dont mean the staffs, but whoever or whatever it is that

controls events) do get bored now and then. And it's when you get bored that you turn petty, play horse.

So now and then I would go up to a Camel squadron behind Amiens and talk with the gunnery sergeant about the synchronization of the machine guns. This was Spoomer's squadron. His uncle was the corps commander, the K.G., and so Spoomer, with his Guards' Captaincy, had also got in turn a Mons Star, a D.S.O., and now a pursuit squadron of single seaters, though the third barnacle on his tunic was still the single wing of an observer.

In 1914 he was in Sandhurst: a big, ruddy-colored chap with china eyes, and I like to think of his uncle sending for him when the news got out, the good news. Probably at the uncle's club (the uncle was a brigadier then, just recalled hurriedly from Indian service) and the two of them opposite one another across the mahogany, with the newsboys crying in the street, and the general saying, "By gad, it will be the making of the Army. Pass the wine, sir."

I daresay the general was put out, not to say outraged, when he finally realized that neither the Hun nor the Home Office intended running this war like the Army wanted it run. Anyway, Spoomer had already gone out to Mons and come back with his Star (though Ffollansbye said that the general sent Spoomer out to get the Star, since it was going to be one decoration you had to be on hand to get) before the uncle got him transferred to his staff, where Spoomer could get his D.S.O.

Then perhaps the uncle sent him out again to tap the stream where it came to surface. Or maybe Spoomer went on his own this time. I like to think so. I like to think that he did it through pro patria, even though I know that no man deserves praise for courage or opprobrium for cowardice, since there are situations in which any man will show either of them. But he went out, and came back a year later with his observer's wing and a dog almost as large as a calf.

That was in 1917, when he and Sartoris first came together, collided. Sartoris was an American, from a plantation at Mississippi, where they

grew grain and Negroes, or the Negroes grew the grain — something. Sartoris had a working vocabulary of perhaps two hundred words, and I daresay to tell where and how and why he lived was beyond him, save that he lived in the plantation with his great-aunt and his grandfather.

He came through Canada in 1916, and he was at Pool. Ffollansbye told me about it. It seems that Sartoris had a girl in London, one of those three-day wives and three-year widows. That's the bad thing about war. They — the Sartorises and such — didn't die until 1918, some of them. But the girls, the women, they died on the fourth of August, 1914.

So Sartoris had a girl. Ffollansbye said they called her Kitchener, "because she had such a mob of soldiers." He said they didn't know if Sartoris knew this or not, but that anyway for a while Kitchener — Kit — appeared to have ditched them all for Sartoris. They would be seen anywhere and any time together, then Ffollansbye told me how he found Sartoris alone and quite drunk one evening in a restaurant. Ffollansbye told how he had already heard that Kit and Spoomer had gone off somewhere together about two days ago.

He said that Sartoris was sitting there, drinking himself blind, waiting for Spoomer to come in. He said he finally got Sartoris into a cab and sent him to the aerodrome. It was about dawn then, and Sartoris got a captain's tunic from someone's kit, and a woman's garter from someone else's kit, perhaps his own, and pinned the garter on the tunic like a barnacle ribbon. Then he went and waked a corporal who was an ex-professional boxer and with whom Sartoris would put on the gloves now and then, and made the corporal put on the tunic over his underclothes.

"Namesh Spoomer," Sartoris told the corporal. "Cap'm Spoomer"; swaying and prodding at the garter with his finger. "Dishtinguish Sheries Thighs," Sartoris said. Then he and the corporal in the borrowed tunic, with his woolen underwear showing beneath, stood there in the dawn, swinging at one another with their naked fists.

You'd think that when a war had got you into it, it would let you be. That it wouldn't play horse with you. But maybe it wasn't that. Maybe it was because the three of them, Spoomer and Sartoris and the dog, were so humorless about it. Maybe a humorless person is an unflagging challenge to them above the thunder and the alarms.

Anyway, one afternoon — it was in the spring, just before Cambrai fell — I went up to the Camel aerodrome to see the gunnery sergeant, and I saw Sartoris for the first time. They had given the squadron to Spoomer and the dog the year before, and the first thing they did was to send Sartoris out to it.

The afternoon patrol was out, and the rest of the people were gone too, to Amiens I suppose, and the aerodrome was deserted. The sergeant and I were sitting on two empty petrol tins in the hangar door when I saw a man thrust his head out the door of the officers' mess and look both ways along the line, his air a little furtive and very alert. It was Sartoris, and he was looking for the dog.

"The dog?" I said. Then the sergeant told me, this too composite, out of his own observation and the observation of the entire enlisted personnel exchanged and compared over the mess tables or over pipes at night: that terrible and omniscient inquisition of those in an inferior station.

When Spoomer left the aerodrome, he would lock the dog up somewhere. He would have to lock it up in a different place each time, because Sartoris would hunt until he found it, and let it out.

It appeared to be a dog of intelligence, because if Spoomer had only gone down to Wing or somewhere on business, the dog would stay at home, spending the interval grubbing in the refuse bin behind the men's mess, to which it was addicted in preference to that of the officers. But if Spoomer had gone to Amiens, the dog would depart up

the Amiens road immediately on being freed, to return later with Spoomer in the squadron car.

“Why does Mr. Sartoris let it out?” I said. “Do you mean that Captain Spoomer objects to the dog eating kitchen refuse?”

But the sergeant was not listening. His head was craned around the door, and we watched Sartoris. He had emerged from the mess and he now approached the hangar at the end of the line, his air still alert, still purposeful. He entered the hangar. “That seems a rather childish business for a grown man,” I said.

The sergeant looked at me. Then he quit looking at me. “He wants to know if Captain Spoomer went to Amiens or not.”

After a while I said, “Oh. A young lady. Is that it?”

He didn’t look at me. “You might call her a young lady. I suppose they have young ladies in this country.”

I thought about that for a while. Sartoris emerged from the first hangar and entered the second one. “I wonder if there are any young ladies any more anywhere,” I said.

“Perhaps you are right, sir. War is hard on women.”

“What about this one?” I said. “Who is she?”

He told me. They ran an estaminet, a “bit of a pub” he called it — an old harridan of a woman, and the girl. A little place on a back street, where officers did not go. Perhaps that was why Sartoris and Spoomer created such a furore in that circle.

I gathered from the sergeant that the contest between the squadron commander and one of his greenest cubs was the object of general interest and the subject of the warmest conversation and even betting among the enlisted element of the whole sector of French and British troops. “Being officers and all,” he said.

“They frightened the soldiers off, did they?” I said. “Is that it?” The sergeant did not look at me. “Were there many soldiers to frighten off?”

“I suppose you know these young women,” the sergeant said. “This war and all.”

And that’s who the girl was. What the girl was. The sergeant said that the girl and the old woman were not even related. He told me how Sartoris bought her things — clothes, and jewelry; the sort of jewelry you might buy in Amiens, probably. Or maybe in a canteen, because Sartoris was not much more than twenty.

I saw some of the letters which he wrote to his great-aunt back home, letters that a third-form lad in Harrow could have written, perhaps bettered. It seemed that Spoomer did not make the girl any presents. “Maybe because he is a captain,” the sergeant said. “Or maybe because of them ribbons he dont have to.”

“Maybe so,” I said.

And that was the girl, the girl who, in the centime jewelry which Sartoris gave her, dispensed beer and wine to British and French privates in an Amiens back street, and because of whom Spoomer used his rank to betray Sartoris with her by keeping Sartoris at the aerodrome on special duties, locking up the dog to hide from Sartoris what he had done. And Sartoris taking what revenge he could by letting out the dog in order that it might grub in the refuse of plebeian food.

He entered the hangar in which the sergeant and I were: a tall lad with pale eyes in a face that could be either merry or surly, and quite humorless. He looked at me. “Hello,” he said.

“Hello,” I said. The sergeant made to get up.

“Carry on,” Sartoris said. “I dont want anything.” He went on to the rear of the hangar. It was cluttered with petrol drums and empty packing cases and such. He was utterly without self-consciousness, utterly without shame of his childish business.

The dog was in one of the packing cases. It emerged, huge, of a napped, tawny color; Ffollansbye had told me that, save for Spoomer's wing and his Mons Star and his D.S.O., he and the dog looked alike. It quitted the hangar without haste, giving me a brief, sidelong glance. We watched it go on and disappear around the corner of the men's mess. Then Sartoris turned and went back to the officers' mess and also disappeared.

Shortly afterward, the afternoon patrol came in. While the machines were coming up to the line, the squadron car turned onto the aerodrome and stopped at the officers' mess and Spoomer got out. "Watch him," the sergeant said. "He'll try to do it like he wasn't watching himself, noticing himself."

He came along the hangars, big, hulking, in green golf stockings. He did not see me until he was turning into the hangar. He paused; it was almost imperceptible, then he entered, giving me a brief, sidelong glance. "How do," he said in a high, fretful, level voice. The sergeant had risen. I had never seen Spoomer even glance toward the rear, toward the overturned packing case, yet he had stopped. "Sergeant," he said.

"Sir," the sergeant said.

"Sergeant," Spoomer said. "Have those timers come up yet?"

"Yes, sir. They came up two weeks ago. They're all in use now, sir."

"Quite so. Quite so." He turned; again he gave me a brief, sidelong glance, and went on down the hangar line, not fast. He disappeared.

"Watch him, now," the sergeant said. "He wont go over there until he thinks we have quit watching him."

We watched. Then he came into sight again, crossing toward the men's mess, walking briskly now. He disappeared beyond the corner. A moment later he emerged, dragging the huge, inert beast by the scruff of its neck. "You mustn't eat that stuff," he said. "That's for soldiers."

IV

I didn't know at the time what happened next. Sartoris didn't tell me until later, afterward. Perhaps up to that time he had not anything more than instinct and circumstantial evidence to tell him that he was being betrayed: evidence such as being given by Spoomer some duty not in his province at all and which would keep him on the aerodrome for the afternoon, then finding and freeing the hidden dog and watching it vanish up the Amiens road at its clumsy hand gallop.

But something happened. All I could learn at the time was, that one afternoon Sartoris found the dog and watched it depart for Amiens. Then he violated his orders, borrowed a motor bike and went to Amiens too.

Two hours later the dog returned and repaired to the kitchen door of the men's mess, and a short time after that, Sartoris himself returned on a lorry (they were already evacuating Amiens) laden with household effects and driven by a French soldier in a peasant's smock. The motor bike was on the lorry too, pretty well beyond repair. The soldier told how Sartoris had driven the bike full speed into a ditch, trying to run down the dog.

But nobody knew just what had happened, at the time. But I had imagined the scene, before he told me. I imagined him there, in that bit of a room full of French soldiers, and the old woman (she could read pips, no doubt; ribbons, anyway) barring him from the door to the living quarters.

I can imagine him, furious, baffled, inarticulate (he knew no French) standing head and shoulders above the French people whom he could not understand and that he believed were laughing at him.

"That was it," he told me. "Laughing at me behind their faces, about a woman. Me knowing that he was up there, and them knowing I knew that if I busted in and dragged him out and bashed his head off, I'd not

only be cashiered, I'd be clinked for life for having infringed the articles of alliance by invading foreign property without warrant or something."

Then he returned to the aerodrome and met the dog on the road and tried to run it down. The dog came on home, and Spoomer returned, and he was just dragging it by the scruff of the neck from the refuse bin behind the men's mess, when the afternoon patrol came in.

They had gone out six and come back five, and the leader jumped down from his machine before it had stopped rolling. He had a bloody rag about his right hand and he ran toward Spoomer stooped above the passive and stiff-legged dog. "By gad," he said, "they have got Cambrai!"

Spoomer did not look up. "Who have?"

"Jerry has, by gad!"

"Well, by gad," Spoomer said. "Come along, now. I have told you about that muck."

A man like that is invulnerable. When Sartoris and I talked for the first time, I started to tell him that. But then I learned that Sartoris was invincible too. We talked, that first time. "I tried to get him to let me teach him to fly a Camel," Sartoris said. "I will teach him for nothing. I will tear out the cockpit and rig the duals myself, for nothing."

"Why?" I said. "What for?"

"Or anything. I will let him choose it. He can take an S.E. if he wants to, and I will take an Ak.W. or even a Fee and I will run him clean out of the sky in four minutes. I will run him so far into the ground he will have to stand on his head to swallow."

We talked twice: that first time, and the last time. "Well, you did better than that," I said the last time we talked.

He had hardly any teeth left then, and he couldn't talk very well, who had never been able to talk much, who lived and died with maybe two hundred words. "Better than what?" he said.

“You said before that you would run him clean out of the sky. You didn’t do that; you did better: you have run him clean off the continent of Europe.”

V

I think I said that he was invulnerable too. November 11, 1918, couldn’t kill him, couldn’t leave him growing a little thicker each year behind an office desk, with what had once been hard and lean and immediate grown a little dim, a little baffled, and betrayed, because by that day he had been dead almost six months.

He was killed in July, but we talked that second time, that other time before that. This last time was a week after the patrol had come in and told that Cambrai had fallen, a week after we heard the shells falling in Amiens. He told me about it himself, through his missing teeth.

The whole squadron went out together. He left his flight as soon as they reached the broken front, and flew back to Amiens with a bottle of brandy in his overall leg. Amiens was being evacuated, the roads full of lorries and carts of household goods, and ambulances from the Base hospital, and the city and its immediate territory was now interdict.

He landed in a short meadow. He said there was an old woman working in a field beyond the canal (he said she was still there when he returned an hour later, stooping stubbornly among the green rows, beneath the moist spring air shaken at slow and monstrous intervals by the sound of shells falling in the city) and a light ambulance stopped halfway in the roadside ditch.

He went to the ambulance. The engine was still running. The driver was a young man in spectacles.

He looked like a student, and he was dead drunk, half sprawled out of the cab. Sartoris had a drink from his own bottle and tried to rouse the driver, in vain. Then he had another drink (I imagine that he was pretty well along himself by then; he told me how only that morning, when Spoomer had gone off in the car and he had found the dog and

watched it take the Amiens road, how he had tried to get the operations officer to let him off patrol and how the operations officer had told him that La Fayette awaited him on the Santerre plateau) and tumbled the driver back into the ambulance and drove on to Amiens himself.

He said the French corporal was drinking from a bottle in a doorway when he passed and stopped the ambulance before the estaminet. The door was locked. He finished his brandy bottle and he broke the estaminet door in by diving at it as they do in American football. Then he was inside.

The place was empty, the benches and tables overturned and the shelves empty of bottles, and he said that at first he could not remember what it was he had come for, so he thought it must be a drink. He found a bottle of wine under the bar and broke the neck off against the edge of the bar, and he told how he stood there, looking at himself in the mirror behind the bar, trying to think what it was he had come to do. "I looked pretty wild," he said.

Then the first shell fell. I can imagine it: he standing there in that quiet, peaceful, redolent, devastated room, with the bashed-in door and the musing and waiting city beyond it, and then that slow, unhurried, reverberant sound coming down upon the thick air of spring like a hand laid without haste on the damp silence; he told how dust or sand or plaster, something, sifted somewhere, whispering down in a faint hiss, and how a big, lean cat came up over the bar without a sound and flowed down to the floor and vanished like dirty quicksilver.

Then he saw the closed door behind the bar and he remembered what he had come for. He went around the bar. He expected this door to be locked too, and he grasped the knob and heaved back with all his might. It wasn't locked. He said it came back into the shelves with a sound like a pistol, jerking him off his feet. "My head hit the bar," he said. "Maybe I was a little groggy after that."

Anyway, he was holding himself up in the door, looking down at the old woman. She was sitting on the bottom stair, her apron over her head, rocking back and forth. He said that the apron was quite clean, moving back and forth like a piston, and he standing in the door, drooling a little at the mouth. "Madame," he said. The old woman rocked back and forth.

He propped himself carefully and leaned and touched her shoulder. "Toinette," he said. "Où est-elle, 'Toinette?" That was probably all the French he knew; that, with vin added to his 196 English words, composed his vocabulary.

Again the old woman did not answer. She rocked back and forth like a wound-up toy. He stepped carefully over her and mounted the stair. There was a second door at the head of the stair. He stopped before it, listening. His throat filled with a hot, salty liquid. He spat it, drooling; his throat filled again. This door was unlocked also. He entered the room quietly.

It contained a table, on which lay a khaki cap with the bronze crest of the Flying Corps, and as he stood drooling in the door, the dog heaved up from the corner furthest from the window, and while he and the dog looked at one another above the cap, the sound of the second shell came dull and monstrous into the room, stirring the limp curtains before the window.

As he circled the table the dog moved too, keeping the table between them, watching him. He was trying to move quietly, yet he struck the table in passing (perhaps while watching the dog) and he told how, when he reached the opposite door and stood beside it, holding his breath, drooling, he could hear the silence in the next room. Then a voice said:

"Maman?"

He kicked the locked door, then he dived at it, again like the American football, and through it, door and all. The girl screamed. But he said he never saw her, never saw anyone. He just heard her scream as he went

into the room on all-fours. It was a bedroom; one corner was filled by a huge wardrobe with double doors.

The wardrobe was closed, and the room appeared to be empty. He didn't go to the wardrobe. He said he just stood there on his hands and knees, drooling, like a cow, listening to the dying reverberation of the third shell, watching the curtains on the window blow once into the room as though to a breath.

He got up. "I was still groggy," he said. "And I guess that brandy and the wine had kind of got joggled up inside me." I daresay they had. There was a chair. Upon it lay a pair of slacks, neatly folded, a tunic with an observer's wing and two ribbons, an ordnance belt. While he stood looking down at the chair, the fourth shell came.

He gathered up the garments. The chair toppled over and he kicked it aside and lurched along the wall to the broken door and entered the first room, taking the cap from the table as he passed. The dog was gone.

He entered the passage. The old woman still sat on the bottom step, her apron over her head, rocking back and forth. He stood at the top of the stair, holding himself up, waiting to spit. Then beneath him a voice said: "Que faites-vous en haut?"

He looked down upon the raised moustached face of the French corporal whom he had passed in the street drinking from the bottle. For a time they looked at one another. Then the corporal said, "Descendez," making a peremptory gesture with his arm. Claspings the garments in one hand, Sartoris put the other hand on the stair rail and vaulted over it.

The corporal jumped aside. Sartoris plunged past him and into the wall, banging his head hollowly again. As he got to his feet and turned, the corporal kicked at him, striking for his pelvis. The corporal kicked him again.

Sartoris knocked the corporal down, where he lay on his back in his clumsy overcoat, tugging at his pocket and snapping his boot at Sartoris' groin. Then the corporal freed his hand and shot point-blank at Sartoris with a short-barreled pistol.

Sartoris sprang upon him before he could shoot again, trampling the pistol hand. He said he could feel the man's bones through his boot, and that the corporal began to scream like a woman behind his brigand's moustaches.

That was what made it funny, Sartoris said: that noise coming out of a pair of moustaches like a Gilbert and Sullivan pirate. So he said he stopped it by holding the corporal up with one hand and hitting him on the chin with the other until the noise stopped. He said that the old woman had not ceased to rock back and forth under her starched apron. "Like she might have dressed up to get ready to be sacked and ravaged," he said.

He gathered up the garments. In the bar he had another pull at the bottle, looking at himself in the mirror. Then he saw that he was bleeding at the mouth. He said he didn't know if he had bitten his tongue when he jumped over the stair rail or if he had cut his mouth with the broken bottle neck. He emptied the bottle and flung it to the floor.

He said he didn't know then what he intended to do. He said he didn't realize it even when he had dragged the unconscious driver out of the ambulance and was dressing him in Captain Spoomer's slacks and cap and ribboned tunic, and tumbled him back into the ambulance.

He remembered seeing a dusty inkstand behind the bar. He sought and found in his overalls a bit of paper, a bill rendered him eight months ago by a London tailor, and, leaning on the bar, drooling and spitting, he printed on the back of the bill Captain Spoomer's name and squadron number and aerodrome, and put the paper into the tunic pocket beneath the ribbons and the wing, and drove back to where he had left his aeroplane.

There was an Anzac battalion resting in the ditch beside the road. He left the ambulance and the sleeping passenger with them, and four of them helped him to start his engine, and held the wings for his tight take-off.

Then he was back at the front. He said he did not remember getting there at all; he said the last thing he remembered was the old woman in the field beneath him, then suddenly he was in a barrage, low enough to feel the concussed air between the ground and his wings, and to distinguish the faces of troops. He said he didn't know what troops they were, theirs or ours, but that he strafed them anyway.

"Because I never heard of a man on the ground getting hurt by an aeroplane," he said. "Yes, I did; I'll take that back. There was a farmer back in Canada plowing in the middle of a thousand-acre field, and a cadet crashed on top of him."

Then he returned home. They told at the aerodrome that he flew between two hangars in a slow roll, so that they could see the valve stems in both wheels, and that he ran his wheels across the aerodrome and took off again. The gunnery sergeant told me that he climbed vertically until he stalled, and that he held the Camel mushing on its back. "He was watching the dog," the sergeant said.

"It had been home about an hour and it was behind the men's mess, grubbing in the refuse bin." He said that Sartoris dived at the dog and then looped, making two turns of an upward spin, coming off on one wing and still upside down. Then the sergeant said that he probably did not set back the air valve, because at a hundred feet the engine conked, and upside down Sartoris cut the tops out of the only two poplar trees they had left.

The sergeant said they ran then, toward the gout of dust and the mess of wire and wood. Before they reached it, he said the dog came trotting out from behind the men's mess. He said the dog got there first and that they saw Sartoris on his hands and knees, vomiting, while the dog

watched him. Then the dog approached and sniffed tentatively at the vomit and Sartoris got up and balanced himself and kicked it, weakly but with savage and earnest purpose.

VI

The ambulance driver, in Spoomer's uniform, was sent back to the aerodrome by the Anzac major. They put him to bed, where he was still sleeping when the brigadier and the Wing Commander came up that afternoon. They were still there when an ox cart turned onto the aerodrome and stopped, with, sitting on a wire cage containing chickens, Spoomer in a woman's skirt and a knitted shawl. The next day Spoomer returned to England. We learned that he was to be a temporary colonel at ground school.

"The dog will like that, anyway," I said.

"The dog?" Sartoris said.

"The food will be better there," I said.

"Oh," Sartoris said. They had reduced him to second lieutenant, for dereliction of duty by entering a forbidden zone with government property and leaving it unguarded, and he had been transferred to another squadron, to the one which even the B.E. people called the Laundry.

This was the day before he left. He had no front teeth at all now, and he apologized for the way he talked, who had never really talked with an intact mouth. "The joke is," he said, "it's another Camel squadron. I have to laugh."

"Laugh?" I said.

"Oh, I can ride them. I can sit there with the gun out and keep the wings level now and then. But I can't fly Camels. You have to land a Camel by setting the air valve and flying it into the ground. Then you count ten, and if you have not crashed, you level off. And if you can get up and walk away, you have made a good landing. And if they can use the crate again, you are an ace. But that's not the joke."

“What’s not?”

“The Camels. The joke is, this is a night-flying squadron. I suppose they are all in town and they don’t get back until after dark to fly them. They’re sending me to a night-flying squadron. That’s why I have to laugh.”

“I would laugh,” I said. “Isn’t there something you can do about it?”

“Sure. Just keep that air valve set right and not crash. Not wash out and have those wing flares explode. I’ve got that beat. I’ll just stay up all night, pop the flares and sit down after sunrise. That’s why I have to laugh, see. I can’t fly Camels in the daytime, even. And they don’t know it.”

“Well, anyway, you did better than you promised,” I said. “You have run him off the continent of Europe.”

“Yes,” he said. “I sure have to laugh. He’s got to go back to England, where all the men are gone. All those women, and not a man between fourteen and eighty to help him. I have to laugh.”

VII

When July came, I was still in the Wing office, still trying to get used to my mechanical leg by sitting at a table equipped with a paper cutter, a pot of glue and one of red ink, and laden with the meager, thin, here soiled and here clean envelopes that came down in periodical batches — envelopes addressed to cities and hamlets and sometimes less than hamlets, about England — when one day I came upon two addressed to the same person in America: a letter and a parcel. I took the letter first. It had neither location nor date:

Dear Aunt Jenny

Yes I got the socks Elnora knitted. They fit all right because I gave them to my batman he said they fit all right. Yes I like it here better than where I was these are good guys here except these damn Camels. I am all right about going to church we don’t always have church.

Sometimes they have it for the ak emmas because I reckon a ak emma needs it but usually I am pretty busy Sunday but I go enough I reckon. Tell Elnora much oblige for the socks they fit all right but maybe you better not tell her I gave them away. Tell Isom and the other niggers hello and Grandfather tell him I got the money all right but war is expensive as hell.

Johnny.

But then, the Malbroucks dont make the wars, anyway. I suppose it takes too many words to make a war. Maybe that's why.

The package was addressed like the letter, to Mrs Virginia Sartoris, Jefferson, Mississippi, U.S.A., and I thought, What in the world would it ever occur to him to send to her? I could not imagine him choosing a gift for a woman in a foreign country; choosing one of those trifles which some men can choose with a kind of infallible tact.

His would be, if he thought to send anything at all, a section of crank shaft or maybe a handful of wrist pins salvaged from a Hun crash. So I opened the package. Then I sat there, looking at the contents.

It contained an addressed envelope, a few dog-eared papers, a wrist watch whose strap was stiff with some dark dried liquid, a pair of goggles without any glass in one lens, a silver belt buckle with a monogram. That was all.

So I didn't need to read the letter. I didn't have to look at the contents of the package, but I wanted to. I didn't want to read the letter, but I had to.

— Squadron, R.A.F., France.

5th July, 1918.

Dear Madam,

I have to tell you that your son was killed on yesterday morning. He was shot down while in pursuit of duty over the enemy lines. Not due to carelessness or lack of skill. He was a good man. The E.A. outnumbered

your son and had more height and speed which is our misfortune but no fault of the Government which would give us better machines if they had them which is no satisfaction to you.

Another of ours, Mr R. Kyerling 1000 feet below could not get up there since your son spent much time in the hangar and had a new engine in his machine last week. Your son took fire in ten seconds Mr Kyerling said and jumped from your son's machine since he was side slipping safely until the E.A. shot away his stabiliser and controls and he began to spin.

I am very sad to send you these sad tidings though it may be a comfort to you that he was buried by a minister. His other effects sent you later.

I am, madam, and etc.

C. Kaye Major

He was buried in the cemetery just north of Saint Vaast since we hope it will not be shelled again since we hope it will be over soon by our padre since there were just two Camels and seven E.A. and so it was on our side by that time.

C. K. Mjr.

The other papers were letters, from his great-aunt, not many and not long. I don't know why he had kept them. But he had. Maybe he just forgot them, like he had the bill from the London tailor he had found in his overalls in Amiens that day in the spring.

. . . let those foreign women alone. I lived through a war myself and I know how women act in war, even with Yankees. And a good-for-nothing hellion like you . . .

And this:

. . . we think it's about time you came home. Your grandfather is getting old, and it don't look like they will ever get done fighting over there. So you come on home. The Yankees are in it now. Let them fight if they want to. It's their war. It's not ours.

And that's all. That's it. The courage, the recklessness, call it what you will, is the flash, the instant of sublimation; then flick! the old darkness again. That's why. It's too strong for steady diet. And if it were a steady diet, it would not be a flash, a glare.

And so, being momentary, it can be preserved and prolonged only on paper: a picture, a few written words that any match, a minute and harmless flame that any child can engender, can obliterate in an instant. A one-inch sliver of sulphur-tipped wood is longer than memory or grief; a flame no larger than a sixpence is fiercer than courage or despair.

The End

V. THE MIDDLE GROUND

Wash, William Faulkner

Wash

SUTPEN STOOD ABOVE the pallet bed on which the mother and child lay. Between the shrunken planking of the wall the early sunlight fell in long pencil strokes, breaking upon his straddled legs and upon the riding whip in his hand, and lay across the still shape of the mother, who lay looking up at him from still, inscrutable, sullen eyes, the child at her side wrapped in a piece of dingy though clean cloth. Behind them an old Negro woman squatted beside the rough hearth where a meager fire smoldered.

“Well, Milly,” Sutpen said, “too bad you’re not a mare. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable.”

Still the girl on the pallet did not move. She merely continued to look up at him without expression, with a young, sullen, inscrutable face still pale from recent travail. Sutpen moved, bringing into the splintered pencils of sunlight the face of a man of sixty. He said quietly to the squatting Negress, "Griselda foaled this morning."

"Horse or mare?" the Negress said.

"A horse. A damned fine colt. . . . What's this?" He indicated the pallet with the hand which held the whip.

"That un's a mare, I reckon."

"Hah," Sutpen said. "A damned fine colt. Going to be the spit and image of old Rob Roy when I rode him North in '61. Do you remember?"

"Yes, Marster."

"Hah." He glanced back towards the pallet. None could have said if the girl still watched him or not. Again his whip hand indicated the pallet. "Do whatever they need with whatever we've got to do it with." He went out, passing out the crazy doorway and stepping down into the rank weeds (there yet leaned rusting against the corner of the porch the scythe which Wash had borrowed from him three months ago to cut them with) where his horse waited, where Wash stood holding the reins.

When Colonel Sutpen rode away to fight the Yankees, Wash did not go. "I'm looking after the Kernel's place and niggers," he would tell all who asked him and some who had not asked — a gaunt, malaria-ridden man with pale, questioning eyes, who looked about thirty-five, though it was known that he had not only a daughter but an eight-year-old granddaughter as well. This was a lie, as most of them — the few remaining men between eighteen and fifty — to whom he told it, knew, though there were some who believed that he himself really believed it, though even these believed that he had better sense than to put it to the test with Mrs. Sutpen or the Sutpen slaves.

Knew better or was just too lazy and shiftless to try it, they said, knowing that his sole connection with the Sutpen plantation lay in the fact that for years now Colonel Sutpen had allowed him to squat in a

crazy shack on a slough in the river bottom on the Sutpen place, which Sutpen had built for a fishing lodge in his bachelor days and which had since fallen in dilapidation from disuse, so that now it looked like an aged or sick wild beast crawled terrifically there to drink in the act of dying.

The Sutpen slaves themselves heard of his statement. They laughed. It was not the first time they had laughed at him, calling him white trash behind his back. They began to ask him themselves, in groups, meeting him in the faint road which led up from the slough and the old fish camp, "Why ain't you at de war, white man?"

Pausing, he would look about the ring of black faces and white eyes and teeth behind which derision lurked. "Because I got a daughter and family to keep," he said. "Git out of my road, niggers."

"Niggers?" they repeated; "niggers?" laughing now. "Who him, calling us niggers?"

"Yes," he said. "I ain't got no niggers to look after my folks if I was gone."

"Nor nothing else but dat shack down yon dat Cunnel wouldn't let none of us live in."

Now he cursed them; sometimes he rushed at them, snatching up a stick from the ground while they scattered before him, yet seeming to surround him still with that black laughing, derisive, evasive, inescapable, leaving him panting and impotent and raging. Once it happened in the very back yard of the big house itself.

This was after bitter news had come down from the Tennessee mountains and from Vicksburg, and Sherman had passed through the plantation, and most of the Negroes had followed him.

Almost everything else had gone with the Federal troops, and Mrs. Sutpen had sent word to Wash that he could have the scuppernongs ripening in the arbor in the back yard. This time it was a house servant, one of the few Negroes who remained; this time the Negress had to

retreat up the kitchen steps, where she turned. "Stop right dar, white man. Stop right whar you is. You ain't never crossed dese steps whilst Cunnel here, and you ain't ghy' do hit now."

This was true. But there was this of a kind of pride: he had never tried to enter the big house, even though he believed that if he had, Sutpen would have received him, permitted him. "But I ain't going to give no black nigger the chance to tell me I can't go nowhere," he said to himself.

"I ain't even going to give Kernel the chance to have to cuss a nigger on my account." This, though he and Sutpen had spent more than one afternoon together on those rare Sundays when there would be no company in the house. Perhaps his mind knew that it was because Sutpen had nothing else to do, being a man who could not bear his own company.

Yet the fact remained that the two of them would spend whole afternoons in the scuppernong arbor, Sutpen in the hammock and Wash squatting against a post, a pail of cistern water between them, taking drink for drink from the same demijohn.

Meanwhile on weekdays he would see the fine figure of the man — they were the same age almost to a day, though neither of them (perhaps because Wash had a grandchild while Sutpen's son was a youth in school) ever thought of himself as being so — on the fine figure of the black stallion, galloping about the plantation. For that moment his heart would be quiet and proud.

It would seem to him that that world in which Negroes, whom the Bible told him had been created and cursed by God to be brute and vassal to all men of white skin, were better found and housed and even clothed than he and his; that world in which he sensed always about him mocking echoes of black laughter was but a dream and an illusion, and that the actual world was this one across which his own lonely apotheosis seemed to gallop on the black thoroughbred, thinking how the Book said also that all men were created in the image of God and

hence all men made the same image in God's eyes at least; so that he could say, as though speaking of himself, "A fine proud man. If God Himself was to come down and ride the natural earth, that's what He would aim to look like."

Sutpen returned in 1865, on the black stallion. He seemed to have aged ten years. His son had been killed in action the same winter in which his wife had died. He returned with his citation for gallantry from the hand of General Lee to a ruined plantation, where for a year now his daughter had subsisted partially on the meager bounty of the man to whom fifteen years ago he had granted permission to live in that tumbledown fishing camp whose very existence he had at the time forgotten. Wash was there to meet him, unchanged: still gaunt, still ageless, with his pale, questioning gaze, his air diffident, a little servile, a little familiar. "Well, Kernel," Wash said, "they kilt us but they ain't whupped us yit, air they?"

That was the tenor of their conversation for the next five years. It was inferior whisky which they drank now together from a stoneware jug, and it was not in the scuppernong arbor. It was in the rear of the little store which Sutpen managed to set up on the highroad: a frame shelved room where, with Wash for clerk and porter, he dispensed kerosene and staple foodstuffs and stale gaudy candy and cheap beads and ribbons to Negroes or poor whites of Wash's own kind, who came afoot or on gaunt mules to haggle tediously for dimes and quarters with a man who at one time could gallop (the black stallion was still alive; the stable in which his jealous get lived was in better repair than the house where the master himself lived) for ten miles across his own fertile land and who had led troops gallantly in battle; until Sutpen in fury would empty the store, close and lock the doors from the inside. Then he and Wash would repair to the rear and the jug.

But the talk would not be quiet now, as when Sutpen lay in the hammock, delivering an arrogant monologue while Wash squatted guffawing against his post. They both sat now, though Sutpen had the single chair while Wash used whatever box or keg was handy, and even this for just a little while, because soon Sutpen would reach that stage

of impotent and furious undefeat in which he would rise, swaying and plunging, and declare again that he would take his pistol and the black stallion and ride single-handed into Washington and kill Lincoln, dead now, and Sherman, now a private citizen. "Kill them!" he would shout. "Shoot them down like the dogs they are—"

"Sho, Kernel; sho, Kernel," Wash would say, catching Sutpen as he fell. Then he would commandeer the first passing wagon or, lacking that, he would walk the mile to the nearest neighbor and borrow one and return and carry Sutpen home. He entered the house now.

He had been doing so for a long time, taking Sutpen home in whatever borrowed wagon might be, talking him into locomotion with cajoling murmurs as though he were a horse, a stallion himself. The daughter would meet them and hold open the door without a word.

He would carry his burden through the once white formal entrance, surmounted by a fanlight imported piece by piece from Europe and with a board now nailed over a missing pane, across a velvet carpet from which all nap was now gone, and up a formal stairs, now but a fading ghost of bare boards between two strips of fading paint, and into the bedroom. It would be dusk by now, and he would let his burden sprawl onto the bed and undress it and then he would sit quietly in a chair beside. After a time the daughter would come to the door. "We're all right now," he would tell her. "Don't you worry none, Miss Judith."

Then it would become dark, and after a while he would lie down on the floor beside the bed, though not to sleep, because after a time — sometimes before midnight — the man on the bed would stir and groan and then speak. "Wash?"

"Hyer I am, Kernel. You go back to sleep. We ain't whupped yit, air we? Me and you kin do hit."

Even then he had already seen the ribbon about his granddaughter's waist. She was now fifteen, already mature, after the early way of her kind. He knew where the ribbon came from; he had been seeing it and

its kind daily for three years, even if she had lied about where she got it, which she did not, at once bold, sullen, and fearful. "Sho now," he said. "Ef Kernel wants to give hit to you, I hope you minded to thank him."

His heart was quiet, even when he saw the dress, watching her secret, defiant, frightened face when she told him that Miss Judith, the daughter, had helped her to make it. But he was quite grave when he approached Sutpen after they closed the store that afternoon, following the other to the rear.

"Get the jug," Sutpen directed.

"Wait," Wash said. "Not yit for a minute."

Neither did Sutpen deny the dress. "What about it?" he said.

But Wash met his arrogant stare; he spoke quietly. "I've knowed you for going on twenty years. I ain't never yit denied to do what you told me to do. And I'm a man nigh sixty. And she ain't nothing but a fifteen-year-old gal."

"Meaning that I'd harm a girl? I, a man as old as you are?"

"If you was ara other man, I'd say you was as old as me. And old or no old, I wouldn't let her keep that dress nor nothing else that come from your hand. But you are different."

"How different?" But Wash merely looked at him with his pale, questioning, sober eyes. "So that's why you are afraid of me?"

Now Wash's gaze no longer questioned. It was tranquil, serene. "I ain't afraid. Because you air brave. It ain't that you were a brave man at one minute or day of your life and got a paper to show hit from General Lee. But you air brave, the same as you air alive and breathing. That's where hit's different. Hit don't need no ticket from nobody to tell me that. And I know that whatever you handle or tech, whether hit's a regiment of men or a ignorant gal or just a hound dog, that you will make hit right."

Now it was Sutpen who looked away, turning suddenly, brusquely. "Get the jug," he said sharply.
"Sho, Kernel," Wash said.

So on that Sunday dawn two years later, having watched the Negro midwife, which he had walked three miles to fetch, enter the crazy door beyond which his granddaughter lay wailing, his heart was still quiet though concerned. He knew what they had been saying — the Negroes in cabins about the land, the white men who loafed all day long about the store, watching quietly the three of them: Sutpen, himself, his granddaughter with her air of brazen and shrinking defiance as her condition became daily more and more obvious, like three actors that came and went upon a stage. "I know what they say to one another," he thought. "I can almost hear them: Wash Jones has fixed old Sutpen at last. Hit taken him twenty years, but he has done hit at last."

It would be dawn after a while, though not yet. From the house, where the lamp shone dim beyond the warped doorframe, his granddaughter's voice came steadily as though run by a clock, while thinking went slowly and terrifically, fumbling, involved somehow with a sound of galloping hooves, until there broke suddenly free in mid-gallop the fine proud figure of the man on the fine proud stallion, galloping; and then that at which thinking fumbled, broke free too and quite clear, not in justification nor even explanation, but as the apotheosis, lonely, explicable, beyond all fouling by human touch: "He is bigger than all them Yankees that kilt his son and his wife and taken his niggers and ruined his land, bigger than this hyer durn country that he fit for and that has denied him into keeping a little country store; bigger than the denial which hit helt to his lips like the bitter cup in the Book.

And how could I have lived this nigh to him for twenty years without being teched and changed by him? Maybe I ain't as big as him and maybe I ain't done none of the galloping. But at least I done been drug along. Me and him kin do hit, if so be he will show me what he aims for me to do."

Then it was dawn. Suddenly he could see the house, and the old Negress in the door looking at him. Then he realized that his granddaughter's voice had ceased. "It's a girl," the Negress said. "You can go tell him if you want to." She re-entered the house.

"A girl," he repeated; "a girl"; in astonishment, hearing the galloping hooves, seeing the proud galloping figure emerge again. He seemed to watch it pass, galloping through avatars which marked the accumulation of years, time, to the climax where it galloped beneath a brandished saber and a shot-torn flag rushing down a sky in color like thunderous sulphur, thinking for the first time in his life that perhaps Sutpen was an old man like himself. "Gittin a gal," he thought in that astonishment; then he thought with the pleased surprise of a child: "Yes, sir. Be dawg if I ain't lived to be a great-grandpaw after all."

He entered the house. He moved clumsily, on tiptoe, as if he no longer lived there, as if the infant which had just drawn breath and cried in light had dispossessed him, be it of his own blood too though it might. But even above the pallet he could see little save the blur of his granddaughter's exhausted face. Then the Negress squatting at the hearth spoke, "You better gawn tell him if you going to. Hit's daylight now."

But this was not necessary. He had no more than turned the corner of the porch where the scythe leaned which he had borrowed three months ago to clear away the weeds through which he walked, when Sutpen himself rode up on the old stallion. He did not wonder how Sutpen had got the word. He took it for granted that this was what had brought the other out at this hour on Sunday morning, and he stood while the other dismounted, and he took the reins from Sutpen's hand, an expression on his gaunt face almost imbecile with a kind of weary triumph, saying, "Hit's a gal, Kernel.

I be dawg if you ain't as old as I am—" until Sutpen passed him and entered the house. He stood there with the reins in his hand and heard

Sutpen cross the floor to the pallet. He heard what Sutpen said, and something seemed to stop dead in him before going on.

The sun was now up, the swift sun of Mississippi latitudes, and it seemed to him that he stood beneath a strange sky, in a strange scene, familiar only as things are familiar in dreams, like the dreams of falling to one who has never climbed.

“I kain’t have heard what I thought I heard,” he thought quietly. “I know I kain’t.” Yet the voice, the familiar voice which had said the words was still speaking, talking now to the old Negress about a colt foaled that morning. “That’s why he was up so early,” he thought. “That was hit. Hit ain’t me and mine. Hit ain’t even his that got him outen bed.”

Sutpen emerged. He descended into the weeds, moving with that heavy deliberation which would have been haste when he was younger. He had not yet looked full at Wash. He said, “Dicey will stay and tend to her. You better—” Then he seemed to see Wash facing him and paused. “What?” he said.

“You said—” To his own ears Wash’s voice sounded flat and ducklike, like a deaf man’s. “You said if she was a mare, you could give her a good stall in the stable.”

“Well?” Sutpen said. His eyes widened and narrowed, almost like a man’s fists flexing and shutting, as Wash began to advance towards him, stooping a little. Very astonishment kept Sutpen still for the moment, watching that man whom in twenty years he had no more known to make any motion save at command than he had the horse which he rode. Again his eyes narrowed and widened; without moving he seemed to rear suddenly upright. “Stand back,” he said suddenly and sharply. “Don’t you touch me.”

“I’m going to tech you, Kernel,” Wash said in that flat, quiet, almost soft voice, advancing.

Sutpen raised the hand which held the riding whip; the old Negress peered around the crazy door with her black gargoyle face of a worn gnome. "Stand back, Wash," Sutpen said. Then he struck. The old Negress leaped down into the weeds with the agility of a goat and fled. Sutpen slashed Wash again across the face with the whip, striking him to his knees. When Wash rose and advanced once more he held in his hands the scythe which he had borrowed from Sutpen three months ago and which Sutpen would never need again.

When he reentered the house his granddaughter stirred on the pallet bed and called his name fretfully. "What was that?" she said.

"What was what, honey?"

"That ere racket out there."

"Twarn't nothing," he said gently. He knelt and touched her hot forehead clumsily. "Do you want ara thing?"

"I want a sup of water," she said querulously. "I been laying here wanting a sup of water a long time, but don't nobody care enough to pay me no mind."

"Sho now," he said soothingly. He rose stiffly and fetched the dipper of water and raised her head to drink and laid her back and watched her turn to the child with an absolutely stonelike face. But a moment later he saw that she was crying quietly. "Now, now," he said, "I wouldn't do that. Old Dicey says hit's a right fine gal. Hit's all right now. Hit's all over now. Hit ain't no need to cry now."

But she continued to cry quietly, almost sullenly, and he rose again and stood uncomfortably above the pallet for a time, thinking as he had thought when his own wife lay so and then his daughter in turn:

"Women. Hit's a mystry to me. They seem to want em, and yit when they git em they cry about hit. Hit's a mystry to me. To ara man." Then he moved away and drew a chair up to the window and sat down.

Through all that long, bright, sunny forenoon he sat at the window, waiting. Now and then he rose and tiptoed to the pallet. But his granddaughter slept now, her face sullen and calm and weary, the child

in the crook of her arm. Then he returned to the chair and sat again, waiting, wondering why it took them so long, until he remembered that it was Sunday.

He was sitting there at mid-afternoon when a half-grown white boy came around the corner of the house upon the body and gave a choked cry and looked up and glared for a mesmerized instant at Wash in the window before he turned and fled. Then Wash rose and tiptoed again to the pallet.

The granddaughter was awake now, wakened perhaps by the boy's cry without hearing it. "Milly," he said, "air you hungry?" She didn't answer, turning her face away. He built up the fire on the hearth and cooked the food which he had brought home the day before: fatback it was, and cold corn pone; he poured water into the stale coffee pot and heated it. But she would not eat when he carried the plate to her, so he ate himself, quietly, alone, and left the dishes as they were and returned to the window.

Now he seemed to sense, feel, the men who would be gathering with horses and guns and dogs — the curious, and the vengeful: men of Sutpen's own kind, who had made the company about Sutpen's table in the time when Wash himself had yet to approach nearer to the house than the scuppernong arbor — men who had also shown the lesser ones how to fight in battle, who maybe also had signed papers from the generals saying that they were among the first of the brave; who had also galloped in the old days arrogant and proud on the fine horses across the fine plantations — symbols also of admiration and hope; instruments too of despair and grief.

That was whom they would expect him to run from. It seemed to him that he had no more to run from than he had to run to. If he ran, he would merely be fleeing one set of bragging and evil shadows for another just like them, since they were all of a kind throughout all the earth which he knew, and he was old, too old to flee far even if he were to flee. He could never escape them, no matter how much or how far he ran: a man going on sixty could not run that far.

Not far enough to escape beyond the boundaries of earth where such men lived, set the order and the rule of living. It seemed to him that he now saw for the first time, after five years, how it was that Yankees or any other living armies had managed to whip them: the gallant, the proud, the brave; the acknowledged and chosen best among them all to carry courage and honor and pride. Maybe if he had gone to the war with them he would have discovered them sooner. But if he had discovered them sooner, what would he have done with his life since? How could he have borne to remember for five years what his life had been before?

Now it was getting toward sunset. The child had been crying; when he went to the pallet he saw his granddaughter nursing it, her face still bemused, sullen, inscrutable. "Air you hungry yit?" he said.

"I don't want nothing."

"You ought to eat."

This time she did not answer at all, looking down at the child. He returned to his chair and found that the sun had set. "Hit kain't be much longer," he thought. He could feel them quite near now, the curious and the vengeful. He could even seem to hear what they were saying about him, the undercurrent of believing beyond the immediate fury: Old Wash Jones he come a tumble at last. He thought he had Sutpen, but Sutpen fooled him. He thought he had Kernel where he would have to marry the gal or pay up. And Kernel refused. "But I never expected that, Kernel!" he cried aloud, catching himself at the sound of his own voice, glancing quickly back to find his granddaughter watching him.

"Who you talking to now?" she said.

"Hit ain't nothing. I was just thinking and talked out before I knowed hit."

Her face was becoming indistinct again, again a sullen blur in the twilight. "I reckon so. I reckon you'll have to holler louder than that

before he'll hear you, up yonder at that house. And I reckon you'll need to do more than holler before you get him down here too."

"Sho now," he said. "Don't you worry none." But already thinking was going smoothly on: "You know I never. You know how I ain't never expected or asked nothing from ara living man but what I expected from you. And I never asked that. I didn't think hit would need. I said, I don't need to. What need has a fellow like Wash Jones to question or doubt the man that General Lee himself says in a handwrote ticket that he was brave?"

Brave," he thought. "Better if nara one of them had never rid back home in '65"; thinking Better if his kind and mine too had never drawn the breath of life on this earth. Better that all who remain of us be blasted from the face of earth than that another Wash Jones should see his whole life shredded from him and shrivel away like a dried shuck thrown onto the fire.

He ceased, became still. He heard the horses, suddenly and plainly; presently he saw the lantern and the movement of men, the glint of gun barrels, in its moving light. Yet he did not stir. It was quite dark now, and he listened to the voices and the sounds of underbrush as they surrounded the house.

The lantern itself came on; its light fell upon the quiet body in the weeds and stopped, the horses tall and shadowy. A man descended and stooped in the lantern light, above the body. He held a pistol; he rose and faced the house. "Jones," he said.

"I'm here," Wash said quietly from the window. "That you, Major?"

"Come out."

"Sho," he said quietly. "I just want to see to my granddaughter."

"We'll see to her. Come on out."

"Sho, Major. Just a minute."

"Show a light. Light your lamp."

“Sho. In just a minute.” They could hear his voice retreat into the house, though they could not see him as he went swiftly to the crack in the chimney where he kept the butcher knife: the one thing in his slovenly life and house in which he took pride, since it was razor sharp. He approached the pallet, his granddaughter’s voice:
“Who is it? Light the lamp, grandpaw.”

“Hit won’t need no light, honey. Hit won’t take but a minute,” he said, kneeling, fumbling toward her voice, whispering now. “Where air you?”
“Right here,” she said fretfully. “Where would I be? What is . . .” His hand touched her face. “What is . . . Grandpaw! Grand. . . .”
“Jones!” the sheriff said. “Come out of there!”

“In just a minute, Major,” he said. Now he rose and moved swiftly. He knew where in the dark the can of kerosene was, just as he knew that it was full, since it was not two days ago that he had filled it at the store and held it there until he got a ride home with it, since the five gallons were heavy. There were still coals on the hearth; besides, the crazy building itself was like tinder: the coals, the hearth, the walls exploding in a single blue glare.

Against it the waiting men saw him in a wild instant springing toward them with the lifted scythe before the horses reared and whirled. They checked the horses and turned them back toward the glare, yet still in wild relief against it the gaunt figure ran toward them with the lifted scythe.

“Jones!” the sheriff shouted; “stop! Stop, or I’ll shoot. Jones! Jones!” Yet still the gaunt, furious figure came on against the glare and roar of the flames. With the scythe lifted, it bore down upon them, upon the wild glaring eyes of the horses and the swinging glints of gun barrels, without any cry, any sound.

The End

Honor, William Faulkner

Honor

I

WALKED RIGHT through the anteroom without stopping. Miss West says, "He's in conference now," but I didn't stop. I didn't knock, either. They were talking and he quit and looked up across the desk at me.

"How much notice do you want to write me off?" I said.

"Write you off?" he said.

"I'm quitting," I said. "Will one day be notice enough?"

He looked at me, frog-eyed. "Isn't our car good enough for you to demonstrate?" he said. His hand lay on the desk, holding the cigar. He's got a ruby ring the size of a tail-light. "You've been with us three weeks," he says. "Not long enough to learn what that word on the door means."

He don't know it, but three weeks is pretty good; it's within two days of the record. And if three weeks is a record with him, he could have shaken hands with the new champion without moving.

The trouble is, I had never learned to do anything. You know how it was in those days, with even the college campuses full of British and French uniforms, and us all scared to death it would be over before we could get in and swank a pair of pilot's wings ourselves. And then to get in and find something that suited you right down to the ground, you see.

So after the Armistice I stayed in for a couple of years as a test pilot. That was when I took up wing-walking, to relieve the monotony. A fellow named Waldrip and I used to hide out at about three thousand on a Nine while I muscled around on top of it.

Because Army life is pretty dull in peace-time: nothing to do but lay around and lie your head off all day and play poker all night. And isolation is bad for poker. You lose on tick, and on tick you always plunge.

There was a fellow named White lost a thousand one night. He kept on losing and I wanted to quit but I was winner and he wanted to play on, plunging and losing every pot. He gave me a check and I told him it wasn't any rush, to forget it, because he had a wife out in California. Then the next night he wanted to play again. I tried to talk him out of it, but he got mad. Called me yellow. So he lost fifteen hundred more that night.

Then I said I'd cut him, double or quit, one time. He cut a queen. So I said, "Well, that beats me. I won't even cut." And I flipped his cut over and riffled them and we saw a gob of face cards and three of the aces. But he insisted, and I said, "What's the use? The percentage would be against me, even with a full deck." But he insisted. I cut the case ace.

I would have paid to lose. I offered again to tear up the checks, but he sat there and cursed me. I left him sitting at the table, in his shirt sleeves and his collar open, looking at the ace.

The next day we had the job, the speed ship. I had done everything I could. I couldn't offer him the checks again. I will let a man who is worked up curse me once. But I won't let him twice. So we had the job, the speed ship. I wouldn't touch it. He took it up five thousand feet and dived the wings off at two thousand with a full gun.

So I was out again after four years, a civ again. And while I was still drifting around — that was when I first tried selling automobiles — I met Jack, and he told me about a bird that wanted a wing-walker for his barn-storming circus. And that was how I met her.

Jack — he gave me a note to Rogers — told me about what a good pilot Rogers was, and about her, how they said she was unhappy with him. “So is your old man,” I said.

“That’s what they say,” Jack said. So when I saw Rogers and handed him the note — he was one of these lean, quiet-looking birds — I said to myself he was just the kind that would marry one of these flighty, passionate, good-looking women they used to catch during the war with a set of wings, and have her run out on him the first chance. So I felt safe. I knew she’d not have had to wait any three years for one like me.

So I expected to find one of these long, dark, snake-like women surrounded by ostrich plumes and Woolworth incense, smoking cigarettes on the divan while Rogers ran out to the corner delicatessen for sliced ham and potato salad on paper plates. But I was wrong. She came in with an apron on over one of these little pale squashy dresses, with flour or something on her arms, without apologizing or flurrying around or anything.

She said Howard — that was Rogers — had told her about me and I said, “What did he tell you?” But she just said: “I expect you’ll find this pretty dull for spending the evening, having to help cook your own dinner. I imagine you’d rather go out to dance with a couple of bottles of gin.”

“Why do you think that?” I said. “Don’t I look like I could do anything else?”

“Oh, don’t you?” she said.

We had washed the dishes then and we were sitting in the firelight, with the lights off, with her on a cushion on the floor, her back against Rogers’ knees, smoking and talking, and she said, “I know you had a dull time. Howard suggested that we go out for dinner and to dance somewhere. But I told him you’d just have to take us as we are, first as well as later. Are you sorry?”

She could look about sixteen, especially in the apron. By that time she had bought one for me to wear, and the three of us would all go back to the kitchen and cook dinner. "We don't expect you to enjoy doing this any more than we do," she said. "It's because we are so poor. We're just an aviator."

"Well, Howard can fly well enough for two people," I said. "So that's all right, too."

"When he told me you were just a flyer too, I said, 'My Lord, a wing-walker? When you were choosing a family friend,' I said, 'why didn't you choose a man we could invite to dinner a week ahead and not only count on his being there, but on his taking us out and spending his money on us?'

But he had to choose one that is as poor as we are." And once she said to Rogers: "We'll have to find Buck a girl, too. He's going to get tired of just us some day." You know how they say things like that: things that sound like they meant something until you look at them and find their eyes perfectly blank, until you wonder if they were even thinking about you, let alone talking about you.

Or maybe I'd have them out to dinner and a show. "Only I didn't mean that like it sounded," she said. "That wasn't a hint to take us out." "Did you mean that about getting me a girl too?" I said.

Then she looked at me with that wide, blank, innocent look. That was when I would take them by my place for a cocktail — Rogers didn't drink, himself — and when I would come in that night I'd find traces of powder on my dresser or maybe her handkerchief or something, and I'd go to bed with the room smelling like she was still there.

She said: "Do you want us to find you one?" But nothing more was ever said about it, and after a while, when there was a high step or any of those little things which men do for women that means touching them, she'd turn to me like it was me was her husband and not him; and one night a storm caught us downtown and we went to my place and she and Rogers slept in my bed and I slept in a chair in the sitting-room.

One evening I was dressing to go out there when the 'phone rang. It was Rogers. "I am—" he said, then something cut him off. It was like somebody had put a hand on his mouth, and I could hear them talking, murmuring: her, rather. "Well, what—" Rogers says. Then I could hear her breathing into the mouth-piece, and she said my name.

"Don't forget you're to come out to-night," she said.

"I hadn't," I said. "Or did I get the date wrong? If this is not the night—"

"You come on out," she said. "Goodbye."

When I got there he met me. His face looked like it always did, but I didn't go in. "Come on in," he said.

"Maybe I got the date wrong," I said. "So if you'll just—"

He swung the door back. "Come on in," he said.

She was lying on the divan, crying. I don't know what; something about money. "I just can't stick it," she said. "I've tried and I've tried, but I just can't stand it."

"You know what my insurance rates are," he said. "If something happened, where would you be?"

"Where am I, anyway? What tenement woman hasn't got more than I have?" She hadn't looked up, lying there on her face, with the apron twisted under her. "Why don't you quit and do something that you can get a decent insurance rate, like other men?"

"I must be getting along," I said. I didn't belong there. I just got out. He came down to the door with me, and then we were both looking back up the stairs toward the door where she was lying on her face on the couch.

"I've got a little stake," I said. "I guess because I've eaten so much of your grub I haven't had time to spend it. So if it's anything urgent. . . ." We stood there, he holding the door open. "Of course, I wouldn't try to muscle in where I don't . . ."

“I wouldn’t, if I were you,” he said. He opened the door. “See you at the field tomorrow.”

“Sure,” I said. “See you at the field.”

I didn’t see her for almost a week, didn’t hear from her. I saw him every day, and at last I said, “How’s Mildred these days?”

“She’s on a visit,” he said. “At her mother’s.”

For the next two weeks I was with him every day. When I was out on top I’d look back at his face behind the goggles. But we never mentioned her name, until one day he told me she was home again and that I was invited out to dinner that night.

It was in the afternoon. He was busy all that day hopping passengers, so I was doing nothing, just killing time waiting for evening and thinking about her, wondering some, but mostly just thinking about her being home again, breathing the same smoke and soot I was breathing, when all of a sudden I decided to go out there.

It was plain as a voice saying, “Go out there. Now, at once.” So I went. I didn’t even wait to change. She was alone, reading before the fire. It was like gasoline from a broken line blazing up around you.

III

It was funny. When I’d be out on top I’d look back at his face behind the windscreen, wondering what he knew. He must have known almost at once. Why, say, she didn’t have any discretion at all. She’d say and do things, you know: insist on sitting close to me; touching me in that different way from when you hold an umbrella or a raincoat over them, and such that any man can tell at one look, when she thought he might not see: not when she knew he couldn’t, but when she thought maybe he wouldn’t. And when I’d unfasten my belt and crawl out I’d look back at his face and wonder what he was thinking, how much he knew or suspected.

I'd go out there in the afternoon when he was busy. I'd stall around until I saw that he would be lined up for the rest of the day, then I'd give some excuse and beat it. One afternoon I was all ready to go, waiting for him to take off, when he cut the gun and leaned out and beckoned me. "Don't go off," he said. "I want to see you."

So I knew he knew then, and I waited until he made the last hop and was taking off his monkey suit in the office. He looked at me and I looked at him. "Come out to dinner," he said.

When I came in they were waiting. She had on one of those little squashy dresses and she came and put her arms around me and kissed me with him watching.

"I'm going with you," she said. "We've talked it over and have both agreed that we couldn't love one another any more after this and that this is the only sensible thing to do. Then he can find a woman he can love, a woman that's not bad like I am."

He was looking at me, and she running her hands over my face and making a little moaning sound against my neck, and me like a stone or something. Do you know what I was thinking? I wasn't thinking about her at all.

I was thinking that he and I were upstairs and me out on top and I had just found that he had thrown the stick away and was flying her on the rudder alone and that he knew that I knew the stick was gone and so it was all right now, whatever happened. So it was like a piece of wood with another piece of wood leaning against it, and she held back and looked at my face.

"Don't you love me any more?" she said, watching my face. "If you love me, say so. I have told him everything."

I wanted to be out of there. I wanted to run. I wasn't scared. It was because it was all kind of hot and dirty. I wanted to be away from her a little while, for Rogers and me to be out where it was cold and hard and quiet, to settle things.

“What do you want to do?” I said. “Will you give her a divorce?” She was watching my face very closely. Then she let me go and she ran to the mantel and put her face into the bend of her arm, crying. “You were lying to me,” she said. “You didn’t mean what you said. Oh God, what have I done?”

You know how it is. Like there is a right time for everything. Like nobody is anything in himself: like a woman, even when you love her, is a woman to you just a part of the time and the rest of the time she is just a person that don’t look at things the same way a man has learned to.

Don’t have the same ideas about what is decent and what is not. So I went over and stood with my arms about her, thinking, “God damn it, if you’ll just keep out of this for a little while! We’re both trying our best to take care of you, so it won’t hurt you.”

Because I loved her, you see. Nothing can marry two people closer than a mutual sin in the world’s eyes. And he had had his chance. If it had been me that knew her first and married her and he had been me, I would have had my chance. But it was him that had had it, so when she said, “Then say what you tell me when we are alone. I tell you I have told him everything,” I said.

“Everything? Have you told him everything?” He was watching us. “Has she told you everything?” I said.

“It doesn’t matter,” he said. “Do you want her?” Then before I could speak, he said: “Do you love her? Will you be good to her?”

His face was gray-looking, like when you see a man again after a long time and you say, “Good God, is that Rogers?” When I finally got away the divorce was all settled.

IV

So the next morning when I reached the field, Harris, the man who owned the flying circus, told me about the special job; I had forgotten

it, I suppose. Anyway, he said he had told me about it. Finally I said I wouldn't fly with Rogers.

"Why not?" Harris said.

"Ask him," I said.

"If he agrees to fly you, will you go up?"

So I said yes. And then Rogers came out; he said that he would fly me. And so I believed that he had known about the job all the time and had laid for me, sucked me in. We waited until Harris went out. "So this is why you were so mealy-mouthed last night," I said. I cursed him. "You've got me now, haven't you?"

"Take the stick yourself," he said. "I'll do your trick."

"Have you ever done any work like this before?"

"No. But I can, as long as you fly her properly."

I cursed him. "You feel good," I said. "You've got me. Come on; grin on the outside of your face. Come on!"

He turned and went to the crate and began to get into the front seat. I went and caught his shoulder and jerked him back. We looked at one another.

"I won't hit you now," he said, "if that's what you want. Wait till we get down again."

"No," I said. "Because I want to hit back once."

We looked at one another; Harris was watching us from the office.

"All right," Rogers said. "Let me have your shoes, will you? I haven't got any rubber soles out here."

"Take your seat," I said. "What the hell does it matter? I guess I'd do the same thing in your place."

The job was over an amusement park, a carnival. There must have been twenty-five thousand of them down there, like colored ants. I took chances that day that I had never taken, chances you can't see from the ground. But every time the ship was right under me, balancing me

against side pressure and all, like he and I were using the same mind. I thought he was playing with me, you see. I'd look back at his face, yelling at him: "Come on; now you've got me. Where are your guts?"

I was a little crazy, I guess. Anyway, when I think of the two of us up there, yelling back and forth at one another, and all the little bugs watching and waiting for the big show, the loop. He could hear me, but I couldn't hear him; I could just see his lips moving. "Come on," I'd yell; "shake the wing a little; I'll go off easy, see?"

I was a little crazy. You know how it is, how you want to rush into something you know is going to happen, no matter what it is. I guess lovers and suicides both know that feeling. I'd yell back at him: "You want it to look all right, eh? And to lose me off the level ship wouldn't look so good, would it?"

All right," I yelled, "let's go." I went back to the center section and cast the rope loose where it loops around the forward jury struts and I got set against it and looked back at him and gave him the signal. I was a little crazy. I was still yelling at him; I don't know what I was yelling. I thought maybe I had already fallen off and was dead and didn't know it.

The wires began to whine and I was looking straight down at the ground and the little colored dots. Then the wires were whistling proper and he gunned her and the ground began to slide back under the nose. I waited until it was gone and the horizon had slid back under too and I couldn't see anything but sky. Then I let go one end of the rope and jerked it out and threw it back at his head and held my arms out as she zoomed into the loop.

I wasn't trying to kill myself. I wasn't thinking about myself. I was thinking about him. Trying to show him up like he had shown me up. Give him something he must fail at like he had given me something I failed at. I was trying to break him.

We were over the loop before he lost me. The ground had come back, with the little colored dots, and then the pressure went off my soles and I was falling. I made a half somersault and was just going into the first turn of a flat spin, with my face to the sky, when something banged me in the back.

It knocked the wind out of me, and for a second I must have been completely out. Then I opened my eyes and I was lying on my back on the top wing, with my head hanging over the back edge.

I was too far down the slope of the camber to bend my knees over the leading edge, and I could feel the wing creeping under me. I didn't dare move. I knew that if I tried to sit up against the slip stream, I would go off backward.

I could see by the tail and the horizon that we were upside now, in a shallow dive, and I could see Rogers standing up in his cockpit, unfastening his belt, and I could turn my head a little more and see that when I went off I would miss the fuselage altogether, or maybe hit it with my shoulder.

So I lay there with the wing creeping under me, feeling my shoulders beginning to hang over space, counting my backbones as they crept over the edge, watching Rogers crawl forward along the fuselage toward the front seat. I watched him for a long time, inching himself along against the pressure, his trouser-legs whipping. After a while I saw his legs slide into the front cockpit and then I felt his hands on me.

There was a fellow in my squadron. I didn't like him and he hated my guts. All right. One day he got me out of a tight jam when I was caught ten miles over the lines with a blowing valve. When we were down he said, "Don't think I was just digging you out. I was getting a Hun, and I got him." He cursed me, with his goggles cocked up and his hands on his hips, cursing me like he was smiling. But that's all right.

You're each on a Camel; if you go out, that's too bad; if he goes out, it's just too bad. Not like when you're on the center section and he's at the

stick, and just by stalling her for a second or ruddering her a little at the top of the loop.

But I was young, then. Good Lord, I used to be young! I remember Armistice night in '18, and me chasing all over Amiens with a lousy prisoner we had brought down that morning on an Albatross, trying to keep the frog M.P.'s from getting him. He was a good guy, and those damned infantrymen wanting to stick him in a pen full of S. O. S. and ginned-up cooks and such. I felt sorry for the bastard, being so far from home and licked and all. I was sure young.

We were all young. I remember an Indian, a prince, an Oxford man, with his turban and his trick major's pips, that said we were all dead that fought in the war. "You will not know it," he said, "but you are all dead. With this difference: those out there" — jerking his arm toward where the front was— "do not care, and you do not know it."

And something else he said, about breathing for a long time yet, some kind of walking funerals; catafalques and tombs and epitaphs of men that died on the fourth of August, 1914, without knowing that they had died, he said. He was a card, queer. A good little guy, too.

But I wasn't quite dead while I was lying on the top wing of that Standard and counting my backbones as they crawled over the edge like a string of ants, until Rogers grabbed me. And when he came to the station that night to say goodbye, he brought me a letter from her, the first I ever had.

The handwriting looked exactly like her; I could almost smell the scent she used and feel her hands touching me. I tore it in two without opening it and threw the pieces down. But he picked them up and gave them back to me. "Don't be a fool," he said.

And that's all. They've got a kid now, a boy of six. Rogers wrote me; about six months afterward the letter caught up with me. I'm his godfather. Funny to have a godfather that's never seen you and that you'll never see, isn't it?

V

So I said to Reinhardt: "Will one day be enough notice?"

"One minute will be enough," he said. He pressed the buzzer. Miss West came in. She is a good kid. Now and then, when I'd just have to blow off some steam, she and I would have lunch at the dairy place across the street, and I could tell her about them, about the women. They are the worst.

You know; you get a call for a demonstration, and there'll be a whole car full of them waiting on the porch and we'd pile in and all go shopping. Me dodging around in the traffic, hunting a place to park, and her saying, "John insisted that I try this car. But what I tell him, it's foolish to buy a car that is as difficult to find parking space for as this one appears to be."

And them watching the back of my head with that bright, hard, suspicious way. God knows what they thought we had; maybe one that would fold up like a deck chair and lean against a fire plug. But hell, I couldn't sell hair straightener to the widow of a nigger railroad accident.

So Miss West comes in; she is a good kid, only somebody told her I had had three or four other jobs in a year without sticking, and that I used to be a war pilot, and she'd keep on after me about why I quit flying and why I didn't go back to it, now that crates were more general, since I wasn't much good at selling automobiles or at anything else, like women will.

You know: urgent and sympathetic, and you can't shut them up like you could a man; she came in and Reinhardt says, "We are letting Mr. Monaghan go. Send him to the cashier."

"Don't bother," I said. "Keep it to buy yourself a hoop with."

The End

Dr. Martino, William Faulkner

Dr. Martino

HUBERT JARROD MET Louise King at a Christmas house party in Saint Louis. He had stopped there on his way home to Oklahoma to oblige, with his aura of oil wells and Yale, the sister of a classmate. Or so he told himself, or so he perhaps believed.

He had planned to stop off at Saint Louis two days and he stayed out the full week, going on to Tulsa overnight to spend Christmas Day with his mother and then returning, "to play around a little more with my swamp angel," he told himself.

He thought about her quite a lot on the return train — a thin, tense, dark girl. "That to come out of Mississippi," he thought. "Because she's got it: a kid born and bred in a Mississippi swamp."

He did not mean sex appeal. He could not have been fooled by that alone, who had been three years now at New Haven, belonging to the right clubs and all and with money to spend. And besides, Louise was a little on the epicene.

What he meant was a quality of which he was not yet consciously aware: a beyond-looking, a passionate sense for and belief in immanent change to which the rhinoceroslike sufficiency of his Yale and oil-well veneer was a little impervious at first. All he remarked at first was the expectation, the seeking, which he immediately took to himself.

Apparently he was not wrong. He saw her first across the dinner-table. They had not yet been introduced, yet ten minutes after they left the table she had spoken to him, and ten minutes after that they had slipped out of the house and were in a taxi, and she had supplied the address.

He could not have told himself how it happened, for all his practice, his experience in surreptitiousness. Perhaps he was too busy looking at her; perhaps he was just beginning to be aware that the beyond-looking, the tense expectation, was also beyond him — his youth, his looks, the oil wells and Yale. Because the address she had given was not toward any lights or music apparently, and she sitting beside him, furred and shapeless, her breath vaporizing faster than if she had been trying to bring to life a dead cigarette. He watched the dark houses, the dark, mean streets. “Where are we going?” he said.

She didn’t answer, didn’t look at him, sitting a little forward on the seat. “Mamma didn’t want to come,” she said.

“Your mother?”

“She’s with me. Back there at the party. You haven’t met her yet.”

“Oh. So that’s what you are slipping away from. I flattered myself. I thought I was the reason.” She was sitting forward, small, tense, watching the dark houses: a district half dwellings and half small shops. “Your mother won’t let him come to call on you?”

She didn’t answer, but leaned forward. Suddenly she tapped on the glass. “Here, driver!” she said. “Right here.” The cab stopped. She turned to face Jarrod, who sat back in his corner, muffled, his face cold. “I’m sorry. I know it’s a rotten trick. But I had to.”

“Not at all,” Jarrod said. “Don’t mention it.”

“I know it’s rotten. But I just had to. If you just understood.”

“Sure,” Jarrod said. “Do you want me to come back and get you? I’d better not go back to the party alone.”

“You come in with me.”

“Come in?”

“Yes. It’ll be all right. I know you can’t understand. But it’ll be all right. You come in too.”

He looked at her face. “I believe you really mean it,” he said. “I guess not. But I won’t let you down. You set a time, and I’ll come back.”

“Don’t you trust me?”

“Why should I? It’s no business of mine. I never saw you before to-night. I’m glad to oblige you. Too bad I am leaving to-morrow. But I guess you can find somebody else to use. You go on in; I’ll come back for you.”

He left her there and returned in two hours. She must have been waiting just inside the door, because the cab had hardly stopped before the door opened and she ran down the steps and sprang into the cab before he could dismount. “Thank you,” she said. “Thank you. You were kind. You were so kind.”

When the cab stopped beneath the porte-cochère of the house from which music now came, neither of them moved at once. Neither of them made the first move at all, yet a moment later they kissed. Her mouth was still, cold. “I like you,” she said. “I do like you.”

Before the week was out Jarrod offered to serve her again so, but she refused, quietly. “Why?” he said. “Don’t you want to see him again?” But she wouldn’t say, and he had met Mrs. King by that time and he said to himself, “The old girl is after me, anyway.”

He saw that at once; he took that also as the meed due his oil wells and his Yale nimbus, since three years at New Haven, leading no classes and winning no football games, had done nothing to dispossess him of the belief that he was the natural prey of all mothers of daughters.

But he didn’t flee, not even after he found, a few evenings later, Louise again unaccountably absent, and knew that she had gone, using someone else for the stalking horse, to that quiet house in the dingy street. “Well, I’m done,” he said to himself. “I’m through now.” But still he didn’t flee, perhaps because she had used someone else this time. “She cares that much, anyway,” he said to himself.

When he returned to New Haven he had Louise's promise to come to the spring prom. He knew now that Mrs. King would come too. He didn't mind that; one day he suddenly realized that he was glad.

Then he knew that it was because he too knew, believed, that Louise needed looking after; that he had already surrendered unconditionally to one woman of them, he who had never once mentioned love to himself, to any woman. He remembered that quality of beyond-looking and that dark, dingy house in Saint Louis, and he thought, "Well, we have her.

We have the old woman." And one day he believed that he had found the reason if not the answer. It was in class, in psychology, and he found himself sitting bolt upright, looking at the instructor. The instructor was talking about women, about young girls in particular, about that strange, mysterious phase in which they live for a while.

"A blind spot, like that which racing aviators enter when making a fast turn. When what they see is neither good nor evil, and so what they do is likely to be either one. Probably more likely to be evil, since the very evilness of evil stems from its own fact, while good is an absence of fact. A time, an hour, in which they themselves are victims of that by means of which they victimize."

That night he sat before his fire for some time, not studying, not doing anything. "We've got to be married soon," he said. "Soon."

Mrs. King and Louise arrived for the prom. Mrs. King was a gray woman, with a cold, severe face, not harsh, but watchful, alert. It was as though Jarrod saw Louise, too, for the first time. Until then he had not been aware that he was conscious of the beyond-looking quality. It was only now that he saw it by realizing how it had become tenser, as though it were now both dread and desire; as though with the approach of summer she were approaching a climax, a crisis. So he thought that she was ill.

“Maybe we ought to be married right away,” he said to Mrs. King. “I don’t want a degree, anyway.” They were allies now, not yet antagonists, though he had not told her of the two Saint Louis expeditions, the one he knew of and the one he suspected. It was as though he did not need to tell her. It was as though he knew that she knew; that she knew he knew she knew.

“Yes,” she said. “At once.”

But that was as far as it got, though when Louise and Mrs. King left New Haven, Louise had his ring. But it was not on her hand, and on her face was that strained, secret, beyond-looking expression which he now knew was beyond him too, and the effigy and shape which the oil wells and Yale had made. “Till July, then,” he said.

“Yes,” she said. “I’ll write. I’ll write you when to come.”

And that was all. He went back to his clubs, his classes; in psychology especially he listened. “It seems I’m going to need psychology,” he thought, thinking of the dark, small house in Saint Louis, the blank, dark door through which, running, she had disappeared. That was it: a man he had never seen, never heard of, shut up in a little dingy house on a back street on Christmas eve. He thought, fretfully, “And me young, with money, a Yale man. And I don’t even know his name.”

Once a week he wrote to Louise; perhaps twice a month he received replies — brief, cold notes mailed always at a different place — resorts and hotels — until mid-June, within a week of Commencement and his degree. Then he received a wire. It was from Mrs. King.

It said Come at once and the location was Cranston’s Wells, Mississippi. It was a town he had never heard of.

That was Friday; thirty minutes later his roommate came in and found him packing. “Going to town?” the roommate said.

“Yes,” Jarrod said.

“I’ll go with you. I need a little relaxation myself, before facing the cheering throngs at the Dean’s altar.”

“No,” Jarrod said. “This is business.”

“Sure,” the roommate said. “I know a business woman in New York, myself. There’s more than one in that town.”

“No,” Jarrod said. “Not this time.”

“Beano,” the roommate said.

The place was a resort owned by a neat, small, gray spinster who had inherited it, and some of the guests as well, from her father thirty years ago — a rambling frame hotel and a housed spring where old men with pouched eyes and parchment skin and old women dropsical with good living gathered from the neighboring Alabama and Mississippi towns to drink the iron-impregnated waters.

This was the place where Louise had been spending her summers since she was born; and from the veranda of the hotel where the idle old women with their idle magazines and embroidery and their bright shawls had been watching each summer the comedy of which he was just learning, he could see the tips of the crepe myrtle copse hiding the bench on which the man whom he had come to fear, and whose face he had not even seen, had been sitting all day long for three months each summer for more than fifteen years.

So he stood beside the neat, gray proprietress on the top step in the early sunlight, while the old women went to and fro between house and spring, watching him with covert, secret, bright, curious looks. “Watching Louise’s young man compete with a dead man and a horse,” Jarrod thought.

But his face did not show this. It showed nothing at all, not even a great deal of intelligence as, tall, erect, in flannels and a tweed jacket in the Mississippi June, where the other men wore linen when they wore coats at all, he talked with the proprietress about the man whose face he had not seen and whose name he had just learned.

“It’s his heart,” the proprietress said to Jarrod. “He has to be careful. He had to give up his practice and everything. He hasn’t any people and he

has just enough money to come down here every summer and spend the summer sitting on his bench; we call it Doctor Martino's bench.

Each summer I think it will be the last time; that we shan't see him again. But each May I get the message from him, the reservation. And do you know what I think? I think that it is Louise King that keeps him alive. And that Alvina King is a fool."

"How a fool?" Jarrod said.

The proprietress was watching him — this was the morning after his arrival; looking down at her he thought at first, "She is wondering how much I have heard, how much they have told me." Then he thought, "No. It's because she stays busy. Not like them, those others with their magazines. She has to stay too busy keeping them fed to have learned who I am, or to have been thinking all this time what the others have been thinking."

She was watching him. "How long have you known Louise?"

"Not long. I met her at a dance at school."

"Oh. Well, I think that the Lord has taken pity on Doctor Martino and He is letting him use Louise's heart, somehow. That's what I think. And you can laugh if you want to."

"I'm not laughing," Jarrod said. "Tell me about him."

She told him, watching his face, her air bright, birdlike, telling him about how the man had appeared one June, in his crumpled linen and panama hat, and about his eyes. ("They looked like shoe-buttons. And when he moved it was as slow as if he had to keep on telling himself, even after he had started moving, 'Go on, now; keep on moving, now.'") And about how he signed the book in script almost too small to read: Jules Martino, Saint Louis, Missouri.

And how after that year he came back each June, to sit all day long on the bench in the crepe myrtle copse, where the old Negro porter would fetch him his mail: the two medical journals, the Saint Louis paper, and the two letters from Louise King — the one in June saying that she

would arrive next week, and the one in late August saying that she had reached home.

But the proprietress didn't tell how she would walk a little way down the path three or four times a day to see if he were all right, and he not aware of it; and watching her while she talked, Jarrod thought, "What rivers has he made you swim, I wonder?"

"He had been coming here for three years," the proprietress said, "without knowing anybody, without seeming to want to know anybody, before even I found out about his heart. But he kept on coming (I forgot to say that Alvina King was already spending the summer here, right after Louise was born) and then I noticed how he would always be sitting where he could watch Louise playing, and so I thought that maybe he had lost his child. That was before he told me that he had never married and he didn't have any family at all.

I thought that was what attracted him to Louise. And so I would watch him while he watched Louise growing up. I would see them talking, and him watching her year after year, and so after a while I said to myself. 'He wants to be married. He's waiting for Louise to grow up.' That's what I thought then." The proprietress was not looking at Jarrod now. She laughed a little. "My Lord, I've thought a lot of foolishness in my time."

"I don't know that that was so foolish," Jarrod said.

"Maybe not. Louise would make anybody a wife to be proud of. And him being all alone, without anybody to look after him when he got old." The proprietress was beyond fifty herself. "I reckon I've passed the time when I believe it's important whether women get married or not.

I reckon, running this place single-handed this way, I've come to believe it ain't very important what anybody does, as long as they are fed good and have a comfortable bed." She ceased. For a time she seemed to

muse upon the shade-dappled park, the old women clotting within the marquee above the spring.

“Did he make her do things, then?” Jarrod said.

“You’ve been listening to Alvina King,” the proprietress said. “He never made her do anything. How could he? He never left that bench. He never leaves it. He would just sit there and watch her playing, until she began to get too old to play in the dirt.

Then they would talk, sitting on the bench there. How could he make her do things, even if he had wanted to?”

“I think you are right,” Jarrod said. “Tell me about when she swam the river.”

“Oh, yes. She was always afraid of water. But one summer she learned to swim, learned by herself, in the pool. He wasn’t even there. Nor at the river either. He didn’t know about that until we knew it. He just told her not to be afraid, ever. And what’s the harm in that, will you tell me?”

“None,” Jarrod said.

“No,” the proprietress said, as though she were not listening, had not heard him. “So she came in and told me, and I said, ‘With the snakes and all, weren’t you afraid?’ And she said:

“‘Yes. I was afraid. That’s why I did it.’

“‘Why you did it?’ I said. And she said:

“‘When you are afraid to do something you know that you are alive. But when you are afraid to do what you are afraid of you are dead.’

“‘I know where you got that,’ I said. ‘I’ll be bound he didn’t swim the river too.’ And she said:

“‘He didn’t have to. Every time he wakes up in the morning he does what I had to swim the river to do. This is what I got for doing it: see?’ And she took something on a string out of the front of her dress and showed it to me. It was a rabbit made out of metal or something, about an inch tall, like you buy in the ten-cent stores. He had given it to her.

“‘What does that mean?’ I said.

“‘That’s my being afraid,’ she said. ‘A rabbit: don’t you see? But it’s brass now; the shape of being afraid, in brass that nothing can hurt. As long as I keep it I am not even afraid of being afraid.’

“‘And if you are afraid,’ I said, ‘then what?’

“‘Then I’ll give it back to him,’ she said. And what’s the harm in that, pray tell me? even though Alvina King always has been a fool. Because Louise came back in about an hour. She had been crying. She had the rabbit in her hand. ‘Will you keep this for me?’ she said. ‘Don’t let anybody have it except me. Not anybody. Will you promise?’

“‘And I promised, and I put the rabbit away for her. She asked me for it just before they left. That was when Alvina said they were not coming back the next summer. ‘This foolishness is going to end,’ she said. ‘He will get her killed; he is a menace.’

“‘And, sure enough, next summer they didn’t come. I heard that Louise was sick, and I knew why. I knew that Alvina had driven her into sickness, into bed. But Doctor Jules came in June. ‘Louise has been right sick,’ I told him.

“‘Yes,’ he said; ‘I know.’ So I thought he had heard, that she had written to him. But then I thought how she must have been too sick to write, and that that fool mother of hers anyway . . .” The proprietress was watching Jarrod. “‘Because she wouldn’t have to write him.’”

“‘Wouldn’t have to?’”

“‘He knew she was sick. He knew it. She didn’t have to write him. Now you’ll laugh.’”

“‘I’m not laughing. How did he know?’”

“‘He knew. Because I knew he knew; and so when he didn’t go on back to Saint Louis, I knew that she would come. And so in August they did come. Louise had grown a lot taller, thinner, and that afternoon I saw

them standing together for the first time. She was almost as tall as he was. That was when I first saw that Louise was a woman. And now Alvina worrying about that horse that Louise says she's going to ride."

"It's already killed one man," Jarrod said.

"Automobiles have killed more than that. But you ride in an automobile, yourself. You came in one. It never hurt her when she swam that river, did it?"

"But this is different. How do you know it won't hurt her?"

"I just know."

"How know?"

"You go out there where you can see that bench. Don't bother him; just go and look at him. Then you'll know too."

"Well, I'd want a little more assurance than that," Jarrod said.

He had returned to Mrs. King. With Louise he had had one interview, brief, violent, bitter. That was the night before; to-day she had disappeared. "Yet he is still sitting there on that bench," Jarrod thought. "She's not even with him. They don't even seem to have to be together: he can tell all the way from Mississippi to Saint Louis when she is sick. Well, I know who's in the blind spot now."

Mrs. King was in her room. "It seems that my worst competitor is that horse," Jarrod said.

"Can't you see he is making her ride it for the same reason he made her swim that snake-filled river? To show that he can, to humiliate me?"

"What can I do?" Jarrod said. "I tried to talk to her last night. But you saw where I got."

"If I were a man, I shouldn't have to ask what to do. If I saw the girl I was engaged to being ruined, ruined by a man, any man, and a man I never saw before and don't even know who he is — old or not old; heart or no heart . . ."

"I'll talk to her again."

“Talk?” Mrs. King said. “Talk? Do you think I sent you that message to hurry down here just to talk to her?”

“You wait, now,” Jarrod said. “It’ll be all right. I’ll attend to this.”

He had to do a good bit of waiting, himself. It was nearly noon when Louise entered the empty lobby where he sat. He rose. “Well?”

They looked at each other. “Well?”

“Are you still going to ride that horse this afternoon?” Jarrod asked.

“I thought we settled this last night. But you’re still meddling. I didn’t send for you to come down here.”

“But I’m here. I never thought, though, that I was being sent for to compete with a horse.” She watched him, her eyes hard. “With worse than a horse. With a damned dead man. A man that’s been dead for twenty years; he says so himself, they tell me. And he ought to know, being a doctor, a heart specialist.

I suppose you keep him alive by scaring him — like strychnine, Florence Nightingale.” She watched him, her face quite still, quite cold. “I’m not jealous,” he went on. “Not of that bird. But when I see him making you ride that horse that has already killed . . .” He looked down at her cold face. “Don’t you want to marry me, Louise?”

She ceased to look at him. “It’s because we are young yet. We have so much time, all the rest of time. And maybe next year even, this very day next year, with everything pretty and warm and green, and he will be . .

.

You don’t understand. I didn’t at first, when he first told me how it was to live day after day with a match box full of dynamite caps in your breast pocket. Then he told me one day, when I was big enough to understand, how there is nothing in the world but living, being alive, knowing you are alive. And to be afraid is to know you are alive, but to do what you are afraid of, then you live.

He says it's better even to be afraid than to be dead. He told me all that while he was still afraid, before he gave up the being afraid and he knew he was alive without living. And now he has even given that up, and now he is just afraid. So what can I do?"

"Yes. And I can wait, because I haven't got a match box of dynamite caps in my shirt. Or a box of conjuring powder, either."

"I don't expect you to see. I didn't send for you. I didn't want to get you mixed up in it."

"You never thought of that when you took my ring. Besides, you had already got me mixed up in it, the first night I ever saw you. You never minded then. So now I know a lot I didn't know before. And what does he think about that ring, by the way?"

She didn't answer. She was not looking at him; neither was her face averted. After a time he said, "I see. He doesn't know about the ring. You never showed it to him." Still she didn't answer, looking neither at him nor away. "All right," he said "I'll give you one more chance."

She looked at him. "One more chance for what?" Then she said, "Oh. The ring. You want it back." He watched her, erect, expressionless, while she drew from inside her dress a slender cord on which was suspended the ring and a second object which he recognized in the flicking movement which broke the cord, to be the tiny metal rabbit of which the proprietress had told him.

Then it was gone, and her hand flicked again, and something struck him a hard, stinging blow on the cheek. She was already running toward the stairs. After a time he stooped and picked up the ring from the floor.

He looked about the lobby. "They're all down at the spring," he thought, holding the ring on his palm. "That's what people come here for: to drink water."

They were there, clotting in the marquee above the well, with their bright shawls and magazines.

As he approached, Mrs. King came quickly out of the group, carrying one of the stained tumblers in her hand. "Yes?" she said. "Yes?" Jarrod extended his hand on which the ring lay. Mrs. King looked down at the ring, her face cold, quiet, outraged. "Sometimes I wonder if she can be my daughter. What will you do now?"

Jarrod, too, looked down at the ring, his face also cold, still. "At first I thought I just had to compete with a horse," he said. "But it seems there is more going on here than I knew of, than I was told of."

"Fiddlesticks," Mrs. King said. "Have you been listening to that fool Lily Cranston, to these other old fools here?"

"Not to learn any more than everybody else seems to have known all the time. But then, I'm only the man she was engaged to marry." He looked down at the ring. "What do you think I had better do now?"

"If you're a man that has to stop to ask advice from a woman in a case like this, then you'd better take the advice and take your ring and go on back to Nebraska or Kansas or wherever it is."

"Oklahoma," Jarrod said sullenly. He closed his hand on the ring. "He'll be on that bench," he said.

"Why shouldn't he?" Mrs. King said. "He has no one to fear here." But Jarrod was already moving away. "You go on to Louise," he said. "I'll attend to this."

Mrs. King watched him go on down the path. Then she turned herself and flung the stained tumbler into an oleander bush and went to the hotel, walking fast, and mounted the stairs. Louise was in her room, dressing. "So you gave Hubert back his ring," Mrs. King said.

"That man will be pleased now. You will have no secret from him now, if the ring ever was a secret. Since you don't seem to have any private affairs where he is concerned; don't appear to desire any—"

"Stop," Louise said. "You can't talk to me like that."

"Ah. He would be proud of that, too, to have heard that from his pupil."

“He wouldn’t let me down. But you let me down. He wouldn’t let me down.” She stood thin and taut, her hands clenched at her sides. Suddenly she began to cry, her face lifted, the tears rolling down her cheeks. “I worry and I worry and I don’t know what to do. And now you let me down, my own mother.”

Mrs. King sat on the bed. Louise stood in her underthings, the garments she had removed scattered here and there, on the bed and on the chairs. On the table beside the bed lay the little metal rabbit; Mrs. King looked at it for a moment. “Don’t you want to marry Hubert?” she said.

“Didn’t I promise him, you and him both? Didn’t I take his ring? But you won’t let me alone. He won’t give me time, a chance. And now you let me down, too. Everybody lets me down except Doctor Jules.”

Mrs. King watched her, cold, immobile. “I believe that fool Lily Cranston is right. I believe that man has some criminal power over you. I just thank God he has not used it for anything except to try to make you kill yourself, make a fool of yourself. Not yet, that is—”

“Stop,” Louise said; “stop!” She continued to say “Stop. Stop,” even when Mrs. King walked up and touched her. “But you let me down! And now Hubert has let me down. He told you about that horse after he had promised me he wouldn’t.”

“I knew that already. That’s why I sent for him. I could do nothing with you. Besides, it’s anybody’s business to keep you from riding it.”

“You can’t keep me. You may keep me locked up in this room to-day, but you can’t always. Because you are older than I am. You’ll have to die first, even if it takes a hundred years. And I’ll come back and ride that horse if it takes a thousand years.”

“Maybe I won’t be here then,” Mrs. King said. “But neither will he. I can outlive him. And I can keep you locked up in this room for one day, anyway.”

Fifteen minutes later the ancient porter knocked at the locked door. Mrs. King went and opened it. "Mr. Jarrod wants to see you downstairs," the porter said. She locked the door behind her. Jarrod was in the lobby. It was empty. "Yes?" Mrs. King said. "Yes?"

"He said that if Louise would tell him herself she wants to marry me. Send him a sign."

"A sign?" They both spoke quietly, a little tensely, though quite calm, quite grave.

"Yes. I showed him the ring, and him sitting there on that bench, in that suit looking like he had been sleeping in it all summer, and his eyes watching me like he didn't believe she had ever seen the ring. Then he said, 'Ah. You have the ring. Your proof seems to be in the hands of the wrong party.

If you and Louise are engaged, she should have the ring. Or am I just old fashioned?' And me standing there like a fool and him looking at the ring like it might have come from Woolworth's. He never even offered to touch it."

"You showed him the ring? The ring? You fool. What—"

"Yes. I don't know. It was just the way he sat there, the way he makes her do things, I guess. It was like he was laughing at me, like he knew all the time there was nothing I could do, nothing I could think of doing about it he had not already thought about; that he knew he could always get between us before — in time. . . ."

"Then what? What kind of a sign did he say?"

"He didn't say. He just said a sign, from her hand to his. That he could believe, since my having the ring had exploded my proof. And then I caught my hand just before it hit him — and him sitting there. He didn't

move; he just sat there with his eyes closed and the sweat popping out on his face. And then he opened his eyes and said, 'Now, strike me.'

"Wait," Mrs. King said. Jarrod had not moved. Mrs. King gazed across the empty lobby, tapping her teeth with her fingernail. "Proof," she said. "A sign." She moved. "You wait here." She went back up the stairs; a heavy woman, moving with that indomitable, locomotivelike celerity.

She was not gone long. "Louise is asleep," she said, for no reason that Jarrod could have discerned, even if he had been listening. She held her closed hand out. "Can you have your car ready in twenty minutes?"

"Yes. But what — ?"

"And your bags packed. I'll see to everything else."

"And Louise — You mean—"

"You can be married in Meridian; you will be there in an hour."

"Married? Has Louise — ?"

"I have a sign from her that he will believe. You get your things all ready and don't you tell anyone where you are going, do you hear?"

"Yes. Yes. And Louise has — ?"

"Not a soul. Here" — she put something into his hand. "Get your things ready, then take this and give it to him. He may insist on seeing her. But I'll attend to that. You just be ready. Maybe he'll just write a note, anyway. You do what I told you." She turned back toward the stairs, fast, with that controlled swiftness, and disappeared.

Then Jarrod opened his hand and looked at the object which she had given him. It was the metal rabbit. It had been gilded once, but that was years ago, and it now lay on his palm in mute and tarnished oxidation. When he left the room he was not exactly running either. But he was going fast.

But when he re-entered the lobby fifteen minutes later, he was running. Mrs. King was waiting for him.

“He wrote the note,” Jarrod said. “One to Louise, and one to leave here for Miss Cranston. He told me I could read the one to Louise.” But Mrs. King had already taken it from his hand and opened it. “He said I could read it,” Jarrod said. He was breathing hard, fast.

“He watched me do it, sitting there on that bench; he hadn’t moved even his hands since I was there before, and then he said, ‘Young Mr. Jarrod, you have been conquered by a woman, as I have been. But with this difference: it will be a long time yet before you will realize that you have been slain.’

And I said, ‘If Louise is to do the slaying, I intend to die every day for the rest of my life or hers.’ And he said, ‘Ah; Louise. Were you speaking of Louise?’ And I said, ‘Dead.’ I said, ‘Dead.’ I said, ‘Dead.’”

But Mrs. King was not there. She was already half way up the stairs. She entered the room. Louise turned on the bed, her face swollen, with tears or with sleep. Mrs. King handed her the note. “There, honey. What did I tell you? He was just making a fool of you. Just using you to pass the time with.”

The car was going fast when it turned into the highroad. “Hurry,” Louise said. The car increased speed; she looked back once toward the hotel, the park massed with oleander and crepe myrtle, then she crouched still lower in the seat beside Jarrod. “Faster,” she said.

“I say faster, too,” Jarrod said. He glanced down at her; then he looked down at her again. She was crying. “Are you that glad?” he said. “I’ve lost something,” she said, crying quietly. “Something I’ve had a long time, given to me when I was a child. And now I’ve lost it. I had it just this morning, and now I can’t find it.”

“Lost it?” he said. “Given to you . . .” His foot lifted; the car began to slow. “Why, you sent . . .”

“No, no!” Louise said. “Don’t stop! Don’t turn back! Go on!”

The car was coasting now, slowing, the brakes not yet on. "Why, you . . . She said you were asleep." He put his foot on the brakes.

"No, no!" Louise cried. She had been sitting forward; she did not seem to have heard him at all. "Don't turn back! Go on! Go on!"

"And he knew," Jarrod thought. "Sitting there on the bench, he knew. When he said what he said that I would not know that I had been slain."

The car was almost stopped. "Go on!" Louise cried. "Go on!" He was looking down at her. Her eyes looked as if they were blind; her face was pale, white, her mouth open, shaped to an agony of despair and a surrender in particular which, had he been older, he would have realized that he would never see again on any face.

Then he watched his hand set the lever back into gear, and his foot come down again on the throttle. "He said it himself," Jarrod thought: "to be afraid, and yet to do. He said it himself: there's nothing in the world but being alive, knowing you are alive."

"Faster!" Louise cried. "Faster!" The car rushed on; the house, the broad veranda where the bright shawls were now sibilant, fell behind.

In that gathering of wide summer dresses, of sucked old breaths and gabbling females staccato, the proprietress stood on the veranda with the second note in her hand. "Married?" she said. "Married?" As if she were someone else, she watched herself open the note and read it again. It did not take long:

Lily:

Don't worry about me for a while longer. I'll sit here until supper time.

Don't worry about me.

J.M.

"Don't worry about me," she said. "About me." She went into the lobby, where the old Negro was pottering with a broom. "And Mr. Jarrod gave you this?"

“Yessum. Give it to me runnin’ and tole me to git his bags into de cyar, and next I know, here Miss Louise and him whoosh! outen de drive and up de big road like a patter-roller.”

“And they went toward Meridian?”

“Yessum. Right past de bench whar Doctor Jules settin’.” “Married,” the proprietress said. “Married.” Still carrying the note, she left the house and followed the path until she came in sight of the bench on which sat a motionless figure in white. She stopped again and re-read the note; again she looked up the path toward the bench which faced the road.

Then she returned to the house. The women had now dispersed into chairs, though their voices still filled the veranda, sibilant, inextricable one from another; they ceased suddenly as the proprietress approached and entered the house again. She entered the house, walking fast. That was about an hour to sundown.

Dusk was beginning to fall when she entered the kitchen. The porter was now sitting on a chair beside the stove, talking to the cook. The proprietress stopped in the door. “Uncle Charley,” she said, “Go and tell Doctor Jules supper will be ready soon.”

The porter rose and left the kitchen by the side door. When he passed the veranda, the proprietress stood on the top step. She watched him go on and disappear up the path toward the bench. A woman passed and spoke to her, but she made no reply; it was as though she had not heard, watching the shubbery beyond which the Negro had disappeared.

And when he reappeared, the guests on the veranda saw her already in motion, descending the steps before they were even aware that the Negro was running, and they sat suddenly hushed and forward and watched her pass the Negro without stopping, her skirts lifted from her trim, school-mistress ankles and feet, and disappear up the path herself, running too.

They were still sitting forward, hushed, when she too reappeared; they watched her come through the dusk and mount the porch, with on her face also a look of having seen something which she knew to be true but which she was not quite yet ready to believe.

Perhaps that was why her voice was quite quiet when she addressed one of the guests by name, calling her "honey":
"Doctor Martino has just died. Will you telephone to town for me?"

The End

Fox Hunt, William Faulkner

Fox Hunt

AN HOUR BEFORE daylight three Negro stable-boys approached the stable, carrying a lantern. While one of them unlocked and slid back the door, the bearer of the lantern lifted it and turned the beam into the darkness where a clump of pines shouldered into the paddock fence.

Out of this darkness three sets of big, spaced eyes glared mildly for a moment, then vanished. "Heyo," the Negro called. "Yawl cole?" No reply, no sound came from the darkness; the mule-eyes did not show again. The Negroes entered the barn, murmuring among themselves; a burst of laughter floated back out of the stable, mellow and meaningless and idiotic.

"How many of um you see?" the second Negro said.

"Just three mules," the lantern-bearer said. "It's more than that, though. Unc Mose he come in about two o'clock, where he been up with that Jup'ter horse; he say it was already two of um waiting there then. Clay-eaters. Hoo."

Inside the stalls horses began to whinny and stamp; over the white-washed doors the high, long muzzles moved with tossing, eager shadows; the atmosphere was rich, warm, ammoniac, and clean. The Negroes began to put feed into the patent troughs, moving from stall to stall with the clever agility of monkeys, with short, mellow, meaningless cries, "Hoo. Stand over dar. Ghy ketch dat fox to-day."

In the darkness where the clump of pines shouldered the paddock fence, eleven men squatted, surrounded by eleven tethered mules. It was November, and the morning was chill, and the men squatted shapeless and motionless, not talking. From the stable came the sound of the eating horses; just before day broke a twelfth man came up on a mule and dismounted and squatted among the others without a word. When day came and the first saddled horse was led out of the stable, the grass was rimed with frost, and the roof of the stable looked like silver in the silver light.

It could be seen then that the squatting men were all white men and all in overalls, and that all of the mules save two were saddleless. They had gathered from one-room, clay-floored cabins about the pine land, and they squatted, decorous, grave, and patient among their gaunt and mud-caked and burr-starred mules, watching the saddled horses, the fine horses with pedigrees longer than Harrison Blair's, who owned them, being led one by one from a steam-heated stable and up the gravel path to the house, before which a pack of hounds already moiled and yapped, and on the veranda of which men and women in boots and red coats were beginning to gather.

Sloven, unhurried, outwardly scarcely attentive, the men in overalls watched Harrison Blair, who owned the house and the dogs and some of the guests too, perhaps, mount a big, vicious-looking black horse, and they watched another man lift Harrison Blair's wife onto a chestnut mare and then mount a bay horse in his turn.

One of the men in overalls was chewing tobacco slowly. Beside him stood a youth, in overalls too, gangling, with a soft stubble of beard. They spoke without moving their heads, hardly moving their lips.

“That the one?” the youth said.

The older man spat deliberately, without moving. “The one what?”

“His wife’s one.”

“Whose wife’s one?”

“Blair’s wife’s one.”

The other contemplated the group before the house. He appeared to, that is. His gaze was inscrutable, blank, without haste; none could have said if he were watching the man and woman or not. “Don’t believe anything you hear, and not more than half you see,” he said.

“What do you think about it?” the youth said.

The other spat deliberately and carefully. “Nothing,” he said. “It ain’t none of my wife.” Then he said, without raising his voice and without any change in inflection, though he was now speaking to the head groom who had come up beside him. “That fellow don’t own no horse.”

“Which fellow don’t?” the groom said. The white man indicated the man who was holding the bay horse against the chestnut mare’s flank.

“Oh,” the groom said. “Mr. Gawtreys. Pity the horse, if he did.”

“Pity the horse that he owns, too,” the white man said. “Pity anything he owns.”

“You mean Mr. Harrison?” the groom said. “Does these here horses look like they needs your pity?”

“Sho,” the white man said. “That’s right. I reckon that black horse does like to be rode like he rides it.”

“Don’t you be pitying no Blair horses,” the groom said.

“Sho,” the white man said. He appeared to contemplate the blooded horses that lived in a steam-heated house, the people in boots and pink coats, and Blair himself sitting the plunging black. “He’s been trying to catch that vixen for three years now,” he said. “Whyn’t he let one of you boys shoot it or pizen it?”

“Shoot it or pizen it?” the groom said. “Don’t you know that ain’t no way to catch a fox?”

“Why ain’t it?”

“It ain’t spo’tin,” the groom said. “You ought to been hanging around um long enough by now to know how gempmuns hunts.”

“Sho,” the white man said. He was not looking at the groom. “Wonder how a man rich as folks says he is” — again he spat, in the action something meager but without intended insult, as if he might have been indicating Blair with a jerked finger— “is got time to hate one little old fox bitch like that. Don’t even want the dogs to catch it.

Trying to outride the dogs so he can kill it with a stick like it was a snake. Coming all the way down here every year, bringing all them folks and boarding and sleeping them, to run one little old mangy fox that I could catch in one night with a axe and a possum dog.”

“That’s something else about gempmuns you won’t never know,” the groom said.

“Sho,” the white man said.

The ridge was a long shoal of pine and sand, broken along one flank into gaps through which could be seen a fallow rice field almost a mile wide which ended against a brier-choked dyke.

The two men in overalls, the older man and the youth, sat their mules in one of these gaps, looking down into the field. Farther on down the ridge, about a half mile away, the dogs were at fault; the yapping cries came back up the ridge, baffled, ringing, profoundly urgent.

“You’d think he would learn in three years that he ain’t going to catch ere Cal-lina fox with them Yankee city dogs,” the youth said.

“He knows it,” the other said. “He don’t want them dogs to catch it. He can’t even bear for a blooded dog to go in front of him.”

“They’re in front of him now though.”

“You think so?”

“Where is he, then?”

“I don’t know. But I know that he ain’t no closer to them fool dogs right now than that fox is. Wherever that fox is squatting right now, laughing at them dogs, that’s where he is heading for.”

“You mean to tell me that ere a man in the world can smell out a fox where even a city dog can’t untangle it?”

“Them dogs yonder can’t smell out a straight track because they don’t hate that fox. A good fox- or coon- or possum-dog is a good dog because he hates a fox or a coon or a possum, not because he’s got a extra good nose. It ain’t his nose that leads him; it’s his hating. And that’s why when I see which-a-way that fellow’s riding, I’ll tell you which-a-way that fox has run.”

The youth made a sound in his throat and nostrils. “A growed-up man. Hating a durn little old mangy fox. I be durn if it don’t take a lot of trouble to be rich. I be durn if it don’t.”

They looked down into the field. From farther on down the ridge the eager, baffled yapping of the dogs came.

The last rider in boots and pink had ridden up and passed them and gone on, and the two men sat their mules in the profound and winy and sunny silence, listening, with expressions identical and bleak and sardonic on their gaunt, yellow faces. Then the youth turned on his mule and looked back up the ridge in the direction from which the race had come.

At that moment the older man turned also and, motionless, making no sound, they watched two more riders come up and pass. They were the woman on the chestnut mare and the man on the bay horse. They passed like one beast, like a double or hermaphroditic centaur with two heads and eight legs.

The woman carried her hat in her hand; in the slanting sun the fine, soft cloud of her unbobbed hair gleamed like the chestnut's flank, like soft fire, the mass of it appearing to be too heavy for her slender neck. She was sitting the mare with a kind of delicate awkwardness, leaning forward as though she were trying to outpace it, with a quality about her of flight within flight, separate and distinct from the speed of the mare.

The man was holding the bay horse against the mare's flank at full gallop. His hand lay on the woman's hand which held the reins, and he was slowly but steadily drawing both horses back, slowing them.

He was leaning toward the woman; the two men on the mules could see his profile stoop past with a cold and ruthless quality like that of a stooping hawk; they could see that he was talking to the woman. They passed so, with that semblance of a thrush and a hawk in terrific immobility in mid-air, with an apparitionlike suddenness: a soft rush of hooves in the sere needles, and were gone, the man stooping, the woman leaning forward like a tableau of flight and pursuit on a lightning bolt.

Then they were gone. After a while the youth said, "That one don't seem to need no dogs neither." His head was still turned after the vanished riders. The other man said nothing. "Yes, sir," the youth said. "Just like a fox.

I be durn if I see how that skinny neck of hern . . . Like you look at a fox and you wonder how a durn little critter like it can tote all that brush. And once I heard him say" — he in turn indicated, with less means than even spitting, that it was the rider of the black horse and not the bay, of whom he spoke — "something to her that a man don't say to a woman in comp'ny, and her eyes turned red like a fox's and then brown again like a fox." The other did not answer. The youth looked at him.

The older man was leaning a little forward on his mule, looking down into the field. "What's that down there?" he said. The youth looked also. From the edge of the woods beneath them came a mold-muffled

rush of hooves and then a crash of undergrowth; then they saw, emerging from the woods at full gallop, Blair on the black horse.

He entered the rice field at a dead run and began to cross it with the unfaltering and undeviating speed of a crow's flight, following a course as straight as a surveyor's line toward the dyke which bounded the field at its other side. "What did I tell you?" the older man said. "That fox is hid yonder on that ditch-bank. Well, it ain't the first time they ever seen one another eye to eye. He got close enough to it once two years ago to throw that ere leather riding-switch at it."

"Sho," the youth said. "These folks don't need no dogs."

In the faint, sandy road which followed the crest of the ridge, and opposite another gap in the trees through which could be seen a pie-shaped segment of the rice field, and some distance in the rear of the hunt, stood a Ford car with a light truck body. Beneath the wheel sat a uniformed chauffeur; beside him, hunched into a black overcoat, was a man in a derby hat.

He had a smooth, flaccid, indoors face and he was smoking a cigarette: a face sardonic and composed, yet at the moment a little wearily savage, like that of an indoorsbred and -inclined man subject to and helpless before some natural inclemency like cold or wet. He was talking.

"Sure. This all belongs to her, house and all. His old man owned it before they moved to New York and got rich, and Blair was born here. He bought it back and gave it to her for a wedding present. All he kept was this what-ever-it-is he's trying to catch."

"And he can't catch that," the chauffeur said.

"Sure. Coming down here every year and staying two months, without nothing to see and nowheres to go except these clay-eaters and Nigras. If he wants to live in a herd of nigras for two months every year, why

don't he go and spend a while on Lenox Avenue? You don't have to drink the gin.

But he's got to buy this place and give it to her for a present because she is one of these Southerns and she might get homesick or something. Well, that's all right, I guess. But Fourteenth Street is far enough south for me. But still, if it ain't this, it might be Europe or somewheres. I don't know which is worse."

"Why did he marry her, anyways?" the chauffeur said.

"You want to know why he married her? It wasn't the jack, even if they did have a pot full of it, of this Oklahoma Indian oil. . . ."

"Indian oil?"

"Sure. The government give this Oklahoma to the Indians because nobody else would have it, and when the first Indian got there and seen it and dropped dead and they tried to bury him, when they stuck the shovel into the ground the oil blowed the shovel out of the fellow's hand, and so the white folks come.

They would come up with a new Ford with a man from the garage driving it and they would go to an Indian and say, 'Well, John, how much rotten-water you catchum your front yard?' and the Indian would say three wells or thirteen wells or whatever it is and the white man would say, 'That's too bad. The way the White Father put the bee on you boys, it's too bad. Well, never mind. You see this fine new car here?

Well, I'm going to give it to you so you can load up your folks and go on to where the water don't come out of the ground rotten and where the White Father can't put the bee on you no more.' So the Indian would load his family into the car, and the garage man would head the car west, I guess, and show the Indian where the gasoline lever was and hop off and snag the first car back to town. See?"

"Oh," the chauffeur said.

"Sure. So here we was in England one time, minding our own business, when here this old dame and her red-headed gal come piling over from

Europe or somewheres where the gal was going to the high school, and here it ain't a week before Blair says, 'Well, Ernie, we're going to get married. What the hell do you think of that?'

And him a fellow that hadn't done nothing all his life but dodge skirts so he could drink all night and try to ride a horse to death all day, getting married in less than a week. But soon as I see this old dame, I know which one of her and her husband it was that had took them oil wells off the Indians."

"She must have been good, to put it on Blair at all, let alone that quick," the chauffeur said. "Tough on her, though. I'd hate for my daughter to belong to him. Not saying nothing against him, of course."

"I'd hate for my dog to belong to him. I see him kill a dog once because it wouldn't mind him. Killed it with a walking stick, with one lick. He says, 'Here. Send Andrews here to haul this away.'"

"I don't see how you put up with him," the chauffeur said. "Driving his cars, that's one thing. But you, in the house with him day and night. . . ."

"We settled that. He used to ride me when he was drinking. One day he put his hand on me and I told him I would kill him. 'When?' he says. 'When you get back from the hospital?' 'Maybe before I go there,' I says. I had my hand in my pocket. 'I believe you would,' he says. So we get along now. I put the rod away and he don't ride me any more and we get along."

"Why didn't you quit?"

"I don't know. It's a good job, even if we do stay all over the place all the time. Jeess! half the time I don't know if the next train goes to Ty Juana or Italy; I don't know half the time where I'm at or if I can read the newspaper next morning even. And I like him and he likes me."

"Maybe he quit riding you because he had something else to ride," the chauffeur said.

“Maybe so. Anyways, when they married, she hadn’t never been on a horse before in all her life until he bought this chestnut horse for her to match her hair. We went all the way to Kentucky for it, and he come back in the same car with it. I wouldn’t do it; I says I would do anything in reason for him but I wasn’t going to ride in no horse Pullman with it empty, let alone with a horse already in it. So I come back in a lower.

“He didn’t tell her about the horse until it was in the stable. ‘But I don’t want to ride,’ she says.

“‘My wife will be expected to ride,’ he says. ‘You are not in Oklahoma now.’

“‘But I can’t ride,’ she says.

“‘You can at least sit on top of the horse so they will think you can ride on it,’ he says.

“So she goes to Callaghan, riding them practice plugs of his with the children and the chorines that have took up horse riding to get ready to get drafted from the bushes out in Brooklyn or New Jersey to the Drive or Central Park. And her hating a horse like it was a snake ever since one day when she was a kid and gets sick on a merry-go-round.”

“How did you know all this?” the chauffeur said.

“I was there. We used to stop there now and then in the afternoon to see how she was coming on the horse. Sometimes she wouldn’t even know we was there, or maybe she did. Anyways, here she would go, round and round among the children and one or two head of Zigfield’s prize stock, passing us and not looking at us, and Blair standing there with that black face of his like a subway tunnel, like he knew all the time she couldn’t ride no horse even on a merry-go-round and like he didn’t care if she learned or not, just so he could watch her trying and not doing it.

So at last even Callaghan come to him and told him it wasn’t no use. ‘Very well,’ Blair says. ‘Callaghan says you may be able to sit on the top of a painted horse, so I will buy you a horse out of a dump cart and nail

him to the front porch, and you can at least be sitting on top of it when we come up.'

"'I'll go back to momma's,' she says.

"'I wish you would,' Blair says. 'My old man tried all his life to make a banker out of me, but your old woman done it in two months.'"

"I thought you said they had jack of their own," the chauffeur said.

"Why didn't she spend some of that?"

"I don't know. Maybe there wasn't no exchange for Indian money in New York. Anyways, you would have thought she was a conductor on a Broadway surface car. Sometimes she wouldn't even wait until I could get Blair under a shower and a jolt into him before breakfast, to make the touch. So the gal goes to the old dame (she lives on Park Avenue) and the gal . . ."

"Was you there too?" the chauffeur said.

"Cried . . . What? Oh. This was a maid, a little Irish kid named Burke; me and her used to go out now and then. She was the one told me about this fellow, this Yale college boy, this Indian sweetheart."

"Indian sweetheart?"

"They went to the same ward school out at Oklahoma or something. Swapped Masonic rings or something before the gal's old man found three oil wells in the henhouse and dropped dead and the old dame took the gal off to Europe to go to the school there. So this boy goes to Yale College and last year what does he do but marry a gal out of a tank show that happened to be in town. Well, when she finds that Callaghan has give her up, she goes to her old woman in Park Avenue. She cries. 'I begin to think that maybe I won't look funny to his friends, and then he comes there and watches me. He don't say nothing,' she says, 'he just stands there and watches me.'

"'After all I've done for you,' the old dame says. 'Got you a husband that any gal in New York would have snapped up. When all he asks is that you learn to sit on top of a horse and not shame him before his swell friends. After all I done for you,' the old dame says.

“‘I didn’t,’ she says. ‘I didn’t want to marry him.’

“‘Who did you want to marry?’ the old dame says.

“‘I didn’t want to marry nobody,’ the gal says.

“So now the old dame digs up about this boy, this Allen boy that the gal . . .”

“I thought you said his name was Yale,” the chauffeur said.

“No. Allen. Yale is where he went to this college.”

“You mean Columbia.”

“No. Yale. It’s another college.”

“I thought the other one was named Cornell or something,” the chauffeur said.

“No. It’s another one. Where these college boys all come from when these hotchachacha deadfalls get raided and they give them all a ride downtown in the wagon. Don’t you read no papers?”

“Not often,” the chauffeur said. “I don’t care nothing about politics.”

“All right. So this Yale boy’s poppa had found a oil well too and he was lousy with it too, and besides the old dame was mad because Blair wouldn’t leave her live in the house with them and wouldn’t take her nowheres when we went.

So the old dame give them all three — her and Blair and this college boy — the devil until the gal jumps up and says she will ride on a horse or bust, and Blair told her to go on and bust if she aimed to ride on this chestnut horse we brought all the way back from Kentucky. ‘I don’t aim for you to ruin this good horse,’ Blair says. ‘You’ll ride on the horse I tell you to ride on.’

“So then she would slip out the back way and go off and try to ride this horse, this good one, this Kentucky plug, to learn how first and then surprise him. The first time didn’t hurt her, but the second time it broke her collar bone, and she was scared how Blair would find it out until she found out how he had knew it all the time that she was riding on it. So

when we come down here for the first time that year and Blair started chasing this lyron or whatever it—”

“Fox,” the chauffeur said.

“All right. That’s what I said. So when—”

“You said lyron,” the chauffeur said.

“All right. Leave it be a lyron. Anyways, she would ride on this chestnut horse, trying to keep up, and Blair already outrun the dogs and all, like this time two years ago when he run off from the dogs and got close enough to this lyron to hit it with his riding whip—”

“You mean fox,” the chauffeur said. “A fox, not a lyron. Say . . .” The other man, the valet, secretary, whatever he might have been, was lighting another cigarette, crouched into his upturned collar, the derby slanted down upon his face.

“Say what?” he said.

“I was wondering,” the chauffeur said.

“Wondering what?”

“If it’s as hard for him to ride off and leave her as he thinks it is. To not see her ruining this good Kentucky horse. If he has to ride as fast to do it as he thinks he does.”

“What about that?”

“Maybe he don’t have to ride as fast this year as he did last year, to run off from her. What do you think about it?”

“Think about what?”

“I was wondering.”

“What wondering?”

“If he knowed he don’t have to ride as fast this year or not.”

“Oh. You mean Gawtrety.”

“That his name? Gawtrety?”

“That’s it. Steve Gawtrety.”

“What about him?”

“He’s all right. He’ll eat your grub and drink your liquor and fool your women and let you say when.”

“Well, what about that?”

“Nothing. I said he was all right. He’s fine by me.”

“How by you?”

“Just fine, see? I done him a little favor once, and he done me a little favor, see?”

“Oh,” the chauffeur said. He did not look at the other. “How long has she known him?”

“Six months and maybe a week. We was up in Connecticut and he was there. He hates a horse about as much as she does, but me and Callaghan are all right too; I done Callaghan a little favor once too, so about a week after we come back from Connecticut, I have Callaghan come in and tell Blair about this other swell dog, without telling Blair who owned it. So that night I says to Blair, ‘I hear Mr. Van Dyming wants to buy this horse from Mr. Gawtrety too.’ ‘Buy what horse?’ Blair says.

‘I don’t know,’ I says. ‘One horse looks just like another to me as long as it stays out doors where it belongs,’ I says. ‘So do they to Gawtrety,’ Blair says. ‘What horse are you talking about?’

‘This horse Callaghan was telling you about,’ I says. Then he begun to curse Callaghan. ‘He told me he would get that horse for me,’ he says. ‘It don’t belong to Callaghan,’ I says, ‘it’s Mr. Gawtrety’s horse.’ So here it’s two nights later when he brings Gawtrety home to dinner with him.

That night I says, ‘I guess you bought that horse.’ He had been drinking and he cursed Gawtrety and Callaghan too. ‘He won’t sell it,’ he says. ‘You want to keep after him,’ I says. ‘A man will sell anything.’ ‘How keep after him, when he won’t listen to a price?’ he says. ‘Leave your

wife do the talking,' I says. 'He'll listen to her.' That was when he hit me. . . ."

"I thought you said he just put his hand on you," the chauffeur said. "I mean he just kind of flung out his hand when he was talking, and I happened to kind of turn my face toward him at the same time. He never aimed to hit me because he knowed I would have took him. I told him so. I had the rod in my hand, inside my coat, all the while.

"So after that Gawtreys would come back maybe once a week because I told him I had a good job and I didn't aim to have to shoot myself out of it for no man except myself maybe. He come once a week. The first time she wouldn't leave him in. Then one day I am reading the paper (you ought to read a paper now and then.

You ought to keep up with the day of the week, at least) and I read where this Yale Allen boy has run off with a show gal and they had fired him off the college for losing his amateur's standing, I guess. I guess that made him mad, after he had done jumped the college anyways.

So I cut it out, and this Burke kid (me and her was all right, too) she puts it on the breakfast tray that A.M. And that afternoon, when Gawtreys happens to come back, she leaves him in, and this Burke kid happens to walk into the room sudden with something — I don't know what it was — and here is Gawtreys and her like a fade-out in the pitchers."

"So Blair got his horse," the chauffeur said.

"What horse?"

"The horse Gawtreys wouldn't sell him."

"How could he, when Gawtreys never owned no horse no more than I do, unless it's maybe some dog still finishing last year's Selling Plate at Pimlico? Besides, Gawtreys don't owe Blair no horse yet."

"Not yet?"

"She don't like him, see. The first time he come to the house alone she wouldn't leave him into the front door. And the next time, too, if this Burke kid hadn't happened to left that piece out of the papers about

this college boy on the breakfast tray. And the time after that when he come, she wouldn't leave him in again; it was like he might have been a horse maybe, or even a dog, because she hated a dog worse than she did a horse even, even if she didn't have to try to ride on no dog.

If it had have been a dog, Blair wouldn't have never got her to even try to ride on it. So I'd have to go out and steam Callaghan up again until it got to where I wasn't no more than one of these Russian droshkies or something."

"A Russian what?"

"One of these fellows that can't call their own soul. Every time I would leave the house I would have to meet Gawtrety in a dump somewheres and then go to see Callaghan and soap him down, because he is one of these boys with ideas, see?"

"What kind of ideas?"

"Just ideas. Out of the Sunday school paper. About how this wasn't right because he liked her and felt sorry for her and so he wanted to tell Blair he had been lying and that Gawtrety hadn't never owned no horse.

Because a fellow that won't take a nickel when it's throwed right in his face, he ain't never as big a fool to nobody as he is to the man that can have some sense about religion and keep all these golden rules in the Sunday school paper where they come from. If the Lord didn't want a man to cut his own grass, why did He put Sunday on Sunday like he did? Tell me that."

"I guess you're right," the chauffeur said.

"Sure I'm right. Jeess! I told Callaghan Blair would cut his throat and mine both for a Rockefeller quarter, same as any sensible man, and I ast him if he thought gals had done all give out with Blair's wife; if she was going to be the last one they made."

"So he don't . . ." the chauffeur said. He ceased; then he said, "Look there."

The other man looked. Through the gap in the trees, in the center of the segment of visible rice field, they could see a tiny pink-and-black dot. It was almost a mile away; it did not appear to be moving fast.

“What’s that?” the other said. “The fox?”

“It’s Blair,” the chauffeur said. “He’s going fast. I wonder where the others are.” They watched the pink-and-black dot go on and disappear.

“They’ve went back home if they had any sense,” the other said. “So we might as well go back too.”

“I guess so,” the chauffeur said. “So Gawtreys don’t owe Blair no horse yet.”

“Not yet. She don’t like him. She wouldn’t leave him in the house again after that day, and this Burke kid says she come back from a party one night because Gawtreys was there. And if it hadn’t been for me, Gawtreys wouldn’t a got invited down here, because she told Blair that if he come, she wouldn’t come.

So I’d have to work on Callaghan again so he would come in once a day and steam Blair up again about the horse to get Gawtreys invited, because Blair was going to make her come.”

The chauffeur got out of the car and went around to the crank. The other man lighted a cigarette. “But Blair ain’t got his horse yet. You take a woman with long hair like she’s got, long as she keeps her hair up, it’s all right. But once you catch her with her hair down, it’s just been too bad.”

The chauffeur engaged the crank. Then he paused, stooped, his head turned. “Listen,” he said.

“What?”

“That horn.” The silver sound came again, faint, distant, prolonged.

“What’s that?” the other said. “Do they have to keep soldiers here?”

“It’s the horn they blow,” the chauffeur said. “It means they have caught that fox.”

"Jees!" the other said. "Maybe we will go back to town to-morrow." The two men on the mules recrossed the rice field and mounted the ridge into the pines.

"Well," the youth said, "I reckon he's satisfied now."

"You reckon he is?" the other said. He rode a little in front of the youth. He did not turn his head when he spoke.

"He's run that fox three years," the youth said. "And now he's killed it. How come he ain't satisfied?"

The older man did not look back. He slouched on his gaunt, shabby mule, his overalled legs dangling. He spoke in a tone of lazy and ironical contempt. "I reckon that's something about gentle-men you won't never know."

"Fox is fox, to me," the youth said. "Can't eat it. Might as well pizen it and save them horses."

"Sho," the other said. "That's something else about them you won't never know."

"About who?"

"Gentle-men." They mounted the ridge and turned into the faint, sandy road. "Well," the older man said, "gentleman or not, I reckon that's the only fox in Cal-lina that ever got itself killed that-a-way. Maybe that's the way they kills a fox up north."

"Then I be durn if I ain't glad I don't live up there," the youth said.

"I reckon so," the other said. "I done got along pretty well here for some time, myself."

"I'd like to see it once though," the youth said.

"I don't reckon I would," the other said, "if living there makes a man go to all this trouble to kill a fox."

They were riding up the ridge, among the pines, the holly bushes, the huckleberries and briers. Suddenly the older man checked his mule, extending his hand backward.

“What?” the youth said. “What is it?”

The pause was hardly a pause; again the older man rode on, though he began to whistle, the tone carrying and clear though not loud, the tune lugubrious and hymnlike; from beyond the bushes which bordered the path just ahead of them there came the snort of a horse. “Who is it?” the youth said.

The other said nothing. The two mules went on in single file. Then the youth said quietly, “She’s got her hair down. It looks like the sun on a spring branch.” The mules paced on in the light, whispering soil, their ears bobbing, the two men sitting loose, with dangling, stirrupless feet.

The woman sat the mare, her hair a bright cloud, a copper cascade in the sun, about her shoulders, her arms lifted and her hands busy in it. The man sat the bay horse a short distance away. He was lighting a cigarette. The two mules came up, tireless, shambling, with drooping heads and nodding ears.

The youth looked at the woman with a stare at once bold and covert; the older man did not cease his mellow, slow, tuneless whistling; he did not appear to look at them at all. He appeared to be about to ride past without a sign when the man on the bay spoke to him.

“They caught it, did they?” he said. “We heard the horn.”

“Yaas,” the man in overalls said, in a dry, drawling tone. “Yaas. It got caught. ‘Twarn’t nothing else it could do but get caught.”

The youth watched the woman looking at the older man, her hands arrested for an instant in her hair.

“What do you mean?” the man on the bay said.

“He rode it down on that black horse,” the man in overalls said.

“You mean, there were no dogs there?”

“I reckon not,” the other said. “Them dogs never had no black horses to ride.” The two mules had halted; the older man faced the man on the bay a little, his face hidden beneath his shapeless hat. “It crossed the

old field and dropped over that ditch-bank and hid, allowing for him to jump the ditch, and then it aimed to double back, I reckon.

I reckon it wasn't scared of the dogs. I reckon it had fooled them so much it wasn't worried about them. I reckon he was what worried it. I reckon him and it knowed one another after these three years same as you maybe knowed your maw or your wife maybe, only you ain't never been married none to speak of.

Anyway it was on the ditch-bank, and he knowed it was there and he cut straight across the field without giving it no spell to breathe in. I reckon maybe yawl seen him, riding straight across that field like he could see like a hawk and smell like a dog.

And the fox was there, where it had done fooled the dogs. But it never had no spell to breathe in, and when it had to run again and dropped over the ditch-bank, it dropped into the briers, I reckon, and it was too tired to get out and run. And he come up and jumped that ditch, just like that fox aimed for him to.

Only the fox was still in the briers, and while he was going through the air he looked down and seen the fox and he clumb off the horse while it was jumping and dropped feet first into the briers like the fox done. Maybe it dodged some then; I don't know. He says it just swirled and jumped at his face and he knocked it down with his fist and trompled it dead with his boot-heels.

The dogs hadn't got there then. But it so happened he never needed them." He ceased talking and sat for a moment longer, sloven and inert upon the shabby, patient mule, his face shadowed beneath his hat. "Well," he said, "I reckon I'll get on. I ain't had ne'er a bite of breakfast yet. I'll bid yawl good morning." He put his mule into motion, the second mule following. He did not look back.

But the youth did. He looked back at the man on the bay horse, the cigarette burning in his hand, the plume of smoke faint and windless in the sunny silence, and at the woman on the chestnut, her arms lifted

and her hands busy in her bright, cloudy hair; projecting, trying to project, himself, after the way of the young, toward that remote and inaccessible she, trying to encompass the vain and inarticulate instant of division and despair which, being young, was very like rage: rage at the lost woman, despair of the man in whose shape there walked the tragic and inescapable earth her ruin. "She was crying," he said, then he began to curse, savagely, without point or subject.

"Come on," the older man said. He did not look back. "I reckon them hunt breakfast hoe-cakes will be about ready time we get home."

The End

Pennsylvania Station, William Faulkner

Pennsylvania Station

THEY SEEMED TO bring with them the smell of the snow falling in Seventh Avenue. Or perhaps the other people who had entered before them had done it, bringing it with them in their lungs and exhaling it, filling the arcade with a stale chill like that which might lie unwinded and spent upon the cold plains of infinity itself.

In it the bright and serried shopwindows had a fixed and insomniac glare like the eyes of people drugged with coffee, sitting up with a strange corpse.

In the rotunda, where the people appeared as small and intent as ants, the smell and sense of snow still lingered, though high now among the steel girders, spent and vitiated too and filled here with a weary and ceaseless murmuring, like the voices of pilgrims upon the infinite plain, like the voices of all the travelers who had ever passed through it quiring and ceaseless as lost children.

They went on toward the smoking room. It was the old man who looked in the door. "All right," he said. He looked sixty, though he was probably some age like forty-eight or fifty-two or fifty-eight. He wore a long overcoat with a collar which had once been fur, and a cap with earflaps like the caricature of an up-State farmer. His shoes were not mates. "There ain't many here yet.

It will be some time now." While they stood there three other men came and looked into the smoking room with that same air not quite diffident and not quite furtive, with faces and garments that seemed to give off that same effluvium of soup kitchens and Salvation Army homes.

They entered; the old man led the way toward the rear of the room, among the heavy, solid benches on which still more men of all ages sat in attitudes of thought or repose and looking as transient as scarecrows blown by a departed wind upon a series of rock ledges. The old man chose a bench and sat down, making room for the young man beside him.

"I used to think that if you sat somewhere about the middle, he might skip you. But I found out that it don't make much difference where you sit."

"Nor where you lie, either," the young man said. He wore an army overcoat, new, and a pair of yellow army brogans of the sort that can be bought from so-called army stores for a dollar or so. He had not shaved in some time. "And it don't make a hell of a lot of difference whether you are breathing or not while you are lying there. I wish I had a cigarette. I have got used to not eating but be damned if I don't hate to get used to not smoking."

"Sure now," the old man said. "I wish I had a cigarette to give you. I ain't used tobacco myself since I went to Florida. That was funny: I hadn't smoked in ten years, yet as soon as I got back to New York, that was the first thing I thought about. Isn't that funny?"

“Yes,” the young man said. “Especially if you never had any tobacco when you thought about wanting it again.”

“Wanting it and not having it couldn’t have worried me then,” the old man said. “I was all right then. Until I—” He settled himself. Into his face came that rapt expression of the talkative old, without heat or bewilderment or rancor. “What confused me was I thought all the time that the burying money was all right. As soon as I found out about Danny’s trouble I come right back to New York—”

II

“Who is this Danny, anyway?” the young man said.

“Didn’t I tell you? He’s Sister’s boy. There wasn’t any of us left but Sister and Danny and me. Yet I was the weakly one. The one they all thought wouldn’t live. I was give up to die twice before I was fifteen, yet I outlived them all. Outlived all eight of them when Sister died three years ago.

That was why I went to Florida to live. Because I thought I couldn’t stand the winters here. Yet I have stood three of them now since Sister died. But sometimes it looks like a man can stand just about anything if he don’t believe he can stand it. Don’t you think so?”

“I don’t know,” the young man said. “Which trouble was this?”

“Which?”

“Which trouble was Danny in now?”

“Don’t get me wrong about Danny. He wasn’t bad; just wild, like any young fellow. But not bad.”

“All right,” the young man said. “It wasn’t any trouble then.”

“No. He’s a good boy. He’s in Chicago now. Got a good job now. The lawyer in Jacksonville got it for him right after I come back to New York. I didn’t know he had it until I tried to wire him that Sister was dead. Then I found that he was in Chicago, with a good job.

He sent Sister a wreath of flowers that must have cost two hundred dollars. Sent it by air; that cost something, too. He couldn't come himself because he had just got the job and his boss was out of town and he couldn't get away. He was a good boy. That was why when that trouble come up about that woman on the floor below that accused him of stealing the clothes off her clothes-line, that I told Sister I would send him the railroad fare to Jacksonville, where I could look after him. Get him clean away from them low-life boys around the saloons and such.

I come all the way from Florida to see about him. That was how I happened to go with Sister to see Mr. Pinckski, before she ever begun to pay on the coffin. She wanted me to go with her. Because you know how an old woman is. Only she wasn't old, even if her and me had outlived all the other seven.

But you know how an old woman seems to get comfort out of knowing she will be buried right in case there isn't any of her kin there to 'tend to it. I guess maybe that keeps a lot of them going."

"And especially with Danny already too busy to see if she was buried at all, himself."

The old man, his mouth already shaped for further speech, paused and looked at the young man. "What?"

"I say, if getting into the ground at last don't keep some of them going, I don't know what it is that does."

"Oh. Maybe so. That ain't never worried me. I guess because I was already give up to die twice before I was fifteen. Like now every time a winter gets through, I just say to myself, 'Well, I'll declare. Here I am again.' That was why I went to Florida: because of the winters here. I hadn't been back until I got Sister's letter about Danny, and I didn't stay long then.

And if I hadn't got the letter about Danny, maybe I wouldn't ever have come back. But I come back, and that was when she took me with her

to see Mr. Pinckski before she begun to pay on the coffin, for me to see if it was all right like Mr. Pinckski said.

He told her how the insurance companies would charge her interest all the time. He showed us with the pencil and paper how if she paid her money to the insurance companies it would be the same as if she worked six minutes longer every night and give the money for the extra six minutes to the insurance company. But Sister said she wouldn't mind that, just six minutes, because at three or four o'clock in the morning six minutes wouldn't—"

"Three or four o'clock in the morning?"

"She scrubbed in them tall buildings down about Wall Street somewhere. Her and some other ladies. They would help one another night about, so they could get done at the same time and come home on the subway together. So Mr. Pinckski showed us with the pencil and paper how if she lived fifteen years longer say for instance Mr. Pinckski said, it would be the same as if she worked three years and eighty-five days without getting any pay for it.

Like for three years and eighty-five days she would be working for the insurance companies for nothing. Like instead of living fifteen years, she would actually live only eleven years and two hundred and eight days. Sister stood there for a while, holding her purse under her shawl. Then she said, 'If I was paying the insurance companies to bury me instead of you, I would have to live three years and eighty-five days more before I could afford to die?'

"Well,' Mr. Pinckski said, like he didn't know what to say. 'Why, yes. Put it that way, then. You would work for the insurance companies three years and eighty-five days and not get any pay for it.'

"It ain't the work I mind,' Sister said. 'It ain't the working.' Then she took the first half a dollar out of her purse and put it down on Mr. Pinckski's desk."

Now and then, with a long and fading reverberation, a subway train passed under their feet. Perhaps they thought momentarily of two green eyes tunneling violently through the earth without apparent propulsion or guidance, as though of their own unparalleled violence creating, like spaced beads on a string, lighted niches in whose wan and fleeting glare human figures like corpses set momentarily on end in a violated grave yard leaned in one streaming and rigid direction and flicked away.

“Because I was a weak child. They give me up to die twice before I was fifteen. There was an insurance agent sold me a policy once, worried at me until I said all right, I would take it. Then they examined me and the only policy they would give me was a thousand dollars at the rate of fifty years old.

And me just twenty-seven then. I was the third one of eight, yet when Sister died three years ago I had outlived them all. So when we got that trouble of Danny’s about the woman that said he stole the clothes fixed up, Sister could—”

“How did you get it fixed up?”

“We paid the money to the man that his job was to look after the boys that Danny run with. The alderman knew Danny and the other boys. It was all right then. So Sister could go on paying the fifty cents to Mr. Pinckski every week. Because we fixed it up for me to send the railroad fare for Danny as soon as I could, so he could be in Florida where I could look out for him.

And I went back to Jacksonville and Sister could pay Mr. Pinckski the fifty cents without worrying. Each Sunday morning when her and the other ladies got through, they would go home by Mr. Pinckski’s and wake him up and Sister would give him the fifty cents.

“He never minded what time it was because Sister was a good customer. He told her it would be all right, whatever time she got

there, to wake him up and pay him. So sometimes it would be as late as four o'clock, especially if they had had a parade or something and the buildings messed up with confetti and maybe flags. Maybe four times a year the lady that lived next door to Sister would write me a letter telling me how much Sister had paid to Mr. Pinckski and that Danny was getting along fine, behaving and not running around with them tough boys any more. So when I could I sent Danny the railroad fare to Florida. I never expected to hear about the money.

“That was what confused me. Sister could read some. She could read the church weekly fine that the priest gave her, but she never was much for writing. She said if she could just happen to find a pencil the size of a broom handle that she could use both hands on, that she could write fine. But regular pencils were too small for her.

She said she couldn't feel like she had anything in her hand. So I never expected to hear about the money. I just sent it and then I fixed up with the landlady where I was living for a place for Danny, just thinking that some day soon Danny would just come walking in with his suit-case.

The landlady kept the room a week for me, and then a man come in to rent it, so there wasn't anything she could do but give me the refusal of it.

“That wasn't no more than fair, after she had already kept it open a week for me. So I begun to pay for the room and when Danny didn't come I thought maybe something had come up, with the hard winter and all, and Sister needed the money worse than to send Danny to Florida on it, or maybe she thought he was too young yet.

So after three months I let the room go. Every three or four months I would get the letter from the lady next door to Sister, about how every Sunday morning Sister and the other ladies would go to Mr. Pinckski and pay him the fifty cents. After fifty-two weeks, Mr. Pinckski set the coffin aside, with her name cut on a steel plate and nailed onto the coffin, her full name: Mrs. Margaret Noonan Gihon.

“It was a cheap coffin at first, just a wooden box, but after she had paid the second fifty-two half a dollars he took the name plate off of it and nailed it onto a better coffin, letting her pick it out herself in case she died that year.

And after the third fifty-two half a dollars he let her pick out a still finer one, and the next year one with gold handles on it. He would let her come in and look at it whenever she wanted and bring whoever she wanted with her, to see the coffin and her name cut in the steel plate and nailed onto it.

Even at four o’clock in the morning he would come down in his night-shirt and unlock the door and turn the light on for Sister and the other ladies to go back and look at the coffin.

“Each year it got to be a better coffin, with Mr. Pinckski showing the other ladies with the pencil and paper how Sister would have the coffin paid out soon and then she would just be paying on the gold handles and the lining.

He let her pick out the lining too that she wanted and when the lady next door wrote me the next letter, Sister sent me a sample of the lining and a picture of the handles. Sister drew the picture, but she never could use a pencil because she always said the handle was too small for her to hold, though she could read the church weekly the priest gave her, because she said the Lord illuminated it for her.”

“Is that so?” the young man said. “Jesus, I wish I either had a smoke or I would quit thinking about it.”

“Yes. And a sample of the lining. But I couldn’t tell much about it except that it suited Sister and that she liked it how Mr. Pinckski would let her bring in the other ladies to look at the trimmings and help her make up her mind. Because Mr. Pinckski said he would trust her because he didn’t believe she would go and die on him to hurt his business like some did, and him not charging her a cent of interest like the insurance

companies would charge. All she had to do was just to stop there every Sunday morning and pay him the half a dollar.”

“Is that so?” the young man said. “He must be in the poor-house now.”
“What?” The old man looked at the young man, his expression fixed.
“Who in the poor-house now?”

IV

“Where was Danny all this time? Still doing his settlement work?”
“Yes. He worked whenever he could get a job. But a high-spirited young fellow, without nobody but a widow woman mother, without no father to learn him how you have to give and take in this world. That was why I wanted him down in Florida with me.”

Now his arrested expression faded; he went easily into narration again with a kind of physical and unlistening joy, like a checked and long-broken horse slacked off again.

“That was what got me confused. I had already sent the money for him to come to Jacksonville on and when I never heard about it I just thought maybe Sister needed it with the hard winter and all or maybe she thought Danny was too young, like women will.

And then about eight months after I let the room go I had a funny letter from the lady that lived next door to Sister. It said how Mr. Pinckski had moved the plate onto the next coffin and it said how glad Sister was that Danny was doing so well and she knew I would take good care of him because he was a good boy, besides being all Sister had. Like Danny was already in Florida, all the time.

“But I never knew he was there until I got the wire from him. It come from Augustine, not any piece away; I never found out until Sister died how Mrs. Zilich, that’s the lady next door to her, that wrote the letters for Sister, had written me that Danny was coming to Florida the day he left, the day after the money come. Mrs. Zilich told how she had written the letter for Sister and give it to Danny himself to mail the night before he left.

I never got it. I reckon Danny never mailed it. I reckon, being a young, high-spirited boy, he decided he wanted to strike out himself and show us what he could do without any help from us, like I did when I come to Florida.

“Mrs. Zilich said she thought of course Danny was with me and that she thought at the time it was funny that when I would write to Sister I never mentioned Danny. So when she would read the letters to Sister she would put in something about Danny was all right and doing fine. So when I got the wire from Danny in Augustine I telephoned Mrs. Zilich in New York.

It cost eleven dollars. I told her that Danny was in a little trouble, not serious, and for her to not tell Sister it was serious trouble, to just tell her that we would need some money. Because I had sent money for Danny to come to Florida on and I had paid the three months for the room and I had just paid the premium on my insurance, and so the lawyer looked at Danny and Danny sitting there on the cot in the cell without no collar on and Danny said, ‘Where would I get any money,’ only it was jack he called it.

“And the lawyer said, ‘Where would you get it?’ and Danny said, ‘Just set me down back home for ten minutes. I’ll show you.’ ‘Seventy-five bucks,’ he says, telling me that was all of it.

Then the lawyer says that was neither here nor there and so I telephoned to Mrs. Zilich and told her to tell Sister to go to Mr. Pinckski and ask him to let her take back some of the coffin money; he could put the name plate back on the coffin she had last year or maybe the year before, and as soon as I could get some money on my insurance policy I would pay Mr. Pinckski back and some interest too. I telephoned from the jail, but I didn’t say where I was telephoning from; I just said we would need some money quick.”

“What was he in for this time?” the young man said.

“He wasn’t in jail the other time, about them clothes off that line. That woman was lying about him. After we paid the money, she admitted she was probably mistaken.”

“All right,” the young man said. “What was he in for?”

“They called it grand larceny and killing a policeman. They framed him, them others did that didn’t like him. He was just wild. That was all. He was a good boy. When Sister died he couldn’t come to the funeral. But he sent a wreath that must have cost \$200 if it cost a cent. By air mail, with the high postage in the . . .”

His voice died away; he looked at the young man with a kind of pleased astonishment. “I’ll declare I made a joke. But I didn’t mean—”

“Sure. I know you didn’t mean to make a joke. What about the jail?”

“The lawyer was already there when I got there. Some friends had sent the lawyer to help him. And he swore to me on his mother’s name that he wasn’t even there when the cop got shot. He was in Orlando at the time. He showed me a ticket from Orlando to Waycross that he had bought and missed the train; that was how he happened to have it with him. It had the date punched in it, the same night the policeman got killed, showing that Danny wasn’t even there and that them other boys had framed him.

He was mad. The lawyer said how he would see the friends that had sent him to help Danny and get them to help. ‘By God, they better,’ Danny said. ‘If they think I’m going to take this laying down they better—’

“Then the lawyer got him quiet again, like he did when Danny was talking about that money the man he worked for or something had held out on him back in New York. And so I telephoned Mrs. Zilich, so as not to worry Sister, and told her to go to Mr. Pinckski.

Two days later I got the telegram from Mrs. Zilich. I guess Mrs. Zilich hadn’t never sent a telegram before and so she didn’t know she had

ten words without counting the address because it just said You and Danny come home quick Mrs. Sophie Zilich New York.

“I couldn’t make nothing out of it and we talked it over and the lawyer said I better go and see, that he would take care of Danny till I got back. So we fixed up a letter from Danny to Sister, for Mrs. Zilich to read to her, about how Danny was all right and getting along fine—”

V

At that moment there entered the room a man in the uniform of the railway company. As he entered, from about him somewhere — behind, above — a voice came. Though it spoke human speech it did not sound like a human voice, since it was too big to have emerged from known man and it had a quality at once booming, cold, and forlorn, as though it were not interested in nor listening to what it said.

“There,” the old man said.

He and the young man turned and looked back across the benches, as most of the other heads had done, as though they were all dummies moved by a single wire. The man in uniform advanced slowly into the room, moving along the first bench. As he did so the men on that bench and on the others began to rise and depart, passing the man in uniform as though he were not there; he too moving on into the room as if it were empty. “I guess we’ll have to move.”

“Hell,” the young man said. “Let him come in and ask for them. They pay him to do it.”

“He caught me the other night. The second time, too.”

“What about that? This time won’t make but three. What did you do then?”

“Oh, yes,” the old man said. “I knew that was the only thing to do, after that telegram. Mrs. Zilich wouldn’t have spent the money to telegraph without good reason. I didn’t know what she had told Sister.

I just knew that Mrs. Zilich thought there wasn't time to write a letter and that she was trying to save money on the telegram, not knowing she had ten words and the man at the telegraph office not telling her better. So I didn't know what was wrong. I never suspicioned it at all. That was what confused me, you see."

He turned and looked back again toward the man in uniform moving from bench to bench while just before him the men in mismatched garments, with that identical neatness of indigence, with that identical air of patient and indomitable forlornness, rose and moved toward the exit in a monstrous and outrageous analogy to flying fish before the advancing prow of a ship.

"What confused you?" the young man said.

"Mrs. Zilich told me. I left Danny in the jail. (Them friends that sent him the lawyer got him out the next day. When I heard from him again, he was already in Chicago, with a good job; he sent that wreath. I didn't know he was even gone from the jail until I tried to get word to him about Sister), and I come on to New York. I had just enough money for that, and Mrs. Zilich met me at the station and told me. At this station right here. It was snowing that night, too. She was waiting at the top of the steps.

"Where's Sister?' I said. 'She didn't come with you?'

"What is it now?' Mrs. Zilich said. 'You don't need to tell me he is just sick.'

"Did you tell Sister he ain't just sick?' I said. 'I didn't have to,' Mrs. Zilich said. 'I didn't have time to, even if I would have.' She told about how it was cold that night and so she waited up for Sister, keeping the fire going and a pot of coffee ready, and how she waited till Sister had took off her coat and shawl and was beginning to get warm, setting there with a cup of coffee; then Mrs. Zilich said, 'Your brother telephoned from Florida.' That's all she had time to say. She never even had to tell Sister how I said for her to go to Mr. Pinckski, because Sister said right off, 'He will want that money.' Just what I had said, you see.

“Mrs. Zilich noticed it too. ‘Maybe it’s because you are kin, both kin to that—’ Then she stopped and said, ‘Oh, I ain’t going to say anything about him. Don’t worry. The time to do that is past now.’ Then she told me how she said to Sister, ‘You can stop there on the way down this afternoon and see Mr. Pinckski.’ But Sister was already putting on her coat and shawl again and her not an hour home from work and it snowing. She wouldn’t wait.”

“She had to take back the coffin money, did she?” the young man said.

“Yes. Mrs. Zilich said that her and Sister went to Mr. Pinckski and woke him up. And he told them that Sister had already taken the money back.”

“What?” the young man said. “Already?”

“Yes. He said how Danny had come to him about a year back, with a note from Sister saying to give Danny the money that she had paid in to Mr. Pinckski and that Mr. Pinckski did it. And Sister standing there with her hands inside her shawl, not looking at anything until Mrs. Zilich said, ‘A note? Mrs. Gihon never sent you a note because she can’t write,’ and Mr. Pinckski said, ‘Should I know if she can’t write or not when her own son brings me a note signed with her name?’ and Mrs. Zilich says, ‘Let’s see it.’

“Sister hadn’t said anything at all, like she wasn’t even there, and Mr. Pinckski showed them the note. I saw it too. It said, ‘Received of Mr. Pinckski a hundred and thirty dollars being the full amount deposited with him less interest. Mrs. Margaret N. Gihon.’

And Mrs. Zilich said how she thought about that hundred and thirty dollars and she thought how Sister had paid twenty-six dollars a year for five years and seven months, and she said, ‘Interest? What interest?’ and Mr. Pinckski said, ‘For taking the name off the coffin,’ because that made the coffin second-handed. And Mrs. Zilich said that Sister turned and went toward the door. ‘Wait,’ Mrs. Zilich said. ‘We’re going to stay right here until you get that money. There’s something funny about this because you can’t write to sign a note.’ But Sister just

went on toward the door until Mrs. Zilich said, 'Wait, Margaret.' And then Sister said, 'I signed it.'"

VI

The voice of the man in uniform could be heard now as he worked slowly toward them: "Tickets. Tickets. Show your tickets."

"I guess it's hard enough to know what a single woman will do," the old man said. "But a widow woman with just one child. I didn't know she could write, either. I guess she picked it up cleaning up them offices every night.

Anyway, Mr. Pinckski showed me the note, how she admitted she signed it, and he explained to me how the difference was; that he had to charge to protect himself in case the coffins ever were refused and become second-hand; that some folks was mighty particular about having a brand new coffin.

"He had put the plate with Sister's name on it back onto the cheap coffin that she started off with, so she was still all right for a coffin, even if it never had any handles and lining. I never said anything about that; that twenty-six dollars she had paid in since she give the money to Danny wouldn't have helped any; I had already spent that much getting back to see about the money, and anyway, Sister still had a coffin—"

The voice of the man in uniform was quite near now, with a quality methodical, monotonous, and implacable: "Tickets. Tickets. Show your tickets. All without railroad tickets."

The young man rose. "I'll be seeing you," he said. The old man rose too. Beyond the man in uniform the room was almost empty.

"I guess it's about time," the old man said. He followed the young man into the rotunda. There was an airplane in it, motionless, squatting, with a still, beetling look like a huge bug preserved in alcohol. There was a placard beside it, about how it had flown over mountains and vast wastes of snow.

“They might have tried it over New York,” the young man said. “It would have been closer.”

“Yes,” the old man said. “It costs more, though. But I guess that’s fair, since it is faster. When Sister died, Danny sent a wreath of flowers by air. It must have cost two hundred dollars. The wreath did, I mean. I don’t know what it cost to send it by air.”

Then they both looked up the ramp and through the arcade, toward the doors on Seventh Avenue. Beyond the doors lay a thick, moribund light that seemed to fill the arcade with the smell of snow and of cold, so that for a while longer they seemed to stand in the grip of a dreadful reluctance and inertia.

“So they went on back home,” the old man said. “Mrs. Zilich said how Sister was already shaking and she got Sister to bed. And that night Sister had a fever and Mrs. Zilich sent for the doctor and the doctor looked at Sister and told Mrs. Zilich she had better telegraph if there was anybody to telegraph to. When I got home Sister didn’t know me.

The priest was already there, and we never could tell if she knew anything or not, not even when we read the letter from Danny that we had fixed up in the jail, about how he was all right. The priest read it to her, but we couldn’t tell if she heard him or not. That night she died.”

“Is that so?” The young man said, looking up the ramp. He moved. “I’m going to the Grand Central.”

Again the old man moved, with that same unwearying alacrity. “I guess that’s the best thing to do. We might have a good while there.” He looked up at the clock; he said with pleased surprise: “Half past one already. And a half an hour to get there. And if we’re lucky, we’ll have two hours before he comes along. Maybe three. That’ll be five o’clock. Then it will be only two hours more till daylight.”

The End

Artist at Home, William Faulkner

Artist at Home

ROGER HOWES WAS a fattish, mild, nondescript man of forty, who came to New York from the Mississippi Valley somewhere as an advertisement writer and married and turned novelist and sold a book and bought a house in the Valley of Virginia and never went back to New York again, even on a visit.

For five years he had lived in the old brick house with his wife Anne and their two children, where old ladies came to tea in horsedrawn carriages or sent the empty carriages for him or sent by Negro servants in the otherwise empty carriages shoots and cuttings of flowering shrubs and jars of pickle or preserves and copies of his books for autographs.

He didn't go back to New York any more, but now and then New York came to visit him: the ones he used to know, the artists and poets and such he knew before he began to earn enough food to need a cupboard to put it in.

The painters, the writers, that hadn't sold a book or a picture — men with beards sometimes in place of collars, who came and wore his shirts and socks and left them under the bureau when they departed, and women in smocks but sometimes not: those gaunt and eager and carnivorous tymbesteres of Art.

At first it had been just hard to refuse them, but now it was harder to tell his wife that they were coming. Sometimes he did not know himself they were coming. They usually wired him, on the day on which they would arrive, usually collect.

He lived four miles from the village and the book hadn't sold quite enough to own a car too, and he was a little fat, a little overweight, so sometimes it would be two or three days before he would get his mail. Maybe he would just wait for the next batch of company to bring the mail up with them.

After the first year the man at the station (he was the telegraph agent and the station agent and Roger's kind of town agent all in one) got to where he could recognize them on sight.

They would be standing on the little platform, with that blank air, with nothing to look at except a little yellow station and the back end of a moving train and some mountains already beginning to get dark, and the agent would come out of his little den with a handful of mail and a package or so, and the telegram. "He lives about four miles up the Valley. You can't miss it."

"Who lives about four miles up the valley?"

"Howes does. If you all are going up there, I thought maybe you wouldn't mind taking these letters to him. One of them is a telegram."

"A telegram?"

"It come this a.m. But he ain't been to town in two-three days. I thought maybe you'd take it to him."

"Telegram? Hell. Give it here."

"It's forty-eight cents to pay on it."

"Keep it, then. Hell."

So they would take everything except the telegram and they would walk the four miles to Howes', getting there after supper. Which would be all right, because the women would all be too mad to eat anyway, including Mrs. Howes, Anne. So a couple of days later, someone would send a carriage for Roger and he would stop at the village and pay out the wire telling him how his guests would arrive two days ago.

So when this poet in the sky-blue coat gets off the train, the agent comes right out of his little den, with the telegram. "It's about four

miles up the Valley,” he says. “You can’t miss it. I thought maybe you’d take this telegram up to him. It come this a.m., but he ain’t been to town for two-three days. You can take it. It’s paid.”

“I know it is,” the poet says. “Hell. You say it is four miles up there?”
“Right straight up the road. You can’t miss it.”

So the poet took the telegram and the agent watched him go on out of sight up the Valley Road, with a couple or three other folks coming to the doors to look at the blue coat maybe. The agent grunted. “Four miles,” he said. “That don’t mean no more to that fellow than if I had said four switch frogs.

But maybe with that dressing-sacque he can turn bird and fly it.”
Roger hadn’t told his wife, Anne, about this poet at all, maybe because he didn’t know himself. Anyway, she didn’t know anything about it until the poet came limping into the garden where she was cutting flowers for the supper table, and told her she owed him forty-eight cents.

“Forty-eight cents?” Anne said.

He gave her the telegram. “You don’t have to open it now, you see,” the poet said. “You can just pay me back the forty-eight cents and you won’t have to even open it.” She stared at him, with a handful of flowers and the scissors in the other hand, so finally maybe it occurred to him to tell her who he was. “I’m John Blair,” he said. “I sent this telegram this morning to tell you I was coming. It cost me forty-eight cents. But now I’m here, so you don’t need the telegram.”

So Anne stands there, holding the flowers and the scissors, saying “Damn, Damn, Damn” while the poet tells her how she ought to get her mail oftener. “You want to keep up with what’s going on,” he tells her, and her saying “Damn, Damn, Damn,” until at last he says he’ll just stay to supper and then walk back to the village, if it’s going to put her out that much.

“Walk?” she said, looking him up and down. “You walk? Up here from the village? I don’t believe it. Where is your baggage?”

“I’ve got it on. Two shirts, and I have an extra pair of socks in my pocket. Your cook can wash, can’t she?”

She looks at him, holding the flowers and the scissors. Then she tells him to come on into the house and live there forever. Except she didn’t say exactly that. She said: “You walk? Nonsense. I think you’re sick. You come in and sit down and rest.” Then she went to find Roger and tell him to bring down the pram from the attic. Of course she didn’t say exactly that, either.

Roger hadn’t told her about this poet; he hadn’t got the telegram himself yet. Maybe that was why she hauled him over the coals so that night: because he hadn’t got the telegram.

They were in their bedroom. Anne was combing out her hair. The children were spending the summer up in Connecticut, with Anne’s folks. He was a minister, her father was.

“You told me that the last time would be the last. Not a month ago. Less than that, because when that last batch left I had to paint the furniture in the guest room again to hide where they put their cigarettes on the dressing table and the window ledges.

And I found in a drawer a broken comb I would not have asked Pinkie (Pinkie was the Negro cook) to pick up, and two socks that were not even mates that I bought for you myself last winter, and a single stocking that I couldn’t even recognize any more as mine. You tell me that Poverty looks after its own: well, let it. But why must we be instruments of Poverty?”

“This is a poet. That last batch were not poets. We haven’t had a poet in the house in some time. Place losing all its mellifluous overtones and subtleties.”

“How about that woman that wouldn’t bathe in the bathroom? who insisted on going down to the creek every morning without even a

bathing suit, until Amos Crain's (he was a farmer that lived across the creek from them) wife had to send me word that Amos was afraid to try to plow his lower field? What do people like that think that outdoors, the country, is? I cannot understand it, any more than I can understand why you feel that you should feed and lodge—"

"Ah, that was just a touch of panic fear that probably did Amos good. Jolted him out of himself, out of his rut."

"The rut where he made his wife's and children's daily bread, for six days. And worse than that. Amos is young. He probably had illusions about women until he saw that creature down there without a stitch on."

"Well, you are in the majority, you and Mrs. Crain." He looked at the back of her head, her hands combing out her hair, and her probably watching him in the mirror and him not knowing it, what with being an artist and all. "This is a man poet."

"Then I suppose he will refuse to leave the bathroom at all. I suppose you'll have to carry a tray to him in the tub three times a day. Why do you feel compelled to lodge and feed these people? Can't you see they consider you an easy mark? that they eat your food and wear your clothes and consider us hopelessly bourgeois for having enough food for other people to eat, and a little soft-brained for giving it away? And now this one, in a sky-blue dressing-sacque."

"There's a lot of wear and tear to just being a poet. I don't think you realize that."

"Oh, I don't mind. Let him wear a lamp shade or a sauce pan too. What does he want of you? advice, or just food and lodging?"

"Not advice. You must have gathered at supper what his opinion of my mentality is."

"He revealed pretty clearly what his own mentality is. The only thing in the house that really pleased him was Pinkie's colored head-rag."

“Not advice,” Roger said. “I don’t know why he shows me his stuff. He does it like you’d give caviar to an elephant.”

“And of course you accept his dictum about the elephant. And I suppose you are going to get them to publish his book, too.”

“Well, there’s some good stuff in it. And maybe if he sees it in print, he’ll really get busy. Work. Or maybe someone will make him mad enough to really write something. Something with an entrail in it. He’s got it in him. It may not be but one poem. But it’s there. Maybe if he can just stop talking long enough to get it out. And I thought if he came down here, where he will have to walk four miles to find somebody to talk to, once Amos comes to recognize that blue coat.”

“Ah,” Anne said. “So you wrote him to come. I knew you had, but I’m glad to hear you admit it of your own free will. Go on to bed,” she said. “You haven’t done a stroke of work today, and Lord only knows now when you will.”

Thus life went along in its old pleasant way. Because poets are all different from one another, it seemed; this one, anyway. Because it soon developed that Anne doesn’t see this poet at all, hardly. It seems that she can’t even know he is in the house unless she hears him snoring at night. So it took her two weeks to get steamed up again. And this time she is not even combing her hair. “Is it two weeks he’s been here, or just two years?”

She is sitting at the dressing table, but she is not doing anything, which any husband, even an artist, should know is a bad sign. When you see a woman sitting half dressed before a dressing table with a mirror and not even watching herself talk in the mirror, it’s time to smell smoke in the wind.

“He has been here two weeks, but unless I happen to go to the kitchen, I never see him, since he prefers Pinkie’s company to ours. And when he was missing that first Wednesday night, on Pinkie’s evening off, I said at first, ‘What tact.’ That was before I learned that he had taken

supper with Pinkie's family at her house and had gone with them to prayer meeting.

And he went again Sunday night and again last Wednesday night, and now tonight (and though he tells me I have neither intelligence nor imagination) he would be surprised to know that I am imagining right now that sky-blue dressing-sacque in a wooden church full of sweating niggers without any incongruity at all."

"Yes. It's quite a picture, isn't it?"

"But apart from such minor embarrassments like not knowing where our guest is, and bearing upon our patient brows a certain amount of reflected ridiculousness, he is a very pleasant companion. Instructing, edifying, and selfeffacing.

I never know he is even in the house unless I hear your typewriter, because I know it is not you because you have not written a line in — is it two weeks, or just two years? He enters the room which the children are absolutely forbidden and puts his one finger on that typewriter which Pinkie is not even permitted to touch with a dust-cloth, and writes a poem about freedom and flings it at you to commend and applaud. What is it he says?"

"You tell. This is fine."

"He flings it at you like — like . . . Wait; I've got it: like flinging caviar at an elephant, and he says, 'Will this sell?' Not, Is this good? or Do you like it? Will this sell? and you—"

"Go on. I couldn't hope to even compete."

"You read it, carefully. Maybe the same poem, I don't know; I've learned recently on the best authority that I am not intelligent enough to get my poetry at first hand. You read it, carefully, and then you say, 'It ought to. Stamps in the drawer there.'" She went to the window.

“No, I haven’t evolved far enough yet to take my poetry straight; I won’t understand it. It has to be fed to me by hand, when he has time, on the terrace after supper on the nights when there is no prayer meeting at Pinkie’s church. Freedom.

Equality. In words of one syllable, because it seems that, being a woman, I don’t want freedom and don’t know what equality means, until you take him up and show him in professional words how he is not so wise, except he is wise enough to shut up then and let you show both of us how you are not so wise either.” The window was above the garden. There were curtains in it. She stood between the curtains, looking out. “So Young Shelley has not crashed through yet.”

“Not yet. But it’s there. Give him time.”

“I’m glad to hear that. He’s been here two weeks now. I’m glad his racket is poetry, something you can perpetrate in two lines. Otherwise, at this rate . . .” She stood between the curtains. They were blowing, slow, in and out. “Damn. Damn. Damn. He doesn’t eat enough.”

So Roger went and put another cushion in the pram. Only she didn’t say exactly that and he didn’t do exactly that.

Now get this. This is where it starts. On the days when there wasn’t any prayer meeting at the nigger church, the poet has taken to doping along behind her in the garden while she cut the flowers for the supper table, talking to her about poetry or freedom or maybe about the flowers.

Talking about something, anyway; maybe when he quit talking all of a sudden that night when he and she were walking in the garden after supper, it should have tipped her off. But it didn’t. Or at least, when they came to the end of the path and turned, the next thing she seemed to know was his mug all set for the haymaker. Anyway, she didn’t move until the clinch was over. Then she flung back, her hand lifted. “You damned idiot!” she says.

He doesn't move either, like he is giving her a fair shot. "What satisfaction will it be to slap this mug?" he says.

"I know that," she says. She hits him on the chest with her fist, light, full, yet restrained all at the same time: mad and careful too. "Why did you do such a clumsy thing?"

But she doesn't get anything out of him. He just stands there, offering her a clean shot; maybe he is not even looking at her, with his hair all over the place and this sky-blue coat that fits him like a short horse-blanket. You take a rooster, an old rooster. An old bull is different.

See him where the herd has run him out, blind and spavined or whatever, yet he still looks married. Like he was saying, "Well, boys, you can look at me now. But I was a husband and father in my day."

But an old rooster. He just looks unmarried, a born bachelor. Born a bachelor in a world without hens and he found it out so long ago he don't even remember there are not any hens. "Come along," she says, turning fast, stiff-backed, and the poet doping along behind her. Maybe that's what gave him away. Anyway, she looks back, slowing. She stops. "So you think you are the hot shot, do you?" she says. "You think I'm going to tell Roger, do you?"

"I don't know," he says. "I hadn't thought about it."

"You mean, you don't care whether I tell him or not?"

"Yes," he says.

"Yes what?"

It seems she can't tell whether he's looking at her or not, whether he ever looked at her. He just stands there, doping, about twice as tall as she is. "When I was a little boy, we would have sherbet on Sunday," he says. "Just a breath of lemon in it. Like narcissus smells, I remember.

I think I remember. I was . . . four . . . three. Mother died and we moved to a city. Boarding-house. A brick wall. There was one window, like a one-eyed man with sore eyes. And a dead cat. But before that we had

lots of trees, like you have. I would sit on the kitchen steps in the late afternoon, watching the Sunday light in the trees, eating sherbet.”

She is watching him. Then she turns, walking fast. He follows, doping along a little behind her, so that when she stops in the shadow of a clump of bushes, with her face all fixed, he stands there like this dope until she touches him. And even then he doesn't get it.

She has to tell him to hurry. So he gets it, then. A poet is human, it seems, just like a man.

But that's not it. That can be seen in any movie. This is what it is, what is good.

About this time, coincident with this second clinch, Roger happens to come out from behind this bush. He comes out kind of happen-so; pleasant and quiet from taking a little stroll in the moonlight to settle his supper. They all three stroll back to the house, Roger in the middle. They get there so quick that nobody thinks to say goodnight when Anne goes on in the house and up the stairs.

Or maybe it is because Roger is doing all the talking himself at that moment, poetry having gone into a slump, you might say. “Moonlight,” Roger is saying, looking at the moon like he owned it too; “I can't stand it any more. I run to walls, an electric light. That is, moonlight used to make me feel sad and old and I would do that. But now I'm afraid it don't even make me feel lonely any more. So I guess I am old.”

“That's a fact,” the poet says. “Where can we talk?”

“Talk?” Roger says. He looked like a head-waiter, anyway: a little bald, flourishing, that comes to the table and lifts off a cover and looks at it like he is saying, “Well, you can eat this muck, if you want to pay to do it.” “Right this way,” he says.

They go to the office, the room where he writes his books, where he doesn't even let the children come at all. He sits behind the typewriter

and fills his pipe. Then he sees that the poet hasn't sat down. "Sit down," he says.

"No," the poet says. "Listen," he says. "Tonight I kissed your wife. I'm going to again, if I can."

"Ah," Roger says. He is too busy filling the pipe right to look at the poet, it seems. "Sit down."

"No," the poet says.

Roger lights the pipe. "Well," he says, "I'm afraid I can't advise you about that. I have written a little poetry, but I never could seduce women." He looks at the poet now. "Look here," he says, "you are not well. You go on to bed. We'll talk about this tomorrow."

"No," the poet says, "I cannot sleep under your roof."

"Anne keeps on saying you are not well," Roger says. "Do you know of anything that's wrong with you?"

"I don't know," the poet says.

Roger sucks at the pipe. He seems to be having a little trouble making it burn right. Maybe that is why he slams the pipe down on the desk, or maybe he is human too, like a poet. Anyway, he slams the pipe down on the desk so that the tobacco pops out burning among the papers.

And there they are: the bald husband with next week's flour and meat actually in sight, and the home-wrecker that needs a haircut, in one of these light blue jackets that ladies used to wear with lace boudoir caps when they would be sick and eat in bed.

"What in hell do you mean," Roger says, "coming in my house and eating my food and bothering Anne with your damned . . ." But that was all. But even that was pretty good for a writer, an artist; maybe that's all that should be expected from them. Or maybe it was because the poet wasn't even listening to him.

"He's not even here," Roger says to himself; like he had told the poet, he used to write poetry himself, and so he knew them. "He's up there

at Anne's door now, kneeling outside her door." And outside that door was as close to Anne as Roger got too, for some time. But that was later, and he and the poet are now in the office, with him trying to make the poet shut his yap and go up to bed, and the poet refusing. "I cannot lie under your roof," the poet says. "May I see Anne?"

"You can see her in the morning. Any time. All day, if you want to. Don't talk drivell."

"May I speak to Anne?" the poet says, like he might have been speaking to a one-syllable feeb.

So Roger goes up and tells Anne and comes back and sits behind the typewriter again and then Anne comes down and Roger hears her and the poet goes out the front door. After awhile Anne comes back alone. "He's gone," she says.

"Is he?" Roger says, like he is not listening. Then he jumps up. "Gone? He can't — this late. Call him back."

"He won't come back," Anne says. "Let him alone." She goes on upstairs. When Roger went up a little later, the door was locked.

Now get this. This is it. He came back down to the office and put some paper into the typewriter and began to write. He didn't go very fast at first, but by daylight he was sounding like forty hens in a sheet-iron corn-crib, and the written sheets on the desk were piling up. . . .

He didn't see or hear of the poet for two days. But the poet was still in town. Amos Crain saw him and came and told Roger. It seems that Amos happened to come to the house for something, because that was the only way anybody could have got to Roger to tell him anything for two days and nights. "I heard that typewriter before I crossed the creek," Amos says. "I see that blue dressing-sacque at the hotel yesterday," he says.

That night, while Roger was at work, Anne came down the stairs. She looked in the office door. "I'm going to meet him," she said.

“Will you tell him to come back?” Roger said. “Will you tell him I sent the message?”

“No,” Anne said.

And the last thing she heard when she went out and when she came back an hour later and went upstairs and locked her door (Roger was sleeping on the sleeping-porch now, on an army cot) was the typewriter.

And so life went on in its old, pleasant, happy way. They saw one another often, sometimes twice a day after Anne quit coming down to breakfast. Only, a day or so after that, she missed the sound of the typewriter; maybe she missed being kept awake by it. “Have you finished it?” she said. “The story?”

“Oh. No. No, it’s not finished yet. Just resting for a day or so.” Bull market in typewriting, you might say.

It stayed bullish for several days. He had got into the habit of going to bed early, of being in his cot on the sleeping-porch when Anne came back into the house. One night she came out onto the sleeping-porch, where he was reading in bed. “I’m not going back again,” she said. “I’m afraid to.”

“Afraid of what? Aren’t two children enough for you? Three, counting me.”

“I don’t know.” It was a reading lamp and her face was in the shadow. “I don’t know.” He turned the light, to shine it on her face, but before it got to her face she turned, running. He got there just in time to have the door banged in his face. “Blind! Blind!” she said beyond the door. “Go away! Go away!”

He went away, but he couldn’t get to sleep. So after a while he took the metal shade off the reading lamp and jimmied the window into the room where the children slept. The door from here into Anne’s room wasn’t locked. Anne was asleep. The moon was getting down then, and he could see her face. He hadn’t made any noise, but she waked anyway, looking up at him, not moving. “He’s had nothing, nothing.

The only thing he remembers of his mother is the taste of sherbet on Sunday afternoon. He says my mouth tastes like that. He says my mouth is his mother." She began to cry. She didn't move, face-up on the pillow, her arms under the sheet, crying. Roger sat on the edge of the bed and touched her and she flopped over then, with her face down against his knee, crying.

They talked until about daylight. "I don't know what to do. Adultery wouldn't get me — anybody — into that place where he lives. Lives? He's never lived. He's—" She was breathing quiet, her face turned down, but still against his knee — him stroking her shoulder. "Would you take me back?"

"I don't know." He stroked her shoulder. "Yes. Yes. I'd take you back."

And so the typewriting market picked up again. It took a spurt that night, as soon as Anne got herself cried off to sleep, and the market held steady for three or four days, without closing at night, even after Pinkie told him how the telephone was out of fix and he found where the wires were cut and knows where he can find the scissors that did it when he wants to.

He doesn't go to the village at all, even when he had a free ride. He would spend half a morning sitting by the road, waiting for somebody to pass that would bring him back a package of tobacco or sugar or something. "If I went to the village, he might have left town," he said.

On the fifth day, Amos Crain brought him his mail. That was the day the rain came up. There was a letter for Anne. "He evidently doesn't want my advice on this," he said to himself. "Maybe he has already sold it." He gave the letter to Anne. She read it, once.

"Will you read it?" she said.

"I wouldn't care to," he said.

But the typing market is still steady, so that when the rain came up this afternoon, he had to turn on the light. The rain was so hard on the house that he could watch his fingers (he used two or three of them)

hitting the keys without hearing a sound. Pinkie didn't come, so after a while he quit and fixed a tray and took it up and left it on a chair outside Anne's door. He didn't stop to eat, himself.

It was after dark when she came down the first time. It was still raining. He saw her cross the door, going fast, in a raincoat and a rubber hat. He caught her as she opened the front door, with the rain blowing in. "Where are you going?" he said.

She tried to jerk her arm loose. "Let me alone."

"You can't go out in this. What is it?"

"Let me alone. Please." She jerked her arm, pulling at the door which he was holding.

"You can't. What is it? I'll do it. What is it?"

But she just looked at him, jerking at her arm and at the door knob. "I must go to the village. Please, Roger."

"You can't do that. At night, and in all this rain."

"Please. Please." He held her. "Please. Please." But he held her, and she let the door go and went back up stairs. And he went back to the typewriter, to this market still going great guns.

He is still at it at midnight. This time Anne has on a bathrobe. She stands in the door, holding to the door. Her hair is down. "Roger," she says. "Roger."

He goes to her, fast for a fat man; maybe he thinks she is sick. "What? What is it?"

She goes to the front door and opens it; the rain comes in again.

"There," she says. "Out there."

"What?"

"He is. Blair."

He draws her back. He makes her go to the office, then he puts on his raincoat and takes the umbrella and goes out. "Blair!" he calls. "John!" Then the shade on the office window goes up, where Anne has raised it

and carried the desk lamp to the window and turned the light outdoors, and then he sees Blair, standing in the rain, without any hat, with his blue coat like it was put on him by a paper-hanger, with his face lifted toward Anne's window.

And here we are again: the bald husband, the rural plute, and this dashing blade, this home-wrecking poet. Both gentlemen, being artists: the one that doesn't want the other to get wet; the other whose conscience won't let him wreck the house from inside. Here we are, with Roger trying to hold one of these green silk, female umbrellas over himself and the poet too, jerking at the poet's arm.

"You damned fool! Come in the house!"

"No." His arm gives a little as Roger jerks at it, but the poet himself doesn't move.

"Do you want to drown? Come on, man!"

"No."

Roger jerks at the poet's arm, like jerking at the arm of a wet saw-dust doll. Then he begins to yell at the house: "Anne! Anne!"

"Did she say for me to come in?" the poet says.

"I — Yes. Yes. Come in the house. Are you mad?"

"You're lying," the poet says. "Let me alone."

"What are you trying to do?" Roger says. "You can't stand here like this."

"Yes, I can. You go on in. You'll take cold."

Roger runs back to the house; they have an argument first because Roger wants the poet to keep the umbrella and the poet won't do it. So Roger runs back to the house. Anne is at the door. "The fool," Roger says. "I can't—"

"Come in!" Anne calls. "John! Please!" But the poet has stepped out of the light and vanished. "John!" Anne calls. Then she began to laugh, staring at Roger from between her hair brushing at her hair with her hands. "He — he looked so f — funny. He I — looked so—" Then she was not laughing and Roger had to hold her up. He carried her upstairs

and put her to bed and sat with her until she could stop crying. Then he went back to the office. The lamp was still at the window, and when he moved it the light went across the lawn and he saw Blair again.

He was sitting on the ground, with his back against a tree, his face raised in the rain toward Anne's window. Roger rushed out again, but when he got there, Blair was gone. Roger stood under the umbrella and called him for a while, but he never got any answer. Maybe he was going to try again to make the poet take the umbrella. So maybe he didn't know as much about poets as he thought he did. Or maybe he was thinking about Pope. Pope might have had an umbrella.

They never saw the poet again. This one, that is. Because this happened almost six months ago, and they still live there. But they never saw this one. Three days later, Anne gets the second letter, mailed from the village. It is a menu card from the Elite Café, or maybe they call it the Palace. It was already autographed by the flies that eat there, and the poet had written on the back of it. Anne left it on Roger's desk and went out, and then Roger read it.

It seems that this was the shot. The one that Roger had always claimed to be waiting for. Anyway, the magazines that don't have any pictures took the poem, stealing it from one another while the interest or whatever it was ate up the money that the poet never got for it. But that was all right, too, because by that time Blair was dead.

Amos Crain's wife told them how the poet had left town. And a week later Anne left too. She went up to Connecticut to spend the rest of the summer with her mother and father, where the children were. The last thing she heard when she left the house was the typewriter.

But it was two weeks after Anne left before Roger finished it, wrote the last word. At first he wanted to put the poem in too, this poem on the menu card that wasn't about freedom, either, but he didn't.

Conscience, maybe he called it, put over the old haymaker, and Roger took it standing, like a little man, and sent off the poem for the

magazines to jaw over, and tied up the papers he had written and sent them off too. And what was it he had been writing?

Him, and Anne, and the poet. Word for word, between the waiting spells to find out what to write down next, with a few changes here and there, of course, because live people do not make good copy, the most interesting copy being gossip, since it mostly is not true.

So he bundled the pages up and sent them off and they sent him the money. It came just in time, because the winter was coming and he still owed a balance on Blair's hospital and funeral. So he paid that, and with the rest of the money he bought Anne a fur coat and himself and the children some winter underwear.

Blair died in September. Anne and the children were still away when he got the wire, three or four days late, since the next batch of them had not arrived yet. So here he is, sitting at his desk, in the empty house, with the typewriting all finished, holding the wire in his hand. "Shelley," he says. "His whole life was a not very successful imitation of itself. Even to the amount of water it took."

He didn't tell Anne about the poet until after the fur coat came. "Did you see that he . . ." Anne said.

"Yes. He had a nice room, in the sun. A good nurse. The doctor didn't want him to have a special nurse at first. Damn butcher."

Sometimes when a man thinks about them making poets and artists and such pay these taxes which they say indicates that a man is free, twenty-one, and capable of taking care of himself in this close competition, it seems like they are obtaining money under false pretenses. Anyway, here's the rest of it, what they did next.

He reads the book, the story, to her, and her not saying anything until he had finished. "So that's what you were doing," she said.

He doesn't look at her, either; he is busy evening the pages, getting them smooth again. "It's your fur coat," he said.

"Oh," she says. "Yes. My fur coat."

So the fur coat comes. And what does she do then? She gave it away. Yes. Gave it to Mrs. Crain. Gave it to her, and her in the kitchen, churning, with her hair in her face, brushing her hair back with a wrist that looked like a lean ham. "Why, Miz Howes," she says. "I caint. I reely caint."

"You'll have to take it," Anne says. "We — I got it under false pretenses. I don't deserve it. You put bread into the ground and reap it; I don't. So I can't wear a coat like this."

And they leave it there with Mrs. Crain and they go back home, walking. Only they stop in broad daylight, with Mrs. Crain watching them from the window, and go into a clinch on their own account. "I feel better," Anne says.

"So do I," Roger says. "Because Blair wasn't there to see Mrs. Crain's face when you gave her that coat. No freedom there, or equality either."

But Anne is not listening. "Not to think," she says, "that he . . . to dress me in the skins of little slain beasts. . . . You put him in a book, but you didn't finish it. You didn't know about that coat, did you? God beat you, that time, Roger."

"Ay," Roger says. "God beats me lots of times. But there's one thing about it. Their children are bigger than ours, and even Mrs. Crain can't wear my underclothes. So that's all right."

Sure. That was all right. Because it was Christmas soon, and then spring; and then summer, the long summer, the long days.

The End

The Brooch, William Faulkner

The Brooch

THE TELEPHONE WAKED him. He waked already hurrying, fumbling in the dark for robe and slippers, because he knew before waking that the bed beside his own was still empty, and the instrument was downstairs just opposite the door beyond which his mother had lain propped upright in bed for five years, and he knew on waking that he would be too late because she would already have heard it, just as she heard everything that happened at any hour in the house.

She was a widow, he the only child. When he went away to college she went with him; she kept a house in Charlottesville, Virginia, for four years while he graduated. She was the daughter of a well-to-do merchant. Her husband had been a travelling man who came one summer to the town with letters of introduction: one to a minister, the other to her father. Three months later the travelling man and the daughter were married. His name was Boyd.

He resigned his position within the year and moved into his wife's house and spent his days sitting in front of the hotel with the lawyers and the cotton-planters — a dark man with a gallant swaggering way of removing his hat to ladies. In the second year, the son was born.

Six months later, Boyd departed. He just went away, leaving a note to his wife in which he told her that he could no longer bear to lie in bed at night and watch her rolling onto empty spools the string saved from parcels from the stores. His wife never heard of him again, though she refused to let her father have the marriage annulled and change the son's name.

Then the merchant died, leaving all his property to the daughter and the grandson who, though he had been out of Fauntleroy suits since he was seven or eight, at twelve wore even on weekdays clothes which made him look not like a child but like a midget; he probably could not have long associated with other children even if his mother had let him.

In due time the mother found a boys' school where the boy could wear a round jacket and a man's hard hat with impunity, though by the time

the two of them removed to Charlottesville for these next four years, the son did not look like a midget.

He looked now like a character out of Dante — a man a little slighter than his father but with something of his father's dark handsomeness, who hurried with averted head, even when his mother was not with him, past the young girls on the streets not only of Charlottesville but of the little lost Mississippi hamlet to which they presently returned, with an expression of face like the young monks or angels in fifteenth-century allegories.

Then his mother had her stroke, and presently the mother's friends brought to her bed reports of almost exactly the sort of girl which perhaps even the mother might have expected the son to become not only involved with but to marry.

Her name was Amy, daughter of a railroad conductor who had been killed in a wreck. She lived now with an aunt who kept a boarding-house — a vivid, daring girl whose later reputation was due more to folly and the caste handicap of the little Southern town than to badness and which at the last was doubtless more smoke than fire; whose name, though she always had invitations to the more public dances, was a light word, especially among the older women, daughters of decaying old houses like this in which her future husband had been born.

So presently the son had acquired some skill in entering the house and passing the door beyond which his mother lay propped in bed, and mounting the stairs in the dark to his own room. But one night he failed to do so.

When he entered the house the transom above his mother's door was dark, as usual, and even if it had not been he could not have known that this was the afternoon on which the mother's friends had called and told her about Amy, and that his mother had lain for five hours, propped bolt upright, in the darkness, watching the invisible door.

He entered quietly as usual, his shoes in his hand, yet he had not even closed the front door when she called his name. Her voice was not raised. She called his name once:

“Howard.”

He opened the door. As he did so the lamp beside her bed came on. It sat on a table beside the bed; beside it sat a clock with a dead face; to stop it had been the first act of his mother when she could move her hands two years ago. He approached the bed from which she watched him — a thick woman with a face the color of tallow and dark eyes apparently both pupil-less and iris-less beneath perfectly white hair.

“What?” he said. “Are you sick?”

“Come closer,” she said. He came nearer. They looked at one another. Then he seemed to know; perhaps he had been expecting it.

“I know who’s been talking to you,” he said. “Those damned old buzzards.”

“I’m glad to hear it’s carrion,” she said. “Now I can rest easy that you won’t bring it into our house.”

“Go on. Say, your house.”

“Not necessary. Any house where a lady lives.” They looked at one another in the steady lamp which possessed that stale glow of sickroom lights. “You are a man. I don’t reproach you. I am not even surprised. I just want to warn you before you make yourself ridiculous. Don’t confuse the house with the stable.”

“With the — Hah!” he said. He stepped back and jerked the door open with something of his father’s swaggering theatricalism. “With your permission,” he said. He did not close the door. She lay bolt upright on the pillows and looked into the dark hall and listened to him go to the telephone, call the girl, and ask her to marry him tomorrow. Then he reappeared at the door.

“With your permission,” he said again, with that swaggering reminiscence of his father, closing the door. After a while the mother turned the light off. It was daylight in the room then.

They were not married the next day, however. “I’m scared to,” Amy said. “I’m scared of your mother. What does she say about me?”

“I don’t know. I never talk to her about you.”

“You don’t even tell her you love me?”

“What does it matter? Let’s get married.”

“And live there with her?” They looked at one another. “Will you go to work, get us a house of our own?”

“What for? I have enough money. And it’s a big house.”

“Her house. Her money.”

“It’ll be mine — ours some day. Please.”

“Come on. Let’s try to dance again.” This was in the parlor of the boarding-house, where she was trying to teach him to dance, but without success. The music meant nothing to him; the noise of it or perhaps the touch of her body destroyed what little co-ordination he could have had. But he took her to the Country Club dances; they were known to be engaged. Yet she still staid out dances with other men, in the parked cars about the dark lawn. He tried to argue with her about it, and about drinking.

“Sit out and drink with me, then,” he said.

“We’re engaged. It’s no fun with you.”

“Yes,” he said, with the docility with which he accepted each refusal; then he stopped suddenly and faced her. “What’s no fun with me?” She fell back a little as he gripped her shoulder. “What’s no fun with me?”

“Oh,” she said. “You’re hurting me!”

“I know it. What’s no fun with me?”

Then another couple came up and he let her go. Then an hour later, during an intermission, he dragged her, screaming and struggling, out

of a dark car and across the dance floor, empty now and lined with chaperones like a theater audience, and drew out a chair and took her across his lap and spanked her. By daylight they had driven twenty miles to another town and were married.

That morning Amy called Mrs. Boyd “Mother” for the first and (except one, and that perhaps shocked out of her by surprise or perhaps by exultation) last time, though the same day Mrs. Boyd formally presented Amy with the brooch: an ancient, clumsy thing, yet valuable. Amy carried it back to their room, and he watched her stand looking at it, perfectly cold, perfectly inscrutable. Then she put it into a drawer. She held it over the open drawer with two fingers and released it and then drew the two fingers across her thigh.

“You will have to wear it sometimes,” Howard said.

“Oh, I will. I’ll show my gratitude. Don’t worry.” Presently it seemed to him that she took pleasure in wearing it. That is, she began to wear it quite often. Then he realized that it was not pleasure but vindictive incongruity; she wore it for an entire week once on the bosom of a gingham house dress, an apron. But she always wore it where Mrs. Boyd would see it, always when she and Howard had dressed to go out and would stop in the mother’s room to say good night.

They lived upstairs, where, a year later, their child was born. They took the child down for Mrs. Boyd to see it. She turned her head on the pillows and looked at the child once. “Ah,” she said. “I never saw Amy’s father, that I know of. But then, I never travelled on a train a great deal.”

“The old — the old—” Amy cried, shuddering and clinging to Howard. “Why does she hate me so? What have I ever done to her? Let’s move. You can work.”

“No. She won’t live always.”

“Yes, she will. She’ll live forever, just to hate me.”

“No,” Howard said. In the next year the child died. Again Amy tried to get him to move.

“Anywhere. I won’t care how we have to live.”

“No. I can’t leave her helpless on her back. You will have to start going out again. Dance. Then it won’t be so bad.”

“Yes,” she said, quieter. “I’ll have to. I can’t stand this.”

One said “you,” the other, “I.” Neither of them said “we.” So, on Saturday nights Amy would dress and Howard would put on scarf and overcoat, sometimes over his shirt-sleeves, and they would descend the stairs and stop at Mrs. Boyd’s door and then Howard would put Amy into the car and watch her drive away.

Then he would re-enter the house and with his shoes in his hand return up the stairs, as he had used to do before they married, slipping past the lighted transom. Just before midnight, in the overcoat and scarf again, he would slip back down the stairs and past the still lighted transom and be waiting on the porch when Amy drove up. Then they would enter the house and look into Mrs. Boyd’s room and say good night.

One night it was one o’clock before she returned. He had been waiting for an hour in slippers and pajamas on the porch; it was November. The transom above Mrs. Boyd’s door was dark and they did not stop.

“Some jelly beans set the clock back,” she said. She did not look at him, dragging her clothes off, flinging the brooch along with her other jewelry onto the dressing table. “I had hoped you wouldn’t be fool enough to stand out there and wait for me.”

“Maybe next time they set the clock back I won’t.”

She stopped, suddenly and perfectly still, looking at him over her shoulder. “Do you mean that?” she said. He was not looking at her; he heard, felt, her approach and stand beside him. Then she touched his shoulder. “Howard?” she said. He didn’t move. Then she was clinging to him, flung onto his lap, crying wildly: “What’s happening to us?” striking herself against him with a wild abandon: “What is it?”

What is it?" He held her quiet, though after they were each in their beds (they already had two of them) he heard and then felt her cross the intervening gap and fling herself against him again with that wild terrified abandon not of a woman but of a child in the dark, enveloping him, whispering: "You don't have to trust me, Howard! You can! You can! You don't have to!"

"Yes," he said. "I know. It's all right. It's all right." So after that, just before twelve, he would put on the overcoat and scarf, creep down the stairs and past the lighted transom, open and close the front door noisily, and then open his mother's door where the mother would be propped high on the pillows, the book open and face down on her knees.

"Back already?" Mrs. Boyd would say.

"Yes. Amy's gone on up. Do you want anything?"

"No. Good night."

"Good night."

Then he would go up and go to bed, and after a time (sometimes) to sleep. But before this sometimes, taking it sometimes into sleep with him, he would think, tell himself with that quiet and fatalistic pessimism of the impotent intelligent: But this cannot go on forever. Some night something is going to happen; she is going to catch Amy. And I know what she is going to do. But what am I going to do? He believed that he did know.

That is, the top of his mind assured him that it knew, but he discounted this; the intelligence again: not to bury it, flee from it: just discounting it, the intelligence speaking out of the impotence: Because no man ever knows what he will do in any given situation, set of circumstances: the wise, others perhaps, drawing conclusions, but never himself. The next morning Amy would be in the other bed, and then, in the light of day, it would be gone.

But now and then, even by daylight, it returned and he from the detachment of his cerebration contemplating his life, that faulty whole

whose third the two of them had produced yet whose lack the two of them could not fill, telling himself, Yes. I know what she will do and I know what Amy will ask me to do and I know that I will not do that. But what will I do? but not for long, telling himself now that it had not happened so far, and that anyway it was six long days until Saturday: the impotence now, not even the intellect.

II

So it was that when he waked to the bell's shrilling he already knew that the bed beside his own was still empty, just as he knew that, no matter how quickly he reached the telephone, it would already be too late. He did not even wait for his slippers; he ran down the now icy stairs, seeing the transom above his mother's door come alight as he passed it and went to the phone and took the receiver down: "Oh, Howard, I'm so sorry — this is Martha Ross — so sorry to disturb you, but I knew that Amy would be anxious about it. I found it in the car, tell her, when we got back home."

"Yes," he said. "In the car."

"In our car. After she lost her switch key and we brought her home, to the corner. We tried to get her to come on home with us and have some ham and eggs, but she—" Then the voice died away. He held the cold receiver to his ear and heard the other end of the wire, the silence, fill with a sort of consternation like an indrawn breath: something instinctive and feminine and self-protective. But the pause itself was hardly a pause; almost immediately the voice went on, though completely changed now, blank, smooth, reserved: "Amy's in bed, I suppose."

"Yes. She's in bed."

"Oh. So sorry I bothered you, got you up. But I knew she would be anxious about it, since it was your mother's, the family piece. But of course, if she hasn't missed it yet, you won't need to bother her." The wire hummed, tense. "That I called or anything." The wire hummed. "Hello. Howard?"

“No,” he said. “I won’t bother her tonight. You can call her in the morning.”

“Yes, I will. So sorry I bothered you. I hope I didn’t wake your mother.”

He put the receiver back. He was cold. He could feel his bare toes curling back from the icelike floor as he stood looking at the blank door beyond which his mother would be sitting, high-propped on the pillows, with her tallow face and dark inscrutable eyes and the hair which Amy said resembled weathered cotton, beside the clock whose hands she had stopped herself at ten minutes to four on the afternoon five years ago when she first moved again. When he opened the door his picture had been exact, almost to the position of the hands even. “She is not in this house,” Mrs. Boyd said.

“Yes. She’s in bed. You know when we came in. She just left one of her rings with Martha Ross tonight and Martha telephoned.”

But apparently she had not even listened to him. “So you swear she is in this house this minute.”

“Yes. Of course she is. She’s asleep, I tell you.”

“Then send her down here to say good night to me.”

“Nonsense. Of course I won’t.”

They looked at one another across the bed’s footboard.

“You refuse?”

“Yes.”

They looked at one another a moment longer. Then he began to turn away; he could feel her watching him. “Then tell me something else. It was the brooch she lost.”

He did not answer this either. He just looked at her again as he closed the door: the two of them curiously similar, mortal and implacable foes in the fierce close antipathy of blood. He went out.

He returned to the bedroom and turned on the light and found his slippers and went to the fire and put some coal on the embers and

punched and prodded it into flame. The clock on the mantel said twenty minutes to one. Presently he had a fair blaze; he had quit shivering.

He went back to bed and turned off the light, leaving only the firelight pulsing and gleaming on the furniture and among the phials and mirrors of the dressing table, and in the smaller mirror above his own chest of drawers, upon which sat the three silver photograph frames, the two larger ones containing himself and Amy, the smaller one between them empty.

He just lay. He was not thinking at all. He had just thought once, quietly, So that's that. So now I suppose I will know, find out what I am going to do and then no more, not even thinking that again.

The house seemed still to be filled with the shrill sound of the telephone like a stubborn echo. Then he began to hear the clock on the mantel, reiterant, cold, not loud. He turned on the light and took up the book face down and open from the table beside his pillow, but he found that he could not keep his mind on the words for the sound which the clock made, so he rose and went to the mantel. The hands were now at half past two.

He stopped the clock and turned its face to the wall and brought his book to the fire and found that he could now keep his mind on the words, the sense, reading on now untroubled by time. So he could not have said just when it was that he found he had ceased to read, had jerked his head up. He had heard no sound, yet he knew that Amy was in the house. He did not know how he knew: he just sat holding his breath, immobile, the peaceful book raised and motionless, waiting. Then he heard Amy say, "It's me, Mother."

She said "Mother," he thought, not moving yet. She called her "Mother" again. He moved now, putting the book carefully down, his place marked, but as he crossed the room he walked naturally, not trying to deaden his footsteps, to the door and opened it and saw Amy just emerging from Mrs. Boyd's room.

She began to mount the stairs, walking naturally too, her hard heels sharp and unnaturally loud in the nightbound house. She must have stooped when Mother called her and put her slippers on again, he thought. She had not seen him yet, mounting steadily, her face in the dim hall light vague and petal-like against the collar of her fur coat, projecting already ahead of her to where he waited a sort of rosy and crystal fragrance of the frozen night out of which she had just emerged.

Then she saw him at the head of the stairs. For just a second, an instant, she stopped dead still, though she was moving again before it could have been called pause, already speaking as she passed him where he stood aside, and entered the bedroom: "Is it very late? I was with the Rosses. They just let me out at the corner; I lost my car key out at the club. Maybe it was the car that waked her."

"No. She was already awake. It was the telephone."

She went on to the fire and spread her hands to it, still in her coat; she did not seem to have heard him, her face rosy in the firelight, her presence emanating that smell of cold, that frosty fragrance which had preceded her up the stairs: "I suppose so. Her light was already on.

I knew as soon as I opened the front door that we were sunk. I hadn't even got in the house good when she said 'Amy' and I said 'It's me, Mother' and she said, 'Come in here, please,' and there she was with those eyes that haven't got any edges to them and that hair that looks like somebody pulled it out of the middle of a last year's cotton bale, and she said, 'Of course you understand that you will have to leave this house at once. Good night.'"

"Yes," he said. "She has been awake since about half past twelve. But there wasn't anything to do but insist that you were already in bed asleep and trust to luck."

"You mean, she hasn't been asleep at all?"

"No. It was the telephone, like I told you. About half past twelve."

With her hands still spread to the fire she glanced at him over her furred shoulder, her face rosy, her eyes at once bright and heavy, like a woman's eyes after pleasure, with a kind of inattentive conspiratorial commiseration. "Telephone? Here?"

At half past twelve? What absolutely putrid — But no matter." She turned now, facing him, as if she had only been waiting until she became warm, the rich coat open upon the fragile glitter of her dress; there was a quality actually beautiful about her now — not of the face whose impeccable replica looks out from the covers of a thousand magazines each month, nor of the figure, the shape of deliberately epicene provocation into which the miles of celluloid film have constricted the female body of an entire race; but a quality completely female in the old eternal fashion, primitive assured and ruthless as she approached him, already raising her arms.

"Yes! I say luck too!" she said, putting her arms around him, her upper body leaned back to look into his face, her own face triumphant, the smell now warm woman-odor where the frosty fragrance had thawed. "She said at once, now. So we can go. You see? Do you understand? We can leave now. Give her the money, let her have it all. We won't care. You can find work; I won't care how and where we will have to live. You don't have to stay here now, with her now. She has — what do you call it? absolved you herself. Only I have lost the car key. But no matter: we can walk. Yes, walk; with nothing, taking nothing of hers, like we came here."

"Now?" he said. "Tonight?"

"Yes! She said at once. So it will have to be tonight."

"No," he said. That was all, no indication of which question he had answered, which denied. But then, he did not need to because she still held him; it was only the expression of her face that changed. It did not die yet nor even become terrified yet: it just became unbelieving, like a child's incredulity. "You mean, you still won't go? You still won't leave her? That you would just take me to the hotel for tonight and that you will come back here tomorrow?"

Or do you mean you won't even stay at the hotel with me tonight? That you will take me there and leave me and then you—" She held him, staring at him; she began to say, "Wait, wait. There must be some reason, something — Wait," she cried; "wait! You said, telephone. At half past twelve." She still stared at him, her hands hard, her pupils like pinpoints, her face ferocious. "That's it. That's the reason. Who was it that telephoned here about me? Tell me! I defy you to! I will explain it. Tell me!"

"It was Martha Ross. She said she had just let you out at the corner."

"She lied!" she cried at once, immediately, scarce waiting to hear the name. "She lied! They did bring me home then but it was still early and so I decided to go on with them to their house and have some ham and eggs. So I called to Frank before he got turned around and I went with them. Frank will prove it! She lied! They just this minute put me out at the corner!"

She looked at him. They stared at one another for a full immobile moment. Then he said, "Then where is the brooch?"

"The brooch?" she said. "What brooch?" But already he had seen her hand move upward beneath the coat; besides, he could see her face and watch it gape like that of a child which has lost its breath before she began to cry with a wild yet immobile abandon, so that she spoke through the weeping in the choked gasping of a child, with complete and despairing surrender: "Oh, Howard! I wouldn't have done that to you! I wouldn't have! I wouldn't have!"

"All right," he said. "Hush, now. Hush, Amy. She will hear you."

"All right. I'm trying to." But she still faced him with that wrung and curiously rigid face beneath its incredible flow of moisture, as though not the eyes but all the pores had sprung at once; now she too spoke directly out of thinking, without mention of subject or circumstance, nothing more of defiance or denial: "Would you have gone with me if you hadn't found out?"

“No. Not even then. I won’t leave her. I will not, until she is dead. Or this house.

I won’t. I can’t. I—” They looked at one another, she staring at him as if she saw reflected in his pupils not herself but the parchment-colored face below stairs — the piled dirty white hair, the fierce implacable eyes — her own image blanked out by something beyond mere blindness: by a quality determined, invincible, and crucified.

“Yes,” she said. From somewhere she produced a scrap of chiffon and began to dab at her eyes, delicately, even now by instinct careful of the streaked mascara. “She beat us. She lay there in that bed and beat us.” She turned and went to the closet and drew out an overnight bag and put the crystal objects from the dressing-table into it and opened a drawer. “I can’t take everything tonight. I will have to—”

He moved also; from the chest of drawers where the small empty photograph frame sat he took his wallet and removed the bills from it and returned and put the money into her hand. “I don’t think there is very much here. But you won’t need money until tomorrow.”

“Yes,” she said. “You can send the rest of my things then, too.”

“Yes,” he said. She folded and smoothed the notes in her fingers; she was not looking at him. He did not know what she was looking at except it was not at the money. “Haven’t you got a purse or something to carry it in?”

“Yes,” she said. But she did not stop folding and smoothing the bills, still not looking at them, apparently not aware of them, as if they had no value and she had merely picked them idly up without being aware of it. “Yes,” she said. “She beat us. She lay there in that bed she will never move from until they come in and carry her out some day, and took that brooch and beat us both.” Then she began to cry. It was as quiet now as the way she had spoken. “My little baby,” she said. “My dear little baby.”

He didn't even say Hush now. He just waited until she dried her eyes again, almost briskly, rousing, looking at him with an expression almost like smiling, her face, the make-up, the careful evening face haggard and streaked and filled with the weary and peaceful aftermath of tears. "Well," she said. "It's late." She stooped, but he anticipated her and took the bag; they descended the stairs together; they could see the lighted transom above Mrs. Boyd's door.

"It's too bad you haven't got the car," he said.

"Yes. I lost the key at the club. But I telephoned the garage. They will bring it in in the morning."

They stopped in the hall while he telephoned for a cab. Then they waited, talking quietly now and then. "You had better go straight to bed."

"Yes. I'm tired. I danced a good deal."

"What was the music? Was it good?"

"Yes. I don't know. I suppose so. When you are dancing yourself, you don't usually notice whether the music is or isn't."

"Yes, I guess that's so." Then the car came. They went out to it, he in pajamas and robe; the earth was frozen and iron-hard, the sky bitter and brilliant. He helped her in.

"Now you run back into the house," she said. "You didn't even put on your overcoat."

"Yes. I'll get your things to the hotel early."

"Not too early. Run, now." She had already sat back, the coat close about her. He had already remarked how sometime, at some moment back in the bedroom, the warm woman-odor had congealed again and that she now emanated once more that faint frosty fragrance, fragile, impermanent and forlorn; the car moved away, he did not look back.

As he was closing the front door his mother called his name. But he did not pause or even glance toward the door. He just mounted the stairs, out of the dead, level, unsleeping, peremptory voice.

The fire had burned down: a strong rosy glow, peaceful and quiet and warmly reflected from mirror and polished wood. The book still lay, face down and open, in the chair. He took it up and went to the table between the two beds and sought and found the cellophane envelope which had once contained pipe cleaners, which he used for a bookmark, and marked his place and put the book down. It was the coat-pocket size, Modern Library Green Mansions. He had discovered the book during adolescence; he had read it ever since.

During that period he read only the part about the journey of the three people in search of the Riolama which did not exist, seeking this part out and reading it in secret as the normal boy would have normal and conventional erotica or obscenity, mounting the barren mountain with Rima toward the cave, not knowing then that it was the cave-symbol which he sought, escaping it at last through the same desire and need to flee and escape which Rima had, following her on past the cave to where she poised, not even waiting for him, impermanent as a match flame and as weak, in the cold and ungrieving moon.

In his innocence then he believed, with a sort of urgent and despairing joy, that the mystery about her was not mystery since it was physical: that she was corporeally impenetrable, incomplete; with peaceful despair justifying, vindicating, what he was through (so he believed) no fault of his own, with what he read in books, as the young do. But after his marriage he did not read the book again until the child died and the Saturday nights began.

And then he avoided the journey to Riolama as he had used to seek it out. Now he read only where Abel (the one man on earth who knew that he was alone) wandered in the impervious and interdict forest filled with the sound of birds. Then he went to the chest and opened again the drawer where he kept the wallet and stood for a moment, his hand still lying on the edge of the drawer. "Yes," he said quietly, aloud: "it seems to have been right all the time about what I will do."

The bathroom was at the end of the hall, built onto the house later, warm too where he had left the electric heater on for Amy and they had forgot it. It was here that he kept his whiskey also. He had begun to drink after his mother's stroke, in the beginning of what he had believed to be his freedom, and since the death of the child he had begun to keep a two-gallon keg of corn whiskey in the bathroom.

Although it was detached from the house proper and the whole depth of it from his mother's room, he nevertheless stuffed towels carefully about and beneath the door, and then removed them and returned to the bedroom and took the down coverlet from Amy's bed and returned and stuffed the door again and then hung the coverlet before it.

But even then he was not satisfied. He stood there, thoughtful, musing, a little pudgy (he had never taken any exercise since he gave up trying to learn to dance, and now what with the steady drinking, there was little of the young Italian novice about his figure any more), the pistol hanging from his hand. He began to look about. His glance fell upon the bath mat folded over the edge of the tub.

He wrapped his hand, pistol and all, in the mat and pointed it toward the rear wall and fired it, the report muffled and jarring though not loud. Yet even now he stood and listened as if he expected to hear from this distance. But he heard nothing; even when, the door freed again, he moved quietly down the hall and then down the steps to where he could see clearly the dark transom above his mother's door. But again he did not pause.

He returned up the stairs, quietly, hearing the cold and impotent ratiocination without listening to it: Like your father, you cannot seem to live with either of them, but unlike your father you cannot seem to live without them; telling himself quietly, "Yes, it seems that it was right.

It seems to have known us better than I did," and he shut the bathroom door again and stuffed the towels carefully about and beneath it. But he did not hang the coverlet this time. He drew it over himself,

squatting, huddling into it, the muzzle of the pistol between his teeth like a pipe, wadding the thick soft coverlet about his head, hurrying, moving swiftly now because he was already beginning to suffocate.

The End

My Grandmother Millard, William Faulkner

My Grandmother Millard

I

IT WOULD BE right after supper, before we had left the table. At first, beginning with the day the news came that the Yankees had taken Memphis, we did it three nights in succession. But after that, as we got better and better and faster and faster, once a week suited Granny.

Then after Cousin Melisandre finally got out of Memphis and came to live with us, it would be just once a month, and when the regiment in Virginia voted Father out of the colonelcy and he came home and stayed three months while he made a crop and got over his mad and organized his cavalry troop for General Forrest's command, we quit doing it at all.

That is, we did it one time with Father there too, watching, and that night Ringo and I heard him laughing in the library, the first time he had laughed since he came home, until in about a half a minute Granny came out already holding her skirts up and went sailing up the stairs. So we didn't do it any more until Father had organized his troop and was gone again.

Granny would fold her napkin beside her plate. She would speak to Ringo standing behind her chair without even turning her head:
"Go call Joby and Lucius."

And Ringo would go back through the kitchen without stopping. He would just say, "All right. Look out," at Louvinia's back and go to the cabin and come back with not only Joby and Lucius and the lighted lantern but Philadelphia too, even though Philadelphia wasn't going to do anything but stand and watch and then follow to the orchard and back to the house until Granny said we were done for that time and she and Lucius could go back home to bed.

And we would bring down from the attic the big trunk (we had done it so many times by now that we didn't even need the lantern any more to go to the attic and get the trunk) whose lock it was my job to oil every Monday morning with a feather dipped in chicken fat, and Louvinia would come in from the kitchen with the unwashed silver from supper in a dishpan under one arm and the kitchen clock under the other and set the clock and the dishpan on the table and take from her apron pocket a pair of Granny's rolled-up stockings and hand them to Granny and Granny would unroll the stockings and take from the toe of one of them a wadded rag and open the rag and take out the key to the trunk and unpin her watch from her bosom and fold it into the rag and put the rag back into the stocking and roll the stockings back into a ball and put the ball into the trunk.

Then with Cousin Melisandre and Philadelphia watching, and Father too on that one time when he was there, Granny would stand facing the clock, her hands raised and about eight inches apart and her neck bowed so she could watch the clock-face over her spectacles, until the big hand reached the nearest hour-mark.

The rest of us watched her hands. She wouldn't speak again. She didn't need to. There would be just the single light loud pop of her palms when the hand came to the nearest hour-mark; sometimes we would be already moving, even before her hands came together, all of us that is except Philadelphia. Granny wouldn't let her help at all, because of Lucius, even though Lucius had done nearly all the digging of the pit and did most of the carrying of the trunk each time. But Philadelphia had to be there. Granny didn't have to tell her but once. "I want the wives of all the free men here too," Granny said. "I want all of you free

folks to watch what the rest of us that aint free have to do to keep that way.”

That began about eight months ago. One day even I realized that something had happened to Lucius. Then I knew that Ringo had already seen it and that he knew what it was, so that when at last Louvinia came and told Granny, it was not as if Lucius had dared his mother to tell her but as if he had actually forced somebody, he didn't care who, to tell her. He had said it more than once, in the cabin one night probably for the first time, then after that in other places and to other people, to Negroes from other plantations even.

Memphis was already gone then, and New Orleans, and all we had left of the River was Vicksburg and although we didn't believe it then, we wouldn't have that long. Then one morning Louvinia came in where Granny was cutting down the worn-out uniform pants Father had worn home from Virginia so they would fit me, and told Granny how Lucius was saying that soon the Yankees would have all of Mississippi and Yoknapatawpha County too and all the niggers would be free and that when that happened, he was going to be long gone. Lucius was working in the garden that morning.

Granny went out to the back gallery, still carrying the pants and the needle. She didn't even push her spectacles up. She said, “You, Lucius,” just once, and Lucius came out of the garden with the hoe and Granny stood looking down at him over the spectacles as she looked over them at everything she did, from reading or sewing to watching the clock-face until the instant came to start burying the silver.

“You can go now,” she said. “You needn't wait on the Yankees.”

“Go?” Lucius said. “I aint free.”

“You've been free for almost three minutes,” Granny said. “Go on.” Lucius blinked his eyes while you could have counted about ten. “Go where?” he said.

“I can't tell you,” Granny said. “I aint free. I would imagine you will have all Yankeedom to move around in.”

Lucius blinked his eyes. He didn't look at Granny now. "Was that all you wanted?" he said.

"Yes," Granny said. So he went back to the garden. And that was the last we heard about being free from him. That is, it quit showing in the way he acted, and if he talked any more of it, even Louvinia never thought it was worth bothering Granny with. It was Granny who would do the reminding of it, especially to Philadelphia, especially on the nights when we would stand like race-horses at the barrier, watching Granny's hands until they clapped together.

Each one of us knew exactly what he was to do. I would go upstairs for Granny's gold hatpin and her silver-headed umbrella and her plumed Sunday hat because she had already sent her ear-rings and brooch to Richmond a long time ago, and to Father's room for his silver-backed brushes and to Cousin Melisandre's room after she came to live with us for her things because the one time Granny let Cousin Melisandre try to help too, Cousin Melisandre brought all her dresses down. Ringo would go to the parlor for the candle-sticks and Granny's dulcimer and the medallion of Father's mother back in Carolina.

And we would run back to the dining-room where Louvinia and Lucius would have the sideboard almost cleared, and Granny still standing there and watching the clock-face and the trunk both now with her hands ready to pop again and they would pop and Ringo and I would stop at the cellar door just long enough to snatch up the shovels and run on to the orchard and snatch the brush and grass and the criss-crossed sticks away and have the pit open and ready by the time we saw them coming: first Louvinia with the lantern, then Joby and Lucius with the trunk and Granny walking beside it and Cousin Melisandre and Philadelphia (and on that one time Father, walking along and laughing) following behind.

And on that first night, the kitchen clock wasn't in the trunk. Granny was carrying it, while Louvinia held the lantern so that Granny could watch the hand, Granny made us put the trunk into the pit and shovel

the dirt back and smooth it off and lay the brush and grass back over it again and then dig up the trunk and carry it back to the house.

And one night, it seemed like we had been bringing the trunk down from the attic and putting the silver into it and carrying it out to the pit and uncovering the pit and then covering the pit again and turning around and carrying the trunk back to the house and taking the silver out and putting it back where we got it from all winter and all summer too; — that night, and I don't know who thought of it first, maybe it was all of us at once.

But anyway the clock-hand had passed four hour-marks before Granny's hands even popped for Ringo and me to run and open the pit. And they came with the trunk and Ringo and I hadn't even put down the last armful of brush and sticks, to save having to stoop to pick it up again, and Lucius hadn't even put down his end of the trunk for the same reason and I reckon Louvinia was the only one that knew what was coming next because Ringo and I didn't know that the kitchen clock was still sitting on the dining-room table.

Then Granny spoke. It was the first time we had ever heard her speak between when she would tell Ringo, "Go call Joby and Lucius," and then tell us both about thirty minutes later: "Wash your feet and go to bed." It was not loud and not long, just two words: "Bury it." And we lowered the trunk into the pit and Joby and Lucius threw the dirt back in and even then Ringo and I didn't move with the brush until Granny spoke again, not loud this time either: "Go on. Hide the pit."

And we put the brush back and Granny said, "Dig it up." And we dug up the trunk and carried it back into the house and put the things back where we got them from and that was when I saw the kitchen clock still sitting on the dining-room table. And we all stood there watching Granny's hands until they popped together and that time we filled the trunk and carried it out to the orchard and lowered it into the pit quicker than we had ever done before.

And then when the time came to really bury the silver, it was too late. After it was all over and Cousin Melisandre and Cousin Philip were finally married and Father had got done laughing, Father said that always happened when a heterogeneous collection of people who were cohered simply by an uncomplex will for freedom engaged with a tyrannous machine. He said they would always lose the first battles, and if they were outnumbered and outweighed enough, it would seem to an outsider that they were going to lose them all. But they would not.

They could not be defeated; if they just willed that freedom strongly and completely enough to sacrifice all else for it — ease and comfort and fatness of spirit and all, until whatever it was they had left would be enough, no matter how little it was — that very freedom itself would finally conquer the machine as a negative force like drouth or flood could strangle it. And later still, after two more years and we knew we were going to lose the war, he was still saying that. He said, “I won’t see it but you will. You will see it in the next war, and in all the wars Americans will have to fight from then on.

There will be men from the South in the forefront of all the battles, even leading some of them, helping those who conquered us defend that same freedom which they believed they had taken from us.” And that happened: thirty years later, and General Wheeler, whom Father would have called apostate, commanding in Cuba, and whom old General Early did call apostate and matricide too in the office of the Richmond editor when he said: “I would like to have lived so that when my time comes, I will see Robert Lee again. But since I haven’t, I’m certainly going to enjoy watching the devil burn that blue coat off Joe Wheeler.”

We didn’t have time. We didn’t even know there were any Yankees in Jefferson, let alone within a mile of Sartoris. There never had been many. There was no railroad then and no river big enough for big boats and nothing in Jefferson they would have wanted even if they had come, since this was before Father had had time to worry them enough

for General Grant to issue a general order with a reward for his capture. So we had got used to the war.

We thought of it as being definitely fixed and established as a railroad or a river is, moving east along the railroad from Memphis and south along the River toward Vicksburg. We had heard tales of Yankee pillage and most of the people around Jefferson stayed ready to bury their silver fast too, though I don't reckon any of them practiced doing it like we did. But nobody we knew was even kin to anyone who had been pillaged, and so I don't think that even Lucius really expected any Yankees until that morning.

It was about eleven o'clock. The table was already set for dinner and everybody was beginning to kind of ease up so we would be sure to hear when Louvinia went out to the back gallery and rang the bell, when Ab Snopes came in at a dead run, on a strange horse as usual. He was a member of Father's troop. Not a fighting member; he called himself father's horse-captain, whatever he meant by it, though we had a pretty good idea, and none of us at least knew what he was doing in Jefferson when the troop was supposed to be up in Tennessee with General Bragg, and probably nobody anywhere knew the actual truth about how he got the horse, galloping across the yard and right through one of Granny's flower beds because I reckon he figured that carrying a message he could risk it, and on around to the back because he knew that, message or no message, he better not come to Granny's front door hollering that way, sitting that strange blown horse with a U.S. army brand on it you could read three hundred yards and yelling up at Granny that General Forrest was in Jefferson but there was a whole regiment of Yankee cavalry not a half a mile down the road.

So we never had time. Afterward Father admitted that Granny's error was not in strategy nor tactics either, even though she had copied from someone else. Because he said it had been a long time now since originality had been a component of military success. It just happened too fast. I went for Joby and Lucius and Philadelphia because Granny had already sent Ringo down to the road with a cup towel to wave when they came in sight. Then she sent me to the front window where I

could watch Ringo. When Ab Snopes came back from hiding his new Yankee horse, he offered to go upstairs to get the things there.

Granny had told us a long time ago never to let Ab Snopes go anywhere about the house unless somebody was with him. She said she would rather have Yankees in the house any day because at least Yankees would have more delicacy, even if it wasn't anything but good sense, than to steal a spoon or candlestick and then try to sell it to one of her own neighbors, as Ab Snopes would probably do. She didn't even answer him. She just said, "Stand over there by that door and be quiet." So Cousin Melisandre went upstairs after all and Granny and Philadelphia went to the parlor for the candlesticks and the medallion and the dulcimer, Philadelphia not only helping this time, free or not, but Granny wasn't even using the clock.

It just all happened at once. One second Ringo was sitting on the gatepost, looking up the road. The next second he was standing on it and waving the cup towel and then I was running and hollering, back to the dining-room, and I remember the whites of Joby's and Lucius's and Philadelphia's eyes and I remembered Cousin Melisandre's eyes where she leaned against the sideboard with the back of her hand against her mouth, and Granny and Louvinia and Ab Snopes glaring at one another across the trunk and I could hear Louvinia's voice even louder than mine:

"Miz Cawmpson! Miz Cawmpson!"

"What?" Granny cried. "What? Mrs. Compson?" Then we all remembered. It was when the first Yankee scouting patrol entered Jefferson over a year ago. The war was new then and I suppose General Compson was the only Jefferson soldier they had heard of yet. Anyway, the officer asked someone in the Square where General Compson lived and old Doctor Holston sent his Negro boy by back alleys and across lots to warn Mrs. Compson in time, and the story was how the Yankee officer sent some of his men through the empty house and himself rode around to the back where old Aunt Roxanne was standing in front of the outhouse behind the closed door of which Mrs. Compson was sitting, fully dressed even to her hat and parasol, on the wicker hamper

containing her plate and silver. "Miss in dar," Roxanne said. "Stop where you is." And the story told how the Yankee officer said, "Excuse me," and raised his hat and even backed the horse a few steps before he turned and called his men and rode away. "The privy!" Granny cried.

"Hell fire, Miz Millard!" Ab Snopes said. And Granny never said anything. It wasn't like she didn't hear, because she was looking right at him. It was like she didn't care; that she might have even said it herself. And that shows how things were then: we just never had time for anything. "Hell fire," Ab Snopes said, "all north Mississippi has done heard about that! There aint a white lady between here and Memphis that aint setting in the back house on a grip full of silver right this minute."

"Then we're already late," Granny said. "Hurry."

"Wait!" Ab Snopes said. "Wait! Even them Yankees have done caught onto that by now!"

"Then let's hope these are different Yankees," Granny said. "Hurry."

"But Miz Millard!" Ab Snopes cried. "Wait! Wait!"

But then we could hear Ringo yelling down at the gate and I remember Joby and Lucius and Philadelphia and Louvinia and the balloon-like swaying of Cousin Melisandre's skirts as they ran across the back yard, the trunk somewhere among them; I remember how Joby and Lucius tumbled the trunk into the little tall narrow flimsy sentry-box and Louvinia thrust Cousin Melisandre in and slammed the door and we could hear Ringo yelling good now, almost to the house, and then I was back at the front window and I saw them just as they swept around the house in a kind of straggling-clump — six men in blue, riding fast yet with something curious in the action of the horses, as if they were not only yoked together in spans but were hitched to a single wagon-tongue, then Ringo on foot running and not yelling now, and last of all the seventh rider, bareheaded and standing in his stirrups and with a sabre over his head.

Then I was on the back gallery again, standing beside Granny above that moil of horses and men in the yard, and she was wrong. It was as if these were not only the same ones who had been at Mrs. Compson's

last year, but somebody had even told them exactly where our outhouse was. The horses were yoked in pairs, but it was not a wagon-tongue, it was a pole, almost a log, twenty feet long, slung from saddle to saddle between the three span; and I remember the faces, unshaven and wan and not so much peering as frantically gleeful, glaring up at us for an instant before the men leaped down and unslung the pole and jerked the horses aside and picked up the pole, three to a side, and began to run across the yard with it as the last rider came around the house, in gray (an officer: it was Cousin Philip, though of course we didn't know that then, and there was going to be a considerable more uproar and confusion before he finally became Cousin Philip and of course we didn't know that either), the sabre still lifted and not only standing in the stirrups but almost lying down along the horse's neck. The six Yankees never saw him.

And we used to watch Father drilling his troop in the pasture, changing them from column to troop front at full gallop, and you could hear his voice even above the sound of the galloping hooves but it wasn't a bit louder than Granny's. "There's a lady in there!" she said. But the Yankees never heard her any more than they had seen Cousin Philip yet, the whole mass of them, the six men running with the pole and Cousin Philip on the horse, leaning out above them with a lifted sabre, rushing on across the yard until the end of the pole struck the outhouse door. It didn't just overturn, it exploded.

One second it stood there, tall and narrow and flimsy; the next second it was gone and there was a boil of yelling men in blue coats darting and dodging around under Cousin Philip's horse and the flashing sabre until they could find a chance to turn and run. Then there was a scatter of planks and shingles and Cousin Melisandre sitting beside the trunk in the middle of it, in the spread of her hoops, her eyes shut and her mouth open, still screaming, and after a while a feeble popping of pistol-shots from down along the creek that didn't sound any more like war than a boy with firecrackers.

"I tried to tell you to wait!" Ab Snopes said behind us, "I tried to tell you them Yankees had done caught on!"

After Joby and Lucius and Ringo and I finished burying the trunk in the pit and hiding the shovel-marks, I found Cousin Philip in the summer house. His sabre and belt were propped against the wall but I don't reckon even he knew what had become of his hat. He had his coat off too and was wiping it with his handkerchief and watching the house with one eye around the edge of the door. When I came in he straightened up and I thought at first he was looking at me. Then I don't know what he was looking at. "That beautiful girl," he said. "Fetch me a comb."

"They're waiting for you in the house," I said. "Granny wants to know what's the matter." Cousin Melisandre was all right now. It took Louvinia and Philadelphia both and finally Granny to get her into the house but Louvinia brought the elder-flower wine before Granny had time to send her after it and now Cousin Melisandre and Granny were waiting in the parlor.

"Your sister," Cousin Philip said. "And a hand-mirror."

"No, Sir," I said. "She's just our cousin. From Memphis. Granny says—" Because he didn't know Granny. It was pretty good for her to wait any time for anybody. But he didn't even let me finish.

"That beautiful, tender girl," he said. "And send a nigger with a basin of water and a towel." I went back toward the house. This time when I looked back I couldn't see his eye around the door-edge. "And a clothes brush," he said.

Granny wasn't waiting very much. She was at the front door. "Now what?" she said. I told her. "Does the man think we are giving a ball here in the middle of the day? Tell him I said to come on in and wash on the back gallery like we do. Louvinia's putting dinner on, and we're already late." But Granny didn't know Cousin Philip either. I told her again. She looked at me. "What did he say?" she said.

"He didn't say anything," I said. "Just that beautiful girl."

“That’s all he said to me too,” Ringo said. I hadn’t heard him come in.
“Sides the soap and water. Just that beautiful girl.”
“Was he looking at you either when he said it?” I said.
“No,” Ringo said. “I just thought for a minute he was.”

Now Granny looked at Ringo and me both. “Hah,” she said, and afterward when I was older I found out that Granny already knew Cousin Philip too, that she could look at one of them and know all the other Cousin Melisandres and Cousin Philips both without having to see them. “I sometimes think that bullets are just about the least fatal things that fly, especially in war. — All right,” she said. “Take him his soap and water. But hurry.”

We did. This time he didn’t say “that beautiful girl.” He said it twice. He took off his coat and handed it to Ringo. “Brush it good,” he said. “Your sister, I heard you say.”

“No, you didn’t,” I said.

“No matter,” he said. “I want a nosegay. To carry in my hand.”

“Those flowers are Granny’s,” I said.

“No matter,” he said. He rolled up his sleeves and began to wash. “A small one. About a dozen blooms. Get something pink.”

I went and got the flowers. I don’t know whether Granny was still at the front door or not. Maybe she wasn’t. At least she never said anything. So I picked the ones Ab Snope’s new Yankee horse had already trampled down and wiped the dirt off of them and straightened them out and went back to the summer house where Ringo was holding the hand-glass while Cousin Philip combed his hair. Then he put on his coat and buckled on his sabre again and held his feet out one at a time for Ringo to wipe his boots off with the towel, and Ringo saw it. I wouldn’t have spoken at all because we were already later for dinner than ever now, even if there hadn’t never been a Yankee on the place. “You tore your britches on them Yankees,” Ringo said.

So I went back to the house. Granny was standing in the hall. This time she just said, “Yes?” It was almost quiet.

“He tore his britches,” I said. And she knew more about Cousin Philip than even Ringo could find out by looking at him. She had the needle already threaded in the bosom of her dress.

And I went back to the summer house and then we came back to the house and up to the front door and I waited for him to go into the hall but he didn't, he just stood there holding the nosegay in one hand and his hat in the other, not very old, looking at that moment anyway not very much older than Ringo and me for all his braid and sash and sabre and boots and spurs, and even after just two years looking like all our soldiers and most of the other people too did: as if it had been so long now since he had had all he wanted to eat at one time that even his memory and palate had forgotten it and only his body remembered, standing there with his nosegay and that beautiful-girl look in his face like he couldn't have seen anything even if he had been looking at it.

“No,” he said. “Announce me. It should be your nigger. But no matter.” He said his full name, all three of them, twice, as if he thought I might forget them before I could reach the parlor.

“Go on in,” I said. “They're waiting for you. They had already been waiting for you even before you found your pants were torn.”

“Announce me,” he said. He said his name again. “Of Tennessee. Lieutenant, Savage's Battalion, Forrest's Command, Provisional Army, Department of the West.”

So I did. We crossed the hall to the parlor, where Granny stood between Cousin Melisandre's chair and the table where the decanter of elder-flower wine and three fresh glasses and even a plate of the tea cakes Louvinia had learned to make from cornmeal and molasses were sitting, and he stopped again at that door too and I know he couldn't even see Cousin Melisandre for a minute, even though he never had looked at anything else but her.

“Lieutenant Philip St-Just Backhouse,” I said. I said it loud, because he had repeated it to me three times so I would be sure to get it right and I

wanted to say it to suit him too since even if he had made us a good hour late for dinner, at least he had saved the silver. "Of Tennessee," I said. "Savage's Battalion, Forrest's Command, Provisional Army, Department of the West."

While you could count maybe five, there wasn't anything at all. Then Cousin Melisandre screamed. She sat bolt upright on the chair like she had sat beside the trunk in the litter of planks and shingles in the back yard this morning, with her eyes shut and her mouth open again, screaming.

III

So we were still another half an hour late for dinner. Though this time it never needed anybody but Cousin Philip to get Cousin Melisandre upstairs. All he needed to do was to try to speak to her again. Then Granny came back down and said, "Well, if we don't want to just quit and start calling it supper, we'd better walk in and eat it within the next hour and a half at least." So we walked in. Ab Snopes was already waiting in the dining-room. I reckon he had been waiting longer than anybody, because after all Cousin Melisandre wasn't any kin to him.

Ringo drew Granny's chair and we sat down. Some of it was cold. The rest of it had been on the stove so long now that when you ate it it didn't matter whether it was cold or not. But Cousin Philip didn't seem to mind.

And maybe it didn't take his memory very long to remember again what it was like to have all he wanted to eat, but I don't think his palate ever tasted any of it. He would sit there eating like he hadn't seen any food of any kind in at least a week, and like he was expecting what was even already on his fork to vanish before he could get it into his mouth. Then he would stop with the fork halfway to his mouth and sit there looking at Cousin Melisandre's empty place, laughing. That is, I don't know what else to call it but laughing. Until at last I said,

"Why don't you change your name?"

Then Granny quit eating too. She looked at me over her spectacles. Then she took both hands and lifted the spectacles up her nose until she could look at me through them. Then she even pushed the spectacles up into her front hair and looked at me. "That's the first sensible thing I've heard said on this place since eleven o'clock this morning," she said. "It's so sensible and simple that I reckon only a child could have thought of it." She looked at him. "Why don't you?"

He laughed some more. That is, his face did the same way and he made the same sound again. "My grandfather was at King's Mountain, with Marion all through Carolina. My uncle was defeated for Governor of Tennessee by a corrupt and traitorous cabal of tavern-keepers and Republican Abolitionists, and my father died at Chapultepec. After that, the name they bore is not mine to change.

Even my life is not mine so long as my country lies bleeding and ravished beneath an invader's iron heel." Then he stopped laughing, or whatever it was. Then his face looked surprised. Then it quit looking surprised, the surprise fading out of it steady at first and gradually faster but not very much faster like the heat fades out of a piece of iron on a blacksmith's anvil until his face just looked amazed and quiet and almost peaceful. "Unless I lose it in battle," he said.

"You can't very well do that sitting here," Granny said.

"No," he said. But I don't think he even heard her except with his ears. He stood up. Even Ab Snopes was watching him now, his knife stopped halfway to his mouth with a wad of greens on the end of the blade. "Yes," Cousin Philip said. His face even had the beautiful-girl look on it again. "Yes," he said. He thanked Granny for his dinner. That is, I reckon that's what he had told his mouth to say.

It didn't make much sense to us, but I don't think he was paying any attention to it at all. He bowed. He wasn't looking at Granny nor at anything else. He said "Yes" again. Then he went out. Ringo and I

followed to the front door and watched him mount his horse and sit there for a minute, bareheaded, looking up at the upstairs windows.

It was Granny's room he was looking at, with mine and Ringo's room next to it. But Cousin Melisandre couldn't have seen him even if she had been in either one of them, since she was in bed on the other side of the house with Philadelphia probably still wringing the cloths out in cold water to lay on her head. He sat the horse well. He rode it well too: light and easy and back in the saddle and toes in and perpendicular from ankle to knee as Father had taught me. It was a good horse too.

"It's a damn good horse," I said.

"Git the soap," Ringo said.

But even then I looked quick back down the hall, even if I could hear Granny talking to Ab Snopes in the dining-room. "She's still in there," I said.

"Hah," Ringo said. "I done tasted soap in my mouth for a cuss I thought was a heap further off than that."

Then Cousin Philip spurred the horse and was gone. Or so Ringo and I thought. Two hours ago none of us had ever even heard of him; Cousin Melisandre had seen him twice and sat with her eyes shut screaming both times. But after we were older, Ringo and I realized that Cousin Philip was probably the only one in the whole lot of us that really believed even for one moment that he had said goodbye forever, that not only Granny and Louvinia knew better but Cousin Melisandre did too, no matter what his last name had the bad luck to be.

We went back to the dining-room. Then I realized that Ab Snopes had been waiting for us to come back. Then we both knew he was going to ask Granny something because nobody wanted to be alone when they had to ask Granny something even when they didn't know they were going to have trouble with it.

We had known Ab for over a year now. I should have known what it was like Granny already did. He stood up. "Well, Miz Millard," he said.

"I figger you'll be safe all right from now on, with Bed Forrest and his boys right there in Jefferson. But until things quiet down a mite more, I'll just leave the horses in your lot for a day or two."

"What horses?" Granny said. She and Ab didn't just look at one another. They watched one another.

"Them fresh-captured horses from this morning," Ab said.

"What horses?" Granny said. Then Ab said it.

"My horses." Ab watched her.

"Why?" Granny said. But Ab knew what she meant.

"I'm the only grown man here," he said. Then he said, "I seen them first. They were chasing me before—" Then he said, talking fast now; his eyes had gone kind of glazed for a second but now they were bright again, looking in the stubbly dirt-colored fuzz on his face like two chips of broken plate in a worn-out door-mat: "Spoils of war! I brought them here! I tolled them in here: a military and-bush! And as the only and ranking Confedrit military soldier present—"

"You ain't a soldier," Granny said. "You stipulated that to Colonel Sartoris yourself while I was listening. You told him yourself you would be his independent horse-captain but nothing more."

"Ain't that just exactly what I am trying to be?" he said. "Didn't I bring all six of them horses in here in my own possession, the same as if I was leading them on a rope?"

"Hah," Granny said. "A spoil of war or any other kind of spoil don't belong to a man or a woman either until they can take it home and put it down and turn their back on it. You never had time to get home with even the one you were riding. You ran in the first open gate you came to, no matter whose gate it was."

"Except it was the wrong one," he said. His eyes quit looking like china. They didn't look like anything. But I reckon his face would still look like an old door-mat even after he had turned all the way white. "So I

reckon I got to even walk back to town,” he said. “The woman that would . . .” His voice stopped. He and Granny looked at one another. “Don’t you say it,” Granny said.

“Nome,” he said. He didn’t say it. “. . . a man of seven horses ain’t likely to lend him a mule.”

“No,” Granny said. “But you won’t have to walk.”

We all went out to the lot. I don’t reckon that even Ab knew until then that Granny had already found where he thought he had hidden the first horse and had it brought up to the lot with the other six. But at least he already had his saddle and bridle with him. But it was too late. Six of the horses moved about loose in the lot. The seventh one was tied just inside the gate with a piece of plow-line. It wasn’t the horse Ab had come on because that horse had a blaze. Ab had known Granny long enough too. He should have known. Maybe he did. But at least he tried. He opened the gate.

“Well,” he said, “it ain’t getting no earlier. I reckon I better—”

“Wait,” Granny said. Then we looked at the horse which was tied to the fence. At first glance it looked the best one of the seven. You had to see it just right to tell its near leg was sprung a little, maybe from being worked too hard too young under too much weight. “Take that one,” Granny said.

“That ain’t mine,” Ab said. “That’s one of yourn. I’ll just—”

“Take that one,” Granny said. Ab looked at her. You could have counted at least ten.

“Hell fire, Miz Millard,” he said.

“I’ve told you before about cursing on this place,” Granny said.

“Yessum,” Ab said. Then he said it again: “Hell fire.” He went into the lot and rammed the bit into the tied horse’s mouth and clapped the saddle on and snatched the piece of plow-line off and threw it over the fence and got up and Granny stood there until he had ridden out of the lot and Ringo closed the gate and that was the first time I noticed the chain and padlock from the smokehouse door and Ringo locked it and

handed Granny the key and Ab sat for a minute, looking down at her. "Well, good-day," he said. "I just hope for the sake of the Confedricy that Bed Forrest don't never tangle with you with all the horses he's got."

Then he said it again, maybe worse this time because now he was already on a horse pointed toward the gate: "Or you'll damn shore leave him just one more passel of infantry before he can spit twice."

Then he was gone too. Except for hearing Cousin Melisandre now and then, and those six horses with U.S. branded on their hips standing in the lot, it might never have happened. At least Ringo and I thought that was all of it.

Every now and then Philadelphia would come downstairs with the pitcher and draw some more cold water for Cousin Melisandre's cloths but we thought that after a while even that would just wear out and quit. Then Philadelphia came down again and came in to where Granny was cutting down a pair of Yankee pants that Father had worn home last time so they would fit Ringo. She didn't say anything. She just stood in the door until Granny said, "All right. What now?"

"She want the banjo," Philadelphia said.

"What?" Granny said. "My dulcimer? She can't play it. Go back upstairs."

But Philadelphia didn't move. "Could I ax Mammy to come help me?"

"No," Granny said. "Louvinia's resting. She's had about as much of this as I want her to stand. Go back upstairs. Give her some more wine if you can't think of anything else." And she told Ringo and me to go somewhere else, anywhere else, but even in the yard you could still hear Cousin Melisandre talking to Philadelphia. And once we even heard Granny though it was still mostly Cousin Melisandre telling Granny that she had already forgiven her, that nothing whatever had happened and that all she wanted now was peace.

And after a while Louvinia came up from the cabin without even being sent for and went upstairs and then it began to look like we were going to be late for supper too. But Philadelphia finally came down and cooked it and carried Cousin Melisandre's tray up and then we quit eating; we could hear Louvinia overhead, in Granny's room now, and she came down and set the untasted tray on the table and stood beside Granny's chair with the key to the trunk in her hand.

"All right," Granny said. "Go call Joby and Lucius." We got the lantern and the shovels. We went to the orchard and removed the brush and dug up the trunk and got the dulcimer and buried the trunk and put the brush back and brought the key in to Granny. And Ringo and I could hear her from our room and Granny was right.

We heard her for a long time and Granny was surely right; she just never said but half of it. The moon came up after a while and we could look down from our window into the garden, at Cousin Melisandre sitting on the bench with the moonlight glinting on the pearl inlay of the dulcimer, and Philadelphia squatting on the sill of the gate with her apron over her head. Maybe she was asleep. It was already late. But I don't see how.

So we didn't hear Granny until she was already in the room, her shawl over her nightgown and carrying a candle. "In a minute I'm going to have about all of this I aim to stand too," she said. "Go wake Lucius and tell him to saddle the mule," she told Ringo. "Bring me the pen and ink and a sheet of paper." I fetched them. She didn't sit down.

She stood at the bureau while I held the candle, writing even and steady and not very much, and signed her name and let the paper lie open to dry until Lucius came in. "Ab Snopes said that Mr. Forrest is in Jefferson," she told Lucius. "Find him. Tell him I will expect him here for breakfast in the morning and to bring that boy."

She used to know General Forrest in Memphis before he got to be a general. He used to trade with Grandfather Millard's supply house and sometimes he would come out to sit with Grandfather on the front

gallery and sometimes he would eat with them. “You can tell him I have six captured horses for him,” she said. “And never mind patter-rollers or soldiers either. Haven’t you got my signature on that paper?”

“I ain’t worrying about them,” Lucius said. “But suppose them Yankees—”

“I see,” Granny said. “Hah. I forgot. You’ve been waiting for Yankees, haven’t you? But those this morning seemed to be too busy trying to stay free to have much time to talk about it, didn’t they? — Get along,” she said. “Do you think any Yankee is going to dare ignore what a Southern soldier or even a patter-roller wouldn’t? — And you go to bed,” she said.

We lay down, both of us on Ringo’s pallet. We heard the mule when Lucius left. Then we heard the mule and at first we didn’t know we had been asleep, the mule coming back now and the moon had started down the west and Cousin Melisandre and Philadelphia were gone from the garden, to where Philadelphia at least could sleep better than sitting on a square sill with an apron over her head, or at least where it was quieter.

And we heard Lucius fumbling up the stairs but we never heard Granny at all because she was already at the top of the stairs, talking down at the noise Lucius was trying not to make. “Speak up,” she said. “I ain’t asleep but I ain’t a lip-reader either. Not in the dark.”

“Genl Fawhrest say he respectful compliments,” Lucius said, “and he can’t come to breakfast this morning because he gonter to be whuppin Genl Smith at Tallahatchie Crossing about that time. But providin he ain’t too fur away in the wrong direction when him and Genl Smith git done, he be proud to accept your invitation next time he in the neighborhood. And he say ‘whut boy’.”

While you could count about five, Granny didn’t say anything. Then she said, “What?”

“He say ‘whut boy’,” Lucius said.

Then you could have counted ten. All we could hear was Lucius breathing. Then Granny said: "Did you wipe the mule down?"

"Yessum," Lucius said.

"Did you turn her back into the pasture?"

"Yessum," Lucius said.

"Then go to bed," Granny said. "And you too," she said.

General Forrest found out what boy. This time we didn't know we had been asleep either, and it was no one mule now. The sun was just rising. When we heard Granny and scrambled to the window, yesterday wasn't a patch on it. There were at least fifty of them now, in gray; the whole outdoors was full of men on horses, with Cousin Philip out in front of them, sitting his horse in almost exactly the same spot where he had been yesterday, looking up at Granny's window and not seeing it or anything else this time either. He had a hat now.

He was holding it clamped over his heart and he hadn't shaved and yesterday he had looked younger than Ringo because Ringo always had looked about ten years older than me. But now, with the first sun-ray making a little soft fuzz in the gold-colored stubble on his face, he looked even younger than I did, and gaunt and worn in the face like he hadn't slept any last night and something else in his face too: like he not only hadn't slept last night but by godfrey he wasn't going to sleep tonight either as long as he had anything to do with it.

"Goodbye," he said. "Goodbye," and whirled his horse, spurring, and raised the new hat over his head like he had carried the sabre yesterday and the whole mass of them went piling back across flower beds and lawns and all and back down the drive toward the gate while Granny still stood at her window in her nightgown, her voice louder than any man's anywhere, I don't care who he is or what he would be doing: "Backhouse! Backhouse! You, Backhouse!"

So we ate breakfast early. Granny sent Ringo in his nightshirt to wake Louvinia and Lucius both. So Lucius had the mule saddled before Louvinia even got the fire lit. This time Granny didn't write a note. "Go

to Tallahatchie Crossing,” she told Lucius. “Sit there and wait for him if necessary.”

“Suppose they done already started the battle?” Lucius said.

“Suppose they have?” Granny said. “What business is that of yours or mine either? You find Bedford Forrest. Tell him this is important; it won’t take long. But don’t you show your face here again without him.”

Lucius rode away. He was gone four days. He didn’t even get back in time for the wedding, coming back up the drive about sundown on the fourth day with two soldiers in one of General Forrest’s forage wagons with the mule tied to the tailgate. He didn’t know where he had been and he never did catch up with the battle. “I never even heard it,” he told Joby and Lucius and Louvinia and Philadelphia and Ringo and me. “If wars always moves that far and that fast, I don’t see how they ever have time to fight.”

But it was all over then. It was the second day, the day after Lucius left. It was just after dinner this time and by now we were used to soldiers. But these were different, just five of them, and we never had seen just that few of them before and we had come to think of soldiers as either jumping on and off horses in the yard or going back and forth through Granny’s flower beds at full gallop. These were all officers and I reckon maybe I hadn’t seen so many soldiers after all because I never saw this much braid before.

They came up the drive at a trot, like people just taking a ride, and stopped without trompling even one flower bed and General Forrest got down and came up the walk toward where Granny waited on the front gallery — a big, dusty man with a big beard so black it looked almost blue and eyes like a sleepy owl, already taking off his hat. “Well, Miss Rosie,” he said.

“Don’t call me Rosie,” Granny said. “Come in. Ask your gentlemen to alight and come in.”

“They’ll wait there,” General Forrest said. “We are a little rushed. My plans have. . . .” Then we were in the library. He wouldn’t sit down. He

looked tired all right, but there was something else a good deal livelier than just tired. “Well, Miss Rosie,” he said. “I—”

“Don’t call me Rosie,” Granny said. “Can’t you even say Rosa?”

“Yessum,” he said. But he couldn’t. At least, he never did. “I reckon we both have had about enough of this. That boy—”

“Hah,” Granny said. “Night before last you were saying what boy. Where is he? I sent you word to bring him with you.”

“Under arrest,” General Forrest said. It was a considerable more than just tired. “I spent four days getting Smith just where I wanted him. After that, this boy here could have fought the battle.” He said ‘fit’ for fought just as he said ‘druv’ for drove and ‘drug’ for dragged. But maybe when you fought battles like he did, even Granny didn’t mind how you talked. “I won’t bother you with details. He didn’t know them either. All he had to do was exactly what I told him.

I did everything but draw a diagram on his coat-tail of exactly what he was to do, no more and no less, from the time he left me until he saw me again: which was to make contact and then fall back. I gave him just exactly the right number of men so that he couldn’t do anything else but that. I told him exactly how fast to fall back and how much racket to make doing it and even how to make the racket. But what do you think he did?”

“I can tell you,” Granny said. “He sat on his horse at five o’clock yesterday morning, with my whole yard full of men behind him, yelling goodbye at my window.”

“He divided his men and sent half of them into the bushes to make a noise and took the other half who were the nearest to complete fools and led a sabre charge on that outpost. He didn’t fire a shot. He drove it clean back with sabres onto Smith’s main body and scared Smith so that he threw out all his cavalry and pulled out behind it and now I don’t know whether I’m about to catch him or he’s about to catch me. My provost finally caught the boy last night.

He had come back and got the other thirty men of his company and was twenty miles ahead again, trying to find something to lead another charge against. 'Do you want to be killed?' I said. 'Not especially,' he said. 'That is, I don't especially care one way or the other.' 'Then neither do I,' I said. 'But you risked a whole company of my men.' 'Ain't that what they enlisted for?' he said. 'They enlisted into a military establishment the purpose of which is to expend each man only at a profit.'

Or maybe you don't consider me a shrewd enough trader in human meat?' 'I can't say,' he said. 'Since day before yesterday I ain't thought very much about how you or anybody else runs this war.' 'And just what were you doing day before yesterday that changed your ideas and habits?' I said. 'Fighting some of it,' he said. 'Dispersing the enemy.'

'Where?' I said. 'At a lady's house a few miles from Jefferson,' he said. 'One of the niggers called her Granny like the white boy did. The others called her Miss Rosie.'" This time Granny didn't say anything. She just waited.

"Go on," she said.

"'I'm still trying to win battles, even if since day before yesterday you ain't,' I said. 'I'll send you down to Johnston at Jackson,' I said. 'He'll put you inside Vicksburg, where you can lead private charges day and night too if you want.' 'Like hell you will,' he said. And I said — excuse me — 'Like hell I won't.'" And Granny didn't say anything. It was like day before yesterday with Ab Snopes: not like she hadn't heard but as if right now it didn't matter, that this was no time either to bother with such.

"And did you?" she said.

"I can't. He knows it. You can't punish a man for routing an enemy four times his weight. What would I say back there in Tennessee, where we both live, let alone that uncle of his, the one they licked for Governor six years ago, on Bragg's personal staff now, with his face over Bragg's

shoulder every time Bragg opens a dispatch or picks up a pen. And I'm still trying to win battles. But I can't.

Because of a girl, one single lone young female girl that ain't got anything under the sun against him except that, since it was his misfortune to save her from a passel of raiding enemy in a situation that everybody but her is trying to forget, she can't seem to bear to hear his last name. Yet because of that, every battle I plan from now on will be at the mercy of a twenty-two-year-old shavetail — excuse me again — who might decide to lead a private charge any time he can holler at least two men in gray coats into moving in the same direction." He stopped. He looked at Granny. "Well?" he said.

"So now you've got to it," Granny said. "Well what, Mr. Forrest?"

"Why, just have done with this foolishness. I told you I've got that boy, in close arrest, with a guard with a bayonet. But there won't be any trouble there. I figured even yesterday morning that he had already lost his mind. But I reckon he's recovered enough of it since the Provost took him last night to comprehend that I still consider myself his commander even if he don't. So all necessary now is for you to put your foot down. Put it down hard. Now. You're her grandma. She lives in your home.

And it looks like she is going to live in it a good while yet before she gets back to Memphis to that uncle or whoever it is that calls himself her guardian. So just put your foot down. Make her. Mr. Millard would have already done that if he had been here. And I know when. It would have been two days ago by now."

Granny waited until he got done. She stood with her arms crossed, holding each elbow in the other. "Is that all I'm to do?" she said. "Yes," General Forrest said. "If she don't want to listen to you right at first, maybe as his commander—"

Granny didn't even say "Hah." She didn't even send me. She didn't even stop in the hall and call. She went upstairs herself and we stood

there and I thought maybe she was going to bring the dulcimer too and I thought how if I was General Forrest I would go back and get Cousin Philip and make him sit in the library until about supper-time while Cousin Melisandre played the dulcimer and sang. Then he could take Cousin Philip on back and then he could finish the war without worrying.

She didn't have the dulcimer. She just had Cousin Melisandre. They came in and Granny stood to one side again with her arms crossed, holding her elbows. "Here she is," she said. "Say it — This is Mr. Bedford Forrest," she told Cousin Melisandre. "Say it," she told General Forrest.

He didn't have time. When Cousin Melisandre first came, she tried to read aloud to Ringo and me. It wasn't much. That is, what she insisted on reading to us wasn't so bad, even if it was mostly about ladies looking out windows and playing on something (maybe they were dulcimers too) while somebody else was off somewhere fighting. It was the way she read it. When Granny said this is Mister Forrest, Cousin Melisandre's face looked exactly like her voice would sound when she read to us.

She took two steps into the library and curtsied, spreading her hoops back, and stood up. "General Forrest," she said. "I am acquainted with an associate of his. Will the General please give him the sincerest wishes for triumph in war and success in love, from one who will never see him again?" Then she curtsied again and spread her hoops backward and stood up and took two steps backward and turned and went out.

After a while Granny said, "Well, Mr. Forrest?"

General Forrest began to cough. He lifted his coattail with one hand and reached the other into his hip pocket like he was going to pull at least a musket out of it and got his handkerchief and coughed into it a while. It wasn't very clean. It looked about like the one Cousin Philip was trying to wipe his coat off with in the summer house day before

yesterday. Then he put the handkerchief back. He didn't say "Hah" either. "Can I reach the Holly Branch road without having to go through Jefferson?" he said.

Then Granny moved. "Open the desk," she said. "Lay out a sheet of note-paper." I did. And I remember how I stood at one side of the desk and General Forrest at the other, and watched Granny's hand move the pen steady and not very slow and not very long across the paper because it never did take her very long to say anything, no matter what it was, whether she was talking it or writing it.

Though I didn't see it then, but only later, when it hung framed under glass above Cousin Melisandre's and Cousin Philip's mantel: the fine steady slant of Granny's hand and General Forrest's sprawling signatures below it that looked itself a good deal like a charge of massed cavalry:

Lieutenant P. S. Backhouse, Company D, Tennessee Cavalry, was this day raised to the honorary rank of Brevet Major General & killed while engaging the enemy. Vice whom Philip St-Just Backus is hereby appointed Lieutenant, Company D, Tennessee Cavalry.

N. B. Forrest Genl

I didn't see it then. General Forrest picked it up. "Now I've got to have a battle," he said. "Another sheet, son." I laid that one out on the desk. "A battle?" Granny said.

"To give Johnston," he said. "Confound it, Miss Rosie, can't you understand either that I'm just a fallible mortal man trying to run a military command according to certain fixed and inviolable rules, no matter how foolish the business looks to superior outside folks?"

"All right," Granny said. "You had one. I was looking at it."

"So I did," General Forrest said. "Hah," he said. "The battle of Sartoris."

"No," Granny said. "Not at my house."

"They did all the shooting down at the creek," I said.

"What creek?" he said.

So I told him. It ran through the pasture. Its name was Hurricane Creek but not even the white people called it hurricane except Granny.

General Forrest didn't either when he sat down at the desk and wrote the report to General Johnston at Jackson:

A unit of my command on detached duty engaged a body of the enemy & drove him from the field & dispersed him this day 28th ult. April 1862 at Harry kin Creek. With loss of one man.

N. B. Forrest Genl

I saw that. I watched him write it. Then he got up and folded the sheets into his pocket and was already going toward the table where his hat was.

"Wait," Granny said. "Lay out another sheet," she said. "Come back here."

General Forrest stopped and turned. "Another one?"

"Yes!" Granny said. "A furlough, pass — whatever you busy military establishments call them! So John Sartoris can come home long enough to—" and she said it herself, she looked straight at me and even backed up and said some of it over as though to make sure there wouldn't be any mistake: " — can come back home and give away that damn bride!"

IV

And that was all. The day came and Granny waked Ringo and me before sunup and we ate what breakfast we had from two plates on the back steps. And we dug up the trunk and brought it into the house and polished the silver and Ringo and I brought dogwood and redbud branches from the pasture and Granny cut the flowers, all of them, cutting them herself with Cousin Melisandre and Philadelphia just carrying the baskets; so many of them until the house was so full that Ringo and I would believe we smelled them even across the pasture each time we came up.

Though of course we could, it was just the food — the last ham from the smokehouse and the chickens and the flour which Granny had been saving and the last of the sugar which she had been saving along with the bottle of champagne for the day when the North surrendered — which Louvinia had been cooking for two days now, to remind us each time we approached the house of what was going on and that the flowers were there. As if we could have forgotten about the food.

And they dressed Cousin Melisandre and, Ringo in his new blue pants and I in my gray ones which were not so new, we stood in the late afternoon on the gallery — Granny and Cousin Melisandre and Louvinia and Philadelphia and Ringo and I — and watched them enter the gate.

General Forrest was not one. Ringo and I had thought maybe he might be, if only to bring Cousin Philip. Then we thought that maybe, since Father was coming anyway, General Forrest would let Father bring him, with Cousin Philip maybe handcuffed to Father and the soldier with the bayonet following, or maybe still just handcuffed to the soldier until he and Cousin Melisandre were married and Father unlocked him.

But General Forrest wasn't one, and Cousin Philip wasn't handcuffed to anybody and there was no bayonet and not even a soldier because these were all officers too. And we stood in the parlor while the home-made candles burnt in the last of sunset in the bright candlesticks which Philadelphia and Ringo and I had polished with the rest of the silver because Granny and Louvinia were both busy cooking and even Cousin Melisandre polished a little of it although Louvinia could pick out the ones she polished without hardly looking and hand them to Philadelphia to polish again: — Cousin Melisandre in the dress which hadn't needed to be altered for her at all because Mother wasn't much older than Cousin Melisandre even when she died, and which would still button on Granny too just like it did the day she married in it, and the chaplain and Father and Cousin Philip and the four others in their gray and braid and sabres and Cousin Melisandre's face was all right now and Cousin Philip's was too because it just had the beautiful-girl look on it and none of us had ever seen him look any other way.

Then we ate, and Ringo and I anyway had been waiting on that for three days and then we did it and then it was over too, fading just a little each day until the palate no longer remembered and only our mouths would run a little water as we would name the dishes aloud to one another, until even the water would run less and less and less and it would take something we just hoped to eat some day if they ever got done fighting, to make it run at all.

And that was all. The last sound of wheel and hoof died away, Philadelphia came in from the parlor carrying the candlesticks and blowing out the candles as she came, and Louvinia set the kitchen clock on the table and gathered the last of soiled silver from supper into the dishpan and it might never have even been.

“Well,” Granny said. She didn’t move, leaning her forearms on the table a little and we had never seen that before. She spoke to Ringo without turning her head: “Go call Joby and Lucius.” And even when we brought the trunk in and set it against the wall and opened back the lid, she didn’t move. She didn’t even look at Louvinia either. “Put the clock in too,” she said. “I don’t think we’ll bother to time ourselves tonight.”

The End

Golden Land, William Faulkner

Golden Land

I

IF HE HAD been thirty, he would not have needed the two aspirin tablets and the half glass of raw gin before he could bear the shower’s needling on his body and steady his hands to shave.

But then when he had been thirty neither could he have afforded to drink as much each evening as he now drank; certainly he would not have done it in the company of the men and the women in which, at forty-eight, he did each evening, even though knowing during the very final hours filled with the breaking of glass and the shrill cries of drunken women above the drums and saxophones — the hours during which he carried a little better than his weight both in the amount of liquor consumed and in the number and sum of checks paid — that six or eight hours later he would rouse from what had not been sleep at all but instead that dreamless stupefaction of alcohol out of which last night's turgid and licensed uproar would die, as though without any interval for rest or recuperation, into the familiar shape of his bedroom — the bed's foot silhouetted by the morning light which entered the bougainvillaea-bound windows beyond which his painful and almost unbearable eyes could see the view which might be called the monument to almost twenty-five years of industry and desire, of shrewdness and luck and even fortitude — the opposite canyonflank dotted with the white villas halfhidden in imported olive groves or friezed by the sombre spaced columns of cypress like the façades of eastern temples, whose owners' names and faces and even voices were glib and familiar in back corners of the United States and of America and of the world where those of Einstein and Rousseau and Esculapius had never sounded.

He didn't waken sick. He never wakened ill nor became ill from drinking, not only because he had drunk too long and too steadily for that, but because he was too tough even after the thirty soft years; he came from too tough stock on that day thirty-four years ago when at fourteen he had fled, on the brakebeam of a westbound freight, the little lost Nebraska town named for, permeated with, his father's history and existence — a town to be sure, but only in the sense that any shadow is larger than the object which casts it. It was still frontier even as he remembered it at five and six — the projected and increased shadow of a small outpost of sodroofed dugouts on the immense desolation of the plains where his father, Ira Ewing too, had been first to essay to wring wheat during the six days between those when,

outdoors in spring and summer and in the fetid half dark of a snowbound dugout in the winter and fall, he preached.

The second Ira Ewing had come a long way since then, from that barren and treeless village which he had fled by a night freight to where he now lay in a hundred-thousand-dollar house, waiting until he knew that he could rise and go to the bath and put the two aspirin tablets into his mouth. They — his mother and father — had tried to explain it to him — something about fortitude, the will to endure. At fourteen he could neither answer them with logic and reason nor explain what he wanted: he could only flee. Nor was he fleeing his father's harshness and wrath.

He was fleeing the scene itself — the treeless immensity in the lost center of which he seemed to see the sum of his father's and mother's dead youth and bartered lives as a tiny forlorn spot which nature permitted to green into brief and niggard wheat for a season's moment before blotting it all with the primal and invincible snow as though (not even promise, not even threat) in grim and almost playful augury of the final doom of all life. And it was not even this that he was fleeing because he was not fleeing: it was only that absence, removal, was the only argument which fourteen knew how to employ against adults with any hope of success.

He spent the next ten years half tramp half casual laborer as he drifted down the Pacific Coast to Los Angeles; at thirty he was married, to a Los Angeles girl, daughter of a carpenter, and father of a son and a daughter and with a foothold in real estate; at forty-eight he spent fifty thousand dollars a year, owning a business which he had built up unaided and preserved intact through nineteen-twenty-nine; he had given to his children luxuries and advantages which his own father not only could not have conceived in fact but would have condemned completely in theory — as it proved, as the paper which the Filipino chauffeur, who each morning carried him into the house and undressed him and put him to bed, had removed from the pocket of his topcoat and laid on the reading table proved, with reason.

On the death of his father twenty years ago he had returned to Nebraska, for the first time, and fetched his mother back with him, and she was now established in a home of her own only the less sumptuous because she refused (with a kind of abashed and thoughtful unshakability which he did not remark) anything finer or more elaborate. It was the house in which they had all lived at first, though he and his wife and children had moved within the year.

Three years ago they had moved again, into the house where he now waked in a select residential section of Beverley Hills, but not once in the nineteen years had he failed to stop (not even during the last five, when to move at all in the mornings required a terrific drain on that character or strength which the elder Ira had bequeathed him, which had enabled the other Ira to pause on the Nebraska plain and dig a hole for his wife to bear children in while he planted wheat) on his way to the office (twenty miles out of his way to the office) and spend ten minutes with her.

She lived in as complete physical ease and peace as he could devise. He had arranged her affairs so that she did not even need to bother with money, cash, in order to live; he had arranged credit for her with a neighboring market and butcher so that the Japanese gardener who came each day to water and tend the flowers could do her shopping for her; she never even saw the bills. And the only reason she had no servant was that even at seventy she apparently clung stubbornly to the old habit of doing her own cooking and housework.

So it would seem that he had been right. Perhaps there were times when, lying in bed like this and waiting for the will to rise and take the aspirin and the gin (mornings perhaps following evenings when he had drunk more than ordinarily and when even the six or seven hours of oblivion had not been sufficient to enable him to distinguish between reality and illusion) something of the old strong harsh Campbellite blood which the elder Ira must have bequeathed him might have caused him to see or feel or imagine his father looking down from somewhere upon him, the prodigal, and what he had accomplished.

If this were so, then surely the elder Ira, looking down for the last two mornings upon the two tabloid papers which the Filipino removed from his master's topcoat and laid on the reading table, might have taken advantage of that old blood and taken his revenge, not just for that afternoon thirty-four years ago but for the entire thirty-four years.

When he gathered himself, his will, his body, at last and rose from the bed he struck the paper so that it fell to the floor and lay open at his feet, but he did not look at it. He just stood so, tall, in silk pajamas, thin where his father had been gaunt with the years of hard work and unceasing struggle with the unpredictable and implacable earth (even now, despite the life which he had led, he had very little paunch) looking at nothing while at his feet the black headline flared above the row of five or six tabloid photographs from which his daughter alternately stared back or flaunted long pale shins: APRIL LALEAR BARES ORGY SECRETS.

When he moved at last he stepped on the paper, walking on his bare feet into the bath; now it was his trembling and jerking hands that he watched as he shook the two tablets onto the glass shelf and set the tumbler into the rack and unstoppered the gin bottle and braced his knuckles against the wall in order to pour into the tumbler.

But he did not look at the paper, not even when, shaved, he re-entered the bedroom and went to the bed beside which his slippers sat and shoved the paper aside with his foot in order to step into them. Perhaps, doubtless, he did not need to. The trial was but entering its third tabloidal day now, and so for two days his daughter's face had sprung out at him, hard, blonde and inscrutable, from every paper he opened; doubtless he had never forgot her while he slept even, that he had waked into thinking about remembering her as he had waked into the dying drunken uproar of the evening eight hours behind him without any interval between for rest or forgetting.

Nevertheless as, dressed, in a burnt orange turtleneck sweater beneath his gray flannels, he descended the Spanish staircase, he was outwardly calm and possessed. The delicate iron balustrade and the marble steps

coiled down to the tilefloored and barnlike living room beyond which he could hear his wife and son talking on the breakfast terrace.

The son's name was Voyd. He and his wife had named the two children by what might have been called mutual contemptuous armistice — his wife called the boy Voyd, for what reason he never knew; he in his turn named the girl (the child whose woman's face had met him from every paper he touched for two days now beneath or above the name, April Lalear) Samantha, after his own mother.

He could hear them talking — the wife between whom and himself there had been nothing save civility, and not always a great deal of that, for ten years now; and the son who one afternoon two years ago had been delivered at the door drunk and insensible by a car whose occupants he did not see and, it devolving upon him to undress the son and put him to bed, whom he discovered to be wearing, in place of underclothes, a woman's brassière and step-ins.

A few minutes later, hearing the blows perhaps, Voyd's mother ran in and found her husband beating the still unconscious son with a series of towels which a servant was steeping in rotation in a basin of ice-water. He was beating the son hard, with grim and deliberate fury. Whether he was trying to sober the son up or was merely beating him, possibly he himself did not know.

His wife though jumped to the latter conclusion. In his raging disillusionment he tried to tell her about the woman's garments but she refused to listen; she assailed him in turn with virago fury. Since that day the son had contrived to see his father only in his mother's presence (which neither the son nor the mother found very difficult, by the way) and at which times the son treated his father with a blend of cringing spite and vindictive insolence half a cat's and half a woman's.

He emerged onto the terrace; the voices ceased. The sun, strained by the vague high soft almost nebulous California haze, fell upon the terrace with a kind of treacherous unbrightness. The terrace, the sundrenched terra cotta tiles, butted into a rough and savage shear of

canyonwall bare yet without dust, on or against which a solid mat of flowers bloomed in fierce lush myriad-colored paradox as though in place of being rooted into and drawing from the soil they lived upon air alone and had been merely leaned intact against the sustenanceless lavawall by someone who would later return and take them away.

The son, Voyd, apparently naked save for a pair of straw-colored shorts, his body brown with sun and scented faintly by the depilatory which he used on arms, chest and legs, lay in a wicker chair, his feet in straw beach shoes, an open newspaper across his brown legs. The paper was the highest class one of the city, yet there was a black headline across half of it too, and even without pausing, without even being aware that he had looked, Ira saw there too the name which he recognized.

He went on to his place; the Filipino who put him to bed each night, in a white service jacket now, drew his chair. Beside the glass of orange juice and the waiting cup lay a neat pile of mail topped by a telegram. He sat down and took up the telegram; he had not glanced at his wife until she spoke:

“Mrs. Ewing telephoned. She says for you to stop in there on your way to town.”

He stopped; his hands opening the telegram stopped. Still blinking a little against the sun he looked at the face opposite him across the table — the smooth dead makeup, the thin lips and the thin nostrils and the pale blue unforgiving eyes, the meticulous platinum hair which looked as though it had been transferred to her skull with a brush from a book of silver leaf such as window painters use. “What?” he said.

“Telephoned? Here?”

“Why not? Have I ever objected to any of your women telephoning you here?”

The unopened telegram crumpled suddenly in his hand. “You know what I mean,” he said harshly. “She never telephoned me in her life. She don’t have to. Not that message. When have I ever failed to go by there on my way to town?”

“How do I know?” she said. “Or are you the same model son you have been a husband and seem to be a father?” Her voice was not shrill yet, nor even very loud, and none could have told how fast her breathing was because she sat so still, rigid beneath the impeccable and unbelievable hair, looking at him with that pale and outraged unforgiveness. They both looked at each other across the luxurious table — the two people who at one time twenty years ago would have turned as immediately and naturally and unthinkingly to one another in trouble, who even ten years ago might have done so.

“You know what I mean,” he said, harshly again, holding himself too against the trembling which he doubtless believed was from last night’s drinking, from the spent alcohol. “She don’t read papers. She never even sees one. Did you send it to her?”

“I?” she said. “Send what?”

“Damnation!” he cried. “A paper! Did you send it to her? Don’t lie to me.”

“What if I did?” she cried. “Who is she, that she must not know about it? Who is she, that you should shield her from knowing it? Did you make any effort to keep me from knowing it? Did you make any effort to keep it from happening? Why didn’t you think about that all those years while you were too drunk, too besotted with drink, to know or notice or care what Samantha was—”

“Miss April Lalear of the cinema, if you please,” Voyd said. They paid no attention to him; they glared at one another across the table.

“Ah,” he said, quiet and rigid, his lips scarcely moving. “So I am to blame for this too, am I? I made my daughter a bitch, did I? Maybe you will tell me next that I made my son a f—”

“Stop!” she cried. She was panting now; they glared at one another across the suave table, across the five feet of irrevocable division.

“Now, now,” Voyd said. “Don’t interfere with the girl’s career. After all these years, when at last she seems to have found a part that she can—” He ceased; his father had turned and was looking at him. Voyd lay in

his chair, looking at his father with that veiled insolence that was almost feminine.

Suddenly it became completely feminine; with a muffled half-scream he swung his legs out to spring up and flee but it was too late; Ira stood above him, gripping him not by the throat but by the face with one hand, so that Voyd's mouth puckered and slobbered in his father's hard, shaking hand. Then the mother sprang forward and tried to break Ira's grip but he flung her away and then caught and held her, struggling too, with the other hand when she sprang in again.

"Go on," he said. "Say it." But Voyd could say nothing because of his father's hand gripping his jaws open, or more than likely because of terror. His body was free of the chair now, writhing and thrashing while he made his slobbering, moaning sound of terror while his father held him with one hand and held his screaming mother with the other one.

Then Ira flung Voyd free, onto the terrace; Voyd rolled once and came onto his feet, crouching, retreating toward the French windows with one arm flung up before his face while he cursed his father. Then he was gone. Ira faced his wife, holding her quiet too at last, panting too, the skillful map of makeup standing into relief now like a paper mask trimmed smoothly and pasted onto her skull. He released her.

"You sot," she said. "You drunken sot. And yet you wonder why your children—"

"Yes," he said quietly. "All right. That's not the question. That's all done. The question is, what to do about it. My father would have known. He did it once." He spoke in a dry light pleasant voice: so much so that she stood, panting still but quiet, watching him. "I remember. I was about ten. We had rats in the barn. We tried everything. Terriers. Poison. Then one day father said, 'Come.' We went to the barn and stopped all the cracks, the holes. Then we set fire to it.

"What do you think of that?" Then she was gone too. He stood for a moment, blinking a little, his eyeballs beating faintly and steadily in his

skull with the impact of the soft unchanging sunlight, the fierce innocent mass of the flowers.

“Philip!” he called. The Filipino appeared, brownfaced, impassive, with a pot of hot coffee, and set it beside the empty cup and the icebedded glass of orange juice. “Get me a drink,” Ira said. The Filipino glanced at him, then he became busy at the table, shifting the cup and setting the pot down and shifting the cup again while Ira watched him. “Did you hear me?” Ira said. The Filipino stood erect and looked at him.

“You told me not to give it to you until you had your orange juice and coffee.”

“Will you or won’t you get me a drink?” Ira shouted.

“Very good, sir,” the Filipino said. He went out. Ira looked after him; this had happened before: he knew well that the brandy would not appear until he had finished the orange juice and the coffee, though just where the Filipino lurked to watch him he never knew. He sat again and opened the crumpled telegram and read it, the glass of orange juice in the other hand. It was from his secretary: MADE SETUP BEFORE I BROKE STORY LAST NIGHT STOP THIRTY PERCENT FRONT PAGE STOP MADE APPOINTMENT FOR YOU COURTHOUSE THIS P.M. STOP WILL YOU COME TO OFFICE OR CALL ME.

He read the telegram again, the glass of orange juice still poised. Then he put both down and rose and went and lifted the paper from the terrace where Voyd had flung it, and read the half headline: LALEAR WOMAN DAUGHTER OF PROMINENT LOCAL FAMILY. Admits Real Name Is Samantha Ewing, Daughter of Ira Ewing, Local Realtor.

He read it quietly; he said quietly, aloud:

“It was that Jap that showed her the paper. It was that damned gardener.” He returned to the table. After a while the Filipino came, with the brandy-and-soda, and wearing now a jacket of bright imitation tweed, telling him that the car was ready.

His mother lived in Glendale; it was the house which he had taken when he married and later bought, in which his son and daughter had been born — a bungalow in a cul-de-sac of pepper trees and flowering shrubs and vines which the Japanese tended, backed into a barren foothill combed and curried into a cypress-and-marble cemetery dramatic as a stage set and topped by an electric sign in red bulbs which, in the San Fernando valley fog, glared in broad sourceless ruby as though just beyond the crest lay not heaven but hell.

The length of his sports model car in which the Filipino sat reading a paper dwarfed it. But she would have no other, just as she would have neither servant, car, nor telephone — a gaunt spare slightly stooped woman upon whom even California and ease had put no flesh, sitting in one of the chairs which she had insisted on bringing all the way from Nebraska.

At first she had been content to allow the Nebraska furniture to remain in storage, since it had not been needed (when Ira moved his wife and family out of the house and into the second one, the intermediate one, they had bought new furniture too, leaving the first house furnished complete for his mother) but one day, he could not recall just when, he discovered that she had taken the one chair out of storage and was using it in the house.

Later, after he began to sense that quality of unrest in her, he had suggested that she let him clear the house of its present furniture and take all of hers out of storage but she declined, apparently preferring or desiring to leave the Nebraska furniture where it was. Sitting so, a knitted shawl about her shoulders, she looked less like she lived in or belonged to the house, the room, than the son with his beach burn and his faintly theatrical gray temples and his bright expensive suavely antiphonal garments did.

She had changed hardly at all in the thirty-four years; she and the older Ira Ewing too, as the son remembered him, who, dead, had suffered as little of alteration as while he had been alive. As the sod Nebraska

outpost had grown into a village and then into a town, his father's aura alone had increased, growing into the proportions of a giant who at some irrevocable yet recent time had engaged barehanded in some titanic struggle with the pitiless earth and endured and in a sense conquered — it too, like the town, a shadow out of all proportion to the gaunt gnarled figure of the actual man.

And the actual woman too as the son remembered them back in that time. Two people who drank air and who required to eat and sleep as he did and who had brought him into the world, yet were strangers as though of another race, who stood side by side in an irrevocable loneliness as though strayed from another planet, not as husband and wife but as blood brother and sister, even twins, of the same travail because they had gained a strange peace through fortitude and the will and strength to endure.

"Tell me again what it is," she said. "I'll try to understand."

"So it was Kazimura that showed you the damned paper," he said. She didn't answer this; she was not looking at him.

"You tell me she has been in the pictures before, for two years. That that was why she had to change her name, that they all have to change their names."

"Yes. They call them extra parts. For about two years, God knows why."

"And then you tell me that this — that all this was so she could get into the pictures—"

He started to speak, then he caught himself back out of some quick impatience, some impatience perhaps of grief or despair or at least rage, holding his voice, his tone, quiet: "I said that that was one possible reason. All I know is that the man has something to do with pictures, giving out the parts. And that the police caught him and Samantha and the other girl in an apartment with the doors all locked and that Samantha and the other woman were naked.

They say that he was naked too and he says he was not. He says in the trial that he was framed — tricked; that they were trying to blackmail

him into giving them parts in a picture; that they fooled him into coming there and arranged for the police to break in just after they had taken off their clothes; that one of them made a signal from the window.

Maybe so. Or maybe they were all just having a good time and were innocently caught." Unmoving, rigid, his face broke, wrung with faint bitter smiling as though with indomitable and impassive suffering, or maybe just smiling, just rage. Still his mother did not look at him.

"But you told me she was already in the pictures. That that was why she had to change her—"

"I said, extra parts," he said. He had to catch himself again, out of his jangled and outraged nerves, back from the fierce fury of the impatience. "Can't you understand that you don't get into the pictures just by changing your name? and that you don't even stay there when you get in? that you can't even stay there by being female? that they come here in droves on every train — girls younger and prettier than Samantha and who will do anything to get into the pictures?"

So will she, apparently; but who know or are willing to learn to do more things than even she seems to have thought of? But let's don't talk about it. She has made her bed; all I can do is to help her up: I can't wash the sheets. Nobody can. I must go, anyway; I'm late." He rose, looking down at her. "They said you telephoned me this morning. Is this what it was?"

"No," she said. Now she looked up at him; now her gnarled hands began to pick faintly at one another. "You offered me a servant once." "Yes. I thought fifteen years ago that you ought to have one. Have you changed your mind? Do you want me to—"

Now she stopped looking at him again, though her hands did not cease. "That was fifteen years ago. It would have cost at least five hundred dollars a year. That would be—"

He laughed, short and harsh. "I'd like to see the Los Angeles servant you could get for five hundred dollars a year. But what—" He stopped laughing, looking down at her.

"That would be at least five thousand dollars," she said.

He looked down at her. After a while he said, "Are you asking me again for money?" She didn't answer nor move, her hands picking slowly and quietly at one another. "Ah," he said. "You want to go away. You want to run from it.

So do I!" he cried, before he could catch himself this time; "so do I! But you did not choose me when you elected a child; neither did I choose my two. But I shall have to bear them and you will have to bear all of us. There is no help for it." He caught himself now, panting, quieting himself by will as when he would rise from bed, though his voice was still harsh: "Where would you go? Where would you hide from it?"

"Home," she said.

"Home?" he repeated; he repeated in a kind of amazement: "home?" before he understood. "You would go back there? with those winters, that snow and all? Why, you wouldn't live to see the first Christmas: don't you know that?" She didn't move nor look up at him. "Nonsense," he said. "This will blow over.

In a month there will be two others and nobody except us will even remember it. And you don't need money. You have been asking me for money for years, but you don't need it. I had to worry about money so much at one time myself that I swore that the least I could do was to arrange your affairs so you would never even have to look at the stuff. I must go; there is something at the office today. I'll see you tomorrow."

It was already one o'clock. "Courthouse," he told the Filipino, settling back into the car. "My God, I want a drink." He rode with his eyes closed against the sun; the secretary had already sprung onto the runningboard before he realized that they had reached the courthouse.

The secretary, bareheaded too, wore a jacket of authentic tweed; his turtleneck sweater was dead black, his hair was black too, varnished smooth to his skull; he spread before Ira a dummy newspaper page laid out to embrace the blank space for the photograph beneath the caption: APRIL LALEAR'S FATHER. Beneath the space was the legend: IRA EWING, PRESIDENT OF THE EWING REALTY CO., — WILSHIRE BOULEVARD, BEVERLY HILLS.

"Is thirty percent all you could get?" Ira said. The secretary was young; he glared at Ira for an instant in vague impatient fury.

"Jesus, thirty percent is thirty percent. They are going to print a thousand extra copies and use our mailing list. It will be spread all up and down the Coast and as far East as Reno. What do you want? We can't expect them to put under your picture, 'Turn to page fourteen for halfpage ad,' can we?" Ira sat again with his eyes closed, waiting for his head to stop.

"All right," he said. "Are they ready now?"

"All set. You will have to go inside. They insisted it be inside, so everybody that sees it will know it is the courthouse."

"All right," Ira said. He got out; with his eyes half closed and the secretary at his elbow he mounted the steps and entered the courthouse. The reporter and the photographer were waiting but he did not see them yet; he was aware only of being enclosed in a gaping crowd which he knew would be mostly women, hearing the secretary and a policeman clearing the way in the corridor outside the courtroom door.

"This is O.K.," the secretary said. Ira stopped; the darkness was easier on his eyes though he did not open them yet; he just stood, hearing the secretary and the policeman herding the women, the faces, back; someone took him by the arm and turned him; he stood obediently; the magnesium flashed and glared, striking against his painful eyeballs like blows; he had a vision of wan faces craned to look at him from either side of a narrow human lane; with his eyes shut tight now he turned, blundering until the reporter in charge spoke to him:

“Just a minute, chief. We better get another one just in case.” This time his eyes were tightly closed; the magnesium flashed, washed over them; in the thin acrid smell of it he turned and with the secretary again at his elbow he moved blindly back and into the sunlight and into his car.

He gave no order this time, he just said, “Get me a drink.” He rode with his eyes closed again while the car cleared the downtown traffic and then began to move quiet, powerful and fast under him; he rode so for a long while before he felt the car swing into the palmbordered drive, slowing. It stopped; the doorman opened the door for him, speaking to him by name.

The elevator boy called him by name too, stopping at the right floor without direction; he followed the corridor and knocked at a door and was fumbling for the key when the door opened upon a woman in a bathing suit beneath a loose beach cloak — a woman with treated hair also and brown eyes, who swung the door back for him to enter and then to behind him, looking at him with the quick bright faint serene smiling which only a woman nearing forty can give to a man to whom she is not married and from whom she has had no secrets physical and few mental over a long time of pleasant and absolute intimacy. She had been married though and divorced; she had a child, a daughter of fourteen, whom he was now keeping in boarding school. He looked at her, blinking, as she closed the door.

“You saw the papers,” he said. She kissed him, not suddenly, without heat, in a continuation of the movement which closed the door, with a sort of warm envelopment; suddenly he cried, “I can’t understand it! After all the advantages that . . . after all I tried to do for them—”

“Hush,” she said. “Hush, now. Get into your trunks; I’ll have a drink ready for you when you have changed. Will you eat some lunch if I have it sent up?”

“No. I don’t want any lunch. — after all I have tried to give—”

“Hush, now. Get into your trunks while I fix you a drink. It’s going to be swell at the beach.” In the bedroom his bathing trunks and robe were laid out on the bed. He changed, hanging his suit in the closet where her clothes hung, where there hung already another suit of his and clothes for the evening. When he returned to the sitting room she had fixed the drink for him; she held the match to his cigarette and watched him sit down and take up the glass, watching him still with that serene impersonal smiling.

Now he watched her slip off the cape and kneel at the cellarette, filling a silver flask, in the bathing costume of the moment, such as ten thousand wax female dummies wore in ten thousand shop windows that summer, such as a hundred thousand young girls wore on California beaches; he looked at her, kneeling — back, buttocks and flanks trim enough, even firm enough (so firm in fact as to be a little on the muscular side, what with unremitting and perhaps even rigorous care) but still those of forty. But I don’t want a young girl, he thought. Would to God that all young girls, all young female flesh, were removed, blasted even, from the earth. He finished the drink before she had filled the flask.

“I want another one,” he said.

“All right,” she said. “As soon as we get to the beach.”

“No. Now.”

“Let’s go on to the beach first. It’s almost three o’clock. Won’t that be better?”

“Just so you are not trying to tell me I can’t have another drink now.”

“Of course not,” she said, slipping the flask into the cape’s pocket and looking at him again with that warm, faint, inscrutable smiling. “I just want to have a dip before the water gets too cold.” They went down to the car; the Filipino knew this too: he held the door for her to slip under the wheel, then he got himself into the back. The car moved on; she drove well. “Why not lean back and shut your eyes,” she told Ira, “and rest until we get to the beach? Then we will have a dip and a drink.”

“I don’t want to rest,” he said. “I’m all right.” But he did close his eyes again and again the car ran powerful, smooth, and fast beneath him, performing its afternoon’s jaunt over the incredible distances of which the city was composed; from time to time, had he looked, he could have seen the city in the bright soft vague hazy sunlight, random, scattered about the arid earth like so many gay scraps of paper blown without order, with its curious air of being rootless — of houses bright beautiful and gay, without basements or foundations, lightly attached to a few inches of light penetrable earth, lighter even than dust and laid lightly in turn upon the profound and primeval lava, which one good hard rain would wash forever from the sight and memory of man as a firehose flushes down a gutter — that city of almost incalculable wealth whose queerly appropriate fate it is to be erected upon a few spools of a substance whose value is computed in billions and which may be completely destroyed in that second’s instant of a careless match between the moment of striking and the moment when the striker might have sprung and stamped it out.

“You saw your mother today,” she said. “Has she—”

“Yes.” He didn’t open his eyes. “That damned Jap gave it to her. She asked me for money again. I found out what she wants with it. She wants to run, to go back to Nebraska. I told her, so did I. . . . If she went back there, she would not live until Christmas. The first month of winter would kill her. Maybe it wouldn’t even take winter to do it.”

She still drove, she still watched the road, yet somehow she had contrived to become completely immobile. “So that’s what it is,” she said.

He did not open his eyes. “What what is?”

“The reason she has been after you all this time to give her money, cash. Why, even when you won’t do it, every now and then she asks you again.”

“What what . . .” He opened his eyes, looking at her profile; he sat up suddenly. “You mean, she’s been wanting to go back there all the time?”

That all these years she has been asking me for money, that that was what she wanted with it?"

She glanced at him swiftly, then back to the road. "What else can it be? What else could she use money for?"

"Back there?" he said. "To those winters, that town, that way of living, where she's bound to know that the first winter would . . . You'd almost think she wanted to die, wouldn't you?"

"Hush," she said quickly. "Shhhhh. Don't say that. Don't say that about anybody." Already they could smell the sea; now they swung down toward it; the bright salt wind blew upon them, with the long-spaced sound of the rollers; now they could see it — the dark blue of water creaming into the blanched curve of beach dotted with bathers.

"We won't go through the club," she said. "I'll park in here and we can go straight to the water." They left the Filipino in the car and descended to the beach. It was already crowded, bright and gay with movement. She chose a vacant space and spread her cape.

"Now that drink," he said.

"Have your dip first," she said. He looked at her. Then he slipped his robe off slowly; she took it and spread it beside her own; he looked down at her.

"Which is it? Will you always be too clever for me, or is it that every time I will always believe you again?"

She looked at him, bright, warm, fond and inscrutable. "Maybe both. Maybe neither. Have your dip; I will have the flask and a cigarette ready when you come out." When he came back from the water, wet, panting, his heart a little too hard and fast, she had the towel ready, and she lit the cigarette and uncapped the flask as he lay on the spread robes. She lay too, lifted to one elbow, smiling down at him, smoothing the water from his hair with the towel while he panted, waiting for his heart to slow and quiet.

Steadily between them and the water, and as far up and down the beach as they could see, the bathers passed — young people, young men in trunks, and young girls in little more, with bronzed, unselfconscious bodies.

Lying so, they seemed to him to walk along the rim of the world as though they and their kind along inhabited it, and he with his forty-eight years were the forgotten last survivor of another race and kind, and they in turn precursors of a new race not yet seen on the earth: of men and women without age, beautiful as gods and goddesses, and with the minds of infants.

He turned quickly and looked at the woman beside him — at the quiet face, the wise, smiling eyes, the grained skin and temples, the hairroots showing where the dye had grown out, the legs veined faint and blue and myriad beneath the skin. “You look better than any of them!” he cried. “You look better to me than any of them!”

III

The Japanese gardener, with his hat on, stood tapping on the glass and beckoning and grimacing until old Mrs. Ewing went out to him. He had the afternoon’s paper with its black headline: LALEAR WOMAN CREATES SCENE IN COURTROOM. “You take,” the Japanese said. “Read while I catch water.” But she declined; she just stood in the soft halcyon sunlight, surrounded by the myriad and almost fierce blooming of flowers, and looked quietly at the headline without even taking the paper, and that was all.

“I guess I won’t look at the paper today,” she said. “Thank you just the same.” She returned to the living room. Save for the chair, it was exactly as it had been when she first saw it that day when her son brought her into it and told her that it was now her home and that her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren were now her family.

It had changed very little, and that which had altered was the part which her son knew nothing about, and that too had changed not at all

in so long that she could not even remember now when she had added the last coin to the hoard. This was in a china vase on the mantel.

She knew what was in it to the penny; nevertheless, she took it down and sat in the chair which she had brought all the way from Nebraska and emptied the coins and the worn timetable into her lap.

The timetable was folded back at the page on which she had folded it the day she walked downtown to the ticket office and got it fifteen years ago, though that was so long ago now that the pencil circle about the name of the nearest junction point to Ewing, Nebraska, had faded away.

But she did not need that either; she knew the distance to the exact halfmile, just as she knew the fare to the penny, and back in the early twenties when the railroads began to become worried and passenger fares began to drop, no broker ever watched the grain and utilities market any closer than she watched the railroad advertisements and quotations.

Then at last the fares became stabilized with the fare back to Ewing thirteen dollars more than she had been able to save, and at a time when her source of income had ceased. This was the two grandchildren. When she entered the house that day twenty years ago and looked at the two babies for the first time, it was with diffidence and eagerness both. She would be dependent for the rest of her life, but she would give something in return for it.

It was not that she would attempt to make another Ira and Samantha Ewing of them; she had made that mistake with her own son and had driven him from home. She was wiser now; she saw now that it was not the repetition of hardship: she would merely take what had been of value in hers and her husband's hard lives — that which they had learned through hardship and endurance of honor and courage and pride — and transmit it to the children without their having to suffer the hardship at all, the travail and the despairs.

She had expected that there would be some friction between her and the young daughter-in-law, but she had believed that her son, the actual Ewing, would be her ally; she had even reconciled herself after a year to waiting, since the children were still but babies; she was not alarmed, since they were Ewings too: after she had looked that first searching time at the two puttysoft little faces feature by feature, she had said it was because they were babies yet and so looked like no one.

So she was content to bide and wait; she did not even know that her son was planning to move until he told her that the other house was bought and that the present one was to be hers until she died. She watched them go; she said nothing; it was not to begin then.

It did not begin for five years, during which she watched her son making money faster and faster and easier and easier, gaining with apparent contemptible and contemptuous ease that substance for which in niggard amounts her husband had striven while still clinging with undeviating incorruptibility to honor and dignity and pride, and spending it, squandering it, in the same way.

By that time she had given up the son and she had long since learned that she and her daughter-in-law were irrevocable and implacable moral enemies. It was in the fifth year. One day in her son's home she saw the two children take money from their mother's purse lying on a table. The mother did not even know how much she had in the purse; when the grandmother told her about it she became angry and dared the older woman to put it to the test.

The grandmother accused the children, who denied the whole affair with perfectly straight faces. That was the actual break between herself and her son's family; after that she saw the two children only when the son would bring them with him occasionally on his unfailing daily visits. She had a few broken dollars which she had brought from Nebraska and had kept intact for five years, since she had no need for money here; one day she planted one of the coins while the children were there, and when she went back to look, it was gone too.

The next morning she tried to talk to her son about the children, remembering her experience with the daughter-in-law and approaching the matter indirectly, speaking generally of money. "Yes," the son said. "I'm making money. I'm making it fast while I can. I'm going to make a lot of it. I'm going to give my children luxuries and advantages that my father never dreamed a child might have."

"That's it," she said. "You make money too easy. This whole country is too easy for us Ewings. It may be all right for them that have been born here for generations; I don't know about that. But not for us."

"But these children were born here."

"Just one generation. The generation before that they were born in a sodroofed dugout on the Nebraska wheat frontier. And the one before that in a log house in Missouri. And the one before that in a Kentucky blockhouse with Indians around it. This world has never been easy for Ewings. Maybe the Lord never intended it to be."

"But it is from now on," he said; he spoke with a kind of triumph. "For you and me too. But mostly for them."

And that was all. When he was gone she sat quietly in the single Nebraska chair which she had taken out of storage — the first chair which the older Ira Ewing had bought for her after he built a house and in which she had rocked the younger Ira to sleep before he could walk, while the older Ira himself sat in the chair which he had made out of a flour barrel, grim, quiet and incorruptible, taking his earned twilight ease between a day and a day — telling herself quietly that that was all.

Her next move was curiously direct; there was something in it of the actual pioneer's opportunism, of taking immediate and cold advantage of Spartan circumstance; it was as though for the first time in her life she was able to use something, anything, which she had gained by bartering her youth and strong maturity against the Nebraska immensity, and this not in order to live further but in order to die; apparently she saw neither paradox in it nor dishonesty.

She began to make candy and cake of the materials which her son bought for her on credit, and to sell them to the two grandchildren for the coins which their father gave them or which they perhaps purloined also from their mother's purse, hiding the coins in the vase with the timetable, watching the niggard hoard grow.

But after a few years the children outgrew candy and cake, and then she had watched railroad fares go down and down and then stop thirteen dollars away.

But she did not give up, even then. Her son had tried to give her a servant years ago and she had refused; she believed that when the time came, the right moment, he would not refuse to give her at least thirteen dollars of the money which she had saved him. Then this had failed. "Maybe it wasn't the right time," she thought. "Maybe I tried it too quick. I was surprised into it," she told herself, looking down at the heap of small coins in her lap. "Or maybe he was surprised into saying No.

Maybe when he has had time . . ." She roused; she put the coins back into the vase and set it on the mantel again, looking at the clock as she did so. It was just four, two hours yet until time to start supper. The sun was high; she could see the water from the sprinkler flashing and glinting in it as she went to the window.

It was still high, still afternoon; the mountains stood serene and drab against it; the city, the land, lay sprawled and myriad beneath it — the land, the earth which spawned a thousand new faiths, nostrums and cures each year but no disease to even disprove them on — beneath the golden days unmarred by rain or weather, the changeless monotonous beautiful days without end countless out of the halcyon past and endless into the halcyon future.

"I will stay here and live forever," she said to herself.

The End

There Was a Queen, William Faulkner

There Was a Queen

I

ELNORA ENTERED THE back yard, coming up from her cabin. In the long afternoon the huge, square house, the premises, lay somnolent, peaceful, as they had lain for almost a hundred years, since John Sartoris had come from Carolina and built it.

And he had died in it and his son Bayard had died in it, and Bayard's son John and John's son Bayard in turn had been buried from it even though the last Bayard didn't die there.

So the quiet was now the quiet of womenfolks. As Elnora crossed the back yard toward the kitchen door she remembered how ten years ago at this hour old Bayard, who was her half-brother (though possibly but not probably neither of them knew it, including Bayard's father), would be tramping up and down the back porch, shouting stableward for the Negro men and for his saddle mare.

But he was dead now, and his grandson Bayard was also dead at twenty-six years old, and the Negro men were gone: Simon, Elnora's mother's husband, in the graveyard too, and Caspey, Elnora's husband, in the penitentiary for stealing, and Joby, her son, gone to Memphis to wear fine clothes on Beale Street.

So there were left in the house only the first John Sartoris' sister, Virginia, who was ninety years old and who lived in a wheel chair beside a window above the flower garden, and Narcissa, young Bayard's widow, and her son. Virginia Du Pre had come out to Mississippi in '69, the last of the Carolina family, bringing with her the clothes in which she stood and a basket containing a few panes of

colored glass from a Carolina window and a few flower cuttings and two bottles of port.

She had seen her brother die and then her nephew and then her great-nephew and then her two great-great-nephews, and now she lived in the unmanned house with her great-great-nephew's wife and his son, Benbow, whom she persisted in calling Johnny after his uncle, who was killed in France. And for Negroes there were Elnora who cooked, and her son Isom who tended the grounds, and her daughter Sattie who slept on a cot beside Virginia Du Pre's bed and tended her as though she were a baby.

But that was all right. "I can take care of her," Elnora thought, crossing the back yard. "I don't need no help," she said aloud, to no one — a tall, coffee-colored woman with a small, high, fine head. "Because it's a Sartoris job. Cunnel knowed that when he died and tole me to take care of her. Tole me. Not no outsiders from town." She was thinking of what had caused her to come up to the house an hour before it was necessary.

This was that, while busy in her cabin, she had seen Narcissa, young Bayard's wife, and the ten-year-old boy going down across the pasture in the middle of the afternoon. She had come to her door and watched them — the boy and the big young woman in white going through the hot afternoon, down across the pasture toward the creek. She had not wondered where they were going, nor why, as a white woman would have wondered.

But she was half black, and she just watched the white woman with that expression of quiet and grave contempt with which she contemplated or listened to the orders of the wife of the house's heir even while he was alive. Just as she had listened two days ago when Narcissa had informed her that she was going to Memphis for a day or so and that Elnora would have to take care of the old aunt alone. "Like I ain't always done it," Elnora thought. "It's little you done for anybody since you come out here. We never needed you."

Don't you never think it. But she didn't say this. She just thought it, and she helped Narcissa prepare for the trip and watched the carriage roll away toward town and the station without comment. "And you needn't to come back," she thought, watching the carriage disappear.

But this morning Narcissa had returned, without offering to explain the sudden journey or the sudden return, and in the early afternoon Elnora from her cabin door had watched the woman and the boy go down across the pasture in the hot June sunlight.

"Well, it's her business where she going," Elnora said aloud, mounting the kitchen steps. "Same as it her business how come she went off to Memphis, leaving Miss Jenny setting yonder in her chair without nobody but niggers to look after her," she added, aloud still, with brooding inconsistency. "I ain't surprised she went.

I just surprised she come back. No. I ain't even that. She ain't going to leave this place, now she done got in here." Then she said quietly, aloud, without rancor, without heat: "Trash. Town trash."

She entered the kitchen. Her daughter Saddle sat at the table, eating from a dish of cold turnip greens and looking at a thumbled and soiled fashion magazine. "What you doing back here?" she said. "Why ain't you up yonder where you can hear Miss Jenny if she call you?" "Miss Jenny ain't need nothing," Saddle said. "She setting there by the window."

"Where did Miss Narcissa go?"

"I don't know'm," Saddle said. "Her and Bory went off somewhere. Ain't come back yet."

Elnora grunted. Her shoes were not laced, and she stepped out of them in two motions and left the kitchen and went up the quiet, high-ceiled hall filled with scent from the garden and with the drowsing and myriad sounds of the June afternoon, to the open library door.

Beside the window (the sash was raised now, with its narrow border of colored Carolina glass which in the winter framed her head and bust like a hung portrait) an old woman sat in a wheel chair.

She sat erect; a thin, upright woman with a delicate nose and hair the color of a whitewashed wall. About her shoulders lay a shawl of white wool, no whiter than her hair against her black dress. She was looking out the window; in profile her face was high-arched, motionless. When Elnora entered she turned her head and looked at the Negress with an expression immediate and interrogative.

“They ain’t come in the back way, have they?” she said.

“Nome,” Elnora said. She approached the chair.

The old woman looked out the window again. “I must say I don’t understand this at all. Miss Narcissa’s doing a mighty lot of traipsing around all of a sudden. Picking up and—”

Elnora came to the chair. “A right smart,” she said in her cold, quiet voice, “for a woman lazy as her.”

“Picking up—” the old woman said. She ceased. “You stop talking that way about her.”

“I ain’t said nothing but the truth,” Elnora said.

“Then you keep it to yourself. She’s Bayard’s wife. A Sartoris woman, now.”

“She won’t never be a Sartoris woman,” Elnora said.

The other was looking out the window. “Picking up all of a sudden two days ago and going to Memphis to spend two nights, that hadn’t spent a night away from that boy since he was born. Leaving him for two whole nights, mind you, without giving any reason, and then coming home and taking him off to walk in the woods in the middle of the day. Not that he missed her. Do you think he missed her at all while she was gone?”

“Nome,” Elnora said. “Ain’t no Sartoris man never missed nobody.”

“Of course he didn’t.” The old woman looked out the window. Elnora stood a little behind the chair. “Did they go on across the pasture?” “I don’t know. They went out of sight, still going. Toward the creek.” “Toward the creek? What in the world for?”

Elnora didn’t answer. She stood a little behind the chair, erect, still as an Indian. The afternoon was drawing on. The sun was now falling level across the garden below the window, and soon the jasmine in the garden began to smell with evening, coming into the room in slow waves almost palpable; thick, sweet, oversweet.

The two women were motionless in the window: the one leaning a little forward in the wheel chair, the Negress a little behind the chair, motionless too and erect as a caryatid.

The light in the garden was beginning to turn copper-colored when the woman and the boy entered the garden and approached the house. The old woman in the chair leaned suddenly forward.

To Elnora it seemed as if the old woman in the wheel chair had in that motion escaped her helpless body like a bird and crossed the garden to meet the child; moving forward a little herself Elnora could see on the other’s face an expression fond, immediate, and oblivious.

So the two people had crossed the garden and were almost to the house when the old woman sat suddenly and sharply back. “Why, they’re wet!” she said. “Look at their clothes. They have been in the creek with their clothes on!”

“I reckon I better go and get supper started,” Elnora said.

II

In the kitchen Elnora prepared the lettuce and the tomatoes, and sliced the bread (not honest cornbread, not even biscuit) which the woman whose very name she did not speak unless it was absolutely necessary,

had taught her to bake. Isom and Saddle sat in two chairs against the wall.

“I got nothing against her,” Elnora said. “I nigger and she white. But my black children got more blood than she got. More behavior.”

“You and Miss Jenny both think ain’t nobody been born since Miss Jenny,” Isom said.

“Who is been?” Elnora said.

“Miss Jenny get along all right with Miss Narcissa,” Isom said. “Seem to me like she the one to say. I ain’t heard her say nothing about it.”

“Because Miss Jenny quality,” Elnora said. “That’s why. And that’s something you don’t know nothing about, because you born too late to see any of it except her.”

“Look to me like Miss Narcissa good quality as anybody else,” Isom said. “I don’t see no difference.”

Elnora moved suddenly from the table. Isom as suddenly sprang up and moved his chair out of his mother’s path. But she only went to the cupboard and took a platter from it and returned to the table, to the tomatoes. “Born Sartoris or born quality of any kind ain’t is, it’s does.” She talked in a level, inflectionless voice above her limber, brown, deft hands.

When she spoke of the two women she used “she” indiscriminately, putting the least inflection on the one which referred to Miss Jenny. “Come all the way here by Herself, and the country still full of Yankees. All the way from Callina, with Her folks all killed and dead except old Marse John, and him two hundred miles away in Mississippi—”

“It’s moren two hundred miles from here to Cal-lina,” Isom said.

“Learnt that in school. It’s nigher two thousand.”

Elnora’s hands did not cease. She did not seem to have heard him.

“With the Yankees done killed Her paw and Her husband and burned

the Cal-lina house over Her and Her mammy's head, and She come all the way to Mississippi by Herself, to the only kin She had left.

Getting here in the dead of winter without nothing in this world of God's but a basket with some flower seeds and two bottles of wine and them colored window panes old Marse John put in the library window so She could look through it like it was Callina.

She got here at dusk-dark on Christmas Day and old Marse John and the chillen and my mammy waiting on the porch, and Her setting high-headed in the wagon for old Marse John to lift Her down.

They never even kissed then, out where folks could see them. Old Marse John just said, 'Well, Jenny,' and she just said, 'Well, Johnny,' and they walked into the house, him leading Her by the hand, until they was inside the house where the commonalty couldn't spy on them. Then She begun to cry, and old Marse John holding Her, after all them four thousand miles—"

"It ain't four thousand miles from here to Cal-lina," Isom said. "Ain't but two thousand. What the book say in school."

Elnora paid no attention to him at all; her hands did not cease. "It took Her hard, the crying did. 'It's because I ain't used to crying,' she said. 'I got out of the habit of it. I never had the time. Them goddamn Yankees,' she said. 'Them goddamn Yankees.'" Elnora moved again, to the cupboard. It was as though she walked out of the sound of her voice on her silent, naked feet, leaving it to fill the quiet kitchen though the voice itself had ceased.

She took another platter down and returned to the table, her hands busy again among the tomatoes and lettuce, the food which she herself could not eat. "And that's how it is that she" (she was now speaking of Narcissa; the two Negroes knew it) "thinks she can pick up and go to Memphis and frolic, and leave Her alone in this house for two nights without nobody but niggers to look after Her. Move out here under a Sartoris roof and eat Sartoris food for ten years, and then pick up and

go to Memphis same as a nigger on a excursion, without even telling why she was going.”

“I thought you said Miss Jenny never needed nobody but you to take care of her,” Isom said. “I thought you said yesterday you never cared if she come back or not.”

Elnora made a sound, harsh, disparaging, not loud. “Her not come back? When she worked for five years to get herself married to Bayard? Working on Miss Jenny all the time Bayard was off to that war? I watched her.

Coming out here two or three times a week, with Miss Jenny thinking she was just coming out to visit like quality. But I knowed. I knowed what she was up to all the time. Because I knows trash. I knows the way trash goes about working in with quality. Quality can’t see that, because it quality. But I can.”

“Then Bory must be trash, too,” Isom said.

Elnora turned now. But Isom was already out of his chair before she spoke. “You shut your mouth and get yourself ready to serve supper.” She watched him go to the sink and prepare to wash his hands. Then she turned back to the table, her long hands brown and deft among the red tomatoes and the pale absinth-green of the lettuce. “Needings,” she said. “It ain’t Bory’s needings and it ain’t Her needings. It’s dead folks’ needings.

Old Marse John’s and Cunnel’s and Mister John’s and Bayard’s that’s dead and can’t do nothing about it. That’s where the needings is. That’s what I’m talking about. And not nobody to see to it except Her yonder in that chair, and me, a nigger, back here in this kitchen. I ain’t got nothing against her. I just say to let quality consort with quality, and unquality do the same thing. You get that coat on, now. This here is all ready.”

It was the boy who told her. She leaned forward in the wheel chair and watched through the window as the woman and the child crossed the garden and passed out of sight beyond the angle of the house. Still leaning forward and looking down into the garden, she heard them enter the house and pass the library door and mount the stairs.

She did not move, nor look toward the door. She continued to look down into the garden, at the now stout shrubs which she had fetched from Carolina as shoots not much bigger than matches.

It was in the garden that she and the younger woman who was to marry her nephew and bear a son, had become acquainted. That was back in 1918, and young Bayard and his brother John were still in France. It was before John was killed, and two or three times a week Narcissa would come out from town to visit her while she worked among the flowers.

“And she engaged to Bayard all the time and not telling me,” the old woman thought. “But it was little she ever told me about anything,” she thought, looking down into the garden which was beginning to fill with twilight and which she had not entered in five years.

“Little enough about anything. Sometimes I wonder how she ever got herself engaged to Bayard, talking so little. Maybe she did it by just being, filling some space, like she got that letter.” That was one day shortly before Bayard returned home. Narcissa came out and stayed for two hours, then just before she left she showed the letter.

It was anonymous and obscene; it sounded mad, and at the time she had tried to get Narcissa to let her show the letter to Bayard’s grandfather and have him make some effort to find the man and punish him, but Narcissa refused. “I’ll just burn it and forget about it,” Narcissa said. “Well, that’s your business,” the older woman said.

“But that should not be permitted. A lady should not be at the mercy of a man like that, even by mail. Any gentleman will believe that, act upon it. Besides, if you don’t do something about it, he’ll write you again.”

“Then I’ll show it to Colonel Sartoris,” Narcissa said. She was an orphan, her brother also in France. “But can’t you see I just can’t have any man know that anybody thought such things about me.”

“Well, I’d rather have the whole world know that somebody thought that way about me once and got horsewhipped for it, than to have him keep on thinking that way about me, unpunished. But it’s your affair.” “I’ll just burn it and forget about it,” Narcissa said. Then Bayard returned, and shortly afterward he and Narcissa were married and Narcissa came out to the house to live.

Then she was pregnant, and before the child was born Bayard was killed in an airplane, and his grandfather, old Bayard, was dead and the child came, and it was two years before she thought to ask her niece if any more letters had come; and Narcissa told her no.

So they had lived quietly then, their women’s life in the big house without men. Now and then she had urged Narcissa to marry again. But the other had refused, quietly, and they had gone on so for years, the two of them and the child whom she persisted in calling after his dead uncle.

Then one evening a week ago, Narcissa had a guest for supper; when she learned that the guest was to be a man, she sat quite still in her chair for a time. “Ah,” she thought, quietly. “It’s come. Well. But it had to; she is young. And to live out here alone with a bedridden old woman. Well. But I wouldn’t have her do as I did.

Would not expect it of her. After all, she is not a Sartoris. She is no kin to them, to a lot of fool proud ghosts.” The guest came. She did not see him until she was wheeled in to the supper table. Then she saw a bald, youngish man with a clever face and a Phi Beta Kappa key on his watch chain.

The key she did not recognize, but she knew at once that he was a Jew, and when he spoke to her her outrage became fury and she jerked back in the chair like a striking snake, the motion strong enough to thrust the

chair back from the table. "Narcissa," she said, "what is this Yankee doing here?"

There they were, about the candle-lit table, the three rigid people. Then the man spoke: "Madam," he said, "there'd be no Yankees left if your sex had ever taken the field against us."

"You don't have to tell me that, young man," she said. "You can thank your stars it was just men your grandfather fought."

Then she had called Isom and had herself wheeled from the table, taking no supper. And even in her bedroom she would not let them turn on the light, and she refused the tray which Narcissa sent up. She sat beside her dark window until the stranger was gone.

Then three days later Narcissa made her sudden and mysterious trip to Memphis and stayed two nights, who had never before been separated overnight from her son since he was born. She had gone without explanation and returned without explanation, and now the old woman had just watched her and the boy cross the garden, their garments still damp upon them, as though they had been in the creek.

It was the boy who told her. He came into the room in fresh clothes, his hair still damp, though neatly combed now. She said no word as he entered and came to her chair. "We been in the creek," he said. "Not swimming, though. Just sitting in the water. She wanted me to show her the swimming hole. But we didn't swim. I don't reckon she can. We just sat in the water with our clothes on. All evening. She wanted to do it."

"Ah," the old woman said. "Oh. Well. That must have been fun. Is she coming down soon?"

"Yessum. When she gets dressed."

"Well. . . . You'll have time to go outdoors a while before supper, if you want to."

"I just as soon stay in here with you, if you want me to."

"No. You go outdoors. I'll be all right until Saddy comes."

“All right.” He left the room.

The window faded slowly as the sunset died. The old woman’s silver head faded too, like something motionless on a sideboard. The sparse colored panes which framed the window dreamed, rich and hushed. She sat there and presently she heard her nephew’s wife descending the stairs. She sat quietly, watching the door, until the young woman entered.

She wore white: a large woman in her thirties, within the twilight something about her of that heroic quality of statuary. “Do you want the light?” she said.

“No,” the old woman said. “No. Not yet.” She sat erect in the wheel chair, motionless, watching the young woman cross the room, her white dress flowing slowly, heroic, like a caryatid from a temple façade come to life. She sat down.

“It was those let—” she said.

“Wait,” the old woman said. “Before you begin. The jasmine. Do you smell it?”

“Yes. It was those—”

“Wait. Always about this time of day it begins. It has begun about this time of day in June for fifty-seven years this summer. I brought them from Carolina, in a basket. I remember how that first March I sat up all one night, burning newspapers about the roots. Do you smell it?”

“Yes.”

“If it’s marriage, I told you. I told you five years ago that I wouldn’t blame you. A young woman, a widow. Even though you have a child, I told you that a child would not be enough. I told you I would not blame you for not doing as I had done. Didn’t I?”

“Yes. But it’s not that bad.”

“Not? Not how bad?” The old woman sat erect, her head back a little, her thin face fading into the twilight with a profound quality. “I won’t

blame you. I told you that. You are not to consider me. My life is done; I need little; nothing the Negroes can't do. Don't you mind me, do you hear?"

The other said nothing, motionless too, serene; their voices seemed to materialize in the dusk between them, unsourced of either mouth, either still and fading face. "You'll have to tell me, then," the old woman said.

"It was those letters. Thirteen years ago: don't you remember? Before Bayard came back from France, before you even knew that we were engaged. I showed you one of them and you wanted to give it to Colonel Sartoris and let him find out who sent it and I wouldn't do it and you said that no lady would permit herself to receive anonymous love letters, no matter how badly she wanted to."

"Yes. I said it was better for the world to know that a lady had received a letter like that, than to have one man in secret thinking such things about her, unpunished. You told me you burned it."

"I lied. I kept it. And I got ten more of them. I didn't tell you because of what you said about a lady."

"Ah," the old woman said.

"Yes. I kept them all. I thought I had them hidden where nobody could ever find them."

"And you read them again. You would take them out now and then and read them again."

"I thought I had them hidden. Then you remember that night after Bayard and I were married when somebody broke into our house in town; the same night that book-keeper in Colonel Sartoris' bank stole that money and ran away? The next morning the letters were gone, and then I knew who had sent them."

"Yes," the old woman said. She had not moved, her fading head like something inanimate in silver.

“So they were out in the world. They were somewhere. I was crazy for a while. I thought of people, men, reading them, seeing not only my name on them, but the marks of my eyes where I had read them again and again. I was wild. When Bayard and I were on our honeymoon, I was wild. I couldn’t even think about him alone. It was like I was having to sleep with all the men in the world at the same time.

“Then it was almost twelve years ago, and I had Bory, and I supposed I had got over it. Got used to having them out in the world. Maybe I had begun to think that they were gone, destroyed, and I was safe. Now and then I would remember them, but it was like somehow that Bory was protecting me, that they couldn’t pass him to reach me. As though if I just stayed out here and was good to Bory and you — And then, one afternoon, after twelve years, that man came out to see me, that Jew. The one who stayed to supper that night.”

“Ah,” the old woman said. “Yes.”

“He was a Federal agent. They were still trying to catch the man who had robbed the bank, and the agent had got hold of my letters. Found them where the book-keeper had lost them or thrown them away that night while he was running away, and the agent had had them twelve years, working on the case.

At last he came out to see me, trying to find out where the man had gone, thinking I must know, since the man had written me letters like that. You remember him: how you looked at him and you said, ‘Narcissa, who is this Yankee?’”

“Yes. I remember.”

“That man had my letters. He had had them for twelve years. He—”

“Had had?” the old woman said. “Had had?”

“Yes. I have them now. He hadn’t sent them to Washington yet, so nobody had read them except him. And now nobody will ever read them.” She ceased; she breathed quietly, tranquil. “You don’t understand yet, do you?”

He had all the information the letters could give him, but he would have to turn them in to the Department anyway and I asked him for them but he said he would have to turn them in and I asked him if he would make his final decision in Memphis and he said why Memphis and I told him why.

I knew I couldn't buy them from him with money, you see. That's why I had to go to Memphis. I had that much regard for Bory and you, to go somewhere else. And that's all.

Men are all about the same, with their ideas of good and bad. Fools." She breathed quietly. Then she yawned, deep, with utter relaxation. Then she stopped yawning. She looked again at the rigid, fading silver head opposite her. "Don't you understand yet?" she said. "I had to do it.

They were mine; I had to get them back. That was the only way I could do it. But I would have done more than that. So I got them. And now they are burned up. Nobody will ever see them. Because he can't tell, you see. It would ruin him to ever tell that they even existed. They might even put him in the penitentiary. And now they are burned up."

"Yes," the old woman said. "And so you came back home and you took Johnny so you and he could sit together in the creek, the running water. In Jordan. Yes, Jordan at the back of a country pasture in Mississippi."

"I had to get them back. Don't you see that?"

"Yes," the old woman said. "Yes." She sat bolt upright in the wheel chair. "Well, my Lord. Us poor, fool women — Johnny!" Her voice was sharp, peremptory.

"What?" the young woman said. "Do you want something?"

"No," the other said. "Call Johnny. I want my hat." The young woman rose. "I'll get it."

"No. I want Johnny to do it."

The young woman stood looking down at the other, the old woman erect in the wheel chair beneath the fading silver crown of her hair. Then she left the room. The old woman did not move. She sat there in the dusk until the boy entered, carrying a small black bonnet of an ancient shape.

Now and then, when the old woman became upset, they would fetch her the hat and she would place it on the exact top of her head and sit there by the window. He brought the bonnet to her. His mother was with him. It was full dusk now; the old woman was invisible save for her hair. "Do you want the light now?" the young woman said.

"No," the old woman said. She set the bonnet on the top of her head. "You all go on to supper and let me rest awhile. Go on, all of you." They obeyed, leaving her sitting there: a slender, erect figure indicated only by the single gleam of her hair, in the wheel chair beside the window framed by the sparse and defunctive Carolina glass.

IV

Since the boy's eighth birthday, he had had his dead grandfather's place at the end of the table. Tonight however his mother rearranged things. "With just the two of us," she said. "You come and sit by me." The boy hesitated. "Please. Won't you? I got so lonesome for you last night in Memphis. Weren't you lonesome for me?"

"I slept with Aunt Jenny," the boy said. "We had a good time."

"Please."

"All right," he said. He took the chair beside hers.

"Closer," she said. She drew the chair closer. "But we won't ever again, ever. Will we?" She leaned toward him, taking his hand.

"What? Sit in the creek?"

"Not ever leave one another again."

"I didn't get lonesome. We had a good time."

"Promise. Promise, Bory." His name was Benhow, her family name.

“All right.”

Isom, in a duck jacket, served them and returned to the kitchen.

“She ain’t coming to supper?” Elnora said.

“Nome,” Isom said. “Setting yonder by the window, in the dark. She say she don’t want no supper.”

Elnora looked at Saddle. “What was they doing last time you went to the library?”

“Her and Miss Narcissa talking.”

“They was still talking when I went to ‘nounce supper,” Isom said. “I tole you that.”

“I know,” Elnora said. Her voice was not sharp. Neither was it gentle. It was just peremptory, soft, cold. “What were they talking about?”

“I don’t know’m,” Isom said. “You the one taught me not to listen to white folks.”

“What were they talking about, Isom?” Elnora said. She was looking at him, grave, intent, commanding.

“‘Bout somebody getting married. Miss Jenny say ‘I tole you long time ago I ain’t blame you. A young woman like you. I want you to marry. Not do like I done,’ what she say.”

“I bet she fixing to marry, too,” Saddle said.

“Who marry?” Elnora said. “Her marry? What for? Give up what she got here? That ain’t what it is. I wished I knowed what been going on here this last week. . . .” Her voice ceased; she turned her head toward the door as though she were listening for something. From the dining-room came the sound of the young woman’s voice.

But Elnora appeared to listen to something beyond this. Then she left the room. She did not go hurriedly, yet her long silent stride carried her from sight with an abruptness like that of an inanimate figure drawn on wheels, off a stage.

She went quietly up the dark hall, passing the dining-room door unremarked by the two people at the table. They sat close. The woman

was talking, leaning toward the boy. Elnora went on without a sound: a converging of shadows upon which her lighter face seemed to float without body, her eyeballs faintly white. Then she stopped suddenly.

She had not reached the library door, yet she stopped, invisible, soundless, her eyes suddenly quite luminous in her almost-vanished face, and she began to chant in faint sing-song: "Oh, Lawd; oh, Lawd," not loud.

Then she moved, went swiftly on to the library door and looked into the room where beside the dead window the old woman sat motionless, indicated only by that faint single gleam of white hair, as though for ninety years life had died slowly up her spare, erect frame, to linger for a twilit instant about her head before going out, though life itself had ceased.

Elnora looked for only an instant into the room. Then she turned and retraced her swift and silent steps to the dining-room door. The woman still leaned toward the boy, talking. They did not remark Elnora at once. She stood in the doorway, tall, not touching the jamb on either side. Her face was blank; she did not appear to be looking at, speaking to, any one.

"You better come quick, I reckon," she said in that soft, cold, peremptory voice.

The end

Mountain Victory, William Faulkner

Mountain Victory

I

THROUGH THE CABIN window the five people watched the cavalcade toil up the muddy trail and halt at the gate. First came a man on foot, leading a horse. He wore a broad hat low on his face, his body shapeless in a weathered gray cloak from which his left hand emerged, holding the reins.

The bridle was silvermounted, the horse a gaunt, mudsplashed, thoroughbred bay, wearing in place of saddle a navy blue army blanket bound on it by a piece of rope. The second horse was a shortbodied, bigheaded, scrub sorrel, also mudsplashed.

It wore a bridle contrived of rope and wire, and an army saddle in which, perched high above the dangling stirrups, crouched a shapeless something larger than a child, which at that distance appeared to wear no garment or garments known to man.

One of the three men at the cabin window left it quickly. The others, without turning, heard him cross the room swiftly and then return, carrying a long rifle.

“No, you don’t,” the older man said.

“Don’t you see that cloak?” the younger said. “That rebel cloak?”

“I wont have it,” the other said. “They have surrendered. They have said they are whipped.”

Through the window they watched the horses stop at the gate. The gate was of sagging hickory, in a rock fence which straggled down a gaunt slope sharp in relief against the valley and a still further range of mountains dissolving into the low, dissolving sky.

They watched the creature on the second horse descend and hand his reins also into the same left hand of the man in gray that held the reins of the thoroughbred. They watched the creature enter the gate and mount the path and disappear beyond the angle of the window. Then they heard it cross the porch and knock at the door. They stood there and heard it knock again.

After a while the older man said, without turning his head, "Go and see."

One of the women, the older one, turned from the window, her feet making no sound on the floor, since they were bare. She went to the front door and opened it. The chill, wet light of the dying April afternoon fell in upon her — upon a small woman with a gnarled expressionless face, in a gray shapeless garment.

Facing her across the sill was a creature a little larger than a large monkey, dressed in a voluminous blue overcoat of a private in the Federal army, with, tied tentlike over his head and falling about his shoulders, a piece of oilcloth which might have been cut square from the hood of a sutler's wagon; within the orifice the woman could see nothing whatever save the whites of two eyes, momentary and phantomlike, as with a single glance the Negro examined the woman standing barefoot in her faded calico garment, and took in the bleak and barren interior of the cabin hall.

"Marster Major Soshay Weddel send he compliments en say he wishful fo sleeping room fo heself en boy en two hawses," he said in a pompous, parrot-like voice. The woman looked at him. Her face was like a spent mask. "We been up yonder a ways, fighting dem Yankees," the Negro said. "Done quit now. Gwine back home."

The woman seemed to speak from somewhere behind her face, as though behind an effigy or a painted screen: "I'll ask him."

"We ghy pay you," the Negro said.

"Pay?" Pausing, she seemed to muse upon him. "Hit aint near a ho-tel on the mou-tin."

The Negro made a large gesture. "Don't make no diffunce. We done stayed de night in worse places den whut dis is. You just tell um it Marse Soshay Weddel." Then he saw that the woman was looking past him. He turned and saw the man in the worn gray cloak already halfway up the path from the gate.

He came on and mounted the porch, removing with his left hand the broad slouched hat bearing the tarnished wreath of a Confederate field officer. He had a dark face, with dark eyes and black hair, his face at once thick yet gaunt, and arrogant.

He was not tall, yet he topped the Negro by five or six inches. The cloak was weathered, faded about the shoulders where the light fell strongest. The skirts were bedraggled, frayed, mudsplashed: the garment had been patched again and again, and brushed again and again; the nap was completely gone.

“Goodday, madam,” he said. “Have you stableroom for my horses and shelter for myself and my boy for the night?”

The woman looked at him with a static, musing quality, as though she had seen without alarm an apparition.

“I’ll have to see,” she said.

“I shall pay,” the man said. “I know the times.”

“I’ll have to ask him,” the woman said. She turned, then stopped. The older man entered the hall behind her. He was big, in jean clothes, with a shock of iron-gray hair and pale eyes.

“I am Saucier Weddel,” the man in gray said. “I am on my way home to Mississippi from Virginia. I am in Tennessee now?”

“You are in Tennessee,” the other said. “Come in.”

Weddel turned to the Negro. “Take the horses on to the stable,” he said.

The Negro returned to the gate, shapeless in the oilcloth cape and the big overcoat, with that swaggering arrogance which he had assumed as soon as he saw the woman’s bare feet and the meagre, barren interior of the cabin. He took up the two bridle reins and began to shout at the horses with needless and officious vociferation, to which the two horses paid no heed, as though they were long accustomed to him.

It was as if the Negro himself paid no attention to his cries, as though the shouting were merely concomitant to the action of leading the horses out of sight of the door, like an effluvium by both horses and Negro accepted and relegated in the same instant.

II

Through the kitchen wall the girl could hear the voices of the men in the room from which her father had driven her when the stranger approached the house. She was about twenty: a big girl with smooth, simple hair and big, smooth hands, standing barefoot in a single garment made out of flour sacks. She stood close to the wall, motionless, her head bent a little, her eyes wide and still and empty like a sleepwalker's, listening to her father and the guest enter the room beyond it.

The kitchen was a plank leanto built against the log wall of the cabin proper. From between the logs beside her the clay chinking, dried to chalk by the heat of the stove, had fallen away in places. Stooping, the movement slow and lush and soundless as the whispering of her bare feet on the floor, she leaned her eye to one of these cracks. She could see a bare table on which sat an earthenware jug and a box of musket cartridges stenciled U. S. Army.

At the table her two brothers sat in splint chairs, though it was only the younger one, the boy, who looked toward the door, though she knew, could hear now, that the stranger was in the room. The older brother was taking the cartridges one by one from the box and crimping them and setting them upright at his hand like a mimic parade of troops, his back to the door where she knew the stranger was now standing. She breathed quietly. "Vatch would have shot him," she said, breathed, to herself, stooping. "I reckon he will yet."

Then she heard feet again and her mother came toward the door to the kitchen, crossing and for a moment blotting the orifice. Yet she did not move, not even when her mother entered the kitchen. She stooped to

the crack, her breathing regular and placid, hearing her mother clattering the stovelids behind her.

Then she saw the stranger for the first time and then she was holding her breath quietly, not even aware that she had ceased to breathe. She saw him standing beside the table in his shabby cloak, with his hat in his left hand. Vatch did not look up.

“My name is Saucier Weddel,” the stranger said.

“Soshay Weddel,” the girl breathed into the dry chinking, the crumbled and powdery wall. She could see him at full length, in his stained and patched and brushed cloak, with his head lifted a little and his face worn, almost gaunt, stamped with a kind of indomitable weariness and yet arrogant too, like a creature from another world with other air to breathe and another kind of blood to warm the veins. “Soshay Weddel,” she breathed.

“Take some whiskey,” Vatch said without moving.

Then suddenly, as it had been with the suspended breathing, she was not listening to the words at all, as though it were no longer necessary for her to hear, as though curiosity too had no place in the atmosphere in which the stranger dwelled and in which she too dwelled for the moment as she watched the stranger standing beside the table, looking at Vatch, and Vatch now turned in his chair, a cartridge in his hand, looking up at the stranger. She breathed quietly into the crack through which the voices came now without heat or significance out of that dark and smoldering and violent and childlike vanity of men:

“I reckon you know these when you see them, then?”

“Why not? We used them too. We never always had the time nor the powder to stop and make our own. So we had to use yours now and then. Especially during the last.”

“Maybe you would know them better if one exploded in your face.”

“Vatch.” She now looked at her father, because he had spoken. Her younger brother was raised a little in his chair, leaning a little forward,

his mouth open a little. He was seventeen. Yet still the stranger stood looking quietly down at Vatch, his hat clutched against his worn cloak, with on his face that expression arrogant and weary and a little quizzical.

“You can show your other hand too,” Vatch said. “Don’t be afraid to leave your pistol go.”

“No,” the stranger said. “I am not afraid to show it.”

“Take some whiskey, then,” Vatch said, pushing the jug forward with a motion slighting and contemptuous.

“I am obliged infinitely,” the stranger said. “It’s my stomach. For three years of war I have had to apologize to my stomach; now, with peace, I must apologize for it. But if I might have a glass for my boy? Even after four years, he cannot stand cold.”

“Soshay Weddel,” the girl breathed into the crumbled dust beyond which the voices came, not yet raised yet forever irreconcilable and already doomed, the one blind victim, the other blind executioner:

“Or maybe behind your back you would know it better.”

“You, Vatch.”

“Stop, sir. If he was in the army for as long as one year, he has run too, once. Perhaps oftener, if he faced the Army of Northern Virginia.”

“Soshay Weddel,” the girl breathed, stooping. Now she saw Weddel, walking apparently straight toward her, a thick tumbler in his left hand and his hat crumpled beneath the same arm.

“Not that way,” Vatch said. The stranger paused and looked back at Vatch. “Where are you aiming to go?”

“To take this out to my boy,” the stranger said. “Out to the stable. I thought perhaps this door—” His face was in profile now, worn, haughty, wasted, the eyebrows lifted with quizzical and arrogant interrogation. Without rising Vatch jerked his head back and aside. “Come away from that door.” But the stranger did not stir. Only his head moved a little, as though he had merely changed the direction of his eyes.

“He’s looking at paw,” the girl breathed. “He’s waiting for paw to tell him. He aint skeered of Vatch. I knowed it.”

“Come away from that door,” Vatch said. “You damn nigra.”

“So it’s my face and not my uniform,” the stranger said. “And you fought four years to free us, I understand.”

Then she heard her father speak again. “Go out the front way and around the house, stranger,” he said.

“Soshay Weddel,” the girl said. Behind her her mother clattered at the stove. “Soshay Weddel,” she said. She did not say it aloud. She breathed again, deep and quiet and without haste. “It’s like a music. It’s like a singing.”

III

The Negro was squatting in the hallway of the barn, the sagging and broken stalls of which were empty save for the two horses. Beside him was a worn rucksack, open. He was engaged in polishing a pair of thin dancing slippers with a cloth and a tin of paste, empty save for a thin rim of polish about the circumference of the tin.

Beside him on a piece of plank sat one finished shoe. The upper was cracked; it had a crude sole nailed recently and crudely on by a clumsy hand.

“Thank de Lawd folks cant see de bottoms of yo feets,” the Negro said. “Thank de Lawd it’s just dese hyer mountain trash. I’d even hate fo Yankees to see yo feets in dese things.” He rubbed the shoe, squinted at it, breathed upon it, rubbed it again upon his squatting flank.

“Here,” Weddel said, extending the tumbler. It contained a liquid as colorless as water.

The Negro stopped, the shoe and the cloth suspended. “Which?” he said. He looked at the glass. “Whut’s dat?”

“Drink it,” Weddel said.

“Dat’s water. Whut you bringing me water fer?”

“Take it,” Weddel said. “It’s not water.”

The Negro took the glass gingerly. He held it as if it contained nitroglycerin. He looked at it, blinking, bringing the glass slowly under his nose. He blinked. “Where’d you git dis hyer?” Weddel didn’t answer. He had taken up the finished slipper, looking at it. The Negro held the glass under his nose. “It smell kind of like it ought to,” he said. “But I be dawg ef it look like anything. Dese folks fixing to pizen you.” He tipped the glass and sipped gingerly, and lowered the glass, blinking.

“I didn’t drink any of it,” Weddel said. He set the slipper down.

“You better hadn’t,” the Negro said. “When here I done been fo years trying to take care of you en git you back home like whut Mistis tole me to do, and here you sleeping in folks’ barns at night like a tramp, like a pater-roller nigger—” He put the glass to his lips, tilting it and his head in a single jerk.

He lowered the glass, empty; his eyes were closed; he said, “Whuf!” shaking his head with a violent, shuddering motion. “It smells right, and it act right. But I be dawg ef it look right. I reckon you better let it alone, like you started out. When dey try to make you drink it you send um to me. I done already stood so much I reckon I can stand a little mo fer Mistis’ sake.”

He took up the shoe and the cloth again. Weddel stooped above the rucksack. “I want my pistol,” he said.

Again the Negro ceased, the shoe and the cloth poised. “Whut fer?” He leaned and looked up the muddy slope toward the cabin. “Is dese folks Yankees?” he said in a whisper.

“No,” Weddel said, digging in the rucksack with his left hand. The Negro did not seem to hear him.

“In Tennessee? You tole me we was in Tennessee, where Memphis is, even if you never tole me it was all disyer up-and-down land in de

Memphis country. I know I never seed none of um when I went to Memphis wid yo paw dat time. But you says so. And now you telling me dem Memphis folks is Yankees?"

"Where is the pistol?" Weddel said.

"I done tole you," the Negro said. "Acting like you does. Letting dese folks see you come walking up de road, leading Caesar caze you think he tired; making me ride whilst you walks when I can outwalk you any day you ever lived and you knows it, even if I is fawty en you twenty-eight. I ghy tell yo maw. I ghy tell um."

Weddel rose, in his hand a heavy cap-and-ball revolver. He chuckled it in his single hand, drawing the hammer back, letting it down again. The Negro watched him, crouched like an ape in the blue Union army overcoat. "You put dat thing back," he said. "De war done wid now. Dey tole us back dar at Ferginny it was done wid. You dont need no pistol now. You put it back, you hear me?"

"I'm going to bathe," Weddel said. "Is my shirt—"

"Bathe where? In whut? Dese folks aint never seed a bathtub."

"Bathe at the well. Is my shirt ready?"

"Whut dey is of it. . . . You put dat pistol back, Marse Soshay. I ghy tell yo maw on you. I ghy tell um. I just wish Marster was here."

"Go to the kitchen," Weddel said. "Tell them I wish to bathe in the well house. Ask them to draw the curtain on that window there." The pistol had vanished beneath the grey cloak. He went to the stall where the thoroughbred was. The horse nuzzled at him, its eyes rolling soft and wild. He patted its nose with his left hand. It whickered, not loud, its breath sweet and warm.

IV

The Negro entered the kitchen from the rear. He had removed the oilcloth tent and he now wore a blue forage cap which, like the overcoat, was much too large for him, resting upon the top of his head

in such a way that the unsupported brim oscillated faintly when he moved as though with a life of its own.

He was completely invisible save for his face between cap and collar like a dried Dyak trophy and almost as small and dusted lightly over as with a thin pallor of wood ashes by the cold.

The older woman was at the stove on which frying food now hissed and sputtered; she did not look up when the Negro entered. The girl was standing in the middle of the room, doing nothing at all. She looked at the Negro, watching him with a slow, grave, secret, unwinking gaze as he crossed the kitchen with that air of swaggering caricatured assurance, and upended a block of wood beside the stove and sat upon it.

“If disyer is de kind of weather yawl has up here all de time,” he said, “I dont care ef de Yankees does has dis country.” He opened the overcoat, revealing his legs and feet as being wrapped, shapeless and huge, in some muddy and anonymous substance resembling fur, giving them the appearance of two muddy beasts the size of halfgrown dogs lying on the floor; moving a little nearer the girl, the girl thought quietly Hit’s fur. He taken and cut up a fur coat to wrap his feet in “Yes, suh,” the Negro said. “Just yawl let me git home again, en de Yankees kin have all de rest of it.”

“Where do you-uns live?” the girl said.

The Negro looked at her. “In Miss’ippi. On de Domain. Aint you never hyeard tell of Countymaison?”

“Countymaison?”

“Dat’s it. His grandpappy named it Countymaison caze it’s bigger den a county to ride over. You cant ride across it on a mule betwixt sunup and sundown. Dat’s how come.” He rubbed his hands slowly on his thighs. His face was now turned toward the stove; he snuffed loudly.

Already the ashy overlay on his skin had disappeared, leaving his face dead black, wizened, his mouth a little loose, as though the muscles

had become slack with usage, like rubber bands — not the eating muscles, the talking ones. “I reckon we is gittin nigh home, after all. Leastways dat hawg meat smell like it do down whar folks lives.”

“Countymaison,” the girl said in a rapt, bemused tone, looking at the Negro with her grave, unwinking regard. Then she turned her head and looked at the wall, her face perfectly serene, perfectly inscrutable, without haste, with a profound and absorbed deliberation.

“Dat’s it,” the Negro said. “Even Yankees is heard tell of Weddel’s Countymaison en erbout Marster Francis Weddel. Maybe yawl seed um pass in de carriage dat time he went to Washn’ton to tell yawl’s president how he aint like de way yawl’s president wuz treating de people. He rid all de way to Washn’ton in de carriage, wid two niggers to drive en to heat de bricks to kept he foots warm, en de man done gone on ahead wid de wagon en de fresh hawses.

He carried yawl’s president two whole dressed bears en eight sides of smoked deer venison. He must a passed right out dar in front yawl’s house. I reckon yo pappy or maybe his pappy seed um pass.”

He talked on, voluble, in soporific singsong, his face beginning to glisten, to shine a little with the rich warmth, while the mother bent over the stove and the girl, motionless, static, her bare feet cupped smooth and close to the rough puncheons, her big, smooth, young body cupped soft and richly mammalian to the rough garment, watching the Negro with her ineffable and unwinking gaze, her mouth open a little.

The Negro talked on, his eyes closed, his voice interminable, boastful, his air lazily intolerant, as if he were still at home and there had been no war and no harsh rumors of freedom and of change, and he (a stableman, in the domestic hierarchy a man of horses) were spending the evening in the quarters among field hands, until the older woman dished the food and left the room, closing the door behind her.

He opened his eyes at the sound and looked toward the door and then back to the girl. She was looking at the wall, at the closed door through which her mother had vanished. "Dont dey lets you eat at de table wid um?" he said.

The girl looked at the Negro, unwinking. "Countymaison," she said. "Vatch says he is a nigra too."

"Who? Him? A nigger? Marse Soshay Weddel? Which un is Vatch?" The girl looked at him. "It's caze yawl aint never been nowhere. Ain't never seed nothing. Living up here on a nekkid hill whar you cant even see smoke. Him a nigger? I wish his maw could hear you say dat." He looked about the kitchen, wizened, his eyeballs rolling white, ceaseless, this way and that. The girl watched him.

"Do the girls there wear shoes all the time?" she said.

The Negro looked about the kitchen, "Where does yawl keep dat ere Tennessee spring water? Back here somewhere?"

"Spring water?"

The Negro blinked slowly. "Dat ere light-drinking kahysene."

"Kahysene?"

"Dat ere light colored lamp oil whut yawl drinks. Aint you got a little of it hid back here somewhere?"

"Oh," the girl said. "You mean corn." She went to a corner and lifted a loose plank in the floor, the Negro watching her, and drew forth another earthen jug. She filled another thick tumbler and gave it to the Negro and watched him jerk it down his throat, his eyes closed. Again he said, "Whuf!" and drew his back hand across his mouth.

"Whut wuz dat you axed me?" he said.

"Do the girls down there at Countymaison wear shoes?"

"De ladies does. If dey didn't have none, Marse Soshay could sell a hun'ed niggers en buy um some . . . Which un is it say Marse Soshay a nigger?"

The girl watched him. "Is he married?"

“Who married? Marse Soshay?” The girl watched him. “How he have time to git married, wid us fighting de Yankees for fo years? Aint been home in fo years now where no ladies to marry is.” He looked at the girl, his eyewhites a little bloodshot, his skin shining in faint and steady highlights. Thawing, he seemed to have increased in size a little too. “Whut’s it ter you, if he married or no?”

They looked at each other. The Negro could hear her breathing. Then she was not looking at him at all, though she had not yet even blinked nor turned her head. “I dont reckon he’d have any time for a girl that didn’t have any shoes,” she said. She went to the wall and stooped again to the crack. The Negro watched her. The older woman entered and took another dish from the stove and departed without having looked at either of them.

V

The four men, the three men and the boy, sat about the supper table. The broken meal lay on thick plates. The knives and forks were iron. On the table the jug still sat. Weddel was now cloakless. He was shaven, his still damp hair combed back. Upon his bosom the ruffles of the shirt frothed in the lamplight, the right sleeve, empty, pinned across his breast with a thin gold pin. Under the table the frail and mended dancing slippers rested among the brogans of the two men and the bare splayed feet of the boy.

“Vatch says you are a nigra,” the father said.

Weddel was leaning a little back in his chair. “So that explains it,” he said. “I was thinking that he was just congenitally illtempered. And having to be a victor, too.”

“Are you a nigra?” the father said.

“No,” Weddel said. He was looking at the boy, his weathered and wasted face a little quizzical. Across the back of his neck his hair, long, had been cut roughly as though with a knife or perhaps a bayonet. The boy watched him in complete and rapt immobility. As if I might be an

apparition he thought. A hant. Maybe I am. “No,” he said. “I am not a Negro.”

“Who are you?” the father said.

Weddel sat a little sideways in his chair, his hand lying on the table. “Do you ask guests who they are in Tennessee?” he said. Vatch was filling a tumbler from the jug. His face was lowered, his hands big and hard. His face was hard. Weddel looked at him. “I think I know how you feel,” he said. “I expect I felt that way once. But it’s hard to keep on feeling any way for four years. Even feeling at all.”

Vatch said something, sudden and harsh. He clapped the tumbler on to the table, splashing some of the liquor out. It looked like water, with a violent, dynamic odor. It seemed to possess an inherent volatility which carried a splash of it across the table and on to the foam of frayed yet immaculate linen on Weddel’s breast, striking sudden and chill through the cloth against his flesh.

“Vatch!” the father said.

Weddel did not move; his expression arrogant, quizzical, and weary, did not change. “He did not mean to do that,” he said.

“When I do,” Vatch said, “it will not look like an accident.”

Weddel was looking at Vatch. “I think I told you once,” he said. “My name is Saucier Weddel. I am a Mississippian. I live at a place named Contalmaison. My father built it and named it. He was a Choctaw chief named Francis Weddel, of whom you have probably not heard. He was the son of a Choctaw woman and a French émigré of New Orleans, a general of Napoleon’s and a knight of the Legion of Honor. His name was François Vidal.

My father drove to Washington once in his carriage to remonstrate with President Jackson about the Government’s treatment of his people, sending on ahead a wagon of provender and gifts and also fresh horses for the carriage, in charge of the man, the native overseer, who was a full blood Choctaw and my father’s cousin.

In the old days The Man was the hereditary title of the head of our clan; but after we became Europeanised like the white people, we lost the title to the branch which refused to become polluted, though we kept the slaves and the land. The Man now lives in a house a little larger than the cabins of the Negroes — an upper servant. It was in Washington that my father met and married my mother. He was killed in the Mexican War.

My mother died two years ago, in '63, of a complication of pneumonia acquired while superintending the burying of some silver on a wet night when Federal troops entered the county, and of unsuitable food; though my boy refuses to believe that she is dead. He refuses to believe that the country would have permitted the North to deprive her of the imported Martinique coffee and the beaten biscuit which she had each Sunday noon and Wednesday night.

He believes that the country would have risen in arms first. But then, he is only a Negro, member of an oppressed race burdened with freedom. He has a daily list of my misdoings which he is going to tell her on me when we reach home. I went to school in France, but not very hard. Until two weeks ago I was a major of Mississippi infantry in the corps of a man named Longstreet, of whom you may have heard."

"So you were a major," Vatch said.

"That appears to be my indictment; yes."

"I have seen a rebel major before," Vatch said. "Do you want me to tell you where I saw him?"

"Tell me," Weddel said.

"He was lying by a tree. We had to stop there and lie down, and he was lying by the tree, asking for water. 'Have you any water, friend?' he said. 'Yes. I have water,' I said. 'I have plenty of water.' I had to crawl; I couldn't stand up. I crawled over to him and I lifted him so that his head would be propped against the tree. I fixed his face to the front."

"Didn't you have a bayonet?" Weddel said. "But I forgot; you couldn't stand up."

“Then I crawled back. I had to crawl back a hundred yards, where—”
“Back?”

“It was too close. Who can do decent shooting that close? I had to crawl back, and then the damned musket—”

“Damn musket?” Weddel sat a little sideways in his chair, his hand on the table, his face quizzical and sardonic, contained.

“I missed, the first shot. I had his face propped up and turned, and his eyes open watching me, and then I missed. I hit him in the throat and I had to shoot again because of the damned musket.”

“Vatch,” the father said.

Vatch’s hands were on the table. His head, his face, were like his father’s, though without the father’s deliberation. His face was furious, still, unpredictable. “It was that damn musket. I had to shoot three times. Then he had three eyes, in a row across his face propped against the tree, all three of them open, like he was watching me with three eyes. I gave him another eye, to see better with. But I had to shoot twice because of the damn musket.”

“You, Vatch,” the father said. He stood now, his hands on the table, propping his gaunt body. “Dont you mind Vatch, stranger. The war is over now.”

“I dont mind him,” Weddel said. His hands went to his bosom, disappearing into the foam of linen while he watched Vatch steadily with his alert, quizzical, sardonic gaze. “I have seen too many of him for too long a time to mind one of him any more.”

“Take some whiskey,” Vatch said.

“Are you just making a point?”

“Damn the pistol,” Vatch said. “Take some whiskey.”

Weddel laid his hand again on the table. But instead of pouring, Vatch held the jug poised over the tumbler. He was looking past Weddel’s shoulder. Weddel turned. The girl was in the room, standing in the doorway with her mother just behind her. The mother said as if she

were speaking to the floor under her feet: "I tried to keep her back, like you said. I tried to. But she is strong as a man; hardheaded like a man."

"You go back," the father said.

"Me to go back?" the mother said to the floor.

The father spoke a name; Weddel did not catch it; he did not even know that he had missed it. "You go back."

The girl moved. She was not looking at any of them. She came to the chair on which lay Weddel's worn and mended cloak and opened it, revealing the four ragged slashes where the sable lining had been cut out as though with a knife. She was looking at the cloak when Vatch grasped her by the shoulder, but it was at Weddel that she looked. "You cut hit out and gave hit to that nigra to wrap his feet in," she said.

Then the father grasped Vatch in turn. Weddel had not stirred, his face turned over his shoulder; beside him the boy was upraised out of his chair by his arms, his young, slacked face leaned forward into the lamp. But save for the breathing of Vatch and the father there was no sound in the room.

"I am stronger than you are, still," the father said. "I am a better man still, or as good."

"You wont be always," Vatch said.

The father looked back over his shoulder at the girl. "Go back," he said. She turned and went back toward the hall, her feet silent as rubber feet. Again the father called that name which Weddel had not caught; again he did not catch it and was not aware again that he had not. She went out the door.

The father looked at Weddel. Weddel's attitude was unchanged, save that once more his hand was hidden inside his bosom. They looked at one another — the cold, Nordic face and the half Gallic half Mongol face thin and worn like a bronze casting, with eyes like those of the

dead, in which only vision has ceased and not sight. "Take your horses, and go," the father said.

VI

It was dark in the hall, and cold, with the black chill of the mountain April coming up through the floor about her bare legs and her body in the single coarse garment. "He cut the lining outen his cloak to wrap that nigra's feet in," she said. "He done hit for a nigra."

The door behind her opened. Against the lamplight a man loomed, then the door shut behind him. "Is it Vatch or paw?" she said. Then something struck her across the back — a leather strap. "I was afeared it would be Vatch," she said. The blow fell again.

"Go to bed," the father said.

"You can whip me, but you cant whip him," she said.

The blow fell again: a thick, flat, soft sound upon her immediate flesh beneath the coarse sacking.

VII

In the deserted kitchen the Negro sat for a moment longer on the upturned block beside the stove, looking at the door. Then he rose carefully, one hand on the wall.

"Whuf!" he said. "Wish us had a spring on de Domain whut run dat. Stock would git trompled to death, sho mon." He blinked at the door, listening, then he moved, letting himself carefully along the wall, stopping now and then to look toward-the door and listen, his air cunning, unsteady, and alert.

He reached the corner and lifted the loose plank, stooping carefully, bracing himself against the wall. He lifted the jug out, whereupon he lost his balance and sprawled on his face, his face ludicrous and earnest with astonishment. He got up and sat flat on the floor, carefully, the jug between his knees, and lifted the jug and drank. He drank a long time.

“Whuf!” he said. “On de Domain we’d give disyer stuff to de hawgs. But deseyer ign’unt mountain trash—” He drank again; then with the jug poised there came into his face an expression of concern and then consternation. He set the jug down and tried to get up, sprawling above the jug, gaining his feet at last, stooped, swaying, drooling, with that expression of outraged consternation on his face. Then he fell headlong to the floor, overturning the jug.

VIII

They stooped above the Negro, talking quietly to one another — Weddel in his frothed shirt, the father and the boy.

“We’ll have to tote him,” the father said.

They lifted the Negro. With his single hand Weddel jerked the Negro’s head up, shaking him. “Jubal,” he said.

The Negro struck out, clumsily, with one arm. “Le’m be,” he muttered. “Le’m go.”

“Jubal!” Weddel said.

The Negro thrashed, sudden and violent. “You le’m be,” he said. “I ghy tell de Man. I ghy tell um.” He ceased, muttering: “Field hands. Field niggers.”

“We’ll have to tote him,” the father said.

“Yes,” Weddel said. “I’m sorry for this. I should have warned you. But I didn’t think there was another jug he could have gained access to.” He stooped, getting his single hand under the Negro’s shoulders.

“Get away,” the father said. “Me and Hule can do it.” He and the boy picked the Negro up. Weddel opened the door. They emerged into the high black cold. Below them the barn loomed. They carried the Negro down the slope. “Get them horses out, Hule,” the father said.

“Horses?” Weddel said. “He cant ride now. He cant stay on a horse.”

They looked at one another, each toward the other voice, in the cold, the icy silence.

“You wont go now?” the father said.

“I am sorry. You see I cannot depart now. I will have to stay until daylight, until he is sober. We will go then.”

“Leave him here. Leave him one horse, and you ride on. He is nothing but a nigra.”

“I am sorry. Not after four years.” His voice was quizzical, whimsical almost, yet with that quality of indomitable weariness. “I’ve worried with him this far; I reckon I will get him on home.”

“I have warned you,” the father said.

“I am obliged. We will move at daylight. If Hule will be kind enough to help me get him into the loft.”

The father had stepped back. “Put that nigra down, Hule,” he said.

“He will freeze here,” Weddel said. “I must get him into the loft.” He hauled the Negro up and propped him against the wall and stooped to hunch the Negro’s lax body onto his shoulder. The weight rose easily, though he did not understand why until the father spoke again:

“Hule. Come away from there.”

“Yes; go,” Weddel said quietly. “I can get him up the ladder.” He could hear the boy’s breathing, fast, young, swift with excitement perhaps. Weddel did not pause to speculate, nor at the faintly hysterical tone of the boy’s voice:

“I’ll help you.”

Weddel didn’t object again. He slapped the Negro awake and they set his feet on the ladder rungs, pushing him upward. Halfway up he stopped; again he thrashed out at them. “I ghy tell um. I ghy tell de Man. I ghy tell Mistis. Field hands. Field niggers.”

They lay side by side in the loft, beneath the cloak and the two saddle blankets. There was no hay. The Negro snored, his breath reeking and harsh, thick. Below, in its stall, the Thoroughbred stamped now and then. Weddel lay on his back, his arm across his chest, the hand clutching the stub of the other arm. Overhead, through the cracks in the roof the sky showed — the thick chill, black sky which would rain again tomorrow and on every tomorrow until they left the mountains.

“If I leave the mountains,” he said quietly, motionless on his back beside the snoring Negro, staring upward. “I was concerned. I had thought that it was exhausted; that I had lost the privilege of being afraid. But I have not. And so I am happy.

Quite happy.” He lay rigid on his back in the cold darkness, thinking of home. “Contalmaison. Our lives are summed up in sounds and made significant. Victory. Defeat. Peace. Home. That’s why we must do so much to invent meanings for the sounds, so damned much. Especially if you are unfortunate enough to be victorious: so damned much. It’s nice to be whipped; quiet to be whipped. To be whipped and to lie under a broken roof, thinking of home.”

The Negro snored. “So damned much”; seeming to watch the words shape quietly in the darkness above his mouth. “What would happen, say, a man in the lobby of the Gayoso, in Memphis, laughing suddenly aloud.

But I am quite happy—” Then he heard the sound. He lay utterly still then, his hand clutching the butt of the pistol warm beneath the stub of his right arm, hearing the quiet, almost infinitesimal sound as it mounted the ladder. But he made no move until he saw the dim orifice of the trap door blotted out. “Stop where you are,” he said.

“It’s me,” the voice said; the voice of the boy, again with that swift, breathless quality which even now Weddel did not pause to designate as excitement or even to remark at all. The boy came on his hands and knees across the dry, sibilant chaff which dusted the floor. “Go ahead and shoot,” he said.

On his hands and knees he loomed above Weddel with his panting breath. "I wish I was dead. I so wish hit. I wish we was both dead. I could wish like Vatch wishes. Why did you uns have to stop here?"

Weddel had not moved. "Why does Vatch wish I was dead?"

"Because he can still hear you uns yelling. I used to sleep with him and he wakes up at night and once paw had to keep him from choking me to death before he waked up and him sweating, hearing you uns yelling still. Without nothing but unloaded guns, yelling, Vatch said, like scarecrows across a cornpatch, running." He was crying now, not aloud. "Damn you! Damn you to hell!"

"Yes," Weddel said. "I have heard them, myself. But why do you wish you were dead?"

"Because she was trying to come, herself. Only she had to—"

"Who? She? Your sister?"

"— had to go through the room to get out. Paw was awake. He said, 'If you go out that door, dont you never come back.' And she said, 'I dont aim to.' And Vatch was awake too and he said, 'Make him marry you quick because you are going to be a widow at daylight.' And she come back and told me. But I was awake too. She told me to tell you."

"Tell me what?" Weddel said. The boy cried quietly, with a kind of patient and utter despair.

"I told her if you was a nigra, and if she done that — I told her that I—"

"What? If she did what? What does she want you to tell me?"

"About the window into the attic where her and me sleep. There is a foot ladder I made to come back from hunting at night for you to get in. But I told her if you was a nigra and if she done that I would—"

"Now then," Weddel said sharply; "pull yourself together now. Dont you remember? I never even saw her but that one time when she came in the room and your father sent her out."

"But you saw her then. And she saw you."

“No,” Weddel said.

The boy ceased to cry. He was quite still above Weddel. “No what?”
“I wont do it. Climb up your ladder.”

For a while the boy seemed to muse above him, motionless, breathing slow and quiet now; he spoke now in a musing, almost dreamy tone: “I could kill you easy. You aint got but one arm, even if you are older. . . .” Suddenly he moved, with almost unbelievable quickness; Weddel’s first intimation was when the boy’s hard, overlarge hands took him by the throat. Weddel did not move. “I could kill you easy. And wouldn’t none mind.”

“Shhhhhh,” Weddel said. “Not so loud.”

“Wouldn’t none care.” He held Weddel’s throat with hard, awkward restraint. Weddel could feel the choking and the shaking expend itself somewhere about the boy’s forearms before it reached his hands, as though the connection between brain and hands was incomplete. “Wouldn’t none care. Except Vatch would be mad.”

“I have a pistol,” Weddel said.
“Then shoot me with it. Go on.”

“No.”

“No what?”

“I told you before.”

“You swear you wont do it? Do you swear?”

“Listen a moment,” Weddel said; he spoke now with a sort of soothing patience, as though he spoke one-syllable words to a child: “I just want to go home. That’s all. I have been away from home for four years. All I want is to go home. Dont you see? I want to see what I have left there, after four years.”

“What do you do there?” The boy’s hands were loose and hard about Weddel’s throat, his arms still, rigid. “Do you hunt all day, and all night

too if you want, with a horse to ride and nigras to wait on you, to shine your boots and saddle the horse, and you setting on the gallery, eating, until time to go hunting again?"

"I hope so. I haven't been home in four years, you see. So I dont know any more."

"Take me with you."

"I dont know what's there, you see. There may not be anything there: no horses to ride and nothing to hunt. The Yankees were there, and my mother died right afterward, and I dont know what we would find there, until I can go and see."

"I'll work. We'll both work. You can get married in Mayesfield. It's not far."

"Married? Oh. Your . . . I see. How do you know I am not already married?" Now the boy's hands shut on his throat, shaking him. "Stop it!" he said.

"If you say you have got a wife, I will kill you," the boy said.

"No," Weddel said. "I am not married."

"And you dont aim to climb up that foot ladder?"

"No. I never saw her but once. I might not even know her if I saw her again."

"She says different. I dont believe you. You are lying."

"No," Weddel said.

"Is it because you are afraid to?"

"Yes. That's it."

"Of Vatch?"

"Not Vatch. I'm just afraid. I think my luck has given out. I know that it has lasted too long; I am afraid that I shall find that I have forgot how to be afraid. So I cant risk it. I cant risk finding that I have lost touch with truth. Not like Jubal here. He believes that I still belong to him; he will not believe that I have been freed. He wont even let me tell him so. He does not need to bother about truth, you see."

“We would work. She might not look like the Miss’ippi women that wear shoes all the time. But we would learn. We would not shame you before them.”

“No,” Weddel said. “I cannot.”

“Then you go away. Now.”

“How can I? You see that he cannot ride, cannot stay on a horse.” The boy did not answer at once; an instant later Weddel could almost feel the tenseness, the utter immobility, though he himself had heard no sound; he knew that the boy, crouching, not breathing, was looking toward the ladder. “Which one is it?” Weddel whispered.

“It’s paw.”

“I’ll go down. You stay here. You keep my pistol for me.”

X

The dark air was high, chill, cold. In the vast invisible darkness the valley lay, the opposite cold and invisible range black on the black sky. Clutching the stub of his missing arm across his chest, he shivered slowly and steadily.

“Go,” the father said.

“The war is over,” Weddel said. “Vatch’s victory is not my trouble.”

“Take your horses and nagra, and ride on.”

“If you mean your daughter, I never saw her but once and I never expect to see her again.”

“Ride on,” the father said. “Take what is yours, and ride on.”

“I cannot.” They faced one another in the darkness. “After four years I have bought immunity from running.”

“You have till daylight.”

“I have had less than that in Virginia for four years. And this is just Tennessee.” But the other had turned; he dissolved into the black

slope. Weddel entered the stable and mounted the ladder. Motionless above the snoring Negro the boy squatted.

“Leave him here,” the boy said. “He aint nothing but a nigra. Leave him, and go.”

“No,” Weddel said.

The boy squatted above the snoring Negro. He was not looking at Weddel, yet there was between them, quiet and soundless, the copse, the sharp dry report, the abrupt wild thunder of upreared horse, the wisping smoke. “I can show you a short cut down to the valley. You will be out of the mountains in two hours. By daybreak you will be ten miles away.”

“I cant. He wants to go home too. I must get him home too.” He stooped; with his single hand he spread the cloak awkwardly, covering the Negro closer with it. He heard the boy creep away, but he did not look. After a while he shook the Negro. “Jubal,” he said.

The Negro groaned; he turned heavily, sleeping again. Weddel squatted above him as the boy had done. “I thought that I had lost it for good,” he said. “ — The peace and the quiet; the power to be afraid again.”

XI

The cabin was gaunt and bleak in the thick cold dawn when the two horses passed out the sagging gate and into the churned road, the Negro on the Thoroughbred, Weddel on the sorrel. The Negro was shivering. He sat hunched and high, with updrawn knees, his face almost invisible in the oilcloth hood.

“I tole you dey wuz fixing to pizen us wid dat stuff,” he said. “I tole you. Hillbilly rednecks. En you not only let um pizen me, you fotch me de pizen wid yo own hand. O Lawd, O Lawd! If we ever does git home.”

Weddel looked back at the cabin, at the weathered, blank house where there was no sign of any life, not even smoke. “She has a young man, I

suppose — a beau.” He spoke aloud, musing, quizzical. “And that boy. Hule.

He said to come within sight of a laurel copse where the road disappears, and take a path to the left. He said we must not pass that copse.”

“Who says which?” the Negro said. “I aint going nowhere. I going back to dat loft en lay down.”

“All right,” Weddel said. “Get down.”

“Git down?”

“I’ll need both horses. You can walk on when you are through sleeping.”

“I ghy tell yo maw,” the Negro said. “I ghy tell um. Ghy tell how after four years you aint got no more sense than to not know a Yankee when you seed um. To stay de night wid Yankees en let um pizen one of Mistis’ niggers. I ghy tell um.”

“I thought you were going to stay here,” Weddel said. He was shivering too. “Yet I am not cold,” he said. “I am not cold.”

“Stay here? Me? How in de world you ever git home widout me? Whut I tell Mistis when I come in widout you en she ax me whar you is?”

“Come,” Weddel said. He lifted the sorrel into motion. He looked quietly back at the house, then rode on. Behind him on the Thoroughbred the Negro muttered and mumbled to himself in woebegone singsong. The road, the long hill which yesterday they had toiled up, descended now. It was muddy, rockchurned, scarred across the barren and rocky land beneath the dissolving sky, jolting downward to where the pines and laurel began. After a while the cabin had disappeared.

“And so I am running away,” Weddel said. “When I get home I shall not be very proud of this. Yes, I will. It means that I am still alive. Still alive, since I still know fear and desire. Since life is an affirmation of the past

and a promise to the future. So I am still alive — Ah.” It was the laurel copse.

About three hundred yards ahead it seemed to have sprung motionless and darkly secret in the air which of itself was mostly water. He drew rein sharply, the Negro, hunched, moaning, his face completely hidden, overriding him unawares until the Thoroughbred stopped of its own accord.

“But I dont see any path—” Weddel said; then a figure emerged from the copse, running toward them. Weddel thrust the reins beneath his groin and withdrew his hand inside his cloak. Then he saw that it was the boy. He came up trotting. His face was white, strained, his eyes quite grave.

“It’s right yonder,” he said.

“Thank you,” Weddel said. “It was kind of you to come and show us, though we could have found it, I imagine.”

“Yes,” the boy said as though he had not heard. He had already taken the sorrel’s bridle. “Right tother of the brush. You cant see hit until you are in hit.”

“In whut?” the Negro said. “I ghy tell um. After four years you aint got no more sense. . . .”

“Hush,” Weddel said. He said to the boy, “I am obliged to you. You’ll have to take that in lieu of anything better. And now you get on back home. We can find the path. We will be all right now.”

“They know the path too,” the boy said. He drew the sorrel forward. “Come on.”

“Wait,” Weddel said, drawing the sorrel up. The boy still tugged at the bridle, looking on ahead toward the copse. “So we have one guess and they have one guess. Is that it?”

“Damn you to hell, come on!” the boy said, in a kind of thin frenzy. “I am sick of hit. Sick of hit.”

“Well,” Weddel said. He looked about, quizzical, sardonic, with his gaunt, weary, wasted face. “But I must move. I cant stay here, not even if I had a house, a roof to live under. So I have to choose between three things. That’s what throws a man off — that extra alternative. Just when he has come to realize that living consists in choosing wrongly between two alternatives, to have to choose among three. You go back home.”

The boy turned and looked up at him. “We’d work. We could go back to the house now, since paw and Vatch are . . . We could ride down the mou-tin, two on one horse and two on tother. We could go back to the valley and get married at Mayesfield. We would not shame you.”

“But she has a young man, hasn’t she? Somebody that waits for her at church on Sunday and walks home and takes Sunday dinner, and maybe fights the other young men because of her?”

“You wont take us, then?”

“No. You go back home.”

For a while the boy stood, holding the bridle, his face lowered. Then he turned; he said quietly: “Come on, then. We got to hurry.”

“Wait,” Weddel said; “what are you going to do?”

“I’m going a piece with you. Come on.” He dragged the sorrel forward, toward the roadside.

“Here,” Weddel said, “you go on back home. The war is over now. Vatch knows that.”

The boy did not answer. He led the sorrel into the underbrush. The Thoroughbred hung back. “Whoa, you Caesar!” the Negro said. “Wait, Marse Soshay. I aint gwine ride down no. . . .”

The boy looked over his shoulder without stopping. “You keep back there,” he said. “You keep where you are.”

The path was a faint scar, doubling and twisting among the brush. “I see it now,” Weddel said. “You go back.”

"I'll go a piece with you," the boy said; so quietly that Weddel discovered that he had been holding his breath, in a taut, strained alertness. He breathed again, while the sorrel jolted stiffly downward beneath him. "Nonsense," he thought. "He will have me playing Indian also in five minutes more.

I had wanted to recover the power to be afraid, but I seem to have outdone myself." The path widened; the Thoroughbred came alongside, the boy walking between them; again he looked at the Negro.

"You keep back, I tell you," he said.

"Why back?" Weddel said. He looked at the boy's wan, strained face; he thought swiftly, "I don't know whether I am playing Indian or not." He said aloud: "Why must he keep back?"

The boy looked at Weddel; he stopped, pulling the sorrel up. "We'd work," he said. "We wouldn't shame you."

Weddel's face was now as sober as the boy's. They looked at one another. "Do you think we have guessed wrong? We had to guess. We had to guess one out of three."

Again it was as if the boy had not heard him. "You won't think hit is me? You swear hit?"

"Yes. I swear it." He spoke quietly, watching the boy; they spoke now as two men or two children. "What do you think we ought to do?"

"Turn back. They will be gone now. We could . . ." He drew back on the bridle; again the Thoroughbred came abreast and forged ahead.

"You mean, it could be along here?" Weddel said. Suddenly he spurred the sorrel, jerking the clinging boy forward. "Let go," he said. The boy held onto the bridle, swept forward until the two horses were again abreast. On the Thoroughbred the Negro perched, highkneed, his mouth still talking, flobbered down with ready speech, easy and worn with talk like an old shoe with walking.

"I done tole him en tole him," the Negro said.

“Let go!” Weddel said, spurring the sorrel, forcing its shoulder into the boy. “Let go!”

“You wont turn back?” the boy said. “You wont?”

“Let go!” Weddel said. His teeth showed a little beneath his mustache; he lifted the sorrel bodily with the spurs. The boy let go of the bridle and ducked beneath the Thoroughbred’s neck; Weddel, glancing back as the sorrel leaped, saw the boy surge upward and on to the Thoroughbred’s back, shoving the Negro back along its spine until he vanished.

“They think you will be riding the good horse,” the boy said in a thin, panting voice; “I told them you would be riding . . . Down the mou-tin!” he cried as the Thoroughbred swept past; “the horse can make hit! Git outen the path! Git outen the. . . .”

Weddel spurred the sorrel; almost abreast the two horses reached the bend where the path doubled back upon itself and into a matted shoulder of laurel and rhododendron. The boy looked back over his shoulder. “Keep back!” he cried. “Git outen the path!” Weddel rowelled the sorrel. On his face was a thin grimace of exasperation and anger almost like smiling.

It was still on his dead face when he struck the earth, his foot still fast in the stirrup. The sorrel leaped at the sound and dragged Weddel to the path side and halted and whirled and snorted once, and began to graze.

The Thoroughbred however rushed on past the curve and whirled and rushed back, the blanket twisted under its belly and its eyes rolling, springing over the boy’s body where it lay in the path, the face wrenched sideways against a stone, the arms back-sprawled, openpalmed, like a woman with lifted skirts springing across a puddle.

Then it whirled and stood above Weddel’s body, whinnying, with tossing head, watching the laurel copse and the fading gout of black powder smoke as it faded away.

The Negro was on his hands and knees when the two men emerged from the copse. One of them was running. The Negro watched him run forward, crying monotonously. "The durned fool! The durned fool!

The durned fool!" and then stop suddenly and drop the gun; squatting, the Negro saw him become stone still above the fallen gun, looking dawn at the boy's body with an expression of shock and amazement like he was waking from a dream.

Then the Negro saw the other man. In the act of stopping, the second man swung the rifle up and began to reload it. The Negro did not move. On his hands and knees he watched the two white men, his irises rushing and wild in the bloodshot whites.

Then he too moved and, still on hands and knees, he turned and scuttled to where Weddel lay beneath the sorrel and crouched over Weddel and looked again and watched the second man backing slowly away up the path, loading the rifle.

He watched the man stop; he did not close his eyes nor look away. He watched the rifle elongate and then rise and diminish slowly and become a round spot against the white shape of Vatch's face like a period on a page. Crouching, the Negro's eyes rushed wild and steady and red, like those of a cornered animal.

The End

VI. BEYOND

Beyond, William Faulkner

Beyond

THE HARD ROUND ear of the stethoscope was cold and unpleasant upon his naked chest; the room, big and square, furnished with clumsy walnut — the bed where he had first slept alone, which had been his marriage bed, in which his son had been conceived and been born and lain dressed for the coffin — the room familiar for sixty-five years, by ordinary peaceful and lonely and so peculiarly his own as to have the same odor which he had, seemed to be cluttered with people, though there were but three of them and all of them he knew: Lucius Peabody who should have been down town attending to his medical practice, and the two Negroes, the one who should be in the kitchen and the other with the lawn mower on the lawn, making some pretence toward earning the money which on Saturday night they would expect.

But worst of all was the hard cold little ear of the stethoscope, worse even than the outrage of his bared chest with its fine delicate matting of gray hair. In fact, about the whole business there was just one alleviating circumstance.

“At least,” he thought with fretted and sardonic humor, “I am spared that uproar of female connections which might have been my lot, which is the ordinary concomitant of occasions of marriage or divorcement. And if he will just move his damned little toy telephone and let my niggers go back to work—”

And then, before he had finished the thought, Peabody did remove the stethoscope. And then, just as he was settling himself back into the pillow with a sigh of fretted relief, one of the Negroes, the woman, set up such a pandemonium of wailing as to fetch him bolt upright in the bed, his hands to his ears.

The Negress stood at the foot of the bed, her long limber black hands motionless on the footboard, her eyes whitely backrolled into her skull and her mouth wide open, while from it rolled slow billows of soprano sound as mellow as high-register organ tones and wall-shattering as a steamer siren.

“Chlory!” he shouted. “Stop that!” She didn’t stop. Apparently she could neither see nor hear. “You, Jake!” he shouted to the Negro man who stood beside her, his hands too on the footboard, his face brooding upon the bed with an expression darkly and profoundly enigmatic; “get her out of here!

At once!” But Jake too did not move, and he then turned to Peabody in angry outrage. “Here! Loosh! Get these damn niggers out of here!” But Peabody also did not seem to hear him. The Judge watched him methodically folding the stethoscope into its case; glared at him for a moment longer while the woman’s shattering noise billowed through the room. Then he flung the covers back and rose from the bed and hurried furiously from the room and from the house.

At once he realized that he was still in his pajamas, so he buttoned his overcoat. It was of broadcloth, black, brushed, of an outmoded elegance, with a sable collar. “At least they didn’t have time to hide this from me,” he thought in fretted rage. “Now, if I just had my. . . .” He looked down at his feet. “Ah. I seem to have. . . .”

He looked at his shoes. “That’s fortunate, too.” Then the momentary surprise faded too, now that outrage had space in which to disseminate itself. He touched his hat, then he put his hand to his lapel. The jasmine was there. Say what he would, curse Jake as he often had to do, the Negro never forgot whatever flower in its season.

Always it would be there, fresh and recent and unblemished, on the morning coffee tray. The flower and the. . . . He clasped his ebony stick beneath his arm and opened the briefcase. The two fresh handkerchiefs were there, beside the book. He thrust one of them into his breast pocket and went on. After a while the noise of Chlory’s wailing died away.

Then for a little while it was definitely unpleasant. He detested crowds: the milling and aimless and patient stupidity; the concussion of life-quick flesh with his own. But presently, if not soon, he was free, and

standing so, still a little ruffled, a little annoyed, he looked back with fading outrage and distaste at the throng as it clotted quietly through the entrance.

With fading distaste until the distaste was gone, leaving his face quiet and quite intelligent, with a faint and long constant overtone of quizzical bemusement not yet tintured with surprised speculation, not yet puzzled, not yet wary. That was to come later. Hence it did not show in his voice, which was now merely light, quizzical, contained, "There seems to be quite a crowd of them."

"Yes," the other said. The Judge looked at him and saw a young man in conventional morning dress with some subtle effluvium of weddings, watching the entrance with a strained, patient air.

"You are expecting someone?" the Judge said.

Now the other looked at him. "Yes. You didn't see — But you don't know her."

"Know whom?"

"My wife. That is, she is not my wife yet. But the wedding was to be at noon."

"Something happened, did it?"

"I had to do it." The young man looked at him, strained, anxious. "I was late. That's why I was driving fast. A child ran into the road. I was going too fast to stop. So I had to turn."

"But you missed the child?"

"Yes." The other looked at him. "You don't know her?"

"And are you waiting here to. . . ." The judge stared at the other. His eyes were narrowed, his gaze was piercing, hard. He said suddenly, sharply, "Nonsense."

"What? What did you say?" the other asked with his vague, strained, almost beseeching air. The Judge looked away.

His frowning concentration, his reflex of angry astonishment, was gone. He seemed to have wiped it from his face by a sudden deliberate

action. He was like a man who, not a swordsman, has practiced with a blade a little against a certain improbable crisis, and who suddenly finds himself, blade in hand, face to face with the event. He looked at the entrance, his face alert, musing swiftly: he seemed to muse upon the entering faces with a still and furious concentration, and quietly; quietly he looked about, then at the other again. The young man still watched him.

“You’re looking for your wife too, I suppose,” he said. “I hope you find her. I hope you do.” He spoke with a sort of quiet despair. “I suppose she is old, as you are. It must be hell on the one who has to watch and wait for the other one he or she has grown old in marriage with, because it is so terrible to wait and watch like me, for a girl who is a maiden to you.

Of course I think mine is the most unbearable. You see if it had only been the next day — anything. But then if it had, I guess I could not have turned out for that kid. I guess I just think mine is so terrible. It can’t be as bad as I think it is. It just can’t be. I hope you find her.”

The Judge’s lip lifted. “I came here to escape someone; not to find anyone.” He looked at the other. His face was still broken with that grimace which might have been smiling. But his eyes were not smiling. “If I were looking for anybody, it would probably be my son.”
“Oh. A son. I see.”

“Yes. He would be about your age. He was ten when he died.”
“Look for him here.”

Now the Judge laughed outright, save for his eyes. The other watched him with that grave anxiety leavened now with quiet interested curiosity. “You mean you don’t believe?” The Judge laughed aloud. Still laughing, he produced a cloth sack of tobacco and rolled a slender cigarette.

When he looked up, the other was watching the entrance again. The Judge ceased to laugh.

“Have you a match?” he said. The other looked at him. The Judge raised the cigarette. “A match.”

The other sought in his pockets. “No.” He looked at the Judge. “Look for him here,” he said.

“Thank you,” the Judge answered. “I may avail myself of your advice later.” He turned away. Then he paused and looked back. The young man was watching the entrance. The Judge watched him, bemused, his lip lifted. He turned on, then he stopped still. His face was now completely shocked, into complete immobility like a mask; the sensitive, worn mouth, the delicate nostrils, the eyes all pupil or pupilless.

He could not seem to move at all. Then Mothershed turned and saw him. For an instant Mothershed’s pale eyes flickered, his truncated jaw, collapsing steadily with a savage, toothless motion, ceased.

“Well?” Mothershed said.

“Yes,” the Judge said; “it’s me.” Now it was that, as the mesmerism left him, the shadow bewildered and wary and complete, touched his face. Even to himself his words sounded idiotic. “I thought that you were dead. . . .” Then he made a supreme and gallant effort, his voice light, quizzical, contained again, “Well?”

Mothershed looked at him — a squat man in a soiled and mismatched suit stained with grease and dirt, his soiled collar innocent of tie — with a pale, lightly slumbering glare filled with savage outrage. “So they got you here, too, did they?”

“That depends on who you mean by ‘they’ and what you mean by ‘here.’”

Mothershed made a savage, sweeping gesture with one arm. “Here, by God! The preachers. The Jesus shouters.”

“Ah,” the Judge said. “Well, if I am where I am beginning to think I am, I don’t know whether I am here or not. But you are not here at all, are

you?” Mothershed cursed violently. “Yes,” the Judge said, “we never thought, sitting in my office on those afternoons, discussing Voltaire and Ingersoll, that we should ever be brought to this, did we?”

You, the atheist whom the mere sight of a church spire on the sky could enrage; and I who have never been able to divorce myself from reason enough to accept even your pleasant and labor-saving theory of nihilism.”

“Labor-saving!” Mothershed cried. “By God, I . . .” He cursed with impotent fury. The Judge might have been smiling save for his eyes. He sealed the cigarette again.

“Have you a match?”

“What?” Mothershed said. He glared at the Judge, his mouth open. He sought through his clothes. From out the savage movement, strapped beneath his armpit, there peeped fleetly the butt of a heavy pistol.

“No,” he said. “I ain’t.”

“Yes,” the Judge said. He twisted the cigarette, his gaze light, quizzical. “But you still haven’t told me what you are doing here. I heard that you had. . . .”

Again Mothershed cursed, prompt, outraged. “I ain’t. I just committed suicide.” He glared at the Judge. “God damn it, I remember raising the pistol; I remember the little cold ring it made against my ear; I remember when I told my finger on the trigger. . . .”

He glared at the Judge. “I thought that that would be one way I could escape the preachers, since by the church’s own token. . . .” He glared at the Judge, his pale gaze apoplectic and outraged. “Well, I know why you are here. You come here looking for that boy.”

The Judge looked down, his lip lifted, the movement pouched upward about his eyes. He said quietly, “No.”

Mothershed watched him, glared at him. “Looking for that boy. Agnosticism.” He snarled it. “Won’t say ‘Yes’ and won’t say ‘No’ until

you see which way the cat will jump. Ready to sell out to the highest bidder. By God, I'd rather have give up and died in sanctity, with every heaven-yelping fool in ten miles around. . . ."

"No," the Judge said quietly behind the still, dead gleam of his teeth. Then his teeth vanished quietly, though he did not look up. He sealed the cigarette carefully again. "There seem to be a lot of people here." Mothershed now began to watch him with speculation, tasting his savage gums, his pale furious glare arrested. "You have seen other familiar faces besides my own here, I suppose. Even those of men whom you know only by name, perhaps?"

"Oh," Mothershed said. "I see. I get you now." The Judge seemed to be engrossed in the cigarette. "You want to take a whirl at them too, do you? Go ahead. I hope you will get a little more out of them that will stick to your guts than I did. Maybe you will, since you don't seem to want to know as much as you want something new to be uncertain about. Well, you can get plenty of that from any of them."

"You mean you have. . . ."

Again Mothershed cursed, harsh, savage. "Sure. Ingersoll. Paine. Every bastard one of them that I used to waste my time reading when I had better been sitting on the sunny side of a log."

"Ah," the Judge said. "Ingersoll. Is he. . . ."

"Sure. On a bench just inside the park yonder. And maybe on the same bench you'll find the one that wrote the little women books. If he ain't there, he ought to be."

So the Judge sat forward, elbows on knees, the unlighted cigarette in his fingers. "So you too are reconciled," he said. The man who Mothershed said was Ingersoll looked at his profile quietly. "To this place."

"Ah," the other said. He made a brief, short gesture. "Reconciled."

The Judge did not look up. "You accept it? You acquiesce?" He seemed to be absorbed in the cigarette. "If I could just see Him, talk to Him." The cigarette turned slowly in his fingers. "Perhaps I was seeking Him.

Perhaps I was seeking Him all the time I was reading your books, and Voltaire and Montesquieu. Perhaps I was.” The cigarette turned slowly. “I have believed in you. In your sincerity.

I said, if Truth is to be found by man, this man will be among those who find it. At one time — I was in the throes of that suffering from a still green hurt which causes even an intelligent man to cast about for anything, any straw — I had a foolish conceit: you will be the first to laugh at it as I myself did later.

I thought, perhaps there is a hereafter, a way station into nothingness perhaps, where for an instant lesser men might speak face to face with men like you whom they could believe; could hear from such a man’s own lips the words: ‘There is hope,’ or: ‘There is nothing.’ I said to myself, in such case it will not be Him whom I shall seek; it will be Ingersoll or Paine or Voltaire.” He watched the cigarette. “Give me your word now. Say either of these to me. I will believe.”

The other looked at the Judge for a time. Then he said, “Why? Believe why?”

The paper about the cigarette had come loose. The Judge twisted it carefully back, handling the cigarette carefully. “You see, I had a son. He was the last of my name and race. After my wife died we lived alone, two men in the house.

It had been a good name, you see. I wanted him to be manly, worthy of it. He had a pony which he rode all the time. I have a photograph of them which I use as a bookmark. Often, looking at the picture or watching them unbeknownst as they passed the library window, I would think What hopes ride yonder; of the pony I would think What burden do you blindly bear, dumb brute.

One day they telephoned me at my office. He had been found dragging from the stirrup. Whether the pony had kicked him or he had struck his head in falling, I never knew.”

He laid the cigarette carefully on the bench beside him and opened the briefcase. He took out a book. "Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary," he said. "I always carry a book with me. I am a great reader. It happens that my life is a solitary one, owing to the fact that I am the last of my family, and perhaps to the fact that I am a Republican office-holder in a Democratic stronghold. I am a Federal judge, from a Mississippi district.

My wife's father was a Republican." He added quickly, "I believe the tenets of the Republican Party to be best for the country. You will not believe it, but for the last fifteen years my one intellectual companion has been a rabid atheist, almost an illiterate, who not only scorns all logic and science, but who has a distinct body odor as well.

Sometimes I have thought, sitting with him in my office on a summer afternoon — a damp one — that if a restoration of faith could remove his prejudice against bathing, I should be justified in going to that length myself even." He took a photograph from the book and extended it. "This was my son."

The other looked at the picture without moving, without offering to take it. From the brown and fading cardboard a boy of ten, erect upon the pony, looked back at them with a grave and tranquil hauteur. "He rode practically all the time. Even to church (I attended church regularly then.

I still do, at times, even now). We had to take an extra groom along in the carriage to. . . ." He looked at the picture, musing. "After his mother died I never married again. My own mother was sickly, an invalid. I could cajole her.

In the absence of my aunts I could browbeat her into letting me go barefoot in the garden, with two house servants on watch to signal the approach of my aunts. I would return to the house, my manhood triumphant, vindicated, until I entered the room where she waited for me.

Then I would know that for every grain of dust which pleased my feet, she would pay with a second of her life. And we would sit in the dusk like two children, she holding my hand and crying quietly, until my aunts entered with the lamp. 'Now, Sophia. Crying again. What have you let him bulldoze you into doing this time?'

She died when I was fourteen; I was twenty-eight before I asserted myself and took the wife of my choice; I was thirty-seven when my son was born." He looked at the photograph, his eyes pouched, netted by two delicate hammocks of myriad lines as fine as etching. "He rode all the time.

Hence the picture of the two of them, since they were inseparable. I have used this picture as a bookmark in the printed volumes where his and my ancestry can be followed for ten generations in our American annals, so that as the pages progressed it would be as though with my own eyes I watched him ride in the flesh down the long road which his blood and bone had traveled before it became his." He held the picture. With his other hand he took up the cigarette.

The paper had come loose: he held it raised a little and then arrested so, as if he did not dare raise it farther. "And you can give me your word. I will believe."

"Go seek your son," the other said. "Go seek him."

Now the Judge did not move at all. Holding the picture and the dissolving cigarette, he sat in a complete immobility. He seemed to sit in a kind of terrible and unbreathing suspension. "And find him? And find him?" The other did not answer. Then the Judge turned and looked at him, and then the cigarette dropped quietly into dissolution as the tobacco rained down upon his neat, gleaming shoe. "Is that your word? I will believe, I tell you." The other sat, shapeless, gray, sedentary, almost nondescript, looking down. "Come. You cannot stop with that. You cannot."

Along the path before them people passed constantly. A woman passed, carrying a child and a basket, a young woman in a plain, worn,

brushed cape. She turned upon the man who Mothershed had said was Ingersoll a plain, bright, pleasant face and spoke to him in a pleasant, tranquil voice.

Then she looked at the Judge, pleasantly, a full look without boldness or diffidence, and went on. "Come. You cannot. You cannot." Then his face went completely blank.

In the midst of speaking his face emptied; he repeated "cannot. Cannot" in a tone of musing consternation. "Cannot," he said. "You mean, you cannot give me any word? That you do not know? That you, yourself, do not know? You, Robert Ingersoll? Robert Ingersoll?" The other did not move. "Is Robert Ingersoll telling me that for twenty years I have leaned upon a reed no stronger than myself?"

Still the other did not look up. "You saw that young woman who just passed, carrying a child. Follow her. Look into her face."

"A young woman. With a . . ." The Judge looked at the other. "Ah. I see. Yes. I will look at the child and I shall see scars. Then I am to look into the woman's face. Is that it?" The other didn't answer. "That is your answer? your final word?" The other did not move. The Judge's lip lifted. The movement pouched upward about his eyes as though despair, grief, had flared up for a final instant like a dying flame, leaving upon his face its ultimate and fading gleam in a faint grimace of dead teeth.

He rose and put the photograph back into the briefcase. "And this is the man who says that he was once Robert Ingersoll." Above his teeth his face mused in that expression which could have been smiling save for the eyes.

"It is not proof that I sought. I, of all men, know that proof is but a fallacy invented by man to justify to himself and his fellows his own crass lust and folly. It was not proof that I sought." With the stick and the briefcase clasped beneath his arm he rolled another slender cigarette.

“I don’t know who you are, but I don’t believe you are Robert Ingersoll. Perhaps I could not know it even if you were. Anyway, there is a certain integral consistency which, whether it be right or wrong, a man must cherish because it alone will ever permit him to die. So what I have been, I am; what I am, I shall be until that instant comes when I am not. And then I shall have never been. How does it go? Non fui. Sum. Fui. Non sum.”

With the unlighted cigarette in his fingers he thought at first that he would pass on. But instead he paused and looked down at the child. It sat in the path at the woman’s feet, surrounded by tiny leaden effigies of men, some erect and some prone. The overturned and now empty basket lay at one side.

Then the Judge saw that the effigies were Roman soldiers in various stages of dismemberment — some headless, some armless and legless — scattered about, lying profoundly on their faces or staring up with martial and battered inscrutability from the mild and inscrutable dust. On the exact center of each of the child’s insteps was a small scar.

There was a third scar in the palm of its exposed hand, and as the Judge looked down with quiet and quizzical bemusement, the child swept flat the few remaining figures and he saw the fourth scar. The child began to cry.

“Shhhhhhhhh,” the woman said. She glanced up at the Judge, then she knelt and set the soldiers up. The child cried steadily, with a streaked and dirty face, strong, unhurried, passionless, without tears. “Look!” the woman said, “See? Here! Here’s Pilate too! Look!” The child ceased. Tearless, it sat in the dust, looking at the soldiers with an expression as inscrutable as theirs, suspended, aldermanic, and reserved.

She swept the soldiers flat. “There!” she cried in a fond, bright voice, “see?” For a moment longer the child sat. Then it began to cry. She took it up and sat on the bench, rocking it back and forth, glancing up at the Judge. “Now, now,” she said. “Now, now.”

“Is he sick?” the Judge said.

“Oh, no. He’s just tired of his toys, as children will get.” She rocked the child with an air fond and unconcerned. “Now, now. The gentleman is watching you.”

The child cried steadily. “Hasn’t he other toys?” the Judge said.

“Oh, yes. So many that I don’t dare walk about the house in the dark. But he likes his soldiers the best. An old gentleman who has lived here a long time, they say, and is quite wealthy, gave them to him.

An old gentleman with a white mustache and that kind of popping eyes that old people have who eat too much; I tell him so. He has a footman to carry his umbrella and overcoat and steamer rug, and he sits here with us for more than an hour, sometimes, talking and breathing hard. He always has candy or something.”

She looked down at the child, her face brooding and serene. It cried steadily. Quizzical, bemused, the Judge stood, looking quietly down at the child’s scarred, dirty feet.

The woman glanced up and followed his look. “You are looking at his scars and wondering how he got them, aren’t you? The other children did it one day when they were playing. Of course they didn’t know they were going to hurt him. I imagine they were as surprised as he was. You know how children are when they get too quiet.”

“Yes,” the Judge said. “I had a son too.”

“You have? Why don’t you bring him here? I’m sure we would be glad to have him play with our soldiers too.”

The Judge’s teeth glinted quietly. “I’m afraid he’s a little too big for toys.” He took the photograph from the briefcase. “This was my son.”

The woman took the picture. The child cried steady and strong. “Why, it’s Howard. Why, we see him every day. He rides past here every day.

Sometimes he stops and lets us ride too. I walk beside to hold him on," she added, glancing up. She showed the picture to the child.

"Look! See Howard on his pony? See?" Without ceasing to cry, the child contemplated the picture, its face streaked with tears and dirt, its expression detached, suspended, as though it were living two distinct and separate lives at one time. She returned the picture. "I suppose you are looking for him."

"Ah," the Judge said behind his momentary teeth. He replaced the picture carefully in the briefcase, the unlighted cigarette in his fingers. The woman moved on the bench, gathering her skirts in with invitation. "Won't you sit down? You will be sure to see him pass here."

"Ah," the Judge said again. He looked at her, quizzical, with the blurred eyes of the old. "It's like this, you see. He always rides the same pony, you say?"

"Why, yes." She looked at him with grave and tranquil surprise.

"And how old would you say the pony is?"

"Why, I. . . . It looks just the right size for him."

"A young pony, you would say then?"

"Why . . . yes. Yes." She watched him, her eyes wide.

"Ah," the Judge said again behind his faint still teeth. He closed the briefcase carefully. From his pocket he took a half dollar. "Perhaps he is tired of the soldiers too. Perhaps with this. . . ."

"Thank you," she said. She did not look again at the coin. "Your face is so sad. There: when you think you are smiling it is sadder than ever. Aren't you well?" She glanced down at his extended hand. She did not offer to take the coin. "He'd just lose it, you see. And it's so pretty and bright. When he is older, and can take care of small playthings. . . . He's so little now, you see."

"I see," the Judge said. He put the coin back into his pocket. "Well, I think I shall—"

“You wait here with us. He always passes here. You’ll find him quicker that way.”

“Ah,” the Judge said. “On the pony, the same pony. You see, by that token, the pony would have to be thirty years old. That pony died at eighteen, six years unriden, in my lot. That was twelve years ago. So I had better get on.”

And again it was quite unpleasant. It should have been doubly so, what with the narrow entrance and the fact that, while the other time he was moving with the crowd, this time he must fight his way inch by inch against it.

“But at least I know where I am going,” he thought, beneath his crushed hat, his stick and briefcase dragging at his arms; “which I did not seem to know before.” But he was free at last, and looking up at the clock on the courthouse, as he never failed to do on descending his office stairs, he saw that he had a full hour before supper would be ready, before the neighbors would be ready to mark his clocklike passing.

“I shall have time to go the cemetery,” he thought, and looking down at the raw and recent excavation, he swore with fretful annoyance, for some of the savage clods had fallen or been thrown upon the marble slab beside it. “Damn that Pettigrew,” he said. “He should have seen to this.

I told him I wanted the two of them as close as possible, but at least I thought that he. . . .” Kneeling, he tried to remove the earth which had fallen upon the slab. But it was beyond his strength to do more than clear away that which partially obscured the lettering: Howard Allison II. April 3, 1903. August 22, 1913, and the quietly cryptic Gothic lettering at the foot: Auf Wiedersehen, Little Boy.

He continued to smooth, to stroke the letters after the earth was gone, his face bemused, quiet, as he spoke to the man who Mothershed had said was Ingersoll, “You see, if I could believe that I shall see and touch him again, I shall not have lost him. And if I have not lost him, I shall

never have had a son. Because I am I through bereavement and because of it.

I do not know what I was nor what I shall be. But because of death, I know that I am. And that is all the immortality of which intellect is capable and flesh should desire. Anything else is for peasants, clods, who could never have loved a son well enough to have lost him." His face broke, myriad, quizzical, while his hand moved lightly upon the quiet lettering. "No. I do not require that.

To lie beside him will be sufficient for me. There will be a wall of dust between us: that is true, and he is already dust these twenty years. But some day I shall be dust too. And—" he spoke now firmly, quietly, with a kind of triumph: "who is he who will affirm that there must be a web of flesh and bone to hold the shape of love?"

Now it was late. "Probably they are setting their clocks back at this very moment," he thought, pacing along the street toward his home. Already he should have been hearing the lawn mower, and then in the instant of exasperation at Jake, he remarked the line of motor cars before his gate and a sudden haste came upon him.

But not so much but what, looking at the vehicle at the head of the line, he cursed again. "Damn that Pettigrew! I told him, in the presence of witnesses when I signed my will, that I would not be hauled feet first through Jefferson at forty miles an hour. That if he couldn't find me a decent pair of horses. . . . I am a good mind to come back and haunt him, as Jake would have me do."

But the haste, the urgency, was upon him. He hurried round to the back door (he remarked that the lawn was freshly and neatly trimmed, as though done that day) and entered. Then he could smell the flowers faintly and hear the voice; he had just time to slip out of his overcoat and pajamas and leave them hanging neatly in the closet, and cross the hall into the odor of cut flowers and the drone of the voice, and slip into his clothes. They had been recently pressed, and his face had been shaved too.

Nevertheless they were his own, and he fitted himself to the olden and familiar embrace which no iron could change, with the same lascivious eagerness with which he shaped his limbs to the bedclothes on a winter night.

“Ah,” he said to the man who Mothershed had said was Ingersoll, “this is best, after all. An old man is never at home save in his own garments: his own old thinking and beliefs; old hands and feet, elbow, knee, shoulder which he knows will fit.”

Now the light vanished with a mute, faint, decorous hollow sound which drove for a fading instant down upon him the dreadful, macabre smell of slain flowers; at the same time he became aware that the droning voice had ceased. “In my own house too,” he thought, waiting for the smell of the flowers to fade; “yet I did not once think to notice who was speaking, nor when he ceased.”

Then he heard or felt the decorous scuffing of feet about him, and he lay in the close dark, his hands folded upon his breast as he slept, as the old sleep, waiting for the moment. It came. He said quietly aloud, quizzical, humorous, peaceful, as he did each night in his bed in his lonely and peaceful room when a last full exhalation had emptied his body of waking and he seemed for less than an instant to look about him from the portal of sleep, “Gentlemen of the Jury, you may proceed.”

The End

Black Music, William Faulkner

Black Music

I

THIS IS ABOUT Wilfred Midgleston, fortune's favorite, chosen of the gods. For fifty-six years, a clotting of the old gutful compulsions and circumscriptions of clocks and bells, he met walking the walking image of a small, snuffy, nondescript man whom neither man nor woman had ever turned to look at twice, in the monotonous shopwindows of monotonous hard streets. Then his apotheosis soared glaring, and to him at least not brief, across the unfathomed sky above his lost earth like that of Elijah of old.

I found him in Rincon, which is not large; less large even than one swaybacked tanker looming above the steel docks of the Universal Oil Company and longer than the palm- and abode-lined street paved with dust marked by splayed naked feet where the violent shade lies by day and the violent big stars by night.

"He came from the States," they told me. "Been here twenty-five years. He hasn't changed at all since the day he arrived, except that the clothes he came in have wore out and he hasn't learned more than ten words of Spanish."

That was the only way you could tell that he was an old man, that he was getting along: he hadn't learned to speak hardly a word of the language of the people with whom he had lived twenty-five years and among whom it appeared that he intended to die and be buried. Appeared: he had no job: a mild, hopelessly mild man who looked like a book-keeper in a George Ade fable dressed as a tramp for a Presbyterian social charade in 1890, and quite happy.

Quite happy and quite poor. "He's either poor, or he's putting up an awful front. But they can't touch him now. We told him that a long time ago, when he first come here. We said, 'Why don't you go on and spend it, enjoy it? They've probably forgot all about it by now.' Because if I went to the trouble and risk of stealing and then the hardship of having to live the rest of my life in a hole like this, I'd sure enjoy what I went to the trouble to get."

“Enjoy what?” I said.

“The money. The money he stole and had to come down here. What else do you reckon he would come down here and stay twenty-five years for? just to look at the country?”

“He doesn’t act and look very rich,” I said.

“That’s a fact. But a fellow like that. His face. I don’t guess he’d have judgment enough to steal good. And not judgment enough to keep it, after he got it stole. I guess you are right. I guess all he got out of it was the running away and the blame. While somebody back there where he run from is spending the money and singing loud in the choir twice a week.”

“Is that what happens?” I said.

“You’re damned right it is. Some damn fellow that’s too rich to afford to be caught stealing sets back and leaves a durn fool that never saw twenty-five hundred dollars before in his life at one time, pull his chestnuts for him. Twenty-five hundred seems a hell of a lot when somebody else owns it. But when you have got to pick up overnight and run a thousand miles, paying all your expenses, how long do you think twenty-five hundred will last?”

“How long did it last?” I said.

“Just about two years, by God. And then there I—” He stopped. He glared at me, who had paid for the coffee and the bread which rested upon the table between us. He glared at me. “Who do you think you are, anyway? Wm. J. Burns?”

“I don’t think so. I meant no offense. I just was curious to know how long his twenty-five hundred dollars lasted him.”

“Who said he had twenty-five hundred dollars? I was just citing an example. He never had nothing, not even twenty-five hundred cents. Or if he did, he hid it and it’s stayed hid ever since. He come here sponging on us white men, and when we got tired of it he took to sponging on these Spigs.

And a white man has got pretty low when he's got so stingy with his stealings that he will live with Spiggotties before he'll dig up his own money and live like a white man."

"Maybe he never stole any money," I said.

"What's he doing down here, then?"

"I'm down here."

"I don't know you ain't run, either."

"That's so," I said. "You don't know."

"Sure I don't. Because that's your business. Every man has got his own private affairs, and no man respects them quicker than I do. But I know that a man, a white man, has got to have durn good reason. . . . Maybe he ain't got it now. But you can't tell me a white man would come down here to live and die without no reason."

"And you consider that stealing money is the only reason?"

He looked at me, with disgust and a little contempt. "Did you bring a nurse with you? Because you ought to have, until you learn enough about human nature to travel alone. Because human nature, I don't care who he is nor how loud he sings in church, will steal whenever he thinks he can get away with it. If you ain't learned that yet, you better go back home and stay there where your folks can take care of you."

But I was watching Midgleston across the street. He was standing beside a clump of naked children playing in the shady dust: a small, snuffy man in a pair of dirty drill trousers which had not been made for him. "Whatever it is," I said, "it doesn't seem to worry him."

"Oh. Him. He ain't got sense enough to know he needs to worry about nothing."

Quite poor and quite happy. His turn to have coffee and bread with me came at last. No: that's wrong. I at last succeeded in evading his other down-at-heel compatriots like my first informant; men a little soiled

and usually unshaven, who were unavoidable in the cantinas and coffee shops, loud, violent, maintaining the superiority of the white race and their own sense of injustice and of outrage among the grave white teeth, the dark, courteous, fatal, speculative alien faces, and had Midgleston to breakfast with me. I had to invite him and then insist.

He was on hand at the appointed hour, in the same dirty trousers, but his shirt was now white and whole and ironed, and he had shaved. He accepted the meal without servility, without diffidence, without eagerness. Yet when he raised the handleless bowl I watched his hands tremble so that for a time he could not make junction with his lips.

He saw me watching his hands and he looked at my face for the first time and I saw that his eyes were the eyes of an old man. He said, with just a trace of apology for his clumsiness: "I ain't et nothing to speak of in a day or so."

"Haven't eaten in two days?" I said.

"This hot climate. A fellow don't need so much. Feels better for not eating so much. That was the hardest trouble I had when I first come here. I was always a right hearty eater back home."

"Oh," I said. I had meat brought then, he protesting. But he ate the meat, ate all of it. "Just look at me," he said. "I ain't et this much breakfast in twenty-five years. But when a fellow gets along, old habits are hard to break. No, sir. Not since I left home have I et this much for breakfast."

"Do you plan to go back home?" I said.

"I guess not; no. This suits me here. I can live simple here. Not all cluttered up with things. My own boss (I used to be an architect's draughtsman) all day long. No. I don't guess I'll go back." He looked at me. His face was intent, watchful, like that of a child about to tell something, divulge itself. "You wouldn't guess where I sleep in a hundred years."

"No. I don't expect I could. Where do you sleep?"

"I sleep in that attic over that cantina yonder. The house belongs to the Company, and Mrs. Widrington, Mr. Widrington's wife, the manager's wife, she lets me sleep in the attic. It's high and quiet, except for a few rats. But when in Rome, you got to act like a Roman, I say. Only I wouldn't name this country Rome; I'd name it Ratville. But that ain't it." He watched me. "You'd never guess it in the world."

"No," I said. "I'd never guess it."

He watched me. "It's my bed."

"Your bed?"

"I told you you'd never guess it."

"No," I said. "I give up now."

"My bed is a roll of tarred roofing paper."

"A roll of what?"

"Tarred roofing paper." His face was bright, peaceful; his voice quiet, full of gleeful quiet. "At night I just unroll it and go to bed and the next a. m. I just roll it back up and lean it in the corner. And then my room is all cleaned up for the day. Ain't that fine? No sheets, no laundry, no nothing. Just roll up my whole bed like an umbrella and carry it under my arm when I want to move."

"Oh," I said. "You have no family, then."

"Not with me. No."

"You have a family back home, then?"

He was quite quiet. He did not feign to be occupied with something on the table. Neither did his eyes go blank, though he mused peacefully for a moment. "Yes. I have a wife back home. Likely this climate wouldn't suit her. She wouldn't like it here. But she is all right."

I always kept my insurance paid up; I carried a right smart more than you would figure a architect's draughtsman on a seventy-five-dollar salary would keep up. If I told you the amount, you would be surprised. She helped me to save; she is a good woman. So she's got that. She earned it. And besides, I don't need money."

“So you don’t plan to go back home.”

“No,” he said. He watched me; again his expression was that of a child about to tell on itself. “You see, I done something.”

“Oh. I see.”

He talked quietly: “It ain’t what you think. Not what them others—” he jerked his head, a brief embracing gesture— “think. I never stole any money. Like I always told Martha — she is my wife; Mrs. Midgleston — money is too easy to earn to risk the bother of trying to steal it. All you got to do is work. ‘Have we ever suffered for it?’

I said to her. ‘Of course, we don’t live like some. But some is born for one thing and some is born for another thing. And the fellow that is born a tadpole, when he tries to be a salmon all he is going to be is a sucker.’ That’s what I would tell her. And she done her part and we got along right well; if I told you how much life insurance I carried, you would be surprised. No; she ain’t suffered any. Don’t you think that.”

“No,” I said.

“But then I done something. Yes, sir.”

“Did what? Can you tell?”

“Something. Something that ain’t in the lot and plan for mortal human man to do.”

“What was it you did?”

He looked at me. “I ain’t afraid to tell. I ain’t never been afraid to tell. It was just that these folks—” again he jerked his head slightly—

“wouldn’t have understood. Wouldn’t have knowed what I was talking about. But you will. You’ll know.” He watched my face. “At one time in my life I was a farn.”

“A farn?”

“Farn. Don’t you remember in the old books where they would drink the red grape wine, how now and then them rich Roman and Greek senators would up and decide to tear up a old grape vineyard or a

wood away off somewheres the gods used, and build a summer house to hold their frolics in where the police wouldn't hear them, and how the gods wouldn't hear them, and how the gods wouldn't like it about them married women running around nekkid, and so the woods god named — named—”

“Pan,” I said.

“That's it. Pan. And he would send them little fellows that was half a goat to scare them out—”

“Oh,” I said. “A faun.”

“That's it. A farn. That's what I was once. I was raised religious; I have never used tobacco or liquor; and I don't think now that I am going to hell. But the Bible says that them little men were myths. But I know they ain't, and so I have been something outside the lot and plan for mortal human man to be. Because for one day in my life I was a farn.”

II

In the office where Midgleston was a draughtsman they would discuss the place and Mrs. Van Dyming's unique designs upon it while they were manufacturing the plans, the blue prints. The tract consisted of a meadow, a southern hillside where grapes grew, and a woodland.

“Good land, they said. But wouldn't anybody live on it.”

“Why not?” I said.

“Because things happened on it. They told how a long time ago a New England fellow settled on it and cleaned up the grape vines to market the grapes. Going to make jelly or something. He made a good crop, but when time came to gather them, he couldn't gather them.”

“Why couldn't he gather them?”

“Because his leg was broke. He had some goats, and a old ram that he couldn't keep out of the grape lot. He tried every way he knew, but he couldn't keep the ram out. And when the man went in to gather the grapes to make jelly, the ram ran over him and knocked him down and broke his leg. So the next spring the New England fellow moved away.

“And they told about another man, a Italian lived the other side of the woods. He would gather the grapes and make wine out of them, and he built up a good wine trade. After a while his trade got so good that he had more trade than he did wine. So he began to doctor the wine up with water and alcohol, and he was getting rich.

At first he used a horse and wagon to bring the grapes home on his private road through the woods, but he got rich and he bought a truck, and he doctored the wine a little more and he got richer and he bought a bigger truck. And one night a storm come up while he was away from home, gathering the grapes, and he didn't get home that night. The next a. m. his wife found him.

That big truck had skidded off the road and turned over and he was dead under it.”

“I don't see how that reflected on the place,” I said.

“All right. I'm just telling it. The neighbor folks thought different, anyway. But maybe that was because they were not anything but country folks. Anyway, none of them would live on it, and so Mr. Van Dyming bought it cheap. For Mrs. Van Dyming.

To play with. Even before we had the plans finished, she would take a special trainload of them down there to look at it, and not even a cabin on the place then, not nothing but the woods and that meadow growed up in grass tall as a man, and that hillside where them grapes grew tangled.

But she would stand there, with them other rich Park Avenue folks, showing them how here would be the community house built to look like the Coliseum and the community garage yonder made to look like it was a Acropolis, and how the grape vine would be grubbed up entire and the hillside terraced to make a outdoors theatre where they could act in one another's plays; and how the meadow would be a lake with

one of them Roman barges towed back and forth on it by a gas engine, with mattresses and things for them to lay down on while they et.”

“What did Mr. Van Dyming say about all this?”

“I don’t reckon he said anything. He was married to her, you know. He just says, one time, ‘Now, Mattie—’ and she turns on him, right there in the office, before us all, and says, ‘Don’t you call me Mattie.’” He was quiet for a time. Then he said: “She wasn’t born on Park Avenue. Nor Westchester neither. She was born in Poughkeepsie. Her name was Lumpkin.

“But you wouldn’t know it, now. When her picture would be in the paper with all them Van Dyming diamonds, it wouldn’t say how Mrs. Carleton Van Dyming used to be Miss Mathilda Lumpkin of Poughkeepsie. No, sir. Even a newspaper wouldn’t dared say that to her. And I reckon Mr. Van Dyming never either, unless he forgot like the day in the office.

So she says, ‘Don’t you call me Mattie’ and he hushed and he just stood there — a little man; he looked kind of like me, they said — tapping one of them little highprice cigars on his glove, with his face looking like he had thought about smiling a little and then he decided it wasn’t even any use in that.

“They built the house first. It was right nice; Mr. Van Dyming planned it. I guess maybe he said more than just Mattie that time. And I guess that maybe Mrs. Van Dyming never said, ‘Don’t you call me Mattie’ that time. Maybe he promised her he wouldn’t interfere with the rest of it.

Anyway, the house was right nice. It was on the hill, kind of in the edge of the woods. It was logs. But it wasn’t too much logs. It belonged there, fitted. Logs where logs ought to be, and good city bricks and planks where logs ought not to be. It was there. Belonged there. It was all right. Not to make anybody mad. Can you see what I mean?”

“Yes. I think I can see what you mean.”

“But the rest of it he never interfered with; her and her Acropolises and all.” He looked at me quite intently. “Sometimes I thought. . . .”

“What? Thought what?”

“I told you him and me were the same size, looked kind of alike.” He watched me. “Like we could have talked, for all of him and his Park Avenue clothes and his banks and his railroads, and me a seventy-five a week draughtsman living in Brooklyn, and not young neither.

Like I could have said to him what was in my mind at any time, and he could have said to me what was in his mind at any time, and we would have understood one another. That’s why sometimes I thought. . . .” He looked at me, intently, not groping exactly.

“Sometimes men have more sense than women. They know what to leave be, and women don’t always know that. He don’t need to be religious in the right sense or religious in the wrong sense. Nor religious at all.” He looked at me, intently. After a while he said, in a decisive tone, a tone of decisive irrevocation: “This will seem silly to you.”

“No. Of course not. Of course it won’t.”

He looked at me. Then he looked away. “No. It will just sound silly. Just take up your time.”

“No. I swear it won’t. I want to hear it. I am not a man who believes that people have learned everything.” He watched me. “It has taken a million years to make what is, they tell us,” I said. “And a man can be made and worn out and buried in threescore and ten. So how can a man be expected to know even enough to doubt?”

“That’s right,” he said. “That’s sure right.”

“What was it you sometimes thought?”

“Sometimes I thought that, if it hadn’t been me, they would have used him. Used Mr. Van Dyming like they used me.”

“They?” We looked at one another, quite sober, quite quiet.

“Yes. The ones that used that ram on that New England fellow, and that storm on that Italian.”

“Oh. Would have used Mr. Van Dyming in your place, if you had not been there at the time. How did they use you?”

“That’s what I am going to tell. How I was chosen and used. I did not know that I had been chosen. But I was chosen to do something beyond the lot and plan for mortal human man. It was the day that Mr. Carter (he was the boss, the architect) got the hurryup message from Mrs. Van Dyming. I think I told you the house was already built, and there was a big party of them down there where they could watch the workmen building the Coliseums and the Acropolises.

So the hurryup call came. She wanted the plans for the theatre, the one that was to be on the hillside where the grapes grew. She was going to build it first, so the company could set and watch them building the Acropolises and Coliseums. She had already begun to grub up the grape vines, and Mr. Carter put the theatre prints in a portfolio and give me the weekend off to take them down there to her.”

“Where was the place?”

“I don’t know. It was in the mountains, the quiet mountains where never many lived. It was a kind of green air, chilly too, and a wind. When it blew through them pines it sounded kind of like a organ, only it didn’t sound tame like a organ. Not tame; that’s how it sounded. But I don’t know where it was. Mr. Carter had the ticket all ready and he said it would be somebody to meet me when the train stopped.

“So I telephoned Martha and I went home to get ready. When I got home, she had my Sunday suit all pressed and my shoes shined. I didn’t see any use in that, since I was just going to take the plans and come back. But Martha said how I had told her it was company there.

And you are going to look as nice as any of them,’ she says. ‘For all they are rich and get into the papers. You’re just as good as they are.’ That was the last thing she said when I got on the train, in my Sunday suit,

with the portfolio: 'You're just as good as they are, even if they do get into the papers.' And then it started."

"What started? The train?"

"No. It. The train had been running already a good while; we were out in the country now. I didn't know then that I had been chosen. I was just setting there in the train, with the portfolio on my knees where I could take care of it. Even when I went back to the ice water I didn't know that I had been chosen.

I carried the portfolio with me and I was standing there, looking out the window and drinking out of the little paper cup. There was a bank running along by the train then, with a white fence on it, and I could see animals inside the fence, but the train was going too fast to tell what kind of animals they were.

"So I had filled the cup again and I was drinking, looking out at the bank and the fence and the animals inside the fence, when all of a sudden it felt like I had been thrown off the earth. I could see the bank and the fence go whirling away. And then I saw it. And just as I saw it, it was like it had kind of exploded inside my head. Do you know what it was I saw?"

"What was it you saw?"

He watched me. "I saw a face. In the air, looking at me across that white fence on top of the bank. It was not a man's face, because it had horns, and it was not a goat's face because it had a beard and it was looking at me with eyes like a man and its mouth was open like it was saying something to me when it exploded inside my head."

"Yes. And then what? What did you do next?"

"You are saying 'He saw a goat inside that fence.' I know. But I didn't ask you to believe. Remember that. Because I am twenty-five years past bothering if folks believe me or not. That's enough for me. And I guess that's all anything amounts to."

"Yes," I said. "What did you do then?"

“Then I was laying down, with my face all wet and my mouth and throat feeling like it was on fire. The man was just taking the bottle away from my mouth (there were two men there, and the porter and the conductor) and I tried to sit up. ‘That’s whiskey in that bottle,’ I said.

“‘Why, sure not, doc,’ the man said. ‘You know I wouldn’t be giving whiskey to a man like you. Anybody could tell by looking at you that you never took a drink in your life. Did you?’ I told him I hadn’t. ‘Sure you haven’t,’ he said.

‘A man could tell by the way it took that curve to throw you down that you belonged to the ladies’ temperance. You sure took a bust on the head, though. How do you feel now? Here, take another little shot of this tonic.’

“‘I think that’s whiskey,’ I said.

“And was it whiskey?”

“I dont know. I have forgotten. Maybe I knew then. Maybe I knew what it was when I took another dose of it. But that didn’t matter, because it had already started then.”

“The whiskey had already started?”

“No. It. It was stronger than whiskey. Like it was drinking out of the bottle and not me. Because the men held the bottle up and looked at it and said, ‘You sure drink it like it ain’t whiskey, anyway. You’ll sure know soon if it is or not, won’t you?’

“When the train stopped where the ticket said, it was all green, the light was, and the mountains. The wagon was there, and the two men when they helped me down from the train and handed me the portfolio, and I stood there and I said, ‘Let her rip.’ That’s what I said: ‘Let her rip’; and the two men looking at me like you are looking at me.”

“How looking at you?”

“Yes. But you dont have to believe. And I told them to wait while I got the whistle—”

“Whistle?”

“There was a store there, too. The store and the depot, and then the mountains and the green cold without any sun, and the dust kind of pale looking where the wagon was standing. Then we—”

“But the whistle,” I said.

“I bought it in the store. It was a tin one, with holes in it. I couldn’t seem to get the hang of it. So I threw the portfolio into the wagon and I said, ‘Let her rip.’ That was what I said. One of them took the portfolio out of the wagon and gave it back to me and said, ‘Say, doc, ain’t this valuable?’ and I took it and threw it back into the wagon and I said, ‘Let her rip.’

“We all rode on the seat together, me in the middle. We sung. It was cold, and we went along the river, singing, and came to the mill and stopped. While one of them went inside the mill I began to take off my clothes—”

“Take off your clothes?”

“Yes. My Sunday suit. Taking them off and throwing them right down in the dust, by gummy.”

“Wasn’t it cold?”

“Yes. It was cold. Yes. When I took off my clothes I could feel the cold on me. Then the one came back from the mill with a jug and we drank out of the jug—”

“What was in the jug?”

“I dont know. I dont remember. It wasn’t whiskey. I could tell by the way it looked. It was clear like water.”

“Couldn’t you tell by the smell?”

"I dont smell, you see. I dont know what they call it. But ever since I was a child, I couldn't smell some things. They say that's why I have stayed down here for twenty-five years.

"So we drank and I went to the bridge rail. And just as I jumped I could see myself in the water.

And I knew that it had happened then. Because my body was a human man's body. But my face was the same face that had gone off inside my head back there on the train, the face that had horns and a beard.

"When I got back into the wagon we drank again out of the jug and we sung, only after a while I put on my underclothes and my pants like they wanted me to, and then we went on, singing.

"When we came in sight of the house I got out of the wagon. 'You dont want to get out here,' they said. 'We are in the pasture where they keep that bull chained up.' But I got out of the wagon, with my Sunday coat and vest and the portfolio, and the tin flute."

III

He ceased. He looked at me, quite grave, quite quiet.

"Yes," I said. "Yes. Then what?"

He watched me. "I never asked you to believe nothing, did I? I will have to say that for you." His hand was inside his bosom. "Well, you had some pretty hard going, so far. But now I will take the strain off of you."

From his bosom he drew out a canvas wallet. It was roughly sewn by a clumsy hand and soiled with much usage. He opened it. But before he drew out the contents he looked at me again. "Do you ever make allowances?"

"Allowances?"

"For folks. For what folks think they see. Because nothing ever looks the same to two different people. Never looks the same to one person, depending on which side of it he looks at it from."

“Oh,” I said. “Allowances. Yes. Yes.”

From the wallet he drew a folded sheet of newspaper. The page was yellow with age, the broken seams glued carefully with strips of soiled cloth. He opened it carefully, gingerly, and turned it and laid it on the table before me. “Dont try to pick it up,” he said. “It’s kind of old now, and it’s the only copy I have. Read it.”

I looked at it: the fading ink, the blurred page dated twenty-five years ago:

MANIAC AT LARGE IN VIRGINIA MOUNTAINS

PROMINENT NEW YORK SOCIETY WOMAN ATTACKED IN OWN GARDEN

Mrs. Carleton Van Dyming Of New York And Newport Attacked By Half Nude Madman And Maddened Bull In Garden Of Her Summer Lodge. Maniac Escapes. Mrs. Van Dyming Prostrate

It went on from there, with pictures and diagrams, to tell how Mrs. Van Dyming, who was expecting a man from the office of her New York architect, was called from the dinner table to meet, as she supposed, the architect’s man. The story continued in Mrs. Van Dyming’s own words:

I went to the library, where I had directed that the architect’s man be brought, but there was no one there. I was about to ring for the footman when it occurred to me to go to the front door, since it is a local custom among these country people to come to the front and refuse to advance further or to retreat until the master or the mistress of the house appears. I went to the door. There was no one there.

I stepped out onto the porch. The light was on, but at first I could see no one. I started to re-enter the house but the footman had told me distinctly that the wagon had returned from the village, and I thought that the man had perhaps gone on to the edge of the lawn where he could see the theatre site, where the workmen had that day begun to prepare the ground by digging up the old grape vines.

So I went in that direction. I had almost reached the end of the lawn when something caused me to turn. I saw, in relief between me and the lighted porch, a man bent over and hopping on one leg, who to my horror I realised to be in the act of removing his trousers.

I screamed for my husband. When I did so, the man freed his other leg and turned and came toward me running, clutching a knife (I could see the light from the porch gleaming on the long blade) in one hand, and a flat, square object in the other. I turned then and ran screaming toward the woods.

I had lost all sense of direction. I simply ran for my life. I found that I was inside the old vineyard, among the grape vines, running directly away from the house. I could hear the man running behind me and suddenly I heard him begin to make a strange noise. It sounded like a child trying to blow upon a penny whistle, then I realised that it was the sound of his breath whistling past the knifeblade clinched between his teeth.

Suddenly something overtook and passed me, making a tremendous uproar in the shrubbery. It rushed so near me that I could see its glaring eyes and the shape of a huge beast with horns, which I recognised a moment later as Carleton's — Mr. Van Dyming's — prize Durham bull; an animal so dangerous that Mr. Dyming is forced to keep it locked up. It was now free and it rushed past and on ahead, cutting off my advance, while the madman with the knife cut off my retreat. I was at bay; I stopped with my back to a tree, screaming for help. "How did the bull get out?" I said.

He was watching my face while I read, like I might have been a teacher grading his school paper. "When I was a boy, I used to take subscriptions to the Police Gazette, for premiums. One of the premiums was a little machine guaranteed to open any lock. I don't use it anymore, but I still carry it in my pocket, like a charm or something, I guess.

Anyway, I had it that night.” He looked down at the paper on the table. “I guess folks tell what they believe they saw. So you have to believe what they think they believe. But that paper dont tell how she kicked off her slippers (I nigh broke my neck over one of them) so she could run better, and how I could hear her going wump-wump-wump inside like a dray horse, and how when she would begin to slow up a little I would let out another toot on the whistle and off she would go again.

“I couldn’t even keep up with her, carrying that portfolio and trying to blow on that whistle too; seemed like I never would get the hang of it, somehow. But maybe that was because I had to start trying so quick, before I had time to kind of practice up, and running all the time too.

So I threw the portfolio away and then I caught up with her where she was standing with her back against the tree, and that bull running round and round the tree, not bothering her, just running around the tree, making a right smart of fuss, and her leaning there whispering ‘Carleton. Carleton’ like she was afraid she would wake him up.”

The account continued:

I stood against the tree, believing that each circle which the bull made, it would discover my presence. That was why I ceased to scream. Then the man came up where I could see him plainly for the first time. He stopped before me; for one both horrid and joyful moment I thought he was Mr. Van Dyming. “Carleton!” I said.

He didn’t answer. He was stooped over again; then I saw that he was engaged with the knife in his hand. “Carleton!” I cried.

“ ‘Dang if I can get the hang of it, somehow,’ he kind of muttered, busy with the murderous knife.

“Carleton!” I cried. “Are you mad?”

He looked up then. I saw that it was not my husband, that I was at the mercy of a madman, a maniac, and a maddened bull. I saw the man raise the knife to his lips and blow again upon it that fearful shriek. Then I fainted.

IV

And that was all. The account merely went on to say how the madman had vanished, leaving no trace, and that Mrs. Van Dyming was under the care of her physician, with a special train waiting to transport her and her household, lock, stock, and barrel, back to New York; and that Mr. Van Dyming in a brief interview had informed the press that his plans about the improvement of the place had been definitely rescinded and that the place was now for sale.

I folded the paper as carefully as he would have. "Oh," I said. "And so that's all."

"Yes. I waked up about daylight the next morning, in the woods. I didn't know when I went to sleep nor where I was at first. I couldn't remember at first what I had done. But that aint strange. I guess a man couldn't lose a day out of his life and not know it. Do you think so?"

"Yes," I said. "That's what I think too."

"Because I know I aint as evil to God as I guess I look to a lot of folks. And I guess that demons and such and even the devil himself aint quite as evil to God as lots of folks that claim to know a right smart about His business would make you believe. Dont you think that's right?" The wallet lay on the table, open. But he did not at once return the newspaper to it.

Then he quit looking at me; at once his face became diffident, childlike again. He put his hand into the wallet; again he did not withdraw it at once.

"That aint exactly all," he said, his hand inside the wallet, his eyes downcast, and his face: that mild, peaceful, nondescript face across which a mild moustache straggled. "I was a powerful reader, when I was a boy. Do you read much?"

"Yes. A good deal."

But he was not listening. "I would read about pirates and cowboys, and I would be the head pirate or cowboy — me, a durn little tyke that

never saw the ocean except at Coney Island or a tree except in Washington Square day in and out. But I read them, believing like every boy, that some day . . . that living wouldn't play a trick on him like getting him alive and then. . . .

When I went home that morning to get ready to take the train, Martha says, 'You're just as good as any of them Van Dymings, for all they get into the papers. If all the folks that deserved it got into the papers, Park Avenue wouldn't hold them, or even Brooklyn,' she says." He drew his hand from the wallet. This time it was only a clipping, one column wide, which he handed me, yellow and faded too, and not long:

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

FOUL PLAY SUSPECTED

Wilfred Middleton, New York Architect, Disappears From Millionaire's Country House

POSSE SEEKS BODY OF ARCHITECT BELIEVED SLAIN BY

MADMAN IN VIRGINIA MOUNTAINS

May Be Coupled With Mysterious Attack

On Mrs. Van Dyming

Mountain Neighborhood In State Of Terror

., Va. April 8, Wilfred Middleton, 56, architect, of New York City, mysteriously disappeared sometime on April 6th, while en route to the country house of Mr. Carleton Van Dyming near here. He had in his possession some valuable drawings which were found this morning near the Van Dyming estate, thus furnishing the first clue. Chief of Police Elmer Harris has taken charge of the case, and is now awaiting the arrival of a squad of New York detectives, when he promises a speedy solution if it is in the power of skilled criminologists to do so.

MOST BAFFLING IN ALL HIS EXPERIENCE

"When I solve this disappearance," Chief Harris is quoted, "I will also solve the attack on Mrs. Van Dyming on the same date."

Middleton leaves a wife, Mrs. Martha Middleton,st., Brooklyn.

He was watching my face. "Only it's one mistake in it," he said.

“Yes,” I said. “They got your name wrong.”

“I was wondering if you’d see that. But that’s not the mistake. . . .” He had in his hand a second clipping which he now extended. It was like the other two; yellow, faint. I looked at it, the fading, peaceful print through which, like a thin, rotting net, the old violence had somehow escaped, leaving less than the dead gesture fallen to quiet dust. “Read this one.

Only that’s not the mistake I was thinking about. But then, they couldn’t have known at that time. . . .”

I was reading, not listening to him. This was a reprinted letter, an ‘agony column’ letter:

New Orleans, La.

April 10,

To the Editor, New York Times

New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir

In your issue of April 8, this year you got the name of the party wrong. The name is Midgleston not Middleton. Would thank you to correct this error in local and metropolitan columns as the press a weapon of good & evil into every American home. And a power of that weight cannot afford mistakes even about people as good as any man or woman even if they dont get into the papers every day.

Thanking you again, beg to remain

A Friend

“Oh,” I said. “I see. You corrected it.”

“Yes. But that’s not the mistake. I just did that for her. You know how women are. Like as not she would rather not see it in the papers at all than to see it spelled wrong.”

“She?”

“My wife. Martha. The mistake was, if she got them or not.”

“I dont — Maybe you’d better tell me.”

“That’s what I am doing. I got two of the first one, the one about the disappearance, but I waited until the letter come out. Then I put them both into a piece of paper with A Friend on it, and put them into a envelope and mailed them to her. But I dont know if she got them or not. That was the mistake.”

“The mistake?”

“Yes. She moved. She moved to Park Avenue when the insurance was paid. I saw that in a paper after I come down here. It told about how Mrs. Martha Midgleston of Park Avenue was married to a young fellow he used to be associated with the Maison Payot on Fifth Avenue. It didn’t say when she moved, so I dont know if she got them or not.”

“Oh,” I said. He was putting the clippings carefully back into the canvas wallet.

“Yes, sir. Women are like that. It dont cost a man much to humor them now and then. Because they deserve it; they have a hard time. But it wasn’t me. I didn’t mind how they spelled it. What’s a name to a man that’s done and been something outside the lot and plan for mortal human man to do and be?”

The End

The Leg, William Faulkner

The Leg

I

THE BOAT — IT was a yawl boat with a patched weathered sail — made two reaches below us while I sat with the sculls poised, watching her over my shoulder, and George clung to the pile, spouting Milton at Everbe Corinthia.

When it made the final tack I looked back at George. But he was now but well into Comus' second speech, his crooked face raised, and the afternoon bright on his close ruddy head.

"Give way, George," I said. But he held us stationary at the pile, his glazed hat lifted, spouting his fine and cadenced folly as though the lock, the Thames, time and all, belonged to him, while Sabrina (or Hebe or Chloe or whatever name he happened to be calling Corinthia at the time) with her dairy-maid's complexion and her hair like mead poured in sunlight stood above us in one of her endless succession of neat print dresses, her hand on the lever and one eye on George and the other on the yawl, saying "Yes, milord" dutifully whenever George paused for breath.

The yawl luffed and stood away; the helmsman shouted for the lock.

"Let go, George," I said. But he clung to the pile in his fine and incongruous oblivion. Everbe Corinthia stood above us, her hand on the lever, bridling a little and beginning to reveal a certain concern, and looking from her to the yawl and back again I thought how much time she and I had both spent thus since that day three years ago when, coweyed and bridling, she had opened the lock for us for the first time, with George holding us stationary while he apostrophised her in the metaphor of Keats and Spenser.

Again the yawl's crew shouted at us, the yawl aback and in stays. "Let go, you fool!" I said, digging the sculls. "Lock, Corinthia!"

George looked at me. Corinthia was now watching the yawl with both eyes. "What, Davy?" George said. "Must even thou help Circe's doves into the sea? Pull, then, O Super-Gadarene!"
And he shoved us off.

I had not meant to pull away. And even if I had, I could still have counteracted the movement if Everbe Corinthia hadn't opened the lock. But open it she did, and looked once back to us and sat flat on the earth, crisp fresh dress and all.

The skiff shot away under me; I had a fleeting picture of George still clinging with one arm around the pile, his knees drawn up to his chin and the hat in his lifted hand and of a long running shadow carrying the shadow of a boat-hook falling across the lock. Then I was too busy steering.

I shot through the gates, carrying with me that picture of George, the glazed hat still gallantly aloft like the mastheaded pennant of a man-of-war, vanishing beneath the surface. Then I was floating quietly in slack water while the round eyes of two men stared quietly down at me from the yawl.

“Yer’ve lost yer mate, sir,” one of them said in a civil voice. Then they had drawn me alongside with a boat-hook and standing up in the skiff, I saw George. He was standing in the towpath now, and Simon, Everbe Corinthia’s father, and another man — he was the one with the boat-hook, whose shadow I had seen across the lock — were there too.

But I saw only George with his ugly crooked face and his round head now dark in the sunlight. One of the watermen was still talking.

“Steady, sir. Lend ’im a ’and, Sam’l. There. ‘E’ll do now. Give ’im a turn, seeing ’is mate. . . .”

“You fool, you damned fool!” I said. George stooped beside me, wringing his sopping flannels, while Simon and the second man — Simon with his iron-gray face and his iron-gray whisker that made him look like nothing so much as an aged bull peering surlily and stupidly across a winter hedgerow, and the second man, younger, with a ruddy capable face, in a hard, boardlike, town-made suit — watched us. Corinthia sat on the ground, weeping hopelessly and quietly. “You damned fool. Oh, you damned fool.”

“Oxford young gentlemen,” Simon said in a harsh disgusted voice.

“Oxford young gentlemen.”

“Eh, well,” George said, “I daresay I haven’t damaged your lock over a farthing’s worth.” He rose, and saw Corinthia. “What, Circe!” he said, “tears over the accomplishment of your appointed destiny?” He went to her, trailing a thread of water across the packed earth, and took her arm. It moved willing enough, but she herself sat flat on the ground, looking up at him with streaming hopeless eyes. Her mouth was open a little and she sat in an attitude of patient despair, weeping tears of crystal purity.

Simon watched them, the boat-hook — he had taken it from the second man, who was now busy at the lock mechanism, and I knew that he was the brother who worked in London, of whom Corinthia had once told us — clutched in his big knotty fist. The yawl was now in the lock, the two faces watching us across the parapet like two severed heads in a quiet row upon the footway. “Come, now,” George said. “You’ll soil your dress sitting there.”

“Up, lass,” Simon said, in that harsh voice of his which at the same time was without ill-nature, as though harshness were merely the medium through which he spoke. Corinthia rose obediently, still weeping, and went on toward the neat little dove-cote of a house in which they lived. The sunlight was slanting level across it and upon George’s ridiculous figure. He was watching me.

“Well, Davy,” he said, “if I didn’t know better, I’d say from your expression that you are envying me.”

“Am I?” I said. “You fool. You ghastly lunatic.”

Simon had gone to the lock. The two quiet heads rose slowly, as though they were being thrust gradually upward from out the earth, and Simon now stooped with the boat-hook over the lock. He rose, with the limp anonymity of George’s once gallant hat on the end of the boat-hook, and extended it.

George took it as gravely. “Thanks,” he said. He dug into his pocket and gave Simon a coin. “For wear and tear on the boat-hook,” he said.

“And perhaps a bit of balm for your justifiable disappointment, eh, Simon?” Simon grunted and turned back to the lock. The brother was still watching us. “And I am obliged to you,” George said. “Hope I’ll never have to return the favor in kind.” The brother said something, short and grave, in a slow pleasant voice. George looked at me again. “Well, Davy.”

“Come on. Let’s go.”

“Right you are. Where’s the skiff?” Then I was staring at him again, and for a moment he stared at me. Then he shouted, a long ringing laugh, while the two heads in the yawl watched us from beyond Simon’s granite-like and contemptuous back. I could almost hear Simon thinking Oxford young gentlemen. “Davy, have you lost the skiff?”

“She’s tied up below a bit, sir,” the civil voice in the yawl said. “The gentleman walked out of ’er like she were a keb, without looking back.”

The June afternoon slanted across my shoulder, full upon George’s face. He would not take my jacket. “I’ll pull down and keep warm,” he said. The once-glazed hat lay between his feet.

“Why don’t you throw that thing out?” I said. He pulled steadily, looking at me.

The sun was full in his eyes, striking the yellow flecks in them into fleeting, mica-like sparks. “That hat,” I said. “What do you want with it?”

“Oh; that. Cast away the symbol of my soul?” He unshipped one scull and picked up the hat and turned and cocked it on the stem, where it hung with a kind of gallant and dissolute jauntiness. “The symbol of my soul rescued from the deep by—”

“Hauled out of a place it had no business being whatever, by a public servant who did not want his public charge cluttered up.”

“At least you admit the symbology,” he said. “And that the empire rescued it. So it is worth something to the empire. Too much for me to

throw it away. That which you have saved from death or disaster will be forever dear to you, Davy; you cannot ignore it. Besides, it will not let you. What is it you Americans say?"

"We say, bunk. Why not use the river for a while? It's paid for."

He looked at me. "Ah. That is . . . Well, anyway, it's American, isn't it. That's something."

But he got out into the current again. A barge was coming up, in tow. We got outside her and watched her pass, empty of any sign of life, with a solemn implacability like a huge barren catafalque, the broad-rumped horses, followed by a boy in a patched coat and carrying a peeled goad, plodding stolidly along the path.

We dropped slowly astern. Over her freeboard a motionless face with a dead pipe in its teeth contemplated us with eyes empty of any thought.

"If I could have chosen," George said, "I'd like to have been pulled out by that chap yonder. Can't you see him picking up a boat-hook without haste and fishing you out without even shifting the pipe?"

"You should have chosen your place better, then. But it seems to me you're in no position to complain."

"But Simon showed annoyance. Not surprise nor concern: just annoyance. I don't like to be hauled back into life by an annoyed man with a boat-hook."

"You could have said so at the time. Simon didn't have to save you. He could have shut the gates until he got another head of water, and flushed you right out of his bailiwick without touching you, and saved himself trouble and ingratitude. Besides Corinthia's tears."

"Ay; tears. Corinthia will at least cherish a tenderness for me from now on."

"Yes; but if you'd only not got out at all. Or having not got in at all. Falling into that filthy lock just to complete a gesture. I think—"

“Do not think, my good David. When I had the choice of holding on to the skiff and being haled safely and meekly away, or of giving the lie to the stupid small gods at the small price of being temporarily submerged in this—” he let go one oar and dipped his hand in the water, then he flung it outward in dripping, burlesque magniloquence. “O Thames!” he said. “Thou mighty sewer of an empire!”

“Steer the boat,” I said. “I lived in America long enough to have learned something of England’s pride.”

“And so you consider a bath in this filthy old sewer that has flushed this land since long before He who made it had any need to invent God . . . a rock about which man and all his bawling clamor seethes away to sluttishness. . . .”

We were twenty-one then; we talked like that, tramping about that peaceful land where in green petrification the old splendid bloody deeds, the spirits of the blundering courageous men, slumbered in every stone and tree.

For that was 1914, and in the parks bands played Valse Septembre, and girls and young men drifted in punts on the moonlit river and sang Mister Moon and There’s a Bit of Heaven, and George and I sat in a window in Christ Church while the curtains whispered in the twilight, and talked of courage and honor and Napier and love and Ben Jonson and death.

The next year was 1915, and the bands played God Save the King, and the rest of the young men — and some not so young — sang Mademoiselle of Armentieres in the mud, and George was dead.

He had gone out in October, a subaltern in the regiment of which his people were hereditary colonels. Ten months later I saw him sitting with an orderly behind a ruined chimney on the edge of Givenchy. He had a telephone strapped to his ears and he was eating something which he waved at me as we ran past and ducked into the cellar which we sought.

II

I told him to wait until they got done giving me the ether; there were so many of them moving back and forth that I was afraid someone would brush against him and find him there. "And then you'll have to go back," I said.

"I'll be careful," George said.

"Because you'll have to do something for me," I said. "You'll have to."

"All right. I will. What is it?"

"Wait until they go away, then I can tell you. You'll have to do it, because I can't. Promise you will."

"All right. I promise." So we waited until they got done and had moved down to my leg. Then George came nearer. "What is it?" he said.

"It's my leg," I said. "I want you to be sure it's dead. They may cut it off in a hurry and forget about it."

"All right. I'll see about it."

"I couldn't have that, you know. That wouldn't do at all. They might bury it and it couldn't lie quiet. And then it would be lost and we couldn't find it to do anything."

"All right. I'll watch." He looked at me. "Only I don't have to go back."

"You don't? You don't have to go back at all?"

"I'm out of it. You aren't out of it yet. You'll have to go back."

"I'm not?" I said. . . . "Then it will be harder to find it than ever. So you see about it. . . . And you don't have to go back. You're lucky, aren't you?"

"Yes. I'm lucky. I always was lucky. Give the lie to the stupid small gods at the mere price of being temporarily submerged in—"

"There were tears," I said. "She sat flat on the earth to weep them."

"Ay; tears," he said. "The flowing of all men's tears under the sky. Horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation, and the world seething away to sluttishness while you look on."

“No; she sat flat in a green afternoon and wept for the symbol of your soul.”

“Not for the symbol, but because the empire saved it, hoarded it. She wept for wisdom.”

“But there were tears. . . . And you’ll see to it? You’ll not go away?”

“Ay,” George said; “tears.”

In the hospital it was better. It was a long room full of constant movement, and I didn’t have to be afraid all the time that they would find him and send him away, though now and then it did happen — a sister or an orderly coming into the middle of our talk, with ubiquitous hands and cheerful aseptic voices: “Now, now. He’s not going. Yes, yes; he’ll come back. Lie still, now.”

So I would have to lie there, surrounding, enclosing that gaping sensation below my thigh where the nerve- and muscle-ends twitched and jerked, until he returned.

“Can’t you find it?” I said. “Have you looked good?”

“Yes. I’ve looked everywhere. I went back out there and looked, and I looked here. It must be all right. They must have killed it.”

“But they didn’t. I told you they were going to forget it.”

“How do you know they forgot it?”

“I know. I can feel it. It jeers at me. It’s not dead.”

“But if it just jeers at you.”

“I know. But that won’t do. Don’t you see that won’t do?”

“All right. I’ll look again.”

“You must. You must find it. I don’t like this.”

So he looked again. He came back and sat down and he looked at me. His eyes were bright and intent.

“It’s nothing to feel bad about,” I said. “You’ll find it some day. It’s all right; just a leg. It hasn’t even another leg to walk with.” Still he didn’t say anything, just looking at me. “Where are you living now?”

“Up there,” he said.

I looked at him for a while. “Oh,” I said. “At Oxford?”

“Yes.”

“Oh,” I said. . . . “Why didn’t you go home?”

“I don’t know.”

He still looked at me. “Is it nice there now? It must be. Are there still punts on the river? Do they still sing in the punts like they did that summer, the men and girls, I mean?” He looked at me, wide, intent, a little soberly.

“You left me last night,” he said.

“Did I?”

“You jumped into the skiff and pulled away. So I came back here.”

“Did I? Where was I going?”

“I don’t know. You hurried away, up-river. You could have told me, if you wanted to be alone. You didn’t need to run.”

“I shan’t again.” We looked at one another. We spoke quietly now. “So you must find it now.”

“Yes. Can you tell what it is doing?”

“I don’t know. That’s it.”

“Does it feel like it’s doing something you don’t want it to?”

“I don’t know. So you find it. You find it quick. Find it and fix it so it can get dead.”

But he couldn’t find it. We talked about it quietly, between silences, watching one another. “Can’t you tell anything about where it is?” he said. I was sitting up now, practicing accustoming myself to the wood-and-leather one. The gap was still there, but we had now established a sort of sullen armistice. “Maybe that’s what it was waiting for,” he said. “Maybe now . . .”

“Maybe so. I hope so. But they shouldn’t have forgot to — Have I run away any more since that night?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” He was watching me with his bright, intent, fading eyes. “George,” I said. “Wait, George!” But he was gone.

I didn’t see him again for a long time. I was at the Observers’ School — it doesn’t require two legs to operate a machine gun and a wireless key and to orient maps from the gunner’s piano stool of an R.E. or an F.E. — then, and I had almost finished the course.

So my days were pretty well filled, what with work and with that certitude of the young which so arbitrarily distinguishes between verities and illusions, establishing with such assurance that line between truth and delirium which sages knit their brows over.

And my nights were filled too, with the nerve- and muscle-ends chafed now by an immediate cause: the wood-and-leather leg. But the gap was still there, and sometimes at night, isolated by invisibility, it would become filled with the immensity of darkness and silence despite me. Then, on the poised brink of sleep, I would believe that he had found it at last and seen that it was dead, and that some day he would return and tell me about it. Then I had the dream.

Suddenly I knew that I was about to come upon it. I could feel in the darkness the dark walls of the corridor and the invisible corner, and I knew that it was just around the corner. I could smell a rank, animal odor. It was an odor which I had never smelled before, but I knew it at once, blown suddenly down the corridor from the old fetid caves where experience began.

I felt dread and disgust and determination, as when you sense suddenly a snake beside a garden path. And then I was awake, rigid, sweating; the darkness flowed with a long rushing sigh. I lay with the fading odor in my nostrils while my sweat cooled, staring up into the darkness, not daring to close my eyes. I lay on my back, curled about the gaping hole like a doughnut, while the odor faded. At last it was gone, and George was looking at me.

“What is it, Davy?” he said. “Can’t you say what it is?”

“It’s nothing.” I could taste sweat on my lips. “It isn’t anything. I won’t again. I swear I shan’t any more.”

He was looking at me. “You said you had to come back to town. And then I saw you on the river. You saw me and hid, Davy. Pulled up under the bank, in the shadow. There was a girl with you.” He watched me, his eyes bright and grave.

“Was there a moon?” I said.

“Yes. There was a moon.”

“Oh God, oh God,” I said. “I won’t again, George! You must find it. You must!”

“Ah, Davy,” he said. His face began to fade.

“I won’t! I won’t again!” I said. “George! George!”

A match flared; a face sprang out of the darkness above me. “Wake up,” it said. I lay staring at it, sweating. The match burned down, the face fell back into darkness, from which the voice came bodiless: “All right now?”

“Yes, thanks. Dreaming. Sorry I waked you.”

For the next few nights I didn’t dare let go into sleep again. But I was young, my body was getting strong again and I was out of doors all day; one night sleep overtook me unawares, and I waked next morning to find that I had eluded it, whatever it was.

I found a sort of peace. The days passed; I had learned the guns and the wireless and the maps, and most of all, to not observe what should not be observed. My thigh was almost reconciled to the new member, and, freed now of the outcast’s doings, I could give all my time to seeking George. But I did not find him; somewhere in the mazy corridor where the mother of dreams dwells I had lost them both.

So I did not remark him at first even when he stood beside me in the corridor just beyond the corner of which It waited. The sulphur reek was all about me; I felt horror and dread and something unspeakable: delight. I believe I felt what women in labor feel. And then George was there, looking steadily down at me. He had always sat beside my head, so we could talk, but now he stood beyond the foot of the bed, looking down at me and I knew that this was farewell.

“Don’t go, George!” I said. “I shan’t again. I shan’t any more, George!” But his steady, grave gaze faded slowly, implacable, sorrowful, but without reproach. “Go, then!” I said. My teeth felt dry against my lip like sandpaper. “Go, then!”

And that was the last of it. He never came back, nor the dream. I knew it would not, as a sick man who wakes with his body spent and peaceful and weak knows that the illness will not return. I knew it was gone; I knew that when I realized that I thought of it only with pity. Poor devil, I would think. Poor devil.

But it took George with it. Sometimes, when dark and isolation had robbed me of myself, I would think that perhaps in killing it he had lost his own life: the dead dying in order to slay the dead.

I sought him now and then in the corridors of sleep, but without success; I spent a week with his people in Devon, in a rambling house where his crooked ugly face and his round ruddy head and his belief that Marlowe was a better lyric poet than Shakespeare and Thomas Campion than either, and that breath was not a bauble given a man for his own pleasuring, eluded me behind every stick and stone. But I never saw him again.

III

The padre had driven up from Poperinghe in the dark, in the side car of a motorcycle. He sat beyond the table, talking of Jotham Rust, Everbe Corinthia’s brother and Simon’s son, whom I had seen three times in my life.

Yesterday I saw Jotham for the third and last time, arraigned before a court martial for desertion: the scarecrow of that once sturdy figure with its ruddy, capable face, who had pulled George out of the lock with a boat-hook that afternoon three years ago, charged now for his life, offering no extenuation nor explanation, expecting and asking no clemency.

“He does not want clemency,” the padre said. The padre was a fine, honest man, incumbent of a modest living in the Midlands somewhere, who had brought the kind and honest stupidity of his convictions into the last place on earth where there was room for them. “He does not want to live.” His face was musing and dejected, shocked and bewildered.

“There comes a time in the life of every man when the world turns its dark side to him and every man’s shadow is his mortal enemy. Then he must turn to God, or perish.

Yet he . . . I cannot seem . . .” His eyes held that burly bewilderment of oxen; above his stock his shaven chin dejected, but not vanquished yet. “And you say you know of no reason why he should have attacked you?”

“I never saw the man but twice before,” I said. “One time was night before last, the other was . . . two — three years ago, when I passed through his father’s lock in a skiff while I was at Oxford. He was there when his sister let us through. And if you hadn’t told me his sister’s name, I wouldn’t have remembered him then.”

He brooded. “The father is dead, too.”

“What? Dead? Old Simon dead?”

“Yes. He died shortly after the — the other. Rust says he left his father after the sister’s funeral, talking with the sexton in Abingdon churchyard, and a week later he was notified in London that his father

was dead. He says the sexton told him his father had been giving directions about his own funeral.

The sexton said that every day Simon would come up to see him about it, made all the arrangements, and that the sexton joked him a little about it, because he was such a hale old chap, thinking that he was just off balance for the time with the freshness of his grief. And then, a week later, he was dead."

"Old Simon dead," I said. "Corinthia, then Simon, and now Jotham." The candle flame stood steady and unwavering on the table.

"Was that her name?" he said. "Everbe Corinthia?" He sat in the lone chair, puzzlement, bewilderment in the very shape of his shadow on the wall behind him. The light fell on one side of his face, the major's crown on that shoulder glinting dully. I rose from the cot, the harness of the leg creaking with explosive loudness, and leaned over his shoulder and took a cigarette from my magneto case tobacco-box, and fumbled a match in my single hand. He glanced up.

"Permit me," he said. He took the box and struck a match. "You're fortunate to have escaped with just that." He indicated my sling. "Yes, sir. If it hadn't been for my leg, I'd have got the knife in my ribs instead of my arm."

"Your leg?"

"I keep it propped on a chair beside the bed, so I can reach it easily. He stumbled over it and waked me. Otherwise he'd have stuck me like a pig."

"Oh," he said. He dropped the match and brooded again with his stubborn bewilderment. "And yet, his is not the face of an assassin in the dark. There is a forthrightness in it, a — a — what shall I say? a sense of social responsibility, integrity, that . . .

And you say that you — I beg your pardon; I do not doubt your word; it is only that — Yet the girl is indubitably dead; it was he who discovered

her and was with her until she died and saw her buried. He heard the man laugh once, in the dark.”

“But you cannot slash a stranger’s arm simply because you heard a laugh in the dark, sir. The poor devil is crazy with his own misfortunes.”
“Perhaps so,” the padre said. “He told me that he has other proof, something incontrovertible; what, he would not tell me.”
“Then let him produce it. If I were in his place now . . .”

He brooded, his hands clasped on the table. “There is a justice in the natural course of events. . . . My dear sir, are you accusing Providence of a horrible and meaningless practical joke? No, no; to him who has sinned, that sin will come home to him. Otherwise . . . God is at least a gentleman. Forgive me: I am not — You understand how this comes home to me, in this unfortunate time when we already have so much to reproach ourselves with.

We are responsible for this.” He touched the small metal cross on his tunic, then he swept his arm in a circular gesture that shaped in the quiet room between us the still and sinister darkness in which the fine and resounding words men mouthed so glibly were the vampire’s teeth with which the vampire fed. “The voice of God waking His servants from the sloth into which they have sunk. . . .”

“What, padre?” I said. “Is the damn thing making a dissenter of you too?”

He mused again, his face heavy in the candle light. “That the face of a willful shedder of blood, of an assassin in the dark? No, no; you cannot tell me that.”

I didn’t try. I didn’t tell him either my belief that only necessity, the need for expedition and silence, had reduced Jotham to employing a knife, an instrument of any kind; that what he wanted was my throat under his hands.

He had gone home on his leave, to that neat little dovecote beside the lock, and at once he found something strained in its atmosphere and

out of tune. That was last summer, about the time I was completing my course at the Observers' School.

Simon appeared to be oblivious of the undercurrent, but Jotham had not been home long before he discovered that every evening about dusk Corinthia quitted the house for an hour or so, and something in her manner, or maybe in the taut atmosphere of the house itself, caused him to question her. She was evasive, blazed suddenly out at him in anger which was completely unlike her at all, then became passive and docile.

Then he realized that the passiveness was secretive, the docility dissimulation; one evening he surprised her slipping away. He drove her back to the house, where she took refuge in her room and locked the door, and from a window he thought he caught a glimpse of the man disappearing beyond a field. He pursued, but found no one.

For an hour after dusk he lay in a nearby coppice, watching the house, then he returned. Corinthia's door was still locked and old Simon filled the house with his peaceful snoring.

Later something waked him. He sat up in bed, then sprang to the floor and went to the window. There was a moon and by its light he saw something white flitting along the towpath.

He pursued and overtook Corinthia, who turned like a vicious small animal at the edge of the coppice where he had lain in hiding. Beyond the towpath a punt lay at the bank. It was empty. He grasped Corinthia's arm. She raged at him; it could not have been very pretty.

Then she collapsed as suddenly and from the tangled darkness of the coppice behind them a man's laugh came, a jeering sound that echoed once across the moonlit river and ceased. Corinthia now crouched on the ground, watching him, her face like a mask in the moonlight.

He rushed into the coppice and beat it thoroughly, finding nothing. When he emerged the punt was gone. He ran down to the water,

looking this way and that. While he stood there the laugh came again, from the shadows beneath the other shore.

He returned to Corinthia. She sat as he had left her, her loosened hair about her face, looking out across the river. He spoke to her, but she did not reply. He lifted her to her feet. She came docilely and they returned to the cottage. He tried to talk to her again, but she moved stonily beside him, her loosened hair about her cold face. He saw her to her room and locked the door himself and took the key back to bed with him. Simon had not awakened. The next morning she was gone, the door still locked.

He told Simon then and all that day they sought her, assisted by the neighbors. Neither of them wished to notify the police, but at dusk that day a constable appeared with his notebook, and they dragged the lock, without finding anything. The next morning, just after dawn, Jotham found her lying in the towpath before the door.

She was unconscious, but showed no physical injury. They brought her into the house and applied their spartan, homely remedies, and after a time she revived, screaming. She screamed all that day until sunset. She lay on her back screaming, her eyes wide open and perfectly empty, until her voice left her and her screaming was only a ghost of screaming, making no sound. At sunset she died.

He had now been absent from his battalion for a hundred and twelve days. God knows how he did it; he must have lived like a beast, hidden, eating when he could, lurking in the shadow with every man's hand against him, as he sought through the entire B.E.F. for a man whose laugh he had heard one time, knowing that the one thing he could surely count on finding would be his own death, and to be foiled on the verge of success by an artificial leg propped on a chair in the dark.

How much later it was I don't know. The candle was lighted again, but the man who had awakened me was bending over the cot, between me and the light. But despite the light, it was a little too much like that

night before last; I came out of sleep upstanding this time, with my automatic.

“As you were,” I said. “You’ll not—” Then he moved back and I recognized the padre. He stood beside the table, the light falling on one side of his face and chest. I sat up and put the pistol down. “What is it, padre? Do they want me again?”

“He wants nothing,” the padre said. “Man cannot injure him further now.” He stood there, a portly figure that should have been pacing benignantly in a shovel hat in green lanes between summer fields. Then he thrust his hand into his tunic and produced a flat object and laid it on the table.

“I found this among Jotham Rust’s effects which he gave me to destroy, an hour ago,” he said. He looked at me, then he turned and went to the door, and turned again and looked at me.

“Is he — I thought it was to be at dawn.”

“Yes,” he said. “I must hurry back.” He was either looking at me or not. The flame stood steady above the candle. Then he opened the door. “May God have mercy on your soul,” he said, and went out.

I sat in the covers and heard him blunder on in the darkness, then I heard the motorcycle splutter into life and die away. I swung my foot to the floor and rose, holding on to the chair on which the artificial leg rested.

It was chilly; it was as though I could feel the toes even of the absent leg curling away from the floor, so I braced my hip on the chair and reached the flat object from the table and returned to bed and drew the blanket about my shoulders. My wrist watch said three o’clock.

It was a photograph, a cheap thing such as itinerant pho tographers turn out at fairs. It was dated at Abingdon in June of the summer just past. At that time I was lying in the hospital talking to George, and I sat

quite still in the blankets, looking at the photograph, because it was my own face that looked back at me.

It had a quality that was not mine: a quality vicious and outrageous and unappalled, and beneath it was written in a bold sprawling hand like that of a child: "To Everbe Corinthia" followed by an unprintable phrase, yet it was my own face, and I sat holding the picture quietly in my hand while the candle flame stood high and steady above the wick and on the wall my huddled shadow held the motionless photograph. In slow and gradual diminishment of cold tears the candle appeared to sink, as though burying itself in its own grief.

But even before this came about, it began to pale and fade until only the tranquil husk of the small flame stood unwinded as a feather above the wax, leaving upon the wall the motionless husk of my shadow.

Then I saw that the window was gray, and that was all. It would be dawn at Pop too, but it must have been some time, and the padre must have got back in time.

I told him to find it and kill it. The dawn was cold; on these mornings the butt of the leg felt as though it were made of ice. I told him to. I told him.

The End

Mistral, William Faulkner

Mistral

I

IT WAS THE last of the Milanese brandy. I drank, and passed the bottle to Don, who lifted the flask until the liquor slanted yellowly in the narrow slot in the leather jacket, and while he held it so the soldier came up the path, his tunic open at the throat, pushing the bicycle.

He was a young man, with a bold lean face. He gave us a surly good day and looked at the flask a moment as he passed. We watched him disappear beyond the crest, mounting the bicycle as he went out of sight.

Don took a mouthful, then he poured the rest out. It splattered on the parched earth, pocking it for a fading moment. He shook the flask to the ultimate drop. "Salut," he said, returning the flask. "Thanks, O gods. My Lord, if I thought I'd have to go to bed with any more of that in my stomach."

"It's too bad, the way you have to drink it," I said. "Just have to drink it." I stowed the flask away and we went on, crossing the crest. The path began to descend, still in shadow.

The air was vivid, filled with sun which held a quality beyond that of mere light and heat, and a sourceless goat bell somewhere beyond the next turn of the path, distant and unimpeded.

"I hate to see you lugging the stuff along day after day," Don said. "That's the reason I do. You couldn't drink it, and you wouldn't throw it away."

"Throw it away? It cost ten lire. What did I buy it for?"

"God knows," Don said. Against the sun-filled valley the trees were like the bars of a grate, the path a gap in the bars, the valley blue and sunny. The goat bell was somewhere ahead. A fainter path turned off at right angles, steeper than the broad one which we were following. "He went that way," Don said.

"Who did?" I said. Don was pointing to the faint mark of bicycle tires where they had turned into the fainter path.

“See.”

“This one must not have been steep enough for him,” I said.

“He must have been in a hurry.”

“He sure was, after he made that turn.”

“Maybe there’s a haystack at the bottom.”

“Or he could run on across the valley and up the other mountain and then run back down that one and up this one again until his momentum gave out.”

“Or until he starved to death,” Don said.

“That’s right,” I said. “Did you ever hear of a man starving to death on a bicycle?”

“No,” Don said. “Did you?”

“No,” I said. We descended. The path turned, and then we came upon the goat bell. It was on a laden mule cropping with delicate tinkling jerks at the pathside near a stone shrine. Beside the shrine sat a man in corduroy and a woman in a bright shawl, a covered basket beside her. They watched us as we approached.

“Good day, signor,” Don said. “Is it far?”

“Good day, signori,” the woman said. The man looked at us. He had blue eyes with dissolving irises, as if they had been soaked in water for a long time. The woman touched his arm, then she made swift play with her fingers before his face. He said, in a dry metallic voice like a cicada’s:

“Good day, signori.”

“He doesn’t hear any more,” the woman said. “No, it is not far. From yonder you will see the roofs.”

“Good,” Don said. “We are fatigued. Might one rest here, signora?”

“Rest, signori,” the woman said. We slipped our packs and sat down. The sun slanted upon the shrine, upon the serene, weathered figure in the niche and upon two bunches of dried mountain asters lying there.

The woman was making play with her fingers before the man's face. Her other hand in repose upon the basket beside her was gnarled and rough. Motionless, it had that rigid quality of unaccustomed idleness, not restful so much as quite spent, dead. It looked like an artificial hand attached to the edge of the shawl, as if she had donned it with the shawl for conventional complement. The other hand, the one with which she talked to the man, was swift and supple as a prestidigitator's.

The man looked at us. "You walk, signori," he said in his light, cadenceless voice.

"Sì," we said. Don took out the cigarettes. The man lifted his hand in a slight, deprecatory gesture. Don insisted. The man bowed formally, sitting, and fumbled at the pack. The woman took the cigarette from the pack and put it into his hand. He bowed again as he accepted a light. "From Milano," Don said. "It is far."

"It is far," the woman said. Her fingers rippled briefly. "He has been there," she said.

"I was there, signori," the man said. He held the cigarette carefully between thumb and forefinger. "One takes care to escape the carriages."

"Yes." Don said. "Those without horses."

"Without horses," the woman said. "There are many. Even here in the mountains we hear of it."

"Many," Don said. "Always whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh."

"Sì," the woman said. "Even here I have seen it." Her hand rippled in the sunlight. The man looked at us quietly, smoking. "It was not like that when he was there, you see," she said.

"I am there long time ago, signori," he said. "It is far." He spoke in the same tone she had used, the same tone of grave and courteous explanation.

"It is far," Don said. We smoked. The mule crooped with delicate, jerking tinkles of the bell. "But we can rest yonder," Don said, extending

his hand toward the valley swimming blue and sunny beyond the precipice where the path turned. "A bowl of soup, wine, a bed?"

The woman watched us across that serene and topless rampart of the deaf, the cigarette smoking close between thumb and finger. The woman's hand flickered before his face. "Sì," he said; "sì. With the priest: why not? The priest will take them in." He said something else, too swift for me. The woman removed the checked cloth which covered the basket, and took out a wineskin. Don and I bowed and drank in turn, the man returning the bows.

"Is it far to the priest's?" Don said.

The woman's hand flickered with unbelievable rapidity. Her other hand, lying upon the basket, might have belonged to another body. "Let them wait for him there, then," the man said. He looked at us. "There is a funeral today. You will find him at the church. Drink, signori."

We drank in decorous turn, the three of us. The wine was harsh and sharp and potent. The mule cropped, its small bell tinkling, its shadow long in the slanting sun, across the path. "Who is it that's dead, signora?" Don said.

"He was to have married the priest's ward after this harvest," the woman said; "the banns were read and all. A rich man, and not old. But two days ago, he died."

The man watched her lips. "Tchk. He owned land, a house: so do I. It is nothing."

"He was rich," the woman said. "Because he was both young and fortunate, my man is jealous of him."

"But not now," the man said. "Eh, signori?"

"To live is good," Don said. He said, e bello.

"It is good," the man said; he also said, bello.

"He was to have married the priest's niece, you say," Don said.

"She is no kin to him," the woman said. "The priest just raised her. She was six when he took her, without people, kin, of any sort. The mother

was workhouse-bred. She lived in a hut on the mountain yonder. It was not known who the father was, although the priest tried for a long while to persuade one of them to marry her for the child's—"

"One of which?" Don said.

"One of those who might have been the father, signor. But it was never known which one it was, until in 1916. He was a young man, a laborer; the next day we learned that the mother had gone too, to the war also, for she was never seen again by those who knew her until one of our boys came home after Caporetto, where the father had been killed, and told how the mother had been seen in a house in Milano that was not a good house.

So the priest went and got the child. She was six then, brown and lean as a lizard. She was hidden on the mountain when the priest got there; the house was empty. The priest pursued her among the rocks and captured her like a beast: she was half naked and without shoes and it winter time."

"So the priest kept her," Don said. "Stout fellow."

"She had no people, no roof, no crust to call hers save what the priest gave her. But you would not know it. Always with a red or a green dress for Sundays and feast days, even at fourteen and fifteen, when a girl should be learning modesty and industry, to be a crown to her husband.

The priest had told that she would be for the church, and we wondered when he would make her put such away for the greater glory of God. But at fourteen and fifteen she was already the brightest and loudest and most tireless in the dances, and the young men already beginning to look after her, even after it had been arranged between her and him who is dead yonder."

"The priest changed his mind about the church and got her a husband instead," Don said.

“He found for her the best catch in this parish, signor. Young, and rich, with a new suit each year from the Milano tailor. Then the harvest came, and what do you think, signori? she would not marry him.”

“I thought you said the wedding was not to be until after this harvest,” Don said. “You mean, the wedding had already been put off a year before this harvest?”

“It had been put off for three years. It was made three years ago, to be after that harvest. It was made in the same week that Giulio Farinzale was called to the army. I remember how we were all surprised, because none had thought his number would come up so soon, even though he was a bachelor and without ties save an uncle and aunt.”

“Is that so?” Don said. “Governments surprise everybody now and then. How did he get out of it?”

“He did not get out of it.”

“Oh. That’s why the wedding was put off, was it?”

The woman looked at Don for a minute. “Giulio was not the fiancé’s name.”

“Oh, I see. Who was Giulio?”

The woman did not answer at once. She sat with her head bent a little. The man had been watching their lips when they spoke. “Go on,” he said; “tell them. They are men: they can listen to women’s tittle-tattle with the ears alone. They cackle, signori; give them a breathing spell, and they cackle like geese, Drink.”

“He was the one she used to meet by the river in the evenings; he was younger still: that was why we were surprised that his number should be called so soon. Before we had thought she was old enough for such, she was meeting him. And hiding it from the priest as skillfully as any grown woman could—” For an instant the man’s washed eyes glinted at us, quizzical.

“She was meeting this Giulio all the while she was engaged to the other one?” Don said.

“No. The engagement was later. We had not thought her old enough for such yet. When we heard about it, we said how an anonymous child is like a letter in the post office: the envelope might look like any other envelope, but when you open it . . . And the holy can be fooled by sin as quickly as you or I, signori. Quicker, because they are holy.”

“Did he ever find it out?” Don said.

“Yes. It was not long after. She would slip out of the house at dusk; she was seen, and the priest was seen, hidden in the garden to watch the house: a servant of the holy God forced to play watchdog for the world to see. It was not good, signori.”

“And then the young man got called suddenly to the army,” Don said. “Is that right?”

“It was quite sudden; we were all surprised. Then we thought that it was the hand of God, and that now the priest would send her to the convent. Then in that same week we learned that it was arranged between her and him who is dead yonder, to be after the harvest, and we said it was the hand of God that would confer upon her a husband beyond her deserts in order to protect His servant. For the holy are susceptible to evil, even as you and I, signori; they too are helpless before sin without God’s aid.”

“Tchk, tchk,” the man said. “It was nothing. The priest looked at her, too,” he said. “For a man is a man, even under a cassock. Eh, signori?” “You would say so,” the woman said. “You without grace.” “And the priest looked at her, too,” Don said.

“It was his trial, his punishment, for having been too lenient with her. And the punishment was not over: the harvest came, and we heard that the wedding was put off for a year: what do you think of that, signori? that a girl, come from what she had come from, to be given the chance which the priest had given her to save her from herself, from her blood . . .

We heard how they quarreled, she and the priest, of how she defied him, slipping out of the house after dark and going to the dances where her fiancé might see her or hear of it at any time.”

“Was the priest still looking at her?” Don said.

“It was his punishment, his expiation. So the next harvest came, and it was put off again, to be after the next harvest; the banns were not even begun. She defied him to that extent, signori, she, a pauper, and we all saying, ‘When will her fiancé hear of it, learn that she is no good, when there are daughters of good houses who had learned modesty and seemliness?’”

“You have unmarried daughters, signora?” Don said.

“Sì. One. Two have I married, one still in my house. A good girl, signori, if I do say it.”

“Tchk, woman,” the man said.

“That is readily believed,” Don said. “So the young man had gone to the army, and the wedding was put off for another year.”

“And another year, signori. And then a third year. Then it was to be after this harvest; within a month it was to have been. The banns were read; the priest read them himself in the church, the third time last Sunday, with him there in his new Milano suit and she beside him in the shawl he had given her — it cost a hundred lire — and a golden chain, for he gave her gifts suitable for a queen rather than for one who could not name her own father, and we believed that at last the priest had served his expiation out and that the evil had been lifted from his house at last, since the soldier’s time would also be up this fall. And now the fiancé is dead.”

“Was he very sick?” Don said.

“It was very sudden. A hale man; one you would have said would live a long time. One day he was well, the second day he was quite sick. The third day he was dead. Perhaps you can hear the bell, with listening, since you have young ears.” The opposite mountains were in shadow.

Between, the valley lay invisible still. In the sunny silence the mule's bell tinkled in random jerks. "For it is in God's hands," the woman said. "Who will say that his life is his own?"

"Who will say?" Don said. He did not look at me. He said in English:

"Give me a cigarette."

"You've got them."

"No, I haven't."

"Yes, you have. In your pants pocket."

He took out the cigarettes. He continued to speak in English. "And he died suddenly. And he got engaged suddenly. And at the same time, Giulio got drafted suddenly. It would have surprised you. Everything was sudden except somebody's eagerness for the wedding to be. There didn't seem to be any hurry about that, did there?"

"I don't know. I no spika."

"In fact, they seemed to stop being sudden altogether until about time for Giulio to come home again. Then it began to be sudden again. And so I think I'll ask if priests serve on the draft boards in Italy." The old man watched his lips, his washed gaze grave and intent. "And if this path is the main path down the mountain, and that bicycle turned off into that narrow one back there, what do you think of that, signori?"

"I think it was fine. Only a little sharp to the throat. Maybe we can get something down there to take away the taste."

The man was watching our lips; the woman's head was bent again; her stiff hand smoothed the checked cover upon the basket. "You will find him at the church, signori," the man said.

"Yes," Don said. "At the church."

We drank again. The man accepted another cigarette with that formal and unfailing politeness, conferring upon the action something finely ceremonious yet not incongruous. The woman put the wineskin back into the basket and covered it again. We rose and took up our packs.

“You talk swiftly with the hand, signora,” Don said.

“He reads the lips too. The other we made lying in the bed in the dark. The old do not sleep so much. The old lie in bed and talk. It is not like that with you yet.”

“It is so. You have made the padrone many children, signora?”

“Sì. Seven. But we are old now. We lie in bed and talk.”

II

Before we reached the village the bell had begun to toll. From the gaunt steeple of the church the measured notes seemed to blow free as from a winter branch, along the wind. The wind began as soon as the sun went down.

We watched the sun touch the mountains, whereupon the sky lost its pale, vivid blueness and took on a faintly greenish cast, like glass, against which the recent crest, where the shrine faded with the dried handful of flowers beneath the fading crucifix, stood black and sharp. Then the wind began: a steady moving wall of air full of invisible particles of something.

Before it the branches leaned without a quiver, as before the pressure of an invisible hand, and in it our blood began to cool at once, even before we had stopped walking where the path became a cobbled street.

The bell still tolled. “Funny hour for a funeral,” I said. “You’d think he would have kept a long time at this altitude. No need to be hurried into the ground like this.”

“He got in with a fast gang,” Don said. The church was invisible from here, shut off by a wall. We stood before a gate, looking into a court enclosed by three walls and roofed by a vine on a raftered trellis. It contained a wooden table and two backless benches. We stood at the gate, looking into the court, when Don said. “So this is Uncle’s house.”

“Uncle?”

“He was without ties save an uncle and aunt,” Don said. “Yonder, by the door.” The door was at the bottom of the court. There was a fire beyond it, and beside the door a bicycle leaned against the wall. “The bicycle, unconscious,” Don said.

“Is that a bicycle?”

“Sure. That’s a bicycle.” It was an old-style machine, with high back-swept handlebars like gazelle horns. We looked at it.

“The other path is the back entrance,” I said. “The family entrance.” We heard the bell, looking into the court.

“Maybe the wind doesn’t blow in there,” Don said. “Besides, there’s no hurry. We couldn’t see him anyway, until it’s over.”

“These places are hotels sometimes.” We entered. Then we saw the soldier. When we approached the table he came to the door and stood against the firelight, looking at us. He wore a white shirt now. But we could tell him by his legs. Then he went back into the house.

“So Malbrouck is home,” Don said.

“Maybe he came back for the funeral.” We listened to the bell. The twilight was thicker inside. Overhead the leaves streamed rigid on the wind, stippled black upon the livid translucent sky. The strokes of the bell sounded as though they too were leaves flattening away upon an inviolable vine in the wind.

“How did he know there was going to be one?” Don said.

“Maybe the priest wrote him a letter.”

“Maybe so,” Don said. The firelight looked good beyond the door. Then a woman stood in it, looking at us. “Good day, padrona,” Don said.

“Might one have a mouthful of wine here?” She looked at us, motionless against the firelight. She was tall. She stood tall and

motionless against the firelight, not touching the door. The bell tolled. "She used to be a soldier too," Don said. "She was a sergeant."

"Maybe she was the colonel who ordered Malbrouck to go home."

"No. He wasn't moving fast enough when he passed us up yonder, for it to have been her." Then the woman spoke:

"It is so, signori. Rest yourselves." She went back into the house. We slipped our packs and sat down. We looked at the bicycle.

"Cavalry," Don said. "Wonder why he came the back way."

"All right," I said.

"All right what?"

"All right. Wonder."

"Is that a joke?"

"Sure. That's a joke. It's because we are old. We lie in the draft. That's a joke too."

"Tell me something that's not a joke."

"All right."

"Did you hear the same thing I think I heard up there?"

"No spika. I love Italy. I love Mussolini." The woman brought the wine. She set it on the table and was turning away. "Ask her," I said. "Why don't you?"

"All right. I will. — You have military in the house, signora?"

The woman looked at him. "It is nothing, signor. It is my nephew returned."

"Finished, signora?"

"Finished, signor."

"Accept our felicitations. He has doubtless many friends who will rejoice at his return." She was thin, not old, with cold eyes, looking down at Don with brusque attention, waiting. "You have a funeral in the village today." She said nothing at all. She just stood there, waiting for Don to get done talking. "He will be mourned," Don said.

“Let us hope so,” she said. She made to go on; Don asked her about lodgings. There were none, she answered with immediate finality. Then we realized that the bell had ceased. We could hear the steady whisper of the wind in the leaves overhead.

“We were told that the priest—” Don said.

“Yes? You were told that the priest.”

“That we might perhaps find lodgings there.”

“Then you would do well to see the priest, signor.” She returned to the house. She strode with the long stride of a man into the firelight, and disappeared. When I looked at Don, he looked away and reached for the wine.

“Why didn’t you ask her some more?” I said. “Why did you quit so soon?”

“She was in a hurry. Her nephew is just home from the army, she said. He came in this afternoon. She wants to be with him, since he is without ties.”

“Maybe she’s afraid he’ll be drafted.”

“Is that a joke too?”

“It wouldn’t be to me.” He filled the glasses. “Call her back. Tell her you heard that her nephew is to marry the priest’s ward. Tell her we want to give them a present. A stomach pump. That’s not a joke, either.”

“I know it’s not.” He filled his glass carefully. “Which had you rather do, or stay at the priest’s tonight?”

“Salut,” I said.

“Salut.” We drank. The leaves made a dry, wild, continuous sound.

“Wish it was still summer.”

“It would be pretty cold tonight, even in a barn.”

“Yes. Glad we don’t have to sleep in a barn tonight.”

“It wouldn’t be so bad, after we got the hay warm and got to sleep.”

“We don’t have to, though. We can get a good sleep and get an early start in the morning.”

I filled the glasses. “I wonder how far it is to the next village.”

“Too far.” We drank. “I wish it were summer. Don’t you?”

“Yes.” I emptied the bottle into the glasses. “Have some wine.” We raised our glasses. We looked at one another. The particles in the wind seemed to drive through the clothing, through the flesh, against the bones, penetrating the brick and plaster of the walls to reach us.

“Salut.”

“We said that before,” Don said.

“All right. Salut, then.”

“Salut.”

We were young: Don, twenty-three; I, twenty-two. And age is so much a part of, so inextricable from, the place where you were born or bred. So that away from home, some distance away — space or time or experience away — you are always both older and eternally younger than yourself, at the same time.

We stood in the black wind and watched the funeral — priest, coffin, a meager clump of mourners — pass, their garments, and particularly the priest’s rusty black, ballooning ahead of them, giving an illusion of unseemly haste, as though they were outstripping themselves across the harsh green twilight (the air was like having to drink iced lemonade in the winter time) and into the church. “We’ll be out of the wind too,” Don said.

“There’s an hour of light yet.”

“Sure; we might even reach the crest by dark.” He looked at me. Then I looked away. The red tiles of the roofs were black, too, now. “We’ll be out of the wind.” Then the bell began to toll again. “We don’t know anything. There’s probably not anything.”

Anyway, we don't know it. We don't have to know it. Let's get out of the wind." It was one of those stark, square, stone churches, built by those harsh iron counts and bishops of Lombardy. It was built old; time had not even mellowed it, could not ever mellow it, not all of time could have.

They might have built the mountains too and invented the twilight in a dungeon underground, in the black ground. And beside the door the bicycle leaned. We looked at it quietly as we entered the church and we said quietly, at the same time:

"Beaver."

"He's one of the pallbearers," Don said. "That's why he came home." The bell tolled. We passed through the chancel and stopped at the back of the church. We were out of the wind now, save for the chill eddies of it that licked in at our backs. We could hear it outside, ripping the slow strokes of the bell half-born out of the belfry, so that by the time we heard them, they seemed to have come back as echoes from a far distance.

The nave, groined upward into the gloom, dwarfed the meager clot of bowed figures. Beyond them, above the steady candles, the Host rose, soaring into sootlike shadows like festooned cobwebs, with a quality sorrowful and triumphant, like wings.

There was no organ, no music, no human sound at all at first. They just knelt there among the dwarfing gloom and the cold, serene, faint light of the candles. They might have all been dead. "It'll be dark long before they can get done," Don whispered.

"Maybe it's because of the harvest," I whispered. "They probably have to work all day. The living can't wait on the dead, you know."

"But, if he was as rich as they told us he was, it seems like . . ."

"Who buries the rich? Do the rich do it, or do the poor do it?"

“The poor do it,” Don whispered. Then the priest was there, above the bowed heads. We had not seen him at first, but now he was there, shapeless, blurring out of the shadows below the candles, his face like a smudge, a thumb print, upon the gloom where the Host rose in a series of dissolving gleams like a waterfall; his voice filled the church, slow, steady, like wings beating against the cold stone, upon the resonance of wind in which the windless candles stood as though painted.

“And so he looked at her,” Don whispered. “He had to sit across the table from her, say, and watch her. Watch her eating the food that made her change from nothing and become everything, knowing she had no food of her own and that it was his food that was doing it, and not for him changing.

You know: girls: they are not anything, then they are everything. You watch them become everything before your eyes. No, not eyes: it’s the same in the dark. You know it before they do; it’s not their becoming everything that you dread: it’s their finding it out after you have long known it: you die too many times. And that’s not right. Not fair. I hope I’ll never have a daughter.”

“That’s incest,” I whispered.

“I never said it wasn’t. I said it was like fire. Like watching the fire lean up and away rushing.”

“You must either watch a fire, or burn up in it. Or not be there at all. Which would you choose?”

“I don’t know. If it was a girl, I’d rather burn up in it.”

“Than to not be there at all, even?”

“Yes.” Because we were young. And the young seem to be impervious to anything except trifles. We can invest trifles with a tragic profundity, which is the world. Because, after all, there’s nothing particularly profound about reality.

Because when you reach reality, along about forty or fifty or sixty, you find it to be only six feet deep and eighteen feet square.

Then it was over. Outside again, the wind blew steadily down from the black hills, hollowing out the green glass bowl of the sky.

We watched them file out of the church and carry the coffin into the churchyard. Four of them carried iron lanterns and in the dusk they clotted quietly antic about the grave while the wind leaned steadily upon them and upon the lantern flames, and blew fine dust into the grave as though all nature were quick to hide it.

Then they were done. The lanterns bobbed into motion, approaching, and we watched the priest. He crossed the churchyard toward the presbytery at a scuttling gait, blown along in his gusty black. The soldier was in mufti now. He came out of the throng, striding also with that long-limbed thrust like his aunt. He looked briefly at us with his bold surly face and got on the bike and rode away. "He was one of the pallbearers," Don said. "And what do you think of that, signori?"

"No spika," I said. "I love Italy. I love Mussolini."

"You said that before."

"All right. Salut, then."

Don looked at me. His face was quite sober. "Salut," he said. Then he looked toward the presbytery, hitching his pack forward. The door of the presbytery was closed.

"Don," I said. He stopped, looking at me. The mountains had lost all perspective; they appeared to lean in toward us. It was like being at the bottom of a dead volcano filled with that lost savage green wind dead in its own motion and full of its own driving and unsleeping dust. We looked at one another.

"All right, damn it," Don said. "You say what to do next, then." We looked at one another. After a while the wind would sound like sleep, maybe. If you were warm and close between walls, maybe.

"All right," I said.

“Why can’t you mean, all right? Damn it, we’ve got to do something. This is October; it’s not summer. And we don’t know anything. We haven’t heard anything. We don’t speak Italian. We love Italy.”

“I said, all right,” I said. The presbytery was of stone too, bleak in a rank garden. We were halfway up the flagged path when a casement beneath the eaves opened and somebody in white looked down at us and closed the shutter again. It was done all in one movement. Again we said together, quietly:

“Beaver.” But it was too dark to see much, and the casement was closed again. It had not taken ten seconds.

“Only we should have said, Beaverette,” Don said.

“That’s right. Is that a joke?”

“Yes. That’s a joke.” A wooden-faced peasant woman opened the door. She held a candle, the flame leaning inward from the wind. The hall behind her was dark; a stale, chill smell came out of it. She stood there, the harsh planes of her face in sharp relief, her eyes two caverns in which two little flames glittered, looking at us.

“Go on,” I said. “Tell her something.”

“We were told that his reverence, signora,” Don said, “that we might—” The candle leaned and recovered. She raised the other hand and sheltered it, blocking the door with her body. “We are travelers, en promenade; we were told — supper and a bed . . .”

When we followed her down the hall we carried with us in our ears the long rush of the recent wind, like in a sea shell. There was no light save the candle which she carried. So that, behind her, we walked in gloom out of which the serrated shadow of a stair on one wall reared dimly into the passing candle and dissolved in mounting serrations, carrying the eye with it up the wall where there was not any light. “Pretty soon it’ll be too dark to see anything from that window,” Don said.

“Maybe she won’t have to, by then.”

“Maybe so.” The woman opened a door; we entered a lighted room. It contained a table on which sat a candle in an iron candlestick, a carafe of wine, a long loaf, a metal box with a slotted cover. The table was set for two. We slung our packs into the corner and watched her set another place and fetch another chair from the hall. But that made only three places and we watched her take up her candle and go out by a second door. Then Don looked at me. “Maybe we’ll see her, after all.”

“How do you know he doesn’t eat?”

“When? Don’t you know where he’ll be?” I looked at him. “He’ll have to stay out there in the garden.”

“How do you know?”

“The soldier was at the church. He must have seen him. Must have heard—” We looked at the door, but it was the woman. She had three bowls. “Soup, signora?” Don said.

“Sì. Soup.”

“Good. We have come far.” She set the bowls on the table. “From Milano.” She looked briefly over her shoulder at Don.

“You’d better have stayed there,” she said. And she went out. Don and I looked at one another. My ears were still full of wind.

“So he is in the garden,” Don said.

“How do you know he is?”

After a while Don quit looking at me. “I don’t know.”

“No. You don’t know. And I don’t know. We don’t want to know. Do we?”

“No. No spika.”

“I mean, sure enough.”

“That’s what I mean,” Don said. The whisper in our ears seemed to fill the room with wind. Then we realized that it was the wind that we heard, the wind itself we heard, even though the single window was shuttered tight. It was as though the quiet room were isolated on the ultimate peak of space, hollowed murmurous out of chaos and the long

dark fury of time. It seemed strange that the candle flame should stand so steady above the wick.

III

So we did not see him until we were in the house. Until then he had been only a shabby shapeless figure, on the small size, scuttling through the blowing dusk at the head of the funeral, and a voice. It was as though neither of them was any part of the other: the figure in blowing black, and the voice beating up the still air above the candles, detached and dispassionate, tireless and spent and forlorn.

There was something precipitate about the way he entered, like a diver taking a full breath in the act of diving. He did not look at us and he was already speaking, greeting us and excusing his tardiness in one breath, in a low rapid voice. Still, without having ceased to speak or having looked at us, he motioned toward the other chairs and seated himself and bowed his head over his plate and began a Latin grace without a break in his voice; again his voice seemed to rush slow and effortless just above the sound of the wind, like in the church.

It went on for some time; so that after a while I raised my head. Don was watching me, his eyebrows arched a little; we looked toward the priest and saw his hands writhing slowly on either side of his plate. Then the woman spoke a sharp word behind me; I had not heard her enter: a gaunt woman, not tall, with a pale, mahogany-colored face that might have been any age between twenty-five and sixty.

The priest stopped. He looked at us for the first time, out of weak, rushing eyes. They were brown and irisless, like those of an old dog. Looking at us, it was as though he had driven them up with whips and held them so, in cringing and rushing desperation. "I forget," he said. "There come times—" Again the woman snapped a word at him, setting a tureen on the table, the shadow of her arm falling across his face and remaining there: but we had already looked away.

The long wind rushed past the stone eaves; the candle flame stood steady as a sharpened pencil in the still sound of the wind. We heard her filling the bowls, yet she still stood for a time, the priest's face in the shadow of her arm; she seemed to be holding us all so until the moment — whatever it was — had passed. She went out. Don and I began to eat. We did not look toward him. When he spoke at last, it was in a tone of level, polite uninterest. "You have come far, signori?"

"From Milano," we both said.

"Before that, Firenze," Don said. The priest's head was bent over his bowl. He ate rapidly. Without looking up he gestured toward the loaf. I pushed it along to him. He broke the end off and went on eating.

"Ah," he said. "Firenze. That is a city. More — what do you say? — spirituel than our Milano." He ate hurriedly, without finesse. His robe was turned back over a flannel undershirt, the sleeves were. His spoon clattered; at once the woman entered with a platter of broccoli.

She removed the bowls. He reached his hand. She handed him the carafe and he filled the glasses without looking up and lifted his with a brief phrase. But he had only feigned to drink; he was watching my face when I looked at him. I looked away; I heard him clattering at the dish and Don was looking at me too.

Then the woman's shoulder came between us and the priest. "There come times—" he said. He clattered at the dish. When the woman spoke to him in that shrill, rapid patois he thrust his chair back and for an instant we saw his driven eyes across her arm. "There come times—" he said, raising his voice.

Then she drowned the rest of it, getting completely between us and Don and I stopped looking and heard them leave the room. The steps ceased. Then we could hear only the wind.

"It was the burial service," Don said. Don was a Catholic. "That grace was."

"Yes," I said. "I didn't know that."

“Yes. It was the burial service. He got mixed up.”

“Sure,” I said. “That’s it. What do we do now?” Our packs lay in the corner. Two packs can look as human, as utterly human and spent, as two shoes. We were watching the door when the woman entered. But she wasn’t going to stop. She didn’t look at us.

“What shall we do now, signora?” Don said.

“Eat.” She did not stop. Then we could hear the wind again.

“Have some wine,” Don said. He raised the carafe, then he held it poised above my glass, and we listened. The voice was beyond the wall, maybe two walls, in a sustained rush of indistinguishable words. He was not talking to anyone there: you could tell that. In whatever place he was, he was alone: you could tell that. Or maybe it was the wind.

Maybe in any natural exaggerated situation — wind, rain, drouth — man is always alone. It went on for longer than a minute while Don held the carafe above my glass. Then he poured. We began to eat. The voice was muffled and sustained, like a machine might have been making it.

“If it were just summer,” I said.

“Have some wine.” He poured. We held our poised glasses. It sounded just like a machine. You could tell that he was alone. Anybody could have. “That’s the trouble,” Don said. “Because there’s not anybody there. Not anybody in the house.”

“The woman.”

“So are we.” He looked at me.

“Oh,” I said.

“Sure. What better chance could she have wanted, have asked for? He was in here at least five minutes. And he just back from the army after three years. The first day he is home, and then afternoon and then twilight and then darkness. You saw her there. Didn’t you see her up there?”

“He locked the door. You know he locked it.”

“This house belongs to God: you can’t have a lock on it. You didn’t know that.”

“That’s right. I forgot you’re a Catholic. You know things. You know a lot, don’t you?”

“No. I don’t know anything. I no spika too. I love Italy too.” The woman entered. She didn’t bring anything this time. She came to the table and stood there, her gaunt face above the candle, looking down at us.

“Look, then,” she said. “Will you go away?”

“Go away?” Don said. “Not stop here tonight?” She looked down at us, her hand lying on the table. “Where could we stop? Who would take us in? One cannot sleep on the mountain in October, signora.”

“Yes,” she said. She was not looking at us now. Through the walls we listened to the voice and to the wind.

“What is this, anyway?” Don said. “What goes on here, signora?”

She looked at him gravely, speculatively, as if he were a child. “You are seeing the hand of God, signorino,” she said. “Pray God that you are too young to remember it.” Then she was gone. And after a while the voice ceased, cut short off like a thread. And then there was just the wind.

“As soon as we get out of the wind, it won’t be so bad,” I said.

“Have some wine.” Don raised the carafe. It was less than half full.

“We’d better not drink any more.”

“No.” He filled the glasses. We drank. Then we stopped. It began again, abruptly, in full stride, as though silence were the thread this time. We drank. “We might as well finish the broccoli, too.”

“I don’t want any more.”

“Have some wine then.”

“You’ve already had more than I have.”

“All right.” He filled my glass. I drank it. “Now, have some wine.”

“We ought not to drink it all.”

He raised the carafe. “Two more glasses left. No use in leaving that.”

“There aren’t two glasses left.”

“Bet you a lira.”

“All right. But let me pour.”

“All right.” He gave me the carafe. I filled my glass and reached toward his. “Listen,” he said. For about a minute now the voice had been rising and falling, like a wheel running down. This time it didn’t rise again; there was only the long sound of the wind left. “Pour it,” Don said.

I poured. The wine mounted three quarters. It began to dribble away. “Tilt it up.” I did so. A single drop hung for a moment, then fell into the glass. “Owe you a lira,” Don said.

The coins rang loud in the slotted box. When he took it up from the table and shook it, it made no sound. He took the coins from his pocket and dropped them through the slot. He shook it again. “Doesn’t sound like quite enough. Cough up.”

I dropped some coins through the slot; he shook the box again. “Sounds all right now.” He looked at me across the table, his empty glass bottom-up before him. “How about a little wine?”

When we rose I took my pack from the corner. It was on the bottom. I had to tumble Don’s aside. He watched me. “What are you going to do with that?” he said. “Take it out for a walk?”

“I don’t know,” I said. Past the cold invisible eaves the long wind steadily sighed. Upon the candle the flame stood like the balanced feather on the long white nose of a clown.

The hall was dark; there was no sound in it. There was nothing in it save the cold smell of sunless plaster and silence and the smell of living, of where people have, and will have, lived. We carried our packs low and close against our legs like we had stolen them.

We went on to the door and opened it, entering the black wind again. It had scoured the sky clear and clean, hollowing it out of the last of light, the last of twilight. We were halfway to the gate when we saw him. He was walking swiftly back and forth beside the wall. His head was bare, his robes ballooning about him. When he saw us he did not stop. He didn't hurry, either. He just turned and went back beside the wall and turned again, walking fast. We waited at the gate.

We thanked him for the food, he motionless in his whipping robes, his head bent and averted a little, as a deaf man listens. When Don knelt at his feet he started back as though Don had offered to strike him. Then I felt like a Catholic too and I knelt too and he made the sign hurriedly above us, upon the black-and-green wind and dusk, like he would have made it in water.

When we passed out the gate and looked back we could still see, against the sky and the blank and lightless house, his head rushing back and forth like a midget running along the top of the wall.

IV

The café was on the lee side of the street; we sat out of the wind. But we could see gusts and eddies of trash swirl along the gutter, and an occasional tongue of it licked chill across our legs, and we could hear the steady rushing of it in the high twilight among the roofs. On the curb two musicians from the hills — a fiddler and a piper — sat, playing a wild and skirling tune. Now and then they stopped to drink, then they resumed the same tune.

It was without beginning and seemingly without end, the wild unmusic of it swirling along the wind with a quality at once martial and sad. The waiter fetched us brandy and coffee, his dirty apron streaming suddenly and revealing beneath it a second one of green baize and rigid as oxidized copper.

At the other table five young men sat, drinking and ringing separately small coins onto the waiter's tray, which he appeared to count by the timbre of the concussion before tilting them into his waistcoat in one motion, and a long-flanked young peasant woman stopped to hear the music, a child riding her hip.

She set the child down and it scuttled under the table where the young men sat, they withdrawing their legs to permit it, while the woman was not looking. She was looking at the musicians, her face round and tranquil, her mouth open a little.

"Let's have some wine," Don said.

"All right," I said. "I like Italy," I said. We had another brandy. The woman was trying to cajole the child from under the table. One of the young men extracted it and gave it back to her. People stopped in the street to hear the music, and a high two-wheeled cart, full of fagots and drawn by a woman and a diminutive mule, passed without stopping, and then the girl came up the street in her white dress, and I didn't feel like a Catholic any more.

She was all in white, coatless, walking slender and supple. I didn't feel like anything any more, watching her white dress swift in the twilight, carrying her somewhere or she carrying it somewhere: anyway, it was going too, moving when she moved and because she moved, losing her when she would be lost because it moved when she moved and went with her to the instant of loss.

I remember how, when I learned about Thaw and White and Evelyn Nesbitt, how I cried. I cried because Evelyn, who was a word, was beautiful and lost or I would never have heard of her. Because she had to be lost for me to find her and I had to find her to lose her.

And when I learned that she was old enough to have a grown daughter or son or something, I cried, because I had lost myself then and I could never again be hurt by loss. So I watched the white dress, thinking, She'll be as near me in a second as she'll ever be and then she'll go on away in her white dress forevermore, in the twilight forevermore.

Then I felt Don watching her too and then we watched the soldier spring down from the bike. They came together and stopped and for a while they stood there in the street, among the people, facing one another but not touching. Maybe they were not even talking, and it didn't matter how long; it didn't matter about time. Then Don was nudging me.

"The other table," he said. The five young men had all turned; their heads were together, now and then a hand, an arm, secret, gesticulant, their faces all one way. They leaned back, without turning their faces, and the waiter stood, tray on hip — a squat, sardonic figure older than Grandfather Lust himself — looking also.

At last they turned and went on up the street together in the direction from which he had come, he leading the bicycle. Just before they passed from sight they stopped and faced one another again among the people, the heads, without touching at all. Then they went on. "Let's have some wine," Don said.

The waiter set the brandies on the table, his apron like a momentary board on the wind. "You have military in town," Don said.

"That's right," the waiter said. "One."

"Well, one is enough," Don said. The waiter looked up the street. But they were gone now, with her white dress shaping her stride, her girl-white, not for us.

"Too many, some say." He looked much more like a monk than the priest did, with his long thin nose and his bald head. He looked like a devastated hawk. "You're stopping at the priest's, eh?"

"You have no hotel," Don said.

The waiter made change from his waistcoat, ringing the coins deliberately upon the table. "What for? Who would stop here, without he walked? Nobody walks except you English."

"We're Americans."

“Well.” He raised his shoulders faintly. “That’s your affair.” He was not looking at us exactly; not at Don, that is. “Did you try Cavalcanti’s?”
“A wineshop at the edge of town? The soldier’s aunt, isn’t it? Yes. But she said—”

The waiter was watching him now. “She didn’t send you to the priest?”
“No.”

“Ah,” the waiter said. His apron streamed suddenly. He fought it down and scoured the top of the table with it. “Americans, eh?”

“Yes,” Don said. “Why wouldn’t she tell us where to go?”

The waiter scoured the table. “That Cavalcanti. She’s not of this parish.”
“Not?”

“Not since three years. The padrone belongs to that one beyond the mountain.” He named a village which we had passed in the forenoon.
“I see,” Don said. “They aren’t natives.”

“Oh, they were born here. Until three years ago they belonged to this parish.”

“But three years ago they changed.”

“They changed.” He found another spot on the table. He removed it with the apron. Then he examined the apron. “There are changes and changes; some further than others.”

“The padrona changed further than across the mountain, did she?”

“The padrona belongs to no parish at all.” He looked at us. “Like me.”

“Like you?”

“Did you try to talk to her about the church?” He watched Don. “Stop there tomorrow and mention the church to her.”

“And that happened three years ago,” Don said. “That was a year of changes for them.”

“You said it. The nephew to the army, the padrone across the mountain, the padrona . . . All in one week, too. Stop there tomorrow and ask her.”

“What do they think here about all these changes?”

“What changes?”

“These recent changes.”

“How recent?” He looked at Don. “There’s no law against changes.”

“No. Not when they’re done like the law says. Sometimes the law has a look, just to see if they were changed right. Isn’t that so?”

The waiter had assumed an attitude of sloven negligence, save his eyes, his long face. It was too big for him, his face was. “How did you know he was a policeman?”

“Policeman?”

“You said soldier; I knew you meant policeman and just didn’t speak the language good. But you’ll pick it up with practice.” He looked at Don. “So you made him too, did you? Came in here this afternoon; said he was a shoe-drummer. But I made him.”

“Here already,” Don said. “I wonder why he didn’t stop the . . . before they . . .”

“How do you know he’s a policeman?” I said.

The waiter looked at me. “I don’t care whether he is or not, buddy. Which had you rather do? think a man is a cop and find he’s not, or think he’s not a cop, and find he is?”

“You’re right,” Don said. “So that’s what they say here.”

“They say plenty. Always have and always will. Like any other town.”

“What do you say?” Don said.

“I don’t say. You don’t either.”

“No.”

“It’s no skin off of my back. If they want to drink, I serve them; if they want to talk, I listen. That keeps me as busy as I want to be all day.”

“You’re right,” Don said. “It didn’t happen to you.”

The waiter looked up the street; it was almost full dark. He appeared not to have heard. “Who sent for the cop, I wonder?” Don said.

“When a man’s got jack, he’ll find plenty of folks to help him make trouble for folks even after he’s dead,” the waiter said. Then he looked at us. “I?” he said. He leaned; he slapped his chest lightly.

He looked quickly at the other table, then he leaned down and hissed: “I am atheist, like in America,” and stood back and looked at us. “In America, all are atheists. We know.” He stood there in his dirty apron, with his long, weary, dissolute face while we rose in turn and shook hands with him gravely, the five young men turning to look.

He flipped his other hand at us, low against his flank. “Rest, rest,” he hissed. He looked over his shoulder at the young men. “Sit down,” he whispered. He jerked his head toward the doorway behind us, where the padrona sat behind the bar. “I’ve got to eat, see?”

He scuttled away and returned with two more brandies, carrying them with his former sloven, precarious skill, as if he had passed no word with us save to take the order. “It’s on me,” he said. “Put it down.”

“Now, what?” Don said. The music had ceased; from across the street we watched the fiddler, fiddle under arm, standing before the table where the young men sat, his other hand and the clutched hat gesticulant. The young woman was already going up the street, the child riding her hip again, its head nodding to a somnolent rhythm, like a man on an elephant. “Now, what?”

“I don’t care.”

“Oh, come on.”

“No.”

“There’s no detective here. He never saw one. He wouldn’t know a detective. There aren’t any detectives in Italy: can you imagine an official Italian in plain clothes for a uniform?”

“No.”

“She’ll show us where the bed is, and in the morning early—”

“No. You can, if you want to. But I’m not.”

He looked at me. Then he swung his pack onto his shoulder. "Good night. See you in the morning. At the café yonder."

"All right." He did not look back. Then he turned the corner. I stood in the wind. Anyway, I had the coat. It was a shooting coat of Harris tweed; we had paid eleven guineas for it, wearing it day about while the other wore the sweater.

In the Tyrol last summer Don held us up three days while he was trying to make the girl who sold beer at the inn. He wore the coat for three successive days, swapping me a week, to be paid on demand.

On the third day the girl's sweetheart came back. He was as big as a silo, with a green feather in his hat. We watched him pick her over the bar with one hand. I believe she could have done Don the same way: all yellow and pink and white she was, like a big orchard.

Or like looking out across a snowfield in the early sunlight. She could have done it at almost any hour for three days too, by just reaching out her hand. Don gained four pounds while we were there.

V

Then I came into the full sweep of the wind. The houses were all dark, yet there was still a little light low on the ground, as though the wind held it there flattened to the earth and it had been unable to rise and escape. The walls ceased at the beginning of the bridge; the river looked like steel.

I thought I had already come into the full sweep of the wind, but I hadn't. The bridge was of stone, balustrades and roadway and all, and I squatted beneath the lee of the weather rail. I could hear the wind above and beneath, coming down the river in a long sweeping hum, like through wires. I squatted there, waiting. It wasn't very long.

He didn't see me at first, until I rose. "Did you think to have the flask filled?" he said.

"I forgot. I intended to. Damn the luck. Let's go back—"

"I got a bottle. Which way now?"

"I don't care. Out of the wind. I don't care." We crossed the bridge. Our feet made no sound on the stones, because the wind blew it away. It flattened the water, scoured it; it looked just like steel.

It had a sheen, holding light like the land between it and the wind, reflecting enough to see by. But it swept all sound away before it was made almost, so that when we reached the other side and entered the cut where the road began to mount, it was several moments before we could hear anything except our ears; then we heard. It was a smothered whimpering sound that seemed to come out of the air overhead. We stopped. "It's a child," Don said. "A baby."

"No: an animal. An animal of some sort." We looked at one another in the pale darkness, listening.

"It's up there, anyway," Don said. We climbed up out of the cut. There was a low stone wall enclosing a field, the field a little luminous yet, dissolving into the darkness. Just this side of the darkness, about a hundred yards away, a copse stood black, blobbed shapeless on the gloom.

The wind rushed up across the field and we leaned on the wall, listening into it, looking at the copse. But the sound was nearer than that, and after a moment we saw the priest.

He was lying on his face just inside the wall, his robes over his head, the black blur of his gown moving faintly and steadily, either because of the wind or because he was moving under them. And whatever the sound meant that he was making, it was not meant to be listened to, for his voice ceased when we made a noise. But he didn't look up, and the faint shuddering of his gown didn't stop.

Shuddering, writhing, twisting from side to side — something. Then Don touched me. We went on beside the wall. “Get down easier here,” he said quietly. The pale road rose gradually beneath us as the hill flattened. The copse was a black blob. “Only I didn’t see the bicycle.”

“Then go back to Cavalcanti’s,” I said. “Where in hell do you expect to see it?”

“They would have hidden it. I forgot. Of course they would have hidden it.”

“Go on,” I said. “Don’t talk so goddamn much.”

“Unless they thought he would be busy with us and wouldn’t—” he ceased and stopped. I jolted into him and then I saw it too, the handlebars rising from beyond the wall like the horns of a hidden antelope.

Against the gloom the blob of the copse seemed to pulse and fade, as though it breathed, lived. For we were young, and night, darkness, is terrible to young people, even icy driving blackness like this. Young people should be so constituted that with sunset they would enter a coma state, by slumber shut safe from the darkness, the secret nostalgic sense of frustration and of objectless and unappeasable desire.

“Get down, damn you,” I said. With his high hunched pack, his tight sweater, he was ludicrous; he looked like a clown; he was terrible and ugly and sad all at once, since he was ludicrous and, without the coat, he would be so cold. And so was I: ugly and terrible and sad. “This damn wind.

This damn wind.” We regained the road. We were sheltered for the moment, and he took out the bottle and we drank. It was fiery stuff. “Talk about my Milan brandy,” I said. “That damn wind. That damn wind. That damn wind.”

“Give me a cigarette.”

“You’ve got them.”

“I gave them to you.”

“You’re a goddamn liar. You didn’t.” He found them in his pocket. But I didn’t wait.

“Don’t you want one? Better light it here, while we are . . .” I didn’t wait. The road rose, became flush with the field. After a while I heard him just behind me, and we entered the wind. I could see past my shoulder his cigarette shredding away in fiery streamers upon the unimpeded rush of the mistral, that black chill wind full of dust like sparks of ice.

The End

Divorce in Naples, William Faulkner

Divorce in Naples

I

WE WERE SITTING at a table inside: Monckton and the bosun and Carl and George and me and the women, the three women of that abject glittering kind that seamen know or that know seamen. We were talking English and they were not talking at all. By that means they could speak constantly to us above and below the sound of our voices in a tongue older than recorded speech and time too.

Older than the thirty-four days of sea time which we had but completed, anyway. Now and then they spoke to one another in Italian. The women in Italian, the men in English, as if language might be the sex difference, the functioning of the vocal cords the inner bidding until the dark pairing time. The men in English, the women in Italian: a decorum as of two parallel streams separated by a levee for a little while.

We were talking about Carl, to George.

“Why did you bring him here, then?” the bosun said.

“Yes,” Monckton said. “I sure wouldn’t bring my wife to a place like this.”

George cursed Monckton: not with a word or even a sentence; a paragraph. He was a Greek, big and black, a full head taller than Carl; his eyebrows looked like two crows in overlapping flight. He cursed us all with immediate thoroughness and in well-nigh faultless classic Anglo-Saxon, who at other times functioned in the vocabulary of an eight-year-old by-blow of a vaudeville comedian and a horse, say.

“Yes, sir,” the bosun said. He was smoking an Italian cigar and drinking ginger beer; the same tumbler of which, incidentally, he had been engaged with for about two hours and which now must have been about the temperature of a ship’s showerbath. “I sure wouldn’t bring my girl to a dive like this, even if he did wear pants.”

Carl meanwhile had not stirred. He sat serene among us, with his round yellow head and his round eyes, looking like a sophisticated baby against the noise and the glitter, with his glass of thin Italian beer and the women murmuring to one another and watching us and then Carl with that biding and inscrutable foreknowledge which they do not appear to know that they possess.

“Èinnocente,” one said; again they murmured, contemplating Carl with musing, secret looks. “He may have fooled you already,” the bosun said. “He may have slipped through a porthole on you any time these three years.”

George glared at the bosun, his mouth open for cursing. But he didn’t curse. Instead he looked at Carl, his mouth still open. His mouth closed slowly. We all looked at Carl. Beneath our eyes he raised his glass and drank with contained deliberation.

“Are you still pure?” George said. “I mean, sho enough.”

Beneath our fourteen eyes Carl emptied the glass of thin, bitter, three per cent beer. "I been to sea three years," he said. "All over Europe."

George glared at him, his face baffled and outraged. He had just shaved; his close blue jowls lay flat and hard as a prizefighter's or a pirate's, up to the black explosion of his hair. He was our second cook. "You damn lying little bastard," he said.

The bosun raised his glass of ginger beer with an exact replica of Carl's drinking. Steadily and deliberately, his body thrown a little back and his head tilted, he poured the ginger beer over his right shoulder at the exact speed of swallowing, still with that air of Carl's, that grave and cosmopolitan swagger. He set the glass down, and rose. "Come on," he said to Monckton and me, "let's go. Might as well be board ship if we're going to spend the evening in one place."

Monckton and I rose. He was smoking a short pipe. One of the women was his, another the bosun's. The third one had a lot of gold teeth. She could have been thirty, but maybe she wasn't. We left her with George and Carl. When I looked back from the door, the waiter was just fetching them some more beer.

II

They came into the ship together at Galveston, George carrying a portable victrola and a small parcel wrapped in paper bearing the imprint of a well-known ten-cent store, and Carl carrying two bulging imitation leather bags that looked like they might weigh forty pounds apiece.

George appropriated two berths, one above the other like a Pullman section, cursing Carl in a harsh, concatenant voice a little overburred with v's and r's and ordering him about like a nigger, while Carl stowed their effects away with the meticulousness of an old maid, producing from one of the bags a stack of freshly laundered drill serving jackets that must have numbered a dozen.

For the next thirty-four days (he was the messboy) he wore a fresh one for each meal in the saloon, and there were always two or three recently washed ones drying under the poop awning.

And for thirty-four evenings, after the galley was closed, we watched the two of them in pants and undershirts, dancing to the victrola on the after well deck above a hold full of Texas cotton and Georgia resin. They had only one record for the machine and it had a crack in it, and each time the needle clucked George would stamp on the deck. I don't think that either one of them was aware that he did it.

It was George who told us about Carl. Carl was eighteen, from Philadelphia. They both called it Philly; George in a proprietorial tone, as if he had created Philadelphia in order to produce Carl, though it later appeared that George had not discovered Carl until Carl had been to sea for a year already.

And Carl himself told some of it: a fourth or fifth child of a first generation of Scandinavian-American shipwrights, brought up in one of an identical series of small frame houses a good trolley ride from salt water, by a mother or an older sister: this whom, at the age of fifteen and weighing perhaps a little less than a hundred pounds, some ancestor long knocking his quiet bones together at the bottom of the sea (or perhaps havened by accident in dry earth and become restive with ease and quiet) had sent back to the old dream and the old unrest three or maybe four generations late.

"I was a kid, then," Carl told us, who had yet to experience or need a shave. "I thought about everything but going to sea. I thought once I'd be a ballplayer or maybe a prize fighter. They had pictures of them on the walls, see, when Sis would send me down to the corner after the old man on a Saturday night. Jeez, I'd stand outside on the street and watch them go in, and I could see their legs under the door and hear them and smell the sawdust and see the pictures of them on the walls through the smoke. I was a kid then, see. I hadn't been nowheres then."

We asked George how he had ever got a berth, even as a messman, standing even now about four inches over five feet and with yet a face that should have followed monstrances up church aisles, if not looked down from one of the colored windows themselves.

“Why shouldn’t he have come to sea?” George said. “Ain’t this a free country? Even if he ain’t nothing but a damn mess.” He looked at us, black, serious. “He’s a virgin, see? Do you know what that means?” He told us what it meant. Someone had evidently told him what it meant not so long ago, told him what he used to be himself, if he could remember that far back, and he thought that perhaps we didn’t know the man, or maybe he thought it was a new word they had just invented.

So he told us what it meant. It was in the first night watch and we were on the poop after supper, two days out of Gibraltar, listening to Monckton talking about cauliflower. Carl was taking a shower (he always took a bath after he had cleared the saloon after supper. George, who only cooked, never bathed until we were in port and the petite cleared) and George told us what it meant.

Then he began to curse. He cursed for a long time.

“Well, George,” the bosun said, “suppose you were one, then? What would you do?”

“What would I do?” George said. “What wouldn’t I do?” He cursed for some time, steadily. “It’s like the first cigarette in the morning,” he said. “By noon, when you remember how it tasted, how you felt when you was waiting for the match to get to the end of it, and when that first drag—” He cursed, long, impersonal, like a chant.

Monckton watched him: not listened: watched, nursing his pipe. “Why, George,” he said, “you’re by way of being almost a poet.”

There was a swipe, some West India Docks crum; I forget his name.

“Call that lobbing the tongue?” he said. “You should hear a Lymus mate laying into a fo’c’sle of bloody Portygee ginneys.”

“Monckton wasn’t talking about the language,” the bosun said.

“Any man can swear.” He looked at George. “You’re not the first man that ever wished that, George. That’s something that has to be was because you don’t know you are when you are.” Then he paraphrased unwitting and with unprintable aptness Byron’s epigram about women’s mouths. “But what are you saving him for? What good will it do you when he stops being?”

George cursed, looking from face to face, baffled and outraged.

“Maybe Carl will let George hold his hand at the time,” Monckton said. He reached a match from his pocket. “Now, you take Brussels sprouts—”

“You might get the Old Man to quarantine him when we reach Naples,” the bosun said.

George cursed.

“Now, you take Brussels sprouts,” Monckton said.

III

It took us some time that night, to get either started or settled down. We — Monckton and the bosun and the two women and I — visited four more cafés, each like the other one and like the one where we had left George and Carl — same people, same music, same thin, colored drinks. The two women accompanied us, with us but not of us, biding and acquiescent, saying constantly and patiently and without words that it was time to go to bed. So after a while I left them and went back to the ship. George and Carl were not aboard.

The next morning they were not there either, though Monckton and the bosun were, and the cook and the steward swearing up and down the galley; it seemed that the cook was planning to spend the day ashore himself.

So they had to stay aboard all day. Along toward midafternoon there came aboard a smallish man in a soiled suit who looked like one of those Columbia day students that go up each morning on the East Side subway from around Chatham Square. He was hatless, with an oiled pompadour. He had not shaved recently, and he spoke no English in a pleasant, deprecatory way that was all teeth. But he had found the right ship and he had a note from George, written on the edge of a dirty scrap of newspaper, and we found where George was. He was in jail.

The steward hadn't stopped cursing all day, anyhow. He didn't stop now, either. He and the messenger went off to the consul's. The steward returned a little after six o'clock, with George. George didn't look so much like he had been drunk; he looked dazed, quiet, with his wild hair and a blue stubble on his jaw.

He went straight to Carl's bunk and he began to turn Carl's meticulous covers back one by one like a traveler examining the bed in a third-class European hotel, as if he expected to find Carl hidden among them. "You mean," he said, "he ain't been back? He ain't been back a-tall?"

"We haven't seen him," we told George. "The steward hasn't seen him either. We thought he was in jail with you."

He began to replace the covers; that is, he made an attempt to draw them one by one up the bed again in a kind of detached way, as if he were not conscious, sentient. "They run," he said in a dull tone. "They ducked out on me. I never thought he'd a done it. I never thought he'd a done me this way. It was her. She was the one made him done it. She knew what he was, and how I . . ." Then he began to cry, quietly, in that dull, detached way. "He must have been sitting there with his hand in her lap all the time. And I never suspicioned.

She kept on moving her chair closer and closer to his. But I trusted him. I never suspicioned nothing. I thought he wouldn't a done nothing serious without asking me first, let alone . . . I trusted him."

It appeared that the bottom of George's glass had distorted their shapes enough to create in George the illusion that Carl and the woman were drinking as he drank, in a serious but celibate way. He left them at the table and went back to the lavatory; or rather, he said that he realized suddenly that he was in the lavatory and that he had better be getting back, concerned not over what might transpire while he was away, but over the lapse, over his failure to be present at his own doings which the getting to the lavatory inferred. So he returned to the table, not yet alarmed; merely concerned and amused. He said he was having a fine time.

So at first he believed that he was still having such a good time that he could not find his own table. He found the one which he believed should be his, but it was vacant save for three stacks of saucers, so he made one round of the room, still amused, still enjoying himself; he was still enjoying himself when he repaired to the center of the dance floor where, a head above the dancers, he began to shout "Porteus ahoy!" in a loud voice, and continued to do so until a waiter who spoke English came and removed him and led him back to that same vacant table bearing the three stacks of saucers and the three glasses, one of which he now recognized as his own.

But he was still enjoying himself, though not so much now, believing himself to be the victim of a practical joke, first on the part of the management, and it appeared that he must have created some little disturbance, enjoying himself less and less all the while, the center of an augmenting clump of waiters and patrons.

When at last he did realize, accept the fact, that they were gone, it must have been pretty bad for him: the outrage, the despair, the sense of elapsed time, an unfamiliar city at night in which Carl must be found, and that quickly if it was to do any good. He tried to leave, to break through the crowd, without paying the score. Not that he would have beaten the bill; he just didn't have time. If he could have found Carl within the next ten minutes, he would have returned and paid the score twice over: I am sure of that.

And so they held him, the wild American, a cordon of waiters and clients — women and men both — and he dragging a handful of coins from his pockets ringing onto the tile floor. Then he said it was like having your legs swarmed by a pack of dogs: waiters, clients, men and women, on hands and knees on the floor, scrabbling after the rolling coins, and George slapping about with his big feet, trying to stamp the hands away.

Then he was standing in the center of an abrupt wide circle, breathing a little hard, with the two Napoleons in their swords and pallbearer gloves and Knights of Pythias bonnets on either side of him. He did not know what he had done; he only knew that he was under arrest. It was not until they reached the Prefecture, where there was an interpreter, that he learned that he was a political prisoner, having insulted the king's majesty by placing foot on the king's effigy on a coin. They put him in a forty-foot dungeon, with seven other political prisoners, one of whom was the messenger.

“They taken my belt and my necktie and the strings out of my shoes,” he told us dully. “There wasn't nothing in the room but a barrel fastened in the middle of the floor and a wooden bench running all the way round the walls.

I knew what the barrel was for right off, because they had already been using it for that for some time. You was expected to sleep on the bench when you couldn't stay on your feet no longer. When I stooped over and looked at it close, it was like looking down at Forty-second Street from a airplane. They looked just like Yellow cabs. Then I went and used the barrel. But I used it with the end of me it wasn't intended to be used with.”

Then he told about the messenger. Truly, Despair, like Poverty, looks after its own. There they were: the Italian who spoke no English, and George who scarcely spoke any language at all; certainly not Italian. That was about four o'clock in the morning. Yet by daylight George had found the one man out of the seven who could have served him or probably would have.

“He told me he was going to get out at noon, and I told him I would give him ten lire as soon as I got out, and he got me the scrap of paper and the pencil (this, in a bare dungeon, from among seven men stripped to the skin of everything save the simplest residue of clothing necessary for warmth: of money, knives, shoelaces, even pins and loose buttons) and I wrote the note and he hid it and they left him out and after about four hours they come and got me and there was the steward.”

“How did you talk to him, George?” the bosun said. “Even the steward couldn’t find out anything until they got to the consul’s.”

“I don’t know,” George said. “We just talked. That was the only way I could tell anybody where I was at.”

We tried to get him to go to bed, but he wouldn’t do it. He didn’t even shave. He got something to eat in the galley and went ashore. We watched him go down the side.

“Poor bastard,” Monckton said.

“Why?” the bosun said. “What did he take Carl there for? They could have gone to the movies.”

“I wasn’t thinking about George,” Monckton said.

“Oh,” the bosun said. “Well, a man can’t keep on going ashore anywhere, let alone Europe, all his life without getting ravaged now and then.”

“Good God,” Monckton said. “I should hope not.”

George returned at six o’clock the next morning. He still looked dazed, though still quite sober, quite calm. Overnight his beard had grown another quarter inch. “I couldn’t find them,” he said quietly. “I couldn’t find them nowheres.”

He had to act as messman now, taking Carl’s place at the officers’ table, but as soon as breakfast was done, he disappeared; we heard the steward cursing him up and down the ship until noon, trying to find him. Just before noon he returned, got through dinner, departed again. He came back just before dark.

“Found him yet?” I said. He didn’t answer. He stared at me for a while with that blank look. Then he went to their bunks and hauled one of the imitation leather bags down and tumbled all of Carl’s things into it and crushed down the lid upon the dangling sleeves and socks and hurled the bag out onto the well deck, where it tumbled once and burst open, vomiting the white jackets and the mute socks and the underclothes. Then he went to bed, fully dressed, and slept fourteen hours. The cook tried to get him up for breakfast, but it was like trying to rouse up a dead man.

When he waked he looked better. He borrowed a cigarette of me and went and shaved and came back and borrowed another cigarette. “Hell with him,” he said. “Leave the bastard go. I don’t give a damn.”

That afternoon he put Carl’s things back into his bunk. Not carefully and not uncarefully: he just gathered them up and dumped them into the berth and paused for a moment to see if any of them were going to fall out, before turning away.

IV

It was just before daylight. When I returned to the ship about midnight, the quarters were empty. When I waked just before daylight, all the bunks save my own were still vacant. I was lying in a halfdoze, when I heard Carl in the passage. He was coming quietly; I had scarcely heard him before he appeared in the door. He stood there for a while, looking no larger than an adolescent boy in the half-light, before he entered. I closed my eyes quickly. I heard him, still on tiptoe, come to my bunk and stand above me for a while. Then I heard him turn away. I opened my eyes just enough to watch him.

He undressed swiftly, ripping his clothes off, ripping off a button that struck the bulkhead with a faint click. Naked, in the wan light, he looked smaller and frailer than ever as he dug a towel from his bunk where George had tumbled his things, flinging the other garments aside with a

kind of dreadful haste. Then he went out, his bare feet whispering in the passage.

I could hear the shower beyond the bulkhead running for a long time; it would be cold now, too.

But it ran for a long time, then it ceased and I closed my eyes again until he had entered. Then I watched him lift from the floor the undergarment which he had removed and thrust it through a porthole quickly, with something of the air of a recovered drunkard putting out of sight an empty bottle. He dressed and put on a fresh white jacket and combed his hair, leaning to the small mirror, looking at his face for a long time.

And then he went to work. He worked about the bridge deck all day long; what he could have found to do there we could not imagine. But the crew's quarters never saw him until after dark. All day long we watched the white jacket flitting back and forth beyond the open doors or kneeling as he polished the brightwork about the companions.

He seemed to work with a kind of fury. And when he was forced by his duties to come topside during the day, we noticed that it was always on the port side, and we lay with our starboard to the dock. And about the galley or the after deck George worked a little and loafed a good deal, not looking toward the bridge at all.

"That's the reason he stays up there, polishing that brightwork all day long," the bosun said. "He knows George can't come up there."

"It don't look to me like George wants to," I said.

"That's right," Monckton said. "For a dollar George would go up to the binnacle and ask the Old Man for a cigarette."

"But not for curiosity," the bosun said.

"You think that's all it is?" Monckton said. "Just curiosity?"

"Sure," the bosun said. "Why not?"

“Monckton’s right,” I said. “This is the most difficult moment in marriage: the day after your wife has stayed out all night.”

“You mean the easiest,” the bosun said. “George can quit him now.”

“Do you think so?” Monckton said.

We lay there five days. Carl was still polishing the brightwork in the bridge-deck companions. The steward would send him out on deck, and go away; he would return and find Carl still working on the port side and he would make him go to starboard, above the dock and the Italian boys in bright, soiled jerseys and the venders of pornographic postcards.

But it didn’t take him long there, and then we would see him below again, sitting quietly in his white jacket in the stale gloom, waiting for supertime. Usually he would be darning socks.

George had not yet said one word to him; Carl might not have been aboard at all, the very displacement of space which was his body, impedeless and breathable air. It was now George’s turn to stay away from the ship most of the day and all of the night, returning a little drunk at three and four o’clock, to waken everyone by hand, save Carl, and talk in gross and loud recapitulation of recent and always different women before climbing into his bunk.

As far as we knew, they did not even look at one another until we were well on our way to Gibraltar.

Then Carl’s fury of work slacked somewhat. Yet he worked steadily all day, then, bathed, his blond hair wet and smooth, his slight body in a cotton singlet, we would see him leaning alone in the long twilight upon the rail midships or forward. But never about the poop where we smoked and talked and where George had begun again to play the single record on the victrola, committing, unrequested and anathemaed, cold-blooded encore after encore.

Then one night we saw them together. They were leaning side by side on the poop rail. That was the first time Carl had looked astern, looked

toward Naples since that morning when he returned to the ship, and even now it was the evening on which the Gates of Hercules had sunk into the waxing twilight and the River Ocean began to flow down into the darkling sea and overhead the crosstrees swayed in measured and slow recover against the tall night and the low new moon.

“He’s all right now,” Monckton said. “The dog’s gone back to his vomit.”

“I said he was all right all the time,” the bosun said. “George didn’t give a damn.”

“I wasn’t talking about George,” Monckton said. “George hasn’t made the grade yet.”

V

George told us. “He’d keep on moping and mooning, see, and I’d keep on trying to talk to him, to tell him I wasn’t mad no more. Jeez, it had to come some day; a man can’t be a angel all your life. But he wouldn’t even look back that way. Until all of a sudden he says one night: “‘What do you do to them?’ I looked at him. ‘How does a man treat them?’

“‘You mean to tell me,’ I says, ‘that you spent three days with her and she ain’t showed you that?’

“‘I mean, give them,’ he says. ‘Don’t men give—’

“‘Jeez Christ,’ I says, ‘you done already give her something they would have paid you money for it in Siam. Would have made you the prince or the prime minister at the least. What do you mean?’

“‘I don’t mean money,’ he says. ‘I mean . . .’

“‘Well,’ I says, ‘if you was going to see her again, if she was going to be your girl, you’d give her something. Bring it back to her. Like something to wear or something: they don’t care much what, them foreign women, hustling them wops all their life that wouldn’t give them a full

breath if they was a toy balloon; they don't care much what it is. But you ain't going to see her again, are you?'

"'No,' he says. 'No,' he says. 'No.' And he looked like he was fixing to jump off the boat and swim on ahead and wait for us at Hatteras.

"'So you don't want to worry about that,' I says. Then I went and played the vic again, thinking that might cheer him up, because he ain't the first, for Christ's sake; he never invented it. But it was the next night; we was at the poop rail then — the first time he had looked back — watching the phosrus along the logline, when he says:

"'Maybe I got her into trouble.'

"'Doing what?' I says. 'With what? With the police? Didn't you make her show you her petite?' Like she would have needed a ticket, with that face full of gold; Jeez, she could have rode the train on her face alone; maybe that was her savings bank instead of using her stocking.

"'What ticket?' he says. So I told him. For a minute I thought he was crying, then I seen that he was just trying to not puke. So I knew what the trouble was, what had been worrying him. I remember the first time it come as a surprise to me. 'Oh,' I says, 'the smell. It don't mean nothing,' I says; you don't want to let that worry you. It ain't that they smell bad,' I says, 'that's just the Italian national air.'"

And then we thought that at last he really was sick. He worked all day long, coming to bed only after the rest of us were asleep and snoring, and I saw him in the night get up and go topside again, and I followed and saw him sitting on a windlass. He looked like a little boy, still, small, motionless in his underclothes.

But he was young, and even an old man can't be sick very long with nothing but work to do and salt air to breathe; and so two weeks later we were watching him and George dancing again in their undershirts after supper on the after well deck while the victrola lifted its fatuous and reiterant ego against the waxing moon and the ship snored and hissed through the long seas off Hatteras. They didn't talk; they just

danced, gravely and tirelessly as the nightly moon stood higher and higher up the sky.

Then we turned south, and the Gulf Stream ran like blue ink alongside, bubbled with fire by night in the softening latitudes, and one night off Tortugas the ship began to tread the moon's silver train like an awkward and eager courtier, and Carl spoke for the first time after almost twenty days.

"George," he said, "do me a favor, will you?"

"Sure, bud," George said, stamping on the deck each time the needle clucked, his black head shoulders above Carl's sleek pale one, the two of them in decorous embrace, their canvas shoes hissing in unison: "Sure," George said. "Spit it out."

"When we get to Galveston, I want you to buy me a suit of these pink silk teddybears that ladies use. A little bigger than I'd wear, see?"

The End

Carcassonne, William Faulkner

Carcassonne

AND ME ON a buckskin pony with eyes like blue electricity and a mane like tangled fire, galloping up the hill and right off into the high heaven of the world

His skeleton lay still. Perhaps it was thinking about this. Anyway, after a time it groaned. But it said nothing. which is certainly not like you he thought you are not like yourself. but I can't say that a little quiet is not pleasant

He lay beneath an unrolled strip of tarred roofing made of paper. All of him that is, save that part which suffered neither insects nor temperature and which galloped unflagging on the destinationless pony, up a piled silver hill of cumulae where no hoof echoed nor left print, toward the blue precipice never gained. This part was neither flesh nor unflesh and he tingled a little pleasantly with its lackful contemplation as he lay beneath the tarred paper bedclothing.

So were the mechanics of sleeping, of denning up for the night, simplified. Each morning the entire bed rolled back into a spool and stood erect in the corner. It was like those glasses, reading glasses which old ladies used to wear, attached to a cord that rolls onto a spindle in a neat case of unmarked gold; a spindle, a case, attached to the deep bosom of the mother of sleep.

He lay still, savoring this. Beneath him Rincon followed its fatal, secret, nightly pursuits, where upon the rich and inert darkness of the streets lighted windows and doors lay like oily strokes of broad and overladen brushes. From the docks a ship's siren unsourced itself. For a moment it was sound, then it compassed silence, atmosphere, bringing upon the eardrums a vacuum in which nothing, not even silence, was. Then it ceased, ebbed; the silence breathed again with a clashing of palm fronds like sand hissing across a sheet of metal.

Still his skeleton lay motionless. Perhaps it was thinking about this and he thought of his tarred paper bed as a pair of spectacles through which he nightly perused the fabric of dreams:

Across the twin transparencies of the spectacles the horse still gallops with its tangled welter of tossing flames. Forward and back against the taut roundness of its belly its legs swing, rhythmically reaching and overreaching, each spurning overreach punctuated by a flicking limberness of shod hooves.

He can see the saddlegirth and the soles of the rider's feet in the stirrups. The girth cuts the horse in two just back of the withers, yet it still gallops with rhythmic and unflagging fury and without progression, and he thinks of that riderless Norman steed which galloped against the

Saracen Emir, who, so keen of eye, so delicate and strong the wrist which swung the blade, severed the galloping beast at a single blow, the several halves thundering on in the sacred dust where him of Bouillon and Tancred too clashed in sullen retreat; thundering on through the assembled foes of our meek Lord, wrapped still in the fury and the pride of the charge, not knowing that it was dead.

The ceiling of the garret slanted in a ruined pitch to the low eaves. It was dark, and the body consciousness, assuming the office of vision, shaped in his mind's eye his motionless body grown phosphorescent with that steady decay which had set up within his body on the day of his birth. the flesh is dead living on itself subsisting consuming itself thriftily in its own renewal will never die for I am the Resurrection and the Life Of a man, the worm should be lusty, lean, hairedover.

Of women, of delicate girls briefly like heard music in tune, it should be suavely shaped, falling feeding into prettinesses, feeding. what though to Me but as a seething of new milk Who am the Resurrection and the Life

It was dark. The agony of wood was soothed by these latitudes; empty rooms did not creak and crack. Perhaps wood was like any other skeleton though, after a time, once reflexes of old compulsions had spent themselves.

Bones might lie under seas, in the caverns of the sea, knocked together by the dying echoes of waves. Like bones of horses cursing the inferior riders who bestrode them, bragging to one another about what they would have done with a first-rate rider up. But somebody always crucified the first-rate riders. And then it's better to be bones knocking together to the spent motion of falling tides in the caverns and the grottoes of the sea.

where him of Bouillon and Tancred too

His skeleton groaned again. Across the twin transparencies of the glassy floor the horse still galloped, unflagging and without progress, its

destination the barn where sleep was stabled. It was dark. Luis, who ran the cantina downstairs, allowed him to sleep in the garret. But the Standard Oil Company, who owned the garret and the roofing paper, owned the darkness too; it was Mrs Widdrington's, the Standard Oil Company's wife's, darkness he was using to sleep in.

She'd make a poet of you too, if you did not work anywhere. She believed that, if a reason for breathing were not acceptable to her, it was no reason. With her, if you were white and did not work, you were either a tramp or a poet. Maybe you were. Women are so wise. They have learned how to live unconfused by reality, impervious to it. It was dark.

and knock my bones together and together It was dark, a darkness filled with a fairy pattering of small feet, stealthy and intent. Sometimes the cold patter of them on his face waked him in the night, and at his movement they scurried invisibly like an abrupt disintegration of dead leaves in a wind, in whispering arpeggios of minute sound, leaving a thin but definite effluvium of furtiveness and voracity.

At times, lying so while daylight slanted grayly along the ruined pitch of the eaves, he watched their shadowy flickings from obscurity to obscurity, shadowy and huge as cats, leaving along the stagnant silences those whisperings gusts of fairy feet.

Mrs Widdrington owned the rats too. But wealthy people have to own so many things. Only she didn't expect the rats to pay for using her darkness and silence by writing poetry. Not that they could not have, and pretty fair verse probably. Something of the rat about Byron: allocutions of stealthful voracity; a fairy pattering of little feet behind a bloody arras where fell where fell where I was King of Kings but the woman with the woman with the dog's eyes to knock my bones together and together

"I would like to perform something," he said, shaping his lips soundlessly in the darkness, and the galloping horse filled his mind again with soundless thunder. He could see the saddlegirth and the

soles of the rider's stirrups, and he thought of that Norman steed, bred of many fathers to bear iron mail in the slow, damp, green valleys of England, maddened with heat and thirst and hopeless horizons filled with shimmering nothingness, thundering along in two halves and not knowing it, fused still in the rhythm of accrued momentum. Its head was mailed so that it could not see forward at all, and from the center of the plates projected a — projected a —

"Chamfron," his skeleton said.

"Chamfron." He mused for a time, while the beast that did not know that it was dead thundered on as the ranks of the Lamb's foes opened in the sacred dust and let it through. "Chamfron," he repeated. Living, as it did, a retired life, his skeleton could know next to nothing of the world. Yet it had an astonishing and exasperating way of supplying him with bits of trivial information that had temporarily escaped his mind. "All you know is what I tell you," he said.

"Not always," the skeleton said. "I know that the end of life is lying still. You haven't learned that yet. Or you haven't mentioned it to me, anyway."

"Oh, I've learned it," he said. "I've had it dinned into me enough. It isn't that. It's that I don't believe it's true."

The skeleton groaned.

"I don't believe it, I say," he repeated.

"All right, all right," the skeleton said testily. "I shan't dispute you. I never do. I only give you advice."

"Somebody has to, I guess," he agreed sourly. "At least, it looks like it." He lay still beneath the tarred paper, in a silence filled with fairy patterings. Again his body slanted and slanted downward through opaline corridors groined with ribs of dying sunlight upward dissolving dimly, and came to rest at last in the windless gardens of the sea. About him the swaying caverns and the grottoes, and his body lay on the rippled floor, tumbling peacefully to the wavering echoes of the tides.

I want to perform something bold and tragical and austere he repeated, shaping the soundless words in the pattering silence me on a buckskin pony with eyes like blue electricity and a mane like tangled fire, galloping up the hill and right off into the high heaven of the world Still galloping, the horse soars outward; still galloping, it thunders up the long blue hill of heaven, its tossing mane in golden swirls like fire. Steed and rider thunder on, thunder punily diminishing: a dying star upon the immensity of darkness and of silence within which, steadfast, fading, deepbreasted and grave of flank, muses the dark and tragic figure of the Earth, his mother.

The End

Uncollected Stories, William Faulkner

Uncollected Stories

Contents

Spotted Horses

The Hound

Lizards in Jamshyd's Courtyard

Fool About a Horse

Race at Morning

Once Aboard the Lugger

Miss Zilphia Gant

Thrift

Idyll in the Desert

Two Dollar Wife

Afternoon of a Cow

Sepulture South: Gaslight

Mr. Acarius

Spotted Horses

Scribner's, June 1931. Later revised for 'The Hamlet'

I

YES, SIR. FLEM Snopes has filled that whole country full of spotted horses. You can hear folks running them all day and all night, whooping and hollering, and the horses running back and forth across them little wooden bridges ever now and then kind of like thunder. Here I was this morning pretty near half way to town, with the team ambling along and me setting in the buckboard about half asleep, when all of a sudden something come swurging up outen the bushes and jumped the road clean, without touching hoof to it. It flew right over my team, big as a billboard and flying through the air like a hawk. It taken me thirty minutes to stop my team and untangle the harness and the buckboard and hitch them up again.

That Flem Snopes. I be dog if he ain't a case, now. One morning about ten years ago, the boys was just getting settled down on Varner's porch for a little talk and tobacco, when here come Flem out from behind the counter, with his coat off and his hair all parted, like he might have been clerking for Varner for ten years already. Folks all knowed him; it was a big family of them about five miles down the bottom. That year, at least. Share-cropping. They never stayed on any place over a year.

Then they would move on to another place, with the chap or maybe the twins of that year's litter. It was a regular nest of them. But Flem. The rest of them stayed tenant farmers, moving ever year, but here come Flem one day, walking out from behind Jody Varner's counter like he owned it.

And he wasn't there but a year or two before folks knowed that, if him and Jody was both still in that store in ten years more, it would be Jody clerking for Flem Snopes. Why, that fellow could make a nickel where it wasn't but four cents to begin with. He skun me in two trades, myself,

and the fellow that can do that, I just hope he'll get rich before I do; that's all.

All right. So here Flem was, clerking at Varner's, making a nickel here and there and not telling nobody about it. No, sir. Folks never knowed when Flem got the better of somebody lessen the fellow he beat told it. He'd just set there in the store-chair, chewing his tobacco and keeping his own business to hisself, until about a week later we'd find out it was somebody else's business he was keeping to hisself — provided the fellow he trimmed was mad enough to tell it. That's Flem.

We give him ten years to own ever thing Jody Varner had. But he never waited no ten years. I reckon you-all know that gal of Uncle Billy Varner's, the youngest one; Eula. Jody's sister. Ever Sunday ever yellow-wheeled buggy and curried riding horse in that country would be hitched to Bill Varner's fence, and the young bucks setting on the porch, swarming around Eula like bees around a honey pot.

One of these here kind of big, soft-looking gals that could giggle richer than plowed new-ground. Wouldn't none of them leave before the others, and so they would set there on the porch until time to go home, with some of them with nine and ten miles to ride and then get up tomorrow and go back to the field. So they would all leave together and they would ride in a clump down to the creek ford and hitch them curried horses and yellow-wheeled buggies and get out and fight one another. Then they would get in the buggies again and go on home.

Well, one day about a year ago, one of them yellow-wheeled buggies and one of them curried saddle-horses quit this country. We heard they was heading for Texas. The next day Uncle Billy and Eula and Flem come in to town in Uncle Bill's surrey, and when they come back, Flem and Eula was married. And on the next day we heard that two more of them yellow-wheeled buggies had left the country. They mought have gone to Texas, too. It's a big place.

Anyway, about a month after the wedding, Flem and Eula went to Texas, too. They was gone pretty near a year. Then one day last month,

Eula come back, with a baby. We figgured up, and we decided that it was as well-growed a three-months-old baby as we ever see. It can already pull up on a chair. I reckon Texas makes big men quick, being a big place. Anyway, if it keeps on like it started, it'll be chewing tobacco and voting time it's eight years old.

And so last Friday here come Flem himself. He was on a wagon with another fellow. The other fellow had one of these two-gallon hats and a ivory-handled pistol and a box of gingersnaps sticking out of his hind pocket, and tied to the tail-gate of the wagon was about two dozen of them Texas ponies, hitched to one another with barbed wire. They was colored like parrots and they was quiet as doves, and ere a one of them would kill you quick as a rattlesnake.

Nere a one of them had two eyes the same color, and nere a one of them had ever see a bridle, I reckon; and when that Texas man got down offen the wagon and walked up to them to show how gentle they was, one of them cut his vest clean offen him, same as with a razor.

Flem had done already disappeared; he had went on to see his wife, I reckon, and to see if that ere baby had done gone on to the field to help Uncle Billy plow maybe. It was the Texas man that taken the horses on to Mrs. Littlejohn's lot. He had a little trouble at first, when they come to the gate, because they hadn't never see a fence before, and when he finally got them in and taken a pair of wire cutters and unhitched them and got them into the barn and poured some shell corn into the trough, they durn nigh tore down the barn. I reckon they thought that shell corn was bugs, maybe. So he left them in the lot and he announced that the auction would begin at sunup to-morrow.

That night we was setting on Mrs. Littlejohn's porch. You-all mind the moon was nigh full that night, and we could watch them spotted varmints swirling along the fence and back and forth across the lot same as minnows in a pond. And then now and then they would all kind of huddle up against the barn and rest themselves by biting and kicking one another. We would hear a squeal, and then a set of hoofs would go

Bam! against the barn, like a pistol. It sounded just like a fellow with a pistol, in a nest of cattymounts, taking his time.

II

It wasn't ere a man knowed yet if Flem owned them things or not. They just knowed one thing: that they wasn't never going to know for sho if Flem did or not, or if maybe he didn't just get on that wagon at the edge of town, for the ride or not. Even Eck Snopes didn't know, Flem's own cousin. But wasn't nobody surprised at that. We knowed that Flem would skin Eck quick as he would ere a one of us.

They was there by sunup next morning, some of them come twelve and sixteen miles, with seed-money tied up in tobacco sacks in their overalls, standing along the fence, when the Texas man come out of Mrs. Littlejohn's after breakfast and clumb onto the gate post with that ere white pistol butt sticking outen his hind pocket. He taken a new box of gingersnaps outen his pocket and bit the end offen it like a cigar and spit out the paper, and said the auction was open. And still they was coming up in wagons and a horse- and mule-back and hitching the teams across the road and coming to the fence. Flem wasn't nowhere in sight.

But he couldn't get them started. He begun to work on Eck, because Eck help him last night to get them into the barn and feed them that shell corn. Eck got out just in time. He come outen that barn like a chip on the crest of a busted dam of water, and clumb into the wagon just in time.

He was working on Eck when Henry Armstid come up in his wagon. Eck was saying he was skeered to bid on one of them, because he might get it, and the Texas man says, "Them ponies? Them little horses?"

He clumb down offen the gate post and went toward the horses. They broke and run, and him following them, kind of chirping to them, with his hand out like he was fixing to catch a fly, until he got three or four of

them cornered. Then he jumped into them, and then we couldn't see nothing for a while because of the dust.

It was a big cloud of it, and them blare-eyed, spotted things swoaring outen it twenty foot to a jump, in forty directions without counting up. Then the dust settled and there they was, that Texas man and the horse. He had its head twisted clean around like a owl's head. Its legs was braced and it was trembling like a new bride and groaning like a saw mill, and him holding its head wrung clean around on its neck so it was snuffing sky.

"Look it over," he says, with his heels dug too and that white pistol sticking outen his pocket and his neck swole up like a spreading adder's until you could just tell what he was saying, cussing the horse and talking to us all at once: "Look him over, the fiddle-headed son of fourteen fathers.

Try him, buy him; you will get the best—" Then it was all dust again, and we couldn't see nothing but spotted hide and mane, and that ere Texas man's boot-heels like a couple of walnuts on two strings, and after a while that two-gallon hat come sailing out like a fat old hen crossing a fence.

When the dust settled again, he was just getting outen the far fence corner, brushing himself off. He come and got his hat and brushed it off and come and clumb onto the gate post again. He was breathing hard. He taken the gingersnap box outen his pocket and et one, breathing hard.

The hammer-head horse was still running round and round the lot like a merry-go-round at a fair. That was when Henry Armstid come shoving up to the gate in them patched overalls and one of them dangle-armed shirts of hisn.

Hadn't nobody noticed him until then. We was all watching the Texas man and the horses. Even Mrs. Littlejohn; she had done come out and built a fire under the wash-pot in her back yard, and she would stand at

the fence a while and then go back into the house and come out again with a arm full of wash and stand at the fence again. Well, here come Henry shoving up, and then we see Mrs. Armstid right behind him, in that ere faded wrapper and sunbonnet and them tennis shoes. "Git on back to that wagon," Henry says.

"Henry," she says.

"Here, boys," the Texas man says; "make room for missus to git up and see. Come on, Henry," he says; "here's your chance to buy that saddle-horse missus has been wanting. What about ten dollars, Henry?"

"Henry," Mrs. Armstid says. She put her hand on Henry's arm. Henry knocked her hand down.

"Git on back to that wagon, like I told you," he says.

Mrs. Armstid never moved. She stood behind Henry, with her hands rolled into her dress, not looking at nothing. "He hain't no more despair than to buy one of them things," she says. "And us not five dollars ahead of the pore house, he hain't no more despair." It was the truth, too. They ain't never made more than a bare living offen that place of theirs, and them with four chaps and the very clothes they wears she earns by weaving by the firelight at night while Henry's asleep.

"Shut your mouth and git on back to that wagon," Henry says. "Do you want I taken a wagon stake to you here in the big road?"

Well, that Texas man taken one look at her. Then he begun on Eck again, like Henry wasn't even there. But Eck was skeered. "I can git me a snapping turtle or a water moccasin for nothing. I ain't going to buy none."

So the Texas man said he would give Eck a horse. "To start the auction, and because you holp me last night. If you'll start the bidding on the next horse," he says, "I'll give you that fiddle-head horse."

I wish you could have seen them, standing there with their seed-money in their pockets, watching that Texas man give Eck Snopes a live horse,

all fixed to call him a fool if he taken it or not. Finally Eck says he'll take it.

"Only I just starts the bidding," he says. "I don't have to buy the next one lessen I ain't overtopped." The Texas man said all right, and Eck bid a dollar on the next one, with Henry Armstid standing there with his mouth already open, watching Eck and the Texas man like a mad-dog or something. "A dollar," Eck says.

The Texas man looked at Eck. His mouth was already open too, like he had started to say something and what he was going to say had up and died on him. "A dollar?" he says. "One dollar? You mean, one dollar, Eck?"

"Durn it," Eck says; "two dollars, then."

Well, sir, I wish you could a seen that Texas man. He taken out that gingersnap box and held it up and looked into it, careful, like it might have been a diamond ring in it, or a spider. Then he threwed it away and wiped his face with a bandanna. "Well," he says. "Well. Two dollars. Two dollars. Is your pulse all right, Eck?" he says. "Do you have ager-sweats at night, maybe?" he says. "Well," he says, "I got to take it. But are you boys going to stand there and see Eck get two horses at a dollar a head?"

That done it. I be dog if he wasn't nigh as smart as Flem Snopes. He hadn't no more than got the words outen his mouth before here was Henry Armstid, waving his hand. "Three dollars," Henry says. Mrs. Armstid tried to hold him again. He knocked her hand off, shoving up to the gate post.

"Mister," Mrs. Armstid says, "we got chaps in the house and not corn to feed the stock. We got five dollars I earned my chaps a-weaving after dark, and him snoring in the bed. And he hain't no more despair."

"Henry bids three dollars," the Texas man says. "Raise him a dollar, Eck, and the horse is yours."

"Henry," Mrs. Armstid says.

“Raise him, Eck,” the Texas man says.

“Four dollars,” Eck says.

“Five dollars,” Henry says, shaking his fist. He shoved up right under the gate post. Mrs. Armstid was looking at the Texas man too.

“Mister,” she says, “if you take that five dollars I earned my chaps a-weaving for one of them things, it’ll be a curse onto you and yourn during all the time of man.”

But it wasn’t no stopping Henry. He had shoved up, waving his fist at the Texas man. He opened it; the money was in nickels and quarters, and one dollar bill that looked like a cow’s cud. “Five dollars,” he says. “And the man that raises it’ll have to beat my head off, or I’ll beat hisn.” “All right,” the Texas man says. “Five dollars is bid. But don’t you shake your hand at me.”

III

It taken till nigh sundown before the last one was sold. He got them hotted up once and the bidding got up to seven dollars and a quarter, but most of them went around three or four dollars, him setting on the gate post and picking the horses out one at a time by mouth-word, and Mrs. Littlejohn pumping up and down at the tub and stopping and coming to the fence for a while and going back to the tub again. She had done got done too, and the wash was hung on the line in the back yard, and we could smell supper cooking. Finally they was all sold; he swapped the last two and the wagon for a buckboard.

We was all kind of tired, but Henry Armstid looked more like a mad-dog than ever. When he bought, Mrs. Armstid had went back to the wagon, setting in it behind them two rabbit-sized, bone-pore mules, and the wagon itself looking like it would fall all to pieces soon as the mules moved. Henry hadn’t even waited to pull it outen the road; it was still in the middle of the road and her setting in it, not looking at nothing, ever since this morning.

Henry was right up against the gate. He went up to the Texas man. "I bought a horse and I paid cash," Henry says. "And yet you expect me to stand around here until they are all sold before I can get my horse. I'm going to take my horse outen that lot."

The Texas man looked at Henry. He talked like he might have been asking for a cup of coffee at the table. "Take your horse," he says. Then Henry quit looking at the Texas man. He begun to swallow, holding onto the gate. "Ain't you going to help me?" he says. "It ain't my horse," the Texas man says.

Henry never looked at the Texas man again, he never looked at nobody. "Who'll help me catch my horse?" he says. Never nobody said nothing. "Bring the plowline," Henry says. Mrs. Armstid got outen the wagon and brought the plowline. The Texas man got down offen the post. The woman made to pass him, carrying the rope. "Don't you go in there, missus," the Texas man says.

Henry opened the gate. He didn't look back. "Come on here," he says. "Don't you go in there, missus," the Texas man says. Mrs. Armstid wasn't looking at nobody, neither, with her hands across her middle, holding the rope. "I reckon I better," she says. Her and Henry went into the lot. The horses broke and run. Henry and Mrs. Armstid followed.

"Get him into the corner," Henry says. They got Henry's horse cornered finally, and Henry taken the rope, but Mrs. Armstid let the horse get out. They hemmed it up again, but Mrs. Armstid let it get out again, and Henry turned and hit her with the rope. "Why didn't you head him back?" Henry says. He hit her again. "Why didn't you?" It was about that time I looked around and see Flem Snopes standing there.

It was the Texas man that done something. He moved fast for a big man. He caught the rope before Henry could hit the third time, and Henry whirled and made like he would jump at the Texas man. But he never jumped. The Texas man went and taken Henry's arm and led him outen the lot. Mrs. Armstid come behind them and the Texas man

taken some money outen his pocket and he give it into Mrs. Armstid's hand. "Get him into the wagon and take him on home," the Texas man says, like he might have been telling them he enjoyed his supper. Then here come Flem. "What's that for, Buck?" Flem says.

"Thinks he bought one of them ponies," the Texas man says. "Get him on away, missus."

But Henry wouldn't go. "Give him back that money," he says. "I bought that horse and I aim to have him if I have to shoot him."

And there was Flem, standing there with his hands in his pockets, chewing, like he had just happened to be passing.

"You take your money and I take my horse," Henry says. "Give it back to him," he says to Mrs. Armstid.

"You don't own no horse of mine," the Texas man says. "Get him on home, missus."

Then Henry seen Flem. "You got something to do with these horses," he says. "I bought one. Here's the money for it." He taken the bill outen Mrs. Armstid's hand. He offered it to Flem. "I bought one. Ask him. Here. Here's the money," he says, giving the bill to Flem.

When Flem taken the money, the Texas man dropped the rope he had snatched outen Henry's hand. He had done sent Eck Snopes's boy up to the store for another box of gingersnaps, and he taken the box outen his pocket and looked into it. It was empty and he dropped it on the ground. "Mr. Snopes will have your money for you to-morrow," he says to Mrs. Armstid. "You can get it from him to-morrow. He don't own no horse. You get him into the wagon and get him on home." Mrs. Armstid went back to the wagon and got in. "Where's that ere buckboard I bought?" the Texas man says. It was after sundown then. And then Mrs. Littlejohn come out on the porch and rung the supper bell.

IV

I come on in and et supper. Mrs. Littlejohn would bring in a pan of bread or something, then she would go out to the porch a minute and come back and tell us. The Texas man had hitched his team to the

buckboard he had swapped them last two horses for, and him and Flem had gone, and then she told that the rest of them that never had ropes had went back to the store with I. O. Snopes to get some ropes, and wasn't nobody at the gate but Henry Armstid, and Mrs. Armstid setting in the wagon in the road, and Eck Snopes and that boy of hisn.

"I don't care how many of them fool men gets killed by them things," Mrs. Littlejohn says, "but I ain't going to let Eck Snopes take that boy into that lot again." So she went down to the gate, but she come back without the boy or Eck neither.

"It ain't no need to worry about that boy," I says. "He's charmed." He was right behind Eck last night when Eck went to help feed them. The whole drove of them jumped clean over that boy's head and never touched him. It was Eck that touched him. Eck snatched him into the wagon and taken a rope and frailed the tar outen him.

So I had done et and went to my room and was undressing, long as I had a long trip to make next day; I was trying to sell a machine to Mrs. Bundren up past Whiteleaf; when Henry Armstid opened that gate and went in by hissself. They couldn't make him wait for the balance of them to get back with their ropes. Eck Snopes said he tried to make Henry wait, but Henry wouldn't do it.

Eck said Henry walked right up to them and that when they broke, they run clean over Henry like a hay-mow breaking down. Eck said he snatched that boy of hisn out of the way just in time and that them things went through that gate like a creek flood and into the wagons and teams hitched side the road, busting wagon tongues and snapping harness like it was fishing-line, with Mrs. Armstid still setting in their wagon in the middle of it like something carved outen wood. Then they scattered, wild horses and tame mules with pieces of harness and single trees dangling offen them, both ways up and down the road.

"There goes ourn, paw!" Eck says his boy said. "There it goes, into Mrs. Littlejohn's house." Eck says it run right up the steps and into the house like a boarder late for supper. I reckon so. Anyway, I was in my room, in

my underclothes, with one sock on and one sock in my hand, leaning out the window when the commotion busted out, when I heard something run into the melodeon in the hall; it sounded like a railroad engine.

Then the door to my room come sailing in like when you throw a tin bucket top into the wind and I looked over my shoulder and see something that looked like a fourteen-foot pinwheel a-blaring its eyes at me. It had to blare them fast, because I was already done jumped out the window.

I reckon it was anxious, too. I reckon it hadn't never seen barbed wire or shell corn before, but I know it hadn't never seen underclothes before, or maybe it was a sewing-machine agent it hadn't never seen. Anyway, it swirled and turned to run back up the hall and outen the house, when it met Eck Snopes and that boy just coming in, carrying a rope.

It swirled again and run down the hall and out the back door just in time to meet Mrs. Littlejohn. She had just gathered up the clothes she had washed, and she was coming onto the back porch with a armful of washing in one hand and a scrubbing-board in the other, when the horse skidded up to her, trying to stop and swirl again. It never taken Mrs. Littlejohn no time a-tall.

"Git outen here, you son," she says. She hit it across the face with the scrubbing-board; that ere scrubbing-board split as neat as ere a axe could have done it, and when the horse swirled to run back up the hall, she hit it again with what was left of the scrubbing-board, not on the head this time. "And stay out," she says.

Eck and that boy was half-way down the hall by this time. I reckon that horse looked like a pinwheel to Eck too. "Git to hell outen here, Ad!" Eck says. Only there wasn't time. Eck dropped flat on his face, but the boy never moved. The boy was about a yard tall maybe, in overhalls just like Eck's; that horse swoared over his head without touching a hair.

I saw that, because I was just coming back up the front steps, still carrying that ere sock and still in my underclothes, when the horse come onto the porch again. It taken one look at me and swirled again and run to the end of the porch and jumped the banisters and the lot fence like a hen-hawk and lit in the lot running and went out the gate again and jumped eight or ten upside-down wagons and went on down the road. It was a full moon then. Mrs. Armstid was still setting in the wagon like she had done been carved outen wood and left there and forgot.

That horse. It ain't never missed a lick. It was going about forty miles a hour when it come to the bridge over the creek. It would have had a clear road, but it so happened that Vernon Tull was already using the bridge when it got there. He was coming back from town; he hadn't heard about the auction; him and his wife and three daughters and Mrs. Tull's aunt, all setting in chairs in the wagon bed, and all asleep, including the mules.

They waked up when the horse hit the bridge one time, but Tull said the first he knew was when the mules tried to turn the wagon around in the middle of the bridge and he seen that spotted varmint run right twixt the mules and run up the wagon tongue like a squirrel. He said he just had time to hit it across the face with his whip-stock, because about that time the mules turned the wagon around on that ere one-way bridge and that horse clumb across one of the mules and jumped down onto the bridge again and went on, with Vernon standing up in the wagon and kicking at it.

Tull said the mules turned in the harness and clumb back into the wagon too, with Tull trying to beat them out again, with the reins wrapped around his wrist. After that he says all he seen was overturned chairs and womenfolks' legs and white drawers shining in the moonlight, and his mules and that spotted horse going on up the road like a ghost.

The mules jerked Tull outen the wagon and drug him a spell on the bridge before the reins broke. They thought at first that he was dead, and while they was kneeling around him, picking the bridge splinters outen him, here come Eck and that boy, still carrying the rope. They was running and breathing a little hard. "Where'd he go?" Eck says.

V

I went back and got my pants and shirt and shoes on just in time to go and help get Henry Armstid outen the trash in the lot. I be dog if he didn't look like he was dead, with his head hanging back and his teeth showing in the moonlight, and a little rim of white under his eyelids. We could still hear them horses, here and there; hadn't none of them got more than four-five miles away yet, not knowing the country, I reckon. So we could hear them and folks yelling now and then: "Whooey. Head him!"

We toted Henry into Mrs. Littlejohn's. She was in the hall; she hadn't put down the armful of clothes. She taken one look at us, and she laid down the busted scrubbing-board and taken up the lamp and opened a empty door. "Bring him in here," she says.

We toted him in and laid him on the bed. Mrs. Littlejohn set the lamp on the dresser, still carrying the clothes. "I'll declare, you men," she says. Our shadows was way up the wall, tiptoeing too; we could hear ourselves breathing. "Better get his wife," Mrs. Littlejohn says. She went out, carrying the clothes.

"I reckon we had," Quick says. "Go get her, somebody."

"Whyn't you go?" Winterbottom says.

"Let Ernest git her," Durley says. "He lives neighbors with them."

Ernest went to fetch her. I be dog if Henry didn't look like he was dead. Mrs. Littlejohn come back, with a kettle and some towels. She went to work on Henry, and then Mrs. Armstid and Ernest come in. Mrs. Armstid come to the foot of the bed and stood there, with her hands

rolled into her apron, watching what Mrs. Littlejohn was doing, I reckon.

“You men git outen the way,” Mrs. Littlejohn says. “Git outside,” she says. “See if you can’t find something else to play with that will kill some more of you.”

“Is he dead?” Winterbottom says.

“It ain’t your fault if he ain’t,” Mrs. Littlejohn says. “Go tell Will Varner to come up here. I reckon a man ain’t so different from a mule, come long come short. Except maybe a mule’s got more sense.”

We went to get Uncle Billy. It was a full moon. We could hear them, now and then, four mile away: “Whooey. Head him.” The country was full of them, one on ever wooden bridge in the land, running across it like thunder: “Whooey. There he goes. Head him.”

We hadn’t got far before Henry begun to scream. I reckon Mrs. Littlejohn’s water had brung him to; anyway, he wasn’t dead. We went on to Uncle Billy’s. The house was dark. We called to him, and after a while the window opened and Uncle Billy put his head out, peart as a peckerwood, listening.

“Are they still trying to catch them durn rabbits?” he says.

He come down, with his britches on over his night-shirt and his suspenders dangling, carrying his horse-doctoring grip. “Yes, sir,” he says, cocking his head like a woodpecker; “they’re still a-trying.”

We could hear Henry before we reached Mrs. Littlejohn’s. He was going Ah-Ah-Ah. We stopped in the yard. Uncle Billy went on in. We could hear Henry. We stood in the yard, hearing them on the bridges, this-a-way and that: “Whooey. Whooey.”

“Eck Snopes ought to caught hisn,” Ernest says.

“Looks like he ought,” Winterbottom said.

Henry was going Ah-Ah-Ah steady in the house; then he begun to scream. "Uncle Billy's started," Quick says. We looked into the hall. We could see the light where the door was. Then Mrs. Littlejohn come out.

"Will needs some help," she says. "You, Ernest. You'll do." Ernest went into the house.

"Hear them?" Quick said. "That one was on Four Mile bridge." We could hear them; it sounded like thunder a long way off; it didn't last long:

"Whooley."

We could hear Henry: "Ah-Ah-Ah-Ah-Ah."

"They are both started now," Winterbottom says. "Ernest too."

That was early in the night. Which was a good thing, because it taken a long night for folks to chase them things right and for Henry to lay there and holler, being as Uncle Billy never had none of this here chloxyfoam to set Henry's leg with. So it was considerate in Flem to get them started early. And what do you reckon Flem's comment was? That's right. Nothing. Because he wasn't there. Hadn't nobody see him since that Texas man left.

VI

That was Saturday night. I reckon Mrs. Armstid got home about daylight, to see about the chaps. I don't know where they thought her and Henry was. But lucky the oldest one was a gal, about twelve, big enough to take care of the little ones. Which she did for the next two days. Mrs. Armstid would nurse Henry all night and work in the kitchen for her and Henry's keep, and in the afternoon she would drive home (it was about four miles) to see to the chaps. She would cook up a pot of victuals and leave it on the stove, and the gal would bar the house and keep the little ones quiet. I would hear Mrs. Littlejohn and Mrs. Armstid talking in the kitchen. "How are the chaps making out?" Mrs. Littlejohn says.

"All right," Mrs. Armstid says.

“Don’t they git skeered at night?” Mrs. Littlejohn says.

“Ina May bars the door when I leave,” Mrs. Armstid says. “She’s got the axe in bed with her. I reckon she can make out.”

I reckon they did. And I reckon Mrs. Armstid was waiting for Flem to come back to town; hadn’t nobody seen him until this morning; to get her money the Texas man said Flem was keeping for her. Sho. I reckon she was.

Anyway, I heard Mrs. Armstid and Mrs. Littlejohn talking in the kitchen this morning while I was eating breakfast. Mrs. Littlejohn had just told Mrs. Armstid that Flem was in town. “You can ask him for that five dollars,” Mrs. Littlejohn says.

“You reckon he’ll give it to me?” Mrs. Armstid says.

Mrs. Littlejohn was washing dishes, washing them like a man, like they was made out of iron. “No,” she says. “But asking him won’t do no hurt. It might shame him. I don’t reckon it will, but it might.”

“If he wouldn’t give it back, it ain’t no use to ask,” Mrs. Armstid says.

“Suit yourself,” Mrs. Littlejohn says. “It’s your money.”

I could hear the dishes.

“Do you reckon he might give it back to me?” Mrs. Armstid says. “That Texas man said he would. He said I could get it from Mr. Snopes later.”

“Then go and ask him for it,” Mrs. Littlejohn says.

I could hear the dishes.

“He won’t give it back to me,” Mrs. Armstid says.

“All right,” Mrs. Littlejohn says. “Don’t ask him for it, then.”

I could hear the dishes; Mrs. Armstid was helping. “You don’t reckon he would, do you?” she says. Mrs. Littlejohn never said nothing. It sounded like she was throwing the dishes at one another. “Maybe I better go and talk to Henry about it,” Mrs. Armstid says.

“I would,” Mrs. Littlejohn says. I be dog if it didn’t sound like she had two plates in her hands, beating them together. “Then Henry can buy

another five-dollar horse with it. Maybe he'll buy one next time that will out and out kill him. If I thought that, I'd give you back the money, myself."

"I reckon I better talk to him first," Mrs. Armstid said. Then it sounded like Mrs. Littlejohn taken up all the dishes and throwed them at the cook-stove, and I come away.

That was this morning. I had been up to Bundren's and back, and I thought that things would have kind of settled down. So after breakfast, I went up to the store. And there was Flem, setting in the store-chair and whittling, like he might not have ever moved since he come to clerk for Jody Varner. I. O. was leaning in the door, in his shirt sleeves and with his hair parted too, same as Flem was before he turned the clerking job over to I. O. It's a funny thing about them Snopes: they all looks alike, yet there ain't ere a two of them that claims brothers.

They're always just cousins, like Flem and Eck and Flem and I. O. Eck was there too, squatting against the wall, him and that boy, eating cheese and crackers outen a sack; they told me that Eck hadn't been home a-tall. And that Lon Quick hadn't got back to town, even.

He followed his horse clean down to Samson's Bridge, with a wagon and a camp outfit. Eck finally caught one of hisn. It run into a blind lane at Freeman's and Eck and the boy taken and tied their rope across the end of the lane, about three foot high. The horse come to the end of the lane and whirled and run back without ever stopping. Eck says it never seen the rope a-tall. He says it looked just like one of these here Christmas pinwheels. "Didn't it try to run again?" I says.

"No," Eck says, eating a bite of cheese offen his knife blade. "Just kicked some."

"Kicked some?" I says.

"It broke its neck," Eck says.

Well, they was squatting there, about six of them, talking, talking at Flem; never nobody knowed yet if Flem had ere a interest in them horses or not. So finally I come right out and asked him. "Flem's done skun all of us so much," I says, "that we're proud of him. Come on, Flem," I says, "how much did you and that Texas man make offen them horses? You can tell us. Ain't nobody here but Eck that bought one of them; the others ain't got back to town yet, and Eck's your own cousin; he'll be proud to hear, too. How much did you-all make?"

They was all whittling, not looking at Flem, making like they was studying. But you could a heard a pin drop. And I. O. He had been rubbing his back up and down on the door, but he stopped now, watching Flem like a pointing dog. Flem finished cutting the sliver offen his stick. He spit across the porch, into the road. " 'Twarn't none of my horses," he says.

I. O. cackled, like a hen, slapping his legs with both hands. "You boys might just as well quit trying to get ahead of Flem," he said. Well, about that time I see Mrs. Armstid come outen Mrs. Littlejohn's gate, coming up the road. I never said nothing. I says, "Well, if a man can't take care of himself in a trade, he can't blame the man that trims him."

Flem never said nothing, trimming at the stick. He hadn't seen Mrs. Armstid. "Yes, sir," I says. "A fellow like Henry Armstid ain't got nobody but hisself to blame."

"Course he ain't," I. O. says. He ain't seen her, neither. "Henry Armstid's a born fool. Always is been. If Flem hadn't a got his money, somebody else would."

We looked at Flem. He never moved. Mrs. Armstid come on up the road.

"That's right," I says. "But, come to think of it, Henry never bought no horse." We looked at Flem; you could a heard a match drop. "That Texas man told her to get that five dollars back from Flem next day. I reckon Flem's done already taken that money to Mrs. Littlejohn's and give it to Mrs. Armstid."

We watched Flem. I. O. quit rubbing his back against the door again. After a while Flem raised his head and spit across the porch, into the dust. I. O. cackled, just like a hen. "Ain't he a beating fellow, now?" I. O. says.

Mrs. Armstid was getting closer, so I kept on talking, watching to see if Flem would look up and see her. But he never looked up. I went on talking about Tull, about how he was going to sue Flem, and Flem setting there, whittling his stick, not saying nothing else after he said they wasn't none of his horses.

Then I. O. happened to look around. He seen Mrs. Armstid. "Psssst!" he says. Flem looked up. "Here she comes!" I. O. says. "Go out the back. I'll tell her you done went in to town to-day."

But Flem never moved. He just set there, whittling, and we watched Mrs. Armstid come up onto the porch, in that ere faded sunbonnet and wrapper and them tennis shoes that made a kind of hissing noise on the porch. She come onto the porch and stopped, her hands rolled into her dress in front, not looking at nothing.

"He said Saturday," she says, "that he wouldn't sell Henry no horse. He said I could get the money from you."

Flem looked up. The knife never stopped. It went on trimming off a sliver same as if he was watching it. "He taken that money off with him when he left," Flem says.

Mrs. Armstid never looked at nothing. We never looked at her, neither, except that boy of Eck's. He had a half-et cracker in his hand, watching her, chewing.

"He said Henry hadn't bought no horse," Mrs. Armstid says. "He said for me to get the money from you today."

"I reckon he forgot about it," Flem said. "He taken that money off with him Saturday." He whittled again. I. O. kept on rubbing his back, slow. He licked his lips. After a while the woman looked up the road, where it went on up the hill, toward the graveyard. She looked up that way for a

while, with that boy of Eck's watching her and I. O. rubbing his back slow against the door. Then she turned back toward the steps.

"I reckon it's time to get dinner started," she says.

"How's Henry this morning, Mrs. Armstid?" Winterbottom says.

She looked at Winterbottom; she almost stopped. "He's resting, I thank you kindly," she says.

Flem got up, outen the chair, putting his knife away. He spit across the porch. "Wait a minute, Mrs. Armstid," he says. She stopped again. She didn't look at him. Flem went on into the store, with I. O. done quit rubbing his back now, with his head craned after Flem, and Mrs. Armstid standing there with her hands rolled into her dress, not looking at nothing.

A wagon come up the road and passed; it was Freeman, on the way to town. Then Flem come out again, with I. O. still watching him. Flem had one of these little striped sacks of Jody Varner's candy; I bet he still owes Jody that nickel, too. He put the sack into Mrs. Armstid's hand, like he would have put it into a hollow stump. He spit again across the porch. "A little sweetening for the chaps," he says.

"You're right kind," Mrs. Armstid says. She held the sack of candy in her hand, not looking at nothing. Eck's boy was watching the sack, the half-et cracker in his hand; he wasn't chewing now. He watched Mrs. Armstid roll the sack into her apron. "I reckon I better get on back and help with dinner," she says. She turned and went back across the porch. Flem set down in the chair again and opened his knife. He spit across the porch again, past Mrs.

Armstid where she hadn't went down the steps yet. Then she went on, in that ere sunbonnet and wrapper all the same color, back down the road toward Mrs. Littlejohn's. You couldn't see her dress move, like a natural woman walking. She looked like a old snag still standing up and moving along on a high water. We watched her turn in at Mrs. Littlejohn's and go outen sight. Flem was whittling. I. O. begun to rub his back on the door. Then he begun to cackle, just like a durn hen.

“You boys might just as well quit trying,” I. O. says. “You can’t git ahead of Flem. You can’t touch him. Ain’t he a sight, now?”

I be dog if he ain’t. If I had brung a herd of wild cattymounts into town and sold them to my neighbors and kinfolks, they would have lynched me. Yes, sir.

The End

The Hound, William Faulkner

The Hound

Harper’s, August 1931. Later revised for ‘The Hamlet’

TO COTTON THE shot was the loudest thing he had ever heard in his life. It was too loud to be heard all at once. It continued to build up about the thicket, the dim, faint road, long after the hammerlike blow of the ten-gage shotgun had shocked into his shoulder and long after the smoke of the black powder with which it was charged had dissolved, and after the maddened horse had whirled twice and then turned galloping, diminishing, the empty stirrups clashing against the empty saddle.

It made too much noise. It was outrageous, unbelievable — a gun which he had owned for twenty years. It stunned him with amazed outrage, seeming to press him down into the thicket, so that when he could make the second shot, it was too late and the hound too was gone.

Then he wanted to run. He had expected that. He had coached himself the night before. “Right after it you’ll want to run,” he told himself. “But you can’t run. You got to finish it. You got to clean it up. It will be hard, but you got to do it. You got to set there in the bushes and shut your eyes and count slow until you can make to finish it.”

He did that. He laid the gun down and sat where he had lain behind the log. His eyes were closed. He counted slowly, until he had stopped shaking and until the sound of the gun and the echo of the galloping horse had died out of his ears. He had chosen his place well. It was a quiet road, little used, marked not once in three months save by that departed horse; a short cut between the house where the owner of the horse lived and Varner's store; a quiet, fading, grass-grown trace along the edge of the river bottom, empty save for the two of them, the one squatting in the bushes, the other lying on his face in the road.

Cotton was a bachelor. He lived in a chinked log cabin floored with clay on the edge of the bottom, four miles away. It was dusk when he reached home. In the well-house at the back he drew water and washed his shoes. They were not muddier than usual, and he did not wear them save in severe weather, but he washed them carefully. Then he cleaned the shotgun and washed it too, barrel and stock; why, he could not have said, since he had never heard of finger prints, and immediately afterward he picked up the gun again and carried it into the house and put it away. He kept firewood, a handful of charred pine knots, in the chimney corner.

He built a fire on the clay hearth and cooked his supper and ate and went to bed. He slept on a quilt pallet on the floor; he went to bed by barring the door and removing his overalls and lying down. It was dark after the fire burned out; he lay in the darkness. He thought about nothing at all save that he did not expect to sleep. He felt no triumph, vindication, nothing. He just lay there, thinking about nothing at all, even when he began to hear the dog. Usually at night he would hear dogs, single dogs ranging alone in the bottom, or coon- or cat-hunting packs. Having nothing else to do, his life, his heredity, and his heritage centered within a five-mile radius of Varner's store.

He knew almost any dog he would hear by its voice, as he knew almost any man he would hear by his voice. He knew this dog's voice. It and the galloping horse with the flapping stirrups and the owner of the horse had been inseparable: where he saw one of them, the other two

would not be far away — a lean, rangy brute that charged savagely at anyone who approached its master's house, with something of the master's certitude and overbearance; and to-day was not the first time he had tried to kill it, though only now did he know why he had not gone through with it. "I never knowed my own luck," he said to himself, lying on the pallet. "I never knowed. If I had went ahead and killed it, killed the dog...."

He was still not triumphant. It was too soon yet to be proud, vindicated. It was too soon. It had to do with death. He did not believe that a man could pick up and move that irrevocable distance at a moment's notice. He had completely forgotten about the body. So he lay with his gaunt, underfed body empty with waiting, thinking of nothing at all, listening to the dog. The cries came at measured intervals, timbrous, sourceless, with the sad, peaceful, abject quality of a single hound in the darkness, when suddenly he found himself sitting bolt upright on the pallet.

"Nigger talk," he said. He had heard (he had never known a negro himself, because of the antipathy, the economic jealousy, between his kind and negroes) how negroes claimed that a dog would howl at the recent grave of its master. "Hit's nigger talk," he said all the time he was putting on his overalls and his recently cleaned shoes. He opened the door. From the dark river bottom below the hill on which the cabin sat the howling of the dog came, bell-like and mournful. From a nail just inside the door he took down a coiled plowline and descended the slope.

Against the dark wall of the jungle fireflies winked and drifted; from beyond the black wall came the booming and grunting of frogs. When he entered the timber he could not see his own hand. The footing was treacherous with slime and creepers and bramble. They possessed the perversity of inanimate things, seeming to spring out of the darkness and clutch him with spiky tentacles. From the musing impenetrability ahead the voice of the hound came steadily. He followed the sound, muddy again; the air was chill, yet he was sweating. He was quite near the sound. The hound ceased. He plunged forward, his teeth drying under his dry lip, his hands clawed and blind, toward the ceased sound,

the faint phosphorescent glare of the dog's eyes. The eyes vanished. He stopped, panting, stooped, the plowline in his hand, looking for the eyes. He cursed the dog, his voice a dry whisper. He could hear silence but nothing else.

He crawled on hands and knees, telling where he was by the shape of the trees on the sky. After a time, the brambles raking and slashing at his face, he found a shallow ditch. It was rank with rotted leaves; he waded ankle-deep in the pitch darkness, in something not earth and not water, his elbow crooked before his face. He stumbled upon something; an object with a slack feel. When he touched it, something gave a choked, infantlike cry, and he started back, hearing the creature scuttle away. "Just a possum," he said. "Hit was just a possum."

He wiped his hands on his flanks in order to pick up the shoulders. His flanks were foul with slime. He wiped his hands on his shirt, across his breast, then he picked up the shoulders. He walked backward, dragging it. From time to time he would stop and wipe his hands on his shirt. He stopped beside a tree, a rotting cypress shell, topless, about ten feet tall. He had put the coiled plowline into his bosom. He knotted it about the body and climbed the stump. The top was open, rotted out. He was not a large man, not as large as the body, yet he hauled it up to him hand over hand, bumping and scraping it along the stump, until it lay across the lip like a half-filled meal sack. The knot in the rope had slipped tight. At last he took out his knife and cut the rope and tumbled the body into the hollow stump.

It didn't fall far. He shoved at it, feeling around it with his hands for the obstruction; he tied the rope about the stub of a limb and held the end of it in his hands and stood on the body and began to jump up and down upon it, whereupon it fled suddenly beneath him and left him dangling on the rope.

He tried to climb the rope, rasping off with his knuckles the rotten fiber, a faint, damp powder of decay like snuff in his nostrils. He heard the stub about which the rope was tied crack and felt it begin to give. He leaped upward from nothing, scrabbling at the rotten wood, and got

one hand over the edge. The wood crumbled beneath his fingers; he climbed perpetually without an inch of gain, his mouth cracked upon his teeth, his eyes glaring at the sky.

The wood stopped crumbling. He dangled by his hands, breathing. He drew himself up and straddled the edge. He sat there for a while. Then he climbed down and leaned against the hollow trunk.

When he reached his cabin he was tired, spent. He had never been so tired. He stopped at the door. Fireflies still blew along the dark band of timber, and owls hooted and the frogs still boomed and grunted. "I ain't never been so tired," he said, leaning against the house, the wall which he had built log by log. "Like ever thing had got outen hand. Climbing that stump, and the noise that shot made. Like I had got to be somebody else without knowing it, in a place where noise was louder, climbing harder to climb, without knowing it." He went to bed. He took off the muddy shoes, the overalls, and lay down; it was late then. He could tell by a summer star that came into the square window at two o'clock and after.

Then, as if it had waited for him to get settled and comfortable, the hound began to howl again. Lying in the dark, he heard the first cry come up from the river bottom, mournful, timbrous, profound.

Five men in overalls squatted against the wall of Varner's store. Cotton made the sixth. He sat on the top step, his back against a gnawed post which supported the wooden awning of the veranda. The seventh man sat in the single splint chair; a fat, slow man in denim trousers and a collarless white shirt, smoking a cob pipe. He was past middle-age. He was sheriff of the county. The man about whom they were talking was named Houston.

"He hadn't no reason to run off," one said. "To disappear. To send his horse back home with a empty saddle. He hadn't no reason. Owing his own land, his house. Making a good crop ever year. He was as well-fixed as ere a man in the county. A bachelor too. He hadn't no reason

to disappear. You can mark it. He never run. I don't know what; but Houston never run."

"I don't know," a second said. "You can't tell what a man has got in his mind. Houston might a had reason that we don't know, for making it look like something had happened to him. For clearing outen the country and leaving it to look like something had happened to him.

It's been done before. Folks before him has had reason to light out for Texas with a changed name."

Cotton sat a little below their eyes, his face lowered beneath his worn, stained, shabby hat. He was whittling at a stick, a piece of pine board.

"But a fellow can't disappear without leaving no trace," a third said.

"Can he, Sheriff?"

"Well, I don't know," the Sheriff said. He removed the cob pipe and spat neatly across the porch into the dust. "You can't tell what a man will do when he's pinched. Except it will be something you never thought of. Never counted on. But if you can find just what pinched him you can pretty well tell what he done."

"Houston was smart enough to do ere a thing he taken a notion to," the second said. "If he'd wanted to disappear, I reckon we'd a known about what we know now."

"And what's that?" the third said.

"Nothing," the second said.

"That's a fact," the first said. "Houston was a secret man."

"He wasn't the only secret man around here," a fourth said. To Cotton it sounded sudden, since the fourth man had said no word before. He sat against the post, his hat slanted forward so that his face was invisible, believing that he could feel their eyes. He watched the sliver peel slow and smooth from the stick, ahead of his worn knife-blade. "I got to say something," he told himself.

“He warn’t no smarter than nobody else,” he said. Then he wished he had not spoken. He could see their feet beneath his hat-brim. He trimmed the stick, watching the knife, the steady sliver. “It’s got to trim off smooth,” he told himself. “It don’t dast to break.” He was talking; he could hear his voice: “Swelling around like he was the biggest man in the county.

Setting that ere dog on folks’ stock.” He believed that he could feel their eyes, watching their feet, watching the sliver trim smooth and thin and unhurried beneath the knife blade. Suddenly he thought about the gun, the loud crash, the jarring shock. “Maybe I’ll have to kill them all,” he said to himself — a mild man in worn overalls, with a gaunt face and lack-luster eyes like a sick man, whittling a stick with a thin hand, thinking about killing them.

“Not them; just the words, the talk.” But the talk was familiar, the intonation, the gestures; but so was Houston. He had known Houston all his life: that prosperous and overbearing man. “With a dog,” Cotton said, watching the knife return and bite into another sliver. “A dog that et better than me. I work, and eat worse than his dog. If I had been his dog, I would not have ... We’re better off without him,” he said, blurted. He could feel their eyes, sober, intent.

“He always did rile Ernest,” the first said.

“He taken advantage of me,” Cotton said, watching the infallible knife.

“He taken advantage of ever man he could.”

“He was a overbearing man,” the Sheriff said.

Cotton believed that they were still watching him, hidden behind their detached voices.

“Smart, though,” the third said.

“He wasn’t smart enough to win that suit against Ernest over that hog.”

“That’s so. How much did Ernest get outen that lawing? He ain’t never told, has he?”

Cotton believed that they knew how much he had got from the suit. The hog had come into his lot one October. He penned it up; he tried by

inquiry to find the owner. But none claimed it until he had wintered it on his corn. In the spring Houston claimed the hog. They went to court. Houston was awarded the hog, though he was assessed a sum for the wintering of it, and one dollar as pound-fee for a stray. "I reckon that's Ernest's business," the Sheriff said after a time.

Again Cotton heard himself talking, blurting. "It was a dollar," he said, watching his knuckles whiten about the knife handle. "One dollar." He was trying to make his mouth stop talking. "After all I taken offen him...."

"Juries does queer things," the Sheriff said, "in little matters. But in big matters they're mostly right."

Cotton whittled, steady and deliberate. "At first you'll want to run," he told himself. "But you got to finish it. You got to count a hundred, if it needs, and finish it."

"I heard that dog again last night," the third said.

"You did?" the Sheriff said.

"It ain't been home since the day the horse come in with the saddle empty," the first said.

"It's out hunting, I reckon," the Sheriff said. "It'll come in when it gets hungry."

Cotton trimmed at the stick. He did not move.

"Niggers claim a hound'll howl till a dead body's found," the second said.

"I've heard that," the Sheriff said. After a time a car came up and the Sheriff got into it. The car was driven by a deputy. "We'll be late for supper," the Sheriff said. The car mounted the hill; the sound died away. It was getting toward sundown.

"He ain't much bothered," the third said.

"Why should he be?" the first said. "After all, a man can leave his house and go on a trip without telling everybody."

“Looks like he’d a unsaddled that mare, though,” the second said. “And there’s something the matter with that dog. It ain’t been home since, and it ain’t treed. I been hearing it ever night. It ain’t treed. It’s howling. It ain’t been home since Tuesday. And that was the day Houston rid away from the store here on that mare.”

Cotton was the last one to leave the store. It was after dark when he reached home. He ate some cold bread and loaded the shotgun and sat beside the open door until the hound began to howl. Then he descended the hill and entered the bottom.

The dog’s voice guided him; after a while it ceased, and he saw its eyes. They were now motionless; in the red glare of the explosion he saw the beast entire in sharp relief. He saw it in the act of leaping into the ensuing welter of darkness; he heard the thud of its body. But he couldn’t find it. He looked carefully, quartering back and forth, stopping to listen.

But he had seen the shot strike it and hurl it backward, and he turned aside for about a hundred yards in the pitch darkness and came to a slough. He flung the shotgun into it, hearing the sluggish splash, watching the vague water break and recover, until the last ripple died. He went home and to bed.

He didn’t go to sleep though, although he knew he would not hear the dog. “It’s dead,” he told himself, lying on his quilt pallet in the dark. “I saw the bullets knock it down. I could count the shot. The dog is dead.” But still he did not sleep. He did not need sleep; he did not feel tired or stale in the mornings, though he knew it was not the dog. He knew he would not hear the dog again, and that sleep had nothing to do with the dog. So he took to spending the nights sitting up in a chair in the door, watching the fireflies and listening to the frogs and the owls.

He entered Varner’s store. It was in mid-afternoon; the porch was empty, save for the clerk, whose name was Snopes. “Been looking for you for two-three days,” Snopes said. “Come inside.”

Cotton entered. The store smelled of cheese and leather and new earth. Snopes went behind the counter and reached from under the counter a shotgun. It was caked with mud. "This is yourn, ain't it?" Snopes said. "Vernon Tull said it was. A nigger squirl hunter found it in a slough."

Cotton came to the counter and looked at the gun. He did not touch it; he just looked at it. "It ain't mine," he said.

"Ain't nobody around here got one of them old Hadley ten-gages except you," Snopes said. "Tull says it's yourn."

"It ain't none of mine," Cotton said. "I got one like it. But mine's to home."

Snopes lifted the gun. He breeched it. "It had one empty and one load in it," he said. "Who you reckon it belongs to?"

"I don't know," Cotton said. "Mine's to home." He had come to purchase food. He bought it: crackers, cheese, a tin of sardines. It was not dark when he reached home, yet he opened the sardines and ate his supper. When he lay down he did not even remove his overalls. It was as though he waited for something, stayed dressed to move and go at once. He was still waiting for whatever it was when the window turned gray and then yellow and then blue; when, framed by the square window, he saw against the fresh morning a single soaring speck. By sunrise there were three of them, and then seven.

All that day he watched them gather, wheeling and wheeling, drawing their concentric black circles, watching the lower ones wheel down and down and disappear below the trees. He thought it was the dog.

"They'll be through by noon," he said. "It wasn't a big dog."

When noon came they had not gone away; there were still more of them, while still the lower ones dropped down and disappeared below the trees. He watched them until dark came, until they went away, flapping singly and sluggishly up from beyond the trees. "I got to eat," he said. "With the work I got to do to-night." He went to the hearth and knelt and took up a pine knot, and he was kneeling, nursing a match

into flame, when he heard the hound again; the cry deep, timbrous, unmistakable, and sad. He cooked his supper and ate.

With his axe in his hand he descended through his meager corn patch. The cries of the hound could have guided him, but he did not need it. He had not reached the bottom before he believed that his nose was guiding him. The dog still howled. He paid it no attention, until the beast sensed him and ceased, as it had done before; again he saw its eyes. He paid no attention to them. He went to the hollow cypress trunk and swung his axe into it, the axe sinking helve-deep into the rotten wood. While he was tugging at it something flowed silent and savage out of the darkness behind him and struck him a slashing blow.

The axe had just come free; he fell with the axe in his hand, feeling the hot reek of the dog's breath on his face and hearing the click of its teeth as he struck it down with his free hand. It leaped again; he saw its eyes now. He was on his knees, the axe raised in both hands now. He swung it, hitting nothing, feeling nothing; he saw the dog's eyes, crouched. He rushed at the eyes; they vanished. He waited a moment, but heard nothing. He returned to the tree.

At the first stroke of the axe the dog sprang at him again. He was expecting it, so he whirled and struck with the axe at the two eyes and felt the axe strike something and whirl from his hands. He heard the dog whimper, he could hear it crawling away. On his hands and knees he hunted for the axe until he found it.

He began to chop at the base of the stump, stopping between blows to listen. But he heard nothing, saw nothing. Overhead the stars were swinging slowly past; he saw the one that looked into his window at two o'clock. He began to chop steadily at the base of the stump.

The wood was rotten; the axe sank helve-deep at each stroke, as into sand or mud; suddenly Cotton knew that it was not imagination he smelled. He dropped the axe and began to tear at the rotten wood with his hands. The hound was beside him, whimpering; he did not know it

was there, not even when it thrust its head into the opening, crowding against him, howling.

“Git away,” he said, still without being conscious that it was the dog. He dragged at the body, feeling it slough upon its own bones, as though it were too large for itself; he turned his face away, his teeth glared, his breath furious and outraged and restrained. He could feel the dog surge against his legs, its head in the orifice, howling.

When the body came free, Cotton went over backward. He lay on his back on the wet ground, looking up at a faint patch of starry sky. “I ain’t never been so tired,” he said. The dog was howling, with an abject steadiness. “Shut up,” Cotton said. “Hush. Hush.” The dog didn’t hush. “It’ll be daylight soon,” Cotton said to himself. “I got to get up.”

He got up and kicked at the dog. It moved away, but when he stooped and took hold of the legs and began to back away, the dog was there again, moaning to itself. When he would stop to rest, the dog would howl again; again he kicked at it. Then it began to be dawn, the trees coming spectral and vast out of the miasmatic darkness. He could see the dog plainly. It was gaunt, thin, with a long bloody gash across its face.

“I’ll have to get shut of you,” he said. Watching the dog, he stooped and found a stick. It was rotten, foul with slime. He clutched it. When the hound lifted its muzzle to howl, he struck. The dog whirled; there was a long fresh scar running from shoulder to flank. It leaped at him, without a sound; he struck again. The stick took it fair between the eyes. He picked up the ankles and tried to run.

It was almost light. When he broke through the undergrowth upon the river bank the channel was invisible; a long bank of what looked like cotton batting, though he could hear the water beneath it somewhere. There was a freshness here; the edges of the mist licked into curling tongues. He stooped and lifted the body and hurled it into the bank of mist. At the instant of vanishing he saw it — a sluggish sprawl of three limbs instead of four, and he knew why it had been so hard to free from the stump.

“I’ll have to make another trip,” he said; then he heard a pattering rush behind him. He didn’t have time to turn when the hound struck him and knocked him down. It didn’t pause. Lying on his back, he saw it in midair like a bird, vanish into the mist with a single short, choking cry.

He got to his feet and ran. He stumbled and caught himself and ran again. It was full light. He could see the stump and the black hole which he had chopped in it; behind him he could hear the swift, soft feet of the dog. As it sprang at him he stumbled and fell and saw it soar over him, its eyes like two cigar-coals; it whirled and leaped at him again before he could rise.

He struck at its face with his bare hands and began to run. Together they reached the tree. It leaped at him again, slashing his arm as he ducked into the tree, seeking that member of the body which he did not know was missing until after he had released it into the mist, feeling the dog surging about his legs. Then the dog was gone. Then a voice said:

“We got him. You can come out, Ernest.”

The countyseat was fourteen miles away. They drove to it in a battered Ford. On the back seat Cotton and the Sheriff sat, their inside wrists locked together by handcuffs. They had to drive for two miles before they reached the highroad. It was hot, ten o’clock in the morning. “You want to swap sides out of the sun?” the Sheriff said.

“I’m all right,” Cotton said.

At two o’clock they had a puncture. Cotton and the Sheriff sat under a tree while the driver and the second deputy went across a field and returned with a glass jar of buttermilk and some cold food. They ate, repaired the tire, and went on.

When they were within three or four miles of town, they began to pass wagons and cars going home from market day in town, the wagon teams plodding homeward in their own inescapable dust. The Sheriff greeted them with a single gesture of his fat arm. “Home for supper,

anyway," he said. "What's the matter, Ernest? Feeling sick? Here, Joe; pull up a minute."

"I'll hold my head out," Cotton said. "Never mind." The car went on. Cotton thrust his head out the V strut of the top stanchion. The Sheriff shifted his arm, giving him play. "Go on," Cotton said, "I'll be all right."

The car went on. Cotton slipped a little farther down in the seat. By moving his head a little he could wedge his throat into the apex of the iron V, the uprights gripping his jaws beneath the ears. He shifted again until his head was tight in the vise, then he swung his legs over the door, trying to bring the weight of his body sharply down against his imprisoned neck. He could hear his vertebrae; he felt a kind of rage at his own toughness; he was struggling then against the jerk on the manacle, the hands on him.

Then he was lying on his back beside the road, with water on his face and in his mouth, though he could not swallow. He couldn't speak, trying to curse, cursing in no voice. Then he was in the car again, on the smooth street where children played in the big, shady yards in small bright garments, and men and women went home toward supper, to plates of food and cups of coffee in the long twilight of summer.

They had a doctor for him in his cell. When the doctor had gone he could smell supper cooking somewhere — ham and hot bread and coffee. He was lying on a cot; the last ray of copper sunlight slid through a narrow window, stippling the bars upon the wall above his head. His cell was near the common room, where the minor prisoners lived, the ones who were in jail for minor offenses or for three meals a day; the stairway from below came up into that room.

It was occupied for the time by a group of negroes from the chain-gang that worked the streets, in jail for vagrancy or for selling a little whiskey or shooting craps for ten or fifteen cents. One of the negroes was at the window above the street, yelling down to someone. The others talked among themselves, their voices rich and murmurous, mellow and

singsong. Cotton rose and went to the door of his cell and held to the bars, looking at the negroes.

“Hit,” he said. His voice made no sound. He put his hand to his throat; he produced a dry croaking sound, at which the negroes ceased talking and looked at him, their eyeballs rolling. “It was all right,” Cotton said, “until it started coming to pieces on me. I could a handled that dog.” He held his throat, his voice harsh, dry, and croaking. “But it started coming to pieces on me....”

“Who him?” one of the negroes said. They whispered among themselves, watching him, their eyeballs white in the dusk.

“It would a been all right,” Cotton said, “but it started coming to pieces....”

“Hush up, white man,” one of the negroes said. “Don’t you be telling us no truck like that.”

“Hit would a been all right,” Cotton said, his voice harsh, whispering. Then it failed him again altogether. He held to the bars with one hand, holding his throat with the other, while the negroes watched him, huddled, their eyeballs white and sober.

Then with one accord they turned and rushed across the room, toward the staircase; he heard slow steps and then he smelled food, and he clung to the bars, trying to see the stairs. “Are they going to feed them niggers before they feed a white man?” he said, smelling the coffee and the ham.

The End

Lizards in Jamshyd’s Courtyard, William Faulkner

Lizards in Jamshyd’s Courtyard

Saturday Evening Post, February 1932. Later revised for 'The Hamlet'

I

ALONG TOWARD MID-AFTERNOON the wagons, the saddle horses and mules would begin to arrive. From both directions they came up the valley, each in its own slow dust, with a quality profound and dramatic, like the painted barge which they hauled across the stage in Ben Hur.

They came, slow, deliberate, behind the bobbing mule ears, with upon their occupants — the men, the women, the young and the old — a quality not festive, since it was too profoundly undivergent, but of holiday, of escape and of immolation like that of people going to the theater to see tragedy, to turn from the broad valley highway into the old road, the peaceful and healing scar.

So peaceful the road was, so healed of the old scars of man's old restlessness, that almost with the turning the road appeared to have run immediately into another land, another world; the weathered wagons, the plow-galled mules, the men and the women in overalls and awkward gingham, into another time, another afternoon without time or name.

For almost sixty years the road had been unmarked by wheel or hoof, so that now, where the sand darkened into the shallow water of the branch, the recent thick marks of rims and iron shoes were as startling as shouts in a church.

Beyond the branch, where there was now no trace of the vanished bridge, the road began to mount. It ran straight as a plumb line, bordered by a shaggy hedgerow of spaced cedars three and four feet thick now, the boughs locked and massed now, mounting to where, out of a jungle of formal cedars, a fading dilapidation of broad formal grounds and gardens, the gaunt and austere skeleton of a huge house lifted its broken roof and topless chimneys.

It was known as the Old Frenchman's place, after its builder, who had straightened the river bed and reclaimed four thousand acres of jungle bottom land for his slaves to raise cotton on — a huge square house which the anonymous builder's nameless and unrecorded successors had been pulling down for firewood since the Civil War, set in grounds laid out by an imported English architect a hundred years ago, upon a knoll overlooking the broad acres parceled now into small shiftless farms among his shiftless and illiterate heirs at large.

They did not even remember his name. They did not know for certain if his anonymous dust lay with that of his blood and of the progenitors of saxophone players in Harlem honky-tonks, beneath the weathered and illegible headstones on a smaller knoll four hundred yards away.

All that was left of him was the old mark of the river bed, and the road, and the skeleton of the house, and the legend of the gold which his slaves buried somewhere when Grant passed through the land on his Vicksburg campaign; so that for sixty years three generations of sons and grandsons, lurking into the place at night and on foot, had turned under the original surface time and again, hunting for the gold and the silver, the money and the plate.

The place was owned now by Varner, who was the principal landowner of the community; he had bought it for the taxes and kept it under the same condition.

The fresh tracks did not go on as far as the house. They went on to where, beside and along the fence to what had once been a garden, the wagons themselves stood and drew up in turn and stopped. The women kept their seats on the splint chairs in the wagon beds.

The men, though, descended and went to the fence and leaned there where the earlier arrivals already stood, watching the man who was digging in the garden. He was digging alone, spading the earth steadily down the slope toward the ditch, working with a certain unflagging fury. He had been digging there for a week. His name was Henry Armstid.

They had been watching him for a week, coming by wagon and on horse and mule back for ten miles, to gather, with lips full of snuff, along the fence with the decorum of a formal reception, the rapt and static interest of a crowd watching a magician at a fair. On the first day, when the first rider descended and came to the fence, Armstid turned and ran at him with the lifted shovel, cursing in a harsh, light whisper, and drove the man away.

But he had quit that, and he appeared to be not even aware of them as on the successive days they gathered along the fence, talking a little among themselves in sparse syllables, watching Armstid spade the surface of the garden steadily down the slope toward the ditch, working steadily back and forth across the hillside.

Along toward sundown they would begin to watch the road, until sometime before dark the last wagon would arrive. It contained a single occupant; a weathered and patched wagon drawn by two rabbit-like mules, creaking terrifically on crazy and dishing wheels.

Then the spectators would stop talking and they would turn and watch quietly while the occupant, a woman in a gray shapeless garment and a faded sunbonnet, descended and lifted down a tin pail and approached the fence beyond which Armstid still had not looked up, had not faltered in his labor.

She would set the pail into the corner of the fence and then stand there for a time, motionless, the gray garment falling in rigid folds to her stained tennis shoes, her hands rolled together into a fold of the garment. She just stood there. She did not appear to look at Armstid, to look at anything. She was his wife; the pail she brought contained cold food.

She never stayed long. He never looked up when she came and they never spoke, and after a while she would return to the crazy wagon and get in and drive away. Then the spectators would begin to drift away, mounting their wagons and creaking also supperward, barnward,

leaving Henry alone again, spading himself into the waxing twilight with the regularity of a mechanical toy and with something monstrous in his unflagging effort, as if the toy were too light for what it had been set to do, and too tightly wound.

In the long forenoons, squatting with their slow tobacco on the porch of Varner's store two miles away, or in halted wagons along the quiet roads and lanes, or in the fields or at the cabin doors about the slow, laborious land, they talked about it.

"Still at it, is he?"

"Sho. Still at it."

"Reckon he's aiming to kill himself there in that garden."

"Well, it won't be no loss to her."

"It's a fact. Save her a trip ever' day, toting him food."

"I notice she don't never stay long out there when she comes."

"She has to get back home to get supper for them chaps of theirs and to take care of the stock."

"I reckon she won't be sorry."

"Sho. It's a fact."

"That Flem Snopes. I'll declare."

"He's a sight, sho. Yes, sir. Wouldn't no other man but him done it."

"Couldn't no other man done it. Anybody might a-fooled Henry Armstid. But couldn't nobody but Flem a-fooled Suratt."

"That's a fact, that's a fact. Sho."

II

Suratt was a sewing-machine agent. He traveled the country in a buckboard, to the rear of which was attached a sheet-iron dog kennel painted to resemble a house. It had two painted windows on each side, in each of which a painted woman's face simpered above a painted sewing machine, and into the kennel a sewing machine neatly fitted.

On successive days and two counties apart, the buckboard and the sturdy mismatched team might be seen tethered in the nearest shade, and Suratt's affable, ready face and neat, tieless blue shirt one of the squatting group on the porch of a crossroads store. Or — and still squatting — among the women surrounded by laden clotheslines and blackened wash pots at springs and wells, or decorous in a splint chair in cabin dooryards, talking and listening.

He had a regular itinerary, selling perhaps three machines a year, and the rest of the time trading in land and livestock, in secondhand farm tools and musical instruments, or whatever came to his hand. He had an affable and impenetrable volubility, a gift for anecdote and gossip. He never forgot names and he knew everyone, man, mule and dog, in fifty miles. He was believed to be well fixed.

His itinerary brought him to Varner's store every six weeks. One day he arrived two weeks ahead of schedule. While across the county he had bought, for twenty dollars, of a Northerner who was establishing a ranch to breed native goats, a contract to sell the Northerner a hundred goats which Suratt knew to be owned near Varner's store, in the Frenchman's Bend country.

Of the four or five men squatting along the porch of the store Suratt made his guarded inquiries, larding them skillfully into his anecdote, and got the information which he wanted. The next morning he drove out to the first goat owner.

"Wish you'd got here yesterday," the man said. "I done already sold them goats."

"The devil you have," Suratt said. "Who to?"

"Flem Snopes."

"Flem Snopes?"

Snopes was the man who ran Varner's store. Varner himself — he was a politician, a veterinary, a Methodist lay preacher — was hardly ever

seen about the store. Snopes had been running the store for two or three years — a squat man who might have been any age between twenty-five and fifty, with a round full face and dull eyes, who sat all day, between the infrequent customers, in a tilted chair in the door, chewing and whittling and saying no word.

All that was known of him was known on hearsay, and that not his own; it was not even known what his exact relation to Varner and the store was, whether clerk, partner or what. He had been sitting in his usual chair, chewing and whittling, while Suratt was getting his information about the goats.

“He come out here last night and bought all I had,” the goat owner said. “You mean, he come out here after dark?”

“About nine o’clock it was. I reckon he couldn’t leave the store sooner.” “Sho,” Suratt said. “I reckon not.” The second goat owner lived four miles away. Suratt drove it in thirty-two minutes. “I come out to see if you sold your goats at ten o’clock last night, or was it half-past ten?”

“Why, yes,” the man said. “It was along about midnight when Flem got here. How did you know?”

“I knowed I had the best team,” Suratt said. “That’s how. Good-by.”

“What’s your hurry? I got a couple of shotes I might sell.”

“Sho, now,” Suratt said. “They wouldn’t do me no good. Soon as they belonged to me they would get elephant-sized overnight, and bust. This here country’s too rich for me.”

He did not call on the other goat owner at all. He returned to Jefferson without passing Varner’s store. Three miles from town, a single goat balanced with somnolent precariousness upon the roof of a barn. Beside the fence a small boy in overalls watched Suratt draw up and stop.

“What did Flem Snopes offer you for that goat, bud?” Suratt said.

“Sir?” the boy said.

Suratt drove on. Three days later Snopes gave Suratt twenty-one dollars for the contract for which Suratt had paid twenty. He put the twenty dollars away in a tobacco sack and held the other dollar in his hand. He chuckled it, caught it, the squatting men along the wall watching him. Snopes had sat again, whittling.

“Well, at least I ain’t skunked.” Suratt said. The others guffawed, save Snopes. Suratt looked about at them, bleak, sardonic, humorous too. Two children, a boy and a girl, mounted the steps, carrying a basket. Suratt gave them the dollar. “Here, chillens,” he said. “Here’s something Mr. Snopes sent you.”

It was three years after that when Suratt learned that Snopes had bought the Old Frenchman place from Varner. Suratt knew the place. He knew it better than anyone suspected. Perhaps once a year he drove three or four miles out of his way to pass the place, entering from the back. Why he took that precaution he could not have said; he probably would have believed it was not to be seen doing something by which he had no expectation of gaining anything.

Once a year he halted his buckboard before the house and sat in the buckboard to contemplate the austere skeleton somnolent in the summer sunlight, a little sinister, thinking of the generations of men who had dug for gold there, contemplating the inscrutable desolation of cedar and brier and crapemyrtle and calycanthus gone lush and wild, sensing out of the sunny and sinister silence the ancient spent and hopeful lusts, the optimism, the effluvium of the defunct greed and despair, the spent and secret nocturnal sweat left upon the place by men as quiet now as the man who had unwittingly left behind him a monument more enduring than any obituary either carved or cast.

“It’s bound to be there, somewhere,” Suratt told himself. “It’s bound to.” Then he would drive on to Varner’s store two miles away or to Jefferson twelve miles away, having carried away with him something of that ancient air, that old splendor, confusing it though he did with the fleshly gratifications, the wherewith to possess them, in his

peasant's mind. "It's bound to. Folks wouldn't keep on digging for it if it wasn't there somewhere. It wouldn't be right to keep on letting them. No, sir."

When he learned that Snopes had bought the place, Suratt was eating dinner in Jefferson in the restaurant which he and his brother-in-law owned. He sat on a backless and friction-smooth stool, his elbows on the friction-smooth counter, eating steak and potatoes. He became motionless, humped forward in the attitude of eating, the laden knife blade arrested halfway to his mouth, his eyes profoundly concentrant. "If Flem Snopes bought that place, he knows something about it that even Will Varner never knowed. Flem Snopes wouldn't buy a nickel mousetrap withouten he knowed beforehand it would make him back a dime."

He reached Varner's store in mid-afternoon. Snopes was sitting in the chair, chewing, whittling minutely at a piece of soft pine. There was about him, his white shirt, his blue denim trousers braced thick and smooth, a profound inertia impervious to haste like that of a cow, to the necessity for haste like an idol. "That's what makes me so mad about it," Suratt told himself. "That he can set still and know what I got to work so hard to find out.

That I got to work fast to learn it and ain't got time to work fast because I don't know if I got time to make a mistake by working fast. And him just setting still." But when he mounted the steps there was upon his brown, lean face its usual expression — alert, quizzical, pleasant, impenetrable and immediate. He greeted in rotation the men who squatted along the wall.

"Well, boys," he said, "I hear Flem has done bought himself a farm. You fixing to start a goat ranch of your own, Flem? Or maybe it's just a home for the folks you trims trading." Then he said, getting his sober and appreciative laugh while Snopes chewed slowly and trimmed minutely at the stick with the profound impenetrability of an idol or a cow, "Well, if Flem knowed any way to make anything offen that old place, he'd be too durn close-mouthed to tell himself about it."

The three men crouched in the weeds along the ditch at the foot of the garden. The shaggy slope rose before them in the darkness to the crest where the broken roof and topless chimneys of the house stood sharp against the sky. In one of the windows a single star showed, like a feeble candle set upon the ledge. They lay in the weeds, listening to the sigh and recover of an invisible shovel halfway up the garden slope.

“Didn’t I tell you?” Suratt whispered. “Didn’t I? Is there e’er a man or woman in this country that don’t know Flem Snopes wouldn’t pay a nickel for nothing if he didn’t know all the time he would make a dime back?”

“How do I know it’s Flem?” the second said. His name was Vernon Tull. He was a well-to-do bachelor.

“Ain’t I watched him?” Suratt said. “Ain’t I laid here in these weeds two nights now and watched him come out here and dig? Ain’t I waited until he left, and crawled up there and found every place where he had done filled the hole up again and smoothed the dirt back to hide it?”
“But how do I know it’s Flem?” Vernon said.

“If you knowed, would you believe it was something buried there?” Suratt whispered. The third man was Henry Armstid. He lay between them, glaring up the dark slope; they could feel him trembling like a dog. Now and then he cursed in a dry whisper. He lived on a small mortgaged farm, which he and his wife worked like two men.

During one season, having lost one of his mules, he and his wife did the plowing, working day about in the second trace beside the other mule. The land was either poor land or they were poor managers.

It made for them less than a bare living, which the wife eked out by weaving by the firelight after dark. She wove fancy objects of colored string saved from packages and of bits of cloth given her by the women

in Jefferson, where, in a faded gingham wrapper and sunbonnet and tennis shoes, she peddled the objects from door to door on the market days. They had four children, all under six years of age, the youngest an infant in arms.

They lay there in the weeds, the darkness, hearing the shovel. After a while it ceased. "He's done found it," Henry said. He surged suddenly between them. They grasped his arms.

"Stop!" Suratt whispered. "Stop! Help hold him, Vernon." They held him until he ceased and lay again between them, rigid, glaring, cursing. "He ain't found it yet." Suratt whispered.

"He knows it's there somewhere; he's done found the paper maybe that tells. But he's got to hunt for it same as we will. He knows it's in that 'ere garden, but he's got to hunt for it same as us. Ain't we done watched him?" They spoke in hissing whispers, rigid, panting, glaring up the starlit slope.

"How do I know it's Flem?" Vernon said.

"Just watch, that's all," Suratt whispered. They crouched; the shadowy, deliberate motion of the digger mounted the slope. It was the sound made by a lazy man rather than by a cautious one. Suratt gripped Henry. "Watch, now!" he whispered. They breathed with hissing exhalations, in passionate and dying sighs.

Then the man came into sight. For a moment he came into relief against the sky upon the crest of the knoll, as though he had paused there for an instant. "There!" Suratt whispered. "Ain't that Flem Snopes? Do you believe now?"

Vernon drew his breath quietly in like a man preparing to sleep. "It's a fact," he said. He spoke quietly, soberly. "It's Flem."

"Do you believe now?" Suratt whispered. "Do you? Do you believe now?" Between them, Henry lay cursing in a dry whisper. Beneath Vernon's and Suratt's arms his arms felt like wire cables vibrating faintly.

“All we got to do,” Suratt said, “is to find where it’s at tomorrow night, and then get it.”

“Tomorrow night, hell!” Henry said. “Let’s get up there now and find it. That’s what we got to do. Before he—”

They argued with him, violent, sibilant, expostulant. They held him flat on the ground between them, cursing. “We got to find where it is the first time and dig it up,” Suratt said. “We got to get Uncle Dick. Can’t you see that? Can’t you see we got to find it the first time? That we can’t be caught looking?”

“We got to get Uncle Dick,” Vernon said. “Hush, Henry. Hush, now.”

They returned the next night with Uncle Dick. When Vernon and Suratt, carrying the second shovel and the pick and half carrying Uncle Dick between them, climbed up out of the ditch at the foot of the garden, they could hear Henry already digging.

After concealing the buckboard in the branch bottom they had had to run to keep even within hearing of Henry, and so Uncle Dick could not yet stand alone. Yet they released him at once, whereupon he sank to the ground at their feet, from where his invisible breathing rose in reedy gasps, and as one Vernon and Suratt glared into the darkness toward the hushed, furious sound of Henry’s shovel.

“We got to make him quit until Uncle Dick’s ready,” Suratt said. They ran toward the sound, shoulder to shoulder in the stumbling dark. Suratt spoke to Henry. Henry did not cease to dig. Suratt grasped at the shovel. Henry whirled, the shovel raised like an ax; they glared at each other, their faces strained with sleeplessness and weariness and lust. It was Suratt’s fourth night without having removed his clothes; Vernon’s and Henry’s second.

“Touch it,” Henry whispered. “Touch it.”

“Wait, Henry,” Suratt said. “Let Uncle Dick find where it’s at.”

“Get away,” Henry said. “I warn you. Get outen my hole.”

Uncle Dick was sitting up when Suratt and Vernon returned running and plunged down beside him and began to scabble in the dark weeds for the second shovel. Suratt found the pick and learned the blade with his hand in one motion and flung it behind him into the darkness again, and plunged down again just as Vernon found the shovel. They struggled for it, their breathing harsh, mute, repressed. "Leave go," Suratt whispered. "Leave go." They clutched the shovel between them. Out of the darkness came the unflagging sound of Henry's digging.

"Wait," Uncle Dick said. He got stiffly to his feet — a shriveled little old man in a filthy frock coat, with a long white beard. Between sunup and sundown Suratt, seventy-two hours without having removed his clothes, drove thirty miles to fetch him from where he lived alone in a mud-daubed hut in a cane swamp.

He had no other name, and he antedated all who knew him. He made and sold nostrums and charms, and they said that he ate not only frogs and snakes but bugs as well — anything that he could catch. "Wait," he said in a reedy, quavering voice. "Ther air anger in the yearth. Ye must make that 'ere un quit a-bruisin' hit, so the Lord kin show whar hit's hid at."

"That's so," Suratt said. "It won't work unless the ground is quiet. I forgot."

When they approached, Henry stood erect in his pit and threatened them with the shovel and cursed them, but Uncle Dick walked up and touched him.

"Ye kin dig and ye kin dig, young man," he said. "Fer what's rendered to the yearth, the yearth will keep withouten the will of the Lord air revealed."

Henry desisted then and lowered the shovel. Uncle Dick drove them back to the ditch. From his coat he produced a forked peach branch, from the end of which, dangling on a bit of string, swung an empty brass cartridge containing a gold-filled human tooth. He held them

there for five minutes, stooping now and then to lay his hand flat on the ground.

Then with the three of them at his heels — Henry rigid, silent; Suratt and Vernon speaking now and then in short, hissing whispers — he went to the fence corner and grasped the two prongs of the branch in his hands and stood there for a moment, muttering to himself.

They moved like a procession, with something at once outrageously pagan and orthodoxly funereal about them, working slowly back and forth across the garden, mounting the slope in overlapping traverses. Near the spot where they had watched the man digging last night Uncle Dick began to slow. The others clumped at his back, breathing with thick, tense breaths. “Tech my elbers,” Uncle Dick said. They did so. Inside his sleeves his arms — arms thin and frail and dead as rotten wood — were jerking a little.

Henry began to curse, pointless. Uncle Dick stopped; when they jarred into him they felt his whole thin body straining. Suratt made a sound with his mouth and touched the twig and found it curved into a rigid down-pointing bar, the string taut as wire. Uncle Dick staggered; his arms sprang free. The twig lay dead at his feet until Henry, digging furiously with his bare hands, flung it away. He was still cursing. He was cursing the ground, the earth.

They got the tools and began to dig, swiftly, hurling the dirt aside, while Uncle Dick, shapeless in his shapeless garment, appeared to muse upon them with detached interest. Suddenly the three of them became utterly still in their attitudes, then they leaped into the hole and struggled silently over something.

“Stop it!” Suratt whispered. “Stop it! Ain’t we all three pardners alike?”

But Henry clung to the object and at last Vernon and Suratt desisted and stood away. Henry was half stooped, clutching the object to his middle, glaring at them.

“Let him keep it,” Vernon said. “Don’t you know that ain’t all? Come here, Uncle Dick.”

Uncle Dick was motionless behind them. His head was turned toward the ditch, toward where they had hidden. "What?" Suratt whispered. They were all three motionless, rigid, stooped a little. "Do you see something? Is it somebody hiding yonder?"

"I feel four bloods lust-running," Uncle Dick said. "Hit's four sets of blood here lusting for dross."

They crouched, rigid. "Well, ain't it four of us right here?" Vernon said.

"Uncle Dick don't care nothing about money," Suratt said. "If it's somebody hiding there—"

They were running then, the tools clutched, plunging and stumbling down the slope.

"Kill him," Henry said. "Watch every bush and kill him."

"No," Suratt said, "catch him first."

They halted at the ditch bank. They could hear Henry beating along the ditch. But they found nothing.

"Maybe Uncle Dick never seen nobody," Vernon said.

"He's gone, anyway," Suratt said. "Maybe it—" He ceased. He and Vernon stared at each other; above their held breath they heard the horse. It was going at a gallop, the sound clear but faint, diminishing. Then it ceased. They stared at each other in the darkness, across their breath. "That means we got till daylight," Suratt said. "Come on."

Twice more Uncle Dick's twig sprang and bent; twice more they exhumed small bulging canvas sacks solid and unmistakable even in the dark.

"Now," Suratt said, "we got a hole apiece and till daylight to do it in. Dig, boys."

When the east began to gray they had found nothing more. At last they made Henry see reason and quit, and they filled up the holes and removed the traces of their labor. They opened the bags in the gray light. Vernon's and Suratt's contained each twenty-five silver dollars. Henry wouldn't tell what his contained. He crouched over it some

distance away, his back toward them. Vernon and Suratt closed the sacks and looked at each other quietly, their blood cool now with weariness, with sleeplessness and fatigue.

“We got to buy it,” Suratt said. “We got to buy it tomorrow.”

“You mean today,” Vernon said. Beneath a tree, in the wan light, Uncle Dick lay sleeping. He slept quiet as a child, not even snoring.

“That’s right,” Suratt said. “It’s today now.”

IV

When at noon the next day Suratt drove up to the store, there was a stranger squatting among the others on the porch. His name was Eustace Grimm, from the adjoining county — a youngish man, also in overalls, with a snuff stick in his mouth. Snopes sat in the tilted chair in the doorway, whittling.

Suratt descended and tethered his team. “Morning, gentlemen,” he said.

They replied. “Be durn if you don’t look like you ain’t been to bed in a week, Suratt,” one said. “What you up to now? Lon Quick said his boy seen your team hid out in the bottom below Armstid’s two mornings ago, but I told him I didn’t reckon them horses had done nothing to hide from. I wasn’t so sho about you, I told him.”

Suratt joined the laugh readily. “I reckon not. I reckon I’m still smart enough to not be caught by nobody around here except Flem Snopes. ‘Course I take a back seat for Flem.” He mounted the steps. Snopes had not looked up. Suratt looked briefly from face to face, his gaze pausing for an instant at Eustace Grimm, then going on. “To tell the truth, I am getting pretty durn tired of traipsing all over the country to make a living. Be durn if I ain’t sometimes a good mind to buy me a piece of land and settle down like folks.”

“You might buy that Old What-you-call-it place from Flem,” Grimm said. He was watching Suratt. Suratt looked at him. When he spoke his tone was immediate, far superior to merely casual.

“That’s a fact. I might do that.” He looked at Grimm. “What you doing way up here, Eustace? Ain’t you strayed a right smart?”

“I come up to see if I couldn’t trade Flem outen—”

Snopes spoke. His voice was not cold so much as utterly devoid of any inflection. “Reckon you better get on to dinner, Eustace,” he said. “Mrs. Littlejohn’ll be ringing the bell soon. She don’t like to be kept waiting.”

Grimm looked at Snopes, his mouth still slacked for talk. He rose. Suratt looked at Snopes, too, who had not raised his head from his whittling. Suratt looked at Grimm again. Grimm had closed his mouth. He was moving toward the steps.

“If it’s goats you’re aiming to trade Flem for,” Suratt said, “I can warn you to look out.”

The others laughed, sober, appreciative. Grimm descended the steps. “That depends on how smart the fellow is that trades with Flem,” he said. “I reckon Flem don’t only need goats—”

“Tell her I’ll be there in ten minutes,” Snopes said. Again Grimm paused, looking back, his mouth slacked for speech; again he closed it.

“All right,” he said. He went on. Suratt watched him. Then he looked at Snopes.

“Flem,” he said, “you sholy ain’t going to unload that Old Frenchman place on a poor fellow like Eustace Grimm? Boys, we hadn’t ought to stand for it. I reckon Eustace has worked pretty hard for every cent he’s got, and he won’t be no match for Flem.”

Snopes whittled with tedious deliberation, his jaw thrusting steadily.

“Of course, a smart fellow like Flem might make something offen that old place, but Eustace now — Let me tell you what I heard about one of them Grimms down there last month; it might be Eustace they tell it

on.” He achieved his anecdote skillfully above the guffaws. When he had finished it Snopes rose, putting his knife away. He crossed the porch, waddling thickly in his denim trousers braced neatly over his white shirt, and descended the steps. Suratt watched him.

“If it’s that time, I reckon I better move too,” Suratt said. “Might have to go into town this evening.” He descended the steps. Snopes had gone on. “Here, Flem,” Suratt said. “I’m going past Littlejohn’s. I’ll give you a free ride that far. Won’t cost you a cent.”

Again the squatting men on the porch guffawed, watching Suratt and Snopes like four or five boys twelve years old might watch and listen to two boys fourteen years old. Snopes stopped. He did not look back. He stood there, chewing with steady unhaste, until Suratt swung the buckboard up and cramped the wheel; then he got in. They drove on.

“So you done sold that old place,” Suratt said. They drove at a walk. Mrs. Littlejohn’s house was a quarter of a mile down the road. In the middle distance Eustace Grimm walked, his back toward them. “That ’ere Frenchman place,” Suratt said.

Snopes spat over the wheel. “Dickering,” he said.

“Oh,” Suratt said. “Can’t get Eustace to close with you?” They drove on. “What’s Eustace want with that place? I thought his folks owned a right smart of land down yonder.”

“Heard so,” Snopes said.

They drove on. Grimm’s figure was a little nearer. Suratt drew the team down to a slower walk. “Well, if a man just give what that old place is worth, I reckon most anybody could buy it.” They drove on. “Still, for a man that just wanted a place to settle down, a fellow that depended on outside work for his living—”

Snopes spat over the wheel.

“Yes, sir,” Suratt said. “For a fellow that just aimed to fix him up a home, say. Like me. A fellow like that might give you two hundred for it. Just the house and garden and orchard, say.” The red dust coiled slow

beneath the slow hoofs and wheels. Grimm had almost reached Mrs. Littlejohn's gate. "What would you take for that much of it?"

"Don't aim to sell unless I sell the whole place," Snopes said. "Ain't in no rush to sell that."

"Yes?" Suratt said. "What was you asking Eustace Grimm for the whole place?"

"Ain't asked him nothing yet. Just listened to him."

"Well, what would you ask me, say?"

"Three thousand," Snopes said.

"Three which?" Suratt said. He laughed, slapping his leg. He laughed for some time. "If you ain't a sight. Three thousand." They drove on. Grimm had reached Mrs. Littlejohn's gate. Suratt quit laughing. "Well, I hope you get it. If Eustace can't quite meet that, I might could find you a buyer at three hundred, if you get in a tight to sell."

"Ain't in no rush to sell," Snopes said. "I'll get out here." Grimm had paused at the gate. He was looking back at them from beneath his hat brim, with a gaze at once attentive and veiled.

That afternoon Suratt, Vernon and Henry made Snopes three joint notes for one thousand dollars each.

Vernon was good for his. Suratt gave a lien on his half of the restaurant which he and his brother-in-law owned in Jefferson. Henry gave a second mortgage on his farm and a chattel mortgage on his stock and fixtures, including a new stove which his wife had bought with her weaving money, and a mile of barbed-wire fence.

They reached their new property just before sundown. When they arrived a wagon, the mules still — or already — in the traces, stood on the lawn, and then Eustace Grimm came around the corner of the house and stood there, watching them. Henry ordered him off the place. He got into the wagon and they began to dig at once, though it was still light. They dug for some little time before they found that Grimm had not yet departed. He was sitting in the wagon in the road,

watching them across the fence, until Henry rushed at him with his shovel. Then he drove on.

Vernon and Suratt had stopped also. Vernon watched Grimm's back as he rattled on down the road in the slow wagon. "Ain't he some kin to them Snopeses?" Vernon said. "A in-law or something?"

"What?" Suratt said. They watched the wagon disappear in the dusk. "I didn't know that."

"Come on," Vernon said. "Henry's getting ahead of us." They began to dig again. It was dark soon, but they could still hear one another.

They dug steadily for two nights, two brief summer darks broken by the daylight intervals of fitful sleep on the bare floor of their house, where even to the ground floor the sunlight reached in patchy splashes at noon. In the sad light of the third dawn Suratt stopped and straightened his back. Twenty feet away, Henry, in his pit, moved up and down with the regularity of an automaton.

He was waist-deep, as though he were digging himself tirelessly into that earth whose born thrall he was; as though he had been severed at the waist, the dead torso laboring on in measured stoop and recover, not knowing that it was dead.

They had completely turned under the entire surface of the garden, and standing in the dark fresh loam, his muscles flinching and jerking with fatigue, Suratt watched Henry; and then he found that Vernon was watching him quietly in turn. Suratt laid his shovel carefully down and went to where Vernon stood. They stood looking at each other while the dawn grayed upon their gaunt faces. When they spoke their voices were quiet.

"You looked close at that money of yours yet?" Suratt said.

Vernon didn't answer at once. They watched Henry as he rose and fell behind his pick. "I don't reckon I dared to," Vernon said. He laid his tool carefully on the earth also, and together he and Suratt turned and went

to the house. It was still dark in the house, so they lit the lantern and took the two sacks from the hiding place in a chimney and set the lantern on the floor.

“I reckon we’d ought to thought it wouldn’t no cloth sack—” Suratt said.

“Sho,” Vernon said. “I reckon you can say that and leave off about the sack.”

They squatted, the lantern between them, opening the sacks. “Bet you a dollar I beat you,” Suratt said.

“All right,” Vernon said. They laid two coins aside and examined the others, one by one. Then they looked at each other. “1901,” Vernon said. “What you got?”

“1896,” Suratt said. “I beat you.”

“Yes,” Vernon said. “You beat me.” Suratt took up the wager and they hid the money again and blew the lantern out. It was lighter now, and they could see Henry quite well as he worked in his thigh-deep trench. Soon the sun; already three buzzards soared in it high against the yellow blue.

Henry did not look up at them when they reached him. “Henry,” Suratt said. Henry did not pause. “When was your oldest dollar minted, Henry?” Suratt said. Henry did not falter. Suratt came nearer and touched his shoulder. “Henry,” he said.

Henry whirled, raising the shovel, the blade turned edgewise, glinting a thin line of steel-colored dawn such as an ax would have.

“Git outen my hole,” he said. “Git outen hit.”

The End

Fool About a Horse, William Faulkner

Fool About a Horse

Scribner's, August 1936. Later revised for 'The Hamlet'

I

YES, SIR. It wasn't Pap that bought one horse from Pat Stamper and then sold two back to him. It was Mammy. Her and Pat jest used Pap to trade through. Because we never left home that morning with Mammy's cream separator money to trade horses with nobody.

And I reckon that if Pap had had any notion that he was fated to swap horses with Pat Stamper, they couldn't even have arrested him and taken him to town. We never even knowed it was Pat Stamper that had unloaded that horse on whoever it was Beasley Kemp got it from until we was halfway there.

Because Pap admitted he was a fool about a horse but it wasn't that kind of a fool he meant. And once he was away from our lot and the neighbor men looking through the fence at whatever it was Pap had traded some more of Old Man Anse Holland's bob-wire and busted tools for this time, and Pap lying to them to jest exactly the right amount about how old it was and how much he give for it; — once Pap was away from there I don't reckon he was even the kind of a fool about a horse that Mammy claimed he was when we come up to the house that noon after we had shut the gate on the horse we had jest traded outen Beasley Kemp, and Pap taken his shoes off on the front gallery for dinner and Mammy standing there in the door, shaking the cold skillet at Pap and scolding and railing and Pap saying, "Now Vynie; now Vynie.

I always was a fool about a good horse and it ain't no use you a-scolding and jawing about it. You had better thank the Lord that when He give me a eye for horse-flesh He give me a little judgment and gumption along with it."

Because it wasn't the horse. It wasn't the trade. It was a good trade, because Pap swapped Beasley a straight stock and fourteen rods of bob-wire and a old wore-out sorghum mill of Old Man Anse's for the horse, and Mammy admitted it was a good swap even for that horse, even for anything that could git up and walk from Beasley Kemp's lot to ourn by itself. Because like she said while she was shaking the skillet at Pap, even Pap couldn't git stung very bad in a horse trade because he never owned nothing that anybody would swap even a sorry horse for and even to him.

And it wasn't because me and Pap had left the plows down in the bottom piece where Mammy couldn't see them from the house, and snuck the wagon out the back way with the straight stock and the wire and the sorghum mill while she thought we were still in the field. It wasn't that.

It was like she knowed without having to be told what me and Pap never found out for a week yet: that Pat Stamper had owned that horse we traded outen Beasley Kemp and that now Pap had done caught the Pat Stamper sickness jest from touching it.

And I reckon she was right. Maybe to hisself Pap did call hisself the Pat Stamper of the Frenchman Bend country, or maybe even of all Beat Four. But I reckon that even when he was believing it the strongest, setting there on the top rail of the lot fence and the neighbor men coming up to lean on the fence and look at what Pap had brung home this time and Pap not bragging much and maybe not even lying much about it; I reckon that even then there was another part of his mind telling him he was safe to believe he was the Pat Stamper of Beat Four jest as long as he done it setting on that fence where it was about one chance in a million of Pat Stamper actually passing and stopping to put it to a test.

Because he wouldn't no more have set out to tangle with Pat Stamper than he would have set out to swap horses with a water moccasin. Probly if he had knowed that Pat Stamper ever owned that horse we

swapped outen Beasley, Pap wouldn't have traded for it at no price. But then, I reckon that a fellow who straggles by accident into where yellow fever or moccasins is, don't aim to ketch fever or snakebite neither.

But he sholy never aimed to tangle with Pat Stamper. When we started for town that morning with Beasley's horse and our mule in the wagon and that separator money that Mammy had been saving on for four years in Pap's pocket, we wasn't even thinking about horse trading, let alone about Pat Stamper, because we didn't know that Pat Stamper was in Jefferson and we didn't even know that he had owned the horse until we got to Varner's store. It was fate.

It was like the Lord Hissself had decided to spend Mammy's separator money for a horse; it would have had to been Him because wouldn't nobody else, leastways nobody that knowed Mammy, have risked doing it. Yes, sir. Pure fate. Though I will have to admit that fate picked a good, quick, willing hand when it picked Pap. Because it wasn't that kind of a fool about a horse that Pap meant he was.

No, sir. Not that kind of a fool. I reckon that while he was setting on the porch that morning when Mammy had done said her say for the time being and went back to the kitchen, and me done fetched the gourd of fresh water from the well, and the side meat plopping and hissing on the stove and Pap waiting to eat it and then go back down to the lot and set on the fence while the neighbor men come up in two's and three's to look at Pap's new horse, I reckon maybe in his own mind Pap not only knowed as much about horse trading as Pat Stamper, but he owned head for head as many of them as Old Man Anse hissself.

I reckon that while he would set there on the fence, jest moving enough to keep outen the sun, with them two empty plows standing in the furrow down in the bottom piece and Mammy watching him outen the back window and saying, "Horse trader! Setting there bragging and lying to a passel of shiftless men, and the weeds and morning glories climbing that thick in the corn and cotton that I am afraid to tote his dinner to him for fear of snakes"; I reckon Pap would look at whatever

it was he had traded the mail box or the winter corn or something else that maybe Old Man Anse had done forgot he owned or leastways might not miss, and he would say to hisself: "It's not only mine, but before God it's the prettiest drove of horses a man ever seen."

II

It was pure fate. When we left for town that morning with Mammy's separator money, Pap never even aimed to use Beasley's horse at all because he knowed it probably couldn't make no twelve-mile trip to Jefferson and get back the same day. He aimed to go up to Old Man Anse's and borrow one of his mules to work with ourn; it was Mammy herself that done it, taunted him about the piece of crowbait he had bought for a yard ornament until Pap said that by Godfrey he would show Mammy and all the rest of them that misdoubted he knowed a horse when he seen it, and so we went to the lot and put the new horse in the wagon with the mule.

We had been feeding it heavy as it would eat for a week now and it looked a heap better than it did the day we got it. But even yet it didn't look so good, though Pap decided it was the mule that showed it up so bad; that when it was the only horse or mule in sight, it didn't look so bad and that it was the standing beside something else on four legs that hurt its looks.

"If we jest had some way to hitch the mule under the wagon where it wouldn't show and jest leave the horse in sight, it would be fine," Pap said. But there wasn't no way to do that, so we jest done the best we could. It was a kind of doormat bay and so, with Pap standing about twenty foot away and squinching first one eye and then the other and saying, "Bear down on it. You got to git the hide hot to make the har shine," I polished it down with croker sacks the best I could.

Pap thought about feeding it a good bait of salt in some corn and then turning it to water and hide some of the ribs, only we knowed that we wouldn't even get to Jefferson in one day, let alone come back, besides having to stop at ever creek and load it up again. So we done the best

we could and then we started, with Mammy's separator money (it was twenty-seven dollars and sixty-five cents; it taken her four years to save it outen her egg- and quilt-money) tied up in a rag that she dared Pap to even open to count it before he handed it to Uncle Ike McCaslin at the store and had the separator in the wagon.

Yes, sir. Fate. The same fate that made Mammy taunt Pap into starting out with Beasley's horse; the same fate that made it a hot morning in July for us to start out on. Because when we left home that morning we wasn't even thinking about horse trading. We was thinking about horse, all right, because we were wondering if maybe we wasn't fixing to come back home that night with Beasley's horse riding in the wagon and me or Pap in the traces with the mule. Yes, sir.

Pap eased that team outen the lot at sunup and on down the road toward Frenchman's Bend as slow and careful as arra horse and mule ever moved in this world, with me and Pap walking up ever hill that was slanted enough to run water down the ruts, and aiming to do that right on into Jefferson. It was the weather, the hot day, that done it. Because here we was, about a mile from Varner's store, and Beasley's horse kind of half walking and half riding on the double tree, and Pap's face looking a little more and a little more concerned ever time our new horse failed to lift its feet high enough to make the next step, when all of a sudden that horse popped into a sweat.

It flung its head up like it had been teched with a hot poker and stepped up into the collar, teching the collar for the first time since the mule had taken the weight off the breast yoke when Pap'd shaken out the whip inside the lot; and so here we come down the last hill and up to Varner's store and that horse of Beasley's with its head up and blowing froth and its eyes white-rimmed like these here colored dinner plates and Pap sawing back on the reins, and I be dog if it not only hadn't sweated into as pretty a blood bay as you ever see, but even the ribs didn't seem to show so much.

And Pap, that had been talking about taking a back road so as to miss Varner's store altogether, setting there on the wagon seat exactly like

he would set on the lot fence where he knowed he would be safe from Pat Stamper, telling Jody Varner and them other men that Beasley's horse come from Kentucky. Jody Varner never even laughed.

"Kentucky, hey?" he says. "Sho, now. That explains why it taken it so long. Herman Short swapped Pat Stamper a buckboard and a set of harness for it five years ago, and Beasley Kemp give Herman eight dollars for it last summer. How much did you give Beasley? Fifty cents?"

That's what done it. From then on, it was automatic. It wasn't the horse, the trade. It was still a good trade, because in a sense you might say that all Pap give Beasley for it was the straight stock, since the bob-wire and the sorghum mill belonged to Old Man Anse. And it wasn't the harness and the buckboard that Herman Short give Pat Stamper: it was that eight dollars that Beasley give Herman. That's what rankled Pap.

Not that he held the eight dollars against Herman, because Herman had done already invested a buckboard and a set of harness. And besides, the eight dollars was still in the county, even if it was out of circulation, belonging to Herman Short, and so it didn't actually matter whether Herman had it or Beasley had it. It was Pat Stamper that rankled Pap.

When a man swaps horse for horse, that's one thing. But when cash money starts changing hands, that's something else; and when a stranger comes into the country and starts actual cash money jumping from hand to hand, it's like when a burglar breaks into your house and flings your clothes and truck from place to place even though he don't take nothing: it makes you mad.

So it was not jest to unload Beasley's horse back onto Pat Stamper. It was to get Beasley's eight dollars back outen Pat some way. And so it was jest pure fate that had Pat Stamper camped right on the road we would take to Jefferson on the very day when me and Pap went to get Mammy's separator.

So I reckon the rest of it don't even hardly need to be told, except as a kind of sidelight on how, when a man starts out to plan to do something, he jest thinks he is planning: that what he is actually doing

is giving the highball to misfortune, throwing open the switch and saying, "All right, Bad Luck; come right ahead." So here was Pat Stamper and that nigger magician of hisn camped in Hoke's pasture, right on the road we would have to pass to git to town, and here was Pap on the way to town with two live animals and twenty-seven dollars and sixty-five cents in cash, and feeling that the entire honor and pride of the science and pastime of horse trading in Yoknapatawpha County depended on him to vindicate it.

So the rest of it don't even need to be told. I don't need to tell whether me and Pap walked back home or not, because anybody that knows Pat Stamper knows that he never bought a horse or a mule outright in his life; that he swapped you something for it that could at least walk out of sight. So the only point that might interest you is, what was pulling the wagon when we got back home.

And what Mammy done when she said, "Where is my separator?" and Pap saying, "Now Vynie; now Vynie—" Yes, sir. When it come down to the trade, it wasn't Pat Stamper after all that Pap was swapping horses with. It was the demon rum.

Because he was desperate. After the first swap he was desperate. Before that he was jest mad, like when you dream you are right in the middle of the track and the train a-coming; it's right on you and you can't run or dodge because all of a sudden you realize you are running in sand and so after a while it don't even matter if the train catches you or not because all you can think about is being mad at the sand.

That's how Pap was. For ever mile we made toward Jefferson, the madder Pap got. It wasn't at Beasley's horse, because we nursed it on toward town the same way we nursed it to Varner's store until it begun to sweat. It was them eight cash dollars that that horse represented. I don't even recollect just when and where we found out that Pat Stamper was at Jefferson that day. It might have been at Varner's store.

Or it might have been that we never had to be told; that for Pap to carry out the fate that Mammy started when she taunted him about

Beasley's horse, Pat Stamper would jest have to be in Jefferson. Because Pap never even taken time to find out where Pat was camped, so that when we did roll into town we had done already swapped.

Yes, sir. We went up them long hills with Pap and me walking and Beasley's horse laying into the collar the best it could but with the mule doing most of the pulling and Pap walking on his side of the wagon and cussing Pat Stamper and Herman Short and Beasley Kemp and Jody Varner, and we went down the hills with Pap holding the wagon broke with a sapling pole so it wouldn't shove Beasley's horse through the collar and turn it wrong-side-outward like a sock and Pap still a-cussing Pat Stamper and Herman and Beasley and Varner, until we come to the three-mile bridge and Pap turned off the road and druv into the bushes and taken the mule outen the harness and knotted one rein so I could ride it and give me the quarter and told me to git for town and git the dime's worth of saltpeter and the nickel's worth of tar and the number ten fish hook.

So we didn't git to town until that afternoon. We went straight to Pat Stamper's camp in Hoke's pasture where I had done already passed it twice on the mule, with Beasley's horse laying into the collar sho enough now and its eyes looking nigh as wild as Pap's looked a hour later when we come outen McCaslin's back door with the separator, and foaming a little at the mouth where Pap had rubbed the rest of the saltpeter into its gums and with a couple of as pretty tarred bob-wire cuts on its chest as you could want and another one on its flank where Pap had worked the fish hook under its hide where he could tech it by drooping the rein now and then; yes, sir, turning into Hoke's pasture on two wheels and Pap sawing back on the reins and Pat Stamper's nigger running up and grabbing the bridle to keep Beasley's horse from running right into the tent where Pat slept and Pat hissself coming outen the tent with that 'ere cream-colored Stetson cocked over one eye and them eyes the color of a new plow point and jest about as warm. "That's a pretty lively looking horse you got there," Pat says.

"Hell fire, yes!" Pap says. "It durn nigh killed me and this boy both before I could git it into that ere gate yonder. That's why I got to git

shut of it. I expect you to beat me, but I got to trade. So come on and beat me quick and give me something I won't be skeered to walk up to."

And I still believe that Pap was right, that it was the right system. It had been five years since Pat had seen the horse, or anyway since he had unloaded it on Herman Short, so me and Pap figured that the chance of Pat's recognizing it would be about the same as for a burglar to recognize a dollar watch that happened to snag onto his clothes in passing five years ago.

And it was the right system, to rush up and say we jest had to trade instead of jest drifting up and hanging around for Pat to persuade us. And Pap wasn't trying to beat Pat bad. All he wanted was to vindicate that ere eight cash dollars. That was it: the eight cash dollars' worth of the pride of Yoknapatawpha County horse trading, and Pap the self-appointed champion and knight doing it not for profit but for honor.

And I be dog if I still don't believe it worked, that Pap did fool Pat, and that it was because of what Pat aimed to swap to Pap and not because Pat recognized Beasley's horse, that he refused to trade anyway except team for team.

Or I don't know. Maybe Pap was so busy fooling Pat that Pat never had to fool Pap, like a man that has jest got to do something, who no matter how hard he tries he jest half does it, while a man that don't care whether he does it or not, does it twice as good with jest half the work.

So there we was: the nigger holding the two mules that Pat wanted to swap for our team, and Pat chewing his tobacco slow and gentle and steady and watching Pap with them plow point eyes, and Pap standing there with that look on his face that was desperate not because he was skeered yet but because he was having to think fast, realizing now that he had done got in deeper than he aimed to and that he would either have to shet his eyes and bust on through, or back out and quit.

Because right here was where Pat Stamper showed how come he was Pat Stamper.

If he had jest started in to show Pap what a bargain he would be getting in them two mules, I reckon Pap would have backed out. But Pat didn't. He fooled Pap exactly like one first-class burglar would purely and simply refuse to tell another first-class burglar where the safe was at.

"But I don't want to swap for a whole team," Pap said. "I already got a good mule. It's the horse I don't want. Trade me a mule for the horse." "No," Pat said. "I don't want no wild horse neither. Not that I won't trade for anything that can walk, provided I can trade my way. But I ain't going to trade for that horse alone because I don't want it no more than you do. What I am trading for is that mule. And besides, this here team of mine is matched. I aim to get about three times for the pair of them what I would get trading either of them single."

"But you will still have a team to trade with," Pap says.

"No," Pat said. "I aim to get more from you for them than if the team was broken. If it's a single mule you want, you better try somebody else."

So Pap looked at the mules again. That was it. They looked all right. They looked jest exactly all right. They didn't look too good and they didn't look too bad. Neither of them looked quite as good as our mule, but the two of them looked jest a leetle mite better than Beasley's horse and one mule of anybody's. That was it.

If they had looked like a bargain, I reckon even I, a twelve-year-old boy, would have had sense enough to tell Pap to come on and let's git outen there. But Lord, I reckon we was doomed from the very second when Jody Varner told about that eight dollars.

I reckon Pat Stamper knowed we was doomed the very second he looked up and seen the nigger holding Beasley's horse outen the tent. I reckon he knowed right then that he wouldn't have to try to trade, that all he would need to do would be jest to say No long enough.

So that's what he done, leaning against our wagon bed with his thumbs hooked into the top of his pants, chewing his tobacco and watching Pap going through the motion of examining them mules again. Because even I knowed that Pap had done already traded, that he had done walked out into what he thought was a spring branch and then found it was quicksand, and now he knowed he couldn't even stop long enough to turn back. "All right," he said. "I'll take them."

So the nigger taken Beasley's horse and the mule outen the wagon and put our new team in, and me and Pap went on to town. And before God, them mules still looked all right. I be dog if I didn't think that maybe Pap had walked into that Stamper quicksand and then got out again. Or maybe it was jest getting outen Stamper's reach with the harness left. Because when we got back into the road and outen sight of Stamper's camp, Pap's face begun to look like it would when he would set on the lot fence at home and tell the fellows how he was a fool about a horse but not a durn fool.

It wasn't easy yet; it was jest watchful, setting there and feeling out our new team. We was right at town now and so he wouldn't have much time to feel them out, but we would have a good chance to on the road home. "By Godfrey," Pap said, "if they can walk home a-tall, I have got that ere eight dollars back, durn him."

Because that nigger of Pat Stamper's was a artist. Because I swear to Godfrey them mules looked all right. They jest looked like two ordinary not extry good mules you might see in a hundred wagons on the road.

I noticed how they had a kind of jerky way of starting off, first one jerking into the collar and then jerking back and then the other jerking into the collar and then jerking back, and even after we was in the road and the wagon rolling good, one of them taken a spell of some sort and snatched hisself crossways in the traces like he aimed to go back, but then Stamper had jest told us that they was a matched team; he never had said they had worked together as a matched team, and they was a well matched team in the sense that neither one of them seemed to

have any idea as to jest when the other one aimed to start moving or what direction it was going to take. But Pap got them straightened out and we went on; we was jest starting up that ere big hill into town, when they popped into a sweat jest like Beasley Kemp's horse done back yonder on the other side of Varner's store.

But that was all right; it was hot enough; that was when I first taken notice that that rain was going to come up before dark; I mind how I was jest thinking how it was going to ketch us before we got home when this here sweat taken them mules.

And that was all right; I didn't blame them for sweating; the trouble was, it was a different kind of sweat from the kind Beasley's horse had given us to expect. I mind how I was looking at a big hot-looking bright cloud over to the southwest when all of a sudden I realized that the wagon had done stopped going forward up the hill and was starting down it backward and then I looked in time to see both them mules this time crossways in the traces and kind of glaring at one another across the tongue and Pap trying to straighten them out and his eyes looking a right smart like the mules' eyes, and then all of a sudden they straightened out and I mind how I thought it was a good thing they happened to have their backs toward the wagon when they did, because I reckon they moved at the same time for the first time in their lives, for the first time since Pap owned them at least; and, gentlemen, here we come swurging up that hill and into town like a roach down a rathole, with the wagon on two wheels and Pap sawing back on the lines and hollering, "Hell fire, hell fire," and folks scattering, and Pap jest managed to swing them into the alley behind McCaslin's store and stopped them by locking our nigh front wheel with another wagon's and the other mules (they was hitched) help to put the brakes on.

So it was a good crowd by then, helping us to git untangled, and Pap led our team on to Uncle Ike's back door and tied them up close to the door handle and me and him went in to get the separator, with the folks still coming up and saying, "It's that team of Stamper's" and Pap kind of breathing hard and looking a right smart less easy in the face than when we had left Stamper's camp even, besides most all-fired

watchful, saying, "Come on here. Let's git that durn separator of your mammy's loaded and git outen here." So we give Uncle Ike the rag with Mammy's money in it and me and Pap taken up the separator and started back out to the wagon, to where we had left it.

It was still there. I mind how I could see the bed of it where Pap had drawed it up to the door, and I could see the folks from the waist up standing in the alley, and then I realized that it was about twice as many folks looking at our team as it had been when we left. I reckon Pap never noticed it because he was too busy hurrying that 'ere separator along. So I jest stepped aside a little to have a look at what the folks was looking at and then I realized that I could see the front of our wagon and the place where me and Pap had left the mules, but that I couldn't see no mules.

So I don't recollect whether I dropped my side of the separator or if Pap dropped hisn or if we still carried it when we come to where we could see out the door and see the mules. They were still there. They were just laying down.

Pap had snubbed them right up to the handle of Uncle Ike's back door, with the same rein run through both bits, and now they looked jest exactly like two fellows that had done hung themselves in one of these here suicide packs, with their heads snubbed up together and their tongues hanging out and their necks stretched about four foot and their legs folded back under them like shot rabbits until Pap jumped down and cut the harness. Yes, sir. A artist. He had give them to the exact inch jest enough of whatever it was, to get them into town and off the square before it played out.

And this here is what I meant when I said it was desperation. I can see Pap now, backed off into that corner behind Uncle Ike's plows and cultivators and such, with his face white and his voice shaking and his hand shaking so he couldn't hardly hand me the six bits. "Go to Doc Peabody's store," he says, "and git me a pint of whiskey and git it quick."

Yes, sir. Desperate. It wasn't even quicksand now. It was a whirlpool, and Pap with jest one jump left. He drunk that pint of whiskey in two drinks and set the empty bottle careful in the corner of Uncle Ike's warehouse, and we went back to the wagon. The mules was still up all right, and we loaded the separator in and Pap eased them away careful, with the folks all watching and telling one another it was a Pat Stamper team and Pap setting there with his face red now instead of white and them clouds were heavy and the sun was even gone now but I don't think Pap ever noticed it.

And we hadn't eaten too, and I don't think Pap noticed that neither. And I be dog if it didn't seem like Pat Stamper hadn't moved too, standing there at the gate to his stock pen, with that Stetson cocked and his thumbs still hooked into the top of his pants, and Pap setting on the wagon trying to keep his hands from shaking and the team stopped now with their heads down and their legs spraddled and breathing like starting up a sawmill on a Monday morning. "I come to trade back for my team," Pap said.

"What's the matter?" Stamper says. "Don't tell me these are too lively for you, too. They don't look it."

"All right," Pap said. "All right. I jest want my team back. I'll give you four dollars to trade back. That's all I got. And I got to have them. Make your four dollars, and give me my team."

"I ain't got your team," Stamper says. "I didn't want that horse either. I told you that. So I got shet of it right away."

Pap set there for a while. It was all clouded over now, and cooler; you could even smell the rain. "All right," Pap said. "But you still got the mule. All right. I'll take it."

"For what?" Stamper says. "You want to swap that team for your mule?" Sho. Pap wasn't trading.

He was desperate, setting there like he couldn't even see, with Stamper leaning easy against the gate and looking at him for a minute. "No," he says. "I don't want them mules. Yours is the best. I wouldn't trade that

way, even." He spit, easy and careful, before he looked at Pap again. "Besides, I done included your mule into another team, with another horse. You want to look at it?"

"All right," Pap said. "How much?"

"Don't you even want to see it first?" Stamper says.

"All right," Pap said. So the nigger led out the horse, a little dark brown horse; I remember how even with it clouded up to rain and no sun, how the horse shined; a horse a little bigger than the one we traded Stamper, and hog fat. Yes, sir. That's jest exactly how it was fat: not like a horse is fat but like a hog: fat right up to its ears and looking tight as a drum; it was so fat it couldn't hardly walk, putting its feet down like they didn't have no weight nor feeling in them. "It's too fat to last," Pap said. "It won't even git me home."

"That's what I think myself," Stamper said. "That's why I am willing to git shet of it."

"All right," Pap said. "But I got to try it."

"Try it?" Stamper said. Pap didn't answer. He jest got down from the wagon careful and went to the horse. It had a hackamore on and Pap taken the rein outen the nigger's hand and started to git on the horse. "Wait," Stamper says. "What you fixing to do?"

"Going to try it," Pap said. "I done traded a horse with you once today." Stamper looked at Pap again for a minute. Then he spit again and kind of stepped back.

"All right," he said. "Help him up, Jim." So the nigger holp Pap onto the horse, only the nigger never had time to jump back because as soon as Pap's weight come onto the horse's back it was like Pap had a live wire in his britches. It throwed Pap hard and Pap got up without no change on his face a-tall and went back to the horse and taken the hackamore again and the nigger holp him up again, with Stamper standing there with his hands hooked into his pants tops, watching.

And the horse slammed Pap off again and Pap got up again with his face jest the same and went back and taken the hackamore from the nigger again when Stamper stopped him. That was exactly how Pap did it, like he wanted the horse to throw him and hard, not to try to hurt hisself, but like the ability of his bones and meat to feel that 'ere hard ground was all he had left to pay for a horse with life enough in it to git us home. "Here, here," Stamper says. "Are you trying to kill yourself?"

"All right," Pap says. "How much?"

"Come on into the tent and have a drink," Stamper says.

So I waited in the wagon. It was beginning to blow a little now, and we hadn't brought no coats with us. But there was some croker sacks in the wagon that Mammy made us bring to wrap her separator in and so I was wrapping the separator up in them when the nigger led out a horse and buggy and then Pap and Stamper come outen the tent and Pap come to the wagon. He never looked at me.

He jest reached in and taken the separator outen the sacks and put it into the buggy and then him and Stamper got in and druv away. They went back toward town and then they went out of sight and I seen the nigger watching me. "You fixing to git wet fo you git home," he said.

"I reckon so," I said.

"You want to eat a snack of dinner until they git back?" the nigger said.

"I ain't hungry," I said. So he went on into the tent and I waited in the wagon. Yes, sir, it was most sholy going to rain; I mind how I thought that anyway now we could use the croker sacks to try to keep dry in. Then Pap and Stamper come back and Pap never looked at me neither. He went into the tent and I could see him drinking outen a bottle and then putting the bottle back into his shirt. I reckon Stamper give him that bottle.

Pap never said so, but I reckon Stamper did. So then the nigger put our mule and the new horse in the wagon and Pap come outen the tent and got in. Stamper and the nigger both holp him now.

“Don’t you reckon you better let the boy drive?” Stamper says.

“I’ll drive,” Pap said. “By Godfrey, maybe I can’t swap a horse with you, but I can still drive it.”

“Sho now,” Stamper said. “That horse will surprise you.”

III

It did. Yes, sir. It surprised us, jest like Stamper said. It happened jest before dark. The rain, the storm, come up before we had gone a mile and we rode in it for two hours before we found a old barn to shelter under, setting hunched under them croker sacks (I mind how I thought how in a way I almost wished Mammy knew we never had the separator because she had wanted it for so long that maybe she would rather for Uncle Ike to own it and it safe and dry, than for her to own it five miles from home in a wagon in the rain) and watching our new horse that was so fat it even put its feet down like they never had no feeling nor weight, that ever now and then, even in the rain, would take a kind of flinching jerk like when Pap’s weight came down onto its back at Stamper’s camp.

But we didn’t catch on then, because I was driving now, sho enough, because Pap was laying flat in the wagon bed with the rain popping him in the face and him not even knowing it, and me setting on the seat and watching our new horse change from a black horse into a bay.

Because I was jest twelve and me and Pap had always done our horse trading along that country road that run past our lot. So I jest druv into the first shelter I come to and shaken Pap awake. The rain had cooled him off some, but even without that he would have sobered quick.

“What?” he says. “What is it?”

“The horse, Pap!” I hollered. “It’s done changed color!”

Yes, sir. It sobered him quick. We was both outen the wagon then and Pap’s eyes popping sho enough now and a bay horse standing there where he had went to sleep looking at a black one.

Because I was jest twelve; it happened too fast for me; I jest mind seeing Pap tech the horse's back at a spot where ever now and then the backband must have teched it (I tell you, that nigger was a artist) and then the next I knowed that horse was plunging and swurging; I remember dodging jest as it slammed into the wall and then me and Pap heard a sound like when a automobile tire picks up a nail: a sound like Whoosh! and then the rest of that shiny fat black horse we had got from Pat Stamper vanished.

I don't mean that me and Pap was standing there with jest our mule left. We had a horse too. Only it was the same one we had left home with that morning and that we had swapped Beasley Kemp the sorghum mill and the bob-wire and the straight stock for two weeks ago.

We even got our fish hook back, with the barb still bent where Pap had bent it and the nigger had jest moved it a little. But it wasn't until we was home the next day at daylight that we found the hand pump valve behind its off fore leg.

And that's about all. Because Mammy was up and seen us pass, and so after a while we had to go to the house, because me and Pap hadn't et since twenty-four hours ago. So we went to the house, with Mammy standing in the door saying, "Where's my separator?" and Pap saying how he always had been a fool about a horse and he couldn't help it and Mammy couldn't neither and that to jest give him time, and Mammy standing there looking at him and then she begun to cry and it was the first time I ever seen her cry.

She cried hard, standing there in her old wrapper, not even hiding her face, saying, "Fool about a horse! Yes, but why the horse? why the horse?"

"Now, Vynie; now, Vynie," Pap said. Then she turned and went back into the house. We didn't go in. We could hear her, but she wasn't in the kitchen, and Pap told me to go around to the kitchen and see if she

was fixing breakfast and then come down to the lot and tell him, and I did but she wasn't in the kitchen.

So we set on the lot fence, and then we seen her coming down the hill from the house; she was dressed and had on her shawl and sunbonnet and her gloves, and she went into the stable without looking at us and we could hear her saddling the mule and Pap told me to go and ask her if she wanted him to help her and I did and she didn't answer and I saw her face that time and so I come back and set on the fence with Pap and we saw her ride out of the barn on the mule.

She was leading Beasley Kemp's horse. It was still black in places where the rain had streaked it. "If it hadn't been for that durn rain, we might could have got shet of it," Pap said.

So we went to the house then, and I cooked breakfast and me and Pap et and then Pap taken a nap. He told me to watch for her from the gallery, but me and him neither never much thought to see her soon. We never seen her until next morning. We was cooking breakfast when we heard the wagon and I looked out and it was Odum Tull's wagon and Mammy was getting outen it and I come back to the kitchen jest before Pap left for the stable. "She's got the separator," I told Pap.

"I reckon it didn't happen to be our team in Odum's wagon," Pap said. "No, sir," I says. So we saw her go into the house with the separator.

"I reckon likely she will wait to put on her old wrapper first," Pap said. "We ought to started breakfast sooner." It did take about that long. And then we could hear it. It made a good strong sound, like it would separate milk good and fast. Then it stopped. "It's too bad she ain't got but the one gallon," Pap said. "You go and look in the kitchen." So I went, and sho enough, she was cooking breakfast. But she wouldn't let us eat it in the kitchen. She handed it out the door to us.

"I am going to be busy in here and I don't aim to have you all in the way," she said. It was all right now. Her face was quiet now; it was jest

busy. So me and Pap went out to the well and et, and then we heard the separator again.

“I didn’t know it would go through but one time,” Pap said.

“Maybe Uncle Ike showed her how to do it,” I said.

“I reckon she is capable of running it right,” Pap said. “Like she wants it to run, anyhow.” Then it stopped, and me and Pap started down to the barn but she called us and made us bring the dishes to the kitchen door. Then we went down to the lot and set on the fence, only, like Pap said, without no stock to look at, it wasn’t no comfort in it. “I reckon she jest rode up to that durn feller’s tent and said, ‘Here’s your team.

Now you git me my separator and git it quick; I got to ketch a ride back home,’ “ Pap said. And then after a while we heard it again, and that afternoon we walked up to Old Man Anse’s to borrow a mule to finish the lower piece with, but he never had none to spare now. So he jest cussed around a while and then we come on back and set on the fence. And sure enough, pretty soon we could hear Mammy starting it up and it running strong and steady, like it would make the milk fly. “She is separating it again,” Pap said. “It looks like she is fixing to get a heap of pleasure and comfort outen it.”

The End

Race at Morning, William Faulkner

Race at Morning

The Saturday Evening Post, March 1955

I WAS IN the boat when I seen him. It was jest dust-dark; I had jest fed the horses and clumb back down the bank to the boat and shoved off to cross back to camp when I seen him, about half a quarter up the river, swimming; jest his head above the water, and it no more than a

dot in that light. But I could see that rocking chair he toted on it and I knowed it was him, going right back to that canebrake in the fork of the bayou where he lived all year until the day before the season opened, like the game wardens had give him a calendar, when he would clear out and disappear, nobody knowed where, until the day after the season closed.

But here he was, coming back a day ahead of time, like maybe he had got mixed up and was using last year's calendar by mistake. Which was jest too bad for him, because me and Mister Ernest would be setting on the horse right over him when the sun rose tomorrow morning.

So I told Mister Ernest and we et supper and fed the dogs, and then I holp Mister Ernest in the poker game, standing behind his chair until about ten o'clock, when Roth Edmonds said, "Why don't you go to bed, boy?"

"Or if you're going to set up," Willy Legate said, "why don't you take a spelling book to set up over? ... He knows every cuss word in the dictionary, every poker hand in the deck and every whisky label in the distillery, but he can't even write his name.... Can you?" he says to me.

"I don't need to write my name down," I said. "I can remember in my mind who I am."

"You're twelve years old," Walter Ewell said. "Man to man now, how many days in your life did you ever spend in school?"

"He ain't got time to go to school," Willy Legate said. "What's the use in going to school from September to middle of November, when he'll have to quit then to come in here and do Ernest's hearing for him? And what's the use in going back to school in January, when in jest eleven months it will be November fifteenth again and he'll have to start all over telling Ernest which way the dogs went?"

"Well, stop looking into my hand, anyway," Roth Edmonds said.

"What's that? What's that?" Mister Ernest said. He wore his listening button in his ear all the time, but he never brought the battery to camp

with him because the cord would bound to get snagged ever time we run through a thicket.

“Willy says for me to go to bed!” I hollered.

“Don’t you never call nobody ‘mister’?” Willy said.

“I call Mister Ernest ‘mister’,” I said.

“All right,” Mister Ernest said. “Go to bed then. I don’t need you.”

“That ain’t no lie,” Willy said. “Deaf or no deaf, he can hear a fifty-dollar raise if you don’t even move your lips.”

So I went to bed, and after a while Mister Ernest come in and I wanted to tell him again how big them horns looked even half a quarter away in the river. Only I would ‘a’ had to holler, and the only time Mister Ernest agreed he couldn’t hear was when we would be setting on Dan, waiting for me to point which way the dogs was going. So we jest laid down, and it wasn’t no time Simon was beating the bottom of the dishpan with the spoon, hollering, “Raise up and get your four-o’clock coffee!” and I crossed the river in the dark this time, with the lantern, and fed Dan and Roth Edmondziz horse. It was going to be a fine day, cold and bright; even in the dark I could see the white frost on the leaves and bushes — jest exactly the kind of day that big old son of a gun laying up there in that brake would like to run.

Then we et, and set the stand-holder across for Uncle Ike McCaslin to put them on the stands where he thought they ought to be, because he was the oldest one in camp. He had been hunting deer in these woods for about a hundred years, I reckon, and if anybody would know where a buck would pass, it would be him. Maybe with a big old buck like this one, that had been running the woods for what would amount to a hundred years in a deer’s life, too, him and Uncle Ike would sholy manage to be at the same place at the same time this morning — provided, of course, he managed to git away from me and Mister Ernest on the jump. Because me and Mister Ernest was going to git him.

Then me and Mister Ernest and Roth Edmonds set the dogs over, with Simon holding Eagle and the other old dogs on leash because the young ones, the puppies, wasn't going nowhere until Eagle let them, nohow.

Then me and Mister Ernest and Roth saddled up, and Mister Ernest got up and I handed him up his pump gun and let Dan's bridle go for him to git rid of the spell of bucking he had to git shut of ever morning until Mister Ernest hit him between the ears with the gun barrel. Then Mister Ernest loaded the gun and give me the stirrup, and I got up behind him and we taken the fire road up toward the bayou, the five big dogs dragging Simon along in front with his single-barrel britchloader slung on a piece of plow line across his back, and the puppies moiling along in ever'body's way.

It was light now and it was going to be jest fine; the east already yellow for the sun and our breaths smoking in the cold still bright air until the sun would come up and warm it, and a little skim of ice in the ruts, and ever leaf and twig and switch and even the frozen clods frosted over, waiting to sparkle like a rainbow when the sun finally come up and hit them.

Until all my insides felt light and strong as a balloon, full of that light cold strong air, so that it seemed to me like I couldn't even feel the horse's back I was straddle of — jest the hot strong muscles moving under the hot strong skin, setting up there without no weight at all, so that when old Eagle struck and jumped, me and Dan and Mister Ernest would go jest like a bird, not even touching the ground. It was jest fine. When that big old buck got killed today, I knowed that even if he had put it off another ten years, he couldn't 'a' picked a better one.

And sho enough, as soon as we come to the bayou we seen his foot in the mud where he had come up out of the river last night, spread in the soft mud like a cow's foot, big as a cow's, big as a mule's, with Eagle and the other dogs laying into the leash rope now until Mister Ernest told me to jump down and help Simon hold them. Because me and Mister Ernest knowed exactly where he would be — a little canebrake island in the middle of the bayou, where he could lay up until whatever

doe or little deer the dogs had happened to jump could go up or down the bayou in either direction and take the dogs on away, so he could steal out and creep back down the bayou to the river and swim it, and leave the country like he always done the day the season opened.

Which is jest what we never aimed for him to do this time. So we left Roth on his horse to cut him off and turn him over Uncle Ike's standers if he tried to slip back down the bayou, and me and Simon, with the leashed dogs, walked on up the bayou until Mister Ernest on the horse said it was fur enough; then turned up into the woods about half a quarter above the brake because the wind was going to be south this morning when it riz, and turned down toward the brake, and Mister Ernest give the word to cast them, and we slipped the leash and Mister Ernest give me the stirrup again and I got up.

Old Eagle had done already took off because he knowed where that old son of a gun would be laying as good as we did, not making no racket atall yet, but jest boring on through the buck vines with the other dogs trailing along behind him, and even Dan seemed to know about that buck, too, beginning to souple up and jump a little through the vines, so that I taken my holt on Mister Ernest's belt already before the time had come for Mister Ernest to touch him. Because when we got strung out, going fast behind a deer, I wasn't on Dan's back much of the time nohow, but mostly jest strung out from my holt on Mister Ernest's belt, so that Willy Legate said that when we was going through the woods fast, it looked like Mister Ernest had a boy-size pair of empty overhalls blowing out of his hind pocket.

So it wasn't even a strike, it was a jump. Eagle must 'a' walked right up behind him or maybe even stepped on him while he was laying there still thinking it was day after tomorrow. Eagle jest throwed his head back and up and said, "There he goes," and we even heard the buck crashing through the first of the cane. Then all the other dogs was hollering behind him, and Dan give a squat to jump, but it was against the curb this time, not jest the snaffle, and Mister Ernest let him down into the bayou and swung him around the brake and up the other bank.

Only he never had to say, "Which way?" because I was already pointing past his shoulder, freshening my holt on the belt jest as Mister Ernest touched Dan with that big old rusty spur on his nigh heel, because when Dan felt it he would go off jest like a stick of dynamite, straight through whatever he could bust and over or under what he couldn't.

The dogs was already almost out of hearing. Eagle must 'a' been looking right up that big son of a gun's tail until he finally decided he better git on out of there. And now they must 'a' been getting pretty close to Uncle Ike's standers, and Mister Ernest reined Dan back and held him, squatting and bouncing and trembling like a mule having his tail roached, while we listened for the shots.

But never none come, and I hollered to Mister Ernest we better go on while I could still hear the dogs, and he let Dan off, but still there wasn't no shots, and now we knowed the race had done already passed the standers; and we busted out of a thicket, and sho enough there was Uncle Ike and Willy standing beside his foot in a soft patch.

"He got through us all," Uncle Ike said. "I don't know how he done it. I just had a glimpse of him. He looked big as a elephant, with a rack on his head you could cradle a yellin' calf in. He went right on down the ridge. You better get on, too; that Hog Bayou camp might not miss him."

So I freshened my holt and Mister Ernest touched Dan again. The ridge run due south; it was clear of vines and bushes so we could go fast, into the wind, too, because it had riz now, and now the sun was up too. So we would hear the dogs again any time now as the wind got up; we could make time now, but still holding Dan back to a canter, because it was either going to be quick, when he got down to the standers from that Hog Bayou camp eight miles below ourn, or a long time, in case he got by them too.

And sho enough, after a while we heard the dogs; we was walking Dan now to let him blow a while, and we heard them, the sound coming faint up the wind, not running now, but trailing because the big son of a

gun had decided a good piece back, probably, to put a end to this foolishness, and picked hisself up and soupled out and put about a mile between hisself and the dogs — until he run up on them other standers from that camp below.

I could almost see him stopped behind a bush, peeping out and saying, “What’s this? What’s this? Is this whole durn country full of folks this morning?” Then looking back over his shoulder at where old Eagle and the others was hollering along after him while he decided how much time he had to decide what to do next.

Except he almost shaved it too fine. We heard the shots; it sounded like a war. Old Eagle must ‘a’ been looking right up his tail again and he had to bust on through the best way he could. “Pow, pow, pow, pow” and then “Pow, pow, pow, pow,” like it must ‘a’ been three or four ganged right up on him before he had time even to swerve, and me hollering, “No! No! No! No!” because he was ourn.

It was our beans and oats he et and our brake he laid in; we had been watching him ever year, and it was like we had raised him, to be killed at last on our jump, in front of our dogs, by some strangers that would probably try to beat the dogs off and drag him away before we could even git a piece of the meat.

“Shut up and listen,” Mister Ernest said. So I done it and we could hear the dogs; not just the others, but Eagle, too, not trailing no scent now and not baying no downed meat, neither, but running hot on sight long after the shooting was over.

I jest had time to freshen my holt. Yes, sir, they was running on sight. Like Willy Legate would say, if Eagle jest had a drink of whisky he would ketch that deer; going on, done already gone when we broke out of the thicket and seen the fellers that had done the shooting, five or six of them, squatting and crawling around, looking at the ground and the bushes, like maybe if they looked hard enough, spots of blood would bloom out on the stalks and leaves like frogstools or hawberries.

“Have any luck, boys?” Mister Ernest said.

“I think I hit him,” one of them said. “I know I did. We’re hunting blood now.”

“Well, when you have found him, blow your horn and I’ll come back and tote him in to camp for you,” Mister Ernest said.

So we went on, going fast now because the race was almost out of hearing again, going fast, too, like not jest the buck, but the dogs, too, had took a new leash on life from all the excitement and shooting.

We was in strange country now because we never had to run this fur before, we had always killed before now; now we had come to Hog Bayou that runs into the river a good fifteen miles below our camp. It had water in it, not to mention a mess of down trees and logs and such, and Mister Ernest checked Dan again, saying, “Which way?” I could just barely hear them, off to the east a little, like the old son of a gun had give up the idea of Vicksburg or New Orleans, like he first seemed to have, and had decided to have a look at Alabama; so I pointed and we turned up the bayou hunting for a crossing, and maybe we could ‘a’ found one, except that I reckon Mister Ernest decided we never had time to wait.

We come to a place where the bayou had narrowed down to about twelve or fifteen feet, and Mister Ernest said, “Look out, I’m going to touch him” and done it.

I didn’t even have time to freshen my holt when we was already in the air, and then I seen the vine — it was a loop of grapevine nigh as big as my wrist, looping down right across the middle of the bayou — and I thought he seen it, too, and was jest waiting to grab it and fling it up over our heads to go under it, and I know Dan seen it because he even ducked his head to jump under it.

But Mister Ernest never seen it atall until it skun back along Dan’s neck and hooked under the head of the saddle horn, us flying on through the air, the loop of the vine gitting tighter and tighter until something somewhere was going to have to give. It was the saddle girth. It broke,

and Dan going on and scrabbling up the other bank bare nekkid except for the bridle, and me and Mister Ernest and the saddle, Mister Ernest still setting in the saddle holding the gun, and me still holding onto Mister Ernest's belt, hanging in the air over the bayou in the tightened loop of that vine like in the drawed-back loop of a big rubber-banded slingshot, until it snapped back and shot us back across the bayou and flang us clear, me still holding onto Mister Ernest's belt and on the bottom now, so that when we lit I would 'a' had Mister Ernest and the saddle both on top of me if I hadn't clumb fast around the saddle and up Mister Ernest's side, so that when we landed, it was the saddle first, then Mister Ernest, and me on top, until I jumped up, and Mister Ernest still laying there with jest the white rim of his eyes showing.

"Mister Ernest!" I hollered, and then clumb down to the bayou and scooped my cap full of water and clumb back and throwed it in his face, and he opened his eyes and laid there on the saddle cussing me. "God dawg it," he said, "why didn't you stay behind where you started out?"

"You was the biggest!" I said. "You would 'a' mashed me flat!" "What do you think you done to me?" Mister Ernest said. "Next time, if you can't stay where you start out, jump clear. Don't climb up on top of me no more. You hear?" "Yes, sir," I said.

So he got up then, still cussing and holding his back, and clumb down to the water and dipped some in his hand onto his face and neck and dipped some more up and drunk it, and I drunk some, too, and clumb back and got the saddle and the gun, and we crossed the bayou on the down logs. If we could jest ketch Dan; not that he would have went them fifteen miles back to camp, because, if anything, he would have went on by hisself to try to help Eagle ketch that buck.

But he was about fifty yards away, eating buck vines, so I brought him back, and we taken Mister Ernest's galluses and my belt and the whang leather loop off Mister Ernest's horn and tied the saddle back on Dan. It didn't look like much, but maybe it would hold.

“Provided you don’t let me jump him through no more grapevines without hollering first,” Mister Ernest said.

“Yes, sir,” I said. “I’ll holler first next time — provided you’ll holler a little quicker when you touch him next time too.” But it was all right; we jest had to be a little easy getting up. “Now which-a-way?” I said. Because we couldn’t hear nothing now, after wasting all this time. And this was new country, sho enough. It had been cut over and growed up in thickets we couldn’t ‘a’ seen over even standing up on Dan.

But Mister Ernest never even answered. He jest turned Dan along the bank of the bayou where it was a little more open and we could move faster again, soon as Dan and us got used to that homemade cinch strop and got a little confidence in it. Which jest happened to be east, or so I thought then, because I never paid no particular attention to east then because the sun — I don’t know where the morning had went, but it was gone, the morning and the frost, too — was up high now.

And then we heard him. No, that’s wrong; what we heard was shots. And that was when we realized how fur we had come, because the only camp we knowed about in that direction was the Hollyknowe camp, and Hollyknowe was exactly twenty-eight miles from Van Dorn, where me and Mister Ernest lived — just the shots, no dogs nor nothing. If old Eagle was still behind him and the buck was still alive, he was too wore out now to even say, “Here he comes.”

“Don’t touch him!” I hollered. But Mister Ernest remembered that cinch strop, too, and he jest let Dan off the snaffle. And Dan heard them shots, too, picking his way through the thickets, hopping the vines and logs when he could and going under them when he couldn’t.

And sho enough, it was jest like before — two or three men squatting and creeping among the bushes, looking for blood that Eagle had done already told them wasn’t there. But we never stopped this time, jest

trotting on by. Then Mister Ernest swung Dan until we was going due north.

“Wait!” I hollered. “Not this way.”

But Mister Ernest jest turned his face back over his shoulder. It looked tired, too, and there was a smear of mud on it where that 'ere grapevine had snatched him off the horse.

“Don't you know where he's heading?” he said. “He's done done his part, give everybody a fair open shot at him, and now he's going home, back to that brake in our bayou. He ought to make it exactly at dark.”

And that's what he was doing. We went on. It didn't matter to hurry now. There wasn't no sound nowhere; it was that time in the early afternoon in November when don't nothing move or cry, not even birds, the peckerwoods and yellowhammers and jays, and it seemed to me like I could see all three of us — me and Mister Ernest and Dan — and Eagle, and the other dogs, and that big old buck, moving through the quiet woods in the same direction, headed for the same place, not running now but walking, that had all run the fine race the best we knowed how, and all three of us now turned like on a agreement to walk back home, not together in a bunch because we didn't want to worry or tempt one another, because what we had all three spent this morning doing was no play-acting jest for fun, but was serious, and all three of us was still what we was — that old buck that had to run, not because he was skeered, but because running was what he done the best and was proudest at; and Eagle and the dogs that chased him, not because they hated or feared him, but because that was the thing they done the best and was proudest at; and me and Mister Ernest and Dan, that run him not because we wanted his meat, which would be too tough to eat anyhow, or his head to hang on a wall, but because now we could go back and work hard for eleven months making a crop, so we would have the right to come back here next November — all three of us going back home now, peaceful and separate, until next year, next time.

Then we seen him for the first time. We was out of the cut-over now; we could even 'a' cantered, except that all three of us was long past

that. So we was walking, too, when we come on the dogs — the puppies and one of the old ones — played out, laying in a little wet swag, panting, jest looking up at us when we passed. Then we come to a long open glade, and we seen the three other old dogs and about a hundred yards ahead of them Eagle, all walking, not making no sound; and then suddenly, at the fur end of the glade, the buck hisself getting up from where he had been resting for the dogs to come up, getting up without no hurry, big, big as a mule, tall as a mule, and turned, and the white underside of his tail for a second or two more before the thicket taken him.

It might 'a' been a signal, a good-by, a farewell. Still walking, we passed the other three old dogs in the middle of the glade, laying down, too; and still that hundred yards ahead of them, Eagle, too, not laying down, because he was still on his feet, but his legs was spraddled and his head was down; maybe jest waiting until we was out of sight of his shame, his eyes saying plain as talk when we passed, "I'm sorry, boys, but this here is all."

Mister Ernest stopped Dan. "Jump down and look at his feet," he said. "Nothing wrong with his feet," I said. "It's his wind has done give out." "Jump down and look at his feet," Mister Ernest said.

So I done it, and while I was stooping over Eagle I could hear the pump gun go, "Snick-cluck. Snick-cluck. Snick-cluck" three times, except that I never thought nothing then. Maybe he was jest running the shells through to be sho it would work when we seen him again or maybe to make sho they was all buckshot. Then I got up again, and we went on, still walking; a little west of north now, because when we seen his white flag that second or two before the thicket hid it, it was on a beeline for that notch in the bayou.

And it was evening, too, now. The wind had done dropped and there was a edge to the air and the sun jest touched the tops of the trees. And he was taking the easiest way, too, now, going straight as he could. When we seen his foot in the soft places he was running for a while at

first after his rest. But soon he was walking, too, like he knowed, too, where Eagle and the dogs was.

And then we seen him again. It was the last time — a thicket, with the sun coming through a hole onto it like a searchlight. He crashed jest once; then he was standing there broadside to us, not twenty yards away, big as a statue and red as gold in the sun, and the sun sparking on the tips of his horns — they was twelve of them — so that he looked like he had twelve lighted candles branched around his head, standing there looking at us while Mister Ernest raised the gun and aimed at his neck, and the gun went, “Click. Snick-cluck. Click. Snick-cluck. Click.

“Snick-cluck” three times, and Mister Ernest still holding the gun aimed while the buck turned and give one long bound, the white underside of his tail like a blaze of fire, too, until the thicket and the shadows put it out; and Mister Ernest laid the gun slow and gentle back across the saddle in front of him, saying quiet and peaceful, and not much louder than jest breathing, “God dawg. God dawg.”

Then he jogged me with his elbow and we got down, easy and careful because of that ere cinch strop, and he reached into his vest and taken out one of the cigars. It was busted where I had fell on it, I reckon, when we hit the ground. He throwed it away and taken out the other one.

It was busted, too, so he bit off a hunk of it to chew and throwed the rest away. And now the sun was gone even from the tops of the trees and there wasn't nothing left but a big red glare in the west.

“Don't worry,” I said. “I ain't going to tell them you forgot to load your gun. For that matter, they don't need to know we ever seed him.”

“Much oblige,” Mister Ernest said. There wasn't going to be no moon tonight neither, so he taken the compass off the whang leather loop in his buttonhole and handed me the gun and set the compass on a stump and stepped back and looked at it. “Jest about the way we're headed now,” he said, and taken the gun from me and opened it and put one

shell in the britch and taken up the compass, and I taken Dan's reins and we started, with him in front with the compass in his hand.

And after a while it was full dark; Mister Ernest would have to strike a match ever now and then to read the compass, until the stars come out good and we could pick out one to follow, because I said, "How fur do you reckon it is?" and he said, "A little more than one box of matches." So we used a star when we could, only we couldn't see it all the time because the woods was too dense and we would git a little off until he would have to spend another match. And now it was good and late, and he stopped and said, "Get on the horse."

"I ain't tired," I said.

"Get on the horse," he said. "We don't want to spoil him."

Because he had been a good feller ever since I had knowed him, which was even before that day two years ago when maw went off with the Vicksburg roadhouse feller and the next day pap didn't come home neither, and on the third one Mister Ernest rid Dan up to the door of the cabin on the river he let us live in, so pap could work his piece of land and run his fish line, too, and said, "Put that gun down and come on here and climb up behind."

So I got in the saddle even if I couldn't reach the stirrups, and Mister Ernest taken the reins and I must 'a' went to sleep, because the next thing I knowed a buttonhole of my lumberjack was tied to the saddle horn with that ere whang cord off the compass, and it was good and late now and we wasn't fur, because Dan was already smelling water, the river. Or maybe it was the feed lot itself he smelled, because we struck the fire road not a quarter below it, and soon I could see the river, too, with the white mist laying on it soft and still as cotton.

Then the lot, home; and up yonder in the dark, not no piece akchully, close enough to hear us unsaddling and shucking corn prob'ly, and sholy close enough to hear Mister Ernest blowing his horn at the dark camp for Simon to come in the boat and git us, that old buck in his brake in the bayou; home, too, resting, too, after the hard run, waking

hissself now and then, dreaming of dogs behind him or maybe it was the racket we was making would wake him.

Then Mister Ernest stood on the bank blowing until Simon's lantern went bobbing down into the mist; then we clumb down to the landing and Mister Ernest blowed again now and then to guide Simon, until we seen the lantern in the mist, and then Simon and the boat; only it looked like ever time I set down and got still, I went back to sleep, because Mister Ernest was shaking me again to git out and climb the bank into the dark camp, until I felt a bed against my knees and tumbled into it.

Then it was morning, tomorrow; it was all over now until next November, next year, and we could come back. Uncle Ike and Willy and Walter and Roth and the rest of them had come in yestiddy, soon as Eagle taken the buck out of hearing and they knowed that deer was gone, to pack up and be ready to leave this morning for Yoknapatawpha, where they lived, until it would be November again and they could come back again.

So, as soon as we et breakfast, Simon run them back up the river in the big boat to where they left their cars and pickups, and now it wasn't nobody but jest me and Mister Ernest setting on the bench against the kitchen wall in the sun; Mister Ernest smoking a cigar — a whole one this time that Dan hadn't had no chance to jump him through a grapevine and bust. He hadn't washed his face neither where that vine had throwed him into the mud.

But that was all right, too; his face usually did have a smudge of mud or tractor grease or beard stubble on it, because he wasn't jest a planter; he was a farmer, he worked as hard as ara one of his hands and tenants — which is why I knowed from the very first that we would git along, that I wouldn't have no trouble with him and he wouldn't have no trouble with me, from that very first day when I woke up and maw had done gone off with that Vicksburg road-house feller without even waiting to cook breakfast, and the next morning pap was gone, too, and it was almost night the next day when I heard a horse coming up and I

taken the gun that I had already throwed a shell into the britch when pap never come home last night, and stood in the door while Mister Ernest rid up and said, "Come on. Your paw ain't coming back neither."

"You mean he give me to you?" I said.

"Who cares?" he said. "Come on. I brought a lock for the door. We'll send the pickup back tomorrow for whatever you want."

So I come home with him and it was all right, it was jest fine — his wife had died about three years ago — without no women to worry us or take off in the middle of the night with a durn Vicksburg roadhouse jake without even waiting to cook breakfast. And we would go home this afternoon, too, but not jest yet; we always stayed one more day after the others left because Uncle Ike always left what grub they hadn't et, and the rest of the homemade corn whisky he drunk and that town whisky of Roth Edmondziz he called Scotch that smelled like it come out of a old bucket of roof paint; setting in the sun for one more day before we went back home to git ready to put in next year's crop of cotton and oats and beans and hay; and across the river yonder, behind the wall of trees where the big woods started, that old buck laying up today in the sun, too — resting today, too, without nobody to bother him until next November.

So at least one of us was glad it would be eleven months and two weeks before he would have to run that fur that fast again. So he was glad of the very same thing we was sorry of, and so all of a sudden I thought about how maybe planting and working and then harvesting oats and cotton and beans and hay wasn't jest something me and Mister Ernest done three hundred and fifty-one days to fill in the time until we could come back hunting again, but it was something we had to do, and do honest and good during the three hundred and fifty-one days, to have the right to come back into the big woods and hunt for the other fourteen; and the fourteen days that old buck run in front of dogs wasn't jest something to fill his time until the three hundred and fifty-one when he didn't have to, but the running and the risking in front of guns and dogs was something he had to do for fourteen days to have the right not to be bothered for the other three hundred and fifty-

one. And so the hunting and the farming wasn't two different things at all — they was jest the other side of each other.

"Yes," I said. "All we got to do now is put in that next year's crop. Then November won't be no time away."

"You ain't going to put in the crop next year," Mister Ernest said.

"You're going to school."

So at first I didn't even believe I had heard him. "What?" I said. "Me? Go to school?"

"Yes," Mister Ernest said. "You must make something out of yourself."

"I am," I said. "I'm doing it now. I'm going to be a hunter and a farmer like you."

"No," Mister Ernest said. "That ain't enough any more. Time was when all a man had to do was just farm eleven and a half months, and hunt the other half. But not now. Now just to belong to the farming business and the hunting business ain't enough. You got to belong to the business of mankind."

"Mankind?" I said.

"Yes," Mister Ernest said. "So you're going to school. Because you got to know why. You can belong to the farming and hunting business and you can learn the difference between what's right and what's wrong, and do right. And that used to be enough — just to do right. But not now. You got to know why it's right and why it's wrong, and be able to tell the folks that never had no chance to learn it; teach them how to do what's right, not just because they know it's right, but because they know now why it's right because you just showed them, told them, taught them why. So you're going to school."

"It's because you been listening to that durn Will Legate and Walter Ewell!" I said.

"No," Mister Ernest said.

"Yes!" I said. "No wonder you missed that buck yestiddy, taking ideas from the very fellers that let him git away, after me and you had run

Dan and the dogs durn nigh clean to death! Because you never even missed him! You never forgot to load that gun! You had done already unloaded it a purpose! I heard you!”

“All right, all right,” Mister Ernest said. “Which would you rather have? His bloody head and hide on the kitchen floor yonder and half his meat in a pickup truck on the way to Yoknapatawpha County, or him with his head and hide and meat still together over yonder in that brake, waiting for next November for us to run him again?”

“And git him, too,” I said. “We won’t even fool with no Willy Legate and Walter Ewell next time.”

“Maybe,” Mister Ernest said.

“Yes,” I said.

“Maybe,” Mister Ernest said. “The best word in our language, the best of all. That’s what mankind keeps going on: Maybe. The best days of his life ain’t the ones when he said ‘Yes’ beforehand: they’re the ones when all he knew to say was ‘Maybe.’ He can’t say ‘Yes’ until afterward because he not only don’t know it until then, he don’t want to know ‘Yes’ until then.... Step in the kitchen and make me a toddy. Then we’ll see about dinner.”

“All right,” I said. I got up. “You want some of Uncle Ike’s corn or that town whisky of Roth Edmondziz?”

“Can’t you say Mister Roth or Mister Edmonds?” Mister Ernest said.

“Yes, sir,” I said. “Well, which do you want? Uncle Ike’s corn or that ere stuff of Roth Edmondziz?”

The End

Once Aboard the Lugger, William Faulkner

Once Aboard the Lugger

Contempo, February 1932

IN THE MIDDLE of the afternoon we made a landfall. Ever since we left the mouth of the river at dawn and felt the first lift of the sea, Pete's face had been getting yellower and yellower, until by midday and twenty four hours out of New Orleans, when we spoke to him he'd glare at us with his yellow cat's eyes, and curse Joe. Joe was his older brother. He was about thirty-five. He had some yellow diamonds big as gravel. Pete was about nineteen, in a silk shirt of gold and lavender stripes, and a stiff straw hat, and all day long he squatted in the bows, holding his hat and saying Jesus Christ to himself.

He wouldn't even drink any of the whiskey he had hooked from Joe. Joe wouldn't let us take any with us, and the Captain wouldn't have let us fetch it aboard, if he had. The Captain was a teetotaller. He had been in the outside trade before Joe hired him, where they took on cargoes of green alcohol in the West Indies and had it all flavored and aged and bottled and labeled and cased before they raised Tortugas. He said he never had been a drinking man, but if he ever had, he'd be cured now. He was a real prohibitionist: he believed that nobody should be allowed to drink. He was a New Englander, with a face like a worn doormat.

So Pete had to hook a couple of bottles from Joe, and we brought them aboard inside our pants leg and the nigger hid them in the galley, and between wheel tricks I'd go forward where Pete was squatting, holding his hat, and have a nip. Now and then the nigger's disembodied face ducked into the port, without any expression at all, like a mask in carnival, and he passed up a cup of coffee which Pete drank and like as not threw the cup at the nigger's head just as it ducked away.

"He done busted two of them," the nigger told me. "We ain't got but four left, now. I gwine give it to him in a bakingpowder can next time." Pete hadn't eaten any breakfast, and he flung his dinner overside and turned his back while I ate mine, his face getting yellower and yellower, and when we fetched the island — a scar of sand with surf creaming

along its windward flank and tufted with gnawed purple pines on a darkling twilit sea — his face and his eyes were the same color.

The Captain held inside. We passed into the island's lee. The motion ceased and we pounded along in slack water of the clearest green. To starboard the island stretched on, bastioned and sombre, without sign of any life at all. Across the Sound a low smudge of mainland lay like a violet cloud. From beyond the island we could hear the boom and hiss of surf, but inside here the water was like a mill-pond, with sunlight slanting into it in green corridors. And then Pete got really sick, leaning overside and holding his hat on.

Twilight came swiftly. The clear green of the water, losing the sun, darkened. We beat on across a pulseless surface fading slowly to the hue of violet ink. Against the sky the tall pines stood in shabby and gaunt parade. The smudge of mainland had dissolved. Low on the water where it had been, a beacon was like a cigarette coal. Pete was still being sick.

The engine slowed. "Forrard there," the Captain said at the wheel. I manned the anchor.

"Come on, Pete," I said, "Give me a hand with it. You'll feel better."

"Hell with it," Pete said. "Leave the bastard sink."

So the nigger came topside and we cleared the hawser. The engine stopped and our momentum died into a violet silence floored with whispering water.

"Let go," the Captain said. We tumbled the anchor over, the hawser rattling and hissing about our feet.

Just before dark came completely down a pale wing of rigid water and a green navigating light stood abruptly in the dusk two miles away and as abruptly faded.

"There her," the nigger said. "Gwine, too."

"What is it?"

"Rum chaser. Gwine to Mobile."

“Hope she stays there,” I said. In the twilight my shirt felt warmer than I, drily so, like a garment of sand.

Pete wouldn't eat his supper, either. He sat humped in the bows, a filthy quilt about his shoulders, looking like a big disgruntled bird. He sat there while the nigger and I warped the dinghy alongside and until the Captain emerged with three spades and a flashlight. Then he refused unconditionally to get into the dinghy, and he and the Captain cursed each other at point-blank range in the darkness, in ferocious whispers.

But move he would not. So we left him there, humped in his quilt, his hat slanted in savage silhouette above the shapeless blob of the vessel lurking neither wholly hidden nor wholly revealed against the perspective of the Sound and the ghostly and sourceless echo of starlight and the new moon.

The dinghy moved in darkness, in silence save for small gurgling clucks of water as the nigger wielded the oars. At each invisible stroke I could feel the steady and fading surge of the thwart under my thighs. Milky serpentine seethed alongside, mooned with bubbled fire, in the nothingness which bore us and which slapped now and then beneath the keel with whispering, caressing shocks, as of soft and secret palms. Soon a lesser darkness smoldered laterally across the bows, the Captain humped in vague relief against it, and the nigger's rhythmic blobbing. It thickened still more. The dinghy lifted with a faint grating jar, and stopped. The new moon hung in the crests of the pines overhead.

We hauled the dinghy up. The Captain stood squinting at the skyline. The sand was white, faintly luminous in the starlight. Staring at it, it seemed to be within a hand's breadth of the face. Then as you stared it seemed to shrink dizzily away until equilibrium itself was lost, fading at last without demarcation into the spangled sky that seemed to take of the sand something of its quality of dizzy and faint incandescence and against which the pines reared their tall and ragged crests, forlorn and gallant and a little austere.

The nigger had lifted the shovels out of the dinghy and the Captain, having oriented himself, took up one of them. The nigger and I took up the other two and followed the dark blob of him across the beach and into the trees. The sand was grown over with a harsh undergrowth of some sort, tough and possessing that pointless perversity of random rusty wire. We struggled through it, the sand shifting beneath us, also with a sort of derisive perversity.

The surge and hiss of surf came steadily out of the darkness upon our faces, with the cool, strong breath of the sea itself, and immediately before us the treacherous darkness burst into mad shapes and a tense, soundless uproar. For a moment it seemed that I could taste my very heart in my mouth and the nigger prodded heavily into me from behind, and in the yellow tunnel of the Captain's flashlight wildeyed and anonymous horned beasts glared at us on braced forelegs, then whirled and rushed soundlessly away with mad overreaching of gaunt flanks and tossing tails. It was like a nightmare through which, pursued by demons, you run forever on a shifting surface that gives no purchase for the feet.

My shirt felt colder than I, now, and damp, and in the dizzy darkness that followed the flash my heart consented to beat again. The nigger handed me my shovel and I found that the Captain had gone on. "What in God's name was that?" I said.

"Wild cattle," the nigger said. "Island full of them. They'll run you in the daytime."

"Oh," I said. We slogged on and overtook the Captain halted beside a dune grown harshly over with the wirelike undergrowth. He bade us halt here while he prowled slowly about the dune, prodding at it with his shovel. The nigger and I squatted, our shovels beside us. My shirt was wet, cold to my body. The steady breathing of the sea came across the sand, among the pines.

"What are cattle doing on this island?" I whispered. "I thought it was uninhabited."

"I don't know," the nigger said. "I don't know what anything want here, walking around night and day in this sand, listening to that wind in them trees." He squatted beside me, naked to the waist, the starlight glinting faintly upon him, reflected by the sand. "Be wild, too." he said.

I killed a mosquito on the back of my hand. It left a huge, warm splash, like a raindrop. I wiped my hands on my flanks.

"Skeeter bad here," the nigger said.

I killed another on my forearm, and two bit me on the ankles at the same time, and one on the neck, and I rolled my sleeves down and buttoned my collar.

"They'll eat you up, without any shirt on," I said.

"No, sir," he said. "Skeeter dont bother me. Cant nothing off the land bother me. I got medicine."

"You have? On you?"

In the darkness somewhere the cattle moved, in dry crackling surges in the undergrowth. The nigger tugged at his middle and drew something from his waist — a cloth tobacco sack in which I could feel three small, hard objects, slung on a cord about his hips.

"Nothing from the land, eh? How about the water?"

"They aint no water charm," he said. I sat on my feet, covering my ankles, wishing I had worn socks. The nigger stowed his charm away.

"What do you go to sea for, then?"

"I dont know. Man got to die someday."

"But do you like going to sea? Cant you make as much ashore?"

The cattle moved now and then in the darkness, among the undergrowth. The breath of the sea came steadily out of the darkness, among the pines.

"Man got to die someday," the nigger said.

The Captain returned and spoke to us, and we rose and took up our shovels. He showed us where to dig, and he fell to with his own

implement and we spaded the dry sand behind us, digging into the dune. As fast as we dug the sand obliterated the shovelmarks, shaling in secret, whispering sighs from above, and my shirt was soon wet and warm again, and where it clung to my shoulders the mosquitoes needed my flesh as though it were naked.

We made progress however, the three rhythmic blobs of us like three figures in a ritualistic and illtimed dance against that background of ghostly incandescence and the deep breath of the sea stirring the unceasing pinetops overhead, for at last the nigger's shovel rang on metal — a single half thump, half clang which the breath of the sea took up and swept on with it among the pines and so away.

We uncovered the metal slowly, a broad, limber sheet of iron roofing, and presently the nigger and I were able to get our hands beneath the edge of it. We bent our backs and straightened our legs and heaved. The sand shifted, hissing drily. We heaved again. "Hah!" the nigger grunted beside me, and the metal sheet buckled and broke free with a single clashing report like that of a pistol fired inside a tin bucket, and it too drifted away on the breath of the sea and sand sifted down across the buckled metal and into the pit beneath it in fading whispers. Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhh. Shhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

The nigger and I leaned on our shovels, panting a little and sweating a good deal, while the sea went Hush Hush through the pines. The Captain propped the corner of the metal up on his shovel and delved beneath it with his hands. I killed three more mosquitoes on my ankles and wished again that I had worn socks.

The Captain was half into the pit now, and he spoke to us again from the dry whispering of that tomb and we laid our shovels aside and helped him haul the sacks out. They were faintly damp, and sand clung to them, and we dragged them out onto the sand and the nigger and I took up one under each arm and he led the way back to the beach.

The vessel was faintly visible against the starlight on the sound, a shadow among treacherous shades, motionless as an island or a rock. We stowed the sacks carefully in the dinghy and retraced our steps.

Back and forth we went, carrying those endless awkward sacks. They were difficult to hold, at best, would have been heartbreaking labor on good footing, but in shifting sand that bartered each step for the price of four, surrounded always by a soundless and vicious needling which I could not brush even temporarily off, that sense of nightmare returned ten fold — a sense of hopeless enslavement to an obscure compulsion, in which the very necessity for striving was its own derision.

We loaded the dinghy and the nigger pulled off in the darkness toward the vessel. Then I was making the trips alone, and still the sacks came out of the black gullet into which the Captain had wholly disappeared.

I could hear the cattle moving about in the darkness, but they paid me no attention. With every return to the beach I tried to mark the stars, if they had moved any. But even they seemed to be fixed overhead, among the ragged crests of the pines and the constant breath of the sea in their sighing tops.

Pete returned in the dinghy with the nigger, with his hat on. He was sullen and uncommunicative, but he had stopped saying Jesus Christ. The Captain came out of his hole and looked at him, but said nothing, and with another hand the sacks moved faster, and when the nigger made his second trip out to the vessel, I had Pete for company.

He worked well enough, as though his meditation on board after we left had imbued him with the necessity of getting the job done, but he spoke only once. That was when he and I got a little off the track and blundered into the cattle again.

“What the hell’s that?” he said, and I knew there was a gun in his hand.

“Just some wild cattle,” I said.

“Jesus Christ,” Pete said, and then he paraphrased the nigger unawares: “No wonder they’re wild.”

Back and forth we went between the sibilant and ceaseless cavern and the beach, until at last Pete and the Captain and I stood again together on the beach waiting for the dinghy to return. Though I had not seen him moving, Orion was down beyond the high pines and the moon was gone.

The dinghy came back and we went on board, and in the dark hold stinking of bilge and of fish and of what other nameless avatars through which the vessel had passed, we hauled and shifted cargo until it was stacked and battened down to the Captain's notion. He flicked the torch upon his watch.

"Three oclock," he said, the first word he had spoken since he quit cursing Pete yesterday. "We'll sleep till sunup."

Pete and I went forward and lay again on the mattress. I heard Pete go to sleep, but for a long while I was too tired to sleep, although I could hear the nigger snoring in the galley, where he had made his bed after that infatuated conviction of his race that fresh air may be slept in only at the gravest peril.

My back and arms and loins ached, and whenever I closed my eyes it seemed immediately that I was struggling through sand that shifted and shifted under me with patient derision, and that I still heard the dark high breath of the sea in the pines.

Out of this sound another sound grew, mounted swiftly, and I raised my head and watched a red navigating light and that pale wing of water that seemed to have a quality of luminousness of its own, stand up and pass and fade, and I thought of Conrad's centaur, the half man, half tugboat, charging up and down river in the same higheared, myopic haste, purposeful but without destination, oblivious to all save what was immediately in its path, and to that a dire and violent menace. Then it was gone, the sound too died away, and I lay back again while my muscles jerked and twitched to the fading echo of the old striving and the Hush Hush of the sea in my ears.

The End

Miss Zilphia Gant, William Faulkner

Miss Zilphia Gant

Book Club of Texas, June 1932

I

Jim Gant was a stock trader. He bought horses and mules in three adjoining counties, and with a hulking halfwitted boy to help him, drove them overland seventy-five miles to the Memphis markets.

They carried a camping outfit with them in a wagon, passing only one night under roof during each trip. That was toward the end of the journey, where at nightfall they would reach ... the first mark of man's hand in almost fifteen miles of cypress-and-cane river jungle and worn gullies and second-growth pine ... a rambling log house with stout walls and broken roof and no trace whatever of husbandry ... plow or plowed land ... anywhere near it.

There would be usually from one to a dozen wagons standing before it and in a corral of split rails nearby the mules stamped and munched, with usually sections of harness still unremoved: about the whole place lay an air of transient and sinister dilapidation.

Here Gant would meet and mingle with other caravans similar to his, or at times more equivocal still, of rough, unshaven, over-alled men, and they would eat coarse food and drink pale, virulent corn whiskey and sleep in their muddy clothes and boots on the puncheon floor before

the log fire. The place was conducted by a youngish woman with cold eyes and a hard infrequent tongue.

There was in the background a man, oldish, with cunning reddish pig's eyes and matted hair and beard which lent a kind of ferocity to the weak face which they concealed. He was usually befuddled with drink to a state of morose idiocy, though now and then they would hear him and the woman cursing one another in the back or beyond a closed door, the woman's voice cold and level, the man's alternating between a rumbling bass and the querulous treble of a child.

After Gant sold his stock he would return home to the settlement where his wife and baby lived. It was less than a village, twenty miles from the railroad in a remote section of a remote county. Mrs. Gant and the two-year-old girl lived alone in the small house while Gant was away, which was most of the time.

He would be at home perhaps a week out of each eight. Mrs. Gant would never know just what day or hour he would return. Often it would be between midnight and dawn. One morning about dawn she was awakened by someone standing in front of the house, shouting "Hello, Hello" at measured intervals. She opened the window and looked out. It was the halfwit.

"Yes?" she said. "What is it?"

"Hello," the halfwit bawled.

"Hush your yelling," Mrs. Gant said, "where's Jim?"

"Jim says to tell you he ain't coming home no more," the halfwit bawled. "Him and Mrs. Vinson taken and went off in the waggin. Jim says to tell you not to expect him back." Mrs. Vinson was the woman at the tavern, and the halfwit stood in the making light while Mrs. Gant in a white cotton nightcap leaned in the window and cursed him with the gross violence of a man. Then she banged the window shut.

"Jim owes me a dollar and six bits," the halfwit bawled. "He said you would give it to me." But the window was shut, the house silent again;

no light had ever shown. Yet still the halfwit stood before it, shouting "Hello, Hello" at the blank front until the door opened and Mrs. Gant came out in her nightdress, with a shotgun and cursed him again. Then he retreated to the road and stopped again in the dawn, shouting "Hello, Hello" at the blank house until he tired himself at last and went away.

Just after sunup the next morning Mrs. Gant, with the sleeping child wrapped in a quilt, went to a neighbor's house and asked the woman to keep the child for her. She borrowed a pistol from another neighbor and departed. A passing wagon, bound for Jefferson, took her aboard and she passed slowly from sight that way, sitting erect in a shoddy brown coat, on the creaking seat.

All that day the halfwit told about the dollar and seventy-five cents which Gant had taken from him and told him Mrs. Gant would repay. By noon he had told them all singly, and hoarse, voluble and recapitulant, he would offer to stop them and tell them again as they gathered at the store over the pistol incident. An ancient mariner in faded overalls he pursued them, gesticulant, shock-haired, with a wild eye and drooling a little at the mouth, telling about the dollar and seventy-five cents.

"Jim said for me to git it from her. He said she would give hit to me."

He was still talking about it when Mrs. Gant returned ten days later. She returned the pistol with no more than thanks. She had not even cleaned it nor removed the two exploded cartridges ... a hale, not-old woman with a broad, strong face: she had been accosted more than once during her sojourn in those equivocal purlieus of Memphis, where, with a deadly female intuition, an undeviating conviction for sin (who had never been further away from home than the county seat and who had read no magazines and seen no movies) she sought Gant and the woman with the capability of a man, the pertinacity of a Fate, the serene imperviousness of a vestal out of a violated temple, and then returned to her child, her face cold, satiate and chaste.

The night of her return she was called to the door. It was the halfwit.
“Jim says you would give me that dollar and....”

She struck him, felled him with a single blow. He lay on the floor, his hands lifted a little, his mouth beginning to open in horror and outrage. Before he could shriek she stooped and struck him again, jerking him up and holding him while she beat him in the face, he bellowing hoarsely. She lifted him bodily and flung him from the porch to the ground and entered the house, where his cries had roused the child. She sat and took it onto her lap, rocking it, her heels clapping hard and rhythmic at each thrust, hushing it by singing to it in a voice louder, more powerful, than its own.

Three months later she had sold the house for a good price; and she moved away, taking with her a battered trunk tied with cotton rope and the shotgun and the quilt in which the child slept. They learned later that she had bought a dressmaking shop in Jefferson, the county seat.

II

They told in the town how she and her daughter, Zilphia, lived in a single room twelve feet square for twenty-three years. It was partitioned off from the rear of the shop and it contained a bed, a table, two chairs and an oil stove. The rear window gave upon a vacant lot where farmers tethered their teams on market days and where sparrows whirled in gusty clouds about the horse and mule droppings and the refuse from the grocery store beneath.

The window was barred and in it for the seven years before the county Health Officer forced Mrs. Gant to let Zilphia go to school, the farmers, hitching or unhitching, would see a wan small face watching them, or, holding to the bars, coughing: a weak hacking sound soon blown away along the air, leaving the still pale face as before with something about it of that quality of Christmas wreaths in a forgotten window.

“Who is that?” one asked.

“Gant’s gal. Jim Gant. Used to live out to the Bend.”

“Oh. Jim Gant. I heard about that.” They looked at the face. “Well, I reckon Mrs. Gant ain’t got a whole lot of use for men-folks no more.” They looked at the face. “But she ain’t no more than a child yet.” “I reckon Mrs. Gant ain’t taking no risk.”

“Hit ain’t her risk. Hit’s whoever’s risk that would chance her.”
“Hit’s a fact. Sho.”

That was before Mrs. Gant came upon Zilphia and the boy lying inside a worn horse-blanket in the woods one day. It was during the time when, every morning and again at one o’clock they would see the two of them going toward the school, and every noon and afternoon returning to the barred room above the vacant lot. At midmorning recess time Mrs. Gant would close the shop and when the dismissal bell rang, she would be standing at the corner of the playground, upright, erect in a shapeless dress of dull black and an oil cloth sewing apron and her bosom festooned with threaded needles; still comely in a harsh way.

Zilphia would cross the playground straight to her and the two of them would sit on the stone coping above the street level, side by side and not talking while the other children ran with random shouts back and forth behind them, until the bell rang again and Zilphia returned to her books and Mrs. Gant to the shop and the seam which she had laid aside.

They told how it was a client of Mrs. Gant’s that got Zilphia in school. One day in the shop she was talking to Zilphia about school; Zilphia was nine then. “All the boys and girls go. You’ll like it.” Her back was to the room. She did not hear the machine cease, she only saw Zilphia’s eyes go suddenly blank and then fill with terror. Mrs. Gant stood over them.

“Go home,” she said. Zilphia ... she did not turn and walk away: she seemed to dissolve behind her wan, haunting face and terrified eyes. The client rose. Mrs. Gant was thrusting a wad of cloth into her arms. “Get out of here,” she said.

The client fell back, her hands raised, the half-finished dress cascading to the floor. Mrs. Gant picked it up and thrust it at her again, her hands hard in a series of restrained blows. "Get out of my shop," she said. "Don't you never come here again."

Mrs. Gant went back to the room. Zilphia crouched in the corner, watching the door. Mrs. Gant drew her out by one thin arm. She began to beat Zilphia, striking her about the body with her flat hand while Zilphia's thin arm appeared to elongate like rubber hose as she silently wrenched and strained. "Bitches!" Mrs. Gant said: "bitches!" She ceased as suddenly and sat on the bed and drew Zilphia toward her. Zilphia resisted. She began to cry and vomit, her eyeballs back-rolling until only the whites showed, shrieking and retching. Mrs. Gant got her to bed and sent for the doctor.

At that time Zilphia was pole-thin, with a wan, haunted face and big, not-quite-conquered eyes, going to and from school at her mother's side, behind her small tragic mask of a face. In her third year she refused one day to go back to school. She would not tell Mrs. Gant why: that she was ashamed to never be seen on the street without her mother. Mrs. Gant would not let her stop. In the spring she was ill again, from anemia and nervousness and loneliness and actual despair.

She was sick for a long time. The doctor told Mrs. Gant that Zilphia would have to have companionship, to play with children of her own age and out-of-doors. When Zilphia was convalescent Mrs. Gant came in one day with a miniature cook stove. "Now you can have the girls in and you can cook," she said. "Won't that be nicer than visiting?" Zilphia lay on the pillow, not less white than it. Her eyes looked like holes thumbed into a piece of blotting paper. "You can have a tea party every day," Mrs. Gant said. "I'll make dresses for all the dolls."

Zilphia began to cry. She lay on the pillow, crying, her hands at her sides. Mrs. Gant took the stove away. She took it back to the store and made them return her money.

Zilphia was convalescent for a long time. She still had sudden crying fits. When she was up Mrs. Gant asked her what girls she would like to visit. Zilphia named three or four. That afternoon Mrs. Gant locked the shop. She was seen in three different parts of town, looking at houses. She stopped passers. "Who lives there?" she said. They told her. "What family have they got?" The passer looked at her. She faced him steadily: a strong, still comely woman. "Have they got any boys?"

The next day she gave Zilphia permission to visit one of them. Zilphia would go home with the girl from school on certain days and they played in the barn or, in bad weather, in the house. At a certain hour Mrs. Gant appeared at the gate in a black shawl and bonnet and she and Zilphia returned to the barred room above the lot. And each afternoon ... behind the barn a short pasture sloped to a ditch where scrub cedars grew ... in these cedars Mrs. Gant sat on a wooden box from the time school was out until the time for Zilphia to start home, when she would hide the box again and go around by the next street to the gate and be waiting there when Zilphia emerged from the house.

She did not watch the barn or, in the winter time, the house; she just sat there ... a woman who for twelve years had been growing into the outward semblance of a man until now at forty there was a faint shadow of moustache at the corner of her mouth ... in the timeless patience of her country raising and her cold and implacable paranoia, in the mild weather, or with the shawl drawn close about her against the rain and cold.

In Zilphia's thirteenth year Mrs. Gant began to examine her body each month. She made Zilphia strip naked and stand cringing before her while the savage light fell through the bars and the gray winter drove above the lot. After one of these examinations ... it was in the spring ... she told Zilphia what her father had done and what she had done. She sat on the bed while Zilphia cringed swiftly into her clothes, telling her about it in a cold, level voice, in the language of a man while Zilphia's thin body shrank and shrank as though in upon itself, as though at the impact of the words.

Then her voice ceased. She was sitting on the bed, upright, motionless, her cold mad eyes gone blank as a statue's; and standing before her, her mouth open a little, Zilphia thought of a rock or a pile from which an abruptly undammed stream has roared away.

They lived now in a kind of armistice. They slept in the same bed and ate of the same food for days in complete silence; sitting at the machine Mrs. Gant would hear Zilphia's feet pass through the room and cease beyond the stairs to the street, without even raising her head. Yet now and then she would close the shop and with the shawl about her shoulders she would repair to the less frequented streets and lanes on the edge of town and after a while she would meet Zilphia walking rapidly and aimlessly. Then together they would return home without a word between them.

One afternoon Zilphia and the boy were lying beneath the blanket. It was in a ditch in the woods on the outskirts of town, within hailing distance of the highroad. They had been doing this for about a month, lying in the mutual, dreamlike mesmeric throes of puberty, rigid, side by side, their eyes closed, not even talking. When Zilphia opened her eyes she was looking up at Mrs. Gant's inverted face and foreshortened body against the sky.

"Get up," Mrs. Gant said. Zilphia lay quietly looking up at her. "Get up, you bitch," Mrs. Gant said.

The next day Zilphia withdrew from school. In an oil cloth sewing apron she sat in a chair beside the window which gave upon the square; beside it Mrs. Gant's machine whirred and whirred. The window was not barred. Through it she watched the children with whom she had gone to school begin to fall into inevitable pairs and pass into and out of her vision, some of them as far as the minister or the church; one year she made the white gown for the girl whom she used to visit; four years later, dresses for her daughter. She sat beside the window for twelve years.

In the town they told about Miss Zilphia's beau, with amusement and pity and, here and there, with concern. "He'll take advantage of her," they said. "It ought not to be allowed. A person of her ... surely they would not sell her a license, even if..." She was a neat woman, with neat hair. Her skin was the color of celery and she was a little plump in a flabby sort of way. Her glasses lent a baffled, ascetic look to her face, enlarging her opaque irises.

As long as she had a needle in her fingers and was unobserved, her movements were direct, assured; but on the street, in the hat and clothes which her mother made for her, they had that vague, indefinite awkwardness of the nearsighted.

"But surely you don't think that she ... of course, her mother is crazy, but Zilphia ... poor girl."

"It's a shame. A tramp painter. She should be protected. How her mother can be so blind I cannot...."

He was a young man with black hair and eyes like wood ashes. One day Mrs. Gant found that he had been painting in the window at Zilphia's chair for two days. She moved Zilphia into the back room ... it was now a fitting room; for two years now they had been living in a frame bungalow bleak as a calendar picture, on an obscure street ... and when he came inside to paint the walls Mrs. Gant closed the shop and she and Zilphia went home. For eight days Zilphia had a holiday, the first in twelve years.

Robbed of her needle, of the slow mechanical manipulation, Zilphia's eyes began to pain her, and she could not sleep well. She would wake from dreams in which the painter performed monstrously with his pot and brush. In the dream his eyes were yellow instead of gray, and he was always chewing, his chin fading away into the blurred drool of the chewing; one night she waked herself by saying aloud, "He's got a beard!" Now and then she dreamed of the pot and brush alone. They would be alive, performing of themselves actions of monstrous and ritualled significance.

After eight days Mrs. Gant fell ill; idleness brought her to bed. One night they had the doctor. The next morning Mrs. Gant rose and dressed and locked Zilphia into the house and went to town. Zilphia watched from the window her mother's black-shawled figure toil slowly down the street, pausing now and then to hold itself erect by the fence. An hour later she returned, in a hired cab, and locked the door and took the key to bed with her.

For three days and nights Zilphia sat beside the bed where the gaunt, manlike woman ... the moustaches were heavier now and grizzled faintly ... lay rigid, the covers drawn to her chin and her eyes closed. Thus it was that Zilphia could never tell if her mother slept or not. Sometimes she could tell by the breathing, then she would search carefully and infinitesimally among the bed clothing for the keys. On the third day she found them. She dressed and left the house.

The inside of the shop was half finished, reeking of turpentine. She opened the window and took her old chair beside it. When she heard his feet at last on the stairs she found that she was sewing, without any recollection of what the garment was or when she had taken it up. With the needle in her hand she sat looking up at him, blinking a little behind the glasses until he removed them.

"I knowed, once them glasses was off," he said. "I kept looking for you and looking for you. And when she come in here and I was working I could hear her on the steps a long time, a step at a time then stop, until she was in the door yonder, holding to the door and sweating like a nigger. Even after she had done fainted she wouldn't let go and faint.

She just laid there on the floor sweating and sweating and counting the money out of her purse and telling me to be out of town by sundown." He stood beside the chair, holding the glasses in his hand. She watched the dark rim of paint under his nails, smelling his odor of turpentine. "I'll get you out of it. That old woman. That terrible old woman. She'll kill you yet. I know she is crazy now.

I've heard. How she's done you. I've talked to folks. When they told me where you lived at I'd walk past the house. I could feel her watching me. Like she was watching me through the window. No hiding; just standing there looking at me and waiting. One night I come into the yard. After midnight it was.

The house was dark and I could feel her standing there, looking at the dark where I was and waiting. Watching me like when she fainted that day and wouldn't faint until I was out of town. She just laid there on the floor sweating, with her eyes shut, telling me to leave the job like it was and be out of town by night.

But I'll get you out of it. Tonight. Now. Not ever again any more." He stood above her. The dusk was thickening; the final swirl of sparrows swept across the square and into the locust trees about the courthouse. "All the time I was watching you I kept thinking about you wearing glasses, because I used to say I wouldn't never want a woman that wore glasses.

Then one day you looked at me and all of a sudden I was seeing you without the glasses. It was like the glasses was gone and I knew then that, soon as I saw you once without them, it wouldn't matter to me if you wore glasses or not...."

They were married by a justice of the peace in the courthouse. Then Zilphia began to hang back.

"No," he said; "don't you see, if you go back now, if you risk her seeing you now...."

"I've got to," Zilphia said.

"What has she ever done for you? What do you owe her? That terrible old woman. Don't you see, if we risk going there.... Come on, Zilphy. You belong to me now. You said to the judge you would do like I say, Zilphy. Now we are away, if we go back now...."

"I've got to. She's my mother. I've got to."

It was full twilight when they entered the gate and went up the walk. She slowed, her hand trembled cold in his. "Don't leave me!" she said. "Don't leave me!"

"I won't ever leave you if you won't ever leave me. But we ought not to ... Come on. It's time yet. I ain't scared for me. It's for you. Zilphy...." They looked toward the house. Mrs. Gant, dressed, in the black shawl and bonnet, stood in the door with the shotgun.

"Zilphy," she said.

"Don't go," he said. "Zilphy."

"You, Zilphy," Mrs. Gant said without raising her voice.

"Zilphy," he said. "If you go in there ... Zilphy."

Zilphia went on and mounted the steps. She moved stiffly. She seemed to have shrunk into herself, collapsing from inside, to have lost height, become awkward.

"Go in the house," Mrs. Gant said, without turning her head. Zilphia went on. "Go on," Mrs. Gant said. "Shut the door." Zilphia entered and turned, beginning to close the door. She saw four or five people halted along the fence, looking back. "Shut it," Mrs. Gant said. Zilphia shut the door carefully, fumbling a little at the knob. The house was still; in the cramped hall the shadows of the twilight loomed like a herd of motionless elephants. She could hear her heart faintly, but no other sound, no sound from beyond the door which she had closed upon her husband's face. She never saw it again.

For the next two days and nights he lay hidden without food in a vacant house across the street. Mrs. Gant locked the door, but instead of going back to bed she seated herself, fully dressed save for the oil cloth apron and the needles, in a chair at the front window, the shotgun leaning at her hand. For three days she sat there, rigid, erect, her eyes closed, sweating slowly. On the third day the painter quitted the vacant house and left town. That night Mrs. Gant died, erect and fully dressed in the chair.

IV

For the first six months she believed that he would hear about it and return for her. She set six months to the day. "He will come before then," she said. "He will have to come before then, because I am being true to him;" now that she was free she dared not even put into thinking the reasons why she should wait for him. For that reason she left the shop half finished, as he had left it, for a symbol of fidelity. "I have been faithful to you," she said.

The day came and passed. She saw it accomplish, quietly. "Now," she said, "that's finished. Thank God. Thank God." She realized how terrible the waiting and believing had been, the having to believe. Nothing was worth that. "Nothing," she said, crying quietly in the dark, feeling tranquil and sad, like a little girl at the spurious funeral of a doll; "nothing."

She had the painting completed.

At first the odor of turpentine was terrible to her. It seemed to obliterate time as it had the stains of twenty-five years on the walls. Her life seemed to elongate, like rubber: from one time she seemed to see her hands prolonged into another one, fitting and pinning. Then she could think peacefully, since beyond the safe ritual of her fingers Zilphia Gant and her husband were like dolls, furious and tragic but quite dead.

The shop was doing well. Within a year she had a partner, but she lived alone in the house. She took three or four newspapers, thinking that she might some day see his name in print. After a while she was writing guarded significant letters to agony columns, mentioning incidents which only he could recognize. She began to read all the wedding notices, substituting her name for the bride's and his for that of the groom. Then she would undress and go to bed.

She would have to be careful about getting into sleep. She was much more careful about that than about getting into her clothes. But even then she sometimes slipped. Then she would lie in the dark, the mock

orange bush beyond the window filling the silence with its faintest suggestion of turpentine, beginning to toss lightly from side to side like a surf getting up.

She would think about Christ, whispering “Mary did it without a man. She did it;” or, rousing, furious, her hands clenched at her sides, the covers flung back and her opened thighs tossing, she would violate her ineradicable virginity again and again with something evoked out of the darkness immemorial and philoprogenitive: “I will conceive! I’ll make myself conceive!”

One evening she opened the paper and began to read of a wedding in a neighboring state. She made the name substitutions as usual and had already turned the page when she realised that she was smelling turpentine. Then she realized that she had not had to make any substitution for the groom’s name.

She cut the story out. The next day she went to Memphis for two days. A week later she began to receive weekly letters bearing the return address of a private detective agency. She stopped reading the papers; her subscriptions lapsed. Every night she dreamed of the painter. His back was toward her now; only by his elbows could she read the familiar action of the pot and brush. There was someone beyond him in the dream whom she could not see, hidden by that back which was less of man’s than goat’s.

She grew plumper, a flabby plumpness in the wrong places. Her eyes behind the shell-rimmed glasses were a muddy olive, faintly protuberant. Her partner said that she was not hygienically over-fastidious. People called her Miss Zilphia; her wedding, that three day sensation, was never mentioned. When on the weekly arrival of the Memphis letters, the postmaster rallied her on her city sweetheart, there was even in this less of insincerity than pity. After another year there was less of both than either.

By means of the letters she knew how they lived. She knew more about each than the other did. She knew when they quarrelled and felt

exultation; she knew when they were reconciled and felt raging and impotent despair. Sometimes at night she would become one of the two of them, entering their bodies in turn and crucified anew by her ubiquity, participating in ecstasies the more racking for being vicarious and transcendent of the actual flesh.

One evening she received the letter telling that the wife was pregnant. The next morning she waked a neighbor by running out of the house in her nightdress, screaming. They got the doctor and when she was well again she told that she had mistaken the rat poison for tooth powder. The postmaster told about the letters and the two looked upon her again with interest and curious pity. "Twice," they said, even though the letters continued to come; "what a shame. Poor girl."

When she recovered she looked better. She was thinner and her eyes had cleared up, and she slept peacefully at night for a while. By the letters she knew when the wife's time would be, and the day she went to the hospital.

Although she had recovered completely she did not dream any more for some time, though the habit she had formed in her twelfth year of waking herself with her own weeping, returned, and almost every night she lay in the darkness and the mock orange scent, weeping quietly and hopelessly between sleep and slumber. How long must this go on? she said to herself, lying flat and still and for a time tear-flushed of even despair in the darkness and the dying rumor of turpentine; how long?

It went on for a long time. She was gone from the town for three years, then she returned. Ten years later she began to dream again. Then she was walking to and from school twice a day with her daughter's hand in hers, her manner on the street confident and assured, meeting the town with level and tranquil eye.

But at night she still waked herself with her own weeping after the old habit, waking wide-eyed from a sleep in which for some time now she had been dreaming of negro men. "Something is about to happen to me," she said aloud into the quiet darkness and the scent. Then

something did happen to her. One day it had happened, and after that she dreamed hardly at all any more, and then only about food.

V

At last the letter came telling of the birth of a daughter and of the mother's death. Enclosed was a newspaper clipping. The husband had been killed by a motor car while crossing the street to enter the hospital.

The next day Zilphia went away. Her partner said she would be gone a year, perhaps longer, to recover from her sickness. The letters from the city sweetheart ceased.

She was gone three years. She returned in mourning, with a plain gold band and a child. The child, a girl, had eyes like wood ashes and dark hair. Zilphia told quietly of her second marriage and her husband's death, and after a time the interest died away.

She opened the house again, but she also fixed a day nursery in the room behind the shop. The window was barred, so she need not worry about the child. "It's a nice pleasant room," she said. "Why, I grew up there, myself." The shop was doing well. The ladies never tired of fondling little Zilphia.

They still called her Miss Zilphia Gant. "Somehow you just can't conceive of her as a wife. If it were not for the child...." It was no longer out of tolerance or pity now. She looked better; black became her. She was plump again in the wrong places, but to people in our town that and more is permitted a woman who has served her appointed ends. She was forty-two. "She is as fat as a partridge," the town said. "It becomes her; it really does."

"I should be, from the way I enjoy my food," she said, pausing to chat with them on the way to and from school with little Zilphia's hand in hers and her open coat, stirring in the wind, revealing her sewing apron of black oil cloth, and the straight thin glints of needles in her black bosom and the gossamer random festooning of the thread.

The End

Thrift, William Faulkner

Thrift

The Saturday Evening Post, September 1930

I

In messes they told of MacWyrghinchbeath how, a first-class air mechanic of a disbanded Nieuport squadron, he went three weeks' A.W.O.L. He had been given a week's leave for England while the squadron was being reequipped with British-made machines, and he was last seen in Boulogne, where the lorry set him and his mates down. That night he disappeared. Three weeks later the hitherto unchallenged presence of an unidentifiable first-class air mechanic was discovered in the personnel of a bombing squadron near Boulogne.

At the ensuing investigation the bomber gunnery sergeant told how the man had appeared among the crew one morning on the beach, where the flight had landed after a raid. Replacements had come up the day before, and the sergeant said he took the man to be one of the replacements; it appeared that everyone took the man to be one of the new mechanics. He told how the man showed at once a conscientious aptitude, revealing an actual affection for the aeroplane of whose crew he made one, speaking in a slow, infrequent, Scottish voice of the amount of money it represented and of the sinfulness of sending so much money into the air in a single lump.

"He even asked to be put on flying," the sergeant testified. "He downright courted me till I did it, volunteering for all manner of off-duty jobs for me, until I put him on once or twice. I'd keep him with me, on the toggles, though."

They did not discover that anything was wrong until pay day. His name was not on the pay officer's list; the man's insistence — his was either sublime courage or sublime effrontery — brought his presence to the attention of the squadron commander. But when they looked for him, he was gone.

The next day, in Boulogne, an air mechanic with a void seven-day pass, issued three weeks ago by a now disbanded scout squadron, was arrested while trying to collect three weeks' pay, which he said was owing to him, from the office of the acting provost marshal himself. His name, he said, was MacWyrghlinchbeath.

Thus it was discovered that MacWyrghlinchbeath was a simultaneous deserter from two different military units. He repeated his tale — for the fifth time in three days fetched from his cell by a corporal and four men with bayoneted rifles — standing bareheaded to attention before the table where a general now sat, and the operations officer of the bomber squadron and the gunnery sergeant:

"A had gone doon tae thae beach tae sleep, beca' A kenned they wud want money for-r thae beds in the town. A was ther-re when thae boombers cam' doon. Sae A went wi' thae boombers."

"But why didn't you go home on your leave?" the general asked.

"A wou'na be spendin' sic useless money, sir-r."

The general looked at him. The general had little pig's eyes, and his face looked as though it had been blown up with a bicycle pump.

"Do you mean to tell me that you spent seven days' leave and a fortnight more without leave, as the member of the personnel of another squadron?"

"Well, sir-r," MacWyrghlinchbeath said, "naught wud do they but A sud tak' thae week's fur-rlough. I didna want it. And wi' thae big machines A cud get flying pay."

The general looked at him. Rigid, motionless, he could see the general's red face swell and swell.

“Get that man out of here!” the general said at last.
“ ‘Bout face,” the corporal said.

“Get me that squadron commander,” the general said. “At once! I’ll cashier him! Gad’s teeth, I’ll put him in jail for the rest of his life!”
“ ‘Bout face!” the corporal said, a little louder. MacWyrghlinchbeath had not moved.

“Sir-r,” he said. The general, in mid-voice, looked at him, his mouth still open a little. Behind his mustache he looked like a boar in a covert. “Sir-r,” MacWyrghlinchbeath said, “wull A get ma pay for thae thr-r-ree weeks and thae seven hour-rs and for-rty minutes in the air-r?”
It was Ffollansbye, who was to first recommend him for a commission, who knew most about him.

“I give you,” he said, “a face like a ruddy walnut, maybe sixteen, maybe fifty-six; squat, with arms not quite as long as an ape’s, lugging petrol tins across the aerodrome. So long his arms were that he would have to hunch his shoulders and bow his elbows a little so the bottoms of the tins wouldn’t scrape the ground. He walked with a limp — he told me about that. It was just after they came down from Stirling in ‘14. He had enlisted for infantry; they had not told him that there were other ways of going in.

“So he began to make inquiries. Can’t you see him, listening to all the muck they told recruits then, about privates not lasting two days after reaching Dover — they told him, he said, that the enemy killed only the English and Irish and Lowlanders; the Highlands having not yet declared war — and such.

Anyway, he took it all in, and then he would go to bed at night and sift it out. Finally he decided to go for the Flying Corps; decided with pencil and paper that he would last longer there and so have more money saved. You see, neither courage nor cowardice had ever functioned in him at all; I don’t believe he had either. He was just like a man who, lost

for a time in a forest, picks up a fagot here and there against the possibility that he might some day emerge.

“He applied for transfer, but they threw it out. He must have been rather earnest about it, for they finally explained that he must have a better reason than personal preference for desiring to transfer, and that a valid reason would be mechanical knowledge or a disability leaving him unfit for infantry service.

“So he thought that out. And the next day he waited until the barracks was empty, prodded the stove to a red heat, removed his boot and putty, and laid the sole of his foot to the stove.

“That was where the limp came from. When his transfer went through and he came out with his third-class air mechanic’s rating, they thought that he had been out before.

“I can see him, stiff at attention in the squadron office, his b. o. on the table, Whiteley and the sergeant trying to pronounce his name.

“ ‘What’s the name, sergeant?’ Whiteley says.

“Sergeant looks at b.o., rubs hands on thighs. ‘Mac—’ he says and bogs down again. Whiteley leans to look-see himself.

“ ‘Mac—’ bogs himself; then: ‘Beath. Call him MacBeath.’

“ ‘A’m ca’d MacWyrghinchbeath,’ newcomer says.

“ ‘Sir,’ sergeant prompts.

“ ‘Sir-r,’ newcomer says.

“ ‘Oh,’ Whiteley says, ‘Magillinbeath. Put it down, sergeant.’ Sergeant takes up pen, writes M-a-c with flourish, then stops, handmaking concentric circles with pen above page while owner tries for a peep at b. o. in Whiteley’s hands. ‘Rating, three ack emma,’ Whiteley says. ‘Put that down, sergeant.’

“ ‘Very good, sir,’ sergeant says. Flourishes grow richer, like sustained cavalry threat; leans yet nearer Whiteley’s shoulder, beginning to sweat.

“Whiteley looks up, says, ‘Eh?’ sharply. ‘What’s matter?’ he says.

“ ‘The nyme, sir,’ sergeant says. ‘I can’t get—’

“Whiteley lays b. o. on table; they look at it. ‘People at Wing never could write,’ Whiteley says in fretted voice.

“ ‘Tain’t that, sir,’ sergeant says. “Is people just ‘aven’t learned to spell. Wot’s yer nyme agyne, my man?’

“ ‘A’m ca’d MacWyrghlinchbeath,’ newcomer says.

“ ‘Ah, the devil,’ Whiteley says. ‘Put him down MacBeath and give him to C. Carry on.’

“But newcomer holds ground, polite but firm. ‘A’m ca’d MacWyrghlinchbeath,’ he says without heat.

“Whiteley stares at him. Sergeant stares at him. Whiteley takes pen from sergeant, draws record sheet to him. ‘Spell it.’ Newcomer does so as Whiteley writes it down. ‘Pronounce it again, will you?’ Whiteley says. Newcomer does so. ‘Magillinbeath,’ Whiteley says. ‘Try it, sergeant.’

“Sergeant stares at written word. Rubs ear. ‘Mac — wigglin-beech,’ he says. Then, in hushed tone: ‘Blimey.’

“Whiteley sits back. ‘Right,’ he says. ‘We’ve it correctly. Carry on.’

“ ‘Ye ha’ it MacWyrghlinchbeath, sir-r?’ newcomer says. ‘A’d no ha’ ma pay gang wrong.’

“That was before he soloed. Before he deserted, of course. Lugging his petrol tins back and forth, a little slower than anyone else, but always at it if you could suit your time to his. And sending his money, less what he smoked — I have seen his face as he watched the men drinking beer in the canteen — back home to the neighbor who was keeping his horse and cow for him.

“He told me about that arrangement too.

When he and the neighbor agreed, it was in emergency; they both believed it would be over and he would be home in three months. That was a year ago. ‘ ‘Twull be a sore sum A’ll be owin’ him for foragin’ thae twa beasties,’ he told me. Then he quit shaking his head. He became

quite still for a while; you could almost watch his mind ticking over. 'Aweel,' he says at last, 'A doot not thae beasts wull ha' increased in value, too, wi' thae har-rd times.'

"In those days, you know, the Hun came over your aerodrome and shot at you while you ran and got into holes they had already dug for that purpose, while the Hun sat overhead and dared you to come out.

"So we could see fighting from the mess windows; we were carting off the refuse ourselves then. One day it crashed not two hundred yards away. When we got there, they were just dragging the pilot clear — all but his legs. He was lying on his back, looking up at the sky with that expression they have, until someone closed his eyes.

"But Mac — they were still calling him MacBeath — was looking at the crash. He was walking around it, clicking his tongue. 'Tzut, tzut,' he says. ' 'Tis a sinfu' waste. Sinfu'. Tzut. Tzut. Tzut.'

"That was while he was still a three ack emma. He was a two soon, sending a little more money back to the neighbor. He was keeping books now, with a cheap notebook and a pencil, and a candle stub for nights. The first page was his bank book; the others were like a barograph of this war, tighter than a history.

"Then he was a one A.M. He began then to work over his ledger late into the night. I supposed it was because he had more money to worry him now, drawing, as he probably did, more a month than he ever had in his life, until he came to me for an N.C.O.'s rating sheet. I gave it to him. A week later he had to buy a new candle. I met him.

" 'Well, Mac,' I said, 'have you decided to go for a sergeant yet?'

"He looked at me, without haste, without surprise. 'Ay, sir-r,' he says. He hadn't heard about flying pay then, you see."

Ffollansbye told about his solo:

"His new squadron were pups. I suppose as soon as he saw they were single-seaters, he realized that there would be no flying pay here. He

applied for transfer to bombers. It was denied. It must have been about this time that he had the letter from his neighbor, telling that the cow had calved. I can see him now, reading the letter through to the last word, keeping all judgment and speculation and concern in abeyance until he had done, then sitting there — his pencil and paper useless in this case — weighing that delicate and unanticipated situation and its unpredictable ramifications of ownership, then deciding that circumstance would take care of it in good time.

“One day he waked up; the impulse, the need to, may have come like a germ in that letter. Not that he had ever soldiered, but now he began to show interest in the machines and in the operation of the controls, talking with the pilots, asking questions about flight, sifting and cataloguing the answers in his bunk at night. He became so — well, ubiquitous, tireless, made such an up-and-doing appearance when brass hats were about, that they made him a corporal. I suppose if I’d been there then I’d have believed that was his aim all along.

“But this time he had hitched to a star, in more than allegorical sense, it proved. It was in the middle of lunch one day when the alarm goes off. They rush out, officer and man, clutching napkins, in time to see a pup go down the aerodrome, the wings at a forty-five-degree angle, the tip practically dragging. It righted itself by putting the other wing down, and with the crash car wailing behind, it nosed up and shot perpendicularly for perhaps two hundred feet, hung for ten thousand years on the prop, flipped its tail up and vanished from view, still at that forty-five-degree angle.

“ ‘What—’ the major says.

“ ‘It’s mine!’ a subaltern shouts. ‘It’s my machine!’

“ ‘Who—’ the major says. The crash car comes wailing back, and at about a hundred m.p.h. the pup comes into view again, upside down now. The pilot wears neither goggles nor helmet; in the fleeting glimpse they have of him, his face wears an expression of wary and stubborn concern.

He goes on, half rolls into a skid that swaps him end for end. He is now headed straight for the crash car; driver jumps out and flees for nearest hangar, the pup in vicious pursuit. Just as the driver, clutching head in both arms, hurls himself into the hangar, the pup shoots skyward again, hangs again on the prop, then ducks from sight, disappearance followed immediately by dull crash.

“They removed Mac from its intricate remains, intact but unconscious. When he waked he was again under arrest.”

II

“And so,” Ffollansbye said, “for the second time Mac had caused near apoplexy in high places. But this time he was not present. He was in detention camp, where he was calculating the amount of deficit which bade fair to be the first entry on the flying-pay page of his ledger. Meanwhile, at B.H.Q. and in London they considered his case, with its accumulated documents.

At last they decided, as a matter of self-protection and to forestall him before he invented any more crimes for which K.R. & O. had no precedent, to let him have his way.

“They came and told him that he was for England and the school of aeronautics.

“ ‘If A gang, wull they be char-rgin’ thae leetle unfor-rtunate machine against me?’

“ ‘No,’ they said.

“ ‘Verra weel,’ he said. ‘A’m ready noo.’

“He returned to England, setting foot on his native side of the Channel for the first time in more than two years, refusing leave to go home, as usual. Perhaps it was that matter of the calf’s economic legitimacy; perhaps he had figured the most minimized minimum of unavoidable outlay for the trip — knowing, too, that, whatever he discovered, he could not remain long enough to solidify against what he might find

when he got there. But perhaps not. Perhaps it was just MacWyrghlinchbeath.”

Seven months later, a sergeant pilot, he was trundling an obsolete and unwieldy Reconnaissance Experimental back and forth above the Somme while his officer observer spotted artillery fire from the blunt, bathtubish nose of it. Big, broad-winged, the heavy four-cylinder Beardmore engine thundering sedately behind and above MacWyrghlinchbeath’s head, a temptation and potential victim to anything with a gun on it that could move seventy miles an hour. But all the same, flying hours accumulated slowly in MacWyrghlinchbeath’s log book.

He and his officer carried on a long, intermittent conversation as they pottered about the ancient thing between flights. The officer was an artilleryman by instinct and a wireless enthusiast by inclination; between him and aviation was an antipathy which never flagged. MacWyrghlinchbeath’s passion for accumulating flying time was an enigma to him until, by patient probing, he learned of the neighbor and the mounting hoard of shillings.

“So you came to the war to make money?” he said.

“Aweel,” MacWyrghlinchbeath said, “A wou’na be wastin’ ma time.”

The officer repeated MacWyrghlinchbeath’s history to the mess. A day or two later another pilot — an officer — entered the hangar and found MacWyrghlinchbeath head down in the nacelle of his machine.

“I say, sergeant,” the officer said to the seat of MacWyrghlinchbeath’s breeks. MacWyrghlinchbeath backed slowly into complete sight and turned over his shoulder a streaked face.

“Ay, sir-r.”

“Come down a moment, will you?” MacWyrghlinchbeath climbed down, carrying a wrench and a bit of foul waste. “Robinson tells me you’re a sort of financier,” the officer said.

MacWyrghlinchbeath laid the wrench down and wiped his hands on the waste. "Aweel, A wou'na say just that."

"Now, sergeant, don't deny it. Mr. Robinson has told on you.... Have a cigarette?"

"A'll no' mind." MacWyrghlinchbeath wiped his hands on his thighs and took the cigarette. "A smawk a pipe masel'." He accepted a light.

"I've a bit of business in your line," the officer said. "This day, each month, you're to give me one pound, and for every day I get back, I give you a shilling. What do you say?"

MacWyrghlinchbeath smoked slowly, holding the cigarette as though it were a dynamite cap. "And thae days when ye'll no fly?"

"Just the same. I owe you a shilling."

MacWyrghlinchbeath smoked slowly for a while. "Wull ye gang wi' me as ma obsair-rver-r?"

"Who'll take up my bus? No, no: if I flew with you, I'd not need underwriting.... What do you say?"

MacWyrghlinchbeath mused, the cigarette in his soiled hand. "'Twill tak' thinkin'," he said at last. "A'll tell ye the mor-rn."

"Right. Take the night and think it out." The officer returned to the mess.

"I've got him! I've got him hooked."

"What's your idea?" the C.O. said. "Are you spending all this ingenuity for a pound which you can only win by losing?"

"I just want to watch the old Shylock lose flesh. I should give his money back, even if I won it."

"How?" the C.O. said. The officer looked at him, blinking slowly. "They have an exchange basis between here and Gehenna?" the C.O. said.

"Look here," Robinson said, "why don't you let Mac be? You don't know those people those Highlanders. It takes fortitude just to live as they do, let alone coming away without protest to fight for a king whom they probably still consider a German peasant, and for a cause

that, however it ends, he'll only lose. And the man who can spend three years in this mess and still look forward to a future with any sanity, strength to his arm, say I."

"Hear, hear!" someone cried.

"Oh, have a drink," the other said. "I shan't hurt your Scot."

The next morning MacWyrghlinchbeath paid down the pound, slowly and carefully, but without reluctance. The officer accepted it as soberly.

"We'll start wi' today," MacWyrghlinchbeath said.

"Righto," the officer said. "We'll start in a half hour."

Three days later, after a short conversation with Robinson, the C.O. called MacWyrghlinchbeath's client aside.

"Look here. You must call that silly wager off. You're disrupting my whole squadron. Robinson says that if you're anywhere in sight, he can't even keep MacBeath in their sector long enough after the battery fires to see the bursts."

"It's not my fault, sir. I wasn't buying a watchdog. At least, I thought not. I was just pulling Mac's leg."

"Well, you look him out tomorrow and ask him to release you. We'll have Brigade about our ears at this rate."

The next morning the client talked to MacWyrghlinchbeath. That afternoon Robinson talked to MacWyrghlinchbeath. That evening, after dinner, the C.O. sent for him. But MacWyrghlinchbeath was firm, polite and without heat, and like granite.

The C.O. drummed on the table for a while. "Very well, sergeant," he said at last. "But I order you to keep to your tour of duty. If you are reported off your patrol once more, I'll ground you. Carry on."

MacWyrghlinchbeath saluted. "Verra gude, sir-r."

After that he kept to his tour. Back and forth, back and forth above the puny shell puffs, the gouts of slow smoke. From time to time he scanned the sky above and behind him, but always his eyes returned

northward, where the other R. E. was a monotonous speck in the distance.

This was day after day, while Mr. Robinson, with his binocular, hung over the leading edge of the nacelle like a man in a bath who has dropped the soap overside. But every day the client returned, daily the shillings grew, until that day came when the shilling was profit, followed by another and another. Then the month was complete, and MacWryglinchbeath paid down another pound. The profit was gone now, and his gaze was a little more soberly intent as he stared northward at brief intervals.

Mr. Robinson was leaning, down-peering, over the nacelle when the heavy engine behind him burst into thunderous crescendo and the earth pivoted one hundred and eighty degrees in a single swoop. He jerked himself up and looked behind, swinging his gun about.

The sky was clear, yet they were moving at the R.E.'s sedate top speed. MacWryglinchbeath was staring straight ahead and Robinson turned and saw, indicated by A-A bursts, the other R.E. plunging and darting like an ancient stiffkneed horse. Shrapnel unfolded and bloomed above it, and at last he made out the Fokker clinging to the R.E.'s blind spot. He swung his gun forward and cleared the mechanism with a short burst.

The two R.E.'s approached at a quartering angle, the first zigzagging just above the clinging German, all three losing altitude. The first and last intimation the German had of the presence of the second R.E. was a burst from Robinson's gun. The German shot straight up, stalled, and burst into flames. Then MacWryglinchbeath, yawing violently to dodge the zooming German, saw Robinson fall forward over the edge of the nacelle, and at the same time a rake of tracer smoke along the fuselage beside him.

He swerved; without pausing, the second German shot past and plumped full upon the tail of the first R.E., and again bullets ripped

about MacWryglinchbeath, coming from beneath now, where British infantry were firing at the German.

The three of them were not a hundred feet high when they flashed above the secondary lines and the tilted pink faces of the A-A battery. The German utterly disregarded MacWryglinchbeath. He hung upon the tail of the first R.E., which was still zigzagging in wild and sluggish yaws, and putting his nose down a little more and unfastening his belt, MacWryglinchbeath brought his machine directly above the German and a little behind him.

Still the German seemed utterly unaware of his presence, and MacWryglinchbeath put one leg over the nacelle and got from directly beneath the engine and pushed the stick forward. The German disappeared completely beneath the end of the nacelle and Robinson's dead body sprawled there; immediately afterward, MacWryglinchbeath felt the prolonged shock. He cut the switch and climbed free of the nacelle, onto the bottom wing, where the engine wouldn't fall on him. "Sax shillin'," he said as the sudden earth swooped and tilted.

III

He climbed stiffly down from his Bristol and limped across the tarmac, toward his hut. His limp was pronounced now, a terrific crablike gait, for in the wet, chill October days his broken hips stiffened, even after fourteen months.

The flight was all in, the windows of the officers' mess glowed cheerily across the dusk; he limped on, thinking of tea, a drink, a cozy evening in his hut behind the locked door. That was against the young devils from the mess. Children they took now. The old pilots, mature men, were all dead or promoted to remote Wing offices, their places filled by infants not done with public school, without responsibility or any gift for silence. He went on and opened the door to his hut.

He stopped, the open door in his hand, then he closed it and entered the cubbyhole of a room. His batman had built the fire up in the

miniature stove; the room was quite warm. He laid his helmet and goggles aside and slowly unfastened and removed his flying boots. Only then did he approach the cot and stand there, looking quietly at the object which had caught his eye when he entered. It was his walking-out tunic. It had been pressed, but that was not all.

The Royal Flying Corps tabs and the chevrons had been ripped from shoulder and sleeve, and on each shoulder strap a subaltern's pip was fixed, and upon the breast, above the D.S.M. ribbon, were wings. Beside it his scarred belt lay, polished, with a new and shining shoulder strap buckled on. He was still looking soberly at them when the door burst open upon a thunderous inrush.

"Now, old glum-face!" a young voice cried. "He'll have to buy a drink now. Hey, fellows?"

They watched him from the mess windows as he crossed the aerodrome in the dusk.

"Wait, now," they told one another. "Wait till he's had time to dress."

Another voice rose: "Gad, wouldn't you like to see the old blighter's face when he opens the door?"

"Old blighter?" a flight commander sitting with a newspaper beneath the lamp said. "He's not old. I doubt if he's thirty."

"Good gad! Thirty! Gad, I'll not live to see thirty by ten years."

"Who cares? Who wants to live forever?"

"Stow it. Stow it."

"Ave, Cæsar! Morituri—"

"Stow it, stow it! Don't be a mawkish fool!"

"Gad, yes! What ghastly taste!"

"Thirty! Good gad!"

"He looks about a hundred, with that jolly walnut face of his."

"Let him. He's a decent sort. Shame it wasn't done sooner for him."

"Yes. Been a D.S.O. and an M.C. twice over by now."

“Got quite a decent clink record too. Deserted once, you know.”

“Go on!”

“ ‘Struth. And first time he was ever off the ground he nipped off alone on a pup. No instruction; ack emma then. Sort of private solo.”

“I say, do you know that yarn they tell about him about hoarding his pay against peace? Sends it all home. Done it for years.”

“Well, why not?” the flight commander said. “If some of you young puppies would just—” They shouted him down. “Clear off, the lot of you!” the flight commander said above the din. “Why don’t you go and fetch him up here?”

They charged from the room; the noise faded in the outer dusk. The three flight commanders sat down again, talking quietly among themselves.

“I’m glad too. Trouble is, they should have done it years ago.

Ffollansbye recommended him once. Dare say some ass hipped on precedent quashed it.”

“Too bad Ffollansbye couldn’t have lived to see it done.”

“What a putrid shame.”

“Yes. But you’d not know it from Mac. Ffollansbye told him when he put him up. Old Mac never said anything at all; just went on about his business. And then, when Ffollansbye had to tell him it was no go, he just sort of grunted and thanked him, and carried on as though it had never come up.”

“What a ruddy shame.”

“Yes. Sort of makes you glad you belong to the same squadron with a chap like that. Does his bit and be damned to you.” They sat in the cozy warmth, talking quietly of MacWyrghinchbeath. Feet rushed again beyond the door; it opened and two of the deputation stood in it with their young, baffled faces.

“Well?” someone said. “Where’s the victim?”

But they were beckoning the senior flight commander, in whose flight MacWyrghlinchbeath was.

“Come here, skipper,” they said. The senior looked at them. He did not rise.

“What’s row?”

But they were merely urgent and mysterious; not until the three of them were outside did they explain. “The old fool won’t take it,” they said in hushed tones. “Can you believe it? Can you?”

“We’ll see,” the flight commander said. Beyond MacWyrghlinchbeath’s door the sound of voices indistinguishable and expostulant came.

The flight commander entered and thrust among them as they stood about the cot. The tunic and belt lay untouched upon it; beside it MacWyrghlinchbeath sat in the lone chair.

“Clear off, now,” the flight commander said, herding them toward the door. “Off with you, the whole lot.” He pushed the last one out and shut the door and returned and straddled his legs before the stove.

“What’s all the hurrah, Mac?”

“Weel, skipper,” MacWyrghlinchbeath said slowly, “thae bairns mean weel, A doot not—” He looked up. “Ye ha’ disfee-gur-red ma walkin-oot tunic, and thae bairns think A sud just dress up in a’ thae leather-r and brass, and gang wi’ they tae thae awf-ficer-rs’ mess.” He mused again upon the tunic.

“Right,” the flight commander said. “Shame it wasn’t done a year ago. Hop into it now, and come along. Dinner’s about about.”

But MacWyrghlinchbeath did not stir. He put his hand out slowly and musingly, and touched the gallant sweep of the embroidered wings above the silken candy stripe.

“Thae bairns mean weel, A mak’ nae doot,” he said.

“Silly young pups. But we’re all damned glad. You should have seen the major when it came through this morning. Like a child on Christmas Eve. The lads could hardly wait until they could sneak your tunic out.”

“Ay,” MacWyrghlinchbeath said. “They mean well, A mak’ nae doot. But ‘twill tak’ thinkin’.” He sat, slowly and gently touching the wings with a blunt hand, pitted and grained with four years of grease. The flight commander watched quietly and with what he thought was comprehension. He moved.

“Right you are. Take the night and think it out. Better show up at breakfast, though, or those devils will be after you again.”

“Ay,” MacWyrghlinchbeath said. “ ‘Twill tak’ thinkin’.”

Dark was fully come. The flight commander strode savagely back to the mess, swearing. He opened the door, and, still cursing, he entered. The others faced him quickly.

“Is he coming?”

The flight commander cursed steadily — Wing, Brigade, Staff, the war, Parliament.

“Do you think he will? Would any of you yourselves, after they’d let you rot for four ruddy years, and then gave you a second lieutenancy as though it were a Garter? The man has pride, and he’s damned well right.”

After his dinner MacWyrghlinchbeath went to the sergeant of the officers’ mess and talked with him. Then he went to the squadron commander’s orderly and talked with him. Then he returned and sat on his cot — he had yet the stub of candle, for light was furnished him now; but he was well into his second pencil — and calculated. He roughly computed the cost of a new uniform and accessories, with an allowance for laundry.

Then he calculated a month’s average battel bill, added the amounts and subtracted the total from a subaltern’s pay. he compared the result with his present monthly net, sitting above the dead yet irrevocable assertion of the figures for a long time. Then he tied the ledger up in its bit of greasy cord and went to bed.

The next morning he sought the flight commander. "Thae bairns mean well, A mak' nae doot," he said, with just a trace of apology. "And the major-r. A'm gritfu' tae ye a'. But 'twina do, skipper. Ye ken that."

"Yes," the flight commander said. "I see. Yes." Again and aloud he cursed the whole fabric of the war. "Stupid fools, with their ruddy tabs and brass. No wonder they can't win a war in four years. You're right, Mac; 'course it's no go at this late day. And I'm sorry, old fellow." He wrung MacWyrghlinchbeath's limp, calloused hand hard.

"A'm gritfu'," MacWyrghlinchbeath said. "A'm obleeged."

That was in October, 1918.

By two o'clock there was not a mechanic on the place. On the tarmac the squadron commander's machine stood, the engine idling; in the cockpit the major sat. He was snoring. Up and down the aerodrome the senior flight commander and a wing commander and an artillery officer raced in the squadron's car, while a fourth man in an S.E. 5 played tag with them.

He appeared to be trying to set his landing gear down in the tonneau of the car; at each failure the occupants of the car howled, the artillery officer waving a bottle; each time the flight commander foiled him by maneuvering, they howled again and passed the bottle from mouth to mouth.

The mess was littered with overturned chairs and with bottles and other objects small enough to throw. Beneath the table lay two men to whom three hours of peace had been harder than that many years of fighting; above and upon and across them the unabated tumult raged. At last one climbed upon the table and stood swaying and shouting until he made himself heard:

"Look here! Where's old Mac?"

"Mac!" they howled. "Where's old Mac? Can't have a binge without old Mac!"

They rushed from the room. In his cockpit the major snored; the squadron car performed another last-minute skid as the S. E.'s propeller flicked the cap from the artillery officer's head. They rushed on to MacWyrghlinchbeath's hut and crashed the door open. MacWyrghlinchbeath was sitting on his cot, his ledger upon his knees and his pencil poised above it. He was taking stock.

With the hammer which he had concealed beneath the well coping four years ago he carefully drew the nails in the door and window frames and put them into his pocket and opened his house again. He put the hammer and the nails away in their box, and from another box he took his kilts and shook them out. The ancient folds were stiff, reluctant, and moths had been among them, and he clicked his tongue soberly.

Then he removed his tunic and breeks and putties, and donned the kilts. With the fagots he had stored there four years ago he kindled a meager fire on the hearth and cooked and ate his supper. Then he smoked his pipe, put the dottle carefully away, smothered the fire and went to bed.

The next morning he walked three miles down the glen to the neighbor's. The neighbor, from his tilted doorway, greeted him with sparse surprise:

"Weel, Wully. A thocht ye'd be comin' hame. A heer-rd thae war-r was done wi'."

"Ay," MacWyrghlinchbeath said, and together they stood beside the angling fence of brush and rocks and looked at the shaggy, small horse and the two cows balanced, seemingly without effort, on the forty-five-degree slope of the barn lot.

"Ye'll be takin' away thae twa beasties," the neighbor said.

"Thae three beasties, ye mean," MacWyrghlinchbeath said. They did not look at each other. They looked at the animals in the lot.

"Ye'll mind ye left but twa wi' me."

They looked at the three animals. "Ay," MacWyrghlinchbeath said. Presently they turned away. They entered the cottage. The neighbor lifted a hearthstone and counted down MacWyrghlinchbeath's remittances to the last ha'penny. The total agreed exactly with the ledger.

"A'm gritfu'," MacWyrghlinchbeath said.

"Ye'll ha' ither spoil frae thae war-r, A doot not?" the neighbor said.

"Naw. 'Twas no that kind o' a war-r," MacWyrghlinchbeath said.

"Ay," the neighbor said. "No Hieland Scots ha' ever won aught in English war-rs."

MacWyrghlinchbeath returned home. The next day he walked to the market town, twelve miles away. Here he learned the current value of two-year-old cattle; he consulted a lawyer also. He was closeted with the lawyer for an hour. Then he returned home, and with pencil and paper and the inch-long butt of the candle he calculated slowly, proved his figures, and sat musing above the result. Then he snuffed the candle and went to bed.

The next morning he walked down the glen. The neighbor, in his tilted doorway, greeted him with sparse surprise:

"Weel, Wully. Ye ha' cam' for thae twa beasties?"

"Ay," MacWyrghlinchbeath said.

The End

Idyll in the Desert, William Faulkner

Idyll in the Desert

Random House, December 1931

I

“It would take me four days to make my route. I would leave Blizzard on a Monday and get to Painter’s about sundown and spend the night. The next night I would make Ten Sleep and then turn and go back across the mesa. The third night I would camp, and on Thursday night I would be home again.”

“Didn’t you ever get lonesome?” I said.

“Well, a fellow hauling government mail, government property. You hear tell of these old desert rats getting cracked in the head. But did you ever hear of a soldier getting that way? Even a West Pointer, a fellow out of the cities, that never was out of hollering distance of a hundred people before in his life, let him be out on a scout by himself for six months, even.

Because that West Pointer, he’s like me; he ain’t riding alone. He’s got Uncle Sam right there to talk to whenever he feels like talking: Washington and the big cities full of folks, and all that that means to a man, like what Saint Peter and the Holy Church of Rome used to mean to them old priests, when them Spanish Bishops would come riding across the mesa on a mule, surrounded by the ghostly hosts of Heaven with harder hitting guns than them old Sharpshes even, because the pore aboriginee that got shot with them heavenly bolts, they never even saw the shooting, let alone the gun. And then I carry a rifle, and there’s always the chance of an antelope and once I killed a mountain sheep without even getting out of the buckboard.”

“Was it a big one?” I said.

“Sure. I was coming around a shoulder of the canyon just about sunset. The sun was just above the rim, shining right in my face. So I saw these two sheep just under the rim. I could see their horns and tails against the sky, but I couldn’t see the sheep for the sunset. I could see a set of horns, I could make out a pair of hindquarters, but because of the sun I

couldn't make out if them sheep were on this side of the rim or just beyond it. And I didn't have time to get closer. I just pulled the team up and threw up my rifle and put a bullet about two foot back of them horns and another bullet about three foot ahead of them hindquarters and jumped out of the blackboard running."

"Did you get both of them?" I said.

"No. I just got one. But he had two bullets in him; one back of the fore leg and the other right under the hind leg."

"Oh," I said.

"Yes. Them bullets was five foot apart."

"That's a good story," I said.

"It was a good sheep. But what was I talking about? I talk so little that, when I mislay a subject, I have to stop and hunt for it. I was talking about being lonesome, wasn't I? There wouldn't hardly a winter pass without I would have at least one passenger on the up or down trip, even if it wasn't anybody but one of Painter's hands, done rode his horse down to Blizzard with forty dollars in his pocket, to leave his horse at Blizzard and go down to Juarez and bust the bank with that forty dollars by Christmas day and come back and maybe set up with Painter for his range boss, provided if Painter was honest and industrious and worked hard. They'd always ride back up to Painter's with me along about New Year's."

"What about their horses?" I said.

"What horses?"

"The ones they rode down to Blizzard and left there."

"Oh. Them horses would belong to Matt Lewis by that time. Matt runs the livery stable."

"Oh," I said.

"Yes. Matt says he don't know what to do. He said he kept on hoping that maybe this polo would take the country like Mah-Jong done a

while back. But now he says he reckons he'll have to start him a glue factory. But what was I talking about?"

"You talk so seldom," I said. "Was it about getting lonesome?"

"Oh yes. And then I'd have these lungers. That would be a passenger a week for two weeks."

"Would they come in pairs?"

"No. It would be the same one. I'd take him up one week and leave him, and the next week I'd bring him back down to make the east bound train. I reckon the air up at Sivgut was a little too stiff for eastern lungs."

"Sivgut?" I said.

"Sure. Siv. One of them things they strain the meal through back east at Santone and Washinton. Siv."

"Oh. Siv. Yes. Sivgut. What is that?"

"It's a house we built. A good house. They kept on coming here, getting off at Blizzard, passing Phoenix where there is what you might call back east at Santone and Washinton a dude lung-ranch. They'd pass that and come on to Blizzard: a peaked-looking fellow in his Sunday clothes, with his eyes closed and his skin the color of sandpaper, and a fat wife from one of them eastern corn counties, telling how they wanted too much at Phoenix so they come on to Blizzard because they don't think a set of eastern wore-out lungs is worth what the folks in Phoenix wanted.

Or maybe it would be vice versa, with the wife with a sand-colored face with a couple of red spots on it like the children had been spending a wet Sunday with some scraps of red paper and a pot of glue while she was asleep, and her still asleep but not too much asleep to put in her opinion about how much folks in Phoenix thought loway lungs was worth on the hoof. So we built Sivgut for them. The Blizzard Chamber of Commerce did it, with two bunks and a week's grub, because it takes me a week to get up there again and bring them back down to make the Phoenix train. It's a good camp. We named it Sivgut because of the view.

On a clear day you can see clean down into Mexico. Did I tell you about the day when that last revolution broke out in Mexico? Well, one day — it was a Tuesday, about ten o'clock in the morning — I got there and the lunger was out in front, staring off to the south with his hand shading his eyes. 'It's a cloud of dust,' he says. 'Look at it.' I looked. 'That's curious,' I said. 'It can't be a rodeo or I'd heard about it. And it can't be a sandstorm,' I said, 'because it's too big and staying in one place.' I went on and got back to Blizzard on Thursday. Then I learned about this new revolution down in Mexico. Broke out Tuesday just before sundown, they told me."

"I thought you said you saw that dust at ten o'clock," I said.

"Sure. But things happen so fast down there in Mexico that that dust started rising the night before to get out of the way of—"

"Don't tell about that," I said. "Tell about Sivgut."

"All right. I'd get up to Sivgut on Tuesday morning. At first she'd be in the door, or maybe out in front of the cabin, looking down the trail for me. But after that sometimes I would drive right up to the door and stop the team and say 'Hello' and the house still as vacant as the day it was built."

"A woman," I said.

"Yes. She stayed on, after he got well and left. She stayed on."

"She must have liked the country."

"I guess not. I don't guess any of them liked the country. Would you like a country you were just using to get well from a sickness you were ashamed for your friends to know you had?"

"I see." I said. "He got well first. Why didn't he wait until his wife got well too?"

"I guess he never had time to wait. I guess he figgered there was a right smart lot for him to do yet back yonder, being a young fellow, and like he had just got out of jail after a long time."

“That’s less reason than ever for him to leave his wife sick.”

“He didn’t know she was sick. That she had it too.”

“Didn’t know?” I said.

“You take a sick fellow, a young fellow at that, without no ties to speak of, having to come and live for two years in a place where there ain’t a traffic light in four hundred miles; where there ain’t nothing but quiet and sunlight and them durn stars staring him in the face all night long. You couldn’t expect him to pay much mind to somebody that never done nothing but cook his food and chop his firewood and haul his water in a tin bucket from a spring three quarters of a mile away to wash him in like he was a baby. So when he got well, I don’t reckon he could be blamed for not noticing that she had one more burden herself, especially if that burden wasn’t nothing but a few little old bugs.”

“I don’t know what you call ties, then,” I said, “If marriage isn’t a tie.”

“Now you’re getting at it. Marriage is a tie; only, it depends some on who you are married to. You know what my private opinion is, after having watched them for about ten years, once a week on a Tuesday, as well as carrying a letter or a telegram back and forth between them and the railroad?”

“What is your private opinion?”

“It’s my private opinion, based on evidence though not hidebound; I was never a opinionated man; that they wasn’t married to one another a-tall.”

“What do you consider evidence?”

“Well, a letter to me from a fellow back east that did claim to be her husband might be considered as evidence. What do you think?”

“Did you kill this sheep with one shot or with two,” I said.

“Sho, now,” the mail rider said.

II

“This fellow got off the west bound train one morning about ten years ago. He didn’t look like a lunger, maybe because he didn’t have but one

grip. Usually it's too late already when they come here. Usually the doctor has told them they haven't got but a month more, or maybe six months. Yet they'll get off that west bound train sometimes with everything but the cook stove. I've noticed that taking trouble just to get through the world is about the hardest habit of all to break. Owning things.

I know folks right now that would hold up a train bound for heaven while they telephoned back home for the cook to run and bring them something which, not having ever had any use for it at home, they had done forgot. They could live in a house on earth with it for years without even knowing where it was, but just try to get them to start to heaven without taking it along.

"He didn't look like a lunger. He didn't look concerned enough. You take them, even while they are sitting on the baggage truck with their eyes shut while the wife is arguing with anybody in sight that her husband's lungs ain't worth as much as western folks seem to think, and they look concerned. They are right there, where it is going on. They don't care who knows that they are the most interested parties present. Like a man on horseback that's swallowed a dynamite cap and a sharp rock at the same time.

"But him. His name was Darrel, Darrel Howes. Maybe House. She called him Dorry. He just got off the train with his one grip and stood on our platform and sneered at it, the mountains, the space, at the Lord God Himself that watches a man here like a man might watch a bug, a ant.

" 'Our station ain't much,' I says. 'You'll have to give us a little time. We only been working on this country about two hundred years and we ain't got it finished yet.'

"He looked at me, a tall fellow in clothes that hadn't never seen as far west as Santone even, before he brought them. What the pitchure magazines would call a dook, maybe. 'That's all right with me,' he says. 'I don't intend to look at any of it longer than I can help.'

“ ‘Help yourself,’ I said. ‘They’ll tell you in Washinton it belongs to you too.’

“ ‘They can have my part of it back soon then,’ he says. He looked at me. ‘You’ve got a house here. A camp.’

“I understood what he meant then, what he had come for; I hadn’t never suspected it. I guess I thought he was a drummer, maybe. A perfume drummer, maybe. ‘Oh,’ I says. ‘You mean Sivgut. Sure. You want to use it?’

“That was what he wanted, standing there in his eastern clothes like a Hollywood dook, sneering. And then I knew that he was just about scared to death. After them three or four days on the train with nobody to talk to except his own inhabitants, he had just about got himself scared to death. ‘Sure,’ I said. ‘It’s a good camp. You’ll like it up there. I’m going up there today. You can go with me, if you want to look at it.

I will get you back here by Thursday night.’ He didn’t say anything. He didn’t seem to be paying any attention at all. ‘You’ll have a lot of time to listen to them little things before you die, my friend,’ I says to myself. ‘And without anybody to help you listen, neither.’ I thought that that was what it was. That he was just young (there was something about him that let you know, plain as if he had told you, that he was an only child and that his ma had been a widow since before he begun to remember; anyway, you could see that he had probably spent all his life being took care of by women, women to whom he looked like quite a figger, and here when he really needed to be took care of, he was ashamed to tell them the reason of it, and scared of himself.

I didn’t think he knew what he wanted to do or what he would do next; I thought that all he wanted was for somebody to tell him they would do this or that next, before the time come to need to do something else even. I thought he was running from himself, trying to lose himself in some crowd or in some strange surroundings where he would get lost and couldn’t keep up. I never thought different even when he asked about food. ‘We’ll find some at camp,’ I said. ‘Enough for a week.’

“ ‘You pass there every week do you?’ he said.

“ ‘Sure. Every Tuesday. I get there Tuesday morning. And Thursday night this team will be champing corn in Blizzard again.’

“The team was. I was in Blizzard too, but he was up there at Sivgut. He wasn’t standing in the door, watching me drive away, neither. He was down in the canyon behind the camp, chopping wood, and not making much of an out with the axe, neither. He gave me ten dollars, to buy him a week’s grub. ‘You can’t eat no ten dollars in a week,’ I said. ‘Five will be all you’ll want. I’ll bring it to you and you can pay me then.’ But that wouldn’t do him. When I left there, I had his five dollars.

“I didn’t buy the grub. I borrowed a buffalo robe from Matt Lewis, because the weather had changed that week and I knew it would be a cold ride for him, them two days back to town in the buckboard. He was glad to see the robe. He said the nights was getting pretty chilly, and that he would be glad to have it. So I left the mail with him and I went back to Painter’s and talked Painter out of enough grub to last him until next Tuesday. And I left him there again. He gave me another five dollars. ‘I’m making out a little better with the axe,’ he told me. ‘Don’t forget my grub, this time.’

“And I didn’t forget it. I carried it to him every Tuesday for two years, until he left. I’d see him every Tuesday, especially during that first winter that near about killed him, I’d find him laying on the cot, coughing blood, and I’d cook him up a pot of beans and cut him enough firewood to last until next Tuesday, and finally I took the telegram down to the railroad and sent it for him. It was to a Mrs. So-and-so in New York; I thought that maybe his ma had married again, and it didn’t make sense. It just said ‘I’ve two weeks more the less long than farewell’ and there wasn’t any name to it. So I signed my name to it, Lucas Crump, Mail Rider, and sent it on. I paid for it, too. She got there in five days. It took her five days to get there, and ten years to leave.”

“You said two years a minute ago,” I said.

“That was him. He just stayed two years. I guess that first winter maybe killed his bugs, same as boll weevils back east in Texas. Anyway, he

begun to set up and to chop the wood himself, so that when I'd get there about ten o'clock she'd tell me he had done been gone since sunup. And then one day, in the spring after she come there the spring before, I saw him in Blizzard. He had walked in, forty miles, and he had gained about thirty pounds and he looked hard as a range pony. I didn't see him but for a minute, because he was in a hurry. I didn't know how much of a hurry until I saw him getting onto the east bound train when it pulled out. I thought then that he was still running from himself."

"And when you found that the woman was still up there at Sivgut, what did you think then?"

"I knew that he was running from himself then," the Mail Rider said.

III

"And the woman, you said she stayed ten years."

"Sure. She just left yesterday."

"You mean that she stayed on eight years after he left?"

"She was waiting for him to come back. He never told her he wasn't coming back. And besides, she had the bugs herself then. Maybe it was the same ones, up and moved onto a new pasture."

"And he didn't know it? Living right there in the same house with her, he didn't know she was infected?"

"How know it? You reckon a fellow that's got a dynamite cap inside him has got time to worry about whether his neighbor swallowed one too or not? And besides, she had done left a husband and two children when she got the telegram. So I reckon she felt for him to come back. I used to talk to her, that first winter when we thought he was going to die.

She was a durn sight handier with that axe than he was, and sometimes there wouldn't be a thing for me to do when I got there.

So we would talk. She was about ten years older than him, and she told me about her husband, that was about ten years older than her, and

their children. Her husband was one of these architects and she told me about how Dorry came back from this Bow and Art school in Paris and how he went to work in her husband's office.

And I guess he was a pretty stiff lick to a woman of thirty-five and maybe better, that had a husband and a house that all run themselves too well for her to meddle with, and Dorry just twenty-five and fresh from Pareesian bowleywards and looking like a Hollywood dook to boot.

So I guess it couldn't have been long before they had one another all steamed up to where they believed they couldn't live until they had told her husband and his boss that love was im-perious or im-peerious or whatever it is, and had went off to live just down the canyon from a stage settin with the extra hands all playing mouth-organs and accordions in the background.

"That would have been all right. They could have bore unreality. It was the reality they never had the courage to deny. He tried, though. She told me that she didn't know he was sick nor where he had went to until she got our telegram. She says he just sent her a note that he was gone and to not expect him back. Then she got the telegram. 'And there wasn't nothing else I could do,' she says, in a man's flannel shirt and corduroy coat. She had fell off and she didn't look thirty-five by five years. But I don't reckon he noticed that. 'There was nothing else I could do,' she says. 'Because his mother had just died the year before.' 'Sho,' I said. 'I hadn't thought of that. And since she couldn't come, you had to since he never had no grandmother nor wife nor sister nor daughter nor maid servant.' But she wasn't listening.

"She never listened to anything except to him in the bed or to the pot on the stove. 'You've learned to cook fine,' I told her. 'Cook?' she said. 'Why not?' I don't guess she knew what she was eating, if she et at all, which I never saw her do. Only now and then I would make her think that she had found herself some way to get the grub done without burning it or having it taste like throwed-away cinch-leathers. I reckon though women just ain't got time to worry much about what food

tastes like. But now and then during that bad winter I'd just up and run her out of the kitchen and cook him something he needed.

"Then that next spring I saw him at the station that day, getting on the train. After that, neither of us ever mentioned him a-tall. I went up to see her next day. But we didn't mention him; I never told her I saw him get on the train. I set out the week's grub and I says, 'I may come back this way tomorrow,' not looking at her. 'I ain't got anything that goes beyond Ten Sleep. So I may come back past here tomorrow on my way to Blizzard.' 'I think I have enough to last me until next Tuesday,' she says. 'Alright,' I says. 'I'll see you then.'"

"So she stayed," I said.

"Sure. She had them herself, then. She didn't tell me for some time. Sometimes it would be two months and I would not see her. Sometimes I would hear her down in the canyon with the axe, and sometimes she would speak to me out of the house, without coming to the door, and I would set the grub on the bench and wait a while. But she would not come out, and I would go on. When I saw her again, she never looked no thirty-five by twenty years. And when she left yesterday, she didn't look it by thirty-five years."

"She gave him up and left, did she?"

"I telegraphed to her husband. That was about six months after Dorry left. The husband he got here in five days, same as she did. He was a fine fellow, kind of old. But not after making no trouble. 'I'm obliged to you,' he says first thing. 'What for?' I says. 'I'm obliged to you,' he says. 'What do you think I had better do first?'

"We talked it over. We figgered he had better wait in town until I got back. I went up there. I didn't tell her he was there. I never got that far; that was the first time I ever come out and talked like there was any such thing as tomorrow. I never got far enough to tell her he was there. I came back and told him. 'Maybe next year,' I told him. 'You try then.'

She still thought Dorry was coming back. Like he would be on the next train.

So the husband he went back home and I fixed the money up in an envelope and I got Manny Hughes in the postoffice to help compound a crime or whatever you do to the government, with the cancelling machine so it would look natural, and I carried it to her. 'It's registered,' I said. 'Must be a gold mine in it.'

And she took it, fake number and fake postmark and all, and opened it, looking for the letter from Dorry. Dorry, she called him; did I tell you? The only thing she seemed to mistrust about it was the only thing that was authentic. 'There's no letter,' she says. 'Maybe he was in a hurry,' I says. 'He must be pretty busy to have earned all that money in six months.'

"After that, two or three times a year I would take her one of these faked letters. Once a week I would write her husband how she was getting along, and I would take the money two or three times a year, when she would about be running out, and take the letter to her, and her opening the envelope and kind of throwing the money aside to look for the letter, and then looking at me like she believed that me or Manny had opened the envelope and taken the letter out. Maybe she believed that we did.

"I couldn't get her to eat right. Finally, about a year ago, she had to go to bed too, in the same cot, the same blankets. I telegraphed her husband and he sent a special train with one of them eastern specialists that won't look at you without you got pedigree stud papers, and we told her he was the County Health officer on his yearly rounds and that his fee was one dollar and she paid him, letting him give her change for a five dollar bill, and him looking at me.

'Go on and tell her,' I said. 'You can live a year,' he said. 'A year?' she says. 'Sure,' I says. 'That'll be plenty long. You can get here from anywhere in five days.' 'That's so,' she says. 'Do you think I ought to try to write to him? I might put it in the papers,' she said. 'I wouldn't do

that,' I said. 'He's busy. If he wasn't pretty busy, he couldn't make the money he's making. Could he?' 'That's so,' she said.

"So the doctor went back to New York on his special train, and he gave the husband an earfull. I had a wire from him right off; he wanted to send the specialist back, this eastern stud doctor. But he figgered by telegraph that that wouldn't do any good, so I told my substitute he could make a good job; he could make one and a half of my pay for a year. It never done no harm to let him think he was working for one of these big eastern syndicates too, as well as the government.

And I took a bed roll and I camped out in the canyon below the cabin. We got a Injun woman to wait on her. The Injun woman couldn't talk enough of any language to tell her better than a rich man sent her to wait there. And there she waited, with me camped out in the canyon, telling her I was on my vacation, hunting sheep. That vacation lasted eight months. It took her a right smart while.

"Then I went back to town and telegraphed her husband. He telegraphed back to put her on the Los Angeles train on Wednesday, that he would go on to Los Angeles by airplane and meet the train, so we brought her down Wednesday. She was laying on a stretcher when the train come in and stopped and the engine uncoupled and went on down to the water tank. She was laying on the stretcher, waiting for them to lift her into the baggage car; me and the Injun woman had told her that the rich man had sent for her, when they come up."

"They?" I said.

"Dorry and his new wife. I forgot to tell that. News passes Blizzard about four times before it ever lights. News happens in Pittsburg, say. All right. It gets radioed, passing right over us to Los Angeles or Frisco. All right.

They put the Los Angeles and Frisco papers into the airplane and they pass right over us, going east now to Phoenix. Then they put the papers onto the fast train and the news passes us again, going west at sixty miles an hour at two A. M. And then the papers come back east on the

local, and we get a chance to read them. Matt Lewis showed me the paper, about the wedding, on Tuesday. 'You reckon this is the same Darrel House?' he says. 'Is the gal rich?' I says. 'She's from Pittsburg,' Matt says. 'Then that's the one,' I says.

"So they were all out of the cars, stretching their legs like they do. You know these pullman trains. Folks that have lived together for four days. All know one another like a family: the millionaire, the movie queen, the bride and groom with rice still in their hair like as not.

He still never looked a day more than thirty, with this new wife holding to him with her face lowered, and the heads of them other passengers turning when they passed, the heads of the old folks remembering their honeymoons too, and of the bachelors too, thinking maybe a few of the finest thoughts they ever think about this world and the bride thinking a little too, maybe, shrinking against her husband and holding him and thinking enough to imagine herself walking along there nekkid and probably she wouldn't take eleven dollars or even fifteen for the privilege.

They come on too, with the other passengers that would come up and pass the stretcher and glance at it and then kind of pause like a house-owner that finds a dead dog or maybe a queer-shaped piece of wood at the corner, and go on."

"Did they go on, too?"

"That's right. They come up and looked at her, with the gal kind of shrinking off against her husband and holding him, with her eyes wide, and Dorry looking down at her and going on, and she — she couldn't move anything except her eyes then — turning her eyes to follow them, because she seen the rice in their hair too by then. I guess she had maybe thought all the time until then that he would get off the train and come to her. She thought he would look like he had when she saw him last, and she thought that she would look like she had when he saw her first. And so when she saw him and saw the gal and smelt the rice,

all she could do was move her eyes. Or maybe she didn't know him at all. I don't know."

"But he," I said. "What did he say?"

"Nothing. I don't reckon he recognized me. There was a lot of folks there, and I didn't happen to be up in front. I don't guess he saw me a-tall."

"I mean, when he saw her."

"He didn't know her. Because he didn't expect to see her there. You take your own brother and see him somewhere you don't expect to, where it never occurred to your wildest dream he would be, and you wouldn't know him. Let alone if he has went and aged forty years on you in ten winters. You got to be suspicious of folks to recognize them at a glance wherever you see them. And he wasn't suspicious of her. That was her trouble. But it didn't last long."

"What didn't last long?"

"Her trouble. When they took her off the train at Los Angeles she was dead. Then it was her husband's trouble. Ours, too. She stayed in the morgue two days, because when he went and looked at her, he didn't believe it was her. We had to telegraph back and forth four times before he would believe it was her. Me and Matt Lewis paid for the telegrams, too. He was busy and forgot to pay for them, I guess."

"You must still have had some of the money the husband sent you to fool her with," I said.

The Mail Rider chewed. "She was alive when he was sending that money," he said. "That was different." He spat carefully. He wiped his sleeve across his mouth.

"Have you got any Indian blood?" I said.

"Indian blood?"

"You talk so little. So seldom."

"Oh, sure. I have some Indian blood. My name used to be Sitting Bull."

"Used to be?"

“Sure. I got killed one day a while back. Didn’t you read it in the paper?”

The End

Two Dollar Wife, William Faulkner

Two Dollar Wife

College Life, Volume XVIII, 1936

“AIN’T SHE NEVER going to be ready!” Maxwell Johns stared at himself in the mirror. He watched himself light a cigarette and snap the match backward over his shoulder. It struck the hearth and bounced, still burning, toward the rug.

“What the hell do I care if it burns the damn dump down!” he snarled, striding up and down the garish parlor of the Houston home. He stared at his reflection again — slim young body in evening clothes, smooth dark hair, smooth white face. He could hear, in the room overhead, Doris Houston and her mother shrieking at each other.

“Listen at ’em squall!” he grunted. “You’d think it was a knock-down-and-drag-out going on instead of a flounce getting into her duds. Oh, hell! Their brains are fuzzy as the cotton we grow!”

A colored maid entered the room and pattered about a moment, her vast backside billowing like a high wave under oil. She glanced at Maxwell and sniffed her way out of the room.

The screams above reached a crescendo. Then he heard rushing feet, eager and swift — a bright eager clatter, young and evanescent.

A final screech from above seemed to shoot Doris Houston into the room like a pip squeezed from an orange. She was thin as a dragonfly,

honey-haired, with long coltish legs. Her small face was alternate patches of dead white and savage red.

She carried a fur coat over her arm and held onto one shoulder of her dress with the other hand. The other shoulder, with a dangling strap, had slipped far down.

Doris shrugged the gown back into place and mumbled between her red lips. A needle glinted between her white teeth, the gossamer thread floating out as she flung the coat down and whirled her back to Maxwell. "Here, Unconscious, sew me up!" he interpreted her mumbled words.

"Good God, I just sewed you into it night before last!" Maxwell growled. "And I sewed you into it Christmas Eve, and I sewed—" "Aw, dry up!" said Doris. "You did your share of tearing it off of me! Sew it good this time, and let it stay sewed!"

He sewed it, muttering to himself, with long, savage stitches like a boy sewing the ripped cover of a baseball. He snapped the thread, juggled the needle from one hand to the other for a moment and then thrust it carelessly into the seat cover of a chair.

Doris shrugged the strap into place with a wriggle and reached for her coat. Outside a motor horn brayed, "Here they are!" she snapped. "Come on!"

Again feet sounded on the stairs — like lumps of half-baked dough slopping off a table. Mrs. Houston thrust her frizzled hair and her diamonds into the room.

"Doris!" she shrieked. "Where are you going tonight? Maxwell, don't you dare let Doris stay out till all hours again like she did Christmas Eve! I don't care if it is New Year's! Do you hear? Doris, you come home—"

"All right! All right!" squawked Doris without looking back. "Come on, Unconscious!"

“Get in!” barked Walter Mitchell, driver of the car. “Get in back, Doris, damn it! Lucille, get your legs outa my lap! How the hell you expect me to drive?”

As the car ripped through the outer fringe of the town, a second car, also containing two couples, turned in from a side road. The drivers blatted horns at each other in salute. Side by side they swerved into the straight road that led past the Country Club. They raced, roaring, rocking — sixty — seventy — seventy-five, hub brushing hub, outer wheels on the rims of the road. Behind the steering wheels glowered two almost identical faces — barbered, young, grim.

Far ahead gleamed the white gates of the Country Club. “You better slow down!” shrieked Doris.

“Slow down, hell!” growled Mitchell, foot and accelerator both flat on the floorboards.

The other car drew ahead, horn blatting derisively, voices squalling meaningless gibberish. Mitchell swore under his breath.

Scre-e-e-e-each!

The lead car took the turn on two wheels, leaped, bucked, careened wildly and shot up the drive. Mitchell slammed his throttle shut and drifted on down the dark road. A mile from the Country Club he ground the car to a stop, switched off engine and lights and pulled a flask from his pocket.

“Let’s have a drink!” he grunted, proffering the flask.

“I don’t want to stop here,” Doris said. “I want to go to the Club.”

“Don’t you want a drink?” asked Mitchell.

“No. I don’t want a drink, either. I want to go to the Club.”

“Don’t pay any attention to her,” said Maxwell. “If anybody comes along I’ll show ’em the license.”

A month before, just after Maxwell had been suspended from Sewanee, Mitchell had dared Doris and him to get married. Maxwell had borrowed two dollars from the Negro janitor at the Cotton Exchange, where Max “worked” in his father’s office, and they had driven a hundred miles and bought a license. Then Doris changed her mind. Maxwell still carried the license in his pocket, now a little smeary from moisture and friction.

Lucille shrieked with laughter.

“Max, you behave yourself!” squawked Doris. “Take your hands away!”

“Here, give me the license,” said Walter, “I’ll tie it on the radiator. Then they won’t even have to get out of the car to look at it.”

“No you won’t!” Doris cried.

“What you got to say about it?” demanded Walter. “Max was the one that paid two dollars for it — not you.”

“I don’t care! It’s got my name on it!”

“Gimme my two dollars back and you can have it,” said Maxwell.

“I haven’t got two dollars. You take me back to the Club, Walter Mitchell!”

“I’ll give you two bucks for it, Max,” said Walter.

“Okay,” agreed Maxwell, putting his hand to his coat. Doris flung herself at him.

“No you don’t!” she cried. “I’m going to tell daddy on you!”

“What do you care?” protested Walter. “I’m going to scratch out yours and Max’s names and put mine and Lucille’s in. We’re liable to need it!”

“I don’t care! Mine will still be on it and it will be bigamy.”

“You mean incest, honey,” Lucille said.

“I don’t care what I mean. I’m going back to the Club!”

“Are you?” Walter said. “Tell them we’ll be there after while.” He handed Maxwell the flask.

Doris banged the door open and jumped out.

“Hey, wait!” Walter cried. “I didn’t—”

Already they could hear Doris’ spike heels hitting the road hard. Walter turned the car.

“You better get out and walk behind her,” he told Maxwell. “You left home with her. Get her to the Club, anyway. It ain’t far — not even a mile, hardly.”

“Watch where you’re going!” yelled Maxwell. “Here comes a car behind us!”

Walter drew aside and flashed his spot on the other car as it passed.

“It’s Hap White!” shrieked Lucille, craning her neck. “He’s got that Princeton man, Jornstadt, with him — the handsome one all the girls are crazy about. He’s from Minnesota and is visiting his aunt in town.”

The other car ground to a halt beside Doris. The door opened. She got in.

“The little snake!” shrilled Lucille. “I bet she knew Jornstadt was in that car. I bet she made a date with Hap White to pick her up.”

Walter Mitchell chuckled maliciously. “ ‘There goes my girl—’ ” he hummed.

Maxwell swore savagely under his breath.

There were already five in the other car. Doris sat on Jornstadt’s lap. He could feel the warmth and the rounded softness of her legs. He held her steady drawing her back against him. Doris wriggled slightly and his arm tightened.

Jornstadt drew a deep breath freighted with the perfume of the honey-colored hair. His arm tightened still more.

A moment later Mitchell’s car roared past.

Lurking between two parked cars, Walter and Maxwell watched the six from Hap White’s car enter the club house. The group [passed] the girls in a bee-like clot around the tall Princeton man, whose beautifully ridged head towered over them. The blaring music seemed to be a triumphant carpet spread for him, derisive and salutant.

Walter handed his almost empty flask to Maxwell. Max tilted it up.

"I know a good place for that Princeton guy," he said, wiping his lips.

"Huh?"

"The morgue," said Max.

"Gonna dance?" asked Walter.

"Hell, no! Let's go to the cloak room. Oughta be a crap game in there."

There was. Above the kneeling ring of tense heads and shoulders, they saw the Princeton man, Jornstadt, and Hap White, a fat youth with a cherubic face and a fawning manner. They were drinking, turn about, from a thick tumbler in which a darky poured corn from a Coca-Cola bottle. Hap waved a greeting. "Hi-yi, boy," he addressed Max. "Little family trouble?"

"Nope," said Maxwell evenly. "Gimme a drink."

Max and Walter watched the crap game. Hap and Jornstadt strolled out, the music squalling briefly through the opening and closing door. Around the kneeling ring droned monotonous voices.

"E-eleven! Shoot four bits."

"You're faded! Snake eyes! Let the eight bits ride?"

"C'mon, Little Joe!"

"Ninety days in the calaboose! Let it ride!"

The bottle went around. The door began banging open and shut. The cloak room became crowded, murky with cigarette smoke. The music had stopped.

Suddenly pandemonium broke loose: the rising wail of a fire siren, the shrieks of whistles from the cotton gins scattered about the countryside, the crack of pistols and rifles and the duller boom of shotguns. On the veranda girls shrieked and giggled.

"Happy New Year!" said Walter viciously. Max glared at him, shucked off his coat and ripped his collar open.

"Lemme in that game!" he snarled.

A tall man with beautifully ridged hair had just sauntered past the open door. On his arm hung a lithe girl with honey-colored hair.

By three o'clock, Maxwell had won a hundred and forty dollars and broken the game. One by one the gamblers arose, stiffly, like people who have been asleep. The music was still droning along but the cloak room was full of flapping overcoat sleeves. Youths adjusted their ties, smoothed their already patent-leather-smooth hair.

"Is it over?" asked Maxwell.

"Damn near it!" grunted Walter.

Fat Hap White sidled in through the door. Behind him was Jornstadt, his face flushed, hesitant.

"That Princeton guy sure can put away the likker," grunted a voice behind Max. "He's still got a quart flask of prime stuff, too."

Hap White eased up beside Maxwell, speaking in a low voice.

"That license you got, Max," he hesitated.

Maxwell gave him a cold look. "What license?"

Hap dabbed at his forehead with a handkerchief. "You know, that marriage license for you and Doris. We — we want to buy it, since you won't be needing it yourself."

"I ain't selling, and it wouldn't do you any good if you did have it. It's got the names already written in it."

"We can fix that," wheedled Hap. "It's easy, Max. Johns — Jornstadt. See? They look alike on paper and there wouldn't anybody expect a county clerk to be able to write so you could read it. See?"

"Yes, I see," said Maxwell quietly, very quietly.

"It's all right with Doris," urged Hap. "Look, here's a note she sent."

Max read the unsigned scrawl in Doris' childish hand: "You leave me be, you old bigamist!" He scowled blackly.

"What say, Max?" persisted Hap.

Maxwell's lean jaw set grimly.

"No, I won't sell it; but I'll shoot Jornstadt for it — the license against his flask."

"Aw, come on, Max," protested Hap, "Jornstadt ain't no crap shooter. He's a Northerner. He don't even know how to handle the dice."

"Best two out of three, high dice," said Max. "Take it or leave it." Hap pattered over to Jornstadt, muttered a few words. The Princeton man protested, then agreed.

"All right," said Hap. "Here's the flask. Put the license beside it on the floor."

"Where's the dice?" asked Maxwell. "Who's got some dice? Peter, gimme that set of yours."

The darky rolled the whites of his eyes. "My dice — they ain't — they—"

"Shut up and give them here!" blazed Maxwell. "We won't hurt 'em. C'mon!"

Peter fished them from his pocket.

"Here, lemme show you, Jornstadt," exclaimed Hap White.

Jornstadt handled the dice awkwardly. He fumbled them onto the floor. A five and a four showed.

"Nine!" chortled Hap. "That's a good roll!"

It was plenty good. The best Max could get was three and four — seven. The first round went to Jornstadt.

Max won the next one, however, nine against five. He clicked the dice together.

"Shall I go on shootin'?" he asked Jornstadt.

The Princeton man looked inquiringly at Hap White.

"Sure, it's all right," said Hap. "Let him shoot first."

Clickety-click! The dice tumbled from Maxwell's hand, rolled over and over and stopped.

"Whoopeee!" cheered Walter Mitchell under his breath. "Two fives! That's a winner!"

"Any use for me to shoot?" asked Jornstadt.

"Sure, take your roll," said Hap gloomily, "but you ain't got no more chance than a female in a frat house."

Jornstadt fumbled the dice awkwardly from hand to hand. He tossed them out. A five showed. The other cube spun dizzily on a corner for a spine-crawling moment and settled. Maxwell stared at the six black dots winking at him like spotty-eyed devils.

"Oskey-wow-wow!" shrilled Hap White. "A natural!"

Jornstadt picked up the dice and glanced inquiringly about.

"Do I win?" he asked.

"Yes, you win," replied Maxwell evenly. He began putting on his collar. Jornstadt handed the dice to the pop-eyed Peter. "Thank you," he said. He sauntered from the room with the gleeful Hap White, stuffing flask and license into his pocket.

The room was very still as Maxwell walked to the mirror and began adjusting his tie. One by one the youths slipped out. Maxwell was left alone. He glared into the mirror.

He heard somebody muttering to himself in the little wash room back of the partition. He recognized Peter's voice.

"Lawdy! Lawdy!" sounded the darky's querulous tones. "He jest nacherly couldn'ta made no 'leben wiff dem bones, kase dey ain't no sixes on 'em! Dem's special bones. He jest couldn't! But he did! I wish I knowed how to shoot crap like he don't know!"

Maxwell stared into the mirror, his lips slowly whitening. He reached to his hip pocket. The dull blue-black of an automatic pistol winked back at him from the mirror. He hesitated, returned the gun to his pocket.

"I don't want to get myself hung!" he muttered.

For long minutes he stood staring, the smoothness of his forehead wrinkled with the unaccustomed labor of intense thought. Peter still pattered around in the washroom.

Maxwell strode around the partition. He gripped the darky by the arm.

“Pete, I want you to get me something, and get it darned quick,” he snarled. “Listen—”

“But, Mistuh Max, that stuff’s blue lightnin’!” protested the darky.

“That ain’t no drinkin’s for white gemmuns! All right, I’s a-gwin’! I’s a-gwin’!”

He was back in five minutes, with a fruit jar full of something that looked like water. Maxwell took it and shoved it into his coat pocket. A minute later Walter Mitchell came in with Jornstadt and Hap White. They had the flask.

Maxwell pulled out his fruit jar, unscrewed the cap and tilted it up.

“This is a man’s drink,” he said. “It ain’t colored water like that stuff!”

Jornstadt sneered. “I never saw anything I couldn’t drink,” he declared.

“Gimme a swig!”

“Better leave it alone,” cautioned Maxwell. “I tell you it’s for men.”

Jornstadt flushed darkly. “Gimme that jar!”

Max handed it to him. Hap White caught a whiff and his mouth gaped open.

“That’s cawn likker!” he squeaked.

“Jornstadt, don’t you—”

Maxwell’s elbow caught him viciously in the throat. Jornstadt, the jar already tilted, did not notice. Hap gagged, gulped and subsided, shivering slightly under Maxwell’s baleful glare. Jornstadt gasped.

“Thought so,” nodded Max. “Can’t take it!”

“Who the hell says I can’t!” snarled Jornstadt, and the jar tilted again.

The orchestra was playing "Goodnight, Sweetheart," when they left the coat room. Jornstadt's eyes were slightly glazed and he held onto Hap White's arm. Maxwell walked behind them, a thin smile on his lips. The smile was still there when he saw Jornstadt wobble to Hap White's car, his arm around Doris.

"We're headin' for Marley," he heard Hap White say. Lucille, already in the car, giggled.

"Follow them!" Maxwell snarled at Walter Mitchell. Marley was twenty-two miles away. There was a justice of the peace at Marley.

Jornstadt was sagging limply, his head on his breast. His once immaculate shirt bosom had burst open. His collar was up around his ears. Doris and Lucille supported him in the careening car. Doris was whimpering:

"I don't want to marry anybody. I want to go home. Old drunken bigamist!"

"You've got to go through with it now," said Lucille. "Both your names are on it now. If you don't it'll be forgery!"

"It says Maxwell Jornstadt!" wailed Doris. "I'll be married to both of them! It'll be bigamy!"

"Bigamy isn't as bad as forgery. We'll all be in trouble!"

"I don't wanna!"

The car slammed to a stop in front of a boxcar that had apparently got lost from its railroad. There were windows cut in it, and a door over which was a sign reading, "Justice of the Peace."

"I don't wanna be married in a boxcar!" whimpered Doris.

"It's just like a church," urged Lucille, "only there ain't no organ. A J. P. isn't a D. D., so he can't marry you in a church."

The boxcar door opened and a paunchy, oldish man carrying a flash light looked out. His nightshirt was thrust into his trousers. His braces were dangling.

"Come in! Come in!" he grumbled.

Walter Mitchell's car slid up. Maxwell got out and strolled to Hap's car.

Hap was pawing at Jornstadt; trying to rouse him.

“Let him be,” grunted Maxwell. “Get the license and give it to me. I’ll stand up for him.”

“I don’t wanna!” whimpered Doris.

They went into the boxcar. The J. P. stood with a large book in his hand. The light of an oil lamp yellowed their wan faces. The J. P. looked at Doris.

“How old are you, sister?” he asked.

Doris stared woodenly. Lucille spoke up quickly:

“She’s just eighteen.”

“She looks about fourteen and like she ought to be home in bed,” grunted the J. P.

“She’s been sitting up with a sick friend,” said Lucille.

The J. P. looked at the license. Lucille gulped in her throat.

“These names—” he began. Lucille found her voice.

“Doris Houston and Maxwell Johnstadt,” she said.

“Good God, don’t they even know their own names!” exclaimed the J. P. “This one looks like—”

Something suddenly nuzzled into the palm of his hand. Maxwell was standing beside him, very close. The thing that nuzzled the J. P.’s hand was the hundred and forty dollars Max had won in the crap game. The J. P.’s hands closed over the roll of bills like a tomcat’s claw over a mouse. He opened the big book.

“Come on,” Max told Doris three minutes later. “From now on you’re taking orders from me — Mrs. Johns!”

Lucille wailed. Hap White yammered. Jornstadt snored loudly in the tonneau of Hap’s car.

“Oh!” said Doris.

The cold light of a January morning was breaking as they reached the big, garish Houston house. There was already a car standing in front of it.

“That’s Doc Carberry’s Chrysler!” exclaimed Maxwell. “Do you reckon somebody—”

Doris was out and running before the car stopped. “If it is it’s your fault!” she wailed thinly over her shoulder: “Go away from me, you old bigamist.”

Maxwell followed her into the house. He heard Dr. Carberry say: “He’ll be all right now, Mrs. Houston. I got it out; but it was a narrow escape.”

Doris was screaming at her mother:

“Mamma! I’m married, Mamma! Mamma! I’m married!”

“Married!” shrieked Mrs. Houston. “My God, ain’t we had enough trouble here tonight! Married! Who—”

She caught sight of Maxwell. “You!” she screeched, rushing at him, waving her pudgy hands. The diamonds on her fingers sent dazzling glints of light into his eyes. “You get out of here! Get out, I say! Get out!”

“We’re mar—” began Max. “I tell you—”

Mrs. Houston rushed him into the hall, screeched a final, “Get out!” and dived back into the parlor. The billowing form of the Negro maid suddenly appeared before Max. He gave back a step.

“De front door’s open,” said the Negress pointedly.

“What you talking about?” demanded Max. “I tell you we’re married, all right. We—”

“Ain’t you kicked up enough bobbery ‘round heah for one night?” demanded the Negress. “You get out now. Mebbe you telefoam t’morrow.”

“Telephone!” sputtered Max. “I tell you she’s my—”

“You to blame for it all!” glowered the Negress. “Leavin’ the needle stickin’ in de chair wheah anybody’d knowed de baby would get hold of it!”

She billowed forward. Max suddenly found himself on the front porch.

“Needle — baby—” he gurgled dazedly. “What — what—”
“You no ‘count good-fo’ nothin’! De baby he swallered it!”
The door closed in his face.

He started the car. It moved slowly away. “Telephone, hell,” he said suddenly. “She’s my—”
But he did not say it. An approaching car swung wide of him. He did not see it. He was fumbling in his pocket. At last he drew out a crumpled cigarette. Another car swerved wildly and barely missed Maxwell’s car.

The cruising driver saw only a big car moving with erratic slowness on the wrong side of the street driven by a young man in evening clothes at nine o’clock in the morning.

The End

Afternoon of a Cow, William Faulkner

Afternoon of a Cow

Furioso, 1947

MR. FAULKNER AND I were sitting under the mulberry with the afternoon’s first julep while he informed me what to write on the morrow, when Oliver appeared suddenly around the corner of the smokehouse, running and with his eyes looking quite large and white. “Mr. Bill!” he cried. “Day done sot fire to de pasture!”

“ — —” cried Mr. Faulkner, with that promptitude which quite often marks his actions, “ —— those boys to —— !” springing up and referring to his own son, Malcolm, and to his brother’s son, James, and to the cook’s son, Rover or Grover. Grover his name is, though both Malcolm and James (they and Grover are of an age and have, indeed, grown up not only contemporaneously but almost inextricably) have

insisted upon calling him Rover since they could speak, so that now all the household, including the child's own mother and naturally the child itself, call him Rover too, with the exception of myself, whose practice and belief it has never been to call any creature, man, woman, child or beast, out of its rightful name — just as I permit no one to call me out of mine, though I am aware that behind my back both Malcolm and James (and doubtless Rover or Grover) refer to me as Ernest be Toogood — a crass and low form of so-called wit or humor to which children, these two in particular — are only too prone.

I have attempted on more than one occasion (this was years ago; I have long since ceased) to explain to them that my position in the household is in no sense menial, since I have been writing Mr. Faulkner's novels and short stories for years. But I long ago became convinced (and even reconciled) that neither of them either knew or cared about the meaning of the term.

I do not think that I anticipate myself in saying that we did not know where the three boys would now be. We would not be expected to know, beyond a general feeling or conviction that they would by now be concealed in the loft of the barn or stable — this from previous experience, though experience had never before included or comprised arson. Nor do I feel that I further violate the formal rules of order, unity and emphasis by saying that we would never for one moment have conceived them to be where later evidence indicated that they now were.

But more on this subject anon: we were not thinking of the boys now; as Mr. Faulkner himself might have observed, someone should have been thinking about them ten or fifteen minutes ago; that now it was too late. No, our concern was to reach the pasture, though not with any hope of saving the hay which had been Mr. Faulkner's pride and even hope — a fine, though small, plantation of this grain or forage fenced lightly away from the pasture proper and the certain inroads of the three stocks whose pleasance the pasture was, which had been intended as an alternative or balancing factor in the winter's victualing of the three beasts.

We had no hope of saving this, since the month was September following a dry summer, and we knew that this as well as the remainder of the pasture would burn with almost the instantaneous celerity of gunpowder or celluloid. That is, I had no hope of it and doubtless Oliver had no hope of it. I do not know what Mr. Faulkner's emotion was, since it appears (or so I have read and heard) a fundamental human trait to decline to recognize misfortune with regard to some object which man either desires or already possesses and holds dear, until it has run him down and then over like a Juggernaut itself.

I do not know if this emotion would function in the presence of a field of hay, since I have neither owned nor desired to own one. No, it was not the hay which we were concerned about. It was the three animals, the two horses and the cow, in particular the cow, who, less gifted or equipped for speed than the horses, might be overtaken by the flames and perhaps asphyxiated, or at least so badly scorched as to be rendered temporarily unfit for her natural function; and that the two horses might bolt in terror, and to their detriment, into the further fence of barbed wire or might even turn and rush back into the actual flames, as is one of the more intelligent characteristics of this so-called servant and friend of man.

So, led by Mr. Faulkner and not even waiting to go around to the arched passage, we burst through the hedge itself and, led by Mr. Faulkner who moved at a really astonishing pace for a man of what might be called almost violently sedentary habit by nature, we ran across the yard and through Mrs. Faulkner's flower beds and then through her rose garden, although I will say that both Oliver and myself made some effort to avoid the plants; and on across the adjacent vegetable garden, where even Mr. Faulkner could accomplish no harm since at this season of the year it was innocent of edible matter; and on to the panel pasture fence over which Mr. Faulkner hurled himself with that same agility and speed and palpable disregard of limb which was actually amazing — not only because of his natural lethargic humor, which I have already indicated, but because of that shape and figure

which ordinarily accompanies it (or at least does so in Mr. Faulkner's case) — and were enveloped immediately in smoke.

But it was at once evident by its odor that this came, not from the hay which must have stood intact even if not green and then vanished in holocaust doubtless during the few seconds while Oliver was crying his news, but, from the cedar grove at the pasture's foot. Nevertheless, odor or not, its pall covered the entire visible scene, although ahead of us we could see the creeping line of conflagration beyond which the three unfortunate beasts now huddled or rushed in terror of their lives.

Or so we thought until, still led by Mr. Faulkner and hastening now across a stygian and desolate floor which almost at once became quite unpleasant to the soles of the feet and promised to become more so, something monstrous and wild of shape rushed out of the smoke. It was the larger horse, Stonewall — a congenitally vicious brute which no one durst approach save Mr. Faulkner and Oliver, and not even Oliver durst mount (though why either Oliver or Mr. Faulkner should want to is forever beyond me) which rushed down upon us with the evident intent of taking advantage of this opportunity to destroy its owner and attendant both, with myself included for lagniappe or perhaps for pure hatred of the entire human race.

It evidently altered its mind, however, swerving and vanishing again into smoke. Mr. Faulkner and Oliver had paused and given it but a glance. "I reckon dey all right," Oliver said. "But where you reckon Beulah at?"

"On the other side of that —— fire, backing up in front of it and bellowing," replied Mr. Faulkner. He was correct, because almost at once we began to hear the poor creature's lugubrious lamenting. I have often remarked now how both Mr. Faulkner and Oliver apparently possess some curious rapport with horned and hooved beasts and even dogs, which I cheerfully admit that I do not possess myself and do not even understand. That is, I cannot understand it in Mr. Faulkner.

With Oliver, of course, cattle of all kinds might be said to be his avocation, and his dallying (that is the exact word; I have watched him more than once, motionless and apparently pensive and really almost pilgrim-like, with the handle of the mower or hoe or rake for support) with lawn mower and gardening tools his sideline or hobby. But Mr. Faulkner, a member in good standing of the ancient and gentle profession of letters! But then neither can I understand why he should wish to ride a horse, and the notion has occurred to me that Mr. Faulkner acquired his rapport gradually and perhaps over a long period of time from contact of his posterior with the animal he bestrode.

We hastened on toward the sound of the doomed creature's bellowing. I thought that it came from the flames perhaps and was the final plaint of her agony — a dumb brute's indictment of heaven itself — but Oliver said not, that it came from beyond the fire. Now there occurred in it a most peculiar alteration. It was not an increase in terror, which scarcely could have been possible. I can describe it best by saying that she now sounded as if she had descended abruptly into the earth.

This we found to be true. I believe however that this time order requires, and the element of suspense and surprise which the Greeks themselves have authorized will permit, that the story progress in the sequence of events as they occurred to the narrator, even though the accomplishment of the actual event recalled to the narrator the fact or circumstance with which he was already familiar and of which the reader should have been previously made acquainted. So I shall proceed.

Imagine us, then, hastening (even if the abysmal terror in the voice of the hapless beast had not been inventive enough, we had another: on the morrow, when I raised one of the shoes which I had worn on this momentous afternoon, the entire sole crumbled into a substance resembling nothing so much as that which might have been scraped from the ink-wells of childhood's school days at the beginning of the fall term) across that stygian plain, our eyes and lungs smarting with that smoke along whose further edge the border of fire crept. Again a wild

and monstrous shape materialized in violent motion before us, again apparently with the avowed and frantic aim of running us down.

For a horrid moment I believed it to be the horse, Stonewall, returned because after passing us for some distance (persons do this; possibly it might likewise occur in an animal, its finer native senses dulled with smoke and terror), remembering having seen myself or recognized me, and had now returned to destroy me alone. I had never liked the horse. It was an emotion even stronger than mere fear; it was that horrified disgust which I imagine one must feel toward a python and doubtless even the horse's subhuman sensibilities had felt and had come to reciprocate. I was mistaken, however.

It was the other horse, the smaller one which Malcolm and James rode, apparently with enjoyment, as though in miniature of the besotted perversion of their father and uncle — an indiscriminate, round-bodied creature, as gentle as the larger one was vicious, with a drooping sad upper lip and an inarticulate and bemused (though to me still sly and untrustworthy) gaze; it, too, swerved past us and also vanished just before we reached the line of flame which was neither as large nor as fearful as it had looked, though the smoke was thicker, and seemed to be filled with the now loud terrified voice of the cow.

In fact, the poor creature's voice seemed now to be everywhere: in the air above us and in the earth beneath. With Mr. Faulkner still in the lead we sprang over it, whereupon Mr. Faulkner immediately vanished. Still in the act of running, he simply vanished out of the smoke before the eyes of Oliver and myself as though he too had dropped into the earth.

This is what he had also done. With the voice of Mr. Faulkner and the loud terror of the cow coming out of the earth at our feet and the creeping line of the conflagration just behind us, I now realized what had happened and so solved Mr. Faulkner's disappearance as well as the previous alteration in the voice of the cow. I now realized that, confused by the smoke and the incandescent sensation about the soles of the feet, I had become disoriented and had failed to be aware that

all the while we had been approaching a gully or ravine of whose presence I was quite aware, having looked down into it more than once while strolling in the afternoons while Mr. Faulkner would be riding the large horse, and upon whose brink or verge Oliver and I now stood and into which Mr. Faulkner and the cow had, in turn and in the reverse order, fallen.

“Are you hurt, Mr. Faulkner?” I cried. I shall not attempt to reproduce Mr. Faulkner’s reply, other than to indicate that it was couched in that pure ancient classic Saxon which the best of our literature sanctions and authorizes and which, due to the exigencies of Mr. Faulkner’s style and subject matter, I often employ but which I myself never use although Mr. Faulkner even in his private life is quite addicted to it and which, when he employs it, indicates what might be called a state of the most robust, even though not at all calm, wellbeing. So I knew that he was not hurt. “What shall we now do?” I inquired of Oliver.

“We better git down in dat hole too,” Oliver replied. “Ain’t you feel dat fire right behime us?” I had forgot about the fire in my concern over Mr. Faulkner, but upon glancing behind me I felt instinctively that Oliver was right. So we scrambled or fell down the steep sandy declivity, to the bottom of the ravine where Mr. Faulkner, still speaking, stood and where the cow was now safely ensconced though still in a state of complete hysteria, from which point or sanctuary we watched the conflagration pass over, the flames crumbling and flickering and dying away along the brink of the ravine. Then Mr. Faulkner spoke: “Go catch Dan, and bring the big rope from the storehouse.”

“Do you mean me?” said I. Mr. Faulkner did not reply, so he and I stood beside the cow who did not yet seem to realize that the danger was past or perhaps whose more occult brute intellect knew that the actual suffering and outrage and despair had yet to occur — and watched Oliver climb or scramble back up the declivity. He was gone for some time, although after a while he returned, leading the smaller and tractable horse who was adorned with a section of harness, and carrying the rope; whereupon commenced the arduous business of extricating the cow. One end of the rope was attached to her horns,

she still objecting violently; the other end was attached to the horse. "What shall I do?" I inquired.

"Push," said Mr. Faulkner.

"Where shall I push?" I asked.

"I don't give a — — ," said Mr. Faulkner. "Just push."

But it appeared that it could not be done. The creature resisted, perhaps to the pull of the rope or perhaps to Oliver's encouraging shouts and cries from the brink overhead or possibly to the motive power supplied by Mr. Faulkner (he was directly behind, almost beneath her, his shoulder against her buttocks or loins and swearing steadily now) and myself. She made a gallant effort, scrambled quite half way up the declivity, lost her footing and slid back. Once more we tried and failed, and then again. And then a most regrettable accident occurred. This third time the rope either slipped or parted, and Mr. Faulkner and the cow were hurled violently to the foot of the precipice with Mr. Faulkner underneath.

Later — that evening, to be exact — I recalled how, at the moment while we watched Oliver scramble out of the ravine, I seem to have received, as though by telepathy, from the poor creature (a female mind; the lone female among three men) not only her terror but the subject of it: that she knew by woman's sacred instinct that the future held for her that which is to a female far worse than any fear of bodily injury or suffering: one of those invasions of female privacy where, helpless victim of her own physical body, she seems to see herself as object of some malignant power for irony and outrage; and this none the less bitter for the fact that those who are to witness it, gentlemen though they be, will never be able to forget it but will walk the earth with the remembrance of it so long as she lives; — yes, even the more bitter for the fact that they who are to witness it are gentlemen, people of her own class.

Remember how the poor spent terrified creature had for an entire afternoon been the anguished and blind victim of a circumstance which it could not comprehend, had been sported with by an element which it

instinctively feared, and had now been hurled recently and violently down a precipice whose crest it doubtless now believed it would never see again. — I have been told by soldiers (I served in France, in the Y.M.C.A.) how, upon entering battle, there often sets up within them, prematurely as it were, a certain impulse or desire which brings on a result quite logical and quite natural, the fulfillment of which is incontestible and of course irrevocable. — In a word, Mr. Faulkner underneath received the full discharge of the poor creature's afternoon of anguish and despair.

It has been my fortune or misfortune to lead what is — or might be — called a quiet, even though not retired, life; and I have even preferred to acquire my experience from reading what had happened to others or what other men believe or think might have logically happened to creatures of their invention or even in inventing what Mr. Faulkner conceives might have happened to certain and sundry creatures who compose his novels and stories.

Nevertheless, I would imagine that a man is never too old nor too secure to suffer what might be called experiences of initial and bizarre originality, though of course not always outrage, following which his reaction would be quite almost invariably out of character. Or rather, following which his reaction would reveal that actual character which for years he may have successfully concealed from the public, his intimates, and his wife and family; perhaps even from himself. I would take it to be one of these which Mr. Faulkner had just suffered.

Anyway, his actions during the subsequent few minutes were most peculiar for him. The cow — poor female alone among three men — struggled up almost at once and stood, hysterically still though no longer violent, trembling rather with a kind of aghast abasement not yet become despair. But for a time Mr. Faulkner, prone on the earth, did not stir at all. Then he rose. He said, "Wait," which naturally we should do until he gave further orders or instructions.

Then — the poor cow and myself, and Oliver looking down from the crest beside the horse — we watched Mr. Faulkner walk quietly a few

paces down the ravine and sit down, his elbows on his knees and his chin supported between his hands. It was not the sitting down which was peculiar. Mr. Faulkner did this often — steadily perhaps is a better word — if not in the house, then (in summer) well down in a large chair on the veranda just outside the library window where I would be working, his feet on the railing, reading a detective magazine; in winter in the kitchen, his stocking feet inside the oven to the stove. It was the attitude in which he now sat. As I have indicated, there was a quality almost violent about Mr. Faulkner's sedentation; it would be immobile without at all being lethargic, if I may put it so.

He now sat in the attitude of M. Rodin's Penseur increased to his tenth geometric power say, since le penseur's principal bewilderment appears to be at what has bemused him, while Mr. Faulkner can have had no doubt. We watched him quietly — myself, and the poor cow who now stood with her head lowered and not even trembling in utter and now hopeless female shame; Oliver and the horse on the brink above. I remarked then that Oliver no longer had smoke for his background. The immediate conflagration was now over, though the cedar grove would doubtless smoulder until the equinox.

Then Mr. Faulkner rose. He returned quietly and he spoke as quietly (or even more so) to Oliver as I have ever heard him: "Drop the rope, Jack." Oliver removed his end of the rope from the horse and dropped it, and Mr. Faulkner took it up and turned and led the cow down the ravine. For a moment I watched him with an amazement of which Oliver doubtless partook; in the next moment doubtless Oliver and I would have looked at one another in that same astonishment.

But we did not; we moved; doubtless we moved at the same moment. Oliver did not even bother to descend into the ravine. He just went around it while I hastened on and overtook Mr. Faulkner and the cow; indeed, the three of us were actually soldiers recovered from the amnesia of battle, the battle with the flames for the life of the cow. It has been often remarked and even insisted upon in literature (novels have been built upon it, though none of them are Mr. Faulkner's) how, when faced with catastrophe, man does everything but the simple one.

But from the fund of my own experience, though it does consist almost entirely of that afternoon, it is my belief that it is in the face of danger and disaster that he does the simple thing. It is merely simply wrong.

We moved down the ravine to where it turned at right angles and entered the woods which descended to its level. With Mr. Faulkner and the cow in the lead we turned up through the woods and came presently to the black desolation of the pasture in the fence to which Oliver, waiting, had already contrived a gap or orifice through which we passed. Then with Mr. Faulkner again in the lead and with Oliver, leading the horse and the cow, and myself side by side, we retraced across that desolate plain the course of our recent desperate race to offer succor, though bearing somewhat to the left in order to approach the stable — or barnlot.

We had almost reached the late hay plantation when, without warning, we found ourselves faced by three apparitions. They were not ten paces away when we saw them and I believe that neither Mr. Faulkner nor Oliver recognized them at all, though I did. In fact, I had an instantaneous and curious sense, not that I had anticipated this moment so much as that I had been waiting for it over a period which might be computed in years.

Imagine yourself, if you will, set suddenly down in a world in complete ocular or chromatic reversal. Imagine yourself faced with three small ghosts, not of white but of purest and unrelieved black. The mind, the intelligence, simply refuses to believe that they should have taken refuge from their recent crime or misdemeanor in the hay plantation before it took fire, and lived.

Yet there they were. Apparently they had neither brows, lashes nor hair; and clothing epidermis and all, they were of one identical sable, and the only way in which Rover or Grover could be distinguished from the other two was by Malcolm's and James' blue eyes. They stood looking at us in complete immobility until Mr. Faulkner said, again with that chastened gentleness and quietude which, granted my theory that

the soul, plunged without warning into some unforeseen and outrageous catastrophe, comes out in its true colors, has been Mr. Faulkner's true and hidden character all these years: "Go to the house."

They turned and vanished immediately, since it had been only by the eyeballs that we had distinguished them from the stygian surface of the earth at all. They may have preceded us or we may have passed them. I do not know. At least, we did not see them again, because presently we quitted the sable plain which had witnessed our Gethsemane, and presently entered the barnlot where Mr. Faulkner turned and took the halter of the horse while Oliver led the cow into its private and detached domicile, from which there came presently the sound of chewing as, freed now of anguish and shame she ruminated, maiden meditant and — I hope — once more fancy free.

Mr. Faulkner stood in the door of the stable (within which, by and by, I could hear the larger and vicious horse, Stonewall, already at his food, stamp now and then or strike the board wall with his hoof as though even in the act of eating it could not forbear making sounds of threat and derision toward the very man whose food nourished it) and removed his clothing. Then, in full sight of the house and of whoever might care or not care to see, he lathered himself with saddle soap and then stood at the watering trough while Oliver doused or flushed him down with pail after pail of water. "Never mind the clothes just now," he said to Oliver. "Get me a drink."

"Make it two," said I; I felt that the occasion justified, even though it may not have warranted, that temporary aberration into the vernacular of the fleeting moment. So presently, Mr. Faulkner now wearing a light summer horse blanket belonging to Stonewall, we sat again beneath the mulberry with the second julep of the afternoon.

"Well, Mr. Faulkner," said I after a time, "shall we continue?"
"Continue what?" said Mr. Faulkner.

"Your suggestions for tomorrow," said I. Mr. Faulkner said nothing at all. He just drank, with that static violence which was his familiar

character, and so I knew that he was himself once more and that the real Mr. Faulkner which had appeared momentarily to Oliver and myself in the pasture had already retreated to that inaccessible bourn from which only the cow, Beulah, had ever evoked it, and that doubtless we would never see it again. So after a time I said, "Then, with your permission, tomorrow I shall venture into fact and employ the material which we ourselves have this afternoon created."

"Do so," Mr. Faulkner said — shortly, I thought.

"Only," I continued, "I shall insist upon my prerogative and right to tell this one in my own diction and style, and not yours."

"By — — !" said Mr. Faulkner. "You better had."

The End

Sepulture South Gaslight, William Faulkner

Sepulture South: Gaslight

Harper's Bazaar, December 1954

WHEN GRANDFATHER DIED, Father spoke what was probably his first reaction because what he said was involuntary because if he had taken time to think, he would not have said it: "Damn it, now we'll lose Liddy."

Liddy was the cook. She was one of the best cooks we had ever had and she had been with us ever since Grandmother died seven years ago when the cook before her had left; and now with another death in the family, she would move too, regretfully, because she liked us also. But that was the way Negroes did: left after a death in the family they worked for, as though obeying not a superstition but a rite: the rite of their freedom: not freedom from having to work, that would not occur to anyone for several years yet, not until W.P.A., but the freedom to move from one job to another, using a death in the family as the

moment, the instigation, to move, since only death was important enough to exercise a right as important as freedom.

But she would not go yet; hers and Arthur's (her husband's) departure would be done with a dignity commensurate with the dignity of Grandfather's age and position in our family and our town, and the commensurate dignity of his sepulture. Not to mention the fact that Arthur himself was now serving his apogee as a member of our household, as if the seven years he had worked for us had merely been the waiting for this moment, this hour, this day: sitting (not standing now: sitting) freshly shaved and with his hair trimmed this morning, in a clean white shirt and a necktie of Father's and wearing his coat, in a chair in the back room of the jewelry store while Mr. Wedlow the jeweler inscribed on the sheet of parchment in his beautiful flowing Spencerian hand the formal notice of Grandfather's death and the hour of his funeral, which, attached to the silver salver with knots of black ribbon and sprays of imitation immortelles, Arthur would bear from door to door (not back or kitchen doors but the front ones) through our town, to ring the bell and pass the salver in to whoever answered it, not as a servant bringing a formal notification now but as a member of our family performing a formal rite, since by this time the whole town knew that Grandfather was dead. So this was a rite, Arthur himself dominating the moment, dominating the entire morning in fact, because now he was not only no servant of ours, he was not even an envoy from us but rather a messenger from Death itself, saying to our town: "Pause, mortal; remember Me."

Then Arthur would be busy for the rest of the day, too, now in the coachman's coat and beaver hat which he had inherited from the husband of Liddy's predecessor who had inherited it in his turn from the husband of her predecessor's predecessor, meeting with the surrey the trains on which our kin and connections would begin to arrive. And now the town would commence the brief, ritual formal calls, almost wordless and those in murmurs, whispers.

Because ritual said that Mother and Father must bear this first shock of bereavement in privacy, supporting and comforting one another. So the

next of kin must receive the callers: Mother's sister and her husband from Memphis because Aunt Alice, Father's brother Charles's wife, would have to be comforting and supporting Uncle Charley — as long as they could keep her upstairs, that is. And all this time the neighbor ladies would be coming to the kitchen door (not the front one now: the kitchen and back ones) without knocking, with their cooks or yardboys carrying the dishes and trays of food they had prepared to feed us and our influx of kin, and for a midnight supper for the men, Father's friends that he hunted and played poker with, who would sit up all night with Grandfather's coffin when the undertaker brought it and put him into it.

And all tomorrow too, while the wreaths and flowers arrived; and now all who wanted to could go into the parlor and look at Grandfather framed in white satin in his gray uniform with the three stars on the collar, freshly shaven too and with just a touch of rouge on his cheeks. And tomorrow too, until after our dinner, when Liddy said to Maggie and the other children: "Now you chillen go down to the pasture and play until I calls you. And you mind Maggie now." Because it was not to me.

I was not only the oldest but a boy, the third generation of oldest son from Grandfather's father; when Father's turn came it would be me to say before I would have time to think: Damn it, now we'll lose Julia or Florence or whatever her name would be by that time. I must be there too, in my Sunday clothes, with a band of crape on my arm, all of us except Mother and Father and Uncle Charley (Aunt Alice was though, because people excused her because she was always a good one to run things when she got a chance: and Uncle Rodney too although he was Father's youngest brother too) in the back room which Grandfather called his office, to which the whisky decanter had been moved from the dining-room sideboard in deference to the funeral; yes, Uncle Rodney too, who had no wife — the dashing bachelor who wore silk shirts and used scented shaving lotion, who had been Grandmother's favorite and that of a lot of other women too — the traveling salesman for the St. Louis wholesale house who brought into our town on his brief visits a breath, an odor, a glare almost of the metropolitan outland

which was not for us: the teeming cities of hotel bellhops and girl shows and oyster-bars, my first recollection of whom was standing at the sideboard with the whisky decanter in his hand and who had it in his hand now except that Aunt Alice's hand was on it too and we could all hear her furious whisper:

"You cannot, you shall not let them smell you like this!"

Then Uncle Rodney's: "All right, all right. Get me a handful of cloves from the kitchen." So that too, the odor of cloves inextricable from that of whisky and shaving lotion and cut flowers, was a part of Grandfather's passing for the last time from his house, we waiting still in the office while the ladies entered the parlor where the casket was, the men stopping outside on the lawn, decorous and quiet, still wearing their hats until the music started, when they would remove them and stand again, their bare heads bowed a little in the bright early afternoon sunshine.

Then Mother was in the hall, in black and heavily veiled, and Father and Uncle Charley in black; and now we crossed into the dining room where chairs had been arranged for us, the folding doors open into the parlor, so that we, the family, were at the funeral but not yet of it, as though Grandfather in his casket now had to be two: one for his blood descendants and connections, one for those who were merely his friends and fellow townsmen.

Then that song, that hymn which meant nothing to me now: no lugubrious dirge to death, no reminder that Grandfather was gone and I would never see him again. Because never again could it match what it had once meant to me — terror, not of death but of the un-dead.

I was just four then; Maggie, next to me, could barely walk, the two of us in a clump of older children half concealed in the shrubbery in the corner of the yard. I at least did not know why, until it passed — the first I had ever watched — the black plumed hearse, the black closed hacks and surreys, at the slow significant pace up the street which was suddenly completely deserted, as it seemed to me that I knew suddenly the entire town would be.

“What?” I said. “A deader? What’s a deader?” And they told me. I had seen dead things before — birds, toads, the puppies the one before Simon (his wife was Sarah) had drowned in a crokersack in the water-trough because he said that Father’s fine setter had got mixed up with the wrong dog, and I had watched him and Sarah both beat to bloody shapeless strings the snakes which I now know were harmless. But that this, this ignominy, should happen to people too, it seemed to me that God Himself would not permit, condone.

So they in the hearse could not be dead: it must be something like sleep: a trick played on people by those same inimical forces and powers for evil which made Sarah and her husband have to beat the harmless snakes to bloody and shapeless pulp or drown the puppies — tricked into that helpless coma for some dreadful and inscrutable joke until the dirt was packed down, to strain and thrash and cry in the airless dark, to no escape forever. So that night I had something very like hysterics, clinging to Sarah’s legs and panting: “I won’t die! I won’t! Never!”

But that was past now. I was fourteen now and that song was woman’s work, as was the preacher’s peroration which followed it, until the men entered — the eight pallbearers who were Father’s hunting and poker and business friends, and the three honorary ones who were too old now to bear a burden: the three old men in gray too, but of privates (two of them had been in the old regiment that day when, a part of Bee, it had fallen back before McDowell until it rallied on Jackson in front of the Henry House).

So they bore Grandfather out, the ladies pressing back a little to make room for us, not looking at us, the men outside in the sunny yard not looking at the passing casket or us either, bareheaded, bowed a little or even turned slightly away as though musing, inattentive; there came one muffled startling half-hollow sound as the bearers, amateurs too, finally got the casket into the hearse, then rapidly with a kind of decorous celerity, passed back and forth between the hearse and the parlor until all the flowers were in too: then moving briskly indeed now,

almost hurrying, as though already disassociated, not only from the funeral but even from death too, around the corner where the carryall waited to take them by back streets to the cemetery so they would be there waiting when we arrived: so that any Southern stranger in our town, seeing that vehicle filled with black-clad, freshly shaved men going at a rapid trot up a back street at three o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, would not need to ask what had happened.

Yes, processional: the hearse, then our surrey with Mother and Father and me, then the brothers and sisters and their wives and husbands, then the cousins in one and two and three degrees, diminishing in nearness to the hearse as their connection with Grandfather diminished, up the deserted street, across the Square as empty now as Sunday, so that my insides swelled with snobbery and pride to think that Grandfather had been this important in the town. Then along the empty street which led to the cemetery, in almost every yard of which the children stood along the fence watching with that same terror and excitement which I remembered, remembering the terror and regret with which I had once wished that we lived on Cemetery Street too so that I could watch them all pass.

And now we could already see them, gigantic and white, taller on their marble pedestals than the rose-and-honeysuckle-choked fence, looming into the very trees themselves, the magnolias and cedars and elms, gazing forever eastward with their empty marble eyes — not symbols: not angels of mercy or winged seraphim or lambs or shepherds, but effigies of the actual people themselves as they had been in life, in marble now, durable, impervious, heroic in size, towering above their dust in the implacable tradition of our strong, uncompromising, grimly ebullient Baptist-Methodist Protestantism, carved in Italian stone by expensive Italian craftsmen and shipped the long costly way by sea back to become one more among the invincible sentinels guarding the temple of our Southern mores, extending from banker and merchant and planter down to the last tenant farmer who owned neither the plow he guided nor the mule which drew it, which decreed, demanded that, no matter how Spartan the life, in death the significance of dollars and cents was abolished: that Grandmother

might have split stovewood right up to the day she died, yet she must enter the earth in satin and mahogany and silver handles even though the first two were synthetic and the third was german — a ceremony not at all to death nor even to the moment of death, but to decorum: the victim of accident or even murder represented in effigy not at the instant of his passing but at the peak of his sublimation, as though in death at last he denied forever the griefs and follies of human affairs.

Grandmother too; the hearse stopped at last beside the raw yawn of the waiting pit, the preacher and the three old men in gray (with the dangling meaningless bronze medals which didn't signify valor but only reunions, since in that war all the men on both sides had been brave and so the only accolades for individual distinction were the lead ones out of the muskets of firing squads) waiting beside it, now carrying shotguns, while the pallbearers removed the flowers and then the casket from the hearse; Grandmother too in her bustle and puffed sleeves and the face which we remembered save for the empty eyes, musing at nothing while the casket sank and the preacher found a place to stop at last and the first clod made that profound quiet half-hollow sound on the invisible wood and the three old men fired their ragged volley and raised their quavering and ragged yell.

Grandmother too. I could remember that day six years ago, the family gathered, Father and Mother and Maggie and I in the surrey because Grandfather rode his horse — the cemetery, our lot.

Grandmother's effigy pristine and dazzling now out of its packing case, tall on the dazzling pedestal above the grave itself, the undertaker, hat in hand, and the Negro workmen who had sweated it erect, withdrawn to one side for us, the family, to look at it and approve.

And in another year, after the tedious carving in Italy and the long Atlantic ship, Grandfather too on his pedestal beside her, not as the soldier which he had been and as I wanted him, but — in the old hard unalterable tradition of apotheosis' apogee — the lawyer, parliamentarian, the orator which he was not: in frock coat, the bare head thrown back, the carven tome carved open in one carven hand

and the other extended in the immemorial gesture of declamation, this time Mother and Maggie and I in the surrey because Father was now on the horse, come for the formal private inspection and approval.

And three or four times a year I would come back, I would not know why, alone to look at them, not just at Grandfather and Grandmother but at all of them looming among the lush green of summer and the regal blaze of fall and the rain and ruin of winter before spring would bloom again, stained now, a little darkened by time and weather and endurance but still serene, impervious, remote, gazing at nothing, not like sentinels, not defending the living from the dead by means of their vast ton-measured weight and mass, but rather the dead from the living; shielding instead the vacant and dissolving bones, the harmless and defenseless dust, from the anguish and grief and inhumanity of mankind.

The End

Mr. Acarius, William Faulkner

Mr. Acarius

The Saturday Evening Post, October 1965

MR. ACARIUS WAITED until toward the end of the afternoon, though he and his doctor had been classmates and fraternity brothers and still saw each other several times a week in the homes of the same friends and in the bars and lounges and grills of the same clubs, and he knew that he would have been sent straight in, no matter when he called. He was, almost immediately, to stand in his excellent sober Madison Avenue suit above the desk behind which his friend sat buried to the elbows in the paper end of the day, a reflector cocked rakishly above one ear and the other implements of his calling serpentined about the white regalia of his priesthood.

“I want to get drunk,” Mr. Acarius said.

“All right,” the doctor said, scribbling busily now at the foot of what was obviously a patient’s chart. “Give me ten minutes. Or why don’t you go on to the club and I’ll join you there.”

But Mr. Acarius didn’t move. He said, “Ab. Look at me,” in such a tone that the doctor thrust his whole body up and away from the desk in order to look up at Mr. Acarius standing over him.

“Say that again,” the doctor said. Mr. Acarius did so. “I mean in English,” the doctor said.

“I was fifty years old yesterday,” Mr. Acarius said. “I have just exactly what money I shall need to supply my wants and pleasures until the bomb falls. Except that when that occurs — I mean the bomb, of course — nothing will have happened to me in all my life. If there is any rubble left, it will be only the carcass of my Capehart and the frames of my Picassos.

Because there will never have been anything of me to have left any smudge or stain. Until now, that has contented me. Or rather, I have been resigned to accept it. But not any more. Before I have quitted this scene, vanished from the recollection of a few headwaiters and the membership lists of a few clubs—”

“Along with the headwaiters and the clubs,” the doctor said.

“Predicating the bomb, of course.”

“Be quiet and listen,” Mr. Acarius said. “Before that shall have happened, I want to experience man, the human race.”

“Find yourself a mistress,” the doctor said.

“I tried that. Maybe what I want is debasement too.”

“Then in God’s name get married,” the doctor said. “What better way than that to run the whole gamut from garret to cellar and back again, not just once, but over again every day — or so they tell me.”

“Yes,” Mr. Acarius said. “So they tell you. I notice how the bachelor always says Try marriage, as he might advise you to try hashish. It’s the husband who always says Get married; videlicet: We need you.”

“Then get drunk,” the doctor said. “And may your shadow never grow less. And now I hope we have come at last to the nut. Just what do you want of me?”

“I want—” Mr. Acarius said. “I don’t just want—”

“You don’t just want to get tight, like back in school: Wake up tomorrow with nothing but a hangover, take two aspirins and a glass of tomato juice and drink all the black coffee you can hold, then at five P.M. a hair of the dog and now the whole business is over and forgotten until next time. You want to lie in a gutter in skid row without having to go down to skid row to do it.

You no more intend going down to skid row than you intend having skid row coming up the elevator to the twenty-second floor of the Barkman Tower. You would join skid row in its debasement, only you prefer to do yours on good Scotch whiskey. So there’s not just an esprit de sty; there’s a snobbery de sty too.”

“All right,” said Mr. Acarius.

“All right?”

“Yes then,” Mr. Acarius said.

“Then this is where we came in,” the doctor said. “Just what do you want of me?”

“I’m trying to tell you,” Mr. Acarius said. “I’m not just no better than the people on skid row. I’m not even as good, for the reason that I’m richer. Because I’m richer, I not only don’t have anything to escape from, driving me to try to escape from it, but as another cypher in the abacus of mankind, I am not even high enough in value to alter any equation by being subtracted from it. But at least I can go along for the ride, like the flyspeck on the handle of the computer, even if it can’t

change the addition. At least I can experience, participate in, the physical degradation of escaping—”

“A sty in a penthouse,” the doctor said.

“ — the surrender, the relinquishment to and into the opium of escaping, knowing in advance the inevitable tomorrow’s inevitable physical agony; to have lost nothing of anguish but instead only to have gained it; to have merely compounded yesterday’s spirit’s and soul’s laceration with tomorrow’s hangover—”

“ — with a butler to pour your drink when you reach that stage and to pour you into the bed when you reach that stage, and to bring you the aspirin and the bromide after the three days or the four or whenever it will be that you will allow yourself to hold them absolved who set you in the world,” the doctor said.

“I didn’t think you understood,” Mr. Acarius said, “even if you were right about the good Scotch where his on skid row is canned heat. The butler and the penthouse will only do to start with, to do the getting drunk in. But after that, no more. Even if Scotch is the only debasement of which my soul is capable, the anguish of my recovery from it will be at least a Scotch approximation of his who had nothing but canned heat with which to face the intolerable burden of his soul.”

“What in the world are you talking about?” the doctor said. “Do you mean that you intend to drink yourself into Bellevue?”

“Not Bellevue,” Mr. Acarius said. “Didn’t we both agree that I am incapable of skid row? No, no: One of those private places, such as the man from skid row will never and can never see, whose at best is a grating or a vacant doorway, and at worst a police van and the — what do they call it? — bullpen. A Scotch bullpen of course, since that’s all I am capable of. But it will have mankind in it, and I shall have entered mankind.”

“Say that again,” the doctor said. “Try that in English too.”

“That’s all,” Mr. Acarius said. “Mankind. People. Man. I shall be one with man, victim of his own base appetites and now struggling to extricate himself from that debasement. Maybe it’s even my fault that I’m incapable of anything but Scotch, and so our bullpen will be a Scotch one where for a little expense we can have peace, quiet for the lacerated and screaming nerves, sympathy, understanding—”

“What?” the doctor said.

“ — and maybe what my fellow inmates are trying to escape from — the too many mistresses or wives or the too much money or responsibility or whatever else it is that drives into escape the sort of people who can afford to pay fifty dollars a day for the privilege of escaping — will not bear mention in the same breath with that which drives one who can afford no better, even to canned heat.

But at least we will be together in having failed to escape and in knowing that in the last analysis there is no escape, that you can never escape and, whether you will or not, you must reenter the world and bear yourself in it and its lacerations and all its anguish of breathing, to support and comfort one another in that knowledge and that attempt.”

“What?” the doctor said. “What’s that?”

“I beg pardon?” said Mr. Acarius.

“Do you really believe that that’s what you are going to find in this place?”

“Why not?”

“Then I beg yours,” the doctor said. “Go on.”

“That’s all,” Mr. Acarius said. “That’s what I want of you. You must know any number of these places. The best—”

“The best,” the doctor said. “Of course.” He reached for the telephone.

“Yes, I know it.”

“Shouldn’t I see it first?”

“What for? They’re all alike. You’ll have seen plenty of this one before you’re out again.”

“I thought you said that this one would be the best,” Mr. Acarius said.

“Right,” the doctor said, removing his hand from the telephone. It did not take them long: an address in an expensive section facing the Park, itself outwardly resembling just another expensive apartment house not too different from that one in (or on) which Mr. Acarius himself lived, the difference only beginning inside and even there not too great: A switchboard in a small foyer enclosed by the glass-panel walls of what were obviously offices.

Apparently the doctor read Mr. Acarius’s expression. “Oh, the drunks,” the doctor said. “They’re all upstairs. Unless they can walk, they bring them in the back way. And even when they can walk in, they don’t see this very long nor but twice. Well?” Then the doctor read that one too. “All right. We’ll see Hill too. After all, if you’re going to surrender your amateur’s virginity in debauchery, you are certainly entitled to examine at least the physiognomy of the supervisor of the rite.”

Doctor Hill was no older than Mr. Acarius’s own doctor; apparently there was between them the aura or memory of more than one Atlantic City and Palm Beach and Beverly Hills convention. “Look here, Ab,” Doctor Hill said. “Haven’t you boys come to the wrong place?”

“Does Doctor Hill think I shouldn’t take up room better used or at least needed by someone else?” Mr. Acarius said.

“No, no,” Doctor Hill said. “There’s always room for one more in dipsomania.”

“Like in adultery,” Mr. Acarius’s doctor said.

“We don’t cure that here,” Doctor Hill said.

“Do they anywhere?” Mr. Acarius’s doctor said.

“Can’t say,” Doctor Hill said. “When do you want to start?”

“What about now?” said Mr. Acarius.

“You just get sober here, not drunk too,” Doctor Hill said. “You’ll have to do that much of it outside, otherwise the antitrust or the free-trade laws might get us.”

“Give us four days,” Mr. Acarius’s doctor said. “We can certainly come in under the wire in that time.”

So four days were set; Mr. Acarius let himself go into alcohol completely again for the first time since his college days. That is, he tried to, because at first it seemed to him that he was making no progress at all and in the end would let down not only his own doctor but Doctor Hill too.

But by the end of the third day, reason told him he had better not try to leave his penthouse; and by the afternoon of the fourth one, when his doctor called for him, his legs themselves assured him that he could not without assistance, so that his doctor looked at him with a sort of admiration almost. “By gravy, you’re even up to an ambulance. What do you say? Go in toes-up like you had come in a patrol wagon right out from under Brooklyn Bridge?”

“No,” Mr. Acarius said. “Just hurry.”

“What?” the doctor said. “It can’t be that your mind is changing.”

“No,” Mr. Acarius said. “This is what I wanted.”

“The brotherhood of suffering,” the doctor said. “All of you together there, to support and comfort one another in the knowledge of the world’s anguish, and that you must be a man and not run from it? How did it go? Peace and quiet for the lacerated and screaming nerves, sympathy, understanding—”

“All right,” Mr. Acarius said. “Just hurry. I’m going to be sick.”

So they did: between his own houseman and an elevator man who remembered him well and tenderly from many Christmases, down the elevator and across the foyer and into the doctor’s car; then into the other small foyer again, where Mr. Acarius knew that at any moment now he was going to be sick, looking out of a sort of tilting chasm of foul bile-tasting misery at what was holding them up: some commotion or excitement at the elevator which a flashy, slightly brassy woman in an expensive fur coat, like a fading show girl, was being forcibly restrained from entering. If somebody doesn’t do something pretty

quick, Mr. Acarius thought, it won't matter anymore. Which apparently someone did, his own doctor perhaps, though Mr. Acarius was too miserable to tell, only that he was in the elevator at last, the door sliding to across the heavily rouged shape of the woman's scream. "Peace and quiet," his doctor said.

"All right," Mr. Acarius said again. "Just hurry."

But they made it: in the privacy of his room at last and the nurse (he did not remark when or where she came from either) even got the basin in position in time. Then he lay exhausted on his bed while the deft hands which he had anticipated divested him of his clothing and slipped his pajamas over his legs and arms, not his doctor's hands, nor — opening his eyes — even the nurse's.

It was a man, with a worn almost handsome actor's face, in pajamas and dressing gown, whom Mr. Acarius knew at once, with a sort of peaceful vindication, to be another patient. He had been right, it was not even as he had merely hoped but as he had expected, lying there, empty and exhausted and even at peace at last while he watched the stranger take up his coat and trousers and move rapidly into the bathroom with them and reappear empty-handed, stooping now over Mr. Acarius's suitcase when the nurse entered with a small glass of something and a tumbler of water on a tray.

"What is it?" Mr. Acarius said.

"For your nerves," the nurse said.

"I don't want it now," Mr. Acarius said. "I want to suffer a little more yet."

"You want to what?" the nurse said.

"The man's suffering," the stranger said. "Go on, Goldie. Bring him a drink. You've got to have something to put down on his chart."

"Says you," the nurse said.

"You've got to watch Goldie," the stranger said to Mr. Acarius. "She's from Alabama."

“What time everybody’s not watching you,” the nurse said to the stranger. She glanced rapidly, apparently at Mr. Acarius’s discarded clothing, because she said sharply, “Where’s his suit?”

“I’ve already put it in,” the stranger said, tossing Mr. Acarius’s shoes and underwear and shirt into the suitcase and closing it rapidly. Then he crossed to a narrow locker in the corner and stowed the suitcase in it and closed the door, which now revealed itself to be armed with a small padlock. “You want to lock it yourself, or will you trust me?” the stranger said to the nurse.

“Hold it,” the nurse said grimly. She set the tray on the table and entered the bathroom and then reappeared. “All right,” she said. “Lock it.” The stranger did so. The nurse approached and tested the lock and then took up the tray again. “When you want this, ring,” she told Mr. Acarius. At the door she paused again, speaking this time to the stranger. “Get out of here now,” she said. “Let him rest.”

“Right,” the stranger said. The nurse went out. The stranger watched the door for perhaps half a minute. Then he came back to the bed. “It’s behind the tub,” he said.

“What?” Mr. Acarius said.

“That’s right,” the stranger said. “You’ve got to watch even the good ones like Goldie. Just wait till you see the one that’s coming at midnight. Boy. But we’ll be all right now.” He looked down at Mr. Acarius, speaking rapidly now. “My name’s Miller. You’re a patient of Doctor Cochrane’s, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” Mr. Acarius said.

“That’ll do it; Cochrane’s got such a good reputation around here that any patient of his gets the benefit of the doubt. Judy’s down stairs — Watkins’s girl friend. She’s already tried once to get up here. But Watkins himself hasn’t a chance; Goldie’s got him sewed up in his room and is watching him like a hawk. But you can do it.”

“Do what?” Mr. Acarius said.

“Call down and say Judy is your guest, and to send her up,” Miller said, handing Mr. Acarius the telephone. “Her name’s Lester.”

“What?” Mr. Acarius said. “What?”

“OK. I’ll do it for you. What’s your name? I didn’t catch it.”

“Acarius,” Mr. Acarius said.

“Acarius,” Miller said. He said into the telephone: “Hello. This is Mr. Acarius in twenty-seven. Send Miss Lester up, will you? Thanks.” He put the receiver back and picked up Mr. Acarius’s dressing gown. “Now put this on and be ready to meet her. We’ll take care of the rest of it. We’ll have to work fast because Goldie’s going to catch on as soon as she hears the elevator.”

It did go fast. Mr. Acarius in his dressing gown was barely on his feet and Miller was scarcely out of the room, when he heard the elevator stop, followed by a hard rapid clatter of female heels in the corridor. Then the next moment his room seemed to be full of people: the brassy, slightly buxom slightly faded girl whom he had left screaming in the foyer, running in and flinging herself upon him shrieking, “Darling! Darling!” with Miller and another man in pajamas and robe on her heels — an older man of at least sixty, with no actor’s face this time because Shriner’s conventions and nightclubs and the first-night lobbies of musical comedies were full of it — and last of all, the nurse and the elevator attendant, Mr. Acarius watching in horror the brassy girl now hissing viciously: “Hurry, you bastards, hurry!” holding the fur coat open while Miller and the other man tore savagely at the front of her dress until it fell open and revealed a half-pint bottle tucked into each lobe of her brassiere.

Then the room was empty again, as suddenly and violently as it had filled, though not for long; indeed, to Mr. Acarius it seemed almost simultaneous, superposed: The uproar still fading up the corridor, the older patient’s voice still raised in adjuration at the nurse or whoever it was who had finally got the two bottles, when the heels clattered again, the brassy girl entering this time at a dead run, snatching the front of her dress and slip into a wad at her middle and revealing a third

bottle, a full pint this time, taped high between her running legs, running to Mr. Acarius and crying down at him: "Grab it! Grab it!" then, while Mr. Acarius, incapable of moving, merely stared, ripping the bottle free herself and thrusting it into the chair behind him and turning already smoothing her skirt over her hips as the nurse entered, saying to the nurse haughtily, in a voice of a princess or a queen: "Have the goodness not to touch me again."

And he still crouched there, weak and trembling, while the uproar really did die away; he was still there perhaps ten minutes later when Miller, followed by the older man, entered. "Good work," Miller said. "Where is it?" Mr. Acarius made a weak gesture. Miller reached behind him and extracted a pint of whiskey.

"Did you ever see a dream ... walking," the older man said.
"Oh yes," Miller said. "This is Watkins."

"Did you ever hear a dream ... talking," Watkins said. "The best place to hide it is here."
"Right." Miller said. "The geranium too."

"Go and get it," Watkins said. Miller went out. Watkins carried the pint bottle to Mr. Acarius's bed and thrust it beneath the covers at the foot. "And the dream that is walking and talking," Watkins said. "This your first visit here?"

"Yes," Mr. Acarius whispered.
"You'll get used to it," Watkins said, "... is you," he said. Miller returned, carrying a potted geranium under his dressing gown, and a folded newspaper which he spread on the floor and then dumped the plant and its nurturing earth from the pot onto the paper, revealing another pint bottle.

"That puts us in pretty good shape," Miller said. "We may not have to use your suit, after all."
"My suit?" Mr. Acarius whispered.

"The fire escape goes down just outside my window," Miller said, folding the refuse of the geranium into the paper. "Last week Watkins got hold of the key long enough to unlock the window. I've still got my shoes and shirt, but we didn't have any pants. But we're fixed now. In an emergency, one of us can climb down the fire escape and go down to the corner and get a bottle. But we won't need to now. We won't even need to risk changing the charts tonight," he said to Watkins.

"Maybe not," Watkins said, brushing the earth from the bottle, "Get a glass from the bathroom."

"Maybe we ought to put this back into the pot," Miller said, raising the folded paper.

"Put it all in the wastebasket," Watkins said. Miller dumped the paper containing the ruined geranium into Mr. Acarius's wastebasket and dropped the empty pot on top of it and went into the bathroom and returned with an empty tumbler. Watkins had already opened the bottle. He poured a drink into the tumbler and drank it. "Give him one too," he said. "He deserves it."

"No," Mr. Acarius whispered.

"Better have one," Miller said. "You don't look too good."

"No," Mr. Acarius whispered.

"You want me to send Goldie back with that bromide she tried to give you?"

"No," Mr. Acarius whispered.

"Let the man alone," Watkins said. "This is still America, even in here. He don't have to drink if he don't want to. Hide this one good too."

"Right," Miller said.

"Did you ever see a dream ... walking," Watkins said.

And still Mr. Acarius crouched. After a while an orderly brought him a tray of supper; he sat looking at the food quietly, as though it contained poison. The nurse entered, again with the tray. This time it bore, in addition to the water, a small glass of whiskey.

“You’ve got to eat,” she said. “Maybe this will give you an appetite.”
“No,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“Come on now,” the nurse said. “You must try to cooperate.”
“I can’t,” Mr. Acarius whispered.

“OK,” the nurse said. “But you must eat some of it, or I’ll have to tell Doctor Hill on you.”

So he tried, chewing down a little of the food anyway; presently the orderly came and removed the tray; immediately after that Miller entered rapidly and removed one of the bottles, the one Watkins had opened, from Mr. Acarius’s bed. “We appreciate this,” Miller said. “Sure you won’t have one?”

“No,” Mr. Acarius whispered. Then he could crouch again, hearing the slow accumulation of the cloistral evening. He could see the corridor beyond his door. Occasionally other men in pajamas and dressing gowns passed; they seemed to be congregating toward another lighted door up the corridor; even as he knotted the cord of his robe he could hear the unmistakable voice: “Did you ever see a dream ... walking,” then, creeping nearer, he could see inside the office or dispensary or whatever it was — a cabinet, open, the keys dangling on a ring from the lock, the nurse measuring whiskey from a brown unlabeled bottle in turn into the small glasses in the hands of the assembled devotees. “Did you ever hear a dream ... talking,” Watkins said.

“That’s right,” Miller said to him in a friendly voice. “Better take it while you can. It’s going to be a long dry spell after Goldie goes off at midnight.”

But that was not what Mr. Acarius wanted; alone with the nurse at last, he said so. “It’s a little early to go to bed yet, isn’t it?” the nurse said.

“I’ve got to sleep,” Mr. Acarius said. “I’ve got to.”

“All right,” the nurse said. “Go get in bed and I’ll bring it to you.”

He did so, swallowed the capsule and then lay, the hidden bottle cold against his feet, though it would warm in time or perhaps in time, soon even, he would not care, though he didn't see how, how ever to sleep again; he didn't know how late it was, though that would not matter either: to call his doctor now, have the nurse call him, to come and get him, take him away into safety, sanity, falling suddenly from no peace into something without peace either, into a loud crash from somewhere up the corridor. It was late, he could feel it.

The overhead light was off now, though a single shaded one burned beside the bed, and now there were feet in the corridor, running; Watkins and Miller entered. Watkins wore a woman's jade-colored raincoat, from the front of which protruded or dangled a single broken-stemmed tuberose; his head was bound in a crimson silk scarf like a nun's wimple.

Miller was carrying the same brown unlabeled bottle which Mr. Acarius had seen the nurse lock back inside the cabinet two or three hours or whatever it was ago, which he was trying to thrust into Mr. Acarius's bed when there entered a nurse whom Mr. Acarius knew at once must be the new and dreaded one: an older woman in awry pince-nez, crying: "Give it back to me! Give it back to me!" She cried to Mr. Acarius: "I had the cabinet unlocked and was reaching down the bottle when one of them knocked my cap off and when I caught at it, one of them reached over my head and grabbed the bottle!"

"Then give me back that bottle of mine you stole out of my flush tank," Miller said.

"I poured it out," the nurse cried in triumph.

"But you had no right to," Miller said. "That was mine. I bought it myself, brought it in here with me. It didn't belong to the hospital at all and you had no right to put your hand on it."

"We'll let Doctor Hill decide that," the nurse said. She snatched up the brown unlabeled bottle and went out.

"You bet we will," Miller said, following.

“Did you ever hear a dream ... talking,” Watkins said. “Move your feet,” he said, reaching into Mr. Acarius’s bed and extracting the unopened bottle. Mr. Acarius did not move, he could not, while Watkins opened the bottle and drank from it. From up the corridor there still came the sound of Miller’s moral indignation; presently Miller entered.

“She wouldn’t let me use the telephone,” he said. “She’s sitting on it. We’ll have to go upstairs and wake him up.”

“She has no sense of humor,” Watkins said. “Better kill this before she finds it too.” They drank rapidly in turn from the bottle. “We’ll have to have more liquor now. We’ll have to get the keys away from her.”

“How?” Miller said.

“Trip her up. Grab them.”

“That’s risky.”

“Not unless she hits her head on something. Get her out into the corridor first, where there’s plenty of room.”

“Let’s go upstairs and wake up Hill first,” Miller said. “I’m damned if I’m going to let them get away with anything as highhanded as this.”

“Right,” Watkins said, emptying the bottle and dropping it into Mr. Acarius’s wastebasket. Then Mr. Acarius was alone again — if he had ever been else, since there was no time to telephone anyone now, no one to telephone to: who was as isolate from help and aid here as if he had waked on an inaccessible and forgotten plateau of dinosaurs, where only beast might be rallied to protect beast from beast; he remembered in the group armed with the small ritual glasses at the dispensary one who looked like a truck driver or perhaps even a prize fighter; he might do to help, provided he was awake, though it was incredible to Mr. Acarius that anyone on the floor could still be asleep; certainly not now because at this moment there came through the ceiling overhead the sound of Doctor Hill’s voice roaring with rage, Mr. Acarius lying in a kind of suffering which was almost peaceful, thinking, Yes, yes, we will save her life and then I will get out of here, I don’t care how, I don’t care where; still lying so while Doctor Hill’s voice reached

its final crescendo, followed by a curious faint sound which Mr. Acarius could define only as a suspended one: then one last thundering crash.

He was off the bed now; the nurse and an orderly running, had already shown the way: A door in the corridor which, open now, revealed a flight of concrete stairs, at the foot of which lay Watkins. He looked indeed like a corpse now. In fact, he looked more than just dead: he looked at peace, his eyes closed, one arm flung across his breast so that the lax hand seemed to clasp lightly the broken stem of the tuberose. "That's right!" Mr. Acarius cried, "tremble! You only hope he is!"

Miller had said he put the suit behind the tub; it was there, wadded. Mr. Acarius had no shirt save his pajama jacket nor shoes save his carpet slippers. Nor did he have any idea where Miller's room with its unlocked window on the fire escape was either. But he did not hesitate. I've done what I can, he thought. Let the Lord provide awhile.

Something did, anyway. He had to wait while the orderly and two patients bore Watkins into his room and cleared the corridor. Then he found Miller's room with no more effort than just selecting a door rapidly and opening it. He had had a fear of height all his life, though he was already on the dark fire escape before he even remembered it, thinking with a kind of amazement of a time, a world in which anyone had time to be afraid of anything consisting merely of vertical space.

He knew in theory that fire escapes did not reach the ground and that you had to drop the remaining distance too; it was dark here and he did not know into what but again he did not hesitate, letting go into nothing, onto cinders; there was a fence too and then an alley and now he could see the sweet and empty sweep of the Park: that and nothing more between him and the sanctuary of his home.

Then he was in the Park, running, stumbling, panting, gasping, when a car drew abreast of him. Slowing, and a voice said, "Hey, you!" and still trying to run even after the blue coats and the shields surrounded him: then he was fighting, swinging wildly and violently until they caught and

held him while one of them sniffed his breath. "Don't strike a match near him," a voice said. "Call the wagon."

"It's all right, officer," his doctor said and, panting, helpless, even crying now, Mr. Acarius saw for the first time the other car drawn up behind the police one. "I'm his doctor. They telephoned me from the hospital that he had escaped. I'll take charge of him. Just help me get him into my car."

They did so: the firm hard hands. Then the car was moving. "It was that old man," he said crying. "That terrible, terrible old man, who should have been at home telling bedtime stories to his grandchildren."

"Didn't you know there were police in that car?" the doctor said.

"No," Mr. Acarius cried. "I just knew that there were people in it."

Then he was at home, kneeling before the cellarette, dragging rapidly out not only what remained of the whiskey but all the rest of it too — the brandy, vermouth, gin, liqueurs — all of it, gathering the bottles in his arms and running into the bathroom where first one then a second and then a third crashed and splintered into the tub, the doctor leaning in the door, watching him.

"So you entered mankind, and found the place already occupied," the doctor said.

"Yes," Mr. Acarius said, crying, "You can't beat him. You cannot. You never will. Never."

The End

The Marble Faun, William Faulkner

Contents
Prologue
The Marble Faun
Epilogue

To My Mother

Prologue

The poplar trees sway to and fro
That through this gray old garden go
Like slender girls with nodding heads,
Whispering above the beds
Of tall tufted hollyhocks,
Of purple asters and of phlox;
Caught in the daisies' dreaming gold
Recklessly scattered wealth untold
About their slender graceful feet
Like poised dancers, lithe and fleet.

The candled flames of roses here
Gutter gold in this still air,
And clouds glide down the western sky
To watch this sun-drenched revery,
While the poplars' shining crests
Lightly brush their silvered breasts,
Dreaming not of winter snows
That soon will shake their maiden rows.

The days dream by, golden-white,
About the fountain's silver light
That lifts and shivers in the breeze
Gracefully slim as are the trees;
Then shakes down its glistered hair
Upon the still pool's mirrored, fair
Flecked face.

Why am I sad? I?
Why am I not content? The sky
Warms me and yet I cannot break
My marble bonds. That quick keen snake
Is free to come and go, while I
Am prisoner to dream and sigh
For things I know, yet cannot know,
'Twixt sky above and earth below.

The spreading earth calls to my feet
Of orchards bright with fruits to eat,
Of hills and streams on either hand;
Of sleep at night on moon-blanced sand:
The whole world breathes and calls to me
Who marble-bound must ever be.

THE MARBLE FAUN

IF I were free, then I would go
Where the first chill spring winds blow,
Wrapping a light shocked mountain's brow
With shrilling tongues, and swirling now,
And fiery upward flaming, leap
From craggy teeth above each deep
Cold and wet with silence. Here
I fly before the streaming year
Along the fierce cold mountain tops
To which the sky runs down and stops;
And with the old moon watching me
Leaping and shouting joyously
Along each crouching dark abyss
Through which waters rush and hiss,
I whirl the echoes west and east
To hover each copse where lurks the beast,
Silence, till they shatter back
Across the ravine's smoky crack.

Here Pan's sharp hooped feet have pressed

His message on the chilly crest,
Saying — Follow where I lead,
For all the world springs to my reed
Woven up and woven down,
Thrilling all the sky and ground
With shivering heat and quivering cold;
To pierce and burst the swollen mold;
Shrilling in each waiting brake:
Come, ye living, stir and wake!

As the tumbling sunlight falls
Spouting down the craggy walls
To hiss upon the frozen rocks
That dot the hills in crouching flocks,
So I plunge in some deep vale
Where first violets, shy and pale,
Appear, and spring with tear-stained cheeks
Peeps at me from the neighboring brakes,
Gathering her torn draperies up
For flight if I cast my eyes up.

Swallows dart and skimming fly
Like arrows painted on the sky,
And the twanging of the string
Is the faint high quick crying
That they, downward shooting, spin
Through the soundless swelling din.

Dogwood shines through thin trees there
Like jewels in a woman's hair;
A sudden brook hurries along
Singing its reverted song,
Flashing in white frothèd shocks
About upstanding polished rocks;
Slender shoots draw sharp and clear
And white withes shake as though in fear
Upon the quick stream's melted snow

That seems to dance rather than flow.

Then on every hand awakes
From the dim and silent brakes
The breathing of the growing things,
The living silence of all springs
To come and that have gone before;
And upon a woodland floor
I watch the sylvans dance till dawn
While the brooding spring looks on.

The spring is quick with child, and sad;
And in her dampened hair sits clad
Watching the immortal dance
To the world's throbbing dissonance
That Pan's watchful shrill pipes blow
Of the fiery days that go
Like wine across the world; then high:
His pipes weave magic on the sky
Shrill with joy and pain of birth
Of another spring on earth.

HARK! a sound comes from the brake
And I glide nearer like a snake
To peer into its leafy deeps
Where like a child the spring still sleeps.
Upon a chill rock gray and old
Where the willows' simple fold
Falls, an unstirred curtain, Pan —
As he sat since the world began —
Stays and broods upon the scene
Beside a hushèd pool where lean
His own face and the bending sky
In shivering soundless amity.

Pan sighs, and raises to his lips
His pipes, down which his finger-tips

Wander lovingly; then low
And clearly simple does he blow
A single thin clear melody
That pauses, spreading liquidly,
While the world stands sharp and mute
Waiting for his magic flute.

A sudden strain, silver and shrill
As narrow water down a hill,
Splashes rippling as though drawn
In shattered quicksilver on
The willow curtain, and through which
It wanders without halt or hitch
Into silent meadows; when
It pauses, breathing, and again
Climbs as though to reach the sky
Like the soaring silver cry
Of some bird. A note picks out,
A silver moth that whirrs about
A single rose, then settles low
On the sorrowful who go
Along a willowed green-stained pool
To lie and sleep within its cool
Virginity.

Ah, the world
About which mankind's dreams are furled
Like a cocoon, thin and cold,
And yet that is never old!
Earth's heart burns with winter snows
As fond and tremulous Pan blows
For other springs and cold and sad
As this; and sitting garment-clad
In sadness with dry stricken eyes
Bent to the unchanging skies,
Pan sighs and broods upon the scene
Beside this hushèd pool where lean

His own face and the bending sky
In shivering soundless amity.

ALL the air is gray with rain
Above the shaken fields of grain,
Cherry orchards moveless drip
Listening to their blossoms slip
Quietly from wet black boughs.
There a soaking broad-thatched house
Steams contemplatively. I
Sit beneath the weeping sky
Crouched about the mountains' rim
Drawing her loose hair over them.
My eyes, peace-filled by falling rain,
Brood upon the steamy plain,
Crouched beneath a dripping tree
Where strong and damp rise up to me
The odors of the bursting mold
Upon the earth's slow-breathing old
Breast; of acorns swelling tight
To thrust green shoots into the light
As shade for me in years to come
When my eyes grow dim and I am dumb
With sun-soaked age and lack of strength
Of things that have lived out the length
Of life; and when the nameless pain
To fuller live and know again
No more will send me over earth
Puzzling about the worth
Of this and that, nor crying "Hence!"

At my unseeking impotence
To have about my eyes close-furled
All the beauty in the world.
But content to watch by day
The dancing light's unthinking play
Ruffling the pool. Then I'll be

Beneath the roses. sleepily
Soaking in the sun-drenched air
Without wish or will or care,
With my softened fading eyes
Shackled to the curving skies.
THE poplars look beyond the wall
With bending hair, and to me call,
Curving shivering hands to me
Whispering what they can see:
Of a dim and silent way
Through a valley white with may.

On either hand gossiping beeches
Stir against the lilac reaches
Half of earth and half of sky;
There the aspens quakingly
Gather in excited bands,
The dappled birches' fluttering hands
Cast their swift and silver light
Through the glade spun greenish white.

So alone I follow on
Where slowly piping Pan has gone
To draw the quiet browsing flocks,
While a blackbird calls and knocks
At noon across the dusty downs
In quivering peace, until Pan sounds
His piping gently to the bird,
And saving this no sound is heard.

Now the blackbirds' gold wired throats
Spill their long cool mellow notes;
In solemn flocks slowly wheeling
Intricately, without revealing
Their desires, as on blue space
They thread and cross like folds of lace
Woven black; then shrilling go

Like shutters swinging to and fro.

ON the downs beyond the trees
Loved by the thrilling breeze,
While the blackbird calls and knocks
Go the shepherds with their flocks.

It is noon, and the air
Is shimmering still, for nowhere
Is there a sound. The sky, half waked,
Half sleep, is calm; for peace is laked
Between the world rim's far spread dikes
And the trees, from which there strikes
The flute notes that I, listening, hear
Liquidly falling on my ear:

"Come quietly, Faun, to my call;
Come, come, the noon will cool and pass
That now lies edgelessly in thrall
Upon the ripened sun-stilled grass.
"There is no sound in all the land,
There is no breath in all the skies;
Here Warmth and Peace go hand in hand
'Neath Silence's inverted eyes.

"My call, spreading endlessly,
My mellow call pulses and knocks;
Come, Faun, and solemnly
Float shoulderward your autumned locks.

"Let your fingers, languorous,
Slightly curl, palm upward rest,
The silent noon waits over us,
The feathers stir not on his breast.

"There is no sound nor shrill of pipe,
Your feet are noiseless on the ground;
The earth is full and stillily ripe,
In all the land there is no sound.

“There is a great God who sees all
And in my throat bestows this boon:
To ripple the silence with my call
When the world sleeps and it is noon.”

When I hear the blackbirds’ song
Piercing cool and mellowly long,
I pause to hear, nor do I breathe
As the dusty gorse and heath
Breathe not, for their magic call
Holds all the pausing earth in thrall
At noon; then I know the skies
Move not, but halt in reveries
Of golden-veiled and misty blue;
Then the blackbirds wheeling through
By Pan guarded in the skies,
Piercing the earth with remorseless eyes
Are burned scraps of paper cast
On a lake quiet, deep, and vast.

UPON a wood’s dim shaded edge
Stands a dusty hawthorn hedge
Beside a road from which I pass
To cool my feet in deep rich grass.

I pause to listen to the song
Of a brook spilling along
Behind a patchy willow screen
Whose lazy evening shadows lean
Their scattered gold upon a glade
Through which the staring daisies wade,
And the resilient poplar trees,
Slowly turning in the breeze,
Flash their facets to the sun,
Swaying in slow unison.

Here quietude folds a spell
Within a stilly shadowed dell
Wherein I rest, and through the leaves
The sun a soundless pattern weaves
Upon the floor. The leafy glade
Is pensive in the dappled shade,
While the startled sunlight drips
From beech and alder fingertips,
And birches springing suddenly
Erect in silence sleepily
Clinging to their slender limbs,
Whitening them as shadow dims.

As I lie here my fancy goes
To where a quiet oak bestows
Its shadow on a dreaming scene
Over which the broad boughs lean
A canopy. The brook's a stream
On which long still days lie and dream,
And where the lusty summer walks —
Around his head are lilac stalks —
In the shade beneath the trees
To let the cool stream fold his knees;
While I lie in the leafy shade
Until the nymphs troop down the glade.

Their limbs that in the spring were white
Are now burned golden by sunlight.
They near the marge, and there they meet
Inverted selves stretched at their feet;
And they kneel languorously there
To comb and braid their short blown hair
Before they slip into the pool —
Warm gold in silver liquid cool.

Evening turns and sunlight falls
In flecks between the leafèd walls,

Like golden butterflies whose wings
Slowly pulse and beat. Slow sings
The stream in a lower key
Murmuring down quietly
Between its solemn purple stone
With cooling ivy overgrown.

Sunset stains the western sky;
Night comes soon, and now I
Follow toward the evening star.
A sheep bell tinkles faint and far,
Then drips in silence as the sheep
Move like clouds across the deep
Still dusky meadows wet with dew.

I stretch and roll and draw through
The fresh sweet grass, and the air
Is softer than my own soft hair.

I lift up my eyes; the green
West is a lake on which has been
Cast a single lily. — See!
In meadows stretching over me
Are humming stars as thick as bees,
And the reaching inky trees
Sweep the sky. I lie and hear
The voices of the fecund year,
While the dark grows dim and deep,
And I glide into dreamless sleep.

CAWING rooks in tangled flight
Come crowding home against the night.

And all other wings are still
Except rooks tumbling down the hill
Of evening sky. The crimson falls
Upon the solemn ivied walls;

The horns of sunset slowly sound
Between the waiting sky and ground;
The cedars painted on the sky
Hide the sun slow flamingly
Repeated level on the lake,
Smooth and still and without shake,
Until the swans' inverted grace
Wreathes in thought its placid face
With spreading lines like opening fans
Moved by white and languid hands.

Now the vesper song of bells
Beneath the evening flows and swells,
And the twilight's silver throat
Slowly repeats each resonant note:
The dying day gives those who sorrow
A boon no king can give: a morrow.

The westering sun has climbed the wall
And silently we watch night fall
While sunset lingers in the trees
Its subtle gold-shot tapestries,
The sky is velvet overhead
Where petalled stars are canopied
Like sequins in a spreading train
Without fold or break or stain.

A cool wind whispers by the heads
Of flowers dreaming in their beds
Like convent girls, filling their sleep
With strange dreams from the outer deep.

On every hill battalions of trees
March skyward on unmoving knees,
And like a spider on a veil
Climbs the moon. A nightingale,
Lost in the trees against the sky,

Loudly repeats its jewelled cry.

I AM sad, nor yet can I,
For all my questing, reason why;
And now as night falls I will go
Where two breezes joining flow
Above a stream whose gleamless deeps
Caressingly sing the while it sleeps
Upon sands powdered by the moon.

And there I'll lie to hear it croon
In fondling a wayward star
Fallen from the shoreless far
Sky, while winds in misty stream,
Laughing and weeping in a dream,
Whisper of an orchard's trees
That, shaken by the aimless breeze,
Let their blossoms fade and slip
Soberly, as lip to lip
They touch the misty grasses fanned
To ripples by the breeze.

Here stand
The clustered lilacs faint as cries
Against the silken-breasted skies;
They nod and sway, and slow as rain
Their slowly falling petals stain
The grass as through them breezes stray,
Smoothing them in silver play.

And we, the marbles in the glade,
Dreaming in the leafy shade
Are saddened, for we know that all
Things save us must fade and fall,
And the moon that sits there in the skies
Draws her hair across her eyes:
She sees the blossoms blow and die,

Soberly and quietly,
Till spring breaks in the waiting glade
And the first thin branchèd shade
Falls 'thwart them, and the swallows' cry
Calls down from the stirring sky,
Thin and cold and hot as flame
Where spring is nothing but a name.

The stream flows calmly without sound
In the darkness gathered round;
Trembling to the vagrant breeze
About me stand the inky trees
Peopled by some bird's loud cries,
Until it seems as if the skies
Had shaken down their blossomed stars
Seeking among the trees' dim bars,
Crying aloud, each for its mate,
About the old earth, insensate,
Seemingly, to their white woe,
But their sorrow does she know
And her breast, unkempt and dim,
Throbs her sorrow out to them.
The dying day gives all who sorrow
The boon no king may give: a morrow.

THE ringèd moon sits eerily
Like a mad woman in the sky,
Dropping flat hands to caress
The far world's shaggy flanks and breast,
Plunging white hands in the glade
Elbow deep in leafy shade
Where birds sleep in each silent brake
Silverly, there to wake
The quivering loud nightingales
Whose cries like scattered silver sails
Spread across the azure sea.

Her hands also caress me:
My keen heart also does she dare;
While turning always through the skies
Her white feet mirrored in my eyes
Weave a snare about my brain
Unbreakable by surge or strain,
For the moon is mad, for she is old,
And many's the bead of a life she's told;
And many's the fair one she's seen wither:
They pass, they pass, and know not whither.

The hushèd earth, so calm, so old,
Dreams beneath its heath and wold —
And heavy scent from thorny hedge
Paused and snowy on the edge
Of some dark ravine, from where
Mists as soft and thick as hair
Float silver in the moon.

Stars sweep down — or are they stars? —
Against the pines' dark etchèd bars.
Along a brooding moon-wet hill
Dogwood shines so cool and still,
Like hands that, palm up, rigid lie
In invocation to the sky
As they spread there, frozen white,
Upon the velvet of the night.

THE world is still. How still it is!
About my avid stretching ears
The earth is pulseless in the dim
Silence that flows into them
And forms behind my eyes, until
My head is full: I feel it spill
Like water down my breast. The world,
A muted violin where are curled
Pan's fingers, waits, supine and cold

And bound soundlessly in fold
On fold of blind calm rock
Edgeless in the moonlight's shock,
Until the hand that grasps the bow
Descends; then grave and strong and low
It rises to his waiting ears.

The music of all passing years
Flows over him and down his breast
Of ice and gold, as in the west
Sunsets flame, and all dawns burn
Eastwardly, and calm skies turn
Always about his frozen head:
Peace for living, peace for dead.

And the hand that draws the bow
Stops not, as grave and strong and low
About his cloudy head it curls
The endless sorrow of all worlds,
The while he bends dry stricken eyes
Above the throngs; perhaps he sighs
For all the full world watching him
As seasons change from bright to dim.

And my eyes too are cool with tears
For the stately marching years,
For old earth dumb and strong and sad
With life so willy-nilly clad,
And mute and impotent like me
Who marble bound must ever be;
And my carven eyes embrace
The dark world's dumbly dreaming face,
For my crooked limbs have pressed
Her all-wise pain-softened breast
Until my hungry heart is full
Of aching bliss unbearable.

THE hills are resonant with soft humming;
It is a breeze that pauses, strumming
On the golden-wirèd stars
The deep full music to which was
The song of life through ages sung;
And soundlessly there weaves among
The chords a star, a falling rose
That only this high garden grows;
A falling hand with beauty dumb
Stricken by the hands that strum
The sky, is gone: yet still I see
This hand swiftly and soundlessly
Sliding now across my eyes
As it then slid down the skies.

Soft the breeze, a steady flame
Cooled by the forest whence it came,
Slipping across the dappled lea
To climb the dim walls of the sea;
To comb the wave-ponies' manes back
Where the water shivers black
With quiet depth and solitude
And licks the caverned sky. The wood
Stirs to a faint far mystic tone:
The reed of Pan who, all alone
In some rock-chilled silver dell,
Thins the song of Philomel
Sad in her dark dim echoed bower
Watching the far world bud and flower,
Watching the moon in ether stilled
Who, with her broad face humped and hilled
In sleep, dreams naked in the air
While Philomel dreams naked here.

Clear and sad sounds Pan's thin strain,
Dims in mystery, grows again;
Mirrors the light limbs falling, dying,

Soothes night voices calling, crying,
Stills the winds' far seeking tone
Where fallow springs have died and grown;
Hushes the nightbirds' jewelled cries
And flames the shadows' subtleties
Through endless labyrinthine walls
Of sounding corridors and halls
Where sound and silence soundless keep
Their slumbrous noon. Sweet be their sleep.

ALL day I run before a wind,
Keen and blue and without end,
Like a fox before the hounds
Across the mellow sun-shot downs
That smell like crispened warm fresh bread;
And the sky stretched overhead
Has drawn across its face a veil
Of gold and purple. My limbs fail
And I plunge panting down to rest
Upon earth's sharp and burning breast.
I lie flat, and feel its cold
Beating heart that's never old,
And yet has felt the ages pass
Above its heather, trees, and grass.

The azure veils fall from the sky
And on the world's rim shimmering lie,
While the bluey flashing sea
Pulses through infinitely.
Up! Away! Now I will go
To some orchard's golden row
Of bursting mellow pears and sweet
Berries and dusky grapes to eat.

I singing crush them to my lips,
Staining cheek and fingertips,
Then fill my hands, I know not why,

And off again along the sky
Down through the trees, beside the stream
Veiled too, and golden as a dream,
To lie once more in some warm glade
Deep walled by the purple shade
My fruits beside, and so I lie
In thin sun sifting from the sky
Like a cloak to cover me:
I sink in sleep resistlessly
While the sun slides smoothly down
The west, and green dusk closes round
My glade that the sun filled up
As gold wine stands within a cup.

Now silent autumn fires the trees
To slow flame, and calmly sees
The changing days burn down the skies
Reflected in her quiet eyes,
While about her as she kneels
Crouch the heavy-fruited fields
Along whose borders poplars run
Burnished by the waning sun.
Vineyards struggle up the hill
Toward the sky, dusty and still,
Thick with heavy purple grapes
And golden bursting fruits whose shapes
Are full and hot with sun. Here each
Slow exploding oak and beech
Blaze up about her dreaming knees,
Flickering at her draperies.

Each covert, a blaze of light
Upon horizons blueish white
Is a torch, the pines are bronze
And stiffly stretch their sculptured fronds
Over the depthless hushed ravine
Wherein their shadows change to green,

Then to purple in the deeps
Where the waiting winter sleeps.

THE moon is mad, and dimly burns,
And with her prying fingers turns
Inside out thicket and copse
Curiously, and then she stops
Staring about her, and the down
Grows sharp in sadness gathering round,
Powdering each darkling rock
And the hunched grain in shock
On shock in solemn rows;
And after each a shadow goes
Staring skyward, listening
Into the silence glistening
With watching stars that, sharp and sad,
Ring the solemn staring mad
Moon; and winds in monotone
Brood where shaken grain had grown
In bloomless fields that raise their bare
Breasts against the dying year.

And yet I do not move, for I
Am sad beneath this autumn sky,
For I am sudden blind and chill
Here beneath my frosty hill,
And I cry moonward in stiff pain
Unheeded, for the moon again
Stares blandly, while beneath her eyes
The silent world blazes and dies,
And leaves slip down and cover me
With sorrow and desire to be —
While the world waits, cold and sere —
Like it, dead with the dying year.

THE world stands without move or sound
In this white silence gathered round

It like a hood. It is so still
That earth lies without wish or will
To breathe. My garden, stark and white,
Sits soundless in the falling light
Of lifting bush and sudden hedge
Ice bound and ghostly on the edge
Of my world, curtained by the snow
Drifting, sifting; fast, now slow;
Falling endlessly from skies
Calm and gray, some far god's eyes.

The soundless quiet flakes slide past
Like teardrops on a sheet of glass,
Ah, there is some god above
Whose tears of pity, pain, and love
Slowly freeze and brimming slow
Upon my chilled and marbled woe;
The pool, sealed now by ice and snow,
Is dreaming quietly below,
Within its jewelled eye keeping
The mirrored skies it knew in spring.

How soft the snow upon my face!
And delicate cold! I can find grace
In its endless quiescence
For my enthralled impotence:
Solace from a pitying breast
Bringing quietude and rest
To dull my eyes; and sifting slow
Upon the waiting earth below
Fold veil on veil of peacefulness
Like wings to still and keep and bless.

WHY cannot we always be
Left steeped in this immensity
Of softly stirring peaceful gray
That follows on the dying day?

Here I can drug my prisoned woe
In the night wind's sigh and flow,
But now we, who would dream at night,
Are awakened by the light
Of paper lanterns, in whose glow
Fantastically to and fro
Pass, in a loud extravagance
And reft of grace, yet called a dance,
Dancers in a blatant crowd
To brass horns horrible and loud.

The blaring beats on gustily
From every side. Must I see
Always this unclean heated thing
Debauching the unarmed spring
While my back I cannot turn,
Nor may not shut these eyes that burn?

The poplars shake and sway with fright
Uncontrollable, the night
Powerless in ruthless grasp
Lifts hidden hands as though to clasp,
In invocation for surcease,
The flying stars.
Once there was peace
Calm handed where the roses blow,
And hyacinths, straight row on row;
And hushed among the trees. What!

Has my poor marble heart forgot
This surging noise in dreams of peace
That it once thought could never cease
Nor pale? Still the blaring falls
Crashing between my garden walls
Gustily about my ears
And my eyes, uncooled by tears,
Are drawn as my stone heart is drawn,

Until the east bleeds in the dawn
And the clean face of the day
Drives them slinkingly away.

DAYS and nights into years weave
A net to blind and to deceive
Me, yet my full heart yearns
As the world about me turns
For things I know, yet cannot know,
'Twixt sky above and earth below.
All day I watch the sunlight spill
Inward, driving out the chill
That night has laid here fold on fold
Between these walls, till they would hold
No more. With half closed eyes I see
Peace and quiet liquidly
Steeping the walls and cloaking them
With warmth and silence soaking them;
They do not know, nor care to know,
Why evening waters sigh in flow;
Why about the pole star turn
Stars that flare and freeze and burn;
Nor why the seasons, springward wheeling,
Set the bells of living pealing.
They sorrow not that they are dumb:
For they would not a god become.
... I am sun-steeped, until I
Am all sun, and liquidly
I leave my pedestal and flow
Quietly along each row,
Breathing in their fragrant breath
And that of the earth beneath.

Time may now unheeded pass:
I am the life that warms the grass —
Or does the earth warm me? I know
Not, nor do I care to know.

I am with the flowers one,
Now that is my bondage done;
And in the earth I shall sleep
To never wake, to never weep
For things I know, yet cannot know,
'Twixt sky above and earth below,
For Pan's understanding eyes
Quietly bless me from the skies,
Giving me, who knew his sorrow,
The gift of sleep to be my morrow.

Epilogue

May walks in this garden, fair
As a girl veiled in her hair
And decked in tender green and gold;
And yet my marble heart is cold
Within these walls where people pass
Across the close-clipped emerald grass
To stare at me with stupid eyes
Or stand in noisy ecstasies
Before my marble, while the breeze
That whispers in the shivering trees
Sings of quiet hill and plain,
Of vales where softly broods the rain,
Of orchards whose pink flaunted trees,
Gold flecked by myriad humming bees,
Enclose a roof-thatch faded gray,
Like a giant hive. Away
To brilliant pines upon the sea
Where waves linger silkenly
Upon the shelving sand, and sedge
Rustling gray along the edge
Of dunes that rise against the sky
Where painted sea-gulls wheel and fly.

Ah, how all this calls to me

Who marble-bound must ever be
While turn unchangingly the years.
My heart is full, yet sheds no tears
To cool my burning carven eyes
Bent to the unchanging skies:
I would be sad with changing year,
Instead, a sad, bound prisoner,
For though about me seasons go
My heart knows only winter snow.

April, May, June, 1919

The End

A Green Bough, William Faulkner

Contents

I

II

III

IV

V

VI

VII

VIII

IX

X

XI

XII

XIII

XIV

XV

XVI

XVII

XVIII
XIX
XX
XXI
XXII
XXIII
XXIV
XXV
XXVI
XXVII
XXVIII
XXIX
XXX
XXXI
XXXII
XXXIII
XXXIV
XXXV
XXXVI
XXXVII
XXXVIII
XXXIX
XL
XLI
XLII
XLIII
XLIV

A Green Bough

I

WE SIT drinking tea
Beneath the lilacs on a summer afternoon
Comfortably, at our ease
With fresh linen on our knees,
And we sit, we three

In diffident contentedness
Lest we let each other guess
How happy we are
Together here, watching the young moon
Lying shyly on her back, and the first star.
There are women here:
Smooth-shouldered creatures in sheer scarves, that pass
And eye us strangely as they pass.
One of them, our hostess, pauses near:
— Are you quite all right, sir? she stops to ask.
— You are a bit lonely, I fear.
Will you have more tea? cigarettes? No? —
I thank her, waiting for her to go:
To us they are like figures on a masque.
— Who? — shot down
Last spring — Poor chap, his mind
.... doctors say ... hoping rest will bring —
Busy with their tea and cigarettes and books
Their voices come to us like tangled rooks.
We sit in silent amity.
— It was a morning in late May:
A white woman, a white wanton near a brake,
A rising whiteness mirrored in a lake;
And I, old chap, was out before the day
In my little pointed-eared machine,
Stalking her through the shimmering reaches of the sky.
I knew that I could catch her when I liked
For no nymph ever ran as swiftly as she could.
We mounted, up and up
And found her at the border of a wood:
A cloud forest, and pausing at its brink
I felt her arms and her cool breath.
The bullet struck me here, I think
In the left breast
And killed my little pointed-eared machine. I saw it fall
The last wine in the cup....
I thought that I could find her when I liked,

But now I wonder if I found her, after all.
One should not die like this
On such a day,
From angry bullet or other modern way.
Ah, science is a dangerous mouth to kiss.
One should fall, I think, to some Etruscan dart
In meadows where the Oceanides
Flower the wanton grass with dancing,
And, on such a day as this
Become a tall wreathed column: I should like to be
An ilex on an isle in purple seas.
Instead, I had a bullet through my heart —
— Yes, you are right:
One should not die like this,
And for no cause nor reason in the world.
'Tis well enough for one like you to talk
Of going in the far thin sky to stalk
The mouth of death: you did not know the bliss
Of home and children; the serene
Of living and of work and joy that was our heritage.
And, best of all, of age.
We were too young.
Still — he draws his hand across his eyes
— Still, it could not be otherwise.
We had been
Raiding over Mannheim. You've seen
The place? Then you know
How one hangs just beneath the stars and sees
The quiet darkness burst and shatter against them
And, rent by spears of light, rise in shuddering waves
Crested with restless futile flickerings.
The black earth drew us down, that night
Out of the bullet-tortured air:
A great black bowl of fireflies....
There is an end to this, somewhere:
One should not die like this —
One should not die like this.

His voice has dropped and the wind is mouthing his words
While the lilacs nod their heads on slender stalks,
Agreeing while he talks,
Caring not if he is heard or is not heard.
One should not die like this.
Half audible, half silent words
That hover like gray birds
About our heads.
We sit in silent amity.
I am cold, for now the sun is gone
And the air is cooler where we three
Are sitting. The light has followed the sun
And I no longer see
The pale lilacs stirring against the lilac-pale sky.
They bend their heads toward me as one head.
— Old man — they say — How did you die?
I — I am not dead.
I hear their voices as from a great distance — Not dead
He's not dead, poor chap; he didn't die —

II

LAXLY reclining, he watches the firelight going
Across the ceiling, down the farther wall
In cumulate waves, a golden river flowing
Above them both, down yawning dark to fall
Like music dying down a monstrous brain.
Laxly reclining, he sees her sitting there
With firelight like a hand laid on her hair,
With firelight like a hand upon the keys
Playing a music of lustrous silent gold.
Bathed in gold she sits, upon her knees
Her silent hands, palm upward, lie at ease,
Filling with gold at each flame's spurting rise,
Spilling gold as each flame sinks and sighs,
Watching her plastic shadow on the wall
In unison with the firelight lift and fall

To the music by the firelight played
Upon the keys from which her hands had strayed
And fallen.
A pewter bowl of lilies in the room
Seems to him to weigh and change the gloom
Into a palpable substance he can feel
Heavily on his hands, slowing the wheel
The firelight steadily turns upon the ceiling.
The firelight steadily hums, steadily wheeling
Until his brain, stretched and tautened, suddenly cracks.
Play something else.
And laxly sees his brain
Whirl to infinite fragments, like brittle sparks,
Vortex together again, and whirl again.
Play something else.
He tries to keep his tone
Lightly natural, watching the shadows thrown,
Watching the timid shadows near her throat
Link like hands about her from the dark.
His eyes like hurried fingers fumble and fly
About the narrow bands with which her dress is caught
And lightly trace the line of back and thigh.
He sees his brain disintegrate, spark by spark.
Play something else, he says.
And on the dark
His brain floats like a moon behind his eyes,
Swelling, retreating enormously. He shuts them
As one concealed suppresses two loud cries
And on the troubled lids a vision sees:
It is as though he watched her mount a stair
And rose with her on the suppleness of her knees,
Saw her skirts in swirling line on line,
Saw the changing shadows ripple and rise
After the flexing muscles; subtle thighs,
Rhythm of back and throat and gathered train.
A bursting moon, wheels spin in his brain.
As through a corridor rushing with harsh rain

He walks his life, and reaching the end
He turns it as one turns a wall
She plays, and softly playing, sees the room
Dissolve, and like a dream the still walls fade
And sink, while music softly played
Softly flows through lily-scented gloom.
She is a flower lightly cast
Upon a river flowing, dimly going
Between two silent shores where willows lean,
Watching the moon stare through the willow screen.
The hills are dark and cool, clearly remote,
Within whose shadow she has paused to rest.
Could she but stay here forever, where grave rain slants above them,
Rain as slow as starlight on her breast;
Could she but drift forever along these ways
Clearly shadowed, barred with veils of rain,
Beneath azure fields with stars in choired processional
To chant the silence from her heart again.
Laxly reclining, he feels the firelight beating
A clamor of endless waves upon the dark,
A swiftly thunderous surf swiftly retreating.
His brain falls hissing from him, a spark, a spark,
And his eyes like hurried fingers fumble and fly
Among the timid shadows near her throat,
About the narrow bands with which her dress is caught,
And lightly trace the line of back and thigh.
He sees his brain disintegrate, spark by spark,
And she turns as if she heard two cries.
He stands and watches her mount the stair
Step by step, with her subtle suppleness,
That nervous strength that was ever his surprise;
The lifted throat, the thin crisp swirl of dress
Like a ripple of naked muscles before his eyes.
A bursting moon: wheels spin in his brain,
And whirl in a vortex of sparks together again.
At the turn she stops, and trembles there,
Nor watches him as he steadily mounts the stair.

THE cave was ribbed with dark. Then seven lights
Like golden bats windy along the eaves
Awoke and slipped inverted anchorage
In seven echoes of an unheard sound.
The cave is ribbed with music. Rumored far
The gate behind the moonwashed sentinel
Clangs to his lifted mace. Then all the bats
Of light slant whirring down the inclined air.
The cave no more a cave is: ribs of music
Arch and crack the walls, the uncaged bats
From earth's core break its spun and floating crust.
Hissing seas rage overhead, and he
Staring up through icy twilight, sees
The stars within the water melt and sweep
In silver spears of streaming burning hair.
The seas roar past, shuddering rocks in seas
Mutter away like hoarse and vanquished horns.
Now comes dark again, he thinks, but finds
A wave of gold breaking a jewelled crest
And he is walled with gold. About him snored
Kings and mitred bishops tired of sin
Who dreamed themselves of heaven wearied,
And now may sleep, hear rain, and snore again.
One among them walks, whose citadel
Though stormed by sleep, is still unconquered.
In crimson she is robed, her golden hair,
Her mouth still yet unkissed, once housed her in
The sharp and quenchless sorrows of the world.
Kings in hell, robed in icy flame
Panted to crown them with her dreamless snows;
Glutted bishops, past the sentinel,
Couched in heaven, mewed for paradise.
Amid the dead walks she who, musicfleshed,
Whose mouth, two notes laid one on other for

A honeyed parting on the hived store;
Whose throat a sweetened reed had blown to be;
Whose breast was harped of silver and of two
Grave small singing birds uncaged; the chant
Of limbs to one another tuned and wed
That, as she walked, the air with music filled;
Now she, for whose caress once duke and king
And scarlet cardinal broke cords of fate,
From couch to couch her restless slumber seeks
And strokes indifferent lead with moaning hands.
The citted dead snore past, the hissing seas
Roar overhead again, and bows of coral
Whip gleaming fish in darts of unmouthed colors:
Trees of coral strip their colored leaves
Of fish, and each leaf has two bats of light
Where eyes would be, while other golden bats
Slipping among them, gleam their curving sides.
Thundering rocks crash down; spears of starlight
Shatter and break among them. Water-stallions
Neighing, crest the foaming rush of tides.
Drowning waves, airward rushing, crash
Columned upward, rake the stars and hear
A humming chord within the heavens bowled,
Then plunging back, they lose between the rocks
A dying rumor of the chanting stars.
The cave is ribbed with music; threads of sound
Gleam on the whirring wings of bats of gold,
Loop from the grassroots to the roots of trees
Thrust into sunlight, where the song of birds
Spins silver threads to gleam from bough to bough.
Grass in meadows cools his fancy's feet:
Dew is on the grass, and birds in hedges
Weave the sunlight with sharp streaks of flight.
Bees break apple bloom, and peach and clover
Sing in the southern air where aimless clouds
Go up the sky-hill, cropping it like sheep,
And startled pigeons, like a wind beginning,

Fill the air with sucking silver sound.
He would leave the cave, before the bats
Of light grow weary, to their eaves return,
While music fills the dark as wind fills sails
And Silence like a priest on thin gray feet
Tells his beads of minutes on beside.
The cave is ribbed with dark, the music flies,
The bats of light are eaved and dark again.
Before him as, the priest of Silence by
And all the whispering nuns of breathing blent
With Silence's self, he walks, the door beside
Stands the moonwashed sentinel to break
Its lichened sleep. Here halts the retinue.
The priest between his fingers lets his beads
Purr down. The nuns the timeless interval
Fill with all the still despair of breath.
He gateward turns. The sentinel his mace
Lifts in calm indifference. At the stroke
The sleeping gate wakes yawning back upon
Where gaunt Orion, swinging by his knees,
Crashes the arcing moon among the stars.

IV

and let
within the antiseptic atmosphere
of russel square grown brisk and purified
the ymca (the american express for this sole purpose too)
let lean march teasing the breasts of spring
horned like reluctant snails within
pink intervals
a brother there
so many do somanydo
from out the weary courtesy of time
fate a lady shopper takes her change
brightly in coppers somanydo
with soaped efficiency english food agrees

even with thos cook
here is a
tunnel a long one like a black period
with kissing punctuate on our left we see
forty poplars like the breasts of girls
taut with running
on our left we see
that blanched plateau wombing cunningly
hushing his brilliant counterattack saying
shhhhhh to general blah in the year mille
neufcentvingtsomethingorother
may five years defunct
in a patient wave of sleep till natures
stomach settles hearing their sucking boots
their brittle sweat harshly evaporating carrying
dung there was no time to drop
the general himself
is now on tour somewhere in the states
telling about the war
and here
battalioned crosses in a pale parade
the german burned his dead (which goes to show
god visited him with proper wrath)
o spring
above unsapped convolvulae of hills april
a bee sipping perplexed with pleasure o spring
o wanton o cruel
o bitter and new as fire
baring to the curved and hungry hand
of march your white unsubtle thighs
grass his feet no longer trouble grows
lush in lanes he
sleeps quietly decay
makes death a cuckold yes lady
8 rue diena we take care of that yes
in amiens youll find 3 good hotels

V

THERE is no shortening-breasted nymph to shake
The tickets that stem up the lidless blaze
Of sunlight stiffening the shadowed ways,
Nor does the haunted silence even wake
Nor ever stir.

No footfall trembles in the smoky brush
Where bright leaves flicker down the dappled shade:
A tapestry that cloaks this empty glade
And shudders up to still the pulsing thrush
And frighten her

With the contact of its unboned hands
Until she falls and melts into the night
Where inky shadows splash upon the light
Crowding the folded darkness as it stands
About each grave

Whose headstone glimmers dimly in the gloom
Threaded by the doves' unquiet calls,
Like memories that swim between the walls
And dim the peopled stillness of a room
Into a nave

Where no light breaks the thin cool panes of glass
To falling butterflies upon the floor;
While the shadows crowd within the door
And whisper in the dead leaves as they pass
Along the ground.

Here the sunset paints its wheeling gold
Where there is no breast to still in strife
Of joy or sadness, nor does any life
Flame these hills and vales grown sharp and cold
And bare of sound.

VI

MAN comes, man goes, and leaves behind
The bleaching bones that bore his lust;

The palfrey of his loves and hates
Is stabled at the last in dust.
He cozened it and it did bear
Him to wishing's utmost rim;
But now, when wishing's gained, he finds
It was the steed that cozened him.

VII

TRUMPETS of sun to silence fall
On house and barn and stack and wall.
Within the cottage, slowly wheeling,
The lamplight's gold turns on the ceiling.
Beneath the stark and windless vane
Cattle stamp and munch their grain;
Below the starry apple bough
Leans the warped and clotted plow.
The moon rolls up, while far away
And thin with sorrow, the sheepdog's bay
Fills the valley with lonely sound.
Slow leaves of darkness steal around.
The watch the watchman, Death, will keep
And man in amnesty may sleep.
The world is still, for she is old
And many's the bead of a life she's told.
Her gossip there, the watching moon
Views hill and stream and wave and dune
And many's the fair one she's seen wither:
They pass and pass, she cares not whither; —
Lovers' vows by her made bright,
The outcast cursing at her light;
Mazed within her lambence lies
All the strife of flesh that dies.
Then through the darkened room with whispers speaking
There comes to man the sleep that all are seeking.
The lurking thief, in sharp regret
Watches the far world, waking yet,

But which in sleep will soon be still;
While he upon his misty hill
Hears a dark bird briefly cry
From its thicket on the sky,
And curses the moon because her light
Marks every outcast under night.
Still swings the murderer, bent of knees
In a slightly strained repose,
Nor feels the faint hand of the breeze:
He now with Solomon all things knows:
That, lastly, breath is to a man
But to want and fret a span.

VIII

HE FURROWS the brown earth, doubly sweet
To a hushed great passage of wind
Dragging its shadow. Beneath his feet
The furrow breaks, and at its end
He turns. With peace about his head
Traverses he again the earth: his own,
Still with enormous promises of bread
And the clean smell of its strength upon him blown.
Against the shimmering azure of the wood
A blackbird whistles, cool and mellow;
And there, where for a space he stood
To fill his lungs, a spurting yellow
Rabbit bursts, its flashing scut
Muscled in erratic lines
Of fright from furrow hill to rut.
He shouts: the darkly liquid pines
Mirror his falling voice, as leaf
Raises clear brown depths to meet its falling self;
Then again the blackbird, thief
Of silence in a burnished pelf.
Inscribes the answer to all life
Upon the white page of the sky:

The furious emptiness of strife
For him to read who passes by.
Beneath the marbled sky go sheep
Slow as clouds on hills of green;
Somewhere waking waters sleep
Beyond a faintleaved willow screen.
Wind and sun and air: he can
Furrow the brown earth, doubly sweet
With his own sweat, since here a man
May bread him with his hands and feet.

IX

THE sun lies long upon the hills,
The plowman slowly homeward wends;
Cattle low, uneased of milk,
The lush grass to their passing bends.
Mockingbirds in the ancient oak
In golden madness swing and shake;
Sheep like surf against a cliff
Of green hills, slowly flow and break.
Then sun sank down, and with him went
A pageantry whose swords are sheathed
At last, as warriors long ago
Let fall their storied arms and breathed
This air and found this peace as he
Who across this sunset moves to rest,
Finds but simple scents and sounds;
And this is all, and this is best.

X

BeYOND the hill the sun swam downward
And he was lapped in azure seas;
The dream that hurt him, the blood that whipped him
Dustward, slowed and gave him ease.
Behind him day lay stark with labor

Of him who strives with earth for bread;
Before him sleep, tomorrow his circling
Sinister shadow about his head.
But now, with night, this was forgotten:
Phantoms of breath round man swim fast;
Forgotten his father, Death; Derision
His mother, forgotten by her at last.
Nymph and faun in this dusk might riot
Beyond all oceaned Time's cold greenish bar
To shrilling pipes, to cymbals' hissing
Beneath a single icy star
Where he, to his own compulsion
— A terrific figure on an urn —
Is caught between his two horizons,
Forgetting that he cant return.

XI

WHEN evening shadows grew around
And a thin moon filled the lane,
Their slowing breath made scarce a sound
Where Richard lay with Jane.
The world was empty of all save they
And Spring itself was snared,
And well's the fare of any day
When none has lesser fared:
Young breasts hollowed out with fire,
A singing fire that spun
The gusty tree of his desire
Till tree and gale were one;
And a small white belly yielded up
That they might try to make
Of youth and dark and spring a cup
That cannot fail nor slake.

XII

YOUNG Richard, striding toward town,
Felt life within him grown
Taut as a silver wire on which
Desire's sharp winds were blown
To a monstrous sound that lapped him close
With a rain of earth and fire,
Flaying him exquisitely
With whips of living wire.
Under the arch where Mary dwelt
And nights were brief and sharp,
Her ancient music fell with his
As cytharn falls with harp
And Richard's fire within her fire
Swirled up into the air,
And polarised was all breath when
A girl let down her hair.

XIII

WHEN I was young and proud and gay
And flowers in fields were thicking,
There was Tad and Ralph and Ray
All waiting for my picking.
And who, with such a page to spell
And the hand of Spring to spread it,
Could like the tale told just as well
By another who had read it?
Ah, not I! and if I had
— When I was young and pretty —
Not learned to spell, then there was Tad
And Ralph and Ray to pity.
There was Tad and Ray and Ralph,
And field and lane were sunny;
And ah! I spelled my page myself
Long ere I married Johnny.

XIV

HIS mother said: I'll make him
A lad has never been
(And rocked him closely, stroking
His soft hair's yellow sheen)
His bright youth will be metal
No alchemist has seen.
His mother said: I'll give him
A brave and high desire,
'Till all the dross of living
Burns clean within his fire.
He'll be strong and merry
And he'll be clean and brave,
And all the world will rue it
When he is dark in grave.
But dark will treat him kinder
Than man would anywhere
(With barren winds to rock him
— Though now he doesn't care —
And hushed and haughty starlight
To stroke his golden hair)
Mankind called him felon
And hanged him stark and high
Where four winds could watch him
Troubled on the sky.
Once he was quick and golden,
Once he was clean and brave.
Earth, you dreamed and shaped him:
Will you deny him grave?
Being dead he will forgive you
And all that you have done,
But he'll curse you if you leave him
Grinning at the sun.

XV

BONNY earth and bonny sky

And bonny was the sweep
Of sun and rain in apple trees
While I was yet asleep.
And bonny earth and bonny sky
And bonny'll be the rain
And sun among the apple trees
When I've long slept again.

XVI

BEHOLD me, in my feathered cap and doublet,
strutting across this stage that men call living:
the mirror of all youth and hope and striving.
Even you, in me, become a grimace.”
“Ay, in that belief you too are but a mortal,
thinking that peace and quietude and silence
are but the shadows of your little gestures
upon the wall of breathing that surrounds you.”
“Ho, old spectre, solemnly ribbed with wisdom!
D’ye think that I must feel your dark compulsions
and flee with kings and queens in whistling darkness?
I am star, and sun, and moon, and laughter.”
“What star is there that falls, with none to watch it?
What sun is there more permanent than darkness?
What moon is there that cracks not? ay, what laughter,
what purse is there that empties not with spending?”
“Ho.... One grows weary, posturing and grinning,
aping a dream to a house of peopled shadows!
Ah, ’twas you who stripped me bare and set me
gibbering at mine own face in a mirror.”
“Yes, it is I who, in the world’s clear evening
with a silver star like a rose in a bowl of lacquer,
when you have played your play and at last are quiet,
will wait for you with sleep, and you can drown.”

XVII

o atthis

for a moment an aeon i pause plunging
above the narrow precipice of thy breast
what before thy white precipice the eagle
sharp in the sunlight and cleaving
his long blue ecstasy and what
wind on hilltops blond with the wings of the morning
what wind o atthis sweeping the april to lesbos
whitening the seas

XVIII

ONCE upon an adolescent hill
There lay a lad who watched amid the piled
And silver shapes of aircarved cumulae
A lone uncleaving eagle, and the still
Serenely blue dissolving of desire.
Easeful valleys of the earth had been: he looked not back,
Not down, he had not seen
Lush lanes of vernal peace, and green
Unebbing windless tides of trees; no wheeling gold
Upon the lamplit wall where is no speed
Save that which peaceful tongue 'twixt bed and supper wrought.
Here still the blue, the headlands; here still he
Who did not waken and was not awaked.
The eagle sped its lonely course and tall;
Was gone. Yet still upon his lonely hill the lad
Winged on past changing headlands where was laked
The constant blue
And saw the fleeing canyons of the sky
Tilt to banshee wire and slanted aileron,
And his own lonely shape on scudding walls
Where harp the ceaseless thunders of the sun.

XIX

GREEN is the water, green

The grave voluptuous music of the sun;
The pale and boneless fingers of a queen
Upon his body stoop and run.
Within these slow cathedralled corridors
Where ribs of sunlight drown
He joins in green caressing wars
With seammaids red and brown
And chooses one to bed upon
And lapped and lulled is he
By dimdissolving music of the sun
Requiemed down through the sea.

XX

HERE he stands, while eternal evening falls
And it is like a dream between gray walls
Slowly falling, slowly falling
Between two walls of gray and topless stone,
Between two walls with silence on them grown.
The twilight is severed with waters always falling
And heavy with budded flowers that never die,
And a voice that is forever calling
Sweetly and soberly.
Spring wakes the walls of a cold street,
Sows silver remembered seed in frozen places:
Upon meadows like still and simply smiling faces,
and wrinkled streams, and grass that knew her feet.
Here he stands, without the gate of stone
Between two walls with silence on them grown,
And littered leaves of silence on the floor;
Here, in a solemn silver of ruined springs
Among the smooth green buds, before the door
He stands and sings.

XXI

WHAT sorrow, knights and gentles? scroll and

Harp will prop the shaken sky
With the bronzehard fame of Roland
Who was not bronze, and so did die.
And ladies fair, why tears? why sighs?
There's still many a champion that'll
Feel the sharp goads of your eyes
As Roland did, in love and battle.
And be of cheer, ye valiant foemen.
Woman bore you: though amain
Life's gale may blow, there's born of woman
One who'll give you sleep again.
Weep not for Roland: envy him
Whose fame is fast in song and story,
While he, with myriad cherubim
Is lapped in ease, asleep in glory.

XXII

I SEE your face through the twilight of my mind,
A dusk of forgotten things, remembered things;
It is a corridor dark and cool with music
And too dim for sight,
That leads me to a door which brings
You, clothed in quiet sound for my delight.

XXIII

SOMEWHERE a moon will bloom and find me not,
Then wane the windless gardens of the blue;
Somewhere a lost green hurt (but better this
Than in rich desolation long forgot)
Somewhere a sweet remembered mouth to kiss —
Still, you fool; lie still: that's not for you.

XXIV

HOW canst thou be chaste, when lonely nights

And nights I lay beside in intimate loveliness
Thy grave beauty, girdle-slacked; and grief
So long my own was gone, and there was peace
Like azure wings my body along to lie
Wherein thy name like muted silver bells
Breathed over me, and found
Less joy, but less of grief than waking thou didst stir?
Then I did need but turn to thee, and then
My hand dreamed on thy little breast. Then flowed
Beneath my hand thy body's curve, and turned
To me within the famished lonely dark
Thy sleeping kiss.

XXV

WAS this the dream?
Thus: It seemed I lay
Upon a beach where sand and water kiss
With endless kissing in a dying fall. The moon
Walked in the water, trod with silver shoon
The quavering sands: naught else but this.
And then and soon, O soon
What wind
Shaped thee in Cnydos? shaped
Thy graven music? whence such guise
Doth starlight take nor beauty never taken
Yet hand so hungry for?
O I have seen
The ultimate hawk unprop the ultimate skies,
And with the curving image of his fall
Locked beak to beak. And waked
And waked. And then the moon
And quavering sands where kissing crept and slaked
And that was all.
(Or had I slept
And in the huddle of its fading, wept
That long waking ere I should sleep again?)

XXVI

STILL, and look down, look down:
Thy curious withdrawn hand
Unprobes, now spirit and sense unblend, undrown,
Knit by a word and sundered by a tense
Like this: Is: Was: and Not. Nor caught between
Spent beaches and the annealed insatiate sea
Dost myriad lie, cold and intact Selene,
On secret strand or old disastrous lee
Behind the fading mistral of the sense.

XXVII

THE Raven bleak and Philomel
Amid the bleeding trees were fixed.
His hoarse cry and hers were mixed
And through the dark their droppings fell
Upon the red erupted rose,
Upon the broken branch of peach
Blurred with scented mouths, that each
To another sing, and close.
'Mid all the passionate choristers
Of time and tide and love and death,
Philomel with jewelled breath
Dreams of flight, but never stirs.
On rose and peach their droppings bled;
Love a sacrifice has lain,
Beneath his hand his mouth is slain,
Beneath his hand his mouth is dead.
Then the Raven, bleak and blent
With all the slow despair of time,
Lets Philomel about him chime
Until her quiring voice is spent.
Philomel, on pain's red root
Bloomed and sang, and pain was not;

When she has sung and is forgot,
The Raven speaks, no longer mute.
The Raven bleak and Philomel
Amid the bleeding trees were fixed.
His hoarse cry and hers were mixed,
On rose and peach their droppings fell.

XXVIII

OVER the world's rim, drawing bland November
Reluctant behind them, drawing the moons of cold:
What do their lonely voices wake to remember
In this dust ere 'twas flesh? what restless old
Dream a thousand years was safely sleeping
Wakes my blood to sharp unease? what horn
Rings out to them? Was I free once, sweeping
Their wild and lonely skies ere I was born?
The hand that shaped my body, that gave me vision,
Made me a slave to clay for a fee of breath.
Sweep on, O wild and lonely: mine the derision,
Then the splendor and speed, the cleanness of death.
Over the world's rim, out of some splendid noon,
Seeking some high desire, and not in vain,
They fill and empty the red and dying moon
And, crying, cross the rim of the world again.

XXIX

AS to an ancient music's hidden fall
Her seed in the huddled dark was warm and wet
And three cold stars were riven in the wall:
Rain and fire and death above her door were set.
Her hands moaned on her breast in blind and supple fire,
Made light within her cave: she saw her harried
Body wrung to a strange and bitter lyre
Whose music once was pure strings simply married.
One to another in sleepy difference

Her thin and happy sorrows once were wed,
And what tomorrow's chords are recompense
For yesterday's single song unravished?
Three stars in her heart when she awakes
As winter's sleep breaks greening in soft rain,
And in the caverned earth spring's rumor shakes
As in her loins, the tilled and quickened grain.

XXX

GRAY the day, and all the year is cold,
Across the empty land the swallows' cry
Marks the southflown spring. Naught is bowled
Save winter, in the sky.
O sorry earth, when this bleak bitter sleep
Stirs and turns and time once more is green,
In empty path and lane grass will creep
With none to tread it clean.
April and May and June, and all the dearth
Of heart to green it for, to hurt and wake;
What good is budding, gray November earth?
No need to break your sleep for greening's sake.
The hushed plaint of wind in stricken trees
Shivers the grass in path and lane
And Grief and Time are tideless golden seas —
Hush, hush! He's home again.

XXXI

HE WINNOWERED it with bayonets
And planted it with guns,
And now the final cannonade
Is healed with rains and suns
He looks about — and leaps to stamp
The stubborn grinning seeds
Of olden plantings back beneath
His field of colored weeds.

XXXII

look, cynthia,
how abelard evaporates
the brow of time, and paris
tastes his bitter thumbs —
the worm grows fat, eviscerate,
but not on love, o cynthia.

XXXIII

DID I know love once? Was it love or grief,
This grave body by where I had lain,
And my heart, a single stubborn leaf
That will not die, though root and branch be slain?
Though warm in dark between the breasts of Death,
That other breast forgot where I did lie,
And from the tree are stripped the leaves of breath,
There's still one stubborn leaf that will not die
But restless in the sad and bitter earth,
Gains with each dawn a death, with dusk a birth.

XXXIV

THE ship of night, with twilightcolored sails,
Dreamed down the golden river of the west,
And Jesus' mother mused the sighing gales
While Jesus' mouth shot drinking on her breast.
Her soft doveslippered eyes strayed in the dusk
Creaming backward from the fallen day,
And a haughty star broke yellow musk
Where dead kings slept the long cold years away.
The hushed voices on the stair of heaven
Upward mounting, wake each drowsing king;
The dawn is milk to swell her breast, her seven
Sorrows crown her with a choiring ring;

A star to fleck young Jesus' eyes is given,
And white winds in the duskfilled sails to sing.

XXXV

THE courtesan is dead, for all her subtle ways,
Her bonds are loosed in brittle and bitter leaves;
Her last long backward look's to see who grieves
The imminent night of her reverted gaze.
Another will reign supreme, now she is dead
And winter's lean clean rain sweeps out her room,
For man's delight and anguish: with old new bloom
Crowning his desire, garlanding his head.
Thus the world, turning to cold and death
When swallows empty the blue and drowsy days
And lean rain scatters the ghost of summer's breath —
The courtesan that's dead, for all her subtle ways —
Spring will come! rejoice! But still is there
An old sorrow sharp as woodsmoke on the air.

XXXVI

GUSTY trees windily lean on green
eviscerated skies, the stallion, Wind,
against the sun's gold collar stamps, to lean
his weight. And once the furrowed day behind,
the golden steed browses the field he breaks
and full of flashing teeth where he has been
trees, the waiting mare his neighing shakes,
hold his heaving shape a moment seen.
Upon the hills, clashing the stars together,
stripping the tree of heaven of its blaze,
stabled, richly grained with golden weather —
within the trees that he has reft and raped
his fierce embrace by riven boughs in shaped,
while on the shaggy hills he stamps and neighs.

XXXVII

The race's splendor lifts her lip, exposes
Amid her scarlet smile her little teeth;
The years are sand the wind plays with; beneath,
The prisoned music of her deathless roses.
Within frostbitten rock she's fixed and glassed;
Now man may look upon her without fear.
But her contemptuous eyes back through him stare
And shear his fatuous sheep when he has passed.
Lilith she is dead and safely tombed
And man may plant and prune with naught to bruit
His heired and ancient lot to which he's doomed,
For quiet drowse the flocks when wolf is mute —
Ay, Lilith she is dead, and she is wombed,
And breaks his vine, and slowly eats the fruit.

XXXVIII

LIPS that of thy weary all seem weariest,
And wearier for the curled and pallid sly
Still riddle of thy secret face, and thy
Sick despair of its own ill obsessed;
Lay no hand to heart, do not protest
That smiling leaves thy tired mouth reconciled,
For swearing so keeps thee but ill beguiled
With secret joy of thine own flank and breast.
Weary thy mouth with smiling: canst thou bride
Thyself with thee, or thine own kissing slake?
Thy belly's waking doth itself deride
With sleep's sharp absence, coming so awake;
And near thy mouth thy twinned heart's grief doth hide
For there's no breast between: it cannot break.

XXXIX

LIKE to the tree that, young, reluctant yet

While sap's but troubled rumor of green spring;
Like to the leaf that in warm bud does cling
In maiden sleep unrefte though passionate;
Or like the cloud that, quicked and shaped for rain
But flees it in a silver hot despair;
The bird that dreams of flight and does not dare,
The sower who fears to sow and reaps no grain.
Beauty or gold or scarlet, then long sleep:
All this does buy brave trafficking with breath,
That though gray cuckold Time be horned by Death,
Then Death in turn is cuckold, unawake.
But sown cold years the stolen bread you reap
By all the Eves unsistered since the Snake.

XL

LADY, unawares still bride of sleep,
To thine own self sweet prisoner and fell
Thrall to the vassalled garrison that keep
Thy soft unguarded breast's white citadel;
Alas, oft-cozened maid, who'd not be twain
Yet self-confounded, while importunates
The foe repulsed, and single, dost remain
The frequent darling of the gods and fates.
Thou chaste? Why, I've lain lonely nights that fled
No swifter than thou came and bridged me
Who held thee as the fabric of thy bed
Where, turning on thy pillow's cheek, thy kiss
Took in thy citadel an enemy
Against whose mouth thy mouth sleeps on — like this.

XLI

HER unripe shallow breast is green among
The windy bloom of drunken apple trees,
And seven fauns importunate as bees
To sip the thin young honey of her tongue.

The old satyr, leafed and hidden, dreams her kiss
His beard amid, leaving his mouth in sight;
Dreams her body in a moony night
Shortening and shuddering into his;
Then sees a faun, bolder than the rest,
Slide his hand upon her sudden breast,
And feels the life in him go cold, and pass
Until the fire that kiss had brought to be
Gutters and faints away; 'tis night, and he
Laughing wrings the bitter wanton grass.

XLII

BENEATH the apple tree Eve's tortured shape
Glittered in the Snake's, her riven breast
Sloped his coils and took the sun's escape
To augur black her sin from east to west.
In winter's night man may keep him warm
Regretting olden sins he did omit;
With fetiches the whip of blood to charm,
Forgetting that with breath he's heir to it.
But old gods fall away, the ancient Snake
Is throned and crowned instead, and has for minion
That golden apple which will never slake
But ever feeds man's crumb of fire, when plover
And swallow and shrill northing birds whip over
Nazarene and Roman and Virginian.

XLIII

lets see I'll say — between two brief balloons
of skirts I saw grave chalices of knees
and momentarily the cloyed and cloudy bees
where hive her honeyed thighs those little moons
these slender moons' unsunder I would break
so soft I'd break that hushed virginity
of sleep that in her narrow house would she

find me drowsing when she came awake —
no — madam I love your daughter — I will say
from out some leafed dilemma of desire
the wind hales yawning spring still half undressed
the hand that once did short to sighs her breast
now slaps her white behind to rosy fire
— sir your health your money how are they —

XLIV

IF THERE be grief, then let it be but rain,
And this but silver grief for grieving's sake,
If these green woods be dreaming here to wake
Within my heart, if I should rouse again.
But I shall sleep, for where is any death
While in these blue hills slumbrous overhead
I'm rooted like a tree? Though I be dead,
This earth that holds me fast will find me breath.